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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 1, 2023

Competition, Depth Front And Center During Spring Practice

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State's spring practices have made one thing clear: In the game of football, there are winners, and then there are losers, and everything being done over the practice sessions ahead of the spring game on April 15 is to ensure that the Buckeyes are on the right side of the equation.

In Ohio State's first spring practice session on March 7 – the first official gathering of this year's team, offering first impressions to coaches, media and the players themselves – it began with stretches, followed by operations assistant Austin Edwards announcing the winner of each heat of warmup sprints.

The fun continued at the next spring practice, which had the offense and defense face off in a good old-fashioned tug-of-war bout, won 6-0 by the offense. It's anyone's guess what other schoolyard games took place at ensuing practices – maybe Red Rover or tag made an appearance – but competition has been a staple so far and should be expected to last through the spring.

"We're trying to find as many ways that we can to create winner-loser situations," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said on March 21. "We're starting practice right after stretches with winner-loser situations. As the pads are on, we're going to find as many ways as possible to do that. We all work hard, and working hard gives us a chance, but the difference between that and competing is there's a winner and a loser every time you compete."

Day said the focus for running these drills is to increase the number of competitive situations that each player faces, and that applies to both seasoned veterans or those entering their first year with the program.

Every one of these repetitions – wheth-



SPRING HAS SPRUNG – Ohio State is buckling down and getting to work over the next few weeks of spring practice ahead of the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 15. That scrimmage, as well as every practice leading up to it, will help Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day fill out a depth chart as the upcoming season approaches.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

er it's pulling on a rope or running a race – helps to build competitive excellence within the program, with the winners wanting to keep their positions and the losers looking to supplant those at the top of the food chain.

That competition is the basis of Ohio

State's goal to build depth this spring, filling in every position on the roster from the starting quarterback all the way down to the backup long snapper – all positions that are legitimately open for battle, by the way – with the best that the Buckeyes have to offer.

"We're always trying to build depth, because we know we're going to need it," Day said. "We talk about this type of thing this time of year and then we get into preseason – how are you going to get all these guys playing time? Eventually they all get into the game, you know? So, some areas have game experience, others,

we're trying to get that in practice."

Day noted several of those positions that he feels have the game experience and depth to succeed this year, including running back and wide receiver. The Buckeyes return a rushing contingent that includes TreVeyon Henderson, Miyan Williams and Dallan Hayden – all with at least one start last season – in addition to Chip Trayanum, who will remain in the room after switching from linebacker, and Evan Pryor, who will be welcomed back after suffering an ACL

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Super Bowl Hold

As usual, I agree with much of Mark Rea's Editor's Notebook column in the March 4 issue.

However, regarding the holding call in the Super Bowl, I want to apply the "shoe on the other foot" test. If a Kansas City defender had done the same thing that the Eagle defender had done, I firmly believe that Eagles fans would have vehemently insisted that a penalty should have been called, whether it was or not. The call was correct. It's just unfortunate that it had such a big impact on the outcome of the game.

My view. I didn't care one

bit which team won the game.

Steven K. Brown
Port Charlotte, Fla.

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From The Message Board

In our most recent edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we looked back at the 25th anniversary of Ohio State basketball leaving St. John Arena for the Schottenstein Center. For this Fan Forum, we asked readers to tell us their favorite memories of St. John and any experiences they've had at the famed arena. Here are some of the responses:

"I have many memories, but I will mention the March 9, 1971, game vs. Indiana with the incredible George McGinnis, who averaged 30.0 points per game that year in his first varsity year. Ohio State won 91-75, which surprised me at the time. Ohio State was 13-1 (in the conference) and the Big Ten champion. It was the last game of the regular season.

"Another strong memory was when I was a student and Rick Mount played for Purdue. That was one of the few games when I sat on the bleachers down near the floor. I think Ohio State won, but it was a shoot-out. A fantastic game."

– Terrier Buck

"I remember going to see Jackson Browne at St. John in 1978. He was with Karla Bonhoff. St. John is a great place for a concert, it's intimate and the sound is great. It's a fantastic memory."

– PeyoteBuck

"My dad somehow scored tickets to the Dec. 6, 1968, game against UCLA. I was a sophomore in high school. We wanted to see this phenom everyone was talking about: Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar). John Wooden's No. 1 team was the envy of all the NCAA in those days. The Bucks did well, keeping the final score reasonable. We lost 84-73."

– R1TBDBITL

"The thing I remember most about St. John Arena is the first game I saw there. I can't remember any details about the game or even when it was. I just know I got there early and there were only a few people there and I was struck by all the wood. The building was kind of nondescript from the outside, but inside that wood was so beautiful. That first vision sticks with me to this day."

– Mcarr

"The thing I remember is how electric St. John Arena would be when Bob Knight and Indiana came to town, especially in the Eldon Miller years. I went to a couple of those games. It was interesting because Miller was hardly electric nor is he remembered as one of the better Ohio State coaches. But he always seemed to have his teams ready for IU and the fans in St. John were always ready for Knight.

"I was not at the epic OT game with the Hoosiers, but from what I have heard and read in BSB through the years, that must have been something. I doubt that game would have been the same in the Schott."

– Poster That Harley Built

"Back in the spring of 1960, when I was eight, we watched every Ohio State basketball game in black and white. One early evening my dad wanted to 'go for a ride.' No one said a word about where we were going. About an hour later we came to a crowded parking lot and walked to a huge building where long lines of people were also going. I still had no idea what was going on. My dad handed some tickets to a man and we went inside. I walked with my parents up some stairs and went through a passageway. Suddenly, there was an explosion of color, and I realized where we were! That giant Ohio State logo was at midcourt, but now in color ... and huge. It was St. John Arena!

"I don't remember a single thing about the game itself, but that moment when I first saw the court in person and realized where we were is etched forever in my memory. The surprise was complete! I loved the basketball arenas from that era and went to many more games over the years, but that first glorious view of the court will always be my greatest memory of St. John."

— Michael Bauer

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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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Is Michigan Really Gaining On Ohio State?

I have been thinking a lot lately about the Ohio State-Michigan football rivalry, specifically about how the series tide has seemingly turned these past two years.

After suffering five straight losses to the Buckeyes, and avoiding a sixth in 2020 only because of a somewhat dubious COVID excuse, Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh finally adopted a plan that would actually work against Ohio State – and, in so doing, ripped a page from the Woody Hayes playbook.

Harbaugh, realizing his program was hopelessly behind the Buckeyes in terms of overall talent, decided to focus his team's energy on a singular mission. Never mind the national championship chase. Harbaugh harkened back to the era of "The Ten-Year War" when beating your rival and earning the Big Ten championship was the primary goal every season.

But how is that goal accomplished when there is such a talent gap? Well, talent is in the eye of the beholder. Lamborghini's are beautiful works of art to behold, especially when they are free to run wide open. But those sleek machines aren't much use at a monster truck rally.

Harbaugh decided he'd rather beat Ohio State more than anything and went back to the 1960s and '70s when controlling the tempo of the game by controlling the line of scrimmage was in vogue. What the Michigan coach discovered when he reverted to that old-style attack was that today's Ohio State has little taste for smashmouth football.

The result in 2021 was a trip to the Michigan woodshed for the Buckeyes, a 42-27 loss during which the Wolverines piled up 297 yards on the ground. In case you need to be reminded, Michigan hadn't rushed for that many yards in the series since the Tim Biakabutuka game in 1995 and hadn't scored as many as 42 points against Ohio State since a 58-6 victory in 1946.

And then, a year later, the Wolverines did it again by sticking to mostly the same script. They piled up another 252 yards on the ground and rolled to a 45-23 victory, a second straight win in the series for the first time since 1999 and 2000.

With those two wins now under the belt of his khaki slacks, Harbaugh figures it's time to take the next step and address that talent gap. Four-star running back Jordan Marshall of Cincinnati Moeller verbally committed to Michigan shortly after a mid-March visit to Ann Arbor, choosing the Wolverines over several other schools including Ohio State.

Four-star running backs are almost a dime a dozen these days, but at least one national recruiting expert saw something different in Marshall's commitment to Harbaugh. As the No. 91 overall prospect in the 247Sports composite rankings, Marshall represents the first top-100 player from Ohio the Buckeyes wanted and lost out to the Wolverines in over a decade. The most recent was four-star athlete Dymonte Thomas of Alliance (Ohio) Marlinton in 2013.

Will Marshall be the next big thing in Ann Arbor? Well, it's recruiting, so one never knows for sure. He's ranked only at No. 198 in the ESPN 300, so there's that. Going back to Thomas, he played in 36 games mostly at safety over four seasons for the Wolverines, finished his career with 122 tackles and one interception, and won All-Big Ten honorable mention in 2016. A nice career, but hardly foundational.

Still, according to former BSB contributor Ari Wasserman, who now covers recruiting for The Athletic, the Marshall commitment signifies a giant leap forward in Harbaugh's pursuit of Ohio State.

"This is personal," Wasserman wrote March

22. "Winning the last two years on the field was more than enough to hurt Ohio State. But going into Ohio and plucking a top-100 player is an invasion, a notice that the Wolverines didn't just win a few fluke games before reverting back to second fiddle in this rivalry.

"This is how Michigan continues to reclaim the rivalry that was once, not long ago, considered all but dead. This is the next step for Michigan football's renaissance."

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Is it? Is getting a four-star running back out of Ohio really that big a deal? Wouldn't it have been a bigger deal had Harbaugh been able to talk Michigan five-star quarterback prospects such as Dante Moore (committed to UCLA) or CJ Carr (committed to Notre Dame) into staying home to play for the Wolverines? Heck, Carr is the grandson of former Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr, for crying out loud.

Give the devil his due, though. Regardless of whatever wins and losses he has counted along the recruiting trail, Harbaugh and his program have earned a tremendous boost from beating Ohio State these past two seasons. Sooner or later, however, Harbaugh will find out what Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer and Ryan Day discovered. When beating your archrival becomes ordinary, nothing less than a national championship will satisfy the masses.

And where that is concerned, Michigan still falls woefully short of Ohio State. While the Buckeyes were taking defending national champion Georgia to the mat in one College Football Playoff on New Year's Eve, the Wolverines fell into a hole against TCU and never quite caught up, losing a 51-45 shootout to the Horned Frogs.

That came one year after Michigan's first-ever foray into the CFP resulted in a 34-11 wipe-out at the hands of Georgia.

Of course, one could argue the last two seasons were mere steppingstones for the Wolverines. The first hurdle was to beat Ohio State and get to the four-team playoff. The second was to repeat against the Buckeyes and then make a better showing in the CFP. Now, with a head-to-head recruiting battle won over a top-100 Ohio prospect, perhaps the Wolverines are ready to take the next step and play for a national championship.

Or they could just be content to stay in their own lane and focus solely on the Ohio State rivalry. All the more reason for Ryan Day, his staff and his team to make Nov. 25 in Ann Arbor the subject of their singular focus and let everything else take care of itself.

St. John Memories

If you have been reading recent issues of BSB, you know it's been 25 years since the Ohio State men's and women's basketball teams moved out of cozy St. John Arena into the antiseptic cavern known as the Schottenstein Center.

My memories of St. John go back a long way beginning with attending games as a teenager during the Bill Andreas-Larry Bolden era. In terms of my professional life, covering four men's basketball games stand out for me – two victories that everyone remembers and two defeats most OSU fans would just as soon forget.

I was courtside for the legendary victory against Indiana on Feb. 17, 1991, the 97-95 win

in two overtimes during which Jim Jackson led all scorers with 30 points and also pulled down a game-high 11 rebounds.

In those days, writers sat at a long press table just inches from the sideline across the court from the respective benches. The vantage point provided an unfettered view of the action, and you really didn't understand the concept of "up close and personal" until Chris Jent (all 6-7 and 220 pounds of him) came crashing into your lap while diving for a loose basketball.

My particular seat was plenty close enough as the teams departed the floor after that double-overtime win against the Hoosiers. With fans streaming onto the floor, and security personnel trying in vain to hold them back, Indiana head coach Bob Knight tried his best to retreat to the visitors' locker room. As I took in the scene, a heavy metal object came whizzing just past Knight and struck me squarely in the side of the head.

After a couple of seconds to regain my bearings, I looked down at the mouthpiece from a trombone. To this day, I don't know if the mouthpiece came accidentally buzzing through the air or if it was thrown intentionally at Knight. I just know it hurt.

The other three games I alluded to earlier share the same calendar day spread out over five years.

On Feb. 23, 1989, the Buckeyes lost an 89-72 decision to Michigan, a game in which Wolverines star Glen Rice scored 30 points. At one point during the proceedings, Rice hit four consecutive shots from the floor, each farther away than the last. When he drilled the fourth, a three-pointer from what appeared to be about 30 feet, I turned to Steve Helwagen – then a BSB contributor – and we both yelled in unison, "Are they ever gonna cover that guy?"

Exactly four years later, on Feb. 23, 1994, I was witness to another outstanding performance by an Ohio State opponent when Purdue standout Glenn Robinson torched the Buckeyes for 40 points during a 95-85 victory by the Boilermakers. Robinson, who was on his way to the Naismith Award as college basketball's player of the year, connected on 10 of 21 shots from the field that night and made 20 of 22 free throws.

One year before that, on Feb. 23, 1993, a struggling Ohio State scored an 81-77 overtime upset of top-ranked Indiana thanks to the heroics of Jamie Skelton, a streaky shooter who always seemed to save his best performances for the Hoosiers.

With three seconds left in regulation, Skelton hit an off-balance three-pointer to give the Buckeyes a 71-70 lead. Then after IU somehow managed to send the game into overtime, Skelton delivered another three-point dagger to finish with a game-high 22 points.

During his final two seasons at OSU, Skelton averaged 17.3 points per game against Indiana. His scoring average for the other 109 games of his college career was roughly half that at 8.9.

Knight, who for years held a grudge against Ohio State because of the way his old coach and mentor Fred Taylor was fired by the university, rarely stuck around for postgame interviews at St. John Arena. After this particular game, however, he made an exception, taking a few questions from reporters. When the inevitable occurred and someone asked about Skelton's performance, the Hall of Fame coach furrowed his brow before letting just a trickle of a smile cross his face.

"Let me tell you something," Knight said. "If Jamie Skelton played us every night, he'd be a (bleeping) All-American."

OHIO STATE INSIDER

OSU Competes In First Spring Scrimmage

Ohio State capped off its third week of spring camp (with spring break sandwiched in between) by holding an open practice for recruits, family and media to take in on March 25 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

Competition was at the forefront of the session, with the offense and defense battling in a variety of drills while the coaching staff handed out points for each rep either unit won. Although the defense led for much of the session, the offense made a late push during the end-of-practice scrimmage and overcame the Silver Bullets, 102-100.

Throughout the practice, the phrase "winner or loser" was repeated over the PA system to hammer home the competitive nature that head coach Ryan Day is trying to implement into his training sessions.

"It was practice six, and one of the things we've been talking a lot about is competing," Day said. "You heard it over and over again, that's what we're trying to do with the winner-loser (situations). Whether it was the individual drills, team drills, 7-on-7, red-zone pass or goal-line tackle, it's something we've really wanted to do.

"The guys were into it and we'll look at the film and see about the execution. I thought overall the effort was there and the

competitive nature was there."

While the offense and defense battled throughout the session, there were also several position battles on display, with the most noticeable coming at the quarterback position.

Signal callers Kyle McCord and Devin Brown each had their share of flashes and struggles, with the pair completing just one attempt in a red-zone passing drill but producing strong outings during the end-of-practice 11-on-11 scrimmage. During the scrimmage, McCord connected on a no-doubt touchdown pass on a deep ball to Jayden Ballard, while Brown produced a large gain of his own on a completion to Kaleb Brown.

McCord's processing ability and penchant to get the ball out quickly stood out, while Brown struggled with downfield reads at times and took several costly sacks in drills. Brown's mobility did stand out, though, as he was able to extend several plays with his legs in the pocket.

And while there's no misconception that transfer quarterback Tristan Gebbia will compete for the starting job, he delivered a handful of strikes downfield during the scrimmage, showing that Ohio State may not be completely out of luck if the Buckeyes are forced to turn to the third string.

Ballard had the aforementioned big gain, while freshmen wideouts Bryson Rodgers, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate also had some impressive catches. First-year tight end Jelani Thurman will likely not be seen pulling off the tightrope catches of his fellow receivers, but he impressed in limited reps as a blocker and had an undeniable presence for the offense whenever lined up for the Buckeyes.

The battle along the offensive line also heated up, with tackles Zen Michalski and Tegra Tshabola splitting first-team reps at right tackle while Carson Hinzman and

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)

transfer Victor Cutler Jr. did the same at center. Josh Fryar held down the left tackle spot for the lion's share of the first-team reps while, as expected, Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones filled in at their respective left and right guard spots.

Overall, the offensive line had some struggles in pass-blocking situations but showed encouraging returns in running situations.

There were several standouts on the defensive side of the ball, especially among the youth on the team. Defensive end Kenyatta Jackson showcased his speedy ball get-off and produced multiple sacks during the scrimmage session while safety Sonny Styles was encouraging in coverage and laid several booming hits throughout the course of practice.

Transfer cornerback Davison Igbinosun also put together a solid day in coverage, while Jordan Hancock found himself on the receiving end of a pair of long touchdowns to Marvin Harrison Jr. and Ballard.

Sensabaugh Declares For Draft, Maintains Eligibility

Ohio State freshman forward Brice

Sensabaugh announced on March 25 that he will enter his name into the 2023 NBA draft but will maintain his eligibility to allow for a return.

Sensabaugh broke out during what could be his lone season with the Buckeyes, leading Ohio State with 16.3 points per game and doing so on 48.2 percent shooting, including a 40.5 percent clip from deep.

"Ever since I can remember, playing in the NBA has always been my dream," Sensabaugh said. "The game of basketball has taken me places I could have never imagined and has provided endless opportunities for me as a student-athlete. The journey to this current position in my life has been immensely challenging. Without God and the help of my peers, I can confidently say I wouldn't be where I am now.

"Ohio State: I am inexplicably proud to say that I am a Buckeye, and I say this with no uncertainty. To be a part of this brotherhood was a dream of mine growing up, and with this freshman year under my belt, I can say that it exceeded my expectations by a long shot."

Sensabaugh is looking to be the next

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one-and-done prospect at Ohio State after guard Malaki Branham did so last season, leaving after his freshman season and being selected with the No. 20 pick in the draft by the San Antonio Spurs.

While Branham's draft stock did not begin to heat up until midseason, Sensabaugh's draft potential was evident early in his career, with a 17-point outing in his first game and double-digit scoring outputs in each of his first six games with Ohio State.

He wound up with 11 20-point outings, including a career-high 27 points in Ohio State's win over Iowa on Jan. 21, though he missed the final two games of the season in the Big Ten tournament after suffering a knee injury.

By season's end, Sensabaugh had picked up four Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors and was also named third-team All-Big Ten in addition to securing a spot on the conference's all-freshman team.

With the 2023 NBA draft approaching on June 22, the 6-6 forward is projected to be a first-round pick and would be the third Buckeye taken in the draft over the last two seasons along with Branham and forward E.J. Liddell. Sensabaugh has until May 31 to decide whether to remain in the draft or return to Ohio State.

Several Assistants Ink New Deals

Five of Ohio State's assistant football coaches will make at least \$1 million this season according to recently released contract details from the university.

With his promotion to offensive coordinator, Brian Hartline received the biggest raise of any Ohio State assistant, going from a \$950,000 salary in 2022 to \$1.6 million in 2023. Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles remains the highest-paid assistant on staff, getting a bump from \$1.9 million to \$1.957 million.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson will make \$1.167 million this year. Offensive line coach Justin Frye and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton received \$200,000 and \$300,000 raises, respectively, both hitting exactly \$1 million for their 2023 salaries.

Running backs coach Tony Alford and safeties coach Perry Eliano will earn \$772,500 and \$515,000, respectively. Special teams coordinator Parker Fleming went from \$300,000 to \$500,000.

After a promotion from graduate assistant to full-time tight ends coach, Keenan Bailey more than doubled his salary from \$150,000 to \$400,000. Quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis rounds out the staff with a salary of \$412,000, up from \$400,000 last season. All of Ohio State's assistant coaching contracts now extend through at least 2024.

With multiple six-figure raises given out, the Buckeyes will now spend \$9.3 million for their 10 assistant coaching contracts this year, which is among the highest in college football and more than Alabama's \$9.2 million.

Another new contract handed out was to associate athletic director of sports performance Mickey Marotti, who received a new three-year contract that will bump his pay up to \$862,238 in 2023 after being paid \$821,179 last year.

Four Buckeyes Shed Black

Stripes During Spring Camp

Since the start of spring camp on March 7, a quartet of Buckeyes shed their black stripes and affirmed their status within the Ohio State football program.

Redshirt freshman offensive linemen George Fitzpatrick and Tshabola, Tate and Igbinosun all completed the rite of passage during the first three weeks of spring camp.

Tshabola joined the Buckeyes as a four-star recruit out of Lakota West in West Chester, Ohio, slotting in as the No. 104 overall recruit and No. 10 tackle in the 2022 recruiting class. He appeared in four games for the Buckeyes last season but did not appear in Ohio State's final eight games. Tshabola is expected to be a major player for the starting right tackle spot, competing with Michalski for playing time.

"It was a long time coming," Tshabola said on March 23. "It's a good feeling having it off. I was more proud of the improvements I've made, rather than just losing the stripe itself."

Fitzpatrick also joined the Buckeyes as a four-star prospect, hailing from Cherry Creek High School in Englewood, Colo. Joining Ohio State as the No. 19 tackle and No. 244 overall recruit, Fitzpatrick saw the field for only nine snaps in his first season as a Buckeye, playing only against Indiana on Nov. 12, 2021. Fitzpatrick's continued development was noticed by Frye, who announced Fitzpatrick had shed his black stripe on March 23.

"He got his black stripe off today, and he's playing better," Frye said. "He's another year mature, and he's bigger and stronger."

Igbinosun and Tate became the first of Ohio State's early enrollees to lose their black stripes, with Tate's lost black stripe believed to be one of the earliest in program history.

Tate is looking to break through in a crowded receiver room, entering as a four-star prospect out of IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla. Prior to becoming a Buckeye, he averaged 20.3 yards per catch while hauling in eight touchdown receptions during his senior season.

Igbinosun (6-0, 203) arrived in Columbus after one season at Ole Miss, where he started 10 games for the Rebels and tallied 37 tackles and five pass breakups. The Union, N.J., native is competing for the starting cornerback spot opposite incumbent starter Denzel Burke, battling Hancock and Jyaire Brown for the right to start.

"(His) physicality you see for sure," Day said earlier this spring. "That length, once you get your hands on him when you have that type of length, it makes it hard for the receiver. Also, being a zone corner and having that type of length and size allows you to cover more ground and get your hands on more balls. For him, he's got experience playing in the SEC as a freshman, so I think that helps with his confidence."

Fryar Gaining Comfort At Left Tackle

For someone who's never played left tackle before, Fryar carried himself with a lot of confidence fielding questions about his transition to the position during interviews on March 23.

Now in his fourth year at Ohio State, a lot of responsibility will be on his plate as he works to protect McCord or Brown's

blind side. But learning from those who went before him and working against elite edge rushers in practice has him feeling a high level of self-confidence.

"I think I'm very prepared (to start at left tackle), honestly," Fryar said. "Hearing everybody talk about it and worrying about it just gets me motivated to step up into that position and succeed."

Fryar (6-6, 320) is looking to build off his experience from last year. He rotated in as the team's sixth offensive lineman, serving as an extra blocking-specific tight end in certain short-yardage sub-packages. When Dawand Jones went down with an injury prior to the Indiana game, Fryar started at right tackle and filled in admirably, particularly as a run blocker.

"He's building his confidence, which will make him play better," Frye said. "If he feels that way and is playing that way, then his play will accelerate and get better. Last year he was sixth (out of the offensive linemen), he was grinding, he was ready every week and we found ways to get him on the field. And when his number was called, he would go in and make those plays. So now, when there's an open spot in front of him, that confidence should propel him into saying, 'This is my spot. I'm going to own it.'"

Despite it being his first start in front of more than 100,000 fans that day against the Hoosiers, Fryar stated his nerves were at a minimum.

"Practice here is harder than the games, honestly," Fryar said. "That's what I think. They put us in those situations and say,

'Hey, it's team pass.' So the defense knows it's pass. You have to protect. For the game, I thought it was a lot more slowed down for me. I thought it was going to be a lot more sped up, but it slowed down for me and I thought it went pretty well."

Of course, that start was on the right side, where Fryar has been the past couple of seasons after kicking out from guard. This year, he'll switch stances to lock down the offensive line at its marquee position at left tackle.

"I don't think it's very hard to switch from right to left, just your left foot is back and you have to kick out of it," Fryar said. "You've just got to work on it and keep going on it."

It hasn't been an easy road for Fryar to arrive at this point. His freshman season was the roller coaster of college football during COVID-19. Then the next year he missed the season with an injury. Last season, finally in the running for playing time, he sat behind All-Americans Paris Johnson Jr. and Jones.

Still, he took lessons from each stage and from those aforementioned players about the position. Now, he's ready to emerge.

"It's been a rough few years for me," Fryar said. "But I think now I'm evolving into (the mindset of), 'I can play anywhere.' And it shows people that you can be confident in me to play left tackle. You don't have to worry that left side, like anybody else. I'm going against elite pass rushers like J.T. (Tu-

Continued On Page 6

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imolou) and Jack (Sawyer) so I feel once I get them down and start beating them, and keep going and keep going and keep going, then I'll be fine.

"Last year I grew the most out of anything. Just sitting back and watching them, watching elite pass protectors, I can get a few things from them and now I'm in that role."

Hinzman Making Case For Starting Center Job

After a surprise NFL draft declaration from former Ohio State center Luke Wyppler on Jan. 10, the Buckeyes found themselves in need of a new centerpiece on their offensive line.

The competition quickly shaped up with incumbent Buckeyes Jakob James and Hinzman being thrown in the fray, and Cutler sliding inside to battle for the starting center spot after transferring to Ohio State. With James sidelined until the fall due to injury, Hinzman (6-4, 300) has a unique opportunity to set himself apart from the others, and it's not something he's taking lightly.

"Looking at the spring and coming off of bowl prep, Coach Frye was just talking about how every practice from there on, since the start of bowl prep, was going to be vital to what I want to do here," Hinzman said. "Looking at what I want to do here and trying to be a starter and doing everything I can to get that part, obviously



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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, leading up to the Spring Game and dated April 15, is scheduled to be mailed on April 11.

There is no need to miss any of the Ohio State sports action between now and then, however. The football team will continue to have spring battles at key position such as quarterback and along the offensive line, and the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be manning the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on any breaking news and providing additional features, along with the latest in football recruiting news. BuckeyeSports.com is free to all BSB subscribers.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Additionally, staff members man the Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day. Staffers and readers have also been interacting

on the Forum's football and basketball recruiting threads, as well as the new transfer portal thread.

Don't forget, the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed and is available to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

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the spring is going to be vital for that.

"We have a really good competition. We have a lot of really good guys in our room. I think, personally, this spring is when most of the growth will happen."

Hinzman joined the Buckeyes last season in the summer and is undergoing his first spring camp in the program after not seeing any action in his first season for the Buckeyes.

He has bounced across the offensive line in his time at Ohio State, starting at right tackle before moving inside and slotting in at center. There was an adjustment process for the Hammond, Wis., native, and he pointed to the fact that his first-ever snap at Ohio State flew over the head of McCord in a drill.

But as the season progressed, Hinzman began to improve at the position, and he cited after-hours workouts to refine his technique at center.

"Just being in (the Woody Hayes Athletic Center) for extra hours and stuff like that, I know (Tshabola) has caught a lot of balls for me," Hinzman said. "It's just roommates coming in and working out with each other. It's been really great just having Kyle, (graduate assistant Mike Sollenne) and Devin coming in and catching balls from me every day. It's just trying to get that muscle memory down."

Although Hinzman was unable to find the field during his freshman campaign, he began to emerge during Ohio State's practices leading up to the Peach Bowl. For Hinzman, the bowl practices turned out to be a steppingstone into the competition for the starting center spot.

"I remember coming off of bowl prep and going back home and sitting down and just really visualizing what I want to do," Hinzman said. "After the first day (of camp), I've never felt more comfortable playing with the guys I do."

With center being a position that requires plenty of discipline, Hinzman may have a step up on his competitors in that regard due to his background. Growing up on a dairy farm, Hinzman was required to wake up at odd hours in order to work the farm, milk the cows or do other tasks required of him, helping build a level of diligence within him.

"Coming from that background, it's not more as if I'm – Coach Frye says it best – it's (that) nothing is extra work if it's just the work that it takes to get to where you want to be," Hinzman said. "Being a dairy farmer and waking up every morning, we didn't think of it as work. We were just doing it because that needed to be done."

"I have a long way to go, obviously, but I'm trying to continue that work and work ethic that my grandparents and parents have passed down to me."

Frye also recognized the growth that Hinzman has displayed at the position over time, adding that he's fit into the role well and is competing hard for the starting job left by Wyppler.

"He's getting thrust in," Frye said. "He's not even been here for 12 months. So, 12 months ago from now, he was still bailing hay and knocking icicles off of the barn up in Wisconsin. Now, there's (defensive tackles) Mike Hall Jr. and Tyleik (Williams) and all of those guys in front of him. He's just getting out and competing that way, and it's been good to see. You don't know these guys are going to go until you go let them play the game, and obviously we don't have games, but taking he's those live reps."

"He's embraced it, he's won some and he's lost some. He's got to learn from those."

Women's Hockey Falls In National Championship

Seeking its second consecutive national title, Ohio State simply couldn't solve Wisconsin goaltender Cami Kronish and suffered a 1-0 loss to the Badgers in the national title game on March 19 in Duluth, Minn.

Despite holding a 31-22 advantage in shots over Wisconsin, the No. 1-seeded Buckeyes fell short of their bid to repeat as national champions. Ohio State's own goaltender, Amanda Thiele, posted a strong outing of her own by making 21 of 22 saves, but it wasn't enough as Kronish stopped all 31 shots that came her way.

The eventual game-winner came from Wisconsin freshman forward Kirsten Simms with 6:42 to play in the opening period. She fired a near-perfect shot from the edge of the right circle that sneaked past

the opposite pipe of the net.

The championship contest mostly played out as a defensive battle from there, though, with neither team scoring in the final 46 minutes of the game.

After taking that early lead, Wisconsin was able to hold on with a lack of penalties helping to keep Ohio State – which has one of the nation's most efficient power plays – at bay. After an elbowing penalty against Casey O'Brien with 9:11 left in the first period, the Badgers didn't send a single player to the penalty box.

Ohio State pulled its goalie for the final 1:04 of game time in an attempt to even the contest, but it wasn't enough to get through Kronish.

Despite the loss, Ohio State is still able to celebrate making its third consecutive Frozen Four and finishing with a 33-6-2 record with a WCHA regular-season title a year after winning the first national title in program history.

For the Badgers, it's the team's seventh national championship, the most in NCAA women's hockey history.

Jaques Wins Kazmaier Award

Although she was unable to claim her second consecutive national title, Ohio State defenseman Sophie Jaques was honored on March 18 with the Patty Kazmaier Award, given to the best women's hockey player in the country.

Jaques became the first Buckeye to ever earn the award and bettered a runner-up finish from a season ago. Despite playing the blue line, Jaques racked up 24 goals this season, tied for eighth in the country among skaters of all positions.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to receive the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award," Jaques said. "I am grateful to be a recipient of an award named after the incredible athlete, scholar and human being, Patty Kazmaier."

"While this is an individual award, I have



Sophie Jaques

been supported by a whole team of people throughout this season and my career at Ohio State, and I owe this all to my coaches and teammates over the last five years. Receiving this award is something I never even could have imagined was possible.”

In five seasons with the Buckeyes, Jaques has appeared in 172 games with 156 points – 61 goals and 95 assists – with 224 career blocks.

Stroud The Favorite To Go No. 1 In NFL Draft

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud is now the betting favorite to be taken with the first overall pick in the upcoming NFL draft.

Following the Carolina Panthers' trade with the Chicago Bears to take over the No. 1 pick, several oddsmakers have Stroud listed as the favorite, followed by Alabama quarterback Bryce Young and Florida quarterback Anthony Richardson as the consensus top three, with Kentucky quarterback Will Levis and Alabama defensive end Will Anderson following that first grouping.

Young had been projected as the top pick in the draft for several months, but a standout performance at the NFL Scouting Combine has elevated Stroud in position to be taken first overall, with the Panthers and head coach Frank Reich looking for a new starting quarterback. If the Panthers were to pass on Stroud, it's unlikely he would make it past the first three selections, with the Houston Texans at No. 2 requiring a quarterback and a team likely to trade up at No. 3 for a signal caller.

The highest selection ever for an Ohio State quarterback was Art Schlichter, who was taken by the Indianapolis Colts with the No. 4 pick in the 1982 NFL draft.

The 2023 NFL draft runs from April 27-29, and other Buckeyes looking to hear their name called in the first round include wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and offensive tackles Johnson and Jones.

Yost Wins Diving National Title

Ohio State diver Lyle Yost claimed a national championship on men's one-meter springboard on March 23 at the Jean K. Freeman Aquatic Center in Minneapolis.

Yost and Indiana diver Andrew Capobianco were locked in a battle throughout the six-dive event, but Yost outlasted Capobianco with a 443.95, topping Capobianco's 439.45. The Buckeyes earned 23 All-American honors with six first-team mentions, including Yost, in swimming and diving.

He is the first Buckeye since Patrick Jeffrey in 1988 to win an NCAA title on the one-meter board, and he is the first Buckeye since Colin Zeng in 2016 (on the platform) to win a national championship.

Ohio State finished the NCAA championships in 11th place, tallying 112 total points during the four-day event. California claimed the national title with 482 points, while the Buckeyes finished second among Big Ten schools behind fourth-place Indiana, with an overall with a score of 379.

Elliott Released By Dallas Cowboys

Former Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott will be on the move for the first time in his NFL career.

Elliott was released by the Dallas Cow-

boys on March 15 after spending seven seasons with the organization. Previously drafted by the Cowboys with the fourth overall pick in the 2016 NFL draft, he appeared in 103 games and dashed for 8,262 yards – the third-most in Cowboys history – and 68 touchdowns during his time with the team.

Upon arriving in Dallas in 2016, Elliott made an immediate impact when he rushed for 1,631 yards and 15 touchdowns as a rookie, shattering the organization's rookie rushing record of 1,007 yards – set by Tony Dorsett in 1977 – and falling just 177 yards of Eric Dickerson's NFL rookie record of 1,808 yards.

From there, Elliott continued his production by rushing for over 1,000 yards in three of the next six seasons, and he likely would have surpassed the mark in 2017, tallying 983 rushing yards in just 10 games, but he was suspended six games stemming from a domestic violence investigation conducted by the NFL. Elliott also found the end zone at a high level as a Cowboy, scoring double-digit touchdowns in four seasons.

The Cowboys heavily relied on the legs of Elliott during his time with the organization, and it took a toll on the former Buckeye. He finished in the top 10 in rushing attempts in each season with the Cowboys and led the league in carries in 2016 and 2018 while finishing second in 2019. Elliott saw his yards per game steadily decline during his time in Dallas, dropping each season from his rookie year on and falling to a career-low 58.4 yards per game this past season.

Contributing to Elliott's career-low average in 2022 was the emergence of running back Tony Pollard, who led the Cowboys in rushing yards with 1,007, ahead of Elliott's 876 yards. Elliott still led the Cowboys in rushing touchdowns with 12, however.

ESPN's Adam Schefter reported that Elliott – now a free agent – had narrowed down his potential destinations to the Cincinnati Bengals, Philadelphia Eagles and

New York Jets.

As a Buckeye, Elliott helped Ohio State to a national championship in 2014 and churned out 3,961 career rushing yards and 43 touchdowns for the Scarlet and Gray. Elliott is third in career yardage but sits atop the record book by producing 6.7 yards per carry.

Ohio State Synchro Earns 34th National Championship

Ohio State's reign over collegiate synchronized swimming continued on March 25 when the Buckeyes claimed their 34th overall national title and their second in as many years.

The Buckeyes narrowly held off runner-up Stanford by three points, 95.0-92.0, to claim the national title. Several Buckeyes contributed to the team title, with sophomore Ruby Remati picking up a pair of national titles in A Figures and duet while being named the Individual High Point Award winner for earning a meet-high 68 points.

Sophomore Emily Armstrong and senior Nikki Dzurko also claimed national titles, with Armstrong winning one alongside Remati in the duet finals. Dzurko completed her storied career by winning her third solo title with a score 84.500.

As a result of yet another national title under her reign, head coach Holly Vargo-Brown was named the U.S. Collegiate Coach of the Year, the seventh such honor in her career at Ohio State.

Pistol Brings Home Third Straight Title

The synchronized swimming team wasn't alone in bringing home a national title, as Ohio State's pistol squad earned its third consecutive national championship on March 18.

Ohio State swept the top-three spots in every team and individual event. Senior Katelyn Abeln placed first in the air pistol and three-event aggregate, and junior Maria Tsarik finished atop the leaderboard in the standard and sport events.

Along with their individual wins, Abeln and Tsarik were named All-Americans in all four events. The sibling trio of Jackson, Abbie and Henry Leverett was also named All-Americans in a variety of events, with all three picking up nods in the three-event aggregate. Freshman Panagiota Charalampous was also named an All-American in the air and three-event aggregate events.

Ginn Sr. Named To National High School Hall Of Fame

Cleveland Glenville head coach Ted Ginn Sr. – the father of former Ohio State wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr. – was announced as a member of the 2023 class of the National High School Hall of Fame on March 16.

Ginn has served at the helm of the Glenville football program since 1997, boasting a career record of 240-60, while leading the Tarblooders to their first state title this past fall. During his 25-year career, Ginn has totaled just one losing season while reaching the playoffs in 19 of 25 campaigns.

Under Ginn, Glenville has become a pipeline of talent to Ohio State. Since 2002, Glenville has produced no shortage of Buckeyes, including quarterbacks Cardale Jones and Troy Smith, safety Donte Whitner, cornerback Marshon Lattimore and Ginn Jr. That well ran dry for a few years as Ohio State went without a commitment from Glenville from 2017 until 2022, with linebacker Arvell Reese ending the drought in the most recent cycle.

Ginn is joined in the class by basketball greats Carlos Boozer and Tamika Catchings, among others. The class will be inducted on July 1 at the National Federation of State High School Associations Summer Meeting in Seattle.

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

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Positions Open For Business Across Roster

Continued From Page 1

tear last fall.

Wideout is even more loaded, featuring Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming, all with significant experience for the Buckeyes, as well as Xavier Johnson, Jayden Ballard and a bevy of second- and first-year receivers looking to break through. While Ohio State is losing Mitch Rossi at tight end, Cade Stover's return for a fifth season quashes any concern about a leader in the room, and Gee Scott Jr., Joe Royer and freshman Jelani Thurman provide needed depth.

But outside of those spots, questions remain for Ohio State.

The quarterback battle is at the front of it all (more on page 10), with Kyle McCord and Devin Brown fighting for the right to go under center for the Buckeyes. Unlike pre-

vious quarterback battles that left the cupboard relatively bare after the dust settled, Ohio State is likely to have at least three scholarship quarterbacks entering next season.

"This was the first time we've had three quarterbacks, and we'll have a fourth one coming in the summer," Day said. "It's been a while since we've had that many quarterbacks on scholarships, so that's good."

The other main area of competition on offense is on the offensive line, where Ohio State is looking to replace both offensive tackles and the center. Beyond those spots, depth remains a work in progress, with both Day and offensive line coach Justin Frye previously saying that they hope to have at least eight or nine guys they feel comfortable with entering the game, if needed.

"Offensive line, there's certainly some

guys we've got to replace and build that," Day said. "That's an area where we've got to focus on."

But for as many questions remain on offense, defense is still where the most is up for grabs, both in terms of starting jobs and opportunities for younger players to rise up the depth chart.

The Buckeyes are replacing a starting cornerback in Cameron Brown and starting safeties in Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister, and there is no shortage of players ready to step up.

Cameron Martinez, Lathan Ransom, Josh Proctor, Kye Stokes and Sonny Styles are among those competing at safety, while Jyaire Brown, Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock are fighting for two spots at cornerback. Ohio State further bolstered depth – and provided a competitive spark – by

bringing in cornerback Davison Igbinosun from Ole Miss and safety Ja'Had Carter from Syracuse, who have already pushed those in their respective position rooms and are priming themselves to start this fall for the Buckeyes.

"(Igbinosun) came in, stepped in and did a nice job establishing himself early on," Day said. "That's something that coming in from another program is not always easy to do, so he's done a good job of that. But it's going to be a good competition."

Starting roles are less of a concern on the defensive line and at linebacker, where a number of entrenched veterans are returning for Ohio State, but there's a distinct lack of experience from those backing up the positions, and this spring offers an opportunity for those like defensive tackle Hero Kanu and linebacker C.J. Hicks to step up.

But it isn't a bad position to be in for the Buckeyes with too many bodies to fill a finite number of spots on the depth chart. It's a far cry from this time last year and last fall camp, when Ohio State – whether due to scholarship numbers or injuries – was unable to have a full complement in practice at some positions.

Most notably, cornerback was so thin during fall camp that kicker Jake Seibert was forced to practice in the secondary, and that isn't a situation that Day wants to revisit. But Ohio State – through development, recruiting and the transfer portal – has been able to beef up numbers across the roster, and the team-wide competition taking place over the next few weeks looks to raise the talent level across the board, ranging from the bona fide starters to those trying to break into the depth chart.

"When you look at our numbers right now, we are able to run (three groups in practice)," Day said. "If we get some guys nicked up, we'll have to adjust and that's something that's happened in the past. But right now, our numbers are pretty good, so we're looking to have a healthy spring."

Competition Expands To Coaching Staff

The competition taking place over the spring isn't limited to the players, however, as offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline is looking to seize play calling responsibilities from Day.

The head coach previously stated his intentions to treat spring practice as a try-out for Hartline in regard to play calling, and that has been a work in progress as the Buckeyes continue through their spring training sessions.

"We're going to try this with these next couple of weeks to try to get some game-type situations and get that going," Day said. "A big part of it right now in the first 10 practices is installing and fundamentals."

"And then we try to start playing the game more. You need to work on red zone and third down and short yardage, those types of situations. It's harder to get into those types of game situations, so we'll typically script a lot of what we do."

"The best you can do is get out there and call it and just see what happens and try to change the situation the best you can, but you don't quite really get a feel for it until

PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

Redshirt sophomore wide receiver Jayden Ballard: There's no position on Ohio State's roster where it's easier to fall into the background than at wide receiver, and that's a reality that Ballard (6-2, 196) will be looking to avoid.

Ohio State is returning Marvin Harrison Jr. (6-4, 208), Emeka Egbuka (6-1, 206) and Julian Fleming (6-2, 205) at wideout this season but will not have Egbuka or Fleming available for the spring, which opens up an opportunity for Ballard. He has just nine receptions for 159 yards and one touchdown over the last two seasons, with a good chunk of that production coming on a 72-yard touchdown reception last year.

It's been challenging for Ballard to see the field with such a high-profile group of wideouts at Ohio State, also including Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Garrett Wilson during Ballard's time with the Buckeyes, but this has the look of a make-or-break season. Ohio State's second-year wideouts are also looking to make an impact, and the incoming freshmen have the talent to push the rest of the room.

This is an important spring for Ballard as he looks to cement his spot for the Buckeyes, but if he doesn't, he could be lost in the crowd by the time the season rolls around.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Devin Brown: Either of Ohio State's quarterbacks vying for the starting job could be expanded on in this section, but if there's one who's going to need a big push to get near the top of the depth chart, it's Brown (6-3, 213).

Kyle McCord (6-3, 215) is the presumed favorite to win the starting role, but head coach Ryan Day has stated that it will be a legitimate competition between McCord and Brown, opening up an opportunity for Brown if he impresses this spring.

He has a significant lack of experience, at least relative to McCord, but he has shown all the intangibles that could put him in position to compete. Brown went blow-for-blow with McCord during the first two spring practice sessions, displaying an impressive zip on the ball and solid accuracy, and his switch to No. 33 shows he isn't afraid of standing out.

Even if Brown were to win the job, it likely would not be finalized until the fall, so this spring is an important step if he hopes to be under center for the Buckeyes this season.

Redshirt sophomore offensive lineman Zen Michalski: Another player on offense looking to secure a starting job is Michalski (6-7, 310), who is among those fighting for one of the open offensive tackle positions. Redshirt junior Josh Fryar (6-6, 320) is likely to fill in at left tackle, leaving Michalski – as well as redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola (6-6, 327) and redshirt sophomore Ben Christman (6-6, 315) – as one of the front-runners at right tackle.

Michalski has seen continued growth, according to his coaches, since arriving on campus out of Floyd Knobs, Ind., and just as important as finding a starting quarterback is finding the players who will protect him on the edge.

He was able to make Ohio State's two-deep last season, stepping in at tackle on the second-team offensive line in several games, and with a solid performance in the spring, he could take the next step as a starter in the trenches this fall.

Junior defensive end Jack Sawyer: A change of pace may be exactly what Sawyer (6-4, 265) needed this spring. The former five-star out of Pickerington (Ohio) North will stay exclusively at defensive end this spring after playing at defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' hybrid defensive end/linebacker position – aptly named the "Jack" – last season, with Knowles wanting Sawyer to hone his technique.

While Sawyer's previous season was not a bad one, leading the Buckeyes with 4½ sacks, it was still a relatively quiet outing, with Sawyer often disappearing for several games in a row. This disparity grew stronger as fellow defensive end J.T. Tuimolouau (6-4, 271) had a breakout year and provided no shortage of highlights for Ohio State.

This spring offers a reset for Sawyer, who could see a benefit by moving back to the line of scrimmage rather than playing several yards off the ball. Knowles did not rule out the possibility that Sawyer returns to the "Jack" down the line, but if Sawyer is able to impress this spring at defensive end, it's likely he'll stay in that role moving forward.

Junior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams: While there may be a logjam of talent at defensive end with Tuimolouau, Sawyer and a number of exciting young players, that does not hold true at defensive tackle, where Ohio State is looking for someone to step up and take control of the room following the departure of Taron Vincent.

Redshirt sophomore Mike Hall Jr. (6-2, 285) showed flashes last season, sharing a team-high 4½ sacks with Sawyer, but struggled to stay on the field for any extended period of time. Redshirt junior Ty Hamilton (6-3, 295) rose throughout last year and notched several late-season starts, but it was Williams (6-3, 320) who finished with 21 tackles, most among the defensive tackles behind Vincent.

Williams saw his most extended playing time last season since arriving at Ohio State, able to stay on the field for extended stretches after struggling to do so during his freshman campaign because he was not "in shape," according to Williams, who entered his first spring practice in 2021 at 360 pounds.

His continued development was a bright spot for Ohio State's defense last season, and if that continues into this spring, he's a likely choice to be among the Buckeyes' starters on the defensive line this fall.

– Braden Moles

COVER STORY/ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School	No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School
2	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	206	Jr.	Steilacoom, Wash./Steilacoom	44	J.T. Tuimolou	DE	6-4	271	Jr.	Edgewood, Wash./Eastside Catholic
2	Kourt Williams II	SAF	6-1	228	Sr.	Harbor City, Calif./St. John Bosco	48	Max Lomonico	LS	6-3	215	Jr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
3	Miyon Williams	RB	5-9	226	Sr.	Cincinnati/Winton Woods	49	Patrick Gurd	TE	6-4	240	Sr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
4	Julian Fleming	WR	6-2	205	Sr.	Catawissa, Pa./Southern Columbia	50	Jackson Kuwath	LB	6-4	236	Jr.	Cincinnati/Lakota West
5	Dallan Hayden	RB	5-10	203	So.	Memphis, Tenn./Christian Brothers	51	Michael Hall Jr.	DT	6-2	285	Jr.	Streetsboro, Ohio/Streetsboro
6	Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	215	Jr.	Mt. Laurel, N.J./St. Joseph's Prep	51	Luke Montgomery	OL	6-4	298	Fr.	Findlay, Ohio/Findlay
6	Sonny Styles	SAF	6-4	223	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central	53	Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	290	Fr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
7	Kyion Grayes	WR	6-0	185	So.	Chandler, Ariz./Chandler	54	Toby Wilson	OL	6-2	290	Jr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
7	Jordan Hancock	CB	6-0	187	Jr.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett	55	Matthew Jones	OL	6-4	312	Grad.	Brooklyn, N.Y./Erasmus Hall
8	Cade Stover	TE	6-4	251	Sr.	Mansfield, Ohio/Lexington	57	Jalen Pace	LB	6-0	229	Jr.	St. Louis/Mary Institute & Country Day
9	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	196	Jr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington	58	Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	295	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
10	Denzel Burke	CB	6-1	190	Jr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Saguaro	59	Victor Cutler Jr.	OT	6-3	295	Sr.	West Monroe, La./Louisiana Monroe
10	Xavier Johnson	WR	6-1	210	Grad.	Cincinnati/Summit Country Day	59	Landon Smith	DL	6-2	277	Jr.	Powell, Ohio/Ashland
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	230	So.	Dayton/Archbishop Alter	61	Jack Forsman	OL	6-6	296	Jr.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
12	Caleb Burton	WR	5-11	175	So.	Austin, Texas/Lake Travis	62	Joshua Padilla	OL	6-3	293	Fr.	Huber Heights, Ohio/Wayne
12	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	207	Sr.	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic	62	Bryce Prater	DL	6-0	279	Jr.	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
13	Kaleb Brown	WR	5-10	196	So.	Chicago/St. Rita	64	Quinton Burke	OL	6-5	301	Sr.	Lancaster, Ohio/Lancaster
13	Cameron Martinez	SAF	5-10	190	Sr.	Muskegon, Mich./Muskegon	65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-7	310	Jr.	Floyds Knobs, Ind./Floyd Central
14	Kojo Antwi	WR	5-11	194	So.	Suwanee, Ga./Lambert	66	Enokk Vimahi	OL	6-4	310	Sr.	Kahuku, Hawaii/Kahuku
14	Ja'Had Carter	SAF	6-0	203	Sr.	Richmond, Va./Syracuse	67	Austin Siereveld	OL	6-5	317	Fr.	Liberty Township, Ohio/Lakota East
15	Tristan Gebbia	QB	6-2	205	Grad.	Calabasas, Calif./Oregon State	68	George Fitzpatrick	OL	6-6	305	So.	Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek
15	Jelani Thurman	TE	6-6	253	Fr.	Fairburn, Ga./Langston Hughes	69	Trey Leroux	OL	6-7	315	Sr.	Norwalk, Ohio/Norwalk
16	Mason Maggs	QB	6-2	215	So.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman	70	Josh Fryar	OL	6-6	320	Sr.	Beech Grove, Ind. Beech Grove
17	Mitchel Melton	LB	6-3	253	Sr.	Silver Spring, Md./Good Counsel	71	Ben Christman	OL	6-6	315	Jr.	Richfield, Ohio/Revere
17	Carnell Tate	WR	6-2	191	Fr.	Chicago/IMG Academy	72	Avery Henry	OL	6-6	309	So.	St. Clairsville, Ohio/St. Clairsville
18	Jyaire Brown	CB	5-11	180	So.	New Orleans/Lakota West (Ohio)	73	Grant Toutant	OL	6-7	327	Sr.	Warren, Mich./De La Salle
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	WR	6-4	208	Jr.	Philadelphia/St. Joseph's Prep	74	Donovan Jackson	OL	6-4	320	Jr.	Bellaire, Texas/Episcopal
19	Chad Ray	QB	6-2	210	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Scioto	75	Carson Hinzman	OL	6-4	300	So.	Hammond, Wis./Saint Croix Central
19	Chip Trayanum	RB	5-11	233	Sr.	Akron/Archbishop Hoban H.S. & Arizona State	76	Miles Walker	OL	6-5	285	Fr.	Greenwich, Conn./Brunswick
20	Davison Igbinosun	CB	6-2	187	So.	Union, N.J./Mississippi	77	Tegra Tshabola	OL	6-6	327	So.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
21	Evan Pryor	RB	5-11	198	Jr.	Cornelius, N.C./William Amos Hough	78	Jakob James	OL	6-5	297	Jr.	Cincinnati/Elder
22	Steele Chambers	LB	6-1	232	Sr.	Roswell, Ga./Blessed Trinity Catholic	80	Noah Rogers	WR	6-2	194	Fr.	Rolesville, N.C./Rolesville
23	Omari Abor	DE	6-3	268	So.	Duncanville, Texas/Duncanville	81	Sam Hart	TE	6-5	248	Jr.	Aurora, Colo./Cherokee Trail
24	Parker Lewis	K	6-3	220	Sr.	Phoenix, Ariz./USC	82	David Adolph	WR	6-4	205	So.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
24	Jermaine Mathews Jr.	CB	5-11	182	Fr.	Cincinnati/Winton Woods	83	Joop Mitchell	WR	5-10	180	Jr.	Wyoming, Ohio/Wyoming
25	Malik Hartford	SAF	6-2	183	Fr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West	84	Joe Royer	TE	6-5	252	Sr.	Cincinnati/Elder
25	Kai Saunders	WR	6-2	205	So.	Northville, Mich./Northville	85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-5	248	So.	Acworth, Ga./Allatoona
26	Cayden Saunders	RB	5-9	188	Jr.	Northville, Mich./Northville	86	Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	175	Fr.	Zephyrhills, Fla./Wiregrass Ranch
28	TC Caffey	RB	5-10	215	So.	Hubbard, Ohio/Hubbard	87	Reis Stocksdale	WR	5-9	188	Jr.	Morrow, Ohio/Little Miami
28	Reid Carrico	LB	6-2	235	Jr.	Ironton, Ohio/Ironton	88	Gee Scott Jr.	TE	6-3	240	Jr.	Seattle/Eastside Catholic
29	Jesse Mirco	P	6-4	215	Jr.	Fremantle, Australia	89	Zak Herbstreit	TE	6-2	240	Jr.	Nashville, Tenn./Montgomery Bell Academy
29	Ryan Turner	CB	5-11	189	So.	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep	90	Jaden McKenzie	DT	6-2	290	Sr.	Wake Forest, N.C./Wake Forest H.S.
30	Will Hartson	RB	5-9	205	Fr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington	91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	320	Jr.	Manassas, Va./Unity Reed
30	Cody Simon	LB	6-2	239	Sr.	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep	92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	259	So.	Greenwood, Ind./Center Grove
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	214	Jr.	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell	93	Hero Kanu	DT	6-4	305	So.	Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif./Santa Margarita Catholic
32	Brenten Jones	SAF	6-1	205	So.	Steubenville, Ohio/Steubenville	95	Casey Magyar	K	5-10	189	Jr.	Dublin, Ohio/Kent State
33	Devin Brown	QB	6-3	213	So.	Gilbert, Ariz./Corner Canyon (Utah)	96	Collin Johnson	LS	6-0	209	Jr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-4	265	Jr.	Pickerington, Ohio/North	97	Kenyatta Jackson	DE	6-5	252	So.	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
34	Chase Brecht	RB	6-0	205	So.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty	98	Jake Seibert	K	6-1	205	Sr.	Cincinnati/La Salle
34	Colin Kaufmann	CB	5-10	188	So.	Avon, Ohio/Avon							
35	Tommy Eichenberg	LB	6-2	239	Sr.	Cleveland/St. Ignatius							
36	Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	230	So.	Marysville, Ohio/Marysville							
37	Kye Stokes	SAF	6-1	192	So.	Seffner, Fla./Armwood							
38	Jayden Fielding	K	6-0	175	So.	League City, Texas/IMG Academy							
38	Cameron Kittle	CB	6-0	182	Sr.	Glouster, Ohio/Trimble							
39	Andrew Moore	CB	5-11	190	Jr.	Cleveland/Cleveland Heights							
41	Josh Proctor	SAF	6-2	205	Sr.	Owasso, Okla./Owasso							
43	John Ferlmann	LS	6-2	225	Jr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Arizona State							
43	Dianté Griffin	CB	5-8	185	So.	Lima, Ohio/Senior							

Coaching staff – Ryan Day, head coach; Brian Hartline, offensive coordinator/wide receivers; Jim Knowles, defensive coordinator/linebackers; Tony Alford, assistant head coach for offense/running backs; Justin Frye, associate head coach for offense/offensive line; Larry Johnson, associate head coach/defensive line; Tim Walton, secondary/cornerbacks; Perry Eliano, safeties; Mickey Marotti, assistant AD, director of football; Corey Dennis, quarterbacks; Parker Fleming, special teams coordinator; Keenan Bailey, tight ends; Todd Fitch, senior advisor/analyst; Brent Zdebski, quality control – defense; Rob Keys, quality control – kicking; Sam McGrath, quality control – defense; Joe Lyberger, quality control – defense; James Laurinatis, graduate assistant – defense; LaAllan Clark, graduate assistant – defense; Mike Sollenne, graduate assistant, offense; Sean Binckes, graduate assistant – offense; Riley Larkin, program assistant – offense; Gunner Daniel, program assistant – special teams; Devin Jordan, program assistant – offense; Gerren DuHart, program assistant – defense; Joshua Chorba, program assistant – defense

you're in the game."

It's all been an effort by Day to take a wide-angle view as Ohio State's head coach, treating his role as that of a CEO rather than his focus lying solely with the offense and quarterbacks, of which he still plays a significant role despite his head-coaching duties.

"I think when you sit down and you evaluate everything in the program, and certainly evaluate where college football is and demands of the job the way it is now as opposed to two or four years ago, I have to look at time management," Day said. "I think that during the offseason, no problem at all. Beginning of the season, it's pretty good.

"As we get to the middle of the season, end of the season, I feel like there's times where I have to manage my time a little bit better and make sure that as the head coach, there's enough presence going around the building late in the season. We're trying to figure out how to best remedy that."

But, even as Day has attempted to take a step back and let others – namely Hartline – take on more responsibility, he's found trouble at points stepping away.

"You have a bigger lens on everything and you're able to see from a big-picture view," Day said. "But it doesn't take long before I'm running over there and coaching up the quarterbacks."

He said it only took halfway through Ohio State's first spring practice to find himself going back to old habits, but he's trying to do everything he can to have his say and presence felt across the team.

"We actually have some technology where we're able to watch practice on an iPad," he said. "I was able to do a little bit of that and bounce around a little bit. The more I can do that, I think the better right now in spring."

And while Hartline would love to see his new promotion come with play-calling responsibilities, he doesn't want to take away from what Day has done to make the team – and specifically the offense – operate at the level it has over the last several seasons.

"I would say that Coach Day is still Coach Day," Hartline said. "We're elite because of what Coach Day brings to the table, so I don't want to steer too far from what he's been continuing to do. But I'm sure he has goals that he's trying to accomplish through spring. We all each have individual (goals), team goals, all those things. I'm sure there's things he identified he wanted to do better. He's probably trying to do that first day of spring. But his energy and what he brings to the table offensively will never change."

If Hartline's audition goes well in the

spring and he does take over those responsibilities entering next season, leaving Day without play-calling duties for the first time since taking over as head coach, Hartline feels comfortable in the staff at Ohio State and their ability to support his transition to calling plays.

"I think that Coach Day has always done it at an elite level," Hartline said. "We've always produced from a production standpoint offensively at an elite level. But the support staff I have around me really empowers me, so my confidence comes from having them. I'd be very confident."

Hartline will have ample opportunities to call plays over the next few weeks, including at several scrimmages and potentially

at Ohio State's spring game. But a formal decision on who will call plays next season won't happen until after spring practice has concluded, with the goal of finding whatever configuration works best to maximize the offense as well as Day's continued push to spread himself out across his team.

"(I'm) just making sure that I'm evaluating myself as the head coach the right way," Day said. "And there's a lot of different things that are changing on a daily basis. Whether that's giving up the play calling and letting Brian do it or not, we'll decide that here in the next few months, probably. But (we're) just trying to figure out how to do a better job of that."

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McCord, Brown Fighting For Starting QB Job

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the first time in Ryan Day's tenure as Ohio State's head coach, he has a true quarterback contest on his hands.

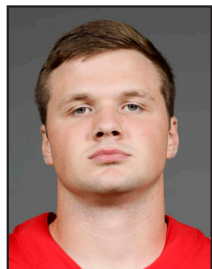
While Day touted contests between Justin Fields and Matthew Baldwin entering 2019 and C.J. Stroud, Kyle McCord and Jack Miller III in 2021, those competitions were largely seen as foregone conclusions with the heavy favorites in Fields and Stroud claiming the starting spots with relative ease. Day isn't a stranger to quarterback competitions, however, after he presided over the fierce battle between Joe Burrow and Dwayne Haskins in 2018 as Ohio State's offensive coordinator.

Now, Day has his eyes on finding the successor to Stroud, with McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown engaged in an off-season-long battle to fill the void at football's most important position. The competition is only expected to heat up during the spring and into fall camp, and Day laid out the factors that will set McCord or Brown ahead of the other on the opening day of spring practice.

"The first thing is leadership," Day said on March 7. "You have to be felt and heard. They did that today, and that was a really encouraging thing. I heard, even after a good play or a bad play, it didn't matter, good leadership is out there. At the end of the day,

it's our job as quarterbacks to lead the team and drive the team down the field, and score touchdowns. Being that leader is critically important.

"I feel like we're going to have a great supporting cast, so the quarterback doesn't need to be superhuman. He just needs to do his job and make routine plays routinely, and then it will build from there. But the No. 1 things we're looking for are leadership and toughness."



Kyle McCord

The leadership onus laid out by Day has been felt by the duo of Brown and McCord, who both emphasized the importance of carrying themselves the right way in the position.

To McCord, the opportunities to lead have come after operating in the shadow of Stroud over the last two seasons. Growing into a primary voice on the team took some getting used to, but he made it clear that he's gained comfort as a leader over his time in Columbus.

"When C.J. was here, you didn't want to step on his toes or anything like that because he was obviously the clear, defined leader of the team. He was the voice of the team," McCord said. "Now that he's gone, naturally, opportunities to step up, lead, speak and things like that came.

"It's definitely something that I was try-

ing to be a little conscious of early on in the winter, and then over time it became second nature."

Brown echoed the sentiment shared by Day and placed emphasis on growing trust with his teammates and being a catalyst for how the offense – and the team as a whole – operates.

"The team just has to believe in you," Brown said. "They've got to feel your energy every day. They've got to feel how you're playing, and you've got to be moving the ball.

"The biggest thing is being a leader and being able to get going and when guys are down, you have to bring them back up. I think the team will surround whoever has the most energy and whoever is the biggest leader."

But leadership can only take either candidate so far. Talent and skill set will ultimately be additional deciding traits, and while McCord and Brown offer varying strengths and weaknesses, there's no denying the level of talent that either option provides for the Buckeyes.

McCord arrived at Ohio State as a five-star prospect out of St. Joseph's Prep in Philadelphia, where he forged a connection with Buckeye wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. while winning the Philadelphia Catholic League MVP and three Pennsylvania 6A state titles during his time with the program. By the end of his high school career, McCord had thrown for 6,887 yards and tossed 88 touchdowns, both of which

constituted city and Philadelphia Catholic League records.

As a result of his record-shattering high school career, McCord arrived in Columbus with high expectations. While it seemed clear that the starting job was Stroud's to lose in McCord's first taste of offseason competition, McCord raised himself ahead of then-redshirt freshman Miller on the depth chart, securing the No. 2 spot despite being in only his first year.

"When I came in for the first (competition), I had no experience, no practices under my belt or a season under my belt," he said. "Now, going into year three – which is crazy to think about – I have a lot more experience and a lot more reps, whether that's in practice or a game.

"You kind of understand what the coaches are looking for. That experience speaks volumes in terms of looking back where I am now and where I was when I first got here."

On the surface, earning the backup spot didn't seem to be overly important with Stroud taking the reins from Fields as the starter, but McCord received a unique opportunity just a few weeks into his freshman campaign. With Stroud battling a lingering shoulder injury during the early stages of the season and coming off a difficult outing against Tulsa, the Buckeyes decided to shut him down for their home contest against Akron while handing the keys of the offense to McCord against the Zips on Sept. 25, 2021.

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SPRING PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

It wasn't exactly a ceremonious start for McCord, as he tossed a pair of incomplections and fumbled on the Buckeyes' opening drive, allowing Akron to stake an early 7-0 lead. But he quickly bounced back on Ohio State's ensuing possession, completing his first pass to Jaxon Smith-Njigba for 22 yards before eventually tossing a 5-yard touchdown strike to Chris Olave to cap off the drive.

It was mainly smooth sailing from there for McCord, outside of a third-quarter interception, finishing his lone start by completing 13 of 18 attempts for 319 yards and two touchdowns in Ohio State's 59-7 blowout of Akron.

Stroud ultimately reclaimed his starting spot, and McCord was seldom utilized from that point forward, appearing only in mop-up duty, and even then, not as much as one would expect. McCord has attempted just 40 passes outside of his lone start in the last two seasons, including just 20 passes last season, of which he completed 16 for 190 yards and a touchdown.

Although McCord hasn't received much meaningful playing time beyond his one start, he noted that he's gained comfort within the program while also continuing to cultivate a competitive approach to how he operates.

"Playing quarterback is a bunch of things, whether it's leading the team, whether it's knowing how to manage the game, knowing how to prepare for the game," McCord said.

McCord's strengths lie primarily in his arm talent, as well as his ability to progress through his reads quickly. Also helping McCord get a leg up on Brown is his connection with Harrison, after the duo arrived in Columbus as a package deal of sorts.

The Buckeyes' star wideout said he still feels in tune with McCord despite catching passes from Stroud the past two seasons. But Harrison added that he's also forged a link with Brown as he's worked in since last spring.

"We definitely have a connection," Harrison said of McCord. "It goes back to when we were sophomores in high school. Obviously, the more you throw with someone the more connected you get. He kind of knows what I'm doing, I know what he's doing."

"But I've developed that connection with Devin too, over time, with him being here last year a little bit and a couple of practices here (in the spring) and in the offseason as well."

While McCord's arm strength and pocket presence are defining traits of his game, Brown boasts a level of mobility that has intrigued a section of the Ohio State fan base that has been pining for a quarterback who can take off and run with the ball if need be.

That's not to say Brown doesn't possess the arm talent needed to compete in the Big Ten. He threw for 85 touchdowns and nearly 8,000 yards during his three seasons as a high school starter. In his senior season at Corner Canyon High School in Draper, Utah, Brown threw for 4,881 yards and 57 touchdowns.

In regard to his dual-threat ability, Brown added 430 rushing yards and eight rushing touchdowns during his senior season. In his first season at Ohio State, Brown did not register a pass attempt but did rush once for a 1-yard gain against Toledo.

One source of inspiration for Brown was



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

NEXT UP — Ohio State is looking for either Kyle McCord (6) or Devin Brown (33) to step up and take hold of the Buckeyes' open quarterback job this spring.

former Ohio State dual-threat quarterback Tate Martell, and Brown worked to emulate some of the things Martell did during his time at Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas.

"My earliest memories are watching Tate Martell in high school," Brown said. "I just idolized him. I used to go to his camps when he was at Bishop Gorman because of the way he played in high school, and I think that's kind of where it started."

As Brown grew into his game as a quarterback, he added that there was a natural progression in his skill set that allowed him to expand his game to include both his arm and legs. Brown credited his move from Queen Creek in Arizona — where he played for former Ohio State quarterback Joe Germaine — to Corner Canyon, which boasted an offense that relied on the quarterback's dual-threat ability rather than his pocket-heavy setup at Queen Creek.

"My early years of high school, I wasn't really scrambling around or anything like that," he said. "It really took off when I moved to Utah and I was in more of a running offense, and I was able to use my legs a lot more. It kind of came to me, I really hadn't done that before."

"We had quarterback runs in the offense, and I didn't have that in Arizona. We were all under center and pro-style with Coach Germaine. When I got to Coach (Eric) Kjar in Utah, it was more spread of-

fense with a lot of throws. We didn't hand the ball off that much, but when I had runs, it was good for me to be able to find my athleticism and be able to make guys miss."

While Brown doesn't have much in-game experience to look back on from his lone season with Buckeyes, in which he appeared in just two games against Toledo and Rutgers and totaled 15 snaps, he certainly hasn't shied away from the spotlight. Brown will sport the unorthodox No. 33 for the Buckeyes, honoring legendary quarterback Sammy Baugh, a number that Day said will draw some attention to the second-year gunslinger.

"It was something that was important to him," Day said. "I said, 'OK, you're going to stick out a little bit. Are you all right with

that?' and he was like, 'Yeah' and I said, 'As long as you're good with it, I'm good with it.'"

With both quarterbacks carrying their own defining skills into the competition, Day emphasized the importance of finding the "extraordinary traits" that set a quarterback apart from the rest. Those are traits that Day identified in Fields and Stroud and is seeking to find in McCord or Brown that will elevate what the Ohio State offense can do with either at the helm.

"The first thing is they have to be able to compete," Day said. "They have to be high competitors because of what it takes to be the quarterback at Ohio State. The other thing is you're looking for some extraordinary traits. When you think about the different quarterbacks we've had, even going back to Braxton (Miller), Cardale (Jones), J.T. (Barrett), Dwayne, Justin, C.J., even when Joe was here, they all had extraordinary traits and I think that's important."

"(Brown and McCord) are starting to take shape. They're doing a good job. The one thing that I can appreciate about both of them is their work ethic and their intelligence level. It's been fun to get out there and see them now take the reps with the ones."

While the competition heats up as the season opener at Indiana on Sept. 2 draws closer, both quarterbacks recognize that the battle for the starting spot has also pushed them in ways to expedite their growth.

Brown said he feels both he and McCord are among the nation's elite at the position, and that the competition is only driving them to get better throughout the offseason and into the fall.

"Kyle and I are two of the best quarterbacks in the country," Brown said. "I feel like when I'm at my best, it's because I'm in the best competition in the country. Going against Kyle everyday really boosts my confidence and boosts my drive to try and get better every day, and I feel like I'm doing the same for him."

McCord said the battle will remain between the lines and that he and Brown have a great respect for one another.

"Devin and I are really close," McCord said. "We both know what it is, but I think that's the beauty of it. All offseason, we've been pushing each other, which is good. He's definitely gotten me better, and I definitely have gotten him better. So I think it's a very beneficial relationship on both sides."

"Obviously, we both know what we're going for, but at the end of the day it's just a really good competition. I think it's bringing the best out of me and the best out of him as well."

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DL Looking To Turn Talent Into Production

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If Ohio State is ever to regain the dominance on the defensive line enjoyed in 2019, when defensive end Chase Young set a school record with 16½ sacks en route to being a Heisman Trophy finalist, now would be the year. At least on paper.

Former five-star defensive ends J.T. Tuimoloau (6-4, 270) and Jack Sawyer (6-4, 265) both enter their junior years after starting last season. Defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. (6-2, 285) is also back after being a starter last season, having flashed fantastic potential in the first half of the campaign before a shoulder injury limited him down the stretch.

The trio should be the building blocks of a defensive front that is looking for an uptick in production, supported by a gaggle of other players – including a talented group of second-years – that will push for playing time. No Buckeye has recorded more than 5½ sacks in a season since Young's record-breaking year, and that season was the last of nine straight for the Buckeyes with one pass rusher reaching at least seven sacks, so OSU is looking for someone to step up.

"Right now they're working hard," defensive line coach Larry Johnson said on March 23. "I'm happy with where they're at, but we've got a long way to go."

For Hall, the offseason has been about getting healthy and realizing the potential he showed while collecting 7½ tackles for loss and 4½ sacks in the first seven games last season. After that impressive start, his shoulder injury limited him to no more than 16 snaps in each of the team's final five games.



Mike Hall Jr.

Johnson has already guaranteed that Hall will be a starter this season, but whether that's at three-technique or one-technique defensive tackle is still to be seen. This spring, for him, is about recapturing the success he realized against teams like Notre Dame and Michigan State last year and working with the group around him to improve.

"My goal is to try to become the best defensive line group in the country," Hall said. "We always strive for that. Coach (Ryan) Day always preaches that, and we're pushing the yardstick every day to try and be better."

Hall stated that his recovery started as soon as the offseason began, and now that it's behind him, he's looking to move forward with a focus on the team. He feels that his production isn't possible without the entire defensive line playing at an optimal level, and Johnson sees another level that Hall can get to.

"He's got all the skills to be special," Johnson said. "He's just got to stay healthy and go from there."

Sawyer is another player with some positional uncertainty. Last season saw him occupy the Jack, a hybrid defensive end/linebacker role that is a staple of defensive

coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme. But his production wasn't to the level expected of a former five-star in his second season. Sawyer collected just 24 tackles with 6½ for loss – though his 4½ sacks did tie for the team lead with Hall.

This spring, however, Sawyer is working exclusively as a traditional defensive end with his hand in the dirt. This is part of a larger move from Knowles to put the Jack on the back burner this spring, but the way Johnson talked, it seems likely that Sawyer will be going from the three-point stance permanently.

"I think we've got another guy who can probably play the Jack and let (Sawyer) put his hand in the ground and go rush," Johnson said. "We brought him here to do that. It was a good experiment, but now let's go play football. And I think that's the best position for him."

While Sawyer didn't commit to whether the switch is permanent, he told reporters that he enjoys the rediscovered feeling of turf pellets underneath his fingers, after he played from three-point stances exclusively on defense in high school at Pickerington (Ohio) North.

"It's good to get back and work on the fundamentals of being a defensive end this spring," he said. "We'll see when the fall rolls around what all that entails, but I'm excited for it."

"(I'm) just getting back to putting my hand in the dirt, which I like to do, coming off the ball like that. I like coming off the ball with my hand on the ground more than standing up. So getting back to that, and getting back into the routine (is what this spring is about)."

One player whose position certainly won't be a moving target is Tuimoloau. Now entering his third season, the Edgewood, Wash., native put up one of the best single-game defensive performances in program history against Penn State last year, racking up six tackles, three tackles for loss, two sacks, a pass breakup that resulted in an interception, a forced fumble and two interceptions of his own, the latter of which went for a touchdown.

The next few weeks and ensuing fall camp will be about Tuimoloau maintaining that level of play, as those two sacks accounted for the majority of his 3½ sacks on the season. Johnson talked much of last year about the amount his defensive end was held, but Tuimoloau is looking to have more games this season like he had against Penn State.

"(The next step is) staying consistent, trusting myself and trusting Coach J," Tuimoloau said. "Staying close to God and having fun."

Tuimoloau is just one factor, though, of a defensive line looking for a resurgence. Hall and Sawyer's 4½ sacks led Ohio State last season, and with the exception of the pandemic-shortened 2020 season that had Jonathon Cooper notch a team-high 3½ sacks, Hall and Sawyer's output was the fewest takedowns by a sack leader since Nathan Williams led the team with 4½ sacks in 2010.

"I'd probably be lying if I told you (last season) was what I expected," Sawyer said.

"I think a lot of us could say that, really. When you look at the season, when you look at how many plays we missed and how many opportunities we had to get a sack or get a tackle for loss – I think, collectively, we're looking forward to finishing those plays off this year and getting the stat number up through the roof, way more than what it was last year."

With those three near shoo-ins to occupy three of the four starting defensive line spots, the only question is who starts opposite Hall, whether that is at one-technique or three-technique defensive tackle.

Junior Tyleik Williams (6-2, 290) appears to be the most obvious candidate, gaining significant experience last season at both defensive tackle spots. He picked up 21 tackles and 2½ tackles for loss last season, and in 2021, he finished with the second-most sacks for the Buckeyes with five despite playing in only spot duty and garbage time.



Tyleik Williams

"I feel great," Williams said. "I feel amazing, ready to play."

With Jerron Cage and Taron Vincent departing as Ohio State's most experienced defensive tackles, Williams feels he needs to pick up the mantle as more of a leader in the room this year in their style. That starts with him finding his voice in the spring.

"I'm really a quiet dude," he said. "But Taron, he's loud, he gets his point across. I've got to work on that. But other than that, everything involving football, they taught me. I just came in as a high school kid, didn't play football for two years (due to COVID-19). They really got me back into loving football freshman year."

He'll see competition from senior Ty Hamilton (6-3, 295), who emerged as the team's starting three-technique defensive tackle after Hall's injury last season and had 15 tackles in 13 games.

"I feel like it's a confidence thing," Hamilton said. "Just being able to be like, 'I'm the older guy now.' So if you have to step into a role, anything like that, you're ready. It's just being able to have that confidence to come out and say, 'I can play. I can do anything. I can lead my squad. I can build my unit and my unit's going to do it together.'"

With the way Johnson tends to rotate defensive linemen – at times rolling through 10 or more players across the four positions – all three are likely to see the field on the interior. The question now centers around whether any of the team's four second-year defensive linemen can earn serious playing time.

Defensive end Caden Curry (6-3, 259) appears the most likely to do so, flashing a good bit last season with 14 tackles with 1½ tackles for loss, as well as an emphatic stop of a fake punt against Iowa. He could be a factor at Jack, too, when (or if) the position returns this fall.

"Getting back out there and having a year under my belt, I feel like us as a unit, too, we're all taking that next step and we're all getting better," Curry said. "We're all im-

proving our game every day."

Johnson holds great expectations for Curry this season. Now that the four-star prospect out of Cedar Grove – a tiny high school in Greenwood, Ind. – has seen what the speed of the collegiate game is like, he's expected to claim a more prominent role on defense.

"Caden's got to come on the field and play for us," Johnson said. "He knows that. It's that time. You get to this point in the game, you've got to play. It's all there. So now he's just got to play more football. He's done a great job for us, and I'm looking forward to seeing how he goes forward."

Kenyatta Jackson Jr. (6-5, 252) and Omari Abor (6-3, 249), the latter of whom missed last season with injury, will also look to make pushes at defensive end. Johnson indicated that their development will be important, along with Curry, as the team looks for depth behind Sawyer and Tuimoloau.

"(Jackson) has got a lot of potential," Johnson said. "Now it's just learning to play the game at maximum speed. On the scout team you can play at a slower pace. Now you're with the big boys for the first time, going against the ones and twos, and the speed has got to pick up. It's a learning process. Everything is a process."

"I like Omari. I think Omari is really starting to move forward. He's 265 (pounds) now, so I like where those two guys are starting to go."

Defensive tackle Hero Kanu rounds out the quartet of second-year defensive frontmen pushing to see the field come fall. After moving to the United States from Germany, he's had to learn and grow in the sport but came into Columbus possessing raw athletic talent with a 6-4, 293-pound frame. He's only added to that in his time on campus, now up to 305 pounds.

"He's starting to come along," Johnson said. "He's starting to figure out this football thing, and his future is ahead of him. I'm looking forward to the next few days, seeing how he does."

All returning players, regardless of experience, are looking to take their next steps. They are joined by freshman early enrollee Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 290) who will get his feet wet along the defensive front throughout spring practice. Also joining the room this summer will be Kayden McDonald (6-3, 310), Joshua Mickens (6-5, 225) and Jason Moore (6-6, 260), with McDonald likely playing in the interior, Mickens coming off the edge and Moore able to step in at either spot.

Across the board, Ohio State's defensive linemen are drilling down on fundamentals so they can return to the production of years past. Johnson wants to have 10 guys ready to go on game days – five at defensive end and five at defensive tackle – and he's waiting to see who steps up for the Buckeyes.

"It's hard to say right now (how many are ready)," he said. "We're still rolling. We're not into depth charts right now. We're still getting guys enough plays to play. That time will come."

Young Linebackers Looking To Make Impact

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Spring football practices allow established players the opportunity to hone their skills in a regimented environment. Those offseason workouts usually do little to change their status as far as being a starter when the season rolls around.

But if you're a less experienced player hoping to make an impact, be it on the first team or as a backup, those practices in March and April can set the agenda for how the coaching staff views the roster.

When it comes to the depth chart for the linebackers corps, there is a clear delineation between starters Tommy Eichenberg at the middle position (Mike) and Steele Chambers at the weakside spot (Will) and the other candidates in defensive coordinator's Jim Knowles' two-linebacker system. Each could have entered the NFL draft but opted to return for a fifth season, and it's a comfort level that Knowles appreciates.

"That's huge, getting Tommy and Steele back," Knowles said. "Those guys know the system. We work so well together. I feel like they made massive improvements throughout the season."

"It's not a position of stress because you feel good about them, and I can be working with some other areas."

This is the time of the year when Knowles is looking for the understudies to step up and make their cases for playing time, especially with Eichenberg (6-2, 239) not participating in the spring because of an injury. His absence will allow others more first-team reps leading to the spring game on April 15.

Senior Cody Simon was the third linebacker when Knowles occasionally opted for that scheme last season and is the front-runner to maintain the role. Sophomore C.J. Hicks would have been in the mix to start if either Chambers or Eichenberg had not returned.

The coaches are eager to see what redshirt junior Mitchell Melton can do after missing the last season because of a knee injury suffered last spring. He, too, is not participating in this year's spring ball while still recovering.

Waiting for their chances are third-year sophomore Reid Carrico, redshirt freshman Gabe Powers and freshman Arvell Reese from Cleveland Glenville, among the scholarship players.

"Those older guys in spring won't get as many reps. We know what they can do," Knowles said. "You have enough to keep them fresh and teach them a couple of new things here and there, but for the most part, you want to work those young guys and make sure they get reps."

Chambers (6-1, 232) and Eichenberg set a high bar after acclimating to Knowles' system in his first season coaching with the Buckeyes.

Eichenberg, a captain, tied for second in the Big Ten with 120 tackles and earned Big Ten first-team honors. He was also a second-team All-American by five organizations: the Walter Camp Foundation, CBS Sports, the Football Writers Association of America, The Associated Press and The Sporting News.



FILE PHOTO

ELDER STATESMEN — Ohio State linebackers Tommy Eichenberg (left) and Steele Chambers (right) are the leaders in a linebackers room that hopes to see continued improvement from younger players at the position.

In 27 games (17 starts) he has 186 tackles — 18½ for loss — and a 15-yard pick-six against Iowa last season to his credit. Chambers, meanwhile, was second on the team with 77 tackles and had the third-most snaps on the defense with 665 last season.

Their leadership will be invaluable in helping the younger players mature, as will the addition of former Buckeye All-American linebacker James Laurinaitis in his first season as a graduate assistant at his alma mater. He spent last season at Notre Dame as a graduate assistant focusing on the linebackers, and now back at Ohio State, he is eager to not only teach but to learn from Eichenberg and Chambers.

"I was just letting both those guys know to reach out with any questions they have," Laurinaitis said. "Don't hold anything back. It'll take me maybe a little bit to kind of get to the point in the scheme where I can help them, but there will be some stuff instantly that I'll be able to help with running back alignments or tight end splits or things that the offense is trying to attack you where I've been in their shoes, literally, and I know the issues and where we can get beat and how to protect ourselves in those situations."

Chambers sees the spring as a chance to get to know Laurinaitis better.

"He's a hell of a guy. I love the dude," he said. "Whenever I first heard he was coming in, I looked at his résumé and it's freaking ridiculous, like something out of a movie. But I mean, he's still a personable guy. You can still talk to him about anything. And he's a hell of a coach."

Next In Line

The coaches want to see if Simon can reach another level. The No. 9 outside linebacker nationally from Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep in the 2020 class played in six games as a freshman for the Buckeyes, mainly on special teams. He started 10 times as a linebacker in 2021 but missed the Rose Bowl game against Utah because of a shoulder injury.

Last season, he was on the field for 234 snaps and had 32 tackles, including 5½ for loss. Knowles wants Simon (6-2, 239) to reach the point where he can spell Chambers or Eichenberg.

"I think Cody Simon, with Tommy out this spring, Cody's going to have a big spring," Knowles said. "And he's going to put himself in a position to play regularly. That's my vision so that we can have a really nice rotation there, which — when you're playing 14, 15 games — is going to help us at the end of the year. It really is."

"We need to get Cody to that point where he can play and rotate with those two guys. I'm definitely hopeful we can take some of the reps off Tommy and Steele because it will help us at the end of the season."

Simon understands the importance of this spring as he looks to take on some bigger responsibilities for the Buckeyes.

"I think that a big part of being here and being mature on this team is knowing to be ready at all times," he said. "I just try to be as selfless as possible. I try to play my role as best as I can, and wherever the coaches think that's best for me, I try to play to the best of my ability. I don't really worry about where or what the scheme is, I just try to — whatever they put me, that's where I go and play my hardest and play my heart out."

"It's all a process. In high school there were times where I wasn't playing a lot either, but it's just trying to maximize the amount of reps you get. And I think that's the most important thing is if you don't get every rep in a game, how are you going to maximize those five, 10, 15, 20 reps you get and play the best you can?"

The focus is also on Hicks (6-3, 225) to make more of an impact. The five-star recruit and top-rated player in Ohio for the 2022 recruiting class out of Kettering Alter played exclusively on special teams last season, admitting the adjustment to playing linebacker at the college level was trying.

"I was just thinking too much," he said. "This is about going out there and having fun."

Hicks made a quick impression on Laurinaitis, who said Hicks has a "ton of talent."

"Unbelievable movement skills," Laurinaitis said. "He looks the part, and I'm just really excited to get to know him and continue to work with him because you can see the talent there. It just pops on the field and kind of the way he moves."

Hicks also has a fan in Chambers, who said, "He could be something special here. He already is something special here. He's fast, he's strong — really the whole package."

Next Up

Powers (6-4, 230) played sparingly on special teams and took a redshirt last season. The Marysville, Ohio, product arrived on campus the same time as Hicks and was the second-ranked player in Ohio behind Hicks in their class, so Powers has enormous potential.

"When you look at C.J. and Gabe, the young guys, you're really looking at that leap from year one to year two," Knowles said. "Can they show in the spring that they're ready to play? You want those guys to force you to put them on the field by how well they play."

Powers is eager to play a bigger role.

"People see what you do on Saturdays, but a lot of people don't see the work that you have to put in — the mental side of the game," he said. "This game (in college) is more mental than it is physical. You've got to know everything that you're doing. I don't care how talented you are, you're not going to be good if you don't know what you're doing."

Based on spring practices, he may be slotted at the Mike linebacker, and Powers said it fits right in with how he played in high school.

"I'm just focusing right now on getting better and see how the spring goes," he said. "I'm working on learning everything I can from the guys in front of me and Coach Laurinaitis and learning the defense."

It's been a hard-luck career for Melton (6-3, 240). He played one game as a freshman in 2020 and missed his sophomore season because of a knee injury. He tore an anterior cruciate ligament in last year's spring game that cost him another season, but Chambers is optimistic Melton will join the other young linebackers in making contributions.

"Everyone in that room is athletic, strong and smart, just students of the game," Chambers said. "Now they get more reps, more opportunities to go out there and showcase what they've got."

Carrico (6-2, 235) played in four games as a freshman before redshirting. He had one tackle in eight games last season, but Knowles hopes his versatility pays off.

"Reid's bouncing around a little bit right now," the coach said. "We're trying him out at some different positions. We have our Sam position against 12 personnel. We definitely want him to make a push on special teams. And we hope he shows up. And you're looking for him, also like Gabe and C.J., to show that they have to be on the field, to show that maturity."

Reese (6-4, 212), a four-star recruit, was the lone linebacker signed in the 2023 recruiting class and won't be on campus until the summer.

Stroud's Pro Day Bolsters Case As Top Pick

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State's annual pro day was held on March 22, offering a final opportunity for several Buckeyes to make an impression on NFL general managers, coaches and scouts before the draft in April.

The event began in the late morning at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, with different NFL team representatives and media members milling about during the early stages as players went through drills, including the 40-yard dash, the 20-yard shuttle and the three-cone, all testing various markers to help indicate success at the next level.

But everyone in attendance locked in when quarterback C.J. Stroud stepped away from the crowd, set to begin his throwing session as one of the top signal callers in the upcoming draft. Each of the 118 NFL representatives – at least one from all 32 teams – as well as 10 general managers and eight head coaches looked on as Stroud put on a throwing clinic for 30 minutes.

He connected during that time with Jayden Ballard, Xavier Johnson, Marvin Harrison Jr., Mitch Rossi and Cade Stover, delivering on routes ranging from quick outs to deep balls down the sideline, with only one or two hitting the turf during the entire session. While Stroud said after the fact that he wished he could have one or two throws back, there was nobody who left his performance without seeing his clear potential as the top pick in the draft.

"It's as good of a workout as I've seen, whether I was coaching in the NFL or now in the last couple years here at Ohio State," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "It even goes back to when I was at Boston College, we had Matt Ryan and he had a great workout. But this is as good as I've seen."

"I just thought the ball came out with pace, he wasn't uptight, he was loose, he was letting it rip. The ball came out down

the field really well, so I thought it was really well done."

No team was more interested in scouting Stroud than the Carolina Panthers, owners of the No. 1 pick in the draft, which sent 14 representatives to Columbus to watch Stroud throw the ball. Panthers head coach Frank Reich in particular spent time talking with Stroud throughout the day, and Stroud had dinner with the team the prior evening, intensifying speculation that the former Ohio State quarterback will be taken with the top pick.

"I appreciate them coming out," Stroud said. "It means a lot. Everything went really well, so I appreciate them talking to me and taking the time. It means a lot. I definitely think that shows how much, not only that they're interested in me, but I'm interested in them. Just to meet them, know them as people and get to know them better and better as a person, that's really big."

With the NFL Scouting Combine and pro day now behind Stroud, all that remains is individual meetings and workouts with teams over the next few weeks. Additional interactions between Stroud and a team interested in drafting him will no doubt increase the comfort level between the two parties, but following his throwing performances under the trained eye of team representatives, reservations about Stroud as the top pick are likely few and far between.

"I'm going to try to do really well in these private workouts and these interviews that I have coming up to the draft," Stroud said. "But I mean, I think what's special about this is that I can control what I can control on the field, and I don't have to make the decision right now. So it's not like me coming to Ohio State. The decision's not on me, so I get to just chill and do what I love to do."

Day said that Stroud's career at Ohio State – one that featured him finishing as the Buckeyes' second all-time passing yards, touchdowns and completion percentage leader, as well as a two-time Heisman finalist – helped prepare him for this pre-draft process and what he will experience at the next level.

"When you come to be the quarterback at Ohio State, it is almost like a test to go see how you can handle it in the NFL. I shared that with some of the personnel and folks that I met with here," Day said. "If you can handle being the quarterback at Ohio State, then you can handle being in the NFL. He's passed all of those tests, and he'll continue to do that."

Other NFL head coaches on hand included New Orleans Saints coach Dennis Allen, Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll, New York Giants coach Brian Daboll, Chicago Bears coach Matt Eberflus, Pittsburgh Steelers coach Mike Tomlin, Cincinnati Bengals coach Zac Taylor and Tennessee Titans coach Mike Vrabel, who visited with plenty of old friends – including Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith – during the event.

But Stroud was not the only Buckeye whom NFL representatives were interested in watching. Beyond the quarterback, participants in pro day – whether running drills or simply on hand to chat with teams – included cornerback Cameron Brown, defensive



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

PUTTING ON A SHOW – Former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was a standout at the Buckeyes' pro day on March 22, impressing NFL scouts, head coaches and general managers in attendance at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center ahead of the NFL draft.

tackle Jerron Cage, linebacker Palaie Gao-teote, defensive end Zach Harrison, safety Ronnie Hickman, offensive tackles Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, safety Tanner McCalister, long snapper Bradley Robinson, Rossi, Smith-Njigba, defensive tackle Taron Vincent and center Luke Wypler.

Ohio State also served as a pro day host for Brown University running back Allen Smith – a native of Westerville, Ohio – and Kellyn Gerenstein, who played quarterback for the Ohio State club football team and won the National Club Football Association championship in 2021 under head coach James Grega.

Smith-Njigba Turns In Solid 40-Yard Dash

Smith-Njigba turned heads at the combine with impressive performances in a variety of drills, including the fastest clocked times in the 20-yard shuttle (3.93 seconds) and three-cone drill (6.57). But in his continued recovery from his hamstring injury that limited him to three games this past season, he held off on participating in the 40-yard dash, opting instead to hold off until Ohio State's pro day.

Expecting to hit a 4.47 – with claims that he hit 4.45 and 4.46 in practice – Smith-Njigba turned in a 4.48. While it does not stand out among wide receivers like some of his

other impressive drill results, he was still pleased with his performance.

"I definitely felt like I could have ran better," he said. "But I told myself I was going to run one, and I'm pleased with what I did. I'm happy I get to walk off the field healthy."

Stroud's throwing session was also beneficial for Smith-Njigba, who got another chance to show off his ability on the field. He was able to impress on a variety of routes throughout Stroud's throwing clinic, drawing strong reactions from those in attendance.

"I wanted to show my quickness, my lateral movement, more than I did at the combine," he said. "I felt like I did it smoothly and was really clean at the combine. Here, I just tried to let my hair down, so to speak, and just show my moves and my creativity that I have."

Smith-Njigba was pleased with his performance in the 40-yard dash, but he wasn't the fastest Buckeye on the field. That honor belonged to McCalister, who clocked in at 4.44 seconds, which would have ranked second among safeties at the combine.

"I didn't get invited to the combine, so I knew I had to come out here and do everything," McCalister said. "I knew I had to tick some boxes as far as my athleticism, and I feel like I did that today."

Other Buckeyes who ran the 40-yard

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Buckeyes At The 2023 Ohio State Pro Day

Name	HT	WT	Arm (In.)	Hand (In.)	Wing (In.)	40-Yd. (Sec.)	10-Yd. (Sec.)	20-Yd. (Sec.)	Vert. (In.)	Broad (Ft.)	Bench (Reps 225)	3-Cone Drill (Sec.)
Cameron Brown (CB)	6-0	197	31½	9	76½	4.53	1.63	2.63	35½	9-7	10	7.12
Jerron Cage (DT)	6-2	311	32⅞	9⅞	79⅞	5.31	1.83	3.01	26	8-11	DNP	7.89
Palaie Gaoteote (LB)	6-1½	247	32	9⅞	77¼	5.00	1.79	2.89	32½	9-7	22	7.45
Zach Harrison (DE)	6-5½	269	36⅜	10	86⅞	DNP	DNP	DNP	34½	10-3	DNP	7.33
Ronnie Hickman (S)	6-0¾	209	33¼	9⅜	78	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Paris Johnson Jr. (OT)	6-6¼	311	33¼	9⅝	85¾	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Dawand Jones (OT)	6-8½	DNP	36½	11⅝	87¾	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Tanner McCalister (S)	5-10½	191	30¼	9¼	73⅝	4.44	1.6	2.59	37	10-3	22	6.9
Bradley Robinson (LS)	6-1⅞	240	30¾	8¾	75¼	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	17	DNP
Mitch Rossi (TE)	6-0⅝	246	30⅝	9¼	73⅝	5.03	DNP	DNP	30½	9-1	19	7.63
Jaxon Smith-Njigba (WR)	6-0⅝	197	30⅝	9	75½	4.48	1.65	2.61	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
C.J. Stroud (QB)	6-3	213	32¾	10 ⅛	78	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Taron Vincent (DT)	6-1⅜	304	32¼	9"	77⅝	5.09	1.84	3	26½	8	26	8
Luke Wypler (OC)	6-2⅝	302	31⅞	9 ⅝	77⅝	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP

dash included Cage (5.31), Gaoteote (5.00), Rossi (5.03) and Vincent (5.09), and Brown also clocked a 4.53, competing in workouts at pro day after opting out of drills at the combine.

"I feel today went great," Brown said. "Doing the drills, I felt like I did everything right. I probably could have caught a couple more (balls), but other than that, everything – drills, footwork – everything looked great."

Harrison, Ballard Next Up In 2024

Stroud had a standout performance in last year's pro day throwing to Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, impressing those in attendance despite not being draft eligible.

This time around, it was the up-and-coming receivers who stole the show despite being at least a year away from NFL consideration.

Ballard and Marvin Harrison were among those catching passes from Stroud, and along with the quarterback, eyes were trained on the receiving duo during the throwing session. Ballard displayed his pure speed, helping Stroud out by tracking down several deep throws, while Harrison impressed with tightrope catches on the sidelines.

"It was nice," Harrison said. "(It was) very nerve-racking to be out here in front of all the NFL general managers and scouts, but it's just another day in the office for us.

We do this a lot, (they were) a lot of our routes all the time."

Harrison's father, NFL Hall of Fame wide receiver Marvin Harrison Sr., was also in attendance, and he said his son's performance is an early peek for NFL teams at a player who will likely be available for them in next year's draft.

"Playing at this university, year-in and year-out, you get to go and play in front of grateful fans," the elder Harrison said. "To have all these executives here, I think it's a good thing to showcase what these guys can do, something that they can look forward to next year."

Stroud's final throw of the day was perhaps his most impressive, as he evaded an

artificial pass rush before stepping up in the pocket and delivering a strike that went over 50 yards in the air, landing gracefully in the arms of Ballard. Most were focused on Stroud and Smith-Njigba, but by the end of the session, Ballard's name was known by all in attendance, and it might still be on their minds this time next year.

"It allows them the opportunity to get the feel of what the pro day is like," Day said on March 21. "Sometimes it can be kind of awkward being out there and running routes and catching, but (it helps them) relax, get a feel for it so when they do it next year, it won't be the first time."

Shrewsberry Departs Penn State For Notre Dame

Coming off Penn State's first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2011 and first win in the tournament since 2001, the Nittany Lions will be in search of a new head coach for its men's basketball program.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

After just two seasons leading the team, Penn State head coach Micah Shrewsberry accepted Notre Dame's head coaching vacancy on March 23, signed to a reported seven-year deal worth more than \$4 million per year. He replaces former head coach Mike Brey, who retired after 23 seasons with the Fighting Irish.

"Thank you to all of the players that I was lucky to coach here," Shrewsberry said of his time at Penn State. "The 2022 team laid a great foundation that allowed the 2023 team to reach unprecedented heights. It's hard to put into words what this team has meant to me. Their competitiveness, toughness and teamwork all showed through in our toughest moments."

Shrewsberry had no head-coaching stops at any Division I schools prior to his time at State College. In two seasons, he posted a combined record of 37-31 after taking over a team that was fresh off an 11-14 campaign in 2020-21.

His only other head-coaching gig came at the NAIA level, coaching Indiana South Bend for three seasons from 2005-08. He went a combined 32-63 in those seasons before taking an assistant coaching job at Butler under Brad Stevens. Assistant coaching

stints with Purdue, the NBA's Boston Celtics – again under Stevens – and Purdue for a second time followed before he landed the Penn State job.

"We are already moving forward in a search of a new head coach and will identify and appoint a tremendous coach, teacher and person who will take us to unprecedented heights," Penn State athletic director Pat Kraft said.

Shrewsberry played collegiately at Division III Hanover College in Hanover, Ind. The Indianapolis native reportedly turned down an extension from Penn State of similar value to Notre Dame's offering because he desired to coach closer to home, with the Fighting Irish's campus located in South Bend, Ind., just a 2½ hour drive from Indianapolis.

According to Centre Daily Times, a Penn State news outlet, candidates to replace Shrewsberry include two of his now-former assistants at Penn State, Adam Fisher and Mike Farrelly, as well as Colgate head coach Matt Langel, Charleston head coach Pat Kelsey, Furman head coach Bob Richey and Texas interim head coach Rodney Terry.



Micah Shrewsberry

Plitzuweit In As Minnesota WBB Coach

It took Minnesota's athletic department less than three weeks to find a replacement after former women's basketball head coach Lindsay Whalen stepped down, announcing on March 18 that Dawn Plitzuweit would be the next head coach of the team.

"I am excited to welcome Dawn, her

husband Jay and their family to Minnesota," said Minnesota athletic director Mark Coyle. "Dawn is a process-driven coach and has coached winning teams at every step of her career. She has recruited Minnesota and has consistently produced teams that compete for championships. Dawn has Big Ten coaching experience and knows how competitive and strong the conference is. I know she is excited to get back to the area and build her program."

Plitzuweit spent this past season at West Virginia, leading the Mountaineers to a 19-12 record and NCAA tournament appearance. Prior to that, she spent six seasons at South Dakota, posting four seasons with at least 28 wins and reaching the Sweet 16 in 2021-22.

Her background also includes head-coaching tenures at Northern Kentucky and at the Division II level at Grand Valley State, with assistant coaching gigs at Green Bay and Michigan. She has an overall coaching record of 365-140.

The Golden Gophers are in need of such winning, as their past three campaigns have been losing ones and Whalen finished with just a 71-76 record over the past five seasons. Within the conference, Minnesota hasn't finished higher than ninth since the 2018-19 season.

"I am extremely excited," Plitzuweit said. "It is a tremendous honor to be named head coach at Minnesota, and I want to thank President Joan Gabel, Mark Coyle, Julie Manning, Joi Thomas and the entire search committee for this opportunity. This is a homecoming of sorts, and Minnesota is a program that I am very familiar with from my previous time in the surrounding area and in the Big Ten."

As a player, Plitzuweit spent four seasons as a major contributor for Michigan Tech in Division II, averaging 11.6 points, 6.0 rebounds and 3.7 assists per game during her career. Her first assistant-coaching job followed at her alma mater in 1995.

Men Disappoint In NCAA Tournament

Outside of one team's run, the Big Ten concluded a disappointing showing in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament with the last team eliminated in the Sweet 16 and no team making the Elite Eight for the second consecutive season.

Michigan State, entering as the seventh seed in its region, knocked off No. 10 USC before rolling to a 69-60 upset of No. 2 Marquette and advancing to the second weekend, but it was the only team from the conference to make it that far. The Spartans then lost an epic clash of a contest against No. 3 Kansas State, falling by a 98-93 final in overtime.

"It must have been a hell of a game for TV, hell of a game for the fans," MSU head coach Tom Izzo said after the loss. "I think, for me, I play for the Big Ten too. It's really important to me when you've been in a league for 40 years that you love and cherish and know how good it is. And we can't get another national championship. Even that stuff is on my mind."

As Izzo referenced, it's been 23 years since the last time a squad from the confer-

ence won a national championship, that being Izzo's own Michigan State squad in 2000.

The team that appeared to be the Big Ten's best hope of winning one this season fell in the first round. Purdue, a No. 1 seed, became the second top-seeded team in NCAA Tournament history to lose to a 16-seed in its opening game as Fairleigh Dickinson – which won in the First Four to advance to the round of 64 – toppled the Boilermakers at Columbus' Nationwide Arena, 63-58. Center Zach Edey and Co. shot a meager 35.8 percent from the field and turned the ball over 16 times.

"Whether it was the turnovers or it was us or it was them, it was still, I thought, a well-played game on their end of things," said Purdue head coach Matt Painter. "It's hard. It's a very hard thing. We work very hard and have done things the right way in our program, and (seven) straight years we've been a top-five seed. That's all you try to do. You just try to fight to get in the best position possible. And now we get in the best position possible and this happens."



Matt Painter

Purdue has lost to a team seeded 13th or lower in each of the last three of those NCAA Tournament appearances where it was placed fifth or higher. As a No. 4 seed in 2021, the Boilermakers lost in the first round to No. 13 North Texas, and last year's campaign ended with Purdue falling in the Sweet 16 to No. 15 Saint Peter's.

No. 8 Iowa and No. 9 Illinois got bounced in the first round, with the former falling to No. 9 Auburn by an 83-75 margin and the latter to No. 8 Arkansas, 73-63. The Big Ten's other eighth-seeded team, Maryland, managed to squeak by West Virginia in the first round but got overwhelmed by No. 1 overall seed Alabama in the second, 73-51.

Three other schools from the league shared the same second-round fate as the Terrapins. No. 4 Indiana, the second-highest placed Big Ten school after Purdue, was ousted by No. 5 Miami (Fla.), 85-69. Seventh-seeded Northwestern knocked off No. 10 Boise St. in the first round, 75-67, before falling to No. 2 UCLA, 68-63, while No. 10 Penn State upset No. 7 Texas A&M in the first round, 76-59, before suffering a 71-66 loss to No. 2 Texas.

Howard Declares For NBA Draft

Michigan freshman guard Jett Howard announced on March 23 that he will forgo the remainder of the eligibility and declare for the 2023 NBA draft.

Howard, the son of Wolverines head coach Juwan Howard, appeared in and started 29 games this season for Michigan, averaging 14.2 points and 2.8 rebounds per game on 41.4 percent shooting, earning third-team conference honors.

He enrolled with the Wolverines as a four-star prospect out of IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla. He had 21 points and five assists in Michigan's season opener and later hit a career high with 34 points in a loss

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to Iowa on Jan. 12, but he missed several games in the second half of the season with an ankle injury.

Howard's projection skyrocketed over the course of the season, at one point viewed as a potential lottery pick, but has settled into a first-round projection in the upcoming draft.

"This was a great learning year for me," Howard told ESPN. "It's what I needed. It taught me how to play within a pro-style offense and be effective, to get out of my comfort zone and play with other good players."



Jett Howard

Basketball Transfers Descend On Portal

Before Final Fours were even set for both men's and women's basketball, transfers started pouring in on both sides of the sport.

On the men's side, Minnesota is going through an exodus after finishing dead last in the Big Ten this season, going 2-17 in conference play and 9-22 overall. The team's second leading scorer, guard Jamison Battle, made his intention to transfer from the team

known on March 16. So did third leading scorer Ta'lon Cooper, who also led the Golden Gophers with 6.3 assists per contest. Both will also explore professional opportunities.

Battle and Cooper, who averaged 12.3 and 9.8 points per game this season, respectively, join center Treyton Thompson and guard Jaden Henley in their move from Minnesota. Thompson played sparingly this season while Henley saw the floor for 20.8 minutes per game, averaging 5.3 points.

Guard Hakim Hart is moving on from Maryland after finishing second for the Terrapins in scoring with 11.4 points per game. He added 2.6 assists, also second on the squad, and he will receive feedback from NBA scouts by declaring for the draft while entering the portal.

"To my coaches, teammates and the entire University of Maryland community, thank you for providing me with the resources, guidance and support to reach this point in my career," Hart said. "With that being said, I am excited to announce that I will be pursuing my lifelong dream and declaring for the 2023 NBA draft while maintaining my college eligibility and also entering my name in the transfer portal."

After redshirting last season and playing just 14.1 minutes per game with 1.7 points per contest this year, Nebraska guard Denim

Dawson made the decision to move on from Lincoln. Iowa guard Ahron Ullis is also hitting the portal after averaging 6.1 points and 2.1 assists for the Hawkeyes this season.

On the women's side, the conference has already had several scholarship players announce their intentions to transfer out.

Perhaps the largest loss among them is Michigan State guard/forward Matilda Ekh, who finished second on the Spartans with 11.8 points per game this season. Ekh was the team's most efficient three-point shooter, making 38.5 percent of her shots from behind the arc, and she is joined in the portal by center Brooklyn Rewers.

Plitzuweit will have to reinvigorate Minnesota's culture without arguably the best forward on the team this past season, with Alanna Micheaux entering the portal as well. Micheaux averaged a team-high 7.9 rebounds and added 13.8 points per game. Plitzuweit did get someone to help bolster the depth down low, however, when former N.C. State center Sophie Hart announced that she'd be transferring to the Golden Gophers.

Illinois guard Jayla Oden, Michigan guard Michelle Sidor (DePaul), Penn State forward Anna Camden and guard Ivane Tensaie, Purdue forward Lilly Stoddard (Butler) and Wisconsin guards Krystyna Ellew and Mary Ferrito will also have new homes for

next season after entering the portal.

Moren Reaches 200 Wins With Hoosiers

Indiana women's basketball coach Teri Moren hit a career milestone at the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament on March 19, collecting her 200th win coaching the Hoosiers.

Moren's 200th win came against 16th-seeded Tennessee Tech, with the Golden Eagles falling 77-47, though Indiana's season quickly came to an end after suffering a 70-68 loss to ninth-seeded Miami (Fla.) on March 21, with the Hoosiers upset as the No. 1 seed in their region.

Moren's career record in nine seasons with the Hoosiers stands at 200-93, with a 99-57 mark in conference play. Moren also came close to setting another mark but will have to wait until next season, as she is one win away from reaching 400 for her career.

Overall, Moren holds a 399-223 record as a head coach, with previous stops at Indianapolis and Indiana State.



Teri Moren

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1983

Stranger things have happened. But who would have predicted that the Ohio State basketball team would have finished second in the Big Ten twice in a row after the fiasco of 1980-81 when the team was 14-13?

And who could have foreseen that the Buckeyes' Eldon Miller would have garnered the conference's Coach of the Year honor for those two years?

Nevertheless, at least one person was not surprised by the Buckeyes' eye-opening 20-10 final record - Miller.

"I didn't have any special feelings about the season," Miller said. "We expect to win all the time."

35 Years Ago - 1988

Welcome to Philosophy 101 with OSU football coach John Cooper.

"It's true in virtually every sport that a high percentage of your players are going to be good enough to not get you beat. They're not going to win for you, but they're not going to beat you.

"To do that you have to learn what your players can't do. It's ridiculous to try to get players to do something they're not capable of doing. But I think we've got some players that can win for us."

There lay priority number one - personnel assignment - for Cooper and his assistants during the new head coach's first spring practice. The Buckeyes began their 20 practices on March 29, practices that would eventually culminate in the annual Scarlet-Gray game in Ohio Stadium on April 30.

30 Years Ago - 1993

Forgive the Ohio State women's basketball team if it didn't quite know how to react following its 75-73 win over Virginia to become the first-ever Big Ten team to make the Final Four.

It took a little time before the ceremonial cutting of the nets took place, and when it was finished, senior point guard Audrey Burcy wore the net on her head in some kind of fashion statement.

But the team could do whatever it wanted because it was one of four heading to Atlanta for the climax of the NCAA tournament, a fact not lost on head coach Nancy Darsch.

"It's extremely rewarding," Darsch said. "I'm sitting here shaking my head because I'm not sure I believe it yet, that we are going to the Final Four. It's extremely rewarding to take a team that wasn't ranked in the preseason to the Final Four. It's really overwhelming."

25 Years Ago - 1998

Cooper had a message for the 19 returning starters who were coming back that spring: Don't get too comfortable.

"Even though we have a lot of starters coming back, there are very few positions where I consider it a lock that somebody is going to play," said Cooper, whose Buckeyes went 10-3 in 1997.

"That's not threatening. That's saying, 'Hey, we've got to do better. What you did last year is not good enough.'"

20 Years Ago - 2003

While a bevy of injuries put a damper on Ohio State's men's basketball season, it was a remarkable flurry of five games in seven days that ended it.

OSU's frustrating season of what might have been nearly panned out when the Buckeyes won three games in three days - including upsets of regular-season champion Wisconsin and Michigan State - to advance to the Big Ten tournament championship game.

But with a chance to extend the school's string of NCAA Tournament appearances to a record five seasons on the line, OSU knuckled under to Illinois, 72-59, in the March 16 title game in Chicago.

"I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge how proud I am of this group," head coach Jim O'Brien said. "We went down swinging, and I think that's a good trait for these kids."

15 Years Ago - 2008

As talented as the Ohio State football team was on offense, it may actually have had even more star power on defense.

Linebacker James Laurinaitis was favored to win the Butkus Award again and was likely to be a leading candidate for the Lombardi Award, as well as the Nagurski and Lott trophies. Fellow linebacker Marcus Freeman was also set to be in the running for the Butkus while cornerback Malcolm Jenkins may have had the inside track on the Thorpe Award.

The trio spearheaded a unit that finished No. 1 in pass, total and scoring defense and No. 3 against the run in 2007. But, for the second year in a row, the Buckeyes faltered down the stretch on defense. They gave up 28 points and 400 total yards to Illinois in a loss that snapped a Big Ten-record streak of 20 straight conference victories, and at one point of the national title game, the Buckeyes surrendered 31 consecutive points to LSU.

"Bottom line? We didn't do what we were capable of doing," Laurinaitis said. "That's not an excuse, and that's not meant as any disrespect to the teams that beat us. We just didn't execute the way we should have. That's one of the reasons everyone in our class wanted to return. We know we're capable of doing better, and we want to prove it."

10 Years Ago - 2013

Junior point guard Aaron Craft, who had missed three of his last four shots from the floor and three of his four free-throw attempts in the final five minutes, buried a three-point dagger with 0:00.5 showing on the clock to give Ohio State a thrilling 78-75 win over Iowa State on March 24 in NCAA Tournament action at the University of Dayton Arena.

The victory sent the second-seeded Buckeyes to the tournament's Sweet 16 for the fourth year in a row.

Craft had missed from almost the same spot - a little closer, just inside the arc - with 31.4 seconds remaining, but a mad scramble for the rebound went out of bounds off an Iowa State player, giving the Buckeyes one final possession with 29.9 seconds left and the game tied at 75.

"That was about as high-powered a college basketball game as you could have," OSU head coach Thad Matta told reporters after the game. "There were great plays made by all the guys on the court - both teams."

Five Years Ago - 2018

John, Ross or Chuck. One of those three would be the starting quarterback for Ohio State in 2018, not J.T. Barrett. But in those names alone, Barrett's legacy would still be felt in Columbus.

John was Joe Burrow, a rising junior who was on track to graduate in the spring. Ross was Dwayne Haskins, a third-year sophomore who became an Ohio State legend when he led the Buckeyes to a comeback win over Michigan in place of the injured Barrett. Chuck was the redshirt freshman Tate Martell, who earned early fame with a confident personality on the field and on social media.

The nicknames stemmed from Burrow's freshman year in 2015. Barrett - or Joe Thomas Barrett - who spent that season in what seemed like a week-to-week battle with Cardale Jones, decided there was room for only one Joe among the signal callers, so he opted to call the new guy John instead.

The following year, Haskins arrived, and Burrow gave him the nickname of Ross - it's not a reference to David Schwimmer's character on the popular TV show "Friends," though. In the spring of 2017, Martell arrived, and he was dubbed Chuck by his teammates.

"The guys are working hard, and we're splitting up the reps," offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Ryan Day said March 22. "Right now, we've only had two (full) practices under our belts with pads on. So it's really early and we're still installing stuff, but the guys are working at it, they're working on trying to get better at it. That's really our focus right now."

One Year Ago - 2022

For Ohio State women's hockey head coach Nadine Muzerall, the early evening of March 20 served as a culmination of more than five years of exhaustive work. Her Buckeyes had just closed out a 3-2 victory over Minnesota Duluth in the NCAA championship, deflecting a last-ditch shot to claim the program's first national title and Muzerall's first as a head coach in her sixth year at the helm in Columbus.

"That was a true national championship game," Muzerall said. "It was back and forth. I want to compliment (my team). They got on the board first which was unique among this postseason. And then credit to Duluth. They kept counterpunching and tying up the game, but we never quit. We looked brilliant today.

"This is something that's forever, that can never be taken from these young ladies. Of course, they're enjoying this moment, but it's one of those things when you come back 15 years later with your kids - or without - as you get older and you can feel that pride that you left a legacy."

Armstrong Brothers Commit To Ohio State

Ohio State is continuing to stay within the state to add offensive linemen, securing a pair of commitments on March 27 from Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive linemen Devontae (6-5, 288) and Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong.

them the first in-state offensive linemen offered by the Buckeyes for this cycle, and the offer was a long time coming for the pair.

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

Deontae lined up at right tackle for St. Edward this past season while Devontae played at left guard, but both feel they have positional versatility, and they said that was one factor that was important to Frye.

"We really can flip-flop back and forth as need be," Devontae said last summer. "We're really good at both left guard and right tackle. It's just being able to play inside and out, (and it) is really important that Coach Frye really liked (that)."

Although their commitment was never inherently a package deal, both expressed excitement at the idea of getting to play together at the next level, which will now be a reality.

"Maybe he sees something in a school that I don't, so I'm not going to compromise and go to a school he goes to," Deontae said. "But it would be pretty nice playing with my brother."

Ohio State's current recruiting class now skews heavily in favor of the offensive line, with the Armstrong brothers joining New Palestine, Ind., four-star Ian Moore (6-5, 295) and Toledo Central Catholic three-star Marc

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
Deontae Armstrong	OL	6-6	280	★★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward
Devontae Armstrong	OL	6-5	288	★★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward
Ian Moore	OL	6-5	295	★★★★	New Palestine, Ind.
Marc Nave Jr.	OL	6-5	315	★★★	Toledo Central Catholic
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	198	★★★★★	Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	SAF	6-0	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut

Nave Jr. (6-5, 315) in the six-man class.

OSU Loses In-State RB Marshall To Michigan

When Ohio State wants a recruit from Ohio, with rare exception, that prospect usually winds up playing for the Scarlet and Gray. That's been true for as long as trees have been planted in Buckeye Grove.

But that was not the case on March 21, when Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193), the No. 91 overall prospect and No. 7 back in 2024, announced he will be playing his college football outside of Ohio. Even worse, he revealed that he'll be taking his skills to Michigan, issuing a significant blow to the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts at the position and in the class.

Marshall had been involved with both schools since last summer, offered by Michigan on June 10 and just days later on June 14 by Ohio State following a camp session with the Buckeyes. He visited both schools this past fall, including for Ohio State's 45-23 loss to Michigan in each team's regular-season finale.

It's no wonder he was highly recruited by both schools, given that he was named Ohio Division I Co-Offensive Player of the Year at Moeller last season after rushing for 1,951 yards and 34 touchdowns. He had previously announced a top four that included the Buckeyes and Wolverines as well as Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Marshall made a return trip to the Wol-

verines in January and said his intentions were to visit the Buckeyes again in the spring and take an official visit this summer, but those visits are obviously off the table at this point following Marshall's commitment to Michigan.

"Family was the biggest thing for me," he told On3. "Being with (running backs coach Mike Hart's) family and meeting them really meant a lot for me, seeing how much his family means to him and him knowing what family means to me."

"Also, just the community and culture there. It feels like home every time I step into that building, and it's a freaking amazing place. They have one of the best institutions in the world, and I take pride in that and know I have to have a plan after football."

"I think Michigan gives me the best opportunity. Last (reason), they win. I'm trying to play for national championships, not just Big Ten championships."

Another likely reason that Michigan appealed to Marshall is the Wolverines' depth chart. It's a favorable situation with running back Blake Corum set to depart after this season, leaving Marshall to contend with Donovan Edwards and CJ Stokes in an offense that already likes to spread their carries out.

Regardless of whatever reason weighed heavily on Marshall, the loss is a significant one for Ohio State. Not only was Marshall the top target at the position for running backs coach Tony Alford, but the perception of losing a highly touted in-state recruit to Michigan is not a good one for the Buckeyes.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

Deontae is the No. 313 overall prospect and No. 25 offensive tackle in the class, while Devontae is the No. 353 overall prospect and No. 23 interior lineman. In addition to Ohio State, the pair had also been considering Kentucky and held additional offers from Georgia, Michigan, Michigan State and Penn State, among others.

"What made us decide that we were ready to commit is because it all just made sense, it was the right fit and we saw everything we needed to see and absolutely love it there," Deontae told Eleven Warriors. "It just felt like home to me, my brother and my family."

The identical twins camped at Ohio State last summer and have made several visits to Columbus in the months since, both for gameday visits and spring practices. Ohio State and offensive line coach Justin Frye formally offered the duo in January, making

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

According to the 247Sports composite rankings, Marshall is the first top-100 prospect from Ohio to commit to Michigan since Alliance Marlinton safety Dymonte Thomas (6-2, 191) opted for the Wolverines in the 2013 recruiting class.

And this is not the only loss for Ohio State in terms of optics on the recruiting trail this cycle. While the Buckeyes had not offered either of these prospects, Michigan still gained a pair of commitments from Avon, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290), and more recently on March 22, from Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320).

Both players spoke about waiting to receive an offer from Ohio State after communicating with the school or participating in a camp session, but the offers never came. Hamilton believed that Ohio State was making a bad impression on in-state prospects by slow-rolling offers and said several other in-state offensive linemen felt the same way. Roebuck was among those, evidently, considering his commitment to the Wolverines.

"In the beginning of the recruiting process, I was still a big Ohio State fan and hoping that they would offer," Roebuck told Rivals. "I remember the first time (Michigan assistant coach Steve Clinkscale) came to St. Edward to watch one of our workouts. I was just thinking if Michigan offers that maybe it could push Ohio State to offer because of the rivalry.

"As things continued it kind of became evident that Michigan was really pushing for me. They were going to be one of those schools that really cared about me and want-

ed me to get there and play."

Although Michigan earning commitments from players such as Hamilton and Roebuck who were not offered by Ohio State is not a cause for concern in a vacuum, combined with Marshall's commitment, there's a growing sense the Wolverines are beginning to pick up momentum on the recruiting trail.

Michigan's class currently features nine commitments, of whom six are four-star prospects, and the class tops the Big Ten and is third nationally behind only No. 2 LSU and No. 1 Georgia. Ohio State's class is third in the conference behind the Wolverines and Iowa, and it checks in at No. 15 in the country with just four commitments.

If Michigan's recruiting momentum begins matching its continued success on the field, especially against Ohio State, it could mark a continued shift in the rivalry that has taken place over the last few years, and it's time for the Buckeyes – whether on the field or on the trail – to begin taking care of business.

Assessing Running Backs After Losing Marshall

Despite the loss of Marshall, the Buckeyes are still in a solid position when it comes to running backs in 2024, assuming that they can land their top targets left on the board.

The plan was always for Ohio State to take two running backs in this class after bringing in only Dallan Hayden in 2022 and not signing a scholarship running back in last year's cycle. That is still feasible, with the Buckeyes focusing on San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star running back James Peoples (5-10,

192) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203).

Beginning with Williams-Dixon, it's likely a matter of time until he ends up in Ohio State's class. He was offered by the Buckeyes in January – one he referred to as a "dream offer" – and has remained in consistent contact with Alford.

While Williams-Dixon has additional offers from Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan State, Penn State and Tennessee, among others, he's already made several visits to Ohio State – including one this spring on March 7 – and is expected to take an official visit in the summer, though it wouldn't be all that surprising if by that point he's visiting as a committed prospect.

Peoples is the higher-rated of the duo, checking in as the No. 69 overall prospect and No. 5 back in the class. He rushed for 1,904 yards and 28 touchdowns last season and is also considering Alabama, Oklahoma, Oregon, TCU and Texas along with the Buckeyes. He was expected to visit Ohio State the weekend of March 30 through April 1 and is expected back in the summer for an official visit.

Another option for Ohio State would be Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Stacy Gage (5-11, 200), though things appear to have cooled off in recent months between the two parties. Gage was offered by Ohio State on Aug. 21, 2021, and returned last summer for a camp session before making an unofficial visit in the fall.

At one point he appeared as a favorite to

end up in Ohio State's class, and while the Buckeyes were still included among his top eight schools in January, there hasn't been any word on Gage making a visit this spring. While that or an official visit down the line are not out of the question, it seems schools such as Alabama, Colorado, Oklahoma and USC have made significant progress in recent months.

Ohio State Receives Visit From Transfer DT Booker

After making several additions in the transfer portal in January, the Buckeyes could be going back to the well for one more player, as former Maryland defensive tackle Anthony "Tank" Booker (6-4, 320) took a visit to Ohio State on March 21.

Booker entered the transfer portal on March 6 after four seasons with the Terrapins, where he totaled 37 tackles – six for loss – with two sacks, two forced fumbles and a pass breakup in 25 games.

He arrived at Maryland as a three-star prospect out of Cincinnati Winton Woods in the 2019 recruiting class. He held offers from Cincinnati, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Pittsburgh and Rutgers but did not hold one from Ohio State.

Based on Booker's social media posts, he's also made visits to Arkansas, Louisville and Purdue since entering the portal with two seasons of eligibility remaining.

While not a position where Ohio State is in immediate need of a starter, Booker would add valuable depth as a rotational piece for

Continued On Page 20

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OSU Among Finalists For Top 2024 Cornerback

Continued From Page 19

the Buckeyes, especially considering the lack of experience at the interior.

OSU Offers Hillman Prior To Michigan Commitment

Marshall was not the only recruit whom Ohio State missed on in recent weeks to Michigan, though this situation was much stranger.

Following Portsmouth (Va.) Churchland four-star safety Brandyn Hillman (6-1, 191) being released from his letter of intent at Notre Dame on March 12, the Buckeyes and Wolverines sent out an offer to the 2023 prospect the next day.

But on March 19, he quickly ended his recruitment by announcing his commitment to Michigan before even visiting Ohio State.

Hillman asked for his release due to "personal reasons" after signing with the Fighting Irish in December, which came after committing in October.

"I would like to thank Coach (Marcus) Freeman and the Notre Dame staff for their interest," Hillman said. "I ask you to respect my privacy and my family's privacy as I explore my options on where to attend school this fall."

Since being released from Notre Dame, Hillman also picked up offers from the likes of LSU, USC and Wisconsin. Hillman also took official visits to Kentucky and Notre Dame and said he intended to visit Ohio State, though that trip never came to fruition, with the Wolverines locking him down on their visit.

A two-way player at Churchland, Hillman picked up 41 tackles – four for loss – along with three sacks and four pass breakups on defense last season while adding 1,054 passing yards and 1,265 rushing yards – as well as 34 total touchdowns – on offense. He was the No. 214 overall prospect in the class.

With Hillman opting for the Wolverines, recruiting is now truly over for Ohio State in 2023. At safety, it leaves Ohio State with three signees in Jayden Bonsu, Malik Hartford and Cedrick Hawkins, of whom Hartford is already going through spring practice as an early enrollee.

DT Scott Making Official Visit From June 23-25

According to Rivals, Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive tackle Justin Scott (6-4, 310) is expected to take an official visit to Ohio State the weekend of June 23-25.

Scott – the No. 11 overall prospect and No. 3 defensive lineman in 2024 – was ex-

pected to be off the board a while back, but he indefinitely postponed his projected January commitment. Prior to pushing back his announcement, Notre Dame was viewed as the favorite to land his services.

He has since been looking around at several schools, including Alabama, Notre Dame, USC and Georgia, where he is also expected to take an official visit from June 2-4.

CB Brown Includes Buckeyes In Top Four

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Zabien Brown (6-1, 180) has trimmed his list of schools, and Ohio State is among the finalists for one of the top corners in the 2024 class.

Brown included the Buckeyes on his top list along with Alabama, Oregon and USC. He is the No. 56 overall prospect and No. 5 cornerback in the class, and while he has yet to visit Ohio State, he's looking to get to Columbus several times over the next few months.

"I'm going to visit the first weekend of April with my (7-on-7) team and then I'm going back the next week with my parents," he told 247Sports. "I've always liked Ohio State a lot, and they do a great job developing defensive backs. It's a big-time program with great tradition, and I like Coach (Tim) Wal-

ton, the (cornerbacks) coach, a lot."

Brown said he plans to take official visits to all four schools over the summer and make a commitment prior to his senior season.

Other Prospects Have Buckeyes On Top

In addition to Brown, several other prospects have also included the Buckeyes among their top schools in recent weeks.

Frisco (Texas) Reedy four-star offensive tackle Max Anderson (6-5, 300) included Ohio State in his top eight along with Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon and Tennessee. He is the No. 200 overall prospect and No. 13 offensive tackle in 2024, and the only official visit he has on deck right now is with the Volunteers on June 23.

Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star linebacker Aaron Chiles (6-3, 220) announced the Buckeyes in his top 10 along with Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Michigan, Notre Dame and Penn State.

He also announced that he plans to make a commitment in July and has set four official visits over the summer to Clemson, Florida, Michigan and Notre Dame, which does not bode well for the Buckeyes if they don't get him on campus for an official visit.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

30 Years Ago – 1993

Like father, like son.

After winning an intense recruiting battle for Shawn Springs (6-0, 180), the son of former Buckeye great Ron Springs, the Ohio State coaching staff hoped the old adage held true.

Ron Springs was a standout tailback for the Buckeyes in the middle 1970s, leading the team in rushing and receiving in 1977 before going on to a prosperous NFL career with the Dallas Cowboys.

Shawn, coming out of Silver Spring (Md.) Springbrook High School, was one of the most highly sought-after defensive back prospects in the country. He was actively pursued by Ohio State, Michigan, Penn State and Syracuse as well as many others.

But while most fans figured Springs was a lock for OSU because of his father, the Bucks came very close to losing him to rivals north and east.

"I just knew I was going to Michigan," Springs said. "In fact, I told Coach (Gary) Moeller I was going there."

However, before signing on the dotted line with either the Wolverines or Nittany Lions, Springs reviewed his options and decided Ohio State was the place for him after all.

"Ohio State is a great school, Columbus is a great city, and I really like the players," he said. "In the end I went where I was most comfortable and that turned out to be Ohio State."

25 Years Ago – 1998

Singleton Hicks (6-7, 345, 5.5), an offensive lineman from Columbus Beechcroft, was an intriguing prospect who was receiving a lot of attention, according to Beechcroft coach Tom Dunlap.

"This kid was meant to play college tackle," Dunlap said. "He's our left tackle, and his No. 1 characteristic that stands out is he is an excellent pass blocker. Once he sets up, it's hard to get around him."

Hicks attended OSU's camp in 1996. His camp plans for 1998 were still uncertain, although Dunlap said Hicks wanted to check out all of the Midwest's top schools, including OSU, Michigan, Penn State and Notre Dame.

The mountainous Hicks was rated only as Ohio's 26th-best junior by Ohio's Future Stars. But if he was able to improve his agility and strength (275-pound bench press), he figured to move up the charts. He had helped Beechcroft make a state playoff run the previous season and seemed destined to qualify academically with a 3.0 GPA.

20 Years Ago – 2003

Ohio State's recruiting class for 2004 doubled in size when Xenia, Ohio, junior offensive lineman Ben Person committed to the Buckeyes.

He joined Hubbard, Ohio, defensive back Shaun Lane as early verbals for the following year's class. OSU also had a verbal for 2005 in Mansfield (Ohio) Senior defensive back Jamario O'Neal (6-1, 190), widely considered the state's top sophomore.

Person (6-4, 300, 5.4) had been offered in February. He mulled it over for a few weeks before committing to the Buckeyes as he attended OSU's pro day at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

"There were a lot of factors," Person said. "They started recruiting me early. I am a Buckeye fan, and I've always been a Buckeye fan. I can basically play at home – it's only an hour away."

Person also made unofficial visits to Notre Dame and Pittsburgh but said, "I just didn't get the same feeling."

15 Years Ago – 2008

Terrelle Pryor, the No. 1 high school prospect in the nation, announced March 19 that he would play his college football at Ohio State.

The 6-6, 225-pounder from Jeannette, Pa., had postponed his decision six weeks after National Signing Day to finish his high school basketball career and perhaps take official visits to Penn State and Oregon. In the end, however, Pryor said his final decision came down to archrivals OSU and Michigan.

"I just broke it down and got involved with a lot of the kids (at Ohio State)," he said. "I felt comfortable with Coach (Jim) Tressel. It was my choice."

Landing Pryor boosted the national ranking of the Buckeyes' 2008 recruiting class. Scout.com vaulted Ohio State four places to fourth in the nation behind only Alabama, Notre Dame and Miami (Fla.). Pryor was the sixth player in the OSU class who was rated a five-star performer by Scout. No other school had more than four.

10 Years Ago – 2013

Former All-America linebacker Greg Jones was the start of what had become a strong relationship between Michigan State and Cincinnati Moeller, joining the Spartans' 2007 class.

Urban Meyer preferred to break up that relationship, however, and Ohio State's head coach recently offered Moeller outside linebacker Sam Hubbard, a four-star prospect whom Scout ranked the No. 18 player at his position in the 2014 class.

But Michigan State, as expected, had also offered the 6-6, 210-pound prospect with the hopes he would become the fourth Moeller player to sign with the Spartans since Jones.

Though he was committed to Notre Dame to play lacrosse, Hubbard said he was wavering on that decision.

Before Ohio State offered the linebacker, he spoke with Meyer and Buckeyes lacrosse coach Nick Myers, and both were in agreement to allow the prospect to play both sports should he choose to come to OSU.

Five Years Ago – 2018

When Mark Bless watched a raw freshman running back debut on varsity late in the 2015 season, the head coach at Avon High in Indiana knew he had a special talent.

As a two-sport athlete, Sampson James (6-1, 200) initially preferred basketball to football. Then two plays completely changed the course of his career.

"Basketball was, at that time, kind of his passion – his first love – and then (James) dressed varsity for a few games as a freshman in the state (football) tournament," Bless told BSB. "In one of the games toward the end, he got in and busted off a 70-yard run which got called back, but on the very next play we gave him the ball again and he ripped off a 40-yard gain. You could just see the excitement in his eyes when he came off the field."

Rated in the 247Sports Composite as the No. 141 overall prospect, No. 8 running back and No. 2 player in Indiana, James gave Ohio State its third commitment in the class of 2019 March 19, 2018. After the Buckeyes got on the board with a pair of four-star offensive tackles in Doug Nester (6-5½, 295) from Huntington (W. Va.) Spring Valley and Ryan Jacoby (6-5, 270) from Mentor, Ohio, James packed a punch out of the backfield.

One Year Ago – 2022

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 185) had long been connected to Ohio State, and he made his interest official on March 15, listing the Buckeyes among his top five schools along with Alabama, Georgia, Notre Dame and Tennessee.

Tate was rated the No. 21 prospect in the class of 2023 and the No. 3 receiver in the class, according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

Tate was offered by Ohio State in April of 2021 and made two unofficial visits in the 2021 season. He was expected to return April 1 along with members of his 7-on-7 team, South Florida Express, which included Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) five-star wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 198), Jacksonville (Fla.) Bartram Trail four-star Sharif Denson (5-11, 170) and four-star safety Daemon Fagan (6-2, 180), a teammate of Inniss' at American Heritage.

"The development there is great with Coach (Brian) Hartline, one of the best wide receiver coaches in college football, and Coach (Ryan) Day getting their receivers the ball," Tate said. "The proof is right there with Jaxon (Smith-Njigba), (Garrett Wilson) and Chris Olave, and you've got (Marvin Harrison Jr.) coming up next. The proof is there, and the path is there for me to follow."

ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Huddle's Marc Givler

What, if anything, went wrong in Ohio State's recruitment of Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193) in light of his commitment to Michigan?

"It did feel at first they were a little slow to kind of put their foot on the gas with him, whereas Michigan was not. I thought that really did change for them in the fall. Ohio State really went all in on him in the fall. But between that and the way Michigan features the running back in their offense, I think those were two pretty big factors.

"Of course, I think the depth charts of both schools looked pretty good, but I think he saw a really good path to the field at Michigan with (running back Blake Corum) leaving after this year and possibly even (No. 2 running back) Donovan Edwards. So I think there was a kind of combination of things there, but I felt they could have picked it up a little bit earlier. But ultimately, when you really start pushing in October and a kid commits somewhere else at the end of March, I don't know how much of a factor that was. Kind of a variety of factors there."

Is the reality of Marshall's loss as bad for Ohio State as the perception seems given the turning tides of the OSU-Michigan rivalry?

"Two big things. One, there are still a few Ohio State-Michigan recruiting battles left in the state, which is actually interesting because there really hadn't been as many as you would think over the recent years. But there are still a few of those left. They can't lose Springfield four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-0, 170) and Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177), that's one. "Then the other thing – this is the case with any re-

cruiting loss, whether it's against Michigan, or Alabama or Georgia, whoever it is – how good of a player are you going to get that ends up taking his spot? If they can go out and get San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star running back James Peoples (5-10, 192) for example, that lessens the sting because you're getting a really good player. Now, if they have to go out and you're getting down to Plan C and Plan D, then that loss gets magnified. It's really just about not letting this trickle into other recruiting battles and also making sure you are filling that spot with a really, really good player.

"So those are just the two things I think are important. But I don't get a sense that the recruiting rivalry has turned too much. But again, it's been kind of strange the last few years. There really have not been that many head-to-head battles, even for Ohio guys. It's been interesting to watch. I kind of have my theories on why that is, but it's just it's one of those things where I think there's a couple more this year than there have been recently."

Where does Ohio State stand at running back in 2024 now considering how many had slotted Marshall into the class for the Buckeyes?

"I really think the focus is going to shift to James Peoples right now. Obviously, they've also offered Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203), and he's always been thought of as one-half of a two-running back class. They're still in line to eventually get a commitment from Sam Williams-Dixon.

"So I think that'll be one half, and then it's, 'OK, now who do you get?' They're still trying with Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Stacy

Gage (5-11, 200). Is that going to happen? Probably not. But James Peoples visits next weekend (April 1), and that is where they're immediately going to turn and make him the focal point."

Shifting gears, what has been the value of Ohio State adding James Laurinaitis to the staff in regard to recruiting?

"There are really three things I would say here. One, he's young and energetic, which always sells on the recruiting trail. We see it with Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline, and we've seen it with other guys over the years. That always works.

"He seems to genuinely like it, which sounds silly, but it's kind of important. Some guys don't like to recruit. That is the reality. Some assistant coaches really don't like to recruit that much, but he really seems to kind of embrace it.

"Obviously, his NFL pedigree. He's an All-American, he had a lengthy NFL career, so that gives him some instant credibility when he's talking to these guys, that's another thing.

"Another thing here, and this goes back to what Hartline can do as well, is he truly loves the program. He's not a mercenary. He's not some hired gun that they're paying a fortune to sell the program, even if he's got no ties to it or anything like that. He genuinely loves the program. He genuinely knows the ins and outs of this program and what it means to play at this program. I think all of those things give him a lot of credibility and allow him to build a level of trust and honesty there with the recruits. I've just had so many recruits telling me how much they enjoy talking to him."

A teammate of Chiles' at Good Counsel, safety Faheem Delane (6-2, 182) in the 2025 class, had the Buckeyes in his top schools along with Alabama, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Maryland, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina, USC and Virginia Tech.

Delane visited Ohio State the weekend of March 24-26 and likes what he has seen from the Buckeyes' defensive scheme.

"They put (defensive backs) in the league like Marshon Lattimore, Malik Hooker, and the list goes on," he told 247Sports. "I like their style of football. They put their safeties in the box to make tackles, and you also have to cover. That's a good thing for me."

Moving back to offense, another prospect at Good Counsel to include the Buckeyes in his top schools was three-star wide receiver Elijah Moore (6-4, 190), who had Ohio State along with Florida, Florida State, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, Texas A&M and Wisconsin.

Moore was offered by Ohio State in December and visited Columbus the weekend of March 24-26. He is the No. 525 overall prospect and No. 74 wideout in 2024.

Sticking to offense, Rochester (Mich.) Adams four-star tight end Brady Prieskorn (6-6, 225) included Ohio State among his top eight schools along with Alabama, Georgia, Michigan, Miami (Fla.), Ole Miss, Penn State and Tennessee. He is the third-best tight end in the class, according to 247Sports, though he is currently viewed as a lean toward Michigan.

Finally, Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star cornerback Marcelles Williams (6-0, 176) whittled his list down to 12 schools, including Alabama, Colorado, Louisville, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma, Ohio State, Tennessee, Texas A&M, UCLA, USC and

Washington.

Williams earned his offer camping with the Buckeyes in June 2021 and is expected back on campus the weekend of March 31 through April 2.

New Offers Sent In 2025

Ohio State has sent out five new offers to 2025 prospects since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, including Mission Hills (Calif.) Bishop Alemany five-star wide receiver Phillip Bell (6-2, 195); Cincinnati Winton Woods defensive end Justin Hill (6-4, 215); Pittsburg, Calif., five-star safety Jadynd Hudson (6-2, 175); Alcoa, Tenn., four-star tight end Eli Owens (6-2, 226); Los Alamitos, Calif., four-star cornerback Jett White (6-2, 160); and Baltimore (Md.) St. Frances Academy defensive lineman Trent Wilson (6-3, 270).

Beginning with Bell, he is the No. 20 overall prospect and No. 5 wideout in the class. He was offered by the Buckeyes during a visit to Columbus on March 20, and he also holds offers from Arizona, Auburn, Colorado, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and USC, among others.

"Columbus is a bigger city than I thought, and I was really comfortable here," he told 247Sports. "I had a really good talk with Coach (Ryan) Day and Coach (Brian) Hartline and enjoyed chopping it up with them. Coming into the visit, I was hoping to get the offer, but it was still an incredible feeling when they told me I had it. Ohio State is very high on my list, and I loved the vibe out here."

Hill's recruitment is just beginning to pick up, not yet assigned a star rating but still holding additional offers from Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame and

Purdue, among others, and he picked up his offer from the Buckeyes while visiting on March 23.

He notched 73 tackles and seven sacks during his sophomore season at Winton Woods, and Hill has already been told by Ohio State that he would be a prime candidate to play at the Jack, the hybrid defensive end/linebacker position, according to 247Sports.

Hudson was another five-star prospect to pick up an offer, doing so during his visit to Columbus the weekend of March 18-19. A three-phase player for Pittsburg, Hudson stays on the field at wideout, safety and as a kick returner.

Ranked the No. 3 safety in the class behind Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star Anquon Fegans (6-1, 180) and Tampa (Fla.) Zephyrhills five-star DJ Pickett (6-2, 170), Hudson has also earned offers from Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Oregon, Penn State and USC, among others.

Owens picked up an offer from Day and new tight ends coach Keenan Bailey during Owens' visit on March 21, and he told Eleven Warriors that it puts the Buckeyes among his top schools. His other Power Five offers include Alabama, Kentucky, Louisville, Michigan, Michigan State, Mississippi State, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

"The visit left me speechless," he said. "I was amazed at everything they had to offer. I thought Coach Ryan Day was a really down-to-earth guy and believe what he says. I loved the way Coach Bailey coached. They said I was a versatile player, and they really liked that. They could see me playing on the field anywhere at any time when they really needed me, which was cool."

White also received an offer during a vis-

it, taking his trip to Ohio State on March 20. He is the No. 64 overall prospect and No. 5 cornerback in his class and has also been offered by Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame and USC, among others.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State will continue to host visitors over the next several weeks, with a large contingent of recruits expected for the spring game on April 15. Buckeye Sports Bulletin will have a full list of expected visitors in our next issue, but in the meantime, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com for the latest visitors checking out Ohio State.

- The Buckeyes also sent out an offer in 2024 to Dayton Centerville three-star safety Reggie Powers (6-1, 195), who visited Ohio State the weekend of March 25-26.

- Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star quarterback Jadynd Hudson (6-1, 202) has set an announcement date for March 31 and said he will decide between Clemson, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio State and Tennessee. The Wolverines are viewed as the heavy favorites to land Davis' services.

- Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star defensive end Jaylen Harvey (6-2, 235), who was offered by Ohio State in October and plans to visit on June 25, announced he will be committing to a school in August. He is the No. 308 overall prospect and No. 23 defensive end in 2024.

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

Buckeyes Scouring Portal To Improve Roster

Ohio State spent much of March on its couch, but that doesn't mean the Buckeyes haven't begun preparations for next season.

Since the conclusion of the season on March 11, the Buckeyes have been actively scouring transfer portal targets with the aim of building depth for the 2023-24 season. Although Ohio State is currently full on scholarships, the expectation is that spots will open up as players transfer out, as well as star freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh declaring for the NBA draft but maintaining his eligibility — leaving his scholarship status in the air until the NCAA early entry withdrawal deadline on May 31.

COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

Starting at guard, the Buckeyes look to shore up depth behind likely starters Bruce Thornton and Roddy Gayle Jr., as well as incoming four-star combo guard Taison Chatman (6-4, 170). Ohio State has turned its attention to a quartet of mid-major players who could give it a scoring boost off the bench in Temple's Khalif Battle (6-5, 175), Rhode Island's Ishmael Leggett (6-3, 190), Wofford's Jackson Paveletzke (6-3, 175) and Towson's Nicholas Timberlake (6-4, 205), according to On3's Joe Tipton.

Over the course of his time at Towson, Timberlake was named Colonial Athletic Association Sixth Man of the Year in 2019-20 and picked up two all-conference nods over the last two seasons. Timberlake posted 12.5 points and 1.6 assists per game in his five seasons at Towson but registered career highs in points (17.7), assists (2.4) and three-point field-goal percentage (41.6) this past season.

Paveletzke was named Freshman of the Year in the Southern Conference behind 15.1 points per game on 49.4 percent shooting — including a 39.3 percent mark from deep — last season. Leggett led the Rams with 16.4 points per game last season while also getting it done on the defensive end by swiping a team-high 42 steals. Battle also led his team in scoring, averaging 17.9 points per game on 41.0 percent shooting, including a 35.0 percent mark from three-point range.

Ohio State has also eyed a guard in Central Michigan's Kevin Miller (6-0, 165), who saw his season cut short after sustaining a season-ending injury just four games into the campaign.

Outside of the backcourt, Ohio State has also looked for some help on the wing and down low. The Buckeyes are already welcoming four-star forwards Devin Royal (6-7, 210) and Scotty Middleton (6-6, 180), as well as three-star center Austin Parks (6-11, 270), but Dartmouth's Dame Adelekun (6-8, 220), Minnesota's Jamison Battle (6-7, 220), Louisville's Kamari Lands (6-8, 225) and Harvard's Chris Ledlum (6-6, 225), among others, have all been connected to Ohio State.

Ledlum and Adelekun are proven pros-

2022-23 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

16-19 Overall (5-15 Big Ten) Final Statistics

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds			A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.	PF-FO					
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 Okpara	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

pects with several seasons of college basketball under their belts, while Lands is more of a project after spending last season at Louisville. Ledlum and Adelekun each have made their marks in the Ivy League, with Ledlum earning All-Ivy first-team honors behind 18.8 points and 8.5 rebounds per game while Adelekun made the conference second team with 13.8 points and 7.2 rebounds per contest. Ohio State's pursuits of Adelekun fell short, though, as he committed to Loyola Chicago on March 26.

Lands struggled to find his place on a lowly Louisville team that produced just a 4-22 record last season but boasts plenty of untapped potential for any team to uncover. Although he averaged just 5.9 points while shooting 32.6 percent last season, he joined the Cardinals as the No. 69 overall prospect and No. 20 small forward in the 2022 recruiting class.

Jamison Battle is a familiar face to the Buckeyes, spending the previous two seasons with the Golden Gophers after a two-year stint at George Washington. In two seasons with Minnesota, Battle averaged 15.1 points per game for the Gophers.

Royal Earns Ohio Mr. Basketball Honors

Hype is already starting to build around the Buckeyes' incoming freshman class heading into next season, and that excitement was furthered on March 15 when Royal was named Mr. Basketball for Ohio.

It was another feather in the cap for Royal's dominant high school career. Royal led Pickerington Central to a state title last season and also broke the Tigers' all-time leading scoring mark on March 10, pulling in front of former Buckeye Jae'Sean Tate.

Royal edged out Centerville, Ohio, four-star point guard Gabe Cupps (6-2, 160) — an Indiana commit — for the honor this season after Cupps took home the award last year. Royal beat out Cupps by just three votes, 90-87, as voted on by a panel of media members.

This season, Royal averaged 19.6 points per game and 7.6 rebounds per game while shooting at a 64.9 percent clip. Royal led the Tigers to a 23-5 record and a spot in the Division I state semifinal at the University of Dayton Arena on March 25, where Royal's

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

squad overcame Centerville High School to advance to the state championship, but fell to Akron Archbishop Hoban 53-47 in the final.

Royal is the 12th Buckeye commit to be named Mr. Basketball in Ohio, joining Malaki Branham, William Buford, Jamar Butler, Jon Diebler, Marc Loving, Jim Jackson, Greg Simpson, Tony Stockman, Damon Stringer, Jared Sullinger and Kaleb Wesson.

Not only did Royal secure Mr. Basketball honors, but he also landed on the OHSAA Division I All-Ohio first team and was named Division I Player of the Year.

Important Offseason Ahead For Okpara

As this past season wore on, there were very few bright spots for the Ohio State men's basketball team.

The Buckeyes endured a stretch in which they lost 14 of 15 games, plummeting to near the bottom of the Big Ten standings by the end of the regular season. Ohio State ultimately dug itself out of the cellar, winning five of its last seven games — including a run to the semifinal of the Big Ten tournament — largely being led by its emerging crop of freshmen.

A notable member of the freshman unit was center Felix Okpara, whose defensive acumen shone all season while his offensive game grew as the campaign continued. He credited his teammates and coaches for sticking with him as he underwent his season-long development.

"I'm going to give the credit to my coaches and my teammates," Okpara said on March 10. "They really believe in me. I also want to thank the coaches for giving me the opportunity. When I'm on the court, I try to do my job as best I can. I feel like I did my job very well tonight, and I've just got to keep doing it every night."

Okpara hung his hat on the defensive end this season, leading the Buckeyes with

44 total blocks and 1.3 denials per game while serving as a rim protector for Ohio State. Not only did Okpara rack up blocks and impact countless shots at the rim, but he hung tough against some of the Big Ten's most impactful post players, showing a natural instinct to defend on the block.

However, standing at 6-11 and weighing 220 pounds, Okpara's slim frame allowed post players to back him down into the paint with relative ease. As the Buckeyes transition into the offseason, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said building muscle mass will be key for Okpara's future in the Big Ten.

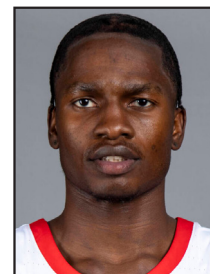
"It's going to be as critical as anything for him," Holtmann said. "I said on my radio show, he needs 10 or 15 pounds of muscle. I'm not sure it's 15 pounds of muscle, but it's certainly in the 10-pound range. He just has to get stronger, his legs have to get stronger. His base and core have to get stronger."

It took some time for Okpara to find an offensive rhythm, but he grew into a roll threat in pick-and-roll situations while also growing as a rim-runner. The Buckeyes

primarily used Okpara around the rim and had a particular penchant to get him on the receiving ends of alley-oops. In all, Okpara produced 4.0 points per game while shooting 58.7 percent from the field last season.

As his offensive game developed over the course of the campaign, Okpara recognized that he settled into his role and improved in that regard, but that there is still room for him to improve this offseason.

"I just got way more comfortable knowing that I can play through mistakes," Okpara said. "Even though I can play through mistakes, I just tried to — with the ball offen-



Felix Okpara

sively – 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.”

While Okpara enters one of the most important offseasons for a college player, jumping from a freshman to a sophomore, Holtmann said Okpara fits into his vision for how he utilizes the center while noting that he was encouraged by the growth Okpara showed this season.

“(The prototypical center) has to defend ball screens,” Holtmann said. “I think he has to really be able to defend ball screens and move his feet, and have the necessary size to do that. That’s probably as important as anything. Protect the rim is another thing, and Felix can clearly do both of those things. Felix has to grow into what he can do at a high level, and I think that’s going to be the challenge for him in the offseason.”

“What we’ve seen with Felix is that he’s just scratching the surface.”

Checking In On Matta’s First Year At Butler

A familiar face paces the sidelines of Hinkle Fieldhouse, much like Holtmann once did before taking over at Ohio State, with former Buckeye head coach Thad Matta taking the reins of the Butler basketball program last offseason.

Matta, who graduated from Butler in 1990, took on a massive rebuild for a program that has fallen from grace since the days of Holtmann. The current Buckeye skipper led the Bulldogs to a 70-31 record, a trio of NCAA Tournament appearances and a run to the Sweet 16 in 2016-17 during his three seasons with Butler from 2014-17.

Matta’s coaching career began at Butler, where he spent one season in 2000-01 and led the Bulldogs to a 24-8 record and an appearance in the NCAA Tournament. In his inaugural season at Butler, Matta established a long-cultivated culture known as “The Butler Way.”

“I had no idea that The Butler Way was going to stick the way it did,” Matta said at his introductory press conference last year. “There’s something special about a Butler guy. So when the call came, I wanted to get back and be a Butler guy again.”

While at Ohio State, Matta led the Buckeyes to a pair of Final Four appearances in 2006-07 and 2011-12, boasting a stellar 337-123 record at the helm of the program. However, health issues resulting from a botched back surgery, which impacted the use of his foot, caused him to step down from the position following the 2016-17 season.

Five years removed from his departure from Ohio State, Matta alleviated any concerns about his health prior to taking over at Butler.

“I wouldn’t have taken this job, just to address the elephant in the room, if I didn’t think I was physically capable,” he said. “I’m not going to die. My foot doesn’t work. That’s it.”

Between Matta and Holtmann’s tenures, the Bulldogs were led by LaVall Jordan, a former player at Butler, whom they cooped up after one season at Milwaukee. Jordan collected a winning record in his time with Butler, producing an 83-74 mark in five seasons, but only appeared in the NCAA Tournament once and endured a 24-34 stretch

during his final two years with the program.

Enter Matta, who immediately began his rebuild process by bolstering his coaching staff. In his support staff, Matta added a pair of Buckeye cornerstones from his time coaching the program, with Greg Oden – who had previously spent the last season on Holtmann’s staff as a graduate assistant – taking over as director of basketball operations and Jon Diebler filling the director of recruiting role for the Bulldogs.

“Greg’s IQ was always so good as a basketball player,” Matta told Indianapolis Monthly. “I knew that he could teach the game. And I love him being around the guys. Greg has seen everything, from the top to the bottom. For him to be as humble and even-keeled as he is, it blows my mind.”

Matta also turned to the transfer portal, bringing in several sought-after players, including Akron forward Ali Ali and Purdue guard Eric Hunter, after the Bulldogs brought in just one recruit in their 2022 recruiting class in three-star center Connor Turnbull.

Despite inheriting a program in decline, Matta appeared to be righting the ship with an 8-3 start in nonconference play, including wins over Kansas State – which earned a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament – and BYU. Cracks had begun to show in the Bulldogs’ start, however, when Butler lost its three games to high-major teams in Penn State, then-No. 22 Tennessee and N.C. State, with all three teams qualifying for the NCAA Tournament at season’s end.

Those early-season cracks bled into conference play, where the Bulldogs registered a 6-14 record in the Big East, finishing ninth in the conference while closing out the season with a 14-18 overall record. The lone bright spot of their Big East slate came when the Bulldogs knocked off then-No. 13 Xavier, 69-67, on Feb. 10. The Bulldogs finished ahead of only Georgetown and DePaul in the conference standings, with the Hoyas relieving head coach Patrick Ewing of his duties at season’s end.

The Bulldogs possessed one of the worst scoring offenses in the country, producing just 65.2 points per game, which ranked last in the Big East and 322nd nationally, and they registered just 43.6 percent shooting, sitting eighth in the Big East.

Butler’s season came to a close in the opening round of the Big East tournament, where the Bulldogs suffered a 76-63 loss to St. John’s on March 8. Since the season’s conclusion, five Bulldogs have entered the transfer portal, including leading scorer Jayden Taylor, who produced 12.9 points per game last season.

Despite the struggles endured by the Bulldogs this season, Matta emphasized his pride in what the team accomplished in his first season back in Indianapolis.

“I’ve said this, in my 18th year as a head coach, I’ve never dealt with all the things, the injuries, we’ve had to deal with and just at times shoving lineups out there,” Matta said after the loss to St. John’s. “It is what is. I thought those guys fought their tails off in the second half (of the game) and I couldn’t have been prouder of them and the effort they gave us.”

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, SPORTS, FORUM, BSB ONLINE, and EAT & STAY, along with a LOGIN button. The main content area features a large image of a basketball game. Overlaid on the image is a headline: "NO. 3 OHIO STATE TO FACE NO. 1 VIRGINIA TECH IN ELITE EIGHT" by Braden Moles in Basketball. Below this, there's a "READ MORE" button. To the right of the image, there are three article teasers:

- March 25, 2023 (6:14 pm) in Basketball: "No. 3 Ohio State Headed To Elite Eight After Upsetting No. 2 UConn, 73-61, Behind Strong Defensive Performance". Below it, a short summary: "No. 3 Ohio State is headed to the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993 after using a stellar defensive performance to knock off No. 2 UConn, 73-61, on..." and a "READ MORE" link.
- March 25, 2023 (4:00 pm) in Basketball: "Ohio State Forward Brice Sensabaugh Declares For NBA Draft, Will Maintain Eligibility". Below it, a short summary: "Ohio State freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh announced Saturday that he will enter his name into the 2023 NBA Draft but will maintain his eligibility in case he decides to return..." and a "READ MORE" link.
- March 25, 2023 (2:31 pm) in Football: "Competition Emphasized With 'Winner-Loser' Situations At Ohio State Spring Scrimmage".

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OSU Cashes In With Incoming Recruiting Class

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the second straight year, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann bolstered his program with a nationally ranked recruiting class, tying top-10 hauls in 2022 and 2023 together as part of a long-term plan to build sustainable success within the program.

Holtmann's desire to stack classes began with difficult results, as the Buckeyes endured a grueling 16-19 record this season which included a 5-15 mark in the Big Ten. Four members of last year's class each played key roles on the squad. Now, Holtmann and Ohio State have few excuses, as the eighth-ranked class of 2023 arrives in Columbus later this year with the goal of getting the program back on track.

"I think it's a great complementary class to the one that they just brought in the year before," Bucknuts reporter Steve Helwagen told BSB. "To have top-10 classes back-to-back, I think that's a good cornerstone for the program."

Freshmen Roddy Gayle Jr., Felix Okpara, Brice Sensabaugh and Bruce Thornton all flashed their abilities over the course of their first season at Ohio State, giving Buckeye fans a glimpse at what the next few seasons could hold for the Scarlet and Gray.

Although Sensabaugh played himself into NBA draft consideration over the course of the campaign, declaring his intention to enter the draft on March 25 while maintaining his eligibility, the Buckeyes will still boast a wealth of talent entering next season with Minneapolis Totino-Grace four-star combo guard Taison Chatman (6-4, 170); Wichita (Kan.) Sunrise Christian four-star forward Scotty Middleton (6-6, 180); St. Marys, Ohio, three-star center Austin Parks (6-10, 240); and Pickerington (Ohio) Central four-star forward Devin Royal (6-7, 210) joining the squad.

"It's a really exceptional class on paper, but more importantly, I think it's another

really good class," Holtmann said. "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 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."

To Helwagen, the addition of the four players from the incoming class only bolsters the foundation set by Holtmann and his staff this season.

"With the next class, you needed to find some guys to complement what those guys could do, and I think that they succeeded with that," Helwagen said. "They basically covered nearly every position across the board, and I think, as you go through it, you have options at all five positions with just four guys."

That positional versatility is visible in each of the three four-star prospects, with Chatman, Middleton and Royal all displaying the abilities needed to play multiple positions at the college level.

Chatman can fill in as a combo guard for the Buckeyes, carrying the ability to seamlessly transition between the point or shooting guard roles when called upon. But Chatman wasn't initially the answer to fill that role for the Buckeyes. Ohio State held a longtime commitment from Dayton Chaminade Julienne four-star guard George Washington III (6-2, 165), and while the Buckeyes continued to pursue Chatman at the same position, Washington ultimately decommitted from Ohio State and wound up signing with rival Michigan.

As a junior, Chatman averaged 13.5 points per game for Totino-Grace while helping the Eagles to a Minnesota Class 3A state title by producing 15 points, eight rebounds and seven assists in the championship game. Chatman sustained an injury during the summer leading up to his senior season but still had the Eagles competing for a state title by leading Totino-Grace's play-

making efforts. He dished out nine assists with 12 points in the Eagles' 70-59 state semifinal win over Alexandria on March 23. He then led Totino-Grace to its second-consecutive state title on March 25, producing a 20-point, 12-rebound double-double en route to a 50-46 win over DeLaSalle.

"Chatman, he was a little banged-up at the beginning of his high school season," Helwagen said. "As the season wore on, he kind of got back to his regular form. He's a guy, that I would say he's Bruce's backup, and he may push to start over or alongside Gayle, however you want to put it. He could play the one and two. He's in the rotation on day one, it would seem."

With Sensabaugh potentially on the way out, Ohio State's need for depth in the front court becomes even greater, and the additions of Middleton and Royal may provide the solution.

The forward tandem boasts very different skill sets, with Royal to be relied on for his inside-out scoring ability while Middleton carries the reputation of a hard-nosed perimeter defender. Despite their varying skill sets, Holtmann said he feels both forwards complement each other's games and will share the floor as needed.

Royal will spend his time at power forward, a specific area of need for Ohio State and a position where he has flourished over the past few seasons at Pickerington Central. Royal led the prominent Tiger program back to the top of the Ohio basketball mountaintop as a junior, tallying 19.1 points, 8.2 rebounds and 1.6 assists during a run to the Division I state title.

As a senior, Royal earned some individual hardware after he was named Mr. Basketball in Ohio, thanks to averages of 19.6 points and 7.6 rebounds per game, becoming the 12th Buckeye commit to earn the honor. Pickerington Central returned to the state title game, powered by 23 points and four rebounds from Royal in the state semifinal matchup against Centerville, but the Tigers fell to Akron Hoban in the final.

"We've been recruiting Devin for a couple of years, but his growth was really obvious to us," Holtmann said. "He just kept getting better. It's a credit to him and his work ethic. He's a wonderful kid and we really loved getting to know him. Obviously, a guy in your back yard that you create a relationship with. He's going to be a really good offensive player. He's going to be a really good player in general, but he brings a real offensive skill set."

While Royal gives the Buckeyes a scoring punch, Middleton will likely serve as their primary defensive option during his time with the Scarlet and Gray. Middleton's defensive acumen is well-documented, but that's not to say he can't be an offensive threat, too.

"I don't think, offensively, he's a guy that's going to come in and score 15 points per game his first year," Helwagen said. "I think he's a guy, potentially down the road, that the sky's the limit for what he ought to be able to do as he grows and matures."

Helwagen stamped Middleton as a potential glue guy for the Buckeyes, pointing to his defensive presence as well as his ability to impact the game outside of just

scoring. Middleton serves in that role for Sunrise Christian, which is gearing up for another run at the GEICO National Tournament, beginning March 30 when the Buffaloes will face a buzzsaw in No. 1 Montverde Academy.

Holtmann said the Buckeyes will rely on Middleton to produce in a variety of ways on both ends of the floor.

"Scotty has the ability to be an elite defender and we're going to need that, but also his offensive game has continued to grow," Holtmann said. "He brings competitiveness to him."

While the Buckeyes made it a point to grab versatile players in the backcourt and on the wings, Holtmann also made sure to provide Ohio State with depth down low by adding Parks.

It's no secret that the Buckeyes lacked depth at the five last season. With Zed Key hampered by an injured shoulder, Holtmann plugged holes with 6-7 guard Eugene Brown III and 6-5 guard Isaac Likekele as small-ball fives alongside Okpara. Parks will give Holtmann another option at center, with Key and Okpara receiving the lion's share of minutes next season.

But Parks' value isn't tied only to his size. He gives the Buckeyes a solid scoring option in the paint, while also boasting the ability to clog the lane for opposing offenses. Parks was named to the OHSAA All-Ohio Division II first team after averaging 21.8 points as a senior.

"I've watched him play quite a bit, and I think he can definitely play the five," Helwagen said. "He's got the skill level to actually step out and hit an occasional three if need be, although I don't think that's necessarily his game. I think he's more of a low-post type of player."

"He is another body that you can add to the mix, depth-wise. I think the greatest thing from his standpoint is they've got Zed Key and they've got Felix Okpara, so he is not a guy that absolutely has to come in and play 25 minutes a game. He can really concentrate on his body, his development."

With the quartet of Chatman, Middleton, Parks and Royal joining Ohio State's strong cast of first-year contributors this season, the Buckeyes will have a roster full of top-tier talent next season and beyond. The coach emphasized that the Buckeyes need to continue the level of recruiting success they've found in the past two cycles going forward.

Ohio State has already taken its first step toward sustaining its national recruiting presence with the commitment of Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star combo guard Juni Mobley (6-0, 150), who is the No. 42 overall recruit in the 2024 class, and have also made progress with Ohio prospects such as Centerville four-star shooting guard Jonathan Powell (6-6, 170) and Cleveland Lutheran East three-star center Jesse McCulloch (6-9, 190).

"We do want to back up these two classes with another really good class that fits us in 2024," Holtmann said. "I do think that's really important, and you're always trying to do that. For us to achieve the things we aspire to, I think we need to do that. We're off to a good start in terms of recruiting in that class."



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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 (12-10, 0-3)

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** at Marshall, canceled; **15** at Marshall, W 5-1; **17** DAYTON, W 7-2; **18** DAYTON, canceled; **17** DAYTON, W 12-8; **21** WRIGHT STATE, L 3-0; **22** TOLEDO, W 6-4; **25** at Indiana, L 14-6; **26** at Indiana, L 9-6, L 7-5; **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 (28-7, 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, W 80-66; **20** NCAA Tournament at Columbus, vs. UNC, W 71-69; **25** NCAA Tournament at Seattle, vs. UConn, W 73-61; **27** NCAA Tournament at Seattle, vs.

Virginia Tech.

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** Sea Island Invitational at St. Simons Island, Ga, 1st/13; **13** Sea Island Invitational at St. Simons Island, Ga, 2nd/13; **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

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, 2/14.

March 17 Mountain View Collegiate at Tucson, Ariz., T2nd/17; **18** Mountain View Collegiate at Tucson, Ariz., 2nd/17; **19** Mountain View Collegiate at Tucson, Ariz., 2nd/17.

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** Tri-Meet at Nebraska, 2nd/3 (401.750), vs. Nebraska (410.400) & Greenville (384.050); **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 (21-16-3, 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; **24** NCAA Tournament at Bridgeport, Conn., vs. Harvard, W 8-1; **26** NCAA Tournament at Bridgeport, Conn., vs. Quinnipiac, L 4-1.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (33-6-2, 23-4-1)

Sept. 30 at Minnesota State, W 2-1.
Oct. 1 at Minnesota State, W 5-4; **7** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-2; **8** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 6-2; **15-16**

at Bemidji State, W 4-0; W 5-2; **21-22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 3-2 OT; W 3-2; **28-29** MINNESOTA, L 4-2, T 4-4 (SOW).

Nov. 5 at St. Thomas, W 4-0; **6** at St. Thomas, W 6-0; **18** BEMIDJI STATE, W 5-0; **19** BEMIDJI STATE, W 7-1; **22** COLGATE, T 4-4 (OT); **23** COLGATE, W 6-2.

Dec. 2 at Minnesota Duluth, W 2-1; **3** at Minnesota Duluth, L 5-4 (OT); **17-18** at Cornell, W 4-3, W 4-0; **30-31** at Lindenwood, W 9-1, W 6-0.

Jan. 13 WISCONSIN, W 2-1 (OT); **14** WISCONSIN, W 5-0; **20** at St. Cloud State, W 6-2; **21** at St. Cloud State, W, 3-2 (OT); **27** MINNESOTA STATE, W 6-2; **28** MINNESOTA STATE, W 4-2.

Feb. 3-4 at Minnesota, L 4-2, W 5-1; **10-11** ST. THOMAS, W 6-1, W 5-0; **17-18** at Wisconsin, L 6-5 (OT), W 3-1; **24-25** BEMIDJI STATE (WCHA quarterfinals), W 4-1, W 2-1.

March 3 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, W 3-0; **19** NCAA national championship game at Duluth, Minn., vs. Wisconsin, L 1-0.

MEN'S LACROSSE (5-4, 1-0)

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, W 19-6; **19** at Denver, L 17-12; **26** RUTGERS, W 11-7.

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 (4-7, 0-3)

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, L 11-8; **25** at Penn State, L 13-3; **28** LOUISVILLE.

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

SOFTBALL (19-8, 1-1)

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), W 2-1 (9 innings) W 13-2; **15** at College of Charleston, W 5-4; **17** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Cleveland State, W 10-0 (5 innings); **17** at Greenville, N.C., vs. East Carolina, W 7-0; **18** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Presbyterian, W 5-2; **18** at Greenville, N.C., vs. East Carolina, W 9-2; **19** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Cleveland State, W 10-0 (5 innings) **21** KENT STATE, W 4-3; **26** MICHIGAN, L 3-1 (10 innings), W 11-2 (5 innings); **27** 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.

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: 3rd/10; Women: 3rd/10; **9-11** NCAA Zone Championships at Bloomington, Ind., NTS; **22-25** NCAA Championships at Minneapolis, Men: 11th/38; Women: 6th/39.

MEN'S TENNIS (19-2, 2-0)

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, W 4-0; **19** MICHIGAN, W 4-2; **24** at Northwestern, W 4-1; **26** at Illinois, W 4-0; **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 (12-5, 5-0)

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, canceled; **17** WISCONSIN, W 7-0; **19** MINNESOTA, W 4-0; **24** PURDUE, W 4-0; **26** at Northwestern, W 4-0.

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 (15-9, 7-3)

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, : 3-0; **18** BALL STATE, W 3-2; **21** at Penn State, W 3-2; **24** LINDENWOOD, W 3-1; **25** QUINCY, W 3-0; **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., 4th/66.

OSU Makes Elite Eight For First Time Since 1993

When the Ohio State women's basketball program last graced the Elite Eight, it happened as Katie Smith was suiting up for the Buckeyes in her freshman season.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

It's been a long stretch for Ohio State without making it to that point in the NCAA tournament, but that run finally came to an end on March 25 as the third-seeded Buckeyes completed a 73-61 upset of No. 2 UConn in the Sweet 16 to secure a berth in the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993 and the fourth appearance in that round in program history.

"We certainly have some really talented players, but I think more than anything our culture and the way these kids love to be around each other has been the key for us," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said following the win over the Huskies. "We've had so many come-from-behind wins, and a lot of that has to do with when things go south, people start pointing fingers and so forth, and you have no chance to make a comeback.

"But that never happens with this group. They stay together, they support each other, and that's really just – a lot has to do with, we've got great kids and just great chemistry."

Ohio State used that chemistry to deliver a rarely seen blow to UConn, notching just the second double-digit win over the Huskies this season. Furthermore, Ohio State broke a significant streak for UConn. This is the first time since the 2004-05 season that the Huskies did not advance to the Elite Eight.

This current iteration of Ohio State joins teams in the 1984-85, 1986-87 and 1992-93 seasons as squads to make it to the Elite Eight, and McGuff becomes just the third coach in

2022-23 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

28-7 Overall (12-6 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 26

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
Taylor Mikesell	35-35	1241-35.4	216-506	.427	109-269	.405	53-62	.855	12-89	101-2.9	49-0	82	76	10	48	594-17.0
Cotie McMahon	35-35	1010-28.9	195-382	.510	15-56	.268	120-179	.670	42-148	190-5.4	100-5	85	102	25	57	525-15.0
Taylor Thierry	35-35	1075-30.7	191-305	.626	12-31	.387	86-130	.662	104-124	228-6.5	112-6	80	53	24	74	480-13.7
Jacy Sheldon	12-9	336-28.0	53-125	.424	9-35	.257	38-43	.884	10-32	42-3.5	29-0	44	29	2	45	153-12.8
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
Rebeka Mikulasikova	34-25	770-22.6	138-286	.483	41-127	.323	35-47	.745	20-107	127-3.7	73-2	51	54	6	20	352-10.4
Rikki Harris	35-19	916-26.2	73-226	.323	30-126	.238	62-105	.590	24-123	147-4.2	90-2	115	48	10	56	238-6.8
Eboni Walker	33-10	507-15.4	65-144	.451	0-3	.000	29-45	.644	49-74	123-3.7	52-1	49	39	3	27	159-4.8
Hevynne Bristow	28-0	305-10.9	36-75	.480	7-18	.389	26-35	.743	21-65	86-3.1	40-0	20	30	10	16	105-3.8
Emma Shumate	30-0	344-11.5	18-75	.240	12-52	.231	3-6	.500	14-18	32-1.1	29-0	14	7	27	13	51-1.7
Kaia Henderson	13-0	43-3.3	4-12	.333	2-5	.400	3-3	1.000	0-4	4-0.3	5-0	2	3	0	1	13-1.0
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	9-0	18-2.0	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-0.1	3-0	0	3	0	1	0-0.0
Team										62-65	127		11			
Total	35	70251033-2239	.461	251-751	.334	491-701	.700	375-874	1249-35.7	616-16	605	484118	400	2808-80.2		
Opponents	35	7025 891-2089	.427	204-684	.298	394-562	.701	387-933	1320-37.7	613-13	486	712103	215	2380-68.0		

program history – along with Tara VanDerveer and Nancy Darsch – to make it to that round.

In Ohio State's most recent appearance in the Elite Eight under Darsch that featured Smith, the top-seeded Buckeyes made it all the way to the national championship game before suffering an 84-82 loss to No. 2 Texas Tech, and that has remained the program's benchmark in the years since.

Ohio State and No. 1 Virginia Tech tipped off in the Elite Eight on March 27 after Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, so for the latest on the Buckeyes' NCAA tournament run, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com for continued coverage.

Sheldon Still Undecided On Potential Return

Despite reports from several outlets indicating that Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon is returning for a fifth season with the Buckeyes, the senior said on March 18 that she is still undecided on whether to use her COVID-19 waiver for an additional year of eligibility.

"That's honestly something I have not thought about yet," she said after Ohio State's 80-66 win over James Madison. "I'm focused on the tournament right now and the group we have because we've got a good one."

Sheldon returned to Ohio State's lineup for the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament after missing 21 games during the season with a lower-leg injury and was able to appear in every remaining game for the Buckeyes.

She was just a freshman during the 2019-20 season that was cut short due to COVID-19, which leaves her with an additional season of eligibility if she chooses to use it.

In 12 games this season through March 25, Sheldon averaged 12.8 points, 3.5 rebounds, 3.7 assists and 3.8 steals in 28.0 minutes of action per game. While limited in her time on the court, she had been a clear boost to the team as both a facilitator on the offensive end and as a strong presence in Ohio State's defensive press, not to mention a leader both on and off the court for the Buckeyes.

With guard Taylor Mikesell exhausting her eligibility after this season, if Sheldon were to depart, the only returning guards with starting experience are Rikki Harris, Taylor Thierry and Madison Greene, who

will be coming off back-to-back season-ending knee injuries.

The standard deadline to declare for the WNBA draft was March 27, but with Ohio State still playing games, Sheldon will have 48 hours after the conclusion of the Buckeyes' final game – regardless of if that comes in the Elite Eight, Final Four or national championship – to make a decision before the WNBA draft, scheduled for April 10.

McMahon Finds Growth In NCAA Tournament

It was the first of what will likely be many NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament games for Ohio State freshman forward Cotie McMahon on March 18, but for most of the Buckeyes' 80-66 win over James Madison, she looked like a seasoned veteran.

Ohio State faced a 16-point first-half deficit, and McMahon – with 11 first-half points on 3-of-5 shooting, including a 5-of-7 mark from the charity stripe – was the main reason the Buckeyes were able to stay in the contest, eventually cutting the deficit to three points at the half.

And with Ohio State still trailing midway through the third quarter, it was McMahon's three-pointer – the first of the game for the Buckeyes – that put her team up 46-44, a lead that they would not relinquish.

"You can see she's got God-given talents, but I think a lot of people have that," McGuff said. "But most people don't have the motor she has or the competitive character that she has, and that's why I think we are really just starting to scratch the surface of the player who she is going to be."

But while there were plenty of positives, there were also some moments of growth in the game for McMahon. Late in the contest, fouls began to stack up for both teams with 52 called for the entire game – 27 for James Madison and 25 for Ohio State. McMahon had picked up a pair in the first quarter and was called for a charge in the third frame, and in the fourth quarter, she fouled out of the contest after picking up her fourth and fifth.

After picking up that final foul, McMahon's emotions got the best of her and she was called for a technical foul after a two-handed spike of the basketball. This sent the Dukes to the line for four free throws, and while it did not impact the outcome of the game, McMahon acknowledged

that in a tighter contest, things could have been different.

"Obviously, if it was a different outcome, if it was a close game, I could have really affected the team and possibly could have sent us home," she said. "Of course I grew up from this, and it won't happen again."

McMahon has not been shy about playing with emotion all throughout her freshman season, and she said the nature of the game likely contributed to picking up the technical foul. But with a tournament game under her belt and this moment to grow from, McMahon said it isn't something she expects to happen again.

"Games like this, it's win or go home," she said. "I'm very passionate. I did think it wasn't smart, but it was something that won't happen again. Emotions were high."

No Hard Feelings On Juhasz' Transfer

On Selection Sunday, no potential Sweet 16 matchup raised more eyebrows than a dance between Ohio State and UConn with a trip to the Elite Eight on the line.

While both programs have their place in women's college basketball, that intrigue was more around the individuals, most notably Husky forward Dorka Juhasz. She played her last two seasons at UConn but began her career at Ohio State, where she was recruited by McGuff and played her first three seasons in Columbus before departing to the transfer portal.

And while some transfer situations are based on hurt feelings or problems within a program, both parties have said there were no issues that led to Juhasz' transfer, and before Ohio State's 73-61 win over UConn in the Sweet 16, they reaffirmed that they were excited for a reunion on the court, even if they were on opposite teams.

"I would say I'm excited," Juhasz said. "I remember seeing the bracket coming out and Ohio State popped up and everybody was like, 'There's a possibility of playing Ohio State.'"

"For me, it's just excitement. There's no negative feelings about that. I still have a lot of friends (there), and I always have a lot of respect for my old coaching staff and everybody that helped me there because at the end of the day, I wouldn't be here without them."

McGuff also looked forward to the matchup and said he was hoping to reconnect with Juhasz after coaching her for so long.



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SONNY BROCKWAY

HELLO OLD FRIEND — During its 73-61 upset win over UConn in the Sweet 16, Ohio State was reunited with former Buckeye forward Dorka Juhasz (left, pictured with Jacy Sheldon), who spent her first three seasons at OSU before joining the Huskies by way of the transfer portal.

"She had three good years for us," he said. "She did a really good job. She went to a great program with great coaches.

"I'm sure this has been a good experience for her in that she's evolved and gotten better, which I think was the goal. I think we've evolved as a program in a really positive direction. In this case, she went to a great program and we continue to get better, so I think both people are in a good place."

While Juhasz is more likely to be remembered for her time with the Huskies given the program's national status, she said her current journey would be incomplete if she didn't mention her time with the Buckeyes.

"Coming to the United States and spending my first year there, I was very grateful and I'll forever cherish all the moments and friendships that I made there.

"Being in this situation to play a Sweet 16, it's just everything I've dreamed of and just having amazing teammates. I think overall, this experience has been great. As I said, part of it is just being at Ohio State. That's just my whole journey. When I think of my journey, it's not just UConn, but those three years, I think,

were obviously essential and necessary to be the player I am today. I'm very thankful for Ohio State and UConn."

In Ohio State's win over UConn, Juhasz finished with 13 points on 6-of-12 shooting and added a game-high 10 rebounds for her 15th double-double of the season.

McGuff Hopes To See Neutral-Site Matchups

The crowds at The Schottenstein Center were electric as the Buckeyes hosted their first- and second-round matchups of the NCAA tournament, but McGuff said he would support a shift to neutral sites if crowds could be in line with what the current host sites produce.

"I think that it would be great if we could get to that and still have the environment like we had (against James Madison)," he said. "I think that's ideal, just like the men do it.

"I don't know that we're there yet to where we could generate the crowds that we had today. I think it's really important to have a great environment for the NCAA tournament."

As it stands, the top 16 seeds – four per

region – host games in the first and second rounds, with games moving to regional sites for the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight and in a central location for the Final Four and national championship game.

While the women's college game is likely not at a point where neutral sites would be able to draw the crowds brought in by the first- and second-round games at host schools, significant progress has been made in recent years to build the crowds up at women's games across the country.

In just the Big Ten, single-game attendance records were broken this season at Indiana, Iowa and Nebraska, and Ohio State's conference tournament finals loss to Iowa drew a Big Ten tournament record of 9,500 fans. Furthermore, last season's NCAA tournament set a new attendance record, with 216,890 fans attending first- and second-round matchups.

"I do think it would be great to have neutral courts," he said. "I think we are closer today than we were a couple years ago. I know you look around the Big Ten, everyone is drawing really, really well. I think eventually you may be

able to carve out some sites where we could get great neutral-court crowds, and I think it would be awesome."

Day, Smith Send Support To Program

Among the different players, coaches, Ohio State staffers and family members who strolled in and out of the Buckeyes' celebration after securing a bid to the Sweet 16, two people stood out in their support of the program: Ohio State football head coach Ryan Day and athletic director Gene Smith.

The pair were quick to join McGuff and the players in the locker room after Ohio State's win over North Carolina, and Day wished the best for McGuff's program as well as that of the women's hockey team.

"I just wanted to start off by saying congratulations to the women's basketball team and Coach McGuff for a great game last night and moving on to Seattle and the Sweet 16," Day said on March 21. "Also to Nadine (Muzerall) and the women's hockey team for a great season and making it all the way to the national championship game."

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Upset Of UConn Sends Ohio State To Elite Eight

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For the first time since 1993, there's no doubt about it – the Ohio State women's basketball team is elite.

After coming back from down 16 points to defeat No. 14 James Madison and needing a game-winner from guard Jacy Sheldon to take down No. 6 North Carolina, the third-seeded Buckeyes utilized a stifling defensive performance to upset No. 2 UConn in the Sweet 16, sending the program to its first Elite Eight appearance since Katie Smith was a freshman.

Ohio State earned a date in the Elite Eight with No. 1 Virginia Tech, which tipped off on March 27 just hours after Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

For the latest on that result and the Buckeyes' NCAA tournament run, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com, and check out our next issue for a full recap of Ohio State's appearance in the Elite Eight and potentially beyond.

Dukes Scare Buckeyes In First-Round Matchup

No. 3 seed Ohio State came back from a significant first-half deficit to take down No. 14 James Madison 80-66 on March 18 in the Buckeyes' NCAA tournament opener at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes found themselves down



SONNY BROCKWAY
IN HER ELEMENT — Ohio State freshman forward Cotie McMahon (32) may be playing in her first NCAA tournament, but she has led the Buckeyes in scoring in two of three games, including a 23-point outing in the 73-61 upset win over UConn.

35-19 with 4:01 remaining in the second quarter but closed the frame on a 15-2 run before outscoring the Dukes in the second half, 46-29, to survive and advance.

"You're always concerned when you get behind," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "The good thing about this group is we always come back. We have a style that we can play from behind, and we have done this before. We have some confidence that regardless of what's going on, if we keep playing our style, we'll have a chance to come back and win."

Despite coming in as the lower seed, James Madison showed some fight early on, going up 8-4 before things got tied up at 10. The Dukes went on a 10-1 run from there to go up 20-11 with 2:49 left in the first quarter.

During that run, the Buckeyes began experiencing some foul trouble, with freshman Cotie McMahon picking up her second foul with less than six minutes gone by, and guard Taylor Thierry also had a pair with 1:22 remaining in the frame. Ohio State broke James Madison's run with a free throw from forward Eboni Walker and a layup from Thierry, but the Dukes scored the final six points of the quarter to lead 26-14.

The Buckeyes, who were 4 of 14 in the opening period, continued to struggle from the floor in the second quarter, starting the frame just 2 of 13 from the field, and James Madison's lead expanded to 35-19, due in part to OSU being forced into significant stretches without McMahon or Thierry.

Ohio State began to build some momentum from there, picking up energy from the home crowd and converting on back-to-back and-one opportunities from forward Rebeka Mikulášiková and McMahon, as well as forcing a 10-second violation on the Dukes with their defensive press.

McMahon's and-one began a 12-0 run for the Buckeyes to end the half – with McMahon accounting for eight of those points – as Ohio State trailed just 37-34 heading into the break. The Buckeyes were down only three points despite shooting just 31.3 percent from the field (10 for 32) and without a make from deep on six attempts.

"The biggest thing is we could not get in the press and couldn't make a shot," McGuff said. "It sounds obvious because it is, but we were having a hard time just getting the game the way we wanted because they were playing in transition offense the whole time in the first quarter. Once the shots started going in and we could get in the press, I think that turned the tide of the game."

Ohio State was able to settle things down to open the third quarter, forcing turnovers on James Madison's first two possessions of the half, and Thierry converted another and-one opportunity to tie the game for the first time since midway through the first quarter.

The Buckeyes were later able to take a 43-42 lead – their first since the first frame – off a pair of free throws from Walker. James Madison guard Jamia Hazell gave the lead back to the Dukes with a basket, but McMahon connected on Ohio State's first made three-pointer of the game before baskets from Mikesell and McMahon put the Buckeyes up 50-44 with 4:35 left in the third.

Scoring dried up from there, with Thi-

erry registering the game's next points on a layup with 2:26 left in the frame. The Dukes finally broke their scoreless streak with back-to-back baskets and a pair of makes at the line, but Ohio State was able to carry a 54-50 advantage into the fourth.

The Buckeyes opened the final frame on an 8-0 run to increase their lead to 62-50 with 7:54 left in the game, and back-to-back baskets by Mikesell – including her first three-pointer of the game – pushed Ohio State to a game-high 69-52 lead. James Madison fought back, cutting the deficit to as little as 76-66 with 44 seconds left, but the Buckeyes were able to secure the win.

"(In the first half), we felt like as a team that the ball only stayed on one side of the court, and that's not how we run our offense," McMahon said. "We do really well when we move the ball from side-to-side, attack, kick it out. We just weren't doing that."

"We went into halftime and we really talked about it, and once we started moving the ball, driving, attacking, we started getting those looks and those open drives."

McMahon led the Buckeyes with 18 points, while Sheldon added 17 points, tallied nine assists and went 9 of 9 from the free-throw line in her first start since Feb. 5, playing nearly 36 minutes. Thierry finished with 15 points and Mikesell added 14 points, while the Dukes were led by guard Kiki Jefferson, who finished with 17 points.

The teams combined for 52 fouls – 27 by James Madison and 25 by Ohio State – as Jefferson, McMahon and Thierry all fouled out, and McMahon was assessed a technical late in the game.

Sheldon's Game-Winner Sends OSU To Sweet 16

Sheldon finished a runner in the lane with just 1.8 seconds remaining to secure a 71-69 win for No. 3 Ohio State over No. 6 North Carolina on March 20, sending the Buckeyes to their 13th Sweet 16 appearance in program history.

The Tar Heels broke through to take a 67-66 lead with 2:09 remaining after trailing for the entire contest, and after North Carolina tied the game at 69 with 9.8 seconds remaining, Sheldon's game-winner gave Ohio State the final lead before the Tar Heels came up short on their last possession.

"We see it every single day in practice, see it every day when we're working out together," Mikesell said of Sheldon's last shot. "How much adversity she's been through this season, just to come back and be ready for that moment and to be like her old self, if not better – pretty incredible."

Flipping the script from their last few outings, Ohio State got off to a fast start by opening up with an 11-2 lead, forcing misses on North Carolina's first six shots of the game and forcing three turnovers during that span.

The Buckeyes' three-point shooting also showed early improvement after a 2-of-17 outing against James Madison, with Mikesell connecting on a triple just 1:31 into the game. North Carolina shook off the early blows by responding with a 10-2 run and connecting on five of its last six shots of the quarter to trail just 16-14 after the first.

Ohio State 80, James Madison 66

March 18, 2023
 Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
James Madison (26-8)	26	11	13	16	66
Ohio State (26-7)	14	20	20	26	80

James Madison	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Kozlova	14	1-2	2-3	1-2	0	5	4		
Germond	34	1-6	6-8	0-3	2	3	8		
King-Hawea	22	2-3	0-0	0-7	0	4	5		
Hazell	24	5-12	0-0	2-3	0	2	10		
Jefferson	34	4-14	8-12	1-7	2	4	17		
McDaniel	25	4-9	0-0	2-2	0	3	9		
Ouderkirk	15	2-5	0-0	1-3	0	2	4		
Goodman	25	4-6	1-3	3-2	0	2	9		
Sterling	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Williams	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Neff	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0		
Toure	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Koné	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Tynes	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	23-58	17-26	11-33	4	27	66		

Percentages: FG: 39.7%. FT: 65.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-16 (Jefferson 1-4, King-Hawea 1-1, McDaniel 1-6, Germond 0-4, Ouderkirk 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Goodman). **Turnovers:** 21 (Germond 4, Hazell 3, Jefferson 3, Kozlova 3, Team 3, King-Hawea 2, Ouderkirk 2, McDaniel). **Steals:** 3 (Germond 2, Jefferson).

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Walker	18	3-7	3-4	1-3	2	2	9		
McMahon	35	6-14	5-9	1-4	0	6	18		
Thierry	31	7-8	1-1	2-4	4	5	15		
Sheldon	36	4-13	9-9	1-4	9	3	17		
Mikesell	35	4-12	5-6	0-3	0	1	14		
Harris	14	0-3	1-2	0-1	1	4	1		
Mikulášiková	20	2-4	2-3	0-1	1	2	6		
Shumate	7	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Bristow	5	0-3	0-0	1-3	0	2	0		
Henderson	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Vreš	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	26-64	26-34	10-26	17	25	80		

Percentages: FG: 40.6%. FT: 76.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 2-17 (McMahon 1-3, Mikesell 1-5, Bristow 0-1, Harris 0-2, Mikulášiková 0-2, Sheldon 0-4). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 4 (McMahon 2, Thierry, Walker). **Turnovers:** 7 (McMahon 3, Mikesell 2, Sheldon, Walker). **Steals:** 10 (Sheldon 4, McMahon 3, McMahon, Mikesell, Walker). **Officials:** Daley, Gloss, Paris. **Attendance:** N/A.

Ohio State scored the first six points of the second quarter to go up 22-14 with 8:00 left in the first half, but North Carolina was able to hang around, cutting the deficit to as few as five points five times by halftime to trail 33-28.

While the Buckeyes significantly out-shot the Tar Heels in the first half (46.2 percent compared to 37.9 percent), Ohio State turned the ball over 12 times during the frame, resulting in 14 points for North Carolina. The Buckeyes had turned the ball over just seven times in the opening round against James Madison, and overall, Ohio State had 16 games this season when it committed 12 or fewer turnovers.

"We had a chance, I thought, to really pull away and put the game out of reach, but we got really sloppy with the basketball," McGuff said. "We had 21 turnovers today, which is really high for us. Credit North Carolina's defense. They have good athletes, quick hands and they do a lot of great stuff."

After turning the ball over again on its first possession of the third quarter, Ohio State regrouped by scoring eight of the half's first 11 points to take a 41-31 lead with 7:14 left in the frame, with McMahon adding a pair of baskets during the stretch.

OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 71, North Carolina 69

March 20, 2023
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
North Carolina (22-11)	14	14	18	23	69
Ohio State (27-7)	16	17	18	20	71

	Total				A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
North Carolina							
Poole	13	0-0	0-0	1-1	1	4	0
Ustby	40	8-16	0-1	4-5	3	2	16
Todd-Williams	38	6-14	3-3	0-2	0	3	16
Hodgson	15	2-2	0-0	1-0	1	2	6
Kelly	36	7-18	7-8	0-5	2	2	22
McPherson	24	3-6	0-0	0-3	1	3	7
Adams	16	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	5	0
Key	6	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Paris	11	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Zelaya	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	27-60	10-12	8-21	8	22	69

Percentages: FG: 45.0%. FT: 83.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-15 (Hodgson 2-2, Kelly 1-4, McPherson 1-3, Todd-Williams 1-4, Ustby 0-1, Zelaya 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Kelly 2, Adams). **Turnovers:** 18 (Ustby 4, Kelly 3, Adams 2, Hodgson 2, Key 2, McPherson 2, Todd-Williams 2, Team). **Steals:** 12 (Kelly 3, McPherson 2, Paris 2, Todd-Williams 2, Ustby 2, Adams).

	Total				A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Ohio State							
Walker	29	4-7	7-8	4-3	3	0	15
McMahon	34	6-11	2-5	0-9	1	4	14
Thierry	27	2-2	2-2	1-2	0	5	6
Sheldon	40	6-14	3-4	1-5	5	4	16
Mikesell	39	6-13	1-1	1-1	3	1	17
Mikulášiková	11	1-2	0-0	0-2	0	0	2
Harris	18	0-1	1-3	0-2	3	3	1
Shumate	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Bristow	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	25-50	16-23	8-25	16	17	71

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 69.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-15 (Mikesell 4-8, Sheldon 1-5, McMahon 0-1, Mikulášiková 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Harris). **Turnovers:** 21 (Mikesell 7, McMahon 5, Sheldon 4, Thierry 4, Mikulášiková). **Steals:** 11 (Harris 3, Mikesell 2, Sheldon 2, Thierry 2, McMahon, Walker). **Officials:** Preato, Smith, Daley. **Attendance:** 5,186.

McMahon's score to cap off the run was the only basket for the Buckeyes over the next several minutes, as their only points came at the line until a layup from Sheldon with 31 seconds left in the quarter. At that point, the Tar Heels had embarked on a 14-7 run to cut the deficit to just 48-45.

After Rikki Harris picked up two fouls in as many seconds during a defensive stand, Mikesell converted an and-one opportunity to put the Buckeyes up 51-46 entering the fourth. Despite the push from the Tar Heels, the Buckeyes were able to seize momentum, opening the final quarter on an 11-4 run to put Ohio State up 62-50 with 7:02 to go on a three-pointer by Mikesell.

Ohio State's momentum came to a halt after a break in the action due to an injury to North Carolina guard Deja Kelly, and the Tar Heels responded with a 9-0 run to make it 62-59 with 5:03 remaining in the game.

Walker responded with the next four points for Ohio State to maintain a 66-63 lead, followed shortly by Thierry fouling out of the contest, and the Tar Heels finally broke through to go up 67-66 with 2:09 left.

Sheldon drove in and finished a layup to give the lead back to Ohio State, and McMahon was able to secure a tough rebound on the other end before Sheldon was fouled and sent to the line to put the Buckeyes up 69-67 after splitting a pair. On North Carolina's ensuing possession, forward Teonni Key was called for an offensive foul, but the Buckeyes turned the ball right back over, and the Tar Heels tied the game up with 9.8 seconds left, setting up Sheldon's heroics.

"Jacy does this day-in and day-out," Walk-

er said. "We practice a lot of the tough situations so that we're prepared for moments like this when games come. Regardless (of) if she would have missed it, I would have been there to help her. At the end of the day, we do a great job of having each other's backs, and whatever it took to win, we were going to do it."

Sheldon finished the contest with 16 points, six rebounds and five assists, while Mikesell led the Buckeyes with 17 points with 4-of-8 shooting from deep. Walker had her most impressive outing for Ohio State with 15 points, seven rebounds and three assists, all while committing no fouls or turnovers, and McMahon added 14 points and nine rebounds.

"I was really proud down the stretch," McGuff said. "Nobody panicked. We kept executing and digging in to try to get stops. There was a sense of determination that we were going to find a way to come away with a win."

The Tar Heels had three finish in double-digits, with Kelly scoring 22 points while guards Alyssa Ustby and Kennedy Todd-Williams each added 16 points, with Ustby contributing nine rebounds. The teams were an identical 5 of 15 from deep, but Ohio State shot 50.0 percent from the floor (25 of 50) compared to 45.0 percent (27 of 60) shooting for North Carolina.

Underdog Buckeyes Muzzle Huskies

No. 3 Ohio State was headed to the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993 after using a stellar defensive performance to knock off No. 2 UConn, 73-61, on March 25.

The Huskies shot 45.3 percent from the field but committed 25 turnovers, which Ohio State was able to turn into 23 points, in one of the best defensive outings by the Buckeyes in recent memory to send them to their fourth Elite Eight in program history.

"When I had the opportunity to come to Ohio State, this was certainly the goal and the vision to go farther than they have been going, and it's not easy to get here," McGuff said. "I'm really proud of our team and our program of how we've evolved to be able to get to this point."

"I have so much respect for (UConn head coach Geno Auriemma) and his staff and all that they have accomplished. So for us to be able to win this game in the Sweet 16 is obviously extremely significant. They're hard to beat, they're so well coached, so this is a great win for us."

Ohio State has tried to emphasize not starting slow this season, given the frequency at which the team has required significant comebacks for some wins, but that advice was not heeded against UConn.

The Buckeyes struggled early with the Huskies' size and what appeared to be some jitters, beginning just 1 of 7 from the field as UConn got off to a 10-2 lead. A timeout from McGuff with 5:57 left in the quarter helped to settle the team, which was then able to start up its hounding full-court press and begin forcing turnovers, a common theme of the matchup.

A basket from Walker and a fastbreak layup from McMahon helped stop UConn's early run, but the Huskies responded with a pair of buckets by former Buckeye Dorka Juhasz and a triple from forward Lou Lopez

Senechal to take a 17-9 lead with 2:37 left in the first quarter.

Ohio State was able to score the final six points of the frame, forcing four turnovers by UConn in the final three minutes, to trail just 17-15 despite shooting 6 of 16 from the field for the period. Momentum continued to build for Ohio State in the second quarter, forcing turnovers on UConn's first three possessions, and McMahon hit the Buckeyes' first three-pointer of the game to take an 18-17 lead.

McMahon hit another triple on Ohio State's next possession after another turnover by the Huskies, and the Buckeyes were able to extend it to a 17-0 run to lead 26-17 with 5:46 left in the second quarter. During that run, Ohio State forced 11 turnovers by UConn, which was also without forward Aaliyah Edwards for most of the stretch after she picked up a pair of fouls in the first quarter.

And while Ohio State was impressive enough in holding UConn scoreless over the first 4:33 of the second frame, it was made more impactful given that the Huskies did not even attempt a shot during that time, turning the ball over on eight straight possessions.

"They were all over the floor," said Juhasz. "I think we were just - nobody wanted the ball. Nobody really was trying to get open and break that press. But not even just the press, but I felt like they were tougher than us, they outrebounded us, they got the loose balls. They were just tougher with the ball, and that's on us."

Ohio State's run was finally broken by a layup from UConn guard Azzi Fudd, and she later tallied a three-pointer to cut the deficit to 30-23, but the Buckeyes were able to build the lead to double digits, up 36-26 at the half.

Going into the break, McMahon led all scorers with 18 points on 6-of-11 shooting. The Huskies shot better from the field, knocking down 43.5 percent (10 of 23) of their shots during the first half to 40.6 (13 of 32) for the Buckeyes, but 18 turnovers resulted in 19 points for Ohio State.

UConn looked better coming out of the half, turning the ball over just twice in the first few minutes of the third quarter and cutting the deficit to 40-32 with 6:40 left in the frame, but Edwards picked up her fourth foul at the 7:07 mark and was sent to the bench, leaving the Huskies without their most notable scoring and post presence.

Coming out of a media timeout with 4:50 left in the quarter, the Huskies looked to build some momentum with a jumper from Juhasz - who had played her first three collegiate seasons at Ohio State - and layup from Lopez Senechal to make it 44-39, the fewest the deficit had been since early in the second quarter. The Buckeyes responded with back-to-back scores from Mikesell and Sheldon - the latter a three-pointer - to go up 49-39.

While McMahon picked up her fourth foul with 1:24 remaining in the third quarter, keeping her out until midway through the final frame, the Buckeyes still maintained a 54-44 lead going into the fourth quarter after a late basket from Thierry.

Ohio State, not allowing an opening for UConn, then opened the fourth quarter with a pair of three pointers (one each from Mikesell and Harris) and a pair of free

throws from Harris to go up 62-46 with 8:23 remaining, forcing Auriemma to call a timeout.

Out of that timeout, the Huskies took off on a 9-2 run to cut the deficit to 64-55. But McMahon, who checked back in with 5:39 left, broke the run by converting on an and-one opportunity to put the Buckeyes back up 67-55 with 4:01 remaining.

The teams continued to trade points until a jumper from Mikesell put Ohio State up 71-60, and Sheldon followed with a pair at the line to go up 73-61 with 1:49 remaining, from which point neither team scored and the Buckeyes coasted to the win.

"You don't want to come into a game expecting to lose or even being nervous," McMahon said. "I feel like as a team, we weren't nervous. We looked at it as any other game. I feel like that's really what helped us, not to feed (into) the fact that they are UConn, this great program, and not to feed into the media and how much they were hyping UConn up."

"We really stayed in our lane, stayed focused and believed in each other, and I feel like that's really what set us apart from other teams who lose the game before it even tips off."

McMahon led the Buckeyes with 23 points on 8-of-17 shooting, while Sheldon finished with 17 points (including 10 of 10 from the line), seven rebounds and five assists, and Thierry added 11 points. The Huskies were led by Lopez Senechal's 25 points, while Fudd added 14 points and Juhasz scored 13 and grabbed a game-high 10 rebounds. The Huskies were hampered by a 7-of-15 performance from the charity stripe, while the Buckeyes were 22 of 30.

Ohio State 73, UConn 61

March 25, 2023
Climate Pledge Arena • Seattle

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (28-7)	15	21	18	19	73
UConn (31-6)	17	9	18	17	61

	Total				A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Ohio State							
Walker	33	3-9	0-2	6-3	4	2	6
McMahon	33	8-17	5-7	1-4	2	5	23
Thierry	32	3-7	5-6	0-3	1	3	11
Sheldon	38	3-9	10-10	2-5	5	4	17
Mikesell	38	4-10	0-0	0-1	0	0	9
Harris	21	2-6	2-5	0-4	0	1	7
Mikulášiková	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Totals	200	23-60	22-30	11-23	13	15	73

Percentages: FG: 38.3%. FT: 73.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-17 (McMahon 2-4, Harris 1-4, Mikesell 1-5, Sheldon 1-2, Mikulášiková 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 14 (Walker 5, McMahon 3, Thierry 3, Sheldon 2, Team). **Steals:** 13 (Thierry 4, Harris 2, McMahon 2, Sheldon 2, Walker 2, Mikesell).

	Total				A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
UConn							
Edwards	17	2-4	0-0	1-6	1	4	4
Juhasz	36	6-12	1-4	5-5	4	3	13
Muhl	40	1-3	1-2	0-2	5	3	3
Lopez Senechal	31	9-13	3-3	0-2	2	4	25
Fudd	38	6-17	0-0	0-3	1	2	14
Ducharme	15	0-4	1-2	1-4	1	1	1
Griffin	22	0-0	1-4	0-3	1	3	1
Patterson	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	24-53	7-15	9-29	15	20	61

Percentages: FG: 45.3%. FT: 46.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-23 (Lopez Senechal 4-7, Fudd 2-9, Ducharme 0-3, Juhasz 0-2, Muhl 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Fudd 2, Juhasz 2). **Turnovers:** 25 (Muhl 7, Fudd 4, Ducharme 3, Edwards 3, Lopez Senechal 3, Griffin 2, Juhasz 2, Team). **Steals:** 11 (Fudd 5, Juhasz 3, Edwards, Griffin, Muhl). **Officials:** McConnell, Cruse, Trimble. **Attendance:** N/A.

Dominance Defines Ruck's Perfect Game

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Emily Ruck jogged back to Ohio State's dugout, but in her mind she was sprinting from the pressures of the achievement that lay in front of her.

Most of her teammates hadn't noticed what was happening March 10 in Conway, S.C. Her catcher, freshman Hannah Church, knew that Ruck was pitching a fantastic game, striking out 12 batters with no walks through five innings of work. But even she didn't realize that Ruck wasn't just having an excellent outing – she was having a perfect one.

"The first two innings, you can't think about it," Ruck told BSB. "Then you finish your third and you're like, 'Oh my gosh, I have two more or I have three more.' You just start to get a little more worked up. Which I didn't have any reason to be, but you definitely are in your head about it."

Fifteen hitters up, fifteen hitters down. That had been the story of Ruck's day thus far. With Ohio State holding a 4-0 lead, she stood just six outs away from a place in Ohio State softball history – or zero outs, if her team managed to score four runs in the bottom of the fifth to close its contest with Canisius early via an 8-0 run rule.

Those stakes weren't salient in the heads of the Buckeyes' batters, though. In softball – or baseball, for that matter – it's superstition to not so much as reference a perfect game or no-hitter while a pitcher is throwing one. Thus, Ruck combatted her nerves in isolation as her teammates prepared for their respective turns at the dish.

"We were just playing," Church said. "As hitters and as fielders, I didn't even notice. I knew she was throwing a really good game, but I couldn't tell you that it was a perfect game. I just knew that she was throwing really well."

Sophomore shortstop Kami Kortokrax took the second pitch she saw over the right-center-field fence – her first career home run – to lead off the inning. Church singled to unknowingly help her pitcher's cause three batters later and came home to score on a two-run single from sophomore second baseman Kaitlyn Farley.

Farley advanced to second and then third on wild pitches, and junior Taylor Heckman recorded a pinch-hit walk. Tension welled up in Ruck's chest as the Golden Griffins brought on Kate Wiggins to pitch with one out in the inning, with Farley just 60 feet away from securing her pitcher's feat for her.

After Wiggins warmed up, senior left fielder Tegan Cortelletti worked a 2-2 count before punching a game-ending single into left field. Ruck and the team's coaching staff were overwhelmed with emotion.

"It was so awesome," Ruck said. "I was sitting with the staff at the end of the dugout, trying not to think about it, obviously. Superstition things. But as soon as it ended, they all crowded around me and we had a big group hug. It was awesome."

For the first time in 16 years, an Ohio State pitcher finished a perfect game. It's only the fourth time since 1997 – the earliest year for which Ohio State has complete archival data – with Jamee Juarez being the last to throw one for the Buckeyes on April 18, 2007, against IUPUI.



PERFECT PERFORMANCE – Ohio State softball pitcher Emily Ruck tossed a perfect game against Canisius on March 11, leading the Buckeyes to an 8-0 win. It was the fourth perfect game in program history and Ruck's second no-hitter.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

"I was just so excited for her – and Hannah, the two of them together – I don't want to celebrate one person too much, but it's a really big deal," head coach Kelly Kovach Schoenly said. "They were all into it."

Ruck woke up that morning with an inkling of what could be in front of her. She previously tossed a no-hitter against UMass on March 13, 2022, and informed her teammates that she would do the same against Canisius.

"She told the whole pitching staff at breakfast she was going to throw a no-hitter. I was like, 'OK then, let's go do that,'" Kovach Schoenly said with a laugh. "She manifested it. So now (freshman pitcher) Julia Miller thinks that's all you've got to do, say you're going to throw a no-hitter and you'll do it."

"She's done it both times she's thrown one – she's said she's going to do it. That's a good way to go into the game."

Her day started off on shaky ground. Ruck fell behind against the first batter she faced 3-0 before firing back with two called strikes and a swinging strike three against Canisius infielder Saige Alfaro. She fanned the next two Golden Griffins to close the opening inning.

"I always say you have to give me my first inning," Ruck said. "Then I'll figure it out. I didn't get nervous. I feel like that happens all the time. I get down in counts in the beginning because I'm trying to find the strike zone and see how far I can stretch it."

Ruck features a complete repertoire of pitches that break every which way, including a rise ball, drop ball, curveball and screwball, among others. She credits Kovach Schoenly, who also acts as the team's main pitching coach, with the development of her arsenal. As a local product at Westerville Central, Ruck played her prep career with a much more limited selection, and she didn't even have an off-speed offering before arriving in Columbus.

Each pitch proved effective against the Golden Griffins. Wherever Church held her

mitt for the ball to move to, it seemed to find the proper location. Only one ball left the infield off a Canisius bat the entire contest, which flew out to Cortelletti in left during the second frame.

"Honestly, there wasn't a pitch that she threw that I thought wasn't exactly what it needed to be when it needed to be there," Church said. "She threw an amazing game, and I don't think she missed anything. And that's what made it so dominant."

Ruck found such a groove in the circle and synergy with her coaches that she shook off only one sign that came from the dugout. It was in the third inning, and just the second – and final – time she fell behind by two balls in a count. After the count reached 3-1 against outfielder Tiara Johnson, she turned to her screwball, got a called strike and finished off a seven-pitch strikeout two throws later.

"I was down in the count, and I was afraid of the walk," Ruck said. "I was getting greedy."

Dominance defined Ruck's perfect game from there on out. She struck out the side in what proved to be her final inning of work, with none of Canisius' hitters so much as reaching a three-ball count. Increasing the difficulty of such control was the cold weather, clocked at 46 degrees, per AccuWeather, which makes spin and velocity tough to put on pitches.

"She wasn't predictable," Kovach Schoenly said. "The batters couldn't really settle in. We were able to hit all four quadrants (of the strike zone) and not just stick with one thing. And she was executing all of her pitches at a very high level. She had a great, fiery mentality, and I could see right away she was feeling good out there."

Church, along with the rest of Ohio State's position players, was ecstatic to learn that the perfect game happened when Kovach Schoenly mentioned it following the contest. None were more excited than her fellow pitchers, though, who did take note of the perfect

game while it unfolded. None more so than the team's ace, junior Allison Smith.

"Allison was probably the happiest for her," Kovach Schoenly said. "They've been together for three years now, and they're so into the other person having success that I think she – outside the coaches and (Ruck and Church) – was the one that paid the most attention as it was happening."

"Coach said it was a perfect game immediately after, and I was like, 'Holy cow, it was,'" Church said. "I was so happy for her, because I know everybody has a rough game, and we'd had a couple of rough games up to that point. I was so happy that she got that and I was able to help her with that. So it was just pure joy."

Last year, Ruck felt as though her no-hitter against the Minutemen served as a springboard for the rest of her season, calling it her "first successful outing" at Ohio State. The perfect game against Canisius has done the same this season – not just for Ruck, but for the entire team.

Ruck's record stood at 1-4 before the perfect game, but she has not lost an outing since. Her ERA is now sub-three, at 2.58 on the season. Though Kovach Schoenly said Ruck's win-loss tally prior to March 10 isn't indicative of her performance to that point – six innings with just one run allowed in a 1-0 loss to UCF on Feb. 11 serve as evidence of that – the hurler has seen an improvement in her mind-set.

"I was caught up in trying to find the best sequencing. I was too analytical about what I wanted to do on the mound, and that game allowed me to throw my pitches and throw to my strengths rather than batters' weaknesses," Ruck said of the perfect game. "I think I just found success in allowing me to do my thing and have a plan and trust my pitches."

As for the squad, Ruck's perfect game began a 12-game winning streak that started against the Golden Griffins, one that was snapped by Michigan on March 26, to take its record from 6-7 to 19-8 as of March 26. The team's bats have found some heat, blasting 15 home runs in 17 games during the run up to Big Ten play after hitting none in the Buckeyes' first eight contests.

"A couple things have really changed for us (since March 10)," Kovach Schoenly said. "We've had Kaitlyn Farley at the bottom, and she's been hitting for a very high average. She's really been turning the order over very well. Then the top with (Melina Wilkinson) and Mariah (Rodriguez), they have really come through. The second thing is that we've added more power."

"After that game, I think we as a defense and as hitters had total faith in our pitching staff," Church said. "And to have total faith in your pitching staff gives everyone else a deep sense of relief, because they're going to do their jobs. Now all we have to do is do our jobs."

Between Ruck and Smith, the latter of whom has posted a 2.14 ERA through 39²/₃ innings of work, Kovach Schoenly and Co. are confident they'll have two optimal options in the circle.

Regardless, Ruck has etched her name in Ohio State's record book forever.

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Andrews, Graveline A Dynamic Catching Duo

Each of Ohio State's top two hitters puts on a protective suit for his primary position, with graduate Cole Andrews and freshman Matthew Graveline rotating at catcher for Ohio State.

FROM THE STRETCH Andy Anders

The pairing alternated starts to open the season before head coach Bill Mosiello tweaked the lineup to get them both on the field, as their production called for it.

"They've both been awesome," Mosiello said.

Both catchers were batting above .400 with 10 games each under their belts several weeks into the team's season. They've cooled off a tad since then, with Andrews' average at .364 and Graveline's hitting .355 through March 26, but those marks were the two best in the Buckeyes' lineup.

It's not as though they were simply doling out singles, either. Andrews' slugging percentage was up at a blistering .618, second only to junior outfielder Kade Kern's .619. He had also posted a team-high 19 RBI. Graveline was slugging .532 (third on the team) with five doubles and 14 RBI. He's added an element of speed as well, with three stolen bases.

"You want your best bats in the lineup every day, and to know that we have two guys (at catcher) that can do that is huge," Andrews said. "Depth is huge with how long of a season baseball is and how injuries can come about. You always want to have as much depth as possible, so it's awesome to have us both in there."

Catcher can be taxing on the legs, which is why Andrews and Graveline each had exactly eight starts for Ohio State through its first 16 games. But with Graveline's talent after arriving as a freshman out of Centerville, Ohio – he hit .421 his senior year there with 21 RBI and 12 stolen bases – Mosiello started playing Graveline in left field on days when he wasn't catching. Andrews, meanwhile, got a turn as a designated hitter when Graveline caught against Toledo on March 22.

"However I can get on the field, I'm in," Graveline said. "Ever since I was young I've been a pretty versatile athlete. I played all positions coming up, so I think that's really helped."

One of the things that got Graveline to hit the ground running at Ohio State, he added, is his experience playing high-level baseball in the year's hottest months with the Midland Redskins. It's the same travel organization for which former Ohio State and current Houston Astros minor-league infielder Zach Dezenzo played.

"Game speed (in college) is up for sure," Graveline said. "I think playing summer ball at a high level, that really helped with my transition here. It speeds up, but I have to slow myself down and that's where the mental game comes in."

Andrews, for his part, is more of an el-

der statesman. It's also his first year in Ohio State's program, being a transfer whom Mosiello attracted from Miami (Ohio), but he started and played in 52 games for the RedHawks as a senior last season with a .291 batting average, nine home runs and 53 RBI.

"He has to be in that lineup every day," Mosiello said. "They both do. They've both earned that right. I'm super proud of them. They're great kids, and they've both worked their tails off."

Mosiello has also been a big fan of what the duo have given the team in terms of defense behind the dish. With strikeouts included in collegiate putout numbers, Andrews has 113 putouts and 11 assists against just one error for a fielding percentage of .992. With his stats in left field mixed in, Graveline has 93 putouts with eight assists and two errors, for a fielding percentage of .981.

"They've both been doing a great job behind the plate," Mosiello said. "That's actually where it starts. Then offensively, it's awesome. It really puts me in a predicament. My worst nightmare is, when you only have two catchers on the team, you cannot have the other catcher DH. Because if the other guy goes down, you're in trouble. It messes up your whole lineup."

"They're both going to catch an equal amount. I want to keep them both fresh, both strong for the season. But with Matt being such a great athlete and the ability to play the outfield, (he's going to do that)."

Mosiello added that Andrews will still fill in as designated hitter some days since catcher is his only true defensive position, but he doesn't want to make a habit of it.

With this being his first year at the collegiate level, Graveline has relied on Andrews a great deal for advice about the game. The elder catcher has provided the first-year player with tips on the minutiae of catching, collegiate baseball and college life in general.

"Coming in as a freshman, catcher is always tough," Andrews said. "The game can speed up on you really quickly. When I was a freshman, I was blessed with older guys that were able to teach me a lot about the game and help me slow the game down. So it's just helping Matt to slow the game down and be able to help the pitcher in the best way he can. He's in a great spot right now. He's miles ahead of where I was as a freshman."

As long as both are healthy, Ohio State shouldn't have much concern about who anchors its lineup behind the plate.

OSU Sweeps Dayton In Home Opener

Ohio State got its first chance to play before friendly crowds at Bill Davis Stadium on March 17 and 19, posting two comfortable wins over in-state Dayton.

Staff ace Isaiah Coupet took the mound on March 17 against the Flyers and posted a strong outing, going seven innings with just two earned runs allowed and 11 strikeouts against one walk to pick up the win. Entering with a five-run lead already in hand, freshman Landon Beidelschies closed the win out with two shutout innings to make 7-2 the final ledger.

Ohio State took control of the contest with a five-run seventh inning. Having already blasted a two-run home run in the first inning of play, junior center fielder Kade Kern lined a two-run double to right-center that expanded his team's lead to 5-2. Andrews polished things off with a two-run double of his own.

Following a game that was rained out March 18, the Buckeyes won a 12-8 offensive showcase against the Flyers on March 19. It was again a big seventh inning that did the work for Ohio State. The Buckeyes scored five runs once more in the frame to build on a 7-6 lead entering the inning.

Sophomore second baseman Josh McAlister got things started with an RBI single before sophomore designated hitter Trey Lipsey lofted a three-run bomb into right field, his first of the season. Andrews tripled home graduate first baseman Marcus Ernst for the inning's final run.

Ernst had a three-run home run of his own in the sixth inning, and Lipsey totaled six RBI after also collecting a three-run double in the fourth.

Buckeyes Drop Four Of Five

Ohio State played five games from March 21 through March 26, its most recent week of action as of BSB's publication, and it dropped four of five games in that span.

Wright State pitcher Alex Theis kept the Buckeyes' bats quiet on March 21, tossing six shutout innings. Relievers Tristan Haught and Jay Luikart finished off the shutout for the Raiders, the latter picking up a save. Ohio State accumulated just three

hits against the trio, stranding seven runners on base in a 3-0 loss.

Those Ohio State hitters came back and recorded a 6-4 win against Toledo the next day, pulling ahead in the seventh inning. With the Buckeyes down 4-3 entering the frame, Kern and sophomore third baseman Tyler Pettorini each hit solo home runs to help hand junior relief pitcher Blayne Robinson his second win of the year.

After junior first baseman Caden Kaiser added some insurance with an RBI single in the eighth, Beidelschies picked up the save with 1 1/3 innings of shutout work.

March 25 opened Big Ten play for the Buckeyes, who fell to Indiana in Bloomington by a 14-6 final. Coupet, in a rare turn, struggled against the Hoosiers, giving up 10 runs in four innings of work to turn what had been a 6-0 lead as he came on the field in the bottom of the first to his second loss of the year. Ohio State didn't score again following its six-run opening inning, and Indiana ran away with the contest.

That loss was the first of what became a three-game sweep the Hoosiers collected against the Buckeyes, taking both games of a double-header on March 26. Indiana jumped out to a 6-1 lead through the first five innings of game one and claimed a 9-6 victory. In game two, the Hoosiers grabbed the same 6-1 lead – also after five innings – to win 7-5. The losses moved OSU's record to 12-10 on the year.

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Buckeyes Fall Short Of Reaching Frozen Four

Ohio State's dream of reaching the Frozen Four again was dashed when the Buckeyes lost 4-1 to Quinnipiac in the Bridgeport, Conn., regional final on March 26.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The Buckeyes were stymied by the stellar goaltending of Yaniv Perets two days after an epic 8-1 beatdown of Harvard in the first round.

Ohio State (21-16-3), the No. 3 seed, was looking to make its third trip to the Frozen Four (1998, 2018) in its 10th NCAA tournament appearance but it wasn't to be despite outshooting the No. 1-seeded Bobcats 35-17.

"Disappointing result," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said. "I mean, I couldn't ask for more from my team. I thought we played a good game. I thought we left everything on the rink.

"As you guys can understand, to coach at any level, there's two things that are really important to me. It's being around great players and great people, and I'm fortunate to have both. I'm really proud of our hockey team and really proud of the people that put so much work into it."

There was no way the Buckeyes were going to have as much space to skate as second-seeded Harvard allowed, but things looked good from the onset vs. Quinnipiac when Joe Dunlap put the Buckeyes up just 1:31 into the game. The junior stole the puck in the neutral zone and scored on a breakaway.

Quinnipiac (32-4-3) took the lead in rapid order beginning at the 13:20 mark when Christophe Fillion scored, and 15 seconds later Skyler Brind'Amour, son of Carolina Hurricanes coach and former NHL player Rod Brind'Amour, followed with a rebound goal for the 2-1 lead. It was reminiscent of the Buckeyes scoring six seconds apart against Harvard.

Cristophe Tellier extended the lead to 3-1 when he scored with two seconds left on a Quinnipiac power play at 15:30 of the third. He flipped a backhand shot over goaltender Jakub Dobeš then got to the loose puck and poked it in despite Dobeš' effort to grab it before crossing the line. Jayden Lee ended all doubt with an empty-net goal with 1:57 to play.

With that, the Buckeyes' season was over in front of a rabid pro-Bobcats crowd of 4,557 at Total Mortgage Arena, about 30 miles from Quinnipiac's Hamden, Conn., campus. Perets made 34 saves while Dobeš stopped 13 of 16 shots.

Quinnipiac advanced to play Michigan in a national semifinal on April 6 in Tampa, Fla. The Wolverines had downed Penn State 2-1 in overtime in Allentown, Pa., on

March 26.

Crimson Faced

The Buckeyes scored their most goals ever in an NCAA tournament and Harvard allowed its most in the surprisingly easy rout on March 24.

Ohio State was so dominant that through two periods it had seven goals (on 34 shots) to Harvard's eight shots on goal, or as ESPN analyst Andrew Raycroft put it, "Harvard could have scored on every one of their shots and it would be a one-goal game."

Spurred by the return from a long-term injury to fifth-year co-captain Gustaf Westlund (goal, two assists), four assists by senior co-captain Jake Wise and two goals apiece by sophomores Cam Thiesing and defenseman Cole McWard, the Buckeyes buried Harvard with a five-goal outburst in the second period.

"We played a really good hockey team there tonight, and we were just relentless, and they believed, and when you put that stuff together, it's pretty powerful," Rohlik said afterward.

The result was stunning considering Harvard led the NCAA tournament teams with 15 NHL draft picks, including its top six forwards, yet the Crimson were outshot 17-3 in the first period. Ohio State has four draftees.

Leading 8-0, the Buckeyes came within 3:14 of recording the largest shutout in NCAA tournament history before John Farinacci scored a power-play goal. In 1988, St. Lawrence defeated Wisconsin 7-0 in the first game of a quarterfinal total-goals series in which Rohlik was playing for the Badgers. However, less than two hours after the Buckeyes' game ended, Penn State defeated Michigan Tech 8-0.

Westlund, who had been out since being injured in the fifth game of the season on Oct. 14, learned prior to the game that he would be in the lineup. He was inserted on the top line and made an immediate impact, winning a battle along the right wall before finding Thiesing, who scored from a low angle at 3:22 of the first for a 1-0 lead.

"He didn't miss meetings. He didn't miss video. He didn't miss practice," Rohlik said of Westlund. "He worked really hard to be in this position tonight, which we didn't think could be possible, and (I'm) just really proud of him."

Later in the first, McWard made it 2-0 before Westlund and Thiesing potted goals early in the second period within six seconds of each other to make it 4-0. Defenseman Mason Lohrei, Dunlap, McWard and junior Patrick Guzzo scored after that. The final shot totals looked somewhat respectable at 40-22, only because Harvard had a 14-6 advantage in the third period.

"Everything was clicking," Wise said. "I think we all know that when we play like that it doesn't really matter who we play. We're still confident that we could play and even dominate teams."

The eight goals surpassed the previous record of five when the Buckeyes defeated Denver 5-1 in the 2018 NCAA tournament.

Coming And Going

With the season over, attention turns to

what could be a seismic shift in the program for the 2023-24 season.

There are 13 seniors on the roster and 11 of them have a bonus year of eligibility awarded to them by the NCAA due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some may stay, some will likely transfer and others will sign pro contracts or begin life outside of hockey.

Of the most interest are the futures of two sophomores – Dobeš (Montreal Canadiens, fifth-round pick in 2020) and Lohrei (Boston Bruins, second-round pick 2020). Both could end up signing with their respective teams.



Jakub Dobeš

Badgered

The Wisconsin job is open after the firing of Tony Granato on March 6, and Rohlik is a hot topic as his replacement because he was a senior captain when the Badgers won the 1990 NCAA championship.

In 10 seasons with the Buckeyes, he has four NCAA tournament appearances, all since the 2016-17 season, and would have had a fifth if not for the pandemic-related cancellation of the 2020 tournament. He was an assistant at Ohio State for three years prior to becoming the head coach.

BIG Time

Unlike the conference men's basketball programs that presented disappointment after disappointment in the NCAA Tournament, the Big Ten had an NCAA regional weekend for the ages with a spectacular display of power in the first round with the four schools outscoring the opposition 36-4 to set all kinds of historical benchmarks.

Those results were the impetus for Minnesota and Michigan to earn berths in the Frozen Four. The Golden Gophers won the Fargo, N.D., region final over St. Cloud State, 4-1, and will face Boston University, a 2-1 winner vs. Cornell in Manchester, N.H., on April 6 in the second semifinal. The title game is April 8.

Minnesota, the conference regular-season champ and No. 1 seed for the NCAAs, started off by blitzing Canisius 9-2 on March 24, scoring the final eight goals. The following day, there was the Buckeyes' 8-1 win followed by Penn State's 8-0 thrashing of Michigan Tech and Michigan's 11-1 humiliation of Colgate.

Only eight of 285 NCAA tournament games from 2003 to 2022 had a team score eight goals or more, and the Big Ten's fearsome foursome did it four times in two days.

The Wolverines' 11 goals were the most in the tournament since Denver defeated St. Lawrence 12-2 in the 1961 championship game. The 10-goal margin of victory was the third largest in an NCAA men's tournament game.

While the Big Ten unleashed its might and is staking a claim as the best conference in the country, the fact is the last time a Big Ten school won a national title in men's hockey was Michigan State in 2007.

That comes with an asterisk. The Spar-

tans were part of the Central Collegiate Hockey Association, as were the Buckeyes and Wolverines. There was no such thing as a Big Ten hockey conference until newcomer (to hockey) Penn State joined the three CCHA schools and Minnesota and Wisconsin from the Western Collegiate Hockey Association for the 2013-14 season.

There were fears that the resources and fame of those Big Ten schools, plus Notre Dame being added as an associate member to become the seventh team at the start of the 2017-18 season, would ruin college hockey for the little schools that compete at the Division I level in hockey only.

The 2018 Frozen Four featured Michigan, Notre Dame and Ohio State, and many people rejoiced when the outlier, Minnesota Duluth, defeated the Fighting Irish in the title game.

A similar anti-Big Ten sentiment was expressed by Michigan Tech coach Joe Shawhan after the eight-goal loss to Penn State. He mentioned how name, image and likeness and the transfer portal are changing the landscape, and not for the better in his opinion.

"The Big Ten is flexing a little muscle right now, and how do you compete with players who are getting paid and things like that?" he said. "And they're jumping ship, jumping ship, jumping ship. You're putting your team together, and people can put their team together out of the portal now.

"And I'm not complaining about it. I just think college hockey's such a beautiful sport, and the parity, the opportunity for schools like St. Cloud, Michigan Tech, Mankato, Duluth – all Division II schools that have won a lot of national championships – you look at their roster and you say, 'Well, I could use that guy, I could use that guy.' You see it everywhere. To take the parity out of it, all of a sudden you get the SEC and the Big Ten in football, that's all you get, and lose everybody else.

"Even coaches will be jumping ship. It's a tough way to go through life when you're trying to teach life lessons and develop men."

Among Big Ten programs, Michigan has won nine national titles with the most recent in 1998. The Wolverines' first came in the inaugural 1948 tourney.

Wisconsin's last of six championships came in 2006; Minnesota has five following their victory in 2003, and Michigan State's other titles came in 1986 and 1966.

Take A Bow

Four Buckeyes earned All-Big Ten honors as announced on March 14.

Wise and Lohrei were named to the second team while Dobeš and freshman forward Stephen Halliday received honorable mention.

Lohrei, who made the honorable-mention list last season, was a finalist for Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year for a second straight season. Dobeš made the first team in 2021-22 when he was also voted the Big Ten Goaltender of the Year.

For a complete recap of the NCAA tournament games check out the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers.

OSU Finishes Fourth At NCAA Championships

Ohio State's wrestling season came to a close March 18 with a strong team finish at the NCAA championships in Tulsa, Okla.

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

The Buckeyes finished fourth with a tally of 70.5 points, behind repeat national champion Penn State (137.5), Iowa (82.5) and Cornell (76.5). Ohio State had five wrestlers reach All-American status with a finish of eighth or better, with Sammy Sasso posting the best finish of all of them as the runner-up at 149 pounds.

"The guys wrestled really well," Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan told Press Pros Magazine. "I'm really proud of them. We always want more. But you have to learn to be happy with what you get."

Sasso, entering as the second seed in his weight class, cruised his way to the quarterfinals before winning a tight 2-1 battle against Northwestern's seventh-seeded Yahya Thomas to advance to the semis. There he met third-seeded Kyle Parco of Arizona State in what was expected to be a hotly-contested bout, but it wasn't, as Sasso smashed Parco via a 14-2 major decision and advanced to the championship match.

There, he met three-time national champion and top-seeded Yianni Diakomihalis of Cornell, and despite a strong fight, Sasso took silver after a 4-2 loss. It very nearly went to overtime, as well – Sasso secured a takedown as time wound down but it was not awarded before the buzzer.

"It was a match of very, very similar style wrestlers," Ryan said. "If Sammy had a few more seconds, he would have scored. He came out the back and it looked like he had two. Time just ran out on him. It was an unbelievable match of two great technicians."

Kaleb Romero fell in the quarterfinals at 184 pounds to eventual national champion Aaron Brooks but went on a rampage in wrestlebacks, winning three straight matches and moving past fourth-seeded Trey Munoz of Oregon State by medical forfeit to reach the third-place match.

In that bronze matchup, Romero met second-seeded Trent Hilday of N.C. State. The Ohio State grappler was considered the underdog as the fifth seed in the weight class but managed to pull out a 3-1 win in sudden victory after scoring a takedown to end the match. It wasn't a certainty whether he got it before the timer expired on the extra period, but a review confirmed that he came out on top.

"I knew I had both of his feet and it was a takedown," Romero told Press Pros. "But you never really know. I had both feet and I was pretty sure, so I was pretty excited, but I had to keep composure just in case they didn't call it."

In a look to the future, Ohio State freshman Jesse Mendez managed to make a run into sixth place at 133 pounds after start-

ing as the No. 13 seed in the bracket. His run included wins over seed Nos. 19, 11, 10 and 6, with the latter of those being a revenge match against Virginia Tech's Sam Latona, who beat Mendez during the regular season. Mendez lost in the consolation semifinals and ensuing fifth-place match, but the freshman's run remains impressive.

At 174 pounds, No. 6 Ethan Smith got upset early by 11th-seeded Nelson Brands of Iowa but rattled off three consecutive victories in wrestlebacks to work his way into the seventh-place match. He closed his tournament in dominant fashion, handing Missouri's Peyton Mocco a 12-2 defeat by major decision.

Dylan D'Emilio rounded out the list of All-Americans for Ohio State, taking eighth place at 141 pounds. That doesn't make his run any less impressive, however, as he started the tournament as the No. 17 seed in his division. Opening with a win over Navy's Josh Koderhandt, he quickly dropped into wrestlebacks with a loss to top-seeded Real Woods of Iowa.

He got to work in those wrestlebacks. D'Emilio rattled off wins against 15th-seeded Tom Crook of Virginia Tech – shutting him out in a 10-0 major decision to earn the Buckeyes bonus points – and 23rd-seeded Cole Mattin of Michigan before meeting what appeared to be a certain end to his run in Pittsburgh's third-seeded Cole Matthews.

With All-America status on the line, it ended up being one of the tightest bouts in the weight class. Neither man could score a takedown, with both getting an escape from bottom position, and neither could score in sudden victory.

The match went to rideouts, with each wrestler getting 30 seconds to try to escape. D'Emilio escaped in all of two seconds during his period on bottom, then rode out Matthews for the victory. Back-to-back losses afterward placed him eighth.

"All of our guys wrestled above their seeds," Ryan said of D'Emilio, Mendez and Smith. "Ethan Smith's win in the blood round was huge, because he beat a kid from Missouri and we were trying to hold them off for fourth. He not only beat the Missouri kid, he kept wrestling and got us bonus points. That was huge."

Four other wrestlers competed for Ohio State at the NCAA championships, enjoying runs of varying length. Carson Kharchla started hot as the No. 10 seed at 165 pounds, beating 23rd-seeded Connor Brady (Virginia Tech) and seventh-seeded Michael Caliendo III (North Dakota State), but back-to-back losses against second-seeded Keegan O'Toole (Missouri) and 12th-seeded Izzak Olejnik (Northern Illinois) ended his run.

At heavyweight, Tate Orndorff faced an uphill battle as the No. 16 seed after dropping his opening match against 17th-seeded Tye Gladioli (Campbell). He looked as though he had a chance to capture All-American status after rattling off three straight wrestleback victories, but he fell to No. 5 Cohlton Schultz (Arizona State) by a 2-1 decision.

No. 28 Paddy Gallagher finished his

OSU NCAA Results

125: Injury
133: No. 14 Jesse Mendez, 6th*
141: No. 17 Dylan D'Emilio, 8th*
149: No. 2 Sammy Sasso, 2nd*
157: No. 28 Paddy Gallagher
165: No. 10 Carson Kharchla
174: No. 6 Ethan Smith, 7th*
184: No. 6 Kaleb Romero, 3rd*
197: No. 26 Gavin Hoffman
285: No. 16 Tate Orndorff
***earned All-America status**

campaign with a 2-2 showing at 157 pounds, beating No. 21 Andrew Clark (Rutgers) and No. 22 Derek Holschlag (Northern Iowa) in wrestlebacks before falling to No. 20 Cael Swenson (South Dakota State) by a 4-3 decision. Gavin Hoffman, entering as No. 26 at 197 pounds, picked up a win in wrestlebacks against No. 23 Luke Stout (Princeton) before falling to No. 9 Max Dean (Penn State) by a 6-0 decision.

Big Ten Shows Out At NCAAs

Penn State repeated as national champions in dominant fashion, pacing the field by 55 points over conference rival Iowa with a score of 137.5. The standings were littered with Big Ten schools, however.

After fourth-place Ohio State was sixth-place Michigan (58.5 points) and eighth-place Nebraska (54.0), putting four Big Ten schools in the top eight. Extending to the top 20, the Big Ten placed three more teams, with Minnesota at No. 15 (30.5), Wisconsin tied with Northern Iowa for No. 16 (29.0) and Purdue tied with Lehigh for No. 20 (28.0).

Heavyweight and 174 pounds featured All-Big Ten finals, with Michigan's Mason Parris meeting Penn State's Greg Kerkvliet at heavyweight and Parris winning via a 5-1 decision. At 174 pounds, Penn State's Carter Starocci didn't have a wrestler come within two points of him, capping off a dominant run with a pin of second-seeded Mikey Labriola of Nebraska. Penn State's Aaron Brooks pulled an upset at 184, winning the crown as the bracket's third seed after defeating top-seeded Parker Keckeisen of Northern Iowa via a 7-2 decision.

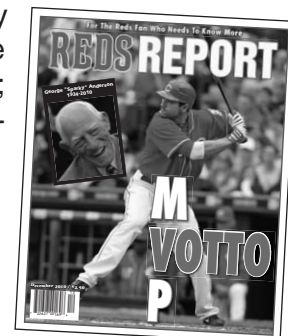
Three top-seeded Big Ten grapplers did suffer upsets in their respective brackets, however. At 133 pounds, Penn State's Roman Bravo-Young fell to third-seeded Vito Arujau of Cornell, 10-4, and Iowa's three-time national champion Spencer Lee suffered a major upheaval at 125 when he lost in the semifinals to the fourth-seeded Matt Ramos of Purdue. Lee forfeited the remainder of the tournament to finish sixth.

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Mindset Change Paying Dividends For OSU Women

It's funny yet sad that it took Kevin McGuff this long to learn that the old football adage about defense winning championships also has a place in college basketball.

For nearly all of his time at Ohio State, McGuff bore a striking resemblance to Ryan Day in terms of the way his teams were modeled and played. Tremendous firepower on offense but lacking on defense. When the shooting was off or the other team had similar talent, the Buckeyes were ousted.

THE FACTS MAN
Mike Wachsman

So it was refreshing to see an Ohio State team that actually set traps and jumped into passing lanes and made things tough for an opponent – in this case, mighty Connecticut. The Huskies' dynasty looked more like a regular old college team, one that was thrown off rhythm by the Buckeyes' frenetic defensive play.

UConn turned the ball over 25 times, which prevented it from getting closer than five points in the second half. Ohio State actually trailed after the opening quarter before turning up the defensive pressure, led at half-

time and never looked back.

Freshman Cotie McMahon has the look of the next big-time Buckeyes star, showing an ability to create her own shot. Whether swishing jumpers from the top of the key or driving to the hoop, McMahon was too much for UConn to deal with, and she left enough of an imprint that it mattered little when she fouled out late in the contest.

The other spark for Ohio State was guard Jacy Sheldon, who missed the bulk of the regular season with injury. She was steady with the ball in the backcourt, deftly set up her teammates and hit some clutch free throws that kept UConn at bay on the rare occasions it threatened to get back into the contest.

As of their win over the Huskies, the Buckeyes ranked 268th nationally in scoring defense, allowing 68.0 points per contest as of March 26, and allowed over 75 in each of their last four non-NCAA tournament contests. Included in that stretch was a 105-point burst by Iowa in the Big Ten title game, which could easily have left the Buckeyes doubting themselves and going into the tournament in a bad place mentally.

But to McGuff's credit, Ohio State buckled down on defense in the tournament, cutting the points allowed down to 65.3 in three contests.

That hard-nosed mentality and commitment to defense propelled Ohio State to its first Elite Eight since a precocious bunch of

freshmen set college basketball on its ear in 1993. That crew, led by all-time great Katie Smith, made it all the way to the national championship game, coming up two points short against Texas Tech and one of the all-time great performances – a title game-record 47 points – by Sheryl Swoopes.

Whether or not this is the blueprint for the Ohio State women going forward, this has been a tremendous run for a team that had the potential but didn't always live up to it.

Stroud Ascends To The Top

From the "Water is Wet" and "The Sun Rose Today" files, C.J. Stroud looks to be a favorite to be not only the top quarterback selected in the NFL draft in late April, but the first overall pick.

Anyone who watched college football the last two seasons could have come to this conclusion, yet there were analysts fawning all over athletic but undersized Bryce Young of Alabama, who does his best work outside of the pocket. Young is an excellent talent and has a clutch gene for days, but the NFL, even with all of its evolution, is still a league where games are won and lost from the pocket. And Stroud has Young beat there by a mile.

Onlookers were apparently in awe of Stroud's accuracy, timing and ball placement during Ohio State's pro day, but they shouldn't have been if they watched even one quarter of a Buckeye game this past season. Stroud makes NFL throws look routine and has deceptive arm strength. It doesn't look like he is throwing hard, but the ball gets to the receivers in a hurry. Speaking of receivers, they are one reason Stroud had maybe a few doubters prior to his pro day performance.

People said, "Well, anyone can throw to guys who are always wide open," and while true in theory, Stroud made more than his share of timing and tight-window throws. Does it benefit him to have stellar receivers? Sure it does, as they can help on the rare occasions he throws a poorly placed pass.

For what it's worth, this is not a great quarterback class. Stroud and Young are quite a bit better than everyone else, and both should have excellent NFL careers – though Young will need to put on some size at just 5-10, 204 pounds. Few players that small have gone on to big-time pro careers – and before anyone says Drew Brees, it should be noted that he was close to 210 pounds when drafted in 2001 and was closer to six feet than Young is.

Joining Stroud in the first round should be his protectors, Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones. Both are rated among the top five tackles available, and each is supremely talented at keeping quarterbacks upright.

Receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba showed that he cannot be overlooked, posting a 4.48 40-yard dash and cementing himself as a top two receiver in this year's draft. He should be a mainstay for a team as a slot receiver for years to come.

Bigger Isn't Always Better

It's been interesting to hear people chattering about the NCAA Tournament and comparing it to the soon-to-expand College Football Playoff.

All I do is laugh, for a number of reasons – chief among them that basketball and football are wholly different sports and their postsea-

sons have different goals.

The NCAA Tournament is trying to put together the most "fun" matchups, most "fun" tournament possible. It isn't trying to find the best team. If it was, the field would be much smaller, reserved for the elite of the elite, teams that earned their way with a conference championship (regular-season variety, by the way).

The CFP rewards on-field play and is actually trying to find the best team, which is why it is light-years better than the Big Dance. Rewarding excellence should be the goal of every sport, and to that end, postseasons should be difficult to get into.

The second reason I chuckle is when reading social media and seeing people loving the upsets. Blue bloods such as Kansas and UCLA were nowhere to be found in the Elite Eight, and Kentucky and Duke were gone even earlier. A lot of fans seem to think that this type of thing will happen in college football when the CFP moves to a dozen teams. I have some bad news for them – it won't.

Unlike basketball, where one superstar can carry you to a title, football relies more on teamwork, functioning as a whole and, quite often, sheer strength and speed. Those last two areas are where the Group of Five teams are lagging and why they won't be able to knock off an Alabama or Ohio State or Georgia.

We already saw the best Group of Five team of the CFP era, Cincinnati in 2021, get bullied by an Alabama team that wasn't one of Nick Saban's best units. There's more where that came from, but the expansionists still want to see it. It will get old after about three or four years of blowouts, at which point that group will need to go back to the drawing board. Basketball is also a sport where one bad night of shooting can doom even the best teams.

The only real "Cinderellas" in the CFP would be a two-loss Crimson Tide or Buckeyes or Bulldogs squad seeded seventh or eighth. Talent wins in college football, and those three have been recruiting the best and most in recent years.

Can a Boise State or Appalachian State or Coastal Carolina spring a first-round upset? Sure, if the foe is someone like Texas Tech or Oregon State or Michigan State. Mid-level Power Five teams can lose to upper-tier Group of Five squads, so maybe the expansionists will be satisfied with one win and then going home. Because there isn't a Group of Five team around that has the horses to make a long run in the CFP.

And that's why college football's postseason is better than college basketball's – because it is rewarding excellence. Oh, and another thing – college football's regular season actually matters, though that will be slightly less so with more teams infiltrating the CFP. Few give a hoot about hoops until it's time to fill out brackets, and I couldn't tell you the last truly high-stakes nonconference regular-season game. Maybe UCLA-Houston in 1968?

Folks can have their brackets. Yours truly will be content with watching the drama of college football unfold each week, with teams losing and then having no margin for error the rest of the way. That, my friends, is top-notch theater.

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'Buckeye Barrier' Was A Tough Nut To Crack

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

By the time you read this, the fate of the Ohio State women's basketball team will have been determined. The Buckeyes' Elite Eight game with Virginia Tech was set to tip off right after Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

Whether Ohio State advances to only its second Final Four in its sometimes illustrious history or not, the Buckeyes achieved a significant milestone this season. They broke what a poster on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum aptly called the "Buckeye Barrier" – advancing past the Sweet 16. That the Buckeyes advanced at the expense of perennial power Connecticut just made it that much more gratifying.

Back in the formative years of NCAA women's basketball, Ohio State advanced to the Elite Eight under Tara VanDerveer in 1985 and Nancy Darsch in 1987. But the '85 tournament featured a 32-team field and the '87 tourney a 40-team field, making the path to the Elite Eight easier for each of those coaches.

By 1993, the women's bracket had expanded to 48 teams, still leaving a clearer path to the Elite Eight. The Buckeyes went all the way to the national championship game that year under Darsch, Ohio State's only Final Four appearance up until the possible trip this season.

The field expanded to 64 teams the following season, but it would make little difference to Ohio State, which made just one appearance in the Big Dance in Darsch's final four seasons, and that ended in the second round.

The Buckeye Barrier was firmly in place.

After an unsuccessful five-year stint under Beth Burns, the Buckeyes turned to future Hall of Famer Jim Foster for the 2002-03 season. Foster was coming off a wildly successful 11-year stay at Vanderbilt, where his teams made three Sweet 16s, four Elite Eights and one Final Four – ironically, the same year Darsch and her Buckeyes made it to college basketball's pinnacle.

While Foster had great regular-season success with the Buckeyes (he did not like the name Lady Buckeyes), winning six straight conference championships from 2004-10, his teams only made it as far as the Sweet 16 three times, and he was relieved of his duties following the 2012-13 season, presumably because of his inability to advance deeper in the tournament.

Enter Kevin McGuff, who had led Xavier to the Elite Eight in 2010. But it was more of the same for the Buckeyes, as he led Ohio State to three more Sweet 16s in his first nine seasons, but no farther.

Then comes this season's group of spunky Buckeyes, who survived pivotal injuries, followed a big winning streak with conference struggles, and then seemed to peak at just the right time, finally breaking the Buckeye Barrier. Is the monkey off the team's back?

"When I had the opportunity to come to Ohio State, this was certainly the goal and the vision to go farther than they have been going, and it's not easy to get here," McGuff said after his team beat the Huskies. "I'm really proud of our team and our program, of how we've evolved to be able to get to this point.

"I have so much respect for (UConn head coach Geno Auriemma) and his staff and all that they have accomplished. So, for us to be able to win this game in the Sweet 16 is obviously extremely significant. They're hard to beat, they're so well coached, so this is a great win for us."

And the win over the Huskies was no fluke.

After a slow start, the Buckeyes were in almost complete control for most of the game, forcing the 11-time national champions into 25 turnovers, 18 in the first half to help the Buckeyes take a 36-26 lead into the locker room.

The closest UConn would get in the second

half was five points at the 3:53 mark of the third quarter, and Ohio State would lead by as many as 18 points in the final stanza.

While the Buckeyes were led by freshman sensation Cotie McMahon with 23 points and five rebounds, it's hard not to wonder if Ohio State peaked in time for March Madness because of the return of Jacy Sheldon, who missed most of the season due to injury.

In Ohio State's three NCAA victories before BSB went to press, Sheldon averaged 16.7 points, 6.0 rebounds, 6.3 assists and 2.7 steals, going 22 of 23 (95.7 percent) from the foul line in the process. Perhaps most importantly after her injury-limited season, she logged an average of 38.0 minutes in the tournament games, giving the Buckeyes the type of intangibles that don't show up in the box score.

If Sheldon had been available throughout the season, perhaps the Buckeyes would have posted better than their 25-7 record heading into the tournament, which might have left them with a higher than No. 3 seed. But that would have altered the bracket, which probably would have eliminated Connecticut as the opponent in the breakthrough victory, an opponent that made the pivotal win all the more thrilling.

As Jackie Gleason might say, "How sweet it is." Or in this case, how Elite.

Learning On The Job

Before I get too far into this note, I want to stress – as I did a couple of issues back – that I am one of Brian Hartline's biggest fans. I did caution at the time of that last writing, however, that Hartline's incredible success as receivers coach does not guarantee his success as offensive coordinator, and I also raised an eyebrow when head coach Ryan Day indicated he might not be giving up his play-calling duties after all. That move was supposed to free him up to deal with the bigger picture. Hartline would essentially have to audition during the spring before Day gave up the play sheet.

The head coach reiterated the need for a trial period once spring practice began.

"We'll put a little game plan together, let him call it and see how it goes," Day said heading into the team's scrimmage on March 25.

Our own Braden Moles was at that scrimmage and had this to say afterward on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum.

"One thing I was keeping an eye on was who was taking the reins with practice," Braden posted. "Hartline was utilizing a headset and play-calling sheet for most of practice while Day was without a headset and did more roaming through the different position groups. It seems like Hartline has a legitimate shot to call plays next year."

What I am concerned about is that, if he does take over the play-calling, is Hartline going to be learning on the job? This is the highest level of college football, and there is little margin for error.

"It's like playing Madden, I guess," Hartline said of calling plays. "The more I can continue to be involved and grow, I'm excited about that. That's kind of been (my) whole path through sports, sports in general. But we'll see how it all plays out."

Playing Madden?

Come on, man. We've got to beat Michigan this season.

The bigger question remains whether Day will actually give up the play calling. He all but

admitted that becoming CEO of the team has not been as easy a transition as he might have hoped.

"You have a bigger lens on everything and you're able to see from a big-picture view," Day said of stepping back from running the offense. "But it doesn't take long before I'm running over there and coaching up the quarterbacks."

He held on to play calling when Kevin Wilson – a coach with far more experience running an offense than Hartline – was present, so you have to wonder if he will ever give that duty up completely.

As my way of saying farewell to Wilson, not to compare Hartline to him, let's try to appreciate who Day had at his side for six seasons before the former offensive coordinator headed off to lead the Tulsa program.

As offensive coordinator at Oklahoma in 2008, he led the Sooners to a then-NCAA record 716 points with Sam Bradford passing for 4,720 yards and 50 touchdowns. For their efforts, Bradford won the Heisman Trophy and Wilson won the Broyles Award as the nation's top assistant coach.

That season, no doubt, helped him land the job as head coach at Indiana. There, in his final five seasons in Bloomington, his Hoosiers led the Big Ten Conference in passing yards per game (226.7 yards) and were second in total yards per game (459.3 yards), third in points per game (31.4 points) and fourth in rushing yards per game (192.7 yards).

In fact, Wilson coached two of the four teams in FBS history that produced a 3,500-yard passer, two 1,000-yard rushers and a 1,000-yard receiver in the same year. His 2015 Indiana and 2008 Oklahoma offenses achieved the feat. The others are USC in 2005 and Southern Mississippi in 2015. Additionally, Ohio State in 2018 was just 46 rushing yards by Mike Weber away from being the fifth team to accomplish the feat.

Here are some facts and figures from Wilson's time in Columbus from the Tulsa media guide: His offenses at Ohio State averaged 524.1 yards and 43.6 points per game. The Buckeyes topped 500 yards of total offense 47 times and 600 yards 18 times. They scored 410 touchdowns (second most nationally), with 242 of those scores coming through the air (first nationally). In addition to the many 1,000-yard receiving seasons accrued while Wilson was at the offensive helm, he was also in charge when Ohio State recorded its first 2,000-yard rusher in J.K. Dobbins.

And despite all that offensive success in Wilson's career, at Ohio State it was Day who called the plays.

Now, maybe, it's Hartline's turn. Even with no experience running an offense, if anyone can succeed in play-calling to Day's satisfaction, it's Hartline. He has been successful at everything else he has done in football.

We will see if he gets the chance.

Reading Between The Lines

Remember those days not so long ago when Ohio State's defensive ends would run wild in opposing backfields and were the envy of football programs throughout the nation? That was fun, wasn't it?

With a pair of veteran five-star ends flanking the line now that Jack Sawyer is back to join J.T. Tuimoloau after playing at the hybrid "Jack" position last season, maybe we'll get back to that type of defensive pressure.

I found a quote from defensive line coach Larry Johnson interesting.

"I think (we can find) another guy who can probably play the Jack and let (Sawyer) put his hand in the ground and go rush," Johnson said. "We brought him here to do that. *It was a good experiment, but now let's go play football.* (my italics) And I think that's the best position for him."

Is that a sign that Johnson wasn't wild about not having Sawyer at defensive end last season?

Need Help? You Can Help

Some of you may have missed my column a few issues back, outlining how increases in the cost of printing and mailing have been a burden here at Buckeye Sports Bulletin, as we try to maintain a vibrant and viable – and affordable – publication. All of us have seen price increases in virtually everything we buy or do in recent months, and BSB is trying to avoid the seemingly exorbitant increases that we are seeing by finding ways to work as a BSB family to hold the price line as best as possible.

That is why you have seen many suggestions in this space as to how readers can help. One of the most important ways is taking the time to email us at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com and offer your thoughts on price points with which you are comfortable and the number of issues of BSB that you would like to see annually, along with things you like and don't like about the paper. We have also asked that those readers who can afford to do so help underwrite the subscription cost of some of our fixed-income readers through such things as our VIP program.

One of the subscribers who reached out had this to say:

"Frank, I am one of those readers who you always talk about who struggles to pay full price for my Buckeye Sports Bulletin. But I have been a subscriber for 30-40 years and wonder if there are things that I can do to help."

First, I want to thank the subscriber for his long-term loyalty. And there are things that anyone can do to help with no cost involved. As suggested here recently, when you are done with your BSB, drop it off at your barber shop. That's a great way to introduce new readers to BSB. Take a copy to your local library and suggest that they subscribe or buy a subscription for them through the Vibrant and Viable promotion, another way for great exposure.

Make sure we have your email address. The best offers are almost always sent via email, and if you take advantage of one of those offers, it saves you money and saves us the cost of multiple renewal cards.

Be sure to enjoy our electronic BuckeyeSports.com website, free with your subscription. There are stories posted every day that you don't see in the print BSB, giving you greater value for your subscription, and joining in on the Fan Forum, with other subscribers and staff members, is fun and informative. Page views generate additional revenue for BSB and cost you nothing.

And finally, don't forget that we will always send four free trial issues to any Buckeye fan you know with no obligation. Why not introduce your children or grandchildren to the joys of reading a newspaper? Send us your trial names and addresses along with your comments at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, phone us at (614) 486-2202 or send your names to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

Thanks for your help!

Reds

APRIL LINEUP!



MAR. 30-APR. 2



presented by **altafiber**

THURSDAY // 4:10

• **OPENING DAY**

• **Reds Magnetic Schedule and Car Magnet, presented by PNC Bank** (while supplies last)



SATURDAY // 4:10

• **KIDS OPENING DAY**, presented by Cutie's

• **Kids Opening Day Cap, presented by Cincinnati Children's** (to kids 14 and younger in attendance, while supplies last)



SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**

• **Reds Calendar, presented by Kroger** (to fans in attendance, while supplies last)



APRIL 3-5



presented by **Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste**

MONDAY // 6:40

3-2-1 TUESDAYS

• **3-2-1 Tuesdays***, presented by **Budweiser and Bud Light** \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!

*Limit 2 per person

WEDNESDAY // 12:35

• **Business Day Specials**

Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

• **Senior Days, presented by Meals on Wheels**



APRIL 13-16



presented by **LifeCenter**

THURSDAY // 6:40

• **Thirsty Thursdays**

Catch the game & receive \$10 in concession credits for \$30!

FRIDAY // 6:40

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by LifeCenter**

SATURDAY // 4:10

• **Great American Ball Park Replica, presented by TriHealth** (celebrating the 20th anniversary of the ballpark's opening, to fans in attendance, while supplies last)



• **Jackie Robinson Baseball Card, presented by LifeCenter** (celebrating MLB's annual Jackie Robinson Day, to fans in attendance, while supplies last)



SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**

• **Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by Thomas More University** (to kids 14 and younger as part of Family Day at the ballpark, while supplies last)



APRIL 17-19



MONDAY // 6:40

3-2-1 TUESDAYS

• **3-2-1 Tuesdays***, presented by **Budweiser and Bud Light** \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!

*Limit 2 per person

WEDNESDAY // 12:35

• **Business Day Specials**

Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

• **Senior Days, presented by Meals on Wheels**



APRIL 24-26



MONDAY // 6:40

TUESDAY // 6:40

• **3-2-1 Tuesdays***, presented by **Budweiser and Bud Light** \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!

*Limit 2 per person

WEDNESDAY // 12:35

• **Business Day Specials**

Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

• **Senior Days, presented by Meals on Wheels**

(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.com/Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.