

Lighting A Spark

Team Chemistry Fostering Success For Ohio State Women's Team

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

In many ways, Ohio State's success this season – from a 19-0 start to an appearance in the finals of the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament for the first time in three seasons – is hard to fathom given some of the trials and tribulations faced by head coach Kevin McGuff's squad.

Losing one point guard is hard enough to overcome, as the Buckeyes were forced to play almost all of the regular season without Jacy Sheldon after she suffered a lower-leg injury just five games into Ohio State's campaign. Sheldon's impact, playing in her senior season for the Buckeyes, is hard to overstate given her contributions as a floor general and leader off the court.

But compound that with a season-ending knee injury to guard Madison Greene midway through the season – the second season-ending injury for Greene in as many years, no less – and Ohio State was suddenly up a creek without a point guard. Asked what his reaction would have been if told in the preseason that he would lose Greene and Sheldon, McGuff said it would have been a big problem for the Buckeyes.

"I think they're both such great players and such integral parts of our program, so I would have expected it to be a huge issue for us," he said. "They both can play the point guard position so well, and I think that would have been the thing that would have been very alarming to me."

Sounding the alarm would have been understandable, even as Ohio State started the season 12-0 before Greene's injury against



SONNY BROCKWAY

BUILDING BONDS – Ohio State enters the NCAA tournament as a No. 3 seed and with a 25-7 record, one that – according to head coach Kevin McGuff and several players – was built on the team's chemistry and leadership this season.

South Florida on Dec. 20. Nobody on the roster had significant experience at point guard at the collegiate level, and with the team boasting several young contributors such as sophomore guard Taylor Thierry

and freshman forward Cotie McMahon, it was one in need of consistency and leadership.

Fortunately for Ohio State – which won the next seven games after losing Greene, all without Sheldon – those struggles brought the team closer, coalescing to finish the regular season and conference tournament with a 25-7 record and secure one of the top 16 seeds in the NCAA tournament, granted the opportunity to host the first two rounds.

What came out of those injuries and unexpected success was some of the deepest team chemistry that McGuff has seen in his over 20 seasons of coaching at the college level, forged by the team's leadership and a

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Encouraging Finish Provides Glimpse Into Bucks' Future

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In mid-February, nothing was going right for head coach Chris Holtmann and his Ohio State squad.

The Buckeyes were reeling from a stretch in which they won just once in 11 games and entered a home battle with Michigan State in desperate need of a win. Instead of triumphing over the Spartans, Ohio State hit rock bottom, tallying its lowest offensive output since 1996 while falling 62-41 in front of a sleepy Value City Arena on Feb. 12.

The bleeding didn't stop there, however, as Ohio State's losing streak extended to eight games when road trips to Iowa and then-No. 3 Purdue yielded poor results, with the Buckeyes outscored 174-130 in the two games.

Ohio State appeared to be dead in the

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SONNY BROCKWAY

FINISHING STRONG – Ohio State and head coach Chris Holtmann had a positive finish to the season, winning three games at the Big Ten tournament to build momentum going into next year.

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From The Message Board

Ohio State kicked off spring practice on March 7 with several intriguing storylines following the team during the 15-practice window. Although we may not get answers to the pressing questions surrounding the Buckeyes until the fall, we asked readers and the BSB staff what they have their eyes on during spring practice. Here are some of the responses:

"Devin Brown has appeared on the scene with a bit of swag and plenty of confidence. He will need it to overtake Kyle McCord. It should be an interesting chemistry and I am excited to see it play out."

– **PeyoteBuck**

"I'm mostly interested in three things: OL, OL, and OL."

– **Terrier Buck**

"Hoping the younger players that should've been playing last season (i.e. Sonny Styles, C.J Hicks, etc.) finally get out on the field and also the quarterback competition, even though it's McCord's job to lose."

– **Tiffin Buckeye**

"Beating Michigan. I repeat: beating Michigan."

– **Michael Bauer**

"I'm not sure how much we will be able to tell in the spring but I am anxious to see how Jim Knowles and his defense do in year two of his regime. Are we looking at more of the good we saw in the first 11 games or more of the bad we saw in

the last two?"

– **Poster That Harley Built**

"The quarterback battle obviously stands out, as well as respective battles on the offensive line. I think the most underrated storyline I'm locked in on is the changes in the defense, with Jack Sawyer moving back to the defensive line, Jim Knowles reevaluating the Jack and the battles in the secondary. It seems like there's going to be a significant amount of moving pieces."

– **Jack Emerson, BSB**

"The quarterback battle is of obvious consequence, but I'm interested in seeing how Ohio State's receivers continue to develop with a new quarterback under center. The Buckeyes have obvious stars in Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka (who is out for the spring), but the Buckeyes will need some younger receivers – specifically the freshmen from last season – to start stepping up."

– **Braden Moles, BSB**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Field Goal Frenzy

Appreciated Mark Rea's report in the Feb. 11 issue on the 182 field goals made by Ohio State kickers from 40-plus yards since 1960, partly because I think the "foot" in football is generally undervalued by most fans.

I remember Earle Bruce saying that a field goal from 40 yards should not be missed by a college kicker; missing beyond 40 was more tolerable.

I would like to know how many attempts were made over the years. When Dick Van Raaphorst kicked in the 1960s, I think more 40-yard field goals were attempted, but I don't know if that's true. With more wide-open, high-scoring offenses today, I wonder if the 40-yard kick is eschewed.

Steven Brown

Port Charlotte, Fla.

Analyzing The QB Battle

Should we have faith that the coaches, who know more about football and much more about the players than we fans, will correctly choose QB1? Let's look at the record.

2011: Joe Bauserman is selected over Braxton Miller.

2014: Due to injuries, we must play with the coach's third-string QB. The third-stringer leads us to a national championship.

2015: The staff eventually benches the championship QB, ultimately leading to a senior day performance of a team with Ezekiel Elliot, Michael Thomas, and Curtis Samuel managing less than 200 yards of total offense against a Michigan State team that gave up nearly 500 yards of offense two weeks prior.

2017: J.T. Barrett starts over both

Dwayne Haskins and Joe Burrow, neither of whom – according to Urban Meyer – are even "serviceable." Fortunately, the less-than-serviceable Haskins comes off the bench to rally Ohio State to a win over Michigan.

2018: Day decides that Haskins should start over Burrow. Even ignoring the difference in their pro careers, the decision is made for an offense that relies on the QB run.

2019 and 2021: The coaches get it right! However, the choice was between record-setting OSU QBs who were multi-year Heisman candidates as well as top NFL draft picks vs. candidates who were either true freshmen or who never ended up playing significant minutes at any D-I school. How long did it take the coaches to make what some might call two of the easiest decisions in the history of decisions? Until two weeks before the season started.

In short, although I know much less about football than the coaches, when it comes to choosing QB1, I – and any other fan – can legitimately question whether coaches know best.

Mark Mitchell

Clarion, Pa.

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No. 4	Oct. 1	No. 16	Feb. 11
No. 5	Oct. 8	No. 17	March 4
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No. 9	Nov. 12	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 19	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 26	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 3	No. 24	August

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OPINION

Basketball Buckeyes Finish On Positive Note

It seems somewhat ironic that at the end of a dismal season that included the program's longest losing streak in a quarter-century, the Ohio State men's basketball team should equal its longest postseason run in Chris Holtmann's six years as head coach.

Rather than resembling a collection of individual high school stars thrown together for a weekday shootaround at the local YMCA, the Buckeyes actually looked like a real team while dispatching Wisconsin, Iowa and Michigan State during the Big Ten tournament. It was a three-game postseason win streak that matched a similar run during the 2021 conference tourney.

Things were a little different this time than they were two years ago when Ohio State was headed to a crash-and-burn against 15th-seeded Oral Roberts in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament. Knowing they had very little more to lose, the Buckeyes managed to overcome a goodly amount of postseason adversity – some of it their own doing, some out of their control.

With starting center Zed Key on the bench, his arm in a sling following season-ending shoulder surgery, Ohio State began its Big Ten tournament odyssey by running Wisconsin out of Chicago's United Center for the first 25 minutes. When freshman Brice Sensabaugh hit a pullup jumper at the 15:31 mark of the second half, the Buckeyes had built a 47-20 cushion against the Badgers, who entered the game as a team on the so-called bubble of making the NCAA Tournament.

As has been OSU's modus operandi for much of the season, the Buckeyes squandered most of that 27-point lead and allowed Wisconsin to close within four points in the final minute before salting away a 65-57 victory. The confidence the team seemed to gain from that win carried over the following day with a 73-69 decision against Iowa, an especially gratifying outcome after the Hawkeyes had taken the Buckeyes to the woodshed in mid-February.

Point guard Bruce Thornton, overshadowed most of the season by classmate Sensabaugh, had a coming-out party against Iowa with 17 points and six assists against no turnovers. Thornton backed up that performance the next day during a 68-58 win against Michigan State with a career-high 21 points, six more assists, and again not a single turnover.

It was another game the Buckeyes would likely have lost during their midseason swoon. Not only was Key unavailable, but Sensabaugh was sidelined with a season-ending knee injury. Then when the Spartans cut a nine-point half-time deficit to just two at the 16:35 mark of the second half, everyone who had witnessed an Ohio State basketball game this season was prepared for the worst.

Instead, Holtmann called a 30-second timeout and then got contributions from some unlikely candidates. Felix Okpara, the 6-11 freshman who remains as much project as prospect, grabbed an offensive rebound and then corralled one at the defensive end that Thornton converted into a three-pointer to give the Buckeyes a little more breathing room. Okpara followed with a blocked shot to thwart Michigan State's next possession, and that was followed by another three-ball, this one from senior forward Justice Sueing.

With its lead quickly back to eight points at the 15:00 mark, Ohio State never looked back and Sparty never got closer than six the rest of the way. The fact the Buckeyes succumbed the following afternoon to the double whammy of playing a fourth game in four days and Purdue center Zach Edey, who exerted his 7-4,

305-pound will to the tune of 32 points and 14 rebounds during an 80-66 blowout, shouldn't diminish what OSU accomplished during its conference tournament run.

Thornton had shown on-and-off flashes of what he could do during the regular season, but his output against Wisconsin, Iowa and Michigan State – averages of 17.7 points, 4.7 assists and 1.3 turnovers – proved his capability of becoming an upper-echelon player.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The tournament also showcased Roddy Gayle Jr., another freshman who set a new career-high scoring total with 15 points against Michigan State before resetting it again with 20 against Purdue. In those two games alone, Gayle shot 70.6 percent (12 for 17) from the floor, including 88.9 percent (8 of 9) from three-point territory.

And then there was Okpara, who collected eight rebounds and a career-best five blocks against Michigan State, a performance that included eight points and only three fouls in more than 35 minutes of action. The freshman was hopelessly outclassed by Edey, but that could be said about almost anyone who tried to defend the Purdue star center this season. Even though he fouled out against the Boilermakers, Okpara still managed seven points, four rebounds and a blocked shot. Perhaps after an offseason spent living in the weight room, Ohio State might just have its long sought-after big man after all.

During the current era of seeking immediate improvement through the transfer portal, Holtmann is staking his future in Columbus on an old-school approach of building a winner through recruiting. He has followed last year's crop that was headlined by Sensabaugh (who earned All-Big Ten third-team honors), Thornton (an All-Big Ten tournament pick), Gayle and Okapara with another top-10 class that includes 6-7 power forward Devin Royal, the No. 1 prospect in Ohio, and 6-4 guard Taison Chatman, the No. 1 prospect in Minnesota.

The class could get even better if California four-star guard Bronny James decides to favor Ohio State over UCLA and Oregon. If that name sounds familiar, it should. The kid's full name is LeBron Raymone James Jr.

But even if James doesn't join the fold, the future for Buckeye basketball seems bright. And although some Ohio State fans can't seem to grasp that, others most definitely do.

"I think you can see the future of Ohio State with Okpara, Gayle and Thornton," Purdue head coach Matt Painter told reporters at the Big Ten tournament. "They've got a great class coming, and they've got a great coach. They lost a lot of close games this year, and some people got them. But I think you can see the future of Ohio State and how good they're going to be."

"If you know basketball, you definitely understand that Ohio State – some people got their licks on them this year, but that's going to come to screeching halt. They have a very, very, good young nucleus."

Fun With Numbers

Second-year Ohio State quarterback Devin Brown made some news during the early part of spring football practice, and it had nothing to do with his battle with Kyle McCord for the starting

job. Brown changed his jersey number from 15 to 33, a most decidedly un-quarterback number currently worn by defensive end Jack Sawyer.

Brown explained the switch as his way of paying homage to a legendary figure from a by-gone era.

"The reason behind it was Sammy Baugh," Brown said. "He was the first quarterback inducted into the (Pro Football) Hall of Fame in 1963 ... so he's a legend. That's the original quarterback number, in my opinion. I want to rock the original quarterback number."

Baugh was indeed part of the 17-member inaugural class inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1963. Playing for the Washington football team known as the Redskins in those days, Baugh led the league in passing yardage four times and completion percentage eight times. When he retired following the 1952 season, his career totals of 21,886 yards and 187 TDs were league records.

How Brown became interested in Baugh is anyone's guess. While Baugh grew up in Texas and became an All-America quarterback at TCU (wearing No. 45) before his professional career in the District of Columbia, Brown grew up in Arizona and played his first three years of high school ball for former OSU quarterback Joe Germaine. Brown then transferred to a high school in suburban Salt Lake City, and he ran and threw for 5,311 yards and 65 TDs as a senior before making his way to Columbus.

Paying tribute to Baugh, who died in 2008 at the age of 94, is pretty cool, but No. 33 has a fairly rich history at Ohio State, too.

During the mid-2000s, it was the property of three-time All-America linebacker James Laurinaitis, who recently returned to his alma mater as a graduate assistant on Ryan Day's staff. All-America fullback Bob White wore the number during the late 1950s, and it was the jersey number Pete Johnson wore during the mid-1970s when he was rushing for 56 touchdowns, still an OSU career record. No. 33 was also the number worn during the mid-1930s by All-America center Gomer Jones, who was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1978.

Despite the fact there are no NCAA rules governing jersey numbers – other than two players can't be on the field at the same time wearing the same number – most Ohio State quarterbacks over the past half-century have donned numbers from 1 to 19. The most recent example of a regular QB for the Buckeyes having a higher number was Bill Long, who wore No. 24 as the starter in 1966 and '67.

Before Long, though, it was not at all unusual for an Ohio State quarterback to sport a jersey number in the 20s. During the 1961 season when the Buckeyes won the Football Writers Association of America's version of the national championship, Woody Hayes rotated three players at quarterback, each of whom wore jersey numbers in the 20s – Joe Sparma (24), John Mummey (25) and Bill Mrukowski (26).

Dave Leggett wore No. 22 when he led the Buckeyes to the 1954 national championship, and two years earlier, John Borton shattered the program record book for passing yardage while wearing No. 20. Two decades before that, Tippy Dye was wearing No. 50 during the mid-1930s when he became the first OSU quarterback to beat Michigan three times in a row.

But as far as my research could go, there has never been an Ohio State quarterback – at least not one since the 1930s – who wore No. 33.

Until now.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Spring Practice Opens For Buckeyes

Ohio State kicked off its preparations for the 2023 season on March 7 with the opening of spring practice, the first of 15 practice sessions that will conclude with the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 15 at Ohio Stadium.

BSB has compiled several notable storylines from the first few days of spring practice. Buckeye Sports Bulletin's Annual Spring Preview is scheduled to be mailed on March 28.

Sawyer Back At Defensive End

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said following the Buckeyes' first spring practice that defensive lineman Jack Sawyer will line up at defensive end this spring after playing at the hybrid defensive end/linebacker – or Jack – last season.

"Jack will be a (defensive) end with J.T. (Tuimoloau)," Knowles said. "He'll work

on all those fundamentals of being an end. I think that's important for Jack.

"I feel like he didn't have the improvement or big jump he could have last year because he got involved in the Jack stuff and maybe he wasn't as focused as he could have been to make those improvements at end," Knowles continued. "I want to make sure I keep him at end opposite J.T."

Sawyer had an up-and-down season filling in at the Jack last season, finishing tied for the team high with 4½ sacks while experiencing several quiet outings at the position. Ohio State also saw some brief contributions at the Jack from defensive linemen Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Caden Curry, but Sawyer filled the majority of snaps.

With Sawyer moving away from the Jack, Knowles said the position will not be a significant focus over the next few weeks for Ohio State.

"We did not quite use the position as much as I had hoped last year," Knowles said. "It just didn't seem to develop with our personnel, so this spring I just want to focus on the fundamentals of our four-down and getting better at the fundamentals."

Once he does return focus to the Jack, though, Knowles has several options in mind. One is defensive end Mitchell Melton, who seemed primed to compete for the job last season before suffering a torn ACL in the spring. Another is sophomore linebacker C.J. Hicks, who seems set for a significant role on Ohio State's defense this season but has a logjam at his

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)

position, with linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers both returning.

"I've thought about (the Jack) for C.J., because when directed, he's skilled," Knowles said. "He can get from Point A to Point B quickly. I don't know how much we'll be delving into the Jack this spring, but I think it is something to look at (for C.J. for the fall."

Wideout Burton Suffers Injury

According to Ohio State redshirt freshman quarterback Devin Brown, fellow redshirt freshman wide receiver Caleb Burton suffered an injury during the Buckeyes' first spring practice session.

Following practice, Brown told reporters that Burton said he "heard something pop," though Brown did not elaborate on where Burton's injury originated or on the severity.

"I think Caleb got hurt today, Caleb Burton, but those four guys have grown tremendously," Brown said of Ohio State's second-year wide receivers.

Burton did not play last season as a true freshman and was the only receiver in his class who did not see the field.

Brown Sports No. 33 In Honor Of Baugh

When Ohio State took the field for the

Buckeyes' first spring practice, there was a notable change among the quarterbacks going through workouts.

It wasn't the absence of C.J. Stroud or the addition of Tristan Gebbia (though both notable), but a new look for Brown, boasting the No. 33 on his jersey rather than the No. 15 he wore during his true freshman season.

The now redshirt freshman, looking to compete with Kyle McCord for the starting job entering this season, said he changed his number to honor quarterback Sammy Baugh, who also wore No. 33.

"He was the first quarterback inducted into the (Pro Football) Hall of Fame in 1963 with Washington, so he's a legend," Brown said. "That's the original quarterback number, in my opinion. I want to rock the original quarterback number."

"My Dad has always talked about it. I put it on when I was 7 years old and had never taken it off until high school."

Day said he cautioned Brown that the number would make him stand out but that Brown was all right with some added attention as he prepares to wear the number this season.

"He's never shied away from competition and never shied away from grabbing onto something," Day said. "This is something he feels strongly about. He's going to blaze his own path with that number, and

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Don't Miss Any Of The Spring Football Action

Ohio State spring football is in full swing, and Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be providing ample coverage. The next print issue of BSB, the Spring Football Preview dated April 1, is scheduled to be mailed on March 28.

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

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.

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slighted by losing the hardware.

"Yeah, that definitely does bother me because I think that's one of the things you look back on in your college career, you can point to that. 'I won the best receiver in country award for that year,' " Harrison said. "I think I definitely deserved it. Jalin had a great year as well at Tennessee, but I think I deserved it."

After Harrison, nobody was more surprised that he lost the award than Ohio State offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who made it clear how he felt about the voting.

"Anybody that has two eyes could have seen that he should have gotten that," the recently promoted Hartline said.

But despite the disappointment, Harrison has another shot at the Biletnikoff Award this season, expected to be his final for the Buckeyes before almost certainly becoming another first-round draft pick at wideout for Ohio State. With Jaxon Smith-Njigba off to the NFL, Harrison enters this season as the unquestioned top option for Ohio State and whichever quarterback – McCord or Brown – is under center to begin the year.

Harrison will attempt to boost the Buckeyes back to a Big Ten title and second consecutive appearance in the College Football Playoff – and maybe even win some individual hardware in the meantime – but Hartline said Harrison's goals remain big picture.

"I think his goal is, like a lot of our

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good for him. When you think about his recruitment and everything that went on, he's not a guy that shies away from things, so I have no problem with it."

Brown wasn't the only Buckeye boasting a new number, however, as wide receiver Kyion Grayes switched from No. 17 to No. 7, kicker Parker Lewis moved from No. 23 to No. 24, and offensive tackle Tegra Tshabola boasted No. 77 – former of-

fensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr.'s number – after wearing No. 67 last season.

Safety Sonny Styles is still listed on Ohio State's roster as wearing No. 20, though he was seen through the first two spring practice sessions wearing No. 6.

Harrison, Hartline Comment On Award Snub

It was a surprise to many when Ohio

State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. was not named winner of the Biletnikoff Award in December, with the honor for the nation's best wideout going to Tennessee's Jalin Hyatt.

It was a close call, with Hyatt hauling in 67 receptions for 1,267 yards and 15 touchdowns compared to 77 catches for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns for Harrison, but the Buckeye wideout still felt

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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guys, it's not sheltered at college football," Hartline said. "I think he has perspective and wants to chase his dad (the NFL Hall of Fame receiver of the same name). The small-mindedness, I don't think Marvin has ever possessed that. He's always been pushed to think big, and I think he's probably doing that."

Second-Year Receivers Finding Their Place

Along with Harrison, wideouts Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming make three returning starters for Ohio State at wide receiver entering this next season.

Harrison and Egbuka return as just the second 1,000-yard tandem in team history, while Fleming had a breakout season with 34 receptions for 533 yards and six touchdowns in 2022.

Two veterans are likely to fill out the depth behind them, with graduate Xavier

Johnson and junior Jayden Ballard each supplementing the two-deep, but with Egbuka and Fleming both out for spring practice following offseason injuries, Ohio State's quartet of second-year pass catchers are hoping to make a name for themselves this spring.

"I'm enjoying having these young guys get opportunities, and they're doing a hell of a job," Hartline said. "The second-year guys are making strides."

Burton is out for the time being, but Kojo Antwi, Kaleb Brown and Grayes are all hoping to make impacts in their own ways during March and April.

Antwi was a four-star prospect out of Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert coming out of high school. What sets him apart among his fellow wideouts is an ability to win contested catches, shielding off defenders with his compact 5-11, 192-pound frame, and he views this spring as an opportunity to set himself up for the future.

"We're just trying to learn from the older guys and see how they operate," he said. "When they leave, we'll take over the helm. So this spring, it's critical for our development so we can get ready for fall."

Special teams can be a way for the group to find roles as well. Brown was seen working at punt returner during Ohio State's first set of spring practice sessions, and Grayes' speed and agility make him a clear candidate to be a gunner on punt or cover man on kickoff.

"I'm trying to help in any way possi-

ble," Grayes said. "I want to make sure that they see me out there."

Brown, a former four-star out of Chicago St. Rita, is the pure slot receiver of the bunch. With Johnson and Egbuka potentially in their final years as Ohio State's options at the position, a great year of development could set up Brown well for a starting spot down the road. He played running back in high school, which he feels differentiates him as an athlete in space.

"My ability to run after the catch, that'd be the No. 1 thing," Brown said. "Just making plays as a big-time player when it counts."

Grayes hails from Chandler, Ariz., and vaulted from being a three-star while Ohio State was recruiting him to a top-100 prospect by the time all was said and done. He's been gaining confidence over the past year, and even hauled in a pass last season.

"I thought I was prepared mentally (for college football), but looking at it now, I've changed a lot and I feel a lot better going out there on the field," he said. "I feel more comfortable being in that offense."

All the second-years will be getting a push from Ohio State's incoming freshman class. Four-stars Bryson Rodgers, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate are already on campus, with five-star Brandon Inniss to arrive in the fall.

"I've already seen (the push happening), but it's no different than when Emeka and Marvin and these guys came in behind Jaxon and Julian, that whole class," Hartline said. "It's no different. We've had that consistency. I love seeing it so early on."

Stroud Made "Really Hard" Decision To Leave OSU

It was an intriguing few days back in January when Stroud had yet to announce his intention to enter his name into the NFL draft, even when it appeared the decision was all but a formality.

Stroud did eventually make that announcement, officially ending his Ohio State career after three years in Columbus and two seasons as a starter, but he said on March 3 at the NFL Scouting Combine that the decision to either leave or return was closer than most imagined.

"I was honestly going to come back to school," Stroud said. "It was really hard for me to leave a place like Ohio State, where it takes time to get to where I was at. It takes a lot of homework, a lot of trust and a lot of building camaraderie off the field. That's something you can't throw in the trash right away. I don't feel like I did that. Coming to the league was a smart decision for me, but it was really hard."

Stroud, a two-time Heisman Trophy finalist, left with his name listed throughout Ohio State's record books, finishing second in school history in passing yards (8,123), passing touchdowns (85) and completion percentage (69.3) while twice winning Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year.

What Ohio State was not able to accomplish in Stroud's two seasons as a

starter, though, was knocking off Michigan, winning the Big Ten or winning a national title, and those factors all led to Stroud considering a return to the Buckeyes.

"Not beating That Team Up North, not winning a national championship. Those were two goals of mine," he said. "And then, of course, not winning the Heisman was, I feel, because of those losses. That kind of hurts. I feel like I could have won two Heismans back-to-back if I were to win those two games (against Michigan)."

Despite the disappointment of not achieving those goals, Stroud is excited to look forward to what the NFL has to offer for him while approaching a new set of goals at the next level wherever he lands.

"At the end of the day, it's a part of God's plan, and I don't question that," he said. "It put a little more fire in me, another chip on my shoulder. I'm excited to go to the league and do better things than that because that wasn't in God's plan, so let's see what the league has for me now."

Stroud worked out at the NFL Scouting Combine (more on page 14) and had an impressive outing, certainly boosting the signal caller's draft stock for the 2023 NFL draft. He is widely expected to be a top-10 pick and is in contention to be the first quarterback off the board.

Smith-Njigba Reflects On Frustrating Final Season

Speaking at the NFL Scouting Combine on March 3 and for the first time since suffering a hamstring injury that kept him out for almost all of his final season in college, Smith-Njigba said it was a frustrating year as he dealt with the first long-term injury of his playing career.

"I never really had an injury that set me out for games or even practices or stuff like that," he said. "But I feel like I'm going to come out a better person, better man, better player. I'm definitely thankful – just looking at it as a positive. I think it will be beneficial for me at the end of the day."

Smith-Njigba appeared in just two games last season for Ohio State, playing in the first half of the season opener against Notre Dame before suffering his hamstring injury. Smith-Njigba returned several weeks later when the Buckeyes hosted Iowa, but again, he played in only the first half of what ended up being his final appearance for Ohio State.

Day and his staff expressed optimism throughout the season that Smith-Njigba would return, and while Smith-Njigba said he wanted to be on the field, he also said that he could have been more patient in his recovery.

"I didn't know too much about hamstrings," he said. "I never really dealt with (an injury there). So wish I had more information, wish I would have definitely dealt with it better."

Despite the disappointment of his junior season, his talent was still evident through his two seasons and change at



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Ohio State. He finished his career with 1,698 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns, including single-season records for the Buckeyes with 1,606 receiving yards and 95 receptions and setting single-game records for receptions (15) and receiving yards (347), all in the 2021 season.

That's not to mention the numerous highlight catches during his career. All that contributes to Smith-Njigba arguing his playmaking ability in the upcoming NFL draft is second-to-none.

Women's Hockey Team Reaches Frozen Four

The top-ranked Ohio State women's hockey team is on to the Frozen Four for the third consecutive season after knocking off No. 8 Quinnipiac, 5-2, at the OSU Ice Rink on March 11.

The Buckeyes, who entered the NCAA tournament as the top seed, advanced to the national semifinals behind two goals from standout defenseman Sophie Jaques, who was named Western Collegiate Hockey Association Player of the Year on March 2.

In the quarterfinals against Quinnipiac, Ohio State outshot the Bobcats 44-23, including a 24-3 edge in the second period that led to a 2-1 advantage at the end of the frame.

After Quinnipiac managed to grab its lone lead in the first, forward Gabby Rosenthal broke through for Ohio State with 12:12 gone by in the second period off a power play. Shortly after, defenseman Lauren Bernard fired one home to give Ohio State a 2-1 advantage at 16:00 in the frame, building a lead that the Buckeyes

would not relinquish.

Ohio State's lead grew to 4-1 when forward Emma Peschel and Jaques each added a goal within the first 15 minutes of the third period, and after a responding goal from Quinnipiac, Jaques scored her second of the game on an empty netter with 29 seconds remaining to secure Ohio State's advancement to the Frozen Four.

After winning the first national championship in school history a season ago, the Buckeyes are one contest closer to repeating. Ohio State will meet No. 5 Northeastern, which knocked off No. 4 Yale, in the Frozen Four semifinals in Duluth, Minn., on March 17. The winner will face either Wisconsin or No. 2 Minnesota on March 19.

Muzerall Named Co-WCHA Coach Of The Year

Much of the women's hockey program's success can be attributed to head coach Nadine Muzerall, who earned a significant honor on March 2 when she was named Co-WCHA Coach of the Year along with St. Cloud State's Brian Idalski.

Ranked No. 1 in the USCHO's most recent poll and holding that top spot for most of the season, Ohio State hasn't suffered any complacency since winning its first national title in program history last year. The Buckeyes are 32-5-2 on the season entering the Frozen Four, already matching the program record for wins in a season with games yet to play.

In addition to another berth in the Frozen Four – the third consecutive for the Buckeyes and fourth in the last six seasons – Ohio State took home the program's first ever WCHA regular-season title this season, boasting a 23-4-1 record in conference play. Muzerall, now in her seventh season at Ohio State, has won WCHA Coach of the Year on four occasions, most recently last season.

Aquilla Claims Fourth Shot Put National Title

Ohio State shot putter Adelaide Aquilla continued her dominant career at the NCAA Indoor National Championships on March 11 in Albuquerque, N.M., claiming her fourth national title for shot put.

Aquilla tossed an indoor personal record of 19.28 meters, breaking her own indoor program-record throw of 19.09 meters at the South Carolina Challenge on Feb. 21, 2021. She previously won the indoor and outdoor national championships in 2021 before winning the outdoor national championship last season with an NCAA-record throw of 19.64 meters.



Adelaide Aquilla

Aquilla is a four-time All-American in shot put and showcased her skills on the international level last year as a member of Team USA in the 2021 Tokyo Summer Olympics. Her quest for a fifth national title begins on March 17 at the Bulls Invitational on the campus of South Florida in Tampa, Fla.

Ruck Tosses Perfect Game For Softball Bucks

Ohio State junior Emily Ruck threw just the fourth perfect game in the softball program's history on March 10, leading the Buckeyes to an 8-0, run-rule win over Canisius.

Ruck, a native of Westerville, Ohio, recorded a career-high 12 strikeouts in the win, recovering after a 6-4 loss earlier in the day to Coastal Carolina. She had appeared in eight games this season for the Buckeyes with a 2-4 record and a 3.30 ERA through March 11 and had pitched

a complete game in three of her seven starts.

The last perfect game by an Ohio State pitcher was by Jamee Juarez on April 18, 2007, against IUPUI. Others include Kristi DeVries throwing a perfect game on March 6, 2004, against Wright State and Katie Chain on April 3, 2001, against Miami (Ohio).

The perfect game also marks the second no-hitter for Ruck, the other coming on March 13, 2022, in an 8-0 win over UMass. In 30 appearances for Ohio State over the last three seasons, Ruck has a 7-6 record with a 3.38 ERA and 89 strikeouts to just 40 walks. During that time, she pitched five complete games.

Ohio State Coaches To Speak At Clinic

Ohio State's annual coaches clinic is set for April 13-15, and several current and former coaches will take part in the festivities.

Day and the rest of Ohio State's coaching staff will all be featured as speakers, and former head coaches John Cooper, Urban Meyer and Jim Tressel will also speak at the event.

Other speakers include former Ohio State quarterback Kirk Herbstreit and current Kentucky head coach Mark Stoops, a native of Youngstown, Ohio.

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



Gabby Rosenthal

Big Ten On Notice After Tournament Run

Continued From Page 1

water, waiting for a torturous season to come to an end, but the Buckeyes flipped the script from there. Signs of a turnaround became evident in a 75-71 loss to Penn State, in which the Nittany Lions needed a miracle performance from guard Jalen Pickett – including 21 points in the second half – to ward off the hungry Buckeyes.

Ohio State then rolled over a pair of surefire NCAA Tournament teams with double-digit wins over Illinois and then-No. 21 Maryland, snapping a nine-game losing streak in the process. Although the Buckeyes faced a setback with an 84-78 loss to Michigan State at the Breslin Center in the regular-season finale, Ohio State coasted into the Big Ten tournament with some momentum.

“We’re doing things the right way,” guard Sean McNeil said after the win over Maryland. “We’ve been doing things the right way. We’re going to continue to trust and do whatever Coach tells us to do. We’re playing the right way. We just haven’t had the result as far as wins and losses go, but knock on wood, we’re getting hot at the right time.”

Holtmann also felt the momentum shifting for his squad, even going as far back as the Buckeyes’ 82-55 loss to Purdue on Feb. 19, pointing to Ohio State’s play in certain stretches despite the 27-point defeat.

“There is a way you need to play when

you’re struggling and maybe you’re down,” Holtmann said on March 9. “I think our team had to learn to play the right way when we go through adversity in games, and that’s been a hard lesson for us, and it’s taken us a minute to understand that.”

“There’s a way you’ve got to play to give yourself a chance. We’ve been saying that over and over, and I think it’s been validated in how our guys have performed, really starting with the first half at Purdue. You play the right way, you give yourselves a chance. We’ve done that.”

Slotting in as the No. 13 seed and in need of five wins in five days to secure the Big Ten’s automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament, the Buckeyes showed they wouldn’t roll over and die. Ohio State delivered an opening-round 65-57 win over 12th-seeded Wisconsin, in which it led by as many as 27 points, before knocking off fifth-seeded Iowa in a 73-69 thriller to advance to the quarterfinal, becoming just the third No. 13 seed to reach the third day of the conference tournament.

Ohio State continued to make history in the quarterfinal, knocking off fourth-seed Michigan State, 68-58, to become the lowest seed to make the semifinals in Big Ten tournament history. The Buckeyes ultimately ran into the buzz saw that was top-seeded Purdue in the semifinals and couldn’t handle 7-4 center Zach Edey, the Big Ten Player of the Year, who led the Boil-

ermakers to an 80-66 triumph over Ohio State with 32 points and 14 rebounds.

The Buckeyes were unable to finish the job and punch their ticket to the NCAA Tournament, but they gained the respect of their conference counterparts despite their struggles to compete in the regular season.

“You can see the heart of Ohio State, and those guys really played well in this tournament,” Purdue head coach Matt Painter said after the Boilers’ victory. “We were fortunate to play them after they’d already played three games and we’ve only played one.”

“I think you can see the future of Ohio State with (Felix) Okpara, (Roddy Gayle Jr.), and Bruce Thornton. They’ve got a great class coming, and they’ve got a great coach. They lost a lot of close games this year, and some people got them. But I think you can see the future of Ohio State and how good they’re going to be.”

As Painter alluded to, the most encouraging aspect of Ohio State’s deep run in the conference tournament was the emergence of several of its first-year players.

Thornton had previously showcased his skills during Ohio State’s 10-3 start to the season before he admittedly hit the metaphorical freshman wall, seeing a dip in his efficiency while the Buckeyes’ campaign spiraled into the abyss. But after Thornton scored just three points in that loss to Purdue on Feb. 19, he registered double-digit scoring outings in the next seven games while playing a key role in getting the Buckeyes back on track.

During the Big Ten tournament, Thornton led the Buckeyes in scoring in two of the four games, pushing Ohio State past Iowa and Michigan State with 17- and 21-point outings, and he averaged 15.5 points and 4.3 assists during the Cinderella run. After Thornton – who was named to the all-tournament team – was able to revitalize his season late in the campaign, he said he’s looking for continual growth

in the offseason in order to right the wrongs of this season next year.

“(My plan is) just getting better. Playing this year with these guys is showing an example how to lead, how to be that top player and lead and get wins,” Thornton said after the conference tournament loss to Purdue. “It’s just so hard in this league trying to fight back when you’re in the hole so deep. That’s one thing I’m going to take away – we’ve got to do our work early and try to get (as many) wins as much as we can, try to get double byes, at least a single bye, instead of playing four games. It showed a real difference (against Purdue).”

“Next year, I have to show the example to the new guys coming up how to play Ohio State basketball.”

Gayle also broke out during the run, providing the Buckeyes with timely scoring and big-time buckets. The Niagara Falls, N.Y., native sank a late go-ahead three-pointer against Iowa to push Ohio State into a 64-61 lead while scoring nine of the team’s last 18 points to carry his squad to the finish line.

Against Michigan State, Gayle tallied 12 of his then-career-high 15 points in the second half, this time scoring seven consecutive points for the Buckeyes to help put the game out of reach. He then put on a show in the first half against Purdue, splashing five three-pointers in the frame while setting a new career high in scoring with 16 points in the game’s first 20 minutes and 20 points total. He produced only four points in the second half, but Gayle’s imprint on Ohio State’s deep run did not go unnoticed.

Over the four games, Gayle produced 12.0 points per game – up from 3.7 points per game during the regular season – while connecting on 9 of 11 three-point attempts.

“I was really proud of Roddy,” Holtmann said. “He’s put in a lot of work, and he’s had Bruce and other guys who have kind of had really big seasons. Sometimes you can compare yourself to them, and it can bother you. I think he’s just stayed with working. We’ve had a lot of conversations, and he’s just stayed with it, stayed working.”

“I was really happy for Roddy to see this moment because we have a really high-level belief in what he’s going to be. We just really do.”

Okpara also displayed his defensive acumen while showing glimpses of his growing offensive game. On the defensive end, Okpara registered nine blocks in the four games, including a career-high five denials against Michigan State.

But the most intriguing development from Okpara, dating back to the final stretch of the regular season, was his growth on the offensive end. As the season wore on, Okpara emerged as a rim-running threat for the Buckeyes, scoring primarily as a roller on pick-and-roll opportunities and a lob threat on alley-oops. Okpara did all of those things during the Big Ten tournament, while also displaying some growth in his post game.

In the four games, Okpara averaged 5.0 points – up from 3.8 points per game during the regular season – while noting that his confidence as a scorer grew.

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ing that I can play through mistakes,” he said. “Even though I can play through mistakes, I just tried to – with the ball offensively – make fewer mistakes so I can stay on the court. Also, I put a lot more trust in my teammates. I feel like those two things played a big role in my development offensively.”

Not to be forgotten is the season-long emergence of forward Brice Sensabaugh, who led the Buckeyes in scoring with 16.3 points per game on 48.2 percent shooting, including a 40.5 percent clip from beyond the arc. Sensabaugh remained an offensive threat for the Buckeyes down the stretch, producing six straight double-digit scoring efforts entering the Big Ten tournament.

In the opening round, Sensabaugh scored just nine points against the Badgers but impacted the game in other ways, pulling down 11 rebounds while adding a block in the win. Although Sensabaugh did not provide his usual scoring punch, Holtmann emphasized that he’s improved at helping the Buckeyes in areas outside of scoring as the campaign has worn on.

“He’s played good offensive basketball, and I think he rebounded it well today,” Holtmann said after the win over Wisconsin. “He’s impacting winning. That’s what players do.

“Teams are giving him a lot of attention. He’s been highly efficient these last couple weeks offensively, and I think any coach, anybody who watches him says, ‘Man, that kid has really improved in terms of reading the game, making the right read, playing the way his team needs him to play,’ and

I’m proud of him for that. He just needs to keep doing that.”

Sensabaugh settled back into an offensive groove against Iowa, tallying 16 points, but disaster struck late in the game. With a little over three minutes remaining in the contest, Sensabaugh called to the sideline for a substitution after tweaking his knee and was held out for the rest of the contest. Sensabaugh was unable to undergo testing on the knee prior to the game against



Brice Sensabaugh

Michigan State, which held him out of the game. After undergoing initial testing by the Ohio State medical staff on the evening of March 10, it was announced the next day that Sensabaugh would be out for the remainder of the season.

While the severity of Sensabaugh’s injury remains up in the air, his future status as a Buckeye is also in question. The Orlando native has been touted as a potential first-round pick in the 2023 NBA draft and could potentially become the second one-and-done out of Ohio State in as many years, joining San Antonio Spurs guard Malaki Branham.

If the Buckeyes can get Sensabaugh back in the fold next season, it would be a major win for Holtmann and his staff, and his long-term plan of combining the talent from the 2022 and 2023 recruiting classes would come to fruition.

Speaking of the Buckeyes’ most recent recruiting class, Holtmann has brought in one of the nation’s best, ranking No. 6 in the country, according to 247Sports. Minneapolis Totino-Grace combo guard Taison Chatman (6-4, 170) is expected to give the Buckeyes a scoring punch in the backcourt, while Wichita (Kan.) Sunrise Christian four-star forward Scotty Middleton (6-6, 180) and Pickerington (Ohio) Central four-star forward Devin Royal (6-7, 210) provide the Buckeyes with versatility on the wing.

Ohio State will also get some much-needed depth inside, adding St. Marys (Ohio) Memorial three-star center Austin Parks – who Holtmann has said is up to 6-11 and 270 pounds – to slot in alongside Zed Key and Okpara.

“It’s a really exceptional class on paper, but more importantly, I think it’s another really good class,” Holtmann said in November. “It’s back-to-back really good classes, that I think fit us, fit our program, fit the kind of versatility and size that we’re looking to add.

“We’re really excited about Devin, Scotty, Austin and Taison,” he continued. “We have a diverse group in terms of their skill sets and how they fit each other, and backing that up with the current freshman class we have here is exciting for us, for sure.”

With the Buckeyes set to lose Isaac Likekele, Sean McNeil and Justice Sueing, Key, Eugene Brown III and Kalen Etzler would likely serve as the team’s primary veteran leaders next season – that is, if all remain in Columbus rather than eyeing

new homes in the transfer portal. Veteran leadership may be thin, but the Buckeyes already have a high-level influencer in Thornton – who was elevated to captain in the middle of the season – that will likely be relied on for further guidance to the team’s youthful makeup.

Although the Buckeyes endured plenty of struggles during this season, it’s abundantly clear that the team never quit, evidenced by their historic run through the Big Ten tournament. Not only did Ohio State show its mental fortitude, but it also sent a warning shot to the rest of the Big Ten that the Buckeyes are not to be trifled with in the years ahead, and their conference counterparts have already taken notice.

“You get to a certain point in the season where people understand about sacrificing and doing things that affect winning,” Painter said. “I think with their youth and their injuries, it took them a little bit longer. Then when you lose closer games, it affects you differently. Then obviously the way they’ve played here in this tournament just shows you how good of a coach (Holtmann) is, first of all, and the pieces that they have, even when they’re shorthanded. How does this look with Zed Key and Brice Sensabaugh out there?

“Their future is bright. If you know basketball, you definitely understand that Ohio State – some people got their licks on them this year, but that’s going to come to a screeching halt. They have a very, very good young nucleus.”



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OSU Looking Ahead To NCAA Tournament

Continued From Page 1

shared competitive character.

"They really like each other, and they play for each other," McGuff said. "That's a real motivating factor – they don't want to let each other down. It's been a great team to coach because of that. If you do this long enough, you're going to have years with great chemistry and you're going to have years of not so good (chemistry). This is one of my favorite teams I've ever had a chance to coach because of how much they enjoy being around each other."

Even without an obvious option to fill in for Greene or Sheldon, there was no shortage of Buckeyes willing to step in. Rikki Harris, who played some point guard in high school, saw the biggest focus, starting all but one of Ohio State's final 20 games heading into the tournament. She went from averaging around 20 minutes per contest to playing fewer than 30 minutes just five times over the last 20 games, and she added a strong presence on defense by accumulating 51 steals, third most on the team.

"Credit to Rikki Harris, who's kind of shouldered the bulk of that burden for somebody to step up," McGuff said. "She's done everything she possibly can to help us."

But when it wasn't Harris, Taylor Mikesell also spent some time at the point, and sophomore Kaitlyn Costner even saw some time later in the season when Ohio State's short rotation looked for brief respites. It wasn't an ideal scenario playing without Greene or Sheldon, but it was made easier given that several Buckeyes were open to expanding their role to help boost the team.

"Obviously, it hurts that we have teammates that get hurt and are out for the season or for however long it is, but it just shows how versatile each of us are," Thierry said. "We're able to play multiple positions and adapt to different changes that happen on the team, and that kind of just shows how well we work with each other and (how) we're able to fulfill different roles on the team. And that's what's helped us win despite having injuries on the team."

"Honestly, this whole team can really play, and we have reliable people that come off the bench too and are able to put up good points and give us good minutes. And so I just think that's helped us a lot."

It's all a matter of playing for each other, a common feeling among the squad that comes from having developed such a deep bond. Ohio State's roster is filled with players from all different walks of life, ranging from freshmen who hail from Ohio such as McMahan and guard Mya Perry to a senior forwards like Rebeka Mikulášiková and Karla Vreš, who respectively hail from Nitra, Slovakia, and Zagreb, Croatia. It's those differences, according to McMahan, that have created such a strong chemistry among Ohio State's 14 scholarship players.

"I feel like we all have a ton of different personalities, but all those different personalities jell really well," McMahan said. "I feel like our chemistry that we have, there's not one weird vibe that we get. We all just jell very well together. That definitely helps us on the court."

Thierry said that chemistry was built



SONNY BROCKWAY

MAKING A RUN — Ohio State and head coach Kevin McGuff (center) are looking to build on last season's tournament success, which had the Buckeyes make a surprise run to the Sweet 16. Ohio State enters this year's tournament as a No. 3 seed and will host first- and second-round games.

through the trials experienced by the team this season. Beyond Greene and Sheldon's injuries, the Buckeyes suffered a three-game skid, including their first loss of the year, and finished the regular season by losing six of their last 10 games, a stretch that featured several blowout losses to the top teams in the conference.

But it was those challenges that helped make Ohio State better, buying into the team culture to turn those struggles into something constructive to use moving forward.

"Individually, we all know that it's important to go through adversity at times, not just staying high and seeing all these wins and stuff," Thierry said. "It's important to have those moments where we have to overcome struggles. But also I think it's part of our team culture that we talked about in practice, and just making sure that we're putting ourselves in those positions to overcome adversity as best we can."

That all led up to Ohio State's trip to Minneapolis for the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament. Entering as the No. 4 seed, the Buckeyes dispatched No. 5 Michigan in the quarterfinals before overcoming a 24-point deficit in the semifinals against No. 2 Indiana, setting a new record for the largest comeback in the history of the tournament.

"It was pretty wild," McGuff said. "I think one of the biggest things is it's hard to go down 24 and win a game against anybody, but especially a great team like Indiana. Not only are they a great team, they're well coached, they're very organized, and they have mature, older players who don't get rattled. So to be able to come back against such a great team was really something special."

While Ohio State's win made history, it was not an unusual position for the Buckeyes. McGuff's squad overcame previous deficits this season of 18 points against South Florida, 17 points against Illinois as well as 14 points at Louisville and 12 points against Tennessee in the season opener, all games that happened during Ohio State's

19-0 start to the campaign.

Of those games, Sheldon was on the court only against the Volunteers, but returning after an extended absence for the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, she was able to fit right back in and display that spirit the rest of the team utilized throughout the season.

"Just staying together, using each other, building energy off of each other, and making sure everybody had the same mind-set," she said after taking the court once again. "We just rely on each other in situations like that, and it worked."

Emotional wins over the Wolverines and Hoosiers were followed by some less-than-stellar play against Iowa in the conference title game, where the Buckeyes fell 105-72. Hawkeye guard Caitlin Clark – the Big Ten Player of the Year – notched her second triple-double of the season against Ohio State.

Despite the disappointment, the Buckeyes' heads were held high after the game. The result wasn't what anyone wanted, but it left Ohio State in a familiar spot, ready to regroup after a challenging experience and look ahead to what's coming up.

"I think all we can do is move on to the next," McMahan said. "We know what we've got to work on, so we've got two weeks of practice. Buckle down, take care of what we need to take care of, and be ready to come out and play our game."

Bucks To Host James Madison

When the NCAA Women's Selection Show took place on March 12, the broadcast frequently cut to feeds showing different schools celebrating their invitation to the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament, ranging from teams living on the bubble to those like South Carolina and Stanford that already knew they were in.

Midway through the show, the unveiling finally arrived at Ohio State's location on the bracket. The Buckeyes were announced as a

No. 3 seed in the Seattle Regional 3, set to host No. 14 James Madison at The Schottenstein Center on March 18 at 1:30 p.m.

While other teams exploded in celebration, Ohio State settled for a handful of claps and the occasional high five, not wanting to make a spectacle out of making The Big Dance, and it showed that the Buckeyes are remaining about their business entering the tournament.

"We honestly just practiced, so we're all tired," Sheldon said with a laugh. "We might not look that excited, but we're definitely excited."

The Buckeyes will open against the Dukes at home, afforded the opportunity to host first- and second-round games by finishing as one of the top 16 seeds. The other game hosted at The Schottenstein Center will be No. 6 North Carolina facing either No. 11 Purdue or St. John's, which will play in the First Four in Columbus on March 16 for the right to face the Tar Heels on March 18, with that winner playing either Ohio State or James Madison on March 20.

"We're really excited to have an opportunity to play at home," McGuff said. "Our fans have been outstanding this year, and so I'm really hopeful we can have a great crowd here on Saturday. I think that would be a really big deal."

If the Buckeyes do make it past the opening weekend, they would play in Seattle through the Elite Eight. As for Ohio State's opponent, the Dukes finished 26-7 through the end of the Sun Belt Tournament, dominating Texas State, 81-51, to win the conference tournament and also winning the conference's regular-season title.

Guard Kiki Jefferson leads James Madison, averaging a team-high 18.3 points and 7.9 rebounds per game, while guard Peyton McDaniel (11.6 points) and center Kseniia Kozlova (10.7 points) also average double digits. In addition to her scoring output, Kozlova – who stands 6-4 – is also the Dukes' best shooter, nailing 57.2 percent of her shots this season.

Ohio State is 6-0 against James Madison all time, with the Buckeyes' most recent win coming on March 21, 2015, in the first round of the NCAA tournament. This is the Dukes' 13th appearance in the NCAA tournament, with their most recent coming in 2016.

"I know they do a really good job and they'll be prepared," McGuff said. "They've got some good players, so it will be a challenge for us. But we're excited to have the opportunity."

Elsewhere in Ohio State's bracket, the top seed is Virginia Tech, followed by No. 2 UConn and No. 4 Tennessee, whom the Buckeyes took down in their season opener. But those are all matchups that might come down the line. First up is James Madison, where Ohio State will try to begin a run in the tournament to build off last season's appearance in the Sweet 16.

"We've got a really tight-knit group," Sheldon said. "We love playing with each other. We have really good chemistry and we've been working hard all year for this. This is exciting for us – just ready to get back out there."

Stokes Hoping To Stoke Flames At Safety

By **ANDY ANDERS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It was this time last year that then-freshman Kye Stokes stoked up quite the burst of flames with his spring-game performance. He racked up nine tackles and broke up two passes in an outing that surpassed the development timeline given that Stokes had been on campus for only a couple of months, and it caught the eye of Ohio State's coaching staff.

"Kye has had a good, good spring," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said after the scrimmage last April. "Without watching the film, I thought he had a great game just because he showed up and flashed and it looked like he rose to the occasion."

"What you worry about with a young guy is the bright lights, and it looked like it was no problem for him. He really stepped up, so I'm expecting good things for him. I liked him all along, but I was impressed today."

That may not have translated to much playing time in the fall, with Stokes mainly seeing the field on special teams and occasionally at safety in garbage time. But with musical chairs going on at safety this off-season, Stokes is hoping he can grab a seat.

"I think I still have some growing to do, some maturing to do as an athlete," Stokes said. "But I think when my number is called, I'll be ready."

Stokes' spring game outperformed his recruiting pedigree, at least by Ohio State standards. It's usually five-star or top-100 prospects who are expected to turn heads as freshmen in Columbus given the level to which head coach Ryan Day and staff recruit.

The safety exited Seffner (Fla.) Armwood High School as a four-star prospect, ranked just 351st overall in the 247Sports composite rankings, the No. 16 athlete and 43rd-best recruit out of Florida. Of the 21 prospects signed by Ohio State in the class of 2022, only two Buckeyes ranked lower nationally than Stokes.

After enrolling early at Ohio State, however, Stokes made it known his ceiling could be higher than those rankings, and it wasn't just his spring-game showcase. He became the first freshman from his class to shed his black stripe, doing so on April 8, 2022.

"The first thing you notice is his smile and his attitude every day is just excellent," Day said the following week. "It's just contagious. I mean, he constantly just has a lot of energy. On the field, athletically, he's got a really high ceiling. His movement is excellent. His range, his ability to change direction, his ball skills, covering skills."

That's not to say his freshman year was without its valleys. Stokes got a rude welcome to major-college football the first time he tried to tackle running back Miyan Williams in practice.

"I tried to go at it with Miyan," Stokes said. "It didn't end too well. It wasn't too bad. It was just, 'This is real.'"

Outside of special teams duty, Stokes played only when games were well in hand for Ohio State during his freshman season. He picked up nine tackles – one for loss – and a forced fumble in eight games, though he did not appear in any of the Buckeyes'



FILE PHOTO

OPEN FOR BUSINESS — Ohio State sophomore safety Kye Stokes is looking to make an impact this season with several safety spots open for competition.

final three contests against Maryland, Michigan or Georgia.

With the speed and range he showed in last year's spring game and in his brief glimpses on the field last season, it doesn't seem as though athleticism is where Stokes needs to improve from his first year to his second. The mental side of things – learning the defense, angles and play recognition skills – are where he felt he made the biggest strides, with the assistance of safeties coach Perry Eliano.

"I've grown in how I approach practices and really the mental part of the game because I feel like that's what separates the good from the great, is what's up in here (your mind)," Stokes said. "Coach, he did a really good job of preparing me mentally, more than anything."

Stokes showed he still had work to do in that area late in Ohio State's win against Wisconsin on Sept. 24. Opposing running back Braelon Allen had mostly been hemmed in by the Buckeyes all contest, but with Ohio State ahead 52-14 in the fourth

quarter, Allen slipped through the front seven, leaving Stokes as the last line of defense.

Stokes took an angle far too flat to the line of scrimmage, and Allen looped around him for a 75-yard touchdown run, a play that was of little consequence to the game but showed that the then-freshman still had some growing pains to go through. Eliano feels as though he's stepped it up from there, however.

"I think the growth for Kye on and off the field has been tremendous," Eliano told BSB. "And I think the beauty of it is that he's still got a lot of growing to do. But the thing I love about him is that he's coachable. He's got an open mind, he's willing to learn, he's willing to be coached hard and he wants to be the very best he can be on and off the field."

Someone who's advised Stokes in his development is former Ohio State linebacker Darron Lee, who spent five seasons in the NFL with the Buffalo Bills, Kansas City Chiefs and New York Jets from 2016-20. Lee reached out to Stokes via Twitter, and the two have been "chopping it up" ever since, according to the native Floridian.

"He's told me the minor things that he did to put him in the position that he is in now," Stokes said. "What he did through college and even what he was doing in the league to keep himself at that high of a level. I think he's a really good resource."

It will take a maximization of Stokes' efforts and abilities to make an impact this upcoming season. A big battle is brewing at safety, and Stokes will have heavy competition from returning starter Lathan Ransom for the team's "adjuster" or field safety role. Ronnie Hickman vacated the spot to leave for the NFL draft, and while Ransom started at "bandit" or boundary safety a year ago, his athletic skill set and training at the position in practice make him an easy candidate to slide over.

Josh Proctor, fellow sophomore Sonny Styles and Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter could also be factors, although they likely have a better chance to see the field in safety roles other than adjuster. In keeping up with the flock attempting to soar to a starting spot, Stokes has kept his focus on giving maximum effort and attention to every rep in practice.

"Practice reps become game reality," he said. "So the way you practice is the way you play."

And there's no better time to get those reps than during spring practice, which presents another opportunity for Stokes. If he maintains his growth mind-set, he could contribute to Ohio State's defense in a more impactful way entering this next campaign.

"He's a tremendous young man," Eliano said. "He's got a great family. He was raised the right way. Guys want to be coached to be the very best they can be. That's what great players want. He has that. He wants to be told, 'You've got to do this better.' He asks, 'What can I do better?' And that's what you appreciate as a coach."

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Quarterback Race Headlines Position Battles

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite any critiques one can loft at Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, there's one area he has yet to falter in: procuring and developing talent at football's most important position.

Being brought aboard the Buckeyes' coaching staff specifically to coach quarterbacks and help coordinate the offense in 2017, Day oversaw the end of J.T. Barrett's four-year tenure as starter under center. When Barrett left, Dwayne Haskins followed and posted Big Ten single-season records for passing yards and touchdowns en route to being a Heisman Trophy finalist and a first-round NFL draft pick.

Haskins left and Justin Fields transferred in from Georgia, becoming a Heisman Trophy finalist in 2019 and making two appearances in the College Football Playoff before becoming a first-round draft pick in his own right. C.J. Stroud followed a similar script, finishing his Ohio State career as a two-time Heisman Trophy finalist, and he is a near-lock to be yet another first-round NFL draft pick.

Now, two questions linger: Can Day find an elite replacement at quarterback a fourth time? And if so, who?

Of course, those aren't the only personnel-related questions circulating around spring practice in Columbus ahead of the spring game on April 15. Position battles rage on the offensive line, at cornerback and at safety, and here's what is known about each so far.

Quarterback

On paper, there's enough talent between the two quarterbacks competing to take over for Stroud that one of them should find success.

Kyle McCord is a former five-star out of Philadelphia St. Joseph's, whose cannon of an arm and savvy drove him to capture

three state championships in the highest division of high school football in Pennsylvania. Devin Brown is a top-50 national recruit in his own right, hailing from Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon and possessing the better running ability of the two.

"The first thing we're looking for is leadership," Day said after spring practiced opened on March 7. "You have to be felt and heard. I saw that today. That was a really encouraging thing. I heard – maybe after a good play or a bad play, it didn't matter – good leadership out there. Because at the end of the day, it's our job as quarterbacks to lead the team and to drive the team down the field and to score touchdowns."

McCord is 41 of 58 in two seasons for a strong 70.7 completion percentage, with 606 yards and three touchdowns against two interceptions. He's made one start in his career as a true freshman against Akron, filling in for an injured Stroud.

Inexperience hasn't been an issue for Ohio State quarterbacks in the past, however. Stroud hadn't attempted a single throw at the collegiate level before taking over in 2021, though he did have some early struggles that year. Despite the lack of playing time, McCord said he can be a playmaker for Ohio State.

"Whatever the team needs me to do to win, that's what I'm going to do," he said. "Obviously I think the film will speak for itself (in terms of my ability), but at the end of the day, I'm just a competitor."

Brown has even less experience than McCord, entering games last season only to hand the ball off and rush one time for just a yard. His focus has been on adjusting some mechanics in his throwing motion over the offseason, working with Day and



Devin Brown



FILE PHOTO

EARLY ADVANTAGE — Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord (pictured) is the favorite to win the Buckeyes' starting quarterback job for the upcoming season after spending two years in the program, but he'll be pushed by red-shirt freshman Devin Brown.

quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis. He feels it's added a faster release and more velocity to his throws.

Neither he nor McCord is backing down from the competition. Iron sharpens iron, as the old saying goes, and with both considered one of the top six quarterbacks in their respective recruiting classes, it should offer an excellent opportunity for both signal callers.

"I think me and Kyle are two of the best quarterbacks in the country," Brown said. "I feel like when I'm at my best is when I'm against the best competition in the country. So going against Kyle every day really boosts my confidence and boosts my drive to get better every day, and I feel like I'm doing the same thing for him."

Offensive Line

Outside of the quarterback competition, most eyes are on the offensive line. Junior Josh Fryar is likely locked in at left tackle for now as Paris Johnson's replacement, leaving right tackle and center open for competition.

Redshirt sophomore Zen Michalski and redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola will fight things out at right tackle, with Michalski (6-7, 310) boasting an early advantage.

"This last offseason, my biggest improvements were in pass blocking," Michalski said on Dec. 29. "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 (Sollenne), our graduate

assistant, doing endless pass blocking drills just trying to figure it out."

Tshabola has a year less experience than Michalski, but both cracked the two-deep as backups last season. Tshabola is listed at 6-6, 327 pounds, and his athleticism at that size stands out.

"Tegra will be in year two," Day said. "Tegra got a lot of reps for us last year, and we see a lot of potential in Tegra. I think every rep you get in for Tegra is going to pay off in the long run. I think it's a really good investment. I'm hoping that he can make a push."

At center, it's a fight to replace Luke Wypler, who left for the NFL draft after just three seasons at Ohio State. Junior Jakob James (6-5, 297) was Wypler's backup a year ago but is out for the spring and may face an uphill battle come fall. Louisiana-Monroe transfer Victor Cutler Jr. and redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman will compete during spring practice.

"That position in and of itself, that's a lot of communication in our offense," offensive line coach Justin Frye said. "The guy in there has got to be heady and smart and get in his fit and set right as we go about those things."

Cutler allowed eight sacks last year starting at left tackle for the Warhawks, but the staff believes he'll be a better fit on the interior. Hinzman might only be in his second year on campus but carries a 6-4, 300-pound body on the inside, slightly larger than Cutler's 6-3, 295-pound measurement.

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Cornerback

Day has not been shy this spring about the fact that cornerback was perhaps the biggest weakness on Ohio State's team a season ago. Many of the big plays that came through the air throughout the year were either contested catches made against corners or coverages that were blown altogether.

Chances are good that junior Denzel Burke (6-1, 190) will start for a third consecutive season to open his career, looking to bounce back from a disappointing 2022 season after picking up an interception and 12 pass breakups in 2021. Who starts opposite him – or if two others rotate alongside him at corner – is up for debate after multi-year starter Cameron Brown departed from the program.

"We've got some really good guys back there, and I think they're all growing up," Day said. "As we know, that was an area that we have to make sure we take a really big step in."

Also gone from the room is junior JK Johnson, who transferred to LSU in the offseason. But plenty of options remain behind Burke, including an incoming transfer Ohio State brought in from Ole Miss in Davison Igbinosun.

The sophomore stands out to even a casual observer among Ohio State's corners on the practice field. At 6-2, he's the tallest in the room, with extremely long arms. He broke up five passes for Ole Miss last season, and his intention is to win a starting spot in Columbus after arriving at the end of winter workouts in early February.

"I think he wants to compete," Day said. "He's going to. He'll have a great opportunity. First day in the books, it was good. When you go through eight weeks of an offseason (winter) program, it allows guys to build discipline and camaraderie and strength and a lot of things, but now it's time to go on the field. Without a great eight weeks of offseason, it's hard to have a good spring. But so many guys did. He stepped in and did a nice job establishing himself early on."

Junior Jordan Hancock (6-1, 185) is also a strong candidate for playing time. He garnered praise in the run-up to last season before suffering a hamstring injury that sidelined him for the first half of the year, though he returned to appear in six games and started against Indiana.

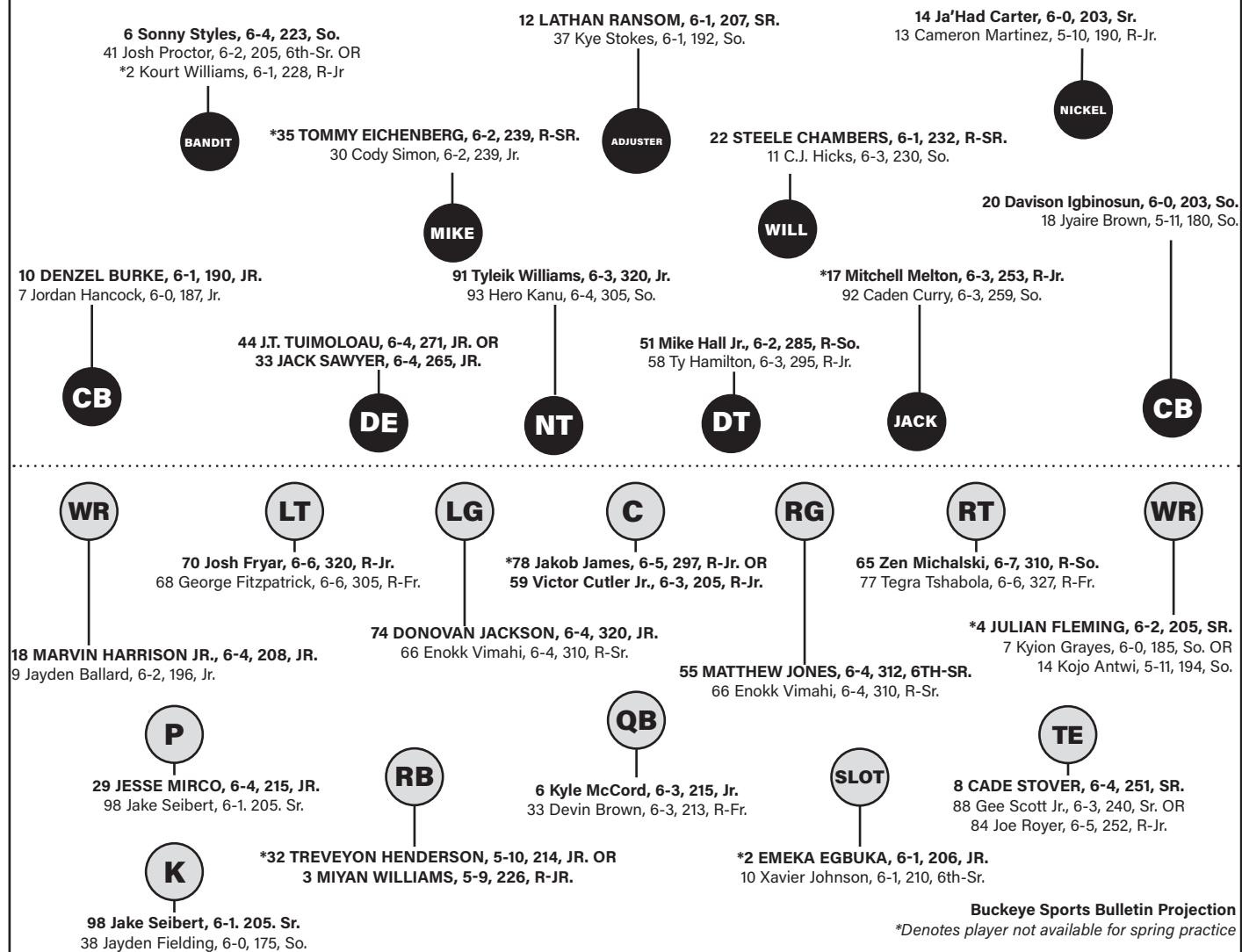
Sophomore Jyaire Brown made a start against Wisconsin last season and performed admirably, making a tackle and breaking up a pass. His physicality could make him a factor, and fellow second-year Ryan Turner (5-11, 189) will also be looking to take his next step along with incoming freshmen Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Calvin Simpson-Hunt.

"What we've got to do now is create competition," cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said Feb. 1. "We've got to open this thing up, let guys go earn jobs, go play and go compete. That's what it's about. We'll try to move guys around because we've got to make sure they're in the right spot. We've



Jordan Hancock

OHIO STATE PROJECTED SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



got to make sure the competition is right."

Safety

There's an argument to be made that seven players have a legitimate shot at landing one of Ohio State's three safety positions this fall.

After the somewhat unexpected return of graduate Josh Proctor and the addition of junior Ja'Had Carter through the transfer portal, there's a litany of questions as to who starts and where for the Buckeyes this season at the position that drives their defense.

"Everybody has their own little niche," said Ohio State safeties coach Perry Eliano. "But as a safety group, we have to be able to do more than one thing. Right now we're still in the evaluation process, and it's a fluid situation."

Each of Ohio State's safeties is schooled in all three positions, but nickel safety seems the easiest to break down because only two names appear to be in the running to replace Tanner McCalister. The first is Carter (6-0, 203), who brings plenty of experience playing the position (as well as deep safety) from Syracuse. He snagged a team-high three interceptions and added 36 tackles last season, his third year as a starter for the Orange.

"He's got his head down and he's working," Eliano said. "He came here because he wanted to be developed to be the very best. He understands the task that's at hand. It's competition. And the old adage, iron sharpens iron. And so far, he's done a great job."

Junior Cameron Martinez (5-10, 190) will ensure that he doesn't win the job easily, however. Martinez backed up McCalister last season and rotated in on occasion, including a start against Toledo while McCalister was injured.

Ohio State's field safety position (also known as adjuster) and boundary safety (the bandit) are competitions that involve three or more players, especially seeing as how some in the room factor in at both spots.

Junior Lathan Ransom (6-1, 205) started at bandit last season and piled up 74 tackles, third most on the team and most among defensive backs. But some lapses in coverage against Michigan and Georgia will need to be learned from. And while Ransom cut his teeth at bandit, he might be a better fit at adjuster with his range and ball-seeking abilities.

Proctor (6-2, 205) has played a traditional free safety role similar to adjuster at Ohio State before, namely in 2021, but moved to bandit last season before being usurped by Ransom in the team's first game against Notre Dame. There's also some injury history with Proctor, but he's shown flashes of what made him a top-100 national prospect out of high school.

Also factoring in at adjuster is sophomore Kye Stokes (6-1, 190), who stood out in last year's spring game before playing sparingly in the regular season. (For more on Stokes, see page 11) Then there's fellow sophomore Sonny Styles (6-4, 222), a

former five-star prospect who played meaningful snaps in the College Football Playoff semifinals against Georgia as a freshman to close last season.

With Styles' recruiting pedigree and athleticism that coaches have raved about, it seems that defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and staff will be looking to find a way to get him on the field, and it seems his best spot might be bandit. It would take advantage of both his physicality playing closer to the box and his range dropping deep, but he's got the versatility to factor in at any of the three safety spots.

"You earn what you get in the secondary, and you earn what you get in the safety room," Eliano said. "There's no handouts. The thing I appreciate most about Sonny is he came in and worked. There was no entitlement. He was the No. 1 (safety) and all that, but you never would have thought that the minute he stepped in the door. He earned the right to be on that stage and play the role that he played."

Another name that could factor in is junior Kourt Williams II (6-1, 220), one of Ohio State's captains last season who missed most of the year with injury. In his limited action he's shown a quick trigger but has needed to develop his coverage ability, making him a likely fit at bandit if he is to contend for playing time.



Sonny Styles

Stroud, Smith-Njigba Shine At NFL Combine

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

A sorely missed sight at Ohio State last season was the connection between quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba. The duo was one of the most electric in college football during the 2021 season, but that linkup was missing this past year while Smith-Njigba rehabbed a hamstring injury that forced him to miss all but two games.

Luckily for Stroud, Smith-Njigba and Ohio State fans alike, they were all afforded one more opportunity to watch the pair when they took the field at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis for the NFL Scouting Combine from Feb. 28 to March 6.

It was an important outing for both, as Stroud tried to stake his claim as the top quarterback in the class while Smith-Njigba fought to regain stock after being out of the spotlight for almost his entire final season in college.

Meeting with reporters at the annual event, Stroud showed he felt strongly about his positioning among the quarterback prospects in the upcoming draft.

"You can put on my film," he said. "I think I've been the best player in college football two years in a row, and I think I've consistently done that. I haven't even touched my potential yet. I have a lot more to get better at, and I have a lot more to prove to not only you all but to myself. That's something that I plan to do because I honestly don't think I got close in college yet."

Stroud showed those flashes during his two seasons as the starter for Ohio State, throwing for 8,123 yards and 85 touchdowns while finishing as a two-time Heisman Trophy finalist and two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year.

Although Ohio State did not experience the team success that Stroud hoped for, dropping both of his starts against Michi-

gan and failing to win a Big Ten championship in either of the last two seasons, he still showed those traits that have him in consideration for the top overall pick.

"I tried to describe myself as free-flowing but still disciplined," he said. "Able to take the completion when it's there, but at the same time making plays. I like to be confident in myself. Another thing I like to do is extend plays and take the routine plays. I don't try to push the envelope, and I think that's very important to being a quarterback sometimes."

Of course, Stroud's final season might have ended differently if he had one of the nation's top receivers in Smith-Njigba available all year instead of just a pair of games. The wideout was widely viewed as the best in the country entering his junior season before that fateful hamstring injury, and he only recently got to a point where he felt fully recovered.

Despite missing all that time, Smith-Njigba still views himself as one of the top picks in the draft and his playmaking ability as "second-to-none" compared to not only receivers, but every prospect hoping to hear his name called in April.

"I see myself as a top-five player, not just receiver," he said. "I see myself as a top-five player in this draft, just being able to make plays and given the opportunities, if you throw me the ball seven to nine times, I can win you the game. I think that speaks for itself."

While that talk from Stroud and Smith-Njigba could have been cheap, the duo backed it up when individual drills and testing began. Despite just recently recovering from his hamstring injury, Smith-Njigba participated in every optional workout except for the bench press and 40-yard dash, which he plans to do at Ohio State's pro day on March 22.

"I would say that I (got) 100 percent maybe two weeks (before the combine)," he said. "I'm just trying to take things very slowly so I can close this book on this nagging hamstring. I'm just wanting to take it slow so we can close the book, which I feel like I have. But I just haven't had enough reps in the (40-yard dash) just yet. So pro day, you'll see me."

Stroud worked out with the other top quarterbacks in the class, including Florida's Anthony Richardson and Kentucky's Will Levis (Alabama's Bryce Young did not work out), and appeared a step above the rest. He was sharp in his delivery and accurate at various distances, firing quick passes at short range and delivering beautiful throws deep down the sideline.

His performance was recognized by cheers from those in attendance at Lucas Oil Stadium, some of whom may have been Indianapolis Colts fans potentially getting an early look at their next quarterback. If the Colts were to wind up getting Stroud at No. 4 in the draft (or trading up to do so), it was a solid first outing on what could be his future home turf.

"C.J. Stroud is having one of the best throwing sessions I've seen at the combine," NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah tweeted.

Stroud's session was spread across sev-



FILE PHOTO

STANDOUT PERFORMANCE — Former Ohio State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba impressed those in attendance at the NFL Scouting Combine in early March, showing why he's among the top wideouts — as well as overall players — in the upcoming NFL draft.

eral receivers, but he still got the chance to throw a handful of passes to Smith-Njigba, who hauled in everything during his workout sessions ranging from deep balls to the gauntlet drill, where passes quickly zip in from the left and right while Smith-Njigba runs down a straight line.

In addition to his solid hands and route running, Smith-Njigba also excelled in individual testing, posting a 6.57-second three-cone and 3.93-second short shuttle, both of which topped every other receiver who ran the drills.

"Despite not running the 40-yard dash, Smith-Njigba looked terrific," ESPN draft analyst Jordan Reid said. "He didn't show any signs of the lingering hamstring injury that limited him to (two) games last season. A precise route runner, JSN just looked different than his counterparts, displaying short-area quickness and details on his patterns."

There was no question entering the combine that Stroud and Smith-Njigba were among the best at their position, but their performances may have cemented their spots among the best the draft will have to offer.

"As I walk out of Lucas Oil (Stadium), two workouts are sticking with me: C.J. Stroud (and) Jaxon Smith Njigba," The Athletic draft analyst Dane Brugler tweeted. "The top two performances I saw today were both Buckeyes. And neither was surprising."

Big Boys Make Big Waves For Scouts

Stroud and Smith-Njigba made solid cases as the best players at their positions during the combine, but they weren't the only Buckeye attempting to make that claim.

Offensive tackle Paris Johnson, viewed by many as the top tackle on the board or at least among the top two or three in the class, said he already felt like the best tackle prospect entering the combine and that his film backs up his case.

"At this time, it's me being able to show them in the interviews, being able to get on a board," he said. "I'm able to explain my technique, what went right, what went wrong, things I can improve on. What are the things, what's the mind-set, how quick am I doing my memory? Trying to remember a play installed — I think all that stuff's been great."

As usual, Johnson — a two-year starter at Ohio State, spending time at guard and tackle — showed off his athleticism for those in attendance, working through drills with ease and drawing acclaim from analysts. Johnson wasn't the only Ohio State tackle who made a name for himself, though, as Dawand Jones turned in several jaw-dropping measurements.

Jones checked in at 6-8¼ and 374 pounds, boasting 11⅝-inch hands, 36⅜-inch arms and an 87⅞-inch wingspan, all of which were the largest among all players

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Buckeyes At The 2023 NFL Combine

Name	POS	HT	WT	Arm (In.)	Hand (In.)	Wing (In.)	40-Yd. (Sec.)	Bench (Reps 225)	Vert. (In.)	Broad (Ft.)	3-Cone Drill (Sec.)	20-Yd. Shuttle (Sec.)
Cameron Brown	CB	6-0	199	31	9	N/A	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Zach Harrison	DE	6-5 ½	274	36 ¼*	10	85 ½	DNP	25	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Ronnie Hickman	S	6-0 ½	203	33	9 ⅜	N/A	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Paris Johnson	OT	6-6 ⅜	313	36 ⅛	9 ½	85 ⅛	DNP	29	DNP	9-2	DNP	DNP
Dawand Jones	OT	6-8 ¼	374	36 ⅜*	11 ⅝*	87 ⅞*	5.35	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-0 ⅝	196	30 ½	9	75 ½	DNP	DNP	35	10-5	6.57*	3.93*
C.J. Stroud	QB	6-3	214	32 ⅝	10	N/A	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Luke Wypler	C	6-3	303	31 ⅝	9 ⅝	N/A	5.14*	29*	30 ½	8-10	7.64*	4.53*

* – First or tied for first in position group.

at the combine. His 40-yard dash was just 5.35 seconds, but that’s understandable given that he weighs 39 more pounds than the next heaviest player at the combine.

While Jones was expected to impress for his size – ditto Johnson for his technique – another standout for Ohio State at the combine was center Luke Wypler.

Wypler was somewhat of a surprise departure from Ohio State this offseason, leaving Columbus after just two seasons as a starter and with three seasons of eligibility remaining. He was a consistent force on the offensive line, rarely making any highlight reels but rarely hearing his name called, either, which is often a good thing for an offensive lineman.

While it was a challenging decision whether to return to Ohio State for another season or opt for the NFL, Wypler felt comfortable with whatever he landed on.

“You couldn’t have really made a bad decision, I kept telling myself,” he said. “Whatever I chose, I knew I was going to be all right. And for me, the NFL just made more sense.”

Despite leaving early, he felt his experience at Ohio State left him well-prepared for what things might look like at the next level.

“I played against some of the best competition that college football has to offer, and for me, I excelled and played well,” he said. “So for me, it made sense for the next step.”

His performance at the combine showed why Wypler might have made a solid decision betting on himself. He turned in a time of 5.14 seconds in the 40-yard dash, which was the best among all centers and 15th-fastest among all offensive linemen.

He also notched 29 reps on the 225-pound bench press, tied for sixth most among offensive linemen and tied for first among all centers. For his effort, Wypler was named to NFL.com’s All-Combine Team.

“There were a number of promising centers on the field at Lucas Oil Stadium on (March 5), but not any one true standout,” NFL.com’s Nick Shook said. “Although most of Wypler’s reps were of high quality – showing efficient footwork, if not a ton of power – it was his overall athleticism that earned him this spot. Among the group of centers I considered to be comparable in on-field performance, Wypler tested the best.”

Brown, Hickman Opt Out Of Testing

Two players looking to boost their stock at the combine were cornerback Cameron Brown and safety Ronnie Hickman.

Brown was an expected departure from Ohio State after this past season while Hickman was a toss-up, leaving with two seasons of eligibility remaining. Both did show up for interviews with teams and measurements, but neither opted for any additional pre-draft testing despite both claiming a clean bill of health. No explanation was given, even after Brown said he hoped to run a 4.2-second 40-yard dash, but the belief is that both are waiting until Ohio State’s pro day to participate in any testing.

Even so, Brown and Hickman both made their case for why NFL teams should take a chance on them following their careers at Ohio State.

“I feel like I did my job,” Hickman said. “That was something that was preached to us (at Ohio State). They want you to do your

job and do it to the best of your ability. Whatever my team needed, I was able to do 100 percent willingly.”

Hickman appeared in 31 games in three seasons with the Buckeyes and started every game over the last two seasons. He had a career year in 2021, finishing with 100 tackles, before settling in at adjuster last season, racking up 53 tackles and a career-high seven pass breakups.

“I’m just a player that can do it all,” he said. “I’m gifted athletically. I was blessed to do some of the things I’ve been able to do on the field. I feel like I’m a great teammate. I’m able to learn things. I am able to be there for our guys. I feel like I know what it takes. And I’m willing to learn and do whatever it takes to help my team win and to better myself.”

As for Brown, he experienced an up-and-down final season at Ohio State. He appeared in just eight games and was limited throughout the year with a knee injury, but he was able to establish a solid body of work in five seasons with the Buckeyes despite dealing with several ailments, ultimately appearing in 36 games with 13 starts.

“I feel like I matured,” Brown said of his final season. “It was more of a personal thing for me, and I feel like I was able to grow better and more of a man, as a football player, everything all around.

“I feel like (teams are) going to get a young, confident corner who’s very physical, who’s long, fast and not afraid to compete with anybody.”

Brown and Hickman both expressed thanks for their time at Ohio State, with Brown explaining that Ohio State helps to establish the mind-set required to succeed in the NFL.

“Most college coaches try to just teach certain things, but they showed me the more detailed part of the game that’s not only athletic ability,” he said. “Because when you get to the NFL, everybody’s talented, everybody’s athletic. It’s all about what are you going to do with it.”

Hamstring Tweak Limits Harrison

Another Buckeye who did not participate in pre-draft testing was defensive end Zach Harrison. He told reporters that he suffered a tweaked hamstring the week prior to the combine.

Outside of the 225-pound bench press, of which Harrison finished with 25 reps, tied for the sixth-most among defensive ends, he only had measurements taken after previously expressing hope to run the 40-yard dash.

Harrison was still able to impress those in attendance with an arm length of 36¼ inches, the longest of any defensive end at the combine since 2014, and he’ll participate in Ohio State’s pro day with a final chance to improve his stock ahead of the draft.

“I’m so excited about the player that I am today and knowing that I have so much to work on and being in this position where I’m at right now, just being at the combine and being one of the top guys of the defensive line class, and knowing I have so much room to improve,” Harrison said. “I hope that I get to tap into that.”

QB Target Noland Committing By End Of Spring

One of Ohio State's top quarterback targets in 2024 – Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star Air Noland (6-3, 195) – is expecting to announce his commitment within the next few weeks.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

The Buckeyes are one of several schools set to receive visits, with Noland visiting Ohio State from March 31 through April 1 in addition to Clemson (March 10-11), Arkansas (March 14-15), Miami (Fla.) (March 23-24), Texas A&M (March 27-28) and Purdue (April 6). Following those trips, Noland is planning to buckle down and make a decision.

"Sometime around April I want to make my decision," Noland told On3. "I definitely want to make my decision before the season, and I think by the time April comes I'll have my mind set on the school I want to go to."

Noland's visit to Ohio State will be of particular importance, as the Buckeyes have yet to offer the signal caller. The expectation, though, is that offer will come during his upcoming visit, giving Noland plenty to think about before his commitment.

"I'm extremely excited to get myself and my mom up there to Ohio State," Noland told Eleven Warriors. "I think Ohio State's coaching staff has done a great job recruiting me between Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach (Corey) Dennis and Coach (Brian) Hartline. They've visited my school twice, and I think they think I have the right intangibles and all the right things to play quarterback for Ohio State."

"I think Coach Dennis does a great

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.
Marc Nave Jr.	OL	6-5	315	★★★	Toledo Central Catholic
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	185	★★★★★	Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	SAF	6-2	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut

job with quarterbacks, and Coach Day and Coach Hartline's offensive system is a very quarterback-oriented type of offense. A lot of quarterbacks have watched Ohio State this year and previous to this year and saw how explosive the offense can be. I'm very excited and can't wait to get to Columbus."

Ohio State is a relatively late arrival to Noland's recruitment, ramping up contact in recent months following the decommitment of Phoenix Pinnacle five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) in December. There's good reason that the Buckeyes have gotten involved, though, as Noland – a left-handed passer – is the No. 99 overall prospect and No. 8 quarterback in the class.

He's been a standout at Langston Hughes – also the high school of Ohio State freshman tight end Jelani Thurman – over the last several seasons, throwing for 8,024 yards and 104 touchdowns while completing 67.8 percent of his passes.

"A lefty that can attack all three levels of the field," said 247Sports recruiting analyst

Andrew Ivins. "He owns a quick, compact release that is believed to be one of the fastest – if not the fastest – in the 2024 cycle. More than comfortable on the move and has plenty of experience running RPOs out of a single-back spread attack."

"He will beat defenders to the sticks with his legs and is more than creative when the pocket starts to break down, but shouldn't be considered a run-first quarterback as he keeps his eyes downfield while working through his progressions and always seems to be looking for the home run."

If Ohio State opts not to offer Noland or he decides on a school elsewhere, the Buckeyes also have notable offers out in 2024 to Carlsbad, Calif., five-star Julian Sayin (6-1, 195), who is committed to Alabama, and Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star Jadyn Davis (6-1, 192). Like with Noland, Ohio State is a relatively late arrival in Davis' recruitment, though the Buckeyes have attempted to make up ground considering Davis' status as the No. 24 overall prospect and No. 4 signal caller in the class.

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Nave Jr. Adds To OL Haul In 2024

Ohio State added a commitment on March 8 from Toledo Central Catholic three-star offensive lineman Marc Nave Jr. (6-5, 315), who became the fourth member of the Buckeyes' 2024 recruiting class.

Nave is the No. 526 overall prospect and No. 29 interior lineman in the class and held additional offers Auburn, Cincinnati, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisville and Purdue, among others. He primarily lines up at right guard for Central Catholic but has also played at center and tackle and was a pivotal part of the Vikings' offensive line that helped lead the team to a state title last season.

He received an Ohio State offer on Jan. 31 – one he considered a dream offer, having grown up as an Ohio State fan – and his commitment comes after his attendance at the Buckeyes' first spring practice on March 7.

"I actually committed while I was there," he told Eleven Warriors. "Coach Day brought me to his office, and he talked me through everything. He told me he didn't want me to rush anything, but if I'm ready, I can do it. I told him right then and there I was committed."

His is the second commitment on the offensive line among the four for Ohio State, joining Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185); New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295); and Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star safety Garrett Stover (6-0, 195).

Ohio State Among Top Schools For OL Seaton

Washington (D.C.) St. John's four-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287), a top target for Ohio State, included the Buckeyes among his top 14 schools on March 4.

He is the No. 41 overall prospect and top interior offensive lineman in 2024, and he had Ohio State in his top programs along with Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC.

Seaton plays at left tackle for St. John's but has the versatility to play anywhere on the line, which is a benefit for the Buckeyes given that depth has been a question over the last few seasons at guard and tackle.

"He has high-level athleticism combined with a nasty streak and is physical and active with his hands," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Brian Dohn. "He has a forceful initial punch and quick feet that allows for impressive lateral movement. He has the ability to sink hips and explode into defenders, and brings a ferocious attitude to the line of scrimmage."

He was offered by Ohio State in September and made a visit for the Buckeyes' loss to Michigan late in the season, but he still came away impressed from the trip.

"For me, the game was the most electric game a recruit could witness," Seaton told On3. "Despite the Buckeyes' loss, one game shouldn't determine something. What stood out to me was how much the

coaches after the game cared for their players. It shows the brotherhood they have. My interest in them remains the same. They are high on my list."

Another pair of prospects also recently included Ohio State among their top schools, in Lancaster, Texas, three-star running back Kewan Lacy (6-0, 205), a 2024 prospect, and Los Alamitos, Calif., five-star tight end Davon Mitchell (6-4, 245), a 2025 recruit.

Lacy was offered by Ohio State last June and included the Buckeyes along with Baylor, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Nebraska, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, TCU and Tennessee. He is the No. 526 overall prospect and No. 40 running back in his class.

Mitchell is the No. 26 overall prospect and top tight end in 2025. He included Ohio State in addition to Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

He was offered by Ohio State last June and followed it up by being named a Texas District 5-6A first-team selection in his sophomore season.

Rudolph Still Interested In Buckeyes Despite Move South

Defensive end Elias Rudolph (6-4, 220) recently announced his move to Deerfield Beach, Fla., for his senior season, after playing his first three seasons of high school football at Cincinnati Taft.

"It was just a change, for real," Rudolph told Eleven Warriors. "There were a

lot of things going on in the city that I just wanted to kind of get away from. It opened up new opportunities."

Despite the move, Rudolph – who is expecting to commit during his senior season – is still very interested in Ohio State as his potential college of choice and plans to take another visit to Columbus at some point in the future.

"The coaching staff, the energy and the outlook on the program are all great," Rudolph said, adding that he frequently communicates with defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

Rudolph was offered by Ohio State last summer and followed it up with an impressive junior season in which he totaled 19 sacks. He is the No. 227 overall prospect and No. 19 defensive end in the class, with Clemson and Pittsburgh viewed as the strongest competition for the Buckeyes.

Meyer Questions NIL Involvement In Recruiting

In a wide-ranging interview with The Athletic, former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer spoke about his history of recruiting – his successes, failures and stories from his several stops – as well as the current state of recruiting, of which Meyer said there has to be a regulatory body.

"Right now, this school can do this and that school can do that," Meyer said. "Most of it is dependent on the financial aspect. 'We can't get this player because

Continued On Page 18

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Top Recruits Making Visits For Spring Practice

Continued From Page 17

we can't pay him enough.' When I hear that, I say, 'You've got to be kidding me.' That's not what this is all about. When I hear that, and I'll be honest with you, it makes me upset.

"I don't think it's bad that college players make money. I think it's great. But when I hear that, I wonder what the future of this sport is."

Meyer mentioned that in his first staff meeting in 1986 under head coach Earle Bruce, the coach spoke about Ohio State's culture that focused on academics, toughness and selflessness, and he worries that those aspects are being lost in today's game.

Asked how he would handle recruiting and everything that comes with it now if he were to step back into the game, his answer was simple: "I'd have to adapt. All I can say is I'd have to adapt."

More Visits Lined Up Over Spring

This space highlighted dozens of prospects in the last issue expected to visit Ohio State over the next few weeks and months, and since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, a number of additional prospects have expressed their in-

tentions to visit Columbus.

Looking back at March 7, several previously unannounced prospects made an appearance for Ohio State's first spring practice, including Cincinnati Woodward Career Technical three-star wide receiver Donte Ferrell (6-2, 175) in 2024; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West tight end Luka Gilbert (6-7, 205) who was recently offered by Ohio State, and Zionsville, Ind., wide receiver Eugene Hilton (6-1, 175) in 2025; and Pickerington (Ohio) Central quarterback Rocco Williams (6-0, 183) in 2026.

Then, on March 9, Ohio State welcomed a trio of 2024 prospects in New Haven, Ind., four-star wide receiver Mylan Graham (6-1, 170); Columbus Gahanna Lincoln three-star defensive end Elijah King (6-6, 230); and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne three-star defensive end Javon Hammonds (6-5, 230). Also on hand were Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne wide receiver Kamaurri Smith (6-5, 200) and Cincinnati Mt. Healthy quarterback Jahmeir Spain (6-3, 180) in 2025.

Other visits expected over the following days include Bellefontaine, Ohio, quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 190), a 2025 prospect, on March 21, and on March 23, the Buckeyes will welcome a 2024 prospect in Cleveland Villa Ange-

la-St. Joseph three-star defensive lineman Dominic Kirks (6-5, 250) and a pair of 2025 prospects in Westerville (Ohio) Central quarterback Jaystin Gwinn (6-1, 165) and Cincinnati Winton Woods cornerback Donmiel Rogers (5-9, 150).

A big group was already expected on March 25, but several names have since been added. As far as 2024 prospects go, this includes Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive tackles Deontae (6-6, 280) and Devontae (6-5, 288) Armstrong; Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes safety Jakob Gude (6-0, 183); Baltimore City College three-star wide receiver Jahmari Powell-Wonson (6-2, 185); and Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star running back DeJuan Williams (5-11, 195).

In 2025, expected are Atlanta Woodward Academy defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 230); Cincinnati Princeton linebacker Paul Nelson (6-2, 205); Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-2, 200); and Baltimore St. Frances Academy cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 180). A pair of 2026 prospects will also be on hand, including Upper Marlboro (Md.) Rock Creek Christian Academy safety Jireh Edwards (6-1, 194) and East Northport (N.Y.) St. Anthony's defensive lineman Preston Carey (6-5, 285).

On March 26, Ohio State will host Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star safety Jordon Johnson-Rubell (5-10, 183), a 2024 prospect, and then on March 28, the Buckeyes will receive a visit from Hudson, Ohio, three-star offensive lineman Tommy Ricard (6-4, 265).

April 1 is also a significant day for visits, with new additions including Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Cardinal Gibbons three-star tight end Colton Heinrich (6-4, 230) and Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview five-star cornerback Charles Lester III (6-1, 171) in 2024 and Dallas South Oak Cliff linebacker Kelvin Riggins (6-0, 200) in 2025.

Moving on, Ohio State will see Columbus Thomas Worthington three-star defensive lineman Francis Brewu (6-2, 270), a 2024 prospect, on April 3, and Cleveland Shaker Heights athlete Trey McNutt (6-0, 180), a 2025 prospect, on April 7. Lake Cormorant, Miss., four-star defensive lineman Kamarion Franklin (6-5, 260), a 2024 prospect, will visit on April 14.

"The history of defensive linemen that came through there is impressive, and I can't wait to get there and see what they have to offer," Franklin told 247Sports.

As for the spring game on April 15, new additions include Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Jayden Jackson (6-2, 300), a 2024

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1988

If Ohio had its own version of Webster's Dictionary, one would discover Massillon was synonymous with football excellence.

Massillon produced more than its share of top college recruits annually, including Ohio State All-America linebacker Chris Spielman, who was expected to be taken early in the upcoming NFL draft.

Spielman's high school alma mater, Washington High, also produced 1988 Buckeye recruit John Schilling. A two-year starter at offensive guard, Schilling (6-4, 260) earned first-team All-Northeastern Ohio and Stark County honors, along with All-Ohio special mention in 1987.

"John became a dominant one-on-one blocker this year and has turned out to be an excellent scheme blocker," said Massillon coach John Maronto, who had recently accepted a high school coaching position in Florida. "He's very advanced and an excellent pass blocker."

30 Years Ago - 1993

Ohio State had spent much of the past decade looking for the next Art Schlichter. And while that search often came up empty, the Buckeyes believed they may have found a quarterback who resembled two signal callers who were in Columbus even before Schlichter.

Called one of the country's top five quarterback prospects by national recruiting expert Tom Lemming, 6-1, 186-pound Stanley Jackson out of Paterson (N.J.) Catholic chose the Buckeyes over Kansas, North Carolina and Syracuse.

There was little doubt the Buckeyes had landed a potential superstar in Jackson.

According to Lemming, "Stanley is terrific on the rollout and can run the trap option just as well. He is perhaps the most athletic quarterback in the nation. He is just an exciting athlete with All-American written all over him."

Jackson's high school coach, Lou Mathis, agreed with Lemmings' assessment and even went so far as to compare him to former OSU quarterbacks Cornelius Greene and Rod Gerald.

Mathis would know. He played with the Buckeyes from 1971-73 and was a senior on the 1973 team when Greene was a freshman.

25 Years Ago - 1998

One of the top quarterbacks in South Carolina chose Ohio State over Nebraska because he wanted to play defensive back.

Derek Ross, a 6-1, 193-pound cornerback from Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwestern high School, turned down the Huskers' offer to play quarterback so he could roam the secondary for the Buckeyes.

"It was between Ohio State and Nebraska," Ross said. "I want

to play defensive back. I was recruited to play quarterback at Nebraska and defensive back at Ohio State. I want to play on the defensive side of the ball."

20 Years Ago - 2003

Ohio State had its first, second or third commitment for 2004, depending on your viewpoint.

Hubbard, Ohio, junior defensive back Shaun Lane, the son of former Buckeye Garcia Lane, attended Ohio State's Feb. 22 junior day and received an offer. He then committed to the Buckeyes on Feb. 25 and made it public during a press conference at his school two days later.

Lane (5-11, 175, 4.45) became the first high school junior to commit to the Buckeyes. But he could have been considered the third member of the class of 2004 because the Buckeyes had two "grayshirts" stacked up already for next year with St. Henry, Ohio, quarterback Todd Boeckman and Charleston (W.Va.) Capital linebacker Cedric Scott.

Lane said he also was interested in Pittsburgh, Syracuse and West Virginia. But no other schools stood a chance once OSU offered.

"I always wanted to go to Ohio State," he said. "I just want to be a Buckeye. Growing up in Ohio, you just want to go to Ohio State."

15 Years Ago - 2008

Terrelle Pryor might have been used to stealing the spotlight while on the hardwood as well as the gridiron, but this may have been a whole different level.

As the Ohio State football coaches hosted a well-attended junior day that resulted in one verbal commitment for the class of 2009, it was the uncommitted senior who was the talk of the town.

In effect, it seemed as if the Buckeyes' men's basketball game against Wisconsin took second billing to the mere fact that Pryor (6-5, 225) was in the house for the game. Accompanied by Jeannette, Pa., quarterbacks coach Roy Hall, Hall's nephew and Pryor's Jeannette teammate Jordan Hall, and an assistant basketball coach from the school, Pryor made the unofficial visit to Columbus on Feb. 24.

As the first half drew to a close, the east end of the arena began chanting, "We want Pryor," while the west end simply was chanting his name. As the teams headed to their respective locker rooms, Pryor also headed for the bowels of the arena preceded by head football coach Jim Tressel.

The shouting for Pryor drowned out the school's halftime recognition of the men's soccer team, which had won the Big Ten and finished as the national runners-up the previous season.

10 Years Ago - 2013

Landing a slew of talented offensive linemen had been designated a priority for the 2014 recruiting class, and one prospect the head coach would have loved to add to the class was four-star offensive tackle Alex Bookser of Mount Lebanon, Pa.

But as is usually the case with top-level prospects, Urban Meyer wasn't alone in his pursuit.

The 6-6, 295-pound prospect accumulated more than a dozen scholarship offers from such programs as Boston College, Florida State, Maryland, Northwestern, Ohio State and West Virginia and had recently gained interest from Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State and Wisconsin.

"I have no idea right now about leaders or trimming my list," Bookser told Scout.com. "Right now, it is just fun. Sometimes I'll go on Facebook and have 10 messages. It gives me something to do."

Five Years Ago - 2018

The Buckeyes already had two offensive tackles committed for their 2019 class in Mentor, Ohio, product Ryan Jacoby and Huntington (W.Va.) standout Doug Nester, but they were not finished recruiting the position. OSU had offered fellow four-star offensive tackle William Harrod out of Fort Washington (Md.) National Christian on Feb. 22.

Harrod, the No. 188 player in America and No. 21 OT, told recruiting analyst Brian Dohn that he was initially hoping to visit Clemson, Michigan, North Carolina, Penn State and South Carolina. With Ohio State offering, though, traveling to Columbus had been added to the 6-5, 305-pound Harrod's agenda.

"The Ohio State offer is huge to me," Harrod said. "I have been watching them since I was young. I know they are one of the top programs in college football, and to know I have a chance to play there is huge to me."

One Year Ago - 2022

Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs was beginning to plan his spring visits, and Ohio State was among those getting a visit from the top safety in 2023. Beyond his status as the top safety in the class, Downs (6-0, 185) was the No. 13 prospect in 2023 and the No. 1 recruit out of Georgia.

Ohio State, which was set to see Downs from April 3-4, was one of six schools getting a visit along with Georgia (March 1), North Carolina (March 5), Oklahoma (March 26), Alabama (April 2) and Notre Dame (April 23), according to 247Sports.

"Ohio State tells me about the tradition of defensive back play there," he said. "How many defensive backs they put in the league, how their guys have been playing."

ASK AN ANALYST

With BuckeyeScoop’s Bill Greene

Toledo Central Catholic three-star offensive line-man Marc Nave Jr.’s (6-5, 315) commitment broke a long stretch without a pledge for Ohio State. What are your opinions on him as a prospect?

“Marc Nave, to me, has got some work to do. I think he’s a project, with the chance to be a really good player. I wouldn’t say he’s a sure thing. I would put him in the mix with guys they took a couple of years ago, when they had that Grant Toutant and Jakob James class (in 2018). They took kids in that class that were sort of lower-rated guys and you hope they pan out. I would put Mark Nave in that category more than I would put him in the Paris Johnson category.”

With Nave and New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295) establishing a foundation in the trenches for 2024, where else are Ohio State’s priorities on the offensive line?

“I think they’re going to get the twins out of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward (four-star offensive lineman Devontae (6-5, 288) and tackle Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong) which would give you four. And then they’re in really good shape with Washington (D.C.) St. John’s four-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287), a national kid, that gives them five probably.

“Then, do they want to just chase the highest-rated guys in the country? They really need tackles and if you get one, great, you expand to six, and if not, you’ve got five guys, which is a good, solid offensive line class.

“So without putting the cart before the horse, I feel strongly they’re going to get the twins, and then Seaton, I wouldn’t have as a guarantee by any means, but I think they’re in really good shape for him and I think they are a

leader for him.”

With Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198), who is committed to Ohio State, drawing interest from schools in his state, how do you feel about his current pledge to the Buckeyes?

“I think it’s really secure. But he’s going to take visits, and I think it’s in his best interest to take visits, just to make sure of his decision. But I think things are so strong with Ohio State, not just between Jeremiah and Brian Hartline, but with his uncle, who was very involved in his recruitment, and his dad, who’s very involved in his recruitment, and their relationship with Hartline and Ryan Day.

“I think he’s going to be signing with Ohio State in December. That’s the lead with these Florida kids when you start making that prediction months out, right? But I feel really good about where Ohio State stands with Jeremiah Smith, and I think they’re going to sign him.”

Ohio State is set to host a number of prospects over the next few weeks leading up to the spring game. Who are you keeping an eye on as those visits begin to ramp up?

“Well, the one they’ve got to get on campus is Jefferson (Ga.) five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-3, 225), a big-time linebacker, and I think they’ve got a shot at him. James Laurinaitis is probably doing the heavy lifting there, and he’s probably got one hand tied behind his back because Sammy Brown has to come to him. James can’t go see Sammy, which is probably a story entirely, why he’s not on the road recruiting when he’s probably one of your best recruiters. It’s a defensive need and the spot where Jim Knowles got blitzed last year and signed nobody, so that’s the main one

I’m really looking forward to.

“There are going to be so many guys visiting. They’re going to get Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Zabien Brown (6-1, 180) (on campus). Sammy Brown, in my opinion, is the best linebacker prospect in the country. And when James can’t go to him, you’ve got to get Sammy to come to see James. That’s what I’m looking for.

“Then on the offensive side of the ball, quarterback recruiting, as always, is so much fun to watch, especially under Day. There are three in the mix right now. I would say that Carlsbad (Calif.) five-star quarterback Julian Sayin (6-1, 195), who’s committed to Alabama, he’s going to be tough to pry away from Nick Saban. Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star quarterback Jadyn Davis (6-1, 192), they are trying to get back in with him there and there are a lot of fences that need to be mended with him. It kind of went sour last year when Ohio State went all in on Phoenix Pinnacle five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220) and kind of kicked Davis to the curb. Now they’re trying to bring him back into the fold.

“But then the third guy is Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195) and I think he wants this offer really bad. I talked to him in Florida, three or four weeks ago when I was down there for 7-on-7. He said Ohio State told him that if he’ll come to campus on his own dime, they will offer him. They just wanted to make sure he was interested in them. I think if Air Noland visits, which is coming up here in a couple of weeks (on March 31), gets the offer and comes back for an official visit, maybe in June, I think that one gets locked up. If I had to guess today I would say that I think Air Noland is going to be the quarterback in this class.”

prospect, and Franklin (Mich.) Wylie E. Groves offensive tackle Avery Gach (6-5, 275), a 2025 prospect.

Recruits who plan to visit but have yet to set a date include Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star running back Jer-rick Gibson (5-10, 200) and Lake Cormo-rant, Miss., four-star safety Jarcooby Hop-son (6-1, 205) in 2024 and Detroit Cass Technical athlete Alex Graham (6-1, 170); Canton (Ohio) McKinley athlete Dante McClellan (6-3, 200); and Galveston (Tex-as) Ball safety Jonah Williams (6-2, 195) in 2025.

Rounding Up New Offers

Ohio State has not been issuing as many offers of late with coaches focused on spring football, but there are still a handful of offers that have gone out in re-cent weeks.

Three went out to prospects in 2024, including Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater three-star athlete Cai Bates (6-2, 168), West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star safety Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185) and Clearwater (Fla.) Academy International three-star defensive lineman Sean Sevilla-no Jr. (6-2, 300).

Starting with Bates, he was offered by cornerbacks coach Tim Walton on March 3 and holds offers from Florida State, In-diana, Miami (Fla.), Pittsburgh and South Carolina, among others. He is a two-way player for Edgewater, hauling in 17 recep-tions for 241 yards and a touchdown on offense and intercepting four passes on defense last season, though his offering

by Walton is a sign the Buckeyes consider him a defensive back.

McClain, meanwhile, is a bona fide safety, racking up 83 tackles and an inter-ception during his junior season. He is the No. 262 overall prospect and No. 23 safety in the class and holds offers from Geor-gia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michi-gan State, Notre Dame, Oregon and Penn State, among others.

Staying on defense, Sevillano – who is originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba – was offered on March 3 after a junior season in which he totaled 78 tackles, with 50 of those going for a loss, and 22 sacks in just 11 games while leading his team to a state title.

Moving on to 2025, the Buckeyes of-fered Lakota West’s Gilbert and Nashville (Tenn.) Lipscomb Academy four-star of-fensive lineman Chauncey Gooden (6-4, 320). Already shaping up as one of the top linemen in the class, Gooden holds addi-tional offers from Florida, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and USC, among others.

Gilbert, meanwhile, was offered on March 7. He does not hold a national ranking and has additional offers from only Connecticut, Kentucky, Nevada and Pittsburgh, signaling a potential diamond in the rough for new tight ends coach Keenan Bailey.

“They said they see what I could be, they see a big future in me and want me to be a part of their program,” he told 247Sports. “They said they watched my film and (that) I am a physical player.”

Finally, Ohio State is looking ahead to 2026, where the Buckeyes offered Avon Lake, Ohio, offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 263). He is the first offensive line-man offered by Ohio State in the class and holds additional offers from Florida State, Miami (Fla.) and Toledo.

“I had no idea they were going to of-fer,” Riley told 247Sports. “My jaw kind of dropped when Coach Day offered. I was really surprised.”

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State added a preferred walk-on commitment on March 8 from Colum-bus Bishop Watterson safety Ryan Rudz-inski (6-4, 190), who is the son of former Ohio State linebacker Jerry Rudzinski. After being offered by the Buckeyes in De-cember after a senior season in which he picked up 89 tackles and 10 interceptions, Rudzinski will join Ohio State in the sum-mer.

- Purdue added a verbal pledge on March 6 from Midland (Texas) Legacy four-star quarterback Marcos Davila (6-3, 217), the No. 316 overall prospect and No. 20 signal caller in 2024. He is the fourth member of the Boilermakers’ class and also their highest-rated prospect.

- Penn State earned a pair of top-500 commitments since BSB last went to press, adding West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star linebacker Kari Jackson (6-2, 215) on Feb. 28 and Philadelphia Imho-tep Institute four-star cornerback Kenneth Woseley (5-11, 170) on March 3. Jackson is the No. 410 overall prospect and No. 31

linebacker in the class, while Woseley is No. 376 overall and the No. 32 corner.

For the latest in Ohio State football re-cruiting news, be sure to check out Buck-eyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

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St. John Arena Still Memorable After 25 Years

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's been 25 years since the Ohio State men's and women's basketball teams moved out of St. John Arena, but memories of the atmosphere that permeated the building in marquee games still linger with those who played, coached or viewed in the space.

Opened in 1956 and named after late longtime athletic director Lynn St. John, the arena was considered state-of-the-art when planned and constructed. It offered an updated seating capacity of 13,276, not to mention an improved location right on Ohio State's campus.

"They were still playing their games off campus at the Fairgrounds Coliseum (before St. John)," said Bucknuts reporter Steve Helwigen. "Which was a good bit of a walk through the neighborhood over to the fairgrounds to get to the Coliseum for anybody who walked to the games from campus. Probably a mile, mile-and-a-half walk. They wanted to put an arena on campus, and that was the perfect place."

The perfect combination of environment and location was so enticing that, during her days as a women's basketball player at Ohio State, Kristin Watt and her teammates made a point of attending every men's home game.

"We would sit in the front row, right underneath the basket," Watt told BSB. "There was no better seat in the house than right there. You could talk smack to the other players, you could talk to the men's team, yell encouragement at them and things like that."

"The beauty of St. John Arena is that there is not a bad sight line in the arena, because it was built up instead of out. If you had 5,000 people in there, that place cranked. It was crazy fun because it seemed so loud."

Above all else, that seems to be the staple of St. John that sticks with people – the way seats sat right on top of the action, providing an incredible noise environment for Ohio State home games. The building played host to some of the best players both in Ohio State history and general college basketball history. While most concede the Schottenstein Center was a necessary upgrade for recruiting and expansion purposes, all seem in agreement that St. John Arena was the louder, better place to take in a game.

"There's no way The Schott could ever be that loud," said former Columbus Dispatch writer Bob Hunter, who started covering Ohio State in 1975. "Part of the thing that was sad about moving over there – not that it's not a nice arena – but it could never be the home court that St. John was. St. John was so close – everything was so close to the floor."

St. John Arena's historic run of basketball began when men's basketball guard Gene Millard scored the first basket on Dec. 1, 1956, in a 98-82 win over Butler. More than 66 years later, he still fondly remembers his days donning the scarlet and gray before those crowds.

"That was one of the best arenas

around," Millard told BSB. "We came up with some pretty good teams there early, and that made it very enjoyable."

Many of Millard's finest recollections come not from his time as a player, however, but in the time since. He made the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame in 2011, in part due to an achievement made at the high school level in St. John Arena. As a head coach in 1983, he led Bexley to a Class AA state title in his home venue.

"Nothing like it in high school basketball than to get there and have an opportunity to play in that game," Millard said. "It's something you always dream about and something that very few coaches ever have the opportunity to do, and especially to win one."

Millard averaged 12.1 points per game in his final season at Ohio State and served as team captain, playing alongside star forward Frank Howard, who averaged 20.1 points and 15.3 rebounds, and it was teams like Millard's that helped take the "crazy fun" to the next level.

When Ohio State basketball historian Lee Caryer had former lettermen vote on their all-time starting five for men's basketball, all five were players who spent their entire careers in front of patrons at St. John. It played host to 13 NCAA Tournament qualifiers, four Final Four outfits and the 1960 national championship team led by forwards Jerry Lucas and John Havlicek and guard Larry Siegfried – three of Caryer's all-time starting five – who claimed the lone national championship team in program history.

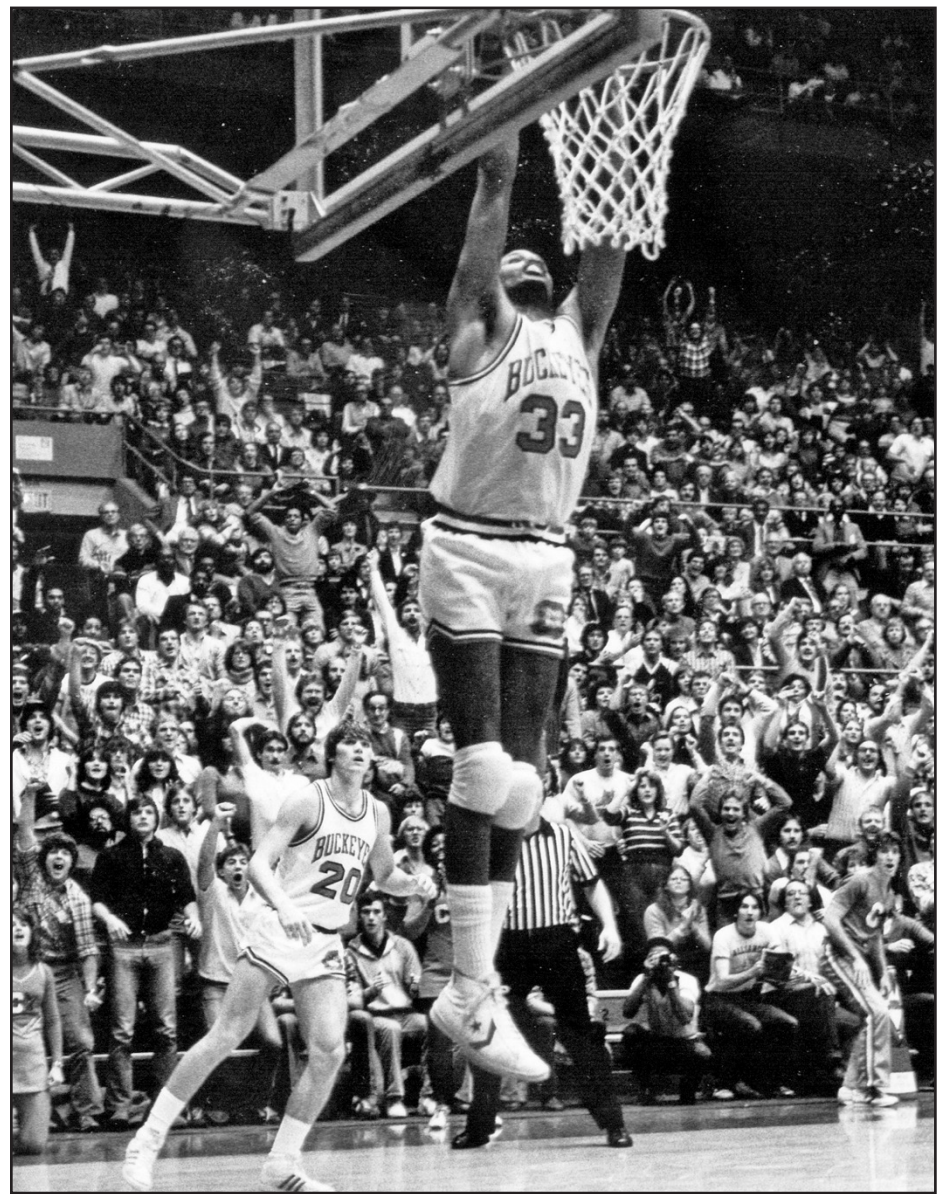
From Caryer's perspective, getting to know the players from the earliest, most successful rosters in St. John like Lucas and Havlicek has grown his admiration for the venue. Their character impressed him, and according to Caryer, Fred Taylor – who coached the Buckeyes from 1963-76 – had 102 lettermen, of whom 97 graduated, all calling St. John home.

"For those of us who were aware of it at the time, it's still far greater than the Schottenstein Center," Caryer said. "The Schottenstein Center is kind of a placeholder for what St. John used to be. St. John was the palace of college basketball when it was built."

"The first time I went to St. John, I thought I was in another world. I think we adapted to that, and we adapted to the greatness of the (1960-62) teams, maybe foolishly thinking it was going to go on forever."

Forward Clark Kellogg and guard Jim Jackson (who round out Caryer's all-time starting five) also made their names at St. John, with Kellogg producing the best high school game of any player in St. John history, scoring 51 points for St. Joseph in a 74-65 loss to Columbus East in the 1979 Class AAA State Basketball Championship in front of a crowd of 14,055. Kellogg's scoring output still stands as the state record in a title game, and he did it without the presence of a three-point line, which was around for only the final 12 seasons of basketball at St. John.

For as many Buckeye legends who saw the floor at St. John, just as many stars



FILE PHOTO

HOUSE OF LEGENDS — Several Ohio State greats left their mark on the history of St. John Arena including Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek, Clark Kellogg (pictured) and Jim Jackson, to name a few.

from other schools also made appearances over the years. Earvin "Magic" Johnson played at St. John during his time at Michigan State, as did other future NBA Hall of Famers such as Kevin McHale (Minnesota), Ralph Sampson (Virginia) and Isiah Thomas (Indiana), as well as UCLA center Lew Alcindor – though most would recognize him now as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

And while the players provided plenty of memories, there were no shortage of notable games played over the years at St. John, and one memory mentioned by both Helwigen and Hunter was Ohio State's double-overtime thriller against Indiana on Feb. 17, 1991.

The Hoosiers entered as the No. 4 team in the country and were led by legendary three-time national champion coach Bob Knight, who also played on that lone OSU championship team. The Buckeyes had a fantastic squad that year as well, coached by Randy Ayers, and were ranked No. 2 in the nation.

Ohio State won a 97-95 thriller before a sellout crowd of 13,276 partisan fans on a last-second shot from forward Treg Lee. The Buckeyes made the Sweet 16 that season, finishing with a 27-4 record, and Hel-

wagen said the win put Ohio State back on the national radar.

"People still talk about it. It's been over 30 years, and they'll be talking about it for a lot longer," he said. "It was probably one of the greatest and most well-played games ever in Columbus."

St. John Arena helped further establish an Ohio State men's program that had already been playing games dating back to the 1800s, but on the women's side, St. John served as a birthplace. The first varsity women's season was played there in 1965, and the Big Ten began sponsoring women's basketball prior to the 1982-83 season.

Ohio State won early iterations of the conference tournament from 1975-78, and the Buckeyes' first NCAA tournament appearance came in the 1981-82 season, the second under head coach Tara VanDerveer. It was just three years later that Ohio State – with Watt in her senior season – made it to the Elite Eight.

Also during this time, St. John played host on several occasions to an intense feud between Ohio State and Iowa, with the teams combining to win 10 out of 11 Big Ten regular-season titles from 1982-

93.

The Buckeyes shared the conference title with Indiana in 1982-83 and Iowa in 1986-87, and they took sole ownership of the title in the years in between. The No. 1-ranked Hawkeyes finally broke Ohio State's streak in the 1987-88 season, defeating the Buckeyes at home before falling at St. John Arena later in the season in a 58-54 classic.

Watt, who played for the Buckeyes from 1982-85, at first stated that the rivalry wouldn't have been the same if played in the Schottenstein Center, but then stepped back a touch. What made the rivalry in her eyes was beating Iowa in front of a sellout crowd in Carver-Hawkeye Arena her senior year, due largely to an advertisement put in the paper by Iowa coach C. Vivian Stringer.

"They actually oversold it by 5- or 6,000 – it was one of the largest crowds ever to see a women's game," Watt said. "It was 22,000-plus."

Watt recalled one of the first near-sellouts in women's history when a crowd of 10,184 packed in to watch an overtime bout between Ohio State and USC on Jan. 8, 1986, that featured two of the premier athletes in women's college basketball going head-to-head in Ohio State's Francine Lewis and USC's Cheryl Miller. The Trojans scratched out an 83-81 victory.

"That arena was just rocking," Watt said. "I was sitting in the front row where we would watch the men's games, right underneath the basket, and two of the best players in the country were banging on each other right there. That was probably one of the most exciting games I ever saw there."

In 1992-93, future WNBA star Katie Smith – whose name currently hangs in the rafters at the Schottenstein Center – led the Ohio State women to their first (and to date, only) Final Four appearance, where they made it to the national title game before falling to Texas Tech in a run of unprecedented success for the Buckeyes, and sparked a trove of memories made within St. John.

"At the time," Watt said, "it was absolutely one of the best arenas around."

Ohio State's men's and women's teams shared St. John Arena not just for games, but also for practice, which created some of Watt's favorite interactions while she was a player. That included getting starstruck by the above-mentioned Kellogg.

"We would share the training room with the men's team at the same time," she said. "We'd be getting treatment as they were getting treatment coming off the court. To share a whirlpool with Clark Kellogg – he was a junior when I was a freshman – that was a pretty big deal, as you might imagine. We thought that was the most awesome thing in the world."

She and her teammates also did some trash talking to a few athletic department staffers who would play pickup games on the floor, including a then-relatively unknown quarterbacks coach for the football team.

"We would be walking in (to practice) and these guys would be playing pickup games from the athletic department. It was always the same four or six guys, half-court. Of course, we'd give them s-t about what their game was or wasn't. And Jim Tressel was one of those guys.



FILE PHOTO

BIRTH OF A PROGRAM — St. John Arena served as the birthplace of Ohio State's women's basketball program, hosting the Buckeyes from their inaugural season in 1965 until 1998, when they moved into the Schottenstein Center. Katie Smith (above) is among the Buckeye greats to have called St. John home.

"And I remember when Jim Tressel came back to Ohio State as the (head) coach, and I was doing women's basketball on the radio at the time and had been for 35 years. I got to meet him at the basketball game when he came. I went up to him and said, 'Hey, nice to meet you. I don't know if you remember (me).' And he was like, 'I totally remember. You played basketball for Ohio State and you used to make fun of us playing half-court.' That was a fun day because it took us way back."

Following her playing career, Watt has provided color commentary for the Ohio State women's team since 1987. Even though it's been more than 40 years now, she still recalls what it was like to see St. John for the first time as a recruit.

The inside appealed much more to her than the outside, which she described as looking like a "gray battleship." After playing in high school gyms during her prep career, her first time in St. John was her first time taking the court in a basketball-specific arena.

"You walk down those ramps onto the court and you look up and you see all the wood," she said. "The wood floor, the wood seats, the wood everything. I thought it was beautiful."

Despite that beauty, Ohio State moved on from St. John and completed construction on the Schottenstein Center in February of 1998, with games beginning that fall. The project cost \$115 million, according

to Ohio State's archives, boasting a greatly increased seating capacity of 19,500 and multipurpose use for hockey games and concerts.

"I was outraged when they decided to (replace St. John)," Caryer said. "I just thought it was a horrible thing. Then very quickly I realized they needed two things: They needed bigger, and they needed better, because St. John had not been maintained like it used to be."

Having made the first basket 42 years prior, Millard was given the chance to make the honorary last basket on Feb. 28, 1998, following the final regular-season game at St. John. He'd been asked to make a layup after Ohio State lost in overtime to Penn State.

"My son said, 'Don't make the layup your last shot,'" Millard said. "So I took the ball back behind the three-point line after I made the layup, made a three and walked off. That's how it ended."

There were some who thought the women's team could have stayed in St. John Arena and been the featured team there, with a smaller space perhaps working better for a team with a lower average attendance.

Watt saw both sides of the argument. On one hand, she believes St. John to be a better environment for a basketball game, but she also appreciates that the women now have equal facilities to the men in the Schottenstein Center, not to mention that both teams were in need of an upgrade. The athletic department gave men's basketball, women's basketball and hockey equal budgets to design and implement their facilities.

"A good crowd of 3- or 4,000 in St. John Arena was huge. That was loud and it was raucous. You put that in Value City Arena and it kind of got lost a little bit," Watt said. "But the facility itself was so much nicer and first class that I would have hated for the women not to have that opportunity to have a first-class locker room like the men did."

With the 25th season of basketball recently wrapping up at the Schottenstein Center, it begs the question: Would Ohio State basketball history have changed if the Buckeyes had stayed in St. John? It's a hypothetical that most felt was difficult to answer, as Hunter pointed to the success of head coach Thad Matta in the early years at the Schottenstein Center, with the team reaching two Final Fours and a national title game.

"They were going to Sweet 16s and winning Big Ten championships and winning Big Ten tournaments and all that," Hunter said. "I don't know whether they could have done all that if (Matta) had to recruit in St. John Arena. I think they probably would have had to put some money into St. John Arena that they hadn't done."

Helwage shared a similar sentiment, saying that although St. John is a louder, better basketball environment, modern facilities were an important part of recruiting when the Schottenstein Center was built and remain as such today. Not to mention, a larger seating capacity allowed for more revenue.

"It probably could have lasted a lot longer, but I think there was this sentiment that Ohio State could draw 15 or 20,000 people for games," Helwage said. "So they sought a replacement for it. In some

ways, The Schott has been great. In other ways, I don't think it has the same charm that St. John had."

Retrofitting the older structure could have been another option, Helwage added, but decisions were made and Ohio State went in the direction of the Schottenstein Center.

Several olympic sports still made use of St. John, including fencing, gymnastics and volleyball, until 2019 when the Covelli Center was constructed for those sports and wrestling, which had also used the Schottenstein Center as its home venue.

The women's basketball team returned to St. John in 2004 for a pair of home games and has made a few visits since. The men's team has played there on several occasions since moving out, most recently against Kent State Nov. 25, 2019, but the expectation is that the Buckeyes have played their last basketball game at St. John.

"I think it was just a special occasion," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told BSB in 2020. "I doubt we'll go back. I just don't see it."

Now that it's not in use anymore, St. John could be torn down in the coming years. Hunter feels a connection with the building, and he said it's painful to think about it being demolished, but he recognizes that it's likely inevitable.

"The last time I talked to Gene Smith about this, probably 2015 or something, he said something to the effect of, he knew it was going to happen someday," Hunter said. "But people who were worried about that could stop worrying in the immediate future because, at the time, I don't know how many sports were still using it."

"(Smith) said, 'Before we can tear this down, we would have to build facilities for this sport and that sport and whatever. That's a lot of fundraising and that's going to take some time.' Since then, I think they've built facilities for all those sports."

Given Smith's statements and the movement of all remaining athletics teams from the space, the future of St. John Arena appears unclear. Ohio State announced plans to tear it down in 2012 in an effort to add more classrooms and maximize campus space, only to go back on that proposal in 2016, according to a report from The Columbus Dispatch.

In January 2017, The Lantern revealed details of a plan for campus expansion called Framework 2.0 that included a removal of St. John. Again, the destruction of the arena did not come to fruition, though the university completed the rest of the plans, including the \$227.8 million Interdisciplinary Research Facility. Framework 3.0 was announced in February 2022 with no mention of St. John. Regardless of whether the physical building remains on campus, the legacy of St. John Arena will live on in Ohio State lore for generations to come.

"I think you can talk to just about any player, and they'll tell you that they'd rather play in St. John Arena," Millard said. "It's closer, everything is compacted, the noise is greater – it's just a great place to play. The new arena might seat a few more people, but I don't think it would replace St. John Arena."

"It was just a privilege to play there with the people I had on my team."

OSU Battles To Bitter End At B1G Tournament

After a 13-18 regular season and just a 5-15 mark through conference play, it's safe to say expectations for 13th-seeded Ohio State in the Big Ten tournament weren't all that lofty.

Although the Buckeyes entered the conference tournament as winners of two of their last three games, many expected them to meet their fate in one of the first two rounds as victims to either Wisconsin or Iowa. Instead, Ohio State ripped off three straight wins en route to an appearance in the semifinals, making many in Columbus forget the lengthy regular-season losing streaks and struggles – at least for a few days.

COURT
REPORT
Jack Emerson

Ohio State was unable to triumph over top-ranked Purdue in the semifinal, but the resolve showed by the Buckeyes left head coach Chris Holtmann proud of what the team accomplished during its week in Chicago.

“I think I’ll need some time to probably process that and think that through, and maybe I’ll have a better statement after I have a chance to kind of process all that went into this year,” Holtmann said after the loss to Purdue. “Certainly, you leave here feeling really proud of how we competed, and yet we also recognize the struggles. So I need some time to process it.”

The Buckeyes became the lowest-seeded team to reach the semifinals in Big Ten tournament history, triumphing over No. 12 Wisconsin, No. 5 Iowa and No. 4 Michigan State during their run, teams that Ohio State went just 1-4 against during the regular season. Not to mention, the Buckeyes also lost the services of leading scorer Brice Sensabaugh late against Iowa, causing him to miss the final two contests of the season.

Ohio State faced a tall task in the semifinal against top-seeded Purdue, and for the first 17 minutes against the Boilermakers, the Buckeyes stepped up to the challenge. They led by as many as eight points in the first half, largely due to guard Roddy Gayle Jr.’s five three-pointers, but the Buckeyes ultimately fell into old habits. Purdue closed the half on a 21-5 run, taking a 42-34 lead into the break.

The Boilermakers stayed hot to start the second half, increasing their lead to as many as 15, but the Buckeyes were able to pull within six with 5:43 to go. But fatigue from playing four games in four days set in, and Purdue was able to ride the hot hand of Big Ten Player of the Year Zach Edey – who tallied 32 points and 14 rebounds for the Boilermakers – en route to the 80-66 win.

While Ohio State was unable to finish the job and make the improbable run to an NCAA Tournament berth, forward Justice Sueing, whose collegiate career ended in Chicago, said the Buckeyes showed they could hang tough with the best of the Big Ten.

2022-23 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics																
16-19 Overall (5-15 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 11																
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	33-21	809-24.5	197-409	.482	60-148	.405	83-100	.830	42-135	177-5.4	82-5	38	67	13	18	537-16.3
Justice Sueing	35-32	1062-30.3	157-370	.424	28-97	.289	90-120	.750	60-123	183-5.2	69-1	64	64	15	26	432-12.3
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	35-35	1069-30.5	139-305	.456	42-112	.375	51-70	.729	10-86	96-2.7	58-1	92	46	5	29	371-10.6
Sean McNeil	35-26	1018-29.1	120-279	.430	59-160	.369	40-45	.889	11-60	71-2.0	45-1	44	31	3	16	339-9.7
Roddy Gayle Jr.	35-11	572-16.3	62-141	.440	21-49	.429	17-21	.810	9-48	57-1.6	57-0	32	27	12	21	162-4.6
Felix Okjara	35-11	541-15.5	61-104	.587	1-5	.200	16-26	.615	47-80	127-3.6	61-2	9	18	44	14	139-4.0
Isaac Likekele	32-15	699-21.8	50-129	.388	3-11	.273	17-36	.472	31-98	129-4.0	67-2	89	34	7	24	120-3.8
Tanner Holden	27-0	366-13.5	33-69	.478	7-14	.500	24-28	.857	16-48	64-2.4	32-0	14	19	3	10	97-3.6
Eugene Brown III	22-1	222-10.1	17-32	.531	6-16	.375	8-12	.667	9-25	34-1.5	31-1	4	9	6	9	48-2.2
Bowen Hardman	7-0	18-2.6	4-8	.500	4-8	.500	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	2-0	0	0	0	0	12-1.7
Kalen Etzler	9-0	30-3.3	3-8	.375	1-5	.200	0-0	.000	2-10	12-1.3	4-0	1	2	0	0	7-0.8
Owen Spencer	7-0	19-2.7	1-6	.167	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	5-4	9-1.3	4-0	2	2	0	0	3-0.4
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									50-57	107					21	
Total	35	7050	948-2052	.462	239-650	.368	403-545	.739	370-887	1257-35.9	573-14	410	375	132	181	2538-72.5
Opponents	35	7050	879-2046	.430	241-751	.321	415-574	.723	355-804	1159-33.1	545-5	432	369	99	164	2414-69.0

“I think the biggest thing I’ll take away from this is that we finished it off the right way,” Sueing said. “We had our ups and downs throughout the season. We had a lot of downs, especially to start off the year (in) 2023. What’s important is we were able to finish it strong together. We (played our best) basketball this past month-and-a-half, and I’m just really proud of the guys. I’m really proud of my teammates.”

And though the outing might have had some considering Ohio State’s potential in the NIT, Holtmann said after the loss to Purdue that the Buckeyes’ health might not allow their season to continue, even if an invitation were to come – which it did not.

“I have thought about it,” he said. “We have some injuries beyond what’s public that make it difficult right now, to be quite honest with you, that we have to really get – we have to get some of our guys back. They’re not significant (injuries), but they need to be tended to, and they need some time off.”

Gayle Shines During Tournament Run

During Ohio State’s unexpected trip to the conference semifinal, the Buckeyes got contributions from an unlikely source.

Gayle entered the postseason averaging just 3.7 points per game while taking only 3.7 field-goal attempts per contest. But he showed out in a huge way for the Buckeyes in Chicago, especially down the stretch of games. In the four games played at the United Center, Gayle averaged 12.0 points per game while shooting 64.0 percent from the field, including a 9-of-11 mark from deep.

“It’s been a learning experience for me,” Gayle said after the loss to Purdue. “Especially with guys like Brice out, our offense was a little bit stagnant, so I feel like that was an opportunity for me to step up. It’s definitely a confidence booster, and I know my teammates and coaches have some confidence in me and that allowed me to play more freely.”

Gayle’s start to the tournament wasn’t anything to write home about. He tallied just four points on 1-of-3 shooting against Wisconsin in the opening round, and that trend seemed to follow him into the Iowa game, where Gayle was held scoreless for

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	

the first 33:58 of game action.

But Gayle found his groove from there, finishing a layup to knot the game at 57 before again tying the game at 61 with a clutch jumper a couple of minutes later. Gayle then broke the tie, connecting on a go-ahead three-pointer to push the Buckeyes into a 64-61 lead with 3:23 to go, and he put the game on ice with a pair of free throws to make it 71-67 with 33 seconds left.

“I really have no explanation for it,” Gayle said of his late-game surge against Iowa. “You just have to do what you have to do, get the job done. I know that Coach (Holtmann) wants me to have my presence felt on the offensive and defensive side, so I just stay aggressive and really defend my man and do as much as the team needs me to do in order to win.”

Gayle followed a similar scenario against Michigan State, tallying just a triple in the first half on two shot attempts. But again, he emerged in the second half to score 12 of his 15 points, including a pair of threes, to push Ohio State across the finish line against the Spartans.

Unlike the previous three games, Gayle wasted no time getting going against Purdue. The Niagara Falls, N.Y., native scored 16 first-half points – already passing his career high, which was later set at 20 points – while hitting five consecutive three-pointers during the frame. Although Gayle cooled down significantly in the second half, he still provided a potential glimpse at his future for the Scarlet and Gray with an incredible stretch during the conference tournament.

“Just being able to see him grow over these past couple weeks, just how fast he’s been able to pick up on stuff and he’s been able to get to it – especially during this Big Ten tournament – it shows the growth and progression he was able to make but also what’s to come,” Sueing said. “Roddy is going to be a great player for (The) Ohio State University.”

Seniors Pace Buckeyes In Final Home Game

Ohio State seniors Isaac Likekele, Sean McNeil and Sueing were honored as part of Senior Night when the Buckeyes earned a 73-62 upset win over No. 21 Maryland on March 1.

Despite closing out their careers in the scarlet and gray, all three players did not begin their collegiate careers at Ohio State. Sueing arrived as a transfer for the 2019-20 season after playing his first two seasons at California, while McNeil and Likekele spent the bulk of their college careers at West Virginia and Oklahoma State, respectively, before joining Ohio State prior to this season.

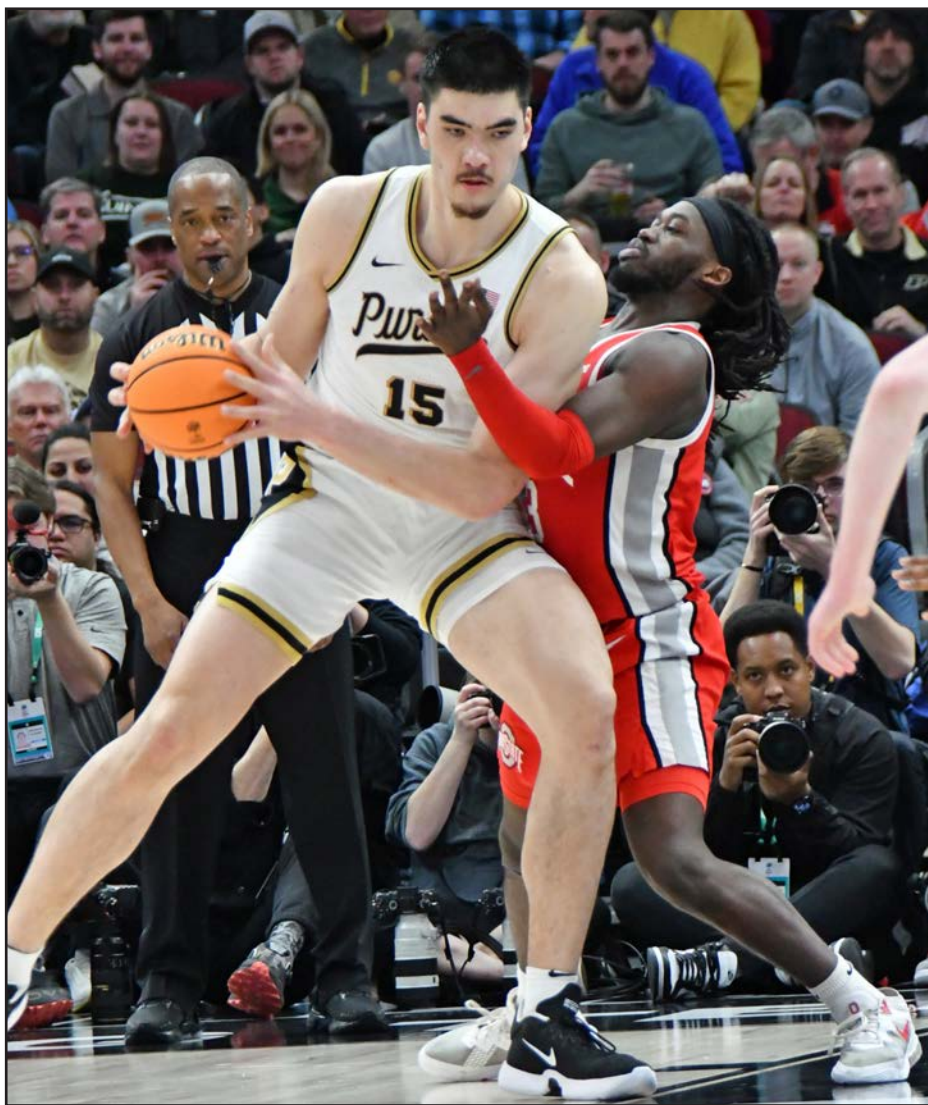
With all three Buckeyes arriving as transfers, Holtmann said the nature of Senior Night has changed, but he still relished the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of his players.

“It’s so unique,” Holtmann said. “When I first got into this, Senior Day was so different than it is now. You had guys that were real seniors and had graduated and had been in your program. You had some transfers, but for the most part it was guys that had been in your program, so your fan base really got to know them over a number of years.”

“Now, it can be, in some ways, a hodgepodge of, ‘Is he a senior? What does Senior Day look like?’ It’s just so different now.”

The feeling was mutual for McNeil and Likekele, who have been in Columbus for less than a calendar year while playing for the Buckeyes. Although McNeil and Likekele’s time at Ohio State has been brief, Sueing said they forged lasting connections together. After the win over the Terrapins, Sueing and his family – who are natives of Hawaii – gifted his senior teammates with leis, a necklace adorned in flower petals and other vegetation, which is a symbol of celebration in Hawaiian culture.

“I was just showing love to my guys,”



SONNY BROCKWAY

TALL TASK — Ohio State 6-5 guard Isaac Likekele (right) and the rest of the Buckeyes struggled to contain 7-4 center Zach Edey (left), who led top-seeded Purdue past Ohio State in the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament with 32 points and 14 rebounds.

Sueing said of the gifts. “This was our only year together, but we were able to build really strong relationships and brotherhoods. This is just an appreciation to them.”

Senior Night can be an emotional time for players and coaches, but the trio of Likekele, McNeil and Sueing did not show it on the court. The three seniors combined to score 19 of Ohio State’s first 25 points, helping the Buckeyes jump on the Terrapins early with a 25-15 lead with 7:05 to play in the first half.

At the half, McNeil and Likekele had combined for 19 points while connecting on all seven of their field-goal attempts in the frame. The duo finished in double digits, with Likekele posting 11 points and McNeil scoring 10.

Although Sueing struggled in the first half – scoring just three points on 1-of-5 shooting – he saved his best for closing time in his final home game.

Sueing helped the Buckeyes keep the Terrapins at arm’s length, scoring 13 of his team-high 16 points in the second half. The longest-tenured Buckeye connected on eight free-throw attempts during the frame, leading the charge on Ohio State’s 20-of-20 mark from the charity stripe, and hit a corner three to push the Buckeyes to a 67-52 lead. After the shot fell, he let out a roar and pointed to his family in the crowd, who had traveled all the way from Hawaii to see him play his final game at Value City Arena.

For Sueing, it was the culmination of a four-year journey in Columbus. He arrived

at Ohio State after two seasons at California and was forced to sit out a year due to transfer rules at the time before contributing to the 2020-21 team that reached the Big Ten tournament finals. Sueing faced a setback last season, sustaining an abdominal injury that held him out of all but two games, before returning this season for one final run with Ohio State.

“I wanted to be able to leave The Schott and the fans on a good note and keep our momentum going into the next game and then into the (Big Ten) tournament,” Sueing said. “I’m really proud of the guys. We’ve had some rough stretches, but more importantly, we’ve stayed together, been able to build on our work ethic and our mentality going forward and we were able to get a couple of (wins) and now we’re going to keep pushing forward.”

Although Sueing faced several difficulties during his Ohio State career, Holtmann acknowledged the value Sueing had on the program during his time with the Buckeyes.

“Justice is a great kid, for one. He’s a really thoughtful kid,” Holtmann said after Senior Day. “He’s had some real challenges this year, and he’s carried a heavy load with how we’ve struggled. But I like where he’s at right now. I like how he’s playing, and I think he’s prepared to finish this thing well.

“He’s a tremendous kid from a wonderful family. He’s been here longer than anybody else. He’s went through sitting out and then playing and having a good year on a really good team, and then he had to deal with another injury where he’s sitting out the whole season, and he’s bounced back and it’s been good to see.”

McNeil and Likekele appeared in only one season for the Buckeyes, an adverse campaign at that, but Holtmann recognized the value that the pair of transfers have brought to Ohio State.

“Those two guys, they’ve been a bridge

for us in a year when we’ve needed some experience,” Holtmann said. “They’ve given us some stability. They’ve struggled at times, but they have a great approach. I really like where they’re at right now, and I love them both as kids.”

Sensabaugh Picks Up All-Big Ten Honors

Sensabaugh has turned heads and made headlines with his scoring ability during his first year at Ohio State, and now he’s picking up hardware to show for it.

The Big Ten released conference awards on March 8 that had Sensabaugh named to the All-Big Ten third team by the media while also landing on the conference’s All-Freshman team after leading the Buckeyes in scoring with 16.3 points per game on 48.2 percent shooting, including 40.5 percent from three-point range.

In addition to his scoring prowess, Sensabaugh emerged as one of Ohio State’s leading rebounders by tallying 5.4 boards per game, the second-highest mark for the Buckeyes. During the season, Sensabaugh picked up four Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors, becoming just the third Buckeye to do so along with D’Angelo Russell and Jared Sullinger.

Sensabaugh was joined by Indiana’s Jalen Hood-Schifino – winner of Freshman of the Year – along with Michigan’s Jett Howard, Purdue’s Braden Smith and Wisconsin’s Connor Essegian on the Big Ten All-Freshman Team.

In addition to Sensabaugh, forwards Zed Key and Sueing were also named All-Big Ten honorable mentions, while McNeil was recognized as Big Ten Sportsmanship Honoree. Sueing produced 12.3 points and 5.2 rebounds per game while shooting 42.4 percent, and Key added 10.8 points and a team-high 7.5 rebounds per game while dealing with a nagging shoulder injury for much of the season.

BIG Men’s Basketball Tournament

March 8-12 • United Center • Chicago

MARCH 8	MARCH 9	MARCH 10	MARCH 11	MARCH 12	All Times ET
	R No. 9 Rutgers Gm. 3 • Noon • BTN	R No. 9 Rutgers Gm. 7 • Noon • BTN	P No. 1 Purdue Gm. 11 • 1 p.m. • CBS	P No. 1 Purdue Gm. 13 • 3:30 p.m. • CBS	P No. 1 Purdue TOURNAMENT CHAMPION
M No. 8 Michigan Gm. 1 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	M No. 8 Michigan Gm. 4 • 25 min. after Gm. 3 • BTN	P No. 1 Purdue Gm. 8 • 25 min. after Gm. 7 • BTN	P No. 1 Purdue Gm. 12 • 25 min. after Gm. 11 • CBS		
O No. 13 Ohio State Gm. 2 • 25 min. after Gm. 1 • BTN	O No. 13 Ohio State Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	O No. 13 Ohio State Gm. 9 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	O No. 13 Ohio State Gm. 10 • 25 min. after Gm. 9 • BTN		
W No. 12 Wisconsin Gm. 6 • 25 min. after Gm. 5 • BTN	W No. 12 Wisconsin Gm. 10 • 25 min. after Gm. 9 • BTN	W No. 12 Wisconsin Gm. 11 • 1 p.m. • CBS			
	I No. 7 Illinois Gm. 1 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	I No. 7 Illinois Gm. 4 • 25 min. after Gm. 3 • BTN	I No. 7 Illinois Gm. 7 • Noon • BTN		
	P No. 10 Penn State Gm. 2 • 25 min. after Gm. 1 • BTN	P No. 10 Penn State Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	P No. 10 Penn State Gm. 8 • 25 min. after Gm. 7 • BTN		
	M No. 14 Minnesota Gm. 3 • Noon • BTN	M No. 14 Minnesota Gm. 6 • 25 min. after Gm. 5 • BTN	M No. 14 Minnesota Gm. 9 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN		
	N No. 11 Nebraska Gm. 4 • 25 min. after Gm. 3 • BTN	N No. 11 Nebraska Gm. 7 • Noon • BTN	N No. 11 Nebraska Gm. 10 • 25 min. after Gm. 9 • BTN		
	M No. 6 Maryland Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	M No. 6 Maryland Gm. 8 • 25 min. after Gm. 7 • BTN	M No. 6 Maryland Gm. 11 • 1 p.m. • CBS		
	I No. 3 Indiana Gm. 6 • 25 min. after Gm. 5 • BTN	I No. 3 Indiana Gm. 9 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	I No. 3 Indiana Gm. 12 • 25 min. after Gm. 11 • CBS		

OSU Ends Season On Deep Tournament Run

By **JACK EMERSON**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State’s final record showed a team that finished the season three games below .500, but the Buckeyes were able to wrap up the 2022-23 campaign in an encouraging way.

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, Ohio State split its last two regular-season games and entered the Big Ten tournament with relatively low expectations as the No. 13 seed. But the Buckeyes made an unforgettable run, becoming the lowest-seeded team to reach the semifinal in Big Ten tournament history.

After knocking off Wisconsin, Iowa and Michigan State to reach those semifinals, Ohio State’s season ended there, with the Buckeyes falling victim to Zach Edey and top-seeded Purdue and finishing with a 16-19 overall record, as well as a 5-15 record in conference play.

Bucks Pull Off Upset Over No. 21 Maryland

Ohio State gave its seniors the perfect send-off from Value City Arena on March 1, picking up an upset 73-62 win over No. 21 Maryland on Senior Night.

The Buckeyes (13-17, 5-14) picked up their second consecutive win thanks to six double-digit scorers, including a team-best 16 points from forward Justice Sueing,

while shooting 48.0 percent (24 of 50) as a team. The Terrapins (20-10, 11-8) couldn’t recover from an early 14-4 deficit as the Buckeyes held an advantage for 37:56 en route to the win.

“We got a win, that’s what’s important,” said guard Sean McNeil, who was honored as part of Senior Night alongside Sueing and Isaac Likekele. “All three of us had pretty good games, I would say, as far as Senior Night goes. I think it was good for us to play the way we did on this night. At the end of the day, it’s really just another game. But on this night, it was good for (Sueing and Likekele) to play the way we all played.”

The seniors paced the Buckeyes early, with McNeil, Likekele and Sueing combining to score 19 of OSU’s first 25 points, lifting the hosts to a 25-15 lead with 7:05 remaining in the opening half while Maryland’s offense lagged behind, tallying six turnovers to that point.

The Terrapins scored the next six points, with a three-pointer from Donta Scott pulling Maryland within four, but the freshman duo of Brice Sensabaugh and Bruce Thornton responded with a bucket and a three-pointer respectively, pushing Ohio State’s lead back up to 30-21 with 3:43 left in the frame. After a three-pointer from Maryland guard Donald Carey, Sensabaugh added another basket on a jumper while McNeil splashed a three-pointer with 2:07 remaining in the frame, but the Buckeyes didn’t score for the rest of the half, taking a 35-29 lead into the break.

Ohio State opened the second half on an 11-4 run to push its lead to 46-33 with 16:05 remaining in the contest, but Maryland guard Ian Martinez – who entered the game averaging 5.8 points per game – scored the Terrapins’ next eight points, his only points of the game, cutting Ohio State’s lead to 50-41.

A pair of free throws from Likekele and a hoop from Sensabaugh, with a Julian Reese free throw sandwiched between, pushed Ohio State’s lead to 54-42 with 10:28 to play. After a jumper from Reese to close the gap to eight, 60-52, the Buckeyes scored the next seven – capped off by a corner three from Sueing – to take their largest lead of the night, 67-52, with 3:31 remaining.

Carey scored the game’s next eight points to make it 67-60 with 1:34 to play, but that’s the closest the Terrapins would get as Ohio State closed out the win at the free-throw line, picking up consecutive wins for the first time since Alabama A&M and Northwestern on Dec. 29 and Jan. 1.

“I think they’re in a really good mind-set right now,” Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann said of his team. “We’re playing quality basketball and having better possessions than really we (had been).”

While Sueing led the way for the Buckeyes, departing seniors McNeil and Likekele also contributed to the win, with Likekele producing 11 points and four assists before fouling out with 6:33 to play and McNeil adding 10 points.

“This was a great win here for our seniors,” Holtmann said. “I thought they had a look in their eye that was tremendous and they played with great competitiveness the whole game. I thought Isaac set the tone

with his defense, Justice was phenomenal all game and Sean was terrific early in his shot-making.”

Felix Okpara and Sensabaugh each added 12 points while Thornton scored 10 points. Okpara also tallied 12 rebounds and three blocks.

Maryland was led by Reese and Carey, who scored 17 and 14 points, respectively, while the Terrapins shot 44.0 percent (22 of 50) as a team. Reese made it a double-double with 12 rebounds, though the Buckeyes held a 32-24 edge on the boards, including nine off the offensive glass for 18 points.

Ohio State connected on all 20 of its free-throw attempts in the win, setting the program record for most makes from the line without a miss. The previous record was achieved twice, with the Buckeyes connecting on all 16 free-throw attempts vs. Penn State on Jan. 25, 2018, and Michigan on Jan. 15, 2003.

OSU Closes Regular Season With Loss To Michigan State

Ohio State closed the regular season with a loss as Michigan State used a good shooting performance to down the Buckeyes 84-78 on March 4 in front of 14,797 at the Breslin Center.

Michigan State (19-11, 11-8) had five players finish in double-digit scoring while shooting 54.7 percent (29 of 53), including 12-of-20 shooting from deep (60.0 percent). Ohio State (13-18, 5-15) cut a 12-point second-half deficit to as few as three, but the Buckeyes couldn’t string together the necessary stops to get over the hump.

“They got a couple (of threes) in transition, and on a couple, we had short close-outs,” Holtmann said. “You’re going to make some shots at home. Give them credit. It was a combination of (good shot-making and poor defense), but I do think there were a couple that we really challenged that they made.”

Sueing finished a layup on Ohio State’s first field-goal attempt, but the Buckeyes missed their next eight shots while Michigan State opened a 17-4 lead with 13:41 remaining in the first half. Okpara ended a 6:54 scoring drought on a post-hook, and Thornton and Likekele hit three-pointers on back-to-back possessions, but baskets from Tyson Walker and A.J. Hoggard kept Michigan State up 22-12 with 9:35 left in the half.

“The (early run) was obviously instrumental at keeping us at arm’s length,” Holtmann said. “That hurt us.”

Forward Joey Hauser extended Michigan State’s lead to 25-14 with a three-pointer, but the Buckeyes countered with a 7-0 run – capped off by a triple from McNeil – to make it 25-21 with 6:39 remaining in the half. Malik Hall and Jaden Akins scored Michigan State’s next 11 points, pushing the Spartans’ advantage back up 36-26.

Thornton and Sensabaugh scored Ohio State’s final eight points of the half, but Michigan State still brought a 43-34 lead into the break after shooting 56.7 percent from the field in the first half.

After Hoggard extended the lead with a layup to start the second half, Ohio State connected on its first four shots – including a pair of threes from Sensabaugh – to cut

Michigan State 84, Ohio State 78									
March 4, 2023 Breslin Center • East Lansing, Mich.									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (13-18, 5-15)		34	44	78					
MSU (19-11, 11-8)		43	41	84					
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Gayle	19	2-3	0-0	0-1	0	2	4		
Thornton	33	7-15	2-2	0-2	1	3	20		
Sensabaugh	30	7-15	4-4	1-4	2	3	21		
Sueing	34	4-10	2-2	3-6	7	3	10		
Okpara	17	2-4	0-0	0-3	1	1	4		
Brown	17	1-1	3-4	1-2	1	1	5		
McNeil	28	4-7	0-0	1-2	3	3	11		
Likekele	22	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	4	3		
Totals	200	28-58	11-12	7-22	15	20	78		
Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 91.7%. Three-point field goals: 11-25 (Thornton 4-8, Sensabaugh 3-6, McNeil 3-6, Likekele 1-1, Gayle 0-1, Sueing 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Gayle, Okpara, Brown). Turnovers: 8 (Sensabaugh 2, Likekele 2, Thornton, Sueing, Brown, Team). Steals: 6 (Sueing 2, Thornton, Okpara, McNeil, Likekele).									
Michigan State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Walker	35	7-15	0-0	0-3	6	2	15		
Hauser	35	6-7	1-2	0-6	2	1	16		
Hoggard	30	6-11	9-11	0-3	7	0	23		
Hall	28	4-8	0-0	1-2	0	3	10		
Whitens	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Akins	25	4-7	2-3	0-3	0	1	13		
Sissoko	22	1-2	2-4	3-4	1	1	4		
Kohler	7	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	0		
Holloman	8	1-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	3		
Cooper	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Brooks	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Izzo	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Smith	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Sanders	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	29-53	14-20	6-23	17	12	84		
Percentages: FG: 54.7%. FT: 70.0%. Three-point field goals: 12-20 (Hauser 3-3, Akins 3-4, Hoggard 2-3, Hall 2-4, Walker 1-4, Holloman 1-1, Brooks 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Hall, Sissoko). Turnovers: 8 (Sissoko 3, Kohler 2, Hauser, Hoggard, Cooper). Steals: 2 (Walker, Hoggard). Officials: Carstensen, Ek, Beaver. Attendance: 14,797.									

the deficit to 50-44 with 17:16 left in the contest. Thornton tried to keep the Ohio State offense afloat by scoring the Buckeyes’ next five points, but the Spartans increased their lead to 61-49 with 12:36 to play.

After a dunk from Eugene Brown III, McNeil sank a pair of triples, but Michigan State responded to both and kept the advantage at 67-57 with 7:29 left in the contest. Ohio State then surged on a 7-0 run – capped by a three-pointer from Thornton – to pull within three and prompt Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo to burn a timeout with 5:31 remaining in the game.

The Spartans quickly pushed their lead back to 73-65 with 2:47 left after a pair of layups from Walker and Hauser sandwiching a pair of free throws by Hoggard. Michigan State remained afloat at the free-throw line as Hoggard and Hauser knocked down three from the charity stripe, and Hoggard added a layup to keep the Spartans in front 78-71 with just 1:03 to play before they closed the game with six more from the line.

“I loved our guys’ approach,” Holtmann said. “I loved our guys’ spirit and the way they had about them, which has been consistent with the last few weeks. This is a hard place to play. Michigan State is a good team.”

Sensabaugh and Thornton led the Buck-

eyes with 21 and 20 points, respectively, with Thornton connecting on 4 of 8 attempts from three-point range. Sueing flirted with a triple-double, scoring 10 points to go with nine rebounds and seven assists, while McNeil added 11 points and was 3 of 6 from deep.

Michigan State was led by 23 points from Hoggard. Hauser and Walker added 16 and 15 points, respectively. Akins (13 points) and Hall (10) also finished in double figures.

Buckeyes Survive Late Push From Badgers

Ohio State withstood a second-half surge from Wisconsin to pick up a 65-57 win in the opening round of the Big Ten tournament on March 8 at the United Center in Chicago.

The 13th-seeded Buckeyes (14-18, 5-15) led by as many as 27 points, but the No. 12 Badgers (17-14, 9-11) closed the game on a 37-18 run while cutting the deficit to as few as four points during the second half. Ohio State shot just 36.4 percent during the second frame (8 of 22) while turning the ball over nine times, but the Buckeyes did just enough to escape from the Badgers, who shot 36.8 percent in the closing half while taking 16 more shot attempts (14 of 38).

"Your mind can go to bad places," Holtmann said. "You've got to have real discipline with your thoughts in that moment. You've got to discipline your mind to stay focused on the possession in front of you. Coaches have watched enough college basketball and coached enough games where they know there is a reason why it says survive and advance come tournament time. We've seen crazy things in our league.

"So you just understand how quickly leads can diminish. Obviously, there were some things as coaches and players we could have done better, but I give our guys credit for trying to finish it."

Sueing got the Ohio State offense rolling early, connecting on a three-pointer and jumper to help the Buckeyes forge an 11-4 lead with 14:28 remaining in the opening half. McNeil then took control of the game, scoring the next seven points for the Buckeyes to increase the advantage to 18-8.

After Wisconsin forward Carter Gilmore connected on a pair of free throws, the Buckeyes emerged on a 9-2 run – led by four points from Thornton – to increase their lead to 27-12 with 7:01 to go in the frame. Thornton's scoring outburst continued, as he nailed a jumper and three-pointer on Ohio State's next two field-goal attempts, to lift the advantage to 32-16 with 4:44 left in the half.

Thornton's late surge contributed to the Buckeyes connecting on 10 of their last 12 attempts from the field, helping Ohio State close out the half with a 36-18 lead over the Badgers.

"We had a good kick to us to start this," Sueing said. "We knew we had to come out with aggression and execute our game plan. We were able to get a comfortable lead."

The Buckeyes opened the second half on an 11-2 run while running away from the Badgers with a 47-20 advantage – their largest lead of the night – on a Sensabaugh jumper with 15:31 remaining in the game. The Badgers quickly responded with a 13-3 run of their own, cutting the deficit to 50-33 while the Wisconsin-heavy crowd began to

rally behind the Badgers.

McNeil silenced the crowd by scoring the next five points to push Ohio State's lead to 55-33 with 11:01 left. Wisconsin forward Tyler Wahl responded to McNeil's outburst with one of his own, scoring the game's next eight points to pull the Badgers within 55-41 with 8:38 to play. Both offenses fell into a funk from there, as the teams combined to go on a 4:13 scoring drought until Sueing hit a turnaround jumper with 4:25 left.

After Wahl answered with a basket, Connor Essegian, Chucky Hepburn and Wahl connected on three-pointers in three consecutive possessions to close the gap to 57-52 with 2:13 remaining. McNeil connected on a pair of free throws while Likekele went 1 of 2 from the charity stripe to increase the lead up to 60-52 with 1:09 to go.

Wisconsin gave Ohio State one last push, as three free throws followed by a layup from Hepburn pulled the Badgers to just a 61-57 deficit with 52 seconds to play. But the Buckeyes put the game away at the free-throw line, where Sueing and Okpara split a pair and Roddy Gayle Jr. hit two to put the game out of reach as the Buckeyes shot 8 of 14 from the free-throw line in the final four minutes.

"I think we kind of did panic a little bit," McNeil said. "That's something we've got to continue to get better at. Teams are going to make a run. Basketball in itself is a game of runs. So it's just about learning how to respond when teams make runs and stay together."

McNeil produced a team-high 17 points for the Buckeyes while connecting on 3 of 4 three-point attempts. Sueing produced 16 points to go along with five rebounds, while Thornton added 15 points. Sensabaugh flirted with a double-double, finishing with nine points and 11 rebounds.

The Badgers were led by Wahl, who scored 17 of his 19 points in the second half and grabbed 10 rebounds for the game. Although Wahl shot 8 of 16 from the field, the Badgers shot just 34.4 percent as a team while shooting a dismal 4 of 22 from deep (18.2 percent).

Ohio State Knocks Out Iowa In Thriller

Ohio State punched its ticket to the quarterfinals of the Big Ten tournament with a nail-biting 73-69 win over Iowa on March 9 at the United Center in Chicago.

The lead changed hands 18 times while the teams locked into eight separate ties, but Ohio State (15-18, 5-15) triumphed over the Hawkeyes (19-13, 11-9) behind 49.2 percent shooting (29 of 59) and solid late-game execution, specifically from Gayle, who tallied all nine of his points in the final 6:02 of play.

"Give our guys a lot of credit," Holtmann said. "I just thought they really battled and found a way to pull it out when it didn't always look that way, especially late. The guys made big plays across the board."

Thornton got things going for Ohio State, hitting a basket on the game's opening possession, but the Buckeyes missed their next four field-goal attempts while

Iowa built a 9-4 lead with 14:35 remaining in the first half. The Buckeyes soon found their rhythm, though, hitting their next five shots to pull in front 12-11 with 12:18 to play in the frame after a jumper by Sensabaugh.

Kris Murray put the Hawkeyes back in the lead with a layup, but the Buckeyes surged on a 9-2 run – propelled by five points from McNeil – to pull back in front 21-15 with 7:48 left in the half. Iowa responded with a run of its own and regained the lead, 26-25, on the back of an 11-4 stretch. Both offenses went silent from there, combining to score just six points in the final 3:03, with the Buckeyes taking a 29-28 lead into the break.

Murray paced the Hawkeyes early in the second half, scoring six of their first nine points in the frame while helping the Hawkeyes jump back into the lead, 37-33, with 15:14 to play. McNeil scored five of Ohio State's next seven points, including a three-pointer, to lift the Buckeyes back to a 40-39 lead.

From that point, the lead changed hands seven times until Iowa took a 51-48 lead with 9:49 remaining, but McNeil quickly responded with a corner three to knot things back up at 51. The Hawkeyes, again, built some semblance of separation, pulling ahead 55-51 on a Payton Sandfort dunk, but a three-pointer from Justice Sueing brought the Buckeyes back within a point with 8:39 left.

Gayle put his imprint on the game down the stretch, scoring seven of Ohio State's next 10 points – including the go-ahead three-pointer – to lift the Buckeyes back into the lead, 64-61, with 3:23 to play.

Ohio State 65, Wisconsin 57

March 8 2023 United Center • Chicago									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (14-18, 5-15)	36	29	65						
Wisconsin (17-14, 9-11)	18	39	57						
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Gayle	21	1-3	2-2	0-4	3	2	4		
Thornton	38	6-12	2-4	0-4	2	2	15		
Sensabaugh	29	4-10	0-0	2-9	0	2	9		
Sueing	32	5-8	5-8	1-4	0	4	16		
Okpara	31	1-2	1-2	1-3	0	1	3		
Brown	10	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	3	0		
McNeil	26	6-8	2-2	0-1	0	1	17		
Likekele	12	0-1	1-2	2-2	2	3	1		
Totals	200	23-44	13-20	7-28	8	18	65		

Percentages: FG: 52.3%. FT: 65.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-13 (McNeil 3-4, Thornton 1-4, Sensabaugh 1-3, Sueing 1-1, Gayle 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Okpara 2, Sensabaugh). **Turnovers:** 16 (Thornton 4, Sensabaugh 3, Sueing 3, Brown 2, McNeil 2, Gayle, Likekele). **Steals:** 8 (Gayle 2, Thornton 2, Okpara 2, Sueing, Brown).

Wisconsin	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Essegian	27	4-13	2-2	2-6	0	3	11		
Wahl	37	8-16	2-4	6-4	3	4	19		
Klesmit	27	0-3	2-4	0-1	0	2	2		
Crowl	25	3-9	2-2	1-0	1	0	8		
Hepburn	30	2-9	1-2	0-1	3	4	6		
Davis	19	3-6	0-0	3-1	1	2	7		
McGee	10	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	0	2		
Lindsey	7	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Gilmore	19	0-1	2-4	0-2	0	3	2		
Totals	200	21-61	11-18	15-17	8	18	57		

Percentages: FG: 34.4%. FT: 61.1%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-22 (Essegian 1-7, Wahl 1-2, Hepburn 1-6, Davis 1-3, Klesmit 0-2, Crowl 0-1, Lindsey 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Wahl, Davis). **Turnovers:** 10 (Crowl 3, Wahl 2, Klesmit 2, Hepburn 2, Essegian). **Steals:** 8 (Wahl 3, Hepburn 2, Davis, Lindsey, Gilmore). **Officials:** Dorsey, Carstensen, Kimble. **Attendance:** N/A.

"I really have no explanation for it," Gayle said of his late-game surge. "You just have to do what you have to do, get the job done. I know that Coach wants me to have my presence felt on the offensive and defensive side, so I just stay aggressive and really defend my man and do as much as the team needs me to do in order to win."

Iowa guard Tony Perkins pulled the Hawkeyes back within one and had an opportunity to give Iowa the lead on its next possession with a trip to the free-throw line, but he missed both, keeping Ohio State in front before a three-pointer from Sueing pushed the lead to 67-63 with 1:54 to go.

Sandfort brought the Hawkeyes within two points on a pair of free throws with 20 seconds to play, but Sueing was able to close things by sinking a pair at the charity stripe with nine seconds left.

Thornton had 17 points and six assists and was aided by 16 points from Sensabaugh and 14 points from Sueing. McNeil added 13 points, helped by a trio of makes from three. The Buckeyes assisted on 17 of their 29 buckets.

Iowa was carried by a trio of double-digit scorers, with Filip Rebraca, Murray and Perkins produced 20, 17 and 16 points, respectively.

"There is a way you need to play when you're struggling and maybe you're down, and I think our team had to learn to play the right way when we went through adversity in games," Holtmann said. "And that's been a hard lesson for us, and it's taken us a minute to understand that. There's a way you've got to play to give yourself a chance. Tonight was a great example."

Continued On Page 26

Ohio State 73, Iowa 69

March 9 2023 United Center • Chicago									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (15-18, 5-15)	29	44	73						
Iowa (19-13, 11-9)	28	41	69						
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Gayle	24	3-5	2-2	1-2	1	2	9		
Thornton	34	8-13	0-0	0-1	6	3	17		
Sensabaugh	27	8-14	0-0	1-3	2	3	16		
Sueing	34	5-13	2-2	1-4	0	1	14		
Okpara	23	1-3	0-0	3-2	0	4	2		
Brown	11	0-1	1-2	0-2	0	1	1		
McNeil	31	4-8	2-2	0-2	3	1	13		
Likekele	17	0-2	1-2	1-3	5	1	1		
Totals	200	29-59	8-10	9-20	17	16	73		

Percentages: FG: 49.2%. FT: 80.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-18 (McNeil 3-6, Sueing 2-3, Gayle 1-1, Thornton 1-3, Sensabaugh 0-3, Okpara 0-1, Brown 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Sueing 2, Sensabaugh, Okpara). **Turnovers:** 8 (Team 3, Sensabaugh 2, Gayle, Sueing, Likekele). **Steals:** 10 (Likekele 3, Thornton 2, Brown 2, Gayle, Sensabaugh, Sueing).

Iowa	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Rebraca	36	7-12	6-6	2-5	2	2	20		
Ulis	17	0-1	1-2	1-1	0	2	1		
Perkins	36	6-12	3-5	3-3	1	1	16		
Murray	38	7-17	1-1	1-5	5	1	17		
C. McCaffery	30	0-2	0-0	0-1	1	3	0		
Dix	6	1-1	0-0	0-1	1	0	2		
Sandfort	15	1-3	2-2	1-2	1	3	4		
P. McCaffery	22	4-8	0-0	1-2	0	0	9		
Totals	200	26-56	13-16	11-20	11	12	69		

Percentages: FG: 46.4%. FT: 81.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-17 (Murray 2-8, Perkins 1-3, P. McCaffery 1-4, C. McCaffery 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Perkins 2, Murray 2, Sandfort). **Turnovers:** 11 (Perkins 4, Rebraca 3, C. McCaffery 2, Murray, Dix). **Steals:** 3 (Perkins 2, Ulis). **Officials:** Dorsey, Riley, Floyd. **Attendance:** 15,537.

Ohio State Advances To Big Ten Semifinals

Continued From Page 25

Buckeyes Continue Miracle Run With Win Over MSU

Ohio State kept its dream run through the Big Ten tournament alive on March 10, defeating fourth-seeded Michigan State 68-58 in the quarterfinals at the Target Center in Chicago.

Despite the Buckeyes being without their leading scorer in Sensabaugh, who missed the contest with knee soreness, Ohio State (16-18, 5-15) got another pair of impressive outings from Thornton and Gayle, who led the way with 21 and 15 points, respectively. Ohio State's defense also played a key part in keeping the Spartans (19-12, 11-8) at bay, as Michigan State shot just 38.2 percent (21 of 55) – including a 3-of-16 mark (18.8 percent) from deep – while forcing eight turnovers and blocking eight shots.

“That was a great team win over an incredible program and terrific players and one of the best (coaches) to ever do it,” Holtmann said. “It’s a great win for our team. I just thought these guys really stepped up and made plays. That’s really what it’s about. Beginning with our defense, they just stepped up and made plays. Players win games, and those guys went out and did it.”

Ohio State relied on the services of Sueing during the early stages of the game, as he tallied eight of the Buckeyes’ first 10 points to push Ohio State to a 10-9 lead at the 14:23 mark in the opening half. Michigan State went on to miss its next four shots, but the Buckeyes held just a 15-11 lead with 11:55 to go in the frame.

The Spartans’ offensive woes continued, making just two of their next seven shots, and Ohio State found a groove offensively to open a 24-17 lead with 7:04 remaining in the half. Buckeye guard Tanner Holden made his first appearance since Feb. 16, cashing a three-pointer during the offensive stretch for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State’s lead ballooned to as many as 11 points, 33-22, after Gayle connected on a corner three with 2:28 to go before the break, but the Buckeyes were held scoreless from there. Michigan State tallied just one basket over the remainder of the half, and Ohio State carried a 33-24 advantage into the break. The Spartans were hampered in the first 20 minutes by hitting just 9 of 29 from the floor (31.0 percent), including just 1 of 9 from deep (11.1 percent). The Buckeyes, meanwhile, connected on 51.9 percent of their shots (14 of 27) and 5 of 9 from outside the arc.

Michigan State emerged during the opening stages of the second half with a vengeance, hitting its first four shots while cutting the deficit to 36-34 with 16:35 remaining in regulation. But the Buckeyes quickly responded with Thornton and Sueing cashing three-pointers on back-to-back possessions to push the advantage to 42-34. The lead then returned to double digits after Thornton finished a layup in transition, making it 46-36 entering the under-12 timeout.

Gayle scored Ohio State’s next five points while the Buckeyes pushed their lead to 51-39, and after a bucket from Hoggard, Sueing added a three-pointer to lift the ad-

Ohio State 68, Michigan State 58

March 10 2023 United Center • Chicago						
	1	2	F			
Ohio State (16-18, 5-15)	33	35	68			
MSU (19-12, 11-8)	24	34	58			

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Gayle	26	5-8	2-2	0-3	1	4	15
Thornton	35	8-17	4-7	2-2	6	0	21
McNeil	39	2-8	0-0	1-5	3	1	5
Sueing	36	5-15	0-0	0-4	2	4	14
Okpara	35	4-6	0-0	2-6	1	3	8
Likekele	19	0-1	2-3	0-1	2	2	2
Holden	5	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	3
Brown	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Hardman	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Spencer	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Etzler	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	25-56	8-12	8-25	15	17	68

Percentages: FG: 44.6%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-19 (Sueing 4-7, Gayle 3-3, Thornton 1-3, McNeil 1-5, Holden 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 8 (Okpara 5, Thornton 2, Gayle). **Turnovers:** 5 (Likekele 2, Gayle, Brown, Team). **Steals:** 4 (Gayle, Thornton, Sueing, Likekele). **Technical Fouls:** 1 (Holden)

Michigan State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Walker	38	4-9	1-2	0-3	2	3	10
Akins	30	5-13	0-0	1-3	0	0	10
Hauser	34	3-5	8-8	1-5	2	2	15
Hoggard	29	4-12	1-2	0-5	2	3	10
Sissoko	25	3-3	0-2	2-1	2	3	6
Hall	23	0-6	3-4	2-2	1	2	3
Holloman	9	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	0	4
Kohler	6	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	2	0
Brooks	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Cooper	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Whitens	1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Totals	200	21-55	13-18	10-25	9	15	58

Percentages: FG: 8.2%. FT: 72.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-16 (Walker 1-4, Hauser 1-3, Hoggard 1-2, Akins 0-2, Holloman 0-2, Hall 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Walker, Akins, Hauser, Hoggard, Sissoko, Hall). **Turnovers:** 8 (Walker 2, Hoggard 2, Sissoko, Kohler, Hall, Team). **Steals:** 3 (Walker, Hauser, Hall). **Officials:** Sciotto, Pfeifer, Kueneman. **Attendance:** 16,738.

vantage to 54-41 with 7:37 to play.

Michigan State then surged on a 9-2 run to cut the deficit to 56-50 with 4:54 to play. Gayle responded by scoring Ohio State’s next seven points, including a three-pointer, to lift the Buckeyes back to a 63-52 lead with 2:01 remaining.

“Yesterday’s performance (against Iowa) just basically gave me even more confidence than I had, knowing that my teammates and my coaches have the same belief or even more confidence in me,” Gayle said. “I just really just stayed aggressive and try to play aggressive and play the best winning basketball.”

The 13th-seeded Buckeyes eventually went up by as many as 14 points in the win and in the process became the lowest-seeded team to make the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament.

In addition to his game-high 21 points, Thornton led Ohio State’s playmaking efforts, dishing out six of the Buckeyes’ 15 assists. Sueing added 14 points and four rebounds. Okpara paced the Buckeyes with a game-high eight off the glass, to go along with eight points and five blocks.

Michigan State was led by Hauser, who produced a team-high 15 points, while Akins, Hoggard and Walker each added 10 points.

“I want to just prove people wrong,” Thornton said. “I want to show everybody

Purdue 80, Ohio State 66

March 11 2023 United Center • Chicago						
	1	2	F			
Ohio State (16-19, 5-15)	34	32	66			
Purdue (28-5, 15-5)	42	38	80			

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Gayle	34	7-9	1-2	1-2	1	2	20
Thornton	34	3-12	2-4	1-1	3	3	9
McNeil	23	2-6	0-0	0-1	0	3	4
Sueing	39	3-11	6-6	0-2	2	3	15
Okpara	22	3-6	1-2	1-3	0	5	7
Holden	12	0-1	0-0	1-3	2	2	0
Brown	13	2-2	2-2	1-5	2	1	7
Likekele	22	2-5	0-1	0-1	5	2	4

Totals 200 22-52 12-17 6-21 13 24 66

Percentages: FG: 42.3%. FT: 70.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-24 (Gayle 5-6, Sueing 3-8, Thornton 1-3, Brown 1-1, McNeil 0-3, Okpara 0-2, Likekele 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Gayle, Sueing, Okpara). **Turnovers:** 9 (Sueing 3, Gayle 2, McNeil, Brown, Likekele, Team). **Steals:** 2 (Gayle, Sueing).

Purdue	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Gillis	27	0-1	2-2	0-1	2	2	2
Loyer	28	1-5	0-0	0-3	5	2	3
Smith	30	5-5	2-2	0-5	5	1	14
Newman	32	5-7	3-4	0-3	3	3	15
Edey	35	12-25	8-11	6-8	3	1	32
Furst	14	3-4	0-0	2-3	0	3	6
Kaufman-Renn	5	0-3	2-2	0-0	0	1	2
Kohler	6	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	2	0
Jenkins	12	2-6	0-0	0-1	0	2	6
Morton	17	0-2	0-1	0-2	0	2	0
Totals	200	28-58	17-22	11-27	18	17	80

Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 77.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-15 (Smith 2-2, Newman 2-4, Jenkins 2-3, Loyer 1-3, Gillis 0-1, Morton 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Newman, Morton). **Turnovers:** 7 (Loyer 2, Smith, Edey, Kaufman-Renn, Jenkins, Team). **Steals:** 3 (Smith, Newman, Edey). **Officials:** Sciotto, Pfeifer, Watson. **Attendance:** N/A.

what this team is really made of. We went through a big slump, but we kept fighting. We keep showing people that we belong. We belong here.”

OSU's Run Ends In Semifinal Loss To Purdue

Ohio State’s Big Ten tournament run came to a close on March 11, when the Buckeyes fell to top-seeded Purdue 80-66 in the semifinals at the United Center.

Ohio State (16-19, 5-15) struggled to contain Big Ten Player of the Year and Purdue center Zach Edey, who registered 32 points and 14 rebounds, to lift the Boilermakers (28-5, 15-5) past the 13th-seeded Buckeyes. Edey, standing at 7-4, helped the Boilermakers out-rebound the Buckeyes 38-27 and stake out a 36-18 scoring advantage in the paint.

“We were trying to trap (Edey), we just couldn’t get there,” Holtmann said. “He got it too deep a couple of times, more than a couple of times. They do a great job getting him the ball, but also he just plants in the paint and you can’t move him. He just plants there, and he’s immovable. Sometimes they’ll do some ball screen actions, but it’s too hard to get him out of the paint.”

Purdue opened the game by connecting

on a pair of threes from Brandon Newman and Fletcher Loyer to help stake out an 8-2 lead with 17:36 remaining in the frame. The Buckeyes received some offense via a pair of buckets from Okpara and a triple from Sueing, but Purdue guard Braden Smith responded with a three of his own to keep the Boilermakers in front 15-10.

Gayle then continued his emergence in the Big Ten tournament, hitting four three-pointers in the span of 4:33 to help put Ohio State up 26-19 with 10:15 left in the half.

“We all knew what Roddy was capable of doing the whole year,” Thornton said. “He just brought it out when we needed it the most. He had a great week.”

Sueing added a triple to put Ohio State up 29-21, but Edey took hold of the game from there. He scored 12 of the Boilermakers’ next 14 points to retake a 35-34 lead for Purdue with 2:41 left in the half. Ohio State was held scoreless for the remainder of the frame, while Edey added a free throw giving him 17 points for the frame and Purdue extended its lead to 42-34 entering the break, closing the half on a 21-5 run.

Edey kept things going for the Boilermakers to start the second half, hitting a post-hook shoot before ceding control to Smith, who scored Purdue’s next five points and pushed the lead to 49-38 with 16:14 to play. The Boilermakers’ lead ballooned to as many as 15 points, but Ohio State, aided by a pair of threes from Thornton and Sueing as well as a prolonged scoring drought by Purdue, closed the gap to 57-50 with 7:44 remaining.

A basket and a pair of free throws from Edey pushed the Boilermakers back to a 61-50 lead, but the Buckeyes were again able to whittle down the deficit, trailing just 61-55 after an Okpara free throw with 5:43 left. That was as close as Ohio State would get, though, as Purdue then surged on a 12-2 run – capped by a triple from Newman and a three-point play from Edey – to extend the lead to 73-57 with 2:19 remaining, putting the game out of reach for good.

“I think we showed what Ohio State basketball is,” Sueing said. “We go out there and we compete. It doesn’t matter who’s on the other side.

“Purdue is a great team at the end of the day. They (have been) No. 1 in the country. We did our job by playing the right way, making the right plays, and leaving it all out there on the floor. With that, we live with the results. So I love my guys, I love the coaches, and I’m just proud of our effort throughout this entire thing.”

Gayle led the Buckeyes with 20 points while shooting 5 of 6 from deep, helping the Buckeyes register 10 of 24 (41.7 percent) mark from three-point range, while Sueing added 15 points.

Supporting Edey’s efforts was Smith, who scored 14 points and connected on all five of his field-goal attempts (two from deep) while adding five rebounds and five assists. Newman scored 15 points on 5-of-7 shooting.

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

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 (8-6, 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, W 8-3; **4** vs. Cal at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas, L 16-1; **5** vs. Oklahoma at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas, W 12-9; **11-12** at Cal State Bakersfield, W 17-5; W 19-6; W 9-5; **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.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (16-19, 5-15)

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, W 73-62; **6** at Michigan State, L 84-78; **8** Big Ten Tournament at Chicago, vs. Wisconsin, W 65-57; **9** Big Ten Tournament at Chicago, vs. Iowa, W 73-69; **10** Big Ten Tournament at Chicago, vs. Michigan State, W 68-58; **11** Big Ten Tournament at Chicago, vs. Purdue, L 80-66.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (24-7, 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.

March 3 Big Ten Tournament at Minneapolis, vs. Michigan, W 81-79; **4** Big Ten Tournament at Minneapolis, vs. Indiana, W 79-75; **5** Big Ten Tournament at Minneapolis, vs. Iowa, L 105-72. **18** NCAA Tournament at Columbus, vs. James Madison.

MEN'S GOLF

Feb. 12 Puerto Rico Classic at Grand Reserve, Puerto Rico, 8/13; **13** Puerto Rico Classic at Grand Reserve, Puerto Rico, 2/13; **14** Puerto Rico Classic at Grand Reserve, Puerto Rico, 5/13.

March 6 Colleton River Collegiate at Bluffton, S.C., 11/12; **7** Colleton River Collegiate at Bluffton, S.C., 8/12; **13-14** Sea Island Invitational at St. Simons Island, Ga.; **27-28** Valspar Collegiate at Stuart, Fla.

April 2-4 Calusa Cup at Naples, Fla.; **21-23** ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE; **28-30** Big Ten Championship at Galloway, N.J.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Feb. 12 Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., T2/16; **13** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., T4/16; **12** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., 6/16; **26** Westbrook Invitational at Peoria, Ariz, T2/14; **27** Westbrook Invitational at Peoria, Ariz, T2/14.

March 17-19 Mountain View Collegiate at Tucson, Ariz.

April 3-5 Silverado Showdown at Napa, Calif.; **15-16** LADY BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL; **21-23** Big Ten Championship at Pittsburgh.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 14 Windy City Invite at Chicago, Ill., 3rd/6 (394.900); **21** at Navy Open, 1st/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, W 409.950-387.600; **11** TRI-MEET, 3rd/3 (397.600) vs. PENN STATE (404.450) & OKLAHOMA (410.000); **17** at Nebraska; **31** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

April 1 BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS; **14-15** NCAA Championships at State College, Pa.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (13-1, 5-1)

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, W 196.700-195.575; **5** TRI-MEET, 1st/3 (197.600) vs. ILLINOIS (196.875) AND KENT STATE (196.025); **10** at Cal Quad, 3rd/4 (196.900); **18** Big Ten Championships at Iowa City, Iowa; **29-April 1** NCAA Regional.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (20-15-3, 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.

March 3 Big Ten Tournament quarterfinals vs. Penn State, W 5-1, L 2-1 (OT), W 3-1; **11** Big Ten Tournament semifinal at Michigan, L 7-3.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (32-5-2, 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 quarter-finals), W 4-1, W 2-1.

March 3 WCHA semifinal at Minneapolis vs. Minnesota Duluth, W 2-1; **4** WCHA Championship at Minneapolis vs. Minnesota, L 3-1; **11** NCAA Regional final vs. Quinnipiac, W 5-2: **17** NCAA Frozen Four semifinals at Duluth, Minn. vs. Northeastern.

MEN'S LACROSSE (3-3, 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, L 16-13; **11** at Notre Dame, L 16-3; **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 (4-4, 0-1)

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, W 13-12 (OT)

March 4 at James Madison, L 16-7; **9** MICHIGAN, L 14-12; **12** COLORADO, L, 14-10; **18** JOHNS HOPKINS; **25** at Penn State; **28** LOUISVILLE.

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

SOFTBALL (9-7, 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. Coastal Carolina, L 6-4; vs. Canisius, W 8-0 (5 innings) **11** at Conway, S.C., vs. Houston Christian, W 5-4; vs. Canisius, W 5-0 **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; **22-25** Big Ten Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich., Men: 2/8; Women: 1/12.

March 5 LAST CHANCE MEET, NTS; **9-11** CSCAA National Invitational at Elkhart, Ind., Men: 3/10; Women: 3/10; **9-11** NCAA Zone Championships at Bloomington, Ind., NTS; **22-25** NCAA Championships at Minneapolis.

MEN'S TENNIS (15-2, 0-0)

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

Feb. 3 TEXAS A&M, W 7-0; **5** TEXAS, W 4-0; **9** at Wake Forest;, 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, L 4-1; **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.

WOMEN'S TENNIS (8-5, 1-0)

Jan. 22 OKLAHOMA W 5-1; **27** ITA KICKOFF WEEKEND VS. OLD DOMINION, W 4-0; **28** ITA KICKOFF WEEKEND VS. TENNESSEE, W 4-2.

Feb. 2 OKLAHOMA STATE, W 4-3; **4** GEORGIA, W 4-0; **10** ITA National Team Indoor Championship at Seattle, Wash., vs. Auburn, W 4-0; **11** ITA National Team Indoor Championship quarterfinals at Seattle, Wash., vs. Texas A&M, L 4-0; **12** ITA National Team Indoor Championship consolation at Seattle, Wash., vs. Michigan, L 4-1; **19** ARIZONA STATE, W 5-2; **22** NC STATE, L 4-3; **26** vs. Texas A&M at Lake Nona, Fla., L 5-2.

March 4 PENN STATE, W 7-0; **12** at UCLA, L 4-3; **14** at Pepperdine; **17** WISCONSIN; **19** MINNESOTA; **24** PURDUE; **26** at Northwestern.

April 5 KENTUCKY; **7** NEBRASKA; **9** IOWA; **14** at Michigan State; **16** at Michigan; **22** at Rutgers; **23** at Maryland; **27** Big Ten Tournament.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (11-8, 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, L 3-1; **10-11** at BYU, L 3-1, L 3-2; **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, 4/14.; **16-18** NCAA Championships at Tulsa, Okla.

McMahon Named Big Ten Freshman Of The Year

Ohio State freshman forward Cotie McMahon was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year on Feb. 28 by a panel of conference coaches and media members.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

McMahon has started all 32 games for the Buckeyes this season, averaging 14.7 points, 5.3 rebounds and 2.6 assists on 51.5 percent shooting. While McMahon has been in the starting lineup all season, she's taken on an increased emphasis in the latter half of the schedule following a season-ending injury to guard Madison Greene and a lower-leg injury that has kept guard Jacy Sheldon out for most of the season.

She's registered double-digit scoring in 22 games while reaching the 20-point

2022-23 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

25-7 Overall (12-6 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 6

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	32-32	1129-35.3	202-471	.429	103-251	.410	47-55	.855	11-84	95-3.0	47-0	79	67	10	44	554-17.3
Cotie McMahon	32-32	908-28.4	175-340	.515	12-48	.250	108-158	.684	40-131	171-5.3	85-3	82	91	23	53	470-14.7
Taylor Thierry	32-32	984-30.7	179-288	.622	12-31	.387	78-121	.645	101-115	216-6.8	99-4	75	46	23	65	448-14.0
Jacy Sheldon	9-6	222-24.7	40-89	.449	7-24	.292	16-20	.800	6-18	24-2.7	18-0	25	22	2	37	103-11.4
Rebeka Mikulasikova	31-25	735-23.7	135-278	.486	41-122	.336	33-44	.750	20-104	124-4.0	71-2	49	53	6	20	344-11.1
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	32-19	863-27.0	71-216	.329	29-120	.242	58-95	.611	24-116	140-4.4	82-2	111	48	9	51	229-7.2
Eboni Walker	30-7	428-14.3	55-121	.455	0-3	.000	19-31	.613	38-65	103-3.4	48-1	40	33	2	23	129-4.3
Hevynne Bristow	26-0	299-11.5	36-72	.500	7-17	.412	26-35	.743	20-62	82-3.2	38-0	20	30	10	16	105-4.0
Emma Shumate	28-0	336-12.0	18-75	.240	12-52	.231	3-6	.500	13-18	31-1.1	29-0	13	7	27	13	51-1.8
Kaia Henderson	12-0	43-3.6	4-12	.333	2-5	.400	3-3	1.000	0-4	4-0.3	5-0	2	3	0	1	13-1.1
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									56-58	114			10			
Total	32	6425	959-2065	.464	239-702	.340	427-614	.695	346-800	1146-35.8	559-12	559	442	113	366	2584-80.8
Opponents	32	6425	817-1918	.426	190-630	.302	360-509	.707	359-850	1209-37.8	544-11	459	648	95	189	2184-68.3

plateau on 13 occasions, including a career-high 30 points in Ohio State's overtime win over South Florida on Dec. 20. She also posted a 28-point, 12-rebound

performance in the Buckeyes' 81-79 win over Michigan in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, one of three double-doubles on the season for McMahon.

She becomes the 10th player in Ohio State history to be named Big Ten Freshman of the Year, joining Tracey Hall (1985), Lisa Cline (1986), Averill Roberts (1990), Katie Smith (1993), LaToya Turner (2000), Jessica Davenport (2004), Jantel Lavender (2008), Samantha Prahalish (2009) and Kelsey Mitchell (2015). McMahon also tied the program record with six Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors, equaling the mark previously set by Mitchell.

"It's exciting and well deserved for her," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "One thing I've just been so happy about this year is how hard she works. She's an incredibly hard worker, she plays hard and just competes at a high level. But I think we're really just starting to see what could be an incredible career."

McMahon's rise to Big Ten Freshman of the Year could be surprising to some given that she was not an expected starter for the Buckeyes entering this season, but it was all according to plan for the first-year Buckeye.

"When I first got here (after) graduating early, that was really the goal on top of other goals, but that was definitely one of them to accomplish – Big Ten Freshman of the Year," she said. "That was always kind of the plan."

McMahon was also one of five members of the Big Ten All-Freshman Team for both the coaches and media. She was unanimous among coaches but not among the media and joined on both lists by Indiana guard Yarden Garzon, Minnesota guard Mara Braun, Rutgers forward Kaylene Smikle and Wisconsin forward Serah Williams.

Several Buckeyes Earn Conference Honors

Several Ohio State players were included among the All-Big Ten teams, including guards Taylor Mikesell and Taylor Thierry as well as McMahon. Mikesell was named first-team by coaches and media, while McMahon and Thierry were both named to the second team by the

coaches and media.

Mikesell is averaging a team-leading 17.3 points per game this season on 42.9 percent shooting, including 41.0 percent shooting from deep. She's averaging 35.3 minutes per contest and has played 145 more minutes – the equivalent of over 3½ games – than Thierry, who has the next most on the team.

"She's been such an impact on our program," McGuff said. "An elite player, a great kid, and she has really blossomed into an incredible leader as well."

Thierry is averaging 14.0 points per game on a team-leading 62.2 percent shooting from the field, which is seventh in the country and third in the Big Ten behind Iowa forward Monika Czinano (67.4 percent) and Indiana forward Mackenzie Holmes (68.8 percent).

"Taylor has worked incredibly hard since she's been here," McGuff said. "She's very disciplined, and it's just been really nice to see the progress that she's made in two years."



Taylor Thierry

Thierry also posted a team-high 6.8 rebounds per game and leads Ohio State with 65 steals on the season, and she is one of just three Buckeyes – along with McMahon and Mikesell – to play in and start every game this year.

"It always feels good to be recognized for something like that, but there are a lot more important things on my mind than all that, like winning our next couple of games," Thierry said. "Like I said, it was good to be recognized."

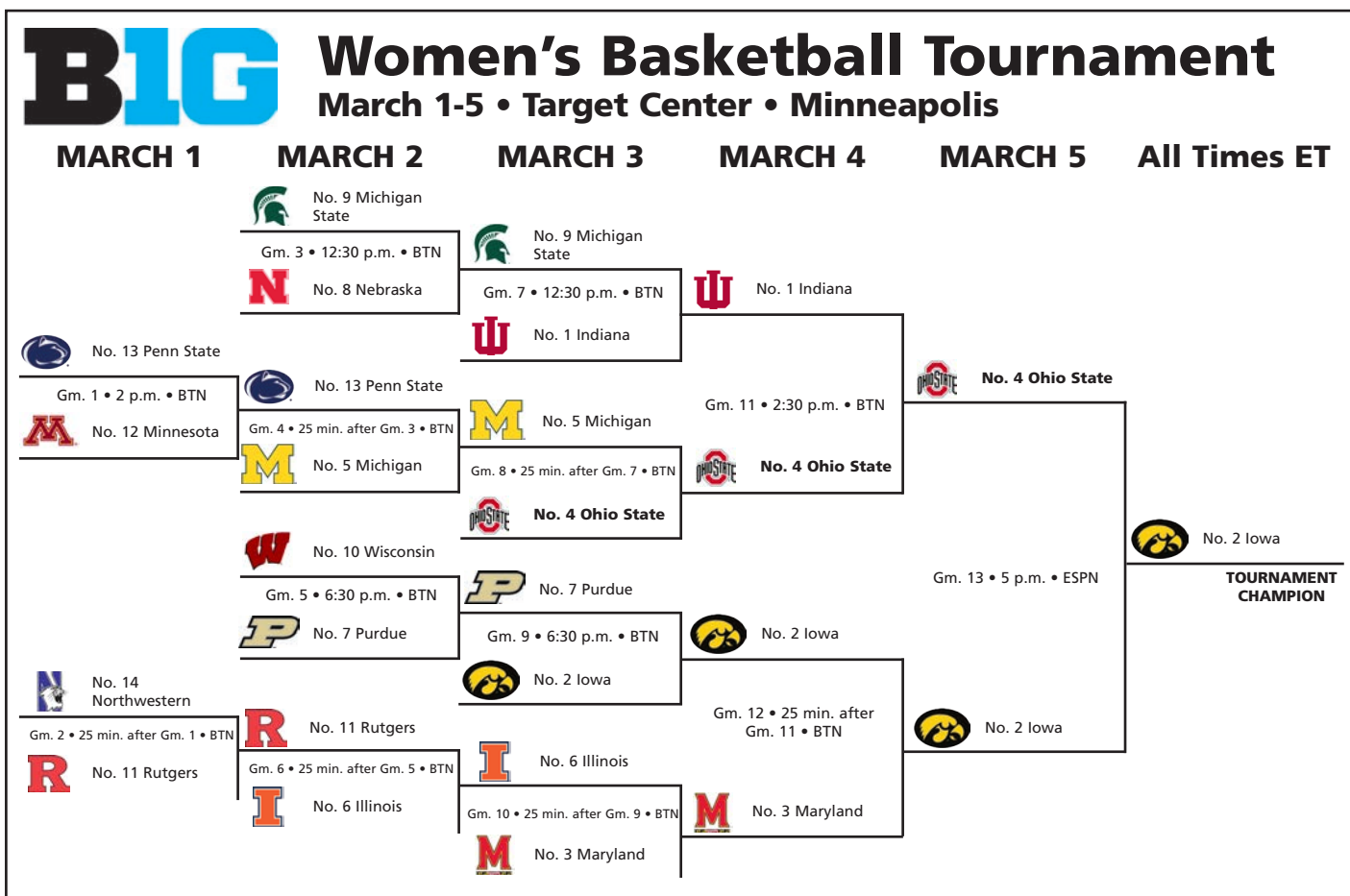
Another recognition for Thierry came on the Big Ten All-Defense Team, where she earned a nod from the conference's coaches but not the media, and she was also Ohio State's Big Ten Sportsmanship Award nominee. No other Buckeyes were recognized by coaches, while the media gave honorable mentions to guard Rikki Harris and forward Rebeka Mikulasiková.

Other individual awards for the Big Ten included Iowa guard Caitlin Clark as Player of the Year; Holmes as Defensive



SONNY BROCKWAY

PHENOMENAL FRESHMAN — Ohio State first-year forward Cotie McMahon was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year on Feb. 28, becoming just the 10th Buckeye to earn the honor. McMahon has started all 32 games for Ohio State this season and is averaging 14.7 points and 5.3 rebounds.



Player of the Year; Iowa forward Hannah Stuelke as Sixth Player of the Year; and Indiana head coach Teri Moren as Coach of the Year.

McMahon and Thierry also earned some postseason honors, voted as members of the Big Ten All-Tournament Team.

No Word On Sheldon's Status For Next Season

McGuff said on March 1 that Sheldon's status is still in the air regarding a potential return to Ohio State for a fifth season of college basketball.

Sheldon has one season of eligibility remaining via a COVID-19 waiver if she chooses to utilize it, but McGuff said those conversations have yet to pick up any steam.

"Haven't decided for sure yet," he said. "We've kind of said, 'Hey, when we get through the last game, we're going to sit down and figure it out.' I'll get any information she might need from the WNBA, so there's nothing for sure yet."

Sheldon made her return to Ohio State's lineup in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, coming off the bench in all three contests and totaling 18 points, six assists and six steals while limited to 46 of a possible 120 minutes.

With nearly a two-week layoff between the conference tournament and NCAA tournament beginning – not to mention that Ohio State will host the first two rounds by virtue of earning a top-16 seed – it's possible that Sheldon will see a return to the Buckeyes' starting lineup, or at least see an increase in minutes over the final games of the season. Those games could go a long way in determining Sheldon's prospects for the WNBA draft, which is scheduled for April 10, leaving little time after the tournament to make a decision.

Sheldon's draft stock has been up-and-down throughout this season. She appeared in several mock drafts early in

the season after averaging 6.0 steals per game in her first five games, but her injury cooled off some draft speculation, and she fell out of a handful of mock drafts. She was still included in some mock drafts in recent months, though, projected as the No. 5 overall pick to the Chicago Sky by The Athletic on Jan. 18.

"She's a dynamic scorer, can get into the lane and finish, and handles the ball well as a primary or secondary playmaker," wrote The Athletic's Sabreena Merchant. "Sheldon has made (34.9) percent of her threes and (83.9) percent of her free throws at Ohio State, so she projects as a quality shooter in the W.

"She's been an active defender at the top of the Buckeyes' press and a good team defender in the half-court as well, though she'll have to work on guarding the pick-and-roll."

McGuff's role over the next few weeks will be working with the WNBA to get a sense of how the league views Sheldon as a potential first-round selection. A departure would seem likely if Sheldon is held in that regard, but if not, her return would be welcome for Ohio State, which will be losing Mikesell and trying to reintegrate Greene, who has suffered season-ending knee injuries in each of the last two seasons.

Transfers Finding Success With Other Programs

Ohio State had three players depart for the transfer portal following the conclusion of last season, with guards Anyssa Jones and Kateri Poole leaving for Dayton and LSU, respectively, while forward Gabby Hutcherson joined the squad at Pittsburgh.

Hutcherson has had the quietest season among Ohio State's transfers. The Panthers finished the season with a 10-20 record, while she averaged 5.0 points and 3.5 rebounds in 29 games with seven starts.

though she's doing so on just 33.3 percent shooting.

The Flyers wrapped their regular season and conference tournament with just a 7-21 record, but Jones has no regrets about her departure.

"I'll take this over my first two years (at Ohio State), I don't care what our record looks like," she told the Dayton Daily News on Feb. 9. "I'll take this a million times over what I had."

“The people here – the team, the coaches, everyone – they’re caring individuals. It feels like family. The atmosphere over there just wasn’t for me. To me, it felt more toxic than anything.”

On the flip side, Poole has experienced plenty of team success with the Tigers. LSU opened the season with 23 consecutive wins and is headed to the NCAA tournament with a 28-2 overall record. Poole has been a significant part of that success, appearing in all but one game this season and averaging 4.4 points and 2.3 rebounds, and she is the team's leading three-point shooter at 42.9 percent. Additionally, her 68 assists are second most on the team.

“Being in the top eight (in the rotation), I just want to make my teammates better, get those extra hustle points and balls on the floor,” Poole told NOLA.com on Feb. 7. “We’ve got scorers. I like to dish the rock, make people show better, buy into what Coach (Kim Mulkey) has to say. I feel I’m doing a good job so far.”

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Buckeyes Make Run To Conference Title Game

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

Fourth-seeded Ohio State had an up-and-down outing at the Big Ten Women’s Basketball Tournament from March 3-5, knocking off No. 5 Michigan and No. 1 Indiana before suffering a blowout loss to No. 3 Iowa in the Big Ten Championship Game. The Buckeyes had a record-breaking outing on several fronts, with the win over the Hoosiers featuring a 24-point comeback – the largest in the history of the Big Ten Women’s Basketball Tournament, as well as tied for the largest comeback in a conference game – but the 105-72 loss to the Hawkeyes featured the largest final deficit in a conference title game.

Ohio State will now set its sights on the NCAA Women’s Basketball Tournament, where the Buckeyes – a No. 3 seed – will host the first two rounds in Columbus, with their first game set against No. 14 James Madison on March 18 at 1:30 p.m.

McMahon’s Big Night Leads OSU Past U-M

Freshman forward Cotie McMahon led No. 14 Ohio State to an 81-79 win over then-No. 17 Michigan on March 3, moving the Buckeyes on to the semifinals of the Big Ten Women’s Basketball Tournament.

McMahon finished with a game-high 28 points on 62.5 percent shooting (10 of 16) while adding 12 rebounds and four assists for her second career double-double. Guard Jacy Sheldon also returned for the Buckeyes, hitting a late triple that helped push Ohio State past the Wolverines.

“We play a little faster with (Sheldon) in the game,” said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. “The overall pace is better. When we press, we’re significantly better with her in there. Also, (she) adds another scoring guard. She can really score the ball.”

Sheldon finished with five points in 13 minutes.

The game got off to a poor start for Ohio State, as Michigan guard Jordan Hobbs was fouled on a made three-pointer on the Wolverines’ first possession and connected from the charity stripe. The Buckeyes got a response from guard Taylor Mikesell with a triple, and Ohio State eventually trailed 10-9 with 6:45 left in the first.

Sheldon then checked in for the first time in nearly a month and immediately assisted on a three-pointer from McMahon. Sheldon then poked the ball away from Michigan forward Leigha Brown, and it was corralled by guard Taylor Thierry for a fastbreak score to put Ohio State up 14-10.

Michigan responded with back-to-back baskets to go up 15-14, but a pair of free throws from Thierry put Ohio State back on top, and the Buckeyes held a 24-22 advantage entering the second frame.

Ohio State continued moving fast on the offensive end, hitting back-to-back triples by Emma Shumate and McMahon to start the second quarter, and after a later three-pointer from Mikesell, the Buckeyes went up 39-33 with 4:23 left in the half. It was one of four made three-pointers during the second quarter on four attempts compared to 1-of-4 shooting from deep for Michigan during the



SONNY BROCKWAY

WELCOME BACK – Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon returned to action for the Buckeyes in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten tournament against Michigan, her first appearance since Feb. 5.

frame.

The Buckeyes maintained that slim lead for the remainder of the half before Thierry, after helping force a shot-clock violation by the Wolverines, scored a layup to close the half with a 47-39 advantage. Ohio State shot 58.6 percent from the field (17 of 29) through the first two quarters and was 6 of 8 from deep.

Michigan opened the third quarter on a 12-5 run to cut the deficit to just 52-51 with 6:02 left in the frame. Sheldon was brought back into the contest following an Ohio State timeout, and after dueling layups from the Buckeyes and Wolverines, she scored her first basket of the game on a midrange jumper to put Ohio State up 56-53.

After Michigan tied things up at 56, Ohio State scored seven unanswered – five courtesy of McMahon, who connected on a pair of circus shots – before leading 65-61 at the end of the frame.

The Buckeyes were held scoreless through the first 2:34 of the fourth, and after a triple from Mikesell to keep Ohio State ahead 68-65, the Wolverines responded with back-to-back baskets to go up 70-68 with 6:26 remaining, their first lead since midway through the first.

The lead traded hands three more times over the next few minutes before McMahon hit a pair at the line to put Ohio State up 76-74 with 1:58 to go. After a pair of free throws by Laila Phelia to tie it again, Sheldon made her presence known, connecting on her first triple of the game, and Mikesell hit a layup on the next possession to give the Buckeyes an 81-76 advantage with one minute left.

The Wolverines had a chance to tie or take the lead, down 81-79 with 47 seconds remaining, but the Buckeyes forced a pair of misses on the final possession – one via a block from McMahon – to secure the win in front of 5,544 at the Target Center in Minneapolis.

“Incredible player,” McGuff said of McMahon. “It’s been a long time since I’ve seen somebody that young play so hard. She competes on every possession. She competes on every possession in practice. It’s really fun to see.”

In addition to McMahon’s impressive outing, Ohio State had Thierry (20 points on 8-of-11 shooting) and Mikesell (16) finish in double digits.

“Honestly, just making sure we’re not forcing shots and letting the game come

Ohio State 81, Michigan 79									
March 3, 2023 Target Center • Minneapolis									
		1	2	3	4	F			
Michigan (22-9, 11-7)		22	17	22	18	79			
Ohio State (24-6, 12-6)		24	23	18	16	81			
Michigan	Total	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
	Kiser	36	5-9	4-4	4-5	2	0	14	
	Williams	13	3-3	0-0	1-2	0	2	6	
	Nolan	38	6-15	1-2	2-4	3	1	16	
	Hobbs	16	1-1	1-1	0-1	0	1	4	
	Brown	35	7-21	5-7	1-2	9	3	19	
	Phelia	30	6-14	4-6	1-2	1	1	17	
	Stuck	22	1-3	1-1	1-4	0	2	3	
	Evans	6	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Kampschroeder	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	0	0		
Totals	200	9-68	16-21	14-22	16	10	79		
Percentages: FG: 42.6%. FT: 76.2%. Three-point field goals: 5-17 (Nolan 3-8, Hobbs 1-1, Phelia 1-1, Brown 0-4, Kampschroeder 0-1, Kiser 0-1, Stuck 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 1 (Kiser). Turnovers: 9 (Brown 3, Phelia 2, Kiser, Nolan, Stuck, Team). Steals: 4 (Nolan 2, Phelia 2).									
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
	Walker	23	2-7	0-0	0-5	0	3	4	
	McMahon	35	10-16	6-7	4-8	4	3	28	
	Harris	22	1-3	0-0	0-4	1	3	3	
	Thierry	37	8-11	4-4	2-3	3	4	20	
	Mikesell	37	6-14	1-2	0-3	1	2	16	
	Sheldon	13	2-3	0-0	0-0	2	4	5	
	Mikulášiková	17	1-4	0-0	0-2	2	2	2	
	Shumate	16	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	3	
Totals	200	31-59	11-13	6-26	13	22	81		
Percentages: FG: 52.5%. FT: 84.6%. Three-point field goals: 8-15 (Mikesell 2-7, McMahon 2-3, Harris 1-1, Sheldon 1-1, Shumate 1-1, Mikulášiková 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 4 (McMahon 2, Mikesell, Shumate). Turnovers: 11 (Walker 4, Harris 2, McMahon 2, Mikesell, Mikulášiková, Shumate). Steals: 6 (Thierry 2, McMahon, Mikesell, Sheldon, Walker). Officials: Cross, McConnell, Morris. Attendance: 5,544.									

to us,” Thierry said of how efficiently Ohio State’s offense operated. “Also being more aggressive. It really helped me, at least, being more offensively aggressive.”

Ohio State finished the game 31 of 59 from the floor (52.5 percent), including 8 of 15 from deep (53.3 percent).

Brown led the Wolverines, who were just 5 of 17 (29.4 percent) from beyond the arc, with 19 points.

It was the third win this season for Ohio State over Michigan and the first time in program history that the Buckeyes knocked the Wolverines off three times in one campaign.

Ohio State Pulls Off 24-Point Comeback To Knock Off IU

Ohio State earned a trip to the finals of the Big Ten Women’s Basketball Tournament after completing a furious 24-point comeback against then-No. 2 Indiana on March 4, knocking off the top-seeded team in the conference by a 79-75 decision.

The Buckeyes trailed 46-22 late in the second quarter but dominated the second half, outscoring the Hoosiers 53-29 in the final two quarters, to pull off the largest comeback in the history of the Big Ten Women’s Basketball Tournament.

“That was awesome,” Sheldon said. “That was a great team win for us. Our effort in the second half was awesome. We played together, and it showed.”

The Hoosiers jumped out to a 10-4 lead before the Buckeyes responded by tying

OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 79, Indiana 75

March 4, 2023
Target Center • Minneapolis

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (25-6, 12-6)	12	14	27	26	79
Indiana (27-3, 16-2)	23	23	17	12	75

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Walker	9	1-3	0-0	1-1	0	0	0	0	2
McMahon	40	3-8	6-7	3-11	3	1	12		
Harris	32	4-17	4-4	0-2	6	4	13		
Thierry	40	7-15	5-5	8-4	1	4	19		
Mikesell	25	4-13	4-5	0-2	1	3	13		
Mikulášiková	18	3-5	0-0	0-3	1	4	8		
Sheldon	16	4-8	4-4	0-1	0	2	12		
Shumate	20	0-4	0-0	0-2	0	2	0		
Totals	200	26-73	25-13	27	12	20	79		

Percentages: FG: 35.6%. FT: 92.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-23 (Mikulášiková 2-4, Harris 1-8, Mikesell 1-5, McMahon 0-1, Sheldon 0-1, Shumate 0-4). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Shumate 3, McMahon, Mikesell, Thierry). **Turnovers:** 8 (Mikesell 3, Harris 2, Mikulášiková, Sheldon, Walker). **Steals:** 14 (Sheldon 4, Harris 3, McMahon 3, Thierry 3, Shumate).

Indiana	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Holmes	29	3-7	6-7	1-6	2	4	12		
Garzon	34	2-7	2-2	0-11	3	5	6		
Moore-McNeil	35	2-10	2-2	0-2	2	3	6		
Parrish	27	3-4	2-2	0-2	0	3	10		
Berger	37	7-15	5-6	0-4	6	2	20		
Scalia	26	5-12	1-1	0-5	1	1	15		
Meister	9	2-4	2-3	5-2	0	4	6		
Sandvik	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	24-59	20-31	14	22	25	75		

Percentages: FG: 40.7%. FT: 87.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-18 (Scalia 4-8, Parrish 2-2, Berger 1-3, Garzon 0-2, Moore-McNeil 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Garzon 2, Meister 2, Holmes, Parrish, Scalia). **Turnovers:** 18 (Moore-McNeil 4, Parrish 4, Garzon 3, Berger 2, Scalia 2, Team 2, Holmes). **Steals:** 3 (Garzon, Holmes, Moore-McNeil). **Officials:** Cross, Hall, Cruise. **Attendance:** N/A.

things up at 12 with 5:34 left in the first. Indiana then closed the frame on an 11-0 run, holding the Buckeyes scoreless for the remainder of the quarter and forcing misses on their last 10 shots entering the second, to lead 23-12.

Thierry eventually broke through, scoring a layup off an offensive rebound with 7:54 left in the half and ending the Hoosiers' run at 16-0. During that stretch, Ohio State missed 14 consecutive shots while Indiana was 7 of 13 on the floor at the Target Center.

Ohio State was able to cut the deficit to 32-20 with 4:35 left in the second quarter, but Indiana responded with another significant run – this time 14-2 – that included a trio of three-pointers to lead 46-22, eventually going into the half up 46-26.

“(At the half), we talked about continuing to get good shots,” McGuff said. “I thought the shots that we got were fine in the first half. We just weren't making them.

“The last thing I said – ‘Hey, guys, there's nothing to save this for. We're not playing (again) until the NCAA tournament, which is weeks away. So everything we got, we've got to show some fight because, if we want to truly play our best basketball down the stretch of the season, we've got to fight.’ ”

The Buckeyes then showed some fire coming out in the third quarter. After a triple from Sydney Parrish on Indiana's first possession, Ohio State responded with a 19-4 run to cut the deficit to single digits, 53-45, on a pair of free throws by Rikki Harris with 3:47 left in the frame.

During that run, the Buckeyes connected on a trio of three-pointers – one each from guards Harris and Mikesell and forward Rebeka Mikulášiková – after going just 1 of 13

from deep in the first half.

After cutting the deficit to as few as four points, Ohio State went into the final quarter down 63-53 after a third quarter in which the Buckeyes outscored the Hoosiers 27-17. Much of the run in the frame was predicated by better execution in Ohio State's defensive press. The Buckeyes forced five turnovers and held the Hoosiers to just 4-of-10 shooting.

“They're not an easy team to press because they're well coached and they're very organized in how they approach things,” McGuff said. “Obviously Jacy makes a difference out there as well. But I just think our overall energy and aggressiveness was at a much higher level than it's been.”

Ohio State was able to make it 63-58 with 8:43 left in the game after an old-fashioned three-point play from McMahon, but Indiana responded with five unanswered points to push the lead back to double digits, 68-58. Later, following a five-second violation by Indiana, Sheldon – who came off the bench for the second consecutive game for the Buckeyes – scored back-to-back layups to make it 70-69 with 4:29 left.

The Buckeyes missed several chances to tie or take the lead until Mikesell completed an and-one opportunity to give Ohio State a 72-71 lead with 3:12 left, the first lead for the Buckeyes since they led 2-0. The lead changed hands twice more before Indiana forward Mackenzie Holmes put the Hoosiers up 75-74 on a layup, but Harris responded with a quick layup to give Ohio State a 76-75 advantage with 38 seconds left.

The Hoosiers missed on their next possession and, with under 30 ticks to go, were forced to begin fouling Ohio State. Mikesell drew a call and split a pair at the charity stripe, putting the Buckeyes up 77-75, and after a missed jumper from Parrish, Ohio State was able to close it out at the line.

Thierry led Ohio State with 19 points, while Harris (13), Mikesell (13), McMahon (12) and Sheldon (12) all finished in double digits. McMahon and Thierry both tallied double-doubles, with McMahon boasting a game-high 14 rebounds and Thierry adding 12, though the Hoosiers held a 45-40 edge on the boards. Indiana guard Grace Berger led the Hoosiers with 20 points, while Holmes was held to just 12 points on 3-of-7 shooting. Sara Scalia chipped in 15 for the Hoosiers.

Both teams took advantage of their trips to the line with Ohio State hitting 23 of 25 (92.0 percent) and IU 20 of 23 (87.0 percent).

Buckeyes Blown Out In Big Ten Title Game

Ohio State's run in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament came just short of a conference title, with the Buckeyes suffering a blowout 105-72 loss to then-No. 7 Iowa on March 5.

The Buckeyes, making their first appearance in the conference tournament finals since the 2019-20 season, faced a 37-point deficit at halftime amid a poor shooting performance, including 25.0 percent (9 of 36) in the first 20 minutes. They finished just 34.8 percent from the field (24 of 69) compared to 62.1 percent shooting (36 of 58) for the Hawkeyes, who were led by a 30-point triple-double

from guard Caitlin Clark.

“We just had a disastrous first half, and they made us pay,” McGuff said. “They were so efficient on offense. They played great and deserved to win. We've got to get back (to Columbus) and get our mojo back a little bit.”

Ohio State showed fight early on, forcing turnovers on the first three possessions of the game for Iowa and jumping out to a 7-6 lead after a three-pointer from Thierry.

That ended up being one of the few positive moments for Ohio State on the afternoon, as Iowa responded with a 20-2 run to close out the quarter with a 26-9 lead. The Hawkeyes connected on their final nine shots of the frame while the Buckeyes were just 1 of 10 after the early advantage.

After a triple from Clark to open the second quarter, Thierry responded with a layup to make it 29-11, but that 18-point deficit would be as close as Ohio State got for the remainder of the contest. Iowa ended up outscoring Ohio State 35-15 in the second frame while shooting 64.7 percent from the field (11 of 17), compared to just 27.8 percent (5 of 18) shooting for the Buckeyes.

Iowa eventually led 61-24 at the half, shooting a blistering 72.4 percent (21 of 29) from the field. The Hawkeyes also held a significant lead in rebounds, boasting a 26-12 advantage heading into the break. Clark already had 23 points, five rebounds and nine assists.

“In the first half, just our competitive spirit wasn't where it's been for almost all of the season,” McGuff said. “We missed some early shots, and then everything just went away. All the things that we've worked on, talked on, all the things we were trying to do today, we were doing none of those, and Iowa was just making us pay big time.”

Mikesell and McMahon began to heat up in the third quarter, with Mikesell adding 11 points on 3-of-4 shooting – all from deep – while McMahon contributed 10 points. Despite outscoring the Hawkeyes 30-22 in the frame, Ohio State still trailed 83-54 heading into the fourth quarter.

The final frame featured more of the same, with the Hawkeyes outscoring the Buckeyes 22-18 in the last 10 minutes of the blowout loss. McMahon was called for a technical foul as frustrations mounted, with Ohio State never able to cut the deficit to fewer than 27 points in the second half of the 33-point loss in front of a Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament record crowd of 9,505 at the Target Center.

Ohio State had Mikesell (24 points), McMahon (23) and Thierry (13) all finish in double digits, with McMahon adding a team-

Iowa 105, Ohio State 72

March 5, 2023
Target Center • Minneapolis

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (25-7, 12-6)	9	15	30	18	72
Iowa (26-6, 15-3)	26	35	22	22	105

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Walker	10	0-4	0-0	1-3	1	0	0		
McMahon	38	8-18	7-9	3-4	3	4	23		
Harris	26	0-8	0-2	0-3	5	4	0		
Thierry	31	5-9	2-5	4-1	3	3	13		
Mikesell	35	8-13	2-2	0-0	2	4	24		
Sheldon	17	0-4	1-2	1-0	4	1	1		
Mikulášiková	7	0-3	0-0	0-1	0	2	0		
Shumate	25	2-9	0-0	0-0	0	2	6		
Bristow	9	0-0	2-2	0-3	1	4	2		
Henderson	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
Totals	200	24-69	14-22	12-17	19	24	72		

Percentages: FG: 34.8%. FT: 63.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-32 (Mikesell 6-10, Shumate 2-9, Henderson 1-1, Thierry 1-2, Harris 0-5, McMahon 0-1, Mikulášiková 0-3, Sheldon 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 2 (McMahon, Mikulášiková). **Turnovers:** 12 (Sheldon 4, McMahon 2, Bristow, Harris, Mikesell, Mikulášiková, Thierry, Walker). **Steals:** 13 (McMahon 4, Harris 2, Mikesell 2, Thierry 2, Sheldon, Shumate, Walker).

Iowa	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Warnock	34	1-5	2-2	1-10	2	3	4		
Czinano	26	11-12	4-6	1-6	0	4	26		
Martin	22	5-6	2-2	0-2	3	3	13		
Clark	33	9-17	7-8	2-8	17	2	30		
Marshall	32	3-4	0-0	0-1	2	0	9		
Affolter	19	2-3	7-8	0-3	1	0	11		
Davis	11	1-2	2-2	0-0	0	3	4		
Stuelke	11	3-5	0-1	1-3	0	2	6		
O'Grady	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	2		
McCabe	4	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Weteling	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0		
Ediger	1	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Gyamfi	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Goodman	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	36-58	24-29	9-36	25	19	105		

Percentages: FG: 62.1%. FT: 82.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-18 (Clark 5-11, Marshall 3-3, Martin 1-1, McCabe 0-1, Warnock 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 16 (Martin 4, Czinano 3, Affolter 2, Clark 2, Warnock 2, Davis, Marshall, Weteling). **Steals:** 6 (Marshall 2, Warnock 2, Affolter, Clark). **Officials:** Grinter, Krommenhoek, Camy. **Attendance:** 9,505.

high seven rebounds. Several Buckeyes got into foul trouble, with guards Hevynne Bristow and Harris as well as McMahon and Mikesell all assessed four fouls.

Clark continued her dominance over the rest of the conference, scoring 30 points – including a 5-of-11 clip from deep – while adding a game-high 17 assists in addition to 10 rebounds for the triple-double, her second of the season against the Buckeyes. Forward Monika Czinano nearly matched Clark, scoring 26 points on 11-of-12 shooting.

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Quarterbacks Battling At Spring Practice

Ohio State might be hosting a quarterback competition this offseason, but it is far from the only Big Ten football team breaking in a new signal caller this spring.

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Northwestern, Penn State, Purdue, Rutgers and Wisconsin are among the conference schools that will all either have open quarterback competitions or feature a clear starter who has not started for them before.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

Taking a closer look at each of those cases, Penn State is replacing four-year starter Sean Clifford, who amassed more than 10,000 career passing yards. The top option is promising sophomore Drew Allar, who was a five-star prospect in the class of 2022 out of Medina, Ohio, and came in to relieve Clifford in 10 games last season.

"I just want to see where we can go as a team," Allar told StateCollege.com, "because I know we definitely have the potential, especially building off a year like we had last year. So I'm really looking forward to the future, just going through these workouts and spring ball and seeing what we have as a team and just seeing how much work we've already put in this year."

Iowa brings in a transfer from a Big Ten rival at the position, with Cade McNamara leaving Michigan after being usurped by J.J. McCarthy for the starting job last season. McNamara will have his hands full trying to help revive the Hawkeye offense, which finished second-to-last in the country for

total offense last year.

"I think this team has a chip-on-their-shoulder mentality," McNamara said. "There's no entitlement whatsoever. There's an eagerness. There's a sense of urgency with this team. That matches everything, all the emotions and ambitions that I have in myself as a player. We're in a really good place right now, and I can't wait to go out there and compete and see it on the football field."

Transfers are involved in a multitude of other Big Ten quarterback races, with Illinois bringing in Luke Altmyer from Ole Miss to replace Tommy DeVito and Purdue landing Hudson Card from Texas to fill the void left by Aidan O'Connell. While Altmyer and Card are the presumed starters for next season, several other teams have transfers in legitimate competition for the starting job at their respective schools.

Indiana will have Tennessee acquisition Tayven Jackson, entering just his sophomore season, competing with redshirt junior Dexter Williams II, though neither has any significant experience at the college level.

Nebraska will have Casey Thompson, the incumbent starter who will be limited this spring, according to head coach Matt Rhule, go up against Georgia Tech transfer Jeff Sims. A three-year starter for the Yellow Jackets, Sims adds dual-threat ability with over 1,000 career rushing yards, but the job is still likely Thompson's to lose.

Wisconsin brought in three transfer quarterbacks all looking for an opportunity



Luke Altmyer

to start following multi-year starter Graham Mertz's transfer to Florida, including SMU's Tanner Mordecai, Oklahoma's Nick Evers and Mississippi State's Braedyn Locke. Mordecai appears the odds-on favorite, having thrown for 7,152 yards and 72 touchdowns over the past two seasons with the Mustangs.

"We wanted a quarterback that was talented enough to do specific things in the system, and we felt like we needed to go to the portal to get that," new Wisconsin offensive coordinator Phil Longo told 247Sports. "So we brought in Tanner Mordecai, Braedyn Locke and Nick Evers, three quarterbacks who probably would not have considered Wisconsin with the previous offense. That's not a knock on the previous offense. That's just the truth. They want to be in a diverse system that can be more prolific and more explosive."

Northwestern and Rutgers will have players with starting experience involved in their quarterback duels, with freshman Aidan Gray trying to push Ryan Hilinski and Brendan Sullivan for the Wildcats and Evan Simon and Gavin Wimsatt back for Rutgers after combining for the majority of the Scarlet Knights' production at quarterback last season.

Gattis Named OC, QBs Coach At Maryland

Former Michigan and Miami (Fla.) offensive coordinator Josh Gattis was hired to the same post by Maryland on March 9, replacing former offensive coordinator Dan Enos, who left this offseason for the same job at Arkansas.

Gattis spent last season with the Hurricanes but saw significant struggles in his brief time at Miami, coordinating an offense that averaged just 23.6 points and 367.1 yards of offense per game, and he was fired in January by head coach Mario Cristobal.

It's no wonder that Gattis got immediate consideration for other jobs, though, as he is a former Broyles Award winner, earning the honor as the nation's top assistant coach in 2021 during his time as offensive coordinator for the Wolverines.

In addition to Gattis' three seasons at Michigan, he was also co-offensive coordinator for Alabama in 2018, where he worked alongside current Maryland head coach Mike Locksley.

"Josh and I have a strong relationship and a proven track record of working together to produce a potent offense," Locksley said. "He and I share many of the same philosophies and it should be a very smooth transition."

While the Hurricanes experienced a lack of talent at skill positions, that should be of no concern with the Terrapins, where Gattis will have the opportunity to coordinate an offense that features quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa, entering his fourth season as the starter for Maryland.

Penn State Wins Wrestling Title

No. 1 Penn State took home the Big Ten championship in wrestling March 5, picking up 147 points to finish ahead of Iowa (134), Nebraska (104.5), Ohio State (99.0) and Michigan State (84.5).

"We're super happy to win a Big Ten championship," Penn State coach Cael Sanderson said. "As a coach or as a team your heart's always with the guys who didn't reach their goals. Unfortunately, that happens in pretty much every event – somebody doesn't have quite the tournament they want. But we still celebrate and be happy and move on to the next one."

The Nittany Lions picked up four individual conference titles en route to their team win, but the most unlikely came from Levi Haines at 157 pounds. A true freshman, Haines entered the tournament as the No. 2 seed and No. 7 wrestler in the country, but the No. 1 seed in the conference was the nation's No. 1 wrestler in the weight class in Nebraska's Peyton Robb.

Haines beat No. 6 Kendall Coleman of Purdue to advance to the finals against Robb, and the two locked into a tight battle. With the score tied 1-1 after both regulation and overtime, Haines scored a take-down to beat Robb 3-1 in sudden victory.

"I just stayed persistent, pulling on his head, and when I felt an opening, I let it rip," Haines said. "It goes back to what we do in the practice room. I have guys doing similar stuff on me so I'm just comfortable in that position."

Each of Penn State's other three individual titles went according to chalk. The Nittany Lions feature three wrestlers ranked No. 1 nationally in their respective weight classes, with Roman Bravo-Young at 133 pounds, Carter Starocci at 174 and Aaron Brooks at 184, all of whom won their



Levi Haines

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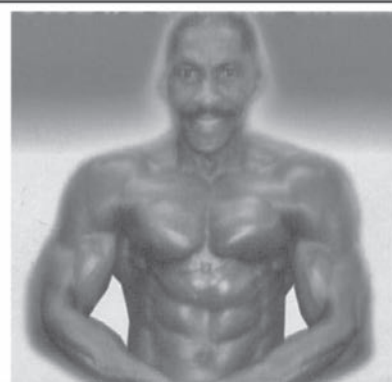
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Penn State is the defending national champion and is the favorite to win again at the NCAA championships, which began on March 16. Bravo-Young, Brooks, Haines and Starocci join heavyweight Greg Kerkvliet as top-three seeds in their respective NCAA tournament brackets for the Nittany Lions, with Bravo-Young and Starocci both landing at No. 1.

Whalen Steps Down From Minnesota WBB

After five seasons at the helm of the Minnesota women's basketball program, head coach Lindsay Whalen announced on March 2 that she is stepping down from her post.

Whalen recently completed her fifth season coaching the Golden Gophers, posting a 71-76 overall record with a 32-58 mark in conference play. Her contract ran through the 2024-25 season, and while she is relinquishing her coaching duties, Whalen is expected to remain with the Gophers as a special assistant to athletic director Mark Coyle.

"I want to thank Mark and the University for giving me the opportunity to lead this program five years ago," Whalen said. "It was an honor of a lifetime. I am grateful to my assistant coaches and staff and want to thank them for everything they did for our student-athletes during the last five years.

"We did things the right way and created a lot of memories, but now is the right time for me to step aside and return to being a proud alum. I look forward to supporting and cheering on the next head coach."

Whalen is a legend in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, hailing from Hutchinson, Minn., and playing basketball within the state at the high school, collegiate and professional level. She played for the Gophers from 2000-04, finishing as the program's all-time leading scorer with 2,285 points and leading the program to their only Final Four appearance in her senior season.

After a stellar collegiate career in which Whalen finished as a three-time All-American, she was taken with the fourth overall pick in the 2004 WNBA draft by the Connecticut Sun. She spent six seasons with the Sun before playing the next nine seasons with the Minnesota Lynx, finishing as a four-time WNBA champion and five-time WNBA All-Star. By the end of her playing career, Whalen's No. 13 had been retired by both the Gophers and Lynx, and she was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball



Lindsay Whalen

Hall of Fame last year.

Whalen was hired by the Gophers prior to the 2018-19 season with no previous coaching experience and finished her first season with a 21-11 record and an appearance in the WNIT. That wound up as the best record among Whalen's five seasons, with her decision to step down coming after an 11-19 finish and a 4-14 mark in conference play this season.

"Together, we just felt like now is the right time for her to step down," Coyle said. "She's still going to be part of our program. She is so much loved in these hallways and these buildings. Obviously, she's an icon. She's on the Mount Rushmore in the state of Minnesota."

Minnesota will now look to find the program's next coach, who will become the 13th in school history.

Expansion Talks Paused Amid Commissioner Search

The Big Ten is still considering adding more teams with USC and UCLA set to arrive in 2024, especially with the Pac-12 in a bit of limbo about its future. But the Big Ten's limbo regarding a conference commissioner is halting those talks for the time being.

Commissioner Kevin Warren left earlier this year to take a job as president and CEO of the Chicago Bears, and without a leader, the conference may encounter

roadblocks in pursuing any potential additions, according to a report from Dennis Dodd of CBS Sports, specifically as it relates to Oregon and Washington, two of the premier brands still remaining in the Pac-12.

"The future of the Ducks and Huskies as members of the Pac-12 may be tied to outgoing Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren," Dodd wrote. "There are indications at least one Big Ten media rights holder won't engage in expansion talks until Warren officially leaves the conference for the Chicago Bears on April 17. That could create an awkward transition for the Pac-12 schools if they have eyes on the Big Ten."

The Pac-12 is still without a media rights deal past the 2024 season, which is part of the reason many of its member schools could be looking to join other power conferences. The Big 12 is rumored to be making a push for Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah as it loses Texas and Oklahoma to the SEC, while Oregon and Washington continue to be associated with the Big Ten ahead of the conference's seven-year media rights deal worth over \$7 billion that begins in 2023.

The Big Ten conference hopes to select a new commissioner by mid-April.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1983

The 1982-83 Ohio State women's basketball season was one of many, many successes, but with one major blemish.

The goal of any Big Ten team is to win the conference title, as was the case with the Buckeyes, but they wanted more. Coach Tara VanDerveer's squad sought a repeat of their 1981-82 conference crown and NCAA tournament berth. OSU got the first but was denied the second, a denial to which many among the Buckeye faithful took great exception.

"That's what our team learned real quick this year," said VanDerveer, "that they couldn't take anything for granted. What we learned from the Big Ten situation was that you have to win it outright to get in the NCAA (tournament)."

Ohio State finished with a 23-5 overall record, including a 15-3 mark in conference play, sharing the Big Ten title with Indiana, who did receive a berth in the tournament.

35 Years Ago - 1988

On the surface, new OSU baseball coach Bob Todd liked what he saw in his team. It was what was underneath, or rather what was missing, that had him worried.

"We've got some people who have gone through the wars in the Big Ten and understand what it is to compete at this level," Todd said. "We have some good athletes, no doubt about it. There are some kids here who are definitely prospects for Major League Baseball. But I see a real lack of depth. If somebody gets hurt, we just don't have anybody at all, of any quality, that can fill in."

Todd was trying to rebound the Bucks from a disappointing 19-27 finish the previous year, when they placed last in the Big Ten's East division with a 4-12 mark under resigned coach Dick Finn.

30 Years Ago - 1993

Languishing in the middle of the Big Ten pack for the last three seasons, the Ohio State women's basketball team climbed one of its last mountains March 7 to make a return to what it considered its rightful place - the conference throne.

Before only the second home sellout crowd in program history, the Lady Buckeyes dumped league archrival and second-ranked Iowa 72-60. That win, coupled with the Hawkeyes' loss to Penn State less than 48 hours before, propelled the Lady Buckeyes into a program-record ranking of No. 3 in the nation and gave OSU a shot at its first Big Ten championship since 1989.

"This puts us right where we want to be," head coach Nancy Darsch said. "We have put our own destiny into our own hands, and that's all you can ask for."

25 Years Ago - 1998

Moments after OSU's regular-season finale with Penn State on Feb. 28, which resulted in yet another heartbreaking defeat,

men's basketball head coach Jim O'Brien made a promise, saying his team will "get good."

Certainly, the Buckeyes didn't get good in 1997-98, O'Brien's first campaign in Columbus. With the overtime disappointment to Penn State, which closed 41-year-old St. John Arena on a downer, OSU stood at 8-21 and 1-15 in the Big Ten. The latter was a school worst, and OSU had been flirting with one of the rare winless seasons in conference history until downing Wisconsin on Feb. 25, which broke a 17-game losing skid.

But O'Brien and his staff put all of their energy into the team's first-round date with rival Indiana in the Big Ten tournament on March 5. OSU lost again, 78-71, to finish 8-22, but not until mounting a furious rally that showed true heart.

"For the first time, I'm happy to talk about the future now," O'Brien said. "I've been hesitant to do that because we're always interested in trying to get this team to improve. This is over now and now all of our efforts are going to be towards getting better."

20 Years Ago - 2003

An early morning snowstorm was not enough to stop the Ohio State football team from making a once-in-a-lifetime journey.

OSU's national championship football team waited out the snowstorm then made a quick 12-hour jaunt to the nation's capital to visit with President George W. Bush at the White House on Feb. 24.

"This is another example of how fortunate we are," OSU junior tight end Ben Hartsock said. "Look at how many great opportunities we've had since we won the national championship. The White House is there in the background. It really is overwhelming the opportunities we've had."

"Being a national champion comes with a lot of perks, that's for sure."

15 Years Ago - 2008

With OSU football player Brian Hartline making his debut on the men's track and field team, the Buckeyes performed well at the Zips Open Feb. 22 in Akron.

Hartline finished second in the 60-meter hurdles with a time of 8.19 seconds. The Canton (Ohio) GlenOak product had won Ohio state titles in the 110- and 300-meter hurdles in high school.

Also showing well for OSU was thrower Lenny Jatsek, who posted the best toss in the Big Ten on the season with a mark of 69 feet, 9 ¾ inches.

10 Years Ago - 2013

Urban Meyer came out of the earliest Ohio State spring football practice session with a smile on his face.

And why not? The head coach of the Buckeyes had not been able to work on a field with his players in 101 days - since they

closed out a perfect season with a 26-21 victory against Michigan on Nov. 24 - and there was nothing Meyer loved to do more.

"I knew we would have good attitudes," Meyer said. "What I'm concerned about is the development of some players. After day one, I can't give you a whole lot because I don't know other than we went out in shorts. We did have a good attitude."

Five Years Ago - 2018

The battle between junior Joe Burrow, sophomore Dwayne Haskins and redshirt freshman Tate Martell was certainly a focus during the spring and went down as one of the most important position battles in program history as the Buckeyes tried to replace J.T. Barrett, who held virtually every major passing record at the school.

While the battle was open, early signs suggested that Burrow (6-3, 215) and Haskins (6-3, 218) would have a head start on Martell. In the first practice of the spring, the duo split first-team reps pretty evenly, while Martell rotated in as well.

"I think it's what you would expect is what I expected," Meyer said. "I think we all know Dwayne kind of finished the season and finished it strong against the team up north. Joe, before his injury, was neck and neck."

"So this is going to be trying to do the best we can to make sure that we have equal opportunity to compete. And I'm going to throw Tate Martell's name in there as well. He's earned the right to compete as well. So we'll do the best job we can to make sure we - you know, playing quarterback, that's everyone's dream, to be a starting quarterback at Ohio State. So we'll make sure we're doing it right."

One Year Ago - 2022

Ohio State offensive lineman Harry Miller announced on March 10 that he would medically retire from football.

Miller released a statement on Twitter that outlined his decision, saying, "I would not usually share such information. However, because I have played football, I am no longer afforded the privilege of privacy, so I will share my story briefly before more articles continue to ask, 'What is wrong with Harry Miller?' That is a good question. It is a good enough question for me not to know the answer, though I have asked it often."

Miller explained that before the 2021-22 season, he informed head coach Ryan Day of his intention to take his own life and that he was immediately put in touch with doctors at Ohio State who helped to support him.

"A person like me, who supposedly has the entire world in front of them, can be fully prepared to give up the world entirely," he continued. "This is not an issue reserved for the far and away. It is in our homes. It is in our conversations. It is in the people we love."

Mosiello Ushers In New Era For OSU Baseball

By **ANDY ANDERS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A new era has begun for Ohio State baseball.

After 12 years under the tutelage of Greg Beals, the Buckeyes parted ways with the coach this offseason and brought in TCU assistant coach Bill Mosiello for his first collegiate head coaching job. Since then, he's gotten to work establishing a winning culture in Columbus.

"I've seen buy-in from day one," Mosiello told BSB on March 7. "And I haven't seen a spot where I'm like, 'Oh shoot, they're not buying in.' They've stayed the course."

The Buckeyes have opened their season with an 8-6 record as of March 12, with a confidence-boosting win in the Frisco Classic from March 3-5 that included an 8-3 win over Mississippi State, the national champions in 2021, and a 12-9 slugfest with Oklahoma to take the tournament's championship.

"You can see that bounce in their step," Mosiello said after the tournament.

Mosiello, who made it to seven NCAA tournaments and four College World Series – a stage Ohio State hasn't gotten to since 1967 – in nine seasons at TCU, is a consummate winner. He said he expects to win every game and make Ohio State nationally relevant immediately, even as he recognizes a slow build over multiple seasons is more likely.

"I had that belief that after 11 games, we're going to be 11-0, the whole country is going to find out that Ohio State's a player right now," Mosiello said after the team's 5-6 start. "That was the goal. You couldn't have exceeded what I believed we could do, so of course it's crushing not to (hit that goal), but it's part of it. You also knew it could happen like that. And I also know that we could be 2-9 right now. So you are who you are. We've just got to continue to get better."

The Buckeyes went 21-30 in 2022, their worst record in a season since a 17-26-2 campaign in 1979. Star shortstop Zach Dezenzo, who more than doubled his teammates with 19 home runs and posted a .319 batting average, left following the 2022 season. So did closer Ethan Hammerberg, who picked up six saves.

Much of Ohio State's lineup has been toyed around with as Mosiello and Co. attempt to figure out the best starting nine. But with Big Ten play set to begin on March 24, the switch-ups could slow down.

"You're always playing to win the Big Ten championship, so the goal is, by your first Big Ten weekend, you really know, 'Here's our three starters. Here's our bullpen. Here's our nine position players,'" Mosiello said. "That's the goal. You just hate to have losses coming into that. But I guess anybody with the tough schedule that we've had early, everybody expected it probably not to go great."

On The Mound

The pitching all starts with junior Isaiah Coupet, a left-handed strikeout manufacturer

whose 5.85 ERA last season has plummeted to an 0.50 mark through 18 innings. He nearly doubles the next best Ohio State hurler in terms of strikeouts, with 27 fans against a mere seven walks, and he struck out exactly nine in each of his first three starts as the staff's ace and Friday starter.

"He's made an amazing turnaround," Mosiello said. "It started as a person. He worked his tail off. As a student, he was over a 3.0 (GPA). I don't know what his highest was before, but it's by far the best he's ever done. He's made an awesome transformation as a kid, and then his work ethic has been awesome."

Taking the mound on Saturday has been junior righthander Justin Eckhardt, a transfer from Texas. Eckhardt appeared in 11 games last season with the Longhorns, striking out 23 batters in 25¹/₃ innings, but his ERA was higher than ideal, an 8.17.

He's had an up-and-down opening to his campaign. He surrendered 12 earned runs in his first 10¹/₃ innings of work to open the year, including a five-run first inning in the Buckeyes' lone loss at the Frisco Classic, a 16-1 drubbing by Cal.

A general lack of bullpen depth allowed the game to get out of hand, and a lack of offense in response to the Golden Bears didn't help matters for Ohio State.

"The way it works in college baseball – especially with us, but really it's most teams – when you don't have a great bullpen, once the score gets to a certain point, you can't say, 'Hey I'm going to bring in this guy to keep it 6-1 or 7-1,'" Mosiello said. "We've got to go to the so-called 'bottom guys' at the time to try to finish the game, so sometimes it can get out of hand."

Sophomore lefty Gavin Bruni completes the Buckeyes' starting rotation as the Sunday opener, with a 4.20 ERA in 15 innings to start the campaign. He'll need to work on improving his control, however, as he's issued 15 free passes against 14 strikeouts to start the season. Gaining experience should help him in that regard – as a freshman last year he pitched just 9²/₃ innings and didn't record a decision or save.

Out of the bullpen, Mosiello has designated freshman lefthander Landon Beidelschies as his go-to arm, and he's picked up two of the team's three saves this season, posting a 3.72 ERA in 9²/₃ innings. He went 1²/₃ shutout innings to close out the team's Frisco Classic-clinching win against Oklahoma, allowing two hits against three strikeouts.

"He's a rock," Mosiello said. "He never stops. He's the best we've got. That's what he's going to do. He's sort of learned that, even if he doesn't pitch great, he is going to get the ball the next opportunity. I'm just proud of his resiliency."

"The head coach of TCU, Kirk Saarloos, called me and is like, 'I love that left-handed stopper you've got. He's awesome.'"

Also seeing heavy usage in relief is graduate righthander Jonah Jenkins – who has the team's other save – as well as graduate Nolan Clegg, sophomore Jacob Gehring, senior Wyatt Loncar and junior Blayne Robinson. Loncar made the switch from starter to reliever, a season after going 2-4 with a 4.56 ERA in 51¹/₃ innings of work.

2023 Ohio State Baseball Roster

No.	Name	Position	Year	Height	Weight	B/T	Hometown
1	Joey Aden	OF	RS-Jr.	6-1	195	R/R	Bentonville, Ark.
12	Cole Andrews	C	Grad.	5-11	200	R/R	Powell, Ohio
54	Drew Bachman	LHP	So.	6-3	205	L/L	West Chester, Ohio
19	Tim Baird	RHP	RS-So.	6-2	195	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
35	Landon Beidelschies	LHP	Fr.	6-3	230	L/L	Canfield, Ohio
10	Gavin Bruni	LHP	So.	6-3	225	L/L	Alliance, Ohio
46	Jameson Campbell	RHP	Grad.	6-0	190	R/R	Painesville, Ohio
20	Nolan Clegg	OF	Grad.	6-2	195	R/R	Toronto, Ohio
34	Isaiah Coupet	LHP	Jr.	6-1	190	L/L	Flossmoor, Ill.
4	Justin Eckhardt	RHP	Jr.	6-2	205	R/R	Sealy, Texas
26	George Eisenhardt	RHP	So.	6-5	200	R/R	Portland, Ore.
2	Marcus Ernst	INF	Grad.	6-1	215	L/R	Dublin, Ohio
5	Nick Erwin	INF	Sr.	6-0	165	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
0	Zach Freeman	OF	So.	6-0	190	L/R	Los Angeles, Calif.
39	Jacob Gehring	RHP	So.	6-1	230	R/R	Canfield, Ohio
9	Matthew Graveline	C	Fr.	6-1	180	R/R	Centerville, Ohio
30	Jonah Jenkins	RHP	Grad.	6-1	205	R/R	Parker, Colo.
43	Jake Johnson	RHP	So.	5-11	190	R/R	Medina, Ohio
23	Logan Jones	RHP	Jr.	6-4	205	R/R	Canton, Ohio
29	Andrew Jones	INF	Fr.	6-2	180	R/R	Cleveland, Ohio
40	Jaylen Jones	LHP	So.	6-1	230	L/L	Thomasville, Ga.
6	Henry Kaczmar	INF	Fr.	5-10	180	L/R	Bath, Ohio
21	Caden Kaiser	OF/1B	RS-Jr.	6-1	200	L/L	Lewis Center, Ohio
7	Kade Kern	OF	Jr.	6-0	200	R/R	Archbold, Ohio
28	Trey Lipsey	OF	So.	6-2	180	L/R	Southfield, Mich.
16	Wyatt Loncar	RHP	Sr.	6-6	240	R/R	Pacific Palisades, Calif.
8	Josh McAlister	INF	So.	6-2	185	R/R	Flossmoor, Ill.
24	Mitchell Okuley	OF	Sr.	6-1	205	L/R	Powell, Ohio
44	Alonzo Paul Jr.	C	Fr.	5-9	160	R/R	Valparaiso, Ind.
17	Cole Pauley	RHP	Fr.	6-0	190	R/R	Lexington, Ohio
42	Tyler Pettorini	INF	So.	5-11	170	L/R	Wooster, Ohio
31	Will Pfennig	RHP	Grad.	6-0	175	R/R	Mason, Ohio
37	Landon Price	LHP	Fr.	5-9	180	L/L	Middle Point, Ohio
38	Blayne Robinson	1B	RS-Jr.	6-5	220	L/L	Defiance, Ohio
32	Hunter Rosson	UTL	Jr.	5-10	180	R/R	Aledo, Texas
41	Mason Sawyer	C	Jr.	6-0	210	R/R	Canal Winchester, Ohio
55	Hank Thomas	OF/1B	Jr.	6-5	215	L/R	Oxford, Ohio
15	Josh Timmerman	RHP	Jr.	6-4	195	R/R	Blacklick, Ohio

Head Coach – Bill Mosiello. **Associate Head Coach/Pitching Coach/Co-Recruiting Coordinator** – Sean Allen. **Recruiting Coordinator / Co-Pitching Coach** – Andrew See. **Assistant Hitting Coach/Catching Coach** – Buck Taylor. **Director of Operations/Recruiting & Player Development** – Damon Lessler. **Director of Player Development/Analytics** – Matt Carpenter. **Director of Player Development/Leadership** – Mike Bahun.

2023 Schedule

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

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

Sophomore righty George Eisenhardt could also be a name to watch, having made one start this season and posting a 1.80 ERA through five innings. Sophomore Jaylen Jones is also someone Mosiello said he'd like to see more of. As a staff generally the Buckeyes will be looking for improvement from last year, as no pitcher who tossed 17 innings or more had an ERA better than 4.54. The team's ERA was 6.51.

"We're trying to use guys out of the bullpen in the highest-leverage situations we can," Mosiello said. "That's where you're trying to find out who's best suited for what, and that's still evolving for us (in the bullpen)."

In The Dirt And Behind The Dish

The Buckeyes' infield has begun to take

shape as the year has progressed. Mosiello has stated that he doesn't like to single out specific players as leaders on the team, but teammates and a look at the roster indicate graduate first baseman Marcus Ernst is one of them. He posted a team-high .337 batting average with four home runs and 24 RBI in 2022.

"The seniors, they're doing a really good job of leading," sophomore designated hitter Tyler Pettorini said. "Marcus, (Mitchell) Okuley, (Nick) Erwin, they've all done a really good job this year."

Ernst has had perhaps the most pop in his bat of any Ohio State hitter, posting a slugging percentage of .559 with a team-high four home runs, and he's one of four players who have started all 14 games for Ohio State through March 12. He also has yet to commit an error in the field, as the Buckeyes have

OHIO STATE BASEBALL

done well defensively as a whole, with a .964 team fielding percentage.

Another productive infield bat has been that of senior third baseman Erwin, who has enjoyed a .277 batting average and 12 RBI, along with a home run thus far this season. It's been a breakout campaign thus far for Erwin, who batted .238 in 2021 before an injury cost him all but one game of the 2022 schedule.

Up the middle of the infield, freshman shortstop Henry Kaczmar and sophomore second baseman Josh McAlister anchor things, each with a fielding percentage above .940 and having already stolen multiple bases on the offensive side. Both are first-time everyday starters, but McAlister did bat .257 in spot duty last year, appearing in 18 games total.

"Kaczmar has played a great shortstop," Mosiello said. "McAlister has played fabulous defense.

"We've done well with the infield defense. They've had a couple of rough plays individually, but I like where we're at. We've just got to keep playing and try to make sure we get better every day."

Pettorini, who is listed as an infielder, serves as designated hitter and has made use of the role with a .286 batting average and team-high four doubles. Last year was a bit of a struggle for the then-freshman, who batted .218 with no home runs in 110 at-bats.

"Whatever Coach Mo thinks is best for me to play, I'm happy," Pettorini said. "I like it."

At catcher is where Ohio State's offense might be flourishing most thus far, with time being split between graduate Cole Andrews and freshman Matthew Graveline. Andrews has posted the team's best batting average to this point, hitting .467 with two doubles and two long balls in 30 at-bats. Graveline is putting up similar video game-esque numbers through 34 at-bats, with a batting average of .441, a slugging percentage of .618 and 12 RBI.

In The Grass

Perhaps Ohio State's best outfielder, according to Mosiello, has been injured for much of the year. After playing the first two games of the season in left field for the Buckeyes, sophomore Trey Lipsey has missed every contest since. That after showing five-tool potential in his freshman season, recording team-highs in on-base percentage with .461 and stolen bases with 14 and adding seven home runs.

"That's an elite leadoff hitter who actually could have a chance to be a premier outfielder in the country," Mosiello said. "He's that good. He's got a chance to be a first-rounder (in the MLB draft) next year after his junior year."

One player who's been healthy and contributing in a big way thus far for the Buckeye outfield is junior Kade Kern. He's started every game in center for the squad, and his range has him far and away leading Ohio State's outfielders with 28 putouts. He did the same in 2022, with 118 putouts while contributing a .298 batting average, 11 stolen bases and nine home runs on the offensive side.

"He's an elite defender, so we're really lucky to have him," Mosiello said. "We've

got to keep him healthy. He can do a lot of things."

Kern has posted a .283 batting average and team-high five stolen bases to this point in 2023. He's also blasted two home runs.

Senior Mitchell Okuley plays right field most days, although there has been some rotation in the corners of the outfield. But the projected lineup when Lipsey returns is Okuley in right with Kern in center and Lipsey in left. Okuley posted a slash line of .287/.397/.476 last season, with eight home runs helping to bolster the last of those three numbers.

Despite several moving parts, the Buckeyes are hoping to put all their new faces and coaching staff in the right position with Big Ten play approaching. Pettorini draws hope for a great campaign from the team's camaraderie.


"I'm really confident in our team this year," he said. "I feel like we're going to win a lot of games. I feel like the guys on our team have a close connection. We go together really well and play as a team."

Mosiello's winning mentality has bled through in the ways that the Buckeyes have won their games. Particularly against Mississippi State and Oklahoma in the Frisco Classic, they fell behind early before responding to pull out the win.

"You're just proud of the players for their perseverance," Mosiello said. "Getting embarrassed on Saturday midgame (against Cal) then coming back, get down 3-0 right away (against Oklahoma) and your thoughts are, 'Well, here we go again.' Then to come back with that and do what they do, I'm really proud of them."

Ohio State was scheduled to travel to face Marshall on March 15 before returning to Columbus for the home opener, a three-game set against Dayton from March 17-19.

"I'm excited to have our home opener," Mosiello said, "and I hope that we can get a lot of people out here. It's going to be important they come watch us early and say, 'Hey, this is a neat group. This is a group worth following.'"

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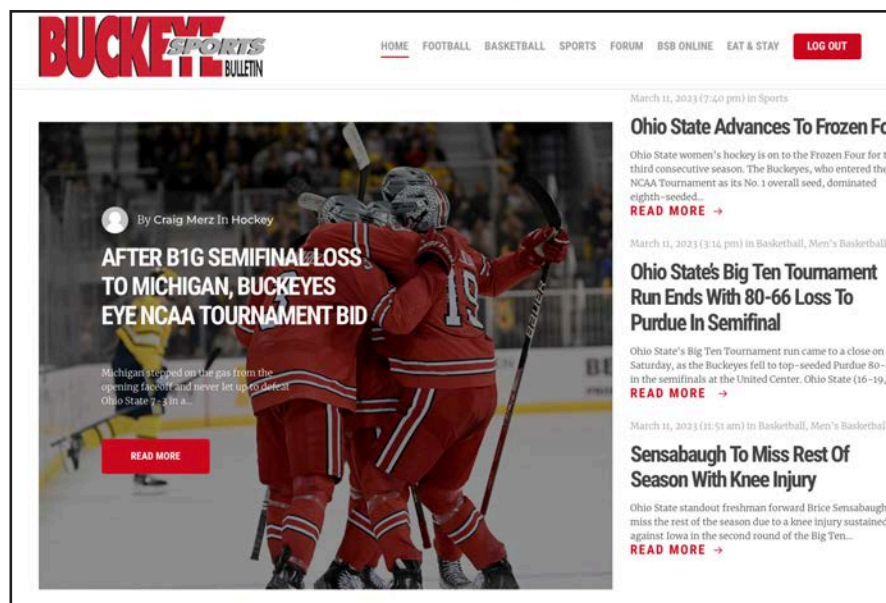
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NCAAs In Sight Despite Loss To Wolverines

Ohio State is playing the waiting game again when it comes to the NCAA tournament selection show on March 19.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

But unlike last season, when the Buckeyes were upset by Penn State in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten tournament and were on the bubble before ultimately being the first team outside the final 16, Ohio State is seemingly a lock to earn an at-large bid this season.

The Buckeyes will return to the NCAAs for the first time since 2019 – they would have made it in 2020 if not for the tournament being canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic – thanks to defeating Penn State in a best-of-three quarterfinals series. It provided enough cushion for a 7-3 loss to Michigan in the semifinals on March 11 that mattered little as far as the PairWise rankings, a statistical formula that emulates the selection process for the 10 at-large bids to the NCAA tournament. The other six spots automatically go to the conference tournament winners.

Ohio State (20-15-3) was ranked ninth as of March 11, and the College Hockey News PairWise Probability Matrix gave the Buckeyes a 100 percent chance of making the tournament.

"It's time to regroup and get ready for the NCAA tournament," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said after the Michigan loss.

There could be upsets in the conference finals the weekend of March 17-18 where a team ranked outside the top 16 team beats a team above the Buckeyes, thus pushing down them down the rankings, but there aren't enough scenarios that should cause Ohio State concern.

In fact, three of the six conference championships will have no effect on the Buckeyes' chances. In the Big Ten, Minnesota (No. 1 in the PairWise) plays Michigan (No. 4). In Atlantic Hockey, the highest of the four ranked semifinalists (Rochester Institute of Technology) is 21st. The Central Collegiate Hockey Association finalists are Northern Michigan (No. 27) and Minnesota State (No. 13).

Compare that to last season when the Buckeyes sat 15th heading into the final weekend of conference tournament play and their probability of making the NCAA tournament was 44 percent. They needed results to go their way in three finals to receive an at-large bid, and the first two did, but Harvard upset Quinnipiac in overtime in the East Coast Athletic Conference championship to take the final spot away from the Buckeyes.

Eerie Reminder

The Michigan semifinal matchup was three years in the making, in a sense, because the teams never got to play it in 2020.

Back then, Ohio State was scheduled to host the Wolverines in a semifinal at Na-

tionwide Arena in downtown Columbus on March 15, but four days earlier the sporting world was changed forever.

It was shortly after media interviews with the Buckeyes ended on the afternoon of March 11 that Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced that he would order a ban on mass gatherings in the coming days because of the rapidly expanding coronavirus. The Columbus Blue Jackets then said the organization's five remaining home games at Nationwide Arena, beginning the following day, would be played without spectators.

Still, Ohio State held out hope that limited attendance would be allowed for its game against the Wolverines.

At 9:27 p.m. on March 11, it was reported that the Utah Jazz' Rudy Gobert had tested positive for the coronavirus. Soon after, the NBA announced its season would be suspended indefinitely. The dominoes would start to fall, and the NHL, MLB and MLS suspended play the next day. College hockey and basketball conference tournaments continued to be canceled until the Big Ten was the final holdout.

On the afternoon of March 12, Rohlik called a team meeting to say no decision had been made about the semifinal. Shortly after the players left Value City Arena, he had to call them back to inform them the rest of the season was canceled. Nearly three years later, Rohlik still finds it hard to grasp what happened.

"It's really surreal to go back and think about that," he told Buckeye Sports Bulletin on March 8. "I remember how excited our group was coming off the ice in that overtime game against Wisconsin (to clinch the quarterfinal series), and I'm excited because we knew we're moving on. We knew we were in the NCAA tournament, and we knew we had a chance to play the Team Up North. And within 24 hours, basically, we were clearing everybody out of here and they had gone home."

This season's semifinal against Michigan gave Rohlik a chance to reflect on the past three years.

"I don't think any of us understood what the COVID situation was going to do to all of us in general, in sports or anything," he said. "A lot of these guys went through some tough times including missing out on that opportunity in the NCAA tournament and the (2020-21 season) playing with COVID. To persevere and be here today, I think that really tells the story."

Senior forward Tate Singleton was excited to get a shot at Michigan in the semifinals after the long wait.

"I was in this position my freshman year, and then we got the call saying, 'Hey, come into the locker room, season's canceled,' so it's kind of surreal," he said. "It just ended right there, and we didn't really know what to do. Everyone kind of just sat there and looked at each other."

"I'm just thankful that we got the opportunity this year to play them. You know, it's kind of a life circle."

Nit-Picking

The Buckeyes reached the semifinals after vanquishing playoff nemesis Penn State at Value City Arena from March 3-5.

Penn State had twice eliminated Ohio State in Columbus, the first coming in 2019 after the Buckeyes had won the regular-season title. Last season, Ohio State took the first game of the quarterfinals, but the Nittany Lions won the next two to advance.

The same scenario was unfolding this season, with the Nittany Lions scoring a dramatic overtime win in the second game on March 4 to force a deciding game. This time, the Buckeyes rallied for a 3-1 win in the third game that relieved the pressure to claim an NCAA spot.

"I believe we're a team that belongs in the tournament. There's no question," Rohlik said after the game. "I think we're built for that. I think we've proven it in the best league in the country."

Penn State is eighth in the PairWise and will be the fourth Big Ten team (along with Michigan and Minnesota) in the NCAA tournament. Expected to just miss the cut are Michigan State at No. 16, likely to be eliminated via an automatic conference bid, and No. 17 Notre Dame, which sits just outside the top 16.

Drama To The End

The series winner was in doubt until the closing moments of game three when the Nittany Lions pulled goalie Liam Souliere with three minutes left and Singleton iced the victory with an empty-netter at 18:17 for the 3-1 final.

"It was unbelievable," said Ohio State defenseman Scooter Brickey. "I mean, that feeling of him shooting that and it (going) in was like no other, and that feeling doesn't plan on stopping anytime soon. We've got more games ahead of us."

The Buckeyes opened the postseason vs. the Nittany Lions with a bang on March 3, posting a 5-1 victory behind the four-point (one goal, three assists) performance from freshman Stephen Halliday.

Ohio State scored three times in the second period to take a 4-0 lead, and Halliday added a goal in the third after the Nittany Lions broke through against Jakub Dobeš. Five Buckeyes scored, with three freshmen and two sophomores each netting a goal.

"We've got to get scoring throughout our lineup, and I think that's our biggest strength, it's not just one line that scores," Halliday said.

He was the center of attention the next night, though not of his own doing, when the Nittany Lions evened the series with the help of 55 saves by Souliere and the controversial winner by Kevin Wall at 10:35 of overtime for the 2-1 score.

The Buckeyes needed a goal by Joe Dunlap with 1:34 left in regulation to tie it 1-1 and thought they had a power play coming midway through the extra period. However, Penn State's Connor McMenamin was called for tripping, but Halliday was also sent off for embellishment, or flopping, causing the Ohio State bench to erupt.

The teams played 4-on-4, creating more wide-open play, and Wall scored 18 seconds after the penalties.

When Rohlik was asked what he saw on the winning goal, he responded, "I mean, besides the call there when our guy gets tripped on a 2-on-1? Unfortunately, I've nev-



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
Michigan State	24	34	10	12	2	1	1	2
Penn State	24	34	10	13	1	0	3	0
Wisconsin	24	18	6	18	0	0	0	0

Overall records — Minnesota 26-8-1, Michigan 23-11-3, **Ohio State 20-15-3**, Notre Dame 16-16-5, Michigan State 18-18-2, Penn State 21-15-1, Wisconsin 13-23-0.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

er seen that before," he said of the embellishment infraction.

It was of little consolation, but the next morning Rohlik received a text from the league saying the penalty on Halliday should not have been called.

Ohio State's misfortunes seemed to continue into the third game when an early goal by Mason Lohrei that would have put the Buckeyes up 1-0 was disallowed because of goaltender interference following a video review.

Wall gave Penn State a 1-0 lead at 6:28 of the second period, and five minutes later, Ohio State had a Singleton goal taken off the board after a review because it was ruled that he kicked it in.

Fortunately for the Buckeyes, Cole McWard scored a power-play goal that counted at 12:08, and Brickey got the go-ahead score at 15:45 of the middle period. Dobeš made the one-goal lead stand until Singleton's empty-netter.

"They weren't going to be denied," Rohlik said of his players. "Lots of guys have had experience in the past, and they just weren't going to let it happen again this year against Penn State."

Added the always quotable Singleton: "We battled and we battled and then finally things kind of went our way at the end. ... It was like we had to beat two teams out there, the refs and Penn State, so it was fun."

Blue Note

The Wolverines (23-11-3) took it to the Buckeyes in Ann Arbor, Mich., on March 11 from the opening faceoff to advance to the final vs. Minnesota. Gavin Brindley scored 23 seconds into the game as part of a 3-0 lead by the 10:27 mark of the first period.

Ohio State pulled to within 5-3 on a Cam Thiesing goal at 15:34 of the third period with Dobeš on the bench for an extra attacker, but U-M scored two late empty-net goals.

Jake Wise had a goal and two assists, and Travis Treloar tallied a goal and an assist for the Buckeyes. Adam Fantilli, who is expected to be the second pick in this year's NHL draft, led the Wolverines with two goals and two assists.

For a complete recap of the Penn State and Michigan postseason games go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

OSU Sending Nine To NCAA Championships

Ten weight classes will be featured at the NCAA Wrestling Championships from March 16-18, and Ohio State will have wrestlers competing in nine of them.

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

March is the month on the wrestling calendar that matters most, and every line on the Buckeyes' schedule has built to this stage. One of the team's top-10-ranked wrestlers, senior 125-pounder Malik Heinselman, will miss the tournament with an injury, but each of the team's starters above him will have a shot to fight for an NCAA title.

Starting at 133 pounds, freshman Jesse Mendez has been enjoying a breakout season after entering Columbus as the No. 1 pound-for-pound recruit, according to InterMat. He's shown flashes of brilliance in a 14-6 first-year campaign, posting ranked wins over No. 5 Lucas Byrd of Illinois and No. 14 Joe Heilmann of Rutgers.

He'll enter the double-elimination tournament as the No. 14 seed at 133. Thirty-three wrestlers qualify at each weight class, with seeds 32 and 33 wrestling for the right to face the top-ranked wrestler in their bracket. Thus, Mendez will meet the No. 19 seed in the first round, facing off against Oregon State's Jason Shaner.

A win would likely pit him against the No. 3 seed in the tournament, Cornell's Vito Arajau, who earned a 6-1 victory over Mendez during the regular season.

Junior Dylan D'Emilio will represent the Buckeyes at 141 pounds, checking in as the No. 17 seed. Should he make it past the 16th-seeded Josh Koderhandt of Navy, he'll have a likely meeting with Iowa's undefeated Big Ten champion Real Woods, the top seed in the bracket.

No other Ohio State wrestler comes close to having the tournament expectations, though, of senior Sammy Sasso at 149 pounds. Fresh off winning his second career Big Ten title, the two-time All-American had a runner-up national finish in the 2021-22 season and enters this year's bracket as the No. 2 seed, boasting a 25-3 record.

If he wants to close his decorated career in Columbus with a national championship, it could mean going through three-time national champion and No. 1 overall seed Yianni Diakomihalis, who hails from Cornell and is 16-1 on the season.

Redshirt freshman Paddy Gallagher is the lowest seed of any wrestler in the tournament for Ohio State, checking in as the No. 28 seed at 157 pounds. At 11-9 on the season, Gallagher – who recently received his black shirt – hovered around the 20s in his national ranking all season before suffering a pair of losses at the Big Ten Wrestling Championships. He gets a tough draw in the first round of the NAAs, facing off with fifth-seeded Josh

Humphreys of Lehigh, who is undefeated this season at 16-0.

At 165 pounds, junior Carson Kharchla will take the mat for Ohio State, slotting in as the No. 10 seed in the bracket. Kharchla was an All-American last season and will hope to put forth a similar effort this year, opening the NAAs against No. 23 Connor Brady of Virginia Tech.

Outside of Sasso, the two highest seeds in their respective weight classes for Ohio State both enter as sixth seeds. Ethan Smith at 174 pounds and Kaleb Romero at 184 pounds, both seniors, will be looking for a strong close to their careers.

Smith enters his bracket boasting a 96-44 career record with the Buckeyes and a 9-5 record in the NCAA championships, with his best finish coming at fifth in the 2020-21 season. He opens competition against No. 27 Tyler Eischens of Stanford.

Romero, meanwhile, has been one of the team's most consistent wrestlers when healthy, holding a 21-5 record on the season that includes a pair of top-10 victories in dual competition. He finished sixth at the NCAA championships last season but hopes to climb even higher this year, set to start his run against No. 27 Caleb Hopkins of Campbell.

Senior Gavin Hoffman will be the No. 26 seed at 197 pounds, but he's used to fighting from the bottom of the bracket. He was the No. 21 seed in last year's championships and went on an improbable run from that spot, upsetting three higher-ranked wrestlers to earn a sixth-place finish and All-America status.

If he can get past seventh-seeded Tanner Sloan of San Diego State, Hoffman would likely face competition further up the bracket from No. 10 Jacob Cardenas of Cornell and No. 2 Bernie Truax of Cal Poly.

Rounding out the team's NCAA qualifiers is heavyweight Tate Orndorff, the No. 16 seed in his division. Orndorff went on a similar run to Hoffman in 2021, going from the No. 21 seed to finish as an All-American in eighth place. He will open against Campbell's Taye Ghadiali, the No. 17 seed, who has a 26-3 record this season.

From a team perspective, Ohio State enters as the No. 6 outfit in the country, according to the NWCA coaches poll. The Buckeyes' stiffest competition for a national title will come from conference rival Penn State, the unanimous No. 1 team in the same poll. The Nittany Lions, looking to defend last year's national championship, feature five wrestlers seeded in the top three of their respective brackets, compared to just one for Ohio State.

The Buckeyes' lone national championship came in the 2014-15 season, and Ohio State has finished in the top 10 at the NCAA championships in 13 of its 16 seasons under head coach Tom Ryan, with five runner-up finishes to go with the national title.

The NCAA Wrestling Championships will run from March 16-18 in Tulsa, Okla. The first day will feature the first two rounds in each division, with

OSU NCAA Seeds

125: Injury
133: No. 14 Jesse Mendez
141: No. 17 Dylan D'Emilio
149: No. 2 Sammy Sasso
157: No. 28 Paddy Gallagher
165: No. 10 Carson Kharchla
174: No. 6 Ethan Smith
184: No. 6 Kaleb Romero
197: No. 26 Gavin Hoffman
285: No. 16 Tate Orndorff

another pair of rounds following the next day. Championship matches for all 10 weight classes will take place on the final day, with the entire event set to be broadcast on either ESPN or ESPNU.

Sasso Wins Big Ten Title, Team Finishes Fourth

In qualifying for the NCAA tournament, Sasso stood alone atop the Big Ten at 149 pounds. He won individual gold on March 5 at the Big Ten Wrestling Championships in Ann Arbor, Mich., to highlight a fourth-place team finish from the Buckeyes.

Sasso defeated sixth-seeded Michael Blockhus of Minnesota in sudden victory, 7-5, in the championship match to win the crown. It's the second conference title of Sasso's career, joining a victory in the 2020-2021 season, to go with two other runner-up finishes over his five seasons with the Buckeyes. His route to the championship bout included victories over fourth-seeded Max Murin of Iowa and ninth-seeded Chance Lamer of Michigan.

Romero also made the conference championship match at 184 pounds but came up short in a major decision against Penn State's Aaron Brooks, the No. 1 wrestler nationally in their class. Brooks came away with a 12-2 victory to end Romero's run with a silver medal.

Kharchla landed a third-place finish at 165 pounds, receiving a medical forfeit over second-seeded Cameron Amine of Michigan in the third-place match to secure the bronze. At 174 pounds, Smith knocked off fifth-seeded Edmond Ruth of Illinois and fourth-seeded Bailee O'Reilly of Minnesota to finish fourth.

D'Emilio made a run to the third-place match at 141 pounds, winning three straight matches in the consolation bracket after falling to ninth-seeded Parker Filius of Purdue in the first round. He defeated Northwestern's fourth-seeded Tal Shahar to make the third-place match before falling to Penn State's Beau Bartlett. Orndorff also took fourth place at heavyweight, while Mendez was upset in the 133-pound bracket by seventh-seeded Chris Cannon of Northwestern and finished sixth after entering as the No. 2 seed.

Gallagher suffered a tough draw at 157 pounds, entering as the No. 12 seed in the Big Ten tournament despite being ranked 25th nationally. He lost each of his first two matches to be eliminated from contention. Redshirt freshman Andres Gonzales, filling in for Heinselman at 125, suffered the same fate. Hoffman managed one victory at 197 pounds, defeating 10th-seeded Nick Willham of Indiana, before losing back-to-back matches to bow out of the tournament.

In total, the Buckeyes collected 99.0 points as a team, finishing behind conference champion and national No. 1 Penn State (147), No. 2 Iowa (137.5) and No. 4 Nebraska (104.5). Behind the Buckeyes in fifth place were No. 11 Michigan (84.5), followed by No. 12 Minnesota (79), No. 13 Northwestern (78.5), No. 17 Wisconsin (55.5), Purdue (47), No. 21 Illinois (46.5), No. 22 Rutgers (32), Indiana (30), No. 23 Michigan State (28) and Maryland (24).

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Quarterback Battle Taking Off In Spring

The spring football game quit being “a game” long ago and, thus for a real football fan, is not very interesting.

A relaxing day in the sun if weather cooperates? Sure. An opportunity for a low-cost family outing in the ‘Shoe with tickets priced at just \$7? Absolutely. But as a game for football fans, not so much. Players switching teams. Running clocks. Re-dos of plays. It’s more of a public practice. Thus, it usually is pretty boring to watch.

But this year has a nugget making it worthwhile viewing. It’s special when there is a legitimate quarterback competition among people we’ve rarely seen on the field to date at Ohio State. That’s why me, this

some point. That’s not going out on a limb. That’s fact.

But it’s not the Heisman talk I’m interested in. I’m interested in seeing who the next Ohio State starting quarterback will be, seeing that person’s strengths and handicapping how things will end up in the competition.

Both McCord and Brown pass the résumé test. McCord looked good in his one Ohio State start two years ago. He was highly regarded as a five-star recruit coming out of St. Joseph’s High School in Philadelphia. Football is in his family (his dad, Derek, being a former Rutgers quarterback).

The competition comes from Brown, a four-star recruit from Utah after playing his first three years of high school ball with coaching from former Buckeye quarterback Joe Germaine in Gilbert, Ariz. Once a USC commitment, Brown switched to the Buckeyes and headed to Columbus after throwing for 4,881 yards and 57 touchdowns as a senior.

This is going to be interesting, though from a fan’s perspective, there should be no worries about quality come fall. History tells us the Buckeyes will be just fine at quarterback.

Yes, it was a little messy in sorting out who should start after the 2014 national championship. A guy who won a national championship (Cardale Jones), or the guy who started the previous season until get-



FILE PHOTO

COMPETING QUARTERBACKS — Devin Brown (pictured) and Kyle McCord will battle for the starting quarterback job for Ohio State throughout the spring and into the fall.

ting hurt (J.T. Barrett)?

Results were mixed then amid the confusion, but no issues since, going from record-setter Dwayne Haskins to the electric Justin Fields, whose only losses came in a national semifinal and a national final, to C.J. Stroud, who will be the third consecutive Ohio State starting quarterback drafted in the first round.

Think about it. The NFL draft started in 1936. But through 2018, only two Ohio State quarterbacks went in the first round. The first was Don Scott, the ninth pick in the 1941 draft who died in 1943 while serving in the military during World War II. The other was Art Schlichter, the fourth pick overall in 1982.

Now Ohio State has had three in a row — Haskins at 15th in 2019, Fields at 11th in 2021 and wherever Stroud ends up this year. Plus, there’s that other guy (Joe Burrow), an Ohio State graduate who left after losing the spring battle to Haskins, ending up as the first player taken in the 2020 draft.

There should be every expectation that the winner of the battle between McCord and Brown will be the next Ohio State quarterback drafted in the first round. And, who knows, maybe both will end up being first-round picks — either both after playing at Ohio State or one after transferring out.

The quarterback battle two years ago was interesting. Not having the benefit of seeing the practices behind closed doors, I liked McCord slightly over Stroud. No complaints in how Stroud turned out. Maybe I like the underdog. I was in the Burrow camp when Haskins won the job during the spring of 2018. Though Haskins did have the impressive “save” off the bench for a win over Michigan the previous year, I was always of fan of Burrow’s ability to throw and run.

But for the most memorable spring quarterback battle for me, I have to turn on the

wayback machine — way back to our very first year of publishing Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

We got started here at the BSB in covering Schlichter’s senior year in 1981. Famously, there were six choices to replace Art the next year. Mike Tomczak beat out the field and became a three-year starter before a long NFL career, though he was undrafted in a 14-round draft at the time.

Brent Offenbecher did get a shot in the 1982 season, starting a game against Wisconsin when Tomczak was benched briefly. Jim Karsatos hung around long enough to become a two-year starter himself at OSU. Scott Wolf transferred out to become an All-American at the Division III level for Mount Union. The others in the race were Walt Norley, who transferred to Georgia, and Tim Stephens, who did appear in 18 games for the Buckeyes.

Who will be that next Ohio State quarterback? The smart money is on McCord. But don’t count out Brown.

Mock Drafting

It is interesting how Stroud appears to have nailed down a spot as not only one of the top players in this year’s NFL draft, but if many predictions hold true, he will be drafted higher than any Ohio State quarterback, a mark currently held by Schlichter with the fourth pick in 1982.

I checked the website NFLMockDraft-Database.com for a variety of opinions following the NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis, reviewing the most recent 35 mock drafts posted from a variety of sources as of March 9. In 25 of those mock drafts, Stroud was a top-three pick.

Twelve mocks had him as the No. 1 pick overall, and nine mock drafts had him slated as the second pick while four put Stroud in the third spot.

THE EXNER POINT

Rich Exner

fuddy-duddy on spring football, is looking forward to this year’s spring game.

The glimpses will be brief. But it’s our one opportunity to see Kyle McCord and Devin Brown compete to become Ohio State’s next Heisman Trophy candidate. Jumping ahead a little bit? I say not. Recent history tells us that the starting Ohio State quarterback will be part of Heisman talk at

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Even the most negative of Ohio State basketball fans would have to concede that the Buckeyes ended their season on a positive note. The team won five of its last seven games, including its improbable run in the Big Ten tournament, in the process becoming the lowest-seeded team to make the semifinals of the tourney before top-seeded Purdue finally brought the Cinderella story to an end.

The encouraging run, of course, begged the question of where this spirited play had been earlier in the season, including in the stretch immediately preceding it, when Ohio State lost 14 of 15 games, including nine in a row before the Buckeyes started the turnaround with an upset of Illinois on Feb. 26.

I was fumbling around for an explanation for Ohio State's surprising play to close the regular season and in the tournament and trying to offer a prediction of where the team goes from here when I came across a quote from Purdue coach Matt Painter after his Boilermakers eliminated the Buckeyes. Painter knows far more about basketball than I do (though I know enough to realize that if you can find a guy who is 7-4, 305 pounds and effective around the basket, grab him) so I will defer to him.

"You get to a certain point in the season where people understand about sacrificing and doing things that affect winning," Painter said. "I think with their youth and their injuries, it took them a little bit longer. Then when you lose closer games, it affects you differently. Then obviously the way they've played here in this tournament just shows you how good of a coach (Chris Holtmann) is, first of all, and the pieces that they have, even when they're short-handed. How does this look with (injured) Zed Key and Brice Sensabaugh out there?"

"Their future is bright. If you know basketball, you definitely understand that Ohio State – some people got their licks on them this year, but that's going to come to a screeching halt. They have a very, very good young nucleus."

While the stretch drive is encouraging and puts a positive vibe around the team after nearly two months of negativity, I don't think this completely takes the heat off Holtmann, contrary to Painter's praise. In fact, if anything, it may put more pressure on Holtmann to produce next season, especially with a second straight strong recruiting class arriving.

Before we can really speculate on the success next season of the Buckeyes, we have to figure out who may be coming and who may be going. Justice Sueing, Isaac Likekele and Sean McNeil are definitely gone. Freshman Brice Sensabaugh may be gone. And we don't know who may elect to enter the portal and who may come in via the portal.

I noted in this space last edition that both Columbus Dispatch columnist Rob Oller and I felt that part of the problem this season was that the "patchwork" mélange of freshmen, transfers and a smattering of returnees made building chemistry for the Buckeyes difficult. Since writing that I found another columnist, Doug Lesmerises from The Plain Dealer, who believed the same thing.

"They aren't connected," Lesmerises wrote of the team on Feb. 26. "They aren't broken because the roster of freshman and transfers was never truly assembled."

Are we looking at more mishmash next season?

This season did the lightbulb suddenly go on, as Painter suggested? Because the chemistry seemed to be there in the tournament.

Much of the chemistry and improvement appeared to come from that "very, very good young nucleus," that Painter talked about.

Bruce Thornton, who in a rare move was elevated to captain as a freshman in midseason,

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

and Roddy Gayle, who had been somewhat of a nonfactor for most of the season, both had outstanding tournaments.

Because most of the tournament was played during the day, I listened to the bulk of it on radio here at BSB world headquarters. First of all, praise to Paul Keels and Ron Stokes, who just do an outstanding job on the radio broadcasts. I heard them say that this was their 25th year together, and it shows.

In the Buckeyes' win over Wisconsin to kick off the tournament, Stokes, whose opinion I really respect, just went on and on about another freshman, Felix Okpara. In fact, after all that gushing, I was surprised that Okpara was credited with only three points, four rebounds, two steals and two blocks against the Badgers.

But I think the silver lining of Key being out is the chance for Okpara to log so much playing time, including an average of nearly 28 minutes in the tournament, a number lessened by his 22 minutes against Purdue. It was a game where he found himself in almost immediate foul trouble trying to contend with the massive Zach Edey, and he eventually fouled out.

Against Michigan State, on the other hand, Okpara was a key factor in the surprising win, scoring eight points, pulling down eight rebounds and, most importantly, blocking five shots. An offseason in the weight room, and the 6-11, 220-pound Okpara, whose role became more prominent after Key went down at Iowa on Feb. 16, may be the one pushing opposing centers around in the paint.

That brings us to Sensabaugh.

He led the team in scoring with 16.3 points, was second with 5.4 rebounds and was a strong 40.5 percent from beyond the arc. The fact that Holtmann had him in and out of the lineup despite those numbers might be an indication that there were other troubling factors in his game, especially his play on the defensive side of the court.

It was his absence due to a knee injury that allowed Gayle to step out of the shadows in the tournament's final two games against Michigan State and Purdue, including the major victory against MSU.

Let me toss out these numbers, which may mean absolutely nothing. In the game with the Spartans on March 4, MSU shot 54.7 percent from the field, including a sizzling 60.0 percent from downtown in an 84-78 victory in the final game of the regular season. Six days later, with Sensabaugh out of the lineup, Ohio State held Michigan State to 38.2 percent shooting and a lowly 18.8 percent from beyond the arc in the big Buckeye upset.

Coincidence?

Maybe the Buckeyes can survive and even advance if Sensabaugh decides to go pro. Someone else will have to step up and fill the stat sheet, but some candidates emerged in Chicago.

One final note about the 2022-23 basketball Buckeyes, and it doesn't involve a rookie.

Sueing, the most tenured player on the Ohio State roster, took his share of criticism when the Buckeyes were struggling. But he was an important part of the Buckeyes winning five of their final seven games.

He scored in double figures in all seven of the games, averaging 14.1 points and 6.0 rebounds. He also shot 46.2 percent from distance. Compare those numbers to the rest of the season, when Sueing averaged 11.9 points and 5.0 rebounds and shot 22.5 percent from

long range.

It's nice to go out on a high note.

St. John Arena Revisited

I hope you enjoyed Andy Anders' look back at St. John Arena 25 years after the migration of the Ohio State basketball teams to the Schottenstein Center, found elsewhere in this edition.

A couple of my thoughts on the article, especially some things from former Buckeye basketball player and current Ohio State broadcaster Kristin Watt.

She recalls during her days as a player, seeing a group of athletic department staffers regularly playing pickup games in St. John Arena, games that I recall as well.

"We would be walking in (to practice) and these guys would be playing pickup games from the athletic department," Watt said. "It was always the same four or six guys, half-court. Of course, we'd give them s-t about what their game was or wasn't. And Jim Tressel was one of those guys."

"And I remember when Jim Tressel came back to Ohio State as the (head) coach, and I was doing women's basketball on the radio at the time and had been for years. I got to meet him at the basketball game when he came. I went up to him and said, 'Hey, nice to meet you, I don't know if you remember (me).' And he was like, 'I totally remember. You played basketball for Ohio State and you used to make fun of us playing half-court.' That was a fun day because it took us way back."

I mention this because it is so Jim Tressel. One of his greatest skills is his ability to remember virtually everything and everyone. I always figured that was one of the reasons he was such a good recruiter. I'm sure he remembered a recruit's grandmother's name and that the prep star's favorite food was spaghetti. I'm sure it made the recruiting process much more personal.

Watt also mentions a couple of times in the article, camping out in the front row under the basket at games before she became a broadcaster. I absolutely remember her sitting there and have told the story many times. I remember her sitting there during the early days of women's basketball, when games would often have only a few hundred people in attendance. You could hear Watt yelling all over the arena.

She may be the dignified and professional voice of the Ohio State women's team now, but she was just a raucous fan back then.

And finally, I thought Watt was diplomatic when asked if the Ohio State women would have been better off if they had stayed in St. John and become the building's primary tenant.

"A good crowd of 3- or 4,000 in St. John Arena was huge. That was loud and it was raucous. You put that in Value City Arena and it kind of got lost a little bit," Watt said. "But the facility itself was so much nicer and first class that I would have hated for the women not to have that opportunity to have a first-class locker room like the men did."

My contention has always been, especially given the millions of dollars Ohio State has poured into athletic facilities in the last 25 years, that those upgrades could have been made for the women at St. John Arena and they would have ended up as the primary tenants of a much nicer building than The Schott.

Finally, kudos to former Buckeye Sports Bulletin editor Steve Helwage for mentioning

the epic battle between Ohio State and then-archrival Indiana in 1991.

"People still talk about it," Helwage said of the 97-95 Ohio State double-overtime victory. "It's been over 30 years, and they'll be talking about it for a lot longer. It was probably one of the greatest and most well-played games ever in Columbus."

And it was *loud*.

That was one of the most memorable sporting events I have ever witnessed, and I can assure you it would not have been nearly as memorable if it had been played in Value City Arena.

Kudos, also, to Andy for tracking down Gene Millard, who connected on the first and last baskets in St. John Arena. Millard, longtime coach at nearby Bexley High School, is a legend in Columbus, and it was nice to see him get some ink. His stepping back to the three-point line, a line that didn't exist when he scored the building's first basket, and hitting nothing but net to close out an era is also one of my most vivid memories of St. John Arena.

Jack Moves From Jack

It was nice to see that mad scientist defensive coordinator Jim Knowles saw what even casual Buckeye fans saw last season – that heralded defensive end Jack Sawyer did not play up to expectations and the hybrid Jack position, manned for the most part by Sawyer, did not seem to have the impact on the Ohio State defense that we all had been hoping.

"Jack will be a (defensive) end with J.T. (Tuimoloau)," Knowles announced as spring practice got under way. "He'll work on all those fundamentals of being an end. I think that's important for Jack."

"I feel like he didn't have the improvement or big jump he could have last year because he got involved in the Jack stuff and maybe he wasn't as focused as he could have been to make those improvements at end. I want to make sure I keep him at end opposite J.T."

With Sawyer moving away from the Jack, Knowles said the position will not be a significant focus over the next few weeks for Ohio State.

"We did not quite use the position as much as I had hoped last year," Knowles said. "It just didn't seem to develop with our personnel, so this spring I just want to focus on the fundamentals of our four-down and getting better at the fundamentals."

If Sawyer and Tuimoloau continue to grow toward their expectations, the Ohio State defensive line could return to being the disruptive force that it was in the days of the Bosas and Chase Young.

Looking To The Future

We continue to ask for your feedback as Buckeye Sports Bulletin navigates the world of rampant inflation and changes in the newspaper industry. If you have a moment, give us your thoughts on what you consider a comfortable price point for BSB, how many issues you would like to see annually and whether price, number of issues, size of the paper or other factors are most important to you. Send your thoughts to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com.

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