

Second Chance

OSU Backs Into CFP, Will Face No. 1 Georgia In Semis

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Going into conference championship weekend, Ohio State needed some serious help if it was to make an appearance in the College Football Playoff for the third time in four seasons. A 45-23 loss to Michigan in the regular-season finale left the Buckeyes without control of their own destiny, ranked No. 5 in the penultimate College Football Playoff rankings.

Georgia and Michigan, undefeated entering championship week, had essentially locked up spots in the playoff, with seeding the only potential change depending on a Bulldog loss to LSU or a Wolverine loss to Purdue in their respective title games. TCU entered at No. 3, set to face No. 10 Kansas State in the Big 12 Championship Game, while No. 4 USC was tasked with No. 11 Utah in the Pac-12 Championship Game, a chance for revenge for the Trojans after being handed their only loss of the regular season by the Utes.

Wins by both TCU and USC – both of which entered as favorites – would eliminate Ohio State from playoff contention, leaving the Buckeyes settling for either the Rose Bowl for a second consecutive season or a potential appearance in the Orange Bowl.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN RIOS

DEFINE YOUR LEGACY — After a disappointing end to the regular season, quarterback C.J. Stroud and No. 4 Ohio State still control their own destiny in regard to winning a national championship. The Buckeyes are set to take on No. 1 Georgia in the semifinals of the College Football Playoff.

Luckily for Ohio State, things never got to that point. With the entire final weekend of the season built up to help determine the final two spots in the College Football Playoff between Ohio State, TCU and USC, the Trojans took out most of the intrigue on Dec. 2, falling 47-24 to Utah while allowing the Utes to score 23 points in the fourth quarter. This gave the Trojans their second loss of the season, ending the playoff hopes for USC and the Pac-12 and all but securing a spot among the final four teams for Ohio State and TCU.

The stakes were clear in Columbus, where ratings showed that over a quarter of televisions in Ohio's capital were tuned in to watch Utah take down USC. Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer opined on FOX's postgame show that Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham likely will never have to pay for a meal if he finds himself in Columbus, and Whittingham responded, "Coach (Ryan) Day, you're welcome."

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BSB's Annual Bowl Preview

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's bowl preview issue is overflowing with information about Ohio State's CFP Semifinal berth as well as features, news and updates on all of OSU athletics, including:

- A preview of the matchup against Georgia at the Peach Bowl, including our staff prediction, season stats for both teams and bowl notes
- A flashback to Ohio State's only previous matchup against the Bulldogs, the Citrus Bowl following the 1992 season
- A feature on which current Buckeyes are weighing their options regarding declaring for the NFL
- Reports on the men's and women's basketball, men's hockey and wrestling programs
- Plus all of BSB's regular columns and features

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Another Era Of Cooper?

On 55 offensive plays, the TUN gained a total of 181 yards (9 of 21 passing for 74 yards, 33 rushing attempts for 92 yards and one touchdown) and scored 10 points. Unfortunately for Ohio State, the TUN had a total of 60 offensive plays. On the other five, they gained 349 yards (189 through the air and 160 on the ground) and scored five touchdowns.

Last year's loss and this year's both hurt a lot, but for very different reasons. Last year Ohio State lost because the TUN was the better team and totally dominated on both sides of the line of scrimmage (Ryan, that is classic old school Big Ten football. It still works, and it wouldn't hurt to learn a little bit of it). This year, Ohio State lost because the offense did basically nothing for the last 30 minutes (one field goal) and, while the defense played really good 92 percent of the time they were on the field, the other eight percent of the time was a colossal, epic failure, the likes of which I can't ever remember seeing before from a good team.

Last year, the TUN beat Ohio State. This year, Ohio State beat itself. When you have two evenly matched teams, more often than not the team that wins is the one that does not repeatedly shoot themselves in the foot (three times the penalty yards of the other team, blown coverages, turnovers, missed tackles, failure on third and fourth down, etc.) and plays hard for the entire game (every play, all 60 minutes).

Way back in 2019, I thought Ryan Day might be the second coming of

Urban Meyer. Now I'm afraid he might be another John Cooper. I don't think Cooper ever really understood The Game. Like Ryan, The Game was never in Cooper's blood. It wasn't a part of his DNA. If Ryan views The Game as just another big game on the schedule, he likely will have experienced his only victory in the rivalry. Ryan, you have now lost two in a row (let's be honest, it's actually three straight – Harbaugh bailing out of The Game in 2020 because of the coronavirus was a win for the TUN).

You are officially on the hot seat and there's only one way off. Actually, there's two ways – you could end up like the last guy who lost three straight.

Michael Walrath
Three Fork, Mont.

Run The Ball, C.J.

I am sure you are bombarded with letters from disappointed fans in the wake of the Michigan loss.

Everyone, I am sure, has their own opinion, but I'd like to register mine. I was privileged to take Woody's football course when I was an undergrad in the mid-'50s. He gave us a lot of tidbits of wisdom, but one I never forgot was his advice, "If you live by the pass, you can die by the pass!"

If there is one lesson I hope Coach Day gets from the past two losses to Michigan, it's this: If you are going to win in today's college football, you have to have a quarterback who can run the ball. C.J. Stroud, when he is on, has shown himself to be an outstanding passer. He will undoubtedly have an outstanding pro future.

But, bluntly put, he is not a runner. There were several times in the Michigan loss where a (Justin) Fields or (Dwayne) Haskins, or a number of former Bucks, would have tucked the ball and ran, but C.J. chose to wait until it was too late. This is not meant to pin the loss on Stroud. He did what he does. He has never been, nor is he inclined to be, a runner.

I wish him the very best in the pros, where I'm sure he will be successful. Thankfully, it looks like we will have a tough, running quarterback next year!

Pete Lively
Chaumont, N.Y.

Second Guessing

Back in the race! Not sure I really want that though. We are just not that good on defense and we are not explosive enough. C.J. holds the ball too long, refuses to run at all, even when there is nothing but grass in front of him. He could've easily gotten that first down (when) he threw the awkward interception while falling down to keep drive alive. He plays scared in big games and in my opinion should come back another year, although I know that won't happen. He will be a top-three pick (in the NFL draft) for sure.

I am disappointed in Coach Day not playing Kyle McCord more this season in preparation for the upcoming season. I also am disappointed in Coach for not playing the running back who just rushed for almost 200 yards the week before (against Maryland) and choosing to go with a guy who has been playing defense all year. Head scratcher. Surely we could've

beaten either two teams the previous two weeks prior to Michigan to give our horses a chance to heal with both Chip Trayanum and Dallan Hayden filling in in those games. I'm miffed to be quite honest.

Michael Ellens Jr.
Youngstown, Ohio

Another Opportunity

Coaches and players of the Buckeye football team have a great opportunity to redeem themselves for the last two seasons of losing to That Team Up North. Hopefully the coaches remind their players that mental mistakes have consequences. We realize offensive and defensive lines are the backbone that helps make a team coordinated for winning. Please show us loyal fans you have the ability to win out on Dec. 31 and have an opportunity to beat That Team Up North. You have heard, "The third time is the charm!" Go BUCKS and enjoy winning and your accolades await the challenge of Jan. 9, 2023.

Nelson Bell
Toledo

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



From The Message Board

The College Football Playoff is nearly upon us, and Ohio State sneaked in as the No. 4 seed after getting some help from Utah during conference championship weekend. With the Buckeyes preparing to make another CFP run, we asked our readers if they believed OSU belonged among the top four teams and how they would assess their chances to beat Georgia with a potential rematch against Michigan on deck. Here are some of the responses:

"Backing into the playoff is never encouraging ... remember the LSU game? If the Buckeyes play their very best game, I believe they will win, but considering they haven't played a really complete game since the mid-season break, we can't really expect it, can we?"

– Michael Bauer

"Any of these four teams is capable of winning two games. Mathematically, I would estimate Ohio State has a 50 percent chance vs Georgia and a 75 percent chance of beating either Michigan or TCU."

– Terrier Buck

"I think they lose but it's close, I'm just happy they made it and will get a chance to win it all."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"The Buckeyes definitely belong among the top four teams. Injuries to a host of players like Jaxon Smith-Njigba, TreVeyon Henderson, Miyan Williams,

and Mike Hall Jr., to name just a few, crucially limited the Buckeyes in the second half of the season. LB Tommy Eichenberg and safety Lathan Ransom put in superhuman efforts with broken hands/fingers. If these players get healthy, as Coach Day indicated they would, the Buckeyes should win it all. Their availability in good health will also permit the coaches to put in an aggressive/loose playing game plan that Coach Day indicated he would use in the playoffs."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"I'd say the chances of OSU winning in Atlanta have about the same odds of an asteroid hitting Earth in the next week. I hope I am wrong."

– PeyoteBuck

"The Bucks belong in the playoffs because who else would you put above them? As for chances against Georgia, I just hope they don't get embarrassed."

– bstu9

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Did Buckeyes Learn From Michigan Game?

After what had transpired around the country on conference championship day, there was little doubt Ohio State was going to be one of the four College Football Playoff finalists despite its double-digit loss to Michigan. After winning each of their first 11 games by an average margin of nearly 30 points and rising to the No. 2 spot in the national rankings, the Buckeyes proved they are one of the four best teams in college football and no amount of righteous they-don't-deserve-to-be-there indignation changes that.

Having stipulated Ryan Day's team earned its place in the playoff, the way Ohio State responds to its shot at glory will determine its legacy, and to be brutally honest, I'm not particularly encouraged that Day, his staff or his players learned much of anything from being rolled for the second straight year by their archrivals.

Day was interviewed by ESPN on Selection Sunday, with Georgia counterpart Kirby Smart as part of a Peach Bowl video press conference, and then again in person with OSU beat writers and broadcasters, and he checked all of the appropriate coach-speak boxes, mentioning how excited his team is to get to participate in the playoff as well as his respect for Smart and the Bulldogs.

Then the inevitable question was asked about what went wrong against Michigan, to which Day put on his Captain Obvious hat and replied that the Buckeyes gave up too many explosive plays. Then he began asking rhetorical questions that perhaps the media should have been asking.

"Are you putting your players in position to be successful?" Day began. "If you're not doing that, why isn't that getting done? There was a lot of looking in the mirror (after the Michigan game) to figure out why that didn't happen.

"At the end of the day, it comes down to accountability and ownership, and it starts with me and then it goes to the coaches and the players. ... You have to take a hard look in the mirror and see what that was. There were a lot of great conversations last week – as hard as they were. We'll find out if we can come out of this thing stronger."

I swear I could have closed my eyes while Day was talking and heard a voice from the distant past as John Cooper tried to explain what had gone wrong against Michigan and how his coaches and players would try to learn from those mistakes. Unfortunately, six times during Cooper's 13-year tenure, the Buckeyes followed a defeat against their archrivals with a postseason loss.

I realize comparing the Ryan Day and John Cooper eras is a classic example of the apples-to-oranges exercise. But there is one constant throughline. Just as no one back in the day wanted to hear, "Nobody around here wants to beat Michigan more than John Cooper," no one today wants to hear, "We'll find out if we can come out of this thing stronger."

Maybe that was an offhanded remark made at the end of a marathon day of interview sessions, and maybe parsing a coach's words is a fool's errand. But if you truly don't know whether your team can rebound from a second straight year of embarrassment at the hands of your rival, then I wonder what kind of mind-set is being cultivated inside the cushy, pampered walls of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

Knowing they can go from program to program and chase scads of money through college football's version of free agency, maybe today's players truly have gone soft. Maybe

they are more interested in preserving themselves and their bodies for greater riches, whether that's at the next school offering NIL enticements or the cold, hard cash that awaits some in the NFL. Maybe a rivalry game between Ohio State and Michigan doesn't mean that much to a kid from California, Texas or Virginia.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

I do know this, though. Nearly no one gives Ohio State a snowflake's chance in hell of beating Georgia, and that would bother me if I were a player or coach with at least one competitive bone in my body.

I have no idea if the Buckeyes can hold up on defense against the Bulldogs and their quarterback Stetson Bennett, a guy so cocky he makes Michigan quarterback J.J. McCarthy look shy and reserved by comparison. But I'm pretty sure that no matter how many points Georgia scores, the Ohio State offense can keep up.

Yes, the Bulldogs have an elite defense, but the Buckeyes have an elite offense. They just have to show it. If my team had just been beaten by its archrival by the largest margin in nearly 30 years, and literally no one was giving me a chance to dethrone the defending national champs, my game plan would be to fully load all of the weapons I have accumulated on the recruiting trail over the past few years and bring them to bear.

The only way to defeat the Bulldogs is with all guns blazing the way the Buckeyes performed during most of the first half of this season. But after the open week, the team seemed more interested in achieving some kind of balance than in throttling opponents. Perhaps Day and his coaching staff tired of hearing the argument of whether the Buckeyes were a team of finesse or power. The answer, of course, is as plain as the noses on the faces at Mount Rushmore, but you have to let your team be what it is.

Ohio State is a finesse team, and it certainly isn't going to trick Georgia into believing otherwise. If what the Buckeyes have on their sideline isn't going to do it against what the Bulldogs have on theirs, then so be it. But if Ohio State goes down, I hope at least the Buckeyes don't try to prove anything to anyone but themselves and go down swinging.

Odds & Ends

- Oddsmakers don't give the Buckeyes much of a chance against the defending national champions, installing Georgia as 6½-point favorites to win the Peach Bowl and advance to the CFP title game. Maybe that's not such a bad thing, though, because being the betting underdog seems to get Ohio State's attention. Since the beginning of the 2012 season, the Buckeyes have played 142 games and entered those games as an underdog only 10 times. And if you think that is remarkable, how about this: In those 10 games since 2012 as the dog, the team's record is 8-2.

- Congratulations to Marvin Harrison Jr. for becoming a unanimous first-team All-American. He is the first OSU player at a skilled position to earn unanimous All-America honors since Troy Smith in 2006, and the first Ohio State receiver ever to be so

honored. High praise for Harrison since the program has produced the likes of Cris Carter, Joey Galloway, Terry Glenn, David Boston, Antonio Holmes, Terry McLaurin, Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave.

- Speaking of OSU receivers, I'm not sure what put fans in such a snit about Jaxon Smith-Njigba and the lingering hamstring injury that limited him to just three games. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of hamstring injuries know they are notoriously unpredictable in terms of how long they linger. As for the conspiracy theorists who insist Smith-Njigba was simply protecting his draft position, wouldn't another record-setting season like the one he had in 2021 have improved that position?

- The way Ohio State reports (or, more accurately, does not report) injuries has also stirred consternation among the fan base. I must admit I don't understand the need for secrecy, but for the past quarter-century, OSU coaches have hidden behind the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), insisting it is an invasion of a player's privacy to disclose injury information. The NFL does not operate the same way, requiring teams to provide detailed injury reports well in advance of games. The league states that policy is, at least in part, "for the benefit of the network television audience." So, until Disney, CBS and/or Fox insist upon injury disclosure as part of their broadcast contracts, you can expect to continue guessing about the week-to-week availability of your favorite college players.

Never Saw It Coming

In our age of 24/7 news cycles, it was borderline miraculous that Wisconsin was able to keep its courtship of Luke Fickell a secret until the Nov. 27 announcement that Fickell had been lured away from Cincinnati after six seasons with the Bearcats.

There was never any doubt Fickell longed to return to the Big Ten, but most observers figured it would be at Ohio State where he played and coached for a total of 20 years. However, when any Big Ten program comes calling, and its calling card includes a seven-year deal worth a reported \$7.8 million annually, that is bound to draw some attention.

But anyone who believes Fickell is choosing the path of least resistance doesn't understand they want to win in Madison just as badly as they do in Columbus. Paul Chryst got fired from Wisconsin – his alma mater, by the way – despite a 67-26 record that included three division titles in seven seasons as well as an enviable 6-1 record in bowl games.

The track record for Ohio State alums who have coached other Big Ten teams has been a decidedly spotty one. Stuart Holcomb was a star halfback for the Buckeyes from 1929-31, but a nine-year stint as head coach at Purdue produced only a 35-42-4 record. After four tumultuous seasons coaching the Buckeyes from 1947-50, three-time OSU All-American Wes Fesler took over at Minnesota, where he was 10-13-4 during three seasons before leaving football altogether for a career in real estate.

More recently, Glen Mason had a fairly successful 10-year run at Minnesota, but his teams never finished higher than fourth in the conference standings and went 1-7 against Ohio State. Gary Moeller won three conference titles in five seasons at Michigan, but before that, he had an abysmal 6-24-3 record at Illinois.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Smith-Njigba Forgoes CFP To Prepare For NFL Draft

Ohio State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who posted a school-record 347 receiving yards in last year's Rose Bowl to cap a 95-reception, 1,606-yard season (both also school records), announced on Dec. 5 that he will forgo playing in the Peach Bowl against No. 1 Georgia, instead beginning preparations for the 2023 NFL draft following an ongoing hamstring injury.

"I want to thank Jaxon for all he has done for our Ohio State program," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. "He has had such a major impact here in Columbus, on and off the field, in a relatively short period of time. We all know he has a very bright future ahead of him, and we all support him as he moves forward with his career."

Smith-Njigba suffered the injury in the Buckeyes' first contest of the season against Notre Dame. After sitting out the next week against Arkansas State, he attempted to return in a limited capacity against Toledo but

reaggravated the injury.

That led to Ohio State keeping him sidelined until after the off week, making what turned out to be his final appearance for the Buckeyes on Oct. 22 against Iowa. Smith-Njigba pulled up lame after failing to haul in a pass down the sidelines during the game, limping back to the team's bench. On the season, during which he played five total quarters, Smith-Njigba had five receptions for 43 yards.

"I did everything possible to put myself in a position to get back on the field multiple times this year," Smith-Njigba said in a statement on Twitter. "I wanted it as much, if not more than anyone else. After consulting with my doctors, it has been determined that I will not be able to play in the playoffs. Having prayed on it with my family, I have decided to focus on getting 100 percent healthy and commit to my training for the next chapter in my football journey. I am officially declaring for the 2023 NFL draft."

Smith-Njigba will leave Columbus with 110 career receptions for 1,698 yards and 10 touchdowns. Despite nearly all of those statistics coming in one season, his 110 receptions rank 18th in Ohio State history, and his 1,698 receiving yards come in at 21st all-time.

Henderson To Miss CFP With Foot Injury

Ohio State running back TreVeyon Henderson announced on Dec. 13 that he will be out for the remainder of the season and will miss the College Football Playoff as he continues to recover from a lingering foot injury.

Henderson was seen on numerous occa-

2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME	W, 21-10	ABC	8-4, 38-27 loss to USC
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE	W, 45-12	BTN	3-9, 48-19 loss to Troy
Sept. 17	TOLEDO	W, 77-21	FOX	8-5, 17-7 win over Ohio
Sept. 24	WISCONSIN	W, 52-21	ABC	6-6, 23-16 loss to Minnesota
Oct. 1	RUTGERS	W, 49-10	BTN	4-8, 37-0 loss to Maryland
Oct. 8	at Michigan State	W, 49-20	ABC	5-7, 35-16 loss to Penn State
Oct. 22	IOWA	W, 54-10	FOX	7-5, 24-17 loss to Nebraska
Oct. 29	at Penn State	W, 44-31	FOX	10-2, 35-16 win over Michigan State
Nov. 5	at Northwestern	W, 21-7	ABC	1-11, 41-3 loss to Illinois
Nov. 12	INDIANA	W, 56-14	FOX	4-8, 30-16 loss to Purdue
Nov. 19	at Maryland	W, 43-30	ABC	7-5, 37-0 win over Rutgers
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	L, 45-23	FOX	13-0, 43-22 win over Purdue
Dec. 31	Georgia	8 p.m.	ESPN	13-0, 50-30 win over LSU

sions sporting a walking boot on his foot this season, including during the Michigan game, and the sophomore running back turned to Twitter to announce that he would miss the remainder of the season.

"As much as I wanted to finish out the season with my brothers, I know God has bigger and better plans for me!" Henderson tweeted. "It's always light at the end of the tunnel, be back better than ever."

Henderson told The Columbus Dispatch that he will have to get surgery on his foot after sustaining an initial injury against Toledo on Sept. 17. Henderson had previously revealed that he played through a broken foot and torn ligaments this season, hampering the back through most of the year.

"The culture here is just fine. You try and come practice/play with torn ligaments and a broken bone in your foot every week," Henderson tweeted on Nov. 28. "My brothers know I've been trying to do whatever it takes to fight alongside of them every week. Carry on."

Henderson appeared in eight games this season, rushing for 571 yards (5.3 yards per attempt) and six touchdowns. After playing in Ohio State's first four games of the season, Henderson was held out of the Buckeyes' game against Rutgers on Oct. 1. Henderson then played in Ohio State's next three games before missing back-to-back games against Northwestern and Indiana and playing sparingly against Maryland. He did not play against Michigan on Nov. 26.

With Henderson out, Ohio State will hope to get running back Miyan Williams fully healthy while continuing to incorporate freshman Dallan Hayden and former transfer Chip Trayanum – who played at linebacker for the first half of the season but repped at running back later in the season, including a 14-carry, 83-yard outing against the Wolverines – as the Buckeyes prepare for Georgia.

While Henderson and Smith-Njigba won't make their return, other Ohio State players who have either been playing through injuries or sidelined by them should be healed up by the time the Buckeyes meet the Bulldogs on Dec. 31. Day is excited to have a full complement back on both sides of the ball.

"Everybody else, I think we should have," Day said. "(The injuries were) a little bit part of the story this year, and to be at full strength or almost at full strength is going to be important to go beat these guys."

Stroud Finishes Third In Heisman Voting

For the second consecutive season, Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud came up short in his quest for the Heisman Trophy on Dec. 10.

Stroud finished third in voting this season, trailing TCU quarterback Max Duggan and USC quarterback Caleb Williams, who took home this year's trophy. Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett was also in attendance as one of the finalists, finishing fourth.

"It feels amazing to be here again," Stroud told reporters in New York before the ceremony. "This is something I've dreamed about as a kid. I'm just blessed to really have an opportunity to inspire people, inspire people from back home, not only just back home, but around the world."

"Just letting everybody know that a young Black kid can do anything that you put your mind to if you put God first, do good in school and listen to your parents. I definitely think that's my job and that's my responsibility of being here at Ohio State."

Stroud finished fourth in Heisman Trophy voting last season and earned his way back to the stage this year, completing 66.2 percent of his passes for 3,340 yards and 37 touchdowns. He has already been named the Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year and Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year in the Big Ten, and he was named a second-team All-American by the Walter Camp Football Foundation.

He is the first Ohio State player to be named a two-time Heisman Trophy finalist (there were no finalists prior to 1982, just the winner) and is the 12th player at Ohio State to either be a finalist or win the trophy.

Ohio State's most recent Heisman winner was quarterback Troy Smith in 2006, but the Buckeyes have been represented in recent years on the Heisman stage by quarterback Justin Fields and defensive end Chase Young in 2019 and quarterback Dwayne Haskins in 2018.

Wilson Remaining With OSU For CFP After Taking Tulsa Job

Ohio State offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson was introduced as the next head coach at Tulsa on Dec. 6 after spending six seasons with the Buckeyes.

Wilson will take over for a Golden Hurricane program that went 5-7 in 2022 with a 3-5 mark in the American Athletic Conference. This will be the second time Wilson has served in a head coaching role, with the first coming at Indiana from 2011-16, where he collected a 26-47 record with a loss in the Pinstripe Bowl in 2015 before becoming offensive coordinator at Ohio State.

During his time with the Buckeyes, Wilson led several top-tier offenses. Ohio State finished in the top 10 in total offense in each of his six seasons with OSU, and the Scarlet and Gray also boasted top-10 finishes in

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2022 Big Ten Individual Award Winners

Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award: Nate Sudfeld, Indiana
Ford-Kinnick Leadership Award: Ron Guenther, Illinois
Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State
Nagurski-Woodson Defensive Player of the Year: Jack Campbell, Iowa
Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year: Nicholas Singleton, Penn State
Hayes-Schembechler Coach of the Year (coaches vote): Jim Harbaugh, Michigan
Dave McClain Coach of the Year (media vote): Jim Harbaugh, Michigan
Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State
Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year: Marvin Harrison Jr., Ohio State
Ameche-Dayne Running Back of the Year: Blake Corum, Michigan
Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year: Sam LaPorta, Iowa
Rimington-Pace Offensive Lineman of the Year: Peter Skoronski, Northwestern
Smith-Brown Defensive Lineman of the Year: Mike Morris, Michigan
Butkus-Fitzgerald Linebacker of the Year: Jack Campbell, Iowa
Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year: Devon Witherspoon, Illinois
Bakken-Andersen Kicker of the Year: Jake Moody, Michigan
Eddleman-Fields Punter of the Year: Bryce Baringer, Michigan State
Rodgers-Dwight Return Specialist of the Year: Jaylin Lucas, Indiana

scoring offense in five of his six campaigns in Columbus, the exception being 2020, when the Buckeyes finished 11th (41.0 points per game).

During his time in Columbus, Wilson had been connected with several head coaching vacancies but never pulled the trigger on those openings. Tulsa provided a unique opportunity to Wilson, though, as he is familiar with the area after coaching at Oklahoma as an assistant from 2002-10.

"I wasn't necessarily chasing jobs," Wilson said on Dec. 6 during his introductory press conference. "I thought I had a chance to lead a program and to build a foundation of a program that can stand and one good shot to swing as hard as you can and get a group of people to work together and build something that a university and a community and an alumni base and most importantly the players can take a lot of pride in."

Prior to coaching at Indiana, Wilson spent eight years with the Sooners, where he served in a variety of roles including offensive coordinator, offensive line coach and tight ends/fullbacks coach. Wilson also held offensive coordinator jobs at Northwestern and Miami (Ohio).

Wilson will spend time between Columbus and Tulsa in the lead-up to Ohio State's game with Georgia in the Peach Bowl on Dec. 31, and he will begin recruiting for the Golden Hurricanes while helping prepare the Buckeyes for the Bulldogs.

"My plan in talking with (Tulsa athletic director Rick Dickson) and what Coach Day wanted, what (Ohio State athletic director) Gene Smith wanted, is to be a part of all the bowl preparations I can up there (at Ohio State), be here (at Tulsa) when we're recruiting," Wilson said. "Then it gets into that dead period, so I'll be working through hopefully an opportunity to play two games and two great opportunities."

"I'm standing here because of the success of our team (at Ohio State), and I think it's my obligation to finish up with that team and give that team a chance to chase the national championship."

Bailey To Fill TE Coach Role

Keenan Bailey, who is in his seventh season on Ohio State's football staff, is set to become the next tight ends coach for the Buckeyes following the departure of Wilson.

As mentioned, Wilson will stay with the Buckeyes through the conclusion of the College Football Playoff before taking over at Tulsa. However, Bailey is set to take over from there.

Bailey has served in a variety of roles

during his time with the Ohio State program, most recently as the senior advisor to the head coach. He was also an offensive quality control coach from 2019-21 and worked with a handful of positions – notably running backs, wide receivers and quarterbacks – as an offensive intern from 2016-18.

"Keenan Bailey is just an excellent coach," Day said. "He's a really sharp young man who's going to do unbelievable things in his career. The relationships he's built over time with former players, current players, recruits and families have been excellent."

"Keenan has turned down a lot of opportunities to go to other places over the last couple years, and he's stayed here and been a huge help. He's got a very bright future ahead of him."

Bailey is widely acknowledged as one of the rising stars in the collegiate coaching ranks, and he earned a spot on 247Sports' 30 Under 30 list in 2021.

Prior to joining Ohio State's staff, Bailey received his undergraduate degree from Notre Dame, where he also spent two years as a recruiting analyst for the Fighting Irish program.

OSU President Johnson Resigning

Ohio State president Kristina M. Johnson announced that she will resign at the conclusion of the 2022-23 academic year in an email to the university student body and faculty on Nov. 30. Johnson's tenure as Ohio State's president spanned just 2½ years after she took over at the university during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

According to a report from The Columbus Dispatch, Johnson resigned at the request of the Ohio State board of trustees after an independent investigation was held regarding concerns raised by Johnson's staff. The university has since denied those reports, noting that the board had been aware of Johnson's impending resignation and that no investigation was conducted.

Despite her short time at the university, Johnson said she will cherish her experiences at Ohio State.

"Since I arrived at The Ohio State University in August of 2020, we have been able to achieve so much on so many different fronts, despite considerable adversity including the COVID-19 pandemic," Johnson stated in the email. "I am very proud of all that we have accomplished together. It's been a privilege to serve this incredible university, and I have been honored to work as part of this brilliant, dedicated and passionate community."

"I offer my deepest gratitude to every student, faculty member and staff member whose care, professionalism and dedication

enabled Ohio State to achieve all these goals and objectives, while keeping our campuses operating and allowing so many Buckeyes to achieve their educational milestones."

Prior to serving as Ohio State's president, Johnson was also the chancellor of the State University of New York system from 2017-20. Johnson will remain Ohio State's president until the end of the academic year while the board of trustees searches for her successor.

Buckeyes Hear Fate On Award Races, All-American Nods

With Ohio State boasting top-10 marks in total and scoring offense this season while showing improvements on the defensive side of the ball, the Buckeyes had several players garner national attention in the form of award nominations and All-American nods.

Outside of his third-place finish in Heisman Trophy voting, Stroud was also in the running for the Davey O'Brien Award, an honor given to the most outstanding quarterback, which Duggan won, and the Maxwell Award, which Williams took home. Stroud also picked up a trio of second-team All-America nods by the American Football Coaches Association, Walter Camp Football Foundation and CBS Sports.

Wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., Stroud's favorite target this season, was a mainstay on award watchlists all season, but he could not come away with the Biletnikoff Award, which was given to Tennessee wide receiver Jalin Hyatt.

Even so, Harrison – who registered 72 receptions for 1,157 yards and 12 touchdowns on the season – was named a unanimous

first-team All-American, the 37th in Ohio State history, by earning first-team honors from the AFCA, The Athletic, Associated Press, Bleacher Report, CBS Sports, Football Writers Association of American, Pro Football Focus, Sporting News and Walter Camp. Fellow wideout Emeka Egbuka, who snagged 66 catches for 1,039 yards and nine touchdowns, also landed as a third-team All-American by PFF.

On the offensive line, Ohio State had a trio of Buckeyes pick up national honors. Leading the pack was left tackle Paris Johnson Jr., who earned first-team All-American honors from the AFCA, The Athletic, Bleacher Report and Walter Camp, second-team honors from the AP and CBS Sports, and an honorable mention by PFF. Fellow tackle Dawand Jones, who anchored the right side of OSU's offensive front, was named a first-team All-American by CBS Sports and PFF and was placed on the second team by the AP and Sporting News. Center Luke Wypler also picked up a third-team All-American honor from PFF.

Flipping over to the defensive side of the ball, linebacker Tommy Eichenberg collected a good deal of national attention and was named a finalist for the Lott IMPACT Trophy, which recognizes the defensive player who has made the biggest impact on his team. Eichenberg fell to Alabama defensive end Will Anderson Jr. for the award but still picked up first-team All-American honors by Bleacher Report and PFF and garnered second-team nods from CBS Sports, Sporting News and Walter Camp. Eichenberg's 112

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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tackles led the Buckeyes, while he added 12 tackles for loss, 2½ sacks and an interception returned for a touchdown.

Safety Ronnie Hickman also garnered second-team All-American honors by the AP and PFF, earning the nod with 51 tackles (1½ for loss), an interception and six pass break-ups in his final season for the Buckeyes.

Chambers Returning For Fifth Season

While Eichenberg's status with Ohio State beyond the College Football Playoff remains up in the air, fellow linebacker Steele Chambers announced on Dec. 14 that he will remain a Buckeye for the 2023 season.

Citing a drive to get a third year at linebacker under his belt, Chambers will utilize his fifth-year option to continue to develop at the position.

"I feel like I've progressed in my knowledge of the game, but I think there's a lot more that I need to learn," Chambers said. "I feel like I'm pretty mature as far as linebacker

savviness."

Chambers began his Ohio State career as a running back but ultimately flipped over to linebacker during fall camp prior to the 2021 season. Although he had to deal with the learning curve of playing a new position, Chambers saw considerable time at linebacker during that campaign, amassing 47 tackles – five for loss – and an interception in his first season at the position.

After Chambers settled into the role in 2021, he emerged as an impactful member

Playoffs To Determine BSB's January Print Schedule

As is typical when Ohio State goes to the playoffs, Buckeye Sports Bulletin's January print schedule will be determined by how the Buckeyes fare. If Ohio State loses to Georgia, the next print issue of BSB will be mailed on Jan. 10, as originally scheduled. However, if Ohio State advances to the championship game, the next issue of BSB will be mailed on Jan. 17 and the print schedule will then continue as listed on page 3 of each issue.

In the meantime, there is no reason to miss any of the Buckeye sports 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.

Football recruiting's early signing period is almost here, and the BSB staff will be monitoring any late prep comings and goings. The BSB staff will also be in Atlanta posting daily as Ohio State and Georgia make their final preparations for the Peach Bowl.

We will offer extensive coverage of the men's and women's basketball teams, the wrestling and hockey teams and all the other Olympic sports action at BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye

Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Additionally, 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, as well as the new transfer portal thread.

Don't forget, the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed and is available to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

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

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

of Ohio State's improved defense this season. Lining up alongside Eichenberg, Chambers racked up 69 tackles (six for loss), 1½ sacks, an interception and a pair of pass breakups.

After starting all 12 games during this most recent regular season, Chambers will undoubtedly fill one of Ohio State's two starting linebacker positions next year.

Several Buckeyes Hit Transfer Portal

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to print, Ohio State sophomore safeties Jaylen Johnson and Jantzen Dunn, as well as fifth-year linebacker Teradja Mitchell, entered their names into the transfer portal, with Johnson and Mitchell announcing on Dec. 5 and Dunn revealing the news on Dec. 13.

Johnson, a former three-star prospect in the 2021 recruiting class out of Cincinnati La Salle, struggled to find his footing at Ohio State. He tore his ACL shortly after arriving on campus, causing him to miss his entire freshman season, and he did not take the field for the Buckeyes this season, either on defense or special teams.

Dunn joined the program as a four-star recruit out of South Warren High School in Bowling Green, Ky. He played multiple positions in high school, spending time at safety and wide receiver before sticking in the secondary upon his arrival to Columbus.

Dunn appeared in just six games during his Buckeye career, playing against Akron and Rutgers during his freshman season while primarily playing special teams in four games this year. Against the Scarlet Knights last season, Dunn sustained a season-ending lower-body injury which caused him to redshirt during his first season in the program.

Johnson and Dunn will have three seasons of eligibility remaining once they commit to new schools.

As for Mitchell, he is entering his name into the transfer portal, though he plans to finish out this season with the Buckeyes.

"After heavy prayer and thought, I have decided to enter the transfer portal with one year of eligibility remaining," Mitchell said in a statement on Twitter. "I am very thankful for my time at Ohio State. It has been an honor to compete and play for one of the greatest uni-

versities in the world, with some of the best people in the world."

Mitchell added that after talks with Day, he will finish the season out with Ohio State and aid the Buckeyes during their College Football Playoff run. He has appeared in 43 games in five seasons for Ohio State (with eight starts, all in the 2021 season) and racked up 63 tackles (seven for loss) and a pass breakup for the Buckeyes.

His impact was also felt off the field for Ohio State, as he was named a team captain prior to the 2021 season. A native of Virginia Beach, Va., Mitchell was a four-star prospect coming out of high school in the 2018 recruiting class and was the nation's No. 44 overall prospect, according to the 247Sports composite rankings. Mitchell has one year of eligibility remaining wherever he chooses to attend.

Doss Inducted Into College Football Hall of Fame

Former Ohio State safety Mike Doss was officially inducted into the College Football Hall Of Fame on Dec. 7 in a ceremony in Las Vegas.

Doss was a first-team All-American during his final three seasons at Ohio State, earning a unanimous nod in 2002 after leading the Buckeyes off the field as a team captain as well as on the field, finishing with 107 tackles and eight pass breakups. Doss earned defensive MVP honors for his role in Ohio State's 31-24 double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl to claim the 2002 BCS National Championship by amassing nine tackles and a key interception.

Doss' 331 career tackles are the most of any defensive back in Ohio State history, while his 228 solos rank fifth in the program.

Doss is the 27th former Buckeye to enter the College Football Hall of Fame and the first since running back Keith Byars was honored in 2020.

AD Smith Issues Support For OSU Collectives

With the name, image and likeness landscape continually evolving across college football, Smith issued a vote of confidence in three NIL collectives in a statement on Dec. 8.

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BSB Patrons Are VIPs During The Holidays

The holidays are a great time to be a Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP!

Looking to send a great book to that Buckeye fan on your list or to add to your own Ohio State library? Rex Kern and Mark Rea are both offering \$10 off on their new books for BSB VIPs.

Kern's autobiography, "The Road to the Horseshoe and Beyond," autographed by Kern, is available for just \$35. Make your check out to Rex Kern and mail it to Lee Caryer at 975 Atlantic Ave., #676, Columbus, Ohio, 43229.

Rea's "The Legends: Ohio State Buckeyes: The Men, the Deeds, the Consequences, Vol II," is available to VIPs for just \$27. The new volume, also autographed, is available through Buckeye Sports Bulletin at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. For faster and more convenient service give us a call at (614) 486-2202. Vol. I of "The Legends" is also available at the VIP price.

Purchase as many of any of the books as you like. Be sure to mention that you are a VIP and include names and addresses for any gift books that you are sending.

VIPs also enjoy unlimited 20 percent savings on non-sale items at Conrads, "The Buckeye State Store." Check out the wide selection of Ohio State gift items at ConradsOSU.com and give them a call (614) 269-7091. Be sure to mention that you are a Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP.

If you are not currently a BSB VIP you can become a Brutus level donor for \$50. Buy \$200 in gifts from Conrads and a copy of Kern and Rea's books and you will have more than paid for your donation, plus you will be recognized in BSB as a patron of the publication.

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 special perks such as the book discounts.

VIP subscribers enjoy the 20 percent discount at Conrads. 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.

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, Scarlet and Brutus VIP subscribers. **Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman):** Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

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"There has never been a more exciting time to be a fan of the Ohio State Buckeyes," Smith said in the statement. "Excellence within our programs and remarkable experiences for our student-athletes will always be the standard at Ohio State, while competing for championships, academic excellence and graduating, and preparing for life after sports are our goals.

"Recent guidance updates from the NCAA clarified how schools can be involved with Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) activities of student-athletes. Many of our Buckeyes are taking advantage of this, and we are committed to supporting our current and future student-athletes while building strong, competitive programs.

"We welcome your help in keeping Ohio State at the top of the college athletics landscape. Three 'collective' organizations that are helping our Buckeyes maximize NIL opportunities are in operation now and seeking additional support."

The collectives outlined by Smith are Gary Marcinick's Cohesion Foundation, Brian Schottenstein's The Foundation and Ron Stokes' "O" Foundation, all of which serve with the mission of aiding Ohio State student athletes in their NIL pursuits.

Prior to the beginning of the season, Day said he believed that it would take \$13 million to keep the team's roster intact. He recently echoed Smith's sentiment regarding Ohio State's NIL strategy, adding that the program could use help from its collectives and fan

base as NIL continues to take shape.

"(NIL) was never a part of the conversation, then it became part of the conversation," Day said Dec. 13. "It's trending toward being the (entire) conversation for a lot of folks. As time has gone on, it has become more and more of a priority for folks. Navigating those

times and adapting is important.

"It's certainly a priority for us to make sure we have everything we need to support our players. I'll kind of leave it there. We have some folks that are really helping and doing everything they can, and that's great. We're going to need as much help as we can moving

forward.

"The great news is that we have great fans that want to support it, and we're going to make sure we do everything we can to make sure our guys get what's fair."

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 7

Hartline Reaffirms OSU Commitment

Following reports that he was interested and potentially set to interview for the open head coaching job at Cincinnati, Ohio State receivers coach Brian Hartline reaffirmed his commitment to his alma mater on Dec. 1.

"I am aware of the speculation surrounding my name connected to other vacant coaching positions and appreciate all of the support, but right now my heart is at Ohio State and I do not have any plans to go anywhere else," Hartline tweeted.

The open job came after former coach Luke Fickell accepted the head coaching job at Wisconsin. Cornerbacks coach and special teams coordinator Kerry Coombs was elevated to the interim coach for the Bearcats and was one of several to be interviewed for the

full-time position, and while Hartline was reportedly considered as a candidate for the job, the Bearcats have since hired former Louisville head coach Scott Satterfield on Dec. 5.

Hartline has coached at Ohio State since 2017, working his way up from a quality control coach to wide receivers coach and adding a passing game coordinator designation this past offseason. Prior to his time in coaching, Hartline – a North Canton, Ohio, native – played at Ohio State from 2005-08, racking up 90 receptions for 1,429 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Following his time at Ohio State, he played for seven seasons in the NFL with the Miami Dolphins and Cleveland Browns, appearing in over 100 games and accounting for 344 receptions for 4,766 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Hartline has said in the past that "it'd be really hard to leave" Ohio State, but he's also viewed as a rising star in the profession and has acknowledged that it's a possibility he eventually leaves his alma mater at some point in his career.

Trio of Linemen Pledge To Postseason Games

Defensive linemen Taron Vincent and Zach Harrison and offensive tackle Dawand Jones affirmed their commitment to a pair of postseason contests, with the goal of improving their draft stock, since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to print.

The East-West Shrine Bowl announced

on Dec. 2 that Ohio State defensive tackle Vincent had accepted an invite to the college all-star game, while Harrison and Jones accepted an invite to the Reese's Senior Bowl on Dec. 12 and 14, respectively.

Vincent has been a standout for Ohio State's defense this season, accounting for 23 tackles (two for loss) and a recovered fumble for the Buckeyes. Though his numbers don't indicate a dominant season, he's played an important role for Ohio State in drawing double teams and clearing lanes for the linebackers.

"That's the heart of our defense right there," Eichenberg said of Vincent. "If you're watching tape, he's taking on double teams, sometimes triple teams. He sacrifices and is the ultimate team player. I wouldn't get a tackle if it weren't for him. For anyone on defense, it really starts with Taron."

Vincent was one of 23 players to take part in Senior Day festivities on Nov. 26, and his acceptance to the East-West Shrine Bowl is another indicator that this will be Vincent's last season at Ohio State despite having another year of eligibility remaining.

Harrison had one of his most impactful seasons this year, amassing 30 tackles (6½ for loss), three sacks, three forced fumbles, four pass breakups and an interception. The Lewis Center, Ohio, native will have the opportunity to build off of those solid statistics in the College Football Playoff, as well.

As for his career, Harrison has tallied 102 tackles (24 for loss), 12½ sacks and five

forced fumbles. Harrison has also been adept at knocking down passes at the line of scrimmage, collecting 10 pass breakups and an interception during his time as a Buckeye.

Jones played a key role on Ohio State's topflight offense and did not allow a sack of Stroud this season while aiding the Buckeyes' efforts on the ground where they churned out 198.5 yards per game, the third-best mark in the Big Ten.

The East-West Shrine Bowl will be played on Feb. 2, 2023, at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas while the Senior Bowl will take place on Feb. 4 at Hancock Whitney Stadium in Mobile, Ala.

Abor, Hinzman Lose Black Stripes

After spending much of his first college football regular season rehabbing a season-long injury, Ohio State defensive end Omari Abor shed his black stripe on Dec. 7.

Abor seldom saw the field this year while dealing with a knee injury for much of the campaign. His lone appearance came in Ohio State's 45-12 victory over Arkansas State on Sept. 10, in which he played nine snaps and did not register a statistic. Abor arrived in Columbus in June as a four-star prospect out of Duncanville, Texas, and is in line to redshirt this season after appearing in just one game.

Abor was joined a week later in losing his black stripe by freshman offensive lineman

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1982

When the Ohio State football team stumbled early the past season, many fingers were pointed at the offensive line. The unit was big, strong, experienced and had been counted on to move some bodies.

When the offensive line did start blowing holes in enemy defenses, the Buckeyes started winning and they never stopped winning, reeling off seven straight.

"We started off the season and we felt pretty good," said Jim Lachey, who saw plenty of action at guard during the year. "It was just those couple of games where things weren't going right. People were giving us a lot of different looks, unfamiliar looks.

"Finally, after we lost those games, we figured it was up to us (the offensive line) if we were going to come back and win some games, so we just picked up the burden on ourselves and took off and did a good job."

35 Years Ago — 1987

OSU basketball coach Gary Williams knew the university had been under the snickering and bewildering glare of the public. The firing of football coach Earle Bruce had seemingly tarnished the integrity of The Ohio State University.

Williams said he and Bruce casually crossed paths in the hallway between their upstairs offices in St. John Arena after Bruce was fired.

"We passed briefly. We just basically said hello. There's really not a lot to say," Williams said. "I have a lot of empathy for Earle and his situation."

30 Years Ago — 1992

After a great deal of speculation to the contrary, John Cooper was set to return for a sixth season as head football coach at Ohio State.

In a statement released through the OSU sports information department to members of the media on Dec. 4, university athletic director Jim Jones said he strongly supported Cooper and his program and that he had the backing of OSU president Gordon Gee.

"The maturation of this team over the final six weeks of the season is clear through the win-loss record (5-0-1)," Jones said. "But of even greater importance, this team has demonstrated exemplary character and a consistent sense of purpose, both on and off the field."

25 Years Ago — 1997

OSU linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer became the first Buckeye and only the second sophomore ever to win the Butkus Award on Dec. 13.

"Mom, I love you. This is for you," Katzenmoyer said moments after his selection. "Coach, thanks for giving an 18-year-old kid a

chance. Thanks for having me down here, thanks to the voters and, most importantly, thanks to God. He put me on this wonderful Earth and gave me all the gifts, and I hope I can live up to his expectations of me.

"I'm a little bit overwhelmed. If you would have told me at the beginning of the year I would have been here, I probably would have given you the strangest look I ever gave somebody."

Katzenmoyer had a career-best 97 tackles. The 6-4, 260-pounder also had a team-leading 13 tackles for loss.

20 Years Ago — 2002

Did the Ohio State Buckeyes have one more fantastic finish in them? Or was the clock moving toward midnight for the Cinderella Buckeyes?

OSU and its legion of fans would find out the answer to those questions and many more when the Buckeyes took on top-ranked Miami (Fla.) in the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl national championship game on Jan. 3 in Tempe, Ariz.

The game matched Division I-A football's only two unbeaten teams. A win would give second-ranked Ohio State (13-0) its first national championship in 34 years. It also would snuff defending national champion Miami's 34-game winning streak.

"Just being part of the whole process it takes to get here – the hard work, the effort, the ups and downs, the exhilaration – is just exciting," said OSU coach Jim Tressel. "It is great to be a part of something that will end Jan. 3 with a great football game."

15 Years Ago — 2007

Redemption is the kind of word thrown around in the sports lexicon when certain teams seek atonement for past missteps.

There probably wasn't a better word to describe what No. 1-ranked Ohio State, which had been crushed by Florida the year before, sought when it traveled to New Orleans to face No. 2 LSU in the BCS National Championship Game in the Louisiana Superdome.

Yet no one connected with the team, from Tressel to the equipment guys who wash uniforms, seemed to want any part of that word or any talk associated with it.

"Redemption? I don't know if I embrace redemption," Tressel said. "I embrace the opportunity that we have to play the best we can play, but I'm not exactly sure what redemption is.

"I guess if we got to play again in 2006 you could have that thought (about redemption), but this happens to be 2007"

10 Years Ago — 2012

Aaron Craft's intellectual nature was what set the foundation for his reputation, one of being a top-notch student in the classroom who brought an unmatched IQ when he was on the basketball court.

Combine that with an insatiable desire to be the best defend-

er in college basketball, and it's no wonder Ohio State's junior point guard had long established himself as a fan favorite.

But those who had learned to admire Craft – and his tendency to analyze just about everything, regardless of whether it's related to basketball – had to excuse OSU head coach Thad Matta for urging the bright junior to occasionally shut off his brain.

"I am a thinker and I like to do that a little too much, whether it's on the court or off it," Craft said, agreeing with Matta's assertion that thinking too much could be the reason for the point guard's recent shooting slump. To that point in the season, Craft had hit on only 37.5 percent of his field-goal attempts.

Five Years Ago — 2017

Born and raised in Ohio, Jacy Sheldon moved from Cleveland to Columbus before the start of her freshman year at nearby Dublin Coffman High School. But wherever she resided, the one constant that always remained was her love for Ohio State.

So when her father, Duane, posed the question, she already knew the answer.

"I've always loved Ohio State," she told BSB. "Just recently, my dad asked me what my dream school was.

"It's always been Ohio State. And it still was."

Holding an offer since June 12, Sheldon had made up her mind and committed to the Ohio State women's basketball staff the previous month, resulting in the Dublin Coffman combo guard's commitment to her dream school and making her the first member of OSU's 2019 class.

One Year Ago — 2021

Just days after the Oklahoma State Cowboys came up just short against Baylor in the Big 12 title game, falling 21-16, and in turn missed out on the College Football Playoff, Buckeye coach Ryan Day announced that Ohio State would be hiring Cowboy defensive coordinator Jim Knowles for the same role in Columbus, effective on Jan. 2 after the two squads had finished out their seasons.

The Buckeye head coach centered focus on finishing out the year with Ohio State still set to play in the Rose Bowl against Utah and Oklahoma State slated for a Fiesta Bowl matchup with Notre Dame.

"I have offered a position on the Ohio State football staff to Oklahoma State University defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, and he has accepted it," Day said. "Starting Jan. 2, Knowles will be the Buckeyes' new defensive coordinator. What is most important at this time is that we put our players in the best position possible to finish this season with a win in the Rose Bowl. To that end, we will continue our planning and preparation for the game with our current staff of 10 assistant coaches."

Final CFP Rankings		
Rk.	Team	Record
1	Georgia	13-0
2	Michigan	13-0
3	TCU	12-1
4	Ohio State	11-1
5	Alabama	10-2
6	Tennessee	10-2
7	Clemson	11-2
8	Utah	10-3
9	Kansas State	10-3
10	USC	11-2
11	Penn State	10-2
12	Washington	10-2
13	Florida State	9-3
14	Oregon State	9-3
15	Oregon	9-3
16	Tulane	11-2
17	LSU	9-4
18	UCLA	9-3
19	South Carolina	8-4
20	Texas	8-4
21	Notre Dame	8-4
22	Miss. State	8-4
23	NC State	8-4
24	Troy	11-2
25	UTSA	11-2

Carson Hinzman, who became an official member of the team on Dec. 14. Hinzman appeared in just one game this season, making his debut against Michigan.

Abor and Hinzman became the 17th and 18th true freshmen to lose their black stripes, respectively, bringing the total number of black stripes lost – including transfers and those who have been in the program but lost theirs only this season – to 24 dating back to the spring.

College Football Playoff Expanding In 2024

The 2023 football season will be the last under the four-team College Football Playoff format. After originally planning expansion to 12 teams for 2026, the CFP announced expansion would start in 2024 on Dec. 1.

“We’re delighted to be moving forward,” Bill Hancock, executive director of the College Football Playoff, said. “When the board expanded the playoff beginning in 2026 and asked the CFP management committee to examine the feasibility of starting the new format earlier, the management committee went right to work. More teams and more access mean more excitement for fans, alumni, students and student-athletes. We appreciate the leaders of the six bowl games and the two future national championship game host cities for their cooperation.”

Negotiations with the Rose Bowl were the last hurdle to clear for expansion, and the CFP reached a deal with the venue based in Pasadena, Calif.

The expanded playoff will feature 12 teams, with the top six conference champions (all Power Five conferences and the top Group of Five representative) and next six at-large teams receiving bids.

The top four seeds, all of which must be conference champions, will receive byes through the first round. First-round contests will be played at the home field of the higher seeds (or a destination of their choosing), while quarterfinal, semifinal and championship games will be on a neutral field. New Year’s Six bowls will play host to quarterfinal and semifinal contests.

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.

2022 All-Big Ten Football Teams

Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media. Ohio State players are in bold, while unanimous selections are in all caps.

Coaches Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE:
QB* – C.J. STROUD, OHIO STATE

RB – BLAKE CORUM, MICHIGAN
RB – MOHAMED IBRAHIM, MINNESOTA
WR – MARVIN HARRISON JR., OHIO STATE
WR – CHARLIE JONES, PURDUE
C* – Olu Oluwatimi, Michigan
JOHN MICHAEL SCHMITZ, MINNESOTA
OG – Trevor Keegan, Michigan
OG – ZAK ZINTER, MICHIGAN
OT – PETER SKORONSKI, NORTHWESTERN
OT – PARIS JOHNSON JR., OHIO STATE
TE* – SAM LAPORTA, IOWA

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE:
DL – JER’ZHAN NEWTON, ILLINOIS
DL – MIKE MORRIS, MICHIGAN
DL – MAZI SMITH, MICHIGAN
DL – JT Tuimoloua, Ohio State
LB – JACK CAMPBELL, IOWA
LB – NICK HERBIG, WISCONSIN
LB – TOMMY EICHENBERG, OHIO STATE
DB – Sydney Brown, Illinois
DB – DEVON WITHERSPOON, ILLINOIS
DB – Riley Moss, Iowa
DB – JOEY PORTER JR., PENN STATE

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
K – JAKE MOODY, MICHIGAN
P – Bryce Baringer, Michigan State
Returner – JAYLIN LUCAS, INDIANA

OFFENSE HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Isaiah Williams, Isaiah Adams, Zy Crisler, Julian Pearl; IOWA: Kaleb Johnson, Mason Richman; MARYLAND: Roman Hemby, Rakim Jarrett, Jaelyn Duncan, Delmar Glaze; MICHIGAN: Karsen Barnhart; MICHIGAN STATE: Keon Coleman, Nick Samac, J.D. Duplain; MINNESOTA: Brevyn Spann-Ford, Aireontae Ersery; NEBRASKA: Anthony Grant; NORTHWESTERN: Evan Hull; OHIO STATE: Cade Stover, Luke Wypler; PENN STATE: Sean Clifford, Parker Washington, Hunter Nourzad, Sal Wormley; PURDUE: Devin Mockobee; WISCONSIN: Joe Tippmann, Tanor Bortolini, Jack Nelson. DEFENSE HONORABLE

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:
Taulia Tagovailoa, Maryland
Aidan O’Connell, Purdue
Chase Brown, Illinois
Braelon Allen, Wisconsin
Jayden Reed, Michigan State
Emeka Egbuka, Ohio State
Alex Pihlstrom, Illinois

Donovan Jackson, Ohio State
Matthew Jones, Ohio State
Ryan Hayes, Michigan
Olu Fashanu, Penn State
Payne Durham, Purdue

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:
Lukas Van Ness, Iowa
Garrett Nelson, Nebraska
Zach Harrison, Ohio State
PJ Mustipher, Penn State
Seth Benson, Iowa
Junior Colson, Michigan
Cal Haladay, Michigan State
Cooper DeJean, Iowa
D.J. Turner, Michigan
Tyler Nubin, Minnesota
John Torchio, Wisconsin

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Chad Ryland, Maryland
Adam Korsak, Rutgers
A.J. Henning, Michigan

MENTION: ILLINOIS: Isaac Darkangelo, Tarique Barnes; INDIANA: Cam Jones, Tiawan Mullen; IOWA: Joe Evans, Kaevon Merriweather, Logan Lee, Noah Shannon; MARYLAND: Ami Finau, Jakorian Bennett; MICHIGAN: Gemon Green, Kris Jenkins, Mike Sainristil; MICHIGAN STATE: Jacob Slade, Simeon Barrow; MINNESOTA: Cody Lindenberg, Danny Striggow, Trill Carter; NEBRASKA: Luke Reimer, Quinton Newsome; NORTHWESTERN: Adetomiwa Adebawore, Bryce Gallagher, Cameron Mitchell; OHIO STATE: Denzel Burke, Jack Sawyer, Lathan Ransom, Mike Hall, Steele Chambers, Tanner McCalister; PENN STATE: Chop Robinson,

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:
J.J. McCarthy, Michigan

Miyan Williams, Ohio State
Nicholas Singleton, Penn State
Ronnie Bell, Michigan
Trey Palmer, Nebraska
Juice Scruggs, Penn State

Chuck Filiaga, Minnesota
Axel Ruschmeyer, Minnesota
Alex Palczewski, Illinois
Dawand Jones, Ohio State
Luke Schoonmaker, Michigan
Brenton Strange, Penn State

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:
Keith Randolph, Illinois
Adisa Isaac, Penn State
Aaron Lewis, Rutgers
Keeanu Benton, Wisconsin
Mike Barrett, Michigan
Mariano Sori-Marin, Minnesota
Abdul Carter, Penn State
Jartavius Martin, Illinois
Ronnie Hickman, Ohio State
Ji’Ayir Brown, Penn State
Kalen King, Penn State

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Drew Stevens, Iowa
Tory Taylor, Iowa
Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers

Curtis Jacobs, Nick Tarburton; PURDUE: Branson Deen, Cory Trice, Jack Sullivan, Jalen Graham, Kydran Jenkins; RUTGERS: Avery Young, Christian Izien, Max Melton; WISCONSIN: Maema Njongmeta.

SPECIAL TEAMS HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Caleb Griffin, Isaiah Williams; INDIANA: Charles Campbell, James Evans; MARYLAND: Colton Spangler; MICHIGAN STATE: Jayden Reed; MINNESOTA: Matthew Trickett, Quentin Redding; OHIO STATE: Jesse Mirco, Noah Ruggles; PENN STATE: Barney Amor, Nicholas Singleton; PURDUE: Charlie Jones; WISCONSIN: Isaac Guerendo.

Bennett, Maryland; Olu Oluwatimi, Michigan; Elijah Collins, Michigan State; Tanner Morgan, Minnesota; Matt Masker, Nebraska; Raymond Niro

Ill, Northwestern; Kamryn Babb, Ohio State; Chris Stoll, Penn State; Aidan O’Connell, Purdue; Noah Vedral, Rutgers; John Torchio, Wisconsin

Media Team

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QB – C.J. STROUD, OHIO STATE
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WR – CHARLIE JONES, PURDUE
C – JOHN MICHAEL SCHMITZ, MINNESOTA
OG – ZAK ZINTER, MICHIGAN
OG – Donovan Jackson, Ohio State
OT – PETER SKORONSKI, NORTHWESTERN
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LB – NICK HERBIG, WISCONSIN
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DB – Cooper DeJean, Iowa
DB – JOEY PORTER JR., PENN STATE
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K – JAKE MOODY, MICHIGAN
P – Tory Taylor, Iowa
Returner* – JAYLIN LUCAS, INDIANA

OFFENSE HONORABLE MENTION ILLINOIS: Alex Pihlstrom, Isaiah Williams, Julian Pearl, Tommy DeVito; IOWA: Kaleb Johnson, Luke Lachey; MARYLAND: Corey Dyches, Jaelyn Duncan, Rakim Jarrett, Roman Hemby, Taulia Tagovailoa; MICHIGAN: Karsen Barnhart, Luke Schoonmaker; MICHIGAN STATE: J.D. Duplain, Jayden Reed, Nick Samac; MINNESOTA: Aireontae Ersery, Brevyn Spann-Ford, Chuck Filiaga, Quinn Carroll; NEBRASKA: Anthony Grant; NORTHWESTERN: Evan Hull; OHIO STATE: TreVeyon Henderson; PENN STATE: Brenton Strange, Bryce Effner, Hunter Nourzad, Juice Scruggs, Kaytron Allen, Parker Washington, Sal Wormley, Sean Clifford; PURDUE: Devin Mockobee, Gus Hartwig, Marcus Mbow, Spencer Holstege; WISCONSIN: Chimere Dike, Jack Nelson, Joe Tippmann,

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:
J.J. McCarthy, Michigan
Chase Brown, Illinois
Braelon Allen, Wisconsin
Trey Palmer, Nebraska
Emeka Egbuka, Ohio State
Olu Oluwatimi, Michigan
Trevor Keegan, Michigan
Matt Jones, Ohio State
Alex Palczewski, Illinois
Dawand Jones, Ohio State
Payne Durham, Purdue

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:
Joe Evans, Iowa
Lukas Van Ness, Iowa
Garrett Nelson, Nebraska
JT Tuimoloua, Ohio State
Seth Benson, Iowa
Cal Haladay, Michigan State
Abdul Carter, Penn State
Sydney Brown, Illinois
Jartavius Martin, Illinois
Riley Moss, Iowa
Tyler Nubin, Minnesota

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Drew Stevens, Iowa
Bryce Baringer, Michigan State
A.J. Henning, Michigan
Nicholas Singleton, Penn State

Tanor Bortolini. DEFENSE HONORABLE MENTION ILLINOIS: Gabe Jacas, Isaac Darkangelo, Kendall Smith, Seth Coleman, Tarique Barnes; INDIANA: Aaron Casey, Cam Jones, Dasan McCullough, Tiawan Mullen; IOWA: Kaevon Merriweather, Logan Lee, Noah Shannon; MARYLAND: Ami Finau, Beau Brade, Deonte Banks, Jaishawn Barham, Jakorian Bennett; MICHIGAN: Gemon Green, Jaylen Harrell, Kris Jenkins, Makari Paige, Mike Barrett, Mike Sainristil, Rod Moore; MICHIGAN STATE: Jacob Slade, Simeon Barrow, Xavier Henderson; MINNESOTA: Cody Lindenberg, Jordan Howden, Kyler Baugh, Mariano Sori-Marin, Terell Smith, Thomas Rush; NEBRASKA: Luke Reimer; NORTHWESTERN: Cameron Mitchell; OHIO STATE: Denzel Burke, Lathan Ransom, Steele Chambers,

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:
Aidan O’Connell, Purdue
Miyan Williams, Ohio State
Nicholas Singleton, Penn State
Ronnie Bell, Michigan
Keon Coleman, Michigan State
Luke Wypler, Ohio State
Isaiah Adams, Illinois
Axel Ruschmeyer, Minnesota
Ryan Hayes, Michigan
Olu Fashanu, Penn State
Cade Stover, Ohio State

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:
Keith Randolph, Illinois
Adetomiwa Adebawore, Northwestern
Mike Hall Jr., Ohio State
PJ Mustipher, Penn State
Junior Colson, Michigan
Bryce Gallagher, Northwestern
Maema Njongmeta, Wisconsin
D.J. Turner, Michigan
Ronnie Hickman, Ohio State
Ji’Ayir Brown, Penn State
Kalen King, Penn State

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Noah Ruggles, Ohio State
Adam Korsak, Rutgers
Jayden Reed, Michigan State

Tanner McCalister, Tyleik Williams; PENN STATE: Adisa Isaac, Chop Robinson, Curtis Jacobs, Johnny Dixon; PURDUE: Cam Allen, Cory Trice, Jack Sullivan, Jalen Graham, Lawrence Johnson; RUTGERS: Aaron Lewis, Avery Young, Christian Braswell, Christian Izien, Deion Jennings, Max Melton; WISCONSIN: C.J. Goetz, Jordan Turner, Keeanu Benton. SPECIAL TEAMS HONORABLE MENTION ILLINOIS: Caleb Griffin, Isaiah Williams; INDIANA: Charles Campbell, James Evans; MARYLAND: Chad Ryland, Colton Spangler; MINNESOTA: Matthew Trickett; OHIO STATE: Jesse Mirco; PENN STATE: Jake Pinegar; PURDUE: Charlie Jones; RUTGERS: Aron Cruickshank; WISCONSIN: Isaac Guerendo.

Defending Champs Await In Georgia

Continued From Page 1

For good measure, and a clear sign that the universe was looking out for Ohio State, the Horned Frogs fell to Kansas State the following day, suffering a 31-28 loss in overtime as the Wildcats won their first conference title since 2012.

The Buckeyes were revealed as the No. 4 seed in the College Football Playoff committee's final rankings on Dec. 4. Ohio State trailed No. 3 TCU, No. 2 Michigan and No. 1 Georgia, setting up a matchup between the Buckeyes and Bulldogs in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta on Dec. 31, with kickoff set for 8 p.m.

"It's hard to explain the range of emotions that have gone on here over the last seven days," Day said after the participants were announced. "But we saw our name go up there on the board and know

that we're going to have an opportunity to play. I said it before, it's like a second lease on life. A couple days ago we were on life support a little bit, our season was, and now there's a two-game season ahead of us. There's unbelievable excitement right now. Guys are just bouncing around the facility."

It was a sense of relief for the Buckeyes after a challenging few days for the program. Many of the same questions that had plagued the team following last season's loss to Michigan – allegations of a lack of toughness in the program and the inability to show up in big games, among them – were present after the most recent loss to Michigan. It was also another season without an appearance in the Big Ten Championship Game, leaving Ohio State with little to do other than sit, reflect and wait.

"You can imagine what that was like," Day said. "Or maybe you can't. But it was awful. I'd rather not get into it, but it was a bad week."

It's the fifth appearance for Ohio State in the College Football Playoff and the third under Day, but it's easily among the strangest paths the Buckeyes have taken. Ohio State responded to an early loss to Virginia Tech in 2014, going undefeated the rest of the way, and 2016 was somewhat of an outlier after the Buckeyes lost to Penn State in the regular season and made the playoff with just one loss and no Big Ten championship. Ohio State's candidacy was then clear in 2019 and 2020 after undefeated regular seasons.

But Ohio State's path this season was a relatively unprecedented one for the College Football Playoff. The Buckeyes – along with TCU – became just the fourth

and fifth teams out of 36 in nine seasons to make the College Football Playoff following a loss in their final game before the committee's final rankings. They are joined by Alabama in 2017, Notre Dame in 2020 and Georgia last season. Alabama and Georgia went on to win the national championship.

"Life is all about opportunity, and what an unbelievable opportunity this is, going down to Atlanta, playing the national champs," Day said. "(Georgia head coach Kirby Smart) has done an unbelievable job again this year. But this is all going to be about taking advantage of this opportunity, who works harder over the next month. The coaches, the players, just maximizing every day, practicing really well and preparing to play in this game."

"Now we're back in control of our destiny. We weren't, and that was the hardest thing going into this past weekend, but now we're back in control of our destiny."

But while Ohio State has control of its destiny back, fate has ordained a semifinal matchup against the defending national champions in Georgia. The Bulldogs are 13-0 this season, boasting an offense with playmakers such as quarterback Stetson Bennett and tight end Brock Bowers, while also operating arguably the nation's best defense with such top NFL draft prospects as defensive tackle Jalen Carter and cornerback Kelee Ringo.

"Certainly on offense Stetson does a great job in all areas," Day said. "I've got a lot of respect for the way he plays. Certainly they put a lot of stress on you with multiple tight ends and a really good offensive line and skill players on the outside. Then on defense, they have excellent scheme and really good players across the board."

"We're not that far into (preparation), but at the same time, the focus has got to be here the next couple weeks of working on fundamentals but start getting going with the game plan and put all that stuff



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together, because they challenge you in all three phases.”

It isn't the preferred matchup for Ohio State in the College Football Playoff having to visit Georgia for what is essentially a home game being played at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, about 70 miles from the Bulldogs' campus, but it's an opportunity to compete for a national championship all the same, and that's all the Buckeyes have asked for. Even in the moments following Ohio State's loss to Michigan, Day had the wherewithal to pitch his team for the College Football Playoff, asking for the committee to give the Buckeyes a chance.

“I thought we were in it and we were fighting,” Day said of the loss to the Wolverines. “It obviously got out of control down the stretch, but it wasn't like we were outmatched in terms of overall play. As we get to those decisions, I think you've got to look at the body of work and what we've done.

“We've got a lot of good pieces on this team and we came up short today, but if we're able to get a shot at the top four, we'd be a dangerous team.”

It's now time for Ohio State to show that potential. The Buckeyes have shown the capacity to be dangerous at times this season, fighting off Notre Dame in the opener, blowing out Michigan State on the road and knocking off Penn State at Beaver Stadium. But Ohio State's potential as a team capable of winning a national championship took a hit as the clock hit all zeroes in the loss to the Wolverines.

With the regular season behind Ohio State, there's no better opportunity to shed that perception than a successful performance over what Day has dubbed the upcoming two-game season.

“It's an opportunity that you just weren't guaranteed,” Day said. “And now you have it, and so what are we going to do with it? That's all I keep thinking about, is that this is an opportunity that wasn't guaranteed and now we do have it, so let's go do it.

“Certainly a lot of people counted us

out, and here we are. I kind of like being in this role, but now we've got to go do something with it. It doesn't mean anything if we don't do anything with it. Just being upset or having a second opportunity is not going to mean anything if we don't do anything with it. But what an unbelievable chance to go do something really special.”

A Title Game For The Ages

Coming into every season since Day took over as Ohio State's head coach, he's set three main goals for the program: beat Michigan, win a Big Ten championship and win the national championship. Somehow, even with a loss to Michigan in the regular-season finale, two of those goals are still on the table.

If Ohio State – which is generally viewed as anywhere from a touchdown to 10-point underdog to Georgia – can knock off the Bulldogs and Michigan defeats TCU in the Fiesta Bowl, it would set up one of the most anticipated national championship games in the history of the sport, matching up the Buckeyes and Wolverines at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles on Jan. 9, 2023, to compete for the right to be crowned national champions.

It would set no shortage of firsts, both for Ohio State and Michigan individually as well as the rivalry at large. It would be the first time The Game has ever been played at a neutral site or outside the months of October or November and the only time the two teams have faced off twice in the same season.

And while the hype is generally through the roof for any given edition of The Game, the concept of a storied rivalry like Ohio State and Michigan playing out on a national stage to determine the best team in college football – both in terms of what happens on the field and the implications for whoever wins and loses – would have to be seen to be believed.

“You don't want to get ahead of yourself, but that would be unbelievable,” Day said. “That would be historic to have that

kind of opportunity. To say we haven't thought about that, of course we have. Everybody has thought about that.”

Despite how definitive the result was on Nov. 26, if the teams were to face each other again for the second time in seven weeks, Day said Ohio State has already looked at where things went wrong and sees a path to fixing those issues.

“Looking back on the last game, we just had too many explosive plays,” he said. “As coaches, you've got to make sure you're looking at, are you putting your players in position to be successful? That's it. And then if not, then why isn't that getting done? There was a lot of looking in the mirror last week and figuring out why that didn't happen.

“At the end of the day, it comes down to accountability and ownership, and it starts with me, and then it goes right to the coaches and then on to the players. It's easy to point the finger at somebody else, or (ask) what's the reason why, and what you have to do is take a hard look in the mirror and figure out why that is.

“There's a lot of those great conversations that happened last week, as hard as they were, but we'll find out if we can come out of this thing stronger.”

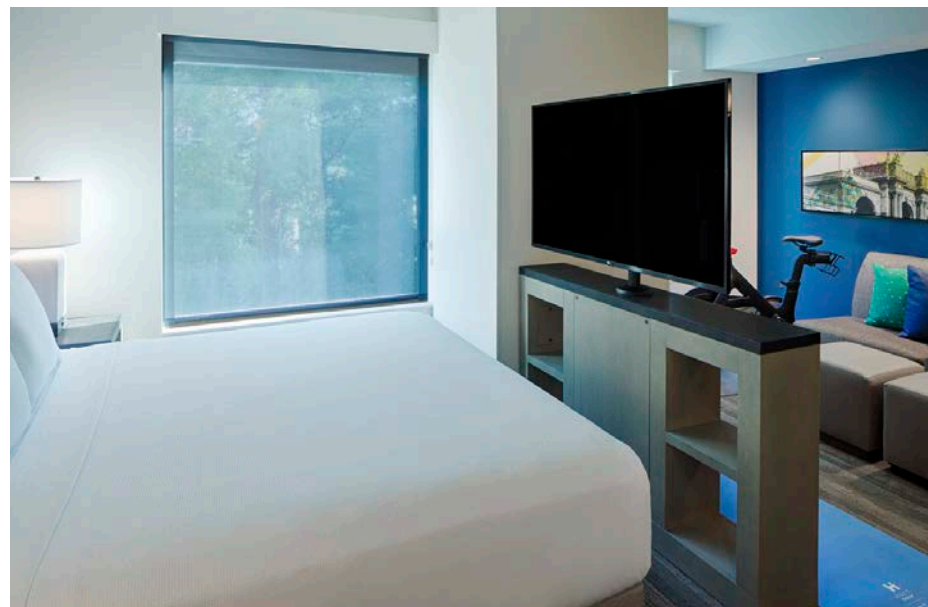
But Day doesn't want that potential matchup taking focus away from the task at hand. All things considered, Georgia is

almost certainly a tougher opponent for Ohio State due to the talent level on the Bulldogs' roster and the way Georgia has dominated teams this season. A potential dream rematch with Michigan – and a chance for Ohio State to right the wrongs of the last two seasons – doesn't exist unless the Buckeyes get past the semifinals, and that's what Ohio State will be locked in on as the College Football Playoff approaches.

“You're playing the defending national champions in their back yard,” Day said. “It's going to take everything we have to go on the road to win this game. I just think that we wanted to be in this situation at the end of the year. It took a different road to get here, but we're here. Now we've got to just do an unbelievable job this month of preparing and maximizing every day.

“That's, in the end, what's going to happen. It's going to be a great matchup. I've got so much respect for what they do in all three phases. So coaches, players, staff members – we've just got to do everything we can to maximize this month and get ready to play a really hard-fought game on (Dec. 31).

“That's where our focus is going. How we got here, at this point, I guess, doesn't really matter. Now that we're here, it's time to go play.”



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Georgia Offers Next-Level Challenge For OSU

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For much of recent college football history, the conversation has been dominated by three schools: Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State.

Since 2011, those three programs have combined to win eight national titles, and even when those schools fell short of a championship, the winning team – whether it be Florida State in 2013, LSU in 2019 or Georgia in 2021 – had to make its way through one or several of those programs to raise the hardware at the end of the season.

The Bulldogs, cursed with existence in the Southeastern Conference alongside the Crimson Tide and several other of the sport's top programs, have largely struggled to reach the mountaintop under head coach Kirby Smart, a longtime defensive coordinator for Alabama. Despite a 52-14 record in his first five seasons in Athens, Ga., the Bulldogs had little to show for it.

An appearance in the College Football Playoff in 2017 ended in an overtime loss to Alabama in the national championship game, and with a berth to the playoffs on the line the following year, Georgia once again fell to the Crimson Tide, this time in the SEC Championship Game. Those same follies, including the inability to knock off rivals or consistently win any conference or national titles, were the same things cited when Georgia parted ways with former head coach Mark Richt following the 2015 season.

The Bulldogs lost their next two to Alabama – one in the regular season in 2020 and then in last season's SEC Championship Game – but Georgia still earned a playoff berth last year, as it was undefeated before the loss to the Crimson Tide.

A win over Michigan in the semifinals set up yet another nightmare matchup for the Bulldogs against Alabama, with the result viewed by most as a foregone conclusion, both due to the talent put on the field by Al-

abama and the apparent mental block that seemingly wouldn't allow Smart's teams to get past their rival.

Alabama was able to take a fourth-quarter lead in the title game, scoring a touchdown following a fumble by Georgia, and looked primed for a kill shot on the Bulldogs. But Georgia responded, going 75 yards in four plays for a go-ahead touchdown to lead 19-18, and cornerback Kelee Ringo later returned an interception of Alabama quarterback Bryce Young to the end zone, going 79 yards to ice the game and bring the program its first national championship since 1980.

"I have tremendous respect for what they do," Smart said after the game. "They have been – let's be honest – they've been the measuring stick. And I was a part of it for nine years and saw it. And I know the preparation that goes into national championship games."

Georgia's title could certainly have been seen as a one-year anomaly given the consistent success of Alabama and that it was the first time since 2007 that the Bulldogs had knocked off the Crimson Tide – that was, at least, until the two teams returned to the field this season. Georgia kept momentum going, riding a 13-0 record – including wins over several ranked teams in Oregon (No. 11 in AP) and No. 1 Tennessee and No. 14 LSU (both according to the College Football Playoff rankings) – to the College Football Playoff while Alabama was left at home after losing twice in the regular season and missing the SEC Championship Game for the first time since 2019.

Last season was the first step, but this year's run – regardless of how it finishes for Georgia – shows there might be a new top dog in not only the SEC, but college football. Smart has long believed his team to be the best in the nation, but this season and last have started to prove his hypothesis correct.

"And you can't do it, but you take Ala-

Get To Know ... Georgia

2022 Record: 13-0.

Team Information: Offensive Formation - Spread; Defensive Formation - 3-4; Starters Returning - Offense 5, Defense 3, Specialists 1.

Head Coach: Kirby Smart, 7th year at Georgia, 79-15.

Series History: 2nd meeting; Georgia leads 1-0-0.

School Facts: Location – Athens, Ga.; Enrollment – 40,118; Nickname – Bulldogs; Colors – Red, Black; Conference – Southeastern Conference (Eastern Division); Stadium – Sanford Stadium (Surface, Grass; Capacity – 92,746).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Kenny McIntosh	137	709	5.2	10
Daijun Edwards	127	681	5.4	7
Kendall Milton	72	533	7.4	6

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Stetson Bennett	269-395	68.1	3425	20-6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Brock Bowers	52	726	14.0	6
Ladd McConkey	51	675	13.2	5
Kenny McIntosh	37	449	12.1	1

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game — 39.2
Rushing Yards Per Game — 207.0
Passing Yards Per Game — 284.9
Total Offense Avg. Per Game — 491.9

2022 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 3	OREGON	W, 49-3
Sept. 10	SAMFORD	W, 33-0
Sept. 17	at South Carolina	W, 48-7
Sept. 24	KENT STATE	W, 39-22
Oct. 1	at Missouri	W, 26-22
Oct. 8	AUBURN	W, 42-10
Oct. 15	VANDERBILT	W, 55-0
Oct. 29	at Florida	W, 42-20
Nov. 5	TENNESSEE	W, 27-13
Nov. 12	at Mississippi State	W, 45-19
Nov. 19	at Kentucky	W, 16-6
Nov. 26	GEORGIA TECH	W, 37-14
Dec. 3	vs. LSU at Atlanta*	W, 50-30

*SEC Championship Game

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.TFL-Yards	Sacks
J. Dumas-Johnson	42	22	64 8.0-23	3.0-12
Smael Mondon Jr.	38	26	64 6.5-21	0-0
Malaki Starks	39	24	63 0.5-0	0-0
Christopher Jones	34	16	50 5.0-20	1.0-13
Javon Bullard	29	13	42 6.0-20	2.5-12

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Christopher Smith	3	29	9.7	0
Kelee Ringo	2	45	22.5	0
Malaki Starks	2	42	21.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed — 12.8
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed — 77.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed — 215.1
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed — 292.1

bama out of it, I think we've had the best team in the country probably two or three times," he said after last year's title win. "But the best team in the country doesn't win the national championship every year. The team that plays the best does."

And as it stands, these current Bulldogs are playing the best football in the country. Georgia enters the College Football Playoff off a 50-30 win over LSU in the conference championship game, another dominant performance that has been commonplace throughout this season. This run earned Georgia the No. 1 seed in the College Football Playoff, setting up a date with No. 4 Ohio State on Dec. 31 in the Peach Bowl, necessitating a takedown of the new class of college football by the Buckeyes to continue their title pursuit.

The Bulldogs have won all but one of their games this season by at least double digits, displaying a balanced team capable of winning on both sides of the ball. But it's

still the defense that has mostly led the way for Georgia.

Despite losing eight defensive players to the 2022 NFL draft – including five who went in the first round, with defensive end Travon Walker taken No. 1 overall – Georgia has mostly been able to regroup on that side of the ball. The Bulldogs are allowing just 12.8 points per game, second in the nation, and are holding opponents to just 292.1 yards of offense, which ranks ninth.

The crux of the defense is built around stopping the run, an area in which Georgia has excelled, limiting the competition to a measly 77.0 rushing yards per game, which leads the nation. It's no coincidence that Georgia's best player on either side of the ball – defensive tackle Jalen Carter – lines up in the interior, and he has been a nightmare for opposing offenses this season.

Perhaps his shining moment came in Georgia's win in the SEC Championship



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OHIO STATE VS. GEORGIA

Game, as Carter sacked LSU quarterback Jayden Daniels and then lifted him up in the air with one arm while celebrating with the other. In 11 games this season (with two missed due to injury), Carter racked up 29 tackles – seven for loss – with a team-high three sacks (tied). Already named a first-team All-American by a number of publications, Carter is in line to be the first non-quarterback prospect taken in the upcoming NFL draft.

“I told you all he’s different,” Georgia linebacker Jamon Dumas-Johnson said. “He’s unstoppable. He’s a different person, a different animal. I’ve never seen anything like him.”

Carter is joined on the defensive line by nose tackle Nazir Stackhouse (28 tackles, 2½ for loss) and a trio of productive defensive ends in Tyrion Ingram-Dawkins, Tramel Walthour and Mykel Williams, with the three combining for 48 tackles – seven for loss – and 3½ sacks. Smart and co-defensive coordinators Will Muschamp and Glenn Schumann also utilize a hybrid defensive end/linebacker role, which has been filled by Robert Beal Jr. (22 tackles, two sacks) this season.

And while the unit has been able to hold rushers in check, it hasn’t found much success getting to the quarterback. The team has combined for just 27 sacks this season, a far cry from last season’s squad that finished with 49. The Bulldogs lost four of their five sack leaders from last season, with Beal (6½ sacks last year) as the lone returnee. The four departed leaders – including linebackers Adam Anderson, Nakobe Dean and Channing Tindall, and Walker – combined for 22½ sacks.

Ohio State has allowed just eight sacks this season, so a path to victory for the Buckeyes likely includes a continued neutralization of Georgia’s spotty pass rush.

“There haven’t been a lot of opportunities, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t do a better job,” Smart said. “We’ve studied that really, really hard, in terms of just looking at ourselves, and we’re telling them, ‘Hey, it’s 2.6 seconds that you have to get there by.’ So, you have to get there in 2.6 seconds or

you have to affect the throw.”

The pass rush has struggled in part due to the loss of linebacker Nolan Smith, who is still tied for the team lead with three sacks despite not playing since suffering a torn pectoral muscle against Florida on Oct. 29. Smael Mondon Jr. and Dumas-Johnson have played the majority of snaps at linebacker this season, with Trezmen Marshall and Rian Davis also filling in at points.

If there’s one area that can be pointed to as a clear weakness for the Bulldogs, though, it’s in the secondary. Georgia has allowed 215.1 passing yards per game, which ranks 52nd nationally and eighth in the SEC.

The most notable breakdown came in the Bulldogs’ most recent game, when the Tigers threw for 502 yards and a trio of touchdowns in the 50-30 loss. Ringo, a red-shirt sophomore, was picked on in particular, allowing five receptions for 71 yards on a season-high 11 targets.

“We all know Kelee is a good player, good corner, top corner in the class,” Dumas-Johnson said. “(We just have to) get his confidence back. His teammates rallied around him. Just got to go back to work and lock in.”

Ringo will likely draw Ohio State wide-out Marvin Harrison Jr., setting up one of the game’s top matchups. Cornerback Kamari Lassiter starts opposite Ringo, and the secondary also features safeties Chris Smith and Malaki Starks, with defensive back Javon Bullard taking the field in any nickel packages.

All that being said for Georgia’s defense, the offense still provides an equally intriguing challenge for Ohio State. The Bulldogs are scoring 39.2 points per game (11th) and are seventh in the country in total offense at 491.9 yards per game – just a hair behind the Buckeyes, who are totaling 492.7 yards per game for sixth.

There is no shortage of play makers, with quarterback Stetson Bennett and tight end Brock Bowers helping orchestrate one of the most efficient offenses in the country this season. Bennett has completed 68.1 percent of his passes while throwing for

3,425 yards and 20 touchdowns compared to just six interceptions.

Bennett – a former walk-on who turned 25 in October – helped spark Georgia’s turnaround last season to a national championship, and the accolades began rolling in this year as he finished fourth in voting for the Heisman Trophy.

“He’s a winner. I mean, let’s be honest – the guy wins,” Smart said. “He’s stubborn as hell sometimes, but he’s a competitor”

Bennett is backed up by an offensive line that is a finalist for the Joe Moore Award, given annually to the top offensive line in football, and has allowed just seven sacks this season. The Bulldogs also have a trio of effective running backs in Kenny McIntosh (709 rushing yards, 5.2 per carry, 10 TD), Daijun Edwards (681, 5.4, 7) and Kendall Milton (533, 7.4, 6), with McIntosh also a receiving threat for the Bulldogs, hauling in 37 receptions for 449 yards this season.

Also available on the outside is wide receiver Ladd McConkey (51 receptions, 675 yards, 5 TD), but the star down the field is Bowers. Winner of this season’s John Mackey Award, which is given annually to the nation’s top tight end, Bowers – a sophomore who came on the scene last season with 56 receptions for 882 yards and 13 touchdowns – leads Georgia again this season with 52 receptions for 726 yards and six touchdowns, and he enters the semifinal against Ohio State with a touchdown in four of his last six games.

He’s even been involved in the rushing attack, with the 6-4, 230-pound weapon carrying the ball six times this season for 93 yards and three touchdowns, including scoring runs of 75 and 2 yards in Georgia’s 39-22 win over Kent State on Sept. 24.

“Anytime you have a guy like that where you can throw him the ball, throw him a quick pass or hand the ball off to him and he has a chance to go the distance,” Bennett said, “it’s special.”

And of course, no title-contending team would be complete without an exceptional special teams unit. Kicker Jack Podlesny is 23 of 26 on field-goal attempts this season with a long of 50, while punter Brett Thorson – who has booted the ball away just 33 times this season – is averaging 44.9 yards per attempt with a long of 75, and 18 of his punts have landed inside the opponent 20-yard line.

Georgia will have the added benefit of playing in what is essentially a home game, with the semifinal contest being played at Mercedes-Benz Superdome in downtown Atlanta, around 70 miles from Georgia’s campus.

“Once you get to the venue, it’s different than when you’re coming in for a game and kids have been in classes and they just fly in for the game. It’s different when you’re there for a whole week,” Smart said. “We’ll practice at Mercedes-Benz. They’ll practice at Mercedes-Benz. It’s not like you’re going to walk in there and not have seen the place.”

“The field is the exact same length as any other field we play them on. I know how strong their alumni base is and how proud they are of it.

“It’s home as in the state of Georgia, but the fan bases both turn out. They both have great fan bases, and I think that’s great for the Peach Bowl and great for the state of Georgia and (Peach Bowl CEO Gary Stokan)’s staff to have two programs of this magnitude playing in this game.”

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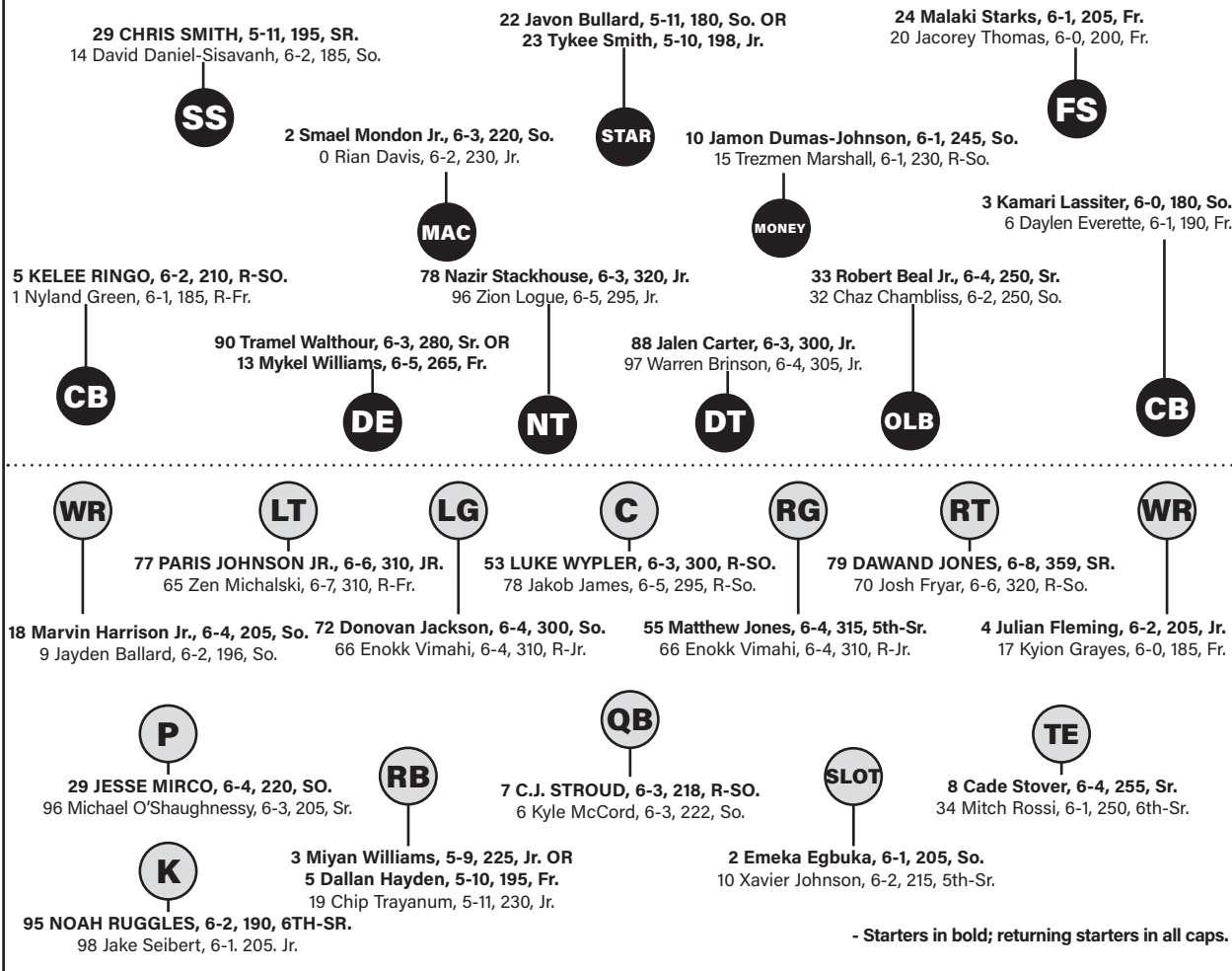
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Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. GEORGIA RUSH DEFENSE

In order for Ohio State to successfully run the ball, it needs players who can carry the ball. It seems simple, but keeping the backfield healthy has been a season-long problem, and as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to print, it was still unclear who will be taking the handoffs against the Georgia Bulldogs on New Year's Eve. TreVeyon Henderson (571 yards, 5.3 average, six touchdowns) and Miyan Williams (817, 6.5, 13) were each in and out of the lineup. Henderson announced on Dec. 13 that he would not play in the CFP because he needs to have surgery on his foot, and Williams was not at full strength in the 45-23 loss to Michigan on Nov. 26, running eight times for 34 yards. The bulk of the carries in that game went to Chip Trayanum, essentially the No. 4 back after spending the majority of the season in the linebacker room. He rushed for 83 yards on 14 carries while freshman Dallen Hayden, who was third in line, had just two totes for 7 yards. Xavier Johnson gained 24 yards on two attempts. The Buckeyes, who rank 28th nationally with 198.5 rushing yards per game (5.5 per carry) and 29 touchdowns, have to find a way to crack the No. 1 rushing defense. Georgia gives up a mere 77.0 yards a game (2.9) and yielded only five TDs on the ground. OSU gained 143 yards (4.9) against a stout Michigan defense but had trouble opening holes against Iowa and Penn State, neither of which is near the caliber of Georgia's defense. **EDGE: GEORGIA**

GEORGIA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Bulldogs average 207.0 rushing yards (5.5 per carry) with 37 touchdowns to rank 18th in rushing offense. They've been doing it by committee with Kenny McIntosh (709 yards, 5.2 average, 10 TDs) leading the way. Daijun Edwards (681, 5.4, 7) and Kendall Milton (533, 7.4, 6) also contribute. Ohio State ranks 23rd in rushing defense at 119.9 yards per game (3.4 per run) and 10 scores allowed. Of course, the numbers are skewed by the 252 yards (7.2) by Michigan. The Buckeyes actually did a decent job containing the Wolverines until Donovan Edwards gashed them for 75- and 85-yard touchdowns late in the game. **EDGE: EVEN**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. GEORGIA PASS DEFENSE

This is where the game could be decided. Quarterback C.J. Stroud finished third in Heisman Trophy voting after throwing for 3,340 yards and 37 TDs against six interceptions. He completed 66.2 percent of his passes, and the Buckeyes were second in scoring (44.5 points per game) to Tennessee (47.3). Marvin Harrison Jr. (72 catches for 1,157 yards, 12 touchdowns) may be the best receiver in the country, at least in the non-injured category since teammate Jaxon Smith-Njigba has already been ruled out of the Peach Bowl. Emeka Egbuka is dangerous (1,039 yards and nine touchdowns on 66 receptions), especially after the catch. Julian Fleming and tight end Cade Stover add further weapons against the No. 52 pass defense (215.1 yards and 11 TDs allowed through the air). Of note, LSU passed for 502 yards against Georgia in the SEC title game and lost 50-30. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

GEORGIA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Quarterback Stetson Bennett doesn't get as many accolades as Stroud, but all he does is win, helping the Bulldogs to last season's national championship. This season his completion rate is 68.1 percent for 3,425 yards, 20 touchdowns and six interceptions. His favorite targets are Brock Bowers (52 catches for 726 yards, 14.0 average, six touchdowns), Ladd McConkey (51, 675, 13.2, five) and McIntosh (37, 449, 12.1, one). Georgia is No. 19 in passing at 284.9 yards per game. The Buckeyes are 14th in pass defense at 184.0 yards allowed per game and 16 TDs but were scorched by Michigan for 278 yards and scores of 69, 75 and 45 yards. **EDGE: EVEN**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Brett Thorson averages 44.9 yards per punt for Georgia. Jesse Mirco has a 45.6 average for the Buckeyes. Jack Podlesny makes 88.5 percent (23 of 26) of his field goals for the Bulldogs with a long of 50. OSU's Noah Ruggles makes 88.2 percent (15 of 17) with a best of 47. **EDGE: EVEN**

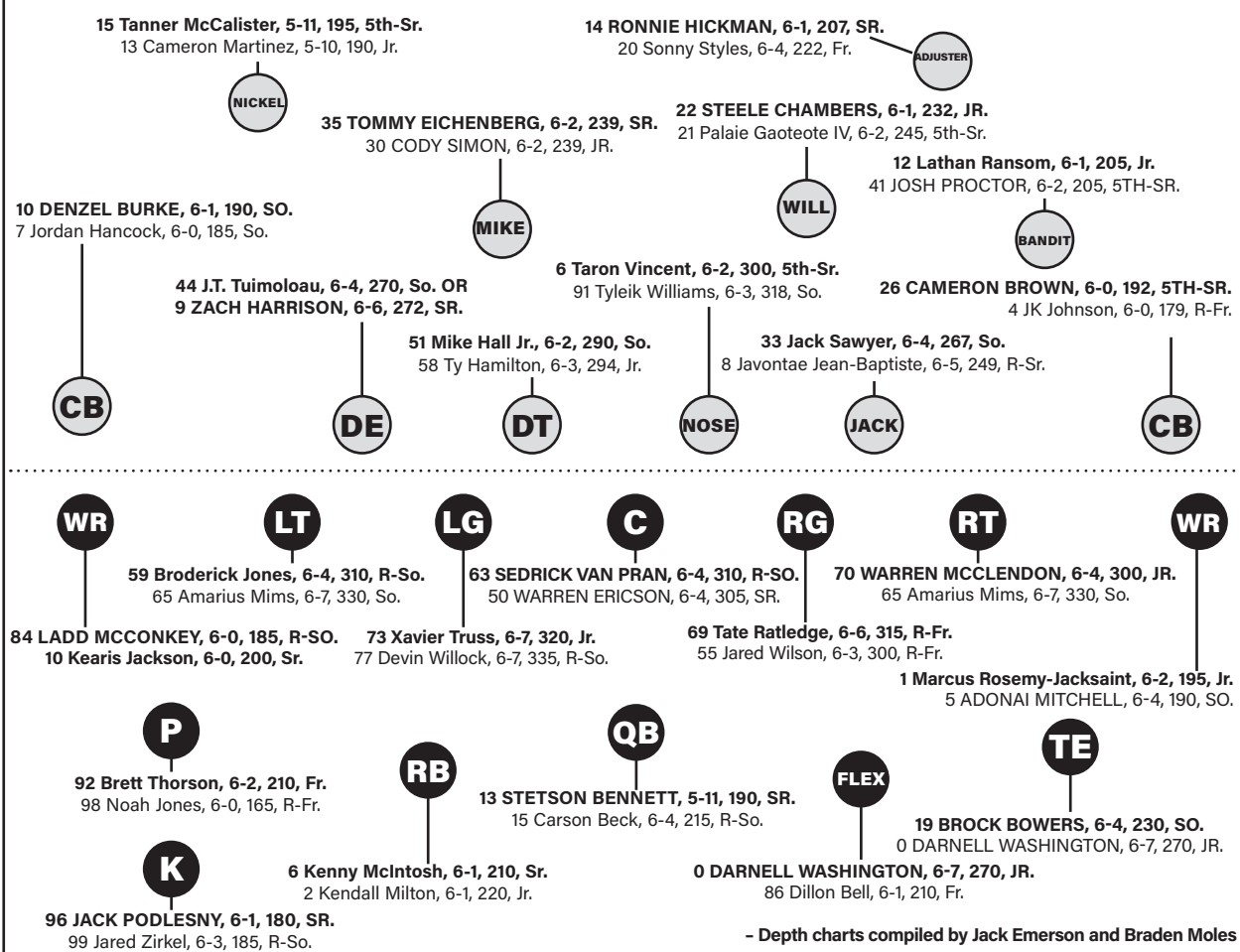
INTANGIBLES

The Buckeyes saw their hopes of making the playoffs fade after the resounding thumping in Ohio Stadium by the Wolverines. But Utah upsetting USC in the Pac-12 championship opened the door for redemption. For the Bulldogs, a key stat is being ranked No. 1 in red-zone defense, giving up 17 scores (nine TDs, eight field goals) on 28 chances (60.7 percent). OSU is 121st of 131 schools in the same category, yielding 21 scores (14 TDs, seven field goals) in 23 tries (91.3 percent). The Bulldogs also have the advantage of playing virtually a home game. **EDGE: GEORGIA**

PREDICTION

After a pair of blowout losses to Michigan, Ohio State needs to repair its image nationally. The heart says the Buckeyes are capable of pulling the upset and won't be as uptight facing somebody other than the Wolverines. The head says playing the defending champions in their back yard is formidable. **GEORGIA 35, OHIO STATE 31.**

WHEN GEORGIA HAS THE BALL...



The Numbers Game

Ohio State 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	(2) IOWA	W, 54-10	104,848	
Oct. 29	(2) at Penn State (13)	W, 44-31	108,433	
Nov. 5	(2) at Northwestern	W, 21-7	42,774	
Nov. 12	(2) INDIANA	W, 56-14	103,888	
Nov. 19	(2) at Maryland	W, 43-30	41,969	
Nov. 26	(2) MICHIGAN (3)	L, 45-23	106,787	

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	286	173
Rushing	108	66
Passing	154	87
Penalty	23	20
Average Per Game/Rush	198.5	119.9
Average Per Game/Pass	294.2	184.0
Total Offense	5912	3647
Total Plays	810	747
Average Per Game	492.7	303.9
Average Per Play	7.3	4.9
Penalties-Yards	69-600	66-545
Fumbles-Lost	9-4	15-7
Third Down Efficiency	71-154	54-177
Percentage	46%	31%
Fourth Down Efficiency	12-18	8-24
Percentage	67%	33%
Sacks-Yards	32-193	8-46
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:36	29:24

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	162	109	139	124	0	534	44.5
Opponents	57	71	20	83	0	231	19.3

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Miyan Williams	125	817	6.5	13	70
T. Henderson	107	571	5.3	6	41
Dallan Hayden	102	510	5.0	5	45
Xavier Johnson	6	118	19.7	1	71
Chip Trayanum	15	92	6.1	0	24
Emeka Egbuka	9	81	9.0	2	27
C.J. Stroud	35	74	2.1	0	44
TC Caffey	10	66	6.6	1	49
M. Harrison Jr.	2	32	16.0	0	18
Jesse Mirco	1	22	22.0	0	22
Mitch Rossi	5	12	2.4	1	8
Cayden Saunders	2	6	3.0	0	5
Kyle McCord	3	4	1.3	0	3
Devin Brown	1	1	1.0	0	1
Team	11	-24	-2.2	0	0
OSU Totals	434	2382	5.5	29	71
OPP Totals	421	1439	3.4	10	85

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	235	355	66.2	3340	37-6	176.2
Kyle McCord	16	20	80.0	190	1-0	176.3
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	251	376	66.8	3530	38-6	175.8
OPP Totals	189	326	58.0	2208	16-10	124.9

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	72	1157	16.1	12	58
Emeka Egbuka	66	1039	15.7	9	69
Cade Stover	35	399	11.4	5	38
Julian Fleming	29	462	15.9	6	79
Xavier Johnson	10	108	10.8	1	34
Jayden Ballard	8	155	19.4	1	72
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	5	43	8.6	0	21
Miyan Williams	5	27	5.4	0	12
Gee Scott Jr.	5	28	5.6	1	16
T. Henderson	4	28	7.0	1	31
Dallan Hayden	4	23	5.8	0	10
Mitch Rossi	2	19	9.5	1	16
Kaleb Brown	1	5	5.0	0	5
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
Reis Stocksdale	1	12	12.0	0	12
Joe Royer	1	1	1.0	0	12
Kamryn Babb	1	8	8.0	1	8
Kylon Grayes	1	2	2.0	0	2
OSU Totals	251	3530	14.1	38	79
OPP Totals	189	2208	11.7	16	75

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Noah Ruggles	-	69-70	-	-	15-17	114

Miyan Williams	13	-	-	-	-	78
M. Harrison Jr.	12	-	-	-	-	72
Emeka Egbuka	11	-	-	-	-	66
T. Henderson	7	-	-	-	-	42
Julian Fleming	6	-	-	-	-	36
Cade Stover	5	-	-	-	-	30
Dallan Hayden	5	-	-	-	-	30
Mitch Rossi	2	-	-	-	-	12
Xavier Johnson	2	-	-	-	-	12
T. Eichenberg	1	-	-	-	-	6
Steele Chambers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Kamryn Babb	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jayden Ballard	1	-	-	-	-	6
J.T. Tuimoloau	1	-	-	-	-	6
TC Caffey	1	-	-	-	-	6
OSU Totals	70	69-70	-	-	15-17	534
PPP Totals	28	26-27	0-0	0-0	11-12	231

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	4-4	5-6	6-6	0-1	15-17
OSU Totals	4-4	5-6	6-6	0-1	15-17
OPP Totals	2-2	5-5	4-4	0-1	11-12

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	44	2006	45.9	0	77
M. O'Shaughnessy	1	41	41.0	0	41
OSU Totals	45	2047	45.5	0	77
OPP Totals	75	3229	43.1	0	75

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Tanner McCalister	3	41	13.7	0	30
J.T. Tuimoloau	2	16	8.0	1	14
Tommy Eichenberg	1	15	15.0	1	15
Zach Harrison	1	2	2.0	0	2
Steele Chambers	1	12	12.0	0	12
Ronnie Hickman	1	8	8.0	0	8
Lathan Ransom	1	0	0	0	0
OSU Totals	10	94	9.4	2	30
OPP Totals	6	55	9.2	1	32

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	11	75	6.8	0	18
Jayden Ballard	1	14	14.0	0	14
JK Johnson	1	0	0.0	0	0
Reis Stocksdale	2	-1	-0.5	0	0
OSU Totals	15	100	6.7	0	18
OPP Totals	8	42	5.3	0	15

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	11	254	23.1	0	46
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	16	308	19.3	0	46
OPP Totals	35	706	20.2	0	38

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
T. Eichenberg	72	40	112	12.0-30	2.5-12
Steele Chambers	40	29	69	6.0-30	1.5-11
Lathan Ransom	44	21	65	3.5-22	1.5-11
Ronnie Hickman	24	27	51	1.5-2	0-0
Cody Simon	16	16	32	5.5-21	2.0-16
Zach Harrison	18	12	30	6.5-26	3.0-19
Denzel Burke	21	8	29	2.0-2	0-0
J.T. Tuimoloau	16	12	28	10.5-39	3.5-26
Taron Vincent	8	15	23	2.0-6	0-0
Jack Sawyer	10	13	23	6.5-24	4.5-20
Tanner McCalister	19	2	21	0-0	0-0
Tyleik Williams	10	11	21	2.5-7	1.0-2
Josh Proctor	14	7	21	2.5-7	1.0-2
JK Johnson	16	4	20	0-0	0-0
Mike Hall Jr.	9	10	19	7.5-46	4.5-39
J. Jean-Baptiste	9	8	17	4.0-20	3.5-19
Cameron Martinez	9	6	15	0-0	0-0
Caden Curry	11	3	14	1.5-6	0.5-0
Ty Hamilton	6	6	12	0.5-3	0.5-3
Chip Trayanum	8	4	12	0-0	0-0
Jerron Cage	5	7	12	2.5-11	1.5-8
Kye Stokes	8	4	12	1.0-4	0-0
Cameron Brown	9	2	11	0.5-1	0-0
Palaie Gaoteote IV	5	3	8	0.5-1	0-0
Jyaire Brown	4	4	8	0-0	0-0
Sonny Styles	4	3	7	1.0-2	0-0
OSU Totals	440	292	732	82-312	32-193
OPP Totals	437	346	782	44-127	6-55

Fumbles Forced: Harrison (3), J. Brown, Hickman, Jean-Baptiste, Ransom, Simon, Stokes, Tuimoloau.
Fumbles Recovered: Gaoteote IV (2), Hall Jr., Ransom, Stocksdale, Tuimoloau, Vincent.

Georgia Season Statistics

2022 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Sept. 3	(3) OREGON (11)	W, 49-3	76,490	
Sept. 10	(2) SAMFORD	W, 33-0	92,746	
Sept. 17	(1) at South Carolina	W, 48-7	78,212	
Sept. 24	(1) KENT STATE	W, 39-22	92,746	
Oct. 1	(1) at Missouri	W, 26-22	58,165	
Oct. 8	(2) AUBURN	W, 42-10	92,746	
Oct. 15	(1) VANDERBILT	W, 55-0	92,746	
Oct. 29	(1) FLORIDA	W, 42-20	75,868	
Nov. 5	(1) TENNESSEE (2)	W, 27-13	92,746	
Nov. 12	(1) at Mississippi State	W, 45-19	60,352	
Nov. 19	(1) at Kentucky	W, 16-6	61,022	
Nov. 26	(1) GEORGIA TECH	W, 37-14	92,746	
Dec. 3	(1) LSU (11)*	W, 50-30	74,810	

*SEC Championship Game at Atlanta

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

Team Statistics		
	UGA	Opp
First Downs	321	199
Rushing	127	58
Passing	175	120
Penalty	19	21
Average Per Game/Rush	207.0	77.0
Average Per Game/Pass	284.9	215.1
Total Offense	6395	3797
Total Plays	917	796
Average Per Game	491.9	292.1
Average Per Play	7.0	4.8
Penalties-Yards	58-598	74-538
Fumbles-Lost	16-10	12-6
Third Down Efficiency	82-159	47-176
Percentage	52%	27%
Fourth Down Efficiency	11-13	12-30
Percentage	85%	40%
Sacks-Yards	26-158	7-55
Time Of Possession Avg.	33:50	26:10

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Georgia	115	164	111	119	0	509	39.2
Opponents	23	47	46	50	0	166	12.8

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Kenny McIntosh	137	709	5.2	10	45
Daijun Edwards	127	681	5.4	7	28
Kendall Milton	72	533	7.4	6	51
Branson Robinson	61	288	4.7	1	30
Stetson Bennett	47	184	3.9	7	64
Ladd McConkey	6	120	20.0	2	70
Brock Bowers	6	93	15.5	3	75
Cash Jones	2	44	22.0	1	36
Carson Beck	7	43	6.1	0	20
Sevaughn Clark	2	9	4.5	0	6
D. Morrisette	1	8	8.0	0	8
Brock Vandagriff	1	7	7.0	0	7
Kearis Jackson	1	-5	-5.0	0	0
Team	17	-23	-1.4	0	0
UGA Totals	488	2699	5.5	37	75
OPP Totals	341	1001	2.9	5	63

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
S. Bennett	269	395	68.1	3425	20-6	154.6
Carson Beck	24	32	75.0	279	4-0	189.5
B. Vandagriff	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0
Team	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0
UGA Totals	293	430	68.1	3704	24-6	156.1
OPP Totals	257	454	56.6	2796	11-10	111.93

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Brock Bowers	52	726	14	6	78
Ladd McConkey	51	675	13.2	5	37
Kenny McIntosh	37	449	12.1	1	83
Darnell Washington	26	417	16.0	2	34
M. Rosemy-Jacksaint	27	303	11.2	2	28
Kearis Jackson	19	265	14.0	0	30
Dominick Blaylock	14	207	14.8	1	35
Dillon Bell	19	169	8.9	3	24
Daijun Edwards	11	80	7.3	0	21
Adonai Mitchell	5	69	13.8	1	27
Arian Smith	3	66	22.0	0	52
Jackson Meeks	6	65	10.8	0	18
Kendall Milton	5	64	12.8	1	35
Oscar Delp	5	61	12.2	1	28
D. Morrisette	4	34	8.5	0	16
Arik Gilbert	2	16	8.0	1	12
Cole Speer	1	12	12.0	0	12
Cash Jones	2	11	5.5	0	9
Mekhi Mews	2	9	4.5	0	6
Sevaughn Clark	1	4	4.0	0	4
Branson Robinson	1	2	2.0	0	2

Citrus Bowl Mistake Costs Buckeyes Dearly

Ohio State and Georgia, opponents in the upcoming Peach Bowl, have met on the gridiron only once previously, on Jan. 1, 1993, in the Citrus Bowl. The following is a reprint of Buckeye Sports Bulletin's game story from the Jan. 16, 1993, issue.

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Although the team that makes the fewest mistakes usually wins, that cliché did not hold true for Ohio State in the Florida Citrus Bowl.

The Buckeyes really made only one mistake during their New Year's Day battle with Georgia, but that mistake wound up costing them the game.

OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit and fullback Jeff Cothran got their signals crossed on a simple trap play at the Bulldogs' 16-yard line, resulting in a fumble that Georgia defensive tackle Travis Jones recovered.

Eleven plays later, the Bulldogs got the game-winning touchdown on a 1-yard plunge by backup running back Frank Harvey. The score made the difference in the game as the Buckeyes lost 21-14 to their Southeastern Conference rival.

It marked the fourth consecutive post-season defeat for Ohio State, leaving the Buckeyes with a final record of 8-3-1. The loss also marked a school-record fifth straight year in which the Buckeyes have finished the season with a loss.

The defeat wasted a superlative game by OSU sophomore tailback Robert Smith in what proved to be his final game as a Buckeye.

He rushed for 112 yards and two touchdowns and also grabbed two passes for 49 yards. It was his exciting 45-yard run with a screen pass from Herbstreit in the fourth quarter that helped the Buckeyes get so far into Georgia territory before they commit-

ted the costly turnover.

Smith wound up the season with a team-high 819 yards rushing, remarkable in that he missed two whole games and significant parts of two others. After the game, he refused to speculate on whether or not he had played his final game for Ohio State.

When asked after the game if he was coming back to Ohio State, Smith replied, "Yes. I think the plane leaves at 7:30. I'll be back there tonight."

After another reporter pressed the issue, Smith refused to answer, saying he would accept questions related only to the Citrus Bowl. Two days later, however, he announced that he will forgo his final two years of eligibility and jump to the NFL.

Smith measured up respectably to Georgia running back Garrison Hearst, who piled up 163 yards and two TDs in the game. Hearst was named the game's most valuable player, while Smith earned offensive player of the game honors for Ohio State.

While the game was billed as a Hearst-Smith showdown, it came down surprisingly to a show of defenses. The Bulldogs allowed only 289 total yards to the Buckeyes, while OSU surrendered 444 total yards to Georgia.

But the Buckeyes also made some big plays, including recovering a pair of fumbles. Both were extremely important.

The first came with about seven minutes left in the first half. The Bulldogs were nursing a 7-0 lead but had just crossed into Ohio State territory. However, UGA quarterback Eric Zeier mishandled the snap from center, and Ohio State sophomore defensive end Randall Brown pounced on the loose ball.

The turnover not only stopped Georgia's momentum, but also gave some to the Buckeyes' offense, which had sputtered to that point. Eleven plays later, Smith waltzed into the end zone from 1 yard out to give OSU a 7-7 tie before the half ended.

Ohio State's second fumble recovery appeared at the time like it might set up a



FILE PHOTO

LAST OUTING — Ohio State running back Robert Smith had a stellar outing in his final game for the Buckeyes despite a loss to Georgia in the 1993 Citrus Bowl, rushing for 112 yards and two touchdowns.

Buckeye victory. With the score tied 14-14, the Bulldogs were driving and had a first down at the OSU 28. On that first-down play, Zeier faded to pass and was bent almost in half by Ohio State senior linebacker Steve Tovar. Zeier coughed up the football, and nose guard Greg Smith smothered it to gain possession for the Bucks.

OSU looked as though it would not cash in on the break, though, as two running plays netted only 4 total yards. Then, on third-and-6 from the OSU 40, Herbstreit faded to pass and was chased from the pocket. He appeared to fade back deeper and deeper, but it turned out to be a ploy by the Buckeye quarterback.

Getting a block from Dave Monnot, Herbstreit dumped a pass in the right flat to Smith, who had circled around the charging Georgia rush. Getting a release block from center Paul Long and two excellent downfield blocks from tackle Alan Kline and Cothran, Smith set off on a broken-field run that brought the crowd to its feet.

He finally ran out of room along the Georgia sideline, but not before Ohio State had a first down at the Bulldogs' 15-yard line.

Poised for a go-ahead touchdown, or, at the very least, a field-goal attempt from placekicker Tim Williams, the Buckeyes would get no further. Backup tailback Butler By'note was thrown for a 1-yard loss on first down, then Herbstreit threw an incomplete on second down. On third-and-11, Cothran and Herbstreit ran into one another and fumbled, and Georgia recovered, setting up the game-winning march.

"We had our opportunities," said OSU head coach John Cooper. "Robert made a nice run and gave us the ball down deep in their territory."

"Our thinking was to run a trap play. It's a play that you check at the line of scrimmage which way you're going to run it, and (Cothran) did not hear the audible and went the wrong way. From that point on, it was pretty much Georgia's game."

Herbstreit explained that the Georgia contingent among the crowd of 65,861 may have had something to do with Cothran's inability to hear.

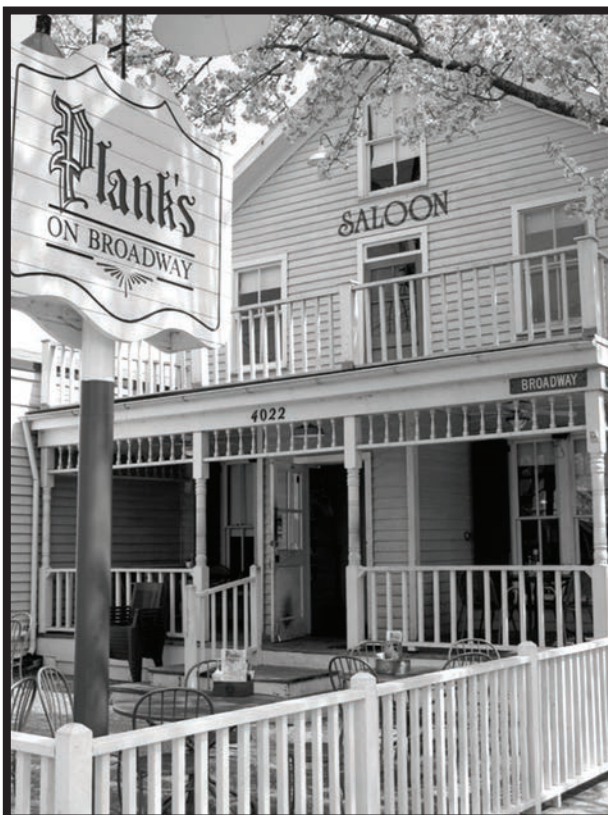
"The Georgia fans were getting pretty loud at that point," he said. "I called the 'white' call, which is a trap to the left, and (Cothran) thought I had said 'red.' He went to the side he thought he'd heard it, and I went to the side where I'd called it. There was a collision and the ball just popped out."

Herbstreit said, in fairness to Cothran, "I usually call the color twice, but this time, I only called it once. I should have turned it around to make sure he heard it."

Ohio State still had a couple of late chances to pull out a victory, but the Bucks could not muster any kind of sustained attack and finally lost the 21-14 decision.

"You have to give Ohio State a lot of credit for creating our mistakes," said Georgia head coach Ray Goff, who is now 2-1 in postseason action with the Bulldogs. "We never could quite put the knockout punch on them. We kept thinking we were close to doing that, but they would bounce back."

The Buckeyes were forced to play catch-



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The Numbers Game

Georgia 21, Ohio State 14

Jan. 1, 1993 - Citrus Bowl, Orlando, Fla.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
GEORGIA	7	0	7	7	21
OHIO STATE	0	7	7	0	14

First Quarter

UGA - Hearst, 1-yard rush (Peterson kick), 6:48.

Second Quarter

OSU - Smith, 1-yard rush (Williams kick), 1:17.

Third Quarter

UGA - Hearst, 5-yard rush (Peterson kick), 13:27.

OSU - Smith, 5-yard rush (Williams kick), 3:31.

Fourth Quarter

UGA - Harvey, 1-yard rush (Peterson kick), 4:32.

Att. - 65,861

Weather - Partly cloudy

Team Statistics

	UGA	OSU
First Downs	26	18
Rushing	11	12
Passing	13	5
Penalty	2	1
Rushes-Yards	49-202	47-179
Passing Yards	242	110
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	21-31-0	8-24-1
Offensive Plays	80	71
Total Net Yards	444	289
Third Down Efficiency	10-16	6-16
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	1-1
Punts-Avg.	6-39.0	8-37.1
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	1-1
Penalties	3-30	5-35
Time of Possession	31:01	28:59

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - UGA: Hearst 28-163; Davis 7-42; Strong 5-14; Harvey 3-10; Zeier 6-(-27). OSU: Smith 25-112; Harris 7-38; By'Not'e 4-17; Cothran 3-11; Herbstreit 8-1.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - UGA: Zeier 21-31-0-242-0. OSU: Herbstreit 8-24-1-110-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - UGA: Hastings 8-113; Mitchell 2-39; Bohannon 2-29; Strong 3-20; Graham 2-15; Thomas 1-13; Etheridge 1-10; Harvey 1-5; Hearst 1-(-2). OSU: Smith 2-49; Stablein 2-31; Saunders 2-16; Beatty 1-8; Cothran 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - UGA: Armstrong 6-39.0-52. OSU: Kessel 8-37.1-53

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - UGA: Hastings 1-6. OSU: Taylor 1-17; Smith 1-12.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - UGA: Hastings 3-81. OSU: By'Not'e 1-26; Smith 1-16.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - UGA: T. Jones 1-1. OSU: Brown 1-0, Smith 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - UGA: M. Jones 1-0. OSU: None.

SACKS - UGA: Davis 2-12, Daniels 1-5. OSU: Simmons 1-10, Tovar 1-8, Smith 1-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - UGA: Davis 3-13; Daniels 1-5; Godfrey 1-1; Harrel 1-1. OSU: Tovar 2-14; Simmons 1-10; Smith 1-4; Styles 1-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Assst.-Tot.) - UGA: Wilson 7-2-9; Godfrey 2-6-8; Tremble 5-2-7; Ward 3-3-6; Barnum 3-2-5; Davis 2-1-5; Harrel 3-0-3; M. Jones 2-1-3; Jackson 1-2-3; T. Jones 1-1-2; Daniels 1-0-1; David 1-0-1; Evans 1-0-1; Fouch 1-0-1; Maib 1-0-1; Muschamp 1-0-1; Owens 1-0-1; Pledger 1-0-1; Clemons 0-1-1; Wilson 0-1-1. OSU: Tovar 6-3-9; Nelson 4-5-9; Clark 6-2-8; Harper 6-1-7; Smith 6-1-7; Powell 4-2-6; Williams 4-2-6; Styles 3-1-4; Walton 3-0-3; Foster 2-0-2; Paul 2-0-2; Wilkinson 2-0-2; Beckman 1-0-1; Simmons 1-0-1; Williams 1-0-1; Borchers 0-1-1; Taylor 0-1-1.

up all day after Georgia took its opening possession 80 yards for a touchdown, getting a 1-yard run from Hearst.

OSU tied it just before halftime on Smith's run, but the Dawgs used a big kick-off return by Andre Hastings to open the second half and took just 93 seconds to make it 14-7 on another touchdown run by Hearst.

The Buckeyes took advantage of a short punt by Georgia to tie the game again, getting a 5-yard run from Smith with 3:31 left in the third period. That preceded the fourth-quarter turnovers by both teams that resulted in Harvey's game-winning TD.

Buckeye fans also witnessed the final game by Tovar. The senior linebacker did not disappoint the faithful, registering nine tackles, including two for loss, and causing one fumble.

It also marked the final game for Herbstreit, who had an uncharacteristically poor afternoon throwing the ball. Entering the

game having connected on 61.3 percent of his attempts, the Buckeye QB completed only 8 of 24 passes against Georgia for 110 yards.

Herbstreit's passing game was hampered by the loss of his favorite receiver, Brian Stablein, to a knee injury midway through the second quarter.

In addition to Hearst's big game, the Bulldogs also had excellent performances from Zeier and Hastings.

Zeier completed 21 of 31 passes for 242 yards. Meanwhile, Hastings was on the receiving end of eight of those for 113 yards. Both the reception and yardage figures set new Georgia bowl records.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin will have additional coverage of the first battle between Ohio State and Georgia as part of our Reprint Thursday on Dec. 29 at Buckeye. Sports.com, free to all subscribers.



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INSIDER

Ohio State Makes First Peach Bowl Appearance

Although the Peach Bowl has been a part of the fabric of College Football since 1968, Ohio State has yet to compete in the prestigious bowl.

That will change come Dec. 31, when the No. 4 Buckeyes will be tested against the No. 1 Georgia Bulldogs in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl in Atlanta. OSU head coach Ryan Day said it's an honor to get the opportunity to play in the iconic game.

"Our team is extremely excited about the opportunity," Day said. "We've heard such wonderful things about the Peach Bowl over the years and are really looking forward to going down there and spending a great week in Atlanta."

"Atlanta has been a wonderful place for us in recruiting. We have so many great Buckeye fans in the area, and I know there's so much excitement for us to get down in there. I can't even imagine what the atmosphere is going to be like at 8 p.m. when the foot hits the ball against the Bulldogs."

Ohio State's appearance in the Peach Bowl this season will mark just the 10th time a Big Ten team has played in the bowl in its history. The Big Ten has amassed just a 3-6 record in the bowl all-time, excluding two appearances by Maryland prior to joining the

conference. Michigan State is the defending Peach Bowl champion after the Spartans outclassed Pittsburgh 31-21 on Dec. 30, 2021.

While the Buckeyes look to make it back-to-back wins for the Big Ten in the Peach Bowl, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said he's looking forward to OSU's involvement in the bowl and the College Football Playoff at large.

"It's a place that we haven't been and a place that we wanted to go," Smith said. "It's a place we felt our fans could get to pretty easily, on the East Coast in particular, and that's playing out."

"We're excited about it, and our players are excited about it. We're looking forward to having the opportunity to be in the Mercedes-Benz Stadium. We have not competed in that stadium, so it's going to be a great experience for all of us."

With the matchup pitting Ohio State's high-powered offense against Georgia's punishing defense, Peach Bowl CEO Gary Stokan said he's expecting a game for the ages to unfold in Atlanta on New Year's Eve.

"This is going to be a true war and a battle, and a lot of fireworks on New Year's Eve in Atlanta," Stokan said.

Day, Smart Have Mutual Respect

The competition will be fierce when the game kicks off between Ohio State and Georgia, but that doesn't mean things can't be friendly as the lead-up to the contest continues over the next few weeks.

The teams' respective head coaches – Day in his fourth season for Ohio State and Kirby Smart in his eighth season for Georgia – were complimentary of each other and the opposing team in an interview session on Dec. 4.

"I have a tremendous amount of respect for Kirby and his staff and team and what they've done here and really certainly winning last year and then going undefeated this season, playing at a high level," Day said. "Congrats on winning the SEC Championship."

Day said Ohio State has continually

looked to the Georgia program during the off-season to see how the Bulldogs – who have a 47-5 record over the past four seasons with a national championship – conduct their business on the field.

"To say that we're knee-deep in a game plan, I can't tell you that," Day said. "We watch them from afar, and they have very, very good players and a good scheme."

"Certainly on offense, (quarterback Stetson Bennett) does a great job in all areas. I've got a lot of respect for the way he plays. Certainly, they put a lot of stress on you with multiple tight ends and a really good offensive line and skill players on the outside. Then on defense, they have excellent scheme and really good players across the board."

Smart returned the favor and said he has a lot of respect for Day and Ohio State as a whole.

"What a tremendous job he has consistently done year in and year out with that program," Smart said. "I have just a lot of respect for the way they play the game. We've watched them, studied them in years past (and in) offseasons, spoken to their staff members. I just always knew that an opportunity to play them would probably come along but not knowing when it would happen, and it came to fruition this year."

"I've got a lot of respect for a lot of their players we recruited and tried to sign, and I've enjoyed watching them mature and play for him and become really good football players."

And while this is Day's first experience with Georgia, it isn't Smart's first experience with Ohio State. He was a defensive coordinator for Alabama in 2014 when the Buckeyes knocked off the Crimson Tide in the semifinals of the inaugural College Football Playoff.

"Long day. It was a long day, and it was physical," he said. "I think it was Ezekiel Elliott, right? He shredded what was a pretty talented Alabama defense. I just remember a lot of explosive plays back and forth. I can't remember all the particulars, but I know they were very talented and very physical and played with a very obvious purpose."

OSU Underdogs For First Time This Season

For the first time during the season, Ohio State will play the role of the underdog when the Buckeyes take on Georgia in the Peach Bowl.

The Buckeyes were favored in each of their 12 regular-season games but will have to embrace a new mentality against the Bulldogs, who sat as 6½-point favorites as of Dec. 14 according to DraftKings. Entering the Peach Bowl, Ohio State had been favored to win each of its last 25 games, and the last time it saw itself on the opposite side came in the 2020 College Football Playoff national championship against Alabama, a game which OSU lost 52-24.

Despite the loss to Alabama, the Buckeyes have largely found success as the underdog in their last 10 games in the role by amassing an 8-2 record, with the other loss coming to Clemson in the 2019 Fiesta Bowl.

Day sports a 1-2 record as an underdog to this point in his Ohio State career, with his lone win coming in the Buckeyes' triumphant 49-28 win over Clemson in the 2020 Sugar Bowl, which avenged the previously mentioned Fiesta Bowl loss to the Tigers.

The Buckeyes are looking to play spoiler against the Bulldogs, and Day relished the opportunity to compete as David to Georgia's Goliath.

"Certainly, a lot of people counted us out and here we are," Day said. "I kind of like being in this role, but now we have to go do something with it. It doesn't mean anything if we don't do anything."

Peach Bowl Could Serve As Home Game For UGA

Not only will Ohio State have to lean into the underdog mind-set, but the Buckeyes will also have to embrace playing in what will likely be a hostile environment in Atlanta.

The University of Georgia's campus is just an hour and a half drive from Atlanta, meaning Bulldog fans are expected to fill Mercedes-Benz Stadium in force for the Peach Bowl. While the game will likely serve as a de facto road contest for the Buckeyes, Ohio State has played well away from Ohio Stadium.

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um this season, collecting a 4-0 record while outscoring opponents 157-88.

Although the Bulldogs have the advantage of proximity to Atlanta, Stokan said he believes Ohio State will be well-represented in Mercedes-Benz stadium. He added that Ohio State's 12,500-ticket allotment went in just two days, which is among the fastest he's ever seen the allotment sell out.

"We have great fans in Atlanta, so obviously the secondary market is active," Stokan said. "But having seen, in my 25 years running a bowl, Ohio State fans (and) the way they travel and knowing the large contingent that's in Georgia and Atlanta of Ohio State, I think there's going to be a tremendous amount of Buckeyes in that stadium and around the stadium as well."

The clash between Ohio State and Georgia will bring two of college football's most extensive fan bases together, and Stokan also announced that the Peach Bowl has added 2,000 additional seats in the stadium for the game and said that he expects it to be a record crowd in Mercedes-Benz Stadium, which hosted Super Bowl LIII and several other Peach Bowl contests since it opened in 2017.

"The way Mercedes-Benz is structured, it's built so they have expandable seats in both sidelines and one of the end zones," Stokan said. "You use those seats for Super Bowls, Final Fours, big games like ours, so we've taken those expandable seats, added those, and we've added another 2,000 standing room only above that."

"We'll be right at 78,000," he continued. "It's going to be a great crowd, a record crowd, and I think a super game with the two

teams that we'll have."

Day Sees Parallels To Last Year's Georgia Team

Day sees a source of inspiration heading into the College Football Playoff that some may view as unusual. Entering the Buckeyes' semifinal matchup as the No. 4 seed facing No. 1 Georgia, Day is drawing hope for his team's national championship chances from none other than last year's Georgia team.

"There's been precedent on this," Day said Dec. 4, referring to the Bulldogs run to the playoff last season after losing in their conference title game to then-No. 3 Alabama.

Ohio State shares that path, making the playoffs this season after falling to Michigan in the regular-season finale and not even getting the opportunity to compete in the conference championship. Coincidentally, the Buckeyes' undefeated run also ended to the No. 3 team in the country.

"You look at last year, Georgia lost to Alabama in this SEC Championship, I think it was 41-24, and then went on to win the whole thing," Day said. "So now it's just a matter of what we do moving forward. Certainly, the game at the end of the year is going to be in the back of our minds as motivation. Now it's just all about maximizing this month."

After that loss, Georgia entered the playoffs as the No. 3 seed and took on No. 2 Michigan. The Bulldogs topped the Wolverines and then got revenge on the team that beat them, Alabama, in the title game for the program's first championship since 1980.

Ohio State could follow that blueprint this season. If the Buckeyes can get past Georgia, they could very well have a shot at revenge

against the team that beat them, so long as No. 2 Michigan gets past No. 3 TCU in the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 31, which will kick off four hours prior to Ohio State-Georgia.

Day Lays Out Prep Plan For Peach Bowl

After the USC's loss to Utah in the Pac-12 Championship Game opened the door for Ohio State to make the College Football Playoff, the Buckeyes had an opportunity that no other team in the field did, spending conference championship week practicing while the other top teams took the field in their conference title games.

Though the Buckeyes weren't certain they would make the final field going into the weekend, they continued to practice with the mind-set that they would get in, focusing on improving key areas and staying sharp despite being unaware of their true fate.

"We start off, really, working on fundamentals," Day said. "We put two practices in last week talking about being in this very situation. Don't wake up on (Dec. 4) and be surprised if you have an opportunity to go play for a national championship. We're not going to feel sorry for ourselves but we need help. And we got help."

Day outlined how the Buckeyes will handle the weeks leading up to the Peach Bowl matchup with Georgia.

"We've been in this, the CFP, three of the last four years," Day said. "So we have a pretty good plan, I think, for this month."

As Day pointed out, this isn't the team's first rodeo gearing up for a playoff game. He's done it twice before, both times with Clemson on the other end of the month-long layoff.

His first year as head coach in 2019, Ohio State fell just short against the Tigers, dropping a 29-23 contest with a couple of controversial calls from officials. Clemson sealed the win with an interception on OSU's final drive.

In 2020, quarterback Justin Fields had one of the more memorable performances from a signal caller in school history, going 22 of 28 for 385 yards and six touchdowns and adding 42 rushing yards despite getting his ribs bruised midway through the second quarter. Ohio State won that game, 49-28.

"I think we did a really good job in 2020 of getting ready to play in that Clemson game," Day said. "We'll use that same formula to prepare for this game. But I think the fundamentals are the first part. We've got to really hammer that."

The next step, then, will be to install as much of the game plan as possible in Columbus before the team arrives in Atlanta on Dec. 26.

"We try to do as much as we can here on campus, then we get on-site down in Atlanta and go through a game-week preparation," Day said.

Moving through the days of preparation that remain, it will be important for the Buckeyes to prevent the type of explosive runs and passes that gashed them in The Game.

"Certainly looking back on the last game, we just had too many explosive plays (against us)," Day said. "As coaches, you've got to make sure you're looking at that, and putting your players in the best position to be successful. That's it. And then if not, then why isn't that getting done."

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No Words Are Minced After Losses To Michigan

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

It's hard to imagine a less enviable position than that of an Ohio State coach at the lectern following a loss to Michigan. It's not an uncommon one, as the Buckeyes' lead man has faced the music after a loss to the Wolverines on 60 occasions, but body language and their words usually indicate that the coach – whether it's Earle Bruce, John Cooper, Jim Tressel or, more recently, Ryan Day – would rather be anywhere else.

"This is not the outcome that we all envisioned," said Day, coming off a shocking 45-23 loss to Michigan at Ohio Stadium on Nov. 26. "I thought we had really good preparation. I thought we were building toward playing really well in this game. We were fighting there in the first half, and I felt really good going into the second half, and we just didn't execute well enough in the second half. I don't know how to answer that other than I thought we played hard, I thought we were fighting out there, but in the end we came up short."

Even so, it comes with the territory – and is likely in their contracts with Ohio State – that coaches spend time addressing the loss and explaining why the Buckeyes fell to their archrivals.

"This is a tough loss," Ohio State's coach said. "I never like to lose, especially in Ohio Stadium. It's going to take a while to get over this one."

While the general sentiment of that statement could be attributed to Ohio State's current head coach in Day, the quote is actually from Bruce following a 26-24 loss to the Wolverines in Columbus on Nov. 22, 1986.

As it turns out, Ohio State's coaches – regardless of era – generally fall back to some similar phrases and cliches in the event of a loss to Michigan. For example, after last year's loss to the Wolverines, Day looked at several factors that led to the loss.

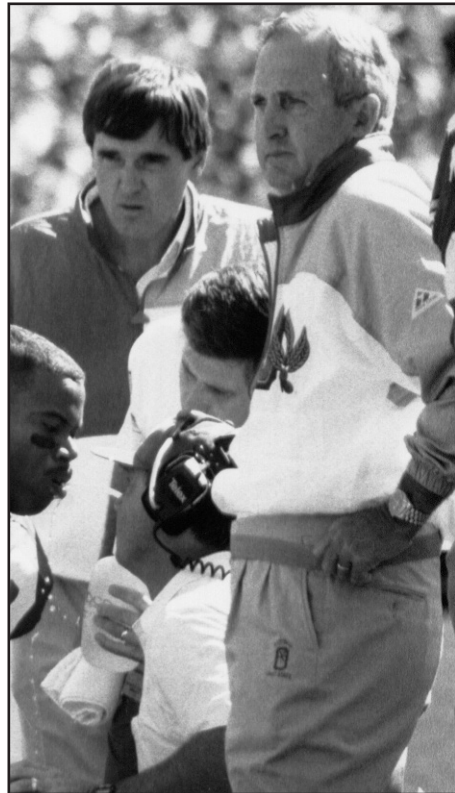
"When you take care of the football, you give yourself a chance," he said. "When you play clean, don't have penalties, you give yourself a chance. When you run the ball and stop the run, you give yourself a chance. Not all those things happened today. And when that happens and they're controlling the game and controlling the ball and we're not getting stops on defense, all those things add up."

But 38 years before Day's first loss to Michigan, Ohio State suffered a 24-14 loss to the Wolverines in Ann Arbor, Mich., on Nov. 19, 1983, which was the second for Bruce, who was in his fifth season at the helm.

"They did a good job today – they didn't turn the ball over at all," Bruce said. "That's the difference in the ballgame today."

No matter how the game might have changed in years since, winning the turnover battle has remained paramount. Since 2000, the team that wins the turnover battle between Ohio State and Michigan is 15-5, with two instances of the teams finishing with an equal number of turnovers and the teams not facing off during the 2020 season due to the pandemic.

One of those instances of a gridlock in the turnover battle was on Nov. 22, 2003,



FILE PHOTO

FACING THE MUSIC — Former Ohio State head coach John Cooper (1988-2000) had to face the media after losing to Michigan on several occasions, going 2-10-1 against the Wolverines during his time with the Buckeyes.

when the Buckeyes suffered a 35-21 loss in Ann Arbor, the first loss to Michigan in three seasons under Tressel.

"I think you can always blame yourself," he said. "If you're the right type of team member, you've got to look at yourself and say, 'OK, what did I design? What did I call? What was my task?' We don't have guys that blame it on other things. We have guys who say, 'You know, what could I have done to give us a chance to succeed? What didn't I do? I've got to go work on that.' And that's the way I look at it."

Tressel also reflected on the turnover battle. Each team had a pass intercepted, while Michigan fumbled the ball once but was able to jump back on it.

"Well, Michigan did an excellent job and earned the Big Ten conference championship," Tressel said. "They came out and did the things that championship teams do. And they stayed away from turnovers and were able to run the pass."

This was Tressel's only loss to Michigan in 10 tries, and for obvious reasons, former head coach Urban Meyer never had to explain away a loss to the Wolverines, knocking Michigan down on seven occasions without a loss to his name.

One coach with extensive experience in losing to Michigan, though, is Cooper. There's a reason Feb. 10 is celebrated every year in The Great Lakes State, noting his 2-10-1 record against Michigan. Woody Hayes is the only other coach in the history of the rivalry to reach double-digit losses, but he did so along with 16 wins from 1951-1978.

Cooper's initiation to the rivalry came in his first season on Nov. 19, 1988, a 34-31

loss to the Wolverines in Columbus. The Buckeyes entered with just a 4-5-1 record and were looking to cap off Cooper's inaugural season with a win over Michigan. They looked well on their way after scoring a go-ahead touchdown for a 31-27 lead with 2:02 remaining after being down 20-0 at the half.

Instead, Michigan returned the kickoff 59 yards, and two plays later, quarterback Demetrius Brown connected with John Kolesar on a 41-yard touchdown. Ohio State quarterback Greg Frey was intercepted on the ensuing drive to secure the Michigan victory.

"I'm happy with the improvement we've made the last three or four weeks," Cooper said. "But I'm not happy with the season. I'm not happy with the way the game came out today. I don't know what you can learn from a loss."

As it turns out, there are some lessons that probably should have been learned given that Cooper's Ohio State teams dropped four of the next five to Michigan, with the fifth contest the infamous 13-13 tie on Nov. 21, 1992.

"Let me say how proud I am of this football team," he said after the rivalry's first tie since 1973. "I thought they played their guts out today. Our guys really laid it all on the line today. For this football team to go out there and perform today after all the adversity we've been through, I couldn't be more proud."

Ohio State entered The Game with an 8-2 record and plenty of adversity faced on the field, but Cooper was likely alluding to controversy taking place off the field. At this point in his tenure – with an 0-5-1 record against Michigan under his belt – the postgame discussion was centered more around his status as Ohio State's lead man rather than what had happened on the field.

Prior to the tie, an article had been published in The Columbus Dispatch by then-sports editor George Strode detailing how Cooper's job status had "created divisiveness within the university, community and alumni" and that the university was looking to "eliminate" that divisiveness.

"If you're asking does it bother me, sure it bothers me," Cooper said after the game of speculation about his job status. "I have more concern, to be honest with you, about my assistant coaches and their families."

Cooper's frustration bled into his answers about simple game decisions. Asked if he gave any thought to going for it on fourth-and-4 from Michigan's 49-yard line with under two minutes remaining in the game before electing to punt, Cooper fired back at the reporter.

"No. See, here again, you want to gamble, guys, but you want to gamble with my chips. Right? We went for it down here a couple of years ago and lost the game, and all I see is that we lost the game," he said. "You guys never make mention of that. Right? You love that kind of stuff. 'Gamble, Coach. Gamble.' Then you lose, and that's all I heard – how many times we've lost. You know, we gave ourselves a chance to win the football game, guys."

At the end of his postgame press conference, Cooper walked out of the room, but not before firing a look at Strode and saying, "Appreciate your timing this week, George."

It really helped us out a lot."

Things got worse the following year, when the Buckeyes headed up to Ann Arbor just to receive a 28-0 beatdown for their troubles. Asked after the game if he was "snakebit" against Michigan, Cooper didn't have much to offer.

"Snakebit? I don't know if that's the right word or not. I know one thing: It's frustrating not being able to beat them," he said. "About as frustrating as it can be."

As with most coaches, Cooper did take time to acknowledge the play of the opponent, saying that the best team – by far, in his words – won.

"It was one of the most embarrassing games, I think, since I've been coaching college football," he said. "We got outplayed every which way possible – offense, defense, kicking game, pass protecting, throwing the ball, catching the ball. Anything you want to say about it, obviously, would be correct."

Cooper then turned it around – relatively speaking, of course – and won against Michigan in two of the next five seasons, but he wouldn't leave Columbus without another dagger in the heart. Entering the 2000 edition of The Game, the Buckeyes were 8-2 while the Wolverines boasted a 7-3 record with a share of the Big Ten championship in the balance. Ohio State trailed just 14-12 entering the locker room, but Michigan exploded for a 17-point third quarter, eventually picking up the 38-26 win in Columbus behind 303 passing yards and four total touchdowns from Wolverine quarterback Drew Henson.

"We had a chance to play for a BCS bowl game – we were the only team in the league, I think, who had a chance to do that," Cooper said. "And obviously, my record against Michigan speaks for itself. Obviously, it's awful."

"And to play here at home, have a chance to beat Michigan for a piece of the Big Ten championship, obviously I'm disappointed."

Like Bruce before him and Tressel and Day after him, Cooper fell back to the impact of the turnover battle, which the Buckeyes lost courtesy of three interceptions from quarterback Steve Bellisari.

"In a big ballgame like today, turnovers will cost you," Cooper said. "We dug ourselves in a hole there in the second half. We were able to get back into the game, but then we didn't make the plays down the stretch."

"I am proud of our effort, but again, I'm not happy with the outcome."

Effort was another common theme from coaches following a loss to Michigan, with most acknowledging that their team tried their hardest while crediting the opposing Wolverines for taking the win.

But perhaps the most grace in defeat came after Tressel's lone loss. Despite Ohio State's title defense being cut short by the Wolverines, Tressel took time to not only credit Michigan, but acknowledge his fortune in being able to participate and leave a mark in the rivalry.

"It's a tremendous privilege to be a part of this," Tressel said. "It's a great atmosphere. I thought the sportsmanship across the board was very good. And it's a great environment. Our kids and their kids will remember being a part of it as all of us will."

Bad Weather Recalls Good Stories For Buckeyes

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It was easily the worst statistical output quarterback C.J. Stroud had in his time starting at Ohio State. Despite coming away with a 21-7 win over Northwestern on Nov. 5, it featured Stroud's lowest completion percentage (38.5 percent), his fewest passing yards (76 yards) and the worst passer rating of his career (63.0), not to mention his only game at Ohio State without accounting for a touchdown.

Stroud's subpar performance – and that of the team as a whole – was almost exclusively because of the wind in Evanston, Ill., where gusts were consistently around 20-to-30 miles per hour and even reached a gust of 60 miles per hour.

"I've never been around conditions like this," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after the contest. "I don't know what the numbers showed. It must have been 30 mile-per-hour winds. And if you've ever tried playing golf in 30 mile-per-hour winds, it's hard to get off the tee, forget throw a football."

With the wild winds against the Wildcats and an upcoming postseason game (or games, potentially) indoors, BSB collected the thoughts of former players and coaches on some of the worst weather they've seen in their respective football careers. The Ohio State alums also gave their thoughts on whether such important contests should be played in climate-controlled environments and if they'd like to see top-tier Southern teams travel north for a game or two in the season's late stages.

"I'll tell you this – when it's bad weather conditions, you want to be one of the guys upstairs in the box," former Ohio State assistant coach Bill Conley said.

Former Ohio State linebacker Brent Johnson (1988-92) played in one of the most notorious bad-weather football games in Buckeye history. The stage was set by a torrential second-half downpour on Sept. 29, 1990, at Ohio Stadium as Ohio State tried to avenge a 42-3 road loss to USC the previous season.

The Buckeyes trailed by several possessions late in the fourth before making it 35-26 with 2:38 to go following a 10-play, 50-yard drive capped off by a two-point conversion. Lightning began to bear down on the 89,422 in attendance, and after Ohio State's onside kick attempt failed, officials called the game off. USC head coach Larry Smith and Ohio State head coach John Cooper had agreed before the play that the game would end if the Buckeyes couldn't get the ball. OSU's players, Johnson included, were not impressed by the decision.

"Absolutely irate. We were mad," Johnson said. "We felt that we should have won the game, we were prepared to win the game. We certainly did not want to give that up, and we wanted to go out there and finish what we started. So it was certainly a huge disappointment for us."

While Johnson and his teammates were willing to play on in the rain, one thing he was not wild about was the cold. He's al-

ways been against playing in the cold, and no experience was worse than when the Buckeyes played Air Force in the Liberty Bowl in 1990.

"It was ice storming," Johnson said. "You couldn't go out and do anything during the day. We barely could make it to practice. The roads were icy, it was cold, it was wet. That was one of the worst games we had to deal with."

"I hated cold weather. Cold weather is the worst. It's one thing if you start, because at least if you start you play. But I was the nickelback, so you have to sit around all the time. You don't like sitting around, possibly for a quarter and a half, and then it's a third-and-long and you're supposed to go in and defend somebody that's been playing the whole time."

Former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin (1976-1979) didn't recall any games played in adverse weather while with the Buckeyes, though he did play in one of the coldest games on record during his one season with the Green Bay Packers in 1983.

While temperatures never got that bad at Lambeau Field during his year in Wisconsin, during a road game at Soldier Field in Chicago on Dec. 18, 1983, the temperature dropped below zero degrees with piercing winds, though access to heating technology on the sidelines mitigated some of the effects for players.

"It was like minus 7 or 8 degrees, and the wind chill was like minus 30," Laughlin said. "That was brutal, but even then we had heaters, we had capes. It was no big deal. I felt sorry for the people in the stands."

That wasn't the case, though, during a high school game Laughlin played during his time at Charles F. Brush High School in Lyndhurst, Ohio, in 1975. While the temperatures were a tick above freezing in the mid-30s for that contest, relentless rain made it feel a lot colder.

"It must have been 34 degrees and the wind, it was like St. Andrews, the golf course, it was coming in sideways," he said. "The wind was blowing and everybody was miserable at halftime. Me and my buddies still talk about that. I tell them, 'You know, I played at Soldier Field at 8 below (zero) around Christmas, but that game we played at Willoughby South in the rain in November our senior year was like the worst of all time.'"

For Conley, the worst conditions in his multi-decade career coaching at Ohio State stand out as much for its location as the sloppy field. The Buckeyes played a road contest with Northwestern in 1991 at Cleveland Municipal Stadium, which was demolished in 1996.

"They wanted to play it in Ohio for recruiting purposes," he said of the Wildcats. "So the team actually invited recruits to the game. But it happened that day that it was rather cold, and wind was coming off Lake Erie. And it was miserable. It was cold, it was rainy, the wind was blowing. The big thing is you have to keep your concentration."

That contest was nicknamed "The Modell Bowl" after then-Cleveland Browns owner Art Modell, who also owned a share

of Cleveland Municipal Stadium. Ohio State maintained its focus and cruised to a 34-3 victory.

Conley said bad weather can be a bigger concern for the better team in a matchup because it slows them down and creates more chances for turnovers, and it's tougher on defenses than on offenses, and this was on full display in Ohio State's recent win over Northwestern.

"Rain has always been more of an advantage for the offense in relation to throwing the football, because the receivers know what routes they're running. The defensive backs do not," he said. "So it's a lot easier to complete passes in a rainy situation, because a defensive back, it's easy for him to lose his footing when he plants his foot and goes for the ball."

It's also something that can be schemed for and turned into an advantage. In 1993, the Buckeyes played at Illinois on another windy day, and Conley had timed the Fighting Illini on punts to figure out how long it took for the ball to reach the punter. He noticed their long snapper had a tendency to snap the ball with its tail end up in the air, causing it to float longer. Combined with the conditions, it created an opportunity.

"The punter was right back near the goal line, the 1- or 2-yard line," Conley said. "I called down to Coach (Cooper) and said, 'We must go try to block this, because he's snapping into the wind, which makes it even tougher.' Now the kicker was kicking with the wind, but that's not good for the snapper, he's snapping into the wind. The ball floated a little bit and we (got) it."

Another good perspective on how weather can affect play under center and in the passing game came from former Ohio State quarterback Rex Kern (1968-1970). The worst weather he saw in a scarlet and gray uniform came on Nov. 14, 1970, in a contest the team played at Purdue. Through driving winds and sideways rain, the Buckeyes ran the ball 60 times for 200 yards while completing just 2 of 9 passes and edging out the Boilermakers 10-7 on a late field goal.

"Ball security (is key), and you're always testing the wind," Kern said. "When it's coming at you or around you or circling, then you've got to talk about the slipperiness of the ball. Those factors really come into play, and you have to be really careful from the quarterback exchange from the center. You get back to set up and throw the ball, you can slip. So it puts a lot of different images in a quarterback's mind of what you have to think about."

With the discussion of weather comes the dialogue about conference championship games, playoff games and bowl games, most of which are currently played in indoor, climate-controlled stadiums or outdoor stadiums in warm, dry areas of the country. Laughlin feels that outdoor stadiums are an integral part of college football and that the energy of a night game outside is unrivaled, and one of the things that makes the Rose Bowl the greatest bowl game in the sport.

"I don't like indoor stadiums, I never have," Laughlin said. "It's not that I didn't like playing in them, but there's nothing

like the Rose Bowl or the Orange Bowl (or) playing at Michigan or Ohio State in November.

"It's just the atmosphere. That's what college football is all about, the atmosphere. The fans, the Ohio State band, the pomp, the tradition and everything else. That's what you love about Ohio State football. That's why you go there."

Conley has always been intrigued by the idea of the Crimson Tide or Bulldogs having to come play a Big Ten team when the temperature drops.

"When you play teams from the South, you'd rather play them, at times, in the weather from the Midwest, especially late in the season," Conley said. "That rarely happens, unfortunately."

With the College Football Playoff expanding to 12 teams in 2024 and the first round consisting of home games for seeds five through eight, it's a possibility that could be realized soon, one that Kern said would be fun upon hearing the idea.

Johnson, on the other hand, believes it's best that everyone from both teams get the chance to showcase their full abilities in a weather-controlled environment. On that note, he isn't of the opinion that Southern football teams such as Alabama or Georgia – where Ohio State will have to travel on Dec. 31 – should be asked to travel north to play in places like Ohio during the colder months of November or December.

He only views that type of weather as an advantage for teams that are truly accustomed to it throughout football season, such as programs like Minnesota or Wisconsin that are further north than the Buckeyes.

"I think (an indoor stadium) makes the game a lot more complete," Johnson said. "A lot of the time that's happening is at bowl games. You want to be somewhere where you can at least enjoy yourself and not have terrible weather."



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Several Buckeyes Could Depart For NFL Draft

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As is usually the case during bowl season, several Buckeyes are faced with the difficult decision of returning to Ohio State or entering their names into the NFL draft pool.

While safety Ronnie Hickman and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba have already made their intentions of entering the draft clear and quarterback C.J. Stroud is also expected to depart, there are still a few Buckeyes who remain on the bubble in regard to whether they will be playing professional football next season or returning to Ohio State.

However, the Buckeyes' national title hopes remain alive as Ohio State will square off against No. 1 Georgia in the Peach Bowl on Dec. 31 with a spot in the national championship on the line, potentially postponing the decision for several Buckeyes.

Although Ohio State looks to make noise in the College Football Playoff, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking an in-depth look at which Buckeyes have difficult decisions to make come January.

Offensive Line

Junior offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. is considered the most surefire prospect from Ohio State's front five, carrying a first-round grade from several draft analysts.

However, Johnson has yet to divulge his decision regarding the NFL draft, noting that he will not make his intentions known until after the season and after long discussions with his family. While Johnson is considered the most NFL-ready out of Ohio State's offensive linemen, there are still several other members of the Buckeye front who could see their NFL dreams realized this offseason.

The most notable NFL draft prospect outside of Johnson is senior right tackle Dawand Jones, who has anchored Ohio State's

protection on the edge alongside Johnson. Standing 6-8 and weighing in at 359 pounds, Jones' size stands out to any NFL team looking to shore up its depth at tackle.

At the conclusion of the 2021 season, Jones said he received a third-day draft grade, which led to his return to Columbus with the goal of raising his value to a first- or second-round pick.

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

Jones proved he made the right decision during the 2022 campaign. He did not allow a sack of Stroud during the regular season. In fact, he allowed only a pair of quarterback hurries, and his Pro Football Focus pass-blocking grade of 83.2 was the second-best mark on the team, trailing only junior center Luke Wypler (87.0).

"On his junior-year tape, (Jones) struggled with his balance and posture against wide rushers," The Athletic draft analyst Dane Brugler said. "As a senior, though, Jones has made substantial strides with his control and strike timing mid-slide to counter speed and protect the pocket. Jones, still just 21 years old, is one of the most unique players in this draft and continues to rise."

Speaking of Wypler, he is another Buckeye who could potentially set his sights on his NFL dreams this offseason. Wypler has served as Ohio State's starting center for the last two seasons and has seen his draft stock rise with each passing week.

According to PFF, Wypler graded out as the third-best center during the 2022 season – trailing just Minnesota's John Michael Schmitz and USC's Brett Neilon – with an 83.3 mark. Wypler's pass-blocking grade of 87.0 sits at fourth in the nation among centers, while his 80.9 run-blocking mark leaves him tied for sixth.



FILE PHOTO

DECISIONS, DECISIONS — Several Buckeyes will have to make the difficult decision of whether to return to Ohio State or enter the 2023 NFL draft, including offensive tackle Dawand Jones (79) and running back Miyan Williams (3).

"Luke Wypler is a polished technician," The Draft Network's Joe Marino said. "He operates under control, stays square, and competes to stay leveraged while fitting his hands. Demonstrating a clear understanding of angles, Wypler is effective in his pass sets to put himself in position to frame blocks while also winning in space."

Standing alongside Wypler is fifth-year guard Matthew Jones, who has one year of eligibility remaining if he chooses to take it. Jones did participate in Senior Day for Ohio State, indicating a potential departure on the horizon. Jones boasts an offensive grade of 77.9 from PFF and is expected to be a day-three selection.

Tommy Eichenberg

While redshirt junior Tommy Eichenberg emerged as one of the nation's most feared linebackers during the 2022 season, he also opened up the opportunity to leave Ohio State early with his play. Prior to his breakout campaign, Eichenberg put the country on notice with his 17-tackle outing against

Utah in the Rose Bowl, which set the stage for his explosive fourth season in Columbus.

This season, Eichenberg registered a team-best 112 tackles – which ranked third in the Big Ten – adding 12 tackles for loss, 2½ sacks, and an interception returned for a touchdown. While Eichenberg grew into a household name during his fourth season with the Buckeyes, he also saw his NFL draft stock soar.

Not only has Eichenberg seen strides on the field, he's also grown into one of Ohio State's most impactful leaders. After being named a team captain, Eichenberg was fashioned as the Buckeyes' leader of the defense.

"You ask anyone on this team, when Tommy is talking, we're listening," Hickman said. "If you ask anyone who they would take in a dark alley, they would say Tommy Eichenberg."

As of Dec. 8, ESPN draft analyst Mel Kiper Jr. listed Eichenberg as the ninth-best inside linebacker prospect in the 2023 NFL draft.

"He has an aggressive downhill trigger and quick processing skills that frequently lead to him sniffing out run plays and erasing them," Marino said. "He is a dynamic blitzing that times it up well and is explosive while remaining balanced."

"He has the range necessary to work laterally and make tackles from sideline to sideline, and the distance he can cover is maximized by taking consistently calculated angles."

Lathan Ransom

Although junior Lathan Ransom did not begin the season as one of Ohio State's three starting safeties, he certainly emerged as one of the unit's most impactful players.

After suffering a serious leg injury during Ohio State's Rose Bowl win over Utah, Ransom showed no indication that he was slowed by the ailment during the 2022 season. He registered 65 tackles – the most of any non-linebacker in the Ohio State defense – to go along with 3½ tackles for loss, 1½ sacks, an interception, three pass breakups and a forced fumble. Ransom also made his money on special teams, where he blocked a pair of punts in back-to-back weeks against Indiana and Maryland.

Ransom's efforts earned him All-Big Ten honorable mention, and he also was named a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, which is given to the best defensive back in college football.

"Third-year junior Lathan Ransom has playmaking speed and has been playing really well in coverage, run support and on special teams," Brugler said prior to Ohio State's season finale against Michigan.

Entering November, Sports Illustrated draft columnist Eli Nachmany pegged Ransom as the No. 31 overall pick to the Buffalo Bills.

"The top safety off the board in most mock drafts has been Texas A&M's Antonio Johnson, but Ransom has played off-the-charts well this season. When scouts sit down with this year's tape, Ransom will skyrocket up draft boards if he keeps playing the way he has been," Nachmany said. "This Buckeye could stand to add some weight, but he hits hard and routinely finds himself exactly where he needs to be on the field."

Cade Stover

Entering his fourth season at Ohio State, Cade Stover was without positional stability, bouncing between defensive end, linebacker and tight end during his first three years in Columbus.

Stover ultimately stuck at tight end, and unlike the prevailing notion surrounding the tight end position at Ohio State, he was greatly involved in the Buckeye offense. His 399 receiving yards are the most among Ohio State tight ends since Jeff Heurman racked up 466 in 2013, while his 35 receptions are the most since Rickey Dudley's 37 in 1995.

"When watching Stover play, there is something natural about the way he competes and executes," Marino said. "He is a savvy player with good athletic ability, and it's clear he has a diverse athletic background. As a receiver, Stover has a sound feel for finding space in zone coverage and making good adjustments on the fly. He has the juice needed to separate, and he's

developed into more of a vertical threat in 2022."

Although Stover bucked the trend of underutilized tight ends in the receiving game, several concerns have risen regarding his prowess as a blocker. His ability as a blocker came under the microscope primarily due to Ohio State's struggles to pick up first downs in short-yardage situations, with Stover missing several key blocks in those scenarios during the second half of the Buckeyes' season. Out of Ohio State's primary contributors, Stover's 71.0 run-block grade lagged behind all five starting offensive linemen and fullback/tight end Mitch Rossi.

"As an in-line blocker, Stover has room to develop his hand placement/timing and get stronger to hold up with more consistency," Marino said. "It doesn't appear Stover has ideal length, and he's frequently outreached when trying to block."

Miyan Williams

Although Miyan Williams arrived in Columbus as a little-known three-star recruit

out of Winton Woods High School in Cincinnati, he has blossomed into an NFL-caliber running back during his three seasons as a Buckeye.

Despite sharing ball-carrying duties with TreVeyon Henderson for much of his career with the Scarlet and Gray, Williams has showcased his bruising running style in his limited opportunities. In his 24 games with the Buckeyes, Williams has churned out 1,389 yards and 16 touchdowns while boasting an eye-popping 6.7 yards per attempt.

This season, Williams saw an increased role but also dealt with several nagging injuries down the stretch. Still, he produced his most impactful season by far, rushing for 817 yards and 13 touchdowns while landing on the All-Big Ten third team.

Thanks to his breakout season, there have been mutterings around Columbus that Williams could look toward the NFL after the College Football Playoff. While the likely scenario is that he will return to Ohio State, the door has been cracked open.

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Nick Bosa Makes Case For Top Defensive Player

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Possibly the only person who can stop San Francisco 49ers defensive end Nick Bosa ... is Nick Bosa.

Injuries have been a part of his history back to having his Ohio State career cut short due to a core muscle tear as well as missing all but the first two games of the 2020 NFL season because of a knee injury. Now, as Bosa trends toward a possible NFL Defensive Player of the Year award, he has another issue to deal with.

He was listed as questionable for the Dec. 11 game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers because of irritation in his hamstring, according to 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan. Bosa, the league leader in sacks with 14½, did play against the Buccaneers, finishing with three solo tackles and a quarterback hit in the 49ers' 35-7 win over Tampa Bay. He had already missed the Oct. 16 game at Atlanta due to a groin injury.

Shanahan said two days prior to the Tampa Bay game that the schedule would factor into deciding if Bosa would suit up against the Buccaneers. The 49ers (9-4) played four days later at Seattle (7-6) in a key NFC West matchup.

"You definitely have to take that into account," Shanahan said. "It's not just will he be effective on a short week on Thursday. It's can he play in this game and the next one if the doctors and himself say it's safe? That's what we're waiting for. It's not there yet."

Injuries, unfortunately, also plagued Bosa's brother, Joey, the four-time Pro Bowl outside linebacker for the Los Angeles Chargers who also played for the Buckeyes

(2013-15).

They were scheduled to face each other for the first time when the 49ers hosted the Chargers on Nov. 13, but Joey was on the injured reserve list with a groin tear and still has not returned to the field as of Dec. 11.

For Nick, the timing of his latest injury comes when he is playing at the peak of his pro career. He was named the NFC Defensive Player of the Month for November. San Francisco played only three games but Bosa still had 10 tackles – five for loss – three sacks and 10 quarterback hits as the 49ers went 3-0.

The next month started strong as well before Bosa's hamstring acted up. In a 33-17 win against the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 4, he recorded three sacks, including a strip-sack fumble that linebacker Dre Greenlaw returned for a touchdown to earn Bosa the NFC Defensive Player of the Week award.

With starting quarterbacks Trey Lance and Jimmy Garoppolo out with injuries, the 49ers have relied on Bosa and the rest of the stop troops to take the pressure off rookie quarterback Brock Purdy.

"Whenever you lose somebody, offensive or defense, you have to step it up, and I think we have the defense that can do that," Bosa said.

Through the Tampa Bay game, Bosa was highly ranked in several league categories, checking in at second in TFLs (15) and pressures (64). He was a big reason San Francisco was ranked first in the NFL in fewest points allowed per game (15.2) and fewest yards allowed per game (286.8).

"I think he definitely is playing his best football," 49ers defensive coordinator DeMeco Ryans told reporters on Dec. 8. "You talk about someone who can change the

game and affect it in a way, Bosa does it, and to me, he's hands down the best in the league. You talk about Defensive Player of the Year type candidate – if it isn't Bosa I don't know who else it should be."

Albert Breer, senior NFL Reporter for Sports Illustrated (and an Ohio State alum) thinks the race is between Bosa and Penn State product Micah Parsons of the Dallas Cowboys. Ryans, of course, lobbies for Bosa (6-4, 266).

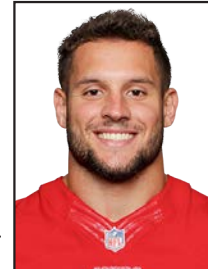
"He's put our defense in the position we are in, and we're not where we are if it's not with Bosa," he said. "How he changes the game, how he affects the quarterback, how he speeds up the quarterback's timing, and he's still able to get as many sacks as he has.

"He's able to get to the quarterback, put him down and force the ball for the scoop and score. There's so many game-changing plays that Bosa has made.

"You can't speak enough about Bosa and how he affects the defense and how he changes the game," Ryans added. "If you want to play great defense, you have to have a great edge rusher and that's what we have in Bosa. He's the best doing it in the league, and I'm so excited to have him on our side."

Bosa, 25, is in his fourth season with San Francisco after being selected second overall in the 2019 NFL draft. He won the AP Defensive Rookie of the Year award for the 2019 season and is a two-time Pro Bowl selection (2019, 2021).

"I think everybody here knows that he is just elite and he's the best," San Francisco linebacker Fred Warner said.



Nick Bosa

tory through six career postseason games behind LaMarr Woodley of Pittsburgh (10) and Chicago's Richard Dent (9½).

Bosa is known for his intensity but also a dry sense of humor. There's a video of Warner firing up the defense against the Chargers and a quick pan to Bosa, who amid the chaos casually said, "Can't agree more."

"We're used to it, but it's still so funny to me," Warner said. "In the heat of battle, I'm trying to get the group going, and obviously, I don't hear him say that right there because he's off in the back of the huddle, but just to know that's his reaction is hilarious.

"But that's just him. He's quite the personality, you could say."

Still, you don't want to poke the Smaller Bear, his nickname to Joey's Big Bear, as Shanahan found out. During a meeting the night prior to playing the Dolphins, the coach, in jest, suggested that the linebackers had outplayed the front four and were the reasons the 49ers had blanked the New Orleans Saints the previous game.

"I thought they would smile at it, but he didn't smile at all," Shanahan said.

The next day, Bosa had the big performance that earned him the player of the week honor.

"He threw a little shade at me and the D-line, so we kind of talked in our meeting," he said. "We don't like being called out like that. It's our head coach, so he obviously has the right and he watches the tape more than anybody and he expects the most out of us."

After Bosa sacked Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa to force the fumble Greenlaw returned for the score, Bosa sprinted to the sideline.

"He came right up to me," Shanahan said. "I thought we were going to celebrate together and he goes, 'That's what happens when you talk s— about me in a team meeting.' And I go, 'I'll make a note. I'll make sure to do it a lot more.'"

Another thing Bosa is passionate about is playing on a grass field. It was on the artificial surface at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., against the New York Jets that he sustained the season-ending knee injury in 2020. The 49ers' home at Levi Stadium features grass, but in total, 14 of the 30 stadiums in the NFL – both MetLife Stadium and SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles share a pair of teams – have turf. He said the playing surface will be a factor when he eventually reaches free agency.

"A hundred percent, for sure," he told The Athletic. "It's usually the older guys who know more about it. Or guys who have dealt with injuries from it. Because when you're young and in high school and college, you think it's fast and fun and it looks good. And then you realize after a few years, it's like, 'Phew, I'll do anything to get on some grass.'"

"The impact of each step, each cut – all the force goes straight into your joints and your body. And you could feel it. It's substantial. And then there's turfs that grab, which happened to me (at MetLife Stadium). And that's a whole other story."

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New Shift In Rivalry Could Impact Recruiting

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Two Ohio prospects issued commitments after attending Ohio State's final home game of this most recent regular season on Nov. 26, likely the loudest atmosphere of the year in the 'Shoe against the No. 3 team in college football and an archrival in Michigan.

Those commitments didn't go to the Buckeyes, mind you – they went to said rival team, as Cincinnati Winton Woods three-star cornerback Cameron Calhoun (6-0, 170) in 2023 pledged his services to the Wolverines in the immediate aftermath of The Game, then Avon, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290) in the 2024 class did the same the following day.

"They're guys that are somewhat highly recruited," said MichiganInsider recruiting analyst Brice Marich. "I know the big bugaboo with all these guys, though, is that they don't have Ohio State offers. People maybe look at them as not as highly regarded, but they're still really good players that have a lot of Power Five, D-I offers. These are guys that can make an impact at the next level. On top of that, they understand this rivalry."

While neither Calhoun nor Hamilton held a scholarship opportunity from Ohio State, it could be a harbinger of things to come in the recruiting sphere between the Buckeyes and Wolverines. With Michigan gaining an edge in the rivalry on the field, it might start to pay dividends in talent acquisition, particularly starting with the 2024 class.

"There's not (much competition) for 2023 anymore really that I can think of," 247Sports recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic said. "There'll be a number of guys in 2024."

Eight straight wins over an archrival will work wonders to establish a recruiting edge over it. Only once since Urban Meyer took over Ohio State's program in 2012 has Michigan finished with a better class than the Buckeyes in the 247Sports composite team rankings, that being the transitional year between the regimes of Meyer and current head coach Ryan Day in 2019. Michigan checked in as the No. 8 class in the country in that cycle, and Ohio State came in at No. 14.

With the Wolverines taking back-to-back victories in The Game for the first time since 1999 and 2000, there's a chance tides could turn in recruiting as well. If not in the national landscape, at the very least in head-to-head battles between OSU and U-M for the best of the Midwest's talent. It hasn't happened yet, according to Kurelic

and Marich.

"They really haven't gone head-to-head for recruits as much as they used to, many years ago," Kurelic said. "I think Michigan will continue to target Ohio kids – they've been doing that for even the last few years. They haven't been able to beat Ohio State for any of the ones Ohio State has really wanted. I don't sense that there's going to be a big change in that, like with the 2024 class, but it's still early for that class. So, we don't know yet."

What the commitments of Calhoun and Hamilton – as well as another 2023 Ohio prospect in Youngstown Chaney three-star athlete Jason Hewlett (6-4, 220) – show Marich more than anything is that players from the Buckeye State aren't waiting around for the Buckeyes themselves to come calling if Michigan is in hot pursuit.

Often Ohio State will see who it can get on the national scene before going all-in on lower-rated prospects in its back yard, and in a state that's always had a deep pool of prep gridiron talent, it can work to the advantage of the Wolverines or other Midwestern schools. Marich pointed to the fact that defensive back Charles Woodson and running back Desmond Howard, two of Michigan's three Heisman Trophy winners, came from Ohio.

"The biggest thing when it comes to Ohio recruiting, in my opinion, is you would always see kids from Ohio, maybe that don't have an offer from Ohio State, kind of be more willing to wait for one," Marich said. "Michigan, they weren't as big of a factor in the state. But now that you're seeing them beat Ohio State in the manner they are, I think they're more willing to pull the trigger and commit to Michigan."

Hamilton is a prime example of an Ohio prospect being more willing to go with Michigan if OSU drags its feet in a player's recruitment. In conversations with Marich, while still uncommitted, Hamilton stated that he started rooting for Michigan during the contest while in Columbus.

"Michigan has made him a priority, and they've really taken a liking to him and his family," Marich said. "Whereas Ohio State it felt more like, 'I wasn't sure where I am on their board.' Obviously he got invited to come up there and visit, so they have to like him a little. But he never got an offer from them."

There's another advantage for Michigan in jumping in early and securing more mid-tier prospects from the state, Marich noted. Those players know what it means to play in The Game. The goal of the Maize and Blue for the past handful of years has

been to take back control of the feud, and adding players who place an extra importance on the contest has likely helped in the squad's wins in the last two seasons.

"They understand this rivalry, which, for years, people have said Michigan hasn't taken it as serious," Marich said. "I think now you're starting to see Michigan kind of turn the tide with that."

The next step up from getting in earlier on certain Ohio recruits and winning that way for Michigan is to start winning head-to-head battles for players whom both schools have expressed true interest in. That hasn't started happening yet, Marich said, but chances are it's coming in the class of 2024.

Cleveland Glenville has been an Ohio State pipeline for years, producing such talents as wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr., Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Troy Smith and national championship-winning quarterback Cardale Jones, among many others. The Buckeyes and Wolverines are already locked in a battle for a top junior defensive back prospect out of the school.

"I think a good litmus test for them, for Michigan, to see if they can really start plucking some of these guys away from Ohio State is a guy like five-star cornerback Bryce West that goes to Glenville High School," Marich said. "Over the years Michigan has gotten a few guys (from Glenville), Willie Henry, Frank Clark, to name a few."

"But if Michigan were to land, let's say, Bryce, he does have an offer from Ohio State. And he's at a position of need at cornerback – obviously Ohio State kind of needs some guys in the back end of their defense. He's highly recruited and in their own back yard. I think then you're like, 'OK, you can chalk that one up as a win over Ohio State (in recruiting).'"

Kurelic said the two programs are positioning themselves to fight for some other up-and-coming Ohio prospects. Cincinnati Taft four-star defensive end Elias Rudolph (6-4, 220) in 2024 is one, and either school would love to have Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 205) of Findlay, brother of a current Ohio State offensive tackle commit Luke Montgomery (6-5, 280), as the quarterback of their 2025 class.

"When he names his top five, I think both will be in the top five or six probably, quite possibly, in the next month or so," Kurelic said. "I really expect both Ohio State and Michigan to be on that list."

Another key Ohio battle mounting in 2024 between OSU and U-M is one for the services of Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall. Rated the No. 2

recruit in the state and No. 105 in the nation, he's a 5-11, 195-pound ball carrier with offers from both schools already. Running back is another major position of need for Ohio State in 2024 with odds growing that the team may not sign any in this current cycle.

"That's a guy that Michigan really, really likes," Marich said. "A powerful running back, he kind of fits the Michigan identity, that offense, what they want to do. Ohio State really likes him as well. He's been very open about the process and schools he likes, and Michigan and Ohio State are two of the schools he's expressed strong interest in."

Three-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck, a 6-7, 320-pound behemoth from Lakewood St. Edward in 2024, could be another Buckeye State prospect to watch. While he holds an offer from just Michigan and not Ohio State currently, he camped with the Buckeyes over the summer and has been in consistent contact with OSU's coaching staff, according to Marich. Roebuck has said the Wolverines currently lead in his recruitment.

Of course, there's competition between OSU and U-M for recruits on the national scene as well. Buford, Ga., four-star defensive end/tight end King Joseph Edwards (6-5, 242), the No. 38 prospect in the country in 2024, is one of several examples, though it won't just be the Buckeyes and Wolverines duking it out for his services. Edwards holds offers from Alabama, Georgia and Florida among many others.

There's also Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive tackle Justin Scott, another big-time national recruit with a long offer list that includes Ohio State and Michigan. Scott is a 6-5, 310-pound interior monster with fantastic burst and bend for his size.

"That's a private school there in the Chicagoland area," Marich said. "Those types of players, especially five-star defensive linemen, don't grow on trees compared to Louisiana and Georgia, stuff like that. Those (states) SEC schools recruit from where you see those trench monsters – I know Ohio State really wants him."

There's still much to play out on the recruiting scene between Ohio State and Michigan, mainly in the 2024 class as the finishing touches are put on 2023. But the future of the rivalry could very well swing based on how well the Wolverines leverage the momentum they've accumulated from the past two seasons on the field to both pull extra recruits from Ohio and win the occasional recruitment against Ohio State.

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DL, RBs In Spotlight For Early Signing Period

The college football recruiting early signing period is set to begin on Dec. 21 after Buckeye Sports Bulletin has gone to press. The following information is the most accurate BSB had at press time. For up-to-the-minute information and full coverage of the early signing period, go to BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

Much like last year, Ohio State has plenty of questions to answer as the early signing period is set to begin on Dec. 21. As Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, the Buckeyes had 20 committed prospects in the 2023 recruiting class, with one five-star prospect in Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190) and six other recruits ranked among the top 100 prospects in the class.

Ohio State's current roster checked in at 85 scholarship members following the conclusion of the regular season, but there are expected to be several departures due to players exhausting their eligibility, some opting to leave early for the NFL and others entering the transfer portal. BSB's estimate is that anywhere from around 21-23 roster spots will be available for the upcoming class, though that number is obviously subject to change, and it doesn't account for any players Ohio State might look to bring in from the transfer portal.

The class – which is currently ranked No. 4 in the country in the 247Sports composite ranking behind No. 3 Notre Dame, No. 2 Georgia and No. 1 Alabama, though those teams all have at least three more commitments than Ohio State – had the makings of a special one, especially over the summer when the Buckeyes earned commitments from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 180), Rolesville, N.C., four-star wide receiver Noah Rogers (6-2, 195) and Inniss in back-to-back-to-back days from June 20-22.

But in the nearly six months since those three committed, Ohio State has earned just nine commitments and also suffered several decommitments from the likes of

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225), Memphis (Tenn.) Lausanne Collegiate School four-star quarterback Brock Glenn (6-2, 195), Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star safety Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) and Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood (6-5, 225), of which Fletcher and Glenn were Ohio State's only committed targets at their respective positions at the time.

Glenn has since been replaced in the class – more on that later – but elsewhere on offense, the Buckeyes continue to search for a running back to help replace Fletcher. The most likely target at this point is Douglasville (Ga.) South Paulding three-star Jamarion Wilcox (5-9, 195), who was offered by the Buckeyes on Nov. 17 and has announced a top four of Auburn, Clemson, Kentucky and Ohio State, but even he appears to be leaning toward the Wildcats.

The Buckeyes will also want to keep an eye on Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star tight end Jelani Thurman (6-5, 230), who has been committed to Ohio State since July but has been consistently recruited by other schools including Auburn, Florida State and Michigan State. Complicating things is the departure of Thurman's position coach in offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson, though Thurman said he is committed to Ohio State and is excited to see Keenan Bailey take over the tight ends for the Buckeyes.

"Coach Wilson gave me a little warning he was leaving," Thurman told 247Sports. "The day he took the (Tulsa) job, Coach (Ryan) Day came to my house. I called Coach Wilson and congratulated him. It's a great opportunity.

"Bailey called me before he came to my game (on Dec. 9). I wasn't surprised he got the job. I'll definitely get my looks with him going from the wide receivers to the tight ends. I'm 100 percent Ohio State, locked in."

But if Ohio State truly wants to put the finishing touches on this class, it will come on the defensive line. The Buckeyes currently have just three commitments on the defensive line in Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star Jason Moore (6-6, 255), Dublin (Ohio) Coffman four-star Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260) and Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star Kayden McDonald (6-3, 310), and it's been well-reported that Ohio State

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	
Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	175	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West	
Cedrick Hawkins	SAF	6-0	175	★★★★	Cocoa, Fla.	
Brandon Inniss	WR	6-0	190	★★★★★	Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage	
Lincoln Kienholz	QB	6-3	185	★★★★	Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs	
Kayin Lee	CB	5-11	185	★★★★	Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove	
Jermaine Mathews	CB	6-0	175	★★★★	Cincinnati Winton Woods	
Kayden McDonald	DT	6-3	310	★★★★	Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett	
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 Siereveld	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	

continues to pursue the duo of five-star defensive ends in Damon Wilson (6-4, 230) of Venice, Fla., and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco's Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265).

Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep's Keon Keeley (6-6, 242) had long been on that list with Wilson and Uiagalelei, but he ended any speculation when he committed to Alabama on Dec. 12. There's been some not-so-positive developments for the Buckeyes in regard to Wilson, who has made up his mind about what school he would like to attend between Ohio State and Georgia and will make his announcement on Dec. 21 on ESPN. Shortly following that news, several predictions came in on Rivals.com in favor of Wilson to the Bulldogs.

While it isn't over by any means for Ohio State – the Buckeyes were the last school Wilson visited when he took a trip for the Michigan game on Nov. 26 and are just as likely to be in the lead as they are to miss out on Wilson – momentum is a big thing in recruiting, and it appears to be with the Bulldogs ahead of Wilson's commitment.

"Just being comfortable with the coaching staff, I feel like that's a big part," Wilson told On3 Sports. "Your position coach, you're going to be around them a lot. Their weight rooms, the training staff. That's pretty much what it comes down to. I feel comfortable with (Ohio State or Georgia), and

being able to see myself live there for the next three to four years."

As for Uiagalelei, who also plans to sign on Dec. 21, he will decide between Ohio State, Oregon and USC. Both Ohio State and USC have both been viewed as leaders at various points in his recruitment, and with no major recruiting services entering any predictions with just days to go until the early signing period, nobody seems to have a clear idea of where Uiagalelei might land.

Another target on the defensive line – one who would have been pursued regardless of how things shook out with Keeley, Uiagalelei and Wilson – is Indianapolis Lawrence Central four-star defensive end Joshua Mickens (6-5, 225). Mickens is the No. 131 overall prospect and No. 20 defensive end in the class, and he decommitted from LSU on Nov. 28, just two days after he took an official visit to Ohio State.

Mickens' official visit came just weeks after receiving an offer from the Buckeyes, so it has been a rapid recruitment for one of the country's top defensive ends. Prior to leaving LSU's class, he had been committed to the Tigers since July, but he is now viewed as likely to land in Ohio State's class.

He is being recruited by Ohio State at the "Jack" position, which is defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' hybrid defensive end/linebacker role. Ohio State defensive end

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Kurelic of 247Sports

Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star cornerback Kayin Lee (5-11, 185) took an official visit to Auburn on Dec. 4. Is there concern about him keeping his commitment to Ohio State?

"Yeah, there's some concern. Auburn wants to flip him, and they're working on it. Ohio State is trying to keep him. I don't know what's going to happen there, he hasn't locked in that he's absolutely going to sign with Ohio State. It may be until next Wednesday (Dec. 21) that we find out for sure. We'll see. But yeah, (Auburn is) definitely recruiting him still."

It seems Georgia has taken the momentum in the recruitment of Venice, Fla., five-star defensive end Damon Wilson (6-4, 230). Where do you see Wilson ending up?

"He's definitely been trending toward Georgia. I don't think that's over yet. He's not a silent commitment for Georgia.

"So both schools are still recruiting him. (Ohio State head coach) Ryan Day and (Georgia head coach) Kirby Smart both made their visits at the end of this past week (of Dec. 5). And now it's really just a matter of him deciding, really."

With the early signing period approaching, what do you see as the biggest priorities for Ohio State in terms of finishing out this class?

"They still want to get either Wilson or Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265) or both. They want to get Indianapolis Lawrence Central four-star defensive end Joshua Mickens (6-5, 225).

"They would like to get a running back, but the options are dwindling there.

"And then, of course, they want to make sure all their com-

mitments sign. The one to most be concerned with right now is definitely Kayin Lee."

Avon, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290), a 2024 prospect, recently committed to Michigan and said Ohio State has put him and other in-state recruits on the back burner. Do you feel Ohio State is slow rolling in-state prospects in terms of issuing offers, especially as it comes to offensive linemen?

"They do their evaluations and then they set their board and they like some of those guys, but they have other guys on their board nationally, ahead of those guys. You never know how it's all going to work out. We have to wait a few years. But if you look at Ohio State's track record on evaluations, it's pretty strong."

OSU Football 2024 Commitments

Players 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
Ian Moore	OL	6-5	295	★★★★	New Palestine, Ind.
Dylan Raiola	QB	6-3	220	★★★★★	Chandler, Ariz.
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	185	★★★★★	Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
Garrett Stover	SAF	6-2	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut

Jack Sawyer has flourished in that role this season, racking up 23 tackles (6½ for loss) and 4½ sacks in 12 games.

McDonald and Smith are likely to play interior while Moore could play either inside or off the edge, so Mickens would be able to fill a different role in Ohio State's class, and the potential addition of Uiagalelei and/or Wilson would push this grouping from great to elite for the Buckeyes and defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

All that being said, there are plenty of moving parts as Ohio State looks to finish this class out in a strong way. For the latest as the early signing period approaches, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com for up-to-the minute happenings as well as information on every prospect that signs with Ohio State from Dec. 21-23, as well as potential targets for National Signing Day on Feb. 1.

Kienholz Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State landed a signal caller shortly before the early signing period began, adding Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185) on Dec. 14. Kienholz was committed to Washington before flipping to the Buckeyes.

Kienholz is the No. 204 overall prospect and No. 14 quarterback in the class and had been committed to the Huskies since June before flipping to Ohio State. Things developed rapidly between him and Ohio State after he visited Columbus for an official visit the weekend of the Michigan game and was offered just days later.

Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis then put a full-court press on Kienholz, making several trips to South Dakota to secure the quarterback's commitment.

"I think their past culture and tradition with their quarterbacks, that's huge," Kienholz told 247Sports. "Also their success they've had with their quarterbacks and success they've had with their football team as well."

Kienholz had extensive success at T.F. Riggs and was named MaxPreps South Dakota Player of the Year following this past season. He threw for 3,422 yards and 46 touchdowns to just six interceptions while adding 1,436 yards and 24 touchdowns on the ground.

"He's an athletic prospect who can make plays with his feet," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Allen Trieu. "He uses that athleticism to navigate the pocket and elude the rush. He throws with excellent touch, drops passes into a bucket, gives his receivers opportunities to make plays on the ball and leads them away from coverage on vertical routes or corner routes.

"He was productive in high school and saw some good programs but did not face many teams with D-I prospects in the secondary, so he will have to adjust to the speed and windows shrinking quicker in college."

Though quarterback isn't necessarily a priority this cycle with Chandler, Ariz., five-star Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) on deck in 2024, Ohio State still didn't want to find it

self without a quarterback in the class given the constant movement at the position, especially after a potential battle between Kyle McCord and Devin Brown next fall.

Lee Takes Official Visit To Auburn

Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star cornerback Kayin Lee (5-11, 185), who has been committed to Ohio State since June, took an official visit to Auburn the weekend of Dec. 2 and indicated that the Tigers are a major factor in his recruitment with the early signing period approaching.

Lee is the No. 208 overall prospect and No. 25 cornerback in the class. During his visit, he was able to meet new Auburn head coach Hugh Freeze with the Tigers' full staff not in place yet.

"He's a pretty straightforward guy," Lee told 247Sports. "A guy I feel like I can have by my side throughout all of my years here if I decide to come here. And a guy I feel like I can really rely on and trust."

Lee has shown interest in Auburn throughout the fall, taking several unofficial visits to the school, and said he and Freeze are working on building relationships right now, but the Tigers are already among his top schools along with Ohio State.

"Most definitely still at the top with Ohio State," Lee said about Auburn. "It's someplace I feel like I could still come to."

Asked if Auburn has a chance to earn his commitment, Lee said, "Most definitely."

If Lee were to flip to Auburn, it would be a significant blow for Ohio State's recruiting class. He's one of just three cornerback commitments in the class along with Waxahachie, Texas, four-star Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-0, 175) and Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 175). Mathews was reportedly set to take an official visit to Miami (Fla.), but he has since reaffirmed his commitment to Ohio State, and the visit never appeared to materialize.

Inniss Could Push Signing To February

Back to Ohio State's lone five-star prospect in the class, Inniss may wait to join the Buckeyes' class until National Signing Day, citing concerns about any potential movement with wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

"I wouldn't be mad if Coach Hartline left and did what's right for his family because I know at the end of the day he has to put them in a better situation," Inniss told 247Sports. "So, I'm going to wait until February to sign, just so I can let everything play out and make sure 100 percent where he will be."

Inniss did not rule out the possibility, however, of signing early if he becomes comfortable about Hartline staying at Ohio State.

"I just want to make sure," he said. "Be 100 percent. I don't want to leave any doubt. I mean crazy things happen in this world. It could change overnight. I just want to make

sure because he's the best in the nation." Hartline was recently connected with the open job at Cincinnati and reportedly interviewed for the role but was quick to say that he is staying at Ohio State.

"I am aware of the speculation surrounding my name connected to other vacant coaching positions and appreciate all of the support," Hartline tweeted, "but right now my heart is at Ohio State and I do not have any plans to go anywhere else."

If those plans were to change, Inniss would have several suitors. He's continued to stay in touch with Alabama and Miami (Fla.) and was one of the earliest prospects contacted by new Colorado head coach Deion Sanders.

OSU Adds Five-Star WR Smith In 2024

While the early signing period is approaching for the 2023 recruiting class, Ohio State is already getting a start on 2024, adding a commitment on Dec. 14 from Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185).

Smith is one of the top prospects in his class, checking in at No. 2 overall – behind only Raiola, who is also committed to the Buckeyes – and the No. 1 receiver for the cycle. He caught 31 passes for 667 yards and seven touchdowns this past season for Chaminade-Madonna Prep.

"He's on the bigger side for his age but looks nowhere near close to being filled out and appears to still be growing into his verified 6-3, 185-pound frame," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins. "He burst onto the scene as a sophomore at one of South Florida's top talent-producing programs totaling over 600 receiving yards. He displays good body control and does a good job of tracking the ball once it's in the air. That has led to plenty of highlight-worthy grabs."

Ohio State and Smith have long been connected, as he was offered by Hartline in June of 2021 after camping with the Buckeyes. He's since made several return trips to Ohio State, including an unofficial visit this

past season for the Buckeyes' win over Notre Dame.

He chose Ohio State over several other top schools, including Alabama, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Penn State and Tennessee, among others. He's the fourth commitment in Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class, which ranks No. 6 according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

Corners, Tackles On Transfer Market For OSU

The NCAA transfer portal became open for business on Dec. 5, and Ohio State has already shown reported interest in a pair of cornerbacks and an offensive tackle that are on the market.

A report from 247Sports indicated that Ohio State has already contacted Virginia transfer cornerback Fentrell Cypress II and North Carolina transfer cornerback Tony Grimes. Both have two seasons of eligibility remaining.

Cypress is a former three-star prospect in the 2019 recruiting class out of Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwestern, and he's started each of the past two seasons for Virginia. He racked up 39 tackles and 14 pass breakups this season for the Cavaliers and was named second-team All-ACC. Other programs expected to be involved with Cypress include Ole Miss, Syracuse and Tennessee.

Grimes is a former five-star prospect in the 2020 recruiting class out of Virginia Beach (Va.) Princess Anne who has been a standout for the Tar Heels over the last three seasons. He started four games as a true freshman in 2020, finishing with 14 tackles, a sack, an interception and four pass breakups, and then started all 13 games for North Carolina in 2021, finishing with nine pass breakups. He had another exceptional season in 2022, accounting for 36 tackles, seven pass breakups and a forced fumble.

Ohio State also issued an offer on Dec. 14 to transfer offensive tackle Ajani Cornelius (6-5, 310), who is in the portal following his sophomore season at Rhode Island, an FCS school. Cornelius has started 22

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Continued From Page 27

games at right tackle for the Rams over the past two seasons, and earned first-team honors in the Colonial Athletic Association Conference. A native of Harlem, N.Y., he holds additional offers from Auburn, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, Penn State and Tennessee, among others.

Ohio State's approach to the portal has been more methodical than most programs in recent years, with the Buckeyes taking in just 10 transfers – cornerback Tanner McCalister; kickers Noah Ruggles and Parker Lewis; linebacker/running back Chip Trayanum; offensive lineman Jonah Jackson; running back Trey Sermon; quarterbacks Justin Fields, Gunnar Hoak and Jagger LaRoe; and tight end Corey Rau – since Day took over as head coach.

Fields, Jackson, McCalister and Sermon are the only ones who have filled an immediate starting role for the Buckeyes, but impact additions like Cypress, Grimes or Cornelius could push to start out of the gate for Ohio State.

It isn't known yet whether fifth-year cornerback Cameron Brown, who participated in Senior Day, plans to exercise his final year of eligibility, but the Buckeyes could be looking to fill a starting role with the depth behind Brown and cornerback Denzel Burke a question after shaky play in the secondary this season.

Coaches Hit The Road

With Ohio State having a week off fol-

lowing the loss to Michigan, there was one positive to be found because the Buckeyes could get out on the recruiting trail. Several coaches – all the way from Day to Dennis – hit the road to visit prospects in the 2023 class and beyond.

Beginning on Nov. 29, Day and offensive line coach Justin Frye paid a visit to Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-5, 280), who has been committed to Ohio State since February.

Day, safeties coach Perry Eliano and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton then visited Mathews and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175), who has been committed to the Buckeyes since April, on Dec. 1. Hartline visited Inniss the following day to watch Inniss and American Heritage advance to the state championship game.

Since he was in Florida, Hartline was also able to see a pair of recruits in Smith, who recently committed to Ohio State, and Joshisa Trader (6-2, 170) of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep, both 2024 prospects.

Also on Dec. 2, Day and Johnson visited Mickens, and Day later broke off to visit a trio of commits in Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive lineman Joshua Padilla (6-4, 280) and Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East four-star offensive tackle Austin Siereveld (6-5, 320) in 2023 and New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295) in 2024, while Johnson went south to visit Keeley and Wilson.

Frye made a trip to visit Greenwich

(Conn.) Brunswick School three-star offensive tackle Miles Walker (6-6, 285), who has been committed to Ohio State since July, and Knowles went to Tennessee to check in on Nashville (Tenn.) Lipscomb Academy four-star linebacker Edwin Spillman (6-1, 216), an uncommitted 2024 prospect, while Eliano and Walton took in a playoff game for Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek, home to five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 195), who is committed to Alabama but continues to be pursued by several schools.

On Dec. 3, Day and Johnson visited Smith Jr., while Dennis left the state to watch Raiola and Chandler High School in their playoff game. The Buckeyes continued checking in on some current commitments on Dec. 5, with Day visiting with Thurman and Dennis checking in again on the Montgomery brothers – Luke and 2025 quarterback Ryan (6-3, 200). Day, Johnson, Knowles and Walton also made an in-home visit to McDonald.

Wilson also wrapped up some recruiting for Ohio State, checking on Dayton Stebbins three-star offensive lineman Jake Wheelock (6-4, 275), an uncommitted 2024 prospect, and Johnson was in Georgia to visit Buford, Ga., four-star defensive/tight end King Joseph Edwards (6-5, 242), another uncommitted 2024 prospect.

Day and Hartline visited Walker and made an in-home visit for Inniss on Dec. 7, and the visits continued into the week, with Dennis making the trip to South Dakota for Kienholz on Dec. 8, and Day and Hartline also conducting an in-home visit with a commit, checking in on Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch four-star wide receiver Bryson Rodgers (6-1, 175) the same day. Day, Knowles and Walton also made the trip that day to Texas for Simpson-Hunt.

Bailey also started his new job off on the recruiting trail on Dec. 8, visiting Savannah (Ga.) Calvary Day School 2024 four-star tight end Michael Smith (6-4, 225). The visit to Smith is in advance of his upcoming commitment, as he plans to announce between Arkansas, Ohio State and South Carolina on Jan. 24.

Some final visits took place on Dec. 9 before Ohio State returned to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to begin preparing for Georgia, with Day and Eliano visiting Hillside (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star safety Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 210), who has been committed to Ohio State since August. Day and Dennis also sneaked out on Dec. 14 to make another visit with Kienholz.

Hamilton Not Pleased With OSU's Reception

Avon, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290), a 2024 prospect, was in attendance for Ohio State's loss to Michigan on Nov. 26 and evidently saw enough. He committed to the Wolverines the following day.

While Hamilton had not yet received an offer from Ohio State, he was still being actively recruited by the Buckeyes, but Ohio State's loss was just one part of his decision to commit to Michigan. According to comments in The Lorain Morning Journal, Hamilton took issue with how Ohio State received him and other in-state recruits for The Game.

"After going to Ohio State and seeing how they treated us – and it wasn't on the good side of treating people – my dad

looked at me and told me to pull the trigger now," Hamilton said. "I think (Michigan) is the right fit for me."

Hamilton said this was a shared experience with several other in-state recruits that Ohio State did not put enough focus on them, though no others have commented in the weeks since The Game about a poor reception.

"(Ohio State) did this to all of the in-state (recruits)," he said. "They put us on the back burner and will wait until the last second, because they think they have us committed there if they offer, which I think is totally stupid. That is not how that works at all. I've talked to linemen all around Cleveland and people that I know and they all feel the same way. I think Ohio State is taking too long and I don't think they are doing it right (at this time)."

While Hamilton did not name any other recruits who had a negative experience, Ohio State has shown interest in several in-state offensive linemen such as three-star offensive tackles Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320) and Deontae (6-7, 270) and Devontae (6-6, 283) Armstrong, all from Lakewood St. Edward, a Cleveland-area high school, who all have yet to receive an offer. In fact, the Buckeyes have yet to offer a single in-state offensive lineman in the 2024 class, with all nine offers – four tackles and five interior prospects – going to prospects in states such as California, Georgia, South Carolina, Massachusetts, Texas, and even Hawaii.

Hamilton – the No. 210 overall prospect and No. 8 in-state prospect in 2024 – may have always been big on Michigan, where he said he always felt at home even before being offered by the Wolverines, but the poor visit cemented things.

"Going to Ohio State, I was kind of on edge on whether they were going to treat me good or are they going to treat me bad," he said. "As soon as I walked in the door, I could tell that there was not good energy."

Woodyard Has OSU In Top Seven

Ohio State is in the running for Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188), who had the Buckeyes among his top seven schools along with Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oregon and USC.

Woodyard is the No. 29 overall prospect and No. 2 safety in 2024. He was offered by the Buckeyes in the summer of 2021 and has made several trips to Columbus, including Ohio State's season opener against Notre Dame.

"I have a great relationship with the coaching staff, especially Coach Eliano and Coach Day," he told 247Sports. "I talk to both of them a couple of times a week and they have made me a priority and always let me know how much they want me to be a part of their program. They have a great football program and I like the school overall."

In addition to releasing his top schools, Woodyard also revealed he will announce his commitment on Jan. 7 at the All-American Bowl.

"I like the idea of going into the offseason with my decision out of the way," he said. "Now I don't have to stress over it and can help start recruiting and build this class. I know it's early, but I took a lot of unofficial



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visits and really started this process early so I know I have all the information I need to make my decision.”

OSU Issues Offers Following U-M Game

Ohio State issued a handful of offers to prospects who attended the Buckeyes’ loss to Michigan on Nov. 26. This list includes Olney (Md.) Good Counsel three-star wide receiver Elijah Moore (6-4, 190) and Chattanooga (Tenn.) Brainerd four-star athlete Boo Carter (5-10, 184), both 2024 prospects, and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage wide receiver Malachi Toney (5-9, 165), a 2026 prospect.

Moore is the No. 412 overall prospect and No. 55 receiver in his class, and he holds additional offers from Florida State, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Penn State and USC, among others.

“(Getting the offer was) crazy,” Moore told Eleven Warriors. “I was still processing it. I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t be any more grateful. Me, my mom, dad, and sister went into Coach Day’s office and he congratulated me with the offer.”

Carter is slightly higher ranked, checking in at No. 268 in the class and the No. 32 athlete, though he is being recruited by Ohio State as a running back. He also has

offers from Arkansas, Florida State, Kentucky, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Oregon and Tennessee, among others.

“I’m very interested in (Ohio State),” he told 247Sports. “I talk to the coaches every week, and when I come up here for a game the coaches show me love. They would be in my top picks for sure.”

And despite Toney being the furthest out among the group of offers, he has a star-studded offer list, with Auburn, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Penn State and Texas A&M having issued offers in addition to the Buckeyes. He is one of just three 2026 prospects to have been offered by Ohio State, joining Cincinnati West Clermont wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-3, 170) and Loganville (Ga.) Grayson defensive end Tyler Atkinson (6-1, 190).

Four Offered From St. Frances In Baltimore

Ohio State issued offers to four prospects from St. Frances Academy in Baltimore on Dec. 12, offering cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 180), four-star cornerback Ify Obidegwu (6-1, 185) and three-star safety Edrees Farooq (6-0, 185) in 2024 and cornerback Kevyn Humes (5-10, 150) in 2025.

Woodby and Humes have not been as-

signed a composite ranking, but Woodby holds offers from Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Tennessee and USC, among others, while Humes has been offered by Georgia Tech, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State and Penn State.

Obidegwu is the No. 158 overall prospect and No. 15 cornerback in his class and holds offers from Maryland, Michigan, Michigan State, Oregon, Penn State and Tennessee, and he’s already taken an official visit to the Volunteers, indicating an early leader in his recruitment. Farooq is the No. 596 overall prospect and No. 46 safety in his class and has offers from Cincinnati, Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State and Tennessee, among others,

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Several current Ohio State commitments earned postseason honors. Mathews was named the OHSAA Division II Defensive Player of the Year and Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Arvell Reese (6-4, 212) earned the same honor in Division IV.

- Loganville (Ga.) Grayson four-star tight end Kylan Fox (6-4, 208), the No. 193 overall prospect in 2024, will commit to a school on Dec. 17, though he has not re-

leased a short list of top schools. He camped at Ohio State this past summer and other schools involved include Alabama, Georgia, Louisville and NC State.

- Smyrna, Tenn., four-star linebacker Arion Carter (6-1, 215) announced his commitment to Tennessee on Dec. 14, choosing the Volunteers ahead of Alabama and Ohio State. The Buckeyes offered Carter, who was originally committed to Memphis, in September and hosted him for an official visit in November.

- Fort Myer (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Winston Watkins Jr. (5-10, 172), a 2025 prospect, committed to Colorado on Dec. 4 just one day after the Buffaloes introduced Sanders. Watkins had originally been committed to Texas A&M and has also been involved with Ohio State, so his recruitment – in which he can’t put pen to paper for two full years – will likely stretch on.

- Buford, Ga., five-star linebacker Jadon Perlotte (6-3, 200), a 2025 prospect who held an offer from Ohio State, committed to Georgia on Dec. 8.

For complete and up-to-the-minute coverage of the early signing period, be sure to check BuckeyeSports.com.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1982

Multipurpose back Terry (Strawberry) White of Cambridge headed the list of the college football prospects from the eastern Ohio area.

The elusive 5-10, 170-pound performer entered his senior season with top gridiron grades from college scouts and lived up to plaudits by being named all-Ohio Class AAA in wire service selections.

White rushed for over 1,200 yards for the Bobcats but raised eyebrows with his improved defensive play from a secondary position where he intercepted eight passes the previous fall. Some talent hunters felt his college future might be on the defensive side of the line of scrimmage.

He was reportedly being courted by Ohio State, Michigan, West Virginia, among others.

35 Years Ago — 1987

The Ohio State assistant football coaches were still recruiting the nation’s top players, but they said they had to be better salesmen more than ever. They were trying to sell a program that had received a lot of negative publicity and was minus a head coach. That was a problem.

“It’s like starting all over again,” said running backs coach Lenny Willis. “The kids are more tentative now. They’re looking for answers we can’t give them.”

Bill Myles had gone through a change of coaches before. Myles, OSU’s associate athletic director, was the tackles and tight ends coach when Woody Hayes was fired and succeeded by Earle Bruce as football coach in 1979. Myles had taken the initiative to organize and push forward the recruiting effort.

“In some ways recruiting may suffer and some ways it won’t, but we have to look at it from the positive side,” Myles said. “There are people who are going to come to Ohio State because it is Ohio State University. There might also be some who come because of the past football coach and there will be some that will come because of the next football coach.”

30 Years Ago — 1992

Ohio State began its season within a season by gobbling up more verbal commitments from top Ohio high school players.

Even before the regular season had ended, the Buckeyes received commitments from lineman Walt Delong of Ironton and kicker Mike Malfatt of Dublin.

Then, during early December, the team landed three more prospects – defensive back Anthony Gwinn of Columbus Brookhaven, defensive lineman Matt Finkes of Piqua and quarterback Tom Hoying of St. Henry.

25 Years Ago — 1997

Tom Gholston was a sophomore backup defensive end, which was as good a time as any to learn.

The Cincinnati St. Xavier High School football team was working on goal-line plays, offensively and defensively, during summer practice when the starter suffered an injury and Gholston was inserted into the lineup.

The Bombers offense immediately ran right over him for a touchdown. Then it happened again and again and again.

Gholston transferred from St. Xavier to Purcell Marian after his sophomore season, but he took his lesson with him, to the benefit of the Cavaliers. He developed into a 6-4, 275-pound defensive end who was a prima-

ry ingredient of a Purcell Marian team that went 6-4 in his junior season and 9-4 while reaching the Division III state semifinals the following year.

He also became one of the most hotly recruited defensive line prospects in the country. Gholston, who ran the 40-yard dash in a flat 5.0 seconds during Purcell Marian’s summer conditioning, possessed a combination of size, speed and quickness that his coach, Herb Woeste, had not seen in any player on his or any other team in more than 20 years of coaching.

Gholston had made visits to Boston College, Penn State and Ohio State and was pondering trips to Michigan State and either Notre Dame or Purdue.

20 Years Ago — 2002

For a number of years, OSU coaches, players and recruits had paid lip service to the fact that you can play for a national championship at Ohio State. Up until 2002, it had all been just that – lip service.

But then, with OSU set to tackle Miami (Fla.) in the Bowl Championship Series national title game at the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, the Buckeyes could boldly say, “We play for national championships at Ohio State.”

That big difference could help the Buckeyes immensely on the recruiting trail.

“No question, it should help them,” said Bill Kurelic of The Ohio Football Recruiting News. “(Top Ohio recruit) Prescott Burgess said it himself: ‘Coach (Jim) Tressel took them to the national championship game in his second year.’

“That’s impressive. That is something they should be able to sell to recruits. That’s for sure.”

15 Years Ago — 2007

A long-held expectation among the Ohio State faithful became a reality on the last day of November when the Buckeyes secured their latest verbal commitment.

For months, Eden Prairie, Minn., defensive end Willie Mobley (6-2, 263) was tagged as a heavy OSU lean. Those expectations became reality on Nov. 30 when the four-star prospect contacted the Buckeye coaching staff and became the 15th verbal member of the class of 2008.

After falling behind academically early in his prep career, Mobley began developing a plan to ensure his collegiate eligibility. It was during that year that Jim Tressel stepped in and helped Mobley lay out the path before him in the classroom and make sure there were no question marks. That gesture gave the Buckeyes an early lead they would never relinquish.

“There was no other school coming in to help me with my academics before football,” he told BSB. “Coach Tressel helped me out a lot through this whole process. That was huge. When that got cleared up, I kind of knew where I wanted to go.”

UCLA was rumored to be OSU’s primary competition, but the Bruins fell from his list and in-state Minnesota rose to that position.

10 Years Ago — 2012

With limited spots remaining in Ohio State’s 2013 recruiting class, head coach Urban Meyer organized a pivotal weekend to host official visitors from Dec. 6-9 with the hopes of finishing out that year’s group in a strong way.

Ohio State Opens Big Ten Play With A Bang

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to print, the Ohio State men's basketball team went 2-1, falling to Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium in Durham, N.C., on Nov. 30, before bouncing back with a win over Saint Francis (Pa.) on Dec. 3. The Buckeyes also opened Big Ten play on a high note with a thrilling win over Rutgers on Dec. 8 in which guard Tanner Holden hit a game-winning three as time expired.

Facing its first true road environment of the season at Cameron Indoor Stadium on Nov. 30, No. 25 Ohio State (5-2) was unable to overcome No. 17 Duke (7-2), falling 81-72 in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

"The fans were crazy," junior forward Zed Key said of the 9,314 in attendance. "I'll give it to them, the Cameron Crazies. As soon as I came out to shoot, they were on me. It's tough but a great environment to play in."

The adverse atmosphere did not faze the Buckeyes early. Ohio State opened the game with an 8-2 run, sparked by a three-pointer and floater by guard Sean McNeil. But the Blue Devils quickly raced back, pulling ahead 11-10 with 15:08 to play in the first half.

From there, Ohio State and Duke went back and forth, trading the lead five times

before locking into a 22-22 tie with 6:31 left in the first half. However, the Blue Devils took control of the game from that point, utilizing a 17-7 run to close the half with a 39-29 lead.

The primary culprit for Ohio State's first-half struggles was turnovers. Duke produced 18 points off 10 Ohio State miscues during the game's first 20 minutes. Freshman guard Bruce Thornton kept OSU steady, though, hitting all four of his shots and producing a team-best eight points entering the locker room.

Duke's lead ballooned to as many as 13 points in the second half, and the Blue Devils held a 48-35 advantage with 15:55 to play. Key connected on all five of his shots in the frame and helped OSU cut Duke's lead to just 52-47 after finishing an and-one opportunity with 11:54 to go, but the Blue Devils repelled Ohio State, quickly lifting their lead back to 59-49 with 10:13 left.

Again, the Buckeyes pulled close when Key powered through contact for a layup to make it 59-54 with 9:25 to play in regulation, but Ohio State was unable to make timely stops on the defensive end of the floor, allowing Duke to keep the Buckeyes at arm's length for the rest of the way in the Blue Devils' win.

Although Key and forward Justice Sueing struggled in the first half, combining for just seven points on 3-of-8 shooting, the veteran duo came alive in the second frame. Key scored 17 of his game-high 21 points in the second half, while Sueing tallied nine second-half points before fouling out with 40 seconds remaining.

"I did not think Zed played at the level we needed him to in the first half, and we really challenged him at halftime," OSU head coach Chris Holtmann said. "I thought he responded in the second half and played much better, defensively and offensively. Justice had foul trouble in the first half, and he couldn't get into a rhythm."

The Blue Devils employed a double-big lineup for much of the night, opting for freshmen centers Kyle Filipowski (7-0) and Dereck Lively II (7-1) to share the floor. The duo helped Duke stake out a 34-31 advantage on the glass while Filipowski powered Duke with a team-high 16 points and seven rebounds. Lively added 11 points and five boards.

"Their size was a problem for us tonight," Sueing said. "They killed us on the boards tonight. I mean, everyone saw it. That's something we definitely have to look at on tape, how to become a better rebounding team."

Saint Francis No Match For OSU

No. 25 Ohio State's offense shone, shooting 50.7 percent from the field and 56.5 percent from three-point range, and the Buckeyes cruised to a 96-59 win over Saint Francis (Pa.) in front of 10,398 fans at Value City Arena on Dec. 3.

Ohio State (6-2) jumped in front of Saint Francis early, going ahead 27-11 with 12:09 to go in the first half. The Buckeyes were unable to keep the Red Flash at arm's length for long. From there, Saint Francis (2-7) outscored Ohio State 25-17 to close the first half, cutting the Buckeye lead to single digits, 44-36, entering the locker room.

"I did not think we were nearly as good as we needed to be in the first half," Holtmann said. "Give Saint Francis credit. I thought they did some good things to expose us in the first half."

Both Ohio State and SFU rolled offensively during the first half. The Buckeyes connected on 51.6 percent of their field-goal attempts (16 of 31), and the Red Flash registered 55.2 percent shooting in the frame (16 of 29). While OSU showcased offensive balance with six different Buckeyes reaching five or more points during the opening frame, the Red Flash relied on a pair of bucket-getters to try to keep pace with Ohio State. Forward Josh Cohen and guard Maxwell Land each scored 12 points, accounting for two-thirds of the Red Flash's 36 first-half points.

Saint Francis was first on the board in the second half thanks to a putback tip-in by Cohen, but a pair of midrange jumpers from McNeil and a three from Thornton pushed Ohio State's lead back to 51-38

Duke 81, Ohio State 72

Nov. 30, 2022
Cameron Indoor Stadium • Durham, N.C.

	1	2	F
Ohio State (5-2)	29	43	72
Duke (7-2)	39	42	81

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Thornton	36	5-8	0-0	0-0	2	1	11
McNeil	35	5-13	2-2	1-2	1	1	14
Likekele	25	2-3	1-4	1-6	1	5	5
Sueing	26	4-10	4-4	3-2	1	5	12
Key	33	7-9	7-8	4-4	1	4	21
Holden	15	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Gayle	9	1-4	1-2	0-2	0	2	3
Sensabaugh	14	2-6	0-0	0-1	0	5	4
Okpara	7	0-1	2-2	2-2	0	1	2
Totals	200	26-55	17-22	12-19	6	25	72

Percentages: FG: 47.3%. FT: 77.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-13 (McNeil 2-7, Thornton 1-2, Likekele 0-1, Sueing 0-1, Key 0-1, Gayle 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Key 3, Sensabaugh). **Turnovers:** 16 (Thornton 4, Sueing 3, Key 3, Sensabaugh 3, McNeil, Gayle, Okpara).

Duke	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Lively	18	4-5	3-3	2-3	1	4	11
Roach	34	3-9	7-9	0-3	5	2	13
Proctor	27	2-8	6-6	1-2	1	1	12
Mitchell	15	1-3	0-0	0-2	1	2	3
Filipowski	30	6-11	4-6	3-4	2	4	16
Whitehead	13	2-5	0-0	2-0	0	1	5
Blakes	15	1-5	0-0	0-1	4	1	2
Grandison	26	3-5	2-2	1-3	0	2	9
Young	22	3-4	4-4	3-2	2	3	10
Totals	200	25-55	26-30	13-21	16	20	81

Percentages: FG: 45.5%. FT: 86.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-13 (Proctor 2-3, Mitchell 1-2, Whitehead 1-1, Grandison 1-2, Roach 0-3, Blakes 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Lively 2). **Turnovers:** 13 (Roach 3, Mitchell 2, Filipowski 2, Grandison 2, Young 2, Lively, Whitehead). **Steals:** 9 (Filipowski 3, Blakes 2, Grandison 2, Lively, Roach). **Officials:** Ayers, Groover, Driscoll. **Attendance:** 9,314.

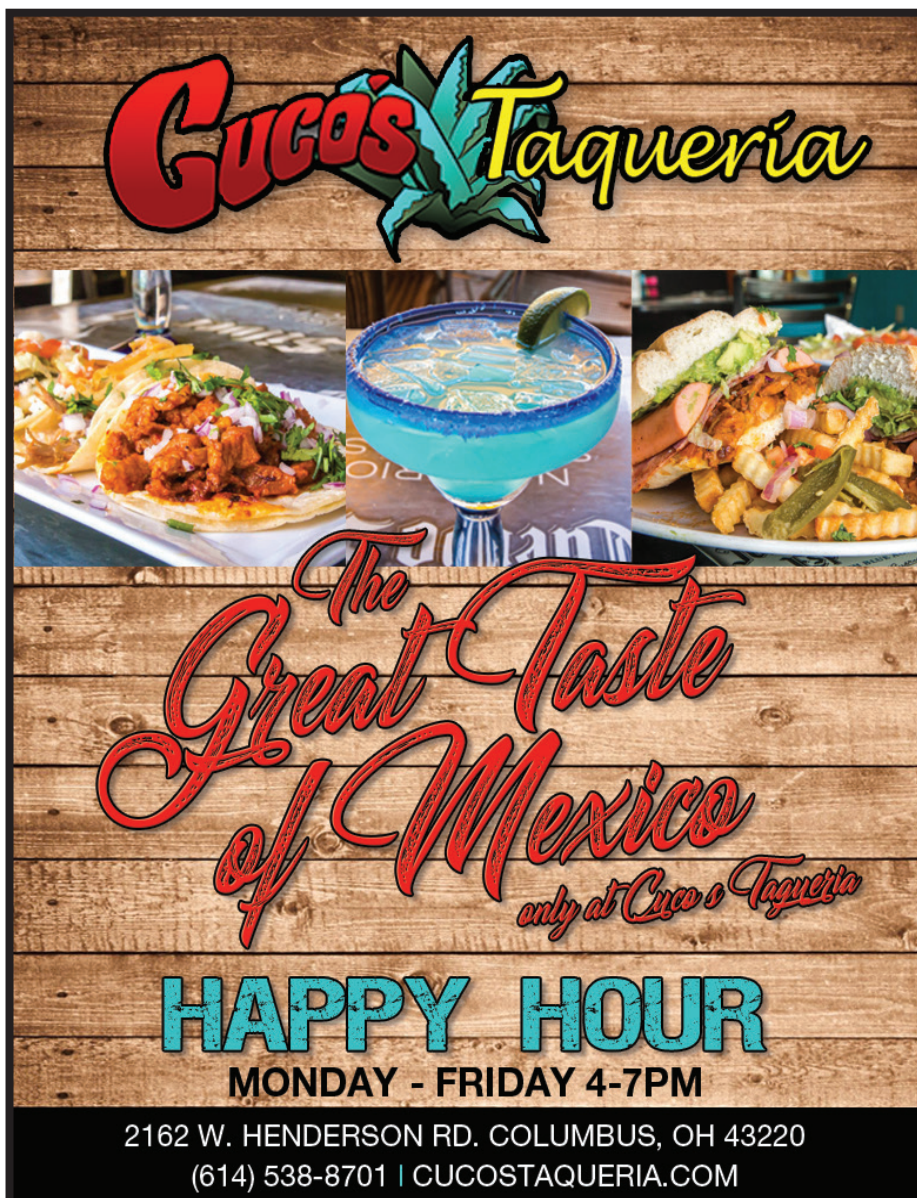
with 17:41 to go. After SFU cut the deficit to 53-43, Key went on a 6-0 run by himself to push Ohio State back up to 16 with 14:13 to play.

Key's efforts helped the Buckeyes put away the Red Flash for good, as OSU outscored Saint Francis 52-23 in the second half to pull away with the win. Key scored eight of his 11 points in the frame. Ohio State benefited greatly from a 29-5 run that spanned from 12:58 to 4:13 remaining in the second half.

All four of Ohio State's contributing freshmen reached double-figure scoring. Forward Brice Sensabaugh led the Buckeyes' youth scoring efforts, posting a team-high 15 points while connecting on 3 of 6 three-point attempts. Thornton finished with 13 points on 3-of-5 shooting from three, and guard Roddy Gayle Jr. added a career-high 12 points. Center Felix Okpara registered the first double-double of his career, producing 10 points and 12 rebounds while adding two steals and a block.

"(Playing freshmen) just makes our bench deeper," Okpara said. "We have more guys coming off of the bench and putting up points. It's helping the team out."

Although the Saint Francis offense ground to a halt in the second half, shooting just 26.7 percent from the field (8 of 30), the Red Flash still registered a trio of double-digit scorers. Cohen led the way with 18 points, while guard Cam Gregory produced 15 and Land added 14.



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Ohio State 96, St. Francis (Pa.) 59**Dec. 3, 2022**

Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	F
St. Francis (2-7)	36	23	59
Ohio State (6-2)	44	52	96

SFU	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Hargis	6	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Cohen	35	8-16	2-4	3-7	3	3	18
Gregory	36	6-11	0-0	0-1	3	0	15
Land	37	6-14	0-0	0-4	1	3	14
Moore	33	1-6	2-2	0-2	5	1	4
Sanon	24	2-5	1-1	2-1	2	3	5
McCabe	16	1-4	0-0	0-3	0	5	3
Ruggery	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Liberis	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Scanlon	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	24-59	5-7	5-20	14	17	59

Percentages: FG: 40.7%. FT: 71.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-19 (Gregory 3-4, Land 2-7, McCabe 1-4, Hargis 0-1, Moore 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Cohen 2, Land 2, Hargis). **Turnovers:** 11 (Land 4, Cohen, Gregory, Moore, McCabe, Ruggery, Liberis). **Steals:** 2 (Gregory, Scanlon)

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Sueing	17	2-7	1-3	0-5	3	1	6
Key	22	5-5	1-2	3-2	1	1	11
Thornton	25	5-10	0-0	0-2	2	0	13
McNeil	21	4-7	0-0	0-1	4	0	10
Likekele	25	4-6	0-0	2-3	3	1	8
Sensabaugh	20	4-10	4-4	0-2	2	3	15
Holden	17	2-5	4-6	3-2	0	0	8
Okpara	16	3-7	3-3	6-6	1	1	10
Gayle	22	5-6	0-0	0-2	3	2	12
Etzler	8	1-1	0-0	0-2	1	1	3
Hardman	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Baumann	2	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Spencer	2	0-3	0-0	3-1	0	0	0
Totals	200	35-69	13-18	30	20	10	96

Percentages: FG: 50.7%. FT: 72.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 13-23 (Thornton 3-5, Sensabaugh 3-6, McNeil 2-4, Gayle 2-2, Sueing 1-3, Okpara 1-1, Etzler 1-1, Hardman 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Key, Likekele, Sensabaugh, Okpara, Gayle). **Turnovers:** 7 (Key, Likekele, Sensabaugh, Holden, Okpara, Gayle, Baumann). **Steals:** 3 (Okpara 2, Gayle). **Officials:** Riley, Garrison, Floyd. **Attendance:** 10,398.

Holden Sinks RU At The Buzzer

Holden drilled a game-winning three-pointer at the buzzer, and the Buckeyes opened Big Ten play with a 67-66 win over Rutgers on Dec. 8.

The game followed Rutgers' (6-3, 1-1) typical path to victory, as the Scarlet Knights made it a low-scoring affair at Value City Arena. However, the Buckeyes (7-2, 1-0) were able to prevail in the tight struggle while shooting 46.4 percent from the field (26 of 56) and 42.1 percent (8 of 19) from three.

"That right there was just how we drew it up," Holtmann joked after the win.

Although Ohio State took an early 5-2 lead, Rutgers stormed back with a 9-0 run to jump ahead 11-5 with 15:59 to play in the opening half. Key then helped spark a 14-0 run – scoring six points during the stretch – to lift OSU to a 19-11 lead with 12:30 to go in the frame.

Key registered 15 of his game-high 22 points in the opening frame, helping the Buckeyes take a 31-20 lead with 4:06 to play in the half on a triple from Sensabaugh. However, the Scarlet Knights rattled off a 9-0 run to close the half, fighting for a 31-29 deficit at the break.

Center Clifford Omoruyi scored Rutgers' first nine points in the second half, helping the Scarlet Knights keep pace with Ohio State during the early stages of the frame.

"(Omoruyi) is a really good defender,

Ohio State 67, Rutgers 66**Dec. 8, 2022**

Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	F
Rutgers (6-3)	29	37	66
Ohio State (7-2)	31	36	67

Rutgers	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Mag	27	1-4	0-0	1-5	4	4	3
Hyatt	28	6-12	0-0	1-1	0	2	13
Omoruyi	29	7-10	2-4	2-6	0	4	16
Spencer	29	5-8	0-0	0-1	5	1	11
McConnell	36	2-6	1-2	1-2	2	2	5
Mulcahy	27	3-6	2-2	0-4	2	2	9
Reiber	3	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	3
Simpson	13	2-4	0-0	0-0	1	1	4
Woolfolk	7	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	2
Totals	200	28-54	5-8	6-21	14	19	66

Percentages: FG: 51.9%. FT: 62.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-17 (Mag 1-3, Hyatt 1-4, Spencer 1-2, Mulcahy 1-2, Reiber 1-3, Omoruyi 0-1, McConnell 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Omoruyi 2, Mag, Hyatt). **Turnovers:** 13 (Omoruyi 4, Mulcahy 4, McConnell 2, Mag, Hyatt, Spencer). **Steals:** 7 (Mulcahy 3, Spencer 2, Hyatt 1, McConnell 1)

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Sensabaugh	31	5-11	0-0	0-2	1	4	13
Sueing	35	4-12	0-0	3-1	3	1	9
Key	33	9-12	3-6	7-7	2	3	22
Thornton	39	3-9	3-4	0-4	5	2	10
McNeil	30	3-6	0-0	0-1	2	0	7
Holden	15	1-3	0-0	0-2	1	1	3
Okpara	7	0-0	1-2	0-2	0	2	1
Gayle	10	1-3	0-0	0-2	0	2	2
Totals	200	26-56	7-12	13-22	14	15	67

Percentages: FG: 46.4%. FT: 58.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-19 (Sensabaugh 3-4, Sueing 1-2, Key 1-2, Thornton 1-4, McNeil 1-3, Holden 1-2, Gayle 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Sensabaugh, Key, McNeil). **Turnovers:** 14 (Sueing 4, Thornton 3, Key 2, McNeil 2, Sensabaugh, Holden, Gayle). **Steals:** 6 (Sensabaugh 2, Sueing 2, Thornton 2). **Officials:** Scirotto, Kissinger, Ayers. **Attendance:** 14,042.

he's very athletic and he's a great big," Key said. "He did a good job tonight."

Omoruyi led his team on the night with 16 points and eight rebounds.

The lead changed hands 10 times during the second while the teams traded buckets for much of the frame. From the 14:39 mark in the second half, neither team was able to gain more than a one-possession lead for the rest of the game.

Down one with less than 30 seconds re-

maining in regulation, the Buckeyes had an opportunity to take the lead. However, Sensabaugh – who tallied 13 points in his first career start – was blocked at the rim by Omoruyi, and the Scarlet Knights cashed a pair of free throws to take a three-point lead with 7.7 seconds to play.

After Thornton hit a pair of free throws to drop the lead to one with 5.0 seconds to go, Rutgers guard Caleb McConnell missed the second half of a one-and-one free-throw opportunity. Following the miss, Thornton received a pass from Sensabaugh before tightroping the sideline and firing the ball to Holden on the wing, and he knocked down the game-winning triple in front of 14,042 crazed fans at Value City Arena.

"We do practice that situation," Holtmann said. "You want your most poised guy in that situation with the ball, and Bruce is that for us."

Holden's game-winner did not come without controversy, though. As Thorn-

ton raced down the court, Holden drifted out of bounds before re-entering the court and catching the pass. According to NCAA rules, if a player goes out of bounds, he

must re-establish himself by having both feet inbounds before touching the ball, and he cannot be the first player to touch the ball.

"I was in," Holden said after the game. "No changing it now."

Key had another big game for the Buckeyes, posting game highs with 22 points and 14 re-

bounds. Key was 9 of 12 from the field. Omoruyi's efforts were supported by forward Aundre Hyatt, who tallied 13 points, and guard Cam Spencer, who scored 11.

Ohio State was scheduled to return to action on Dec. 17 against North Carolina in the CBS Sports Classic at Madison Square Garden in New York City, with the tip set for 3 p.m. on CBS.

**Tanner Holden**

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Holden's Heroics Highlight Recent Stretch

With five seconds remaining in Ohio State's Big Ten opener against Rutgers on Dec. 8, Rutgers guard Caleb McConnell was at the foul line looking to hit his second free throw in a one-and-one opportunity to lift the Scarlet Knights' lead to three. But before McConnell settled into his routine at the charity stripe, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann turned to his bench.

COURT
REPORT

Jack Emerson

Holtmann opted to replace forward Justice Sueing with transfer guard Tanner Holden, who had missed a pair of jumpers to that point in the game, in order to put Ohio State's best deep inbound passer on the floor. However, there was no need for an inbound passer when McConnell's free-throw attempt bounced off the rim and into the hands of Ohio State freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh, who quickly dished it to guard Bruce Thornton. Thornton tightroped the sideline before passing it to Holden, who pulled up from several feet beyond the arc and drilled the game-winning three-pointer at the buzzer for the 67-66 win.

When the ball swished through the net, pandemonium spread throughout Value City Arena. The Ohio State faithful were sent into a frenzy, and Holden was mobbed by his teammates at halfcourt.

"I just so happened to get open and (Thornton) passed it to me and I shot it," Holden said. "I couldn't really see it because (Rutgers forward Mawot Mag) was in my way, but I just heard the crowd go crazy, and then I celebrated after that. Then I had 15 guys rushing me.

"It was a crazy game," he added. "The Big Ten is a tough place to play and a tough place to win. That was just a crazy game, up-and-down. I think it was one possession for almost

the entire game."

To that point, Holden's night had been fairly lackluster. The Wright State transfer had yet to tally a point and had only two rebounds and an assist on his stat sheet. However, his early-game struggles went out the window after his game-winner found the bottom of the net.

Junior forward Zed Key, who has experienced several tight wins during his time at Ohio State, ranked Holden's game-winner as the greatest moment he's had in his time with the program.

"I almost passed out," Key said. "I was down by the block, but I couldn't rebound because the buzzer went off. I just looked up in the air and I was like, 'Oh, wow. That's going in.' And it went in.

"I just ran. I was more tired just chasing after (Holden) than on the last possession," he added. "It was a great shot, a great pass by Bruce, and we got the W."

There was some controversy surrounding Holden's game-winner, however, as he drifted out of bounds before catching the pass. According to NCAA rules, if a player goes out of bounds he cannot be the first player to touch the ball upon returning to play. However Thornton maintained possession when Holden re-entered the court.

Holden said he didn't realize he ran out of bounds but added that he was firmly inbounds prior to the shot.

The Big Ten released a statement the following day that read, in part, "During regulation play, an OSU student-athlete passed the ball to a teammate who had drifted out of bounds and returned to the court to complete the game-winning shot. The action of stepping out of bounds and being the first player to touch the ball after returning inbounds constituted a violation of NCAA Rule 9, Section 3, Article 1. The play should have been stopped, and the ball ruled dead.

"The officiating crew that was on the court is one of the best in the country, but unfortunately missed the call. The Big Ten Conference takes officiating very seriously and has addressed the matter with both member institutions and the officiating crew. Additionally, the conference will be providing added education and rule reinforcement to our basketball officials."

After the game, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann was pleased with how his team handled the chaotic final seconds, noting that Holden has the ability to elevate himself in clutch situations.

"He's a gamer," Holtmann said. "He's made big shots his whole life. He made a game-winning reception as a wide receiver in the state championship game. He's just a gamer."

Holden did not remain in the moment for long, however, emphasizing that the Buckeyes need to utilize the momentum from their stunning win over Rutgers going forward as a matchup with North Carolina and the rest of their Big Ten schedule looms in the distance.

"It's huge. For me, it's a confidence builder," Holden said. "That's one game we're going to learn from. We're going to get back in the gym tomorrow and work on it. Overall, it's just a good building block for us."

Freshmen Making Early Impact

The members of Ohio State's top-10 2022

OSU Men's Basketball 2024 Commitments

Players in the class of 2024 who have issued verbal commitments to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Juni Mobley	PG	6-0	150	★★★★	Las Vegas Bishop Gorman

recruiting class have wasted no time proving their worth to the Buckeye basketball program, playing a key role in OSU's 7-2 start and appearance in the AP top 25.

Sensabaugh has been a reliable bucket-getter, Thornton has taken on the primary ball-handler and facilitator roles with ease, center Felix Okpara has become a rim protection option, and guard Roddy Gayle Jr. has showcased strong two-way play in the backcourt during their first month of collegiate action.

No game showcased the impact of the freshman class more than OSU's 96-59 win over St. Francis (Pa.), in which the previously mentioned first-year players each scored in double figures. While Ohio State continues to jell, Holtmann is proud of the strides made by his freshman class to this point in the season.

"It's good just to see the freshmen play," Holtmann said. "Sometimes guys will play these kinds of minutes and sometimes they won't play these kinds of minutes, so when they have these minutes in front of them, they obviously have to continue to grow and get better."

Sensabaugh has been an offensive spark off the bench for the Buckeyes so far this season, scoring 14.1 points per game, trailing only Key, despite playing just the sixth-most minutes on the team. Sensabaugh has largely carried OSU's second unit with 48.8 percent shooting (42 of 86), which is supported by an elite 50.0 percent mark (18 of 36) from beyond the arc.

While Sensabaugh has blossomed into one of Ohio State's most effective offensive weapons through the Buckeyes' first nine games, there are still glaring areas of his game that need improvement. The Orlando, Fla., native has shown defensive lapses and has turned the ball over 13 times compared to just five assists.

Sensabaugh said he's still getting acclimated to the demands of college basketball but is staying the course going forward.

"It was definitely a wakeup call for me," Sensabaugh said. "Obviously, it's big jump from high school with the pace and the strength. (I'm) just locking in personally and learning from the older guys and the coaches as well, what it really takes to be a Big Ten player.

"I'm just kind of flipping the switch here, recently, and just looking to continue growing and showing more on the court."

While Sensabaugh has given Ohio State a scoring boost, Thornton has also grown into a reliable option with the ball in his hands, serving as the Buckeyes' starting point guard all season.

"Bruce is really tough," Holtmann said. "He really does have great poise. He's used to winning, and as much as anybody I've ever coached at a young age, he plays to win. Not every kid plays to win or understands what playing to win looks like. He was extremely well-coached in high school and understands what playing to win is."

Thornton has provided Ohio State with solid playmaking, averaging 2.8 assists per game, and he has had growth as a scorer through his first nine outings. After failing to reach double figures in scoring in his first three games, Thornton has hit the 10-point mark or more in five of the last six contests. His confidence continues to grow, and Thornton has averaged 9.9 points per game while shooting 46.7 percent (14 of 30) from three.

Gayle joins Thornton in the backcourt and has been lauded for his defensive play to this point in the season, tallying three blocks and four steals through nine games. On the offensive end, Gayle averages 4.8 points on 43.6 percent shooting (17 of 39).

"He's a two-way player," Holtmann said. "His defense is just ahead of his offense right now. And that's fine. We need his defensive presence. And he's not a bad offensive player. He's still reading the game. He's a really good kid, and I think he's only going to get better in front of our eyes."

Okpara has grown into a defensive specialist for the Buckeyes, tallying eight blocks and three steals through nine games, while showcasing deceptive lateral quickness despite his 6-11 frame. Okpara adds 3.9 rebounds and 3.7 points per game.

"Defense, that's why I check in," Okpara said. "I try to get defensive rebounds, crash the glass offensively. For me, scoring right now is a bonus. I like to do the little stuff like set screens and dive on the floor."

Bucks Talk Cameron Indoor Experience

Ohio State had the opportunity to play at one of the more treasured college basketball venues on Nov. 30, trekking to Cameron Indoor Stadium in Durham, N.C.

Although the Buckeyes endured an 81-72 loss at the hands of Duke, the magnitude of playing in such a storied arena was not lost on Holtmann and Co. Ohio State's skipper also said that playing in that atmosphere will help the Buckeyes in the long run.

"It was a great environment, a great college basketball environment," Holtmann said. "I love playing on the road this time of year, in hostile environments. I think it only gets you better, so I love the fact that we were able to play in this environment."

Sueing echoed Holtmann's sentiments and said that playing at Duke will have an immense impact on the team's younger players prior to playing on the road in the Big Ten.

"This game was much-needed for everybody," Sueing said. "Being able to play in an arena like this with an environment as intense as it is will only help prepare us for Big Ten play."

There were 9,314 spectators in Cameron Indoor Stadium, and Key said he felt the team's freshmen were able to handle the adverse environment well.

"I think they handled it fine," Key said. "All the freshmen, Bruce and everybody, I told them to relax and they did that."

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Mikulášiková Leading Charge For Ohio State

Entering this season, it made sense to expect that Ohio State might live or die behind the impressive trio of guards in Jacy Sheldon, Taylor Mikesell and Madison Greene, who was returning for the Buckeyes after she missed last season with a knee injury.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

All have been impressive in their own right this year, with Mikesell averaging 18.9 points, Sheldon stealing the ball 6.0 times per game and Greene leading the team from deep (11 of 20, 55.0 percent), but it's been the contributions of forward Rebeka Mikulášiková that have helped lead the Buckeyes to an 10-0 start to the season.

She's one of Ohio State's leading scorers at 17.2 points per game through the first 10 contests of the season, trailing only Mikesell, and is also leading the Buckeyes with 6.0 rebounds per game. She has also been among Ohio State's most consistent shooters, shooting 61.5 percent from the field and 43.8 percent from deep.

This is Mikulášiková's fourth season in the program, and she's seen increases in basically every statistical category since her sophomore season. Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said he's seen her improve on and off the court since she arrived in Columbus from Nitra, Slovakia.

"It's a great example of every year, she's gotten a little bit better," he said. "I think she had a great offseason, she got in tremendous shape, and I'm just really happy for her because she's worked really hard. Hopefully she can continue to grow and develop and have a great year."

McGuff credited her conditioning for some of her continued improvement – and it's allowed her to stay on the court longer, playing 27.7 minutes per game this season after just 20.1 minutes per game last year – but her teammates have said her mental toughness has grown as well and is allowing her to succeed on the court.

"Just watching her become stronger mentally has helped her game out so much," guard Rikki Harris said. "Mental health is serious and we all struggle from it, so seeing the growth that she has had over the time has been great to see for us and is good for her personally on the court and off the court."

Greene, who is roommates with Mikulášiková, has seen similar growth for her teammate, who has twice been named to the Big Ten weekly honor roll this season.

"She's my teammate, we're like best friends, so I've seen her grow a lot," Greene said. "I see her during practice, at home at our apartment, so just seeing her grow mentally, it was big for me. I feel like a big part of that was just her confidence and just believing in herself more, and you can definitely see it out here on the court for sure."

Mikulášiková has previously cited conditioning for her continued improvement, but she also said she's been able to play with more confidence this season for Ohio State.

"I feel like I worked a lot on my mental state to be more confident to trust myself," she said. "For me, it was more mental than physical."

LeBron Gifts Team With Beats, Shoes

The team received a special gift on Dec. 2, when Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James gifted the entire team with a new pair of Nike shoes and Ohio State-branded Beats by Dre headphones. The moment was captured in a video posted to the team's Twitter account, showing McGuff reading a personal note from James.

"The season is here. So are the expectations," the note read. "But you've put in the work. Time to play the game. And change it forever. Let's make some history."

James, a native of Akron, is among the most well-known Ohio State fans, even jokingly asking earlier this year if he would have eligibility to play for the football team. He's often shown support for the school through gifts like the ones he provided for the women's basketball team.

"It's really cool. What a great gesture from him," McGuff said. "Just a very, very generous situation there and our kids were really excited, so I was really happy for them. It was a really cool thing, though."

Several of the players also got the opportunity to meet James at a football game earlier this season, and the recent gifts for the team showed his further support for the program.

"It was a great experience," Harris said of the gifts. "We weren't told that at first – we thought we had a meeting and the way they made it seem like we were in trouble, so we were kind of nervous. But to get that type of gift from LeBron was amazing. It just made us know that he's watching us, too. But it was just nice. It brought joy to the team."

"It was a crazy experience," Greene added. "I would have never thought at some point something like that would happen, so it really just means a lot that he's actually watching us and paying attention and is really invested in the women's basketball game."

McGuff thanked James on Twitter, to which James responded, "Very welcome Coach!! Best of luck to you and your hard working ladies this year and beyond! Always got my support!! O-H."

Bucks Up To No. 3 In AP Poll

Other than a few brief weeks during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 seasons that the Ohio State women's basketball team was up to No. 2 in the nation, the Buckeyes are currently experiencing one of the highest rankings in team history.

Ohio State checked in at No. 3 in the AP top 25 released Dec. 5, trailing only No. 2 Stanford and the defending national champions in No. 1 South Carolina, and continued to hold that spot as of Dec. 13. The Buckeyes last reached No. 3 in the 2009-10 season, several seasons before McGuff arrived on campus.

And while Ohio State is reaching new heights in terms of its ranking, McGuff said the Buckeyes aren't sure what to make of it yet but are more interested in what it will look like at the end of the season.

"It's just so early," he said. "It's hard to tell what being ranked third even means because I haven't had a chance to watch a lot of the other teams and so forth. It's good – publicity for the team. It probably helps recruiting right now. But I will say, I'll be more interested in where we're ranked when it's all said and done in March or April than right now."

And while a billing as the No. 3 team in the country is sure to give the Buckeyes a boost moving forward, McGuff said just as much drive comes from the team's 10-0 start to the season.

"Winning in general has given them some confidence, and they think they're confident in what we're doing, how we're doing it, and what our opportunity to have a special season is," he said.

Harris said the team is enjoying the high ranking, but it won't matter if the Buckeyes don't continue their winning ways.

"We love it. I think most of it is more so for our fans because that just shows them how good we are, but we just play," she said. "If we don't win we can't be No. 3, so we just focus on playing and winning games."

Greene echoed Harris' sentiment, and added that the team – from the coaches down to the players – have put an added focus on preparation this season.

"Our coaches do a great job of doing everything they can to prepare for each and every game," she said. "I feel like just to stay where we are, we can't get satisfied with the No. 3 ranking. We've just got to keep working and keep getting better every day."

Mikulášiková Is Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month

Given her impressive start to the season outlined above, Mikulášiková is Plank's Lady Buck of the Month for November.

In seven games during the month, she averaged 18.1 points, 6.0 rebounds and 2.6 assists on 63.0 percent shooting, including 40.9 percent from deep as the Buckeyes were 7-0. She had a pair of 23-point outings, setting then-career highs, in wins over Boston College and North Alabama, and she also finished with 21 points on 9-of-14 shooting in Ohio State's win over Louisville.

The win over Boston College also had Mikulášiková finishing with 10 rebounds to notch her fourth career double-double and her first with at least 20 points.

Plank's Cafe



Rebeka Mikulášiková
Senior Forward
Nitra, Slovakia

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OSU Still Undefeated As Big Ten Play Begins

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State (10-0, 2-0 Big Ten) continued its winning ways since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, overcoming Louisville and Rutgers on the road before returning home to take down New Hampshire and Michigan State.

The Buckeyes fought back from a 14-point deficit to knock off No. 18 Louisville on the road, 96-77, to remain undefeated on the season on Nov. 30.

The Buckeyes faced a 39-25 deficit in the second quarter and trailed 45-37 at the half, largely due to 12 turnovers and eight personal fouls in the first half, but outscored the Cardinals 59-32 in the final two quarters to secure the win.

And while turnovers were a problem for Ohio State, they equally impacted Louisville, and it became clear early on that both teams would have trouble holding onto the ball. Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon – who returned to the starting lineup after missing the previous two games with an injury – struggled the most early on, turning the ball over three times in the first 2:31 of play as the Cardinals got off to a 6-1 lead.



Jacy Sheldon

The teams began trading blows through the first quarter, with Louisville taking a 12-3 lead before Ohio State ripped off a 9-0 run to tie things up with 3:42 remaining in the opening frame. The Cardinals then took off on a 27-13 run as the first quarter stretched into the second, taking a 39-25 lead with 5:57 remaining in the half. Ohio State was mostly kept at arm's length, trailing by at least two possessions for the entire quarter, and entered the locker room down 45-37.

"Going into halftime, we were just turning the ball over too much and kind of shooting ourselves in the foot," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "I wanted a little bit more of an experienced lineup out there – some people like Madison (Greene) and Rikki (Harris) who have played in games like this, and I thought that was a big factor for the second half."

After biding their time in the first half, the Buckeyes opened the third quarter on a 15-7 run to tie it up at 52-52 midway through the frame. The Cardinals had six turnovers in the first five minutes of the second half after just nine total turnovers in the first half.

A layup from guard Taylor Mikesell gave Ohio State a 61-59 lead, the first for the Buckeyes since it was 1-0, and they eventually led 65-63 going into the final quarter.

Ohio State continued to build a lead in the fourth as Harris made her presence known for the Buckeyes. She forced several turnovers in the quarter and stole the ball twice. She was also fouled on a three-point attempt and connected on two of her foul shots to help Ohio State take a 79-65 lead with 6:20 remaining after a 14-0 run.

"She's the heart and soul of our team in

many ways, just from a competitive character standpoint," McGuff said of Harris. "She does all the little things. She got tough rebound after tough rebound tonight, dove on the floor for loose balls – just a great performance, and we really, really needed it."

The Cardinals attempted a comeback but never cut the deficit to less than 10 at 85-75.

The loss for Louisville (5-3) in front of 8,259 fans at the KFC Yum! Center snapped a 21-game home winning streak and a 48-game home nonconference winning streak.

The Buckeyes were led by Mikesell, who finished with 26 points on 10-of-16 shooting, as well as Sheldon's 22 points and Rebeka Mikulášiková's 21 points. Harris pulled down a team-high 10 rebounds and passed out six assists, to go along with her five points.

The Buckeyes shot 59.7 percent from the field (37 of 62) and 53.3 percent (8 of 15) from deep in the win.

Louisville was led by guard Hailey Van Lith, who finished with 20 points on 7-of-18 shooting and pulled down 10 rebounds. The Cardinals were limited to 43.5 percent shooting (30 of 69), including just 28.6 from beyond the arc (6 of 21). Louisville was guilty of 24 turnovers, with the Buckeyes picking up 13 steals, led by Greene's four.

Mikesell, Mikulášiková Dominate Rutgers

Ohio State opened conference play with a comfortable win on Dec. 4, going on the road to defeat Rutgers, 82-70.

The Buckeyes were led by the duo of Mikesell and Mikulášiková, who combined for 61 points and shot 62.2 percent (23 of 37) from the field, while Mikesell was 6 of 12 from deep.

Ohio State (8-0, 1-0) took the court without the services of Sheldon, who was out with a lingering lower-leg injury, though it was likely rest rather than her being unable to play considering Sheldon had been on the court for nearly all of Ohio State's win over Louisville just four days earlier.

Greene started in Sheldon's place and got Ohio State on the board first, taking advantage of an early shot-clock violation by Rutgers (4-6, 0-1) and scoring on the other end. The Buckeyes later took a 20-6 lead after the first quarter, holding the Scarlet Knights to just 3-of-14 shooting in the first frame (21.4 percent) while the Buckeyes were 7 of 14, including 3 of 7 from three-point range, two of which were courtesy of Mikesell.

The Buckeyes rotated in just six players during the first quarter, sending Harris in off the bench at points, while Rutgers had all eight scholarship members of the team – Division I women's basketball teams are allowed 14 scholarship players – appear in the first 10 minutes.

Mikesell continued dominating in the second quarter, knocking down a pair of triples in the first two minutes, and another three-pointer later gave Ohio State a 39-18 lead with 4:54 remaining in the half.

The short-handed Scarlet Knights began to push, though, ending the first half on a 10-4 run (Ohio State led 43-28 at the break

Ohio State 96, Louisville 77

Nov. 30, 2022 KFC Yum! Center • Louisville, Ky.						
	1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (7-0)	18	19	28	31	96	
Louisville (5-3)	25	20	18	14	77	

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	33	9-14	3-4	0-5	4	3	21
McMahon	6	0-0	1-2	0-2	0	2	1
Thierry	22	3-4	1-1	1-3	2	5	7
Sheldon	39	9-14	2-4	0-3	0	2	22
Mikesell	40	10-16	2-3	0-2	2	3	26
Harris	26	1-2	3-6	2-8	6	1	5
Greene	35	5-12	2-2	1-2	6	3	14
Totals	200	37-62	14-22	7-27	20	19	96

Percentages: FG: 59.7%. FT: 63.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-15 (Mikesell 4-8, Greene 2-3, Sheldon 2-3, Mikulasikova 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Sheldon 2, Thierry). **Turnovers:** 20 (Mikulashikova 4, Sheldon 4, Harris 3, Mikesell 3, Greene 2, McMahon 2, Thierry 2). **Steals:** 13 (Greene 4, Sheldon 3, Harris 2, Thierry 2, McMahon, Mikulasikova).

Louisville	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Cochran	28	3-8	3-4	1-6	2	3	9
Carr	30	5-12	0-0	0-2	1	3	14
Robinson	38	3-6	2-2	2-3	4	3	8
Van Lith	39	7-18	5-5	4-6	3	3	20
Jones	21	7-14	1-1	3-3	1	3	15
Dixon	5	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	2	2
Verhulst	7	2-5	0-0	1-1	0	0	5
Russell	15	0-2	0-0	0-1	2	2	0
Konno	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Harris	7	2-3	0-1	2-1	0	0	4
Brown	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	30-69	11-13	14-23	13	19	77

Percentages: FG: 43.5%. FT: 84.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-21 (Carr 4-9, Verhulst 1-4, Van Lith 1-6, Russell 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Robinson 2, Russell). **Turnovers:** 24 (Van Lith 8, Robinson 5, Jones 4, Carr 3, Brown, Cochran, Dixon, Verhulst). **Steals:** 5 (Jones 2, Cochran, Robinson, Van Lith). **Officials:** Vaszily, Kanter, Spurlock-Welsh. **Attendance:** 8,259.

Ohio State 82, Rutgers 70

Dec. 4, 2022 Jersey Mike's Arena • Piscataway, N.J.						
	1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (8-0, 1-0)	18	19	28	31	96	
Rutgers (4-6, 0-1)	25	20	18	14	77	

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	36	11-16	7-8	1-5	2	0	31
Mikesell	40	12-21	0-0	0-2	1	1	30
Thierry	25	3-4	1-1	2-2	2	4	7
Greene	40	3-6	0-0	0-2	7	1	6
McMahon	34	1-6	3-4	0-4	7	2	5
Harris	21	1-4	1-2	2-3	2	2	3
Bristow	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Shumate	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	31-58	12-15	5-19	21	11	82

Percentages: FG: 53.4%. FT: 80.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-19 (Mikesell 6-12, Mikulasikova 2-4, Greene 0-1, Harris 0-1, McMahon 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 3 (McMahon 2, Thierry 2). **Turnovers:** 10 (Mikulashikova 4, McMahon 3, Harris 2, Thierry). **Steals:** 9 (Greene 3, McMahon 3, Mikesell, Shumate, Thierry).

Rutgers	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Brown	32	6-8	1-1	0-3	1	3	15
Carter	31	4-9	2-2	1-5	5	2	11
Sidibe	36	5-7	0-0	1-4	1	2	10
Cornwell	14	2-5	2-2	4-2	0	1	6
Streeter	20	0-4	0-0	0-2	1	0	0
Smikle	36	8-14	4-7	2-4	3	3	21
Lafayette	25	3-9	0-0	0-1	1	4	7
Bates	6	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	28-57	9-12	12-23	12	16	70

Percentages: FG: 44.9.1%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-18 (Brown 2-3, Carter 1-3, Lafayette 1-4, Smikle 1-4, Streeter 0-4). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Sidibe). **Turnovers:** 21 (Sidibe 7, Smikle 4, Brown 3, Carter 3, Team 3, Bates). **Steals:** 5 (Brown 2, Sidibe, Smikle, Streeter). **Officials:** Barksdale, Steratore, Cross. **Attendance:** 2,649.

and continuing that momentum out of the locker room, opening the third quarter on a 9-5 run. Rutgers eventually cut the lead to single digits, with Ohio State leading just 53-45 with 3:25 remaining in the quarter, but Mikesell and Mikulášiková combined for the Buckeyes' next eight points and the visitors led 61-49 heading into the final quarter.

Ohio State was able to maintain a comfortable lead for most of the final frame, though Rutgers did cut the deficit to 77-68 with 2:22 remaining. Greene responded on the next possession with a driving layup to extend the lead back to double digits, and the Buckeyes kept pushing for the 12-point win.

"I thought we got off to a great start, but Rutgers played really well today," McGuff said. "We were just really consistent all day long. We got off to a great start. We moved the ball well. We got great shots. I thought our press was effective, and we were getting back and getting matched up so it was hard for (Rutgers) to get going. It was a great start, but overall not a great performance by us. We have to do a lot better."

Mikulášiková led with a career-high 31 points and added six rebounds while Mikesell added 30 points. Mikulášiková finished



Madison Greene

11 of 16 from the field, while Greene and Cotie McMahon each added seven assists.

Rutgers guard Kaylene Smikle led the Scarlet Knights with 21 points on 8-of-14 shooting. Rutgers turned the ball over 21 times, with Greene and McMahon each grabbing three steals in the game played before 2,649 in Jersey Mike's Arena.

OSU Turns On Second-Half Jets In Win Over UNH

Whether it was the early 11 a.m. tip or complacency after an 8-0 start to the season, the Buckeyes seemed out of sorts as they went into the locker room at the break with just a 39-29 lead against New Hampshire (4-7) on Dec. 8 in Value City Arena.

It wasn't what many have come to expect from Ohio State's offense, and the Buckeyes clearly got the message, as they came out of the locker room and completely took the game over. Ohio State outscored New Hampshire 53-7 in the second half, holding the Wildcats to just 8.7 percent shooting from the field (2 for 23) in the final 20 minutes, to secure a 92-36 win.

Ohio State (9-0) was slow coming out of the gates and unable to develop a rhythm on offense, and New Hampshire took a 9-8 lead with 3:03 remaining in the first frame.

The Buckeyes closed the quarter on a 9-0 run, but the Wildcats continued to push in the second, shooting 50.0 percent (8 of 16) from the field to trail just 39-29 at the break. The Buckeyes shot just 41.0

OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 92, UNH 36

Dec. 8, 2022

Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	3	4	F
New Hampshire (4-7)	9	20	4	3	36
Ohio State (9-0, 1-0)	17	22	30	23	92

New Hampshire	Total		FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A					
Cote	23	0-1	0-0	0-1	6	3	0
Kane	35	5-15	2-6	5-3	0	1	13
Williams	37	2-11	1-2	0-4	2	2	7
O'Connor	29	2-10	1-2	0-10	1	0	6
Groman	31	2-8	0-0	1-1	0	0	4
Eliasson	22	0-1	0-0	1-1	0	1	0
Andersson	24	3-9	0-0	2-2	0	3	6
Totals	200	14-55	4-10	11-26	9	10	36

Percentages: FG: 25.5%. FT: 40.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-25 (Williams 2-8, Kane 1-2, O'Connor 1-7, Andersson 0-5, Groman 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 1 (O'Connor). **Turnovers:** 27 (Kane 5, Andersson 4, O'Connor 4, Team 4, Williams 4, Groman 3, Eliasson 2, Cote). **Steals:** 3 (Groman, Kane, Williams).

Ohio State	Total		FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A					
Mikulasikova	22	3-6	0-0	1-5	1	1	7
McMahon	20	9-16	1-2	0-4	4	2	20
Greene	28	2-5	1-1	3-2	4	0	6
Thierry	22	7-9	0-1	2-4	1	2	14
Mikesell	29	6-12	3-3	0-3	3	0	19
Harris	22	1-4	0-0	2-4	2	2	3
Walker	18	2-6	2-2	2-2	3	0	6
Shumate	18	2-5	0-0	0-4	1	2	6
Bristow	10	3-5	3-4	0-2	0	2	9
Henderson	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Costner	5	1-2	0-0	0-2	1	0	2
Totals	200	36-70	10-13	10-33	20	12	92

Percentages: FG: 51.4%. FT: 76.9%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-25 (Mikesell 4-6, Shumate 2-5, Greene 1-2, Harris 1-3, McMahon 1-5, Mikulasikova 1-2, Bristow 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Bristow, Harris, Shumate, Thierry). **Turnovers:** 10 (Mikulasikova 2, Thierry 2, Bristow, Costner, Greene, McMahon, Mikesell, Walker). **Steals:** 17 (McMahon 5, Bristow 3, Harris 3, Mikesell 2, Costner, Greene, Thierry, Walker). **Officials:** Inouye, Cruse, Cruz-Johnson. **Attendance:** 6,857.

percent from the field (16 of 39) and were 3 of 11 from deep in the first two quarters (27.3 percent), and they held just a slight advantage on the boards, leading 23-22 at the half.

"We didn't play hard, we didn't play with focus or with intensity (in the first half) and that's all we talked about at halftime," McGuff said. "I told them we looked like a team that, for the last 10 days, we were listening to everyone tell us how good we are. At the start of the year, we were one of the hardest playing teams in the country. I think we got back to that in the second half, and the results were reflective of that."

Whatever discussion McGuff had with the team in the locker room evidently worked. Ohio State outscored New Hampshire 30-4 in the third quarter. After Wildcat guard Brooke Kane scored a layup with 5:56 remaining in the frame, the Buckeyes closed on a 15-0 run to lead 69-33 going into the fourth.

After the Wildcats were just 2 of 11 from the field in the third, the fourth quarter was more domination by Ohio State, which outscored New Hampshire 23-3 in the period for the win. The Wildcats' only points came on three free throws as they did not connect on any of their 12 shot attempts during the quarter. Even at the stripe, the Wildcats were just 3 of 8 in the stanza.

New Hampshire's seven-point second half was tied for the fewest points ever given up in a half by Ohio State, the other instance coming in the opening half of a 94-35 win over Nicholls on Nov. 26, 2005.

Ohio State 74, Michigan State 68

Dec. 11, 2022

Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	3	4	F
Michigan State (6-5, 0-2)	17	15	22	14	68
Ohio State (10-0, 2-0)	29	13	17	15	74

Mich. State	Total		FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A					
Alexander	15	4-4	1-3	3-2	1	3	9
Elliott	27	5-9	0-0	4-5	1	1	11
McDaniel	16	1-6	2-2	0-1	2	0	4
Ekh	25	2-8	0-0	1-2	1	4	6
Joiner	34	6-13	1-1	0-3	4	5	16
Ozment	24	2-7	0-0	2-4	3	4	4
Visscher	9	0-1	1-2	0-3	0	2	1
Ayrault	25	4-11	0-1	2-7	1	1	8
Hallock	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	1	0
Kimball	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hagemann	18	3-6	2-3	1-0	1	1	9
Totals	200	27-66	7-12	13-27	16	22	68

Percentages: FG: 40.9%. FT: 58.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-25 (Joiner 3-6, Ekh 2-5, Elliott 1-2, Hagemann 1-1, Ayrault 0-5, Kimball 0-1, McDaniel 0-1, Ozment 0-3, Visscher 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Elliott 3, Ayrault 2, Alexander). **Turnovers:** 22 (Ozment 5, McDaniel 4, Elliott 3, Hallock 3, Alexander 2, Ekh 2, Joiner 2, Ayrault). **Steals:** 6 (Joiner 2, Alexander, Ekh, Hagemann, Ozment).

Ohio State	Total		FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A					
Mikulasikova	27	2-6	1-2	1-5	0	3	7
McMahon	26	4-12	0-2	2-8	1	3	8
Greene	40	2-8	11-13	2-2	5	3	15
Thierry	40	10-13	0-1	2-6	1	3	21
Mikesell	40	4-15	6-6	1-6	3	2	16
Harris	19	3-6	0-1	0-1	3	3	7
Walker	8	0-0	0-0	1-2	1	1	0
Totals	200	25-60	18-25	12-30	14	18	74

Percentages: FG: 41.7%. FT: 72.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-22 (Mikesell 2-9, Mikulasikova 2-6, Harris 1-4, Thierry 1-2, Greene 0-1, McMahon 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Thierry 2, Harris). **Turnovers:** 20 (Mikesell 5, Greene 4, McMahon 4, Thierry 4, Harris 2, Team). **Steals:** 8 (Greene 5, Harris, McMahon, Thierry). **Officials:** Grinter, Krommenhoek, Maxey. **Attendance:** 6,979.

Ohio State was led by McMahon, who finished with 20 points on 9-of-16 shooting, and Mikesell, who had 19 points on 6-of-12 shooting. Guard Taylor Thierry also added 14 points, while Mikulasikova, Thierry and Harris each pulled down six rebounds. The Wildcats were led by Kane, who finished with 13 points on 5-of-15 shooting.

In total, Ohio State finished 51.4 percent from the field (36 of 70) and 40.0 percent from deep (10 of 25), while New Hampshire shot just 25.5 percent from the field (14 of 55) and 16.0 percent (4 of 25) from three-point range.

The win was played in front of a season-high 6,857 fans, with nearly 4,000 of those students from Columbus City Schools, who were brought to the game in a collaboration between Ohio State and the 2nd and 7 Foundation, a local nonprofit organization.

Thierry's Career High Pushes OSU Past MSU

Ohio State (10-0, 2-0 Big Ten) overcame a late push by Michigan State (6-5, 0-2) to secure the Buckeyes' second conference win of the season, a 74-68 victory at home before 6,979 on Dec. 11.

The Spartans were able to cut the deficit to just 67-66 with 1:44 remaining in the contest, but Ohio State was able to withstand the charge and close things out at the free-throw line to hold off Michigan State. The Buckeyes were without Sheldon for the third consecutive game.

"We have a lot to work on," McGuff said. "It's nice to be able to do it off of a win, but

there's a lot of areas to improve."

It appeared early on that Ohio State and Michigan State might go blow-for-blow for the duration of the contest, with the teams trading the lead five times as the Buckeyes took a 14-13 lead with 5:53 remaining in the first quarter. Michigan State guard Gabby Elliott later connected on a triple to cut the deficit to 19-17 with 2:22 remaining, but those would be the last points of the frame for the Spartans as Ohio State closed on a 10-0 run to lead 29-17 at the end of the first.

Both teams slowed down in the second, combining to shoot 2 of 17 from the field to begin the frame. Spartan guard Kamaria McDaniel scored a layup at 9:24 in the quarter, and the next points for either team came at 6:17 off a layup from Michigan State guard Tory Ozment.

Ohio State's first points of the quarter came on a free throw from Mikulasikova at 5:39, and the Spartans took advantage in the meantime, cutting the deficit to 30-25 with 4:27 remaining. But the Buckeyes' first basket of the frame – a layup from Mikesell – helped spark a 6-0 run in a matter of just 33 seconds to push the lead back to double digits. Ohio State eventually went into the locker room up 42-32.

The teams traded runs to open the second half, with Ohio State starting the third quarter on an 8-0 run – including two triples from Mikulasikova – and Michigan State responded with a 9-0 run to cut the deficit to 50-41 with 5:37 remaining in the frame before entering the fourth down just 59-54.

Ohio State was held scoreless for over three minutes to begin the fourth quarter, and Michigan State eventually made it 67-66 with 1:44 remaining on a triple from guard Matilda Ekh. Following the score, the Spartans were unable to find the basket on any of their next three possessions and were forced to foul the Buckeyes, and Mike-sell was able to close things out at the foul line, connecting four times, before Thierry beat the buzzer for the final margin.

The Buckeyes were led by a career-high 21 points from Thierry on 10-of-13 shooting in addition to nine rebounds. McMahon had a game-high 10 rebounds, while Mike-sell (16 points) and Greene (15 points) also reached double digits. Spartan guard Moira Joiner led her team with 16 points.

"My goal was to work on getting out of my comfort zone and then being comfortable being out of my comfort zone, and it's starting to work out," Thierry said. "It showed a little bit today, and hopefully I can keep it up moving forward."

Before Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes to press again, the Buckeyes will host the University of Albany on Dec. 16 and then play in the San Diego Invitational from Dec. 20-21. Ohio State will play South Florida in the first round on Dec. 20 before facing either Arkansas or Oregon the following day.

Ohio State will stay on the road to face Northwestern on Dec. 28 and return home – to the Covelli Center – to face Michigan on Dec. 31. The Buckeyes will then travel to Minnesota on Jan. 5 before hosting Illinois on Jan. 8.



Purdue Lands On Walters To Replace Brohm

The Boilermakers got caught with their engines off when head coach Jeff Brohm, who led Purdue for the past six seasons and took it to its first Big Ten Championship Game this season, took the head coaching job at Louisville, his alma mater, on Dec. 7.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

"On behalf of Purdue University, our football program and the entire Purdue community, we're grateful to Coach Brohm, his staff and our players for their dedicated efforts in elevating the performance and profile of Purdue football over the past six seasons," Purdue athletic director Mike Bobinski said. "We're very well positioned for the future and are focused on continuing to strive for greater and sustained success."

In his six seasons at the helm, Brohm posted a 36-34 record, picking up bowl victories in 2017 at the Foster Farms Bowl and 2021 at the Music City Bowl. He's posted 9-4 and 8-5 records the past two campaigns, with the former being Purdue's first nine-win season since 2003. The Boilermakers posted four consecutive seasons with at least nine losses before Brohm's arrival in 2017.

Purdue announced Dec. 13 that Illinois defensive coordinator Ryan Walters would take over Brohm's post. Walters, 36, has no prior head coaching experience and no connection to the Purdue program. He becomes the fourth-youngest head coach in college football, behind Arizona State's Kenny Dillingham (32), South Alabama's Kane Wommack (35) and Oregon's Dan Lanning (36).

His defenses at Illinois posted exceptional numbers, going from the nation's No. 29 scoring and No. 46 total defense during his first season in 2021 to Nos. 1 and 2, respectively, in 2022. Prior to his time with the Fighting Illini, he spent four seasons as defensive coordinator at Missouri. He played safety for Colorado during his career on the field, posting 81 tackles and two interceptions in his senior season to cap a career that featured 205 total takedowns and six picks.

"It's been a dream. I feel like I've been floating the past couple of days," Walters said at his introductory press conference. "But this is real. This is awesome. This is a dream come true."

Purdue will play in the Citrus Bowl against No. 16 LSU on Jan. 2 at 1 p.m. With Brohm already at Louisville, his younger brother, offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Brian Brohm, will serve as interim head coach for the postseason contest before Walters takes over starting in the off-season.

Joseph Face Charges Of Domestic Violence, Strangulation

Nebraska associate head coach and wide receivers coach Mickey Joseph was arrested on Nov. 30 and faces charges of strangulation and third-degree domestic assault.

According to a police affidavit filed Dec. 1, Joseph and a woman got into an argument during which he shoved her onto a couch and proceeded to put his hands around her throat, the woman said, and she couldn't breathe until she pushed him off of her. The woman also stated that Joseph pulled her hair, and police observed swelling around her left eye.

Joseph, 54, served as Nebraska's interim head coach for nine games after the program fired Scott Frost earlier this season, and the Cornhuskers went 3-6 under him to close the year. He was placed on administrative leave by the Cornhuskers on Nov. 30.

"I was made aware of the charges against Coach Joseph, and given the nature of the allegations and based on university policy, he has been placed on administrative leave," Nebraska athletic director Trev Alberts said. "We will have no additional comment at this time."

He is under contract through the end of next season. Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule, who was introduced on Nov. 28, had planned to meet with Joseph regarding his future with the program prior to his arrest, but that meeting never took place.

Smith Pleads Guilty To Misdemeanor

Michigan defensive tackle Mazi Smith pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor weapons charge Dec. 8 as part of a plea deal that will allow him to avoid having a criminal record after originally receiving a felony weapons charge.

According to his sworn testimony in court records, detective Jon McDonagh observed Smith driving an estimated 50 miles per hour in a 25 mile-per-hour zone on Oct. 7. Upon being pulled over, McDonagh witnessed Smith place a Glock 19 handgun behind his seat. Smith admitted to owning the gun when questioned, and when Smith exited the vehicle, McDonagh found two loaded magazines in his pockets.

"I was riding around with it because people are starting to know me more and I don't feel comfortable," Smith told police, according to the report.

The handgun was purchased legally and registered to the defensive lineman, but Smith did not have a concealed pistol license and thus was not allowed to keep it on his person. Smith was arrested and taken to the Ann Arbor Police Department, where he received a felony weapons charge, pending authorization. Information about Smith's charge did not become public until Dec. 1, the day after it was authorized on Nov. 30.

"He is not and never has been considered a threat to the university or community," Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said in a statement on Dec. 1. "Based on the information communicated to us, we will continue to allow the judicial process to play out. Mazi will continue to participate as a member of the team."

BIG

2022 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
x-Michigan	9	0	13	0	1.000
Ohio State	8	1	11	1	.917
Penn State	7	2	10	2	.833
Maryland	4	5	7	5	.583
Michigan State	3	6	5	7	.417
Indiana	2	7	4	8	.333
Rutgers	1	8	4	8	.333

West Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
x-Purdue	6	3	8	4	.667
Illinois	5	4	8	4	.667
Iowa	5	4	7	5	.583
Minnesota	5	4	8	4	.667
Wisconsin	4	5	6	6	.500
Nebraska	3	6	4	8	.333
Northwestern	1	8	1	11	.083

x – denotes division champion

Dec. 3 Game

Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis
Michigan 43, Purdue 22.

Smith has 45 tackles with 2½ tackles for loss playing on the interior of the Wolverines' defensive line this season. He was named first-team All-Big Ten by both the conference's coaches and media.

Smith is expected to be sentenced on Dec. 29 under the Holmes Youthful Trainee Act, which allows young adults to avoid a criminal record if they complete given conditions.

McNamara, All Transfer To Iowa

Former Michigan quarterback Cade McNamara announced on Dec. 1 that he is transferring to Iowa with two years of eligibility remaining.

Last season, McNamara led the Wolverines to their first win over Ohio State since 2011 and first Big Ten championship since 2004. He completed 64.2 percent of his throws for 2,576 yards and 15 touchdowns against six interceptions.

Former five-star prospect and current sophomore quarterback J.J. McCarthy won a battle for the starting signal caller job that ran into the early portion of the Wolverines' season in 2022, and he led Michigan to a 13-0 record complete with a second straight win over Ohio State and second straight Big Ten title. McCarthy connected on 65.3 percent of his attempts for 2,376 yards, 20 touchdowns and three interceptions.

While serving as McCarthy's backup, McNamara suffered a knee injury against UConn on Sept. 17 and later had surgery, ending his season. Another Michigan player who sustained a season-ending injury was tight end Erick All, who also entered the portal and will join McNamara with the Hawkeyes.

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BIG Conference Bowl Matchups

Guaranteed Rate Dec. 27 • 10:15 p.m. ESPN  Wisconsin (6-6) vs. Oklahoma State (7-5)	Pinstripe Dec. 29 • 2 p.m. ESPN  Minnesota (8-4) vs. Syracuse (7-5)	Duke's Mayo Dec. 30 • Noon ESPN  Maryland (7-5) vs. NC State (8-4)	Music City Dec. 31 • Noon ABC  Iowa (7-5) vs. Kentucky (7-5)	Fiesta (CFP Semifinal) Dec. 31 • 4 p.m. • ESPN  Michigan (12-1) vs. TCU (12-1)
Peach (CFP Semifinal) Dec. 31 • 8 p.m. • ESPN  Ohio State (11-1) vs. Georgia (13-0)	ReliaQuest Jan. 2 • Noon ESPN2  Illinois (8-4) vs. Mississippi State (8-4)	Citrus Jan. 2 • 1 p.m. ABC  Purdue (8-4) vs. LSU (9-4)	Rose Jan. 2 • 5 p.m. ESPN  Penn State (10-2) vs. Utah (10-3)	

"Wolverine nation, love you guys but it's time for me to move on," All said on Twitter. "I know some of you are wondering why I would leave and the answer to that question is unexpected. Not everything/everyone are what they seem and I learned that from my time here at Michigan. Sometimes you have to let go and do what's best for you and your family."

All reeled in 38 passes for 437 yards and two touchdowns last season for Michigan. He played in just three games due to his injury in 2022, bringing in only three catches for 36 yards. In his stead, tight ends Luke Schoonmaker (34 catches, 386 yards, 3 TD) and Colston Loveland (12, 199, 2) found success for the Wolverines.

Several Others Hit The Portal

McNamara and All weren't the only two transfers from Big Ten schools as the NCAA transfer portal window opened Dec. 5. According to Sports Illustrated, there have been more than 100 players from the conference to enter their names, and more than 1,200 FBS players across the country had entered the portal as of Dec. 13.

Maryland has the most departing talent in terms of sheer numbers at the time of press, with 15 players currently transferring out of head coach Mike Locksley's program. Indiana is not far behind, with 14 players having entered the portal.

Thus far, the Terrapins have gained back only one player from the portal in Cincinnati wide receiver Ja'Quan Sheppard. The Hoosiers haven't added anyone while losing quarterbacks Connor Bazalak and Jack Tuttle as well as linebacker Dasan McCullough, a former top-100 national prospect and Ohio State commit who will play at Oklahoma next season.

Three other Big Ten schools have lost double-digit numbers of football players, with Iowa, Nebraska and Wisconsin each losing exactly 10 players. Illinois and Ohio State each have a conference-low three players in the portal.

Outside All, McCullough and McNamara, the most notable transfer out in the Big Ten is arguably Wisconsin quarterback Graham

Mertz. Mertz played in four seasons for the Badgers and started from 2020-22, completing 59.5 percent of his passes for 5,405 yards with 38 touchdowns to 26 interceptions. His destination is not yet known, but he will have two years of eligibility remaining.

"I am grateful for my time as a Badger. My time in Madison has lessons that go far beyond the football field," Mertz said in a statement on Twitter. "I want to thank Coach (Paul) Chryst, Coach (Bobby) Engram, (graduate assistant) Keller Chryst, our strength staff, our training room staff and everyone that is a part of this program for making my dream come true."

Iowa lost two key pieces to offset its above-mentioned gains, with linebacker Justin Jacobs – who played high school football at Englewood (Ohio) Northmont – and wide receiver Keagan Johnson both bolting for other programs.

Jacobs picked up 53 tackles last year before this season was derailed by a season-ending injury, and he would have been the team's top linebacker in 2023 with Jack Campbell leaving for the NFL draft. Johnson also suffered a season-ending injury that held him out of all but two games this year after finishing with 18 receptions for 352 yards and two touchdowns in 13 games last season.

Big Ten Players Departing Early For NFL Draft

In addition to the transfer portal, departures for the NFL draft are also causing roster attrition throughout the conference.

Wisconsin junior linebacker Nick Herbig, the conference leader in sacks with 11, is among the most notable draft declarations to date. The Kauai, Hawaii, native was a consensus first-team All-Big Ten selection and second-team Walter Camp All-American.

"Thank you for accepting a young kid from over 4,000 miles away in Kauai and making my family and I feel at home the past three years," Herbig said on Twitter. "I appreciate Coach Chryst, Coach (Jim) Leonhard and Coach (Robert) April for the opportunity to be a Badger and represent the Red and White. You helped turn me into a man on and off the field."

Maryland junior wide receiver Rakim Jarrett, who's posted 1,552 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns in his career, is also departing early, alongside fellow wide receiver Don-tay Demus, who has 2,008 career yards and 14 touchdowns. Jacob Copeland, who played with the Terrapins for one season after four years at Florida and has 1,742 career receiving yards, joined Demus and Jarrett to make it a trifecta of Maryland receivers with

at least 1,500 career yards to declare for the upcoming NFL draft.

Other declarations include Penn State fourth-year cornerback Joey Porter Jr., a consensus first-team All-Big Ten selection at his position, who will not make use of his remaining eligibility. Neither will Nebraska fourth-year wide receiver Trey Palmer, one of four 1,000-yard receivers in the conference this season.

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Rohlik: Slur, Fallout Do Not Define Program

Steve Rohlik understands the microscope his hockey team is under in the wake of alleged racial slurs uttered by senior forward Kamil Sadlocha to Jagger Joshua, an African-American player for Michigan State, and the aftermath in which Sadlocha was not suspended by the Big Ten or Ohio State following an investigation.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

What the Buckeye head coach doesn't accept is questioning the culture of his program.

In a sport dominated by white players, he points out that OSU had at least one African-American player on the roster for eight seasons until this season, with Christian Lampasso (2014-18), Joshua's brother Dakota (2015-19) and Quinn Preston, an alternate captain his junior and senior seasons of 2020-21 and 2021-22, all spending time on the roster.

"That's where I have a problem," Rohlik told Buckeye Sports Bulletin on Nov. 30. "I mean, the people that know me the best understand what I'm all about, what our culture is all about, what our program is all about from Lamps to Quinn to Dakota.

"Never could I imagine that something like this would be a discussion point. You could ask my players for the last 10 years (as head coach), 13 years since I've been here – equality and respect is No. 1. The one thing I talk about from day one is respect, no matter what color, what race or anything like that.

"You should be in a safe place in hockey, in any sport or in life and that's a firm belief of mine and it's been a belief in the culture of this team for as long as I've been here."

That hasn't stopped the criticism for the

way the matter was handled by Ohio State and the conference. Joshua said Sadlocha made multiple slurs during the game of Nov. 11 in East Lansing, Mich. Sadlocha, who is white, was given a game misconduct penalty (ejection) at 10:39 of the second period after Joshua said an official heard a remark by Sadlocha.

A source told BSB that Sadlocha was accused of using a monkey reference directed toward Joshua.

The Big Ten later investigated and in statement said, "Due to the absence of indisputable evidence presented to the conference, the conference has not imposed further disciplinary action."

With that, Sadlocha played in the two-games series against Notre Dame on Nov. 18 and 19. On Nov. 21, Joshua posted on Twitter a strong condemnation that Sadlocha went unpunished. Following the avalanche of support for Joshua, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said in a Nov. 22 statement that Sadlocha was sent home and not with the team at that time.

Rohlik was asked by BSB if public pressure prompted the move, considering he was fine with Sadlocha playing only a few days earlier. In other words, what changed?

"A lot of things came out at that point, right or wrong," Rohlik said. "There's a lot of things on Kamil's plate, a lot of things on everybody's plate at that point. I think the decision was made at some point that he felt maybe going home was a discussion and maybe it's best for him not to play right now. That was a decision we made.

"Moving forward we want to make sure that we're doing the right things for the team, Kamil, for the incident, for the process.

"Right now, we're unsure when the time will be for him to come back. He is still part of the team. He is still in school."

Rohlik said he was comfortable with

the decision to play Sadlocha rather than sit him for an undetermined number of games.

"At the time (of the Notre Dame series) that was what was talked about and relayed down to us, that he should not be suspended," he said.

"Obviously there was a full investigation. There was a full process, and it went to a supplementary group at the Big Ten above and beyond the coaches from either team or the administrations of either team.

"Everything beyond that point was taken care of by that group, and they did a full investigation and came back and basically said, this is where we see it, that there should be no other (discipline), he should not be suspended."

The Big Ten in its statement said it agreed with the decision to issue the game misconduct to Sadlocha. Rohlik was questioned whether Sadlocha taking a leave of absence was an admission of guilt.

"At the end of the day, for us, there's nothing that came out from (the conference) that said absolutely, 'This is what was said,' " Rohlik said. "Yes, we're

dealing with the incident. There's something that happened that a linesman heard and a player heard. It was taken to the league supplementary discipline process.

"We've got to do the best job we can on our end as far as just educating ourselves to try to put our program in the best position possible to do what we need to do next. And that's from the administration to the coaches to the team."

Rohlik said he is not aware of anyone from Ohio State having contacted Joshua directly. In Smith's statement, he issued a public apology to Joshua.

"I haven't talked to Jagger, personally," Rohlik said. "I have spoken with Dakota. Obviously he played for me for years, and he understands how I feel about him and his family, and I think he knows how our program feels about his family."

Joshua said in an interview on the MSU Coaches Show that he would be willing to talk with Sadlocha about the impact of his words.

"You know, people make mistakes and I'm not perfect either," Joshua said. "This could be just a life-learning lesson for all of us involved and everybody that is a part of it."

Michigan State plays at Value City Arena on Jan. 6 and 7.

Aftermath

Moments prior to speaking exclusively with BSB, Rohlik and senior captain Jake Wise met with the media outside the locker room at Value City Arena.

In their first games since Sadlocha's departure, the Buckeyes had a disappointing series at Long Island University, splitting the two games against a second-year program that entered the weekend with two wins for the season.

Wise said he and his teammates were still dealing with everything that had hap-

pened over the previous weeks.

"It's been a lot," he said. "Not something you expect to go through during the season at all, and obviously really unfortunate, but we're working on moving forward as a group and just continuing on and playing hockey.

"I mean, it's pretty difficult. But we've got a smart group of guys that that really care about hockey and we all care about each other."

In Smith's apology statement to Joshua, he said the team would "complete education on racial sensitivity, diversity, equity, inclusion and the use of respectful dialog."

To date, the educational programming has not been defined.

"There's no room for anything like that (slurs) in hockey or sports or life," Rohlik said. "We're trying to figure out the right means of moving forward and educating and trying to help these guys get in a position where something like this never happens again."

Said Wise, "We all want to be better, and I think we can handle it by just trying to grow as a group, grow as an individual and that's all you can do."

One Of Two

As they did at Long Island, the No. 15 Buckeyes (10-7-1, 5-5-0-0 Big Ten) lost the first game at No. 5 Penn State, 2-1, before taking the second, 4-3, at Pegula Arena in University Park, Pa., on Dec. 2 and 3.

In the opener, Cole McWard tied it 1-1 for the Buckeyes with 3:58 remaining in the second period, but Jimmy Dowd scored the winner for the Nittany Lions (14-3-0, 6-3-0-1) with 5:31 left in the third.

In the rematch, Jakub Dobeš made 37 saves, while McWard and Mason Lohrei each had two assists. Wise, Jaedon Leslie, Tate Singleton and Joe Dunlap scored for the Buckeyes.

Singleton broke a 2-2 tie at 14:53 in the first period before Dunlap redirected a pass from Patrick Guzzo for a 4-2 lead at 4:14 of the second. Penn State got to within 4-3 at 6:22 of the third.

Penn State pulled its goalie with 1:28 remaining and went on the power play with 1:04 left for a 6-on-4 advantage but Dobeš made three saves and Wise had a block to preserve the win.

Next

The Buckeyes were scheduled to play at Bowling Green on Dec. 16 and host the Falcons on Dec. 17 for their final games of the calendar year.

Smart Choice

Wise is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for November.

He had seven points (two goals, five assists) in six games, including assisting on all three goals by Cam Thiesing in a 4-1 win at Long Island on Nov. 26. Wise led the Buckeyes with 18 points (seven goals, 11 assists) in 18 games.

For recaps of all Ohio State games, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



Kamil Sadlocha

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For November



Jake Wise
Senior Forward
Reading, Mass.

OSU Seeking Health As Several Wrestlers Rehab

Wrestling has a combination of factors that make injuries a serious concern for most teams. The most obvious is the physical demand of the sport, with athletes being twisted and slammed and pulled and pushed and otherwise contorted while attempting to do the same to others.

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

Then there's the lack of depth that results when only one wrestler at each weight class can start in a given dual meet and compete for conference and national championships.

So not only are injuries prevalent, but they can also be very damaging to a team's outlook. And right now, Ohio State is certainly not the healthiest it can be. Multiple ranked wrestlers have missed time with various ailments the past few weeks.

"It was a tough weekend for us (at the Cliff Keen Invitational from Dec. 2-3)," said Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan. "Everything is fixable, but the main thing is we have to get everyone healthy."

Three of Ohio State's starters have missed matches. Freshman phenom Jesse Mendez, the nation's No. 15 wrestler at 133 pounds according to InterMat, did not wrestle at the Cliff Keen Invitational or in OSU's most recent dual meet against Kent State on Dec. 11. Redshirt freshman Paddy Gallagher, who is No. 18 at 157 pounds, also did not appear at either event.

Ohio State junior Carson Kharchla, No. 9 at 165 pounds, had to bow out of the Cliff Keen via medical forfeit after sustaining an injury of his own and missed the ensuing dual meet against Kent State.

Two more wrestlers haven't been wrestling at full strength, according to Ryan, with seniors Ethan Smith and Tate Orndorff, the No. 7 and 9 wrestlers at 174 pounds and heavyweight, respectively, each limited. Smith and Orndorff both medically forfeited from the Cliff Keen, with Smith exiting after a 2-2 run and Orndorff finishing 3-2.

"The focus of the team right now is healing," Ryan said. "We have to get healed up so we can train hard and get ready for this Big Ten schedule."

Ohio State competes again at the Collegiate Duals in New Orleans Dec. 19-20 then receives a few weeks off that should afford it the chance to get healthy before its second Big Ten dual meet of the season at Indiana on Jan. 6. That will kick off a run of eight consecutive dual meets against conference opponents for the Buckeyes.

OSU Eighth At Cliff Keen Invite

Ohio State's above-mentioned injuries contributed to a mere eighth-place finish (tied with NC State) at the 34-team Cliff Keen Invitational, though the tournament was not without some highlights for the Buckeyes.

Redshirt senior Sammy Sasso took home the top prize in his division at 149 pounds, posting a perfect 5-0 record that included two pins and a technical fall. His last three matches were all against ranked opponents in his division. He pinned No. 25 Alec Hagan of Ohio University, beat No. 7 Yahya Thomas of Northwestern by an 8-2 decision and won the title match against No. 4 Kyle Parco of Arizona State by a 6-2 decision. Sasso himself is ranked No. 3 at 149 pounds.

"It felt good to compete like I know how," Sasso said. "The confidence has always been there, but you have to do the right things all the way throughout. You have to get to bed on time. You have to eat right. Fixing those little things that I wasn't doing perfectly definitely helps your mental state when you step on the mat."

Two other wrestlers landed in the top five at the event for the Buckeyes, with senior 184-pounder Kaleb Romero taking fourth and senior 125-pounder Malik Heinselman landing in fifth place. Romero, ranked No. 5 in his weight class, posted wins over No. 11 Cade King of South Dakota State and No. 7 Hunter Bolen of Virginia Tech en route to his 4-2 finish, though Bolen did get revenge on Romero in sudden victory during the pair's third-place match. Romero's other loss came against No. 2 Trent Hidlay of NC State.

Heinselman, No. 11 at 125 pounds, responded to an opening match defeat at the hands of No. 21 Brett Ungar (Cornell) by rattling off five straight victories, including defeats of No. 29 Caleb Smith (Appalachian State) and Ungar in a rematch. No. 10 Brandon Kaylor of Oregon State handed Heinselman his second loss, but he bested No. 28 Tanner Jordan (South Dakota State) in his final match of the invitational to take fifth place.

"You see a wide range of competitors that throw different things at you," Ryan said of the Keen. "The more tough things are thrown at you, the better chance you have at figuring it out in March. We've been going to this event for quite a while because we learn a lot about our team."

Redshirt junior Dylan D'Emilio, ranked No. 18 at 141 pounds, also placed after going 4-3. He finished eighth and saw his best victory against No. 20 Cole Mattin, who wrestles for Michigan. Despite Kharchla's medical forfeit, he still finished eighth at 165 pounds with a 3-2 record.

Buckeyes Blind Golden Flashes

OSU responded to its disappointment at the Cliff Keen Invitational by routing Kent State 32-9 in a dual meet at the Covelli Center in Columbus Dec. 11, with two Ohio State grapplers picking up ranked victories.

Heinselman knocked off No. 26 Jake Ferri 4-3, using a bonus point from riding time to secure the win. Sasso dominated No. 32 Kody Komara via technical fall 19-3, racking up two four-point near-falls and five takedowns to add five points to the Buckeyes' score for the dual.

The Golden Flashes' only two individual victories came as a result of Ohio State

injuries. With Gallagher out, junior Isaac Wilcox had to fill in at 157 pounds and lost a 6-3 decision to Kent State freshman Keegan Knapp. With Kharchla also still recovering one class up, the Buckeyes ate a forfeit at 165 pounds, handing the Golden Flashes six of their nine points.

In addition to Sasso, three others picked up wins by technical fall for OSU. Smith took down senior Mason Karpinski at 174 pounds, 21-6, while Romero crushed senior Tyler Bates, 25-10, at 184 and redshirt senior Gavin Hoffman picked up a 21-6 win over Ryan Boyle at 197 pounds.

Two Champions At CSU Open

Some of Ohio State's backups not wrestling in the dual meet against Kent State took part in the Cleveland State Open at Cleveland State University on Dec. 11, and two of them returned to Columbus with titles.

Junior Bryce Hepner, who wrestled unattached at 165 pounds, had easily the biggest day of anyone by clearing his bracket with a 4-0 record. He pulled perhaps the most stunning upset of the entire tournament in the championship match against Michigan's Cameron Amine, the No. 4 wrestler in the country in the weight class, defeating him by a 6-4 decision.

It was Hepner's first action of the season since defeating Kharchla in the team's

wrestle-offs on Oct. 27 in a 2-1 decision. With Kharchla returning as an All-American from the 2021-22 season, there wasn't consideration at that point to start Hepner at 165. No indication has been given yet as to whether Hepner's upset at the CSU Open could change that.

"Bryce did a really good job, he competed really hard against Carson and wrestled the match that he had to to win," Ohio State assistant coach J Jagers said Nov. 9. "Carson's got to get a little more urgency on his finishes, maybe not his best performance. Not to take anything away from Bryce, but (Carson) was seventh in the country last year. And Bryce is striving to get to that level of consistency."

Despite his now 4-0 record wrestling unattached this year, Hepner is just 7-6 in his collegiate career when representing the Buckeyes and 12-2 wrestling unattached. This is his first season at 165 pounds after previously filling in at 157.

Freshman Seth Shumate picked up the other championship for the Buckeyes, running through the 184-pound weight class with a 4-0 record and defeating Rutgers' John Poznanski – an All-American from two seasons ago – in the finals. Among other Ohio State wrestlers, redshirt freshman Andres Gonzales finished second at 125 pounds, while freshman Brendan McCrone placed fourth at 125 and redshirt sophomore Gavin Bell grabbed fifth at 184.

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OSU Reaches First Elite Eight Since 1994

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Jen Flynn Oldenburg took over the Ohio State volleyball program, it saw an immediate spike in quality.

The team had seen three consecutive losing seasons before she arrived at the helm. Hired during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Oldenburg weathered that chaos alongside the typical rigors of a coaching transition and guided her squad to a 16-4 record that culminated in a loss in the Sweet 16 against Florida.

OSU rattled off a 27-6 mark in 2021, but the campaign ended at the same signpost, a loss in the Sweet 16, this time to Georgia Tech. It left a sour taste in the mouths of Oldenburg and her players that their results stagnated from year one to year two.

But in year three, the Buckeyes finally broke through to do what no volleyball unit from the school had done since 2004. After a 19-9 regular season earned them a No. 3 seed in the NCAA tournament, they won three matches to make it to a regional final, standing among the sport's final eight teams. Even though Ohio State's tournament run then ended to No. 1-overall seeded Texas on Dec. 10, it was a step forward for a program still seeking its first national title.

"I saw that from day one when I got the job, that this is a team that wanted more and wanted the program to be back on the map," Oldenburg said Dec. 8. "I think over the course

of the last two years, gaining the experience we did in the postseason – not the results we wanted, of course – but the experience and the leadership and the drive of the upperclassmen not to just put us on the map but do a little bit more, I think that's the reason we are in this position right now, today."

The outlook wasn't always so grand for the Buckeyes. They sleepwalked to an 0-3 start to the season – all losses to ranked opponents, with a pair of defeats to then-No. 2 Texas and a loss to No. 15 San Diego – en route to a pedestrian 5-5 record through 10 matches.

"I think our team grew a lot throughout the season," senior outside hitter Jenaisya Moore said. "If your team stays the same, I would be concerned. I think we've gone through a lot of bumps and a lot of smooth patches, but I think ultimately we lean on each other and we just trust each other that we'll be there."

Soon Ohio State hit its stride, so much so that at one point it was one of the hottest teams in collegiate volleyball, rattling off 14 consecutive victories from Sept. 28 to Nov. 13. Among their fallen foes in that stretch were Penn State twice (ranked No. 13 and 11), No. 10 Minnesota, No. 15 Purdue and No. 4 Nebraska, and they tallied two wins over Michigan.

"I think every single team out there is different from game to game," junior opposite hitter Emily Londot said. "You learn something new every game that propels your game forward, and we're a completely different team from the first weekend out."

A bevy of talent catalyzed the Buckeyes' winning torrent, perhaps none more so than Londot. Her 463 kills led the team by a healthy margin, and she added 311 digs on the defensive side of things, second most on the team. Such two-way proficiency earned her Northeast Region Player of the Year from the American Volleyball Coaches Association and status as first-team All-Big Ten.

Two teammates joined Londot as first-team selections for the conference, with senior libero Kylie Murr and senior setter Mac Podraza also honored, with Podraza as a unanimous selection. Murr mounted a team-high 530 digs and took home Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, and Podraza added 1,299 assists and earned Big Ten Setter of the Year. Podraza became the fifth Ohio State setter to reach 4,000 assists in her career, hitting that mark in the team's final match of the season to finish with 4,001 in her time in Columbus. Murr broke the school's career record for digs, her total now up to 1,935.

An additional two volleyballers donning scarlet and gray found themselves on an All-Big Ten team, with senior outside hitter Gabby Gonzales and junior middle blocker Rylee Rader landing second-team honors. Senior outside hitter Mia Grunze was a sportsman-ship honoree as well.

OSU's stove-hot streak then turned freezer-cold, however. The team dropped four straight contests to close the regular season, and while it still easily made the NCAA tournament as a No. 3 seed, the squad's momentum needed recovering.

"It was definitely not great," Londot said. "But we moved into the tournament with one goal in mind, (and) that's to make it to the end. But we knew that we had to go one game at a time, and with each game comes every single practice before that. So we just go every single day, every minute counts."

Fourteenth-seeded Tennessee State provided ample opportunity to get Ohio State back on track in its first-round match at home in the Covelli Center. The Tigers lost in straight sets, the closest being a 25-15 OSU

rout in the final set.

That pushed the Buckeyes through to the second round against a much tougher opponent on paper in No. 6 USC. But the Trojans were dispatched with similar ease, falling in straight sets to send Ohio State to the Sweet 16 for a third year in a row, looking for its first win on that stage since 2004.

"We talk a lot about playing Buckeye volleyball, and we saw that at the end of the Big Ten season, but really in the first two rounds of the NCAAs," Oldenburg said prior to the regional semifinal. "I think it really showed in the USC match, and I think with that type of play and a loose and free type of mentality, that serves us well heading into the match (against Minnesota)."

Ohio State's opponent for the match would be a familiar one in Minnesota. The two teams split a pair of contests in the regular season, with the Buckeyes winning in straight sets at Minnesota on Oct. 12 before the Golden Gophers retaliated in Columbus on Nov. 25, winning 3-1.

During the regional semifinal, Londot launched perhaps the best performance of her career to date. She racked up a match-high 29 kills, 13 more than anyone else and a career high for the Utica, Ohio, native. Ohio State faced issues with Minnesota's block early, falling 25-22 in the first set and going down 6-2 to open the second, causing Oldenburg to call a timeout to refocus her unit.

"It was about controlling our side," Oldenburg said. "We talked about it in the timeout – we don't ride their momentum, we've got to create our own. Our leadership really took hold out of that timeout, and that's how we went on."

From there, the match changed. The Buckeyes took control of the second set with a late 5-0 run to go ahead 22-18, spring-boarding them to a 25-21 victory in the frame. Each of the next two sets bore a similar result. Gonzales offered the exclamation point as her last shot hit the floor for the 25-19 win in the fourth set, and the team was finally celebrating an appearance in the regional finals.

"Just an amazing day for Buckeye volleyball," Oldenburg said after the win. "For this group to state some goals early on in the off-season, and to come out and accomplish this 'more' that we've been talking about, it's pretty special."

Ohio State had ambitions for the Final Four beyond that win, even against Texas, which was not only the top seed in the tournament but also beat the Buckeyes twice during the regular season. Ohio State managed to respond down 1-0 to take its second set against the Longhorns 25-21, but Texas pulled away in front of a home crowd in Austin, and defeats of 25-13 and 25-21 in the final sets sealed Ohio State's tournament fate.

The run to the Elite Eight was another step forward by the program this season, and now Oldenburg will look to maintain that momentum.

"It's a great team, and the opportunity to play against them at (their) home in a regional match like this, I think it's something that's memorable for our student athletes," Oldenburg said following the loss. "It just gets us ready for more. Back in the gym."

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, W 54-10; **29** at Penn State, W 44-31.

Nov. 5 at Northwestern, W 21-7 **12** INDIANA, W 56-14 **19** at Maryland, W 43-30; **26** MICHIGAN, L 45-23.

Dec. 31 at Peach Bowl vs. Georgia.

2023 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 at Indiana; **9** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (7-2, 1-0)

Nov. 1 CHAMINADE (EXH.), W 101-57; **7** ROBERT MORRIS, W 91-57; **10** CHARLESTON SOUTHERN, W 82-56; **16** EASTERN ILLINOIS, W 65-43; **21** at Maui Invitational vs. San Diego State, L 88-77; **22** at Maui Invitational vs. Cincinnati, W 81-53; **23** at Maui Invitational vs. Texas Tech, W 80-73; **30** at Duke, L 81-72.

Dec. 3 ST. FRANCIS, W 96-59; **8** RUTGERS, W 67-66; **17** at New York, vs. North Carolina; **21** MAINE; **29** ALABAMA A&M.

Jan. 1 at Northwestern; **5** PURDUE; **8** at Maryland; **12** MINNESOTA; **15** at Rutgers; **18** at Nebraska; **21** IOWA; **24** at Illinois; **28** at Indiana.

Feb. 2 WISCONSIN; **5** at Michigan; **9** NORTHWESTERN; **12** MICHIGAN STATE; **16** at Iowa; **19** at Purdue; **23** PENN STATE; **26** ILLINOIS.

March 1 MARYLAND; **6** at Michigan State.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (10-0, 2-0)

Oct. 31 NOTRE DAME COLLEGE (EXH.), W 108-33.

Nov. 8 TENNESSEE, W 87-75; **13** at Boston College, W 82-64; **17** at Ohio, W 86-56; **20** MCNEESE STATE, W 99-43; **23** WRIGHT STATE, W 105-52; **27** NORTH ALABAMA, W, 105-67; **30** at Louisville, W 96-77.

Dec. 4 at Rutgers, W 82-70; **8** NEW HAMPSHIRE, W 92-36; **11** MICHIGAN STATE, W 74-68; **16** UALBANY; **20** at South Florida; **21** at Arkansas/Oregon; **28** at Northwestern; **31** MICHIGAN.

Jan. 5 at Minnesota; **8** ILLINOIS; **14** at Nebraska; **19** NORTHWESTERN; **23** IOWA; **26** at Indiana; **29** PURDUE.

Feb. 1 at Wisconsin; **5** at Maryland; **8** MINNESOTA; **13** INDIANA; **16** at Penn State; **20** at Michigan; **24** MARYLAND.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (10-7-1, 5-5)

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, T 0-0; L 1-6; **20-21** BENTLEY, W 9-2; W 3-1; **28-29** MINNESOTA, W 6-4, L 4-2.

Nov. 10-11 at Michigan State, L 2-4, L 3-4; **18-19** NOTRE DAME, W 5-2, L 1-0; **25-26** at Long Island University, L 3-2, W 4-1.

Dec. 2-3 at Penn State, L 2-1, W 4-3; **16** at Bowling Green; **17** 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 (14-2-2, 13-2-1)

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, W 4-0; W 5-2; **21-22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 3-2 OT; W 3-2 **28-29** MINNESOTA, L 4-2, T 4-4 (SOW).

Nov. 5 at St. Thomas, W 4-0; **6** at St. Thomas, W 6-0 **18** BEMIDJI STATE, W 5-0; **19** BEMIDJI STATE, W 7-1; **22** COLGATE, T 4-4 (OT); **23** COLGATE, W 6-2.

Dec. 2 at Minnesota Duluth, W 2-1; **3** at Minnesota Duluth, L 5-4 (OT); **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.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (22-10, 15-5)

Aug. 26 TEXAS, L 3-0; **27** L 3-1.

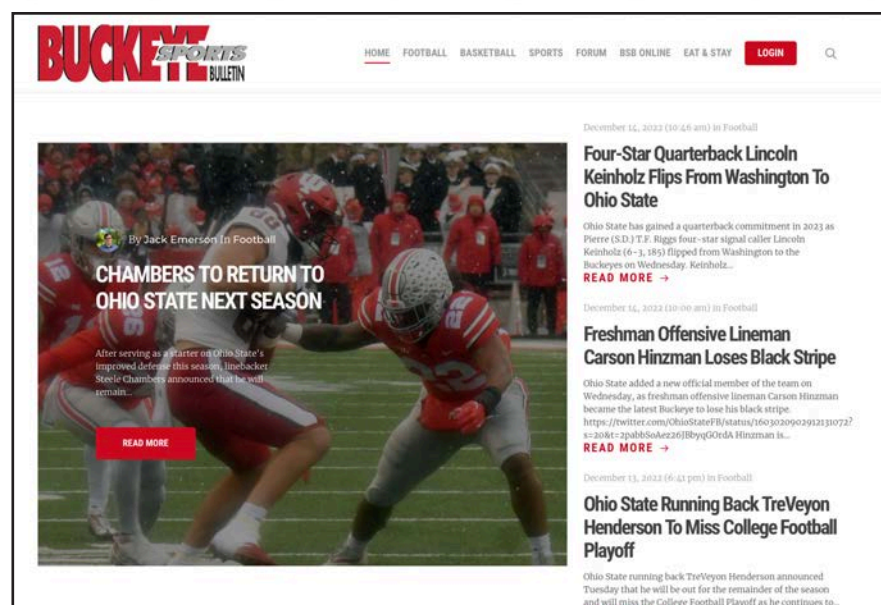
Sept. 3 San Diego, L 3-0; **4** Louisville, W 3-1; **9**, BYU, W 3-0; **11** Georgia Tech, W 3-1; **17** Tennessee, W 3-0; **18** Pittsburgh, L 3-0; **23** Iowa, W 3-0; **24** Nebraska, L 3-2; **28** Michigan, W 3-1.

Oct. 1 Indiana, W 3-1; **7** PENN STATE, W 3-2; **9** NORTHWESTERN, W, 3-1; **12** Minnesota, W 3-0; **15** RUTGERS, W 3-0; **19** ILLINOIS, W 3-0; **21** IOWA, W 3-1; **26** MICHIGAN, W 3-0; **29** Penn State, W 3-2.

Nov. 4 Northwestern, W 3-0; **5** Michigan State, W 3-0; **10** Purdue, W 3-1.; **13** NEBRASKA, W 3-1.; **18** Maryland, L 3-1.; **20** INDIANA, L 3-2; **25** MINNESOTA, L 3-1; **26** WISCONSIN, L 3-1.

Dec. 2 NCAA Tournament First Round vs. Tennessee State, W 3-0; **3** NCAA Tournament Second Round s. USC, W 3-0; **8** NCAA Regional Semifinal vs. Minnesota, W 3-1; **10** NCAA Regional Final vs. Texas, L 3-1.

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Buckeyes Have To Play Like Bulldogs In CFP

Georgia may be known as the Bulldogs, but Ohio State is the team that will need to play with a bulldog mentality if it wants to win the Peach Bowl.

Last we saw, the Buckeyes they were scraping themselves off the turf at Ohio Stadium after losing to rival Michigan for the second straight time. While this one wasn't nearly as dominant for the Wolverines – don't forget, it was a one-score game halfway through the fourth quarter – it was still a shot fired across the Buckeyes' bow.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Even if for only a short time, the Wolverines have wrested Big Ten superiority from the Buckeyes and look like the better long-term forecast at this moment. And it's all because of toughness.

After nearly taking an NFL job, Jim Harbaugh returned to Michigan and reshaped his approach and his team, and it has worked. Michigan is 25-2 over the last two seasons, with the losses coming to Michigan State last season and in last year's College Football Playoff semifinal against Georgia, which would go on to the win the national title. Harbaugh brought in younger, more energetic coaches, flipped the script against his rivals to where the Wolverines were the aggressors, dictating terms while the Buckeyes were counterpunchers who threw their shot too late.

Ryan Day also did a little retooling of his coaching staff, getting better on defense with Jim Knowles and getting more consistent line play after the hiring of Justin Frye. The results during the season were much more even and predictable than in 2021, when OSU pretty much had to outscore teams and hold on for dear life too many times. This year's defense – save for the Michigan game – was one that was vastly improved and showed itself to be one of the best in the country for much of the season.

Yet none of that mattered when it faced the brute that was Michigan.

The Wolverines are not more talented, yet they were the team not playing scared. They called a fullback pop pass, adjusted to have more quarterback runs when Blake Corum couldn't go, and even took shots downfield, an aspect of the offense that had been missing for most of the season. The Buckeyes? They played their usual game, getting out to a fast start and then stagnating. It seems that Day runs out of ideas after the initial flurry, and when the Buckeyes really have to dig down, there are problems.

Which is why it will be very interesting to see the mind-set Ohio State takes into the Peach Bowl.

Trivia Break: What CFP record will the Buckeyes set if they beat Georgia? The answer at the end of this column.

The fans are definitely buying into the idea of redemption, selling out their allotment of tickets in record time and forcing the game to add 2,000 standing room only seats.

OSU fans usually travel, and this one is no exception. Maybe it's the fact that the Buckeyes have never played in the Peach Bowl, or maybe it's because it's a heavyweight matchup, or maybe it's because fans think that if they can somehow will their team to an upset of Georgia, it means another shot at the Wolverines. What better scenario to erase the hurt of the November loss than to turn the tables and beat Michigan for the national title?

But first things first. Ohio State will need to change its approach and play the alpha. It's one thing to flex your muscles against Arkansas State and Rutgers, but another to do it against teams that can hit back like Michigan and like Georgia.

The Buckeyes were still in the game against Michigan with a chance to seize momentum, but Day decided to punt on fourth-and-3 from his own 32-yard line with a lot of time left in the fourth quarter. He said afterward that making them drive the ball seemed like the right thing to do, but OSU had punted on its previous drive, too, one that nudged into Michigan territory.

For a guy who gets a rep as this innovative play caller, Day seemed to give up on his offense at that point. And the play the rest of the way bore that out, as OSU looked unsteady and mustered only a field goal in the final 30 minutes of play.

Decisions such as those make people think that you lack killer instinct, and that seeps down to the players. As talented as they are, I don't know that Ohio State has the killer instinct needed to take down Georgia.

You *never* doubted whether OSU was mentally tough when Urban Meyer was on the sidelines. Maybe it self-destructed against lesser foes on occasion, but in big games it always showed up, and more often than not played the role of bully. Now it is routinely having its lunch money stolen and seems unwilling to do anything about it.

C.J. Stroud is a great talent, a wonderful quarterback, but I've seldom seen him get angry or thought he would will his team to victory. Justin Fields had that quality. Troy Smith had that quality. Stroud may be more talented than either, but does he have the clutch gene, the personality that will tell his teammates that he's ready to put them on his shoulders and carry them through? If he has it, he needs to let it out against Georgia.

And Day would be wise to throw caution to the wind, too. Go for it on fourth down, within reason. Run something unconventional, like a double reverse or a middle slant. Call a quarterback run from the pistol, one where Stroud just tucks the ball and goes. Do something that makes it look like you have a take-no-prisoners mentality.

The last time the Buckeyes came in as the fourth seed, they played with house money as few people thought they had a chance against heavily favored Alabama. That same mentality was on display in that game and in the national title contest against Oregon, where OSU was a six-point underdog but won going away to seal the national title.

If Ohio State loses this one in the same fashion it has lost its last three marquee contests – Michigan the last two years and Oregon early in 2021 – then more questions will arise about whether Day runs a country club with a bunch of soft players rather than

a football team of guys who want to knock you into next week.

Fill Your Stockings With Football

The holiday season doesn't only mean family and celebrations and presents and marathons of "Elf" and "Christmas Vacation" – it also means bowl games.

The number of postseason contests has crept to 43, with only about 10 of those serving any real purpose. As I say every year, bowls should be a reward for a good season, not a bone thrown to mediocre teams. And there is a lot of mediocrity in this year's bowl slate. And yes – if I am cutting the bowl games, I am also sticking with four teams in the College Football Playoff. That is something that should be reserved for excellence, not "fun" matchups. If you want fun, watch the NCAA Tournament in March. You get upsets and seldom have the best team winning.

The regular season is one long playoff, with various stakes each weekend. In a 12-team playoff, the stakes of Ohio State-Michigan would have been reduced nationally as neither team would have been out of the mix.

As it went, the Buckeyes crept into the final spot, but that wasn't known at kickoff. The pervading thought was the loser would likely be out, or would need a lot of help to get in. That meant the margin for error was very small. That won't be the case with an expanded playoff, and the sport will be the worse for it. Yes, there will be more games that mean something but fewer games that mean everything. And it's yet to be determined whether that's something I can live with.

So while I do say every year that the bowls should be reduced, I also say every year that I'll watch as many of them as possible because that's what the holidays are for. If you love college football the way I do, you'll take every chance to watch even the worst matchups as it's the last time we will see anything meaningful until August.

Here is one man's stab at predicting the Big Ten bowl games. It gets harder each year with opt-outs and players heading to the transfer portal – you just don't know who is going to be available for the bowl game.

But, as I do when out amongst the denizens at the mall looking for that last perfect gift, I will push on and make picks as best I can. Do with them what you wish, though please laugh at the names, as most of them are flat-out ridiculous.

Guaranteed Rate Bowl – The only guarantee here is that someone has to win. Oh, and that it likely won't be very aesthetically pleasing as neither team will have its full roster. **Wisconsin 23, Oklahoma State 20**

Pinstripe Bowl – Football in a baseball stadium – can't think of anything I love more. And this is one of two games that fit the bill, the other being the Fenway Bowl. Let's give the Yankee Stadium contest to the team from New York. **Syracuse 28, Minnesota 27**

Duke's Mayo Bowl – It's been said that the difference between Duke's and regular mayo is a that it has a bit more kick. Well, it's the view from this corner that mayo is by far the worst condiment. Let's hope this game doesn't reach that level. **Maryland 31, NC State 24**

Music City Bowl – Given how challenged these two are offensively, this one should

be called the "Off Key Bowl" or "Flat Note Bowl." First one to six probably wins. **Kentucky 18, Iowa 16**

ReliaQuest Bowl – ReliaQuest is a security company, so it's fitting that two teams with solid defenses are facing off here. No funny lines on this one as the college football community mourns the loss of Bulldogs coach Mike Leach, a true innovator. For that reason, I believe MSU will give all it has and will come away with the victory. **Mississippi State 26, Illinois 23**

Citrus Bowl – Year one of Brian Kelly in Baton Rouge went better than expected, so why does he still look like a grade-schooler who had his bike stolen? There is almost never a smile on the man's face, and even a victory here likely doesn't bring one. But it could be a springboard toward a big 2023 for the Tigers. **LSU 33, Purdue 30**

Rose Bowl – After never participating in the Rose Bowl, the Utes are making up for lost time with consecutive trips. Anyone who thinks they will be in the "been there, done that" camp doesn't know how coach Kyle Whittingham operates. He'll have his team ready. Not sure we can say the same for James Franklin's team, which is just 3-4 in bowl games under his leadership. **Utah 27, Penn State 23**

Fiesta Bowl (CFP Semifinal) – There is little doubt that the Wolverines are the better team here, and if they play up to capability it could be a blowout. But TCU has defied the odds all season and has made a habit of pulling victory from the jaws of defeat on a routine basis. The feel-good story of the season had one plot twist – an overtime loss in the Big 12 title game – but redemption is often just around the corner in these tales. Can the Horned Frogs find the magic once more? **Michigan 34, TCU 32**

Peach Bowl (CFP Semifinal) – As stated above, this one comes down to Ohio State's mental fortitude because the rosters are very close. Both teams have offensive weapons and both teams can turn opponents over and make stops when necessary on defense. What Ohio State hasn't done recently is show that it can weather body shots and pick itself up off the canvas. It has collapsed under adversity in its last three losses, and if Georgia socks the Buckeyes in the mouth without an answer, then real questions will start to be asked about whether OSU has championship stock or whether it feasts on tomato cans.

Presented are two picks for this game because it's truly an unknown what Ohio State's attitude will be for this one. With "Dawg" mentality, **Ohio State 35, Georgia 32**; Without "Dawg" mentality, **Georgia 38, Ohio State 24**

Trivia Answer

Should Ohio State beat Georgia, it will become the first team to win every New Year's Six bowl game – though there is a bit of a catch. It has wins in the Sugar (Alabama and Clemson), Rose (Utah and Washington), Fiesta (Notre Dame) and Cotton (USC) in the CFP era, and it won the Orange Bowl way back on Jan. 1, 1977 (Colorado). If you're allowing grandfathering of bowl games, that would make five of the New Year's Six. The Peach would make it complete.

Buckeyes' Sour Mood Is Now Just Peachy

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

When last we met in this space, Buckeye Nation was in a state of depression after another humiliating – and for me, unexpected – loss to Michigan. Another trip to the Rose Bowl, with a disappointed and probably disinterested bunch of Buckeyes, most likely without C.J. Stroud and whoever else chose to move on, seemed in the cards.

Now we reconvene and somehow the dominos fell in place and Ohio State is off to the College Football Playoff. All is well again in Columbus – at least for now.

“Practices have been spirited so far,” head coach Ryan Day said of his Buckeyes. “The energy has been really good.”

And for the most part, the energy has been good among Buckeye fans as well, though their team faces a tall task in their matchup with No. 1 Georgia in the Peach Bowl. But most fans seem ever optimistic, and some have even taken the brave – and premature – step of looking ahead to a rematch with the hated Wolverines.

Is one of those rare dream seasons in the offing or are Buckeye fans setting themselves up for another round of disappointment – be it in Atlanta on Dec. 31 or in Los Angeles on Jan. 9?

“Certainly, a lot of people counted us out and here we are,” Day said. “I kind of like being in this role, but now we’ve got to go do something with it. It doesn’t mean anything if we don’t do anything with it. Just being upset or having a second opportunity is not going to mean anything if we don’t do anything with it. But what an unbelievable chance to go do something really special.”

Something really special indeed.

On our Buckeye Sports.com website and when talking to anyone who would listen, I kept saying that the last time Ohio State “backed into” the CFP, they went on to win the national championship in 2014, entering as the No. 4 seed again and vanquishing another No. 1 seeded SEC power, in that case Alabama, to earn a chance to play for all the marbles.

In retrospect, after I thought about it and checked my old BSBs, the Buckeyes didn’t back into the 2014 playoffs at all. In fact, they impressively played their way into the final four after being all but written off following a week-two loss to Virginia Tech.

The Buckeyes, who had entered the 2014 season ranked No. 5 in the AP poll, plummeted all the way to No. 22 after their loss to the Hokies and would drop to No. 23 the following week before starting their slow ascent up the charts. Led by the inexperienced freshman J.T. Barrett, who was thrown into the fire after a season-ending injury to star quarterback Braxton Miller late in fall camp, Ohio State improved – and won – each week.

When the first-ever CFP ranking came out the week of Oct. 28, the Buckeyes were ranked 16th. By the time they dispatched Michigan to end the regular season, they were ranked No. 5 and knocking on the door. Alabama (11-1) and Oregon (11-1) seemed set in the top two spots, leaving Ohio State to fight it out with No. 3 TCU (10-1), No. 4 Florida State (12-0) and No. 6 Baylor (10-1) for the remaining bids.

Then came the Big Ten Championship Game.

As out of the blue as this year’s loss to Michigan was for me, so too was that victory over a very good Badger team led by running back Melvin Gordon with the Buckeyes being led by an even less experienced quarterback than the injured Barrett in Cardale Jones. Ohio State caught not just me, but virtually everyone by surprise with a dominating 59-0 win over the Badgers. It was enough to propel Ohio State into the fourth and final spot in the first CFP playoff and a date with destiny and the Crimson Tide.

“The Buckeyes roared into the playoff com-

mittee’s psyche with their beyond-dominant performance against Wisconsin,” I wrote in this space at the time. “Even with that 59-0 victory, I thought Ohio State’s chances of making the final field were 50-50.”

But almost as stunning as Ohio State’s win in Indianapolis was, so too was TCU’s fall from third to sixth after a 55-3 win over Iowa State in its finale, freeing the final space in the bracket for the Buckeyes and leaving me to ask in this space, “Did the Horned Frogs have to win 100-0 to maintain their status?”

I’m sure TCU will remember that slight if the Frogs should happen to meet Ohio State in the championship game this year.

So, as it turns out, even though the 2014 and 2022 Buckeye teams were moving in opposite directions at the end of their regular seasons, they wound up in the same spot come playoff time – the No. 4 seed and getting ready to face a top-ranked SEC power.

The fact that the Buckeyes were up to the challenge then gives me hope that they will be up to the challenge now.

When you think of the Bulldogs, you think of defense, and rightfully so. Georgia is ranked No. 1 in rushing defense (77.0 yards per game), No. 2 in scoring defense (12.8 points), and No. 9 in total defense (292.1 yards).

But let’s not forget that the Buckeyes are no slouch on offense. They are ranked No. 2 in scoring offense (44.5 points) and No. 6 in total offense at 492.7 yards per game.

The match-up I will be watching, however, will be the Buckeye passing attack, which is ranked 14th with 294.2 yards a game, against Georgia’s pass defense, which I was surprised to see was ranked just 52nd, giving up 215.1 yards a game. Is there vulnerability there?

Which brings us to C.J. Stroud.

I know he had a great season statistically, but I continue to maintain that he didn’t play particularly well after the off week in mid-October. And he had a good passing line against Michigan, but he didn’t dominate there either. I mean you are talking about a guy who was being held up there with the all-time great Buckeye quarterbacks just a month or two ago – Kern, Schlichter, Smith, Haskins, Fields. And C.J. Stroud was looking like the best of the best.

One need only look at Stroud’s fall from grace among Heisman Trophy voters to get the picture. As the Buckeyes headed into that off week, he was the odds-on favorite to win college football’s most prestigious award. By the time the season ended he was left to finish third in the voting.

I can only imagine how humiliating it had to have been for him to have to go to New York for a second time, knowing as well as anyone that he was going to once again come back to Columbus as a bridesmaid.

But just as the Buckeyes and their fans were given new life when Ohio State made the playoffs, Stroud has been given a new chance to write his legacy at Ohio State. He might even get a chance to do what all the other Ohio State quarterbacks I mentioned previously did – beat Michigan.

I’m rooting for him and I’m rooting for the Buckeyes, even if they did back into the playoffs.

Tuck It And Run

For as long as he has been the starting quarterback at Ohio State, Stroud has been stuck with a reputation for not wanting to run with the football. That reputation is not helped by

the fact that Day seems reluctant to call his star quarterback’s number.

Stroud has proved that he is perfectly capable of picking up ground yardage, dating back to his freshman season when he was rarely used, but when given an opportunity scored on a 48-yard run in a 52-12 win over Michigan State, before he ever threw a pass for the Buckeyes.

This season he helped blow open a hard-fought, wind-swept game against Northwestern with six carries for 79 yards and a long of 44 in what ended up being a 21-7 Buckeye victory.

After that win, Day talked about his reluctance to have Stroud run.

“That’s the balance you try to find of, ‘Is it worth it to get the quarterback involved and expose him to shots that could potentially get him out of the game?’ Or do you need those yards, and I think that’s where you have to make good decisions,” Day said. “You have to take a deep breath at times and keep working through that, knowing that if you involve the quarterback, yeah, you might gain more yards, but you also expose him to hits.”

I found those comments rich coming from a coach who continually left his star quarterback in late in games that were well in hand, exposing him to the very injuries that he feared. Incidentally, in the three games after the game with the Wildcats, Stroud ran just 10 times (two were actually sacks) for minus-1 yard.

As I have watched Stroud, I have come to the belief that the failure to at least show the possibility of a QB run leaves Ohio State, regardless of how good its passing game is, seemingly playing against 11 defenders with only 10 men on offense. It would be foolish to use as gifted a passer as Stroud like he was Braxton Miller or Barrett and expose him to said shots. But we are in the playoffs now and you have to let it all hang out.

Legacies and victories are at stake.

Converting On Fourth Down

Much of the discussion following Ohio State’s loss to Michigan centered around Day’s decision not to go for it on fourth-and-5 down in the third quarter at the Michigan 43, a debate further fueled by Wolverine coach Jim Harbaugh’s contention that the Buckeyes were trying to set up a fake punt.

In these situations, the assumption among fans is always that their team is going to convert the first down. With that thought, I found it interesting that in this issue of BSB we recall John Cooper giving one of his most famous quotes after being faced with a similar punt-or-go-for-it situation against Michigan in the famous 13-13 tie in 1992.

A reporter asked Cooper why he didn’t go for it on a fourth-and-4 at the Michigan 49 late in the game.

“See, here again, you want to gamble, guy, but you want to gamble with my chips,” Cooper responded. “We went for it down here a couple of years ago and lost the game, and all I see is that we lost the game. You guys never make mention of that. Right? You love that kind of stuff. Gamble, Coach. Gamble. Then you lose, and that’s all I heard – how many times we’ve lost. You know, we gave ourselves a chance to win the football game, guys.”

VIP Gift-Giving

The holidays are a great time to be a Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP!

Looking to send a great book to that Buck-

eye fan on your list or to add to your own Ohio State library? Rex Kern and Mark Rea are both offering \$10 off on their new books for BSB VIPs.

Kern’s autobiography, “The Road to the Horseshoe and Beyond,” autographed by Kern, is available for just \$35. Make your check out to Rex Kern and mail it to Lee Caryer at 975 Atlantic Ave., #676, Columbus, Ohio, 43229.

Rea’s “The Legends: Ohio State Buckeyes: The Men, the Deeds, the Consequences, Vol. II,” is available to VIPs for just \$27. The new volume, also autographed, is available through Buckeye Sports Bulletin at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Make checks out to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. For faster and more convenient service give us a call at (614) 486-2202. Vol. I of “The Legends” is also available at the VIP price

Purchase as many of any of the books as you like. Be sure to mention that you are a VIP and include names and addresses for any gift books that you are sending.

VIPs also enjoy unlimited 20 percent savings on non-sale items at Conrads, “The Buckeye State Store.” Check out the wide selection of Ohio State gift items at Conradsosu.com and give them a call (614) 269-7091. Be sure to mention that you are a Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP.

If you are not currently a BSB VIP you can become a Brutus level donor for just \$50. Buy \$200 in gifts from Conrads and a copy of Kern and Rea’s books and you will have more than paid for your donation, plus you will be recognized in BSB as a patron of the publication.

For information on how to become a Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP and support this publication while enjoying special discounts and perks, see page 7 of this issue.

Not a VIP?

You can still save on Rex and Mark’s books. Both authors offer \$5 off – \$40 for Kern’s book and \$32 for Rea’s – to any BSB subscriber. Use the same addresses as above.

And for an amusing and entertaining book from a lesser-known author, you might try Tim Sullivan’s “Buckeye Game Day Memories,” one man’s memories from many years of attending Ohio State games. Tim’s book is available for \$12.99 at Amazon.com.

Of course, Conrads continues its longstanding tradition of serving Buckeye fans and holiday shoppers can choose from the many items at Conradsosu.com or if you are in town, you can check out their new location at 71 W. Schrock Rd. in Westerville.

Playoff Printing Contingencies

Buckeye Sports Bulletin’s January print schedule will be determined by how the Buckeyes fare. If Ohio State loses to Georgia, the next print issue of BSB will be mailed on Jan. 10, as originally scheduled. However, if Ohio State advances to the championship game, the next issue of BSB will be mailed on Jan. 17 and the print schedule will then continue as listed on page 3 of each issue.

In the meantime, there is no reason to miss any of the Buckeye sports 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.

Football recruiting’s early signing period is almost here, and the BSB staff will be monitoring any late prep comings and goings. The BSB staff will also be in Atlanta posting daily as Ohio State and Georgia make their final preparations for the Peach Bowl.

For information on how to access BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers, see page 6.



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