



Finding A Rhythm

Buckeyes Looking To Build On New Additions

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Entering this season, the focus for the Ohio State men's basketball team largely fell on getting its patchwork roster – which boasted 10 new faces, including five freshmen – ready for another difficult campaign in the Big Ten.

The Buckeyes were reeling from the losses of stars E.J. Liddell and Malaki Branham – who became Ohio State's first one-and-done freshman since D'Angelo Russell in 2014-15 – as well as program cornerstone Kyle Young, whose defensive versatility and tenacity set the tone for Ohio State during much of head coach Chris Holtmann's first five seasons at the helm of the program.

Forwards Zed Key and Justice Sueing – who returned from a nearly season-long abdominal injury, playing in just the first two games of the 2021-22 season – stepped into feature roles, and Holtmann stacked up talent with the No. 8 recruiting class, in addition to a trio of veteran transfers to fill out the roster.

Along with the significant roster changes came shifts in the coaching staff, as well. Longtime Holtmann assistant Ryan Pedon, who had followed the Buckeye skipper to Columbus from Butler, accepted his first head coaching job at Illinois State while first-year assistant Tony Skinn joined Kevin Willard's staff at Maryland. As a result, Holtmann elevated Jake Diebler to associate head coach and added Mike Netti as an assistant after he spent the past five seasons as special assistant to the head coach. Holtmann also looked outside the program for additional support, adding former Miami (Ohio) head coach Jack Owens to serve as an assistant coach, with a primary focus



SONNY BROCKWAY

UP AND DOWN — After a strong start to the season for Ohio State men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann's squad, the Buckeyes suffered a five-game losing streak to drop them near the bottom of the Big Ten standings. Holtmann is looking for answers among a roster made up of mostly freshmen and transfers to help turn the season around for Ohio State.

on defense.

With all of the moving pieces in the offseason, it's safe to say expectations weren't as high as they had been in the past few seasons entering this year, and Holtmann stressed as much prior to Ohio State's season-opener against Robert Morris.

"We are well at work here in our program at finding our identity as a group, like so many teams in college basketball and like several teams in the Big Ten," Holtmann said at Big Ten Media Days on Oct. 12. "We have a lot of new faces this year, and I think that's exciting on one hand, but it can also be challenging on the other hand. But we really are excited about so many of the new faces as well as some of the returning faces within our program."

It appeared that Ohio State had put the pieces together rather quickly, jumping out to a 10-3 record to start the season, including a pair of Big Ten wins. The Buckeyes also

boasted one of the most feared offensive units in the conference, entering their tilt with then-No. 1 Purdue on Jan. 5 as the No. 2 offense in the conference while averaging 81.0 points per game.

The Buckeyes were well on their way to an upset win over the top-ranked Boilermakers to continue their strong start to the season, leading for 25:39 against Purdue, but a game-winning three-pointer from Boilermaker guard Fletcher Loyer with 11 seconds remaining buried the Buckeyes.

Little did Ohio State know at the time, but Loyer's game-winner kicked off a stretch of five conference losses – all within single digits, and three within a single possession – for the Buckeyes, knocking Ohio State to the cellar of the Big Ten with a 2-5 conference record. The Buckeyes were able to stop the bleeding with a 93-77 win over Iowa on Jan.

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From The Message Board

“The women have been amazing and I admire how they have held on in the absence of Jacy Sheldon and Madison Greene. Fantastic! The men? Keep at it guys.”

– PeyoteBuck

“If Jacy Sheldon can return to the court at 100 percent health, the team has a real shot at making the Final Four. It could all depend on their bracket assignment. They would need to stay out of foul trouble and avoid a cold-shooting game. It always takes a little luck. So far, they have played with confidence and determination.

“The men’s team is so close. It seems every game is decided in the final 20 seconds. They’ve had some bad luck. A costly turnover, a missed shot. Opponents have been better at finishing the game. Brice Sensabaugh has been very impressive. A few key plays have decided at least five games. If they figure it out, they will go on a good run.”

– BYRON MCNUTT

“Men: until they lost at Maryland, I thought it would take a good team, playing well, to beat them. After losing to Minnesota, I am thinking they can lose to any Big Ten team when OSU plays poorly. I suspect chemistry problems since Sensabaugh has emerged as the leading scorer.

“Women: I haven’t followed as closely, but I think they’re as good as anybody.”

– Terrier Buck

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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Ohio State’s women’s basketball team jumped out to a historic 19-0 start, rising into the No. 2 spot in the most recent AP poll, while the men’s team opened the season strong but has floundered in recent weeks while enduring a lengthy losing streak. We asked BSB subscribers and staff members what their impressions of both programs have been this season. Here are some of the responses:

“The women are very good and entertaining. The men stink to high heaven.”

– Tiffin Buckeye

“Women: Talented, focused, cohesive, playing with a sense of purpose.

“Men: Talented, unfocused, floundering at times, playing like they fell off a cliff. Capable of beating anyone. Capable of losing to anyone.”

– Michael Bauer

“The women’s team plays an incredibly sound brand of team defense that feeds into their offense and has allowed continued success even in the face of big injuries.

“The men’s team lacks depth at center and has real trouble guarding skilled bigs, plus some of their best offensive options are liabilities defensively on the perimeter. Whenever off-ball movement stagnates – which is far too often – their offense gets stuck in neutral. Fixable problems but problems that have been there for multiple years in the Holtmann era. It’s important for his future at the program that they go on a late-season run.”

– Andy Anders, BSB

“The women’s team is one of the more fun basketball teams I’ve seen play in quite some time. Their penchant to run in transition, to go along with their lights-out shooting from beyond the arc, has been a ton of fun to watch this year. I also really like the fact that they hang their hat on the defensive end and turn defense into offense easily.

“I think communication and connectivity have become real issues for the men’s team. At times they’ve looked disjointed on offense and defense, as well as on the glass. The Buckeyes have also faltered in late-game scenarios far too often this season. It seems they put themselves in a position to win most times out but struggle to close out games. The win over Iowa is an encouraging sign for them turning around their season, but they'll need to stack wins if they're to get back into the picture for an NCAA Tournament berth.”

– Jack Emerson, BSB

“I’m approaching the belief that, at least for the women’s team, the only team that can beat Ohio State is Ohio State. There are simply too many potential scoring options (Cotie McMahon, Taylor Mikesell, Rebeka Mikulášiková, Taylor Thierry and Jacy Sheldon, at least when she returns) for opposing teams to focus on, and any perceived faults – whether it be rebounding or a lack of defense around the post – has yet to cost them. The brunt of the Big Ten schedule is approaching, though, so it will be exciting to see what the team is made of.

“I’ve admittedly watched less of the men’s team, but it seems like crunch time is approaching for Holtmann. Roster turnover can only be an excuse for so long before a head coach – especially one in his sixth season – needs to start making some changes.”

– Braden Moles, BSB

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PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Braden Moles

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS

Andy Anders	Ryan Rios
David Breithaupt	Bob Roehm
Bill Conley	Mark Schmetzer
Jack Emerson	Steve Siegfried
Rich Exner	Jeff Svoboda
Craig Merz	Mike Wachsman

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Paula Serra Ron Friedman

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Time Has Way Of Affecting Legacy Judgments

In terms of where you were, who you were with and what you were doing, the span of 15 years can seem like a lifetime to some while just the blink of an eye to others.

The same is true, it seems, for Ohio State football. Fifteen years ago, the Buckeyes were coming off back-to-back appearances in the BCS National Championship Game and enjoying a string of three straight Big Ten titles, and head coach Jim Tressel had agreed to a contract extension that eventually pushed his annual salary past the \$3.5 million mark.

Meanwhile, 7-year-old Coleridge Bernard Stroud IV was about to enter the second grade.

Flash ahead 15 years, and after two seasons as starting quarterback at Ohio State, Stroud announced Jan. 16 that he would submit his name for April's NFL draft, leaving behind a string of program records as well as a debate as to where his legacy fits among his predecessors as quarterback of the Buckeyes.

There can be no debate that Ryan Day's approach to offensive football allowed Stroud to flourish, but still someone had to be the delivery device for each of those 8,123 yards and 85 touchdown passes.

Still, yardages and scores tell only part of the story. Despite the fact he threw for 743 yards and four touchdowns in two starts against Michigan, Stroud's record against the Wolverines was 0-2. Likewise, he was 0-1 in College Football Playoff games, although a strong case can be made that Stroud did about all he could do against Georgia (382 yards of total offense and four touchdown passes) during an eventual 42-41 loss.

So, how will Stroud place among Ohio State quarterbacks of the past and future? As difficult as it might be to determine his legacy against those who came before him, it is impossible to gauge where Stroud might rank a decade and a half from now.

By way of comparison, I compiled a list 15 years ago of whom I considered to be the best quarterbacks in Ohio State history and why. Here is the list, complete with comments that are now as outdated as the list itself.

1. Art Schlichter (1978-81) – What he has done after leaving school is despicable, but the guy had a whale of athletic ability. He was 2-2 vs. Michigan, never won a national championship and was only 1-3 in bowl games, but Schlichter still holds the school records for most yardage in a single game, most career passing yards and most career total offense – all more than a quarter-century after he played his last game.

2. Troy Smith (2003-06) – The Heisman Trophy and three straight victories against Michigan pretty much speak for themselves. Smith came to Ohio State with a tempestuous persona and somewhat checkered past and turned himself into a model citizen. Along the way, he also transformed himself into one of the most productive passers in school history.

3. Rex Kern (1968-70) – What set Kern apart was his sheer determination and will to win. It is a common misconception that Kern started every game between 1968 and '70. Injuries put backup Ron Maciejowski into the lineup on several occasions during that span, and Mace deserves his due for that. But Kern was the undisputed leader, and there is no doubt the Buckeyes were 27-2 during that three-year stretch because of him.

4. Bobby Hoying (1992-95) – The benefactor of Ohio State's offensive firepower in the mid-1990s, Hoying probably doesn't get as much recognition as he deserves. After all, he does hold the school records for most career completions and most TD passes while

standing second all-time to Schlichter in career passing yardage. He also finished 10th in the Heisman balloting in 1995, the same year teammate Eddie George won the award.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

5. Cornelius Green (1973-75) – Archie Griffin got all the publicity and Pete Johnson scored all the touchdowns, but Green was the fire that lit the fuse on the Buckeyes in the mid-1970s. He was the first African-American to start at quarterback for Ohio State, and he was an electrifying blur of kinetic energy. All you need to know about Green's value to the team can be summed up in the fact that Griffin voted for him as team MVP in 1975. That's how Corny came to be Big Ten Player of the Year the same year Archie won his second Heisman.

6. Joe Germaine (1996-98) – No one ever squeezed more talent out of their right arm than Germaine. His 3,330 yards in 1998 ranks as the best all-time in Ohio State history – not bad for a guy who had to start his college career at the JUCO level because no one wanted to give him a scholarship to play quarterback.

7. Don Unverferth (1963-65) – A player whose athletic legacy has largely been forgotten, Unverferth was a strong-armed quarterback out of Dayton. As a sophomore, he ran for the winning touchdown in OSU's 14-10 victory at Michigan in 1963, and then he engineered a 9-7 win at Ann Arbor two years later. When he finished his career, he had set the school career record with 2,518 passing yards. The mark stayed on the books for 16 years until Schlichter broke it midway through the 1979 season.

8. Mike Tomczak (1981-84) – Tomczak was the touchstone on a couple of ultra-talented rosters that featured such stars as Tim Spencer, Keith Byars, John Frank, Jim Lachey, Cris Carter, Pepper Johnson, Chris Spielman, William Roberts, Marcus Marek, Garcia Lane and Kirk Lowdermilk.

9. Greg Frey (1987-90) – This guy is never mentioned among the best QBs in school history because he is associated with an era when the Buckeyes quite frankly weren't very good. Still, he remains the only player in the history of the program to produce three consecutive seasons with 2,000 or more passing yards.

10. William "Tippy" Dye (1934-36) – Hey, the guy helped to beat Michigan three times in a row. That's good enough to make anyone's top 10 list. He was also a three-time letterman in basketball at OSU and a two-time letter winner in baseball.

Over the past 15 years, the Buckeyes and their fans have been treated to the athletic talents of Terrelle Pryor, Braxton Miller, J.T. Barrett, Cardale Jones, Dwayne Haskins, Justin Fields and Stroud, and it would be difficult to keep any of those quarterbacks off a top-10 list of the best Ohio State players at the position.

Barrett is now the program's all-time leader in passing yardage (9,434) and TDs (a Big Ten-record 104), Haskins has the single-season marks for yardage (a Big Ten-record 4,831) and touchdowns (50), and Stroud owns the single-game mark with a Rose Bowl-record 573.

With regard to how their respective teams fared in games during which they started, it

might interest you to know Jones was a perfect 11-0, and that included the 2014 national title game against Oregon. In terms of winning percentage, Haskins is next (13-1, .929) followed by Fields (20-2, .909), Pryor (31-4, .886), Barrett (38-6, .864), Stroud (21-4, .840) and Miller (26-8, .765).

Boiling it down to records against Michigan, it's difficult to believe anyone will ever match Barrett and his perfect 4-0 mark as a starter against the Wolverines. Pryor (3-0), Fields (2-0) and Haskins (1-0) were also undefeated in The Game.

Still, if one truly desires to pinpoint the very best of the best, perhaps that determination should be left to those who evaluate talent for living – NFL coaches and scouts. Although Fields and Haskins were first-round selections, they were taken with the No. 11 and 15 picks, respectively, in 2019 and 2021.

It is now Stroud's turn, and from nearly every draft projection, he not only is a slam-dunk first-rounder, he is likely to be a top-five pick. And if that comes to fruition, Stroud will become only the second Ohio State quarterback in history to go among the top five picks of an NFL draft, joining Schlichter, who went No. 4 overall to the Baltimore Colts in 1982.

Does It Matter Who's Next?

Now that Stroud has left the program, Day and his coaching staff shift their focus to his successor. But I have to say that on the heels of having someone who threw for more than 8,000 yards and 80 TDs in just two seasons, it doesn't really matter whether Kyle McCord, Devin Brown, Lincoln Kienholz or even former Nebraska and Oregon State QB Tristan Gebbia takes over for Stroud if the defense doesn't improve.

To be honest, when Jim Knowles was hired as defensive coordinator, I was skeptical. I know he had success at Oklahoma State, but having the best defense in the Big 12 is kind of like an ugly duckling contest. Then when I heard about his approach to hitting and tackling, not to mention his assertion that allowing a big play or two (or three or four) per game is no big deal, I was anything but enthusiastic.

Unfortunately, after what I witnessed this past season, my enthusiasm level hasn't risen any higher. Yes, most of the defensive statistics improved across the board, but that was to be expected after such a putrid performance in 2021. Missed tackles and blown assignments still are a major issue, DBs unable or unwilling to locate the ball while it is in the air continues to mystify me, and the number of big plays allowed by Ohio State was borderline ridiculous.

Some have conjectured that since Knowles favors a unique kind of alignment, his players were sometimes out of position because they were still learning the defense. That's one excuse, I guess, but when it came time to play its toughest opponents at the end of the season, the defense folded like a three-legged card table. Michigan scored 45 points, totaled 530 yards, and averaged 8.8 yards per play. Georgia scored 42 points, totaled 533 yards, and averaged 8.9 yards per play. Those numbers speak for themselves, but here's another: Prior to the Peach Bowl, Ohio State was 281-0 all-time when scoring 40 points or more.

Knowles signed a three-year contract, and maybe it will take time for his defense to take hold. Unfortunately for him, Buckeye Nation is notorious for its impatience.

OHIO STATE

INSIDER

Stroud Declares For NFL Draft

Ohio State quarterback and two-time Heisman Trophy finalist C.J. Stroud declared for the NFL draft on Jan. 16, ending his three-year career in Columbus.

Stroud's declaration came on the final day for players to enter their names into the 2023 draft, meaning Ohio State's signal caller took all the time available to him to make his decision, and it wasn't one that came easy.

"This process has been difficult and the decision one of the hardest I've ever had to make," Stroud said in a statement "As a kid, I dreamed of playing football at the highest level, and after much prayer, I've made the decision that it's time to turn those dreams into a reality."

Stroud finishes second all-time in Ohio State history for career passing yards with 8,123, doing so in just two years as the Buckeyes' starter. He also stands second in career touchdown passes with 85, behind four-year starter J.T. Barrett in both categories.

His best single-season marks in yards and touchdowns – 4,435 passing yards and 44 touchdowns in 2021 – also land second behind late former quarterback Dwayne Haskins' 2018 campaign, and he became the second quarterback in program history to surpass 4,000 yards through the air. Stroud finished with 3,688 yards this past season, good for third all-time in a single season at Ohio State.

Where Stroud holds the top mark in school history is for passing yards in a single game. He registered the only 500-yard passing performance ever from a Buckeye against Utah in the Rose Bowl following the 2021 season, racking up 573 yards in a 48-45 Ohio State win. He also tied a school record in that game with six passing touchdowns, a mark he also equaled against Michigan State in both 2021 and 2022.

In addition to his two appearances in New York City as a Heisman finalist, Stroud was a second-team All-American in 2022 and third-team All-American in 2021. He was also a finalist for the Davey O'Brien Award, given to the nation's best quarterback, in both of those seasons.

At the conference level, Stroud won Graham-George Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year and Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year awards each of the last two seasons. He was also named first-team All-Big Ten for both campaigns.

"To Buckeye Nation, it's been a hell of a ride," Stroud stated. "To the students, alumni and all THE Ohio State fans, thank you for welcoming a kid from Cali into the Buckeye family."

Hartline Promoted To Offensive Coordinator

Wide receivers coach and passing game



SONNY BROCKWAY

CALL IT A CAREER — Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud declared for the 2023 NFL draft on Jan. 16, bringing to an end a three-year career with the Buckeyes that had him finish second all-time in OSU career passing yards. Stroud is expected to be among the top picks in the upcoming draft.

coordinator Brian Hartline will be taking over as offensive coordinator for Ohio State football, the team announced on Jan. 13.

Hartline takes over for former offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, who left the program following its loss to Georgia in the College Football Playoff to become the head coach at Tulsa.

"Brian has been successful in every football capacity for which he has been engaged," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "He has progressed incredibly well from college to NFL receiver, and then from quality control coach to wide receivers coach to passing game coordinator. He figures things out quickly, and he is more than ready to now transition to offensive coordinator."

Few position coaches in college football have enjoyed as much success as Hartline has in his receivers room. After never having done so before in school history, Ohio State had multiple 1,000-yard receivers on its team in back-to-back years in 2021 (Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Garrett Wilson) and 2022 (Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka), and Chris Olave and Wilson were each taken with first-round picks in the 2022 NFL draft. Smith-Njigba – who set the program single-season receiving record with 1,606 yards in 2021 before missing

most of 2022 with a hamstring injury – is projected as a first-rounder in the upcoming draft.

"Brian has also developed his receivers at an unprecedented level, and he has recruited as well or better than anyone in the country," Day said. "Now he'll be recruiting for our entire offense, and I think that is something that will be really positive for our program."

He's consistently pulled in topflight recruits as well, with Smith-Njigba and Wilson joining Julian Fleming, Egbuka and incoming freshman Brandon Inniss as consensus five-star prospects signed by Hartline.

Hartline played wide receiver for the Buckeyes from 2005-08 before enjoying a seven-year NFL career – six seasons with the Miami Dolphins and one with the Cleveland Browns. He joined Ohio State's staff as a quality control coach in 2017 and took over as interim wide receivers coach in 2018 following Zach Smith's firing. Hartline was then promoted to the full-time role beginning in 2019, and he received another promotion to passing game coordinator prior to this past season.

While Day has yet to confirm or deny a previous report from ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit that he plans to take a step back from

play-calling duties next season, it would seem likely that Hartline would take up that mantle if Ohio State is searching for a play caller.

"I am ready and I am really looking forward to this opportunity," Hartline said. "Ohio State has established a premier threshold with regard to offensive output, and that is something that we will strive to meet every day. I want to thank Coach Day for his belief in me and for the positions he has put me in these last several years that have allowed me to succeed and grow."

With Hartline filling in for Wilson as offensive coordinator, Ohio State's offensive staff is now set for next season. Running backs coach/assistant head coach for offense Tony Alford, run game coordinator Justin Frye and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis all return with their same responsibilities, and the Buckeyes have also confirmed the promotion of quality control coach Keenan Bailey to tight ends coach to replace Wilson.

In his seven seasons with the Ohio State staff, Bailey has served in a variety of roles while working with the program's running backs, wide receivers and quarterbacks.

"Keenan is an excellent coach," Day said in December. "He's a really sharp young man who's going to do unbelievable things

2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2022 Record, Bowl Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	TBA	TBA	7-4
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	TBA	TBA	9-5, 44-23 win over So. Alabama (R&L Carriers)
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	TBA	TBA	9-4, 45-38 win over So. Carolina (Gator)
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	8-5, 16-12 win over NC State (Duke's Mayo)
Oct. 14	at Purdue	TBA	TBA	8-6, 63-7 loss to LSU (Citrus)
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	11-2, 35-21 win over Utah (Rose)
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	7-6, 24-17 win over Okla. St. (Guar. Rate)
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	9-4, 28-20 win over Syracuse (Pinstripe)
Nov. 25	at Michigan	TBA	TBA	13-1, 51-45 loss to TCU (Fiesta)

in his career. And the relationships he's built over time with former players, current players, recruits and family have been excellent. He's got a very bright future ahead of him."

Trio Of Offensive Linemen Declare For NFL Draft

While the long wait for Stroud's declaration captured much of the attention around Buckeye Nation, Ohio State lost a trio of starters on the offensive line to the 2023 NFL draft.

Declarations from starting tackles Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones – on Jan. 10 and 11, respectively – came as no surprise to many in Columbus, but center Luke Wypler's announcement that he would enter the draft on Jan. 10 came as a surprise to many.

Wypler's departure came despite having three seasons of eligibility remaining. He started every game over the last two seasons for Ohio State at center and tied as the offensive leader in snaps this season with 827 plays under his belt.

A four-star prospect out of Montvale, N.J., Wypler joined Ohio State in the 2020 recruiting class. He played in one game during his redshirt freshman season before claiming the starting job prior to 2021, and in two years with Wypler under center, Ohio State's offense has been among the best in

the country.

"Football means the world to me," Wypler said in a statement. "It has been my passion from the moment I first put on pads at the age of 7. Growing up, I worked hard to give myself the opportunity to play college football at the highest level. To compete as a Buckeye at The Ohio State University – the best university in the country – has been the privilege of a lifetime."

Less surprising were the departures of Johnson and Jones. Johnson was touted as one of the nation's best tackles during his junior season, becoming a consensus All-American as Ohio State's anchor at left tackle. In addition to his status as an All-American, Johnson was named a finalist for the Rotary Lombardi Award and a semifinalist for the Outland Trophy. Johnson is considered a likely first-round selection in the upcoming draft by several outlets.

Joining the Buckeyes as a five-star recruit and No. 1 tackle in the 2020 recruiting class, Johnson – who hails from Cincinnati – arrived in Columbus with high expectations. Although he played sparingly his freshman season, appearing in five games with a majority of his snaps at guard, he became a starter in his second season, manning the right guard spot while Jones and Nicholas Petit-Frere served as the starting tackles.

While at guard, Johnson started in all 13 games and helped the Ohio State offense to 561.5 yards of total offense and 45.7 points per game, both top marks in the country in 2021. Johnson slid back to tackle – his natural position – entering his junior season, manning the left tackle spot in all 13 games.

"It has always been a dream of mine since I committed to The Ohio State University to leave with both my degree and a buckeye tree," Johnson said. "I am grateful to be able to accomplish both in three years. After having several conversations with my coaches and family, I want to accomplish the first dream of mine since I was 5 years old, which is to declare for the 2023 NFL draft."

Jones started two seasons at right tackle for the Buckeyes. He earned second-team All-Big Ten honors from the media and third-team from its coaches for his play during the 2021 season before upgrading to first-team All-American status from CBSSports this past season. According to Pro Football Focus, Jones didn't allow a single sack during his final campaign in Columbus while yielding just five pressures to opposing pass rushers in 393 pass-blocking snaps.

"Thank you to all the Ohio State coaching staff that have put me on this stage to showcase my abilities on the premier stage," Jones said. "It's been a great four years. Without saying anything else, I would like to say that I'm entering my name in this upcoming NFL draft."

Several Announce Return To Ohio State

While Ohio State was likely sad to see the trio of offensive linemen depart, the Buckeyes did receive some good news in the form of four players who announced their intention to return to Columbus since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

Offensive lineman Matthew Jones and safeties Lathan Ransom and Josh Proctor will return to Ohio State next season, helping bolster areas of need for the Buckeyes in the offensive line and secondary. Linebacker Tommy Eichenberg will also remain in Columbus, meaning Ohio State's linebacking unit will be fully retained after Steele Chambers announced prior to the Peach Bowl that he would return.

Eichenberg emerged as Ohio State's leading tackler this season, amassing 120 tackles – 12 for loss – to go along with 2½ sacks. The Cleveland native was labeled the "leader of the defense" by his teammates this season, primarily thanks to his leadership qualities and the workmanlike attitude he brings to the sport.

"After a lot of consideration and thought, I've decided to return for a final season at Ohio State," Eichenberg said in an Instagram post. "Back to work. Go Bucks."

Prior to last season, Eichenberg burst onto the scene with a Rose Bowl-record 17 tackles to cap off his sophomore season. Eichenberg joined the Buckeyes as a four-star prospect out of St. Ignatius High School in Cleveland, ranking as the No. 19 inside linebacker in the 2019 class.

Continued On Page 6



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Jones bided his time in a backup role during his first four seasons at Ohio State and started all but one game this past season for the Buckeyes at right guard.

This will be the last season of eligibility for the former four-star prospect out of Erasmus Hall in Brooklyn, N.Y. He started three games in 2020 and two games in 2021, and he has appeared in 41 overall games for the Buckeyes.

Jones' return is a significant one for Ohio State, which is set to lose both starting offensive tackles in Johnson and Dawand Jones, as well as center Wypler. Barring any further surprises, this leaves Ohio State with three starters who will need to be replaced on the offensive line. With previous experience at the position, Jones could be a candidate to slide over to center.

Moving to the returning defenders, Ransom's stock grew considerably this season, beginning the year on the bench before being thrust into action against Notre Dame in the season opener. He took hold of the starting boundary safety job and never relinquished it, turning into one of Ohio

State's best defenders, though he had notable lapses in the Buckeyes' back-to-back losses to Michigan and Georgia to end the season.

A semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, given to the best defensive back in college football, Ransom finished the year with 74 tackles – third most on the team behind linebackers Chambers (77) and Eichenberg (120) – in addition to 3½ tackles for loss, 1½ sacks, an interception and two blocked punts.

His breakout season featured several standout contests, including a trio of nine-tackle outings and an interception in Ohio State's win over Michigan State.

Also returning in the secondary is Proctor, who entered this past season as a starter before losing his job to Ransom. Proctor still saw the field in 11 games, finishing with 21 tackles and a pair of pass breakups, but his role was largely diminished as Ransom took over.

While Ransom will slot in as one of Ohio State's starting safeties next season, Proctor will have the chance to compete for one of the open safety positions following the departure of Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister, both of whom have declared for the 2023 NFL draft.

Buckeyes Add QB And OL Transfers

Ohio State added a pair of transfers prior to the first portal window closing, with former Oregon State quarterback Tristan Gebbia and Louisiana-Monroe offensive lineman Victor Cutler announcing their transfers to Columbus in recent weeks.

Gebbia is entering his seventh season of college football, spending a season at Ne-

braska out of high school before transferring to Oregon State, where he has suited up for the last five seasons (though he did not take the field in 2021 due to an injury).

"I am extremely thankful to Coach Day, Coach Hartline and Coach Dennis for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime to continue playing the game I love," Gebbia said. "I am excited to get started on this new journey."

He appeared in 12 games for the Beavers with five starts, completing 64.0 percent of his passes (128 of 200) for 1,250 yards, five touchdowns and four interceptions, and he was a team captain this past season.

His transfer gives Ohio State four quarterbacks on scholarship, joining Kyle McCord, Devin Brown and incoming freshman Lincoln Kienholz.

Cutler recently completed his fourth season of college football with the Warhawks, starting all of this past season at left tackle. He had previous starting experience at center and right tackle during the 2021 season and appeared in 29 games in total over the last four seasons.

A native of West Monroe, La., he arrives at Ohio State with two years of eligibility remaining. While offensive tackle is a position of need for Ohio State, his 6-3, 302-pound stature is more likely to factor in on the interior for the Buckeyes.

Gebbia and Cutler are the Buckeyes' fourth and fifth incoming transfers in this cycle, joining former Syracuse safety Ja'Had Carter, Arizona State long snapper John Ferlmann and Kent State kicker Casey Magyar.

Babb Medically Retiring From Football

Ohio State wide receiver Kamryn Babb announced on Jan. 17 that he is medically retiring from football following his fifth season with the Buckeyes.

"Thank you to everyone who has supported me and helped me throughout my journey," Babb said. "Glory to Jesus my God for carrying me through every moment in my life. Whatever you may battle in life, keep fighting and know that there is a God in heaven who loves you so deeply."

Babb, a Missouri native, was rated a four-star prospect at wideout in the class of 2018 but suffered four total torn ACLs – two in each knee – from his senior year of high school through his first four seasons at Ohio State.

After all those season-ending injuries, Babb got a chance to see the field this past season against Indiana. He made his first career catch, hauling in an 8-yard touchdown against the Hoosiers, and immediately fell to his knees in prayer before being mobbed by his teammates in an emotional scene at Ohio Stadium. It will stand as the only catch of his collegiate career.

Babb's impact on the team was largely felt off the field. He served as a captain each of the last two seasons and donned No. 0 in 2022 as the team's Block O recipient, which is granted to the player who most exudes the program's values of toughness, accountability and fight, created in honor of Buckeye great Bill Willis.

Babb was a four-time scholar-athlete for Ohio State and graduated in December 2021 with a degree in communications.



Kamryn Babb

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Recruiting Wrap-Up Set For Feb. 7 Mailing

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be our popular Football Recruiting Wrap-Up and is scheduled to be mailed on Feb. 7. If there is any recruiting intrigue or development between now and the traditional National Signing Day, there is no need to miss it. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be manning the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on any breaking stories between now and the next print issue.

In addition to ongoing 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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with rising sophomores Caden Curry, Kenyatta Jackson and Omari Abor.

Wilson, Olave Among Finalists For NFL Rookie Of The Year

Olave and Wilson were both named finalists for the 2022 Pepsi Zero Sugar NFL Rookie Of The Year award following a pair of stellar seasons from the duo.

Olave and Wilson already inserted themselves into NFL history after becoming the first pair of rookie receivers from the same college to rack up over 1,000 receiving yards. Wilson led all rookies with 1,103 receiving yards on 83 catches and added four touchdowns for the New York Jets, while Olave matched Wilson's touchdown total to go along with 1,042 yards on 72 catches for the New Orleans Saints.

The former Buckeyes are finalists along with Jets cornerback Sauce Gardiner and Detroit Lions defensive end Aidan Hutchinson, as well as cornerback Tariq Woolen and running back Kenneth Walker of the Seattle Seahawks.

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.

Spring Game Set For April 15

Ohio State fans will get their first glimpse of the 2023 edition of the Buckeyes at the spring game on April 15, set for noon at Ohio Stadium.

There are several intriguing storylines regarding the Buckeyes this spring, including a quarterback battle between McCord and Brown as well as searches for starters on the offensive line and in the secondary, and all should be on display in the spring game.

Tickets for the spring game are set to go on sale on Feb. 10 at 10 a.m., with general admission prices at \$7, and reserved seating options available for \$15 and \$30. Parking for the game will also be free.

Henry Begins Chemotherapy Treatment For Osteosarcoma

Ohio State offensive lineman Avery Henry announced on Jan. 10 that he has begun chemotherapy to treat osteosarcoma after he was diagnosed in December.

Henry underwent treatment at The James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute on Ohio State's campus.

"I've started my first chemotherapy session," Henry tweeted. "I feel great and ready! I'm extremely thankful for the support I have received from everyone! I will always continue to fight, and I ask that you guys do the same throughout your lives."

Osteosarcoma is a form of bone cancer that impacts the cellular level within bones. The disease is typically prevalent in teenagers and young adults, but cases have been seen in younger children and older adults as well.

Henry joined the Buckeyes in Atlanta for the Peach Bowl, and Day said that the Ohio State football program is with him in his fight against cancer.

"He's got a whole team behind him that's going to help him through this fight," Day said on Dec. 21. "We're just going to be a part of this fight with him. So I know the whole team is behind him."

Ohio State Finishes Fourth In Final AP Poll

Following Georgia's 65-7 blowout of TCU in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game, The Associated Press released its final poll of the season

on Jan. 10, with the Buckeyes coming in at No. 4.

Ohio State (11-2) placed behind No. 3 Michigan – which defeated the Buckeyes in each team's regular-season finale by a 45-23 margin – No. 2 TCU and No. 1 Georgia, which finished the season with an unblemished 15-0 season en route to winning the program's second consecutive national championship.

It is Ohio State's highest ranking in the final AP poll since finishing No. 2 in 2020 following the Buckeyes' loss to Alabama in the title game. Ohio State has finished in at least the top six dating back to 2014.



Avery Henry

The only other Big Ten team to make the final poll was No. 7 Penn State, which knocked off Utah in the Rose Bowl. The Nittany Lions, along with the Bulldogs, Wolverines and No. 18 Notre Dame, make four ranked opponents this past season for Ohio State.

Jean-Baptiste Announces Transfer To Notre Dame

Former Ohio State defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste found a new home on Jan. 13, announcing that he will transfer to Notre Dame.

Jean-Baptiste's move to the Fighting Irish means that he will get the opportunity to square off against his former team on Sept. 23 when Notre Dame hosts the Buckeyes in South Bend, Ind. Jean-Baptiste has one season of eligibility remaining.

"Thank you, Ohio State, for all you have done for me," Jean-Baptiste said. "The relationships and connections I have built will last forever. To my brothers, I love you boys to death. We have a bond that will last a lifetime. Thank you Coach (Larry) Johnson, (strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti) and (Coach) Day for all that you poured into me and for turning me into the man I am today – a proud alum."

"I'm ready to start my next chapter, and I will be playing my final season of college football at Notre Dame."

Jean-Baptiste joined the Buckeyes as a four-star prospect in 2018 before redshirting his true freshman season. He

played in 47 games for the Scarlet and Gray, corraling 53 total tackles – 10½ for loss – and eight sacks in his time with Ohio State. Jean-Baptiste enjoyed a career season in 2022, recording career highs in tackles (19), tackles for loss (4½) and sacks (four).

Despite the loss of Jean-Baptiste, the Buckeyes will still be well-manned up front with J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer – who serves in the "Jack" position – primed to improve heading into their junior seasons. Ohio State also has some depth on the edge

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Freshmen Seeing Extensive Time On Court

Continued From Page 1

21 but were well aware that they needed to keep things rolling from there if they were to punch their ticket to the NCAA Tournament.

"It's only one win," guard Isaac Likekele said following the win over the Hawkeyes. "It's really nothing. It's a long league season ahead of us. But it could be the start of something. We're just going to look to build on it."

Buckeyes Trending At Rate Of Freshmen

Holtmann made it clear this season that these Buckeyes would produce at the rate of their highly touted freshman class.

"They'll go through some ups and downs, they'll have some challenges, but all four are going to play," Holtmann said prior to the season. "You're going to see them a part of every game, for sure. And we're excited about that. We're excited about the potential of that group, for sure."

That notion has largely rung true through 19 games, with four of five freshmen playing a key role in Ohio State's rotation. Guard Bowen Hardman is the lone exception.

Guard Bruce Thornton has served as the Buckeyes' primary offensive facilitator, starting at point guard in all 19 games this season, while forward Brice Sensabaugh has emerged as Ohio State's go-to guy on offense, serving as Ohio State's leading scorer with 17.5 points per game.

Thornton and Sensabaugh have emerged as near-everyday starters, and guard Rod-

dy Gayle Jr. and center Felix Okpara have carved out significant roles for themselves off the bench, even registering their first career starts as a result of injuries.

Sensabaugh has grown into the feature scoring role for the Buckeyes to this part of the season, boasting efficient shooting numbers with a 51.3 percent mark from the field, including 47.7 percent shooting from beyond the arc. His emergence as a scorer has garnered him attention around league circles, and he earned four Big Ten Freshman of the Week nods from mid-December into January.

Although Sensabaugh has become the primary fixture in Ohio State's offense, boasting solid numbers for a freshman along the way, he said the transition process to the college game has still been difficult for him.

"It's definitely been tough," Sensabaugh said after the Buckeyes' loss to Purdue. "Transitioning into the Big Ten, everybody is good and it's super hard to win. You don't have to play perfect, but you have to do a lot of things right. Individually, I just put my trust in my teammates and coaches to put me in the right spots and just play my game."

Thornton got off to a fast start to the season, averaging 10.4 points and 3.5 assists on 48.5 percent shooting from the field entering the Jan. 5 game against Purdue. The wind came out of the sails of the freshman guard, however, in the five games following the Purdue loss, as he averaged just 4.6 points per contest while seeing his shooting percentage plummet to 26.5 percent and his



SONNY BROCKWAY

ANSWER AT TRANSFER — Ohio State brought in former West Virginia guard Sean McNeil this offseason, and he's been a boost for the Buckeyes. The sharpshooter has averaged 9.9 points per game this season with 40.4 percent shooting from beyond the arc.

assist total drop to an average of just 1.4 per game.

Holtmann said he felt he may have been putting too much on Thornton's plate at this point in his career but added that he sees bright things ahead for the first-year guard.

"He's running our team," Holtmann said. "It's just a lot for a kid. Bruce is great and I really believe he's going to be one of the best point guards in the country before his time is done. No question about that in my mind. He's got to continue to work through some things and obviously get physically better."

Gayle and Okpara have both largely been utilized as defensive specialists to this point in the campaign, with Holtmann saying he expects both to show offensive growth by the season's end.

In the case of Okpara, he has grown into Ohio State's second option in the paint behind Key, emerging as a rim protector on defense and a rim-running lob threat on offense. His 23 blocks are most on the team despite Okpara averaging just 12.9 minutes per game, sixth fewest on the squad. While Okpara averages 3.6 points and 3.4 rebounds per game, he emphasized that his primary focus is to impact the game with his defense.

"Defense, that's why I check in," Okpara said. "I try to get defensive rebounds, crash

the glass offensively. For me, scoring right now is a bonus. I like to do the little stuff like set screens and dive on the floor."

Gayle — who was the highest-ranked member of the recruiting class — has slowly seen his role develop on both ends of the floor. Holtmann has said numerous times this season that Gayle's offensive skill set has lagged behind his defense but added that he expects to see the Niagara Falls, N.Y., native continue to grow.

"He's a two-way player," Holtmann said. "His defense is just ahead of his offense right now. And that's fine — we need his defensive presence. And he's not a bad offensive player. He's still reading the game. He's a really good kid, and I think he's only going to get better in front of our eyes."

The freshmen have been largely as advertised this season, making an important impact for the Buckeyes thus far, but Holtmann said the focus remains on continuing their long-term growth.

"All of them, all four freshmen, have had a level of success and they've handled that pretty well," he said. "They've also had some struggles, and we'll see how we handle that. But I think it's different when you're out there kind of for everybody to see and everybody to do whatever they do when teams or kids struggle, that's different."

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"You try to help kids remember that this is really about us growing as a group, us moving forward."

Transfers, Returners Making Contributions

The freshmen have been productive for Ohio State, but the first-years were never going to be able to shoulder the entire load. With that, the Buckeyes made several splashes in the transfer portal to fill areas of need while enduring the process of a roster rebuild.

The Buckeyes secured the services of Oklahoma State's do-it-all wing in Likekele, West Virginia sharpshooter Sean McNeil and Wright State bucket-getter Tanner Holden, giving Ohio State an added veteran presence with each transfer playing at least three seasons at the college level.

"Sean will provide immediate shooting at one of the wing positions," Holtmann said prior to the season. "Tanner is going to provide the ability to play downhill. He also shot it pretty well in (preseason practice in) the Bahamas. Likekele is a kid who you can play as many as three-to-four different positions, and we will move him around from point to wing to some small-ball options. We'll move him all over the floor."

Likekele's worth is largely examined outside of the box score, with the wing averaging just 4.0 points per game on 38.9 percent shooting. He is typically the primary defender of the opponent's leading scorer and also serves as a facilitator for the Buckeye offense – especially in transition.

Likekele showcased his well-rounded game against Iowa, producing 18 points – the most he's scored in an Ohio State uniform – to go with 10 rebounds and seven assists. After the game, Likekele said that he has the ability to play at that level while he continues to gain comfort in his role with the Buckeyes.

"As humble as I can be, it's not like that's something I've never done before," he said. "Glory to God for these talents that he's given me. But I'm in a new environment, new situation, new team."

"These guys around me, all 15, 16 guys, they make it easier on me every day. They encourage me and tell me to keep working."

McNeil has been the most impactful scorer of the transfers, averaging 9.9 points per game and shooting 40.4 percent from three-point range. McNeil has hit at least one three-pointer in 18 of Ohio State's 19 games.

The sharpshooter has made it a point to prove that his game is much more expansive than his shooting ability, though. He's taken 63 shots from inside the arc, with a 47.6 percent mark on two-point attempts.

"God gave me the ability to shoot the ball," McNeil said prior to the season. "But I think it can be developed, for sure. One thing I focused on this summer is being more aggressive off the dribble, off the bounce."

Holden's role has been the least developed of the transfer class, with him primarily coming off the bench in a limited capacity. That's by design, however, as Holden is the only transfer with eligibility beyond this season and was also the only one to transfer in from a mid-major program, with Wright State playing in the Horizon League.

That doesn't mean that Holden hasn't made any big plays in his time with the Buckeyes. Holden's most notable contribution came in Ohio State's 67-66 win over



SONNY BROCKWAY

BIG MAN BLOCKING — Ohio State freshman center Felix Okpara has been able to keep pace with center Zed Key this season, at least when it comes to blocking opponents' shots. Okpara has 23 blocks, which is most on the team and ahead of Key, who has 20.

Rutgers on Dec. 8, in which Holden drilled a game-winning three-pointer from just inside the half-court line as time expired to secure the win for the Buckeyes.

While Holden has averaged just 4.6 points per game on only 3.1 field-goal attempts per contest, Holtmann said he's been encouraged by the strides Holden has made this season – most notably on the defensive end of the floor.

"He's improved defensively," Holtmann said. "He's not where we need him to be yet, but he's improved to the point to where there are not as many errors as there were earlier in the year. He got rejected on ball-screens a lot earlier in the year. He had trouble guarding the ball earlier in the year. Now, he's really locked in on those things."

Ohio State also retained Key, Sueing and wing Eugene Brown III as veterans, with Key and Brown playing out their junior seasons and Sueing enjoying his sixth season at the collegiate level. Due to their veteran status, as well as their overall potential impact on the team, Key, Sueing and Likekele were all named captains.

Outside of Sensabaugh, Sueing and Key are the only other Buckeyes averaging double-figure scoring with 12.9 and 12.1 points per game, respectively. Key has registered six double-doubles on the season, as well, while averaging 8.1 rebounds per game.

During the offseason, Key placed attention on expanding his range, adding the ability to shoot midrange jumpers and three-pointers to his offensive repertoire. Key has shot the three-ball at a 30.0 percent clip on 20 attempts, typically shooting them only when wide open. In fact, Ohio State's first points of the season came off a three-pointer from Key.

"I consider myself like (J.J.) Redick," Key joked after the win over Robert Morris on Nov. 7. "I worked on it a lot this year, hard. During the summertime, that was one of my main goals, being able to add a three-point to my game."

While Key has remained fairly steady for the Buckeyes, Sueing has undergone several highs and lows throughout the campaign. The forward scored a career-high 33 points against then-No. 21 Texas Tech during the Maui Invitational and has scored in double figures in 13 games this season, but he has also faltered late in games – including throwing away what proved to be the game-losing turnover against Purdue.

During Ohio State's five-game losing streak, Sueing endured a two-game stretch against Rutgers and Nebraska in which he shot 4 of 17, produced 11 total points and gave up eight turnovers.

"I know I'm a good scorer, but when the shots are not falling, they're not falling," Sue-

ing said. "I have to control what I can control. Whether that's just bringing my team together and being a good communicator, just those little things, those details."

Brown sustained a concussion during the summer and missed Ohio State's first 11 games. Since his return, his role has been inconsistent with him playing a decent amount of center in Ohio State's small-ball lineups while working his way back to full strength. Brown has played in just seven games this season, but did not see action against Iowa despite being available. He has 12 points and 10 rebounds on the season.

The Buckeyes have faced adversity at several junctures of the season, especially during the five-game losing streak, and Likekele said the onus fell on the veterans to keep the team steady with several young contributors experiencing the highs and lows of college basketball for the first time.

"With us being such a new team, and having a bunch of new guys, I think it was very important for those young guys to see us get back in that win column," Likekele said. "I've experienced starting off slow in season play and finishing on top, but these freshmen and newer guys have never experienced those things."

As the Buckeyes look to turn their fortune in Big Ten play and fix the issues that have plagued them during the adverse January stretch, Holtmann said he's trying to coach on a deeper level to help Ohio State out of the conference cellar.

"When you're a coach, the challenge is to try to get inside the minds of 18- to 22-year-olds, and to do that consistently," he said. "Sometimes they're going to be open and honest with you, and other times it's going to be a bit of a guessing game. What I've tried to do and what we tried to do – and a friend shared this with me years ago – this time of year, we try to coach the heart as much as possible."

"I think if we can continue to do that and improve in those areas, like rebounding, like having better execution at times and being a more committed defensive group, then that's all we can ask for."



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Another Loss To U-M Leads Top 2022 Stories

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The most recent calendar year for Ohio State was one filled with storylines, both on the football field and in other areas of competition. Continued failings against the team's most bitter rival and memorable bowl matchups highlighted the year for the school's gridiron squadron, but history was made by several other programs at the university in a year with plenty to celebrate.

The following are the top 10 Ohio State sports stories of 2022, as voted on by the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff.

1. U-M Takes Second Straight Game Over Ohio State

In Buckeye Sports Bulletin's recap of the top storylines from 2021, Ohio State's first rivalry loss to Michigan since 2011 took the No. 1 spot. For 2022, the Wolverines' first time taking back-to-back games against the Buckeyes since 1999 and 2000 topped the staff's voting.

Just as in 2021, heavy stakes weighed on The Game. With Ohio State sitting No. 2 and Michigan No. 3 in the College Football Playoff rankings and the winner moving on to the Big Ten Championship Game, it appeared as though every possible ambition for both teams was on the line Nov. 26. Beyond both teams entering Ohio Stadium with an 11-0 record, wide receivers coach

Brian Hartline best summarized the immense pressure in a pregame speech.

"For 365 days, we've heard them talk," Hartline said. "For 365 days, I had to watch them attack our head coach, attack our quarterback and attack Buckeye Nation. Instead of getting loud and trying to respond on social media, we got quiet. We circled a date on the calendar: Nov. 26, 2022. And we went to work. And we knew what we did in the dark, what we did in the quiet, would someday come to light. Today is that light."

Unfortunately for Ryan Day and company, no matter how much revenge may have been on their minds, all that came to light was a three-score loss to their archrival.

Six big plays doomed the Buckeyes, with Michigan scoring touchdowns on a mix of passes and runs that went for 69, 75, 45, 75 and 85 yards, respectively, with another 15-play, 80-yard touchdown drive thrown in for good measure. The Wolverines entered half-time down 20-17 and dominated the second half to win 45-23.

"I thought we had a great week," Day said after the game. "Emotionally, we came into this thing swinging. But we came up short. I've just got to get my mind wrapped around why that happened today and how in the end, we didn't finish this thing the right way."

Self-inflicted wounds certainly didn't help Ohio State's cause. The Buckeyes incurred 91 yards of penalties to the Wolver-

ines' 30, finishing just one of their four red-zone drives with a touchdown. Perhaps the worst of Ohio State's yellow flags came on a post-play head butt from tight end Gee Scott Jr. on the sideline in the third quarter.

Scott's lapse in judgment, coupled with a holding penalty on the same play, took away a 24-yard passing play to running back Chip Trayanum and instead set the team back 25 yards for a first-and-35. From there, it battled back to get to fourth-and-5 at the Michigan 43, where, after a 5-yard penalty, Day dialed up a fake punt. The snap was supposed to go to tight end Mitch Rossi, where he appeared to have a wide-open running lane, but the ball instead went to punter Jesse Mirco, who booted it away in a state of surprise.

It was just one part of a disappointing effort that spelled an anticlimactic end to a year-long goal for Ohio State and puts an increased emphasis on next season's battle in Ann Arbor.

2. Former Quarterback Haskins Dies At 24

Former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins died April 9 at the age of 24 in a tragedy that shook the Ohio State community. The star signal caller, who rewrote the football program's record books, passed away after being struck by a dump truck while walking across Interstate 595 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

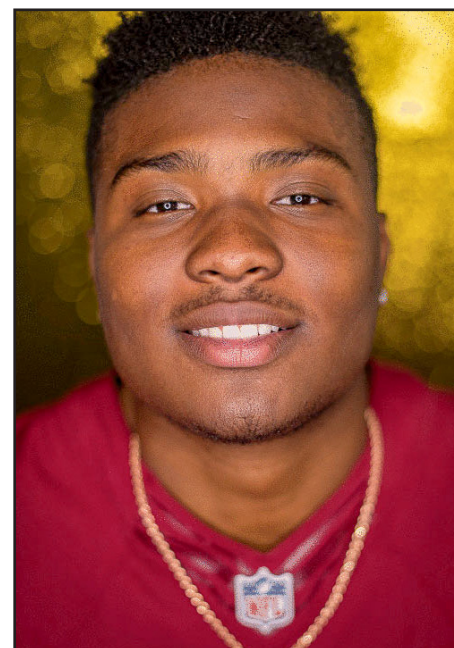
"It certainly was a very, very difficult weekend. For all of us," Day said April 11. "We had a meeting with the team today – we talked about a lot of things. There's a good group of our guys who played with Dwayne, and they're hurting."

Haskins' car was found parked on the shoulder of I-595 nearby with a "female companion" inside, according to a report from the Broward County medical examiner's office. Witnesses spotted him attempting to flag down vehicles for assistance on the shoulder of the highway prior to his death, and a 911 call from his wife, Kalabrya, surfaced in which she told operators that he was trying to find gas after running out.

The autopsy revealed that Haskins – who was declared dead at the scene – had a blood-alcohol content of .20 percent, more than twice the legal limit in Florida. Ketamine and norketamine, anesthetic drugs that are often taken recreationally, were also found in his system.

A backup quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers at the time, Haskins – preparing for his second season with the Steelers after being released by the Washington Commanders – was in Florida training with his teammates at the time of his passing. Regardless of the circumstances around his death, Haskins left a legacy both on and off the field.

"For as long as I can remember Dwayne, he always was a genuine person," said former Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields. "He always cared about me, has always been positive. Just the impact he's had on me, not only as a player but as a person, always going to workouts with him and stuff like that. It's sad but he's impacted not only me but a lot of people on this Earth in a pos-



FILE PHOTO

REST IN PEACE — Former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins' passing on April 9 rocked the Ohio State community. The signal caller started just one season with the Buckeyes but left a mark both on and off the field in Columbus.

itive way. I know he's in a better place now, and I'm just praying for his family."

Haskins set Columbus on fire his one year as a starter in 2018, setting single-season school records with 4,831 passing yards and 50 touchdowns, marks that also established the conference record in their respective categories.

Haskins landed an invite to New York City as a finalist for the Heisman Trophy after quarterbacking the Buckeyes to a 12-1 record, a 62-39 win over No. 4 Michigan and a Big Ten championship. He capped the season off with a Rose Bowl victory before being selected with the 15th overall pick in the 2019 NFL draft by the Commanders.

"What Dwayne meant to college football, the state of Ohio, Ohio State University, the football program, our staff and my family is hard to put into words," Day said in his eulogy at Haskins' memorial service on April 24. "His compassion, the way he loved – I mean, he loved big. And that still lives on at Ohio State."

3. Ohio State Comes Up One Play Short In Peach Bowl

Following its second straight loss to archrival Michigan in The Game, Ohio State could have easily been stuck in free fall, losing the one contest the team had prepared for all year, but the Buckeyes instead got new life.

With an upset win by Utah over USC in the Pac-12 Championship Game on Dec. 2, Ohio State found a spot in the College Football Playoff as the only one-loss team left standing outside the other top three teams in the country. This gave the squad a shot at redemption against No. 1 Georgia at the Peach Bowl on Dec. 31.

"When you go through a few days where you think that maybe your whole season's gone, and all of a sudden you start to build









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FILE PHOTO

MAKING HISTORY — The Ohio State women's ice hockey team won the first national championship in program history last year, fully realizing the vision of head coach Nadine Muzerall, who arrived in Columbus in 2016.

hope and then you start to see the opportunity where everything's right out in front of you, it's almost like a second lease on life," Day said on Dec. 4 after the team's selection. "We're very excited. There's been a whole swing in the whole program here in the last 24 hours."

The contest between the Buckeyes and Bulldogs turned out to be an instant classic, featuring outstanding quarterback performances from Ohio State's C.J. Stroud and Georgia's Stetson Bennett. Stroud finished 23 of 34 for 348 yards and four touchdowns while Bennett went 23 of 34 with 398 yards and three scores against one interception.

Ohio State scored right before halftime to take a 28-24 lead and took some control of the game in the third quarter, entering the final frame with a 38-24 advantage but without wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., who was lost for the game after a blow to the head that initially drew a targeting call but was later overturned.

After the Buckeyes were forced to settle for a field goal on the same drive that Harrison was injured, Georgia struck back. Down 38-27, Bennett came out on the first play of his team's next drive and found wide receiver Arian Smith — who raced past safety Lathan Ransom, who had slipped in coverage — for a 76-yard touchdown, and an ensuing two-point conversion cut the lead to 38-35. The Buckeyes responded with a field goal, but Georgia quickly converted on a five-play, 72-yard drive in 1:42 to take a 42-41 lead with 54 seconds to play.

Stroud led the Ohio State offense all the way back down to the Bulldogs' 31-yard line, but the offense stalled over the next three plays and had to settle for what would have been a career-long 50-yard field goal for kicker Noah Ruggles. The kick sailed wide

to the left as the calendar shifted from 2022 to 2023, and the Buckeyes lost a thriller to the eventual national champions.

"I told the guys I'm proud of the way they played," Day said. "I'm proud of the way they competed. For the older guys, the seniors, I'm 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)."

4. Women's Hockey Wins First NCAA Title

The quest Ohio State women's hockey head coach Nadine Muzerall embarked on when she took the job leading the Buckeyes — taking on a program that was 10-25-1 the season prior to her arrival in 2016 — came to be fully realized last spring.

Before the 2021-22 campaign, only four programs — Clarkson, Minnesota, Minnesota-Duluth and Wisconsin — had claimed a national championship in women's hockey, with the four teams combining for each of the last 20 titles.

On the flip side, Ohio State's women's hockey team plays in an ice rink that seats fewer than 1,000 spectators. It had never won more than 20 games, nor had it been to an NCAA tournament prior to Muzerall's arrival, and the program's last two coaches had been fired. But in Muzerall's sixth season, the Buckeyes brought home the national championship.

"This is something that's forever, that can never be taken from these young ladies," Muzerall said after the win on March 20. "And I mean, of course they're enjoying this moment, but it's one of those things when you come back 15 years later with your kids or as you get older, and just the amount of

pride that you left a legacy."

Defenseman Sophie Jaques led the team's efforts, recording a team-high 59 points. She finished tied for third nationally in that category, rare from a defender, and forward Paetyn Levis followed with 53 points, including a team-high 24 goals.

The biggest surprise of the year occurred in net, however. When senior goaltender Andrea Braendli — a native of Zurich, Switzerland — left for international duty toward the end of the season, sophomore Amanda Thiele filled in and went on a hot streak, ending the campaign with a 1.31 goals against average and .939 save percentage, both an improvement over the veteran Braendli.

As such, when Braendli returned, Muzerall stuck with Thiele at goalie for the Western Collegiate Hockey Association and NCAA tournaments. The WCHA's conference tournament is no laughing matter, as the organization has a reputation as easily the best in women's collegiate hockey and has produced 18 of its 21 national championships to date.

The Buckeyes upset No. 1 Minnesota 3-2 in overtime for the conference title, earning the No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament. In the NCAA quarterfinals, Ohio State won a double-overtime thriller against Quinnipiac, 4-3, and the Buckeyes then earned a 2-1 win over Yale in the Frozen Four semifinals to meet Minnesota-Duluth in the championship game.

Both sides exchanged blows in the title matchup. Ohio State landed first with a second-period power-play goal from Levis, and Minnesota-Duluth struck back eight minutes later with the two sides entering the final period tied 1-1.

It then took just 24 seconds for Ohio State to make it 2-1 after forward Clair

DeGeorge sent a shot home. The Bulldogs equalized it 2-2 after another 80 seconds, but a snipe from forward Kenzie Hauswirth gave the Buckeyes a 3-2 advantage with 6:40 to play, and an aggressive forecheck to keep Minnesota-Duluth reeling in the game's waning minutes secured the national title for Ohio State.

"That was a true national championship game," Muzerall said. "It was back and forth. We looked brilliant today. Areas of the ice that I thought we were really weak on in previous weeks, we really tightened up."

5. Day Brings In Knowles To Overhaul Defense

Day's quest for a defense capable of supporting his high-flying offense in big games resulted in one of the nation's most-talked about assistant coaching hires of the offseason.

There was no doubt improvements were needed following Ohio State's defensive performance in 2021. The Buckeyes finished tied for 59th in the nation in total defense and 97th against the pass, switching defensive play callers midseason after early struggles from defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs.

Knowles, Oklahoma State's defensive coordinator at the time and a finalist for the Broyles Award — which is given annually to the nation's most outstanding assistant coach — was brought in to fix those issues.

His hiring meant that for the first time in decades, Ohio State would run something other than 4-3 as its base alignment, instead rolling with Knowles' 4-2-5 in the majority of its sets. The utilization of three safeties made for the potential of myriad coverages, and Knowles' strategy was to play offense on defense, creating chaos and confusion for opposing quarterbacks and play callers in exchange for giving up the occasional big play.

"We want to be able to create indecision for the (opposing) offense and particularly for the offensive coordinator," Knowles said last January. "I think in college, offensive coordinators even have more hands-on things that happen than in the NFL, so we want to be able to create multiple defenses out of simple looks and to be creative in a way that the players can understand."

Another feature of the Knowles defense was the "Jack" position, a hybrid defensive end and linebacker with coverage and rush responsibilities who can move around the defensive formation. The role was mostly filled by defensive end Jack Sawyer this past season.

To say results were a mixed bag may be optimistic. Knowles' unit started the year strong, flustering Notre Dame to the tune of 10 points in the season opener and not allowing more than 21 points in a game until playing at Penn State on Oct. 29.

But Knowles was brought in to help the Buckeyes beat Michigan and win a national championship, and his defense crumbled when presented with those opportunities. As previously noted, big plays doomed the Buckeyes against Michigan, but the same outcome happened against Georgia, yielding the first team in program history to score at least 40 points and lose a game. Ohio State allowed the most yards per play in a contest in team history against Michi-

Continued On Page 12

Several Teams Experience Postseason Success

Continued From Page 11

gan at 8.8 yards per, then fared even worse in that metric to break the record again against the Bulldogs at 8.9 yards per play.

"We played defense to prevent the big plays," Knowles said after the Georgia loss. "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."

6. Women's Basketball Takes Big Ten Title

For the first time since the 2017-18 season, the Ohio State women's basketball team took home the Big Ten regular-season championship. Tying with Iowa at 14-4 in conference play, the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes each nabbed a share of the conference title, and since Ohio State defeated Iowa in the regular season, head coach Kevin McGuff's squad earned the top seed in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament.

"I think it is a real testament to the kids in our program," McGuff said. "We have great leadership out of our upperclassmen. We had immense disappointment the last two years because of COVID cutting the season short, and last year we had a post-season ban. We have great kids who just kept fighting and scratching and clawing, so I am super happy for them and I couldn't be more proud."

Ohio State went through a self-imposed postseason ban in the 2020-21 season as

the result of NCAA violations by former associate head coach Patrick Klein. Those violations forced the Buckeyes to vacate all their wins from the 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons, including their regular-season conference titles from 2017 and 2018, as well as their conference tournament victory from 2018.

Ohio State got off to a 9-3 start and stayed in the thick of the conference title race by winning 13 of 16 down the stretch in Big Ten play. The Buckeyes did so without the services of star guard Madison Greene, who missed the entire season with injury.

Guards Jacy Sheldon and Taylor Mikesell led the team with 19.7 and 18.6 points per game, respectively, while Mikesell shot a gaudy 47.5 percent from three-point range. Down low, the team's efforts were fueled by forward Rebeka Mikulášiková, who finished third on the squad with 9.4 points per game and recorded a team-high 5.0 rebounds per game.

All told, Ohio State outshot its opponents 37.6 percent to 30.9 percent behind the arc, finishing with a 25-7 overall record that included three ranked victories. A six seed entering the NCAA tournament, the Buckeyes reached the Sweet 16 for the first time since the 2016-17 season, falling to second-seeded Texas by a 66-63 score line.

"It was a really fun season," Sheldon said. "I think every single person on this team contributed to what we were able to do. I think despite everything we've been through, we proved we're one of the best

teams in the country."

7. Records Fall In Rose Bowl Victory

Ohio State's football team kicked off 2022 in style with one of the more memorable Rose Bowl games in school history, with the No. 6 Buckeyes taking on No. 11 Utah, the PAC-12 champions, in Pasadena, Calif., on Jan. 1.

Ohio State entered off a sad note, falling to rival Michigan for the first time in a decade. A team with national championship aspirations every year, Ohio State looked on paper as though it might not be as motivated as the Utes considering their head coach, Kyle Whittingham, stated before the season that his team's top goal was to make and win the program's first Rose Bowl.

"When we entered the Pac-12, then it became a goal," Whittingham said. "It's been a long, hard road, I'm telling you. It was a lot of recruiting, a lot of development of players, a lot of hard work by the coaching staff and the players to get here. We're ecstatic to be here."

Four Ohio State players had opted out to protect themselves from injury ahead of the NFL draft, with wide receivers Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave, offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere and defensive tackle Haskell Garrett sitting out the game. Fears of an unmotivated Ohio State squad or concerns about the opt-outs were well-founded early in the contest when Utah jumped out to a 14-0 lead behind a stout running game and strong quarterback play from Cameron Rising.

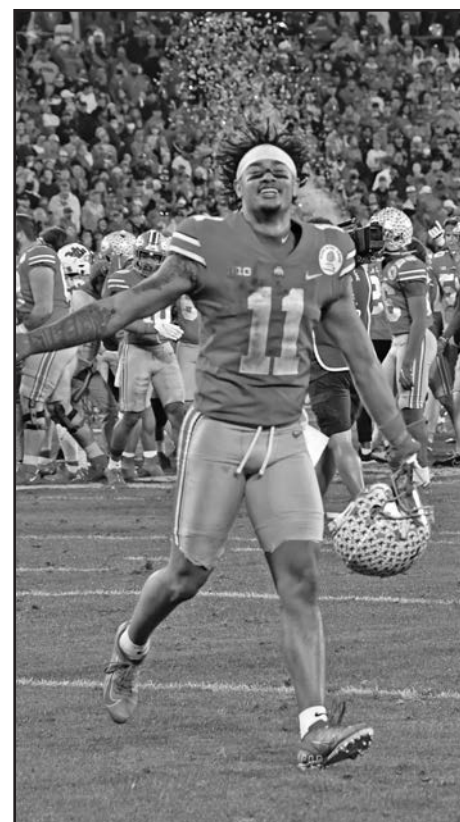
Unsatisfied with the season ending in a Rose Bowl loss, Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and the other Buckeye receivers got to work keeping the Buckeyes in the game. Stroud connected with Harrison for a 25-yard touchdown on a fourth-and-1 to make it 14-7 before Smith-Njigba burned Utah's secondary up the left sideline for 50 yards to make it 21-14 on Ohio State's next possession.

Before the game ended, both Stroud and Smith-Njigba would set school records. Stroud collected 573 passing yards to set Ohio State's single-game mark and equaled it in passing touchdowns with six. Smith-Njigba broke not only Ohio State's single-game receiving yardage mark but a national record for receiving yards in a bowl game with 15 receptions for 347 yards and three touchdowns. Smith-Njigba's 15 receptions also tied his own single-game program record in that category, achieved earlier in the season against Nebraska.

"I think Jaxon's done what he's done all year, and that's play within himself," Day said. "Certainly, some of the plays he had tonight were tremendous. We leaned on him a lot."

That first Smith-Njigba scoring grab kicked off a frenetic stretch in the game with three touchdowns scored in just 2:08 of game time, leading to a 35-21 halftime lead for the Utes.

Ohio State came out in the second half and outscored Utah 24-3 to start, capped by a connection between Stroud and Smith-Njigba on a slot fade in the end zone for a 30-yard, toe-dragging scoring strike to



FILE PHOTO

RECORD BREAKER — Ohio State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba set several records in the Buckeyes' Rose Bowl win over Utah with his 15-catch, 347-yard performance, including the FBS bowl receiving yards record and the Ohio State single-game receiving yards record.

put OSU up 45-38 with 4:22 to play.

"You could watch this sport forever," ESPN's Chris Fowler said on the broadcast after the grab. "You won't see many better games from a wide receiver than this one,"

An injury to Rising put walk-on Bryson Barnes in at quarterback for the Utes for his first collegiate pass attempts. He proceeded to lead Utah on a game-tying drive, capped by a 15-yard scoring toss to tight end Dalton Kincaid, but a chip-shot field goal by Ruggles with nine seconds remaining secured a 48-45 victory for the Buckeyes. It was the ninth Rose Bowl win in program history, second most in the game behind USC's 25 victories.

"That Utah team is a very, very good team," Day said. "They're well coached, very good players. I have a tremendous amount of respect for them. They played their tails off tonight in an unbelievable game. But I couldn't be prouder of our guys."

8. NIL Alters Landscape Of College Football

The storylines that followed Ohio State throughout the season involving Name, Image and Likeness dollars for collegiate athletes are ones that were prevalent throughout the landscape of college football and college sports in general, not just in Columbus. Sticking to the Ohio State perspective, however, there's little doubt that it had huge implications for the present and future of the program.

It was felt at every stage of the program,



FILE PHOTO

TITLE TOWN — The Ohio State women's basketball team took home a share of the Big Ten regular-season championship last season, closing on a 13-3 run to finish as a leader in the conference.

from those already on the roster to those preparing to begin their careers at Ohio State. Several Buckeyes on last year's team – including Stroud, Smith-Njigba, running back TreVeyon Henderson and cornerback Denzel Burke – reportedly signed a joint NIL deal with The Foundation, one of Ohio State's NIL collectives, worth a combined \$550,000.

These total pales in comparison, though, to what Day believes Ohio State should be dishing out. During an event at the Covelli Center in June that featured over 100 businesses from the Columbus area, the head coach claimed Ohio State needed around \$13 million in NIL to maintain the Buckeyes' roster.

"I think that's the thing that we're working towards, but it's here," Day said in December. "It's not going anywhere. So embracing it and moving forward and having all those things working towards exactly that is where we all have to be and where we're going."

"I don't know exactly where we're at with all that right now, but that's the goal. I mean, that has to be it. And, you know, we're all in. And, again, we've got to do everything we can to fight for our players to make sure they have what they need, and we've got to be on the forefront of that. So that's important. And our players need to know that we're fighting for them. We are. And the same thing with recruits."

As Day alluded to, the impact has also been felt in recruiting, though the direct correlation can be hard to nail down given that high schoolers and the programs recruiting them are not required to disclose any conversations. Ohio State suffered several losses on the recruiting trail and four decommitments in the 2023 recruiting class from July 30 through Dec. 21, with NIL believed to be at least a part of the equation in all the decisions.

But as NIL continues to develop and take shape, Day said it will be a priority to ensure that Ohio State's players – those on campus already and those that the Buckeyes would like to have in Columbus – have everything they need.

"We have some folks that are really helping and doing everything they can, and that's great," he said. "We're going to need as much help as we can moving forward. But the great news is we have great fans who want to support it, and we're going to make sure we do everything we can to make sure our guys get what's fair."

9. Aquilla Wins NCAA Title And Breaks Shot Put Record

Thrower Adelaide Aquilla is likely to go down as the best women's shot put specialist in Ohio State track and field history, and one could argue she's among the best in NCAA history.

In the final event of her Ohio State career at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships on June 9, Aquilla broke the collegiate women's shot put record with a throw of 19.64 meters. The throw also won Aquilla her second consecutive national championship, besting the field by more than a meter.

"To come back and defend my title – and do it in a bit of style – was an awesome feeling," Aquilla told The Lantern in June. "I was super excited to go out there and compete in Eugene (Ore.)."

Throwers get six attempts to record their best possible throw, and four separate tosses recorded by Aquilla would have claimed first place that day. And she's no stranger to big stages, as Aquilla qualified for and competed in the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.

Beyond winning back-to-back NCAA titles, Aquilla was Ohio State's Female Athlete of the Year in 2021, and she also owns the Buckeyes' program record in discus with a throw of 57.86 meters at the Big Ten championships in 2022. She also won the Big Ten title in both indoor and outdoor shot put last year.

"The numbers she put out and the goals she put out were everything you'd expect," said Travis Coleman, Ohio State's assistant coach for throwing events. "It's what you'd expect out of arguably one of the best female athletes to ever be here at Ohio State."

10. Branham Goes One-And-Done

Perhaps the biggest story of the year out of the men's basketball team was the meteoric rise of freshman forward Malaki Branham, the first one-and-done player in head coach Chris Holtmann's tenure at Ohio State, who was taken with the 20th overall pick in the 2022 NBA draft.

He was the first freshman to depart the Buckeyes for the NBA after one season since D'Angelo Russell left to be drafted second overall by the Los Angeles Lakers in 2015.

"I believe (Branham) has elite touch," Holtmann told The Athletic in May. "When I'm saying elite touch, I think he has the best touch of anybody I've ever coached."

"The combination of his shooting, his ball skills, his ability to get to spots, how fluid of an athlete he is, really make him a difficult guard for people. And it's really going to make him, I think, a very good NBA player."

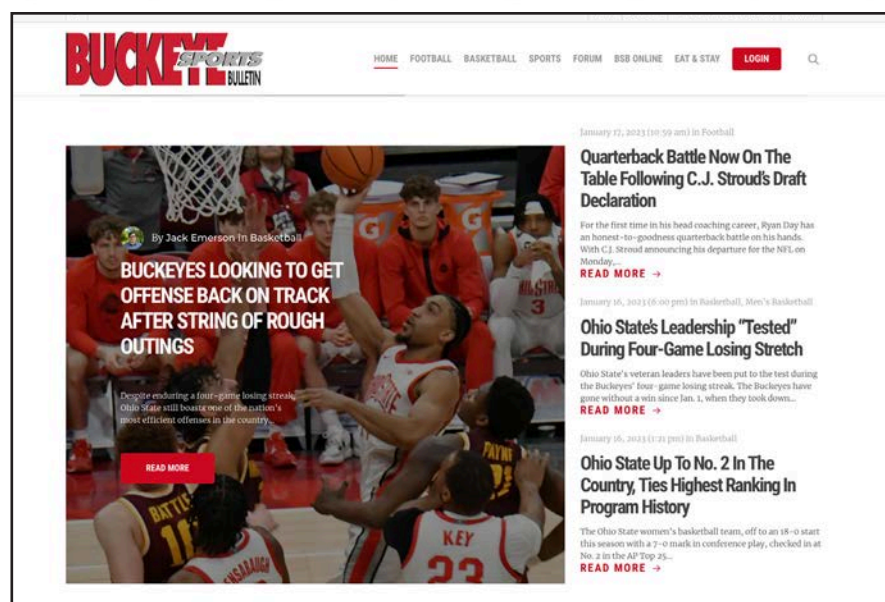
Branham's lone year with the Buckeyes started in a bit of a slog. Beginning the season as a backup, he played no more than 28 minutes in each of the team's first 10 games, averaging a mere 6.3 points during that first stretch of games. Branham's breakout shortly followed in an 87-79 overtime win over Nebraska on Jan. 2, 2022, in which the Ohio native scored a career-high 35 points on 13-of-19 shooting.

"I kind of built my confidence after I hit those first couple," Branham said. "They just told me to keep shooting, so that's what I did."

That confidence never seemed to fade, as Branham posted a 24-point outing two games later against Northwestern, eventually hitting the 20-point mark on six more occasions before season's end. He posted those numbers with consistent efficiency as well, shooting 49.8 percent from the field and 41.6 percent from three for the season.

"I think he's got all the stuff that you need to really compete at the highest level," Holtmann said. "And he's just scratching the surface, too, on the player that he can be."

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Johnson Left Mark During Time With Buckeyes

By BRADEN MOLES

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

As Ohio State's eventual season-ending contest against Georgia approached, junior offensive lineman Paris Johnson Jr. took time out of his preparation for both the Peach Bowl and the upcoming NFL draft to pen a heartfelt letter to the Ohio State faithful.

He explained his journey to Columbus, including stories about his college allegiance growing up – it was Miami (Ohio), not the Buckeyes – as well as the moment he determined Ohio State would be his future school.

Sitting in the office of then-head coach Urban Meyer prior to Johnson's junior year of high school, the coach put on film of Ohio State's comeback win over Penn State in 2017. Every time the Nittany Lions scored, Meyer looked at Johnson, exclaiming, "Can you believe this?" or, "Are you seeing this?" and by the time the Buckeyes came back to win, Johnson was sold and ready to commit.

But Johnson's mother, Monica Daniels, had him follow through with some due diligence on the remaining schools he was still considering. Following some additional visits, he was still ready to become a Buckeye, but that meant informing every school that had offered him that he was committing to Ohio State.

"I remember I started at (8 a.m.) and I finally called Coach Meyer at (9 p.m.) and told him I wanted to be a Buckeye," he wrote. "I was so tired that all I can remember him saying was, 'Well, son, we're ready to have you.'"

Johnson's article – which was written for The Players' Tribune, an online outlet that publishes stories by athletes – went on to explain some of his favorite memories at Ohio State, his reaction to the Buckeyes' loss to Michigan this year and the agonizing wait to discover their College Football Playoff fate, and he ended it by explaining how badly he wished to win a national championship.

"This was not supposed to happen," he wrote. "But I thank God that my path led me to Columbus, because this university and this community is about a lot more than wins and losses and banners on the wall. It's really a feeling. It's a brotherhood and an unbreakable bond, and I'm not just talking about football."

"No matter what happens down in Georgia, just know that we'll be ready to run through that wall for you one more time," he continued. "This is family. Forever. Thank God that I'm a Buckeye."

Johnson's wish did not come true, with the Buckeyes falling to the Bulldogs in heartbreaking fashion, and he declared for the 2023 NFL draft on Jan. 10, expected to be one of the first offensive tackles off the board in April. He leaves Columbus with no shortage of accolades, including several All-Big Ten honors and a consensus first-team All-America recognition for this past season.

As for his letter, it came just as naturally as putting an opposing defensive end in the dirt. When not dominating on

the field during his three seasons at Ohio State, he was taking classes as part of his journalism major, for which he earned his bachelor's degree in December as part of the university's fall commencement ceremony.

"Paris Johnson is a tremendous young man," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "I did read his letter. I think that's why we get into coaching. To see his growth, what he's done on and off the field and to see his impact is tremendous."

"That's the reason you get into coaching is to have an impact on young people, and winning just allows you the opportunity to do that more and more. I'm proud of him. I thought it was well-written."

Beyond his letter in The Players' Tribune, he's also written a dozen stories for The Lantern, Ohio State's student-run newspaper, including articles on several student organizations and Ohio State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He's even tried his hand at sportswriting, covering an Ohio State baseball game for the publication.

"I love to write," he said prior to the Peach Bowl. "When I got into it, I thought I would be writing long articles and long stories. When I got to Ohio State, I had to learn about word limits and trying to tell a story in the fewest amount of words, and that was really hard for me."

"Once I learned to do that, it became fun to do. For me it just became something that's really fun to do, to tell other people's stories. I like to find a lot of groups out there, like a lot of community service groups on campus because that's what I covered. I covered the diversity and accessibility on campus. I covered a lot of those types of groups on campus."

His dedication in the classroom showed, and he was named an Ohio State scholar-athlete each of the last three seasons. Of the seven members of the football team to earn his degree in December, he was the only one to complete that accomplishment in just three years.

Johnson and his mother also founded the Paris Johnson Jr. Foundation prior to his arrival at Ohio State, and he has somehow found time between classes and football to raise over \$15,000 for the charity, which is dedicated to disabled veterans and disadvantaged student-athletes.

"I've always been passionate about veterans," Johnson said. "I have so much respect for veterans. It's easy to say it, but words are just words. Our team tries to find a way to give back to those people who have arguably made the second greatest sacrifice on earth. Those people shouldn't have to worry about the basic necessities when they come back home. They should be taken care of by the people that they protected."

In November, the charity was named the recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award, which is given annually to an individual or group within the sphere of college football that has made an impact on the military community.

"Paris is a wonderful individual, one who cares about and takes care of those who are less fortunate," Day said. "He does this through his foundation. These



FILE PHOTO

STUDENT OF THE GAME — Ohio State offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr., who declared for the 2023 NFL draft on Jan. 10, has left an impression on and off the field for the Buckeyes in his three seasons in Columbus.

efforts are indicative of the leader that he is on the field and off. He is a conscientious young man, an incredibly sincere and thoughtful individual, and someone I can't wait to see succeed in life as an upstanding citizen."

Johnson credited his mother with helping him balance his ventures on and off the field and assisting with the development of the foundation.

"Growing up, I always told my mom that when I have the chance to play in the NFL, I wanted to use that money to be able to give back to people," he said. "I wanted to use that platform of being an NFL player to be able to spread awareness about the things that I found that are very important, and I told this to my mom since I was 5 years old."

With Johnson set to depart, Ohio State will go into this next season attempting to

find a replacement at left tackle, but that challenge won't be nearly as great as replacing the leadership, camaraderie and maturity that he brought to the program in just three seasons.

"He's always been well-rounded," Day said earlier this season. "His mom, Monica, has done an unbelievable job raising him. And Paris has a really good balance of football and life. He's done a lot. He has a foundation, and he's done very well on the field."

"We saw that in recruiting. And I think that's where he saw the culture here at Ohio State, recognized what the culture was here and recognized what Ohio State could do for him. But also, we recognized early on what Paris Johnson could do for Ohio State. I think it's been a great marriage, and in three short years, he's made a major impact here."

QB Battle, OL Among Top Offseason Questions

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Once the clock hit all zeroes in Ohio State's loss to Georgia in the Peach Bowl, that meant the long, dark and dreary reality of the offseason was upon the Buckeyes.

While last offseason offered plenty of intrigue in terms of off-the-field developments – namely a retooling of the coaching staff under head coach Ryan Day and the program's response to the first loss to Michigan since 2011 – this offseason will have no shortage of on-the-field questions that need to be answered leading into the spring.

Spring practice won't begin until early March with the annual spring game to follow on April 15, but there's no better time to look ahead to Ohio State's focus over the next few weeks. Buckeye Sports Bulletin is breaking down the biggest questions faced by the Buckeyes entering the spring and as the 2023 season approaches.

Finding Stroud's Replacement

For the first time in his head coaching career, Ryan Day has an honest-to-goodness quarterback battle on his hands. With C.J. Stroud departing for the NFL, this leaves Kyle McCord and Devin Brown, who are entering their third and second years in the program, respectively, to duke things out for the right to go under center for Ohio State.

Day has seen a quarterback battle in his time at Ohio State, with Dwayne Haskins beating out Joe Burrow in 2018 before the latter's transfer to LSU, but he's had a clear starter in each of his four seasons as head coach despite the program pushing battles between Justin Fields and Matthew Baldwin in 2019 or Stroud, Jack Miller and McCord in 2021.

McCord enters the offseason with a clear advantage, having appeared in 12 games for the Buckeyes over the last two seasons. He also has a start under his belt, filling in for a nonconference win over Akron in 2021 where he finished 13 of 18 passing for 319 yards, two touchdowns and an interception.

"I think last year, getting the chance to play was huge," McCord said during this past fall camp. "Getting that opportunity to go out there and get game experience, it really did me a lot of good things. And I think this year, if that same opportunity happens, I know I'll be ready because I know what to expect. I know how to prepare like a starter and how to approach the game and stuff like that. So getting that opportunity last year is definitely huge."

Despite being viewed as the heir apparent to Stroud by most, McCord largely rode the bench this past season, seeing the field late in only a handful of blowouts. Despite Ohio State winning seven games by at least three possessions, McCord did not play in the first half of any game and just three times saw the field as early as the third quarter. His other four appearances all came with the clock winding down in the final frame.

In total, he attempted just 20 passes on the season, completing 16 of them for 190 yards and a touchdown, with a 72-yard strike to wide receiver Jayden Ballard accounting for a good chunk of those yards. Brown took the field for just 15 snaps in two games, all to

hand the ball off.

"That's just the way that I've always believed the game should be played," Day said. "I think when you're rolling and you're in the third quarter, beginning of the fourth quarter – go play. But when you start to get towards the end of those games, and they get a little lopsided, I just think that's the way to respect the game."

McCord has the pedigree of a former five-star quarterback, not to mention his connection with wideout Marvin Harrison Jr., who played with McCord at St. Joseph's in Philadelphia. Brown, a former four-star signal caller, offers upside as a passer and can take off with the ball. While he has yet to throw the ball in a game for the Buckeyes, he did show off his arm during practice prior to the Peach Bowl, uncorking a nearly 50-yard touchdown bomb to soon-to-be redshirt freshman wideout Kyion Grayes.

Replacing Stroud – a two-time Heisman finalist, no less – is no easy task, and while McCord may have an early lead, this is as open a quarterback battle as there's been at Ohio State in several years.

If the result of that battle leads to either McCord or Brown opting to transfer, Ohio State added some insurance via the portal on Jan. 17, bringing in former Oregon State quarterback Tristan Gebbia for his seventh season of college football. If not for his addition, the Buckeyes could have been left with Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star quarterback Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185) backing up McCord or Brown as a true freshman.

Taking The Next Step On Defense

It's been noted ad nauseam that defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' new defensive scheme was never meant to be a quick fix. It took several seasons to establish himself and his defense at Oklahoma State, and while he's admitted that standards are higher at Ohio State, his installation was always viewed as a multi-year process.

Although Ohio State didn't quite reach the heights of a top-five defense, as Knowles said he hoped for prior to the season, the Buckeyes still showed solid improvement, allowing just 21.0 points and 321.5 total yards of offense per game, marks which ranked 25th and 14th in the nation, respectively.

Of course, those numbers would have looked much better had it not been for porous performances in the final games of the season against Michigan and Georgia. The Buckeyes allowed over 40 points and 500 yards of offense to both teams, with the majority of that production coming on missed tackles and busted coverage.

Those explosive plays killed Ohio State, which allowed a combined five touchdowns of at least 60 yards against the Wolverines and Bulldogs, including a 76-yard touchdown pass that ultimately helped boost Georgia to a win over the Buckeyes in the Peach Bowl.

"We didn't get it done in the fourth quarter defensively, and it's up to me now to spend a lot of dark nights figuring that out," Knowles said after the game. "It's not the players. It's

on me to put them in the right positions."

And while those two games had the most obvious examples of explosive plays given up by Ohio State, it was a constant throughout the season. The Buckeyes allowed 11 plays of at least 50 yards, six plays of at least 60 yards and five plays of at least 70 yards, a number that tied Ohio State for second worst in the country.

Outside of the explosive plays, though, the positives were abundant for Ohio State's defense. Opposing rushing attacks found little success, and Ohio State – from the defensive line and linebackers all the way out to the secondary – seemed more aware and responsive than Buckeye defenses in previous seasons under Day. Stars also developed under Knowles, including linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, safety Lathan Ransom and defensive end J.T. Tuimolau.

But if Ohio State wants to return to the College Football Playoff and continue competing for national championships, it starts with opponents – especially those of the same caliber as Michigan and Georgia – not having free rein over the field for long, back-breaking plays.

"At Ohio State, the expectations are different," Knowles said. "That's why we get paid the way we do. That's why we get the resources that we do. The expectations are different. Do I think we played our best (against Georgia)? I don't know. I'll have to watch the film, but I know we gave up too many plays. And that's my job to fix that and not let that happen."

Filling In The Offensive Line

It was fully expected that Ohio State would lose the services of offensive tackles Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones following the conclusion of this past season. Johnson has been viewed as a future first-round NFL draft selection since the day he arrived on Ohio State's campus, and Jones' stock has risen over the past few seasons, and he is now considered by most to be at least a day-two selection.

What was not expected, however, was that center Luke Wypler would also declare for the draft. Ohio State got some welcome news with the return of guard Matthew Jones, who announced he's staying for a sixth season, but it still leaves the Buckeyes and offensive line coach Justin Frye in the unenviable position of replacing three starters in the trenches while also trying to break in a new starting quarterback.

Left guard Donovan Jackson joins Jones as the only returning starters, and Jackson's presence will be an important one for Ohio State's offensive line. He was one of the Buckeyes' most consistent run blockers and played 827 snaps on offense, tied with Johnson and Wypler for the most on that side of the ball.

The only other returning members of the offensive line unit with starts under their belts are tackle Josh Fryar and guard Enokk Vimahi. Fryar filled in earlier this season when Dawand Jones was out against Indiana, and Vimahi started – though Fryar finished the game – against Michigan when Matthew Jones was out.

Fryar finished with the most snaps on the offensive line this season outside of the

five starters, tallying 231, and his successful outing as a starter presumably slots him in at one of the open tackle positions, likely on the right side of the line.

"I think it's huge," Fryar said of his start. "Just to prove to myself and prove to my teammates that I can play and coming back next year ... I can play."

Vimahi had the next-most snaps among non-starters, seeing the field on 116 plays as first off the bench at either guard position. That marks the end of any significant experience for the returning offensive linemen, though, with center Jakob James, tackle Zen Michalski and guard Tegra Tshabola rounding out the second-team rotation, each checking in at under 80 snaps on the season.

Ohio State clearly did not believe that two starting-caliber tackles were on the roster, though, given the extensive searching in the transfer portal. Despite the Buckeyes missing on several of the top tackles in the portal – including Ajani Cornelius (Oregon), Jeremiah Byers (Florida State) and Jarrett Kingston (USC) – the Buckeyes were able to close on former Louisiana-Monroe offensive tackle Victor Cutler, a starter at left tackle last season for the Warhawks who announced his commitment to Ohio State on Jan. 18.

But while Cutler has experience at left tackle, his frame – just 6-3 and 302 pounds – likely projects him at the interior for Ohio State, setting up a battle between Michalski and rising redshirt sophomore Ben Christman for the remaining tackle spot, though the competition could feature several players vying for the role this spring and into the fall.

Beyond finding the starting five, Ohio State will also work to secure depth beyond the first team. Frye has previously stated that he prefers to have eight or nine players that he feels comfortable can step in on the offensive line. Given the lack of playing time this season for those like third-year players Trey Leroux and Grant Toutant, it means Ohio State will be looking for significant contributions from the likes of Tshabola or the incoming freshmen to help supplement depth.

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Roses Wilting In College Football Playoff

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On Jan. 1, 1902, the Tournament of Roses hosted the first-ever postseason college football game. West Coast Conference champion Stanford and Western Conference champion Michigan descended on Tournament Park in Pasadena, Calif., for what turned out to be a 49-0 rout by the Wolverines.

Michigan's win was so lopsided that the Tournament of Roses opted to replace the New Year's Day football game with Roman-style chariot and ostrich races, and even elephants and camels were pitted against one another in tests of speed.

After the allure of animal races died off, and safety concerns arose, the Tournament of Roses revived its yearly football game in 1916 and, from there, the game was woven into the cultural fabric of college football, growing into one of the sport's most renowned postseason contests – the Rose Bowl.

"The Rose Bowl was everything growing up," former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin said. "I remember my dad went out and bought one of those big cabinet wood Zenith color TVs before the 1968 game – I was 10 years old – so we could watch Rex Kern, (Jim) Stillwagon and (Jack) Tatum and those guys. And that was the coolest thing in the world to see that game on TV in color.

"When we got to go to one, there's nothing like it," he continued. "It's the greatest. Playing Michigan and then playing in the Rose Bowl, there's nothing like it."

In 1946, the Big Ten and Pac-12 – known at the time as the Big Nine and Pacific Coast conferences – struck an agreement to play the yearly game between the champions from each conference. Ohio State had already made its first appearance in the annual game, however, falling to California 28-0 in its first-ever bowl game on Jan. 1, 1921.

The Rose Bowl served as the setting

for several de facto national championship games over the following years, including Ohio State's 27-16 triumph over USC on Jan. 1, 1969, which pushed the Buckeyes past the finish line for the 1968 consensus national title. In the days of the Bowl Championship Series, the Rose Bowl was used to decide the outright national champion twice, with the 2006 battle between Texas and USC widely regarded as one of the greatest college football games ever played.

Former Ohio State receiver Bruce Jankowski, a member of the fabled "Super Sophs" who won the title in 1968, played in a pair of high-stakes Rose Bowls, including the victory over USC in 1969. While the Buckeyes geared up for a crack at the national title, Jankowski said he had to quickly acclimate himself to the historic nature of the game.

"We were young (in 1969), and showing up and putting all these different athletes together, we just didn't know that much at that point other than we had a big job ahead and we're at some school who's trying to be famous and continue to win national championships," Jankowski said. "I had watched some Rose Bowls in the past, and typically they're played for a national championship, I did know that. Once we got there and started to get out and get acclimated, it was really pretty neat."

Vaughn Broadnax, who played fullback at Ohio State from 1980-83, missed out on the opportunity to play in the Rose Bowl during his playing career, joining the Buckeyes fresh off their appearance in the Rose Bowl following the 1979 season – a game which they lost 17-16 to USC – and he said not getting the chance to play in the game was one of his great regrets from his time with the Buckeyes.

Broadnax said the program emphasized the opportunity to play in the game in recruiting and during the season, adding that receiving a bid to the Rose Bowl coincided with their aspirations to beat Michigan.



FILE PHOTO

CHAMPIONSHIP MOMENT — Ohio State head coach John Cooper and sophomore quarterback Joe Germaine hoist the Rose Bowl championship trophy after Germaine guided a last-minute scoring drive in OSU's 20-17 win over Arizona State on Jan. 1, 1997.

"It was pretty well emphasized," Broadnax said. "That was something that was always kind of looked at as 'The Granddaddy Of Them All,' as (commentator) Keith Jackson would say. In my scope, it was the best bowl game out there.

"Our goal was always to beat Michigan and generally if you beat Michigan, you were going to the Rose Bowl," he continued.

While enthusiasm to play in the Rose Bowl was high for the players in the Ohio State program, Ike Reynolds – who has worked in the travel business for more than 45 years and is the founder of Reynolds Travel in Columbus – said the game also had a significant impact on business.

"(Football season) had a big impact financially, but the impact is directly related to the bowl game," Reynolds said. "The Citrus Bowl, we aren't going to take as many people as we would to the Rose Bowl or to the (College Football Playoff)."

Although the Rose Bowl once stood as the crown jewel of bowl season, the integration of the BCS and CFP has since diminished the value of the game. In today's era, the best of the Big Ten and Pac-12 are no longer pitted against one another, with the conference champions likely being sent to the playoff rather than Pasadena.

This season, Penn State – which finished third in the Big Ten's East Division – and Pac-12 Champion Utah battled in the Rose Bowl, with the Nittany Lions winning 35-21. Had it not been for an upset by Utah over USC in the conference championship game, the Trojans would have locked in a spot in the playoff, leaving the conference's runner up to represent the Pac-12 in the Rose Bowl.

"Typically, it had always been the teams that played in the Rose Bowl were playing for the national championship," Jankowski said. "You really don't have that at this point anymore. To me, it's just one of many bowl games."

Broadnax said the loss of the Big Ten and Pac-12 tie-ins, as a result of the playoff, have changed how he views the game.

"When you see the Rose Bowl host the national championship game and a Big Ten or Pac-12 team is not in the game, it's kind of reminiscent to me that somebody should be there representing us," he said. "But it's a national championship game and, for whatever reason, we didn't make it. That, over the years, has changed the scope of the game for me."

Laughlin recounted when former Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler was asked to share his thoughts on the 2002 Rose Bowl – which doubled as the BCS National Championship between Miami (Fla.) and Nebraska – and Schembechler replied that it wasn't a true Rose Bowl.

"They asked him, 'What did you think of the Rose Bowl, Bo?' and he just said 'Didn't watch it, it's not the Rose Bowl,'" Laughlin said with a laugh. "And I've kind of felt the same way."

Following the Rose Bowl's run as a BCS bowl from 1998-2013, the annual contest has continued in modernization by carrying the label of a New Year's Six bowl in the age of the CFP. Since the playoff was established in 2014, the Rose Bowl has hosted three semifinal games – including an all-time classic shootout between Oklahoma and Georgia in 2018, in which the Bulldogs triumphed 54-48 – none of which included members of Big Ten.

Ohio State has played in a pair of Rose Bowls since the integration of the CFP, boasting a pair of wins over Washington in 2019 and Utah in 2022. The latter came on the heels of the Buckeyes' first loss to Michigan since 2011, which greatly diminished the buzz around the team.

"You have the playoff games, and then you have all the other games," longtime Columbus Dispatch sportswriter Bob Hunter said. "Arguably the Rose Bowl is, a lot of the time, the best of the other bowl games, but they're just games."

"Honestly, in the case of Utah and Ohio State, who's really excited about that when you're thinking 'Well, we should have beat Michigan and got to the playoff.' It's just kind



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of another game, and I do really think that's true."

That feeling has been met by the Ohio State fan base, according to Reynolds, who said that there has been a level of fatigue with traveling to the game in recent appearances from the Buckeyes. Hunter added that he's also seen a general apathy toward the Rose Bowl from Ohio State fans in recent trips.

"Ohio State and Utah were highly ranked teams, but it's kind of like 'Eh, it doesn't mean anything,'" Hunter said. "I've got a lot of rabid Ohio State fan friends, and some of them go to bowl games every year. And last year, I don't know if I know anybody that went to the Rose Bowl."

The Buckeyes dispatched the Utes in a 48-45 shootout, which saw Ohio State erase a 35-21 halftime deficit behind record-breaking performances from quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Entering the game, however, there were different feelings between the two programs. Ohio State arrived in Pasadena reeling from its first two-loss regular season since 2017, holding the Buckeyes out of the playoff for the first time since 2018. Although head coach Ryan Day recognized the historic nature of the Rose Bowl, he made it clear that the Buckeyes had larger goals than obtaining the Leishman Trophy, awarded to the Rose Bowl champion, entering the season.

"The goal here is to win championships, and that's the goal that we have year in and year out," Day said on Dec. 5, 2021. "We didn't reach that goal. However, we have the opportunity to go play in a very tradition-rich Rose Bowl, and that means a lot."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Utah had just produced one of the best seasons in program history – aside from a pair of undefeated seasons in 2004 (under Ur-



FILE PHOTO

ANOTHER FOR THE TROPHY CASE — Acting Tournament of Roses president Jeff Throop (left) hands the 2010 Rose Bowl championship trophy to Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel (center) as offensive game MVP Terrelle Pryor (2) and the rest of the Buckeyes watch. Ohio State defeated Oregon 26-17 on New Year's Day to win "The Granddaddy of Them All."

ban Meyer) and 2008, when the Utes were a part of the Mountain West Conference – and claimed its first Pac-12 title, punching its ticket to the program's first Rose Bowl appearance.

Unlike Ohio State, the Utes rallied around the idea of playing in the Rose Bowl, and head coach Kyle Whittingham emphasized that playing in the game was a big deal for the growth of the Utah football program.

"For us, it's a great opportunity for our program," Whittingham said. "It's the next step in the evolution of our program, getting to the Rose Bowl. It was the next step and the next goal for our program. It's something we've been shooting for and had our

sights on for a number of years. We've finally been able to get over that mountain, and we're very excited to have that opportunity."

In a similar vein to Utah's handling of the Rose Bowl, Gold and Black publisher Alan Karpick – a Purdue writer who has held that title since 1996 – noted that the Rose Bowl remains a long-term goal for the "schools that are not overexposed," including Utah and the Boilermakers, who have made just two appearances in program history in 1967 and 2001.

"I would argue that the Rose Bowl is a whole different situation for a school like Purdue vs. Ohio State or Michigan," Karpick said. "It's a huge deal for Purdue, and it remains that way."

"With the CFP, maybe it changes some, but it won't change for a school like Purdue because it's a huge bowl game for them."

With the CFP set to expand to 12 teams in 2024, the Rose Bowl is at risk of losing several of the key traditions that make it special. Chief among them is the annual Rose Parade, which typically occurs on Jan. 1, the same day as the game is normally played.

"Even though the Rose Bowl got into the rotation of the CFP, it just isn't the same as it was," Reynolds said. "The competition is just different. I guess it's evolution. You have to wonder how long the Rose Bowl can exist because of the new CFP program that's going to start up, and most likely the parade is not going to be at least a gameday part of the program."

Hunter echoed the sentiment shared by Reynolds, noting that the Rose Bowl's typical New Year's Day fixture could be impacted.

"You always knew when the Rose Bowl was going to be," Hunter said. "They were so wedded in tradition and all of that, and I thought that was great. But under this format, there's obviously no way that it's going to stay that way."

"The Rose Bowl has kind of been this steadfast institution. You know where it is, you know who's playing in it and it was great. I guess you could say the way college football has changed, the way college athlet-

ics has changed, just in the last few years with all the (name, image and likeness) stuff and transfers, just the whole thing, there's going to be very little that's going to be the same way that it was even 15 years ago."

Although the Rose Bowl's significance to Ohio State fans and in the grand scheme of college football has lessened in recent years, the grandeur and spectacle that surround the game remain. The rich tradition of the game, from the fans being split apart based on allegiance to the colors of the sunset stretched across the San Gabriel Mountains, continues to live on despite the sport's modernization.

"Its stature is still going to be there," Broadnax said. "There's no artificial setting, so to speak, that matches the beauty and grandeur of the Rose Bowl. It's always going to have that mystique. And I think it's always going to be a top-tier bowl."



FILE PHOTO

FEELING ROSY — Ohio State ended its 2021 season with a celebration in Pasadena for contributors new and old, sending off seniors such as Thayer Munford (left) with a win, while welcoming new stars like Dawand Jones (right).

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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.

BASEBALL

Feb. 17 vs. UConn at Venice, Fla.; **18** vs. UConn at Sarasota, Fla.; **19** vs. UConn at Sarasota, Fla.; **20** vs. UConn at Port Charlotte, Fla.; **23** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz.; **24** vs. Gonzaga at Phoenix, Ariz.; **25** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz.; **26** vs. Gonzaga at Phoenix, Ariz.

March 3 vs. Mississippi State at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas; **4** vs. Cal at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas; **5** vs. Oklahoma at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas; **10-12** at Cal State Bakersfield; **14-15** at Marshall; **17-19** DAYTON; **21** WRIGHT STATE; **22** TOLEDO; **24-26** at Indiana; **28** XAVIER; **31** MINNE-SOTA.

April 1-2 MINNESOTA; **4** KENT STATE; **7-9** at Michigan State; **11** AKRON; **12** BOWLING GREEN; **14-16** MARYLAND; **18** at Miami (Ohio); **21-23** at Penn State; **25** at Kent State; **28-30** ILLINOIS.

May 2 at Wright State.; **5-7** at Iowa; **9** UCF; **10** CENTRAL MICHIGAN; **12-14** UNC GREENSBORO; **18-20** MICHIGAN; **24-28** Big Ten Championships, TBA.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (11-8, 3-5)

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, L 70-67; **15** at Rutgers, L 68-64 (OT); **18** at Nebraska, L 63-60; **21** IOWA, W 93-77; **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 (19-0, 8-0)

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, W 76-67; **19** NORTHWESTERN, W 84-54; **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 GYMNASTICS

Jan. 14 Windy City Invite at Chicago, Ill., 3rd/6 (394.900); **21** at Navy Open, 1/6 (405.350); **28** at Michigan.

Feb. 11 Illinois; **23** at Winter Cup at Louisville, Ky.

March 4 at Army; **11** PENN STATE & OKLAHOMA; **17** at Nebraska; **31** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

April 1 BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS; **14-15** NCAA Championships.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 8 OHIO STATE QUAD MEET, 1st/4 (196.775) vs. KENTUCKY (196.575), ARIZONA (194.950) AND GREENVILLE (181.425); **16** at Georgia Quad Meet at Athens, Ga., 1st/4 (196.250) vs. Georgia (196.125), Rutgers (194.675) and Fisk (190.100); **22** IOWA; **28** at Michigan.

Feb. 5 MARYLAND; **13** at Illinois; **17** at Penn State; **25** at B1G Five Meet.

March 3 BRIGHAM YOUNG; **5** TRI-MEET VS. ILLINOIS & KENT STATE; **10** at Cal; **18** Big Ten Championships at Iowa City, Iowa; **29-April 1** NCAA Regional.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (16-9-1, 9-7)

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, W 7-2, L 4-2; **20-21** at Wisconsin, L 4-0, W 2-0.

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 (22-2-2, 17-2-1)

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; **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 WISCONSIN, W 2-1 (OT); **14** WISCONSIN, W 5-0; **20** at St. Cloud State, W 6-2; **21** at St. Cloud State, W, 3-2 (OT); **27-28** MINNESOTA STATE.

Feb. 3-4 at Minnesota; **10-11** ST. THOMAS; **17-18** at Wisconsin.

MEN'S LACROSSE

Feb. 4 AIR FORCE, noon; **11** CLEVELAND STATE; **19** NORTH CAROLINA; **25** vs. Virginia at Naples, Fla.

March 4 CORNELL; **11** at Notre Dame; **14** DETROIT MERCY; **19** at Denver; **26** RUTGERS.

April 1 at Penn State; **9** MARYLAND; **15** at Johns Hopkins; **21** at Michigan; **29** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals.

May 4 Big Ten Tournament Semifinals; **6** Big Ten Tournament Championship.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

Feb. 10 ROBERT MORRIS; **12** TEMPLE.; **17** at San Diego State; **19** at USC; **25** DENVER; **28** CINCINNATI.

March 4 at James Madison; **9** MICHIGAN; **12** COLORADO; **18** JOHNS HOPKINS; **25** at Penn State; **28** LOUISVILLE.

April 4 at Marquette; **8** at Maryland; **15** NORTHWESTERN; **20** at Rutgers.

SOFTBALL

Feb. 10 at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. Georgia; **11** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. Boise State; **11** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. UCF; **12** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. UMass; **17** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Notre Dame; **18** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Notre Dame; **18** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Clemson; **19** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Clemson; **24** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. Cal State Northridge; **25** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. San Diego State; **26** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. Utah.

March 10 at Conway, S.C., vs. Canisius; **10** at Conway, S.C., vs. Coastal Carolina; **11** at Conway, S.C., vs. Canisius; **11** at Conway, S.C., vs. Houston Christian; **12** at Conway, S.C., vs. Houston Christian; **14** at Charleston Southern (DH); **15** at College of Charleston; **17** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Cleveland State; **17** at Greenville, N.C., vs. East Carolina; **18** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Presbyterian; **18** at Greenville, N.C., vs. East Carolina; **19** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Cleveland State; **21** KENT STATE; **24-26** MICHIGAN; **29** at Dayton; **31** at Indiana.

April 1-2 at Indiana; **4** OHIO; **7-9** RUTGERS; **11** at Penn State (DH); **14-16** at Illinois; **18** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **21-23** PURDUE; **28-30** MINNESOTA.

May 5-7 at Nebraska ; **10-13** Big Ten Tournament at Champaign, Ill.

SWIMMING & DIVING

Jan. 13 Tri-Meet at Tuscaloosa, Ala.,

Men: vs. Alabama, W 124-62, vs. Texas W 101-85; Women: vs. Texas L 109-77, vs. Alabama W 115-71; **14** Tri-Meet at Tuscaloosa, Ala., Men: vs. Alabama, W 230-123, vs. Texas W 189-164; Women: vs. Texas L 196-157, vs. Alabama W 220-133; **21** at Michigan, Men: W 151.5-148.5; Women: W 186.5-113.5; **27-28** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind.

Feb. 10-12 OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **15-18** BigTen Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **26** LAST CHANCE MEET.

March 9-11 CSCAA National Invitational at Elkhart, Ind.; **15-18** NCAA Championships at Knoxville, Tenn.

MEN'S TENNIS (5-0)

Jan. 15 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 4-0; XAVIER, W 7-0; **19** CLEVELAND STATE, W 7-0; TOLEDO, W 4-0; **22** ILLINOIS, W 6-1; **28** UCF; TULSA.

Feb. 3 TEXAS A&M; **5** TEXAS; **9** at Wake Forest; **11** at Virginia; **14** BAYLOR; **17** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill.; **25** NOTRE DAME.

March 8 at South Carolina; **15** at UCF; **19** MICHIGAN; **24** at Northwestern; **26** at Illinois; **31** NEBRASKA.

April 2 WISCONSIN; **7** at Michigan State; **9** at Michigan; **15** PENN STATE; **21** PURDUE; **23** INDIANA; **28** Big Ten Tournament at Bloomington, Ind.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (4-2, 0-0)

Jan. 5 CENTRAL STATE, W 3-0; **7** PENN STATE, L 3-1; **14** at Patriot Invitational in Fairfax, Va., vs. Grand Canyon, L 3-2; **15** at Patriot Invitational in Fairfax, Va., vs. George Mason, W 3-1; **20** MARYVILLE, W 3-0; **21** MISSOURI S&T, W 3-0; **26-27** PRINCETON.

Feb. 3 at Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in State College, Pa., vs. USC; **4** at Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in State College, Pa., vs. UCLA; **9** MCKENDREE; **11** LEWIS; **16** at Purdue Fort Wayne; **18** at Loyola Chicago; **24** at Quincy; **25** at Lindenwood.

March 4 CHARLESTON; **10-11** at BYU; **15** at Ball State; **18** BALL STATE; **21** at Penn State; **24** LINDENWOOD; **25** QUINCY; **30** at Lewis.

April 1 at McKendree; **6** PURDUE FORT WAYNE; **8** LOYOLA CHICAGO; **15** MIVA Quarterfinals; **19** MIVA Semifinals; **22** MIVA Finals.

WRESTLING (9-1, 3-0)

Nov. 5 at Michigan State Open, 8 champs; **11** VIRGINIA TECH, W 18-13; **18** COLUMBIA, W 33-6; **20** at North Carolina, W 33-9.

Dec. 2-3 Cliff Keen Invitational at Las Vegas, Nev., 8th/34; **11** KENT STATE, W 32-9; **19** Collegiate Duals at New Orleans, La., vs. Lock Haven, W 39-3; vs. Northern Iowa, L 19-13; **20** Collegiate Duals at New Orleans, La., vs. Lehigh, W 23-12.

Jan. 6 at Indiana, W 26-13; **15** RUTGERS, W 27-12; **20** at Maryland, W 38-6; **27** at Michigan; **29** MICHIGAN STATE.

Feb. 5 at Northwestern; **10** NEBRASKA; **18** Spartan Combat Dual at Tampa, Fla., vs. Cornell.

March 4-5 Big Ten Championships; March **16-18** NCAA Championships.

Hubbard Runs His Way Into NFL Record Book

By **CRAIG MERZ**

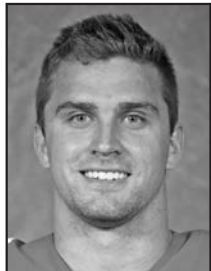
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Sam Hubbard has made no shortage of big plays for his hometown Cincinnati Bengals. This includes back-to-back sacks of Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes late in last season's AFC Championship that helped the Bengals to an overtime victory and a trip to Super Bowl LVI.

But nothing the former Cincinnati Moeller and Ohio State standout had done in his career remotely approached the historic play he made in the Bengals' 24-17 wild card win against the Baltimore Ravens on Jan. 15.

With the score tied 17-17, the Ravens were driving for the go-ahead score in the fourth quarter when quarterback Tyler Huntley, on third-and-goal from the 1-yard line, tried to stretch across the goal line with the ball in hand. Bengals linebacker Logan Wilson poked the ball away, and Hubbard scooped it up and returned it 98 yards for the longest fumble recovery for a touchdown in NFL playoff history.

The 14-point swing gave Cincinnati a 24-17 lead with 11:39 left in regulation, and that's the way the game ended to advance the Bengals to the divisional-round matchup at the Buffalo Bills on Jan. 22, which Cincinnati won, 27-10.



Sam Hubbard

"It's hard to put into words," Hubbard said after the Baltimore game. "We've been in that spot where you're in the playoffs. It's not going how you pictured it. Everyone thought we'd be blowing them out, and you've just got to rise to the occasion. I'm glad to be that guy that made a play to kind of change the momentum a bit."

The play – which Bengals fans took to calling "The Fumble in the Jungle" – came exceedingly close to not happening. According to NFL's NextGen Stats, the ball was 0.6 yards away from the end zone before Wilson pushed the ball loose with both hands.

"I'm going to be thinking about that the whole offseason – just how one play, they won the game," Huntley said.

The Bengals may have gotten another break when Hubbard (6-5, 265) took off with ball. NextGen Stats said Hubbard traveled 123.6 yards (taking into account that he didn't run in a straight line) at a top speed of 17.43 mph to go the longest distance by a ball carrier for a touchdown this season. As Hubbard raced to the end zone, Ravens tight end Mark Andrews tried to chase him down and came close, topping out at 20.72 mph.

"I was watching on the big screen," Hubbard said. "I was like, 'He's coming, somebody block him, please don't get caught.' That's all I was thinking about. Just get to the end zone. We know that these playoff games are never pretty. By any means, get it done."

Along the way, he got help when linebacker Markus Bailey shoved Andrews in the back in an attempt to provide interference for Hubbard. While Bailey could have been flagged for blocking in the back, giving Cincinnati the ball around the Baltimore 40-yard line after the penalty, the play instead stood to become part of Bengals – and probably Ravens – lore.

Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow, who befriended Hubbard at Ohio State before he transferred to LSU, was not surprised that the defensive end produced a magical moment.

"He's kind of what this whole thing is built on. Toughness, hard work, leadership, those are the kind of guys we try to bring in here," Burrow said. "He's one of my best friends, and he comes up with big plays over and over and over again. He's a great leader, gets his work done – a constant positive attitude in the locker room. He's exactly the kind of guy you want on your team."

Hubbard also had four tackles and a quarterback hit in the game. He's been playing at a high level since his days at Moeller when he helped the Crusaders to state titles in his junior (2012) and senior (2013) seasons.

Hubbard originally committed to play lacrosse at Notre Dame but changed his mind at the persuasion of then-Ohio State coach Urban Meyer, who first saw him playing dodgeball in a gym class.

During Hubbard's redshirt freshman year in 2014, the Buckeyes won the national championship by beating Oregon in the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship Game. Over his next three seasons he played in 40 games, making 22 starts, before becoming a third-round draftee (77th overall) by the Bengals in 2018.

Hubbard played in all 16 games his rookie season, with a highlight being a 19-yard scoop-and-score of Miami quarterback Ryan Tannehill's fumble late in the fourth quarter to give the Bengals a two-touchdown lead in just the fifth game of Hubbard's career.

That was among his most memorable moments until the AFC Championship Game last season when the Chiefs were in a goal-to-go situation late in the game. A touchdown would give Kansas City the lead, but on second and third downs, Hubbard sacked Mahomes, forcing the Chiefs to kick the tying field goal.

The game went to overtime, and the formerly downtrodden Bengals won 27-24 for their third trip in franchise history to the Super Bowl, just as Hubbard and Burrow planned for when the former Buckeyes were reunited in Cincinnati.

"The thing about Joe and myself, we are winners," Hubbard said after the game. "We've won our whole lives. I have been pretty miserable along with a lot of teammates losing games the last few years. I told Joe, 'We need you. You are the guy to turn us around. I know it.' He embraced that."

Hubbard's most recent on-field exploits triggered an outpouring for his off-field charity work. In the week after his historic

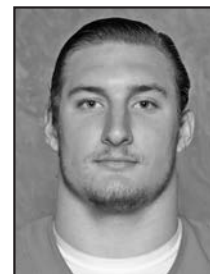
return, more than \$60,000 was donated through individuals and corporate matching funds to his foundations to combat hunger in the Cincinnati area and provide vulnerable children with educational, medical and athletics resources. Many donors gave \$9.80 or \$98.00 to signify the yards on his touchdown run.

Sounding Off

Elsewhere, a pair of ex-Buckeyes had less pleasant experiences in their wild card games. One, of course, was Ravens running back J.K. Dobbins, who made headlines with his postgame rants about his lack of carries, especially during the critical drive that resulted in Hubbard's touchdown.

The other was Los Angeles Chargers outside linebacker Joey Bosa. His two unsportsmanlike penalties and criticism of the officials for missed calls predictably resulted in a hefty fine.

He was irate during and after the Chargers' meltdown against the Jacksonville Jaguars in which the Chargers led 27-0 before losing 31-30 on Jan. 14. Bosa's first flag came after he said something to referee Shawn Smith about the lack of holding calls against the Jaguars' offensive line.



Joey Bosa

Later, Bosa threw his helmet down while still on the field near the sideline, drawing another penalty. He wanted a false start on a Jacksonville touchdown that made it 30-26. After the penalty on him moved the ball closer to the goal line, the Jaguars successfully converted a two-point conversion to pull to within two at 30-28 with 5:25 left in the fourth quarter. That added point proved to be the difference when Riley Patterson made a 36-yard field goal as time expired.

"If I say something to them, I get a \$40,000 fine," Bosa told ESPN after the game. "But if they blow a call that ruins an entire team's season – they'll probably be back in the locker room after the game like, 'Ha-ha, got that (expletive). Oh yeah, got him 15 yards. What a loser.'"

He then added, "I guarantee it, that's what they're (doing), talking like (that) in the back. Whatever power trip. I'm sick of those (expletive) people."

Bosa admitted he needs to control his emotions but added, "I do really, really want to say some things. I need to be more accountable for my actions, obviously, but it's a heated game and I'm hurting out there. I'm playing on half a leg. I'm getting dragged to the ground, whatever. It could hurt me along with screwing our team, and yeah, maybe some of them weren't as blatant as I thought, but I don't know. I think there just needs to be more accountability."

He also accused Smith of antagonizing him: "But how is it fair for me, who is out there playing my butt off and there's a missed call and I say something, and he's going to run up in my face – what grown man in a position that he's in (says), 'Oh,

what did you say to me? What did you say to me?'"

Bosa got support from former Ohio State wide receiver Garrett Wilson. The rookie for the New York Jets tweeted during the game that he had a similar encounter with the same referee: "That ref. He don't (mess) with Buckeyes. I see he getting on Bosa's nerve tonight."

Wilson had posted earlier in the season that Smith told him, "This ain't (Ohio) State no more," after a play.

Following Bosa's second penalty, a fan mentioned on Wilson's Twitter that Smith was from Michigan, to which Wilson responded, "It all adding up now."

In the aftermath, the NFL on Jan. 21 fined Bosa a total of \$55,546 – \$29,785 and \$13,261 for his two unsportsmanlike conducts, and an additional \$12,500 for his postgame comments.

Running Mouth, Not Ball

Meanwhile, Dobbins criticized his coaches for not giving him the ball down the stretch, a decision that he felt ultimately put Huntley in a bad position.

"He should have never been in that situation," Dobbins said. "I don't get a single carry (on the drive). I didn't get a single carry. He should never have been in that situation. I believe I would have put it in the end zone, again."

Dobbins finished with 13 carries for 62 yards and four catches for 43 yards and one touchdown against the Bengals.

"I should be the guy. I'm tired of holding that back. I'm tired of that," he said. "Twelve (carries). It's the playoffs. I'm tired of holding that back. Let's go win the game. I'm tired of that."

Some media took him to task for saying that the outcome would have been different if injured starting quarterback Lamar Jackson had played, insinuating that Huntley was not up to the task.

"If we'd have had Lamar, we'd have won too," Dobbins said in response to a question.

Ravens coach John Harbaugh on Jan. 19 said the matter had been put to rest after a chat with Dobbins at breakfast the morning after the game.

"We had a good talk," the coach said. "He made it very clear to me what he meant in terms of that vs. the way it came out and where he was coming from in the heat of battle and all of that. I was real good with that conversation and what he told me."

Dobbins' postgame outburst must have brought flashbacks to Buckeye fans who heard similar comments from Ezekiel Elliott after Michigan State upset the defending national champions, 17-14, in Ohio Stadium in on Nov. 21, 2015. Elliott had 12 carries for 33 yards.

"I think I do deserve more than 12 carries," he said. "I think I really do. Honestly, I can't speak for the play calling. I don't know what was going on. I don't know what they were seeing. Honestly, it didn't work out. It wasn't working. I asked for those plays to be called, and they weren't. I was lobbying all game."

Changes In College Football Make December Unique

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the opening lines of the popular song “Changes” by David Bowie, the great rock star recounted how he’d traveled down “a million dead-end streets,” believing each would bring him fame or success or some form of fulfillment.

By the catchy yet wistful chorus of the tune, he concludes that while time may change him, he can’t trace, control or predict how time unfolds.

In that same vein, college football has undergone a series of changes of its own the past few years. The chaos generated by those alterations isn’t one predicted by the powers that be, and it certainly feels out of control right now.

This past December, the combination of Name, Image and Likeness, the transfer portal (now featuring the transfer window) and the early signing period, as well as the usual day-to-day stresses that come with running a football program, became overwhelming for coaches to shoulder. And in the case of Ohio State, there was a College Football Playoff game to prepare for, too.

“You just don’t sleep,” Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said Dec. 13. “That’s December. I was laughing with somebody earlier, growing up in the month of December you think about Christmas and holiday times and everything else. (Now) when I think about December, I think about bowl practice, I think about recruiting, I think about home visits, I think about transfer portal. I think about all these different things.”

While far from the only source of both strife and change in today’s college football landscape, NIL has been the cause of much confusion and toil.

The original intent was to allow collegiate athletes to profit from endorsements, autograph signings, video game recreations of themselves – anything where their own name, image or likeness is a source of income.

What the NCAA legislated when the rule was first introduced was that it could not be used as a recruiting inducement or as a substitute for pay-for-play, but there’s been easy workarounds. University boosters have set up massive NIL collectives, inking top high school prospects to multi-million dollar endorsement deals from a pool of money. In naming specific schools that may be violating rules, or delving into NIL-specific issues in general, Day has stayed mum as a policy.

“It’s certainly not a road that I want to go down,” he said Dec. 21. “I don’t think there’s any benefit to it. So what do we do? We just focus on the guys that we signed. There’s a lot of hearsay out there and a lot of people talking about all kinds of different things. That can be frustrating, but we’re just going to focus on our guys right now.”

Such practices created a war of words between Alabama head coach Nick Saban and Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher this past summer following a record-setting class from the Aggies that finished first in the 247Sports composite rankings.

“I mean, we were second in recruiting last year,” Saban said during an event in Birmingham on May 18. “A&M was first. A&M bought every player on their team – made a deal for

name, image, likeness. We didn’t buy one player, all right? But I don’t know if we’re going to be able to sustain that in the future because more and more people are doing it. It’s tough.”

Fisher fired back a day later, saying that the Aggies “never bought anybody.” While Saban and Fisher’s back-and-forth certainly provided some memorable quotes, it connects back to Ohio State in regard to the recruiting losses the team suffered leading up to the early signing period from Dec. 21-23.

It’s hard to say exactly how much of an impact NIL had in each of the specific scenarios because deals, particularly with high school recruits, are scarcely made public. But even if NIL is not the entire story of a prospect’s recruitment, there’s no doubt it plays at least a small part.

After he had decommitted in November, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225) – previously the lone running back commitment in Ohio State’s class, his departure leaving none in the class – signed with Miami (Fla.).

Fast-forward to the opening day of the early signing period, and the Buckeyes lost Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star cornerback Kayin Lee (5-11, 185), who flipped to Auburn.

Hillside (N.J.) St. Peter’s Prep four-star safety Jayden Bonsu waited a day before eventually signing his letter of intent with Ohio State. Following his signing, The Foundation, Ohio State’s top NIL collective, quote tweeted Bonsu’s signing announcement with the caption “Saved. Go Bucks!”

On top of that, the Buckeyes failed to sign any of the three five-star defensive ends they were in hot pursuit of the entire cycle 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. The trio signed with Alabama, Oregon and Georgia, respectively.

When all was said and done, Ohio State held the No. 6 class in the country with the third-best average player rating behind Alabama and Georgia. The class is a tick below the Buckeyes’ usual standard but still respectable.

“These are guys who want to be Buckeyes,” Day said. “They know the opportunity here. And there’s a lot that comes with deciding on where to go to a school. A lot of these guys did it for the right reasons. What I mean by that is focusing on the things that truly matter in this case.

“It’s the development at Ohio State. It’s the ability to come in and get an unbelievable education. It’s being a part of a program that’s going to be in the national championship hunt every year, but also part of an unbelievable culture in the city of Columbus.”

The potentially biggest loss for Ohio State in December didn’t come in the class of 2023, though. On Dec. 17, Chandler, Ariz. five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220), the consensus No. 1 player in the 2024 class, decommitted from Ohio State after being part of the Buckeyes’ class since May.

“It was never part of the conversation, then it became part of the conversation, and it’s trending towards being the (entire) conversation for a lot of folks,” Day said Dec. 13. “So just as time has gone on, it’s become more and more of a priority for folks. And so navigating those times and adapting is important.”



FILE PHOTO

TIMES ARE A-CHANGIN’ – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has been forced to navigate the shifting landscape of college football, including the implementation of Name, Image and Likeness and the transfer portal, in his time with the Buckeyes.

Program policy, according to Day and athletic director Gene Smith, is still not to tangle with the inducement side of NIL before recruits arrive at Ohio State. Rather, the program – through the NIL Edge Team, founded by the athletic department early last year – works to coordinate NIL deals for its players once they are on campus. But as more and more schools offer huge sums to recruits and divert talent from Columbus, one has to wonder about the long-term viability.

The NCAA hasn’t shown many signs of cracking down, as no investigations have been launched into programs about their NIL practices. The organization sent letters to its member schools saying it would be looking into potential violations, but not much has come to fruition. It doesn’t help that the NCAA is currently transitioning leadership, with former Massachusetts governor Charlie Baker set to take over for former president Mark Emmert in March.

“With NIL, we need federal legislation,” Smith said on a Rivals.com podcast. “There’s no way the NCAA can fix that, in my view. We need federal help to mitigate what’s happening in the inducement space. We’ve got to have that. If we don’t get federal help, we’ve got to get state help, maybe.”

Another practice against the rules that appears to be taking place through back channels is tampering with players not in the transfer portal. Washington State head coach Jake Dickert indicated as much was happening within the walls of his facilities on Dec. 16, sometimes not even through said back channels.

“There’s more tampering going on than you could ever imagine,” Dickert said. “We’ve had guys contact our players’ parents. We had a coach from another school contact one of our players and offer him NIL. A coach.”

At Ohio State’s media day on Dec. 29 leading up to the Peach Bowl, wide receiver Emeke Egbuka indicated he’d been approached by teams with NIL offers but that he is content in Columbus. Rumors had circulated about similar tampering with wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., but he denied any teams had approached him. Recruitment of any kind of players on other teams’ rosters who are not in the transfer portal is strictly prohibited by the NCAA.

Speaking of the transfer portal, it’s another road teams are having to navigate. This year brought a new wrinkle with the transfer portal

window, leaving only two designated periods of the season when players can transfer to new schools. The first window opened Dec. 5 and closed Jan. 18, and a second window runs from May 1-15.

Last year, more than 3,000 players transferred to new schools, and this season there appears to be a similar number. Restricting those transfers to set dates created a frenzy of sorts, one that happened the same month as the early signing period and bowl preparations for teams.

“I think when some of these decisions are made, no one can really forecast the ultimate implications,” Smith said. “The transfer portal happened before NIL. Then NIL came into place. Agents became allowable – people weren’t really talking about that. That’s been a major, major change.”

College athletes are still not allowed to hire agents to represent them personally until they leave for the pros, but agents have been allowed to facilitate deals from the marketing side of things, and Smith said this is just one more piece leading to a complicated landscape.

“Collegiate athletics has reached an unbelievable level of commercialization, and the ecosystem we serve is different,” he said. “The families, the student-athletes are totally different than when I grew up.”

Through the confusion of NIL, the transfer portal and the early signing period, Ohio State was still left with a game to play against Georgia. The Buckeyes fell in a 42-41 heavyweight title fight, missing a do-or-die field goal as the clock hit midnight, ringing in the new year and leaving 2022 – and specifically the challenges of December – in the past, though it will all be back at the forefront this time next year.

“This year was a unique season,” Day said on Dec. 21. “It’s going to be a (another) unique recruiting cycle next year, and every year it changes. This year, certainly, there were a lot of changes. But in the end it comes down to relationships, and our guys did a great job of that.”

It might have felt like Ohio State wandered down a million dead-end streets in December. But it’s all part of adapting to the changes happening within college football.

Five Incoming Freshmen Reaping NIL Benefits

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Mere days into their time at Ohio State, opportunities to profit from Name, Image and Likeness deals are already cropping up for some of the Buckeye freshmen who are enrolling early at the university.

The Foundation – Ohio State's top NIL collective – held a signing ceremony for five of the team's early enrollees on Jan. 10, establishing a partnership that will connect them with sponsorships and other opportunities in the NIL space. Among them were safety Malik Hartford, cornerback Jermaine Mathews, wide receivers Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate, and tight end Jelani Thurman.

"The Foundation is just a dream come true," Thurman said. "Great opportunities, great chance to give back to the kids. A great chance to put my face out there and show who I really am."

Thurman has already profited from his partnership with the collective, posting photos with a brand-new car courtesy of Ricart Automotive on his Instagram. The lone tight end commitment in Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class also sees the long-term benefits that could come with NIL if he develops into a star at such a big-name school.

"A few of the great players that have come through here told me about some of the opportunities that Ohio State would be offering," Thurman said. "If you make a play or actually show that you can be the future of Ohio State, they're going to make sure they take care of you."

The Foundation was launched early last year by real estate developer and Ohio State booster Brian Schottenstein alongside former Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones, with the goal to help football and men's basketball players receive compensation for their NIL.

"I wasn't really planning on getting involved personally, and then I saw a lot of other schools were putting together collectives and different ways to raise money for the student-athletes," Schottenstein told BSB in July. "I decided to get involved with it and didn't want to be left behind, as far as Ohio State, with attracting the best student-athletes. That's why I started working on it."

Schottenstein has held the opinion that collegiate athletes should have a source of income for some time, and that helped fuel his desire to get the collective up and running.

"It's something that I've always believed in," Schottenstein said. "And then once it looked like it was going to become law, and also passed by the NCAA, then I wanted to get more involved with it."

While opportunities offered through The Foundation give a nice financial boost to players along the way, many of them view the long-term profitability of becoming an NFL draft pick – as well as the additional publicity and name recognition of playing at Ohio State – as the advantage of coming to Columbus. The program's policy is still to prohibit collectives – a list that also includes Gary Marcinick's Cohesion Foundation and Ron Stokes' "O" Foundation – from offering inducements directly to recruits for them to become Buckeyes, which is what several other programs have been accused of doing.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FOUNDATION

FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE — Several Ohio State early enrollees signed deals with The Foundation, an NIL collective that works closely with Buckeye athletes. Top row, L-R: wide receivers Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate. Bottom row, L-R: Safety Malik Hartford, tight end Jelani Thurman and cornerback Jermaine Mathews.

"For Ohio State, if you play here and you beat out players here, you're going to the NFL," Hartford said. "That's how I see it. That's how the coaches see it. And when you're able to play at such a high level, the NIL comes – and it came."

"That's really a big thing, just making some money while you're in college," Mathews added. "Getting your name out there, your voice, just your image, basically. That's the NIL. I think it's very big for everybody in the country. And it's going to keep growing."

Big-time recruits are often in very competitive markets when it comes to potential NIL deals on the table. Tate, a top-60 national prospect and the No. 10 wideout, amassed 777 yards and eight touchdowns receiving for a national high school powerhouse in IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla., and he could have made some serious money if he committed to any number of other schools recruiting him.

"It was very intense," Tate said. "A lot of schools came around trying to poach me, offering high numbers and stuff like that. But at the end of the day, I stayed true to myself and remembered why I wanted to play the game and why I chose the school I chose."

For Tate, that "why" included his relationship with recently promoted offensive coordinator Brian Hartline and the school's tradition of developing some of the nation's best wide receivers. NIL still factored into his recruitment, but he saw a path to profitability in that area at Ohio State that outweighed any potential cash to be made immediately at other schools.

"NIL ranked third on (my list of priorities)," Tate said. "Ultimately, my relationship with the staff, the player development and then NIL, because I know the path to the draft ultimately comes first."

Mathews was another prospect whom schools tried to steal from Ohio State's clutches with the allure of money in the form of an inducement. He confirmed at The Foundation's signing ceremony there were

other suitors, but he never wavered in his pledge.

"Being loyal to The Foundation is really what I'm about," Mathews said. "Being loyal to anybody that I love or care about is very dear to me. I just feel like my loyalty and my words go a long way."

Mathews added that he sees the people at The Foundation as part of Ohio State's "brotherhood" and part of his extended family.

Brand exposure is something that the signees indicated could help with their long-term earnings potential, too. Ohio State is known across the expanse of the country, Mathews said, and with its large alumni base, there's plenty of places to get recognized.

Rogers, who hails from Rolesville, N.C., grew up in a different region of the country and has a different perspective. Ohio State wasn't as relevant to him in his childhood, he said, but he's excited to be around teammates who share different backgrounds from his own.

"Growing up in the South, seeing Ohio State, it's different," Rogers said. "Football in the South is very popular. But in this direction, I feel like playing with guys from all over, it's just different. You can just learn a lot and build a lot of relationships from that."

Rogers also sees an ability to give back to his community through NIL, both in terms of his own hometown back in North Carolina and the charity partners The Foundation has in Columbus.

"It's just unbelievable what NIL can do for you," Rogers said. "It can really help a student ... not just that, (but) you can help others signing NIL deals and all that. You just never know what somebody's going through or what they may need, so you can be helping another individual."

Overall, all five signees were grateful for the perks of NIL and to be coming up in today's era of college football when it is available.

"It's definitely a great time to be joining

college football right now as a high school athlete," Rogers said. "You're getting paid what you're worth, you truly feel like a professional and feel wanted and know your value. It means a lot."

With pen now to paper and NIL sorted out, the five signees are in the swing of classes as they prepare for spring practice to begin, and all are eager for their respective careers to get going in Columbus.

"The culture here is different," Hartford said. "The opportunity to play for Ohio State is unmatched. Just the ability to be able to go to the NFL, develop into the player I want to be, develop into the man I want to be, it's untold of. I'm happy and I'm proud to play for Ohio State."

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Quarterback Recruiting Heating Up For 2024

Until a quarterback signs his national letter of intent to play for Ohio State in December, the main question for the Buckeyes is what signal caller will ultimately wind up in Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Braden Moles

For the longest time, it was believed that would be Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220). The No. 1 overall player in the class, he decommitted from Ohio State's class in December after being committed to the Buckeyes since May. While it gives the Buckeyes and head coach Ryan Day over a year to find the new candidate at quarterback, it's still less than ideal having to start over at the position for the class.

Even so, the process of finding that quarterback is already under way, and progress has been made in getting back into it with several prospects. The most notable so far is Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star quarterback Jadyn Davis (6-1, 192), the No. 19 overall prospect and No. 3 quarterback in the class.

Ohio State had been in deep pursuit of Davis early in the cycle, set to welcome him on campus for the Buckeyes' spring game last year. That visit never materialized, though, as it became clear to all parties involved that Ohio State had homed in on Raiola. Davis had previously made several visits to Columbus, but Raiola wound up committing to Ohio State just weeks later, ending any speculation of Davis joining the Buckeyes' class.

That was, at least, until recently. According to a report from 247Sports, Davis was visited by Day, newly promoted offensive coordinator Brian Hartline and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis on Jan. 20, potentially reigniting interest between

school and prospect.

"Our guys were on the track and in the weight room, and Coach Day and Coach Dennis watched them from afar," Providence Day head coach Chad Grier told 247Sports. "It was great having them here to come in and see Jadyn and (2025 five-star offensive tackle David Sanders). It means a lot when Coach Day stops in. He was very gracious with his time. Coach Day and Coach Dennis were great."

Other programs involved with Davis include Clemson, Georgia, Michigan, Penn State, North Carolina and Tennessee, so Ohio State faces an uphill battle – especially after a public situation in passing up Davis for Raiola the first time around – but a visit keeps those lines of communication open as the process continues.

Another quarterback the Buckeyes recently threw their hat into the ring for is Carlsbad, Calif., five-star quarterback Julian Sayin (6-1, 195), who is committed to Alabama.

"Sayin has been one of the state's top quarterbacks since his sophomore year," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Greg Biggins. "He's a pure thrower and might be the most ready to step in and play early of all the signal callers in the '24 class. His football IQ is very high, and he has an advanced feel for the position and understands how to throw with timing and anticipation. He has excellent pocket mobility and short area quickness. He can elude pressure and either buy time outside the pocket or take off and run when he needs to."

Sayin – the No. 15 overall prospect and No. 2 quarterback in the class – has been committed to the Crimson Tide since November, and there hadn't been much movement in his recruitment until Ohio State offered on Jan. 17.

It's obviously a tall task to flip a quarterback from another school – no less Alabama – but Ohio State did so as recently as the 2023 recruiting class, convincing Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star quarterback Lincoln Kienholz (6-2, 182) to flip his commitment from Washington to Ohio State. Furthermore, the Buckeyes have

OSU Football 2023 Signees						
Players in the class of 2023 who have signed their national letter of intent 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

been picky about offering quarterbacks in 2024, which can help to put an increased focus by the staff on each target.

Along with Davis and Sayin holding offers, Ohio State has offered Avon (Conn.) Old Farms four-star Ryan Puglisi (6-3, 205), who is committed to Georgia, Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star Colin Hurley (6-0, 213), who reclassified to 2024 and is committed to LSU, as well as Hialeah (Fla.) Mater Academy Charter four-star Adrian Posse (6-4, 205), who recently decommitted from Auburn.

Posse is another domino that could potentially fall. In addition to Ohio State, he's also been offered by Florida, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame and Texas A&M, among others. He had been committed to Auburn since July prior to his decommitment on Jan. 14, so his recruitment is starting over, and the Buckeyes are one of several schools that will look to get involved.

Twelve Early Enrollees Arrive On Campus

Eleven scholarship members and one

walk-on from Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class arrived on campus to begin classes in recent weeks, enrolling at the university and set to take part in the football team's winter conditioning before spring practice begins in March.

The group of early enrollees includes cornerback Jermaine Mathews; defensive tackle Will Smith; offensive linemen Luke Montgomery, Joshua Padilla, Austin Sierveld and Miles Walker; safety Malik Hartford; tight end Jelani Thurman; wide receivers Bryson Rodgers, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate; and walk-on running back Willtrell Hartson.

In addition to the new signees (as well as Hartson), the Buckeyes also welcomed three new transfers to campus in long snapper John Ferlmann, kicker Casey Magyar and safety Ja'Had Carter, who joined the team on Jan. 14.

DL Scott Deciding Between Eight Schools On Jan. 31

Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-5, 310) will an-

ASK AN ANALYST

With Garrick Hodge of Eleven Warriors

It's offer season for Ohio State, with double-digit offers going out for the 2024 class for several different positions in recent weeks. Of those recently offered, who do you view as some of the most important for the Buckeyes?

"That's really tough, mostly because Ohio State has offered approximately 5,000 players in the last two weeks. But considering Larry Johnson offered a good handful of defensive linemen and ends, I'd have to say starting there would be wise. Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star defensive lineman David Stone Jr. (6-4, 270) is a top-10 prospect nationally and someone who said Ohio State is 'easily in his top two.'"

"Another I'll say is Millersburg (Ohio) West Holmes three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203), who I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up in the 2024 class sooner rather than later."

How is the board looking at quarterback for Ohio State in 2024 following the decommitment of Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) in December?

"I'd say it's relatively unchanged for the most part. They did expand it slightly by offering Alabama commit and Carlsbad, Calif., five-star Julian Sayin (6-1, 195) on Jan. 17, but getting him to flip is a tall order. Hialeah (Fla.) Mater Academy Charter four-star Adrian Posse (6-4, 205) also decommitted from Auburn, so that could be a guy Ohio State could put a full-court press on."

"But I think right now they're still in evaluation mode for the most part. Seeing as the last two Ohio State quarterbacks in Devin Brown and Lincoln Kienholz went through fast recruiting processes, it wouldn't be surprising to see the same thing play out in 2024."

The Buckeyes had 11 members of the 2023 recruiting class enroll early at Ohio State. Out of that group, who do you feel is most prepared to make an immediate impact?

"I'll say cornerback Jermaine Mathews, both because of his talent and because of the position he plays. While he certainly won't be a favorite to start year one, Ohio State has had

two true freshman cornerbacks make starts in back-to-back years in Jyaire Brown and Denzel Burke.

"If injury/poor performance hampers Ohio State's cornerbacks in 2023, don't be surprised if Mathews or Waxahachie (Texas) four-star cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-0, 175) get their chance to contribute early."

How much do you feel NIL had an impact on Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class, and how do see the role of NIL expanding in recruiting going forward?

"It definitely had some impact at minimum, and anyone who said it didn't is lying to you. But the extent of the impact is unclear without knowing 100 percent what happened behind closed doors at other universities."

"Either way you look at it, Ohio State has still struggled to adjust to the new modern world of college football with NIL, and it's something they're going to need to re-evaluate going forward if they want to contend for the five-star Southern players of the world."

OSU Football 2024 Commitments

Players in the class of 2024 who 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 Prep
Garrett Stover	SAF	6-2	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut

nounce his college decision on Jan. 31, his birthday, deciding between Alabama, Colorado, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oregon and USC.

He is the No. 18 overall prospect and No. 4 defensive lineman in the 2024 class and was offered by Ohio State in September. He took an unofficial visit for the Buckeyes’ win over Rutgers on Oct. 1.

“All eight schools, I could see myself coming in and being a factor immediately and being able to (have an) impact as soon as I enroll there,” Scott told On3 Sports.

His timeline originally included taking official visits in the spring or summer before committing, but that has obviously been moved up. While Ohio State did get Scott on campus and the Buckeyes viewed him as an important target for this cycle, Notre Dame is viewed as the favorite to land his services.

If Scott opts for a school other than Ohio State, the Buckeyes have already set some clear recruiting priorities on the de-

fensive line with Buford, Ga., five-star Ed-drick Houston (6-3, 255) and Melissa, Texas, four-star Nigel Smith II (6-5, 260) – as well as a newly offered target, but more on him later.

Offer Season At Ohio State

Ohio State has issued nearly 30 offers since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, joining in the flurry of offers being sent out to high school prospects in recent weeks.

While not everyone will ultimately wind up at Ohio State or even be involved with the Buckeyes by the time the 2024 cycle has closed, prospects offered around this time last year included linebacker Tackett Curtis (who ended up at USC) and Rogers, who ended up among the top prospects at their respective positions.

With so many prospects and offers to break down, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is offering analysis on some of the most im-

pactful offers, with the remaining offers sent out in recent weeks also listed below.

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star defensive lineman David Stone (6-4, 270): As alluded to above, the Buckeyes issued an offer to Stone on Jan. 11, joining programs such as Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Oregon, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas A&M to offer the five-star prospect.

While the Sooners are viewed as one of the teams to beat, Stone’s reaction to Ohio State’s offer indicated the Buckeyes will be in on his recruitment for the long haul.

“It was pretty exciting,” he told Eleven Warriors. “I was expecting it pretty soon. I’ve been talking with Coach (Larry) Johnson for a while, and a lot of the staff came to our school a few times to visit.

“It was always a matter of whether I’d get down there first or I get the offer (before that). I planned to go last year, but things were difficult and I couldn’t make it. I plan to go sometime in March on a visit, hopefully.”

Stone is the No. 9 overall prospect and No. 2 defensive lineman in 2024, trailing only Houston in his positional rankings.

Millersburg (Ohio) West Holmes three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203): While Williams-Dixon is only a three-star prospect,

he’s already racked up an impressive offer list that features Cincinnati, Kentucky, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Rutgers and Tennessee, among others, in addition to receiving an offer from the Buckeyes on Jan. 12.

He rushed for nearly 1,300 yards and 41 touchdowns this past season after going for 35 touchdowns in his sophomore year for West Holmes, a high school in north-eastern Ohio that is just 90 miles from Ohio State’s campus.

After missing out on a scholarship running back in 2023, it’s likely that Ohio State will look to take two in 2024. The Buckeyes are involved with several top running backs in the class such as Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star Jerriek Gibson (5-10, 200), Cincinnati Moeller four-star Jordan Marshall (5-11, 195) and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star Stacy Gage (5-11, 200).

Williams-Dixon isn’t rated as highly as those prospects, but the offer shows that Ohio State clearly views Williams-Dixon as a take and potentially a good match with a topflight back in the class. It may not be long until he looks to join the class, either, as he said Ohio State is his hometown team.

“(The offer) meant a lot, especially because of the relationship I have with Coach (Tony) Alford. Him saying the words, ‘You

Continued On Page 24

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

“Corey Pargo is without a doubt the best lineman in the Midwest,” said national recruiting expert Tom Lemming. “There may not be a better lineman in the entire country. He is very strong and for an athlete his size has phenomenal speed. He is a definite starter with unlimited potential for success. Predicting him as a future All-American is a reasonable assumption.”

Those were big-time words but well deserved because Pargo was a big-time player in a big-time frame. He stood 6-5 and weighed 300 pounds. It was praise he had heard through his entire senior season at Toledo Rogers High. And it was praise the three-year starter at offensive and defensive tackle relished, including the future expectations that accompanied it.

“I like what they’re saying about me. It feels nice to know someone thinks that I’m that good,” said Pargo on Jan. 20, a couple of hours after verbally committing to Ohio State. “But I’m not one of those guys who likes to brag. I don’t like to say what I can do. I would just prefer you read about it and then come see. If I’ve worked, you’ll know it. If I haven’t worked, you’ll also know.”

30 Years Ago — 1993

Ohio State’s recruiting effort for 1993 passed the halfway point with two more verbal commitments during the week, bringing to 13 the number of high school seniors who had said they would become Buckeyes for the upcoming season.

Joining the fold were wide receiver Dimitrious Stanley of Worthington (Ohio) Thomas Worthington and quarterback Mark Zban of Huntington (W.Va.) East.

Stanley was an all-purpose player in high school and became the first wide receiver on Ohio State’s roster of verbal commits. The 5-11, 195-pounder was primarily a running back and defensive back, rushing for 1,534 yards and 16 touchdowns while grabbing eight interceptions. But the fact that OSU lost three receivers – Brian Stablein, Greg Beatty and Allen DeGraffenreid – to graduation from the 1992 team appealed to him.

While Stanley became the first receiver to verbally commit to OSU, Zban (6-5, 198) became the third quarterback in the class, joining Tom Hoying of St. Henry, Ohio, and Stanley Jackson of Pat-terson (N.J.) Catholic.

25 Years Ago — 1998

Ohio State welcomed three more key prospects to campus over the weekend of Jan. 16 and received a commitment from one of them.

Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwest cornerback Derek Ross committed to the Buckeyes over South Carolina and Nebraska during the weekend, which also had the Buckeyes entertain linebacker prospects Rocky Calmus of Jenks, Okla., and Shamar Finney of Shelby Crest, N.C.

Ross (6-1, 186, 4.4) was a standout cornerback prospect who had intercepted a total of 16 passes over the past three years. He

was hosted on his OSU visit by defensive back Gary Berry.

“We really had a great time,” Ross said. “They really made me feel welcome. I liked the coaching staff and the academic support they give their freshmen.”

20 Years Ago — 2003

OSU was among the many schools that were looking at Cleveland St. Ignatius junior quarterback Brian Hoyer.

The 6-4, 195-pound Hoyer threw for 2,100 yards and 18 touchdowns during his junior season for St. Ignatius. He also was the winning pitcher in the state championship baseball game during his sophomore season. He and his family had attended games at Michigan and OSU the past fall.

“We went to the Michigan-Washington game and the Michigan-Wisconsin game,” Hoyer’s father, Axel, told recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic. “And we went to the Ohio State-Penn State game and the Ohio State-Michigan game. He visited Ohio State and Michigan, and he’s definitely interested in those two.

“And he gets letters every week from Boston College, Pitt, Colorado and Iowa.”

15 Years Ago — 2008

It was the weekend all fans of OSU recruiting were dreading. After initially scheduling an official visit to check out Michigan during the last weekend prior to signing day, quarterback Terrell Pryor instead moved up the trip and headed to Ann Arbor during the Jan. 18-20 weekend.

Once Pryor was there, new U-M head coach Rich Rodriguez and his coaching staff had their best chance to pitch their spread offense and a clear path to playing time to Pryor, ranked the No. 1 player in the country by Scout.com.

It was a message that Jeannette, Pa., head coach Ray Reitz said could have left a big impression on Pryor.

“Some places he has a chance to play right away, so that could be something too,” he told BSB. “At Ohio State he doesn’t have the chance to play right away. I’m not saying that’s a factor, but I’m sure that’s intriguing when you go to certain schools and they don’t have a quarterback. Oregon and Michigan have said he’s got a chance to compete. Kids want instant gratification.”

During the week of Jan. 21, Pryor was expecting visits from Penn State and Michigan for sure, but coaches from LSU – a recent addition to his list – and OSU could also be making trips. One school Reitz said would not be in attendance during the week was Oregon because Pryor would be taking an official visit to check out the Ducks during the Jan. 25 weekend.

10 Years Ago — 2013

Cleveland Glenville linebacker Christopher Worley (6-3, 190), a three-star prospect ranked the No. 55 outside linebacker in the 2013 class, became the 22nd member of Urban Meyer’s 2013 recruiting class when he pledged to the OSU coach on Jan. 11.

Worley became the 21st commitment Ohio State had received from a Tarblooder since 2002, and Meyer had a player from Glenville in each of his first three recruiting classes with the Buckeyes. That is because defensive back Devan Bogard signed with OSU in 2012, and Meyer had already accepted a verbal from offensive tackle Marcelys Jones (6-5, 325), who was the first player to join OSU’s 2014 class.

Meanwhile, Worley decided to keep the Glenville pipeline going despite having offers from such programs as Arkansas, Bowling Green, Cincinnati, Georgia Tech, Illinois, Michigan State, Pittsburgh and West Virginia.

Five Years Ago — 2018

With three wide receivers already signed to its 2018 class, Ohio State snagged a commitment from a fourth when San Marcos (Calif.) Mission Hills wideout Chris Olave announced his pledge to the Buckeyes on Jan. 28.

Olave (6-1, 170), who chose OSU out of a final four that also included UCLA, USC and Utah, was the No. 396 overall prospect and No. 69 player at his position in the 247Sports composite. He did not receive an offer from the Buckeyes until early October but took an official visit to Columbus the weekend of Nov. 11, when the Scarlet and Gray trampled then-No. 12 Michigan State, 48-3.

Recruiting analyst Bill Greene said the Buckeyes put the full-court press on Olave during an in-home visit made by OSU wide receivers coach Zach Smith and offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Ryan Day on Jan. 22, and that proved to be the difference.

“I think it was the home visit with Zach Smith,” Greene said. “Ohio State was kind of slow-playing (Olave) a little bit. They weren’t really all in for him, and then Urban made the decision – because he makes all the final calls – where they had lost some guys there, so they had some spots open that maybe weren’t going to be open and he made the decision to go full go on Chris, and they did.”

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State earned its fourth commitment of 2023 when Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star defensive lineman Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260), the son of the late Ohio State and NFL defensive end Will Smith, committed to the Buckeyes on Jan. 23, just nine days after receiving an offer.

The elder Smith played for Ohio State from 2000-03, helping lead the Buckeyes to the 2002 BCS national championship. In 2003, he was named first-team All-Big Ten, Big Ten Defensive Lineman and Player of the Year, and a first-team All-American.

The younger Smith held additional offers from Boston College, Duke, Illinois, Northwestern and West Virginia, among others. He was rated the No. 540 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 71 defensive lineman, and he visited for a pair of games in 2021 against Maryland and Purdue.

Continued From Page 23

have earned an offer from (Ohio State),’ I was really looking forward to the call from either Coach Day or Alford,” Williams-Dixon told 247Sports. “I can’t speak for others, but getting an offer from your hometown team is very electrifying.”

Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star offensive linemen Deontae (6-7, 280) and Devontae (6-6, 288) Armstrong: It may be cheating to include two prospects in the same section, but it’s hard to separate the Armstrong brothers.

The offers have been a long time coming, as the pair of in-state offensive linemen – in fact, the first in-state offensive linemen offered by Ohio State in 2024 – have been regulars at Ohio State over the past year, making several unofficial visits and participating in summer recruiting camps.

“Being a Buckeye fan all my life, looking at it from the outside in and now from the inside out with working with the coaches, talking to Ryan Day, it means even more knowing the coaches and the coaching staff,” Deontae said after a camp session last summer.

Deontae plays at right tackle for St. Edward, while Devontae – slightly shorter and slightly bulkier than his brother – is at left guard. Three-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320), a teammate of the Armstrong brothers at St. Edward, fills in at left tackle for the Eagles, though he has not been offered by Ohio State.

And while it makes sense the duo is a package deal – and it’s not out of the

question that they attend the same school – both are doing their due diligence in finding a home, so one or the other (as well as both or neither) could end up in Ohio State’s class.

Devontae is rated the No. 357 overall prospect and No. 27 offensive tackle, and Deontae is considered the No. 435 overall prospect and No. 34 offensive tackle. They are the No. 13 and No. 17 in-state recruits, respectively. Other notable schools to offer both brothers include Cincinnati, Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State, Pittsburgh and Wisconsin.

While the Armstrongs, Stone and Williams-Dixon were some of the more notable offers, other recent offers in 2024 include Waco (Texas) Connally five-star cornerback Kobe Black (6-0, 190); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star defensive lineman Aydin Breland (6-5, 290); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Zabien Brown (6-1, 180); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy defensive lineman Jayden Jackson (6-2, 290); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star safety Jordan Johnson-Rubell (5-10, 175); Swainsboro, Ga., four-star athlete Demello Jones (6-1, 176); Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star defensive end Marquise Lightfoot (6-5, 215); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Jordan Lyle (6-0, 180); and Olney (Md.) Good Counsel three-star defensive end Darien Mayo (6-7, 247).

The Buckeyes also offered Tampa (Fla.) Catholic three-star wide receiver Terrance Moore (6-3, 190); Lees Sum-

mit (Mo.) North five-star defensive lineman Williams Nwaneri (6-5, 245); Tulsa (Okla.) Noah defensive end Danny Okoye (6-4, 241); Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225); Mukwonago, Wis., four-star offensive tackle Nathan Roy (6-5, 265); Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic five-star defensive end Elijah Rushing (6-6, 235); Sayin; Longview, Texas, four-star running back Taylor Tatum (5-10, 195); and Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day three-star defensive end Solomon Williams (6-3, 235).

For 2025, the Buckeyes sent out offers to Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star running back Tory Blaylock (5-11, 175); Clayton (Ohio) Northmont four-star wide receiver Dorian Brew (6-2, 185); Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional athlete Jahmir Joseph (6-1, 175); and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic athlete Quincy Porter (6-3, 190). Ohio State also sent out a pair of offers in 2026 to Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas athlete Justice Fitzpatrick (6-0, 165) and Carrollton, Ga., quarterback Julian Lewis (6-1, 175).

Farooq, Butler Include OSU Among Top Schools

A pair of 2024 prospects recently included Ohio State among their top schools. First up is Baltimore St. Frances Academy three-star safety Edrees Farooq (6-0, 185), the No. 618 overall prospect and No. 47 safety in the class.

He included Ohio State in his top 10 along with Cincinnati, Maryland, Michigan, Oklahoma, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Tennessee, USC and Virginia Tech. He was offered by Ohio State back in December along with several cornerbacks from St. Frances Academy, including Kevyn Humes (5-10, 150), four-star Ify Obidegwu (6-1, 185) and Blake Woodby (5-11, 180).

The other prospect with the Buckeyes among his top schools was Calabasas, Calif., four-star cornerback Aaron Butler (6-1, 170). Butler – the No. 65 overall prospect in the class – recently decommitted from USC before announcing that he is con-

sidering Ohio State along with Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Washington. Despite leaving the Trojans’ class, USC was also listed as a finalist.

Cautionary Tale Of NIL At Florida

There have been positives and negatives over the last year and change with Name, Image and Likeness, but no story has picked up headlines like the recent saga between Florida and Pittsburg, Calif., four-star quarterback Jaden Rashada (6-4, 175).

Rashada had previously been committed to Miami (Fla.), pledging to the Hurricanes in June. He walked back on that commitment to join Florida’s class on Nov. 10 before signing with the Gators on Dec. 21. According to a report from The Associated Press, the quarterback was offered a \$13 million NIL package by Gator Collective, an NIL collective for Florida student-athletes.

The only problem was that the reported deal fell through, with Rashada still locked into his national letter of intent. After not enrolling in classes at Florida, Rashada requested his release from Florida’s class on Jan. 17 and was granted that release on Jan. 20, putting the signal caller back on the market.

It’s the first high-profile case of a potential NIL deal souring the relationship between a prospect and a program, though with the way things are trending in the NIL arms race, it’s unlikely to be the last.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Woodstock (Ill.) Marian Central Catholic four-star tight end Christian Bantancur (6-5, 240) committed to Clemson on Jan. 13 over Ohio State and Oregon.

- Penn State earned a commitment on Jan. 17 from Pittsburgh Central Catholic four-star linebacker Anthony Specca (6-2, 220), rated the No. 331 overall prospect and No. 26 linebacker in 2024. Specca held an offer from Ohio State.

- Colorado head coach Deion Sanders is continuing to assert himself on the recruiting trail despite just arriving on campus. On Jan. 19, the Buffaloes flipped Lakeland, Fla., five-star cornerback Cormani McClain (6-2, 165) from Miami (Fla.). McClain had been committed to the Hurricanes but did not sign during the early signing period.

- Ohio State has announced dates for several summer recruiting camps. The Buckeyes will host one-day camps on June 8, 12, 14-15 and 20, with offensive and defensive linemen camping in the morning and skill positions going in the afternoon. There will also be a youth camp from June 5-6, a middle school 7-on-7 competition on June 13 and a high school 7-on-7 competition on June 21.

National Signing Day is set for Feb. 1. While it isn’t the holiday it once was for recruiting, there’s always the possibility of some late-breaking news that impacts the Buckeyes. For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

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New Lacrosse Stadium Provides Pride For Teams

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's men's and women's lacrosse teams now have a nearly 1,900-seat stadium to call their own.

In January, the university completed the Ohio State Lacrosse Stadium, a \$21.5 million project that will serve both as the host to Ohio State men's and women's home games and training grounds for much of their work honing their skills.

"To have a place, a classroom, a home to call our own has been phenomenal," women's lacrosse coach Amy Bokker said. "I think you're able to focus a lot more and really feel like you're in your own environment. And just little things, like having our own lines, the lacrosse lines are on the field and our cages are already over there."

The Ohio State board of trustees approved plans for construction of the facility in August 2021, and construction has now been completed with seasons set to begin for both teams in February. The stadium is situated between the Ty Tucker Tennis Center and Jennings Wrestling Facility, two other recent facility upgrades for Buckeye athletics. The men's and women's lacrosse teams had previously played their games in Ohio Stadium.

Bokker and men's lacrosse coach Nick Myers were involved in the process from the design stage. Their input into certain details was taken with great weight, from the look of the midfield logo to the color of field lines to other minutiae of the stadium.

"The approval of the board of trustees was obviously a big win for our programs, but I think we feel lucky because Coach Myers and I were involved in a lot of the decisions behind the scenes," Bokker said. "There was a lot of input from our end. There definitely a lot of in-person meetings, Zoom meetings just to make sure it really felt custom and intimate and a place that our student-athletes would be able to grow and thrive."



Amy Bokker

Myers said there were a lot of people to thank for the completion of the project, from athletic director Gene Smith and deputy athletic director Janine Oman to the board and other university officials. One of his favorite parts about the new facility is the gameday experience it provides for fans, and it was important that a lot of care went into developing a unique atmosphere people of all ages would enjoy.

"For the fans, you're elevated. You're right on the field. You walk in, and you're already at an elevated standing-room-only section with a rail that goes along the sidelines. That's a really cool spot to watch the game," he said. "You have a berm that runs around the stadium in a circle that you can sit on, put a blanket on, relax. On the east side we have what is the equivalent of a courtside seat at a basketball game built into the berm."

"I have young kids. I remember going to games – kids don't want to sit in the bleach-



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOUSEWARMING PARTY — The Ohio State men's and women's lacrosse programs moved into their new home, the Ohio State Lacrosse Stadium, in January. The programs previously played at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and Ohio Stadium.

ers, they want to run around. So we'll have a kid zone in one area where they can shoot, throw around. To me, that's really the exciting part – you have a spot for your alumni to enjoy, you have a spot for family, a spot for young kids that want to come to games. And certainly a spot for our student body to get excited and get rowdy."

There are upgrades there for the players, too, who have been practicing there since Jan. 9. The highlights include an indoor shooting room as well as a heated field. The stadium also features a press box with broadcast facilities for television networks.

"It's hard to pick just one part of the facility as my favorite," said women's lacrosse attacker Jamie Lasda. "Honestly, just the fact that we have our own stadium now, and the fact that it's so intimate, the experience with the fans will be so exciting and animated with the stands being so close."

After both teams got a couple of weeks to practice at the new facility, the men's team broke in the field in front of the stadium's first spectators on Jan. 21 with a scrimmage against Lafayette. The team then welcomes Robert Morris for a scrimmage on Jan. 28 before its first regular-season contest against Air Force on Feb. 4. The women's team follows with its first contest at the new stadium on Feb. 10 against Robert Morris.

"(The excitement) has been building since it was announced," Lasda said. "But over the last couple of months, just seeing it be built piece by piece, getting to see some of the things behind-the-scenes, it's really grown. Then in the last couple days, getting to practice on the field for the first time, stepping foot on it with all my other teammates, it's just really exciting."

The venue also affords the campus a chance to grow the sport of lacrosse by hosting outside competitions and camps. Myers said that the Professional Lacrosse League has already signed on to play games at the field in June, and in the future he hopes that

top Ohio high school programs get to compete for state championships in Columbus.

"We want young men and women growing up in the great state of Ohio dreaming of playing in that stadium," Myers said. "So if we can look at that, that would be exciting."

He added that such a step would also have a positive impact on the team's recruiting. A large chunk of both the men's and women's roster is made of talent from the Buckeye State, and recruiting Ohio remains a high priority for the programs.

"You look at our recruiting, 20 percent of our roster is from Ohio. That's a priority," Myers said. "We got the (Ohio) Player of the Year last year, Sam Burns, he's a freshman for us. We continue to make that a big-time deal, and you love to see that. The year we went to the national championship, 2017, two of our three captains were from central Ohio."

Generally, the sport has seen a bit of a boom in the state over the past several years. The Ohio High School Athletic Association introduced state championships for both boys and girls teams in 2017, with girls lacrosse becoming a sponsored sport that same season. Prior to that, the Ohio High School Lacrosse Association sanctioned state championships for boys while the Ohio School

Girls Lacrosse Association did the same for girls.

There are a number of things to credit for that growth, according to Myers. His kids are now able to see lacrosse highlights in ESPN's SportsCenter Top 10 with the expansion of both the PLL and National Lacrosse League. More and more games are televised, and grassroots communities have started up programs around the country.

"With all that being said, I'd like to think the game speaks for itself," Myers said. "Once people get exposed to it, they get really excited. It's fast, it's got a lot of scoring, it's got physicality, and it's great to see the sport taking off."

Lasda grew up in Ithaca, N.Y., an area of the country where lacrosse has been ingrained in the culture for much longer than the Midwest. Her father won two national championships playing the sport at Cornell, and her two older brothers both played collegiately at the Division I level.

"Coming out to school in Ohio, it's something that I didn't even know was big up here," she said. "But having people on our team from Ohio and the new stadium, having the newest lacrosse stadium in the country is also something that really symbolizes that. Having the Ohio State shape in the center of a field, it signifies how (the sport) is growing, how it's getting more West, picking up speed."



Jamie Lasda

Lasda added that she wants to see Columbus become a hub of sorts for the sport, and building a facility like the Ohio State Lacrosse Stadium is a big step toward making that the case. The programs have

seen more exposure in recent seasons, with additional games making it on the Big Ten Network and more marquee matchups against top competition overall.

Above all else, though, Bokker is thankful for the sense of pride the new facilities have instilled in her players. Bokker, Myers and their teams are excited for what lies ahead.

"We're super grateful," she said. "The excitement is about putting our best foot forward and making everyone who helped make this happen proud, moving the program in the right direction and just representing Ohio State and lacrosse at a high level."

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January Struggles Return For Ohio State

Throughout his six seasons at the helm of the Ohio State men's basketball program, head coach Chris Holtmann has gained a reputation for his teams enduring lulls in January.

Whether the criticism is fair or not, the Buckeyes again found themselves slumping in January, sporting a 2-5 record in the month thus far – including a five-game losing

COURT
REPORT
Jack Emerson

ing streak that spanned from Jan. 5 to Jan. 18. While Ohio State has been known for its January failings during the Holtmann era, the head coach believes that notion has been largely overblown in the grand scheme of his time in Columbus.

“We looked at it a couple years ago after we struggled in January,” Holtmann said on Jan. 16. “But we’ve also been really good in January, last year, and struggled late. And we’ve had times where we’ve been really good late and struggled (early). I don’t know if there is a specific pattern or factors other than we just need to play better.”

Holtmann’s first January in Columbus was one to remember. Ohio State took off on a seven-game winning streak, which included an 80-64 win over then-No. 1 Michigan State, and went 8-1 during the month.



SONNY BROCKWAY

LEANING ON LEADERSHIP — During Ohio State’s five-game losing streak, the Buckeyes’ captains — Justice Sueing (pictured), Zed Key and Isaac Likekele — were tasked with getting the Buckeyes back on track.

2022-23 Ohio State Men’s Basketball Statistics

11-8 Overall (3-5 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of Jan. 21

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	19-10	456-24.0	120-234	.513	42-88	.477	51-62	.823	22-84	106-5.6	47-3	20	36	9	11	333-17.5
Justice Sueing	19-18	550-29.0	92-208	.442	13-51	.255	49-70	.700	38-50	88-4.6	30-1	41	40	5	13	246-12.9
Zed Key	18-16	458-25.5	83-142	.585	6-20	.300	45-68	.662	56-89	145-8.1	36-0	15	23	20	11	217-12.1
Sean McNeil	19-18	544-28.6	66-152	.434	36-89	.404	21-24	.875	6-33	39-2.1	27-1	24	18	3	7	189-9.9
Bruce Thornton	19-19	549-28.9	59-141	.418	22-54	.407	26-33	.788	4-53	57-3.0	31-1	56	30	1	15	166-8.7
Tanner Holden	19-0	310-16.3	29-59	.492	6-12	.500	24-28	.857	14-41	55-2.9	27-0	11	18	2	10	88-4.6
Isaac Likekele	16-10	359-22.4	28-72	.389	1-7	.143	7-14	.500	22-54	76-4.8	30-1	47	16	5	12	64-4.0
Roddy Gayle Jr.	19-1	260-13.7	31-73	.425	7-24	.292	5-7	.714	2-25	27-1.4	31-0	20	16	5	9	74-3.9
Felix Okpara	19-2	245-12.9	29-49	.592	1-1	1.000	9-13	.692	25-39	64-3.4	31-1	6	8	23	9	68-3.6
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
Eugene Brown III	7-1	52-7.4	4-9	.444	2-4	.500	2-2	1.000	3-7	10-1.4	7-0	0	0	4	3	12-1.7
Kalen Ertzler	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									26-29	55			5			
Total	19	3850	549-1163	.472	141-364	.387	240-323	.743	227-517	744-39.2	303-8	243	214	77	100	1479-77.8
Opponents	19	3850	461-1135	.406	123-409	.301	222-309	.718	196-436	632-33.3	312-3	224	223	53	96	1267-66.7

The Buckeyes rose to as high as No. 13 in the AP poll during the stretch.

In 2018-19, Ohio State entered the new year with a 12-1 record, split between a pair of six-game winning streaks. However, the wheels fell off in January, starting with an 86-77 loss to then-No. 8 Michigan State which spiraled into a five-game losing streak. The Buckeyes won their lone game of the month against Nebraska on Jan. 26 but ultimately finished January with a 1-6 record.

The next season followed a similar trajectory. Ohio State started the month with an 11-2 record and was ranked the No. 2 team in the country until losing its first

three games in January, extending a losing streak to four games after the Buckeyes lost to then-No. 22 West Virginia 67-59 on Dec. 29, 2019. Ohio State picked up wins against Nebraska and Northwestern during the month but endured a 2-5 mark in total in January.

“Bottom line, we just have got to find a way to play tougher and smarter,” Holtmann said on Jan. 22, 2020. “And that may seem like an oversimplification, but there’s a lot that goes into it.”

In 2020-21, the Buckeyes returned to the same success in January that Holtmann had seen in his first year with the program. Despite a 77-60 loss to Minnesota to start the month, Ohio State ripped off three-straight wins before suffering another loss at the hands of Purdue. The Buckeyes bounced back with a trio of wins – including a victory over then-No. 10 Wisconsin – to end the month with a 6-2 mark.

Last season Ohio State amassed a 5-3 record in January. The Buckeyes were boosted by the emergence of freshman guard Malaki Branham during the stretch, who produced 16.0 points per contest on 51.2 percent shooting in those eight games.

While the notion that Holtmann typically struggles in January has been prevalent throughout his time in Columbus and amplified in recent weeks with Ohio State’s adverse stretch, the month has tended to be much more of a mixed bag for the Buckeyes’ skipper. In all, Holtmann has registered a 24-22 record in the month through Ohio State’s win over Iowa on Jan. 21, with games still remaining during the month against Illinois on Jan. 24 and Indiana on Jan. 28.

OSU’s Leadership Tested During Losing Stretch

Ohio State’s veteran leaders were put to the test during the Buckeyes’ recent five-game losing streak.

The Buckeyes went 20 days without a win after they took down Northwestern 73-57 on Jan. 1, and endured the program’s longest losing stretch since the 2018-19 season. While Ohio State battled to get back in the win column, Holtmann recognized the value of leadership during this juncture in the season.

“You certainly need your leadership in

this moment,” Holtmann said. “We’re going to need them the rest of the way. I think in January and February, your leadership really gets defined. I’m not putting all of the responsibility on them, but I think it’s going to be really critical for the (younger) guys and the older guys to be able to lead in ways that good leaders lead.”

Holtmann laid out the responsibilities that good leaders take on in regard to what he’s seen at the college level.

“They control things in the locker room. They limit distractions,” Holtmann said. “They bring perspective. They have poise in the midst of challenging moments. They communicate and play for each other. They lead the way in playing for each other. They lead the way in their own (selflessness). They play for Ohio State. They come to work and are everyday guys.

“That’s what’s going to be needed in these moments, and I think that’s the challenge in front of those guys.”

Holtmann said Ohio State’s captains – center Zed Key, guard Isaac Likekele and forward Justice Sueing – have evolved into that leadership role but added that they’ll continue to face challenges, especially in stretches of adverse play.

“Our captains – Justice leading the way with that – are growing into that role,” Holtmann said. “But again, that is going to continue to get tested here these (next) several weeks. That story is still being written.”

The Buckeye skipper also emphasized that there were several other factors in addition to leadership during a losing stretch.

“Obviously, there’s a significant remainder of the Big Ten season to go – there’s a lot in front of us,” Holtmann said. “Your leadership, resilience, tough-mindedness of your group gets tested. That’s the case for a lot of teams around the country and a lot of teams in leagues where there’s just a lot of good teams.”

Key noted that the mood in the Ohio State locker room remained good despite the losing streak, and he said the Buckeye captains tried to keep things light while placing a focus on growth moving forward.

“We have a lot of new faces and young guys, so we’re trying to stay positive,” Key said on Jan. 16. “It can be a lot on their spirits – losing four games in a row, it takes a

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

toll. But we're trying to stay positive, just move on and get better every day and correct our mistakes."

Sueing added it was on the veteran leaders to get the team back on track, especially with four freshmen in the rotation.

"As far as a player-led locker room, it's our responsibility that guys are able to move on," he said. "We're able to continue to push them and make sure that we're continuing to get better."

Offensive Efficiency Remains High Despite Poor Outings

Despite enduring an extended losing streak, Ohio State still boasts one of the nation's most efficient offenses in the country, ranking sixth in the nation in adjusted offensive efficiency by KenPom as of Jan. 23.

The Buckeyes sport an adjusted offensive efficiency rating of 118.0, sitting behind only No. 1 Marquette, No. 2 Baylor, No. 3 Gonzaga, No. 4 Purdue and No. 5 Iowa while ranking third in the Big Ten. Adjusted offensive efficiency is measured on a game-to-game basis, comparing a team's offensive efficiency to the national average while also taking the opponent's defensive efficiency into consideration. The single-game ratings are then averaged, with more weight on recent games, to produce the final adjusted offensive efficiency metric.

Although the Buckeyes still sit among the nation's best in terms of offensive efficiency, Ohio State has seen several deficiencies during the recent stretch.

"We've got to make better paint decisions," Holtmann said. "We've got to see the open man quicker and better. We need to make cleaner reads in those situations when we've created help situations. I think those are the biggest things for us right now."

Prior to the losing stretch, Ohio State produced 81.0 points per game while shooting a solid 49.2 percent from the field and 37.5 percent from beyond the arc. While a good deal of the competition wasn't to the standard that the Buckeyes see every night in the Big Ten, Ohio State still played against several big-name programs, such as Duke and North Carolina, as well as defensive-minded teams in San Diego State and Texas Tech.

Since Ohio State's win over Northwestern, the Buckeyes' averages have dropped to 71.0 points per contest resulting from a 42.9 percent mark from the field. Ohio State also shot below 40.0 percent in losses to Minnesota, Rutgers and Nebraska.

"Our offense this year has been top-tier across the country," Sueing said. "The past couple of games, a lot of our shots that we usually make just weren't falling. A lot of the defenses we've played have made adjustments to try to put us in those spots where we're less efficient. But we know that we can make shots. We know we're a really good offensive team and we know those shots are going to fall."

The Buckeyes also struggle to share the ball at an efficient rate. After registering 11 assists in the 71-69 loss to then-No. 1 Pur-

due, Ohio State did not reach double-digit assists in each of the next four games – tallying eight, five, seven and nine in their losses to Maryland, Minnesota, Rutgers and Nebraska.

While the Buckeyes seek a return to the offensive fireworks they displayed earlier in the campaign, Sueing said the unit needs to slow down and play with more control moving forward.

"That's just a matter of being poised and being under control," Sueing said. "Sometimes we can get a little sped up, which usually leads anyone to make any type of poor decision in the paint. It's just a repetition thing that we're going to continue to work on."

Ohio State Reportedly In James' Top Three Schools

According to a report from Luca Evans of the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Sierr Canyon four-star combo guard Bronny James (6-3, 190) – the son of Los Angeles Lakers star forward LeBron James – has Ohio State in his top three schools.

James' recruitment has been largely kept under wraps until this point, though he did take an unofficial visit to Ohio State on Sept. 3, taking in the football team's season opener against Notre Dame with his father. Other schools in the mix for James include Oregon and USC, and the report also notes that James will make his decision following the conclusion of Sierra Canyon's season.

James has received reported offers from Ohio State, Memphis and USC, according to 247Sports. He is the No. 36 overall recruit and No. 11 combo guard in the nation.

Ohio State's 2023 class already ranks among the nation's best, landing as the No. 6 class in the 247Sports composite team rankings. Four players have already signed their national letter of intent to play for the Buckeyes, including Minneapolis Totino-Grace four-star combo guard Taison Chatman (6-4, 170), Wichita (Kan.) Sunrise Christian four-star forward Scotty Middleton (6-6, 180), St. Marys (Ohio) Memorial three-star center Austin Parks (6-9, 240) and Pickerington (Ohio) Central four-star forward Devin Royal (6-7, 210).

Taking Stock Of OSU's Transfer Departures

Ohio State lost a pair of contributors to the transfer portal this offseason, with guard Meechie Johnson Jr. and Justin Ahrens finding homes at new programs.

Johnson opted to take his talents to South Carolina, remaining at a Power Six program, while Ahrens headed to Los Angeles, to play for Loyola Marymount, which resides in the West Coast Conference.

Johnson has emerged as one of the Gamecocks' most relied upon scorers while starting in 16 of 17 games played this season. Although he battled a nagging ankle injury that sidelined him for a pair of games early in the season, Johnson has posted career-highs in points (12.5), rebounds (4.1), and assists (3.5) per game, while aiding

South Carolina to an 8-11 record.

Johnson's most notable performance for his new team came in the Gamecocks' 71-68 upset over Kentucky in Rupp Arena on Jan. 10. The Cleveland native hit six three-pointers en route to a career-high 26 points – to go along with six rebounds and assists – on 9-of-16 shooting.

"My coaches have confidence in me," Johnson told the Field of 68 podcast. "Every game, he's telling me to go out there and be in attack mode. (Head coach Lamont Paris) really believes in me. He believes in the players. I just couldn't ask for a better situation, a better second chance to be in a situation like this and to be who I know I am and go through ups and downs, and be able to bounce back. That's important for a player."

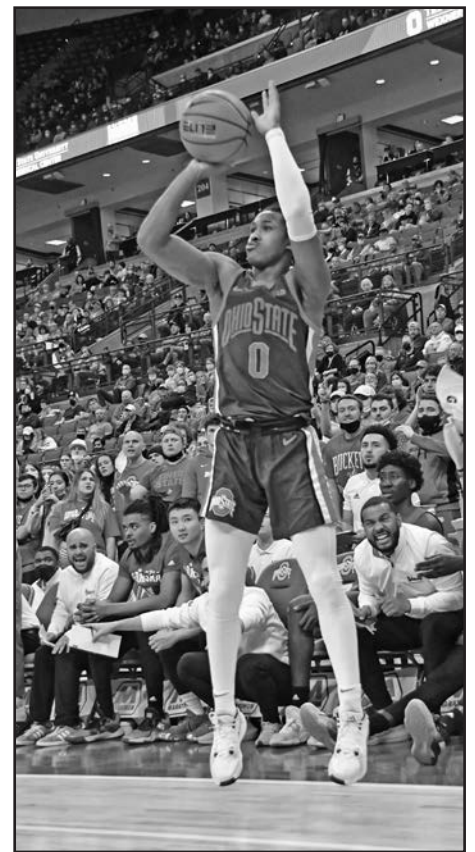
"I'm just grateful that I made the right choice to come here and be here at South Carolina. I couldn't ask God for anything better."

While with Ohio State, Johnson joined the program prior to his 18th birthday and was largely featured in a bench role. Johnson appeared in 43 games with the Buckeyes, including five starts, and posted averages of 3.2 points and 0.8 assists per game while shooting 31.9 percent from the field.

Ahrens went west for his final season of eligibility and has largely remained in the sharpshooting role that defined his time with the Buckeyes for the Lions. The Versailles, Ohio, native has posted a career-high 7.0 points per game, but hasn't shown the efficiency he displayed at Ohio State, registering just 33.3 percent from three, a career-low mark.

Ahrens' best outing with Loyola Marymount came in an 18-point performance in a 92-72 win over Portland on the road, hitting 4 of 8 three-pointers off the bench.

"Justin was a massive priority for our program," LMU head coach Stan Johnson said following Ahrens' addition. "Justin's experience at a high level fills so many needs for us. Although Justin is an elite shooter and has a chance to be one of the best shooters in college basketball, his game is much



FILE PHOTO

FINDING HIS FOOTING — Former Ohio State guard Meechie Johnson Jr. has found a new home at South Carolina, where he has registered career highs in points, rebounds and assists this season.

more multidimensional than just shooting.

"Justin is hungry to continue to improve his game while helping us win. We couldn't be more elated to add Justin and his family to our program. They are true winners."

Ahrens was a veteran of 114 games with the Buckeyes, producing 4.3 points per game on 39.2 percent shooting from beyond the arc. He served as a captain in his final season in Columbus despite seeing his on-the-court role diminish over the course of the campaign.

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Buckeyes' Losing Streak Ends At Five Games

By JACK EMERSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State had its losing streak extend to five games since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, but the Buckeyes finally returned to the win column with a 93-77 win over Iowa on Jan. 21 to sit at 11-8 and 3-5 in conference play.

As a result of the five-game losing stretch, the Buckeyes plummeted down the Big Ten standings, sitting near the bottom of the conference as of Jan. 22. The teams that trailed Ohio State, Nebraska and Minnesota, both handed the Buckeyes a loss during the losing streak.

Buckeyes Upset By Gophers At Home

Minnesota forward Dawson Garcia tied a career-high 28 points to help the Gophers hand Ohio State its third straight loss, 70-67, on Jan. 12 in front of 11,202 at Value City Arena.

The Golden Gophers (7-8, 1-4) carried a 66-60 lead into the game's final minute, but the Buckeyes (10-6, 2-3 Big Ten) ripped off a 7-1 run to knot the game at 67 with 8.6 seconds to play on a pair of free throws from forward Brice Sensabaugh. However, Minnesota guard Ta'Lon Cooper hit the go-ahead free throw with 1.7 seconds left after a controversial foul on Bruce Thornton – which the Big Ten said was a blown call a day following the game – to sink the Buckeyes.

Ohio State shot just 37.5 percent from the field (27 of 64), while the Golden Gophers countered with a 50.0 percent clip (27 of 54). As a result of hot shooting, Minnesota controlled the contest for much of the night, leading for 34:56 of game action.

"It was our worst offensive game of the year," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "Give Minnesota credit. I thought them going under ball screens bothered us. It was our poorest offensive outing in quite some time, certainly this year."

Ohio State forward Justice Sueing opened the scoring with an up-and-under bucket off a pump fake, but it was the only lead the Buckeyes would hold for the entire first half. Minnesota countered by scoring 11 of the game's next 15 points, taking an 11-6 lead into the under-16 timeout.

After a bucket by Minnesota freshman forward Pharrel Payne to push the lead to 19-10, Ohio State closed to 19-15 before Garcia scored the Golden Gophers' next 12 points, keeping the Buckeyes down eight, 31-23, with 6:29 to play in the opening frame. Ohio State later tied the game at 35 with 59 seconds remaining after a 6-0 run from guard Sean McNeil, but Minnesota carried a 37-35 advantage into the locker room after a late jumper from Cooper.

Ohio State and Minnesota traded buck-

ets for the first six minutes of the second half, until the 13:06 mark, when Sensabaugh gave the Buckeyes their first lead since it was 2-0 by finishing a three-point play to lift Ohio State ahead 51-50.

From there, Ohio State endured a scoring drought of nearly six minutes, allowing the Golden Gophers to rip off a 10-0 run to pull back in front 60-51 with 9:01 remaining in regulation. The Buckeyes whittled the lead down to as few as four on a layup by McNeil at 2:21, before exploding on their 7-1 run to tie it at 67, taking advantage of an extended field-goal drought by Minnesota. But the Golden Gophers iced the game at the free-throw line to hold the Buckeyes' comeback attempt at bay.

Five Buckeyes finished with double-digit scoring and Sensabaugh led the pack, recording 18 points on 6-of-18 shooting while adding 10 rebounds. Sueing tallied 13 points while McNeil produced 11, and Zed Key and Thornton added 10, with Key grabbing eight rebounds.

Supporting Garcia was Cooper, who added 13 points in addition to 11 rebounds and four assists. Forward Jamison Battle also gave the Golden Gophers a lift, scoring 11 points.

"In some ways, if we had won it, it would have been a bit of a disservice because I'm not sure we deserved it," Holtmann said. "They did a great job clawing back, our guys did, and they did a good job executing late. But the reality is I'm not really sure we earned this one."

Skid Moves To Four With OT Loss To Rutgers

Ohio State's losing streak was extended to four games after the Buckeyes (10-7, 2-4) fell to Rutgers 68-64 in overtime at Jersey Mike's Arena on Jan. 15.

The lead changed hands 22 times, but Rutgers outscored Ohio State 11-7 in overtime to claim victory. Both offenses struggled to produce for much of the contest. The Buckeyes registered just a 34.3 percent (23 of 67) mark from the field while Rutgers (13-5, 5-2) shot 33.9 percent (21 of 62).

"We've got to make better paint decisions," Holtmann said. "We've got to see the open man quicker and better. We need to make cleaner reads in those situations when we've created help situations. I think those are the biggest things for us right now."

The Buckeyes and Scarlet Knights combined to miss the game's first 12 shots until Rutgers guard Caleb McConnell finished a layup in transition with 16:00 to go in the first half. After another layup by McConnell, Ohio State's offense finally found some rhythm on a 15-0 run over the next 4:12 to pull ahead 15-4. The spurt featured three-pointers by McNeil, Tanner Holden and Sensabaugh.

Rutgers quickly responded with a 7-0 run of its own, punctuated by an emphatic two-handed slam from center Clifford Omoruyi, to make it 15-11 with 9:19 remaining in the frame. After a three-pointer from McNeil and a pair of free throws from Key, the Buckeyes extended their lead to 20-11. Ohio State scored just three points

Minnesota 70, Ohio State 67									
Jan. 12, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	F					
Minnesota (7-8, 1-4)		37	33	70					
Ohio State (10-6, 2-3)		35	32	67					
Minnesota	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Ola-Joseph	13	1-2	0-0	0-2	0	3	2		
Garcia	38	9-15	8-11	2-7	2	3	28		
Battle	35	5-12	0-0	0-4	1	0	11		
Samuels	33	2-6	0-1	0-1	3	0	6		
Cooper	40	5-10	1-2	1-10	4	2	13		
Payne	24	5-6	0-2	0-3	1	1	10		
Carrington	13	0-3	0-0	0-1	1	2	0		
Henley	5	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	3	0		
Totals	200	27-54	9-16	4-28	12	14	70		
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 56.3%. Three-point field goals: 7-22 (Garcia 2-4, Samuels 2-6, Cooper 2-3, Battle 1-6, Ola-Joseph 0-1, Carrington 0-2). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 6 (Cooper 2, Battle, Samuels, Payne, Carrington). Turnovers: 9 (Payne 5, Samuels, Cooper, Carrington, Henley). Steals: 3 (Garcia, Samuels, Cooper).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Sensabaugh	25	6-18	4-4	2-8	0	4	18		
Sueing	29	4-13	5-6	3-2	2	0	13		
Thornton	31	4-10	0-0	1-2	1	4	10		
Brown	8	1-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	2		
McNeil	34	3-9	3-3	0-1	0	0	11		
Key	30	5-7	0-1	2-6	0	2	10		
Holden	11	1-1	1-1	1-1	0	0	3		
Likekele	18	0-2	0-0	0-1	2	1	0		
Okra	7	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	1	0		
Gayle	8	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	2	0		
Totals	200	24-64	13-15	14-25	5	15	67		
Percentages: FG: 37.5%. FT: 86.7%. Three-point field goals: 6-13 (Sensabaugh 2-3, Thornton 2-4, McNeil 2-2, Sueing 0-2, Key 0-1, Gayle 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 3 (Okpara 2, Sueing). Turnovers: 9 (Key 4, Holden 2, Sueing, Thornton, Gayle). Steals: 5 (Thornton, McNeil, Key, Likekele, Okpara). Officials: Breeding, Daily, Ayers. Attendance: 11,202.									

in the final 8:02 of the half, but Rutgers couldn't take full advantage, and the Buckeyes still carried a 23-20 lead into the half.

After McNeil extended Ohio State's lead to five with a pair of free throws to start the scoring in the second half, Rutgers utilized a 7-0 run to take its first lead since the score was 4-2, jumping ahead 27-25 with 17:22 remaining.

After a three-pointer by guard Cam Spencer to give Rutgers a 32-30 lead, the Scarlet Knights missed their next six shots, but Omoruyi kept their offense afloat with six makes from the charity stripe to keep them in front 38-35 with 12:49 to play.

The Buckeyes took advantage of the Scarlet Knights' struggles from the field, jumping out on a 9-0 run – sparked by five points from Sensabaugh – but Rutgers countered with another 7-0 run, capped off by a pair of free throws from Spencer, to retake the lead 45-44 with 7:54 left.

Ohio State and Rutgers traded the lead eight times over the next six minutes before Sensabaugh drilled a midrange jumper over a pair of Scarlet Knight defenders to knot the game at 57 with 49 seconds to play.

The freshman had an opportunity to give Ohio State a late lead, but his go-ahead attempt from the top of the key hit off the backboard and the front of the rim before rattling off with seconds remaining. A game-winning attempt from Spencer

Rutgers 68, Ohio State 64									
Jan. 15, 2023 Jersey Mike's Arena • Piscataway, N.J.									
		1	2	OT	F				
Ohio State (10-7, 2-4)		23	34	7	64				
Rutgers (13-5, 5-2)		20	37	11	68				
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Thornton	36	2-7	0-0	0-5	1	1	4		
McNeil	31	3-12	2-2	1-2	1	5	11		
Sueing	34	3-10	1-2	1-2	2	2	7		
Okpara	16	2-4	0-0	2-3	0	2	4		
Likekele	18	0-5	0-0	0-0	1	3	0		
Holden	21	3-6	0-0	0-1	1	1	7		
Gayle	8	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0		
Brown	3	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	0		
Sensabaugh	30	6-11	4-5	1-10	1	2	20		
Key	27	4-11	3-3	5-4	0	4	11		
Totals	200	23-67	10-12	15-31	7	22	64		
Percentages: FG: 34.3%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-21 (Sensabaugh 4-6, McNeil 3-7, Holden 1-1, Thornton 0-2, Sueing 0-4, Likekele 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Okpara 2, Gayle, Sensabaugh). Turnovers: 13 (Sueing 4, Sensabaugh 3, McNeil 2, Likekele, Holden, Key, Team). Steals: 5 (McNeil 2, Thornton, Likekele, Sensabaugh).									
Rutgers	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Mag	33	5-6	3-4	4-4	1	2	15		
Mulcahy	42	2-12	0-0	0-1	4	1	6		
Spencer	37	5-13	9-11	1-6	6	3	21		
Omoruyi	32	4-11	6-8	4-7	1	3	14		
McConnell	43	4-13	2-3	0-7	4	2	10		
Simpson	10	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	2		
Miller	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Hyatt	18	0-4	0-0	1-2	0	1	0		
Woolfolk	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0		
Reiber	4	0-1	0-1	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	21-62	20-27	14-30	16	15	68		
Percentages: FG: 33.9%. FT: 74.1%. Three-point field goals: 6-24 (Mag 2-3, Mulcahy 2-6, Spencer 2-7, Omoruyi 0-1, McConnell 0-5, Hyatt 0-2). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 8 (Omoruyi 6, Mag, Mulcahy). Turnovers: 10 (Hyatt 2, Mag, Mulcahy, Spencer, Omoruyi, McConnell, Simpson, Woolfolk). Steals: 8 (Spencer 4, McConnell 2, Hyatt, Reiber). Technical Fouls: 1 (Team). Officials: Riley, Gaffney, Green. Attendance: 8,000.									

was also off as time expired, sending the game to overtime.

"We've seen (Brice) make that shot a number of times," Holtmann said. "He did not have their best defender on him, a good defender but not their best defender. They kind of got switched in transition. They're really good at guard actions, as well as blowing up certain actions, so he did a great job of creating some separation. I think he probably just rushed it a little bit."

The game stayed within a point in overtime, until Rutgers forward Mawot Mag drilled a dagger three-pointer from the corner with 38 seconds remaining to lift Rutgers' lead to 65-61, and a late triple from Sensabaugh was the only basket the Buckeyes could muster in the final four minutes of overtime as the Scarlet Knights completed the four-point win.

The Buckeyes were led by Sensabaugh and Key, who both came off the bench and aided Ohio State's 38-2 advantage over Rutgers' reserves. Sensabaugh produced a double-double with 20 points and 11 rebounds while Key added 11 points and nine boards. McNeil also had 11 points for the Buckeyes in a game played before 8,000.

Spencer produced a game-high 21 points to go along with seven rebounds, six assists and four steals. Omoruyi struggled from the field, hitting just four of his



Justice Sueing

11 attempts, but finished with 14 points – thanks to 6-of-8 shooting from the free-throw line – and 11 rebounds.

Losing Skid Reaches Five In Loss To Nebraska

Ohio State was handed its fifth consecutive loss on Jan. 18, falling to Nebraska 63-60 at Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln, Neb., as McNeil's game-tying three-point attempt at the buzzer rimmed out before a crowd of 12,918.

Ohio State (10-8, 2-5) shot just 35.7 percent from the field (20 of 56) and 29.4 percent from three (5 of 17) en route to yet another loss in Big Ten play. Nebraska (10-9, 3-5) finished the evening with a 41.1 percent mark from the field (23 of 56), boosted by 53.8 percent shooting in the second half (14 of 26).

"I thought we missed a lot of somewhat clean looks," Holtmann said. "But they have a good defense, so give them credit. We just didn't convert on some plays that would've given us more of a lead at half, that we should have converted on."

As it did against Minnesota and Rutgers, Ohio State came out flat offensively, hitting just one of its first 11 field-goal attempts while allowing Nebraska to open an 8-3 lead with 13:51 to play in the opening half. The Buckeyes endured a stretch of eight straight misses until a floater from guard Isaac Likekele and a jumper by McNeil on back-to-back possessions cut Nebraska's lead to 8-7 at the under-12 timeout.

The Buckeyes hit just two of their next 12 field-goal attempts, and Nebraska held a 21-15 lead with 3:12 to play in the first half. However, Ohio State closed the half on a 7-0 run – sparked by five points from Sensabaugh, who had opened the game with eight consecutive misses – to take a 22-21 lead into the locker room.

Ohio State started the second half hitting 3 for 9 from the field, including a pair of three-pointers from McNeil, and Nebraska held a 33-32 lead with 15:12 remaining in regulation.

After a free throw from Sueing knotted the game at 33, Nebraska guard Sam Griesel responded with a three-point play, but Key scored the game's next five points and lifted the Buckeyes back into the lead, 38-36, with 12:45 to go in regulation.



Brice Sensabaugh

Sensabaugh later drilled a pair of jumpers to put the Buckeyes on top 49-47 with 8:55 left in regulation, but Nebraska quickly responded with an 8-0 run to pull ahead 55-49, and the run coincided with a 6:35 field-goal drought for Ohio State, a stretch that included four turnovers from the Buckeyes. Key stopped the bleeding by finishing a layup off an assist from Likekele, pulling Ohio State to a 55-52 deficit with 2:20 to play.

Sensabaugh cut the deficit to two after hitting 1 of 2 from the foul line, but Nebraska guard Emmanuel Bandoumel scored the game's next four points to extend the Cornhuskers' lead to 59-53 with 1:03 to play.

Sensabaugh gave the Buckeyes some

Nebraska 63, Ohio State 60

Jan. 18, 2023

Pinnacle Bank Arena • Lincoln, Neb.

		1	2	F			
Ohio State (10-8, 2-5)	22	38	60				
Nebraska (10-9, 3-5)	21	42	63				

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Thornton	33	1-6	0-0	0-3	2	1	2
McNeil	32	4-10	3-6	0-3	2	2	13
Sensabaugh	24	6-16	3-4	1-9	0	5	18
Sueing	29	1-6	2-4	2-2	4	4	4
Key	29	4-10	3-5	3-7	0	1	11
Holden	20	1-3	4-4	0-1	0	0	6
Gayle	8	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	2
Brown	7	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Likekele	13	2-3	0-0	0-2	1	2	4
Okpara	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Totals	200	20-56	15-23	6-32	9	16	60

Percentages: FG: 35.7%. FT: 65.2%. Three-point field goals: 5-17 (Sensabaugh 3-7, McNeil 2-7, Thornton 0-2, Holden 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Key 3, Brown 2). Turnovers: 11 (Sueing 4, McNeil 2, Thornton, Sensabaugh, Holden, Gayle, Likekele). Steals: 6 (Holden 2, Thornton, Sensabaugh, Key, Likekele)

Nebraska	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Grilles	33	4-9	5-8	0-7	3	2	15
Dawson	30	3-4	0-0	2-6	0	2	7
Walker	27	4-8	0-0	1-9	4	5	8
Bandoumel	31	2-9	2-2	0-3	4	0	6
Tominaga	24	4-12	2-3	0-1	0	3	11
Witcher	20	2-8	1-2	1-3	0	1	6
Lawrence	19	2-3	0-0	0-4	0	0	5
Breidenbach	16	1-2	1-2	0-0	0	4	3
Kojenets	5	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Totals	200	23-56	11-17	4-35	11	17	63

Percentages: FG: 41.1%. FT: 64.7%. Three-point field goals: 6-21 (Griesel 2-3, Dawson 1-1, Tominaga 1-6, Wilcher 1-4, Lawrence 1-2, Bandoumel 0-4, Breidenbach 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Griesel, Dawson, Walker). Turnovers: 13 (Walker 4, Griesel 2, Bandoumel 2, Lawrence 2, Dawson, Wilcher, Breidenbach). Steals: 5 (Bandoumel 3, Griesel, Dawson). Officials: Carstensen, Dailey, Barlow. Attendance: 12,918.

life after hitting a corner three with 35 seconds to play, pulling Ohio State to a 61-58 deficit. McNeil later tallied a pair of free throws to cut Nebraska's lead to 62-60 with 10 seconds left, but after Nebraska extended the lead to three with another trip to the free-throw line, McNeil's game-tying attempt rattled off the rim.

"It's hard to get a three when everybody knows you need to get a three," Holtmann said. "They did a good job taking our action, and our guys had good poise in that situation."

Sensabaugh tallied a double-double with 18 points and 10 rebounds. Key also had a double-double with 11 points and 10 rebounds and McNeil added 13 points of his own. Griesel produced a team-high 15 points along with seven rebounds and three assists for the Cornhuskers.

OSU Gets Back In Win Column Against Iowa

Sensabaugh scored a career-high 27 points while helping the Buckeyes snap a five-game losing streak with a 93-77 win over Iowa on Jan. 21 at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes' offense was firing on all cylinders during the win. Ohio State (11-8, 3-5) registered 56.3 percent (36 of 64) shooting – including 8-of-16 shooting from deep – to roll past the Hawkeyes (12-7, 4-4). Iowa was also effective from deep, shooting 45.8 percent (11 of 24) from beyond the arc, but it was not enough to take down the Buckeyes.

"Obviously, it hasn't been the brightest lately with five straight losses in a row, but it just feels good," Likekele said. "It does

Ohio State 93, Iowa 77								
Jan. 21, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus								
		1	2	F				
Iowa (12-7, 4-4)		35	42	77				
Ohio State (11-8, 3-5)		37	56	93				
Iowa	Total	FG	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Rebraca	31	5-7	5-6	1-2	2	2	15	
Ulis	28	4-9	3-3	1-1	2	1	12	
Perkins	29	2-7	4-5	2-4	1	2	8	
Murray	35	9-19	0-0	2-5	4	2	22	
McCaffery	27	2-7	0-0	0-2	2	4	6	
Dix	14	2-3	0-0	0-1	1	1	6	
Bowen	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	2	0	
Sandfort	20	2-7	0-0	0-3	1	2	6	
Mulvey	5	1-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	2	
Totals	200	27-60	12-14	10-19	15	17	77	
Percentages: FG: 45.0%. FT: 85.7%. Three-point field goals: 11-24 (Murray 4-9, McCaffery 2-5, Dix 2-3, Sandfort 2-4, Ulis 1-3). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 1 (Mulvey). Turnovers: 14 (Rebraca 4, Ulis 4, Murray 2, Bowen 2, Perkins, Dix). Steals: 6 (Ulis 2, Sandfort 2, Perkins, McCaffery)								
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Gayle	17	4-7	1-1	0-2	0	4	9	
Thornton	15	0-4	0-0	0-0	2	0	0	
Sensabaugh	26	10-12	3-3	2-3	1	3	27	
Likekele	32	7-12	3-5	2-8	7	3	18	
Key	28	4-10	3-4	2-7	1	1	11	
Holden	16	0-1	2-2	0-1	0	1	2	
McNeil	24	4-5	0-0	1-1	2	2	10	
Sueing	28	4-9	1-2	1-1	2	0	10	
Okpara	12	3-4	0-0	2-0	0	3	6	
Totals	200	36-64	13-17	12-24	15	17	93	
Percentages: FG: 56.3%. FT: 76.5%. Three-point field goals: 8-16 (Sensabaugh 4-5, McNeil 2-2, Sueing 1-4, Gayle 0-1, Thornton 0-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Okpara 3). Turnovers: 11 (Sensabaugh 5, Sueing 2, Likekele, Key, Holden, McNeil). Steals: 7 (Holden 3, Key 2, Sensabaugh, Sueing). Officials: Dorsey, Irving, Curry. Attendance: 13,630.								

something for the players' and team's confidence to get back in that win column. It's really a momentum thing."

The Buckeyes connected on just two of their first seven shots, both of which came from Sensabaugh, as Iowa held an 11-5 lead with 15:30 to play in the opening half. Ohio State caught fire from there, ripping off a 20-4 run across the next 6:15, to pull ahead 25-15 with 9:15 remaining in the frame. The stretch was highlighted by a trio of blocks from center Felix Okpara.

Ohio State's lead grew to as many as 11 points in the first half, with the Buckeyes holding a 28-17 advantage following a three-pointer from Sueing with 8:25 remaining. But Iowa finished the frame on an 18-9 run to pull within two, 37-35, at halftime. The Buckeyes were led in the half by Sensabaugh with 12 points, and

they were helped by 6-of-11 shooting from deep.

After Iowa guard Ahron Ulis tied the game with a jumper just 14 seconds into the second half, Ohio State embarked on a 12-2 run – sparked by six points from Sensabaugh – to put the Buckeyes ahead 49-39 with 16:20 to play.

It was part of a successful start to the second half from the field for Ohio State, which connected on 11 of its first 15 field-goal attempts to score 25 points in the first 8:45 of the frame. The Hawkeyes still remained in striking distance, however, trailing 62-52 entering the under-12 timeout.

The Buckeyes held the Hawkeyes at arm's length until the under-eight timeout, maintaining a 71-61 lead with 7:35 to play despite Iowa star forward Kris Murray scoring 11 points through the first 12 minutes of the frame.

Ohio State's lead ballooned to as much as 16 several times in the final minutes of regulation as the Buckeye offense shot 64.7 percent from the field (22 of 34) to outscore Iowa 56-42 in the second half. Sensabaugh scored 15 of his 27 points in the second half, hitting all six of his shots in the frame, to finish the game 10-of-12 shooting from the field.

Likekele produced a double-double with a season-high 18 points to go along with 10 rebounds and seven assists, while Sueing added 10 points on 4-of-9 shooting after coming off the bench for the first time this season. Freshman guard Roddy Gayle Jr. registered his first career start, finishing with nine points, while Murray led the Hawkeyes with 22 points with seven rebounds and four assists.

"It certainly feels really good," Holtmann said. "But it's one game. I think that's the perspective, it's one game. We're focused on the same things we are after a loss. It's how do we improve and how are we playing. I think we have had some good stretches of play, and certainly some disappointing stretches of play, in the last five games. Tonight, I thought we did some really good things."

Ohio State will take the court four more times before Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes to press again. The Buckeyes will play a pair of road games at Illinois on Jan. 24 and Indiana on Jan. 28 and return home to face Wisconsin on Feb. 2. Ohio State will then hit the road again, facing Michigan on Feb. 5.



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Sheldon Working Toward Return For OSU

Ohio State has been without guard Jacy Sheldon since late November due to a lower-leg injury, but it appears the senior is nearing a potential return for the Buckeyes.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

"We're getting closer," Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff said on Jan. 17. "We're just making sure we give it ample time to fully heal so we can have her at 100 percent down the stretch. But we're getting closer, for sure."

Sheldon has not played since Ohio State's win over Louisville on Nov. 30, missing the last 12 games leading into the Buckeyes' matchup with Iowa on Jan. 23. Prior to her injury, she was averaging 16.0 points on 48.5 percent shooting while adding 3.4 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 6.0 steals per game.

She started showing signs of being hampered following Ohio State's win over Wright State on Nov. 23, finishing the game but leaving the court with a noticeable limp. She missed the following game against North Alabama and then played nearly the entire game against Louisville. From that point she had sported a boot on her right leg, though she did not have it during Ohio State's win over Northwestern on Jan. 19.

She's also been seen at times using crutches, though she has been without them for the last several games on the team's bench. Despite the injury keeping her off the floor, Sheldon has remained plugged into the team, traveling to road contests and participating in whatever capacity she can on the bench.

"She's been very supportive and very selfless," forward Cotie McMahon said. "It's obviously hard being out with an injury, but not one game, not one practice, not one moment have you seen her down. She's still on the bench, coaching us up, expecting a lot more from us."

Ohio State Ties Highest Ranking In AP Poll

Ohio State, off to a 19-0 start to begin the season, reached yet another program milestone. The Buckeyes checked in at No. 2 in the AP top 25 poll released on Jan. 16, which ties the highest ranking in team history, and stayed in that spot in the poll released Jan. 21.

The Buckeyes previously held the No. 2 spot in five polls across the 2004-05 and 2005-06 seasons under then-head coach Jim Foster, including a placement of second in the country in the final regular-season poll of the 2005-06 season. The highest ranking for Ohio State under McGuff was No. 5, achieved during several weeks in the 2015-16 and 2017-18 seasons.

"It's tricky, because you know how it is," McGuff said. "You get ranked No. 2



SONNY BROCKWAY

GET WELL SOON — The Ohio State women's basketball team is hoping to get star guard Jacy Sheldon back on the court after she sustained a lower-body injury in November.

and you win 18 games, everybody's telling you how good you are. I try to really hammer home every single day that the goal for us right now is just to continue to get better and get prepared for the next game on the schedule, and that's where we put our emphasis and focus."

In that Jan. 21 poll, Ohio State trailed only No. 1 South Carolina, the defending national champions that also boast an undefeated record. The top five was rounded out by No. 3 Stanford (19-2), No. 4 LSU (19-0) and No. 5 UConn (17-2).

Mikulášiková Making Mark From Deep

Outside of guard Taylor Mikesell, whose shooting acumen from beyond the arc has been well-chronicled, most would guess that another one of Ohio State's guards would be the team's next most productive player from deep.

Perhaps Sheldon or guard Madison Greene was excelling from three-point range before injury, or maybe guard Emma Shumate – a known sharpshooter prior to her transfer to Ohio State – would be among the Buckeyes' leaders in three-point shooting. Greene was lighting it up before her injury, shooting 56.0 percent from deep, though she had taken only 25 attempts on the season. Sheldon and Shumate have a similarly low volume, taking just 16 and 26 attempts, respectively, through Ohio State's home contest against Northwestern on Jan. 19.

As it turns out, the Buckeyes' biggest weapon from deep this season outside of Mikesell has been Rebeka Mikulášiková, the 6-4 post player whose game has quickly extended beyond the paint. Through the win over Northwestern, Mikulášiková was shooting 37.9 percent from beyond the arc on 87 attempts, which is far and away

the most attempts besides Mikesell's 152 shots from deep.

Mikulášiková has always had some infatuation with the deep ball, shooting it at a 46.3 percent clip in her freshman season on nearly two attempts per game, but she struggled to find that success again, at least until this season. She shot just 18.2 percent in 2020-21 before improving to 28.8 percent last season, and her impressive marks this season also feature her shooting at a higher volume, averaging 4.6 three-point attempts per game.

Some of her biggest games this season have been spurred by big performances from beyond the arc. She had 27 points on 5-of-10 shooting from deep in Ohio State's win over Oregon on Dec. 21, and in the Buckeyes' win over Minnesota on Jan. 5, she had 15 points – all coming from the three ball, throwing it up 12 times from beyond the arc. She also finished with 25 points in Ohio State's win over Nebraska on Jan. 14, going 3 of 4 from deep.

She's still finding success as well inside the perimeter, shooting 59.3 percent on two-point attempts, but her game has been more well-rounded for Ohio State.

"She's had a terrific season so far," McGuff said. "She had a couple games there where she wasn't quite as good as she'd been, so it was great to see her play so well at Nebraska. We wouldn't have won against Nebraska if she didn't play like she did."

"She's a great player, she's a great fit in our system. One of the things that makes us unique is the spacing that we play with on offense, and you can only do that when you have a center who can play on the perimeter as effectively as Rebeka does."

And for a team like Ohio State that doesn't feature much height outside of Mikulášiková, her ability to stretch the floor on offense helps open things up for the rest of the squad.

"I really like the way we're playing on offense, and having a center like that, it just creates great spacing," McGuff said. "It's a tough matchup for other opposing centers that have to guard her on the perimeter."

Mikesell Wins Big Ten Player Of The Week

Mikesell hauled in a Big Ten Player of the Week honor on Jan. 9 following Ohio State's wins over Minnesota on Jan. 5 and Illinois on Jan. 8.

Against the Gophers, Mikesell finished with a game-high 22 points on 9-of-19 shooting while dishing out seven assists and pulling down seven rebounds. She followed that up with a season-high 31 points on 11-for-22 shooting, including a strong 7-of-14 performance from beyond the arc, in the win over the Fighting Illini.

Through 19 games, Mikesell was averaging 18.5 points per game on 45.2 percent shooting while adding 3.3 rebounds



Taylor Mikesell

and 2.7 assists, helping lead Ohio State to the best start in program history despite injuries to Greene and Sheldon.

Speaking of Sheldon, she was the last Ohio State player to earn Big Ten Player of the Week honors, taking the award home on Jan. 17, 2022. Mikesell is the 28th player in program history to be named Big Ten Player of the Week.

Recruiting Rolls On For Ohio State

Ohio State added a pair of incoming freshmen back in November, signing Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood four-star guard Diana Collins (5-9) and Buchanan, Mich., center Faith Carson (6-4) to the class. The Buckeyes don't appear to be involved with any remaining 2023 prospects, meaning Collins and Carson are likely the complete class, but McGuff said they fit exactly what the program was looking for.

"We look for fitting the style of play and then also our needs," he said. "We have some really good upperclassmen that we'll be graduating here in the next couple of years, so we've got to start to (try to) replace them."

When it comes to prospects in the 2024 class and beyond, Ohio State has been boosted on the recruiting trail by the last year and change for the program. A shared Big Ten title last season and the impressive start to this season have provided an easy showcase for recruits considering the Buckeyes.

"People in this day and age with media and social media, people pay attention to

2022-23 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

19-0 Overall (8-0 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Jan. 19

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	19-19	647-34.1	127-281	.452	61-152	.401	37-43	.860	6-56	62-3.3	17-0	52	34	6	31	352-18.5
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
R. Mikulasikova	19-19	527-27.7	106-210	.505	33-87	.379	32-43	.744	17-86	103-5.4	41-1	35	40	1	18	277-14.6
Cotie McMahon	19-19	463-24.4	89-174	.511	6-27	.222	54-83	.651	15-62	77-4.1	43-1	43	51	11	37	238-12.5
Taylor Thierry	19-19	540-28.4	99-148	.669	4-16	.250	30-50	.600	56-68	124-6.5	53-2	42	25	14	41	232-12.2
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	19-7	476-25.1	40-115	.348	15-62	.242	39-64	.609	20-68	88-4.6	44-1	63	26	4	24	134-7.1
Hevynne Bristow	17-0	207-12.2	30-56	.536	6-14	.429	22-30	.733	14-49	63-3.7	27-0	13	18	9	14	88-5.2
Eboni Walker	17-0	186-10.9	25-50	.500	0-0	.000	13-18	.722	18-26	44-2.6	19-0	19	9	2	11	63-3.7
Emma Shumate	15-0	162-10.8	10-38	.263	7-26	.269	2-4	.500	8-10	18-1.2	16-0	10	2	16	7	29-1.9
Kaia Henderson	8-0	33-4.1	2-8	.250	1-4	.250	3-3	1.000	0-3	3-0.4	5-0	1	2	0	1	8-1.0
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	8-0	28-3.4	1-4	.250	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-4	4-0.5	1-0	1	1	1	1	2-0.3
Karla Vres	6-0	14-2.4	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	3-0	0	3	0	1	0-0.0
Team									34-37	71			7			
Total	19	3825	604-1246	.485	152-432	.352	279-398	.701	209-501	710-37.4	307-5	355	260	66	255	1639-86.3
Opponents	19	3825	460-1137	.405	100-383	.261	176-273	.645	216-492	708-37.3	341-7	247	438	57	114	1196-62.9

everything," McGuff said. "We've been getting a great response from people we're talking to right now, and now it's just a matter of making sure we continue to find the right kids that fit our program, because I think that's a big part of our success right now. We've got outstanding kids that really fit Ohio State, our culture and our program."

The Buckeyes were recently listed among the top schools for a pair of 2024 prospects. Mountain (Minn.) Iron-Buhl shooting guard Jordan Zubich (5-11) included Ohio State among her top schools along with Creighton, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina and Utah, while Concord (N.C.) Jay M. Robinson

four-star forward Ella Hobbs (6-3) had the Buckeyes listed alongside Miami (Fla.), Michigan, North Carolina and Virginia Tech.

Zubich has been a standout for Mountain Iron-Buhl this season, averaging 29.7 points, 6.1 rebounds, 3.8 assists and 2.6 steals per game on 57.1 percent shooting from the field and 44.5 percent shooting from deep.

Hobbs, rated the No. 47 overall prospect in 2024 by ESPN, attends school at Jay M. Robinson but plays for 1 of 1 Prep Academy in Charlotte, N.C. She took an unofficial visit to Ohio State the weekend of Oct. 1 and took in the football team's win over Rutgers along with her brother,

Daevin, a four-star defensive lineman who showed interest in Ohio State but eventually signed with Tennessee.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Mikulášiková was named to the Big Ten weekly honor roll on Jan. 17 after her impressive outing against Nebraska. This is the third time this season she's made the list, also honored on Nov. 14 and Nov. 28.

- Ohio State was named the NCAA.com Team of the Week on Jan. 17 following the Buckeyes' 18-0 start to the season.

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Ohio State Up To 19-0 To Begin Season

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State played in just two games since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, picking up a pair of wins as the Buckeyes advanced to a 19-0 record to begin the season, including an 8-0 mark in the Big Ten. The Buckeyes went on the road to dispatch Nebraska on Jan. 14 before returning home to Value City Arena on Jan. 19 in a win over Northwestern.

While Ohio State has already surpassed the previous best start in program history, the Buckeyes are quickly approaching the most consecutive wins in program history, a mark that stands at 20 and has been achieved twice previously in 1984-85 and 2005-06.

Cornhuskers No Match For Bucks

No. 3 Ohio State remained undefeated with a comfortable win on Jan. 14, going on the road to take down Nebraska 76-67 in Pinnacle Bank Arena.

The Buckeyes (18-0, 7-0) stifled the Cornhuskers (11-7, 3-4) defensively throughout the contest. While most focus has been put on Ohio State's full-court press this season, it was actually the Buckeyes' half-court defense that won the game, limiting the home team to just 36.8 shooting from the field (28 of 76) and 18.5 percent from deep (5 of 27).

Ohio State jumped out to a 13-2 lead to begin the contest before ending the first quarter up 25-12, holding Nebraska to just 26.3 percent shooting (5 of 19) from the field in the first frame. Guard Taylor Mikesell and forward Rebeka Mikulášiková led the way, combining for 15 points on 6-of-13 shooting, while Mi-

kulášiková had five rebounds through the first 10 minutes.

The Cornhuskers scored the opening points of the second quarter, but the Buckeyes responded with an 11-5 run – featuring five points from guard Hevynne Bristow and a pair of jumpers from Mikesell – to push the lead to 36-19 with 5:06 remaining in the half. Nebraska was kept in the contest by center Alexis Markowski, who scored the last six points of the frame for the Cornhuskers to trail 42-32 at the half.

Markowski finished the first half with 12 points on 6-of-9 shooting, but Nebraska struggled otherwise, with the rest of the team combining for just 20 points on 8-of-27 shooting. Mikesell and Mikulášiková led the way for Ohio State, combining for 25 of the team's 42 points in the first two quarters.

The Cornhuskers then cut the deficit to three early in the third quarter, opening the frame on a 7-0 run to make it 42-39 in favor of the Buckeyes at 7:45. Ohio State responded with a pair of triples by guard Rikki Harris and Bristow, but Nebraska fought back to make it 48-45 with 5:09 remaining in the quarter.

"They were offensive rebounding and getting second-chance points," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "That was really hurting us. On offense, we were trying to go one pass and then make a play off the dribble. When we got back to much better ball movement side-to-side, it resulted in a lot better shots for us."

Mikulášiková took over, scoring the next nine points for Ohio State – a run that included a three-pointer, one of three on the evening for Mikulášiková – before late points from Harris and guard Taylor Thierry that gave the Buckeyes a 62-50 lead heading into the fourth. Ohio State continued to pour things on in the final frame, leading by as many as 18 points before Nebraska shaved the final margin to single digits by scoring the final five points in the game played before 5,879.

The Buckeyes were led by Mikulášiková, who finished with a game-high 25 points on 10-of-19 shooting, including a mark of 75.0 percent from deep, in her sixth 20-point game of the season.

"I feel like it was missing from me the last couple of games," Mikulášiková said. "I was shooting a lot of threes, and I didn't really play inside. I wanted to focus on playing a more balanced game, both inside and out."

Mikesell added 14 points on 6-of-14 shooting, while Harris and Thierry each had eight rebounds. Mikulášiková pulled down seven. Nebraska guard Sam Haiby led the Cornhuskers with 16 points, while Markowski, who was held to 1-of-6 shooting in the second half, finished with 15 points and eight rebounds.

Buckeyes Complete Sweep Of Wildcats

The good times kept rolling in Columbus as No. 2 Ohio State took down visiting Northwestern in an 84-54 win on Jan. 19 to remain undefeated on the season and record a sweep of the Wildcats on the season.

The Buckeyes (19-0, 8-0) dispatched the Wildcats (6-12, 0-8) with ease, holding Northwestern to just 32.7 percent shooting (18 of 55) from the field and forcing 19 turnovers, resulting in 25 points.

Mikulášiková opened up Ohio State's scor-

Ohio State 76, Nebraska 67

Jan. 14, 2023
Pinnacle Bank Arena • Lincoln, Neb.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (18-0, 7-0)	25	17	20	14	76
Nebraska (11-7, 3-4)	12	20	18	17	67

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	35	10-19	2-2	3-4	2	2	25
McMahon	23	2-4	3-5	0-5	5	4	7
Harris	34	2-8	2-2	1-7	4	4	7
Thierry	40	6-6	1-1	2-6	1	1	13
Mikesell	40	6-14	0-0	0-3	3	1	14
Bristow	18	2-3	2-2	3-3	3	4	8
Walker	5	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	2
Shumate	5	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	29-56	10-12	10-30	18	17	76

Percentages: FG: 51.8%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-15 (Mikulášiková 3-4, Bristow 2-2, Mikesell 2-4, Harris 1-5). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 6 (Thierry 2, Bristow, Harris, McMahon, Mikesell). Turnovers: 18 (Mikesell 8, Mikulášiková 4, Bristow 3, McMahon 3). Steals: 6 (Mikulášiková 2, Thierry 2, Bristow, Harris).

Nebraska		Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bourne	26	6-10	1-4	4-4	2	4	13
Markowski	33	7-15	1-3	4-4	0	2	15
Shelley	36	2-12	1-1	3-1	6	1	6
Haiby	31	6-15	3-3	3-4	3	0	16
Krull	23	1-6	0-0	1-0	1	2	2
Hake	21	4-9	0-0	0-2	3	3	11
Moriarty	10	0-1	0-0	0-0	2	0	0
Stewart	10	1-3	0-0	1-0	0	0	2
Mendelson	5	1-4	0-0	0-1	1	0	2
Coley	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	28-76	6-11	21-18	18	13	67

Percentages: FG: 36.8%. FT: 54.5%. Three-point field goals: 5-27 (Hake 3-6, Haiby 1-3, Shelley 1-6, Bourne 0-2, Krull 0-3, Markowski 0-3, Mendelson 0-1, Moriarty 0-1, Stewart 0-2). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 2 (Markowski, Shelley). Turnovers: 12 (Shelley 5, Bourne 3, Haiby 2, Team 2). Steals: 11 (Shelley 5, Haiby 2, Hake, Krull, Mendelson, Stewart). Officials: Jones, Tiemann, Seales. Attendance: 5,879.

Ohio State 84, Northwestern 54

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	1	2	3	4	F
Northwestern (6-12, 0-8)	9	15	15	15	54
Ohio State (19-0, 8-0)	19	19	27	19	84

Northwestern	Total		FT		Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Walsh	15	1-8	1-2	1-2	0	1	3	
Mott	28	6-10	4-7	0-3	1	4	16	
Rainey	24	1-2	0-0	2-2	2	2	2	
Wood	30	1-4	6-7	0-3	0	1	8	
McWilliams	23	0-6	1-2	0-4	1	2	1	
Lau	22	5-9	2-4	1-4	2	2	13	
Brown	18	1-7	0-0	0-2	1	1	2	
Weaver	15	0-2	0-0	0-2	0	0	0	
Shaw	13	0-3	1-2	0-3	0	3	1	
Goodchild	7	2-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	5	
Ademusayo	5	1-1	1-3	1-3	0	2	3	
Totals	200	18-55	16-27	8-29	7	19	54	

Percentages: FG: 32.7%. FT: 59.3%. Three-point field goals: 2-13 (Goodchild 1-2, Lau 1-2, Brown 0-2, McWilliams 0-1, Walsh 0-3, Weaver 0-2, Wood 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 1 (Wood). Turnovers: 19 (Rainey 6, Walsh 4, McWilliams 3, Wood 3, Shaw 2, Goodchild). Steals: 6 (Rainey 2, Weaver 2, McWilliams, Mott).

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	24	6-9	4-5	1-6	1	3	18
McMahon	21	2-5	7-10	0-3	1	1	11
Harris	30	2-7	3-3	2-3	6	1	8
Thierry	27	5-10	0-0	4-1	5	4	10
Mikesell	29	7-16	0-0	0-2	2	1	18
Bristow	27	3-8	1-3	1-7	1	2	7
Shumate	16	1-5	1-2	1-3	0	2	4
Walker	14	3-4	2-2	0-6	0	3	8
Henderson	5	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Costner	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Vreš	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	29-65	18-25	10-34	16	19	84

Percentages: FG: 44.6%. FT: 72.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-30 (Mikesell 4-10, Mikulášiková 2-4, Harris 1-4, Shumate 1-5, Bristow 0-2, Henderson 0-1, McMahon 0-1, Thierry 0-3). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Bristow, Mikulášiková, Shumate). Turnovers: 11 (Harris 3, Bristow 2, Thierry 2, McMahon, Mikulášiková, Shumate, Vreš). Steals: 15 (Bristow 3, Harris 3, Mikesell 3, McMahon 2, Thierry 2, Mikulášiková, Shumate). Officials: Thompson, Came, Howell. Attendance: 4,698.



SONNY BROCKWAY

REWRITING HISTORY — The OSU women's basketball team, with contributors such as guard Hevynne Bristow, ripped off a program-best 19-0 start to the season while claiming the No. 2 ranking in the AP poll on Jan. 16 (and remained in that spot in the Jan. 23 poll), tying the highest ranking in program history.

Walker Offering Versatility For Buckeyes

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

When transfer Eboni Walker checked into Ohio State's game against Northwestern on Jan. 19, it was yet another opportunity for the 6-0 forward to display what she can do on the court. By her own admission, she's too short to be a point guard but too tall to play consistently in the post, which leaves her in positional limbo – and that's exactly where she likes to live.

"I've always been the person that's against labels, essentially," Walker told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "People always ask what position I play, and I say I play whatever position I need to play to win. If you need me to go out there and call a play and dribble, I'll do that. If you need me to do defense, I'll do that. If you need a rebound, I'll do that. I don't want to just be a five or a four or a post player."

And she did a little bit of everything in the Buckeyes' 84-54 win over the Wildcats. The transfer from Syracuse (and formerly Arizona State) had perhaps her best game thus far for the Scarlet and Gray, finishing with a season-high eight points on 3-of-4 shooting and adding six rebounds in just 14 minutes on the court, all above her averages of 3.4 points and 2.4 rebounds per game entering the contest.

She showed an acumen for slicing through the defense, cutting through on layups of her own and sneaking under the basket for an uncontested shot courtesy of an assist by guard Rikki Harris. Walker also showed fight on several of her rebounds, hustling along with her teammates in the blowout win. Even so, Walker has yet to become a consistent part of the rotation, but if performances like that against Northwestern continue to stack up, it's only a matter of time before her minutes – just 10.9 per game – begin to increase.

"We need depth at the post, and she fits from a talent standpoint," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "She's a really good athlete and can still play on the perimeter like we like our post players to be able to do, so she's got the skill set to be able to do it."

"I think it's been a bit of a learning curve for being in our program and how we do things – just the more experience she gets, even just practicing. I think now it's just a matter of consistency. She's got the talent and she works hard, but she's got to be much more consistent."

It's no wonder that Walker may have needed some time to adjust given the whirlwind of schools she's played for in recent seasons. She was a five-star prospect out of Centennial High School in Las Vegas and committed to Arizona State in the 2019 recruiting class. She played two seasons for the Sun Devils, appearing in 53 games with nine starts and averaging 6.9 points per contest, before transferring to Syracuse prior to the 2021-22 season.

Walker played in just six games for the Orange before being shut down due to an injury, and those wound up as the only games where she took the floor for Syracuse. After some issues within the program – Syracuse's former head coach Quentin Hillsman

resigned shortly before the season began after being accused by several players of improper behavior, including unwanted physical contact and bullying – she entered the portal again last offseason, this time without a destination in mind.

"I wasn't looking for anything," she said. "I was just looking for a fit that represented me as a person, not so much of the basketball, because I know that I can play basketball. We're going to win games; we're going to lose games. That's the game. I want to feel supported as a person as well."

She found that fit at Ohio State, thanks in part to assistant coach Wesley Brooks. Brooks – who is in his second season as an assistant under McGuff – had previously recruited Walker in high school before his arrival in Columbus, and that relationship forged on despite several destinations for both over the following years.

"Every time – even though unfortunately I transfer so many times – but every time I would transfer, because we had that relationship, it was like, 'Hey, how are you doing? How's everything?' " she said. "I found out that he was here and just kind of went from there."

That was just one bond that helped Walker feel welcome at Ohio State, where she said it's like a "family culture" in how both the team – from the player to the coaches – as well as the Ohio State community make sure the program feels supported.

"It hit all the marks," she said. "They cared about my academics. Something I love about the coaching staff is the environment that they have here – we're adults, at the end of the day. If you don't want to do your job, just sit down. It's just that simple. It's not like they want to baby you and monitor everything that you do. At the end of the day, we're 20 years old – some people are 24, 25. We could be having families right now, but we're choosing to go to school and further our education and play a sport."

"They support us in the ways that they can. They let us live and make us feel normal, essentially. It's not just basketball or bust."

She had already gotten a firsthand look at the program during her time with the Orange. While this current Ohio State squad is off to a 19-0 start, last year's team started 6-0 before being upset by Syracuse, 97-91, in a game where the Buckeyes had been favored by double digits.

Walker was already out with her injury by the time that game came along, but she still uses it as an opportunity to badger her teammates.

"I don't want to talk bad about any other team, but I didn't think Syracuse was going to win," she said. "That's one of the funniest things. Syracuse, we had a very talented group of individuals, which is why they did end up winning."

"But it was kind of funny transferring here, because they're like, 'Wait, you were at Syracuse?' I didn't play in the game but I had my Syracuse bag and everything when I first got here. I still clown them to this day like, 'Y'all lost to Syracuse, so I guess you needed me to help you all or something.' "

Despite that blip on the schedule, Ohio State went on to become one of the most



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO LABELS – Ohio State transfer forward Eboni Walker can fill any number of positions for the Buckeyes, able to play in the post as well as on the perimeter.

dominant teams in the country during the latter half of the season, going on to win a share of the Big Ten title and advancing to the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament. That championship pedigree appealed to Walker, who wanted a team where she could have fun and win.

"That's one thing when it came to recruiting – they knew that I knew what it took to win. I knew the business style," she said. "The high school I went to and the things I learned, it prepared me just for this. I know what it takes to win. I know the little things that we have to really focus on to get there."

Beyond the fit matching off the court, it made just as much sense when plugging her into Ohio State's lineup. The Buckeyes

needed some additional bodies at forward, and with injuries knocking guard Madison Greene out for the season and hampering guard Jacy Sheldon through the first half of the season, she's providing valuable depth as a player who can do it all.

"I will pick up a point guard if I am supposed to. I think that shows me the best, because I'm versatile," she said. "I'm not the tallest – too tall to be a point guard, too short to be a post player, so I've got to find a way to do a little bit of everything. I do what I can. I go as hard as I can, and that showcases it the best. Not that I'm just going to stick to a role, but that I'm willing to do whatever it takes to help my team and myself win."

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Kevin Warren Departs For Bears CEO Job

The Big Ten is officially on the hunt for a new commissioner, after former commissioner Kevin Warren was named the president and CEO of the Chicago Bears on Jan. 12.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

"Kevin is a man of integrity, respect and excellence, all of which are critical core values of the Chicago Bears, and we welcome his perspective and diverse thought to lead this storied organization," Bears chairman George H. McCaskey said. "He is a proven leader who has many times stepped outside of his comfort zone to challenge the status quo for unconventional growth and prosperity."

Warren officially took over the Big Ten position in January 2020, replacing former commissioner Jim Delany, who had served 30 years in the role and helped the conference reach new heights, including the creation of the Big Ten Network and the addition of Maryland, Penn State, Nebraska and Rutgers to the league.

After a rocky start for Warren attempting to guide the conference through un-

certain waters during the COVID-19 pandemic, he helped orchestrate the addition of Pac-12 powers USC and UCLA to the Big Ten. He also helped negotiate a new seven-year media rights deal for the conference estimated at over \$8 billion.

Prior to his time leading the Big Ten, Warren spent four years as the Minnesota Vikings' chief operating officer, during which he sparked the construction of TCF Bank Stadium, a \$1.13 billion venue that the Vikings now call home. The Bears view him as being able to help them achieve something similar as they look for a new home to replace Soldier Field in Chicago, and Warren referred to a new stadium as the team's "sole focus" during his introductory press conference on Jan. 18.

"I'm a big believer in challenges, and I wouldn't want it if it were easy," Warren said. "If all the elements were in place, it wouldn't have been as attractive. But the main thing is the challenge. And I believe in every organization, there are certain inflection points. I think the Chicago Bears are (at) that point from a positive standpoint. We have so many positive things. I never look at the negatives. There is no such thing as a negative situation. There are only opportunities."

Warren has 23 total years of experience as an NFL executive, spending 10 with the Vikings as an executive vice president prior to being promoted to chief operating officer

and also filling prior roles with the then-St. Louis Rams and Detroit Lions.

From a football perspective, the Bears are in rebuild mode, finishing with the league's worst record this season and earning the No. 1 pick in the 2023 NFL draft. Warren hopes to help build around former Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields, who played for the Buckeyes during Warren's first year as Big Ten commissioner.

"So many times, people in organizations don't want to talk about winning a championship," Warren said. "I want to talk about it, but not only talk about it but then put in the work to be able to do what we need to do to win a championship."

With Warren out, the Big Ten is on the hunt for a new commissioner, and experts are already compiling lists of potential candidates, with CBS Sports' Barrett Sallee and The Athletic's Nicole Auerbach, among others, each giving several names that the conference could look into.

Of most note to Buckeye fans, both writers mentioned Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith as a potential replacement. One of the most seasoned Big Ten athletic directors, Smith's experience with the conference's biggest brand and seeing firsthand the increased monetization of collegiate athletics make him a strong option. He's also had experience on the College Football Playoff selection committee.

Current Atlantic Coast Conference commissioner Jim Phillips was listed as another possibility. He was one of the favorites to replace Delany before Warren was hired and has more than a decade as a Big Ten athletic director under his belt, serving as Northwestern's AD from 2008-21.

Should the Big Ten look to promote from its own current roster of executives, Kerry Kenny, senior vice president for television, media analytics and emerging platforms, is viewed as a strong candidate. He's been a league executive for 15 years and had a significant role in landing the above-mentioned media rights deal.

Others mentioned included WNBA commissioner Cathy Engelbert, Patriot League commissioner Jennifer Heppel, Stanford athletic director Bernard Muir and FOX Sports president and chief operating officer Mark Silverman.

Harbaugh Staying At U-M Despite NFL Interest

After the rumor mill once again surrounded Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh this offseason regarding his interest in taking off for the NFL, the Wolverines' lead man is expected to return next season. University of Michigan president Santa Ono released a statement on Jan. 16 confirming that Harbaugh will return.

"I just got off the phone with Coach Harbaugh, and Jim shared with me the great news that he is going to remain as the head coach of the Michigan Wolverines," Ono's statement read. "That is fantastic news that I have communicated to our Athletic Director Warde Manuel."

Harbaugh interviewed for the Denver Broncos' open head-coaching job and reportedly had discussions with the Carolina Panthers, but those talks never extended to

a formal interview. Harbaugh also showed interest in the NFL this time last year, interviewing with the Vikings on National Signing Day on Feb. 2, 2022. Even though it's clear that Harbaugh does have interest in the NFL given that he is taking interviews, it appears he'll be back in the saddle for at least one more season.

"I love the relationships that I have at Michigan – coaches, staff, families, administration, President Santa Ono and especially the players and their families," Harbaugh said in a statement. "My heart is at the University of Michigan. I once heard a wise man say, 'Don't try to out-happy, happy.'"

Harbaugh's statement notably left out any mention of Manuel, and Ono's statement implying that Harbaugh left Manuel out of the decision-making process only furthers speculation of a rift between Harbaugh and Manuel.

Even so, Harbaugh will return in another attempt to lead Michigan to the program's first national championship since 1997. He and the Wolverines have come close the last two seasons, making consecutive appearances in the College Football Playoff while knocking off Ohio State in back-to-back games for the first time since 1999-00.

Michigan Fires Co-OC Weiss

In more Michigan news, the program fired co-offensive coordinator Matt Weiss on Jan. 20 amid an investigation by university police into alleged computer access crimes that occurred at Schembechler Hall, the operating facility of the Wolverines' football team.

"The University of Michigan Police Department is investigating a report of computer access crimes that occurred at Schembechler Hall (from Dec. 21-23)," U-M deputy police chief Crystal James said. "Since this is an ongoing investigation, there is no additional information to share."

According to several reports, Weiss' home appeared to have undergone a search by police on Jan. 10. He was later placed on leave by Michigan on Jan. 18 prior to his firing just two days later.

"I am proud of the success we achieved over the last two seasons and (am) grateful to all of the Michigan players, coaches and staff," Weiss said in a statement on Jan. 20 after his firing. "I have nothing but respect for the University of Michigan and the people who make it such a great place. I look forward to putting this matter behind me and returning my focus to the game that I love."

Weiss was hired as quarterbacks coach by Harbaugh prior to the 2021 season and then promoted to co-offensive coordinator this past season following the departure of offensive coordinator Josh Gattis. Prior to his time at Michigan, Weiss spent 12 seasons coaching with the Baltimore Ravens.

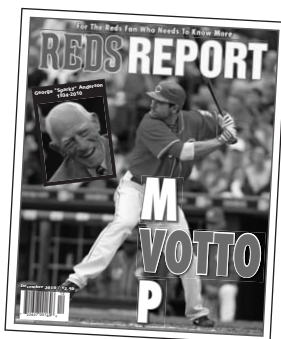
Tagovailoa Returning To Maryland For Fifth Season

Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa announced on Jan. 18 that he will be

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returning to the Terrapins for his fifth season of college football.

“It’s an honor to represent this great university,” Tagovailoa said. “My goal coming here was to help Coach (Mike) Locksley turn this program around. After winning back-to-back bowl games, I believe everything is going the right direction. But we’re not done yet. I’m not done yet. And as Coach Locks always says, the best is ahead.”

In just three seasons with the Terrapins, Tagovailoa has already put himself among the best quarterbacks in program history. He holds Maryland’s career records for passing yards (7,879), passing touchdowns (51), total touchdowns (59) and completion percentage (67.4), as well as single-season records for passing yards (3,860) and passing touchdowns (26).

Maryland posted an 8-5 record in this past season under Tagovailoa’s guidance, its best mark since a 9-4 campaign in 2010.

First Transfer Window Closes

The first-ever transfer portal window closed Jan. 18, ending any potential movement through the portal for the time being. The next window, the last before the next college football season begins, will be open from May 1-15. Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, several notable moves were made in the transfer market by Big Ten teams prior to the portal closing.

Nebraska picked up Georgia edge line-backer MJ Sherman, who will have two years of eligibility remaining. Sherman may not have seen much meaningful playing time in his three-year career with the Bulldogs, collecting just 15 tackles, but he was a highly touted prospect coming out of high school. Hailing from St. John’s in Washington, D.C., Sherman was the No. 33 player and No. 2 outside linebacker in the class of 2020.

Indiana scooped up an option at quarterback, nabbing former Tennessee signal caller Tayven Jackson, who appeared in three games this season as a freshman. Originally from Indiana’s own Greenwood Center Grove, Jackson exited high school as a four-star prospect and was ranked the No. 198 overall player and No. 13 quarterback in the class of 2022.

Penn State gained former Florida State wide receiver Malik McClain, a former four-star high school prospect from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy. In two seasons with the Seminoles, McClain caught 33 passes for 396 yards and five touchdowns.

On the other side of the ball, Illinois scooped up a player making a transition from the MAC to the Big Ten, grabbing former Ohio defensive lineman Denzel Daxon. While only recording 10 tackles in his career with the Bobcats at defensive tackle, he has two years of remaining eligibility and will compete for a spot in the

rotation of the Fighting Illini’s defensive front.

As far as transfers out of programs, Indiana lost three players to the portal in recent weeks. Cornerback Brylan Lanier, defensive lineman Sio Nofoagatoto’a and safety Deland McCullough II all entered into the transfer portal, though their destinations are not yet known. McCullough is perhaps the biggest loss of the three, having recorded 49 tackles – 6½ for loss – with four sacks this past season.

Penn State had three players hit the portal as well, losing linebacker Jamari Buddin, cornerback Marquis Wilson and wide receiver Jaden Dottin. Wilson made the most impact this past season, recording 20 tackles and two pass breakups in 11 games.

Purdue Basketball Remains Hot

Purdue’s men’s basketball team is off to one of the hottest starts in the country, boasting a 19-1 record, a 2 1/2-game lead in the Big Ten conference standings and a No. 3 national ranking in both major polls as of Jan. 22.

After losing what was an unblemished 13-0 record against Rutgers on Jan. 2, the Boilermakers have again found the success they enjoyed throughout their undefeated November and December, rattling off six straight wins. During that stretch, Purdue’s most dominant victory was a 61-39 defen-

sive smothering of Minnesota on Jan. 19.

“I think it was a combination of a lot of things,” Purdue coach Matt Painter said after the win. “Zach (Edey) changed some shots, blocked some shots. I thought Ethan Morton did a really good job. I thought Caleb (Furst)’s length with (Minnesota guard Dawson) Garcia was a good matchup for us, even though Garcia had his way with us when he played at North Carolina last year.”

Prior to the win over Minnesota, Edey tallied 32 points in a 64-63 victory at Michigan State on Jan. 16. The Boilermakers have rotated top scorers throughout their latest winning streak, with guard Fletcher Loyer picking up 27 points against Nebraska on Jan. 13 and guard Braden Smith collecting 19 in the contest with Minnesota.

“We’ve played, now, four out of five games on the road and were able to win all of them,” Painter said, “which is pretty impressive. I’m just proud of our guys. It wasn’t a perfect game for us (against Minnesota), but I thought defensively we really set the tone.”

Also during the streak, Purdue’s win over Nebraska notched the 400th victory of Painter’s career, fifth most all-time by a coach at a Big Ten school. The Boilermakers, in their 18th season under Painter, have made the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament six times under Painter, though they have yet to advance past the Elite Eight.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1983

Certainly one of the most pleasant surprises for the Ohio State basketball team the previous year, on a team that was surprising itself, was the play of Ron Stokes.

The 5-11 guard was not the most publicized of the freshmen on Eldon Miller’s squad a season prior, but he still managed to turn in a solid season. Stokes started 15 games for the Buckeyes, scoring 6.5 points a game for the season. He was second on the club to former high school teammate Troy Taylor with 91 assists and 29 steals. Despite his size, he blocked five shots.

Yet Stokes thought he was a much better player in his sophomore season.

“I’m more assertive with my game,” he explained. “I’m a little more under control. I think I can see the floor a little better now, and I understand the game a whole lot better than I did last year.”

35 Years Ago – 1988

What was expected to be a dash turned out to be a marathon, when Ohio State upset seventh-ranked Michigan, 70-68, on Jan. 18 by slowing down the fast-paced Wolverine attack in St. John Arena.

The Buckeyes snapped Michigan’s 13-game winning streak and won on a Grady Mateen dunk from a Curtis Wilson feed with seven seconds to play. Glen Rice’s 15-footer had tied the score eight seconds earlier.

With Michigan (14-2, 3-1) being one of the fastest teams in the country, Ohio State (9-5, 2-2) was content to walk the ball up the court and then rely on its defense.

“We didn’t want to get into a running game with (Michigan guard Gary Grant),” said OSU coach Gary Williams after his team’s second straight win over a top-20 team. “We were able to spend some time on the offensive end, and that helped our defense.”

30 Years Ago – 1993

The previous year’s Ohio State men’s volleyball team had unexpected success in the conference tournament, coming within a whisker of winning and going to the Final Four despite finishing the season six games below .500.

A closer look at the Buckeyes’ 12-18 record, though, showed plenty of matches that could have gone either way. If some of those close shaves could go the Buckeyes’ way in 1993, a trip to the Final Four would certainly not be out of the question.

“I’d like to think we can duplicate last year’s finish,” ninth-year coach Pete Hanson said. “There’s no reason to think we can’t take the next step. That’s what the kids have set as a goal.”

25 Years Ago – 1998

When asked by a local TV reporter how tough it is to come

out of a losing spell, Michael Redd didn’t ponder long.

“I wouldn’t know. I don’t know. I’m still a young player,” he said. “We just have to suck it up, I guess.”

Therein laid the charm of Michael Redd.

Times had been trying during OSU’s seven-game losing streak, but Redd’s numbers (21.5 points and 6.8 rebounds) had not dipped much and easily remained team highs.

“He wants to be coached, and he is very coachable,” head coach Jim O’Brien said. “When you have a talented kid who has that kind of a disposition, you can’t ask for a whole lot more.”

20 Years Ago – 2003

Following the lead of the drum major who escorted them, the collection of Ohio State senior players arched their backs and high-stepped their way atop the thin vowel in the marching band’s fabled Script Ohio formation.

The group dotting took place at the Jan. 18 national championship celebration at Ohio Stadium, a rally that also served as a send-off for the 10 seniors present, a group that OSU coach Jim Tressel lauded for its leadership.

“Everything that they asked of their teammates they were willing to do themselves and then some,” Tressel said of his senior class. “They led when the going was good. They led when the going was tough. We challenged this group to have their career-best years in 2002, and each and every one of them did that.”

15 Years Ago – 2008

The Ohio State women’s basketball team won games at both ends of the spectrum in one weird eight-day period, something they hoped was a reflection of things to come.

First came the 77-55 win at Northwestern on Jan. 13. The Buckeyes followed that performance by first grinding out a defensive win over Illinois 43-42 on Jan. 17, then by outscoring Wisconsin 79-75 four days later.

The win over the Fighting Illini represented Ohio State’s lowest scoring output in six years and the Buckeyes’ fewest points scored in a win in more than three decades. The victory against the Badgers was the high-scoring Big Ten game of the season for Ohio State.

“I don’t think we have to depend on one thing,” head coach Jim Foster said after the Wisconsin game. “I think we have to depend on our effort. I think defensively we’ll learn a little bit from this. The film session will help us, just like offensively we learned a little bit from the Illinois game.”

10 Years Ago – 2013

When Thad Matta looked back at the Ohio State men’s basketball program he had taken over in July of 2004, even he strug-

gled to comprehend the strides the team had made under his guidance in the years since.

That progress wasn’t lost on the university hierarchy, however. OSU director of athletics Gene Smith announced on Jan. 21 that Matta was in line to receive a 10 percent raise that increased his salary to more than \$3.2 million.

“One of the things I am most proud of is what we’ve built here,” Matta said. “From where we started, we were at ground zero nine years ago in terms of the uncertainty of our program. We’ve been very, very fortunate with the teams that we have had and the jobs the coaches have done to build this program.”

Five Years Ago – 2018

As senior guard Asia Doss scanned the floor after she passed center court, Kelsey Mitchell leaked across the baseline and was alone on the right wing. Doss dished it to Mitchell, who caught and shot the deep three-point attempt inches from the Ohio State bench. As two Michigan State defenders collapsed on her, Mitchell fell back to the floor and the triple rattled home.

With the bucket during Ohio State’s 78-62 win on Jan. 27 over Michigan State, Mitchell surpassed the 3,093 points tallied by Minnesota’s Rachel Banham (2011-16) for sole possession of the all-time scoring title in the Big Ten.

“I didn’t even know about the record,” Mitchell said. “I just knew that Rachel Banham had a lot more points than me. To be a part of that conversation is something wonderful, and I want to thank everyone for congratulating me and for all their support.”

One Year Ago – 2022

Carson Kharchla offered the match of the night during Ohio State’s 21-12 loss to Iowa on Jan. 21 at 165 pounds, defeating No. 1 Alex Marinelli in the most significant victory of his collegiate career.

It was a battle from the opening whistle, with Marinelli holding riding time late into the third period. Kharchla needed a takedown to win – and he delivered.

“The match isn’t over until the whistle blows at the last second,” Kharchla said. “Knowing that, continuing to wrestle, knowing where you are and what positions you need to be in and trusting in your wrestling – it can be a little daunting if you think about, ‘Well, I didn’t score here. I didn’t score now. Maybe I’m not going to score again.’ But you have to block that out and go through it.”

With the wrestlers deadlocked at the mat’s center, Kharchla swept underneath Marinelli’s waist and used his upward momentum to topple the top-ranked wrestler to the floor. The official shot his arm into the air with two fingers pointing upward, and the 4,400 Buckeye fans at the Covelli Center erupted.

Brothers Duke It Out In OSU, U-M Rivalry

The Ohio State-Michigan rivalry can bring out the best in terms of competition but also the worst among fans who are so set in their allegiances that households sometimes are forced to take sides.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

It's rare when someone can root for both schools and, in the case of Sharon Duke, feel good about the split of the series between the Buckeyes and Wolverines in Ann Arbor, Mich., on Jan. 13 and 14.

She was among the many family and friends in Yost Ice Arena to see her sons play against each other when Ohio State freshman defenseman Tyler Duke went against Michigan sophomore forward Dylan Duke, a fourth-round (No. 126) selection by the Tampa Bay Lightning in the 2021 NHL draft.

What she witnessed was her Wolverine scoring twice and her Buckeye getting a goal as Ohio State won the opener 7-2. Neither made the score sheet the following night in the Wolverines' 4-2 victory.

"I think in her mind, that's exactly what she wanted, one of us to each get a win," the freshman Duke told BSB. "In our minds I was hoping for two wins, and (my brother) was probably hoping for two wins as well."

There was no mistaking that their mother was in the building to cheer on her children.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHARON DUKE
FAMILY AFFAIR — Having to root for two teams is no concern for Sharon Duke, who proudly displays her split jersey in support of her two sons — Tyler, who plays for Ohio State, and Dylan, who plays for Michigan.

Big Ten Hockey's Twitter account posted a photo of her wearing a customized hockey jersey, split down the middle with half displaying the Buckeyes' scarlet uniform and the other half showing Michigan's blue top.

"I think she made it. It's pretty impressive that she did that," Tyler Duke said. "I think it's great for her to enjoy the experience too, because it's obvious that's two of her boys playing against each other."

It seems appropriate that there is an Ohio-Michigan split. The Dukes moved from Strongsville, Ohio, near Cleveland to Northville, Mich., when Tyler was 10. His father, Steve, played hockey at Western Michigan and in the minor leagues and now owns a Harley Davidson dealership. Prior to the series, the freshman Duke said their supporters sections would likely be divided.

"It's definitely a little crazy because we're originally from Ohio and then we moved to Michigan," he said. "It's a pretty good balance of both, but most of our family is from Ohio so I think a couple more family members will be Ohio State fans."

The brothers — of whom the Duke at Michigan is 16 months older and recently helped the U.S. to a silver medal at the World Junior Championships while on a break from the Wolverines — played for the USA Hockey National Team Development Program in Plymouth, Mich. While the brothers are close, they went their separate ways when it came to choosing a college.

"I've always been an Ohio State fan, being an Ohio kid," the freshman Duke said. "It's a great hockey program, great coaches. I liked everything about it. I really wanted to go here and that's kind of been a dream of mine, so it's pretty cool and special to be here."

Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik understood the choices the brothers had in front of them deciding whether to play together or separately.

"That's something that (Tyler) had to determine," he said. "Do you want to play there (at Michigan), be with your brother or be on your own? Right now, it's probably been best for both of them to be on their own, have their own identity. It's worked out pretty good for each of them. It's pretty amazing for their family where they both are. Dylan's a great kid, and I've met him quite a bit."

"Tyler is one of the youngest players in college hockey, and to go up there and to have a chance to play against his brother was pretty unique."

Part of the way through his freshman season, his age (18) and size (5-9, 180 pounds) have not hindered him, although it's been an adjustment from his development program days when he was going against fellow teenagers.

"It's definitely different from junior hockey, just playing with older kids," he said. "I'm playing against 20, 24-year-olds, so I'm adapting to a more mature game and I think I've done that."

Duke has two goals and seven assists for nine points in 26 games for the Buckeyes through Jan. 21.

"He's small but he doesn't shy away from anything," Rohlik said. "He's probably one of our most physical defensemen, to be honest with you."

"He's learning when to take hits, when not

to, and I think he's done an unbelievable job to step in at this age and to play the minutes he has and be put in the position that he has. He's got a lot of room to grow, which is the exciting part."

The Duke brothers aren't finished facing each other this season, with two more regular-season games on deck and the possibility of a postseason matchup. Michigan visits Value City Arena on Feb. 16, and the teams will meet two days later in an outdoor game in the "Faceoff on the Lake" at FirstEnergy Stadium, home of the Cleveland Browns.

The game — expected to have at least 350 friends and family members of the Dukes — will bring back memories. The Dukes had a youth hockey game at Progressive Field, where baseball's Cleveland Guardians play, prior to Ohio State and Michigan meeting on Jan. 15, 2012, so playing outside in the winter chill is not unusual.

"When we were younger, my dad used to build a rink in our back yard and we would play against each other, so there's definitely a lot of outdoor hockey between us," Ohio State's Duke said. "We would always go one-on-one against each other. We're both super competitive, and it's going to be a good battle for sure. I was joking with some of my teammates — I score a goal and then he's got to score two, so older brother has to always one-up the younger brother."

No Ordinary Joe

One of the many positives for the Buckeyes this season is the continued progress by junior forward Joe Dunlap from Windham, N.H.

After getting one point in 16 games as a freshman, he recorded 13 points (seven goals, six assists) in 32 games last season when he won the team's most improved player award.

Already this season, he is third on the Buckeyes with 10 goals and has seven assists for 17 points in 26 games.

"I think it's just getting better defensively," he said. "The coaches are really harping on that with me, and I think I'm making a lot of progress in my game and it's helping me do better in the offensive zone too."

He said it took a while to accept the theory that good defense can lead to scoring chances.

"My freshman year, I didn't want to believe that for sure," Dunlap said. "But after all the evidence and doing it every day in practice and it turns out like that in the game, it's second nature so I don't really need to think about it anymore."

"He's one of those guys I think is really learning his game," Rohlik added. "Sometimes you play one game the right way and the next you want to go east-west and toe-dragging guys. You can see how dangerous he is when he's going north-south and he shoots the puck a ton. It comes with confidence, and sometimes it takes time. He's just scratching the surface."

Dunlap's asset is his speed, and coming from a family of multisport athletes certainly doesn't hurt his ability on the ice.

"My mom was a track star in high school," he said. "She was more of a sprinter. I'm not very good at long distances, but a sprinter? Definitely. My brother's very fast as well, and I think the fact we were playing play a lot of sports — hockey, lacrosse and football — helped."

Wanting More

That Ohio State left the Ann Arbor series



	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Minnesota	16	37	12	3	1	1	1	0
Ohio State	16	27	9	7	0	0	0	0
Penn State	16	27	8	7	1	0	2	0
Michigan State	16	24	7	7	2	1	0	2
Notre Dame	16	20	6	8	2	1	0	1
Michigan	14	18	6	8	0	2	2	0
Wisconsin	14	9	3	11	0	0	0	0

Overall records — Minnesota 18-7-1, Ohio State 16-9-1, Penn State 18-7-1, Michigan State 13-11-2, Notre Dame 11-12-3, Michigan 14-9-1, Wisconsin 10-14-0.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

disappointed with not sweeping the Wolverines shows their high expectations, especially after dominating the opener.

In that first game, the Buckeyes scored five goals in the second period to stun the Wolverines in front of a sellout crowd of 5,800. Travis Treloar had two goals and an assist, Stephen Halliday had a goal and two assists, and Tate Singleton picked up three helpers. Cole McWard and Michael Gildon each had two assists, and Jakub Dobeš made 19 saves as the Buckeyes outshot the Wolverines 52-21, including 45-16 through two periods.

In the rematch, Cam Thiesing gave the Buckeyes the lead only 18 seconds into the game before another sellout crowd, but U-M scored three straight before Mason Lohrei made it 3-2 at 9:00 in the third period. A late power-play goal sealed the win for the Wolverines.

Blanks For Badgers, Buckeyes

It was a split of shutouts when the No. 7 Buckeyes (16-9-1, 9-7-0 Big Ten) went to Madison, Wis.

The last-place Badgers (10-14-0, 3-11-0) registered a 4-0 upset on Jan. 20 before Dobeš earned his third shutout of the season and the sixth in his career by making 27 saves in the second game for a 2-0 victory. Tate Singleton and Davis Burnside scored for the Buckeyes, who won three of four from Wisconsin this season.

Of note, OSU senior forward Kamil Sadlocha, who was alleged to have directed racial slurs at Michigan State's African-American forward Jagger Joshua on Nov. 11, returned to the lineup for the first time since the Notre Dame series on Nov. 18-19.

He was sent home after the games against the Fighting Irish following public outcry over the school's and Big Ten's refusal to suspend him because of a lack of evidence. Sadlocha rejoined the team after the holiday break, and his return against the Badgers was not announced beforehand.

He did not have any points vs. Wisconsin but did receive a roughing penalty in the second game.

Next

The Buckeyes are idle the weekend of Jan. 27-28 before hosting Penn State on Feb. 3-4.

For recaps of the Michigan and Wisconsin series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Jesse Mendez Maturing More And More

Wrestling is a sport dominated by experience, as evidenced by the fact that of the hundreds of national champions crowned by the NCAA in the history of the sport, just 20 have been true freshmen.

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

Beyond winning a national title, it's rare for freshmen to even start for their squads. Dominant high school competitors get to the next level and often realize they are not alone at the top – they are one of many. There are some exceptions to that rule, however.

Some freshmen do walk on campus and immediately compete for national championships, and Ohio State just may have one of those exceptions in 133-pound wrestler Jesse Mendez, who is beginning to take the next step in his maturation.

"Jesse, he's a competitor," Ohio State assistant coach J Jagers said in November. "Midsummer he's like, 'I don't need a redshirt, I want to go now.' It's a July workout and you're like, 'Oh, really? Boy is pumped up.' But he believes in himself. He believes he's going to win the nationals this year. People will call him crazy and laugh at him, but that's what he believes. And there's nothing that I don't think he can do."

Mendez was ranked the nation's No. 1 pound-for-pound recruit out of high school by FloWrestling, and his pedigree makes it easy to see why. Finishing his prep career with a 157-1 record, Mendez won Indiana state championships each of his four seasons – one at 126 pounds, one at 132 pounds and two at 138 pounds – and he took home Win Magazine's Junior Hodge Trophy in 2021 as the best high school wrestler in the country.

After arriving on campus, it didn't take him long to make waves at Ohio State. At his first major collegiate tournament on Nov. 5, Mendez won the Michigan State open by going 4-0 and recording an upset over Illinois' Lucas Byrd in the finals. Byrd was ranked No. 5 at 133 pounds at the time and is still ranked in the top 10.

"I think throughout the years, the work I've put in, I feel like I'm one of the top 133 pounders in the country," Mendez said. "A lot of people doubt me, but they can keep doubting me."

He hit some snags in the middle of the season, however. About a month after suffering his first – and to date, only – collegiate loss to then-No. 19 Sam Latona of Virginia Tech, Mendez sustained an injury and had to miss time during a crucial stage of his development.

"For any freshman who starts out like that and gets injured, has to take some time off, it will impact their development just a little bit," said senior Kaleb Romero, ranked No. 5 at 184 pounds. "Because coming into the college realm as a freshman, it's always good to have time in the room, get the college feel, get beat up on a little bit. But Jesse's a competitor, and he works his freaking butt off."

Mendez missed roughly six weeks before returning for the opening meet of Big Ten duals season against Indiana on Jan. 6, and he's been on fire since then. He came within one point of a technical fall against Indiana's Henry Porter, winning 20-6, and then beat the then-No. 14 wrestler in his weight class – Rutgers' Joe Heilmann – by a comfortable 5-1 decision on Jan. 15.

After such a response and demonstrating a great work ethic early in his collegiate career, Mendez – now up to No. 9 in his weight class – was awarded a black shirt by the coaching staff on Jan. 18. Black shirts were introduced by Ryan in 2019 as a way to recognize the program's most elite wrestlers on and off the mat. Thirteen wrestlers have been awarded a black shirt since the concept began four years ago, and Mendez is the first new black shirt this season.

"(Mendez) is just competing at a rate that is expected of Buckeye wrestlers," Jagers said of awarding the black shirt. "There is an element to this, make no mistake about it, in competing hard. Competing hard, surrendering nothing, pace, going forward and wrestling a style of wrestling that we all want to see."

Maryland No Match For Ohio State

Maryland won exactly one match in its dual meet against Ohio State, and that was at a weight class where the Buckeyes' top wrestler was injured. All told, Ohio State trounced the Terrapins 38-6 on Jan. 20 in College Park, Md.

Mendez continued building on his success with a pin of Maryland's Conner Quinn, and both Romero and 157-pounder Paddy Gallagher – ranked No. 22 at his weight – recorded technical falls for Ohio State, winning 22-7 and 22-5, respectively.

Sammy Sasso, ranked No. 3 at 149 pounds, showed No. 18. Ethen Miller what 15 spots of separation in the rankings looks like. Sasso scored another bonus-point victory for the Buckeyes, dominating Miller in a 12-1 win. He came close to a pin, too, scoring four points for a near-fall in the third period.

The only win Maryland could record against Ohio State came at 125 pounds in the absence of the Buckeyes' Malik Heinselman, ranked No. 10 in his class. Wrestling in his place, Brendan McCrone fell to No. 18 Braxton Brown via first-round pin.

Even Isaac Wilcox, filling in for No. 8 Ethan Smith at 174 pounds, beat the opponent placed in front of him. The junior took down Dominic Solis in sudden victory, scoring a takedown to win 3-1.

OSU Gets Ranked Win Over Rutgers

Ohio State's victory at Maryland was the second dual meet in a span of five days for the Buckeyes, with Big Ten duals season in full swing. Prior to defeating the Terrapins, the Buckeyes took care of business against the visiting Scarlet Knights by a 27-12 final on Jan. 15. In addition to Mendez's above-mentioned victory, there were some other standout performances from the Buckeyes' grapplers.

Romero picked up the most resounding win of the meet, recording a pin against a top-15 opponent. He took a 5-1 lead on then-No. 14 Brian Soldano before gaining side control off a takedown and rolling his



Kaleb Romero

opponent's shoulders over for the fall. It was the first match of the night as well at the Covelli Center, and Romero took the opportunity to hype up the home crowd.

The Buckeyes also got bonus-point victories from Tate Orndorff – ranked No. 16 at heavyweight – who got a 15-0 technical fall over John O'Donnell, and Sasso, who got an 11-2 major decision over Anthony White.

No. 23 Gavin Hoffman made his return from injury at 197 pounds and recorded a comfortable 8-3 decision over Billy Janzer. Hoffman closed the match on a 6-1 run after it was initially tied 2-2.

It wasn't a perfect meet, however, as Dylan D'Emilio – then the No. 16 wrestler at 141 pounds – lost via decision to Joseph Olivieri after neither wrestler scored in sudden victory in a 1-1 overtime bout. Olivieri had 30 seconds of riding time during regulation, and that was enough to determine the match in the end.

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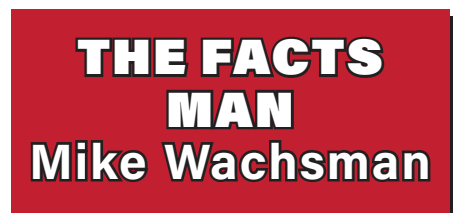
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Eventful Offseason Ahead For The Buckeyes

There are two seasons at Ohio State – football season and the offseason. The former is where the Buckeyes do their thing each week, usually to much success and praise, and the latter is where Buckeye Nation shows its colors. And that is often not a good thing.

When OSU is winning, fans are among the most rabid in the nation, but when the Buckeyes lose – even if it's one game that ultimately doesn't affect whether it made the College Football Playoff – you'd think they were Indiana or Rutgers.



The Buckeyes played excellent defense all season, finishing 14th in total defense – a huge improvement from 59th in 2021. One bad game against Michigan and Ohio State fans went to social media and said the Jim Knowles hire was a bad one, the defense still sucks, \$2 million wasted. It's a good thing these people aren't in charge of anything that involves long-term, big-picture thinking.

The defense was better, by a lot, in 2022. The secondary was a liability, and Knowles could have adjusted better to that fact. Asking that group to cover without getting consistent pressure was a recipe for disaster, and it showed up against Michigan and on Georgia's game-winning drive in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

After a slip by Lathan Ransom allowed a Georgia touchdown to close the margin to 38-35 in the fourth quarter, Knowles went conservative. The Bulldogs proceeded to rip that up, marching to a 72-yard touchdown drive that ultimately proved the difference in a 42-41 victory. Ohio State went aggressive, and it didn't work. It then went conservative, and it didn't work. To me, that's more (but not totally) on the personnel than on the coaching.

Having Ransom in coverage was the first blunder, and not going after Stetson Bennett on the final drive was the second, and worst of them all. There were times in the game when Ohio State got to the Georgia quarterback and forced misfires, so maybe going that route would have been best instead of dialing things back.

It wasn't the best performance by the defense by any stretch, but it also didn't undo all of the progress the unit made in year one under Knowles. It exceeded my expectations by a ton, and year two should be more progress as players get more comfortable in their roles. Oh, and better talent comes in to help the secondary, which is a must for any improvement to stick. If you can't hold up on the outside in today's game, you can't win.

OSU fans were also predictably excited about the possibility of C.J. Stroud returning for another year, even though that was never going to happen. The fact that Stroud waited until the last possible day to make his declaration for the NFL put fans in a tizzy – the same fans who said Ohio State needed to move on from Stroud because he refused to run, or because he didn't have the “look” of a real leader, or because he didn't put the team on his back

and will it to victory the way Justin Fields did.

Would it have been nice if Stroud returned? Sure. It would put OSU right back into the national title hunt in 2023. But it was always unlikely that the NIL collective at Ohio State would be able to raise enough money to contend with the guaranteed money of a top-10 NFL draft pick, money that could set up Stroud and his family for life.

So that appears to be the fans' perspective on the offseason. A different one is that OSU takes a slight step back next season – but not because of quarterback play. There should be confidence in both Kyle McCord and Devin Brown as both show traits of successful quarterbacks. Ohio State has yet to have subpar quarterback play in Day's tenure, and it won't start next year.

No, the real concern (aside from the secondary, which looks to have help on the way) is the offensive line – specifically the tackle spots. Both Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones received All-American honors this season, but both are off to the NFL.

Ohio State would have been wise to jump into the transfer portal for help, and there were plenty of veterans available. Ajani Cornelius (Rhode Island) and Jeremiah Byers (UTEP) that Ohio State reportedly had contact with, but they selected Oregon and Florida State, respectively. Stanford's Myles Hinton was a four-year starter with high productivity, but he ultimately chose Michigan. The Buckeyes did add transfer offensive lineman Victor Cutler (6-3, 302) from Louisiana-Monroe with two years of eligibility remaining, but he figures to factor into the interior.

Josh Fryar is the one veteran who has played some, and fairly well. He could be the answer on the right side. But on the left side it's anyone's guess. Zen Michalski may have first dibs since he was the listed backup to Johnson for most of the season. OSU recruited Tegra Theola and George Fitzpatrick last season, and both were listed as top 20 nationally at their positions.

There was talk from some that Matthew Jones could slide out to tackle from his guard spot, but he is more likely to take over at center. He and left guard Donovan Jackson are the only holdovers from 2022, so finding that experience outside is paramount. But one guard spot is left open, and it could be filled by Enokk Vimahi, who was behind Jackson on the left side last season. Maybe incoming freshman Luke Montgomery makes waves early and throws his name into the mix at guard.

Ohio State has a lot of talent, but up front it's almost more important to have experience. Three spots will be manned next season by players who have taken very few meaningful snaps at Ohio State, and that is a point of worry. Offensive line coach Justin Frye has a reputation for being a developer of players, so maybe he helps these guys make big strides in spring camp. I would feel better if it looked like there was an Orlando Pace type in the group, but that doesn't appear to be the case.

So, along with Cutler, OSU will need to rely on what it has. And what it has right now is a lack of experience. And that's just enough to worry whether the College Football Playoff is attainable in 2023. Sounds like this guy has something to look forward to this offseason.

Familiar Face In New Role

When Day announced that he might cede play-calling duties, Buckeye Nation perked up.

Dreams of games with no more horizontal passes or quarterbacks failing to take yardage that's there or taking the foot off the gas pedal suddenly became more than just dreams.

Day has been guilty of all of those as a play caller, and it's good that he is realizing he needs to be more in tune with the overall component rather than just the offense. The best coaches are CEOs, letting their assistants handle the game planning and in-game adjustments while they deal with the more overarching parts of the job.

Day promoted from within, elevating receivers coach and passing game coordinator Brian Hartline to offensive coordinator. This will be Hartline's first time coordinating at any level, so it shouldn't be seen as a slam dunk. Remember what happened last time Day promoted an assistant to coordinator? Kerry Coombs had no previous experience as a coordinator.

That said, the signs seem to be pointing upward for the elevation of Hartline, who has already proven himself to be an outstanding recruiter and quite possibly the best developer of receiver talent in all of college football.

“Brian has been successful in every football capacity for which he has been engaged,” Day said. “He has progressed incredibly well from college to NFL receiver, and then from quality control coach to wide receivers coach to passing game coordinator. He figures things out quickly, and he is more than ready to now transition to offensive coordinator.”

“Brian has also developed his receivers at an unprecedented level, and he has recruited as well or better than anyone in the country. Now he'll be recruiting for our entire offense, and I think that is something that will be really positive for our program.”

It remains to be seen whether Day will truly be hands off in the play calling. Sure, he will be allowed to overrule if there is something he really wants, but in a perfect world the play-to-play, series-to-series stuff should be left to Hartline.

Final Buzzer Sounding On Holtmann's Tenure?

The mantra heading into this basketball season was that the Buckeyes would be very talented but very young and would take time to really find their feet.

The flashes of brilliance were there – a ranked win over Texas Tech in Hawaii, playing then-17th-ranked Duke toe-to-toe until attrition finally got the better of the Buckeyes, an overtime loss to defending national champion North Carolina in Madison Square Garden, and falling on the last shot to No. 1 Purdue. All of those games showed great effort and heart, though most were not the result head coach Chris Holtmann wanted.

He preached patience, that things were close, that this team was on the brink of being very good. And then Minnesota happened.

For those who don't follow college basketball's regular season – and that's probably a majority since the postseason appears to be all that matters – the Gophers entered the game in Columbus as the only Big Ten team without a conference victory. There is no Kevin

McHale or Trent Tucker or Sam Jacobsen on this Gophers team, so when the scoreboard showed a 70-67 victory for the visitors, it was understandably frustrating and depressing.

Holtmann generally has a lot to say following a game, but he was unusually short with the media following this one, giving the usual “we just have to get better” and “this was disappointing” you hear so often after a loss.

That would be all right if it wasn't the same thing every time, either blowing a lead (as Ohio State did against North Carolina and Purdue) or showing a lack of shooting acumen (Maryland and Minnesota). Holtmann's teams lack purpose on offense – it's either guys jacking up threes or someone dribbling around the perimeter and driving to the hoop with short seconds on the clock, hoping to get fouled. Most of the time it just results in a poor shot and possession for the opposition.

Speaking of free throws, OSU is actually pretty good at that, but it doesn't go to the line nearly enough to make a real difference. The Buckeyes drained at least 70 percent of their foul shots in games against Northwestern, Purdue, Maryland, Minnesota and Rutgers (above 80 percent against the latter three) but only won one of those contests. Ohio State averaged fewer than 15 foul shots in those games, including only seven against the Boilermakers.

For the season, the Buckeyes have attempted 17.0 free throws per game, tied for 229th nationally out of 352 teams. That tells me there is either lack of aggression or lack of patience, or maybe both, in OSU's offense.

Ohio State's losing streak would extend to five games before the Buckeyes scored a 93-77 victory over visiting Iowa.

I don't think it's the job of the media to advocate for coaches to be fired. That's something that should be left to the administration. If those in charge value their programs, they will be proactive, and if they just like making money and paying lip service, they will keep a guy too long.

What OSU fans see with Holtmann is pretty much what they get. He's been in charge for five full seasons, losing at least 10 games in four of those seasons. Ohio State has never advanced past the second round of the NCAA Tournament on his watch and has seemingly settled into that 20-win, 10-loss sort of consistency that few programs want – not great, but not truly bad enough to warrant firing the coach. But maybe it should be.

Holtmann has put together some very nice recruiting classes in the last three seasons (counting next year's group in that span), and this year's top freshman in Brice Sensabaugh has the look of a future star. If there is truly a bunch of talent on hand, why does Ohio State continue to struggle? It's one thing to play close with Purdue, but another entirely to lose at home to a lurching Minnesota outfit. The Buckeyes seldom show urgency and far too often don't get off a smart shot in crunch time. That falls on the coach.

There is still a lot of season to play out, and things can obviously turn around. But if Ohio State finishes 20-10 again, it may be time for Gene Smith to give the position some thought. And while I am not one of those who believes basketball should be contending yearly for the Big Ten crown, it would be nice to have it happen more than once in six seasons.

A Sincere Message From Your BSB Publisher

The biggest recent news in the trendy Grandview area of Columbus, home to BSB world headquarters since 1981 (long before the area was trendy) is the opening of Hot Chicken Takeover, a popular purveyor of – believe it or not – hot (as in spicy) chicken. Their signature chicken sandwich will cost you \$11.25 and offer you 15 minutes or so of eating enjoyment.

Down Grandview Avenue from there, Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream draws a crowd even in winter. There you can have a scoop of their famous Salty Carmel ice cream for \$5.95. Take 15 minutes with that and you will be eating Salty Carmel soup. Next door to Jeni's is another Grandview fixture, Stauf's Coffee Roasters. There, for \$4.70, you can relax with a large latte. Drink fast though. In 15 minutes that latte will be cold.

OK, Frank, what's your point?

Each issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin costs subscribers \$4.37, even less for those who take advantage of our many special offers throughout the year. Did you know that on average, readers spend two hours and six minutes with each issue of BSB? It doesn't melt, it doesn't get cold and it doesn't disappear like the chicken sandwich you had for lunch. In fact, you can keep it as long as you wish and relive your favorite win, refer back to your most excruciating loss or enjoy stories about your favorite players. Oh, we've had dogs eat readers' BSBs (truly), family members throw them away, or friends or co-workers "borrow" them, but for the most part the paper is yours to enjoy at your leisure.

A while back, we raised the BSB subscription price to \$104.95. When we broke that \$100 barrier, we met some reader resistance. It seems that there is something psychological about that jump from \$99.95, even though the difference amounts to less than 21 cents an issue. I want to assure our readers that we don't just pull subscription prices out of a black Woody cap. We try to come up with a price that allows us to put out a quality product while keeping the doors at world headquarters open.

Readers repeatedly tell us how much they enjoy BSB.

I can't tell you how many times through the years a frantic wife has called and told us, "I let my husband's BSB subscription run out and he is going to kill me." It is both troubling and gratifying when the poor spouse sounds like she really means it. Or the saddest of calls that we receive all too often: "My (father, mother, husband, wife) loved your publication, but has passed away." Then there are people who just say straight out, "I love Buckeye Sports Bulletin."

How do we hear these things?

Because a live person actually picks up the phone here. And it's not somebody in India or the Philippines and not after a veritable blockade of prompts. Somebody right here in the office picks up the phone and says, "How can I help you?" and means it. We have gotten to know many of you via the phone through the years. And if we are not here, we have used the same answering service for more than 40 years. They know the drill.

This is the type of little thing that makes BSB what it is. But these things come with a cost.

Since that increase to \$104.95, our printing cost went up 9 percent last June, followed by a similar increase in postage rates in July. We absorbed those rates without increasing our price. Now, postage has gone up again on Jan. 22.

To my knowledge, Buckeye Sports Bulletin and Notre Dame's Blue and Gold Illustrated are the only college sports publications that still publish weekly in football season, and Blue and Gold is monthly the rest of year, while BSB goes to a biweekly schedule. Publications at such schools as Michigan and Penn State now

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

publish monthly year-round, and many of the other publications from around the country no longer print at all. And yet with your continued support BSB chugs along.

I ask our loyal readers to reach out to me at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com and let me know your thoughts. At what price-point are you comfortable or uncomfortable? Would you rather pay a little bit more or receive fewer issues? What are the things in BSB that are most important to you? This will help us use reader feedback to plan for the future.

In the meantime, I am going to offer suggestions from time to time on how you can help keep Buckeye Sports Bulletin vibrant and viable.

My first suggestion is to consider our VIP program, which so many of you loyally support. Many of our readers are on fixed incomes now, and some of our other readers are doing quite well. I like to think BSB readers are a family, and VIP readers help underwrite those family members who are a little less fortunate.

But please note that in my eyes, all BSB readers are VIPs and I thank each and every one of you for your support – many of you for the full 42 years.

So, sit back with your latte, your ice cream or even your hot chicken sandwich and enjoy this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. I'll be waiting to hear from you.

Knowles And Tackling

Missed tackles have been a problem for recent Ohio State football teams, and the problem seemed to continue in the defense's first season under Jim Knowles. Former BSB associate editor Patrick Mayhorn wrote an extensive article on Knowles' tackling philosophy in the April 16, 2022, issue of BSB, and we ran the story again on Jan. 5 as part of our Reprint Thursday feature at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com to see if it offered insight into any struggles the 2022 defense had.

Patrick is a real student of football's X's and O's, and the story is fairly intricate. If you are into football in that type of detail, I strongly suggest you reread the story. I am more of a football layman but reread the story to see if it offered any insight for the more casual fan.

One thing that struck me is that Knowles apparently does not use a lot of live tackling in practice.

"The bottom line is that you don't have to practice bringing guys to the ground – it's all about positioning," Knowles said. "Tackling is technique and timing. What I'm looking for out there is what I call 'owning your hip.' You can do this all year long, you don't need pads on, you just need to own your hip."

Knowles then goes on to demonstrate "owning the hip" with a phantom runner.

"I have to have one guy at (the runner's) side – in a good position – and he has to tag (coaching slang for hit) the hip. And then I need another guy in front of him, with his near leg up (the near leg is on the same side of the body as the leading shoulder, and to have it up just means to have it in front of the other), and he's got to tag the hip. You can do that all over the field, you don't ever really have to tackle somebody in practice. It matters if you're in the right position. I teach them that it's OK to miss tackles if you're in the right position."

This was all a little too complicated for me. But "it's OK to miss tackles" caught my attention.

"(With this approach), when you're looking at it as a fan or a guy who reports on it and you see a guy fly by and miss but he's on the right angle, you're not going to pay much attention to it because there's going to be another guy right there," Knowles said. "You're not going to miss badly because there's going to be another guy in a position to make a tackle. The ones that stand out are when a guy loses leverage, the ball cuts back, there's nobody else there on the defense and it looks bad. It's all about timing, technique and angles."

I guess the problem for me is that too many times this season, especially against Michigan and Georgia, there wasn't "another guy right there."

As mentioned, the story was written back in April, and Patrick closed it with a quote from Ryan Day, who seemed quite impressed with Knowles' teaching ability.

"The thing I've noticed with Jim is that it's not a competition every day of who can win the drill. It's about teaching because he has his eyes on that first game in September," Day said at the time. "There will be a time when we want to go against each other, move the ball and compete, but I think that's the veteran coach in him. He understands the big picture. There's a method to the way he's installing, the way he's teaching."

I, too, have been impressed with the way Knowles seemed to be teaching throughout the spring, in fall camp and through much of the season. But I think we would all have to agree that his students took a step back in the final two games of the season.

I am very eager to see how the defense does moving forward, as new talent comes in and those already here better acclimate to Knowles style of defense and his unique ways. But if there is a collapse at the end of next season similar to the one in 2022, who will be on the hotter seat – Knowles or Day?

Do We Sound Like That?

For the Jan. 19 edition of Reprint Thursday, we ran stories covering the public celebration for the 2002 Ohio State national champions, marking the 20th anniversary of the event in Ohio Stadium attended by 52,000 Buckeye fans. The stories and pictures were reprinted from the Jan. 25, 2003, issue of BSB.

One story that was not reprinted was my column from that issue. In that column, I quoted extensively from a Miami Herald column blaming the loss by the seemingly invincible defending national champion Miami almost exclusively on the infamous pass interference call against the Hurricanes in the game's first overtime.

"Miami was doomed by a call that felt right on the cusp of corrupt," Dan Le Batard wrote. "In the first overtime, as Miami players and coaches stormed the field, thinking they had won, a flag came out of a referee's pocket terribly late."

Le Batard goes on to say, "The pass interference call was made by an official behind the play even as a ref with a better view, a few yards from it, ruled the pass incomplete without penalty."

"It was so long after the end zone contact being alleged that UM players were dancing at midfield before most of them were even made aware that there was a flag on the field, and even Miami's jubilant mascot had to be shooed off the field."

He did give the Buckeyes some modest

praise before getting back to the point at hand.

"Do you understand how much it took to dethrone these valiant Hurricanes?"

"It took a blood-red crowd of Ohio State fans that out-numbered Miami fans 10-1."

"It took a 14-0 Ohio State team playing its finest game of the year."

"And it took some help from a referee, too."

In the last issue of BSB, staff writer Jack Emerson looked back at that exciting BCS national championship game, controversial pass interference call and all. Emerson reached out to my very dear friend Gary Ferman, longtime publisher of Cane Sport, for his thoughts on the game 20 years later.

Ferman said that Miami fans still believe that they truly won the Fiesta Bowl but were denied because 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."

I just wonder if this is how Buckeye fans sound to outsiders when they complain about things like the targeting call in the Peach Bowl or any of the questionable calls in the 2019 play-off game with Clemson. And 20 years from now will we still be bitter like Hurricane fans?

Worse yet, will the Peach Bowl loss send the Buckeyes into a tailspin like the one Miami experienced after that 2002 national championship loss? The Hurricanes – the Alabama or Georgia of their day – went 11-2 the following season and have posted only one season with at least 10 wins since. In fact, the Hurricanes have actually had four losing seasons since that time, including this past season when they were just 5-7.

We will see if NIL money helps even that out.

High-Flying Offense

While many may be concerned about Knowles and the Buckeye defense, there doesn't seem to be much concern about Ohio State's offense, though it will be interesting to see if there is any change in production with the transition from Kevin Wilson to Brian Hartline as Day's offensive coordinator.

Day's tenure at Ohio State, with an assist from Urban Meyer and Jim Tressel, has resulted in an interesting entry in the Big Ten record book. The top four season touchdown pass totals are held by Buckeyes, and seven of the top 10.

Five of the top six touchdown pass totals were achieved since Day's arrival in 2017. Dwayne Haskins leads the pack with 50 in 2018. C.J. Stroud follows with 44 in 2021 and 41 in 2022, and Justin Fields also had 41 in 2019. J.T. Barrett is sixth on the list with 35 in 2017.

That means that one of Day's quarterbacks has posted a top-six Big Ten performance in touchdown passes every year he has been in Columbus with the exception of the COVID-shortened 2020 season. Who was the non-Buckeye in the top six? It was a good one. Drew Brees threw 39 TD passes in 1998.

Barrett also ranked seventh with 34 scoring tosses in 2014 under Meyer, and Troy Smith it tied for the 10th highest total with 30 in his Heisman Trophy-winning season of 2006 under Tressel. Minnesota's Tanner Morgan also had 30 scoring passes in 2019.

Zac Brown Band

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