



Fantastic Freshmen

McMahon Growing Into Star In First Year

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

In the storied history of the Ohio State women's basketball program, nine players have been honored as Big Ten Freshman of the Year. That group includes the likes of forward Jantel Lavender and guard Kelsey Mitchell, who were also named Big Ten Player of the Year during their freshman campaigns, as well as program greats such as Lisa Cline, Tracey Hall, Samantha Prahalis and Katie Smith, among others.

Those names all went on to have impressive careers with the Buckeyes, notching individual accomplishments such as becoming the program's all-time leading scorer in the case of Mitchell, as well as experiencing unprecedented team success with Smith leading Ohio State to the school's only Final Four and championship game appearance in 1992-93.

All those listed left strong legacies at Ohio State, and while it will be a few years before another player will reflect

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SONNY BROCKWAY

LOCKING OUT THE NOISE — Despite NBA buzz growing louder throughout Ohio State forward Brice Sensabaugh's freshman campaign, the first-year star for the Buckeyes is focused on a strong close to the season for the Scarlet and Gray.

Sensabaugh Shows Promise As NBA Decision Looms

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If one is to glance at Brice Sensabaugh's recruiting profile, there are several evaluations that may catch the eye.

Sensabaugh was the No. 65 overall prospect and No. 18 small forward while boasting just the third-best ranking of Ohio State's five signees from the 2022 recruiting class, according to 247Sports' composite score. By all initial indications, Sensabaugh was set to factor into Ohio State's rotation behind veteran wings

Eugene Brown III, Isaac Likekele and Justice Sueing.

But he quickly showed that the recruiting services had him all wrong.

The freshman forward has emerged as Ohio State's leading scorer, tallying 16.5 points per game as of Feb. 26 while leading the Buckeyes with 56 makes from beyond the arc on 48.5 percent efficiency. As the season has progressed, Sensabaugh has earned recognition throughout the Big Ten, collecting four conference Freshman of the Week honors, while

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SONNY BROCKWAY

TAKING HOME THE HONORS — Ohio State freshman forward Cotie McMahon tied a program record by winning Big Ten Freshman of the Week on six occasions, reaching the mark previously set by guard Kelsey Mitchell in 2014-15.

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From The Message Board

“My feelings about it haven’t changed much. I always thought it was an opening of Pandora’s Box. Without regulation from NCAA or Congress or some national body, I think cheating will be widespread. Wherever there’s money, crooks are sure to follow. Ed O’Bannon played years ago at UCLA, so they had plenty of time to get guardrails in place. I’m in favor of players getting compensation, but regulations are needed.”

– Terrier Buck

“It’s a work in progress. I think they launched it too soon without knowing what they were doing. Right now it seems just as seedy as before NIL with dark money buying recruits.”

– PeyoteBuck

“It’s dumb and it’s not what it’s meant to be. I was okay with car dealership commercials and I was cool with sponsorships. Pay for play, I don’t like.”

– Tiffin Buckeye

It’s been quite some time since Name, Image and Likeness went into effect on July 1, 2021. Since then, we’ve seen college programs try to navigate the ever-changing landscape of the NIL world while labeling it “the wild west.” We asked BSB subscribers about their general opinions of NIL and how much those feelings have changed since it was first implemented. Here are some of the responses:

“NIL has fewer regulations than the cryptocurrency industry. I don’t see how anyone other than players benefitting from it or schools advancing their programs because of it can think this is a viable template for compensating players.

“Today’s players, especially incoming recruits, should enjoy this because I don’t see this model as sustainable and I predict players will be making less money in the future.”

– Poster That Harley Built

“Quinn Ewers – ‘nuff said.”

– R1TBDBITL

“In my darkest thoughts, I fear that NIL will be the undoing of college sports, at least as we have known them. If it is going to work the way some people have hoped, it needs national regulation ASAP.”

– Michael Bauer

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1983

There are athletes in every sport who do things that don't show up in the game summaries but still contribute prominently to the success of their teams. Larry Huggins of the Ohio State basketball team was one of those players.

The senior co-captain was averaging only 7.5 points per game through 25 contests, but Huggins' least concern was his point production.

"It never bothers me," Huggins said. "That is not the main priority of my game. I'm a team player, always have been and will continue to be.

"I'm a defensive stopper, and I look to run what's going on out there," he added. "I call the offenses. I call the defenses."

35 Years Ago — 1988

Living on the edge is dangerous, and that's where the Ohio State Buckeyes found themselves in their quest for an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament.

NCAA committee chairman Arnie Ferrin of Utah told USA Today that determining the schools to be awarded the 34 at-large berths would be difficult. The other 30 spots went to automatic qualifiers – conference winners.

"The number of teams that are going to be on the bubble just amazes me," Ferrin said. "This is probably the hardest selection process we've ever had."

Enter Ohio State. With five games remaining, OSU was 14-9 overall and sixth in the Big Ten with a 7-6 mark through Feb. 20.

30 Years Ago — 1993

For the fourth straight game, Ohio State women's basketball team got out of the box quickly, scoring points in droves and causing a turnover frenzy with opposing teams.

Most coaches talk about getting off to a good start, and the first five minutes in each game had been crucial for the Lady Buckeyes. OSU built leads of 10-8 against MSU, 13-2 vs. Michigan, 13-2 on Penn State and 19-9 against Wisconsin in the first five minutes.

The secret to their success?

"I think it's just our defensive intensity," said OSU senior Nikki Keyton. "We're creating turnovers and executing our offense. We're just doing things better and much crisper. We look better and we're peaking. It all goes back to our defense, though."

25 Years Ago — 1998

It was nearly the ultimate send-off, with Ohio State falling in overtime to Penn State, 89-85.

But the majority of cheers and tears on display at the farewell to St. John Arena were out of unconditional love for a classic home court and proud program that had meant so much to Ohio State fans.

"It's sad, but it's not like they're throwing basketball out," legendary Ohio State head coach Fred Taylor whispered when asked about the end of St. John Arena.

20 Years Ago — 2003

As far as the Ohio State men's hockey team was concerned, the current season began last postseason.

The Buckeyes struggled throughout much of the 2001-02 campaign before making a run in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association playoffs, dispatching Western Michigan in two games and then winning a 6-5 overtime thriller over Alaska Fairbanks to advance to the conference semifinals, where they fell to Michigan in overtime.

"In the playoffs last year everybody started to sort of come together and guys started maturing and said, 'OK, this is enough of the mediocrity stuff. It's time to come together,'" goalie Mike Betz said.

The main objective going into this season was to pick up where the team left off.

"We saw at the end of the season how we could play if we all worked together and play as a team and if we did that night in, night out, what could happen," captain Scott Titus said.

With four games remaining in the season, OSU was five points off the CCHA lead while holding a 15-7-2 record.

15 Years Ago — 2008

One page of Thad Matta's dictionary had to be wearing thin.

As the Ohio State men's basketball team headed into its final handful of games before the Big Ten and – ideally – NCAA tournaments, the head coach of the Buckeyes had preached one word throughout the 2007-08 season – consistency.

Now, with five regular-season games remaining, the two-time defending Big Ten champions found themselves facing a much more uncertain future than in the past two seasons under Matta, living life on the bubble with a 17-9 record.

"I hope that with what this team has gone against, I think that – and I don't know if I would describe it as a tournament team, I don't know exactly what that is – this team has shown in stretches it can play very good basketball," Matta said. "That is the biggest thing, is getting us to understand that consistency."

10 Years Ago — 2013

Matching the newness of 2012 was nearly impossible, but

there was no doubt plenty of change was in the air yet again as Ohio State prepared for another round of spring football.

After rejuvenating the football program in his first year as head coach, Urban Meyer planned to refine it in year two.

"There's a lot of good stuff going on here," Meyer said on National Signing Day. "But this is the kind of place good stuff should be going on.

"So a year removed, I'm very pleased with where we are. I think our guys recruit really hard. Fundamentally we're not where we need to be as a football team, but we're working hard at it. We have good coaches, good people and a great support staff. And most importantly, I walk in the locker room and there are a bunch of players I love being around."

Five Years Ago — 2018

The magical regular season by Ohio State, in which the Buckeyes went 24-8, led to head coach Chris Holtmann being named the Big Ten Coach of the Year and fourth-year junior forward Keita Bates-Diop being named the Big Ten Player of the Year by both the league coaches and media on Feb. 26.

Holtmann became the fifth Ohio State coach to earn the honor. Thad Matta received the award three times – 2006, 2007 and 2010. While appreciating his fellow Big Ten coaches for choosing him, Holtmann was quick to deflect credit to his entire staff.

"Having the coaches, your peers, vote is a really nice thing," he said. "I think we've been really blessed. At times, I feel like head coaches get too much credit. Now we get our fair share of blame too, and that comes with the job. But I've got an outstanding staff, and it's a collaborative effort, it really is."

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State senior forward Seth Towns would miss the remainder of the season for the Buckeyes, Holtmann confirmed at a press conference on Feb. 8.

Holtmann said the decision was made within the 24 hours before his press conference and came about as a new development related to the back surgery that Towns had undergone before the season, which had held him out of the first three months of play.

"The doctors just said, 'Hey, let's shut you down and focus on rehab.' They evaluated him earlier this week and that was the (conclusion they came to)," Holtmann said.

The head coach clarified that it was "by no means a career-ending injury" and that while a potential return to Ohio State remained a decision that Towns would need to make, he would be eligible and able to return if he so chose.

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OPINION

Several Things That I Totally Don't Understand

I totally don't understand where all the time has gone, and that was especially underscored recently when my mail contained correspondence from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Inside the envelope was a red, white and blue card emblazoned with my name and bold letters reading "Medicare Health Insurance."

How I got to this advanced age, especially with all of the red meat and Tennessee sour mash I have consumed over the years, is anyone's guess. I certainly don't understand it, but that's just one of the things I can't seem to comprehend these days. Here are some others.

I totally don't understand how the Ohio State men's basketball team can fall into a seemingly bottomless crater. The Buckeyes cruised into the 2023 portion of their schedule with a convincing 73-57 win at Northwestern on New Year's Day and were enjoying a 10-3 record that had them trending upward in the national rankings.

How long ago that seems. The team proceeded to lose 14 of its next 15 games, assuring itself of the program's first losing season in nearly 20 years. What's worse is that the Buckeyes went from losing narrow decisions during the first part of that slide to being uncompetitive.

The bottom really fell out when injuries began to plague starting center Zed Key, and his absence only amplified the fact that Ohio State has little to no answer for other teams in the Big Ten who have accomplished big men. And that's another thing I totally don't understand. How can Purdue, Michigan and Rutgers somehow find 7-footers who can make immediate impacts on their programs while most of the tall centers recruited by the Buckeyes are typically works in progress?

Did you know Purdue center Zach Edey, who was leading the Big Ten in rebounding with 12.9 per game through Feb. 26, had 22 rebounds in a game against Minnesota earlier this season? You might be forgiven if you don't remember the last time an Ohio State player grabbed 20 or more rebounds against a Big Ten opponent. That's because it happened 52 years ago when Luke Witte had 20 during an 84-70 win against Minnesota at St. John Arena in March 1971.

Despite the collapse, and the fact that the team often looked rudderless until a much-needed home win Feb. 26 against Illinois, I don't expect sixth-year head coach Chris Holtmann to be relieved of his duties. The coach's fully guaranteed contract has about \$17.5 million remaining, and the university isn't about to eat that. Additionally, Holtmann presides over a relatively young team, and this season could simply be an aberration born out of growing pains. So unless he decides to start looking around at current vacancies such as Notre Dame, or if the Kentucky job comes open because the rumors about John Calipari's interest at Texas are true, Holtmann isn't going anywhere for the time being.

Such as that is, however, I totally don't understand how Ohio State can maintain excellence with its football program year after year after year but can't approach anything close to sustainability when it comes to men's basketball. No Big Ten championships since 2012 and a decade-long streak of failing to advance past the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament seems mediocre at best and wholly unacceptable at worst.

While we're on the subject of mediocrity, I totally don't understand professional leagues and college conferences that not only toler-

ate poor officiating but go out of their way to defend it.

Shortly before Super Bowl LVII between the Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said, "When you look at officiating, I don't think it's ever been better in the league." Then the Super Bowl officiating crew effectively quashed any comeback plans the Eagles might have entertained by calling a ticky-tack defensive holding penalty that allowed the Chiefs to maintain possession and kick a last-second field goal for a 38-35 victory.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Yes, I saw the replay. I know that Philadelphia cornerback James Bradberry admitted to tugging on the jersey of Kansas City receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster. And I know that in the strictest of rulebook interpretations, it was defensive holding. But you're going to tell me that of the other 65 pass plays throughout that entire Super Bowl, not one other warranted a similar penalty? That's right. The call against Bradberry was the only defensive holding/pass interference flag thrown during the game.

I'm not ready to argue that National Football League games have a predetermined ending, but it does begin to stretch the imagination somewhat that the league can stage up to 16 games during any given week, and all but one or two come down to the final possession determining the outcome.

Of course, bad officiating is something Ohio State football fans have had to get used to in recent years.

To say I totally don't understand how college officials rule with regard to targeting is an understatement. Clemson got the mother of all breaks during a 2019 College Football Playoff semifinal when QB Trevor Lawrence drew a dubious targeting call against OSU cornerback Shaun Wade. The Buckeyes held a 16-0 lead at the time, and that call erased a third-down sack, allowing the Tigers to maintain possession, score their first touchdown of the game, and go on to a 29-23 victory.

An even more egregious call (or non-call as it turned out) came in December during another CFP semifinal game, this one against Georgia. As the Buckeyes were preparing to increase their lead to 18 points against the Bulldogs, UGA cornerback Javon Bullard launched himself into Ohio State receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. at the back of the end zone. Bullard's helmet made clear contact with the side of Harrison's head, breaking up a potential touchdown and knocking Harrison temporarily unconscious.

The foul was so flagrant that it drew an immediate flag, but when the play was reviewed, not only was targeting off the table, the flag had disappeared and no penalty of any kind was called. Harrison, who had already torched the Bulldogs for five catches for 106 yards and two touchdowns, sat out the rest of the game in concussion protocol while Georgia put on a furious comeback to claim a 42-41 victory.

Maybe it's sour grapes or the crotchiness of an old man shouting at clouds, but I totally don't understand how one team's best player can get knocked out of the game while the op-

posing player and his team suffer no penalty whatsoever.

Finally, I totally don't understand why college football is intent upon destroying itself. From the inevitability of two superconferences – the SEC and Big Ten – drowning out the rest of the sport and unproven youngsters chasing (and getting) millions of NIL dollars before they set foot on a college campus to roster upheaval due to unfettered transfer rules (college football's version of free agency) as well as an expanded playoff format de-emphasizing regular-season wins and losses, the game we have grown to know and love will be virtually unrecognizable in just a few years.

The only reason I can fathom is greed. Otherwise, I totally don't understand why the powers-that-be are letting it happen.

All In The Family

In collaboration with old BSB colleague Marcus Hartman, now an Ohio State beat writer for the Dayton Daily News, comes this interesting little tidbit. With the exception of the 2017 season, there has been at least one former OSU football player on the full-time coaching staff for the past 110 years.

The stretch began in 1912 when Lynn St. John joined the Buckeyes as part of John R. Richards' staff. St. John, who was Ohio State's first director of athletics and ran the department for 35 years from 1912 to 1947, actually graduated from Wooster in 1906 and later coached football, baseball and basketball at Ohio Wesleyan.

But St. John's college career began in the fall of 1900 when he enrolled at Ohio State and played as a halfback for the Buckeyes. That season, under second-year head coach John Eckstorm, the team posted an 8-1-1 record which included a 0-0 tie at Michigan. Unfortunately for St. John, a family emergency caused him to drop out of school, and when he resumed two years later, it was at Wooster.

He returned to Ohio State as head basketball coach in the fall of 1911, and the following year he joined the football staff, beginning a 12-year stint as an assistant under Richards and successor John Wilce before moving full-time into the athletic department in 1923.

Serving with St. John were such other former OSU football players as Grant Ward, who played for the Buckeyes in 1912 and then coached for a decade from 1916 to 1925. The following year, Sam Willaman returned to his alma mater after a four-year stint as head coach at Iowa State.

Willaman, a star halfback from 1911-13 who in the 1920s was rated behind only Chic Harley and Pete Stinchcomb as the finest running backs Ohio State had ever produced, was an assistant from 1926 to 1928 before succeeding Wilce as head coach in 1929.

Joining Willaman's first staff was former halfback Ernie Godfrey, who lettered for the Buckeyes in 1914 before beginning an 11-year stretch as head coach at Wittenberg. Godfrey remained an OSU assistant until his retirement in 1961. By that time, former All-America end Esco Sarkkinen had been on staff since 1946, and he remained through the 1977 season.

Since then, the streak of former Buckeyes on the football staff has continued with such coaches as Glen Mason (1978-85), Fred Pagac (1982-2000), Bill Conley (1992-2003), Luke Fickell (2002-16) and Brian Hartline (2018-present), with only the 2017 season being played without at least one former Ohio State player on staff.



Ohio State Sends Support Following Shooting At MSU

Ohio State President Kristina M. Johnson issued a statement of support on Feb. 14 following a mass shooting at Michigan State on the evening of Feb. 13 that left three students dead and five more injured in critical condition.

According to reports, 43-year-old Anthony McRae fired inside Michigan State’s Berkey Hall and the MSU Student Union before dying of a self-inflicted gunshot wound nearly four hours after the shooting began. All victims of the shooting were Michigan State students.

“Ohio State joins our Big Ten community and so many others in grieving for the lives lost at Michigan State University Monday evening in a senseless act of violence,” Johnson’s statement read in part. “The thought of this happening so close to home and in familiar spaces is frightening and deeply disturbing. Just as we are here to support our Big Ten family, we are here to support one another.”

As a gesture of support, Johnson authorized the use of a plane to fly over the Michigan State campus carrying a banner that read “We are with you. Spartan Strong. Love, Ohio State” on the students’ first day returning to classes on Feb. 19.

For Ohio State forward Zed Key, the

shooting hit close to home as a college student. Key said he had a direct tie to a person at Michigan State at the time of the attack, who hid in an attic while the shooting took place.

“It makes me angry,” Key said. “It gives me goose bumps, just that someone is able to do that and have the mind-set of ‘I’m going to go in there and cause problems.’ It’s tough, I’m praying for them, all of the families involved, and the students up there.

“You kind of think about and it’s like, ‘Yeah, it’s probably not going to happen to us.’ And that’s what everybody thinks. And it could happen – you just never know.”

Ohio State honored the victims of the shooting with a moment of silence prior to the Buckeyes’ men’s basketball home game against Penn State on Feb. 23.

OSU Cancels Series With Washington

Ohio State has canceled its previously scheduled home-and-home football series with Washington, the athletic department announced on Feb. 15.

The Buckeyes were initially slated to make the trip to Husky Stadium in Seattle, Wash., in 2024 before hosting the Huskies in 2025. The change in schedule coincides with the shifting landscape in college football, including the impending additions of USC and UCLA to the Big Ten for the 2024 season.

Ohio State will now need to fill the holes in those schedules and intends to add an eighth home game to the 2024 slate after scrapping the road game at Washington.

“We initiated the cancellation,” said Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith. “I have the utmost respect for the University of Washington and for Director of Athletics Jennifer Cohen, and this was a very difficult call to make.”

Smith added that Ohio State will be required to pay a financial penalty for backing

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)

out of the initial agreement, pointing to the added home game in 2024 as an option to help pay the fine.

“Consistent with the terms of the contract, we will be responsible for the \$500,000 cancellation penalty that has to be paid by February 2025,” Smith said. “As a result of the cancellation, we will add an eighth home game for the 2024 season, affording us the opportunity to have the funding to pay the penalty and guarantee for that eighth opponent.”

Former OSU Receiver Stanley Passes At 48

Former Ohio State wide receiver Dimitrious Stanley passed away after a four-year battle with prostate cancer, as reported on Feb. 9. He was 48.

Stanley played for the Buckeyes from 1993-96, amassing 1,136 receiving yards and 13 touchdowns on 63 receptions during his career. His final season in Columbus was his most notable campaign, when he led the Buckeyes with 43 catches for 829 yards and eight touchdowns.

Following his time with the Buckeyes, Stanley played in the Canadian Football League and Arena Football League.

After his prostate cancer diagnosis in 2019, Stanley began a nonprofit organization, Brave Men Inc., with the aim of advocating prostate cancer research while also aiding those affected by the disease with financial help.

Eight Buckeyes To Attend NFL Combine

Eight Ohio State players were among those who received invites to the NFL scouting combine, offering another chance to bolster their stock before the NFL draft.

The Buckeyes set to attend the showcase included center Luke Wypler, cornerback Cameron Brown, defensive end Zach Harrison, offensive tackles Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, quarterback C.J. Stroud, safety Ronnie Hickman and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Notable Buckeyes who did not receive an invite include defensive tackles Taron Vincent and Jerron Cage, kicker Noah Ruggles and safety Tanner McCalister, though all will have at least one more opportunity to impress scouts at Ohio State’s Pro Day in March.

Alabama was expected to have the most representatives at the scouting combine,

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with 13 prospects set to attend. Georgia is the only other team with double-digit attendees, set to send 12 players, while Florida, LSU, Michigan and TCU have nine and Clemson and Ohio State have eight.

The NFL scouting combine was slated to take place in Indianapolis from Feb. 28 through March 6. Prospects interview with teams throughout the week, with measurements and on-field workouts beginning on March 2.

Board Of Trustees Approves Plans For Hockey Facility

The Ohio State board of trustees approved plans for professional services and a design for a new hockey facility on Feb. 16.

The proposed ice rink will be located in the university's athletic district, sitting north of the Covelli Center, and with construction expected to begin in June 2024, the venue is projected to open in April 2026.

"We appreciate the board of trustees considering this proposal allowing us to hire an architect to plan this much-needed facility," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told The Columbus Dispatch. "We are looking forward to hiring a firm to help define program components and to design a state-of-the-art complex that will serve our student-athletes and fans."

According to the proposal, the hockey-only facility will include several amenities for both programs, including team locker rooms, an athlete lounge, team dining areas, support services, offices for team coaches, as well as an expansion of spectator capacities and broadcasting capabilities. The proposal does not include a total budget but does request \$2.7 million for professional services.

The Ohio State men's team currently plays its home games at Value City Arena and would continue to do so even with the new venue, though the Buckeyes would use the new rink for practice. The women's team currently occupies the OSU Ice Rink, which seats fewer than 1,000 spectators, and would see all of its facilities moved to the new rink.

"I feel like they have very little that they can say about us because we've been doing it all – conference titles, final face-off championships, national championships," women's hockey head coach Nadine Muzerall told The Columbus Dispatch. "I just think it's only going to enhance our recruiting because why wouldn't you choose Ohio State?"

Women Earn First Outright Regular-Season WCHA Title

While the trustees have set plans in motion for its new facility, the women's hockey team has continued to collect hardware.

After capturing the school's first women's hockey national championship and first Western Collegiate Hockey Association conference tournament title last season, the No. 1-ranked Buckeyes won the first regular-season WCHA crown in program history with a 3-1 win over No. 6 Wisconsin on Feb. 19.

Ohio State's league record of 23-4-1 beat out No. 4 Minnesota's mark of 22-3-3, with 70 points to the Golden Gophers' 68. Teams get three points for a win and one point for a tie in the WCHA standings.

Entering the weekend with a six-point advantage, the Buckeyes needed to win just one of their games against the Badgers to claim the conference title outright or tie both to guarantee a share of it. After Wisconsin beat Ohio State 6-5 in overtime on Feb. 18, a goalie battle ensued in the matchup on Feb. 19, with both netminders posting a shutout through the opening two periods.

Wisconsin forward Laila Edwards finally broke the ice seven minutes into the third period with an even-strength goal. Undeterred, Ohio State picked up a power play off a hooking penalty, and forward Emma Maltais netted an equalizer with just over four minutes remaining.

Overtime seemed a likely destination as the contest stayed tied 1-1 with the clock winding under a minute when Ohio State's Madison Bizal converted a forced turnover off a forecheck with a snipe over Kronish's right shoulder. Maltais, who took the puck away initially, and defenseman Sophie Jaques picked up assists on the play.

That put Ohio State up 2-1 with 55 seconds to go, and Bizal scored another goal on the power play to stop any hopes Wisconsin had of winning. Thiele finished 31 of 32 on saves in the victory.

The Buckeyes, looking for a repeat in the conference tournament to establish complete dominance over the rest of the league competition, swept Bemidji State in the quarterfinals of the WCHA tournament, defeating the Beavers 4-1 on Feb. 24 and the following night.

The sweep of Bemidji State established a matchup between Ohio State and No. 4 Minnesota Duluth in the WCHA Final Faceoff, with No. 2 Wisconsin and No. 3 Minnesota in the other half of the bracket. Both semifinal games will be played on March 3, with the championship game set for the following day.

Miller Attends State Of The Union Address

Former Ohio State offensive lineman and mental health advocate Harry Miller was one of 20 people invited to sit with first lady Jill Biden as President Joe Biden delivered the 2023 State of the Union address on Feb. 7.

Miller joined Jill Biden in the viewing box in the House chamber of the United States Capitol building as Joe Biden delivered the annual speech addressing the nation's issues and policy goals for the upcoming year.

"Each of these individuals (was) invited by the White House because they personify issues or themes to be addressed by the president in his speech, or they embody the Biden-Harris administration's policies at work for the American people," a release from the White House stated.

Miller medically retired from football last March due to concerns with his mental health but has remained with the team, present at practices and games throughout this past season.

"Prior to this year, I told Coach (Ryan) Day of my intention to kill myself," Miller said in a statement on Twitter on March 10, 2022. "He immediately had me in touch with Dr. Candice (Williams) and Dr. (Joshua) Norman, and I received the support I needed. After a few weeks, I tried my luck at



FILE PHOTO

PRESIDENTIAL PEDIGREE — Former Ohio State offensive lineman Harry Miller, who medically retired from the team last March, was a guest of first lady Jill Biden at President Joe Biden's State of the Union address on Feb. 7.

football once again, with scars on my wrists and throat ... There was a dead man on the television set, but nobody knew it."

Since that time, Miller has shared his story across the country, becoming an advocate for access to mental health resources, not just for athletes but for all people.

"I am grateful for the infrastructure Coach Day has put in place at Ohio State, and I am grateful that he is letting me find a new way to help others in the program," Miller said in his statement. "I hope athletic departments around the country do the same. If not for him and the staff, my words

would not be a reflection. They would be evidence in a post-mortem."

Pair Of Ohio State NIL Collectives Merge

Two of Ohio State's name, image and likeness collectives are joining forces to help increase NIL opportunities for the school's football and men's basketball athletes, with The Foundation and The "O" Foundation announcing their merger on Feb. 9.

"The two organizations will now contin-

Continued On Page 6

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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ue to support Ohio State football and men's basketball athletes in conjunction," The Foundation said in a statement on Twitter. "The two collectives, being 'team players,' have decided to work together in order to more efficiently support the same cause."

The Foundation signed five of Ohio State's early enrollees upon their entry to the team in January. In the past, they've worked to secure deals for a number of Ohio State athletes including quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, among many others. It is run by former Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones and athletic booster and real estate developer Brian Schottenstein.

"Both groups look forward to this partnership that will only enhance our brand together and continue to be the top non-profit collective brand in the country," the statement said.

Founded by former Ohio State basketball captain Ron Stokes, The "O" Foun-

dation was designed to focus primarily on deals for men's basketball players.

Riep, Wint Found Not Guilty Of Rape, Kidnapping

Former Ohio State football players Amir Riep and Jahsen Wint were found not guilty on charges of rape and kidnapping by a Franklin County jury on Feb. 9 following a three-day trial.

Riep and Wint, both 24, were arrested and charged with two counts of rape and a count of kidnapping on Feb. 11, 2020, after being accused of raping a then-19-year-old woman, a freshman at Ohio State, at their shared apartment on Feb. 4, 2020. Both were dismissed from the football program the day following their arrest.

According to The Columbus Dispatch, Riep and Wint's defense attorneys said the woman had consensual sex with both men, which Riep and Wint both testified to during the trial.

Franklin County Assistant Prosecutor Daniel Meyer said the woman arrived at the shared apartment expecting to "just hang" with Riep, but she was then raped by both and forced to record a video agreeing the sex was consensual. A video taken by Riep of the alleged victim crying and agreeing that the sex was consensual was admitted into evidence.

During the trial, Riep and another witness, former Ohio State football player Lloyd McFarquhar, testified that players were instructed by Ohio State's coaching staff to get evidence that sexual encounters were consensual. Neither Riep nor McFar-

quhar testified as to who on staff instructed them to do this.

Carmen's Crew To Return This Summer

After a one-year break, Ohio State's The Basketball Tournament alumni team, Carmen's Crew, plans to return to the floor this summer with a new look.

Previous rosters of Carmen's Crew tended to lean toward players from the Thad Matta era, with Aaron Craft, Jon Diebler and David Lighty competing for the team, but the 2023 edition of the team is expected to rely heavily on players from Chris Holtmann's six seasons with the program.

"We're going to have a nice little group of guys that came from the Holtmann era of Ohio State basketball and try to put them on the map, because the old heads, we're done," head coach Jared Sullinger told The Columbus Dispatch. "We're getting old. We can't keep doing it anymore. We're going to keep fighting, and we're going to start a new era of Carmen's Crew."

Carmen's Crew won the The Basketball Tournament in 2019, taking home the \$2 million cash prize, but suffered early exits in 2020 and 2021 before taking a break last season. Dates and locations have yet to be announced for this year's edition of The Basketball Tournament.

Former OSU QB Jackson Enters Coaching Ranks

Former Ohio State quarterback Stanley Jackson, who played for the Buckeyes from 1994-97, will become the next head coach

at Westerville North High School outside Columbus, the school announced on Feb. 14.

Jackson is the ninth coach in program history and will take over a program reeling from a 3-9 season this past fall, which concluded with a seven-game losing streak. Jackson's son, Ronald, played quarterback for the Warriors last season.

During his time with the Buckeyes, Jackson threw for 2,660 yards, 22 touchdowns and nine interceptions while completing 55.0 percent of passes. He added 533 yards and five touchdowns on the ground for Ohio State.

Several Buckeyes Place Highly In Mock Drafts

While the previously mentioned former Buckeyes work through the pre-draft process, speculation about where they'll begin their NFL career has continued to pick up.

Recent mock drafts have placed Stroud as high as the No. 1 pick to the Houston Texans (via a trade with the Chicago Bears, who hold the top pick) and as low as the No. 8 selection to the New York Giants by CBS Sports, but the general consensus tends to favor him being selected at No. 4 by the Indianapolis Colts if they hold onto the pick rather than trading up.

Johnson and Smith-Njigba are also slated by several mock drafts to land in the first round, with Johnson largely trending toward either the Tennessee Titans at No. 11 or New York Jets at No. 13 and Smith-Njigba hovering in the early 20s, with the consensus landing on the Baltimore Ravens at No. 22.



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FILE PHOTO

NEXT-LEVEL HONORS — Former Ohio State wide receiver Garrett Wilson was named NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year following this season in which he had 83 receptions for 1,103 yards and four touchdowns.

Jones and Wypler will also look to have their names called when the draft takes place from April 27-29 in Kansas City, Mo. Several recent mock drafts predict Jones could land in the first round, with several analysts also looking at Tennessee at No. 11 as a potential landing spot, though most have him near the end of the first night.

While Jones hovers around the late first round, Wypler is largely expected to find his NFL home on the second day of the draft, with CBS' Chris Trapasso slotting him in as a third-round selection to the Houston Texans.

Flipping over to the defensive side of the ball, Harrison and Hickman have also continued to appear on draft boards. Neither player is expected to be drafted on the first day, but Harrison is mocked as high as No. 22 overall to the Baltimore Ravens, while Hickman was seen as the No. 30 pick by NFL.com. Most mock drafts have Harrison as a third-round selection, though, while Hickman is a consensus fifth-round pick.

Babb To Work In Smith's Leadership Institute

It was announced on Feb. 20 that former Ohio State wide receiver Kamryn Babb will join The Eugene D. Smith Leadership institute as a program coordinator.

Babb was a two-time team captain for the Buckeyes and Ohio State's Block "O" recipient in 2022. Babb graduated from Ohio State in December and had the opportunity to return to the football team for

an additional season but decided to medically retire from the sport after sustaining four ACL tears since his senior year of high school.

"Thank you to everyone who has supported me and helped me throughout my journey," Babb said in his retirement message. "Glory to Jesus my God for carrying

me through every moment in my life. Whatever you may battle in life, keep fighting and know that there is a God in heaven who loves you so deeply. God Bless."

Pair Of Buckeyes Earn NFL Honors

Ohio State was well-represented at the 12th annual NFL Honors ceremony on Feb. 9, when a pair of former Buckeyes were awarded for their strong play during the 2022 NFL season.

Former Ohio State defensive end Nick Bosa, now with the San Francisco 49ers, was named the Defensive Player of the Year, while New York Jets wide receiver Garrett Wilson – who played for the Buckeyes from 2019-21 – picked up Offensive Rookie of the Year honors.

Bosa led the NFL in sacks with 18½, surpassing his previous career high of 15½, while helping the 49ers finish with the top-ranked defense this season. He beat out Dallas Cowboys linebacker Micah Parsons – who played his college career at Penn State – and Kansas City Chiefs defensive tackle Chris Jones.

It took no time for Wilson to get acclimated to the NFL, where he racked up 83 receptions for 1,103 receiving, the most by a rookie in Jets history, while adding four touchdowns despite playing with several different quarterbacks as the season progressed. Wilson beat out Seattle Seahawks running back Kenneth Walker III – a former Michigan State Spartan – and 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy for the award.

As a Buckeye from 2016-18, Bosa racked up 77 tackles (29 for loss), 17½ sacks and two forced fumbles. He earned the Smith-Brown Big Ten Defensive Line-man of the Year award in 2017, in addition to an All-American nod that season. Wilson emerged as one of the nation's best receivers during his time with the Buckeyes by hauling in 143 receptions for 2,213 yards and 23 touchdowns.

OSU Swim & Dive Claims Fourth-Straight Big Ten Title

For the fourth year in a row, the Ohio State women's swimming and diving team

finished on top of the Big Ten, scoring 1,425 points in the four-day competition at Canham Natatorium on Michigan's campus. The team took its initial lead on the second day of competition and never looked back, claiming the title on Feb. 18.

At the conclusion of the championships, the Buckeyes held a lead of more than 100 points over second-place Indiana (1,291.5 points) and more than 300 points over third-place Michigan (1,108).

Between relays and individual races, Ohio State collected 11 individual conference titles. Three Ohio State program records were broken, with one each in the 200- and 400-meter freestyle relay. Junior Katherine Zenick, sophomore Teresa Ivan and senior Amy Fulmer served as the first, third and anchor legs, respectively, in both races. The only difference in team construction between the two events was who raced in the second leg, with sophomore Nyah Funderburke filling in for the 200-meter while junior Catherine Russo took the position in the 400-meter.

The lone individual Ohio State record that was broken belonged to Fulmer, who captured a conference championship in the 100-meter freestyle with a time of 47.02 seconds. Along with her freestyle wins and a victory as part of the 400-meter medley relay, Fulmer collected four Big Ten titles throughout the event.

The swimmer who captured the most individual golds, though, was Zenick, who won a combined six individual events and relays. Added to her 200- and 400-meter freestyle relay wins were the top spots in the 50-meter freestyle, 100-meter butterfly, 200-meter medley relay and 400-meter medley relay.

Funderburke also collected four crowns, winning the 100-meter backstroke in addition to three relay victories. Senior Josie Panitz carried the day for Ohio State in the 200-meter individual medley while graduate Felicia Pasadyn did the same in the 400-meter individual medley, both setting pool records.

BSB Gearing Up For Spring Football

Ohio State spring football practice begins March 7, and Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be providing ample coverage, starting with our next issue dated March 18, which is scheduled to be mailed on March 14.

There is no need to miss any of the Ohio State sports action between now and then, however. Not only will the football team be back on the field, but such popular winter sports as men's and women's basketball, men's and women's hockey and wrestling are entering tournament time.

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be manning the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on any breaking stories and providing additional features, along with the latest in football recruiting news. BuckeyeSports.com is 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 have also been interacting

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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Sensabaugh Gaining Attention from NBA

Continued From Page 1

also playing his way into NBA draft consideration.

"It's (the product) of just working hard, working on off days and in the offseason, leading up to the season, before practice and after practice," Sensabaugh said. "It's just working on little details and skills, polishing my game and stuff like that to the point where I can feel comfortable on the court to do what I practice and stay confident."

"I'm just trying to perfect my craft, so when it comes time for game time, it's kind of just natural."

Entering the season, Sensabaugh was hardly viewed as the crown jewel of Ohio State's recruiting efforts. Despite being the lone forward in the class, most of the attention focused on the talented backcourt additions of Roddy Gayle Jr. and Bruce Thornton – who were ranked the No. 49 and No. 51 overall recruits, respectively – and 6-11 center Felix Okpara, who settled in as the No. 66 overall recruit in the class. The four freshmen, along with Cincinnati's Princeton three-star guard Bowen Hardman, emerged as the No. 8 class in 2022, the highest mark of any Big Ten program.

Despite Sensabaugh slotting in behind the backcourt duo in terms of recruiting rankings, the potential was evident. As a senior, Sensabaugh was named Florida's Mr. Basketball and Gatorade Player of the Year while leading Lake Highland Prep to a 25-4

record and semifinal appearance in the state playoffs behind averages of 25.1 points, 7.2 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game.

Even before Sensabaugh debuted for the Scarlet and Gray, he was already making a name for himself in the Columbus basketball scene. Sensabaugh posted 51 points against former Buckeye forward Andre Wesson and veteran NBA guard Trey Burke at the Kingdom League Pro-Am at Ohio Dominican in July.

"The kid's not scared, very competitive, didn't back down from a challenge, very athletic," Burke told Eleven Warriors after the game. "I like his game. I think the sky's the limit for him. I told him after the game, 'What I saw tonight, I want to see that this year.' So I'm expecting big things from him."

Sensabaugh had shown that he could score at a high level prior to his time with the Buckeyes, but he came into the program with the expectation that he would serve in a supporting role as a freshman.

"I'm just ready to do the right thing, and I'm a big listener," Sensabaugh said on Sept. 26. "I like to listen a lot and just hear what the coaches have to say and just play the game the right way and do what I'm told. So wherever that takes me, I'm ready to play. Whatever my role is, I'm looking to fulfill that."

While Sensabaugh downplayed his potential role for the Buckeyes entering this season, head coach Chris Holtmann made it

clear that he and his fellow freshmen would be key cogs for Ohio State during the campaign. Holtmann recognized Sensabaugh's scoring ability early on, even comparing the forward to former Buckeye guard Duane Washington Jr., who led Ohio State in scoring during the 2020-21 season.

"He's physically one of the most unique players we've coached," Holtmann said last spring. "He's Duane in a 6-6 frame, and he's as good a shooter as there is in the country as a freshman."

It was clear from the start that Sensabaugh would be a major option in Ohio State's offensive plans, after he registered 11 shot attempts in the Buckeyes' exhibition win over Chaminade on Nov. 1 – the second most, trailing just Tanner Holden. However, his volume didn't equate to efficiency, as he hit on just three attempts against the Silver-swords while scoring eight points.

Sensabaugh saw shooting struggles in his first outing at Value City Arena, but he turned on the jets during the Buckeyes' season-opening, three-game homestand. Sensabaugh stuffed the stat sheet in Ohio State's season opener against Robert Morris, producing 17 points and nine rebounds off the bench, before hitting the 20-point mark two games later in a 65-43 win over Eastern Illinois.

Despite playing in just three regular-season games at that point, Sensabaugh said he felt comfortable enough as a scorer within Ohio State's offense to take charge and hunt for his own shots.

"As games go by and I get more comfortable in myself and playing with this team, it's just taking what the defense gives me," Sensabaugh said after the win over the Panthers on Nov. 16. "We prepare very well for games, and we scout their defense and what they're going to look like coming into the game. So it's just picking them apart and getting to our spots."

Sensabaugh put up gaudy numbers against those early season warmups, but a distinct challenge awaited him and the Buckeyes at the Maui Invitational. Sensabaugh quickly showed he was up to the challenge against topflight competition, though, producing 17 points on 5-of-10 shooting against the vaunted San Diego State defense.

While Sensabaugh's scoring mark couldn't push Ohio State to a win, with the Buckeyes falling 88-77 to the Aztecs, it set the tone for the games ahead. Sensabaugh again registered 17 points in Ohio State's 81-53 win over Cincinnati before scoring 10 points on an efficient 4-of-6 shooting in the Buckeyes' 80-73 win over then-No. 21 Texas Tech.

Sensabaugh's hot start quickly cooled during Ohio State's trip to Cameron Indoor Stadium on Nov. 30. Duke stifled the freshman phenom, holding him to just four points while he battled foul trouble all night, fouling out with 33 seconds remaining in the 81-72 loss. It was a struggle in Sensabaugh's first true road environment, but Holtmann said playing in such a difficult atmosphere as a freshman would help Sensabaugh and his fellow first-year players grow.

"I think all of our young guys had good

moments," Holtmann said after the loss. "Obviously, you'd like to win on the road, but long term, I think this can be a really good thing for our group to learn how to play better in an environment like this."

At the time, it appeared that foul trouble would be a one-time issue for Sensabaugh, who hadn't registered more than a pair of infractions in the six games prior, but as the season progressed, it became clear that it would be an overarching issue for the forward. In the three games that followed, Sensabaugh was called for at least three fouls in each contest while tallying a quartet in two of them.

Despite his struggles to defend without fouling, Sensabaugh was inserted into the starting lineup as a result of Likekele taking time away from the team for personal reasons, and he continued to produce on the offensive end. He tallied 15 and 13 points in wins over St. Francis (Pa.) and Rutgers, respectively, before shining on the national stage during the CBS Sports Classic against North Carolina.

Playing at the famed Madison Square Garden on Dec. 17, Sensabaugh produced a then-career-high 22 points and lifted the Buckeyes into a late lead after beating Tar Heel guard Leaky Black off the dribble and drilling a go-ahead jumper with two seconds to play. It wouldn't be enough to push Ohio State to the finish line, though, as the Tar Heels sent the game to overtime where they eventually won 89-84.

Even though the Buckeyes didn't claim the victory, the game gave a national audience a glimpse of Sensabaugh's abilities and began to generate buzz surrounding a potential jump to the NBA at the season's end. As Sensabaugh began to emerge as a potential one-and-done candidate, comparisons to former Buckeye guard Malaki Branham, who played for Ohio State last season before heading to the NBA, popped up.

To further the comparisons between him and Branham, Sensabaugh noted that he spent time watching film of Branham and his teammate E.J. Liddell to see how he would fit into the offense prior to joining the Buckeyes.

"I definitely watched them by myself, even before I got here," Sensabaugh said after Ohio State's win over Maine on Dec. 21. "Their midrange game, and using their body to create separation in the midrange, is something that I added to my game when I got here. I've worked on it relentlessly since I've been here."

Sensabaugh's breakout caught the attention of not only the NBA but also Big Ten media members, and he became the first Buckeye since D'Angelo Russell to pick up a trio of conference Freshman of the Week honors in three consecutive weeks for his play during the month. In five games during December, Sensabaugh produced 18.0 points per game on 54.7 percent shooting, boosted by a 48.1 percent mark from three-point range.

The NBA buzz only grew louder entering the new year, and while it appeared Sensabaugh would be heading to the professional ranks following the season, Holtmann shot down any comparisons to Branham, pointing to various differences in their skill sets.

"They're different players," Holtmann

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SONNY BROCKWAY

TAKING THE REINS — Ohio State freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh has become a productive member of the Buckeyes this season, posting averages of 16.5 points and 5.2 rebounds on 48.5 percent shooting.

said after the Buckeyes' 71-69 loss to Purdue on Jan. 5. "It's hard to get a gauge and a comparison right now."

Holtmann was quick to write off the comparisons, but Branham, himself, said after visiting Cleveland for the first time as a member of the San Antonio Spurs on Feb. 15 that he feels Sensabaugh "picked up where I left off."

"He's a great athlete," Branham told The Columbus Dispatch. "A great player. Off the court, he's even good. I texted him a couple games just saying how I thought he played on the offensive and defensive end, so we talk here and there. I said if you ever needed anything, just ask me. It's been good just watching him perform at a high level and him being consistent."

But while Sensabaugh's draft stock continued to rise, Ohio State's season began

to take a turn for the worst. After falling to then-No. 1 Purdue, the Buckeyes went on to lose their next four games, part of a stretch in which they lost 14 of 16 contests.

During the five-game losing streak that began against the Boilermakers, Sensabaugh's scoring numbers remained strong, but he saw his efficiency dip. He still averaged 19.8 points per game during the stretch but shot 43.8 percent and had 2.2 turnovers per game.

But he bounced back in Ohio State's first win since the Purdue loss, scoring a career-high 27 points while going 10 of 12 from the field and 4 of 5 from deep to push the Buckeyes past Iowa 93-77 on Jan. 21.

"I haven't been at this stage before, in high-major basketball, so these last two, three weeks, I've really seen how easy it is to lose and what it takes to win," Sensabaugh

said after the game. "Losing these games was important for us. Obviously, it didn't feel good, but I think it taught us as a team what it takes and everybody is buying in right now."

The Buckeyes failed to build any momentum off of the win over the Hawkeyes, however, losing their next nine, and as the losses continued to mount, blame spread throughout the team and coaching staff — Sensabaugh included.

His offensive numbers, once again, fell considerably. He averaged 14.7 points per game while his shooting efficiency nosedived to 43.0 percent during the losing stretch. Furthermore, his fouling issues also popped up as a result of poor play on the defensive end of the court.

Sensabaugh fouled out in a loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 5 and was forced to come off the bench for the next two games. Along with the loss to the Badgers, that stretch was the worst of the season for Sensabaugh, who averaged just 8.7 points per game while shooting 22.2 percent from the field and 13.3 percent from deep in those three games.

"Brice is a freshman. He's being guarded by the best player," Holtmann said after Ohio State's 69-63 loss to Northwestern on Feb. 9, in which Sensabaugh scored four points on 1-of-8 shooting. "This is not an easy thing for a kid. Freshmen have moments. We'll help him the best we can. The young man is fighting hard, give him credit. He's allowed to have an off shooting night."

Although Sensabaugh's offense returned to form with back-to-back 20-point outings against Purdue and Penn State, his struggles on the defensive end were glaring in the

loss to the Nittany Lions, causing Holtmann to play Sensabaugh for only 10 minutes in the second half, including an over nine-minute stretch in which he watched from the sidelines.

"There are two ends (of the floor)," Holtmann said in regard to Sensabaugh's defense. "He's got to continue to grow on the other end. There are times when it does impact our team, and he knows that. He's working hard at that."

Regardless of the recent slump, both by the team and individually, there remains an expectation that Sensabaugh could make the jump to the NBA following this season. As of Feb. 24, Sensabaugh's name had popped up in NBA mock drafts across several outlets, and his stock had risen as high as the No. 15 overall selection, showing that the buzz has continued to surround him regardless of the recent struggles.

Despite the possibility of the NBA calling at the conclusion of the season, Sensabaugh remains locked in on helping the Buckeyes finish the campaign strong.

"I hear it. I'd be lying to you if I said I wasn't," Sensabaugh said of the NBA talk. "But to be honest, I try to focus on staying where my feet are and living in the moment, and I think I do a pretty good job of that. I don't really pay much attention to it, to be honest."

"Whatever I can do, in the moment, to play however I'm playing or make little improvements for Ohio State, obviously things like that build up. Your performance gets better (and) it can reflect on the future. But right now, I'm just in the moment."

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Enrolling Early Set Up McMahon's Success

Continued From Page 1

those contributions made to the program, it may be time to add a new name to the list of standout freshmen.

First-year forward Cotie McMahon, the winner of six Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors as of Feb. 20 – tying the program record previously set by Mitchell – has provided a significant boost for Ohio State this season, growing in a matter of months from a wide-eyed freshman to a leader for one of the better teams in program history.

"She's got a lot of talent, and the good news is I think she's really just scratching the surface of it, but she's working hard at it," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said earlier this season. "She's already made a lot of progress, but she's still really got a long way to go to reach the great potential that she has."

That potential for McMahon started with a standout career at Centerville High School, just an hour's drive from Columbus. She averaged 15.8 points per game her freshman season, boosting that to 18.9 points in her sophomore season and 20.2 points during her junior season before enrolling early at Ohio State and forgoing her senior season.

She was able to surpass 1,000 career points in just 3½ seasons, leading the Elks to a Greater Western Ohio Conference championship in 2021. She wound up as the No. 23 overall prospect in her class,

according to ESPN, and her proximity to Ohio State made it easy for McGuff and his staff to see what she might offer for the Buckeyes.

"Watching her in high school and AAU, we knew that she was extremely talented," he said. "She works really hard. She practices hard, she plays hard, so her intensity and work ethic has been great, and I think that's allowed her to succeed."

After her high school career wrapped, she joined the Buckeyes last spring, enrolling early and getting a head start on her college career both in the classroom and on the court. Once the spring semester was finished, McMahon joined the USA Basketball Women's U18 National Team at the FIBA Americas in Buenos Aires, Argentina, averaging 14.2 points, 7.5 rebounds and 3.2 assists as the United States went 6-0 and took home the team's 11th gold medal.

That set the stage for her official start at Ohio State, rejoining the team in preparation for the current season. She had already arrived in Columbus with high expectations, but her experience internationally and her previous semester at Ohio State gave her a leg up entering her freshman campaign.

"I think (enrolling early and playing internationally) were really important," McGuff said. "She had a great semester last year coming early. I think that set her up



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TAKING OWNERSHIP — Despite being in only her freshman season, Ohio State forward Cotie McMahon has grown into a leader for the Buckeyes amid several injuries to the team's top players.

to have success with USA Basketball, and I think she gained a lot of confidence and a lot of great experience."

It was clear from the start that McMahon would have an early impact for Ohio State. She started in the team's lone exhibition contest against Notre Dame College, scoring nine points and dishing out six assists in 20 minutes on the floor while providing several highlights.

McGuff said after the game that the starting lineup – one that featured McMahon in addition to forward Rebeka Mikulášiková and guards Taylor Mikesell, Jacy Sheldon and Taylor Thierry – could be in flux moving forward, but after that successful outing, it was that same starting five who took the court when the Buckeyes opened the season on Nov. 8 hosting then-No. 5 Tennessee.

The lights appeared slightly too bright for McMahon in the early stages of that contest, and she was called for a pair of fouls – one on the offensive end – and committed two turnovers in the first four minutes of play, forcing her to the bench just minutes into the official beginning of her collegiate

career. She sat out the remainder of the quarter, getting her mind right after a hectic start, but she returned to the floor to begin the second frame and went on to finish with 10 points on 5-of-6 shooting and the Buckeyes knocked off the Volunteers, 87-75, resulting in a court storming at Value City Arena.

"We all make mistakes on the court, but it's just a matter of what you do after you make that mistake," McMahon said after the game. "If you make a mistake, you know what you need to do in order to eliminate that mistake, so I feel like I did what needed to be done and it was like a scratch-out."

McGuff added that McMahon's personality allows her to forget mistakes quickly – perhaps even too quickly, to the chagrin of her coach.

"She's got an incredible amount of talent," he said after the Tennessee game. "We continue to invest in her, and she's only going to get better. She's still got to get some experience, because you saw some spectacular plays and flashes of brilliance and things that could be coming in the future, but at the same time, you saw some youth-

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ful mistakes that hopefully as she gets more experience she can take care of those.”

It may have felt as though McMahon was thrown into the deep end in her first game with the Buckeyes, but given the option of sinking or swimming, she quickly learned how to stay afloat, even when the going got tough. After starting each of the next five games for Ohio State, McMahon once again got the start at Louisville on Nov. 30, but she played just six minutes – all in the first half – after picking up a pair of early fouls.

“She’s going to be a spectacular player for us, and everyone’s seen how good she is already,” said McGuff. “But in this particular game, I wanted to lean on our experience.”

As impressive as McMahon was early in the season with three double-digit outings and a 20-point game in her first six college games, that learning experience at Louisville helped push her game to another level, and she has yet to relent in her pursuit of excellence.

Since being benched against Louisville, McMahon has scored in single digits just six times, piling in comparison to her 10 20-point outings, including a career-high 30 points in Ohio State’s overtime win over South Florida on Dec. 20. That was just one impressive performance that helped boost the Buckeyes to a 19-0 start to begin the season and an eventual 23-6 record to close the regular season, with McMahon starting every game.

And what has stood out about McMahon’s play is her aggressiveness, even when it sometimes can get out of control. Fresh-

men are not usually known for taking matters into their own hands, but McMahon is not afraid of driving the ball and initiating contact, and she is often able to finish in those situations as well.

“‘One-Speed Cotie’ is always really aggressive,” McGuff said. “In horse racing they have the most exciting two minutes in sports, but we have the most exciting five seconds in college basketball in Cotie McMahon, as I like to say.”

McMahon has owned up to her aggressive style of play and did not disagree with her coach’s sentiment.

“Yeah, he’s said it before. It is what it is – that’s how I am,” she said with a laugh.

McMahon’s experience prior to Ohio State is a big part of her development, but she issues as much credit to her teammates for helping her succeed.

“They’ve been behind me since I got here,” she said. “I obviously wasn’t very confident coming in, but they definitely helped me out a lot, made me realize my strengths more. They always talk me up and everything, motivating me to do what I know how to do.”

Mikesell and Sheldon are the team’s most vocal leaders, and McMahon said they are there for her as a teammate and also help to coach her up, utilizing their several years of combined experience under their collective belts to impart some wisdom on the freshman. Beyond the guard duo, McMahon said the team’s positive chemistry has helped her grow.

“We all have a ton of different personalities, but all those different personalities

jell really well,” she said. “Our chemistry we have, there’s not one weird vibe we get. We all jell very well together, and that definitely helps us on the court.”

Through this process, McMahon has become a leader in her own right. Despite the strong start to the season, the team has also experienced several struggles, including a season-ending injury to guard Madison Greene and a lower-leg injury that has largely left Sheldon on the bench since the win over Louisville.

This has put an increased emphasis on contributors such as McMahon, Mikesell and Thierry. McMahon and Thierry are averaging 14.0 and 13.7 points, respectively, and in Mikesell’s case, the fifth-year guard leads Ohio State with 17.3 points per game, doing so at a 42.7 percent shooting clip and hitting 40.6 percent from deep.

It’s no coincidence that McMahon’s rise has coincided with Greene and Sheldon’s injuries. Since some of the team’s leaders have gone down, McMahon has felt a calling to step up and help the Buckeyes push through what has been a tumultuous stretch, both on and off the court, with Ohio State finishing the regular season just 4-6 after the 19-0 start.

“With Madison and Jacy being out, I felt like T-Mike can’t do it all by herself,” McMahon said. “She’s a huge part of the scoring aspect, so I felt like this would be the perfect opportunity for me to gain confidence and step in and do what I’m capable of doing.”

That confidence has boosted McMahon to one of the most impressive freshman

seasons in program history, and there’s still plenty of time left to boost her résumé. Ohio State will enter the Big Ten Women’s Basketball Tournament as the No. 4 seed, tasked with having to avenge losses to either Maryland, Iowa or Indiana to win the conference tournament.

That will be followed by McMahon’s first taste of the NCAA tournament, but despite that being her first postseason experience at the college level, it’s more likely she’ll bring that veteran poise that has driven her this season.

“She’s very motivated,” McGuff said. “She works hard, she’s a great kid, has a great personality, and her teammates really like her. Her effort and intensity are rare for someone that young. It usually takes someone a while to build those habits. That’s been a big part of her progress is how hard she plays and how hard she practices.”

Regardless of how this season closes for Ohio State – whether with a conference tournament title, an appearance in the Elite Eight or something greater – McMahon is just getting started for the Buckeyes, and her freshman year is just the first step in her legacy waiting to be written in Columbus.

“I definitely wanted to come to Ohio State and make an impact, and I feel like I’ve done that along with my teammates and the newcomers and Taylor Mikesell coming back,” McMahon said. “She definitely wanted to make that imprint too and put us on the map again and make us great, and so I feel like we’re doing that and it’s been great.”

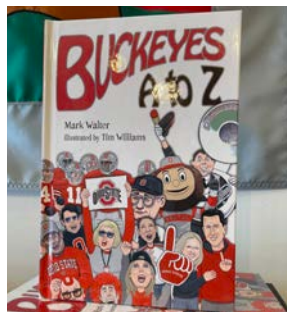
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Ohio State Trying To Keep Pace In NIL Race

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

A brief statement on Dec. 8 from Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith was a sure sign that things were not trending in the right direction in regard to the Buckeyes' name, image and likeness efforts.

It began innocuously, with Smith claiming that there has never been a more exciting time to be a fan of the Buckeyes. He then transitioned into a discussion of Ohio State's NIL efforts in an ever-changing landscape.

"Many of our Buckeyes are taking advantage of this, and we are committed to supporting our current and future student-athletes while building a strong, competitive program," he said. "We welcome your help in keeping Ohio State at the top of the college athletics landscape."

Smith then advertised three collectives – alumni and booster-led groups helping to create NIL opportunities for Ohio State student-athletes – endorsed by the university, including Gary Marcinick's Cohesion Foundation, Brian Schottenstein and Cardale Jones' The Foundation and Ron Stokes' The "O" Foundation.

All have varying degrees of backing by those connected to Ohio State, with Gary Nicklaus – Jack Nicklaus' son – and Jeff Heurman on the board for Cohesion, Urban Meyer and J.T. Barrett connected to The Foundation and Mike Conley and Evan Turner on the board for The "O" Foundation, among others.

Smith's statement was a not-so-subtle plea to the Ohio State faithful to break out their wallets and support the collectives that, in turn, will funnel money to the student-athletes who will take the field or court for the Buckeyes.

His statement came just a couple of weeks before the early signing period in which Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day signed a top-five recruiting class for



FILE PHOTO

PLAYING THE GAME — Ohio State is continuing to evolve when it comes to Name, Image and Likeness, which was enacted in July 2021 with the support of those such as Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith (right) and State Sen. Niraj Antani.

2023 but also missed out on several top prospects, some rumored to have been basing their college decision on NIL. Day echoed Smith's sentiment on Dec. 21, asking for support from all those – whether it be individual fans or businesses – who fly the Ohio State flag.

"It's certainly a priority for us to make sure we have everything we need to support our players, and that's kind of where I'll leave it," Day said. "We have some folks

that are really helping and doing everything they can, and that's great.

"We're going to need as much help as we can get moving forward. But the great news is we have great fans who want to support it, and we're going to make sure we do everything we can to make sure our guys get what's fair."

The help Ohio State needs is in terms of both dollars and optics. No school will ever claim to have enough NIL money to support both the current roster and the pursuit of prep talent – a number that Day previously set at around \$13 million, with the exact amount varying between schools – but the Buckeyes have seemingly fallen out of step with several programs that have been among the national leaders in NIL.

Schools that have made a name for themselves over the past year and change include such powerhouses as Florida, Miami (Fla.), Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC, with individual boosters like Florida's Eddie Rojas, Miami's John Ruiz and Oregon's Phil Knight all helping to send fundraising efforts through the moon.

By no means has Ohio State been absent from NIL, though. Several Buckeyes have reported noteworthy deals, including The Foundation inking a joint \$500,000 deal with C.J. Stroud, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, TreVeyon Henderson and Denzel Burke in July 2022 and recently signing NIL deals with five incoming members of the 2023 recruiting class.

"Some of our guys are doing really good, but the majority of our guys are doing very, very good," Day said. "But it's also (not just) the program and what Ohio State has to offer in the city of Columbus and our program, but our development and playing

in the 'Shoe – there's so many things that come with being an Ohio State Buckeye that so many of these guys understand."

Speaking of that recruiting class, Ohio State still secured a top-five haul nationally and held on to commitments from the likes of Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 198) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 180) despite significant interest from Miami and Tennessee and corresponding NIL potential with both programs.

"NIL didn't cost them everybody," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB. "Plus, I think the kids that really investigated Ohio State can see that there are tremendous NIL opportunities at Ohio State."

"Now, are they happening up front? No, and so it cost them Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 226). But they did sign a lot of kids that I think were approached by other schools with huge NIL deals, especially those wide receivers."

In addition to Fletcher, other prospects who reportedly moved away from Ohio State due to NIL included the trio of five-star defensive ends pursued by the Buckeyes, including Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep's Keon Keeley (6-5, 242), Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco's Matayo Uiagalelei (6-5, 265) and Damon Wilson (6-4, 225) of Venice, Fla. The trio ended up at Alabama, Oregon and Georgia, respectively, after being viewed as leans toward Ohio State for at least part of their recruitment.

"I think it definitely came up down the stretch with those defensive ends," Buckeye Huddle recruiting analyst Marc Givler



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said. "You have this situation right now where schools are not supposed to be inducing commitments via NIL, and everyone's accusing each other, but no one's actually naming names."

"It's all very interesting right now to try and sift through what's true and what's sour grapes," he continued. "But there's no question that in the last couple months of this cycle, there were a lot of murmurs about NIL being a factor with the Damon Wilson, Keon Keeley, Matayo Uigalelei trio."

What is separating these schools – those viewed at the forefront of NIL and those lagging behind – is a matter of approach. Programs like those mentioned above arrived quickly on the scene with promises of up-front payment for simply signing with a school, while Ohio State is encouraging student-athletes and collectives to wait until their arrival on campus to begin conducting business.

"Ohio State didn't go big on the NIL like a few schools did with – whatever you want to call it – a signing bonus or up-front money," Bucknuts recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic said. "I don't think (paying recruits up front) is really a sustainable model. I think Ohio State is, to me, on the right path. A lot of schools didn't go big on that. Alabama and Georgia, they're not big up-front money schools."

"I think it's just going to have to wait to be sorted out. I think all the schools are making decisions and seeing how things go, and things will change over time. But I think it's not a sustainable model, though, to continually pay high school players big bonus money to sign."

While it may not be sustainable, it certainly is working in the meantime. Texas A&M signed the nation's top class in the 2022 recruiting cycle after years of middling recruiting, leading to allegations from Alabama head coach Nick Saban that the Aggies and head coach Jimbo Fisher "bought every player on their team."

Fisher denied those allegations, but it pointed to the confusion that exists even between the head coaches in college football of what's allowed, what isn't and how they should operate their program.

"It's hard to articulate what being competitive in NIL actually means," Givler said. "Clearly it's not the Texas A&M method, but clearly you can't just also be sitting back and saying, 'Oh, you know, don't worry about NIL. We'll figure it out in a year or two when you're on campus.' There's a sweet spot here that everybody is trying to figure out with NIL and how it's going to impact their recruiting and how it's going to impact their locker room culture."

The long-term impacts of NIL will be discovered a year or two down the road, but some results are already being felt in the interim. Some deals have already reportedly gone sour at schools like Florida, where Pittsburg, Calif., four-star quarterback Jaden Rashada (6-4, 175) signed with the school and inked a \$13 million deal with the Gator Collective, one of the most aggressive NIL collectives in the country.

Unfortunately for Rashada, the collective exercised a termination clause shortly after his arrival on campus, according to The Athletic. This left the quarterback without an NIL deal and, after requesting a release from his national letter of intent,

without a school, at least until he signed with Arizona State on Feb. 2. This is just one of the broken promises that Greene believes will come to light over the next few years.

"The one thing we're going to find out with NIL is are these promises being kept? You're not signing contracts here that are enforceable by law," he said. "The one school I'll mention is that USC got all those transfers last year and promised them all everything, and the majority of those kids did not get what they were promised. A couple of them, I know for a fact, got nothing ... You're going to know all these wild promises that were made and how many of them are kept and how many of them are not kept, (and) I think (that) is going to be the story of NIL."

These are just some of the concerns that have Ohio State viewed as slow adopters of NIL, able to take care of student-athletes but not yet pushing for exorbitant deals that have made headlines at other schools. The Buckeyes have an optimistic view of what optimized NIL might eventually look like in Columbus, though, and the strategy may begin paying dividends soon.

"I'm excited because I think that ultimately, we're going to be in a really good place," Day said. "But sometimes, in order to do something, it takes a little bit longer. But I am confident here over the next couple of months we're going to have a really good plan in place and have an opportunity to be one of the best in the country. Because when you combine everything that we have here, certainly we have an opportunity to be the best in the country."

Collective Bargaining

Beyond the raging debate between various NIL philosophies of different programs, there's also the matter of how involved universities are in supporting NIL efforts, specifically when it comes to throwing their weight behind collectives.

"I would say that across the NIL landscape right now, some of the collectives that are thriving are the ones that are in alignment with the university," said Pete Nakos, an NIL reporter for On3. "That really means making sure they're not doing anything that the athletic department would look down upon. Athletic programs now can basically point boosters in the direction of collectives – by no means can they tell them to donate or anything, but having university officials or an athletic director be able to tell the top-level donors, 'Hey, this is our NIL collective,' that makes all the difference when it comes to fundraising."

It's a fine line for a university when it comes to supporting a collective. Athletic departments are averse to any potential blowback – whether it be public relations or from the NCAA – and collectives, with a loose set of rules and lack of enforcement, could cause issues down the line for schools if collectives are found to have induced a recruit or improperly contacted them.

This has already been seen in recent weeks, with the NCAA handing down a Level II violation to Miami women's basketball coach Katie Meier, who facilitated impermissible contact between two players – Haley and Hanna Cavinder – and Ruiz prior to the pair's transfer to Miami

this past offseason. The sanctions include a one-year probationary period, a \$5,000 fine, plus one percent of the women's basketball budget, though it does not require Ruiz to disassociate from the school.

Ohio State has exercised caution in that area, with the first public support by the athletic administration of any collective coming via Smith's statement on Dec. 8, over 18 months after NIL's introduction and 10 months after The Foundation – the first established collective for Ohio State – launched, though Smith did acknowledge all three of the major collectives that represent the Buckeyes.

It was a first step in taking some ownership over Ohio State's NIL efforts, though Nakos believes that schools can do more than a simple endorsement.

"If an athletic department wants to go ahead and back a collective, the way to do it is not saying it to a few reporters at a basketball game," he said. "It is by coming out in full force with a social media blitz with videos and graphics and posts on Instagram and Twitter. It means sitting down with collective leaders and putting out a video on YouTube and trying to do NIL education. That is what a well-thought-out NIL endorsement looks like. It's what Tennessee's done; it's what Georgia's done; it's what Alabama's done."

"It means a lot when Nick Saban comes out and endorses a collective. I think if you had some of these coaches sit down and really talk about NIL to a camera, it would really help some of these fans."

But even since Smith's statement, more

change has taken place. A recent step was taken to help consolidate Ohio State's various NIL efforts, with The Foundation and The "O" Foundation announcing a merger to combine the leading collectives for football (The Foundation) and men's basketball (The "O" Foundation).

"The two organizations will now continue to support Ohio State football and men's basketball student-athletes in conjunction," the collectives announced in a joint statement on Feb. 9. "The two collectives, being 'team players,' have decided to work together in order to more efficiently support the same cause. With these two collectives coming together, this is now undeniably the (No.1) joint NIL collective for Ohio State."

The statement was a clear shot across the bow at Cohesion, which now stands opposite the other merged collectives. While the collectives all have the same purpose – to fundraise and facilitate NIL deals for Ohio State student-athletes – they differ in terms of which sports for which funds are being raised.

All of The Foundation's reported deals are either with football or men's basketball players, while The "O" Foundation's only deals are with men's basketball. Cohesion, meanwhile, has reported deals with student-athletes in cheerleading, fencing, golf, men's lacrosse, rowing, soccer, women's basketball, women's gymnastics, women's ice hockey and women's swim and dive in addition to football.

Furthermore, the charities supported

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Continued From Page 13

by each collective paint a picture of where Ohio State's administration might be issuing more support. The Foundation and The "O" Foundation partner with several local charities, but one notable partnership for Cohesion is with Learfield's Ohio State Sport Properties, the Buckeyes' exclusive multimedia rights holder, aligning the collective with Ohio State athletics, according to Cohesion's website.

The squabble between collectives has even played out on the public stage, with The Foundation's official Twitter account tweeting on Feb. 2 that it had supported over 40 student-athletes with "99 percent" of donations going directly to football and men's basketball student athletes, while "the other collective helps sports like rowing and fencing," before swiftly deleting the perceived shot at Cohesion.

"It seems The Foundation and Cohesion are butting heads," Nakos said. "I think that anyone who's following that can kind of pick up on that. That's not some insider secret. While it's great to have two organizations fundraising to raise money for Ohio State football players and student-athletes in general, I'm sure it's also making it harder for some fans to decide where they want their cash to go and if they want to do that at all.

"Consolidation is coming across the country," he continued. "In 18 months, will there still be The Foundation and Cohesion? Will they each be their own entities still? I'm not really sure. I'm also not sure if the model that we're in right now is going to be sustainable."

But even as these collectives quarrel, it's still – at least for now – the way for schools to get ahead in NIL. Ohio State's reluctant messaging in support of the collectives was a long time coming, and it signals a shift in how the Buckeyes might embrace the collectives and NIL moving forward as the arms race continues to ramp up.

"The Foundation has said it has supported about 40 student-athletes, and Co-



FILE PHOTO

BUILDING A FOUNDATION — Former Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett is one of several former players, coaches and others associated with the Buckeyes who are involved with The Foundation, the leading NIL collective for Ohio State.

hesion, I think, is in that range or closing in on it," Nakos said. "It's just tough. John Ruiz has been open – he's reportedly spent more than \$10 million.

"I don't know if (it takes) that much money to run a successful collective, but I think to run an operation that is going to make sure that talent stays in Columbus, you're going to need at least \$3-6 million annually, strictly for college football."

Continuing To Adapt

Whether it's due to a lack of fundraising, combative collectives or simply a decision from up top to protect the Buckeyes' culture, if Ohio State determines it either can't or isn't willing to get into the mud regarding NIL, a potential path forward has already been set.

"This year is the learning curve of feeling it the hard way," said Mark Pantoni, Ohio State's assistant athletic director of player personnel. "Now that we've been through a full cycle, I think we'll go into this (2024) class with a better mind-set of spending our time and resources in certain areas vs. others."

One way Pantoni may look for a better utilization of resources is to take a step back sooner from recruitments where it is clear that NIL may be a key factor – or the most important factor – for a prospect.

"It's definitely a new mind-set of how

we're going to have to approach things during this time," he said. "(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 the NIL is going to be a main factor in their recruitments.

"It's just probably not something we're going to want to end up being able to compete with – by choice – as well. Is that something we want to bring into the locker room? Those are the conversations we have in this day."

Greene disagreed with the strategy of exiting national recruitments earlier, claiming that Urban Meyer wouldn't have done so and that it would mark a shift for Day's philosophy.

"Maybe NIL has them so spooked that they're just going to not compete with the national kids and try to win the (Jim) Tressel way by getting the best kids out of Ohio," Greene said. "You don't have to have NIL battles – you can get them committed fairly early and develop them. It doesn't make sense to me.

"I don't think they have to change the way they're doing things to win battles with the kids that you want championships with. I think they're close in NIL. They did well. I would tweak a few things, but I wouldn't

drop out. Nick Saban has repeatedly said that he is not paying kids up front and he's dropping kids that want up-front money. But he's not taking two- and three-star kids out of Alabama. There's a balance there."

And while Pantoni's conversations about NIL are happening between himself and the coaching staff, other conversations taking place about NIL are between the coaching staff and the recruits themselves. Since NIL was introduced in 2021, Day has acknowledged that the frequency with which it comes up with recruits has increased.

"It was never part of the conversation (before 2021)," he said. "Then it became part of the conversation, and it's trending towards being the conversation for a lot of folks. As time has gone on, it's become more and more of a priority for folks, and so navigating those times and adapting is important."

Offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who helped secure several of those wideouts who had reported interest from other schools offering a significant advantage in NIL, said that NIL is just one variable in recruiting.

"It's a part of a variable. The variable, anything can change," he said. "Where the young athletes placed that variable in the importance of their recruitment is on them. We know it's important. We don't believe it's the most important, so all that has to match up. I think that's really important. That's part of the emphasis in the athlete's mind or family's mind, and it all plays a part."

But even as Ohio State continues to tweak strategies and beliefs regarding NIL, there's no way of knowing what NIL might look like in a matter of weeks, months or even years down the line. The writing may have been on the wall that NIL – specifically in regard to recruiting and the transfer portal – would devolve into pay-for-play, but few could have guessed the amounts that boosters and collectives would begin raising to support their respective schools.

"I do think that NIL is immature and slowly developing," Nakos said. "We're about 19 months in now. I don't know if collectives are going to exist in two years. They're definitely going to continue to evolve. I could see someday where they get absorbed by athletic departments, but some things are going to have to change at the NCAA level for that to happen. But until there's revenue sharing and things, NIL is basically what it is.

"I think that collectives are going to be uberly important to make sure you're winning games on the field or on the court."

Many are awaiting any sort of guidance from the NCAA, which to this point has offered little more than brief statements about how schools can operate when it comes to NIL and, prior to sanctions handed down to Miami's women's basketball program, had done nothing in terms of enforcement. The most recent communication came in October, when the NCAA clarified that schools are able to inform student-athletes about NIL opportunities as well as assist collectives with fundraising.

These assists can be in the form of appearances from administrators, coaches or student-athletes, the offering of signed memorabilia, requesting that donors support specific collectives and offering tickets



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and suites to collectives. But schools are still not allowed to donate directly to collectives or directly broker NIL deals, and university staff members are unable to be employed by or have an ownership stake in a collective.

While the update did offer some clarification to how involved universities can be with collectives and NIL, it did not even scratch the surface in terms of answering any outstanding questions about recruiting inducements and pay-for-play as well as any potential penalties. Miami's recent sanctions provide a brief glimpse at what those punishments may look like in the future, but until players or boosters are penalized, business will likely continue as usual.

With some schools operating in that alleged "gray area" and others more hesitant to play under an undefined set of rules, Day said it has created some frustration and hard feelings as different programs take different approaches to NIL.

"I think where we sit right now we have a vision of where we want to be, and I think the most important thing is that we go and do it now and put this plan together and then move forward," he said. "To say over the last year there hasn't been that type of angst, I'd be lying. There is that feeling and the biggest thing I think we've done is we have advocated for our guys. I think the guys that have come in this class love the product that Ohio State has to offer."

To that point, those like Pantoni who would welcome changes are not optimistic

that anything will get done to help curb the rules being broken.

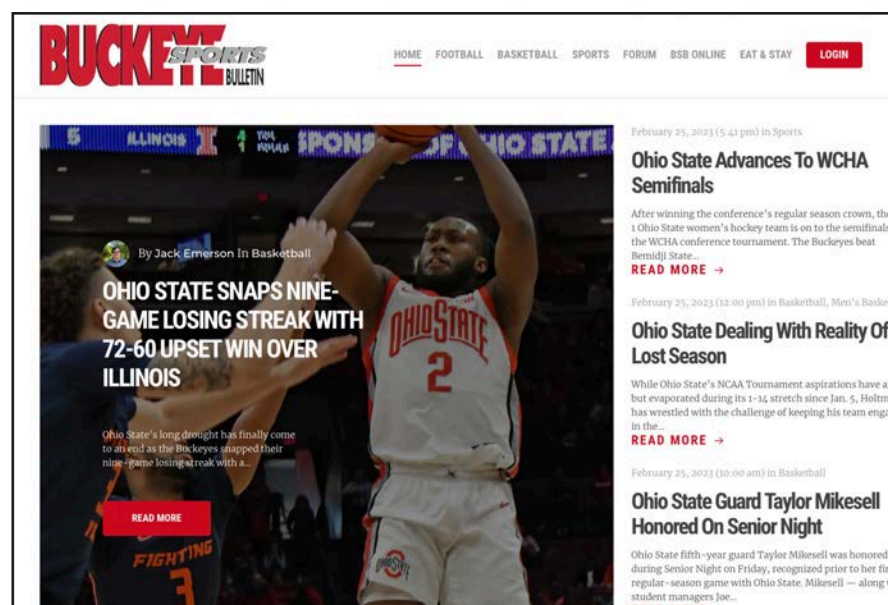
"I just hope there's a lot of really smart people in this profession that we can all come together and get a solution to this as quickly as possible," he said. "Because I don't think there's a lot of people who enjoy what's going on. NIL isn't what it was intended to be. And so I'm raising my hand to help any way I can to get a solution to get this fixed."

But until those changes come – if they ever do come – Ohio State is left with the current state of NIL and trying to operate within those parameters. It remains a learning process, and as the Buckeyes continue to navigate that landscape, Day believes Ohio State is in a prime position to take advantage of NIL.

"When it first happened, nobody was too sure of how this was going to shake out and in short order, people have handled it in different ways," he said. "I think our guys have done very, very well."

"It is a little bit different in the recruiting area, because there's different parts of NIL with your current team, there's the portal, and then there's the recruiting area. It's going to be here for a while, and it's not going anywhere. This is something that really has to be done well. It has to be built the right way. It's going to be a big business, and so in order to do something like that, it has to be done the right way. And certainly at Ohio State, we're held to a very high standard."

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Michalski Hopes To Surge Into Starting Role

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

An offensive tackle spot is there for someone to win this offseason for Ohio State.

Following the departure of Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, the Buckeyes' two All-America starters at the position last season, only one clear successor to their edge-protecting prowess has emerged. That's junior Josh Fryar, who played meaningful snaps both in spot duty when Jones missed time and as a blocking-centric tight end in short-yardage subpackages.

Offensive line coach Justin Frye indicated Feb. 1 that Fryar is likely to flip to left tackle after spending most of his career on the right side, though it's not 100 percent certain as the Buckeyes prepare for spring practice to begin.

"You've got to see how guys function that way," Frye said. "Some guys are right-brained and left-brained, some guys are (just) left-brained. Internal guys can play both sides. That's just a feel thing right now – we'll figure that out."

Determining who will start opposite Fryar is one of the top questions Frye and head coach Ryan Day will try to answer this offseason, in addition to who anchors the bunch at center. Among the top starting right tackle candidates is redshirt sophomore Zen Michalski. If he's to start in the Scarlet and Gray before his career ends in Columbus, his third year feels like the best opportunity for him to do so.

"I'm just going to put my head down this offseason, work with Coach Frye and (graduate assistant) Mike (Sollene), do whatever I've got to do," Michalski said. "Just give it my best shot. I'm not going to go into it thinking I have (the job). I want to work for it."

Michalski was a late bloomer on the recruiting trail out of Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Central, finishing as the No. 306 overall

prospect and No. 21 offensive tackle in the 2021 class and only earning his fourth star in the 247Sports composite during December of his senior year. Originally a Louisville commit, he flipped to Ohio State in October 2020 after having been committed to the Cardinals for five months.

Exiting high school at 6-6½ and 288 pounds, Michalski is now listed at 6-7 and 310 pounds on Ohio State's roster. His biggest change, though, has been acclimating to Ohio State-level pass protection.

At Floyd Central, he only ever went out of a three-point stance and his offense was run-heavy, as were the teams he played against. Not only was he pass blocking less than a typical Power Five tackle recruit, but he was facing a low caliber of pass rusher on those few snaps.

"This last offseason, my biggest improvements were in pass blocking," Michalski said. "That's what I struggled with the most my first year. So I took this entire past offseason after spring ball to develop that even more. I was with Paris and Mike, our graduate assistant, doing endless pass blocking drills just trying to figure it out."

This past season, Michalski worked behind Johnson as the team's backup left tackle. Knowing that a pivotal job along the front five could be his in 2023, he worked with Johnson to drill down on as many details of his game as possible.

"Zen has taken a crazy jump," Johnson said. "We've done every drill together since the summertime. And honestly, the amazing thing about playing offensive line is that it's all about refining the basic tools of the game. So I think instead of trying to focus on X, Y, Z, we spent every day just doing the basics: stance, set, putting our hands a certain way – the small details."

That pass-blocking deficiency from Michalski's first year started dissipating in year two, according to the projected first-round NFL draft pick. Michalski instead began stonewalling many of the team's more experienced pass rushers in drills this past fall.

"He has come a long way," Johnson said. "He's always had the ability. I think doing the drills and seeing the drills and that work you put in come to fruition – I think he's built a lot of confidence in that area, and it's starting to show. He's started beating a lot of the older guys."

"As a lineman, the more you bank reps, the better you get, plain and simple," Frye said. "So the physicality and all those things, I'm really happy with his development. I really am."

From Frye's perspective, the third year is when collegiate offensive linemen are truly ready to step into a starting job. For Michalski, who's entering that prime third year, it's just a matter of if he can capitalize on the opportunity in front of him.

"As you look just through phases, 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 (sports dietician Kaila Olson) and organize your meal and get stronger and faster. Year two, you figure out how to play your position, and then by year



FILE PHOTO

IN THE TRENCHES — Ohio State offensive tackle Zen Michalski (65) is one of several players looking to fill a pair of open tackle positions for the Buckeyes next season following the departures of Paris Johnson Jr. (77) and Dawand Jones.

three you play your position. That's the general progression."

Even with Fryar slotted for a starting job and Michalski pushing for one himself, younger players are lurking, eager for their own shots at an open tackle position.

Perhaps the most imposing of the bunch is redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola, a 6-6, 330-pound specimen with great athleticism at that size. He was the No. 10 offensive tackle and No. 104 overall prospect in the class of 2022, coming out of West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West. He cracked the two-deep last season at guard but now looks to kick back outside.

"He's got a really good skill set," Frye said. "His top end is really high. Many of those young guys, if they're capable and they're ready to do it, (we play them) in those three or four games but keep their redshirt year. So now when he gets into the fall, it's not the first time he's traveled. It's not the first time he's run out of the tunnel and been in a big-game atmosphere."

George Fitzpatrick is another four-star option at the position from Tshabola's class, and the highest-rated recruit at the position coming in for Ohio State is freshman Luke Montgomery. A 6-4, 295-pound prospect out of Findlay, Ohio, Montgomery checked in as the nation's 92nd-ranked recruit.

However, no true freshman has started on Ohio State's offensive line since guard Michael Jordan in 2016, and it hasn't happened at offensive tackle since Orlando Pace in 1994. Even so, Frye has no preconceived notions about who could step in the trenches for the Buckeyes this season.

"We're going to play our five best or six best," Frye said. "At the end of the year last year, at some points Josh (Fryar) was playing tight end."

Then there's also the possibility Ohio State could add a transfer at the position during the second transfer window this May. Day and his staff tried to bring in someone to compete with Michalski and company during the first transfer window, extending offers to four offensive tackles but landing none of them. The Buckeyes did scoop up former Louisiana-Monroe offensive tackle Victor Cutler out of the portal, but he's expected to compete for the open center position. Regardless of who is competing to line up for Ohio State, Michalski is settling in and will attempt to make a push this offseason.

"First year was a little rough, learning how to play college football," Michalski said. "This year I've been so much more comfortable. It's been a lot more fun, a lot more actually playing. It's been good."

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Thurman A Threatening Future Weapon

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The arrival of tight end Jelani Thurman (6-6, 225), a four-star prospect out of Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes, feels impeccably timed as the Buckeyes prepare for spring football.

Since head coach Ryan Day took over at Ohio State, a wide receiver-centric approach has dominated the passing game. Prior to this most recent season, the most receiving yards by a tight end under Day had been 309 yards, achieved by Jeremy Ruckert in 2021.

There's good reason for that, as the Buckeyes have cranked out NFL wideout talent at an impressive pace under the tutelage of wide receivers coach and newly minted offensive coordinator Brian Hartline. Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson each went in the first round of last year's draft, and Alabama wideout Jameson Williams – a former Buckeye who transferred to the Crimson Tide prior to the 2021 season – joined them as a first-round selection.

Terry McLaurin was a third-round pick in 2019 out of Hartline's room who has since turned into a pro bowler with the Washington Commanders. Despite missing most of his junior season with an injury, Jaxon Smith-Njigba is projected as a first-rounder this year, and Marvin Harrison Jr. will likely follow suit next year.

But this past season, tight end Cade Stover broke that mold. He hauled in 36 passes for 406 yards and five touchdowns, with his receptions ranking third and yards ranking fourth on a team filled with four- and five-star receivers. His receiving yards were the most by an Ohio State tight end since Jeff Heurman's 466 yards in 2013, and Stover's 36 catches were the most by a Buckeye tight end since Rickey Dudley's 37 receptions in 1995.

Now enters Thurman, who is Ohio State's highest-rated tight end signee since Ruckert in 2018, and he took notice of Day's increased usage of the tight ends.

"The more they threw to the tight end, the more I really wanted to come here," Thurman said Jan. 11. "That was the last part for me. They sold me on the Block O, really. The tight end spot was used a lot more this year. You're going to see a lot of exciting things coming from me."

Winning Thurman's recruitment wasn't a small undertaking for the Ohio State staff. He had offers from some of the nation's best, including Alabama, Clemson, Michigan, Oklahoma and USC among others, and he took visits to Alabama, Auburn and Michigan State in addition to Ohio State. Another obstacle was that the Buckeyes already had one tight end commitment in Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star Ty Lockwood (6-5, 225) that Thurman thought he'd have to compete with down the road.

In the end, the players and staff who would help him develop attracted him to the Scarlet and Gray. Thurman announced his commitment on July 17, pulling out an Ohio State hat at a ceremony at his high school. Lockwood decommitted a few



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

EARLY IMPACT — Ohio State freshman tight end Jelani Thurman, an early enrollee as a four-star prospect out of Georgia, has all the tools to potentially see the field in his first year with the Buckeyes.

weeks later on Aug. 2, later signing with Alabama.

"Ohio State just has a legacy," Thurman said. "Everyone knows about the great Ohio State – *the* Ohio State. The chance to play with great players such as my teammates in this recruiting class, the chance to come play for Ryan Day (is why I chose the Buckeyes)."

Thurman was the No. 104 overall prospect in the class, the No. 3 tight end and fifth-best player out of Georgia. He piled up 12 touchdowns for Langston Hughes this past season, with 36 receptions for 582 yards. That was fresh off a junior year in which he compiled 31 receptions for 479 yards and seven scores.

"He has great height and an elite frame with long arms and a large catch radius," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Gabe Brooks. "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, and shows encouraging conviction as a blocker."

That 6-6, 225-pound frame features long arms, and his high school highlight film features several one-handed sideline

catches that show him utilizing that attribute. When evaluating Thurman's recruiting class at his early signing day press conference on Dec. 21, Day brought up Thurman unprompted.

"It was great to get Jelani Thurman," Day said. "He's a really talented tight end. As we start to get into multiple-tight-end use as we did this year, it was great to get him."

Shortly after signing the class, the Buckeyes traveled to Atlanta – of which Thurman's hometown of Fairburn is a suburb – for the Peach Bowl against No. 1 Georgia

in the College Football Playoff. That gave the tight end a chance to see firsthand how the team prepared for a major game.

"I got to go there a little bit early because I'm from Atlanta," Thurman said. "I got to build chemistry with some of the teammates, got to see the environment around playoff time. I got to see how the coaches interact when there's hard times and got to see the game, which was a great game."

A few weeks later, Thurman fully entered Ohio State's program as an early enrollee. He's been going through his first round of winter workouts and will participate in his first set of spring practices once those get under way.

Newly promoted tight ends coach Keenan Bailey believes the veteran leadership of Stover and others should help Thurman realize his potential quickly. He's already seen the Georgia product soaking up knowledge from those more senior players.

"I don't need to go pull up clips and say, 'Here's how Heurman and (Nick) Vannett did it, here's how it should be done,'" Bailey said. "No, just watch Stover. If he's in here getting extra work, why aren't you? And Jelani's done a great job so far of attaching himself to those old guys, taking coaching. He's done a great job since he's been here."

Thurman has lofty ambitions. During his commitment ceremony, he stated his objectives for his collegiate career, all ones he sees himself achieving in Columbus.

"I just feel like I can grow up there," Thurman said. "Come in, make an impact my freshman year, complete my goal of winning a Mackey Award and getting to the NFL one day with a (national championship) ring."

The Mackey Award is given annually to the best tight end in all of college football. Since it was created in 2000, no Ohio State player has ever won it, though there have been five recipients from the Big Ten.

Checking off all those boxes would easily put Thurman in the conversation of the best tight end in Ohio State history. He's at the foothills of that mountain now, however. There's a long road ahead of him to have a chance at that zenith, but Bailey has already seen him beginning to climb.

"Since day one, he's been in my office with a notepad and we're getting to work," Bailey said. "I'm going to let his actions speak, but he's definitely eager. I can't wait to get on the field working with him."

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Spring Visits Taking Shape For Ohio State

Just as Ohio State's spring practice is set to begin, recruiting is beginning to heat up for the Buckeyes, with dozens of prospects in 2024 and beyond getting visits to Columbus on their calendars.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is breaking down the list of expected visitors by date and class, with information compiled from

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Braden Moles

recruits themselves as well as other outlets. Changes are a constant in recruiting, so for the latest on any additions (or potential subtractions) from Ohio State's expected spring visitors, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com.

Beginning on March 7, the Buckeyes will welcome a trio of 2024 prospects in Millersburg (Ohio) West Holmes three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203) – who recently included Ohio State among his top five schools – as well as Toledo Central Catholic three-star offensive lineman Marc Nave (6-5, 315) and Mount Pleasant, Mich., three-star offensive lineman Andrew Dennis (6-5, 275).

Next up on March 9, Ohio State will host a pair of prospects from Mt. Healthy High School in Cincinnati, including three-star athlete Javier Etheridge (5-10, 156) in 2024 and athlete Jai'mier Scott (6-1, 177) in 2025.

The Buckeyes will then welcome in a large group on March 23 that includes Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Jordan Lyle (6-0, 180), a 2024 prospect, as well as Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190) in 2025 and another

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

er pair of 2025 prospects from Cincinnati Winton Woods in offensive tackle Raphael Greene (6-6, 320) and defensive end Justin Hill (6-4, 215).

Another large group will visit on March 25, with visits expected from Lagrange (Ga.) Troup County four-star linebacker Qua Birdsong (6-2, 195), Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star defensive end Darien Mayo (6-7, 247), Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Ify Obidegwu (6-1, 185), Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225), Dayton Centerville three-star safety Reggie Powers (6-1, 195) and Washington (D.C.) Friendship Collegiate Academy four-star defensive end Dylan Stewart (6-5, 235).

A pair of 2025 prospects are also expected on that date, including Westerville (Ohio) North offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295) and Baltimore St. Frances Academy defensive lineman Trent Wilson (6-3, 270).

They will all be followed by a visit on March 30 from San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star running back James Peoples (5-10, 192), and the next day, Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195) is expected to visit.

Noland's recruitment has blown up in recent weeks, holding offers from Alabama, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), Ole Miss and Texas A&M, among others. Through his first three seasons of high school football, he's thrown for 8,024 yards and 104 touchdowns to just

16 interceptions while completing 67.8 percent of his passes.

While he has yet to receive an offer from Ohio State, he still thinks highly of the Buckeyes, who seem likely to offer the quarterback during his visit.

"The offensive system Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach (Brian) Hartline and Coach (Corey) Dennis run fits perfectly for a quarterback like myself," Noland told 247Sports. "Also, Coach Day, Coach Dennis and Coach Hartline have been recruiting very well. They love the way I carry myself on and off the field. They like my personality, mind-set and leadership skills."

On April 1, Ohio State will host Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star cornerback Marcelles Williams (6-0, 176), the No. 70 overall prospect in 2024, as well as Dayton Stebbins three-star offensive lineman Jake Wheelock (6-4, 275), a 2025 prospect. The visits will be followed by another pair on April 4 from Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough offensive tackle Eagan Boyer (6-8, 265), a 2024 prospect, as well as Atlanta Douglass cornerback Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175), a 2025 recruit who is committed to Ohio State.

A number of prospects also have visits in mind for Ohio State's spring game, which takes place on April 15 at Ohio Stadium. The preliminary list of attendees includes Buford, Ga., four-star defensive end KingJoseph Edwards (6-5, 242); New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive tackle Ian Moore (6-5, 295), who is committed to Ohio State; and Picayune (Miss.) Memorial four-star defensive end Jamonta Waller (6-2, 225).

The Buckeyes are also expecting a 2025 prospect in attendance, with Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 200) – the younger brother of Ohio State freshman offensive lineman Luke Montgomery – expected at the exhibition. Carrollton, Ga., quarterback Julian Lewis (6-1, 175), a 2026 prospect who was recently offered by Ohio State, is also set for the contest.

Beyond those scheduled dates, many prospects have indicated their plans to visit Ohio State at some point in the spring but have yet to settle on a specific date.

Notable prospects in 2024 expected to visit in the spring include Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive tackles Devontae (6-6, 288) and Deontae (6-7, 280) Armstrong; Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285); Buford, Ga., five-star safety KJ Bolden (6-1, 185); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Zabien Brown (6-1, 180); Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star defensive end Marquise Lightfoot (6-5, 215); Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan

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Marshall (5-11, 193); and St. Louis Christian Brothers College four-star wide receiver Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190).

Also expected are Tampa (Fla.) Catholic four-star wide receiver Terrance Moore (6-3, 190); Hiram, Ga., three-star offensive tackle Jameson Riggs (6-5, 285); Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic five-star defensive end Elijah Rushing (6-6, 235); and Cleveland Glenville four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215).

Expected visitors in the 2025 class include Bellefontaine, Ohio, quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 190); Cleveland Heights running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190); Toledo Whitmer offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290); and Calhoun, Ga., tight end Emaree Winston (6-3, 230).

June 16-18 Setting Up For Big Recruiting Weekend

Those visits will all be spread out throughout the spring, but the weekend of June 16-18 is shaping up for one of the biggest recruiting events of the cycle for Ohio State.

With over three months until that weekend, the list of expected visitors already includes Bolden, Edwards, Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview five-star cornerback Charles Lester III (6-1, 171) and Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star cornerback Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185).

Ohio State is the only school Bolden

has an official visit planned for right now, though he intends to use all five, with Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, Georgia, Michigan, Oregon and USC all in contention to receive one of the remaining four.

“My cousin (Perry Eliano) is the safeties coach, so he stays on me,” Bolden told On3. “He’s been calling my mom. He just gave us a date and he was like, ‘I really hope that you come to this one.’ I think that’s when all the top recruits come, for that (official visit) right there, so I’m going to try to go to that one.”

Bolden is the No. 4 overall prospect and top safety in 2024. Ohio State has made several trips to visit the five-star prospect in Georgia, and he’s returned the favor with several trips to Columbus.

Edwards has already made two trips to Columbus, and will make a third for the spring game prior to his official visit. He is the No. 43 overall prospect in the class, and though listed as an athlete on recruiting services, he is being recruited by Ohio State as a defensive end.

Lester is the highest-priority target for the weekend outside of Bolden, checking in as the No. 24 overall prospect in 2024 and the No. 4 cornerback in the class. He has already announced a top five of Alabama, Florida, Florida State, Georgia and Ohio State, with the other schools figuring to receive his other official visits.

As for Lockhart, while not as highly

rated as the other visitors – he is the No. 283 overall prospect and No. 36 athlete in the class, though he is being recruited as a cornerback for Ohio State – he already has a stronger connection with the Buckeyes, viewing them as a leader in his recruitment.

“Every school I go to, I just try to compare what they have and what they can offer,” Lockhart told Eleven Warriors. “They just can compete with anybody, obviously they compete for national championships every year. They can give me the education I need. If I go on to the NFL, they’ll give me the chance to develop. It’s just a great atmosphere to be in and a great place to be. They offer you a lot of opportunities.”

The list of prospects attending that weekend is only expected to grow in the coming weeks and months. Ohio State hosted several notable recruiting weekends last cycle, with double-digit prospects turning out for the weekends of June 17 and 24 in 2022.

WR Commit Smith Hearing From Florida Programs

If Ohio State wants to hold onto the commitment of Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185), it will have to fight until the bitter end.

Smith – the No. 2 overall prospect and top wideout in 2024 – has been committed

to the Buckeyes since December, but there have been recent discussions about visits with Florida, Florida State and Miami (Fla.), with a visit to the Seminoles on deck for March 4, according to 247Sports. He has also been in touch with the Gators and could make a trip to Gainesville in the next few weeks.

“I talk with the receivers coach (Keary Colbert), Coach (Benedick) Hyppolite, Coach (David) Doeker, and (head coach Billy) Napier,” Smith said. “I have a great relationship with the guys on the offensive side of the ball. They want me to come up and check them out. They tell me they have a quarterback in their class that is a great player. They tell me I can be a big game changer for them. I will probably come up there in March, but I run track too, so I’ve got to see. I don’t know any days when yet (to visit).”

Florida has been heavily involved with Smith’s recruitment, even since he committed to Ohio State, and he said he likes how Florida’s offense runs in addition to some other positives about the program.

“They have a really good fan base and the fans show a lot of love,” he said. “Even when I committed (to Ohio State), a lot of fans were still showing me a lot of love. It’s a great college town really, and it’s great weather. I love the coaches. Florida is a

Continued On Page 20

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

Chris Roy, a 6-4, 235-pound tight end from Columbus DeSales High, grew up cheering for the Buckeyes and attended many OSU football games. Not surprisingly, he always dreamed of playing for the Scarlet and Gray.

But he also felt college should provide the opportunity to move away from home and learn to become independent.

When Roy selected his official university visits, Ohio State was not on the list. Eagerness to leave the area was part of the reason Ohio State was absent, as was the fact that Ohio State was going through a coaching transition.

However, OSU inside linebackers coach Gary Blackney persuaded Roy to cancel his final visit, scheduled for Florida State, to accommodate the Buckeyes. And it paid off.

Roy, who in '87 averaged 14.6 yards on 30 receptions, earning first-team All-State recognition by UPI, signed to play for Ohio State Feb. 10.

30 Years Ago — 1993

Top high school football players throughout California dreamed of going on to play major-college football and especially playing in the Rose Bowl.

Most envisioned themselves playing in the “Granddaddy of Them All” as a member of the University of Southern California football team, or as a UCLA Bruin or as a member of any number of other Pac-10 colleges.

Nicky Sualua had similar dreams. Like any other high school player growing up in the shadow of the Rose Bowl, he someday wanted to play in the big game. But that’s where he differed from most of the rest of the California prepsters. You see, Sualua was not interested in going to Pasadena as a Trojan or Bruin.

Sualua, a 5-11, 240-pound fullback out of Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei in suburban Los Angeles, chose to leave the West Coast and play his college football for Ohio State. Sualua picked Ohio State over Kansas, Oregon and UCLA.

25 Years Ago — 1998

Five future Buckeyes were on the team Ohio planned to send to Pennsylvania for the annual Big 33 Football Classic on July 25 in Hershey, Pa.

The five OSU signees set to appear in the game were Cleveland St. Ignatius lineman LeCharles Bentley, Shaker Heights defensive back Nate Clements, New Philadelphia defensive back “Cie” Grant, Canton McKinley fullback Jamar Martin and McKinley defensive end Kenny Peterson.

“The Big 33 game is really a special game,” OSU recruiting coordinator Bill Conley said in a press conference. “You guys, for playing the game, will be considered heroes in your community when you go back there.

“We recruit the best players in the country, as do Penn State

and Pitt. The cream of the crop will be playing in Hershey. These are the two best football states in America.”

20 Years Ago — 2003

A relatively new word was added to the recruiting vernacular when the term “grayshirt” was used to describe the status of Cedric Scott of Charleston (W.Va.) Capital.

From all indications, Scott, the younger brother of then Buckeye Darrion Scott, was expected to enroll as a full-time student at Ohio State in the fall, but he would be considered the equivalent of a walk-on who had already been promised a scholarship when the winter quarter began in January 2004.

“A grayshirt is no problem,” Cedric said. “Basically, I’ll live with my brother and lift weights, and in January I’ll start playing. So it’s worked out all right.”

According to Scott (6-1, 230), it was the only alternative left for him if he really wanted to join his brother at Ohio State, and so he did it, albeit somewhat reluctantly.

“I didn’t want to do it,” he said, “but I didn’t have my (test) score passed so that’s just what I had to do. That’s the main reason why. That was my only choice left so that’s what I had to do. I’m all right with it.”

15 Years Ago — 2008

Since he left the nation hanging by announcing live on national television that he had not selected a school as of National Signing Day, it appeared that little had changed for the nation’s top prospect.

Jeannette, Pa., quarterback Terrelle Pryor was in the midst of attempting to lead his Jayhawks to a state championship in basketball. As a result, the 6-6, 225-pound athlete had put very little time into thinking about recruiting in the time following signing day.

When Pryor elected to hold off on making an official decision, he did so in large part so he could take official visits to Penn State and Oregon. But Jeannette head coach Ray Reitz did not believe either of the planned trips would have much of an effect on where Pryor wound up going.

Pryor had officially visited OSU (Nov. 2) and Michigan (Jan. 18). He had been unable to fit any more official visits into his hectic schedule because his football team’s run to a state championship forced the school to reschedule its basketball games until later in the season.

Jeannette had one more game before reaching the state championship game.

10 Years Ago — 2013

Defensive end Lawrence Marshall of Southfield, Mich., somewhat surprisingly issued a verbal commitment to Ohio State during an unofficial visit Feb. 10. Once the euphoria of the trip

wore off, however, Marshall decided he had been a little hasty.

Four days after telling Urban Meyer he would join the Buckeyes’ class of 2014, Marshall called the head coach to tell him he had changed his mind.

“I told him I wanted to decommit and wait out my decision,” Marshall said Feb. 14. “He said OK, he understood and that he appreciated it.”

Ohio State remained in the running for the 6-4, 230-pound defender, but the Buckeyes had to contend with several other programs, including Marshall’s home-state Big Ten schools.

Marshall was at Michigan State on Feb. 12 for the Spartans’ home basketball game against Michigan, and while there he got a chance to speak with MSU football coach Mark Dantonio in person. The following day, Marshall was in Ann Arbor to become more familiar with U-M head coach Brady Hoke of the Wolverines.

Five Years Ago — 2018

Since Meyer arrived in Columbus to start coaching the Ohio State football team in 2012, the program had a trend of not offering in-state prospects early in the recruiting process. The Buckeyes looked to be employing that same tactic again for the 2019 class, at least in some cases.

One Ohio prepster who was hearing from OSU but had yet to garner an offer to play for the Buckeyes was Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star linebacker Tommy Eichenberg (6-3, 225). He had previously visited Ohio State (an unofficial in mid-December) and was in contact with the staff.

“I’ve been to Ohio State and talked to the coaches,” Eichenberg told Scout.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene. “They said these things take time, and they just want to make sure I’m the right fit for them. They haven’t said anything about coming to camp, but they want me to come for spring practice.”

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State won an important recruiting battle for 2023 when Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Montgomery (6-5, 270) committed to play for the Buckeyes on Feb. 17.

Montgomery was rated the No. 49 overall prospect in the class, the No. 4 offensive tackle and the top recruit from Ohio. If his commitment held, it would be the fourth consecutive class that the Buckeyes signed the top prospect from Ohio.

“Columbus is a great city,” Montgomery said during his commitment ceremony at Findlay High School. “I was born there, I lived there for about 10 months of my life before moving to Findlay, so I’ve always been an Ohio kid. I grew up an Ohio State Buckeye fan. Just being able to play for the home team, it’s pretty amazing.”

Ohio State was the pick over Montgomery’s other finalists, including Clemson, Michigan, Notre Dame and Oklahoma.

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team I've been watching since I was little. They are one of my uncle's favorite college football teams."

Smith has also said that Miami's coaches – namely head coach Mario Cristobal – have continued to contact him and that a spring visit is on the table.

OSU Hires New Director Of Player Personnel

Ohio State is hiring Marshall general manager Marc Votteler as the Buckeyes' new director of player personnel.

Votteler has been in that role for the Thundering Herd since last January and has also been an assistant director of player personnel at Alabama, Central Florida and Tennessee. Votteler's role is one under Mark Pantoni, who remains in charge of Ohio State's recruiting efforts while Votteler and other support staffers accomplish more of the day-to-day functions.

"My job now is to run the ranch, not necessarily work the ranch," Pantoni said on Feb. 1. "It's more of an overseeing (job). We have a great staff here. I'm more of a support system to them."

Votteler is replacing Zach Grant, who left Ohio State this offseason to become general manager at Cincinnati under head coach Scott Satterfield.

Grant was added to Ohio State's staff last offseason and was previously named Player Personnel Director of the Year by FootballScoop following the 2021 season at Western Kentucky.

Peoples Includes OSU In Top Six

Peoples included the Buckeyes in his top six on Feb. 9 along with Alabama, Oklahoma, Oregon, TCU and Texas.

Peoples, who rushed for 1,904 yards and 28 touchdowns in his junior season, is listed as the No. 78 overall prospect and No. 5 running back in 2024. He previously visited Ohio State last summer for a camp session and is expected to return this spring.

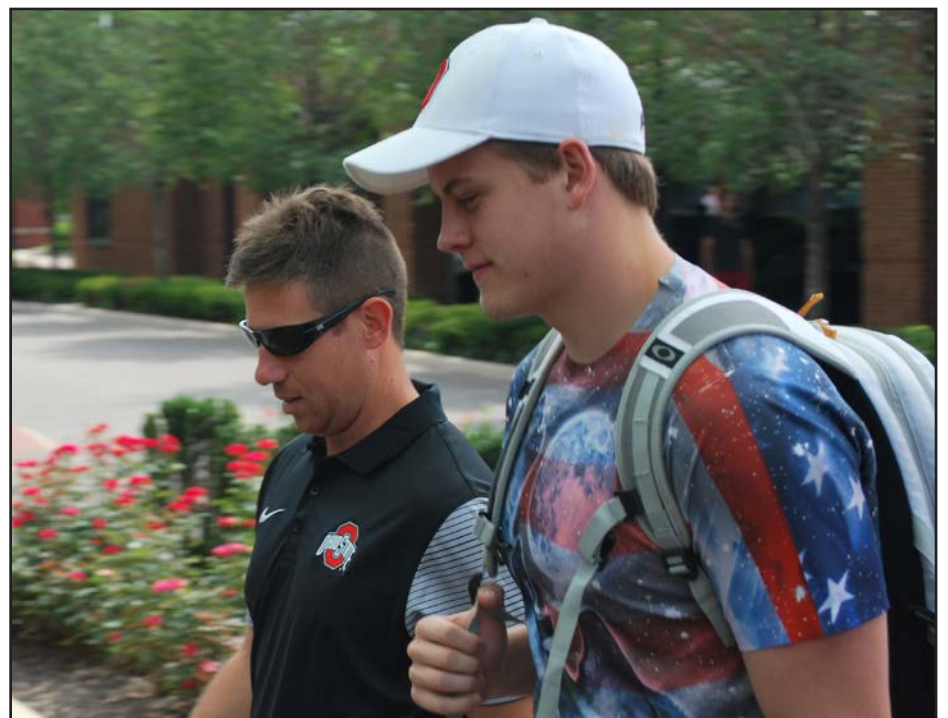
"Coach (Tony) Alford is a great coach," Peoples told 247Sports. "(He and I) stay in contact very often and we talk about serious things. He also picks my brains on things I know and don't know to help me grow."

"I enjoy speaking with the rest of the coaching staff such as Coach (Ryan) Day and Coach (Brian) Hartline to strengthen our relationship and know what I contribute and bring to the table for the Buckeyes as well as them for me if I go there."

He was offered by Ohio State back in October and is one of the Buckeyes' top tailback targets in the class along with Cincinnati Moeller's Marshall, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star Stacy Gage (5-11, 200) and Millersburg West Holmes' Williams-Dixon.

Several Prospects Include OSU Among Top Schools

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, numerous recruits have announced their lists of top schools, with Ohio State appearing as a finalist on more



FILE PHOTO

RUNNING THE RANCH — Ohio State associate athletic director for player personnel Mark Pantoni (left) added a new member to his staff, hiring former Marshall general manager Marc Votteler as a director of player personnel.

than a handful.

Some of the less helpful lists include that of Melissa, Texas, four-star defensive lineman Nigel Smith II (6-5, 260), who "narrowed" his list to 16 top schools, as well as Loganville (Ga.) Grayson four-star athlete Kylan Fox (6-4, 208), who has whittled his scholarship list down to 15 top

schools. Even so, the Buckeyes remain contenders.

Obidegwu included Alabama, Maryland, Michigan, Oregon, USC and Tennessee along with the Buckeyes for his top schools. He is the No. 171 overall prospect and No. 16 cornerback in the class, though he's taken several visits to Tennessee, with the

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Eleven Warriors' Garrick Hodge

Ohio has one five-star prospect in Cleveland Glenville cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177) and several more ranked in the top 200 for this upcoming class. How do you view the talent in Ohio for the 2024 cycle?

"I think the talent in Ohio in 2024 is stronger than it's been in a long time. There are a couple dozen players that have the potential to play in the Power Five, which is a testament to how deep the class is. While it may not be overloaded at the top, such as the 2022 class was (with C.J. Hicks and Sonny Styles), it's incredibly deep."

Along with West, Ohio State is also pursuing four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215) at Glenville. Where do you view the Buckeyes' standing with these prospects, and how important is it for Ohio State to keep the pipeline open from Glenville?

"I think they're in good shape with both Glenville pros-

pects. Michigan is a real threat for Bryce West, and I'm not counting the Wolverines out by any stretch of the measure. Ultimately, I think both will eventually end up with Ohio State, though."

Michigan already has commitments from two top-15 prospects in Ohio and is viewed as a favorite for others such as Youngstown Fitch four-star defensive end Brian Robinson (6-5, 255) and Lakewood St. Edward three-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320). What do you make of the Wolverines' push into Ohio for this cycle and potentially moving forward?

"Michigan has always recruited Ohio pretty well, so it's not terribly surprising to see it scoop up a few Ohio prospects early in 2024.

"I think it would be more alarming if any of those prospects mentioned were huge priorities for Ohio State, but

none even hold an offer, so none of them are that big of a loss, at least according to the Ohio State staff's evaluation. We'll see if that translates to on-the-field results in a few years, though."

Who are some under-the-radar prospects from Ohio whom you like who maybe aren't getting the same recognition as some other highly rated recruits from the state?

"All three of the in-state offensive linemen Ohio State has offered are pretty underrated: Toledo Central Catholic three-star guard Marc Nave (6-5, 315) and Lakewood St. Edward four-star offensive tackles Devontae (6-6, 288) and Deontae Armstrong (6-7, 280).

"All but Deontae are going to end up as interior prospects, but all could be key contributors for Ohio State if they end up committing to the Buckeyes."

Volunteers seemingly a leader in his recruitment.

Mukwonago, Wis., four-star offensive tackle Nathan Roy (6-5, 265) joined Obidegwu in announcing a top seven, including Ohio State along with Michigan State, Minnesota, Tennessee, UCLA, USC and Wisconsin. He was offered by the Buckeyes in January and is expected to visit sometime this spring.

The Buckeyes were also included among the top schools for Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive end Booker Pickett Jr. (6-3, 200), who had Ohio State in addition to Florida State, Georgia, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Penn State, South Carolina and Tennessee. The No. 66 overall prospect and No. 7 defensive end in 2024, Pickett is also expected to visit Ohio State in the spring, with a date yet to be determined.

"The Buckeyes are building something special up there, and I know I'll get developed there," Pickett told On3. "The relationship has been really consistent, and we're building a great bond."

And if Ohio State is looking to finally capitalize on a two-tight end class, one potential option could be Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star Max LeBlanc (6-4, 225), who includes the Buckeyes in his top eight along with Duke, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Penn State, Stanford and Tennessee.

"Love Coach (Keenan) Bailey and how they use the tight end," he told 247Sports. "Also I've been a big fan of Ohio State since I started playing football."

Moving back to defense, the Buckeyes were among the top schools for Swainsboro, Ga., four-star cornerback Demello Jones (6-1, 176), who also had Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Vanderbilt among his favorites.

Rounding Up The New Offers

Ohio State has continued sending out new offers in recent weeks to prospects in 2024 and beyond, casting a wide net for potential future Buckeyes.

Beginning in 2024, Ohio State offered North Palm Beach (Fla.) Benjamin School four-star running back Chauncey Bow-

ens (5-11, 219), who has been committed to Florida since September. Bowens has continued to take visits to other schools – namely Georgia – so his recruitment appears to still be open.

The Buckeyes also offered Lake Cormorant, Miss., four-star defensive lineman Kamarion Franklin (6-5, 260); Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes safety Jakob Gude (6-0, 183); Lafayette (La.) Acadiana defensive lineman Dominick McKinley (6-5, 290); and Landisville (Pa.) Hempfield three-star defensive lineman Deyvid Palepale (6-3, 288).

"Coach (Perry) Eliano offered me," Gude told 247Sports. "I was beyond excited. I spoke to him a few times prior to the offer, him and Coach (Tim) Walton. OSU is an offer I've been waiting on."

In 2025, Ohio State send out offers to Lake City, S.C., four-star defensive lineman Amare Adams (6-3, 275); Port Charlotte, Fla., defensive lineman Myron Charles (6-5, 270); Lewisville, Texas, offensive tackle Michael Fasusi (6-6, 280); Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes offensive tackle Dontrell Glover (6-4, 275); and Galveston (Texas) Ball athlete Jonah Williams (6-2, 195).

"It's very exciting," Williams told On3 of his offer. "I loved talking with Coach Eliano – (we have a) great connection."

The Buckeyes also sent out a pair of offers in 2026 to Scottsdale (Ariz.) Desert Mountain defensive lineman Tony Cumberland (6-5, 250) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy safety Zech Fort (5-10, 175).

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State added Chicago Marist wide receiver Nolan Baudo (5-10, 170) as a preferred walk-on on Feb. 24. He was a teammate of freshman wideout Carnell Tate at Marist before Tate transferred to IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

- Moore, who has been committed to Ohio State since October, announced on Feb. 10 that he will participate in the 2024 All-American Bowl next January.

- Four-star defensive end Elias Rudolph (6-4, 220) will have a new home for his senior season, as the top-150 edge rusher will play his final year of high school football at Deerfield Beach, Fla., after three seasons at Cincinnati Taft. Ru-

dolph is planning a visit to Ohio State this spring.

- Nebraska added a commitment on Feb. 20 from Garwood (Texas) Rice Consolidated four-star athlete Roger Gradney (6-1, 190). He is the No. 236 overall prospect and No. 28 athlete in 2024 and is the first addition to the Cornhuskers' class.

- Michigan added a commitment in 2025 from Buford, Ga., linebacker

Mantrez Walker (5-11, 215). Walker does not hold a composite or star rating, but he does have offers from Florida, Florida State, LSU, Michigan State, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Penn State and Tennessee, among others.

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Key Shut Down In Advance Of Shoulder Surgery

Ohio State forward Zed Key will undergo surgery on his shoulder and miss the remainder of the season, head coach Chris Holtmann confirmed on Feb. 22.

Key initially sustained his shoulder injury on Jan. 5 against Purdue and missed one game before playing through it, with the use of a restrictive brace, during the next 10 games. However, Key reaggravated the injury after taking a pair of hits to the injured shoulder during the second half at Iowa on Feb. 16 before missing the Buckeyes' next game against the Boilermakers on Feb. 19.

COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

"We wanted him to get back to campus so the medical team could fully evaluate him," Holtmann said. "They didn't feel comfortable clearing him given some of his continued issues with his shoulder."

Key was largely hampered by the injury, seeing declines in scoring and shooting efficiency, and he also was required to exit games on multiple occasions after tweaking his shoulder. Prior to the injury, Key posted 13.4 points per game on 63.5 percent shooting. His scoring average dropped to 8.8 points per game on 44.7 percent shooting following the injury.

Holtmann said the Buckeyes expected Key would have surgery after the season but added that the injury became too much for him to play through after the Iowa game.

"We had always intended for him to have surgery," Holtmann said. "This just moved up the surgery to season-ending."

Holtmann also said the medical staff was continually testing out the strength of



SONNY BROCKWAY

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR — Ohio State officially shut down forward Zed Key for the season on Feb. 22 in advance of shoulder surgery. Key has been dealing with the injury since Jan. 5, playing through it with the use of a brace, but he tweaked it again on Feb. 16 against Iowa in what turned out to be his final game of the season.

Key's shoulder throughout the season and noted that continued weakness was a red flag in his recovery. While losing Key for the rest of the season hurts, moving the surgery up will also give him more time to recover and build toward next season.

"As it continued to weaken, and not get better, I think they felt he was going to be more susceptible to further injury," Holtmann said. "They just didn't feel comfortable clearing him, which I fully supported. I know Zed and his family felt some relief in the sense that they can move forward and get the surgery done a little earlier and hopefully have a little bit of a longer offseason next year."

With Key sidelined, the Buckeyes have a very thin frontcourt rotation with which to work. Felix Okpara and former walk-on Owen Spencer — who was placed on scholarship after OSU's 93-77 win over Iowa on Jan. 21 — are the only other natural frontcourt players for Ohio State. Holtmann has also worked 6-7 wing Eugene Brown III into a small-ball center role for the Buckeyes. Against Purdue, Brown played 23 minutes while primarily defending 7-4 Zach Edey.

Holtmann's patchwork frontcourt allowed Edey to rack up 26 points and 11 rebounds while the Boilermakers carved out a 44-21 rebounding advantage.

Holtmann recognized the significance that Key's loss will have on the Buckeyes as they look to close out the season in a respectable manner but also said it gives some of the younger players more opportunities to gain experience.

"Zed's injury was significant," Holtmann said. "He was a guy, even in the pre-season, where we said, 'OK, we're going to be much deeper next year at the five.' This year, we knew we were going to be a little bit thin, so it was going to be hard if we lost any one of those guys for a significant period of time."

"What Zed's injury does is continue to provide opportunities for Felix to grow," he continued.

Ohio State Dealing With Reality Of Lost Season

Ohio State's NCAA Tournament aspirations have all but evaporated during its 2-14 stretch since Jan. 5, and Holtmann has wrestled with the challenge of keeping his team engaged in the midst of a lost season.

The losses have piled up for the Buckeyes, and Holtmann said he and his players need to dive into the grind and continue to emphasize growth moving forward. While Holtmann admitted that his players can feel the temperature rising on them

from outside the program, he said the Buckeyes just need to continue to show up every day and get lost in the work.

"How could they not (feel pressure)?" Holtmann said after Ohio State's 62-41 loss to Michigan State on Feb. 12. "It's part of being in the public eye. It's part of playing at a major university. I think they do a good job, to some degree, of blocking it out, but that's a lot to ask."

"The answer is to throw yourself in your work and focus on the work."

The Buckeyes' midseason tailspin has Ohio State fans searching for answers as to what could have caused a team that started the season 10-3 to fall all the way to 12-17 by early March. Whether it be on or off the court, there are several issues plaguing the Buckeyes, but Key said he still feels the team is connected despite the recent struggles.

"We're still a together team," Key said after Ohio State's 65-60 loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 2. "There are no problems in the locker room. We still hang out with each other. We like each other. So there's definitely no problems there. We're just in a slump right now."

For Ohio State's four contributing freshmen, the recent losing stretch has been something none of them have ever experienced. The quartet of Bruce Thornton, Roddy Gayle Jr., Brice Sensabaugh and Okpara all saw overwhelming on-the-court success during their high school careers, with Thornton claiming a Georgia state title and all four players competing deep into their high school playoffs.

Although the strain of losing has grown for the team's younger players, Thornton has kept an optimistic outlook despite the difficulties plaguing the Buckeyes.

"It's just very frustrating losing, to keep it honest," Thornton said after the loss to the Spartans. "Losing, in general, just is not a good feeling at all. So I feel as a team, we still have that confidence in each other and we still have time. We've just got to make tomorrow a better day because that's the only thing we can do at this point."

Not only have the players felt the heat of losing, but Holtmann also acknowledged that the recent stretch has gotten to his own psyche, as well.

"It's a dark time when you are struggling," he said. "I think you have to be able to approach each day with the optimism that we're going to grow and get better."

"It certainly can be challenging. You feel these things in a way that's hard to understand. You eat differently, and you sleep differently. You just live differently when you lose a game, so it's certainly the case."

Although the losing slide has hampered the Buckeyes' confidence in recent months, Thornton said the team's younger players will use this difficult season as motivation to improve moving forward.

"I never want to go through this ever again," Thornton said. "No matter how long I'm here as a Buckeye, I just never want to have this feeling of every time you go into the locker room, you're just like 'Dang, we've lost again and again.'"

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2022-23 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

12-17 Overall (4-14 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of Feb. 26

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	29-18	698-24.1	174-359	.485	56-132	.424	75-92	.815	36-114	150-5.2	72-5	32	58	10	16	479-16.5
Justice Sueing	29-26	851-29.4	132-306	.431	16-73	.219	67-94	.713	53-99	152-5.2	51-1	53	55	11	20	347-12.0
Zed Key	25-23	621-24.8	104-190	.547	7-24	.292	56-85	.659	76-112	188-7.5	61-1	20	34	24	14	271-10.8
Bruce Thornton	29-29	861-29.7	103-226	.456	33-87	.379	40-52	.769	7-74	81-2.8	47-1	71	39	2	23	279-9.6
Sean McNeil	29-23	836-28.9	99-236	.419	47-133	.353	34-39	.872	9-46	55-1.9	35-1	35	28	3	14	279-9.6
Roddy Gayle Jr.	29-6	438-15.1	44-111	.396	12-37	.324	10-13	.769	7-36	43-1.5	44-0	26	22	9	16	110-3.8
Isaac Likekele	26-14	583-22.4	43-113	.381	2-9	.222	10-25	.400	28-90	118-4.5	50-1	71	27	7	18	98-3.8
Tanner Holden	25-0	348-13.9	32-67	.478	6-13	.462	24-28	.857	15-44	59-2.4	28-0	12	19	3	10	94-3.8
Felix Okpara	29-5	382-13.2	45-75	.600	1-1	1.000	12-20	.600	36-55	91-3.1	44-1	7	16	31	11	103-3.6
Bowen Hardman	5-0	17-3.5	4-8	.500	4-8	.500	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	2-0	0	0	0	0	12-2.4
Eugene Brown III	16-1	158-9.8	13-26	.500	5-14	.357	2-4	.500	7-14	21-1.3	16-0	2	2	5	6	33-2.1
Kalen Etzler	7-0	29-4.3	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	6-0	18-3.0	1-6	.167	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	5-4	9-1.5	4-0	2	2	0	0	3-0.5
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									41-49	90		12				
Total	29	5850	797-1733	.460	190-537	.354	331-454	.729	324-748	1072-37.0	458-11	333	317	105	148	2115-72.9
Opponents	29	5850	732-1713	.427	204-642	.318	336-465	.723	294-676	970-33.4	455-5	360	315	79	144	2004-69.1

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

"It's just a feeling where you feel helpless, but I just never want to have that feeling again. So us in the future and working this summer, it's going to be a different level of intensity so we can just not have this feeling next year."

Okpara Calls Out Team's Mentality

Ohio State's loss to Michigan State followed an all too familiar script for the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes trailed by as many as 16 points during the first half before cutting the deficit to five midway through the second frame. However, the Spartans controlled the game from there and outscored Ohio State 24-8 over the contest's final 11:24 to run away with a 62-41 win at Value City Arena.

To Okpara, Ohio State's struggles to finish the job stem from the Buckeyes lacking the necessary mentality to close out games.

"We need more of a dog mentality, that killer mentality," Okpara said on Feb. 14. "We have to go out there and try to do what's best for the team and try to play harder and smarter. I feel like we've been lacking that for the past five games now,

but we're going to find it out."

Ohio State is 3-12 in games decided by single digits this season, which includes a 10-game losing streak in such contests. While the Buckeyes have shown the necessary fight to keep games close, their inability to take hold of contests has remained a prevalent aspect of their recent losing stretch in which they've lost 14 of their last 16 games.

Okpara said he feels some players are playing too relaxed in crunch time, while also pointing to poor shot selection as a result of players forcing the action on the offensive end of the floor.

"Some games I see our guys trying to press, trying to get the big shot instead of just taking it one point, one possession at a time," Okpara said. "Sometimes we've, as players, seen guys playing relaxed and pretty much – I wouldn't say giving up – but still playing a little bit relaxed."

Key, a team captain, said he agreed with Okpara's criticism of the team's mentality in tight games while pointing to areas that need to be cleaned up in those scenarios, including effort on the defensive end of the floor.

"He's right," Key said. "Guys need to value defense a little bit more and get

stops because defense wins games. Obviously, we've been struggling in that department, but every day we're trying to get better."

With two games remaining in the regular season and Ohio State's NCAA Tournament aspirations dashed, Okpara said the Buckeyes' play in the recent stretch is not indicative of their talent level but added that something needs to change fast.

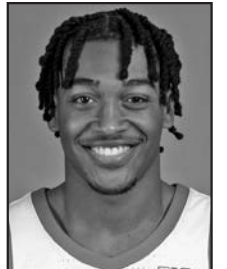
"It's the way we're losing, I think, that's the issue right now," Okpara said. "I feel like the way we're losing right now, it's just not us, like the coaching staff has said.

"I know we're better than this. I'm not going to sit here and call out names, but I feel like we need more guys to step up."

Sensabaugh In Top 10
For Julius Erving Award

Sensabaugh has largely outplayed his label as a first-year player this season, and his production has placed him among the nation's elite.

Sensabaugh landed in the top 10 for the Julius Erving Award, which recognizes the best small forward in the country, on Feb. 8. Despite his status as a freshman, Sensabaugh leads the Buckeyes



Brice Sensabaugh

in scoring with 16.5 points per game on 48.5 percent shooting, while adding 5.2 rebounds – the second-best mark on the team. Sensabaugh's scoring output ranks third among all freshmen, behind fellow Erving Award finalist and Alabama forward Brandon Miller (19.7 ppg) and Lamar guard Nate Calmese (17.6 ppg).

Sensabaugh and Miller are joined by Matthew Cleveland (Florida State), Jamie Jaquez Jr. (UCLA), Keyontae Johnson (Kansas State), Colby Jones (Xavier), Kevin Obanor (Texas Tech), Baylor Scheierman (Creighton), Julian Strawther (Gonzaga) and Jalen Wilson (Kansas) in the top 10.

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Buckeyes’ Losing Streak Ends At Nine Games

By JACK EMERSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State saw its losing streak balloon to nine games since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press but finally captured that elusive win on Feb. 26 with a victory over Illinois.

The Buckeyes dropped a game at home to Northwestern before losing three consecutive contests by double digits, eventually tightening the gap in a 75-71 loss to Penn State on Feb. 23 before finally getting over the hump in a 72-60 takedown of the Fighting Illini.

Losing Streak Moves To Five In Loss To Northwestern

Northwestern guards Boo Buie and Brooks Barnhizer scored 19 points each, and Ohio State was handed its fifth straight loss, falling 69-63 on Feb. 9 at Value City Arena before an announced crowd of 12,305.

Ohio State (11-13, 3-10) shot 50.0 percent (24 of 48) from the field and outrebounded the Wildcats 35-24 but also registered 15 turnovers – which Northwestern turned into 16 points – while shooting an ice-cold 1 of 14 from beyond the arc. Northwestern (17-7, 8-5) held the Buckeyes without a bucket for 3:28 during the game’s final four minutes to seal the victory.

“At the end of the day, it keeps coming back to all of the small things,” guard Bruce Thornton said. “I wouldn’t say it’s déjà vu,

Northwestern 69, Ohio State 63									
Feb. 9 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	F					
Northwestern (17-7, 8-5)		28	41	69					
Ohio State (11-13, 3-10)		27	36	63					
Northwestern	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Buie	36	6-10	5-6	1-1	5	1	19		
Audige	37	3-12	3-5	1-2	4	3	12		
Berry	19	1-7	0-0	0-2	0	3	3		
Beran	26	3-7	0-0	0-4	2	2	8		
Nicholson	19	2-2	0-0	0-3	2	2	4		
Martinelli	14	2-4	0-0	0-0	1	1	4		
Verhoeven	21	0-0	0-0	0-3	1	2	0		
Barnhizer	28	7-10	1-2	3-1	0	3	19		
Totals	200	24-52	9-13	6-18	15	17	69		
Percentages: FG: 46.2%. FT: 69.2%. Three-point field goals: 12-29 (Barnhizer 4-7, Audige 3-7, Buie 2-3, Beran 2-5, Berry 1-6, Martinelli 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Audige). Turnovers: 10 (Buie 4, Audige 2, Berry, Nicholson, Martinelli, Verhoeven). Steals: 6 (Audige 2, Berry 2, Buie, Verhoeven).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Thornton	35	5-9	2-2	0-2	3	3	12		
McNeil	36	3-9	1-2	1-1	0	0	8		
Likekele	28	1-2	2-6	0-7	2	3	4		
Sueing	34	7-11	5-7	3-5	2	2	19		
Key	28	3-5	2-3	4-6	2	4	8		
Holden	6	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	2		
Gayle	4	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	2		
Sensabaugh	16	1-8	2-2	1-2	1	3	4		
Okpara	13	2-2	0-0	1-1	0	0	4		
Totals	200	24-48	14-22	10-25	10	16	63		
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 63.6%. Three-point field goals: 1-14 (McNeil 1-4, Sensabaugh 0-4, Thornton 0-3, Sueing 0-3). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 1 (Key). Turnovers: 15 (McNeil 4, Sensabaugh 4, Sueing 3, Likekele, Key, Okpara, Team). Steals: 3 (Sensabaugh 2, Likekele). Officials: Smith, Kimble, Simpson. Attendance: 12,305.									



SONNY BROCKWAY

COLD SHOOTING — Ohio State shot just 28.3 percent in a 62-41 loss to Michigan State on Feb. 12, with guard Sean McNeil (4) going just 4 of 13 (and 2 of 8 from deep) with a team-high 10 points.

but we’re just getting this feeling game after game after game. It’s human nature. You’re going to get frustrated.”

Both offenses raced out to a fast start with Northwestern connecting on six of its first nine attempts, while the Buckeyes registered a 7-of-12 start from the field to knot the game up at 15 entering the under-12 timeout. The squads then fell into a rut as Ohio State and the Wildcats combined to miss their next five shots, and Northwestern held onto a 17-15 lead with 9:59 to play in the opening half.

While the Wildcats remained cold, the Buckeyes connected on five consecutive field-goal attempts starting with a Roddy Gayle layup at 7:09 to take a 25-19 lead with 3:58 left in the first half. Justice Sueing had a pair of baskets in the stretch. Northwestern countered by closing the frame on a 9-2 run, boosted by a layup from forward Nick Martinelli as time expired, to take a 28-27 lead into the locker room.

The close margin came despite freshman forward and leading scorer Brice Sensabaugh, coming off the bench, being held scoreless and playing just six minutes during the frame.

“Brice is a freshman. He’s being guarded by (the opponent’s) best player,” said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. “This is not an easy thing for a kid.

“Freshmen have moments. We’ll help them the best we can. The young man is fighting hard, give him credit. We’ll find ways to put him in better positions.”

Northwestern opened a 33-28 lead early in the second half on a three-pointer from guard Chase Audige and a jumper by Buie, but Ohio State responded with a jumper from Sueing and a triple from guard Sean

McNeil, the Buckeyes’ first three-pointer of the night, to start Ohio State on a 9-0 run to pull back in front 37-33 with 15:59 remaining in regulation.

Buie and Barnhizer pushed the Wildcats back into the lead, combining to score their next nine points, but Sensabaugh registered his first bucket of the night with 12:32 remaining to reclaim a 43-42 advantage for the Buckeyes entering the under-12 timeout.

Sueing extended Ohio State’s lead with a pair of free throws, but the Wildcats countered with a 9-2 run, boosted by five points from forward Robbie Beran, to pull back ahead 51-47 with 7:58 remaining.

After a pair of baskets from Thornton sandwiching a free throw by Isaac Likekele, Northwestern got four free throws from Buie and a three from Barnhizer to extend its lead to 61-52 with 4:44 remaining. Sueing tried to get the Buckeyes back into the game by scoring five straight points to cut the deficit to 61-57 with 3:37 to play, but Audige put the game out of reach with a dagger three-pointer to push the Northwestern lead back up to seven with 2:04 left.

The Buckeyes hit on just one of their last seven attempts to close the game.

“We couldn’t get enough stops,” Holtmann said. “(We) just had too many missed opportunities.”

Sueing led the Buckeyes with 19 points on 7-of-11 shooting and added eight rebounds, while Thornton added 12 points, 10 of which came in the second half. Sensabaugh tied a career low with four points while shooting 1 of 8 from the field in the loss. Audige added 12 for the Wildcats, and Buie passed out five assists.

Michigan State 62, Ohio State 41									
Feb. 12 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	F					
Michigan State (16-9, 8-6)		27	35	62					
Ohio State (11-14, 3-11)		14	27	41					
Michigan State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Walker	34	5-9	0-0	1-2	3	2	10		
Akins	25	4-11	0-0	2-7	0	0	8		
Hauser	34	8-13	0-0	1-7	2	1	22		
Hoggard	25	3-8	0-0	0-2	5	2	6		
Sissoko	17	1-3	0-0	3-1	1	3	2		
Hall	27	1-5	0-0	2-4	3	1	3		
Kohler	13	3-3	0-0	0-1	0	1	6		
Brooks	13	0-3	0-0	1-1	0	1	0		
Cooper	6	2-2	1-1	0-1	1	1	5		
Holloman	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Izzo	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Smith	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Sanders	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Whitens	1	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	27-59	1-1	12-30	15	12	62		
Percentages: FG: 45.8%. FT: 100.0%. Three-point field goals: 7-22 (Hauser 6-9, Hall 1-1, Walker 0-2, Akins 0-6, Hoggard 0-1, Brooks 0-2, Smith 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Hauser, Sissoko). Turnovers: 11 (Sissoko 3, Walker 2, Kohler 2, Akins, Hoggard, Holloman, Team). Steals: 4 (Walker 2, Akins, Hoggard).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Gayle	26	2-6	0-0	1-1	2	0	5		
Thornton	38	4-9	0-0	0-5	2	0	9		
Sensabaugh	27	3-14	1-2	0-0	0	2	8		
Sueing	31	2-11	0-0	1-5	1	2	5		
Key	19	2-4	0-0	5-3	0	3	4		
McNeil	27	4-13	0-0	0-2	0	0	10		
Okpara	16	0-2	0-0	4-2	0	0	0		
Holden	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Brown	6	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Likekele	6	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	17-60	1-2	14-19	5	7	41		
Percentages: FG: 28.3%. FT: 50.0%. Three-point field goals: 6-29 (McNeil 2-8, Gayle 1-3, Thornton 1-4, Sensabaugh 1-7, Sueing 1-6, Brown 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Gayle, Okpara). Turnovers: 11 (Sensabaugh 3, Key 3, Sueing 2, Gayle, Thornton, Team). Steals: 6 (Gayle, Thornton, Sueing, McNeil, Likekele, Okpara). Officials: Kissinger, Pfeifer, Oglesby. Attendance: 15,110.									

Spartans Hand Bucks Sixth Straight Loss

Ohio State could not find an offensive rhythm, and Michigan State (16-9, 8-6) handed the Buckeyes their sixth consecutive loss in a 62-41 decision on Feb. 12 at Value City Arena. A crowd of 15,110 showed up for the Super Bowl Sunday matinee.

The Buckeyes (11-14, 3-11) shot just 28.3 percent (17 of 60) from the field, including a 6-of-29 mark (20.7 percent) from beyond the arc in the loss. The Buckeyes’ 41 points were their lowest scoring output since a 55-41 loss at Michigan State on Feb. 7, 1996.

“We couldn’t get to the paint,” Holtmann said. “Obviously, as a coach, I should have gotten them more ready for their defense, so I’ll take full responsibility for that. I should have clearly had a better plan for our offensive attack.

“We just had no opportunities to get to the paint, and then missing some of the open shots early led to us playing frustrated and tight offensively and you can’t play good offense like that.”

The Buckeyes had 12 points in the paint for the game, compared to 26 for the Spartans.

It took just 4:30 of game action for Ohio

State to hit more three-pointers than it did in its last game, cashing in on a pair of triples from Sensabaugh and Sueing to take a 6-4 lead with 15:30 remaining in the first half.

Ohio State's offense went silent from there, however, as the Buckeyes missed their next eight shots while Michigan State forward Joey Hauser drilled a pair of three-pointers to help give the Spartans a 14-9 lead with 7:52 to play in the opening frame.

After a basket by Sueing, the Buckeyes endured another prolonged stretch without a bucket, missing their next 10 shots while battling through a 7:14 scoring drought, and Michigan State utilized a 13-0 run to widen its lead to 27-11. But Gayle hit a three-point-er with five seconds left in the half to cut the deficit to 27-14 entering the locker room.

Ohio State shot a dismal 19.2 percent (5 of 26) while turning the ball over eight times during the first half. Michigan State posted a significant advantage in the paint, outscoring the Buckeyes 14-2 in the lane, while also outrebounding Ohio State 23-17.

"Our offensive frustration was significant in the first half," Holtmann said. "It dug us too deep into a hole for us to climb out, but give (Michigan State) credit for their defense today."

Thornton and Zed Key, both scoreless in the first half, scored Ohio State's first nine points of the second stanza to help the Buckeyes cut their deficit down to 31-23 with 16:20 remaining in regulation.

Ohio State later cut the lead down to as little as 38-33 thanks to a pair of buckets from Sensabaugh, but Michigan State responded with a 13-2 run to pull back in front 51-35 with 5:56 remaining in the contest. Michigan State closed the game with little resistance from the Buckeyes, leading by as many as 23 points before sending the Buckeyes to the 11th loss in their last 12 games.

"We just didn't make shots," Thornton said. "It's kind of hard to beat a top team in the Big Ten if you don't make shots. And they made shots in transition, got quick and easy buckets."

McNeil was the only Buckeyes to reach double digits, finishing with 10 points, while Thornton and Sensabaugh added nine and eight, respectively. Sensabaugh was just 3 of 14 from the field and 1 of 7 from distance.

Hauser scored a game-high 22 points while drilling six three-pointers and pulling down eight rebounds to lead the Spartans. Guard Tyson Walker added 10 points in the win.

Iowa Burns OSU With Hot Shooting

Iowa had five players finish in double figures and the Hawkeyes pulled away from Ohio State 92-75 on Feb. 16 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, handing the Buckeyes their seventh straight loss – the longest losing streak in Holtmann's time with the program.

The Hawkeyes (17-9, 9-6) shot a blistering 56.9 percent from the floor (37 of 65) while forcing 14 turnovers, which they turned into 16 points. Ohio State's offense bettered Iowa, hitting 57.1 percent from the field, but the Buckeyes (11-15, 3-12) got off 16 fewer shots and couldn't recover from a 12-0 run from the Hawkeyes to close the first half.

"We played really well for a majority of

the first half, and there's a 2½, 3-minute stretch where defensively we have continuous lapses where we give up big plays and allow them to make runs," McNeil said after the loss.

Both offenses started off hot from the field, with the Buckeyes connecting on seven of their first nine attempts while Iowa started 9 of 12, with 13,257 looking on.

Iowa took an early 19-12 lead, aided by four Buckeye turnovers – three from Sensabaugh. Ohio State then utilized a 10-2 run, sparked by back-to-back three-pointers from McNeil, to pull in front 22-21 with 11:56 remaining in the first half. After the teams traded the lead several times, Sensabaugh gave Ohio State a 36-35 advantage on a three-pointer with 2:56 remaining, but the Buckeyes' offense went silent from there, missing their final three shots while Iowa knocked down four three-pointers over the final 2:20 to close the half with a 47-36 lead.

"We needed to be better defensively," Holtmann said. "We really played 17 good minutes offensively. Their small lineup hurt us with their motion and their five-out. We just don't have a great answer for that."

Ohio State turned the ball over nine times in the frame, which Iowa turned into nine points. Iowa's takeaways and a 17-13 edge on the boards also helped the Hawkeyes register 16 more field-goal attempts than the Buckeyes (37-21) in the opening half. The Buckeyes did find success from the free-throw line, shooting 11 of 11.

Iowa hit 10 of its first 13 shots to start the second half while lifting its lead to 72-49 with 11:50 remaining in regulation. The Hawkeyes later led by as many as 28 points in the blowout.

McNeil was a rare bright spot for the Buckeyes, leading Ohio State with 20 points on 7-of-7 shooting and a 4-of-4 clip from beyond the arc. Sensabaugh added 16 points but was charged with six turnovers, while Thornton added 11 points. Key's night – just four points and one rebound – was cut short after he reaggravated his shoulder injury and left the game with 15:46 remaining.

Guard Tony Perkins led the scoring efforts for the Hawkeyes with 24 points, while Kris Murray, who entered the game as Iowa's leading scorer, produced 20. Ahron Ulis posted 12 points, and Payton Sandfort and Filip Rebraca each added 10. Iowa assisted on 23 of its 37 makes, with Connor McCaffery dishing out 13 assists without registering a turnover.

Edey Leads Boilermakers Past Overmatched Buckeyes

Purdue center Zach Edey took advantage of Ohio State's depleted frontcourt, scoring a game-high 26 points while corralling 11 rebounds to lead the then-No. 3 Boilermakers past the Buckeyes 82-55 before 14,876 at Mackey Arena on Feb. 19.

The Buckeyes (11-16, 3-13) were without Key, who was held out due to a lingering shoulder injury, while starting center Felix Okpara was impacted by early foul trouble. Purdue (24-4, 13-4) utilized its size well, outrebounding the Buckeyes 44-21 while carving out a 40-20 scoring advantage in the paint.

"(The 7-4 Edey is) a load in there, but it's not just him," Holtmann said. "They rebound the ball really well. But obviously, he's the largest player that those guys have ever played against."

Despite starting four freshmen and being without Key, Ohio State opened an early 8-2 lead, sparked by a pair of steals from Thornton on Purdue's first two possessions. But Purdue found its footing with a 12-2 run capped by an Edey bucket to pull ahead 14-10 with 14:29 remaining in the first half.

McNeil scored Ohio State's next six points, but the Boilermakers utilized a 13-4 run to increase their lead to 31-20, their largest of the half, with 5:33 to play in the frame.

Edey scored eight of Purdue's final nine points in the half, including an emphatic put-back dunk as time expired, to lift the Boilermakers to a 38-29 advantage entering the break. Edey scored 16 points – matching his point total from the first meeting between OSU and Purdue on Jan. 5 – and corralled seven rebounds in the first half alone.

"It felt like (Edey) was more involved this time," Likekele said. "I don't know what he produced last time, but I think he had his total of what he had last time in the first half of this game."

Several Buckeyes found themselves in foul trouble, as little-used center Owen Spencer picked up four fouls, Sensabaugh had a trio, and Gayle and Okpara registered a pair during the opening half. The Boilermakers connected on 15 of 19 free-throw attempts during the first half, compared to just 3-of-4 shooting from the Buckeyes.

Purdue continued to overwhelm the Buckeyes with its size to start the second half, and the Boilermakers quickly extended their lead to 47-33 while outrebounding the

Iowa 92, Ohio State 75									
Feb. 16, 2023 Carver-Hawkeye Arena • Iowa City, Iowa									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (11-15, 3-12)		36	39	75					
Iowa (17-9, 9-6)		47	45	92					
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Gayle	25	3-4	0-0	1-1	0	1	6		
Thornton	25	3-5	3-3	0-2	2	2	11		
Sensabaugh	24	6-11	2-2	1-2	3	2	16		
Sueing	27	2-5	4-4	0-4	0	2	8		
Key	13	2-5	0-0	0-1	1	3	4		
Holden	12	2-3	0-0	0-1	1	0	4		
Brown	9	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
McNeil	24	7-7	2-2	0-0	0	0	20		
Likekele	26	2-7	0-0	0-3	4	2	4		
Okpara	14	1-2	0-0	0-3	0	3	2		
Totals	200	28-49	11-11	2-20	11	15	75		
Percentages: FG: 57.1%. FT: 100.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-15 (McNeil 4-4, Thornton 2-4, Sensabaugh 2-4, Sueing 0-1, Holden 0-1, Likekele 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Gayle, Key, Holden). Turnovers: 14 (Sensabaugh 6, Gayle 2, Thornton 2, Sueing, Key, McNeil, Okpara). Steals: 3 (Sensabaugh, Sueing, McNeil).									
Iowa	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Rebraca	17	5-7	0-0	0-2	2	3	10		
Ulis	23	4-7	3-3	0-0	1	1	12		
Perkins	36	11-16	0-1	1-1	3	2	24		
Murray	38	8-13	1-2	3-2	1	2	20		
C. McCaffery	35	2-4	2-2	0-6	13	2	7		
Sandfort	23	4-9	0-0	2-3	1	0	10		
P. McCaffery	20	3-8	2-2	3-2	1	0	9		
Dix	4	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	0	0		
Bowen	1	0-0	0-1	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	37-65	8-11	11-19	23	10	92		
Percentages: FG: 56.9%. FT: 72.7%. Three-point field goals: 10-27 (Murray 3-6, Perkins 2-3, Sandfort 2-6, Ulis 1-3, C. McCaffery 1-3, P. McCaffery 1-5, Dix 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Murray 2, Rebraca). Turnovers: 7 (Murray 3, Rebraca, Ulis, Perkins, Sandfort). Steals: 7 (Murray 2, C. McCaffery 2, Perkins, Sandfort, P. McCaffery). Officials: Dorsey, Breeding, Irving. Attendance: 13,257.									

Buckeyes 6-1 through the first four minutes of the frame.

Edey scored eight of Purdue's next 10 points to increase the Boilermakers' lead to 57-38 with 11:22 remaining, and while Edey continued to roll, Ohio State's offense floundered. After making their first two attempts of the half, the Buckeyes hit on just two of their next 11 shots.

Purdue's lead ballooned to as many as 31 points, with the Boilermakers outscoring the Buckeyes 44-26 in the second half of the win. The loss to the Boilermakers marked Ohio State's eighth straight defeat and the 13th in their last 14 contests.

Sensabaugh led the Buckeyes with 20 points while McNeil finished with 10, marred by an 0-of-5 mark from beyond the arc. Sueing was charged with five turnovers while scoring just six points on 2-of-9 shooting. Edey registered his 21st double-double this season, while forward Trey Kaufman-Renn was the only other Boilermaker to reach double-digit scoring, tallying 11 points. Mason Gillis added 10 rebounds.

"(Purdue head coach Matt Painter) has an outstanding team," Holtmann said. "Everything is built around Edey, but they've got a lot of really good players. I thought their ability to get the stops in the second half and take it from a nine- to a 15-point game, which they built from there, was too much to overcome."

Continued On Page 26

Purdue 82, Ohio State 55									
Feb. 19, 2023 Mackey Arena • West Lafayette, Ind.									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (11-16, 3-13)		29	26	55					
Purdue (24-4, 13-4)		38	44	82					
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Gayle	22	1-4	0-0	0-0	0	2	3		
Thornton	26	1-6	1-2	0-0	1	0	3		
Sensabaugh	29	8-16	1-2	3-2	2	3	20		
Sueing	29	2-9	2-2	0-2	1	2	6		
Okpara	16	2-2	0-0	1-1	1	2	4		
Brown	23	2-5	0-2	0-1	2	3	5		
McNeil	32	4-10	2-2	0-1	2	1	10		
Likekele	17	2-3	0-1	1-3	1	4	4		
Spencer	6	0-0	0-0	0-2	1	4	0		
Totals	200	22-55	6-11	5-16	11	21	55		
Percentages: FG: 40.0%. FT: 54.5%. Three-point field goals: 5-19 (Sensabaugh 3-6, Gayle 1-2, Brown 1-4, Thornton 0-1, Sueing 0-1, McNeil 0-5). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 6 (Okpara 4, Gayle, Thornton). Turnovers: 11 (Sueing 5, Thornton, Sensabaugh, Okpara, McNeil, Spencer, Team). Steals: 9 (Thornton 3, McNeil 3, Gayle, Sueing, Brown).									
Purdue	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Gillis	18	1-2	5-6	3-7	1	2	7		
Loyer	26	2-6	1-2	0-1	4	1	6		
Smith	24	1-1	2-2	0-2	2	3	4		
Edey	25	11-20	4-6	7-4	0	0	26		
Morton	21	2-3	1-2	0-2	3	0	7		
Furst	20	0-0	0-0	1-5	2	1	0		
Kaufman-Renn	3-4	5-6	1-2	1	1	11	11		
Newman	19	3-9	0-0	0-2	2	2	8		
Jenkins	23	2-6	3-3	0-2	0	3	9		
Barrett	2	2-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	4		
Waddell	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Martin	2	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
King	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	27-54	21-30	14-30	16	14	82		
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 77.8%. Three-point field goals: 7-16 (Morton 2-2, Newman 2-6, Jenkins 2-4, Loyer 1-4). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Edey 3). Turnovers: 11 (Edey 2, Morton 2, Gillis, Loyer, Smith, First, Jenkins, Martin, King). Steals: 7 (Newman 2, Loyer, Smith, Morton, First, Kaufman-Renn). Officials: Sciotto, Pfeifer, Kimble. Attendance: 14,876.									

OSU Returns To Win Column Against Illinois

Continued From Page 25

Bucks Keep Pace But Fall To Penn State

Jalen Pickett scored Penn State's final 14 points to carry the Nittany Lions to the finish line and hand Ohio State its ninth straight loss 75-71 on Feb. 23 at Value City Arena before a crowd of 11,996.

Penn State (17-11, 8-9) entered the contest in desperate need of a win to bolster its NCAA Tournament résumé and picked up a huge victory, powering past Ohio State (11-17, 3-14) behind Pickett's late surge. Pickett found his rhythm in the second half, scoring 21 of his 23 points with a pair of triples in the frame.

"He made a lot of tough shots," Thornton said of Pickett. "He's a good player – don't take that away from him. He'd probably be Player of the Year in the Big Ten if it weren't for Zach Edey."

For the second straight game, Ohio State started a quartet of freshmen, and a pair of first-year players guided the Buckeye offense early. Thornton and Sensabaugh combined to score Ohio State's first 13 points, but the Nittany Lions opened up a 19-13 lead with 12:00 remaining in the first half behind seven early points from guard Seth Lundy.

Sensabaugh continued his scoring barrage while lifting the Buckeyes into the lead, 24-23, with a midrange jumper that gave him 11 points with 8:25 to play in the opening frame. From there, Ohio State and Penn State traded the lead until a post-hook from Okpara and a three-pointer from Sensabaugh lifted the Buckeyes' lead to 33-29 with 4:46 remaining in the half.

A three-pointer from Lundy and scores on back-to-back possessions from guard Camren Wynter pushed the Nittany Lions back into the lead, 37-35, but a two-handed



SONNY BROCKWAY
BACK ON TRACK — Ohio State guard Bruce Thornton led the Buckeyes back to the win column on Feb. 26, scoring a game-high 20 points to push OSU past Illinois 72-60.

Penn State 75, Ohio State 71										
Feb. 23, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus										
		1	2	F						
Penn State (17-11, 8-9)		37	38	75						
Ohio State (11-17, 3-14)		37	34	71						
Penn State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Lundy	33	5-9	5-8	0-5	2	1	19			
Kebba	17	2-5	1-1	2-3	1	1	5			
Funk	27	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	3	0			
Wynter	25	7-12	0-1	0-6	1	0	18			
Pickett	29	8-11	5-5	1-2	4	3	23			
Clary	15	3-7	0-0	0-1	0	0	6			
Dread	20	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Mahaffey	19	2-3	0-0	1-2	1	0	4			
Henn	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	27-52	11-15	6-21	9	10	75			
Percentages: FG: 51.9%. FT: 73.3%. Three-point field goals: 10-19 (Lundy 4-8, Wynter 4-5, Pickett 2-2, Clary 0-1, Dread 0-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Pickett). Turnovers: 4 (Nebba, Wynter, Pickett, Team). Steals: 1 (Dread).										
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Gayle	12	1-3	0-0	0-2	0	1	3			
Thornton	37	7-12	2-3	1-3	1	2	19			
Sensabaugh	25	8-14	2-2	2-3	2	2	20			
Sueing	32	4-12	1-1	4-6	4	2	9			
Okpara	18	4-4	0-0	0-1	0	2	8			
Brown	16	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0			
McNeil	28	2-10	0-0	1-0	0	1	5			
Likekele	32	3-7	0-0	1-5	4	1	7			
Totals	200	29-63	5-6	13-20	11	11	71			
Percentages: FG: 46.0%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-23 (Thornton 3-7, Sensabaugh 2-4, Gayle 1-2, McNeil 1-8, Likekele 1-1, Sueing 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Sueing, Brown, Likekele). Turnovers: 1 (Likekele). Steals: 1 (Sensabaugh). Officials: Breeding, Groover, Daily. Attendance: 11,996.										

dunk by Okpara off an assist by Likekele knotted things up at 37 with 2:09 left. Both offenses went silent from there, combining to miss their final five shots of the half to take that tie into the break.

Similar to the first half, Thornton and Sensabaugh paced Ohio State's offense early in the final frame, scoring the Buckeyes' first seven points, while Penn State held a 45-44 lead with 17:01 to play. Later, a three-pointer from Lundy and a pair of free throws from Pickett pushed Penn State's advantage to six, 55-49, but the Buckeyes came right back with an 8-0 run – sparked by a pair of layups from Likekele – to pull in front 57-55 with 11:28 remaining in regulation.

From there, the lead changed hands seven more times, and the Nittany Lions carried a 66-65 lead with 5:49 to play. Pickett began heating up, scoring his team's next two baskets to push the Penn State lead to 70-65, and Sensabaugh and Thornton each scored a layup to pull the Buckeyes within one, 70-69, with 1:24 to play. Pickett then finished a three-point play to make it a two-possession game with 59 seconds left.

Pickett finished the game with a pair of makes at the free-throw line, and Ohio State's final possession – which featured five offensive rebounds and five missed three-pointers, three courtesy of McNeil – came up short, and the Nittany Lions handed the Buckeyes their 14th loss in their last 15 games.

"We ran an action to try to get Sean a look to his left, and I thought he had an OK

Ohio State 72, Illinois 60										
Feb. 26, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus										
		1	2	F						
Illinois (19-10, 10-8)		26	34	60						
Ohio State (12-17, 4-14)		41	31	72						
Illinois	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Shannon	29	3-12	4-4	1-3	2	5	10			
Epps	23	3-10	3-4	2-0	1	2	10			
Mayer	31	4-11	0-0	0-3	1	2	11			
Hawkins	38	6-13	0-1	2-5	2	0	14			
Dainja	9	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	0	0			
Harris	13	1-4	0-0	0-2	1	1	2			
Goode	7	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	2			
Melendez	22	2-2	1-1	0-2	0	1	5			
Rodgers	28	2-4	2-4	1-3	1	1	6			
Totals	200	22-61	10-14	9-19	8	13	60			
Percentages: FG: 36.1%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 6-29 (Mayer 3-10, Hawkins 2-5, Epps 1-6, Shannon 0-3, Harris 0-3, Goode 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 4 (Mayer 2, Hawkins, Goode). Turnovers: 11 (Shannon 4, Hawkins 3, Epps 2, Mayer, Rodgers). Steals: 4 (Hawkins 2, Dainja, Rodgers).										
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Gayle	30	1-5	0-0	0-2	2	4	2			
Thornton	34	8-11	3-4	1-4	2	2	20			
Sensabaugh	28	5-11	4-4	0-6	2	0	14			
Sueing	37	6-14	2-2	3-8	2	2	14			
Okpara	8	2-3	0-0	0-1	0	1	4			
Brown	17	4-4	0-0	2-2	0	2	9			
McNeil	19	4-8	0-0	0-1	0	1	9			
Likekele	27	0-0	0-0	0-4	2	3	0			
Totals	200	30-56	9-10	8-32	10	15	72			
Percentages: FG: 53.6%. FT: 90.0%. Three-point field goals: 3-14 (Thornton 1-2, Brown 1-1, McNeil 1-4, Gayle 0-1, Sensabaugh 0-4, Sueing 0-2). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 3 (Sensabaugh, Sueing, Okpara). Turnovers: 15 (Sensabaugh 3, Likekele 3, Team 3, Okpara 2, Gayle, Thornton, Brown, McNeil). Steals: 6 (Gayle 2, Brown 2, Sueing, Okpara). Technical Fouls: 1 (Brown) Officials: Szelc, Oglesby, Green. Attendance: 14,212.										

look, to be honest," Holtmann said. "We did need to get a three at that point.

"We had some clean looks off of the rebounds, so I don't have an issue with any of those looks."

Sensabaugh and Thornton carried Ohio State for much of the evening, producing 20 and 19 points, respectively. The Buckeyes assisted on 11 of their 29 makes (Sueing and Likekele had four helpers each) while shooting 46.0 percent from the field (29 of 63) and tallying only one turnover. Sueing helped the Buckeyes to a 33-27 edge on the glass with 10 rebounds to go along with nine points. In addition to Pickett's game-high 23 points, Lundy and Wynter paced the Nittany Lions throughout the contest with 19 and 18 points, respectively, while they both produced four makes from beyond the arc (8 of 13 combined).

Losing Skid Snapped At Nine In Win Over Illinois

Ohio State's long drought finally came to an end when the Buckeyes snapped their nine-game losing streak with a 72-60 upset win over Illinois before 14,212 at Value City Arena on Feb. 26.

The Buckeyes (12-17, 4-14) collected their first win since Jan. 21, with the freshman duo of Thornton and Sensabaugh combining for 34 points. Illinois (19-10, 10-8) shot an icy 36.1 percent (22 of 61) while the Buckeyes outrebounded the Illini 40-28 and cultivated a 46-28 scoring advantage in the paint.

"At this point, it's about how we're playing

as much as anything," Holtmann said. "We really did feel like we were playing better basketball and not always being rewarded necessarily for that. We felt the dividends and the awards of it with the win here."

Ohio State hit on five of its first six shots, three of which came from Thornton, to open up a 10-8 lead with 15:20 left in the first half. Sensabaugh took over from there scoring the first five points on a 9-1 run to push ahead 19-9.

Illinois connected on just five of its first 22 shots while the Buckeyes continued to roll offensively, pulled ahead 29-16 with 6:22 remaining in the frame. Ohio State's lead ballooned to as many as 15 points in the first half after Sensabaugh finished a three-point play with 29 seconds remaining in the frame, but a Matthew Mayer three-pointer with three seconds to play made it 41-29 heading into the break.

The Buckeyes hit just two of their first seven shot attempts to start the second half but held firm with a 45-35 lead entering the under-16 timeout. That was until Illinois guard Terrance Shannon Jr. completed three-point plays on back-to-back possessions and later hit a pair of free throws, and after layups from guard Sencire Harris and Mayer, the Illini trailed just 49-47 with 10:16 left in regulation.

Ohio State missed three of its next five shots, and Illinois freshman guard Jayden Epps splashed a corner three to make it a one-point game, 53-52, with 6:53 left.

Sensabaugh came alive at that point, throwing down an emphatic dunk in transition before hitting a turnaround jumper and extending Ohio State's lead to 59-52 with 5:24 to play. Thornton was next, hitting back-to-back baskets – including a three-point play – to push Ohio State's lead back to double-digits, 64-53.

"I thought we got high-quality shots and obviously an emotional play with Brice's phenomenal dunk," Holtmann said. "We knew they were going to make a run. It's college basketball, every team does. I thought those guys stepped up and made plays."

All told, the Buckeyes hit on their last seven attempts from the field to close the game, collecting the elusive win that had escaped them for more than a month.

"It feels great because we did all the small things and that just separated us," Thornton said.

Thornton led the way for the Buckeyes with 20 points on 8-of-11 shooting, while Sensabaugh and Sueing each produced 14 points, with Sueing also adding 11 rebounds for a double-double. Coleman Hawkins led the Illini in scoring with 14 points, aided by Mayer with 11 points and Shannon and Epps each scoring 10. Neither team shot well from distance, with Illinois hitting just 6 of 29 from beyond the arc (20.7 percent) and Ohio State 3 of 14 (21.4)

Ohio State has just two more regular season games remaining before the Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes looked to build off the win over Illinois on March 1, hosting Maryland at Value City Arena for Senior Night before traveling to East Lansing, Mich., to take on Michigan State on March 4.

Rookie Branham Shooting For Success With Spurs

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Malaki Branham spent only a short time at Ohio State, but his learning curve as a pro basketball player is never-ending, as he is finding out in his first season with the San Antonio Spurs.

Branham was a one-and-done for the Buckeyes last season and parlayed a rise in the second half of the season into becoming the 20th selection in the 2022 NBA draft. In many ways, his rookie season with the Spurs has mimicked how he progressed as a freshman from Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary into the Big Ten Freshman of the Year for the Buckeyes.

Branham, who turns 20 on May 12, did not post noteworthy statistics early in the season for the Spurs and even played two games for the Austin Spurs of the NBA G League, a step below the NBA. The forward's breakout game came Feb. 1 when he scored a career-high 22 points against the Sacramento Kings. He also had career bests in assists (five) and minutes played (32) while not committing a turnover.

"Probably the biggest thing is he is playing against all these NBA guys he has never played against before," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said. "He is getting more and more aggressive, doing well at both ends."

Branham (6-5, 180) followed that up two days later against Philadelphia, finishing with 26 points on 11-of-16 shooting. He has since set another career high with 27 points on Feb. 10 vs. the Detroit Pistons, and he posted back-to-back 23-point games against Charlotte on Feb. 15 and Dallas on Feb. 23.

In 47 games he is averaging 9.5 points, 2.2 rebounds, 2.0 assists and 1.1 turnovers in 22.4 minutes per game. He's making 44.6 percent of his field goals, including 31.4 percent from the three-point line.

Just as important as those numbers is earning the trust of Popovich, who announced Feb. 13 that Branham would no longer do the G League shuffle.

"He's been a quick study and used this time wisely, so there will be no more G League for him," the coach said while praising Branham's improvement in shooting and defense.

"Pop is a defensive-minded coach, so if you want to get on the floor, you're going to have to play some defense," Branham said. "You're going to have to stop somebody. I learned that, and once I learned that I got a little leash on the offensive end and I'm just being aggressive and taking the shots I know I can make."

Branham was quick to add that being sent to the G League, while humbling, was also beneficial to his development.

"I only played like two games there, but it was definitely good getting game reps in," he said. "Practice is another thing, but playing the game, playing against other competition gets you ready."

The curmudgeon Popovich, who is in his 27th season as the Spurs' head coach, has been practically gushing over Branham's recent play.

"He really is comfortable on the court," Popovich said. "More so than most people



FILE PHOTO

GETTING INTO A GROOVE — Former Ohio State guard Malaki Branham is starting to get into a rhythm during his rookie season in the NBA with the San Antonio Spurs after a relatively slow start to his career.

his age. He's not in a hurry. He's not intimidated by anything. He's learned a lot. The people guarding him are a lot better than the people guarding him in college, obviously, so he's beginning to understand the difference in physicality and athleticism and basketball IQ that he's going to pick up. He's been a quick learner."

It's been a terrible season for the Spurs (14-47), including a franchise-record 16-game losing streak as of Feb. 25, but Popovich said Branham has been a bright spot.

"Even though we've had a lot of injuries over the year, he still would have been playing," Popovich said. "He's earned that position. He's not just playing because people are hurt."

"He's really developed quickly. He's worked on his shot more, worked on his defense. Just all the things young kids have to do when they get in the league because they haven't been in college very long. Coaches never really got to create habits for them when you have somebody that short of time."

In that brief period for the Buckeyes, fans saw a glimpse of Branham's NBA potential, although many likely didn't expect him to turn pro so quickly. He was one of the top recruits in the country and named Ohio's Mr. Basketball as a senior in 2021, becoming the first St. Vincent-St. Mary play-

er to earn the honor since LeBron James. Branham helped the Fighting Irish to Division II state titles in 2018 and 2021.

His Buckeye debut got off to a good start when he scored seven points and assisted on the game-winning buzzer-beater by Zed Key against Akron in Ohio State's season opener, but it wasn't until the second half of the season that Branham's NBA stock ascended.

He set an Ohio State freshman record for points in a Big Ten game, scoring 35 in an overtime win vs. Nebraska on Jan. 1, 2022. Against Northwestern eight days later, he poured in 24 points, going 13 of 14 from the free-throw line, and dished out five assists. He followed that up with performances of 27 points, five rebounds and three assists in another OT win vs. Indiana and 31 points vs. Illinois later in the season.

In his last game as a Buckeye, he scored a game-high 23 points in a loss to Villanova in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. Branham averaged 13.7 points and 3.6 rebounds while starting 31 of his 32 games. He scored in double figures in each of his final 11 games, averaging 19.4 points during that stretch.

His strong finish led to his drafting by San Antonio, and on Feb. 13 his basketball life came full circle when he returned to

northeast Ohio with the Spurs to play the Cleveland Cavaliers. He made 8 of 11 field goals and scored 18 points in front of many family and friends.

"I could hear them all night," Branham said. "Trust me, I was trying to block them all out, but it was cool, though. I was just having fun out there. They were just yelling my name. They're just so happy I'm here."

There have been plenty of highs for Branham, but he's also learning to navigate the lows of pro basketball. Prior to that 22-point game against Sacramento, he shot 2 of 6 from the floor and missed all three attempts from three-point range vs. Washington on Jan. 30.

"I like that he's recovering from bad games and bad shooting nights," Spurs veteran guard Stanley Johnson told TV station KENS. "In the NBA that's how you make your money. That's what it is. It is about being consistent. I've told him about this process and that sometimes shots just don't go in. It's about being consistent with your work. Being consistent with your stuff."

"Just as a night where he can't make his shot, he'll have nights where he can't miss a shot. The nights that you can't miss, get to the free-throw line. Get a layup, get your teammates involved. Play good defense. The nights you're hitting, keep shooting more."

Buckeye Brethren

Branham is not the only former Ohio State player with the Spurs. Keita Bates-Diop, the 2018 Big Ten Player of the Year, is in his fifth NBA season and third with San Antonio.

The 27-year-old power forward (6-8, 229) is averaging 8.3 points, 3.4 rebounds and 1.2 assists with a shooting percentage of 49.2 in 20.6 minutes per game over 47 games (25 starts).

He has also played for the Minnesota Timberwolves and Denver Nuggets but hopes to stay with the Spurs after his two-year contract expires at the end of the season.



Keita Bates-Diop

"It's a long process for most of us," he told The Columbus Dispatch. "We have to find our way, find our lane, find what we do best. I had the opportunity to grow here, which a lot of guys have had the opportunity to do. I've found what makes me go, the spots I need to get to on offense and defense and the little things like that that keep me going."

Popovich has seen Bates-Diop grow in confidence, saying, "He's believing that he belongs. I think we've gotten that through to him, and he's done a really good job for us this year. He's progressing very well."

"It's a matter of becoming a little nastier, a little more aggressive, understanding that people would like to take his job away, and he's trying to carve out an NBA career."

OSU Secures Double-Bye In Big Ten Tournament

Even with a disappointing finish to the regular season after a 19-0 start, Ohio State – which wrapped the regular season with a 23-6 record and 12-6 mark in conference play – was able to secure the No. 4 seed in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, which means the Buckeyes receive one of four double-byes to the quarterfinals.

As the No. 4 seed, Ohio State will take on either No. 5 Michigan, No. 12 Minnesota

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

or No. 13 Penn State with the winner set to face either No. 1 Indiana – which secured the top seed after claiming the regular-season championship – or the winner of No. 8 Nebraska vs. No. 9 Michigan State.

The other top seeds include No. 2 Iowa and No. 3 Maryland, against which the Buckeyes went 0-3 during the regular season. In total, Ohio State finished 0-5 against the top three seeds and 12-1 against teams seeded Nos. 5-14, with the lone loss in that group coming to No. 7 Purdue.

Ohio State will hope to welcome back guard Jacy Sheldon, who has not played since a 25-minute outing at Maryland on Feb. 5. Sheldon's status has remained day-to-day for the last several weeks with the hope that she would be available for the final games of the season for the Buckeyes, so the quarterfinal game seems a likely goal

2022-23 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

23-6 Overall (12-6 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 25

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	29-29	1032-35.6	184-431	.427	93-229	.406	40-46	.870	11-79	90-3.1	38-0	75	62	8	41	501-17.3
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
Cotie McMahon	29-29	795-27.4	154-298	.517	10-43	.233	89-135	.659	30-108	138-4.8	77-3	72	87	19	45	407-14.0
Taylor Thierry	29-29	876-30.2	159-253	.628	11-29	.379	67-107	.626	87-107	194-6.7	88-4	68	45	22	58	396-13.7
R. Mikulasikova	28-25	692-24.7	131-266	.492	39-113	.345	33-44	.750	20-98	118-4.2	63-2	46	50	5	20	334-11.9
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	29-16	783-27.0	66-188	.351	27-106	.255	54-89	.607	24-107	131-4.5	71-2	99	43	9	46	213-7.3
Eboni Walker	27-4	386-14.3	52-107	.486	0-3	.000	19-31	.613	36-56	92-3.4	45-1	39	27	2	21	123-4.6
Hevynne Bristow	25-0	289-11.6	36-72	.500	7-17	.412	24-33	.727	20-59	79-3.2	34-0	19	29	10	16	103-4.1
Emma Shumate	25-0	275-11.0	15-61	.246	9-38	.237	3-6	.500	13-16	29-1.2	24-0	13	6	23	11	42-1.7
Kaia Henderson	11-0	41-3.7	3-11	.273	1-4	.250	3-3	1.000	0-4	4-0.4	5-0	2	3	0	1	10-0.9
Mya Perry	6-0	19-3.2	1-8	.125	0-3	.000	3-5	.600	1-0	1-0.2	3-0	0	0	0	3	5-0.8
Kaitlyn Costner	15-0	69-4.6	1-6	.167	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	0-5	5-0.3	7-0	3	3	1	3	2-0.1
Karla Vres	8-0	17-2.2	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-0.1	3-0	0	3	0	1	0-0.0
Team									52-54	106				10		
Total	29	5825	878-1864	.471	217-632	.343	379-554	.684	315-730	1045-36.0	493-12	515	411	101	333	2352-81.1
Opponents	29	5825	728-1733	.420	169-577	.293	300-436	.688	325-758	1083-37.3	493-10	404	605	87	176	1925-66.4

for her return.

Even without Sheldon, the Buckeyes finished the regular-season with a 3-2 record over their last five games, including a win at then-No. 12 Michigan – a team Ohio State also beat at home earlier this season. While Ohio State still is not quite playing to the level it was during the 19-0 start to the season, Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff believes the Buckeyes have shown improvement ahead of the tournament.

"I think we were in a bit of a funk, but I think in the last week, 10 days, we've played much better and have been where we need to be," McGuff said on Feb. 24. "(We're going to get a little bit of rest) and just sharpen up some things before we get to Minneapolis."

The Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament will run from March 1-5 at the Target Center in Minneapolis. All games through the semifinals will be broadcast on the Big Ten Network, with the Big Ten Championship Game to be broadcast on ESPN.

Mikesell Honored On Senior Night

Ohio State fifth-year guard Taylor Mikesell was honored during Senior Night on Feb. 24, recognized prior to her final regular-season game with Ohio State.

Mikesell – along with student managers Joe Gryboski and Gaby Schorling – were recognized prior to the opening lineups, receiving a framed jersey and flowers from McGuff before a raucous ovation from those in attendance for the game.

In addition to the jersey, a video was played on the scoreboard at Value City Arena with Mikesell's teammates talking about the impact she has had on them in her two seasons with Ohio State, though she said after the game that the feeling was mutual.

"It's really cool to see the impact I've had on them, and they don't know the impact they've had on me," she said. "Coming back here, having them support me every day, has meant a lot."

Mikesell transferred to Ohio State prior to the 2021-22 season after a season at Oregon and two seasons at Maryland, the team that she ultimately ended her regular-season career against. Though there are still games left to play with the Buckeyes, Mikesell has already surpassed 1,000 points for Ohio State – as well as 2,000 for her career – and has notched the sixth-most three-pointers in program history with 207 at the conclusion of the regular season.

Several on the list ahead of her are within reach, including Brittany Johnson (216) and Katie Smith (218). Furthermore, her 44.1 percent shooting from deep is second in program history behind Cheryl Perozek's 45.8 percent shooting, but her impact will be felt off the court just as much as it is on the floor.

"She's been incredible," McGuff said. "She's incredibly impactful. You see what she does on the court, but more importantly – especially this year, in her second year – she's a great leader."

Mikesell – a native of Massillon, Ohio –

said it meant a lot for her to be able to return home for her final seasons of college basketball.

"Coming back home meant a little more to me after having made it through what I made it through," Mikesell said. "I'm just thankful for McGuff and the coaching staff for taking me in, kind of not really knowing the baggage I had coming in mentally or even if I was going to be able to play the year I came in. Credit to him and the rest of the coaching staff for bringing me in here."

While Mikesell being the only senior honored on Senior Night might raise an eyebrow in regard to the other seniors on the roster – namely Sheldon and forward Rebeka Mikulášiková, who each have a season of eligibility remaining – an Ohio State spokesperson said those seniors and the coaching staff have not had conversations yet about whether to use that extra year.

Even if those conversations have yet to happen, it seems likely that neither Sheldon – a native of Dublin, Ohio – or Mikulášiková, a native of Nitra, Slovakia, who has called Columbus home for the last four years – would want to leave Ohio State without having participated in their Senior Night, so a return seems at least plausible for both, with decisions expected after the conference and NCAA tournaments have wrapped.

McMahon Earns Additional Freshman of the Week Honors

Freshman forward Cotie McMahon was named Big Ten Freshman of the Week on Feb. 20 for the sixth time this season, tying the program record previously set by guard Kelsey Mitchell in the 2014-15 season.

McMahon has averaged 14.0 points, 4.8 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game this season, appearing in and starting all 29 contests for Ohio State. She's doing so on 51.7 percent shooting – second best on the team behind guard Taylor Thierry's 62.8 percent shooting clip – while adding 45 steals and 19 blocks.

Looking at the conference as a whole, McMahon is third in scoring among freshmen, trailing only Minnesota's Mara Braun (15.2 points) and Rutgers' Kaylene Smikle (17.5 points).

Smikle has won Big Ten Freshman of the Week three times, and Braun has been given the honor twice, establishing McMa-



SONNY BROCKWAY

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING – Ohio State fifth-year guard Taylor Mikesell was honored as part of Senior Night on Feb. 24, joined by her family as the crowd at Value City Arena celebrated her two seasons with the program before her final regular-season game.



Women's Basketball Tournament

March 1-5 • Target Center • Minneapolis

MARCH 1

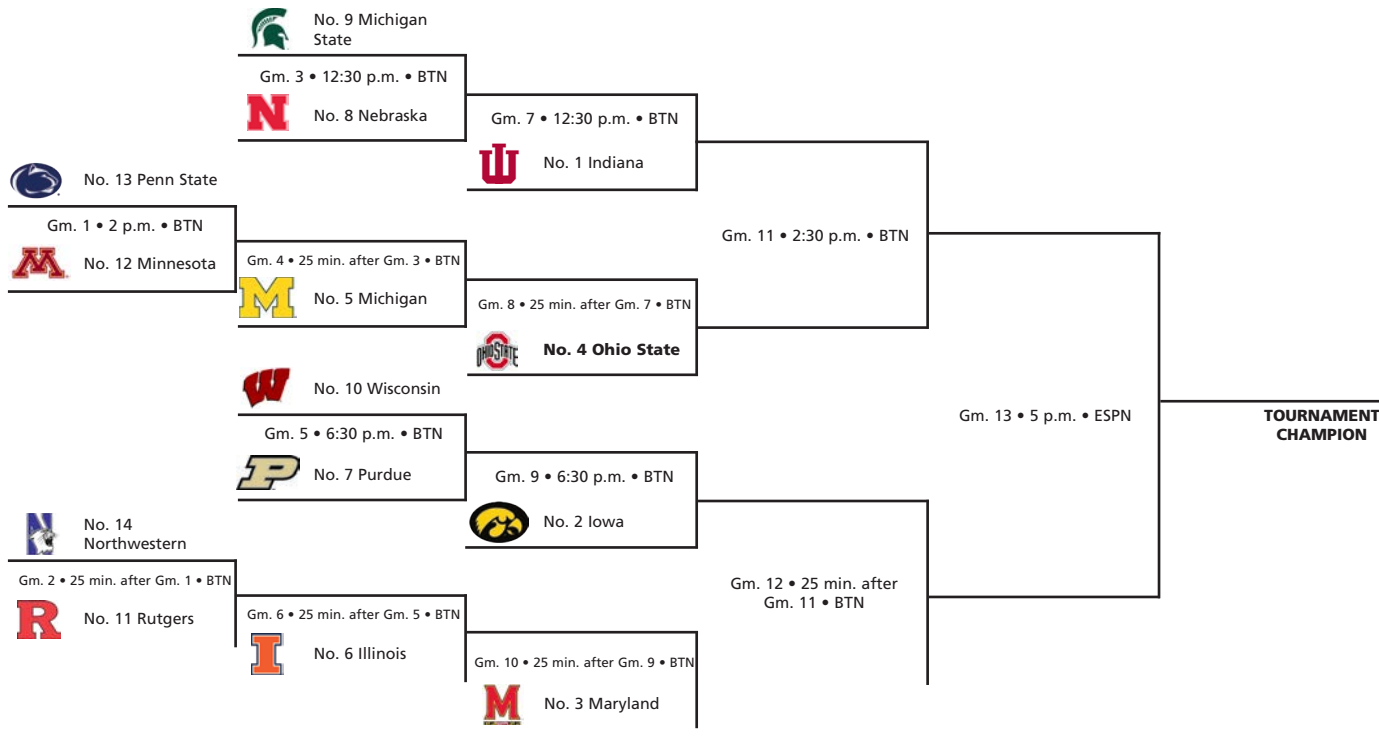
MARCH 2

MARCH 3

MARCH 4

MARCH 5

All Times ET



hon as a heavy favorite to be named Big Ten Freshman of the Year. It would be the ninth time in program history that an Ohio State freshman has attained that accomplishment.

McGuff Named To Naismith Watch List

McGuff was named on Feb. 15 as one of 15 coaches on the late-season watch list for the Werner Ladder Naismith Women's Coach of the Year honor, with the list set to be narrowed down several times in the following weeks until the winner is announced on March 29 at the NCAA Women's Final Four in Dallas.

This is the second time in McGuff's career that he has been included on the watch list, previously doing so in the 2020-21 season. He is one of four Big Ten coaches on the list, along with Illinois' Shauna Green, Indiana's Teri Moren and Iowa's Lisa Bluder, who previously won the award in the 2018-19 season.

Former Ohio State coach Tara VanDerveer, who is in her 36th season at Stanford, is also included on the watch list after previously winning the award in the 2020-21 season. South Carolina's Dawn Staley is the incumbent winner, having also secured the award in 2019-20.

Costner Seeing Floor Earlier And More Often

An understated development during the second half of the season has been some increased playing time for sophomore guard Kaitlyn Costner, who has helped fill in at times at point guard as Ohio State has struggled with depth at the position.

Costner – who appeared in 11 games last season, playing 59 minutes and scoring six points in total – has been a mainstay near the end of games this season, checking in usually with under five minutes remaining in blowouts, but she's seen the floor early in more contests of late.

She subbed in late during the first quarter of Ohio State's 90-67 win over Wisconsin on Feb. 1, playing just over two minutes before checking out early in the second, and then repeated this process near the end of the second and third quarters. She then did not appear until late in the third quarter of the Buckeyes' 90-54 loss to Maryland on Feb. 5.

But during Ohio State's 93-63 win over Minnesota on Feb. 8, Costner played a career-high 21 minutes, checking in with 2:49 left during the first quarter and playing the majority of the remaining quarters.

Nobody is expecting Costner to come in

and provide the impact that other starting point guards on the roster have done, but she's filled a valuable role in helping temper the time on the court for the likes of Mikesell and guard Rikki Harris, who have been tasked with extensive minutes over the past several weeks with Sheldon's injury.

"(Costner's) a really hard worker," Mc-

Guff said on Feb. 8. "Looking back at the injuries we've sustained, we're asking so much of Taylor (Mikesell) and Rikki and the minutes they're playing. I feel like we've got to give them a little more of a break, and Kaitlyn's capable.

"She's playing really hard defensively. She's really good in the press. She keeps it simple and keeps the ball moving and maybe gets it back to Cotie and (Thierry) who are more natural scorers."

With Mikesell departing after this season and Sheldon yet to announce a decision, next year could be a big one for Costner as she tries to break into Ohio State's rotation, and she's getting valuable minutes this season for her development.

Harris Is Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month

Harris had a breakout month for the Buckeyes, helping lead the team to a 4-3 record in February to secure the double-bye in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament.

Harris appeared in and started all seven games, averaging 8.3 points, 4.3 rebounds and 4.3 assists (compared to just 2.1 turnovers) on 43.5 percent shooting in addition to being a leader on and off the court for the Buckeyes.

Her highlight came in Ohio State's 71-64 win over then-No. 12 Michigan on Feb. 20 in which she scored a career-high 23 points on 7-of-9 shooting, including an impressive 3-of-4 mark from beyond the arc, while adding seven steals, five assists and four rebounds.

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Rikki Harris
Junior Guard
Indianapolis

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OSU Finishes 3-2 Against Tough Final Slate

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

Ohio State closed the regular season with a 23-6 overall record and a 13-5 mark in conference play, finishing 4-6 after the Buckeyes' 19-0 start to the season.

The Buckeyes went 3-2 since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, picking up a win over Minnesota and falling to No. 2 Indiana before winning a pair of road contests over Penn State and then-No. 12 Michigan.

Ohio State's regular season then ended with a loss at home to then-No. 7 Maryland, suffering a fifth ranked loss in conference play – two each to Maryland and Indiana and one to Iowa.

Stellar Shooting Leads OSU Past Minnesota

No. 13 Ohio State (21-4, 10-4) saw a return to form on Feb. 8 against Minnesota (9-15, 2-11), picking up a comfortable 93-63 win over the Gophers in front of 4,357 fans at Value City Arena.

Ohio State had one of its best shooting performances of the season, finishing 54.7 percent (35 of 64) from the field, with guard Taylor Mikesell connecting on all six of her three-point attempts. Guard Jacy Sheldon did not play for Ohio State as part of a planned absence for her continued recovery from a lower-leg injury.

The Buckeyes looked motivated coming out of the locker room, jumping out to a 17-4 lead with 4:51 left in the first quarter. Ohio State forced five Minnesota turnovers during the opening stretch as the Gophers started just 1 of 7 from the floor.

Forward Cotie McMahon paced the Buckeyes for most of the first quarter, scoring 11 points in the opening frame. Most of those points came from the free-throw line, where McMahon was 7 of 7 to help give



SONNY BROCKWAY

STEPPING UP — Ohio State forward Eboni Walker (22) filled in during recent weeks after forward Rebeka Mikulášiková suffered a high-ankle sprain, leading to Walker spending time in the starting lineup.

Ohio State a 23-10 lead heading into the second.

While McMahon dominated the first quarter, it was Mikesell's turn in the second frame. She helped push the Buckeyes to a 42-23 lead with 5:29 left in the half by connecting on all four of her three-point attempts in the quarter, all coming within that span.

"It was good to see it go in," Mikesell said. "I think we all did a good job of getting out in transition early, got some easy looks and saw them go in."

Ohio State later increased the lead to as many as 23 points, 48-25, before going into the break up 52-33. Minnesota shot 41.4 percent from the field (12 of 29) in the first half (compared to 62.1 percent for Ohio State) but just 22.2 percent (2 of 9) from deep while turning the ball over 12 times, resulting in 14 points for the Buckeyes.

The pendulum swung back to McMahon to begin the second half. After a series of baskets from Mikesell and guards Rikki Harris and Taylor Thierry, she scored the next nine points for the Buckeyes to give them a 68-37 advantage with 4:50 left in the frame.

Ohio State then got contributions from guard Hevyne Bristow, who scored the final eight points of the quarter for the Buck-

eyes. They led 80-47 entering the fourth before being outscored 16-13 by Minnesota in the final frame.

McMahon led the Buckeyes with 25 points, followed closely by Mikesell with 24, while the Gophers were led by guard Mara Braun's 19 points. Ohio State also had Thierry (15 points, eight rebounds), Bristow (10 points) and forward Eboni Walker (12 points) finish in double digits, with Walker filling in after forward Rebeka Mikulášiková exited the game in the first quarter with a high ankle sprain.

"I thought (Walker) did a great job stepping up," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "We just did our 'Dub Chain' in there, and we gave it to her because we really need her to step up with Rebeka's absence. I thought her energy was really good. (Minnesota) has really good post players that made her work for everything she got."

Holmes' Big Night Downs Buckeyes

No. 13 Ohio State suffered another loss – the fifth in its last seven games – as visiting No. 2 Indiana went home with an 83-59 win on Feb. 13, disappointing the 7,178 fans in attendance at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes (21-5, 10-5), who were without Sheldon or Mikulášiková, could do

Ohio State 93, Minnesota 63								
Feb. 8, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus								
		1	2	3	4	F		
Minnesota (9-15, 2-11)		10	23	14	16	63		
Ohio State (21-4, 10-4)		23	29	28	13	93		
Minnesota		Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Micheaux	25	3-8	2-2	2-2	1	5	8	
Heyer	27	4-9	0-0	3-5	2	1	8	
Battle	26	4-8	0-0	0-5	5	1	8	
Czinano	20	0-2	4-4	2-3	0	1	4	
Braun	34	7-18	2-2	1-1	0	0	19	
Borowicz	13	1-2	2-2	0-1	0	1	4	
Gradwell	14	2-2	0-0	1-2	0	3	5	
Cayton	19	0-5	2-2	0-2	3	2	2	
Hammond	19	2-2	1-2	1-1	0	2	5	
Oberg	5	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	0	
Totals	200	23-57	13-14	12-24	11	16	63	
Percentages: FG: 40.4%. FT: 92.9%. Three-point field goals: 4-13 (Braun 3-8, Gradwell 1-1, Borowicz 0-1, Cayton 0-1, Heyer 0-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Hammond, Heyer). Turnovers: 23 (Borowicz 5, Battle 4, Braun 3, Micheaux 3, Cayton 2, Czinano 2, Gradwell 2, Oberg, Team). Steals: 4 (Battle, Borowicz, Hammond, Micheaux).								
Ohio State		Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Mikulášiková	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
McMahon	24	8-13	9-9	1-3	0	3	25	
Harris	24	3-4	0-0	0-4	4	3	7	
Thierry	27	7-11	1-2	1-7	5	2	15	
Mikesell	32	9-15	0-0	1-1	5	1	24	
Walker	26	4-7	4-6	1-1	6	1	12	
Shumate	15	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	0	
Costner	21	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	0	
Bristow	19	4-7	1-1	1-2	1	1	10	
Henderson	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	0	0	
Perry	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Vreš	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Totals	200	35-64	15-18	7-22	23	14	93	
Percentages: FG: 54.7%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-10 (Mikesell 6-6, Bristow 1-1, Harris 1-1, Mikulášiková 0-1, Shumate 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Shumate 2, Thierry 2). Turnovers: 14 (Bristow 2, McMahon 2, Mikesell 2, Walker 2, Costner, Harris, Henderson, Shumate, Team, Thierry). Steals: 12 (Harris 3, Thierry 3, Bristow 2, Walker 2, McMahon, Shumate). Officials: Kantner, Dickerson, Steratore. Attendance: 4,357.								

little to stifle the Hoosiers (24-1, 14-1) and forward Mackenzie Holmes, who finished with a game-high 33 points on 15-of-18 shooting.

"Right now, we're in a little bit of – not in any selfish way in terms of, 'Hey, I'm going to score a bunch of points,' but something goes wrong and we have individuals on both ends trying to make plays rather than staying together in our system," McGuff said, "and it's exposing us a little bit."

Ohio State kept pace with Indiana early on, tied 6-6 with 3:40 gone by in the first quarter. Walker, tasked as Holmes' primary defender, was able to briefly keep the 6-3 forward at bay, but Holmes then scored eight of Indiana's next 11 points to take a 17-10 lead.

After Indiana finished the first frame with a 24-12 lead, it took just 42 seconds into the second quarter for the Hoosiers to go up 29-12 and for McGuff to call a timeout. It did little to get the Buckeyes back in form, as Indiana took off on a 12-2 run to increase the lead to 41-14 with 6:01 left in the first half.

Ohio State then began finding a groove on offense, scoring 15 points over the final six minutes of the second quarter courtesy of Mikesell's first triple and McMahon, Thierry and Walker all finding the basket. The

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Indiana 83, Ohio State 59

Feb. 13, 2023
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Indiana (24-1, 14-1)	24	30	14	15	83
Ohio State (21-5, 10-5)	12	17	24	6	59

Indiana	Total		FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Holmes	32	15-18	3-5	1-4	2	3	33
Garzon	31	2-8	0-0	0-4	1	1	5
Moore-McNeil	37	1-3	0-0	4-3	7	2	2
Parrish	20	1-5	0-0	0-2	3	2	3
Berger	36	6-10	3-3	0-10	5	2	16
Scalia	29	9-12	0-0	0-1	2	1	24
Meister	7	0-0	0-0	1-4	0	1	0
Sandvik	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Bargesser	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Geary	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Zaric	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Wisne	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	34-57	6-8	7-28	20	12	83

Percentages: FG: 59.6%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-20 (Scalia 6-8, Berger 1-2, Garzon 1-6, Parrish 1-4). **Team rebounds:** 11 (Scalia 4, Berger 3, Garzon, Holmes, Moore-McNeil, Parrish). **Blocked shots:** 2 (Garzon, Holmes). **Turnovers:** 11 (Scalia 4, Berger 3, Garzon, Holmes, Moore-McNeil, Parrish). **Steals:** 4 (Moore-McNeil 2, Parrish, Scalia).

Ohio State		Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Walker	34	6-12	0-0	2-9	4	5	12
McMahon	37	9-13	3-6	1-5	3	0	22
Harris	37	1-8	0-0	0-0	0	2	2
Thierry	37	4-8	0-2	1-1	1	2	8
Mikesell	37	6-15	1-1	0-1	3	2	15
Bristow	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Costner	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Shumate	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Henderson	2	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Vreš	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	26-57	4-9	5-18	11	11	59

Percentages: FG: 45.6%. FT: 44.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-15 (Mikesell 2-8, McMahon 1-3, Harris 0-3, Walker 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Shumate, Thierry). **Turnovers:** 6 (McMahon 2, Harris, Mikesell, Thierry, Walker). **Steals:** 6 (Harris 3, McMahon, Mikesell, Thierry). **Officials:** Hall, Inouye, Camy. **Attendance:** 7,178.

turnaround was not felt on the defensive end, however. The Hoosiers hit seven of their final eight shots to take a 54-29 lead into the half.

The Buckeyes shot a respectable 46.7 percent from the field in the first half (14 of 30), but the Hoosiers countered by shooting 74.2 percent (23 of 31), including a mark of 7 of 11 from deep (63.6 percent), with both Holmes (18) and guard Sara Scalia (17) hitting double digits.

Ohio State showed some fight coming out of the half, dominating most of the third frame with a 21-6 run to make it 60-50 with 2:11 remaining in the quarter.

"We played hard and competed and played the right way in the third quarter," McGuff said. "But we just put ourselves into too big of a hole, obviously, and then we kind of had a letdown, and they continued to play well in the fourth."

But after making the game as close as it had been since late in the first quarter, Indiana closed on an 8-3 run to make it 68-53 entering the fourth. The short-lived rebellion for the Buckeyes did not persist into the fourth, with Ohio State being outscored 15-6 in the final frame.

The Buckeyes were led by McMahon, who finished with 22 points on 9-of-13 shooting. Walker notched her fourth career double-double with 12 points and a team-high 11 rebounds, and Mikesell finished with 15 points. All of Ohio State's 59 points came from the starting five, with no points

Ohio State 67, Penn State 55

Feb. 16, 2023
Bryce Jordan Center • State College, Pa.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (22-5, 11-5)	21	17	13	16	67
Penn State (13-13, 4-11)	16	10	5	24	55

Ohio State		Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Walker	32	4-10	1-1	0-6	2	3	9
McMahon	38	8-12	0-2	3-8	4	4	17
Harris	35	5-11	1-2	1-7	7	3	15
Thierry	40	5-7	3-4	4-3	4	4	13
Mikesell	40	3-12	0-0	1-2	3	0	9
Shumate	3	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Mikulášiková	7	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	0	2
Bristow	4	1-2	0-0	0-0	2	2	2
Costner	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	27-60	5-9	13-30	22	18	67

Percentages: FG: 45.0%. FT: 55.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-23 (Harris 4-9, Mikesell 3-7, McMahon 1-2, Costner 0-1, Mikulášiková 0-2, Shumate 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Harris 2, Mikesell 2, Thierry 2, Mikulášiková). **Turnovers:** 22 (Walker 5, Harris 4, Mikesell 4, Thierry 4, McMahon 3, Costner, Bristow). **Steals:** 5 (Harris 2, Costner, McMahon, Mikesell).

Penn State		Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Williamson	27	0-4	1-2	2-5	0	2	1
Ciezki	22	2-9	0-0	1-0	2	2	5
Kapinus	36	3-12	4-7	4-7	3	3	10
Marisa	37	8-20	4-6	0-5	3	1	22
Thompson	30	3-9	2-2	0-0	0	2	8
Pinto	20	2-6	1-2	2-0	1	3	5
Brigham	6	1-2	0-0	1-1	0	1	2
Thomas	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Dia	8	0-1	0-0	1-1	0	2	0
Cash	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Camden	6	1-1	0-0	1-1	0	0	2
Totals	200	20-64	12-19	7-22	9	18	55

Percentages: FG: 31.3%. FT: 63.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-14 (Marisa 2-8, Ciezki 1-3, Pinto 0-1, Thompson 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Camden, Kapinus). **Turnovers:** 16 (Williamson 4, Kapinus 3, Pinto 2, Thompson 2, Cash, Ciezki, Pinto, Thomas, Thompson). **Steals:** 9 (Kapinus 3, Pinto 2, Thompson 2, Marisa, Williamson). **Officials:** Daley, Cruse, Enterline. **Attendance:** 2,306.

coming from the bench.

In addition to Holmes, the Hoosiers also had Scalia (24 points) and guard Grace Berger (16 points, 10 rebounds) finish in double digits. Indiana's 24-point win over Ohio State was the largest in program history against the Buckeyes.

McMahon's Double-Double Leads OSU Past Penn State

No. 13 Ohio State picked up an important win on Feb. 16 with the regular season winding down, going on the road to take down Penn State, 67-55.

The Buckeyes (22-5, 11-5) were boosted by McMahon's first career double-double (17 points, 11 rebounds), overpowering the Nittany Lions (13-13, 4-11), who shot just 31.3 percent (20 of 64) from the field for the contest.

"I felt like this was a game for us to get back on our feet and to focus on the things that we lacked in the past games we lost where we just didn't play our game," McMahon said.

Ohio State jumped out to a 15-5 lead with 5:32 left in the first quarter, taking advantage of seven early points from McMahon. Penn State ultimately closed the quarter on a 9-2 run, with the Buckeyes holding a 21-16 lead after the opening frame.

Although she was not in the starting lineup for Ohio State, Mikulášiková, who did not play in the previous game against Indiana, did check into the game in the first quarter, finishing the contest with two points and a rebound in seven minutes on the floor.

Penn State cut the deficit to five points early in the second after a pair of free throws from guard Makenna Marisa, but Ohio State responded with an 11-2 run to go up 34-20 with 5:25 left in the half, capping off the run with a triple from Harris.

"I thought we got plenty of good shots," said McGuff of his team, which shot 51.6 in the first half and 45.0 for the game. "Sometimes, you've got to have somebody else step up and make some, and Rikki made some threes that really hurt them."

Offense dried up at that point, though, as the Buckeyes made just two of their final eight shots. The Nittany Lions were unable to take advantage, scoring just six points after Harris' three-pointer, and Ohio State carried a 38-26 lead into the half.

Penn State continued to struggle in the third quarter, held to just 11.8 percent shooting (2 of 17) in the frame, with both makes coming in the first minute of the quarter. After guard Taniyah Thompson's layup with 9:23 left, the Nittany Lions' only remaining point in the frame came on a free throw with 5:52 left.

On Ohio State's side, the Buckeyes shot just 31.3 percent in the quarter but were still able to increase their lead to 20 points, up 51-31 entering the fourth quarter. Harris (5), McMahon (4) and Thierry (4) were the only Buckeyes to score in the third.

In the final frame, Ohio State went up by as many as 29 points after beginning the quarter with three-pointers on three consecutive possessions, two by Harris. Penn State responded with a 16-0 run – with 13 of those points coming from Marisa – and

eventually cut the deficit to 11 points on a pair of free throws by Marisa, but it came with just under a minute remaining, leaving little time for a comeback.

"I think we had such great stretches tonight," McGuff said, "but then we were awful at the end, and they made us pay."

McMahon led the Buckeyes with her 17 points, doing so on 8-of-12 shooting. Harris added 15 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, while Thierry also reached double digits, scoring 13 points. Marisa and guard Leilani Kapinus were the only Nittany Lions to finish in double digits, adding 22 and 10 points, respectively, in front of the 2,306 fans at the Bryce Jordan Center.

Harris' Big Night Sparks Win At U-M

No. 16 Ohio State had a stellar outing on Feb. 20 from Harris, who scored a career-high 23 points in a 74-61 win at No. 12 Michigan to secure a double-bye in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament.

In addition to Harris' impressive performance – which also included seven steals, five assists and four rebounds – the Buckeyes (23-5, 12-5) shot a blazing 52.6 percent (10 of 19) from deep and forced the Wolverines (20-7, 10-6) into 27 turnovers, resulting in 17 points for the Buckeyes.

"Rikki was just absolutely spectacular," McGuff said. "She played her heart out, played with toughness, intensity, focus and just great leadership overall. I'm really proud of her."

Continued On Page 32



Continued From Page 31

Ohio State and Michigan traded big runs to begin the contest, with the Wolverines jumping out to a 10-2 lead before the Buckeyes responded with a 14-4 run to lead 16-14 with 3:48 left in the first quarter after a Walker layup.

The Buckeyes later extended the lead to 24-17 entering the second frame, capitalizing on 6-of-7 shooting from deep in the opening quarter, including a trio of makes from Mikesell and a triple from Thierry, who was 2 for 2 from deep in the frame, with just 13 seconds remaining in the first.

After triples from Mikulášiková – who came off the bench for the second consecutive game – and Harris, Michigan forward Leigha Brown scored the next seven points for the Wolverines to make it 30-27. An old-fashioned three-point play by Harris and a layup by Thierry pushed the lead back up to 35-27. After a three-pointer from guard Jordan Hobbs, Brown took advantage of a turnover by Mikesell to cut the deficit to 35-32 with 4:14 left in the half.

Harris responded by completing another and-one opportunity, and after a layup from Brown and three-pointer from Hobbs, Harris was fouled on a three-point attempt and hit all three shots at the charity stripe to give the Buckeyes a 41-37 lead heading into the half.

After a first half played at breakneck speed, things slowed down to begin the third quarter. The teams combined to shoot just 4 of 14 from the field to start the period, leaving Ohio State holding a 47-43 lead with 4:55 remaining in the frame.

The Buckeyes held a 55-48 lead heading into the fourth, maintaining their advantage after the Wolverines shot just 27.3 percent (3 of 11) from the field and turned the ball over nine times in the third, good for 10 OSU points.

“I thought we looked different tonight,” McGuff said. “We competed for 40 minutes, for sure, and played pretty well for most of the game.”

Harris started the fourth quarter off with

a jumper and, after a Mikulášiková layup, connected from deep to give Ohio State a 62-50 lead with 7:37 remaining. The Buckeyes were then held scoreless for 4:12, but the Wolverines were unable to capitalize on the drought and Ohio State maintained a 64-53 lead with 3:25 left. The Buckeyes then pushed their lead to as many as 15 points in the final minutes after late points from McMahon and Thierry.

In addition to Harris’ team-leading performance, Thierry and Mikesell also finished in double digits, scoring 15 and 12 points, respectively. Brown paced the Wolverines with 36 points – including 11 of 11 from the free-throw line – and added nine rebounds, while forward Emily Kiser (11 points) and Hobbs (10 points) were the only other double-digit scorers in the game played before 5,832 at Crisler Arena.

McMahon's Final Shot Comes Up Late In Loss To Maryland

No. 16 Ohio State closed out the regular season with a loss on Feb. 24, falling to No. 7 Maryland 76-74 after a last-second putback attempt from McMahon came after the final buzzer sounded.

After a miss near the elbow from Thierry with just one second remaining, McMahon was able to corral the miss and get the ball back up in the air, but the putback attempt – which went in – came off her hand just moments after the buzzer sounded, rendering the final shot no good.

The loss for the Buckeyes (23-6, 13-5) came despite 20 points from McMahon and 18 points from Mikesell, who was honored as part of Senior Night in front of 8,949 fans at Value City Arena. Beyond the late would-be game-tying shot, the main culprit in the two-point loss was at the free-throw line, where Ohio State finished 8 of 20 compared to 11-of-14 shooting for the Terrapins (24-5, 15-3).

“We had chances,” McGuff said. “We had some decent shots. They made one more shot than us. I’m disappointed that we didn’t get the win, but proud of our effort.”

Ohio State fell behind 12-6 midway through the first quarter, but McMahon

Ohio State 74, Michigan 61

Feb. 20, 2023 Crisler Center • Ann Arbor, Mich.							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (23-5, 12-5)	24	17	14	19	74		
Michigan (20-7, 10-6)	17	20	11	13	61		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Walker	17	3-8	0-0	2-0	1	3	6
McMahon	30	3-8	1-1	2-6	7	4	7
Harris	35	7-9	6-8	0-4	5	5	23
Thierry	40	6-12	1-3	0-4	2	4	15
Mikesell	40	4-12	0-0	0-3	1	2	12
Mikulášiková	23	4-9	0-0	1-1	2	4	9
Costner	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Shumate	15	1-2	0-0	2-0	1	3	2
Totals	200	28-60	8-12	7-20	19	25	74
Percentages: FG: 46.7%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 10-19 (Mikesell 4-6, Harris 3-4, Thierry 2-3, Mikulášiková 1-4, McMahon 0-1, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 1 (Mikulášiková). Turnovers: 19 (Harris 4, McMahon 4, Mikesell 3, Walker 3, Mikulášiková 2, Thierry 2, Shumate). Steals: 13 (Harris 7, Walker 2, McMahon, Mikesell, Mikulášiková, Thierry).							
Michigan	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kiser	39	3-7	4-8	1-5	4	2	11
Williams	9	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	2
Nolan	36	1-7	0-0	0-1	1	3	2
Hobbs	30	3-9	1-2	0-2	1	4	10
Brown	38	11-21	11-11	3-6	3	3	36
Kampschroeder	9	0-3	0-0	3-3	0	0	0
Stuck	3	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0
Wiggins	12	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Evans	17	0-3	0-3	2-6	2	1	0
Crockett	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	19-51	16-23	12-26	11	15	61
Percentages: FG: 37.3%. FT: 33.3%. Three-point field goals: 7-21 (Brown 3-6, Hobbs 3-6, Kiser 1-2, Kampschroeder 0-2, Nolan 0-5). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Evans 2, Kiser, Williams). Turnovers: 27 (Brown 5, Kampschroeder 4, Team 4, Stuck 3, Wiggins 3, Williams 3, Hobbs 2, Kiser 2, Evans). Steals: 6 (Kiser 2, Crockett, Evans, Nolan, Stuck). Officials: Pethtel, Gulbeyan, Enlund. Attendance: 5,832.							

Maryland 76, Ohio State 74

Feb. 24, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus								
	1	2	3	4	F			
Maryland (24-5, 15-3)	15	23	20	18	76			
Ohio State (23-6, 12-6)	16	17	30	11	74			
Maryland	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Masonius	20	1-1	0-0	2-4	2	3	2	
Sellers	29	2-9	3-4	0-1	4	5	7	
Miller	33	7-17	2-2	0-7	1	4	16	
Meyers	38	11-15	1-2	2-4	2	1	24	
Pinzan	18	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	2	
Briggs	31	3-7	0-0	1-3	1	2	8	
Alexander	29	4-10	4-4	0-4	2	1	16	
McDaniel	4	0-0	1-2	0-1	0	0	1	
Totals	200	29-61	11-14	6-25	12	16	76	
Percentages: FG: 47.5%. FT: 78.6%. Three-point field goals: 7-20 (Alexander 4-9, Briggs 2-3, Meyers 1-4, Miller 0-3, Sellers 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 4 (Sellers 2, Masonius, Miller). Turnovers: 12 (Miller 7, Masonius 2, Meyers 2, Sellers). Steals: 4 (Meyers 3, Miller).								
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Walker	21	0-3	0-4	3-3	3	4	0	
McMahon	39	8-14	3-7	1-7	2	3	20	
Harris	35	1-4	2-4	0-8	8	2	4	
Thierry	37	7-15	1-3	6-1	4	2	16	
Mikesell	40	6-16	2-2	0-2	3	3	18	
Mikulášiková	19	6-8	0-0	0-3	0	1	13	
Shumate	9	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	1	3	
Totals	200	29-63	8-20	15-27	20	16	74	
Percentages: FG: 46.0%. FT: 40.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-21 (Mikesell 4-9, McMahon 1-3, Mikulášiková 1-2, Shumate 1-3, Thierry 1-2, Harris 0-2). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 16 (McMahon 5, Harris 3, Thierry 3, Mikesell 2, Mikulášiková, Team, Walker). Steals: 7 (Thierry 3, Harris 2, McMahon, Mikesell). Officials: Kantner, McConnell, Camy. Attendance: 8,949.								

it out then and we didn't because turnovers hurt us," he said. "Lapses like that, we've got to take away. We were way more consistent tonight, but still there's a higher level in those areas that can really help us."

Ohio State responded with two trips to the free-throw line sandwiching a layup from Thierry, to lead 69-65 with 6:36 left, but the Terrapins took off on an 8-0 run to go up 73-69. After tying the game at 73 on a Thierry layup, McMahon later connected on a free throw to trail 75-74 with 2:38 left, but it began a combined scoring drought of over two minutes as Ohio State attempted to even the score or take the lead.

The Buckeyes had several chances in the late stages but were unable to capitalize, including letting a loose ball go out of bounds with only 11 seconds remaining and Harris missing a pair of game-tying free throws with under 10 seconds remaining before McMahon's ill-fated shot sealed the win for the Terrapins.

In addition to McMahon and Mikesell's scoring outputs, Thierry (16 points) and Mikulášiková (13 points) also finished in double digits. Harris added eight rebounds and eight assists, while the Terrapins were led by Meyers' 24 points on 11-of-15 shooting in addition to 16 points from both Alexander and guard Diamond Miller.

Despite the rough finish to the regular season, Ohio State was still able to secure the No. 4 seed and a double-bye in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, which is set for March 1-5 at the Target Center in Minneapolis. The Buckeyes will open tournament play on March 3 against either No. 5 Michigan, No. 12 Minnesota or No. 13 Penn State.

scored the next six points for the Buckeyes to tie the game with 2:26 left in the frame. After a three-pointer from Maryland forward Brinae Alexander and an ensuing layup from Mikulášiková, Mikesell connected on a jumper at the buzzer to give the Buckeyes a 16-15 lead after 10 minutes.

Free throws were then the name of the game in the second frame. Maryland hit on 5 of 6 attempts, while the Buckeyes were just 2 of 8, and that disparity led to Ohio State trailing by as many as seven before heading into the locker room down 38-33.

Ohio State continued to trail early in the third quarter before scoring three points on consecutive possessions – one on a three-point play from Thierry and a deep shot from Mikesell – to tie the game at 46 with 6:45 left in the quarter, but the Buckeyes turned the ball over on their next three possessions as Maryland scored five unanswered.

The Buckeyes then took off on a 17-7 run over the remainder of the quarter, with Mikesell knocking down another pair of triples and McMahon and Thierry combining for the remainder of the run. During that same stretch, the Terrapins were just 4 of 11 from the field as they suddenly trailed 63-58 entering the final quarter.

Unfortunately for Ohio State, it took Maryland just 51 seconds into the fourth to erase the deficit, forcing McGuff to call a timeout.

“In the first four minutes (of the fourth quarter), we had three or four turnovers, and I thought we had a chance to stretch

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Michigan State Mourns Shooting Victims

On Feb. 13, a lone shooter attacked Michigan State's campus at Berkey Hall and the MSU Student Union, killing three students and hospitalizing five others. Investigators are still trying to pin down a motive for the 43-year-old gunman Anthony McRae, who took his own life after being confronted by police. Two nine-millimeter handguns, dozens of rounds of ammunition and a note were found with McRae.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

"It appears based on the content of the note that he felt he was slighted in some way by people or businesses," campus deputy police chief Chris Rozman said at a news conference. "Did a mental health issue amplify that or was it a component of that? We're not sure at this point. We're working our best to try to determine that as best as possible."

In the wake of the tragedy, Michigan State students have been mourning the loss of their fellow classmates: Arielle Anderson, 19, Brian Fraser, 20 and Alexandria Verner, 20.

That period of mourning included the Michigan State men's basketball team, which postponed its game against Minnesota scheduled for Feb. 15. When the Spartans returned to the court on the road vs. rival Michigan on Feb. 18, the Crisler Center held a moment of silence before the contest and illuminated the floor and crowd with green light.

Michigan's students and band also wore shirts that read "Michigan Basketball Stands With MSU" and held up signs that said "Spartan Strong" during the moment of silence.

The Spartans then returned home to an intensely emotional reception at Breslin Center, facing Indiana on Feb. 21. Head coach Tom Izzo shed tears as he gazed upon the crowd pregame.

"It was one of those moments where I just said, 'I'm a lucky guy,'" Izzo said after the game. "I said to myself, 'I hope we can come through for you.'"

Eight white shirts were placed on eight empty seats in the front row of the Michigan State student section to honor the victims of the shooting. Victims, survivors and first responders were all honored with pregame remarks, followed by a moment of silence which was broken by Michigan State's band playing "MSU Shadows," the school's alma mater.

Michigan State senior guard Tyson Walker scored 23 points to lead the Spartans to an 80-65 win over the Hoosiers.

Indiana Clinches Title In Women's Basketball

The Indiana women's basketball team secured a share of the Big Ten's regular-season crown on Feb. 19, knocking off Purdue, and were given the entire share of the title

following second-place Iowa's loss to Maryland on Feb. 21.

The second-ranked Hoosiers ended the regular season on a 14-game winning streak before falling to Iowa in their regular-season finale, finishing with a 26-2 record overall and 16-2 mark in league play.

That winning streak for Indiana included several ranked wins over Illinois, Maryland and Iowa, as well as a pair of victories over both Michigan and Ohio State, and it helped secure the program's first regular-season Big Ten championship since 1983 in front of a record crowd of 17,222 at Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall.

"That makes it even extra special, that we can share it with all of our fans," Indiana head coach Teri Moren said after the Purdue win. "I'm really happy. Other than us getting the win, we had several pieces that showed up today."

"I'm just really proud of this group," she added. "They set out to do this. I'm not surprised by it. This was one of their goals. They have other goals as well, but this is what their expectations were. We're just here to help."

Senior forward Mackenzie Holmes has led the team all season, racking up 22.6 points per game, good for second in the Big Ten. Holmes also paces the team in rebounds with 7.4 per game. Freshman guard Yarden Garzon has added a sniper's presence from the outside, shooting 45.9 percent from beyond the arc and scoring 11.3 points per contest.

In the 83-60 win over the Boilermakers, Holmes again led the way with 20 points and made her presence known defensively with four blocked shots. Junior guard Sydney Parrish posted a double-double with 13 points and 10 rebounds while all five starting Hoosiers finished with double-digit scoring totals.

Northwestern Making Push In Standings

Northwestern men's basketball is on pace for its best finish in the Big Ten standings since Fred Taylor's first season at Ohio State.

As of Feb. 26, the Wildcats possess an 11-7 conference record, good for second place in the conference behind Purdue (24-5, 13-5). The last time Northwestern finished as high as second in the regular-season standings was 1958-59, when it went 8-6 in league play to finish in a three-way tie with Michigan and Purdue behind regular-season champion Michigan State.

The Wildcats have already guaranteed a winning conference record, the first time they'll have accomplished that feat since the 2016-17 season and just the third time since 1967-68.

After starting 3-3 in conference play this season, the Wildcats – led by head coach Chris Collins – have rattled off an 8-4 record in the league to sit second in the standings. That run has included ranked wins over Indiana and Michigan State, as well as an upset of then-No. 1 Purdue on Feb. 12, the first win in program history over a No. 1 team.

"What a day. What a game," Collins said after the game. "The atmosphere in (Welsh-Ryan arena) was as good as I've ever

been in, which is awesome. The crowd was amazing. Purdue is an incredible team."

Illinois only barely snapped the Wildcats' winning streak Feb. 23, knocking them off 66-62 in Champaign, Ill. Still, bolstered by senior guard Boo Buie, sixth best in the conference with 17.2 points per game, Northwestern will be on the hunt for its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2016-17 and just the second in program history.

Further Adjustments To Football Coaching Staffs

The last few rounds of adjustments to Big Ten football coaching staffs have shored up a handful of the conference's teams as spring practice reaches its beginning.

Following the departure of Indiana wide receivers coach Adam Henry to the Buffalo Bills on Feb. 15, the Hoosiers took just five days to land on former Utah State offensive coordinator Anthony Tucker, who will also serve as co-offensive coordinator along with quarterbacks coach Walt Bell.

Tucker played college football at Fresno State before spending three seasons as a member of NFL practice squads in 1999, 2000 and 2002. He then entered into coaching, working his way through the ranks at Colorado, Idaho State, Arkansas State, Maryland – where he worked with Bell – and UCF before landing at Utah State.

Maryland, meanwhile, brought in a name at co-offensive coordinator some college football fans may recognize: former Arizona, Houston and Texas A&M head coach Kevin Sumlin, who will coach tight ends in addition to his coordinating responsibilities.

"Kevin brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to our staff, and I couldn't be more thrilled that he's joining our program," Maryland head coach Mike Locksley said. "My relationship with Kevin goes back

over 25 years. He has a tremendous football mind, along with a proven track record of developing players and winning at the highest levels. I'm excited to welcome him and his family to College Park."

Sumlin spent four seasons as head coach at Houston from 2008-11 prior to landing the Texas A&M job, but that's where his career took a downturn. After going 11-2 and 9-4 in his first two years, he suffered five losses in each of the next four seasons. Sumlin was given his walking papers but still landed on his feet as head coach at Arizona, where he was fired after three seasons and a 9-20 record.

In the last of three moves at coordinator positions, Illinois hired Robby Discher to be its special teams coordinator and coach tight ends. He spent last season as special teams coordinator at Tulane, helping the Green Wave win the AAC and the Cotton Bowl, and he was also a special teams quality control coach for Georgia's title-winning team in 2021.

"We are very excited to have Robby and his family join us here at the University of Illinois," Illinois head coach Bret Bielema said. "He will touch our program in many different ways working with our tight ends, specialists, and coordinating our special teams overall. He has proven to have success in every place he has been. I am excited to see and feel his impact here in our program."

The last bit of coaching staff news comes from Wisconsin, where head coach Luke Fickell promoted quality control coach Nate Letton – who was on Fickell's staff last season at Cincinnati – to be the team's full-time tight ends coach. The promotion comes after tight ends coach Gino Guidugli left to take a job at Notre Dame.

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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Tracy Leads Tennis Team With Title Ambitions

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's been seven years since JJ Tracy has seen his hometown.

A multi-sport athlete through junior high, once he decided tennis was the sport for him, it became his sole focus – quite literally. He and his mother packed their things and moved out to Hilton Head, S.C., to train at Smith Stearns Tennis Academy, where Tracy spent all of his high school years. He has yet to return to where he grew up in Michigan.

"Growing up I played a bunch of sports," Tracy said. "Pretty much every one you could think of, I played. I had to start eliminating sports one by one, because as they start getting older they travel and stuff. Tennis was just the last one remaining. I always wanted to go there before any of the other ones.

"It was definitely different. I had adjusted hours (at Smith Stearns). Three to four hours on the court, then maybe an hour of on-court conditioning there in the gym four or five days a week. But the intensity there is nothing compared to where we are right now (at Ohio State)."

After signing with Ohio State as a blue-chip prospect in 2020, Tracy is on a surge in his junior season, fresh off a sophomore campaign in which he earned All-America status. As of the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's Feb. 21 polls, Tracy was the No. 15 singles player in the nation, best among Ohio State's fourth-ranked squad. He hopes to be a part of a championship puzzle as the program searches for its first-ever NCAA team title in the summer.

"The jump he made (to now) from when he got here his first year was incredible," said Ohio State associate head coach Justin Kronauge. "He's as good as anyone we've had improvement-wise. He's hitting every ball with a purpose."

Moving his life from Michigan to South Carolina wasn't an easy decision for Tracy, and there were plenty of people he left behind in his pursuit of tennis.

"I had to leave friends I had in Michigan and transition to high school in a completely different setting," Tracy said. "Growing up Midwestern then going to southern Hilton Head where the population's mostly over 60 (years old) – it's a big change, but I think tennis-wise it helped me a lot, getting a lot of hours on the court. It helped me a lot mentally and physically."

His move paid off. Tracy reached the semifinals of the 2018 Eddie Herr International tournament and the finals of the Easter Bowl in 2019, and he won three International Tennis Federation singles titles and four doubles titles. By the time he signed with Ohio State, he was a top-15 prospect in his class.

"We got to watch him a few times in the junior tournaments, and I know he had some family in Columbus, Ohio," Kronauge said. "So we had to take a look at him. We brought him on a visit, and he got along really well with the guys and seemed like a hard worker. His game transitions well to college tennis. It was a guy we wanted."

There's always an adjustment period



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

TITLE-SEEKING TRACY — JJ Tracy of the Ohio State men's tennis team, who has already claimed the ITA Indoor Fall National Championship in doubles this season, looks to claim more hardware by the campaign's end.

for any recruit for a major Division I sport. Learning how to balance class with your sport and other obligations takes some getting used to, and for Tracy, the hardest part was time management. The amount of hours he was putting into tennis at Ohio State exceeded what he was doing at Smith Stearns, even if that academy was tennis-specific. And the collegiate coursework was more demanding.

"Having to do my classes and practice, trying to make my way into the lineup that first year, putting so many hours on the court then coming home and having to do school the rest of the night was definitely an adjustment," Tracy said.

It took him all of three matches to get settled in as a freshman. After dropping two matches to two Michigan players on the first day of his collegiate career at the Ohio State Invitational on Jan. 15, 2021, Tracy rattled off 24 consecutive victories to help the Buckeyes reach the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament.

"I remember those (first two) matches, actually," Tracy said. "I was very tentative. I was playing at the back of the court trying to lob balls back, trying to feel out the college game. I got blasted. I think (head coach Ty Tucker) and Kronauge came up to me and were like, 'You need to be inside the court. You need to be taking control of the points.' I think from that point on – I played Michigan's now No. 1 player (Andrew Fenty) and I beat him that day. I think that got me a lot of confidence."

His sophomore campaign brought even more success. Tracy posted a team-best 36-6 record in singles, staying in the top 21 of the national rankings throughout the entire season, and he posted 10 wins over ranked opponents. It all culminated in an All-America finish for Tracy, who made a run to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament in men's singles.

He didn't lose a set en route to that third round, but it was there he ran into the tour-

namment's No. 1 overall seed and eventual national champion in Florida's Ben Shelton. A 6-4, 6-4 loss ended his individual ambitions. Prior to that, he helped Ohio State reach the Final Four in team play, where it lost to Kentucky.

Tracy feels his biggest strength as a player is his forehand, particularly the pace of the shot. Kronauge agrees but also made note of the junior's athleticism.

"Two things that stand out with JJ: incredible athlete, and very, very fast. Great wheels," Kronauge said. "No matter if you go on the road or if you're at home, the feet travel with you. So that's an unbelievable weapon for him."

"He has a live arm. The ball comes off his racket quick. It's a God-given thing, and it allows you to really develop as a player and take that next step."

While enjoying such singles success as a Buckeye, Tracy has also found a rhythm with senior Cannon Kingsley as his partner for doubles dating back to Tracy's freshman year, boasting a record of 38-4 in three seasons.

"JJ's a great athlete," Kronauge said. "He can run around and get everything, and Cannon brings a giant serve to the table and great returns. So when Cannon's hitting a serve, it sets up JJ pretty well to volley and clean up balls at the net."

Kingsley echoed Kronauge's sentiments about the pair's strengths. Their game plan, he stated, is typically to break opponents down from deep in the court.

"Tracy's very fast," Kingsley said. "He gets to a lot of balls. Very agile. I feel like I bring a pretty big serve to the table and return (the ball well). I think we just blend well together. We're both hitting big from the baseline – we're anticipating, sliding."

Off the court, Tracy and Kingsley are close friends as well. The two are roommates and both love to cook – especially steak, which they both take medium rare.

"He's a little messy," Kingsley said with a chuckle. "I cook a better steak though."

"We're definitely together a lot," Tracy said.

In general, Tracy is known by coaches and teammates as a laid-back, lively person to spend time with off the court.

"He's fun to be around," Kronauge said. "He's well-liked by the team, a funny guy. Everybody likes being around him and having him in the van. A good guy."

Kingsley had been out a few weeks as he dealt with an ankle problem, but he returned for the ITA Indoor Championships Feb. 17-19. Redshirt freshman Jack Anthrop filled in as Tracy's doubles partner in the meantime.

Ohio State reached the quarterfinals of the indoor championships with a win over Illinois on Feb. 17 but fell short the following day against No. 7 Texas by a 4-3 score before regaining some momentum with a consolation match victory against No. 5 Virginia.

"I'm working on getting healthy right now," Kingsley said prior to the match against Illinois. "That's my main focus right now is getting physically ready to play this weekend."

When it comes time to compete for individual national championships, however, Tracy's partner for doubles is redshirt senior Andrew Lutschaunig. The duo won the ITA Fall National Championship in November and are ranked the No. 2 pairing in the country. For matchup purposes in team competition, however, Tracy partners with Kingsley while Lutschaunig is coupled with redshirt senior James Trotter.

"They had a great couple weeks playing together in the fall, and they obviously accomplished a lot individually," Kronauge said Lutschaunig and Tracy. "We have to look at what's best for the team, which might not be best for individual accolades, but (we) obviously keep that in mind as well. Those guys will get a shot to play together down the road, and we'll continue to mix up the doubles and try to find the best pairings for the team."

Service and consistency have been the next steps in Tracy's development. Gaining the ability to win points that are back-and-forth and using his serve as a weapon is important for him moving forward.

"He's worked on his serve a lot," Kronauge said. "I think just being with us and going to practices, being able to hit the ball – he's always been able to hit the ball big, but he can now consistently do it and he can play 15-ball, 20-ball rallies. Those are major keys to developing, and we've put him through the tough practices and he's been able to stay out there all day with these guys."

As Tracy continues developing, an even deeper run in the men's singles championships could be in order for this season. But team objectives will come first, he said. He's one of four Ohio State players ranked in the top 75 nationally, and with him and the others in tow, the Buckeyes feel they could finally capture the school's first NCAA national title.

"The team definitely comes first, we get a national championship there," Tracy said. "Then once team stuff is over, I'd like to play in the (ITA) All-Americans for singles and doubles, get another chance to defend (the fall championship) with Andrew and hopefully be an All-American again this year."

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.

BASEBALL (3-5, 0-0)

Feb. 17 vs. UConn at Venice, Fla., W 3-0; **18-19** vs. UConn at Sarasota, Fla., L 9-6, L 8-6; **20** vs. UConn at Port Charlotte, Fla., W 10-5; **23** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz., L 1-0; **24** vs. Gonzaga at Phoenix, Ariz., L 11-9 (10 innings); **25** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz., L 7-5; **26** vs. Gonzaga at Phoenix, Ariz, W 8-2.

March 3 vs. Mississippi State at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas; **4** vs. Cal at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas; **5** vs. Oklahoma at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas; **10-12** at Cal State Bakersfield; **14-15** at Marshall; **17-19** DAYTON; **21** WRIGHT STATE; **22** TOLEDO; **24-26** at Indiana; **28** XAVIER; **31** MINNESOTA. **April 1-2** MINNESOTA; **4** KENT STATE; **7-9** at Michigan State; **11** AKRON; **12** BOWLING GREEN; **14-16** MARYLAND; **18** at Miami (Ohio); **21-23** at Penn State; **25** at Kent State; **28-30** ILLINOIS.

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

MEN'S BASKETBALL (12-17, 4-14)

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, L 69-63; **12** MICHIGAN STATE, L 62-41; **16** at Iowa, L 92-75; **19** at Purdue, L 82-55; **23** PENN STATE, L 75-71; **26** ILLINOIS, W 72-60.

March 1 MARYLAND; **6** at Michigan State.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (23-6, 12-6)

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, W 93-63; **13** INDIANA, L 83-59; **16** at Penn State, W 67-55; **20** at Michigan, W 74-61; **24** MARYLAND, L 76-74.

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, W 401.000-399.200; **24** at Winter Cup at Louisville, Ky., NTS; **26** at Winter Cup at Louisville, Ky., NTS.

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, W 196.825-196.475; **17** at Penn State, W 196.725-196.125; **25** at B1G Five Meet., 3rd/5 (196.750).

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 (18-13-3, 11-11-2)

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, L 2-1, T 2-2 OT (SL); **16** MICHIGAN, T 3-3 OT (SW) **18** at FirstEnergy Stadium, Cleveland, vs. Michigan, W 4-2; **24-25** at Minnesota, L 4-0, L 5-2.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (30-4-2, 23-4-1)

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, W 6-1, W 5-0; **17-18** at Wisconsin, L 6-5 (OT), W 3-1; **24-25** BEMIDJI STATE (WCHA quarterfinals), W 4-1, W 2-1.

March 3 at Minnesota Duluth (WCHA semifinal).

MEN'S LACROSSE (3-1, 0-0)

Feb. 4 AIR FORCE, W 15-7 **11** CLEVELAND STATE, W 19-12; **19** NORTH CAROLINA, W 8-5; **25** vs. Virginia at Naples, Fla., L 17-6.

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 (3-2, 0-0)

Feb. 10 ROBERT MORRIS, W 18-6; **12** TEMPLE, W 10-9; **17** at San Diego State, W 10-4; **19** at USC, L 18-10; **25** DENVER, L 11-4; **28** CINCINNATI.

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

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

SOFTBALL (6-6, 0-0)

Feb. 10 at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. Georgia, L 11-4; **11** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. Boise State, W 8-2; **11** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. UCF, L 1-0; **12** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. UMass, W 1-0; **17** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Notre Dame, L 7-2; **18** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Notre Dame, W 6-5 (9 innings); **18** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Clemson, L 5-1; **19** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Clemson, L 10-0 (5 innings); **24** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. Cal State Northridge, W 12-0 (5 innings); **25** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. Oregon State, W 6-0; **25** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. San Diego State, W 5-4; **26** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs., Calif., vs. Utah, L 9-1 (5 innings).

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

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

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

SWIMMING & DIVING

Jan. 13 Tri-Meet at Tuscaloosa, Ala., Men: vs. Alabama, W 124-62, vs. Texas W 101-85; Women: vs. Texas L 109-77, vs. Alabama W

115-71; **14** Tri-Meet at Tuscaloosa, Ala., Men: vs. Alabama, W 230-123, vs. Texas W 189-164; Women: vs. Texas L 196-157, vs. Alabama W 220-133; **21** at Michigan, Men: W 151.5-148.5; Women: W 186.5-113.5; **27-28** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind., Men: 1st/4 (1,955.5); Women: 1st/4 (1,803).

Feb. 10-12 OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL, NTS; **15-18** Big Ten Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich., Men: 2/8; Women: 1/12; **26** LAST CHANCE MEET.

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

MEN'S TENNIS (15-1)

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;, W 4-3 **11** at Virginia, W 4-1; **14** BAYLOR, W 4-0; **17** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Illinois, W 4-0; **18** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Texas, L 4-3; **19** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Virginia, W 4-0; **25** NOTRE DAME, W 7-0.

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 (11-5, 4-2)

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, W 3-1; **11** LEWIS, W 3-0; **16** at Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-1; **18** at Loyola Chicago, L 3-0; **24** at Quincy, W 3-0; **25** at Lindenwood, L 3-2.

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 (13-3, 6-2)

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, L 25-16; **18** Spartan Combat Dual at Tampa, Fla., vs. Cornell, W 22-14.

March 4-5 Big Ten Championships; at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **16-18** NCAA Championships at Tulsa, Okla..

Icers Making Noise In Tournament Season

There was plenty happening around the Ohio State men's hockey team on and off the ice since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last printed.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Most notably, the regular season ended on a sour note for the Buckeyes, who lost 4-0 and 5-2 at top-ranked Minnesota on Feb. 24-25 to fall from a second-place tie with Michigan to third in the Big Ten standings.

Still, Ohio State (18-13-3, 11-11-1-1 Big Ten) will host sixth-seeded Penn State at Value City Arena in a best-of-three quarterfinal series March 3-5 looking to not only advance to the semifinals but likely securing a spot in the NCAA tournament.

The Buckeyes are 10th in the PairWise rankings, a statistical formula that emulates the selection process for at-large bids to the 16-team NCAA tournament.

Showing the strength of the conference, the Nittany Lions are ahead of the Buckeyes at No. 8 in the PairWise. Notre Dame also checks in at No. 14, with Michigan at No. 4 and Minnesota topping the rankings.

Last season, Ohio State lost in three games to visiting Penn State in a quarterfinal series and had to wait two weeks for conference tournament results before the Buckeyes learned they barely missed earning an at-large spot.

Unlike last season when the Nittany Lions were not in the top 15 and their upset seriously damaged the Buckeyes' NCAA chances, losing to them again wouldn't be quite as lethal. Of course, the surest way to reach the NCAA tournament is to win the Big Ten Tournament for the automatic qualifier.

The College Hockey News PairWise Probability Matrix gives the Buckeyes a 99.5

percent chance of making the NCAA tournament.

The week prior to the Minnesota series brought a bundle of attention to the program with an announcement of plans for a hockey arena, a Senior Night on a Thursday (Feb. 16) against Michigan at Value City Arena and a classic outdoor game in Cleveland two days later vs. the Wolverines.

Not So Fast

When news came on Feb. 13 that Ohio State's board of trustees would be asked to approve a \$2.7 million proposal to design a new ice rink to house the men's and women's teams, it was widely reported that the facility (which was approved) would be the new home for the men's and women's teams.

The assumption was partially true, but many people read more into it than was there. Yes, under the plan the women will move from the OSU Ice Rink, ideally by April 2026, but the men would use the new rink only for practices. The venue, still at an undetermined cost and size, will be located north of the Covelli Center in the athletic district off Fred Taylor Drive.

The men would still be playing the majority of their games at Value City Arena for a long, long time if the current proposal is adopted. There isn't enough land at the proposed site, nor the money right now, to build an arena with a capacity in the 6,000 to 8,000 range.

"If we were able to get into that 3,000-seat area, there are some contests the men play where they could play in the new rink," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told The Athletic. "But the larger ones – the games against that team up north (Michigan) or Penn State, for instance – we'd go to (Value City Arena)."

He said the athletic department is looking to raise up to \$42 million for the project, and an arena with a capacity of about 6,000 could cost at least double that. If the new rink houses around 3,000, it's likely the men could play a few early-season nonconference

opponents there that typically draw below 4,000 a game.

Playoff games, which sometimes occur when students are on a break and are not included in season-ticket packages, could be held there as well in case of conflicts at VCA. The three-game quarterfinals at Value City Arena vs. Penn State last season averaged 1,808 fans.

Ohio State averaged 4,944 fans for 14 home dates this season and had sellouts of 8,439 and 8,593 (the upper deck has been curtained since the 2021-22 season to limit capacity) and one crowd of 7,174 among the five Big Ten home games in January and February.

Ohio State men's coach Steve Rohlik told BSB on Feb. 15 that he was not sure what the proposal approved by the trustees means for his program.

"I know there's an architect they're hiring," he said. "I've been fully supportive of the women, 100 percent. I know there are decisions to be made, and hopefully they're for both programs."

While there are many unanswered questions, it's clear that a plan unveiled in December 2019 to build a rink seating approximately 2,500 adjacent to Value City Arena at the corner of Fred Taylor Drive and Lane Avenue is dead. It would have been the site for women's practices and games and men's practices.

That's bad news for the men, who with the new proposal would still have to bus to practice when they can't use Value City Arena. They currently practice at the OSU Ice Rink in those situations while maintaining their locker room in VCA. The women use the OSU Ice Rink, built in 1961, for practices and games.

Out-Standing

Playing Michigan anytime in any sport gets the competitive juices flowing. To do so under a pair of special circumstances and come away with five of a possible six points made it memorable.

That's what the Buckeyes did when they tied U-M 3-3 before earning the extra conference point for a shootout win on Senior Night on Feb. 16. It was held on a Thursday because the outdoor game served as the final "home" game of the regular season.

Thirteen seniors were honored prior to the first game of the series, and two of them provided the goals as the Buckeyes overcame a 3-1 deficit.

Tate Singleton scored the first and third goals, and Matt Cassidy added the other. For NCAA purposes, the game was a tie, but senior Jake Wise scored the only goal of the three-round shootout – he was the first shooter – and sophomore Jakub Dobeš made 14 saves in regulation and overtime before stopping a trio of Wolverines in the shootout.

"We outplayed them, honestly, all night," Singleton said. "I think we shot pucks when we needed to shoot pucks, and I thought we were all over them."

That game set up the fourth outdoor game all-time for the Buckeyes. The temperature was in the 40s for the contest at FirstEnergy Stadium, home of the Cleveland Browns. Despite a few delays to repair the ice, it was a near-perfect day for the Buckeyes, who en-

BIG Men's Hockey

	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Minnesota	24	57	19	4	1	2	1	0
Michigan	24	38	12	10	2	3	3	0
Ohio State	24	36	11	11	2	0	0	0
Notre Dame	24	35	10	10	4	2	0	3
Penn State	24	34	10	13	1	0	3	0
Michigan State	24	34	10	12	2	1	1	2
Wisconsin	24	18	6	18	0	0	0	0

Overall records — Minnesota 25-8-1, Michigan 20-11-3, **Ohio State 18-13-3**, Notre Dame 15-14-5, Penn State 20-13-1, Michigan State 16-16-2, Wisconsin 13-21-0.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

tertained a crowd of 45,523 – the most ever to watch the Buckeyes play hockey – with 4-2 win.

"It was an incredible event and experience our guys will remember for the rest of their life," Rohlik said.

The turnout surpassed the 45,021 at TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis on Jan. 17, 2014. The Buckeyes lost that one to the Gophers as well as their previous outdoor games to Michigan at Cleveland's Progressive Field in 2012 and to Wisconsin at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wis., in 2006.

The side story to the rematch was Ohio State freshman defenseman Tyler Duke and U-M sophomore forward Dylan Duke facing off again in their hometown with a large cheering section wearing custom caps made by the Dukes' mother, Sharon, which featured both teams.

"It's super special," Tyler said. "I think we had around 400 people here, so (we had) all the love and support. For us, it's just something that we're going to remember for a long time and something that we got to enjoy with our family."

The Buckeyes, wearing special jerseys honoring the 1942 national championship football team that played a game in Cleveland that season, got goals from Cole McWard, Wise, Duke and Stephen Halliday. Dobeš made 19 of his 35 saves in the final period.

"It was a surreal experience," defenseman Mason Lohrei said. "Walking out for warm-ups, not everyone was there yet, but the music was on and it felt like I was warming up for an NFL game. And then we went to the locker room, came back out for starting lineups and that place is packed and there's fireworks going off, flames shooting and we get the long walk with us on the jumbotron. It's something I'll never forget."

The Buckeyes went 2 of 6 on the power play and killed all seven Michigan chances in the game to go 12 for 12 in the series.

"It was unbelievable," Wise said. "I don't know if there's any other word for it. I mean, even right away, with the whole flyover, the national anthem, I think every person on the ice got chills. It can't get much better than that."

Long Time Coming

The Buckeyes had a mostly forgettable weekend at Notre Dame on Feb. 10 and 11, dropping five of six points following a 2-1

Continued On Page 37

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For February



Tate Singleton
Senior Forward
West Lebanon, N.H.

Ohio State Prepares For B1G Tournament

The month that wrestling season is always building toward has finally arrived: March is here.

Improving one's national ranking throughout the season can help for NCAA tournament qualification and seeding, but

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

Ohio State coach Tom Ryan has made it clear, and the championship structure indicates, that the regular season in the college game has little bearing on the end. Conference tournament time is when wrestlers start to contend for titles.

"The Big Ten, it's something you prepare for year-round," Ryan told BSB Feb. 23. "All summer these guys were in here. Some of them were wrestling internationally, wrestling overseas. So it's a year-round thing."

While focused throughout the year, the No. 6 Buckeyes have been especially locked in the last few weeks. Every calorie eaten, every minute of sleep, every bit of energy exerted in practice and every cold tub used for recovery is tracked and optimized.

"Right now we really tone down the volume and we really up the intensity," Ryan said. "Practice will be short, really intense. There's always a focus on nutrition and water intake, but these few weeks you're just kind of hyper-focused on some things that are critically important. Recovery is also really important."

The Big Ten is the best conference in collegiate wrestling, and the rankings make that hard to argue. Four of the top six ranked teams in the country, including No. 1 Penn State and No. 2 Iowa, reside in the conference, according to the NWCA coaches poll released Feb. 19. Extending further, the league possesses seven of the top 15 and 11 of the top 25 teams, and each of the last 15 national championships has been won by a Big Ten team.

Such depth, with not just a few nationally competitive teams at the top but the bottom and middle of the conference scattered throughout the rankings, makes an al-

ways-challenging league all the more daunting this year.

"I mean, it's brutal," Ryan said. "Minnesota, Illinois has got good guys. Northwestern's got a good team. Obviously Michigan's got a bunch of studs. It's a competitive conference."

According to Ryan, if every wrestler across the conference finished according to how they are seeded in the tournament – beating the opponents seeded lower than them and losing to the ones that are not – Ohio State would be projected to a third-place finish behind the Hawkeyes and Nittany Lions.

There's hope that the Buckeyes will be able to punch above their weight class, however, as after several wrestlers missed recent meets with injuries, Ryan expects to have his full complement of grapplers back for the conference tournament. He noted that it is just the third time this season Ohio State's full starting 10 will be available, though not everyone will be at an optimal spot in their recovery.

"All 10 of our starters will be ready to wrestle," Ryan said. "They may not be 100 percent with their injuries, but at this point you have no option. Most of them are healthy. The main issue is the training that you missed from the injury. This is a heavily cardiovascular-driven sport. But we're ready to go, we're excited."

None are projected to win league titles based on their seeding despite the fact that the team has four wrestlers ranked in the top eight of their weight class – the same number of grapplers who finish as All-Americans at the NCAA tournament.

Redshirt senior Sammy Sasso, ranked No. 3 at 149 pounds, might have the best shot at individual gold for the Buckeyes. The only Big Ten opponent ranked ahead of him is Wisconsin's Austin Gomez, ranked No. 2, who knocked Sasso off earlier this season in a 10-9 bout at the NWCA All-Star Classic. Northwestern's Yahya Thomas, ranked No. 4 at 149, and Iowa's No. 6 Max Murin should also factor into title contention.

Ohio State freshman Jesse Mendez, ranked No. 8 at 133 pounds as one of the best true freshmen in the country, is also projected in second place behind Penn State's Roman Bravo-Young, who is ranked first in the nation and is the two-time defend-

ing national champion in the weight class.

The Buckeyes have one more wrestler predicted to finish second in graduate Kaleb Romero, No. 5 in the country at 184 pounds. If he wants to win his weight class, he'll have to contend with Penn State's Aaron Brooks, ranked No. 1 in the class.

That's not to say there can't also be some surprises. Ohio State sees a high ceiling for redshirt freshman Paddy Gallagher at 157 pounds, who is ranked No. 25 in the weight class behind no less than 11 other representatives from the Big Ten. Gallagher dealt with some injury issues during the regular season, and Ryan believes he's better than his ranking.

"We think Paddy can win the nationals," Ryan said. "And in the Big Ten, based on how his season's gone, they have him scoring no (advancement) points (based on his seed)."

Redshirt senior Ethan Smith could also have a puncher's chance at 174 pounds, ranked as the No. 5 wrestler in the country. He'll have to go toe-to-toe with the top two wrestlers nationally in the class if he wants a title, however, with Penn State's No. 1 Carter Starocci and Nebraska's No. 2 Mikey Labriola projected to be the championship match pairing.

Ohio State gets under way at the Big Ten tournament on March 4 in Ann Arbor, Mich. Ryan is confident that all 10 of his team's wrestlers will qualify for the national championships and, as unconventional as it may sound, is grateful for the anxiety the tournament brings.

"The opposite of stress is, what, boredom? So on one end of the spectrum you have stress," Ryan said. "On the other end of the spectrum you have complete boredom. Give me stress all day long over boredom."

Gallagher Earns His Black Shirt

Gallagher will enter the Big Ten tournament with a boost, after the second-year grappler earned a black shirt from the coaching staff Feb. 22.

Black shirts are given to members of the Ohio State wrestling program who are considered elite both on and off the mat. Only wrestlers awarded black shirts are allowed to wear black in the team facility.

"His effort is unbelievable," Ryan said to the team when presenting Gallagher with

his black shirt. "He deeply loves this sport, was a really big recruit, has had some injury issues. He's worked through them. He trains really hard."

In his first year as a starter for the Buckeyes, Gallagher has posted a 10-6 record with a 6-5 mark in dual meets. He's picked up two wins by tech fall and one by major decision to help Ohio State earn bonus points at various times this season.

"I want to thank my teammates, coaches, my roommates," Gallagher said to the team. "I've had a lot of injuries since I've been here, and you guys just helped me push through."

Big Red Dead In Spartan Combat Dual

Ohio State will enter the conference championships with some momentum after upsetting No. 4 Cornell by a 22-14 final at the Spartan Combat Dual in Tampa, Fla., Feb. 18.

There weren't any individual upsets on either side, with the higher-rated grappler taking each of the matches in the meet. Gallagher earned bonus points for the Buckeyes by beating Cole Handlovic by major decision, 14-6, and Sasso did the same via medical forfeit against Sal Jones, up 11-2 before the medical default.

Ohio State redshirt sophomore Gavin Bell, filling in for Romero at 184 pounds, beat Ethan Hatcher in an airtight bout, 10-9, after grabbing a 9-5 lead and holding on for the victory.

The Buckeyes opened the dual with a 13-0 lead off the back of Gallagher and Sasso's victories, plus a 6-1 decision in favor of No. 19 Dylan D'Emilio at 141 pounds over Ethan Fernandez. Cornell chipped that lead down to 13-8 after it got a tech fall at 165 pounds and a decision at 174, but Bell's victory stabilized things for the Buckeyes before redshirt senior Tate Orndorff, No. 17 at heavyweight, defeated Brendan Furman by a 4-1 decision.

Redshirt senior Malik Heinselman, No. 10 at 125 pounds, then put the dual meet out of reach by beating Joe Sciarra via an 8-1 final. Ohio State led 22-11 with only a match to play, securing the win despite Mendez falling by a 6-1 decision to No. 3 Vito Arujau in the event's final match.

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setback and 2-2 tie with a shootout loss, but there was one shining moment.

In the second game, senior Dalton Messina scored his first career goal in his 39th game for the Buckeyes to take a 2-0 lead.

"Honestly, I didn't really see it actually go into the net," he said. "I saw Jaedon (Leslie) throw his hands up in the air, and I was kind of more relieved. My teammates were super excited for me, and they made it a really special moment for me."

Leslie, also a senior, was pumped to see his linemate score.

"That's fantastic," he said. "I mean, the guy comes to the rink every day with a smile on his face ready to work, and I think I was a little more excited than even he was when

he scored."

Dream Come True

In the state where Hollywood endings are created, David Gust made one of his own north of there in San Jose on Feb. 25.

The former Ohio State player (2013-17) almost retired from pro hockey last season having never played an NHL game, but the Orland Park, Ill., native decided to give it one more try with the hometown Chicago Blackhawks' top affiliate in Rockford, Ill., of the American Hockey League.

He had an outstanding season with 24 goals, 26 assists and 50 points in 51 games, and on Feb. 23, two days after his 29th birthday, he signed a two-year contract with the Blackhawks and was called up.

With his parents having hurriedly flown

to San Jose to catch his debut, Gust scored his first NHL goal on his first shot of his first shift at 2:14 of the first period.

"Can't write it any better," he said after the Blackhawks' 4-3 shootout win. "(I was) like, 'Holy smokes, that was fast. And can't believe it happened.'"

He had 94 points (37 goals, 57 assists) in 126 games for the Buckeyes and was a three-time Ohio State Scholar-Athlete and a two-time Academic All-Big Ten selection.

Quick Preview

The Buckeyes and Penn State split the four-game season series, each winning once in the other's building. Ohio State went on the road Dec. 2-3, losing 2-1 and winning 4-3. Penn State played in Columbus Feb. 3-4, taking the opener 4-3 before Ohio State pre-

vailed 4-2 the next night.

Big Month

Singleton is the Varsity Cub Icer of the Month for February after the senior from West Lebanon, N.H., scored four goals and added two assists for six points in eight games.

In addition to his two goals against Michigan, he had two goals and an assist in the series vs. Penn State and a helper against Notre Dame on Feb. 11. He had a career-high 25 points (10 goals, 15 assists) through 34 games this season.

For recaps of all men's hockey series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Plenty Of Questions For Retooled Buckeyes

What is that old saying about the more things change ...

Well, as far as Ohio State football is concerned, the more things change, they actually change.

Gone are C.J. Stroud, an all-timer at quarterback despite the masses saying otherwise, jumbo protectors Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, quarterback disruptor Zach Harrison and defensive missile Ronnie Hickman. While programs the caliber of Ohio State reload rather than rebuild, there are just enough important missing pieces that it's safe to say that the Buckeyes likely won't be in the preseason top four later this summer.



Sure, Kyle McCord may have the bona fides – he was a five-star get out of high school in Philadelphia, where he threw the rock often to some guy named Marvin Harrison Jr. The running corps may finally be able to show just what it can do with good health, and year two of a defense under coordinator Jim Knowles usually means improvement. If it's anything like the improvement in year one, the Buckeyes could border on ferocious.

With all of that smoke being blown, why might there be pessimism about OSU's preseason ranking? Two reasons – questions on the offensive front and the looming specter of That Team Up North.

Johnson and Jones weren't just big dudes who could protect – both are projected as first-round picks in the upcoming NFL draft. Johnson didn't allow a sack all season, and Jones was seen as one of the best run blockers in all of college football. They were experienced and excelled at their jobs, and their loss will no doubt be felt. Whether spring is enough time to adequately fill their spots remains to be seen.

It's long been the opinion from this corner that teams replacing multi-year starters at quarterback and up front are likely to take a step back the following year, no matter how good the talent may be. McCord will almost certainly have a few growing pains, and the trench guys will almost certainly miss an assignment or block as they are finding their feet.

And then there is the schedule. After opening with what should be a trio of layups against Indiana, FCS (boo!) Youngstown State and Western Kentucky (which will bring in the best opposing receiver the Buckeyes will face in 2023 in Malachi Corley), things get real with a trip to South Bend to face Notre Dame.

Yes, the Irish lost some firepower, but they gained the services of a legit quarterback in Wake Forest transfer Sam Hartman. He alone should be good for some big plays, and with a young team early in the year it wouldn't be the biggest shock in the world to see the Buckeyes come home

with a “1” in the loss column.

A trip to Camp Randall Stadium on Oct. 28 to take on Luke Fickell's new-look Wisconsin Badgers could be very interesting, as could a home tilt against Penn State a week prior. But the Buckeyes seem to do well against the Nittany Lions at home, so I'm not terribly worried about that one.

Most of November is manageable until a trip to Ann Arbor to face two-time defending league champ Michigan. The Wolverines have regained their mojo, and the return of Blake Corum and the addition of three outstanding offensive line reinforcements via the transfer portal means the offense won't slip much, if at all.

It will be intriguing to see if the physicality and mental toughness Ohio State showed against Georgia in the Peach Bowl can carry over into the season, and against the Wolverines, especially, because the usual Ryan Day calling card of finesse isn't going to get it done against U-M, and if OSU does indeed lose a third straight to the Wolverines, Day will learn what it's *really* like to be head football coach in Columbus, Ohio.

Familiar Face In The Linebackers Room

There haven't been a ton of complaints about Day during his tenure as the Buckeyes' football boss, but after consecutive losses to Michigan, we're starting to hear echoes of “he doesn't understand the rivalry” and “maybe if he recruited more Ohio kids this wouldn't happen.” Though both statements are laughable and incorrect, Day has shaken things up with the coaching staff, bringing fan favorite and three-time All-American linebacker James Laurinaitis into the coaching fold.

Little Animal spent last season as a graduate assistant at Notre Dame – the first of 11 Buckeye victims during the 2022 football campaign – and will assume the same role in Columbus, helping out with the linebackers.

“I am thrilled for our program and especially for our current and future Buckeyes who will benefit so much from having James on staff,” Day said. “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.”

The Buckeye linebackers took a huge step forward last year under Knowles – who also oversaw that position on a daily basis – after a poor 2021 campaign full of missed tackles, bad angles and getting bullied by opponents.

Tommy Eichenberg especially was the bulwark of the group, but Steele Chambers also made huge strides. Both are back for 2023, and Laurinaitis appears eager to have a chance to coach them up.

“I love the game of football, and I love working with young people,” Laurinaitis said. “That's why I got into coaching. 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 – the same thing Luke

Fickell did for me and Jim Tressel did for me.”

Knowles doesn't appear the least bit worried about ceding control of the linebackers to Laurinaitis. In fact, it might allow him to spend more of his time coming up with new wrinkles for the defense, which made a big jump back to prominence this past season but faltered a bit in the final two contests. If you're going to allow someone to take some of your responsibilities, you won't find many better than Laurinaitis.

“It's always exciting when you have a guy to come in and coach with you who also has his picture on your (office's) wall,” Knowles said. “He's a legend – All-American, a pro, a Buckeye – and having a veteran corps of linebackers coming back, I think it's good to have someone come in who can work with them individually technique-wise and maybe do some different things than I've done.”

While Laurinaitis' acumen as a player isn't in doubt, he is still a bit green in the coaching department. But many in Buckeye Nation won't care, because he has one thing that some coaches on the staff do not – on-field victories over Michigan and an understanding of the hatred that comes with the rivalry.

Whether that's enough to turn the tide back to the Buckeyes' favor won't be known until November, but from an appearance standpoint, it looks like a solid move by Day.

Stroud Coming On Strong In Draft Talk

There is still some buzz surrounding Stroud following his eye-opening performance against Georgia in the College Football Playoff. The Bulldogs were seen as a nearly unbeatable foe with a snarling, active defense, yet Stroud made play after play and put the Buckeyes right on the brink of upsetting the defending – and eventual consecutive – national champs.

For his efforts, Stroud rocketed up the mock draft lists, even going No. 1 overall in some recent projections. This shouldn't be news to anyone who watched football last year, though it appears to be as most analysts have Alabama's Bryce Young atop the quarterbacks list, and a few even have Kentucky's Will Levis ahead of Stroud, despite his numbers being average at best.

Young has talent and mobility – something Stroud showed little of until the Georgia game – and good arm talent, but he is small. Like 6-0, 194-pounds small. That kind of frame will get a guy killed in the NFL, especially if he goes to a team with a horrible offensive line.

Levis has measurables – he's 6-3 and 232 pounds – and does possess a big-time arm. Problem is, it doesn't always get the ball to the right color uniform. After throwing 13 picks in 2021, Levis tossed another 10 for the Wildcats in 2022 – roughly one every 28 passes.

His numbers don't add up to his measurables, yet the scouts are drooling over him, thinking he could be the next Josh Allen. The NFL is littered with guys who

had “measurables” but who couldn't consistently get it done on the field for one reason or another. Levis is the third-best quarterback in this draft, but that's faint praise as this isn't a great class.

Stroud has processing talent that previous OSU quarterbacks have lacked, and while a few have had a stronger arm – Cardale Jones, for one – none has had more pure arm talent. Stroud can fit balls into tight windows unlike any Buckeye signal-caller I've seen, and it's almost never that you wonder “where was he throwing *that* one?” He admittedly wasn't as good facing pressure as Young (or many others), and he'll have to continue to get better keeping plays alive at the next level.

Stroud also excels down the middle of the field and in intermediate routes, and in today's NFL that's precisely where a quarterback needs to be good if he is to succeed.

There is some trepidation at making Stroud a high pick, simply because Ohio State quarterbacks have not fared well in the NFL – especially first-round choices (though Justin Fields has yet to get a fair chance to prove himself in Chicago given the personnel available to him). But Stroud has the intangibles and abilities the others have lacked, which is why – to these eyes, anyway – he is the safest bet for stardom at the quarterback spot in the 2023 NFL draft.

Leaving The Big Ten In Their Wake

Don't look now, but there is another dominant team on Ohio State's campus.

For years, when people talked about Olympic sports excellence at Ohio State, they mentioned wrestling or men's tennis or women's volleyball. It's time to add another program to that roster, as the women's swimming team won its fourth consecutive Big Ten crown, topping second-place Indiana by more than 100 points in the league meet held at Michigan.

The four straight crowns are one off the current school record (set from 1982-86) but well behind the conference mark of 12 held by Michigan (1987-98). Ohio State has won nine championships, second most in conference history, and head coach Bill Dorenkott now has seven Big Ten title-winning teams, including four with the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes used the same formula that's been working for them for four years now to win this latest title. Ohio State has the best depth in the conference and had just one swimmer on the championships scoring roster who didn't score points during the season, which indicates they did a phenomenal job when it came to choosing who to swim exhibition and who to put on the scoring team. A whopping 15 Buckeyes contributed 50-plus points to the team score, the most of any team.

One legacy is making a name for herself. Sophomore Nyah Funderburke, daughter of former Ohio State hoops star Lawrence, took home gold in the 100-yard backstroke, beating out Olympian Phoebe Bacon in the process.

Men's Hoops Season Makes Basket Case Of Us All

Going back to my days at the old Buckeye Leaves, I have been writing this column for well over 40 years now. While doing so I have gained a great appreciation for those who do this far more frequently than the 24 times a year that I have to fill this space.

Every columnist has their own style. Many use their allotted space to be provocative. I have always tried to offer thoughts from a fan's point of view, rather than maintaining the role of the unbiased reporter. Frequently, a reader will drop me a line or email telling me, "What you wrote is exactly what I was thinking."

Not only did I offer validation for their point of view, but in the end the reader was offering validation to *my* opinion or observation.

A few weeks back, I felt exactly like you, my dear readers.

I was reading a piece by Columbus Dispatch columnist Rob Oller (who I swear contributed to BSB 30 or 40 years ago and is now one of those previously mentioned writers who has to produce a column multiple times a week) about the struggles of the Ohio State basketball team, and I wanted to say, "What you wrote is exactly what I was thinking."

At that point the Buckeyes had dropped only seven of their past eight and were still 11-10 overall and 3-7 in conference play. Not nearly as bad as it has become, but for Oller, the reality that the team was playing about as he had expected heading into the campaign was starting to set in:

"At its core, Ohio State is about what I thought it would be – an untested patchwork of players who struggle to find a cohesive identity that allows them to handle the grind of a rugged conference."

That's what I thought, too, Rob. I saw a team with a bunch of newcomers – recruits and transfers alike – and only a few returnees, including one who missed most of last season due to injury, to offer a built-in foundation. I was worried about team chemistry. "Patchwork" was *exactly* the word that came to mind for me too. There was talent there, however, and I envisioned a middle-of-the-pack campaign for the Buckeyes at best.

But the Buckeyes fooled me in the early going, getting off to an unexpectedly solid start and lulling me into what turned out to be a false sense of optimism. Apparently, so too did they lull Oller.

"Early on OSU showed it could overperform," Oller wrote. "After defeating ranked Texas Tech in Hawaii to improve to 5-1 in late November and losing by single digits at ranked Duke soon after, there was budding confidence the Buckeyes might contend for a conference title. The season rolled along at 10-3 until Jan. 5, when a heartbreaking loss to No. 1 Purdue set in motion a demotion."

We all know what happened after that.

At this point I would say that the Buckeyes are going to end up finishing worse than I would have originally predicted, and I am not sure that any hopes I had of the team gradually building chemistry were anything more than just that – hopes. When a team elevates a freshman to captain in the middle of the season, it is not a good sign.

At the time of Oller's writing, Feb. 1, he did not believe the freshmen were the problem.

"The rooks are not the problem. The vets are," he wrote. "Ohio State needed Justice Sueing and Zed Key to perform at high levels. Instead, both have underwhelmed. Granted, Key had been limited by a shoulder injury – explanation, not excuse – but Sueing has no alibi besides having missed most of last season with a groin injury."

I think many Buckeye fans would say Sueing – who averaged as many as 14.3 points per

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

game in a season while at Cal and averaged 10.7 points on 49.1 percent shooting in his one full season with the Buckeyes – has been the biggest disappointment so far this season. He is second on the team with 12.0 points per game but is shooting just 43.1 percent from the floor and is a dismal 21.9 percent from distance.

I am no Fred Taylor, but I am smart enough to see that super-frosh Brice Sensabaugh has been yanked from the starting lineup and has had his minutes limited at times when he was back in the first five. Things like that happen for a reason.

After the recent loss to Penn State, in which Sensabaugh scored 14 points in the first half but sat for much of the second half, Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann finally came out and said, "There are two ends (of the floor). He's got to continue to grow on the other end. There are times when it does impact our team, and he knows that. He's working hard at that."

Not that I am not blaming Sensabaugh for all the team's problems. It takes a team effort to get as low as the Buckeyes.

But if Sensabaugh is considering moving on to the NBA after this season, he might want to heed the words in this issue of Malaki Branham, who was one and done for the Buckeyes after last season. Branham was talking about his coach with the San Antonio Spurs, veteran Gregg Popovich, but he could have been talking about just about any coach, from prep to pro.

"Pop is a defensive-minded coach, so if you want to get on the floor you're going to have to play some defense," Branham said. "You're going to have to stop somebody. I learned that, and once I learned that I got a little leash on the offensive end and I'm just being aggressive and taking the shots I know I can make."

Sound advice for Sensabaugh, whose trajectory – contrary to Branham's opposite path last season – seems to be going down, not up.

Sadly, the Buckeyes have spent the last several weeks heading in the same direction. Were any of you readers thinking the same thing?

NIL Today

In this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, BSB associate editor Braden Moles takes a look at where the ever-changing Name, Image and Likeness compensation in college sports stands as of February of 2023 and whether Ohio State is keeping up with those changes.

I have to admit that NIL is a far cry from I thought it was going to be when it was introduced such a short time ago. What I envisioned is something along the lines of what I called "Card Shows, Car Dealers and Camps." College athletes could pick up extra money signing autographs at card shows, make money endorsing businesses like car dealers or anyone else willing to spring for an endorsement fee, or even profit from their love and knowledge of their respective sports by teaching young athletes at camps. Of course, there were dozens of other ways athletes could profit from their name, image or likeness.

What I didn't count on way back when was another "C" – collectives. Braden rolls his eyes at me because, even after reading his well-conceived story, I still don't understand collectives.

It seems like Ohio State understands them but is not fully comfortable in the world of offering large sums of money to prep prospects

as part of the recruiting process. The football program may be re-evaluating how it competes in the wild-west recruiting territory.

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

"It's just probably not something we're going to want to end up being able to compete with – by choice – as well. Is that something we want to bring into the locker room? Those are the conversations we have in this day."

Longtime Ohio State recruiting analyst Bill Greene worries that course of action will be a departure from the broad-based recruiting strategy that Urban Meyer brought to Columbus in 2012, a strategy that helped lift the Buckeyes into the ultra-elite in the country.

"Maybe NIL has them so spooked that they're just going to not compete with the national kids and try to win the (Jim) Tressel way by getting the best kids out of Ohio," Greene said. "You don't have to have NIL battles (with Ohio talent) – you can get them committed fairly early and develop them. It doesn't make sense to me."

"I don't think they have to change the way they're doing things to win battles with the kids that you win championships with. I think they're close in NIL. They did well. I would tweak a few things, but I wouldn't drop out. Nick Saban has repeatedly said that he is not paying kids upfront and he's dropping kids that want upfront money. But he's not taking two- and three-star kids out of Alabama. There's a balance there."

This is my column to agree with others. I agree with Greene that there is probably a middle ground.

But I also believe that things are completely out of control right now. Some order has to be restored in college sports, especially football. Here, I agree with Pantoni.

"I just hope there's a lot of really smart people in this profession and that we can all come together and get a solution to this as quickly as possible," he said. "Because I don't think there's a lot of people who enjoy what's going on. NIL isn't what it was intended to be. And so, I'm raising my hand to help anyway I can to get a solution to get this fixed."

I know this much. Those athletes who are lucky enough to be in this early era of NIL should enjoy it (and invest their money wisely). I just don't see this model as sustainable.

Looking Back At St. John

It was 25 years ago that Ohio State's men's and women's basketball teams were finishing out their runs at historic St. John Arena in advance of their move to the brand-spanking-new Schottenstein Center the next season.

For our Reprint Thursday feature on Feb. 23 at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, we ran stories from our "So Long, St. John" issue dated Feb. 28, 1998.

Kudos to the BSB staff back in the day. Such BSB stalwarts as Mike Wachsman, Steve Helwagen and Jeff Rapp helped produce coverage of the end of the St. John era that was

so comprehensive, we are breaking up the stories into two segments of Reprint Thursday, with part two scheduled to be posted at BuckeyeSports.com on March 2.

The Feb. 23 segment is archived for those of you who didn't see it. Go to BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers, and go to the "BSB Online" tab and drop down to "BSB Reprints."

St. John And The Schott

Speaking of Ohio State's two arenas, did anybody besides me think it was cheesy that Ohio State considers the women's basketball game against Iowa on Jan. 23 "a sellout", even though there were only 9,955 in attendance at The Schott, with its capacity of "up to 19,700 for basketball," according to the building's website. The upper bowl, of course, was curtained off for the women's game.

Put those same 9,955 in the 13,276 seat St. John Arena and you would be rocking like the old days. I'm sure longtime OSU women's basketball fans remember what the crowds in St. John were like when Iowa, coached by C. Vivian Stringer, came to town in the heyday of the rivalry between the two schools. In 1993, a season in which both teams made the NCAA Final Four, the Hawkeyes and Buckeyes sold out St. John Arena – no curtains necessary.

On a side note, while it was no laughing matter, when a piece of the scoreboard came crashing down on the court at Indiana's storied Assembly Hall during the Hoosiers' men's game with Ohio State on Jan. 28, IU officials attributed the incident to the piece being loosened by "vibrations caused by the music and crowd noise in the arena."

While this was hardly a laughing matter, I couldn't help but joke that couldn't happen at Value City Arena – well, maybe with the loud music.

Helping Hands

Thanks to the many of you who took advantage of the "Vibrant and Viable" special, as mentioned in this space last issue. You may recall, as part of our effort to get loyal readers to help keep Buckeye Sports Bulletin, well, vibrant and viable, we have brought back a no-longer-used gift rate of \$19.95 for subscribers to introduce fellow Buckeyes to BSB. 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.

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.

Among the many subscribers who responded to this offer was very loyal reader Dave Thompson, who used his gift subscription in a unique and helpful way for BSB. He gave a subscription to his barber shop! What a great way to increase exposure. Others of you might consider doing the same thing, or perhaps giving a subscription to your local library.

Just send the name and address of the person or people (or barber shop or library) 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.

And for those of you who don't have the extra money to help BSB by becoming a VIP subscriber or giving gifts, passing the paper on to *your* barber shop when you are finished with it is a great way to participate in this group effort.

Zac Brown Band

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