

TOUGH ENOUGH

Expectations Remain High Amid Changes Within OSU Program

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

To most programs, it would have been a storybook ending. A season, one filled with numerous trials and tribulations, coming down to the wire in the final game of the year in Pasadena, Calif., home of the historic Rose Bowl – one backdropped, no less, by the San Gabriel Mountains – that has played host to some of college football's most memorable contests.

Ohio State played in what can only be described as another classic in The Granddaddy of Them All, making a dramatic comeback after the Buckeyes found themselves with a 14-point deficit at the half that required record-breaking performances from quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba to get Ohio State back into the game.

Noah Ruggles knocked in a 19-yard field goal with just nine seconds remaining for the eventual 48-45 final, and confetti celebrating the Scarlet and Gray began raining down as "Buckeye Battle Cry" raged on in the background courtesy of the Ohio State University marching band.

Just 31 teams have claimed victory in the annual competition between the best that the Big Ten and Pac-12 have to offer – though as time has marched on, more conferences have gained representation and the game itself has taken a backseat in the era of the Bowl Championship Series and College Football Playoff, especially as playoff expansion appears on the horizon – meaning that Ohio State's experience of hoisting the Leishman Trophy is one that most schools can only aspire to.

It was challenging, though, for those around the program to not feel a tinge of disappointment despite the captivating climax to the season. The only reason that Ohio State was in a position to win the Rose Bowl was because of two regular-season losses – a nonconference upset by Oregon in the second week of the season, and a shocking 42-27 shellacking by Michigan to close the regular season, the first win by the Wolverines in the rivalry since 2011 and the most decisive win by Michigan since a 28-0 drubbing in Ann Arbor in 1993.



**BSB'S 2022
FOOTBALL
PREVIEW**

SONNY BROCKWAY

SPARKING CHANGE – Offensive line coach Justin Frye (above) and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles (below) are two new coaches attempting to get Ohio State back to the College Football Playoff this season.

If those results had been flipped, the Buckeyes would have made their fifth appearance in the College Football Playoff – not to mention likely would have been winners of the Big Ten championship considering Iowa's paltry showing in the title game – with the chance for the school's first national championship since 2014. Instead, Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day, who suffered his first (and second) regular-season loss at the helm of the Buckeyes, were left with a bittersweet feeling reserved for the upper echelon of college football.

"Every year, the expectations at Ohio State are high, and that doesn't change based on what happened the year before. The expectation is to win them all," Day said at Big Ten Media Days. "Maybe at some places, 11-2 with a Rose Bowl victory is a good year. It isn't at Ohio State. Our three goals are to beat That Team Up North, win the Big Ten championship and the national championship. Those are our goals. Those things didn't happen last year."

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FAN FORUM



From The Message Board

"I'm expecting the running game to be better and the passing game to be no worse than last season, and I expect the defense to be much better in third-down efficiency and red zone efficiency. Also I expect at least one player to surprise us with an excellent performance. I'm not expecting any close games during the regular season."

– Terrier Buck

"This is 'THE' Year! The offense dominates the competition and the Silver Bullets are back. Two of the Heisman Trophy finalists are Buckeyes (C.J. Stroud and TreVeyon Henderson). The Buckeyes run the table and win the Big Ten, plow through the College Football Playoffs and WIN the Natty!"

– BuckeyeScott

"This is probably the most stacked roster I've seen in awhile. You got most of the younger guys back on defense and the offense is stacked. I predicted they would lose to Oregon last year and I was correct. I doubt they lose to Notre Dame ... not a lot of talent on offense returning compared to Ohio State. They will prove last year's Michigan game was a fluke and I really don't see them losing. Out of all the games I'm worried about, it's probably the Wisconsin game."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I'm thinking the defense will really kick in three or four games in. I'm a little

nervous with this new system getting a test run in the first game against ND. But as I say, trust in the Bucks. I say we lose one game and that will be against Iowa."

– PeyoteBuck

"Veniemus, videbimus, vincent. Barring injury, of course..."

– Michael Bauer

"If the defense is truly improved, we could be swimming in confetti at the national championship game."

– R1TBDBITL

"This team can win 11 or 12 games purely on talent. To win those other two or three games, the team will have to be perfect. It will have to play nasty, physical and mistake free. And get a few timely breaks. While the team has depth, it can't afford two or three injuries to key players. Timing is everything. They need to be in peak team health for the Michigan game, the Big Ten Title Game and the playoffs. Stroud can't be banged up and playing at 80 percent. It will be very hard to beat Alabama. They have NFL-ready level talent at every position. Beating Bama will be like beating Miami in 2002 and Alabama in 2014. Does this year's team have that heart and grit?"

– BYRON MCNUTT

"I think that the Buckeye anger from last year's TTUN game, the new and improved Buckeye defensive schemes

Expectations remain high for Ohio State as the Buckeyes attempt to return to the Big Ten Championship Game and the College Football Playoff. With an exciting offense and cautious optimism for the defense, we asked our readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum, as well as staff writers, what their predictions are for this upcoming season. Here are some of the responses:

and the inexperienced HC at ND propel the Buckeyes to an unbeaten season, a B1G Championship and into the playoffs. How the Buckeyes do in the playoffs will depend on whether they can produce a balanced offense, run the ball effectively when they want to and also win short-yardage situations. If they do, I see us all celebrating in January."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Defense. Defense. Defense. Play it and the Buckeyes have as good a shot at the marbles as anyone. I don't see anyone stopping the offense, especially if Ohio State does a better job of working TreVeyon into the equation. A few more holes from the revamped offensive line would help in that quest."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I predict that both Michigan and the Buckeyes will be undefeated when they meet in Columbus on Nov. 26. "

– btsu9

"I personally don't think it's even a question that Ohio State is undefeated going into the playoffs. I'm not sold on Notre Dame yet (talk to me next season when the Buckeyes have to travel to South Bend, though) and I think Ohio State will be seeing red on Nov. 26, and the rest of the schedule doesn't particularly concern me.

"Once the playoffs start, though? It all comes down to whether or not Jim Knowles has figured things out.

If Ohio State is a top-five defense as he claims they can be, it could be a national championship season. If they finish outside of the top 30 in defense, I think the playoffs might go the way of the 2020 season. I'm very interested to see not just how the defense looks against Notre Dame, but how it develops throughout the season and to see if they can actually make adjustments on that side of the ball."

– Braden Moles, BSB

"Ohio State should return to the Big Ten mountaintop this season on the back of another top-tier offense and a much improved defense. Although the games against Notre Dame and Michigan loom large, I think the Buckeyes should handle both teams with relative ease. My biggest concern for this team lies in some of those games in the middle of the schedule (vs. Wisconsin, vs. Iowa, @ Michigan State, @ Penn State), where I could see Ohio State potentially slipping up and dropping one of those games (à la 2017 vs. Iowa or 2018 vs. Purdue).

"Overall, I do believe the Buckeyes will go 12-0, if they are locked in for all 12 games, and take home the Big Ten crown for the fifth time in the last six seasons. Beyond the Big Ten title, I do think the Buckeyes have a legitimate shot at the national title, but Alabama will prove to be a very difficult team to beat."

– Jack Emerson, BSB

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kudos For Interview Issue

Nice job on The Interview Issue! I particularly enjoyed the illuminating article on Brian Schottenstein, NIL and the outstanding board representing my favorite school. Plus, it is always a pleasure to read about the man who checks all the boxes – except knees – Clark Kellogg.

Lee Caryer
Columbus, Ohio

The Truth of the Matter

Times are changing whether we like it or not ...

Universities that formed the original Big Ten Conference provided leadership and laid the foundation for the formation of rivalries among member schools. From a symbolic and geographic/regional perspective, these rivalries have matured and are now deeply embedded in popular Midwestern sports cul-

ture and folklore.

However, in 2014, with the addition of Rutgers University and the University of Maryland to the Big Ten Conference, the dynamics changed. With all due respect to these excellent academic institutions, they are viewed by many as more of a distraction to the Big Ten rather than as enriching the conference. Over the past eight years, Rutgers and Maryland have formed no meaningful rivalries within the conference and are often viewed as weak sisters – not formidable foes that generate interest and excitement.

With the addition of USC and UCLA to the Big Ten Conference in 2024, will we witness the waning or even the possible demise of some of today's premiere college football rivalries and traditions? True, USC and UCLA are known as West Coast rivals, but when added to the Big Ten, are they just like Rutgers and Maryland – adding girth to what is becoming a conference conglomer-

ate of disjointed parts, but adding little else? They will certainly add to the complexities of scheduling 16 coast-to-coast teams, but offer little synergy for rivalry development when compared to the rivalries that have existed for decades. Will even more teams be added to the Big Ten Conference, further diluting and sacrificing its character and uniqueness for primarily financial gains?

Moreover, the day of the amateur collegiate athlete and the notion of "student athlete" are dead. We are entering an era of "professional college athletics." As we watch universities follow the money trail by abandoning one conference for another, we are also beginning to witness some athletes readily deserting one school for another – wherever the financial incentives are the greatest for them, with loyalty and allegiance to an educational institution surely dying. These professional college athletes (not student athletes) are profiting directly from their name, image and likeness by earning large sums of money as well as being given free room and board and scholarships for their service. Now more than ever, college athletes are perceived as part of an

institution's media/entertainment, public relations and marketing departments – should they then be classified as adjunct employees of the universities they represent? Sadly, we will now look with suspect on how some of these well compensated athletes focus on educational attainment – if at all.

Yes – times are changing in the Big Ten Conference and in collegiate sports overall, but I fear these changes are not for the best.

Joseph H. Huber
Walpole, Massachusetts

If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or email it to bsb@buckeyesports.com. Letters must be signed and include the writer's hometown and a daytime telephone number for verification. Publication priority will be given to those letters that are brief, and we reserve the right to edit letters for publication.

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OPINION

Buckeyes' Fate Rests In Hands Of Defense

This time last year, Ryan Day and his Ohio State football team were working on an unprecedented streak of four consecutive Big Ten championships, a string of 18 straight conference victories, and a 21-game winning streak in regular-season contests. Those indisputable facts made the Buckeyes an overwhelming favorite to roll to another league title and make a third straight trip to the College Football Playoff.

But as invincible as the team looked on paper, it was walking on thin ice and the head coach had to know it. There were bound to be growing pains for a team that had new starters at quarterback and running back, untested players up and down the defensive depth chart, and growing fissures both on the coaching staff and in the locker room.

Somehow, the Buckeyes managed to overcome relative inexperience, player meltdowns and defections, coaching staff upheaval, a litany of injuries and defensive deficiencies to produce an 11-2 record that included a thrilling Rose Bowl victory – a season that would trigger euphoric celebrations on most college campuses.

Where Ohio State is concerned, however, any season that includes a loss to Michigan and falling short of playing for the national championship just doesn't cut it. And the head coach understands that.

"Some places," Day told reporters at the annual Big Ten Media Days in late July, "going 11-2 and winning the Rose Bowl is a great year. At Ohio State, it's not."

In reaction to that assessment, Day hired defensive coordinator Jim Knowles away from Oklahoma State and gave the 34-year veteran of the college coaching wars a free hand to rebuild the defense from the ground up. Knowles began by coaxing safety Tanner McCalister to come with him from Stillwater to Columbus and then started to implement his own approach to playing defense that incorporates wholesale changes – some markedly noticeable, others more subtle.

To say Knowles had his work cut out for him would be something of an understatement. The Buckeyes finished tied for 59th nationally in total defense, including a lowly 97th against the pass. But the new OSU assistant is nothing if not confident. When Day mentioned early in fall camp that he thought a reasonable expectation would be for the Buckeyes to field a top-10 defense this season, Knowles replied, "I wish he would have said top five. That's our expectation."

There is little doubt Ohio State will have one of the most high-powered offenses in college football. The Buckeyes led the nation in total offense as well as scoring last season, and despite losing receivers Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave to the NFL, the team should be every bit as explosive this year.

On nearly any other team in the nation, TreVeyon Henderson would be the centerpiece of the offensive attack and the unquestioned leader for Heisman Trophy consideration. But while Henderson will get his share of carries, yardage and touchdowns, the heart of any Day-coached offense is going to be its quarterback, and C.J. Stroud seems intent upon improving on eye-popping numbers from his redshirt-freshman season that included 4,435 yards and 44 touchdowns.

Stroud needs exactly 5,000 yards to pass J.T. Barrett and become Ohio State's all-time career leader in passing yardage, and you get the feeling he just might do it. Jaxon Smith-Njigba is coming off a season that saw him rewrite the OSU record book for receivers, and the departures of Wilson and Olave simply open the way for such youngsters as Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Egbuka and Jayden Ballard to showcase

their seemingly limitless upsides.

The natural proclivity would be to continue to extol the virtues of the Ohio State offense. Stroud seems to be the preseason Heisman favorite, consistently polling ahead of last year's winner, Bryce Young of Alabama. Meanwhile, at least according to a couple of websites, Henderson and Smith-Njigba were also polling inside the top 10 in mid-August.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

They are the main reasons the Buckeyes were consensus No. 2 picks in most preseason rankings, one slot behind perennial favorite Alabama and one ahead of defending national champion Georgia. In reality, though, any road for Ohio State to the 2022 College Football Playoff will steer itself directly on the path Knowles maps for his defense.

It was uttered many years ago – long before the so-called arms race and proliferation of high-octane offensive attacks changed the landscape of football – but it still remains one of the sport's few remaining truths: Offense gets the headlines, defense wins the championships.

Defense Has To Play Better

While the Buckeyes were rewriting history on offense, the same was true on defense except those were the kinds of records best left alone. Opponent scoring, first downs, passing yardage, total offense, average yards per play, rushing touchdowns, passing touchdowns and pass completions each ranked among the five worst single-season performances by an OSU defense in program history.

The first warning sign came in the season opener at Minnesota when the Buckeyes were powerless to stop running back Mohamed Ibrahim, who was well on his way to a 200-yard performance before suffering a season-ending knee injury late in the third quarter. The following week, during the home opener against Oregon, Ohio State amassed 32 first downs and 612 yards of total offense – and still lost. But the problems with the defense were underscored and italicized during the regular-season finale against Michigan.

The Wolverines were not exactly anyone's idea of an efficient offensive juggernaut, yet they faced only eight third-down situations during the entire game – none in the second half – and converted five of them. To help set the tone for the remainder of the afternoon, Michigan faced third-and-2 once and third-and-1 twice on its initial possession of the game and averaged 11.7 yards on those three plays.

Tailback Hassan Haskins converted each of those third-down plays and wound up shredding Ohio State for 169 yards and five touchdowns on 28 carries. Backup tailback Blake Corum added 87 yards on just six carries, including a 55-yard bolt early in the third quarter that helped propel the Wolverines to a 28-point second half.

In addition to the agony of surrendering 487 total yards, losing to their archrivals for the first time in a decade and squandering the right to play for a fifth straight Big Ten championship, the Buckeyes had to absorb the ignominy of being taunted by Michigan players and coaches after the game.

"They're a good team," Michigan offensive coordinator Josh Gattis said, "(but) they're a fi-

nesse team. They're not a tough team. We knew going into the game that we could out-physical them, we could out-tough them, and that was going to be the key to the game. That's what we prepared for all year long."

The claims were not without merit. Michigan finished with 297 yards rushing on 41 carries, while quarterbacks Cade McNamara and J.J. McCarthy were afforded stress-free afternoons. The duo combined for 20 throws with no sacks. In fact, Ohio State registered no tackles for loss in a Michigan game for the first time since at least 1965.

"You saw earlier this year in the game they lost to Oregon," Gattis said. "Oregon was the more physical team on the field. That's the way (Ohio State) lost. We committed to that recipe, and it paid off."

If a challenge to your manhood doesn't put you in a bad mood, I wouldn't know what would. That said, to exact any amount of redemption against the Wolverines when they come to Columbus in late November, the Buckeyes simply must play better on defense.

I believe Ohio State will be fine up front and in the secondary. Although there are no supernovas the likes of the Bosa brothers or Chase Young, the talent along a deep defensive line is unquestionable. Likewise in the secondary, led by a group of young players who were thrown into the proverbial deep end last season and were just beginning to swim by year's end.

The key to whether the Buckeyes will field an improved defensive unit in 2022 rests squarely on the shoulders of the linebackers, once the calling card of Ohio State defenses but a unit that has dropped off dramatically in recent years.

Would it interest you to know the Buckeyes haven't fielded a first-team All-America linebacker since Ryan Shazier in 2013? Heck, only three OSU linebackers have earned first-team All-Big Ten honors over the last decade – Shazier (2012-13), Raekwon McMillan (2015-16) and Malik Harrison (2019).

What does it say about a program that consistently churns out top recruiting classes that the case could be made that one of its best linebackers in 2021 was a converted running back? Steele Chambers was learning the position on the fly and still managed to finish fifth on the team with 47 tackles while recording his first career sack and interception.

The leading tackler among last year's linebackers was Tommy Eichenberg, who finished with 64 stops despite starting only four games. Eichenberg excels when he's traveling north and south but is somewhat challenged when asked to go east-west. Still, his aggressive, straight-ahead approach should mesh well with the kind of attacking defense Knowles wants to play, and the fact that he was elected a team captain might offer some insight into how much Eichenberg will be relied upon.

Cody Simon started 10 games last year, but much of that playing time was done with a bad shoulder that got progressively worse as the season went on. The fact that he still managed to finish fourth on the team with 54 tackles is testament to Simon's toughness.

From all indications, Knowles has stripped the defense down to the studs, changing everything from alignment (a 4-2-5 look will be the base defense) to nomenclature including positions named Jack, Mike, Will and Sam.

The bottom line, though, is that it doesn't matter what the names are. If the Ohio State football team is going to get where it wants to go in 2022, its linebackers will have to stop playing like Larry, Curly and Moe.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Pryor Out For Season With Knee Injury

Ohio State second-year running back Evan Pryor is expected to be out for the season after suffering a knee injury during fall camp.

Along with third-year back Miyan Williams, Pryor was set to back up incumbent starter TreVeyon Henderson this season. Pryor rushed 21 times for 98 yards last season, including a 12-yard rushing touchdown against Akron in the first game of his career.

With Master Teague III off to the NFL and Marcus Crowley medically retiring in the spring, Pryor was set for an expanded role this season and had a positive spring and fall camp to help build toward that.

"I feel like I've paid my dues," Pryor said during camp. "I feel like I'm still paying my dues in a way. I had a good spring, but I'm still kind of young around here, about to go into my actual freshman season. There are some older guys who have been trying me sometimes, but it's good. It's all competition. I love the guys."

With Pryor on the mend, Ohio State and running backs coach Tony Alford will look to

true freshman running back Dallan Hayden, who has impressed throughout fall camp.

"Dallan goes 100 miles an hour, so the biggest thing we've got to figure out is to get him to kind of slow down and take a deep breath," Alford said. "He's very hard on himself. He's the guy that you can tell he wants to do things perfectly, and that bothers him immensely if he doesn't. He's going to be a really good player. I think he's got a chance to be a really good person."

Before Pryor's injury, Alford stressed how important depth was at running back and how integral Hayden's inclusion was in Ohio State's most recent recruiting class.

"At running back you need depth," Alford said. "You have to have depth. I mean, you've seen games where a couple guys in one game that go down, so you've got to have depth. (Hayden) was critically important (in the class)."

Babb Honored With Block "O" Jersey

Ohio State fifth-year wide receiver Kamryn Babb – also a team captain – has been selected as the Buckeyes' recipient of the Block "O" jersey for the upcoming season, the third player to receive this honor after the tradition began in 2020.

The Block "O" jersey honors legendary Ohio State defensive lineman Bill Willis, who played from 1942-44 and earned All-America honors in addition to winning a national championship with the Buckeyes. He was one of the first to break the NFL's color barrier as a member of the Cleveland Browns, and he was later inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame

OSU Golfer, Open Champ Weiskopf Dead At 79

Tom Weiskopf, former Ohio State golfer and winner of the 1973 British Open championship, died on Aug. 20 at 79 after a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer.

Weiskopf, a native of Massillon, Ohio, played his first season at Ohio State in 1962 immediately following Jack Nicklaus' run with the Buckeyes. Weiskopf then turned pro in 1964, going on to win 16 titles on the PGA Tour from 1968 to 1982 and four titles on the PGA Champions Tour. According to Golf Digest, Weiskopf earned the nickname of "The Towering Inferno" due to his 6-3 stature and the fiery competition he displayed on the green.

Former Ohio State golfer and longtime men's golf coach Jim Brown, who met Weiskopf when they were just 16 years old and later roomed with him during their time together at Ohio State, said Weiskopf lived up to the nickname.

"I've been reading a lot and they're calling him 'The Towering Inferno.' He did have a temper," Brown told BSB. "But he controlled it pretty well. He was a loyal friend. Tom was very, very loyal. I thank him for that. I really miss him a lot. He was misunderstood. We always called him 'Tom Terrific.' But everybody else called him The Towering Inferno. His nickname was 'The Knife.' A 1-iron is a knife, and he could hit a 1-iron so good and so high. It was unbelievable."

Weiskopf's lone major championship came at the 1973 Open Championship where he finished 12 under par, three strokes ahead of

Neil Coles and Johnny Miller, and four ahead of Nicklaus. He finished tied for second at The Masters on four occasions in 1969, 1972, 1974 and 1975, and had finishes of second at the U.S. Open in 1976 and third at the PGA Championship in 1975. In total, he had 21 top-10 finishes and 12 top-five finishes in 71 major starts.

Along with Nicklaus, Brown contends that Weiskopf – who was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in 1985 – is among the greatest golfers to ever grace Ohio State's campus.

"He would be first or second," Brown said. "Jack would be first with his record and everything, but Tom with no doubt about it, he would be a close second. Without a doubt. Then I'd go with probably John Cook and then Chris Perry, who would be my top four guys, and five would be probably Joey Sindelar," Brown told BSB.

Following his playing career, Weiskopf broke into golf course design by partnering with Jay Morrish, and Weiskopf went on to design upward of 70 courses, including Troon North and TPC Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Ariz., Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio, and Loch Lomond in Scotland. He also spent time in broadcasting for ABC, CBS and ESPN, calling The Masters in 1981 and from 1985-95.

Weiskopf is survived by his second wife, Laurie, and daughter Heidi from his first marriage, and two grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his son, Eric.

and College Football Hall of Fame.

His No. 99 is retired, and the Block "O" jersey is awarded to someone who displays Willis' values of toughness, accountability and the highest of character, and few on Ohio State's roster made more sense than Babb.

"He's a guy that rubs off on others," wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said this spring. "What do they say, surround yourself with people you want to become, right? So those that are maybe on the fence from a faith perspective or a positivity perspective or a guidance perspective, Kam's there to kind of push you over the edge."

Babb has experienced several roadblocks during and before his time at Ohio State, including several season-ending injuries that have led to him appearing in just seven games in four seasons. He suffered a setback in fall camp but is expected to return this season, according to head coach Ryan Day.

A four-star receiver in the 2018 class out of Christian Brothers College in St. Louis, Mo., he tore his ACL in his first summer on campus, missing all of the 2018 season. He then suffered another injury during spring practice in 2019 that kept him out for that season, and after a healthy yet shortened 2020 season due to the pandemic, he suffered another injury in last year's spring practice that held him out for the season.

"The last five years have been a long journey," Babb said. "There were times when I was down and had a lot of questions. But God put people in my life who wouldn't let me give up, and it's been a blessing. I couldn't have done this without them."

Babb is the third recipient of the Block "O" jersey, joining Jonathon Cooper in 2020 and Thayer Munford last season in honoring Willis.

"It's an honor to have this number attached to my name," Babb said. "With it comes the responsibility to lead this team any way that I can."

AD Smith, Stroud Split On Revenue Sharing

After the Big Ten agreed to the largest media rights contract in college football history on Aug. 18 (more on Page 47), Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud and athletic director Gene Smith shared differing opinions on the idea of college athletes earning a share of the revenue from the TV deal.

The idea of revenue sharing has picked up steam since name, image and likeness was introduced in 2021. At Big Ten Media Days, Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh spoke in favor of allowing the conference's student-athletes to earn some of the revenue from the new media rights deal.



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2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2021 Record
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME	7:30 p.m.	ABC	11-2
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE	12 p.m.	BTN	2-10 (1-7 Sun Belt)
Sept. 17	TOLEDO	7 p.m.	FOX	7-6 (5-3 MAC)
Sept. 24	WISCONSIN	TBA	ABC	9-4(6-3 Big Ten)
Oct. 1	RUTGERS	3:30 p.m.	TBA	5-8 (2-7 Big Ten)
Oct. 8	at Michigan State	TBA	TBA	11-2 (7-2 Big Ten)
Oct. 22	IOWA	TBA	TBA	10-4 (7-3 Big Ten)
Oct. 29	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	7-6 (4-5 Big Ten)
Nov. 5	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	3-9 (1-8 Big Ten)
Nov. 12	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	2-10 (0-9 Big Ten)
Nov. 19	at Maryland	TBA	TBA	7-6 (3-6 Big Ten)
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	12 p.m.	FOX	12-2 (9-1 Big Ten)

Stroud echoed Harbaugh's sentiment, emphasizing his belief that players and coaches should earn a share of the media rights deal.

"I'll probably have to think about that a little more, but off of the rip, I would say yes," Stroud said. "They're paying for our school, so that's definitely a plus. But at the same time, I'm not 100 percent sure what our tuition is, but I'm sure it's not the worth of how much we're actually worth."

"It would definitely mean a lot, not only to the players, but to the coaches. I think even the school would appreciate just giving us maybe a little something because we put in so much work. We're in here when no one is looking and all of the time that goes into it, it's definitely tough," he continued. "Then you take the time away from your family. I'm 2,000 miles away from home. I don't want anyone to feel bad for me, but at the same time it does take a lot of courage, it does take a lot of heart, to be here day-in and day-out and year-in and year-out."

"I definitely think it should be shared, but if not, at the end of the day, we still have the NIL space and we can do it that way"

While Stroud laid out his belief that players and coaches should earn a share of the television revenue, Smith said the conference's student-athletes already benefit from the media deals by way of athletic and academic resources on campus.

"That's something that we haven't discussed, but frankly they're already getting a piece of the television revenue," Smith said. "When you aggregate in what we offer here with our circle of care, all of the people that we put around our student-athletes – trainers, strength coaches, sports psychologists, nutritionists, academic counselors – just keep going down the list and that's how we fund those positions. That's how we fund this building. That's how we fund this new field. That's how we fund the new field in the stadium. That's how we fund the security that we'll need for 103,000 people in the stadium."

"They actually already get a piece. It might not be directly in their pocket, but it's an investment in them. Do we do more down the road? Possibly. And that will be discussed, but not in the form of pay-for-play. Otherwise, I'm out."

Smith's feelings on media revenue sharing were not met by Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren, who told HBO Real Sports' Bryant Gumbel that he envisions the conference will pay players in the future.

"Those are the things that we have to resolve," Warren said. "I want to be part of this conversation and will be part of this conversation of what we can do to make this better."

Safeties Dunn, Martinez Cross-Training At Corner

Injury concerns at cornerback have led

to Ohio State employing some creativity in finding depth within the secondary, including cross-training second- and third-year safeties Jantzen Dunn and Cameron Martinez at corner and safety.

Buckeyes currently rehabbing at cornerback include freshman Ryan Turner, sophomores Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock and fifth-year Cameron Brown, who was on a pitch count throughout fall camp, though none of the injuries are expected to be long term according to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

"You're going to get corners who run all the time back and forth," Knowles said. "You're going to get soft-tissue injuries. And we need to be fresh. So I feel it's definitely something we are keeping our eye on and making sure we

get multiple guys their repetitions."

It's still more likely that Dunn or Martinez will ultimately line up at safety if and when they enter the game for Ohio State, but it speaks to the concern of Day and Knowles with only six scholarship cornerbacks on the roster.

"It's (a top-three concern)," Day said on Aug. 11. "We need to make sure we're building depth there. We certainly have some candidates there. A couple of guys are bumped and bruised, but hopefully we'll get them back soon and keep working."

Ohio State also added a cornerback designation onto kicker Jake Siebert's roster listing, though it isn't expected to amount to anything more than another body in practice

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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at cornerback.

Speaking of kickers, Parker Lewis and Ohio State are still awaiting to hear the status of his eligibility waiver to see if he'll be able to play for the Buckeyes this season.

The program has been mum about why Lewis has yet to be granted eligibility, as this is his first collegiate transfer, but it has been explained that his situation is similar to that of linebacker Palaie Gaoteote IV, who transferred to Ohio State last offseason and did not receive his eligibility until the season had started.

Day said on Aug. 11 that the Buckeyes had yet to hear anything from the NCAA but were

hoping to have news soon.

Retirement Not On Johnson's Mind

Although Day overhauled the defensive coaching staff following the 2021 season, defensive line coach Larry Johnson reaffirmed his commitment to the Buckeyes on Aug. 16.

At 70 years old, Johnson is the oldest member of the Ohio State coaching staff. Despite his age and status as the lone returning member of the defensive coaching staff, Johnson said thoughts of retirement never crept up during the offseason.

"My retirement plan is a way away from here. I enjoy coaching," Johnson said. "The day that I stop enjoying coaching, that passion that I have, then I'll do that. But I don't get up in the morning and say, 'Well, this is it.' I don't do that. That's not the way I function. I get up every morning dying to get into this building and coach those guys."

Since joining the Buckeyes in 2014, Johnson has seen plenty of turnover on the defensive coaching staff and has been in a similar situation before. After the 2018 season, Day made wholesale changes to the defensive coaching staff ahead of his first full season as head coach, replacing then-defensive coordinator Greg Schiano with Jeff Hafley and

Greg Mattison.

Similarly this past offseason, Johnson was the only member of the defensive coaching staff to remain with the Buckeyes in 2019. He said he draws from past experiences in these types of situations in order to transition to different defensive coaching regimes without issue.

"It's different. Different terminology and things are learned differently, that's all new," Johnson said. "It's a new language but football is football. Teaching is teaching, when it comes down to it. You have to teach a different way or do things a different way. Besides that, it's football. It's all ball."

As far as the current defensive coaching staff, Johnson said he's enjoyed working alongside Knowles, safeties coach Perry Eliano and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton and enjoys what the unit is building ahead of the Buckeyes' season opener against Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

"First of all, it's a great defensive staff," Johnson said. "It's a really great staff. Great guys, great people. I think it's a really fun staff. When you have a good unit, and guys are really close together and get a chance to bond – I think that's what's happening and I think our players are feeding off of that because we have bonded. We come from different backgrounds, but at the end of the day, we're football coaches."

Warren Excited About USC, UCLA Additions

The college football world was flipped on its head on June 30 when USC and UCLA announced they would leave the Pac-12 and join the Big Ten in 2024.

Warren emphasized his excitement to include the Bruins and Trojans in the conference's ranks but also laid out his thoughts on where his conference goes from here during Big Ten Media Days on July 26.

"These are two academic and athletic institutions and a strong location in Los Angeles with great rich history and tradition, who are innovative, who are forward thinking, who are bold, who will make us even stronger as a conference," Warren said. "And I look forward to welcoming these two fine institutions into the Big Ten Conference, to working with them, to making our conference even stronger than it already is."

"Where we are right now, I'm focused on being realistic about the state of college athletics, about accepting our responsibility to shape college athletics, lead college athletics, fortify college athletics, to be bold, to be strong, to be innovative."

As the Big Ten prepares for a seismic shift by including the pair of Los Angeles-based universities, Warren emphasized that the conference will remain vigilant and aggressive when it comes to expanding.

"I get asked every single day 'What's next?' " he said. "It may include future expansion, but it will be done for the right reasons at the right time with our student-athletes, academic and athletic empowerment at the center of any and all decisions that we will make regarding any further expansions."

"We will not expand just to expand," he continued. "It will be strategic, it will add additional value to our conference, and it will provide a platform to even have our student-athletes be put on a larger platform so they can build their careers but also that they have an opportunity to grow and learn from an education and from an athletic standpoint."

Former CB Williamson Arrested And Charged

Former Ohio State cornerback Marcus Williamson was arrested in Memphis, Tenn., on Aug. 20 and charged with two counts of aggravated robbery and one count of aggravated kidnapping and tampering with fabricated evidence.

Williamson reportedly kidnapped a 23-year-old woman in her own car and forced her to drive him to an ATM, where he told the woman to withdraw \$500. He then told the woman to get out of the vehicle and drove away. Local law enforcement found the woman's car in Williamson's possession the day after the alleged kidnapping, and he was found to be removing the victim's items from the car and throwing them away.

Williamson played for the Ohio State football team from 2017-21, playing on four Big Ten championship teams and competing in the College Football Playoff twice. He retired from football during last season's Rose Bowl and released several tweets regarding his experience as a Division I athlete at a major institution, some of which were critical of the Ohio State football program and former coach Urban Meyer.

According to court records, Williamson is being held on \$80,000 bond and will next appear in court on Sept. 7.

Harbaugh Claims U-M Can Surpass OSU In NIL

Name, Image and Likeness has dominated the collegiate landscape dating back to last summer, and Ohio State has often found itself at the center of the conversation due to its national prominence. The topic once again came up at Big Ten Media Days on July 26.

Asked about Michigan's NIL efforts and Day's previous comments that it would take \$13 million per year to maintain Ohio State's roster, Wolverine head coach Jim Harbaugh claimed that Michigan could soon surpass Ohio State in the NIL race.

"My thoughts are that I think we could do more," Harbaugh said. "I think we could maybe double (the \$13 million) at Michigan. I think that's possible. I think it's going in a terrific direction that way."

Ohio State's boosters were one of the first groups on the scene as NIL developed throughout the scene, with The Foundation – a booster-led collective that provides NIL opportunities for Ohio State student-athletes – going into operation earlier this year. According to Business of College Sports, several collectives have launched that will support Michigan student-athletes, though it does not appear that any have found the mainstream success of collectives at other schools such as Ohio State's The Foundation or Tennessee's Spyre Sports Group.

Several numbers have been reported regarding NIL deals for Ohio State's student-athletes, including a recent deal between four Buckeyes – Burke, Henderson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Stroud – that will pay each \$550,000. Exact numbers are not reported for the majority of NIL deals, but it is believed that Ohio State is near or at the top in both deals conducted and money brought in.

While Michigan likely would have some catching up to do to match Ohio State, Harbaugh is supportive of the school's NIL efforts and believes that they can match the Buckeyes, if not surpass them at some point.

As Day and Harbaugh battle off the field in preparation for November's matchup at Ohio

Ohio State Ranks No. 2 In Preseason Consensus Poll

Ohio State followed up an appearance in the College Football Playoff National Championship with a disappointing season in 2021. The Buckeyes lost their first game to rival Michigan since 2011, did not win the Big Ten title for the first time in five seasons and missed the CFP for the first time since head coach Ryan Day took the reins of the program in 2019.

The Buckeyes were mired by youth and inexperience last season but return 14 total starters – six on offense and eight from the defense – from their Rose Bowl-winning team. Most notably, Ohio State retained the services of quarterback and Heisman Trophy finalist C.J. Stroud and his favorite target Jaxon Smith Njigba – who holds the program single-season records for receptions and receiving yards. Expectations have risen for the Buckeyes' defense as well, fueled by the addition of former Oklahoma State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

As Ohio State carries a more veteran team into the 2022 season, the Buckeyes are expected to make a return to the CFP – according to a compilation of eight rankings from significant publications. The Buckeyes ranked No. 2 in Buckeye Sports Bulletin's consensus poll, which includes rankings from The Associated Press, Athlon Sports, CBS Sports, College Football News, ESPN FPI, Phil Steele, Sporting News and USA Today (coaches poll).

BSB awarded points for its consensus poll on a 25-24-23 scale, with the No. 1 team earning 25 points, the No. 2 team earning 24 points, and so on. The maximum number of points a team can receive is 200 and the total number of first-place votes is written in parentheses.

All eight polls carried the same top three teams – Alabama, Ohio State and Georgia – in the same order, with the Crimson Tide earning the top spot in each ranking and the maximum point total with 200. The Buckeyes and Bulldogs trailed behind at No. 2 and No. 3 in each poll, respectively.

According to the consensus poll, the Buckeyes are expected to return to the Big Ten mountaintop after ceding control of the conference to Michigan last season. The Wolverines remain Ohio State's biggest threat in the Big Ten, according to the rankings, as they ranked

Rk.	Team	Points
1.	Alabama (8)	200
2.	Ohio State.....	192
3.	Georgia.....	184
4.	Clemson.....	175
T-5.	Notre Dame	156
T-5.	Michigan.....	156
7.	Utah.....	148
8.	Texas A&M	136
9.	Oklahoma.....	130
10.	Oregon	110
11.	Oklahoma State	102
12.	USC.....	97
13.	Baylor.....	95
14.	NC State	90
15.	Michigan State	78
16.	Miami (FL)	65
17.	Wisconsin	56
18.	Pittsburgh	55
19.	Texas.....	47
20.	Arkansas.....	37
T-21.	Kentucky.....	36
T-21.	Wake Forest.....	36
23.	Mississippi.....	34
T-24.	Cincinnati.....	32
T-24.	Penn State	32

at No. 5 – tied with Notre Dame.

Michigan State (15), Wisconsin (17) and Penn State (T-24) round out the Big Ten's representatives in the consensus poll. The Buckeyes will play all three teams, hosting the Badgers on Sept. 24 before road games against the Spartans and Nittany Lions on Oct. 8 and Oct. 29, respectively.

Ohio State opens the season with a top-five matchup according to the poll. The Buckeyes will play host to No. 5 Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

.- Compiled by Jack Emerson

Stadium, Harbaugh said that his relationship with Day is professional and that they were cordial to each other at last year's Heisman Trophy ceremony in which Stroud and Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson were both finalists.

Despite that, Harbaugh declined when asked to expand on his comment following Michigan's win over Ohio State in which he said, "Some people were born on third and think they hit a triple," likely in reference to Day.

"I have no comment about that at this time," Harbaugh said with a smirk to end his time with the media.

Ryan, Nina Day Donate \$1M For Mental Health

Day and his wife, Nina, furthered their support of local mental health awareness initiatives on Aug. 3, donating \$1 million and creating the Mental Health Resilience Fund at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.

The Days pointed to the Ohio State community's support of their family as a factor for why they established the fund.

"It's just how wonderful Ohio State has been to our family," Ryan Day said. "We just felt like it was the right thing to do. So many people have poured into us and invested in our family. We think it's the right thing to do to give back."

The Day family has previously established the Christina and Ryan Day Fund for Pediatric and Adolescent Mental Health, in collaboration with Nationwide Children's Hospital, focusing on raising awareness and creating resources surrounding mental well-being for children.

Day said the Mental Health Resilience

29 Ohio State Student-Athletes Receive Degrees

Ohio State University sent off 1,012 students with their diplomas on Aug. 7, including 29 current and former Buckeye student-athletes who were honored for finishing their degrees during summer commencement at the Schottenstein Center.

Four of the 29 student-athlete graduates came from the women's track and field team, the most from a single program to earn their degrees on Aug. 7. Indiana graduate transfer Mallory Mulzer, who also ran cross country at Ohio State, Alyssa Marsh, Alexis Pyles and Lynea Diller all received their diplomas at summer commencement. Pyles garnered plenty of academic recognition during her time at Ohio State, collecting three All-Academic Big Ten honors prior to her graduation.

While women's track and field led the way in number of graduates, there were five national champions from the 2021-22 school year who also completed their schooling. Emily Curlett and Lexi Templeman, who helped Ohio State's women's hockey team to its first national title in program history, along with synchronized swimming national champions Laila Huric, Rachel Jager and Kristin StremLaw, all walked across the stage. Huric was recog-

nized as a Big Ten Scholar Athlete in 2022 and combined for seven national championship routines and four team championships with Jager and StremLaw across their time at Ohio State.

Three former men's basketball players also earned their diplomas, as Jimmy Sotos, the recently-transferred Justin Ahrens and Jeremie Simmons - who played for the Buckeyes from 2008-10 - all graduated in the building they had played their college careers in. Simmons played two seasons overseas following his Ohio State career, competing in Germany and the United Kingdom.

The following is a complete list of Ohio State's 29 student-athlete graduates, as well as their majors, in alphabetical order by sport.

Men's Basketball - Justin Ahrens, sport industry; Jeremie Simmons, sociology; Jimmy Sotos, kinesiology.

Women's Cross Country/Track and Field - Lynea Diller, agricultural systems management; Alyssa Marsh, sport industry; Mallory Mulzer, assistive and rehabilitative technology; Alexis Pyles, biology.

Women's Golf - Shotika Phadungmartvorakul, kinesiology.

Men's Gymnastics - Angel Leon, human de-

velopment and family sciences.

Men's Hockey - Eric Cooley, public management; William Riedell, public management.

Women's Hockey - Emily Curlett, public management; Lexi Templeman, kinesiology.

Women's Lacrosse - Alexandra Beekhuizen, kinesiology.

Men's Soccer - Abdirizak Mohamed, sport industry.

Women's Soccer - Maciah Lipsey, criminology.

Softball - Alexis Handley, sports coaching; Jaycee Ruberti, criminology.

Men's Swim & Dive - Trahern Gribble, sport industry.

Synchronized Swimming - Laila Huric, translational pharmacology; Rachel Jager, health sciences; Kristin StremLaw, psychology.

Women's Tennis - Isabelle Boulais, psychology.

Men's Track and Field - Amir Metts, public management; Kainnan Ramsey, communications.

Women's Volleyball - Gabrielle Gonzales, sport industry; Kylie Murr, sport industry.

Wrestling - Jashon Hubbard, sport industry; Rocky Jordan, sport industry.

before and during her college years. As the Days have personal experiences in the mental health field, Nina said she has had a lifelong devotion to raising awareness around mental health initiatives.

"Resilience is something we can all work on and develop to help us overcome challenges. As we all know, today's fast-paced world can bring stressful obstacles including some we do not see coming," she said. "We want our kids to understand that life is about enjoying the highs and managing the lows. We want

our children to have the resilience to thrive in the face of adversity, and if they ever face a challenge that feels too big to handle, we want them to be empowered to ask for help.

"That's why Ryan and I feel so strongly about advocating for mental health."

White Dead At 56 Following ALS Battle

Former Ohio State cornerback William

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From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1982

In January, Dom Capers replaced Nick Saban as secondary coach for the Ohio State football team. Buckeye fans hoped Capers was good at saving sinking ships.

The previous season had not been a banner year for the OSU secondary. It gave up 3,038 yards, an average of 276.1 yards per game.

Since Capers wasn't at OSU at the time, he preferred not to talk about the performance of that secondary. Instead, he wanted to concentrate on an important aspect he had seen in the OSU players - attitude.

"The players are in a winning program and they learn how to win," the new coach said. "You can't say enough for that because they expect to do well and they're going to work towards that end. Hopefully, they're not going to settle for anything less than that."

35 Years Ago - 1987

The rumors had been circulating for nearly four months, but it took only a short and simple statement to confirm them.

"It's my disappointing, depressing, disheartening task this afternoon to announce to you that Cris Carter is ineligible for the 1987 season and for anytime thereafter," said Ohio State athletic director Rick Bay. "The Ohio State University will not appeal for the restoration of his eligibility anytime in the future. As far as I know, Cris Carter will never play football again for The Ohio State University."

The Buckeye standout had accepted money from an agent and signed a representation contract.

30 Years Ago - 1992

Four former Ohio State sports stars, all of them All-Americans in their respective sports, constituted the list of honorees selected for induction into the Ohio State Athletic Hall of Fame.

Basketball sharpshooter Allan Hornyak, PGA Tour veteran Joey Sindelar, football lineman Aurelius Thomas and diving specialist Jim Patterson would be officially enshrined Oct. 9 at an induction dinner hosted jointly by the OSU athletic department and the Varsity "O" Association.

As part of the weekend's festivities, the new hall of fame members were also honored at halftime of the Ohio State-Illinois football game Oct. 10.

25 Years Ago - 1997

When the Ohio State Buckeyes took the field Aug. 28 against Wyoming in the first ever Eddie Robinson Football Classic, they

had a vastly different look from the last time they were seen in public.

That appearance - a stunning Rose Bowl win over Arizona State - marked the final game for 14 Ohio State starters, including such household names as tackle Orlando Pace, cornerback Shawn Springs and defensive end Mike Vrabel.

But you couldn't fault OSU coach John Cooper for looking ahead, not back.

"Last year is going to be hard to top, but I like our team," Cooper said. "We probably lost more quality football players off last year's Ohio State team than any time since I've been a head football coach.

"We've got a lot of young football players who have worked hard, paid their dues and now they're anxious to show the fans what they can do."

20 Years Ago - 2002

For the first time in its 132-year history, Ohio State had itself a female president.

On July 25, the OSU board of trustees approved the hiring of 59-year-old Georgia Provost/Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Karen A. Holbrook after a special meeting at the Longaberger Alumni House. Holbrook, a cell biologist by trade, would officially become the university's 13th president when she assumed the office on Oct. 1.

"It is truly the most exciting day I think I can ever remember," Holbrook said. "I can unequivocally offer the assurance that I'm here as my last career move. I am not interested in any other position at any other time."

15 Years Ago - 2007

While James Laurinaitis stole plenty of headlines in 2006, Marcus Freeman and several other linebackers also had impressive seasons. Freeman had 15 stops in the BCS National Championship Game against Florida and 71 on the season.

The 6-2, 242-pound junior knew all three linebacker positions and had impressed many with his maturity.

Freeman said he had been trying to take more of a leadership role on the defense.

"Leadership comes with being older, and that's something I've tried to do more of," he said. "I'm trying to be a leader and help the young guys out and help them go toward the right direction."

OHIO STATE INSIDER

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White died July 28 at the age of 56 following a six-year battle with ALS.

Born in Lima, Ohio, White played for the Buckeyes from 1984-87, starting all four seasons at cornerback, and was taken by the Detroit Lions in the 1988 NFL draft with the 85th overall pick. He ultimately played 11 seasons in the NFL, spending six seasons with the Lions and three with the Kansas City Chiefs before spending his final two seasons in Atlanta, where he played in Super Bowl XXXIII with the Falcons.

The Lions released a statement that evening from White's former Ohio State and Lions teammate Chris Spielman.

"I loved William," said Spielman, who works in Detroit's front office. "We shared experiences of joy and sorrow on and off the field. He was and always will be my brother. I am grateful to share a special moment last year when he was able to share the ring of honor moment with me. I can't wait to see him again when he will be free from ALS. May God's Peace rest upon his family."

White was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, in 2016, which is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that impacts nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

White's son, Brendon, played for three seasons at Ohio State from 2017-19 before transferring to Rutgers prior to the 2020 season.

Meyer Returning To 'Big Noon Kickoff'

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer is returning to television for the upcoming

BSB Returns To Weekly Print Schedule On Sept. 6

Buckeye Sports Bulletin returns to its weekly football season publishing schedule on Sept. 6, with coverage of the Notre Dame game. There will be immediate coverage of that game posted on our BuckeyeSports.com website, as well as discussion of the game at our Forum, including the "Official Game Thread," with real-time comments from BSB staff members and readers throughout the game.

Please note that recent developments with the mail service have us concerned about delivery time for BSB this football season. 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 online to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

The BSB staff provides daily posts on any and all Ohio State sports news, including the latest in football recruiting, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Additionally, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

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

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

As mentioned, readers who have been experiencing postal delivery problems can also 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.

football season, rejoining the cast of FOX's "Big Noon Kickoff."

Meyer was part of the initial "Big Noon Kickoff cast" – along with Reggie Bush, Matt Leinart, Brady Quinn and Rob Stone – that debuted in 2019. Meyer was on the show for two seasons before leaving to become the head coach of the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars, a tenure that came to an end after just 13 games due to numerous public issues with the team on and off the field.

Now eight months removed from his head-coaching stint, Meyer will return to FOX to replace Bob Stoops, who initially replaced Meyer when he left. Stoops announced his departure in April, citing a conflict with his XFL head-coaching responsibilities.

"Big Noon Kickoff" will travel for every week of the college football season this year, beginning on Saturdays at 10 a.m. on FOX with a game kicking off at noon every week.

'Iron Buckeye' Given To Seven Players

Seven Buckeyes were honored on Aug. 4 for the work they put in during the summer, earning the "Iron Buckeye" distinction.

Wide receivers Babb and Julian Fleming, tight end Cade Stover, defensive end Tyler Friday, linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safeties Ronnie Hickman and Kourt Williams II were named Iron Buckeyes. Day said the Iron Buckeye honors players who go above and beyond with their training during the time between spring and fall camp.

"Mick (Marotti) has his champions," Day explained. "We have gold, red and blue. Gold is what you want – that's the gold standard. Those are the guys who had great summers, didn't miss anything and weren't late. The Iron Buckeye is a little bit further where in each skill and then in the line recognizes those who had outstanding summers."

Although the Iron Buckeye is just a distinction based on offseason training, Day said the title carries real value that can be applied to in-game situations.

"The carry-over, on the field, has been tremendous. It doesn't mean anything but it gives you a chance because all of the things we do on the field carry over to what Mick does in the offseason," Day said. "It doesn't guarantee you anything but it gives you one heck of a chance (to see the field)."

Lions Hire Barrett As Offensive Assistant

The Detroit Lions announced on July 23 that former Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett had been hired by the team as an offensive assistant.

A three-time Griesse-Brees Quarterback of the Year Award winner, Barrett spent five seasons at Ohio State, throwing for 9,434 yards and 104 touchdowns and rushing for 3,262 yards and 43 touchdowns in 50 games. Also a three-time first-team All-Big Ten honoree, he helped lead the Buckeyes to a national championship in the 2014 season.

Barrett most recently appeared in the Ca-

nadian Football League, playing for the Edmonton Elks. He went undrafted in 2018 after leaving Ohio State but caught on as an undrafted free agent with the New Orleans Saints and also appeared on the practice squad for the Seattle Seahawks and Pittsburgh Steelers before being waived prior to the 2020 season.

NFL Network's Ian Rapoport reported that the 27-year-old Barrett will likely work with the quarterbacks in Detroit. Several former Buckeyes are on the Lions' roster, including a pair of Barrett's former teammates in Taylor Decker and Jeff Okudah, as well as Jashon Cornell and Jonah Jackson.

Several Buckeyes Shed Black Stripes

One of the most popular preseason traditions in Columbus is the shedding of a player's black stripe on their helmet, which indicates they have become a full member of the team. Several Buckeyes shed their black stripes in the spring, including transfer safety Tanner McCalister and a pair of freshmen in defensive end Caden Curry and safety Kye Stokes.

Several more Buckeyes lost their black stripes throughout preseason camp, with more certainly on the way as the season progresses. Going by date, freshman cornerback Jyaire Brown and transfer linebacker Chip Trayanum both became the first to lose their black stripes during fall camp, earning the honor on Aug. 9.

Freshman linebacker C.J. Hicks became the next up, losing his black stripe on Aug. 14. He was followed by walk-on tight end Zak Herbstreit and freshman wide receiver Kaleb Brown, who shed theirs on Aug. 17.

Ohio State then saw three Buckeyes lose their black stripe on Aug. 20, with wide receiver Kyion Grayes, Hayden and second-year receiver Joop Mitchell all becoming members of the team. Freshman defensive end Kenyatta Jackson then lost his on Aug. 21, becoming the eighth freshman to do so.

Themes, Promotions Set For Ohio Stadium

Ohio State has announced several season promotions for various games throughout the upcoming eight-game slate at Ohio Stadium.

Beginning with the Sept. 3 matchup against Notre Dame, Ohio State will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the 2002 national championship team, with several former coaches and players expected for a team reunion.

The following week against Arkansas State, Ohio State will host the Scarlet and Gray Game as well as the Buckeyes Care Game. This contest will also serve as a faculty and staff appreciation as well as a celebration of the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame. The following week against Toledo will feature the



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annual alumni band performance.

To close out the month at home, the Buckeyes will have a blackout theme for their Sept. 24 game against Wisconsin. The Buckeyes are 3-0 all-time when they wear the black uniforms.

In October, Ohio State will host Rutgers on the first day of the month in a contest that will serve as the university's homecoming game and celebration of the 100th anniversary of Ohio Stadium. The Buckeyes will then "Scarlet the Shoe" against Iowa on Oct. 22, an event where fans are encouraged to wear scarlet-colored clothing to the game.

Ohio State will host two contests in November, facing Indiana on Nov. 12 and Michigan on Nov. 26. Against the Hoosiers, the Buckeyes will honor former and active military members, and against the Wolverines, Ohio State will celebrate Senior Day.

Buckeyes Abound On Preseason Watch Lists

The college football season is set to begin and expectations are high for Ohio State as several individual players have landed on preseason watch lists for various awards throughout the college landscape.

Beginning on offense, Stroud, Henderson and Smith-Njigba were all named as "Players To Watch" for the Walter Camp Player of the Year Award and to the watch list for the Maxwell Award, given annually to the best player in college football. The trio were all given Big Ten football preseason honors, named among the best 10 players in the conference for the upcoming season.

Stroud – who was the only unanimous selection on the list – earned several honors within the conference last season, including being named Big Ten Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year, Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year and Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year. He was also a first-team All-Big Ten selection.

Stroud was also named to the preseason watch list for the Davey O'Brien Award, given annually to the top quarterback in college football.

Henderson landed on the Doak Walker Award preseason watch list, earning the status as one of the nation's top running backs entering the 2022 season. The Doak Walker Award is given to the best running back in college football at the conclusion of each season, and Henderson was a semifinalist last season. He is one of 10 running backs within the Big Ten to appear on the list, including Wisconsin's Braelon Allen, Michigan's Blake Corum and Minnesota's Mohamed Ibrahim.

Smith-Njigba is also in line for some individual hardware this season. While he did not win the Biletnikoff Award last season – and actually found himself out of the top three by the time the award was given to Pittsburgh's Jordan Addison – he's on the preseason watch list and should be one of the favorites to take home the award given to the top receiver in college football.

If Smith-Njigba were to take home that honor at the end of the season, he would be the second receiver from Ohio State to do so, joining Terry Glenn in 1995.

Another member of the Ohio State offense garnered preseason attention as redshirt sophomore center Luke Wypler was placed on the Rimington Trophy watch list. The Rimington Trophy serves to celebrate college football's best center, as voted on by members of the Football Writers Association of America,

Walter Camp Football Foundation and Sporting News.

Wypler is one of six Big Ten centers to earn preseason recognition, joining Michigan's Olu Oluwatimi, Minnesota's John Michael Schmitz, Penn State's Juice Scruggs, Purdue's Gus Hartwig and Wisconsin's Joe Tippmann. Three Buckeyes have previously won the trophy since its creation in 2000, with LeCharles Bentley (2001), Pat Elflein (2016) and Billy Price (2017) all taking home the honor.

Ohio State's starting tackles also received recognition, with Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones both named to the preseason watch list for the Outland Trophy, awarded to the top offensive lineman in college football.

Moving to the defense, defensive end Zach Harrison and Hickman were named to the Bednarik Award watch list, which honors the top defensive player in college football. Harrison and Hickman were also named to the Lott IMPACT Award watch list, which is presented annually to the college football defensive IMPACT player of the year. IMPACT is an acronym for Integrity, Maturity, Performance, Academics, Community and Tenacity – five qualities NFL Hall of Fame inductee Ronnie Lott exemplified during his football career.

The duo was also named to the Bronko Nagurski Trophy watch list, which is granted to the best defensive player in college football and voted on by the FWAA. Along with Hickman, Burke was named to the Jim Thorpe Award watch list, which is given to the top defensive back in the country.

Ohio State also has a member of the special teams in consideration for an award. Kicker Noah Ruggles was named to the preseason watch list for the Lou Groza Award, which is given to the nation's top kicker.

Chase Brown, Jack Emerson and Braden Moles contributed to this report. For up-to-the-minute Ohio State news and discussion, be sure to check out Buckeyesports.com and the BSB Fan Forum, available to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Defense Remains Key Focus For Ohio State

Continued From Page 1

The problems became evident as the season rolled on. A lack of push and physicality from the offensive line – a makeshift group that featured four tackles in an attempt to get the best five linemen on the field – led to minimal contributions from the run game in the season's most important moments despite the evident skill of freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson.

The defense showed minimal improvement from the pandemic-shortened season, finishing 38th in the country in scoring defense and 59th in total defense, as well as 97th in passing defense. It wasn't as though Ohio State ran the gantlet during the regular season, either. Outside of Oregon and Michigan, the Buckeyes' remaining opponents in the regular season finished a combined 62-65 on the year, not the hallmark of a particularly challenging schedule that Ohio State nonetheless, at times, had struggles with.

All the while, as these issues continued emerging, an apparent lack of leadership infected the program. While rarely spoken about – no head coach is willingly going to out his team as one bereft of leadership, especially with six veteran captains – Day did acknowledge in the spring that leadership was one of Ohio State's key focuses this offseason, and a program was completed during the winter to help identify leaders on the team.

The issue of leadership remains a work in progress, but there's reason to believe things are looking up on that front with five new captains, though it doesn't change how it impacted Ohio State last season. The loss to Oregon was a precursor of things to come, and the loss to Michigan – the Rose Bowl notwithstanding – offered an unfortunate culmination to the season that, on a national stage, led to questions about the program's culture and identity entering Day's fourth season as head coach.

"Last year, we were so young that we didn't know what we didn't know," Day said.



SONNY BROCKWAY

BACK TO THE TOP — Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, who is entering his fourth season leading the Buckeyes, is looking for his third Big Ten title and third appearance in the College Football Playoff.

"This year, we know what it's like to lose a game. We know what it's like to lose that rivalry game. And that was not good. And so there are some scars there, which is a good thing."

Scars are rarely a good thing, but in the metaphorical sense as Day implied, it does mean that the healing process has started for Ohio State. That began with a near total overhaul of the coaching staff on the defensive side of the ball, with only defensive line coach Larry Johnson – who is entering his ninth season with the Buckeyes – surviving the purge.

Out were secondary coach Matt Barnes

and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, and in their stead, Day hired Oklahoma State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles to the same role for the Buckeyes. Knowles helped turn the Cowboys into a top-10 defense that was in serious consideration for the College Football Playoff before a loss to Baylor in the Big 12 Championship Game.

Also joining the staff was longtime NFL cornerbacks coach Tim Walton and former Cincinnati cornerbacks coach Perry Eliano, who will coach the cornerbacks and safeties, respectively. Day also made a change on offense, bringing in UCLA's Justin Frye as Ohio State's offensive line coach and associate head coach for offense to replace Greg Studrawa.

After the conclusion of last season, Day considered running it back with the existing staff, further digging in on what he had built in three seasons at Ohio State. At the end of the day, he decided that change would be in the best interest of the program, which appeared to have gone stagnant.

"I certainly considered that and considered a lot of things and then thought long and hard on it," Day said. "I felt like a fresh start was the right thing to do."

"I felt like that's kind of what we've been doing the last couple of years, tweaking it and bringing a guy in and moving a piece over here," he continued. "I really wanted to start fresh and have a system in place so that when something goes wrong, there's an answer to the system, that everybody believes in the system."

With Knowles and company on staff, work began in the spring installing his new scheme. He brings a 4-2-5 formation from Oklahoma State, which is not unfamiliar given that Coombs ran the same alignment last season, though the results were not up to snuff for the Buckeyes' standards.

The talk of Ohio State's defense has tradi-

tionally centered around defensive linemen, at least since Johnson arrived in 2014, but the second and third levels of the defense will be under the microscope this season with Knowles, who said early in his tenure that Ohio State's defense will be driven by its safeties: the "adjuster" (free safety), "bandit" (boundary safety) and nickel.

Graduate Josh Proctor, who is returning after missing most of last season with a leg injury, will start at bandit. The adjuster will be helmed by senior Ronnie Hickman, and graduate transfer Tanner McCalister – who joined the Buckeyes this offseason from Oklahoma State and started at nickel for the Cowboys last season under Knowles – is set to start again at nickel, with cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Cameron Brown filling out the rest of the secondary.

Knowles will also be closely involved with the linebackers, which he will coach in addition to his responsibilities as defensive coordinator. Returning starters Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers impressed in camp and are likely to retain their jobs, with junior Cody Simon, junior transfer Chip Trayanum, graduate Teradja Mitchell and freshman C.J. Hicks rounding out the rotation.

"These guys are hungry," Knowles said. "They're tired of being pointed at as being deficient in any way. They came here as the best players in the country, and they want to play. They want to be coached."

Beyond his unique perspective at safety and linebacker, another trademark of Knowles' defenses has been the "Leo" or "Jack," which is a hybrid linebacker/stand-up defensive end position that utilizes a player's strength in pass-rushing situations and mobility when defending against the run or pass.

"The (Jack) is a fun position for the players," Knowles said. "You don't have to have a certain size or even a certain skill set, you just have to have a ballplayer at that position – someone who enjoys the game, has instincts, who is creative. You can find that guy anywhere."

This season, the most likely candidate to fill the Jack role is – aptly – sophomore Jack Sawyer, with graduate Javontae Jean-Baptiste, senior Palaie Gaoteote IV and freshman Caden Curry as possible backups. The position won't be used on every snap, but when it is in play, Knowles has high expectations for whoever is in the game.

"Once you've got the (Jack) moving all around, you've got him in different places, you see how the offense adjusts to that and their schemes and you can come back with other things and counter in the passing game," he said. "That player is productive in the pass rush because they develop a mentality of being a wild card who makes plays."

Elsewhere on the defensive line, Ohio State is performing a delicate balancing act between rewarding seniority within the program and allowing the younger members of the roster to flourish.

Seniors Zach Harrison and Tyler Friday and graduates Jerron Cage and Taron Vincent all return to the Buckeyes for this season but are facing serious pressure from the likes of sophomores J.T. Tuimoloau, Tyleik Williams and Mike Hall and junior Ty Hamilton, as well as Sawyer when Ohio State is

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in a traditional four-man front, and everyone is competing to see the field and step up in the room.

"You've got to have a little bit of dog in you when you get here; you've got to have a little attitude when you get here," Johnson said. "You want to be relentless in what you do. That guy is the guy that kind of leads the pack, and I think we have a couple guys who can do that. That's what's been really fun. The energy and the spirit in practice has been off the charts, better than it's ever been since I've been here."

There are plenty of moving parts on the defense, but the expectations remain high for Knowles and what he brings to Columbus. Day said as much at Big Ten Media Days when he opined that Ohio State expects a top-10 defense. That may appear a lofty task considering the lack of consistency on defense since Jeff Hafley departed following the 2019 season, but when asked about Day's comment, Knowles upped the ante even further.

"I wish he would have said top five," Knowles said. "That's what we expect. We talk about having a Silver Bullet defense, to mirror the traditions that have been around here, I tell the guys that means ranking in the top five. That's what we're pressing for. Nothing really goes through my mind other than it's great to be at Ohio State because the expectations are high and that's what I always wanted."

As things change on defense, though, the more they stay the same on offense. Quarterback C.J. Stroud will continue to build off last season's Heisman candidacy, viewed as one of the two favorites along with Alabama quarterback Bryce Young, who took home the hardware over Stroud, Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson and Pittsburgh quarterback Kenny Pickett in last year's ceremony.

At most other schools, a drop-off would be expected for Stroud after losing Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave to the NFL, but Ohio State has been reloading like no other at wide receiver. Junior Jaxon Smith-Njigba takes over as the clear No. 1 receiver, and with another offseason under his belt to work with Stroud, the sky's the limit for the potential connection between these two superstars.

"Just being off the field with him a lot, going places, just hanging around each other, we've been around each other a lot," Smith-Njigba said. "Our friendship has grown over this time and I feel like that will carry onto the field. The love of the brotherhood is real at Ohio State. I love all my guys and we're going to be ready to battle this year."

Flanking Stroud in the backfield will be Henderson, who running backs coach Tony Alford said during fall camp is "light-years" better than he was this time last year. He'll be backed up by junior Miyan Williams and freshman Dallan Hayden, as second-year back Evan Pryor was lost for the year due to a knee injury.

"I think we've got a real talented room," Alford said. "They're great guys to work with. I enjoy coming to work with them every day."

As previously mentioned, Ohio State had several members of the offensive line playing out of position last season, which means some shuffling will be in order this year. From left to right, the line will feature junior

Paris Johnson Jr., sophomore Donovan Jackson, junior Luke Wypler, fifth-year senior Matthew Jones and senior Dawand Jones.

Johnson, Wypler and Dawand Jones are the only returning starters, with Jackson rising quickly up the depth chart and Matthew Jones earning his first crack at the starting line entering his fifth year in the program.

With Frye now at the helm in the offensive line room and all five starters competing at their actual positions, expectations will be high in the trenches for the Buckeyes, who will look to shed the "finesse" moniker with more physicality and presence on the offensive line.

"You just put them in those situations (third down, red zone) as much as we can," Frye said of coaching the offensive line up during camp. "Ryan does a great job of moving the ball around the field. We get to play situational football. We're touching on all those things, so the first time in a game it happens, it's not the first time they've seen it. They have a book of work, and there's that

confidence because it's executed at a high level."

All told, Ohio State's offense has the potential to break records, but that side of the ball is a known quantity going into this season. Everyone in and outside of Columbus knows the talent that the Buckeyes will have on the field when the offense is in, but Ohio State's goals for this season – a win over Michigan at Ohio Stadium, a Big Ten championship, a return to the College Football Playoff and ultimately a national championship – will be decided by whatever turnaround may happen on defense and if Ohio State has taken steps to cure the leadership issues and allegations of being a soft or finesse program that ailed the Buckeyes last season.

It's no easy task, either, for all of these new pieces to come together when Notre Dame, a top-five matchup at Ohio Stadium, is the first game on the schedule. Whether the result is a win or loss for Ohio State, the opener will be an early indication as to

whether the Buckeyes are on track to reach their goals.

"Our offense hasn't done anything," Day said. "We're just a whole new group. We've got to go and prove ourselves. You think we will just go out there and score and be the best offense in the conference. Well, it doesn't just happen. We have to make sure we're starting with our foundation."

"And that's having toughness and having a range of goals, securing all the little things that lead you there. And then it goes from there. But I will say, if we can play complementary football this year, then that gives us a chance to win the first game. And that's all we're going to really focus on right now. It's very easy to start getting ahead of ourselves."

"But in order to reach our goals, we've got to take care of business early on. And really, you can't start accomplishing those goals until November. We've got to focus on just getting better every day. And, boy, that's cliché, I get it. But there's a reason why it's a cliché, because you have to do that."

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Ohio State Names Six Captains For 2022

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For all the talk of a record-breaking offense and a retooled defense for this upcoming season, one of the main focuses this offseason for Ohio State was establishing more leadership within the program.

Head coach Ryan Day lamented in the spring that the staff felt a lack leadership needed to be addressed, and steps were taken to build that back up, including an offseason program to identify leaders within the program that, according to Day, led to more leadership in the winter and spring than Ohio State had around “in a while.” After identifying those candidates throughout the offseason, Ohio State took final steps on Aug. 13 by announcing the program’s six captains for the season.

The Buckeye captains include a returning captain in fifth-year wide receiver Kamryn Babb and five new captains in fourth-year linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, fifth-year defensive lineman Tyler Friday, fourth-year tight end Cade Stover, third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud and third-year safety Kourt Williams II. Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a closer look at each captain who will help to foster leadership at Ohio State this season.

Kamryn Babb

Babb is the only returning captain this season as defensive end Zach Harrison and linebacker Teradja Mitchell were not voted captains after earning the honor last season. Babb is a logical choice, though, as a returning captain considering his impact on the team despite his lack of production on the field due to injury.

He suffered another injury setback during fall camp but is expected to return this season, according to Day, potentially in the first few weeks of the season. Dating back to his senior year of high school, Babb has suffered four torn ACLs, but his perseverance to get back on the field makes him an easy choice for a captaincy as well as receiving Ohio State’s Block “O” jersey.

“The last five years have been a long journey,” Babb said. “There were times when I was down and had a lot of questions. But God put people in my life who wouldn’t let me give up, and it’s been a blessing. I couldn’t have done this without them.”

In total, Babb has appeared in just seven games in four seasons, but his performance in fall camp has indicated that a larger role could be in store if he can make a healthy

return to the field. Whether or not he becomes a significant contributor at receiver, he’ll still be able to make an impact in the locker room for Ohio State.

“Something that’s a mark of a lot of successful people is the ability to be resilient and bounce back from adversity and failure and emotional pain, and he is the epitome of that,” Day said. “He’s been an unbelievable leader. He’s set a standard.”

Tommy Eichenberg

Eichenberg does not jump off the page as a top captain choice for Ohio State given his quiet nature, but it’s that quality that has endeared him to the Buckeyes, including defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

“I think Tommy has been a great leader for us,” Knowles said in March. “I really like what I’ve seen from Tommy. He’s mastering the defense quickly and making plays. He’s quiet, but he’s fierce.”

Eichenberg, who comes to Ohio State out of Cleveland, started four games last season for Ohio State, including a breakout performance in the Rose Bowl, in which he finished with a team-high 17 tackles. That game could be an indication of things to come, as Eichenberg is now entering his first season as a bona fide starter for the Buckeyes alongside fourth-year linebacker Steele Chambers.

“I just trusted myself and played with more confidence,” Eichenberg said. “That was a big thing for me.”

“I feel confident. Not only confident in myself but my confidence comes from the defensive line and the defensive backs, the offseason of working with spring ball and everything,” he continued. “It comes from knowing that I’m going to do my job and they’re going to do their job. That’s where my confidence comes from.”

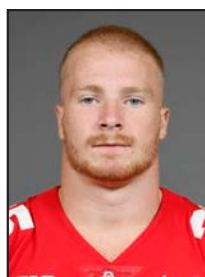
Tyler Friday

Like Babb, Friday is returning to the field this season after an extended absence. He tore his ACL during last season’s fall camp and underwent a long rehab to return for Ohio State.

“It was very difficult, but I’ve got a great team here full of brothers,” he said. “Instead of one brother, I got over 100 here at Ohio State. During the tough times, I just leaned on them, my family, kept my faith in God



Kamryn Babb



Tommy Eichenberg



Tyler Friday



Cade Stover



C.J. Stroud



Kourt Williams II

and I was able to get through it.”

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson said that during Friday’s time away from the field, he became an example for his teammates of how players should conduct themselves, and it helped set a bar for the program and led to Friday being voted a captain.

“He can provide a lot,” Johnson said. “We missed Tyler last year. Tyler is really strong at the point of attack. He plays hard. He’s physical. He cares. We missed that last year. We missed that leadership a little bit, too, because he was a strong leader in the room. When you sit in the back of the room, you can have a tendency to be quiet because you’re not playing, and now he’s a voice. I think that’s what we need.”

Friday, a native of Ramsey, N.J., will look to make an impact on Ohio State’s rotation on the defensive line. In 26 career games, he has accounted for 18 tackles (four for loss), three sacks and a fumble recovery.

Cade Stover

Whether lining up at defensive end, linebacker or tight end, it’s evident the impact that Cade Stover has had on Ohio State over the past several seasons that led to him being voted a captain.

“He’s a dude that I would want in my fox-hole,” graduate tight end Mitch Rossi said. “He’s not going to blame me for something or throw me under the bus. We’re working together out there, and I can trust him. It’s great.”

Stover, a native of Mansfield, Ohio, will get a chance to start at tight end this season for the Buckeyes, and with his position seemingly settled, it’s made it easy for Stover to help lead the team.

“It’s kind of hard to lead when you don’t really know what’s going to come next or where you’re going to play next,” he said. “Once I got comfortable, I found a little bit of a route here for me and it felt good. That’s kind of when it really clicked.”

As a captain, Stover brings 21 games’ worth of experience, including 15 at tight end, four at defensive end and two at linebacker. He has 15 career tackles and has caught five passes for 76 yards.

C.J. Stroud

As the star quarterback and Heisman candidate, it would have been surprising

had Stroud not checked in as one of Ohio State’s six captains. What is notable, though, is the strides he has made in the leadership department since earning the starting job last season.

“C.J. has always had very good leadership skills,” Day said. “He’s always had a voice. Once you go on the field and you show credibility that you can do it, you walk a little differently, and guys look at you through a different lens. I think that’s been the case.”

Stroud slowly morphed into that role last season, beginning the season mostly reserved and just going about his business as Ohio State’s starting quarterback but eventually finding his way as a voice for the team in his actions both on and off the field.

“I feel like we’ve all changed,” wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba said. “I feel like one of his things that he’s going to show is he’s a more mature quarterback. He makes the right decisions and stuff like that, which is a big deal as a quarterback. He’s definitely more mature, I would say.”

A four-star recruit out of Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., Stroud surpassed all expectations in his first season as the starter, throwing for 4,435 yards and 44 touchdowns, and he could be in line for more this season with a year of experience under his belt.

Kourt Williams II

Williams has appeared in just 11 games entering his third year in the program, but he’s made a strong impression on his fellow Buckeyes with his work ethic.

“I think if you said, ‘Who’s the hardest-working guy in our building?’ a good portion of our team would say Kourt Williams,” Day said last fall. “Sometimes he’s there at 5:30 in the morning, and I go home at night, he’s still there. He’s unbelievable, his work ethic, the way he’s rehabbed his knee.”

A four-star prospect in 2020 out of St. John Bosco in Bellflower, Calif., he suffered a torn ACL prior to his freshman season and made his first appearance for the Buckeyes last year, tallying 27 tackles (four for loss), one sack and a pass breakup, including a season-high six solo tackles in Ohio State’s Rose Bowl win over Utah, his first career start.

Now a captain for Ohio State – something Day said would happen when Williams signed his letter of intent with the Buckeyes – Williams will factor into Ohio State’s rotation at safety and is likely the first off the bench for the Buckeyes’ secondary.

“I think right now from where I saw Kourt from last year and his leadership skills, this is a safety-driven defense, it really is,” Knowles said in the spring. “And he’s been playing a lot at our boundary safety position, which we call bandit. We feel like he can get into the run fit there when we want him. We feel that he’s a guy who’s a leader. Off the field, when I watched him in the weight room, he’s a worker, he’s a leader. So I like him with more depth and vision to be able to see the ball and to control the movements of the secondary.”

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2022 Ohio State Football Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
0	Kamryn Babb	WR	6-0	210	Graduated	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College
2	Kourt Williams II	SAF	6-1	220	3rd Year	Harbor City, Calif./St. John Bosco
2	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	205	2nd Year	Steilacoom, Wash./Steilacoom
3	Miyan Williams	RB	5-9	225	3rd Year	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
3	Teradja Mitchell	LB	6-2	239	Graduated	Virginia Beach, Va./Bishop Sullivan
4	JK Johnson	CB	6-0	179	2nd Year	St. Louis, Mo./De Smet
4	Julian Fleming	WR	6-2	205	3rd Year	Catawissa, Pa./Southern Columbia
5	Dallan Hayden	RB	5-10	195	1st Year	Memphis, Tenn./Christian Brothers
5	Denzel Burke	CB	6-1	190	2nd Year	Scottsdale, Ariz./Saguaro
6	Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	222	2nd Year	Mt. Laurel, N.J./St. Joseph's Prep
6	Taron Vincent	DT	6-2	300	5th Year	Baltimore, Md./IMG Academy
7	C.J. Stroud	QB	6-3	218	3rd Year	Inland Empire, Calif./Rancho Cucamonga
7	Jordan Hancock	CB	6-1	185	2nd Year	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett
8	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	DE	6-5	249	Graduated	Spring Valley, N.Y./Bergen Catholic
8	Cade Stover	TE	6-4	255	4th Year	Mansfield, Ohio/Lexington
9	Zach Harrison	DE	6-6	272	4th Year	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy Orange
9	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	196	2nd Year	Massillon, Ohio/Washington
10	Xavier Johnson	WR	6-2	215	Graduated	Cincinnati, Ohio/Summit Country Day
11	C.J., Hicks	LB	6-3	225	1st Year	Dayton, Ohio/Archbishop Alter
11	Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-1	200	3rd Year	Rockwall, Texas/Rockwall
12	Caleb Burton	WR	5-11	169	1st Year	Austin, Texas/Lake Travis
12	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	205	3rd Year	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic
13	Cameron Martinez	SAF	5-10	190	3rd Year	Muskegon, Mich./Muskegon
13	Kaleb Brown	WR	5-10	197	1st Year	Chicago, Ill./St. Rita
14	Ronnie Hickman	SAF	6-1	207	4th Year	South Orange, N.J./DePaul Catholic
14	Kojo Antwi	WR	5-11	192	1st Year	Suwanee, Ga./Lambert
15	Devin Brown	QB	6-3	210	1st Year	Draper, Utah/Corner Canyon
15	Tanner McCalister	SAF	5-11	195	Graduated	Rockwall, Texas/Oklahoma State
16	Mason Maggs	QB	6-2	218	1st Year	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
17	Kyion Grayes	WR	6-0	185	1st Year	Chandler, Ariz./Chandler
17	Mitchell Melton	LB	6-3	245	3rd Year	Silver Spring, Md./Good Counsel
18	Jyaire Brown	CB	5-11	180	1st Year	New Orleans, La./Lakota West
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	WR	6-4	205	2nd Year	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep
19	Chad Ray	QB	6-2	215	2nd Year	Dublin, Ohio/Scioto
19	Chip Trayanum	LB	5-11	230	3rd Year	Akron, Ohio/Arizona State
20	Sonny Styles	SAF	6-4	222	1st Year	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
21	Evan Pryor	RB	5-11	198	2nd Year	Cornelius, N.C./William Amos Hough
21	Palaie Gaoteote IV	LB	6-2	245	5th Year	Las Vegas, Nev./USC
22	Steele Chambers	LB	6-1	232	4th Year	Roswell, Ga./Blessed Trinity Catholic
23	Omari Abor	DE	6-3	249	1st Year	Duncanville, Texas/Duncanville
24	Jantzen Dunn	SAF	6-1	192	2nd Year	Bowling Green, Ky./South Warren
25	Jaylen Johnson	SAF	6-1	211	2nd Yea	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle
25	Kai Saunders	WR	6-2	210	1st Year	Northville, Mich./Northville
26	Cayden Saunders	RB	5-9	190	2nd Year	Northville, Mich./Northville
26	Cameron Brown	CB	6-0	192	Graduated	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College
28	Reid Carrico	LB	6-2	230	2nd Year	Ironton, Ohio/Ironton
28	TC Caffey	RB	5-10	218	1st Year	Hubbard, Ohio/Hubbard
29	Jesse Mirco	P	6-4	220	2nd Year	Fremantle, Australia
29	Ryan Turner	CB	5-11	188	1st Year	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
30	Cody Simon	LB	6-2	239	3rd Year	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep
30	Corban Cleveland	WR	5-11	180	2nd Year	Rockwall, Texas/Rockwall Heath
32	Brenten Jones	SAF	6-1	196	1st Year	Steubenville, Ohio/Steubenville
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	214	2nd Year	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-4	267	2nd Year	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington North
33	Chase Brecht	RB	6-0	205	1st Year	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
34	Mitch Rossi	TE	6-1	250	Graduated	Franklin, Tenn./Franklin
34	Colin Kaufmann	CB	5-10	185	1st Year	Avon, Ohio/Avon
35	Tommy Eichenberg	LB	6-2	239	4th Year	Cleveland, Ohio/St. Ignatius
36	Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	228	1st Year	Marysville, Ohio/Marysville
37	Kye Stokes	SAF	6-1	190	1st Year	Seffner, Fla./Armwood
38	Jayden Fielding	K	6-0	175	1st Year	League City, Texa/IMG Academy
38	Cameron Kittle	DB	6-0	182	3rd Year	Glouster, Ohio/Trimble
39	Andrew Moore	DB	5-11	185	2nd Year	Cleveland, Ohio/Cleveland Heights
41	Josh Proctor	SAF	6-2	205	5th Year	Owasso, Okla./Owasso
42	Lloyd McFarquhar	CB	5-10	180	Graduated	Cleveland, Ohio/Brush
42	Bradley Robinson	LS	6-1	230	Graduated	Troy, Mich./Athens

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
43	Dianté Griffin	CB	5-8	185	1st Year	Lima, Ohio, Lima Senior
43	Riordin Stauffer	TE	6-1	242	1st Year	Milford Center, Ohio/Fairbanks
44	J.T., Tuimoloau	DE	6-4	270	2nd Year	Edgewood, Wash./Eastside Catholic
46	Elias Myers	LB	6-2	245	4th Year	Sunbury, Ohio/ Pittsburgh
48	Max Lomonico	LS	6-3	225	2nd Year	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
49	Patrick Gurd	TE	6-4	248	3rd Year	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
50	Jackson Kuwatch	LB	6-4	235	2nd Year	Cincinnati, Ohio/Lakota West
51	Michael Hall Jr.	DT	6-2	290	2nd Year	Streetsboro, Ohio/Streetsboro
52	Jay Stoker	LB	5-11	215	1st Year	Liberty Twp., Ohio/Cincinnati Princeton
53	Luke Wypler	OL	6-3	300	3rd Year	Montvale, N.J./St. Joseph Regional
54	Tyler Friday	DE	6-3	264	5th Year	Ramsey, N.J./Don Bosco Prep
54	Toby Wilson	OL	6-2	290	2nd Year	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
55	Matthew Jones	OL	6-4	315	Graduated	Brooklyn, N.Y./Erasmus Hall
56	Zack Cicero	DL	6-2	265	2nd Year	Youngstown, Ohio/Niles McKinley
57	Jalen Pace	LB	6-0	228	2nd Year	St. Louis/Mary Institute & St. Louis Country Day
58	Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	294	3rd Year	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
60	Ryan Smith	OL	6-1	285	4th Year	Valley City, Ohio/Buckeye
61	Jack Forsman	OL	6-6	295	2nd Year	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
62	Bryce Prater	DL	6-0	275	2nd Year	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
63	Zach Prater	DL	6-0	285	2nd Year	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
64	Quinton Burke	OL	6-5	310	3rd Year	Lancaster, Ohio/Lancaster
65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-7	310	2nd Year	Floyds Knobs, Ind./Floyd Central
66	Enokk Vimahi	OL	6-4	310	4th Year	Kahuku, Hawaii/Kahuku
67	Tegra Tshabola	OL	6-6	330	1st Year	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
68	George Fitzpatrick	OL	6-6	285	1st Year	Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek
69	Trey Leroux	OL	6-7	315	3rd Year	Norwalk, Ohio/Norwalk
70	Josh Fryar	OL	6-6	320	3rd Year	Beech Grove, Ind./Beech Grove
71	Ben Christman	OL	6-6	310	2nd Year	Akron, Ohio/Revere
72	Avery Henry	OL	6-6	309	1st Year	St. Clairsville, Ohio/St. Clairsville
73	Grant Toutant	OL	6-7	320	3rd Year	Warren, Mich./De La Salle
74	Donovan Jackson	OL	6-4	300	2nd Year	Bellaire, Texa/Episcopal
75	Carson Hinzman	OL	6-4	290	1st Year	Hammond, Wis./Saint Croix Central
77	Paris Johnson Jr.	OL	6-6	310	3rd Year	Cincinnati, Ohio/Princeton
78	Jakob James	OL	6-5	295	3rd Year	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
79	Dawand Jones	OL	6-8	359	4th Year	Indianapolis, Ind./Ben Davis
80	Blaize Exline	WR	5-10	175	1st Year	Salem, Ohio/Salem
81	Sam Hart	TE	6-5	245	2nd Year	Aurora, Colo./Cherokee Trail
82	David Adolph	WR	6-4	210	1st Year	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
83	Joop Mitchell	WR	6-2	180	2nd Year	Wyoming, Ohio/Wyoming
84	Joe Royer	TE	6-5	245	3rd Year	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-5	245	1st Year	Acworth, Ga./Allatoona
86	Jerron Cage	DT	6-2	305	Graduated	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
87	Reis Stocksdale	WR	5-9	188	2nd Year	Morrow, Ohio/Little Miami
88	Gee Scott Jr.	TE	6-3	239	3rd Year	Seattle, Wash./Eastside Catholic
89	Zak Herbstreit	TE	6-2	243	2nd Year	Nashville, Tenn./Montgomery Bell Academy
90	Jaden McKenzie	DT	6-2	286	4th Year	Wake Forest, N.C./Wake Forest H.S.
91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	318	2nd Year	Manassas, Va./Unity Reed
92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	250	1st Year	Greenwood, Ind./Center Grove
93	Hero Kanu	DT	6-4	305	1st Year	Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif./Santa Margarita Catholic
94	Mason Arnold	LS	6-0	228	2nd Year	Tampa, Fla./Carrollwood Day
95	Noah Ruggles	K	6-2	190	Graduated	Odessa, Fla./North Carolina
96	Michael O'Shaughnessy	P	6-3	205	4th Year	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
97	Kenyatta Jackson	DE	6-5	239	1st Year	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
98	Jake Seibert	CB/K	6-1	205	3rd Year	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle

COACHING STAFF: Ryan Day Head Coach; Kevin Wilson Offensive Coordinator/Tight Ends Coach; Jim Knowles Defensive Coordinator/Linebackers Coach; Larry Johnson Associate Head Coach/Defensive Line Coach; Tony Alford Assistant Head Coach for Offense/Run Game Coord./Running Backs Coach; Justin Frye Associate Head Coach for Offense/Offensive Line Coach; Tim Walton Secondary Coach/Cornerbacks Coach; Perry Eliano Safeties Coach; Brian Hartline Passing Game Coordinator/Wide Receivers Coach; Corey Dennis Quarterbacks Coach; Parker Fleming Special Teams Coordinator; Keenan Bailey Senior Advisor to the Head Coach; Matt Guerrieri Senior Advisor & Analyst; Keegan O'Hara Graduate Assistant, Offense; Cam Spence Graduate Assistant, Defense; Todd Fitch Offensive Analyst; Brent Zdebski Quality Control; Koy McFarland Defensive Graduate Assistant; Mike Sollenne Graduate Assistant, Offense; Rob Keys Quality Control, Kicking; Devin Jordan Program Assistant - Offense; Reilly Jeffers Program Assistant - Offense; Sam McGrath Program Assistant - Defense; Joe Lyberger Program Assistant - Defense; Miguel Patrick Quality Control; Owen Fankhauser Program Assistant - Kicking

2022 Big Ten Schedule

	WEST DIVISION							EAST DIVISION						
	ILLINOIS	IOWA	MINNESOTA	NEBRASKA	N'WESTERN	PURDUE	WISCONSIN	INDIANA	MARYLAND	MICHIGAN	MICHIGAN STATE	OHIO STATE	PENN STATE	RUTGERS
SEPT. 3	Wyoming (Aug. 28) at Indiana (Sept. 2)	SOUTH DAKOTA STATE	NEW MEXICO STATE (Sept. 1)	Northwestern (Aug. 27) NORTH DAKOTA (Sept. 3)	Nebraska (Aug. 27)	PENN STATE (Sept. 1)	ILLINOIS STATE	ILLINOIS (Sept. 2)	BUFFALO	COLORADO STATE	WESTERN MICHIGAN (Sept. 2)	NOTRE DAME	at Purdue (Sept. 1)	at Boston College
SEPT. 10	VIRGINIA	IOWA STATE	WESTERN ILLINOIS	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	DUKE	INDIANA STATE	WASHINGTON STATE	IDAHO	at Charlotte	HAWAII	AKRON	ARKANSAS STATE	OHIO	WAGNER
SEPT. 17		NEVADA	COLORADO	OKLAHOMA	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	at Syracuse	NEW MEXICO STATE	WESTERN KENTUCKY	SMU	UCONN	at Washington	TOLEDO	at Auburn	at Temple
SEPT. 24	Chattanooga (Sept. 22)	at Rutgers	at Michigan State		MIAMI (OH)	FAU	at Ohio State	at Cincinnati	at Michigan	MARYLAND	MINNESOTA	WISCONSIN	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	IOWA
OCT. 1	at Wisconsin	MICHIGAN	PURDUE	INDIANA	at Penn State	at Minnesota	ILLINOIS	at Nebraska	MICHIGAN STATE	at Iowa	at Maryland	RUTGERS	N'WESTERN	at Ohio State
OCT. 8	IOWA	at Illinois		at Rutgers (Oct. 7)	WISCONSIN	at Maryland	at N'western	MICHIGAN	PURDUE	at Indiana	OHIO STATE	at Michigan State		NEBRASKA (Oct. 7)
OCT. 15	MINNESOTA		at Illinois	at Purdue		NEBRASKA	at Michigan State	MARYLAND	at Indiana	PENN STATE	WISCONSIN		at Michigan	
OCT. 22		at Ohio State	at Penn State		at Maryland	at Wisconsin	PURDUE	at Rutgers	N'WESTERN			IOWA	MINNESOTA	INDIANA
OCT. 29	at Nebraska	N'WESTERN	RUTGERS	ILLINOIS	at Iowa					MICHIGAN STATE	at Michigan	at Penn State	OHIO STATE	at Minnesota
NOV. 5	MICHIGAN STATE	at Purdue	at Nebraska	MINNESOTA	OHIO STATE	IOWA	MARYLAND	PENN STATE	at Wisconsin	at Rutgers	at Illinois	at N'Western	at Indiana	MICHIGAN
NOV. 12	PURDUE	WISCONSIN	N'WESTERN	at Michigan	at Minnesota	at Illinois	at Iowa	at Ohio State	at Penn State	NEBRASKA	RUTGERS	INDIANA	MARYLAND	at Michigan State
NOV. 19	at Michigan	at Minnesota	IOWA	WISCONSIN	at Purdue	N'WESTERN	at Nebraska	at Michigan State	OHIO STATE	ILLINOIS	INDIANA	at Maryland	at Rutgers	PENN STATE
NOV. 26	at N'western	NEBRASKA (Nov. 25)	at Wisconsin	at Iowa (Nov. 25)	ILLINOIS	at Indiana	MINNESOTA	PURDUE	RUTGERS	at Ohio State	at Penn State	MICHIGAN	MICHIGAN STATE	at Maryland
DEC. 3	Big Ten Championship Game • Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis • 8 p.m. ET													

Stroud Returns As Heisman Hopeful In 2022

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At the start of last season's fall camp, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day hadn't announced a starting quarterback for his team, though all signs pointed to then-red-shirt freshman C.J. Stroud as the first-team signal caller.

That proved to be true, and one year later, that decision has worked very well for Day, who picked a record-breaking talent who finished fourth in Heisman Trophy voting. However, his decision wasn't met without pushback.

In the first three games of 2021, Stroud led Ohio State to a 2-1 record, including a home loss to Oregon in Week 2. The following week, the Buckeyes looked questionable against a middling Tulsa team. Stroud looked particularly shaky, completing 15 of 25 passes for just 185 yards, one touchdown and one interception. The first-year starter said he had been dealing with pain in his throwing shoulder since the start of fall camp, but he would battle through it.

Day thought his quarterback should take a different approach. He chose to bench Stroud against Akron – one of the worst programs in the FBS – to allow Stroud an opportunity to heal his tender arm. Freshman Kyle McCord performed admirably against the Zips, collecting 319 yards, two touchdowns and a pick.

Buckeye fans took to the message boards asking if the team would be better off with McCord at quarterback. After all, Ohio State beat Akron, 59-7, and the offense looked great. Still, Day kept faith in Stroud, claiming he would be the starter if he were healthy.

"I thought C.J. had a good week of work, so we're looking forward to having him back on the field this week," Day said before the Rutgers game the following week. "I think stepping away has been good for him. It allowed him the opportunity to heal and rest his shoulder. It also offered him a different perspective on watching practice. Watching the game from the sidelines and seeing how things are happening from that lens helps, and I'm hoping that pays off here for C.J."

As it turns out, that was just the remedy Stroud needed.

Over the next nine games, Stroud put up video-game numbers, connecting on 254 of his 340 attempts (74.7 percent) for 3,472 yards and 36 touchdowns to only three interceptions. He built an outstanding connection with Jaxon Smith-Njigba while bolstering the professional résumés of Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave en route to leading college football's top offense.

Perhaps his best performance came when the lights shone brightest at the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day. Without Wilson and Olave, who skipped the game in preparation for the NFL draft, Stroud led the Buckeyes to a thrilling 48-45 win over Utah, completing 37 of 46 passes for a record-tying six touchdowns in Ohio State's ninth Rose Bowl victory of all time. He etched his name in the bowl game's history with 573 passing yards, the most in a

Projected Starter

Quarterback

7 • C.J. Stroud

**6-3 • 218 • So.
Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.**

After a record-breaking freshman campaign, Stroud will look to repeat as one of the nation's best quarterbacks this season.

single game in its 108-year run.

"This is the Rose Bowl," Stroud said after the contest. "This is where the legendary games are being played. If you aren't motivated to play, I question your love of the game. Every game I go out there, I try to do my best and make sure I prepare the right way and do the right things because you never know what can happen in the game."

Stroud ended the season with 4,435 yards, 44 touchdowns, and six interceptions. He had the third-best completion percentage in the FBS at 71.9 percent, and his passing efficiency rating was second best to Coastal Carolina's Grayson McCall at 186.6.

He broke 17 school records in 2021, and the Big Ten recognized the Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., native with numerous honors after the season, including the Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year, Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year and the Griesse-Brees Quarterback of the Year awards. He was also named a first-team all-conference member by the coaches and media.

At the national level, Stroud finished fourth for the Heisman Trophy behind Alabama quarterback Bryce Young, Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson and Pittsburgh signal-caller Kenny Pickett. He also was a finalist for the Davey O'Brien Quarterback of the Year award and earned third-team Associated Press All-American honors.

Day reflected in the spring on Stroud's progress during his first season under center, claiming that the redshirt sophomore took tremendous strides in a breakout year.

"At this time last year, he had not thrown a college pass," Day said. "Now, he's got a whole year under his belt. You're learning what to do. Now you're kind of learning why you do it. There is a deeper understanding of things."

Day said Stroud spent much of the winter and spring learning new schemes and plays that Ohio State would implement this fall, opening up exciting new possibilities for an offense returning six starters from 2021.

"There is a little bit of a Rolodex of plays under his belt," Day said. "We will look at some new concepts, too, and some things he can handle and maybe put a little more on his play with what he can do at the line of scrimmage."

At Big Ten Media Days, Day couldn't contain his excitement when discussing Stroud's continued development over the summer, especially as a leader in the

locker room. He said Stroud added some healthy weight, strengthened his throwing shoulder to avoid potential flare-ups, and developed even greater chemistry with Smith-Njigba, junior Julian Fleming and sophomores Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeika Egbuka.

"C.J.'s always had very good leadership skills," Day said. "He's always had a voice. But once you go on the field and show credibility that you can do it, you walk a little differently and guys look at you through a different lens, and I think that's been the case."

Stroud – who was named one of Ohio State's six captains for this season – agreed that he's improved in the leadership department, but he believes he could have accomplished more for Ohio State last season. He even called his first year as a starter unsuccessful.

"I would probably counteract me having success last year. Maybe I did, but I don't think I did a lot," Stroud said. "I feel like I barely touched my potential. I feel like I can do a lot more."

Day disagreed with Stroud's self-assessment of his performance, claiming that his quarterback had an excellent season by consistently putting his team in a position to win football games. Still, Day recognized Stroud's comments as an indication of growing maturity in the signal-caller.

"I think it says a lot about C.J. for him to make that comment on who he is as a person because when you look at the two losses (last season), I don't think he played that bad in those two games. I don't think C.J. Stroud was the problem," Day said. "But for him to say that, and for him to take on those losses, says a lot about who he is as a leader."

"To say he accomplished nothing last year, that's not accurate. But that's his approach, and I think that's what makes him great. And I respect that about him. So he did many great things last year, but I think his best football's ahead of him."

Behind Stroud, McCord will battle freshman Devin Brown for the backup role and an early start on the competition to helm the offense next season, assuming Stroud's likely departure to the NFL. McCord was a five-star quarterback out of Philadelphia and served as the primary backup to Stroud in 2021, completing 25 of 38 passes for 416 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions. Brown arrived on campus in January as a four-star prospect out of Draper, Utah.

"Kyle had a really good offseason, so that was great," Day said. "And Devin's worked really hard as well, and that's another guy who's only been here since January, but you've got to develop these guys."

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Henderson Headlines Talented RB Room

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After struggling to find its footing down the stretch of the 2021 campaign, the Ohio State running backs room is searching for consistency in 2022.

The Buckeyes' offense found itself out of balance at key junctures last season, relying heavily on the passing game, at times, while the running game lagged behind. With an off-season of growth, sophomore TreVeyon Henderson (5-10, 215) and company are looking to carry their weight for the entire 2022 campaign.

However, the unit was dealt a significant blow during fall camp, as second-year running back Evan Pryor (5-10, 198) suffered a knee injury during a team scrimmage on Aug. 13 that will likely keep him out for the season. Despite the loss of Pryor, Henderson, third-year back Miyan Williams (5-9, 225) and freshman Dallan Hayden (5-10, 195) still give the Buckeyes a solid rotation of rushers heading into the season.

"I think we've got a real talented room," running backs coach Tony Alford said. "They're great guys to work with. I enjoy coming to work with them every day. I'm asking them to be pros about the way they approach the business. The way they go to meetings, walk-throughs, practice – be pros and just continue to get better. But I love the room I've got."

Behind a record-breaking performance against Tulsa early last season in which he gashed the Golden Hurricane for an OSU

Projected Starter

Tailback
32 • TreVeyon Henderson

5-10 • 214 • So.
Hopewell, Va.

After winning the starting job last year, Henderson will look to avoid a sophomore slump coming off one of the best rushing seasons by a freshman in Ohio State history with 19 total touchdowns.

freshman-best 270 yards and three touchdowns, Henderson burst onto the scene as the clear-cut No. 1 option out of the Buckeyes' backfield.

Henderson extended that breakout performance into a promising freshman campaign, breaking Maurice Clarett's program record for total touchdowns for a first-year player with 19 scores. In addition to his knack for finding the end zone, Henderson added 1,248 rushing yards on 183 carries in his first season with the Buckeyes. With a full offseason to hone his skills, Henderson is once again expected to lead the Buckeyes' rushing attack.

In order for him to build on last season's success, Henderson said he's keeping his head down and putting in the work needed to improve.

"I'm just staying focused, not getting too big-headed because I felt like I did a lot last year," Henderson said. "I'm not at the level that I want to be at yet. So I have to keep grinding,

and I have to stay focused."

As a freshman, Henderson showcased the ability to make plays in space and pick up chunks of yardage with the ball in his hands. He finished the season with an average of 6.8 yards per carry, tied for second in the conference behind Williams, who turned in an average of 7.2 yards per attempt, though Williams did so on significantly fewer carries.

While Henderson's home-run hitting ability was a staple of his game last season, he said he had to refocus his mind-set to understand that he was not going to pick up big gains on every carry.

"The learning and teaching moments that I had to work through was that it's not going to be a lot of home runs," Henderson said. "Sometimes you have to take those tough 3- to 5-yard runs. So that's what I had to transition to for a majority of the end of the season, just taking those 3- to 5-yard runs."

While Henderson will undoubtedly be the feature running back for the Buckeyes this season, Williams, Hayden and walk-ons Cayden Saunders and Xavier Johnson – a receiver with previous experience at running back – slot in behind the talented sophomore after depth-piece Master Teague III departed the program for the NFL and Marcus Crowley, who was entering his fourth year in the program, medically retired from football in the spring.

Williams carries the most experience of the Buckeyes' backup backs after playing a significant role in Ohio State's rushing attack last season.

In the Buckeyes' season opener against Minnesota, he earned the starting nod over Henderson and Teague and made the most of his carries, rumbling his way to 125 yards and a touchdown on nine attempts, headlined by a 71-yard touchdown run on Ohio State's first offensive drive of the season.

Williams led the Buckeyes in carries and yards in their 35-28 loss to Oregon a week later, toting the rock 14 times for 77 yards. From there, however, his role greatly diminished. He missed Ohio State's third game against Tulsa due to an illness, and Henderson took the opportunity to cement himself at the top of the depth chart.

With the exception of a 14-carry, 117-yard outing against Purdue, Williams was largely out of the picture for the remainder of the season, with just 13 carries total in Ohio State's final three games of the season, finishing the year with 508 yards and three touchdowns on 71 total carries.

As Williams is known for his physicality with the ball, he said Alford wants him to be the thunder to Henderson's lightning. Carrying the label of a power running back, Williams said his drive to create contact started from a young age.

"Running over people started for me when I was younger," Williams said. "I used to have anger problems. I would get the ball and try to go hit somebody. As I got older, I learned how to control my anger. People still think that I like to run angry, but it's not the case. I'm just running like I always have but with controlled anger."

Although power is at the forefront of his game, Williams spent the offseason slimming down and reshaping his body. As the running back retooled his physique, Alford said that Williams' dedication to shedding weight was felt beyond just him.

"Look what he just did to his body," Alford said. "That wasn't easy. It's not easy to transform your body that way, and that took time. I think with this team, they can look at that and say, 'OK, here's what he's doing to better serve the football team, the football program,' and for him, it's like, 'Hell, I put in all this work. Let's not have it go for naught.' I think it's beneficial to everybody – not just to the players, but to the coaches too."

With Pryor's season over before it started, Hayden steps into a much larger role as a true freshman. Despite arriving in Columbus in June, the Memphis, Tenn., native has shown promise in his short time with the program. Alford mentioned Hayden's hyper-competitive attitude as a trait that has helped in his acclimation process.

"Dallan goes 100 miles an hour, so the biggest thing we've got to figure out is to get him to slow down and take a deep breath," Alford said. "He's very hard on himself. He's the guy that you can tell he wants to do things perfectly, and that bothers him immensely if he doesn't. He's going to be a really good player."

Saunders and Johnson may also see their numbers called if injuries continue to pile up for the unit.

Johnson has bounced around positions a considerable amount during his Ohio State career, having spent time with the running backs and wide receivers. As Johnson has worked to find the field during his four-year Ohio State career, Alford said he could count on Johnson to return to running back if needed.

"That's not even a question, if he would do that. That's a foregone conclusion," Alford said. "He is a consummate team player. I'm more than proud of the way he's handled himself. I've watched him grow into the man that he is."

While the Buckeyes' running back room was rife with competition during the offseason, Alford emphasized that the players who make plays will work themselves into a role on the field.

"Those guys all deserve to play," Alford said. "I've got to make sure that they're all ready to play because they all have shown the capacity and ability to play winning football here for Ohio State."



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Building Depth At Tight End A Priority

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Cade Stover had a choice to make entering the 2022 season, and the one he made will likely benefit not only him but the entire Ohio State team, particularly in a tight end room that is long on athleticism but short on experience.

The 2018 Ohio Mr. Football from Lexington High School was set on being a linebacker for the Buckeyes, but since his arrival on campus he has teetered between that position and being a tight end with a short stint as a defensive end thrown in for good measure.

His versatility was never more apparent than the 2021 season, when he made more tackles (six) in the Rose Bowl against Utah than catches (five) for the season.

Yet he is favored to be the starting tight end when the No. 2 Buckeyes open the season Sept. 3 in Ohio Stadium against fifth-ranked Notre Dame. The fourth-year Stover (6-4, 255) thought long and hard about his future but ultimately concluded that his biggest contribution could be on the offensive side of the ball, not to mention seeing a better avenue to making an NFL roster down the road.

"I don't know how many teams anymore want a 6-5, 260-pound middle linebacker," Stover said in March. "Thirty years ago, I would be playing middle linebacker and there wouldn't be a question about it."

"But I think with today's game, the way our defensive line was and playing the four-down defense, and then having the experience over at tight end already and looking at (NFL scouting) combine numbers about where you stand and where you come out, it just made more sense to go over and play tight end. Really, I just came back with a much clearer mind-set than when I came over the first time."

The tight ends at Ohio State have a reputation for quality over quantity when it comes to receptions, but they are also known for being skilled in blocking techniques. There's a reason in the past two years Luke Farrell (No. 145 in 2021 by Jacksonville) and Jeremy Ruckert (101st in 2022 by the New York Jets) were drafted into the NFL.

Ruckert last season led the tight ends with 26 catches for 309 yards (11.9 average) and three touchdowns. He had the most catches for an OSU tight end since Marcus Baugh grabbed 28 in 2017.

It's an eclectic mix that offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson is mentoring with graduate Mitch Rossi, a former walk-on entering his sixth season, emerging from the preseason camp as a challenger for a starting spot.

"Cade and Mitch Rossi, they're our two most consistent, strongest guys," Wilson said Aug. 15. "Cade's going to have a great year. He's a pretty good player. Mitch is much more valuable than I think people realize. He is a solid component of what we do."

Rossi (6-1, 245) made four catches for only 28 yards and a TD but 22 of those yards came on a critical catch deep in Utah territory early in the fourth quarter of the Rose Bowl that led to the tying score (38-38) en route to the 48-45 victory.

The Franklin, Tenn., product underwent offseason shoulder surgery but decided to take advantage of the NCAA's rule that gave

Projected Starter

Tight End
8 • Cade Stover

6-4 • 225 • Jr.
Mansfield, Ohio

Stover is the expected starter at tight end with just five career catches to his name, all coming last season.

athletes an extra year of eligibility because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though he has only five career catches for 36 yards while splitting time between fullback and tight end, he has big aspirations.

"I thought I'd be working in an office somewhere by this point in like investment banking or something like that," he said. "Now, I'm looking at playing in the NFL next year, so it's definitely been a change in mind-set over the years, but I wouldn't trade it. It's been an awesome journey."

The other returning tight ends who made at least one catch last season are former wide receiver Gee Scott Jr. (five catches for 42 yards) and three-star recruit Joe Royer (one catch, nine yards). Each is in his third year.

Also on scholarship are second-year player Sam Hart (6-5, 245) – who redshirted the 2021 season – and freshman Bennett Christian (6-5, 245) from Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona.

Rounding out the roster are preferred walk-ons Patrick Gurd (6-4, 245), in his third season, and second-year Zak Herbstreit (6-2, 243). Riordin Stauffer (6-1, 242) is in his first season out of Milford Center (Ohio) Fairbanks.

The reality is the Buckeyes need to have depth at tight end to be able to run the full arsenal of weapons. There will be times when two tight ends, two running backs and a lone receiver will be used.

"We have to have tight ends," head coach Ryan Day said. "When you don't put a tight end in the game, it really limits what you can do running the football. We have to have the physicality up front to be able to do that. We certainly want to have at least one tight end in the game, and possibly two."

He mentioned the possibility of going with four receivers and no tight ends but that option is not high on his priority list.

"It limits what you can do," Day said.

Rossi thinks the tight ends offer the perfect solution.

"We have a lot of different skill sets," he said. "It gives us a better chance to get more of us on the field at once."

Wilson agreed and said the tight end group is like a basketball unit.

"It would be nice if they were all 6-5, 6-6 and 260 and 270 (pounds) and ran 4.4 (40-yard dash), but they're not," he said. "Typically, some guys block better. Some guys run routes better."

"But when those guys get going and you put them on the field and move them around, you can take advantage of matchups, and that's what we're looking for."

Beyond the tight end's impact on the field, Stover was named one of six captains, a testament to his willingness to do anything to help the team.

"In that room, we have guys who have a lot of different skill sets, but Cade's really worked hard," Day said. "His physicality is what you notice the most, and for a big guy he is athletic, has good ball skills and he's worked hard in the offseason to work on his route running and catching the ball. That's been excellent."

As Stover gets more comfortable at his permanent (maybe?) position, it's evident he has no regrets.

"You look about where you can excel, where people are going to want you to play at and where your prototypical body would be at," he said. "I think tight end was the best decision for me."

Scott (6-3, 240), from Seattle Eastside Catholic was in a similar predicament as Stover in that he had to mentally prepare to be a full-time tight end after being recruited as a wide receiver. He came in at 210 pounds and played last season at 220, but he doesn't feel slower and thinks the added weight will aid him in blocking.

"When I first got over there and I'm blocking these big guys, the coaches were obviously taking care of me. They wouldn't have me doing these bigger blocks when I was 215 pounds," Scott said. "But now that I'm a lot bigger, I feel like I take on all the blocks pretty well."

He is still learning the spot but has fully embraced who he is now.

"My goal as a tight end is to not have a (specific) role. I can do everything," he said. "It's like that running back that's your speed back and he plays on speed downs or a third-down back, but I want to be the guy that's every down."

"I'm not a receiver that plays tight end. I'm a tight end that plays tight end, and I want to be a great tight end."

Scott and Royer (6-5, 245) are battling for that third tight end spot. Royer, a Cincinnati Elder product, has also added 20 pounds since his arrival to manage the rigors of the college game.

"You've got Gee and Joe figuring out that

next niche and how good are you without the ball and blocking and what's the blocking matchups and then what's the route running?" Wilson said. "You see (a little inconsistency) as they're growing, so I think both of those guys are kind of jabbing back and forth."

Hart, an Aurora, Colo., native, said he used his redshirt season to develop an understanding of the position.

"I kind of struggled mentally," he said. "I was thinking too much, and that would make me hesitate and be slow. Now I'm finally starting to figure it out and being able to play fast."

Christian admits that coming into a new environment is taxing. He has a solid foundation for Wilson's blocking schemes, but he needs to work on his receiving skills.

"It's like learning a few positions at once," Christian said.

Day set the bar high for the tight ends early in camp.

"The tight end group had a really good summer," the coach said. "Cade Stover had an unbelievable summer. Mitch Rossi had a really good summer. Joe, Gee, Sam and Bennett, that room has a great chance to have some depth. They have to build and they have to grow. There's not a ton of experience in that group, so it will be an important (fall camp) for Coach Wilson and that room."

Scott could have been speaking for all the tight ends when he likened his progress to scaling a summit.

"If you look at the greatest mountain climbers in the world, they don't climb the mountain in one step," he said. "They don't look to the top. Their job is to 'Let me just place this one foot here and place the next foot here.'"

"And that's what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis. Today, I did practice. I just played. It's another foot, and tomorrow I'll come out and place another foot. So, before you know it, I'll be at the top of the mountain. It's just a matter of being consistent."

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Talented WRs Set For Dominant Season

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's wide receivers room saw two program greats ascend to the NFL this off-season, yet Brian Hartline's unit remains among the strongest on the team heading into the 2022 season.

With transformational receivers Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave off to the next stage of their careers, the Buckeyes will reload their pass-catching corps with star junior Jaxon Smith-Njigba at the helm. Young guys, such as sophomores Marvin Harrison Jr. and Eme-ka Egbuka, are likely to slot in behind him while others, such as redshirt sophomore Julian Fleming, sophomore Jayden Ballard and graduate Kamryn Babb, will also compete for touches. Add in a quartet of four-star freshmen – Kyion Grayes, Caleb Burton, Kaleb Brown and Kojo Antwi – and the Buckeyes' receiving corps appears to carry a good deal of depth into the season.

Last season's Rose Bowl win over Utah served as a preview of what to expect from Ohio State's receivers this season, after Olave and Wilson decided to sit out the game in order to maintain their health for draft season. The Buckeyes' aerial attack did not skip a beat against the Utes, though, allowing quarterback C.J. Stroud to shatter Rose Bowl records for passing yards (573) and touchdowns (six) while Smith-Njigba hauled in a bowl-game record 347 receiving yards and a trio of touchdowns – including a toe-tapping, over-the-shoulder score

in the front right corner of the end zone to give the Buckeyes their first lead of the game with 4:22 remaining in regulation.

Although Smith-Njigba stole the show with his record-breaking performance, Harrison, Egbuka and Fleming all proved they can be solid complementary pieces behind the Rockwall, Texas, native. Harrison matched Smith-Njigba's scoring output while snagging six receptions for 71 yards. Fleming registered five receptions for 35 yards, while Egbuka added three catches for 46 yards in the win.

Entering this season, Smith-Njigba and Harrison are the top two options on the depth chart, while Egbuka and Fleming are expected to compete for snaps below the duo. Despite the losses of Wilson and Olave, Hartline said he expects his unit to remain among the best in the country.

"There's just an extended list of guys that I feel very comfortable putting on the field," Hartline said. "We have a great, solid group of guys, and I know we lost two great ones but I think we have a lot of guys in our room that can fill that void, plus some."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day echoed Hartline's sentiment and added that the unit would likely play to its depth in 2022.

"Last year, with Chris and Garrett, they took the majority of the reps on the perimeter," Day said. "We're going to let those guys rotate a little bit because they deserve to play."

At the head of the pack is Smith-Njigba, who is expected to produce yet another historic season in what will likely be his final run with the

Buckeyes. He excelled last year behind stars Wilson and Olave, shattering single-season program records with 95 receptions and 1,606 receiving yards. He also snared nine receiving touchdowns in 2021.

But his most memorable performances came in games in which his role increased. His production in the Rose Bowl obviously ranks at the pinnacle of his career to this point, but he also willed the Buckeyes to a midseason win against Nebraska – which Wilson missed due to injury – with a program-record 15 receptions for 240 yards and a touchdown.

Those games helped Smith-Njigba land in the national spotlight among the nation's best receivers. With his rise to the feature receiving role, Smith-Njigba recognized the attention he may receive this season as compared to last. He also mentioned he still has plenty to prove despite his record-breaking sophomore campaign.

"I trust the work," Smith-Njigba said at Big Ten Media Days. "I put in a lot of work. I've got a chip on my shoulder. I'm ready to prove myself right and get after it. I have to dig deeper into myself and who I am and what I can show on film and do on the field. I think I'm the best so I have to work like it. I'm just trying to do that. I just take it day-by-day."

Smith-Njigba has already garnered plenty of preseason attention, landing on the watch lists for the Maxwell and Biletnikoff awards while being named to the Walter Camp All-American first team. While the buzz grows around him, he's said his individual goals are more in line with the team rather than any personal honors.

"There are new goals that I set for myself, higher goals that are harder to achieve," Smith-Njigba said. "I have to stay focused, I have to stay levelheaded, or I know I'm not going to reach those goals."

"We fell short as a team last year, not making it to the playoffs or the national championship, so I feel like I haven't really done anything or won anything. This year, hopefully, I'm looking for a change. I know I have to work to get there so that's my mind-set."

Also stepping into a larger role is Harrison, whose aforementioned Rose Bowl performance all but secured his status as the No. 2 option behind Smith-Njigba in 2022.

Harrison noted that his three-touchdown performance in the Rose Bowl allowed him to believe more in his abilities as a receiver and carry that newfound belief into his offseason training.

"It gives you confidence, if anything, just knowing that you can go out there and perform

at a high level like that," Harrison said.

Harrison's football lineage runs deep. As evident by his name, he is the son of NFL Hall of Fame wide receiver Marvin Harrison Sr., but that's not how he wants to be remembered. He's looking to make a name for himself. Now he has the opportunity to do just that this season.

Although Harrison has his sights set on his own legacy, he is applying lessons he has learned from his father to his own game.

"He taught me to always pretend like it's the last play in the Super Bowl," Harrison said. "Just having that mind-set of, 'This is the catch – I have to make this play.'"

With another offseason to develop, Harrison added muscle while keeping his overwhelming athleticism in mind. As he took strides in terms of his strength, he landed on The Athletic's annual college football freaks list, which highlights college football players with unique physical skill sets.

Ohio State second-year quarterback Kyle McCord, who played high school football with Harrison at St. Joseph's Prep in Philadelphia, pointed to Harrison's determination and drive to improve as staples of the receiver's game.

"When I first met Marvin, at the beginning of our high school careers, obviously he was talented. He was 6-3, he moved really well. But the thing that really stuck out to me when we first started working together was just how hard he works," McCord said. "A perfect example of that is, during COVID, which was going into our senior year, practice was shut down and there wasn't really anything to do. We were sneaking onto the field at 6 a.m., before summer school, throwing. He was never a guy that would complain. He was just like, 'Tell me where and when, and I'll be there.'"

"Once we got to college, he's even taken his work ethic to the next level," McCord continued. "It's no surprise to see what he's been able to do on the field. I think it's just a product of his talent matching his work ethic."

Harrison is not the only sophomore wideout expected to see a boost in usage. Egbuka, who was largely utilized as a kick returner last season, has spent the offseason engaged in a competition for the No. 3 spot on the depth chart with Fleming. Suffice it to say Egbuka will be an important piece to Ohio State's passing offense regardless of if he starts or not.

Egbuka harnesses blazing speed and a tremendous leaping ability that helps him get the edge in jump-ball situations. He is a yards-after-reception threat as well, utilizing his speed and agility to shake away from defenders in his

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<p>Wide Receiver 18 • Marvin Harrison Jr.</p> <hr/> <p>6-4 • 205 • So. Philadelphia (Pa.) St. Joseph's Prep</p> <hr/> <p>Appeared in all 13 games as a freshman, amassing 11 receptions for 139 yards and three touchdowns.</p>	<p>Wide Receiver 4 • Julian Fleming</p> <hr/> <p>6-2 • 205 • Jr. Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia</p> <hr/> <p>Played in eight games last season, hauling in 12 receptions — including a career-high five catches in the Rose Bowl.</p>	<p>Slot Receiver 11 • Jaxon Smith-Njigba</p> <hr/> <p>6-1 • 200 • Jr. Rockwall, Texas</p> <hr/> <p>Shattered program single-season records with 95 receptions and 1,606 yards last year.</p>
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path, which is evident in his kick-return game.

While Egbuka will elevate to a more defined role in 2022, he pointed to the lessons he learned from working behind Ohio State's three-headed receiving monster last season.

"Last year was a great year for me," Egbuka said. "I got to sit behind guys like Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, Jaxon and really just learn from them. I know how great of careers they're going to have in the NFL, and just to have those guys as my big brothers, guiding me along the way, was the best thing I took out of last year."

Egbuka displayed his danger in the open field several times last season, and with the physical side of things figured out, he placed his focus on the mental aspect of the game during the offseason.

"The game is a lot faster at this level, I'm sure a lot of people say that, but it's really true," Egbuka said. "The main thing is knowing your assignment and knowing, not just your assignment, but the whole play, so if you get put in there at the other position, you know what you're doing and the full concept. Once you know the full concept, the full play, you're able to play at full speed."

Another former five-star recruit stands in Egbuka's way for the final starting spot, as Fleming is still seeking his breakout in scarlet and gray. Health has been a major factor holding him back from his potential. He has missed considerable time the last two seasons while battling a shoulder injury.

"I've just gradually made progressions every year," Fleming said. "I've had to progress past injuries, because then I come back a little bit rustier and take a step back and then I feel like it's constantly two steps forward. I feel like right now, my route running is at its best. I feel good. I feel fast and I feel strong. I'm going to continue my routine right now, and hopefully the sky's the limit."

Despite his injury history, Fleming has shown flashes of his ability when healthy. His most notable performance came in the 2020 Big Ten Championship Game, in which he led the Buckeyes with 53 receiving yards. In 15 appearances in scarlet and gray, Fleming has amassed 20 receptions for 187 yards and a touchdown.

This offseason, Fleming was awarded with the Iron Buckeye distinction, which is bestowed upon the players who go above and

beyond with their training during the summer.

"Julian Fleming had the best offseason he's had to this point," Day said. "He's one of the most improved. It was excellent."

The most veteran member of the unit is two-time captain and Block "O" recipient Kamryn Babb, who has evolved into the heart of the Buckeyes' locker room during his time with the program.

Despite enduring four ACL tears during his high school and college careers, Babb's impact on the team is undisputed. While the biggest attribute he brings to the table is his leadership, he can also be a valuable depth piece on the field for the Buckeyes.

But the injury bug bit Babb once again during the spring, as he suffered another knee injury, however this one was deemed as minor. He missed much of spring camp with the injury and did not play in the annual spring game. While Babb entered fall camp at full strength, he suffered another injury set-back during the session's second week — but Day said that he does not believe the injury will hold Babb out for the season.

As Babb has dealt with the cycle of injury and rehabilitation for much of his college career, he pointed to his faith as a driving factor during his recovery processes.

"It is a struggle," Babb said during the spring. "Of course I'm human so you definitely have those doubts. I lean on my faith. I'm just reading my bible and really trusting in God and trusting that I know he has a plan for me."

"I feel great. A lot of people say, you go through four ACL injuries and you wouldn't think my knees feel good or anything. I really feel good and strong and fast. That's only a testament to who Jesus is and what he's doing in my life," he continued. "I just know there's so many people out here that feel like they don't have hope or feel like they're lost, whatever it may be, even on this team maybe. This is bigger than me, and I know in my head if I can get through this, then maybe someone who is struggling through the same thing or even something worse can look at my story and be like, 'He did it, why can't I?' Because I'm no different than anybody else."

Babb was recruited to Ohio State as a four-star receiver out of St. Louis in the class of 2018. After missing his first two seasons due to knee injuries, Babb finally saw the field in 2020

— a season of relative health for him — in which he played seven of the Buckeyes' eight games. However, he was unable to parlay that season into another year of health, as he tore his ACL during the offseason leading into the 2021 campaign — holding him out for all 13 games.

While Babb seeks a return to the field in his fifth year in the program, he is also still looking for his first career catch. Despite the multiple setbacks during the offseason, Babb said just being back on the field and practicing has been a rewarding feeling for him.

"It's an amazing feeling. When you're away from the game for so long, you ask yourself, 'Do I love the game anymore?' Just being out there, making plays, and seeing other guys make plays and being able to celebrate right there with them, it just brings joy and fun back to the game," Babb said. "It allows me to realize, like I've been saying, this is bigger than me. This is about this whole team, Zone 6, just everybody. We're one big family. I love being a part of it."

Ballard may also see the field more in 2022, as several of his teammates cited him as someone who flies under the radar in terms of potential production.

After redshirting his first season with the Buckeyes, Ballard is known for his speed and deep-threat ability. Donning the No. 9 jersey this season, Ballard has received comparisons to former Buckeye receiver Devin Smith, who was adept at hauling in the deep ball. While Ballard was grateful for the lofty comparison, he said he wants to be a well-rounded receiver, rather than just a deep-ball threat.

"I want to be a deep threat like (Smith), Chris (Olave) and Garrett (Wilson) and those types of guys," Ballard said. "But I also want to build up my smaller routes too, like my medium routes and stuff like that instead of just being a deep threat."

Antwi, Brown, Burton and Grayes are also waiting in the wings in their first season in the program.

While Burton and Grayes arrived in the spring as early enrollees, Antwi and Brown joined the team in the summer. Despite his late arrival, Brown was the first of the group to shed his black stripe and has emerged as a special teamer, working in with the punt-return rotation in fall camp.

Stroud praised Brown's abilities during fall camp and said he's come along nicely despite missing spring practices.

"He's done really well," Stroud said. "He's very dynamic, very twitchy, very quick. He has looked really good."

Day was pleased with how the group worked during the offseason and expects big things from the unit this season.

"Those guys, when you look at them, they're strong and they're tough," he said. "We need toughness on the perimeter and guys who are going to make plays."

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Frye, Reworked OL Looking For Improvement

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Greg Studrawa tried something new on the Ohio State offensive line in 2021: a four-tackle experiment involving Nicholas Petit-Frere, Thayer Munford, Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones. The experiment didn't work, however, and Studrawa was swiftly fired following the season's conclusion.

Enter Justin Frye, a rising talent who coached the offensive line for UCLA under Ryan Day's mentor, Chip Kelly.

In Los Angeles, Frye was tasked with installing the same running scheme he had used as an offensive line coach for Boston College years prior. From 2013-17, he facilitated the Eagles' running game and its scheme – one that produced conference-leading statistics, including a 2,177-yard rushing season for former BC tailback Andre Williams in Frye's first season.

Those results came from believing how hard-nosed football and running downhill can win games. He took that same approach to the West Coast. After four seasons at UCLA, Frye's work culminated with the 14th-ranked rushing attack in 2021 at 215.1 yards per game. Meanwhile, Ohio State was 47th in that category at 180.6 yards per contest.

After impressing at his last two stops, Frye will get the opportunity to help improve Ohio State's offensive line, which is set to feature five talented players in the trenches. The lineup is set, with Johnson at left tackle, Donovan Jackson at left guard, Luke Wypler at center, Matthew Jones at right guard and Dawand Jones at right tackle, and Day believes these five players are the ones he can count on for consistency and tone-setting up front.

"Paris and Dawand are both very talented and have played a lot," Day said. "Paris hasn't played much at tackle, but there was a reason that I wanted Paris in there last year to play – even though he was at guard – because he's played a lot of football now. Matt Jones has played more now. Luke had a great year. And then Donovan is going to be younger, but we think he's very talented. When you look at those five, those are five really good offensive linemen."

Johnson returns for his third year at Ohio State this fall, but it will be his first as the starting left tackle. He paid his dues for two seasons under Studrawa, contributing as the unit's sixth man as a freshman before starting all 13 games and earning All-Big Ten recognition at right guard as a sophomore. However, the former No. 1 tackle in the class of 2020 looks poised to take over his natural position this fall.

Day said Johnson has made great strides in the weight room since Ohio State's Rose Bowl win over Utah. However, Day had been most impressed with his efforts to improve his technique and football IQ in the offseason.

Johnson learned from former Buckeye tackles Petit-Frere and Munford during his first two seasons in Columbus, and he also worked with them in March and April as

Projected Starters

Left Tackle
77 • Paris Johnson Jr.

6-6 • 310 • Jr.
Cincinnati (Ohio) Princeton

Johnson, a five-star offensive tackle out of high school, will play at his true position after starting at right guard last season.

they prepared for the NFL draft. Additionally, Johnson spent the summer months studying game films of professional left tackles, learning what allows them to succeed against the world's best defensive ends and edge rushers.

"We recruited him as a tackle, and we've always felt that he was a tackle," Day said. "To his credit, he wanted to be on the field last year and learned a lot while playing at guard last season. His pad level and understanding calls will pay dividends for him down the road. Now making the transition back to tackle – the position he played his whole life other than last year – it's not like it's new to him. This will be his first time starting out there, and he has to grab it and own it."

Despite his not starting at the position before this season, NFL scouts are already high on Johnson's potential to hold down quarterback C.J. Stroud's blind side. According to several mock draft big boards, including those from Phil Steele and ESPN, Johnson and Northwestern's Peter Skoronski are the premier draft-eligible tackle prospects for professional organizations.

Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, a former offensive lineman at North Carolina, said Johnson is a unique talent who will give the Buckeyes an edge in the trenches.

"Left tackle is the quarterback's blind spot, so you need someone who will be dependable. Paris is a tremendous athlete, and he has tremendous upside," Wilson said. "The most consistent player will always be your left tackle. Right now, he's starting there with the opportunity to prove that he's the guy. You'd expect him to. The ball is in Paris' court."

On the other side of the line, Dawand Jones returns at right tackle as one of the most intriguing NFL prospects in college football for 2022. The 6-8, 350-pound force of nature caught everyone's attention last season as one of the most imposing linemen in the Big Ten and the NCAA. Still, he has a few more rungs to climb on the ladder to build beyond his physical tools as he hopes to develop into a more well-rounded and polished prospect for professional organizations to draft.

"At the end of the season, you normally get a draft grade. I had seen mine, and it was for the fourth or fifth round," Jones said in the spring. "After playing my season and seeing my potential, coming back for one more year will definitely do me some good. I wasn't surprised. I hadn't played much, and I was only a first-year starter. I wasn't expecting much (from the grade). I tested

Center
53 • Luke Wypler

6-3 • 300 • Jr.
Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional

Wypler returns for his second season as the starting center after winning the job last year in Harry Miller's absence.

Left Guard
74 • Donovan Jackson

6-4 • 300 • So.
Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal

The rapidly ascending Jackson, a five-star interior lineman in the class of 2021, will get his first career start under the lights against the Fighting Irish.

Right Tackle
79 • Dawand Jones

6-8 • 359 • Sr.
Indianapolis (Ind.) Ben Davis

Jones took steps this offseason, including dropping 10 pounds, to improve his mobility and technique

Right Guard
55 • Matthew Jones

6-4 • 315 • 5th-Sr.
Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall

Jones is entering his fifth year in the program and his first as a starter for the Buckeyes. He has previously started eight games for Ohio State in 2020 and 2021.

the NFL like how NCAA basketball players test the waters. It was similar to that."

Day understood that Jones might look beyond Ohio State at NFL opportunities. However, he secretly wished Jones would return for another season on the offensive line opposite Johnson, allowing Stroud to feel comfortable with having both sides of the pocket set when he drops back to pass and giving the running backs another lineman to set the edge for their running lanes.

"There was a conversation in the building, and I know there was the conversation outside of the building, that Dawand could go into the draft and decide whether or not that would make sense for him and his future," Day said. "He wanted to come back and be a first- or second-rounder. That's his goal. He's been challenged with a set of things that needs to be done if he wants to get there."

"Consistency will be one of them. He's done some good things, and I think he knows what those things are that he wants to be done (before next year's draft)."

Day said Jones has made tremendous progress toward his goals in fall camp – including an improvement in his pass protection – and believes his experience and determination to improve will lead to great success for the Buckeye offensive line this season.

"I'm really excited with the offseason Dawand Jones has had," Day said. "He's lost a bunch of weight, and he's in really good shape."

Ohio State's starting center position belonged to Harry Miller before last year's fall camp. However, Miller did not participate in the 2021 season because of an ongoing mental health battle which caused him to retire from football in March.

With Miller absent, Wypler stepped in as a leader on the offensive line. He performed admirably for the Buckeyes, starting in all 13 games and logging 860 snaps from scrimmage. His production came as no surprise to the Ohio State coaching staff. This was the same player who was in the Woody



Dawand Jones



Paris Johnson

Hayes Athletic Center working on his technique the day after his team lost to Alabama in the 2021 College Football Playoff title game.

"I was prepared," Wypler said of last season. "I prepared all offseason for it. It was something I was ready for. Now the experience is an added bonus, but I still have to work on getting better every day."

As he approaches this season, Wypler expects himself to remain the same – a player who works hard and keeps a levelheaded approach in the middle of the offensive line. However, he believes the changing of the guard to Frye will change a lot for the Buckeyes' scheme up front.

"I really like Coach Frye," Wypler said. "He has come in and done an excellent job with our unit. I think he takes a great approach to coaching and coaches everyone individually. He's trying to make us better."

Wypler said he thrives in the mental aspects of football, claiming his knowledge gives him a critical edge against his opponents. While he might not be as big as Dawand Jones or as athletic as Jackson, Wypler's smarts make him a unique addition to the offensive line.

The Montvale, N.J., native developed a strong connection with Stroud last season and helped him accumulate record-breaking statistics for Ohio State. He looks forward to continuing the on-field relationship with his quarterback this fall.

"After 13 games here last year, I think C.J. and I have a good rapport with each other," Wypler said. "We know what the other is thinking on every play, so it's easy to communicate without actually having to communicate."

"I think you'll see a cleaner operation between us. We probably won't have to communicate as much at the line of scrimmage because we will see the look and think the same thing. We will always be on the same page."

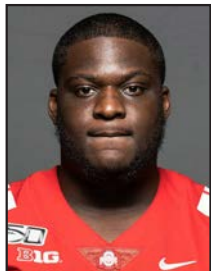
Like Johnson in 2020, Matthew Jones was the sixth man for Ohio State's offensive line last season. He logged 427 snaps for the Buckeyes and earned two starts against Akron and Nebraska after Munford suffered an ankle injury against Tulsa. The veteran lineman earned All-Big Ten honorable mention for his efforts.

While coming off the bench as a plug-

FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OFFENSIVE LINE

and-play lineman wasn't Jones' ideal trajectory at Ohio State, he feels thankful for his steps in Columbus and believes the work he's put in and the time he's spent waiting will pay dividends in 2022 as an every-game starter at right guard.

"I'm proud of myself for not giving up and continuing to push myself through the ups and downs," Jones said. "I'm just happy to be where I'm at now. And I'm just going to keep pushing myself and grinding. You just have to trust



Matthew Jones

the process. There are always going to be obstacles thrown at you."

Jones is a former top-100 prospect out of Brooklyn, N.Y., and was an All-American on the interior offensive line for Erasmus Hall High School. He was also considered the nation's top-ranked center recruit by 247Sports in the class of 2018. However, he had to wait his turn behind now-NFL contributors Wyatt Davis and Jonah Jackson. He was then positioned behind Miller and finally backed up Munford and Johnson.

His versatility has always excited the Ohio State coaches, but the timing never lined up for him to break into the starting lineup. This fall, though, Day believes Jones is in store for an excellent season in Columbus and hopes to see him and Dawand Jones create a brick wall to the right of Wyppler.

"We're hoping this is a great opportunity for Matthew," Day said. "He's been thrust into this role. And so far, he has been doing a great job. He has to keep coming and keep growing. Because like every position at Ohio State, the expectation is that you're the best in the country at what you do."

According to Wilson, Matthew Jones has worked this offseason as if he's the nation's best guard. Wilson said that his work ethic in the weight room and commitment to building a stronger and healthier body stood out the most.

"He's doing awesome," Wilson said. "He's in his fifth year, and he's got some recognition (from the Big Ten). He's not been bad. Matthew is a starter, and he's playing very well. He and Donovan, I think with Luke, we're going to be good inside. If we get those tackles comfortable, that front five has a chance to be good."

"Matthew is mature, in good health, in good spirits, in good condition. He has a chance to have a good year."

Jones shares Wilson's optimism and believes that this past spring and summer combined have created the most successful offseason of his four years as a Buckeye. He's finally achieved his goal of becoming a starter, but he'll still be the same hungry and motivated player he was as a backup.

"It helps me a lot," Jones said of his mentality. "Especially in the way I train. I buy into the details of my technique and everything. It helps me a lot. It brings me a motivation that I have to keep going."

Jackson will line up as a first-year starter opposite Matthew Jones. The former Belaire (Texas) Episcopal five-star and No. 1 overall guard played in all 13 games last season and recorded 100 snaps for the Buckeyes, though most of the reps came as a short-yardage tight end.

With Jackson checking in at 6-4 and 300 pounds, Day expects significant production from the talented sophomore and believes he and Matthew Jones will be formidable forces on Ohio State's interior offensive line this fall.

"Both of those guys are built like guards, and they're a little bit more road-graders inside, so we're hoping we can get a little bit more push inside than last year. But they're also going to have to hold up in pass protection," Day said. "Paris and Thayer did a good job inside last year, too. It wasn't like they didn't do a good job. But I think they were a little bit more tackle body types. Matt and Donovan are built a little bit lower to the ground – more like guards."

In July, Jackson expressed confidence in himself and the entire unit. He said the offensive linemen need to step up this season after being a weakness in 2021. The five players struggled to win the battle in the trenches against more talented defensive fronts like the one they faced against

Michigan. According to Jackson, that won't happen again this year.

"I feel like everyone had great player development in their training in the summer," Jackson said. "In terms of offensive line depth, I feel like we will be solid. Some guys who came in or guys who are coming back are more motivated than ever. We are trying to work hard and see where we can go."

Beyond the top five linemen, Ohio State will look to Josh Fryar and Zen Michalski as the primary backups at right and left tackle, respectively. Both players missed spring practices with undisclosed injuries but were full-go in fall camp. Fourth-year lineman Enokk Vimahi is expected to be a top backup at guard for Jackson and Matthew Jones but also has experience at tackle, with third-year lineman Jakob James as the likely backup to Wyppler.

Others who appeared on the two- and three-deep throughout fall camp include third-year Trey Leroux and second-year Ben Christman on the interior and true fresh-

men George Fitzpatrick, Avery Henry, Carson Hinzman and Tegra Tshabola at tackle.

Depth will remain a concern as the season begins – and was a major focus for Day and company in the spring and into fall camp – but the sense now is that the program is more comfortable with where Ohio State stands at depth in the trenches.

"Right now they're just working, they're buying in," Frye said. "There's not a guy out there right now that's just showing up. We're talking about taking reps or using reps, those guys are using their opportunities, they're using reps, whether they win the rep or lose the rep, they're using those right now."

"(Fryar and Michalski), the young tackles, Enokk's in there working his butt off, Jakob James is back and feeling good and fighting. As you just work your way down the youth of that, these guys right now, they're all just working and it'll shake out as it goes."



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Defensive Line Looking For Leaders In 2022

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State defensive line was spoiled throughout the last decade by being blessed with star defensive ends Joey and Nick Bosa and Chase Young.

In the seasons since Young finished fourth for the Heisman Trophy in 2019 as a junior, the Buckeyes have struggled to find a dominant force that could lead the defense and force opposing offenses to change their game plans.

As the Sept. 3 season opener against Notre Dame approaches, the search continues for that monster along the line, although there are candidates ranging from fourth-year defensive end Zach Harrison to second-year ends J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer.

But this season's version of the Silver Bullets under first-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, formerly of Oklahoma State, may get the job done by a committee – a large one at that.

"I feel like our defensive line, the Rushmen, have a lot of depth – a lot of guys coming off the ball," Knowles said. "It really doesn't matter who's in there because we're aggressive and attacking."

"Our defensive line, when we unleash them – and we're going to find ways to unleash them – they get after the quarterback. And they get after it in the run game."

Up to a dozen ends and tackles may be in the rotation, said defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

Projected Starters

Defensive End
44 • J.T. Tuimoloau

6-4 • 272 • So.
Edgewood (Wash.) Eastside Catholic

Tuimoloau finished fourth on the team last season with 2½ sacks and had 4½ tackles for loss.

"If I'm lucky, I can play 12. If I'm lucky," Johnson said Aug. 16. "Normally we play anywhere between 10 to 11. But you know, we could get to 12 to play for us. It depends how the game plays and what we're playing, what packages we're playing. All that stuff plays a role in what we're doing."

In addition to Harrison, Tuimoloau and Sawyer, other defensive ends projected to make impacts are fifth-year Tyler Friday – also voted a captain for the Buckeyes – and graduate Javontae Jean-Baptiste. Freshmen ends are Omari Abor, Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson, all top-125 prospects.

The defensive tackles have veteran leadership with graduate Jerron Cage and fifth-year Taron Vincent bringing along third-year Ty Hamilton and a pair of second-year tackles in Mike Hall Jr. and Tyleik Williams. Other tackles are fourth-year Jaden McKenzie and freshman Hero Kanu.

Knowles was brought in to fix a porous defense that was rattled by Michigan (42 points allowed) and Utah (45) in the final

Defensive End
9 • Zach Harrison

6-6 • 272 • Sr.
Lewis Center (Ohio) Olen. Orange

Harrison brings 33 games of experience into his fourth season at Ohio State, having started 14 of those contests.

Jack/Leo
33 • Jack Sawyer

6-4 • 260 • So.
Pickerington (Ohio) North

Sawyer will play at defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' hybrid defensive end/linebacker position and also rotate in as a traditional end.

Nose Tackle
86 • Jerron Cage

6-2 • 305 • 6th-Sr.
Cincinnati Winton Woods

Cage scored the first touchdown of his career last season, returning a fumble 57 yards for the score against Penn State.

Three-Tech Tackle
6 • Taron Vincent

6-2 • 300 • 5th-Sr.
Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

Vincent will look to build off his career-high six-tackle performance against Utah in the Rose Bowl that capped off his season.

two games to epitomize a less than stellar season. The Buckeyes gave up 523 rushing yards in those two games, including 297 in Ann Arbor.

Sawyer sees the improvement daily in practice but knows fans will be skeptical of the new-look defense.

"People can say this, they can say that," he said. "It doesn't mean anything until we step on the field and prove it and show it every game and every snap. We're all looking forward to Sept. 3 for obvious reasons, to show everybody what we're about on the defensive side of the ball this year."

A defense by committee can be a positive in terms of the competitive edge and keeping players fresh, but one drawback that was evident during the preseason camp was the lack of a take-charge guy.

"In every group, you've got to have an alpha dog," Johnson said. "That guy is the guy that leads the pack. I think we have a couple of guys who can do that. That's what's been really fun. The energy and the spirit in practice have been off the charts, better than it's ever been since I've been here."

When pressed who those "dogs" might be, he smiled and said, "You can't name the alpha dog. That's something you have to see."

Certainly Harrison (6-6, 272), rated the nation's top defensive end for the recruiting class of 2019 from Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange, is in the mix even though he was not chosen as one of the six captains this season after being selected last season.

"They are not captains (just) because they were voted captains," Harrison said. "They are captains because they embody leadership and the program. I feel like just because my name wasn't voted captain, that I won't have a 'C' on my shirt doesn't mean I'm not a head of the program. I know that guys are still looking up to me, so I have to maintain that standard regardless of whether I'm a captain or not."

Harrison is the most experienced defensive end with 33 games played, although only 14 have been starts. Last season he had 34 tackles, eight tackles for loss, four sacks, four pass breakups, two forced fumbles and two quarterback hurries. Yet he

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEFENSIVE LINE

has been seen by some as a disappointment based on his high school accolades and expectations. Johnson sees a breakout season for Harrison.

"I think he's in a good place right now, better than he's been before," the coach said. "He's worked extremely hard. He understands what the big picture is all about. Now it's just a matter of going out and doing it."

Head coach Ryan Day agrees.

"I'm really impressed with just the way he's going about his business," the coach said. "He looks awesome, so we're expecting a big year from Zach."

Harrison, for his part, looks to Friday (6-3, 264) for guidance and inspiration. He's not surprised Friday was named a captain.

"Friday's a guy that the older guys, other leaders go to for advice and go to when they have something on their mind," Harrison said. "I go to Friday when things aren't going right. I know that Friday's going to have my back and I have Friday's back. I expected it from day one that he was going to be one of those guys to put the team on his back and lead us to where he wants us to go."

Friday redshirted last season because of a torn ACL, but he brings 26 games with five starts' worth of experience. His hunger to return to the field is evident to everyone.

"He came back grinding," Tuimoloau said. "He came back like he never left."

That's not to say there weren't rough patches in the recovery process.

"It was very difficult," Friday said, "but I've got a great team here full of brothers. Instead of one brother, I've got over a hundred here at Ohio State. During the tough times, I just leaned on them and my family

and kept my faith in God, and I was able to get through it."

Johnson applauded Friday's determination.

"You saw him every morning, every day, trying to get himself back," he said. "That was impressive to a lot of kids. It set the bar for who he was as a young man."

It's a standard Tuimoloau and Sawyer strive for in their second seasons. Each was a five-star recruit who has been pegged for stardom.

"These are guys that do not have limitations," Knowles said. "It's my job to grow them to put them into the different positions to succeed and to utilize their skills to the fullest, but there's no limits on their success."

Tuimoloau got a late start. He didn't commit until July 4, 2021, and missed the spring practices but still had 17 tackles (4½ for loss) and he added 2½ sacks. His 339 plays were second most among all first-year defenders and fourth among all freshmen on the team.

"I've seen him grow a lot in a lot of areas," Johnson said. "I've seen him mature. I've seen a guy who's gotten much stronger. He's more flexible. He can bend. He can run. And he's playing practice really well."

Tuimoloau (6-4, 272) is four pounds lighter and much wiser than a year ago.

"It just feels great to have a full season and everything under your belt," he said.

Sawyer (6-4, 260), from nearby Pickerington North, was the highest rated player in the 2021 recruiting class according to 247Sports. Last season he had 13 total tackles and three quarterback sacks.

"I heard a quote one time and it said, 'Pressure is privilege,' " Sawyer said. "If anyone feels like I should have pressure, that's kind of a good thing. But at the same time, I'm not worried about pressure. I'm just trying to go out there and play as hard and as best as I can every time I step on the field."

This season he may be employed in Knowles' hybrid defensive end/linebacker spot called the "Jack" after adding weight and muscle. Jean-Baptiste and Curry are also candidates to get some snaps at that position.

"(Tuimoloau) came early last year, but he didn't get the full offseason with a full winter and spring, and I think the strength gains have been tremendous," Johnson said. "The same thing with Jack. He's gone from 255 pounds to 265 pounds so those guys have done a great job in the weight room."

Sawyer said he's added 35 pounds since enrolling in January 2021.

"With learning a new defense, I've just tried to put my head down and really make sure I know where I'm supposed to be in every play and package," he said. "That's really where I've made a lot of strides. And, obviously, in the offseason, I've put on some more weight and gotten stronger and tried to tune up everything because you can get better at everything."

Speaking of second-year players losing weight, the Buckeyes are expecting big things from Williams (6-3, 315), who claimed "I was fat," in describing his former self.

He did not play his senior season in 2020 because of COVID-19 and reported to Ohio State at 360 pounds, 40 more than the coaching staff wanted. Despite the extra

poundage, he was second on the team with five sacks and had 6 ½ tackles for loss last season.

"His body changed," Day said. "We just need more consistency out of Tyleik. He's another player who flashes. He is very, very athletic. We are going to need competitive stamina out of Tyleik, and we are going to need him to build the toughness to stop that run game. He can really rush the passer great. Those are all things he and Coach Johnson are working on. He's cut some weight, and he's looking much better."

Another tackle looking to build off last season is the oft-injured Vincent, who showed his potential when he recorded a career-high six tackles (three solo, three assists) in the Rose Bowl against Utah.

"I think Taron is going to be great," Knowles said. "He's got experience. He showed great leadership and a great attitude. He's open to the process of wanting to learn the new system. And he's smart. He's picked things up quickly, so I think the sky's the limit."

It seems like Vincent has been around forever while Cage (6-2, 305) has been around even longer. The graduate is in his sixth season with the program and has played 30 games with two starts.

He will battle for playing time with all those youngsters around him in a sign that the defensive line is deep and talented.

"Mike Hall goes out there as a three (third-teamer)," offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson said. "That's as good a three as I ever seen in my life. He's no three. They're deep, and they just keep coming at you in waves."

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Chambers, Eichenberg Leading LB Room

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After Ohio State's spring game, it became apparent that redshirt juniors Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers were the front-runners to start at linebacker for the Buckeyes this season, and according to first-year defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Jim Knowles, those players are the leaders of the room after fall camp.

In an Aug. 9 press conference, Knowles identified Eichenberg and Chambers as the team's top two linebackers. He also said Cody Simon, Teradja Mitchell, Chip Trayanum, C.J. Hicks and Palaie Gaoteote IV would push the starters for playing time.

"Tommy and Steele have been solidifying things at linebacker for us," Knowles said. "I like Cody and Teradja mixing in, while Chip, C.J. and Palaie have been float-around guys for us. I feel like we have potential there for depth, but it is still developing."

Knowles said he wanted confidence, consistency and toughness from his starters at the second level. Eichenberg and Chambers have exuded those qualities on the practice field, and Knowles hopes that will translate to the regular season.

"Tommy is the quiet leader of the defense," Knowles said. "He studies and he shows up like he knows what to do. He rarely makes mistakes. And Steele, I think he has confidence – a little bit more than the others – because he's played. You can see that he's played, and he's battle-tested."

Eichenberg and Chambers ended last season on high notes. The former finished his year with a 17-tackle performance in Ohio State's Rose Bowl win over Utah, and the latter continued an upward trajectory at a new position after a transition from running back last offseason.

"It feels good," Chambers said of being a starter, "but there's still plenty of stuff to work on. There's a lot of (stuff) that Tommy and I can work on, but we're getting better every single day."

At this time, Knowles believes Simon has

Projected Starters

Weakside
22 • Steele Chambers

6-1 • 232 • Sr.
Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic

Chambers has fully completed his transition into linebacker and is set for his first full season as a starter in the middle of the field.

Middle
35 • Tommy Eichenberg

6-2 • 236 • Sr.
Franklin, Tenn.

Eichenberg will look to build off his 17-tackle performance in last year's Rose Bowl win over Utah.

firm control over the third linebacker spot. He started all 10 games for the Buckeyes last season before undergoing season-ending shoulder surgery before the Rose Bowl. That surgery also required him to miss Ohio State's spring practices, which put him behind Eichenberg and Chambers while he recovers.

"Cody has great football acumen and football intelligence. He's tough," Knowles said. "He didn't play as much or as full-go as he would have liked to have been in the spring. All that I'm seeing with Cody now are just some issues with timing, and timing is so important when you're making tackles. He's kind of getting the rust off, but I really like what I've seen so far."

Mitchell would be the next in line. As a "super senior" in his fifth season, he is the most experienced player of the bunch. He practiced at the Mike and Sam positions in the spring, suggesting he could also be a candidate for Knowles' three-linebacker sets. However, Knowles said safeties Kourt Williams and Lathan Ransom could be more viable options for the Buckeyes in that role.

"We've been using it some," Knowles said. "We've also been experimenting with some things by using Kourt and Lathan and a couple of the other safeties that may get the job done without bringing in another linebacker. There's been some development with our safeties that may not make (having three-linebacker sets) quite as urgent."

Mitchell's linebacker foil would be Trayanum, who has no collegiate experience at the

position. Still, Trayanum offers unique athleticism at the position as a former running back at Arizona State. As with Chambers last season, Ohio State wishes to unlock untapped potential in Trayanum and utilize him as a powerful weapon on defense.

"Being honest, man, Chip's probably one of the most athletic people I've seen come through the facility," Mitchell said. "He's fast, and he's strong. I'm excited to see him play. I feel like he's made a great transition over from running back to linebacker, and I am excited to see him play."

The Buckeyes have wild cards beyond the initial two-deep. The first to draw attention is Hicks, who was Ohio State's top-rated recruit in the class of 2022. He also was the fourth member of the freshman class to lose his black stripe behind safety Kye Stokes, defensive end Caden Curry and cornerback Jyaire Brown.

"His upside is fantastic," Knowles said of Hicks. "He really has great quickness and athleticism that you don't see out of many linebackers at that size (6-3, 225). It's just a matter of how quickly he can learn and get himself up to speed to use those tools. Sometimes when you think too much, you can't use your tools. So we'll just keep working with C.J. so that he gets it down and so he can really cut it loose, but I think his upside is going to be amazing."

Another wild card is Gaoteote, who transferred from USC last summer but never caught proper footing for the Buckeyes

during the season, finishing with nine tackles, one tackle for loss and half a sack in eight games. The 6-2, 245-pound linebacker was a former five-star in high school and appeared in 20 games with 14 starts for the Trojans. He collected 105 tackles, 7½ tackles for loss and two sacks in those contests.

While he didn't replicate that kind of success in his first year at Ohio State, Gaoteote believes that he can make a significant impact for the Buckeyes in 2022 as a jack-of-all-trades for the position.

"I'm just kind of floating around the room and playing different spots," Gaoteote said. "For the most part, I'm playing at different spots and trying to be flexible in my position. Right now, I'm at the Will linebacker, but I've been going to wherever they decide to put me. Whether it's at the Jack, the Sam or wherever, if they call on my number and tell me a spot, then I'll be ready for it."

Behind those seven linebackers, Ohio State has two more scholarship players at the position, with redshirt freshman Reid Carrico and freshman Gabe Powers rounding out the room. Carrico played in four games last season against Akron, Rutgers, Maryland and Michigan State before receiving his redshirt. Powers was a top-150 overall prospect in the class of 2022 and was the No. 5 player in Ohio. He made 90 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and had six sacks for Marysville as a senior.

With such a deep room but limited positions available in the defensive scheme, Knowles said he's offered plenty of opportunities to different players during fall camp. In his mind, all of the players were worthy of a scholarship at Ohio State, which means they should be ready to perform when needed.

"During camp, that's why you try to get as many reps as you can to get ones, twos, threes, early on fours. You're trying to get guys seen and reps, but this is the Ohio State," Knowles said. "So those guys, they have to earn the right to play. So you kind of give them chances when you can, but people have to earn the right to play."

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SCAN TO SHOP

Secondary Takes Center Stage Under Knowles

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State secondary had a forgettable season in 2021 under the tutelage of then-defensive coordinator and cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs and safeties coach Matt Barnes.

After the Buckeyes allowed 246.2 passing yards per game, the third-worst mark in the Big Ten and 97th in the country, head coach Ryan Day shook up Ohio State's coaching staff in the secondary, adding longtime NFL assistant Tim Walton and former Cincinnati cornerbacks coach Perry Eliano to head the defensive back end, joining new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. Walton will serve as the secondary and cornerbacks coach, while Eliano will run the safeties unit.

Prior to joining Day's staff, Walton spent the past 13 years coaching in the NFL. Los Angeles Rams All-Pro cornerback Jalen Ramsey said Walton was one of the best coaches he's had in his career, pointing to the way he coaches technique but also his impact on him off the field. Although Walton has spent the last decade in the professional ranks, he has experience at the college level as well – coaching collegiate ball for 14 years prior to his jump to the NFL.

Walton is not new to Ohio State, either, as he played for the Buckeyes from 1990-93. He appeared in 41 games while totaling 159 tackles, 10 interceptions and 11 pass breakups in his four seasons with the program. He said his time as a player produced fond memories for him and that he's excited to be coaching at his alma mater.

"It hit at the right time to get a chance to come back here," Walton said in the spring. "When you spend your college years here and have an extremely exciting career here, I met a lot of great people. It's a lifetime journey when you're here. You're family for life here. It's been exciting to get a chance to come back, and it's been a dream come true to come back to a place where you basically grew up as a young man."

Projected Starters

Cornerback
5 • Denzel Burke

6-1 • 190 • So.
Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro

Started all 13 games last season while leading the Buckeyes in passes defended with 12.

Cornerback
26 • Cameron Brown

6-0 • 192 • 5th-Sr.
St. Louis Christian Brothers

The most veteran member of cornerback unit. Has appeared in 32 games (started seven) in his four seasons.

Adjuster
14 • Ronnie Hickman

6-1 • 205 • Sr.
Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic

Led the Buckeyes in tackles last season with 100, which was 36 tackles more than the next defender.

Bandit
41 • Josh Proctor

6-2 • 200 • 5th-Sr.
Owasso, Okla.

Returns to action after sustaining a season-ending leg injury against Oregon last season. A veteran of 31 total games with OSU.

Nickel
15 • Tanner McCalister

5-11 • 195 • 5th-Sr.
Rockwall (Texas) Heath/OK State

Joins the Buckeyes after spending four seasons at Oklahoma State. Appeared in 50 games for the Cowboys, amassing 125 tackles and 12 pass breakups.

Eliano saw overwhelming success at Cincinnati during the previous two seasons, presiding over 2022 NFL draft selections Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner and Coby Bryant and aiding the Bearcats to a College Football Playoff appearance last season. His time at Cincinnati was prefaced by stints with New Mexico, Bowling Green and UTSA, among others.

Now at his first Power Five school, Eliano said the importance of building a winner at Ohio State is not lost on him.

"We're at one of the best schools in the country: The Ohio State University," he said at his introductory press conference. "The opportunity to work with Coach Day, this staff, and the tradition and just the type of players we have here and what we're capable of doing, competing and winning a national championship year-in and year-out – for me and my family, we're just blessed and fortunate. You get a job and you hit the ground running. For me, I'm just excited about the opportunity to do some special things here."

Ohio State's new batch of secondary coaches are tasked with bouncing back from last season's struggles with much of the unit returning from last year. With experience gained from last season, along with added depth in the form of a talented freshman class, Ohio State's defensive back end expects a more polished campaign this time around.

The Buckeyes also boast a new scheme in the secondary, opting to maintain the 4-2-5 look from the Coombs era, but placing three safeties on the field at a given time – the bandit, the adjuster and a nickel safety to cover the slot receiver. The bandit refers to a high-safety who plays the boundary, while the adjuster is more of a free-roaming safety. During his time at Oklahoma State and into his first eight months at Ohio State, Knowles has referred to his defensive scheme as "safeties-driven."

A hierarchy has already taken shape among the Buckeyes' safety unit. Graduate Josh Proctor will likely handle the bandit, fourth-year Ronnie Hickman will slot in as the adjuster and Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McCalister will serve as the nickel, the role he played in Knowles' defense at Oklahoma State last season.

Third-year safety and team captain Kourt Williams II is likely the first man off the bench for Ohio State, while Lathan Ransom and Cameron Martinez, both in their third seasons in the program, will provide further depth at the position.

Freshmen Kye Stokes and Sonny Styles have also impressed since their arrival into the program. Stokes enrolled at Ohio State in January and had a productive spring camp,

becoming the first freshman to shed his black stripe while making a name for himself during the spring game, in which he accounted for nine tackles and two pass breakups. Styles did not make his way to campus until the summer but has quickly shown off his skill since reclassifying and joining the program a year early.

"For somebody who was supposed to be in high school right now, (Styles is) doing darn good," Day said. "It's hard when you come in during the summer and you're supposed to be in high school, working with your high school teammates. And he's in there at Ohio State battling at practice."

Proctor returns to the field after sustaining a season-ending leg injury in Ohio State's Week 2 loss to Oregon last season. Prior to his early exit in 2021, Proctor had played in 31 career games with the Buckeyes, amassing 44 tackles, six pass breakups and two interceptions.

Although Proctor entered last season with expectation of making the jump to the NFL at the end of the campaign, the injury threw a wrench in his plans. Now with rejuvenated health and the transfer of Bryson Shaw to USC, Proctor is reclaiming his spot as one of the starting safeties.

"I felt like I didn't go out like I wanted to," Proctor said. "I wasn't able to achieve what I wanted to achieve. It probably took me like a month or two to grasp that 'OK, I'm working my way back to another year' and getting back into the swing of things."

Hickman will line up alongside Proctor as the adjuster, with the intention to build off his promising season as the bullet, Coombs' hybrid safety/linebacker, in 2021. At the bullet, Hickman led the Buckeyes with 100 tackles. The South Orange, N.J., native added two interceptions, including one returned for a touchdown.

After Hickman emerged as one of the Buckeyes' top defenders in 2021, he's been tasked with adjusting to the free safety role this offseason. Despite the move to free safety, Hickman pointed to similarities in each safety spot that he has applied to his transition to the deep safety position.

"The safeties are kind of interchangeable as far as the bandit and adjuster," Hickman said. "We do a lot of similar things. I'm on the field and used to the boundary, but being an athlete, it's just new techniques you have to

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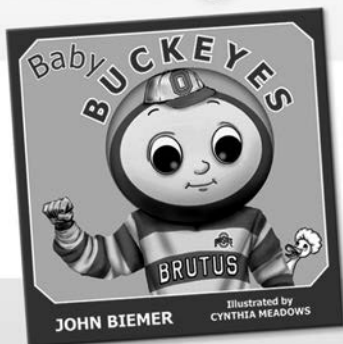
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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEFENSIVE BACKS

learn. But it's nothing too much."

McCalister is the elder statesman when it comes to experience in Knowles' defensive scheme. He pieced together a strong senior season in Stillwater, with 39 tackles, six pass breakups and an interception.

Following Knowles to Columbus, McCalister has served as an on-the-field teacher of the defensive coordinator's scheme. Although the scheme did not change for McCalister, he's now operating in a new environment with the Buckeyes. McCalister mulled over making the jump to the NFL, but he decided to stay in college to further his development, albeit in a new home.

"There was a lot that went into my decision," McCalister said. "Obviously, Coach Knowles being here, that helped a lot. I know his system, I know what he likes to do. I feel like one more year in college will help me develop. I figured if I was going to do one more year, I wanted to do it at the highest level, like Ohio State. So when Coach Knowles got the job, when I entered the portal, he was one of the first people to call and he let me know that he wanted me to come."

Williams steps in as the primary rotational piece for the Buckeyes and will likely play both the adjuster and bandit. Although his on-the-field responsibilities are not as prominent as a starter, he will still be leaned on as an important member of the unit as well as the entire team, after being named a team captain.

"We feel like he's a guy that's a leader," Knowles said. "When I watched him in the weight room and get to work, he's a worker and a leader. I like him with more depth and vision to be able to see the ball and to control the movements of the secondary."

Although the safeties will be a key component to the Buckeyes' defense under Knowles, Ohio State also appears well-equipped on the perimeter despite having just six scholarship cornerbacks. As concern rose for the health of the unit during fall camp, Day pledged that the Buckeyes' cornerbacks will be at full strength against Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

Sophomore Denzel Burke is slated to serve as the No. 1 cornerback for the second season in a row, while graduate Cameron Brown will likely serve as the second cornerback. Rising sophomores JK Johnson and Jordan Hancock have garnered plenty of buzz from their peers during the offseason, while freshmen Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner have progressed through their first camp with the Buckeyes.

Burke's prowess in coverage is already well-known after he secured freshman All-American nods by ESPN, The Athletic and 247Sports last season. He was also named to the All-Big Ten third team by the conference's coaches. In his first campaign in scarlet and gray, Burke accounted for a team-best 12 pass breakups, an interception and 36 total tackles.

Burke said he was not surprised at how quickly he picked up the intricacies of college football and made the impact that he did in his first season, and as he transitions into his second year with the Buckeyes, Burke said he's "way better" than he was entering last season but he also recognized that he has to live up to elevated expectations.

"I feel like I have a chip on my shoulder," he said. "I have expectations on me, even from myself since I'm my biggest critic. I want to just level up and be even better than I was."

Cameron Brown, meanwhile, brings a veteran presence to Ohio State's young cornerbacks room, which was especially needed with graduate Sevyn Banks transferring to

LSU. The St. Louis native carries the most experience in the unit by far, appearing in 32 games in his four-year career.

After an injury shortened his 2020 season, Brown appeared in 11 games in 2021, accounting for 24 tackles while boasting a career-best seven passes broken up. He also corralled his first career interception during Ohio State's 33-24 win over Penn State.

As the veteran member of the cornerbacks, Brown emphasized a need to take his leadership skills to the next level this season.

"I have to take the young guys under my wing," he said. "When Jeff Okudah was here, he taught me everything I know, so I want to take that knowledge and pass it on to them and hopefully lead them in the right direction."

Johnson, Hancock and Jyaire Brown have all garnered plenty of buzz from the Buckeyes' coaching staff over the offseason and seek to translate their successes in practice to the games.

While Hancock was limited for a short span of fall camp, he has still impressed during the offseason for the Buckeyes. The Suwanee, Ga., native appeared sparingly last season but his role will almost certainly increase in 2022.

As Hancock's coaches took notice of his improved skill set during the offseason, he pointed to a drive to improve his body and mind ahead of his second year in the program.

"Getting in with Coach (Mickey Marotti) has made me physically ready," Hancock said. "Also, tapping in with Coach Walton before practice and after practice, just watching film and talking about how to get better on my technique. It's routine now and I feel like it's just made my play better on the field."

With Cameron Brown, Burke and Hancock all hampered at one point or another during fall camp, Johnson and Jyaire Brown stepped into increased roles in practice. Day said Johnson and Jyaire Brown had "practiced their tails off" and "are getting real close" to being game-ready.

Johnson redshirted last season while rehabilitating an injury but did appear in Ohio State's 59-7 win over Akron.

Jyaire Brown hit the ground running upon his arrival in Columbus in January. The West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West product shed his black stripe on Aug. 9, joining transfer line-backer Chip Trayanum as the first players to complete the tradition during fall camp.

As the duo battles for playing time, Johnson and Jyaire Brown are also roommates, and the first-year cornerback said he's picked up tips from Johnson and their competition has bled into other aspects of their lives.

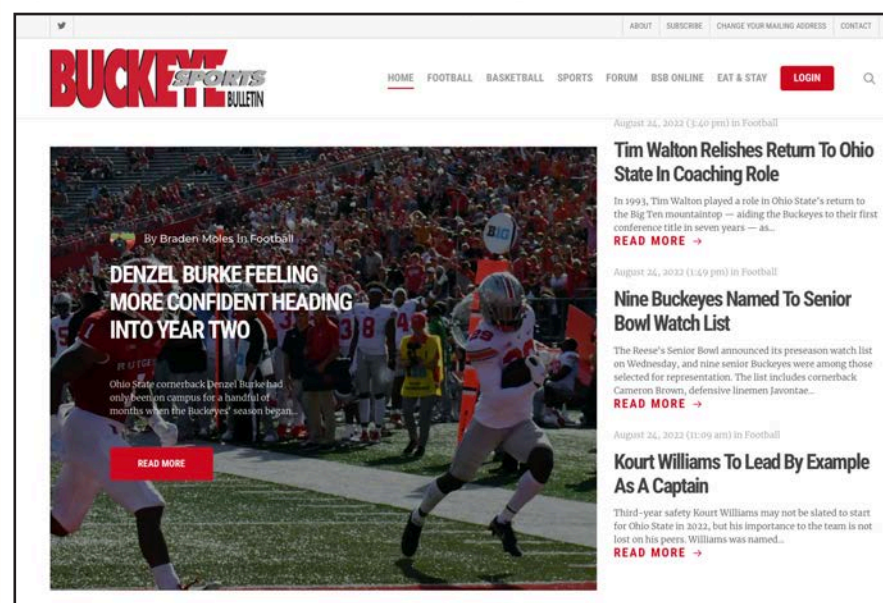
"He and I are really tight," Brown said. "We compete with each other every day when we're working out."

While Day said the Buckeyes are eyeing a top-10 defense and Knowles doubled down with expectations that his unit will rank among the top five, the secondary will need to improve considerably this season if Ohio State will see a major jump in terms of defensive production.

As the secondary will have heightened expectations in 2022, Eliano emphasized the unit has placed its focus on growing from last season.

"As a competitor you want to be the best," Eliano said. "I'm looking forward as a competitor myself, not just as a coach, but as a competitor to roll my sleeves up and dive headfirst and go to work. Let's get this thing right."

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Experienced Special Teams Provide Intrigue

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For all the positive attention toward Ohio State's offense (and the more negative response to the defense) last season, it seems that special teams flew under the radar with bigger issues to worry about in Columbus.

Ohio State's special teams – coordinated by special teams coach Parker Fleming, who is entering his fifth season with the Buckeyes and his second as a coordinator – quietly finished as the 17th-ranked special teams unit in the country, according to Football Outsiders, with only Michigan (No. 1) and Iowa (No. 2) outpacing Ohio State within the conference.

A turnaround was needed last season on special teams after the Buckeyes finished 95th out of 127 teams in 2020, and that spark came in the form of Australian punter Jesse Mirco and transfer kicker Noah Ruggles, who joined the team last offseason and provided a significant boost in the third phase of the game.

The punter from Down Under held a respectable average of 42.3 yards per punt, though he saw the field just 31 times in 12 games (he did not punt against Maryland), while Ruggles connected on all but one of his 21 field-goal attempts, the lone miss a 38-yarder that sailed right in Ohio State's blowout win over Michigan State. Ruggles more than made up for the miss, though, by nailing the chip shot 19-yard field goal to lift the Buckeyes over Utah in the Rose Bowl.

Mirco and Ruggles – as well as graduate long snapper Bradley Robinson, who handled those responsibilities for the last two seasons and will do so again this year – all return to the Buckeyes and make for an experienced special teams room that will look to improve on last season's successful outing.

"We really like where we are in the room," Fleming said. "Noah will be back

Projected Starters

Long Snapper
42 • Bradley Robinson

6-1 • 230 • 7th-Sr.
Troy (Mich.) Athens

This will be Robinson's fifth season at Ohio State and his seventh overall of college football, with his third season as the starter.

Kicker
95 • Noah Ruggles

6-2 • 190 • 6th-Sr.
Odessa, Fla./North Carolina

Ruggles capped off an impressive first season in Columbus with the game-winning kick in Ohio State's Rose Bowl victory over Utah.

Kick Returner
2 - Emeka Egbuka

6-1 • 205 • So.
Steilacoom, Wash.

Egbuka was an electric option at kick return last season, averaging 29.0 yards per return on 20 kick returns for the Buckeyes.

Punter
29 • Jesse Mirco

6-4 • 220 • So.
Fremantle, Australia

Mirco rarely saw the field last season, punting just 31 times across 12 games, but he turned in a respectable 42.3 yards per punt average.

Punt Returner
11 • Jaxon Smith-Njigba

6-0 • 198 • Jr.
Rockwall, Texas

Smith-Njigba handled eight of Ohio State's 22 punt return opportunities last season, averaging 7.5 yards per return.

for this year. He had a really good season last year, so it's something to build off of. Something we've talked about a lot is how do you improve on a great season? Well, there's a lot of ways you can. That's something we've been focusing on. (Noah) wasn't with us in the spring, and it gave the young guys a great opportunity to go show what they did."

As Fleming referenced, Ruggles was not with the team throughout the spring, a situation that was left largely unexplained other than a brief mention from Fleming that it was a "personal thing" that was cleared by both him and head coach Ryan Day.

"It allowed me to settle down a bit, just take a lot of time away from the game and figure things out on my own," Ruggles said. "With kicking, you can make anywhere your office. When I was traveling, I could find a field with a light pole or something and aim at that if there weren't any uprights or no access to a football field. I got kicked out a time or two, but at the end of the day you find a place to get the work in."

Regardless of why he was out, Ruggles returned to the team over the summer and said he was happy to be back with his teammates.

"Honestly, I was itching to get back," he said in July. "We had a week off the other week and I found myself back at home in Tampa and I found myself just wanting to get back here with the guys, honestly. This feels like home and I was welcomed back with open arms. This place is so special, and it's just family here. I mean, a lot of places talk about family, but this place it's unreal. It's unbelievable."

While Ruggles was away, Ohio State made an addition to the special teams room by welcoming in transfer kicker Parker Lewis, who announced his transfer from USC – Ohio State's future conference foe beginning in 2024 – in April.

At time of press, Lewis currently remains ineligible for the Buckeyes, though he is practicing with the team. Day said at Big Ten Media Days that his situation is similar to that of linebacker Palaie Gaoteote IV, who joined Ohio State last offseason and had to wait several weeks to gain his eligibility, though Day did not expound on why Lewis is ineligible.

"We're waiting for him and eligibility

(with) the transfer," Day said. "Once he can get cleared eligibility-wise, we can take the next step with him."

If Lewis is cleared to play, he could battle with Ruggles to start at placekicker. Lewis is entering his junior year and was 17 of 22 on his field-goal attempts and 23 of 24 on extra points, while Ruggles made all 74 of his extra-point attempts.

The advantage is with Ruggles in the kicking competition, but there could be a path to playing time for Lewis on kickoffs, which is a job that could keep someone busy at Ohio State this season. Lewis earned a touchback on 27 of his 34 kickoffs last season – nearly 80 percent – while Ruggles found the end zone on just 21 of his 99 kickoffs, just above 20 percent.

"I think all competition is good competition," Fleming said. "Our job here is to make sure that we get the best out of our players every day. The motto around here is fight to be the best version of yourself every day. In some places, the best possible way to do that is to compete. Sometimes competition against yourself is really good. Sometimes competition against other people brings the best out of everybody, and that's our mind-set."

Lewis will be a new face, but with Mirco and Robinson returning, Ruggles said those relationships – along with the bonds he has formed with his coaches – helped his decision to wait another year before trying his luck in the NFL.

"I wasn't ready to say goodbye to that just yet. I mean, this past year changed my life," he said. "Coach Day giving me an opportunity to come here changed my life. I feel like I need to just keep putting forward my best effort, and obviously another good year under my belt will help with the NFL stuff as well. That is the goal at the end of the day, but I'm focused on this team and getting our goals accomplished right now."

The main goal of the special teams unit this season is to continue improving, but another goal in sight could be an act not seen at Ohio State since the days of Jordan Hall. The Buckeyes' last kickoff return for a touchdown came on Nov. 27, 2010, when Hall returned a kickoff from Michigan 85

yards to give Ohio State a 17-7 lead in an eventual 37-7 win over the Wolverines.

It's now going on 12 years without a kickoff return touchdown for the Buckeyes, but there's optimism that Ohio State might have found the right man for the job in sophomore Emeka Egbuka. Egbuka quickly established himself as Ohio State's top kickoff return option last season, averaging 29.0 yards per return – good for 12th in the country – and of his 20 kickoff returns, several were no more than one broken tackle away from him finding pay dirt.

On punt returns, there are several names in contention to start. Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba (eight returns for a 7.5-yard average with a long of 21) carried the bulk of that load last year, and Smith-Njigba could be in line to do so again this season, though Day is looking for a group that could potentially contribute.

"It's one thing to do it in practice," Day said. "It's another thing when you're in a game and the game is on the line. You've got to get a guy, and that's a unique skill set because there's bullets flying right outside your ears and right in front of you. You've got to be able to catch the ball and you've got to have a couple guys who can fair-catch it."

"We do a good job with that, but also have some guys that have to be able to turn it. Jaxon's done a good job with that. There's a couple other guys that I think we can count on, but we're trying to train at least four or five so that we have a bullpen."

That group could include Smith-Njigba, Egbuka, junior Cameron Martinez and freshman Kaleb Brown, who all tried their hand at returning punts during fall camp. If Smith-Njigba does end up as the main guy, Day said they will try to be smart about his usage.

"We try to find that balance," Day said. "We don't want to put him at risk, but at the same time, we've got to go win games."



Emeka Egbuka



Noah Ruggles



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The Numbers Game

Final 2021-22 Football Statistics

2021-22 Game-By-Game					Individual Statistics (Cont.)						
Date	Opponent	Result	Crowd		Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Sept. 2	(4) at Minnesota	W, 45-31	50,805		Noah Ruggles	-	74-74	-	-	20-21	134
Sept. 11	(3) Oregon #12	L, 28-35	100,482		TreVeyon Henderson	19	-	-	-	-	114
Sept. 18	(9) Tulsa	W, 41-20	76,540		Garrett Wilson	13	-	-	-	-	78
Sept. 25	(10) Akron	W, 59-7	95,178		Chris Olave	13	-	-	-	-	78
Oct. 2	(11) at Rutgers	W, 52-13	51,006		Jaxon Smith-Njigba	9	-	-	-	-	54
Oct. 9	(7) Maryland	W, 66-17	99,277		Master Teague	4	-	-	-	-	24
Oct. 23	(5) at Indiana	W, 54-7	52,656		Marvin Harrison Jr.	3	-	-	-	-	18
Oct. 30	(5) Penn St. #20	W, 33-24	102,951		Miyan Williams	3	-	-	-	-	18
Nov. 6	(6) at Nebraska	W, 26-17	84,426		Jeremy Ruckert	3	-	-	-	-	18
Nov. 13	(6) Purdue	W, 59-31	101,009		Haskell Garrett	1	-	-	-	-	6
Nov. 20	(5) Michigan St. #7	W, 56-7	101,858		Mitch Rossi	1	-	-	-	-	6
Nov. 27	(2) at Michigan #6	L, 27-42	111,156		Ronnie Hickman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jan. 1	(7) Utah #10^	W, 48-45	87,842		Cameron Martinez	1	-	-	-	-	6
* OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.					Jerron Cage	1	-	-	-	-	6
^ Rose Bowl; Pasadena, California					Julian Fleming	1	-	-	-	-	6
					Evan Pryor	1	-	-	-	-	6
					Denzel Burke	1	-	-	-	-	6
					Craig Young	1	-	-	-	-	6
					Dominic DiMaccio	-	2-2	-	-	-	2
					OSU Totals	76	76-76	-	-	20-21	594
					OPP Totals	3938	-39	-	-	8-13	296
					FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total	
					Noah Ruggles	7-7	9-10	4-4	0-0	20-21	
					OSU Totals	7-7	9-10	4-4	0-0	20-21	
					OPP Totals	2-2	3-4	3-7	0-0	8-13	
					Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long	
					Jesse Mirco	31	1310	42.3	0	62	
					OSU Totals	31	1310	42.3	0	62	
					OPP Totals	67	2918	43.6	0	74	
					Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
					Ronnie Hickman	2	65	32.5	1	46	
					Ryan Watts	2	18	9.0	0	18	
					Tommy Eichenberg	1	0	0	0	0	
					Bryson Shaw	1	20	20.0	0	20	
					Cody Simon	1	24	24.0	0	0	
					Steele Chambers	1	0	0.0	0	0	
					Denzel Burke	1	25	25.0	1	25	
					Cameron Brown	1	25	25.0	0	25	
					Cameron Martinez	1	61	61.0	1	61	
					Craig Young	1	70	70.0	1	70	
					OSU Totals	12	306	25.5	4	70	
					OPP Totals	8	58	7.3	0	23	
					Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
					Garrett Wilson	13	68	5.2	0	23	
					Jaxon Smith-Njigba	8	60	7.5	0	21	
					Chris Olave	1	4	4.0	0	4	
					OSU Totals	22	132	6.0	0	23	
					OPP Totals	7	41	5.9	0	17	
					Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
					Emeka Egbuka	20	580	29.0	0	67	
					Xavier Johnson	3	52	17.3	0	22	
					Julian Fleming	3	22	7.3	0	11	
					Steele Chambers	1	13	13.0	0	13	
					TreVeyon Henderson	1	19	19.0	0	19	
					OSU Totals	28	686	24.5	0	67	
					OPP Totals	40	713	17.8	1	97	
					Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL	Yds.	Sacks
					Ronnie Hickman	54	46	100	1.0-4	1.0-4	
					Tommy Eichenberg	33	31	64	6.5-17	-	
					Bryson Shaw	30	29	59	0.5-1	-	
					Cody Simon	21	33	54	2.5-16	1.0-11	
					Steele Chambers	27	20	47	5.0-16	1.0-7	
					Teradja Mitchell	21	24	45	4.5-11	-	
					Lathan Ransom	21	17	38	2.5-11	1.0-7	
					Denzel Burke	28	8	36	-	-	
					Zach Harrison	23	11	34	8.0-27	4.0-17	
					Kourt Williams II	21	6	27	4.0-11	1.0-7	
					Marcus Williamson	18	9	27	0.5-3	-	
					Tyreke Smith	12	14	26	5.0-24	3.0-19	
					Cameron Brown	17	7	24	-	-	
					Antwuan Jackson	11	12	23	4.5-20	2.5-16	
					Taron Vincent	12	11	23	3.5-6	0.5-2	
					Cameron Martinez	14	9	23	0.5-4	-	
					Haskell Garrett	12	10	22	7.0-33	5.5-31	
					J.T. Tuimoloua	8	9	17	4.5-30	2.5-24	
					Tyleik Williams	10	6	16	6.5-51	5.0-43	
					Craig Young	6	9	15	0.5-1	-	
					Javontae Jean-Baptiste	7	7	14	2.5-19	1.5-13	
					Jack Sawyer	9	4	13	3.0-24	3.0-24	
					Ty Hamilton	6	6	12	2.0-7	2.0-7	
					Cade Kacherski	7	4	11	-	-	
					Josh Proctor	3	7	10	-	-	
					Dallas Gant	4	6	10	-	-	
					Jerron Cage	4	6	10	4.0-13	1.0-10	
					Cade Stover	5	4	9	-	-	
					OSU Totals	493	412	905	83-379	37-247	
					OPP Totals	531	300	831	47-186	17-133	
					Fumbles Forced:	11 - Harrison (2), Chris Booker, Chambers, Hickman, Jaden McKenzie, Ransom, Sawyer, Smith, Williams, Williamson.					
					Fumbles Recovered:	8 - Cage (2), Garrett (2), Eichenberg, Palaie Gaoteote IV, Hamilton, Shaw.					

2022 Preseason Polls

The Associated Press Top 25					Coaches' Top 25				
Rank	School	2021	Pts.	'21 Rank	Rank	School	2021	Pts.	'21 Rank
1	Alabama (54)	13-2	1,566	2	1	Alabama (54)	13-2	1634	2
2	Ohio State (6)	11-2	1,506	6	2	Ohio State (5)	11-2	1564	5
3	Georgia (3)	14-1	1,455	1	3	Georgia (6)	14-1	1542	1
4	Clemson	10-3	1,292	14	4	Clemson	10-3	1356	16
5	Notre Dame	11-2	1,242	8	5	Notre Dame	11-2	1284	9
6	Texas A&M	8-4	1,212	NR	6	Michigan	12-2	1232	3
7	Utah	10-4	1,203	12	7	Texas A&M	8-4	1219	25
8	Michigan	12-2	1,203	3	8	Utah	10-4	1134	12
9	Oklahoma	11-2	956	10	9	Oklahoma	11-2	1027	10
10	Baylor	12-2	884	5	10	Baylor	12-2	891	6
11	Oregon	10-4	831	22	11	Oklahoma St.	12-2	859	7
12	Oklahoma St.	12-2	814	6	12	Oregon	10-4	734	21
13	N.C. State	9-3	752	20	13	N.C. State	9-3	726	19
14	USC	4-8	711	NR	14	Michigan St.	11-2	711	8
15	Michigan St.	11-2	631	9	15	USC	4-8	602	NR
16	Miami (Fla.)	7-5	476	NR	16	Pittsburgh	11-3	450	13
17	Pittsburgh	11-3	383	13	17	Miami (Fla.)	7-5	433	NR
18	Wisconsin	9-4	365	NR	18	Texas (1)	5-7	383	NR
19	Arkansas	9-4	348	21	19	Wake Forest	11-3	381	14
20	Kentucky	10-3	332	18	20	Wisconsin	9-4	369	NR
21	Ole Miss	10-3	324	11	21	Kentucky	10-3	353	15
22	Wake Forest	11-3	303	15	22	Cincinnati	13-1	339	4
23	Cincinnati	13-1	265	4	23	Arkansas	9-4	334	20
24	Houston	12-2	263	17	24	Ole Miss	10-3	327	11
25	BYU	10-3	234	19	25	Houston	12-2	257	17
(First-place votes in parentheses)					(First-place votes in parentheses)				
Others receiving votes: Tennessee (180); Texas (164); Iowa (163); Penn State (160); LSU (55); Fresno State (32); Minnesota (31); UCF (27); Purdue (17); Auburn (15); Mississippi State (15); Kansas State (14); Florida (14); North Carolina (9); Boise State (5); Air Force (4); Appalachian State (4); Utah State (2); UCLA (2); San Diego State (2); South Carolina (2); Nebraska (1).					Others receiving votes: Iowa 248; Penn State 246; Tennessee 163; Brigham Young 152; Louisiana State 143; Auburn 98; Central Florida 55; North Carolina 34; San Diego State 25; Fresno State 21; Mississippi State 19; Florida 17; Utah State 12; Air Force 12; UCLA 10; Boise State 10; Appalachian State 10; Minnesota 6; South Carolina 5; Kansas State 4; Iowa State 3; Army 3; UL Lafayette 2; Southern Methodist 2; Purdue 2; Oregon State 2; Coastal Carolina 2; Texas-San Antonio 1; Louisville 1; Florida State 1.				

2021 Big Ten Year In Review

Final Standings

	All			Conf.		
EAST	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	12	2	.857	8	1	.889
Ohio State	11	2	.846	8	1	.889
Michigan State	11	2	.846	7	2	.778
Penn State	7	6	.538	4	5	.444
Maryland	7	6	.538	3	6	.333
Rutgers	5	8	.385	2	7	.222
Indiana	2	10	.167	0	9	.000

	All			Conf.		
EAST	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Iowa	10	4	.714	7	2	.778
Minnesota	9	4	.692	6	3	.667
Purdue	9	4	.692	6	3	.667
Wisconsin	9	4	.692	6	3	.667
Illinois	5	7	.417	4	5	.444
Nebraska	3	9	.250	1	8	.111
Northwestern	3	9	.250	1	8	.111

2021 All-Big Ten Teams

Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media.

Coaches Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – C.J. Stroud, Ohio State; Running back – Hassan Haskins, Michigan; Kenneth Walker III, Michigan State; Wide receiver – Chris Olave, Ohio State; David Bell, Purdue; Center – Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa; Guard – Thayer Munford, Ohio State; Josh Seltzer, Wisconsin; Tackle – Daniel Faaele, Minnesota; Nicholas Petit-Frere, Ohio State; Tight end – Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin.

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Aidan Hutchinson, Michigan; Haskell Garrett, Ohio State; Arnold Ebiketie, Penn State; George Karlaftis, Purdue; Linebacker – David Ojabo, Michigan; Leo Chenal, Wisconsin; Jack Sanborn, Wisconsin; Defensive back – Dane Belton, Iowa; Riley Moss, Iowa; Dax Hill, Michigan; Jaquan Brisker, Penn State.

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Jake Moody, Michigan; Punter – Jordan Stout, Penn State; Adam Korsak, Rutgers; Return specialist – Charlie Jones, Iowa.

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – Aidan O'Connell, Purdue; Running back – TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State; Braelton Allen, Wisconsin; Wide receiver – Garrett Wilson, Ohio State; Jahan Dotson, Penn State; Center – Doug Kramer, Illinois; John Michael Schmitz, Minnesota; Guard – Kyler Schott, Iowa; Paris Johnson, Ohio State; Tackle – Ryan Hayes, Michigan; Pe-

ter Skoronski, Northwestern; Logan Bruss, Wisconsin; Tight end – Austin Allen, Nebraska.

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Zach VanValkenburg, Iowa; Jacob Panasiuk, Michigan State; Tyreke Smith, Ohio State; PJ Mustipher, Penn State; Keeanu Benton, Wisconsin; Linebacker – Micah McFadden, Indiana; Jolo Domann, Nebraska; Ellis Brooks, Penn State; Defensive back – Kerby Joseph, Illinois; Matt Hankins, Iowa; Cam Taylor-Britt, Nebraska; Ronnie Hickman, Ohio State.

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Caleb Shudak, Iowa; Noah Ruggles, Ohio State; Punter – Bryce Baringer, Michigan State; Return specialist – Jayden Reed, Michigan State.

Media Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – C.J. Stroud, Ohio State; Running back – Hassan Haskins, Michigan; Kenneth Walker III, Michigan State; Wide receiver – Jahan Dotson, Penn State; David Bell, Purdue; Center – Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa; Guard – Blaise Andries, Minnesota; Thayer Munford, Ohio State; Tackle – Andrew Stueber, Michigan; Peter Skoronski, Northwestern; Nicholas Petit-Frere, Ohio State; Tight end – Austin Allen, Nebraska.

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Aidan Hutchinson, Michigan; Haskell Garrett, Ohio State; Arnold Ebiketie, Penn State; George Karlaftis, Purdue; Linebacker – Jack Campbell, Iowa; David Ojabo, Michigan; Leo Chenal, Wisconsin; Defensive back – Kerby Joseph, Illinois; Dane Belton, Iowa; Riley Moss, Iowa; Jaquan Brisker, Penn State.

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Caleb Shudak, Iowa; Punter – Jordan Stout, Penn State; Return specialist Charlie Jones, Iowa.

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – Aidan O'Connell, Purdue; Running back – TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State; Braelton Allen, Wisconsin; Wide receiver – Chris Olave, Ohio State; Garrett Wilson, Ohio State; Center – Andrew Vastardis, Michigan; Guard – Zak Zinter, Michigan; Josh Seltzner, Wisconsin; Tackle – Dawand Jones, Ohio State; Logan Bruss, Wisconsin; Tight end – Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin.

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Jacob Panasiuk, Michigan State; Zach VanValkenburg, Iowa; Boye Mafe, Minnesota; Zach Harrison, Ohio State; Linebacker – Micah McFadden, Indiana; Chris Bergin, Northwestern; Jack Sanborn, Wisconsin; Defensive back – Matt Hankins, Iowa; Dax Hill, Michigan; Cam Taylor-Britt, Nebraska; Brandon Joseph, Northwestern.

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Noah Ruggles, Ohio State; Punter – Bryce Baringer, Michigan State; Return specialist – Jayden Reed, Michigan State.

Returning Big Ten Individual Player Award Winners

Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State

Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State

Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State

Bakken-Andersen Kicker of the Year: Jake Moody, Michigan

Hayes-Schembechler Coach of the Year (coaches vote): Mel Tucker, Michigan State

Dave McClain Coach of the Year (media vote): Mel Tucker, Michigan State

Rodgers-Dwight Return Specialist of the Year: Charlie Jones, Iowa

Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year: Riley Moss, Iowa

Standout Freshmen Looking To Make Impact

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day welcomed yet another top-five recruiting class to Columbus prior to the 2022 season.

With the No. 4 overall class, according to 247Sports, the Buckeyes have plenty of freshmen who could make an immediate impact during the season. Day emphasized his eagerness to work with this group on National Signing Day last December.

"I'm very excited about this class," Day said on Dec. 15, 2021. "When you combine the athletic ability and the potential these guys have to be really good football players, that's one thing, but it's also the type of people we have coming into this program."

Now that the class has arrived in Columbus in full – with 11 joining the fold as early enrollees in January and 10 making their way to campus during the summer – several potential impact players have emerged

heading into the 2022 campaign.

Here are five first-year Buckeyes who could play key roles for an Ohio State team in pursuit of its first national title since 2014.

Kaleb Brown

Wide receiver Kaleb Brown was a summer arrival for the Buckeyes but has quickly emerged as someone who could make a notable impact for Ohio State right out of the gate.

Brown is one of four freshman receivers to join Brian Hartline's constantly evolving unit this year. Flanked by the likes of fellow freshmen Kojo Antwi, Caleb Burton and Ky-ion Grayes, Brown set himself apart from the pack by becoming the first of the four to shed his black stripe on Aug. 17.

Not only has he flashed his potential as a receiver during fall camp, but Brown has worked into the Buckeyes' punt-return rotation as well.

He missed much of his senior season at Chicago St. Rita due to injury but still ranked as the No. 3 prospect out of Illinois, according to the 247Sports composite score.

"He's very dynamic, very twitchy, very quick," Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud said. "He's looked really good."

Caden Curry

Defensive end Caden Curry played a multitude of positions on the defensive line during his high school career, and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles is looking to tap into his versatility this season.

Curry has cross-trained as a defensive lineman and linebacker since arriving on campus and emerged as a top candidate for Knowles' hybrid linebacker/defensive end position known as the "Jack."

"In high school, I played zero-technique, three-technique and five-technique (tackle). I played middle linebacker, long snapper," Curry said. "I've done all the positions I've needed to get ready for it."

While at Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove, Curry collected 65 tackles, 24 tackles for loss and seven sacks while leading the Trojans to a Class 6A state title. As one of two freshmen to shed their black stripes during the spring, Curry has shown promise in his short time as a Buckeye.

"Caden plays with a high motor," Day said. "He's a really good football player. He plays a lot bigger than he is (6-3, 250) and is really intelligent. He has a quick twitch. I think he's going to be a heck of a football player."

Dallan Hayden

Although running back Dallan Hayden arrived in Columbus during the summer, he will be an important piece for Ohio State's rotation in 2022.

With second-year back Evan Pryor most likely out for the season with a knee injury, Hayden will step in as the No. 3 running back on the depth chart, slotting in behind second-year TreVeyon Henderson and third-year Miyan Williams.

"Dallan goes 100 miles an hour, so the biggest thing we've got to figure out is to get him to kind of slow down and take a deep breath," running backs coach Tony Alford said. "He's going to be a really good player. I think he's got a chance to be a really good person. It takes some time."

"Remember, he wasn't even here in the spring, but he's got a chance. He's got some skills and he can run, and he's just got to learn the game."

As a senior at Memphis Christian Broth-

ers, Hayden earned offensive player of the year honors for Tennessee Division II-AAA West with 2,002 rushing yards and 33 touchdowns.

C.J. Hicks

Linebacker C.J. Hicks already earned the hearts of Ohio State fans around the country through his passionate peer recruiting during the 2022 cycle, earning the moniker of Captain Buckeye.

While Hicks was an integral part of building Ohio State's 2022 class, he was also the crown jewel of the incoming freshmen. The Kettering (Ohio) Alter prospect ranked as the No. 1 linebacker recruit and the top prospect from Ohio in the class, according to 247Sports' composite score. He compiled 84 tackles, 18 tackles for loss and two interceptions during his senior season en route to Ohio Division III Defensive Player of the Year honors.

Since arriving at Ohio State in January, Hicks has made a quick impression on his teammates and coaches and is slated to be a depth piece behind starters Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers at linebacker.

"His upside is fantastic," Knowles said. "He really has a great quickness and athleticism that you don't see out of many linebackers at that size (6-3, 225). It's just a matter of how quickly he can learn, get himself up to speed, so he can use those tools."

Kye Stokes

It didn't take long for safety Kye Stokes to garner interest from the Ohio State fan base.

Stokes rightfully earned a good deal of hype from his peers and the Buckeye faithful following a promising spring-game performance, in which he tallied nine tackles and two pass breakups.

Although Stokes enters a deep safeties unit, he's already left a strong impression on his coaches, becoming the first member of the class to shed his black stripe during the offseason.

"The first thing you notice is his smile and his attitude every day is just excellent," Day said in the spring. "It's just contagious. He constantly has a lot of energy. But on the field, athletically, he's got a really high ceiling. His movement is excellent. His range, his ability to change direction, his ball skills, covering skills."

Stokes played wide receiver and safety at Seffner (Fla.) Armwood, where he amassed 25 tackles, two interceptions and six passes defended in seven games as a senior in 2021, and he'll look to break into the rotation for Ohio State this season.

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J.K. Is OK For Comeback Season With Ravens

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Question the resolve of J.K. Dobbins at your own peril.

The former standout Ohio State running back was miffed in July when a report suggested he would not be ready for the first week of the 2022 season after a knee injury forced him to miss the 2021 campaign for the Baltimore Ravens, but as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to print, Ravens head coach John Harbaugh had not yet committed to having Dobbins in the lineup when the regular season kicks off Sept. 11 against the New York Jets.

A two-word answer to a question about Dobbins' availability for that game raised hope, however.

"We'll see," Harbaugh said.

That simple comment came after Dobbins was removed from the physically unable list Aug. 8 and practiced that day, marking the next stage of his comeback from a torn left anterior cruciate ligament a year earlier.

"My man looks great," running back Justice Hill said after the practice. "He's been looking great. We've been working out here in the offseason too, and it's his time. He's ready to come back and show what he can do."

Harbaugh was cautiously optimistic about Dobbins.

"I thought he looked pretty good in individual (drills), first day back," the coach said. "He moved around during the ball-handling drills. That will be a first step, maybe add a little bit every day, kind of see how he handles it, and see how the knee responds. But it seems like it's so far so good."

The Ravens intend to bring Dobbins along slowly and gave him scheduled days off in the ensuing two weeks.

"There's a great plan with the doctors and the trainers going forward, so we're just going to follow that," running backs coach Craig Ver Steeg said. "We're going to add a

little bit each day and see how it goes. But, as you know, J.K. has been champing at the bit, and I have too."

Dobbins did not play in the first two preseason games, and his status for the final on Aug. 27 vs. the Washington Commanders was unknown. He sustained the injury in the first series of the 2021 preseason finale Aug. 28 against Washington, and he joined fellow Ravens running backs Gus Edwards and Hill with season-ending injuries before the regular season began.

While Dobbins spent the offseason working toward a return for the opener against the Jets, NFL Network's Ian Rapoport on July 18 reported that Dobbins was no sure thing for the first game and possibility would miss the first several games of the regular season.

Those words caught the attention of Dobbins, who responded through his Twitter account, "I might not even go on (the physically unable to perform list) because that's how good my rehab is going and I'm damn sure going to be ready for week 1."

As noted, he was on PUP until Aug. 8 but that was more of a formality until he passed his physical. In another tweet he wrote, "I would post videos but I want all you fake a-- doctors and people who have never spoken a word to me to see what me and Jesus been up to on the biggest stage."

Also, he told doubters to "check my resume." That's where Dobbins should have been taken seriously. As a senior at La-Grange (Texas) High School in 2016, he sustained a broken ankle and multiple ligament tears on the first play of the season and didn't play the rest of the year.

In almost an exact situation as he faces now, he returned a year later and in his first game for Ohio State he rushed for 181 yards against Indiana, breaking the OSU freshman first-game record of 176 by Maurice Clarett in 2002.

He never missed a game in his Buckeye career and started 40 of 42 games he played. Dobbins is the only OSU player to

rush for more than 1,000 yards as a freshman, sophomore and junior, and in 2019, he became the first to rush more than 2,000 yards in a season, finishing with 2,003.

He finished his career second in Ohio State career rushing (4,459) to Archie Griffin's 5,589. Dobbins declared for the NFL draft after his junior season and was taken in the second round (55th overall) by the Ravens in 2020.

Dobbins had a supporter in his latest comeback from injury with NFL.com's Adam Schein, who tabbed him as a candidate for the NFL Comeback Player of the Year award.

"I thought Baltimore stole him late in Round 2 of the 2020 NFL Draft and spent much of that offseason gassing him up," Schein wrote. "Then he went out and averaged a robust 6.0 yards per carry as a rookie, only furthering my infatuation."

"I think he bounces back with a monster season in 2022. As I've said time and again, the 5-10, 212-pounder was put on Earth to run the rock for the Ravens. Dobbins was a part of Baltimore's hellacious injury toll in 2021. In 2022, he and the rest of the team get back to playing Ravens football."

Dobbins rushed for 805 yards and nine touchdowns in 15 games as a rookie and scored in six consecutive games (seven TDs) to end the season. His 6.0 yards per carry ranked third in the NFL behind quarterbacks Lamar Jackson of Baltimore and Arizona's Kyler Murray.

Big things were expected of Dobbins in 2021 until the injury derailed him. Yet, Gary Davenport of Bleacher Report recently wrote that he expects Dobbins to "explode into stardom" this season.

"If the trade that sent wide receiver Marquise Brown to Arizona is any indication, the Ravens are headed back to their run-heavy ways in 2022," Davenport wrote. "With a healthy Dobbins likely to lead the team in carries, that big season so many saw coming may just be a year late."

Dobbins can be invaluable to the Ravens in relieving the pressure on Jackson. The dual-threat quarterback, who has missed several games entering his fifth season in the NFL, would not have to put himself at risk carrying the ball if the Ravens have a successful running game.

Rich Eisen of the NFL Network, a Michigan alum and avid Wolverines fan, praised Dobbins on July 29 by listing him No. 2 on his list of most impactful players returning from injury.

"Once he gets back and starts rolling, this offense will be far more significant, especially if we're not going to get much of a passing game out of Baltimore again from the wide receiver position," Eisen said. "J.K. Dobbins is terrific. He can wear you out. He can be one of the best running backs in this league like he was in the Big Ten. I think the sky's the limit for him. I hope he is as healthy as the Ravens hope, and he says he is."



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Freeman Leading Irish Into Ohio Stadium

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's a new day in South Bend. Notre Dame, spurned by former head coach Brian Kelly who decided to leave for LSU after 12 seasons, promoted defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Marcus Freeman to become lead man on Dec. 3, 2021, just days after Kelly's move was announced.

"I get my discipline, my work ethic, my honesty from my father," Freeman said during his introductory press conference. "I get my unselfishness and other centered focus from my mother, and that's exactly how I will lead this football program. We will be disciplined. We will be tough. We will work tirelessly. But we will do it with the understanding that no one person, no one coach is more important than another. As a team and as a family, we'll accomplish all of our goals. I plan on leading this team with an unwavering standard."

Freeman, who now finds himself as Indiana royalty, has extensive roots in Ohio. A native of Huber Heights who played football at Wayne High School, Freeman attended Ohio State from 2004-08, appearing in 51 games at linebacker with 37 starts for the Buckeyes. After bouncing around NFL practice squads for a season, he got into coaching, returning to Ohio State as a graduate assistant in 2010.

His later stops took him through Kent State, Purdue and Cincinnati (under Luke Fickell), all before he got the call to join Kelly at Notre Dame. Along the way, he reportedly turned down a pair of overtures to rejoin Ohio State's coaching staff under head coach Ryan Day.

The Irish coaching staff also includes former Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington as defensive line coach and former linebacker James Laurinaitis as a graduate assistant, so the familial connections provide some extra intrigue to No. 5 Notre Dame's season opener in which the Irish will travel to face No. 2 Ohio State in a prime-time matchup on Sept. 3.

"(Ohio State is) so talented, but our guys are competitors and they're up for the challenge," Freeman said. "We've got some great football players in South Bend, and we're looking forward to the competition."

Once Freeman took over, one of the most pressing questions was who would start at quarterback for the Irish. With last season's starter in Jack Coan off to the NFL, Freeman was left with a choice between sophomore Tyler Buchner and junior Drew Pyne.

Buchner appeared in 10 games last season, completing 60.0 percent of his passes (21 of 35) for 298 yards, three touchdowns and three interceptions. Pyne made two appearances, completing half of his 30 attempts for 224 yards and two scores. Buchner was also a rushing threat for the Irish, carrying the ball 46 times for 336 yards, good for a team-best 7.3 yards per carry.

It took just eight fall camp practices for Freeman and offensive coordinator Tommy Rees – a former starter at quarterback

for the Irish – to call the competition on Aug. 13, landing on Buchner to lead Notre Dame's offense this season.

"We just felt like it was time," Freeman said. "It was time to give the offense clarity on who's going to be the starting quarterback. Drew made it extremely difficult. Those guys both can give us a chance to win, both of them. We just think that Tyler brings a dynamic element with his feet, the ability to extend plays, and have a quarterback running game. That really kind of added to this decision."

Buchner's job will be more difficult given the season-ending injury to starting wideout Avery Davis, who was expected to be the top option for the Irish offense with Kevin Austin entering into the NFL draft this past offseason.

Still, Notre Dame returns several receiving options from last season, including graduate Braden Lenzy (32 catches, 350 yards) and sophomore Lorenzo Styles Jr. (24 catches, 344), and will look to get more sophomores and freshmen into the rotation.

"I think losing Avery Davis is a huge blow, but the outlook on that room to me is still very good," Freeman said. "We've got some young guys that have to step up. You're going to have to see Lorenzo Styles and Jayden Thomas and Deion Colzie and Tobias Merriweather step up. You're going to have to see Matt Salerno step up. What it does is create more roles and a bigger responsibility for those guys in the room."

In addition to the wide receivers, Buchner will also be throwing to one of the nation's top tight ends in junior Michael Mayer. Mayer, who hauled in 71 receptions for 840 yards and seven touchdowns last season, was one of just two tight ends on the preseason watch list for the Walter Camp Award, given annually to the top player in college football.

While the Irish return four starters on the offensive line – sophomore right tackle Blake Fisher is the only new addition to the line this season – there is some concern with graduate center Jarrett Patterson, who suffered a foot sprain and is questionable to play against Ohio State. Freeman indicated that he expects Patterson to play, but a starting center missing practice time – especially for an environment like it will be in Ohio Stadium – is notable.

At running back, the Irish have mostly a clean slate with Kyren Williams, last season's leading rusher with 1,002 yards on 204 carries, off to the NFL. Sophomore Chris Tyree (222 yards, 56 carries) will slot in as the starter, but the room will likely work as a committee with sophomores Logan Diggs (230 yards, 52 carries) and Audric Estime (60 yards, seven carries) rotating in.

While some questions remain for the offense, expectations will be high for Notre Dame and new defensive coordinator Al Golden. The Irish finished 15th in scoring defense (19.7 points per game) and 43rd in total defense (359.5 yards per game) last season and return eight starters in addition to welcoming star senior safety Brandon Joseph, who transferred to Notre

Get To Know ... Notre Dame

- **2021 Record:** 11-2.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Pro-Style; Defensive Formation - 4-2-5; Starters Returning - Offense 7, Defense 8, Specialists 0.
- **Head Coach:** Marcus Freeman, 1st year at Notre Dame, 0-1.
- **Series History:** 7th meeting; Ohio State leads 4-2.
- **School Facts:** Location - South Bend, Ind.; Enrollment - 8,874; Nickname - Fighting Irish; Colors - Blue, Gold; Conference - Independent; Stadium - Notre Dame Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf Revolution; Capacity - 77,622).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Tyler Buchner	46	336	7.3	3
Logan Diggs	52	230	4.4	3
Chris Tyree	56	222	4.0	1

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Tyler Buchner	21-35	60.0	298	3-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Michael Mayer	71	840	11.8	7
Avery Davis	27	386	14.3	4
Braden Lenzy	32	350	10.9	3

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game - 35.2
Rushing Yards Per Game - 143.8
Passing Yards Per Game - 282.5
Total Offense Avg. Per Game - 426.2

2022 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 3	at Ohio State	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 10	MARSHALL	2:30 p.m.
Sept. 17	CALIFORNIA	2:30 p.m.
Sept. 24	at North Carolina	TBA
Oct. 8	vs. BYU at Las Vegas	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 15	STANFORD	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 22	UNLV	2:30 p.m.
Oct. 29	at Syracuse	TBA
Nov. 5	CLEMSON	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 12	vs. Navy at Baltimore	12 p.m.
Nov. 19	BOSTON COLLEGE	2:30 p.m.
Nov. 26	at Southern California	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
JD Bertrand	63	38	101	7.0-22	1.5-13
Clarence Lewis	44	9	53	2.0-11	1.0-6
Isaiah Foskey	38	14	52	12.5-128	11.0-127
Jayson Ademilola	29	20	49	8.0-31	3.5-22
Bo Bauer	23	24	47	4.0-14	1.5-8
Jack Kiser	26	19	45	1.0-3	0-0
Cam Hart	25	17	42	4.0-16	0-0
DJ Brown	21	21	42	1.0-2	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
DJ Brown	3	31	10.3	0
Jack Kiser	2	109	54.5	2
Cam Hart	2	32	16.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed - 19.7
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed - 135.3
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed - 224.2
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed - 359.5

Dame after three seasons at Northwestern.

"I think (Joseph is) a natural leader," Freeman said. "He's confident, which is extremely important playing the defensive back position because, listen, if you're not confident, I don't know any defensive back, corner or safety that hasn't been confident in what he does that's been successful. But you've got to be confident. B-Jo is very confident. He's made plays. You've got to be a playmaker back there. He's done that."

Elsewhere in the secondary, Joseph will be joined by graduates D.J. Brown and Houston Griffith and junior Ramon Henderson at safety as well as junior Clarence Lewis and senior Cam Hart at cornerback, with graduate TaRiq Bracy on the field in a nickel look for the defense. With the exception of Joseph, all were significant contributors on last year's team that allowed just 224.2 passing yards per game.

At linebacker, the Irish will feature a pair of seniors with JD Bertrand, who led Notre Dame with 101 tackles last season, at the Mike and first-time starter Marist Liufau at the Will. Senior Jack Kiser will reprise his role as the Rover for Notre Dame's defense, a hybrid linebacker/safety that is similar to the Bullet trotted onto the field the last few seasons by Ohio State. Kiser was pushed into the role in 2020 and 2021 due to injuries but has firmly claimed it for this season.

"I feel like every year, I kind of find myself in the role of learning everything and making sure I'm available at any position or any need within the linebacker level," Kiser said. "This year's the same. Nothing's really changed. I'm learning everything (and

cross-training. (I'm) just trying to be the best player I can be at any position."

The defensive line has two returning starters, with graduate Jayson Ademilola at defensive tackle and senior Isaiah Foskey returning at Notre Dame's "Vyper" end, which is a stand-up defensive end who can play at linebacker like Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' Jack position.

Senior Howard Cross III and junior Ry-lie Mills are in line to start at nose tackle and defensive end, respectively, and the quartet accounted for 140 tackles (25½ for loss) and 20 sacks last season.

"We're veteran and we're good," defensive line coach Washington said. "But we can be great. There are other levels there. We identify (each level) and we constantly remind ourselves of what we want to be. If we're not there on a consistent basis, then we've got work to do."

All indications this offseason have been that Ohio State is feeling confident about this season, and with the Buckeyes set to host a veteran Notre Dame squad – not to mention the first season-opening top-five matchup in Ohio Stadium history – there should be no shortage of storylines as this premier nonconference game approaches to kick off the season.

"It's great for us because there's no lack of motivation for our guys," Freeman said. "So we can continue to remind them of the great challenge that we have Sept. 3. Being an ultimate competitor, you want to play the best. What better way to measure your team than to play Ohio State?"

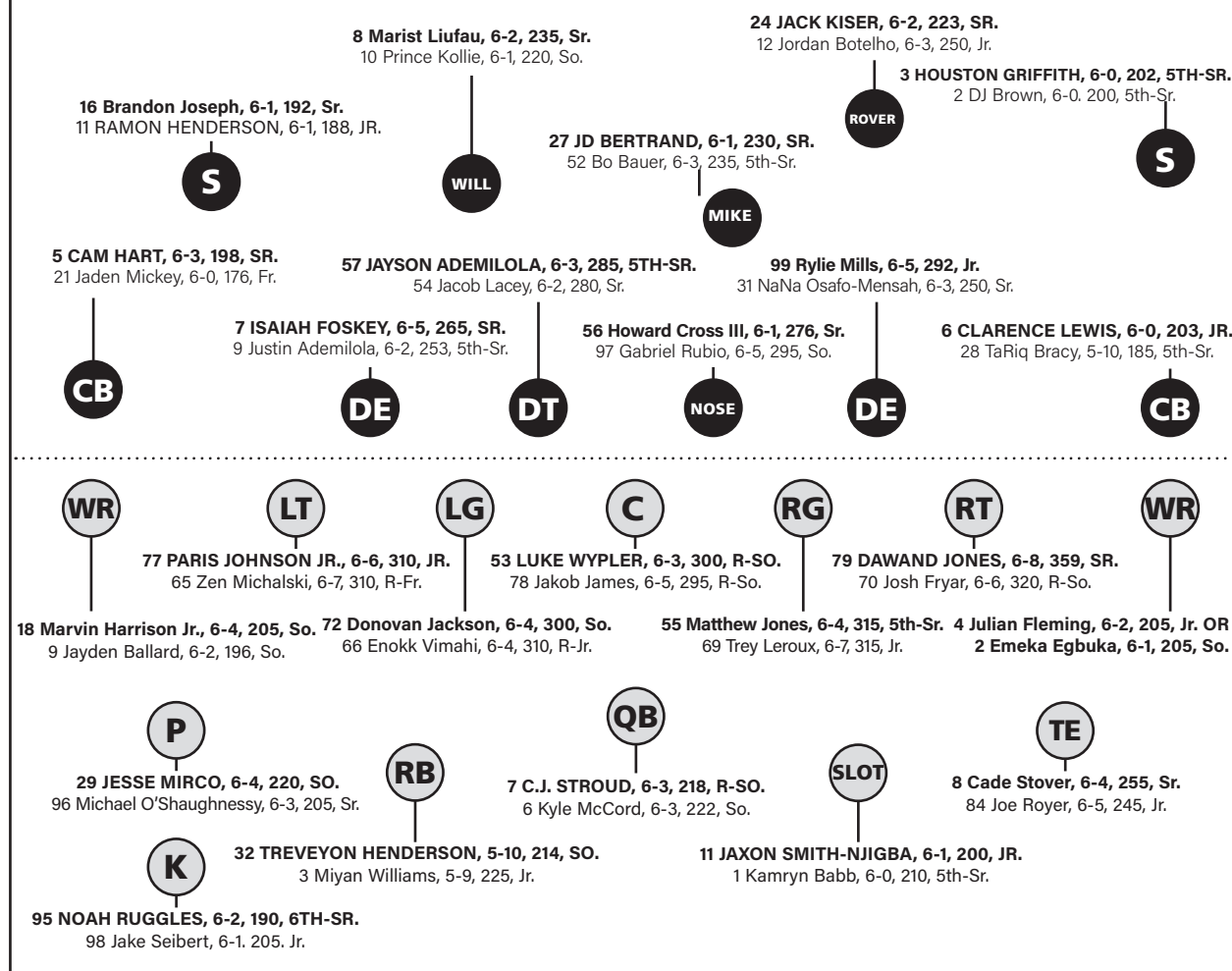
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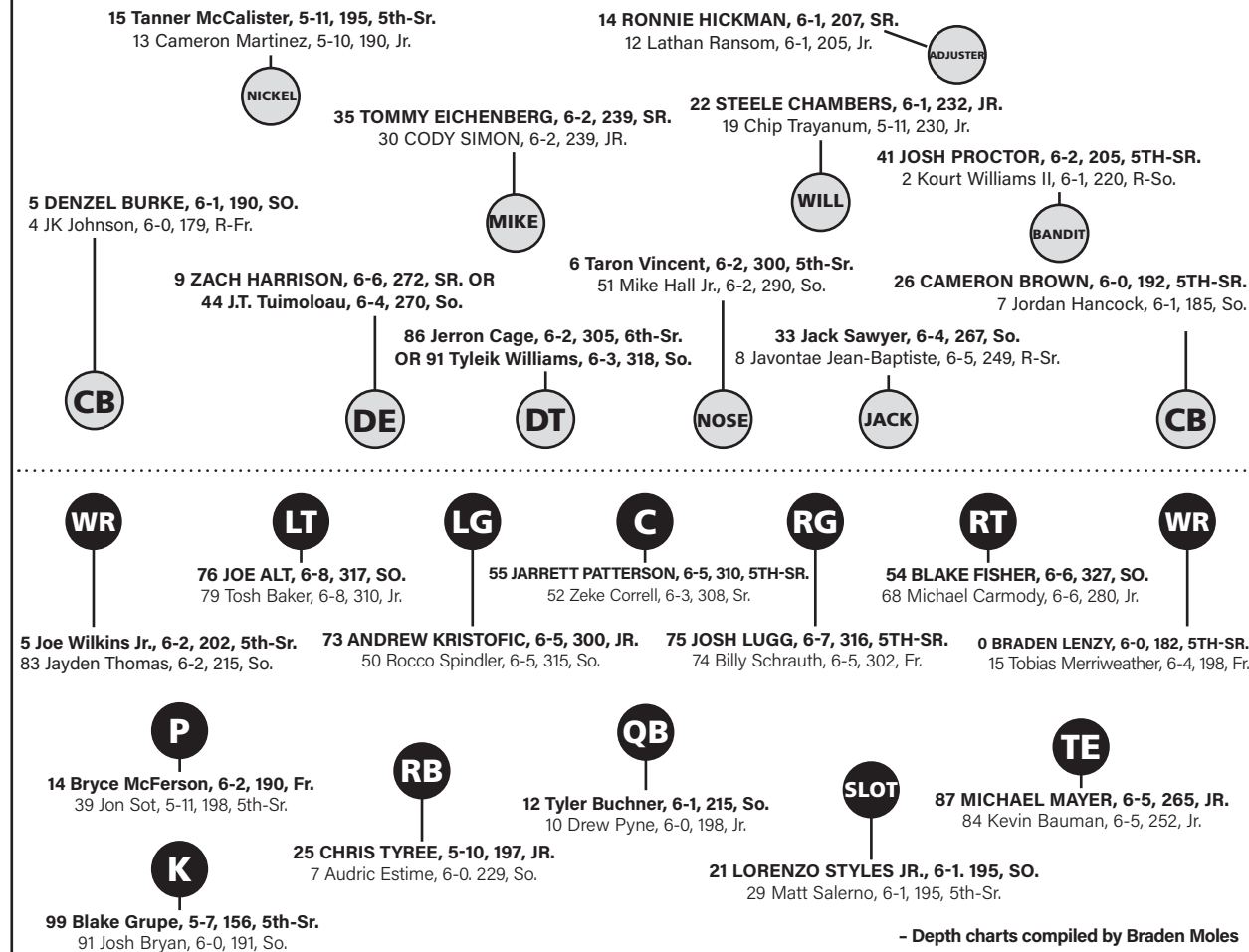
Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



▪ Starters in **bold**. Returning starters in ALL CAPS

WHEN NOTRE DAME HAS THE BALL...



- Depth charts compiled by Braden Moles

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. NOTRE DAME RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes return a wealth of talent on offense while the Fighting Irish have eight returnees on defense. Yes, Notre Dame has former Ohio State linebacker Marcus Freeman in his first season as head coach, but he is a familiar face in South Bend, having been elevated from defensive coordinator when Brian Kelly abruptly left for LSU prior to the Fiesta Bowl.

What that means is the Buckeyes' running game will face a stiff challenge from the get-go. Fortunately, they have TreVeyon Henderson for a second season and a backup who could start elsewhere. Henderson rushed for 1,248 yards (6.8 yards per carry) and 15 touchdowns along with 312 receiving yards and four scores, but obviously he was overshadowed by quarterback C.J. Stroud and the receivers. Backup Miyan Williams gained 508 yards with a 7.2 average, best in the Big Ten. Notre Dame was 37th nationally in rushing defense last season, allowing 135.3 yards per game and 3.8 yards per carry with 13 TDs. Yet they were 15th in points allowed (19.7) even with a 37-35 loss to Oklahoma State in the Fiesta Bowl. **EDGE: EVEN**

NOTRE DAME RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Irish must replace Kyren Williams, who rushed for 1,002 yards and had another 359 in catches. With injuries to Logan Diggs and Jadarian Price, that task may fall to Chris Tyree. He made two starts last season and finished fourth on the team with 827 all-purpose yards – 222 rushing, 258 receiving and 347 on kick returns. He scored three touchdowns, two of which were on receptions. Overall, ND was not very good on the ground, ranking 83rd with 143.8 yards per game, 4.1 yards per carry and 23 TDs. Whether statistics from last season mean anything is up for debate. The Buckeyes would argue they don't matter when you consider their defensive staff was overhauled, including head coach Ryan Day prying defensive coordinator Jim Knowles from Oklahoma State. For the record, the Buckeyes were 28th in rush defense, giving up 126.8 yards a game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. NOTRE DAME PASS DEFENSE

At first glance it doesn't get any easier than this when choosing who has the advantage. OSU has a Heisman Trophy favorite in Stroud and a couple dozen (or so it seems) five-star receivers hanging around waiting to make a catch. The problem is the Irish have a decent secondary and a rush that could cause problems, belying that they were middle of the pack (64th of 130 teams) in passing yards allowed with 224.2 per game. They were tied for 13th in sacks, tying the school record with 41 in 13 games. The defensive line featured Isaiah Foskey and twins Justin and Jayson Ademilola. The trio combined for 20 sacks (11 by Foskey), eight forced fumbles, and two fumble recoveries and are looking to improve those numbers. ND totaled 15 interceptions, including linebacker Jack Kiser's two pick-sixes. Still, if the Ohio State offensive line does its job, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Marvin Harrison Jr., Julian Fleming, Emeka Egbuka and others will be unstoppable. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

NOTRE DAME PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

This is where it gets tricky for the Buckeyes. They were bad last season against the pass. The 246.2 yards per game allowed was 97th, and the coverage was worse than that at times. Enter Knowles and his scheme that is designed to present various looks to confound the quarterback. A veteran QB might not get flustered, but Notre Dame replaces Jack Coan with dual threat Tyler Buchner, who will make his first collegiate start. In 10 games last season as a freshman, he completed 21 of 35 passes for 298 yards, three touchdowns and three interceptions and ran 46 times for 336 yards and three touchdowns. To make it even tougher for him, wide receiver Avery Davis sustained a season-ending knee injury in early August. Look for tight end Michael Mayer to be the top target. The OSU secondary needs to be better, and if the defensive line can apply pressure, the Irish will be in for a long evening. **EDGE: EVEN**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Noah Ruggles and Jesse Mirco are a formidable tandem for the Buckeyes. Ruggles made 20 of 21 field goals and all 74 extra points. Mirco was used a mere 31 times while averaging 42.3 yards per punt. Egbuka peeled off 29.0 yards per kickoff return. Notre Dame will use transfer placekicker Blake Grupe, who made 20 of 25 field goals with a long of 50 for Arkansas State last season. Harvard graduate transfer Jon Sot is expected to get the punting duties over freshman Bryce McFerson. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INTANGIBLES

In addition to Freeman's Buckeye ties, defensive line coach Al Washington was OSU's linebackers coach from 2020-22, and former linebacker James Laurinaitis is a graduate assistant for the Irish defense. Unfortunately for Notre Dame, none of them will be suiting up, but the offensive coaches can take comfort that they put 35 points on Knowles' Oklahoma State defense the last time they played.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

STAFF PREDICTION

An 11-2 mark is good most places but not in Columbus. There's no better way to respond to the criticism from last season than making an opening statement for 2022. **OHIO STATE 42, NOTRE DAME 17**

Schedule Bookended By Tough Contests

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State enters the 2022 season coming off its first multi-loss regular season since 2017, capped by a grueling 42-27 road loss to then-No. 5 Michigan at the Big House – the Buckeyes' first loss to the rival Wolverines since 2011.

The Buckeyes' loss to Michigan displayed the same issues they had shown in their first loss of the season to then-No. 12 Oregon in September. Ohio State's run defense was sluggish, while the offense fell into a multiple-score hole that it could not dig itself out of.

After Michigan and Oregon followed similar blueprints to take down the Buckeyes, Ohio State made wholesale changes to its coaching staff in the offseason with the motivation to prevent another multi-loss season and return to the College Football Playoff.

After their transformative offseason, the Buckeyes turn their attention to a 2022 schedule bookended by challenging matchups at Ohio Stadium. Head coach Ryan Day's squad kicks off the season against former Ohio State linebacker and Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman in prime time on Sept. 3 and ends the season with The Game at home on Nov. 26.

But there are several other marquee matchups that pose challenges for the Buckeyes between those games. Ohio State will host Wisconsin and Iowa and will be tasked with winning in difficult road environments against Michigan State and Penn State during a brutal five-game stretch in late September through October.

Ohio State will play eight teams this season that boasted winning records in 2021. Of those eight teams, four of them – Notre Dame, Iowa, Michigan State and Michigan – won 10 or more games last year. Phil Steele ranks Ohio State's schedule the 14th toughest in the nation and third in the Big Ten, trailing only Indiana and Rutgers.

As Day and the Buckeyes seek a return to the CFP, here are brief previews for all 12 games on Ohio State's 2022 schedule, with a full preview of its season-opening matchup against Notre Dame on pages 32-33.

Notre Dame, Sept. 3 – Freeman embarks on his inaugural season at the helm of the program with a new-look coaching staff and numerous holes to fill on both sides of the ball.

Notre Dame saw starting quarterback Jack Coan, leading rusher Kyren Williams and leading receiver Kevin Austin depart the program during the offseason. Safety

Kyle Hamilton also made the jump to the NFL, leaving a large void in the Irish secondary.

Freeman has found his answer to replace Coan, turning to sophomore Tyler Buchner to fill the role of signal caller for the Irish. Buchner flashed his dual-threat ability last year, completing 21 of 35 pass attempts for 298 yards, three touchdowns and three interceptions while adding 336 rushing yards and three scores on the ground. He will make his first career start against the Buckeyes on Sept. 3.

Buchner will likely rely heavily on red-shirt sophomore tight end Michael Mayer, who turned a team-best 71 receptions into 840 yards and seven touchdowns in 2021. With Austin out of the way, Braden Lenzy, Joe Wilkins Jr. and Lorenzo Styles Jr. will have to step up as pass-catching threats.

Running backs Chris Tyree and Logan Diggs are expected to handle the Irish's running game by committee in 2022. The pair combined for 452 rushing yards and four touchdowns last season but showed an ability to produce in the passing game. With the Irish returning nearly their entire starting offensive line from 2021, Tyree and Diggs should be slated for solid contributions this season.

Freeman's transfer portal coup of former Northwestern safety Brandon Joseph greatly alleviates concerns of Hamilton's absence. Joseph has corralled nine interceptions since the 2020 season and totaled 79 tackles last year. The former Wildcat joins a defense that will return eight starters, including cornerbacks Cam Hart and Clarence Lewis.

Arkansas State, Sept. 10 – Head coach Butch Jones' first season in Jonesboro did not go according to plan. The veteran skipper saw his Arkansas State squad nosedive to a 2-10 record after a season-opening win against FCS-level Central Arkansas.

The most prevalent issues came on defense, where the Red Wolves allowed 505.8 total yards – ranking second-to-last in the country – and 38.6 points per game, which placed 124th in the nation. Jones' defense allowed 50 or more points on four separate occasions, including a 59-point outing from 3-9 Georgia Southern. Arkansas State's run defense ranked dead last in the nation in rushing yards allowed, allowing an average of 261.8 yards per game. The Red Wolves

will also be without last season's tackles leader Elery Alexander and sacks leader JoJo Ozougwu in 2022.

On offense, Arkansas State hangs its hat on its aerial attack but failed to find a consistent answer at quarterback last season, splitting snaps between Layne Hatcher and James Blackman. With Hatcher's transfer to Texas State, Blackman will likely take over the starting role for the Red Wolves in 2022. He saw reasonable success last season, completing 59.6 percent of his passes for 1,344 yards, eight touchdowns and four interceptions.

Blackman will likely have to operate with minimal help from his run game, which accounted for just 82.4 yards per game – 128th in the nation – in 2021. Redshirt senior Johnnie Lang will likely carry the load for the Red Wolves as Arkansas State's leading rusher from last season, Lincoln Pare, entered the transfer portal this offseason, joining Hatcher at Texas State.

Toledo, Sept. 17 – Toledo was better than its 7-6 record would indicate last season. Five of the Rockets' six losses came by seven or fewer points, including a tight 32-29 loss to then-No. 8 Notre Dame in South Bend on Sept. 11, 2021.

Fourth-year quarterback Dequan Finn is the centerpiece of a Toledo offense that led the Mid-American Conference in scoring last season. Finn kept opponents honest through the air and on the ground, tossing 18 touchdowns to two interceptions while running in nine more scores. He'll look to junior wide receiver Devin Maddox – who led the Rockets with 567 yards in 2021 – as his top receiving option.

However, the Rockets' running game took a major hit this offseason. Running back Bryant Koback, an All-MAC first-team member, left for the NFL after rushing for 1,400 yards and 15 touchdowns last season. A committee of backs are expected to pick up that burden, including sophomores Micah Kelly and Jacquez Stuart and Maryland transfer Peny Boone.

Defensively, Toledo boasts a threatening presence both on the ground and in the air, leading the MAC in scoring defense (21.8 ppg) and ranking second in yards allowed (350.2 ypg) in 2021. The Rockets' defense is boosted by All-MAC third-team linebacker Dyontae Johnson, who tallied 86 tackles last season.

Former Ohio State linebacker Dallas Gant will also make his return to Ohio Stadium after transferring to Toledo during the 2021 season. In the secondary, the Rockets lost All-MAC first-team members Sam Womack and Tycen Anderson during the

offseason but retained safety Maxen Hook, who was second on the team with 95 tackles last season.

Wisconsin, Sept. 24 – Wisconsin's tradition of electrifying rushing attacks is primed to continue in 2022. Badgers running back Braelon Allen elevated his name into the same category as Ron Dayne, James White and Jonathan Taylor last season, becoming the fourth true freshman to rush for over 1,000 yards in program history.

Expectations have risen for Allen in 2022, despite two of his more experienced offensive linemen – guard Josh Seltzner and tackle Logan Bruss – entering the NFL.

Graham Mertz will remain the starting quarterback for the Badgers in 2022 after a rocky 2021 campaign. Through Wisconsin's first four games of the season, Mertz completed just 56.4 percent of his passes and threw two touchdowns to six interceptions, leading to losses against Penn State, Notre Dame and Michigan. However, Mertz found his footing over the next nine games, completing 61.5 percent of his passes for eight touchdowns and five interceptions while leading the Badgers to an 8-1 record to close the season.

Wisconsin's defense was among the best in the Big Ten a season ago, holding opponents to 239.1 yards and 16.2 points per game. With 2021 Butkus-Fitzgerald Big Ten Linebacker of the Year Leo Chenal and All-Big Ten first-team linebacker Jack Sanborn – who combined for 206 tackles in 2021 – off to the NFL, outside linebacker Nick Herbig will be expected to step into a larger role after tallying a team-best nine sacks last season.

Rutgers, Oct. 1 – Head coach Greg Schiano took his rebuild to the next level in his second season back with Rutgers in 2021, leading the Scarlet Knights to their first bowl game since 2014.

The Scarlet Knights offense will be led by either incumbent starting quarterback Noah Vedral or Gavin Wimsatt. Vedral completed 60.4 percent of passes for 3,107 yards, 16 touchdowns and 15 interceptions in his two seasons as the starter.

Wimsatt, a four-star out of Owensboro, Ky., in the 2021 recruiting class, is expected to make a run at the starting job after reclassifying and joining the program a year early last season. He appeared in four games last year, maintaining his redshirt, but saw significant time in the Gator Bowl, completing 7 of 16 passes for 30 yards and an interception.

The pair of quarterbacks will be without Bo Melton, who led the Scarlet Knights in receiving in each of the last two seasons.



Marcus Freeman



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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OPPONENT OVERVIEW

Wide receivers Shameen Jones and Aron Cruickshank, who combined for 578 receiving yards and two touchdowns last season, will carry the load in the passing game.

Defensively, Rutgers returns six starters from last season. The secondary retains much of its core, trotting out four returning starters from a season ago, and is seeking to improve on a 2021 campaign in which it allowed 234.9 passing yards per game, which ranked 10th in the Big Ten.

Michigan State, Oct. 8 – After bursting onto the scene with an 11-2 record and Peach Bowl victory last season, head coach Mel Tucker looks to keep the good times rolling in East Lansing.

Tucker faces an immense challenge on the offensive side of the ball after losing six starters in the offseason – most notably star running back Kenneth Walker. Although sophomore quarterback Payton Thorne returns under center, the Spartans will need a boost in the run game after Walker's 1,636 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns last season. Colorado transfer and 2020 Pac-12 Offensive Player of the Year Jarek Broussard is expected to step into the starting running back role after producing 661 yards on 142 carries for the Buffaloes last season.

The Spartans retained the services of leading wideout Jayden Reed, who hauled in 59 receptions for 1,026 yards and 10 touchdowns last season. Junior Tre Mosley is also expected to take another step after operating in Reed and Jalen Nailor's shadow last season.

Although the Michigan State offense was decimated by departures, the Spartan defense remains largely intact, retaining nine starters. The Spartans return their entire starting linebacker and secondary units while keeping their starting interior defensive line together. Senior Khristian Bogle and junior Jeff Pietrowski, both defensive ends, will be relied on to continue the Spartans' top-ranked pass rush after leading the Big Ten with 43 sacks last season.

Iowa, Oct. 22 – The Hawkeyes look to continue their reign over the Big Ten West in 2022. Iowa sported a 10-4 record last season, including a Big Ten Championship Game appearance, behind an imposing defense and special teams unit.

This season, the Hawkeyes' defense and special teams are expected to continue their level of success from a year ago. Iowa returns seven starters to a defense that held opponents to 328.8 yards and 19.2 points per game in 2021. The most notable returners include inside linebackers Jack Campbell and Seth Benson, who led the Hawkeyes in tackles with 143 and 105, respectively.

Flipping to the offensive side of the ball, Spencer Petras will likely be pegged as the starting quarterback for the third straight season. He was inconsistent at best last year, tossing just 10 touchdowns to nine interceptions on 57.3 percent passing. The Hawkeyes found reasonable success on the ground last season, primarily thanks to running back Tyler Goodson, who accounted for 1,151 yards rushing in 2021. But with Goodson off to the NFL, Gavin Williams, his backup, is expected to lead Iowa's ground attack in 2022 after rushing for 305 yards on an average of 4.7 yards per carry last season.

Penn State, Oct. 29 – Penn State is looking to shake off the disappointment

of the previous two seasons in which they combined for an 11-11 record. The Nittany Lions battled rumors surrounding head coach James Franklin's future for much of last season, which were put to rest on Dec. 5, 2021 after Franklin signed a 10-year contract extension to stay in State College.

Quarterback Sean Clifford is back for his fifth season, fourth as the starter, with the Nittany Lions. With Medina, Ohio, five-star quarterback Drew Allar joining the program in the spring, the pressure is on for Clifford. As star wide receiver Jahan Dotson heads to the NFL, sophomore wideouts Parker Washington and KeAndre Lambert-Smith will carry the receiving load after promising freshman campaigns. But Penn State returns only two starters to an offensive line that allowed the most sacks in the conference (34) last season.

Leading rusher Keyvone Lee returns to Penn State after a 530-yard season, but all eyes will be on Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin five-star running back Nick Singleton, who ranked as the best back in the 2022 class according to 247Sports.

Penn State returns only four defensive starters from a season ago, headlined by senior safety Ji'Ayir Brown, who led the Big Ten with six interceptions last year.

Northwestern, Nov. 5 – Northwestern will look to keep its even-year magic alive in 2022. After claiming Big Ten West titles in 2018 and 2020, the Wildcats saw significant regression in 2019 and 2021, collecting losing records in each of those seasons. With a roster that appears near the bottom of the conference in terms of talent, head coach Pat Fitzgerald will have his work cut out for him if the Wildcats are to return to the Big Ten title game.

After boasting one of the nation's strongest defenses in 2020, Northwestern took a significant step back in 2021. With star safety Joseph heading to Notre Dame, it appears Northwestern may be heading for another subpar year on that side of the ball. However, three returning starters in the secondary – A.J. Hampton, Cameron Mitchell and Coco Azema – should help fill the void left by Joseph. Elsewhere on the defense, linebacker Bryce Gallagher and defensive lineman Adetomiwa Adebawore return to a unit that allowed 29.0 points per game last season.

The Wildcats failed to find a consistent answer at quarterback last season, with three quarterbacks attempting at least 75 passes. With Hunter Johnson and Andrew Marty departing the program, South Carolina transfer Ryan Hilinski will likely lead the Northwestern offense in his second season in Evanston. Hilinski tallied 978 passing yards, three touchdowns and four interceptions while completing 54.0 percent of his passes in 2021. He will benefit from an offense that returns nine starters, including running back Evan Hull and highly-touted NFL tackle prospect Peter Skoronski.

Indiana, Nov. 12 – Indiana appeared primed for a breakthrough entering the 2021 season, but a host of injuries and poor play on both sides of the ball had the Hoosiers fall to a Big Ten-worst 2-10 record,

their worst finish under sixth-year head coach Tom Allen.

With injury-prone quarterback Michael Penix Jr. transferring to Washington, Indiana scooped up Missouri transfer Connor Bazalak to head its offense in 2022. Bazalak was the Tigers' starter for two seasons prior to his transfer to Indiana, completing 66.2 percent of passes for 4,914 yards, 23 touchdowns and 17 interceptions in that time.

The Hoosiers' receiving corps was decimated by departures, most notably tight end Peyton Hendershot and wideout Ty Fryfogle. Senior receiver D.J. Matthews will be tasked with increasing his production while AJ Barner will look to emulate Hendershot's impact at tight end. Indiana also lost its top three rushers from last season and will rely on Auburn transfer running back Shaun Shivers and several young players to take over the running game.

Despite losing program cornerstone and linebacker Micah McFadden during the offseason, the Hoosiers are expected to improve on the defensive side after allowing a conference-worst 33.3 points per game in 2021. The Hoosiers return seven defensive starters, including three members of their secondary. Junior cornerback Tiawan Mullen returns after an injury-shortened season and will be joined by cornerback Jaylin Williams and safety Devon Matthews in a talented secondary.

Maryland, Nov. 19 – Maryland took a step in the right direction last year, collecting its first winning season (7-6) since its first year in the Big Ten. Head coach Mike Locksley also led the Terrapins to their first bowl win in 11 years, beating Virginia Tech 54-10 in the Pinstripe Bowl.

With quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa entering his third season at the helm of the Maryland offense, alongside nine returning starters, the Terrapin offense is primed to take its place among the best in the Big Ten this season. Maryland returns its entire starting offensive line from a year ago, as well as its top two leading receivers in Rakim Jarrett and Dontay Demus. Sophomore running back Colby McDonald will likely take over for the departing Tayon

Fleet-Davis.

While the Terrapins' offense could be scary in 2022, the defense could carry that description for the opposite reason. Although they return seven starters, the Terrapins lost a pair of leading tacklers from a season ago in Jordan Mosley and Nick Cross. Maryland also allowed 404.3 yards and 30.7 points per game last season, ranking 12th and 13th in the Big Ten, respectively. Senior cornerback Jakorian Bennett should step up as the leader of the defense after a 2021 campaign in which he registered 13 pass-breakups and three interceptions.

Michigan, Nov. 26 – Coming off their first College Football Playoff appearance, the Wolverines appear to have the pieces to make another run at it in 2022.

Michigan returns nine offensive starters to a group that finished third in the Big Ten in scoring offense (35.8 ppg) and second in total offense (443.1). The quarterback duo of Cade McNamara and J.J. McCarthy remains intact and will have their top five receivers from a season ago, as well as star wideout Ronnie Bell, who missed nearly all of last season with a torn ACL.

With running back Hassan Haskins entering the professional ranks, junior Blake Corum will step into the spotlight. Corum was a tremendous second option for the Wolverines last season, rushing for 952 yards and 11 touchdowns. Corum will also be running behind an offensive line that returns four starters after winning the Joe Moore Award, an honor given to the best offensive line unit in the country, last season.

Although the Wolverines offense remains stacked, their defense took a significant hit during the offseason. Michigan returns just four starters from a 2021 season in which the Wolverines held opponents to 17.4 points per game, good for fourth in the Big Ten. The Wolverines' most glaring losses come from their pass rush with David Ojabo and Aidan Hutchinson – who combined to produce 25 of Michigan's 34 sacks last season – both beginning their professional careers.



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BSB Staff Has Buckeyes Back In Playoffs

Despite coming off the first two-loss season in Columbus since 2017 and the first loss to Michigan since 2011 – not to mention failing to win the Big Ten championship for the first time since 2016 – expectations remain high for No. 2 Ohio State entering this season.

The Buckeyes will look for a return to the top of the conference mountain as well as the College Football Playoff, where head coach Ryan Day is attempting to make his third trip entering his fourth season at the helm for Ohio State.

It won't be easy going for the Buckeyes, though, with a challenging regular season bookended by games against No. 5 Notre Dame to start the season and the traditional Thanksgiving-weekend matchup with No. 8 Michigan. Sandwiched in between are dates with No. 15 Michigan State and No. 18 Wisconsin, as well as a road trip to Penn State's Beaver Stadium.

With that said, it's time for the staff writers of Buckeye Sports Bulletin to reveal our predictions for how the upcoming season might shake out. The staff is hopeful, though, that the predictions for this season go better than they did last year.

Of our six respondents last year, none predicted that Ohio State would go on to lose two games. In fact, three believed that the Buckeyes would have an undefeated regular season. The writers were also unanimous in their belief that Ohio State would defeat Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game and go on to the College Football Playoff, of which neither happened.

Few foresaw the rise of Mel Tucker's Michigan State Spartans with the possible exception of Craig Merz, whose prediction of a 5-7 record for the Spartans – still last in the East Division – was the closest to Michigan State's true 11-2 finish. Along the same line, Tucker – who was named Big Ten Coach of the Year – received no votes from our staff, with four votes going to Wisconsin's Paul Chryst and one vote each handed to Day and Indiana's Tom Allen.

The most outlandish prediction came from Wyatt Crosher, who argued for a playoff of No. 1 Georgia, No. 2 Clemson, No. 3 Ohio State and No. 4 Iowa State, of which only the Bulldogs reached the playoff, though credit Patrick Mayhorn for calling his shot with a

playoff run for the Cincinnati Bearcats. Here are this year's BSB staff predictions.

Brown: OSU Reaches Pinnacle For First Time Since 2014

I wrote last season that the expectations for Ohio State football never change. I'll remind you that the floor is a Big Ten title, and the ceiling is a College Football Playoff championship. I thought the Buckeyes would capture the former and not the latter in 2021. As it turns out, they didn't win either.

Despite record-breaking seasons for C.J. Stroud and second-year wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, possessing two first-round receivers in Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave and utilizing a rookie running back who broke Archie Griffin's single-game rushing record for a freshman, all Ohio State ended up with was a Rose Bowl win over Utah on New Year's Day.

For whatever reason, last year's team couldn't figure out the defensive side of the ball. It was evident against Minnesota in the season opener, but we offered the unit some benefit of the doubt because it was the first game against a Big Ten team on the road and in the rain. However, the flood gates opened in a Week 2 loss to Oregon, when the Ducks waddled into the 'Shoe and outdueled the Buckeyes for four quarters, beating them 35-28 and stripping then-defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs of his play-calling responsibilities.

For the next 11 games, the Ohio State offense flourished. It was the No. 1 scoring offense in the country at 45.7 points per game and also led the nation with 561.5 yards per contest. In those same defensive categories, the Buckeyes ranked No. 38 in scoring (22.8 ppg) and No. 59 in total defense (372.9 ypg).

Expect more of the same this season from the Ohio State offense, and on defense, new coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme will improve the defense into a top-25 unit, giving Day his first well-rounded team since 2019.

Ohio State receives its first test against Notre Dame in Ohio Stadium. In what will be the team's most important home game outside of its matchup with Michigan, the Buckeyes will face heavy resistance from the Irish. First-year head coach Marcus Freeman – a former Buckeye – will throw everything but the kitchen sink to stop Stroud and Smith-Njigba from

connecting. Even if Notre Dame can keep up with the early OSU scoring, Notre Dame won't outlast Day, Stroud and Ohio State in a shootout, giving Freeman little chance to spoil his alma mater's season from the beginning. The Buckeyes win their opener comfortably.

After a tone-setting victory over the Golden Domers, Ohio State will win its next two against Arkansas State and Toledo. If it doesn't, go ahead and throw any College Football Playoff hopes out the window.

Ohio State's first conference opponent will be Wisconsin – the first regular-season meeting between the teams in three seasons. The Badgers have been known to be a thorn in the Buckeyes' side from time to time, but not when they play in Columbus or Indianapolis. In fact, Ohio State's last home loss against Wisconsin was a 20-17 upset in 2001. Since then, the Buckeyes have won the last five games played at Ohio Stadium and 12 of the previous 15 contests overall.

The final outing of a five-game homestand to start the season comes against Rutgers. The Scarlet Knights went 5-8 last season, including a 52-13 loss at the hands of Ohio State. The Buckeyes will look for a similar outcome as they win this one comfortably, preparing for their first road test in East Lansing, Mich., the following week.

Against Michigan State, the Buckeyes will face a Spartans team without star running back Kenneth Walker III, whose absence will undoubtedly cause MSU to step back this fall. Tucker's ambitious national recruiting and aggressive transfer portal strategy will keep his team in Big Ten title contention. Still, Ohio State beat a Michigan State squad with Walker by 49 points last season, so the Buckeyes should win this game while looking strong across four quarters.

After an off week, Ohio State returns to Columbus for a matchup with Iowa in Week 8. The Hawkeyes had one of the best defenses in the country in 2021 and will return eight starters from that unit, indicating that the defense will again be the team's strength this fall. However, the offense looked mediocre for most of last season, which will ultimately be Iowa's downfall this year. There will be no midseason stumble here as Day and company look ahead to a trip to Happy Valley seven days later.

Penn State found itself in a similar predicament to Iowa last season, bolstering one of the NCAA's best defensive units while struggling to generate offensive production. Sean Clifford returns for a super senior season, but if James Franklin is smart, he'll bench Clifford a few games into the year and bring in five-star freshman Drew Allar of Medina, Ohio, instead. This doesn't seem like a likely scenario, though, and the Buckeyes will march into University Park, Pa., and leave with a comfortable victory.

The Buckeyes then have three games that should bolster the Heisman Trophy résumé for Stroud. Ohio State will head to Evanston, Ill., to face Northwestern before returning to Columbus to play Indiana. The final matchup is in College Park, Md., against the Terrapins. These three opponents will allow Day's squad to get healthy while allowing depth players to gain vital experience for the future.

Ohio State's final regular-season game has been on the mind of everyone in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center since last season's devastating loss in Ann Arbor. Michigan's roster is still incredibly talented from top to bottom, and head coach Jim Harbaugh can get the most out of his players, but Day and the Buckeyes will exact their revenge in front of 100,000-plus in Columbus and earn their way into the Big Ten Championship Game.

The Big Ten title game brings together Ohio State and Wisconsin at Lucas Oil Stadium for the fourth time. As they did earlier in the season against the Badgers, the Buckeyes will make enough impact plays to defeat the West Division representative, sending them to the College Football Playoff for the first time since 2020 as the No. 2 seed behind top-seeded Alabama and in front of No. 3 Georgia and No. 4 Utah.

After defeating the defending national champions in the semifinals, Ohio State will once again match up with Alabama in the national championship game. The last time these teams met, wide receiver DeVonta Smith – winner of the 2020 Heisman Trophy – led a 52-24 beatdown over the Buckeyes. In 2022, Stroud will enter the title game after receiving the same honor.

During the most important game of his career, Stroud will prove why he was worthy of being named the nation's best player, coming

How We See The 2022 Big Ten Race

Here is a look at how members of the BSB staff predict the Big Ten football season:

Chase Brown			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	10-2	7-2	Rose
Iowa	9-3	6-3	ReliaQuest
Minnesota	8-4	5-4	Pinstripe
Purdue	8-4	5-4	Duke's Mayo
Nebraska	5-7	3-6	
Northwestern	5-7	2-7	
Illinois	5-7	2-7	
East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
Michigan	10-2	7-2	Orange
Penn State	10-2	7-2	Citrus
Michigan St.	9-3	6-3	Music City
Indiana	4-8	2-7	
Maryland	4-8	1-8	
Rutgers	4-8	1-8	
Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin			
Offensive POY: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State			
Defensive POY: Ji'Ayir Brown, Penn State			
Coach of the Year: Ryan Day, Ohio State			
Freshman POY: Nick Singleton, Penn State			

Jack Emerson			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	10-2	7-2	Rose
Minnesota	9-3	6-3	ReliaQuest
Iowa	8-4	5-4	Pinstripe
Purdue	8-4	5-4	Quick Lane
Nebraska	6-6	4-5	Duke's Mayo
Illinois	4-8	1-8	
Northwestern	3-9	0-9	
East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
Michigan	10-2	7-2	Orange
Penn State	9-3	7-2	Citrus
Michigan St.	9-3	6-3	Music City
Maryland	7-5	4-5	Guar. Rate
Rutgers	3-9	1-8	
Indiana	3-9	1-8	
Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin			
Offensive POY: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State			
Defensive POY: Ji'Ayir Brown, Penn State			
Coach of the Year: Ryan Day, Ohio State			
Freshman POY: Nick Singleton, Penn State			

Craig Merz			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	10-2	7-2	Orange
Purdue	9-3	7-2	Citrus
Iowa	9-3	6-3	ReliaQuest
Minnesota	7-5	4-5	Pinstripe
Northwestern	6-6	4-5	Guar. Rate
Nebraska	5-7	3-6	
Illinois	4-8	3-6	
East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	11-1	8-1	CFP
Michigan	10-2	7-2	Rose
Penn State	9-3	6-3	Music City
Michigan State	7-5	4-5	Quick Lane
Indiana	7-5	3-6	
Maryland	5-7	2-7	
Rutgers	4-8	2-7	
Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin			
Offensive POY: C.J. Stroud, QB, Ohio State			
Defensive POY: Jack Campbell, Iowa			
Coach of the Year: Jeff Brohm, Purdue			
Freshman POY: Nick Singleton, Penn State			

Braden Moles			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Iowa	10-2	7-2	Orange
Wisconsin	9-3	6-3	Music City
Purdue	8-4	5-4	Pinstripe
Nebraska	7-5	5-4	Quick Lane
Minnesota	6-6	3-6	Duke's Mayo
Illinois	4-8	1-8	
Northwestern	3-9	0-9	
East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
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Maryland	7-5	4-5	Guar. Rate
Rutgers	4-8	1-8	
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Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Iowa			
Offensive POY: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State			
Defensive POY: Jack Campbell, Iowa			
Coach of the Year: Ryan Day, Ohio State			
Freshman POY: Nick Singleton, Penn State			

FOOTBALL PREVIEW: BSB SEASON PREDICTIONS

alive to bring the first national championship trophy back to Columbus since the inaugural College Football Playoff following the 2014 season.

Emerson: OSU Returns To CFP After Brief Hiatus

To many in the Ohio State fandom, the 2021 season was a disappointment on a multitude of levels. The Buckeyes missed the College Football Playoff, saw their eight-game winning streak against rival Michigan come to an end and did not claim the Big Ten title for the first time since 2016. Still, Ohio State capped off its season nicely with a roller-coaster win over Utah in the Rose Bowl.

In my opinion, Ohio State's difficulties in the 2021 season were necessary to spring-board a 2022 campaign that could potentially see the Buckeyes raise the College Football Playoff National Championship Trophy. Last season, the Buckeyes trotted out a largely inexperienced defense and a quarterback who hadn't attempted a collegiate pass in their season opener against Minnesota. Now, the Buckeyes enter this season in a much better place, returning a bulk of their starters – including eight on defense – while the trio of Stroud, TreVeyon Henderson and Smith-Njigba have already garnered Heisman Trophy buzz.

While last season served as a stepping-stone for a young team, the Buckeyes simply have too much talent and experience to miss the College Football Playoff this year.

Outside of the annual season finale against Michigan, no game is more important than the Buckeyes' season opener against Notre Dame. The Fighting Irish, once again, carry high expectations into this season but will sport a first-time starting quarterback against the Buckeyes at Ohio Stadium. I fully expect Knowles to take advantage of this and look to put pressure on Tyler Buchner throughout the contest. Notre Dame also lost running back Kyren Williams, its bell cow in the running game, which could pose some issues in establishing the run against Ohio State.

On the flip side, the Fighting Irish pass defense was middle-of-the-pack last season, and despite the addition of former Northwestern safety Brandon Joseph, Stroud should be in a prime position for a dominant performance against Notre Dame.

The Buckeyes should beat both Arkansas State and Toledo with ease in the two games following the marquee season opener before another early-season test rolls into Columbus in Week 4 as Ohio State will play host to the Wisconsin Badgers.

Sophomore running back Braelon Allen is a threatening presence to an Ohio State defense that struggled mightily against the run last year, but an ineffective passing game makes the Wisconsin offense one-dimensional. The Badgers also return just three defensive starters, none of whom are in the secondary, which Stroud and Smith-Njigba should take serious advantage of. Ohio State closes its five-game homestand against Rutgers, a contest in which the Buckeyes should cruise to a fifth straight victory.

Ohio State's first venture outside of Columbus takes the Buckeyes to East Lansing, Mich., for a date with the Spartans. Although Michigan State returns nearly its entire starting secondary, it's important to remember that Stroud threw for a program-tying six touchdowns – all coming in the first half – against the Spartans last season. The Spartans' running game also took a major hit with the loss

of Walker, opening the door for the Buckeyes to blow out Michigan State for a sixth straight time.

The Buckeyes return home and get a week of rest leading up to their meeting with defending Big Ten West champion Iowa. The Hawkeyes boast a strong defense but also sport an ineffective offense that has only gotten weaker with the departure of running back Tyler Goodson. If Ohio State's defense has elevated itself from last season at this point in the year, then the Buckeyes should have no problem knocking off the Hawkeyes.

After dealing with Iowa, Ohio State is on the road for back-to-back weeks with trips to Penn State and Northwestern. Although the Buckeyes will not play in a White Out environ-

ment in State College, Pa. this year, they'll still face a tall task against veteran quarterback Clifford and the Nittany Lions.

Penn State returns just four starters on the defensive side of the football but will likely continue its trend of solid defenses. However, there are too many question marks on the offensive side of the ball for the Nittany Lions, which will allow Ohio State to earn the win. I project Northwestern to be the worst team in the Big Ten this year, and that will hold true against the Buckeyes. It should be an ugly day at Ryan Field for the Wildcats.

The Buckeyes should roll past Indiana in the week following their road trip, but I could see Maryland giving Ohio State some issues a week later. The Terrapins boast a high-pow-

ered offense that may be able to keep pace with the Buckeyes if Ohio State's defense falters. I expect the Buckeyes to win by two or more scores, but Maryland is returning a lot of production to a team that went .500 last year and could keep it close for most of the game.

For the second straight year, The Game will serve as the de facto Big Ten East championship game. Although I have the Wolverines falling to Iowa earlier in the season, Michigan would still have the chance to claim the division with a win in Columbus. But the Wolverines have not won at Ohio Stadium in over two decades, and that trend should continue in 2022. The Buckeyes' run defense should be

Continued On Page 38



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Big Ten Championship In Sight For OSU

Continued From Page 37

much improved this season under Knowles and certainly will not give up five touchdowns to Michigan running back Blake Corum. If Ohio State can limit the Wolverines on the ground and protect Stroud, then it should be able to claim the Big Ten East title in the winner-take-all game.

Ohio State and Wisconsin will rematch in the Big Ten Championship Game. I would envision the game to be similar to when the Buckeyes and Badgers met in 2019, with Wisconsin relying heavily on the legs of its ground game. Ohio State should secure its fifth Big Ten title in six seasons and cruise to the playoffs.

Merz: A Detour On The Road To Playoffs

It seems too easy to predict that Ohio State will roll to a 12-0 regular season followed by a win in the Big Ten title game and a spot in the College Football Playoff.

There doesn't need to be a lot of thought put into it, not with the explosive offense led by Stroud and a horde of talented receivers, Henderson leading the ball carriers and Knowles expected to work magic (or is it miracles?) to drastically improve a soft defense.

Yes, there's reasons why the Buckeyes should return to the playoffs after a one-year absence with an unblemished record ... but I just can't let it go that something will go wrong along the way. It's the same feeling I had about the Oregon game last season. What could happen in a home game against the Ducks? Sure, Stroud was starting just his second game of his Ohio State career and the defense was a little suspect, but come on, no big deal. Well, it was, and that loss coupled with the rare defeat to Michigan provide a smidgen of caution heading into this season.

But let's be clear: the pundits who have the Buckeyes prancing to a 12-0 record will more than likely be correct, but there needs to be a contrarian, and my pessimism for a perfect season is based not on what the Buckeyes should do (read: dominate, dominate, dominate) but the unforeseen and unknown.

COVID-19 and the subsequent variants are still around, and some experts forecast another outbreak this fall. That alone should give pause in making bold predictions, but that's not how the sports world works. Add in a couple of key injuries (again, the unforeseen) and the view of the Buckeyes might be different in two or three months.

With that in mind, I looked at what team would give a potentially shorthanded OSU squad the most trouble, and that opponent is Penn State, with the deciding factor being the Buckeyes traveling there for their eighth game on Oct. 29.

Now, if the Buckeyes are at full strength, I expect they will face their stiffest challenge of the regular season yet leave Happy Valley with a win. That's called hedging your bet.

OSU will handle Notre Dame in the season opener, but Fighting Irish fans will feel the same way Buckeye fans did following the Oregon loss; you're lucky you got them early.

Notre Dame will have a good season under new coach Freeman but the Buckeyes, especially with the matchup being in Ohio Stadium, will be out to prove last season's two losses were an aberration, and the Irish will be the first step.

Next are home games against Arkansas State and Toledo. The Buckeyes open Big Ten play with another treat for home fans when Wisconsin comes to Columbus on Sept. 24 for a possible Big Ten Championship Game preview. The Badgers have junior quarterback Graham Mertz, a major disappointment to date, and running back Allen (more than 1,200 rushing yards plus 12 touchdowns as a true freshman last season), who was not. The five-game homestand ends with Rutgers' arrival for their annual beating.

At Michigan State, the Spartans lost Walker and will have to rely more on quarterback Payton Thorne while somehow improving a defense that was 11th in the Big Ten in passing efficiency last season. Buckeye receivers will be salivating.

Ohio State then returns home for Iowa, another Big Ten West contender. Jack Campbell will be a strong candidate for conference defensive player of the year, but the Hawkeyes averaged 23.0 points in conference games (including the Big Ten Championship Game), and without a dramatic upswing, there's no way they can hang with the Buckeyes.

The showdown at Penn State follows. If the Nittany Lions somehow pull off the upset, I think the Buckeyes can still earn a College Football Playoff spot. First, the Buckeyes need Penn State, Michigan (when they beat them) and their West opponent in the title game (when they beat them) to be highly ranked. Otherwise, they'll be another one-loss OSU team sitting on the outside like 2018 after being upset by Purdue.

After Penn State, road games at Northwestern and Maryland with a home tilt against Indiana in between set up the Michigan game in Columbus.

Should the Buckeyes be worried about the three opponents before the Wolverines? Nope, although Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa will be another test for the secondary. As long as Ohio State isn't looking past the Terrapins, the outcome will not be in doubt.

As for The Game, the Wolverines are better than Penn State, but OSU has all the intangibles (home crowd, revenge, playoffs at stake) that will lead to an impressive and satisfying victory.

From there it's on to the conference championship. I hesitate picking against Iowa or Wisconsin to win the West, but my source with deep knowledge of Purdue football says this could be their year.

We'll find out soon enough when the Boilermakers host Penn State in the season opener. Although they have road games at Minnesota and Wisconsin, Purdue plays Iowa in West Lafayette, Ind., and avoids Michigan, Michigan State and Ohio State on the schedule. Also, Purdue has an excellent quarterback in Aidan O'Connell, and most of the defense returns.

Every few years a Minnesota or Northwestern pops up to challenge Wisconsin and Iowa, and it just might be time for the Boilermakers to make some noise coming off a nine-win season.

Whoever the opponent, I expect the Buckeyes to win and advance to the playoffs one more time.

Moles: Playoff In Sight, Title Out Of Reach

Even with all the changes within the Ohio

State program this offseason – a new defense and defensive coordinator chief among them – expectations remain high for the Buckeyes to regain their spot in the Big Ten Championship Game and return to the College Football Playoff for the first time since 2020 and the third time in four tries for Day.

He's made wholesale adjustments throughout the team, including an increased focus on toughness and leadership for the Buckeyes, who lacked both down the stretch last year, and for as loud as the hype might be getting from fans for this upcoming season, hopes may be even higher within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to see this team take the field.

There's no better way to break in all the new pieces than a top-five matchup with Notre Dame to kick things off for Ohio State. There are storylines galore for this premier nonconference matchup, ranging from the return of Freeman to the possibility of this being a contest between future conference mates.

At the end of the day, this feels like a game where Ohio State will try to make a statement. After an offseason of hearing nothing but accusations of a lack of toughness and leadership within the program (with some of that talk brought up by the team, to be fair), this game – one in prime time, under the lights at Ohio Stadium – seems like one where the Buckeyes could be out for blood, no fault of Notre Dame.

Following the win over the Fighting Irish and presumably blowout wins over Arkansas State and Toledo, ones in which the highly advertised young guys on the team get some fresh air – talking to you, Caden Curry, C.J. Hicks and Sonny Styles – the Big Ten slate begins against Wisconsin in the fourth week of the season.

The Badgers' star sophomore Allen should be a good litmus test for Ohio State's run defense that got gashed against Oregon and Michigan (566 rushing yards across both games, good for 7.2 yards per carry). Even if Allen has a day, though, Wisconsin doesn't have the offensive firepower to keep up with the Buckeyes given the deficiencies of Mertz, who returns after a middling season as the Badgers' starter (1,958 yards, 10 touchdowns, 11 picks). Wisconsin will bring a solid defense into Ohio Stadium, but like most teams on the schedule, it won't be any match for Stroud and company.

Rutgers is on the rise but is still a year or two away from competing, if not more. Former Ohio State defensive coordinator Greg Schiano seems to have the program moving in the right direction in his second stint with the Scarlet Knights, but the average margin of victory for Ohio State since Rutgers joined the Big Ten is 42.5 points in eight games. There's little reason to believe that will change this year.

Ohio State will then head on the road for the first time in Week 6, taking on Michigan State in East Lansing, Mich. Even with Thorne and some productive receivers returning, the Spartans don't inspire nearly as much confidence in their offense this season with Walker off to the NFL (not that he made much of an impact last year against the Buckeyes). The Spartans will look for an improved passing defense (ranked dead last in the nation in 2021) but this won't be the game where they find success.

The Buckeyes then face the toughest two-game stretch of the regular season, hosting Iowa and then traveling to Penn State for a non-White Out game. Iowa's offense doesn't present much of a challenge, but the defense – with Campbell, named a Big Ten preseason honoree – will be one of the best Ohio State goes up against this season.

The Hawkeyes have one crucial problem for this game, though – it isn't at Kinnick Stadium, a location that has historically given the Buckeyes some pause. The defense may make some plays, and perhaps even force a turnover or two (though hopefully not on Stroud's first passing attempt), but it's hard to imagine Iowa keeping up if Ohio State's offense gets rolling. Penn State will present a similar challenge with a tough defense but an average-at-best offense. It doesn't seem likely that Clifford will suddenly take a jump entering his fourth year as the starter, and the Buckeyes have had Penn State's number dating back to 2017, and that should continue this year.

After likely wins against Northwestern on the road – don't believe in the even-year magic for the Wildcats – and Indiana, the Buckeyes will travel for an intriguing matchup at Maryland. The Terrapins are on the rise with head coach Mike Locksley, who led Maryland to its first winning season since 2014 and the program's first bowl win since 2010 last year, and with Tagovailoa and wide receiver Rakim Jarrett returning, this could be one of the best offenses Ohio State runs into this season, though the defense has questions.

Assuming the Buckeyes get through the first 11 games unblemished, as I predict they will, that brings us to what I expect to be an undefeated, top-five matchup between Ohio State and Michigan. For as painful as the loss to Michigan was last season for those in and out of the program, it's starting to feel like that course correction was required to get Ohio State back competing for national championships.

It will be a work in progress this season fixing the issues that led to the downfall last year against Michigan – namely run defense, short-yardage situations and a general lack of leadership – but the belief from the program throughout the offseason and into fall camp is that these are all fixable, and perhaps optimistically, I think Ohio State might have things figured out by this point. That means it will be a long day for the Wolverines, who have a solid offense but don't have the same playmakers on defense they did last year to contain Ohio State again. The Buckeyes took things personally last year, and this is their chance to repay the favor – likely by a double-digit margin.

Ohio State will sleepwalk through whatever the Big Ten West throws at it in the conference championship game – pick your poison between Iowa or Wisconsin – and earn a berth in the College Football Playoff.

Even as optimistic as I may be about the defense, though, I still struggle with taking Ohio State against the field in the playoffs. Perhaps by this point in the season the defense will be viewed as one viable enough to lead the Buckeyes to the promised land, but as it currently stands, I'll take a playoff appearance with a loss in the national championship game, likely to Alabama.

Late Kickoffs Provide Boost In Recruiting

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A breath of relief reverberated throughout Columbus when it was announced that Ohio State's season opener against Notre Dame would be a prime-time matchup on ABC, set to kick off at 7:30 p.m. Not only for fans, who have decried the lack of premier, home night games in recent years, but for Ohio State's staff, which will be able to maximize the potential of a massive recruiting weekend for the Buckeyes.

"You've got Ohio State-Notre Dame (which) is going to be the biggest game in America," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "That would probably be a game that you would want to try to get kids in for visits. You might use your official visits for that game. More than likely, though, you're going to try to get a lot of unofficial visitors to come in on their own dime for that game."

Several visitors from upcoming classes are expected to be in attendance, including Buford, Ga., five-star athlete KJ Bolden (6-1, 185), Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185) and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star safety Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188) in 2024 and Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 200) in 2025.

All will be accosted on their visits by several current commitments to the Buckeyes who will be in attendance, including Ryan's older brother, four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-5, 280), and Ohio State's quartet of wide receivers in 2023. The late kickoff, though, pro-

vides a rare opportunity for the Buckeyes to dedicate an extended amount of time to recruiting before the evening's festivities kick off.

This will be the first prime-time kickoff at home against a top-10 opponent since Ohio State welcomed in No. 5 Oklahoma in 2017. As reported by BSB at the time, upwards of 20 prospects – both of the committed and uncommitted variety – made the trip to see the Buckeyes play under the lights against the Sooners.

Given the number of high-profile recruits who might want to take in the scene for one of college football's biggest nonconference games this season, similar numbers could be seen for Ohio State's contest against Notre Dame, and every minute will count as the staff tries to make time for every visitor.

"You hear stories – especially when Urban Meyer was the coach – about guys that would come in early Saturday morning and then they would actually go to the Blackwell (Inn) and hang out with Urban during the day, watch a game or something in the hotel with him," Buckeye Huddle recruiting analyst Marc Givler told BSB. "(A late kickoff) does build in a lot of time. Coaches are still busy on game day. I think we overestimate how much one-on-one time these guys actually get on a game day. You're really just coming for the atmosphere and for having a great experience and seeing how the guys play, how the guys coach, and hopefully if you're a five-star kid, maybe you get 15-20 minutes with Ryan Day or something or maybe you get 20-30 minutes with Brian Hartline. It gives the coaches a little more flexibility on a night game, for sure."

The time spent building relationships on Ohio State's campus is pivotal to the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts, but those opportunities seldom exist for earlier kickoffs, least of all a game that begins at noon. That can make for a long day for a local prospect who may need to arrive by 10 a.m. just to shake Day's hand, but it makes it near impossible for out-of-state recruits who are playing on Friday nights to get the full experience.

"A kid from California that plays his game on Friday night or a kid from Texas or Florida, it's tough to get on a plane and get into Columbus and make your way into that stadium," Greene said. "You want to meet with (Day) before the game. That kid doesn't want to run into the stadium so he could get there by noon. 3:30 p.m. gives so much more leeway, and a night game gives that much more leeway. But that noon game – it's a killer for a kid from Florida or Georgia or Texas or California who plays on Friday night. Then you expect him to be there by 11 a.m. in the morning? That's kind of tough to do."

"That's why (coaches) just hate that," he continued. "I don't like it personally, either. I can't conceive that it's better for the networks – they know their numbers better than I do – but I can't believe that having (Notre Dame) at noon is better than having it in prime time or at 3:30 p.m."

Even for those who live near metropolitan areas like Atlanta or Los Angeles and have quick access to an airport, an early kickoff eliminates any margin of error if there are logistical issues with their trips to Columbus.

"Last year, St. John Bosco (in California) was

supposed to have eight or nine guys come to the Ohio State-Oregon game and then there's a flight mix-up late Friday night and they weren't able to make it to the game, and then some of those guys still haven't been able to make it back since," Rivals.com recruiting analyst Zack Carpenter told BSB. "If that Ohio State-Oregon game had been at 8 p.m. as opposed to noon, then they would have been able to take a flight Saturday morning or early afternoon to get here. That's who it affects the most."

Assuming that traveling arrangements work out, once a recruit arrives in Columbus – especially if he is on an official visit – it can be a long day filled to the brim with meetings, presentations and even a few minutes with coaches, if time allows. That tight schedule is then further truncated with an earlier kickoff, and when combined with a late night for most recruits playing on Friday night, it can lead to a diminished experience.

"I know these kids are young, so give them credit for their bodies being able to recover and not needing as much sleep to be able to function the next day," Carpenter said. "But still, they are humans so they're going to be much more tired when they're having to go through that process and then getting dragged from meeting room to meeting room on a visit. It affects the West Coast guys the most."

That won't be a concern for this season's opener, though. With a late kickoff set, recruits will have plenty of time to take in the sights at Ohio Stadium before Ohio State's season begins in dramatic fashion against the Fighting Irish, perhaps with several future Buckeyes on hand.

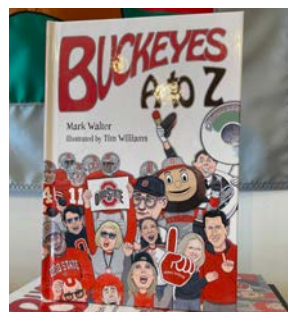
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Up-And-Down Summer For OSU Recruiting

July and August were not lost causes for Ohio State recruiting considering the additions of seven commitments and 27 stars worth of prospects to the Buckeyes' class, but it was somewhat understated given the recruiting misses that also took place over that period.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

Ohio State lost out on several high-priority targets in July, including Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit four-star linebacker Troy Bowles (6-1, 205); Many, La., four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218); Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 185); and Osceola (Fla.) Kissimmee four-star defensive lineman John Walker (6-3, 310).

While Downs was always viewed as a tossup between Ohio State and Alabama – his eventual school of choice – the Buckeyes appeared to lead at one point or another for Bowles, Curtis and Walker. The narrative was blown out of the water, though, when Bowles announced Georgia as his college of choice, Curtis pledged to USC and Walker elected to stay close to home at the University of Central Florida.

This all took place within a matter of weeks, and in the midst of those losses, Ohio State also suffered decommitments from Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive back Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) and Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood (6-5, 225).

All the while, Ohio State was represented at Big Ten Media Days on July 27 by several players and head coach Ryan Day, who defended the class and offered up an explanation for the recent struggles.

"I think our recruiting class is strong," Day said. "Our goal is to be top five in the country, and I think we will be this year. Our defensive guys have done a really good job recruiting. They're hustling like crazy and working at it. I'm sure (recruits) do want to see that, but I also think they understand that we've got some really good guys."

"When you change a defense as drastically as we have, a lot of people want to see what it's going to look like," he continued. "I think it's easy for recruits to see how we're going to run based on (defensive coordinator Jim Knowles') past and some of the guys in that room. Part of it is development, too, not just the scheme. Recruits have been excited about that, but I think they're excited to see what this is going to look like. When they see the energy and guys flying around, it's going to be much easier to sell."

Day tried to put a positive spin on things, but Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill

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
Jayden Bonsu	S	6-1	210	★★★★	Hillside (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep
Mark Fletcher	RB	6-1	225	★★★★	Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage
Brock Glenn	QB	6-2	195	★★★★	Memphis (Tenn.) Lausanne Collegiate
Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	175	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
Cedrick Hawkins	SAF	6-0	165	★★★★	Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa
Brandon Inniss	WR	6-0	190	★★★★★	Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage
Kayin Lee	CB	5-11	185	★★★★	Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove
Jermaine Mathews	CB	6-0	175	★★★★	Cincinnati Winton Woods
Luke Montgomery	OT	6-5	270	★★★★	Findlay, Ohio
Jason Moore	DE	6-6	255	★★★★	Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic
Joshua Padilla	OG	6-4	265	★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne
Arvell Reese	LB	6-4	212	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville
Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	170	★★★★	Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch
Noah Rogers	WR	6-2	180	★★★★	Rolesville, N.C.
Austin Sierveld	OL	6-5	315	★★★★	Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East
Calvin Simpson-Hunt	CB	6-0	175	★★★★	Waxahachie, Texas
Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	260	★★★	Dublin (Ohio) Coffman
Carnell Tate	WR	6-2	185	★★★★★	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
Jelani Thurman	TE	6-5	230	★★★★	Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes
Miles Walker	OT	6-6	285	★★★	Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School

Greene told Buckeye Sports Bulletin that concern over recruiting – specifically on the defensive side of the ball – is justified, though he cautioned that what matters is the finished class in February.

"I think there's a little room for some criticism," he said. "There have been some guys that they were in the fight for and they didn't get. I think you almost have to take it position group by position group."

"When you look at Larry Johnson and the defensive line, there may be some upset people right now. But, if he pulls Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep five-star defensive end Keon Keeley (6-6, 242) or Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265), then people are going to be ecstatic about how great defensive line recruiting is."

While there's optimism around the defensive line with several high-profile prospects in the mix and Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star defensive end Jason Moore in the fold, Greene is more concerned about the linebackers.

"There's no way around this one – it's not good. There have been points made by people that Jim Knowles has never recruited at this level before. He's been at Cornell and Duke and Oklahoma State. Well, now he's got to beat Georgia for Troy Bowles. He has to beat USC for Tackett Curtis, who it looked like all along Ohio State was going to get. So linebacker recruiting, there is definitely cause for concern there."

"You've got nothing right now. They can list Cleveland Glenville four-star Arvell Reese (6-4, 212) as a linebacker, (but) I don't think he is. There has to be some work done there."

In the secondary, Greene believes Ohio State has a solid haul with the three cornerbacks and three safeties in the class, but it's hard not to feel the loss of Johnson, a top-100 prospect.

"You thought you had Dijon Johnson. My information was that a week or 10 days after he decommitted, he wanted back in the class," Greene said. "I think things were working toward him being back in the class. He had a long conversation with Tony Alford. He did check into the NIL possibilities

at Ohio State and that box was checked, (and then) he had a Zoom call with Ryan Day, and that just didn't go well from Ryan Day's point of view. I don't think Ryan Day is comfortable with Dijon Johnson right now and his situation. There's a lot going on there."

Even with the struggles in recruiting, there were plenty of wins on the recruiting trail over the past several weeks, and BSB is breaking down every addition to Ohio State's class in alphabetical order.

Safety Bonsu Joins 2023 Class

The Buckeyes received a commitment on Aug. 14 from Hillside (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star safety Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 210), one of Ohio State's top targets left on the board.

Bonsu is the No. 264 overall prospect and No. 23 safety in the class and chose Ohio State over his other top schools of Miami (Fla.) and Michigan State. Initially viewed as a favorite to end up in Miami's class, Bonsu pushed back his initial commitment date before ultimately deciding on the Buckeyes.

A physical safety with range who seeks out contact, Bonsu played 12 games last season for St. Peter's Prep, recording 62 tackles (7½ for loss), 2½ sacks and two forced fumbles while intercepting two passes.

He also plays at multiple positions for St. Peter's Prep, operating in coverage and near the line of scrimmage at times, showing a versatility that has recently been embraced at Ohio State among its defensive backs.

His commitment is the third at safety for Ohio State, joining West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Malik Hartford (6-3, 175) and Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa four-star Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 175).

OSU Adds QB Glenn In 2023

After a long and winding road trying to recruit the most important position on the field, Ohio State has found its quarterback for the 2023 class as Memphis (Tenn.) Lausanne

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OSU Football 2024 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2024 who has/have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.					
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Dylan Raiola	QB	6-3	220	★★★★★	Chandler, Ariz.

Collegiate School four-star Brock Glenn (6-2, 195) announced on July 30 that he was committing to the Buckeyes.

Glenn is the No. 380 overall prospect and No. 23 quarterback in his class, and he chose Ohio State over Auburn, Florida State, LSU and TCU. He also held offers from Cincinnati, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan State and Pittsburgh, among others.

“I love their coaching staff,” Glenn told 247Sports. “Coach Day and Coach (Corey) Dennis, they’re great people. They’re top-notch. They’re great football coaches. They know how to develop quarterbacks. When I was there I felt we related and worked well together. I just felt at home with them and felt I can tell them anything. That was a huge part.

“I love their offense and think it fits me perfectly. I was watching their film and saw so many formations and similar plays as we do at Lausanne. I felt comfortable with the offense and knew it would set me up for success as they have great success every year.”

Ohio State only recently picked up contact with Glenn, offering him on June 7 and hosting him for an official visit on June 17. He also took official trips to Auburn, Florida State and TCU in recent months.

Facing a potential quarterback conundrum after this season once C.J. Stroud heads off to the NFL, Ohio State was in need of a quarterback in the class, whether he came from the high school ranks or the transfer portal.

The Buckeyes heavily recruited Dripping Springs, Texas, four-star quarterback Austin Novosad (6-3, 185), but shortly after Glenn’s commitment, Novosad ended his recruit-

ment by reaffirming his pledge to Baylor.

Though Glenn will face an uphill battle to see the field at Ohio State – Kyle McCord and Devin Brown could both be on the roster once he arrives, and Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) is waiting in the wings in 2024 – he has the talent to make some noise once he arrives in Columbus.

“He possesses adequate size at the quarterback position at 6-2 and 195 pounds,” said 247Sports national recruiting analyst Cooper Petagna. “He maintains growth potential to add additional weight to his frame and displays above average athleticism and appears to have some quick twitch ability in the pocket to extend plays. He plays in a shotgun pro-style offense but shows the ability to play under center.

“He flashes good pocket awareness and adequate mobility as a runner. He demonstrates good foot quickness/setup in the pocket but feet can get a little happy at times leading to accuracy issues, and he possesses above average arm talent and adequate arm strength.”

Top DL Moore Commits To OSU

DeMatha Catholic in Hyattsville, Md., produced one of the best defensive ends in Ohio State history when Chase Young committed to the Buckeyes’ 2017 recruiting class. Six years later, Ohio State is returning to the well, earning a commitment on July 10 from Moore, who also hails from DeMatha Catholic.

Moore (6-6, 255) committed to the Buckeyes over his other top schools that included

Maryland, Michigan, Notre Dame and Penn State. He is the No. 52 overall prospect, No. 5 defensive lineman in the class and the top prospect out of Maryland.

Moore primarily lines up on the edge for DeMatha Catholic where he tallied 13 sacks as a junior. He boasts a long frame which, combined with his impressive pursuit, creates a strong pass-rushing attack, though he could be flexed inside for Ohio State if he adds some size.

He took official visits to all of his top schools in June and took his final visit to Ohio State during the weekend of June 24.

“I would say just being out there, and the atmosphere,” Moore told 247Sports of what led to his decision. “Just getting the feeling they would develop me and they would be pushing me to be the best version of myself on and off the field.”

He was initially offered in January by the Buckeyes and was recruited by defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who already has a faster start on his position group in the 2023 class than he did at this point last year.

“That’s definitely big,” Moore said. “Having the chance to play with one of the best D-line coaches ever, it’s definitely an experience that a lot of players had and is something I want to have, so it’s definitely a blessing to be able to play there.”

Moore joins Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star defensive lineman Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260) on the defensive line in this class. Other targets for Johnson include Keeley, Uiagalelei and Venice, Fla., five-star defensive end Damon Wilson (6-4, 230).

Reese Becomes First LB In Class

Ohio State picked up its first linebacker commitment of the 2023 recruiting class on Aug. 6 as Reese announced his intention to join the Buckeyes.

Reese is the No. 20 linebacker and No. 7 recruit out of Ohio in the class, and he

picked Ohio State over Alabama, Iowa and Penn State, among others. Reese received his scholarship offer from the Buckeyes on March 8.

“What stood out about Ohio State the most was how I felt at home every time I visited there,” Reese told On3 Sports. “When I first got to Glenville, Coach Alford told me he was going to make me a Buckeye, and they have been recruiting me since. And also the relationship with the coaches as well. My mom and dad feel the same way about the coaches, which means a lot.”

While Reese is listed as a linebacker, his larger frame could lead to development as a defensive lineman for Ohio State depending on how the Buckeyes want to use him.

“Arvell Reese has one of the bigger frames among the group, checking in at over 6-3 and around 225 pounds with close to 33-inch arms,” On3 Sports recruiting analyst Charles Power said. “Reese pairs that size with good athleticism and posted a 4.59 second 40-yard dash at Ohio State’s camp this summer. He’s had a bit of an up-and-down high school career to date, but has flashed considerable physical upside and potential.”

Reese could signal a return for Glenville, which took a step back from turning out talent for several years but could be on the rise. In addition to Reese, Glenville is home to four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177), who is expected to be one of the top defensive backs in 2024.

Thurman Adds To TE Room

While the loss of Lockwood hurts, Ohio State took steps to make up for it with the addition of Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star tight end Jelani Thurman (6-5, 230), who committed to the Buckeyes on July 17.

Thurman pledged to Ohio State over his other top schools, including Michigan State,

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ASK AN ANALYST
With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

With Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star cornerback Dijon Johnson's (6-1, 190) situation in flux and the Buckeyes adding Hillside (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star safety Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 210), where do you see that secondary recruiting ending up for this class?

“The Dijon thing is totally understandable to me. I think Ryan Day could have him right now. He just didn’t feel comfortable with where things are with Dijon. He decommitted then he wants back in, he’s talking to Florida and Miami. Ohio State wants him to get his life settled, get things settled down and then maybe we’ll talk later. He just wasn’t comfortable.

“Bonsu is a hit for them. That’s a guy that is listed as a safety that I think could be a linebacker. I think he’s going to get bigger. He’s more of a hitter than he is a cover guy. So if he ends up being one of your linebackers and he’s a heat-seeking missile type guy, that’s pretty good.

“You lost Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 185), I guess you could say lost. I mean, he never was committed and you’re fighting Alabama for that kid. It’s not like they were fighting Michigan State or Purdue or Kentucky for that guy. You go up against the best of the best, you’re not going to win all those battles. When you’re in battles with Georgia and Alabama,

you’re not going to hit 75 percent of those. So all in all, when you look at what they have DB-wise, I think it’s a very successful class. They needed a lot of successes in the DB room because there have been some guys that haven’t panned out, guys that have transferred out. You’ve got to take five or six DBs in this class.

“In a way, if they had just landed Many, La., four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218), I think this whole narrative would be looked at differently. So is there a concern? Yeah, mostly in the linebacker area. But is it time for panic? Absolutely not. It’s August. There are going to be probably more flips this year than we’ve ever seen, toward the end. The hope is that you hold onto your kids. If you can flip a guy or two from another program, that’s even better. Do I think there’s cause for panic? No. Cause for a little bit of concern? Yes.”

How much would recruits being able to see the new defensive scheme in action help in defensive recruiting?

“It won’t hurt if you’re good. To me, it usually boils down to comfort and relationships with these kids. When you look at Tackett Curtis, USC hasn’t put a defense on the field yet. You don’t know what their defense is going to be like. I don’t think you can say, ‘Oh, he’ll look at the Ohio State defense and he’ll want to jump right in.’ Well, he jumped

into an unknown at USC. I think it was just comfort and relationships there. You’ve got to build these relationships with these kids.

“With Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit four-star linebacker Troy Bowles (6-1, 205), I think Ohio State was in great shape as long as Al Washington was doing that recruiting. Well, when he leaves Ohio State, now you start over with that kid now. All of his relationships were with Al Washington. Now Jim Knowles is coming in, and I guarantee that kid has never heard of Jim Knowles before. Ohio State fans are very excited about Jim Knowles, they should be, but let’s be honest – six months ago or a year ago, 95 percent of the Ohio State fans had never heard of Jim Knowles. And these kids are the same thing. Like I said, there was a lot of staff turnover. That inhibits your ability to build these relationships. Jim Knowles is now going against ‘Bama and Georgia, and they’ve had their guys in place for a couple of years now recruiting Caleb Downs, or Tackett Curtis or Trey Bowles. You got a whole new staff there on defense, other than Larry Johnson, So these guys are basically starting fresh with these kids.

“I do think there’s a chance that as these relationships build, late in the year, you got a chance to flip some kids. Looking forward to next year’s class, you’re in a much better position than to the

land these kids going into their junior year, the 2024 guys. This is still going to be a top-10 class, maybe top-five class and that’s all you need to contend for titles year after year.”

Tampa (Fla.) Berkley Prep five-star defensive end Keon Keeley (6-6, 242) decommitted from Notre Dame recently. Where do you put the Buckeyes’ chances to land him, and what do they have to do to beat Alabama to land him?

“You’re going against the best of the best here, so you have to get him on campus, number one, for an official visit. I think he’ll be there for the Notre Dame game. Now, is that going to be an unofficial visit, where he comes and watches the game and he goes home at midnight, or is he coming in and it’s going to be a 48-hour official visit where Ohio State can show him the real life Wednesday program they’ve had in the past, how they take care of their kids after football? Ohio State does this stuff amazingly under Mark Pantoni. They really know how to maximize all 48 hours of that visit. They do it as well as anyone.

“But again, now you’re going against Alabama, so you have to put your best foot forward, do the best you can. Let the chips fall where they fall. But if they get that kid to take an official visit, I think they have a fighting chance.”

Walker Adds To OSU's Offensive Line Haul

Continued From Page 41

Auburn, Jackson State and Alabama. He is the No. 6 tight end in his class and the No. 7 recruit out of Georgia, as well as the No. 105 overall prospect in 2023.

"If you can catch the ball, the quarterback is going to find a way to highlight you," Thurman told 247Sports about his decision. "That's what I like about Ohio State. They know if they've got a dog, they're going to find a way to get you the ball. We got four dogs, so we all are going to eat. I just feel like I can go up there and play my first year. Obviously, win. And just practice with the top guys and play against the top guys."

According to 247Sports, Thurman hauled in 31 receptions for 479 yards and seven touchdowns during his junior season. He also contributed on the defensive side of the ball, collecting 61 tackles, five quarterback hurries and a sack.

"Thurman has great height and an elite frame with long arms and a large catch radius," 247Sports analyst Gabe Brooks said. "He owns the body to stay personnel-flexible for the long run. He generally catches the ball away from his body and shows above-average plucking ability. He is dangerous in contested situations as a ball winner whose physical tools overwhelm defenders and shows en-

couraging conviction as a blocker. He flashes pop in his hands and makes disengaging difficult for opposing defenders."

Less than two weeks after committing to Ohio State, Thurman then took a visit to Auburn, where the War Eagles are evidently attempting to flip the only tight end remaining for the Buckeyes.

"Me committing to Ohio State, it doesn't mean I stopped looking at Auburn," Thurman told 247Sports after his trip to Auburn. "I just felt like Ohio State was the move for me right now."

OT Walker Rounds Out O-Line Class

Miles Walker, a fast-rising three-star offensive tackle from the Brunswick School in Greenwich, Connecticut, joined Ohio State's class on July 8 as the fourth commitment on the offensive line.

Walker – who stands tall at 6-6 and 285 pounds – is the No. 482 overall prospect and No. 40 offensive tackle in the class. Despite the low ranking, Walker held additional offers from Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Penn State and Texas A&M, among others.

"When I first got there, the whole vibe felt right," Walker told 247Sports. "I wasn't expecting Columbus to be how it was, and this was where I wanted to be. And getting to

know some of the players and just seeing how they interact, it was really good to see that in real time. It made me feel like I was at home."

He plays left tackle for Brunswick and shows strong use of his hands while consistently finishing on blocks. He anchored an offensive line that helped Brunswick's running backs average 7.4 yards per carry last season.

Walker's recruitment began ramping up earlier this year once he received his first Power Five offer from Kentucky on March 3. Offers continued rolling in, and Ohio State joined the party on May 27 and then hosted Walker for an official visit on June 10.

He is the fourth member of Ohio State's offensive line class, joining Findlay, Ohio, four-star Luke Montgomery (6-5, 280), Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Josh Padilla (6-4, 265) and Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East four-star Austin Siereveld (6-5, 320).

OSU Adds First 2025 Commitment

Atlanta (Ga.) Douglass cornerback Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175) committed to Ohio State on July 29, becoming the first member of the Buckeyes' 2025 recruiting class.

Gilbert was first offered a scholarship by Ohio State in May, and he made an unofficial visit in June. The Buckeyes are one of just seven schools who offered Gilbert, including Ar-

kansas, Buffalo, Florida A&M, Georgia Tech, Pittsburgh and UAB.

"I wanted to commit because I felt like this is where I can see myself playing in the near future," Gilbert told 247Sports. "It felt like home on my visit there, and I knew that was the place to be."

Gilbert is entering only his sophomore year at Douglass High School so he does not hold a composite rating yet, but he possesses solid measurables with three years of high school football remaining.

He has also already been invited to the 2025 Under Armour All-America Game. Several members of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class participated in the most recent game, including linebacker C.J. Hicks and defensive ends Omari Abor and Kenyatta Jackson Jr.

Ohio State is working on a strong finish for the 2023 class and already has a head start in 2024, securing a commitment from Raiola in May. Including Gilbert, Ohio State has issued 25 offers in the 2025 class to date.

While there's some reasonable skepticism about this early of a commitment – especially from a prospect from Georgia – Gilbert felt the need to join Ohio State's class as early as he did.

"I chose to commit to Ohio State early for a reason," he said. "I felt like I'm needed and wanted there."

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1982

Buckeye-bound football players John Wooldridge (Akron Central-Hower), Bob Maggs (Youngstown Cardinal Mooney), Mark Pfister (Upper Arlington), Keith Byars (Dayton Roth), Darryl Lee (Columbus Marion-Franklin) and Byron Lee (Columbus Eastmoor) participated in the 37th annual Ohio High School North-South All-Star Football Game in late July in Massillon, Ohio.

Wooldridge, a running back and the game's offensive MVP, and Maggs, an offensive lineman, were on the winning North team as it gained a one-sided 32-0 win over the South, the widest margin of victory in the history of the game.

Ohio State coach Earle Bruce, while still coaching high school ball at Massillon Washington, had been coach of a North squad that netted a 16-6 win back in 1965. Buckeye AD Hugh Hindman led the South to a 26-0 win in 1957 while at Columbus North, and former OSU mentor Wes Fesler coached the South to a 6-6 tie in 1947.

35 Years Ago – 1987

Four players from the state made Street & Smith's Top 50 list: Tony Closson (6-1, 235, 4.5 40 speed, LB/RB), Delphos Jefferson; Kirk Herbstreit (6-3, 195, 4.8, QB), Centerville; Patrick Rogan (6-2, 216, 4.7, RB), Urbana; and Chuck Webb (5-11, 190, 4.5, RB), Toledo Macomber.

At quarterback, Herbstreit led Centerville to a 10-1 record and number one ranking in the state before Centerville lost to Dayton Dunbar in the first round of the playoffs. Herbstreit completed 68 of 120 passes for 1,280 yards and 11 touchdowns and rushed for 610 yards while being voted Southwest Ohio back of the year and first team all-state.

30 Years Ago – 1992

The 1992 edition of the annual Ohio North-South All-Star Football Game gave fans a good preview of Ohio State's 1992 football recruiting class. A dozen OSU football recruits were represented during the game played in Massillon's storied Paul Brown Tiger Stadium and won by the South, 10-0.

Suiting up for the North squad were linebackers Jimmy Bell of Youngstown Ursuline and Matt Christopher of Uniontown Lake and linemen R.C. Jones of Youngstown Cardinal Mooney, Neal Hawkins of Bucyrus, Juan Porter of Cleveland St. Ignatius and Korey Stringer of Warren Harding.

On the victorious South squad were wide receiver Buster Tillman of Steubenville, defensive back Dan Colson of Middletown, running back Ty Howard of Columbus Briggs, lineman Steve Sheets of Columbus West, linebacker Jayson Gwinn of Columbus Brookhaven and tight end D.J. Jones of Lebanon. Defensive back Jon Orsak of Dublin, who planned to walk on with the Buckeyes in the fall, also participated on the South squad.

25 Years Ago – 1997

A pair of Ohio players who had expressed an interest in playing

at Ohio State during summer camp were keeping their options open.

Euclid running back Tony Fisher and Shaker Heights cornerback Nate Clements reportedly had committed to the Buckeyes during the summer camp. However, as BSB reported in July, both changed their minds upon returning home.

OSU remained the top school on each player's list, but other schools were still in the race.

"I got a chance to go up to Michigan State a few weeks ago for their academic day," Clements said. "I liked the support system they have in place for athletics and academics."

"I was at Ohio State for the camp, so we didn't talk a lot about academics then. But I really like the Ohio State program."

20 Years Ago – 2002

Dublin (Ohio) Coffman quarterback Brady Quinn discussed the verbal commitment he made to Notre Dame live on Columbus' WCMH-TV – the local NBC affiliate which showed all of ND's home games – on Aug. 12.

"I guess for me it was the combination of academics and athletics," Quinn said. "I don't know if anything gets any better. Coach (Tyrone) Willingham is a great person. He is definitely somebody I want to play for."

"Being on that campus, I just loved it and felt I would be comfortable there."

Quinn said it would be hard to tell coaches from Michigan and Ohio State, his other finalists, of his decision.

"That was extremely hard because I grew close to both coaches from those schools who were recruiting me," he said. "At Michigan, that was a number of people. At Ohio State, I grew close to Luke Fickell."

15 Years Ago – 2007

In the end, Danny McCarthy simply had to go where his family legacy led him.

After telling BSB three days before announcing his final decision that he was down to just OSU and Notre Dame, McCarthy told a gathered crowd at Youngstown Cardinal Mooney that he would be joining his older brother, Kyle, as a member of the Fighting Irish defense.

"They both were high on my list," he said of Notre Dame and the Buckeyes. "The only real thing that sets them apart is where I'm going to jell the best at and where I can enjoy myself for four years and get the best opportunity."

A four-star safety prospect who helped lead Mooney to a state championship as a junior, McCarthy was offered by Jim Tressel on Sept. 1, 2006 – the first day juniors could be officially offered. Prior to narrowing his list to the Buckeyes and Fighting Irish, McCarthy had a top five that also included Michigan, Penn State and Stanford.

10 Years Ago – 2012

Rossville (Ga.) Ridgeland safety Vonn Bell understood there were plenty of eyes on him given he was one of the top remaining uncommitted defensive prospects in the 2013 recruiting class.

But it had been more than a month since he cut his list down to seven schools – Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Ohio State, Tennessee, Texas and Vanderbilt – and the same programs remained in Bell's recruitment.

"I am still at my seven schools I cut it down to awhile back," he told Scout national recruiting analyst Chad Simmons. "It is still the same right now. I will get down to three schools and that will be my final cut before I commit. I have not figured out the time to do that yet, but when I am ready, I will cut my list to three."

Five Years Ago – 2017

Fairfield, Ohio, offensive tackle Jackson Carman (6-6, 330) was one of the country's top recruits from the 2018 class, and five schools had the opportunity to host him.

Carman told Scout.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene on Aug. 12 that he planned to make official visits to Clemson, Florida State, Ohio State, USC and Wisconsin. Carman, who confirmed with Greene that he would be graduating from high school early, said he would take some officials during the season and others in December.

Greene asked Carman, the No. 18 overall prospect, if the five visits would help determine his college decision.

"After I've visited all of the schools that I want to visit, yes," Carman responded. "I don't think I'll go to one and not visit the others and be like, 'Oh, that's the place.' I've got the list and want to check off the list."

One Year Ago – 2021

What had been the top-ranked class in 2022 took a hit on July 27, when Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star tight end Benji Gosnell announced that he was decommitting from Ohio State.

Less than a week later on Aug. 1, Jacksonville (Fla.) Riverside five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary also made the announcement that he would be decommitting from Ohio State.

"First off, I would like to thank the entire Ohio State coaching staff for giving me an opportunity to be a part of the Buckeye family and believing in my talents," Singletary wrote in a tweet. "After talking it over with my family, I have decided to decommit from The Ohio State University and re-open my recruitment. Respect my decision."

Singletary ranked as the fifth-best cornerback and No. 15 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He committed to the Buckeyes on Jan. 2, 2021. The highly touted prospect posted a variety of official scholarship offers on Aug. 1 that came from Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Ole Miss and Oregon.

More On Johnson, Lockwood Decommits

As referenced earlier, Ohio State suffered decommitments from Johnson and Lockwood in recent weeks. Johnson is the No. 92 overall prospect and No. 9 cornerback in the class and had committed to the Buckeyes back in April shortly after the spring game, at the time just the ninth commitment in Ohio State's class. He decommitted on July 30.

"I want to thank everyone at The Ohio State University for their time and effort of recruiting me," he said in a statement. "I am thankful for the relationships that I've built over the past year, especially with Coach (Tony) Alford, Coach (Tim) Walton, and the players.

"After long talks with my family, I've decided that it's best for me to decommit from the Ohio State University, and I will be reopening my recruitment."

The decommitment came after Johnson took a visit to Florida the same weekend he decommitted, and though he is still uncommitted, the Gators are viewed as the favorite to land him.

Johnson's decommitment leaves Ohio State with just three cornerbacks in the class: Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star Kayin Lee (5-11, 185), Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 175) and Waxahachie, Texas, four-star Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-0, 175), though Johnson was the highest-rated of the group.

If Ohio State decides to bring that number back up to four, other potential targets could include Arlington (Texas) Martin four-star Javien Toviano (6-0, 185) or Roswell, Ga., four-star Ethan Nation (5-10, 165), both of whom are uncommitted and have been offered by the Buckeyes.

On the other side of the ball, Lockwood's flip came only days after being offered by the Crimson Tide. He was offered on July 29 and made a trip to Tuscaloosa that same weekend before announcing his flip on Aug. 2.

"First of all, I'm grateful for Ohio State, the coaching staff, and the Buckeye players and fans," he said in a statement. "I have a lot of respect for the program and the team. I've been all in with Buckeye Nation, so this decision and announcement is hard for me.

"After much discussion and prayer, my family and I have decided that it would be best to decommit from Ohio State University. I take commitment and loyalty very seriously, but it's the right choice I needed to make for my future and my family."

Lockwood was the first commitment in Ohio State's 2023 class, initially pledging to the Buckeyes on Aug. 19, 2021, meaning he was in the class for nearly a year before flipping to Alabama. The Crimson Tide and head coach Nick Saban had clearly been

working behind the scenes to make this happen, as there had been no smoke about a potential flip by Lockwood until Alabama's offer went out.

"This is a business and this is a little bit better fit for me relationship-wise and football-wise," he told 247Sports.

Ohio State is not currently involved with any uncommitted tight ends that it has issued an offer to, so the Buckeyes will likely settle for Thurman in the class, assuming they can hold on to him.

Keeley Decommits From Notre Dame

While the flirtation had been apparent between Keeley and Ohio State dating back to his visit in the spring, things became real when Keeley announced his decommitment from Notre Dame on Aug. 17.

"First and foremost I would like to thank the University of Notre Dame and their tremendous staff for spending the time to recruit me to Notre Dame," he said in a statement on Twitter. "I'm truly grateful for the opportunity. Making a decision that will ultimately affect my life's path has been quite challenging and cannot be understated. With that said I will (be) decommitting from the University of Notre Dame."

Keeley is the No. 9 overall prospect and No. 1 defensive end in the 2023 class and was the top-rated recruit in the Fighting Irish's class. In addition to Keeley's spring trip to Ohio State, he also visited Alabama, viewed as the other likely finalist for the five-star prospect.

While the Crimson Tide are rumored to be the favorite – 247Sports' crystal ball predictions are all in favor of Alabama – anything could change after Sept. 3, when Keeley is believed to be taking a visit to Ohio State. If the Buckeyes can get Keeley on campus, it's anyone's best guess as to who might end up with Keeley's services, but until he does get to Columbus, the Crimson Tide are in the driver's seat.

Ohio State Set For Packed Opener

As chronicled on Page 39, Ohio State's season opener is expected to be a huge recruiting weekend for the Buckeyes with prospects coming from across the nation to see Ohio Stadium under the lights.

Through various reports and word from the recruits themselves, BSB has a preliminary list of recruits who are expected to be in attendance on Sept. 3. While there are far too many to fit within these pages, for the latest information and a full list of expected attendees, visit BuckeyeSports.com. We won't leave you empty-handed, though, so here are some high-profile recruits expected to be in attendance:

Beginning in the 2023 class, several Ohio State commitments are expected on the scene. This includes wide receivers Brandon Inniss, Bryson Rodgers, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate, as well as Montgomery and Moore. Uncommitted prospects expected are Keeley and Wilson, though there is still some uncertainty around whether or not Keeley makes the trip.

Moving to 2024, the Buckeyes will host five-star athlete K.J. Bolden (6-1, 185) and four-star tight end KingJoseph Edwards (6-5, 242), both from Buford, Ga.; Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185); and four-star linebacker Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-2, 225) and five-star safety Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188), both of whom hail from St. John Bosco in Bellflower, Calif.

Several visitors in 2025 and beyond will also be in attendance, including Gilbert; Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 200); St. Louis University athlete Landon Pace (6-2, 200); Buford, Ga., linebacker Jadon Perlotte (6-3, 200); and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Winston Watkins Jr. (5-10, 172), who is committed to Texas A&M.

Future Bucks On MaxPreps Preseason All-America Team

High school football is in full swing throughout the country, and several Ohio State commitments – as well as some targets for the Buckeyes – have been named to MaxPreps' Preseason All-American Football Team, which is separated by class.

Seniors honored by MaxPreps include Montgomery and Inniss, who were both

named to the second-team offense, and Lee, who was named to the second-team defense. Ohio State's lone junior commitment, Raiola, earned honors for the second-team offense.

Several priority targets for Ohio State were also honored, including Uigalelei in 2023 and Bolden; Jefferson, Ga., five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-3, 225); Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star running back Stacy Gage (5-11, 200); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star cornerback Ellis Robinson IV (6-0, 175); Smith; Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star wide receiver Joshisa Trader (6-2, 170); Viliamu-Asa; and Woodyard in 2024.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Detroit Cass Technical four-star defensive lineman Jalen Thompson (6-3, 245) announced his commitment to Michigan State on Aug. 22. He is the No. 197 overall prospect and No. 30 defensive lineman in the 2023 recruiting class, and he held offers from Cincinnati, Georgia, Michigan, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State and USC, among others.

- Upper Marlboro (Md.) Charles Herbert Flowers four-star defensive end Desmond Umeozulu (6-6, 239) will announce his commitment on Aug. 29 between Ohio State, North Carolina and South Carolina. He is the No. 167 overall prospect and No. 21 defensive end in the 2023 class.

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



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Reynolds Travel is once again offering packages to all 2022 Ohio State Away Football Games and a Bengals vs. Browns Same Day trip and hope you can join us for another great football season. Here is a listing but full details are available on our website at www.reynoldstravel.com.

OSU vs Michigan State — Oct. 7-9: Two-night motorcoach trip to East Lansing area for the Ohio State vs. Michigan State game. The package includes a roundtrip motorcoach (you can purchase land only if desired) with two nights at the Marriott Grand in Grand Rapids including breakfast daily and city tour of Grand Rapids and Gerald Ford Museum and game tickets in the Ohio State Visitor section and roundtrip transportation to East Lansing for the game and fully escorted by Reynolds Travel.

OSU vs Penn State — Oct. 28-30: Two-night motorcoach trip to State College area (you can purchase land only package) and hotel accommodations at the Omni Bedford Springs Hotel for two nights with breakfast daily, a tour of Bedford area, and game tickets in the Ohio State Visitor section and roundtrip transportation to State College for the game and fully escorted by Reynolds Travel.

OSU vs Northwestern — Nov. 3-6: Three-

night motorcoach trip to the windy city, Chicago (you can purchase land only package) and hotel accommodations for 3 nights at the Embassy Suites Magnificent Mile with breakfast included daily and Manager's party (except game day) with a tour of Wrigley Field and Northwestern University and game tickets in Ohio State visitor section and game day transportation to Evanston and fully escorted by Reynolds Travel.

OSU vs Maryland — Nov. 17-20: Three-night motorcoach trip to Alexandria, Virginia (land-only package available) at the Alexandrian Hotel in the center of Alexandria with breakfast daily, a tour of the Naval Academy with lunch at the Academy Club, and a tour of Mount Vernon and game tickets in the Ohio State Visitor Section and roundtrip transportation to College Park, Maryland for the game.

NFL Game-Bengals vs. Browns — Dec. 11: Same day motorcoach trip to Cincinnati and game tickets in Section 334 in lower rows.

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OSU Picks Up Big Wins On Recruiting Trail

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann made a splash on the recruiting trail in August, shoring up the Buckeyes' future wing depth with commitments from a pair of 2023 four-star small forwards.

Holtmann started his big week with Pickerington (Ohio) Central small forward Devin Royal (6-7, 210), who announced his commitment to Ohio State on Aug. 3. Wichita (Kan.) Sunrise Christian forward Scotty Middleton (6-6, 180) followed suit, joining the class on Aug. 6.

opposing defenses on their heels.

"He has broad shoulders and long arms and is a face-up forward," On3 recruiting analyst Jamie Shaw said. "He has a high IQ and can handle the ball, shoot and pass. He plays within himself and has nice vertical pop. His quick first step from mid-post creates free-throw opportunities, and he makes his free throws."

As a native of Ohio, plenty of factors went into his decision to stay in his home state, with building his legacy chief among them.

"It would mean a lot to leave a legacy behind," Royal said at his commitment event. "To go from high school to college and still be at home, I think it would mean a lot to everyone in the community."

While Royal brings an offensive and familiar presence to the Buckeyes, Middleton's calling card comes on the defensive side of the ball. He scored 10.0 ppg and had 3.3 rpg in the Nike Elite Youth Basketball League.

Middleton is a defense-first player, utilizing his long arms and on-ball activity to pester opposing forwards. Despite his defensive prowess, Middleton is also a rangy scorer who can put the ball in the hoop from anywhere on the floor, excelling in transition and off the catch. He was slotted as the No. 6 small forward and No. 34 overall recruit in the class.

"Scotty Middleton is a versatile de-

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2023 who have issued verbal commitments to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Scotty Middleton	SF	6-6	180	★★★★	Wichita (Kan.) Sunrise Christian
George Washington III	SG	6-2	165	★★★★	Dayton (Ohio) Chaminade-Julienne
Austin Parks	C	6-9	240	★★★★	Saint Mary's (Ohio) Memorial
Devin Royal	SF	6-7	210	★★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) Central

fender," Shaw said. "He has the length and motor to guard on or off the ball and the size to defend up a lineup. With his feet set, Middleton can knock down a jump shot and is excellent in transition, switching ends quickly. He will need to continue tightening his ball skills and shooting off the bounce, but his motor keeps him productive."

Middleton cited his relationship with Ohio State assistant coach Jake Diebler as a key reason for his decision to join the Buckeyes.

"Coach Holtmann and Diebler always did a good job of consistently staying in contact with me through my good and my bad times," Middleton told 247Sports. "I think them always being consistent and always giving me advice when I was down or when I was up just separated them from every other school."

Royal and Middleton join Dayton Chaminade four-star shooting guard George Washington III (6-2, 165) and St. Marys (Ohio) Memorial four-star center Austin Parks (6-9, 240) in the Buckeyes' 2023 class. The class ranks No. 4 overall on the 247Sports' composite team rankings, trailing No. 1 Duke, No. 2 Kentucky and No. 3 Michigan State.

Buckeyes Take Trip To Bahamas

The Ohio State men's basketball team got some time in the sun but was also hard at work during its five-day trip to the Bahamas from Aug. 4-9.

With a focus on building chemistry and finding a potential rotation for the regular season, the Buckeyes also picked up a pair of exhibition-game wins over the Egyptian and Puerto Rican national

COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

Royal ranks as the No. 2 recruit out of Ohio in 2023 and the No. 14 overall small forward in the class, according to the 247Sports' composite ranking. He committed to the Buckeyes despite fierce pursuit from Michigan State and Alabama.

Royal provides the Buckeyes with offensive versatility from the wing, primarily playing face-up rather than out of the post. He averaged 19.1 ppg and 8.2 rpg as a junior, leading Pickerington Central to a state title. He is a score-first forward but has a distinct passing ability that keeps



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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

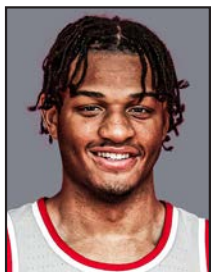
teams on Aug. 6 and 7. The games were played under FIBA rules, which meant Ohio State played four 10-minute quarters as opposed to two 20-minute halves against Egypt and Puerto Rico.

While Ohio State meshed pool time with practices and scrimmages, Holtmann had some goals for his team during the international trip.

"We said, 'Hey just give us the best teams that you have there.' We believe the Egyptian and Puerto Rican national teams are both really good teams and good measures for us as a group," Holtmann said on Aug. 1. "The trip is obviously not about that. The trip is about the practice time and the chance to play a bunch of different rotations."

The Buckeyes opened play in the Bahamas against Egypt, which marked the first time that Team 124 – representing the number of seasons of Ohio State basketball – played together as a unit. It was a tight affair throughout the game, but Ohio State prevailed 72-68.

The highlight of the Buckeyes' triumph over Egypt came from freshman shooting guard Roddy Gayle Jr., who drove from the baseline and soared for a two-handed slam over an Egyptian defender to push Ohio State's lead to 68-65 with just under a minute to play in the game. Wright State



Roddy Gayle Jr.

transfer guard Tanner Holden and freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh each added 15 points in the win.

Ohio State strung together a second straight win the next day, sneaking past Puerto Rico 75-68. The Buckeyes were led by third-year big man Zed Key during the early stages of the scrimmage, aiding Ohio State to a 39-34 halftime lead with nine points in the first two frames.

After Puerto Rico cut the lead to as few as three points with under a minute to go, a transition layup from freshman point guard Bruce Thornton and a pair of free throws from West Virginia transfer Sean McNeil put the game on ice.

Ohio State was without graduate forwards Seth Towns and Justice Sueing during the exhibition games. Towns continues to rehabilitate from a back procedure he underwent during the 2021 off-season which caused him to miss all of the last campaign. Sueing is still recovering from an abdominal injury that held him out of the final 30 games on Ohio State's schedule last year. Prior to leaving for the Bahamas, Holtmann said he expects both Buckeyes to be available for preseason practices in September.

OSU In Contact With LeBron James Jr.

As a native of Akron, Los Angeles Lakers star forward LeBron James has never shied away from his Ohio roots.

During his historic run through the NBA, James has been consistent in his support of the Ohio State Buckeyes and

has attended numerous football games. At a skull session prior to Ohio State's game against Wisconsin in 2013, James said that if he attended college, he would have been a Buckeye. The university even sells No. 23 football and basketball jerseys with his last name displayed on the back, in homage to the Buckeye superfan.

Now, Ohio State may have a real reason to sell those "James" jerseys.

According to On3's Jamie Shaw, Ohio State has interest in James' son, Bronny, who is a 2023 four-star combo guard out of Sierra Canyon High School in Los Angeles.

Despite his status as the son of one of the greatest basketball players in the world, Bronny James' recruitment has largely flown under the radar. To this point, Bronny James has taken only one reported visit to a school as he toured Duke on an unofficial visit in 2018. He has no reported offers from any Division I programs, according to 247Sports, but his recruitment has picked up in recent weeks.

Bronny James has reportedly forged a connection with Ohio State's coaching staff and is trending toward scheduling a visit to the Columbus campus, according to Shaw.

While Ohio State is seemingly in on the younger James, Shaw said Oregon has emerged as the favorite to land him, giving the Ducks a 50 percent chance to earn his commitment.

As he carries the James name, his addition to any program goes beyond just

what he can provide on the court. According to On3's NIL Valuation Rankings, Bronny James is the No. 1 high school athlete in terms of potential NIL value – carrying a valuation of \$7.3 million. Not to mention, LeBron James' billionaire status would give the school that lands his son a valued booster.



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Ohio State Begins Filling Out Schedule

The start of the season for the Ohio State women's basketball team is still months away, but the selection of opponents for the Buckeyes is beginning to come together. The Big Ten announced home and away contests for the conference's teams, with times and dates still to be announced.

Ohio State will play at home and on the

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

road against Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota and Northwestern. The Buckeyes will host Illinois, Iowa, Michigan State and Purdue while traveling to face Nebraska, Penn State, Rutgers and Wisconsin.

Moving to the nonconference schedule, which has not been announced in full, Ohio State has several marquee matchups set for this season and beyond.

The Buckeyes will host Tennessee on Nov. 8, with a return trip to Knoxville scheduled for next season. Ohio State and Tennessee have faced off 11 times dating back to 1976, with the Volunteers holding a distinct edge in the series, winning all but one of those contests.

The lone win for the Buckeyes came on Dec. 17, 1981, in an 83-82 win in double overtime, and the last time Tennessee visited

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2023 who have issued verbal commitments to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Faith Carson	C	6-4	NA	Buchanan, Mich.

Ohio State was on Jan. 31, 1980, a 72-56 loss for the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes will then travel to face Boston College on Nov. 13. Ohio State has matched up with Boston College on 10 occasions, with the Buckeyes holding a 7-3 lead in the series. The last game between these teams was on Nov. 21, 2006, in an 80-72 win for Ohio State in double overtime.

Both Boston College and Tennessee have played three NCAA tournament games against Ohio State, tied for the most of any team along with Maryland.

The third nonconference game announced for Ohio State is at Louisville on Nov. 30 as part of the annual ACC/Big Ten matchup. This will be just the fourth time these teams have played each other, with Louisville holding a 2-1 edge over the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes will also travel to California for the San Diego Invitational from Dec. 20-21. OSU will face South Florida in the first round and either Arkansas or Oregon the next day.

The remainder of the nonconference schedule – likely to be around 10 games, in

total, as well as an exhibition contest – as well as game times will be announced as the season approaches.

New Arrivals Get Jersey Numbers

Ohio State has six new arrivals this season to go along with five departures from the program, meaning that there are plenty of jersey numbers to go around.

Nothing changes for guards Madison Greene (No. 0), Rikki Harris (No. 1), Jacy Sheldon (No. 4), Kaitlyn Costner (No. 20) and Taylor Mikesell (No. 24) or forward Rebeka Mikulasikova (No. 23), who will each wear the same numbers they did last season.



Taylor Thierry

Sophomore forward Taylor Thierry and senior guard Hevyne Bristow were the only returning Buckeyes to change their numbers. Thierry swapped out No. 14 for No. 2 – previously worn by Pittsburgh transfer Gabby Hutcherson – while Bristow traded her No. 21 jersey for No. 3, which was worn by Dayton transfer Anyssa Jones last season.

The Buckeyes are bringing in three new team members as part of their most recent recruiting class with guards Kaia Henderson (No. 11) and Mya Perry (No. 12) and forward Cotie McMahon (No. 32) joining the team. Ohio State also brought in three transfers, with guard Emma Shumate (No. 5) and forwards Karla Vreš (No. 15) and Eboni Walker (No. 22) receiving their new numbers for Ohio State.

WNBA Season Enters Final Stages For Buckeyes

It was a challenging season for both of Ohio State's alumni representing the Buckeyes in the WNBA.

Guard Kelsey Mitchell, who stars for the Indiana Fever, hit career highs in points (18.4) and three-point field-goal percentage (40.9) but suffered through a tumultuous year with the Fever, which finished the season with a 5-31 record, by far the worst in the WNBA.

Mitchell was an outlier for the Fever, which ranked at or near the bottom of the league in essentially every statistic this season, including field-goal percentage (40.9), points per game (78.0), opponent points per game (89.1), opponent field-goal percentage (47.4), defensive rebounds per game (23.5) and assists per game (18.0).

She appeared in 31 games this season before suffering a plantar fascia tear in her left foot, cutting short her fifth season in the league.

The other Buckeye in the WNBA, forward Jantel Lavender, has seen her minutes decline as the season rolls on. After starting in four of the Seattle Storm's first nine games and playing at least 10 minutes in each of those contests, she has played only 10 minutes in three of her last nine games and hadn't made an appearance for the Storm since she played 8:40 and scored two points on Aug. 3 against the Minnesota Lynx.

While Mitchell's season is done, Lavender's could continue if she can work her way back into the rotation. The Storm clinched a spot in the WNBA playoffs as the No. 4 seed, and defeated the No. 5 Washington Mystics in a best-of-three series, taking both games in the first round. They will face the No. 1 ranked Las Vegas Aces in the semifinals beginning Aug. 28.

CBS, Peacock To Begin Broadcasting Games

The Big Ten announced the conference's new media rights agreement on Aug. 18 with CBS, FOX, NBC and Peacock, and the Ohio State women's basketball team – and Big Ten women's basketball as a whole – will see some changes as to where games can be viewed beginning next season.

Starting with Big Ten Network, which was and will remain a television partner of the Big Ten, the network will broadcast a minimum of 49 games per season beginning in 2023 and into the future.

While NBC itself will have no women's basketball programming, Peacock will begin streaming 30 regular-season games beginning in 2023, with 20 conference games and 10 nonconference games. FOX/FS1 will continue to broadcast select games throughout the season, though there is no specific quota that has to be met.

As for the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, the two opening-night games will be streamed on Peacock. The next three rounds through the semifinals will be broadcast on the Big Ten Network, and the finals of the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament will appear on CBS beginning in 2023.

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Big Ten Inks Historic Television Deal

The Big Ten announced on Aug. 18 that it had agreed to media distribution agreements with CBS, Fox, NBC and Peacock to televise the conference's sporting events starting in 2023 through the 2029-30 season.

The deal is slated to total nearly \$8 billion for the conference through the course of its seven-year commitment with the networks, with the Big Ten estimated to collect \$1.1 billion per year, according to Sports Business Journal's Michael Smith.

BIG TEN NOTES Jack Emerson

"The Big Ten Conference media rights agreements are more than just dollars and deals," Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren said. "They are a mechanism to provide stability and maximum exposure for our student-athletes, member institutions and partners during these uncertain times in collegiate athletics.

"We are very grateful to our world-class media partners for recognizing the strength of the Big Ten Conference brand and providing the incredible resources we need for our student-athletes to compete at the very highest levels and to achieve their academic and athletics goals."

With the implementation of CBS, Fox and NBC, the Saturday football television slate will emulate the networks' handling of NFL Sundays. Fox will hold the Big Noon Kickoff game while CBS will follow with the 3:30 window, and NBC will close the afternoon with a prime-time kickoff, dubbed Big Ten Saturday Night. Peacock, NBC's streaming platform, will stream eight games each season. Big Ten Network will remain a mainstay in football coverage, hosting 38-41 games per season, while Fox and its associate channels will be home to 24-27 football games next season.

In 2023, CBS will host seven Big Ten football games while it continues its typical coverage of SEC football through the last year of its deal with the conference. Following the 2023 season, CBS will be home to 15 regular-season Big Ten games, including an annual Black Friday contest.

The Big Ten Conference Championship Game will rotate between the three networks with Fox televising the game in 2023, 2025, 2027 and 2029, CBS hosting in 2024 and 2028 and NBC holding the rights in 2026.

Flipping from the gridiron to the hardwood, CBS will televise an undisclosed number of regular-season men's basketball games while hosting the final two rounds of the conference tournament each season. CBS will also become the first network to televise the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament final to a national audience in 2023. Peacock will feature as many as 47 regular-season men's basketball games – with 32 conference games and 15 nonconference matchups – and 30 regular-season women's basketball games, with 20 conference contests and 10 nonconference clashes.

ESPN will not be a featured partner with the Big Ten for the first time in nearly 40 years as a result of the conference's new deal.

Izzo Inks Five-Year Extension With Michigan State

Michigan State men's basketball head

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

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.

MEN'S SOCCER

Aug. 12 OHIO DOMINICAN, EXH.; **16** Oakland, EXH.; **20** CHARLESTON, EXH.; **25** SOUTH CAROLINA, 7 p.m.; **28** CAL POLY, 6 p.m.

Sept. 1 Bowling Green, 7 p.m. **5** WRIGHT STATE, 7 p.m.; **9** BUTLER, 7 p.m.; **13** Akron, 7 p.m.; **18** INDIANA, 2 p.m.; **21** Cleveland State, 7 p.m.; **25** Maryland, 2 p.m.; **30** RUTGERS, 7 p.m.

Oct. 5 NORTHERN KENTUCKY 7 p.m.; **11** Michigan, 7 p.m.; **16** NORTHWESTERN, 2 p.m.; **21** Penn State, 7 p.m.; **25** MICHIGAN STATE 6 p.m.; **30** Wisconsin, 2 p.m.

coach Tom Izzo inked a five-year extension with the Spartans on Aug. 11, which will make him the second highest-paid coach in college basketball.

According to Michigan State, Izzo's extension will grant him approximately \$6.2 million per year. Kentucky's John Calipari is the only coach with a larger yearly package, earning \$8.6 million per year.

Izzo has amassed a 666-267 record since taking over at Michigan State in 1995. He holds the record for most wins at a single Big Ten school and also presided over the most recent Big Ten team to win the national championship, guiding the Spartans to the crown in 2000. He has led Michigan State to eight final fours and 24 NCAA Tournament appearances during his 27-year coaching career.

"Michigan State has been a home to me and my family for 40 years, and I'm ecstatic to sign this contract," Izzo stated in a release. "We have worked hard to maintain championship standards, and I'm as energized to coach now as I was when I started as the head coach in 1995."

Michigan Scoops Up Former Five-Star DE

Head coach Jim Harbaugh shored up his defensive line on Aug. 18, claiming the commitment of graduate-transfer defensive end Eyabi Anoma.

Michigan is Anoma's fourth stop during his college football career. The former five-star defensive end began his career at Alabama – where he played one season – before transferring to Houston in 2019 and Tennessee-Martin in 2020.

Anoma arrived at Alabama as the No. 4 player in the 2018 class, according to ESPN's Top 300, and played in 13 games as a freshman, racking up nine tackles and two tackles for loss. He was suspended at season's end, which prompted his transfer to Houston. As a Cougar, Anoma did not see the field, redshirting his lone season in the program before being dismissed for violating team rules.

After his brief stint with Houston, Anoma found a home at Tennessee-Martin. He sat out his first season with the Skyhawks before

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Aug. 8 NC State, EXH.; **11** UNC Wilmington, EXH.; **18** Kansas, W 1-0; **21** Missouri, W 2-1; **26** BYU, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 1 Dayton, 7 p.m.; **4** TEXAS A&M, noon; **8** Brown, 7 p.m.; **11** KENT STATE, 6 p.m.; **18** Rutgers, 1 p.m.; **22** Michigan, 7 p.m.; **25** IOWA, noon; **29** Indiana, 7 p.m.

Oct. 2 PENN STATE, noon; **8** Nebraska, 2:05 p.m.; **13** MARYLAND, 7 p.m.; **16** Illinois, 2 p.m.; **20** MICHIGAN STATE, 7 p.m.; **23** NORTHWESTERN, noon.

WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY

Aug. 26 Northeastern, 3 p.m.; **28** Albany 1 p.m.

Sept. 4 LEHIGH, noon; **11** Miami (Ohio), 1 p.m.; **16** MARYLAND, 3 p.m.; **18** WAKE FOREST, 1 p.m.; **23** Rutgers, 3 p.m.; **25** Penn State, noon; **30** MICHIGAN STATE, 4 p.m.

Oct. 2 KENT STATE 1 p.m.; **7** CENTRAL MICHIGAN, 3 p.m.; **9** Ohio, 1 p.m., **14**

IOWA, 3 p.m.; **16** NORTHWESTERN, noon; **21** Indiana, 3 p.m.; **23** Bellarmine, 1 p.m.; **28** Michigan, 6 p.m.; **30** BALL STATE, 1 p.m.

Nov. 3 Big Ten Tournament; **4** Big Ten Tournament; **6** Big Ten Tournament.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Aug. 26-27 TEXAS, 8 p.m.

Sept. 3 San Diego, 5 p.m.; **4** Louisville, 2 p.m.; **9**, BYU, 7 p.m.; **11** Georgia Tech, 1 p.m.; **17** Tennessee 5 p.m.; **18** Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.; **23** Iowa; **24** Nebraska; **28** Michigan, 7 p.m.

Oct. 1 Indiana; **7** PENN STATE, 6:30 p.m.; **9** NORTHWESTERN, 1 p.m.; **12** Minnesota, 8 p.m.; **15** RUTGERS, 5 p.m.; **19** ILLINOIS, 6 p.m.; **21** IOWA, 7 p.m.; **26** MICHIGAN, 7 p.m.; **29** Penn State.

Nov. 4 Northwestern; **5** Michigan State; **11** Purdue, 7 p.m.; **13** NEBRASKA, 4:30 p.m.; **18** Maryland; **20** INDIANA, 1 p.m.; **25** MINNESOTA, 6 p.m.; **26** WISCONSIN, 7 p.m.

breaking out in 2021, amassing 36 tackles, 9½ tackles for loss and six sacks while helping Tennessee-Martin to an Ohio Valley Conference title and Football Championship Subdivision playoff appearance.

Anoma is immediately eligible for the Wolverines and will have two seasons of eligibility at Michigan as a graduate transfer.

Howard Wants More From U-M's NIL

Although Harbaugh lauded the university's name, image and likeness strategy at Big Ten Media Days, Wolverines men's basketball skipper Juwan Howard believes Michigan can do more in the NIL space.

"NIL, it's one of those things where it has helped other programs and what they've done in the transfer portal. For us, NIL hasn't hurt or helped me or the team when it comes to recruiting from the transfer portal," Howard told reporters on Aug. 11. "Would I like to see more done for the program, in the sense of some of

the things happening in other basketball programs? Yes."

Howard pointed to Michigan's lack of an NIL collective as a primary reason that the university has fallen behind in that area. Although the Wolverines do not benefit from a collective, Harbaugh said he believes that Michigan could double Ohio State head coach Ryan Day's estimation that the Buckeyes need \$13 million in NIL revenue to keep their roster intact.

"I think maybe we can even double that at Michigan," Harbaugh said. "I think that's possible. And I think it's going in a terrific direction that way."

Despite Harbaugh's lofty beliefs in regard to Michigan's NIL apparatus, Howard believes Michigan's athletic department could be more forward-thinking when it comes to NIL.

"Could we be more proactive with NIL and use more forward thinking? Yes," Howard said. "When I say 'we,' I'm including myself. But our athletic department, as well as Michigan as a whole, can do better."



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Opener Huge for Knowles and OSU Defense

The season opener against Notre Dame will mark the start of Ryan Day's fourth season as full-time head coach for the Buckeyes. Day has had remarkable success in his short tenure as a head coach. His teams have already made the college football playoffs twice, have won 23 of 24 conference games and have been victorious in 34 of 38 contests overall.

Last season the Ohio State offense led the nation in scoring and total offense. Day has one of the greatest offensive football minds in all of

Oklahoma State, Knowles' defenses showed improvement each season and were often in the nation's top five in sacks, tackles for loss, rush defense and third-down defense.

Perhaps his most notable accomplishment for the Cowboys was the fact that he took a defense that gave up 32.5 points per game in 2018 to one that allowed only 18.1 points per game in 2021, a mark that ranked ninth in the nation in scoring defense. He inherits an Ohio State defense that gave up 22.8 points per game, very respectable, but gave up 87 points in the last two games. Adding to the sting was the 42 points given up to archrival Michigan.

Knowles' defensive philosophy seems to center around running multiple defensive schemes out of base looks, thus making it hard for opposing offenses to know what the defense is going to do at the snap of the football. This is especially true in terms of pass coverage. By disguising coverages, Knowles hopes opposing quarterbacks will throw into coverage or force them to hold on to the ball long enough for the defensive rush to get there. The concept makes sense, but the key is for the players to execute it. Fortunate for Knowles is the fact he is now at an OSU that consistently has more talent to work with than the OSU he just left.

Helping Coach Knowles to implement his defense is Oklahoma State transfer safety Tanner McCalister. The 5-11, 195-pound safety/nickel has the experience in Knowles' defensive system, and that experience can be valuable in helping other defensive backs understand the scheme. In Knowles' 4-2-5 defense, the safeties must be athletic, fast and physical. They must be aggressive when coming up on run support but smart enough not to be caught flat-footed vs. play-action passes. Knowles hopes to take some of the pressure off the inside linebackers in terms of pass responsibilities. They must be able to cover in the underneath zones but not in the deeper ones.

Linebackers Tommy Eichenberg, Steele Chambers and Cody Simon provide valuable experience at the position. Boundary safety (bandit) Josh Proctor and free safety (adjuster) Ronnie Hickman, along with McCalister, will

most likely be the keys to Knowles' defense in terms of secondary run support plus middle-of-the-field pass coverage while allowing the corners like Denzel Burke and Cam Brown to concentrate on manning up outside receivers.

Those are some things to look for under Knowles' system but like any defense, it all starts up front. The cupboard is not as full there as in the back end of the defense, but no matter how many starters return on the defensive line for Larry Johnson, Buckeye fans will see a ton of guys see action on the defensive front.

Johnson likes to go deep into his depth chart in order to keep fresh bodies on the field. He wants his defensive linemen to be stout against the run and athletic rushing the quarterback vs. pass. To hold your ground, disengage and then get to the football is not an easy task. Coach Johnson demands that even his defensive tackles be outstanding pass rushers, not just his defensive ends. Ty Hamilton, Jeron Cage, Tyleik Williams and Taron Vincent, along with fast-maturing Mike Hall, will anchor the defensive interior while Tyler Friday, Zach Harrison, Jack Sawyer, Javontae Jean-Baptiste and J.T. Tuimolalo will work the edges. The defensive line may not have a Chase Young or a Bosa this year, but you can count on a very solid front being put on the field by Johnson.

Day wants to see improvement in the defense for 2022. The pressure is on Knowles and the defensive staff to be better on third down, stout in the red zone, not give up big plays, and have better overall consistency. Knowles seems to thrive on pressure, and there will be plenty at Ohio State.

Opener Against Irish

It can be argued that the Buckeyes' prime-time game against the Fighting Irish is the biggest opener in Ohio State football history, at least in the modern era of college football. Two storied programs, two teams that just missed the college playoffs last season, two teams that begin the season ranked in the top five of the country, and two teams with strong Ohio connections. Both teams know the importance

of winning the game in terms of the national rankings and both are motivated by the "pride factor" for the players and coaching staffs.

The Ohio State and Notre Dame football programs have combined for 19 national championships, both have had seven Heisman Trophy winners, and both programs have won over 900 college football games. Despite being less than 300 miles apart, the two schools have only played a total of six times. The Buckeyes and Fighting Irish have played twice in Ohio Stadium, twice at Notre Dame and twice in the Fiesta Bowl. The Irish won the first two times the teams met, both in the 1930s, but the Buckeyes have won the last four in a row.

Ohio State and Notre Dame narrowly missed the football playoffs in 2021. An early-season loss to Cincinnati was enough to dash Notre Dame's hopes of making the final four while Ohio State's late loss to archrival Michigan doomed the Buckeyes' hopes. Notre Dame went on to lose its bowl game to Oklahoma State and Knowles' defense by a score 37-35 while Ohio State was unimpressive, especially on defense, in beating Utah in the Rose Bowl by a score of 48-45. It's easy to see why both programs are focused on starting their 2022 campaign with a big win.

The talent level is high in South Bend and Columbus in 2022. Both teams have a good number of starters returning, and both teams deserve their high preseason ranking. Offensively, the Buckeyes hold the edge at the quarterback position, with Heisman finalist CJ Stroud leading an offense that has the nation's best stable of receivers including Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Emeka Egbuka, Julian Fleming and Marvin Harrison Jr. Put those guys with running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Mijan Williams, and you have the potential to have one of the Buckeyes' most explosive offenses in history as long as a less experienced offensive line can quickly mature.

For Notre Dame, dual-threat quarterback Tyler Buchner will have a talented receiving corps in wide receiver Braden Lenzy and tight end Michael Mayer to throw the ball to. The Irish have talent but not near the depth of Ohio State at the offensive skilled positions. At the same time, the Fighting Irish offense will face a newly implemented but unproven Ohio State defense.

Adding to the drama and excitement of the game is the return of Marcus Freeman to Ohio Stadium, but this time as Notre Dame's head football coach. The former Ohio State linebacker and Dayton native made his mark in the college football coaching ranks as Luke Fickell's defensive coordinator at the University of Cincinnati. But Freeman will go against a proven offensive-minded head coach in Day. Freeman will also bring in a staff that includes another former Buckeye linebacker, James Laurinaitis, and former Ohio State linebacker coach Al Washington. Laurinaitis is serving as a graduate assistant, and Washington, from Columbus, is the Irish defensive line coach.

The two sons of still another Ohio State great linebacker, Lorenzo Styles, will be playing in the game, one for each team. Sophomore wide receiver Lorenzo Jr. will suit up for the Irish, and his brother, freshman safety Sonny Styles, for the Buckeyes. There are a number of story lines leading up to this highly anticipated season opener.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

college football along with being an outstanding recruiter. Under Day, Ohio State consistently brings a high number of "blue-chip" recruits into the program each season. On this year's team alone, there will be 66 players who were ranked four- or five-star recruits coming out of high school.

This season, with the hiring of Jim Knowles, Day hopes the Buckeye defense can mirror the offense in terms of consistently performing at a high level. The stakes are high vs. the Fighting Irish on Sept. 3 in Ohio Stadium in front of a national television audience.

Knowles Knows Best

There is no doubt Knowles knows defensive football. Being in college football coaching for 35 years at five different schools and coaching environments before coming to Ohio State has made Knowles one of the most respected defensive signal-callers in the profession.

Besides serving as defensive coordinator at Western Michigan, Duke and the other OSU, Oklahoma State, he took a floundering Cornell football program, his alma mater, to respectability as their head coach. His ability to take average defensive units to some of the best in the conference has been his trademark. At

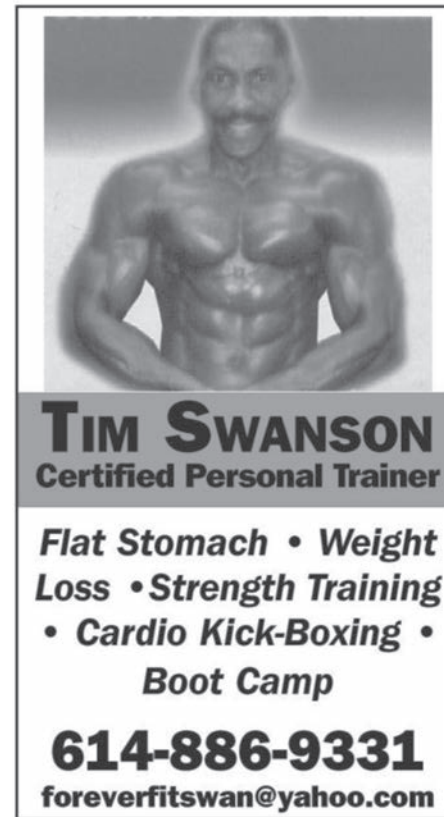


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Skill Positions Leading Skilled Offense

Even in the era of very high expectations and success for Ohio State football that we've become accustomed to over the last several years, this season holds the promise of being extraordinary in at least one regard.

Never has Ohio State entered a season with better talent at the skill positions on the offensive side of the football. This should be the greatest offense in school history.

Although two Buckeye receivers went in the first 11 picks in the 2022 NFL draft, this season's group should be better.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

The Buckeyes' quarterback a year ago had some learning bumps in the early going but went on to finish fourth in the Heisman voting. He, C.J. Stroud of course, is back and experienced from the start this time.

Oh, by the way, freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson – who was second in the nation at 6.8 yards per carry – is back with 1,248 yards of rushing experience now under his belt.

With apologies to the Archie Griffins, Rex Kerns, Art Schlichters, Eddie Georges, David Bostons and Ezekiel Elliotts of the past, there really has been nothing like this, together and all so young in their careers.

Everything mentioned above for the current group was accomplished by the end of their sophomore seasons.

A year ago, the Buckeyes led the nation with 45.7 points and 561.5 yards per game. They should be better this time.

Why? Experience for one. Talent for two.

The Catchers

While the Buckeyes did lose star receivers Chris Olave (936 yards on 65 catches) and Garrett Wilson (1,058 yards on 70 catches) in the NFL draft, the best of last year's receivers is back in Jaxon Smith-Njigba (1,606 yards and 95 catches).

Never to be forgotten was his Rose Bowl performance, a record for any bowl with 347 yards receiving on 15 catches, including three TDs.

It's easy to forget with so much deserved media attention on Wilson and Olave last year, but Smith-Njigba did finish No. 2 in the country with 123.5 receiving yards per game. And his 1,606 receiving yards for the season were more than any OSU receiver in history.

Just an incremental improvement for Smith-Njigba this year, with promising talents such as Marvin Harrison Jr., Julian Fleming and Emeka Egbuka, should make this group better than last year's – a somewhat staggering but reasonable expectation even with the loss of Wilson and Olave.

First, Smith-Njigba as a junior should be better than last year, or perhaps better than any OSU receiver ever. Second, the passer, Stroud, will be experienced from the get-go. And third, the emerging receivers come with both high and reasonable expectations.

The Thrower

Now, about that guy throwing the foot-

ball.

A little recap here is in order, beyond noting the fact that Stroud finished fourth in the Heisman voting after leading the country's most explosive offense a year ago as a redshirt freshman and first-year starter.

Stroud was No. 2 nationally in passing efficiency (behind Grayson McCall, playing in the less competitive Sun Belt for Coastal Carolina). And he was No. 3 in the country with 369.6 passing yards per game.

How does 369.6 yards per game stack up in Ohio State history?

Consider this: Before last season, only nine times in all of Ohio State history has a quarterback thrown for that many yards in a single game, let alone averaged that for a season. Joe Germaine, Justin Fields and Art Schlichter each topped 369 yards just once each; Dwayne Haskins did it six times.

Though Haskins still holds the school season record with 4,831 passing yards in 2018, he did that in 14 games, meaning he averaged 345.1 yards a game to Stroud's 369.6 yards in 12 games a year ago.

The Runner

But how valuable can a passing game be without a complementary running game?

For that, OSU a year ago turned to a freshman in Henderson. Well, sometimes OSU turned to him.

Henderson's carries were severely limited at times – fewer than 10 carries in five separate games and only three games with more than 20 carries. Yet Henderson amassed 1,248 yards for the season, finishing just 23rd in the country in rushing, but no one with fewer carries than his 183 ranked higher.

The nation's leading rusher, Lew Nichols of Central Michigan, carried the ball 341 times. A dozen of the players ahead of Henderson had at least 250 carries each. All but two had at least 200 carries.

But when it came to yards per carry, as noted earlier, Henderson ranked second. His 6.8 yards per chance ranked behind only Devon Achane of Texas A&M (130 carries for 910 yards, a 7.0 average) among players with a minimum of 100 carries.

Among Buckeyes before him, there's not a single back among OSU's top 25 rushers all-time with a better per carry average. The closest any come to where Henderson stands now is Griffin (6.0 yards per carry), Carlos Hyde (6.1), J.K. Dobbins (6.2) and Ezekiel Elliott (6.7).

Those are career stats. For a single season, among 1,000 rushers, three did slightly better than Henderson did a year ago – Elliott averaged 6.9 yards in the national championship season of 2014, Dobbins averaged 7.2 yards as a freshman in 2017, and Hyde averaged 7.3 yards in 2013.

The Group

Best ever at Ohio State? Individually, maybe for some. Henderson and Stroud certainly are among the best. And Smith-Njigba most certainly could end up being considered the best, as well as the 2022 receivers as a group.

But combine the talent at receiver, running back and quarterback, and Ohio State has never had so much at hand heading into a season.

Stay healthy, and this should be really fun to watch.

More About Buckeye Points

The 45.7 points a game OSU averaged a year ago marked just the eighth time OSU has topped 40 points a game in a season. But it was also the fifth straight season above 40.

Before Urban Meyer arrived in 2012, OSU had topped 40 points a game only once, that being the 1969 team that averaged 42.6 points.

It's a quite remarkable change on top of the leaderboard, considering that this has followed more than a century of OSU football and is decades removed from Woody Hayes' run-driven days.

In 2012, these were the top five scoring teams in OSU history, with the leading passer, rusher and receiver for each team in terms of yards.

1. 42.6 points, 1969 – Rex Kern (1,002), Jim Otis (1,027) and Bruce Jankowski (404)

2. 38.8 points, 2010 – Terrelle Pryor (2,772), Dan Herron (1,155) and Dane Sanzenbacher (948).

3. 37.9 points, 1996 – Stanley Jackson (1,298), Pepe Pearson (1,484) and Dimitrios Stanley (829).

4. 37.5 points, 1973 – Cornelius Greene (343), Griffin (1,577) and Fred Pagac (159). Note: Greene completed 20 of just 46 passes the entire season, with Pagac catching

nine.

5. 36.9 points, 1916 – Could not locate the stat leaders

But now here's the top five entering the 2022 season.

1. 46.9 points, 2019 – Justin Fields (3,273), Dobbins (2,003) and Chris Olave (840).

2. 45.7 points, 2021 – Stroud (4,435), Henderson (1,248) and Smith-Njigba (1,606).

3. 45.5 points, 2013 – Braxton Miller (2,094), Carlos Hyde (1,521) and Corey Brown (771).

4. 44.8 points, 2014 – J.T. Barrett (2,834), Elliott (1,878) and Devin Smith (931).

5. 42.6 points, 1969 – Kern (1,002), Otis (1,027) and Jankowski (404).

The other three OSU teams to top 40 points a game were the 2020 squad at 41.0, 2018 at 42.4 and 2017 at 41.1.

Scoring By Decade

Historically speaking, OSU averaged 22.7 points a game during the 1960s and jumped to 29.9 points a game during the 1970s.

Then things were fairly steady (28.5 in the 1980s, 29.5 in the 1990s and 28.7 during the 2000s).

But in the 2010s, OSU averaged 39.6 points a game, and the Buckeyes are averaging 43.9 points a game during the first two years of the 2020s.

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Buckeyes Should Return To Top Of Big Ten

I'm not going to waste a lot of your time (or mine) by hashing over Ohio State's roster or reliving the 2021 campaign. There are plenty of places in this issue to find that information.

I will say that 2022 brings keen interest to the defensive side of the ball, especially after having three of the last four seasons fail to meet expectations. While he may not have brought a completely new scheme to the table, first-year DC Jim Knowles has brought a new attitude – be prepared, play fast and loose. Those qualities have been noticeably absent from the Buckeyes' stop unit in recent seasons, so it will be interesting to see if they are back this year.

The offense should be unstoppable, with playmakers all over the place and a Heisman Trophy favorite in C.J. Stroud. If the defense gets to even the top 30, it could be lights out for opponents because the only ones capable of stopping the offense are the offense itself.

**THE FACTS
MAN
Mike Wachsman**

After last season's hiccup, you can bet that the Buckeyes want to reclaim what they feel is their birthright – the Big Ten title. Sure, OSU has bigger goals in mind, but none of that can happen without first taking home the conference crown.

Ohio State is easily the most talented team in the league, but that and a dollar will get you a cup of coffee. If you don't play well, you'll lose football games. The Buckeyes had enough of that last season to ensure that 2022 isn't a repeat of 2021.

What follows is one guy's diagnosis of how Big Ten football will look this season.

EAST DIVISION

Ohio State (12-0, 9-0) – The Buckeyes will have the best offense in college football, and if the defense can simply elevate itself to com-

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petence, a national championship is certainly in play. There are too many all-league caliber players to list here, but one guy to watch for is Marvin Harrison Jr. He gave a glimpse of his talent in the Rose Bowl, and now he's set to unleash himself on the rest of the nation. Getting Wisconsin, Iowa and Michigan at home helps a lot, and the opener against Notre Dame and former OSU linebacker turned Irish head coach Marcus Freeman will set the tone for the season. **Fun fact:** Ryan Day was OSU's first Big Ten Coach of the Year winner (2019) since Earle Bruce in 1979.

Michigan (10-2, 7-2) – The Wolverines became the hunted after upsetting the appecart last year but appear to have lost too much defensively to defend their crown. In a reversal of storyline, the U-M offense should carry the freight for a good portion of the season while new faces on defense find their footing. Running back Blake Corum is one of the best in the conference, and the offensive line is top-notch. If either Cade McNamara or J.J. McCarthy seize the quarterback job, this could be one of the better attacks in the conference. **Fun fact:** The Wolverines' No. 3 poll finish was the first time since 1999 they ended the year in the top five.

Michigan State (9-3, 7-2) – Sparty was the surprise of the league in 2021, and while they won't go away completely, they will come back down to earth just a little bit. For all of its accomplishments, MSU was at a deficit of 63 yards per game in Big Ten play, and that's not sustainable for winning. The rushing attack of Jarek Broussard and Jalen Berger could be lethal, and the defense will be physical and opportunistic led by safety Xavier Henderson. Going to Washington, Michigan and Penn State, as well as hosting OSU and Wisconsin, could prove to be formidable obstacles. **Fun fact:** Kenneth Walker was Michigan State's first 1,000-yard rusher since 2014.

Penn State (8-4, 6-3) – The Nittany Lions have won 11 games twice in the last five seasons yet feel like they are in a holding pattern. Winners of just seven a year ago, PSU should once again be nails on defense with what may be the league's best secondary, and if they can get any kind of ground production from freshmen Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen, then the offense could be tough to handle. Penn State ran for just 107.8 yards per game in 2021, a number that has to increase if it wants to contend. Trips to Auburn and Michigan could be tricky, and home tilts with Ohio State and Michigan State won't be a walk in the park. **Fun fact:** Penn State had 40-plus sacks each year from 2015-2019 but fell to just 27 in 2021 (2020 was a COVID-shortened season).

Maryland (6-6, 3-6) – The Terps are slowly moving forward, getting solid recruiting and a more physical mind-set on defense. The offense can tax opponents with quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa and receivers Dontay Demus, Rakeem Jarrett and Jeshaun Jones, and the offensive line returns intact, which is typically an indicator of success. The defense needs to improve, but Maryland is geared to win shootouts, and with a November schedule that has roadies to Wisconsin and Penn State and a home date with Ohio State in succession, it may need to do just that. **Fun fact:** The lowest winning score in the past five meetings between the Terps and Buckeyes has been 52, scored by OSU in 2018.

Rutgers (4-8, 2-7) – Greg Schiano seems to be working his magic again in New Brunswick, elevating the Scarlet Knights from two wins to three in his first season and to five a year ago. The talent base is improving. Rutgers will get it done with defense, notably a secondary that includes Max Melton and Avery Young, two of the better players in the Big Ten. Trips to OSU, Minnesota and Michigan State mean reaching the postseason will be difficult, but Rutgers has slowly become more competitive under Schiano. **Fun fact:** Rutgers has not won a Big Ten home game since 2017.

Indiana (3-9, 1-8) – Will the real Hoosiers please stand up? Is Indiana more like the eight- and six-win teams of 2019 and 2020, or the two-win squad from last year? Finding out which is the outlier is head coach Tom Allen's chore, and there are pieces around that say IU could be better this year. Missouri transfer quarterback Connor Bazelak comes in to run things, and he has transfers in the backfield and out wide to help his cause. The defense was atrocious and needs to find ways to put more pressure on opposing quarterbacks (17 sacks last year). The schedule makers were not friendly, mapping road trips to Cincinnati, Nebraska, Ohio State and Michigan State. **Fun fact:** Indiana's 0-8 finish was its first winless league campaign since 2011.

WEST DIVISION

Iowa (10-2, 7-2) – Discount the Hawkeyes at your own peril – a dicey proposition considering Iowa has won 10 games in each of the last two full seasons. Yeah, the offense is 1980s grind it out, but the defense is mammoth. Linebackers Jack Campbell and Seth Benson are both All-America caliber, and interior defender Lukas Van Ness could be the next great Hawkeye trench defender. The schedule isn't terrible – Michigan and Wisconsin at home, Ohio State and Minnesota away – so another double-digit win campaign is in Kirk Ferentz's sights. **Fun fact:** Iowa knocked off two AP ranked teams to open the year, the first time that's happened for the Hawkeyes since 1960.

Wisconsin (9-3, 6-3) – The Badgers suffered through a miserable offensive campaign in 2021, scoring 20 points or fewer five times. Much of the onus falls to quarterback Graham Mertz, who completed just 59.5 percent after a solid freshman campaign, but he has the luxury of running back Braelon Allen behind him. So his task will be to not fall down on the handoff as Allen rivals Ohio State's TreVeyon Henderson as the league's top runner. The Badgers will field their usual tough-as-nails defense, led by linebacker Nick Herbig. Road swings to OSU, Michigan State and Iowa will be tough and could be just enough to keep Wisconsin from climbing back to the top of the West. **Fun fact:** Wisconsin has shut out six foes since 2017, the best total in the Big Ten in that span.

Minnesota (8-4, 5-4) – As unlikeable as he is, P.J. Fleck has done a solid job turning Minnesota into a solid football program. Winners of 20 games over the last two full seasons, the Gophers have been very good defensively but take a few hits on that side in 2022. But those woes could be salvaged by the return of a healthy Mo Ibrahim in the backfield – you remember him, right? The guy who ran for 163 yards in the opener against Ohio State before being lost for the year to a knee injury. If he is full-go,

the Gophers could be a very tough matchup for opposing defenses. Minnesota must travel to Michigan State, Penn State, Nebraska and Wisconsin. **Fun fact:** Last season's loss to Bowling Green ended the Big Ten's longest nonconference winning streak since 1933 at 21 games.

Nebraska (6-6, 4-5) – You have to think this is a make-or-break year for Scott Frost, who has yet to guide the Huskers to more than five wins in a season in his four-year tenure in Lincoln. Texas transfer quarterback Casey Thompson should be a good fit for the offense, which will likely try to put more pressure on defenses downfield. The defense was very good in 2021 and returns most of its important pieces, but the most important off-season addition may be special teams coach Bill Busch. Nebraska had atrocious specialty units in 2021, ranking 11th or lower in every relevant measurement. Those little things could be the difference between winning and losing, especially when eight losses are by a single score. **Fun fact:** Nebraska is 5-20 in one-score games under Scott Frost.

Purdue (6-6, 3-6) – The Boilermakers are a trendy pick to contend for the West Division, but some of the important numbers from last year are trending the opposite direction. Quarterback Aidan O'Connell is a good one but will need to break in new weapons after stalwart wide receiver Milton Wright was declared ineligible. The transfer of running back Kobe Lewis from Central Michigan could add punch to a ground game that has lacked it, and the offensive line is a veteran group. The defense took some hits and may struggle to match last year's mark of 22.4 points per game allowed. The season opener at home against Penn State could set the tone for the season. **Fun fact:** The Boilermakers' five road wins were their most since 1943.

Illinois (5-7, 2-7) – There was a noticeable improvement in the Illini in Bret Bielema's second year as the Illini won five games and lost four by a single score. Can Illinois take the next step? The offense has been stagnant for a couple of years but may get a boost from quarterback Tommy DeVito, a Syracuse transfer. Running back Chase Brown is not a household name but could be by season's end. The defense improved from allowing 34.9 points per game in 2020 to 21.9 last year but has to replace a few important pieces. A manageable schedule, which includes Purdue, Minnesota and Iowa at home, could boost confidence, especially if Illinois can get out of the gate 4-0 (Wyoming, Indiana, Virginia and Chattanooga). **Fun fact:** Entering 2022, Illinois has allowed an average of 30 points or more per game seven times in the previous 10 seasons.

Northwestern (4-8, 1-8) – It's easy to look at the Wildcats and see another year of struggle, but it's been pretty consistent for Pat Fitzgerald to follow up a bad year with a good one. So maybe the Wildcats surprise. Still, without a proven quarterback and few weapons on the outside, the offense has the look of a unit stuck in the mud. The defense allowed 29.0 points per game, the highest ever under Fitz, but can at least hang its hat on a very good secondary, led by cornerback Cameron Mitchell. NU must face Iowa and Penn State on the road and Ohio State at home. **Fun fact:** Fitzgerald is the only player in league history to win a conference Player of the Year honor as a player and win Coach of the Year honors.

Time For Tinkering Over, Let The Season Begin

Here it is: the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Football Preview issue. What's on my mind as I look toward the 2022 Ohio State football season? Probably the same thing that is on yours. Defense!

From the moment Noah Ruggles knocked in that 19-yard field goal to cap an exciting Ohio State Rose Bowl win over Utah despite allowing 45 points, I have said to anyone who would listen to me: If Ohio State can play any sort of defense this season, they will be right smack in the middle of the CFP playoff discussion. And virtually everyone I spoke to agreed.

Just look at that Rose Bowl. The Buckeye offense, which could have mailed it in after the devastating loss at Michigan, put up 48 points against a solid Utah defense (the Utes entered the game 12th nationally in total defense and had beaten Buckeye vanquisher Oregon not once, but twice, 38-7 and 38-10) despite playing without two receivers who were first-round draft choices (Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson) in the spring.

Most of the key components of that offense – with the notable exception of the departed receivers who weren't missed in the slightest at the Rose Bowl, along with a couple of starters on the offensive line in Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere, both of whom were drafted, and tight end Jeremy Ruckert, also drafted – have returned.

Despite those losses, it's hard to not just assume that the offense will be even better in 2022, a lofty assumption when you consider that the Buckeyes led the nation in both total offense (561.5 yards per game) and scoring offense (45.7) in 2021 and finished third in passing offense with 380.9 yards per game.

A lofty assumption, but realistic just the same.

Let's start with Heisman finalist quarterback C.J. Stroud. He was able to post staggering numbers in 2021 even though he had never previously thrown a collegiate pass. He posted his passing line despite playing (or sitting in the case of the Akron game) while suffering from a nagging shoulder injury early in the season. While learning on the fly, he demonstrated the amazing passing touch that endeared him to Buckeye fans, his receivers and, no doubt, NFL scouts.

I just don't see how Stroud can't be even better in 2022.

"Now he's got a whole year under his belt," head coach Ryan Day said of his star pupil. "You're learning what to do. Now you're kind of learning why you do it. There is a deeper understanding of things.

"There is a little bit of a Rolodex of plays under his belt," Day continued. "We will look at some new concepts, too, and some things he can handle and maybe put a little more on his plate with what he can do at the line of scrimmage."

One thing I am curious to see is if Stroud runs the ball a little more in 2022. I'm not talking J.T. Barrett or Braxton Miller running. No one wants to put that type of wear and tear on a franchise player such as Stroud, let alone unnecessarily expose him to injury. But if there is a broad expanse of green in front of him and a sure first down or more – take it. A key play in the Rose Bowl win came when Stroud ran 10 yards to convert a third-and-8 that helped Ohio State score its first touchdown after falling behind 14-0.

Can Stroud improve without Wilson and Olave? I think any of us who saw the Rose Bowl and has followed the rise of receivers coach Brian Hartline knows the answer to that. Despite Wilson and Olave sitting out the Granddaddy (a practice I understand but ab-

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

solutely hate), Ohio State rewrote the Rose Bowl record book as Stroud completed 37 of 46 passes for 573 yards and six touchdowns with 15 of those completions going to Jaxon Smith-Njigba for 347 yards and three scores.

By the end of the regular season, I believed that Olave – one of the all-time great Ohio State receivers – was actually the third-best receiver on the team, with Smith-Njigba battling Wilson for the title of the best. In fact, Smith-Njigba ended up leading the team with school records of 95 receptions and 1,606 yards. He also set a school record with 15 catches in a hard-fought win at Nebraska.

No Wilson or Olave in Pasadena? No problem. Former prep stars Marvin Harrison Jr. and Julian Fleming combined for 11 catches against the Utes for 106 yards. No Wilson or Olave in 2022? I see no reason to think Harrison and Fleming can't take up right where they left off in the Rose Bowl.

And don't underestimate Emeka Egbuka. Despite all that star power in Hartline's room, it was Egbuka, yet another five-star who is entering his second year in Columbus, who led the team in yards per catch with a 21.2-yard average on his nine receptions. And even if he must battle for playing time at receiver this season, you have to love the excitement he has injected into Ohio State's kick-return team, leading the conference with a 29.0-yard average. How long before he breaks one?

As for replacing Ruckert, the Buckeye coaching staff can under-use Cade Stover as a receiver just as easily as they did Ruckert. On the flip side, Stover and Co. should be able to provide the same rugged blocking Ruckert did.

On the offensive line, Ohio State will miss Munford and Petit-Frere, but I like the guys slated to replace them in the young Donovan Jackson and the veteran Matthew Jones. Gone is the experiment of playing four tackles implemented last season to "get the best five players on the field."

Also gone is longtime offensive line coach Greg Studrawa, a remnant of the Urban Meyer era. There has to be a reason that the offensive-minded Day let Studrawa go after the season and replaced him with Justin Frye, who had success as line coach at UCLA.

It's not like the four-tackle approach was a complete failure, evidenced by the Buckeyes' lofty standings in offensive statistical categories. But there was always that feeling that the offense could have done even more, especially in terms of freeing up running back TreVeyon Henderson.

Which leads me to one of the main reasons I think the Ohio State offense will be even better this season. Henderson had an outstanding rookie campaign in 2021, rushing for 1,248 yards and scoring 19 total touchdowns. But even the most casual observer could see that Henderson was at his best in open space and not at his best when he had to create his own space.

Enter Frye, who led UCLA to top-15 rushing finishes the past two seasons. Get the line to open some holes, get full potential out of Henderson and the Ohio State passing attack most likely becomes even more effective with opposing defenses having another thing to deal with.

Who knows what kind of numbers the Buckeyes can put up this season? It's exciting to think about. But when you play the good teams, you can't always outscore them 48-45

like Ohio State did Utah.

Which brings us back to defense. In its two losses last season, against two quality opponents, the Buckeyes gave up an average of 38.5 points. That's a problem.

As I peruse the defensive roster, there seems to be a lot of talent there. A recruiting machine like Ohio State does not guess wrong on several classes of defensive recruits, so there must have been athletes there last season. Add in the fact you had players very publicly leaving the program in the middle of the season and it becomes clear that something was very wrong on that side of the ball, and it might not have been because of personnel.

It was a big enough problem that Day was forced to make the rare decision to tinker with his staff in the middle of the season, and at the close of the campaign he did more than just tinker, though he at least considered standing pat with the existing staff.

"I certainly considered that and considered a lot of things and then thought long and hard on it," Day said. "I felt like a fresh start was the right thing to do.

"I felt like that's kind of what we've been doing the last couple of years, tweaking it and bringing a guy in and moving a piece over here," he continued. "I really wanted to start fresh and have a system in place so that when something goes wrong, there's an answer to the system, that everybody believes in the system."

That "system" was brought in by veteran defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. In my more than 40 years covering the Buckeyes, I don't ever recall so much buzz surrounding an assistant coach. Not only is Knowles accomplished and innovative as a defensive coordinator he is, well – colorful. There was probably more offseason chatter about Knowles than even Stroud.

A lot of that has to do with the vision that remains for Buckeye fans of the OSU defense appearing in complete disarray last season that ranked 59th in total defense (372.9) and 97th in pass defense (246.2). The linebackers, whom Knowles will coach, looked bewildered, and none of the other units, including Larry Johnson's vaunted defensive line, looked particularly dominant.

"These guys are hungry," Knowles said of the Buckeye defense. "They're tired of being pointed at as being deficient in any way. They came here as the best players in the country, and they want to play. They want to be coached."

The "best players in the country." This has to be a much higher caliber of player than Knowles has worked with at such stops as Western Michigan, Mississippi, Duke or Oklahoma State. That raises expectations among the Buckeye faithful.

As I said, you look at the roster and there is some potential star power here.

In the back end, Denzel Burke, Ronnie Hickman, Josh Proctor, Kourt Williams and Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McCalister, along with Lathan Ransom and Cameron Martinez, offer hope.

Up front, where Buckeye fans have been waiting for the next Bosa or Young, the wait may be over with two of the brightest potential stars – Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau – looking ready to break out. Keep an eye on veteran Zach Harrison. He has had a competent career at Ohio State, but most would consider it a disappointment. Perhaps the slight of not

being named a captain this year will spur him to close strong.

"I think he's in a good place right now, better than he's been before," Johnson said. "He's worked extremely hard. He understands what the big picture is all about. Now it's just a matter of going out and doing it."

If he doesn't do it, there is plenty of other talent, young and old, to bolster the defensive line.

"If I'm lucky, I can play 12. If I'm lucky," Johnson said. "Normally we play anywhere between 10 to 11. But you know, we could get to 12 to play for us."

Knowles seems to agree about the depth and seems excited about his defensive line.

"I feel like our defensive line, the Rushmen, have a lot of depth – a lot of guys coming off the ball," Knowles said. "It really doesn't matter who's in there because we're aggressive and attacking."

"Our defensive line, when we unleash them – and we're going to find ways to unleash them – they get after the quarterback. And they get after it in the run game."

I even like the linebackers.

Projected starters Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers look solid to me. I'm hopeful all they needed was some better coaching. Cody Simon, Teradja Mitchell, Chip Trayanum, C.J. Hicks and Palaie Gaoteote provide plenty of depth. I am curious to see if the once highly rated Mitchell finally has a breakout season.

"Tommy and Steele have been solidifying things at linebacker for us," Knowles said. "I like Cody and Teradja mixing in, while Chip, C.J. and Palaie have been float-around guys for us. I feel like we have potential there for depth, but it is still developing."

I am also eager to see if and where local product Sonny Styles fits in.

It should be noted that Ohio State has had great success in recent years with coaches who have been brought in to shore up the defense.

When the defense struggled early in Urban Meyer's tenure, Meyer brought in Chris Ash, and the result was a national championship in 2014. After the epic porous performance by the defense in 2018, Day brought in Jeff Hafley, and the result was a trip to the playoffs.

Now it's Knowles' turn. If he lives up to the hype and his defense responds, the 2022 Ohio State football season could be something very special.

Big Year For Day

I don't think the honeymoon is over for Day. But I think this is an important season for him. Compared to his first two seasons, 2021 was certainly a step back, especially the humiliating loss to rival Michigan. But give him credit. He identified the problems of lack of leadership and lack of toughness and is addressing those issues. And I admire Day's willingness to make bold staff moves when necessary. Obviously, Day's acumen on offense and working with quarterbacks is, as Meyer would say, elite.

But this is his fourth season as head coach.

Woody Hayes won a national championship in his fourth year in Columbus. Earle Bruce came within a couple of points of a national championship in his first season. Jim Tressel won a national championship in year two, and Meyer won it all in year three. Only John Cooper (I give Luke Fickell a pass) failed to win or seriously challenge for the national crown in his first four seasons during the last 70 years.

Is this the year Day joins the Buckeye coaching greats?

FOR ATHLETES

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache, nausea, vomiting,
- balance problems, dizziness,
- double or blurred vision,
- sensitivity to light or noise, feeling
- sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy,
- just not "feeling right" or
- "feeling down," memory
- problems, confusion, and
- trouble sleeping.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON



<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

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