



Ruggles' Miss, Harrison's Injury Among "What-Ifs" In Peach Bowl Loss To Georgia

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

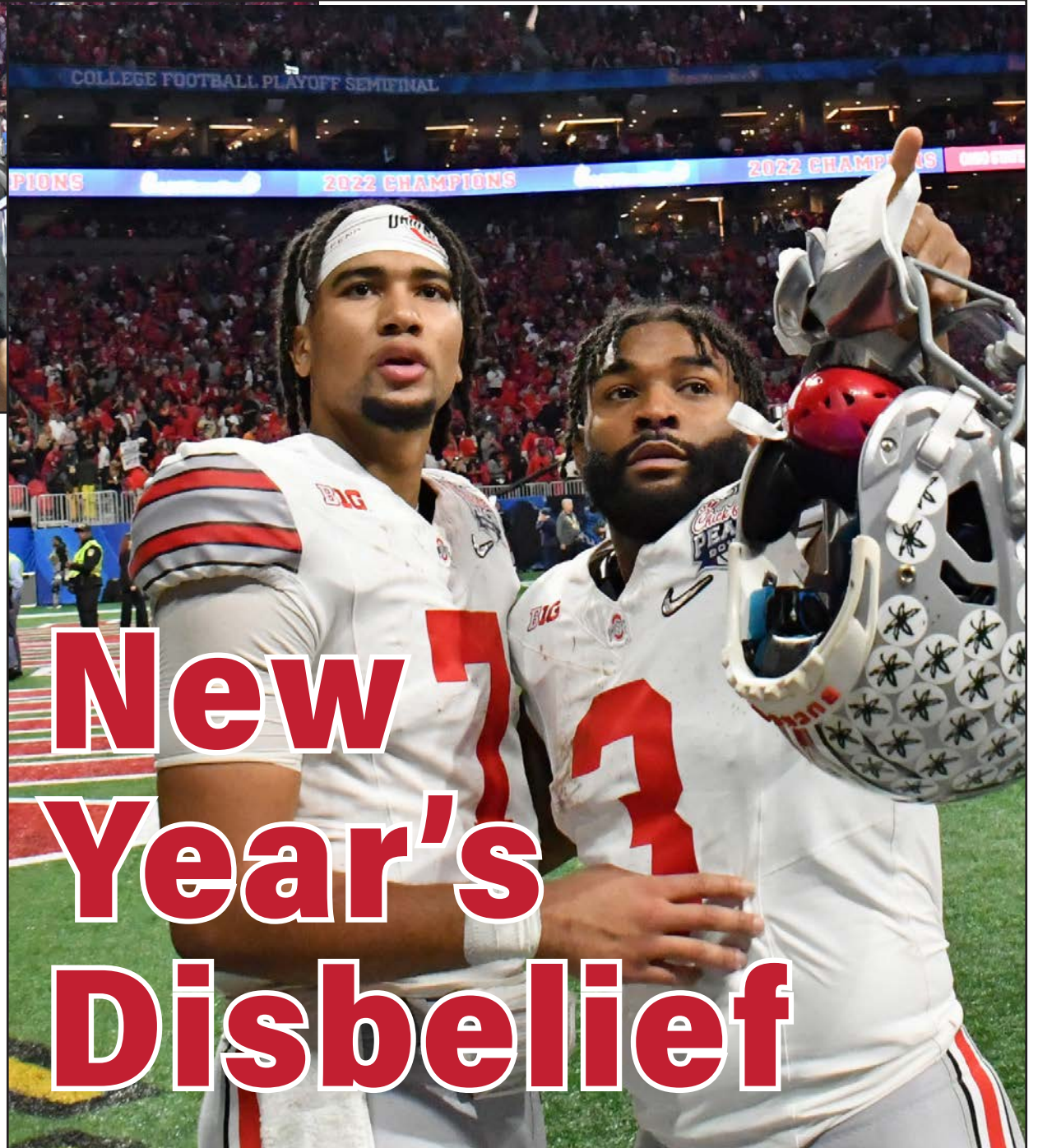
When the calendar still showed 2022, things were looking good for the Ohio State football team despite giving up a potential game-winning touchdown drive to

Georgia, one which put the Bulldogs up 42-41 over the Buckeyes with under a minute remaining in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta on Dec. 31.

Ohio State drove 43 yards in just 46 seconds to get in position for a game-winning field goal by kicker Noah Ruggles, one which would have sent the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoff National Championship Game for the second time in the last three seasons and the third time since the playoff's introduction in 2014.

With the Buckeyes lined up on the left hash at Georgia's 32-yard line, the transfer kicker from North Carolina calmly lined up for the 50-yard kick, one which would have been a career high, surpassing his previous mark of 49 yards, and prepared to join the ranks of legendary kickers who have converted on game-winning kicks, let alone one of this magnitude.

Long snapper Mason Ar-



SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT SO PEACHY — Ohio State suffered a devastating defeat to Georgia in the Peach Bowl on Dec. 31, dropping a 42-41 decision after kicker Noah Ruggles' 50-yard attempt went wide left with just three seconds remaining, leaving the Buckeyes — including quarterback C.J. Stroud (left) and running back Miyan Williams (right) — wondering what could have been.

nold delivered the ball to holder Jesse Mirco, who spun the laces out as Ruggles approached. His right foot connected with the ball and sent it careening into the air, more reminiscent of a knuckleball than a technically sound, end-over-end kick, and it was at that moment that the ball dropped.

Ruggles' kick sailed left, landing closer to the pylon in the left corner of the end zone than it did the field-goal post, while the other ball — that being the nearly six-ton Times Square Ball in New York — dropped simultaneously, meaning that Ruggles' shank brought in perhaps the worst new year imaginable for the Buckeyes.

The miss left just three seconds remaining on the clock, and the celebration ensued for the defending na-

tional champions, surviving by the skin of their teeth as Ohio State's season came to a sudden and unthinkable end.

"It came down to one play," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. "It wasn't just the last play. There were a lot of plays in the game that you wish you had back as coaches and players. That's what happens in a game like this."

Not only had the Buckeyes been just a field goal away from advancing to the title game, but the Peach Bowl was one in which Ohio State led by two touchdowns entering the fourth quarter, making the bitter loss an even more

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Buckeye Leaves

Though Ohio State suffered a 42-41 loss to Georgia in an instant classic at the Peach Bowl, there were still spectacular individual performances from several Buckeyes in the game. We asked BSB staff and subscribers to give out Buckeye Leaves to the most impactful players from Ohio State against the Bulldogs.

Andy Anders, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to the defender who stood out most to me in the game for Ohio State, and that was linebacker Steele Chambers.

Chambers collected eight tackles, making plays from sideline to sideline against the Georgia offense. He teamed up with some defensive linemen for a sack.

His biggest play came in the second quarter, however. A miscommunication with Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett and one of his receivers resulted in an underthrown ball, which Chambers returned to and intercepted to set the Buckeyes up with a quick touchdown.

Jack Emerson, BSB: When Georgia jumped ahead 24-21 with 1:44 to play in the first half, Ohio State turned to its tempo offense looking to retake the lead just before halftime.

Quarterback C.J. Stroud turned to former walk-on Xavier Johnson, who stepped up in a big way. Johnson opened the drive with a 6-yard reception, setting up a pair of chunk gains from Stroud to Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming.

Then Johnson left his imprint on the game. Stroud lofted a pass into his outstretched hands on first down, and Johnson did the rest, putting on a nasty spin move to shake a Bulldog defender and waltz into the end zone for a 37-yard score.

Johnson spent time at both running back and wide receiver during the evening, and

with several stars injured, his ability to play multiple positions is the reason he'll get my Buckeye Leaf. Johnson finished the game with three receptions for 43 yards and a score, while adding 28 yards on the ground.

Braden Moles, BSB: Stroud clearly heard the criticism of Ohio State and his potential legacy over the last month. The signal caller had perhaps his best game as a Buckeye, finishing with 348 yards on 23-of-34 passing and four touchdowns through the air.

It was a Stroud who hasn't been seen for much of the season, at least since Ohio State's off week, and it came at a perfect time for the Buckeyes. Stroud was cool and collected facing off against arguably the best defense he's taken on in his college career, making the layups and hitting on some impressive deep shots.

He also made significant use of his legs, a rarity this season, adding 34 net yards on 12 carries – including a pivotal gain of 27 yards on Ohio State's late drive – offering yet another challenge for Georgia's defense that the Bulldogs were largely unable to solve. Though his career will end with a loss in the Peach Bowl, he had clearly saved his best for last.

BSB Subscribers

Tiffin Buckeye: C.J. Stroud. One of the best performances he's had in his two years as a starter. I wish it put them over the top but it doesn't take away from how well he played.

PeyoteBuck: Stroud and Marvin Harrison get my leaves, and one for Ruggles who carried us through many games.

Terrier Buck: According to PFF, the defense played its worst game of the season and Zach Harrison was the only one with a winning grade.

BuckeyeScott: I can't disagree with those chosen by the staff. I would add Jesse Micro for performing his workman-like duty.



From The Message Board

Ohio State suffered just a one-point loss in the Peach Bowl after being viewed as a heavy underdog entering the game. We asked the BSB staff and our readers what they made of Ohio State's fight against Georgia and how they feel about the team heading into the offseason. Here are some of the responses:

"I was extremely proud of the effort, and the performance confirmed my season-long view that OSU was as good as any team. Next season? I expect OSU to be as good as anyone in the Big Ten."

– Terrier Buck

"I am incredibly proud of their performance. They left it all out on the field, and they did everything they could to win and just came up short. I expect Ryan Day to get the troops rolling and that Ohio State will be back sooner rather than later."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"The Buckeyes played like true warriors, and my hat is off to them. I look forward to McCord and Brown becoming elite QBs in 2023 and beyond."

– PeyoteBuck

"Ohio State is one of a handful of FBS teams that can win a national championship. Unfortunately, the path there was missing some football skill sets on the defensive side of the ball. We should have a solid core of returning lettermen next year. Let's hope between THE veterans, THE newbies, THE portal, and THE coaching skill set, they reach THE Mountain Top."

– BuckeyeScott

"Ohio State proved that it's still competitive and relevant at a national championship level with how it played against Georgia. While big plays on defense are still an issue and the Buckeyes came one play short of holding on to what was a 14-point fourth-quarter lead, Ryan Day showed that he can, in fact, have his team ready to go for big games. The offensive schematics

were fantastic throughout the contest as well."

– Andy Anders, BSB

"Even though the result was a loss, Ohio State played with grit and determination that we hadn't seen all season. The Buckeyes clearly proved that they left everything they had on the field at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, and they played admirably, nearly knocking off a historically great Georgia team.

"As for the future, the defensive lapses will clearly need to be cleaned up, but with plenty of offensive weapons returning to help a first-year starting quarterback in Devin Brown or Kyle McCord, I don't expect a drop-off in production from Ohio State."

– Jack Emerson, BSB

"Admittedly, I was thinking this would turn out to be a blowout in favor of Georgia. But Ohio State answered the call and looked every bit like one of the nation's top four teams, and if the Buckeyes had gotten past the Bulldogs, I'd have trouble believing they wouldn't have taken down TCU in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game.

"As for next season, there remain a multitude of questions. The quarterback battle between McCord and Brown will rightfully be the topic that is most focused on, but there's plenty of intrigue with the defense, which will have a year of Jim Knowles' scheme under their belt and several exciting young players who will have the chance to step up."

– Braden Moles, BSB

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

By The Numbers

"By the Numbers" will tell you many things, especially in the game of football. Four teams. Georgia, being rated one, vs. Ohio State, ranked number four, played in the Peach Bowl. Michigan was ranked number two and Texas Christian University was ranked number three and played in the Fiesta Bowl. These two games would decide which two teams would play for the National Championship title on Jan. 9.

1. Fiesta Bowl: TCU 51, Michigan 45, or a combined number equaling 96.

2. Peach Bowl: Georgia 42, OSU 41, or a combined number equaling 83.

Total: 179. Every Ohio State Buckeye and Michigan Wolverine football player and their coaching staff have to admit these two bowl games were not only disappointing but also filled with drama when looking at the numbers generated by all four teams. The Big Ten teams failed to win "By the Numbers" and suffered their losses, but we Buckeye fans saw a great offense and defense team play their hearts out.

The Stroud to Harrison duo did not fail, but the Harrison injury left a big void later in the game. History will prove that these two All-Americans

will go down as the greatest duo ever in Buckeye history and giving us fans many thrills "By the Numbers."

**Nelson Bell
Toledo**

Proud Of The Buckeyes

Hats off to the players and coaches for putting the Michigan loss in the rear-view mirror and delivering an epic performance against Georgia. Loved the emotion Day showed on the sideline, and I could write six pages on Stroud's play. The Bucks played to win and left it all out on the field for the world to see. Buckeye Nation should be proud.

**Brian Copfer
Indian Hill, Ohio**

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

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No. 11	Nov. 26	No. 23	July
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Defensive Deficiencies Cost Buckeyes Again

History will likely judge Noah Ruggles harshly for missing a 50-yard field goal in the final seconds of Ohio State's 42-41 Peach Bowl loss to defending national champion Georgia. But while Ruggles couldn't win the game for the Buckeyes, he certainly didn't lose it.

That distinction should be reserved for the Ohio State defense, a unit that played against the Bulldogs pretty much the way it played five weeks earlier during a 45-28 loss to Michigan. A unit that gave up big play after big play against the Wolverines outdid itself against Georgia, giving up a total of 533 yards to mark only the fifth time in program history the Buckeyes had allowed a bowl opponent to eclipse the 500-yard mark.

Even more telling was the fact the OSU defense allowed Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett to throw for 398 yards, making Bennett the fifth opposing quarterback the Buckeyes have faced over their last seven bowl appearances to throw for 300 yards or more. What in the name of Michael Allen Doss happened to the once-proud program known as DBU?

When Ryan Day hired veteran assistant Jim Knowles away from Oklahoma State, and gave him a three-year deal reportedly worth nearly \$6 million to resurrect the Ohio State defense, it was expected the Buckeyes would rebound from a 2021 performance punctuated by missed tackles, blown assignments and giving up points in bunches. And by way of comparing raw numbers, the defense did show improvement in its first season with Knowles as coordinator.

After surrendering an average of 372.9 yards per game last year, the Buckeyes made their biggest jump in total defense, shaving that number to 321.5 this season and going from No. 59 nationally to No. 14. Likewise, OSU showed improvement in nearly every other defensive category, including scoring (No. 38 to No. 25) and rushing (No. 28 to No. 25).

But a little deeper dive reveals that perhaps the Buckeyes didn't make as much progress defensively as everyone had hoped.

For example, while this year's unit improved in terms of pass defense, allowing an average of 200.5 yards per game compared to last year's average of 246.2, opposing teams this season were actually more efficient against the Buckeyes. Last year's unit allowed averages of 6.9 yards per pass attempt and 11.3 yards per completion, while this year those numbers rose to 7.2 yards per attempt and 12.3 yards per completion.

Bringing opposing receivers down after they had made a catch also continued to be a problem. The Buckeyes gave up 2,606 yards through the air in 2022, and 1,107 of those yards (42.5 percent) came after the catch. Granted, that was an improvement over the 2021 season when the defense allowed 3,200 yards, including 1,632 of that total (51.0 percent) after the catch. But I'd be willing to bet good money that neither Day nor Knowles thinks allowing more than 1,000 yards after the catch is even remotely acceptable.

Equally as unacceptable – actually even more so – was the fact that Ohio State allowed an inordinate number of so-called chunk plays throughout the season. Knowles is on record as claiming the surrender of a big play or two during a game is no cause for alarm, but I believe even he would have to admit that when it came to giving up big plays, the number his unit allowed in 2022 was way, way, way too many.

The Buckeyes gave a dizzying total of 50 plays gaining 20 yards or more during the season. Eleven of them went for 50 yards or more, and five of those were worth at least 75 yards.

Particularly painful were all of the big plays surrendered to Michigan and Georgia in the two marquee games of the year. Rather than showcase a much-improved defense under Knowles, the Buckeyes wilted against the Wolverines and Bulldogs. And in case you think that's some kind of overwrought hyperbole, here are some more numbers.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Ohio State gave up five plays of 45 yards or more to Michigan, and each of those five plays went for touchdowns. Against Georgia, three more plays accounted for 45 yards or more with a 76-yard scoring pass from Bennett to a could-not-have-been-more-wide-open Arian Smith midway through the fourth quarter fueling the Bulldogs' comeback from what once was a 14-point deficit.

On the biggest stages of the season, in their two more important games, the Buckeyes gave up 1,063 total yards to Michigan and Georgia, and allowed each of those opponents to score in excess of 40 points. When was the last time an Ohio State defense surrendered 40 or more points in back-to-back games? Never is the answer to that question.

I sometimes think back to when Jim Tressel was head coach, when the Buckeyes were winning Big Ten championships and beating Michigan almost every year, and remember how fans complained about how boring it was to watch the Buckeyes in those days. "Why can't we be more exciting?"

Well, guess what? Everyone who lamented those days has apparently gotten their wish.

Ohio State will continue to ring up double digits in victories every year, the offense will annually be among the nation's leaders, the quarterback will be a Heisman Trophy finalist more often than not, and the program will supply a veritable assembly line of receivers to the NFL. But as long as the defense remains something of an afterthought, the Buckeyes won't get close to raising a national championship trophy again anytime soon.

How Do You Like Me Now?

C.J. Stroud appears destined to be one of those handful of players who comes through Columbus and leaves without getting a full measure of devotion from Ohio State fans.

During the weeks between the losses to Michigan and Georgia, the subject of Stroud's scarlet and gray legacy was discussed more than once with many fans reasoning that a multi-year starting quarterback with no victory against Michigan on his resumé is to be judged as something of a failure.

Stroud is going to leave Ohio State as one of the most prolific passers in program history. His 8,123 yards and 85 touchdown passes in just two seasons ranks second only to J.T. Barrett, who compiled his record 9,434 yards and 104 TDs over four years. Stroud holds a bevy of other OSU records, including most career 300-yard games (15).

But for several reasons, not the least of which was because he seemed reluctant to run the ball in certain situations, Stroud was never fully embraced by a certain faction of Ohio State fans.

I have a theory on why Stroud didn't run more often. I think Day watched as Barrett and Justin Fields ran the ball with regularity, and the

OSU head coach didn't want to expose Stroud to the same kind of punishment endured by his predecessors. That is only conjecture on my part, but it seems that when the Buckeyes were faced with an elimination game against Georgia, Stroud suddenly had no problem running the ball in certain situations, and was pretty efficient doing so.

When Stroud gets to the next level – and make no mistake about the fact that he will be a top-five NFL draft pick – he will likely be asked to escape the pocket on occasion. But those who believe he will not survive very long as a pro because of the misconception that he isn't tough enough simply don't know Stroud's background. And if you don't know about that background, enlighten yourself about the scrawny wisp of a kid who grew up the youngest of four children in a home broken apart by drugs and the ongoing incarceration of his father.

Upon Further Review

Although he defended his decision at the time, perhaps Day would do things a little differently at the end of the Peach Bowl as his team prepared for what it hoped would be a game-winning field goal.

Just before the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve, the Buckeyes got the ball at their own 25-yard line with 0:54 showing on the game clock. Two plays got them to the their 42 before Stroud took off on a 27-yard scramble to move to the Georgia 31-yard line with 24 seconds remaining.

But rather than continue to push the issue against a Bulldogs defense that was obviously on its heels, Day did something he swore he wouldn't do. Surmising he was already within Ruggles' range, the OSU head coach went conservative and called for a running play that actually netted the loss of a yard. Ruggles then entered the game, badly chunked his 50-yard attempt, and you know the rest.

The mere fact that Ruggles had never in his career connected on a field goal of 50 yards or more – his career-best of 49 yards came in 2019 when he was at North Carolina – should have given Day more than a little pause. Also, Ohio State is not a program exactly known for its kickers and their long-range prowess.

Since Drew Basil kicked a 52-yard field goal during Ohio State's 26-21 win against Michigan in 2012, the Buckeyes have converted exactly one field goal in excess of 50 yards. That was a 55-yarder by Blake Haubeil during a 52-3 win at Northwestern in 2019. Even more remarkable is that Haubeil's field goal was the only attempt of 50 yards or longer by an OSU kicker over a span of 117 games – between Basil's 52-yarder in 2012 and Ruggles' 53-yard miss during the first quarter of this season's 44-31 win against Penn State.

By way of comparison, Michigan kicker Jake Moody attempted seven field goals of 50 yards or more this season alone and made three of them, including a school-record 59-yarder against TCU in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

The last time an Ohio State kicker converted a walk-off field goal of 50 yards or more was when Mike Nugent booted a 55-yarder as time expired to give the Buckeyes a 24-21 win against Marshall in 2004.

No OSU kicker has won a game on a field goal of any length since 2009 when Devin Barclay put a 39-yard attempt through the uprights in overtime for a 27-24 victory against Iowa.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Williams, Stover Returning To OSU

A pair of significant contributors have announced their upcoming return to Ohio State, with running back Miyan Williams and tight end Cade Stover each revealing that they will be back for the Buckeyes in 2023.

Williams, who was eligible for entry into the 2023 NFL Draft, rushed for 825 yards on 128 carries this season, an average of 6.4 yards per carry. He scored a team-high 14 rushing touchdowns despite missing two of the team's 13 games and being limited by injury in several others, including against Georgia in the Peach Bowl, where he only ran three times, though he did score.

The former three-star prospect from Cincinnati Winton Woods rushed for 100 yards in four contests this season and equaled a school record with five rushing touchdowns in a single game against Rutgers on Oct. 1.

For his career, Williams has 1,397 rushing yards and 17 touchdowns, averaging 6.7 yards per carry. Barring any transfers, backfield mates TreVeyon Henderson and Evan Pryor — the latter of whom missed this season due to an ACL tear — should be back to complement him in 2023, as will Dallan Hayden, who picked up 553 yards as a freshman this season.

As for Stover, any questions about who'd be starting at tight end for Ohio State got a four-word in answer in all-caps on Twitter on Jan. 9.

"I AM COMING BACK," wrote Stover, the soon-to-be fifth-year tight end.

Stover hauled in 36 receptions for 406 yards this season, the most yards by an Ohio State tight end since Jeff Heurman's 466 yards in 2013 and the most receptions since Rickey Dudley caught 37 balls in 1995.

Stover started his Ohio State career at linebacker before switching to tight end before his second season in 2020. He filled in at linebacker again during the Rose Bowl following the 2021 regular season, but moved back to be a tight end on a more permanent basis before this past season. He started all 13 games there for the Buckeyes.

Williams and Stover were the only Buckeyes to announce that they will return to Ohio State since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, though they are not the only ones with decisions expected in the coming weeks. With the deadline to enter the NFL Draft approaching on Jan. 16, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com for the latest on who is staying and going for the Buckeyes.

Herbstreit: Day To Step Back From Calling Plays

Former Ohio State quarterback and current ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit said on Jan. 2 that, according to pregame production meetings prior to the Peach Bowl, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day will give up play-calling duties next season.

Herbstreit and play-by-play broadcast partner Chris Fowler were the announcers for Ohio State's 42-41 loss to Georgia in the Peach Bowl on Dec. 31, and as part of broadcasting the game, crews will usually meet prior to the game with the coaches from each team. It was during those meetings, according to Herbstreit, that Day revealed his intentions to step back from calling plays for the Buckeyes.

"Ryan Day mentioned in our production meeting that he's going to stop calling plays next year because he needs to become more of a manager as a head coach," Herbstreit said on ESPN's College

GameDay. "When you're prepping a game plan, there's a lot more that goes into it (Monday through Friday) to be ready to call those plays on Saturday, so he's thinking about maybe relinquishing (play-calling duties)."

Day has called plays for Ohio State each of the last five seasons, including the last four as head coach of the Buckeyes. If Day does opt to give up play calling, the responsibility would fall to whoever is hired as offensive coordinator, a position which is still open following former offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson's departure to become the head coach at Tulsa.

Ohio State has several in-house options who could be promoted to offensive coordinator, including offensive line coach Justin Frye, who was an offensive coordinator at UCLA under Chip Kelly, or passing game coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who is viewed as a rising star in the coaching industry.

Freshman OL Henry Diagnosed With Bone Cancer

Ohio State freshman offensive lineman Avery Henry announced on Dec. 19 that he has been diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer.

"This isn't the way I wanted to release this, but I know no other way. A couple days ago I was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer," Henry tweeted. "I will fight this! I have never been a statistic and I never will! I want to thank my brothers and coaches for the endless support!"

Henry is in his first year at Ohio State from St. Clairsville, Ohio, where he was a three-star prospect coming out of high school. He has not appeared in a game yet for the Buckeyes and will redshirt with four seasons of eligibility remaining.

According to the Mayo Clinic, osteosarcoma is a type of bone cancer that begins in bone-forming cells, and it "tends to occur in teenagers and young adults, but it can also occur in younger children and older adults...Treatment innovations for osteosarcoma have greatly improved the outlook (prognosis) for this cancer over the years."

Following Henry's announcement, support flooded in from those in and outside of the program wishing him a full recovery.

"We love you brother," offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. tweeted. "We are with you in this fight!"

Ruggles' Mother Thanks

49 Student-Athletes Earn OSU Degrees

Ohio State's fall graduate list included 49 current or former student-athletes. They celebrated with commencement on Dec. 18 at The Schottenstein Center.

Within the football team, seven players earned their degrees, including wide receiver Kamryn Babb, defensive end Zach Harrison, safety Ronnie Hickman and offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr., among others. In total, 21 different programs at Ohio State saw student-athletes earn their degrees.

A complete list of the graduates can be found below, divided by sport and in alphabetical order.

Baseball — Casey Maniglia, accounting; Drew Reckart, human development and family science.

Women's Basketball — Rikki Harris, human development and family science; Taylor Mikesell, sociology; Braxtin Miller, sport industry.

Cheerleading — Julia Aepli, logistics management; Emily Gramza, health sciences; Garrett Raney, construction systems management.

Football — Kamryn Babb, kinesiology; Marcus Crowley, human development and family science; Tyler Friday, communications; Zachary Harrison, criminology; Ronnie Hickman, human development and family science; Paris Johnson, journalism; Ryan Smith, sport industry.

Fencing — Shanvanth Arnipalli, environmental science.

Field Hockey — Emma Goldean, biology; Beatrice Maloney, finance.

Women's Gymnastics — Raina Malas, political science; Zoe Schweitzer, sport

industry.

Women's Hockey — Clair DeGeorge, bioethics.

Men's Lacrosse — Clifford Blanchard IV, kinesiology; Jack DeSantis, marketing; Gabriel Galbraith, economics-business.

Women's Lacrosse — Sophia Baez, kinesiology.

Pistol — Shrenik Jain, data.

Men's Soccer — Christopher Dowling, economics-business; Devyn Etling, kinesiology; Xavier Green, environment, economy, development and sustainability; Samuel Mason, marketing; Chase Thiel, operations management.

Women's Soccer — Talani Barnett, human development and family science; Kamryn Davis, biology; Madison Lowe, kinesiology.

Softball — Kaitlin Coffman, speech and hearing science.

Men's Swim & Dive — Semuede Andreis, computer and information science; John Sampson, air transportation.

Synchronized Swimming — Ava Lichter, communication.

Men's Track & Field — Donnie James, consumer and family financial services; Praise Olatoke, sport industry.

Men's Tennis — Andrew Lutschaunig, finance; Jake Van Emburgh, public management; Matej Vogel, sport industry.

Women's Tennis — Irina Cantos Siemers, communication.

Women's Volleyball — Mia Grunze, kinesiology; Reilly MacNeill, sport industry; Adria Powell, biology.

Wrestling — Cade Hepner, consumer and family financial services; Ethan Smith, human resource management.



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2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME	W, 21-10	ABC	9-4, 45-38 win over South Carolina
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE	W, 45-12	BTN	3-9, 48-19 loss to Troy
Sept. 17	TOLEDO	W, 77-21	FOX	9-5, 21-19 win over Liberty
Sept. 24	WISCONSIN	W, 52-21	ABC	7-6, 24-17 win over Oklahoma St.
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	8-5, 21-0 win over Kentucky
Oct. 29	at Penn State	W, 44-31	FOX	11-2, 35-21 win over Utah
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	8-5, 316-12 win over NC State
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	L, 45-23	FOX	13-1, 51-45 loss to TCU
Dec. 31	Georgia	L, 42-41	ESPN	14-0, 42-41 win over Ohio State

Fans Following Missed Kick

After Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles' game-winning, 50-yard field goal attempt in the Peach Bowl against Georgia sailed wide left, the Buckeye kicker sauntered off the field with his head facing the ground.

Three days following Ruggles' off-target attempt, his mother, Jackie, took to Twitter to thank Ohio State fans for their support while also noting that her son "takes full responsibility for the missed kick."

"Thank you Buckeye Nation for the overwhelming support. I know the loss breaks every Buckeye heart, and I appreciate the grace many of you have shown," Jackie said. "He will be forever grateful to his coaches and teammates who, week after week, put him in a position to be successful. For every person who works so hard for this team, in whatever role you play, thank you!"

Ruggles' eligibility exhausted following the conclusion of this season. During his two years at Ohio State, Ruggles hit on 37 of 41 field-goal attempts while hitting 148 of 149 extra-point tries.

22.4 Million Tune In For Peach Bowl

Ohio State's 42-41 loss to Georgia in the Peach Bowl attracted one of the best audiences for a College Football Playoff semifinal in several seasons, with 22.4 million viewers tuning in on New Year's Eve.

It was the first time in nine years of the College Football Playoff that both semifinal games finished within one score, and viewers responded by making the Peach Bowl the most-watched semifinal game since the first year of the College Football Playoff, and it's also one of the top 20 cable telecasts on record, according to ESPN.

It's the most-watched non-NFL broadcast since last year's national championship game – one that had Georgia knock off Alabama – and the Peach Bowl also peaked at 24.3 million viewers shortly before halftime.

The other semifinal, in which No. 3 TCU knocked off No. 2 Michigan, 51-45, drew 21.7 million viewers, for an average of 22.1 million across both games. It was the third-most watched pair of semifinals games dating back to 2014, and the best over the last five seasons.

Transfer Safety Carter Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State's biggest addition in the transfer portal this offseason was announced on Jan. 3, when former Syracuse safety Ja'Had Carter, who was ranked as the top-ranked safety in the transfer portal by 247Sports, revealed he had committed to the Buckeyes.

Carter is the biggest splash of Ohio State's transfer pursuits to this point, bringing plenty of experience to the Ohio State secondary, as well as two seasons of eligibility. In three seasons with the Orange, Carter collected 138 tackles (3 1/2 for loss) and five interceptions while being named a freshman All-American by Rivals in 2020 and an ACC Honorable Mention this year.

Last season, Carter played in 12 games (10 starts) for Syracuse, racking up 36 tackles and three interceptions. Carter also scored on a 90-yard scoop and score against Clemson.

Carter joins a safeties room that has already lost a quartet of players, with Jaylen Johnson and Jantzen Dunn entering the portal, Tanner McCalister exhausting his eligibility and Ronnie Hickman entering his name in the 2023 NFL draft.

Starting boundary safety Lathan Ransom and depth-piece Josh Proctor have also not made announcements on their future at Ohio State. The Buckeyes also have young talent at the position in rising sophomores Sonny Styles and Kye Stokes. Kourt Williams, who served as a captain for Ohio State last season, and Cameron Martinez are also likely to occupy the room next season.

Three Buckeyes Hit Transfer Portal

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, three members of the Ohio State football team announced their entry into the transfer portal, including defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste, cornerback JK Johnson and long snapper Mason Arnold.

Jean-Baptiste, who announced his entry into the portal on Jan. 2, recently completed his fifth season at Ohio State, reaching new career highs with 19 tackles (4.5 for loss) to go with four sacks on the year. The former four-star prospect — originally a linebacker out of Bergen Catholic in Oradell, N.J., in the 2018 class — leaves Columbus having played in 47 games with six starts, accounting for 53 tackles (10.5 for loss) with eight sacks, a forced fumble

Continued On Page 6

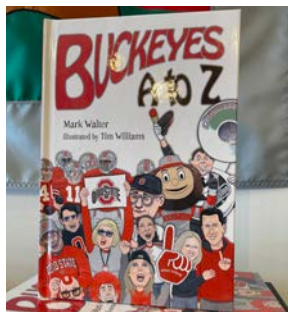
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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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and a pass breakup.

One day prior to Jean-Baptiste's announcement, Arnold also revealed he was hitting the portal. The long snapper spent just two seasons with Ohio State, joining the Buckeyes as a preferred walk-on in 2021.

Due to an injury to starting long snapper Bradley Robinson, Arnold was thrown into the fire during the second half of the season and started for the Buckeyes in their last seven games. In Ohio State's 45-23 loss to Michigan on Nov. 26, Day dialed up a fake punt on a critical fourth down in the third quarter, but Arnold snapped the ball to punter Jesse Mirco rather than tight end/fullback Mitch Rossi, negating the fake.

Johnson then announced his entry on Jan. 3, but while Jean-Baptiste and Arnold are still searching for new homes, it took Johnson less than a week to find a new school, announcing his commitment to LSU on Jan. 8.

After playing in just two games as a true freshman, Johnson appeared in all

13 games this season for Ohio State and made five starts for the Buckeyes, filling in when cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Cameron Brown were on the mend, though he did not register a statistic in Ohio State's most recent loss to Georgia in the College Football Playoff.

He finished with a career-high five tackles in Ohio State's win over Northwestern, and also picked up four tackles in his first career start against Wisconsin. It was enough of an audition that he likely would have competed for a starting role next year opposite Burke, but he will instead look to use his three remaining seasons of eligibility with the Tigers.

His departure will leave Ohio State with six scholarship cornerbacks entering next season, including Burke, Jyaire Brown, Ryan Turner, Jordan Hancock, and incoming freshmen Jermaine Mathews and Calvin Simpson-Hunt.

Other Buckeyes who had entered the portal this offseason included safeties Jantzen Dunn and Jaylen Johnson, as well as linebacker Teradja Mitchell. All three have found their transfer destinations, with Dunn committing to Kentucky, Mitchell committing to Florida and Johnson opting for Memphis, where former Ohio State defensive backs coach Matt Barnes is the defensive coordinator.

Dunn has three seasons of eligibility remaining, redshirting in 2021 for the Buckeyes after sustaining a lower-body injury and only appearing in a special teams role this year for Ohio State. Mitchell had previously announced he was entering the portal and followed through on his promise to stick with the Buckeyes through the remainder of the College Football Playoff.

"Really wish things could've ended differently. Sometimes giving it your all only gives you a chance," Mitchell tweeted on Jan. 1. "A special thank you to Buckeye Nation and the ones who gave us unwavering support throughout this journey. It's been a pleasure."

With several Buckeyes still needing to announce their future plans, the full linebacker picture for Ohio State in 2023 is unclear. Tommy Eichenberg is yet to make an official declaration about his respective future, while Steele Chambers has already decided to return for his senior season, and Chip Trayanum could either factor in at linebacker or running back moving forward. Fifth-year Palaie Gaoteote could return for another year via a COVID-19 waiver, while Cody Simon, Mitchell Melton, Reid Carrico, C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers are likely to return barring a transfer.

As for Johnson, who announced his commitment to the Tigers on Jan. 8, he never saw the field in a two-year career with the Buckeyes, redshirting his first campaign after sustaining a season-ending knee injury. He'll reunite with the coach who recruited him in Barnes, who called plays for Ohio State's defense for 11 games in 2021 after then-defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs was relieved of those duties.

OSU Adds Special Teamers From Portal

To counteract the losses, Ohio State made a pair of transfer additions on special teams. The Buckeyes earned a commitment on Dec. 17 from former Arizona State long snapper John Ferlmann before adding former Kent State walk-on kicker Casey Magyar on Dec. 21.

Ferlmann was in Columbus for a visit on Dec. 17 prior to announcing his commitment to Ohio State as a scholarship member of the team. He started all 12 games during this past redshirt freshman season for the Sun Devils and will have three years of eligibility remaining.

He is a native of Phoenix, Ariz., and played high school football at Boulder Creek. He was a five-star prospect and the No. 7 long snapper out of high school, according to Rubio's Long Snapping.

Following the departure of Arnold as well as Robinson, who exhausted his eligibility this season, Ferlmann's addition is an important one for Ohio State, and he figures to immediately contend for the starting job.

Magyar — a native of Dublin, Ohio — spent one year at Kent State, hitting an extra-point attempt against Virginia Military Institute during his debut on Sept. 11, 2021, but missing his only other extra-point attempt against Western Michigan on Oct. 16, 2021. He entered the transfer portal on July 1.

As a senior at Dublin Coffman High School, Magyar hit all 38 of his extra-point attempts and collected 55 touchbacks in nine games.

Magyar joins Ohio State's kicking unit, which lost incumbent placekicker Ruggles after the College Football Playoff, and also includes USC transfer Parker Lewis, kicker/cornerback Jake Seibert, and current kick-off specialist Jayden Fielding.

Stroud Defends Smith-Njigba Opting Out Of CFP

Ohio State star wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba previously announced on

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1983

Freshman basketball player Matt Lucas said he didn't feel there was any added pressure on him at Ohio State because he was the son of former OSU great Jerry Lucas.

"Not really," answered the 6-3 guard when asked about the situation, "because my dad was born to play basketball and he's one of those 'one in a million players that everything is natural for.'"

All Jerry Lucas did at OSU was average 24.6 points a game during a career that included three Big Ten championships, one national title and two second-place finishes in the NCAA from 1960-62.

35 Years Ago - 1988

Ohio State's 21st football coach, John Cooper, was amiable, humorous, bold and ambitious.

"I think we can win the national championship," Cooper said Dec. 31 after being introduced by athletic director Jim Jones. "I felt like we could win the national championship at Arizona State."

"That's the goal we had every year, and that's a goal we'll have at The Ohio State University every year. We're going to try to have the best, most competitive football team we can have, year in and year out. The Big Ten is a great conference, and if you can win the Big Ten conference, you can win the national championship."

30 Years Ago - 1993

The usually affable Gordon Gee, Ohio State's president, had turned grim during the last few days of the 1992 football season as rumors circulated that he would have to dismiss head coach John Cooper if the Buckeyes did not beat Michigan and win their bowl game.

But in the wake of OSU's 13-13 tie with Michigan and a favorable review of Cooper by athletic director Jim Jones, Gee could return to his smiling self, even though the Buckeyes dropped a 21-14 decision to Georgia in the Citrus Bowl on Jan. 1.

"That's all behind us," Gee told reporters. "John Cooper is our coach, he will remain our coach, and we won't say we'll evaluate him anymore."

25 Years Ago - 1998

It wasn't strictly a North/South thing that explained how and why Florida State dominated Ohio State in the Sugar Bowl.

No, more to the point, it was a speed thing.

Florida State's superior speed, specifically on the defensive line and at wide receiver, helped the Seminoles cruise to a 31-14 win over the Buckeyes on Jan. 1 in New Orleans.

"I didn't underestimate their speed at all," Cooper said after his team ended the year 10-3, including the Sugar Bowl loss. "I think I talked all week about the speed of not only their skill people, but their other players as well."

20 Years Ago - 2003

After 34 years of near misses and close calls, the wait was finally over for Ohio State and its legion of fans.

The Buckeyes defied the odds by pulling off a 31-24 double-overtime upset of top-ranked Miami (Fla.) to claim the national championship on Jan. 3 at the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl in Tempe, Ariz.

"I'll tell you what, we are so proud of these young men," said OSU coach Jim Tressel, who won a national championship in his second year on the job. "We have always had the best damn band in the land. Now, we've got the best damn team in the land."

15 Years Ago - 2008

The BCS National Championship Game was supposed to be the Ohio State football team's chance to prove it could run with any of the best teams from the nation's top conferences — one conference in particular. The trouble is, the Buckeyes lost their heads too many times in the effort, leading to a 38-24 loss to LSU on Jan. 7 in New Orleans.

Thus, six minutes into the third quarter the Buckeyes and their fans had to endure chants of "S-E-C" from the largely pro-LSU crowd after Tiger Early Doucet caught a short pass in the flat, broke a couple of tackles and scampered across the goal line to give LSU a 31-10 lead.

By the time the confetti began falling on yet another opponent, the Buckeyes had been whistled for five personal fouls, committed three turnovers and had a field goal blocked during an un-Tresselball-esque evening on the bayou.

"We made too many mistakes," linebacker Larry Grant said. "We basically hit ourselves in the back with all the penalties we had, but I can't take anything away from LSU. That's a great team coached by some great coaches."

10 Years Ago - 2013

Despite leading his first Ohio State team to a perfect 12-0 record, Urban Meyer had been overlooked for coach of the year honors in both the Big Ten and the nation.

If that bothered him, he could perhaps take solace in receiving recognition from the Football Writers Association of America as the national first-year coach of the year. That honor was revealed on Jan. 7

along with the FWAA's annual Freshman All-America team, of which there were no members from Ohio State.

Five Years Ago - 2018

Ohio State's 24-7 Cotton Bowl victory over No. 8 USC in Arlington, Texas, on Dec. 29 did more than end a seven-game losing streak to the Trojans that dated back to the 1974 Rose Bowl. It culminated the illustrious careers of 19 seniors, including seven fifth-year players.

The 2017 senior class left Ohio State with a national championship and two Big Ten titles. The 12 fourth-year seniors departed with four pairs of gold pants representing the 4-0 mark against Michigan while the seven fifth-year seniors walked out with five medallions. The former contingent of seniors went 49-6 as Buckeyes, and the latter experienced 61 wins to just eight losses while donning the scarlet and gray.

Needless to say, some of Ohio State's most successful years in program history occurred over those four or five seasons. It also goes without saying that no one was prouder of the latest group of outgoing seniors than head coach Urban Meyer.

"We just had every senior say a few words," Meyer said after the Cotton Bowl. "And I can't get enough of those guys. They're everything that you want in a young person. They lead the team. They live right off the field. And, obviously, they're winners. They won a lot of games here, and they're champions. We just had a lot of not very many dry eyes in the locker room."

One Year Ago - 2022

As the sun dropped below the San Gabriel Mountains and the blue sky turned orange and purple, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and C.J. Stroud rewrote the Ohio State record book in a gutsy, come-from-behind win over Utah in the Rose Bowl.

The Buckeyes, without wide receivers Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson after they opted out of the game to prepare for the 2022 NFL draft, were unsure where they might find their offense against the Utes. But the sophomore wide receiver filled the void, and he did it better than anyone could have imagined. Smith-Njigba caught 15 passes for 347 yards and three touchdowns. It was the most receiving yards by anyone in bowl history, and his records didn't stop there. The Rockwall, Texas, native added several accolades to his résumé in Pasadena, including the record for most receptions and receiving touchdowns in Rose Bowl history.

"We all stepped up," Smith-Njigba said. "Opportunities came my way, and it's what I prayed for. I can't be surprised by what I prayed for."

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Brutus VIPs: Joel Altschule, New Albany, Ohio; Michael Brandt, Columbus; Gary Devaul, Uhrichsville, Ohio; George Ferebee, Ashland, Ohio; Michael Funk, Groveport, Ohio; Dan Grissom, Canal Fulton, Ohio; Thomas Gustinella, Savannah, Ga.; Phil Haas, Marion County, Ohio; Jeff Hodge, Columbus; Ed Maxwell, Jackson Center, Ohio; Frank McBride, Centerville, Ohio; Greg Olwine, Punta Gorda, Fla.; Robert Risher, Celina, Ohio; Dudley Senger, Columbus; David Wagner, Indiana, Pa.; John C. Waite, Tampa, Fla.

Dec. 5 that he would be unable to play in the Buckeyes' College Football Playoff run due to his lingering hamstring injury, and that he will place his focus on rehabilitating prior to the 2023 NFL draft.

Although Smith-Njigba's decision was rooted in a desire to get to 100 percent health, ESPN draft analyst Todd McShay said that NFL scouts have told him that Smith-Njigba was healthy enough to play and was protecting his health for the draft process. Several members of Smith-Njigba's family fired back at McShay, noting that if the receiver was healthy enough, he would have played for the Buckeyes in the Peach Bowl.

"Being with my son yesterday for his first day of rehab and seeing his limitations for myself gave me peace (with) our family's choice to get my son healthy," Smith-Njigba's mother, Maada, tweeted in response to McShay's report. "Encouraging him to play would be selfish and abusive. I'm at peace because I know he's in the right hands for recovery."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was also quick to defend his teammate, and someone he's called his brother since before either of them arrived on campus. Stroud echoed the sentiment shared by Smith-Njigba's mother while pointing to the physical nature of football and the microscope its players are put under.

"Honestly, it sucks," Stroud said. "I feel so bad for him. He works so hard. The stuff that people are saying is crazy, man. We really put our lives on the line, and our bodies on the line, our (mental health). I'm not saying other people in other careers don't, but people judge us so much because we have a scoreboard and we have a result

that people can go look up online. That makes it kind of tough."

Stroud also defended Smith-Njigba's character, and said he remained engaged with the team throughout the season while aiding the Buckeyes' young receiving corps despite not being able to play.

"I know that people were talking about how he should play," Stroud said. "You have no idea the stuff he's been through this year, no clue. Who are people to talk about my brother like that?"

"It kind of makes me a little angry. People try to make it seem like he's not a team player or that he doesn't care about his teammates, but that's the total opposite. I'm on the phone with him every day. It's, 'How's practice, bro?' and 'I'm watching film, doing this. I'm helping out the young receivers.' He helped out (Marvin Harrison Jr.) so much this year, and he helped out (Emeka Egbuka), those dudes who had to step up.

"It's unfair for people to try to ridicule Jaxon."

Several Coaches Leave For Other Schools

Following Ohio State's loss to Georgia, Wilson officially stepped into his new role as head coach at Tulsa and brought a pair of Buckeye defensive staffers with him.

Wilson cooped up defensive analyst Matt Guerreri to be his defensive coordinator and graduate assistant Koy McFarland, who will take over as the linebackers coach for the Golden Hurricane.

Prior to joining Ohio State's staff,

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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Guerreri served as a co-defensive coordinator for Duke from 2018-21, where he was elevated after current OSU defensive coordinator Jim Knowles left for Oklahoma State.

McFarland followed Knowles from Oklahoma State to Ohio State last off-season, and largely worked with the Buckeye linebackers this season as a graduate assistant. McFarland was also a graduate assistant at Louisiana Tech from 2017-20.

"Truly a blessing to work at The Ohio State University!" McFarland tweeted. "I made memories to last a lifetime and coached players who will be unbelievable men in whatever they choose to do! Also cannot thank Coach Knowles enough for being a mentor to me in my time with him! Will dearly miss the players and the #Regulators which made coaching at Ohio State so special. Excited for this next step in my coaching career!"

Ohio State also lost a key member of

BSB Starts Bi-Weekly Printing Schedule

With this issue, Buckeye Sports Bulletin kicks off its winter/spring bi-weekly publishing schedule. The next print issue will be mailed on Jan. 24, followed by the annual Football Recruiting Wrap-Up, set to be mailed Feb. 7.

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.

In addition to on-going football recruiting coverage, 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.

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its strength and conditioning program on Jan. 4, when assistant director of strength and conditioning Niko Palazeti announced that he had taken a job as Cincinnati's new director of football performance.

"Coaching at The Ohio State University has been a privilege of a lifetime," Palazeti said via Twitter. "Thank you Gene Smith, Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach Mick (Marotti) & (senior director for sport performance) Heather Mason, and all the amazing support staff members. To the players — I love you, thank you for making me a better coach and man. I am forever grateful."

Palazeti concludes a five-year career

with the Buckeyes under Marotti, the team's head strength and conditioning coach. He spent a season each at Mississippi State and Maryland, prior to his arrival in Columbus ahead of the 2017 season.

In college, Palazeti played running back at Michigan State, where he was a two-time letter winner.

Wilson, Olave Enter NFL History Books

Former Ohio State wide receivers Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave are already making history at the next level.

The receiver duo became the first

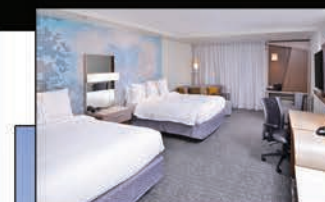
pair of rookies from the same college to eclipse 1,000 yards during their first season in the NFL. Wilson led all rookies in receiving yards this season, hauling in 83 catches for 1,103 yards and four touchdowns for the New York Jets. Olave saw similar success with the New Orleans Saints, snagging 72 receptions for 1,042 yards and four touchdowns.

Wilson and Olave spent three seasons catching passes alongside each other at Ohio State, with both leaving their mark on the Buckeye receivers room. Olave hauled in 175 receptions for 2,702 yards and a program-record 35 touchdowns. Wil-

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Buckeyes See 124 Recognized As Academic All-Big Ten Honorees

The Big Ten announced on Dec. 9 that 124 student-athletes from Ohio State earned academic All-Big Ten honors this past fall. It's the second-most all-time for Ohio State behind the 140 honorees on last fall's list.

This fall's honorees include student-athletes from field hockey, football, men's and women's cross country, men's and women's soccer and women's volleyball. To be eligible for academic All-Big Ten selection, students must be on a varsity team, have been enrolled for a minimum of 12 months and carry a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or higher.

The football team led with 39 honorees, followed by women's cross country and men's soccer, each with 17. Field hockey and women's soccer each had 14 honorees, followed by men's cross country with 12 and women's volleyball with 11. Football's Noah Ruggles and women's cross country's Lindsay Stull were recognized for a 4.0 grade-point average.

The following is a complete list of Ohio State's fall academic All-Big Ten honorees, including their class year and major. The list is in alphabetical order by sport.

Men's Cross Country - Kevin Agnew, So., electrical and computer engineering; Sean Carney, So., management & industry exploring; Giovanni Copploe, Sr., fashion and retail studies; John Cuozzo, Jr., mechanical engineering; Alex Dediu, Jr., international business; Jack Good, 5th-Sr., accounting; Zubin Jha, Jr., computer science and engineering; Kaleb Martin, So., mechanical engineering; Zach Plotkin, So., computer science & engineering (pre); Zach Shultz, Sr., city and regional planning; Ivan Slyepkan, Sr., health sciences; Nathaniel Tamminga, Gr., physics.

Women's Cross Country - Emma Bucher, So., primary education; Chloe Dawson, So., romance studies; Addie Engel, Jr., health sciences; Amelia Figler, Jr., history; Dinah Gigandet, So., speech and hearing science; Allie Guagenti, Sr., art education; Andrea Kuhn, Sr., mathematics; Juliana Metz, So., health sciences; Mia Mlynek, Jr., health sciences; Carina Napoleon, So., speech and hear-

ing science; Gia Napoleon, Sr., women's, gender & sexuality studies; Daniella Santos, Jr., social work; Kathleen Shay, Sr., biomedical engineering; Sophia Spencer, So., health professions exploration; Lindsay Stull, So., human nutrition; Ava Tenaglia, Jr., biology; Akemi Von Scherr, Jr., health promotion, nutrition and exercise science.

Field Hockey - Leanne Bough, Sr., accounting; Hallie Brost, So., exploration; Sarah Charley, Sr., psychology; Abby Danson, Jr., construction systems management; Cameryn Forgash, So., radiologic sciences & therapy; Emma Goldean, 5th-Sr., biology; Ali Gordon, Jr., communication; Hanna Killeen, So., Journalism; Beatrice Maloney, 5th-Sr., finance; Megan McKenna, Jr., health sciences; Sarah Richards, Jr., health sciences; Claudia Thomas, So., marketing; Olivia Zettervall, So., exploration; Jenna Zunic, So., health sciences.

Football - Mason Arnold, So., finance; Kamryn Babb, Gr., kinesiology; Jayden Ballard, So., sport coaching, recreation and physical education; Quinton Edison Burke, Jr., zoology; Reid Carrico, So., construction systems management; Emeka Egbuka, So., marketing; Jack Forsman, Jr., accounting; Patrick Gurd, Jr., health sciences; Ty Hamilton, Jr., consumer and family financial services; Jordan Hancock, So., human development & family science; Marvin Harrison, So., finance; Samuel Hart, So., marketing; TreVeyon Henderson, So., sport industry; Donovan Jackson, So., sport industry; Paris Johnson, Jr., journalism; Cameron Kittle, Jr., construction systems management; Trey Leroux, Jr., finance; Maxwell Lomonico, So., human development & family science; Kyle McCord, So., communication; Jaden McKenzie, Sr., human development & family science; Zenuae Michalski, So., sport industry; Jesse Mirco, So., sport industry; Teradja Mitchell, 5th-Sr., sport industry; William Mitchell, So., finance; Andrew Moore, Jr., consumer and family financial services; Elias Myers, Jr., sport industry; Bryce Prater, So., construction systems management; Zachary Prater, So., construction systems management; Chad Ray, Jr., health sciences; Bradley Robinson, Gr., kinesiology; Mitchell H. Rossi, Gr., human

resource management; Noah Ruggles, Gr., sports coaching; Jacob Seibert, Jr., finance; Cody Simon, Jr., finance; Ryan Smith, Sr., sport industry; Kourt Williams, Jr., communication; Miyan Williams, Jr., human development & family science; Toby Wilson, So., sport industry; Luke Wypler, Jr., sport industry.

Men's Soccer - Nathan Demian, So., finance; Connor DesRoches, Jr., finance; Christopher Dowling, 5th-Sr., economics — business; Brayden Durbin, Sr., sport industry; Devyn Etling, Gr., kinesiology; Thomas Gilej, Jr., economics; Xavier Green, 5th-Sr., environment, economy, development and sustainability; Joakim Jahnsen, So., economics; Keagan McLaughlin, Gr., statistics; Sean Ryan, Sr., accounting; Anthony Samways, So., psychology; Owen Sullivan, Sr., accounting; Maximiliano Trejo, So., sport industry; Peter Van Euwen, Jr., finance; Deylen Vellios, Jr., psychology; Tommaso Villa, So., health professions exploration; Laurence Wootton, Jr., environment, economy, development and sustainability.

Volleyball - Gabby Gonzales, Gr., kinesiology; Mia Grunze, Gr., kinesiology; Emily Londot, Jr., sport industry; Reilly MacNeill, Sr., sport industry; Jenaisya Moore, Sr., sport industry; Sarah Sue Morbitzer, Sr., exercise science; Kylie Murr, Gr., kinesiology; Mac Podraza, Gr., kinesiology; Adria Powell, 5th-Sr., biology; Rylee Rader, Jr., sport industry; Sydney Taylor, So., marketing.

Women's Soccer - Tatum Adamson, So., biology; Christin Baumbick, Jr., health sciences; Sydney Browning, So., health sciences; Chloe Delyser, Jr., sport industry; Kailyn Dudukovich, So., mathematics; Kayla Fisher, Gr., nursing; Kine Myhrer Floetre, So., psychology; Caitlin Foley, Jr., communication; Nina LeFlore, Jr., public policy analysis; Madison Lowe, Gr., kinesiology; Peyton McNamara, Jr., international business; Haley Roberts, Jr., health sciences; Emma Sears, Sr., health promotion, nutrition and exercise science; Emaly Vatne, Gr., kinesiology.

son snagged 143 catches for 2,213 yards and 23 touchdowns.

Trio Of Freshmen Shed Black Stripes

As Ohio State geared up for its Peach Bowl matchup against top-ranked Georgia, a trio of freshmen shed their black stripes and affirmed their status as Buckeyes.

Powers and wide receiver Caleb Burton became the most recent Buckeyes to shed their black stripes on Dec. 20, and were the first to do so since tight end Bennett Christian lost his on Dec. 17.

Powers joined Ohio State as the No. 5 in-state prospect in the 2022 recruiting class, while also ranking as the No. 8 linebacker in the nation. He was named the Gatorade Ohio Player of the Year in 2021 thanks to his 90 tackles (17 for loss) and six sacks.

Powers appeared in just two games for the Buckeyes this season, receiving snaps against Toledo on Sept. 17 and Wisconsin on Sept. 24.

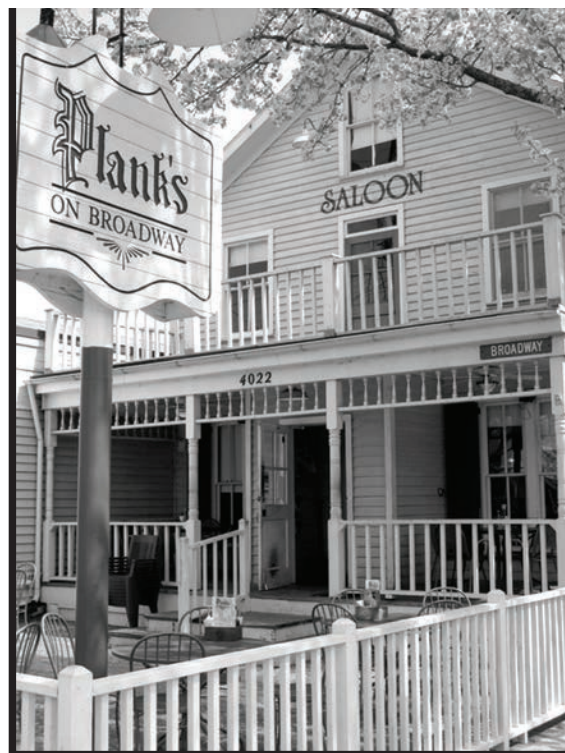
Burton arrived in Columbus last January as an early enrollee and ranked as the

No. 1 wideout in his recruiting class. Hailing from Austin, Texas, Burton played his first two seasons of high school football at Del Valle High School, where he caught 82 passes for 1,515 yards and 18 touchdowns as a freshman and sophomore.

After missing his junior season with an injury, Burton transferred to Lake Travis High School in Austin, Texas, the same high school that produced former Ohio State receiver Wilson. Burton did not appear in a game for the Buckeyes this season.

Christian played in nine offensive snaps this season, all of which coming in Ohio State's 77-21 win over Toledo on Sept. 17. He joined the Buckeyes as a three-star recruit out of Acworth, Ga., Allatoona High School. He is the highest-rated recruit to ever come out of Allatoona.

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.



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Hit Leaves Harrison, Buckeyes Reeling

Continued From Page 1

difficult pill to swallow. Though Ruggles' miss put a definitive cap on the loss, the wheels of defeat had already been set in motion earlier in the evening.

"You can't put it on him," linebacker Steele Chambers said. "There's so many other times in the game where we could have executed better, could have done our jobs better. It's not just one player. So anyone that says he lost the game is wrong. I mean, he's a part of our brotherhood too. He's a hell of a player. He kept us in the game because he was making kicks all day."

"Yeah, it doesn't come down to Noah," linebacker Tommy Eichenberg added. "It comes down to us, it comes down to me. I've got to really do better."

As the linebackers alluded to, execution was lacking in pivotal moments against the Bulldogs. Despite Ohio State going into the fourth quarter up 38-24 against the defending national champions, that final frame featured a combination of mistakes and miscues that would spell the end of the season for the Buckeyes.

Georgia's comeback – which featured an 18-point fourth quarter compared to just a field goal for Ohio State in the final 15 minutes – began on a 31-yard field goal by kicker Jack Podlesny with 10:14 remaining in the game, which was just four plays after the Buckeyes allowed a conversion on fourth-and-6, failing to bring down tight end Brock Bowers short of the line to gain.

Ohio State went three-and-out on the ensuing drive, and even that series came with a missed chance for the Buckeyes. After a 6-yard scramble by Stroud on third-and-7, Ohio State lined up for the punt with a fake in mind, set on direct snapping it to tight end Mitch Rossi, and the play worked like a charm as Rossi dived forward for a gain of several yards, at least enough for a new set of downs.



SONNY BROCKWAY

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR — Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. was knocked out of the Peach Bowl following a hit by Georgia cornerback Javon Bullard that caused Harrison to enter the concussion protocol. Harrison left the game with five catches for 106 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

But Georgia head coach Kirby Smart had correctly sniffed out the fake, calling a timeout at nearly the same moment Arnold snapped the ball, wiping the fake off the board. Even if Smart hadn't identified it, Ohio State still unknowingly had 12 men on the field, so the officials could have blown it dead anyway. Regardless, the Buckeyes punted the ball away.

"They just were not in their traditional formation," Smart said. "A lot of teams carry that speed break. They come up to the line quickly. Everybody's lined up tight. And we've seen it in the SEC. A lot of teams carry it, and you try to practice it, but it's another thing when they actually do it and execute it. So it was one of those gut reactions that I didn't think that we had it lined up properly to stop it, so we called timeout."

Then, on the first play of Georgia's next possession, quarterback Stetson Bennett uncorked a deep ball to wideout Arian Smith, who left safety Lathan Ransom in the dust on a 76-yard touchdown. The Bulldogs were then successful on a two-point conversion, and the game that had been teetering on the edge of dominance for Ohio State was suddenly just a 38-35 lead with under nine minutes remaining.

The Buckeye offense drove the ball 57 yards to the Georgia 18-yard line on the next drive, but a sack by quarterback C.J. Stroud on second-and-5 and an ensuing incompleteness on third-and-17 forced Ohio State into another Ruggles field goal to make it 41-35, setting up a storybook ending for whichever team would come out on

top.

Of course, Ohio State's offense might have fared better in that fateful fourth quarter with the presence of arguably the nation's best wide receiver. Marvin Harrison Jr. was lost for the game in the final minute of the third quarter after taking what appeared to be a helmet-to-helmet hit – or at least shoulder-to-helmet – courtesy of Georgia cornerback Javon Bullard while attempting to haul in a pass from Stroud in the back of the end zone.

Bullard was originally flagged for targeting, but after some deliberation, the foul was picked up, with his hit deemed legal upon review.

Harrison entered the concussion protocol, and after being evaluated by Ohio State's medical staff, the sophomore – who had five receptions for 106 yards and two touchdowns to that point – was held out of the remainder of the contest.

"I respect the trainers' decision to keep me out," Harrison said after the game. "At the end of the day, they're just looking out for my health and my safety. I respect their decision though."

Harrison added that he felt well enough to go back into the game and just wanted the opportunity to leave it all on the field for his team.

"I wanted to be out there with my team," he said. "But like I said, I respect their decision. At the end of the day, they're just looking out for my health. But I definitely tried to fight."

"It hurt badly (to not go back in). Fourth quarter, College Football Playoff, a chance

to go to the national championship," he continued. "I wish I could have been out there for my teammates and do the best I can (to) help."

After the game, Day questioned how the hit taken by Harrison and his ensuing concussion symptoms can happen if the hit – deemed legal and not meeting the NCAA rulebook's definition of "forcible contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless opponent with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder" – wasn't considered targeting.

"I was told that it was not targeting, that he didn't take a shot to the head, which is hard – I didn't see it, so I don't know," Day said. "But to get a concussion and not get hit in the head, I'd have to see the replay. And they said that it happened after he got hit, but I'd have to take a look at the video. I wasn't able to see the replay."

Harrison's pedigree was well-established entering the game, and he turned on the jets once again with his two-touchdown performance in the first half. He finished the season with 77 receptions for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns, with those respective marks ranking fourth, fourth and tied for second in a single season for Ohio State.

The Buckeyes will be happy to welcome Harrison back for what is almost certainly a final season in Columbus before he moves on to what will likely be a long career in the NFL, but the loss to Georgia begs the question of how the result might have changed had Harrison seen the field during those last 15 minutes.

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"To say that losing Marv didn't have an impact on the game, it absolutely did," Day said. "What this guy did and the way he competed in the second half with all those things coming at him, I just can't say enough. I'm so proud of the way he played."

Furthermore, the hit on Harrison came on third-and-7, so the Buckeyes were again forced to settle for a field goal instead of receiving a new set of downs just a yard away from the end zone. Those factors – the missed opportunities and losses out of Ohio State's control – combined with the defensive lapses, featuring 10 plays given up of at least 20 yards and a career-high 398-yard passing performance by Bennett, could have put the game out of Georgia's reach before Ruggles stepped on the field for his ill-fated kick. But the ever-persistent Bulldogs instead remained in the contest.

Ohio State entered the game as an underdog, with Georgia viewed as a two-possession favorite over the Buckeyes. The expectation made sense, seeing as the Bulldogs entered the game undefeated while Ohio State's most recent appearance on the gridiron ended in another humiliating loss to Michigan. The No. 2-seeded Wolverines didn't fare much better on New Year's Eve, however, falling 51-45 to No. 3 TCU.

Though that betting line eventually came down for Ohio State and Georgia, ultimately settling on the Bulldogs as favorites by a little more than a field goal given the apparent home-field advantage

with the game being in Atlanta, the chip never left the shoulder of the Buckeyes, who proved themselves deserving of a continued spot on the sport's biggest stage after a tumultuous month for the program.

"This is the way that we need to play football," Day said. "You can see the energy and passion on the sideline, and you can see the way guys were playing physically. I mean, listen, that's a good team. Let's call it for what it is. They are the defending national champs, undefeated. They're a good team. But I don't think there's one guy in that locker room that doesn't feel like we shouldn't have won the game."

Although moral victories are not a business that Day was interested in after the game, especially given the fashion in which the contest ended, he did acknowledge the team's fight in defeat.

"It doesn't mean anything if you don't win though," he said. "And I think that's probably what hurts the most is that, when you put that much work and that much energy and that much time into something and you're right there and you just – you don't get the victory."

"This is a performance business, and you win or you lose, and we lost the game. That's just what hurts to our core. And that's what it is. We're here to win, and it didn't happen."

"That being said, yeah, we came out. Guys were flying around. We were competing. In the end, we came up short. So we'll have to figure out how to get it fixed in the offseason so that when we're here again, we're on top when it comes to it."



SONNY BROCKWAY

WALK-ON TO WINNER — Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett, a former walk-on for the Bulldogs, cemented his spot as one of the sport's best quarterbacks with his 398-yard passing performance in Georgia's 42-41 win over Ohio State.

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Explosive Plays Continue To Sink Buckeyes

For the second consecutive game, Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' reliance on aggressiveness came back to bite the Buckeyes.

In the first half of the Peach Bowl alone, Georgia completed 10 plays of more than 15 yards – which is Knowles' threshold for an explosive play. The Bulldogs added another five in the second half, including a 76-yard touchdown pass from Stetson Bennett to wide receiver Arian Smith, who was wide-open after Lathan Ransom lost his footing, which cut Ohio State's lead to three with 8:41 to go in regulation.

GAME NOTEBOOK Jack Emerson

On Georgia's game-winning drive, the Bulldogs had two separate plays of at least 15 yards – which included a 35-yard completion to wide receiver Kearis Jackson, pushing the Bulldogs into the red zone.

"I think there were too many explosive plays," linebacker Steele Chambers said. "There were times when we were just off-kilter a little bit on our assignments. At the end of the day, you've just got to take each punch, you've got to keep going. We fought to the end, and I love this team for that."

The Buckeyes allowed Bennett to throw for a career-best 398 yards and three touchdowns, while Georgia's committee of backs churned out 135 yards on the ground on an average of 5.2 yards per attempt. In total, the Bulldogs racked up 533 yards of total offense – with 187 of those coming in the fourth quarter.

During the fourth quarter, Ohio State largely gave Georgia man-to-man looks with Ronnie Hickman as the lone deep safety, opting to remain aggressive rather than sitting in a zone and keeping the Bulldog offense in front of them. Although Knowles' late-game

play-calling came into question following the loss, Chambers defended his defensive coordinator despite the unit's miscues.

"We work two-minute drill all the time in practice, and a lot of time that's the call," Chambers said. "If you're trying to pin it on Jim Knowles, that's not how you do it. He's a great coach, puts us in great spots. We just have to make plays."

In regard to the defensive miscues as a whole, defensive end Zach Harrison said he was proud of the Buckeyes' effort but was disappointed in the results.

"We can't let up 42 points in a game like that, especially with the offense playing the way it is, but the plan was to go out there and let it all out, and we definitely did that," Harrison said. "You can't say we didn't play hard. There's definitely some plays we could have gone back, could have executed better on, could have made tackles and been in a better position."

"But we played hard, and I'm proud of my guys, and I love my guys for doing that."

Stroud's Heroics Fall Short In Loss

In the immediate aftermath of Ohio State's loss to Michigan on Nov. 26, Buckeye quarterback C.J. Stroud's legacy was called into question.

In his two seasons as the starter, Stroud was 0-2 against the rival Wolverines and did not capture a conference title or even win the Big Ten East division. Despite shattering several Ohio State records, Stroud still had much to prove in his first career College Football Playoff appearance at the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl on Dec. 31.

"People are going to say I never won The Game, and I understand," Stroud said after the loss to Michigan. "People are going to say I never won a Big Ten championship, and I understand. When it comes to that, I just have to eat it. It's life. Nothing has ever been easy for me, and I don't expect it to be easy."

Although Ohio State didn't wind up on the winning end of the scoreboard, falling to No. 1



SONNY BROCKWAY

YOU CAN'T DO THAT — Despite Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. exiting the game because of a suspected concussion, the hit that knocked him out was not considered targeting, with officials picking up the flag.

Georgia in a thrilling 42-41 loss in the semifinal matchup, Stroud's effort and impact on the game were unquestioned. The Buckeye signal caller completed 23 of 34 pass attempts for 348 yards and four touchdowns in the loss.

While Stroud showcased his usual prowess as a passer, it was his ability to keep the Bulldog defense honest with his legs that stood out. Throughout much of his time as the starter, Stroud caught flak from the media and Ohio State fan base regarding his typical reluctance to tote. But against Georgia, Stroud tallied 70 yards on eight carries, not including sacks, with 17- and 27-yard keepers in the fourth quarter.

As the dust settled on a difficult end to Ohio State's season, and potentially Stroud's collegiate career, head coach Ryan Day said he was proud of the way his quarterback competed against Georgia while noting that Stroud played a key role in the Buckeyes' handling of the Bulldog defense.

"What (Stroud) did and the way he competed in the second half with all those things coming at him, I just can't say enough," Day said. "I'm so proud of the way he played. He's not the only one, but he's sitting right here, and he's the quarterback of this team. Just the way he attacked this game, I couldn't be any prouder of the way he did that. We were missing some guys out there, and we were trying to figure it out. On the biggest stage, he played

one of his best games, in my opinion."

As Georgia pulled ahead with 54 seconds remaining, taking a 42-41 lead thanks to a 10-yard touchdown pass from Bennett to Adonai Mitchell, the game fell on Stroud's shoulders. Operating without star wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. and tight end Cade Stover, both of whom were knocked out with injuries, Stroud nearly delivered.

Stroud opened the possession with a 5-yard run, followed by a 12-yard completion to wideout Julian Fleming to push Ohio State to its own 42-yard line. The Inland Empire, Calif., native then took off on the previously-mentioned 27-yard tote, but OSU's drive stalled there as running back Dallan Hayden was stuffed for a 1-yard loss and Stroud was hurried on a pair of incompletions.

Despite Stroud's efforts, kicker Noah Rugles' game-winning attempt went wide to the left, and the Buckeyes fell. Stroud said he left everything on the field, while also giving thanks that he had the opportunity to play with his teammates one final time this season.

"I just try to leave it all on the line," Stroud said. "The last drive, man, I saw how much time we had with timeouts, and I knew we could do it. I tried my hardest to get us down here. I got to maybe split somebody else, make another move, and just try to get a little more, but I tried my hardest."

"I think I left my heart out on that field."

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Nearly everything Ohio State did passing the ball – at least before star wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. had to leave the game with an injury – worked well against Georgia. Third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud finished 23 of 34 for 348 yards and four touchdowns while Harrison and second-year wideout Emeka Egbuka each surpassed 100 yards receiving.

Head coach Ryan Day schemed up a cavalcade of concepts to generate that production too. Throws were completed to all areas of the field. Egbuka caught a touchdown pass on a slide route from the back side, knifing through the Ohio State backfield to lose Georgia's defense off play action.

Harrison and third-year wide receiver Julian Fleming each made big gains off throwbacks going opposite the motion of plays to catch the Bulldogs' defense out of position. A slant pass to Egbuka on a third-and-1 in the first quarter gained 13 yards and extended what became an OSU touchdown drive.

Even when schematics didn't immediately yield an open target, Stroud's ability to extend plays and throw off-platform were game-changing. He evaded the pass rush and threw running to his right to nail Harrison in the end zone for the contest's opening score.

A few minutes into the second quarter, he slid by a pair of Bulldog defensive linemen and gunned a 16-yard scoring strike to Harrison again, giving the Buckeyes a 21-7 advantage. Graduate wide receiver Xavier Johnson hauled in another aerial score, a 37-yard bomb.

Stroud's final performance, and that of the Buckeyes' passing offense as a whole, was a memorable one even in defeat.

What Didn't Work

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said post-game that the team stayed basic in its defensive schemes, skirting its usual aggression after giving up too many big-play touchdowns against Michigan Nov. 26. The changes didn't seem to make much progress.

Georgia gouged the Buckeyes for 533 yards. With a big play defined as 20 yards or more, Ohio State still surrendered 10 of them, more than it allowed all season. The Bulldogs averaged 8.88 yards per play, the most ever allowed in a game by an OSU defense, edging out Michigan's 8.83 record-breaking mark a month prior.

Midway through the second quarter, Ohio State's defense ran back on the field with two defensive tackles and two defensive ends in the game. It would have been the first play for second-year defensive tackle Mike Hall. At the last second, he was swapped out for a third defensive end despite a two-tight end set from the Bulldogs. Georgia running back Kenny McIntosh busted through the middle for a 52-yard

gain, setting up a touchdown for his team.

Eight of the Bulldogs' 10 big plays came on passes, however, not on runs.

A slip from third-year safety Lathan Ransom – though he may have been beaten anyway on the route – yielded the biggest play of the night for either side, a 76-yard strike from Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett to wide receiver Arian Smith in the fourth quarter.

Linebacker Tommy Eichenberg was left man-to-man on a seam route against Smith earlier in the game, a mismatch exploited by Bennett for a 47-yard gain on a second-and-14. It wasn't the only blown coverage with Georgia behind the chains.

The Bulldogs faced a second-and-17 early at the Ohio State 25-yard line, and the Buckeyes opted for a soft coverage alignment with no defensive back within 10 yards of the line of scrimmage. Georgia countered by running a quick tunnel screen to McIntosh, split out at wide receiver, who knifed through the middle of Ohio State's defense for a 25-yard scoring jaunt that tied the game 7-7.

A 35-yard strike to wide receiver Kearis Jackson set up a 10-yard touchdown toss to Adonai Mitchell that proved the game-winning touchdown for the Bulldogs.

Play Of The Game

The most impactful play in the Peach Bowl isn't so much one made by either side for this contest, but it did serve as the most pivotal point in the action.

On third-and-goal at the Georgia 7-yard line up 35-24, Stroud dropped back to pass and was met by a cavalry of Georgia pass rushers. The quarterback heaved the ball toward the back of the end zone off his back foot, and Harrison worked his way underneath it and stuck his hands out in an attempt to make the catch.

As Harrison arrived at the ball, Georgia defensive back Javon Bullard smashed into Harrison, first making shoulder-to-shoulder contact before colliding helmets with the receiver, at least as it appeared on replay. A flag immediately flew in for targeting.

Replay officials then took a long look at the call. According to the rules of targeting, any player attempting to catch a forward pass is deemed defenseless, and thus any forcible contact to the head or neck area should be considered targeting. Replay has to confirm the call, but it was instead overturned, leaving Ohio State to kick a field goal rather than having first-and-goal.

More impactful, though, is that the hit knocked Harrison, the Buckeyes' best receiver and one of the best in the country, out of the contest. Following the loss of Harrison, Ohio State had just 97 total yards of offense in the fourth quarter, and the Bulldogs outscored the Buckeyes 18-3 in that final frame.

— Andy Anders

Of course, it's something that's heavy on the heart. It's going to be tough, but I'd rather – I don't want to go out there with anybody else. I love my teammates so much. We put everything on the line, and I would never want to do it with anybody else."

Harrison, Stover Injuries Slow Down Offense

Clinging to a 35-24 lead with 43 seconds to play in the third quarter, the Buckeyes lined up for a pivotal third-and-goal from the Georgia 7-yard line. With a touchdown potentially putting the game out of reach for the Bulldogs, Stroud looked in the direction of his favorite target in Marvin Harrison.

Although Stroud uncorked the ball under immense pressure, he still found Harrison in the back of the end zone for what looked to be another score. However, at the last moment, safety Javon Bullard laid a vicious hit on Harrison, jarring the ball loose and leaving the Buckeye wideout on the turf for a prolonged period of time.

Bullard's hit was initially called targeting, but after a lengthy review, the call was overturned, and the Buckeyes had to settle for a field goal instead. Although Bullard's breakup kept the Bulldogs within two possessions, the most lasting impact of the play was that Harrison was held out of the game from that moment as he entered concussion protocol.

To that point in the contest, Harrison had corralled five receptions for 106 yards with a pair of touchdowns. With Harrison off the field, the Buckeye offense could generate only 97 yards while not finding the end zone for the rest of the night. Ohio State registered an average of 7.8 yards per play prior to Harrison's injury, a number that fell to 5.1 yards with Harrison sidelined.

Stroud suddenly found himself without his top weapon for all of the game's final frame. Day noted that Harrison's injury changed the complexion of the contest.

"To say that losing Marvin didn't have an impact on the game, it absolutely did," Day said.

Harrison's injury was among a long line of ailments that battered Ohio State's offense against the Bulldogs. The Buckeyes entered the semifinal matchup already without running back TreVeyon Henderson, who was recovering from surgery on his foot. Fellow running back Miyan Williams was also recovering from a variety of injuries he had sustained during the late stages of the regular season and dealt with a stomach bug during the week of the Peach Bowl. Williams played sparingly against Georgia, tallying 8 yards and a touchdown on three carries.

The Buckeyes also saw starting tight end Cade Stover sustain a back injury during the first quarter after he tried to hurdle a Georgia defender, falling hard to the turf. Stover was able to walk off the field, but he was later transported to a local Atlanta hospital as a precaution due to back spasms. Ohio State was already without Stover's backup in Gee Scott Jr., who was a game-time decision but ultimately did not play, so the Buckeyes were forced to turn to the little-used duo of Joe Royer and Sam Hart, who had tallied seven and 17 snaps during the regular season, respectively. Royer had one catch against the Bulldogs for 9 yards. Ohio State also relied further on fullback/tight end Mitch Rossi in Stover's absence.

"We lost Cade early in the game, which really sent us into a little tailspin in a couple

of groupings," Day said. "I thought Xavier (Johnson) and Mitch and even Joe stepping in did a nice job with something we had to work through all season."

Smart Recognizes Slim Chance Of Win

When Ruggles' game-winning attempt sailed left of the uprights, the usually sure-fire kicker's head sank before he lifted up holder/punter Jesse Mirco from the turf.

While the Georgia sideline was sent into a scene of jubilation, Ohio State's fell into a state of despair. Day bowed his head, while several players fell to the ground in agony. Following the win, Georgia head coach Kirby Smart recognized the battle the underdog Buckeyes gave to his squad.

"My heart goes out to those guys because they played well enough to win," Smart said. "That's not my concern. My concern is the

men in our locker room. We played well enough to win too. I would have liked to have seen a little cleaner game, and you've got to give them a lot of credit. They disrupted a lot of that. We didn't have a lot of turnovers. We didn't have self-inflicted wounds, and they didn't either. Both teams played really well, and both defenses rose up and made stops. It was a very competitive, balanced game."

Chambers echoed the sentiment made by Smart, asserting that the Buckeyes should have been the team to lift the George P. Crumbley Trophy.

"I stayed out because I wanted to watch the celebration," Chambers said. "I feel like it should have been us."

The Bulldogs overcame a pair of 14-point deficits, falling behind 21-7 in the first half and 38-24 entering the fourth quarter. Georgia outscored the Buckeyes 18-3 in the final frame to pull off the comeback and secure its spot in the

Late Score The Difference In CFP Semifinal

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State played like a champion, but Georgia was the champion, a difference as slim as the 42-41 score in favor of the Bulldogs that kept alive their dream of back-to-back national titles.

The Buckeyes gave favored Georgia all it could handle, but ultimately Stetson Bennett threw a 10-yard touchdown pass to Adonai Mitchell with 54 seconds left as the top-ranked Bulldogs rallied from a 14-point deficit to defeat No. 4 Ohio State in the College Football Playoff semifinal in the Peach Bowl at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Dec. 31.

After the score and deciding extra point by Jack Podlesny, quarterback C.J. Stroud put the Buckeyes (11-2) in a position for the win, but Noah Ruggles missed a 50-yard field goal with three seconds left before a pro-Georgia crowd of 79,330 inside the dome.

Georgia would play TCU for the title in Inglewood, Calif., on Jan. 9. The third-ranked Horned Frogs defeated No. 2 Michigan 51-45 in the other semifinal on Dec. 31.

The Bulldogs scored 17 unanswered points for a 24-21 lead late in the second quarter before Stroud engineered a scoring drive to give the Buckeyes a 28-24 halftime lead that was extended to 38-24 through three quarters.

Stroud was 23 of 34 for 348 yards and four touchdowns while Bennett was 23 of 34 for 398 yards, three touchdowns and an interception.

Emeka Egbuka had eight catches for 112 yards and a touchdown. Marvin Harrison Jr. made five catches for 106 yards and two scores, all in the first half, but was unavailable for the fourth quarter because of a head injury.

“Ohio State probably deserved to win the game, but we never quit,” Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. “We didn’t play our best game. Maybe they didn’t either.”

Back And Forth

Ohio State started from its 25 after the opening kickoff, and Stroud hit Harrison for 11 yards on the first play, but on third-and-7, Stroud suffered a 10-yard sack to force a punt, a 45-yarder by Jesse Mirco.

Bennett went 4 of 5 for 48 yards on the Bulldogs’ first drive, but the Buckeyes stiffened and Podlesny missed a 47-yard field goal. Mitchell had two catches for 33 yards in the series.

The Buckeyes needed four plays and 2:15 to take a 7-0 lead on a 31-yard catch by Harrison at the 8:16 mark.

Harrison had a 24-yard grab followed by a 13-yard reception by Egbuka to the Georgia 34. After Dallan Hayden ran for 3 yards, Stroud rolled right and found Harrison in the end zone.

Georgia answered with a 25-yard TD catch by Kenny McIntosh at 3:15 of the first to complete a 75-yard march in eight plays and 5:01 used.

The Bulldogs had a third-and-10 from their 25 when Dominick Blaylock made a 20-yard catch. Daijun Edwards had an 18-yard rush followed by a 17-yard completion to Brock Bowers to the 18. Steele Chambers



SONNY BROCKWAY

THE MAN IN THE ARENA — The Peach Bowl came down to the foot of Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles, whose 50-yard attempt with just three seconds remaining went wide left. Ruggles’ teammates showed immediate support for the kicker after his miss, claiming that the loss was on everyone.

and friends had a 7-yard sack on first down, but Bennett threw to McIntosh behind the line and he did the rest for the tying score.

Miyan Williams’ 2-yard run made it 14-7. OSU converted two third downs needing just a yard. The second was a 13-yard slant catch by Egbuka to place the ball on the Georgia 40 to end the first quarter.

On the first play of the second quarter, Harrison made a catch at the 28, and the ball was punched free by Kelee Ringo before it went out of bounds at the 16. On a third-and-6 from the 12, Stroud threw to Egbuka and Georgia was called for pass interference to put the ball on the 2.

After an incompleting to Harrison at the left pylon, Williams scored with 12:30 left in the half. The drive was 75 yards in 11 plays and 5:45.

A Bennett interception led to a 16-yard TD catch for Harrison to make it 21-7 at 10:56.

Chambers got the pick at the Georgia 45 and returned it 15 yards. Julian Fleming had his first catch of the game for 13 yards, and Hayden picked up a yard on the ground. Stroud then stepped up and out of the pocket to hit Harrison in the right corner.

Georgia again answered, going 75 yards in four plays and 1:40 to make it 21-14 at 9:16 when Kendall Milton ran for an 11-yard score. The Bulldogs had a second-and-14 from their 42 when Bennett launched a 47-yard strike to Arian Smith to the 11. Milton hit pay dirt on the next play.

The Bulldogs tied it at 21 after the Buck-

eyes’ three-and-out. Starting from their 38, McIntosh rambled 52 yards and was stopped at the 10 when he tripped. Edwards rushed for 7 yards, and Bennett ran it in from the 3 at 6:07. Georgia needed 1:34 to go the 62 yards.

When OSU next got the ball, the Buckeyes went for it needing a yard on fourth down from their 35. Stroud took the snap and rolled right for the first, but Mitch Rossi was called for illegal motion and Mirco punted 37 yards to the Georgia 33.

It was costly because the Bulldogs took a 24-21 lead on a 32-yard field goal by Podlesny with 1:44 left in the half. The big play in the drive was a 28-yard reception on third-and-6 by Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint to the OSU 35. Milton ran 15 to the 20, but Georgia gained only 6 more yards before Podlesny’s kick.

Back came the Buckeyes in stunning fashion to go 75 yards, using 55 seconds and four plays, the last a 37-yard toss from Stroud to Xavier Johnson to go ahead 28-24 with 49 seconds left.

Johnson started the possession with a 6-yard catch. Egbuka had another for 19, and Fleming took in a 13-yard throw. Johnson then came out of the backfield, beat the linebacker in isolation and made a catch at the 13. He spun from several defenders at the 5 to reach the end zone. Georgia ran three plays to end the half.

The Buckeyes got bad news at the half when tight end Cade Stover was ruled out with back spasms from earlier in the game.

To The Bitter End

After forcing a Georgia three-and-out to open the third quarter, the Buckeyes started from their 30 and immediately got a 25-yard catch by Fleming to ignite a six-play drive in 3:19 that culminated in Stroud’s fourth touchdown pass, a 10-yarder to Egbuka for a 35-24 advantage at 10:37 of the third quarter.

After the completion to Fleming, Johnson gained 8 in the ground on the second play, and Egbuka’s 19-yard grab moved the ball to the 18. Johnson ran for 8 yards on two carries before the score.

After Georgia punted to the OSU 10, the Buckeyes had to punt from their 4. A 22-yard return by Kearis Jackson following a 50-yard Mirco punt gave UGA the ball at the Buckeye 32. Edwards got 3 yards on two carries before Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Zach Harrison sacked Bennett for a 5-yard loss to the 34 to set up a 52-yard field-goal try that Podlesny missed with 3:50 left in the third quarter.

The Buckeyes took over at the 34 and went backward with a holding call to start, although the end result was a 25-yard field goal by Ruggles with 31 seconds left in the third to make it 38-24.

After the OSU penalty, a defensive pass interference on Ringo gave the Buckeyes new life at the Ohio State 39. Stroud followed with a 7-yard scramble, and Hayden ran for 17 to the Georgia 37.

Egbuka made a catch for 27, but on third-and-goal from the 7, a scrambling Stroud threw to the back of the end zone where Harrison tried to make the catch but it was broken up by Javon Bullard, who was initially flagged for targeting before the play was overruled after a review, leaving Ruggles to kick the field goal.

gles to kick the field goal.

The incompleting would be the final play of the game for Harrison, who entered the concussion protocol. The Buckeyes were outscored 18-3 going forward.

Georgia drove to the Ohio State 7-yard line thanks to a critical fourth-down play by Bowers, who made a catch and stretched to make it across the line to gain. The play was at first ruled a stop, but the review gave Georgia another set of downs. The Buckeyes stiffened, and a 31-yard Podlesny field goal made it 38-27 with 10:14 to play.

But just as in the 45-23 loss to Michigan, the OSU defense gave up a huge play. On the first play after an OSU punt, Smith got by Lathan Ransom for a 76-yard TD, and the subsequent two-point conversion – a pass to Ladd McConkey – made it 38-35 with 8:41 left.

When OSU got the ball, Hayden rushed for 12, and Stroud later scrambled for 17 to the Georgia 34. Looking at third-and-8, he connected with Egbuka across the middle for 9 yards.

Stroud ran for 5, but on the next play he was sacked for a 12-yard loss back to the Georgia 30. After an incompleting, Ruggles nailed a 48-yard field goal for a 41-35 lead with 2:43 to play.

Georgia began its final drive at its 28. It reached the Bulldog 45 on a 15-yard catch by Bowers. An OSU offside moved the ball to the 50, and Jackson made a 35-yard catch to the 15. McIntosh had a 5-yard reception to the 10 before the game-winning toss to Mitchell.

After the kickoff, Stroud ran for 5 and passed 12 yards to Fleming to the OSU 42 before Stroud took off again, this time for 27 yards to the 31.

Hayden lost a yard on first down, and a pass was incomplete to Johnson. Stroud was pressured on third down and threw another incomplete pass to set up the failed Ruggles field-goal attempt.

“We scored and I was scared to death because (Ohio State) played a hell of a game on offense,” Bennett said. “I was like, ‘Did we score too fast?’ Then our D stepped up. What a game.”

Notes

Georgia had 533 total yards (398 passing, 135 rushing). At the half, the Bulldogs had 191 through the air and 123 running for 314 yards. ... OSU totaled 467 yards (348 passing, 119 running). The Buckeyes had just 10 of their 248 total yards in the first half on the ground. ... In the fourth quarter, Georgia not only outscored the Buckeyes 18-3 but outgained them 187 to 97. ... The Bulldogs had four sacks for 36 yards, the Buckeyes two for 12. ... Hayden led OSU with 43 yards on nine carries. Stroud ran for 71 gross yards on 12 carries but netted only 34 after the sacks and a run for a 1-yard loss in the second quarter were accounted. ... McIntosh had 70 yards on five rushes, and Smith had 129 yards on just three catches for the Bulldogs. ... Ransom had a game-high nine tackles (five solo). Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers each had five solo and eight total tackles, and Zach Harrison recorded 1½ tackles for losses of 12 yards.

BSB Quotebook: Georgia 42, Ohio State 41



SONNY BROCKWAY

HIS BEST GAME — Despite the loss to Georgia, Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud turned in perhaps his best performance as a Buckeye, completing 23 of 34 attempts for 348 passing yards and four touchdowns against arguably the nation's top defense.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on his postgame locker room message: "I told the guys I'm proud of the way they played. I'm proud of the way they competed. For the older guys, the seniors, proud of what they've done for the program. For the younger guys, the guys that are coming back, it's an opportunity to learn and grow and see what it takes to win in the (College Football Playoff)."

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart on the Buckeyes: "I have a lot of respect for Ohio State, Coach Day and his program. I saw C.J. Stroud out there, and my heart goes out to those guys because they played well enough to win the game, and they've got a really good football team. So do we."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on the offense's performance: "We were very efficient in the pass game. In the run game we started rolling a little bit, got a lot of positive runs. I felt we were very efficient. Just a couple of those drives where I maybe missed a read or protection broke down and I got sacked, whatever the case may be, maybe those were the reasons why we lost. No one really knows."

Stroud on the team's mind-set entering the game: "At the end of the day, we had the mind-set of we were going to let everything hang. We were going to go out and fight as hard as we could and swing as hard as we could. I felt we did that."

Day on Ohio State's game plan: "Everybody had

some input on this game plan. Keenan Bailey, one of our assistants, did a study – we had 1,500 reps over the last month, 1,500 reps in bowl practice to get ready for this game plan. I thought our guys executed really well at times. Again, there were some calls that I absolutely wish I had back."

Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett on the close nature of the contest: "That game was – that was a good game. I'm looking at these stats right here, and they're pretty much dead even across the board. That was special."

Bennett on watching Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles' attempted game-winner: "They were beating us. We had sucked on offense, and it was just, hey, play by play, do your job. It doesn't matter what happens on the other side of the ball or another position, do your job. So we had done our job, and then we trusted the defense. Then at that point, it was up to, I guess, the kicker."

Georgia cornerback Javon Bullard on his hit on Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.: "C.J. scrambled, he made a play with his feet and threw the ball up in the air. I saw Marvin's hands going for the ball and just tried to make a play when I could."

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles on whether there were things that could have been done better by the defense: "When you don't win the game, things can always be done better. That's a fact.

We didn't win the game. We got beat defensively in the fourth quarter. Yes, they're tough games, they're match-up games and it's going to be back-and-forth. But we didn't finish in the fourth quarter. That's what it comes down to."

Day on giving up explosive plays: "All we were talking about was just swinging as hard as we can. We did give up some explosive plays again. We did. And it was something that we spent a lot of time talking about is avoiding the big play. I think the difference was, in this game, it didn't demoralize us in this game. We kept swinging and fighting, and we just kept going at it."

Stroud on how the coaches and players fought throughout the game: "Everybody on our team, we didn't splinter. We didn't turn eye-to-eye or point fingers when we lost. We owned our mistakes and kept swinging, like our culture. I wouldn't want to play for anybody else, with anybody else."

Ohio State offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. on his emotions postgame: "I think I'm just shocked. I'm a person who takes a while to process things, good and bad. I'll process it a little later. But I feel like the process – when I was out there I was trying to process, 'How was that kick missed?' We'd been going hard on field goal all day, and there were the matchups inside. I took my guy to the ground, the lights started going crazy. I thought we won, I thought we hit it. Then it was a feeling of shock."

The Numbers Game

Georgia 42, Ohio State 41

Dec. 31, 2022 – Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta, Ga.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	7	21	10	3	41
GEORGIA	7	17	0	18	42

First Quarter

- OSU** – Harrison Jr., 31-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 8:16.
- UGA** – McIntosh, 25-yard pass from Bennett (Podlesny kick), 3:15.

Second Quarter

- OSU** – Williams, 2-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 12:30.
- OSU** – Harrison Jr., 16-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 10:56.
- UGA** – Milton, 11-yard rush (Podlesny kick), 9:16.
- UGA** – Bennett, 3-yard rush (Podlesny kick), 6:07.
- UGA** – Podlesny, 32-yard field goal, 1:44.
- OSU** – Johnson, 37-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 0:49.

Third Quarter

- OSU** – Egbuka, 10-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 10:37.
- OSU** – Ruggles, 25-yard field goal, 0:31.

Fourth Quarter

- UGA** – Podlesny, 31-yard field goal, 1:44.
- UGA** – Smith, 76-yard pass from Bennett (McConkey pass from Bennett), 8:41.
- OSU** – Ruggles, 48-yard field goal, 2:43.
- UGA** – Mitchell, 10-yard pass from Bennett (Podlesny kick), 0:54.
- Att.** – 79,330
- Weather** – Indoor

	Team Statistics	
	OSU	UGA
First Downs	24	21
Rushing	5	6
Passing	17	15
Penalty	2	0
Rushes-Yards	32-119	26-135
Passing Yards	348	398
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	23-34-0	23-34-1
Offensive Plays	66	60
Total Net Yards	467	533
Third Down Efficiency	4-12	2-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	1-1
Punts-Avg.	5-43.4	2-44.5
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties	4-24	4-45
Time of Possession	32:36	27:24

	Individual Statistics	
RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Hayden 9-43; Stroud 12-34; X. Johnson 6-28; M. Williams 3-8; Egbuka 2-6. UGA: McIntosh 5-70; Edwards 8-58; Milton 3-26; Bowers 1-1; Team 2-(-2); Bennett 7-(-18).		
PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Stroud 23-24-0-348-4. UGA: Bennett 23-34-1-398-3.		
RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Egbuka 8-112; Harrison Jr. 5-106; Fleming 5-71; X. Johnson 3-43; Royer 1-9; Stover 1-7. UGA: McIntosh 5-56; Bowers 4-64; Smith 3-129; Mitchell 3-43; Rosemy-Jacksaint 2-34; McConkey 2-(-1); Jackson 1-35; Blaylock 1-20; Washington 1-9; Edwards 1-9.		
PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU: Mirco 5-43.4-50. UGA: Thorson 2-44.5-52.		
PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: None. UGA: Jackson 1-22.		
KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: X. Johnson 1-15. UGA: Jackson 2-50.		
FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – OSU: None. UGA: None.		
INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Chambers 1-15. UGA: None.		
SACKS – OSU: Chambers 0.5-4; Harrison 0.5-3; Vincent 0.5-3; Jean-Baptiste 0.5-2. UGA: Dumas-Johnson 1-12; Mondon Jr. 1-10; Williams 1-9; Bullard 1-5.		
TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Harrison 1.5-10; Burke 1-3; Chambers 0.5-4; Vincent 0.5-3; Jean-Baptiste 0.5-2. UGA: Williams 1.5-9; Dumas-Johnson 1-12; Mondon Jr. 1-10; Bullard 1-5; Starks 1-1; Chambliss 0.5-1.		
TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Ransom 5-4-9; Eichenberg 5-3-8; Chambers 5-3-8; Burke 3-2-5; Harrison 2-24; Hamilton 3-0-3; C. Brown 2-1-3; McCalister 1-2-3; Hickman 2-0-2; Styles 1-1-2; Vincent 0-2-2-; Jean-Baptiste 0-2-2; Gaoteote IV 0-1-1; Trayanum 0-1-1; Mirco 0-1-1; Sawyer 0-1-1. UGA: Smith 8-0-8; Mondon Jr. 7-0-7; Ringo 5-0-5; Williams 4-1-5; Starks 4-0-4; Stackhouse 3-0-3; Bullard 3-0-3; Walthour 2-1-3; Smith 2-0-2; Dumas-Johnson 1-1-2; Lassiter 1-0-1; Bowers 1-0-1; Carter 1-0-1; Beal Jr. 1-0-1; Marshall 1-0-1; Ingram-Dawkins 1-0-1; Daniel-Sisavanh 1-0-1; Chambliss 0-1-1; Meeks 0-1-1; Smith 0-1-1.		
PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OSU: Harrison Jr., Egbuka, Fleming, Hayden, Wypler, M. Jones, Stroud, D. Jackson, Johnson Jr., D. Jones, Stover, Burke, Ransom, Hickman, McCalister, Chambers, C. Brown, Eichenbeurg, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, Vincent, Harrison, X. Johnson, Hicks, Martinez, Trayanum, Styles, Gaoteote IV, Mirco, M. Williams, Simon, Sawyer, Rossi, Fielding, J. Johnson, Proctor, Hall Jr., Fryar, Jean-Baptiste, Royer, Cage, T. Williams, Curry, Arnold, Ruggles. UGA: Washington, Rosemy-Jacksaint, Bennett, Bowers, Mitchell, Jones, McIntosh, Van Pran, Mims, Ratledge, Truss, Dumas-Johnson, Mondon Jr., Bullard, Starks, Smith, Lassiter, Beal Jr., Ringo, Stackhouse, Carter, Walthour, Davis, Green, Jackson, Walker, Smith, Williams, Daniel-Sisavanh, Marshall, D. Smith, Milton, T. Smith, Edwards, Chambliss, Delp, Walker, Mote, Everette, Jones Jr., Willock, Lindberg, Sherman, Blaylock, Seither, McConkey, Bell, Goede, Meeks, Thorson, Ingram-Dawkins, Podlesny, Logue, Brinson, Alexander.		

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	MICHIGAN (3)	L, 45-23	106,787
Dec. 31	(4) Georgia (1)	L, 42-41	79,330

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	310	195
Rushing	113	73
Passing	171	102
Penalty	26	20
Average Per Game/Rush	192.4	121.1
Average Per Game/Pass	298.3	200.5
Total Offense	6379	4180
Total Plays	876	807
Average Per Game	490.7	321.5
Average Per Play	7.3	5.2
Penalties-Yards	73-624	70-590
Fumbles-Lost	10-4	16-7
Third Down Efficiency	75-166	56-187
Percentage	45%	30%
Fourth Down Efficiency	12-17	9-25
Percentage	71%	30%
Sacks-Yards	34-205	12-82
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:45	29:15

Score								
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.	
Ohio State	169	130	149	127	0	575	44.2	
Opponents	64	88	20	101	0	273	21.0	

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Miyan Williams	128	825	6.4	14	70
T. Henderson	107	571	5.3	6	41
Dallan Hayden	111	553	5.0	5	45
Xavier Johnson	12	146	12.2	1	71
C.J. Stroud	47	108	2.3	0	44
Chip Trayanum	15	92	6.1	0	24
Emeka Egbuka	11	87	7.9	2	27
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	466	2501	5.4	30	71
OPP Totals	447	1574	3.5	12	85

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	258	389	66.3	3688	41-6	177.7
Kyle McCord	16	20	80.0	190	1-0	176.3
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	274	410	66.8	3878	42-6	177.2
OPP Totals	212	360	58.9	2606	19-11	131.0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	77	1262	16.4	14	58
Emeka Egbuka	74	1151	15.6	10	69
Cade Stover	36	406	11.3	5	39
Julian Fleming	34	533	15.7	6	79
Xavier Johnson	13	151	11.6	2	37
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
Dallan Hayden	4	23	5.8	0	10
T. Henderson	4	28	7.0	1	31
Mitch Rossi	2	19	9.5	1	16
Joe Royer	2	10	5.0	0	9
Kaleb Brown	1	5	5.0	0	5
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
Kamryn Babb	1	8	8.0	1	8
Reis Stocksdale	1	12	12.0	0	12
Kyion Grayes	1	2	2.0	0	2
OSU Totals	274	3878	14.2	42	79
OPP Totals	212	2606	12.3	19	76

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Noah Ruggles	–	74-75	–	–	17-20	125
M. Harrison Jr.	14	–	–	–	–	84
Miyan Williams	14	–	–	–	–	84
Emeka Egbuka	12	–	–	–	–	72
Julian Fleming	7	–	–	–	–	42
Cade Stover	5	–	–	–	–	30
Dallan Hayden	5	–	–	–	–	30
Xavier Johnson	3	–	–	–	–	18
T. Henderson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Mitch Rossi	2	–	–	–	–	12
Steele Chambers	1	–	–	–	–	6
Kamryn Babb	1	–	–	–	–	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	–	–	–	–	6
Jayden Ballard	1	–	–	–	–	6
T. Eichenberg	1	–	–	–	–	6
J.T. Tuimoloau	1	–	–	–	–	6
TC Caffey	1	–	–	–	–	6
OSU Totals	75	74-75	–	–	17-20	575
OPP Totals	33	30-31	–	–	13-16	273

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	5-5	5-6	7-7	0-2	7-20
OSU Totals	5-5	5-6	7-7	0-2	7-20
OPP Totals	2-2	7-7	4-5	0-2	13-16

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	49	2223	45.4	0	77
M. O'Shaughnessy	1	41	41.0	0	41
OSU Totals	50	2264	45.3	0	77
OPP Totals	77	3318	43.1	2	75

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Tanner McCalister	3	41	13.7	0	30
Steele Chambers	2	27	13.5	0	15
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
Ronnie Hickman	1	8	8.0	0	8
Lathan Ransom	1	0	0	0	0
OSU Totals	11	109	9.9	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	9	64	7.1	0	22

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	12	269	22.4	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	17	323	19.0	0	46
OPP Totals	37	756	20.4	0	38

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
T. Eichenberg	77	43	120	12.0-30	2.5-12
Steele Chambers	45	32	77	6.5-34	2.0-15
Lathan Ransom	49	25	74	3.5-22	1.5-11
Ronnie Hickman	26	27	53	1.5-2	0-0
Denzel Burke	24	10	34	3.0-5	0-0
Zach Harrison	20	14	34	8.0-36	3.5-22
Cody Simon	16	16	32	5.5-21	2.0-16
J.T. Tuimoloau	16	12	28	10.5-39	3.5-26
Taron Vincent	8	17	25	2.5-9	0.5-3
Jack Sawyer	10	14	24	6.5-24	4.5-20
Tanner McCalister	20	4	24	0-0	0-0
Josh Proctor	14	7	21	1.5-1	1.0-1
Tyleik Williams	10	11	21	2.5-7	1.0-2
JK Johnson	16	4	20	0-0	0-0
J. Jean-Baptiste	9	10	19	4.5-22	4.0-21
Mike Hall Jr.	9	10	19	7.5-46	4.5-39
Cameron Martinez	9	6	15	0-0	0-0
Ty Hamilton	9	6	15	0.5-3	0.5-3
Cameron Brown	11	3	14	0.5-1	0-0
Caden Curry	11	3	14	1.5-6	0.5-0
Chip Trayanum	8	5	13	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
Palaie Gaoteote IV	5	4	9	0.5-1	0-0
Sonny Styles	5	4	9	1.0-2	0-0

OSU Totals	469	318	787	86.0-334	34.0-205
OPP Totals	483	352	835	50.0-165	12.0-82
Fumbles Forced:	Harrison (3), J. Brown, Hickman, Jean-Baptiste, Ransom, Simon, Stokes, Tuimoloau, .				
Fumbles Recovered:	Gaoteote IV (2), Chambers, Hall Jr., Ransom, Tuimoloau, Vincent.				

Buckeyes Unite In Support of Fallen Bills Player

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Former Ohio State football players joined the chorus of well-wishers for stricken Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin, who suffered cardiac arrest during a game at Cincinnati on Jan. 2.

Hamlin collapsed after a first-quarter collision with Bengals receiver Tee Higgins. He was immediately administered CPR, and a defibrillator was used in the life-and-death situation. Hamlin was taken by ambulance to the University of Cincinnati Medical Center.

The game was suspended, and later in the week, the NFL decided it would not be resumed or replayed and both teams would play one game fewer than the standard 17.

Hamlin was in critical condition for three days but by Jan. 6 had made a remarkable recovery, and that day he spoke to his teammates via video conferencing.

Throughout the ordeal, former Buckeyes such as Indianapolis Colts wide receiver Parris Campbell went to their Twitter accounts to express their thoughts: "Please everybody take time and say a prayer for Damar and his family."

Chicago Bears quarterback Justin Fields and New Orleans Saints wide receiver Chris Olave each had the same offering: "Prayers up," and Denver Broncos linebacker Jonathan Cooper had a similar sentiment, posting "Pray for Damar."

Added New York Jets tight end Jeremy Ruckert, "The thoughts and prayers of all of Bills Mafia are supporting you, Damar."

Bradley Roby, a Saints cornerback, reposted a tweet from Bills left tackle Dion Dawkins, "Prayer is power and Prayer is POWERFUL. We need the world to pray for Damar Hamlin and his family."

Dre'Mont Jones, a defensive end for the Denver Broncos, took to Twitter to express his displeasure with FOX Sports personality Skip Bayless, who put out a much-criticized tweet in the moments after Hamlin collapsed.

At that point there was no word on Hamlin's condition and there was speculation that the game might be resumed, so Bayless wrote, "No doubt the NFL is considering postponing the rest of this game – but how? This late in the season, a game of this magnitude is crucial to the regular-season outcome ... which suddenly seems so irrelevant."

To which Jones responded, "The tweet represents how us pro athletes get dehumanized because of money and entertainment."

Two days after Hamlin was hospitalized, former Ohio State and LSU quarterback Joe Burrow met the media to explain why he led the Bengals' captains to the Bills' locker room during the time Hamlin was being transported to the hospital.

"Everyone out there was watching it and thinking that could be me, that could be any of us in this (Bengals) locker room," Burrow said. "I just wanted to make sure everyone knows in that locker room how I feel about them, to make sure I tell them that."

Not only were the Bills traumatized by what they saw on the field, but the Cincinnati

players witnessed it as well. Burrow said it would be tough to focus on their Jan. 8 regular-season finale against the Baltimore Ravens.

"Personally, I think playing is going to be tough," Burrow said. "There are people that want to play, and there's people that don't. Personally, I probably want to play. I think getting back to as normal as you can, as fast as you can, is how I deal with these kinds of things. But everybody has a different way of dealing with it."

The Bills announced Jan. 4 that Hamlin was showing signs of improvement, and the following day he awoke from a medically-induced coma and was communicating with family members and doctors by writing on a notepad.

"God is always working!" Los Angeles Rams safety Jordan Fuller posted on Twitter.

Bengals defensive end Sam Hubbard retweeted this from UC (University of Cincinnati) Health: "We cannot express how proud we are of Dr. Pritts and Dr. Knight's leadership and thankful for the entire care team supporting Damar Hamlin. As the region's only Level 1 trauma center, UC Medical Center is uniquely and expertly equipped for moments like this."

Ian Rapoport of NFL Network tweeted on Jan. 7, "This is amazing: For the first time, Bills S Damar Hamlin is addressing the team via Facetime. The breathing tube is out, and he's spent the morning speaking to various teammates on Facetime. Now, he's delivering a message to the entire group, I'm told."

That encouraging news prompted former NFL and current B.C. Lions (Canadian Football League) safety Tyvis Powell to write on his Twitter, "Best news ever! God is good!"

On The Run

With the NFL regular season wrapping up the weekend of Jan. 7-8, it's time to look at the exploits of a few former Buckeyes.

Fields was ruled out of the game against the Minnesota Vikings, denying him a chance to break the NFL record for rushing yards by a quarterback in a season. He finished second all-time with 1,143 yards to the 1,206 yards for Baltimore's Lamar Jackson in 2019. Jackson did his in a 16-game schedule.

Bears coach Matt Eberflus said Fields has a hip strain.

"He's just not able to go full speed," Eberflus said on Jan. 4. "I asked him how it was today, and he said it's still real sore."

There was speculation that Fields was being held out to help the Bears' (3-13) draft position. A Bears loss and a Houston Texans win over Indianapolis on Jan. 8 would give Chicago the No. 1 pick in the 2023 draft.

Eberflus discounted that theory.

"I would just go back to our normal operating procedure," he said. "So what is it? It's the medical staff, so he didn't clear that hurdle. So if he'd have cleared that hurdle, then we'd have to go to the next one, which is the coaches. Is he functioning the way he can function to protect himself? Then it's the player. Does he feel good about doing that. He didn't clear the first one. So that's just where it is."

The Bears secured the first pick with a

29-13 loss while the Texans defeated the Colts 32-31.

In Fields' last game, a 41-10 loss to the Detroit Lions on Jan. 1, he rushed for 132 yards on 10 attempts. He had 105 yards in the first quarter, the most for a quarterback in a quarter over the past 45 years.

Despite gaudy running stats, the verdict is still out on Fields. Chicago has the worst passing attack in the league, and he finished the season completing 60.4 percent of his passes for 2,242 yards with 17 touchdowns and 11 interceptions while being sacked a league-high 55 times.

Fields also ran for eight scores and had a league-leading 7.1 yards per carry, but his 16 fumbles – with eight lost – were the most in the NFL. Bears quarterback coach Andrew Janocko said he still believes in Fields.

"He wants this to be his franchise," Janocko said. "He wants this to be his city. Spend five minutes with the kid and you know he's a dude, he's a dog, he's an alpha. This guy wants to be it."

Food For Thought

Los Angeles Chargers edge defender Joey Bosa returned from groin surgery that sidelined him for three months to play against the Los Angeles Rams on Jan. 1.

He was on a snap restriction, finishing with three quarterback pressures in 24 plays in the 31-10 victory. Not only did Bosa have to get in game shape, but he also had to overcome food poisoning the night before facing the city rival.

"I had gotten food poisoning on Saturday, so it was a kind of a rough outing," Bosa said. "But other than that, my groin felt good. My mind was kind of somewhere else, luckily, so I wasn't worrying about my groin as much."

"Kind of crappy luck, pun intended, with my first game back. My girlfriend is not going to be my chef ever again. I think I was definitely a little run-down from being dehydrated and not getting some food in me, and obviously being my first game back, but I thought I felt pretty good. I need to get my wind back."

Meanwhile, on the same day, younger brother Nick solidified his chances to win the NFL Defensive Player of the Year award when he recorded five hits against Las Vegas Raiders quarterback Jarrett Stidham, including one in overtime that pressured Stidham into throwing an interception to safety Tashaun Gipson that set up the winning field goal in a 37-34 victory.

Rave Reviews

In four games since returning from knee surgery (through games of Jan. 1), Baltimore Ravens running back J.K. Dobbins had rushed for 397 yards, the most in the NFL during that span. His 7.0 yards per carry were also tops in the league in that four-game stretch as were his 13 runs of 10-plus yards. Second on the yardage list was San Francisco's Christian McCaffrey with 394 yards.

On Jan. 1, Dobbins rushed for 93 yards on a career-high 17 carries in the Ravens' 16-13 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers. With a playoff spot assured going into the game, Dobbins did not play in the 27-16 loss to the Bengals.

Zeke At Peak

Dallas Cowboys running back Zeke Elliott took a personal nine-game touchdown streak into the game against the Washington Commanders on Jan. 8, but the streak came to an end as Elliott could not find the end zone in the Cowboys' 26-6 loss to their NFC East rivals. Elliott finished with just 10 rushing yards on eight carries.

He rushed for a touchdown in two games on Oct. 16 and 23 before missing two games with a knee injury. He returned to score in seven straight, including a 1-yard touchdown in the 27-13 win over Tennessee on Dec. 29.

Saintly Numbers

Olave, who missed two games because of injury, entered the game against the Carolina Panthers with a chance to become the third Saints rookie wideout to break the 1,000-yard mark. He had 982 receiving yards and finished the season with 1,042 after he gained 60 yards on a game-high five catches, including a 25-yard TD catch from Andy Dalton, in the 10-7 defeat.

Olave finished second on the Saints' all-time list for receiving yard by a rookie. Former Buckeye Michael Thomas holds the franchise record of 1,137 yards in his rookie season of 2016. Olave moved ahead of Marques Colston (1,038 yards in 2006).

Nice Guy

It's not as glamorous as possibly winning the Offensive Rookie of the Year award in the AFC, but Jets receiver Garrett Wilson was honored with the team's Hampton Award, given to the rookie "who acts like a pro in the locker room," as voted by the equipment staff.

Wilson ended his first season with 1,105 receiving yards. He and Olave are the first pair of rookies from the same college to top 1,000 yards in the same season, according to Albert Breer, senior NFL reporter/lead content strategist for the Monday Morning Quarterback.

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Stroud Rewrites Legacy Despite Semifinal Loss

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

In the lead-up to the Peach Bowl, no game in recent memory had felt more like a potential referendum on the Ohio State program, one that could establish either an optimistic offseason or one filled with uncomfortable questions and conversations.

This was true for the program as well as for head coach Ryan Day, who dealt with over a month of criticism and questioning following Ohio State's second consecutive loss to Michigan on Nov. 26. A berth in the College Football Playoff smoothed things over, certainly, but a blowout loss to No. 1 Georgia – yet another domination of the Buckeyes by a team from the Southeastern Conference – would have reflected poorly on him and the team.

And while the stakes were high for everyone taking the field or posting up on the sideline in Atlanta on Dec. 31, perhaps none faced more pressure than Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud. Though Stroud ultimately had little to do with the team's losses over his two years as a starter – he had one of his best outings in the loss to Oregon in 2021 and appeared as one of few Buckeyes to show some fight late in the losses to the Wolverines – a team's quarterback is often saddled with the blame, fair or unfair.

He became the face of back-to-back teams, with toughness and fight brought into question, that did not achieve any of Day's three stated goals of beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten and winning a national championship. The criticism mounted after the recent loss to the Wolverines, with Stroud's legacy at Ohio State ultimately coming into question.

"It is what it is," Stroud said on Dec. 29. "It comes with the nature of the beast. You can't accept the good and not accept the bad. For me, I think if you cut on the film, you watch the tape, I think I really try to do everything that I could to win games in my career."

If Ohio State had not made the College Football Playoff, opening the door for Stroud – expected to be one of the top picks in the 2023 NFL draft – to potentially sit out the Buckeyes' season finale, he still would have finished with a strong presence in Ohio State's record books. His performance in last season's Rose Bowl – a career-high 573-yard outing with six touchdowns in the Buckeyes' comeback win over Utah – as well as a pair of six-touchdown games against Michigan State over the last two seasons would likely have served as the career highlights for Stroud.

But the signal caller clearly took the talk and the criticism to heart. Faced with a win-or-go-home contest against the defending national champions, Stroud had clearly saved his best for last, authoring one of the best quarterbacked games in program history.

Though the game ended in defeat for Ohio State, that the Buckeyes were in position for a potential game-winning field goal was because of the quarterback who finished 23 of 34 passing for 348 yards and four touchdowns and also made an impact for the first time in his career on the ground, rushing for 71 yards (adjusted for sacks) and making clutch plays whenever the moment called for it.

"What (Stroud) did and the way he competed in the second half with all those things coming at him, I just can't say enough," Day said. "I'm so proud of the way he played. Just the way he attacked this game, I couldn't be any prouder of the way he did that. We were missing some guys out there, and we were trying to figure it out. On the biggest stage, he played one of his best games, in my opinion."

Stroud was clearly on a different level early in the contest. To that point, the latter half of the season did not feature the same highlight-reel plays that littered tape from the first six games, but shades of Stroud through the first half of the season were evi-

dent against Georgia.

He completed eight of his first nine passes and went into the locker room 15 of 19 for 219 yards with three touchdown passes, helping the Buckeyes to a 28-24 lead over the Bulldogs. Out of the locker room, he completed his next three passes, capped off by another touchdown pass to put Ohio State up 35-24. He wasn't just taking the layups but was finding throws in tight windows and going over the top of the defense in what was easily the offense's best showing of the season considering the pedigree of Georgia's defense.

"When we were out there, it was kind of like you knew what was going to happen," Stroud said. "When you're playing like that, you're playing free. You're having fun. I think that was one of the most fun games I ever played in my life."

The fun didn't last much longer, however, as Stroud would miss on four of his next five throws with the Bulldogs charging back to make it 38-35 with 8:41 remaining. He made use of his legs on the ensuing drive, scrambling three times for 26 yards, but a sack on second-and-5 and incompleteness aimed at tight end Joe Royer – only in the game because of Cade Stover being knocked out due to back spasms – led to Ohio State settling for a field goal to go up 41-35 with 2:43 left.

"Of course you're going to have some regrets on certain plays," he said. "Wish you did this, wish you did that. At the end of the day, man, it's the man in the arena. It's hard to do what we do. It's hard, but it's a blessing at the same time. You've got to be joyful in these moments."

After Ohio State's defense failed to answer the call on Georgia's next drive, allowing the Bulldogs to go 72 yards in just five plays to take a 42-41 lead, it was once again on Stroud to deliver, requiring a drive from the Buckeyes' own 25-yard line needing just a field goal to move on to the College Football Playoff National Championship Game.

Stroud scrambled on first down and then found wideout Julian Fleming down the left sideline for a 12-yard gain on the next play. After gaining the first down, Stroud was immediately pressured and forced out of the pocket on first-and-10, escaping a shoe-string tackle and taking advantage of an open field – as well as some nifty maneuvering around some Georgia defenders – all the way to the Bulldogs' 31-yard line.

Despite the run that Stroud was on, Day then opted to take the ball out of his hands, handing it off to freshman running back Dallen Hayden, who was dropped for a 1-yard loss. Stroud's pass was then broken up on second down, and he was forced to dump the ball to the sideline on third down after facing some quick pressure, leaving the game down to the foot of Noah Ruggles.

In a kick that few will forget, it sailed left and missed, a jarring end to Ohio State's season and the career for Stroud, who had hoped to help the Buckeyes compete for a national championship.

"It just sucks that it has to come down like that, but God's plan," Stroud explained, "it's something you don't really understand in the moment."

"Of course I'm not sitting here smiling and happy, but God is still amazing to me."

Still blesses me, blesses Coach. Of course you want to win things like this, and this means a lot to us. I mean, me and Coach Day, man, we get up early every morning on the phone constantly, whatever we can do to win and put smiles on people's faces.

"It's tough. My mom, she goes through a lot. Coach Day's wife goes through a lot. My family, people from home. But I wouldn't regret anything. I wouldn't take anything back. I'm blessed to have a coach like Coach Day. I'm blessed to have my teammates that I have. And I wouldn't want to go out there and do it with anybody else."

And despite that Herculean effort from Stroud, the Peach Bowl – for better or worse, balancing the loss with his individual performance – likely marks the last time the signal caller will take the field for the Scarlet and Gray. The lead-up to the game as well as the contest itself showed not only his passion for preparation, but for holding himself at a higher standard and being a leader of men. Several Buckeyes stated that after the loss to Michigan, it took a speech from Stroud and defensive end J.T. Tuimola to instill fight back into the team, unsure of their immediate future after another crushing defeat to the Wolverines.

The speech seemed to do just the trick, as the team came to Atlanta prepared for the challenge at hand, eventually going toe to toe with the defending national champions with Stroud at the helm of the shootout.

"He's such a great leader for this team," wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. said of Stroud. "And I'm definitely going to miss him, personally. This whole team's going to miss him. He's just such a great player. I'm blessed to be able to play a whole year with him."

"I got to start with him this year, and seeing him last year too with that Rose Bowl, I'm just definitely blessed to play with a quarterback like him and also have a friend, at the end of the day, on and off the field."

He leaves Columbus with the second-most passing yards in school history, checking in with 8,123 and trailing only J.T. Barrett's 9,434 career passing yards. Stroud also holds the record for the second- and third-most passing yards in a single season, trailing only Dwayne Haskins' 4,381 yards in 2018.

Stroud also holds the single-game record for passing yards with 573 in the Rose Bowl, and that was one of his three games with six passing touchdowns, which is also an Ohio State record. He also boasts 15 games of at least 300 passing yards, which is six more than Haskins, who is second on the list.

The accolades would have come for Stroud either way given his gaudy numbers through his two seasons as a starter at Ohio State, but it was his performance against Georgia – as well as his fight in other losses during his tenure – that showed his true character, as well as his potential moving forward.

"I mean, if he's not the best player in the country right now, then I don't know who is," Harrison said. "I think he gave it his all. (People said) he can't run or he's not tough enough to run. I think he showed that today – he can do anything he wants on the football field."

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Defense 'Didn't Finish The Journey' At Peach Bowl

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For all the strides Ohio State's defense made from last year to this one, improving in every major defensive category, it fell flat when it mattered most.

As had happened a month prior against Michigan, the Buckeyes were gashed by big plays against No. 1 Georgia and ultimately lost, although in a much closer contest.

"We didn't finish the journey," said Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. "We certainly had a great plan, and adjustments worked in the third quarter. But they didn't work in the fourth."

While many of the Wolverines' big passes or runs came against Buckeye blitzes, the Buckeyes mainly stayed back in coverage against the Bulldogs. Lapses in those coverage alignments and playmakers on the opposite side meant that Ohio State still allowed the most explosive plays it had all season, using Knowles' definition of 20 yards or more considered explosive.

"We played defense to prevent the big plays," Knowles said. "We didn't do much blitzing today. We really didn't. We were pretty basic, gave our guys a chance to play. So it wasn't the aggressiveness. We just missed on a couple."

Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett finished 23 of 34 for 398 yards and three touchdowns, with the yards a career high for Bennett, who also had the most passing yards the Buckeyes have allowed from an opposing quarterback since Sept. 18, 2021, when Tulsa's Davis Brin racked up 428, though it took Brin an additional 20 attempts to get there.

All told, the Bulldogs averaged 8.9 yards per play, the most ever allowed in a game by an Ohio State defense, edging out Michigan's 8.8 yards per play on Nov. 26. Georgia churned out 5.2 yards per carry on the ground, with leading running back Kenny McIntosh collecting 70 yards in just five rushes.

"We can't let up 42 points in a game like that, especially with the offense playing the way it was," defensive end Zach Harrison said. "But the plan was to go out there and let it all out, and we definitely did that. You can't say we didn't play hard. There's definitely some plays we could have executed better on, could have made tackles and been in a better position."

There were no shortage of plays where the Buckeyes could have executed better. Early on, Georgia netted a 25-yard touchdown on a screen pass on second-and-17 against soft coverage to open its scoring for the evening.

Early in the second quarter, linebacker Tommy Eichenberg was left man-to-man on a receiver in the slot, and Bennett made the Buckeyes pay with a 47-yard strike to Arian Smith that set up another score. Later in the frame, Ohio State's defense – holding a 21-14 lead – ran back on the field with two defensive tackles and two defensive ends in the game.

It would have been the first play of the game for defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr., but at the last second, he was swapped out for a third defensive end despite a two-tight end set from the Bulldogs. McIntosh took advan-

tage, busting through the middle for a 52-yard gain and setting up a touchdown just two plays later.

"I think there were too many explosives," linebacker Steele Chambers said. "I think there were some times they made plays, sometimes we were just off-kilter a little bit. It happens. But at the end of the day, you've just got to take each punch and you've got to keep going."

Chambers had perhaps the best game of any Buckeye ball stopper. He collected eight tackles, performing his usual sideline-to-sideline roam from linebacker and adding half a sack. When Bennett under-threw a ball in the second quarter, Chambers slid right into its path for an interception and returned it 15 yards, the lone turnover by either side.

Chambers took the loss particularly hard, unable to bring himself to trudge back to the locker room after the clock hit all zeroes.

"I wanted to watch (Georgia's) celebration, because I feel like it should have been us," he said. "It's a tight brotherhood. I would die for any one of those guys in the locker room. So even though we lost, we love each other."

The most productive segment of the contest for Ohio State's defense was the third quarter. It pitched a shutout the entire 15-minute frame, allowing its offense the space needed to create a two-touchdown lead for the final period. A field goal finally broke the second-half ice for the Bulldogs' attack with 10:14 remaining in the contest.

"We started fitting things differently against the run," Knowles said. "We were able to control the line of scrimmage better. We played a little bit tighter in our coverages, started disguising some things better. I think that threw them off-balance. The adjustments all worked in the third quarter, but they didn't work in the fourth."

Down 38-27 with 8:51 remaining and starting a drive at its own 24-yard line, things still looked bleak for Georgia midway through the final period. Even if it allowed a touchdown, a prolonged scoring drive against Ohio State's defense meant the clock could have put the Bulldogs in dire straits. It didn't play out that way.

On the first play on that possession, Smith lined up in the slot with Ohio State safety Lathan Ransom over top of him. Ransom was responsible for a quarter of the field deep, but Smith closed the distance between them, and as he turned outside to streak up the sideline, Ransom slipped and Smith was left wide open for a 76-yard touchdown.

Following a Buckeye field goal, Georgia marched 72 yards in five plays to score what proved its game-winning touchdown, utilizing just 1:42 of time off the clock. Bennett rattled off five straight completions on the drive, not counting one play nullified by penalty, with his greatest successes coming against man coverage from Ohio State.

The biggest play of that possession came against such a look. Georgia wide receiver Kearis Jackson bolted by Ohio State nickel safety Tanner McCalister on a seam route from the slot, and Bennett fit a perfect ball underneath the deep coverage of safety



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STEELE RESOLVE — Ohio State linebacker Steele Chambers stepped up in the Buckeyes' loss to Georgia, finishing with eight tackles, half a sack and an interception, the game's lone turnover.

Ronnie Hickman.

"They made plays (the last drive)," Knowles said. "They executed. We switched coverages probably three or four different times to throw them off balance. But they executed, they got it done. We didn't. That's the bottom line."

Chambers reiterated that the defensive failings weren't entirely on his coach's shoulders, however, as man coverage is a staple of the squad's scheme against up-tempo offense in the final minutes. Moving forward to next year, Chambers and Co. already have ideas on how they can better limit big plays.

"I think better communication," Chambers said. "I know there were a couple of times I could have been better at communicating, maybe helped change the outcome of the game. There's a lot of factors that go into it. But we've just got to keep going."

Knowles does have a track record of improving his units year over year. In his

four seasons at Oklahoma State from 2018-21, his defenses – in terms of total yards allowed – improved from 112th in his first season to 82nd, 44th and fifth in the following years, with this Ohio State team checking in at 14th in the country.

History indicates that it may take time for Knowles and his defense to realize their true potential, but the inability of the Ohio State defense to finish this team's journey to the national championship will haunt the defensive coordinator throughout the off-season.

"Everything will bother me," Knowles said. "Everything. Every play we didn't make has to be analyzed by me. You've got to think not just about the call. You've got to think about who's in what position and just how I can do it better. Because it's not the players' fault, it's my fault. I've got to get them in the best position to win the game. I thought we did that at times, but not enough."

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Harrison's Acrobatics Highlight Top Plays

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State came within a single play of advancing to the national championship this season following an emphatic second straight loss to its rival. Despite the team's ultimate defeat against No. 1 Georgia in the College Football Playoff, there were still a multitude of great plays to reflect on from the Buckeyes' most recent campaign.

With Ohio State transitioning into the offseason now, Buckeye Sports Bulletin's staff voted on the top 10 plays from this past season that featured excitement in all three phases of the game.

Honorable Mentions

If there were an 11th spot on this list, it might have gone to running back Miyan Williams' fifth touchdown run against Rutgers on Oct. 1. The 2-yard plunge with 14:50 to play equaled the school record for rushing scores in a game, tying Pete Johnson's mark against North Carolina in 1975 and Keith Byars' total against Illinois in 1984.

Marvin Harrison Jr. has three plays in the top 10, but his toe-tapping touchdown snag in the first quarter against Toledo on Sept. 17 – one that gave an early demonstration of why he'd finish as a finalist for the Biletnikoff Award – didn't quite crack the list. The 6-4 wideout went full extension to grab a ball thrown near the front-left pylon – not the last time he'd make a highlight-reel catch in that spot – and tap both feet down in bounds with inches to spare.

The last honorable mention goes to punter Jesse Mirco for calling his own number in the Rutgers game. Ohio State elected to punt on a fourth-and-2, and Mirco rolled right to boot the ball away. The Scarlet Knights' punt return team left that side of the field completely uncovered, though, and Mirco kept running, picking up 22 yards and a first down before getting decked by a late hit on the sideline. The play incited a skirmish between the Rutgers defense and Ohio State's bench, with both head coaches getting involved.

10. Pick-Six For Eichenberg (Iowa – Oct. 22)

In arguably the most highlight-heavy game of the year for Ohio State's defense, its leading tackler generated the biggest of them all against the pass.

Linebacker Tommy Eichenberg dropped into zone coverage with Iowa facing a first-and-10 at its own 13-yard line. Hawkeye quarterback Spencer Petras scanned the field for an open target but found none, instead tossing an off-target checkdown to running back Leshon Williams. Eichenberg jumped in front of Williams and snagged the errant ball then weaved through a tunnel of Iowa players before tumbling into the end zone to secure a 15-yard pick-six. Asked by reporters, he couldn't even recall the last touchdown he scored.

"Somewhere around (fifth grade)," Eichenberg said. "I don't even remember the last time I scored a touchdown. But yeah, it's been a long time."

His grab and dash extended Ohio State's first-half lead to 26-10, killing off the hopes of an anemic Hawkeye offense en route to a 54-



SONNY BROCKWAY

TOUCHDOWN TOMMY – Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg returned an interception 15 yards for a touchdown against Iowa on Oct. 22. The play ranked No. 10 on BSB's Top Plays list.

10 Ohio State win. The Buckeyes forced six turnovers in total for the contest.

9. Caffey Takes Off (Toledo – Sept. 17)

Ohio State's contest against in-state Toledo was the blowout everyone expected going in, with the Buckeyes cruising to a 77-21 victory. Such a wide margin made room for a fun moment, however.

Walk-on running back TC Caffey, a native of Hubbard, Ohio, got in the game and took his first career carry against the Rockets. Later, with Ohio State up 70-21 and less than 7:30 to play, he took the ball and was met by a trio of Toledo defenders for a pedestrian 4-yard gain.

At least, it would have been pedestrian had Caffey not popped out of the Rockets' horde, looped around to the right sideline, stiff-armed a defensive back and stutter-stepped around another to bolt 49 yards for the game's closing touchdown.

"It was crazy. I told him he might mess around and make SportsCenter Top 10," freshman running back Dallan Hayden said after the game. "That was awesome. I was happy for him."

Caffey could have factored into the team's running back rotation late in the season given the ways injuries piled up at the position had he not suffered a season-ender himself in October. His rumble against the Rockets certainly left some fans speculating about the true talent of the walk-on.

8. Stroud, Harrison's Last Link (Georgia – Dec. 31)

There's no question quarterback C.J. Stroud came to play in the College Football Playoff semifinal against No. 1 Georgia, and

possibly none of his highlights was more impressive than his second touchdown toss to put Ohio State up 21-7.

Following an interception from linebacker Steele Chambers and an ensuing first down, the Buckeyes faced second-and-9 at the Georgia 16-yard line. Stroud caught a shotgun snap and settled into a three-step drop, only to immediately come face-to-face with 320-pound defensive tackle Nazir Stackhouse, who'd beaten guard Donovan Jackson off the line of scrimmage.

Stroud drop-stepped then slipped forward as Stackhouse grasped for the signal caller, catching his sleeve and nearly dragging him to the turf. Stroud simultaneously dodged the edge rush of defensive end Robert Beal Jr., scrambled right, shucked defensive tackle Warren Brinson and zipped a ball off-platform toward the end line as linebacker Trezmen Marshall bore down on him.

The ball was a duck, but it found its target. Harrison dived to the ground to cradle the rock 8 yards deep in the end zone. Stroud finished the Peach Bowl 23 of 34 for 348 yards and four touchdowns against no interceptions, putting together one of his best performances in what was likely his final game at Ohio State. The play will most likely be the final TD connection between the two as Buckeyes.

7. Ransom Blocks Punt Through Pain (Maryland – Nov. 19)

Safety Lathan Ransom blocked his second punt in as many weeks against Maryland on Nov. 19, but the second of those two kick swattings makes this list both for the role it played in the game and the circumstances Ransom had to battle through.

Ohio State struggled in College Park, Md.,

the week before it was set to play Michigan. The offense had sputtered throughout the first half as Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa found spaces downfield with consistency against Ohio State's defense, so much so that the Buckeyes trailed the unranked Terrapins 13-10 in the second half.

Early in the third quarter, with the Terrapins punting on fourth-and-12 from their own 39-yard line, Ransom got a free rush off the edge on Maryland's punt unit and went full extension to block the boot. Wide receiver Xavier Johnson scooped up the loose football and took it down to Maryland's 14-yard line, setting up a touchdown to give Ohio State a 17-13 lead it never relinquished.

Ransom blocked the punt with his right hand, which is particularly impressive given that Ransom confirmed to reporters that he broke his right thumb on the game's first play. Knowing that and being in whatever pain he may have been in, Ransom still sold out for the swat.

"We're just doing what we've got to do to win the game, doing what I've got to do for my brothers," Ransom said. "I mean, at the end of the day, like, Tommy (Eichenberg) is playing with two messed up hands. What's my excuse to not go out there and play?"

6. X's Catch Sparks Win Over Irish (Notre Dame – Sept. 3)

For the first time in school history, Ohio State opened a season with a top-five matchup. The No. 2 Buckeyes took on No. 5 Notre Dame in a game that was largely nip-and-tuck and dominated by defense, though the looming threat of an Ohio State offense featuring a Heisman Trophy finalist at quarterback, multiple former five-stars at wide receiver and a five-star at running back remained.

Who else but a former walk-on to break things open?

Trailing 10-7 with less than 30 seconds left in the third quarter, it appeared Ohio State might have to settle for a game-tying field goal as it faced a third-and-11 at the Notre Dame 24-yard line. But as Stroud dropped back to pass, he spotted wide receiver Xavier Johnson – a player affectionately nicknamed "X" who had to earn his scholarship after joining the roster – gaining a half-step of separation on a post route. An accurate ball and clean catch yielded a touchdown.

Johnson's score gave the Buckeyes a 14-10 lead, culminating in a 21-10 victory to open the season and becoming the second of what would become 12 straight victories for Ohio State dating back to its Rose Bowl win over Utah on Jan. 1, 2022.

5. Scoop-And-Score Scuttles Terps (Maryland – Nov. 19)

Ransom's punt block may have turned the tide in favor of Ohio State on the road against Maryland, but the play that sealed the win was one of the biggest defensive highlights of the season for the Buckeyes, checking in as the second-best defensive play on this list.

The Terrapins got one final shot to pull a stunning upset as they got the ball back at their own 16-yard line trailing 36-30 with 36 seconds to play. Their hopes took a huge hit, quite literally, when Ohio State defensive end Zach Harrison bull-rushed opposing offensive tackle Jaelyn Duncan and enveloped



SONNY BROCKWAY

SAVORING THE MOMENT — Wide receiver Kamryn Babb, who battled four season-ending knee injuries during his football career, took his first career reception for an 8-yard score against Indiana on Nov. 12.

Tagovailoa for a sack.

Harrison got home again the next play. This time, however, he separated Tagovailoa from the ball as he cranked his arm back to pass, causing it to flutter in the air and land in the arms of Chambers, who snatched it to walk in for a 1-yard scoop-and-score to make turtle soup of the Terrapins.

"The last couple plays, I just kept rushing," Harrison said. "On film, we saw that they're a good team, they've got good players, they've got good offensive linemen and if I just kept rushing, they'd wear out as the game went on. I felt like those last couple plays, I just took advantage of my technique and kept going hard."

Harrison and Chambers' efforts handed Ohio State a 43-30 advantage with nine seconds remaining. Harrison collected five tackles, including the two sacks he recorded in the game's waning moments.

4. Harrison Hugs The Sideline (Indiana - Nov. 12)

While Harrison's catch against Indiana was of little consequence relative to the other plays on this list, it's among the most eye-popping and jaw-dropping individual efforts on a down in team history.

Comeback routes are typically a bread-and-butter play for the Ohio State passing game under head coach Ryan Day. Former wide receiver Chris Olave made a habit of chunking defenses with such patterns, which can leave a pass catcher with plenty of separation given clean technique.

As Harrison snapped off the top of a late-second quarter comeback route vs. the Hoosiers, defensive back Josh Sanguinetti

was in airtight coverage. In addition, Stroud's pass appeared overthrown.

A giant leap, full extension and flawless high point ensured Harrison secured the ball, but Sanguinetti hit him square in the back just as it arrived. Somehow, though, as Harrison fell flat to the ground, he bent his right leg back into the field of play with his knee at a full 90-degree angle and tapped his right foot in bounds before the rest of his body came down out of bounds for a 12-yard gain.

Replay made the catch look even more impressive, as it showed Harrison had the body awareness to hoist his left leg high and keep it from touching before his right.

"That's not possible," remarked FOX color commentator Joel Klatt.

Ohio State already led in the contest 28-7 and closed the contest with a 56-14 win, so it wasn't a needed play from Harrison. That didn't make it any less impressive. And in the fourth quarter of the same contest, Harrison also hauled in a ball for 24 yards to midfield that helped allow wide receiver Kamryn Babb to come onto the field and set the stage for the next entry on BSB's top plays list.

3. Babb Has His Moment (Indiana - Nov. 12)

It's hard to even conceive of a player with more roadblocks thrown in his way than Babb. He's suffered no less than four torn ACLs – two in each knee – with one before his senior year of high school and three during his time at Ohio State.

"This is somebody who's overcome four ACL surgeries," Day said. "That's nine months of recovery times four. That's a long

time to be in recovery, not being able to do something that you love. When it happened the last time, there were a lot of questions on whether he wanted to do (the rehab). He never batted an eye, said 'This is what I want to do.' He put his faith in God, felt like this was his journey.

"What happened today in the stadium was magical."

With a second-and-1 at the Indiana 8-yard line and a 49-14 lead in the fourth quarter, Stroud asked Day what he thought of dialing up a play to get Babb a touchdown. Day said he felt it was right. Pre-snap, Indiana showed one-on-one coverage with the former four-star prospect.

"I didn't want to mess it up," Stroud said. "Like, I was nervous. When I saw the coverage that we got, I saw the leverage that we had on the corner and I was like, 'Oh man, I better not mess this up on my guy.'"

Babb rounded off an out route and pulled in a toss in the end zone as Stroud rolled to his right, the first career reception for the Missouri native. He immediately dropped to his knees in the end zone then was mobbed by ecstatic teammates.

"I don't really know if words can describe (how I feel)," Babb said. "But if I had to say a word, man, just thankfulness. First and foremost, Jesus Christ and who he is to me. He's my rock, my lord, my savior. Also thankful for my teammates and C.J."

2. Tuimoloau's House Call (Penn State - Oct. 29)

Defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau had one of the best individual defensive performances in Ohio State history at Penn State on Oct. 29, and the play that capped it sealed a top-15 win on the road for the Buckeyes.

Having already recorded six tackles, three tackles for loss, two sacks, a forced fumble, a fumble recovery, a pass deflection that led to an interception and an interception of his own, Tuimoloau took the field against the Nittany Lions' offense with 2:47 remaining.

On a first-and-10 snap, he threw a forearm shiver to offensive tackle Bryce Effner, knocking him to the ground. Penn State

quarterback Sean Clifford attempted to throw a screen pass to wide receiver Parker Washington, but Tuimoloau arrived directly in the passing lane and leapt up high to intercept the toss. From there, he dashed 14 yards untouched to the house for a pick-six.

"I've got to shout out (defensive coordinator Jim) Knowles," Tuimoloau said. "He's allowed us to show that versatility, and he has trust in me to do those things. I got to thank him."

1. Harrison Reaches At The Pylon (Michigan State - Oct. 8)

There's been only one player in Ohio State history to record three receiving touchdowns in three separate games, and his name is Marvin Harrison Jr. True to form, he caught his record-breaking score in spectacular fashion against Michigan State.

On a first-and-10 from the MSU 19-yard line in the third quarter, Harrison embarked on a fade route up the left sideline. Stroud lobbed a back-shoulder throw toward the front-left pylon, a slightly underthrown ball into airtight coverage from Michigan State cornerback Charles Brantley.

Harrison turned back and leapt, reaching down through Brantley's arms, and scooped the ball off his shoelaces in midair for a catch, and he spun into the end zone from there.

"That was a tremendous catch by Marvin," Day said. "I was amazed. It was like he jumped up and caught it by his ankles. It was just an acrobatic catch but a tremendously talented player, so it was fun to watch him out there."

Harrison credited work he put in behind the scenes when a reporter asked him "how the hell" he caught the ball. His other two three-touchdown games came in the Rose Bowl against Utah last season and against Arkansas State on Sept. 10.

"Just talking to Coach (Brian) Hartline, we talk a lot about going up and getting the ball, being aggressive to the catch point, using my size and strong hands," Harrison said. "So it's just practice."

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Offense Regresses In Back Half Of Season

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

During the first half of the season, Ohio State's offense was trending toward an encore of its dominant 2021 campaign.

The Buckeyes ranked first in the nation in scoring offense – scoring 48.8 points per game – and second in total offense at 543.7 yards per contest. While Ohio State's offense was on track to meet the lofty expectations placed on the unit, head coach Ryan Day said the Buckeyes still needed to grow and improve off that fast start.

"There's a whole bunch that we have to get better at," Day said before the Buckeyes' 54-10 win over Iowa on Oct. 22. "I think our guys know that, and that's why we come in every day hungry to get better. We know the issues are there, and we have to identify those and be introspective enough to recognize those and get them fixed after a game, even if we've had a lot of success."

Although the sense of urgency to improve remained, Ohio State's offense largely regressed during the season's final six games. Whether it was due to the improved caliber of defenses it faced, adverse weather conditions or injuries piling up, the Buckeyes looked a step behind where they were following their 49-20 win over Michigan State on Oct. 8.

In the final seven games of the season, Ohio State averaged 445.3 yards per game, nearly a 100-yard drop-off from the first half of the campaign. The Buckeyes' ability to score also took a hit, dropping to 40.3 points per game, which is 8.5 fewer points per contest than prior to the idle week.

Combining those declines with issues on third down and in the red zone – specifically in regard to taking field goals when touchdowns would have been preferred – the regular season culminated in a devastating 45-23 loss to Michigan, one in which Day deflected the offense's struggles by deferring to the Wolverines' defensive prowess.

"They're a good defense," Day said. "The No. 1 defense in the country, statistically, and they did a good job coming in with a solid game plan. It wasn't anything out there that we hadn't seen before. Again, I think in the end, we just didn't make enough plays."

Though the regular season ended on a sour note for the Ohio State offense, the Buckeyes played to their full capabilities in the Peach Bowl against No. 1 Georgia. Ohio State churned out 467 yards of offense while scoring 41 points, the most of any team during the Bulldogs' 16-game winning streak dating back to last season. The Buckeyes also found their rhythm in the red zone again, going 5 for 5 with three touchdowns. However, Ohio State's offensive efforts just weren't enough to unseat the defending national champions, and the Buckeyes fell 42-41 in Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart, who has developed some of the best defenses college football has seen in recent years, noted that the Buckeye offense was still the juggernaut it was during the first half of the season.

"A lot of credit goes to (the Ohio State offense). We tried man. We tried zone. We

mixed it up," Smart said. "They've got really good playmakers, and they've got a guy that could throw the ball to them and have a really good offensive line, and they can score points."

Quarterbacks

Through the first six games of the season, Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud appeared to be on a collision course with the Heisman Trophy.

The Buckeye signal caller was rolling along with 1,737 yards and 24 touchdowns compared to three interceptions while completing 70.6 percent of his passes, placing himself as the Heisman front-runner entering Ohio State's idle week. But with six regular-season games remaining, including contests with several talented defenses in Iowa, Penn State and Michigan, Stroud knew that he would need to play his best ball down the stretch rather than look back at his dynamite start to the season.

"We did some good things as a whole, but definitely have to clean up some little minor things," Stroud said before Ohio State's matchup with Iowa. "But overall we moved the ball with decent execution. That's where it starts, just executing, and that's what it kind of came down to with the (self-scouting)."

Opening the back half of the season against Iowa, Stroud looked out of sorts during the first half, completing 10 of 17 attempts for 105 yards, before tossing an interception on his first attempt of the third quarter. The Buckeye signal caller ultimately righted the ship, throwing four touchdowns following the pick, but cracks began to show regarding Stroud's decision-making and pocket presence in the 54-10 win over the Hawkeyes.

Stroud excelled in the hostile environment of Beaver Stadium, completing 78.8 percent of his passes for 354 yards and a touchdown while leading Ohio State to a 44-31 win, continuing to forge his connection with Marvin Harrison Jr., who hauled in a career-best 10 receptions for 185 yards.

The Buckeyes' trek to Ryan Field in Evanston, Ill., provided the opposite of what Ohio State fans came to expect of Stroud. With swirling winds and a steady rain falling onto the field, Stroud struggled to hit his targets – completing just 10 of 26 attempts for 76 yards – but turned to an unconventional method to bury the Wildcats. During much of his career, Stroud caught flak for his unwillingness to scramble, but he relied heavily on his legs against the Wildcats, carrying the ball six times for 79 yards, including a 44-yard scamper to set up Miyan Williams' 2-yard touchdown to secure Ohio State's 21-7 victory over the Wildcats.

"C.J. wants to run," Day said. "But we know how important it is to keep C.J. healthy, and he's not going to take shots unless we need him to. We needed him to (run) today, and he did it. So you can see what he's capable of, and when we need him to do it,

he's there for us. And he's a weapon. He's got good feet, you could see him running down the sideline, almost took that one all the way to the house."

Through the first three games of the second half of the season, Stroud had tossed five touchdowns, greatly slowing his scoring pace. But he found his rhythm against Indiana, throwing for 297 yards and five touchdowns. He also put concerns that he could play in adverse conditions to rest, connecting on 60.7 percent of passes as snow fell in Columbus. Stroud then turned in an average outing in a closer-than-expected win over Maryland, throwing for 241 yards and a touchdown, setting up a top-five matchup with Michigan.

Hosting the Wolverines, Stroud sought vengeance for Ohio State's loss at the Big House a year prior, and early on, it appeared he would do just that. He tossed two first-half touchdowns and compiled 191 passing yards to give the Buckeyes a 20-17 lead heading into halftime. However, Stroud's luck ran out there. Michigan controlled much of the second half of the contest, and with the Buckeyes playing catch-up, Stroud threw two interceptions in the fourth quarter while the Wolverines ran away with the 45-23 win.

"I definitely played with as much heart as I could," Stroud said after the loss. "I definitely tried to do anything I possibly could to win this game. But at the end of the day, it's on me. I'm the quarterback. I take all the blame. I'll take all the credit. I feel like I made plays, I put the ball in positions where it needed to be caught. Sometimes they came up and made good plays on defense, and sometimes we just made little mistakes, like a drop or something like that. But at the end of the day I've got to do more. I wish I could have."

Despite Ohio State's bout with Georgia in the Peach Bowl resulting in a loss, Stroud produced one of the greatest performances, if not the greatest, of his career against the Bulldogs. He trounced Georgia's defense with 348 yards and four touchdowns through the air while adding 34 net yards on the ground, including a 27-yard tote that put the Buckeyes in field-goal range on their final drive.

As a whole, Stroud finished the season with 3,688 yards, 41 touchdowns and six interceptions while completing 66.3 percent of his passes. As for his Heisman Trophy hopes, he finished third in voting behind USC's Caleb Williams and TCU's Max Dugan.

Outside of Stroud, Day barely utilized backups Kyle McCord and Devin Brown in blowouts, opting to keep his starting quarterback on the field for as long as possible. McCord and Brown now enter an offseason that will likely be rife with competition for the starting job.

BSB Midterm Grade: A
BSB Second-Half Grade: A-
BSB Final Grade: A

Running Backs

Ohio State's running game was not as whole as the coaches or players would have liked during the second half of the season.

While the Buckeyes showcased the devastating running back duo of Williams and TreVeyon Henderson during their first six games, injuries held the thunder-and-lightning combination largely at bay down the stretch. With Evan Pryor and T.C. Caffey also sustaining season-ending injuries, the availability situation in the running backs room was so dire that freshman Dallan Hayden briefly became a fixture in the Ohio State offense, and transfer line-backer Chip Trayanum – who played running back at Arizona State before joining the Buckeyes – converted back to his original position.

It's difficult to evaluate the play of Henderson and Williams with neither player being fully healthy during Ohio State's stretch run. However, as a result of injuries to the unit, Ohio State's rushing offense plummeted from averaging 228.0 yards per game during the first six games to producing just 161.9 per game during Ohio State's final seven games of the year.

"We all need to do better, absolutely," Day said on Nov. 8 in regard to the running game's struggles. "We have to block better, we have to run better, we have to try to do a better job of equating numbers."

Henderson played in just three games during the back half of the season, collecting only 135 yards on 38 carries, a far cry from his 436 yards in the first six games. Following Ohio State's loss to Michigan, Henderson announced that he was dealing with ligament damage and broken bones in his foot while trying to play through it. He opted to get season-ending surgery prior to the Peach Bowl, holding him out of the Buckeyes' battle with Georgia.

While Henderson bounced in and out of the lineup, Williams took on an increased role and ran for more than 100 yards in outings against Northwestern and Indiana. However, he also dealt with his fair share of injuries, sustaining an ailment after getting caught in the chains at Penn State and being held out of the Maryland game on Nov. 19. Williams did return for the final two games of the season, carrying the ball just 11 times for 42 yards.

As Henderson and Williams succumbed to injuries, Hayden saw his role increase toward the end of the season. The freshman back showed flashes with a 102-yard outing against Indiana and a 146-yard, three-touchdown performance to lift the Buckeyes past Maryland. However, Hayden was largely shelved during Ohio State's final two games, carrying the ball twice against Michigan and nine times against Georgia. In total, Hayden finished the season with 553 yards and five touchdowns with an average of 5.0 yards per carry.

As for Trayanum, the Akron native was

Rating The Offense

Here is where the OSU offense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally through Jan. 8.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Offense	192.4	32nd	3rd
Passing Offense	298.3	14th	1st
Total Offense	490.7	9th	1st
Scoring Offense	44.2	2nd	1st
Turnovers Lost	10	T-5th	T-1st
Third Down Con.	45.2	T-26th	2nd



TreVeyon Henderson

pushed to running back due to the injury situation in the room and carried the load for the Buckeyes against Michigan. Trayanum made his first carry against Iowa on Oct. 22 and did not tally another attempt until the Michigan game, where he rushed for 83 yards on 14 carries. However, he did not tote against Georgia with Hayden and Williams taking the majority of the snaps. Looking ahead, Day said he and Trayanum will have discussions in the offseason regarding his future at the position.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

BSB Second-Half Grade: C-

BSB Final Grade: B

Wide Receivers

Despite being without star wideout Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who dealt with a nagging hamstring injury throughout the regular season, the Ohio State wide receivers room did not skip a beat.

For the second consecutive year, the Buckeyes produced a pair of 1,000-yard receivers with Harrison and Emeka Egbuka crossing the mark. However, like the rest of the Ohio State offense, the wide receivers unit also took a step back during the final six games of the regular season. Harrison largely remained steady, but Egbuka and Julian Fleming each went through stretches of adverse play.



Emeka Egbuka

Although Smith-Njigba tried to return to the field against Iowa, the Rockwall, Texas, native was unable to play the entire game without further tweaking his hamstring, holding him out for the rest of the season. Harrison remained slotted at the top of the receiver depth chart and continued to put up gaudy numbers.

Whether it was his 10-catch, 185-yard outing against Penn State or his two-touchdown, 106-yard performance against Georgia, Harrison was an unwelcome sight for any secondary. The Philadelphia native caught at least five receptions in each of Ohio State's final seven regular-season games, as well as the Peach Bowl, and finished the season with 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns on 77 receptions.

Egbuka started the back half of the season on the right foot, registering a pair of six-reception games against Iowa and Penn State. However, the next three games weren't as fortunate for the Buckeye wideout, as he collected just 126 yards on 10 catches. When the stakes increased, though, Egbuka was dynamite. He produced nine catches for 125 yards and a touchdown against Michigan and eight receptions for 112 yards and a score in the Peach Bowl.

Fleming experienced the biggest drop-off of any Ohio State receiver. After the idle week, Fleming endured a five-game stretch of games with fewer than three receptions while also registering a number of drops. During Ohio State's final five regular-season games, as well as the Peach Bowl, Fleming went without a touchdown.

Outside of the starters, former walk-on Xavier Johnson emerged as a dynamic threat for the Buckeyes, both as a slot receiver and out of the backfield. Johnson pro-

duced a highlight-reel 37-yard touchdown reception against Georgia, in which he shook a Bulldog defender with a dynamic spin move before striding into the end zone.

In one of the season's more heartfelt moments, Kamryn Babb hauled in his first career touchdown against Indiana. Elsewhere on the depth chart, Jayden Ballard snagged only one reception during the back half of the season, taking it 24 yards against Indiana.

When it comes to the unit as a whole, Smart provided an outside perspective of just how difficult they are to scheme against.

"Those guys grew up under a system of wideouts that were just tremendous," he said. "You look at it and say, if I get to play behind some of the guys they've had, you know the training they've had, you know who they've been able to watch. Across the board, they've got size, physicality, ball skills, vertical speed, all the qualities you want in wideouts. They recruit wideouts at a high level, and you see why when you see the guys they're playing with now."

BSB Midterm Grade: A+

BSB Second-Half Grade: A-

BSB Final Grade: A

Tight Ends

The Buckeyes underwent a receiving renaissance at tight end during the first half of the season, with Cade Stover putting up strong numbers as a pass-catcher despite the stereotype that Ohio State tight ends are typically used only for blocking.

Stover became a reliable target for Stroud while also taking his mauler mentality from playing linebacker and applying it to blocking during the first six games. Stover finished the season with 36 catches for 406 yards and five touchdowns, with 20 of those receptions coming during the final seven games of the season.

Stover showed lapses as a blocker at times, though, and his typically reliable hands faltered at key moments, including a drop on a fourth-down conversion attempt during the first half against Michigan.

As Stover bucked the trend of Ohio State tight ends being seldom used in the offense, he said that all that mattered was how he could impact winning at the position.

"It means a lot," Stover said prior to the Michigan game. "It's just a super big blessing to be a part of it and get the ball in my hands with all the talent we have around here. I really just look at it, you take it day-by-day. As long as you're winning games, it really doesn't matter how much you're catching or what you're doing, as long as you're doing what you have to do to win that game."

The departing Mitch Rossi remained an integral part of Ohio State's short-yardage efforts due to his versatility and ability to play on the line of scrimmage as a tight end and in the backfield as a fullback. Rossi was primarily utilized for his blocking, but he also showed what he could do with the ball in his hands against Penn State, gaining 8 yards on one carry and snagging one reception for a gain of 16.

Converted wide receiver Gee Scott Jr. also saw snaps at tight end this season and made a pair of catches totaling 19 yards following Ohio State's idle week. The most notable moment during Scott's season, however, came against Michigan and was not one to remember for the tight end.

With the Buckeyes trailing 24-20 during

the third quarter, Stroud hit Trayanum for a 24-yard gain to push Ohio State deep into Wolverines territory, but after the play was whistled dead, Scott headbutted a Michigan defender. Scott's unsportsmanlike conduct penalty was also added to a holding penalty by Donovan Jackson, netting a 49-yard swing.

In the Peach Bowl, Stover sustained a back injury during the first quarter and did not return while Scott was already out due to an injury. With the room greatly depleted, the Buckeyes turned to seldom-used Joe Royer, who hauled in a 9-yard reception during the second quarter.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

BSB Second-Half Grade: C

BSB Final Grade: B

Offensive Line

As a whole, the offense lagged behind its production from the first half of the season, and the offensive line was no exception.

The Ohio State offensive front struggled mightily with Georgia's fierce defensive line, allowing four sacks – which matched the total of the previous five games – while the Bulldogs held the Buckeyes to an average of 3.7 yards per carry. Though the Ohio State offensive line couldn't handle the pressure caused by Georgia, the unit was still solid in the lead-up to the postseason, especially in pass protection.

The unit had a celebrated two-week span in which it didn't allow a sack, giving Stroud clean pockets against Northwestern and Indiana. Stroud was sacked only once against Maryland, Michigan and Iowa and twice

against Penn State, but for the most part he had plenty of time to throw prior to Ohio State's meeting with Georgia.

While Ohio State's pass protection mostly held up, the Buckeyes' biggest missteps came against the run. As previously mentioned, Ohio State averaged 67.0 fewer rushing yards per contest from the first half of the season compared to the final seven games. While there are compounding factors, including injuries and weather conditions, that play a part in that steep decline, Day said he was displeased with how the running game was operating following Ohio State's 21-7 win over Northwestern.

"Our expectation is to score every time we have the ball," he said. "So if you're looking at it like that, no, it's not good enough, and we need to be better. Certainly, the offensive line is a big part of that, but the running backs are too. The tight ends, the wide receivers, the quarterback – everyone's involved in the run game."

Ohio State's offensive line was still well-regarded through the entire season, though, as tackles Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones were named first-team All-Americans by a variety of outlets. Guards Jackson and Matthew Jones were first- and second-team All-Big Ten, respectively, while center Luke Wypler was also an all-conference third-team member.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

BSB Second-Half Grade: B+

BSB Final Grade: A-

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Defense Faltered When Buckeyes Needed It Most

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Anyone who watched the final three games of the Buckeyes' season knows that the defense, and team as a whole, did not close the way it wanted to. So it should be no surprise that the final grades for Ohio State's defense have taken a dip since the midterms.

Taking a look at raw data, Ohio State allowed 379.9 yards per game during the final seven contests of the season, a significant increase from the 253.5 total yards per game allowed through the first six contests. The Buckeyes also went from allowing 15.7 points per game in the first half of the season to 25.6 per game over the final seven games.

Despite entering the off week ranked in the top 15 for scoring defense and total defense, as well as marks of eighth in passing defense (160.3) and 15th in rushing defense (93.2), the Buckeyes finished outside of the top 20 in three of those four categories by the season's end, peaking at 14th in total defense with 321.5 yards allowed per contest. Following head coach Ryan Day's call for a top-10 unit in the country, the Buckeyes finished with a sizable gap between where they currently stand and those lofty goals.

The squad's biggest defensive lapses came in its two most important contests of the season. In the annual rivalry tilt with Michigan, Ohio State allowed explosive touchdown plays of 69, 75, 45, 75 and 85 yards as the Wolverines quite literally ran away with the contest in the fourth quarter, winning 45-23.

Against No. 1 Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinals, the Buckeyes carried a 38-24 lead in the fourth quarter, but the defense presented a wall resembling Swiss cheese in the final frame and the Bulldogs held an 18-3 advantage in the fourth to grind out a 42-41 win. Against Michigan and Georgia, the defense allowed 530 and 533 yards, respectively.

While some notable positive defensive performances against Iowa and Penn State did populate the second half of the team's campaign, it will always be remembered for the negatives that closed the year. It might be an optimistic view to say year one of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles at Ohio State had mixed results.

The following are BSB's second-half and

Rating The Defense

Here is where the OSU defense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally through Jan. 8.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Defense	121.1	25th	7th
Passing Defense	200.5	26th	6th
Total Defense	321.5	14th	6th
Scoring Defense	21.0	25th	7th
Sacks/Game	2.6	35th	4th
Third-Down Def.	29.9	8th	2nd

*statistics as of Jan. 8

final grades for each defensive position, taking into account the final seven games of the Buckeyes' season.

Defensive Line

For a unit that was wreaking havoc the first half of the season, Ohio State's defensive line faded into the background a bit in the latter half, especially against Michigan and Georgia. It should be noted the Wolverines and Bulldogs have two of the better offensive lines in the country, but the point still stands that the front's play was merely passable against them – and possibly worse against Michigan, given the gaping holes that running back Donovan Edwards dashed through en route to fourth-quarter touchdown runs of 75 and 85 yards that sealed U-M's victory.

"There at the end, they hit a couple big runs," Knowles said after the game. "That's just disheartening. Obviously, I have to take the blame for that, and I should. I've just got to do a better job. It's a story of explosive plays. I thought we matched well. There's nothing good in a loss like that, but we matched through the course of the game."

The defensive line managed just 1 1/2 sacks against Georgia and none against Michigan, with Wolverine quarterback J.J. McCarthy managed to constantly evade rushes and extend critical plays.

That's not to say there weren't highlights from the back half of the campaign for the front four. The unit dominated against Iowa on Oct. 22 – as did Ohio State's entire defense – to the tune of four sacks, a pass deflection and a fumble recovery from defensive linemen alone.

Defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau had one of the greatest defensive performances in school history at Penn State the following week. His final stat line read six tackles with three tackles for loss, two sacks, a forced



FILE PHOTO

TURNOVER MACHINE — During Ohio State's 44-31 win over Penn State on Oct. 29, Buckeyes defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau had a trio of takeaways, including a pick-six, to lead OSU to victory in State College, Pa.

fumble and ensuing fumble recovery, two interceptions, a pass deflection (which was intercepted by defensive end Zach Harrison) and a touchdown. The score, a pick-six, effectively sealed Ohio State's victory.

"To intercept balls like that as a defensive end and then get a defensive score, I don't know if I've ever seen that before," Day said after the contest. "That's big time. JTT has put so much hard work into this. He's an unbelievable player but he's a better person, and you can see his talent."

Harrison had his own star turn at Maryland in the penultimate week of the regular season, recording back-to-back sacks, the latter of which was a strip-sack for a scoop-and-score from linebacker Steele Chambers that iced Ohio State's win.

One of the more puzzling developments for the defensive line was the lack of play from defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. Dealing with an injury, according to coaches, Hall finished with just six tackles – none for loss – over the final seven games, unable to improve upon his 4½ sacks and 7½ tackles for loss from the front half of the season. Furthermore, after playing 25 snaps against Iowa and 32 against Penn State, he did not surpass 20 snaps during the remainder of the season.

Defensive end Jack Sawyer filled in at the "Jack" position admirably, though his production may have been somewhat below the expectations of a former five-star. He finished with 24 tackles and 4½ sacks, matching Hall for the team high. Tuimoloau collected 28 tackles and 3½ sacks, while defensive tackle Taron Vincent grabbed 25 tackles and 2½ tackles for loss.

Javontae Jean-Baptiste, who has announced he is transferring, saw time at defensive end while graduate Jerron Cage, Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams got reps at

defensive tackle. All told, it was a good but not great second half of the season for the Ohio State defensive line.

BSB Midterm Grade: A-
BSB Second-Half Grade: B
BSB Final Grade: B+

Linebackers

Perhaps the only defensive unit that didn't trail off as Ohio State's season hiked forward was linebacker.

Tommy Eichenberg kept producing at the high rate he was in the first six games, grabbing his first career defensive touchdown on a pick-six against Iowa and finishing the season with 120 tackles, the most by an Ohio State linebacker since 2014 when Joshua Perry recorded 124, though Perry had the added benefit of two additional games. Eichenberg – a semifinalist for the Chuck Bednarik Award – added 12 tackles for loss and 2½ sacks with three pass break-ups.

"He can see things as they happen," Knowles said Oct. 4. "So if something's not right on the practice field, you'll see him just stop, and he won't really say anything, but I know he's looking for me to give him the answer."

Beside him step-for-step was Chambers, arguably Ohio State's best defender in the Peach Bowl against Georgia. Chambers gathered eight tackles, half a sack and an interception – the game's lone turnover – against the Bulldogs. He finished the season with 77 tackles, 6½ tackles for loss, two sacks, two interceptions and a touchdown.

"I think Steele gave great effort," Knowles said after the loss to Georgia. "It looked to me like he had a really good game."

Perhaps the only real lapse for the linebackers came against Michigan. Eichenberg and Chambers were stonewalled in



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FINAL GRADES: DEFENSE

the second half as Edwards began cracking off his big runs. Eichenberg felt personal responsibility for the rivalry loss, even though he recorded a team-high seven tackles and a pass deflection while playing with two broken hands.

"As a captain, I take it as my job to get everyone, including myself, ready (to play)," Eichenberg said. "Which, I know we were ready. But it's my job to get the whole team, the whole defense ready, hold guys accountable."

Cody Simon performed spot duty and was often the third linebacker in the team's three-linebacker sets, recording 32 tackles and 5½ tackles for loss on the campaign. Palaie Gaoteote also provided some depth and contributed on special teams. Ohio State's linebackers – and Eichenberg in particular – may have been the team's most dependable position group on defense this season.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

BSB Second-Half Grade: A-

BSB Final Grade: A-

Safeties

One could argue that no other position on Ohio State's defense suffered a more drastic decline in the final three games of the season than its safeties. Maryland, Michigan and Georgia threw for 318, 278 and 398 yards, respectively, and coverage lapses from the safeties had a lot to do with it.

Each of Ohio State's three starting safeties got burned deep in the back end against either Michigan or Georgia. Ronnie Hickman – filling in at the "adjuster" for the season – was caught napping deep over the middle on long completions against both the Wolverines and Bulldogs. Lathan Ransom got beat for a 45-yard strike up the sideline in The Game and then slipped while bailing out into a deep zone to allow a 76-yard scoring toss in the fourth quarter against Georgia.

"Do I think we played our best (against Georgia)?" Knowles said. "I don't know, I'll have to watch the film. We gave up too many plays, and that's my job, to fix that and not let that happen, and we didn't get it done tonight."

Hickman did enter the Michigan contest fresh off a solid stretch, recording 10 tackles against Northwestern and seven tackles against Maryland. He recorded a pass breakup against both the Wolverines and Bulldogs despite some of his other mistakes. Declaring for the 2023 NFL draft prior to The Game, Hickman finished his campaign with 53 tackles, seven pass breakups and an interception.

In terms of other second-half highlights, Ransom collected a blocked punt against both Indiana and Maryland, and Tanner McCalister hauled in two interceptions against the Hawkeyes, while Ransom collected a team-high eight tackles against Iowa. Ransom finished third on the team and first among defensive backs with 74 tackles, adding three pass breakups and an interception.

McCalister, who transferred with Knowles from Oklahoma State to be the third starting safety for the Buckeyes, collected 24 tackles and a team-high three interceptions.

A number of depth pieces made contributions at safety as well, with Cameron

Martinez seeing spot duty at nickel and Josh Proctor adding some work at the boundary safety or "bandit" position, though he logged just eight defensive snaps against Michigan and none against the Bulldogs.

Freshman Sonny Styles, who left a year early from high school to join the Buckeyes this past offseason, saw meaningful action against Georgia, primarily playing in the box in the first half. He and fellow freshman Kye Stokes look to be factors next season.

After a strong start to the year, the big plays surrendered by the safeties in Knowles' "safety-driven" defense severely tainted the unit's overall outlook, particularly on a championship grading scale.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

BSB Second-Half Grade: C-

BSB Final Grade: B-

Cornerbacks

The above-mentioned big passing plays against Maryland, Michigan and Georgia reflect negatively on Ohio State's cornerbacks as they do its safeties, but the difference is that the cornerbacks had been doing it all season.

The cornerbacks – who, improbably, finished the season without a single interception – were the lowest-graded unit entering the off week. Despite finishing a respectable 26th in the country in passing defense – allowing just 200.5 passing yards per game, an improvement from the 246.2 yards allowed last season – the cornerbacks faltered in the biggest moments of the season.

Cameron Brown missed a tackle in man coverage on a third-and-long play that allowed Michigan wide receiver Cornelius Johnson to sprint 69 yards for U-M's first touchdown in The Game, and Georgia's wideouts worked themselves open for a number of explosive plays.

Cornerback was Day's top defensive concern entering Ohio State's off week, both in terms of productivity and health, and the outside defenders never quite got to the level he was hoping.

"I keep looking at it, and we're there. We just don't seem to be making the plays," Day said Oct. 8. "So we've got to figure that part of it out. If it's something where guys are just creating separation, can't cover anybody, that's one issue. The issue seems to be that we're there, we're just not making the play."

Brown did have some positive coverage moments against Georgia, breaking up a deep shot at one point. He recorded 14 tackles and five pass breakups on the season. Denzel Burke, the starter opposite Brown, had 34 tackles and five pass breakups, perhaps slightly better in the second half of the season but nowhere near the level of his freshman campaign.

For the fanfare surrounding his injury, Jordan Hancock didn't make much impact upon his return to the lineup at the position. JK Johnson – who announced his entry into the transfer portal on Jan. 3 – and Jyaire Brown worked in throughout the season, and Brown could look to become a meaningful contributor next season.

Cornerback will be one of the top areas Ohio State looks to address this offseason, be it through development or the transfer portal or some combination of the two.

BSB Midterm Grade: C-

BSB Second-Half Grade: D+

BSB Final Grade: D+



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Good And Bad For Ohio State's Special Teams

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The good news is that the special teams showed improvements in all areas in the second half of the season covering seven games.

The not-so-good news is that Ohio State ranked below average nationally in many of those categories, certainly not what would be expected of a national powerhouse that annually recruits the best players in the country.

Of course, the end of the 2022 season will be remembered for a special teams play – a missed 50-yard field goal by Noah Ruggles with three seconds left that would have given the Buckeyes a 44-42 win over Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

It was a cruel finale for Ruggles, who made two earlier attempts in the game and nearly a year earlier was the hero when he booted a 19-yard field goal with nine seconds left for a 48-45 victory vs. Utah in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

Such is the life of a kicker.

"Sadly, that's the world we live in," Ruggles said two days prior to the Georgia game. "People want to make a reason, an excuse ... to pick on anybody they can. If something goes wrong, they can blame the game on that."

"It could be a bunch of different things (a game) comes down to. Just executing your job on a personal assignment, any play could change the game in college football. Any play during the game can be the one that wins or loses the game. If people want to pick a certain thing and blame it on that, then that's their fault, because there's a whole game long, there's a whole team playing."

Under special teams coordinator Parker Fleming, the Buckeyes had fake punt attempts go awry against Michigan and Georgia, saw an extra-point try against Maryland turn into two points for the Terrapins and continued the tradition of not returning a kickoff or punt for a touchdown.

The highlight for the special teams in the latter part of the season was a pair of blocked punts in consecutive games by Lathan Ransom.

Kicking Game

Ruggles converted 17 of 20 field-goal attempts this season, including a perfect 4 of 4 in the Oct. 22 game against Iowa, connecting from 46, 41, 35 and 26 yards. The following week against Penn State, he made tries from 38, 37 and 40 yards out but missed from 53 yards.

In the Maryland game, he was perfect on three tries (33, 47 and 45) but had an extra

point blocked. The Buckeyes were up 31-21 early in the fourth quarter when head coach Ryan Day opted for a two-point conversion, but that idea was scratched by a delay of game penalty. Jakorian Bennett then picked up the blocked kick and ran 80 yards to make it 33-23.

Ruggles also was 3 for 3 in the 45-23 loss to Michigan (32, 47, 27).

While he made 37

of his 41 field-goal attempts in two seasons with the Buckeyes, that wide-left miss against Georgia will be the one remembered, unfair or not, even though he was successful from 25 and 48 yards against the Bulldogs.

As for kickoffs, freshman Jayden Fielding handled them. Of the 105 kickoffs for the Buckeyes for the season, 46 were touchbacks (43.8 percent) and three went out-of-bounds. Through the first six games, Ohio State was slightly worse with 42.9 percent (21 of 49) going for touchbacks.

Iowa gained 130 yards on six runbacks with Kaleb Johnson getting 118 yards on five attempts. Jaylin Lucas had a long of 24 yards for Indiana among his total of 82 yards on four returns.

The Ohio State kickoff return defense ranked 71st of 131 teams in the NCAA and 10th in the Big Ten at 20.4 yards per attempt. That's stingier than the average through the first six games of 21.8 per attempt, which ranked 90th in the country at the time.

BSB Midterm Grade: C+

BSB Second-Half Grade: B-

BSB Final Grade: C

Punting Game

Jesse Mirco was his usual consistent self, but what Buckeye fans will remember most are the punts he wasn't supposed to make, which left fans wondering how things could get botched.

On the first, the Buckeyes trailed Michigan 24-20 in the third quarter but faced a fourth-and-5 from the Wolverines' 43. The punt squad was sent onto the field, to the displeasure of the Ohio Stadium crowd and quarterback C.J. Stroud.

After an illegal procedure penalty, Mirco booted the ball into the end zone for a touchback and Michigan went on a 15-play, 80-yard touchdown drive to suck the life out of the Buckeyes.

Day defended the call after the game, but the next day, Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh said the Buckeyes were ready to pull off the fake punt that could have changed the outcome of the game.

"We got so lucky," Harbaugh said. "They had a fake on. And they had us. I mean they had us cold. We were prepared for it. We knew the fake was coming just by the personnel that was there. We had four prac-

tices, four meetings. And not one of us saw it. Nobody on the field saw it, and they had us cold."

"I think their snapper snapped to the wrong guy, snapped it to the punter instead of to the faker, but it would have been a huge gain. We got extremely lucky."

Indeed, long snapper Mason Arnold – who has since entered the transfer portal – was supposed to get the ball to fullback Mitch Rossi, who had an open field to his left, but instead sent the ball to an unsuspecting Mirco, who had to hurry his punt.

"I think he was too locked in on his snap, and that's maybe why he didn't hear the call," Ruggles said of Arnold. "Obviously, in that position you have to be ready to hear and adjust. That's just another learning point for him."

The second fake punt attempt was against the Bulldogs. The Buckeyes were up 38-27 with 8:58 left in the game and had a fourth-and-1 from their own 34-yard line.

Once again, the punt team entered the field with a fake in mind, but this time, Rossi took the direct snap and got the first down. However, Georgia coach Kirby Smart saw what was about to happen and got a timeout a split second before the snap to nullify the play.

Mirco then launched a 42-yard punt for a fair catch at the Georgia 24-yard line. On the first play, Stetson Bennett threw a 76-yard touchdown to Arian Smith, and the ensuing two-point conversion made it 38-35.

Smart looked like a genius, but video reviews later showed the Buckeyes had 12 men on the field and had it been called by the officials, which is open to conjecture, Rossi's run would have been negated anyway.

When the Buckeyes weren't trying fakes, they had a net punting average of 40.8 yards, good for 25th nationally and fifth in the Big Ten. That was a 15-team leap in the NCAA but a drop of three schools in the conference from when Ohio State had a net of 40.5 through six games.

That average was certainly boosted by Mirco's wind-aided, 77-yarder at Northwestern, the same game he managed a 34-yard punt into the gale forces.

"When we saw (the weather report) we knew it would be a major factor in the game," said Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald.

Ohio State improved 14 spots to 67th in punt return defense (7.1 yards) compared to 9.0 yards in the midterm report. The Buckeyes finished eighth in the Big Ten after being 13th through six games.

Ransom provided the two best moments for the special teams this season with punt blocks against Indiana and Mary-

land. Against the Hoosiers, his block was pounced on at the 2-yard line by Xavier Johnson, and the Buckeyes would score on a Stroud to Cade Stover pass for a 35-7 lead in the third quarter.

Maryland led 13-10 in the third quarter when Ransom went untouched to swat the ball from punter Colton Spangler. Johnson made the recovery at the 14-yard line, and two plays later, the Buckeyes were up 17-13. Remarkably, Ransom made the block despite breaking his thumb on the Buckeyes' first defensive play of the game.

"We're just doing what we've got to do to win the game, doing what I've got to do for my brothers," he said.

Ohio State also had standout play against Iowa, snuffing out a fake punt when Caden Curry made the stop 2 yards shy of a first down at the Hawkeyes 34-yard line.

The defensive plays were good, but the pair of missed opportunities on the Buckeyes' fake punts will haunt them for a while and factor into the overall evaluation of the punting unit.

BSB Midterm Grade: B

BSB Second-Half Grade: C+

BSB Final Grade: B-

Return Game

The Buckeyes did not reach the end zone through a kickoff or punt return. No surprise there.

On Nov. 27, 2010, Jordan Hall had the last kickoff return for a score when he went 85 yards against Michigan. The last one on a punt was Jalin Marshall, a 54-yarder vs. Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014.

The Buckeyes placed 79th in the NCAA in punt return average and seventh in the Big Ten (6.7 yards), bettering their respective marks of 88th and 10th (6.1) in the first half of the season. Emeka Egbuka had 11 of the 15 returns for a 6.8 average with a long of 18 among his 75 yards. Jayden Ballard had a 14-yard return in his one try. Fleming would love to see a returner break one for a touchdown, but that's not the first objective.

"That's what we're working toward," he said before the season. "But really, at the end of the day, we just want to have positive field position. If we make the last guy miss, that's a big bonus. But we're really trying to get drives started in the right way. That's our goal."

The kickoff return unit made strides over the final seven games, increasing from 10.8 to 19.0 yards per attempt. That still left the Buckeyes tied for 87th with Eastern Michigan, although it's a lot better than their previous mark at 130th through the first six games. In the Big Ten, Ohio State jumped four spots to 10th.

Johnson led the way with 12 returns for 269 yards (22.4 yards per return). He had three returns for 80 yards against Maryland, including a season-best 46-yarder. His four returns against Michigan went for 76 yards. Chip Trayanum had three returns for 29 yards (9.7), Egbuka one for 25 and Ballard gained nothing on his one return.

The rankings show the Buckeyes need a lot of work if they want to make their return units a weapon as dangerous as their offense.

BSB Midterm Grade: D

BSB Second-Half Grade: C

BSB Final Grade: C-



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Remembering Buckeyes We Lost In 2022

By **DAVID BREITHAUP**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Contributor

As Father Time continues on, he takes some of our best and brightest with him, and 2022 was no exception. Among our own family and friends who passed last year, several former Buckeye players and those associated with the university also claimed their reward after their notable contributions to Ohio State athletics. May they all rest in peace. The following is a list of Buckeyes who passed away, listed in order of date of passing.

Don Sutherin, age 85, passed away on Jan. 11. Born on Feb. 29, 1936, in Empire, Ohio, Sutherin was best known for kicking the winning field goal in the 1958 Rose Bowl, a 34-yard kick which sealed a 10-7 victory over Oregon. The Buckeyes finished that season with a 9-1 record and ended the year ranked No. 1 in the UPI coaches poll.

He went on to be drafted by the New York Giants in the eighth round of the 1958 NFL draft. He later played 12 seasons in the Canadian Football League and became a coach for more than two decades. He was inducted into the Canadian Football Hall of Fame in 1992.

Dave Monnot, a three-year starter at right guard for Ohio State from 1991-93, died on Feb. 6 at age 50 after battling cancer. Monnot accepted a scholarship offer from John Cooper's program immediately after touring the Ohio State facilities.

He contributed in 42 contests, helping to win a Big Ten championship and a Holiday Bowl over Brigham Young in 1993, his final year at Ohio State.

Chuck Csuri died on Feb. 27 at the age of 99. Csuri played for the Buckeyes football team from 1941-43 under Paul Brown who called him "the perfect tackle." Csuri was part of the 1942 national championship team and served as an Ohio State captain in 1943.

Drafted by the Chicago Cardinals in 1944, he opted out to serve in World War II and fought in the Battle of the Bulge, which earned him a Bronze Star for heroism. After the war, he returned to Ohio State and received his master's in fine arts and became a professor for the next 40 years.

It was during this time he pioneered computer animation, earning the title of "father of digital art and computer animation" from the Smithsonian. Csuri worked to form the Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design (ACCAD), co-founded the Ohio Supercomputer Center and one of the world's first computer animation companies, Cranston/Csuri Productions.

He received the Ohio Governor's Award for the Arts in 2000 and Ohio State's Joseph Sullivant Medal. He also received the award for Lifetime Achievement in Digital Art by ACM SIGGRAPH, the Association for Computer Machinery, in 2011.

Ohio State granted him the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award from the College of Arts and Sciences in 2014.

Shane Olivea died at the age of 40 on March 2. Olivea played for the Buckeyes from 2000-03 and was part of the 2002 team which beat Miami (Fla.) to win the na-

tional championship.

He was drafted by the San Diego Chargers in the seventh round of the 2004 NFL draft and played in 60 games with 57 starts through four seasons. He battled an addiction to opioids and entered rehab and later played for the United Football League in 2010 and 2011 with the Florida Tuskers and Virginia Destroyers, respectively.

He returned to Ohio State in 2015 and earned his bachelor's degree in sports industry. His cause of death was listed as hypertensive heart disease.

Woodrow Roach, age 69, passed away on March 15. Roach was a backup tailback for Archie Griffin from 1973-75. As a freshman in 1972, he was one of only three black scholarship players with Griffin and Cornelius Greene. His playing time was limited, but when he played, he produced, rushing for 436 yards on 67 attempts (6.5 yards per carry).

Tom Blinco passed away at age 64 on March 21. Blinco earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 1981.

He played fullback and linebacker for Lewiston-Porter High School in Lewiston, N.Y., and was also a two-time All-State wrestler. Blinco was a three-year varsity letterman (1976-77, 1979) for the Buckeyes and played three seasons under Woody Hayes and Earle Bruce, totaling 60 tackles with three for loss, though he missed the 1978 season with a knee injury.

He played in the 1977 Orange Bowl, the 1978 Sugar Bowl and 1980 Rose Bowl. He went on to a successful business career in the pharmaceutical industry.

Dwayne Haskins died in a tragic vehicular accident in Florida on April 9 at age 24. A four-star football prospect out of Maryland, Haskins went on to be a Heisman finalist, setting Big Ten records and leading the Buckeyes to 13-1 season and a Rose Bowl win in 2018.

To don the scarlet and gray was Haskins' dream as a kid growing up in Maryland, and he rescinded his commitment to his home-state school after interest from Ohio State appeared. He might best be remembered for taking over for an injured J.T. Barrett against Michigan in 2017, leading Ohio State in a rousing second half for a 31-20 win at the Big House.

Haskins climbed to ninth in Ohio State history with 5,396 passing yards and fifth with 54 touchdown passes, accomplished in 22 games (14 starts). He set the conference record for Offensive Player of the Week awards with six. Haskins was also a two-time Academic All-Big Ten conference honoree.

He was the 15th overall pick in the 2019 NFL draft for the Washington Football team, where he played for two seasons. Haskins then played for a season with the Pittsburgh Steelers and was under contract for 2022. He was in Florida training with his teammates at the time of his death.

Frederick "Rick" Jones, died April 25 at the age of 87. Jones played for the Ohio State golf team from 1954-56 and won an individual NCAA championship in 1956.

After graduating from Ohio State, Jones went on to play the PGA Tour from 1960-61. He went on to win numerous events, including the Ohio State Amateur Cham-

pionship in 1975 as well as the Ohio State Pre-Seniors Championship in 1975, 1979 and 1980 and the Senior Masters Championship in 1992.

Gary Moeller died July 11 at age 81. Moeller was a three-year football letter winner at Ohio State, playing primarily at linebacker under Hayes from 1961 to 1963. He served as team co-captain in his senior year along with offensive tackle Bob Vogel.

He joined Bo Schembechler as a coach at Miami (Ohio) in 1967 and followed him to Michigan in 1969 where he served as a defensive ends coach until being promoted to defensive coordinator in 1973. After a brief stint at Illinois, he returned to Michigan where he served as head coach from 1990-94.

William White died July 28 at the age of 56 following a six-year battle with ALS. Born in Lima, Ohio, White was a cornerback for the Buckeyes from 1984-87, starting all four seasons.

He was taken by the Detroit Lions in the 1988 NFL draft with the 85th overall pick. He played 11 seasons in the NFL, spending six seasons with the Lions and three with the Kansas City Chiefs before spending his final two seasons in Atlanta, where he played in Super Bowl XXXIII with the Falcons.

Tom Weiskopf, age 79, died Aug. 20 after a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer. A native of Massillon, Ohio, Weiskopf played his first season at Ohio State in 1962, immediately following Jack Nicklaus' run with the Buckeyes.

Weiskopf turned pro in 1964 and won 16 PGA Tour titles between 1968 and 1982. In 1973, he won seven tournaments around the world, including his lone major at Royal Troon where he finished 12 under par at the Open Championship. He finished tied for second at The Masters on four occasions in 1969, 1972, 1974 and 1975 and had finishes of second at the U.S. Open in 1976 and third at the PGA Championship in 1975. In total, he had 21 top-10 finishes and 12 top-five finishes in 71 major starts.

He went on to consult on the designs of several courses including Troon North and TPC Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Ariz., as well as the Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio, and Loch Lomond in Scotland. Weiskopf later worked in television at ABC, CBS and ESPN as a golf analyst.

Phyllis Bailey, former athletics administrator and Ohio State women's basketball coach, died on Oct. 1 at age 96. Bailey was a trailblazer during her 39 years with the Ohio State athletic department as a mentor,

role model and pioneer of women's sports as well as the first head coach of Ohio State's women's basketball program. She opened the doors for women's sports at Ohio State and impacted the lives of generations of women athletes.

Bailey became women's basketball coach at Ohio State in 1956 and transformed the school's women's athletics from a handful of club teams into more than a dozen varsity teams as an administrator.

Bailey was a native of Fairport Harbor in northern Ohio and graduated from in-state Miami University with a degree in physical education. She received a master's degree at Indiana before arriving at Ohio State in 1956 to pursue her doctorate. Ohio State suggested she drop her studies and take a job as professor and with women's club sports, specifically as the first varsity women's basketball coach, which she accepted. In 1970 she moved full time into Ohio State athletic administration.

Joe Roberts died on Oct. 10 at the age of 86 after battling cancer. He was a forward for the Ohio State men's basketball team, lettering from 1958-60, and was a co-captain for the 1959-60 team that won the program's only national championship.

He was drafted in the third round of the 1960 NBA draft and spent three years with the Syracuse Nationals, where he averaged 5.8 point and 4.9 rebounds per game. He also spent time in the Elite Pro Basketball League, North American Basketball League and American Basketball Association before entering the NBA's coaching ranks, spending time as an assistant with the Golden State Warriors and Los Angeles Clippers.

Jamaal Brown, a guard who served as a captain on the Buckeyes' 1992 Big Ten title team, passed away at his home in Texas on Nov. 13. He was 52.

Brown played in 127 games as a Buckeye from 1988-92 tallying 1,139 points in his career. Brown was a key figure on Ohio State's back-to-back Big Ten title teams in 1991 and 1992, producing a career-best mark of 12.0 points per game in 1991. Brown made his name on the defensive end of the floor, though, serving as Ohio State's primary perimeter defender during his time with the program.

Brown's efforts led the Buckeyes to a trio of NCAA Tournament appearances, with the deepest run coming in 1991-92, when Ohio State made it to the Elite Eight before falling in heartbreaking fashion to Michigan.

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National Championship Upset Stands Test Of Time

On the 20th anniversary of Ohio State's 2002 national championship, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has been running occasional stories on that magical season. The following story recalls Ohio State's dramatic double-overtime victory over Miami (Fla.) in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl to secure the program's first national championship since 1968.

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Throughout the 2002 regular season, Ohio State survived by the skin of its teeth on numerous occasions en route to a perfect 14-0 record, a share of the Big Ten title and winning the BCS National Championship Game at the Fiesta Bowl.

Seven of Ohio State's wins – including the final four games of the season – came by one possession, but somehow, the Buckeyes always found a way to win. Whether it was the Buckeyes' fourth-quarter comeback to stun Cincinnati at Paul Brown Stadium or quarterback Craig Krenzel's miracle touchdown to wideout Michael Jenkins on fourth-and-1 against Purdue, Ohio State had a flare for dramatic wins. Although the Buckeyes began the season ranked No. 13 by The Associated Press, they clawed their way to a national title appearance.

"I think the thing that, above all, for the whole season, is how this team refused to lose," then-Ohio State recruiting coordinator and assistant coach Bill Conley said. "They found a way of winning every close game. And sometimes those games weren't really against a stronger opponent, but that's the game of college football. The ball bounces funny ways and you have to win games even when you're not playing to your best technically and physically. And this team found a way to do it."

The Buckeyes' 31-24 double-overtime victory in the Fiesta Bowl was no different.

Ohio State battled the defending national champions in the Miami Hurricanes, who entered the title game on a 34-game winning streak and with several future NFL stars such as wide receiver Andre Johnson, safety Sean Taylor, and linebacker Jonathan Vilma.

The Hurricanes were the perfect opposite to Ohio State. Miami boasted a high-powered offense and had largely cruised to the Big East title, winning all but two games by multiple possessions. The run included ranked wins over No. 6 Florida and tight victories over No. 9 Florida State, 28-27, and No. 17 Pittsburgh, 28-21. As head coach Larry Coker's squad eyed its second consecutive national title, oddsmakers considered the Hurricanes anywhere from 11- to 12-point favorites over the Buckeyes.

"As you looked at (Miami), you saw a team that was dominant at times," Bucknuts reporter and BSB alum Steve Helwag said. "But also, almost kind of bored at times with how easy things were for them in the Big East. They were a dominant team, and you just figured that they were on their way to repeating. That's what I think a lot of people looked at, so I don't think many people gave (a chance for) Ohio State, which had struggled throughout the season with



SONNY BROCKWAY

UNEXPECTED CHAMPIONS — The 2002 Ohio State football team won the BCS National Championship Game 31-24 against overwhelming favorite Miami (Fla.), claiming the program's first title since 1968.

tough wins down to the wire. They just saw one team as dominant and the other team just kind of got there somehow, somehow, undefeated."

As the Buckeyes clawed their way through a difficult Big Ten conference slate and into the Fiesta Bowl, tight end Ben Hartsock largely agreed with the sentiment shared by Helwag.

"I think it would be human nature to watch us play and see the way we've won and have doubts about us being the best team," Hartsock said prior to the game. "But we've won every game. We haven't won them all definitively, but we don't care about that."

"The experiences this team has been through will help us when we face them again."

With Miami chasing history and being the overwhelming favorite, Ohio State took on the label of the underdog in the month leading up to the game. Conley said the Buckeyes took note of the national media attention that surrounded the Hurricanes.

"One thing about Miami, I don't think they realized how much skill and speed we had," Conley said. "I think they felt they were superior in both things. They did embrace the fact that every time there was an article in the paper or something came up on ESPN, whatever it was, it was not, 'Who's going to win the game?' but rather, 'How much Miami was going to win by?'"

"You don't do that to the Buckeyes for about a month straight," he continued. "But we had a very positive attitude. We had a chip on our shoulder and something to

prove."

The eyes of the college football world gazed upon Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz. on the night of Jan. 3, 2003. Regardless of the outcome, history was to be made with Ohio State seeking its first national title since 1968 and Miami looking to become just the third program at the time to win back-to-back consensus national championships.

As the sun dipped over the horizon and darkness spread over the desert, Miami kicker Todd Sievers booted the opening kickoff over the head of Ohio State freshman phenom Maurice Clarett and through the back of the end zone.

Ohio State did not get off on the right foot to open the game. The Buckeyes were hit with a penalty for 12 men on the field on the opening play from scrimmage, setting up a three-and-out on their first possession of the night. Ohio State's defense countered by getting the Miami offense off the field without points despite Johnson hauling in receptions of 20 and 11 yards during the possession.

After another Ohio State three-and-out, Miami struck. The high-powered Hurricane offense flashed, with quarterback Ken Dorsey connecting with wide receiver Roscoe Parrish on a 25-yard touchdown strike to cap off a five-play, 52-yard drive and give Miami the first lead of the game.

On the next play from scrimmage, Krenzel was flushed out of the pocket to his right by the aggressive Miami pass rush before he set his feet and threw up a prayer into dou-

ble coverage for flanker Chris Vance, but the ball lofted into the hands of Taylor, flipping possession back to the Hurricanes.

The Buckeyes and Hurricanes each traded punts until Ohio State finally made its first game-changing play of the evening. Stuck on a third-and-4 at his own 29-yard line, Dorsey sailed a pass over his intended target and into the hands of Ohio State cornerback Dustin Fox.

"Dorsey is a great player," Fox said after the game. "But sometimes when you can get pressure on him, he'll just chuck it up there. When he does that, you have to make plays on the ball."

The Ohio State offense stalled again, however, and the Buckeyes brought out kicker Mike Nugent and the field-goal unit while facing fourth-and-1 from the Miami 17-yard line. Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel then reached into his back of tricks, dialing up a fake for holder Andy Groom, but the Hurricanes snuffed it out and tackled Groom for no gain.

Though the Buckeyes were denied deep in Miami territory, they quickly got the ball back. Dorsey again was rushed into a throw by the Ohio State pass rush, as his pass deflected off the hands of the typically sure-handed Johnson and into the possession of Buckeye safety Mike Doss, who returned it 35 yards into the Miami red zone.

After taking over at the Hurricanes' 17-yard line, the Buckeyes needed seven plays to find pay dirt. Facing third-and-goal from just a yard out, Tressel dialed up a pair of quarterback sneaks for Krenzel, who fell into the end zone on fourth down. Nugent knotted the game up at seven with 2:28 to play in the first half.

"In all the years I coached college football, I had never seen any quarterback run the quarterback sneak better than Craig Krenzel," Conley said. "He would slide along the line of scrimmage and hit the little creases to get the needed yards for a first down, keep the drive going, and several times for touchdowns."

For the third consecutive possession, the Buckeyes started deep in Miami territory after Kenny Peterson jarred the ball free from Dorsey on the Hurricanes' first play following the Ohio State score. Defensive end Darrion Scott fell on the ball, and Ohio State took over from the Miami 14-yard line. Just two plays later, Clarett powered to the end zone on a 7-yard score to give the Buckeyes their first lead of the game with 1:10 to play in the half.

Taking a 14-7 lead into the locker room, the Buckeyes had largely made the game in their image by keeping it a low-scoring, defensive affair.

"Miami was this team with all these weapons and firepower and all that," CaneSport.com publisher Gary Ferman said. "But they were successful in turning it into a boxing match, really. And I think that kept the score down to a place where Ohio State could give itself a chance to win."

Helwag noted that Ohio State's play in the first half showed the Hurricanes that the Buckeyes weren't a team that would roll over in the face of adversity.

"Ohio State was serving notice that, 'Hey, we're here for the whole four quarters

of this game,' " Helwagen said. "They really took the fight to Miami."

After holding Miami to a three-and-out to start the second half, Krenzel hooked up with Ohio State utility man Chris Gamble for a gain of 57 yards, pushing the Buckeyes to the Miami 6-yard line. But one play later, Taylor picked off Krenzel in the end zone before being stripped by Claret on the return. Claret then recovered the ball to flip possession back in the Buckeyes' favor at the Miami 28-yard line.

"Maurice had talked about how whenever there was a turnover that he had been coached by Tim Spencer, the running backs coach, to go play defense," Helwagen said. "The running backs, who are now some of the better athletes on the field, have got to go try and make a play and get the ball carrier down. Well, Maurice did much more than that – he recovered on the play and tracked the defensive player down on the sideline."

"He gives them new life right there. It had to be demoralizing for Miami, (getting) the pick and losing possession on the same play. But what a heads-up football play by Maurice Claret."

Ohio State's next three plays netted just a yard, and Nugent nailed a field goal to go up 17-7 with 8:33 to play in the third quarter. It took just over six minutes for the Hurricanes to close the gap thanks to a 9-yard touchdown run by running back Willis McGahee, and Ohio State and Miami entered the final frame locked in a 17-14 battle.

Miami had a chance to tie it up with 11:26 to play in regulation, but Siever's 54-yard field goal attempt sailed wide right. On Ohio State's ensuing possession, a 42-yard attempt from Nugent that would have pushed the lead to six met the same fate, and the game remained at 17-14 with 6:36 to play.

The Hurricanes saw another scoring opportunity slip through their fingers after Dorsey hit Parrish for a first down on third-and-8 from the Ohio State 47-yard line, pushing the Hurricanes to the Ohio State 21-yard line. But as Parrish fought for extra yards, Fox jarred the ball loose and safety Will Allen fell on it to cut another Miami possession short.

"I was just trying to tackle him, and the ball was there," Fox said. "I just got it out. It was like a perfect tackle, and Will was there to pick it up."

Ohio State could not take advantage of the turnover, however, punting the ball away with 2:18 to play. In an uncharacteristic special teams blunder by the Buckeyes, Parrish returned the punt 50 yards to the Ohio State 26-yard line, putting the Hurricanes in position to either tie or win the game. The Hurricanes found themselves in an advantageous position, but a run for just a yard by Jarrett Payton and a 5-yard sack of Dorsey forced Miami to play for overtime rather than the win. Sievers knocked down the game-tying 40-yard field goal to send the Fiesta Bowl to overtime.

"I wouldn't say we were really chipper," Hartsock said of the team's mind-set entering overtime. "But we had a sense that we had been there before and we could handle the situation."

The Hurricanes started on offense and scored in just five plays, as Dorsey connected with tight end Kellen Winslow Jr., who snagged the 7-yard touchdown despite a pass-interference call on Allen.

After Krenzel was sacked for a 4-yard loss on second down and misfired on third down, the Buckeyes faced a do-or-die fourth-and-14, where Krenzel connected with Jenkins for a gain of 17 yards to keep the drive alive. While Krenzel went on to finish the night just 7 of 21 passing with two interceptions, he stepped up in several key plays with his legs and on that throw to Jenkins.

"He didn't get rattled," Conley said. "He was a guy who kept his cool under pressure all year and performed when he had to."

Three plays later, the Buckeyes faced another fourth down, needing just 3 yards to extend the game. Instead of looking to get past the sticks, Krenzel looked to Gamble in the end zone. As the ball traveled through the air, Miami cornerback Glenn Sharpe and Gamble collided while both trying to make a play, and the ball fell to the turf. The Miami sideline erupted in jubilation and fireworks lit the sky as it appeared the Hurricanes had completed the comeback. Despite signaling an incomplete pass initially, field judge Terry Porter threw his flag and ended up calling pass interference on Sharpe, prolonging Ohio State's drive.

"We were standing on the sideline and the ball falls to the ground," Ferman recalled. "The fireworks start going off over the stadium, Larry Coker is up on people's shoulders. A national championship celebration had literally broken out and it was complete euphoria on the Miami side of the field. Then all of a sudden, everything stopped. It was the weirdest thing I had ever seen in over four decades of covering college football."

The pass interference call has long been the topic of discussion among college football fans, especially due to the delayed nature of the flag.

"There was controversy that it took a while and there was controversy as to whether there had been a lot of contact before the ball had arrived," Helwagen said. "But there are also still images of the ball in the air, and (Sharpe) is all over him."

Ferman said that Miami fans still believe that they truly won the Fiesta Bowl 20 years later because of the controversial nature of the interference call.

"All of these years later, there's no question in anybody that had anything to do with Miami's mind that Miami won the game," Ferman said. "That call at the end was absolute nonsense, that they had a national championship taken away from them."

"It was a horrendous call at any stage of the game, really, but at that moment with that play deciding the game and what was at stake, it was very minimal contact. It's a call that they're still debating two decades later."

It took three plays following the pass interference for Krenzel to plow into the end zone for his second 1-yard score of the day, sending the game to a second overtime. He finished with 81 rushing yards and two scores on 19 carries.

Ohio State's possession in the second overtime was much less painstaking as the Buckeyes scored in just five plays, capped off by a 5-yard touchdown run from Claret to regain the lead, 31-24, while placing all of the pressure on the Miami offense.

The Hurricanes faced a do-or-die fourth-and-3 of their own from the 18-yard line. Miami was also able to convert, prevailing after Dorsey connected with Winslow for a

gain of 7 yards. Back-to-back penalties by the Ohio State defense – a face mask followed by a pass interference – then gave the Hurricanes first-and-goal from the Ohio State 2-yard line.

Payton gained a yard, and Dorsey threw an incompleteness. After fullback Quadtrine Hill was stuffed short of the goal line, the game fell on Dorsey's shoulders. As the quarterback took the snap from under center, Ohio State linebacker Cie Grant came untouch off the edge, forcing Dorsey to throw up a prayer that fell harmlessly to the turf.

"Cie Grant was a guy that before we went to bed at night, he would lead the team in the singing of the alma mater," Conley said. "It's kind of like a Hollywood movie in a sense. You couldn't write a better scenario that he's the guy to make the last play to win the national championship. I mean, you almost felt like it was destiny."

The Ohio State sideline stormed the field as the Buckeye defense rushed to celebrate with their storming teammates. Tressel embraced his players as the Ohio State-heavy

crowd at Sun Devil Stadium exploded in glee.

As the Buckeyes had done all season, they did just enough to unseat the defending national champions and etch their names into the college football history books.

"We knew we could do the things we needed to do and we would compete," Tressel said after the win. "It was a pretty even matchup, two great heavyweights slug-ging it out, and our guys had every confidence in our ability to get it done."

Conley recounted a feeling of excitement but also peace after helping his team achieve the ultimate goal.

"Everybody from players to coaches realized that we really accomplished something special, something nobody in college football expected us to do when the season started. And it was like a fairy tale ending," Conley said. "You're excited, and you're almost at the same time mentally and physically exhausted. There's a calming moment that sets over you."

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Recent Decade Perhaps Stadium's Most Unusual

Throughout the 2022 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* has published stories commemorating the 100th anniversary of Ohio Stadium. In this issue, BSB concludes the series with a look at the Horse-shoe's 10th decade (2012-21) that featured everything from championships and a coaching change to a worldwide pandemic.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

As Ohio Stadium neared its centennial anniversary season in 2022, its most recent decade was perhaps more unusual than the previous nine combined.

Under first-year head coach Urban Meyer, Ohio State produced an undefeated season in 2012, but because of NCAA sanctions stemming from the so-called "Tattoogate" scandal, it was not allowed to participate in the postseason.

Two years later, the Buckeyes suffered a rare home-opening loss to a nonconference opponent but then rattled off 13 consecutive victories to secure the program's first national championship in 12 years.

The decade also saw an unparalleled run of eight consecutive top-six finishes in the national rankings and record success against archrival Michigan, extending a home winning streak to nine games over the Wolverines.

But the ultra-successful decade that saw the Buckeyes win 90.0 percent of their games with a record of 117-13, five Big Ten

championships including a league-record four outright titles in a row, and one national title ultimately ended in tumult.

Meyer was suspended by the university for the first three games of the 2018 season, after which he somewhat abruptly retired. Three games of a reconfigured 2020 regular season were canceled, including what would have been the 103rd consecutive meeting with Michigan due to the pandemic, and the landscape of college football itself began to change with the implementation of new rules allowing players unprecedented benefits such as unfettered transfers as well as large sums of money through Name, Image and Likeness legislation.

"You could look back at any point in time during the history of Ohio Stadium and find a certain amount of change that occurred," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "Players come and go, there are coaching staff changes, and changes within the university administration and athletic department. Those are just the nature of college athletics."

"But when you look at the period beginning in 2012 and then move along through the ensuing 10 years, in my opinion the changes undergone by the Ohio State program in particular and college football in general are just remarkable."

Ohio Stadium sat on the banks of the Olentangy River in the fall of 2012, ready for its 91st season of intercollegiate football while the university's football team was at a crossroads. Despite winning six conference titles and the 2002 national championship,



FILE PHOTO

LONGTIME LEGEND — Longtime Ohio State starting quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) broke several program records — including career yards and touchdowns — while a member of the Buckeyes from 2013-17.

head coach Jim Tressel had been fired for NCAA violations stemming from his players exchanging personal memorabilia for benefits that included free tattoos.

Tressel's dismissal had occurred shortly before the 2011 season was set to begin, and under head coach Luke Fickell, the Buckeyes sputtered to a 6-7 record, their first losing sea-

son in 23 years as well as their first seven-loss campaign in more than a century.

Meyer, an Ohio native who had never made it a secret that Ohio State was one of his dream jobs, had spent the 2011 season as an analyst for ESPN when health problems caused him to leave Florida after six seasons. Two days after the Buckeyes lost a 40-34 de-



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Ohio Stadium Record Crowds

Date	Attendance	Opponent	Result
Oct. 7, 1922	25,000	Ohio Wesleyan	Win, 5-0
Oct. 21, 1922	72,500	Michigan	Loss, 19-0
Nov. 13, 1926	90,411	Michigan	Loss, 17-16
Nov. 2, 1985	90,467	Iowa	Win, 22-13
Nov. 22, 1986	90,674	Michigan	Loss, 26-24
Oct. 15, 1988	90,970	Purdue	Loss, 31-26
Sept. 7, 1991	92,743	Arizona	Win, 38-14
Oct. 5, 1991	94,221	Wisconsin	Win, 31-16
Oct. 26, 1991	94,341	Michigan State	Win, 27-17
Nov. 2, 1991	95,357	Iowa	Loss, 16-9
Sept. 30, 1995	95,537	Notre Dame	Win, 45-26
Sept. 2, 2000	96,583	Fresno State	Win, 43-10
Sept. 16, 2000	96,721	Miami (Ohio)	Win, 27-16
Sept. 23, 2000	98,144	Penn State	Win, 45-6
Nov. 4, 2000	98,406	Michigan State	Win, 27-13
Nov. 18, 2000	98,681	Michigan	Loss, 38-26
Sept. 8, 2001	102,602	Akron	Win, 28-14
Oct. 6, 2001	104,042*	Northwestern	Win, 38-20
Nov. 10, 2001	104,189	Purdue	Win, 35-9
Nov. 17, 2001	104,407	Illinois	Loss, 34-22
Sept. 14, 2002	104,553	Washington State	Win, 25-7
Oct. 12, 2002	104,892	San Jose State	Win, 50-7
Oct. 26, 2002	105,103	Penn State	Win, 13-7
Nov. 23, 2002	105,539	Michigan	Win, 14-9
Sept. 10, 2005	105,565*	Texas	Loss, 25-22
Nov. 18, 2006	105,708	Michigan	Win, 42-39
Oct. 25, 2008	105,711*	Penn State	Loss, 13-6
Sept. 12, 2009	106,033*	USC	Loss, 18-15
Oct. 6, 2012	106,102*	Nebraska	Win, 63-38
Sept. 6, 2014	107,517*	Virginia Tech	Loss, 35-21
Sept. 27, 2014	108,362	Cincinnati	Win, 50-28
Nov. 29, 2014	108,610	Michigan	Win, 42-28
Nov. 21, 2015	108,975	Michigan State	Loss, 17-14
Nov. 26, 2016	110,045	Michigan	Win, 30-27 (2OT)

* – denotes night game

cision at Michigan, Meyer was introduced as the program's new head coach, and he immediately began work on a total overhaul.

Several players rebelled at the new coach's often-demeaning motivational tactics, but by midseason it was obvious the Buckeyes had fully bought into Meyer's way of doing things. The result was a thrill ride of a season, including six of 12 victories by margins of seven points or fewer, and only the sixth unblemished record in program history.

Along the way, a crowd of 106,102 attended a 63-38 victory against Nebraska on an early October evening to set a new stadium attendance record. And another 105,899 were on hand inside the Horseshoe to watch the Buckeyes shut out Michigan in the second half on their way to a 26-21 victory. It was the first of seven straight victories in the series for Meyer, who never lost to the Wolverines.

The promise of the 2012 season extended well into the following year when the Buckeyes won their first 12 games. But a 34-24 loss to Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship Game and a 40-35 Orange Bowl defeat at the hands of Clemson during which Tigers quarterback Tajh Boyd ran and passed for a combined 505 yards and six touchdowns ended the 2013 campaign on a pair of sour notes.

Determined not to allow a repeat of how the previous season ended, Meyer brought in Chris Ash as co-defensive coordinator with linebackers coach Fickell. Ash had spent 16 years as a defensive assistant at the college level, including two seasons at Wisconsin in 2011 and 2012 when the Badgers won back-

to-back Big Ten championships.

Just before the 2014 campaign began, however, no one was talking about the Ohio State defense. One week before the season was to open, three-year starting quarterback Braxton Miller – coming off shoulder surgery for an injury suffered in the Orange Bowl – threw a short pass during a practice drill and quickly crumpled to the ground in pain. Miller had reinjured the labrum in his shoulder and would be lost for the season.

Redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett was pressed into service and threw for 226 yards and two touchdowns during a 34-17 win against Navy, a game played in Baltimore that signified the first time the Buckeyes had played a season opener on the road in 15 years. But when the team returned to Ohio Stadium the following week, Barrett threw three interceptions and was sacked seven times as unranked Virginia Tech rolled to a 35-21 upset of the No. 8 Buckeyes.

Not only did the defeat mark the first in a home opener to a nonconference opponent since a 19-0 loss to Penn State in 1978, the night game was held in front of an Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 107,517.

Perhaps the record-setting crowd shouldn't have been a surprise following completion of a \$13.7 million stadium renovation that included a new FieldTurf playing surface, installation of permanent lights and 2,522 additional seats in the South Stands to push official capacity to an all-time high of 104,581.

The loss to Virginia Tech dropped Ohio State all the way to No. 22 in the national polls, but the Buckeyes slowly dragged themselves out of that hole. Three weeks after the

Ohio Stadium Concert Crowds

Beginning in 1988, Ohio Stadium has hosted a number of musical events. The following is the list of the biggest concerts the Horseshoe has seen.

Date	Opponent	Attendance
May 28, 1988	Pink Floyd	63,016
May 22, 1992	Genesis	71,550
May 29, 1994	Pink Floyd	75,250
Aug. 6, 1994	Elton John/Billy Joel	67,606
May 24, 1997	U2	43,813
Sept. 27, 1997	Rolling Stones	60,621
May 9, 1998	George Strait & Friends	69,954
July 19, 2003	Metallica	41,458
May 30, 2015	Rolling Stones/Kid Rock	59,038
July 20-21, 2015	Buckeye Country Superfest	90,000
Aug. 18, 2015	One Direction	31,626
July 7, 2018	Taylor Swift	62,897
Aug. 16, 2018	Beyoncé & Jay-Z	35,083
June 8, 2019	Buckeye Country Superfest	55,402
July 23, 2022	Buckeye Country Superfest	63,000

loss to the Hokies, another new stadium attendance record was set when 108,362 turned out to watch Barrett throw for 330 yards and four touchdowns as OSU rolled to a 50-28 win against in-state rival Cincinnati.

By the time the traditional regular-season finale against Michigan was played, Ohio State had rattled off nine straight victories to climb back into the top 10 of the national rankings.

The Wolverines were on their way to a 5-7 finish in 2014 but fought the Buckeyes to a 21-21 deadlock midway through the third quarter. But thanks to a pair of touchdown runs from Ezekiel Elliott and a crucial fumble return for a touchdown by linebacker Darron Lee, Ohio State cruised to a 42-28 victory in front of 108,610 fans, setting another stadium record.

The Horseshoe welcomed 744,075 fans during the 2014 season, helping the Buckeyes lead the nation in average attendance at 106,296.

Unfortunately, during the win against Michigan, Barrett suffered a broken ankle early in the fourth quarter, leaving sophomore Cardale Jones to take over at quarterback. But Jones, who began the season behind Miller and Barrett on the QB depth chart, helped lead the Buckeyes to a 59-0 pounding of Wisconsin the Big Ten Championship Game and then victories over Alabama and Oregon in the College Football Playoff to capture the program's first national championship since 2002.

More Records Fall

Jones began the 2015 season as the team's starting quarterback, but Barrett was back at the controls by the time the Buckeyes hosted Michigan State in late November. The defending national champions were unbeaten in 10 games and ranked No. 3 in the nation, while the upstart Spartans were ranked ninth with a narrow 39-38 loss at Nebraska the only blemish on their 9-1 record.

With a crowd numbering 108,975 – another stadium record – watching as a light rain fell throughout most of the game, Michigan State held the powerful OSU offense to only 132 total yards before Michael Geiger's 41-yard field goal as time expired gave the Spartans a 17-14 victory.

The Buckeyes regrouped and finished the season with convincing victories at No. 10 Michigan and against eighth-ranked Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl to finish fourth in The Associat-

ed Press and USA Today coaches' polls.

That made anticipation for the 2016 season exceedingly high, an excitement that reached a fever pitch when a national-record crowd of 100,189 showed up on a warm, late April afternoon to watch the team's annual spring game.

Another attendance record fell in August when 86,641 filed into Ohio Stadium to watch Paris Saint-Germain take a 3-1 win against Real Madrid. It was the largest crowd ever to watch a soccer game in the state of Ohio, smashing the record of 35,061 set the previous month for an international match played at the University of Cincinnati's Nippert Stadium between FC Cincinnati of the United Soccer League and English Premier League club Crystal Palace FC.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes averaged 107,278 fans for their seven home games in 2016, establishing yet another single-game mark in late November when 110,045 jammed into a chilly Horseshoe to watch the annual OSU-Michigan game. The crowd got their money's worth, too, as the teams waged battle into double overtime before Curtis Samuel bolted 15 yards for a touchdown in the second extra period to give Ohio State a 30-27 victory.

Attendance at the 2016 Michigan game was the fifth time in three seasons the stadium record had been broken. But the total of 110,045 will likely stand a while because another renovation project – this one beginning in 2017 – actually decreased capacity. The three-year project, costing an estimated \$42 million, included the installation of upgraded video and audio equipment as well as the renovation of suites and premium seating areas. The result was a decrease in official capacity from 104,944 to its present 102,780.

Despite the reduction in capacity, and a coaching change following the 2018 season when recurring health problems forced Meyer into retirement again with top offensive assistant Ryan Day taking over the program, Ohio State continued among the attendance leaders in college football. The Buckeyes finished second only to Michigan in 2017 before slipping to third behind Michigan and Penn State the following two seasons.

In 2020, however, stadium capacities were the last thing on anyone's agenda as the COVID-19 pandemic was well on its way to claiming more than 1.1 million lives in

Continued On Page 32

Attendance Recovering After 2020 Dip

Continued From Page 31

the United States and more than 6.7 million worldwide.

The Big Ten initially canceled the entire 2020 football season before allowing universities to play a truncated schedule against conference teams. Ohio State played only five regular-season games that year, including just three at home in front of small crowds consisting mostly of players' family members. As a result, total home attendance for the season numbered only 3,254.

Another casualty of the 2020 season was the Michigan game, a contest from which the Wolverines opted out due to the number of players on their roster who had contracted the coronavirus. The cancellation forced the interruption of the rivalry series for the first time after 102 straight meetings.

Still, the Buckeyes nearly made the most of an otherwise terrible situation, advancing all the way to the national championship game thanks to a 22-10 win against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game and a 49-28 victory against Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal contest. The conference title game, played at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, featured an announced crowd of 3,178, while the playoff semifinal was played at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans in front of 3,000 fans.

Ohio State eventually lost a 52-24 decision to Alabama in the national championship game played before a crowd of 14,926

at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami.

Centennial Celebration

As the 2021 season began and college football returned to some form of normalcy, the Buckeyes once again opened on the road with a new quarterback and captured a 45-31 victory against Minnesota as C.J. Stroud threw for 294 yards and four touchdowns. It was the second-highest passing yardage for an Ohio State quarterback in his first collegiate start, surpassed only by Dwayne Haskins, who threw for 313 yards during a 77-31 rout of Oregon State in 2018.

Unfortunately, the win against Minnesota was followed by a 35-28 loss to Oregon in the home opener. The game was witnessed by 100,482 fans, the smallest crowd for a game inside the Horseshoe since the stadium was renovated in 2001. One week later, for a 41-20 win against Tulsa, the announced Ohio Stadium crowd of 76,540 was the smallest since Sept. 11, 1971, when only 75,596 showed up for a 52-21 victory against Iowa.

By the time the team suited up for the final home game of the 2021 season to close out the 100th season of football at Ohio Stadium, average attendance was back near the 100,000 mark, and the Buckeyes celebrated with a 56-7 mauling of 10th-ranked Michigan State. A crowd of 101,858 was on hand to watch Stroud complete 32 of 35 pass attempts for 432 yards and a program record-tying six touchdowns.



FILE PHOTO

CULTIVATING SUCCESS — Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer presided over one of the most successful eras in Buckeye history, amassing an 83-9 record with OSU while leading the program to the national title in 2014.

As the Horseshoe entered its second centennial, attendance figures began to return to pre-pandemic levels. A crowd of 106,594 showed up for the 2022 season opener, a 21-10 victory against Notre Dame, and the stadium hosted a total of 837,300 fans for eight games. It was only the fifth time in the history of the facility that more than 800,000 had moved through its turnstiles during a single season, and the average attendance of 104,663 was the highest since 2017 (107,495).

In addition to hosting Ohio State football games each fall, Ohio Stadium will continue to serve as the venue for a variety of other activities such as concerts featuring marquee headliners.

A crowd estimated at 63,000 attended the Buckeye Country Superfest, a day-long event last July that included two-time Academy of Country Music and Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year Luke Combs, and another similar event featuring country music legend George Strait as well as multi-Grammy winners Chris Stapleton and Little Big Town is expected to draw an even bigger crowd this summer.

Additionally, three other major concerts are on the stadium's docket during an eight-day stretch this coming August, the first starring Rock and Roll Hall of Fame members Stevie Nicks and Billy Joel, the second featuring rock groups Def Leppard and Mötley Crüe, and the third headlined by current country star Morgan Wallen.

Over its first 100 years, Ohio Stadium has welcomed more than 50 million fans through its gates, seen nearly 500 Buckeye victories, and continues to provide a link from the football program's storied past to the modern day. Although it hosts only seven or eight Ohio State football games each fall, people make pilgrimages to the Horseshoe every day throughout the year just to walk around the edifice, visit the Buckeye Grove, or take photos of themselves standing in front of the rotunda. Some have such an affinity for the place, they request their ashes be scattered in and around the stadium after they're gone.

Not a bad legacy for a concrete-and-steel structure many observers thought too large and too expensive when it was constructed in 1922.

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Analysts Break Down Ohio State's 2023 Class

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The early signing period has wrapped, with prospects who didn't sign from Dec. 21-23 now required to wait until National Signing Day on Feb. 1 to put pen to paper for their national letters of intent. While it's possible Ohio State continues to scout the high school ranks for recruits, it seems likely that the Buckeyes – with 20 prospects signed during the early period – have completed their 2023 recruiting class, one that ranks sixth in the country according to the 247Sports composite ranking.

The Buckeyes' class – which features just one five-star prospect in Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190) – checks in behind No. 5 Oklahoma, No. 4 Miami (Fla.), No. 3 Texas, No. 2 Georgia and No. 1 Alabama, though Ohio State's average player ranking is third in the country behind Georgia and Alabama, signaling a class of quality over quantity for head coach Ryan Day and his staff.

"I think it's a darn good class," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB. "I think there are needs that they filled and then needs that they didn't fill. Really good. I wouldn't say exceptional or the best class in America or best class they've ever landed in the last decade or anything like that, but it's a darn good class."

There are several positions where Ohio State exceeded expectations, including at wide receiver and at quarterback. In addition to Inniss, the Buckeyes and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline signed Rolesville, N.C., four-star Noah Rogers (6-2, 195) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Carnell Tate (6-2, 180) – both top-100 prospects – and Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch four-star Bryson Rodgers (6-1, 175).

As for who might throw to them down the line, Ohio State landed a late commitment and ensuing signature from Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star quarterback Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185). While Kienholz wasn't initially Ohio State's quarterback in the class – the Buckeyes previously had a commitment from Memphis (Tenn.) Lausanne Collegiate School four-star quarterback Brock Glenn (6-2, 195) – the trade appeared to benefit Ohio State as Kienholz, who flipped from Washington, is rated the No. 205 overall prospect in the class compared to just No. 467 for Glenn.

"He's very talented," Buckeye Huddle recruiting analyst Marc Givler said. "He's big. He's still skinny but he's going to fill out. He's every bit of 6-3, maybe 6-4. He's a very good natural athlete. He was all-state in three sports. I think it's a good fit. He's a pass-first guy, but he's a pass-first guy with the athleticism the Ohio State staff would like to have at the position."

Ohio State also brought in four offensive linemen in this cycle, inking Findlay, Ohio, four-star Luke Montgomery (6-4, 295), Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Joshua Padilla (6-4, 280), Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East four-star Austin Siereveld (6-5, 320) and Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School three-star Miles Walker (6-6, 285).

Montgomery is the No. 52 overall prospect in the class and the top player in Ohio for this cycle, while Walker was the lone three-star in Ohio State's class. Both are viewed as future

tackles, with Padilla and Siereveld able to flex in on the outside or the interior.

"He plays with a mean streak," Givler said of Siereveld. "He's played tackle and guard, he can play left or right side. Alabama doesn't really get involved with a lot of Ohio guys, (but) they were very much involved with Austin. He's not really one of the guys that gets talked about a lot in this class."

Along with the signing of Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star tight end Jelani Thurman (6-5, 230), Ohio State had plenty of positives on the offensive side of the ball for this cycle, though it still wasn't without struggles.

The lone position Ohio State did not land a commitment at was running back. Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225) had been a member of Ohio State's class since April, but he decommitted from the Buckeyes in November before eventually signing with Miami (Fla.).

It was too late in the process for Ohio State to land one of the big fish, but the Buckeyes looked around at some in-state prospects – namely Cincinnati Winton Woods three-star Trey Cornist (5-11, 209) and Ironton three-star Jaquez Keyes (6-1, 207) – as well as Douglasville (Ga.) South Paulding three-star Jamarion Wilcox (5-7, 195), but all have since signed elsewhere or appear to be leaning away from Ohio State.

The Buckeyes did not come away from this cycle empty-handed, though, earning a preferred walk-on commitment from Massillon (Ohio) Washington three-star Willtrell Hartson (5-9, 200), who walked on to Ohio State despite holding scholarship offers from Boston College, Buffalo, Central Michigan, Marshall, Miami (Ohio), Temple and Toledo, among others. Even so, the Buckeyes will likely continue to pursue options.

"That's a great walk-on to get," Greene said. "I'd take him for free right now. It was a good move on their part to land him, but you've got to bring in someone else. It's to the point now where you know you run through your Plan A, Plan B, you're down to Plan C, you take a shot"

Things were less clear-cut on the other side of the ball, where several high-profile recruits leaned away from Ohio State late in the cycle.

The Buckeyes had long been involved with the trio of five-star defensive ends in Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep's Keon Keeley (6-6, 242), Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco's Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265) and Damon Wilson (6-4, 230) of Venice, Fla. Nobody was under the impression that Ohio State would land all three, but it was believed that the Buckeyes were in the running to land at least one or two of the game changers.

As it turns out, Ohio State was unable to close on any of them, with Keeley, Uiagalelei and Wilson winding up at Alabama, Oregon and Georgia, respectively. It wasn't all bad news for the Buckeyes, who landed Indianapolis Lawrence Central four-star Joshua Mickens (6-3, 225) on the first day of the early signing period, but it still wasn't the finish Ohio State was looking for.

"Everybody looks at the three they missed at the end, and those guys were obviously huge," 247Sports recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic said. "They were obviously very important and huge targets. But I liked the guys that they got at tackle a lot in Dublin (Ohio) Coff-

man four-star Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260), Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star Kayden McDonald (6-3, 310) and Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star Jason Moore (6-6, 280), if he plays tackle – and he can play tackle. I like Moore as a defensive end, that's where he has most of the experience.

"And then they added Mickens, who I thought looked very good in Texas (for the All-American Bowl). I think it's an underrated group because everybody focused on the three at the end that they didn't get."

The Buckeyes also had an up-and-down cycle in the secondary. Ohio State signed a solid pair of cornerbacks in Waxahachie, Texas, four-star Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-0, 175) and Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 175), but the group could have been bigger had it not been for the decommitments of Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190), who flipped to Florida, and Ellenwood (Ga.) Cesar Grove four-star Kayin Lee (5-11, 185), who flipped to Auburn on the first day of the early signing period.

"I love both the corners," Greene said. "I love both of them kids. Those kids can both play. I would have them rated about where I had JK Johnson and (Jordan) Hancock rated. Now, those two have not panned out, but that's where I would have Simpson-Hunt and Mathews. I've had those guys that could possibly be in the two-deep next year and contribute."

Ohio State completed the group in the secondary with three safeties, signing West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Malik Hartford (6-3, 175), Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 210) and Cocoa, Fla., four-star Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 175).

There was some concern with Bonsu, who waited until the second day of the early signing period to submit his national letter of intent with the Buckeyes, but he eventually signed with Ohio State.

"They needed defensive backs in this class, and I think they hit some home runs there," Greene said. "I kind of like the whole defensive back class. All those guys look to me like potential starters down the road."

Hartford was the highest-ranked of the bunch, checking in at No. 163 overall and as the No. 4 prospect in Ohio, and he is one of seven prospects signed from the Buckeyes' home state.

"I think Hartford is a potentially special safety," Givler said. "He's my No. 1 player in Ohio. I view him as one of the best players in this class. He's got all the tools to be a complete safety. He's 6-2, 6-3, he can run, he's incredibly physical, he's long. He's going to need to get a little bit stronger, a little bigger, and he already knows that and that's all he's focusing on right now."

Ohio State signed just one linebacker in Cleveland Glenville four-star Arvell Reese (6-4, 212), and it remains a position of need for the Buckeyes exiting the early signing period along with running back and potentially offensive tackle.

"They filled a huge need in getting Ja'Had Carter from the portal at safety," Kurelic said. "I think the biggest need now would be offensive line, in particular offensive tackle, guys that could come in and play right away, portal guys. That's the biggest need. A corner that can come in and play right away would be nice, but that's not as big a need as offensive tackle."

With the Buckeyes seemingly not involved with many remaining 2023 prospects, it's likely the transfer portal will serve to fill some of those needs, leaving Ohio State's current 20-man class standing pat through National Signing Day.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual Recruiting Wrap-Up, with complete coverage of Ohio State's latest class, is scheduled to be mailed Feb. 7.

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OSU Signs 20 During Early Signing Period

The early signing period has come to a close, and with it, likely the entirety of Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class. The Buckeyes earned signatures from 20 prospects over the three-day period from Dec. 21-23, and while Ohio State will continue to scout the transfer portal for talent, it's likely that the last scholarship has been handed out to a high school prospect for this recruiting cycle.

Ohio State's 20-man group ranks sixth in the country, according to the

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

247Sports composite rankings, and has the third-highest average player rating in the nation (.9357) behind Georgia (.9375) and Alabama (.9490), which also have the second and first overall composite classes, respectively. While the Buckeyes' class is not lacking in quality, it is in quantity, as it has at least four fewer commitments than every school that finished higher in the rankings.

The Buckeyes' class features one five-star commitment in Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190), and he's one of seven top-

100 prospects for Ohio State.

"It's a great group," Day said on Dec. 21, the first day of the early signing period. "And I think when you look at the quality of the people that we're bringing in, I think that's the focus right now. These are guys who want to be Buckeyes."

If Day seems slightly defensive on a day normally reserved for a victory lap, it's because everything wasn't exactly peachy approaching the finish line. Ohio State had long been in pursuit of a trio of five-star defensive ends in Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep's Keon Keeley (6-6, 242), Damon Wilson (6-4, 230) of Venice, Fla., and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco's Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265). While Keeley had since committed to Alabama before the early signing period, Ohio State entered that stretch still in the hunt for Wilson and Uiagalelei.

As it turns out, Ohio State landed neither, with Wilson signing with Georgia and Uiagalelei opting for Oregon, which came on late in the process. Both had received a full-court press from Ohio State's staff, with in-home visits in the weeks leading up to the signing period. It wasn't meant to be, though, for the Buckeyes and defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who ended up with a solid haul on the defensive line but still missed on his three biggest targets for the cycle.

Ohio State already had commitments

OSU Football 2023 Signees

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
Jermaine Mathews	CB	6-0	175	★★★★	Cincinnati Winton Woods
Kayden McDonald	DT	6-3	310	★★★★	Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett
Joshua Mickens	DE	6-5	225	★★★★	Indianapolis Lawrence Central
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 Sierveld	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

on the defensive line from 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) but were able to make one addition on the opening day of the early signing period with Indianapolis Lawrence Central four-star Joshua Mickens (6-5, 225).

Mickens is the No. 131 overall prospect and No. 20 defensive end in the class. He had previously been committed to LSU but decommitted from the Tigers in November before eventually signing with the Buckeyes.

His departure from LSU's class came just days after taking an official visit to Ohio State the weekend of Nov. 26, and that visit came just a couple of weeks after being offered by the Buckeyes.

Mickens has dominated for Lawrence Central over the past two seasons, racking up a combined 152 tackles – 43½ for loss – to go with 18½ sacks, eight forced fumbles and eight pass breakups. He's also a multi-sport athlete, playing basketball and competing in shot put for Lawrence Central, which is a trait Day has said in the past that he looks for in recruits.

Mickens' commitment meant it was a finish with four four-star prospects on the defensive line for Day and Johnson, but it's hard not to focus on what the group could have looked like had the Buckeyes landed one of Keeley, Wilson or Uiagalelei.

"We felt like we were in a pretty good position with a couple guys that didn't work out in the end," Day said. "But we did have a couple other guys that we were recruiting. Certainly Josh, to add him to the class, was great. He's a guy that is from Indiana, and he's a very athletic basketball player. We had him in camp. For him to make the decision down the stretch was big for us. We think he can be a very good player."

"And we also like Jason Moore's ability to go inside and outside. He's shown that he was a player of the year in the area there, had a big-time season. He was important to get, and then Kayden McDonald inside from northern Georgia was a big

add for us."

But the losses of Wilson and Uiagalelei weren't the only issues for Ohio State late in the cycle. Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star safety Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 210) caused some concern when he didn't sign on the first day of the early signing period, leading to speculation that an 11th-hour flip might have been in the works from schools offering significant name, image and likeness packages. Bonsu eventually signed the next day, but the situation did not play out the same way with Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star cornerback Kayin Lee (5-11, 185), who flipped to Auburn on Dec. 21.

Lee is the No. 209 overall prospect and No. 25 cornerback in the class, and he had been committed to Ohio State since June. In the months since his verbal pledge to the Buckeyes, Lee remained publicly committed to Ohio State but continued to accept overtures from the Tigers.

New Auburn head coach Hugh Freeze made Lee a priority, hosting the four-star prospect on an official visit the weekend of Dec. 2 despite not having a full staff in place, and Lee was complimentary of what Freeze was putting together at Auburn.

Lee had previously committed to Ohio State shortly following an official visit over the summer, though he had long been viewed as a lean for the Buckeyes after visiting in the spring.

Without Lee in the class and the decommitment of Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star cornerback Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) back in July, this left Ohio State with only a pair of cornerbacks signed with Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 175) and Waxahachie, Texas, four-star Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-0, 175).

"I just think it's kind of the way of the world right now," Day said. "You know, some guys decommit two or three times before they actually sign nowadays. And I would say if it was 10 years ago, I'd probably be like, 'What's going on?' But right now, we've had some guys change commitments from another school to our school."

"I remember a time when once somebody committed, everybody just stopped

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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.
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	185	★★★★★	Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
Garrett Stover	SAF	6-2	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut

recruiting them. That doesn't change anything anymore. So with early recruiting, with all the different things that are out there right now, guys are changing their minds. We just have to adapt to it and move on."

Even with some of the late losses, the grouping was the highest-rated in the Big Ten and featured more four-star prospects than every class except for Alabama and Georgia. The 20-man group was highlighted by a strong core of receivers in Inniss; Rolesville, N.C., four-star Noah Rogers (6-2, 195); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Carnell Tate (6-2, 180); and Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch four-star Bryson Rodgers (6-1, 175).

The Buckeyes also got a late addition in the class from Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star quarterback Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185), who openly admitted that Washington, the school he had formerly been committed to, had better NIL opportunities. Ohio State also signed seven four-star prospects from Ohio, ranging from Smith all the way to Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-4, 295).

"There's just a lot of twists and turns along the way, a lot of emotional roller coasters, but in the end, it's like, 'OK, who are the guys you bring in?' And I think when you look at this list of 19 guys (Bonsu had not signed yet), I don't know what rankings or anything like that (are)," Day said. "But I know if you take the quality of each guy, it's got to be up there as one of the top ones in the country."

As for those who will arrive on campus early as early enrollees, this list includes West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175), Mathews, McDonald, Montgomery, Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive lineman Joshua Padilla (6-4, 280), Rogers, Rodgers, Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East four-star offensive lineman Austin Siereveld (6-5, 320), Smith, Tate and Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School three-star offensive tackle Miles Walker (6-6, 285). The remaining signees will trickle in over the summer.

Raiola Decommits From Ohio State

Even with some recruiting misses in 2023, no loss hurt Ohio State more in recent weeks than that of Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220), the top-ranked signal caller in 2024 who decommitted from the Buckeyes on Dec. 17.

He deleted any reference to Ohio State on social media in the days leading up to his decommitment. No real reason has been given for Raiola stepping back from Ohio State's class, though it's believed that his numerous connections with Nebraska – including his father, Dominic, who played for the Cornhuskers and his uncle, Donovan, who was recently retained as offensive line coach under Matt Rhule –

could ultimately be swaying his decision.

The blow is a significant one for Ohio State, who had Raiola locked up in the class since May. For that reason, the Buckeyes had been slow-playing any quarterback recruiting in both the 2023 and 2024 classes, not pressured with the top quarterback in 2024 already in the fold.

And while Ohio State is only just under a year out from needing to officially sign that quarterback in 2024, the Buckeyes – specifically Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis – are likely already hard at work trying to backfill the position.

Ohio State currently has offers out to

four quarterbacks in 2024, with Raiola and Hialeah (Fla.) Mater Academy Charter four-star Adrian Posse (6-4, 205), who is committed to Auburn, on the list but unlikely to wind up in scarlet and gray. Two offers that could make some noise, however, are Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star Jady Davis (6-1, 190) and Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star Colin Hurley (6-0, 213), who recently reclassified to 2024 and committed to LSU.

Hurley camped with Ohio State over the summer and was offered by the Buckeyes, but it was with the knowledge at the time that Hurley would be a member of the 2025 class. With his timeline moved up a year and him showing prior interest in Ohio State – as well as Florida, Florida State and Miami (Fla.), where he also camped – the Buckeyes will likely check back in on Hurley to see where things stand.

As for Davis, the five-star prospect was

planning to visit for Ohio State's spring game earlier this year, but that visit never came to fruition as it became clear the Buckeyes preferred Raiola in the class. Davis has since been viewed as a lean to Michigan with Penn State, North Carolina and Tennessee also involved, so it could take some heavy lifting for Ohio State to get back in the picture.

Ohio State will also continue evaluating quarterbacks in the class that have yet to be offered, and this is a process that could stretch deep into next year. And the Buckeyes – especially under Day – have shown no qualms about waiting for the right quarterback, as two-time Heisman finalist C.J. Stroud did not commit to Ohio State until Dec. 18, 2019, just a few months before he would arrive on campus, with similar situations unfolding with Devin Brown and Kienholz.

Some notable quarterback prospects

Continued On Page 36



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Continued From Page 35

who are uncommitted and have not been offered include Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star Elijah Brown (6-2, 180), Savannah (Ga.) Calvary Day School four-star Jake Merklinger (6-3, 195), Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star Michael Van Buren (6-0, 185). The highest-ranked in-state quarterback in 2024 is Dayton Trotwood-Madison three-star Timothy Carpenter (6-4, 200).

And there's also the matter of being able to build a class around a quarterback, which may not be possible now depending on how quickly Ohio State can replace Raiola. At the time, Raiola was the first commitment in Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class, and the Buckeyes had since gained commitments from an offensive tackle in New Palestine, Ind., four-star Ian Moore (6-5, 295) and wide receiver in Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185).

"I take a lot of pride in having the guys around me," Raiola said in June. "It really falls on me who I want to bring in, so my goal is to bring in the top class in 2024 and maybe even 2023. Get both and try to bring a championship back to Columbus."

Raiola took his role seriously as a peer recruiter for Ohio State, a factor which the Buckeyes won't have moving forward as they look to replace Raiola and continue filling out their class in 2024.

Ohio State Adds PWO Hartson

While Ohio State did not sign a scholarship running back in 2023 after the decommitment of Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225) late in the cycle, it didn't mean the

Buckeyes came away empty-handed when it comes to a high school prospect.

Ohio State earned a preferred walk-on commitment from Massillon (Ohio) Washington three-star running back Willtrell Hartson (5-9, 200) on Dec. 24. Rated a three-star prospect, Hartson held offers from Buffalo, Central Michigan, Marshall, Miami (Ohio), Temple, Toledo and UAB, as well as a Power Five offer from Boston College.

He recently broke Massillon's single-season rushing record, going for 2,042 rushing yards this past season. He's also the school's career leader in rushing yards per game with 132.8 yards and ranks second in school history with 3,983 rushing yards and 53 rushing touchdowns.

While Ohio State gladly would have accepted the commitment of Fletcher or any other number of highly touted running backs, the current situation in the Buckeyes' running backs room didn't necessitate a ball carrier in this cycle. Running back Miyan Williams has already announced that he is returning for a fourth season at Ohio State, while TreVeyon Henderson, Evan Pryor and Dallan Hayden are all expected back for the Buckeyes. Chip Trayanum may also add to the running backs depth, after he split time between linebacker on running back this season.

"We have pretty decent depth there," Day said. "When you look at TreVeyon and Miyan and then Chip (Trayanum), we've got to decide if we're going to move him over full-time or not. We have Dallan (Hayden), and then Evan Pryor's been hurt. Going into the year, we knew we were already kind of with five guys there, 4½ guys."

"If we had somebody there that we really liked, we were going to take them. We didn't feel like we needed to, but we're al-

ways going to look to upgrade if we possibly can or add somebody to the roster that we think can help us. So it didn't work out for us this year. We certainly had a head start, and then we lost the guy."

Ohio State Misses On Portal Targets

Ohio State was able to bring in one addition from the portal over the last month, welcoming in former Syracuse safety Ja'Had Carter, but there were plenty of other targets the Buckeyes were hoping to land who opted for another school.

One of Ohio State's clear positions of need has been at offensive tackle, where the Buckeyes have been active in the portal. Since the first window opened on Dec. 5, Ohio State offered Rhode Island's Ajani Cornelius (6-5, 310), UTEP's Jeremiah Byers (6-4, 331) and Washington State's Jarrett Kingston (6-5, 302). While Kingston still remains on the market, Cornelius has since committed to Oregon, with Byers opting for Florida State.

Ohio State was also involved with transfer cornerbacks Fentrell Cypress (6-0, 184) of Virginia and Tony Grimes (6-0, 195) of North Carolina, but Cypress has committed to Florida State, while Grimes is off to Texas A&M. Cypress, ranked the No. 4 transfer available in the portal according to 247Sports, would have offered immediate starting upside.

The Buckeyes also searched for a weapon on offense, making the top three schools for Maryland transfer tight end C.J. Dippre, but the former four-star wound up at Alabama.

Updated Lists For Top Prospects

Besides the exception of some holdouts

for National Signing Day, the 2023 recruiting class has mostly wrapped, with the focus now shifting to 2024. With that in mind, several 2024 prospects have started trimming down their lists of top schools, with Ohio State included for some of the top prospects in the cycle.

Buford, Ga., five-star safety KJ Bolden (6-1, 185) had the Buckeyes in his top 15, along with Alabama, Clemson, Colorado, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Michigan State, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee and USC. He's the No. 4 overall prospect in the class and has visited Ohio State several times over the last year.

Woodstock (Ill.) Marian Central Catholic four-star tight end Christian Bentancur (6-5, 240), the No. 102 overall prospect and No. 4 tight end in his class, had Ohio State in his top three along with Clemson and Oregon. He was scheduled to announce his college of choice on Jan. 13. This past high school football season, Bentancur had 54 receptions for 1,058 yards and 11 touchdowns, and the year prior, he hauled in 53 passes for 1,165 yards with 16 touchdowns.

An under-the-radar prospect who had the Buckeyes among his top schools was Atlanta Pace Academy four-star defensive lineman Hevin Brown-Shuler (6-4, 290). The nation's No. 72 overall prospect and No. 10 defensive lineman, Brown-Shuler had Ohio State along with Clemson, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina, Texas A&M and Virginia.

Wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was likely pleased to hear that Chattanooga (Tenn.) Brainerd four-star wide receiver Boo Carter (5-10, 184) included Ohio State in his top five along with Colorado,

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1988

Recruiting is no big thing, said John Cooper.

"I think one of the best things I can do is recruit, and the best example I can give you of my recruiting ability is right here," Cooper said Dec. 31 while pointing to his wife, Helen, after being introduced to the media as Ohio State's new football coach. "If I can convince this beautiful lady to spend 31 years of her life with me, I'll be able to recruit these great high school players to come to an outstanding institution like The Ohio State University."

For the moment, Cooper could jest about anything. But only for the moment. Six weeks had passed since his predecessor, Earle Bruce, had been fired. The concerns of the media and fans were not only who the next coach would be, but how well he could recruit. And how fast.

Only a couple of hours later, Cooper phoned Centerville, Ohio, quarterback Kirk Herbstreit, rated among the nation's best, and received Herbstreit's verbal commitment to become a Buckeye.

30 Years Ago - 1993

Ohio State went into the Jan. 8-9 weekend all set to top off another outstanding recruiting season.

Fifteen distinguished high school seniors, including Boca Raton (Fla.) linebacker Greg Bellisari, Silver Spring (Md.) Springbrook defensive back Shawn Springs and Norwood, Ohio, running back Marc Edwards, took their official campus visit to OSU, taking in the campus style of life including a thrilling 92-81 victory by the men's basketball team over eighth-ranked Iowa.

However, the Buckeyes came away with the same number of verbal commitments - 11 - as they had at the beginning of the weekend.

Even with the lack of new commitments, Ohio State remained in pretty good shape with a full three weeks remaining in the 1993 recruiting season. In a recruiting class that could number anywhere from 20 to 25, the maximum allowable in any one year by the NCAA, the Buckeyes continued to pursue a host of Ohio prospects as well as countless out-of-state players.

25 Years Ago - 1998

Ohio State's football recruiting effort inched forward in late December with the signing of City College of San Francisco linebacker James Cotton.

Cotton (6-4, 245, 4.47) became the seventh member of OSU's recruiting class when he signed on Dec. 30. Cotton intended to enroll when win-

ter quarter began Jan. 5.

But as BSB went to press on Jan. 7, Cotton had yet to attend a class at OSU. The delay was due to the fact Cotton took exams at CCSF during the week before Christmas and had not received his final transcript yet.

20 Years Ago - 2003

Houston Klein defensive back Ashton Youboty (6-1, 180, 4.5) had long ago decided to play his college football in the Big Ten. But he was torn between Ohio State and Penn State. He visited PSU in September for the Nebraska game. He saw OSU on Nov. 23 for the Michigan game.

Youboty, ranked the nation's 16th-best safety and Texas' No. 28 prospect by Rivals.com, canceled a planned trip to Tennessee and spent weeks agonizing over the two Big Ten powers before selecting OSU.

"I had my choices down to Ohio State and Penn State," he told BSB. "Basically I thought about it and felt academically the quarter system at Ohio State is better for me credit-wise."

"I liked both schools a lot overall and it was a tough decision, but I had to make a decision and I just chose Ohio State. Recruiting-wise, they are taking some other (defensive backs) in this class. It will be neat to go in there with those guys. I was happy with my trip there, and I liked the environment."

15 Years Ago - 2008

After heading into the holiday with two verbal commitments for their class of 2009, the Buckeyes picked up three more from Dec. 26-29. All three came from top in-state prospects who had been on OSU's radar for some time.

First came Youngstown Cardinal Mooney defensive end Johnny Simon (6-3, 265), who verbalized to the Buckeyes the day after Christmas. Two days later, it was offensive lineman Jack Mewhort (6-6, 285) from Toledo St. John's. Finally, Coldwater middle linebacker Adam Homan (6-2, 230) - the brother of Ohio State linebacker Ross Homan - joined the party one day later, giving the Buckeyes five members for their class of 2009.

10 Years Ago - 2013

While most people were enjoying the Christmas holiday with their families and letting go of work for at least a day, Urban Meyer was busy setting up the future of his program. Not only was OSU's coach on the phone Dec. 25 with Lawrenceville (Ga.) Central Gwinnett linebacker Trey Johnson, but he also landed his initial 2014 commitment in Cleveland

Glenville offensive tackle Marcelys Jones.

The 6-5, 325-pound junior was the cousin of defensive tackle Donovan Munger of Shaker Heights, Ohio - a Buckeye commitment for the 2013 class - and Jones said he was excited to become the latest Tarblooder in the long line of Glenville players to join the Buckeyes.

"It's a blessing for me and my whole family, and we are all very happy," Jones said Christmas Day after announcing his decision. "Coach Meyer said it was a great Christmas present for him, and he said he was very excited."

Five Years Ago - 2018

After signing 21 prospects from the 2018 recruiting class on Dec. 20, the first day of the inaugural Early Signing Period, the Ohio State football team rang in the new year by outlasting Penn State in a battle for Cleveland Heights defensive end Tyreke Smith. The four-star prospect officially ended his recruitment on Jan. 4 at the 2018 Under Armour All-American Game in Orlando, Fla., when he publicly announced his commitment to the Buckeyes.

Ten days after declaring to OSU, Smith (6-3, 260), who also played for his high school's basketball team, competed in the Flyin' to the Hoop Invitational in Dayton when Cleveland Heights lost to Springfield, Ohio, 73-67, in overtime. Following the game, the No. 60 overall prospect and No. 4 weakside defensive end in the 247Sports composite explained to BSB why he went with the Buckeyes.

"Ohio State, it's definitely a family feeling when I go there," said Smith, who finished with 17 points on 7-of-11 shooting before fouling out in the extra session. "I feel like I'm with my brothers. They already took me in as one of theirs. The coaching staff is great. I think they have the best chance to develop me into the player I need to be."

One Year Ago - 2022

After a drawn-out recruiting battle between Ohio State and Wisconsin, the Buckeyes came out on top for Hammond (Wis.) Saint Croix Central four-star offensive lineman Carson Hinzman (6-4, 280), who committed to play for Ohio State Jan. 4.

He was rated the No. 134 overall prospect in 2022 and the No. 6 interior lineman, as well as the second-best prospect out of Wisconsin. He also held offers from Alabama, Clemson, Oregon and Penn State.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Kurelic of 247Sports

Following the decommitment of Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) from Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class, where do the Buckeyes go now to find a signal caller in the upcoming cycle?

"I think they can start over and start at the top. Nobody from 2024 has signed anything yet, and nobody will sign anything for a year. If you look back at the Ohio State quarterbacks that they've signed – a year out (from the early signing period), nobody had ever heard of Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185). A year out, nobody in the Ohio State market had heard of Devin Brown. A year out, nobody had heard of C.J. Stroud. Getting their quarterbacks six weeks before (the early signing period) is usually how it's happened here recently. It's been crazy. Whatever names we throw out today may not be the guy.

"The thing is with Ryan Day and his pedigree for offense and developing quarterbacks, he can go after anyone and have a legitimate shot at anyone – without Raiola, and I do think that is dead in the water. I don't think that will be revisited between Raiola and Ohio State. That one's over. But they can now start at the top and start recruiting the best of the best of the best.

"The likelihood is that they're probably going to get their guy next fall because that's the way it's gone lately. Jack Miller was committed for forever and they recruited over him in the same class with C.J. Devin Brown was a December guy. Kienholz here is a December guy. Quarterback recruiting with Ryan Day, it's never over until it's over. He'll start at the top of the board right now at the five stars. He'll start recruiting them right now, and I have no doubt he's going to get somebody. We just may not know who it is until late in the process."

Raiola seemed as committed as a prospect can be to Ohio State right up until he left the class. Where did things go wrong between him and the Buckeyes?

"I wish I had an answer there. I really don't. When the rumbling started, I didn't really take it seriously. He removed his Ohio State stuff from his Twitter, and I thought, 'Yeah, maybe he wanted attention,' so I didn't really pay it a lot of mind there. To be honest with you, I don't know.

"It's hard for me to believe that this would be an NIL thing. You know, his dad (Dominic Raiola) played 15 years in the NFL, and it just doesn't fit the profile of somebody with their hand out for NIL. I don't know. It just fell apart, and I don't think it's

getting put back together, either. I think it's over and it's done. I don't know where it all fell apart."

Raiola's decommitment came late in the 2023 recruiting cycle. How could it have impacted Ohio State's most recent recruiting class had he decommitted sooner?

"The Raiola (decommitment) really put them in a bind. When they got Raiola's commitment, I think there was an agreement between Ryan Day and the Raiola family that Ohio State would not chase Downey (Calif.) Warren five-star Nicholas Iamaleava (6-5, 195) or one of the top quarterbacks and they would take a lesser quarterback. Nobody's going to admit that, but I was told that and I believe it.

"They had Memphis (Tenn.) Lausanne Collegiate School four-star Brock Glenn (6-2, 195) committed for a while, but you didn't see them chasing the top kids. And then Raiola decommits on you and now there you are chasing top-25 quarterbacks instead of the top one, two or three quarterbacks in (2023), so he hurts you not only in his class, but he hurts you in this class. That was a killer, losing Raiola, and then losing him when they lost him."

Michigan, Oregon and Tennessee. It may be delaying the inevitable though, as Carter is viewed as a lean toward the Volunteers.

One prospect Ohio State has a much better shot with is Buford, Ga., four-star athlete King Joseph Edwards (6-5, 242). Ranked the No. 38 overall prospect in the class, Edwards is viewed as a potential tight end or defensive end at the next level, and he included the Buckeyes in his top 15 with Alabama, Cincinnati, Florida State, Georgia, Michigan, Michigan State, NC State, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

Another offensive target for Ohio State is Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star running back Stacy Gage (5-11, 200), who had Ohio State in his top eight along with Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma, Penn State and USC. He visited Ohio State earlier this season and also camped with the Buckeyes this past summer, getting some one-on-one training from running backs coach Tony Alford.

"I really do love his coaching style," Gage said. "It's not even just me. It's things that everybody else is saying about him. They say he's a great guy, great person, great father and everything. Being coached by him and everybody talking about him made me feel good."

Someone who could block for Gage down the line would be Waukesha (Wis.) Catholic Memorial four-star offensive lineman Donovan Harbour (6-5, 310). Harbour, the No. 60 overall prospect and No. 4 offensive lineman in the class, included Ohio State among his top seven schools along with Florida, Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Moving to the defense, Stafford (Va.) Mountain View four-star linebacker Kristopher Jones (6-2, 220) had Ohio State in his top 12 along with Florida, Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Penn State, Tennessee, Virginia and Virginia Tech. Jones is the No. 85 overall prospect and No. 9 linebacker in the class, and he's made multiple trips to Ohio State.

The lone cornerback in this group is Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview five-star cornerback Charles Lester III (6-1, 171), who in-

cluded the Buckeyes in his top five, along with Alabama, Florida, Florida State and Georgia. He's the No. 22 overall prospect and No. 3 cornerback in the class, and made a trip to Ohio State this past season to watch the Buckeyes' win over Wisconsin.

A local product who included Ohio State among his top schools was Cincinnati Taft four-star defensive end Elias Rudolph (6-4, 220), who had the Buckeyes along with Arkansas, Cincinnati, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Pittsburgh, Tennessee and West Virginia. Rudolph is the No. 116 overall prospect and No. 11 edge rusher in the class.

Another defensive line prospect who is keyed in on the Buckeyes is Chicago St. Ignatius four-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-5, 310), who included Ohio State in his top eight along with Alabama, Colorado, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Notre Dame, Oregon and USC. He's the No. 18 overall prospect and No. 4 defensive lineman in the class.

Finally, after earning a commitment in 2024 from Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep's Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State would love to add his teammate in five-star wide receiver Joshisa Trader (6-2, 170), who had the Buckeyes in his top five along with Florida, Florida State, Miami (Fla.) and Tennessee. Trader had 47 receptions for 743 yards and seven touchdowns for Chaminade-Madonna Prep this past season, and he's been on campus in Columbus several times.

One notable prospect who did not include Ohio State was Dorchester (S.C.) Woodland four-star offensive tackle Kam Pringle (6-7, 330). Pringle, the No. 46 overall prospect and top tackle in the class, had Clemson, Florida, Georgia, NC State, South Carolina and Tennessee among his top six schools.

OSU Issues New Offers

Between juggling the early signing period and the College Football Playoff, the Buckeyes did find some time in recent weeks to issue offers to new prospects.

Ohio State issued three offers to 2025

prospects since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, including Alpharetta, Ga., four-star tight end Ethan Barbour (6-3, 215), Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco wide receiver Kamryn Jones (6-3, 180) and Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-2, 200). Jones' and Underwood's offers came in on Dec. 17, with Barbour's following on Dec. 24.

Barbour is considered the No. 69 overall prospect and No. 3 tight end in the class, and he holds additional offers from Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame, Ole Miss, Pittsburgh and South Carolina, among others. He was in attendance earlier this season for Ohio State's win over Indiana.

Jones is unranked, but his pedigree is evident within his offer list, which includes Georgia, Oregon, Tennessee and Washington, among others. He's one of four wide receivers offered in 2025 by Ohio State, along with Duncanville, Texas, five-star Dakorien Moore (5-10, 175), Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star Jaime P French (6-1, 175) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star Winston Watkins Jr. (5-10, 172), who is committed to Colorado.

Underwood is the most notable offer, especially in the wake of Raiola's decommitment. While Ohio State will obviously attempt to haul in a top-tier quarterback in 2024, the Buckeyes could instead look to 2025, where there are already several quarterbacks that Ohio State is involved with.

Underwood is the No. 3 overall prospect and No. 1 quarterback prospect in the class, and he already has offers from Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Notre Dame, Pittsburgh and Tennessee, among others. The only other quarterback offer sent out in 2025 by Ohio State is Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 200).

Other Notes And Tidbits

• Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Peyton Woodyard, the No. 29 overall prospect and No. 2 safety in 2024, committed to Georgia on Jan. 7 during the All-American Bowl. Woodyard

had recently included Ohio State among his top schools and visited the Buckeyes for their win over Notre Dame this past season.

• Three of Ohio State's recent signees in Kienholz, Inniss and Jason Moore were named Gatorade State Football Player of the Year in their respective states, with Kienholz calling South Dakota home, Inniss hailing from Florida and Moore arriving at Ohio State via Maryland.

• Seven future Buckeyes participated in the All-American Bowl on Jan. 7 in San Antonio. The East squad – featuring Hartford, Montgomery, Inniss and Tate – took down the West – with Kienholz, Mickens and Simpson-Hunt – by a 55-17 margin. Inniss and Tate each hauled in a touchdown pass, while Kienholz threw for two scores.



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U-M, Harbaugh Under Investigation By NCAA

Although Michigan head football coach Jim Harbaugh released a statement Jan. 5 stating he “expects to stay” at Michigan, it was reported the same day the program is being investigated by the NCAA for possible violations during the COVID-19 recruiting dead period.

Among the possible violations are impermissible contact with recruits during the mandated dead periods and the use of an analyst for on-field coaching activities. Perhaps more importantly, Harbaugh’s cooperation – or lack thereof – with NCAA enforcement officials is also under investigation, which could result in a multi-game suspension for the Wolverines’ head man.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

“Yesterday (Jan. 5), we received draft allegations from the NCAA regarding our football program,” Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said in a statement. “We have cooperated and will continue to cooperate with this investigation. Out of respect to the NCAA’s enforcement process, we will not offer further comments.”

The NCAA allegations reportedly include a Level I violation for Harbaugh – considered the most serious, according to the NCAA’s by-laws – for not complying with or misleading NCAA investigators. The Wolverines also face allegations of four Level II violations related to recruiting. These less-serious violations are the ones about which Harbaugh did not cooperate with investigators.

Prior to the release of the allegations, Harbaugh put out a response to reports that he was pursuing NFL coaching opportunities.

“As I stated in December, while no one knows what the future holds, I expect that I will be enthusiastically coaching Michigan

BIG

2022 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
x-Michigan	9	0	13	1	.929
Ohio State	8	1	11	2	.846
Penn State	7	2	11	2	.846
Maryland	4	5	8	5	.615
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	6	.571
Minnesota	5	4	9	4	.692
Illinois	5	4	8	5	.615
Iowa	5	4	8	5	.615
Wisconsin	4	5	7	6	.538
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.

in 2023,” Harbaugh said on Jan. 6. “I have spoken with (University) President Santa Ono and athletic director Warde Manuel and appreciate their support of me and our program.”

He interviewed this past offseason for the Minnesota Vikings’ head coaching job – which took place on Feb. 2, coinciding with National Signing Day – but returned to the Wolverines, telling the Detroit Free Press afterward that his ambitions to return to the NFL were a

“one-time thing” and that he informed Manuel as such.

Despite his denial of interest in the NFL, he’s been connected with several open head-coaching positions, including the Denver Broncos, Carolina Panthers and the Indianapolis Colts, where he played from 1994-97 and resides in the team’s Ring of Honor.

Rutgers Hires Ciarrocca As OC

To say Rutgers’ offense struggled in this past season is a bit of an understatement. The Scarlet Knights scored a paltry 17.4 points per game, 124th out of 131 teams, and they were 127th in total yards at 282.1 per game.

Offensive coordinator Sean Gleeson got his walking papers in-season, and interim offensive coordinator Nunzio Campanile didn’t fare much better than his predecessor. Head coach Greg Schiano went out and nabbed a new play caller from a Big Ten rival, tabbing Minnesota offensive coordinator Kirk Ciarrocca as his offensive coordinator moving forward.

“It is great to welcome back Kirk and his family to Rutgers,” Schiano said after the hiring Jan. 7. “He is a proven leader of men, an excellent football coach and understands what it takes to be successful in the Big Ten. We look forward to getting to work.”

Ciarrocca was the quarterbacks coach and co-offensive coordinator at Rutgers under Schiano from 2008-10.

This past season under Ciarrocca, Minnesota’s offense finished 16th in the nation with 207.3 rushing yards per game. Running back Mohamed Ibrahim led the way with 1,665 yards and 20 touchdowns on the ground, both school records, and the Golden Gophers finished 65th in total offense (389.5 yards per game) and 66th in scoring offense (28.2 points per game). Ciarrocca also coordinated Minnesota’s attack from 2017 to 2019, with the team finishing 109th, 64th and tied for 21st in those seasons for scoring offense, respectively.

He also coordinated for Penn State in 2020 with the Nittany Lions finishing 54th in scoring and 37th in total offense. Penn State went 4-5 during the COVID-19-shortened season, with an 0-5 start where it scored 25 points or fewer in four of the defeats. Ciarrocca was fired and replaced by Mike Yurcich after the season.

Rhule Rolling At Nebraska

There are plenty of new faces in Lincoln this offseason with the hiring of Matt Rhule at Nebraska. The Cornhuskers’ new lead man has been hard at work filling out his support staff, announcing eight assistant coaching hires in recent weeks.

Coordinators always take precedence, and Rhule found his men for the job on both the offensive and defensive side of the ball. For offense, the selection was South Carolina offensive coordinator Marcus Satterfield, who will also coach the team’s quarterbacks. The Gamecocks had the 111th total offense in college football in 2021 in Satterfield’s first year there jumping to 72nd this past season. He coached six seasons with Rhule previously at Temple and Baylor, as well as one season in the NFL with the Panthers.

“Even though I’ve been at different jobs, we’re still really, really close,” Satterfield said Jan. 6. “We expect football to be played a certain way. We expect coaches to coach a certain way. I think we’re truly aligned from that standpoint.”

For defensive coordinator, Rhule reeled in Syracuse’s Tony White, who led the Orange to a top-25 total defense finish each of the last two years. White spent two years at Arizona State – one as defensive coordinator – prior to his three at Syracuse. Stops have also included New Mexico, San Diego State and UCLA, where he spent his playing career as a linebacker. He’s known for running a 3-3-5 defensive scheme.

“I grew up in it,” White said. “The guy who really came up and redefined the 3-3-5, Rocky Long, he’s the one who recruited me to UCLA. Then he gave me a chance at the University of New Mexico coaching linebackers there in 2007. Then when I went to San Diego State, all those times we were running a 3-3-5. So it’s something I grew up in. I played in it and then coached in it my whole time.”

Among Rhule’s other hires have been UConn running backs coach E.J. Barthel to coach his own ball carriers, Carolina Panthers assistant strength coach Corey Campbell to handle the team’s strength and conditioning, Panthers assistant defensive line coach Terrance Knighton to be the Huskers’ defensive line coach and Arlington (Texas) Martin High School head coach Bob Wager to handle tight ends.

Walters Filling Out Staff At Purdue

Since taking over as Purdue’s head coach in December, former Illinois defensive coordinator Ryan Walters has begun shuffling his staff in West Lafayette, Ind.

On Dec. 20, the team announced the hirings of Graham Harrell and Kevin Kane as offensive and defensive coordinator, respectively. Harrell enters off a year with West Virginia as its offensive coordinator, with the Mountaineers posting the nation’s No. 50 scoring and No. 57 total offense. The former Green Bay Packers backup quarterback also spent three seasons as offensive coordinator at USC from 2019-21.

“I played against Graham and always respected his knowledge and the way he approaches the game of football,” Walters said. “When I got into this profession, I really kept an eye on his career. He is very innovative in the passing game and gets creative with the run game. We are looking forward to him leading our offense here at Purdue.”

Kane was Walters’ right-hand man while serving as defensive coordinator at Illinois the past two seasons. This year, their defense finished No. 1 in the country for scoring (12.8 points) and No. 3 in total defense (273.5 yards). Kane coached outside linebackers and served as an associate head coach for the Fighting Illini.

“I was very excited about the ability to attract Coach Kane to Purdue University,” Walters said. “I got to see, firsthand, his football IQ and ability to connect and develop young men. His position group steadily improved throughout the two years we were together at Illinois. He has been a coordinator at two previous stops (Northern Illinois and SMU)

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Peach (CFP Semifinal) Dec. 31 • 8 p.m. • ESPN Georgia 42, Ohio State 41	ReliaQuest Jan. 2 • Noon ESPN2 Mississippi State 19, Illinois 10	Citrus Jan. 2 • 1 p.m. ABC LSU 63, Purdue 7	Rose Jan. 2 • 5 p.m. ESPN Penn State 35, Utah 21	

and he is ready to lead an entire unit in the Big Ten."

Walters also plucked a pair of coaches from Ole Miss to help fill out his positional assistants. Cornerbacks coach Sam Carter will take on the same position for the Boiler-makers, while analyst Seth Doege is joining as tight ends coach.

Carter leaves the Rebels after just one season, previously spending three campaigns as cornerbacks coach at Arkansas from 2019-21. Carter played defensive back for TCU from 2011-14. As for Doege, he does have prior experience in the role, coaching tight ends for Clay Helton's staff at USC before the program transitioned to Lincoln Riley. The former Texas Tech and Canadian Football League quarterback also spent three seasons coaching at Bowling Green.

Like Schiano at Rutgers, Walters is also borrowing from Minnesota's coaching staff. Defensive line coach Brick Haley makes the leap to the same position, bringing with him over 30 years of coaching experience to complement the younger blood of Doege and Carter.

The coaching ranks isn't the only place Walters is acquiring new talent. Following the departure of quarterback Aidan O'Connell, who passed for 9,219 yards and 65 touchdowns against 30 interceptions in four seasons, Walters hit the transfer portal and acquired former Texas quarterback Hudson Card on Dec. 26.

Card, a former four-star prospect out of Austin (Texas) Lake Travis, was supplanted as the Longhorns' starter by Ohio State transfer Quinn Ewers this past season. In limited action he holds a 65.5 completion percentage with 1,523 passing yards and 11 touchdowns with two interceptions in his time under center.

Other Moves In Coaching Carousel

Walters wasn't the only Big Ten coach making moves to secure his staff. It's the time of year for the coaching carousel across college football, and in this season things are always in flux.

Illinois head coach Bret Bielema replaced Walters as his defensive coordinator by pro-

moting defensive backs coach Aaron Henry to the position. In two seasons with Henry leading the secondary, the Fighting Illini improved from 43rd in passing defense in 2021 to eighth in the country this season. LSU analyst Antonio Fenelus is replacing Henry as the team's defensive backs coach.

"I am thrilled to announce Aaron Henry as our defensive coordinator," Bielema said. "Aaron is a special person and coach. His ability to connect with our current roster, as well as potential student-athletes, is among the best I've been around. He has a gift to teach, motivate, inspire and lead young people."

Akron defensive line coach Winston DeLattiboudere is the selection of Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck to replace Haley as the leader of his defensive front. A mere 24 years old, DeLattiboudere played defensive end for Fleck from 2015-19. He spent one season as a graduate assistant at Oregon before becoming the Zips' defensive line coach prior to 2021.

More Movement In Transfer Portal

As a conference, the Big Ten added 11 more four-star players from the transfer portal since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, with Michigan State bring in perhaps the single biggest addition.

Former Texas A&M defensive end Tumise Adeleye, a one-time Ohio State commitment and top-40 national recruit, gave his pledge to the Spartans on Dec. 21. He was ranked the No. 21 player in the transfer portal by 247Sports and the No. 3 defensive lineman. He collected six tackles in three games this season for the Aggies after redshirting in 2021.

"Giving out favors held me back, standing on business now," Adeleye said in a Twitter post announcing his commitment.

The only higher-rated transfer in the conference – outside of Ohio State's addition of former Syracuse safety Ja'Had Carter, who checked in at No. 12, and Card at No. 10 – since Dec. 17 is former Western Michigan defensive end Andre Carter, who committed to Indiana on Dec. 21. Andre Carter is rated the No. 16 transfer in the portal.

Two Big Ten schools added quarter-

backs, with Nebraska taking former Georgia Tech signal caller Jeff Sims and Illinois picking up former Ole Miss' QB Luke Altmyer. Altmyer had yet to earn a role as a program's starter, backing up Matt Corral and Jaxson Dart during his two seasons for the Rebels.

Running the Yellow Jackets' offense, Sims completed 57.5 percent of his passes for 4,464 yards and 30 touchdowns in three sea-

sons. He missed nine combined games the last two campaigns due to injury.

In a bit of intra-conference drama, tight end AJ Barner is heading to Michigan from Indiana, even with the tight end depth currently possessed by the Wolverines that caused multi-year starter Erick All to transfer out. Michigan also added former Coastal Carolina defensive end Josaiah Stewart, the No. 43 prospect in the portal.



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Brown Makes Debut, Likekele Returns To Team

Through the first two months of the season, the Ohio State men's basketball team was never fully intact.

In the Buckeyes' first 11 games, junior guard Eugene Brown III was held out due to the lingering effects of a concussion, keeping one of head coach Chris Holtmann's most reliable perimeter defenders off the floor. With Brown out, Oklahoma State transfer Isaac Likekele emerged as a well-rounded wing for Ohio State, providing the Buckeyes with stout defense and high-level playmaking skills.

COURT
REPORT
Jack Emerson

However, after Ohio State's 96-59 win over St. Francis (Pa.) on Dec. 3, Likekele missed the next three games when he returned to his home state of Texas to deal with personal matters.

The Buckeyes finally reached full strength on Dec. 29, and the result was a resounding 90-59 win over Alabama A&M. Holtmann recognized the importance of getting both Brown and Likekele back but also stressed patience as he integrates them back into the rotation.

"We're really happy for (Isaac) and Gene to be back," Holtmann said. "Now the challenge is, I'm going to need patience from our team because we can't play 11 guys. So I think we're going to need to figure that out."

During the preseason, Brown was eyeing an emergence in his third year with the Buckeyes after starting in 10 games last season. But Brown's buildup to the regular season was cut short after he took an errant elbow to the head from freshman center Felix Okpara in practice, holding him out of much of the preseason and the first

2022-23 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics																	
10-5 Overall (2-2 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Jan. 8																	
Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.	
									O-D	T-Avg.							
Brice Sensabaugh	15-7	351-23.4	92-177	.520	29-67	.433	37-46	.804	16-54	70-4.7	33-2	18	27	8	8	250-16.7	
Justice Sueing	15-15	429-28.6	80-169	.473	12-41	.293	40-56	.714	31-43	74-4.9	24-1	31	29	4	12	212-14.1	
Zed Key	14-14	344-24.6	66-105	.629	6-19	.316	36-55	.655	44-65	109-7.8	28-0	14	17	17	7	174-12.4	
Bruce Thornton	15-15	434-28.9	52-114	.456	20-43	.465	26-33	.788	3-43	46-3.1	25-1	50	28	1	12	150-10.0	
Sean McNeil	15-15	423-28.2	52-116	.448	27-71	.380	13-13	1.000	4-26	30-2.0	18-0	19	13	3	4	144-9.6	
Tanner Holden	15-0	242-16.1	24-48	.500	5-10	.500	17-21	.810	13-37	50-3.3	25-0	10	13	2	5	70-4.7	
Roddy Gayle Jr.	15-0	219-14.6	26-61	.426	7-22	.318	4-6	.667	2-22	24-1.6	23-0	20	14	4	9	63-4.2	
Felix Okpara	15-1	206-13.7	24-41	.585	1-1	1.000	9-13	.692	21-33	54-3.6	24-1	6	8	16	8	58-3.9	
Isaac Likekele	12-8	278-23.2	19-50	.380	0-5	.000	4-9	.444	17-43	60-5.0	21-1	36	13	5	9	42-3.5	
Eugene Brown III	4-0	34-8.6	3-7	.429	2-4	.500	2-2	1.000	2-4	6-1.5	6-0	0	0	2	3	10-2.5	
Bowen Hardman	5-0	17-3.5	4-8	.500	4-8	.500	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	2-0	0	0	0	0	12-2.4	
Kalen Etzler	7-0	30-4.3	3-8	.375	1-5	.200	0-0	.000	2-10	12-1.7	4-0	1	2	0	0	7-1.0	
Owen Spencer	5-0	13-2.5	1-6	.167	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	5-2	7-1.4	0-0	1	1	0	0	3-0.6	
Colby Baumann	3-0	6-2.0	0-2	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	2-1	3-1.0	0-0	1	1	0	0	0-0.0	
Team									18-22	40		4					
Total	15	3025	446-912	.489	114-297	.384	189-256	.738	180-405	585-39.0	233-6	207	170	62	77	1195-79.7	
Opponents	15	3025	363-903	.402	93-318	.292	170-235	.723	164-324	488-32.5	249-2	170	177	35	74	989-65.9	

couple of months of the campaign.

It was Brown's second concussion in as many seasons, and he said he wasn't expecting the recovery process to take as long as it did this time around after his experience with the injury last year. Although he wasn't able to do much in the way of live basketball while recovering from his second concussion, he said he tried to make an impact as a leader after being voted one of the team's captains during the offseason.

"It was definitely a struggle," Brown said. "Just being out there and around those guys, watching them work, and being able to give my perspective – being a leader and a captain – on the sideline and just trying to give little insights of what's going on."

Brown has played in four games, tallying 8.6 minutes per contest as he continues to work toward playing sustained minutes in Big Ten play. He has registered 10 total points and three steals in game action this season.

While Brown continues to get acclimated, he said he's happy to be back on the court with his teammates.

"It felt good," he admitted. "It's kind of been a while, so I'm just getting in a good flow with my teammates. Honestly, coming back to practice was more enjoyable than the game, just starting that process of just coming back."

Likekele was with the team for its 89-84 overtime loss to North Carolina in New York City on Dec. 17 before returning to Texas until rejoining the Buckeyes prior to the Alabama A&M game.

Since the Oklahoma State transfer has returned, he's seen a role change. Holtmann has opted to insert freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh into the starting lineup while bringing Likekele off the bench. Holtmann said that the Buckeyes are trying to ease Likekele back into the rotation after missing three games, and in the four games since his return, Likekele has averaged 1.5 points, 2.8 assists and 2.5 rebounds while playing in just 14.7 minutes per game.

"His role has changed a little bit, and part of that is because he's still getting back into the swing of things and some other guys have kind of seized some op-

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

portunities there," associate head coach Jake Diebler said. "That's something we're going to have to continue to navigate, but (Isaac) has been great. His experience is a gift for him, and how he's worked through this progression after having that time (off) has been good. And his energy, his talk, and his leadership have been really good.

"We expect him to continue to grow to get back to kind of where he was from a conditioning and rhythm standpoint."

Sensabaugh Earning Freshman Honors

Sensabaugh picked up his third consecutive Big Ten Freshman of the Week honor on Jan. 3.

Sensabaugh led the Buckeyes to a pair of wins over Alabama A&M and Northwestern during the course of the week, producing 21 and 18 points in each game respectively. The freshman phenom averaged 19.5 points and 7.0 rebounds per game while shooting 57.1 percent from the field and 36.4 percent from three during the week.

While Sensabaugh is picking up conference-wide recognition for his play, he has emerged as Ohio State's leading scorer entering the brunt of the Buckeyes' conference schedule. The Orlando native has posted averages of 16.7 points and 4.7 rebounds per game this season. He's also scored at an efficient clip, shooting 52.0 percent from the field and 43.3 percent from three.

Sensabaugh is the third Buckeye to earn three consecutive Big Ten Freshman of the Week nods, joining Jared Sullinger, who completed the feat twice during the 2010-11 season, and D'Angelo Russell, who won the award four times during the 2014-15 season.

Ohio State freshmen have dominated the conference weekly honor over the past month. Sensabaugh's three consecutive

Freshman of the Week nods have coincided with Buckeyes women's basketball forward Cotie McMahon's four consecutive honors.

McNeil Surpasses 1,000 Career Points

Transfer guard Sean McNeil surpassed 1,000 career points – a majority of those coming from his time at West Virginia – after hitting a three-pointer with 2:51 to play in the opening half against Maine on Dec. 21

McNeil has cemented himself as a reliable three-point shooter during his career with the Mountaineers and Ohio State. McNeil scored 900 points as a Mountaineer and has amassed 144 through 15 games with the Buckeyes.

Although this will be McNeil's lone season of eligibility for the Scarlet and Gray, Holtmann said he's bought into the culture of the Ohio State program.

"Sean has been great for us," Holtmann said. "He's a real weapon, obviously, in terms of shooting the ball. He's really adapted well to how we do things. I'm just really pleased that he was able to get that honor tonight."

Looking back to his recruitment this offseason, McNeil said his fit in the Buckeyes' offensive scheme was an aspect that jumped out to him in his decision to go to Ohio State.

"Their vision in what they needed and their role for me to be here was something that intrigued me," McNeil said. "Just seeing the past numbers and what they're able to do with players, and their offensive schemes and things like that, it seemed like the right fit for me to be here."

McNeil has posted averages of 9.6 points and 1.3 assists while shooting the three-ball at a 38.0 percent clip this season.

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OSU Splits Six Games As Big Ten Play Begins

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to print, the Ohio State men's basketball team went 3-3, including back-to-back losses to No. 1 Purdue and Maryland in Big Ten play.

The Buckeyes lost a heartbreaker to North Carolina in the CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 17 after the Tar Heels hit a shot at the buzzer to send the game to overtime, where they eventually ripped the victory away from Ohio State.

Ohio State won its next three games, blowing out Maine and Alabama A&M before dispatching Northwestern 73-57 on the road on New Year's Day.

After a 2-0 start in Big Ten play, the Buckeyes dropped their next two contests, failing to hold on down the stretch against top-ranked Purdue before lagging behind the Terrapins during the second half in College Park, Md., on Jan. 8.

Against the Tarheels, freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh led No. 23 Ohio State with 22 points, but the Buckeyes were unable to hold off a furious second-half comeback by North Carolina, falling 89-84 at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

North Carolina (8-4) outscored Ohio State 54-40 in the second half and overtime, and the Buckeyes (7-3) shot just 2 of 10 from the field during the extra period, allowing the Tar Heels to come back from an 11-point second-half deficit.

"It was a hard-fought game by two good teams," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "Give them a lot of credit for finishing it in overtime. We just couldn't seem to get enough stops. We just couldn't answer the bell enough there, defensively or offensively, in overtime."

Ohio State scored the game's first five points before North Carolina ripped off an 11-1 run to pull ahead 11-6 entering the under-16 timeout. Forwards Justice Sueing and Sensabaugh scored 11 of Ohio State's next 13 points, and Sueing's bucket at 13:22 started a 9-0 run that gave Ohio State a 19-14 lead.

After North Carolina forward Armando Bacot hit a pair of free throws to make it 19-16, the Buckeyes ripped off another 9-0 run to extend their lead to 12 with 8:32 to go in the first half. Sensabaugh later cashed in on a triple to lift Ohio State to what would be its largest lead of the game, 34-20, with 6:01 remaining in the frame.

Bacot then got into a groove, scoring 12 of North Carolina's final 15 points in the half while helping the Tar Heels cut Ohio State's deficit to 41-35 with nine seconds to play in the stanza. Sueing drilled a three-pointer at the buzzer, and Ohio State took a 44-35 lead into the half.

The Tar Heels hit four of their first five shots to begin the second half, while using a 10-2 run to cut Ohio State's lead to 46-45 with 16:38 remaining in the game. The Buckeyes quickly repelled North Carolina's run with a 6-0 run of their own to push the lead to 52-45 with 14:40 to play on a jump shot by Sean McNeil.

Taking advantage of bucket and a free throw by Bacot, North Carolina cut its defi-

North Carolina 89 , Ohio State 84

Dec. 17, 2022
Madison Square Garden • New York, N.Y.

	1	2	OT	F
Ohio State (7-3)	44	35	5	84
North Carolina (8-4)	35	44	10	89

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Thornton	35	6-10	3-5	2-3	5	2	17
McNeil	37	3-10	0-0	0-3	2	2	7
Sensabaugh	34	9-17	2-3	3-5	3	4	22
Sueing	39	7-14	1-4	4-5	0	1	16
Key	32	4-11	1-2	1-3	1	3	11
Holden	16	2-6	0-0	1-2	2	2	5
Gayle	20	1-4	0-0	0-2	2	3	2
Okpara	12	2-2	0-0	1-2	2	5	4

Totals 200 34-74 7-14 14-28 17 22 84

Percentages: FG: 45.9%. FT: 50.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-24 (Thornton 2-4, Sensabaugh 2-6, Key 2-3, McNeil 1-5, Sueing 1-3, Holden 1-1, Gayle 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Okpara 2, Key). **Turnovers:** 16 (Thornton 5, McNeil 3, Sensabaugh 3, Team 2, Sueing, Key, Gayle). **Steals:** 8 (Okpara 4, Sensabaugh, Key, Holden, Gayle)

UNC	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Black	34	2-5	2-4	3-3	2	4	7
Love	42	8-20	2-2	0-4	7	0	22
Davis	40	6-13	8-9	1-7	4	3	21
Bacot	37	11-19	6-9	7-8	3	2	28
Nance	40	4-11	0-0	2-8	2	3	8
Trimble	11	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Styles	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Washington	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Johnson	13	1-2	0-1	1-1	1	3	2
Nickel	5	0-2	1-2	0-0	0	0	1

Totals 200 32-72 19-27 16-32 20 16 89

Percentages: FG: 44.4%. FT: 70.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-28 (Love 4-13, Black 1-2, Davis 1-5, Nance 0-6, Nickel 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Nance, Nickel). **Turnovers:** 13 (Davis 3, Love 2, Bacot 2, Nance 2, Trimble 2, Black, Johnson). **Steals:** 7 (Love 2, Davis 2, Johnson 2, Black)

Officials: Ayers, Curry, Evans. **Attendance:** N/A.

cit down to 54-50 with 12:30 remaining, but Ohio State again responded with a 6-0 run to push its lead back to double-digits with 10:07 to play.

From there, the Tar Heels outscored the Buckeyes 25-14 to take their first lead since they were up 14-12 in the first half, jumping ahead 75-74 on a three-pointer from New York native RJ Davis with 1:29 remaining in regulation. Fellow New York native Zed Key put Ohio State right back into the lead with a three-pointer, but a layup from Bacot knotted the game at 77 with 17 seconds to play.

On Ohio State's final offensive possession of regulation, Sensabaugh drilled a jumper in the face of North Carolina guard Leaky Black to push Ohio State into the lead with three seconds to go.

"He's probably our best guy at creating his own shot, and I think that's what you're looking for late in games," Holtmann said of Sensabaugh. "I've got tremendous confidence in his ability to do that. There will be a number of guys that we'll go to late, that we've identified, but he'll certainly be one of them."

Despite Sensabaugh's heroics, North Carolina forward Pete Nance corralled the ensuing inbound pass and drilled a turnaround jumper at the buzzer to send the game to overtime, knotted up at 79.

The Tar Heels scored the first four points in overtime, but the Buckeyes responded with a layup and free throw from guard Bruce Thornton. North Carolina then widened its lead to 87-82 behind a bucket from

Ohio State 95, Maine 61

Dec. 21, 2022
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	F
Maine (6-6)	26	35	61
Ohio State (8-3)	47	48	95

Maine	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Tynes	35	9-14	1-2	0-3	6	0	19
Wright-McLeish	1-7	0-0	0-1	1	1	3	3
Clayton	34	2-6	2-2	0-2	3	0	6
Feierbergs	21	3-6	0-0	1-1	0	2	6
Juozapaitis	34	6-15	1-1	1-1	1	2	16
Ireland	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Turgut	16	1-3	1-1	0-1	0	2	3
Adetogun	5	0-3	0-0	1-1	0	0	0
Nenadic	5	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Steele	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Filipovity	8	3-8	0-0	3-2	0	3	8

Totals 200 25-64 5-6 6-13 11 13 61

Percentages: FG: 39.1%. FT: 83.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-25 (Juozapaitis 3-9, Filipovity 2-3, Wright-McLeish 1-5, Tynes 0-2, Clayton 0-1, Feierbergs 0-2, Turgut 0-1, Adetogun 0-1, Nenadic 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 8. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Clayton, Juozapaitis). **Turnovers:** 13 (Tynes 2, Juozapaitis 2, Turgut 2, Filipovity 2, Wright-McLeish, Clayton, Feierberg, Nenadic, Team). **Steals:** 4 (Tynes 3, Wright-McLeish)

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Thornton	29	5-10	0-0	0-6	5	1	11
McNeil	24	3-6	0-0	0-1	2	0	8
Sensabaugh	25	8-12	0-1	1-6	7	1	19
Sueing	31	7-12	1-1	0-6	3	1	15
Key	24	5-9	4-5	3-3	2	0	14
Holden	22	2-2	0-0	2-2	1	4	4
Gayle	20	3-5	0-0	0-1	2	0	6
Hardman	4	2-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	6
Etzler	4	1-2	0-1	0-2	0	0	2
Okpara	13	5-7	0-0	3-1	0	2	10

Spencer 3 0-0 0-0 0-0 1 0 0

Totals 200 41-67 5-7 10-29 23 10 95

Percentages: FG: 61.2%. FT: 71.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-19 (Sensabaugh 3-5, McNeil 2-4, Hardman 2-2, Thornton 1-2, Sueing 0-1, Key 0-3, Gayle 0-1, Etzler 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Key 2, Holden 2, Okpara). **Turnovers:** 7 (Gayle 3, McNeil, Sensabaugh, Key, Team). **Steals:** 6 (Key 2, Holden 2, Okpara)

Officials: Sciroto, Anderson, Kitts . **Attendance:** 10,641.

guard Caleb Love and pair of free throws from Davis before closing things out at the free-throw line for the victory.

Thornton and Sueing supported Sensabaugh's scoring efforts, adding 17 and 16 points, respectively, while the trio of scorers helped the Buckeyes shoot 45.9 percent (34 of 74) from the field and 37.5 percent (9 of 24) from deep.

Bacot led all scorers with 28 points on 11-of-19 shooting while keying North Carolina's 48-42 advantage on the glass with a game-high 15 rebounds. Sueing paced the Buckeyes with nine off the glass. Love scored 19 of his 22 points in the second half and overtime. Davis added 21 points.

Ohio State Bullies Maine In The Lane

Ohio State utilized a dominant performance in the paint, outscoring Maine 64-28 in that area, to blow out the Black Bears 95-61 on Dec. 21 at Value City Arena in front of 10,641 fans.

The Buckeyes (8-3) led for all but 30 seconds early in the first half, while shooting a blistering 61.2 percent (41 of 67) from the field. Ohio State also assisted on 23 of its 41 buckets.

"Our guys made shots and were able to attack their zone effectively," Holtmann said. "We defended in spurts pretty well and took

Ohio State 90, Alabama A&M 59

Dec. 29, 2022
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	F
Alabama A&M (4-9)	33	26	59
Ohio State (9-3)	36	54	90

AAMU	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Thompson	27	3-10	0-0	0-1	4	1	8
Hicks	31	5-10	0-0	2-4	4	0	11
Harvell	13	1-2	0-0	0-3	0	2	2
Smith	17	1-4	1-2	0-0	0	1	4
Blaise-Akonobi	3-7	0-0	1-2	0	0	2	6
Randall	7	1-2	2-2	0-2	0	0	4
Peek	14	3-5	1-1	0-1	1	4	7
Tucker	13	0-3	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Powell	16	2-4	0-0	3-2	1	3	5
Brewer	8	0-3	0-0	1-2	1	2	0
Downey	8	2-3	1-2	0-0	0	3	6
Lee	7	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
T. de Brito	7	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Williams	16	3-6	0-0	1-3	0	3	6

Totals 200 24-62 5-7 9-21 12 24 59

Percentages: FG: 38.7%. FT: 71.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-18 (Thompson 2-4, Hicks 1-3, Smith 1-3, Powell 1-1, Downey 1-1, Harvell 0-1, Randall 0-1, Tucker 0-1, Brewer 0-2, Lee 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Williams). **Turnovers:** 17 (Blaise-Akonobi 3, Tucker 3, Powell 2, Brewer 2, Williams 2, Team 2, Harvell, Downey, Tavares de Brito). **Steals:** 4 (Peek, Tucker, Powell, Lee)

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Thornton	30	4-8	4-8	0-2	5	3	12
McNeil	27	3-10	0-0	0-4	1	0	9
Sensabaugh	27	9-14	1-2	0-6	1	0	21
Sueing	32	6-8	4-5	1-0	2	3	18
Key	26	3-6	3-6	4-6	1	1	9
Holden	13	2-4	0-0	2-4	0	0	4
Gayle	12	1-2	0-0	0-1	3	1	2
Brown	5	0-1	2-2	1-1	0	1	2
Likekele	9	1-1	0-0	1-1	5	1	2
Hardman	3	2-4	0-0	0-0	0	1	6
Etzler	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Okpara	12	1-2	2-4	2-2	0	0	4
Baumann	1	0-1	0-0	1-0	1	0	0
Spencer	1	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	0	1

Totals 200 32-61 17-29 13-29 19 11 90

Percentages: FG: 52.5%. FT: 58.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-25 (McNeil 3-9, Sensabaugh 2-6, Sueing 2-3, Hardman 2-4, Key 0-1, Brown 0-1, Baumann 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Key 3, Thornton, McNeil, Gayle, Likekele). **Turnovers:** 10 (Sueing 3, Holden 2, Thornton, Sensabaugh, Key, Gayle, Okpara). **Steals:** 5 (Brown 2, Sueing, Holden, Okpara)

Officials: Ek, Shortt, Barlow. **Attendance:** 14,521.

care of the ball."

The Buckeyes were charged with just seven turnovers.

Maine (6-6) took a 6-5 lead after forward Gedi Juozapaitis and guard Ja'Shonte Wright-McLeish connected on a pair of three-pointers to lift the Black Bears in front with 2:22 gone.

Key and Sensabaugh combined to score the game's next eight points and push the Buckeyes back ahead 13-6 with 15:49 to play in the half. The Buckeyes later ran away from the Black Bears thanks to a 14-0 run from 10:12 to 5:06 to lift its advantage to 40-18.

Maine used a 6-0 run to crawl back within 16 with 3:49 to play in the half, but Ohio State closed the half with a 7-2 run, lifted by a midrange jumper from Thornton with six seconds to play in the frame, and took a 47-26 lead into the locker room.

Ohio State opened the second half with a 7-0 run, widening its lead to 54-26, and controlled the second half with ease. The Buckeyes did not allow the Black Bears to get within 20 points in the final frame while

Continued On Page 42

OSU Clamps Down On Bulldogs, Wildcats

Continued From Page 41

shooting a red-hot 69.0 percent (20 of 29) during the period.

Ohio State's offense came from a variety of contributors, but Sensabaugh led the way with 19 points on 8-of-12 shooting. The Orlando, Fla., native also registered his best game as a facilitator, producing a career-best seven assists.

"They were a good defensive team with steals, so we knew they were going to bite," Sensabaugh said. "I knew that personally. Just seeing my teammates, when they help over and just making easy reads like that – I think we had 23 assists as a team, which is our highest (of the season), so obviously it was working for everybody."

Sueing produced 15 points while Key added 14 on 5-of-9 shooting and Thornton stuffed the stat sheet with 11 points, six rebounds and five assists.

While Ohio State's offense was led by a committee of scorers, the Black Bears relied on a pair of bucket-getters all night. Guard Kellen Tynes and Juozapaitis scored 19 and 16 points, respectively. The Black Bears shot just 39.1 percent from the field (25 of 64) and 6 of 25 (24.0 percent) from three. Ohio State was 8 of 19 from beyond the arc (42.1 percent).

Bucks Down Bulldogs With Big Second Half

Ohio State utilized a dominant second half to close out nonconference play with a 90-59 win over Alabama A&M on Dec. 29 at Value City Arena.

Although the Buckeyes held just a 36-33 lead over the Bulldogs at halftime, Ohio State (9-3) bullied Alabama A&M (4-9) 54-26 in the final 20 minutes to secure the victory. Ohio State's field-goal percentage rose from 44.4 percent (12 of 27) in the first half to 58.8 in the second (20 of 34), while the Buckeyes improved from a 2 of 12 start from beyond the arc to shoot 53.8 percent (7 of 13) from deep in the closing frame.

"I did not expect this to be a game where we would be up by 20 at half," Holtmann said. "I kind of knew that they had the ability to keep this thing really close. But I thought our shot selection hurt us in the first half too, and again, we're putting it all on us. Give them credit too. I thought they did some good things."

The Buckeyes jumped out to an 11-4 lead with 15:15 to go in the first half, with Sensabaugh contributing a pair of jumpers and a triple during the stretch. However, the Bulldogs got a pair of three-pointers from guards Messiah Thompson and Dailin Smith to knot the game at 13 with 13:54 to play.

The Buckeyes pushed their lead back to seven, 24-17, midway through the period, but Alabama A&M again closed the gap. With 1:51 to play in the opening frame, guard Brandon Powell drilled a three-point-er to lift Alabama A&M into the lead for the first time of the afternoon, 32-31. A trio of free throws from Thornton and Sueing, as well as a layup by Key, pushed Ohio State back in front prior to halftime, and the Buckeyes carried a 36-33 lead into the locker room.



SONNY BROCKWAY

FRESHMAN PHENOM — Ohio State freshman guard Bruce Thornton (2) has emerged as an impact player for the Buckeyes this season, leading OSU with 3.3 assists per game while adding 10.0 points per contest.

Ohio State's offense struggled immensely during the final 10 minutes of the frame, hitting just 3 of 9 shots while turning the ball over six times in that span, allowing the Bulldogs back into the contest. The Buckeyes also shot just 10 of 18 from the free-throw line during the first half.

The Buckeyes went on a 15-4 run to start the second half, jumping out to a 51-37 lead with 15:00 remaining, while getting buckets from each of their five starters during the opening stretch of the frame.

Sueing scored eight of Ohio State's first 18 second-half points and finished the afternoon with 18 points, 12 of which came in the second half, on 6-of-8 shooting for the game.

Ohio State remained in control of the contest the rest of the way, as its lead ballooned to a game-high 31 points for the final in front of 14,521 fans for the afternoon affair.

The freshman duo of Thornton and Sensabaugh impressed yet again, with Sensabaugh producing a game-high 21 points while shooting 9 of 14, and Thornton adding 12 points and five assists in the win.

Junior guard Eugene Brown III made his first appearance of the season against the Bulldogs after recovering from a concussion during Ohio State's first 11 games of the campaign. He finished with two points, two rebounds and two steals in five min-

utes of action. Guard Isaac Likekele also returned from a three-game absence and registered five assists and a pair of points in nine minutes.

"We really needed another perimeter defender and another perimeter ball-handler," Holtmann said of Likekele. "I thought he could impact this game, and I think he did right away."

Garrett Hicks and Thompson paced Alabama A&M's offense, producing 11 and eight points, respectively, with each player adding four assists.

OSU Has Wire-To-Wire Win Against Wildcats

Sensabaugh led Ohio State with a game-high 18 points, helping the Buckeyes dominate Northwestern in a wire-to-wire 73-57 win in Evanston, Ill., on Jan. 1.

Northwestern (10-3, 1-1) shot just 19 of 67 (28.4 percent) from the field and 29.0 percent (9 of 31) from three. The Buckeyes (10-3, 2-0) flipped the script on one of the conference's best defensive teams, countering with a 46.4 percent mark from the field (26 of 56) and 6 of 15 shooting from deep (40.0 percent) while running away from the Wildcats for much of the evening.

The Buckeyes opened the game on a 14-3 run, sparked by six early points from Sueing. After Northwestern guard Boo Buie drilled a three to cut Northwestern's deficit

Ohio State 73, Northwestern 57

Jan. 1, 2023
Welsh-Ryan Arena • Evanston, Ill.

	1	2	F
Ohio State (10-3)	35	38	73
Northwestern (10-3)	17	40	57

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Thornton	28	2-8	2-2	0-4	6	1	6
McNeil	32	5-8	2-2	0-2	2	0	15
Sensabaugh	25	7-14	2-2	3-5	0	3	18
Sueing	33	4-8	5-9	2-4	5	3	13
Key	28	4-7	3-4	1-10	0	3	11
Holden	14	3-5	1-1	0-0	0	3	8
Gayle	7	0-3	0-0	0-4	0	0	0
Brown	6	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Likekele	16	0-2	0-0	1-3	2	0	0
Okpara	11	0-0	0-0	0-3	0	0	0
Totals	200	26-56	15-20	10-36	15	13	73

Percentages: FG: 46.4%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-15 (McNeil 3-5, Sensabaugh 2-5, Holden 1-2, Thornton 0-1, Key 0-1, Gayle 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Sensabaugh 2, Key 2, Okpara 2, Sueing). **Turnovers:** 12 (Sueing 3, Likekele 3, Sensabaugh 2, Key 2, Thornton, Holden). **Steals:** 5 (Key 2, McNeil, Brown, Likekele)

NU	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Buie	35	3-15	1-2	0-3	3	1	10
Audige	37	6-17	2-4	0-2	2	2	16
Berry	22	4-11	1-1	0-1	0	0	11
Beran	24	1-7	4-4	3-3	1	2	6
Nicholson	21	0-7	0-4	8-5	1	4	0
Roper	24	2-5	0-0	0-0	1	1	6
Verhoeven	19	1-2	0-0	0-0	2	4	2
Barnhizer	18	2-3	2-2	1-8	1	2	6
Totals	200	19-67	10-17	14-23	11	16	57

Percentages: FG: 28.4%. FT: 58.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-31 (Buie 3-10, Audige 2-9, Berry 2-7, Roper 2-3, Beran 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Beran 2, Nicholson 2, Barnhizer). **Turnovers:** 7 (Buie, Audige, Berry, Beran, Nicholson, Roper, Barnhizer). **Steals:** 5 (Buie, Audige, Berry, Roper, Barnhizer). **Officials:** Simons, Sciroto, Pfeifer. **Attendance:** 4,372.

to 14-6, the Buckeyes ripped off an 8-0 run to take a 22-6 lead with 7:51 to play in the first half.

Northwestern guard Chase Audige stopped the bleeding for the Wildcats, hitting a layup to end the Ohio State run. But the Buckeyes knocked down another 12 unanswered points, with Sueing and McNeil each scoring five points during the stretch.

Ohio State's lead ballooned to as many as 26 points in the opening stanza, holding a 34-8 advantage with 4:31 remaining in the first half. Northwestern closed out the frame strong, holding Ohio State without a bucket for the final 5:18 of the frame and utilizing a 9-1 run to cut the deficit to 35-17 entering the locker room.

"They did have some clean looks that they'll make, and when we were able to get into a lead, it made it harder to make those shots," Holtmann said. "There's just more game pressure. For us, that was important for us to get a lead."

Despite Northwestern's strong finish to the first half, Ohio State came out swinging to start the second frame. The Buckeyes lifted their lead to a game-high 28 points, 46-18, thanks to an 11-1 run over the first 4:29 of the second half. Although the Wildcats later utilized a 12-2 stretch to cut Ohio State's lead to 63-49 with 3:48 remaining in regulation, Sensabaugh kept Northwestern at arm's length by scoring seven of his 18 points over those final minutes.

Key added his fifth double-double of the season with 11 points and 11 rebounds,

while Sueing finished with 13 points, six rebounds and five assists in the win. McNeil also produced 15 points while hitting on 3 of 5 three-point attempts in front of the 4,372 fans at Welsh-Ryan Arena.

The guard trio of Audige, Ty Berry and Buie did all they could to get the Wildcats back in the game, leading Northwestern with 16, 11 and 10 points, respectively.

Bucks Fall Short Against Top-Ranked Purdue

Purdue guard Fletcher Loyer drilled a go-ahead three-pointer with 11 seconds remaining to lift the No. 1 Boilermakers to a 71-69 win over No. 24 Ohio State at Value City Arena in front of 17,227 stunned fans on Jan. 5.

Sensabaugh's attempt at a game-winning three-pointer came after the buzzer as the Purdue defense suffocated Ohio State's offense on its final possession, securing the win for the Boilermakers (14-1, 3-1). Purdue scored the final five points in the last 28 seconds to snatch the victory from the hands of the Buckeyes.

"It comes down to just finishing the game all the way through," Sueing said. "We were up three with (41) seconds to go. That's what it comes down to in Big Ten play. The teams here, they're all good. So at the end of the game, those last couple of possessions, every possession counts. And we didn't make enough plays at the end, especially, and we paid for it."

After jumping ahead 6-5, Ohio State (10-4, 2-1) lost Key, who sustained a shoulder sprain with 16:13 remaining in the frame and did not return, leaving OSU without its primary defender on Purdue center Zach Edey, who stands 7-4 and 305 pounds.

Despite Key's injury, and Purdue taking a 7-6 lead, the Buckeyes ripped off a 12-0 run to pull back in front, 18-7, with 11:52 to go in the frame. Sensabaugh and Sueing combined for nine points during the stretch.

Purdue cut the deficit to just 20-14, but Ohio State countered with a 6-0 run over the span of 1:24 to extend its lead back to 26-14 with 6:55 to play in the half. The Boilermakers took control from there and outscored the Buckeyes 19-10 to close the frame, highlighted by a 9-0 run punctuated by a steal and three-pointer by freshman guard Braden Smith to tie the game at 33 before Brown gave Ohio State a 36-33 lead at the break with a shot from beyond the arc.

Ohio State shot a solid 55.6 percent from the field (15 of 27) during the first half while holding the Boilermakers to a 38.2 percent mark (13 of 34). However, Purdue's eight offensive rebounds sparked 10 second-chance points for the Boilermakers.

After scoring just four first-half points, Edey found his footing during the second frame. He scored six of Purdue's first nine points to start the second half, and Purdue later took off on a 10-0 run to wrestle control of the game, pulling ahead 52-46 with 13:10 to play.

Sensabaugh and guard Roddy Gayle Jr. got the Ohio State offense back on track and combined to score the Buckeyes' next 10 points, cutting the deficit to 57-56 with 9:32 remaining in regulation.

A Sueing bucket lifted the Buckeyes

back in front, 60-58, with 6:57 remaining, and a jumper by McNeil on the next possession put Ohio State ahead 62-58. But a pair of threes from Purdue guard Ethan Morton and Loyer put the Boilermakers back up 64-63 entering the under-four timeout.

Sensabaugh drilled a jumper to get the Buckeyes back in front, but Edey countered by sinking a pair of free throws to give the Boilermakers a 66-65 advantage with 2:58 left in regulation. After drawing a foul on Edey, center Felix Okpara went 1 for 2 from the charity stripe, knotting the game up at 66.

McNeil then hit a go-ahead three from the top of the key with 41 seconds to play, pushing the Buckeyes ahead 69-66. However, Edey countered by finishing a hook shot over Okpara to close the gap to one with 28 seconds left.

After the ensuing inbound pass, Morton registered a steal, intercepting a pass from Sueing to set up Loyer's game-winning three-pointer from the top of the key, assisted by Edey, to give the Boilermakers the victory. Ohio State's final possession fell apart after Morton blew up a screen that was meant to free Sensabaugh for a game-winning three-point attempt.

"The last play was a set action we run to get a three," Sensabaugh said. "I came off the screen and I was kind of expecting the aggressive double switch, and I saw it. It was good defense, I give them credit for that, so I couldn't really get it off."

Sensabaugh led all scorers with 21 points on 10-of-17 shooting, while Sueing added 15 points along with four rebounds and two assists. Thornton added eight points, five rebounds and three assists.

Edey and Smith led the Boilermakers with 16 points, with Smith shooting 3 of 6 from beyond the arc with six assists, while Edey was 6 of 10 from the field. Loyer added 11 points and also tallied a trio of threes, including the game-winner. Edey had a game-high 11 rebounds.

Terps Top Bucks In College Park

No. 24 Ohio State couldn't keep pace with Maryland in the second half, falling to the Terrapins 80-73 before 12,497 at the XFINITY Center.

The Terrapins (11-5, 2-3) shot a strong 60.9 percent during the second half while outscoring the Buckeyes 46-34 in the frame to secure the win.

The Buckeyes and Terrapins traded shots early, and Ohio State (10-5, 2-2) took an 11-10 lead into the under-16 media timeout thanks to a trio of triples from McNeil and Sensabaugh. Maryland, however, led by as much as seven in the opening half, taking a 23-16 lead with 11:16 to play in the first half after a basket by Donta Scott.

Ohio State responded with a 7-0 run to tie the game with Thornton hitting the equalizer from beyond the arc, but the Terrapins pulled back ahead 31-26 with 3:47 remaining in the frame. Maryland's offense – which missed 15 of 16 shots to close the half – went cold from there, and the Buckeyes took off on a 13-3 run to enter the locker room with a 39-34 lead.

Several Buckeyes found themselves in foul trouble during the first half. Thornton, Brown and guard Tanner Holden – who also tallied a technical foul – each registered a

Purdue 71, Ohio State 69

Jan. 5, 2023
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

		1	2	F
Purdue (14-1)		33	38	71
Ohio State (10-4)		36	33	69

Purdue	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Furst	16	1-4	1-2	5-2	1	1	3
Edey	32	6-11	4-4	4-7	4	1	16
Loyer	25	4-12	0-0	0-2	1	1	11
Smith	38	6-10	1-2	1-3	6	1	16
Morton	34	3-8	2-2	1-3	1	0	10
Gillis	24	2-7	0-0	0-3	0	3	6
Newman	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Jenkins	19	3-4	0-0	0-0	2	0	9
K.-Renn	7	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	25-58	8-10	16-21	15	9	71

Percentages: FG: 43.1%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 13-31 (Loyer 3-6, Smith 3-6, Jenkins 3-3, Morton 2-7, Gillis 2-7, Furst 0-1, Kaufmann-Renn 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 14 (Loyer 4, Morton 4, Edey 3, Smith, Newman, Kaufmann-Renn). Steals: 4 (Smith 2, Morton 2)

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Sensabaugh	36	10-17	1-1	2-3	1	2	21
Sueing	32	6-11	1-2	2-2	2	2	15
Key	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Thornton	27	2-8	2-2	0-5	3	1	8
McNeil	25	3-5	0-0	0-1	0	0	7
Okpara	30	2-5	1-2	3-2	2	2	5
Likekele	11	1-3	0-0	1-1	0	2	2
Holden	13	2-3	0-0	0-2	2	2	4
Brown	6	1-2	0-0	1-1	0	1	3
Gayle	16	2-4	0-0	0-0	1	1	4
Totals	200	29-58	5-7	9-18	11	13	69

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 6-14 (Sueing 2-3, Thornton 2-3, McNeil 1-3, Brown 1-2, Sensabaugh 0-2, Gayle 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 4 (Okpara 3, Sensabaugh). Turnovers: 7 (Sensabaugh 3, Sueing 2, Thornton 2). Steals: 8 (Sensabaugh 2, Thornton 2, Gayle 2, McNeil, Likekele). Officials: Riley, Ayers, Kimble. Attendance: 17,227.

Maryland 80, Ohio State 73

Jan. 8, 2023
XFINITY Center • College Park, Md.

		1	2	F
Ohio State (10-5)		39	34	73
Maryland (11-5)		34	46	80

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Thornton	25	2-7	2-2	0-2	1	3	7
McNeil	26	2-4	2-2	0-2	1	3	8
Sensabaugh	30	7-18	6-7	2-5	1	5	22
Sueing	34	8-13	3-4	3-2	1	3	21
Okpara	12	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	3	2
Holden	15	0-1	2-2	1-4	0	2	2
Gayle	16	2-4	1-2	0-1	0	2	6
Brown	17	1-3	0-0	0-2	0	4	3
Likekele	24	1-3	0-0	1-1	4	3	2
Totals	200	24-55	16-19	7-19	8	28	73

Percentages: FG: 43.6%. FT: 84.2%. Three-point field goals: 9-19 (McNeil 2-3, Sensabaugh 2-7, Sueing 2-4, Thornton 1-3, Gayle 1-1, Brown 1-1). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 3 (Brown 2, Sensabaugh). Turnovers: 12 (Sensabaugh 4, Thornton 3, Sueing 3, Holden, Gayle). Steals: 7 (Thornton 2, Gayle 2, Sensabaugh, Sueing, Likekele). Technical Fouls: 1 (Holden)

Maryland	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Carey	33	3-3	2-2	0-4	1	2	10
Young	35	8-18	13-15	5-6	0	3	30
Reese	27	4-10	2-2	2-6	3	3	10
Hart	37	3-10	6-7	1-6	1	2	12
Scott	30	4-9	2-3	1-2	1	2	12
Long	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1	0
Emilien	20	1-1	2-4	4-0	0	2	4
Martinez	11	1-1	0-0	0-2	0	2	2
Spencer	1	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	0	1
Totals	200	24-52	27-33	14-26	7	18	80

Percentages: FG: 46.2%. FT: 81.8%. Three-point field goals: 5-13 (Carey 2-2, Scott 2-4, Young 1-5, Hart 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 2 (Reese, Scott). Turnovers: 12 (Young 3, Hart 3, Martinez 2, Carey, Reese, Scott, Long). Steals: 4 (Carey 2, Hart 2). Technical Fouls: 3 (Reese, Martinez, Team). Officials: Szlec, Sirmons, Kueneman. Attendance: 12,497.

out the win.

Sensabaugh and Sueing led the Buckeyes in scoring with 22 and 21 points, respectively. Sueing shot an efficient 8 of 13 from the field, while Sensabaugh hit just 7 of 18 field-goal attempts.

Maryland guard Jahmir Young led all scorers with 30 points, hitting 13 of 15 free-throw attempts while adding 11 rebounds despite standing just 6-1. All five of the Terrapins' starters ended with double-digit scoring, including Young. The Terrapins hit on 27 of their 33 free-throw attempts in the win. The Buckeyes were also efficient from the line, connecting on 16 of 19.

The Buckeyes will play in four games before Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes to press again, hosting Minnesota on Jan. 12 before a two-game road trip at Rutgers on Jan. 15 and Nebraska on Jan. 18. Ohio State will then return home to face Iowa on Jan. 21.

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Greene Out For The Season After Knee Injury

Ohio State announced Dec. 28 that guard Madison Greene will miss the remainder of the season after suffering a knee injury in the Buckeyes' win over South Florida on Dec. 21.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Greene exited that game late in the fourth quarter after falling down on the court and was unable to put any weight on her left leg after being helped up. Ohio State conducted tests once returning home from the San Diego Invitational before announcing her loss for the season.

This is the second consecutive season-ending knee injury for Greene, who missed all of last season after suffering a knee injury just days prior to Ohio State's season opener. Greene had appeared in 12 games this season and started seven times, filling in at point guard while Jacy Sheldon worked through her own lower-leg injury. Greene played over 30 minutes per game, averaging 10.9 points, 2.9 rebounds, 5.0 assists and 3.0 steals on 48.3 percent shooting from the field and 56.0 percent shooting from deep.

"It's really tough," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the Buck-

eyes' win over Northwestern on Dec. 28. "I feel terrible for her. She's an incredible kid, and she's worked incredibly hard to get back. She was playing so well and being so impactful on our team, but we can't control that.

"She's down, but she loves this team so much. She was really involved in the game tonight, and she'll continue to be as we move forward."

Guard Rikki Harris has filled in at point guard when Sheldon and Greene were both out, with guard Taylor Mikesell also picking up some responsibilities when Harris is out of the game.

McGuff said that the plan moving forward will be for Harris to remain at point guard while the Buckeyes await the return of Sheldon and handle the loss of Greene for the second season in a row.

"She's a really good playmaker," guard Taylor Thierry said of Harris. "She's able to handle the ball, look up the court and see who's open – really just a good facilitator. It's helpful and it showed in this game (against Northwestern)."

As for Sheldon – who remains with a boot on her right leg and has been seen using crutches at points – McGuff said following the Northwestern game that she remains week-to-week.

"She's coming," he said. "We're really making sure to give her ample time to make sure we get it right, so when she does come back there won't be any setbacks. I'd call it week-to-week right now."

Sheldon last played in Ohio State's win over Louisville on Nov. 30, finishing with 22 points on 9-of-14 shooting in nearly 39 minutes on the court. In five games this season, she's averaged 16.0 points, 3.4 rebounds and 3.2 assists on 48.5 percent shooting.

Mikesell Dominates In Win Over Ducks

Plenty was at stake for Ohio State on Dec. 21 when taking on Oregon in the finals of the San Diego Invitational – including a victory in the tournament as well as a continued undefeated start to the season – but there was an extra sense of urgency for Mikesell.

Prior to her draining three-pointers at Ohio State, the fifth-year senior – who also played a pair of seasons at Maryland – competed for Oregon during the 2020-21 season, and she felt some added motivation when preparing to take on the Ducks.

"Anytime you leave one program and go to another and play your previous team, you certainly want to win," she said after Ohio State's 84-67 win over Oregon.

Mikesell was clearly locked in from the start, scoring 10 first-quarter points on 4-of-5 shooting, including makes on two of her three attempts from deep. While it was ultimately a big night for forward Rebeka Mikulášiková, who finished with a team-high 27 points, Mikesell was arguably the most efficient Buckeye on the court, racking up 25 points on 10-of-13 shooting while pulling down five rebounds and dishing out six assists.

"I'd be lying if I said it wasn't one of the first games I looked at on the schedule," she said. "At the end of the day, we had to take care of business, and we did that through some adversity. A shout-out to my teammates for having my back today but also just coming out and treating it like it's another game.

"At the end of the day we still have to win, regardless of my emotions or how I was feeling before the game."

McMahon Raking In Freshman Awards

Ohio State freshman forward Cotie McMahon has gone back-to-back-to-back-to-back, earning her fourth consecutive Big Ten Freshman of the Week award on Jan. 2.

In wins over Northwestern and Michigan – a pair of victories that contributed to Ohio State's program-record 16-0 start to begin the season – McMahon finished with 36 points on 15-of-24 shooting (62.5 percent) with seven rebounds, three assists and five steals.

Those were her seventh and eighth double-digit scoring games of the season, respectively. With an additional double-digit performances against Minnesota and Illinois, that made it six out of the last seven that McMahon reached double digits. She's reached at least 20 points on six occasions this season, including a career-high 30 points on 10-of-18 shooting in Ohio State's overtime win over South Florida.

It's the first time in program history that a player has earned four consecutive Big Ten Freshman of the Week awards. Former guard Kelsey Mitchell, who won Big Ten Freshman of the Year and Big Ten Player of the Year kudos in 2014-15 behind 24.9 points, 4.2 rebounds and 4.2 assists on 44.8 percent shooting, won the weekly honor six times that season, a mark for which McMahon will certainly be in contention.

McMahon has started all 17 games for Ohio State this season, averaging 12.9 points, 4.1 rebounds, 2.2 assists and 2.1 steals per game on 51.5 percent shooting, which is third on the team behind only guard Hevynne Bristow (55.6 percent) and guard Taylor Thierry, who leads the nation at 66.7 percent shooting from the field.

Mikesell Named To Wooden Award Midseason Top 25

Mikesell was named on Jan. 4 as one of the 25 finalists for the John R. Wooden Award, given annually to the player of the year in women's college basketball.

She leads Ohio State in scoring this season through Jan. 8, averaging 18.8 points per game on 45.4 percent shooting while adding 3.4 rebounds and 2.8 assists per contest. Though she isn't connecting from deep quite at last year's clip of 47.5 percent she's still leading the Buckeyes by shooting 39.9 percent from beyond the arc.

Mikesell was one of two Buckeyes on the preseason watch list along with Sheldon, though Sheldon did not appear on the updated list. The Big Ten has the most selections on the list, with Mikesell joined by Indiana forward Mackenzie Holmes, Iowa guard Caitlin Clark and forward Monika Czinano, Maryland guard Diamond Miller and Michigan forward Emily Kiser.

The Wooden Award All-American Team will be announced during the Elite Eight round of the NCAA tournament, and the winner will be announced in April following the season's conclusion.

McMahon Is Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month

All things considered, it's no surprise that McMahon is Plank's Lady Buck of the Month for December.

Several Buckeyes were integral to Ohio State's 17-0 start to the season, but McMahon has been a standout over the last month. In eight games played during December, the freshman phenom averaged 16.1 points, 5.4 rebounds, 3.0 assists and 2.4 steals on 52.5 percent shooting.

As mentioned, her career high of 30 points against South Florida featured a 10-of-18 shooting performance, and she also excelled from the free-throw line, knocking down 10 of her 11 attempts.

Plank's Cafe



Cotie McMahon
Freshman Forward
Centerville, Ohio

PLANK'S LADY BUCK OF THE MONTH FOR DECEMBER

OSU's 17-0 Start Best In Program History

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Through several twists and turns over recent weeks, including comeback wins as well as the loss of guard Madison Greene for the season (as well as the awaited return of guard Jacy Sheldon), Ohio State remains undefeated on the season.

As of the Buckeyes' win over Illinois on Jan. 8, Ohio State was off to a 17-0 start to begin the season, which is the best in program history. The Buckeyes had surpassed the previous record – a 15-0 start in the 2011-12 season – in a win over Minnesota on Jan. 5.

"One day, we'll look back and maybe take note of that, but right now we just had a hard-fought game and found a way to win," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the Minnesota game. "We put ourselves in a tough spot, but I'm proud of the kids for finding a way to win this one and get to 16 games."

The Buckeyes played in and won seven games since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, including a pair of ranked wins over Oregon in the San Diego Invitational and over Michigan on New Year's Eve, to also get off to a 6-0 start in conference play.

Bucks Take Care Of Business Against UAlbany

It took some time to get into a rhythm, but No. 3 Ohio State (11-0) eventually turned on

the jets in an 82-57 win over visiting Albany (6-7) on Dec. 16 behind the performance of freshman forward Cotie McMahon, who finished with 24 points before 3,616 in Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes led by just a possession at the half – and even trailed 27-24 at one point during the second quarter – but outscored the Great Danes 48-26 in the second half to run away with the win.

McMahon showed up to play early, scoring Ohio State's first nine points of the game and finishing the first quarter with 11 points on 5-of-6 shooting as the Buckeyes held a 21-12 lead.

Albany began heating up in the second quarter, opening on an 8-0 run and later pulling ahead by three with 5:28 to go in the half after a 7-0 run. The Great Danes found some success breaking Ohio State's full-court press and were especially effective from deep, finishing the first half 5 of 10 from three-point range.

Ohio State was once again helped by McMahon, who contributed a triple and a layup as the Buckeyes went into the locker room up just 34-31.

The Great Danes looked to continue that first-half momentum in the early stages of the second half, scoring on their first possession, but McMahon responded with a jumper and a steal, dishing to guard Taylor Mikesell for a basket to give Ohio State a 38-33 lead.

McMahon later made another pivotal play, grabbing a defensive rebound and charging down the court before opting to pass it outside to Greene, who knocked down a triple to make it 47-37 in favor of the Buckeyes midway through the third.

Ohio State later led 52-39 – the largest lead of the game to that point – after back-to-back baskets by forward Rebeka Mikulášiková and ended the third quarter up 59-43. Harboring that 16-point lead entering the fourth, the Buckeyes continued to dominate the Great Danes, outscoring them 23-14 in the final quarter for the 25-point win.

"I talked to them at halftime and said (Albany) is more committed to running good offense than we are committed to stuff," McGuff said. "Until that changes, the game is not going to go our way. Second half, we came out with great energy in the press. I think that really kind of rattled them and wore on them."

McMahon led the Buckeyes in scoring on a solid performance from the field, earning her keep on 10-of-15 shooting to go with a team-high seven rebounds and three assists. Mikesell (13 points) and Greene (11 points) also hit double digits. Greene had six steals, helping Ohio State force 20 turnovers, while committing only seven.

Albany forward Helene Haegerstrand led the Great Danes with 21 points on 10-of-16 shooting.

OSU Pulls Out OT Thriller Over USF

Ohio State (12-0) overcame an 18-point first half deficit to remain undefeated on the season, knocking off South Florida 88-86 in an overtime classic in the San Diego Invitational on Dec. 20.

The Buckeyes – who lost Greene late in the fourth after she suffered a season-ending knee injury – pulled off the win despite shooting just 42.9 percent (30 of 70) from the field and 4 of 20 from deep (20.0 percent).

Ohio State's poor shooting night started ear-

ly, as the Buckeyes began the game just 4 of 16 from the field and trailed 21-11 at the end of the first quarter. On the flip side of things, South Florida was 10 of 14 from the field in the frame.

South Florida opened the second quarter on an 8-0 run to push the lead to 29-11 with 8:17 remaining in the half. McMahon and guard Taylor Thierry helped avoid the game getting out of hand for the Buckeyes, combining for 12 points on 5 of 6 shooting in the frame to trail just 39-30 at the half after trailing by 18 points on two occasions in the second quarter.

"We were playing like we were a little overwhelmed in the first half and part of that was that (USF) was playing well and we weren't," McGuff said. "We played hard in the second half and just did what we had to do to win."

The Bulls pushed their lead to 45-32 with 6:58 remaining to begin the second half before Ohio State then embarked on a 12-4 run, capped off by a triple from Greene, to cut the lead down to 49-44, the smallest deficit since early in the first quarter. USF guard Sammie Puiis added a triple near the buzzer to make it 55-46 heading into the fourth.

Another three-pointer by Puiis pushed the lead to 63-50 with 8:16 remaining, but Ohio State fought back and was eventually able to tie the game at 64 with just under five minutes remaining on a layup by Thierry. The Buckeyes then took their first lead of the game, 67-65, after a triple from Greene, who suffered her injury on the next offensive possession.

South Florida was able to retake the lead, going up 73-69 with 1:37 remaining, but McMahon hit a pair of free throws in the final minute to send the game to overtime knotted at 75-75.

In the extra period, the teams traded blows before South Florida was able to take advantage at the free throw line, going up 86-80 with 1:12 remaining after several fouls by Ohio State, including a technical foul by McGuff. But the Buckeyes continued to push, getting a basket from forward Eboni Walker, a free throw from McMahon and a triple from Mikesell – her first successful make from deep for the game after six attempts – to tie it 86-86 with 15 seconds remaining.

After a block by Walker as South Florida looked to take the lead, Ohio State got back on the other end and McMahon found Thierry on the fast break. She put in the game-winning score with just six seconds remaining. The Bulls turned the ball over on the ensuing possession to secure Ohio State's victory.

"We finished the game strong and it was a great way to end the game, but I think that throughout the game we could have done a lot better," McMahon said. "We could have started the first half a lot stronger. We are capable of

Ohio State 88, South Florida 86

Dec. 20, 2022 Pechanga Arena • San Diego, Calif.									
	1	2	3	4	OT	F			
South Florida (10-4)	21	18	16	20	11	86			
Ohio State (12-0, 2-0)	11	19	16	29	13	88			

South Fla.	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Mendjiadeu	40	11-15	12-15	7-10	0	5	5	34	
Brito	17	3-6	0-0	2-3	1	4	6		
Puiis	44	6-15	3-4	0-5	1	2	20		
Tsineke	43	6-15	3-4	1-1	2	1	15		
Wilson	19	0-0	1-4	0-2	3	5	1		
Gonzalez	25	2-4	4-6	3-3	1	3	8		
Alvarez	26	0-0	2-2	0-1	3	3	2		
Johansson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Williams	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
McGee	5	0-2	0-2	0-0	0	1	0		
Totals	200	8-59	25-37	15-26	11	25	86		

Percentages: FG: 47.5%. FT: 67.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-18 (Puiis 5-13, Brito 0-2, Tsineke 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Alvarez, Fankam Mendjiadeu). **Turnovers:** 21 (Tsineke 9, Brito 3, Puiis 3, Alvarez 2, Wilson 2, Fankam Mendjiadeu, Gonzalez). **Steals:** 4 (Brito 2, Gonzalez, Tsineke).

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Mikulášiková	29	1-8	0-0	2-5	4	5	2		
McMahon	41	10-18	10-11	1-4	3	3	30		
Greene	32	5-12	2-2	2-0	1	4	14		
Thierry	37	9-11	5-10	3-3	2	4	23		
Mikesell	42	2-13	3-4	0-3	2	2	8		
Harris	24	2-5	2-4	4-1	1	5	7		
Walker	4	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2		
Shumate	4	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Bristow	11	0-1	2-2	0-1	0	4	2		
Perry	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Costner	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Perry	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Totals	200	30-70	24-33	17-21	13	28	88		

Percentages: FG: 42.9%. FT: 72.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-20 (Greene 2-4, Harris 1-2, Mikesell 1-7, McMahon 0-2, Mikulášiková 0-5). **Team rebounds:** 8. **Blocked shots:** 8 (Mikesell 3, Harris, McMahon, Shumate, Thierry, Walker). **Turnovers:** 13 (Greene 4, McMahon 4, Bristow, Harris, Mikesell, Mikulášiková, Team). **Steals:** 10 (McMahon 3, Mikesell 3, Greene 2, Mikulášiková, Thierry). **Officials:** Garland, Knight, Seales. **Attendance:** 318.

playing at a level higher than what we played out there, but a win is a win and we took care of business when it came down to it."

McMahon and Thierry each finished with career highs in the win, with McMahon going for 30 points on 10-of-18 shooting and Thierry racking up 23 points on a sharp 9-of-11 shooting. Outside of those two, Ohio State had just 35 points on 11-of-41 shooting. USF forward Dulcy Fankam Mendjiadeu finished with a game-high 34 points on 11-of-15 shooting. She also had a game-high 17 rebounds.

OSU Knocks Off Ducks To Win San Diego Invitational

Continued On Page 46



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OSU Ends 2022 With Win Over Michigan

Continued From Page 45

Ohio State (13-0) returned home as the winner of the San Diego Invitational, knocking off No. 16 Oregon (10-2) in the championship game by an 84-67 margin on Dec. 21.

After a hard-fought victory the previous evening, it was largely smooth sailing against the Ducks. The Buckeyes led just 25-23 after the first quarter – 10 of those courtesy of Mikesell on 4-of-5 shooting – but opened the second frame on a 17-4 run, holding a 42-27 lead with 4:48 remaining in the half.

Much of the success in that second quarter was due to the facilitation of Ohio State's offense by Rikki Harris and Mikesell, who combined for 10 points and six assists (three each) in the quarter while attempting to fill the void left by Greene and Sheldon, who remained out with a lower-leg injury.

"Something about (Harris) is she's always going to be ready, regardless of the role you put her in," Mikesell said. "It was a quick turnaround from last night and we didn't have a whole lot of time to prepare, but she's going to be ready regardless of where she plays."

After increasing the lead to as much as 52-34 with 1:18 on the clock, Ohio State eventually went into the locker room up 54-37 following a late layup from Thierry.

The Buckeyes continued to push out of the break, with Mikulášiková hitting a pair of free throws and Mikesell connecting from deep to make it 59-37 with 7:18 remaining, but those would be the last points of the quarter for Ohio State as Oregon cut the lead to 59-49 with a 12-0 run entering the fourth.

After the Ducks opened the final frame with a three by Endyia Rogers to cut the lead to seven, the Buckeyes responded. Mikulášiková connected from deep to stop the bleeding with 9:07 left in the game. She continued to take over the contest, finishing the quarter with 13 points on 5-of-9 shooting, including a 3 of 5 mark from beyond the arc.

Ohio State also got some late contributions from guard Hevynne Bristow, who had a personal 5-0 run to push the Buckeyes' lead to 67-54 with 7:20 remaining, and the Ducks wouldn't cut the deficit to fewer than 10 points for the remainder of the contest.

"I think the bigger story is we took a tough injury with Madison Greene going down last night," McGuff said. "I was proud of how our team showed up and the resilience they showed, fighting through some tough adversity."

Mikulášiková led the Buckeyes with 27 points on 10-of-23 shooting, while Mikesell, playing against her former team, added 25 points on 10-of-13 from the field. Thierry had a team-high eight rebounds, while Harris dished out eight assists. Oregon forward Grace VanSlooten led all players with 29 points and added nine rebounds.

Wildcats No Problem For Buckeyes

Ohio State (14-0, 3-0) continued to live among the nation's unbeaten, going on the road to take down Northwestern, 81-48, on Dec. 28 before 1,372 in Welsh-Ryan Arena.

The Wildcats (6-6, 0-2) stayed close to Ohio State through the game's early stages, forcing several mistakes by the Buckeyes to the tune of

Ohio State 84, Oregon 67								
Dec. 21, 2022								
Pechanga Arena • San Diego, Calif.								
	1	2	3	4	F			
Oregon (10-2, 1-0)	23	14	12	18	67			
Ohio State (13-0, 2-0)	25	29	5	25	84			
Oregon	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
VanSlooten	34	11-16	7-9	3-6	0	3	29	
Kyei	24	0-1	0-0	2-8	1	1	0	
Gray	26	2-9	0-0	1-0	1	1	4	
Rogers	33	3-10	1-2	0-3	3	0	9	
Paopao	37	8-17	0-0	1-3	4	0	17	
Hanson	20	1-7	0-0	1-1	3	2	3	
Hurst	21	2-6	0-0	0-1	0	0	5	
Hosendove	6	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	3	0	
Totals	200	27-66	8-11	11-24	12	10	67	
Percentages: FG: 40.9%. FT: 72.7%. Three-point field goals: 5-25 (Rogers 2-7, Hanson 1-4, Hurst 1-4, Paopao 1-6, Gray 0-4). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 8 (Kyei 4, VanSlooten 3, Hurst). Turnovers: 15 (Paopao 8, Kyei 2, Rogers 2, Hanson, Hurst, Team). Steals: 5 (Hurst 2, Paopao 2, Kyei).								
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Mikulášiková	33	10-23	2-2	0-2	2	3	27	
McMahon	30	3-8	0-0	2-4	3	2	6	
Harris	27	1-4	0-0	0-4	8	3	3	
Thierry	37	6-10	1-2	2-6	3	0	14	
Mikesell	40	10-13	0-0	0-5	6	1	25	
Bristow	22	2-4	1-1	1-3	3	1	5	
Shumate	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	1	0	0	
Walker	7	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	1	4	
Totals	200	34-66	4-5	8-26	26	11	84	
Percentages: FG: 51.5%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 12-22 (Mikesell 5-7, Mikulášiková 5-10, Harris 1-2, Thierry 1-2, McMahon 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Thierry 2, Bristow). Turnovers: 14 (Harris 3, McMahon 3, Mikulášiková 3, Mikesell 2, Thierry 2, Bristow). Steals: 5 (Mikesell 2, Thierry 2, Mikulášiková). Officials: Garland, Esho, Seales. Attendance: 378.								

nine first-half turnovers and just 42.4 percent shooting (14 of 33) from the field – including a 1-of-10 mark from deep – but Ohio State outscored Northwestern 46-24 in the second half for the win.

Ohio State – which was again without Sheldon or Greene, the latter announced as out for the season with a knee injury prior to the contest – opened on an 11-1 run through the game's first 3:58, with McMahon and Thierry accounting for nine of those 11 points.

Northwestern's first basket of the game came off a triple from guard Hailey Weaver with 5:41 gone by, which kick-started an 11-5 run for the Wildcats to close the opening quarter with Ohio State leading 18-13.

Despite the Wildcats' push – including a pair of free throws to cut the deficit to 18-15 to open the second quarter – Ohio State exploded for an 11-0 run to take a 29-15 lead with 4:41 remaining in the half, holding Northwestern scoreless for four minutes while jumping out to their biggest lead of the game to that point. During that run, the Buckeyes were 5 of 5 from the field as McMahon knocked down the team's first triple of the contest.

Northwestern stopped the bleeding with a layup from forward Courtney Shaw, and Ohio State led 35-24 heading into the break.

McMahon continued to dominate out of the locker room, scoring Ohio State's first two baskets, and Mikulášiková added her first three-pointer of the game to give the Buckeyes a 42-24 lead with 8:16 remaining in the quarter.

Ohio State – with most contributions coming from McMahon, Mikesell and Mikulášiková

Ohio State 81, Northwestern 48							
Dec. 28, 2022 Welsh-Ryan Arena • Evanston, Ill.							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (14-0, 3-0)	18	17	24	22	81		
Northwestern (6-6, 0-2)	13	11	14	10	48		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	19	2-6	0-0	0-4	1	1	6
McMahon	29	10-15	3-4	0-4	3	3	24
Harris	33	1-6	6-12	1-7	6	4	8
Thierry	34	8-11	2-4	4-4	3	3	18
Mikesell	35	6-15	1-2	2-7	3	0	16
Bristow	6	0-0	2-2	0-4	0	1	2
Shumate	17	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	2	0
Walker	19	3-5	1-2	1-3	2	2	7
Henderson	3	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	0	0
Costner	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Vreš	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	30-62	15-26	11-35	19	17	81
Percentages: FG: 48.4%. FT: 57.7%. Three-point field goals: 6-21 (Mikesell 3-7, Mikulášiková 2-5, McMahon 1-3, Harris 0-5, Shumate 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (McMahon 2, Thierry 2, Shumate). Turnovers: 17 (Mikulášiková 5, McMahon 4, Harris 2, Mikesell 2, Bristow, Team, Thierry, Vreš). Steals: 17 (Mikesell 7, Thierry 4, McMahon 2, Mikulášiková 2, Walker 2).							
Northwestern	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Walsh	15	3-9	0-0	1-3	1	5	7
Mott	13	1-3	0-0	0-2	0	3	2
Rainey	23	0-3	0-0	0-1	4	4	0
Wood	32	3-10	0-0	2-2	0	4	6
McWilliams	5	0-1	1-2	1-1	0	0	1
Shaw	25	5-8	2-5	3-8	1	0	12
Brown	31	2-11	8-8	1-2	3	3	13
Weaver	17	2-6	0-1	1-2	1	1	5
Lau	19	0-3	0-0	0-2	3	1	0
Hartman	10	1-7	0-0	1-1	0	0	2
Ademusayo	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Morris	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Goodchild	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	17-62	11-16	12-27	13	22	48
Percentages: FG: 27.4%. FT: 68.8%. Three-point field goals: 3-18 (Brown 1-6, Walsh 1-3, Weaver 1-3, Goodchild 0-1, Hartman 0-1, Lau 0-2, Wood 0-2). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 6 (Brown 2, Ademusayo, McWilliams, Mott, Wood). Turnovers: 21 (Wood 5, Lau 4, Rainey 3, Walsh 3, Brown 2, Weaver 2, McWilliams, Morris). Steals: 8 (Brown 3, Walsh 2, Rainey, Weaver, Wood). Officials: Daley, Gulbeyan, Reynolds. Attendance: 1,372.							

– eventually went up by as many as 25 points before leading 59-38 entering the fourth, where the Buckeyes added 22 points to just 10 for the Wildcats to cruise to the win.

"We're a versatile team," Thierry said. "We have players who can play multiple positions and execute really well. We're a reliable team and we're able to execute at multiple positions, which makes it hard on other teams."

The Buckeyes were led by McMahon, who finished with 24 points on 10-of-15 shooting, while Mikesell added a team-high nine rebounds to go with 16 points and Harris finished with eight points, eight rebounds and six assists.

Jillian Brown was the leading scorer for Northwestern, totaling 13 points on just 2-of-11 shooting, though she went 8 of 8 at the charity stripe. Ohio State held the hosts to a dismal 27.4 shooting percentage (17 of 62) and only 16.7 percent from distance (3 of 18). The Buckeyes also forced 21 turnovers.

OSU Caps Year With Top-15 Win

In a battle between the Big Ten's best offense in No. 3 Ohio State and the best defense in No. 14 Michigan, the Buckeyes (15-0, 4-0) came out on top, knocking off the Wolverines (12-2, 2-1)

Ohio State 66, Michigan 57							
Dec. 31, 2022 Covelli Center • Columbus, Ohio							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Michigan (12-2, 2-1)	10	17	14	16	57		
Ohio State (15-0, 4-0)	9	21	20	16	66		
Michigan	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kiser	36	4-8	2-6	0-10	0	3	10
Williams	37	8-10	2-4	8-2	1	2	18
Nolan	37	4-11	0-0	1-4	3	3	10
Phelia	30	3-13	3-4	1-1	1	5	9
Brown	31	0-4	8-12	1-4	10	5	8
Evans	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0
Kampschroder	20	0-5	2-2	1-5	0	1	2
Stuck	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Crockett	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Wiggins	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	19-51	17-28	16-29	15	24	57
Percentages: FG: 37.3%. FT: 60.7%. Three-point field goals: 2-17 (Nolan 2-8, Kampschroder 0-4, Kiser 0-2, Phelia 0-3). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 27 (Kiser 9, Brown 8, Williams 3, Kampschroder 2, Phelia 2, Nolan, Stuck, Team). Steals: 7 (Nolan 3, Brown 2, Phelia, Williams).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	29	1-7	0-0	0-5	0	4	3
McMahon	25	5-9	2-3	0-3	0	5	12
Harris	35	3-8	7-12	1-2	3	2	14
Thierry	31	3-7	2-2	6-4	2	4	8
Mikesell	40	4-16	6-6	1-1	2	0	16
Shumate	10	1-5	0-0	2-0	0	2	3
Bristow	18	3-7	2-2	1-3	0	4	8
Walker	11	1-1	0-0	1-0	1	2	2
Totals	200	21-60	19-25	13-20	8	23	66
Percentages: FG: 35.0%. FT: 76.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-23 (Mikesell 2-7, Harris 1-4, Mikulášiková 1-6, Shumate 1-2, Bristow 0-2, McMahon 0-1, Thierry 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 4 (Bristow 2, McMahon, Shumate). Turnovers: 16 (McMahon 5, Thierry 4, Bristow 2, Harris 2, Mikesell 2, Mikulášiková). Steals: 13 (Bristow 3, McMahon 3, Thierry 3, Harris 2, Mikesell, Walker). Officials: Cross, Grinter, Dickerson. Attendance: 4,038.							

Michigan then closed the quarter on a 9-2 run that was capped by a layup from guard Maddie Nolan at the buzzer, leaving the Buckeyes with just a 50-41 lead entering the fourth. Ohio State's lead continued to evaporate early in the frame, with Michigan opening on another 9-2 run to cut the Buckeyes' lead to just 52-50 with 6:47 remaining in the game.

Harris then took over for Ohio State, scoring five of the team's next nine points before Mikulášiková connected from deep to push the lead to 64-52 with 3:01 left. The Wolverines did not come closer than seven points the remainder of the way as Ohio State held on for the win before 4,038.

“(McGuff said) play your hardest and lock in,” Harris said. “We knew what we had to do. We had done it earlier in the game, but then we gave them a few baskets and gave them a lot more hope than we should have. We had to toughen up and lock in on our stuff so we didn't turn the ball over as much.”

Mikesell led the Buckeyes with 16 points on 4-of-16 shooting, while Harris added 14 points. Thierry pulled down a team-high 10 rebounds, while Michigan forward Cameron Williams led the Wolverines with 18 points and 10 rebounds.

OSU Sets Program Record In Win Over Minnesota

Ohio State survived a back-and-forth battle at Minnesota on Jan. 5, improving to 16-0 (5-0 Big Ten) to begin the season with an 83-71 win over the Gophers (8-7, 1-3) in Williams Arena.

The 16-0 start to the season surpassed the previous program-record 15-0 start by the 2011-12 team.

Ohio State started out the game with a 7-0 run, with Mikesell, Mikulášiková and Thierry all getting in on the action to start. Later on,

Ohio State 83, Minnesota 71								
Jan. 5, 2023								
Williams Arena • Minneapolis, Minn.								
		1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (16-0, 5-0)		24	15	16	28	83		
Minnesota (8-7, 1-3)		19	24	18	10	71		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Mikulášiková	29	5-14	0-0	0-4	1	0	15	
McMahon	37	3-8	6-10	1-6	2	2	12	
Harris	36	7-13	4-4	0-4	4	4	19	
Thierry	32	2-6	3-3	6-6	2	3	7	
Mikesell	40	9-19	2-4	1-6	7	0	22	
Shumate	12	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	2	3	
Walker	11	2-2	1-2	0-3	2	2	5	
Bristow	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Totals	200	25-53	0-0	7-24	18	13	83	
Percentages: FG: 45.3%. FT: 69.6%. Three-point field goals: 9-28 (Mikulášiková 5-12, Mikesell 2-8, Harris 1-5, Shumate 1-2, Thierry 0-1). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 4 (Shumate 2, Mikesell, Walker). Turnovers: 17 (McMahon 4, Mikesell 3, Mikulášiková 3, Bristow 2, Thierry 2, Walker 2, Harris). Steals: 9 (Mikesell 3, Shumate 2, Harris, McMahon, Mikulášiková, Thierry).								
Minnesota	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Micheaux	31	7-12	0-0	1-3	0	3	14	
Heyer	33	5-13	4-4	4-8	3	1	15	
Battle	32	6-9	2-3	1-8	2	4	14	
Braun	34	4-10	1-3	0-1	2	1	12	
Borowicz	33	3-12	0-0	1-3	2	3	7	
Czinano	8	1-4	1-1	0-2	2	0	3	
Oberg	8	0-3	0-0	2-0	1	2	0	
Gradwell	9	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Cayton	13	2-6	2-3	0-1	1	3	6	
Totals	200	28-71	10-14	11-29	13	17	71	
Percentages: FG: 39.4%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 5-19 (Braun 3-7, Borowicz 1-5, Heyer 1-6, Gradwell 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Battle 3). Turnovers: 16 (Battle 3, Borowicz 3, Braun 3, Micheaux 3, Heyer 2, Cayton, Oberg). Steals: 16 (Borowicz 5, Cayton 5, Braun 3, Gradwell, Heyer, Micheaux). Officials: Cruse, Tieman, Enterline. Attendance: 2,410.								

2022-23 Ohio State Women’s Basketball Statistics																	
17-0 Overall (6-0 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Jan. 8																	
Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.	
									O-D	T-Avg.							
Taylor Mikesell	17-17	577-34.0	114-251	.454	55-138	.399	37-43	.860	6-51	57-3.4	15-0	47	26	5	28	320-18.8	
Jacy Sheldon	5-5	152-30.3	32-66	.485	5-16	.313	11-14	.786	4-13	17-3.4	11-0	16	16	2	30	80-16.0	
Rebeka Mikulasikova	17-17	468-27.5	90-182	.495	28-79	.354	26-36	.722	13-76	89-5.2	36-1	32	35	0	15	234-13.8	
Cotie McMahon	17-17	420-24.7	85-165	.515	6-26	.231	44-68	.647	15-54	69-4.1	38-1	37	47	10	35	220-12.9	
Taylor Thierry	17-17	473-27.8	88-132	.667	4-13	.308	29-49	.592	50-61	111-6.5	48-2	36	23	12	37	209-12.3	
Madison Greene	12-7	374-31.1	42-87	.483	14-25	.560	33-41	.805	16-19	35-2.9	24-0	60	26	0	36	131-10.9	
Rikki Harris	17-5	412-24.2	36-100	.360	13-53	.245	34-59	.576	17-58	75-4.4	39-1	53	23	3	20	119-7.0	
Hevynne Bristow	15-0	162-10.8	25-45	.556	4-10	.400	19-25	.760	10-39	49-3.3	21-0	9	13	7	10	73-4.9	
Eboni Walker	15-0	167-11.1	21-45	.467	0-0	.000	11-16	.688	18-19	37-2.5	16-0	19	9	2	11	53-3.5	
Emma Shumate	13-0	141-10.8	9-32	.281	6-21	.286	1-2	.500	7-7	14-1.1	13-0	10	1	15	6	25-1.9	
Kaia Henderson	7-0	28-4.0	2-7	.286	1-3	.333	3-3	1.000	0-3	3-0.4	4-0	1	2	0	1	8-1.1	
Mya Perry	5-0	17-3.5	1-7	.143	0-3	.000	3-5	.600	1-0	1-0.2	3-0	0	0	0	3	5-1.0	
Kaitlyn Costner	7-0	24-3.4	1-4	.250	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-4	4-0.6	1-0	1	1	1	1	2-0.3	
Karla Vres	5-0	12-2.3	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	2-0	0	2	0	1	0-0.0	
Team									32-33	65				7			
Total	17	3425	546-1125	.485	136-387	.351	251-361	.695	189-437	626-36.8	271-5	321	231	57	234	1479-87.0	
Opponents	17	3425	414-1006	.412	93-343	.271	154-235	.655	187-445	632-37.2	309-7	222	407	54	97	1075-63.2	

Mikesell helped the Buckeyes jump out to a 24-14 lead with 1:06 remaining in the quarter, scoring eight points herself in the frame while dishing out five assists to five different teammates. Minnesota scored the final points of the quarter to cut the deficit to 24-19 entering the second frame.

Mikulášiková connected on a three-pointer to begin the second quarter, but Minnesota's talented pair of freshmen – guard Amaya Battle and forward Mallory Heyer – began taking over, scoring the team's next six points before guard Mara Braun made a triple and layup on back-to-back possessions to give the Gophers a 30-29 lead, their first of the game, with 5:43 remaining in the quarter.

The lead changed twice throughout the remainder of the half, with Harris connecting on a three-pointer to give Ohio State the lead at 3:32 before a later layup from Katie Borowicz

regained the advantage for Minnesota at 1:33, with the Gophers going into the half up 43-39.

The Gophers' lead ballooned to as many as 10 points in the third quarter, holding a 56-46 lead with 3:58 remaining in the frame, with the Buckeyes just 1 of 10 from the field to begin the second half.

After Minnesota went up by double digits, Ohio State took off on an 8-0 run to cut it to 56-54, but the Gophers entered the fourth holding a 61-55 lead. The Buckeyes continued applying pressure in the fourth, opening the frame on a 14-0 run to flip the game from a six-point deficit to an eight-point lead, 69-61, with 6:59 remaining.

“It came down to getting stops in the fourth quarter,” Mikesell said. “Being down isn't something we're used to, but it's a Big Ten game on the road. It's not going to be easy.”

Braun later connected on a three-pointer to make it 74-68 with 5:22 remaining, but that would be the last field goal for the Gophers until Heyer found the basket on a driving layup with just 1:29 left in the game, cutting it to 79-71, but Ohio State was able to close things out in the game played before 2,410.

Mikesell led the way for Ohio State with 22 points on 9-of-19 shooting in addition to seven rebounds and seven assists. Harris added 19 points on 7-of-13 shooting, while Mikulášiková contributed 15 points – all from deep – and four rebounds. Thierry added a career-high 12 rebounds to go with seven points, while Heyer led the Gophers with 15 points on 5-of-13 shooting and grabbed 12 off the glass.

OSU Overcomes 17-Point Deficit Against Illinois

Midway through the third quarter of Ohio State's matchup with Illinois on Jan. 8 at Value City Arena, it appeared the dream run for the Buckeyes to begin the season was coming to an end.

Ohio State trailed 57-40 with 6:56 remaining in the third, offering little in the way of answers to Illinois' shooting from deep and dominance in the paint. But the Buckeyes, as they've done all season, then flipped the switch, closing the quarter on a 25-8 run to tie the game and going on to win 87-81.

Ohio State (17-0, 6-0) and Illinois (14-3, 4-2) traded blows throughout the first quarter, with no team leading by more than a possession.

After a layup from Illini guard Jayla Oden to put Illinois up 22-19 with 1:08 remaining, the Buckeyes responded with a free throw from Bristow and a layup from Mikesell to tie it at 22 entering the second quarter.

Genesis Bryant notched a triple to begin the second frame, the first points of a 10-2 run for Illinois to go up 32-24 with 6:13 remaining. Mikesell continued to will Ohio State back into the game with eight in the period, but Ohio State still trailed 47-37 entering the locker room.

Mikesell looked to build some momentum in the third, connecting from deep on Ohio State's first possession, but Illinois responded with a 10-0 run that featured triples from Bryant and forward Brynn Shoup-Hill. As she's done in pivotal moments this season, McMahon got Ohio State back into the contest, taking less than a minute off the clock on a personal 7-0 run to make it 57-47 with 5:49 remaining in the frame.

“We needed someone to step up and get the energy going,” McMahon said, “so I felt like that was my perfect moment to take it from there, and I did.”

After a free throw from Illinois forward Kendall Bostic, the Buckeyes took off on yet another run, this time an 11-0 stretch to tie the game at 58. Bostic scored on the next possession, but Harris responded with a triple to give the Buckeyes a 61-60 lead with 1:50 remaining in the third.

Illinois eventually tied the game up at 65 entering the fourth, but Ohio State opened the final frame with another triple from Harris to make it 68-65. The Buckeyes later extended their lead to as many as nine points, 77-68, before Illinois cut the deficit to just 84-79 with 2:35 remaining.

McMahon knocked down a free throw with 1:35 remaining, and following misses from the Illini on their next two possessions, Illinois was forced to foul, with Ohio State closing things out at the free-throw line for the win in front of a crowd of 6,273.

Mikesell led the Buckeyes with a game-high 31 points on 11-of-22 shooting – including 7 of 14 from deep – while McMahon added 22 points on 6-of-10 shooting. As a whole, the Buckeyes shot 42.9 percent (27 of 63) from the field and 39.3 percent from deep (11 of 28), and they were outpaced on the floor by Illinois, which shot 48.6 percent (34 of 70). The Illini were led by Bostic's 27 points on 13-of-15 shooting. The Illini held the edge on points in the paint, 42-30.

Ohio State will take the floor twice before Buckeye Sports Bulletin next goes to press, traveling to Nebraska on Jan. 14 and hosting Northwestern on Jan. 19.

Transfer Vreš Seeking Growth At Ohio State

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The journey for Karla Vreš to Ohio State has been a long one in the making.

Born in Zagreb, Croatia, Vreš' basketball travels have taken her from her hometown to Sweden and all the way to American University in Washington, D.C., where she played forward for the Eagles before entering the transfer portal this offseason, eventually landing with the Buckeyes to continue her playing career with two years of eligibility remaining.

"A lot of what the coaches were saying about the style of play and where they would see me fit in potentially, that spoke to me for sure," Vreš told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I thought that this is the place where I would be challenged, but I could also contribute to the team as well."

Vreš' foray into the portal came after American won the Patriot League last season and made an appearance in the NCAA tournament, just the third in program history. But it came as Vreš saw significantly less time on the court, averaging just 11.4 minutes per game after playing 18.9 minutes per game the season prior.

Along with less time on the court, Vreš' contributions fell across the board. After starting in seven of American's 11 games in the 2020-21 season, she opened just two last year as she shot just 36.4 percent from the field and 30.8 percent from deep, down from 60.3 and 61.9 percent, respectively, compared to the prior season.

"Our goal was always to win the Patriot League, and we did," she said. "We made it to the (NCAA) tournament. That was a big thing for that school. I'm very proud to have been a part of that. My teammates were great, the coaches really did everything they could for us to make

it that far."

Facing the prospect of returning to American or testing the waters elsewhere, Vreš – like some of her previous moves in life – opted to set sail.

"At that point, I just felt like I could stay at American, a great academic institution. We definitely had a chance to make something big again on the court and that would be very comfortable, or I could go seek more growth," she said. "That's ultimately what I ended up choosing, to put myself in an uncomfortable situation again in order to grow somewhere."

It was at Ohio State where Vreš found that opportunity for growth, taking her time with her decision but finding that head coach Kevin McGuff's program provided the best situation among the schools she was considering.

"Ohio State reached out, and (assistant coach Wesley Brooks) was the first person I talked to from the school," she said. "He told me about what they're looking for and the style of play and what the rest of the team is like. I felt like this could be good, but I definitely didn't make any early decisions."

"I wanted to visit the campus. I wanted to see what everything is like. I wanted to meet the coaches in person and some of the people on the team. Once that happened, I gathered at home with my circle of people and talked everything through – the pros and cons of this school vs. other schools – and ultimately decided that this is a chance that I couldn't really pass on."

McGuff couldn't pass on the opportunity, either, excited to add someone of Vreš' 6-3 stature considering the lack of experienced forwards on Ohio State's roster, at least entering the season.

"Karla, we brought in – obviously she's got the size but also the skill to give us some depth with our post play," McGuff said. "We're really happy to be able to

bring her in."

Beyond the connections she forged with her coaches and teammates, Vreš found some added comfort in Ohio State's fast-paced play that ranks among the quickest teams in the country.

"It reminds me a lot of home," she said. "It will take some adjusting to the different level of the conference, obviously, and everything we do here, but I like it. I think that's the first and most important step for me to be competitive with everybody."

That reminder of home dates back to when Vreš started playing basketball at 11 years old and eventually made the move to Sweden, where she lived in the 24,000-person settlement of Visby, which makes up the majority of the population of Gotland, the largest island of Sweden.

"You're at a new team, new school, learning a new language and everything," she said. "Luckily, I could already speak English because I started learning that at 6 years old, so that helped a lot in the process of learning Swedish. But it was definitely a shock. I think that basketball helped me get into those groups of people and get myself more familiar with the surroundings and everything."

Vreš continued moving around Sweden for different basketball opportunities and played for the Croatian National Team, picking up some extensive world experience before deciding to come to the United States to pursue Division I basketball. There was a notable difference between playing basketball at the club level and in the NCAA, both in terms of rules and the competition, and it was a major adjustment for Vreš.

"It started with small things, like some of the rules are different like the shot clock," she said. "There are some other

small things like lining up for free-throw shots, all those things. I didn't know that right away, so it was shocking. We would play in practice and somebody's like, 'No, you're doing that wrong.'

"Plus over there, playing club basketball, you play with people of all ages, so I was usually the youngest one. All of my teams in general, I would play with people who are like 35 and up. So then coming here and playing with people my age and younger than me was an adjustment

as well, stepping into that new role as more of a leader, more of a person who already had some experience compared to some of the kids coming from high school in the States."

Along with the ability to provide some depth in the post for Ohio State with forward Rebeka Mikulášiková as the only returning forward

this season, Vreš' ability to communicate with her teammates and coaches – one sparked by her multilingual nature and experience playing at multiple levels – was a considerable draw.

"We talked about me being a really good communicator on the court and how that would definitely help me acclimate, but also in everything we do because it requires a lot of communication," she said. "That's something that I know coming in, I can do no matter what. Those are two big things, helping out in that position and communicating."

That help has been to the benefit of Mikulášiková, who has been one of the leaders at Ohio State – along with guard Rikki Harris, whom Vreš specifically cited as being "great" – who have helped Vreš feel acclimated to her new home. While Vreš' home in Zagreb, Croatia, and Mikulášiková's in Nitra, Slovakia, are separated by the borders of several countries and nearly 300 miles, their similar backgrounds helped the pair connect once Vreš arrived on campus this offseason.

"She was the first person I met in terms of the team when I got on campus for my visit," Vreš said. "There are a lot of similarities with our upbringing and everything and where we come from, which is a lot of fun."

She has yet to become a consistent part of Ohio State's rotation, appearing in just five games this season with just 11:40 of time on the court to her name, but it's all according to plan as she looks to find her place for the Buckeyes.

"I think this year is going to be all about me finding a role on the team, whether that's on the court or if that's off the court, communicating and helping in any other way with the experience that I do have," she said. "So it's just finding that role for this first year, because I do have two years of eligibility, and then see where that takes me. I'm definitely open to filling out any role that's going to help my team the most."



Karla Vreš

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Buckeyes and Spartans Return Focus To Games

Nearly two months of off-ice drama culminated with Ohio State and Michigan State meeting on the Value City Arena ice on Jan. 6.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"Two good hockey teams came out and played hockey, and that's it," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik.

He spoke after the No. 12 Buckeyes' 3-1 win against the 14th-ranked Spartans in their first encounter since Nov. 11 in East Lansing, Mich., when Ohio State senior forward Kamil Sadlocha directed racial slurs toward Michigan State's Jagger Joshua, an African-American forward and the brother of former Buckeye player Dakota Joshua.

That had been the focal point leading to the matchup, but the subplot was the Spartans swept the Buckeyes – 4-2 and 4-3 – in the November series.

"We talked about it," Ohio State senior captain Jake Wise said following the series-opening win in Columbus. "We definitely didn't forget it. There hasn't been many games or weekends that we've been swept since I've been here, so it was definitely memorable, and now you get a second chance. We wanted to bounce back and especially start the second half (of the season) off on the right foot."

The Buckeyes (14-7-1, 7-5-0) accomplished their goal the next night with a 6-0 pounding of the Spartans (12-11-1, 6-7-1) for their fifth straight win to move a point ahead of them into third place in the conference with 21 points. Minnesota leads with 30 points, followed by Penn State with 22.

"We had more of a complete game tonight," Rohlik said on Jan. 7. "I thought we started great last night. They had a great push and we kind of lost our way a little bit. Tonight, we stayed there for close to 60 minutes. That was good to see."

Overview

To recap what happened during Ohio State's last trip to Michigan State, Sadlocha was ejected from the game because a linesman heard the comments, which reportedly were making reference to Joshua about Curious George, a book about an orphaned monkey. An investigation by the Big Ten backed the decision, but the conference's report indicated it did not take further action "due to the absence of indisputable evidence presented to the conference."

Sadlocha played the next series against Notre Dame, so Joshua later went on Twitter to express his disappointment in the conference and Ohio State for not suspending Sadlocha. In the ensuing days, a firestorm of criticism forced the school to announce Sadlocha had been sent home for the remainder of the semester, and director of athletics Gene Smith offered a

public apology to Joshua.

With that backdrop and the two-game set against Michigan State in Columbus looming, Rohlik said prior to the series that Sadlocha had returned to the team after the holiday break but that he would not play against the Spartans.

When asked by Buckeye Sports Bulletin if that was to avoid any incidents, Rohlik said that was part of it, but also that Sadlocha was not ready to play after a long layoff.

"I think a little bit of everything," the coach said. "I think it should be about the hockey game. And I think it should be about Michigan State playing hockey and about Ohio State playing hockey and I think that's No. 1. And for everybody, that's really the bottom line, and for Kamil to do what he needs to do, and we'll make that decision when he's ready."

"He's had to go through some internal things himself. We're not in his shoes, and he spent a lot of time with his family. I think he feels good being around his teammates, and I think it's a growing thing for all of us."

Rohlik said he has been in constant communication with Michigan State coach Adam Nightingale about Sadlocha's status.

"I think Jagger has done a great job and his teammates have supported him," Nightingale told The State News, the Michigan State student newspaper, on Jan. 3. "On the flip side, I think everyone makes mistakes. I don't think it should be the end of anyone."

"I have faith in Ohio State and their ability to help people change, and I think that at the end of the day, that's why we're here as college coaches. The biggest thing is we are trying to make an impact, and some people make mistakes and it's about moving on. I trust that they've gone through a process where they feel he's ready to be back on the team."

Part of Smith's statement when he issued the apology was the team would complete education in "racial sensitivity, diversity, equity, inclusion and the use of respectful dialog," and Rohlik said that has been ongoing.

"I really think it's an educational piece for all of us, not just in the game of hockey, but in life and everything we do," Rohlik said. "We're trying to educate. We're trying to teach and to work through the process. Not just (Sadlocha) but our whole team, and I think we're trying to be part of the solution and we're moving forward. And I think, really, that's the bottom line."

Wise said the educational component has been beneficial.

"I think it has been really important, and it's been really important for us as a group, too," he said. "It's made us a bit closer. Like I've said before, it's a terrible situation. But the only way to get through it was to kind of really get closer and become even better as a team, and I think that's what we're trying to do, just be better as a team in all aspects."

Wise said the players were happy to have Sadlocha back, but he repeatedly emphasized at the media availability on Jan. 4 that Sadlocha's actions were abhorrent.

"It's tough and obviously an awful situa-

tion," Wise said. "You don't want any of that in hockey at all or in society."

Sweep Revenge

In the series opener, Tate Singleton gave the Buckeyes the lead at 1:53 of the first period. For a team that had not played since Dec. 17, it was the type of start needed.

"It's nice to get the first goal," Rohlik said. "You could see we were off for a long time there."

Ohio State would never trail in the two games. The Buckeyes made it 2-0 with a power-play goal by Stephen Halliday in the second period. After Jesse Tucker scored for the Spartans at 9:39 of third, Joe Dunlap clinched the win with an empty-net goal with 16 seconds left.

In the second game, it was all Buckeyes as they scored three times in the first and twice in the second. Sophomore Jakub Dobeš made 32 saves for his second shutout of the season and fifth in his career. Dunlap scored twice, and Halliday had three assists.

There were the usual skirmishes and scrums with the Spartans but no more than what would be expected when teams play a second series.

"There's always a little more intensity because we've already played and we know each other," Wise said prior to the games.

Nonetheless, the conference wanted to make sure things did not get out of hand because of the incident in East Lansing. Big Ten coordinator of officials Steve Pitrowski and legendary retired Michigan coach Red Berenson, a special advisor to Big Ten hockey, were present at Value City Arena for the first game, which had four minor penalties to each team.

"It just felt like a normal game to us," Wise said. "We were just ready to play, especially after the long break. We're excited to get back, so I thought was a good game. Both teams played hard and it was clean out there. So it was good."

In the rematch, Michigan State took eight minors – five for cross-checking – while two of the three infractions for Ohio State were cross-checks. Joshua, who was tied for the team lead with seven goals, played both games but was not a factor. He took two shots in the opener and received a penalty for cross-checking late in the second game.

The attention for both teams can return to the ice, but the Buckeyes will likely be in the spotlight when, and if, Sadlocha next plays, keeping in mind the possibility of a conference playoff series between Ohio State and Michigan State.

Next

The Buckeyes go on the road for two series – against Michigan on Jan. 13-14 and Wisconsin on Jan. 20-21 – then have an open weekend before hosting Penn State on Feb. 3 and 4.

The Wolverines are ranked seventh in the USCHO.com poll, but in the all-important Pairwise Rankings that determines the 16-team NCAA tournament field, Ohio State is sixth while Michigan checks in at seventh.

No Ordinary Joe

Dunlap, a junior forward from Windham, N.H., is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for December after garnering six points (four goals, two assists) in four games.

He was held scoreless against Penn State on Dec. 2 but had a goal vs. the Nit-tany Lions the next night in a 4-3 victory. Dunlap scored against Bowling Green on Dec. 16 in a 5-2 win and followed with two goals and two assists in a 9-4 rout of the Falcons a day later.

For recaps of the Bowling Green and Michigan State series, go to the Buckeye-Sports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For December



Joe Dunlap
Junior Forward
Windham, N.H.

Big Ten Duals Season Under Way For Wrestling

Wrestling season often feels like one long build to March, when conference champions, All-Americans and national champions are all decided within the span of two weeks – particularly at a program like Ohio State, where the best wrestler in each weight class is a near-lock to qualify for the NCAA championships.

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

That doesn't mean head coach Tom Ryan is demanding anything less than the best from his athletes as the Big Ten dual meet season gets under way. And while No. 7 Ohio State beat Indiana 26-13 on the road on Jan. 6 in the team's first conference dual, Ryan wanted to see more from some of his wrestlers.

"Every time you compete, you're looking for the perfect outing in terms of effort and skill and intensity and decision making," Ryan told BSB on Jan. 7. "And we didn't get that, but we saw some things that were positive."

Two Buckeye wrestlers fresh off injuries suffered upset losses against the

Hoosiers, who started just two ranked grapplers in the dual to seven for Ohio State. Senior heavyweight Tate Orndorff, ranked 15th in his weight class, lost to Indiana's Jacob Bullock via a 7-2 decision.

Redshirt freshman Paddy Gallagher, ranked 18th at 157 pounds, fell at the hands of No. 20 Derek Gilcher in a 5-4 battle. After falling behind 2-0 early, Gilcher closed the bout with an escape and two takedowns to secure victory.

"You've got a couple of guys that are coming off injuries. They're struggling, their bodies aren't healthy," Ryan said. "They missed training, and it showed. Paddy was a tough loss. He didn't have the energy to continue to execute the way he needed to, and the same with Tate. They've been hurt, they've been missing wrestling training sessions, and it's a competitive sport. If you're off a little bit you struggle."

That didn't mean the Buckeyes were devoid of top-notch performances, as the two highest-ranked wrestlers on the roster delivered in big ways. Senior Sammy Sasso, the No. 4 wrestler at 149 pounds, pinned Indiana's Graham Rooks in under a minute. Senior Kaleb Romero, No. 5 at 184 pounds, did the same to Drayton Harris just 59 seconds into the second period of the match.

"Sasso and Romero continue to lead

us," Ryan said. "Both got pins, and we want to dominate. The end goal is to dominate. The more you win by, the more the team can win by. So those two wrestled really well."

Ohio State freshman phenom Jesse Mendez, the nation's No. 1 recruit in the class of 2022 and currently the No. 15 wrestler at 133 pounds, returned from injury and recorded a dominant 20-6 major decision over Indiana's Henry Porter. Porter avoided a technical fall by one point, with his six points all coming on escapes.

"(Mendez) wrestled really well for being out as long as he was," Ryan said.

Heading into the winter break, Ryan stated that his team's top goal was to get healthy, and Ohio State is still trying to get back to its full complement of starters to fill out its lineup. While Gallagher and Mendez returned, Gavin Hoffman (No. 26 at 197 pounds) and Malik Heinselman (No. 8 at 125) both missed the dual with Indiana due to injuries that popped up recently. Carson Kharchla (No. 8 at 165) also remains out.

"It's kind of been two steps forward, one step back," Ryan said. "You get back Paddy, you get back Jesse, you lose Hoffman, you lose Malik. You lose Carson. The challenge is twofold. One, you don't have your starter in there. But two, every person that improves by training with that partner suffers as well. So when you have 33 guys in your room and four, five, six of your best guys are injured, that affects 12 people."

Two freshmen from Ohio State's talented 2022 recruiting class filled in for Heinselman and Hoffman, though both lost. Brendan McCrone faced off with Indiana's Jacob Moran and dropped a 4-2 bout while Seth Shumate, the No. 3 overall prospect from the class, wrestled up a weight to fill in for Hoffman and lost a major decision, 10-2, though Ryan said the coaching staff was impressed with his willingness to wrestle up for the team.

Junior Isaac Wilcox wrestled up a weight class to fill in for Kharchla at 165 pounds, earning his second win of the season over Indiana's Nick South after starting 1-3, though he does have a 7-2 record wrestling unattached. Wilcox registered four takedowns to leap out to a 9-4 lead, hanging on for a 10-7 victory.

"It was really good to see Isaac just open up and wrestle freely out there up a weight at 165," Ryan said.

The good news, Ryan noted, is that he hopes to have all his wrestlers back in the fold by the team's dual at Rutgers on Jan. 15.

Buckeyes Take Two Of Three At Collegiate Duals

Two weeks prior to Ohio State's dual against Indiana, the Buckeyes faced off with three opponents at the Collegiate Duals in New Orleans from Dec. 19-20. The Buckeyes dominated Lock Haven, 39-3, before falling to No. 13 Northern Iowa by a 19-13 margin. The following day, the Buckeyes placed third in the du-

als with a 23-12 win over No. 20 Lehigh.

Heinselman recorded a ranked victory over No. 20 Anthony Noto, and Sasso collected another pin en route to the team's win against Lock Haven.

As for the loss to Northern Iowa, UNI got upsets at 149 pounds and at heavyweight, with Sasso falling to No. 12 Colin Realbuto via a 9-7 decision, followed by Orndorff going down to No. 14 Tyrell Gordon, 3-2.

Freshman Nic Bouzakis, filling in for the then-injured Mendez at 133 pounds, recorded the highlight of the meet for Ohio State by beating No. 12 Kyle Bisceglia in a 9-6 decision. Following a scoreless first and second period, Bouzakis rallied from a 5-3 deficit with a takedown and four-point near-fall to leap ahead 9-5 and hold on from there.

A new rule allows freshmen to wrestle in five meets attached to their teams and still maintain their redshirt, which has allowed Ryan and company to evaluate him on bigger, more intense stages. Bouzakis was ranked the No. 2 overall prospect in the 2022 class behind Mendez.

"It's been good to see him there," Ryan said. "He really stepped up big against UNI. He's managing what all 18-year-olds manage when you come to college. It is very hard. The training is very hard. The schooling is different – you're in a number of different classes. You've got to manage your free time better. You've got more of it than you've ever had. And he's learning."

Romero grabbed a ranked win against No. 21 Tate Samuelson to help ensure Ohio State's win over Lehigh. Sasso and Smith earned bonus points for the team with major-decision wins over their respective unranked opponents. It was the 300th career dual-meet win for Ryan.

Each meet between now and March is really a build to that stage, Ryan said, and every chance to wrestle competition at the Division I level is a chance for his players to learn, grow and fix holes in their game.

"In a wrestling schedule in general, everything leading up to the Big Ten championships is about learning," Ryan said before the collegiate duals on Dec. 14. "It's about preparation for the Big Tens and the NCAAAs. So in saying that, this weekend is just a chance to wrestle three Division I teams in a really cool event."

Health was the team's focus during the two weeks off between collegiate duals and the dual meet at Indiana, and it remains so until everyone is back in the lineup. When the Buckeyes are at 100 percent, they're among the most deep and talented outfits in the country.

"We're ranked third when we have our best lineup in there, so we've got to get our best lineup in there," Ryan said. "We don't have that right now."

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Romero's Maturity Setting Him Apart For OSU

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Kaleb Romero cracked a joke at the beginning of the season: "It's hard to stay healthy when you're 36 years old."

The Mechanicsburg, Ohio, native may only be 24 in reality, but so much has happened in his Ohio State wrestling career that it certainly may feel like he's been in the program long enough to be in his mid-30s. There was also a hint of truth in Romero's statement, because head coach Tom Ryan views him as one of the most mentally and emotionally mature wrestlers he's worked with.

"When you live your whole life the way he has, the discipline and the habits are so ingrained in him, you really don't veer off of them," Ryan said. "They've worked for you in your life and you continue to do them."

In his sixth and final season in Columbus, the 2022 All-American is looking to close his collegiate career as a national title contender while maintaining the humble focus on the present moment that's earned him his greatest successes.

Romero made his first impressions on Ryan while still in high school. A successful multi-sport athlete, Romero starred at quarterback for Mechanicsburg, leading the Indians to a 12-1 record his senior year. He completed 64.5 percent of his passes that season for 1,216 yards and 16 touchdowns with just two interceptions, adding 1,620 yards and 28 touchdowns rushing at a dazzling 13.4 yards per carry. That all came in addition to being a four-time state wrestling champion after pinning his opponent in the state finals as a senior in 52 seconds.

Having already drawn a commitment from Romero to wrestle at the next level, while Ryan watched one of the 184-pounder's football games, he remarked to Romero's parents that he was concerned he'd abandon the wrestling program to pursue football. He may have only been half-kidding.

"When I recruited him, I thought initially, 'This guy might play football,'" Ryan said. "I went to watch him at a high school football game, and if my memory is correct I believe he had 160 yards on three carries. He was an option quarterback. He scored every time he ran. I was standing next to his father, and I'm like, 'Jeepers creepers, he's got to stop doing that. Football coaches are going to come after him. He needs to wrestle.'"

Off the mat, the bond Romero had with his mother, father, sisters and grandparents, alongside his reputation as a straight-A student, stood out to Ryan. On the mat, however, Romero was ranked by Intermat as the No. 12 ranked wrestler in the country exiting high school, as well as No. 1 both overall in Ohio and at 170 pounds nationally.

Romero's always been one to live his life day-by-day, he stated, remaining focused on attacking what's in front of him to the best of his ability. That's helped him excel in multiple areas.

"I've always approached it that way," Romero told BSB "There's no reason to try to look into the future and guess what it's going to be like – you never know. That causes anxiety too, or stress, so you might as well



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

ONE LAST RUN — Sixth-year senior Kaleb Romero (right), who wrestles at 184 pounds for the Buckeyes, is looking for a national championship to cap off his impressive career at Ohio State.

try to live in the moment, live in the present and take each day as it comes rather than stressing about the future."

That day-to-day approach got tested early in his career at Ohio State. Romero dealt with a tough weight cut to 165 pounds and redshirted his first season. Then an injury slowed him down before he got replaced in the lineup as a redshirt freshman.

"That was really hard for him," Ryan said. "But to me, he always saw things from an aerial view and not just his view, and that's very difficult for an 18- to 22-year-old to see. It's difficult for anybody to see. He was able to make sense of our decisions, and he was able to look at it from a lens other than himself. And that's obviously a mature way to see things."

The main thing that Romero said helps him keep that perspective is his faith. A devout Christian, he maintains the mind-set that if he stays focused on what's in front of him, God will take care of the rest.

"My faith, staying in the present, reading up on scripture, going to Bible studies, just understanding that God has a plan (keeps me grounded)," Romero said. "We're kind of out of control. If it's meant to be, it will be."

"He's centered," Ryan said. "I think when you realize that there is a power greater than you that you can lean on and that the world doesn't revolve around you, and you have a bigger sense of your why and how

you got here, I think it's very calming. It's very reassuring. And he has that in his life."

His redshirt sophomore season is when Romero started to show his true potential, according to Ryan. Romero was the No. 6 wrestler in the country at 174 pounds following the 2020 Big Ten championships. Despite All-American projections, he didn't get a chance to compete at the NCAA tournament that season with the event suddenly canceled following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following season, he suffered a disappointing 2-2 finish at the NCAA championships. An upset elsewhere in the bracket caused him to run into the No. 5 seed during his first match of wrestlebacks, and a 6-1 defeat to Michigan's Logan Massa eliminated Romero from the tournament.

Finally, in 2022, he claimed All-American status, with a 13-4 major-decision win over Iowa State's Marcus Coleman, the eighth seed in the tournament, earning him the designation. He earned the team's "Most Courageous" award for his efforts, and following the season, he decided to use his COVID-19 waiver to return for one final season in Columbus.

"We're excited he came back for his senior year," Ryan said. "He's already been an All-American. He's a legitimate NCAA title contender, and he continues to improve. He's got maybe 70 days left in his college

wrestling career and he's really focused right now. He looks strong, he looks powerful, has good skills."

Having him back is also great for leadership in the wrestling room, Ryan added, even if he's one of six seniors in Ohio State's starting lineup. Romero earned a black shirt back in his redshirt sophomore season, given only to the team's wrestlers who are deserving of "elite distinction" for their leadership and ability.

"He's a great example for the team," Ryan said. "He's not arrogant. He's down to earth, he's humble. He's relatively quiet. He's funny. He's got great friendships here, so he's a great example."

Outside of maintaining his health, Romero's top goal entering his final campaign was to fine-tune small details in his approach and set up his best moves in matches.

"Probably the main thing is attacking my strengths," Romero said. "That's something me and the coaches have been talking about. As long as a lot of us have been in college, you're not going to learn a whole lot more wrestling in a few months. So right now, I'm just making sure my conditioning is where it needs to be, my strength is where it needs to be, then in wrestling, attacking where I'm strong at."

Romero's off to a solid start. He was ranked No. 5 at 184 pounds as of Jan. 4 and held a 15-3 record – the best winning percentage of his career – with 10 bonus-point victories, including two pins. He picked up a ranked win over No. 21 Tate Samuelson of Lehigh at the Collegiate Duals in New Orleans and fought No. 2 Parker Keckeisen of Northern Iowa to 3-1 loss at the same event. He and the team hope all of it builds to an NCAA title in March.

"We're going to miss him," Ryan said. "But we want to see him go out with a national championship."

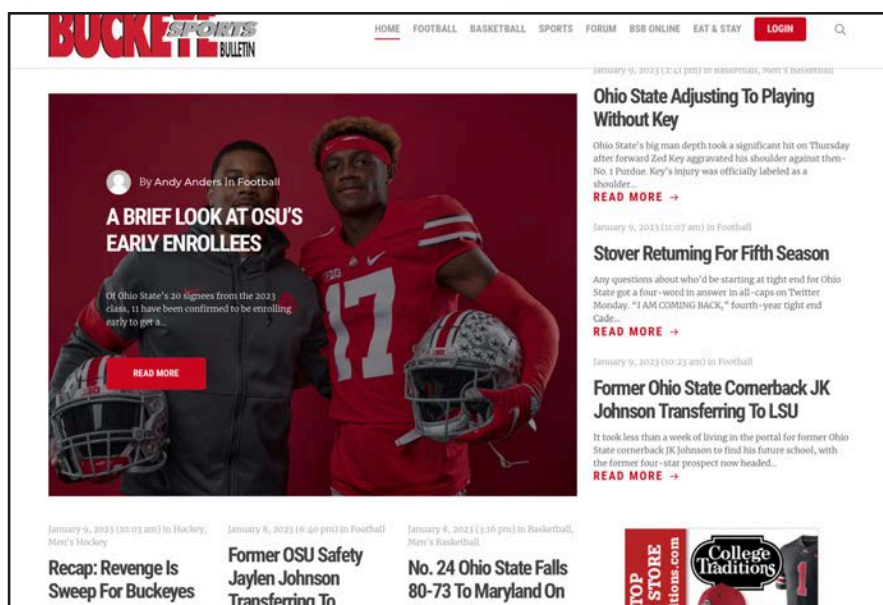
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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2022 FOOTBALL

Sept. 3 NOTRE DAME, W 21-10; **10** ARKANSAS STATE, W 45-12; **17** TOLEDO, W, 77-21.; **24** WISCONSIN, W 52-21.

Oct. 1 RUTGERS, W 49-10; **8** at Michigan State, W 49-20; **22** IOWA, 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, L 42-41.

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 (10-5, 2-2)

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, L 89-84 (OT); **21** MAINE, W 95-61; **29** ALABAMA A&M, W 90-59.

Jan. 1 at Northwestern, W 73-57; **5** PURDUE, L 71-69; **8** at Maryland, L 80-73; **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 (17-0, 6-0)

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, W 82-57; **20** at South Florida, W 88-86 (OT); **21** at Oregon, W 84-67; **28** at Northwestern, W 81-48; **31** MICHIGAN, W 66-57.

Jan. 5 at Minnesota, W 83-71; **8** ILLINOIS, W 87-81; **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 (14-7-1, 7-5)

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, W 5-2; **17** BOWLING GREEN, W 9-4.

Jan. 6-7 MICHIGAN STATE, W 3-1, W 6-0; **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 (18-2-2, 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, W 4-3, W 4-0; **30-31** at Lindenwood, W 9-1, W 6-0.

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. USC, W 3-0; **8** NCAA Regional Semifinal vs. Minnesota, W 3-1; **10** NCAA Regional Final vs. Texas, L 3-1.

Peach Bowl A Frustrating End For Buckeyes

The success standard for the Ohio State football program is set very high. Due to the tradition, domination of the Big Ten from 2002 through 2020 and final yearly rankings, the Ohio State Buckeyes are among the elite of college football programs in the country.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

The ultimate expectations every year, as set by coaches and fans alike, are to win the Big Ten, beat Michigan, make it to the playoffs, and win the national championship. To end up as the best college football team in the country is a difficult task. It takes outstanding talent, excellent coaching, and a favorable schedule. Even considering those factors, you have to add such things as limited injuries, officiating, and good old “lady luck” to go your way in order to win it all.

The Buckeyes of 2022 had their chance to reach that lofty goal of being the nation’s very best college football team, but in the end, the only major goal that was accomplished was making it to the playoffs. That in itself is a major feat, to be selected as one of the best four teams out of 131 FBS football programs.

However, the sting of losing embarrassingly to your archrival for two years in a row, along with getting beat in the Peach Bowl after holding a 14-point, fourth-quarter lead, put a huge damper on an otherwise exciting and very momentous football season.

Peach Bowl Frustration

Ryan Day and his offensive staff devised an excellent game plan for moving the ball and putting points on the board against the nation’s second-best defense against the run and 11th overall defense.

The Buckeyes rushed the football for 119 yards, below their season average of 192.4 yards but more than the 80.0 yards per game Georgia gave up per game. The Buckeye backfield had been decimated with injuries this season, and it would be reserve running back Dallan Hayden and converted receiver Xavier Johnson carrying the load at running back for the game. The Buckeyes’ top rusher for the season, Miyan Williams, would only have three carries in the Peach Bowl.

Most surprising of all in terms of the running game for the Buckeyes was the performance of C.J. Stroud, who kept some drives alive with his feet by carrying the ball 12 times. Adjusted for sacks, Stroud netted 71 yards for the evening. The bottom line is that the Buckeye running attack was good enough to beat the Bulldogs.

Both through the air and on the ground, Stroud was the most dynamic player on the field for either team. As good as his stock was before the Peach Bowl, it soared by the way he managed the offense, threw the ball and maneuvered in the pocket. The outcome of the game might have been different

if Stroud’s top receiver, Marvin Harrison Jr., had been able to finish or the overruled targeting call hadn’t happened. The Buckeyes would amass just 97 yards of offense after Harrison went out.

Stroud likely secured his spot as being the first quarterback taken in this year’s NFL draft. Despite not beating Michigan as a starter, Stroud proved himself to be one of the very best Buckeye quarterbacks of all time, especially throwing the football.

The major disappointment of the night was the giving up of big plays on defense. For the second game in a row, the Jim Knowles-led defense gave up too many plays of 20 plus yards to the opposition – 10 plays, to be exact. After holding the Bulldogs to just 32 total yards and no points in the third quarter, the Buckeyes gave up 18 points – including a 76-yard touchdown pass – in the last 11 minutes of play.

Jim Knowles has done an admirable job with the defensive unit, but things must get better toward the end of the season against tough opponents. There is no doubt the Buckeyes must improve the quality of play and personnel in the secondary. A defense that depends on sound man-to-man play by its corners and versatility vs. the run and pass by the safeties has to get better. The next few months are key for the Buckeyes to recruit or get portal talent good enough to fit into the defensive scheme.

The Peach Bowl proved that “it’s not how you start, but how you finish” is the mark of greatness. To put up 467 yards of offense, 41 points and 24 first downs without any turnovers is enough offense to win a college football game.

Replacing C.J. Stroud

During this season, including the Peach Bowl, there were 410 passes thrown by Ohio State, with Stroud accounting for 389 of them. As a matter of fact, Stroud was the only quarterback to play in five of the last six games, with Kyle McCord making a relief appearance against Indiana.

Replacing one of the most talented players in Ohio State football history at the quarterback position is a major task of Day and his staff for the 2023 season. At this point, the battle for the top spot at quarterback will be between McCord, Devin Brown, and the incoming Lincoln Kienholz.

McCord has the inside track going into spring practice due to his experience in terms of playing time. McCord played in seven games this fall and completed 16 of 20 passes for 190 yards and a touchdown. Like Stroud, he is primarily a drop-back quarterback and has been impressive in his limited number of snaps, and he seems to have the confidence of the staff.

As with McCord, Brown was used in mop-up duties but only appeared in the Toledo and Rutgers games for a total of 15 snaps. Even though Brown has not thrown a pass in his career as a Buckeye, he was a high-profile quarterback recruit, throwing for nearly 8,000 yards and 85 touchdowns during his high school career and winning a state championship. Brown was trained and coached by former Ohio State quarterback Joe Germaine in Arizona before his

move to Utah for his senior year.

The third candidate for the starting quarterback position for next season is new recruit Kienholz from South Dakota. Kienholz (6-3, 185) has impressive credentials in throwing for 3,422 yards and 46 touchdowns his senior year. Kienholz added another 1,436 yards and 24 touchdowns running the football. Even though South Dakota isn’t exactly the mecca of high school football, Kienholz’s accomplishments warranted him the South Dakota Player of the Year honors. Kienholz arguably offers the best dual-threat potential of the three quarterbacks vying for the starting job.

Whoever wins the starting quarterback position this spring also creates another problem for Buckeye coaches in keeping the other two around for next fall. The current transfer portal that opened in early December ends Jan. 18, but the next one begins on May 1 and is open until May 15. Buckeye fans remember well when Joe Burrow transferred to LSU after Dwayne Haskins won the quarterback job in 2018. As we have seen, the transfer portal can be both a positive and a negative for football programs across the country.

Promising Schedule In 2023

Until portal decisions are made, the Buckeye coaches do not really know – with the exception of graduating seniors – who

will return, who will declare for the NFL draft and who will transfer. Those who return for next season will face a schedule that is promising to grow on for a new starting quarterback and other new starters.

The first real test that will face the Buckeyes comes on Sept. 23 at Notre Dame, where Marcus Freeman and the Fighting Irish will be seeking revenge on Freeman’s alma mater. Another former Buckeye, Luke Fickell, will also go head-to-head with his former school in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 28. It should be an emotional game for the Badgers, but it is tough to imagine they will have enough firepower to beat Ohio State in Fickell’s initial season as head coach.

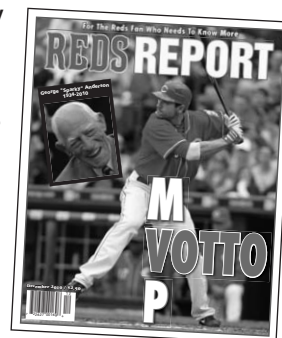
Ohio State will have to earn every victory in 2023, and some games will be competitive. In reality, it should boil down to the annual Big Ten finale against Michigan, this season in Ann Arbor on Nov. 25. It’s a must-win for Day, who hasn’t beaten the Wolverines the last two seasons. To many Buckeye fans, that major team goal is the most important one. Beating The Team Up North and going on to win the Big Ten championship should earn the Buckeyes a spot in the playoffs once more.

It sounds easy, but everyone knows the task is hard to accomplish. One game at a time, no stumbles along the way, limited injuries, and a little of that “lady luck,” and dreams can become reality.

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OSU Shows Its Mettle In Peach Bowl Loss

In the end, the injuries concentrated so much at two very key positions – receiver and running back – were too much for Ohio State to overcome.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

In fact, it's hard to believe that given that adversity, Ohio State still came up just a field goal short – and quite easily could have beaten the defending national champion and undefeated Georgia Bulldogs.

Think about it. By the time things were on the line during the second half, and in some cases for much of the season, Ohio State was without its top two running backs, top two wide receivers and starting tight end, yet still had a chance to advance to the national championship game.

No Jaxon Smith-Njigba, the guy who caught 15 passes for 347 yards and three touchdowns in last year's Rose Bowl.

No Marvin Harrison Jr., who quite possibly will end up being regarded as the best receiver to ever play for Ohio State.

No Cade Stover, whose 36 catches

on the season were the most by an Ohio State tight end in more than a quarter-century, since Rickey Dudley's 37 catches in 1995.

No TreVeyon Henderson, who ran for 1,248 yards as a freshman a year ago and entered his second season with a better career yards-per-carry average than any of the top 25 running backs in OSU history.

And no Miyan Williams, Henderson's very capable but often injured backup who some reasonably believe might have even been better than Henderson, when healthy.

That's five prime-time offensive weapons at end or running back not at Ryan Day's disposal when it mattered most. Yes, it's up to a quality team to have depth. But depth can only be so deep, while also keeping players happy enough to stay in this era of loosened transfer rules.

Consider running back.

With Williams and Henderson out, Day turned to a seldom-used freshman (Dallan Hayden), a walk-on wide receiver (Xavier Johnson) and a transfer linebacker (Chip Trayanum) to handle the carries over the last two games.

Why wasn't Ohio State three-deep with star-power running backs?

Steele Chambers, who averaged 7.9 yards per carry over his first two seasons at Ohio State, switched to linebacker a

year ago because there wasn't room for him at running back.

But even with all this adversity, it still hurts to lose. In fact, in a way it's a tougher loss to take than if Ohio State was simply beaten by a better team.

This was a case of Ohio State showing it had the talent to beat the nation's top-ranked team. The game was within its grasp until a long field-goal attempt fluttered left at the end. Make no mistake, however. Ohio State proved it is at the top of the college football world, right there with Georgia and maybe another team or two.

Was the defense frustrating? Yes.

But I've come to believe – like it or not – when the best teams play the best, there are going to be a lot of points scored. The best offenses simply are better than the best defenses these days. It's a change I don't like. But it's a change that has happened.

In the eight playoff championship games before this season, the losing team has averaged 24.6 points a game.

In this year's semifinals, Michigan scored 45 and lost; Ohio State scored 41 and lost. Georgia allowed just 166 points in its first 13 games (12.8 a game), then gave up 41 to Ohio State and moved on to the title game.

Michigan's defense was nearly as good this season, allowing 174 points (13.4 a game), but then let TCU put 51 on the board.

About Stroud

I wasn't always in the C.J. Stroud camp. I liked what I saw from afar of Kyle McCord when he got the chance to start a game last season. And, who knows, in a couple of years McCord may even be considered the better of the two.

But I clearly was wrong to question Stroud. Stroud's play in the Peach Bowl ranks right up there with the best big-game performances by any Buckeye quarterback ever.

Stroud's numbers were impressive, though not huge (23 of 34 for 348 yards and four touchdowns).

Beyond the numbers was the accuracy, the difficulty of some of the throws, the improvisations to keep plays alive, and the running. Mix all that together, and it was what I believe to be Stroud's best game as a Buckeye. And he did it at the very biggest moment.

Playoffs Ahead

The 12-game playoff can't get here soon enough, but we have to go through one more year of the current setup before the new playoff system is installed for the 2024 season.

I've grown tired of the conjecture of who will make the narrow four-team playoff field. No one really knows who deserves to be there until the games are played, despite the best efforts of any selection committee.

Ohio State wouldn't have made the

playoffs if USC had won the Pac-12 title game. But we saw OSU was deserving of the bid and USC wasn't, as the Trojans closed out with a Cotton Bowl loss to Tulane. Yes, Tulane.

Back in 2014, Ohio State snuck into the playoffs as the fourth seed and won it.

People questioned TCU this year. But TCU showed it belonged.

The 12-team playoff will still come with subjective calls. But in terms of leaving out a legitimate title contender, the odds will be greatly diminished.

More will be decided on the field. Win a major conference and you're in. (Automatic bids will go to the six highest-ranked conference champions.) Yet, the other good teams will be included as well.

After the six highest ranked champions, the other spots will go to the six highest-ranked remaining teams.

What this would have meant for Ohio State had the 12-team system been in place since the first year of the playoffs in 2014 is that OSU would have made it every year – the only school to do so.

Here's how this season's bracket would have worked out.

First-round byes to Georgia, Michigan, Clemson and Utah, with each hosting a quarterfinal. (Byes will only go to the top four ranked league champions.)

First-round matchups:

- Kansas State at Tennessee, with the winner to play Georgia.
- Tulane at TCU, with the winner to play Utah.
- USC at Alabama, with the winner to play Michigan.
- Penn State at Ohio State, with the winner to play Clemson.

This Season's Top 10.

1-2 – Georgia or TCU – Our deadline for this issue was ahead of the national title game.

3 – Michigan (13-1) – Everyone else had at least two losses.

4 – Ohio State (11-2) – So close to playing for the title.

T5 – Penn State (11-2) – You'll be hard-pressed to find anyone else ranking the Rose Bowl winner this high. But look at it this way: PSU's only losses were to No. 3 Michigan and No. 4 Ohio State.

T5 – Tennessee (11-2) – Closed out with an impressive win over ACC champion Clemson in the Orange Bowl and has a win over Alabama on its résumé.

7 – Alabama (11-2) – Finished strong in routing Big 12 champion Kansas State in the Sugar Bowl.

8 – Washington (12-2) – We have a serious drop-off here from the first seven, but the Huskies did close out with a win over Texas to end up with just two losses.

9 – USC (11-3) – Two straight losses to wrap up the season.

10 – Clemson (11-3) – Three losses for the Tigers. Buckeye fans won't shed tears about that.



C.J. Stroud.

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Georgia Still On The Buckeyes' Minds

Disappointed but proud.

That's the way I feel after Ohio State's epic battle with Georgia that resulted in a 42-41 Bulldog victory in a CFP semifinal game at the Peach Bowl in Atlanta on Dec. 31.

I know there are some of you who are angry. "The Buckeyes blew the game. Fire Ryan Day. Even more importantly, fire Jim Knowles."

Some of others are also angry. "We were robbed. The officiating is always against us. It was just like the 2019 Clemson game."

Some of you are at peace. "They are our Buckeyes. I love them win or lose."

Me, I'm disappointed but proud.

I'm proud because Ohio State, a team than no one seemed to give a chance to win, played toe-to-toe with the defending national champions and the No. 1 team in the nation and had victory within its grasp.

In the end, maybe I give a slight edge to proud. Am I getting less cynical in my old age?

I give the edge to proud because the team fought and fought and fought until the end. These Buckeyes were a far cry from the ones we last saw in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 26, being humiliated by their archrivals. OK, so the Buckeyes didn't get a chance to play for the national championship by beating Georgia. But they certainly proved that, contrary to popular belief, they are every bit the equal of any SEC rival. They went toe-to-toe with the best of the best. It was like a heavyweight boxing championship – back and forth. Ali-Frazier. In this case there was no knockout. One of the combatants simply outlasted the other.

I'll guarantee you Georgia knows it was in a battle. And I will guarantee you that the Bulldogs know that it could have just as easily been them who had to trudge off the field in defeat.

"Ohio State probably deserved to win the game, but we never quit," Georgia coach Kirby Smart admitted. "We didn't play our best game. Maybe they didn't either."

It's natural to focus on that which came last and remember how Georgia marched through the Buckeye defense on its game-winning drive. And it's even more natural to focus on Noah Ruggles' ugly attempt at the game-winning field goal. But those are just things that we remember better because they came at the end when everything was on the line.

The Buckeyes did plenty of marching of their own, putting a 41-spot and 467 yards on what many felt was the best defense in the country.

When Georgia marched 53 yards late in the first half to take a 24-21 lead, Ohio State went to the two-minute drill and marched 75 yards in just four plays, capped by a dazzling touchdown reception by Xavier Johnson to give Ohio State a 28-24 lead going into the half. When Georgia marched 72-yards late in the fourth quarter for what proved to be the game-winning touchdown, leaving C.J. Stroud and Co. a scant 54 seconds to try to win the game, the Buckeyes marched right down the field again, giving Ruggles the chance to try the game-winning kick.

It was a heavyweight bout. Back and forth.

Special kudos to Stroud. What an impressive showing. Very seldom does a quarterback improve his legacy in a losing cause, but Stroud, haunted by his failure to beat Michigan in two attempts, did just that. I have no doubt that if he had played the way he did against Georgia in The Game this season, he would have won the Heisman Trophy going away, rather than somehow letting it slip from his grasp down the regular-season stretch.

I thought our Rich Exner summed up Stroud's performance well in his column this issue.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

"Beyond the numbers was the accuracy, the difficulty of some of the throws, the patience he showed in the pocket, the improvisations to keep plays alive, and the running," Exner writes. "Mix all that together and it was what I believe Stroud's best game as a Buckeye. And he did it at the very biggest moment."

I know you are going to cringe when you read my next statement.

Even the defense had its moments.

I know, how does a defense that gives up 533 yards have its moments? For one thing, the stop troops forced four field-goal attempts by Jack Podlesny, two of which he missed. A TD on any of those drives and Ruggles never has the shot at the win.

Georgia received the opening kickoff in the third quarter and could have gone back ahead, but the Buckeye defense held them to a three-and-out. In fact, the defenders shut out Georgia in that period, allowing the Bulldogs just 32 yards, helping Ohio State build its lead to 38-24. Then came a rash of big plays for Georgia in the fourth quarter, including a 76-yard touchdown pass from Stetson Bennett to Arian Smith, and it was the Bulldogs' turn to take the lead.

Back and forth.

"All we were talking about was just swinging as hard as we can," Day said. "We did give up some explosive plays again. We did. And it was something that we spent a lot of time talking about is avoiding the big play. I think the difference was, in this game, it didn't demoralize us in this game. We kept swinging and fighting, and we just kept going at it."

Which brings me back to Ruggles. He will always be remembered for missing that game-winning field goal. But there were so many other sequences and happenings that had as much or more to do with the loss than Ruggles' kick. In fact, Ruggles might never have had the opportunity to win the game because of certain sequences and happenings. Don't forget that Podlesny, who came into the game with similar credentials to Ruggles, missed two field goals. His just weren't as visible as that of the Ohio State kicker because they came within the flow of the game. He makes either of those misses and the score late in the fourth quarter is 45-41 and it is Stroud who is left to win the game, not Ruggles.

Back and forth. Disappointed but proud.

Game Tidbits

I know you are going to think I am just saying this, but for the last several columns I have been wanting to include a note stating that I believed Ruggles' range was about 48 yards, but I kept running out of space. I swear. If you happen to be in the office, I'll show you my notes.

Ruggles is like clockwork and I am a huge fan. I just don't think he can hit a 50-yarder, and I think he may know it too, which may have caused him to miss his attempt at winning the Peach Bowl so badly. I don't think he is afraid of the moment. He was as cool as a cucumber when he beat Utah in the final seconds of the Rose Bowl last season, but that was from 19 yards out.

Some will say that the fact that Day took the ball out of Stroud's hands (or feet) on the final possession and ran Dallan Hayden on first down from the Bulldogs 31, a play that resulted in a loss of a yard, forced Ruggles

to attempt the kick from 50 yards. It's a case where if the play works you look like a genius. If it doesn't, we're having this discussion. Day defended his call.

"Two timeouts left, any couple yards right there could add to the field goal, and that was the idea," Day said of giving the ball to Hayden, who averaged 4.8 yards a carry for the game. "We didn't quite execute it as well as we would like to, but I wouldn't change that call."

Stroud agreed.

"It was a good call, great call," Stroud said.

Ruggles has had four misses in his time at Ohio State. This season he missed from 39 yards against Notre Dame, 53 yards vs. Penn State and the 50-yarder against Georgia. Last season he missed from 38 yards against Michigan State. While with the Buckeyes, Ruggles was 11 of 11 from 40 to 49 yards, connecting from as far as 46 yards twice last season (both against Nebraska when he helped the Buckeyes win with four field goals) and 46 yards (Iowa), 47 yards twice (Maryland and Michigan) and 48 yards (Georgia) this season.

• One thing that I have written about many times in this space is my disdain for ball-carriers trying to leap over defenders. I have always maintained that it is an invitation for injury, and rarely does it result in significant additional yardage.

Well, we saw my theory illustrated in the Peach Bowl when tight end Cade Stover attempted to leap over a Bulldog defender late in the first quarter on a 7-yard reception. Rather than gaining any additional yardage, he ended up in the hospital.

Cade Stover is a 6-4, 255-pound former linebacker. If he had just put his shoulder down, he would have probably gotten the first down (he was a yard short), rather than the trip to the hospital. Much has been made of the Buckeyes being hurt by not having Marvin Harrison Jr. available in the fourth quarter. They were also hurt by having Stover unavailable for three quarters.

Consider this my de facto tight end report. With Stover unavailable, Joe Royer got to step on the big stage and had a 9-yard reception, but also two incompletions.

Tight end/fullback Mitch Rossi remains one of my favorites because of his scrappiness, but he cost the Buckeyes a first down and potential points when he was flagged for illegal motion on a fourth down, negating an 8-yard run by Stroud.

I don't blame Rossi, however. I blame the call. The Buckeyes needed about a foot. Why not just line Stroud up under center and run the quarterback sneak, something Urban would never have done, but Day has shown a willingness to do. Sometimes it doesn't pay to get cute.

I always attribute this to Jim Tressel, but I am actually not sure who said it.

"If we can't get a yard, then we don't deserve to win anyway."

In a loosely related side comment, in our look back 20 years to Ohio State's championship win over Miami (Fla.) in the 2002 season, former assistant coach Bill Conley had this to say about championship quarterback Craig Krenzel:

"In all the years I coached college football, I had never seen any quarterback run the quarterback sneak better than Craig Krenzel. He would slide along the line of scrimmage and hit the little creases to get the needed yards for

a first down, keep the drive going, and several times for touchdowns."

• Speaking of being without receivers, this may have been the first time all season that the Buckeyes missed Jaxon Smith-Njigba. The receiving trio of Harrison, Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming did just fine most of the season, and there came a point where I believed if JSN did come back, it might have hurt the chemistry that the Buckeyes had established in the passing game.

However, in this case, if Smith-Njigba had been playing, and Harrison was knocked out of the game, Fleming would have been elevated to the No. 2 spot and the Buckeyes might not have missed a beat.

How Did They Miss That?

Of course, one of the hot topics around town since the Peach Bowl loss is the play that knocked Harrison out of the game. One of the places where it was discussed was on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum. Let me make a shameless plug for the Forum. Videos of the play were posted there, as were the NCAA rules on targeting, and we would have enjoyed your input.

Watching the game in real time, when Harrison was clobbered, my first reaction was that he was defenseless. I didn't know what the ramifications of being defenseless were, but I thought he was defenseless. And then they call targeting, something that hadn't crossed my mind.

Since then, I have watched our posted clip of the play at least 20 times. From different angles, it is hard to tell if Javon Bullard hits Harrison with his helmet or his shoulder. But if I am reading the rule right, it shouldn't make a difference.

"No player shall target and make forcible contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless opponent (See Note 2 below) with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder. This foul requires that there be at least one indicator of targeting. When in question, it is a foul," says NCAA Rule 9, Article four, with my italics.

As for the Note 2 concerning a defenseless player: "When in question, a player is defenseless. Examples of defenseless players include but are not limited to:

- A receiver attempting to catch a forward pass or in position to receive a backward pass, or one who has completed a catch and has not had time to protect themselves or has not clearly become a ball carrier.

- A player on the ground." (My selections)

If I am reading these rules correctly, that was targeting, plain and simple. If you watch the clip, you will see that the official has an excellent angle on the play and doesn't hesitate to throw his flag. A key thing to consider here is the declaration in the rules that "when in question, it is a foul," or "when in question, a player is defenseless."

I just don't see how they justified overturning the ruling on the field.

Even if they had called targeting and the Buckeyes got the ball, first and goal, there is no guarantee that they would have scored a touchdown rather than a field goal, and even if Harrison had played the fourth quarter, there is no guarantee it would have affected the ultimate outcome of the game.

But both scenarios were certainly possibilities.

It's funny, but I am one of the ones who has continually complained that they are legislating defense out of football. But if there is the rule, go ahead and call it.

Zac Brown Band

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