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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 22, 2022

Stroud Bounces Back In Win Over Michigan State

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

After his career at Ohio State has wrapped – likely after this season – there will be no shortage of things to remember quarterback C.J. Stroud by.

Some may recall his stellar career completion percentage – 71.5 through six games this season, a current Ohio State record. Others may point to his ballooning number of touchdown passes, now standing at 68 and having passed Justin Fields for the second most in Ohio State history. Many could bring attention to his staggering passing yards in under two seasons of play, with 6,172 under his belt – the fifth most ever for the program, with the potential to rise even further before the season comes to a close.

Perhaps his most definable trait, though, was on display in Ohio State's 49-20 win at Michigan State on Oct. 8. Stroud has a clear ability to dominate the Spartans. He finished with six passing touchdowns on 21-of-26 passing for 361 yards – helping lead the offense to 614 total yards – in another outstanding performance against Michigan State during Stroud's relatively brief career.

He also finished with more passing touchdowns than he did incompletions, the second time that Stroud has accomplished that feat. The first time was against – you may have guessed – Michigan State last season. In last year's contest, Stroud finished 32 of 35 for 432 yards and six touchdowns, arguably Ohio State's most dominant win of the season given the Spartans' ranking of No. 7 at the time.

Don't forget what happened in Stroud's first significant appearance for Ohio State back in the 2020 season, either. Playing at Spartan Stadium in front of no fans on Dec. 5, 2020 – a stark contrast to the announced attendance of 72,809 on Oct. 8 – Stroud entered the game in relief of Fields and, in his only recorded statistic of his true freshman season, he took off for a 48-yard rushing touchdown against Michigan State.

In total, Stroud – who is almost certainly off to the NFL after this season and is in contention to be the top pick in the draft – will have played in three games against the Spartans, totaling 793 passing yards on an 86.9 completion percentage (53 of 61) with 12 touchdowns and just one interception, an early pick-six in their most recent matchup.

A game like this is exactly what the doctor might have ordered for Stroud, who was coming off one of the shakier outings of his career in Ohio State's



SONNY BROCKWAY

SPARTY PARTY – Ohio State third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud had his second outstanding outing against Michigan State in as many years on Oct. 8, leading the Buckeyes to a 49-20 win in East Lansing, Mich., with 361 passing yards and six passing touchdowns, the third time in his career he's reached that Ohio State record TD mark.

49-10 win over Rutgers. He finished with just 154 passing yards – the fewest of his career as a starter – and completed just 59.1 percent of his passes. The Buckeyes still won the game on the back of a strong defensive performance and a five-touchdown game from running back Miyan Williams, so Stroud wasn't particularly concerned.

"At the end of the day as a quarterback, you just want to win," he said after the Rutgers game. "I'm not in it for my personal stats or anything like that. It's not about me, it's about this team and so many great people on this team that have decided to come play at this great university, and it

would be selfish for me just to do things that are unordinary or just dumb to put the team at risk.

"At the end of the day we just want to win. If that means that I don't throw for a lot of yards, for a lot of touchdowns, I couldn't really care less. I'm here to win."

Stroud got the best of both worlds against the Spartans, coming away with the yards, the touchdowns and the all-important win to move Ohio State to 6-0 (3-0 in the Big Ten)

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From The Message Board

Ohio State survived some early miscues to come away from Spartan Stadium with a 49-20 win over Michigan State on Oct. 8. We asked our staff and readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what their impressions were from the Buckeyes' first road win. Here are some of the responses:

"Workmanlike effort against a grossly overmatched opponent."

– **Terrier Buck**

"This team has taken toughness and physicality to a new level. The physicality of run blocking combined with the lack of sacks permitted by the tackles on passing downs is amazing. WR blocking for the run game has risen to the 2014 level. The passing game will live long in Buckeye memories. The D, especially the run defense, is championship-caliber D. I can't wait to bring on Penn State and TTUN. The other teams on the way surely can't compete with the Buckeyes."

– **AnthonyBuck**

"Kudos to the Buckeye fans that attended the game and appeared to sit in about 1/3 of the stadium! Hopefully, the fans helped the Buckeyes who were playing without their band."

– **Luckeeman**

"Our DBs practice all week against a very talented group of WRs. If they can do the job against them they should be able to handle covering the receivers of most of their opponents. Here's a thought. No matter what a CB does, an opposing team will likely complete a few passes. Are those passes good for 15-yard gains, or are they for 65-yard touchdowns? So far, our DBs have surrendered 18-yard completions, but not many long passes for touchdowns. We've seen our own Marvin Harrison Jr. make numerous incredible catches when he was covered like a blanket by the defender. If our CBs can be successful 90 percent of the time, that might be the best we can expect. If the offense scores 50 points a game, we will likely win every

game. If our DL would pressure the opponent's QB on every pass play, and get at least one sack every four plays, we would probably be thrilled ... and win every game. Bottom line: against MSU, the starting defense gave up one TD for six points. You can't blame them for the pick-six or the late TD against the backup unit. That's a winning performance. The big test ahead for this team is can this defense win that one game in which the offense struggles and only scores 21 points? They will face adversity at some point. It could be a horrible weather day or just a fired-up opponent that gets every possible break. It could be while playing Alabama or Georgia."

– **BYRON MCNUTT**

"I'm impressed how this team works the ball down the field with a great mix of runs and passes and over 600 yards of offense. Kudos to the offensive line for opening holes and protecting Stroud. Now we have two weeks to tighten up the D so no big plays as we move into the heart of our championship run."

– **John Lanning**

"McCord has a cannon arm, reminds me of Cardale's passing arm."

– **PeyoteBuck**

"As the weeks pass, I notice that the offensive line keeps coming up more and more in this space. These guys are for real, a genuine upgrade from last season, and they make everything on offense (including 614 total yards against the Spartans) possible."

– **Mcarr**

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State once again cruised to victory, this time on the road against Michigan State in a 49-20 win on Oct. 8. A multitude of Buckeyes on both sides of the ball played key roles in aiding the Scarlet and Gray to its first win away from Ohio Stadium this season and earned Buckeye Leaves from BSB staff and readers alike.

Andy Anders, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf is going with the quarterback that finished with more touchdown passes than incompletions and whose only interception came when his receiver ran the wrong route.

That is, of course, third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud. Stroud went 21 of 26 for 361 yards with a school-record-tying six touchdowns against Michigan State. Somehow, none of those six scores were his most impressive throw, either, as a third-and-8 dime to the outside shoulder of streaking second-year wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. up the right sideline netted the team 32 yards.

Stroud could be emerging as the front-runner for the Heisman Trophy, and his performance against the Spartans only helped that hype build. He spread the ball around in his usual fashion as well, with each of his three starting wide receivers finishing above 80 yards receiving.

Jack Emerson, BSB: Marvin Harrison Jr. was once again a dominant presence in the Ohio State passing game, but this time he made history.

Harrison elevated himself as the lone Ohio State receiver to have a trio of three-touchdown performances, surpassing Joey Galloway, who passed that benchmark twice in his career. Harrison hauled in seven receptions for 131 yards, producing his third three-score game in his last seven outings alongside his Rose Bowl breakout and his three-score game against Arkansas State earlier this season.

He showcased his tremendous body control while making several highlight-reel catches en route to his historic day. His outing against the Spartans served as his third game with over 100 receiving yards this season.

Braden Moles, BSB: It wasn't the best defensive performance by Ohio State this season, but the final 49-20 deficit looked closer than the game actually was. In reality, the defense limited the Spartans to just 202 total yards, and perhaps the biggest part of that defensive effort was defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. in limited action.

Hall finished the game with a team-high 2½ sacks and could have been credited with another that got wiped

off the board following a defensive penalty. He was everywhere against the Spartans, causing havoc inside, helping limit the Michigan State rushing attack to just 7 total yards, while quarterback Payton Thorne was just 11 of 18 for 113 yards.

Hall has dealt with some injuries this season and hasn't always been around for the defense, but he showed against Michigan State the impact he can have as a healthy contributor moving forward for Ohio State.

Mark Rea, BSB: I'll skip giving leaves to the obvious skill position players in lieu of awarding mine to the offensive linemen who made 614 total yards possible.

BSB Subscribers

Bstu9: When a QB has more TD passes than incompletions, is there any mystery about who gets the Buckeye leaf? C.J. Stroud pulled off this feat for the second year in a row against Michigan State, so Buckeye leaves to C.J. Bonus leaf for the offensive line for (again) giving Stroud all day to throw the ball.

Terrier Buck: I want to give a shout-out to Xavier Johnson. It seemed that he made some nice hard-nosed runs when Henderson was out of the game in the second half.

AnthonyBuck: Marvin Harrison for his Superman TD catch and a barrage of TD catches since the Rose Bowl. Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming for making this the best receiver trio in America and for their dominating run blocking. C.J. Stroud for his spectacular capability and playing with maturity and intelligence. The OL for being the best in America. The entire D for the run defense. Mike Hall Jr. for being the wrecking ball sacker. Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister for consistent excellence in the secondary, and the whole team for excellent outings in the midst of so many injuries.

Poster That Harley Built: Just about everyone except Jayden Fielding or Cameron Brown deserves a leaf. I'll go with Mike Hall Jr. That man is a one-man wrecking crew with a nose for the football.

John Lanning: Leaves to the usual suspects in this fun game to watch. Leaves should be given to Mark Pantoni for the consistent finding of talent for our Buckeyes. Look at the depth at running back and receivers. A great job helping our coaches build a great team. Keep up the great work.

PeyoteBuck: Gee Scott Jr. for his first career touchdown. Additional leaves to Mike Hall Jr. and Marvin Harrison Jr. All in all a great day.

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Statistics Say Ohio State Is On Historic Ride

Those who have read this column with any regularity over the past 30-some years know that I like statistics. To be more specific, I like statistics as they relate to history. For example, I enjoy knowing that Ohio State's 49-20 victory against Michigan State represented the 25th time in the 133-year history of the program that the Buckeyes had scored exactly 49 points, but the first time they had ever beaten an opponent by a final score of 49-20.

After the game, though, even a numbers guy like me was finding it difficult to keep up.

For example, Ohio State is working on a streak of five consecutive games in which it has scored at least 45 points, a feat no other Big Ten team has accomplished in three-quarters of a century. Michigan finished the 1946 season with a 58-6 win against the Buckeyes and then tallied more than 45 points in each of its first four games in 1947.

Before the 2013 season, no OSU quarterback in program history had ever thrown more than five touchdown passes in a single game. C.J. Stroud has now thrown for six touchdowns three times in his last nine games. He also has eight career games in which he has had at least five TD passes, and that is a Big Ten record. Anytime you set a Big Ten record, I think it's pretty special since the conference began playing football in 1896.

Would it interest you to know that only three Ohio State quarterbacks have ever thrown for 250 or more yards during a game against Michigan State in a series that dates to 1912? Stroud has done it twice – 432 last year to go with 361 this season – with J.T. Barrett (300 in 2014) and Mike Tomczak (256 in 1984) being the other two.

Conversely, TreVeyon Henderson became the 25th different OSU player since 1960 to enjoy a 100-yard rushing performance against the Spartans. Archie Griffin and Mike Weber each cracked the century mark three times vs. MSU during their careers while Chris "Beanie" Wells, Braxton Miller and J.K. Dobbins each did it twice.

Coming into this season, only Joey Gallo-way had more than one game during which he had three touchdown catches – three against Michigan State in 1993 and three against Purdue in 1994. Marvin Harrison Jr. now has a trio of three-touchdown performances, and he's accomplished that over his past seven games.

Harrison grabbed TD receptions of 19, 28 and 19 yards, abusing Michigan State cornerback Charles Brantley on all three. The first of those catches came in the first quarter when Harrison made a leaping catch despite coverage from Brantley so tight that it drew a flag for interference. After viewing the replay, ABC color analyst Kirk Herbstreit said simply, "That's just your player is better than theirs."

That catch gave Ohio State an early 7-0 lead, capping a seven-play, 80-yard drive that was set up by OSU safety Lathan Ransom, who made a nice over-the-shoulder catch in the end zone for his first career interception. That gives the Buckeyes interceptions in four straight games, the third year in a row they have had a four-game pick streak. They haven't had interceptions in five straight games since 2019 when they picked off an enemy pass in each of the first seven games of that season.

Of course, not every number is a positive one. For example, Michigan State has now lost four straight games by double digits for the first time since 2002. The Spartans, who host Wisconsin on Oct. 15, haven't suffered five double-digit losses in a row since 1917. Does anyone else think maybe there's some

second-guessing going on in East Lansing with regard to Mel Tucker's 10-year contract worth a fully guaranteed \$95 million?

More numbers to ponder.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Why No Targeting?

I've never made any secret that I'm no fan of college football's targeting rule. It's a wrong-headed approach to the noble undertaking of trying to eliminate head and neck injuries. But the rule has always been open for widely debated interpretation from conference to conference with some seemingly flagrant fouls going unpunished while others that appear either accidental or incidental prosecuted to the full extent of the rule.

I bring this up because of two incidents – each involving Henderson – that took place during the Ohio State-Michigan State game, neither of which drew a call of targeting.

The first occurred with 1:37 remaining in the first quarter with the Buckeyes holding a 14-7 lead. Henderson took off on a 13-yard run before being tackled by Spartans safety Jaden Mangham. Replays appeared to show Mangham and Henderson banged helmets with the MSU true freshman getting the worst of the exchange. He was prone on the field for several minutes before being immobilized and taken from the field on a cart.

Mangham underwent tests at a nearby hospital but thankfully was well enough to return to the Michigan State sideline in the second half.

I realize it would have been borderline ghoulish to flag a player while he lay motionless on the field, but it appeared that Mangham lowered his head while initiating contact with Henderson. That the play resulted in the offending player's injury should be immaterial, shouldn't it?

The second occurred on the first offensive play from scrimmage in the second half. Henderson broke off to his left when Brantley – who'd already had more than his share of an afternoon's worth of frustration – launched himself at the OSU running back, slamming his helmet into Henderson's right thigh. Henderson hobbled his way to the sideline and into the medical tent, and his afternoon was suddenly over.

Why was that not a targeting call on Brantley? He clearly launched himself at an opposing ball-carrier and made contact with the crown of his helmet. That he didn't launch himself at Henderson's head shouldn't matter. Isn't the rule designed to protect all of the player's body and not just the head and neck area?

A Few Observations

Since the OSU-Michigan State kickoff wasn't until shortly after 4 p.m. Eastern, I got to check in on a couple of early games, and here are some observations off the top of my head.

- Indiana might have given Michigan's future opponents a kind of blueprint on how to move the ball against the Wolverines. IU quarterback Connor Bazelak completed 18 first-half passes for 163 yards and a touchdown, dinking and dunking his way down the field against a Michigan pass defense that entered the game ranked 10th in the nation.

The result was a 10-10 tie at the half, and although the Wolverines eventually wore down the Indiana offensive line after the break – four of U-M's seven sacks came in the second half – opposing offensive coordinators surely took note of Indiana's first-half attack.

- Led by Heisman hopeful Hendon Hooker, who threw for 239 yards and two touchdowns and added 56 more yards on the ground, eighth-ranked Tennessee went to Death Valley and put a 40-13 beating on LSU. It was the first win for the Volunteers against the Tigers since 2005 and their largest margin of victory against a ranked opponent since 1995.

Tennessee won't have much time for celebrating, though. Top-ranked Alabama visits Knoxville on Oct. 15 carrying a 15-game winning streak against the Vols.

- First-year Oklahoma head coach Brent Venables might be wishing he'd stayed defensive coordinator at Clemson after his Sooners absorbed a 49-0 shutout against rival Texas in the annual Red River Rivalry. Longhorns QB Quinn Ewers (remember him?) contributed to the whipping by throwing for 289 yards and four touchdowns as Texas shut out Oklahoma for the first time since 1965.

It was also the worst shutout loss in OU program history and the first time the Sooners had failed to dent the scoreboard since a 29-0 loss to Texas A&M in 1998, ending a streak of 311 games in which Oklahoma had scored points.

- Speaking of snapped streaks, the University of Dayton went into its Oct. 8 game at Butler with a streak of scoring points in 501 consecutive games. But that one fell by the wayside, too, when the Bulldogs rolled to a 31-0 victory.

The Flyers hadn't been shut out since a 9-0 loss to Marshall in 1976. The Thundering Herd were coached that season by Frank Ellwood, who was a backup end on Ohio State's 1954 national championship team before switching to quarterback, and he was a captain of the 1956 team. Ellwood, who turned 87 in April, later was a defensive assistant at his alma mater from 1962-64, serving the last two years as defensive coordinator for Woody Hayes.

- Early in the Big 12 matchup between Texas Tech and No. 7 Oklahoma State, I saw a rule invoked that I never knew existed.

The Red Raiders drew first blood with a touchdown in the first three minutes to take a quick 7-0 lead. Then first-year Texas Tech head coach Joey McGuire's team perfectly executed an onside kick to grab possession near midfield. But officials threw a penalty flag because Oklahoma State player Demarco Jones saw the onside kick coming and alertly called for a fair catch.

According to the NCAA rulebook, "a fair catch of a free kick is a catch by a Team B player who has made a valid signal during an untouched free kick." OK. That part I knew. What I didn't know was that "during a free kick, a player of the receiving team in position to receive the ball has the same kick-catch and fair-catch protection whether the ball is kicked directly off the tee or is immediately driven to the ground, strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of the ball kicked directly off the tee."

As a result of Jones' quick thinking, Texas Tech was assessed a 15-yard penalty for illegal touching. Oklahoma State turned that possession into a game-tying touchdown and then went on to remain unbeaten with a 41-31 victory.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Ohio State Up To No. 2 In AP Poll

Coming off a 49-20 win over Michigan State on Oct. 8, Ohio State jumped up to No. 2 in the most recent AP top 25 poll on Oct. 9 behind No. 1 Georgia and ahead of No. 3 Alabama, which fell two spots. Georgia had the most first-place votes with 32, followed by Ohio State's 20 and Alabama's 11.

No. 4 Clemson and No. 5 Michigan rounded out the top five, with No. 6 Tennessee, No. 7 USC, No. 8 Oklahoma State, No. 9 Ole Miss and No. 10 Penn State in the top 10. The only other Big Ten team in the poll was newcomer Illinois, which checked in at No. 24. Purdue, Minnesota and Maryland also received votes.

No. 11 UCLA and No. 16 Mississippi State saw the biggest jumps, each moving up seven spots. The Bruins had a 43-32 win over Utah, while the Bulldogs dominated Arkansas, 40-17. No. 20 Utah and No. 22 Kentucky saw the biggest declines, each dropping nine spots.

RB Williams, Smith-Njigba Out Against Spartans

Ohio State will have to wait until after the off week to see an important pair of offensive players return. Running back Miyan Williams was listed as unavailable against Michigan State while wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba remained out.

In addition to Williams and Smith-Njigba, Ohio State's offense was without wide receiver Kamryn Babb and tight end Joe Royer, and offensive lineman Enokk Vimahi was the lone game-time decision. Vimahi ultimately ended up playing, receiving snaps when the game was well in Ohio State's hands.

On defense, Ohio State welcomed back cornerback Cameron Brown after he missed the last two games against Wisconsin and Rutgers, though cornerback Jordan Hancock remained unavailable in addition to defensive ends Tyler Friday and Omari Abor, linebacker Teradja Mitchell and cornerback Lloyd McFarquhar.

Running back Evan Pryor and linebacker Mitchell Melton remained out with season-ending injuries.

Lewis Does Not Travel After Gaining Eligibility

Ohio State placekicker Parker Lewis, who transferred from USC during the off-season, did not travel with the Buckeyes for their game against Michigan State despite being granted eligibility by the NCAA on Sept. 24. Although he was eligible for the Buckeyes' matchup against Rutgers on Oct. 1, he did not play against the Scarlet

Knights.

Lewis was left in Columbus for the road contest along with kicker Jake Seibert, line-backer Gabe Powers, running back Cayden Saunders, safety Jaylen Johnson, wide receivers Caleb Burton and Kyion Grayes, and offensive linemen Ben Christman, George Fitzpatrick, Jack Forsman, Avery Henry, Trey Leroux, Ryan Smith and Grant Toutant.

While several freshmen did not make the trip to Michigan State, 18 were with the Buckeyes for the matchup with the Spartans, including walk-ons kicker Jayden Fielding, running back TC Caffey and quarterback Mason Maggs.

Also joining on the trip were quarterback Devin Brown, running back Dallan Hayden, wide receivers Kojo Antwi and Kaleb Brown, tight end Bennett Christian, offensive linemen Carson Hinzman and Tera Theola, defensive ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson, defensive tackle Hero Kanu, linebacker C.J. Hicks, cornerbacks Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner, and safeties Kye Stokes and Sonny Styles.

Pair Of Buckeyes Limited Against Michigan State

While the Buckeyes did not have any surprises on the injury front outside of the availability report, several players played limited snaps.

After starting the last two games against Wisconsin and Rutgers, fourth-year safety Josh Proctor played behind third-year Lathan Ransom, who registered an interception on the game's opening drive. Proc-

tor did appear with the No. 2 defense when the game became out of reach, tallying a hurry on Michigan State backup quarterback Noah Kim.

Up front, it appeared that Mike Hall Jr. would miss his second game of the season after not participating in 11-on-11 during warmups. But Hall did take the field and excelled in a limited role against Michigan State, producing three tackles and 2½ sacks despite playing just seven snaps, according to Pro Football Focus.

Stroud, Harrison Make History Vs. Spartans

Just a few weeks removed from his three-touchdown outing against Arkansas State on Sept. 10, wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. separated himself from the pack in the Ohio State record books.

Harrison became the first Ohio State wide receiver to tally a trio of three-touchdown games, hauling in seven receptions for 131 yards and three scores against Michigan State. He surpassed Joey Galloway, who is the only other Ohio State receiver to complete the feat twice. He did so against Michigan State in 1993 (nine catches, 186 yards, three TDs) and Purdue in 1994 (seven catches, 95 yards, three TDs).

Harrison also registered a three-touchdown performance against Utah in the Rose Bowl last season. All three of Harrison's three-score games have come in the last seven contests.

Harrison's efforts could not be possible without a similarly dominant performance from quarterback C.J. Stroud, who pro-

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2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME	W, 21-10	ABC	3-2, 28-20 win over BYU
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE	W, 45-12	BTN	2-4, 42-20 loss to James Madison
Sept. 17	TOLEDO	W, 77-21	FOX	4-2, 52-32 win over Northern Illinois
Sept. 24	WISCONSIN	W, 52-21	ABC	3-3, 42-7 win over Northwestern
Oct. 1	RUTGERS	W, 49-10	BTN	3-3, 14-13 loss to Nebraska
Oct. 8	at Michigan State	W, 49-20	ABC	2-4, 49-20 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 22	IOWA	TBA	TBA	3-2, 27-14 loss to Illinois
Oct. 29	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	5-0, idle
Nov. 5	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	1-5, 42-7 loss to Wisconsin
Nov. 12	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	3-3, 31-10 loss to Michigan
Nov. 19	at Maryland	TBA	TBA	4-2, 31-29 loss to Purdue
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	12 p.m.	FOX	6-0, 31-10 win over Indiana

duced the third six-touchdown outing of his Ohio State career. Stroud finished the afternoon with more touchdowns than incompleitions, completing 21 of 26 attempts for 361 yards, six touchdowns and one interception.

Thanks to his performance against Michigan State, Stroud became the first quarterback in Big Ten history with three career games of six touchdowns. He did so against Michigan State last season – with all six coming in the first half – and in the previously mentioned Rose Bowl.

Stroud is just the fifth Ohio State quarterback to throw for six touchdowns in a game along with Justin Fields (vs. Clemson, 2020), Dwayne Haskins (vs. Indiana and Michigan, 2018), J.T. Barrett (vs. Bowling Green, 2016; vs. Kent State, 2014) and Kenny Guiton (vs. Florida A&M, 2013). His most recent outing was also the first time an Ohio State quarterback has thrown for six touchdowns in a true road game.

Stroud also surpassed Justin Fields on the Ohio State all-time passing touchdowns list, moving up to No. 2 with 68 scores. Just this season, Stroud – with 24 touchdown passes – has surpassed Art Schlichter (50), Braxton Miller (52), Haskins and Troy Smith (54), Joe Germaine (56) and Bobby Hoying (57), though Barrett's mark of 104 touchdown passes – also a Big Ten record – is likely out of reach.

Day Recounts 2020 Michigan State Matchup

The last time Ohio State made the trip to East Lansing in 2020, the circumstances were much different. Spartan Stadium's 75,005 seats sat vacant, and the Buckeyes were without 23 players – including key members of their offensive line and their defense – but their most notable absence came on the sidelines.

Ohio State entered Spartan Stadium

without its head coach, as Day was still quarantining from a COVID-19 diagnosis from the week prior. While the Buckeyes battled the Spartans, Day took in the game from his basement with his son, R.J.

During the game's first few drives, Day said he was on edge since he didn't have the same control over the game that he normally does. But the Buckeyes pulled away early, jumping out to a 28-0 halftime lead.

"It was in hand pretty quickly," Day said on 97.1 The Fan on Oct. 6. "But those first couple of drives, I was screaming and yelling and walking around the basement. As the game got away as it did there in the second, I got to at least enjoy it. I didn't say I relaxed because you never relax until the game is over."

While Day was unable to make the trip, defensive line coach Larry Johnson served as the acting head coach and notched his first career win while leading the Buckeyes to a 52-12 victory over the Spartans. Day said he addressed the team over Zoom prior to the game before ceding control of his squad to Johnson.

"I thought Larry and (strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti) did a great job," Day said. "That was a wild experience, but the guys handled it really well. The leadership was great."

Day Prioritized Composure, Focus Ahead Of MSU Game

Third-ranked Ohio State left the comforts of home for the first time this season when the Buckeyes made the trip to East Lansing, Mich., to take on Big Ten East divi-

sion rival Michigan State.

While the Buckeyes enjoyed a five-game homestand to kick off the season, Day noted that his squad had to lean on its veteran leadership in order to remain comfortable in the hostile environment of Spartan Stadium.

"(It's) a tough place to play," Day said. "Certainly a great stadium, great environment. It's going to be hard to win up there, it always is. It's the first time we're going on the road, so it's a new challenge for us, a new test. It's been unique that we're into week six here and haven't played a game on the road. It's been great, we've gotten into a good rhythm. But now, we have to go get our first conference road game."

Ohio State utilized the raucous Ohio Stadium crowd to jump out to a 5-0 start to the season while outscoring opponents 244-74 in that span. While the Buckeyes largely dominated their opponents through the first five weeks of the season, Day recognized the challenge of going on the road for the first time. For Day, there are two primary factors to stress when going on the road: composure and focus.

"The first thing is composure and focus when you go on the road," Day said. "You have to do a great job with leadership. The older guys that have been here before have to lead the way, because if you haven't been through that before it's hard to simulate going into a hostile environment."

"We have to show composure and focus. And we obviously have to play hard, that

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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goes without saying because there can be a lot more distractions when you go on the road.”

The Buckeyes certainly passed the road test, dominating the Spartans in the 49-20 win. Following the win, Day pointed to the team’s veteran leadership as the driving factor in surviving on the road.

“When you talk about winning on the road, leadership has to show up,” he said. “Veteran guys have to play veteran. It looked like that happened.”

OSU Names Players Of Game For Win Over Rutgers

Ohio State released its Players of the Game against Rutgers on Oct. 2 via Twitter, with an offensive, special teams, and two co-defensive players of the game announced.

Williams took home Offensive Player of the Game following a record-tying five-touchdown performance against the Scarlet Knights. He collected 189 yards on 21 carries, good for an average of 9.0 per carry. His 70-yard touchdown run in the third quarter – 1 yard short of his career long – put the Buckeyes up 35-10 and all but put any Rutgers comeback hopes to bed.

Williams’ efforts against the Scarlet Knights also earned him Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week honors, becoming the third Buckeye to pick up those honors along with Harrison, who earned the nod on Sept. 12, and Stroud, who picked up the weekly award a week later.

Attention! No BSB Print Issue Until Oct. 25

With the Ohio State football team enjoying an off day on Oct. 15, the next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will not be mailed until Oct. 25.

However, there is no need for BSB readers to miss any of the Ohio State action. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be manning the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on any breaking stories, plus posting additional features, between now and the next print issue dated Oct. 29.

Football recruiting is a 365-day-a-year process these days, and the BSB staff has stepped up its coverage of Ohio State’s quest for prep talent. The Ohio State coaches will be taking advantage of their “week off” to fan out across the country in pursuit of future Buckeyes, so be sure to check in regularly at BuckeyeSports.com.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day. Staffers and readers alike have also been reacting to recruiting efforts on the Forum’s football and basketball recruiting threads.

Many readers continue to report struggling to get their Buckeye Sports Bulletin in a timely fashion. The complete edition of

each issue is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems.

BSB subscribers can also upgrade their existing subscriptions to first-class mail in an envelope through football season for just \$19 and through recruiting season for \$29. Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 for credit card orders or send your check or money order to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Mention the “football” or “recruiting” upgrade.

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Fourth-year linebacker Steele Chambers was selected as the first Co-Defensive Player of the Game, collecting a game-high 11 tackles, eight solo, with two tackles for loss and an interception. His sideline-to-sideline run coverage abilities were on display against the Scarlet Knights, with Chambers collecting several of his takedowns outside the tackles when Rutgers’ ball carriers attempted to get around Ohio State’s defense.

Senior defensive end Zach Harrison grabbed the Co-Defensive Player of the Game spot, though he had only two tackles. He generated two turnovers, stripping Rutgers quarterback Evan Simon of the ball as he tried to scramble in the first quarter and deflecting the pass Chambers intercepted in the third.

Both of second-year punter Jesse Mirco’s punts were downed inside the Rutgers 20-yard line, and as such, he rounded out the honors by collecting Special Teams Player of the Game. Those two kicks covered 81 yards of distance for 40.5 yards per punt.

Mirco also converted a fourth-and-2 midway through the fourth quarter by tucking the ball and running outside as the Scarlet Knights’ punt block slanted inside. Mirco picked up 22 yards on the play before getting decked by a late hit out of bounds, which incited an altercation between Ohio State’s sideline and the Rutgers defense. Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano made his way to the sideline across the field, where he and Day got into a heated exchange. Both drew unsportsmanlike conduct fouls.

QB Brown, K Fielding Lose Black Stripes

Devin Brown and Fielding became the latest Buckeyes to shed their black stripes on Oct. 6. Fielding has kicked off 49 times for the Buckeyes this season, with 21 going for touchbacks. The average distance of his kicks is 61.3 yards, although three of his kickoffs have gone out of bounds.

Brown joined the program for spring camp as an early enrollee and has already

seen the field during Ohio State’s first six games this season. The freshman quarterback has appeared in two games this season – against Toledo and Rutgers – and collected one carry for 1 yard.

Prior to arriving in Columbus, Brown threw for 4,881 yards and 57 touchdowns while producing 430 rushing yards and eight rushing touchdowns during his senior season at Corner Canyon High School in Draper, Utah. He also spent the first three years of his high school career learning under former Ohio State quarterback Germaine at Queen Creek High School in Arizona.

Fielding and Brown became the 19th and 20th Ohio State players, respectively, to shed their black stripes this season, and Fielding was the first specialist this season to earn the honor. Brown was the second quarterback to lose his black stripe, joining walk-on Mason Maggs.

Former OSU CB Banks Sustains Spinal Injury

Former Ohio State cornerback Sevyn Banks was diagnosed with a spinal cord bruise on Oct. 3 and is expected to miss the next 5-6 weeks for LSU, where he transferred to during the offseason.

Banks was injured on the opening kickoff of LSU’s 21-17 win against Auburn on Oct. 1, which came on a tackle of Auburn kick returner Keionte Scott. Banks lowered his head to tackle Scott and hit it against Scott’s hip, which caused him to remain on the turf for several minutes before he was carted off of the field and taken to East Alabama Medical Center for further evaluation.

LSU head coach Brian Kelly confirmed on Oct. 3 that Banks did not suffer any structural damage to his spine as a result of the hit.

Former OSU Center Price Signs With Arizona

Former Ohio State center Billy Price found a new home on Oct. 4 after he was signed by the Arizona Cardinals to shore up their offensive line.

Price was signed off the Las Vegas Raiders’ practice squad after he joined the team

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If you have wanted to show your support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program but are unable to participate at the Scarlet, Elite or Elite-Plus level, now is the time to sign up at the Brutus level for just \$50. Brutus level VIPs are recognized in BSB twice a year, and we will be running the complete list of Brutus VIPs in the upcoming Michigan Issue.

VIP donors help Buckeye Sports Bulletin stay alive and vibrant.

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 41 years and what we plan to do in the future."

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

VIP subscribers enjoy a 20 percent discount at Conrads College Gifts. VIP subscribers also enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint," as well as a card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant.

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

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

And those who donate more than \$125 will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs.

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

The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite-Plus, Elite and Scarlet VIP subscribers. **Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman):** Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

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on Sept. 13. He did not appear in a game for the Raiders during his time with the organization.

Price was a first-round selection by the Cincinnati Bengals in 2018, where he spent the first three seasons of his NFL career. Price appeared in 42 games with the Bengals and started in 19 games before spending the 2021 season with the New York Giants, playing in all 16 games last year.

Price played for Ohio State from 2014-18, where he won the 2017 Rimington Trophy, which is awarded to the best center in college football as voted on by writers belonging to the Walter Camp Foundation, Sporting News and the Football Writers of America Association.

Safety Williams "Banged Up"

The Buckeyes have dealt with the injury bug for much of the first half of the season, and safety Kourt Williams is no exception.

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said on Oct. 4 that Williams has been "banged up," which has largely limited

his role in the defense. Williams – a captain for Ohio State – has played just 42 defensive snaps this season, compared to 78 special teams snaps.

"Kourt has been banged up," Knowles said on Oct. 4. "He's had some things going on that haven't given him the chance to fully compete to earn a position. He's a great leader and certainly we hope he comes along, but he's not completely healthy so we need to give him time to get better."

Knowles "Pleased," But Sees Room To Grow

Six weeks into the 2022 season, Ohio State's defense is showing marked improvements from last year. The Buckeyes have cracked the top 10 nationally in total defense, ranking No. 7 and allowing just 253.5 yards per game. That's down from 372.9 a season ago, and they are also No. 8 in pass defense, surrendering only 160.3 yards each contest through the air.

That has not satisfied Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, however. He's remaining focused on the next stop,

the next progression, and he sees plenty of places for his unit to improve.

"I'm pleased," Knowles said. "We have seen some success. But defense is such a right-now proposition. Failure is not an option. It's just drive, drive, push, push to be better. Never really look back on any of that until the end of the season."

One area Knowles wants to see better numbers is on third down. An inventive play caller, Knowles has developed a reputation for having some of the nation's best defenses when it comes to getting off the field in

those situations.

At Oklahoma State last season, the coordinating performance that landed him the Broyles Award as the nation's best assistant coach, the Cowboys ranked No. 4 in the country and No. 2 among Power Five schools in defensive third-down conversion percentage. Ohio State was eighth overall and fourth in the Power Five following the win over Michigan State – good on paper, but short of Knowles' expectations.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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"We certainly have higher aspirations than that," Knowles said. "We're doing well. But it is a critical part of our system, so our guys are trained from the beginning on how to hold the line and know where that down is. Because to me, that's the game of defense is getting the ball back to the offense."

Sack production could help that number tick upward. The Buckeyes have just 14 quarterback takedowns in 2022, tied for 46th in college football. Knowles has been good with the pressure his defensive line has applied to opposing signal callers but wants to tweak his scheme so the rush gets home more often.

"I'm pleased with what we're doing up front," he said. "I think it's my job to continue to create more opportunities. To me,

it's a function of coverage and rush working together. It's a matter of the quarterback having to hold the ball. When they're getting rid of the ball quickly or keeping people in in the protection, nobody's guys are going to have a chance to get there."

His largest worry, on the whole, aligns with one of Day's mantras in maintaining competitive stamina. Mistakes happen in a game, and Knowles attempts to alleviate his players from that burden. He tells them on game days their mistakes are his, he said, which he believes gives them the ability to go out and play fast, without worry.

How his players respond to a big play or when the team is ahead, however, remains at the top of his list of concerns.

"You can play well, you can play great for a long time in the game. But it only takes one play," Knowles said. "It only takes one play for something to go wrong or a 50/50 ball to go up in the air. My biggest concern is that we continue to compete and have that mentality on defense of stopping them on that play, no matter what the score is."

Overall there's a sense of immediacy with Knowles, found not only in his quotes to the press but in his aggressive play calling and instruction to his players.

"Like I said when I got here, we don't have three or four years to put this system in, to make it into a premier defense," Knowles said. "It's got to happen right now, this season. So it's my job to keep pushing that."

Knowles defense took another step in the right direction against Michigan State, holding the Spartans to just 202 total yards – 97 of which came in the fourth quarter with the game out of reach.

DL Harrison Comments On Move Inside Vs. Rutgers

Although he has spent much of his career playing on the edge of the defensive line, defensive end Harrison showcased his versatility during Ohio State's 49-10 win over Rutgers.

As mentioned, the Lewis Center, Ohio, native played a hand in a pair of Buckeye takeaways, but he didn't operate from his natural position on the end of the line – but rather from a down stance in the three-tech. Harrison emphasized that he's enjoyed his time inside and that he's willing to bump into the interior whenever needed.

"I told (Larry Johnson) that I like it and if he wants to put me in there, I have no problem rushing from a three-tech," Harrison said. "I'm working on it a little bit at practice, doing some one-on-ones at three-tech."

Harrison (6-6, 272) noted that his length and athleticism give him a newfound advantage when playing out of the three-tech, which he may not have had while rushing from the end. His utilization of that length aided the Buckeyes in both of his forced takeaways.

After the game, Harrison noted that

playing against centers and guards differed from his typical assignment against tackles.

"It's just different," he said. "One thing, there's not a lot of space, which definitely is sometimes hard for me. I'm a longer guy. I've got long arms, and a lot of the inside guys don't have that length. I feel like I can use that and use my quickness and speed to get around those guys. You can tell it's a little different to rush against. Normally, they block guys who are 300-something pounds with a little shorter build. I feel like I've got an advantage on the inside, rushing against guards and centers."

His move to the interior is felt by his fellow defensive linemen. Second-year defensive end Jack Sawyer – who also mans the team's "Jack" position – said that Harrison lining up inside gives the Buckeyes a unique threat up front.

"His speed and his length, guards aren't used to seeing guys that big and that fast," Sawyer said. "I think it's a mismatch 90 percent of the time."

Harrison primarily stayed in his natural position on the edge against Michigan State, compiling one tackle and a hurry in the win.

Andy Anders, 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.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1982

Ohio State's 6-0 loss at home to Wisconsin on Oct. 9 dropped the Buckeyes to 2-3 on the season, their worst start since 1967. The Buckeyes started out 2-3 that year also, falling to Arizona, defeating Oregon, losing to Purdue, barely edging Northwestern 6-2 and dropping a game to Illinois.

It could have been a good sign that the Buckeyes came back to win their final four games that season, including a 24-14 win over Michigan, to finish 6-3 overall and 5-2 in the Big Ten.

The loss to Wisconsin was Ohio State's third consecutive loss, which marked the first time the Buckeyes lost three straight games since 1971.

35 Years Ago – 1987

Indiana (4-1, 2-0) ended 36 years of frustration against Ohio State, going 0-30-1 in that span, by manhandling the Buckeyes (3-1-1, 1-1) 31-10 at Ohio Stadium on Oct. 10. The Hoosiers outscored Ohio State, 21-0, in the second half.

"You just saw an Ohio State football team in the second (half) get the devil knocked out of it," said a solemn OSU coach Earle Bruce afterward. Bruce was not in the mood for conversation and did not stay long to mingle with the media.

"They did what they wanted to, offensively and defensively against Ohio State in the second half," Bruce said. "That's about it. I've been associated (with Ohio State) since I came in as a freshman in 1949, and it's got to be the darkest day I've seen in Ohio State football."

30 Years Ago – 1992

With 17 incoming freshmen and coming off a dismal 12-21-5 record, the 1992-93 edition of the Ohio State ice hockey team appeared to be facing a rebuilding season.

Such was not the case, according to longtime head coach Jerry Welsh.

"It's not so much a rebuilding season; it's more accurately restructuring than rebuilding," said Welsh, who was beginning his 18th season as head coach at his alma mater. "We've made some positive moves to strengthen our situation immediately."

25 Years Ago – 1997

It was a classic Big Ten football game. It just didn't go Ohio State's way.

After watching seventh-rated Ohio State grab a 10-point lead in the third quarter, No. 2-ranked Penn State flexed its considerable muscles to grind out a pair of touchdowns and then masterfully slammed the door on OSU's late charge to take a 31-27 win on Oct. 11 at State College, Pa.

"You just feel kind of empty," said OSU flanker Dee Miller minutes after the final gun. "You put everything out on the field, and

you have a real good collegiate game, a big-time game. But it goes like that sometimes, and you just have to regroup.

"We can't feel sorry for ourselves."

20 Years Ago – 2002

Autumn quarter classes began at Ohio State on Sept. 25, and it seemed likely that the OSU football team would be taking some detailed notes in the wake of its Oct. 5 showing at Northwestern.

The fifth-ranked Buckeyes prevailed 27-16 in their first Big Ten road game of the season, but it was not easy.

Ohio State (6-0, 2-0 Big Ten) allowed a pair of long special teams returns while freshman tailback Maurice Claret lost three fumbles. Those factors allowed heavy underdog Northwestern (2-4, 0-2) to stick around until the closing minutes.

OSU coach Jim Tressel outlined his recipe for success in Big Ten road games, noting his team won despite falling down on nearly all three phases of the game.

"We talked going into this football game that if you want to win on the road in this league, the first thing you have to be is superior in the special teams, and we weren't," Tressel said. "We always say you have to play restless defense. I think when we were at the point where we had given up three field goals, we were OK. But it was disappointing to see that (third-quarter) touchdown.

"And then, offensively, we always say you have to be mistake-free on the road. You cannot go on the road in the Big Ten and make mistakes. We turned it over three times. That was disappointing."

15 Years Ago – 2007

Ohio State announced that it would retire the No. 99 to honor program legend Bill Willis in ceremonies at the Ohio State-Wisconsin game on Nov. 3.

A Buckeye lineman from 1942-44, Willis was a three-year starter playing both offense and defense. The 6-2, 215-pound Columbus native was a key part of the Buckeyes' first national championship team in 1942 and the first African-American to win All-America honors as a Buckeye when he did so in 1943 and '44.

"His record of accomplishment on the field and the class and dignity he exudes exemplify the qualities of Ohio State," OSU athletic director Gene Smith said. "He is the consummate gentleman. Recognizing his career and legacy as an athletics pioneer by retiring his jersey number is a way to salute not just the Willis family, but the Buckeye program overall."

10 Years Ago – 2012

Some had thought junior forward Deshaun Thomas would be working out with an NBA team at this point after a string of performances he gave during Ohio State's deep NCAA Tournament run in the 2011-12 season. Opting to return to the Buckeyes instead,

Thomas enjoyed being one of the more recognized talents in college basketball.

The preseason accolades started Oct. 1 when Thomas was named a part of Sporting News' 2013 preseason All-America first team. Thomas was joined by Creighton forward Doug McDermott, Indiana forward Cody Zeller, North Carolina forward James Michael McAdoo and Lehigh guard C.J. McCollum.

Thomas became one of the closest-watched players in the country after averaging 19.2 points per game in five NCAA Tournament contests, helping the Buckeyes advance to the second Final Four of head coach Thad Matta's Ohio State tenure.

Five Years Ago – 2017

The Jan. 10 announcement that Kevin Wilson had been hired as Ohio State's new offensive coordinator, coming in the wake of a 31-0 loss to Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal on New Year's Eve, had been met with excitement by fans who had seen the offense struggle in the final three games of the season.

Less heralded was the OSU press release a week earlier that Ryan Day had been hired as the team's quarterbacks coach/co-offensive coordinator, replacing Tim Beck.

Although he had spent the previous two seasons as the QB coach for Chip Kelly in the NFL, the first with Philadelphia and the 2016 season with the San Francisco 49ers, Day was a relative unknown.

But as the regular season hit the midway point, Day's input had a profound impact on how the Buckeyes ran their offense.

"Ryan Day brought that whole package to us," head coach Urban Meyer said. "It's been dynamic. The big hits we had against Indiana were the same package. So now (we have) about seven, eight different concepts off of that.

"A lot of times you get questioned about when you hire a coach, do you let them enhance your offense? Ryan Day enhanced our offense. It's been very successful"

One Year Ago – 2021

Former Ohio State and then-Jacksonville Jaguars head coach Urban Meyer spent a good portion of early October apologizing to his Jaguars team, his family and Jacksonville owner Shad Khan after a viral video surfaced Oct. 2 that showed a young woman dancing close to his lap at his restaurant in Columbus.

Meyer apologized in an Oct. 4 team meeting and also stated multiple times it was stupid to put himself in such a compromising position Oct. 1, one day after the Jaguars lost a 24-21 decision at Cincinnati.

"I just apologized to the team and staff for being a distraction," Meyer told reporters Oct. 4. "Just stupid, and so I explained everything that happened and owned it. Just stupid. I should not have put myself in that kind of position."

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 49, Michigan State 20

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on handling business against the Spartans: "It didn't exactly start the way we wanted it on offense. Nobody panicked at all. I thought the way the defense played – Lathan (Ransom) got the early interception, and across the board, we gave up a couple things outside and a couple of penalties, but after that, they did a great job of stopping the run. I thought the defensive line was strong. Tommy (Eichenberg) and the linebackers were excellent. Across the board, our guys played strong."

Michigan State head coach Mel Tucker on building his team toward Ohio State's level: "I definitely understand it. I've been at Georgia, I've been at Alabama, so I know what that type of program looks like. I know what it feels like, I know what goes into it. We're not there yet, but we'll get there."

Ohio State third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud on why the team handles adversity well: "I think the reasoning for that is that practice is harder than the games, if you ask me. That's not always the case, because you do play against great teams and Michigan State was a good team. They're not terrible. They haven't lost big except for one time (against Minnesota), and their backs were on the ropes. Knowing that we had to come in and play a team that didn't have anything to lose, it was tough. During the week, you definitely have to push greatness and perfection because once you get in the game it just becomes rhythm."

Day on if he wonders what the offense would look like fully healthy: "Yeah, sometimes. But also, I feel like it's

rare in today's day and age that you deal with a full deck, just the way the game's played. Typically you have to play depth, and we know that. When we talk about it in the preseason like, 'Who's your tailback going to be?' we always say, 'You're going to need two.' I don't know how it's going to shake out, but we're going to need two. How about our receivers? We're going to need five. We just know we're going to need this many guys because things happen."

Ohio State fourth-year linebacker Eichenberg on how second-year defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. frees him up on blitzes: "He's really disruptive as a pass rusher, but also great in the run game too. But I think the O-line focuses on him, and it kind of frees up other people, too."

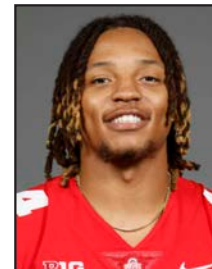
Ohio State second-year wide receiver Marvin Harrison, Jr. on the Buckeyes' stable of wide receivers: "It's scary to me, so I can only imagine what it is like to the rest of the country. We just like to go out there and have fun. We put a lot of work in during the week to be able to succeed come Saturday. So that's really all it is – seeing the hard work pay off, get to have fun on Saturdays."

Harrison on why he excels in the red zone: "That's one of Coach Day's things he tries to emphasize to us: We've got to score touchdowns in the red zone. We can't have field goals. We've got to score touchdowns. You're just trying to develop that confidence that he has in me to come to me in the red zone and make the plays."

Hall on his favorite line position to rush from: "I'd have to say three-(tech-

nique), because it just gives me a lot of leeway where I can go inside or out. It just gives me a lot of space to work with."

Ohio State fourth-year safety Ronnie Hickman on the ceiling for OSU's defense: "The sky's the limit. We're not even fully healthy, so we've just got to use



Ronnie Hickman

this bye week to get fully healthy, defensively and offensively. But defense specifically, we know what we can do. We've shown some of the flashes of what we can do, but there's still a lot of work that needs to be put in."

Stroud on being the first Ohio State quarterback to throw for six touchdowns in three different games: "All glory has to go to God because I wouldn't be at a place like Ohio State, 2,000 miles away from home, somewhere where I'd never thought I would be, if it wasn't for him. I'm super blessed to be able to go out there with my brothers. But it's not just me, it's my linemen. It's my receivers running great routes. It's my tight ends blocking and running great routes. And my running backs toting the ball so well. It's a small part on me."

Michigan State linebacker Cal Haladay on Stroud and Ohio State's offense: "They're a talented and really well-coached team. They've got explosive players all over the field, and it's not just (Stroud). I mean he's a heck of a player – Heisman candidate – but he's got a really good WR room, really good backs and a really good O-line. Just a really good offense and they're tough to stop."

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WR Harrison Has Another Strong Outing

Continued From Page 1

entering the off week, though head coach Ryan Day attributed it to a team effort.

"It all starts with the running game," he said. "When you're running the ball well, then it certainly opens up a lot of different things. I give our offensive staff a lot of credit."

"It starts off with Kevin Wilson. Kevin Wilson is one of the best offensive minds in college football and continues to come up with great game-plans in that meeting room with Brian Hartline and Tony Alford. You think about some of the guys we have in that room – Justin Frye – we have some really bright minds in there, so you go in there and you come up with different ideas and the best idea wins. But it all starts with the physicality up front and running the football effectively, and that opens up everything else."

While the final stat line indicates a dominant game for Ohio State – and it was, make no mistake – the start of the game was not as clean. During Ohio State's second drive of the game, Stroud delivered a ball intended for sophomore wideout Emeka Egbuka near the sideline that was instead intercepted by Michigan State cornerback Charles Brantley and returned 32 yards for a touchdown.

"(The interception) was a little bit of a miscommunication there," Day said. "I could have done a better job helping the two

of them. But I thought the best thing was it was like nothing ever happened. We kept rolling. That shows confidence – I'm proud of those guys."

It was the first pick-six thrown by an Ohio State quarterback since Dwayne Haskins had one against Maryland on Nov. 17, 2018, but it would fortunately be the final miscue of the day for Ohio State's offense that would find the end zone on the next six drives, five of which ended on a touchdown pass from Stroud.

It showed a certain resiliency from Stroud in not just recovering from the ill-fated throw but from the previous performance against Rutgers and responding with one of the finest games in his Ohio State career.

"It's just the next play," Stroud said. "There's no positive in thinking about negative things that happened to you in the past. I definitely think that has to do with some of my off-the-field character, just that I'm prayed-up. At the end of the day, mistakes happen. Plays happen and you just have to bounce back. It's always about the answer. It's never about how you start, it's how you finish."

"I think last year taught us that a lot. And then just my life growing up, just perseverance and working through tough times and tough plays."

In throwing six touchdown passes, Stroud – a Heisman candidate for the second consecutive season, if not the outright favorite this time around – became the first



SONNY BROCKWAY

RACKING THEM UP – Against the Spartans, Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. had the third three-touchdown performance of his career – all coming in his last seven games – breaking an Ohio State record he had tied with former Buckeye Joey Galloway earlier this season.

player in Big Ten history to accomplish the feat three times. He also did so against Michigan State last season and in last year's Rose Bowl, and with the way the offense and Stroud are operating right now, it likely won't be the last time this season he shows out.

"For him to throw it that accurately (in the wind), that was really well done on the

road," Day said. "He was just clicking. You could see the timing – he was able to step up in the pocket. A big part of that is the protection. Our offensive line did a good job giving him a pocket, and when you do that, he can do some damage. I thought he embraced the game plan, worked it, had a good thought process the whole game. Had a good look in his eye."

"That's one heck of a day on the road, especially a program as proud as Michigan State and coming in here as our first road game – a big day for C.J."

'Route Man Marv' Rides Again

Stroud had another stellar performance quarterbacking the Ohio State offense, but it couldn't have been done without his group of seemingly otherworldly receivers who are not content just bringing in catches, but doing it in ways that drop the jaws of everybody from their teammates to the opposing team.

One of those receivers who made those kinds of catches against Michigan State was wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., who continued his breakout performance this season with seven receptions for 131 yards and a trio of athletic touchdown snags.

"He's been blessed with a lot of gifts and talent, but he has unbelievable discipline and skill, and when you take a tremendous amount of talent and mix it with discipline and skill, that's what you're seeing right there," Day said of Harrison. "Did we see all that in recruiting? We saw some of it, but the rest of it is a credit to him as a person and his work ethic."

His first touchdown grab came on Ohio








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State's first offensive possession of the day. The Buckeyes faced a second-and-13 from the MSU 19-yard line, and Harrison stayed with his man down the right side of the field before turning around, high-pointing the ball and falling backward into the end zone, completing the catch despite interference from a Michigan State defender.

His second score was a simple grab in the middle of the field before outpacing a quartet of defenders for a 28-yard score in the second period, but it was his third touchdown of the game that will be played on highlight reels for years to come. The Buckeyes had just picked up a first-and-10 early in the third quarter leading 35-13, and Stroud dropped back to pass and immediately identified Harrison, who was already streaking toward the end zone's left pylon. Harrison turned around and jumped at the last moment, and through contact, reached down toward his ankles to snag the ball out of the air and tiptoe into the end zone for the 19-yard score.

"I was surprised," Day said. "Maybe if they saw my face on camera I was like, 'What was that?' That was a tremendous catch. We do see things in practice, but that was special."

Harrison – who also had an impressive 32-yard grab over his shoulder in the second quarter – said he sometimes surprises himself with the catches he makes but said he also has to have the confidence that he can make those grabs.

"Talking to Coach (Hartline), we talk a lot about going up and getting the ball, being aggressive at the catch point, using my size

and strong hands so just practice," he said of how he pulls off his highlight receptions.

With Harrison's scores, he broke the Ohio State record for games with at least three receiving touchdowns, surpassing the former record holder, Joey Galloway, after tying the record just four weeks prior against Arkansas State. It's the third time in the past seven games that Harrison has pulled in three touchdowns, and Stroud agreed with Day that Harrison's work ethic is what gives him an advantage.

"Staying after practice, the summer workouts and the summer routes that we've thrown – you just have to give him a chance," Stroud said. "He's so dynamic out there, and he always has a 50/50 chance, but I think it's more like 70/30 just because he's so big and strong. I definitely think it's the work ethic that he has."

Schedule Ramps Up After Off Week

After heading on the road to take down Michigan State, the Buckeyes are being rightfully rewarded with an off week, bisecting the regular season into two clear halves.

The first half featured little in the way of resistance for Ohio State. The season-opening contest against Notre Dame on Sept. 3 – then a top-five matchup – was interesting for the first two quarters, but the Fighting Irish petered out in the final two frames for an ultimately underwhelming 21-10 win for the Buckeyes. Now several weeks removed from the game, the win doesn't appear as strong in retrospect given Notre Dame's home loss the following week to Marshall.

Ohio State stayed home for the next four games that all featured varying degrees of blowouts. The Buckeyes displayed total domination in a 45-12 win over Arkansas State on Sept. 10 and a 77-21 decision against Toledo on Sept. 17. Ohio State then opened conference play with a 52-21 thrashing against Wisconsin on Sept. 24, followed by the previously mentioned 49-10 win over Rutgers.

With the 49-20 win over the Spartans, Ohio State enters the off week with some answers and even more questions about the overall potential for this team. The offense has excelled, with several obvious examples in Harrison's pair of three-touchdown outings, Stroud's games against Toledo and Michigan State, or Miyan Williams' record-tying five touchdown runs against the Scarlet Knights.

The defense, viewed as a work in progress as the season began, appears to be a nearly completed project under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, allowing just 15.7 points per game and 253.5 total yards per game, with several standouts on that side of the ball including linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers, defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. – who had 2½ sacks against the Spartans – and nearly every member of the revamped secondary, though the cornerbacks remain a concern with both the quality of play and number of players available.

Now, the true season begins for Ohio State. Coming out of the week off, the Buckeyes will host Iowa on Oct. 22 – one of the top defenses in the nation – before traveling

to Happy Valley to play Penn State on Oct. 29. The Nittany Lions looked shaky in their season-opening win over Purdue but have since dominated en route to a 5-0 record and a No. X ranking in the AP top 25 poll.

Northwestern (1-5, 1-2 Big Ten) on the road on Nov. 5 and Indiana (3-3, 1-2) at home on Nov. 12 will provide the last tune-up opportunities of the season for the Buckeyes before traveling to face Maryland on Nov. 19. The Terps are 4-2 (1-2) to begin the season.

Of course, everyone in and outside of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center knows what follows. Michigan is looking to take a win over Ohio State in consecutive seasons for the first time since winning back-to-back games in 1999 and 2000 – the latter the most recent win in Columbus for the Wolverines – when it enters Ohio Stadium on Nov. 26 for the traditional noon kickoff.

Preparation for the regular-season finale surely began days after – if not the day of – Ohio State's 42-27 loss to Michigan last season, but the Buckeyes' current off week may allow some additional time to cram before the second half of the season begins and the Wolverines begin rising over the horizon.

"We're looking forward to getting to the bye week, looking forward to getting guys healthy and reflecting on the things that we did well in the first six games, but also projecting where we need to be, where we need to go," Day said. "It's great to get this win on the road and get into the bye week."

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OSU Tackle Hall Dominates In Limited Role

Entering its week-six meeting with Michigan State, questions swirled regarding Ohio State's ability to finish on pass-rush opportunities.

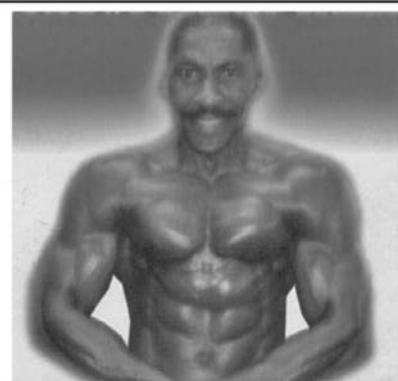
The Buckeyes had tallied just 10 sacks prior to their trip to East Lansing, Mich., ranked tied for 68th in the nation and eighth in the Big Ten. However, sophomore defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. had something to say about that.

Although Hall ceded a good deal of snaps to more veteran members of the defensive line such as Taron Vincent, Ty Hamilton and Jerron Cage, he made the most of his opportunities, finishing with three tackles and 2½ sacks against the Spartans. Hall noted that he feels he's improved since last season but that he can't get lost in the moment and needs to continue to grow as a player.

"I feel like I did great my first games, but like Coach (Ryan) Day preaches, you can't worry about the last one because you get too big in your head," Hall said. "That affects how you play."

Hall got after Michigan State quarterback Payton Thorne early. Michigan State drove into Ohio State territory down 14-7 in the first quarter. The Spartans faced a crucial third-and-6 from the Buckeyes' 31-yard line. As Thorne dropped back and surveyed the field, he was quickly pursued by Hall and line-backer Tommy Eichenberg from the heart of the Michigan State offensive line. Facing the pressure, Thorne had no other choice but to eat the sack from the pursuing duo. The combined sack pushed Michigan State out of field-goal range and forced head coach Mel Tucker to turn to his punter rather than his placekicker.

Thorne could not stay away from Hall much longer, as the pair met twice in the backfield in the second quarter. The first time, Hall, once again, knocked the Spartans out of field-goal position as he brought Thorne to the turf on third-and-7 from the OSU 33-yard line. However, an illegal hands-to-the-face penalty on defensive end Zach Harrison negated Hall's sack and gave Michigan State 15 free yards, leading to a Spartan score to make it 21-13.



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GAME NOTEBOOK Jack Emerson

Although Hall's second sack of the afternoon did not count, he made up for it just a few minutes later.

With the Buckeyes ahead 35-13 and the seconds dwindling away in the first half, the Spartans tried to get on the board before the break. As Thorne dropped back to pass on the drive's first play, Hall was there to meet him in the backfield and sent the quarterback to the turf for a loss of 7 yards. From there, Tucker elected to play it safe for the rest of the half.

Hall was not just satisfied with his first-half onslaught. With the Spartans facing third-and-15 from their own 20-yard line on their first drive of the third quarter, Hall put a bow on his big afternoon. As Thorne rolled to his right, he ran directly into Hall, who punished him with a crushing hit and ended his day.

"He wasn't even looking my way," Hall said. "I just saw him drifting over, and I was like, 'Yeah, I've got to get him now.'"

Hall upped his sack total to a team-best 4½ and 7½ tackles for loss on the season. As Hall has shown strides in his second year with the Buckeyes, especially as a pass rusher, he pointed to his hard work in the offseason as the catalyst for his fast start.

"I worked on really just my explosiveness and getting off the ball," Hall said. "Coach (Larry Johnson) is just doing extra drills and all that, and really just using my hands."

Buckeye Offense Going The Distance

Although the Buckeyes once again dazzled offensively, their 49-point outing was not thanks to advantageous field position.

Six of Ohio State's seven scoring drives came on possessions of 75 or more yards, three of which started within the Buckeyes' own 10-yard line. Ohio State's long drives allowed its offense to rack up 614 total yards.

The Buckeyes also shook off an early-game pick-six, which was caused by miscommunication between quarterback C.J. Stroud and wideout Emeka Egbuka. Day praised his unit's determination against the Spartans.

"You get into a rhythm in the game," the coach said. "For instance, we had the early turnover and nobody batted an eye. I just think that's the way we practice and we have a certain level of expectation of efficiency, and if it doesn't happen we're surprised, but when it does, we don't fret over it. We just move on and go from there. I think confidence is the most important thing in the pass game."

Although the Buckeyes dealt with a long field on a majority of their scoring possessions, they once again showcased their explosive nature. All but one of their scoring drives took less than five minutes off the game clock. Their drives of 98, 91 and 96 yards took just 2:44, 4:36 and 5:03 off the clock respectively.

Ohio State also finished drives of 80, 75, 75 and 50 yards, all of which ate up less than five minutes of clock.

It's important to note that the Buckeyes were without the services of star wide receiver



SONNY BROCKWAY

WRECKING BALL — Ohio State sophomore defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr.'s playing time was limited in the Buckeyes' 49-20 win over Michigan State, but he still led the team with 2½ sacks and now sits at 4½ through six games.

er Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who has not played since Sept. 17 against Toledo, and running back Miyan Williams, who leads the Buckeyes with 497 rushing yards. Stroud said the sky is the limit for the offense once it returns to full health.

"I don't really think we have a limit," Stroud said. "I'm super excited to get Jaxon back and of course Miyan, just to see where we're at full strength. Hopefully, they come along. I know Jaxon and Miyan are two veterans that we need when you add leadership in that as well. They've definitely stepped up in that area. I definitely think that they'll come in and have an immediate impact."

"I'm bummed for Jaxon, all the work that he puts in and how hard of a worker he is. He's a good guy. When your brother is not out there with you, it hurts a little bit. We've also had to adjust with that just because he's such a dominant player in there at the slot position, even on the outside. I'm super excited to get him back. Super excited to get Miyan back as well."

Henderson Gets Taste Of Bell Cow Responsibilities

TreVeyon Henderson watched from the sideline on Oct. 1 against Rutgers while his backfield partner, third-year back Williams, rumbled his way into Ohio State history.

Williams produced a career-high 189 yards while tying former Ohio State greats Keith Byars and Pete Johnson for the Ohio State single-game rushing touchdown record with five scores against the Scarlet Knights.

However, the roles were reversed when the Buckeyes visited Michigan State. Williams was listed as unavailable on Ohio State's status report, causing Henderson to play the role of the bell cow against the Spartans. Not surprisingly, Henderson excelled as the lone running back, producing 118 rushing yards and one touchdown. The Hopewell, Va., native pounded the Spartans with an average of 6.2 yards per carry.

"I thought he was running hard, he was running physical, he was finishing runs," Day said. "You could see that. He had a bounce in his step, and he was running determined."

Henderson was dialed in from the game's opening whistle, taking his first rushing attempt 26 yards while shaking off a tackle from a Spartan defender before exploding past Michigan State's second line of defense into the open field. Henderson was finally dragged down by Spartans cornerback Charles Brantley.

From there, Henderson further contributed to his reputation as a chunk runner — ripping off six runs of 5 or more yards in the first quarter. Henderson carried that over into the second quarter, completing five runs that met that parameter.

The second-year running back also showcased his prowess on the goal line during the second quarter. Facing a second-and-goal from the Michigan State 1-yard line, Henderson opted to bounce to the outside as the play developed and trotted into the end zone virtually untouched for his lone touchdown of the afternoon.

Henderson did not play for a majority of the second half after sustaining a lower-body injury on the first play out of the locker room. Day said Henderson was not badly injured and probably would have returned to action if the game were closer.

"If it was a different game, he probably would have come back in," Day said. "Out of an abundance of caution, we decided to hold him out. We didn't feel like we needed to use him at that point."

Henderson racked up 436 rushing yards and four touchdowns during the season's first six games, of which he played in five. As the running back had clear lanes to operate with, Day also heaped praise on the Buckeyes who aided Henderson in his efforts.

"The offensive line played strong," Day said. "Tight ends, at times are unsung heroes."

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

It's often a case of broken records when talking about Ohio State's offense. The Buckeyes shucked off whatever gunk was left in their passing attack from the Rutgers game and maintained their edge on the ground, pummeling Michigan State's defense the entire time their starters played.

Ohio State's five first-half scoring drives spanned 80, 75, 98, 75 and 91 yards. Michigan State graduate punter Bryce Baringer averaged 48.9 yards per punt for the Spartans, whose average starting field position was 8 yards better than Ohio State's throughout the contest, but it was irrelevant.

The biggest microcosm of this trend came after Baringer pinned Ohio State at its own 2-yard line late in the first quarter. Second-year running back TreVeyon Henderson picked up 31 yards in three carries to quickly flip the field but was later walled off on a third-and-1 run to set up a fourth-and-1 for the Buckeyes at their own 42-yard line.

With Michigan State sliding its defensive linemen and linebackers inside pre-snap, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day called an audible to an outside-zone handoff to Henderson. Offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. collapsed the defensive line with a ferocious down block, and Henderson picked up an easy 7 yards for a first down.

Wide receiver Julian Fleming streaked open on a post route on the next play, scoring a 51-yard Ohio State touchdown to cap an eight-play, 98-yard scoring drive. All those other first-half scoring drives? None lasted longer than nine plays. The Buckeyes were up 429 to 117 on total yardage and 35 to 13 on the scoreboard when the first half ended. They averaged 11.0 yards per play.

A nine-play, 96-yard scoring drive opened the third quarter, with second-year wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. recording his third touchdown reception on an eye-popping catch of a ball thrown behind him in which he pulled the ball off his ankles with his fingertips. Harrison broke a school record with his third career three-touchdown performance for Ohio State.

There's simply no offensive stat that doesn't reflect pure dominance for the Buckeyes. Quarterback C.J. Stroud went 21 of 26 with 361 yards and six touchdowns, tying a school record. The team averaged 5.2 yards per carry, and Harrison, Fleming and receiver Emeka Egbuka each finished with at least 80 yards receiving.

Michigan State's defense isn't exactly among the nation's elite – the Spartans ranked 115th in the country for pass defense entering the contest – but outside of one early miscommunication on a throw from Stroud to Egbuka that led to a pick-six, it's hard to envision a better offensive performance a team could piece together.

What Didn't Work

Cornerback play continues to be a concern for the Buckeyes. The only positive momentum Michigan State mustered on offense or defense came on plays that directly challenged the position, as the Spartans cobbled together 195 passing yards to counter a dismal 7 rushing yards.

Wide receiver Jaylen Reed proved the biggest beneficiary. He hauled in a dart of a throw from Michigan State quarterback Payton Thorne for 20 yards in the first quarter then won a second-quarter jump ball for a 24-yard gain against Ohio State cornerback Cameron Brown despite a pass-interference call against the defensive back.

None of Reed's catches was more gorgeous than his 18-yard touchdown reception with 10:43 to play in the first half, a back-shoulder throw he won with strong hands against Brown. It stood as the Spartans' only offensive touchdown until there were less than six minutes left in an out-of-reach contest. Reed finished with four catches for 67 yards and the score.

Michigan State finished the game with 202 yards of total offense, so the struggles at cornerback didn't cost Ohio State much in its first Big Ten road contest. The cornerbacks showed a tendency to play receivers instead of the football, however, not getting their heads around in coverage and giving up receptions even when in-phase.

Thirty yards worth of penalties also helped the Spartans complete their lone offensive first-half scoring drive, with two fouls against the Buckeye defense helping to move them up the field. Ohio State finished the game with four penalties for 49 yards.

Play Of The Game

Each of Harrison's touchdown catches seemed more impressive than the last, but it's one of his receptions that didn't end up in the end zone getting recognized here – more so for the throw than the catch itself.

Facing third-and-8 at his team's own 38-yard line, Stroud stood in the face of a free-running Michigan State blitz and delivered an arcing strike to Harrison up the right sideline. The ball landed perfectly outside his receiver's right shoulder, inches beyond the outstretched arms of Spartan defensive back Ameer Speed.

In the face of winds that were swirling goalpost flags all game, Stroud dropped it in with pinpoint accuracy 32 yards downfield. Harrison's catch wasn't anything to sneeze at either, with the Pennsylvania native tracking the ball over his shoulder and sticking two feet in bounds before rolling out, still maintaining control. Henderson later capped that drive with a 1-yard touchdown plunge.

— Andy Anders

These guys are working really hard on the edge, and Cade (Stover) is just a really good football player. But Tre ran hard today, and it was good to see him back after last week.”

Secondary Struggles, Bucks Excel Against Run

Ohio State held Michigan State to just 202 yards of total offense, with 97 of those yards coming in a garbage-time fourth quarter. While the numbers would lend credence that the Buckeyes were nearly flawless against the Spartans, that wasn't fully the case.

The Buckeyes' secondary was once again a major question mark, and while it gave up only 195 passing yards, cracks still showed. Outside of an interception to safety Lathan Ransom on Michigan State's opening drive, Thorne was able to find a bit of rhythm in the first half, which included a stretch in which he completed 8 of 10 attempts, including an 18-yard touchdown strike to wide receiver Jayden Reed.

Graduate cornerback Cameron Brown returned from a two-game absence and showed some rust at various junctures of the first half. In fact, Brown accounted for each of Ohio State's first three penalties – two pass interferences and a horse-collar tackle, though one of the PI calls was declined – giving Michigan State 15 free yards on its lone touchdown drive in the first half.

With regard to his secondary's shortcomings, Day emphasized that the unit has covered receivers well but has left much to be desired with their play when the ball is in the air.

“I keep looking at it and we're there. But we just don't seem to be making the plays,” Day said. “We've got to figure that part of it out. If it's something where guys are just creating separation and we can't cover anybody, that's one issue. This issue seems to be that we're there, we're just not quite making the play. We've got to address it. I know we can.”

“We have the right guys over there, and they're pressing a little bit, but that's OK. And they're doing some really good things,”

Although the passing defense had some trouble against Thorne and his talented set of receivers, Ohio State was dominant against the Spartans' committee of rushers. The Buckeyes held the Spartans to just 7 yards on the ground – 38 yards, not including four sacks – turning in their best performance since Ohio State held Indiana to a negative rushing yard on Nov. 21, 2020.

Ohio State has held opponents to less than 100 yards in three games this season and would have been close to a fourth if Wisconsin running back Braelon Allen hadn't broken free for a 75-yard touchdown run in garbage time during the Buckeyes' 52-21 win over the Badgers on Sept. 24. Eichenberg mentioned that Ohio State's prowess against the run begins at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

“I think just a hard week of practice,” Eichenberg said of what it takes to stop the run. “Emphasizing (that) we've got to stop the run is a big thing for a defense, so you want to bring that attitude – it helps.”

While the Buckeyes are still working to get their run and pass defenses aligned, Day nonetheless expressed pleasure over the way the unit has played at the halfway point of the season.

“Overall, I think our defense is playing very, very well. Tommy is playing at a high level, the defensive line, the safety play has been excellent,” Day said. “I think Ronnie Hickman has been a really good leader for us. Tommy has

shown good leadership.”

To Eichenberg, the defense has yet to reach its full potential.

“We haven't played our best game yet,” Eichenberg said. “Week in and week out, we're just going to keep trying to get better. We'll use this bye week to get better.”

Road Trippin' Roundup

Ohio State put its heightened focus on competitive stamina to the test against the Spartans, straying outside of Columbus for the first time this season.

The Buckeyes were seemingly unfazed by the new environment in East Lansing, dominating in nearly all phases during the win. However, there were some early issues that could be attributed to nerves of playing on the road.

First-year kickoff specialist Jayden Fielding started the game on a sour note, booting the opening kickoff out of bounds, which marked

the third time he's done so this season. Fielding's kick out of bounds was not the only special teams mishap of the afternoon. Running-back-turned-linebacker-turned-kick-returner Chip Trayanum also muffed a kick return opportunity but quickly recovered it.

Stroud's pick-six to Egbuka was attributed to miscommunication, a common occurrence on the road. Stroud noted that staying level-headed and having a short-term memory aided him in putting that play behind him.

“I definitely have to just play off our off-season work and knowing that we didn't come here for anything other than a win,” Stroud said. “It's not life or death, so it's nothing to be crying about or lose my mind over. And then we have coaches like Coach Day and Coach (Kevin) Wilson. They're going to call it just as good as they were before you had the interception, whatever the case may be. That just gives you all the confidence in the world.”

Despite the few outstanding issues, Ohio State largely played a clean game beyond the

interception and a few lapses during garbage time.

“When you have that type of back and forth and that balance on offense and defense and they play against each other, you can see what we did there in the first half,” Day said. “I thought for the first half of that third quarter as well, and even maybe into the end of that third quarter, I just think overall we played good football on the road. Certainly not perfect.”

“We got a little sloppy in the fourth quarter. But we just wanted to get some guys out of the game and make sure that we got to the bye week as healthy as we could.”

Overall, Day walked away pleased with the victory on the road, especially with how the Buckeyes' experienced players led in the adverse environment.

“When you talk about winning on the road, leadership has to show up,” Day said. “Veteran guys have to play veteran. It looked like that happened today.”

Buckeyes' First Trip A Series Of Long Drives

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State went on the road for the first time this season and made itself at home. By the fourth quarter, many of the Michigan State supporters had exited Spartan Stadium, leaving the large and loud contingent of Buckeye fans to celebrate a victory, just as they had done the previous five games in Ohio Stadium.

That's because C.J. Stroud threw for 361 yards and tossed six touchdowns for a second straight season against MSU in a 49-20 victory in East Lansing, Mich., on Oct. 8.

The No. 3 Buckeyes (6-0, 3-0 Big Ten) had touchdown drives of 80, 75, 98, 75 yards and 91 yards for a 35-13 halftime lead and a 96-yarder to open the third-quarter scoring.

Stroud was 21 of 26, Marvin Harrison Jr. had seven catches for 131 yards and three touchdowns, and Emeka Egbuka caught five passes for 143 yards and a score against the Spartans (2-4, 0-3), who lost their fourth straight before a crowd of 72,809 on a sunny and windy 54-degree late afternoon.

The Buckeyes' revolving running back situation continued when Miyan Williams, who ran for a career-high 189 yards and tied a school record with five rushing touchdowns in the previous game vs. Rutgers while TreVeyon Henderson was out with an injury, was unavailable this game due to a lower-body injury.

Henderson ran for 117 yards and a TD on 18 carries in the first half but had just one run for a yard to start the third quarter before leaving with an injury.

Marching On

On the Spartans' first drive, after kicker Jayden Fielding put the kickoff out of bounds, they reached the OSU 41-yard line with the help of a 20-yard catch by wide receiver Jayden Reed. But on third-and-7, quarterback Payton Thorne was intercepted in the end zone by safety Lathan Ransom.

Ohio State marched 80 yards in seven plays and 2:20 for the 7-0 lead at 10:50 when Stroud passed 19 yards to Harrison. Credit Egbuka for sparking the series with a 16-yard end-around on the second play to the 34-yard line. After Henderson ran for 26 yards, Stroud used play action to find Egbuka for a 24-yard gain to the 16-yard line. Following tight end Cade Stover's catch for a 3-yard loss, Harrison put the Buckeyes on the board.

After forcing a three-and-out, on the Buckeyes' fourth play of the ensuing drive, cornerback Charles Brantley stepped into a Stroud pass and returned it 32 yards to tie the score 7-7 at 8:32. There appeared to be a miscommunication between the quarterback and Egbuka, but nonetheless it was the third straight game Stroud had been picked off.

Egbuka quickly made amends, outracing the secondary to haul in a 69-yard TD pass

on third-and-4 to complete the 75-yard drive in just three plays and 1:21 to make it 14-7 at the 7:11 mark.

Michigan State was headed for another punt after it got the ball back when on third-and-10 from its 25-yard line, Thorne scrambled and flailed an underthrown ball only to have Ohio State cornerback Cameron Brown commit pass interference to keep the drive alive. The Spartans later faced a third-and-6 from the OSU 31-yard line when Tommy Eichenberg and Mike Hall Jr. combined for a 7-yard sack, forcing a punt.

OSU's next possession began at its 2-yard line after the Bryce Baringer kick. Following a 13-yard run by Henderson to the 21-yard line, Michigan State's safety Jaden Mangham was carted off with a possible head or neck injury after a collision with Henderson, though he later returned to the Spartan sideline.

After the lengthy delay, Henderson went for 12 more yards. Needing a yard on fourth down from the OSU 42-yard line, Henderson got 7 yards to open the second quarter. On the next snap, Julian Fleming was the recipient of a 51-yard TD pass for a 21-7 lead at 14:29. The Buckeyes used eight plays to go 98 yards in 2:44.

The Buckeyes imploded to allow Michigan State to pull to within a possession at 21-13 at 10:43 on an 18-yard catch by Reed. Jack Stone missed the extra point. The Spartans went 76 yards in 3:40 in seven plays along with several OSU miscues.

Reed had a 24-yard grab to the OSU 46-yard line on a play in which Brown was called for interference, but it was declined. Brown was then called for a horse collar tackle on second-and-15 from the MSU 49-yard line that would have resulted in a 1-yard loss, and a later sack of Thorne by Hall that would have set up fourth down was nullified when Zach Harrison was called for hands to the face. MSU scored on the next play.

Back came the Buckeyes with a 75-yard drive capped by Henderson's 1-yard run to extend the lead to 28-13 at the 7:05 mark. Using eight plays and 3:38 of the clock, Fleming had two catches for 24 yards, Harrison added 32 yards on his reception, and an MSU penalty for hands to the face gave the Buckeyes a first at the 6-yard line. Stover's grab put the ball on the 1-yard line to set up Henderson's score.

After a Spartan three-and-out, Ohio State went 91 yards in nine plays and 4:36. Harrison got his second TD, a 28-yarder to make it 35-13 with 1:20 left before the break. Harrison earlier had a 12-yard catch, Egbuka caught a 16-yarder to the MSU 33, and Hen-

derson contributed a 10-yard rush among four totes for 24 yards.

Stroud in the first half was 15 of 18 for 285 yards, and the Buckeyes had 429 total yards.

"It didn't exactly start the way we wanted on offense," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "But no one panicked at all."

Still Rolling

It was more of the same when the Buckeyes took the second half kickoff and consumed 5:03 to go 96 yards in nine plays, capped by Harrison's twisting catch of 19 yards for a 42-13 score. Chip Trayanum had difficulty fielding the kickoff, and the Buckeyes added an illegal block on the play to force the long march.

Henderson left after the first play but Egbuka had a 20-yard catch, Harrison gained 12 yards through the air and Egbuka got another catch of 14 yards to the MSU 34-yard line. Then the ball moved to the 19-yard line on a personal foul prior to the TD.

Tight end Gee Scott Jr. got into the act, catching Stroud's TD pass from 2 yards on fourth down with 3:04 left in the third quarter for the Buckeyes' final points. It was a drive of a mere 50 yards but still took 10 plays and 4:38. Dallon Hayden ran four times for 30 yards prior to Scott's first career TD. The drive finished Stroud's day.

Michigan State finished the scoring when Montorie Foster had a 25-yard TD catch from Noah Kim against the Buckeye backups with 5:40 to play. The Spartans went 80 yards in eight plays and 3:10.

The game ended with TC Caffey running three times for 7 yards for the Buckeyes to the OSU 29-yard line as the clock expired.

Notes

Stroud (68) moved past Justin Fields (63) into second place on OSU's career passing touchdown list behind J.T. Barrett's 104. ... Harrison is the first OSU receiver to have a trio of three-touchdown games. His first was the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1 and the other came in the second game vs. Arkansas State. ... Fleming's four catches went for 81 yards. ... Hayden gained 70 yards off his 14 runs, and receiver Xavier Johnson carried three times for 23 yards. ... The Buckeyes limited MSU to 7 net yards on 20 rushes (0.4 yards per carry). ... Ohio State totaled 614 yards (377 pass, 237 run). The Spartans gained 202 yards. ... Thorne was 11 of 18 for 113 yards, a TD and an interception. ... Eichenberg had eight tackles (five solo). The Buckeyes had four sacks for 31 yards.

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 49, Michigan State 20

Oct. 8, 2022 - Spartan Stadium, East Lansing, Mich.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	14	21	14	0	49
MICHIGAN STATE	7	6	0	7	20

First Quarter

OSU - Harrison Jr., 19-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 10:50.

MSU - Brantley, 32-yard INT return (Stone kick), 8:32.

OSU - Egbuka, 69-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 7:11.

Second Quarter

OSU - Fleming, 51-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 14:29.

MSU - Reed, 18-yard pass from Thorne (Stone missed kick), 10:43.

OSU - Henderson, 1-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 7:05.

OSU - Harrison Jr., 28-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 1:20.

Third Quarter

OSU - Harrison Jr., 19-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 9:46.

OSU - Scott Jr., 2-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 3:04.

Fourth Quarter

MSU - Foster, 25-yard pass from Kim (Stone kick), 5:40.

Att. - 72,809

Weather - Sunny, 18 mph wind

Team Statistics

	OSU	MSU
First Downs	29	12
Rushing	10	1
Passing	17	8
Penalty	2	3
Rushes-Yards	46-237	20-7
Passing Yards	377	195
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	23-28-1	17-28-1
Offensive Plays	74	48
Total Net Yards	614	202
Third Down Efficiency	5-11	3-11
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-2	0-0
Punts-Avg.	3-52.0	7-48.9
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties	4-49	6-45
Time of Possession	37:14	22:46

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - **OSU**: Henderson 19-118; Hayden 14-70; X. Johnson 3-23; Egbuka 2-19; Caffey 4-9; Rossi 1-1; McCord 2-1; Stroud 1-(-4). **MSU**: Collins 2-9; Broussard 3-8; Berger 5-7; Simmons 2-6; Joiner 1-0; Thorne 7-(-23).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - **OSU**: Stroud 21-26-1-361-6; McCord 2-2-0-16-0. **MSU**: Thorne 11-18-1-113-1; Kim 6-10-0-82-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Harrison Jr. 7-131; Egbuka 5-143; Fleming 4-81; Stover 3-6; Stocksdale 1-12; Ballard 1-4; Scott Jr. 1-2; Henderson 1-(-2). **MSU**: Mosley 6-40; Reed 4-67; Foster 3-54; Bernard 3-28; Coleman 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - **OSU**: Mirco 3-52.0-55. **MSU**: Baringer 7-48.9-59.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Egbuka 1-1. **MSU**: McDonald 1-10; Reed 1-8.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Trayanum 1-7. **MSU**: Henry 4-96.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: None. **MSU**: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Ransom 1-0. **MSU**: Brantley 1-32.

SACKS - **OSU**: Hall Jr. 2.5-20; Cage 1-7; Eichenberg 0.5-4. **MSU**: Harmon 1-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Hall Jr. 2.5-20; Cage 1-7; Vincent 1-5; Eichenberg 0.5-4. **MSU**: Harmon 1-4; Haladay 1-3; Brantley 0.5-1; Grose 0.5-1; Windmon 0.5-1; Fletcher 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - **OSU**: Eichenberg 5-3-8; Hickman 2-3-5; McCalister 3-0-3; Trayanum 3-0-3; Hall Jr. 2-1-3; Simon 2-1-3; Burke 1-2-3; Ransom 0-3-3; J. Brown 1-1-2; Styles 0-2-2; C. Brown 1-0-1; Vincent 1-0-1; Hicks 1-0-1; Cage 1-0-1; Carrico 1-0-1; Martinez 1-0-1; Ballard 1-0-1; T. Williams 1-0-1; J. Johnson 1-0-1; Harrison 0-1-1; Chambers 0-1-1; Sawyer 0-1-1; Jean-Baptiste 0-1-1; McKenzie 0-1-1; Stokes 0-1-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Curry 0-1-1. **MSU**: White 4-7-11; Brooks 4-6-10; Brantley 3-5-8; VanSumeren 2-6-8; Speed 5-2-7; Haladay 3-3-6; Grose 1-5-6; Mangham 5-0-5; Harmon 2-3-5; Hansen 2-1-3; Young 1-2-3; Windmon 0-3-3; Dunn 0-3-3; Gaoteote 1-1-2; Fletcher 0-2-2; Barrow 0-2-2; McDonald 1-0-1; Mallory 1-0-1; Tatum 1-0-1; Brule 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - **OSU**: Harrison Jr., Egbuka, Henderson, Fleming, Wypler, Wilson, M. Jones, Stroud, Johnson Jr., D. Jones, Stover, Burke, Ransom, Hickman, McCalister, Chambers, C. Brown, Eichenberg, Tuimoloua, Vincent, Cage, Harrison, X. Johnson, Hicks, Martinez, J. Brown, Trayanum, K. Williams, Styles, Carrico, Caffey, Mirco, Simon, Sawyer, Rossi, Stokes, Fielding, J. Johnson, Proctor, Robinson, Hayden, Kuwatch, Hall Jr., Hamilton, McCord, Vimahi, Fryar, Jackson, James, JEan-Baptiste, Stocksdale, Scott Jr., Ballard, McKenzie, T. Williams, Curry, Ruggles. **MSU**: Coleman, Reed, Thorne, Mosley, Carrick, Brown, Samac, Duplain, Horst, Berger, Hunt, Brantley, Mangham, VanSumeren, Grose, Wright, Haladay, Brooks, Windmon, Harmon, Speed, Barrow, Gaoteote, Henry, Kimbrough, Kim, Young, Brown, Joiner, Willie, Tatum, Simmons, Collins, Broussard, White, Majeed, Jones, Casteel, Fletcher, Bernard, Greene, Baldwin, Donovan, Carr, Brule, Fincher, VanDeMark, Boyd, Foster, McDonald, Brunning, Williams Jr., Barker, Morris, Stone, Mallory, Hansen, Dunn, Baringer.

Season Statistics

2022 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Sept. 3	(2) NOTRE DAME (5)	W, 21-10	106,549
Sept. 10	(3) ARKANSAS STATE	W, 45-12	100,067
Sept. 17	(3) TOLEDO	W, 77-21	105,398
Sept. 24	(3) WISCONSIN	W, 52-21	105,473
Oct. 1	(3) RUTGERS	W, 49-10	104,245
Oct. 8	(3) at Michigan State	W, 49-20	72,809
Oct. 22	IOWA	TBA	
Oct. 29	at Penn State (10)	TBA	
Nov. 5	at Northwestern	TBA	
Nov. 12	INDIANA	TBA	
Nov. 19	at Maryland	TBA	
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN (5)	Noon	
Dec. 3	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.	

OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	160	75
Rushing	64	27
Passing	81	37
Penalty	15	11
Average Per Game/Rush	228.0	93.2
Average Per Game/Pass	315.7	160.3
Total Offense	3262	1521
Total Plays	404	340
Average Per Game	543.7	253.5
Average Per Play	8.1	4.5
Penalties-Yards	30-282	36-310
Fumbles-Lost	4-2	5-2
Third Down Efficiency	40-69	22-81
Percentage	58%	27%
Fourth Down Efficiency	6-6	2-8
Percentage	100%	25%
Sacks-Yards	14-91	4-12
Time Of Possession Avg.	31:19	28:41

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	98	69	84	42	0	293	48.8
Opponents	27	33	13	21	0	94	15.7

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	69	436	6.3	4	41
Miyan Williams	64	497	7.8	8	70
Dallan Hayden	52	250	4.8	1	45
C.J. Stroud	10	4	0.4	0	5
TC Caffey	10	66	6.6	1	49
Emeka Egbuka	4	49	12.3	1	27
Mitch Rossi	3	5	1.7	1	3
Xavier Johnson	3	23	7.7	0	8
Kyle McCord	3	4	1.3	0	3
Cayden Saunders	2	6	3.0	0	5
M. Harrison Jr.	1	14	14.0	0	14
Jesse Mirco	1	22	22.0	0	22
Devin Brown	1	1	1.0	0	1
Team	5	-9	-1.8	0	-18
OSU Totals	228	1368	6.0	16	70
OPP Totals	188	559	3.0	4	75

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	113	160	70.6	1737	24-3	207.6
Kyle McCord	12	16	75.0	157	1-0	178.1
OSU Totals	125	176	71.0	1894	25-3	204.9
OPP Totals	87	152	57.2	962	6-4	118.2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	35	655	18.7	6	69
Marvin Harrison Jr.	31	536	17.3	9	45
Cade Stover	16	206	12.9	2	38
Julian Fleming	15	222	14.8	5	51
Jayden Ballard	7	131	18.7	1	72
Xavier Johnson	5	48	9.6	1	24
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	4	36	9.0	0	21
Miyan Williams	4	26	6.5	0	12
Gee Scott Jr.	3	9	3.0	1	4
Dallan Hayden	2	13	6.5	0	10
T. Henderson	1	-2	-0.2	0	0
Reis Stocksdale	1	12	12.0	0	12
Kyion Grayes	1	2	2.0	0	2
OSU Totals	125	1894	15.2	25	72
OPP Totals	87	962	11.1	6	58

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Marvin Harrison Jr.	9	-	-	-	-	54
Miyan Williams	8	-	-	-	-	48
Noah Ruggles	-	41-41	-	-	2-3	47
Emeka Egbuka	7	-	-	-	-	42
Julian Fleming	5	-	-	-	-	30
T. Henderson	4	-	-	-	-	24

Cade Stover	2	-	-	-	-	12
Mitch Rossi	1	-	-	-	-	6
Xavier Johnson	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jayden Ballard	1	-	-	-	-	6
Dallan Hayden	1	-	-	-	-	6
TC Caffey	1	-	-	-	-	6
OSU Totals	41	41-41	-	-	2-3	293
OPP Totals	11	10-11	0-0	0-0	6-6	94

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	2-2	0-1	0-0	0-0	2-3
OSU Totals	2-2	0-1	0-0	0-0	2-3
OPP Totals	1-1	4-4	1-1	0-0	6-6

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	18	807	44.8	0	55
M. O'Shaughnessy	1	41	41.0	0	41
OSU Totals	19	848	44.6	0	55
OPP Totals	39	1781	45.7	0	75

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Tanner McCalister	1	30	30.0	0	30
Steele Chambers	1	12	12.0	0	12
Ronnie Hickman	1	8	8.0	0	8
Lathan Ransom	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	4	50	12.5	0	30
OPP Totals	3	47	15.7	1	32

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	6	35	5.8	0	13
Jayden Ballard	1	14	14.0	0	14
JK Johnson	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	8	49	6.1	0	14
OPP Totals	2	18	9.0	0	10

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Chip Trayanum	3	29	9.7	0	17
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
Emeka Egbuka	1	25	25.0	0	25
OSU Totals	5	54	10.8	0	25
OPP Totals	16	349	21.8	0	38

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
T. Eichenberg	28	22	50	6.0-20	2.5-12
Steele Chambers	18	13	31	4.0-19	1.0-7
Ronnie Hickman	10	13	23	0-0	0-0
Lathan Ransom	11				

Defense Standing Out Through First Half

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day turned some heads at Big Ten Media Days in July when he made the declaration that his Buckeye defense – which ranked 59th in total yards (372.9 per game) and 38th in scoring (22.8 points per game) in 2021 – would be a top-10 unit during the 2022 season.

Day had reason to believe his unit would be much improved this season, primarily thanks to the additions of defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Jim Knowles, safeties coach Perry Eliano and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton during the offseason, replacing Matt Barnes, Kerry Coombs and Al Washington.

Knowles brought a gaudy resume to Ohio State, leading an Oklahoma State defense that held opponents to 18.1 points per game – ninth in the nation – and 297.9 yards which placed fifth in the country last season. Knowles built up his reputation in 34 seasons of coaching at the college level, 14 of which he served as a defensive coordinator before arriving in Columbus. The Philadelphia native has spent the past 12 years – including this current one – as a defensive coordinator, coaching for seven years at Duke before emerging as one of the nation's best in the role at Oklahoma State from 2018-21.

Eliano played a significant hand in developing Cincinnati standout cornerbacks Sauce Gardiner, who was selected with the fourth overall pick in the 2022 NFL draft, and Coby Bryant, now with the Seattle Seahawks after being selected in the fourth round of the draft. Walton, who played his collegiate ball at Ohio State, made a name for himself as a cornerbacks coach at the NFL level.

The new-look staff of Knowles, Eliano and Walton – as well as lone returner defensive line coach Larry Johnson – has shown an immediate improvement across their first six games with the Buckeyes. Ohio State has held opponents to 253.5 yards per game – the seventh-best mark in the nation – and 15.7 points

per contest, which ranks 15th nationally, to this point in the season.

The Knowles defense is known for its aggressive nature, which Knowles says allows the unit to play offense on defense. Buckeye Huddle reporter Tony Gerdeman emphasized that the connectivity of each level of the defense has allowed the unit to jell and perform at a high level.

“For me, what stands out most is that everything has a purpose and that it's all tied together,” Gerdeman told BSB. “It's not three areas of the field acting independent of each other. It's three areas of the field acting in unison. While that's probably simplistic, and you think every defense does it, I would argue that we have seen in the past that not every Ohio State defense has done that over the last few years. But this one is kind of like a Rube Goldberg machine where every action triggers something else and is connected to something else for an eventual outcome, and that eventual outcome being the tackle of the ball.”

“I've just been really impressed with the selflessness as well, where you've got defensive linemen just being happy clogging things up so that the linebackers can make tackles. Just the way it all works together, kind of like it's supposed to be – one unit, eleven guys working together. We've seen maybe five guys working together over the last couple of years, maybe seven. But now, it's all eleven. And you're seeing results.”

While Knowles has brought a similar base 4-2-5 formation that was utilized under Coombs, there have been stark differences in production. Unlike the Coombs defense, Knowles tends to stray away from a base look, utilizing his “Jack” position – a hybrid defensive end/linebacker position primarily manned by second-year end Jack Sawyer – to move all around the defense's front end.

The Buckeye linebackers have shown more pre-snap motion than was seen in the Coombs defense, as well as heightened responsibilities as pass rushers on blitzes. Knowles has also opted to play with three safeties: a roaming free safety (the adjuster), one who plays the bound-

ary (the bandit) and a nickel safety.

The new attention to pre-snap motion has jumped out to The Columbus Dispatch's Bill Rabinowitz, who emphasized that Knowles is aiming to throw opposing offenses off beat by moving those pieces around.

“I think they're kind of midway through what (the Jack) can be,” Rabinowitz told BSB. “You can tell that Jack Sawyer likes playing the Jack. It's kind of fun being a wild card if you could just kind of move all over the place.”

“But to be able to do the pre-snap stuff and confuse offenses, that's really the hallmark of Jim Knowles' defenses,” he continued. “He wants the quarterback and the offensive coordinator to be confused. That split-second of hesitation or doubt can make all the difference. And you can see that at times, offenses are just not quite sure where the weakness is because, on every play, the defense can't cover everything, there's always a vulnerability. But if you can mask it, and confuse the offense, that's half the battle.”

One of the more glaring improvements from last season's defense has been the production of the linebacker unit. Although several of the contributors remain the same with Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers reprising their roles as the starters and Cody Simon, a starter from last season, providing a boost as the first man off of the bench, the Buckeyes have seen a stark boost in play from the group.

Day emphasized that the growth of the unit is a combination of the linebackers gaining experience from last season, as well as the injection of Knowles as the linebackers coach. With this newfound confidence, Rabinowitz said Eichenberg has looked like an All-American-caliber player to this point in the season while Chambers has been much improved and elevated himself to one of the top linebackers in the conference.

Jim Laughlin, a former Ohio State linebacker from the late '70s, said he's been impressed with the unit's play to this point of the season.

“They're prepared and know what they're doing,” Laughlin told BSB. “A lot of times you look at them, it's like they're shot out of a cannon. They're so aggressive. That's the thing. You've got to remember what you're doing, first of all, and then you've just got to go 100 miles an hour and smash into people and make tackles. You have to be a good tackler, and they're good and aggressive. So far, I think that they're doing great.”

Eichenberg leads the Buckeyes with 50 tackles, six of which have gone for loss, while Chambers has added 31 tackles, four for loss. Simon has produced 20 tackles to this point in the season.

Gerdeman lauded the unit's improvement from last season, noting that he feels that the linebackers have boosted the defense as a whole and have vaulted the Buckeyes, potentially, into the national championship conversation.

“I think they've been fantastic,” Gerdeman said. “I think they're moving faster. They may be running the same 40s or the same (miles per hour) that they ran last year, but they're getting to spots quicker, they're recognizing things better. It's no longer where it would be a tackle 7 yards down the field. Now it's near the line of scrimmage. You're also not seeing many missed tackles because they're in the right spots and they're not a step too late, which leads to those missed tackles. They're in their gaps, they're in

their holes, waiting basically for the running back or receiver, whomever, to come to them, and then they're making that tackle.

“Steele Chambers has talked about how much he enjoys this defense because it lets them make plays and the more you're in it, the more confident you get. Everybody is kind of following Tommy Eichenberg's lead in that. He knows the defense, and they see him playing well. It's like ‘Well, if I knew the defense as well as Tommy, maybe I'll be playing as well as him.’”

“I've even been impressed with Cody Simon when he's getting in there. He had some issues last year with his shoulder and whatnot, but he's been able to hold up as well,” Gerdeman added. “Steele and Tommy, they're playing as well as they really need to for this defense to be where they want. I said before the season that if this is going to be a national championship team, your linebackers need to have NFL decisions to make after this year. And I think they're playing to that point.”

The unit has aided Ohio State to the middle of the pack in the Big Ten in run defense, holding opposing offenses to 93.2 yards per game, which is down 33.6 yards from last season.

Fred Pagac – who served on Ohio State's coaching staff from 1978-2000 in a variety of roles including defensive coordinator and played in Columbus under Woody Hayes – said that while he's been pleased with the way the defense has played to this point in the season, there are still areas for improvement, especially against the run.

“I think defensively, they've been playing very well this year,” Pagac told BSB. “I'm an old-school guy, and I'm always going to be in the mind-set that you have to stop the run and force them into passing situations and obviously get after them then. I think the pass defense is doing well. I'd like to see us improve a little bit in run defense.”

While Eichenberg, Chambers and Simon have all been lauded for their improved play, they have largely benefited from a defensive line that has eaten up blocks and clogged running lanes that have freed up space for the linebackers to operate. Rabinowitz noted that the defensive line has been an unsung hero of sorts for the defense to this point.

“It helps to have the defensive line that you have,” Rabinowitz said. “I just did a story on Taron Vincent, and Tommy Eichenberg basically credits him for a lot of his success. When you have a defensive tackle, an interior lineman, that can occupy two blockers, then all you have to do is run to the ball. I think that's a really underrated part of this defense.”

Laughlin, who also played eight seasons in the NFL with the Atlanta Falcons, Green Bay Packers and Los Angeles Rams, recalled specific points in his playing career where he felt the defensive line's presence, or lack thereof, as a linebacker.

“It sounds cliché, ‘the game is won in the trenches,’ and all that stuff you've been hearing it for 100 years, but it's true,” Laughlin said. “We played Alabama one year in the Sugar Bowl (a 35-6 win for the Crimson Tide in 1978), and they were just rolling our defensive line and it didn't matter what Tommy Cousineau, who was the No. 1 draft pick, could do. He was making tackles 5 or 6 yards down the field.”

“Same with me. I played on defenses in the NFL that were No. 1 against the run in the league, and it was all because of the guys in front of me and then I could be free to make



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tackles of 2 yards every time. When I was in Green Bay, the one year (1983), I played a few games, then there were only 28 teams, but we were last in the league against the run. The defensive line was getting pushed back into your face. That makes all the difference in the world for linebackers.”

Although the Buckeyes’ front has been felt against opposing running games, questions have emerged regarding the team’s pass-rushing prowess. Ohio State is currently tied for fourth in the Big Ten in total sacks produced with 14. The Buckeyes are led by second-year defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr., who has totaled 4½ sacks so far, as well as Eichenberg with 2½ and Sawyer and graduate defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste, who have each registered a pair of sacks to this point in the season.

Despite the low sack numbers, the Buckeyes have seen general success in the pass rush according to Rabinowitz. He noted that he’s seen the unit force a lot of pressure and fluster several quarterbacks they’ve seen to this point in the season.

“They’re not racking up sacks like people want them to, but they are being pretty disruptive,” Rabinowitz said. “Right now, quarterbacks are just getting rid of the ball. It’s three-step drops, five-step drops. You’re not seeing quarterbacks sit back in the pocket. Any competent quarterback, if you give them time, they’ll pick you apart. And they’re just not giving them time consistently.”

While the defensive line has done its job by placing pressure on the quarterback, they’ve been aided by strong secondary play to this point in the campaign. Knowles has fashioned his defense as “safeties-driven,” and the Buckeyes have held opposing passing offenses to just 160.3 yards per game, which ranks third in the Big Ten.

Although the Buckeye pass defense has produced highly-touted numbers, there have seemingly been cracks within the unit, most notably on the injury front.

Ohio State entered the season with just six scholarship cornerbacks, and each of its top three corners has missed at least one game. Sophomore cornerback Denzel Burke missed Ohio State’s bout with Wisconsin with a hand injury, while graduate Cameron Brown was held out of the Buckeyes’ last three games prior to the Michigan State matchup. OSU has been without the services of sophomore cornerback Jordan Hancock since the beginning of the season, as well.

In the meantime, the cornerbacks have seen solid play from redshirt freshman JK Johnson and true freshman Jyair Brown in relief of the injured starters, but there is little sustainability there.

“It’s definitely a concern when you’ve already had to start a redshirt freshman and a true freshman at cornerback and you’re just five games into the season,” Gerdeman said. “It was going to be a concern all year long, having just six scholarship corners and you have to keep guys healthy. And this is a group of corners that has not stayed healthy, and that creates even more of a concern, because even Denzel Burke was banged up last year at times and we all know what Cameron Brown has been through.

“I think that’s going to be a year-long issue, but that’s also something that Jim Knowles said before the season that keeping guys fresh is going to be a year-long thing.”

Along the same lines, Pagac said that Knowles has a good handle on how to deal with the depth situation in the cornerbacks

room.

“Coach Knowles and the defensive staff will do a good job of doing whatever they need and adjusting however they have to, to get things done,” Pagac said. “There’s a lot of talent there and they’re doing a good job with it.”

Although depth at cornerback has become a very real issue for Ohio State at this juncture of the season, the safeties have showcased how deep their unit is on numerous occasions. While the starting trio of Ronnie Hickman, Josh Proctor and Tanner McCalister have emerged as one of the more dangerous units in the Big Ten this season, injuries have also allowed Lathan Ransom, Cameron Martinez and true freshmen Kye Stokes and Sonny Styles to produce in key moments.

Rabinowitz lauded the ability of the safeties as a whole and emphasized that the three starters have begun to set themselves apart.

“I think that’s a very talented position,” Rabinowitz said. “Ronnie Hickman is really good. No shock there.

“Josh Proctor, after the shaky start against

Notre Dame – well, it was one play – just missed a tackle on one play and then he was benched the rest of the game. He’s played better. He said the Wisconsin game was really the first time that he felt like himself, like the old Josh Proctor. He’s a real asset if he’s playing the way he can play because he can hit and he’s got range. He can really be a difference-maker back there. Tanner McCalister has been solid and a coach on the field as we thought.

“I’ve been really impressed with Lathan Ransom. He flashed last year, and he’s going to be the kind of guy it’s hard to keep off the field.”

Gerdeman previously likened the unit to almost machine-like, and the overall efficiency of the unit can be attributed to the mechanic Knowles himself. Fashioned as a “mad scientist” or teacher-like figure, Knowles has injected his own energy within the defense – something that was severely lacking in several recent iterations.

Gerdeman noted that Knowles’ hands-on nature has allowed his defense to be more engaged in learning the schemes and concepts

as well as play more freely during games on Saturdays. But he also said that Knowles is not the sole proprietor of the defensive turnaround and that the players have turned their hunger to improve into results.

“I think maybe he views himself as a teacher as much as a coach,” Gerdeman said. “It’s one of those things where he engages his players. That’s not just the linebackers, that’s everybody, with doing the stuff like he’s talked about with his game shows or his quizzes. It’s just the fact that he’s keeping guys engaged, keeping them on their toes.

“I think it also goes back to the fact that, as Jim Knowles has said when he came here, these guys were hungry to be good. They were hungry to learn a defense that basically would work. And that’s one of the reasons they picked it up so well – they’ve been tired of the way things have gone recently in the last couple of years and they want to be good. And if you want to be good, you’re going to be willing to work for it and then do whatever is necessary.”



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'Warrior For Women's Sports' Passes At 96

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State and universities across the country this year are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Title IX – a civil rights law that prohibits sex-based discrimination by any school or education program that receives federal funding – and perhaps nobody at Ohio State better embodied what Title IX meant for intercollegiate athletics and the advancement of women's sports than former athletics administrator and women's basketball coach Phyllis Bailey, who passed away Oct. 1 at the age of 96.

Bailey was a trailblazer during her 39 years with the Ohio State athletic department, operating as a teacher, mentor, role model and pioneer for women's sports, as well as the first head coach for the Ohio State women's basketball program.

"She stopped by the office several times," current Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said. "Just a great woman. She was an incredible ambassador for Ohio State and certainly our program and women's basketball, so she'll be missed by many. You think about all the things she was able to accomplish when the resources and so forth weren't quite the same as they are now when she was the coach, but just an incredible person, and I'm very sad to see her pass."

Bailey, a native of Fairport Harbor in northern Ohio, graduated from in-state Miami University with a degree in physical education, and she earned her master's degree from the University of Indiana before arriving at Ohio State in 1956 to pursue her doctorate. Once on campus, she was approached about dropping her schooling entirely and becoming a professor at Ohio State, as well as working with the women's club sports at the university – specifically as the first varsity women's basketball coach in program history.

"They told me what they wanted me to be doing, and I said, 'Well, that's what I came here (for), to have the degree to be able to do that,' and they said, 'You don't need to have that degree because you had enough experience at that time. Are you willing to just drop the idea of being a student and just take this job?'" Bailey said in a 2019 interview with Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "And I really had to kind of think



FILE PHOTO

PIONEER FOR WOMEN – Former Ohio State women's basketball coach and athletics administrator Phyllis Bailey, who helped spark change within the school's athletic department, passed away on Oct. 1 at the age of 96.

about it because I thought that if I didn't want to stay at Ohio State or if Ohio State didn't want me after some time, then I said, 'Well, what about that?'

"And they said, well, they didn't think that was going to happen. I would have had enough experience in my profession already that they wanted to have me to do the job that they were giving me. So that's just the way it went.

"At that time, there were hardly any of the colleges or the universities having women's teams. So it was just there. They just said, 'Hey, we'd like to try to have a team, and we'd like you to be the coach. Will you forget about your student part of it and just take this job?' And that's what happened."

Up until Bailey's arrival, women's sports at Ohio State existed in only a club capacity, and she was an integral part of helping Ohio State make the transition from intra-

mural to intercollegiate competition. That shift took place prior to the 1965-66 season, which is the first season of recorded history in the Ohio State women's basketball record book.

Bailey would then go on to coach five recognized seasons as Ohio State's head coach, finishing her coaching career with a 28-10 record. Following the 1969-70 season, Bailey's responsibilities at the university became too much for her to handle along with coaching, and she resigned the position to become a full-time member of the athletic department.

"When I was a basketball coach, they moved me up until I had the position that I had the responsibility of all of the women's teams," she said. "And I said, 'Well, I've never had any work like this.' And they said, 'Neither has anyone else.' And that was just the time when they needed to have somebody who, I guess, they thought had maybe a loud enough voice that people would listen to me."

Bailey's rise within the Ohio State athletic department, where she was eventually named an assistant athletic director in 1975, coincided with the further advancement of women's sports throughout the United States.

The Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women – an organization that Bailey helped oversee the founding of – began organizing and recognizing women's intercollegiate competition in 1971, and Title IX was passed in 1972, opening the door for women's sports to begin growing with equal access to federal funding for programs and scholarships. The NCAA finally began recognizing women's intercollegiate competition beginning in the 1981-82 sea-

son, at which point Bailey was appointed as Ohio State's first administrator over women's athletics.

"Well, any of the young women at any colleges were overshadowed by men," Bailey said. "They didn't have anything like (those sports programs). That was just the time after that when it came along to Title IX and they said, 'This is something that's happening for the girls. We're going to have to have the young women have the same things that the young men at these colleges and universities have. We have to give them the programs.'"

While Bailey helped usher in change throughout the college sports landscape through the athletic department, she also left her mark on Ohio State's on-the-court product. She was integral in the hiring of several coaches, including former women's basketball coach Tara VanDerveer.

"Tara, I saw her as a player," Bailey said. "Tara was a player at Indiana University. And I don't know why I knew she was good about women's basketball, but I was in a family that knew a lot about sports. You had some kind of idea of what a person might be able to do. So that was my first hire, and then by gosh, that's the best thing I ever did. She was a great one."

VanDerveer said that correspondence from Bailey was one of the main reasons she ended up at Ohio State.

"When I graduated, I wrote to the athletic directors – in the day, they had a women's athletic director and a men's athletic director," VanDerveer told BSB in 2019. "So, I wrote to the women's athletic directors, all 20 of them, and I heard back from two and one was Ohio State. So that's how I decided to go there. And it was a beautiful letter from Phyllis that was very, very encouraging for me to go to Ohio State."

VanDerveer lasted for just five seasons at Ohio State before leaving for the same position at Stanford, which was offering significantly more money and support for her services. VanDerveer would go on to win three national championships with the Cardinal, and Bailey said VanDerveer's departure came down to a lack of money being offered to keep her there.

"Well, she was going to get (more money there)," Bailey said. "I worked very hard at Ohio State to try to get the people above me to give me the money and the position that I needed to have to carry Tara. And they said, 'No, we don't want to do that here at Ohio State.' Well, it's people who are in positions of power at times – whether they like something or they don't like it, or they think it's not worth something for women to do or not do. I've had a long life anyway, but it's gone a long way since then.

"I know that it was a money issue. I didn't want to let Tara go. I tried my best to get the money for Tara. But the athletic director at that time (Rick Bay) said, 'We don't have that much money.' And I kept saying, 'I don't believe that, because we have all of that money coming out of the football team.' But the football has to have a lot of that money, he told me. And I said, 'They're getting more than they're giving me.' He said, 'No.' And that was just it."

VanDerveer said the decision was as

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much about money as it was the focus on women's basketball at Stanford that caused her to leave Ohio State, though it was a decision that made her "physically ill," and she said years later that Bailey was "wonderful to work for."

"She was one of the leaders of women's athletics. She's a great representative of Ohio State," VanDerveer said. "She was a wonderful, wonderful boss. She was wonderful to work for. She's very intelligent, very hardworking."

"I think she had a difficult time because there was a lot of sexism. There's no other way to put it. She had to deal with a lot of negative attitudes towards women in sports. She had to fight tooth and nail for everything, for every penny to help women to be able to play. We didn't fly all over the place. In fact, we drove more. But she fought for things for women. She's a warrior for women's sports. She's a wonderful, wonderful person, and I'm so glad our lives crossed."

Bailey's impact was felt throughout the university, down to the student-athletes themselves benefiting from the rapid advancement of the women's game. Former Ohio State women's basketball player Kristin Watt, who played for the Buckeyes from 1981-85, told BSB earlier this year that she and her teammates never wanted for anything at Ohio State.

"We felt like we were on par with the men's team. (VanDerveer) fought for all those equal rights for us," Watt said. "Our locker room was basically the same. We had the same weight facilities that the guys had. We had the same gym facilities the guys had, same training-table opportunities and tutoring opportunities. We had sports psychologists, and we had our own trainer. It was amazing how she and Phyllis Bailey fought for our program to be on par. I didn't appreciate that when I was being recruited, but by my first year I realized, 'Wow, we've got it good.' And when we traveled to other schools, we had it so much better than other schools."

"Ohio State treated our sport way differently than other universities treated their women's basketball teams at that time," she continued. "A lot of that was Tara, and a lot of that was Phyllis Bailey, the director of women's athletics at the time, who is also a legend."

Watt and Bailey's paths would cross several times over the years, as Watt said Bailey was a mentor for her as she pursued her law degree at Ohio State following her playing career, and in 1992, they crossed again when Bailey was instrumental in creating the Women's Varsity O to recognize female student-athletes at Ohio State. At the time, the Ohio State Sports Hall of Fame – which inducted its inaugural class in 1977 – had inducted 16 classes with 126 student-athletes recognized, but not one was a female student-athlete.

With the administration once again lacking in support for women's sports, Bailey stepped up to help the organization draft and implement guidelines to elect the first class of female athletes into the hall.

"When I found out that there was an OSU Sports Hall of Fame and there were no women in it and she told me that – at that point it was easy for me (to get involved) because remember, I never saw the distinctions and never appreciated them be-

cause we didn't see that in our sport at the university," Watt said. "When I found out (I said), 'What do you mean there's a sports Hall of Fame and there's no women in it?' It was easy (to get involved) because it's that organization that helps put that program together."

"It's been great to be the launchpad of that and to see now the two varsity O's as one program, men and women, because we're all varsity athletes, and that took a long time. It was more painful than it should have been to happen, but it happened."

"Phyllis Bailey – and really for that, (since-retired OSU athletic administrator) Michelle Willis – was instrumental in mak-

ing that happen, the two varsity O's coming together," Watt continued. "But Phyllis was the one that started it."

Since the Ohio State Sports Hall of Fame began inducting women in 1993 – Bailey was a member of the inaugural class – more than 100 women have been inducted representing 19 varsity sports at Ohio State as of the most recent induction on Sept. 9. Bailey retired from Ohio State in 1994, and in the years that followed before her passing, she was able to see women's sports grow to heights she never could have imagined.

"Oh, it's grown. It's grown and grown. I have just been thrilled with it," she said. "When the (NCAA women's basketball)

Final Four was here (in 2018), it was just great to me. I didn't think I'd ever live to see something like that for young women."

"I never thought I'd see that. I never even thought there'd be a Final Four for women's basketball, let alone in Columbus. That was just one of the wonderful things of my life. It was the best. I was on the NCAA basketball committee for seven years, and that one we had here was the best they've ever had. We were lucky to have such a good one."

"Think about it. Why are you talking to me? Because I'm talking to you about women's sports. Twenty years ago, would anyone be calling me or any other women to talk about the Final Four?"



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Hafley Hoping To Soar With Boston College

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Just shy of three years have passed since Jeff Hafley left his position as co-defensive coordinator at Ohio State to take the head coaching job at Boston College, and thus far, not much has changed for the Eagles.

Prior to Hafley's arrival, BC had won six or seven games in four consecutive seasons, and six of its last seven with the exception a 3-9 campaign in 2015. Hafley's record at the program's helm is 14-15 through Oct. 8, with marks of 6-5 and 6-6 in his first two full seasons.

"On the field, the results have been kind of up-and-down," said A.J. Black, publisher of 247Sports' Eagle Insider.

Given Hafley's predecessor, Steve Addazio, received his walking papers following the 2019 season for producing similar results – he finished with a perfectly balanced 44-44 record in seven seasons at BC – those in power in Boston College's athletic department expected something more than .500 teams. The question remains as to whether Hafley can deliver, although the perception around his program is much stronger than Addazio's.

"Hafley has done a really nice job reinventing the culture around BC," Black said. "Before he got there it was much more (closed-off) under Steve Addazio, where players were seen and not heard. Now players seem to be much more comfortable with where Hafley's at. He's brought a really positive culture to the team."

Coaching up one of the best defenses in Ohio State history will put you in the conversation for head coaching jobs. Hafley's unit – along with co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison – posted the No. 1 total defense in the country in 2019, and as secondary coach his defensive backs help create the No. 1 passing defense, as well. Cornerback Jeff Okudah went No. 3 in the ensuing 2020 NFL draft, with defensive end Chase Young selected No. 2 following a season that landed him as a Heisman Trophy finalist.

Following those successes in his lone year with the Buckeyes, Hafley was tabbed as Boston College's next head coach on Dec. 14, 2019. He coached Ohio State's defense through its playoff loss to Clemson two weeks later before assuming his role with the Eagles full time.

"I had no intention of leaving (Ohio State) after one year. Never. You can ask my wife," Hafley said Dec. 26, 2019. "For me to leave, it had to be the perfect opportunity. It had to be a school I felt really good about, with people that I felt really good about. With a chance to win that I felt really good about. With support from the athletic director and the whole community that I felt good about, and then it had to be in a location where I fit. And everything kept checking off, 'Yes, yes, yes.'"

Hafley's defensive philosophies took a year to soak in at BC, with the Eagles finishing 73rd nationally in defense during the COVID-hindered 2020 season before rising to 28th in 2021, with a passing defense that ranked No. 3 in the country.

"His biggest strength has been the defensive backs," Black said. "For Ohio State fans, they obviously know that. He's really solidified that position."

Offensively, however, they were 73rd and 103rd in total yardage those years. They ranked 118th in rushing in 2020 at just 101.7 yards per game, and six games into this season, the rushing attack remains among the worst in the country (131st out of 131 teams) at 69.5 yards per game.

The offensive line has been an issue since Hafley arrived, Black said, which has contributed to those dismal rushing numbers. The Eagles lost four of five starters from their 2021 front five during the offseason, and the one returner, fourth-year guard Christian Mahogany, tore his ACL in June and was ruled out for the season.

"The big question was, could BC figure out a way to get their offensive line to be serviceable," Black said. "The first four games, the answer was an absolute 'No.' It was a nightmare. (Graduate quarterback Phil

Jurkovec was getting hammered – I think it was 44 percent of the passes he dropped back for, he got pressured. They had the worst rushing attack in the league. And a lot of this went on Hafley, because you went into the season with zero returning starters. He didn't get anyone in the transfer portal."

Hafley's 2022 squad is off to a 2-4 start, most recently adding a 31-3 loss to Clemson to its tally. The Golden Eagles managed just 34 rushing yards and turned the ball over three times, getting outscored 21-0 in the second half.

Rutgers knocked off the Eagles to start their season in a 22-21 slugfest, with the team's other two defeats coming in a less-respectable fashion similar to the Clemson game. Boston College lost to Virginia Tech and Florida State by 17 and 30 points, respectively.

"I think a lot of the shine of a nice, young head coach who seemed to be going in the right direction kind of faded away (after the early-season struggles)," Black said.

Out of the remaining six games on Boston College's schedule, four are on the road, including bouts at Wake Forest (Oct. 22), NC State (Nov. 12) and Notre Dame (Nov. 19), as well as a home contest to close the regular season on Nov. 26 against Syracuse, one of the season's early surprises. Upsets will be necessary if the Eagles desire their first eight-win season since 2009, but they've already been essentially eliminated from ACC title contention with a pair of conference losses.

Adding to the disappointment of that suboptimal start is the talent Boston College returned on offense for this season, save for its concerns on the offensive line, Black said.

Jurkovec is in his third year as a starter for the Maroon and Gold since transferring from Notre Dame, and he posted 2,558 passing yards with 17 touchdowns and five interceptions in 2020. In 2021, as Hafley noted at this year's ACC Media Days, Jurkovec played only one game fully healthy. A broken wrist early in the season and flu later on held him out of seven games and he played through those ailments in four more.

"If I'm an NFL GM or coach and have been in those meetings, that tells you everything you need to know about Phil," Hafley said. "You can turn on the tape and watch him play, but kids aren't built like that anymore. He is tough. He cares about his team. When he gets out on the field, there's nothing that fazes him."

Jurkovec entered his 2022 campaign with the fifth-best odds to be the No. 1 pick in the 2023 NFL draft, per Betonline. His numbers have been solid, completing 60.5 percent of his passes for 1,335 yards and 10 touchdowns – though he does have six interceptions – in six games.

His top target has been fourth-year wide receiver Zay Flowers, who boasts more than 2,000 career receiving yards and already has 42 catches for 556 yards and five touchdowns this season. He, along with Jurkovec and Mahogany, all are on the 2023 NFL draft big board of ESPN's Mel Kiper.

Prior to the team's contest with Clemson, Jurkovec and Flowers did help lead the Eagles to a hectic 34-33 win over a Louisville squad favored by multiple scores. With

Jurkovec going 18 of 21 for 304 yards and three scores and Flowers catching five passes for 151 yards and two touchdowns, the Eagles managed an eventual game-winning field goal with 1:56 to play and their defense held. It's helped inject some momentum back into BC, according to Black.

"It really did show that the team is starting to trend in the right direction," Black said. "So I think Hafley has a chance to salvage this season, a season that looked completely lost a couple weeks ago. We'll have to wait and see what happens there."

What's Next?

With all the above signs pointing to another season around .500 for BC and Hafley, questions remain as to the direction of his program. The Eagles have dipped defensively, just 66th nationally in total defense following the Oct. 8 loss to Clemson, despite returning eight starters on that side of the ball.

Jurkovec and Flowers are both likely departures for the NFL draft. Hafley's three recruiting classes have ranked 56th, 40th and 51st nationally, with the Eagles' current 2023 talent haul slotting in at 37th in the 247Sports team composite rankings. That's an improvement over Addazio, who failed to record a top-60 class in each of his final four seasons. Black feels the depth of the team has improved as a result.

"The Steve Addazio guys are leaving," Black said. "Either they've been pushed out, transferred or graduated, in general. I think getting his guys in, you're going to start to see differences in the depth of the team. That's been a big issue for BC since 2007, the Matt Ryan years."

Where talent acquisition has been lacking, Black said, is in the transfer portal.

"Hafley said he doesn't want to live in the transfer portal, and I'm not a big fan of that mind frame," Black said. "I think that's something that really bit him this year, and it could really help a BC team if they find an area of weakness to do it."

The coaching carousel has been in full turn the past few weeks. In-season firings have abounded in college football, with head coach Paul Chryst at Wisconsin, Scott Frost at Nebraska and Karl Dorrell at Colorado all receiving a proverbial hook before their respective seasons were even halfway done. Black doesn't foresee a scenario where Hafley is under similar pressures, however, believing he'll get one more season at the very least.

"BC's a slow school to move on a coach; it takes them a while," Black said. "I don't know if it's a financial reason or just the athletic program. They don't usually do that. Even if BC went like 3-9 this year, which I don't think they will, I don't think Hafley will be on the hot seat this year."

Entering the season, Hafley wasn't concerning himself with such matters. He stated he's coaching with the same urgency he always has.

"We just need to get better," Hafley said Aug. 5. "I'm going to be here for a while. I'm going to build it. There is no (urgency for tangible results), no. It's about our process, can our team get better, can we coach better, can we play better, and is there improvement? That's always how I'm going to do it."

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Wypler The 'Vice President' Of OSU Offense

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud serves as commander in chief for Ohio State's offense, third-year center Luke Wypler is a five-star general.

There's no overstating the importance of a center in setting pass protection. Not only is it his responsibility to set the foundation of the pocket the rest of the offensive line builds around, but Wypler and other centers like him are responsible for dictating protection schemes and assignments at the line of scrimmage.

"He's like the vice president (and) I'm like the president," Stroud said. "He'll make a claim, and I'll either veto it or make something else. I'm seeing everything from a bird's eye. He's down in a stance. If I see a rotation or see somebody flipping, then I can flip it, or I can base somebody, which means that he's the (indicator for protection) now."

With Wypler's cunning, callouts and skills at the center position, Ohio State's offensive line has a dependable anchor as it paves the way for a topflight offense in college football this season.

Wypler was thrust into action as Ohio State's center last year following the unavailability of center Harry Miller, who ultimately retired from the game due to mental health issues.

In 493 pass-blocking snaps last year, Wypler didn't allow a single sack and gave up only eight total pressures. That efficiency has only ticked up in his second year starting, as Wypler allowed just one pressure and no sacks in the first five contests this season.

"Things have changed a lot since this time last year," Wypler said during fall camp. "Last year I was competing for a job, hoping to get some time on the field, and now after playing 13 games and getting a lot of snaps, live snaps at least, it's really been instrumental in how much my growth has been."

Five games into Ohio State's season, Stroud had been sacked all of three times behind the line Wypler directs. He was pressured on just 18.0 percent of his dropbacks, a mark bested in the Big Ten only by Illinois quarterback Tommy DeVito at 17.9 percent, though DeVito has faced significantly fewer blitzes than Stroud.

Wypler said he feels his off-field personality bleeds into his on-field command. Third-year offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. had an easy explanation for his linemate's persona.

"His off-field personality is just Jersey – just, like, Jersey," Johnson said. "He thinks he's part of 'The Sopranos.'"

Wypler summed up exactly what Johnson meant a bit later, beyond the fact that he grew up and played his high school football in New Jersey for St. Joseph Regional. He was a four-star prospect ranked in the top 100 nationally coming out of the prep institution in 2020 and was the No. 1 player in the state of New Jersey according to the 247Sports' composite ratings.

"The typical Jersey person (is) tough, rugged, tells you how it is. He shows up



FILE PHOTO

SECOND IN COMMAND — Ohio State third-year center Luke Wypler (53) has been likened to the vice president of the OSU offense by third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud (7).

ready to work," Wypler said. "I think that's kind of the Jersey attitude. I think that's something I really pride myself on."

Wypler isn't one to sugarcoat. There's not much room to mince words when staring into the faces of blitzing linebackers, anyhow.

"I tell it how it is," Wypler said. "I tell it how I see it. Some people don't like to hear the truth and the truth always hurts, but there's a great quote by (former MLB manager Joe Maddon), like, 'If I lie to you today, you'll hate me forever, but if I tell you the truth you may hate me for a few days.' That's the way I look at life, and I'd rather be straightforward and honest and tell you how I see it."

That doesn't mean he can't kick back and be an off-field energizer.

"He's definitely outgoing," Stroud said. "He's a cool guy to me. I mean, he's tough. You can tell that he comes from a strong household. I met his dad a couple times. You can tell he's a strong dude. His mom as well, so he grew up kind of rough with his parents, teaching him how to live the right way with discipline, stuff like that."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day described Wypler as having a Type A personality – someone who's detail-oriented and takes pride in his craft. Both Day and Stroud pointed to his film-study habits as evidence of that. The snapper spends extra hours outside team meetings studying what looks a defense will give. Wypler has called weightlifting and film study his hobbies.

"That's what you want out of your center

because he's the guy who's got to get everybody together," Day said. "He does a very, very good job of that. You've got to be a good communicator. You've got to be able to process high levels of information. You've got to be able to make in-game adjustments, and he really feeds off of that."

Beyond Stroud's oft-clean uniform, the Buckeyes' rushing numbers also reflect a strong season to date for Wypler and the offensive line. Ohio State running backs are averaging 6.0 yards per carry, tied for sixth-best in the country, with third-year ball carrier Miyan Williams leading the way at 7.8 yards per tote on 64 carries through six games.

"We've been doing a great job running the ball," Wypler said. "That's something this season, we came into, we knew we needed to improve on (it). We talked earlier in camp. We had a chip on our shoulder about how people were knocking our offen-

sive line last season, and for us it's something that we put the work into and we're happy to see it's been paying off."

One story stands out to Wypler in terms of that "chip" from last season. Stroud landed a spot as a Heisman Trophy finalist in 2021, although Alabama quarterback Bryce Young ultimately took home the award. While live on the stage at the ceremony in New York, current ESPN analyst and former Michigan wide receiver Desmond Howard spoke with then-Wolverine defensive end Aidan Hutchinson, also a finalist.

Hutchinson talked about how one of his team's top goals was to beat Ohio State, causing a stir, and former Florida quarterback Tim Tebow jokingly insisted that Pitt quarterback Kenny Pickett "stay between" Stroud and Hutchinson. Howard replied, "better than his offensive line," pointing at Stroud.

"That runs through my mind at least once a (day), and I can't wait until C.J. is back there this year and what they're going to say now," Wypler said.

On paper, Ohio State had a solid rushing attack last season. The Buckeyes finished just 47th in the country in rushing yards per game, but were all the way up at No. 6 in yards per carry, with the offense as a whole leading the nation in points and second in yardage. As Day pointed out during this year's camp, however, Ohio State failed to run the ball when it needed to in key spots and on third-and-short during losses to Oregon and Michigan.

After marking their territory on the ground with 121 rushing yards on 20 hard-nosed carries in the fourth quarter I'M SHOWING 16 FOR 85 to secure a 21-10 victory over then-No. 5 Notre Dame in the season opener, showing a clear improvement from a year ago, Wypler attributed the change to a mix of mentality and fundamentals.

"I think it's mind-set," Wypler said. "I think it's technical things that we can get better at. I think (offensive line coach Justin) Frye has done a great job coming in and teaching us new things that we've taken to heart and really improved on."

With his vice president paving lanes for a ground game and coordinating the protection detail in front of him, Stroud and Ohio State's offense can work to establish an executive authority on the field.

"I love him to death," Stroud said. "He's my brother for life. He's super smart – the smartest offensive lineman I've ever met in my life."



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Iowa's Potential Limited By Offensive Struggles

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Facing a 20-7 deficit at home against Michigan on Oct. 1, Iowa was presented with a pivotal fourth-and-2 at the Wolverines' 6-yard line with less than six minutes remaining in the contest. The offense had struggled to produce to that point, with just 207 yards of total offense, but a score and a quick defensive stop – not entirely unrealistic given that the Hawkeye defense had already forced three punts, two of which were three-and-out – could have put Iowa in position to win the game.

Instead, Hawkeye quarterback Spencer Petras – facing immediate pressure from the Michigan defensive line – delivered an off-target throw to tight end Sam LaPorta short of the sticks, and Iowa turned the ball over on downs. They would get the ball back following another Wolverine punt but again turned it over on downs, this time just a four-play drive in which Petras was sacked twice.

A touchdown pass from Petras to tight end Luke Lachey with just seconds remaining made the 27-14 final look closer than it really was, but the offense, for the third time in five games, had little to show for its effort. With the offense continuing to struggle in a 9-6 loss to Illinois Oct. 8, it will now face an unprecedented task in going up against Ohio State's revamped defense on Oct. 22 at Ohio Stadium.

"You know, we're a work in progress," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said following the loss to Michigan. "I'm not discouraged by our guys. In fact, I'm encouraged by some of the things I'm seeing. But we're going to have to keep moving and obviously have to get better. We're not going to win a game scoring seven points."

Ironically, the Hawkeyes scored exactly seven points in their 7-3 win to open the season over FCS-level South Dakota State. The points came from a 46-yard field goal and pair of safeties, with the offense totaling just 166 total yards and giving up two turnovers. The following week against Iowa State, the Hawkeyes had just 150 total yards in a 10-7 loss.

The offense showed signs of life in wins over Nevada and Rutgers, accruing 614 total yards, before falling back to Earth against Michigan. The rushing attack – that is averaging 82.2 yards per game, 127th in the nation – continued to falter with just 35 yards on 24 carries (1.5 per attempt), though Petras showed some strides, finishing 21 of 31 passing for 246 yards and a touchdown against the Wolverines.

"I saw a lot of things I thought were better," Ferentz said of the passing attack, "but

that's not going to get it done for us unless we really keep pushing this thing forward and squeezing some things down."

Petras has been fairly pedestrian this season, completing just 54.0 percent of his passes and throwing just two scores to three interceptions. An early-season cry for a change at quarterback has grown into a chorus of late, but the Hawkeyes are committed to Petras.

"We view the quarterback position in a way that we don't want to be juggling guys," offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz, son of Kirk, said after the win over South Dakota State. "We don't want to do that. I don't think it's like being a pitcher in baseball, where some days you just don't have your stuff.

"We're trying to go with the guy that we feel gives us the absolute best chance to win right now at this moment."

The passing attack – and the offense as a whole – is run almost exclusively through tight ends Lachey, son of former Buckeye great and current OSU broadcaster Jim Lachey, and LaPorta, who have accounted for 39 receptions and 435 receiving yards this season. Arland Bruce IV is the team's leading wide receiver with 14 catches for 150 yards.

"I don't know what (Lachey's) actual age was when we recruited him, but he looked like he was 16, like a young-looking guy," Kirk Ferentz said. "But a tremendous guy with a great work ethic and good ability. It's been fun to watch him grow. He's playing really well."

Kaleb Johnson and Leshon Williams are the Hawkeyes' top backs, but they've combined for just 494 yards on 114 carries this season (4.3 yards per attempt) behind a young offensive line group that is still on the rise.

"We had a couple good runs to our right (against Michigan), and one of our younger guys in there reacted to something that was the way they were playing that run, the defense was, and I'll promise you, three weeks ago he never would have seen it," Kirk Ferentz said. "So that gave me encouragement. Little things like that, just little intricacies that take some time and take some preparation and study, all those kinds of things."

If the offense can begin showing some strides for Iowa, the Hawkeyes could be in a position to compete in an evidently wide-open Big Ten West Division, as the defense has been one of the nation's best through the first part of the season. Iowa is allowing just 9.8 points per game (third in the country) and 265.0 yards per game (ninth), as well as the third-fewest yards per play at 3.8.

This could be problematic for Ohio

Get To Know ... Iowa

- **2022 Record:** 3-3.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Pro-Style; Defensive Formation - 4-3; Starters Returning - Offense 7, Defense 7, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Kirk Ferentz, 24th year at Iowa, 181-113.
- **Series History:** 65th meeting; Ohio State leads 46-15-3.
- **School Facts:** Location - Iowa City, Iowa; Enrollment - 21,608; Nickname - Hawkeyes; Colors - Black, Gold; Conference - Big Ten (West Division); Stadium - Kinnick Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf; Capacity - 69,250).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Leshon Williams	64	236	3.7	2
Kaleb Johnson	40	232	4.6	3
Spencer Petras	30	-94	-3.1	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Spencer Petras	87-161	54.0	939	2-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Sam LaPorta	30	278	9.3	0
Arland Bruce IV	14	150	10.7	1
Nico Ragaini	13	157	12.1	0
Luke Lachey	9	157	17.4	1

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game	— 14.7
Rushing Yards Per Game	— 82.2
Passing Yards Per Game	— 156.5
Total Offense Avg. Per Game	— 238.7

2022 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 3	SOUTH DAKOTA	W, 7-3
Sept. 10	IOWA STATE	L, 10-7
Sept. 17	NEVADA	W, 27-0
Sept. 24	at Rutgers	W, 27-10
Oct. 1	MICHIGAN	L, 27-14
Oct. 8	at Illinois	L, 9-6
Oct. 22	at Ohio State	TBA
Oct. 29	NORTHWESTERN	3/3:30 p.m.
Nov. 5	at Purdue	TBA
Nov. 12	WISCONSIN	TBA
Nov. 19	at Minnesota	TBA
Nov. 25	NEBRASKA	4 p.m.
Dec. 3	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Jack Campbell	25	38	63	3.0-4	0-0
Seth Benson	17	34	51	1.0-2	0-0
Cooper DeJean	26	11	37	0-0	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Cooper DeJean	3	45	15.0	3
Kaevon Merriweather	1	33	33.0	0
Terry Roberts	1	0	0.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed	— 9.8
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 111.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 154.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed	— 265.0

State, which is not only second in the country at 8.07 yards per play but loves to demoralize opponents with long plays. Through six games, the Buckeyes have 110 gains of at least 10 yards, 44 gains of at least 20 yards, a nation-leading 24 gains of at least 30 yards, as well as 13 gains of 40 yards, tied for second in the country.

"That's always important on defense," Kirk Ferentz said. "Big plays, period. The more you can make a team work, the better chance you have of getting them off the rails. The odds go up that somebody is going to make mistakes if you can keep them on the field longer, but you give up the big play, boy, it's tough to overcome those. Too many of them in a game, it's goodnight."

The biggest key in limiting those big plays for Iowa will be in the middle of the field with senior linebackers Jack Campbell, Seth Benson and Logan Klemp. Campbell has the most accolades of the group, earning AP Preseason All-American honors and appearing on award watch lists for the Butkus (top linebacker), Bronko Nagurski (top defensive player) and Bednarik (top defensive player) trophies.

He's backed up that preseason hype so far this season, collecting a team-high 63 tackles (three for loss).

"He just does a great job of getting to the football," Ferentz said. "You use the word 'instinct,' but instinct is study and film and all that. He's got an ability to really close fast. He just never seems to get tired. He just likes playing. He's a great leader in his kind of quiet way, if you will, but boy, he goes hard."

The Hawkeyes also have a punishing defensive front, with defensive ends Joe Evans and John Waggoner and defensive tackles Logan Lee and Noah Shannon all helping Iowa limit opposing offenses to just 111.0

rushing yards per game, 27th in the country.

"Everybody's playing the proper leverage, the proper technique, the proper fundamentals at all times," Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh said of the Hawkeye defense. "Opportunistic – the challenges that it presents are if you are inaccurate where the throw, overthrow, underthrow, tip ball, it's highly likely that it's going to result in a turnover if you're not as sound as you can possibly be. Then you're in for a rough one."

"But it's a scheme (that) is flawless, everybody where they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there, playing the techniques, they're supposed to be there."

Speaking of those pesky turnovers, the Hawkeyes grabbed 10 through the first six games of the season – four fumbles and six interceptions, three of which have come courtesy of sophomore defensive back Cooper DeJean. He has one of Iowa's two defensive touchdowns this season, the other coming on an 18-yard fumble return touchdown from safety Kaevon Merriweather.

DeJean is joined in the Hawkeyes' secondary by returning senior starters Merriweather and Riley Moss, with juniors Sebastian Castro and Quinn Schulte chipping in as well. The unit as a whole has turned out an impressive performance this season, limiting opposing quarterbacks to just 154.0 passing yards per game – fifth in the country – and a 58.7 completion percentage.

Notre Dame and Wisconsin's defenses were supposed to provide a challenge against Ohio State, but the Buckeyes moved swiftly past those opponents, and the Hawkeyes will present the next test for a Buckeye squad looking to move to 7-0 on the season coming out of the idle week. If Iowa's offense can't figure some things out, though, that test may turn into little more than a speed bump for Ohio State.

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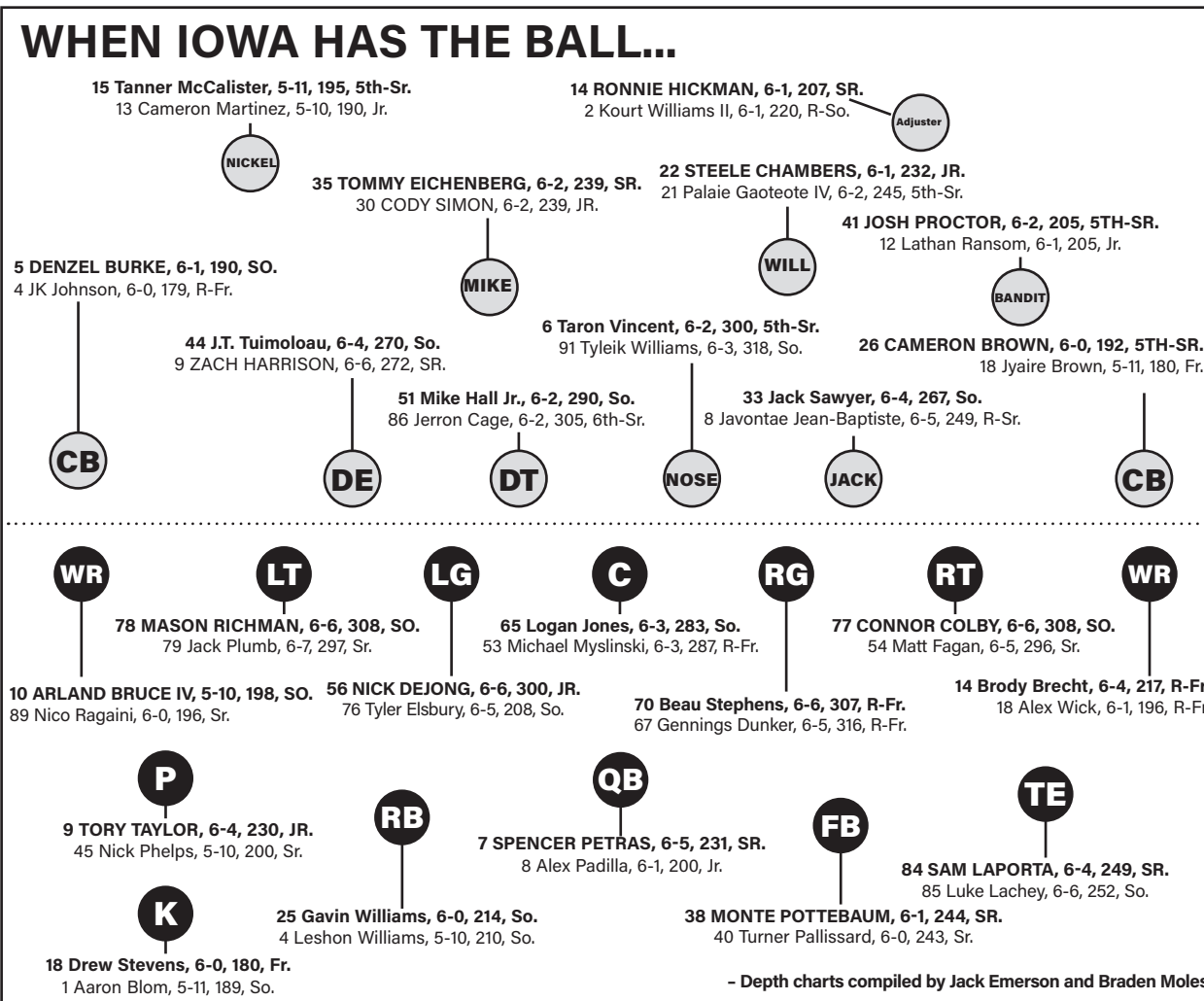
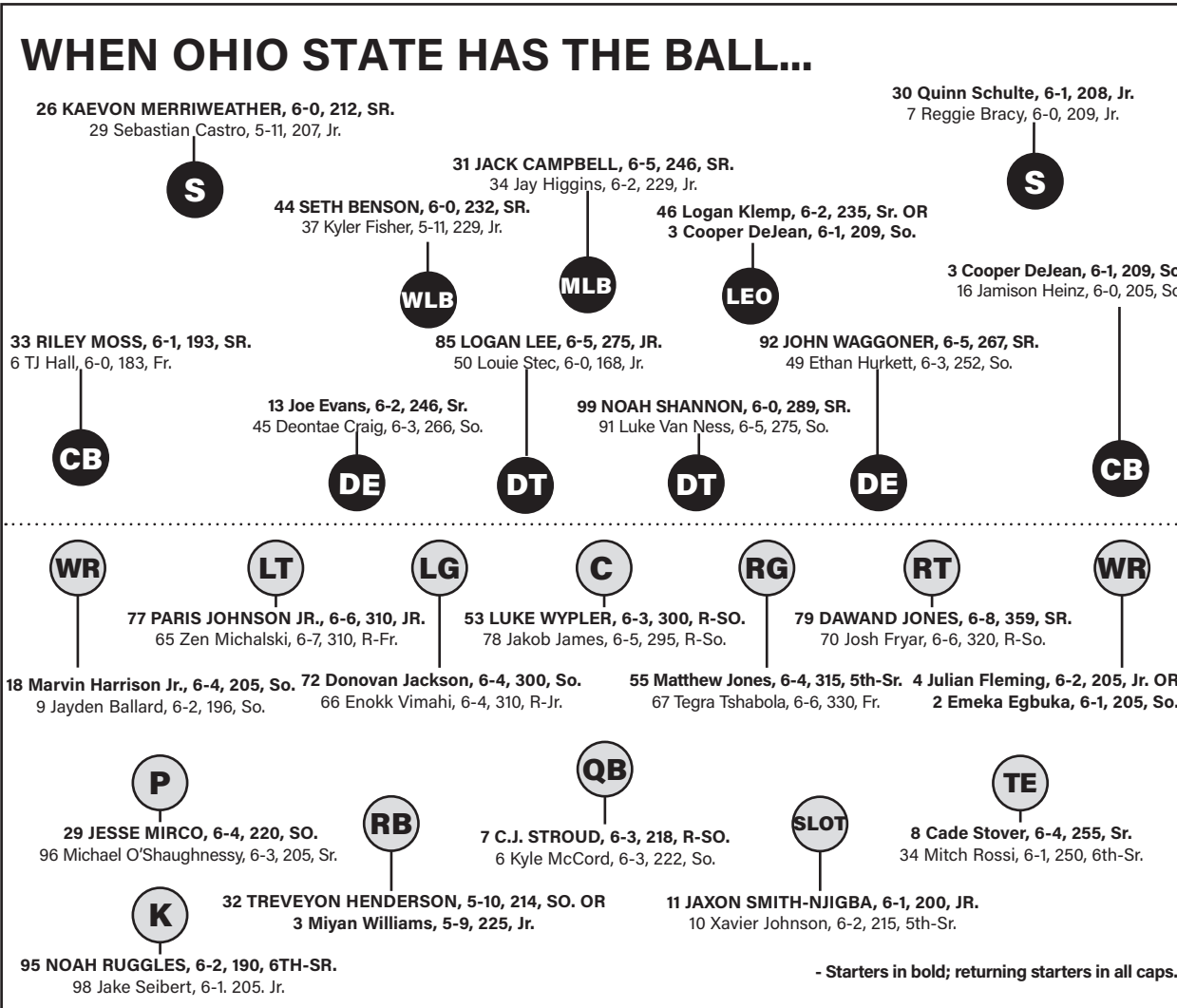


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Projected Depth Charts



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. IOWA RUSH DEFENSE

Whether it's TreVeyon Henderson or Miyan Williams, or occasionally both in the same game, Ohio State can rely on somebody grinding out a hard 100-plus-yard game. Henderson, filling in for the ailing Williams, rushed for 117 yards and a touchdown on 18 carries in the first half of the 49-20 win at Michigan State on Oct. 8. He ran one more time for 1 yard in the second half before being pulled as a precautionary measure after getting dinged. Williams had subbed for Henderson the previous game vs. Rutgers, and all he did was run for 189 yards and tie the school record with five rushing TDs. The open weekend will benefit both because Iowa is a bruiser. Clarification, though: The Hawkeye defense is stout. It has to be to carry the impotent offense. Iowa is third nationally in scoring defense (9.8 points per game) and has allowed only five touchdowns to rank second (behind Illinois with three). The run defense is 27th (111.0 yards per game) and gives up 3.0 yards per carry. However, in a 9-6 loss to Illinois on Oct. 8, Illini back Chase Brown had 31 carries for 146 yards (4.7 per carry). The Buckeyes' rush offense is 14th with 228.0 yards on the ground per game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

IOWA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Ohio State rush defense is 15th (93.2 per game) while yielding 3.0 yards a run with four scores allowed. That's going to be a big problem for the woeful Hawkeye attack, which is 127th of 131 schools (82.2 per game) with five rushing touchdowns. That's one reason that Iowa is last nationally in total offense (238.7 per game). Freshman Kaleb Johnson from Hamilton, Ohio, tops the team with three rushing touchdowns – a good half for OSU's Williams – but had 26 yards on nine carries (2.9) vs. the Illini while Leshon Williams gained 32 yards on seven attempts (4.6). The Hawkeyes got 52 net yards from 30 runs (1.7). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. IOWA PASS DEFENSE

C.J. Stroud and company look unstoppable in leading the Buckeyes to the most productive offense in the country at 48.8 points per game after the 49-20 win at Michigan State on Oct. 8. OSU is second in total offense (543.7 per game) and 14th in passing (315.7) as well as first in passing TDs (25). Stroud was 21 of 26 for 361 yards and six touchdowns against the Spartans but did throw a pick-six, his third straight game with an interception. Marvin Harrison Jr. had three TD catches and 131 receiving yards, and Emeka Egbuka had a 69-yard TD among five grabs for 143 yards. Again, Iowa's strength is its stop troops. The pass defense is fifth nationally (154.0). The Hawkeyes have conceded only three touchdowns through the air and have six interceptions. Illinois did manage pass plays of 34 and 21 yards but accumulated only 116 yards for the game through the air. Jack Campbell is one of the best linebackers in the country, and Cooper DeJean has three interceptions. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

IOWA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Iowa has two – repeat, two – passing touchdowns to tie for 127th. Only UMass has fewer (one) and even grind-them-out Army has five. The Hawkeyes' 156.5 passing yards per game rank 120th. When Spencer Petras wasn't flat on his back (sacked five times), he was 18 of 36 for 170 yards and a late desperation interception when he was hurried against Illinois. Still, the Buckeyes must be wary of tight end Sam LaPorta, who was targeted 16 times and made nine catches for 100 yards. Sophomore tight end Luke Lachey, son of former OSU standout offensive tackle and current radio analyst Jim Lachey, had four catches for 84 yards and his first career TD vs. Michigan in the previous game. The Buckeye secondary, particularly the cornerbacks, are worrisome, and Iowa's best option to move the ball might be to throw it downfield and pray for pass interference. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Iowa's Tory Taylor and Jesse Mirco for the Buckeyes are both solid punters. Ohio State booted another kickoff out of bounds against the Spartans, now three on the season. Noah Ruggles hasn't had much field-goal work for the Buckeyes while Iowa freshman Drew Stevens made field goals of 32 and 27 yards but missed from 45 yards against the Illini, negating the Hawkeyes' most lethal weapon. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

In a bit of an oddity, each team will be coming off an open week, so there's no advantage there other than Iowa will have more time to work on gadget plays because it doesn't have the talent or skill to match the Buckeyes. It's easy to see this as a blowout because of Iowa's inept offense, but the Hawkeye defense has the capability of making teams uncomfortable. **EDGE: IOWA**

STAFF PREDICTION

The score in Iowa City on Nov. 4, 2017, when the Hawkeyes embarrassed the No. 6 Buckeyes was 55-24. While the players from that team are gone and head coach Ryan Day was an assistant to Urban Meyer back then, the fans want revenge in the first meeting since that humiliation. **OHIO STATE 49, IOWA 13**

Innovation, Renovation Mark Stadium's 4th Decade

Throughout the 2022 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* is publishing stories commemorating the 100th anniversary of Ohio Stadium. This week, BSB looks at the Horseshoe's fourth decade (1952-61) that included a number of renovation projects as well as the first of several national championships claimed under the guidance of head coach Woody Hayes.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

As Ohio Stadium entered its fourth decade of existence, the football program for which the facility played host was undergoing a number of exciting changes.

Woody Hayes had just turned 40 and was under fire after his first three seasons as head coach of the Buckeyes had produced a decidedly pedestrian 16-9-2 record and nothing better than a third-place finish in the Big Ten standings. Making matters worse was the fact that Hayes' first three teams had a 1-2-1 record against ranked opponents and a 1-2 record against archrival Michigan.

However, Hayes was about to scrap his old-fashioned T-formation for the more innovative Split-T that he had learned about during a visit to Oklahoma during the spring of 1952. It took a couple of years to perfect, but the Split T formation helped Ohio State win a national championship in 1954 with the running style that later transformed into "three yards and a cloud of dust."

It was an innovation that likely saved Hayes his job.

Average home attendance for Ohio State games during the coach's first season in 1951 was 75,956, one of the highest in college football. But as large as the crowds were for marquee games against top-ranked Michigan State (82,640) and No. 3 Illinois (79,457), the other three games on the home slate that season were not sellouts.

The same was true the following year



FILE PHOTO

JUMP AROUND — Former Ohio State tailback Howard "Hopalong" Cassady played a key role on the 1954 national championship team and became Woody Hayes' first Heisman Trophy winner during his Buckeye career.

when, despite a crowd of 81,541 attending the 27-7 upset win against No. 12 Michigan in the season finale, average attendance suffered a slight dip to 75,652.

Perhaps that average would have been larger had fans known what was in store for them over the next four years. Only 70,208 showed up on a sunny late September afternoon for the 1952 season opener against Indiana, the smallest crowd to watch a Big Ten season opener at the Horseshoe since

the World War II years.

But as the years passed, more than twice that many fans would insist they were in the Horseshoe for the debut of freshman halfback Howard "Hopalong" Cassady, a product of Central High School in Columbus who scored three touchdowns during a 33-13 win against the Hoosiers. Cassady scored on a leaping 27-yard touchdown reception midway through the second quarter and then had touchdown runs of 5 and 3 yards in the second half.

The OSU fans who stayed away that 1952 season also missed one of the most prolific passing performances during the early portion of the Hayes era. While the team sometimes struggled to gain traction in the running game with the new Split T formation, junior quarterback John Borton threw for a program-record 1,555 yards. That single-season total was on the books for 27 years until Art Schlichter broke it with 1,816 yards in 1979.

The following year, the 1953 Buckeyes appeared well-stocked and ready to contend for their first Big Ten championship in four years. With Borton returning at quarterback along with Cassady and Bobby Watkins at halfback, Ohio State featured one of the most potent offensive attacks in college football.

That offense was on display during the 1953 season opener when the Buckeyes rolled to a 23-0 halftime lead before coasting to a 36-12 victory against Indiana. A crowd of 75,898 — at the time the largest ever to watch an OSU-Indiana game — looked on as Borton threw for 122 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

But the quarterback suffered a serious

thumb injury during a week-three loss to Illinois, and the Buckeyes were never the same. They lost three of their final seven games to finish with a 6-3 record for the second year in a row.

Average attendance at Ohio Stadium ticked up slightly to 79,600 in 1953, thanks again mostly to games against Illinois and Michigan State. But when the third-ranked Buckeyes suffered a 41-20 blowout loss to the Fighting Illini in front of an early October crowd of 81,745 and then sent home 82,328 fans disappointed following a 28-13 loss to the Spartans in early November, the backroom whispers about whether Hayes was in over his head turned into full-throated calls for his dismissal.

Then came the 1954 season that changed the course of Ohio State football history.

Team That Saved Woody

As the coach made his annual rounds on the offseason banquet circuit during the spring of 1954, Hayes knew the writing was on the wall. His team had better contend for the Big Ten championship and beat Michigan during the upcoming season or there would be a tombstone with his name on it in what had become known as "The Graveyard of Coaches."

Ohio State was picked by most sports-writers to finish third in the 1954 conference race behind Wisconsin and Minnesota, but the Buckeyes caught fire early.

They pitched a 28-0 shutout against Indiana in the season opener before a Horseshoe crowd of 72,703 and then notched two more important wins. First was a 21-13 defeat of No. 18 California with a crowd of 79,527 looking on, and then came a 40-7 road thrashing of Illinois to avenge the 21-point loss to the Fighting Illini from the year before.

Those games were followed by two more home wins witnessed by crowds in excess of 82,000. The Buckeyes carved out a 20-14 win against 13th-ranked Iowa on Oct. 16 and a week later turned in a convincing 31-14 victory against No. 2 Wisconsin. It was to be the signature touchstone for a magical season.

The Badgers were clinging to a 7-3 advantage late in the third quarter and appeared poised to pad their lead when quarterback Jim Miller took to the air. With a second-and-4 situation at the OSU 20-yard line, Miller tried to throw a ball in the flat to one of his ends, but Cassady anticipated the pass and jumped the route. The junior speedster made the interception at the 12-yard line and raced 88 yards the other way for a touchdown.

Ohio State tacked on three more touchdowns in the fourth quarter to run away with the victory. Meanwhile, the defense limited Wisconsin star fullback Alan "The Horse" Ameche to only 42 yards on 16 carries, the lowest single-game total that season for Ameche, who went on to win the 1954 Heisman Trophy.

Suddenly, Ohio State was undefeated with a 5-0 record and ranked by The Associated Press as the nation's No. 1 team. The team's rise from unranked in the preseason to No. 1 in just five weeks was unprecedented in the history of the AP poll, and it re-

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OHIO STADIUM

mained a record for 60 years until Mississippi State equaled the feat in 2014.

The Buckeyes followed with three more victories – at Northwestern, in Columbus against No. 20 Pittsburgh, and at Purdue – before hosting archrival Michigan in the traditional season finale.

In front of a more-than-capacity crowd of 82,438 in Ohio Stadium and an overflowing press box after the university issued more than 500 media credentials, the No. 12 Wolverines drew first blood when halfback Dan Cline scored on a 7-yard touchdown run in the first quarter for a 7-0 lead.

Michigan dominated most of the first half, but with just a little more than three minutes before intermission, little-used OSU linebacker Jack Gibbs picked off Wolverine quarterback Jim Maddock near midfield and returned the interception to the U-M 11. After a delay-of-game penalty against the Buckeyes, third-string sophomore end Fred Kriss grabbed a 16-yard touchdown pass from QB Dave Leggett, and somehow Ohio State had forged a 7-7 half-time tie despite being outgained by a 190-42 margin in total yardage.

After a scoreless third period, the fourth quarter began with Michigan enjoying first-and-goal at the OSU 4-yard line. What transpired next was one of the most memorable goal-line stands in program history as the Buckeyes stonewalled the Wolverines on four straight running plays to take over on downs at the 6-inch line.

Leggett followed by directing one of the most remarkable touchdown drives in scarlet and gray history, moving his team 99 yards the other way with team co-captain Dick Brubaker finishing off the march with an 8-yard touchdown reception.

Cassady tacked on another fourth-quarter score, set up by his own interception, and the Buckeyes had their 21-7 victory and a first undefeated regular season since 1944.

They followed with a 20-7 win against USC in the Rose Bowl to finish the program's first 10-victory season in history and only its second unblemished record since 1917. The undefeated season also resulted in the AP awarding Ohio State its national championship – the second in school history and the first for Hayes.

Years later, Hayes would say that the 1954 season was one of his greatest accomplishments because the way that team performed allowed him to keep his job at Ohio State.

“Woody gave credit to that team many times over the years for saving his job,” Ohio State football historian Jack Park told BSB. “Woody had a lot of people who thought he wasn't up to the job. But that season and the way that team played was what allowed him to keep his job and establish Ohio State as one of the top college football programs in the nation. If it hadn't been for the 1954 season, the history of Ohio State football as we know it would probably have changed dramatically.”

The following season, the Buckeyes were knocked out of the national title race early with a 6-0 upset loss at Stanford in early October. But the team rebounded for a second Big Ten championship in a row, a title topped off with a 17-0 shutout of No. 6 Michigan, the first time OSU had claimed victory in Ann Arbor since 1937. The game was played with 97,369 in attendance at

Michigan Stadium, at the time the largest crowd ever to witness an OSU-Michigan game.

Cassady finished his college career in that game by rushing for 146 yards against the Wolverines and went on to become Hayes' first Heisman Trophy winner. After rushing for 958 yards and 15 touchdowns that season, Cassady ran away with the trophy, becoming the first player ever to amass 2,000 points in the Heisman scoring system. He bested runner-up Jim Swink of TCU by a whopping 1,477 points, the largest margin of victory to that time.

The following month, the AP named Cassady its “Athlete of the Year for 1955,” beating out such other notables as heavy-weight boxing champion Rocky Marciano and Cleveland Browns quarterback Otto Graham.

Ohio State was setting records at the ticket window, too. Average home attendance during the 1955 season broke through the 80,000 mark for the first time, with six games averaging 81,746 fans.

From Rags To Riches

When Ohio State opened its 1957 football season, there was little indication the Buckeyes were on the threshold of greatness.

A year before, the university's athletic department had been slapped with a one-year probation by the NCAA because several football players had reportedly accepted improper benefits from a campus official. That official happened to be Hayes, who had casually mentioned in 1955 that he often loaned small amounts of money to players who were in need of financial assistance.

The story eventually made its way into several national magazines, which prompted an NCAA investigation and subsequent one-year penalty for all Ohio State athletic teams.

Hayes was incensed by the ruling, saying the aid was merely token assistance to youngsters in need. Nevertheless, he agreed to abide by the NCAA probation without public appeal. The Buckeyes went on to post a 6-3 record in 1956, getting shut out in their final two games – 6-0 at Iowa and 19-0 at home against Michigan – and finished in fourth place of the Big Ten standings.

By the time the 1957 season rolled around, the probation had been lifted, but it didn't seem to matter. The football team wasn't expected to do much, being picked fifth in a Big Ten preseason poll behind Michigan State, Minnesota, defending champion Iowa and Michigan.

That preseason forecast for a middle-of-the-pack showing seemed to be correct when the team stumbled coming out of the gate, losing an 18-14 decision to Texas Christian in the 1957 season opener. Ohio State entered the game as a two-touchdown favorite against the Horned Frogs, a team that would go 5-4-1 that year and finish fifth in the old Southwest Conference. The loss also marked Hayes' first opening-game defeat in seven years as head coach of the Buckeyes and, coupled with the two season-ending losses the year before, gave him his first three-game losing streak in Columbus.

No one could have foreseen at that time that OSU would go on to rattle off nine

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Continued From Page 25

consecutive victories, including a 10-7 win against Oregon in the Rose Bowl, and capture the United Press International and Football Writers Association of America versions of the 1957 national championship.

Although the season began with only a handful of returning veterans, several members of the team became some of the most recognizable names in Ohio State football history.

Manning the tackle positions on the team were Dick Schafrath and Jim Marshall, who went on to become stars in the NFL. Schafrath was a six-time Pro Bowler for the Cleveland Browns from 1959-71 and opened holes for such Hall of Fame running backs as Jim Brown, Bobby Mitchell and Leroy Kelly. Marshall spent most of his 20-year Hall of Fame career with the Minnesota Vikings and started an NFL-record 282 consecutive games at defensive end from 1960-79.

Alongside the young tackles were seniors Aurelius Thomas and Bill Jobko. Thomas was named a first-team All-American following the 1957 season and later earned enshrinement into the College Football Hall of Fame. Jobko, who many believe was the most underrated player on the team, played such a vital role in the national championship run that his teammates voted him most valuable player.

Also on the line was a sophomore end named Jim Houston, who would go on to become an All-American at Ohio State, a member of the College Football Hall of Fame and a four-time Pro Bowl linebacker with the Browns.

The backfield featured powerhouses such as Galen Cisco and Bob White at fullback, junior Frank Kremblas at quarterback, and talented stars like Don Clark and Dick LeBeau at halfback. LeBeau went on to a 14-year NFL playing career with the Detroit Lions and served as head coach or assistant coach with six pro teams, including the Pittsburgh Steelers, with whom he won Super Bowl championship rings following

the 2005 and 2008 seasons. He was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2010.

Cisco served as team captain in '57 along with fellow senior Leo Brown, who was an end. Cisco went on to become a major-league pitcher with the Boston Red Sox, Kansas City Athletics and New York Mets then spent 31 years as a pitching coach in the majors for several different teams.

The Buckeyes' kicker that season was Don Sutherin, whose 34-yard field goal provided the winning margin over Oregon in the Rose Bowl. Sutherin went on to a Hall of Fame career in the Canadian Football League where he played in eight Grey Cup championships, winning four.

While UPI and FWAA awarded their national championship trophies to Ohio State, the Buckeyes apparently did not do enough to convince AP voters, who bestowed its version of the 1957 national championship upon undefeated Auburn.

Nevertheless, Hayes was named national coach of the year by several organizations including the American Football Coaches Association and the FWAA.

'Couldn't Go For Three'

After the national championship in 1957, the Ohio State football program took a few steps backward. The Buckeyes slipped to a 6-1-2 record in 1958 and 3-5-1 in 1959, one of only two losing seasons during Hayes' long tenure as head coach.

The fans didn't seem to mind, however, as the hottest ticket in Columbus got even hotter. Despite the losing season in 1959, the program broke the Ohio Stadium attendance record with an average crowd of 82,756 – not bad for a facility whose official capacity was 79,658.

OSU improved to seven wins against only two defeats in 1960 and then came all the way back in '61. After being surprised by TCU in the season opener with a 7-7 tie, the Buckeyes steamrolled over eight opponents in a row and averaged better than 30 points per game during that streak.

Despite all the victories, however, Ohio State went into its traditional season finale at Michigan not knowing if a win would be

enough to clinch the Big Ten championship. Minnesota, which had shared the 1960 title with Iowa, was hosting a three-loss Wisconsin team and held an edge over the Buckeyes by virtue of playing more conference games that season.

The Wolverines were led in 1961 by College Football Hall of Fame coach Chalmers "Bump" Elliott, who was in his third season in Ann Arbor. Elliott's team entered the game on a three-game winning streak and hoped for revenge against its archrivals for a 7-0 victory the Buckeyes had enjoyed in 1960.

That wasn't to be, however. OSU held the Wolverines on a fourth-and-1 situation early in the game and never looked back. Fullback Bob Ferguson rushed for 152 yards and a single-game-record four touchdowns as the Buckeyes rolled to a 50-20 win. The 30-point margin of victory was Ohio State's widest in the overall series since a 38-0 victory over Michigan in 1935, and the 50 points represented an all-time high for OSU against its archrivals.

The Buckeyes' final touchdown of the game also created more than its share of controversy – not to mention folklore.

With less than 30 seconds to play, Hayes instructed his quarterback to go to the air, and Joe Sparma connected with Paul Warfield on what the OSU speedster turned into a catch-and-run worth 70 yards. Then, with just five seconds left in the game, Sparma threw a 10-yard touchdown pass to backup end Sam Tidmore, who fought his way through a pair of defenders across the goal line.

Hayes then elected to go for a two-point conversion. The Sparma-to-Tidmore connection worked again, accounting for the Buckeyes' final margin of victory.

When quizzed about the final touchdown and two-point conversion, the Ohio State coach offered several different explanations. First, he denied that pouring it on at the end was his way of paying back the Wolverines for kicking a field goal in the fourth quarter of a 58-6 win over the Buckeyes in 1946.

"The Bucks don't get steamed up on junk like that," Hayes told The Columbus Dis-

patch. "One writer accused me of running up the score on Bump. I might do that to Fritz Crisler (who was Michigan coach for the '46 game), but not Bump. Bump Elliott is truly one of the great sportsmen in football."

Elliott later told reporters, "I'm not sure what Ohio State was shooting for – shooting for us, I guess."

Many years later, Hayes supposedly admitted to longtime Dispatch sportswriter Paul Hornung that he indeed had the Wolverines' win in 1946 on his mind. Asked by Hornung why he went for two, the coach reportedly replied, "Because I couldn't go for three."

The Buckeyes finished the 1961 campaign with an 8-0-1 overall record, and when Wisconsin upset Minnesota on the final day of the regular season, Ohio State won the outright Big Ten championship and earned the right to represent the conference at the Rose Bowl.

At the time, however, the contract between the Big Ten and Pacific Coast Conference had expired and a new one was still in negotiation. It was a forgone conclusion that the Rose Bowl would offer an invitation to the Buckeyes to play against Pacific Coast champion UCLA. But the 44-member Ohio State faculty council, fearing that athletics was overtaking academics on the campus, voted to deny the Buckeyes their trip to Pasadena.

It was a bitter pill for players and coaches on the 1961 team to take, one that Hayes held a grudge about for several years. Instead of getting a chance to play in Pasadena, the Buckeyes had to be content with the Football Writers Association of America's version of the national championship for 1961 while Alabama captured the title awarded by both the AP and UPI.

Birth Of South Stands

As the winning escalated on the field, the university expanded seating in Ohio Stadium to keep up with demand for tickets. Novice G. Fawcett, who served as a teacher, coach and administrator for several public school systems throughout Ohio, succeeded Howard L. Bevis as president of Ohio State in 1956 and the following year OK'd a modest project to increase the capacity of Ohio Stadium.

The project could hardly be called a stadium renovation since the increase in capacity was only about 1,000. But the minor changes involved adding temporary field bleachers behind the end zone in the open end of the Horseshoe and the birth of what would become known as the "south stands."

"We're trying to find ways to accommodate our fans without interfering with or altering the unique horseshoe-shaped structure of Ohio Stadium," OSU director of athletics Richard Larkins told reporters at the time. "University policy is that we will not sell more tickets than we have seats, so as ticket demand increases, we have to find innovative ways to be able to increase available seating."

Three years later, Fawcett signed off on another creative request from Larkins to increase the size of the south bleachers, bringing the official stadium capacity to 79,727.

But even that would become undersized well before the Horseshoe's next decade had ended.

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Werner Continues Buckeye Tradition With Saints

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Pete Werner is not the most recent draftee of the New Orleans Saints out of Ohio State to make an impact – that honor belongs to rookie wide receiver Chris Olave – but the second-year linebacker is still making a name for himself.

Werner, a second-round selection (60th overall) in the 2021 NFL draft, led the league in solo tackles with 35 through the first five games this season.

“I think it’s pretty cool,” Werner said. “But I think it starts with being in the right position and taking coaching and just going out and executing at the end of the day. It’s a great honor, and I just keep that foot forward and keep grinding.

“I think I’m playing well. I think I’ve had a good start so far. But I’ve just been fortunate to be a part of a good game plan and have some certain matchups that I’m willing to succeed in.”

Olave, an Ohio State teammate of Werner from 2018-20 when the Buckeyes were 33-3, is not surprised by his success.

“It ain’t new,” Olave said. “Pete is a dog. I always want him on my team. When he’s out there, I know he’s going to get the job done every time. He’s quiet, but he’s always going to get the job done.”

Werner and Olave, the team’s leading pass catcher and the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month for September, have been bright spots for the Saints, who entered their Oct. 8 game against the Seattle Seahawks with a 1-3 record. Olave made four catches for 54 yards while Werner made seven tackles in the 39-32 win.

The Buckeye pipeline to New Orleans has been steady and productive. Ohio State players besides Olave and Werner who have been drafted by the Saints since 2004 include Will Smith, Antonio Pittman, Malcolm Jenkins, Michael Thomas, Vonn Bell and Marshon Lattimore.

Joining Werner and Olave on the current active roster are guard Wyatt Davis, cornerback Lattimore, cornerback Bradley Roby and tight end Nick Vannett. Werner has a theory why so many Buckeyes, at least in the case of the Saints, have been successful in the NFL.

“I think it starts with our coaches there at Ohio State and what they have built through culture and just developing that strong chemistry throughout the building,” Werner said. “They prepare us in that we are going to be the toughest team out there. What they have shown in the past and all of the success we have had in the NFL is all a credit to them.

“I think what they have done there is establish that toughness piece, and at the end of the day just going out there and executing in the game and it’s translated very well to the pros.”

Olave said its part of the winning atmosphere in Columbus.

“At Ohio State, it’s that competitive excellence that we go by whenever your number is called,” Olave said. “That same thing carries over into the NFL. When we get onto the field, I feel like we turn into different people.”

Werner, a four-star recruit from Indianapolis Cathedral, was first-team All-Big Ten as a senior, leading the Buckeyes with 54 tackles in the abbreviated eight-game 2020 season, and was a semifinalist for the Butkus Award (top collegiate linebacker) when Ohio State reached the College Football Playoff title game.

In his first NFL season, he made significant contributions on defense and special teams. He played 15 of 17 games with eight starts at weakside linebacker, making 59 tackles (36 solo) and adding three special teams tackles.

In his first start against New England on Sept. 26, 2021, he recorded two tackles. His best game came two weeks later against Washington when he was part of 13 stops, including eight solos.

Saints veteran linebacker Demario Davis was impressed with how well Werner’s game translated to the pros.

“I think he’s done a tremendous job for us,” he said. “He’s smart, he’s athletic. He’s very instinctual downhill, physical in the run game and can get out in space and can make open-field tackles. He’s a high-motor guy. He’s everything that you want in a linebacker.”

Davis also enjoyed mentoring young players such as Werner.

“I think he is unique in his ability to not shy away from big moments. You know, a lot of times for a young guy, the game can get too big and they forget little details and discipline, and that sets him apart,” he said. “He’s made those big moments and he’s all the way down in on his assignment, and he’s only going to get better. I think that’s a quality that you can’t teach. He’s doing a phenomenal job, and that’s a credit to him.”

Starting Strong

Werner missed all three preseason games this year with a groin injury but was ready once the games counted. He had a game-high 12 solo and one combined tackle at Atlanta in the season opener. He also forced a fumble.

“It was nice (to play),” he said. “Obviously, I would have liked to have a lot of those reps

in camp and be a part to build that chemistry so we can complement each other on the defense, but my body felt good (in) week one. I was just fortunate to be healthy.”

Against Tampa Bay the following week, he had six solos and two assists and defended a pass.

“Pete’s been balling,” said defensive end Marcus Davenport. “Pete’s been able to go. It’s just one of those things where – I want to say it was first play of Atlanta – but we didn’t get enough pressure, they caught the ball on us and Pete was able to punch it out and build momentum for us.”

Co-defensive coordinator Ryan Nielsen was pleased to have Werner back in the lineup and said he’s been productive for the Saints.

“Look, it’s good to see Pete,” Nielsen. “He got a little nicked up in camp and came back and had really good game one and two. This is what I think we all expected to see of this player, of Pete. He’s got very good ball aware-

ness. That’s what you see when he plays. He’s in the right spot to make plays. Good players do that.”

Despite the team’s slow start – just a 2-3 record through five games – Werner said Davis and others make sure negativity doesn’t take over.

“Just listening to Demario talk, you gravitate toward him, and I think we have strong leaders on this team,” he said. “They’re the ones that instill that confidence throughout everybody on this team. We keep continuing to repeat that. It’s a long season, and we’ve been close in every single game.”

As for his own game, Werner was never a flashy player, and it’s reflected in the approach he works on each time he takes the field.

“I see myself going out there playing the game,” he said. “I do what I’m told to do and going out there and just looking at each assignment and executing and making plays.”

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Day, Alford Reflect On Williams' Recruitment

Ohio State running back Miyan Williams was the clear star in the Buckeyes' 49-10 win over Rutgers on Oct. 1, filling in for the injured TreVeyon Henderson and rushing for 189 yards and a school record-tying five touchdowns on 21 carries.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

He scored in a variety of ways, plunging into the end zone four times on runs of 2 yards or shorter, and he also scored on a 70-yard trot, the second longest of his career behind a 71-yard rush at Minnesota last season.

So far this year, Williams has rushed for 497 yards and eight touchdowns on 64 carries – though he missed Ohio State's most recent contest against Michigan State – and is one of the all-important halves of Ohio State's electric rushing duo along with Henderson. Not bad for a three-star prospect who was committed to Iowa State.

Williams is in his third season at Ohio

State and is beloved by the Columbus faithful, but his journey – specifically as a football recruit – began a few hours south of Ohio Stadium at Winton Woods High School in Cincinnati.

His first offer came from Kentucky on May 31, 2017, just prior to his sophomore season at Winton Woods. He added an offer from Toledo that fall, but Williams did not report any further offers until they started rolling in during his junior season. He was offered by Maryland on Sept. 29, 2018, and by Cincinnati a month later. By the end of the year, he'd received offers from Boston College, Iowa State, Michigan and Missouri, with further offers in the spring coming in from Minnesota, Purdue and Kansas.

It was the Cyclones that stood out to Williams, as he took an official visit on June 21, 2019, and committed just weeks later on July 4. That was seemingly a wrap on his recruitment, at least until Ohio State offered on Sept. 21.

Of course, this was shortly after Ohio State lost out on a pair of prospects.

Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic five-star running back Bijan Robinson (6-0, 215) committed to Texas, and while Deerfield Beach, Fla., five-star running back Jaylan Knighton (5-10, 190) would not commit

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	SAF	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	175	★★★★	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	280	★★★★	Findlay, Ohio
Jason Moore	DE	6-6	255	★★★★	Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic
Joshua Padilla	OG	6-4	280	★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne
Arvell Reese	LB	6-4	212	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville
Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-1	175	★★★★	Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch
Noah Rogers	WR	6-2	195	★★★★	Rolesville, N.C.
Austin Sierveveld	OL	6-5	320	★★★★	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

to Miami (Fla.) until that November, the staff likely had inklings at that point that Knighton would not end up at Ohio State.

"We were on some other guys," running backs coach Tony Alford said on Oct. 4. "(Miyan) was always right there, and we

were always talking to him. But at the end of the day, we didn't know where it was going and it kind of fell back into his lap a little bit. And then he had some decisions to make."

The offer did not signal the first steps in

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1987

Offensive lineman Paul Sherrick was 6-8 and weighed 285 pounds. That made it hard to believe he was only a 17-year-old high school senior. But he'd used his years well.

"I think a lot of people forget how young he is when they look at him, but he's wise beyond his years," said Middletown, Ohio, coach Jim Price. "He's played great football for us, and his best football is yet to come in the future."

Obviously, Ohio State coaches were hoping Sherrick's future was at Ohio State, especially considering the struggles and injuries the offensive line faced in the 1987 season.

"I think he's one of the best in Ohio," said OSU linebackers coach Bill Conley, who was recruiting Sherrick. "He's one of the tops in all of the recruiting services and one of the tops in the country. He's very tall, but at the same time keeps pretty good technique. He keeps pretty low coming off the line and has good leverage for a guy that tall."

30 Years Ago - 1992

After being named to several preseason All-America teams, earning all-state honors for two consecutive years, and leading his team to its first-ever state championship, one would think Joe Jurevicius would have had his telephone ringing off the hook with scholarship offers from Division I colleges.

The fact is his phone was hardly ringing at all.

But that wasn't because college scouts didn't want to talk to the 6-5, 210-pound senior receiver from Mentor (Ohio) Lake Catholic. A quiet phone was the way Jurevicius wanted it.

"I told all of the college coaches in early August that I would talk to them after the season," Jurevicius said. "I told them I meant no offense. I just want to concentrate solely on my senior season and put off any college decisions until it is over."

He indicated Ohio State was definitely one of the options he was considering but quickly added there were many others. He did not elaborate, but several recruiting services had him listing Florida, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State and Tennessee as just a few of the programs with interest in him.

25 Years Ago - 1997

Steve Bellisari (6-3, 210, 4.5) was enjoying a fine year as a quarterback and free safety.

In one game for Boca Raton, Fla. (3-2), he threw for 144 yards and three touchdowns, rushed for 132 yards and another score, and returned an interception 64 yards.

Bellisari, the brother of former OSU captain Greg Bellisari, said he was looking at nine different schools with the idea of whittling the list to five for official visits. OSU had offered a scholarship to Bellisari, who had attended OSU's summer camp several times. Quarterbacks coach Tim Salem was recruiting Bellisari for OSU.

"They've said they would give me a chance to come in and

compete at quarterback," the younger Bellisari said. "That's the plan. I'm trying to keep my options open. I'll narrow it down and start taking visits in late November or early December."

20 Years Ago - 2002

Even though he'd been in attendance at the two most recent home games in Ohio Stadium and he claimed to be a lifelong fan, defensive lineman David Patterson of Warrensville Heights (Ohio) High School wasn't about to make a verbal commitment to Ohio State or anyplace else just yet.

"Ohio State has always been one of my favorites, and it's where I've been wanting to go ever since I was a little kid," said Patterson, ranked Ohio's fifth-best prospect by Rivals.com. "I just really love that atmosphere, and every time I come down I like to bring one of the younger guys on my team so they could see something and have something to work for and so they can get a good feel for the school."

With such a ringing endorsement given of Ohio State, it would seem as if all the pieces were precisely in place for Patterson to become a Buckeye.

"I don't really want to rush it," he said. "I've been trying not to think about it that much during the season. I'm just trying to get through with the season and see if our team can make it into the playoffs and worry about all that stuff after it's over."

15 Years Ago - 2007

While the Buckeyes had not gained any new verbal commitments since Madison, Ohio, tight end Nic DiLillo became the 11th member of their class of 2008 in late July, that did not stop Ohio State's group from being ranked among the better classes in the country.

As the football team sat at a perfect 6-0 midway through the 2007 season, the OSU recruiting class appeared to be reflecting that success. Scout.com pegged the team's class in progress as the No. 13 group in the country based on its points system.

"I think it's a great class," Scout Midwest recruiting analyst Greg Powers told BSB. "It's coming together terrifically. They're not only getting great players, they are addressing great needs that they needed this season as far as recruiting goes."

One thing that was hurting the Buckeyes' totals in the Scout rankings was the low number of verbal commitments comparable to other schools. Of all the schools in the top 15, OSU had the fewest verbal commits.

10 Years Ago - 2012

Urban Meyer made continuing Ohio State's relationship with Cleveland Glenville a priority, and the Buckeyes head coach had a few Tarblooders visit for Ohio State's win over Nebraska.

Among them were linebacker Chris Worley, a 6-3, 195-pound three-star prospect with an OSU offer and a No. 73 ranking among

outside linebackers, and 2014 offensive tackle Marcelys Jones, a 6-4, 325-pound prospect who was on the verge of becoming one of the most sought-after junior prospects in the country. Jones also had an Ohio State offer.

"It was a good visit, and I really enjoyed myself," Jones told BSB of the night game at the Horseshoe. "It was a crazy atmosphere so it was a pretty cool experience. It was really good to see the coaches and see the team and to be down there."

Five Years Ago - 2017

An in-state recruit OSU had yet to offer but was certainly pursuing was Mentor offensive tackle Ryan Jacoby, who did not have a star rating, national ranking or positional ranking from Scout or the 247Sports' composite.

The programs that had extended an invitation to the 6-4, 260-pound offensive tackle were Akron, Bowling Green, Iowa State, Toledo and West Virginia.

Jacoby had been on hand when Ohio State hosted Oklahoma in the prime-time showdown earlier in the season. Though the Buckeyes lost, 31-16, that didn't affect Jacoby's view of the program.

"It could have been a better game for Ohio State, but it was awesome being there," he said. "I was there twice for games last year, and we talk all the time. An offer from Ohio State would mean a lot, because that's the team I grew up rooting for."

One Year Ago - 2021

Ohio State's 2022 class had been at a standstill for three months, with its most recent commitment coming July 9 from four-star offensive tackle George Fitzpatrick of Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek.

But what was true then, and remained true, was that the Buckeyes still had zero commits in one specific area – the defensive line.

Lettermen Row recruiting writer Jeremy Birmingham told BSB he didn't think it was quite time to panic. That's because most of Ohio State's major defensive line targets remained uncommitted heading into the final months before the early signing period.

"They're in good shape for a handful of them," Birmingham said. "Generally speaking, it's going to take as long as it takes. It certainly sounds silly to say that, but they're not in a position right now where they're going to go chasing any other players to fill up on kids just because someone wants to commit. They've invested a lot of time, a lot of personal capital in getting to know these kids, and they're going to continue to be patient."

The big names included five-star defensive end Omari Abor of Duncanville, Texas; Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star defensive lineman Caden Curry; four-star defensive end Kenyatta Jackson of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep; Rancho Santa Margarita (Calif.) Catholic four-star defensive lineman Hero Kanu; and four-star defensive lineman Chris McClellan of Owasso, Okla.

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.

Ohio State's relationship with Williams but rather the culmination of what they had seen from him at Winton Woods. Williams ended up as the No. 627 overall prospect and No. 45 running back in the class, as well as just the 17th-ranked prospect in Ohio, but Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said his skill was undeniable.

"Tony watched him run. Kevin Wilson actually saw him play live in a game," Day said. "And we just felt like he just ran really hard. And maybe he wasn't as highly recruited, but we just felt like we saw something in a kid from Cincinnati who ran hard."

Though Williams ultimately ended up at Ohio State, Alford admitted that there was likely some hesitancy on Williams' part due to how late the Buckeyes offered him.

"Quite frankly, I think he was pretty pissed at me," Alford said. "First impressions do go a long way, but they also can be wrong sometimes too. He didn't talk much. He kind of sat there and didn't say much. He wasn't very responsive to things that I was trying to say to him or do with him, as far as calls and text messages and driving an hour and a half up here. So I was like, well, maybe he doesn't want to be recruited by us. But it really came down to, I think, he might have felt that I slighted him a little bit."

DL McDonald Sets Decision Date

Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star defensive lineman Kayden McDonald (6-3, 310) is nearing the end of his recruitment. Along with announcing a top five of Clemson, Florida, Michigan, Ohio State and Oklahoma, McDonald told 247Sports that he plans to commit on Oct. 31.

He is the No. 302 overall prospect in

2023 and the No. 44 defensive lineman in the class. He's taken official visits to Florida over the summer, Michigan on Sept. 10 and Ohio State on Sept. 24, and he has a visit scheduled to Oklahoma on Oct. 15.

"It's a different vibe with Coach (Jim) Knowles being the defensive coordinator," McDonald told Eleven Warriors. "The defense looks faster. They're playing more together and relentlessly. It's a relentless defense and a national championship-type defense."

McDonald has arrived as a late target in Ohio State's class. He was offered by the Buckeyes in September 2021 in the midst of a junior season that saw him finish with 95 tackles – 62 for loss – to go with 20 sacks.

While he stayed in communication with Ohio State over the past year, headlines shifted toward the Buckeyes' stellar offensive recruiting and pursuit of the trio of five-star defensive ends in Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep's Keon Keeley (6-6, 242), Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco's Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265) and Damon Wilson (6-4, 230) of Venice, Fla., and McDonald became somewhat of an afterthought.

His potential addition to the class, though, would be important given the current composition of Ohio State's class. The Buckeyes currently have just a pair of defensive linemen committed in Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260) and Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star Jason Moore (6-6, 255), and with Hero Kanu the only defensive tackle commitment in last year's class, creating a solid class in the interior will be important for Ohio State.

As far as McDonald's potential destination, Clemson is viewed as the favorite to land him with three crystal ball predictions on 247Sports in favor of the Tigers.

Even so, Ohio State has made a strong impression with just a few weeks until he announces his decision.

"The academics, it's a championship football program and so many opportunities off the field are in Columbus," he told 247Sports. "Coach Day and Coach (Larry Johnson) have been recruiting me the longest. They made it clear Columbus is home. Coach Day is cool. I can FaceTime him whenever I've got a question or just chop it up."

"Coach J is the GOAT. He's been in the game a long time. He's respected by most of the coaches recruiting me. My former North Gwinnett teammate Jordan Hancock is there. I love everything about Ohio State."

Idle Week Offers Recruiting Opportunities

Through Ohio State's five-game home-stand to begin the season, there were plenty of opportunities to get recruiting done by hosting prospects on campus. Now, with the Buckeyes beginning to head on the road, those opportunities will be limited to home contests against Iowa on Oct. 22, Indiana on Nov. 12 and Michigan on Nov. 26.

In the meantime, Day said Ohio State will get the chance to do some recruiting on the road during the off week. Players

may get some time off to visit their families and go home for a few days, but recruiting never stops.

"We will (travel) during the bye week," Day said. "We're going to try to get out next week for a couple days at least and kind of try to catch a few practices and maybe even a game. We like to be with the team on a Friday night but we have had a couple guys head out to a couple games (this season)."

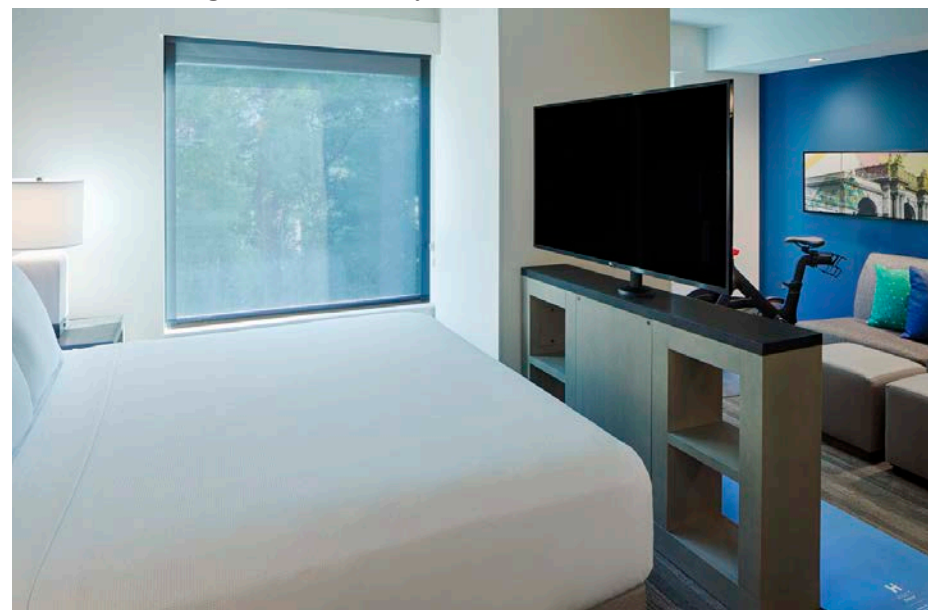
"The most important thing is being with the team, so we don't really like to spread out too thin, but there's times where that's appropriate, and certainly the bye week will be a big week for us for recruiting."

OSU, Michigan Battling For Hobbs

Ohio State and Michigan won't kick off until later this season, but it doesn't mean that battles can't take place off the field, especially in the world of recruiting.

One of those battles is taking place around Concord (N.C.) Jay M. Robinson four-star defensive lineman Daevin Hobbs (6-4, 262), who is considering the Buckeyes and Wolverines along with Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Continued On Page 30



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RB Fletcher Remains Solid For Ohio State

Continued From Page 29

Hobbs is the No. 150 overall prospect and No. 21 defensive lineman in 2023, and he made time the weekend of Oct. 1 to make a trip to both Ohio State and Michigan, visiting the Buckeyes for their win over Rutgers and the Wolverines the following day.

"It was cool to experience Ohio State and Michigan," Hobbs' mother, Adrienne, told 247Sports. "From what we saw, (Ohio State) is definitely a great program."

While they were able to take in a game at Ohio Stadium, it was a sleepy Sunday on Michigan's campus without a raucous gameday atmosphere, but they still came away impressed.

"It's the Big House," Adrienne said. "The history alone was intriguing to see all that. Hopefully we'll be able to go up there for a game unofficially before the season is out. The gameday environment is important for Daevin. To be able to experience it is important. Hopefully we can do that."

Fletcher Locked In To Ohio State

Ohio State has already suffered decommitments in the current recruiting class, with Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood (6-5, 225) and Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star cornerback Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) both backing out of their pledges to the Buckeyes, and Ohio State is looking to avoid any

more departures.

One such prospect who has fans concerned about a potential flip is Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225), an Ohio State commitment since April who has remained in contact with Miami (Fla.) and head coach Mario Cristobal since committing to the Buckeyes.

"It's just really (Ohio State and Miami)," Fletcher told 247Sports. "Those are the two talking to me. But you know, I'm still committed to Ohio State."

Fletcher – who is planning to attend the Buckeyes' regular-season finale against Michigan – admitted that Cristobal still texts him every day, but he still feels Ohio State is the best place for him.

"I watch all their games," Fletcher said. "I just feel like that's the best place for me. A lot of people are trying to tell me that I'm not going to play early, but I'm not worried about that because I'm going to have someone to look up to in (Henderson). That's a great running back. He can teach me some things and help me get ready."

As it stands, Fletcher is the only running back committed in Ohio State's class. The Buckeyes do not have any offers out to uncommitted running backs but have previously been in contact with Ironton, Ohio, three-star running back Jaquez Keyes (6-1, 207), according to a report from 247Sports' Bill Kurelic. Keyes was in attendance at one of Ohio

State's recruiting camps over the summer despite having committed to Wisconsin on May 13.

2024 RB Gibson Has OSU In Top 12

One of 2024's top running backs has Ohio State among his top choices. Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star Jerrick Gibson (5-10, 200) included the Buckeyes along with Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Texas A&M.

Gibson is the No. 8 overall prospect and top running back in the class. He played last season for Mundy's Mill in Jonesboro, Ga., before transferring to IMG Academy for his current junior season, where he had 331 rushing yards (7.2 yards per carry) and four rushing touchdowns through four games.

"Explosive in almost everything he does and is fast enough to win his fair share of footraces out on the perimeter," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins. "By far one of the better route runners to come out of the Sunshine State in recent memory as he mixes gears well and uses a nice burst to shake linebackers and safeties before securing the football with above-average hands. Not one to go down at the first sign of contact – at least at the prep level – and usually is able to get out of trouble with his quick feet and

loose hips."

His visits so far have mostly been limited to schools from the SEC, with Gibson making several trips to Florida and Georgia in addition to Auburn and Tennessee. He's also visited Florida State, Georgia Tech, Miami (Fla.) and Texas but has yet to make the trip to Columbus.

While Ohio State will obviously try to take a shot at the top running back in the class, the major focus for the position so far has been Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star running back Stacy Gage (5-11, 200), who has taken several visits to Ohio State.

Gage is ranked the second-best running back in the class behind Gibson and is the No. 41 overall prospect. He said back in June that he and Alford talk "almost every week" and that Alford has said Gage would be a great fit for Ohio State.

"I really do love his coaching style," Gage said. "It's not even just me. It's things that everybody else is saying about him. They say he's a great guy, great person, great father and everything. Being coached by him and everybody talking about him made me feel good."

Other running back offers in the class include Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day four-star Anthony Carrie (6-0, 185); Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star Davion Gause (5-11, 215); Lancaster, Texas, three-star Kewan Lacy (5-11, 195); and Cincinnati Moeller four-star Jordan Marshall (5-11, 195).



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	SAZAREC	WAYNE FARMS	isaac wiles	OHIO STATE

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With Bill Kurelic of 247Sports

Ohio State recently offered Concord (N.C.) Jay M. Robinson four-star defensive lineman Daevin Hobbs (6-4, 262). Where on the defensive line is Ohio State recruiting him, and what does this mean for their pursuit of other defensive linemen in the 2023 class?

"They offered him as a defensive end. It's really another possibility, I guess you'd say. But it doesn't change that they are going all out for Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265) as well as Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep five-star defensive end Keon Keeley (6-6, 242) and Venice (Fla.) five-star defensive end Damon Wilson (6-4, 230).

"Actually, while Hobbs is considering Ohio State, I don't think it's particularly likely at this point that he is going to end up at Ohio State."

The Buckeyes also offered Smyrna, Tenn., four-star linebacker Arion Carter (6-1, 210), who is committed to Memphis, and he's had several high-profile offers come in within the last month. What has caused his profile to blow up recently?

"He's had a great first half of his senior season. It really kind of comes down to that. He's just really played well his senior sea-

son, and now all the big schools are recruiting him."

(Through six games, Carter contributed 48 tackles – two for loss – with three sacks, three passes defended and two forced fumbles on defense, and rushed for 566 yards on 92 carries on offense for Smyrna.)

With the offer, how serious is Ohio State about taking a second linebacker in the class to join Cleveland Glenville four-star Arvell Reese (6-4, 212)?

"If they can get one they really like, they'll definitely take another one in the class. They're not just going to take one because they don't need to do that. But if they can get someone they really want, they'll take one.

"That's why they've continued to stay in touch with Many, La., four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218) (who is committed to USC). I don't think he's going to flip, but they have continued to stay in contact with him."

With that said, we're approaching the end of the 2023 cycle with the focus about to shift toward 2024. What's your assessment of Ohio's talent in the upcoming class, especially compared to 2023?

"I think it's a little bit too early to tell because offensive linemen, for instance, develop later. There are a number of guys in this class that are offensive linemen that are potential Ohio State guys. If a couple of them, two or three, develop between now and the middle of their senior year to Ohio State-caliber, that would change the class dramatically.

"I think it's a solid class, a good class. It could be a really good class, depending on how some guys develop."

A guy that has really jumped out in the 2023 class is Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-5, 280). How have you seen him grow since he committed to OSU in February?

"He's a fantastic prospect. He's just getting bigger, and he's getting better, stronger, more agile, and he has good feet. He's probably 6-5, 285 now. A lot of people thought guard for him. But Justin Frye, the offensive line coach, really feels like he can play tackle. I know Luke was thinking left tackle for the Buckeyes.

"He's a guy with a lot of potential. He works really hard to try to help recruit guys to Ohio State, and he does a very good job."

DL Scott Feeling Love From OSU

Chicago St. Ignatius four-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-5, 310) was in attendance for Ohio State's win over Rutgers, and what a sight it was for one of 2024's top defensive linemen – so much so, in fact, that the Buckeyes are now among his top schools.

"I'd say definitely they shot up to the top," Scott told On3 Sports. "After that visit, my interest is definitely going up a lot."

Scott is the No. 31 overall prospect and No. 4 defensive lineman in the class and holds additional offers from Arkansas, Auburn, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas A&M, among others.

"He has prototypical size and athletic ability for the position," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Allen Trieu. "He bends well, gets off the ball quickly and can beat blockers with initial quickness. He closes to the ball with speed as well, and for a taller interior defensive lineman, he generally does a good job with pad level, and his flexibility helps with that."

Scott only recently received an offer from Ohio State on Sept. 5, but in that time, the Buckeyes have made up a lot of ground.

"With Coach Day, he was telling me that they really want me at Ohio State and that I could be really successful, do whatever I want and do whatever dreams I had and I could achieve whatever at Ohio State," Scott said. "And Coach Johnson was just telling me about being one of the best coaches in the country, him just letting me know that if I really want to go to the NFL, that Ohio State is the place for me to go."

The Fighting Irish are considered among the favorites for Scott, and he also made a visit to Miami on Oct. 8.

Gilbert Drawing Interest From Alabama, Georgia

Atlanta Douglass cornerback Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175) became the first member of Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class on July 29, committing after receiving an offer on May 10 and making an unofficial visit on June 9.

Over two years and some change remain until he will be able to sign his letter of intent with the Buckeyes, but it's likely that Ohio State will be fighting until the finish line to hold down Gilbert's commitment. Gilbert has already visited Ohio State and is expected to return for the game against Michigan, but he also visited Tuscaloosa for Alabama's game against Texas A&M on Oct. 8, and he is just over an hour drive if he wants to visit Georgia.

"That's the hometown (school)," Gilbert told On3 Sports. "I grew up watching them with my family. Everybody in the household is a Georgia fan."

Even so, Gilbert said he is still all in at Ohio State, with a major part of that being cornerbacks coach Tim Walton.

"I feel the coaching staff really loved me when I took my first visit up there," Gilbert said. "Coach Walton didn't offer me for no reason. We had a good talk. He kept it real. He did not sugarcoat anything when I took my first visit there and gave me the rundown."

While Alabama and Georgia have shown interest in Gilbert, Ohio State is still one of just four Power Five programs to offer him, along with Arkansas, Georgia Tech and Pittsburgh. Other offers include Buffalo, Florida A&M and UAB.

OSU Issues 2025 Offer

Ohio State has given out just one offer since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, and this time, it went to a prospect whom the Buckeyes are hoping to get a jump on in 2025. Franklin (Mich.) Wylie E. Groves offensive tackle Avery Gach (6-5, 265) was the recipient of the offer, his first from a Power Five program.

"I talked to (offensive line coach Justin) Frye," Gach told 247Sports. "I didn't know he was going to offer – he said to call him, and I was just excited to talk to him again. I was very excited and humbled when he offered me. It's my first Power Five offer."

"He said I'm too young to say what position I'll play in college. He just said I'm a really good football player that could play guard, center or tackle."

Gach's only other offers are from Cen-

tral Michigan and Toledo, so given that the offer came from Frye himself, Ohio State clearly sees some potential. Gach was in attendance for Ohio State's win over Wisconsin and said he plans a return trip for the spring game.

He is just the fourth offensive tackle offered by Ohio State in 2025, joining Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star David Sanders (6-6, 255) – currently the top prospect in 2025, according to the 247Sports composite rating – Evans, Ga., five-star Mason Short (6-7, 280) and Toms River (N.J.) North four-star Jaelyne Matthews (6-5, 290).

Other Notes And Tidbits

• Ohio State will receive one of five official visits from Smyrna, Tenn., four-star linebacker Arion Carter (6-1, 210), a current Memphis commitment. Carter – a 2023 prospect – recently received an offer from the Buckeyes and will make an official visit on Nov. 12 against Indiana in

addition to trips to Michigan (Oct. 15), Tennessee (Oct. 29), LSU (Nov. 19) and Alabama (Nov. 26).

• Purdue earned a commitment on Oct. 7 from New Berlin (N.Y.) Milford Academy three-star quarterback Ryan Browne (6-5, 207). He does not have a composite rating but is rated by 247Sports as the No. 104 overall quarterback in the 2023 class. He is the only quarterback commitment in the Boilermakers' class that currently ranks 37th in the country.

• As BSB went to press, Ohio State had the No. 4 class in 2023 according to the 247Sports team composite rankings with a team score of 284.63, trailing No. 3 Notre Dame (284.68), No. 2 Georgia (289.98) and No. 1 Alabama (309.21), while slightly edging out No. 5 Texas (284.61) and No. 6 Oklahoma (284.49).

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More Details Revealed On Chryst's Firing

As Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, Wisconsin had a late announcement on Oct. 2 that the program had fired head football coach Paul Chryst. Since then, more details have been revealed about his firing, including a statement released by the Badgers.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

"After a heartfelt and authentic conversation with Coach Chryst about what is in the long-term interest of our football program, I have concluded that now is the time for a change in leadership," Wisconsin athletic director Chris McIntosh said. "Paul is a man of integrity who loves his players. I have great respect and admiration for Paul and the legacy of him and his family at the University of Wisconsin."

Chryst agreed to a reduced buyout of \$11 million, with defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard assuming the role of interim head coach for the remainder of the Badgers' season. Leonhard has been on Chryst's staff for seven years, calling plays for five defenses that finished in the top 10 for scoring nationally.

"I also have confidence in Jim Leonhard to guide the program for the remainder of the season," McIntosh said. "There is still a lot of sea-

son left to play, and I know Jim will do a great job while the program is under his leadership."

Chryst concluded his eight-year career at Wisconsin with a 67-26 record. The Badgers appeared in three Big Ten Championship Games and three New Year's Six bowls during Chryst's tenure, taking home an Orange Bowl win in 2017 and a Cotton Bowl victory in 2016. Chryst took home Big Ten Coach of the Year honors in both '16 and '17.

Several players spoke out following Chryst's firing, including running back Braelon Allen, who said that nobody wanted to see Chryst leave the program.

"For me personally, it's fuel. It's really on us," he said. "We didn't execute. We didn't play the football that we needed to play. This is a consequence of that."

As for Leonhard, he leads the list of potential candidates to replace Chryst in a permanent capacity, according to CBS Sports' Tom Fornelli. Other names to watch include Baylor coach Dave Aranda, Iowa State coach Matt Campbell, NC State coach Dave Doeren, Kansas coach Lance Leipold, Kent State coach Sean Lewis and Carolina Panthers coach Matt Rhule.

To fend off those names, Leonhard will have a seven-game trial run as head coach that began with a 42-7 win at Northwestern on Oct. 8.

"The messaging in this building is always very consistent with what we expect, what we demand from our players to hold each other accountable," Leonhard said. "To me it's time

to show it. There is no special talk. There is no players-only meeting. There's no coaches-only meeting. It's getting it done at this point.

"We know the issues. We know we have to play better. There is no talking anymore. It's time to get it done. That is what I'm excited about. It's the action piece of it."

U-M RB Coach Hart Carted Off At Indiana

Michigan running backs coach Mike Hart had to be carted off the field as the result of a medical emergency at Memorial Stadium during the first quarter of the Wolverines' game at Indiana on Oct. 8. It was later reported that he suffered a seizure.

Hart received further evaluation at a nearby hospital. He was moving his extremities and head as he left the field. Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh informed the press that Hart was in stable condition after the game.

"Mike's a strong guy, and just abundant prayers going his way," Harbaugh said. "And it really can put things in perspective. In the moment, everybody's thoughts are with Mike. Mine were. Everybody around us was to just get him the care that he needed."

Hart coached the Hoosiers' running backs from 2017 through 2020 before joining Michigan's staff for the 2021 season. He played for the Wolverines as a running back from 2004-2007, setting the school record for rushing yards at 5,040 yards, which still stands today. He was a finalist for the Doak Walker Award, given annually to the best running back in college football, in 2006.

Michigan running backs Blake Corum and Donovan Edwards were visibly emotional as Hart left the sideline. The coach was held in a local hospital overnight for observation and discharged on Oct. 9. Michigan eventually won the contest 31-10.

Gleeson Out As Rutgers OC

Earlier this season, Rutgers coach Greg Schiano expressed great faith in his offensive coordinator Sean Gleeson. Asked about his confidence level in the New Jersey native, Schiano stated that it was "as high as it could be" and that the Scarlet Knights "got the right guy" to call their offense.

On Oct. 9, Schiano dismissed Gleeson from his coaching duties. Out of 131 schools, Rutgers ranked 104th in scoring offense (22.8 points per game) and 109th in total offense (334.0 yards per game) through the first six weeks of the season. The Scarlet Knights' passing attack has been especially abysmal, ranking 114th in the country at 173.2 yards per game. As a team, they complete just 54.9 percent of throws.

Rutgers got off to a 3-3 start to its season

BIG 2022 Standings

East Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	3	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Ohio State	3	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Penn State	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Maryland	1	2	0.333	4	2	0.667
Indiana	1	2	0.333	3	3	0.500
Rutgers	0	3	0.000	3	3	0.500
Michigan State	0	3	0.000	2	4	0.333

West Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Illinois	2	1	0.667	5	1	.833
Purdue	2	1	0.667	4	2	.667
Nebraska	2	1	0.667	3	3	.500
Minnesota	1	1	0.500	4	1	.800
Northwestern	1	2	0.333	1	5	.167
Iowa	1	2	0.333	3	3	.500
Wisconsin	1	2	0.333	3	3	.500

Oct. 7 Game

Nebraska 14, Rutgers 13

Oct. 8 Games

Michigan 31, Indiana 10
Purdue 31, Maryland 29
Wisconsin 42, Northwestern 7
Ohio State 49, Michigan State 20
Illinois 9, Iowa 6

Oct. 15 Games

Nebraska at Purdue, 7:30 p.m.
Wisconsin at Michigan State, 4 p.m.
Penn State at Michigan, noon
Minnesota at Illinois, noon
Maryland at Indiana, 3:30 p.m.

Oct. 22 Games

Iowa at **Ohio State**, TBD
Indiana at Rutgers, noon
Purdue at Wisconsin, 3:30 p.m.
Northwestern at Maryland, 3:30 p.m.
Minnesota at Penn State, 7:30 p.m.

and suffered three straight losses to Iowa, Ohio State and Nebraska while failing to surpass 13 points in any of the defeats. Michigan and Penn State also await on its schedule on Nov. 5 and 19, respectively.

Tight end coach Nunzio Campanile will step in as interim offensive coordinator following Gleeson's firing. Campanile is in his fifth season with Rutgers after joining the staff in 2018 as running backs coach. He served as interim head coach for eight games in 2019 following the firing of Chris Ash four weeks into the season.

Hiller Out As IU OL Coach

Gleeson is not the only coach looking for a

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BIG TEN NOTES

job. Indiana let go of offensive line coach and running game coordinator Darren Hiller on Oct. 9 following the Hoosiers' loss to Michigan the previous day. Hiller will be replaced by former Northern Illinois and Temple head coach Rod Carey, who is in his first season on Indiana's coaching staff. He is a former offensive lineman for the Hoosiers from 1990-93.

"I want to thank Darren for his effort and dedication to our football program," Indiana coach Tom Allen said. "He represented IU in a first-class manner, but I believe it is time for a new voice to lead the offensive line room.

"Rod is a tremendous football coach and leader of young men," Allen added. "His record as a head coach and offensive line coach speaks for itself. Rod will make an immediate impact and integrate well with our offensive staff."

In his sixth season as the Hoosiers' offensive line coach, Hiller's front five failed to gain much traction on the ground, with Indiana ranking 124th in the nation for rushing at 90.8 yards per game prior to his firing. Starting quarterback Connor Bazalak has been under pressure 34.6 percent of his dropbacks, and the Hoosiers have allowed 19 sacks, the most in the Big Ten.

In Hiller's final game with the program, Indiana's offensive line gave up seven sacks to the Wolverines while the rushing attack went for just 19 yards on 25 carries, a dismal 0.8 yards per attempt.

Preseason All-Big Ten Men's Basketball Team Released

Eleven players were recognized as part of the Big Ten's preseason all-conference team Oct. 6 as the countdown to college basketball

season continues. Three of the 11 players were unanimous selections, with Wisconsin as the only school to have multiple players make the list. No Ohio State players were chosen.

Indiana third-year forward Trayce Jackson-Davis, fresh off a second-team All-Big Ten selection last season, earned Preseason Player of the Year honors for the conference. Jackson-Davis averaged 18.3 points last year, playing sound enough on the defensive side to also make the Big Ten All-Defense team. His 2.3 blocks per game placed second in the league. He's been second- or third-team All-Big Ten each of his three years with the Hoosiers.

The other two unanimous selections were Michigan third-year center Hunter Dickinson and Purdue third-year center Zach Edey. Dickinson finished fifth in the conference with 1.5 blocks per game, adding the fourth-most rebounds at 8.6 to go with 18.6 points per contest. Edey posted 14.4 points per game of his own, adding 7.7 rebounds and 1.2 blocks and finishing second in the Big Ten with a field-goal percentage of 64.8.

Minnesota third-year forward Jamison Battle landed in the top 10 for scoring last year in the Big Ten with 17.5 points per game, and also made the preseason All-Big Ten squad. Wisconsin placed both second-year guard Chucky Hepburn, the lone player from last year's All-Big Ten freshman team who didn't leave for the NBA draft, and fourth-year forward Tyler Wahl to give the Badgers two selections.

Rounding out the list are Illinois fourth-year guard Terrence Shannon Jr., Iowa third-year forward Kris Murray, Michigan State fourth-year forward Malik Hall, Penn State fourth-year guard Jalen Pickett and Rutgers

third-year center Clifford Omoruyi.

QB Controversy For Wildcats

Northwestern starting quarterback Ryan Hilinski exited the Wildcats' loss to Wisconsin on Oct. 8 with concussion-like symptoms, but it wasn't the first time that day that Hilinski was forced to leave the field.

Second-year quarterback Brendan Sullivan entered during the Wildcats' third series against the Badgers, taking Hilinski's place after he threw an interception. That pick wasn't the reason Hilinski came out, however, according to Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald – it had been the idea entering the contest to put in Sullivan during the third series.

"Part of the plan was to get him out there and get him into the mix, see if we could get a spark," Fitzgerald said.

Each of Sullivan's first three possessions under center resulted in three-and-outs, after which Hilinski came back into the game. That lasted until a bit after halftime, when a physical tackle put Hilinski into concussion protocol and out of the remainder of the contest. Sullivan completed three passes after his entry that series but fumbled away possession to end it. Overall, Sullivan finished 11 of 17 with

114 yards and one touchdown.

Hilinski has completed 57.8 percent of his passes for 1,576 yards, six touchdowns and six interceptions through six games this season.

Lower.com Field To Host Women's Soccer Tournament

The Big Ten announced on Oct. 7 that the 2022 Big Ten Women's Soccer Tournament will be coming to Columbus, with the tournament semifinals and finals to be played at the Columbus Crew's Lower.com Field.

Following quarterfinal matches at the home stadium of the higher-seeded teams Oct. 30, the final four teams standing in the conference will battle in the semifinals at Lower.com Field Nov. 4 with the championship to follow Nov. 6.

This is the fourth time Columbus has played host to the event, with both times prior being on Ohio State's campus. Those two occasions were 1996, when Indiana took home the title, and 2004, when the Buckeyes won the crown on their home turf. The move also marks just the fourth time since adding women's soccer in 1994 that the Big Ten has held its conference tournament away from one of its campuses.

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Thornton Eyes Impactful Freshman Season

As a member of Ohio State's five-man freshman class, guard Bruce Thornton is currently experiencing the transition from high schooler to college student.

COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

A consensus four-star recruit, Thornton emerged as one of the nation's top guards at Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton. During his time at Milton, Thornton scored over 1,500 career points and was named to the All-State first team three times. He led the Eagles to a state title as a junior and was named Georgia's Gatorade Player of the Year following his senior season with averages of 17.2 points, 7.7 rebounds and 7.5 assists.

Now Thornton is expected to step into a primary ball-handling role for Ohio State as a freshman. With his first summer with the program under his belt, Thornton said it's been a process to get used to the more attentive nature of collegiate athletics.

"It's been fun," Thornton said. "I've had some ups and downs of being new, getting used to the workouts and everything. As a freshman, you really don't know. You're just going and then you realize that you're hurting in your core, in your legs, and trying to figure out why you're hurting so bad and can't get up. It's just the struggles you have to go through as a freshman. I'm thankful for the summer. That helped me deal with that and build a foundation."

While recovering from high-intensity practices has been a focus of his on the basketball court, time management has become one of the more prevalent learning curves for him since he arrived in Columbus.

"You have to make sure you get your work done early so you don't have to worry about it later," Thornton said. "The second thing (I've learned) is to not procrastinate. The next thing you know, you've got three or four assignments due at one time, so it's just making sure you do things at the right time so you don't have to worry about it."

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said he expects Thornton will have a major role for the Buckeyes this season and that

he'll see the court a considerable amount as a freshman. With heightened expectations entering his first season as a Buckeye, Thornton acknowledged that there is still some work left to improve his game but noted that he understands the importance of his role with this team.

"I feel like I still have some work to do," Thornton said. "My teammates are helping me every day, my coaches are helping me every day, so I can become a better player every single day. I feel like, during the season, I have to have some impact for us to win."

On the floor, Thornton boasts a stocky build – standing 6-2 and weighing 215 pounds – and said that he tries to play like a pair of guys who share that body type in Miami Heat guard Kyle Lowry and Milwaukee Bucks guard Jrue Holiday.



Bruce Thornton

Although Thornton acknowledged that he's still getting used to the college experience, his partner in the backcourt – Oklahoma State transfer guard Isaac Likekele, who played four years with the Cowboys prior to his move to Ohio State – said that the freshman is well beyond his years as a basketball player and person.

"If you ask me, Bruce isn't even under my wing, we're more like partners honestly," Likekele said. "He plays ahead of his time for a freshman. For me, the way he thinks about the game and the pace he plays at, he's definitely ahead of his time more than I was as a freshman. I learn things from him every day. He teaches me things I don't know, and vice versa. We just push each other to be the best."

Buckeyes On The Blacktop Returns

For the first time since 2016, the Ohio State men's and women's basketball teams introduced themselves to Buckeye Nation through the "Buckeyes on the Blacktop" Event.

On Oct. 6, both OSU teams took to the blacktop courts outside of the Recreational and Physical Activity Center on Ohio State's campus to showcase their skills in a variety of competitions – including three-point and dunk contests – in front of the university's student body.

The evening started with the Shooting Stars competition, which was a competition between the men's and women's teams in a tournament format. One player from each team was required to make a layup, free throw, three-pointer and half-

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
Taison Chatman	G	6-4	170	★★★★	Minneapolis Totino-Grace
Scotty Middleton	SF	6-6	180	★★★★	Wichita (Kan.) Sunrise Christian
Austin Parks	C	6-9	240	★★★	Saint Mary's (Ohio) Memorial
Devin Royal	SF	6-7	210	★★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) Central

court shot faster than their counterpart. Fourth-year guard Madison Greene bested graduate forward Justice Sueing before downing Wright State transfer guard Tanner Holden en route to victory in the competition.

After Greene's victory, each team trotted out four players to compete in the three-point contest. Freshmen Brice Sensabaugh and Bowen Hardman, West Virginia transfer Sean McNeil and third-year forward Zed Key represented the men's team while seniors Taylor Mikesell and Rebeka Mikulášiková, junior Rikki Harris and sophomore transfer Emma Shumate – also arriving from West Virginia – competed for the women. Each player received 60 seconds to shoot 25 three-pointers from five racks of five balls set in both corners, both wings and at the top of the key.

Sensabaugh separated himself from his teammates, knocking down 14 threes compared to McNeil and Hardman's 12 and Key's six. Mikesell emerged from the women's side of the bracket, dropping 12 threes and beating out Mikulášiková (11), Harris (eight) and Shumate (four). Sensabaugh and Mikesell then competed for the crown of three-point champion in a winner-take-all final round. Sensabaugh took home the win, again hitting 14 threes to beat out Mikesell, who drained 11.

Sensabaugh was also a contender in the dunk contest, producing a 360 slam in the first round before throwing down a between-the-legs windmill slam to earn a perfect 40 score from judges Sueing, OSU quarterback C.J. Stroud, former OSU guard Joey Lane and Brutus. But freshman guard Roddy Gayle Jr. also showed off his bunnies during the contest.

After underwhelming with a simple windmill slam after multiple attempts, Gayle went deep into his bag of tricks on his next dunk. Gayle placed 6-6 teammate Eugene Brown III in the center of the paint before flying over him and throwing down a between-the-legs dunk to advance to the final round against Sensabaugh.

While Gayle and Sensabaugh met in the final round, redshirt freshman Kalen Etzler and freshman Felix Okpara each put up valiant efforts in the first two rounds. Okpara threw down a one-handed slam on his first dunk before throwing his elbow in the rim on his second-round slam, emulating former Toronto Raptors guard Vince Carter's dunk from the 2000 NBA dunk contest. Etzler threw down a reverse dunk on his first attempt before skying over his

mother and lacrosse player Mitchell Pelke while throwing down a one-handed slam in the second round.

With Okpara and Etzler out of the way, Gayle and Sensabaugh duelled in the final round. Sensabaugh again relied on a 360 dunk, while Gayle wowed with a reverse slam that was thrown off the corner of the backboard by Likekele and took home the win.

The night concluded with a brief scrimmage by the men's team that looked more like an all-star game. The players threw down some dunk-contest worthy slams, primarily off alley-oops and fastbreak opportunities.

After the six-year hiatus, Ohio State expects to make "Buckeyes on the Blacktop" a yearly event.

Recruitment Picks Up For PG Mobley

Less than a week after he placed Ohio State in his top six schools, 2024 Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star point guard John Mobley Jr. (6-0, 150) took an official visit to the Columbus campus for the weekend of Oct. 2.

Mobley took photos in which he and his family were clad in Ohio State gear. In the photos, Mobley donned an OSU uniform with the No. 3, his high school number. He and his family also took in the Ohio State-Rutgers football game at Ohio Stadium.

Mobley's top six consists of LSU, Xavier, Arizona State, Creighton and USC alongside Ohio State. He is the No. 43 overall player in the 2024 class and the No. 7 point guard, according to 247Sports' composite score.

Harris Places OSU In Top Four

While the Buckeyes closely recruit Mobley in the backcourt, they've also made headway with a significant 2024 frontcourt prospect.

Fairfax (Va.) Paul VI Catholic four-star small forward Darren Harris (6-6, 195) placed Ohio State in his top four. The Buckeyes slot in alongside Maryland, Miami (Fla.) and Duke.

Harris is the No. 14 small forward and No. 48 overall player in the 2024 class, according to 247Sports' composite score. He has already taken an unofficial visit to Ohio State and left Columbus impressed with what he experienced in his short time with the program.

"I loved my visit there," Harris told On3. "I talk to the coaches every single day. The facilities are crazy. The program is in a really good spot right now. They made it clear I'm a big priority there."



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Greene Excited For Return To The Court

Ohio State lost several tenured players over the offseason, including guard Braxtin Miller and forward Tanaya Beacham, but the Buckeyes are getting one important member of the team back in point guard Madison Greene.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Greene will return to the lineup this season after missing last year with a knee injury suffered just days before the Buckeyes' opener. Ohio State toyed around with several options at point guard in her absence, including Kateri Poole, who has since transferred to LSU, and senior guard Jacy Sheldon, who handled those responsibilities for much of last season.

When Greene last played for Ohio State in the 2020-21 season, she averaged 13.4 points and 4.3 assists on 42.7 percent shooting, and she was also one of the Buckeyes' top playmakers on defense, averaging nearly two steals per game. Now, she'll get to return her talents to the court.

"I feel great," Greene said. "It's really exciting to be back on the court again and to play with my teammates. I'm really excited about this year and what we can do, so it's going to be fun, for sure."

While Greene was unable to take the floor last season, she still stayed involved with the team, hanging around practice and sitting with the team on the bench during games. She said this experience, despite the difficulty of recovering from a serious knee injury, helped give her a new perspective on the game.

"Just sitting on the bench this (past) season, it really helped me learn more about the game, more about my players that I'm going to play with this year, so it just made me learn," she said. "It really made me just appreciate being healthy, because I've never been through a major injury like this. So it was definitely a different perspective, and then you sit back and think about basketball, family, friends and everything – so it's been a long journey."

Greene's return is also welcomed by her teammates, and her ability on the court – along with that of Sheldon and senior guard Taylor Mikesell – should give Ohio State one of the top backcourts in the conference, if not the nation.

"I'm excited to have Madison back," Mikesell said. "Madison's defense and just her leadership and her ability to create from the point guard position is pretty impressive. That's her natural position, which allows Jacy and I to play our natural positions as well, which is nice. I think it's going to be pretty exciting what all three of us can do in the backcourt."

Sheldon also looked forward to how the Buckeyes might look with Greene back on the court, in addition to the embarrassment of riches Ohio State has at the guard spot.

"I love playing with Madison," Sheldon said. "We played against each other in high

school, and it's not even close – it's way more fun playing with her (than against her). With Rikki (Harris), T-Mike (Mikesell) and a lot of the other really good guards we have, our chemistry is really good and it's really fun to play in an environment like that."

And while Greene is expected to return to the starting point guard position, Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said that Sheldon offers some flexibility given that she filled the role for most of last season.

"She did a great job in that position last year, so I would say it gives us a lot more options this year," he said. "But she was really effective in that role last year, and I thought we executed well with her there, so I think the way I look at it is definitely a lot more options. And especially with her versatility, she can play the one, she can play the two and (we) just have to figure out how the team best fits around that. But she certainly did a great job as the point last year, and that's certainly an option again this year."

OSU Earns High Marks In Preseason Big Ten Poll

The Big Ten released the conference's preseason media and coaches polls on Oct. 5, and Ohio State was given high expectations by both groups. The coaches voted the Buckeyes to finish second in the conference behind Iowa, while the media had Ohio State finishing third behind Indiana and Iowa.

The Buckeyes split last year's regular-season conference championship with the Hawkeyes, while Iowa went on to win the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament. Ohio State was knocked out in the semifinals by Indiana.

The coaches' full top five was Iowa, Ohio State, Indiana, Maryland and Michigan, while the media had Iowa, Indiana, Ohio State, Maryland and Nebraska. With the exception of Nebraska, all of those teams were in the hunt for the regular-season title

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2023 who have verbally committed to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the ESPN rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Faith Carson	C	6-4	NA	Buchanan, Mich.
Diana Collins	PG	5-9	★★★★	Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood

last year, even down to the last week of the season.

As for individual honors, Iowa guard Caitlin Clark was voted unanimously as the Big Ten Preseason Player of the Year, the second consecutive season that Clark earned the honor. She took home Player of the Year honors at last season's end. Clark was also one of just two players, along with Sheldon, voted unanimously to both the coaches and media preseason All-Big Ten team.

Including Clark and Sheldon, the All-Big Ten team – voted on by coaches and media – featured the same 10 players. Clark and Sheldon were joined by Mikesell, Indiana guard Grace Berger and forward Mackenzie Holmes, Iowa center Monika Czinano, Maryland guard Diamond Miller, Michigan guard Leigha Brown, Nebraska forward Alexis Markowski and Penn State guard Makenna Marisa.

Berger, Clark, Czinano, Mikesell and Sheldon were unanimous selections by the coaches, while only Clark and Sheldon were unanimous by the media.

Mikesell Opens Up On Return To OSU

Mikesell spoke in the spring about her decision to return to Ohio State rather than testing the waters in the WNBA draft, citing the Buckeyes' run to the Sweet 16 in last season's NCAA tournament, and she further broke down her decision in a recent media availability. While she had an inkling that she might come back to Ohio State, she said her decision was not made until moments after the Buckeyes' tournament loss to Tex-

as.

"I had an idea (but) I didn't really want to think about it during the tournament," she said. "I wanted to be fully present with the team and what our goal was, but obviously not having played in that last (weekend of the tournament), I had to make the decision quicker than I had wanted to.

"I think it would have been right after we lost (to Texas), me and Jacy kind of looked at each other (and thought) that we can do something really special," she continued. "We need one more shot at this. I guess in that moment, I kind of knew that I wanted to come back, wanted to chase one more chance. Why not come back to another institution that is going to be like Ohio State? You don't get that opportunity more than once."

Mikesell finished the season averaging 18.6 points per game on 48.2 percent shooting – including 47.5 percent from deep – and her services obviously would have been wanted by Ohio State for an additional season. Even so, Mikesell complimented the Ohio State coaching staff for supporting her regardless of what her decision might have been.

"They were actually great," she said. "They were putting out some feelers for me and the WNBA with the GMs and stuff and just seeing where I was at. They were really supportive of whatever I wanted to choose. That's how they were from the start when I got here, and they were like that the whole entire year, even at the end when I had to make a decision whether I was coming back or leaving. So they were really supportive, and I appreciate them for that."



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Treloar Pointing Toward A Rebound Season

When Travis Treloar led Ohio State in scoring as a freshman during the pandemic-shortened 2020-21 season, he seemed poised for an even better year two with the team on the upswing as well.

While the Buckeyes improved on a 7-19-1 record to 22-13-2 last season and came close to qualifying for the NCAA tournament, Treloar's points per game fell from 0.80 as a freshman to 0.39 as a sophomore.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"I've seen it a lot when you've been around the game as long as I have," coach Steve Rohlik said. "There's something to be said about a sophomore jinx, or a slump. Like it or not, sometimes you come in and have success and you almost think it's going to be easy, right or wrong.

"The team had success so I think he was happy with that, but individually, it wasn't quite what he wanted. You've got to continue to improve all the time. As soon as you think you've made it to the top, you're going to get knocked down, and I think it was a great learning experience for him."

Those teachable moments may be paying off this season. Following the opening

series sweep of Mercyhurst (4-2, 4-1) on Oct. 1 and 2, Treloar was named the Big Ten's second star of the week after collecting four points (one goal, three assists), two in each game. In the first contest, he recorded his first two-assist game since March of 2021.

"Obviously, it helped my confidence, but it's one weekend," he said. "I want to be a player that performs every weekend."

Treloar had two more points in the No. 14 Buckeyes (4-0-0, 2-0-0 Big Ten) sweep of visiting Wisconsin on Oct. 7 and 8. He had an assist in the 3-1 victory in the opener and scored during the 4-3 win in the rematch. He leads the team with six points (two goals, four assists). It's a good start after last season's subpar outing in which he had 14 points (seven goals, seven assists) in 36 games compared to his rookie campaign of 20 points (eight goals, 12 assists) in 25 games to become the first freshman to lead the team in scoring since Ryan Dzingel in 2011-12. Dzingel has gone on to play 404 NHL games and is playing this season in the Carolina Hurricanes organization.

Treloar disagrees with Rohlik's assessment that he may have gotten complacent last season.

"No, I don't really think that had any effect," he said. "Every summer and before the season I put in the work and have my goals that I want to accomplish. Every game and every season doesn't go your way, so I think it's how you respond to it. I want to be the best player I can be and help the team as

much as I can.

"I learned a lot last year. For myself, it was a disappointment so coming into this season I have a chip on my shoulder and honestly, I think it was good for me. It gave me a little wake-up call and I'm ready and I felt like I prepared well for this season."

Rohlik said another reason for Treloar's decline in offense was the different makeup of the team.

"The year before, he was depended upon a lot more, and suddenly your team's personality changes," the coach said. "And he got moved to the wing and wasn't playing in the middle like he's used to. We did some things as a team that all of a sudden other guys were scoring. We had four lines scoring, and we're not leaning on one line and one power play and one guy last year like we were before."

The Buckeyes averaged 3.4 goals last season, up considerably from the program-record low 2.0 in Treloar's first season. Even then, he said he wasn't burdened to carry the load for the goal-starved team as a freshman.

"I never felt any pressure that way," he said. "I always put that pressure on myself to produce and being the guy and being as good as I can be."

Rohlik reminded Treloar to stay positive and focus on the areas that need improvement.

"You've got to work on the things that are going to elevate your game to a whole new level," Rohlik said. "Some guys are unbelievable stick handlers and (have a) skill set like that and they go out and they do that and work on that. Well, what about the other things like strength conditioning and shooting that we talked to him about that he needed to work on? I think he's done that."

Treloar was excited for the Wisconsin series because not only did it open the Big Ten schedule but his father, Darren, was in Columbus from Norway, where he is sporting director for a hockey club.

"It's awesome to have him," Treloar said. "Obviously, it's a little bit hard to make the trip out every weekend and I know he wishes he could do that, but he's taking care of his team at home. It will be nice to have small talks after the games and some dinners, so I'm really, really thankful for that."

His father played junior hockey in Canada before a nine-game minor-league stint in the American Hockey League from 1987-88. He played professionally in Sweden from 1989-98 and has since been a head coach in Sweden and Norway.

"I was born in Sweden and raised in Norway," Travis Treloar said. "I have Swedish and Canadian citizenship, nothing Norwegian. My dad is Canadian. That's where I got the Canadian citizenship."

Leading The Way

Fifth-year seniors Gustaf Westlund and Jake Wise will wear the captain's "C" with senior Jaedon Leslie serving as the alternate captain.

Westlund was captain last season and was an alternate in 2020-21 as a junior. Wise, in his second season with the Buckeyes after transferring from Boston University, is a first-time captain. Leslie was an alternate captain last season.

"It's a huge honor to be a captain on this team," Leslie said. "There's lots of great voices in this room that deserve letters and unfortunately, they all can't wear one, but they have big voices and they're a big part of this team."

"I think going back to last year, there were just learning curves throughout the year. There's always ups and downs, and I think staying even-keeled throughout it all and making sure that you have a positive mind-set to go into games and weekends can really help out a team."

Leslie said he likes his mentorship role, especially in regard to the younger members of the team.

"It's always being there for them, supporting them in any way that I can is kind of what we need to do as older guys, and I think if we can do that, then we're going to create great team chemistry," he said.

He's contributing on the ice too. Leslie got his first points of the season, a goal and an assist, in the first game against Wisconsin.

Besting The Badgers

The Buckeyes have won their first four games for the first time since the 1983-84 season when they went 13-0-0 and reached their first No. 1 ranking in program history.

Against the Badgers, they did it in different ways. In the opener, they scored three unanswered goals until Jakub Dobeš lost his shutout with less than four minutes remaining.

Wisconsin responded the next game for a 3-0 lead midway through before Treloar and Cam Thiesing made it 3-2 after two periods. Jake Wise tied it on the power play at 11:52 of the third, and Cole McWard netted the winner at 15:22.

For a full recap of the Wisconsin series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



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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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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2022 FOOTBALL

Sept. 3 NOTRE DAME, W 21-10; **10** ARKANSAS STATE, W 45-12; **17** TOLEDO, W, 77-21.; **24** WISCONSIN, W 52-21.

Oct. 1 RUTGERS, W 49-10; **8** at Michigan State, W 49-20; **22** IOWA; **29** at Penn State.

Nov. 5 at Northwestern; **12** INDIANA; **19** at Maryland; **26** MICHIGAN.

2023 FOOTBALL

Sept. 9 SAN JOSE STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

CROSS COUNTRY

Sept. 2 Mike Baumer Cross Country Classic at Dayton, OH Men: 1/15; Women: 1/13; **9** Big Ten Preview at Michigan, Men 5/6; Women 2/6; **23** Roy Griak Invitational at Minneapolis, Minn. Men: 13/17; Women 5/20; **30** Lakefront Invitational at Chicago, Ill. Men 2/7; Women: 2/11.

Oct. 15 Arturo Barrios Invitational at College Station, Texas; **28** Big Ten Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.

Nov. 11 NCAA Regional Championships at Terre Haute, Ind.; **18** NCAA Championships at Stillwater, Okla.

WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY (7-5)

Aug. 26 Northeastern, W 4-0; **28** Albany W 3-0.

Sept. 4 LEHIGH, W 4-0; **11** Miami (Ohio), L 1-0; **16** MARYLAND, L 4-2; **18** WAKE FOREST, L 1-0; **23** Rutgers, L 2-0; **25** Penn State, L 2-0; **30** MICHIGAN STATE, W 2-1 (OT)

Oct. 2 KENT STATE, W 4-0; **7** CENTRAL MICHIGAN, W 7-1; **9** Ohio, W 7-1, **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.

MEN'S GOLF

Sept. 7 Frederica Cup at St. Simons Island, Ga., 6/8; **8** Frederica Cup at St. Simons Island, Ga., 7/8; **26** Inverness Intercollegiate at Toledo, Ohio, 4/16 **27** Inverness Intercollegiate at Toledo, Ohio, 7/16.

Oct. 3 Hamptons Invitational at East Hamptons, N.Y., 6/10; **4** Hamptons Invitational at East Hamptons, N.Y., 4/10; **31** Cal Poly Collegiate at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.

Nov. 1 Cal Poly Collegiate at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Sept. 12-13 Dick McGuire/Branch Law Firm at Albuquerque, N.M., 1/17; **23-24** Mason Rudolph at Nashville, Tenn., 1/17.

Oct. 3-4 Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio, 7/8; **23-24** Jim West Challenge at San Marcos, Texas.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (4-0, 2-0)

Oct. 1 at Mercyhurst, W 4-2; **2** at Mercyhurst, W 4-1; **7** WISCONSIN, W 3-1; **8** WISCONSIN, W 4-3; **14-15** at UConn; **20-21** BENTLEY; **28-29** MINNESOTA.

Nov. 10-11 at Michigan State; **18-19** NOTRE DAME; **25-26** at Long Island University.

Dec. 2-3 at Penn State; **16-17** at Bowling Green.

Jan. 6-7 MICHIGAN STATE; **13-14** at Michigan; **20-21** at Wisconsin.

Feb. 3-4 PENN STATE; **10-11** at Notre Dame; **16** MICHIGAN **18** at FirstEnergy Stadium, Cleveland, vs. Michigan; **24-25** at Minnesota.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (4-0)

Sept. 30 at Minnesota State, W 2-1.

Oct. 1 at Minnesota State, W 5-4; **7** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-2; **8** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 6-2; **15-16** at Bemidji State; **21-22** MINNESOTA DULUTH; **28-29** MINNESOTA.

Nov. 5-6 at St. Thomas; **18-19** BEMIDJI STATE; **22-23** COLGATE.

Dec. 2-3 at Minnesota Duluth; **17-18** at Cornell; **30-31** at Lindenwood.

Jan. 13-14 WISCONSIN; **20-21** at St. Cloud State; **27-28** MINNESOTA STATE.

Feb. 3-4 at Minnesota; **10-11** ST. THOMAS; **17-18** at Wisconsin.

MEN'S SOCCER (6-1-4)

Aug. 25 SOUTH CAROLINA, T 1-1; **28** CAL POLY, W 3-0.

Sept. 1 Bowling Green, W 1-0. **5** WRIGHT STATE, W 2-0; **9** BUTLER, W 2-0; **13** Akron, T 3-3.; **18** INDIANA, W 2-1; **21** Cleveland State, T 0-0; **25** Maryland, L 1-0; **30** RUTGERS, T 2-2.

Oct. 5 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-2; **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.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (8-2-3)

Aug. 18 Kansas, W 1-0; **21** Missouri, W 2-1; **26** BYU, L 2-0.

Sept. 1 Dayton, W 4-0; **4** TEXAS A&M, T 0-0; **8** Brown, W 3-2; **11** KENT STATE, W 2-1; **18** Rutgers, L 2-0; **22** Michigan, T 0-0; **25** IOWA, W 2-0; **29** Indiana, W 4-0.

Oct. 2 PENN STATE, W 3-0; **8** Nebraska, T 2-2; **13** MARYLAND, 7 p.m.; **16** Illinois, 2 p.m.; **20** MICHIGAN STATE, 7 p.m.; **23** NORTHWESTERN, noon.

MEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 19 Columbus Challenger at Columbus, Ohio.

Oct. 1 ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla.; **20** ITA Midwest Regional Championship at Champaign, Ill.; **24** Las Vegas Challenger at Las Vegas, Nev.; **31** Ithica Challenger at Ithica, N.Y.; **31** Charlottesville Challenger at Charlottesville, Va.

Nov. 2 Big Ten Singles & Doubles Championship; **2** ITA Fall Championship at San Diego, Calif.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 16 Debbie Southern Furman Fall Classic at Greenville, S.C., NTS; **22** Fall Spotlight at Raleigh, N.C.

Oct. 1 ITA All-Americans at Cary, N.C.; **14** Buckeye Invite at Columbus, Ohio; **20** ITA Midwest Regionals at Ann Arbor, Mich.

Nov. 2 ITA Fall Championships at San Diego, Calif.; **4** ASU Thunderbolt Invitational at San Diego, Calif.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (9-5, 5-1)

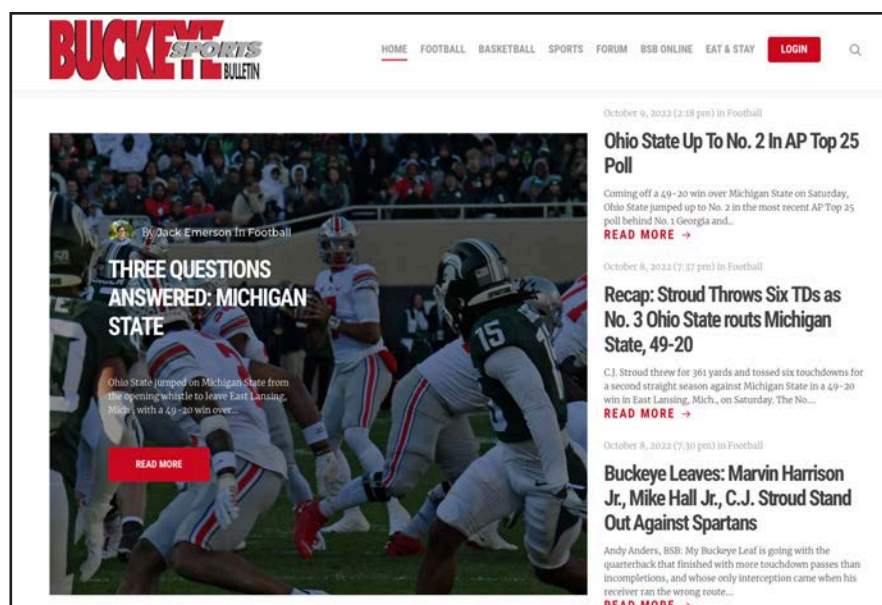
Aug. 26 TEXAS, L 3-0; **27** L 3-1.

Sept. 3 San Diego, L 3-0; **4** Louisville, W 3-1; **9**, BYU, W 3-0; **11** Georgia Tech, W 3-1; **17** Tennessee, W 3-0; **18** Pittsburgh, L 3-0; **23** Iowa, W 3-0; **24** Nebraska, L 3-2; **28** Michigan, W 3-1.

Oct. 1 Indiana, W 3-1; **7** PENN STATE, W 3-2; **9** NORTHWESTERN, W, 3-1; **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.

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First Half Shows Championship Potential

We know Ohio State is good enough to win a national championship. That much is obvious at the midpoint of the regular season. What we don't know yet is whether Ohio State is good enough to be considered the favorite.

THE EXNER POINT Rich Exner

There's Ohio State, Alabama and Georgia – I believe in that order – at the top of the college football heap. And then there is everybody else. But the ordering for that top three is iffy, and arguments can be made for all.

Ohio State most consistently has been the best. Georgia has had the most impressive win (49-3 over Oregon back on Sept. 3), and Alabama is Alabama. Maybe the Tide should have lost to Texas (or would have lost if Quinn Ewers hadn't been knocked out of the game), but it didn't lose. And it also survived a tight game against Texas A&M on Oct. 8. Alabama still hasn't lost.

What we do know about Ohio State is that the offense is premium – again – and the defense is much improved over last season.

But there are those moments that cause you to wonder. A bad Michigan State team – a team that hasn't won a game outside of Mid-American Conference play this season – posted 13 first-half points on OSU. The game was 7-7 at one point, then 21-13. Yes, Ohio State went on to blow out MSU more convincingly than the 49-20 final score would indicate. But the mistakes that made the game so close early on won't be so easy to overcome against elite opponents.

Are we asking for perfection? Yes, or close to it. That's what you need to see at this point of the season to say a team is likely to win the national championship. Perhaps that's too much to ask. No one has been perfect so far.

But at least there has been a lot to witness to say this team is very capable. I'm far more certain about this team having a real chance now than I was heading into the season. The 48.8 points per game is better than last year (a nation's-best 45.7 a game). But Ohio State would have far more points if it hadn't called off the attack early in nearly every game.

C.J. Stroud is better, and so are the receivers and the running backs, in part because so many more of them have proven to be premium players. And the 15.7 points per game allowed is a solid improvement from the 22.8 a year ago.

Now a breather. A week off. Then Iowa. What's really going to tell us a lot about

this team is the Oct. 29 trip to Penn State, currently unbeaten (though by then PSU will have played both Michigan and Minnesota). I expect Ohio State to beat Penn State and Michigan then head to the Big Ten title game undefeated and win there as well.

But, more confidently, what I really can't imagine happening is any more than one loss. Undefeated or one loss should (emphasize should) be enough to make the playoffs, assuming that loss comes against a Penn State or Michigan team that finishes undefeated. Get in the playoffs, and then we'll really find out if this team is as special.

Midterm Report Card

Halfway through the regular season, here's a midterm report card of sorts.

Dominating: Mike Hall Jr. has been a disrupting force on the Ohio State defensive line. It's fun to hit the rewind on the DVR to see the variety of moves – left and right – brute force, and quickness he uses to disrupt more plays than the official tackle stats show (13 tackles, 4½ sacks). Hall gets my vote for the defensive MVP at this point.

Most improved: The linebacker core has gone from what could be considered pedestrian play last year to really solid. Tommy Eichenberg consistently leads the team in tackles (50 for the season) and is second with 2½ sacks. And Steele Chambers truly is playing like a linebacker this season after his position switch from running back a year ago.

Better than expected: Emeka Egbuka (35 catches, 655 yards, six touchdowns), Marvin Harrison Jr. (31, 536, nine) and Julian Fleming (15, 222, five) have exceeded my expectations at the wideout positions, maybe in part because the best of the receivers (Jaxon Smith-Njigba) was sidelined most of the first half of the season.

All this begs the question: Who will be Ohio State's third-best receiver when Smith-Njigba returns? Mr. Big Gainer Egbuka or Mr. Touchdown Harrison? Whoever it is, can you imagine any team in the country having a better No. 3 receiver? Not to mention Fleming as a solid fourth?

Already good, now better: Stroud was No. 2 in the country last year for passer rating and No. 5 for yards. But he clearly is more accurate and more composed in the pocket this season. It's no hyperbole to say he's the odds-on Heisman favorite.

Stroud threw for 4,435 yards and 44 touchdowns last year in 12 games. His yards are down this year, 1,737 at the halfway point, while his TDs are up (24 so far). But Stroud has thrown far fewer passes this year, largely because of the rout fashion of the victories.

OSU is gaining 10.9 yards per Stroud pass attempt this season, up from 10.1 a year ago. Stroud averaged 37 passes a game last year and just 27 a game so far this year. That likely will change as the schedule toughens.

Double duty: The combo of TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams has proven

valuable and reassuring at the running back spot.

With Williams unavailable, Henderson racked up 118 yards on 19 carries before exiting early in the second half with an injury at Michigan State. It certainly looked like he could have flirted with a 200-yard game (third-teamer Dallan Hayden did come in in relief to pick up another 70 yards).

A week earlier, it was Williams, in the absence of Henderson, who ran for 189 yards on 21 carries. And two weeks earlier, with both available, they combined for 222 yards (Henderson had 121 on 21 carries and Williams had 101 on 11 carries.)

Add in 28 yards Hayden had against Rutgers, and that's 627 yards out of the top two available tailbacks over the last three games, or just over 200 yards a game. That's championship-level production.

Top 10 At Midseason

Here's my stab at a top 10 at the mid-season point.

1. Ohio State (6-0) – On cruise control so far, closest game being a 21-10 victory over Notre Dame (now 3-2) in the opener.

2. Georgia (6-0) – Some too-close games against Kent State (17 points) and Missouri (four points), but the most impressive win to date among the top teams (49-3 over Oregon in the opener).

3. Alabama (6-0) – Flirted with losses twice but survived 20-19 over Texas and 24-20 over Texas A&M. We'll know more after the Oct. 15 game at Tennessee.

4. Tennessee (5-0) – Solid so far against Pitt, Florida and LSU to remain unbeaten heading into its big game against Alabama. However, don't expect Tennessee to remain undefeated for long. After Alabama, Georgia awaits on Nov. 5.

5. Clemson (6-0) – This is not the Clemson team of years past, struggling in wins over Wake Forest and NC State. But the Tigers are undefeated. Mark Nov. 5 on the calendar when Clemson visits Notre Dame, which may be Clemson's top remaining test.

6. Michigan (6-0) – No tests yet. Michigan's season will, short of a big misstep, be determined by two games: home against Penn State on Oct. 15 and at Ohio State on Nov. 26.

7. Penn State (5-0) – Much of what I noted about Michigan applies here. Penn State was off Oct. 8, freeing extra time to prepare for U-M.

8. Oklahoma State (5-0) – Best of the Big 12 so far but beware of two-loss Texas on Oct. 22. Ewers is back for Texas. He may just make the Longhorns unbeatable in the Big 12.

9. USC (6-0) – The Trojans keep rolling along, but we likely won't know until late season whether USC is for real. The Trojans wrap the regular season with games against UCLA and Notre Dame.

10. UCLA (6-0) – It's looking a lot like a 1970s-style USC-UCLA showdown awaits at the end of the season.



Tommy Eichenberg

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On Target Or 'Completely' Off The Mark?

One of the features of our BuckeyeSports.com website is the "Live Game Thread" on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum. Staff members and readers basically give a running commentary on each game. It can be both informative and entertaining, and I encourage all of you to jump in, even if it is only to check in at halftime or after the game.

In my final post after the Michigan State game, I called the contest, "Not a complete blowout but a convincing win."

Managing editor emeritus Mark Rea immediately responded.

"49-20 with a 614-202 advantage in total yardage. What exactly is your definition of a blowout?"

This put me a tad on the defensive, but I will try to answer the question. First of all, I said it was not a "complete" blowout. And with a 614-202 advantage in yardage, might the Buckeyes not have won by more? (The Vegas consensus seemed to be around 26.5 points so they did beat that.)

Maybe my vision of a blowout has been skewed since Urban Meyer came to town in 2012, breaking the Ohio State mold, but I guess I would consider a game like the 59-0 win over Wisconsin in the 2014 Big Ten Championship Game a "complete" blowout, or the 56-7 victory over these very same Spartans last season.

Is there a difference between being dominant and blowing a team out?

I guess I put the qualifying "complete" on the blowout remark because I felt the Buckeyes could easily have won by more. I found myself in a critical mood early because of the pick-six thrown by C.J. Stroud, his third interception in three games, and the struggling nature of the defensive secondary, both of which left me nit-picky.

In retrospect, the final margin was tempered by the fact that Buckeye coach Ryan Day cleared his bench in the fourth quarter. Backup quarterback Kyle McCord threw the ball all of two times in the final stanza, and Ohio State pounded the Spartans with basic running plays, failing to score. There was going to be no animated Mel Tucker charging across the field in the belief that Ohio State was running up the score. In fact, it was Tucker's Spartans who scored the only points in the quarter, taking advantage of the reserves for a 25-yard touchdown pass to Montorie Foster to make the game look a little closer than it really was.

It wasn't a "complete" blowout, but there was plenty to excite Buckeye fans and enough to propel the Buckeyes to the No. 2 spot in the nation, including a strong performance by the defense despite any secondary woes, and continued great play by the offensive line which helped lead to a nice mix of rushing (237) and passing (377) yards.

And then there was Stroud.

I don't think anyone would have questioned me after the previous game against Rutgers if I had said he had one of his weakest efforts as a Buckeye. But even with his miscommunication with Emeka Egbuka in the first quarter that allowed the host Spartans to tie the game at 7, I don't think anyone would question me if I said this was one of his best efforts.

Stroud's numbers against the Spartans speak for themselves and are recapped in any number of places in this issue. His ability to hit streaking receivers in full stride is on display on a frequent basis.

After the Michigan State game, I found myself focusing on two different types of plays from Stroud, in this case both involving Marvin Harrison Jr. The first was a pass that Stroud dropped to Harrison in a tight window along the sidelines for a 32-yard gain in the second quarter. It is a type of pass that Stroud has

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

dropped in any number of times, but it is the type of toss from the Heisman candidate that I find truly magical. There are plenty of great quarterbacks out there, but few can make that particular throw.

The second play that stood out to me required less accuracy and more confidence in the receiver. Stroud found Harrison at the left pylon and the receiver outbattled his man for an acrobatic catch on a 50-50 ball for a 19-yard TD. At the time I was thinking to myself that it has to be easy for Stroud to go to Harrison on those 50-50s, because Harrison is able to flip those odds to 70-30. Lo and behold, after the game Stroud backed me up on that.

"He's so dynamic out there, and he always has a 50-50 chance, but I think it's more like 70-30 just because he's so big and strong," the quarterback said of Harrison.

You've got a quarterback who can hit a receiver when he is open, can hit a receiver when he is covered and has great chemistry with seemingly all of the guys who catch the passes.

That adds up to something very special. The whole team adds up to something very special.

Which leads me to believe that there is only one team that can defeat Ohio State, at least until the playoffs, and that team is not Penn State. It's not Michigan. It's Ohio State.

And that may be true of the playoffs as well.

Tight Ends And Tidbits

Opposing defenses seem to finally be getting wise to Cade Stover. Stover was targeted four times against the Spartans, catching three, but for just 6 yards. Six yards or not, the bottom line is that the coaches have not abandoned him, as they might have in seasons past, and the Buckeyes keep throwing the ball his way.

With the season at the halfway point, it's easy enough to project Stover's numbers for the regular season, which would be 32 catches for 412 yards (12.9 average) and four touchdowns, which would easily surpass the best year of his predecessor Jeremy Ruckert. Ruckert, who has moved on to the NFL, had 26 receptions for 309 yards (11.9 average) and three touchdowns last season.

And let's not forget Gee Scott Jr., who pulled in the first touchdown pass of his career against the Spartans.

The tight end lives!

- I have been a bit critical of the defense for not being able to finish off sacks this season. They finally did so against Michigan State, registering four against the Spartans, increasing their season total by 40 percent to 14. The Buckeyes were again led by Mike Hall Jr., who had 2½ sacks lifting his team-leading total to 4½. Is this guy a playmaker or what? He has just 13 tackles on the season and 7½ of them, or 57.7 percent, are for losses.

Dare I say it? The last time I saw a defensive lineman wreaking that kind of havoc, he was named either Bosa or Young.

Despite the sacks against MSU, the Buckeyes still ranked only 46th in the country with 2.3 per game.

- Don't look now but the Buckeye defense is inching ever-closer to coordinator Jim Knowles' bold prediction of a top-five ranking. The 202-yard performance against the Spartans lifted Ohio State to No. 7 in the country, yielding 253.5 yards per game.

Interestingly, there are five Big Ten teams among the top 10. Minnesota leads the country at 222.0, followed by No. 3 Illinois (227.8), No 5 Michigan (247.0), Ohio State, and No. 9 Iowa, Ohio State's next opponent, at 265.0.

In case you are wondering, there are two SEC schools in the top 10, and you can probably guess them: Alabama at No. 6 (250.8) and No. 8 Georgia (263.3).

Loss Of A Titan

We lost one of the true giants in women's sports with the recent passing of former Ohio State women's basketball coach (the first OSU women's basketball coach, to be precise) and athletic administrator Phyllis Bailey at the age of 96.

You can read about Phyllis' contributions on pages 18-19 of this issue. I thought one quote from an interview we did with her in 2019 really summed things up as to where women's sports were when Bailey started working her way up the ranks at Ohio State.

"When I was a basketball coach, they moved me up until I had the position that I had the responsibility of all of the women's teams," she said. "And I said, 'Well, I've never had any work like this.' And they said, 'Neither has anyone else.' And that was just the time when they needed to have somebody who, I guess, they thought had maybe a loud enough voice that people would listen to me."

"Neither has anyone else."

When they say that, that's when you know you are a pioneer.

And Phyllis ended up having "maybe a loud enough voice that people would listen to me."

She truly was a pioneer.

Just Because Everyone Says It

Just because nearly everyone on radio, television, online and on the street says it doesn't make it right, and this week I have perfect examples to illustrate what I am talking about.

Ohio State has an off day on Oct. 15.

The Houston Astros, New York Yankees, Los Angeles Dodgers and Atlanta Braves all earned first-round byes in the MLB playoffs.

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines a "bye" as "the position of a participant in a tournament who advances to the next round without playing."

The Buckeyes had an "off week" because when the 2022 football schedule was put together, there was no game scheduled for them on Oct. 15. The Astros, Yankees, Dodgers and Braves all earned a bye in the playoffs because they finished the regular season seeded either No. 1 or No. 2 in their league.

At BSB, we call proper use of the word "bye" the Karen Wachsmann Rule. The late assistant publisher was insistent that we use the word correctly, even though virtually everyone else calls an off week a bye week.

We have a crop of new writers here at BSB, and I was confident they would turn in stories for this issue speaking of the Buckeyes and their bye. I was also confident Becky Roberts and I would edit those references out. Word must have gotten around, because the boys surprised me and referred to Ohio State's hiatus as an off week.

Don't worry, Karen. We've got your back.

A Coach's Job Never Ends

Speaking of the "off week," Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson had a great response when the hosts of the postgame game show on 97.1 The Fan told him they hoped that he would get some R&R in the days after the Michigan State game.

"I'll get some R&R," Wilson replied. "Recruiting and Recruiting."

On Mail Problems

As regular readers of this column know, I enjoy Ohio State football history, and I have the benefit of a more than 40-year archive of Buckeye Sports Bulletins from which to do research.

As I look back through the old BSBs, it is amazing how the issue of poor mail service is always mentioned, dating back to the very first issues in the early '80s. It's always, "This is the worst mail service we have ever seen," year after year.

This year really is the worst.

I want to assure Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers that the paper goes out at the same time every week. I personally am at the plant and see the papers go on the truck, and London, Ohio, Postmaster Matt Doherty, who oversees the Post Office from which BSB is mailed, was a Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscriber long before he took that position. He makes sure the papers clear his dock immediately. Once gone from there, neither he nor I have control of where the BSBs go or don't go.

A couple of thoughts.

First, just a suggestion. If you call to tell us you haven't gotten your paper yet, don't start the call with "Did the papers go out on time this week?" We are very sensitive about that here. The BSB staff works very hard to meet our deadline each issue, an effort that is made more difficult by the increasing number of night games, which reduces the number of hours to get the paper written, edited, composed, printed and mailed. Yet we do it.

We've worked through hurricanes (yes hurricanes), power outages, major computer failures and other debacles to get the paper finished and mailed to our readers. We are proud of that, and I probably just jinxed us.

Interestingly, I have noticed a greater acceptance from readers this year of the fact that the problems are on the postal end, not BSB's end. Enough of you have had problems with late bill payments, difficulty getting meds, not receiving your birthday card from Aunt Jane, etc., that you realize that timely delivery is not just a problem with your BSB.

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Also, don't forget the complete edition of each issue is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems. BuckeyeSports.com – and all of the features that go with it – is free to all BSB subscribers. For instructions on how to access BuckeyeSports.com, see page 6 of this issue or you can always give us a call during regular business hours. The affable Dave Breithaupt will be glad to help you, and he has taught many an old dog the new BuckeyeSports.com trick.

Thanks for your patience, and thanks for your support.

No BSB Oct. 18

There will certainly be no reason to call us about not receiving your BSB following the Oct. 15 weekend. With no game that weekend, there will be no Buckeye Sports Bulletin mailed on Oct. 18. The next issue of BSB will be mailed Oct. 25, following the Iowa game.

Any breaking news in the interim will be posted on BuckeyeSports.com.

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