



# Buckeye State Bounty

## OSU's 2023 Class Boosted By Strong Haul From Ohio

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For almost every football player growing up in Ohio, there's little question what school they might imagine themselves playing for once they hit college. Given that Ohio State is the only Power Five program within the state – that is until Cincinnati joins the Big 12 on July 1 – there isn't a team that is more synonymous with its home state than the Buckeyes.

That's why when a recruit from Ohio receives an offer from Ohio State, the term "dream offer" is often not far behind. The Buckeyes issued those coveted offers to eight prospects in Ohio for the 2023 class, with seven opting into the class of Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day. Those seven Ohio prospects helped establish the foundation of the class that finished with 20 signees and as the No. 5 class in the country, according to the 247Sports composite ranking.

"I think we have really good prospects in the state, and I also think it matters to have guys from the state of Ohio – now more than ever," Day said on Feb. 1.

For all the talk of name, image and likeness, the transfer portal and other issues that have popped up in recent years, Ohio has remained the bedrock of Ohio State's classes. This year's crop of seven players represented the largest share of prospects from Ohio to make up the Buckeyes' class (35.0 percent) since Ohio State took nine prospects from the state in 2016's 24-man class (37.5 percent).

A relatively large group from Ohio is somewhat surprising



SONNY BROCKWAY

**OHIO STATEMENT — Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class featured seven prospects from Ohio, with head coach Ryan Day signing one of the largest in-state classes in recent years for OSU.**

when analyzing from a statistical standpoint, as the average player rating of the top 10 prospects from Ohio in 2023 was just .9250, the second-lowest in the state dating back to 2012, when former head coach Urban Meyer began to take Ohio State's recruiting to a national level.

Even if the recruits, on average, are not what they used to be when John Cooper and Jim Tressel were at the reins of Ohio State's recruiting efforts, the Buckeyes were able to find several diamonds in the rough for this cycle.

Of the seven prospects Ohio State signed from Ohio – all ranking within the top eight for the state – the highest-rated was Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star cornerback Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 175), the No. 51 overall prospect and No. 6 cornerback in the class. Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-4, 295) was another top-100 prospect, checking in at No. 92 in the country and second in Ohio behind Mathews.

The two underwent very different recruitments, with Montgomery an early target of Ohio State in the class and

pursued constantly until his eventual commitment last February, over a year after being offered. Mathews, meanwhile, didn't receive an offer until camping with the Buckeyes this past summer, but it took just a few weeks to get an official visit in order before he committed to Ohio State just a month after getting his offer.

What they have in common, though, is that Ohio State's staff was always on the prowl. Whether kick-starting a recruitment like Montgomery's or getting involved late like with Mathews, rest assured that Ohio State – likely through the lens of associate athletic director of player personnel Mark Pantoni – always has an eye on the best Ohio has to offer.

"We're always going to be trying to sign the best players possible, but the Ohio kids are always going to be on the top of that list," Pantoni said on Feb. 1. "We spend more time evaluating those kids, whether that may be a fault of us sometimes over evaluating them, but I can guarantee you we spend (time) and do our due diligence, go into those high schools to gather as much information (as pos-

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# FAN FORUM



## From The Message Board

**Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class has taken shape with 20 prospects signing their national letters of intent during the early signing period. As anticipation begins to rise regarding the next crop of freshmen, we asked Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers and staff which member of the incoming class they are most looking forward to seeing during their Ohio State career. Here are some of the responses:**

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"Most intriguing might be defensive end Will Smith Jr. He went from not being recruited to a bona fide prospect for Ohio State. I'm not predicting great success for him, but he should be intriguing to watch."

– Terrier Buck

"Can Malik Hartford, Cedrick Hawkins or Calvin Simpson-Hunt steal some playing time at safety or cornerback? Can Brandon Inniss crack the top six in the crowded wide receivers room? And finally, will Hartline want to see Jelani Thurman as a tight end running up the seams? These players may get an early look, especially if the injury bug hits those (positions) in the two-deep. Isn't it about time the Buckeyes have some good luck when it comes to injuries?"

– BYRON MCNUTT

"I'm interested in seeing how Lincoln Kienholz fits in. Quarterback battles always fascinate me – who will stick and who will go? The Buckeyes have some good competition here for the starting role. Let's see who wins."

– PeyoteBuck

"Offensive lineman Luke Montgomery. I have a good friend from Findlay who sends me all the local articles on this guy. Anxious to see how he does at the next level."

– R1TBDBITL

"Jermaine Mathews. I think he will be in the corner rotation by the end of the season."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Malik Hartford's range and sideline-to-sideline ability are eye-catching to me, but my pick here is Calvin Simpson-Hunt. He has legitimate track speed and great length at the corner position, and I think he has first-round potential if developed the right way."

– Andy Anders, BSB

"I'm most looking forward to seeing how Luke Montgomery fits on the shifting offensive line. With the Buckeyes in need of tackles, I think he has the opportunity to step up and make an immediate impact as a freshman. I'm also interested to see how he'll grow in a leadership role, after he played a big part in peer recruiting the 2023 class."

– Jack Emerson, BSB

"I think Jason Moore can be a real game wrecker on the defensive line, regardless of whether he lines up on the edge or the interior. He had a very impressive high school career and there's space in that room right now for a young guy to step up, and I see no reason why he can't take a leap in his freshman season."

– Braden Moles, BSB

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# Clear Front-Runner In Springtime Race For QB

"I hope that one of them emerges and we can name a starter. ... I think it would be great for our program to be able to do that. Some vision on who the starter is coming out of the spring would be nice. ... It's going to be a heck of a competition."

Those were the words uttered Feb. 1 by Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, taken straight out of the "Who's Going to be Your Starting Quarterback?" chapter of the "All-Purpose Coach-Speak Handbook." Most of Day's predecessors have used the same passage in one form or another when the program transitioned from one quarterback to the next.

Woody Hayes likely used some version of it in 1968 with regard to two-year starter Bill Long and fresh-faced sophomore Rex Kern. Earle Bruce had a choice to make in 1982 when Mike Tomczak and Brent Offenbacher were eager to follow Art Schlichter.

John Cooper said it in 1991 after Greg Frey had exhausted his eligibility, and again in 1996 when he had to choose (and never really did) between Stan Jackson and Joe Germaine. Jim Tressel repeated it in 2002 when it was time for Craig Krenzel and Scott McMullen to determine who would succeed Steve Bellisari. And Urban Meyer never strayed very far from the script in 2018 when describing the battle between Dwayne Haskins and Joe Burrow.

Woody, Earle, Coop, Tress and Urban each had to talk the way they did to ensure the eventual starter never became complacent while keeping the No. 2 man fully engaged. Day walks a little finer line nowadays because he realizes whoever loses the battle to start will likely jump ship via the transfer portal. And the last thing you want is for a guy to transfer, lead his new team to a national championship, and win the Heisman Trophy in the process.

Of course, in most cases, the coach has a pretty good idea who his starting quarterback will be in the fall, and with no disrespect to Devin Brown, Oregon State transfer Tristan Gebbia or incoming freshman Lincoln Kienholz, the starting quarterback at Ohio State for the 2023 season is going to be Kyle McCord.

That assumption is based almost entirely on what we know mixed with a pinch of conjecture.

What we know is that McCord has been the primary backup for two years running, an apprenticeship that includes his only career start in September 2021 when he threw for 319 yards and two touchdowns during a 59-7 victory against Akron. In 12 career games with the Buckeyes, McCord has attempted 58 passes and completed 41 of them for 606 yards and three scores.

All of that, plus he came to Ohio State with an impeccable pedigree that included a five-star rating out of St. Joseph's Prep in Philadelphia where he helped lead the Hawks to three straight state championships. The fact that his favorite receiver during their days at The Prep was none other than Marvin Harrison Jr. doesn't hurt, either.

The 6-3, 222-pound McCord is a pure pocket passer with a big-time arm, and his knowledge of Day's playbook as well as his game experience – albeit limited – would seem to give him a huge edge on his competition.

That's what we know. What we don't know – but can perhaps surmise – is that McCord might have earned some sort of assurance this time last year that if he stuck around and didn't explore his transfer options, he would indeed have the inside track to the starting job in 2023.

McCord's chief competitor will be Brown, of course, the former four-star prospect out of Utah who would bring a different dynamic to

Ohio State's offensive attack. During his senior season in high school, the 6-3, 210-pounder not only threw for 4,881 yards and 57 TDs, he ran for 430 yards and eight scores. Last year, he appeared in only two game for the Buckeyes – garbage time at the end of big wins against Toledo and Rutgers during which he led three series that consisted of 14 handoffs and a quarterback keeper.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

To be honest, for Brown to win the starting job, it would be a sea change in the way Day has operated during his time as head coach of the Buckeyes. He is much more unwilling than Meyer to rely on the run-pass option and put his quarterback in harm's way, so Brown would likely have to outperform McCord by a wide margin to supplant him on the depth chart.

Should Day choose to do so, he conceivably could keep McCord and Brown bracketed at the top of the depth chart into the first month of the season because of a favorable early schedule. The Buckeyes begin with a conference game at Indiana, a team coming off a 4-8 record, with subsequent games against Football Championship Subdivision member Youngstown State and Western Kentucky from Conference USA.

But by a Sept. 23 trip to Notre Dame to take on the Fighting Irish – and barring injury or some other unforeseen circumstance – McCord should be firmly entrenched as the starter.

## Ain't That A Kick?

While doing research for another project, and with thoughts of Noah Ruggles and his chunked 50-yard attempt at the end of the Peach Bowl, I began compiling field goals of at least 40 yards converted by Ohio State kickers since 1960 – all 182 of them – and found some interesting stuff.

Would you believe Dick Van Raaphorst had more career 40-yard field goals than Tom Skladany? Skladany, who was a three-time All-America punter for the Buckeyes, holds the program record for longest field goal with the 59-yarder he made at Illinois during a 40-3 win in 1975. Skladany also made a 40-yarder in that game, but during the rest of his entire career, he made only one more of 40 yards or longer – a 46-yarder during a 34-14 win at Iowa in 1976.

Meanwhile, Van Raaphorst was one of the last straight-away kickers the Buckeyes ever had. He kicked from 1961-63 and converted four field goals of 40 yards or longer, including a career-best 49-yarder during a 20-20 tie with Illinois in 1963. Van Raaphorst held the record for longest field goal by an OSU kicker until Gary Cairns booted one from 55 yards during a 10-9 loss at Illinois in 1966. Interestingly, that was the only three-pointer from 40 yards or more during Cairns' career as a Buckeye.

Several Ohio State kickers have converted two field goals of 40 yards or more in the same game, the most recent of which was Ruggles, who accomplished that feat for the fourth time in his career with 47- and 45-yarders against Maryland this past season.

But only two kickers in program history have ever had three field goals of 40 yards or

more in the same game – Tom Klaban and Mike Nugent, who did it twice.

Klaban, who escaped at an early age with his family from behind the Iron Curtain and learned how to kick a football soccer-style from his sister, accounted for all of Ohio State's points during a 12-10 victory against Michigan in 1974. Klaban converted field goals of 47, 25, 43 and 45 yards during the game, after which the kicker was rewarded with a scholarship, something Hayes termed "a battlefield promotion." It was the first time Hayes had ever given a full scholarship to a kicker.

Nugent matched Klaban in 2002 with three field goals of 40 yards or more during a 25-7 win against Washington State and then did it again two years later during a 22-14 win at North Carolina State.

Nugent is also the all-time OSU leader with 29 career field goals of at least 40 yards, and his 13 field goals of 50 yards or more is also a program record. Second on both lists is Aaron Pettrey (2006-09), who converted 18 attempts from at least 40 yards, including six from 50 yards or more during his career.

## Just One More Thing

Of the aforementioned kickers, only Van Raaphorst was recruited by the Buckeyes to play another position. Listed at 6-1 and 208 pounds, the product of Charlevoix High School in northern Michigan was recruited as a defensive end, but his powerful and accurate right leg quickly earned him the placekicking duties as a sophomore in 1961.

The projected kicker for that season was junior Ben Jones, who had kicked exactly one field goal the previous year, a 30-yarder in the third quarter of a 24-0 win against SMU in the 1960 season opener. To be fair, that was the only attempt of the season for Jones, who also converted 22 of 28 PATs that year.

By the time the 1961 season had begun, however, Van Raaphorst had taken over the placekicking duties and held onto them for the next three seasons, although eligibility for his senior year was touch-and-go for awhile.

While kicking a game-winning field goal against Indiana in 1962, Van Raaphorst suffered a knee injury that later required surgery. During his recovery, he underwent an emergency appendectomy that forced him to drop out of school during the spring quarter. Only after attending summer school and passing his final exams was Van Raaphorst allowed to return to the Buckeyes for his final season.

Van Raaphorst was selected by the Cleveland Browns in the 10th round of the 1964 NFL draft, but when the Browns decided to keep 40-year-old Lou Groza as their kicker, Van Raaphorst was traded to the Dallas Cowboys. He played one season in Dallas before spending three years with the San Diego Chargers. He was selected by the Cincinnati Bengals in the 1968 AFL expansion draft, but he opted for retirement, staying in the San Diego area to become a successful real estate developer.

His son, Jeff, was recruited out of a suburban San Diego high school by then-Arizona State head coach John Cooper to play quarterback, and the younger Van Raaphorst led the Sun Devils to a 22-15 victory against Michigan in the 1987 Rose Bowl. That win against the Wolverines was part of the reason Ohio State hired Coop as Bruce's replacement.

In addition to his career in real estate development, Dick Van Raaphorst served as a color analyst on Chargers radio broadcasts during the 1970s and was a scratch golfer. He remained in the San Diego area until his death on Oct. 3, 2020, at the age of 77.



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Laurinaitis Joining Ohio State's Staff

Former Ohio State linebacker James Laurinaitis will return to his alma mater to serve as a graduate assistant for the 2023 season, the program announced on Jan. 27.

Laurinaitis spent last season as a member of former teammate Marcus Freeman's coaching staff at Notre Dame, serving in a graduate assistant role for the Irish as well. Laurinaitis will primarily work with the linebackers this season, according to an Ohio State press release.

"I am thrilled for our program and especially for our current and future Buckeyes who will benefit so much from having James on staff," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "James is a terrific young man with wisdom as a Buckeye and experience as an eight-year NFL veteran. He is going to be a very important part of our program going forward."

Laurinaitis played for the Buckeyes from 2005-08, during which time he racked up a trio of All-American nods, the Bronko Nagurski Award in 2006 and the Butkus Award in 2007 while amassing 375 career tackles, the seventh-highest mark in Ohio State history. Laurinaitis was also named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year in 2007 and 2008.

He was selected in the second round of the 2009 NFL draft by the St. Louis Rams, where he amassed an organization-record 852 tackles during his seven years with the team.

"I love the game of football, and I love working with young people so that's why I got into coaching," Laurinaitis said. "You want to impact the kids on the field, but more importantly you want them to leave, after building relationships with them, as better men and hopefully give them an example of what being a good husband and father can be."

"It's the same thing Luke Fickell did for me and the same thing Jim Tressel did for me. So you pair that with your alma mater, you pair that with Columbus, Ohio, and when it became something that could happen, I asked my wife and our girls – it was pure giddiness at that point that we could be coming back home."

## Smith Not Interested In Big Ten Commissioner Job

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told The Columbus Dispatch on Feb. 2 that he is not interested in the open position for Big Ten commissioner.

"I'm not interested in that commissioner's job," Smith said. "People keep asking me that and I'm like, 'Why?'"

Smith has been athletic director at Ohio State since 2005 and has been viewed as a potential candidate for the opening given his standing within college athletics, but his comments seem to quash any speculation about a potential departure for one of the biggest jobs in college football.

The job came open after former commissioner Kevin Warren departed in January to become president and CEO of the Chicago Bears, returning to the NFL ranks after leading the Big Ten for three years. Warren's tenure featured numerous highs and lows, including the initial cancellation of the 2020 football season before returning to play as well as the addition of USC and UCLA to the conference.

Other names connected to the commissioner candidacy include ACC commissioner Jim Phillips, Patriot League commissioner Jennifer Heppel and UCLA athletic director Martin Jarmond, who previously spent time in the conference in administrative roles for Michigan State and Ohio State.

## 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)

## Buckeyes Add Transfer Cornerback Igbinosun

Ohio State strengthened its cornerbacks room by landing former Ole Miss cornerback Davison Igbinosun through the transfer portal, garnering his commitment on Jan. 31.

Igbinosun landed on the Buckeyes after taking an official visit to Columbus on Jan. 28, with Ohio State beating out Michigan, Tennessee and UCLA for Igbinosun's services. He was ranked the best remaining cornerback in the transfer portal and the No. 10 overall player in the portal by 247Sports.

Igbinosun, a former four-star recruit out of Union, N.J., played out his freshman season with the Rebels in 2022, collecting 37 tackles and five pass breakups in 13 games, including 10 starts. He joins the Buckeyes with three remaining seasons of eligibility.

The Buckeyes gain some much-needed depth at cornerback with the addition of Igbinosun, who will likely compete for a starting spot against the likes of Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Jyaire Brown along with incoming freshmen Calvin Simpson-Hunt and Jermaine Mathews.

## Spring Practices Set To Begin March 7

Ohio State will return to the field in just a matter of weeks, set to begin spring practice on March 7 in preparation for the upcoming football season.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson revealed the schedule on Jan. 24, with the Buckeyes set to take part in 14 practices before Ohio State's spring game on April 15. The Buckeyes will practice twice before Ohio State's spring break and then return for three practices per week until the spring game.

Though not noted on Johnson's schedule, Ohio State has recently reserved one of the spring practice dates for a Student Appreciation Day, opening up a practice session for Ohio State students.

## Day Hopes To Name Quarterback In Spring

Day, who is facing his first legitimate quarterback battle since taking over for the Buckeyes, said on Feb. 1 that he hopes to name a starter by the end of spring practice.

"I don't know where we will be. I hope that one of them emerges and we can name a starter, I really do," he said. "I think the way that our dynamic is, I think it would be great for our program to be able to do that."

"There were times in the past when I didn't see that happening. I'm hoping that can happen. If it doesn't, it doesn't. But

some vision on who the starter is coming out of the spring would be nice. So I'm hoping that one of them emerges here in these 15 practices."

The two whom Day is looking at for a starter to emerge are Kyle McCord and Devin Brown. McCord has spent the past two seasons as the backup to C.J. Stroud, while Brown recently completed his first season at Ohio State.

McCord has thrown for 606 yards and three touchdowns over the past two seasons and also has a start under his belt, filling in against Akron in 2021 while Stroud recovered from a shoulder injury. In the start, McCord threw for 319 yards and two touchdowns (and an interception) while completing 72.2 percent of his passes.

Brown, meanwhile, has yet to throw a pass. He appeared in just two games last season, carrying the ball once but mostly handing the ball off. Even though he doesn't have the experience that McCord has yet, Day is treating it as an open competition.

"I'm excited to see these two guys compete" he said. "What an unbelievable opportunity for both of them. When you look at the guys that are surrounding and the cast that's surrounding them, you couldn't be more excited to be quarterback right now, I would think, in college football."

"It's going to be a heck of a competition. I'm really looking forward to seeing it. They both have a little bit of a different skill set, and it's going to be fun to watch them compete this spring."

## Several Buckeyes To Miss Spring Practice

It's no secret that the Buckeyes were bitten heavily by the injury bug last season, losing key pieces on both sides of the ball for much of the campaign. Several Buckeyes will be held out of spring practices in order to recover from any ailments still plaguing them from the previous season.

Linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Mitchell Melton, offensive lineman Jakob James, running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Evan Pryor, safety Kourt Williams and wide receivers Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming will all sit out of spring practices while rehabilitating injuries.

"These guys have had some long-term surgeries here," Day said on Feb. 1. "We'll have them ready after the spring, but we are just going to be careful with them throughout the spring."

## Day To Evaluate Play Calling In Spring

Following wide receivers coach Brian

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Hartline's promotion to offensive coordinator, the exact plan for Ohio State's offensive play calling next season is still to be determined.

Day spoke to the media on Feb. 1 for the first time since the Peach Bowl, and addressing previous reports that he was looking to give up play calling responsibilities, Day said several options are still being evaluated.

“What we’re going to do is go through the spring – I talked to Brian about that – and create some environments where we can have (defensive coordinator) Jim (Knowles) call (the defense), have an opportunity for Brian to call (the offense),” Day said. “Then we’ll come up for air at the end of the spring and figure out what that dynamic looks like.”

Day’s decision to consider stepping back from play calling comes after a period of evaluation to start the offseason. Constraints on his time grew greater and greater as last season wore on, taking away from his ability to both game plan effectively and be there in other areas where the team needed its head coach.

“You have to look at time management,” he said. “I think that during the offseason, no problem at all (balancing those responsibilities). Beginning of the season, pretty good. As we get to the middle of the season, end of the season, I feel like there’s times I have to manage my time a little bit better and make sure that, as the head coach, there’s enough presence going around the building late in the season.”

Hartline, for his part, stated that he’d feel comfortable calling a game right now if given the opportunity because of Day and the other coaches around him.

“I’m pretty comfortable, just because of the surrounding party I have,” Hartline said. “I think that Coach Day has always done it at an elite level. We’ve always produced, from a production standpoint offensively, at an elite level. But the support staff I have around me really empowers me. My confidence comes from having them. So I’d be very confident.”

In Day’s eyes, Hartline has proved in his five years as Ohio State’s wide receivers coach that he is ready for the expanded responsibility. Having produced two first-round NFL draft picks last year with Jaxon Smith-Njigba projected in the first round of this year’s draft, Hartline has shown himself as the most consistent recruiter and producer of talent among the Buckeyes’ assistant coaches.

“He’s now, really, done a good enough job, in my opinion, to solidify himself as the best wide receivers coach in the country,” Day said. “I think that’s important as a coach, to get really good at something, be an expert.”

Thus, Day and Hartline will continue picking apart who will hold the reins and to what extent. For now, it’s all about getting reps – not just for Hartline but for the pieces he’d potentially be calling plays for.

“The more opportunities we get to play it as real as possible, for myself and the young quarterbacks and for everyone else, it serves everybody well,” Hartline said.

Friday, Gaoteote Move On From Ohio State

Day said on Feb. 1 that defensive end Tyler Friday and linebacker Palaie Gaoteote

IV are moving on from the Buckeyes. Day did not clarify whether their intentions are to pursue the NFL or use an additional year of eligibility with a different program, but it marks the end of their respective careers with the Buckeyes.

Friday recently wrapped his fifth season with the Buckeyes, appearing in six games and serving as a team captain. He finished with three tackles and a pass breakup this season.

Over his five years at Ohio State, Friday – a native of Ramsey, N.J. – played in 31 games, totaling 21 tackles – four for loss – to go with three sacks and a pass breakup.

Gaoteote was not in Columbus for as long as Friday but still made an impact in his two seasons for the Buckeyes. He totaled 18 tackles and half a sack in 19 games for Ohio State, and for his career – including three seasons at USC prior to transferring to Ohio State – he totaled 123 tackles (nine for loss) with 2½ sacks in 39 games. Gaoteote was also a significant contributor on special teams.

OSU Athletics Reports Record Revenue In FY 2022

The Ohio State athletic department saw a major rebound during the fiscal year 2022, reporting a record \$251,615,345 in revenue, according to a university release.

Ohio State had major disruptions in the 2021 fiscal year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reporting just \$106,896,918 in revenue. As things transition to normalcy, Ohio State bounced back in the fiscal year 2022, which ran from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, by \$144,718,427, primarily thanks to the return of fans to university venues. The athletic department also reported its total operating expenditures from the 2022 fiscal year, which totaled \$225,733,418, resulting in a net profit of \$25,881,927.

“Buckeye Nation continues to show their tremendous support for our incredible student-athletes, our coaches and our support staff,” Smith said. “We are grateful for the enthusiasm they bring to our stadiums, fields and pools.”

Ohio State reported \$59,649,921 in ticket sales in FY 2022, with more than \$47 million coming from football. The ticket sales are up from the reported \$7,386 in FY 2021 when fans were kept out of university venues to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

Ohio State also reported more than \$48 million in revenue from media rights contracts, as well as \$62.9 million in support from “individuals, foundations and companies” – a mark that rose from \$19.7 million in FY 2021.

Day Sought Answers On Waived Targeting Call In Peach Bowl

In the weeks since Ohio State’s 42-41 loss to Georgia in the Peach Bowl, one play has remained a hot topic of discussion among Buckeye and Bulldog fans alike: the waived targeting penalty on Georgia safety Javon Bullard that knocked Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. out of the game’s final quarter.

In the direct aftermath of the game, Day expressed doubt that Bullard’s hit did not constitute targeting and revealed on Feb. 1

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Buckeyes In The Super Bowl

Super Bowl (Year)	Player	Postion	Team
I (1967)	Jim Tyrer	OT	Kansas City Chiefs
III (1969)	Tom Matte	RB	Baltimore Colts
	Matt Snell	RB	New York Jets
IV (1970)	Bob Vogel	OT	Baltimore Colts
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
V (1971)	Jim Tyrer	OT	Kansas City Chiefs
	Bob Vogel	OT	Baltimore Colts
VI (1972), VII (1973)	Paul Warfield	WR	Miami Dolphins
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
VIII (1974)	Paul Warfield	WR	Miami Dolphins
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
IX (1975)	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Morris Bradshaw	WR	Oakland Raiders
XI (1977)	Neal Colzie	DB	Oakland Raiders
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Jack Tatum	S	Oakland Raiders
	Lenny Willis	WR	Minnesota Vikings
XII (1978)	Randy Gradishar	LB	Denver Broncos
XIV (1980)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Los Angeles Rams
	Doug France	OT	Los Angeles Rams
XV (1981)	Morris Bradshaw	WR	Oakland Raiders
	Archie Griffin	RB	Cincinnati Bengals
XVI (1982)	Pete Johnson	RB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Ray Griffin	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
XVII (1983)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Miami Dolphins
	Tom Orosz	P	Miami Dolphins
XIX (1985)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Miami Dolphins
	John Frank	TE	San Francisco 49ers
XX (1986)	Pete Johnson	RB	Miami Dolphins
	Shaun Gayle	DB	Chicago Bears
XXI (1987)	Mike Tomczak	QB	Chicago Bears
	Pepper Johnson	LB	New York Giants
XXIII (1989)	Williams Roberts	OG	New York Giants
	John Frank	TE	San Francisco 49ers
XXV (1991)	Pepper Johnson	LB	New York Giants
	Williams Roberts	OG	New York Giants
XXVI (1992)	Jim Lachey	OT	Washington Redskins
	Joe Staysniak	OT	Buffalo Bills
XXX (1996)	Mike Tomczak	QB	Pittsburgh Steelers
	Keith Byars	FB	New England Patriots
XXXI (1997)	Terry Glenn	WR	New England Patriots
	William Roberts	OG	New England Patriots
	Tom Tupa	P	New England Patriots
XXXIII (1999)	Tito Paul	DB	Denver Broncos
	William White	DB	Atlanta Falcons
XXXIV (2000)	Eddie George	RB	Tennessee Titans
	Joe Germaine	QB	St. Louis Rams
	Orlando Pace	OT	St. Louis Rams
	Chris Sanders	WR	Tennessee Titans
XXXV (2001)	Lorenzo Styles	LB	St. Louis Rams
	Joe Montgomery	RB	New York Giants
XXXVI (2002)	Orlando Pace	OT	St. Louis Rams
	Ryan Pickett	DT	St. Louis Rams
	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XXXVII (2003)	Rickey Dudley	TE	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
	Tom Tupa	P	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
XXXVIII (2004)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
	Nick Goings	RB	Carolina Panthers
XXXIX (2005)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XLII (2008)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XLIII (2009)	Santonio Holmes (MVP)	WR	Pittsburgh Steelers
XLIV (2010)	Malcolm Jenkins	CB	New Orleans Saints
	Will Smith	DE	New Orleans Saints
XLV (2011)	Will Allen	DB	Pittsburgh Steelers
	A.J. Hawk	LB	Green Bay Packers
	Ryan Pickett	DT	Green Bay Packers
	Matt Wilhelm	LB	Green Bay Packers
XLVI (2012)	Jake Ballard	TE	New York Giants
	Jim Cordle	C	New York Giants
XLVII (2013)	Alex Boone	OT	San Francisco 49ers
	Larry Grant	LB	San Francisco 49ers
	Ted Ginn Jr.	WR	San Francisco 49ers
	Donte Whitner	S	San Francisco 49ers
XLIX (2015)	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
	Corey “Philly” Brown	WR	Carolina Panthers
50 (2016)	Kurt Coleman	S	Carolina Panthers
	Ted Ginn Jr.	WR	Carolina Panthers
	Andrew Norwell	OG	Carolina Panthers
	Bradley Roby	CB	Denver Broncos
LI (2017)	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
LII (2018)	Malcolm Jenkins	DB	Philadelphia Eagles
LIII (2019)	Jake McQuaid	LS	Los Angeles Rams
	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
	John Simon	DE	New England Patriots
	Nick Bosa	DE	San Francisco 49ers
LIV (2020)	Darron Lee	LB	Kansas City Chiefs
LVI (2022)	Eli Apple	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Vonn Bell	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Joe Burrow	QB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Sam Hubbard	DL	Cincinnati Bengals
	Isaiah Prince	OL	Cincinnati Bengals
	Jordan Fuller	DB	Los Angeles Rams
LVII (2023)	Trey Sermon	RB	Philadelphia Eagles



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

that he reached out to several different avenues in pursuit of answers regarding the play.

"I made a lot of calls after the game," he said. "I felt like it was targeting. In the moment, when things are moving fast and you can't see the replay, it's very hard to see. The hard thing for me is to see and understand (was) that our medical staff let us know that he had been knocked unconscious and that's why we're not going to put him back in the game, yet the flag gets picked up."

Day added that he reached out to both the Big Ten and Pac-12, which provided the officiating crew for the Peach Bowl, while seeking a definitive answer regarding the play.

"I spoke with the officials in the Big Ten and had a great conversation with (coordinator of football officials Bill Carollo)," Day said. "I then called the Pac-12 to find out an explanation there. The explanation that was told to me was that it wasn't forcible enough. I then asked to speak with the head of the officials, Steve Shaw, and he explained to me that the hit didn't go right to Marvin's head, that it wasn't a shot right on his head, it was to shoulder."

"I completely disagree with that, but that was the decision that was made, and those

are the two explanations that I was given."

## Ruggles Gives Thanks In First Remarks Since Peach Bowl

Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles thanked his friends, family, coaches and fans in a social media post on Feb. 4 announcing his plans to pursue the NFL.

"We all have a vision, an imaginary path we believe is our destiny. As clear as the vision can be at times to ourselves, only God knows the true path, the true, the absolute plan," he said. "If there is one thing I've learned from my journey, it is no matter how dark life seems at times, moments of adversity have provided me an opportunity for unimagined growth, humility and appreciation."

"I am grateful to my teammates and coaches who have inspired me through their own trials; to my family who has sacrificed, loved and supported me; to all the people behind the scenes who serve others selflessly; to the media who tell the stories of failures and comebacks that inspire us; and to the true fans of The Ohio State University who are the backbone of this great football program."

Ruggles' career at Ohio State came to an end this past season after he missed a 50-yard field goal with just seconds remaining that would have lifted the Buckeyes over Georgia in the Peach Bowl. He had previously converted on two field goals in the College Football Playoff semifinal before his final kick sailed wide left.

"From my very first kick as a Buckeye to my very last, I put my faith in God, praying to give him all the glory," he said. "Though I may not see what he is going to do next, I have learned to trust him with all of it. I'm a Buckeye for life."

Ruggles leaves Ohio State having converted on 37 of 41 field-goal attempts and all but one of his 149 extra-point attempts

over the last two seasons, and his field-goal percentage (90.2 percent) is the best in program history for the Buckeyes.

"The Lord makes no promises that our paths will be easy. However, I remember God has a plan, and I trust Him. He has given me this ability," he said. "For this reason, I will be pursuing my next goal to make an NFL roster. To those of you who have given me unwavering support, I hope to make you proud. Thank you."

## Tressel Voices Support For Day

Former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel seems to be impressed with the job Day has done at his old place of employment.

Tressel told the crowd at The Hall of Fame Luncheon Club in Canton, Ohio, on Jan. 23 that he's admired the work Day has done with the Ohio State program to this point in his tenure.

"I'm a Ryan Day fan," Tressel said, according to The Canton Repository. "I think he's got something about him."

Day is coaching in a much different landscape than Tressel once did, with the implementation of name, image and likeness and the transfer portal marking stark differences between their tenures. Tressel said he believes Day is the right man to lead the Buckeyes into the next era of college football.

"The people who spend a lot of time whining about (transfer portal and NIL) aren't going to progress," Tressel said. "The people who try to figure out how to do it well are going to be much ahead."

"I think Ryan Day is going to navigate this. Sure, he's going to lose some players, and, sure, there's going to be a player or two who comes to him. He's never going to be a guy who runs all over the place and has 19 roster changes. He's going to recruit well

and build within."

## Wilson, Bosa Named AP NFL Award Finalists

The NFL released its finalists for its 2022 end-of-season awards on Jan. 25, and two former Buckeyes made the list.

San Francisco 49ers defensive end Nick Bosa is one of three finalists for AP Defensive Player of the Year, while New York Jets wide receiver Garrett Wilson is one of three finalists for AP Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Bosa led the NFL with 18½ sacks to go along with his 51 tackles and two forced fumbles. Joining him as finalists for the award are Dallas Cowboys outside linebacker Micah Parsons and Kansas City Chiefs defensive tackle Chris Jones.

Wilson caught fire with an eight-reception, 102-yard, two-touchdown performance in a comeback win against the Cleveland Browns in week two and did not look back. He finished with 83 receptions for 1,103 yards and four touchdowns on the season. He faces competition for the award from Seattle Seahawks running back Kenneth Walker, who rushed for 1,050 yards and nine touchdowns at a clip of 4.6 yards per carry.

Former Ohio State teammate and current New Orleans Saints wide receiver Chris Olave did not make the cut as a finalist despite catching 72 balls for 1,042 yards and four touchdowns. The last spot instead went to San Francisco 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy, the last pick in the 2022 NFL draft, who started the season as the third-string quarterback but helped lead the team to the NFC Championship Game after being forced into action due to injuries.

Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow, who spent three seasons in Columbus and earned his degree as a backup at Ohio

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**Scarlet VIPs:** Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Joseph A. Cusma Sr., Massillon, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Julie Ellis, Apple Valley, Calif.; Mike Freeburn, Columbus; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Richard G. Hannan Jr., Chillicothe, Ohio; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Dave Palmer, Washington, Mich.; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; William Torok, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Gaffney, S.C.; Anonymous, Norwalk, Ohio.

State before transferring to LSU where he won a Heisman Trophy and national championship in 2019, was one of five finalists for AP Most Valuable Player.

The winners will be announced during the NFL Honors Ceremony, which is set for Feb. 9 at 9 p.m. on NBC.

### Three Former Buckeyes Compete In Pro Bowl Games

Ohio State was well-represented at the 2023 NFL Pro Bowl Games. Former Buckeyes Bosa, Cameron Heyward and Terry McLaurin all competed in the event in Las Vegas on Feb. 5.

Heyward, a defensive tackle for the Pittsburgh Steelers, made his seventh-consecutive Pro Bowl appearance, while Bosa attended his third Pro Bowl. McLaurin, who has emerged as a star wide receiver for the Washington Commanders, made his first career appearance in the Pro Bowl.

Heyward racked up 74 tackles (14 for loss) and 10½ sacks this season. McLaurin surpassed the 1,000 receiving yard mark for the third straight season in 2022, hauling in 77 receptions for 1,191 yards and five touchdowns.

### Borland Joins Fickell At Wisconsin As GA

Former Ohio State linebacker Tuf Borland will join fellow former Buckeye Luke Fickell at Wisconsin as a graduate assistant for the Badgers during the 2023 season.

## Important BSB Print Scheduling Notice!

Buckeye Sports Bulletin traditionally has a three-week publishing gap between this, the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up, and the start of our spring football coverage. The next print issue of BSB, dated March 4, will be mailed on Feb. 28.

There is no need to miss any of the Ohio State sports action between now and then, however.

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be manning the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on any breaking stories. In addition to ongoing football and 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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Borland, who is listed with a defensive focus in regard to his graduate assistant position, will reunite with Fickell, who recruited Borland and coached him for his freshman season as the Buckeyes' defensive coordinator and linebackers coach before taking the head coaching job at Cincinnati.

Borland was a three-time captain at Ohio State, amassing 229 tackles (19 for

loss), 6½ sacks, two forced fumbles and an interception during his time as a Buckeye. Following his collegiate career, Borland signed with the Minnesota Vikings as an undrafted free agent, where he spent the 2021 season on the practice squad before being released prior to the 2022 season.

Fickell and Borland will get a crack at their alma mater when the Buckeyes travel to Madison, Wis., to take on the Badgers on

Oct. 28.

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

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago - 1983

Keith Byars was one of the Ohio State football team's backs of the future. The question was, at what position?

Byars, who understudied to Vaughn Broadnax at fullback during the 1982 season, showed signs in high school that he might have a future as a tailback – signs like an 11.5-yard per carry average on 147 tries as a senior. And with top dogs Tim Spencer and Jimmy Gayle departing, the Buckeyes were in the market for a new tailback.

On the other hand, you couldn't ignore the freshman's size. At 6-2, 225 pounds, he certainly had the build to play fullback.

"I really don't know what position I'm going to play," Byars said. "When I was recruited here, I was recruited as a tailback. They asked me to play fullback my first year, and I agreed to play fullback my first year, then my sophomore year, move back to tailback."

### 35 Years Ago - 1988

When Ohio State and Indiana stepped onto the court for the opening tip on Jan. 27, there was something missing from both sides. For the Hoosiers, it was starters Ricky Calloway and Keith Smart. For the Buckeyes, it was emotion.

While Indiana was able to replace its missing ingredients, Ohio State wasn't. The Hoosiers took advantage of the flat outing from the Buckeyes to take a 75-71 win at St. John Arena.

"I thought we were a little off our game in the first half in terms of emotion," said OSU coach Gary Williams. "I just wish we could have gone out there and played the game without all the stuff that was around the game."

Williams was referring to rumors that Calloway and Smart were benched by Indiana coach Bob Knight and had been thrown out of practice the day before.

### 30 Years Ago - 1993

After falling behind early, Ohio State went on an impressive 20-7 run to tie its Jan. 30 game against Illinois at 60 with 8½ minutes to go.

Unfortunately, the Fighting Illini succeeded in scoring the game's next seven points and later got a critical 24-foot three-point field goal from freshman Richard Keene on their way to an 86-76 win over the Buckeyes at St. John Arena.

The loss was the fifth straight for Ohio State, which fell to 9-7 overall and 2-5 in Big Ten play.

"I think we knew and everyone else knew we needed to come back home and get a victory," said OSU forward Lawrence Funderburke, who delivered game highs in points (25) and rebounds (10) in a losing effort. "Unfortunately, we didn't do that. We had some key moments in the second half where we didn't rebound,

and we got beat."

### 25 Years Ago - 1998

Living in the shadows of a great performer can sometimes be to an athlete's detriment. They may sulk, get down or not put out the maximum effort, all of which could have a negative effect on a team.

Ohio State had its own set of shadow lords in seniors Mike Glane, Robbie Archer and Dan DiCesare, but you wouldn't see this trio of wrestlers whining or pining.

They all put in the work and, more often than not, got the results. A lot of that was lost, however, because of a celebrated classmate – Mitch Clark, the nation's top-ranked 177-pounder.

"All three of these guys are capable of making a difference for our team at the Big Ten tournament," OSU coach Russ Hellickson said.

### 20 Years Ago - 2003

You would have thought at that point in the season that most of what a coach said had sunk in. But that didn't seem to be the case with the Ohio State women's basketball team.

Despite contending for a postseason berth and the Big Ten title with a 15-5 record, 6-3 in the conference, the Buckeyes hadn't been immune to constant coaching from skipper Jim Foster. While he may have let off the gas pedal a little bit, he was always in the teaching mode – though at that juncture it was a little more gentle.

"We constantly have to remind players and teach players and challenge players with things that are specific to them," Foster said. "I don't have to tell (forward) Courtney Coleman to run hard very often. Every once in a while you have to remind her, maybe she can run harder. You can go down through the team like that."

### 15 Years Ago - 2008

If he played baseball, Ohio State forward David Lighty would have been labeled a utility player, a catch-all phrase for someone who doesn't quite stand out in any phase of the game but is reliable in all areas.

On the basketball court, a player with Lighty's abilities is called versatile. If that bothered the former Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School standout, he didn't show it. More likely, he didn't care as long as he was making a contribution.

"I just try to help my team as much as possible," Lighty said. "If it's rebounds, points or playing defense, I still have the same mentality. I'll do whatever it takes to win."

### 10 Years Ago - 2013

One of Ohio State's most visible football assistant coaches

moved into a more prominent title after Kerry Coombs was made special teams coordinator on Feb. 8. He continued in his previous role as cornerbacks coach as well.

A 31-year veteran of coaching, Coombs had been at Ohio State since the winter of 2012. He quickly became a popular staffer among players and fans for his enthusiastic approach to his craft and life.

"Kerry Coombs is an excellent coach who was a great deal of experience and expertise with special teams," OSU head coach Urban Meyer said. "He is an outstanding teacher, an excellent motivator, and he has a true passion for special teams."

### Five Years Ago - 2018

One of the Ohio State assistants whose contract ran out at the end of January was defensive coordinator and safeties coach Greg Schiano.

Near the end of the regular season, Schiano had a deal to leave Columbus and become the head coach at Tennessee before that plan fell through due to fan and media backlash in regard to unsubstantiated claims that Schiano was involved in the cover-up of the Jerry Sandusky sex abuse scandal at Penn State.

Instead, he stayed at Ohio State through the postseason before reports emerged that he was a candidate to become the defensive coordinator of the New England Patriots. On National Signing Day, the Wednesday after the Patriots lost to Philadelphia in the Super Bowl on Feb. 4, Meyer said that Schiano had assured him he was staying in Columbus.

"It's between myself and him, and then obviously, Gene Smith is very involved," Meyer said. "We had many, many discussions and he's informed me that he's 100 percent staying at Ohio State University. So that's done and he's here."

### One Year Ago - 2022

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day is one of college football's most respected offensive minds. As Ohio State's head coach, he didn't have to create a scheme or call plays, but he chose to bear that responsibility for the previous three seasons.

Despite offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson entering his sixth season and Tony Alford and Brian Hartline earning promotions to the running game and passing game coordinators, respectively, Day confirmed on Jan. 31 that he would lead the unit again in 2022.

"I'm going to run the offense," Day said. "When this thing's running well, there's a head coach of the defense, there's a head coach of recruiting, there's a head coach of the special teams, and then I'm heavily involved with the offense. If those things aren't happening and it takes me away from the offense, then the way that this structure is built isn't being optimized."



# Ohio Remains Key Factor In Recruiting

Continued From Page 1

sible). We're trying to sign as many Ohio kids as possible."

Beyond making sure there's a fit between program and prospect on the field, the extended evaluation time allows Ohio State to ensure there's a fit between recruit and culture. This results in those such as Montgomery or linebacker C.J. Hicks in the previous recruiting class who were widely recognized as leaders of their respective classes, familiar with the infrastructure at Ohio State and helping build camaraderie between classmates and even assisting the Buckeyes on the trail as peer recruiters.

"That's a big deal for us, for them growing up here, knowing the culture, most likely being willing to develop, not coming in with a lot of expectations of, 'I need to play right away,'" Pantoni said. "Those are all important factors for us that in the ideal world, we're going to sign as many and the best Ohio kids as we can."

While Mathews and Montgomery were the highest-rated prospects from Ohio in the Buckeyes' class, they were far from the only notable additions. All seven signees from Ohio received high marks nationally, with West Chester Lakota West safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175), Cleveland Glenville linebacker Arvell Reese (6-4, 212), Huber Heights Wayne offensive lineman Joshua Padilla (6-4, 280), Dublin Coffman defensive lineman Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260) and

Middletown Lakota East offensive lineman Austin Sierveld (6-5, 320) joining Mathews and Montgomery as four-star, top-300 prospects.

Once all had committed to Ohio State, it was clear all had completely bought into the culture. It was rare to attend one of the Buckeyes' games this past fall and not see one, two or all of the aforementioned recruits taking in the scene at Ohio Stadium, getting just a taste of what their future would look like.

And while that vision is an easy sell for prospects from Ohio, that is not to say there's a shortage of recruits outside of Ohio who fit the culture at Ohio State. For the staff, it's now just a matter of finding the ones who, as Day puts it, want to be at Ohio State for the right reasons amid the constant change throughout college football.

"Obviously, we're going to do our due diligence on everybody as usual, and then we just really have to do a better job of vetting and seeing what's really important (to a prospect)," Pantoni said. "We want kids, first of all, to want to come to Ohio State because of Ohio State and the great tradition and history of all the guys who've been here before them. The number one reason why we win is that culture in our locker room, and so we can't do anything that's going to take away from that."

And as good as the haul Ohio State

found in Ohio in 2023 was, it's appearing as though 2024 could be even better. According to the 247Sports composite ratings, the state features 14 blue-chip prospects – rated either four- or five-star recruits – and 16 prospects among the top 400, an increase from 12 blue chips and 12 top-400 recruits in 2023. The Buckeyes have clearly picked up on the shift in talent, already offering 10 prospects from Ohio in the class, the most since offering 11 in 2021.

The 2024 grouping from Ohio is highlighted by Cleveland Glenville five-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177), Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193), Cincinnati Taft four-star defensive end Elias Rudolph and Springfield four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-1, 170), all considered leans toward Ohio State.

That's already an impressive group without mentioning Sunbury Big Walnut four-star safety Garrett Stover (6-2, 195), who is already committed to Ohio State, or one of West's teammates at Glenville, four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215), who is likely to rise up the rankings in the coming months.

"I'm excited about this next class," Day said. "I think we have the opportunity to sign a really good class. We just have to make sure everything is in place to make sure we can do that. There's some really

good players in Ohio this year, which is really exciting. That certainly makes a big difference for us."

## Portal Becoming New Focus On National Signing Day

Since the early signing period was introduced in 2018, allowing prospects the opportunity to sign early with their school of choice and enroll in classes while getting a jump start on their football careers, football's National Signing Day has seen less and less of an emphasis in each successive year.

That lack of attention has never been more prevalent than the most recent National Signing Day on Feb. 1, in which the Buckeyes did not add a single new prospect to their recruiting class after signing all 20 members of the class during the early period.

Ohio State has signed at least one prospect on National Signing Day in four of the last five cycles – 2021 was the exception, though the Buckeyes ended up adding defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau over the summer – meaning that Ohio State's latest recruiting class is the first to ever be entirely settled before National Signing Day.

The lack of drama around the recruiting holiday was evident given that Day hosted a press conference on Feb. 1, but only a handful of questions actually centered on the recruits, some of whom have already

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COURTESY OF OHIO STATE

**ALL SMILES —** Offensive line coach Justin Frye's signees had an Ohio flair, with Luke Montgomery (left), Austin Siereveld (center) and Joshua Padilla (right) all hailing from the Buckeye State.

arrived on campus as early enrollees.

Many of the questions, though, focused on another set of arrivals – that being the five new additions from the transfer portal, which may make more sense to associate National Signing Day with moving forward given that it's often the first chance head coaches have to speak about the new players arriving on campus from the portal.

In Ohio State's case, the list of transfers includes safety Ja'Had Carter, offensive lineman Victor Cutler, long snapper John Ferlmann, quarterback Tristan Gebbia and cornerback Davison Igbinosun. All except Igbinosun enrolled at Ohio State prior to the first transfer window closing on Jan. 18, meaning that Igbinosun – formerly of Ole Miss, who announced his transfer to the Buckeyes on Jan. 31 – will have to wait until summer to enroll.

In lieu of new high school signees to break down, Day and the assistant coaches were able to offer up comments on the majority of the transfers, outlining what the upcoming season will look like as they transition to a new school. Even though most have several years of collegiate experience under their belts, they share a common thread with the Buckeyes' incoming recruits in that they're all experiencing Ohio State for the first time.

Carter, who transferred to Ohio State from Syracuse, likely slots into one of the Buckeyes' open safety positions following the departures of Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister. Hickman and McCalister filled the adjuster and nickel safety roles, respectively, but anything could be up for grabs as Day and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles look for the best combination in the secondary.

"We're now in that three-safety system," Day said. "We wanted to make sure we

had the right numbers there. Ja'Had has stepped in right off the bat and has done a nice job. We're looking forward to seeing him on the field this spring."

Along with Carter, Igbinosun is a likely candidate to start for the Buckeyes after starting 10 games as a true freshman for the Rebels while registering 37 tackles and five pass breakups.

With Ohio State losing a starter in Cameron Brown, the Buckeyes have an open spot opposite Denzel Burke that Igbinosun will compete for, and his experience makes him the favorite. While cornerbacks coach Tim Walton was unable to speak directly about Igbinosun given that he hasn't enrolled yet, the coach did speak in veiled terms that hint at an excitement for Igbinosun's addition.

"It's always good to get guys to upgrade the room," Walton said on Feb. 1. "Going through the recruiting process at the level that we do here is like the NFL. You're always trying to get the elite guys in the country here because of the competition that you're going to be playing and the expectation here.

"During the recruiting process, we're trying to get the best guys in the country to make sure the room is deep, the room is always upgraded, and make sure we keep the competition good. With numbers low and things that happen during the season, you want to have guys ready to go and step in."

Cutler and Ferlmann were another pair of additions who could start in their first seasons with the Buckeyes. Cutler previously started at tackle for Louisiana-Monroe but also notched starts at guard and center, and he is likely to factor into the interior for the Buckeyes as the offensive line is set to experience some shuffling.

"Having (center) Luke Wypler declare

(for the draft), we needed another guy inside," Day said. "We're looking forward to seeing what he can do this spring."

Day echoed that excitement for Ferlmann, who is expected to start at long snapper after Bradley Robinson exhausted his eligibility and Mason Arnold, who filled in last season after Robinson was injured, transferred to Michigan State. Ferlmann started at long snapper each of the last two seasons for Arizona State.

The one offseason addition who isn't expected to contend for a starting job is Gebbia, who is preparing for his first season in Columbus but his seventh overall in college football. With the upcoming quarterback battle between Kyle McCord and Devin Brown set to dominate the spring and potentially into the fall, there was never a belief from Gebbia – who transferred from Oregon State – that he would see the field, instead looking for additional experience as he prepares for a career in coaching.

"Gebbia comes into a unique situation where we always want to have four quarterbacks on the roster here," Day said. "That's not easy to do in today's day and age. He shared with us that he wanted to be a (graduate assistant) and a coach and felt like coming here was an opportunity to build his network but also provide some depth and be able to possibly help in that (quarterback) room.

"He's coming in with the mind-set that if he gets on the field he's ready to go but thought he was really a great addition to the room and can help mentor some of

those young guys in there."

The other common thread between the incoming transfers is that Ohio State views them as a fit not only on the field, but off it. There are always concerns about a transfer – especially high-profile ones – upsetting the chemistry of a locker room, but this is a potential issue taken into consideration by the Buckeyes when contemplating a transfer.

"There's a lot of vetting going on," Pantoni said. "We want to make sure, most importantly, they're a great fit, because we feel like we have a great culture and great players here. We want to make sure that it's all going to mesh well."

Day said during the early signing period that Ohio State's recruiting efforts focused on those prospects "doing things the right way" and that the eventual 20 signees had their priorities – like the prospect of development as well as the education offered by Ohio State – in order. It stands to reason that those expectations would continue when it comes to Day, Pantoni and the rest of the staff recruiting out of the portal.

"We'll never take a guy because we're scared that we may lose anybody here," Pantoni said. "But we do want to make sure it's going to be an upgrade. We don't want to just bring guys in to bring guys in. The worst thing you can do is bring in a guy and they expect to start and that doesn't happen, because that can ruin a locker room as well. The guys we've brought in in the past have been home runs, and hopefully we continue to hit on those."

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# OSU Debating Early Exits From National Recruits

In a wide-ranging discussion with reporters on Feb. 1, associate athletic director of player personnel Mark Pantoni broke down the current state of college football as it relates to recruiting and revealed that a change could be on the horizon regarding how Ohio State approaches national recruitments.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

According to Pantoni, if Ohio State gets wind that a prospect's only concern relates to potential compensation from name, image and likeness, the Buckeyes could opt to end any involvement with said prospect, spending that time elsewhere on other recruits.

"It's definitely a new mind-set of how we're going to have to approach things during this time," Pantoni said. "So obviously, (we'll recruit) way more heavily in Ohio, in the Midwest. And then regionally, we're going to do our best as we've always have, but we may have to pull out of recruiting some guys nationally quicker than we have if we know right away that the NIL is going to be a main factor in their recruitments."

"It's just not something we're going to want to compete with – by choice – as well," he continued. "Is that something we want to bring into the locker room as well? So those are the conversations we have in this day."

With Ohio State not willing to enter that gray area that several schools have either operated in or toed the line near, Pantoni said the Buckeyes will do their best to gauge early on what the most important factor is in a prospect's recruitment.

"It's conversations we have all the time," he said. "Just going through names and where we're at on guys, and what's going to make this kid make his decision? Is it going to be NIL? Is it going to be development and brotherhood and culture and winning, and all the great things this place has to offer? Or is it going to be strictly because of money? Those are conversations we have."

"The worst thing we can do is waste a lot of time and effort on kids knowing that and then you lose them at the end of the day. In today's world, we really understand some of these national kids – we may make their top five or top three, but at the end of the day, that could change very quickly."

Beyond the struggles of NIL, another area where Pantoni would like to see some changes is the college football calendar, specifically as it relates to recruiting.

Within the last several years, everything from the College Football Playoff to the introduction of the early signing period and

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

transfer portal has created a hectic landscape for programs, with the impact felt all the way from Pantoni to the head coach.

"The current landscape will add a lot of gray hairs on coaches' heads," he said. "Championship games, on the road traveling, the portal opening with 500 plus kids going in in one day – that's hard. I think we need to take a hard look at the calendar and see how we can fix that."

Pantoni supports an early signing period, as it at least takes some stress off January with most prospects – or in Ohio State's case in the 2023 class, every prospect – signed with the program, but he would be open to either moving it back or adding an additional signing period in the summer.

"Something I've talked to my colleagues about is potentially a July 1 signing day," he said. "It just makes sense that you have all these official visits coming in June, and if they're ready to make the decision then, why can't they go ahead and sign? At least that clears out another potential group of guys as well."

## Marshall Has Ohio State In Top Four

The recruitment is continuing to heat up for Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193), who included the Buckeyes among his top four schools on Feb. 2 along with Michigan, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Marshall is the No. 105 overall prospect and No. 8 running back in 2024, as well as the second-ranked recruit out of Ohio behind Cleveland Glenville five-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177). He was offered by Ohio State after camping with the Buckeyes this past summer.

"I want to win, and I want to compete for a national championship someday," Marshall told Eleven Warriors. "They're going to do that. Coach (Ryan) Day and (running backs coach Tony) Alford are great people, and I love being around them every time I'm at Ohio State. You can tell the bond and everything they have there."

Marshall rushed for 1,951 yards and scored 34 total touchdowns last season, and he was named Ohio Division I co-Of-

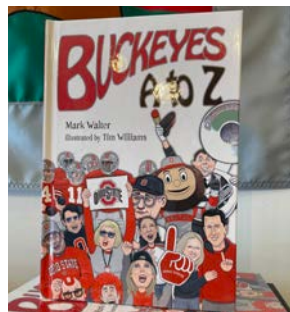
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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With BuckeyeScoop's Bill Greene

### What positions do you view as the biggest need for Ohio State as the focus shifts to the 2024 class?

"On the offensive side, they need two running backs. They didn't get anything in the 2023 class – they had Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 226) committed, and then he ditched them late in the process. Instead of trying to yank a two- or three-star kid, they just scrapped it and kind of looked toward this class now, and you've got to get two in this class.

"There are times when you think you have running-back depth, your depth is good, everything's fine, and then you get to the Michigan game and you're starting a kid that had one carry all year. Or in Maryland, you get in trouble and you're playing a freshman who had hardly played all year. There can be times when you think you have depth, and then you suddenly realize you don't. So on the offensive side, you've got to get two running backs.

"Then on the offensive line, I think they did OK bringing in four (in 2023) and I think they need five in this class. They need to concentrate on tackles, and it doesn't seem like they're doing much there, but they know more than I know. So a lot of it I don't get, but I guess I don't have to get it – they have to get it. On offense, that's where you have to concentrate.

"Defensively, they had (only one) linebacker last time so you've got to bring in three. I think the hope is with James Laurinaitis back in the fold – it would help if he were a full-time coach that could get out on the road and recruit, but I think he'll help there.

"So you need linebackers, and then the other positions, you've got to fill them every year. They took a lot of defensive backs in the

last class and they better get good defensive backs in this class. If you want to stay as a playoff-level team, every position group, every year, you have to restock. But for this year, it's linebackers and running backs, for sure."

### Regardless of position, who do you view as the biggest targets on Ohio State's board?

"They've offered a bunch of Ohio kids on the offensive line, so I think that (position) could be completed really soon here.

"If you get back and you look at running backs, they really want Cincinnati Archbishop Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193). They're looking at Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Stacy Gage (5-11, 200), who was at IMG and now at St. Thomas. They've got a good relationship down there. They also offered another Ohio kid, Millersburg West Holmes three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203). That's another one I don't understand, but I don't have to understand – they do. So if he's a taker, I can't believe that kid (hasn't committed) already. I don't know what he would be waiting for. That's where they're at running back-wise.

"Linebacker-wise, I didn't think they were really in too good of shape with anyone, but then bringing in Laurinaitis, who has got a great relationship with Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225), that would make a big impact there if they can get him. They're chasing Jefferson (Ga.) five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-3, 225) and I think they've got a chance, but I wouldn't say they're the leader or anything. I would look at Payton Pierce as a guy they've really got a great shot at with Laurinaitis on

board. Then you've got to find two others somewhere. I think they need three in this class."

### Ohio State took seven signees from Ohio in 2023 and seems likely to grab a similar haul, or even more, in this cycle. How do you view the talent in Ohio in 2024?

"It's not what I would do. That's not the way I would do it, but they have to do it their way. I just don't think you can take these three-star Ohio kids and line them up all over the field and beat the SEC. I don't think that's the way to do it, but we'll see how it goes. Again, it's not the way I would do it. I don't understand a lot of these offers, but that's what they get paid for. That's their job. It's what they have to do. So we'll find out in the end. If they get these kids and they turn out to be superstars, then it was definitely the right move."

### Much has been made lately of Ohio State waiting too long to offer in-state prospects, often holding off on an offer until later in a cycle, especially compared to some national recruits. What do you make of this strategy, and do you feel it's helping or hurting Ohio State on the recruiting trail?

"I don't want lower-level guys. If I wanted them, I would have offered them. I'm not going to let Michigan dictate my strategy. I'm competing against the SEC, and although Ohio State has lost to Michigan the past two years, I still wouldn't lower my sights because of that. And the better you make your team to beat the SEC, you get back to beating Michigan. I've got to say, no, I don't want those (three-star kids that Michigan is taking). If I wanted them, I would have offered them in June."

fensive Player of the Year. He has already visited Ohio State several times and plans to take his official visits in the spring before committing prior to his senior year.

### DL Scott Postpones Commitment Indefinitely

Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-5, 310) has indefinitely postponed his commitment after initially setting a commitment date of Jan. 31.

Scott, the No. 18 overall prospect and No. 4 defensive lineman in 2024, was widely expected to select Notre Dame before postponing his commitment. He told On3 Sports that he felt he was rushing his recruitment, and wanted to put things on hold while letting the process play out.

"I hadn't even taken any officials and really, when you look at it, I really haven't even been to that many places," he said. "I just wanted to maximize the opportunities because you only get this once. I just want to enjoy it.

"I felt like there was no need to just rush this commitment. The last thing I want to be is committed and still take visits. When I commit to a school, I want to be locked in with that school and just shut down my recruitment."

While Ohio State and other schools in the running have more time to try to sway the five-star, Notre Dame is still believed to be the favorite for his services. Other schools involved for Scott include Alabama, Colorado, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oregon and USC.

### Laurinaitis Breaks Down Recruiting Duties At ND

New Ohio State graduate assistant James Laurinaitis has been on campus for only a few days, but everyone is excited to see how he helps the program both on and off the field as he makes his return to Columbus.

Beyond his new role working with the linebackers, the three-time Buckeye

All-American will also assist Ohio State with recruiting. While graduate assistants are not as heavily involved in recruiting as assistant coaches or head coaches, they still play a pivotal role in a school's recruiting efforts, and Laurinaitis brings plenty of experience from his last stop at Notre Dame.

"Recruiting is definitely part of it," Laurinaitis said on Feb. 1. "You've got to love it, and recruiting is relationship building. You're trying to figure out what's important to not only the kid but what's important to the family, and you have to be willing to be consistent and build those relationships."

Laurinaitis said he played a part in nearly every aspect of Notre Dame's recruiting process – the exception being that he has not traveled on the road to visit with high school coaches – but anything that happened in the Fighting Irish's facilities, he was helping to bring in talent for the program.

"I met with all of our linebacker recruits as if I was the linebacker coach," he said. "I would have a 30-minute meeting with them and then I would take them to the DC/LB coach, so I had recruiting presentations."

That experience allowed him to find ways of connecting with prospects and their families, and he found that consistency and building relationships were the key factors that he'll use moving forward as he begins recruiting for Ohio State.

"The way that you always start to like people – as you get to know any friend – is you have to listen, and you have to ask questions, and you have to just be authentic," he said. "If you're trying to cut it all short and skip all that, people will find you out really quick."

### Gage Visiting In The Spring

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Stacy Gage (5-11, 200) included Ohio State among

his top eight schools in January, and he's taking the next step with the Buckeyes by planning an official visit for the spring.

While a date has not been set, he told 247Sports that he plans to visit his top schools in the spring – Alabama, Ohio State, Oklahoma and USC are some of the leaders right now – before making a decision in the summer.

"Ohio State, they've been recruiting me since I was a freshman," he told 247Sports. "The relationship is off the chain with them. They always develop real good running backs. They've got a good passing game. It opens up the run game a lot. It's a really good fit for me."

He rushed for 704 yards and 14

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Continued From Page 11

option for Ohio State at running back in 2024, other names have entered the field in recent months such as Marshall and Millersburg (Ohio) West Holmes three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203), so it may be a matter of who jumps into the class first before spots begin running out.

CB Gilbert Continuing Contact With Georgia

When Atlanta Douglas cornerback Jon-tae Gilbert (6-1, 175) committed to Ohio State over the summer, everyone knew the recruitment of the 2025 prospect was no-where near over. That quickly became evident when he visited other schools in the fall, and those visits have now continued as he stopped by Georgia’s campus the week-end of Jan. 27.

Despite the visit – as well as several trips he took to Georgia in the fall – Gilbert contends that he is locked into his Ohio State commitment.

“What’s up coach, just wanted to let you know I’m locked in, I’m not going nowhere,” Gilbert texted cornerbacks coach Tim Walton, according to 247Sports. “I know the media (is) trying to say I’m flipping (because) of my visit, but you’ve got my word I’m not going nowhere.”

Even so, he hasn’t shied away from any interest from the Bulldogs. He said Georgia will be doing “everything” to try to get him to flip, and when asked what stands out about the Bulldogs, he said, “The whole staff and the relationship they have with each other to help develop the players.”

Gilbert plans a return visit to Ohio State this spring. He holds additional offers from Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, South Carolina and Tennessee, among others.

Armstrong Brothers Visit Ohio State

Fresh off receiving offers from Ohio State, the pair of three-star offensive tackles from St. Edward in Lakewood, Ohio, the Armstrongs – Deontae (6-7, 280) and Devontae (6-6, 288) – took unofficial visits to the school on Jan. 21.

The duo got the opportunity to spend some time with offensive line coach Justin Frye and several other offensive assistants while receiving a tour of campus.

“It went really well,” Deontae told 247Sports. “We went to the basketball game (on Jan. 21). We talked to Coach Frye, Coach (Mike) Sollenne, Coach (Brian) Hartline. Ryan Day was sick so he wasn’t there, but we talked to just about all of the coaches.”

While the duo are not necessarily con-

Final 2023 247Sports Composite Ohio Rankings

Rank	Name	Position	High School	College
1.	Jermaine Mathews	CB	Cincinnati Winton Woods	Ohio State
2.	Luke Montgomery	OL	Findlay	Ohio State
3.	Malik Hartford	S	West Chester Lakota West	Ohio State
4.	Brenan Vernon	DL	Mentor	Notre Dame
5.	Arvell Reese	LB	Cleveland Glenville	Ohio State
6.	Joshua Padilla	OL	Huber Heights Wayne	Ohio State
7.	Will Smith	DL	Dublin Coffman	Ohio State
8.	Austin Siereveld	OL	Liberty Twp. Lakota East	Ohio State
9.	Braedyn Moore	ATH	Hamilton	Wisconsin
10.	Nigel Glover	LB	Clayton Northmont	Northwestern
11.	Ben Minich	S	West Chester Lakota West	Notre Dame
12.	Cameron Calhoun	CB	Cincinnati Winton Woods	Michigan
13.	Anthony Brown	WR	Springfield	Kentucky
14.	Trevor Carter	LB	Ironton	Cincinnati
15.	Josiah Jackson	CB	Fairfield	West Virginia
16.	Jason Hewlett	ATH	Youngstown Chaney	Michigan
17.	Jackson McGohan	TE	Miamisburg	LSU
18.	Michael Kilbane	DE	Lakewood St. Edward	Northwestern
19.	Ardell Banks	WR	Massillon Washington	Kentucky
20.	Kamari Burns	DL	Columbus Gahanna Lincoln	Cincinnati

sidered a package deal, they did cite the same set of programs that have stood out so far, including Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State, with official visits in order to those schools for this summer.

Deontae played at left tackle for St. Edward last season while Devontae repped at left guard, helping lead the team to a state championship. Both are viewed as top-500 prospects in the class and among the top 40 offensive tackles.

Buckeyes Still Showing Interest In OT Roebuck

The Armstrong brothers have already secured their offers from Ohio State, but another member of St. Edward’s offensive line who has yet to receive an offer is three-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320).

Roebuck – the No. 358 overall prospect and No. 27 offensive tackle in the class – has remained in contact with Day and Frye, and the coaches have also stopped by St. Edward’s to touch base.

“They’ve talked about getting my body right, getting faster and stronger,” Roebuck told 247Sports. “I’m definitely still interested in Ohio State. I’m hoping to get back to Ohio State in the spring.”

While he waits for an offer from Ohio State, he does hold offers from Cincinnati, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Ole Miss, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin, among others. He plans to take official visits over the spring and summer before making a decision prior to his senior year.

More Offers Go Out In 2024 And Beyond

Ohio State issued double-digit offers since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, casting a wide net for prospects in the classes of 2024, 2025 and 2026.

While any offer sent out by the Buckeyes is significant, it’s especially notable when one is given to a recruit from in-state, especially this early in the process. That’s the case for Toledo Central Catholic offensive lineman Marc Nave Jr. (6-5, 315), a 2024 prospect who was offered by Ohio State on Jan. 31.

Despite not being nationally ranked as yet, Nave holds offers from Cincinnati, Duke, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Pittsburgh and Pitt, among others, but the offer from Ohio State was special.

“(Frye) called my coach and my coach gave me the green light to call him back,” Nave told 247Sports. “I called him and he offered. I was shocked. I could barely talk. It was crazy. I grew up a wholehearted Buckeye fan. My family are all Buckeye fans.”

Nave visited for Ohio State’s win over Indiana last season and is expecting to return at some point this spring before committing to a program over the summer. He primarily lined up at right guard for Central Catholic during his junior season but

Superlatives For Ohio State’s 2023 Recruiting Class

**Most Likely To Succeed:** There’s only one five-star commitment in Ohio State’s recruiting class, and he’s in a position room that has performed at the highest level in the country year-in and year-out for the Buckeyes.

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage standout Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190) is one of four wide receivers entering the room of offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who has done nothing but churn out game-changing collegiate pass catchers who go on to be game-changing at the NFL level. Recent examples of Hartline’s handiwork include Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Terry McLaurin, with Jaxon Smith-Njigba expected to be a first-round selection in the upcoming draft.

Inniss, on paper, has the highest ceiling of the four wideouts who signed with the Buckeyes this cycle, and he showed why by tearing up defensive backs during practices at the All-American Bowl. The most talented player in the class paired with an assistant coach whose track record is as good as any in the country sets Inniss on a good track to success.

**Future Captain:** None of Ohio State’s signees was more involved in peer recruiting than Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Montgomery (6-5, 295). Given that fellow prospects can speak with and relate to each other in ways coaches can’t, his leadership helped pull together the Buckeyes’ class.

Raised an Ohio State fan, Montgomery also understands what it means to play for the Buckeyes. He’s at a position of need for the team, with the future at offensive tackle looking quite murky, though it might not be where he ends up permanently.

“He’s been the leader of this class,” head coach Ryan Day said on Dec. 21. “He’s got a great personality. He and his family have been unbelievable during this process. But he’s very, very talented. You can see it on the basketball court, the way he moves his feet. He’s got toughness and physicality. He could play, probably, all five positions (on the offensive line), but we’re going to start him at tackle.”

**First To The Field:** Given only four cornerbacks from last season are currently on scholarship entering this upcoming season, either of the two cornerbacks Ohio State landed in the class are solid picks to see the field early in 2023, but Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 180) stands out from the pack.

Mathews earned an offer from the Buckeyes at their camp in June, locking up every wide receiver in sight to the point where other attendees were hollering at the staff to give him the scholarship opportunity. He has the length and speed to make an impact quickly, especially after enrolling early.

“I was really impressed right off the bat,” Day said. “I first met him early on in the process, but then when he came to camp – he did a great job at camp. It was a hot day, it was a competitive day. Coach (Jim) Knowles was going through the drills and (Mathews) was getting worn (down) at one point. I thought, ‘Man, he’s going to pass out.’ But he kept going and

going and going.”

**Fan Favorite:** Dublin (Ohio) Coffman four-star defensive end Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 285) is a name that most fans will recognize and root for because of his father. Will Smith Sr., a captain for the Buckeyes, enjoyed an accomplished career at defensive end for Ohio State, recording eight tackles in Ohio State’s 2002 national championship victory over Miami (Fla.). He parlayed that success into an NFL roster spot, where he won a Super Bowl with the New Orleans Saints.

Smith Sr. tragically passed away in April 2016 after being shot in a road rage incident, and his son’s legacy and story of hardship with the loss of his father makes him an easy player to root for. Smith Jr. isn’t simply at Ohio State because of his father, however. He’s a talented defensive lineman who recorded 14 tackles for loss and five sacks in his senior season.

“Will has, in the past year, just absolutely poured it on,” Day said. “He’s put on, I think, about 45 pounds and played with an unbelievable motor. We saw that motor in his junior film, but we sat down and explained to him what the expectation was if he came here. These are the things that we expect out of you to be a Buckeye.

“It was a little bit of a risk (to offer him) early on because we didn’t know for sure. But he and his mom, they asked, ‘Is he really good enough to be a Buckeye?’ And we said, ‘If he does these things, we absolutely think he is.’ It’s a no-brainer now.”

**Biggest Recruiting Win:** Given recent shortcomings on defense, recruiting that side of the ball was a priority for the Buckeyes in their most recent class. While Ohio State didn’t finish quite as well as it might have hoped in that regard, one huge domino that fell the Buckeyes’ way was Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star defensive lineman Jason Moore (6-6, 260).

Moore attended the same high school as Washington Commanders defensive end and Ohio State legend Chase Young, putting up a gaudy 73 tackles and 14 sacks as a junior in 2021. He landed as the No. 82 prospect nationally and No. 11 defensive lineman. The Buckeyes beat out the likes of Alabama, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State and USC for his services

**Underrated (For Now):** Missing out on Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 195) may have made it look like a disappointing cycle at the position from an outside perspective, but West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175) isn’t a prospect to sleep on.

Ranking as the nation’s No. 158 prospect overall and Ohio’s third-best player, Hartford was described by 247Sports recruiting analyst Chris Singletary as having the range to make plays all over the field. He piled up more than 100 tackles and four interceptions in his last two seasons with Lakota West, and he represented Ohio State at the All-American Bowl.

— Andy Anders



A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1988

OSU coach John Cooper said it would begin to snowball, and it had.

The week of Jan. 24-31 proved bountiful. From Zanesville, Ohio's Buster Howe (5-11, 182) to Sugar Land, Texas, standout receiver Joel Scott (6-1, 200), the effort far outdistanced the Big Ten opposition for the same period.

Cooper continued to amaze and thrill Buckeye faithful with his first recruiting class by landing many of the state's top recruits. He also received a verbal commitment from Scott's teammate, Greg Beatty (5-11, 175), who was another talented receiver. That, too, was good news considering Ohio State's woes in that area in 1987.

"What a tremendous week for Ohio State," said national recruiting expert Tom Lemming. "Cooper was right about the snowball effect. Sometimes when the best players start committing, other top players back off and go elsewhere. But that's not happening to Ohio State, and that's to Cooper's credit.

"I think the whole Big Ten is stunned by how well they've done. Ohio State could end up with the best class in the Big Ten. It could end up with a top-10 class nationally."

30 Years Ago – 1993

Ohio State didn't exactly sprint to the finish line during the final week of the 1993 football recruiting season. But the Buckeyes did manage to close the deal on three blue-chip prospects, grabbing players from states long considered to be hotbeds for football talent.

OSU reaped the benefits of staying persistent in Florida and California and received a much-anticipated verbal commitment from inside linebacker Greg Bellisari (6-2, 220) of Boca Raton, Fla. That came just a few days after commitments from fullback Nicky Sualua (5-11, 235) of Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei and running back Keith Wilkerson (5-8, 175) of Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas.

"You've got to hand it to John Cooper and the rest of the Ohio State staff," Lemming told BSB. "A week ago, it looked like they were dead in the water. But now they got some of the kids they've been after for a long time, and it's paid off.

"I think Ohio State did a very good job finishing off its class with Bellisari, Wilkerson and Sualua."

25 Years Ago – 1998

With just hours remaining until national signing day on Feb. 4, it appeared that Ohio State would close football recruiting for 1998 on a high note.

The Buckeyes enjoyed a flurry of activity during the final full week of recruiting, securing verbal commitments from consensus prep All-American Steve Bellisari (6-3, 210), a quarterback from Boca Raton, Fla., and Jonathan Wells (6-2, 225), a running back from River Ridge, La.

OSU also got Cleveland St. Ignatius offensive lineman LeCharles Bentley (6-3, 275) to reconsider his previous commitments to Michigan State and Indiana and subsequently choose Ohio State.

By BSB's unofficial count, Ohio State had verbal commitments from 14 players, with the possibility that one or more players could join the class at the last minute.

20 Years Ago – 2003

Hoboken, N.J., defensive back Ira Guilford (5-11, 183, 4.5) announced his commitment to Ohio State on Jan. 29 during a live television broadcast on a local cable news station. He said the Buckeyes were his longtime favorite, even before their national championship win in the Fiesta Bowl.

"Ohio State was my number one choice even prior to that," Guilford said. "But it came down to a matter of whether I felt Notre Dame might be a better situation for me. But it's the icing on the cake that they won the national championship."

As a senior, Guilford had 2,261 yards rushing and scored 29 touchdowns on offense. Defensively, he had 87 tackles, four fumbles caused and three sacks.

15 Years Ago – 2008

Meet Jim Tressel, airstrike coordinator.

In the final hours leading up to National Signing Day, the Ohio State head coach was putting the finishing touches on a recruiting class that was ranked the best in the Big Ten with the potential to be No. 1 in the nation.

But as it turned out, the path to landing one of the most highly touted recruiting classes in recent OSU history began shortly after the ink dried on the national letters of intent signed by the members of the 2007 class.

Although the first verbal commitment of the class of 2008 did not arrive until nearly a full month after the previous year's signing day, the OSU coaching staff had wrapped up some of the top talent in the nation right around the time spring football was being completed.

When the calendar turned from April to May, the Buckeyes had seven verbal commitments. Of those seven, four were ranked by Scout.com as five-star prospects.

"With the rapidness that Tressel and his staff attacked this class, it was just like partition bombing – like an air war," Scout.com Midwest football recruiting manager Bob Lichtenfels said. "They had the guys targeted that they went after and landed them. I'm kind of surprised by how quickly they got those guys."

"Those guys" include the likes of Dublin (Ohio) Coffman offensive lineman Mike Adams, Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater center Michael Brewster, Cincinnati La Salle wide receiver DeVier Posey and Klein, Texas, offensive lineman J.B. Shugarts.

10 Years Ago – 2013

The day before National Signing Day, head coach Urban Meyer spoke to the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and made it clear why he made \$4 million per year.

"What do I really do for a living?" Meyer asked the crowd. "I convince 17- and 18-year-olds to go to school here."

The next day, the Ohio State football coach proved he deserved every penny.

On Feb. 6, National Signing Day, the Buckeyes picked up

two huge verbal commitments to top off a class that was already among the best in the country.

First, four-star wide receiver James Clark (5-11, 170) – a player who had barely been on the Ohio State recruiting board two months previous – chose the Buckeyes. The Smyrna Beach, Fla., prospect was the No. 30-rated player at his position in the Scout.com rankings.

But the true big fish was reeled in around 10 a.m. when safety Vonn Bell (6-1, 190) of Rossville (Ga.) Ridgeland donned a scarlet Ohio State hat on national television. With that, the Buckeyes' dogged pursuit of the five-star prospect resulted in a commitment from the No. 25 overall player in the nation.

Five Years Ago – 2018

Ohio State inked 20 players on Dec. 21, the first day of the inaugural early signing period, and received verbal commitments from three more prospects in the weeks leading up to National Signing Day.

But there was still work to be done on the final day of the 2018 recruiting cycle. Meyer and his assistants were keying in on three prospects in particular – Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste (6-5, 215), Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley five-star offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere (6-6, 272) and Waldorf (Md.) North Point four-star offensive tackle Rasheed Walker (6-6, 290).

Shortly before Meyer took the lectern for his annual National Signing Day press conference, Petit-Frere donned a scarlet Ohio State hat on national TV. With that, the Buckeyes' persistence resulted in a commitment from the No. 7 player in America.

Then, moments after Meyer finished addressing the media, associate head coach and defensive coordinator Greg Schiano announced that Jean-Baptiste had officially declared he was heading to Ohio State. The Buckeyes managed to beat out Nebraska and Texas A&M for Jean-Baptiste despite not offering him until Jan. 9.

Meyer and his staff were unable to land the trifecta, though, as Walker ended up signing with Penn State.

One Year Ago – 2022

Many, La., four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218) was one of Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' first offers since joining the Buckeyes, and he made Curtis a considerable priority in the ensuing weeks.

Knowles offered Curtis on Jan. 18 after visiting him at his high school and then made a second visit to Curtis on Jan. 28.

Curtis' father and coach, Jess, made his appreciation known on Twitter, saying, "We appreciate (Knowles) for flying back to Many High School today! We appreciate him for making time to get back to our school and recruiting our kids!"

Curtis was ranked the No. 5 linebacker in 2023 and the No. 64 overall prospect in his class. He held other offers from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State and Notre Dame, all of which had coaches stop by Many in recent weeks.

also has experience at center and tackle.

He wasn't the only recent offer from Toledo, though, as Ohio State offered Toledo Whitmer offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), a 2025 prospect, on Jan. 27. He holds additional offers from Cincinnati, Michigan and Michigan State.

While Lowe and Nave will likely see a rise in the rankings before their high school careers have wrapped, Ohio State also offered a prospect who is already considered among the best in the country. The Buckeyes sent out an offer on Jan. 26 to Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170), considered the No. 25 overall prospect and No. 2 cornerback in 2025.

Sanchez finished with 36 tackles, 18 pass breakups and four interceptions during his sophomore season and was named a Texas District 21-6A first-team selection.

Other offers for 2024 include Frisco (Texas) Reedy four-star offensive tackle Max Anderson (6-5, 300); Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star cornerback Dakota Fields (6-2, 175); Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School tight end Max LeBlanc (6-5, 220); Hiram, Ga., three-star offensive tackle Jameson Riggs (6-5, 285); Baltimore St.

Frances Academy four-star running back Dejaun Williams (5-11, 195); and Conroe (Texas) Oak Ridge four-star linebacker Justin Williams (6-2, 205).

In 2025, Ohio State also offered Cleveland Heights running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190), Detroit Cass Technical athlete Alex Graham (6-1, 170), Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei cornerback Chuck McDonald (6-1, 180) and Atlanta Woodyard Academy defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 230).

Ohio State also sent out a pair of 2026 offers to Camp Hill (Pa.) Trinity running back Messiah Mickens (5-11, 185) and Detroit Cass Technical athlete Corey Sadler Jr. (5-10, 170). Mickens already has offers from Alabama, Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State and Texas A&M, racking them up after a freshman season in which he rushed for 961 yards and 18 touchdowns.

The Buckeyes have been deliberate in issuing offers for the 2026 class so far, with just seven others in the class holding offers from Ohio State. Beyond Mickens and Sadler, that list includes Loganville (Ga.) Grayson defensive end Tyler Atkinson (6-2, 190); Upper Marlboro (Md.) Rock Creek Christian Academy safety Jireh Edwards (6-1, 194); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas athlete Justice

Fitzpatrick (6-0, 165); Cincinnati Withrow wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185); Carrollton, Ga., quarterback Julian Lewis (6-1, 175); Buford, Ga., defensive lineman Bryce Perry-Wright (6-3, 240); and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage wide receiver Malachi Toney (5-9, 165).

Other Notes And Tidbits

- South Carolina gained a pair of commitments from Ohio State targets in recent weeks, adding Dorchester (S.C.) Woodland four-star offensive tackle Kam Pringle (6-7, 338) on Jan. 22 and Savannah (Ga.) Cavalry Day School four-star tight end Michael Smith (6-4, 225) on Jan. 24. Both held offers from the Buckeyes.

- Another high-profile prospect came off the board when Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star cornerback Ellis Robinson IV (6-0, 175) committed to Georgia on Feb. 1. Ohio State was involved with his recruitment earlier in the cycle but was not included among his top five schools announced prior to his commitment to the Bulldogs.

- Michigan added a pair of notable commitments in recent weeks, earning verbal pledges from Cincinnati St. Xavier four-

star defensive lineman Ted Hammond (6-5, 258) on Jan. 25 and Harper Woods, Mich., four-star athlete Jacob Oden (6-1, 188) on Feb. 2.

- Indianapolis Franklin Central three-star cornerback Hudaury Hines (6-2, 185) committed to Purdue on Jan. 29. He is the No. 540 overall prospect and No. 51 cornerback in 2024 and the first commitment in the Boilermakers' class.

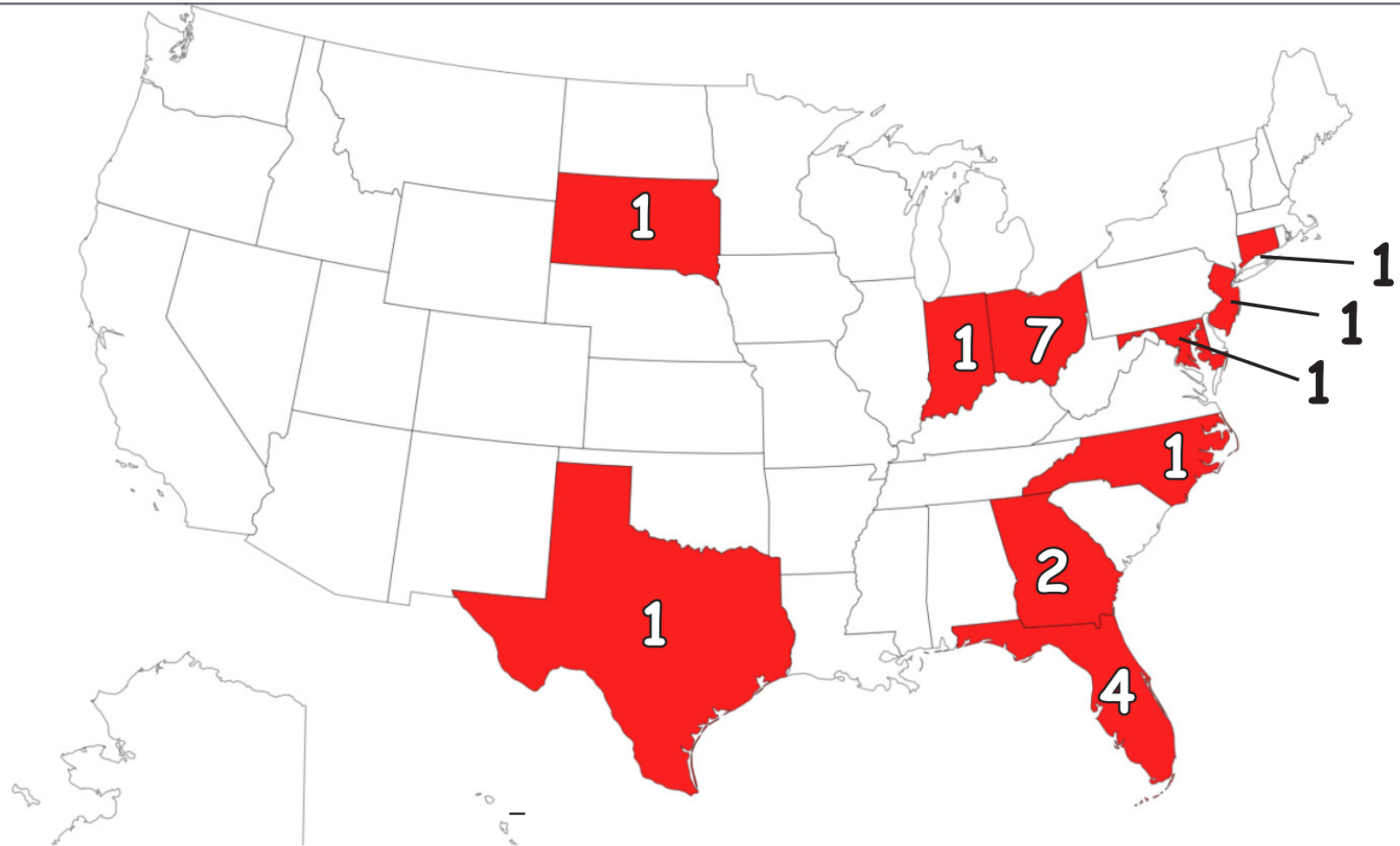
- Wisconsin picked up a commitment on Jan. 29 from Algonquin (Ill.) Harry D. Jacobs four-star tight end Grant Stec (6-6, 220), considered the No. 212 overall prospect and No. 10 tight end in 2024. He held additional offers from Cincinnati, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Penn State and Tennessee, among others.

- A 2025 target for the Buckeyes is already off the board, after Toms River (N.J.) North four-star offensive tackle Jaelyne Matthews (6-5, 290) committed to Penn State on Jan. 30. He was offered by Ohio State back in April.

*For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.*



# OSU's Class Of 2023



All rankings from the 247Sports composite. All statistics provided by Ohio State and MaxPreps.



## JAYDEN BONSU

SAF • 6-1 • 210

Jersey City (N.J.)

St. Peter's Prep

Rank: SAF 24, Overall 273, NJ 4



**ACCOLADES:** Bonsu excelled at St. Peter's Prep over the last few seasons, breaking out as a junior with 62 tackles – 7½ for loss – with 2½ sacks, two interceptions and seven pass breakups. He followed it up this past season with 70 tackles – 4½ for loss – with 2½ sacks, an interception and five pass breakups while playing in two fewer games.

**BONSU SAYS:** "(My decision) was really close. But me and my family re-evaluated it and came down to a decision. My relationship with Coach (Perry) Eliano and Coach (Ryan) Day was second-to-none. Being in Columbus felt like home to me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "The Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep product is a physical striker who excels working as a cover down defender from his safety spot. Bonsu has good size at around 6-foot-1, (210) pounds with arms over 32 inches. He excels as a run defender and tackler. Bonsu's skill set allows him to line up at multiple spots including covering the slot and rolling into the box." – Charles Powers, On3 Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Bonsu was the last member of Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class to sign his national letter of intent, opting for the second day of the early signing period before officially signing with the Buckeyes. While there was some speculation that a flip was on the horizon, he followed through with his commitment to end up in Ohio State's class. He is the son of Brittany and Jason Bonsu.

**COMMIT DATE:** Aug. 14, 2022.



## MALIK HARTFORD

SAF • 6-3 • 175

West Chester (Ohio)

Lakota West

Rank: SAF 11, Overall 150, OH 3



**ACCOLADES:** In addition to being named Greater Miami Conference Defensive Player of the Year in 2022, Hartford was also selected by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association as the Division I Southwest District Defensive Player of the Year and co-Division I Defensive Player of the Year.

**HARTFORD SAYS:** "I picked the Buckeyes because they are not only a great program, but a great school. I love the three-safety scheme they run, and they are great at developing players. I was impressed with the program as a whole. Just an amazing place to be."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Instinctive player who has the range to make plays all over the field. He possesses better-than-average speed and has nice acceleration that enables him to cover a lot of ground to make plays sideline-to-sideline. He lines up all over the field and is comfortable in any alignment, whether it's the deep middle, half-field, or lined up on the end of the line of scrimmage as a blitzer. ... He keys the receiver and plays with good eyes and technique to determine how he needs to play the player along with whatever coverage they are playing." – Chris Singletary, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Hartford participated in the All-American Bowl on Jan. 7, one of seven future Buckeyes to take part in the event, and he also played lacrosse at Lakota West. He is the son of Zainab and Jim Hartford.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 7, 2022.



## CEDRICK HAWKINS

SAF • 6-0 • 175

Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa

Rank: SAF 35, Overall 354, FL 64



**ACCOLADES:** Hawkins saw the field for Cocoa as early as his eighth-grade season before picking off five passes and breaking up 13 more as a freshman. He finished this past season with 55 tackles, four pass breakups and an interception, and he also saw some success playing both ways, hauling in 38 receptions for 671 yards and five touchdowns in addition to 14 carries out of the backfield.

**HAWKINS SAYS:** "I'm just looking to have fun, play ball, build a great bond with my teammates, and live up to the moment."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "A feisty defensive back prospect with plenty of experience. Thin and wiry, but plays much bigger than his size/frame suggests as he isn't afraid to square up with a ball carrier or lower his shoulder pad and make a hit. He got varsity snaps as an eighth-grader at Cocoa ... fluid backpedal and looser hips allow him to cover a ton of grass and get to the deeper parts of the field. He has a high football IQ that allows him to anticipate throws and jump routes with his advanced ball skills leading to takeaways." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Hawkins committed in the middle of Ohio State's Rose Bowl victory over Utah to cap off the 2021 season. Beyond football, he also ran track for Cocoa and became a regional qualifier as a junior in the 200-meter dash. He is the son of Lakeesha McCloud and Cedrick Hawkins Sr.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 1, 2022.





## BRANDON INNISS

WR • 6-0 • 190  
Fort Lauderdale (Fla.)  
American Heritage  
Rank: WR 5, Overall 35, FL 9



**ACCOLADES:** Inniss has been a standout the past two seasons for American Heritage. After accounting for 1,253 yards of total offense in 2021 – lower numbers due to the fact that he filled in at quarterback for the team – he exploded for 1,336 receiving yards and 15 touchdowns this past season on 73 receptions.

**INNISS SAYS:** “The coaches there (are why I chose Ohio State). I built a great relationship with them over time. I know Coach (Brian) Hartline will develop me to be the best version of myself on and off the field. Also, the competition in the (wide receiver) room is going to be great. I will have other top guys like me pushing me every day, and that’s what I need.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Arguably the most established prospect in the class of 2023. He burst onto the scene making plays as an eighth-grader down in South Florida and never left, racking up accolade after accolade. Listed as a wide receiver and will likely get paid one day to catch passes, but could also be labeled as just a straight up alpha as he’s someone that absolutely hates to lose and will do whatever it takes to win. He has evolved as a wide receiver over the years and seems to be settling in as a game-changing inside receiver that can work all the different numbers of the route tree.” – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Inniss played at TRU Prep Academy in Miami Gardens, Fla., in his sophomore season before transferring to American Heritage for his final two seasons in high school. He is the son of Amy Flinton.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 22, 2022.



## LINCOLN KIENHOLZ

QB • 6-3 • 185  
Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs  
Rank: QB 15, Overall 189, SD 1



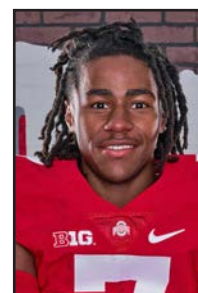
**ACCOLADES:** Kienholz won both MaxPreps’ and Gatorade’s South Dakota Player of the Year award last season after throwing for 3,422 yards and 46 touchdowns while adding 1,436 yards and 24 touchdowns on the ground. He finished his high school career as South Dakota’s all-time passing yards leader, throwing for 9,100 yards and 104 touchdowns during his three-year career as a starter.

**KIENHOLZ SAYS:** “It’s Ohio State. They have a great track record with their quarterbacks with the past four or five getting drafted and everything. I think they know what they are doing there. It’s a pretty good process to trust.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “He’s an athletic prospect who can make plays with his feet. He uses that athleticism to navigate the pocket and elude the rush. He can run but will look to throw when he breaks contain, and he throws with excellent touch. He was productive in high school and saw some good programs but did not face many teams with Division I prospects in the secondary, so he will have to adjust to the speed and windows shrinking quicker in college.” – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Kienholz is only the second player from South Dakota to sign with Ohio State, the first being offensive lineman Grant Schmidt in the 2015 recruiting class. Schmidt never played a down with the Buckeyes, though, so Kienholz could be the first from the state to formally take the field for Ohio State. He is the son of Kacy Kienholz.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 14, 2022.



## JERMAINE MATHEWS

CB • 6-0 • 175  
Cincinnati Winton Woods  
Rank: CB 6, Overall 51, OH 1



**ACCOLADES:** Mathews earned several state honors this past season, named by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association as the Division II Southwest District Defensive Player of the Year and Division II Defensive Player of the Year.

**MATHEWS SAYS:** “Just growing up in Ohio, everybody wants to go to Ohio State. Everybody just dreams of playing for Ohio State and getting recruited by them. And now, my dream is coming true.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “He’s a quick cover corner with the skills and tools to play man to man or in zone. He has a good change of direction and recovery/closing speed. He shows he can play the ball in the air, and he still has to add weight and strength. He was not a varsity starter until his junior year so still has learning to do, but he has improved rapidly and has the movement skills to be a high-end college corner and have a chance to play on Sundays. He fits as a player who could play both in the slot and outside.” – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Mathews – a multisport athlete at Winton Woods, where he also played basketball – is an elite scorer from several different spots on the field, returning three interceptions for a touchdown this past season in addition to a receiving touchdown and touchdowns on a punt return and kickoff return. He is the son of Bianca Adkins.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 1, 2022.



## KAYDEN MCDONALD

DL • 6-3 • 310  
Suwanee (Ga.)  
North Gwinnett  
Rank: DL 35, Overall 259, GA 23



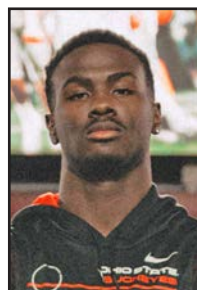
**ACCOLADES:** McDonald finished with 68 tackles and 13 sacks for North Gwinnett this past season in just 12 games. His team made it to the third round of the Georgia High School Football Class 7A Playoffs.

**MCDONALD SAYS:** “I chose Ohio State because of the academics. I feel like I can thrive on and off the field in Columbus. Coach (Ryan) Day and Coach (Larry) Johnson were one of the first schools to believe in me, and they were consistent during the recruiting process. Ohio State is a family atmosphere, a great locker room culture. I’ll have an opportunity to go in and compete early, play with the best, be coached by the best and compete for a national championship.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “He exhibits good quick twitch explosiveness off the line of scrimmage with an excellent first step. He is nimble for his size, possessing good initial foot and body quickness. He flashes heavy hands at the point of attack, in addition to good play strength, showing the ability to penetrate consistently behind the line of scrimmage. He possesses the frame and the ability to anchor the run while also adding some pass-rush ability as an interior lineman. He projects as a one-technique in a 4-3 defense with the ability to offer some position versatility along the defensive line if needed.” – Cooper Petagna, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** McDonald is interested in broadcast journalism and has said former Ohio State quarterback Kirk Herbstreit is one of his broadcasting idols. He is the son of Kristi Green.

**COMMIT DATE:** Oct. 31, 2022.



## JOSHUA MICKENS

DE • 6-3 • 225  
Indianapolis Lawrence Central  
Rank: DE 17, Overall 119, IN 2



**ACCOLADES:** Mickens has accrued eye-popping numbers over the last two seasons, racking up 152 tackles (43½ for loss) with 18½ sacks, eight forced fumbles and eight pass breakups. For his efforts in his senior season, he was named the top defensive lineman in the state by the Indiana Football Coaches Association.

**MICKENS SAYS:** “That was one of the schools that I primarily wanted to go to. Being a Midwest kid, you grow up and that college is Ohio State.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “He possesses requisite physical tools for a true edge projection, whether putting a hand on the ground or standing up in a hybrid role. He has good height with a wiry, strong frame. Will need to continue adding mass to combat point-of-conflict size and strength at the high-major level. He’s a bit unorthodox in movement patterns – gets the job done – but can get looser and twitchier in short-area lateral scenarios. He is generally a good tackler but occasionally compromises form for a big hit. He can get more consistent in snap anticipation to further elevate pass-rush threat.” – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Mickens was also a standout in basketball at Lawrence Central, averaging 13.0 points and 7.3 rebounds in his junior season, and threw shot put. He is the son of Lavonnya Mickens.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 21, 2022.



## LUKE MONTGOMERY

OL • 6-5 • 295  
Findlay, Ohio  
Rank: OL 3, Overall 92, OH 2



**ACCOLADES:** Montgomery picked up several honors during his high school career, including Division I first-team All-Ohio nods from the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association in 2021 and 2022. He also saw some time on the defensive side of the ball, picking up a second-team All-Ohio honor in 2020 for his play on defense. His efforts in high school also earned him a spot in the 2023 All-American Bowl.

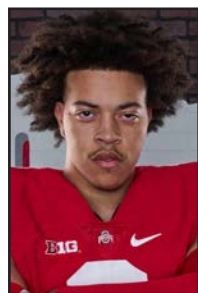
**MONTGOMERY SAYS:** “It’s the best fit for me personality wise. The people there all fit for me. At the end of the day, I wanted to go where I fit in best.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “As an offensive lineman, he is athletic and aggressive. Keeps his feet as he drives and finishes blocks and also has the coordination and comfort in space to get out in front of plays and make blocks in the open field. He shows quickness off the snap and gets to his blocks easily because of his physical gifts. The upside is tremendous and he shows the demeanor, athletic background and work ethic to get to his high ceiling. Not out of the question that he is a swing guy who can play inside if needed.” – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** He started his high school career as a tight end and defensive lineman before moving to the offensive line. He was a multi-sport athlete and played basketball throughout high school. His brother, Ryan, is one of the most sought-after quarterback recruits in the 2025 class. He is the son of Christina and Mike Montgomery.

**COMMIT DATE:** Feb. 17, 2022.





## JASON MOORE

DL • 6-6 • 280

Hyattsville (Md.)  
DeMatha Catholic

Rank: DL 8, Overall 67, MD 2



**ACCOLADES:** Moore put together a strong final two seasons at the high school level, recording 73 tackles and 14 sacks as a junior while being named the Maryland Gatorade Player of the Year as a senior. Moore racked up 96 tackles (18 for loss) and 13 sacks in his final season for DeMatha Catholic.

**MOORE SAYS:** "(What helped make a decision was) just spending time with the staff, the players – you see how close they are with each other. They were open with me, accepting me to be around. It was like a true brotherhood."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He is strong at the point of attack and can anchor, stack and shed. He locates the ball carrier well. Showed improved get-off and explosion at snap early in his junior season and is powerful and can sink his hips to explode up and into offensive linemen. Shows the ability to collapse the pocket. He does not get frustrated and keeps working hard against double teams. He has lower body flexibility to dip his shoulder and get around the edge and explode into the backfield and has improved his ability to chase down the line of scrimmage in the offseason." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Basketball runs in Moore's family, as he played during his high school years while his brother, Justin, plays at Villanova. He also hails from the same high school as former Buckeye defensive end Chase Young. He is the son of Keli and Greg Moore.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 10, 2022.



## JOSHUA PADILLA

OL • 6-4 • 280

Huber Heights (Ohio)  
Wayne

Rank: OL 11, Overall 226, OH 6



**ACCOLADES:** Padilla received a pair of All-Ohio nods from the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association in 2021 and 2022, while also being named first-team All-Southwest District for Division I in 2022. He helped Wayne's offense to an average scoring output of 36.8 points per game in the team's six wins in 2022.

**PADILLA SAYS:** "Ohio State is recruiting me as a center. I grew up as an Ohio State fan. (I grew up) watching players from my high school go there."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Hard-nosed player who plays with great intensity and tenacity. He finishes blocks and is aggressive. He can get off the ball and drive defenders in the run game. Also shows the ability to get out in space and do his job there. He is a solid-to-good athlete, not currently an elite one. Has also wrestled at a high level, and his use of leverage is evident there. He has right tackle experience but figures to move inside at the next level. He projects safely as a college contributor based on the way he plays and his fundamentals. He is a higher floor guy than he is an upside guy, but should be a Power Five starter and have a chance to work his way toward playing on Sundays." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Padilla is also an accomplished wrestler, finishing as the state runner-up in the heavy-weight class in 2022. He is the son of Lora and Mike Padilla.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 4, 2021.



## ARVELL REESE

LB • 6-4 • 212

Cleveland Glenville

Rank: LB 22, Overall 209, OH 5



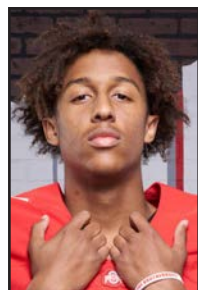
**ACCOLADES:** Reese was named the Division IV Defensive Player of the Year by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association while also receiving an All-Ohio first-team nod for his efforts in helping Glenville to a state title in 2022. Reese was also a finalist for the 2022 Butkus Award, which honors the nation's top high school linebacker.

**REESE SAYS:** "They see me as an inside linebacker. Blitzing off the edge on third downs, but being an inside linebacker on first and second down. I like playing all over the place, coming up to the edge and blitzing and sitting in coverage."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He shows he can shoot gaps and play the run. He has good physicality and will take on blocks, shed and make the play. A good hitter who arrives with impact. Generates explosion without needing to load up. He should only get better with that as he gets bigger and stronger. He can stand up and rush off the edge, and is explosive, twitchy and has a great speed rush. He still needs to develop technique and a repertoire as a pass rusher and has athletic tools to be successful in pass coverage but needs continued reps there." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Reese is the latest recruit to arrive in Columbus by way of the Glenville pipeline, becoming the 24th Tarblooder to sign with Ohio State since 2002. He spent his first three years of high school at Euclid in Cleveland. He is the son of Maeko Walker and Alex Reese.

**COMMIT DATE:** Aug. 6, 2022.



## BRYSON RODGERS

WR • 6-1 • 175

Zephyrhills (Fla.)  
Wiregrass Ranch

Rank: WR 49, Overall 354, FL 64



**ACCOLADES:** Rodgers played in three varsity seasons during his high school career, amassing 110 receptions for 1,625 yards and 29 touchdowns in 26 games. As a junior, Rodgers racked up 645 yards and 14 touchdowns on 42 receptions.

**RODGERS SAYS:** "We just want to be the best group in the country – as a group, not individually. I feel like Ohio State thrives off that, having the best groups in the country, not just a single receiver. We just want to be the best group we can be, we want to compete and bring the best out of each other."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "One of the more unique prospects in the 2023 cycle. Slight of frame, especially for a wide receiver prospect that isn't exactly known for his long speed times, but plays with an exuberant amount of confidence, which allows him to create separation in traffic and then pick up chunks of yardage after the catch. His ability to accelerate in the snap of a finger is without a doubt a strength at this stage in his development with rubber band-like joints that allow him to change directions with ease. He must add some body armor over the next few years and befriend his strength coach while learning how to do the little things like block out on the perimeter." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Rodgers originally hails from Warren, Ohio. He is the son of Amanda Dorchock and Brandon Rodgers.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 17, 2022.



## NOAH ROGERS

WR • 6-2 • 195

Rolesville, N.C.

Rank: WR 8, Overall 53, NC 1



**ACCOLADES:** Rogers burst onto the national scene during his junior season in which he corralled 70 receptions for 1,432 yards and 22 touchdowns. He followed up his dominant junior campaign with 39 receptions for 799 yards and 15 scores in his senior season.

**ROGERS SAYS:** "Coach (Brian) Hartline, he's so smooth and his coaching style fits best. The way he develops guys and having fun. Coach (Ryan) Day, I like how he's not just the OC, he contributes to the offense. There is nothing bad you can say about Coach Day. He's a great guy in general."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "A smooth route runner, he gets off line and into routes well. He's sure-handed and willing to make plays in traffic. He exhibits body control and makes acrobatic catches look easy, and knows how to use size to shield defensive backs. He high-points the ball well and excels on 50-50 balls, and shows the ability to pierce defenses and make big plays after the catch. Demonstrates some elusiveness after the catch but is at his best when securing the catch and getting up field. He consistently gets behind defenses despite facing very little press coverage, and knows how to sit in holes against zone. He has strength throughout his frame but will need to continue to develop strength." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Rogers also competed in track and field during his high school years, and boasts sub-4.5 40-yard dash speed. He is the son of Lisa Rogers.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 22, 2022.



## AUSTIN SIEREVELD

IOL • 6-5 • 320

Middletown (Ohio)  
Lakota East

Rank: OL 15, Overall 297, OH 8



**ACCOLADES:** Playing offensive tackle for Lakota East, Siereveld has been named first-team all-district on three occasions with a selection to the All-Ohio Division I first team in his senior season.

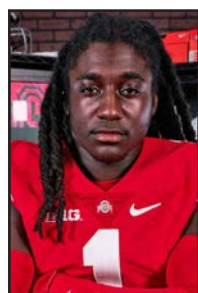
**SIEREVELD SAYS:** "It's still so surreal. I still can't believe it. Just having an opportunity – it's every Ohio kid's dream to go play there (at Ohio State). But I think in the next week after I announced, it all settled in. This is reality. I've got to go work now."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He has very good size and can get off the ball, be mobile and change directions at 320 pounds. He plays under control and with a good base. He showed he could bend at camps, but can still do that more consistently in pads. Would like to see him play at around this weight in college. A high-major strength and conditioning program should help him do that while adding strength and explosion. He plays with toughness and a no-nonsense approach. He's a high-floor prospect who should be a starting guard or center for several years at a high-major program." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** After committing to Ohio State, Siereveld was a constant on the Buckeyes' sidelines during the 2022 season, taking in several games at Ohio Stadium. He is the son of Karla and Clay Siereveld.

**COMMIT DATE:** May 4, 2022.





## CALVIN SIMPSON-HUNT

CB • 6-0 • 175  
Waxahachie, Texas  
Rank: CB 8, Overall 62, TX 11



**ACCOLADES:** A late riser in the recruiting rankings, Simpson-Hunt picked up 25 tackles, two tackles for loss, a fumble recovery and three pass breakups in 10 games in 2022. He had 29 tackles with an interception as a junior. His performance was enough to earn him an invite to the 2023 All-American Bowl in San Antonio.

**SIMPSON-HUNT SAYS:** "Ohio State's a really good school (academically), too, so I just had to keep them in mind, like Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, all those schools. Just keep them in mind because you know the value of that school. But it was mainly Ohio State that kept up there compared to all those other schools. And they stayed in contact with me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "The long-armed cornerback consistently makes plays on the ball and flashes quick recovery speed when initially beaten. Simpson-Hunt's ability to stay attached to quick receivers in a talented school district and metropolitan area stands out. The defensive back is also more than willing to be physical to stop running backs." – Charles Power, On3

**PERSONAL:** Simpson-Hunt was previously committed to Texas Tech before joining Ohio State's class. He is also a gifted track athlete, running a 10.67 100-meter and 21.77 200 meter in the spring of 2022. He is the son of Janel Simpson.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 30, 2022.



## WILL SMITH JR.

DL • 6-3 • 260  
Dublin (Ohio) Coffman  
Rank: DL 31, Overall 243, OH 7



**ACCOLADES:** Smith was named All-Central District Division I Defensive Player of the Year for his efforts in 2022, recording 47 tackles, 14 tackles for loss and five sacks for Coffman. He was also named first-team All-Ohio.

**SMITH SAYS:** "It was the legacy part (that made me commit), and just going there and meeting everybody, I really like their atmosphere there."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He's quick off the ball and is a good penetrator. He is also quick with his hands. He plays with good bend and leverage and can get skinny and not allow offensive linemen to get a good punch off on him. In terms of measurables, he isn't going to be the biggest, the longest or maybe the straight-up fastest prospect, but he plays hard, has great short area quickness and is a strong bet to be a productive player at the high-major level." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Will Smith Jr. is the son of Kerry Monahan and late former Ohio State and New Orleans Saints defensive end Will Smith Sr., who recorded eight tackles in Ohio State's BCS National Championship win over Miami (Fla.) on Jan. 3, 2003, and later won a Super Bowl in the NFL. Smith Jr. is also gifted in shot put, qualifying for Ohio's state championships after multiple throws beyond 50 feet in 2022.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 23, 2022.



## CARNELL TATE

WR • 6-2 • 180  
Bradenton (Fla.)  
IMG Academy  
Rank: WR 9, Overall 59, FL 13



**ACCOLADES:** Tate racked up 750 yards and eight touchdowns – averaging 20.3 yards per catch – for one of the nation's premier high school programs in IMG Academy in 2022. He was named preseason second-team All-Florida by MaxPreps prior to his junior season.

**TATE SAYS:** "At the end of the day, (Ohio State) was where my heart was at and where I had the most trust in. I had the most trust in Coach (Brian) Hartline and Coach (Keenan) Bailey and Coach (Ryan) Day, so that's where I ended up going."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Owns a slender frame, but plays much bigger than the numbers suggest as he uses elite body control and natural bounce to elevate and make contested grabs on the perimeter. He's a savvy route runner that does a nice job of sinking his hips and exploding in and out of his breaks. He tracks the football well over his shoulder and isn't afraid to get the jersey dirty in order to move the chains. He shouldn't be considered a burner, and laser-timed testing data back that up, but can build up plenty of momentum if given a runway, and he has proven to be a pretty effective return man having flipped the field multiple times against top-flight competition." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Tate grew up and played his freshman season of football in Chicago before transferring to IMG. He is the son of Ashley Griggs and Sean Tate.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 20, 2022.



## JELANI THURMAN

TE • 6-5 • 230  
Fairburn (Ga.)  
Langston Hughes  
Rank: TE 3, Overall 104, GA 5



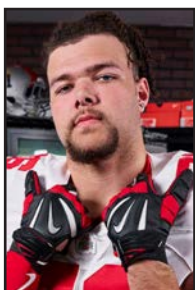
**ACCOLADES:** Thurman starred for Langston Hughes' undefeated, state-title winning 2022 squad, with 36 receptions for 582 yards and 12 touchdowns. He made his All-Region team both this past season and as a junior, when he hauled in 31 passes for 479 yards and seven touchdowns for a team that made its state championship game.

**THURMAN SAYS:** "I just feel like I can grow up (at Ohio State). Come in, make an impact my freshman year, complete my goal of winning a Mackey Award and get to the NFL one day with a ring."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Great height and elite frame with long arms and a large catch radius. He owns the body to stay personnel-flexible for the long run. He generally catches the ball away from his body and shows above-average plucking ability. He's dangerous in contested situations as a ball winner whose physical tools overwhelm defenders. He's a multi-sport athlete who plays basketball and transfers that functional athleticism to the gridiron. He shows encouraging conviction as a blocker, flashes pop in his hands and makes disengaging difficult for opposing defenders. Also has played defensive end to add another valuable layer to a strong overall athletic profile." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Thurman's mother, Kara Braxton, was a two-time WNBA champion with the Detroit Shock.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 17, 2022.



## MILES WALKER

OT • 6-6 • 285  
Greenwich (Conn.)  
Brunswick School  
Rank: OT 33, Overall 497, CT 4



**ACCOLADES:** With Walker and his fellow linemen paving the way, Brunswick rushed for more than 1,800 yards and 25 touchdowns in 10 games in 2022. Walker made first-team All-League for the Northeast Prep Football Conference.

**WALKER SAYS:** "When I got to campus, right away the vibes were feeling right. Then just getting to know all the players there and hearing what they had to say, and then just getting to know (offensive line coach Justin) Frye, he had come to see me in May, and then getting to know Coach (Ryan) Day, it was really like, 'This is where I want to be. This is the program I want to be in.'"

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "His film answers all the questions you have for an offensive lineman. He shows excellent feet and balance in pass protection. He uses his wingspan and technique to dominate the edge in high school, and displays superior athleticism on zone schemes and running in space tracking smaller defenders. He's very aggressive and powerful coming off the ball in the run game. He has no issues rooting out defenders and blowing open holes at the point of attack. He has a long, lean body now that should develop in the weight room and be more effective around 300 lbs. Still has some puppy dog in him with long limbs and may continue to grow. He has left tackle potential but will need to take on elite edge rushers to prove his ability vs college competition." – Mark Porter, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Walker also played baseball for Brunswick. He is the son of Bobby and Becky Walker, with Bobby being a former All-American on the gridiron and in track at Williams College.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 4, 2022.



# CLASS OF 2023



# Ohio State Lands Fifth In Consensus Poll

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day landed yet another impressive recruiting class in 2023, signing the fifth-best haul nationally in this year's edition of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin consensus poll.

The Buckeyes brought in 20 signees, including a five-star prospect in Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 198) – the No. 35 overall prospect and No. 5 receiver in the class – in addition to 18 four-star prospects and a high three-star.

Inniss was one of seven top-100 prospects signed by Ohio State, a grouping that also featured Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star cornerback Jermaine Mathews (6-0, 175) and a pair of four-star wide receivers in Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy's Carnell Tate (6-2, 180) and Noah Rogers (6-2, 195) of Rolesville, N.C. Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-4, 295) was also a highlight of the class, checking in as the second-best prospect out of Ohio behind Mathews.

Ohio State also hit on some positions of need, signing Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star quarterback Lincoln Kienholz (6-2, 182) and Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Arvell Reese (6-4, 212), two of the Buckeyes' 17 top-300 prospects in the class.

But while the Buckeyes turned out one of the nation's best hauls, it still paled in comparison to the classes signed by several

## National Recruiting Experts' Rankings

### 247Sports

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. Texas
4. Oklahoma
- 5. Ohio State**
6. LSU
7. Miami (Fla.)
8. Oregon
9. Tennessee
10. Notre Dame

### Rivals

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. Texas
- 4. Ohio State**
5. LSU
6. Oklahoma
7. Miami (Fla.)
8. Oregon
9. Clemson
10. Notre Dame

### On3 Sports

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. Texas
- 4. Ohio State**
5. LSU
6. Miami (Fla.)
7. Oklahoma
8. Oregon
9. Notre Dame
10. Clemson

### ESPN

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. Texas
4. Oklahoma
5. Miami (Fla.)
6. LSU
7. Notre Dame
8. Oregon
- 9. Ohio State**
10. Clemson

teams in the South. The unanimous top two across the four major recruiting services – 247Sports, ESPN, Rivals and On3 Sports – were Alabama and Georgia, with the Crimson Tide taking the top spot.

Alabama's class at the top of the rankings featured nine five-star prospects and 18 four-star prospects (as well as a lone three-star) with an average player rating of .9478. The Crimson Tide had 10 signees within the top 50, three more than any other team in the country.

Several of those signees were won in battles with Ohio State, including Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep five-star defensive end Keon Keeley (6-5, 242), Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (5-11, 197), Windsor (Conn.) Loomis Chaffee School

## Consensus Poll Fast Facts

- The SEC led the way with 10 teams in the top 25. The only schools from the conference not included were Kentucky, Missouri, Ole Miss and Vanderbilt.
- The Big 12 and Big Ten each were represented by four teams in the poll. Outside of No. 3 Texas and No. 4 Oklahoma – who won't represent the conference following next season, set to join the SEC – the Big 12 also had No. 19 TCU, who fell to Georgia in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game, and No. 25 Texas Tech.
- Ohio State was the only Big Ten team to land in the top 10, with No. 15 Penn State, No. 18 Michigan and No. 24 Michigan State rounding out the conference's representatives. Nebraska received four votes, the most of any team outside of the poll.
- Also tying in the consensus poll were the ACC and Pac-12, each with three teams in the top 25. Miami (Fla.) was the highest-ranked ACC team at No. 7, followed by No. 10 Clemson and No. 21 Florida State. The Pac-12's highest-ranked team was No. 8 Oregon, followed by No. 12 USC and No. 20 Utah. Colorado just missed out on the top 25, receiving three votes.
- Notre Dame was the lone non-Power Five team in our poll, checking in at No. 9. The Fighting Irish fell two spots from No. 7 in last year's poll.
- Newcomers to the top 10 included No. 6 LSU, No. 7 Miami (Fla.), No. 8 Oregon and No. 10 Clemson. This replaces Penn State (No. 6), Oklahoma (No. 8), Michigan (No. 9) and North Carolina (No. 10) from last year's poll.
- Teams that made last year's poll but were not in this year's poll include Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Ole Miss and Stanford. The Tar Heels saw the biggest fall, dropping out after checking in at No. 10 last year.
- Newcomers to the poll this year include No. 12 USC, No. 16 South Carolina, No. 19 TCU, No. 20 Utah, No. 22 Arkansas and No. 25 Texas Tech.
- Of the teams that appeared in both this year's and last year's poll, Oregon saw the biggest rise, jumping from No. 24 to No. 8. The biggest drop belonged to Texas A&M, which fell from No. 1 to No. 15.

— Braden Moles

four-star offensive tackle Olaus Alinen (6-6, 315) and Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood (6-5, 225), who was formerly committed to the Buckeyes.

Georgia's class followed closely at No. 2, featuring five five-star prospects and 17 four-star prospects with an average player rating of .9407, just shy of Alabama for the top mark in the class. The Bulldogs signed 12 top-100 prospects and seven in the top 50, highlighted by Venice, Fla., five-star defensive end Damon Wilson (6-4, 225), another target lost out on by Ohio State.

Texas was unanimous at No. 3, and while the fourth spot was not unanimous, the consensus poll landed on Oklahoma at No. 4, with the Buckeyes rounding out the top five. The Longhorns' third-ranked class was bolstered by four five-star prospects, including the top player in the class in New Orleans (La.) Isidore Newman five-star quarterback Arch Manning (6-4, 215). Texas won out for Manning's services over the likes of Alabama and Georgia to secure the top recruit in program history.

Texas wasn't done there, however, signing some additional offensive firepower in Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater five-star running back Cedric Baxter Jr. (6-1, 215) and DeSo-

to, Texas, five-star wide receiver Johntay Cook II (6-0, 175). The Longhorns also made a killing in their home state, hauling in 14 of their 24 signees from inside state borders.

Oklahoma's class featured more quantity than quality, signing 26 commitments with an average player rating of .9148, just sixth among the top 10 teams. The Sooners signed nine three-star prospects compared to 14 four-star prospects and three five-star prospects, with Denton (Texas) Guyer five-star quarterback Jackson Arnold (6-1, 205) checking in as the top prospect in Oklahoma's class.

In total, the top five programs in our consensus poll signed 27 of the top 50 prospects and 48 of the top 100 prospects in the class, keeping the majority of the top talent in the class among the top schools. The remainder of the top 10 is rounded out by No. 6 LSU, No. 7 Miami (Fla.), No. 8 Oregon, No. 9 Notre Dame and No. 10 Clemson. All except Notre Dame signed at least one five-star prospect, with LSU and Miami (Fla.) each hauling in two.

The Ducks were late risers in the poll, finishing with a class that featured just one five-star prospect but 19 four-star prospects, second most in the country behind Notre Dame's 20. Many of those high-profile addi-



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## OSU'S 2023 CLASS

### BSB Consensus Poll

Rk.	Team	Pts.
1.	Alabama (4).....	100
2.	Georgia .....	96
3.	Texas .....	92
4.	Oklahoma .....	83
5.	<b>Ohio State .....</b>	<b>82</b>
6.	LSU .....	82
7.	Miami (Fla.).....	79
8.	Oregon .....	72
9.	Notre Dame .....	68
10.	Clemson .....	64
11.	Florida.....	56
12.	USC .....	55
13.	Tennessee .....	55
14.	Texas A&M .....	48
15.	Penn State .....	46
16.	South Carolina .....	41
17.	Auburn.....	33
18.	Michigan .....	32
19.	TCU .....	28
20.	Utah.....	23
21.	Florida State.....	21
22.	Arkansas .....	16
23.	Miss. State.....	9
24.	Michigan State.....	5
25.	Texas Tech.....	5

*Teams received points based on their placement in four top-25 polls. Points assigned to teams are inversely proportional to their placement in a poll (25 points for first, 24 for second, etc.) First-place votes are in parentheses. Also receiving votes in the poll were Nebraska (5), Colorado (3) and Ole Miss (1).*

tions came during the early signing period, as Oregon signed Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265) and flipped Dripping Springs, Texas, four-star quarterback Austin Novosad (6-3, 185) from Baylor and Long Beach (Calif.) Poly four-star cornerback Daylen Austin (6-1, 180) from LSU.

One conference dominated the middle part of the poll, with the SEC accounting for five teams ranked Nos. 11-20. This includes No. 11 Florida, No. 13 Tennessee, No. 14 Texas A&M, No. 16 South Carolina and No. 17 Auburn.

The Volunteers have been rising steadily, jumping from No. 18 in 2021 and No. 15 in last year's poll to No. 13 this time around. Tennessee secured one of the cycle's best quarterbacks in Downey (Calif.) Warren five-star Nico Iamaleava (6-5, 195) in addition to 12 other four-star prospects.

The most surprising result in the conference was that of the Aggies, which fell from the top spot in last year's poll all the way to No. 14 this time around. Whether a result of NIL money drying up or a lack of progress on the field, Texas A&M signed just 19 prospects – third-fewest in the poll behind No. 21 Florida State (18) and No. 23 Michigan State (16) – and only five recruits in the top 100.

The Aggies were able to secure a pair of five-star prospects in Katy (Texas) Paetow defensive lineman David Hicks (6-4, 290) and El Campo, Texas, running back Reuben Owens

(5-11, 190), but it's a far cry from last year's class that featured eight five-star signees and 18 top-100 prospects.

Penn State at No. 15 and Michigan at No. 18 are no surprises, while TCU entered the poll at No. 19 fresh off an appearance in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game, and Utah landed at No. 20. Perhaps the most surprising team in this range, though, was USC.

The Trojans – who have appeared in just three of the last five consensus polls and were not among last year's teams – entered this season's poll all the way at No. 12, signing the second-best class in the Pac-12 behind Oregon. USC's class had two five-star prospects – tied for the most outside of the top 10 with Texas A&M – that gave the Trojans an average player rating of .9133, ahead of the likes of Clemson, Oregon and Tennessee – all teams that finished ahead of USC in the poll.

USC's class was highlighted by Las Vegas Bishop Gorman five-star wide receiver Zachariah Branch (5-10, 172) and Los Alamitos, Calif., five-star quarterback Malachi Nelson (6-3, 182). The Trojans also secured an Ohio State target in Many, La., four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 244), the second highest-ranked defender in USC's class behind Friendswood, Texas, four-star defensive end Braylan Shelby (6-5, 235).

No. 21 Florida State, No. 23 Mississippi State and No. 24 Michigan State all held on after appearing in last year's poll, while No. 22 Arkansas and No. 25 Texas Tech were both newcomers. Of the Razorbacks' 20 signees, eight were four-star prospects, with Frisco (Texas) Lone Star cornerback Jaylon Braxton (6-0, 170) as the highest-ranked recruit in their class.

The Red Raiders, meanwhile, went for quantity over quality, signing 26 prospects with just five four-star recruits among them in the first recruiting cycle for head coach Joey McGuire. Arlington (Texas) Mansfield Timberview four-star safety Jordan Sanford (5-11, 185) at No. 252 overall was the highest-ranked commitment for Texas Tech.

Of the 25 teams in our consensus poll, they combined to sign 92 of the top 100 prospects in the class, with Arizona State, Colorado, Kansas State, Nebraska, Ole Miss, UCF and UCLA as the only programs outside of our top 25 to sign a top-100 recruit.

Also of note were the teams that just missed out on the poll. Nebraska had the most votes of a team outside the top 25 with five, followed by Colorado with three votes, and Ole Miss with one. The Buffaloes and head coach Deion Sanders have made waves since Sanders' hiring in December, and they rode that momentum to a top-30 class.

Despite being on the job for only a couple of months, Sanders earned signatures from four blue-chip prospects – either a four- or five-star recruit – including Lakeland, Fla., five-star cornerback Cormani McClain (6-2, 165), the No. 13 overall prospect and top cornerback in the class. The Buffaloes were one of just three teams outside the consensus top 25 – along with Ole Miss and UCLA – to sign a five-star recruit.

Colorado also signed an additional trio of four-star prospects, adding Derby, Kan., running back Dylan Edwards (5-8, 160), Thomasville (Ga.) County Central wide receiver Adam Hopkins (6-2, 190) and Vivian (La.) North Caddo wide receiver Omarion Miller (6-2, 190).



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# Buckeyes Seeking Topflight Talent In 2024

By **BRADEN MOLES**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

All 20 members of Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class signed their national letters of intent on Dec. 21, signaling the official shift of focus to the 2024 class.

The Buckeyes currently have three prospects committed in 2024, including Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185), New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295) and Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star safety Garrett Stover (6-2, 195). Despite holding just three commitments, the Buckeyes' class checks in at No. 15 in the country, with a nation-best average player rating of .9657.

Moore was the earliest commitment of that group, joining Ohio State's class in October, with Stover following in November and Smith committing in December. Of course, the complexion of the class might look different had Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) not decommitted from Ohio State in December.

It's still a positive start to the class for the Buckeyes, who have already offered over 100 prospects in 2024 with more offers seemingly being sent out daily. Here's a look at some top-100 prospects of note whom Ohio State is expected to be involved with throughout this cycle. All ratings come from the 247Sports composite, and prospects are listed alphabetically.

**KJ Bolden, SAF**  
**Buford, Ga.**

Bolden (6-1, 185) is only first on the list because of his name, but if prospects were ranked by importance to the Buckeyes, he'd top that list as well. He's ranked the No. 4 overall prospect in the country behind Lilburn (Ga.) Parkview five-star athlete Mike Matthews (6-2, 180) – whom the Buckeyes are not currently involved with – Smith and Raiola, meaning Bolden is the highest-pro-

**Class Of 2024 National Prospects**

Ten of the top players OSU is pursuing in the 2024 class from around the nation, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Overall Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	Top Colleges
4	KJ Bolden	SAF	6-1	185	*****	Buford, Ga.	UGA, OSU, TENN
11	Joshisa Trader	WR	6-2	170	*****	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep	FSU, MIA, OSU
12	Sammy Brown	LB	6-3	225	*****	Jefferson, Ga.	CLE, UGA, OSU
18	Justin Scott	DL	6-5	310	*****	Chicago StIgnatius	ND, OSU, USC
19	Jadyn Davis	QB	6-1	192	*****	Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School	UM, UNC, PSU
22	Charles Lester III	CB	6-1	171	*****	Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview	ALA, FSU, UGA, OSU
32	Mylan Graham	WR	6-0	170	****	New Haven, Ind.	ALA, ND, OSU
36	Nigel Smith II	DL	6-5	260	****	Melissa, Texas	OU, OSU, TAMU
42	Jordan Seaton	OL	6-5	287	****	Washington (D.C.) StJohnis	ALA, CLE, OSU
60	Donovan Harbour	OT	6-5	310	****	Waukesha (Wisc.) Catholic Memorial	OSU, TENN,WISC

file target on the board for Ohio State.

He visited for Ohio State's win over Notre Dame last season and has a built-in connection with the Buckeyes given that he is a cousin of safeties coach Perry Eliano, but there will be plenty of competition for one of the nation's best prospects. Bolden recently trimmed his offer list down to 15 schools – with Alabama, Georgia and Florida as the highlights – but had previously stated Ohio State was definitely among his top three programs.

A two-way player for Buford, Bolden is a player who could see the field early for Ohio State, especially now that the Buckeyes are running with three safeties on the field.

"He has been utilized as both a wide receiver and safety early on in his prep career and is more than capable of producing big gains, whether that be via deep shots or quick screens/jet sweeps," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins. "His ceiling seems like it might ultimately be highest somewhere in the secondary given how he reads and reacts to what's going on in front of him."

**Sammy Brown, LB**  
**Jefferson, Ga.**

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' reputation has never been that of a vigorous recruiter, but one of the first pros-

pects he took an interest in once he arrived at Ohio State was Brown (6-3, 225).

Rated the No. 12 overall prospect and top linebacker in the class, Brown is the prototypical athlete whom Ohio State looks for at linebacker. In addition to his duties on defense – in which he finished with 113 tackles last season – he's also an excellent running back for Jefferson, carrying the ball 181 times for 1,459 yards and 21 touchdowns. For good measure, he also wrestles and competes in track and field.

Alabama, Clemson and Georgia are the main competition for Brown, who has made several visits to Ohio State and is expected to return to campus over the next few months. Knowles has remained at the lead of his recruitment for the Buckeyes, and securing a prospect like Brown – out of the South, no less – would be a massive win on the recruiting trail.

**Jadyn Davis, QB**  
**Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day**

It's difficult to say at this point what quarterback might end up in Ohio State's class. Few within the Ohio State sphere were familiar with Devin Brown or Lincoln Kienholz at this point in their recruitments, so it seems possible that another option could come out of left field to sign with the Buckeyes, but Ohio State's efforts as of now are focusing on Davis (6-1, 192).

It will be an uphill battle for the Buckeyes getting back into Davis' good graces after publicly choosing Raiola as their quarterback prior to his decommitment, but those fences have already started mending following a recent visit by Ohio State's staff to Providence Day School.

And it's no wonder he's their target given that he is the No. 3 quarterback in the class behind Carlsbad, Calif., five-star Julian Sayin (6-1, 195), who is committed to Alabama, and Raiola. Davis was named North Carolina Gatorade Player of the Year this past season after throwing for 3,425 yards and 43 touchdowns while leading his team to a state championship.

Clemson, Michigan, North Carolina, Penn State and Tennessee are other programs Davis is focusing on, but Ohio State's track record with quarterbacks under head coach Ryan Day figures to keep the Buckeyes in this one for a while.

**Mylan Graham, WR**  
**New Haven, Ind.**

Another elite class from offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline could be in order including Graham (6-0,

170). After he camped with Ohio State over the summer, the Buckeyes extended to Graham his first scholarship offer.

Several schools followed, with Alabama, Michigan, Notre Dame and Tennessee offering in the following weeks and months, but Ohio State's offer to Graham will always remain his first. He's since risen from an unranked prospect with no stars to a four-star recruit, checking in at No. 32 in the class and as the No. 4 wide receiver. He had 48 receptions for 1,149 yards and 13 touchdowns for New Haven last season and also pulled in an interception on defense.

He's made several trips to Ohio State since receiving his offer, putting the Buckeyes in good position to land Graham after some early identification by Hartline. Along with Smith and Joshisa Trader, Ohio State could be in position to land three of the top five receivers in the class.

**Donovan Harbour, OL**  
**Waukesha (Wis.) Catholic Memorial**

Ohio State already has a head start on the offensive line with Moore's commitment, but Harbour (6-5, 310) would be another solid addition for offensive line coach Justin Frye.

Harbour checks in at No. 60 overall and as the No. 4 interior lineman in the class, though his frame could certainly translate to offensive tackle as needed, with some projecting him to play on the outside eventually.

He has already announced a top seven of Florida, Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin, and new Badger head coach Luke Fickell is working hard to keep Harbour in his home state. He's already made several visits to Columbus, so it's not out of the question for Ohio State to land him.

Day's staff has also shown the ability to pull offensive linemen out of Wisconsin, doing so with Carson Hinzman in last year's recruiting class.

**Charles Lester III, CB**  
**Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview**

One of the top defensive players on Ohio State's board is Lester (6-1, 171), who checks in as the No. 22 overall prospect and No. 3 cornerback in the class. The Buckeyes already made the first round of cuts for Lester, landing in his top five along with Alabama, Florida, Florida State and Georgia.

Despite most of his interest focusing on Southern schools, he's already made a visit to Columbus this past season and is expect-



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ed to take official visits to each of his top five schools before committing prior to his senior year.

“He uses his length to his advantage once the ball is airborne as he can swallow up pass catchers of all different sizes out on the boundary,” said 247Sports’ Ivins. “Must get better at shedding blocks and inserting himself in run support if he wants to be more of a complete defender. His top-end speed could raise some concerns given limited testing profile and no track times, but he has generated plenty of chunk plays while doubling as a wide receiver and wildcat quarterback against solid Sunshine State competition.”

Justin Scott, DL  
Chicago St. Ignatius

It seemed initially that Scott (6-5, 310) would be off the board for Ohio State after he announced a commitment date of Jan. 31, with Notre Dame viewed as the favorite, but the Buckeyes might still be in it after Scott pushed his commitment back indefinitely.

He’s the No. 18 overall prospect and No. 4 defensive lineman in the class, giving Ohio State good reason to continue pursuit. The Buckeyes offered him in the fall, and he visited Columbus on Oct. 1 for Ohio State’s win over Rutgers.

He previously announced a top eight of Alabama, Colorado, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon, Notre Dame and USC before postponing his commitment, telling multiple outlets that he felt he was rushing his recruitment.

Jordan Seaton, OL  
Washington (D.C.) St. John’s

Much of what was said about Harbour applies to Seaton (6-5, 287), though he is more likely to stick to the interior at the college level.

Rated the No. 42 overall prospect and No. 1 interior lineman in the class, Seaton was offered by Ohio State in September and has already made a handful of trips to Columbus. Despite interest from several high-profile programs such as Alabama and Georgia, Seaton is viewed as a lean toward Ohio State, with 247Sports recruiting analyst Steve Wiltfong issuing a projection for Seaton to land with the Buckeyes.

“Few prospects made a more drastic transformation from their sophomore to junior seasons than Jordan Seaton,” said On3 Sports recruiting analyst Charles Powers. “That physical transformation is showing up on the field, with Seaton moving at a different level as a junior. While he’s always been a strong, technical offensive lineman, the improved movement skills have helped him develop into a borderline dominant player with positional flexibility.”

Nigel Smith II, DL  
Melissa, Texas

One of the most uphill recruiting battles Ohio State will face on this list will be for Smith (6-5, 260), who is among the top defensive linemen being recruited by the Buckeyes.

He’s the No. 36 overall prospect and No. 6 defensive lineman in the class and is being recruited by the likes of Alabama, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas and Texas A&M.

Ohio State has already made significant progress in his recruitment, hosting him on

Class Of 2024 In-State Prospects

The top 10 players in the state of Ohio for the 2024 class, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Overall Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	Top Colleges
27.	Bryce West	CB	5-11	177	*****	Glenville	UM, MSU, OSU
105.	Jordan Marshall	RB	5-11	195	****	Moeller	UM, OSU, TENN
116.	Elias Rudolph	DE	6-4	220	****	Taft	CLEM, OSU, PITT
123.	Aaron Scott	CB	6-1	170	****	Springfield	OSU, ND, TENN
127.	Brian Robinson	DE	6-4	230	****	Fitch	UK, UM, PITT
168	Garrett Stover	LB/SAF	6-2	195	****	Big Walnut	Committed to Ohio State
181.	Tayvion Galloway	TE	6-5	230	****	Chillicothe	Committed to LSU
213.	Luke Hamilton	OT	6-5	290	****	Avon	Committed to Michigan
279.	Koy Beasley	SAF	6-0	180	****	LaSalle	BC, UK, PITT
296.	Terhyon Nichols	CB	6-0	180	****	Withrow	UK, ND, PSU

campus on four separate occasions over the last couple of years, and he’s been complimentary of the Buckeyes’ coaches – specifically defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who is in frequent contact with Smith.

He had 103 tackles – 17 for loss – last season to go with 11 sacks and a pair of forced fumbles. This followed a sophomore season in which he racked up 20 tackles for loss and 10 sacks.

Joshisa Trader, WR  
Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna

A two-way player at wide receiver and cornerback in high school, Trader (6-2, 170) is viewed as the No. 11 overall prospect and No. 2 athlete in the class, though he is being recruited on offense for Ohio State.

He finished with 47 receptions for 743 yards and seven touchdowns last season for Chaminade-Madonna Prep, showing his acumen on that side of the ball. Ohio State has already earned a commitment from one of his teammates in Smith, and the Buckeyes would love to bring Trader along to join him in the class.

He’s already announced a top five of Florida, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Ohio State and Tennessee. The Buckeyes will have to work to pull Trader out of his home state, but he’s already made several visits to the school and isn’t expected to commit to a school until December, so Ohio State has time to get things sorted out.

Ohio Stacked With Talent For 2024

Even though 2023 was statistically a down cycle for Ohio, the Buckeyes still filled up on talent from the Buckeye State, signing seven of their 20 prospects from their home region. And Ohio State can look to keep that momentum going in 2024, as Ohio has several top prospects in the class worthy of consideration.

Just three of the top 10 prospects in Ohio have already committed to a school, with Stover committing to Ohio State, Chillicothe four-star tight end Tayvion Galloway (6-5, 230) joining LSU’s class and Avon four-star offensive tackle Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290) headed north to Michigan.

This means that plenty of talent in the state is still up for grabs, so here is a look at some of the top uncommitted prospects from Ohio in the class.

Jordan Marshall, RB  
Cincinnati Moeller

Running back is an important position for Ohio State in 2024 after missing on Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star Mark Fletcher (6-1, 226) and not signing a back in 2023, but the good news for the

Buckeyes is that a very capable option is in their own back yard.

Marshall (5-11, 195) picked up an offer from Ohio State after camping last summer and followed it up by being named Ohio Gatorade Player of the Year during his junior season. He’s steadily risen in the rankings, now viewed as the No. 105 overall prospect and No. 8 running back in the class.

The back has made several visits to Ohio State and has frequently cited the strength of his relationship with running backs coach Tony Alford. Given Marshall’s proximity to Ohio State, he figures to be one of the Buckeyes’ most important targets for this cycle.

Other schools in the running for Marshall include Michigan, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin, and he is expected to make a decision in early summer.

Elias Rudolph, DE  
Cincinnati Taft

Also out of Cincinnati, Rudolph (6-4, 220) is the No. 116 overall prospect and No. 11 defensive end in the class. His ranking is backed up by a junior season in which he recorded 92 tackles (16 for loss) and 19 sacks, as well as four offensive touchdowns, while being named to the All-Ohio Division IV first-team.

Rudolph was offered this past summer by Ohio State and is viewed as a Buckeye lean. There will be plenty of competition for Rudolph considering his offer list that includes Cincinnati, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Pittsburgh, and Tennessee,

but Rudolph – who has made several visits to Columbus – has consistently stated that Ohio State is among his top choices.

“I really love (Coach Johnson),” Rudolph said after receiving his offer. “I feel like he sees something in me and he wants to push me to do that. It gave me more energy to perform great.”

Bryce West, CB  
Cleveland Glenville

After signing Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Arvell Reese (6-4, 212) in 2023, the Buckeyes could head back to the Tarblooder pipeline in this class for West (5-11, 177).

Currently the only five-star prospect in Ohio for 2024 – and the first since linebacker C.J. Hicks and safety Sonny Styles in 2022 – West is the No. 27 overall prospect and No. 4 cornerback in the class. While several Big Ten schools are involved with his recruitment, including Michigan, Michigan State and Penn State, the Buckeyes are viewed as heavy favorites to land West.

His position is one of need for the Buckeyes, who have struggled with numbers of late at cornerback and are likely to see cornerback Denzel Burke depart after this upcoming season. The last five-star cornerbacks signed by Ohio State were Jeff Okudah and Shaun Wade in 2017. The only other five-star cornerbacks signed by the Buckeyes since 2000 include Ted Ginn Jr., Jamario O’Neal and Donte Whitner – all from Glenville.



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# Ohio Provides Base For Offensive Line Haul

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's offensive line haul in the 2023 recruiting class features an interesting mix of players, of whom the three highest-rated are from the Buckeyes' own back yard.

Findlay's Luke Montgomery, Middletown Lakota East's Austin Siereveld and Huber Heights Wayne's Joshua Padilla are all four-star, in-state offensive linemen, and they are joined in the class by Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School three-star Miles Walker. All four enrolled early and have been going through offseason workouts with the team in preparation for their first spring football practice.

"I'm just glad that they're here early," said Ohio State offensive line coach Justin Frye. "The process and the development of offensive linemen, it's long and it's tough. So those guys all coming in midyear is good to get them acclimated to everything, getting into the weight room with Coach Mick (Marotti), getting in with (team dietician) Kaila (Olson) and doing meals, those things."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day felt that Frye, the former UCLA offensive line coach, did well during his first recruiting cycle with the Buckeyes in adding pieces for the team to work with in the future.

"I thought Justin did an excellent job," Day said. "We have three offensive line-

men here from Ohio and also Miles from Connecticut. I really think all three of (the Ohioans) have an ability to make an impact right away. These are guys who we've had in camp, we've seen work live."

Despite their just recently joining the program, there are several areas where any one of these new arrivals could contribute. With some of the uncertainty surrounding who will fill either of the open offensive tackle spots for the Buckeyes next season, Montgomery could be a factor to crack the two-deep as a freshman.

Montgomery (6-4, 295) – the No. 92 prospect for this cycle – was called the leader of Ohio State's class by Day, taking on a huge role when it came to peer recruiting. Frye was asked why so many people gravitated toward Montgomery.

"He's a real guy," Frye said. "We all know what that means. We've all been around those in our lives. Like, 'Tell me about that guy. That's a real dude right there.' He's a great human, he's a great person, he comes from the right family. He's cut from the right cloth and all he cares about is being his best and the team being its best. Why wouldn't you want to be around that guy?"

"On the field, it's going to be the same. We'll talk about him and his future and why did he have a great career, what happened? Because he was a real guy. He studied the right way, he trained the right way, he lived the right way. He was

around the right people and those guys, they don't fail very often in life."

Beyond his mentality, Montgomery is the highest-rated prospect of the team's four offensive line signees for a reason. He's already demonstrated positional versatility, playing tight end and defensive end in addition to offensive tackle in high school. He was a multi-sport star at Findlay, so Day and the coaching staff are excited about his feet and run-blocking abilities.

"He's very, very talented," Day said. "You can see him on the basketball court, the way he moves his feet. He's got toughness and physicality. He could play, probably, all five positions, but we're going to start him out at tackle."

Padilla is another candidate to crack the two-deep this season, mainly because of attrition at his position. Frye and Day have both confirmed that the plan is to have him begin his Ohio State tenure at center, a position currently open for competition after Luke Wypler declared for the upcoming NFL draft.

Right guard Matthew Jones has experience at the position, but Day said Feb. 1 that the plan is to keep Jones – as well as left guard Donovan Jackson – at their respective positions. That leaves last year's backup in Jakob James, a former three-star recruit entering his fourth year, and rising sophomore Carson Hinzman as the lone centers left from last year's team.

Incoming transfer Victor Cutler could factor into the battle as well, and Frye indicated that guard Enokk Vimahi might also get a look at the position. But Padilla enters as the nation's No. 226 prospect and has the traits necessary to make a push as the backup behind whoever wins the starting center job.

"This is a guy whose dad is a wrestling coach," Day said. "He was a wrestler. He has all the traits you look for in a center – the quickness, the ability to leverage the nose (tackles) and the guys that he's

going to have to go against every day. He's got a toughness about him."

While Padilla (6-4, 280) enters Columbus as a center, Siereveld projects next to him at guard. He is the eighth-best prospect in Ohio and No. 297 overall in the class, and his 6-5, 320-pound frame and athletic background offer plenty of promise on the inside.

"He is a very big and strong and powerful guy," Day said. "You can see, when you get up on him, the size of his legs. His family said that they can't find him a pair of pants so he has to wear sweatpants or shorts. That's how big his thighs are. But he's very, very powerful and big inside, and kind of that road grader you're looking for at guard."

Walker walks into the Woody Hayes Athletic Center as a developmental prospect. The only one of the bunch firmly staked at offensive tackle by the staff, the measurables for Walker are there for the position at 6-6, 285 pounds. The lone three-star prospect in Ohio State's class, however, Walker is ranked the No. 33 offensive tackle in the country and No. 497 overall.

"You look at his length and his athleticism and his size, he's going to start (his career) at tackle for us as well," Day said. "He brings a lot of potential there."

As Frye pointed out, it's likely to be a multiyear development process for each of the team's offensive line prospects before any of them are considered for a starting position. Because of the technique, strength and knowledge required to take on one of the five spots and the chemistry needed between the five starters, true freshmen rarely make such a cut. It hasn't happened at Ohio State since Michael Jordan started at guard in 2016.

"Year one of college football for a lineman, you learn how to play college football," Frye said. "How to show up to meetings on time, how to train, how to be in the weight room, how to get with Kaila and organize your meal and get stronger and faster. Year two, you figure out how to play your position, and then by year three you play your position. That's the general progression of that."

"You talk about those four incoming true freshmen that all came in midyear, they're waking up every morning looking at their phone, hoping their alarm went off at the right time. Then, how I am getting over (to practice) from the dorms? They're in a completely different realm. They're all going to be really good players. We feel like we can develop those guys well, but that's kind of your young group."

Now that the quartet has arrived on campus – even if they may need some help getting around – Day and Frye are excited to see what they can do.

"All four of those guys we're excited about," Day said. "Hopefully we can get those guys going and make a push."

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# Big Ten Recruiting A Mixed Bag For 2023 Cycle

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State topped the Big Ten in recruiting for the fourth straight cycle in 2023, finishing with the nation's fifth-best class with 289.05 points, according to the 247Sports team composite rankings. That included an average rating per recruit of .9362, which checks in at third nationally and significantly ahead of any other Big Ten team.

While the Buckeyes again topped their yearly competition, that didn't mean there weren't positive recruiting results from across the rest of the league. No. 13 Penn State, No. 18 Michigan, No. 23 Michigan State and No. 24 Nebraska all finished in the top 25 nationally, while 10 schools finished inside the top 50.

What follows is a breakdown of every recruiting class from around the Big Ten, excluding Ohio State and Michigan, with a more in-depth rundown of the Wolverines' signees featured below. Each team is ordered by its final composite ranking, with the number of signees in parentheses. Player and team rankings are according to the 247Sports composite rankings as of Feb. 6.

## 13. Penn State (23)

Not only did the Nittany Lions finish second to Ohio State in the conference standings for their class, collecting a team score of 270.20, but they also featured the conference's second-highest average rating per recruit at .9115.

No recruit helped bolster that star rating more than Reading (Pa.) Wyomissing four-star offensive tackle J'ven Williams (6-4, 285). Rated the No. 6 offensive tackle in the class and No. 40 prospect overall, Williams is the second-highest ranked prospect the Big Ten signed outside the signature Ohio State got from Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 198).

Williams kept up a trend of homegrown talent in the class for Penn State, which signed six of the top 10 players – and three of the top four – from the state of Pennsylvania. Beyond Williams, that group was highlighted by Philadelphia Roman Catholic four-star defensive end Jameal Lyons (6-4, 255), Pittsburgh Brashear four-star defensive end Ta'Mere Robinson (6-4, 225) and Reading Exeter Township four-star tight end Joey Schlaffer (6-6, 215).

The Nittany Lions' future on the offensive line is looking bright after this cycle given their top two commitments were up front, with Ashburn (Va.) Broad Run four-star interior lineman Alex Birchmeier (6-5, 285)

## Big Ten Team Rankings

Rk.	Team	Signees
5.	Ohio State.....	20
13.	Penn State .....	23
18.	Michigan.....	23
23.	Michigan State.....	16
24.	Nebraska.....	28
37.	Maryland .....	25
40.	Iowa .....	22
43.	Illinois.....	23
44.	Minnesota.....	21
46.	Northwestern.....	19
57.	Rutgers .....	19
58.	Wisconsin .....	15
66.	Purdue .....	16
67.	Indiana.....	15

\*247Sports composite rankings

joining Williams. Alongside them is Aldie (Va.) Lightridge four-star interior lineman Anthony Donkoh (6-5, 310) and Dundalk, Md., four-star offensive tackle Chimdy Omoh (6-5, 270).

Four top-170 commits headline the defensive side of the ball. Fairfax, Va., four-star linebacker Tony Rojas (6-2, 200) slots in No. 86, with Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Saint Thomas Aquinas four-star safety King Mack (5-11, 180) at No. 87, Selma, Ala., four-star safety Dakaari Nelson (6-3, 203) at No. 168 and Venice, Fla., four-star safety Elliot Washington (6-0, 195) at No. 169.

In all, the Nittany Lions landed 18 four-star or better commitments, one shy of Ohio State's conference-leading mark of 19.

## 23. Michigan State (16)

Michigan State went for quality over quantity in its class, landing just 16 commitments and finishing 23rd in the nation with a team score of 224.92 as a result but posting an average rating of .8969, which ranked third in the Big Ten.

Nine of the Spartans' 16 signees were four-star prospects. Head coach Mel Tucker and company had a particularly successful cycle on the defensive line, where three of those four-stars play.

The highest-rated of the bunch is Norman (Okla.) Community Christian School four-star defensive end Bai Jobe (6-3, 225), the No. 9 defensive end in the country and 54th-ranked prospect overall. Jobe also holds the top spot for recruits out of Oklahoma.

Bettendorf (Iowa) Pleasant Valley four-star Andrew Depaepe (6-5, 245) and Detroit Cass Technical four-star Jalen Thompson (6-4, 245), ranked No. 137 and 228 in the country, respectively, complement Jobe on the defensive line. Throw in Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star linebacker Jordan Hall (6-3, 225), the nation's No. 163 prospect, and the Spartans have several pieces to build

around in the front seven from this class.

On the offensive side of things, West Linn, Ore., four-star quarterback Sam Leavitt (6-2, 197) will look to become Michigan State's signal caller of the future. He's the No. 19 gunslinger in the class and No. 309 prospect overall, as well as the Spartans' second-highest ranked offensive commit to Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson four-star offensive tackle Stanton Ramil (6-7, 310). Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College four-star interior offensive lineman Keyshawn Blackstock (6-5, 315), the No. 7 JUCO prospect in the country, will look to help Ramil keep Leavitt upright.

In terms of targets for Leavitt, Michigan State also signed Dexter, Mich., four-star tight end Brennan Parachek, a player possessing a 6-6, 235-pound frame with the athleticism to also star in baseball and basketball in high school. Out wide, the Spartans added Richmond (Va.) Thomas Jefferson three-star Aziah Johnson (6-2, 175) and Houston Klein Cain three-star Jaelen Smith (6-1, 185).

Two other players in the top 500 help bolster the mid-tier talent of the class. Clarkston, Mich., three-star interior offensive lineman Cole Dellinger (6-4, 280) and Denton (Texas) Ryan three-star cornerback Chance Rucker (6-1, 180) will look to be future contributors in East Lansing.

## 24. Nebraska (28)

Given that Nebraska fired its head coach

during the season and new head coach Matt Rhule only arrived on Nov. 27, the Cornhuskers finishing with a top-25 class is quite the accomplishment, even if they did so with quantity rather than quality.

The majority of Nebraska's 28 commitments in the class were reeled in during the two months and change since Rhule's hiring, including the program's three highest-ranked commitments. While the Cornhuskers' class is No. 24 overall and fifth in the Big Ten with 224.13 points, Nebraska's average recruit rating of .8726 was sixth in the conference.

Rhule protected his back yard to land the class' crown jewel. Lincoln (Neb.) East four-star wide receiver Malachi Coleman (6-4, 190), the No. 1 player in the state of Nebraska and the nation's No. 66 overall prospect, signed with the Cornhuskers.

A trio of defensive linemen round out the team's list of four-star commitments with Princewill Umanmielen (6-4, 225) of Manor, Texas; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy's Cameron Lenhardt (6-3, 250); and four-star Riley Van Poppel (6-4, 270) of Argyle, Texas. The three are respectively ranked No. 274, 305 and 382 nationally.

Two more prospects among the nation's top 500 players add to the depth of the class. Nashville (Tenn.) McGavock three-star athlete Demitrius Bell (6-1, 175) pledged to Nebraska on Jan. 24 before signing on Na-

Continued On Page 24

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# Terps Sign Quartet Of Four-Star Prospects

Continued From Page 23

tional Signing Day, and Roswell, Ga., three-star cornerback Ethan Nation (5-10, 165) will look to contribute in the Cornhuskers' secondary.

Nebraska landed 24 three-star prospects to go with its four four-star signees. Sacramento (Calif.) American River Community College three-star defensive end Kai Wallin (6-6, 240), a junior college pickup, rounded out the class.

## 37. Maryland (25)

Maryland checks in as the No. 6 class in the conference by virtue of signing 25 prospects, second most in the Big Ten behind Nebraska's 28 commitments. The class features just four four-star commitments – the lone future Terrapins ranked inside the top 500 – and six total players in the top 1,000. They totaled 206.06 points with an average player rating of .8640.

Hickory, N.C., four-star athlete Rico Walker (6-3, 233) headlines the bunch. Ranked the No. 230 prospect in the country and No. 7 North Carolinian, Walker is viewed as a linebacker at the next level.

If he does indeed play in the defensive front, he's joined by a pair of four-star defensive ends in Olney (Md.) Our Lady Of Good Counsel's Neco Avery (6-5, 230) and Columbia (Md.) Wilde Lake's Dylan Gooden (6-4, 204).

Reinforcing that bunch in a big sign-

ing-day commitment for Maryland Feb. 1 is Altamonte Springs (Fla.) Lake Brantley four-star linebacker Michael Harris (6-1, 190), who instantly became the third-highest rated player in the Terrapins' class.

Avery, the No. 7 prospect from Maryland, is the highest-rated recruit Maryland hit on from its home state. Head coach Mike Locksley signed just two other players in the state's top 20, with Gooden at No. 8 and Potomac Winston Churchill three-star wide receiver Ezekiel Avit (6-3, 180) at No. 18.

Each of Maryland's top four signees are on the defensive side of the ball, with Valdosta (Ga.) Lowndes three-star cornerback Kevin Thomas (6-0, 179) joining Walker, Gooden and Avery. This leaves a lot to be desired on the offensive side of the ball for the Terrapins, as only one of their offensive commits cracked the top 1,000, that being Orlando (Fla.) Jones three-star athlete Dylan Wade (6-4, 240), the nation's No. 970 prospect, who projects as a tight end in college.

## 40. Iowa (22)

The Hawkeyes checked in at seventh in the Big Ten with a team score of 204.24 and an average player rating of .8678, which ranks eighth in the conference.

Iowa City, Iowa., four-star linebacker Ben Kueter (6-3, 220) will hope to continue Iowa's tradition of great linebackers, featuring such players recently as Josey Jewell and Jack Campbell. One of two four-star commits in the class for the Hawkeyes, Kueter is

their lone top-300 prospect, ranked No. 291 in the country and No. 4 in Iowa.

Indianapolis Roncalli four-star offensive tackle Trevor Lauck (6-6, 285) joins him as the second four-star commitment. He'll protect the edge for whichever quarterback is attempting to get the ball to Marion, Iowa, three-star athlete Alex Mota (6-1, 175), the team's third-highest-rated signee and a projected wide receiver.

Other offensive Hawkeye commits in the top 1,000 include Brownwood, Ind., three-star interior offensive lineman Leighton Jones (6-4, 275), St. Louis University three-star tight end Zach Ortwerth (6-4, 220) and Princeton (N.J.) Hun School three-star quarterback Marco Lainez III (6-3, 225).

In terms of defensive prospects Iowa signed in the top 1,000, the list includes Chicago Kenwood Academy three-star safety Kahlil Tate (6-2, 185), Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek three-star defensive end Chase Brackney (6-4, 285), Detroit Martin Luther King three-star defensive end Kenneth Merrieweather (6-3, 235) and Chicago Marist three-star safety John Nestor (6-1, 185).

## 43. Illinois (23)

While Illinois couldn't land any of the top three players from in state, the No. 4 and 5 prospects from its home turf served as the anchors to a class that placed eighth in the Big Ten with 203.20. The average player rating for the Fighting Illini was just .8623, second worst in the conference after Rutgers.

On the bright side, the Fighting Illini at least picked up some solid offensive skill pieces. Chicago Simeon four-star wide receiver Malik Elzy (6-2, 204) is the top-rated recruit in Illinois' class, checking in as the nation's No. 224 overall prospect and No. 33 wideout, and Arthur (Ill.) Sr. four-star athlete Kaden Feagin (6-3, 221) projects as a running back at the next level. Moore Haven, Fla., three-star athlete Kenari Wilcher is a track star in a 5-11, 165-pound frame, ranked the No. 712 prospect in the class.

Beyond Elzy and Feagin, the only other four-star commitment for Illinois is West Orange, N.J., safety Saboor Karriem (6-3, 180), the No. 33 safety and No. 342 overall player in the class.

Poplarville (Miss.) Pearl River Community College three-star cornerback Kaleb Patterson (6-2, 186) is the No. 40 JUCO prospect, but nobody else in the class resides within the top 800. Ardmore, Okla., three-star quarterback Cal Swanson (6-3, 185), ranked No. 42 at the position and No. 848 overall, is notable for the position he plays, but Illinois was his lone FBS offer.

## 44. Minnesota (21)

Only 11 of Minnesota's 21 signees landed in the top 1,000, though the talent was spread across several positions in the class, with linebacker, quarterback and tight end being the only three rooms not to add a nationally ranked player.

In all, the Golden Gophers finished ninth in the conference with 201.22 points, posting an average recruit rating of .8666.

Two four-star prospects pledged their services to the staff of head coach P.J. Fleck. Walled Lake (Mich.) Western running back

Darius Taylor (5-11, 202) and Osseo (Minn.) Senior offensive lineman Jerome Williams (6-4, 295) are the No. 347 and 444 prospects in the country, respectively.

Prior Lake, Minn., three-star offensive lineman Greg Johnson (6-6, 305) will help complement Williams in the interior as the third-highest-rated recruit both in Minnesota's class and from the state of Minnesota.

The Golden Gophers went south to scoop up a pair of top-700 wide receiver commitments, landing Pensacola (Fla.) Pine Forest three-star Donielle Hayes (6-0, 180) and Decatur, Ga., three-star Kenric Lanier (6-2, 180).

Savannah (Ga.) Benedictine Military School three-star cornerback Zaquan Bryan (5-9, 180) is the team's top pledge on defense, rated the nation's No. 78 corner and No. 762 prospect overall, while West Fargo, N.D., three-star defensive end Karter Menz (6-5, 215) will look to rush quarterbacks.

## 46. Northwestern (19)

With two fewer commitments than Minnesota but boasting a slightly higher average player rating (.8695 for the Wildcats and .8666 for the Golden Gophers), Northwestern's class features a touch more talent per player. Eleven future Wildcats also had enough of a pedigree to earn a composite ranking. All told, head coach Pat Fitzgerald signed the Big Ten's No. 10 class with 200.13 points.

Clayton (Ohio) Northmont four-star linebacker Nigel Glover (6-3, 210) headlines the group as the lone four-star commitment. Bolingbrook, Ill., three-star safety Damon Walters (6-1, 175) and Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star defensive end Michael Kilbane (6-4, 240) give him some assistance on defense.

Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwestern three-star Jordan Knox (6-3, 310) and Dearborn (Mich.) Divine Child three-star Dylan Senda (6-5, 275) give Fitzgerald a pair of solid interior offensive linemen to work with, ranked No. 487 and No. 510 in the country, respectively. Joliet (Ill.) Catholic Academy three-star Anthony Birsas (6-5, 270) joins them at the position.

Two top-800 tight ends should help them in their blocking duties, in Houston Strake Jesuit three-star Chico Holt (6-5, 220) and Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater three-star Camp Magee (6-6, 210). St. Louis Christian Brothers three-star defensive end Tyler Grant (6-3, 280), the No. 70 defensive end and No. 668 prospect in the country, will try to give the team's defensive line a boost.

## 57. Rutgers (19)

As of National Signing Day, the composite rankings assigned 446 players as four-star recruits or better. Rutgers was one of two schools in the Big Ten (along with Indiana) to not land a single one of them.

Featuring the lowest average recruit rating in the conference at .8590, the Scarlet Knights didn't sign a single player in the composite top 500 for an 11th-place overall finish in the conference. They totaled 188.51 points. Union City, N.J., three-star offensive lineman JaSire Peterson (6-4, 270) is the lone prospect the team signed who cracked the top 600. Peterson is the No. 47

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# Michigan Finishes With Nation's No. 18 Class

The quality of talent landed by Michigan is a significant step behind the top two schools in the Big Ten – Ohio State and Penn State – for this cycle. While the Buckeyes' and Nittany Lions' classes were largely made up of four-star prospects, only 10 of Michigan's 23 signees held at least a four-star rating. They finished with a team score of 241.74 and an average recruit rating of .8897, the latter of which was fourth in the Big Ten.

That's not to say the Wolverines didn't land some good pieces. But a mere seven prospects in the top 300 – and just one in the top 150 – isn't up to the expectations of head coach Jim Harbaugh and his staff in Ann Arbor, especially coming off consecutive appearances in the College Football Playoff.

Colleyville (Texas) Covenant Christian Academy four-star defensive lineman Enow Etta (6-5, 260), the nation's No. 120 prospect and No. 13 defensive lineman, was the highest-ranked signee for the Wolverines and will bolster Michigan's defensive front going forward.

Dexter, Mich., four-star running back Cole Cabana (6-0, 180) and Kankakee, Ill., four-star cornerback Jyaire Hill (6-1, 170), ranked No. 171 and 172 overall, respectively, headline the rest of U-M's haul. The Wolverines also managed to pluck a top-200 recruit at wide receiver, landing Phenix City (Ala.) Central four-star Karmello English (5-11, 175).

Beyond those players, only a pair of offensive linemen and a linebacker ranked among the top 300 for the Wolverines. This includes West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star offensive lineman

Amir Herring (6-3, 300), Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga four-star offensive tackle Evan Link (6-6, 290) and Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star linebacker Semaj Bridgeman (6-2, 230).

A lean year in the state of Michigan didn't help Harbaugh's efforts. Only nine prospects in the state were given four-star designations, with just two of those players going to Michigan. The No. 1 prospect in the state and its only five-star, Detroit Martin Luther King quarterback Dante Moore (6-3, 210), signed with UCLA. Herring's teammate at West Bloomfield, three-star wide receiver Semaj Morgan (5-10, 175), and Ann Arbor Huron three-star kicker Adam Samaha (6-0, 170) are the other commitments Michigan got from its home state.

The Wolverines did pluck four players from Ohio, though none of them had offers from Ohio State. Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star cornerback Cameron Calhoun (6-0, 170) was the highest-ranked of that grouping, checking in at No. 394 nationally. Youngstown Chaney three-star athlete Jason Hewlett (6-4, 220) – ranked No. 523 – was the only other Ohio signee for Michigan within the top 1,000.

After signing a pair of three-star quarterbacks in the 2022 recruiting class, Michigan added another in this cycle with Kansas City (Mo.) Park Hill athlete Kendrick Bell (6-3, 180). He is the No. 854 overall prospect in the class and is the brother of Michigan wide receiver Ronnie Bell.

– Andy Anders

interior lineman in the country and the No. 553 prospect overall.

Peterson also checks in as the No. 9 prospect from New Jersey, an indication as to how the Scarlet Knights did in their home state. Peterson was the only player in the state's top 10 signed by Rutgers, though New Jersey did produce two of the team's other six commits in the top 1,000. Those are Mullica Hill Clearview Regional School three-star offensive tackle Nick Oliveira (6-5, 280) and Sewell Washington Township three-star offensive lineman John Stone (6-3, 285).

The Scarlet Knights also went outside the United States for a recruit, signing Montreal Cegep du Vieux three-star defensive lineman Djibril Abdou Rahman (6-4, 245). He's the second highest-rated player in Rutgers' class, checking in at No. 644 overall.

Rutgers also signed a pair of top-1,000 athletes, earning the signatures of Washington, Pa., three-star Davoun Fuse (6-4, 190) and Newburgh (N.Y.) Free Academy three-star Deondre Johnson (6-8, 200).

## 58. Wisconsin (15)

Wisconsin may have signed only 15 players in the wake of a coaching transition from Paul Chryst to Luke Fickell, but the quality of the class puts it in a league above some of the Big Ten classes. The Badgers finished 12th in the Big Ten for total points (188.21) but all the way up at fifth in average rating (.8732).

Fickell's Ohio connections paid off in a big way as he pulled in Hamilton (Ohio) Badin four-star athlete Braedyn Moore (6-2, 190), who had formerly committed to play for Fickell at Cincinnati and also held offers from Boston College, Illinois, Indiana and Minnesota.

Moore wound up as the highest-rated player in the Badgers' class, the No. 13 athlete in the country and No. 318 player overall. He's one of three four-star commitments Wisconsin landed, one of them another former Fickell commit at Cincinnati in Ros-

eville, Mich., four-star cornerback Amare Snowden (6-3, 187). Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star offensive lineman James Durand (6-4, 280), who stayed committed through the coaching change, rounds out the list of Wisconsin's four-stars.

Moore is expected to play defensive back at the next level, with he and Snowden forming a strong tandem in that position group. Three more cornerbacks inside the top 800 join them, with Naples, Fla., three-star Jonas Duclona (5-10, 180), Marietta, Ga., three-star Jace Arnold (5-10, 168) and College Station, Texas, three-star A.J. Tisdell (5-10, 180) also in the class.

Fickell also secured signatures from a pair of top-700 offensive skill pieces. The No. 1 prospect from Wisconsin, Milwaukee King three-star running back Nate White (6-0, 175), stayed home to give the Badgers the nation's No. 51 ball carrier and No. 689 overall prospect. Las Vegas Bishop Gorman three-star wide receiver Trech Kekahuna (5-11, 180), the nation's No. 67 wideout and No. 483 overall recruit, was another quality pickup for the Badgers.

The only remaining prospects in the top 1,000 for Wisconsin were La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy three-star athlete Justin Taylor (6-1, 185), ranked the No. 929 overall prospect, and Batavia, Ill. three-star linebacker Tyler Jansey (6-1, 215), ranked 854th overall.

## 66. Purdue (16)

Purdue finished with the second-worst class in the Big Ten for total points (179.36) and was tied with Illinois second-to-last for average player rating (.8623). The Boilermakers' class was largely held up by Indianapolis Cathedral four-star defensive lineman Kendrick Gilbert (6-5, 250), who was not only the lone four-star but also the lone player in Purdue's class to crack the top 700, but he flipped to Kentucky on National Signing Day.

Coaching changes always make recruit-

ing tough, particularly when they come without much warning. Head coach Jeff Brohm left unexpectedly for Louisville, and the Boilermakers hired former Illinois defensive coordinator Ryan Walters on Dec. 13, just eight days before the early signing period began.

Nine players jumped ship from Purdue's class in total this cycle, with eight leaving after Brohm's departure. Five of the commitments were ranked among the top 700 prospects in the country, including Gilbert and Baton Rouge (La.) Woodlawn four-star quarterback Rickie Collins (6-2, 190), though he reneged on his pledge prior to Brohm's departure.

Carmel, Ind. three-star defensive end Will Heldt (6-6, 240) and Nashville (Tenn.)

Father Ryan three-star defensive lineman Drake Carlson (6-4, 260), both just outside the top 700, are the two highest-rated signees for the Boilermakers. Factor in Lexington (Ky.) Frederick Douglass three-star Jamarrion Harkless (6-4, 320), and three of Purdue's top five commitments are defensive linemen.

That trend is only broken up by Festus, Mo., three-star wide receiver Arhmad Branch (6-1, 175) and Fortville (Ind.) Mount Vernon three-star tight end George Burhenn (6-5, 205), the nation's No. 781 and No. 802 prospects, respectively. Beyond them, Walters signed just two more top 1,000 players, Lagrange (Ohio) Keystone three-star wide receiver Ryne Shackelford (6-0, 175) and Westfield, Ind., three-star safety Dillon Thieneman (6-0, 190).

## 67. Indiana (15)

Indiana joins Rutgers and Purdue as the only Big Ten teams not to sign a four-star player in the 2023 cycle, turning out the conference's worst class with a total score of 177.18. The Hoosiers' average player rating of .8629 was fourth-worst in the conference.

While the Hoosiers did not sign a four-star prospect, one of their signees – Shreveport (La.) Northwood three-star defensive end TaDerius Collins (6-4, 240) – did come close to four-star status, finishing as the No. 458 overall prospect in the class.

Indiana signed one other recruit in the top 600, Lake City (Fla.) Columbia three-star safety Amare Ferrell (6-2, 192). The Hoosiers also grabbed two JUCO transfers at the safety position in Independence (Kan.) Community College three-star Tyrik McDaniel (6-1, 200) and Ellisville (Miss.) Jones College three-star Jamison Kelly (6-1, 205). They're the No. 51 and 67 transfers at the JUCO level, respectively.

Three other top-1,000 recruits join head coach Tom Allen's squad, with Downey (Calif.) St. Pius X-St. Matthias Academy three-star cornerback Jordan Shaw (6-0, 170), Greensburg (Ind.) Community three-star tight end Sam West (6-5, 205) and Duluth, Ga. three-star tight end Anthony Miller Jr. rounding out the class.



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# Sermon Lone OSU Representative At Super Bowl

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Then there was one. Of the numerous former Ohio State players who were on the active rosters for the playoff-bound NFL teams, the list of survivors is down to running back Trey Sermon of the Philadelphia Eagles.

Blame the Kansas City Chiefs for the paucity of Ohio State players. They defeated the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20 on Jan. 29 in the AFC Championship Game to advance to Super Bowl LVII on Feb. 12 in Glendale, Ariz.

The Bengals, who lost 23-20 to the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl LVI, had six ex-Buckeyes on the active roster, assuming star quarterback Joe Burrow is included. In the NFC title game on Jan. 29, Sermon's Eagles downed the San Francisco 49ers in a 31-7 contest, thus eliminating defensive end Nick Bosa.

So, if a neutral fan is looking for a rooting interest for the Super Bowl based on Buckeyes, then "Fly, Eagles Fly."

However, Sermon is unlikely to dress for the game. He is fourth on the running back depth chart behind Miles Sanders, Kenneth Gainwell and Boston Scott and has been on the inactive list since Oct. 9. Sermon had his only two carries of the season the previous week against Jacksonville, rushing for 19 yards. Each run resulted in

a first down.

It wasn't what he had hoped for after being claimed off waivers on Sept. 2 following one season with San Francisco, where he was a third-round pick (88th) in the 2021 NFL draft. Sermon played nine games (two starts) as a rookie before an ankle injury put him on injured reserve the remainder of the season.

He finished the season with 167 yards on 41 rushes (4.1 per carry) with one touchdown. His most productive game was against Seattle in just the third game of his career, rushing for 89 yards on 19 carries. Being released by the 49ers at the end of the 2022 training camp was something he didn't expect.

"I definitely didn't see it coming, so when it happened it was a lot to take in," Sermon told PhiladelphiaEagles.com on Sept. 7. "At the same time, it was like, 'What's next?' I knew I had to figure out a plan and figure out what happened and learn from it. Then I got the call that I was coming to Philadelphia, and I focused on what is ahead for me and this opportunity. It's a great team here, a good running back room with guys who are very talented and helpful to me.

"It made me realize that the NFL is a business and, yeah, you hear about it, but once it happens to you and you see it firsthand, it's real. At the same time, the way I approached this year, I wouldn't change it at all. I'm a totally different player than I

was last year. I'm healthy and I'm confident in what I'm doing and I'm excited to learn the system and be the best player I can be and help this football team win."

He had experience switching teams before. Sermon played for Oklahoma for three seasons before becoming a graduate transfer at Ohio State for what turned out to be the pandemic-abbreviated 2020 season. At Oklahoma, he rushed for 2,076 yards (6.1) with 22 touchdowns.

In eight games for the Buckeyes, he ran 870 yards (7.5) and four touchdowns while catching 12 passes for 95 yards.

He rushed for a school-record 331 yards vs. Northwestern in the Big Ten title game, breaking Eddie George's mark of 313, and had 193 yards against Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal. Unfortunately, he was injured on the first play of the championship game loss to Alabama.

He said his experiences in college prepared him for the adjustments in schemes going from the 49ers to Philadelphia.

"There is definitely a big difference between what we did in San Francisco and what we're doing here," Sermon said prior to the season. "But what helps me is that it's similar to what I did in college, at Ohio State and Oklahoma. Just having that background, something to revert back to, I feel like it will help me being here. There is more zone running here, whereas in San Francisco it's more of that wide-zone scheme, so I hope to show my best here."

Despite Sermon's lack of playing time this season, head coach Nick Sirianni said on Feb. 1 that he still believes in him.

"Trey has had some good games this year, and we're excited about what the future holds for Trey," he said.

## Bengals Bounced

There could have been a half-dozen former Buckeyes headed to the Super Bowl, including offensive tackle Isaiah Prince, who was promoted from the practice squad but did not play in the AFC Championship Game, but a last-second field goal by the Chiefs put an abrupt end to Cincinnati's season.

One of the stars of the postseason was Bengals defensive end Sam Hubbard. After setting an NFL postseason record with a 98-yard scoop-and-score against Buffalo, he had another fumble recovery against Kansas City that helped set up a touchdown to tie the score at 20.

Safety Vonn Bell led the Bengals with seven tackles, and cornerback Eli Apple had six tackles against the Chiefs while Burrow was 26 of 41 for 270 yards, a touchdown and two interceptions. Punter Drue Chrisman averaged 49.0 yards on four punts, but his last one for 54 yards was returned 29 yards by Skyy Moore that set up the winning field goal for Kansas City.

Meanwhile, Bosa had a rough day against the Eagles. He was gashed in the leg while standing on the sideline when two players collided near him in the first quarter, but he recovered and made four tackles in the game, including two for loss.

## He's Ours

Burrow continues to be the center of attention as to which school can "claim" him as their own, with Buckeyes and Tigers each holding on fiercely to take credit for the signal caller.

He has Ohio roots beginning with a stellar prep career at The Plains High School in Athens. He redshirted at Ohio State as a freshman in 2015 and had limited playing time the next two seasons behind J.T. Barrett.

Going into the 2018 season, Burrow lost the starter's battle to Dwayne Haskins and transferred to LSU, where in 2019 he won the Heisman Trophy and led the Tigers to a national championship.

So, OSU or LSU? In reality, both programs should consider him one of their own, but that would end the debate, and what fun would that be? Adding fuel the discussion, a video of Burrow from earlier this season went viral the week of the Kansas City game.

In it, he expressed his appreciation for all things Ohio State while mentioning head coach Ryan Day, quarterback coach Corey Dennis and Mickey Marotti, assistant athletic director for football sports performance:

"I'm definitely still a Buckeye," Burrow said. "I graduated from there. I still have relationships to this day that I wouldn't have without being there. I'm still in contact with Coach Mick and Coach Day, Corey, all those guys, so I'm still a Buckeye."

He also noted that he attended the first game of the season against Notre Dame. LSU fans weren't happy, but ESPN analyst and SEC mouthpiece Paul Finebaum took a poke at the Ohio State faithful.

"Ohio State has to claim something," Finebaum said. "I mean, they don't have a lot to wrap their arms around these days. So if the Buckeyes want to claim Joe Burrow, that's great."

Of course, Ohio State is not the only school tugging for the affection of former players. Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts finished at Oklahoma in 2019 after starting his career at Alabama. In a press release, the Sooners noted that the eight former Oklahoma players on the two Super Bowl teams are the most from any school. That list includes Sermon and Hurts, and despite similar situations to both Burrow and Hurts, Sermon's duality hasn't come under the same scrutiny.

Former Alabama quarterback Greg McElroy was diplomatic when discussing Hurts, saying, "They can both claim him because he started and was a (Heisman Trophy) finalist at Oklahoma. He was at Alabama for three years and started in two national championship games."

FOX Sports college football analyst Joel Klatt was more precise, claiming that Hurts – who, for his part, often wears Alabama gear to press conferences for the Eagles – is the player he is now because he had the ability to transfer.

"That's why I think it's somewhat comical Alabama is claiming Jalen Hurts," he said. "Listen, I get it and I'm sure he has a big place in his heart for Alabama, but he had to leave."



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# Hartline Adding Responsibilities In OC Role

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Over the course of the past five years, Brian Hartline has rapidly built up a nationally recognized reputation throughout college football.

Joining the support staff at his alma mater in 2017, the former Ohio State wideout has quickly risen up the ranks while garnering attention from nearly all corners of the sport. Hartline was thrown into the fire in 2018, serving as the interim wide receivers coach after then-position coach Zach Smith was let go in July, and he was later promoted to full-time receivers coach before emerging as one of the Buckeyes' most impactful recruiters and developers of talent.

Since Hartline took the reins as wide receivers coach, the Buckeyes have boasted five wideouts with 1,000-yard campaigns – including back-to-back seasons with a pair of receivers crossing the mark in 2021 and 2022 – and he has played a role in sending five players to the NFL by way of the draft, with another on the way in Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Not only has Hartline's reputation skyrocketed in recent seasons, so has the buzz regarding his future. Hartline's name has been thrown out for potential offensive coordinator and even head coaching positions, but he has remained steadfast in his commitment to Ohio State.

In the leadup to the Buckeyes' appearance in the Peach Bowl, Hartline's name was connected to the open head coaching job at Cincinnati with reports that he planned to interview, but he made it clear that he was remaining at his alma mater.

"I am aware of the speculation surrounding my name connected to other vacant coaching positions and appreciate all of the support, but right now my heart is at Ohio State and I do not have any plans to go anywhere else," Hartline tweeted on Dec. 1.

On Jan. 13, Hartline's patience paid off. The Canton, Ohio, native was elevated to Ohio State's offensive coordinator position, filling the opening after incumbent coordinator Kevin Wilson took the head coaching job at Tulsa.

As the responsibilities and expectations have grown for Hartline, he said on Feb. 1 that he's relying on his past experiences to help settle into the offensive coordinator role.

"It's not just carrying a title, I don't believe," Hartline said. "It's probably more than that. But in any profession, you continue to build more responsibilities and how you handle those responsibilities, and how those fingers reach outside those responsibilities. You're supposed to really just show your growth potential."

"I like to think I did a good job with that, but again, it's still a reset," he continued. "Here's where I'm at now: Where can I grow from here and how can I help this team accomplish the goals we want to accomplish?"

Hartline's promotion will require him to wear several hats outside of the receivers

room, with the opportunity to call plays on the table as well as the ability to serve as a recruiter for the entire offense rather than just for the wideouts. Hartline has already served in an expanded offensive role as the passing game coordinator last season, tasked with scheming Ohio State's aerial attack. Head coach Ryan Day said he has the utmost confidence in Hartline to take over the responsibilities of offensive coordinator.

"You follow all the way through high school, and then he comes to Ohio State and plays at a high level. Then he goes on to the NFL and not only has an NFL career but a sustained NFL career and maximized himself," Day said on Feb. 1. "And then he steps into a situation here, where he gets thrust into the wide receiver (coach) role and does an excellent job. And he has now really, in my opinion, done the job of solidifying himself as the best wide receiver coach in the country."

Day said Hartline has continued to develop as both a recruiter and developer of Ohio State's wide receiver talent and that he's continued to take on challenges – such as his passing game coordinator role and expanding his knowledge on protections and the running game – in addition to his recruiting responsibilities.

"His recruiting is certainly important, with his understanding of Ohio State and he loves Ohio State," Day said. "He's going to be able to now recruit the whole entire offensive room. His knowledge of offensive football is excellent, and now he's got an opportunity to take that next step in his progression, and I think that's natural for him."

Hartline has been regarded as one of the best recruiters in the country during his time with Ohio State. He's signed five five-star prospects dating back to the 2019 recruiting class and currently holds the commitment of Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, the No. 2 overall player in 2024.

While Hartline is able to recruit the big fish, he also reeled in four-star receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Jameson Williams, both of whom were ranked outside the top 10 for their position but turned out to be among the nation's elite in production.

Now with the opportunity to spread his recruiting wealth across the offense, Hartline said he plans to take a hands-off approach while helping in more of an oversight role in the positions outside of receiver.

"I think my job as a coordinator is to help facilitate the position coaches to go after the guys they want, not to go get the guys," Hartline said. "I lean heavily on the position coaches to help guide me on where they want me and where they don't. That's really important."

As Hartline moves into a more holistic role in regard to recruiting – though his primary focus will remain on the receivers – he said the approach doesn't change despite having to bounce from position to position.

"The biggest part is, through recruiting, I feel like the relationship part can be built

because if there's no relationship, there's no coaching," he said. "You can only coach a guy as hard as the relationship allows. And I like to speed that process up through recruiting, so when they get here, they already know when I call it's for a reason."

In addition to Hartline leading Ohio State's recruiting efforts on the offensive side of the ball, he also may serve as the unit's play caller. Following reports that Day would relinquish play-calling duties for this upcoming season, he confirmed on Feb. 1 that the Buckeyes are looking at several options. This includes Hartline potentially taking over those responsibilities, with spring practice serving as a trial run.

"What we're going to do is go through the spring – and I talked to Brian about that – and create some environments where we can have (defensive coordinator) Jim (Knowles) call (the defense) and Brian call (the offense)," Day said. "Then we'll come up for air at the end of the spring and figure out what that dynamic looks like going into the preseason and then into the season."

"So we won't decide on any of that now, but (we) certainly will give him an opportunity to call it this spring and see how that goes."

Hartline said he feels he won't have any issues running the unit because of the infrastructure already put in place by Day.

"(I'd be) pretty comfortable just because of the surrounding party I have," Hartline said. "The support staff I have around me really empowers me, so my confidence comes from having them. I'd be very confident."

As Hartline progresses into his first season at the helm of the Ohio State offense, he said his focus is on continuing the tradition of overwhelming success on that side of the ball while maximizing the talent put in front of him.

"It's definitely multifaceted," he said of coaching the entire offense. "As a coach in general, you wear a lot of hats. Being an offensive coordinator is putting your finger-



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**MOVING UP THE RANKS — Brian Hartline has emerged as one of the nation's top assistant coaches since becoming Ohio State's wide receivers coach, and he has been named OSU's next offensive coordinator.**

print on things that you find more important than others.

"My job as a receivers coach is to get the best out of the receivers. My job as an offensive coordinator is to maximize each guy in (the offensive) room, each coach in that room, to what they're capable of. That doesn't change in the grand scheme, but the dynamics within the groups are a little different."

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# Smith Gives Vote Of Confidence To Holtmann

Prior to Ohio State's 65-60 loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 2, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith alleviated any buzz regarding Chris Holtmann's security as the Buckeyes' head coach.

Smith told The Columbus Dispatch's Adam Jardy that Holtmann is the "coach of the future" while adding that he's "confident in what Chris is doing" just before the Buckeyes tipped off what would be their eighth loss in the last nine games.

## COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

Holtmann's status as the Buckeyes' head coach was secured prior to the beginning of this season when he inked a three-year contract extension that would keep him in Columbus through the 2027-28 campaign. Smith stressed patience regarding Holtmann's tenure, pointing to the foundation that Holtmann has created in regard to stringing together a pair of top-10 recruiting classes in 2022 and 2023.

"These are young guys," Smith said. "I really look forward to them continuing to grow and get better. There are a lot of games left. We've just got to keep getting better."

Since taking over as head coach of the Buckeyes in 2017, Holtmann has led Ohio State to five consecutive 20-win seasons, as well as four NCAA Tournament appearances – with the lone absence coming in 2020 when the tournament was canceled due to the pandemic. Holtmann's total record at Ohio State sits at 118-68, but the Buckeyes have gotten off to just an 11-12 start with a 3-9 mark in Big Ten play this season.

### Holtmann Ejected In Loss To Wisconsin

With less than a minute remaining in the first half of Ohio State's loss to Wisconsin, Buckeye forward Justice Sueing went to work on the low block.

Sueing backed down Wisconsin forward Tyler Wahl, using his body to try to create separation from Wahl, who stands 6-9. As Sueing sent his body into Wahl for the second time, Wahl flailed to the ground, selling the contact just enough to draw a charge on Sueing.

The charge call sent Holtmann – who felt Wahl had flopped – into a frenzy. Holtmann quickly picked up a technical foul, and despite the best efforts of forward Zed Key and the assistant coaches to pull Holtmann away from the officials, he was almost immediately assessed another technical by referee John Higgins.

"The first technical was warranted," Holtmann said after the game. "I deserved the first technical, (but) I don't believe the second one was. But officials are going to do what they want to do, and I've got to be more composed in that situation. I wasn't composed, and that's on me."

It was Holtmann's second ejection since taking the reins at Ohio State and marked his first since Feb. 25, 2021, when the Buck-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**EARLY EXIT — Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann was ejected with 27 seconds remaining in the first half of the Buckeyes' 65-60 loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 2. It's only the second time Holtmann has been tossed in his six seasons at Ohio State.**

eyes fell to Michigan State 71-67.

Holtmann explained that he felt the officials were lacking in their communication with him for the entire first half and said he never got an explanation regarding the charging call and his ejection.

"I couldn't talk to them all night," Holtmann said. "All we want to do as coaches is talk to officials. I couldn't talk to one of them."

Holtmann's pair of technicals resulted in four free throws for guard Connor Essagian, who converted all four attempts and lifted Wisconsin's lead to 41-27 with 27 seconds remaining in the half. The free throws didn't end up being the difference in the loss but still played a key role in Ohio State's 65-60 defeat.

Key, who tried to hold Holtmann back after he received his first technical foul, said he felt he needed to step in to try to prevent his coach from getting ejected, but it ended up being for naught.

"I was just going over there to help stop the tech from happening, but if the ref is going to call it, he's going to call it," Key said. "I just didn't want him to get thrown out, and I saw the ref was already fired up."

Key also added that Holtmann's ejection gave the Buckeyes some juice after slogging through a largely lifeless first half.

"It definitely gave us some extra fire," Key said. "(Isaac Likekele) said, 'We've got to pick it up, Holtmann is out there fighting for us.'"

Associate head coach Jake Diebler filled in for Holtmann for the second half, and the Buckeyes whittled an 18-point deficit to as little as two during the frame but couldn't

get over the hump.

"It was good," Likekele said. "(Diebler) is an extension of Coach Holtmann. They do a good job of being on one page together and communicating. So when Coach Holtmann had to step out, (Diebler) filled in just fine."

As for Holtmann, he reiterated his gripes with how the moment was handled on both ends but remained steadfast in his opinion that the charging call should have been ruled a flop on Wahl.

"I've got to be better in that situation. I would like to be able to talk to officials, that's all I would ask," Holtmann said. "I've coached hundreds of games and not gotten thrown out. The first technical was warranted. I thought it was a flop, I think the video concluded that it was a flop. They're trying to get (flops) out of the game, and they didn't."

### Holtmann Teases Potential Double-Big Lineup

In the closing minutes of Ohio State's 86-70 loss to Indiana on Jan. 28, the Buckeyes utilized a lineup that placed Key and freshman center Felix Okpara on the court at the same time, marking the first time the duo shared the floor this season.

Key and Okpara shared the frontcourt for just 26 seconds of game action before Holtmann sent Key to the bench in favor of Eugene Brown III for the final 3:02 of play. Although the double-big lineup was used only briefly against the Hoosiers, Holtmann said on Jan. 30 during his weekly radio show on 97.1 The Fan that the Buckeyes plan to utilize the big-man duo more in the future, primarily next season.

"It is something that we definitely plan to play next year, for sure," Holtmann said. "There's absolutely intent to play both of those guys together. Will we do it some more this year? We might, on certain matchups."

"Defensively is the biggest challenge. That's why you kind of need the whole off-season. But there's no question that will be a big part of what we do next year. The reality is there will still be some times when we see it this year."

Although Holtmann displayed some apprehension toward the duo's defensive potential, noting that Key may struggle with quicker, more athletic power forwards, the benefit of having both Key and Okpara on the floor at a given time could help shore up the Buckeyes' rebounding ability in stretches.

"The biggest thing right now is the ability to rebound the ball better," Holtmann said. "That's our biggest issue right now – we're not rebounding the ball at the level we need to. It's a variety of things, but having that kind of length and size at the rim and rebounding will definitely help, and it would allow us to rebound offensively better too."

"Those are two long guys and they're two big bodies, and again there are some teams that play a traditional four and five and old-school four and five, and that's kind of what it would be."

Okpara has traditionally played behind Key this season, primarily operating off the bench. Holtmann said Okpara has made several strides with his game, which could allow him to share the floor with Key with more ease.

In 23 games this season, Okpara has posted 3.3 points per game while leading the Buckeyes in blocks with 25 on the campaign.

"His footwork has gotten better in the low post, so he's got the ability to score some in the low post," Holtmann said. "He's going to be a really good player. He's got great length and great athleticism. He's got good enough touch to score. He'll make free throws at a higher level. I don't want to put too much on him, but he's got to keep growing. He's growing in front of our eyes."

### Sensabaugh Picks Up Fourth Big Ten Frosh Of The Week Honor

Ohio State forward Brice Sensabaugh was named the Big Ten Freshman of the Week for the fourth time this season on Jan. 23.

Sensabaugh averaged 22.5 points during the Buckeyes' two games that week against Nebraska and Iowa. He helped Ohio State snap its five-game losing streak against the Hawkeyes with a career-best 27 points on Jan. 21. Sensabaugh shot the ball at an efficient rate during the week, connecting on 57.1 percent of attempts, including a 58.3 mark from beyond the arc.

On the season, Sensabaugh has led the Buckeyes with 17.3 points per game, which ranks second among freshmen nationally, trailing only Alabama forward Brandon Miller.

Sensabaugh is the first Buckeye since D'Angelo Russell – who earned seven Big Ten Freshman of the Week nods in his one season with Ohio State – to garner at least



2022-23 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

11-12 Overall (3-9 Big Ten)  
Statistics through games of Feb. 5

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	23-13	550-23.9	143-285	.502	48-103	.466	63-78	.808	29-99	128-5.6	60-5	22	41	9	12	397-17.3
Justice Sueing	23-20	661-28.7	109-244	.447	15-59	.254	53-78	.679	42-69	111-4.8	39-1	43	44	9	16	286-12.4
Zed Key	22-20	561-25.5	97-176	.551	7-24	.292	54-82	.659	67-102	169-7.7	51-1	17	29	22	14	255-11.6
Sean McNeil	23-22	670-29.1	75-179	.419	38-100	.380	29-33	.879	7-41	48-2.1	32-1	33	21	3	9	217-9.4
Bruce Thornton	23-23	666-28.9	75-174	.431	26-66	.394	29-38	.763	5-58	63-2.7	38-1	60	34	1	19	205-8.9
Tanner Holden	22-0	326-14.8	29-63	.460	6-12	.500	24-28	.857	15-42	57-2.6	28-0	11	19	2	10	88-4.0
Isaac Likekele	20-13	447-22.4	35-94	.372	1-7	.143	8-18	.444	26-67	93-4.7	37-1	58	22	6	16	79-4.0
Roddy Gayle Jr.	23-1	318-13.8	35-88	.398	9-29	.310	10-13	.769	5-30	35-1.5	35-0	22	18	6	12	89-3.9
Felix Okpara	23-2	298-12.9	34-60	.567	1-1	1.000	12-20	.600	30-46	76-3.3	36-1	6	11	25	9	81-3.5
Bowen Hardman	5-0	17-3.5	4-8	.500	4-8	.500	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	2-0	0	0	0	0	12-2.4
Eugene Brown III	11-1	88-8.0	7-15	.467	3-8	.375	2-2	1.000	4-10	14-1.3	11-0	0	1	4	3	19-1.7
Kalen Etzler	7-0	30-4.3	3-8	.375	1-5	.200	0-0	.000	2-10	12-1.7	4-0	1	2	0	0	7-1.0
Owen Spencer	5-0	13-2.5	1-6	.167	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	5-2	7-1.4	0-0	1	1	0	0	3-0.6
Colby Baumann	3-0	06-2.0	0-2	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	2-1	3-1.0	0-0	1	1	0	0	0-0.0
Team									33-39	72		6				
Total	23	4650	647-1402	.461	159-423	.376	285-392	.727	272-616	888-38.6	373-11	275	250	87	120	1738-75.6
Opponents	23	4650	568-1370	.415	152-500	.304	276-384	.719	236-539	775-33.7	379-4	274	261	65	115	1564-68.0

mann said he was concerned about resuming play from that point forward, citing player safety.

"I wasn't sure I wanted the game to resume under these circumstances," he said. "Obviously, it ended up fine, but that would have been a significant thing, and thank God that it did not injure Brice or any other player."

Former Guard Washington  
Waived By Phoenix Suns

Former Ohio State guard Duane Washington Jr. was waived by the Phoenix Suns on Feb. 1 after just one season with the organization.

Washington played in 31 games for the Suns this season, averaging 7.9 points per game while shooting 36.7 percent from the field and 36.0 percent from three-point range. Phoenix was the second stop of his professional career after he spent the 2021-22 season with the Indiana Pacers, where he produced 9.9 points per game while shooting 40.5 percent from the field.

Washington spent three seasons at Ohio State, posting career averages of 11.4 points, 2.9 rebounds and 1.8 assists. He led the Buckeyes in scoring in 2020-21, averaging 16.4 points per game while shooting 41.0 percent from the field. He went undrafted in the 2021 NBA draft before being scooped up by the Pacers as a free agent.

Although his NBA future is now in question, several teams are expected to be in the running for Washington's services with the regular season hitting its stretch run.

said it has been difficult to watch the replay and see from a third-person point of view how close it truly got to striking him.

"I didn't really see anything," he said. "In the moment, I didn't realize how close it was. It was kind of crazy. Obviously, it's thanks to God it didn't hit me. I don't know what would have happened (if it did)."

After the game, Indiana clarified that the piece that fell from the scoreboard was "an unused unistrut bracket" that was 18 inches in length and weighed just over a pound. The university said it believes that the piece was loosened by vibrations caused by the music and crowd noise in the arena.

Immediately following the game, Holt-

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

four Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors. Sensabaugh previously earned three consecutive nods during a stretch that spanned from Dec. 19 through Jan. 3.

Sensabaugh Nearly Struck By  
Falling Debris At Indiana

As Ohio State took the floor to start the second half during its loss at Indiana, Sens-

abaugh strode across the court to meet his teammates who were getting into a huddle prior to the resumption of play.

Just as he crossed midcourt, a narrow metal rod fell from the scoreboard at Assembly Hall and nearly hit the Buckeyes' star forward, clattering to the floor just a few feet away. In the moment, Sensabaugh didn't see the rod plummet to the floor but



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# Ohio State Suffers Extended Losing Streak

By JACK EMERSON  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After Ohio State took down Iowa on Jan. 21, hope began to creep in for the Buckeye faithful as the Buckeyes had snapped their five-game losing streak and it appeared they had finally built up some momentum for the stretch run in Big Ten play.

However, Ohio State came crashing right back to Earth, losing four consecutive games since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

Losing nine of their last 10 games, the Buckeyes dipped below .500 (11-12) for the first time since the 2015-16 season. They also find themselves in the cellar of the Big Ten with a 3-9 conference mark, tying them for 12th in the conference with Nebraska, sitting above only Minnesota – which scored its lone conference win against the Buckeyes on Jan. 12.

## Poor Shooting Costs OSU In Loss To Illinois

Ohio State could not keep pace with Illinois on Jan. 24 at the State Farm Center in Champaign, Ill., falling 69-60 for its sixth loss in its last seven games.

The Illini (14-6, 5-4 Big Ten) gashed the Buckeyes (11-9, 3-6) in transition, outscoring Ohio State 16-1 in fastbreak situations. Illinois also dominated the boards, sparking several of their fastbreak opportunities with a 44-30 advantage on the glass.

“I just didn’t think we ever had the kind of bite and fight we needed in a game like this,” said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. “Ultimately, that’s on me. That’s my responsibility, and we didn’t have it.”

Forward Brice Sensabaugh and guard Sean McNeil combined to score Ohio State’s first 12 points and were the only two Buckeyes to hit a field goal during the game’s first 10 minutes. Ohio State hit just four of its first 16 shots, including a span of eight straight misses, but Illinois couldn’t take full advantage and held just a 16-12 lead with 9:43 to play in the first half.

After a triple from guard Bruce Thornton and a jumper from Sensabaugh helped the Buckeyes cut the deficit to 19-17, Illinois ripped off a 13-4 run over the next 5:36 to open up a 32-21 lead – their largest of the first half – with forward Matthew Mayer capping off the stretch with a three-pointer with 2:28 remaining in the stanza.

Guard Roddy Gayle Jr. stopped the bleeding with a three-pointer, and guard Eugene Brown III added a layup to pull the Buckeyes within six, but Illinois guard Jayden Epps hit a pair of late free throws to give the Illini a 34-26 advantage heading into the locker room.

Ohio State shot just 10 of 32 (31.3 percent) during the opening frame while the Illini countered with a 45.5 percent mark from the field (10 of 22) despite shooting 3 of 13 from deep.

Illinois quickly stretched their lead to 12 to open the second half. The Buckeyes cut the Illinois lead to seven after Thornton finished a three-point play to make it 38-31 with 18:07 to play, but the Illini countered with a 10-0 run to pull ahead 48-31 with 15:18 to play in regulation.

Forwards Justice Sueing and Zed Key, with six and five points respectively, helped spark

a 13-4 run to cut Illinois’ lead to 52-44 with 10:47 to play, but a pair of emphatic dunks in transition by Illinois forward Coleman Hawkins and guard Ty Rodgers expanded their lead to 64-48 with 6:17 left.

Illinois closed out the game with ease, never letting the Buckeyes get closer than the final margin of nine points.

“I just didn’t feel like we played as well as we needed to,” Holtmann said. “They’re a really good team, they’re playing well, obviously they were coming off of a loss. So, we might have still performed well and lost, it’s possible in this league, but I’m disappointed with both of our preparation and our effort.”

The Illini held Ohio State to 36.7 percent (22 of 60) shooting for the game, including a 4-of-10 mark from three. Sensabaugh was Ohio State’s leading scorer with 14 points on 5-of-13 shooting while Sueing added 13 points.

Guard Terrence Shannon Jr. had a game-high 17 points for the Illini, hitting all nine of his free-throw attempts, while adding seven rebounds and three assists. Epps and Mayer added 14 and 12 points, respectively and Hawkins had 11 points and six assists in a game played before 15,544.

## Buckeyes Collapse Late In First Half At Indiana

Indiana guard Jalen Hood-Schifino scored a game-high 24 points, sparked by 6-of-9 shooting from three-point range, to help the Hoosiers hand Ohio State an 86-70 loss before 17,222 at Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall in Bloomington, Ind., on Jan. 28.

Indiana (15-6, 6-4) utilized a 17-1 run to close the first half and run away from Ohio State, and the Buckeyes (11-10, 3-7) never truly recovered from the stretch while dropping the seventh game out of their last eight. Ohio State shot 44.1 percent from the field (26 of 59) while Sensabaugh led the Buckeyes with 23 points on 9-of-17 shooting.

The Hoosiers shot 50.0 percent (32 of 64), while connecting on 10 of 20 three-point attempts, to stifle the Buckeyes. Indiana added 23 second-chance points – sparked by 15 of fensive rebounds – in the win.

“I thought it was our poorest defensive effort in a while,” Holtmann said. “Give Indiana credit, they’re obviously playing well right now. But I thought it was our poorest defensive output on the year.”

Ohio State opened the game with a 9-2 run, sparked by five points from Sensabaugh during the stretch. But the Hoosiers quickly responded with an 11-0 run of their own, carried by a trio of three-pointers from Hood-Schifino, to take a 13-9 lead with 13:56 to play in the first half.

The Buckeyes fought back to take a 21-18 lead with 9:17 remaining in the frame, but it was the last time Ohio State would hold the lead for the rest of the night. Indiana surged on a 9-0 run, sparked by a three-pointer from Hood-Schifino and a technical foul by Holtmann, to go ahead 27-21 with 7:38 left in the half.

McNeil later strung together a pair of three-point plays on back-to-back possessions to knot the game at 29 with 5:37 remaining in the first half, but it was all Hoosiers from there. Indiana closed the half on the previously mentioned 17-1 run, including the final 15

Illinois 69, Ohio State 60									
Jan. 24, 2023									
State Farm Center • Champaign, Illinois									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (11-9, 3-6)		26	34	60					
Illinois (14-6, 5-4)		34	35	69					
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Thornton	28	3-7	1-2	0-1	0	2	8		
McNeil	33	2-6	2-2	1-4	3	0	7		
Sensabaugh	24	5-13	4-7	2-2	1	2	14		
Likekele	26	2-8	1-4	1-4	2	1	5		
Key	23	2-8	4-5	1-2	1	5	8		
Holden	6	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Gayle	18	1-4	0-0	1-0	1	0	3		
Brown	8	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	2	2		
Sueing	21	6-11	0-0	2-2	0	3	13		
Okpara	13	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	22-60	12-20	10-20	8	16	60		
Percentages: FG: 36.7%. FT: 60.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-10 (Thornton 1-2, McNeil 1-2, Gayle 1-1, Sueing 1-2, Sensabaugh 0-2, Key 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 3 (Key, Sueing, Okpara). Turnovers: 6 (Key 2, Thornton, McNeil, Sensabaugh, Likekele). Steals: 6 (Gayle 3, Thornton, Likekele, Key)									
Illinois	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Shannon	36	4-10	9-9	3-4	3	1	17		
Epps	31	5-13	2-2	0-2	1	1	14		
Mayer	27	3-9	4-5	2-6	0	5	12		
Hawkins	37	5-10	0-0	4-5	6	1	11		
Dainja	13	3-5	0-0	1-3	1	4	6		
Harris	7	0-2	0-0	0-1	1	2	0		
Lieb	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	2		
Melendez	31	1-6	1-2	0-3	0	2	3		
Rodgers	16	2-3	0-0	3-5	1	3	4		
Totals	200	24-59	16-18	14-30	13	20	69		
Percentages: FG: 40.7%. FT: 88.9%. Three-point field goals: 5-28 (Epps 2-8, Mayer 2-6, Hawkins 1-6, Shannon 0-3, Harris 0-2, Melendez 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 6 (Hawkins 3, Mayer 2, Lieb). Turnovers: 12 (Epps 2, Mayer 2, Rodgers 2, Team 2, Shannon, Hawkins, Dainja, Lieb). Steals: 4 (Shannon, Hawkins, Dainja, Rodgers). Officials: Szelc, Pfeifer, Young. Attendance: 15,554.									

points, while the Buckeyes missed their final seven field-goal attempts of the frame, and the Hoosiers led 46-30 going into the break.

“The run at the end of the half hurt us in the long run,” Key said. “We can’t give up that many consecutive points. It starts on the defensive end. And shots weren’t falling so that wasn’t helping either.”

Indiana star forward Trayce Jackson-Davis opened the second half with a powerful one-handed dunk, lifting the Hoosiers’ lead to 18, but Ohio State countered with a 7-0 run to make it 48-37 with 18:07 remaining in the contest. Indiana rebuilt its lead, however, jumping back in front 60-43 with 13:30 to play on a layup by Jackson-Davis, who scored 10 of his 18 points in the second half.

The Hoosiers extended their lead to as many as 19 points in the final half. The Buckeyes shot 53.3 percent in the frame (16 of 30) but couldn’t get the necessary stops for a meaningful comeback attempt, allowing the Hoosiers to shoot 51.7 percent in the second half (15 of 29).

Jackson-Davis tallied his third consecutive double-double, also producing 10 rebounds. He added a game-high six assists in the win.

Sensabaugh tried to match Jackson-Davis’ impact, scoring 11 second-half points of his own, but he couldn’t pull the Buckeyes back into contention. Key was Ohio State’s only other player in double figures against the Hoosiers, tallying 12 points while adding four rebounds.

Indiana 86, Ohio State 70									
Jan. 28, 2023									
Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall • Bloomington, Ind.									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (11-10, 3-7)		30	40	70					
Indiana (15-6, 6-4)		46	40	86					
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Thornton	24	1-5	2-2	0-1	3	4	4		
McNeil	31	3-11	3-3	0-1	1	0	9		
Sensabaugh	27	9-17	2-2	3-3	1	1	23		
Sueing	25	2-7	1-2	0-3	0	3	5		
Key	26	4-6	3-5	2-2	0	3	12		
Holden	5	0-2	0-0	1-1	0	0	0		
Gayle	19	2-3	2-2	2-3	1	2	7		
Brown	11	1-2	0-0	1-0	0	0	2		
Likekele	17	0-1	0-0	0-2	3	4	0		
Okpara	15	4-5	0-3	1-3	0	1	8		
Totals	200	26-59	13-19	21-21	9	19	70		
Percentages: FG: 44.1%. FT: 68.4%. Three-point field goals: 5-19 (Sensabaugh 3-5, Key 1-1, Gayle 1-2, Thornton 0-2, McNeil 0-5, Sueing 0-3, Brown 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 2 (Gayle, Okpara). Turnovers: 8 (Okpara 2, McNeil, Sensabaugh, Sueing, Key, Gayle, Team). Steals: 5 (McNeil 2, Sueing 2, Thornton). Technical Fouls: 1 (Team)									
Indiana	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Hood-Schifino	32	8-12	2-2	0-1	3	1	24		
Kopp	30	2-5	0-0	0-2	0	3	5		
Jackson-Davis	33	8-18	2-4	4-6	6	1	18		
Thompson	21	1-6	3-3	1-3	2	3	5		
Galloway	28	2-4	0-0	0-2	0	2	5		
Reneau	23	6-10	2-2	4-4	3	4	15		
Banks	12	2-3	1-4	3-4	1	1	5		
Bates	17	2-5	2-2	0-1	2	3	7		
Gunn	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	2		
Leal	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	32-64	12-17	15-24	17	19	86		
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 70.6%. Three-point field goals: 10-20 (Hood-Schifino 6-9, Kopp 1-3, Galloway 1-3, Reneau 1-1, Bates 1-3, Thompson 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Jackson-Davis 2, Hood-Schifino). Turnovers: 9 (Jackson-Davis 3, Thompson 2, Hood-Schifino, Reneau, Bates, Team). Steals: 5 (Hood-Schifino 2, Jackson-Davis, Galloway, Reneau). Officials: Carstensen, Riley, Brill. Attendance: 17,222.									

## Second-Half Comeback Falls Short In Loss To Wisconsin

Ohio State whittled an 18-point second-half deficit to as little as two with under a minute remaining but couldn’t get over the hump, and Wisconsin downed the Buckeyes 65-60 on Feb. 2 at Value City Arena, handing OSU its third straight loss and the eighth in its last nine games in front of 11,918.

The Buckeyes (11-11, 3-8) gave the Badgers (13-8, 5-6) all they could handle down the stretch despite losing the services of Holtmann, who was ejected late in the first half after picking up a pair of technical fouls. Ohio State outscored Wisconsin 33-22 in the second half and held the Badgers without a field goal across the game’s final 7:18, but the Badgers did just enough to come out with the win.

“(Wisconsin) started the game more hungry,” Isaac Likekele said. “We’re at home. They can’t come in more hungry than us. In the second half, we were able to cut down the lead, but still, this is our home court. We should be the ones coming out energized and going hard off the rip, but we didn’t today.”

Wisconsin scored the game’s first eight points, but Sensabaugh responded with eight straight points of his own to knot the game up with 16:13 remaining in the first half. Forward Steven Crowl scored seven of Wisconsin’s next nine points while helping the Badgers open a 17-11 lead heading into the under-12 timeout.



## Wisconsin 65, Ohio State 60

Feb. 2, 2023  
Value City Arena • Columbus

Wisconsin (13-8, 5-6)	43	22	65
Ohio State (11-11, 3-8)	27	33	60

Wisconsin	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Essegian	35	5-10	5-6	1-6	1	2	17
Wahl	34	2-10	1-5	2-2	2	2	5
Klesmit	32	4-9	2-2	0-1	1	3	12
Crowl	35	6-10	1-2	0-9	1	3	14
Hepburn	35	5-14	4-6	0-2	3	1	15
Davis	6	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
McGee	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Gilmore	18	1-1	0-1	1-0	0	2	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>23-55</b>	<b>13-22</b>	<b>4-22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>65</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 41.8%. FT: 59.1%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-20 (Essegian 2-5, Klesmit 2-7, Crowl 1-2, Hepburn 1-4, Wahl 0-1, Davis 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 8 (Crowl 2, Hepburn 2, Essegian, Wahl, Klesmit, Team). **Steals:** 8 (Wahl 2, Essegian, Klesmit, Crowl, Hepburn, Davis, Gilmore).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Thornton	29	2-8	0-0	1-2	0	1	5
McNeil	32	2-5	2-2	0-2	3	2	7
Sensabaugh	16	5-7	1-1	0-3	0	5	13
Likekele	33	4-9	0-0	2-5	4	2	8
Key	29	5-13	2-4	4-5	1	4	12
Holden	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Gayle	11	1-4	0-0	0-2	0	2	2
Brown	2	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Sueing	31	4-6	0-2	1-10	1	2	8
Okpara	12	1-3	3-4	1-2	0	2	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-56</b>	<b>8-13</b>	<b>12-33</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>60</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 42.9%. FT: 61.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-14 (Sensabaugh 2-4, Thornton 1-5, McNeil 1-1, Key 0-2, Gayle 0-1, Brown 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Sueing 2, Likekele). **Turnovers:** 16 (Likekele 5, Sueing 3, Thornton 2, Sensabaugh 2, McNeil, Key, Holden, Gayle). **Steals:** 5 (Likekele 3, Sensabaugh, Sueing). **Technical Fouls:** 2 (Team 2). **Officials:** Pfeifer, Higgins, Green. **Attendance:** 11,918.

A jumper from Thornton cut Wisconsin's lead to 21-16 with 10:30 to play in the half, but the Badgers exploded on a 12-2 run – sparked by 10 combined points from guards Connor Essegian and Chucky Hepburn – to lift their advantage to 33-18 with 4:06 remaining in the frame. The run coincided with scoring droughts from Ohio State that spanned 3:31 and 3:08 of game action, and one that would have totaled 6:39 if not for a layup from Likekele.

Ohio State responded with a 9-2 run, cutting the deficit to 35-27 with 1:18 left in the half. But the hits kept coming for the Buckeyes after Holtmann was ejected for arguing a charging call on Sueing, picking up a pair of technical fouls with 27 seconds remaining in the frame.

"I've got to be more composed in that situation," said Holtmann, who was ejected for the first time since a 71-67 loss to Michigan State on Feb. 25, 2021. "I wasn't composed, and that's on me."

The Badgers finished the half with eight straight points – largely aided by four makes from the charity stripe by Essegian as a result of Holtmann's technical fouls – to take a 43-27 advantage into the locker room.

"From the beginning, we didn't come out with the force that we needed to," Key said. "We have to come out with more fight and more bite in the beginning, then we wouldn't be in the position where we're trying to claw back in the second half."

Ohio State struggled to string together stops, allowing the Badgers to hold a 52-36 advantage with 12:57 remaining in regulation. A pair of layups from Key then helped

## Michigan 77, Ohio State 69

Feb. 5, 2023  
Crisler Center • Ann Arbor, Mich.

Ohio State (11-12, 3-9)	36	33	69
Michigan (13-10, 7-5)	41	36	77

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Thornton	36	10-13	0-1	0-1	1	0	22
McNeil	31	2-5	1-2	0-1	2	3	5
Likekele	13	1-4	0-0	1-2	2	0	2
Sueing	33	5-12	3-4	1-4	1	1	14
Key	24	3-7	0-0	4-4	0	3	6
Gayle	10	0-4	3-4	0-0	0	0	3
Brown	14	1-2	0-0	0-2	0	2	3
Sensabaugh	26	4-14	5-6	2-7	0	5	14
Okpara	14	0-3	0-0	3-1	0	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>26-64</b>	<b>12-11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>69</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 40.6%. FT: 70.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-16 (Thornton 2-3, Sueing 1-3, Brown 1-2, Sensabaugh 1-4, McNeil 0-3, Gayle 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Sueing, Key). **Turnovers:** 6 (Key 2, Thornton, Brown, Sensabaugh, Okpara). **Steals:** 4 (Thornton 2, Key 2).

Michigan	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
McDaniel	37	3-10	0-1	0-4	3	0	8
Dickinson	36	10-15	6-9	5-6	2	1	26
Bufkin	35	5-10	1-2	1-7	5	0	13
Williams	31	2-5	2-2	0-4	0	2	6
Je. Howard	34	5-12	4-4	0-2	1	2	16
Baker	16	3-5	0-0	0-3	0	3	8
Ja. Howard	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Reed	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	4	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>28-57</b>	<b>13-18</b>	<b>7-27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>77</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 49.1%. FT: 72.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-23 (McDaniel 2-5, Bufkin 2-4, Howard 2-7, Baker 2-4, Dickinson 0-1, Williams 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Dickinson 2, Bufkin). **Turnovers:** 9 (McDaniel 2, Dickinson, Bufkin, Williams, Je. Howard, Baker, Ja. Howard, Team). **Steals:** 2 (McDaniel, Bufkin). **Technical Fouls:** 1 (Team). **Officials:** Sciroto, Szalc, Walton. **Attendance:** 12,707.

the Buckeyes whittle the deficit down to 57-47 with 8:59 left.

Wisconsin pushed the lead back to 15, but the Buckeyes utilized a 9-0 run to make it 62-56 heading into the under-4 timeout. Sueing made back-to-back jumpers to close the gap to 62-60 with 30 seconds left, but he then missed a free throw, and a trio of makes from Hepburn at the line lifted Wisconsin's lead back up to five with 10 seconds left to ice the game. The Badgers missed their final nine shot attempts, yet the Buckeyes couldn't find a way to pull out the win.

Key led the way during the Buckeyes' comeback attempt, scoring nine of his 12 points during the second half. Sensabaugh finished with a team-high 13 points despite fouling out with 9:20 remaining in regulation. Sueing pulled down 11 rebounds to go along with eight points.

Wisconsin was carried by four double-digit scorers and was led by Essegian's 17 points. Hepburn added 15 while Crowl and guard Max Klesmit produced 14 and 12, respectively. The Badgers shot 41.8 percent as a team (23 of 55), while the Buckeyes checked in at 24 of 56 for 42.9 percent.

## Losing Streak Extends To Four In Loss To Michigan

Ohio State could not overcome 26 points from Michigan center Hunter Dickinson, and the Buckeyes fell 77-69 to the rival Wolverines on Feb. 5 at the Crisler Center, marking their fourth straight loss and the ninth in their last 10 games.

Dickinson shot an efficient 10 of 15 from the field, helping the Wolverines (13-10, 7-5) to 49.1 percent shooting (28 of 57) in the win.

Ohio State's offense could not keep pace despite a career-high 22 points from Thornton, as the Buckeyes (11-12, 3-9) shot 40.6 percent (26 of 64) while getting outscored 30-22 in the paint.

"(Dickinson) was able to score some over us," Holtmann said. "I just didn't think we were able to bottle him up. He's a really talented kid with great touch, and he can move well."

Ohio State connected on just two of its first eight shot attempts while the Wolverines benefited from a pair of three-pointers from guards Dug McDaniel and Kobe Bufkin, as well as a trio of buckets from Dickinson, to open a 12-6 lead heading into the under-16 timeout. After the Buckeyes made it 12-11, Michigan responded with a 12-3 run to lift the lead to 24-14 with 9:50 to play in the opening half.

Guard Jett Howard later extended Michigan's lead to 34-23 off a three-pointer, but Thornton sparked a 10-2 run for the Buckeyes, scoring seven points during the stretch, to cut the deficit to 36-33 with 3:03 remaining in the frame.

Sueing closed the half with a three-pointer, and the Buckeyes trailed 41-36 entering the locker room. Thornton kept Ohio State's offense, which shot 34.3 percent during the half (12 of 35), afloat with 11 points, while Bufkin, Dickinson and Howard combined to score 33 of Michigan's 41 first-half points.

Dickinson continued to bully the Buckeyes to start the second half, taking advantage of a mismatch on Ohio State freshman center Felix Okpara to score eight points in the first seven minutes of the frame and lift Michigan's lead to 54-47 with 13:00 to play.

McDaniel cashed a triple with 9:26 left to push Michigan's lead back to double digits, 61-50, and the Wolverines' lead grew to as many as 13 points several times over the game's final minutes. Michigan kept the Buckeyes at bay by outscoring them 36-33 in the second half while shooting at a 46.2 percent clip (12 of 26) during the frame.

"I thought there were some stretches of really good play," Holtmann said. "I still think some of the issues that have challenged us, the inability to get a stop when it's maybe a three- or five-point game, too many shots over length, not playing off two feet, shows, in some cases, our inexperience together and our youth."

Sueing and Sensabaugh, who came off the bench in the game, were the only other Buckeyes to reach double-digit scoring, each producing 14 points. Sensabaugh added a team-high nine rebounds but shot just 4 of 14 from the field in the loss before fouling out.

Howard and Bufkin each supported Dickinson's scoring efforts with 16 and 13 points, respectively. Dickinson finished with a double-double, adding 11 rebounds to go along with his 26 points, though the Buckeyes out-rebounded the victors, 36-34.

Ohio State has six games prior to the next edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, with home contests against Northwestern and Michigan State on Feb. 9 and Feb. 12. The Buckeyes then hit the road for battles with Iowa and Purdue on Feb. 16 and Feb. 19 before returning to Value City Arena to start a three-game home-stand with games against Penn State and Illinois on Feb. 23 and Feb. 26, respectively.

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# Buckeyes Under Microscope After Poor Start

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With just under a minute remaining during Ohio State's clash with top-ranked Purdue on Jan. 5, the Buckeyes were primed to score a season-defining upset win over the Boilermakers.

Guard Sean McNeil cashed a step-back three-pointer to lift Ohio State in front 69-66 with 41 seconds left, but a bucket from Purdue big man Zach Edey and a costly turnover by Justice Sueing gave the Boilermakers an opportunity to snatch the victory from the jaws of defeat. Purdue guard Fletcher Loyer drilled the go-ahead triple with 11 seconds left, and Ohio State couldn't get a shot off during its final possession, letting a golden opportunity slip through its fingers in a 71-69 loss.

The loss to the Boilermakers sparked a five-game losing streak and a stretch in which the Buckeyes dropped nine of 10 games, with a 93-77 triumph over Iowa as the lone win in the span. If Ohio State had closed out the game against Purdue, the Buckeyes would have sat atop the Big Ten with an 11-3 record and a 3-0 mark in conference play. Instead, they were sent on a downward spiral, falling to 11-12 with a 3-9 Big Ten record as of Feb. 5.

It appeared that Ohio State's new-look roster, which was largely pieced together with a combination of freshmen and transfers, had no issue jelling early in the season en route to its 10-3 start. But as the Buckeyes have crashed down to Earth, Bucknuts reporter Patrick Murphy said they've plummeted well below the expectations they built with their fast start to the season.

"If you go back and (use) truth serum (on) people to start the season, there weren't a ton of expectations," Murphy said. "I think they were ranked around 30th, so they were certainly expected to be better than they are. But this was a roster that was piecemealed together with the four freshmen and three transfers, and everyone was like 'Well, we'll see what happens.'"

"Obviously, the way the first half of the season started raised expectations, which I think happens every year at Ohio State. But I think we've seen the real issues with this roster. Given that these guys haven't played together, there's not a natural leader who can produce on the court night-in and night-out."

To Bucknuts reporter Steve Helwage, Ohio State's 10-3 start was fairly overblown due to the unfamiliarity between the Buckeyes and their nonconference opponents, and he said that Ohio State hasn't done enough to turn its fortunes against Big Ten teams.

"We get lulled into something with college basketball that the first six weeks, two months, you're playing teams that you only play once every several years," Helwage said. "You're not playing them twice a year or three times a year as you do in conference. When you get into conference play, everybody knows everybody's personnel and everybody knows what they're doing. You've got to work much harder to overcome it, and this team just hasn't done that."

While Ohio State has seen a freefall in



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FREE FALLING — The Ohio State men's basketball team has fallen off the proverbial cliff since the calendar flipped to 2023, sporting an 11-12 record and a 3-9 mark in Big Ten play as of Feb. 5.**

nearly all offensive statistical categories during the slide, Eleven Warriors beat writer Griffin Strom pointed to a multitude of areas that have hurt the Buckeyes during the stretch.

"I think one of the biggest issues, in general, is that it's not just one specific problem," Strom said. "I wrote a piece a few days ago about all the different things that have been Ohio State's biggest problems and the drop-offs in all of those statistical categories, whether it's ball movement, defense, rebounding, shooting, three-point attempts, all of that. So it's a lot of different problems, but mainly just consistency on both sides of the ball."

The most noticeable drop-off has come on offense, where the Buckeyes have plummeted in terms of efficiency and output. Prior to the Purdue game, Ohio State ranked among the nation's elite in terms of offensive efficiency, producing 81.0 points per game while shooting 49.2 percent as a team. Since then, the Buckeyes have averaged just 68.5 points per contest, dropping 12.5 from the first two months of the season, while their shooting efficiency dropped to 42.1 percent during the losing stretch.

Ohio State shot below 40.0 percent in four of the last 10 games, all of which resulted in losses – including defeats to Big Ten bottom-feeders Nebraska and Minnesota.

Not only has Ohio State's shooting efficiency fallen off a cliff, but the Buckeyes have also displayed a reluctance to share the ball at a high level. In their first 13 games, the Buckeyes produced 14.5 assists per game, a number that has dropped to 8.7 in their last 10 games. Ohio State has reached double-digit assists just twice in the last 10 games, crossing the mark only during its win over Iowa and the loss to Purdue.

"You have a lot of guys who need the ball in their hands to try and create something for themselves, which is Zed Key on the block – he needs it to back guys down," Helwage said. "(Brice) Sensabaugh needs it on the wing to decide if he's going to shoot a three-pointer or drive to the basket, and Sueing is a lot the same way. All of those are basically unassisted plays. So you're much easier to defend, obviously, if you're not moving the ball."

"That, to me, is a big problem that they have. They're not putting defenses at a disadvantage and working the ball to get a

mismatch. It's too much one-on-one, in my opinion."

Murphy and Strom both pointed to the unexpected emergence of Sensabaugh, who leads the Buckeyes with 17.3 points per game, as a potentially disjointing factor of the offensive cohesion. Entering the season, the prevailing thought surrounding the team was that the Buckeyes had several bucket-getters they could rely on on any given night rather than one go-to guy. But as Sensabaugh grew into the feature-scoring role, Ohio State was forced to change its offensive identity on the fly.

"Having a guy like Brice emerging, when maybe you didn't think that he was going to be as prolific offensively, changes things a little bit," Murphy said. "When we were talking to them in the preseason and early in the year, it was 'OK, we have a number of guys that can score. We don't have one guy that's going to be our go-to guy.' And that's obviously changed."

"How much did they work on certain things? And now, a lot of times they're just giving the ball to Brice and hoping he can score. You need him out there, but (the ball) needs to be moving. The ball just can't be sticking with a guy."

Strom noted that Sensabaugh has been Ohio State's only consistent offensive threat and that he needs more support in order for the Buckeyes to return to their levels of production from earlier in the season.

"When you look at the team, it really seems like Brice Sensabaugh is the only one consistently putting together standout efforts while guys like Justice Sueing, Zed Key and Bruce Thornton, those are guys that Ohio State needs to have better performances, and they haven't had those consistently," Strom said.

Another issue plaguing the Buckeyes is their struggles in late-game situations. In games decided by single digits this season, Ohio State is 2-10, with one of the wins coming against Rutgers on a buzzer-beating three from Tanner Holden that the Big Ten said after the game should not have counted.

At one point, close losses against Duke, North Carolina and Purdue were seen as encouraging signs for a young team trying to find its way during the first two months of the season, but the single-digit losses have piled up during their recent struggles.

"There was a stretch there where you could take it as a silver lining almost, that they're in all of these close games," Strom said. "They're at least keeping things close, one way or another, at the end of a lot of games. The thought was maybe that experience will help them and they won't make those same mistakes again in close games later on in the season."

"It's no longer a consolidation prize to just make it close in the final minutes. Ohio State needed to make the extra play in a lot of these games to continue to be in NCAA Tournament talks by this point."

Ohio State's four freshmen – Sensabaugh, Thornton, Roddy Gayle Jr. and Felix Okpara – have had an impact for the Buckeyes to this point in the season. Sensabaugh leads Ohio State's offensive efforts, Thornton has served as the Buckeyes' primary fa-



cilitator for much of the season, averaging 2.6 assists per game, and Gayle and Okpara have been touted for their defensive effort off the bench.

While the Buckeyes have placed significant reliance on the freshman class to this point in the campaign, Ohio State's veteran players have largely lagged behind where head coach Chris Holtmann needs them to be at this point. Sueing and Key both average double-digit scoring, producing 12.4 and 11.6 points, respectively, but Sueing has scored fewer than 10 points four times in the last 10 games, while Key has had two such games while progressing through injuries to his shoulder and knee.

The Buckeyes' transfers have also had their struggles, with Isaac Likekele scoring in double figures just once this season while Holden has fallen almost completely out of the rotation and didn't tally a single minute during Ohio State's 77-69 loss to Michigan on Feb. 5. McNeil has remained a viable offensive and shooting threat, averaging 9.4 points while shooting 38.0 percent from three, but has struggled defensively.

"I've been pleased with the freshman class," Murphy said. "I just think that you've had to rely on them more than you would have liked. You haven't gotten the production from your returning upperclassmen. Then, the guys you brought in through the transfer portal have been largely irrelevant on a consistent basis, other than maybe Sean McNeil, who does give you something as a three-point threat. But, again, consistently has he done that? I don't think so."

Ohio State's shortcomings this season have only thrown more fuel on the debate regarding Holtmann's job security. Prior to the regular season, Holtmann was given a three-year contract extension by Ohio State despite not reaching the Sweet 16 in his first four NCAA Tournament appearances with the Buckeyes. Athletic director Gene Smith reaffirmed his support of Holtmann prior to the Buckeyes' 65-60 loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 2, telling The Columbus Dispatch that Holtmann "is (Ohio State's) coach of the future."

Despite his relative success during his five seasons at the helm of the Ohio State program, a portion of the Buckeye fan base has been vocal regarding Holtmann's extension and current status as head coach. Although the outside buzz surrounding Holtmann's job security has only grown since the Buckeyes have fallen into their rut, Helwage, Strom and Murphy all said they believe Holtmann will remain as Ohio State's head coach next season.

"I can't imagine that he's not the guy next season," Murphy said. "They've been in the NCAA Tournament every year. They've almost won a Big Ten tournament title (in 2021). So there's been a lot of good, and I think that can't be forgotten just because they haven't advanced in the NCAA Tournament, for whatever reason, or that they've had one bad year."

"It's important to remember that they have another really good recruiting class coming in and you want to keep that together and keep those guys happy. I think if things go poorly next year, if we're sitting here at this point a year from now and having these same conversations – even though that team will still have its flaws and still be pretty young – I think at that point, you probably are really talking about Chris Holt-

mann being out of a job."

Holtmann's extension also carries a massive buyout, with Ohio State required to give the skipper his remaining contract in full if Holtmann were to be fired before his contract runs out following the 2027-28 season. In addition to that, Holtmann also has strung together a pair of top-10 recruiting classes, with the 2022 class ranking at No. 8 and the incoming 2023 class standing at No. 6, according to the 247Sports composite score, and Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star point guard Juni Mobley (6-0, 150) already committed in 2024.

"I tend to doubt they're going to buy him out with so many years left on his contract," Helwage said. "He's got a really good recruiting class coming in next year with three national top-50 players. I think he's going to get at least one more year. If they don't make the NCAA Tournament this year, I'd think he'd at least get one more year to try and turn it around."

While the questions surrounding Holt-

mann have grown, Strom argued that the Buckeyes' skipper still has the internal support from Smith and the university brass.

"I do think the buzz is continuing to grow, but I honestly don't know how much that would actually sway Gene Smith," Strom said. "I don't think he is going to sit there and judge this as the season by which Chris Holtmann's future needs to be decided on."

"I know Chris Holtmann. His premise for the season, or the near future, was, 'Let's get these two classes in here, the 2022 and 2023 freshman classes, and if we can keep those groups together, then I think we'll have a chance to make a run.' That's what he said. So I think you have to give him the time to do that."

Though Ohio State's tournament hopes continue to fade with each passing day, the Buckeyes still have around a month to turn things around and punch their ticket to the Big Dance. With time dwindling to get back in tournament position, Helwage stressed that Ohio State's sense of urgency needs to

pick up in the coming weeks.

"We haven't seen them put away a good opponent in two full months," Helwage said. "This is the stretch where they have to put it together. Six of the last 10 games are at home. You've got to steal one on the road somewhere. This is where they've got to put it together or the NCAA Tournament streak, the 20-win streak, it's all gone."

"I'm cautiously optimistic because I think they've got some good pieces. They just have to go back to work. That's the thing – it's hard. This time of the year is hard, and it's the team that works the hardest and plays the best defense that is going to pull these games out. You have to go in mentally tough and expect every game is going to be 70-69 in this conference, home and away, and you just have to outwork the opponent."

"We haven't seen them do that enough to where you think you have a lot of great feelings. But there's time left. You just need to put it together."



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# Buckeyes Drop Four Of Five After 19-0 Start

By **BRADEN MOLES**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State's season is not over by any means, but it's taken on a different complexion after the Buckeyes – who got off to a program-record 19-0 start to begin the season – dropped four of their next five, with three of those losses coming to top-10 teams in Iowa, Indiana and Maryland.

The Buckeyes (20-4, 9-4 Big Ten) also fell at home to unranked Purdue, with a win at Wisconsin as the only beacon of hope over the last five games. With the losing stretch, Ohio State has fallen to fourth in the conference standings with just five games remaining in the regular season.

## Ohio State Suffers First Loss To Iowa

No. 2 Ohio State (19-1, 8-1 Big Ten) suffered its first loss of the season, dropping an 83-72 decision to visiting No. 10 Iowa (16-4, 8-1) on Jan. 23.

Ohio State could do little to fight off the attack of Iowa guard Caitlin Clark, who finished with a triple-double – only the third ever recorded against Ohio State – behind 28 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds. The Buckeyes also had trouble generating their own offense, shooting just 38.0 percent (27 of 71) from the field and 16.0 percent (4 of 25) from deep.

“You saw a little bit of everything,” said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. “(Clark) spread the ball around, she was really efficient – when we could get it out of her hands, she was really efficient making the correct reads, leading to great shots for them. She plays with such range on her shot, change of pace off the dribble. She's a really, really special player.”

Ohio State and Iowa were off to the races quickly, battling to a 14-all tie with 3:54 left in the first quarter. The Hawkeyes were paced early on by forward Monika Czinano, who had six of Iowa's first 12 points, while the Buckeyes saw early contributions from forwards Cotie McMahon and Rebeka Mikulášiková. Mikulášiková scored eight points in the opening frame and McMahon seven.

Clark scored her first basket of the game to put the Hawkeyes up 18-14 with 2:57 to go in the first, but a triple from guard Taylor Mikesell at the first-quarter buzzer put Ohio State up 24-23 entering the second stanza.

The Buckeyes' lead grew after a layup from McMahon to start the quarter, but Iowa responded with an 11-0 run – including seven points from Clark – to put the Hawkeyes up 34-26 with 6:28 remaining in the half. Iowa later took a 39-30 lead, but guard Taylor Thierry scored the next two baskets for Ohio State to cut the deficit to five.

The Buckeyes went cold from there, though, missing their final five shots of the half, and Iowa led 43-34 entering the locker room. Iowa outscored Ohio State 20-10 in the second frame as the Buckeyes shot just 27.8 percent from the field (5 of 18) and were blanked on six shots from deep.

McMahon took advantage of an and-one opportunity to cut Iowa's lead to 43-37 to begin the third, but the Hawkeyes responded by outscoring Ohio State 13-7 over the next 3:53 to take a 56-44 lead with 5:56 left in the

stanza.

Those would be the last points of the quarter for Iowa, however, as Ohio State closed on a 10-0 run to make it 56-54 entering the final frame. The Hawkeyes missed their final nine shots of the third quarter as the Buckeyes cut the 12-point deficit to just one possession.

Despite momentum on Ohio State's side – in part due to a sell-out crowd of 9,955 at Value City Arena – the Hawkeyes were able to keep the Buckeyes at arm's length in the fourth, hitting triples on back-to-back possessions before a layup by forward Hannah Stuelke put Iowa up 64-57 with 7:54 remaining.

Ohio State threatened after a triple from guard Rikki Harris made it 64-60, but the Buckeyes missed all but one of their next eight shots as Iowa's lead grew to 13 points, 75-62, with 3:11 left in the game. Ohio State later cut the deficit to eight points with 2:02 left on an old-fashioned three-point play by Thierry, but Iowa still went home with the 11-point win.

“I think this can be a learning experience,” McGuff said. “One of things I told the team was that outside of tonight, I think for the most part we've handled winning fine. It will show a lot about our competitive character in the coming days in how we practice and how we show up (against Indiana) to play. It's not going to be any easier.”

The Buckeyes were led by McMahon, who finished with 21 points on 8-of-19 shooting, while Thierry added 20 points and nine rebounds. In addition to Clark's triple-double, Czinano added 22 points for the Hawkeyes on 11-of-13 shooting, and guard Kate Martin added a double-double with 13 points and 11 rebounds. Ohio State was outrebounded 51-31 by Iowa with Stuelke adding a game-high 13 off the boards.

## Hoosiers Dominate OSU In Second Half

Ohio State suffered its second loss of the week, and of the season, on Jan. 26, falling on the road 78-65 at No. 6 Indiana in front of a record crowd of 10,455 at Simon Skodt Assembly Hall.

The Buckeyes (19-2, 8-2) were unable to contain Indiana forward Mackenzie Holmes, who led the Hoosiers (19-1, 9-1) with 26 points, while Ohio State had a poor outing from the field and shot just 20.0 percent (3 of 15) from deep.

“We're capable of doing so much,” McMahon said. “We have to just stay the course and do what we do and stay consistent throughout the entire game.”

Ohio State opened up the competition with a floater from Mikesell – giving her 2,000 points for her college career – before taking a 16-8 lead just over six minutes into the contest. The Buckeyes got off to a positive start in enemy territory as the Hoosiers were just 3 of 10 from the field to begin the game.

Ohio State was held without a point for the remainder of the quarter, though, with Indiana closing on a 9-0 run to take a 17-16 lead at the end of the first.

After trading the lead four times to begin the second quarter, the Hoosiers increased their advantage to 23-20 with 7:26 left in the frame. McMahon – who had six points in the

Iowa 83, Ohio State 72								
Jan. 23, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus								
	1	2	3	4	F			
Iowa (16-4, 8-1)	23	20	13	27	83			
Ohio State (19-1, 8-1)	24	10	20	18	72			
Iowa	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Czinano	24	11-13	0-0	1-3	1	4	22	
Davis	30	1-4	0-0	0-2	1	4	3	
Martin	36	3-9	4-4	1-10	4	2	13	
Clark	40	8-19	9-10	1-9	15	1	28	
Marshall	35	2-8	0-0	2-1	2	1	5	
Affolter	11	2-5	0-0	1-1	0	2	4	
Stuelke	22	4-7	0-0	3-10	1	2	8	
Ediger	1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Totals	200	31-65	13-14	13-38	24	16	83	
Percentages: FG: 47.7%. FT: 92.9%. Three-point field goals: 8-27 (Clark 3-10, Martin 3-8, Davis 1-3, Marshall 1-4, Affolter 0-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Clark 2, Martin 2). Turnovers: 17 (Clark 7, Czinano 4, Martin 3, Team 2, Davis). Steals: 3 (Clark, Czinano, Davis).								
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Mikulášiková	26	3-4	1-1	0-1	2	1	8	
McMahon	40	8-19	5-7	3-5	3	3	21	
Harris	29	2-12	1-2	0-1	2	1	6	
Thierry	33	7-16	6-8	4-5	3	4	20	
Mikesell	40	5-16	0-0	0-2	1	4	12	
Bristow	6	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0	
Shumate	12	0-2	1-2	1-1	1	1	1	
Walker	14	2-2	0-0	2-2	0	1	4	
Totals	200	27-71	14-20	11-20	12	16	72	
Percentages: FG: 38.0%. FT: 70.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-25 (Mikesell 2-10, Harris 1-8, Mikulášiková 1-2, McMahon 0-2, Shumate 0-1, Thierry 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Harris, Shumate). Turnovers: 9 (McMahon 2, Mikesell 2, Mikulášiková 2, Thierry 2, Bristow). Steals: 11 (Walker 5, McMahon 2, Thierry 2, Harris, Mikesell). Officials: Kantner, Suffren, Morris. Attendance: 9,955.								

opening quarter – responded with nine of Ohio State's next 13 points to give the Buckeyes a 31-25 lead with 3:37 remaining in the half.

Ohio State later headed into the locker room up 36-32, with McMahon and Holmes each boasting 18 points. Outside of McMahon, the Buckeyes had just 18 points on 7-of-18 shooting, while the Hoosiers had only 14 points on 5-of-23 shooting outside of Holmes.

Indiana then opened the final half on a 17-2 run through the first 6:09 of the third period to take a 49-38 lead. During that stretch, the Buckeyes were just 1 of 7 from the field, with Ohio State's only basket courtesy of a driving layup by Thierry.

McMahon stopped the bleeding by converting on an and-one opportunity, but the Hoosiers then closed the frame on a 10-1 run to lead 59-42 going into the fourth. The Buckeyes were outscored 27-6 in the third while shooting just 16.7 percent from the field.

“It snowballed on us, obviously,” McGuff said. “It was disappointing because we thought we had played a pretty good first half, put ourselves in a position right where we wanted to be. To come out and have that type of third quarter was certainly not ideal.”

Ohio State cut the deficit to eight points on two occasions in the fourth, the last at 5:51, but was unable to complete the comeback as several players experienced foul trouble, including McMahon, who fouled out with 4:50 to play.

McMahon led the Buckeyes with 21 points on 8-of-15 shooting. Thierry added

Indiana 78, Ohio State 65							
Jan. 26, 2023							
Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall • Bloomington, Ind.							
		1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (19-2, 8-2)		16	20	6	23	65	
Indiana (19-1, 9-1)		17	15	27	19	78	
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	17	1-6	0-0	1-1	1	4	3
McMahon	33	8-15	5-8	0-3	1	5	21
Harris	39	1-4	4-7	0-5	1	2	7
Thierry	26	5-11	3-5	6-6	1	4	13
Mikesell	40	7-17	0-0	1-4	2	3	15
Bristow	13	0-3	1-2	2-2	1	1	1
Walker	23	2-5	1-2	2-5	1	3	5
Shumate	9	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Totals	200	24-63	14-24	14-27	8	23	65
Percentages: FG: 38.1%. FT: 58.3%. Three-point field goals: 3-15 (Harris 1-4, Mikesell 1-5, Mikulášiková 1-3, Bristow 0-1, McMahon 0-1, Shumate 0-1, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 8 (McMahon 3, Mikulášiková 2, Bristow, Harris, Shumate). Turnovers: 13 (Bristow 3, McMahon 3, Mikesell 2, Walker 2, Harris, Mikulášiková, Thierry). Steals: 5 (McMahon, Mikesell, Mikulášiková, Thierry, Walker).							
Indiana	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Holmes	34	11-13	4-7	0-4	1	5	26
Garzon	37	8-17	0-1	1-9	3	3	20
Moore-McNeil	38	1-8	2-3	2-3	6	0	4
Parrish	32	4-9	3-4	1-10	4	4	12
Berger	37	4-9	3-4	0-2	6	2	12
Scalia	15	0-6	2-2	1-0	1	0	2
Meister	6	0-0	2-2	2-3	0	1	2
Bargesser	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	28-62	16-23	10-31	21	16	78
Percentages: FG: 45.2%. FT: 69.6%. Three-point field goals: 6-21 (Garzon 4-9, Berger 1-1, Parrish 1-5, Moore-McNeil 0-3, Scalia 0-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Holmes, Parrish). Turnovers: 12 (Garzon 3, Berger 2, Moore-McNeil 2, Bargesser, Holmes, Parrish, Scalia, Team). Steals: 5 (Garzon 3, Berger, Parrish). Officials: Grinter, Jones, Pethel. Attendance: 10,455.							

a double-double with 13 points and 12 rebounds, while Mikesell added 15 points. In addition to Holmes' 26 points, Indiana guard Yarden Garzon had 20 points on 8-of-17 shooting and 10 rebounds, while guard Sydney Parrish had a double-double with 12 points and 11 rebounds.

Ohio State finished the game 24 of 63 from the field (38.1 percent).

## Losing Streak Rolls On Against Purdue

No. 2 Ohio State stumbled to its third consecutive loss on Jan. 29, dropping a 73-65 contest to visiting Purdue.

Despite the Buckeyes tying the game in the fourth quarter after facing a 46-29 deficit early in the third frame, Ohio State (19-3, 8-3) was unable to complete the comeback after the Boilermakers (15-6, 6-5 Big Ten) closed the contest by outscoring OSU 15-7 over the game's final 4:28.

The teams went back-and-forth through the early minutes of the contest, with Ohio State leading 11-10 before a triple from Purdue guard Abbey Ellis put the Boilermakers up 13-11 entering the first media timeout.

Out of the break, Purdue went on an 8-2 run to force a quick timeout from McGuff, but it did little to get the Buckeyes back into shape as the Boilermakers added another pair of three-pointers to lead 27-13 at the end of the first quarter. Purdue finished the first frame 7 of 9 from deep, with one of the misses coming on a heave at the buzzer.

The second quarter featured several short-lived comeback attempts by Ohio



## Purdue 73, Ohio State 65

Jan. 29, 2023  
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Purdue (15-6, 6-5)	27	14	11	21	73
Ohio State (19-3, 8-3)	13	16	15	21	65

Purdue	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Harper	31	4-8	3-3	0-2	2	2	12
Hardin	35	5-8	0-0	1-5	3	1	15
Terry	32	3-8	2-2	1-6	8	2	8
Petree	11	0-4	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Ellis	30	9-16	3-4	0-2	1	2	26
Smith	23	1-7	0-0	1-2	0	1	2
Layden	28	3-7	2-2	1-6	3	3	10
Woltman	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Learn	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-58</b>	<b>10-11</b>	<b>7-26</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>73</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 43.1%. FT: 90.9%. **Three-point field goals:** 13-29 (Ellis 5-8, Hardin 5-8, Layden 2-6, Harper 1-3, Petree 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Layden, Smith). **Turnovers:** 13 (Layden 5, Hardin 4, Team 3, Terry). **Steals:** 7 (Terry 4, Ellis, Hardin, Smith).

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	37	5-11	0-0	1-2	4	4	11
McMahon	38	4-11	2-3	3-4	4	4	11
Harris	30	3-11	0-0	2-5	3	2	8
Thierry	31	6-8	6-9	2-5	0	5	18
Mikesell	40	4-13	0-0	0-2	2	3	11
Bristow	11	1-1	0-0	3-1	1	1	2
Walker	3	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	0	2
Shumate	10	1-2	0-0	1-1	0	0	2
Costner	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-60</b>	<b>8-12</b>	<b>12-23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>65</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 41.7%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-28 (Mikesell 3-9, Harris 2-9, McMahon 1-3, Mikulášiková 1-5, Thierry 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 8 (McMahon 3, Thierry 3, Harris, Shumate). **Turnovers:** 15 (Mikesell 5, McMahon 4, Mikulášiková 2, Thierry 2, Bristow, Harris). **Steals:** 5 (Thierry 2, Harris, Mikesell, Shumate). **Officials:** McConnell, Inouye, Thompson. **Attendance:** 8,664.

State, which trailed 29-13 after an early basket by Purdue's Jeanae Terry, but nearly every attempt to get back in the contest was immediately answered by the Boilermakers, who did not let the deficit reach single digits prior to halftime.

Thierry – who added a basket with just two seconds remaining in the first half to make it 41-29 entering the locker room – was the main reason Ohio State kept the score within reach through the first 20 minutes, though, adding 13 points on 4-of-5 shooting.

“We had some good energy,” McGuff said. “We looked good in our press until we hit a stretch where we didn’t. We have to get way closer to 40 minutes and clean up the type of basketball we’re capable of if we want to win. Credit to Purdue, they came in and were more focused and more ready from the tip.”

Purdue went up 46-29 to begin the third quarter before a 12-2 run by the Buckeyes made it 48-41 with 4:43 left in the frame. Ohio State’s run was boosted by Mikesell’s first eight points of the game, including a pair of makes from deep.

The Buckeyes were then held scoreless for more than four minutes until a triple from Mikulášiková broke the scoring drought to make it 52-44 entering the fourth.

Purdue guard Cassidy Hardin and Harris traded triples to begin the final frame, with Harris’ three-pointer sparking a 9-0 run, and the Buckeyes eventually tied the game at 58 with 4:28 remaining. Ohio State wilted in the game’s final minutes, though, as Purdue closed with the 15-7 run to ice the game.

“There is still a lot of basketball left and a lot of league play left,” Mikesell said. “You don’t want to be playing your best basketball

right now. It’s good to take a little bit of adversity, take it on the chin and get better.”

The Boilermakers dominated from beyond the arc, shooting 44.8 percent (13 of 29) from deep, while the Buckeyes shot just 7 of 28 (25.0). Over three games – all losses after a 19-0 start to the season – Ohio State shot just 20.6 percent (14 of 68) from three-point range.

Thierry led the Buckeyes with 18 points on 6-of-8 shooting before fouling out of the game, while McMahon, Mikesell and Mikulášiková each finished with 11 points. The Boilermakers were led by Ellis, who had 26 points on 9-of-16 shooting. Terry dished out eight assists.

A crowd of 8,664 was in attendance at Value City Arena for the Sunday matinee.

### OSU Gets Back In Win Column Against Badgers

No. 10 Ohio State snapped a three-game losing streak with a 90-67 win over Wisconsin at the Kohl Center on Feb. 1, with the Buckeyes claiming their 20th victory of the season before 2,890.

Ohio State (20-3, 9-3) led for 39:37 of game action, but Wisconsin (7-16, 2-9) trailed by just one point early in the second half. The Buckeyes shot 55.2 percent (32 of 58) while Thierry led the way with a career-high 25 points on 7-of-8 shooting, along with 10 of 14 from the free-throw line, to keep the Badgers’ upset bid at bay.

“I’m just letting the game come to me, not forcing any shots and being confident in myself,” she said. “Making the easy shots and not forcing anything.”

Mikesell came out swinging, hitting a pair of three-pointers in the game’s first two minutes to help the Buckeyes forge an early 8-4 lead. The Badgers closed the gap to 10-9, but Thierry and Mikulášiková scored Ohio State’s next nine points to spark a 19-5 run by the Buckeyes, who closed the first quarter with a 29-14 lead.

The Buckeyes’ lead ballooned to as many as 16 points after McMahon finished a layup, pushing the advantage to 34-18 with 7:39 remaining in the half. Forward Serah Williams scored eight of the Badgers’ first 11 points in the frame, and after a pair of baskets from guard Julie Pospisilova, Wisconsin made it 39-29 with 2:08 left in the quarter.

Despite Ohio State hitting on just two of its seven shots in the final five minutes of the half, the Buckeyes still carried a 45-34 lead into the locker room, with Thierry (12) and Mikesell (11) – as well as Wisconsin guard Avery LaBarbera (12) – already into double digits.

Wisconsin opened the second half with a 15-5 run – with all five of Ohio State’s points coming from McMahon – to close the gap to 50-49 with 6:05 to play in the third frame.

“They did a really good job in the third quarter, and we came out flat and a little soft on defense, frankly, and allowed them to do whatever they wanted,” McGuff said. “They threw the ball inside and got easy shots, so that was certainly the lull.”

Thierry countered with a pair of three-point plays on back-to-back possessions, which sparked a 20-8 run by Ohio State to end the third quarter with a 70-57 advantage.

The Buckeyes cruised to the win by out-

Continued On Page 36

# SEE WHAT YOU’VE BEEN MISSING ON BUCKEYESPORTS.COM Free To Print Subscribers

The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website. At the top is a navigation bar with links for HOME, FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, SPORTS, FORUM, BSB ONLINE, EAT & STAY, and a LOGIN button. The main headline reads "OHIO STATE DROPS FOURTH-STRAIGHT IN 77-69 LOSS AT MICHIGAN" by Jack Emerson, dated February 5, 2023 (3:06 pm), categorized under Basketball, Men's Basketball. Below the headline is a photo of a player in an Ohio State jersey. To the right, under "LATEST ADDITIONS", there are several article teasers with small images and dates.

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Continued From Page 35

scoring Wisconsin 20-10 in the final frame, doing so while shooting 63.6 percent from the field (7 of 11) in the quarter.

"It was really important (to get a win)," McGuff said. "We talk about the process all the time and not focusing on winning and losing too much, but we needed a win. Everybody knows that. You lose a couple games in a row and everybody loses a little confidence, so we need to get our mojo back a little bit. Hopefully tonight was a good step toward that."

Along with Thierry, Mikesell and McMahon also reached double digits, registering 21 and 19 points, respectively. Wisconsin was led by Williams, who had 23 points on 9-of-12 shooting, while LaBarbera scored 17 points.

Terrapins Blow Out Buckeyes

No. 10 Ohio State suffered its fourth loss in its last five games on Feb. 5, falling on the road at No. 8 Maryland in a 90-54 blowout before 11,167 in the XFINITY Center.

The loss came despite the Buckeyes (20-4, 9-4) welcoming back guard Jacy Sheldon, who took the court for the first time since Nov. 30. The Terrapins (19-5, 10-3) shot 52.3 percent from the field (34 of 65) while forcing 24 turnovers that resulted in 24 points.

"Overall, they played a great game and we were really bad," McGuff said. "That's to their credit. They coached better, they played better, everything was better about them today."

Ohio State looked in step with Maryland through the game's first minutes, fighting

back from an early deficit to tie it up at seven with 4:29 left in the first. The jumper from Thierry to tie it was the last points of the opening frame for the Buckeyes, and the Terrapins closed on a 12-0 run to lead 19-7 at the end of the first.

During that 12-0 run, Ohio State turned the ball over six times and missed all four shots from the field. Maryland guard Abby Meyers accounted for eight points during the run, finishing the opening frame with 11 points.

Maryland's run continued into the second quarter, with the Terrapins scoring a pair of baskets – broken up by a layup from Sheldon – before Thierry broke through by converting on an and-one opportunity to make it 23-12. Mikesell scrapped to keep the Buckeyes close, scoring on two separate occasions to cut the deficit to single digits, but the Terrapins increased their lead to as many as 14 points before going into the half up 42-30.

Maryland continued to pile on in the third, leading by 25 points, 69-44, at the end of the quarter. Most of that dominance was courtesy of guard Diamond Miller, who had 16 points in the frame and personally outscored Ohio State, which had just 14 points in the quarter.

"She's a good player," Thierry said. "She's very athletic and she's very physical. I think that got in our heads a little bit, and I think that's just something we need to work on and be more physical."

The Buckeyes were out of sorts in almost every phase of the game, shooting just 35.7 percent in the quarter (5 of 14) and turning the ball over six times. Ohio State also got into significant foul trouble, with Harris, McMahon and Thierry each picking

Ohio State 90, Wisconsin 67							
Feb. 1, 2023 Kohl Center • Madison, Wis.							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (20-3, 9-3)	29	16	25	20	90		
Wisconsin (7-16, 2-9)	14	20	23	10	67		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulášiková	15	4-9	0-0	0-2	2	5	9
McMahon	32	6-9	7-8	0-4	4	3	19
Harris	30	1-6	1-2	1-5	5	3	3
Thierry	35	7-8	10-14	5-2	3	3	25
Mikesell	38	8-15	0-0	0-4	2	1	21
Shumate	22	1-4	0-0	1-2	1	0	3
Walker	13	4-5	0-0	2-0	2	4	8
Costner	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	2	0
Bristow	5	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	0	0
Henderson	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Totals	200	32-58	18-24	10-21	21	21	90
Percentages: FG: 55.2%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-21 (Mikesell 5-10, Mikulášiková 1-4, Shumate 1-3, Thierry 1-1, Harris 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (McMahon, Shumate). Turnovers: 13 (McMahon 5, Thierry 2, Bristow, Harris, Mikesell, Mikulášiková, Shumate, Walker). Steals: 9 (Thierry 3, Harris 2, Mikesell 2, Costner, Shumate).							
Wisconsin	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Williams	30	9-12	5-10	3-1	0	2	23
Schramek	25	2-10	0-0	1-5	2	4	5
Pospisilova	31	5-12	1-2	1-2	4	2	11
Wilke	30	2-8	2-2	3-0	4	3	6
LaBarbera	31	5-8	3-3	0-2	2	1	17
Copeland	25	1-2	0-2	1-1	0	3	3
Porter	9	0-1	0-0	0-3	1	1	0
Leuzinger	15	1-3	0-0	2-2	1	3	2
Ellew	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Stapleton	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	25-56	11-19	14-17	14	19	67
Percentages: FG: 44.6%. FT: 57.9%. Three-point field goals: 6-17 (LaBarbera 4-5, Copeland 1-2, Schramek 1-3, Leuzinger 0-1, Porter 0-1, Pospisilova 0-2, Wilke 0-3). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Williams 2, Schramek, Stapleton, Wilke). Turnovers: 21 (LaBarbera 4, Pospisilova 4, Schramek 4, Copeland 3, Williams 3, Ellew, Leuzinger, Team). Steals: 5 (Wilke 2, Williams 2, Schramek). Officials: Knight, Enterline, Reynolds. Attendance: 2,890.							

Maryland 90, Ohio State 54								
Feb. 5 2023 XFINITY Center • College Park, Md.								
		1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (20-4, 9-4)		7	23	14	10	54		
Maryland (19-5, 10-3)		19	23	27	21	90		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Mikulášiková	18	1-5	0-0	0-1	0	3	2	
McMahon	20	3-10	0-1	1-1	1	5	6	
Thierry	30	6-9	6-7	2-5	3	5	21	
Sheldon	25	2-8	0-0	1-4	3	0	5	
Mikesell	38	5-19	0-0	2-2	1	2	12	
Harris	13	2-4	0-0	0-0	1	4	4	
Bristow	18	0-2	0-0	0-3	0	1	0	
Shumate	16	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	0	2	
Walker	17	1-2	0-0	4-3	1	2	2	
Costner	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Totals	200	21-62	6-8	12-21	10	22	54	
Percentages: FG: 33.9%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 6-23 (Thierry 3-3, Mikesell 2-7, Sheldon 1-5, Bristow 0-1, Harris 0-2, McMahon 0-1, Mikulášiková 0-3, Shumate 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (McMahon). Turnovers: 24 (McMahon 6, Mikesell 6, Walker 3, Bristow 2, Thierry 2, Harris, Mikulášiková, Sheldon, Shumate, Team). Steals: 5 (Harris, Mikesell, Sheldon, Shumate, Thierry).								
Maryland	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Masonius	21	1-2	0-0	1-4	3	3	2	
Sellers	32	6-13	7-7	1-3	9	2	19	
Miller	30	11-16	6-8	2-8	0	1	29	
Meyers	34	9-15	1-1	2-4	1	1	22	
Pinzan	17	1-2	0-0	0-3	2	2	2	
Briggs	27	4-9	0-0	2-3	0	2	8	
Alexander	27	1-5	2-2	1-4	3	0	5	
McDaniel	7	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3	
Reynolds	2	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0	
Sciolla	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Cooke	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Totals	200	34-65	16-18	11-29	18	11	90	
Percentages: FG: 88.9%. FT: 88.9%. Three-point field goals: 6-12 (Meyers 3-7, Alexander 1-2, McDaniel 1-1, Miller 1-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 3 (Meyers 2, Masonius). Turnovers: 15 (Miller 5, Meyers 4, Pinzan 3, Briggs 2, Sellers). Steals: 15 (Alexander 3, Briggs 3, Miller 3, Sellers 3, Masonius, McDaniel, Meyers). Officials: Grinter, Daley, Enlund. Attendance: 11,167.								

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Taylor Mikesell  
Senior Guard  
Massillon, Ohio

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FOR JANUARY

up their fourth fouls in the third. The fourth quarter was of little consequence as the Buckeyes trailed 69-44 entering the final frame before being outscored 21-10 in the quarter.

The Buckeyes ended the contest with 22 fouls – both McMahon and Thierry fouled out – compared to just 11 for the Terrapins on their home court.

"That was a huge problem for us tonight," McGuff said. "It killed us, especially on the defensive end. We were trying to keep (McMahon and Thierry) matched up with Diamond, but we couldn't keep them in the game enough, and she's so good, if you don't have the right matchup on her she's going to make you pay (on) about every possession."

Thierry and Mikesell were the only Buckeyes to reach double digits, with Thierry scoring 21 points and pulling down seven

rebounds while Mikesell added 12 points on just 5-of-19 shooting. Sheldon played just 25 minutes in her return, scoring five points on 2-of-8 shooting.

The Terrapins were led by Miller, who finished with a double-double behind 29 points and 10 rebounds. Meyers and guard Shyanne Sellers finished with 22 and 19 points, respectively, while Sellers dished out nine assists.

Ohio State will close out the regular season by the time Buckeye Sports Bulletin next goes to press. Games left on the schedule include home contests against Minnesota on Feb. 8 and Indiana on Feb. 13 and road games at Penn State on Feb. 16 and Michigan on Feb. 20. The Buckeyes will close the regular season at home against Maryland on Feb. 24.

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# Kelsey Mitchell Makes Return To Columbus

Former Ohio State guard Kelsey Mitchell was honored in a ceremony during Ohio State's loss to Iowa on Jan. 23, with the Buckeyes welcoming back one of the program's greats in conjunction with the WNBA.

Mitchell – a three-time Big Ten Player of the Year who played four seasons at Ohio State from 2014-18 – made her return to Columbus coming off her fifth season with the Indiana Fever.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

"It's kind of like a surreal feeling, honestly," Mitchell said a day prior to the ceremony. "I haven't been there in a while due to being a professional at the next level. I think it will be a surreal moment. But it's one of those ones where it's like, family is family. To have been a Buckeye and been able to have that fan base to support me, I'm just super grateful."

Mitchell garnering recognition from the program is no wonder given how frequently her name pops up throughout Ohio State's record books. The guard finished as the Buckeyes' career leader in points (3,402), points per game (24.5), games played (139) and three-pointers (497). She also holds the single-season record in points (889 in 2015-16) and the single-game scoring record, scoring 48 points against Michigan State in 2015-16.

"I would just say how grateful I'll be to be a part of that atmosphere at this junction, at this point in my career," she said when asked what it means to return to Ohio State. "Being a Buckeye means a lot to me, and to know that the university wants me back and to be in support of the ladies, it just goes to show that relationship and that bond that was built over years and the years to come. I'm just very, very happy to be a part of it. I'm very grateful to be a part of it."

While Mitchell found plenty of success with Ohio State, it's been harder to come by at the professional level. The Fever have consistently been among the worst teams in the WNBA over recent years, with a combined record of just 36-122 in the five seasons since Mitchell's arrival.

Despite a lack of team success, Mitchell has remained an individual standout. She averaged 18.4 points per game last season on 43.8 percent shooting, including 40.9 percent shooting from beyond the arc, while averaging 4.2 assists.

Given that the Fever will stand near the top of the WNBA's draft order, Mitchell said she would be excited for the team bringing in one of Ohio State's potential draftees in guards Taylor Mikesell and Jacy Sheldon.

"Man, that would be great," she said. "I'm a Buckeye for life, so I'm an advocate for any athlete that comes from Ohio State University. I've tapped into a little bit of the rest (of the sports) – baseball, basketball on the men's side, of course the women's (basketball) side, football. I'm an advocate to see one of our own being drafted, for sure."

Even if neither have the opportunity to play with Mitchell in Indiana, she still had advice for the duo based on her experience going

## 2022-23 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

### 20-4 Overall (9-4 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 5

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	24-24	843-35.1	156-361	.432	74-193	.383	37-43	.860	9-70	79-3.3	30-0	60	50	6	37	423-17.6
Jacy Sheldon	6-6	177-29.5	34-74	.459	6-21	.286	11-14	.786	5-17	22-3.7	11-0	19	17	2	31	85-14.2
Taylor Thierry	24-24	695-29.0	130-200	.650	8-24	.333	61-93	.656	75-91	166-6.9	74-4	52	34	17	50	329-13.7
Cotie McMahon	24-24	626-6.1	118-238	.496	7-34	.206	73-110	.664	22-79	101-4.2	63-3	56	71	19	40	316-13.2
Rebeka Mikulasikova	24-24	640-26.6	120-245	.490	37-104	.356	33-44	.750	19-93	112-4.7	58-2	44	47	3	19	310-12.9
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	24-11	617-25.7	49-152	.322	19-87	.218	45-75	.600	23-84	107-4.5	56-1	75	30	7	29	162-6.8
Hevynne Bristow	22-0	261-11.9	31-63	.492	6-16	.375	23-32	.719	19-57	76-3.5	31-0	16	26	10	14	91-4.1
Eboni Walker	22-0	256-11.6	35-67	.522	0-1	.000	14-20	.700	28-37	65-3.0	29-0	23	15	2	17	84-3.8
Emma Shumate	20-0	231-11.6	13-51	.255	8-32	.250	3-6	.500	11-15	26-1.3	18-0	12	4	20	10	37-1.9
Kaia Henderson	9-0	35-3.9	3-9	.333	1-4	.250	3-3	1.000	0-3	3-0.3	5-0	1	2	0	1	10-1.1
Mya Perry	5-0	17-3.5	1-7	.143	0-3	.000	3-5	.600	1-0	1-0.2	3-0	0	0	0	3	5-1.0
Kaitlyn Costner	11-0	40-3.6	1-4	.250	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-5	5-0.5	4-0	2	1	1	2	2-0.2
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									40-43	83			8			
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4825</b>	<b>733-1560</b>	<b>.470</b>	<b>180-544</b>	<b>.331</b>	<b>339-486</b>	<b>.698</b>	<b>268-613</b>	<b>881-36.7</b>	<b>409-10</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>1985-82.7</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4825</b>	<b>603-1443</b>	<b>.418</b>	<b>139-489</b>	<b>.284</b>	<b>242-358</b>	<b>.676</b>	<b>271-633</b>	<b>904-37.7</b>	<b>416-8</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>1587-66.1</b>

through the draft process and playing at the professional level.

"If I could say anything to them, it would be to run your own race," she said. "Whatever work and craft that you've abided by up to this point, I would say continue to do it. There's nothing like tapping into your craft and sharpening iron every day on a consistent basis. Whatever they do now, continue to tap into that and stay true to who they are."

### Sheldon Returns In Loss To Maryland

Shortly before the Buckeyes took the court before their eventual 90-54 loss to Maryland on Feb. 5, it was announced that not only would Sheldon be available for the first time since Nov. 30, but that she would return to the starting lineup for Ohio State.

Sheldon had missed the previous 17 games with a lower-leg injury, and her presence had been sorely missed by the Buckeyes who, despite a 19-0 start to the season, would have rather done so with the senior guard on the court.

"There's the obvious impact on the court in terms of her play and how she impacts our team," said Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff. "There's also a psychological lift for the team because they know how good she is and her energy. We play faster on offense when the ball is in her hands. Our full-court defense is better. There's a good lift coming, hopefully soon."

While McGuff cautioned that Sheldon would be under a minutes restriction once she returned, it wasn't immediately clear against the Terrapins whether the Buckeyes would stick with that restriction. She played nine minutes in the first quarter and the entire second frame, but she played just six minutes for the remainder of the game as Ohio State fell significantly behind, with little purpose served by keeping her in the contest.

Sheldon finished with just five points on 2-of-8 shooting with five rebounds, three assists and a steal, and she was also just 1 of 5 from beyond the arc.

"It felt good. I obviously missed playing with everybody," she said. "We could have played better tonight and had a lot more energy."

### Mikesell Reaches Several Milestones

Despite Ohio State suffering a loss on

Jan. 26 against Indiana, there was a highlight for the program as Mikesell surpassed 2,000 points during her collegiate career. She reached 2,000 points on the first points of the game for either team, hitting a floater to reach the accomplishment.

Mikesell arrived at Ohio State prior to last season with 1,038 points under her belt. She scored 596 points last season for the Buckeyes – a single-season high for her career so far – before surpassing the 2,000-point mark against the Hoosiers.

"It's a really incredible accomplishment from Taylor," McGuff said. "She's such a great player and has been such an incredible addition to our program. She's a great kid, great leader, especially in year two. She's using her voice within the team to help our young people grow and get better."

"To score 2,000 points in college basketball is very difficult, and she's done it at the highest level, as well. She's been facing really tough defenses night in and night out, so an incredible accomplishment."

While Mikesell acknowledged the accomplishment after the game, she would have preferred to come out with a win against the Hoosiers.

"It's pretty cool, but at the end of the day you want to come out with the win," she said, "so it doesn't really mean anything if you don't win the game."

Mikesell followed that up by reaching 1,000 points for the Scarlet and Gray in Ohio State's win over Wisconsin on Feb. 1. A third-quarter three-pointer pushed her past the 1,000-point mark just midway through her second season with the Buckeyes.

She became just the 36th player in program history to eclipse 1,000 points as a Buckeye, joining the likes of Mitchell, guard Katie Smith and even Sheldon, who accomplished that feat last season.

"That was really special," McGuff said. "I told the team it's really two things – one, Taylor's incredible ability as a player to score the ball, but also having teammates that share the ball. It's special for her, special for our program, and it's not easy to do in two years."

Those weren't the only accomplishments reached in recent weeks by Mikesell. She was also named to the midseason watch list for the Ann Meyers-Drysdale Award, given to the top shooting guard in the country. She

finished as one of five finalists for the award last season.

### Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State's three-game losing streak against Iowa, Indiana and Purdue represented a rarity for the Buckeyes under McGuff. Since taking over at Ohio State, beginning in the 2013-14 season, McGuff's teams have suffered just six losing streaks of at least three games. The most consecutive games lost by Ohio State under McGuff is five games during his first season in Columbus, a stretch in which the Buckeyes faced four ranked opponents.

- During halftime of Ohio State's loss to Purdue, the Buckeyes welcomed back several members of the 1992-93 team – including Smith, who was a freshman on that squad – that made it to the national championship game. At the time, it was the first women's team from the Big Ten to make the title game.

- After rising to No. 2 in the AP top 25 poll, the Buckeyes fell to No. 13 in the poll released on Feb. 6.

### Mikesell Is Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month

Despite the Buckeyes suffering their first losses of the season, January was still filled with mostly stellar outings for Mikesell, who was named Plank's Lady Buck of the Month for her efforts.

The Massillon, Ohio, native appeared in seven games during January, averaging 17.6 points per contest on 41.9 percent shooting from the field and 35.0 percent shooting from deep. She added 3.3 rebounds and 2.7 assists per game and was also an ironwoman for Ohio State in January, playing all 40 minutes in all games but the Buckeyes' blowout win over Northwestern.

Mikesell's highlight came in a 31-point outing in the Buckeyes' comeback win over Illinois on Jan. 8. She added that total – just three points shy of her career high, achieved last season – on 11-of-22 shooting, including a strong mark of 7 of 14 from behind the arc. Beyond her contributions on the court, she's also been a leader for Ohio State, helping to lead the Buckeyes over the last several months during Sheldon and guard Madison Greene's absences.



# Rutgers' Pikiell Lands Contract Extension

The Rutgers board of governors on Feb. 2 approved a one-year contract extension for men's basketball coach Steve Pikiell, tying the Scarlet Knights' lead man to the university through the 2030-31 season.

The extension comes after Pikiell had already received a four-year contract extension last March. With the latest addendum to his contract, his deal with Rutgers is now extends to eight years and \$30.8 million. The contract features a \$15 million buyout that will decrease by \$2 million every year beginning in the 2024-25 season.

## BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

Rutgers' program has seen a stark turnaround under Pikiell's guidance. The Scarlet Knights finished just 7-25 in 2015-16, the season before Pikiell's arrival, and had not experienced a winning season since 2005-06.

Things changed immediately upon Pikiell's arrival in Piscataway, N.J., as Rutgers went 15-18 in his first season at the program's helm and hovered just below .500 the following two years before finally breaking through with a winning campaign in 2019-20. The Scarlet Knights finished 20-11 that season, including a breakthrough into the AP top 25 poll for the first time since the 1978-79 season.

Following the NCAA Tournament's cancellation in 2020 – one that Rutgers likely would have participated in – the Scarlet Knights finally cracked the field in 2020-21, making it for the first time in Pikiell's tenure and for the first time as a program since the 1990-91 season.

Rutgers' made it to the tournament by way of a 16-12 regular season and made it to as high as No. 11 in the AP poll. The Scarlet Knights beat seventh-seeded Clemson in the first round before losing to second-seeded Houston in the second round.

The Scarlet Knights returned to the NCAA Tournament last season, upset by 11th-seeded Notre Dame in the first round. Rutgers is off to a 16-7 start to its 2022-23 campaign at time of press.

### Search For New Commissioner Continues

Since former Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren left to become president and CEO

of the Chicago Bears, the search for the seventh commissioner of the conference has been picking up steam.

On Jan. 27, the league's Council of Presidents and Chancellors released a statement that they had selected an executive search firm to assist them in the hiring process. Haddonfield, N.J.-based TurnkeyZRG will begin a nationwide search for Warren's replacement, with the council to make the final decision on who the next conference commissioner will be.

"It is an exciting and transformative time to be at the Big Ten Conference," council chairman and University of Illinois Chancellor Robert Jones said. "The Big Ten Conference is rich in academic and athletic traditions and positioned for continued success in the future. We are confident TurnkeyZRG will present candidates with strategic vision and integrity to best lead the conference."

TurnkeyZRG has been a go-to for filling similar positions in the sports world, having led past searches for commissioners of the ACC, Pac-12 and Big 12 as well as the NCAA president, among others. The council stated that it would not make any further public comment regarding its search until the announcement of the new commissioner.

"Commissioner Warren did a great job taking the Big Ten Conference to an even higher level than it already was," TurnkeyZRG CEO Len Perna said. "These are very big shoes to fill and TurnkeyZRG is honored and humbled by the opportunity."

While the conference is currently left without a leader, Iowa athletic director Gary Barta told The Athletic on Feb. 2 that the lull in leadership won't alter the league's plans after USC and UCLA join in 2024, especially as it comes to scheduling.

"We've had enough conversations," he said. "I think we're far enough along in the concept. And, really, we can't wait much longer. It's really important to lay out '24 and beyond. We've talked about different versions of it. We've also talked about a range from '24 to some other number out away so we can all plan. Maybe it's a four- or five-, six-year window that we lock in, so that we can put together our nonconference schedules."

### Iowa Sticking With Current Football Staff

While other coaches around the conference have been swapping out coaches and getting their ideal rosters of assistants together the past few months, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz plans on doing nothing of the sort after an 8-5 campaign last season.

"I anticipate no changes in our staff going forward," Ferentz said on Feb. 1. "I think we do have a terrific staff."

The Hawkeyes featured one of the worst offenses in all of college football in 2022, finishing 130th of 131 teams in total offense at just 251.6 yards per game. The Hawkeyes also ranked 123rd in scoring offense and passing offense, as well as 124th in rushing offense. Beyond that, Iowa had as many defensive touchdowns as it did passing touchdowns, with seven each.

Ferentz's son, Brian Ferentz, has served as Iowa's offensive coordinator since 2017. In that time, the Hawkeyes have never risen above the nation's No. 87 total offense, finishing 121st in 2021 to couple with their mark of 130th this past season.

While there won't be any shuffling on the side of the ball his son leads, the elder Ferentz did note that the offense needed to improve. The majority of his concerns were with the offensive line, where he felt the team played too many players who weren't ready for the spotlight.

"The 2022 performance, in a nutshell, was not good enough," he said. "We're well aware of that. We have been well aware of that, and we own it. The whole idea is to move forward and fix it."

Iowa did make two large transfer-portal acquisitions in the offseason to help improve that side of the ball, scooping up quarterback Cade McNamara and tight end Erick All, both formerly of Michigan. Joining them in a more recent pickup on Jan. 29 was former Miami (Ohio) offensive lineman Rusty Feth, who was second-team All-MAC in 2022.

By the same token, the Hawkeyes lost wide receiver Keagan Johnson to Kansas State via the transfer portal. Johnson was the team's second-leading pass catcher as a freshman in 2021 despite playing only nine games but appeared in just two games this season while dealing with a lingering injury.

### Schools Announce New Assistant Hires

As spring practices draw within a month of their respective start dates for teams across the Big Ten, the league's head football coaches have been making the final few tweaks to their assistant coaching staffs in an effort to draw the best out of their players.

Following the firing of co-offensive coordinator Matt Weiss in the midst of an ongoing police investigation into alleged computer crimes, Michigan promoted analyst Kirk Campbell to quarterbacks coach. Campbell spent two seasons as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Old Dominion before joining the Wolverines this past season as an analyst.

"Kirk is a bright, young offensive mind that immediately meshed with our coaching staff last year," Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh said. "Our offensive staff was really impressed with his knowledge and expertise of the entire offense, and he was integral to the success of the offense with game planning and opponent scouting."

Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano also filled in a vacancy in his offensive staff, hiring former New York Giants offensive line coach Pat Flaherty to coach the Scarlet Knights' front five going forward.

Flaherty spent 12 seasons with the Giants from 2004-15, coaching on the staff of two Super Bowl-winning teams in 2007 and 2011. Since 2015, he's also been the offensive line coach of the San Francisco 49ers, Jacksonville Jaguars and Miami Dolphins, and he returned to the Giants for a lone season as an analyst in 2021. Flaherty does have prior experience in Piscataway, N.J., coaching as an offensive line assistant from 1984-91.

"Pat is a highly respected coach and someone I have known for a long time," Schiano said on Feb. 1. "His experience will be beneficial to the development of our offensive line. We all know the Big Ten is a line-of-scrimmage league, and Pat understands what it takes to be successful at the highest level."

On the defensive side of the ball, Illinois head coach Bret Bielema hired Arizona Cardinals outside linebackers coach Charlie Bullen to the same position on his staff. Similar to Flaherty, Bullen also brings a long track record of NFL experience, coaching linebackers and defensive line for the Miami Dolphins from 2012-18 before coaching the Arizona Cardinals' linebackers beginning in 2019.

"To me, in the coaching profession, I try to identify good opportunities with good people," Bullen, a Palatine, Ill., native said on Feb. 1. "Program on the rise, back home, I always respected Coach B. Coming here, I had a great feel for him and his staff during my interview. And I think it's a unique opportunity for me to come back to my home state and coach for my state's state institution."

Rounding out the list of recent Big Ten football assistant coaching hires is the move of Michigan State head coach Mel Tucker to bring aboard Stanford defensive line coach Diron Reynolds to the same position. During his seven seasons at Stanford, Reynolds produced four NFL draft picks – including Solomon Thomas, who went third overall in the 2017 NFL draft – along the defensive line.

### Maryland Unanimous Among Preseason Lacrosse Polls

Maryland's men's and women's lacrosse teams are expected to dominate this season, as both were tabbed as preseason favorites within the Big Ten by the conference's coaches in a preseason poll.

On the men's side, the Terrapins are coming off an undefeated season in which they captured the program's fourth NCAA championship. Trailing Maryland in the rankings are No. 2 Ohio State, No. 3 Rutgers, No. 4 Johns Hopkins, No. 5 Penn State and No. 6 Michigan.

While the Terrapins on the women's side did not bring home a national championship last season, they did make it to the Final Four before falling to Boston College in the semifinals, earning their preseason ranking at No. 1.

Behind Maryland, the conference coaches agreed on No. 2 Northwestern, No. 3 Rutgers, No. 4 Michigan, No. 5 Johns Hopkins, No. 6 Ohio State and No. 7 Penn State. The men's season began on Feb. 4, with the women's season following on Feb. 10.

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# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## 2022 FOOTBALL

**Sept. 3** NOTRE DAME, W 21-10; **10** ARKANSAS STATE, W 45-12; **17** TOLEDO, W, 77-21.; **24** WISCONSIN, W 52-21.

**Oct. 1** RUTGERS, W 49-10; **8** at Michigan State, W 49-20; **22** IOWA, W 54-10; **29** at Penn State, W 44-31.

**Nov. 5** at Northwestern, W 21-7 **12** INDIANA, W 56-14 **19** at Maryland, W 43-30; **26** MICHIGAN, L 45-23.

**Dec. 31** at Peach Bowl vs. Georgia, L 42-41.

## 2023 FOOTBALL

**Sept. 2** at Indiana; **9** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

**Oct. 7** MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

**Nov. 4** at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

## MEN'S BASKETBALL (11-12, 3-9)

**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, L 69-60; **28** at Indiana, L 86-70.

**Feb. 2** WISCONSIN, L 65-60; **5** at Michigan, L 77-69; **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 (20-4, 9-4)

**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, L 83-72; **26** at Indiana, L 78-65; **29** PURDUE, L 73-65.

**Feb. 1** at Wisconsin, W 90-67; **5** at Maryland, L 90-54; **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, L 409.200-404.000.

**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 (8-1, 3-1)

**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, W 197.225-196.900; **28** at Michigan, L 197.075-196.350.

**Feb. 5** MARYLAND, W 197.575-196.475; **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 (17-10-1, 10-8)

**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, L 4-3, W 4-2; **10-11** at Notre Dame; **16** MICHIGAN **18** at FirstEnergy Stadium, Cleveland, vs. Michigan; **24-25** at Minnesota.

## WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (25-3-2, 20-3-1)

**Sept. 30** at Minnesota State, W 2-1.

**Oct. 1** at Minnesota State, W 5-4; **7** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-2; **8** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 6-2; **15-16** at Bemidji State, W 4-0; W 5-2; **21-22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 3-2 OT; W 3-2; **28-29** MINNESOTA, L 4-2, T 4-4 (SOW).

**Nov. 5** at St. Thomas, W 4-0; **6** at St. Thomas, W 6-0; **18** BEMIDJI STATE, W 5-0; **19** BEMIDJI STATE, W 7-1; **22** COLGATE, T 4-4 (OT); **23** COLGATE, W 6-2.

**Dec. 2** at Minnesota Duluth, W 2-1; **3** at Minnesota Duluth, L 5-4 (OT); **17-18** at Cornell, W 4-3, W 4-0; **30-31** at Lindenwood, W 9-1, W 6-0.

**Jan. 13** 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** MINNESOTA STATE, W 6-2; **28** MINNESOTA STATE, W 4-2.

**Feb. 3-4** at Minnesota, L 4-2, W 5-1; **10-11** ST. THOMAS; **17-18** at Wisconsin.

## MEN'S LACROSSE (1-0)

**Feb. 4** AIR FORCE, W 15-7 **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 2** at Penn State; **7** 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.

## 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., Men: 1st/4 (1,955.5); Women: 1st/4 (1,803).

**Feb. 10-12** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **15-18** Big Ten 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 (9-0)

**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, W 4-0; TULSA., W 4-0

**Feb. 3** TEXAS A&M, W 7-0; **5** TEXAS, W 4-0; **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 (7-3, 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, W 3-1, W 3-2.

**Feb. 3** at Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in State College, Pa., vs. UCLA, L 3-1; **4** at Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in State College, Pa., vs. USC, W 3-1; **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 (12-2, 6-1)

**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, W 23-15; **29** MICHIGAN STATE, W 36-3.

**Feb. 3** Penn State, L 29-9; **5** at Northwestern, W 21-12; **10** NEBRASKA; **18** Spartan Combat Dual at Tampa, Fla., vs. Cornell.

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

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# OSU Bested At Home By PSU In Top-Five Bout

Penn State came into Columbus on Feb. 3 and showed why it is favored to win its sixth national championship in eight years. The No. 1 Nittany Lions beat No. 5 Ohio State 29-9, with only two Buckeyes coming out victorious in their individual matches.

## ON THE MAT Andy Anders

"We measure two things closely: effort and skill," Ohio State wrestling coach Tom Ryan told BSB. "Overall, our effort was good. In some matches our skill was great, and in too many we just didn't execute perfect skill. I'm proud of my team. They are warriors."

Senior Malik Heinselman, the No. 10 wrestler at 125 pounds nationally, opened the dual meet with some fireworks. He pinned Penn State's Gary Steen in 1:56 of match time, opening the bout with a quick takedown, landing four points for a near fall and eventually rolling the younger grappler over to stick him to the mat and put Ohio State up 6-0.

"Malik started us off with a bang," Ryan said. "He executed two moves perfectly, and the second ended the match."

It was always going to be tough sledding from there for the Buckeyes, however. Penn State started just one wrestler from 133 pounds and up who was ranked outside the top 10 in his respective weight class. Even that grappler, 149-pound Shayne Van Ness, entered the evening ranked 13th in his class. Ohio State redshirt senior Sammy Sasso, ranked No. 3 at 149, beat Van Ness by a 6-3 decision for the lone other Buckeye win.

The rest was all Nittany Lions. Each of its three No. 1-ranked wrestlers – Roman Bravo-Young at 133 pounds, Carter Starocci at 174 and Aaron Brooks at 184 – scored victories. One of the closest losses for Ohio State was at 184 pounds, where redshirt senior Kaleb Romero did show grit in his 3-2 loss to Brooks.

Midway through the match, Romero dislocated his finger. Rather than forfeit due to injury, even with his team down 16-9 in the meet at that point, Romero shoved it back into socket and finished the match. It wasn't the last ailment he'd suffer in the bout, either.

"We watched Kaleb dislocate his finger, pop it back in place and then suffer a lower extremity injury and continue to battle," Ryan said.

Ohio State followed the loss with a road match at No. 15 Northwestern on Feb. 5, where the Buckeyes returned to the win column with a 21-12 victory over the Wildcats.

## Buckeyes Complete Weekend Sweep Of Michigan Schools

During the weekend prior to their showdown with Penn State, the Buckeyes went on the road and toppled No. 7 Michigan by a 23-15 score on Jan. 27 before returning home to crush Michigan State, 36-3, on Jan. 29.

Freshman Jesse Mendez, the No. 9 wrestler in the country at 133 pounds, gave Ohio State a huge early boost against Michigan by defeating No. 12 Dylan Ragusin in sudden victory by a 3-1 final.

"Jesse is a competitor and is excited for any challenge," OSU assistant coach J Jaggers told The Lantern. "He does not get tired. He has good technique and is trusted and respected by his teammates and coaches."

Coupled with victories over ranked opponents from Heinselman at 125 pounds and No. 18 Dylan D'Emilio at 141 pounds, the Buckeyes were out to a 9-0 start against the Wolverines. That grew to 14-0 when Sasso earned a technical fall over Michigan's Fidel Mayora, 20-5.

Romero also picked up a huge top-10 victory over No. 8 Matt Finesilver that largely put the match out of reach for Michigan, as the Wolverines trailed 20-9 with only two matches remaining, needing a pin and a technical fall to equalize things.

The Wolverines didn't get either in their next match. Instead, Ohio State's Gavin Hoffman, No. 21 at 197 pounds, defeated Michigan's Rylan Rodgers, 5-3, to secure the dual-meet victory.

Dominance was then the name of the game for the Buckeyes just two days later against Michigan State. Only one wrestler lost his match in the dual, with the Spartans' 13th-ranked Chase Saldate beating Ohio State's 23rd-ranked Paddy Gallagher at 157 pounds.

The rest went according to plan for the Buckeyes. D'Emilio and Sasso recorded pins, and Romero and Mendez each registered bonus-point victories, with Mendez taking down No. 18 Rayvon Foley in a 10-2 major decision. Hoffman also picked up an upset, knocking off No. 14 Cameron Caffey by a 3-2 decision.

## Former Buckeyes Collect International Hardware

Three former Ohio State grapplers made the finals at the 2023 Zagreb Open on Feb. 2, a huge international tournament that is the first stop on the road to the World Championships. Wrestlers earn points from their respective finishes at the open that go toward qualification and seeding for said worlds.

The trio of former Buckeyes certainly collected plenty of points for themselves. Kyle Snyder – a 2016 Olympic gold medalist, 2021 Olympic silver medalist and three-time national champion – dominated the 97-kilogram weight class at the event, winning each of his four matches by

at least three points. He beat Amirali Hamid Azarpira of Iran in the championship match, 3-0.

Kollin Moore, who wrestled for the Buckeyes from 2016-20, added a second gold medal from former Ohio Staters at the tournament by winning the 92-kilogram class. He scraped out a 4-3 win over Georgia's Miriani Maisuradze in the finals.

Moore's international career has been picking up steam, as he earned a bronze medal at the Yasar Dogu Tournament last year followed by a silver medal at the U.S. team trials, where he fell to Snyder. It's been a rebound from a disappointing end to his collegiate tenure, during which Moore finished second at the NCAA tournament as a junior and was undefeated entering the tournament his senior year only to have the event canceled due to COVID-19.

Joey McKenna, who wrestled two seasons at Ohio State from 2018-19, rounded out the list of former Buckeyes competing in the Zagreb Open, picking up a silver medal at 65 kilograms. McKenna's first two wins of the tournament came by technical fall and pin, respectively, before a narrow 4-3 victory over Japan's Ryoma Anraku placed him in the finals. There, he lost a 4-1 bout to Mongolia's Tulga Tumurchir, a bronze medalist at the World Championships in 2021.

"They wrestled great," Ryan said. "Tough. Smart. Great tactics and skill. They were all great leaders here. Focused men."

## Five Freshmen Win At Blue Raider Open

While Ohio State's starters were resting up between the Michigan and Michigan State duals on Jan. 28, five of the team's backups – all of them freshmen – won their respective weight classes at the Blue Raider Open, hosted at Lindsey Wilson College in Columbia, Ky.

Nic Bouzakis posted the most dominant outing, pinning all three of his opponents while wrestling unattached at 133 pounds to win the division. It was his first three bouts wrestling unattached this season, as he also holds an 8-1 record with three additional pins representing the Scarlet and Gray.

One weight class below him at 125 pounds, Brendan McCrone picked up a quarterfinal pin, semifinal decision and final-round pin over Life University's Adrian Morales to ensure the Buckeyes bested the two lowest weight classes.

Seth Shumate had to eliminate a teammate en route to his open title at 184 pounds, going to sudden victory to beat Gavin Bell in the semifinals. Life University's Asher Eichert proved equally formidable, but Shumate managed to squeak out a 5-4 decision.

Another freshman wrestled one weight class above what he's listed at on Ohio State's roster but still managed an open title, with Luke Geog grabbing the crown at 197 pounds behind a technical fall and two decision wins. Gavin Brown rounded out the list of champions, sweeping through four matches to win the 157-pound division. Each of his victories were by at least eight points.



Jesse Mendez

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# Transfer Made Wise Choice In Joining OSU

Jake Wise was looking for a fresh start, and Ohio State was interested in retooling after a subpar 2020-21 season. The matching of the two has been a win-win, which is how the transfer portal is meant to work.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The fifth-year senior had three unproductive seasons at Boston University and started looking elsewhere to regain the confidence and swagger that made the Chicago Blackhawks use a third-round pick (69th overall) in the 2018 NHL draft on the Reading, Mass., native. But he rarely flashed at BU, scoring just 17 points (three goals, 14 assists) in 50 career games.

Ohio State needed a scorer, and despite Wise's rather pedestrian numbers, coach Steve Rohlik and his staff saw Wise's potential.

"They were kind of taking a chance," Wise said. "I guess in my situation, kind of not really playing great for a little stretch, they took a chance on me, and I was just trying to get back to my game and I thought I could do that coming here."

"I knew I could bring a lot to the table, whether that was scoring or just playing a complete game, so when I was first transferring that's sort of what Coach (Rohlik) and I talked about. He wanted me to get back to playing confident, playing my best, and I told him I want to be a guy that can really help this team win."

Last season for the Buckeyes, Wise showed he was that guy. He tied for second on the team with 10 goals, ranked second with 18 assists and was third with 28 points in 35 games. Through 28 games this season, he has 24 points (nine goals, 15 assists).

Just as importantly, he was named a captain and has been the go-to player to speak with the media through all the ups and downs.

"You see what Jake's done the last two years for us as a leader and now as a captain," Rohlik said. "He's been a valuable addition in everything he's done."

The Buckeyes have five transfers this season, including senior defenseman Dominic Vidoli and forward Mark Cheremeta, who were Boston University teammates of Wise for the 2018-19 season. Vidoli and Cheremeta are each in their third seasons with the Buckeyes.

Senior forward Matt Cassidy spent the 2018-19 season at Quinnipiac, returned to junior hockey the next season and has been at Ohio State for three seasons. The most recent transfer is senior defenseman Scooter Brickley, who came to Columbus this season after three with Western Michigan.

"I wanted to bring my compete level every day and I don't need to have a letter on my jersey to be a leader," Brickley said. "I come to practice ready to play every day. I feel like I can lead in that way. That's what I told them from the start. I told them I'm coming here to help be a game changer."

"In return, they've given everything to me."

This is an unbelievable place to play, and when I'm older hopefully my kid will play here someday."

Rohlik said that transfers such as Brickley and Wise provide a different perspective.

"They just bring that new, fresh attitude, and we're very lucky that both these guys are tremendous human beings," the coach said. "What I like is their excitement about how many good things we have here, the resources you have here at Ohio State to help you both off the ice and on the ice. That was refreshing as a coach that these two have come in and are like, 'Wow, this is incredible.'"

"For me, as a coach, it's refreshing to know from them that we're doing things the right way here, and we're doing some things above and beyond as far as the development side of things, which I think really helps."

Wise is appreciative of his time at Ohio State, as short as it has been.

"I can't say enough good things about my teammates, coaching staff, from being at the rink, away from the rink, the school, everything," he said. "It's been a real dream come true. I'm so lucky."

### Another Day

The five aforementioned seniors are among 13 who will be honored Feb. 16 on Senior Night, which will be held on a Thursday and not the customary Saturday. It's also not technically the last home game of the regular season for the Buckeyes, although it is for Value City Arena.

After hosting Michigan on Feb. 16, the Buckeyes will be the home team two days later against the Wolverines at FirstEnergy Stadium, home of the Cleveland Browns. The Buckeyes' regular season concludes Feb. 24-25 at Minnesota.

"Senior night on a Thursday is not your perfect scenario," Rohlik said. "But to have the experience of playing the outdoor game, and that was something I talked to our guys about right away. This is something that we wanted to do as a group so they're willing to do this Senior Night on a Thursday and hopefully have a good crowd in order to have the opportunity to play the outdoor game."

Brickley understands the switch in tradition, though he admitted that it's "pretty crazy" to hold the proceedings on a Thursday.

"It would be nice to have a ton of people here on that Thursday, especially playing Michigan, a big-time rival," he said. "Then the outdoor game, that's going to be super special with everyone's families and the 50,000 seats they've already sold."

The other seniors to be recognized are goalie Ryan Snowden; defensemen James Marrooney and C.J. Regula; and forwards Gustaf Westlund, Jaedon Leslie, Dalton Messina, Kamil Sadlocha and Tate Singleton.

However, because of a pandemic-related rule instituted by the NCAA, athletes are allowed a fifth year, so some seniors may return next season. That was the case for Westlund and Wise.

### On The Road

Another quirk in the schedule had the Buckeyes play only three home games after Nov. 19 until the Feb. 3-4 series against Penn State, with nine away games during that span. Even worse, students were out of school for all

three games.

There were more than 1,500 students were on hand for the series opener against the Nittany Lions and 800-plus attended the game the next night.

### Half As Good

The games drew big crowds both nights but the Buckeyes sent them home happy only after the second one. No. 9 Penn State scored late for a 4-3 win before No. 7 Ohio State took the rematch 4-2 in front of a season-high turnout of 8,439.

The Nittany Lions (19-10-1, 9-10-1 Big Ten) jumped to a 2-0 lead in the first game, but Wise scored at 12:01 of the third period to tie it 3-3. Kevin Wall scored his second of the game at 17:40 to give Penn State the win as 7,174 watched.

In the second game, Ohio State (17-10-1, 10-8-0) twice took leads on goals by Leslie and Davis Burnside, but the Nittany Lions tied it each time. Burnside, a freshman, tops the Buckeyes with 13 goals.

The winning score came off the stick of Singleton at 15:58 of the third when he redirected a shot by Cole McWard to make it 3-2, and McWard added an empty-net tally at 17:58.

McWard (goal, two assists) had the first three-point game of his career, and Stephen Halliday had two assists to give him five for the weekend. Halliday, a freshman, leads the team with 23 helpers and 30 points.

### Where They Stand

Other than Minnesota (43 points) at the top running away with the regular-season title and Wisconsin (nine) scuffling at the bottom, the other five teams are in a scramble for play-off positioning.

Ohio State, Michigan, Penn State and Michigan State each have 30 points, and Notre Dame sits sixth with 26. The Buckeyes and Wolverines have played two fewer games than the other three.

The top seed receives a first-round bye while the second through fourth schools host

## BIG Men's Hockey

	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Minnesota	18	43	14	3	1	1	1	0
Michigan	18	30	10	8	0	2	2	0
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Penn State	20	30	9	10	1	0	2	0
Michigan State	20	30	9	9	2	1	0	2
Notre Dame	20	26	8	10	2	1	0	1
Wisconsin	18	9	3	15	0	0	0	0

**Overall records —** Minnesota 20-7-1, Michigan 18-9-1, **Ohio State 17-10-1**, Penn State 19-10-1, Michigan State 15-13-2, Notre Dame 13-14-3, Wisconsin 10-18-0.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

best-of-three quarterfinal series against the bottom three in a 2-7, 3-6, 4-5 format.

### Up Next

The Buckeyes play at Notre Dame on Feb. 10-11. Ohio State is eighth in the PairWise rankings that mimic the selection for the 16-team NCAA field. Minnesota is first, followed by No. 4 Michigan, No. 5 Penn State, No. 14 Michigan State and the Fighting Irish on the bubble at No. 17.

### Czech Mate

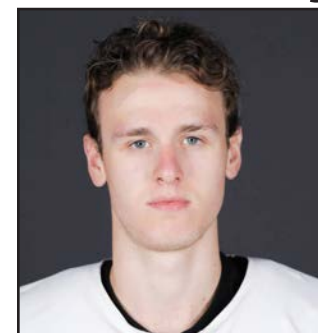
Jakub Dobeš, a sophomore from Ostrava, Czech Republic, recorded two shutouts and allowed two or fewer goals in four of the six January games to earn the Varsity Club Icer of the Month award.

He was the Big Ten First Star of Week after giving up one goal in a sweep of Michigan State on Jan. 6-7. He made 27 saves for a 3-1 win in the opener and stopped 32 shots the next night for the 6-0 victory.

Dobeš, a fifth-round selection by the Montreal Canadiens in the 2020 NHL draft, made 27 saves at Wisconsin on Jan. 21 for his sixth career shutout, 2-0 over the Badgers.

For a recap of the Penn State series go to the [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

## VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For January



**Jakub Dobeš**  
*Sophomore Goalie*  
*Ostrava, Czech Republic*



# Recruiting Is First Step In Finding Success

Success for a college football program is about more than recruiting – far, far more.

But in sports, a head start sure is nice. That's what outstanding recruiting can amount to. And that's why there should be at least a little bit of concern about how things turned out this season for Ohio State.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

You'll find plenty of different opinions floating around, but if there is a consensus, it is that Ohio State is at least a few steps below Alabama and Georgia in this year's recruiting classes. And the tighter gap between Ohio State and the teams ranking next isn't one we've been accustomed to.

From the best I can tell – and I certainly don't treat any rating system as gospel – Ohio State landed just one of the so-called five-star recruits this year, while Alabama nabbed nine, Georgia grabbed five, and Texas around four – depending on where you look.

Does five-star mean guaranteed success? Absolutely not.

But when you successfully recruit high numbers of players with such ratings, it certainly improves the odds of having multiple

game-changing superstar players on the roster. Among the Ohio State five-stars in recent history: Ted Ginn, Terrelle Pryor, Nick Bosa, Chase Young, Garrett Wilson. You get the idea. Those are big-time talents.

You'll also find guys like J.T. Tuimoloau, Jack Sawyer, Julian Fleming. Pretty good players, but not the type, at least yet, that belong in that first group. But overall, most five-star players in recent Ohio State history have turned out to be pretty good players.

This year we have only one to talk about. That's Brandon Inniss, wide receiver from Florida. We're told he's more than just a package of speed. One evaluation I read online described him as "big, physical, explosive, reliable." Sounds good to me. And given the success of Ohio State wide receivers in recent years, I'd fully expect him to be a star.

So on one hand, it raises concern that Ohio State has "just" one five-star this year. On the other, Buckeye fans should not be fretting, but rather a little concerned. Overall, by all accounts, this class is solid, very solid.

And remember, it's about more than recruiting. It's about taking those top stars and developing them to be even better. It's about taking guys who were not necessarily the very top of their class, and helping them become big-time players.

How much difference do you think there is between five-star TreVeyon Henderson and three-star back Miyan Williams? I like

them both, Henderson a little higher if it came down to picking. But I'm sure in some corners this would be a healthy debate.

Wilson, as we noted, was a five-star. Chris Olave, a three-star. But once their college careers were done, they were the 10th (Wilson) and 11th (Olave) players picked in the 2022 NFL draft – the second and third receivers off the board.

The point is, a five-star is not guaranteed to be better than a three-star. So the jury is out on all these new recruits right now.

Take TCU, which worked its way into the national championship game with a bunch of recruits who aren't in the league of Alabama, Georgia and Ohio State recruiting. And, tough as this may be to take, the team with the far more highly rated recruiting classes of late has lost the last two Ohio State-Michigan games.

But I still go back to increasing the odds of success. Step back for a minute and look at this past season's playoffs, or even the entire playoff era. What team without a roster packed with star power won a national championship? None.

Which two teams in this past season's playoffs would be the odds-on favorites as the top two if the playoffs were replayed? Georgia and Ohio State, obviously.

Does recruiting top-rated talent guarantee victories? Obviously not. Ohio State lost to Michigan. Michigan lost to TCU. But having the players certainly puts you in a better chance to win. And recruiting is a good starting point.

## Remember When?

In talking about recruiting, however, it is a little old school. Remember when recruiting was nearly the end-all in putting together a roster? Yes, there were always the occasional transfers. But those were the exceptions.

Now players move as fast as a hurry-up offense – and good for them. They only have a short opportunity to play college football. Why not be in the best situation?

But while we talked above about there being just one five-star in this OSU class, that could be shortchanging things a little. The big news around signing day was the addition of transfer cornerback Davison Igbinosun.

Igbinosun came out of Union (New Jersey) High School as a four-star a year ago. But he may very well be considered a five-star if that was redone now. He was a freshman All-American at Ole Miss last season, starting 10 games for a team that was ranked as high as seventh nationally in late October before falling apart down the

stretch.

At 6-foot-2, 185 pounds, he won't be dwarfed by big receivers. He was considered the best high school player coming out of New Jersey in 2022. And now he's a valuable addition to the Buckeyes at a position of need.

## The Ryan Day Era

Including three games in 2018, Ryan Day is now 45-6 as Ohio State's head coach. No national championships, but only once finishing out of the top four (sixth in 2021 to go with rankings of two in 2020, three in 2019 and four in 2022).

Everyone knows he's behind Georgia (two national titles), Alabama (one) and LSU (one) during that time for the big prize. But how does his win/loss record stack up? I totaled the records of the 131 major programs over the last four seasons, and here's how it sorts out:

### Nation's Top 10

1. Georgia, 49-5 (90.7%)
2. Alabama, 48-6 (88.9%)
3. Ohio State, 42-6 (87.5%)
4. Clemson, 45-9 (83.3%)
5. Cincinnati, 42-9 (82.4%)
6. Notre Dame, 41-10 (80.4%)
7. Louisiana, 40-12 (76.9%)
8. Michigan, 36-11 (76.6%)
9. Air Force, 34-11 (75.6%)
10. Oregon, 36-12 (75.0%)

Missing is one of the recent national champions, LSU, which came in at No. 20 (36-16, 69.2%)

(As an aside, there are multiple Ohio State ties near the top. Alabama coach Nick Saban is a former Ohio State assistant, Cincinnati was coached by former Ohio State player and coach Luke Fickell, and Notre Dame is coached by ex-Buckeye Marcus Freeman.)

Here's the rest of the Big Ten, with their national rankings:

17. Iowa, 34-14 (70.8%)
19. Minnesota, 32-14 (69.6%)
21. Penn State, 33-15 (68.8%)
30. Wisconsin, 30-17 (63.8%)
52. Michigan State, 25-20 (55.6%)
74. Purdue, 23-22 (51.1%)
90. Maryland, 20-23 (46.5%)
92. Illinois, 21-25 (45.7%)
94. Indiana, 20-25 (44.4%)
108. Nebraska, 15-29 (34.1%)
113. Northwestern, 14-31 (31.1%)
116. Rutgers, 14-32 (30.4%)

The bottom nationally?

Akron came in 130th out of 131 schools with a 5-37 record (11.9%), ahead of only Massachusetts at 3-37 (7.5%).

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# Day Considers Using Hartline To Make Calls

Almost immediately after it was announced that Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson would be leaving to take the head job at Tulsa, posters on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum began clamoring for Brian Hartline to be elevated to the coordinator's position and were already touting him as Ryan Day's future successor. That proposition became even more exciting for our posters when Buckeye-turned-broadcaster Kirk Herbstreit indicated that Day was going to be giving up play-calling duties heading into next season. Let Hartline call the plays, our readers requested.

I'm not suggesting that I was the voice of reason, but I wanted everyone to at least slow down.

Before I say anything else, I have to say that Hartline's performance since taking over the receivers' room on short notice after the dismissal of Zach Smith has been nothing short of stunning. Smith was considered an excellent recruiter, but Hartline has taken things to an entirely different level. And once his blue-chip receivers have arrived here, he has helped them shine as Buckeyes and prepared them well for the next level, one he would completely understand after a seven-year NFL career that included two seasons of more than 70 catches and 1,000 yards.

But the first question you had to ask was did Hartline even *want* to be a coordinator or, ultimately, a head coach? Some guys, like OSU defensive line coach Larry Johnson, appear perfectly happy to be assistant coaches. Or a guy like Jim Knowles seems content to be a defensive coordinator. These coaches appear to have little, if any, aspirations to be a head coach. Why put up with the type of hassles that led Day to consider giving up play-calling duties?

By accepting the job of offensive coordinator, Hartline indicated that he is interested in being upwardly mobile.

However, I am still left with the very fresh vision of another popular Buckeye coach who recruited his position exceptionally and developed his players into prime NFL talent, but stumbled as a coordinator. That, of course, would be Kerry Coombs.

That promotion proved to be such a disaster that Day was forced to make defensive staff adjustments in the middle of the 2021 season, a move that you just don't see at Ohio State. Buckeye coaches have generally waited until after the season to make any changes.

Now we hear that Day is possibly backtracking on his decision to give up the play-calling.

"What we're going to do is go through the spring – and I talked to Brian about that – and create some environments where we can have Jim (Knowles) call (the defense) and Brian call (the offense)," Day said. "Then we'll come up for air at the end of the spring and figure out what that (play calling) dynamic looks like going into the preseason and then into the season."

"So, we won't decide on any of that now, but we certainly will give (Hartline) an opportunity to call it this spring and see how that goes."

Does this proclamation indicate that Day wants to see what Hartline can do before ceding responsibilities, or does it mean he is having second thoughts about giving up those gameday duties?

Two things we know for certain. Day is going to be involved in the offense whether he is the primary play caller or not, and he is bound to have the final say on what is sent out to the field. But we also know that Ohio State is not a place where you can learn on the job. You have to be ready to call a championship-caliber game right out of the gate.

Things I don't want to see? Unnecessary timeouts or delay of game penalties because of indecisiveness or confusion over who is calling

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

the play. And I don't want to see Hartline's reputation at Ohio State sullied, like that of Coombs.

Day and Wilson collaborated with great success for six seasons in Columbus, both as co-offensive coordinators and as head coach and OC, but failed to win a national championship and came up empty the last two seasons against archrival Michigan. Maybe it's time for some new blood at the top of the OSU offensive hierarchy. Hartline has risen to every challenge presented to him since returning to Ohio State and then some, so let's see how he does moving forward.

If Hartline doesn't succeed as a play caller, Day has proved he will make a change, even if it comes, as mentioned, after the start of the season. Only this time he wouldn't be calling on Matt Barnes to take over play calling from Coombs. He would most likely be calling on himself.

One last word on Coombs, who was retained on the Cincinnati staff by Scott Satterfield when Luke Fickell took the Wisconsin job.

After his failed stint as defensive coordinator at Ohio State, some Buckeye fans seem to consider him an overly enthusiastic buffoon. Consider this: In recent years Coombs has been hired by Brian Kelly, Urban Meyer, Mike Vrabel, Day and Fickell. That's a lot of very successful coaches who have wanted Coombs on their staff.

But for all of his successes and the one noticeable failure as a coach, the thing I will appreciate most about Coombs – in addition to his infectious enthusiasm – is the professionalism and dignity with which he conducted himself during that tumultuous 2021 season. That had to be humiliating for an otherwise successful coach. There is an example there from which all of his pupils and all of us can learn.

### Recruiting Notes

You are reading Buckeyes Sports Bulletin's Football Recruiting Wrap-Up, always one of our most popular issues of the year. Greetings to the many lapsed subscribers or new subscribers who jumped on board in time to get this issue.

I had a couple of thoughts as I read through copy for the Wrap-Up.

First would be the fact that it doesn't seem like Jim Harbaugh and Michigan have been able to capitalize on two straight victories over Ohio State and two straight trips to the College Football Playoff. I'll give Harbaugh and his staff a mulligan for finishing third in the Big Ten in recruiting last season behind OSU and Penn State (though an impressive ninth nationally). It is often said that a team does not get a recruiting rub from a successful season until the following cycle. But this year the Wolverines again finished third in the conference behind the Buckeyes and Nittany Lions and dipped to 18th nationally, according to the BSB consensus poll.

Only 10 of Michigan's 23 signees held at least a four-star rating (Ohio State by comparison had 19) and only seven of its recruits were in the top 300 – just one in the top 150. Obviously, that pales in comparison to the Buckeye haul. But it's all about what you do with your talent when it takes the field and I don't have to remind you that Michigan is on a two-game win streak over Ohio State so we will have to reserve judgment for the time being.

- Looking at other schools that fared well in the Big Ten, I noticed that Penn State, Mich-

igan State and Nebraska, who finished second, fourth and fifth in conference recruiting, respectively, all had classes that were strong along the defensive line. Ohio State nabbed four defensive linemen, all four-star prospects, but lost out on some very high-profile defensive linemen who were considering coming to Columbus.

Are the negative recruiters telling prospects that Johnson, one of the best teachers in the business, is getting ready to retire?

- While most would consider Ohio State's top-five recruiting haul according to the BSB consensus poll a success, some Buckeye fans will fret that the Buckeyes weren't higher, especially when compared to Alabama and Georgia, the unanimous No. 1 and No. 2 classes, respectively.

But consider this: Ohio State's was listed as the fourth-best class by two of the organizations polled and fifth by a third. ESPN – sometimes referred to as E-SEC-PN – ranked the Buckeyes *ninth*. If ESPN picked the Buckeyes even eighth, they would have tied with Oklahoma for fourth, and if they saw the OSU class as seventh, the Buckeyes would have been fourth outright.

Conspiracy?

- In looking at the bios on the Ohio State recruits in this issue, I was really struck by the numbers of quarterback Lincoln Kienholz, the No. 1 player out of South Dakota. He passed for 3,422 yards and 46 touchdowns as a senior and ran for another 1,436 yards and 24 touchdowns. *That's 70 touchdowns accounted for.*

Now I know what you are thinking, and of course I have thought about it too. Against what kind of competition did he post those numbers in South Dakota? Good question.

Then I got to thinking about Joe Burrow, who had one of the greatest seasons by a quarterback in NCAA history and has gone on to stardom for Cincinnati in the NFL. What kind of competition did *he* face in high school?

Burrow played his prep ball at Athens (Ohio) High School in the Tri-Valley Conference's Ohio (big school) Division. Other schools in the division include Alexander, Meigs, Nelsonville-York, River Valley, Vinton County and Wellston. Now before any of our many readers in southeastern Ohio say I am picking on the Tri-Valley Conference, based on the number of recruits I have seen come out of the conference in my years on the beat, I'm guessing that Burrow was not facing the likes of Moeller and Massillon, St. Ignatius or St. Ed's on a regular basis.

As an athlete you can't control how good your competition is. You can only control how good you are. I am eager to see how Kienholz's college career progresses.

### Proud Alums

As noted in the NFL feature on page 26 of this issue, Burrow still claims allegiance to Ohio State, even though he won his Heisman Trophy and national championship at LSU. I think many forget that Burrow went to LSU as a graduate transfer, not through the transfer portal, after appearing to lose the battle to be Ohio State's starting quarterback in 2018 to the late Dwayne Haskins.

"I'm definitely still a Buckeye," Burrow said this fall. "I graduated from there. I still have relationships to this day that I wouldn't have without being there. I'm still in contact with Coach (Mickey Marotti) and Coach Day, Corey (Den- nis), all those guys, so I'm still a Buckeye."

As a graduate, he is a Buckeye forever, and that makes Burrow every bit as much a Buckeye as this Washington, D.C., native (M.A., Ohio State, 1981).

And now is as good a time as any to congratulate the seven football graduates from the OSU December commencement. Among those to walk across the stage at the Schottenstein Center on Dec. 18 were Kamryn Babb, Marcus Crowley, Tyler Friday, Zach Harrison, Ronnie Hickman, and Paris Johnson. It was a small group, but one that left its mark on the Ohio State gridiron.

By the way, Johnson, who will soon be off to the NFL, earned his degree in journalism.

### Nota Bene

As many longtime subscribers will recall, there is traditionally a three-week BSB publishing gap following the Recruiting Wrap-Up. The next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, dated March 4, will be mailed on Feb. 28.

### Ways To Help BSB

As I mentioned in this space last issue, I will be presenting ways for readers to help keep BSB vibrant and viable.

Many of you have given gifts through the years at the special rate of \$19.95. We have pretty much retired that rate because it no longer is enough to cover the annual cost of printing and mailing a subscription.

However, I am going to dust off that rate for what is probably the last time to give you an opportunity to help BSB grow. If you purchase a subscription for someone who you genuinely think might enjoy it and they subscribe on their own, we will make our money back when they pay full price in future years. Additionally, we are saving a bit of money by having you read this here as opposed to us sending out a direct mail piece. Also, more readers mean more advertisers.

*Please!* Do not use this rate to subscribe people who already get BSB! That defeats the whole purpose of this request, as we would be taking paying subscribers and converting them to a money losing rate.

Just send the name and address of the person or people you would like to subscribe at the \$19.95 rate to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Or give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and order by credit card. Either way, mention the "Vibrant and Viable" special. This offer is good for gifts only.

I had to chuckle. I have gotten more responses to last issue's column about whether or not we should raise BSB subscription rates than I did even when I wrote in this space after the loss to Penn State in 1994 that John Cooper should be fired. People literally stopped me in the street to talk about it, as well as complain about the high cost of coffee and chicken sandwiches.

Many thanks to the people who have already offered their two cents' worth on the cost of BSB. The consensus among the people I have heard from so far is that they would rather pay a little more and keep the number of issues the same (or better yet add issues), though many of you have acknowledged that others may not be able pay as much. Speaking of two cents' worth, if we were to raise the current rate by \$5, that would be 21 cents per issue – hardly a lot compared to raises we have seen elsewhere of late.

I look forward to hearing from you at [subscriptions@buckeyesports.com](mailto:subscriptions@buckeyesports.com) with your thoughts on price points with which you are comfortable, how you feel about a price increase vs. fewer issues, what you like in BSB and what you don't, etc. This information really helps us in planning for the future!



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