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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

May 2023

No Clarity On Quarterback Battle Exiting Spring Practice

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Spring practice began for Ohio State without a defined starter at quarterback, and more than six weeks later, the Buckeyes and head coach Ryan Day still do not have an answer as to who will be under center on Sept. 2 at Indiana.

This is despite Day hoping to name a starting quarterback after spring practice concluded, wishful that 15 practice sessions – as well as some full-fledged scrimmages mixed in – would map out a path to name either sophomore Kyle McCord or redshirt freshman Devin Brown as the quarterback who will follow the trail left by C.J. Stroud.

"I don't know where we'll be. I hope that one of them emerges and we can name a starter," Day said on Feb. 1. "I really do. Because I think the way that our dynamic is, I think it would be great for our program to be able to do that. There were times in the past when I didn't see that happening. I'm hoping that can happen. If it doesn't, it doesn't. But some vision on who the starter is coming out of the spring would be nice, so we're hoping that one of them emerges here in these 15 practices."

That opportunity was presented at Ohio State's spring game on April 15. With Brown out due to surgery on a fractured right pinkie finger, it put the spotlight on McCord with a chance to fully cement himself as the Buckeyes' starter. By most accounts, McCord already held a slim lead in the quarterback battle given his previous starter experience and more time spent in the program than Brown, but a standout performance in front of 75,122 fans at Ohio Stadium would make it hard to deny him as heir to the throne.

"It's a piece of the puzzle, for sure," Day said on April 12 of how much the spring game factors into their evaluation. "I mean,



SONNY BROCKWAY

LOOKING FOR A LEADER — Despite Ohio State head coach Ryan Day hoping to name a starting quarterback coming out of the spring, neither Kyle McCord (pictured) nor Devin Brown was able to take control of the job.

we've had guys who have gone out and played really, really well in that game and not really had great careers. And then other guys who have really played poorly in that game and had great careers. I'd say the majority of it, it's a pretty good indication of how they're going to handle themselves in a pressure environment."

McCord had an up-and-down outing as the offense suffered a 40-31 loss to the defense in a modified scoring format (more on page 15). He completed just 52.9 percent of his passes (18 of 34) for 184 yards and one touchdown while taking three sacks, with five of his passes broken up either near the line of scrimmage or in the secondary.

While he was accurate in close range, going 14 of 19 on passes within 9 yards of the line of scrimmage, he struggled from beyond that point, completing just three of his 12 passes that traveled more than 10 yards, with several sailing out of bounds. His three other passing attempts were thrown short of the line.

There were also some highlights, such as a 36-yard gain to Marvin Harrison Jr. in which McCord layered the ball over a pair of defensive backs and a later 37-yard touchdown to freshman wideout Carnell Tate, whom McCord connected with in stride on a perfect throw. But McCord's performance was mostly in line with what had been seen over practice sessions in the weeks prior – some good, some bad, but still growth, according to Day.

"I think that the pocket sometimes was clean, other times not as clean," Day said. "I think Marvin only played

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From The Message Board

It's been five years since Joe Burrow announced that he would transfer to LSU after losing out on Ohio State's quarterback competition during spring camp to Dwayne Haskins. For Fan Forum, we asked our readers if they believe Ohio State made the right decision in rolling with Dwayne Haskins over Burrow, and how they envision Haskins' career would have gone in the NFL if not for his tragic death. Here are some of the responses:

"I do think Ohio State made the right decision when choosing Haskins over Burrow and each player's performance the following year reinforces the idea. Haskins played much better at OSU than Burrow did his first year at LSU.

"I think there's a 50/50 chance that Haskins would have been an outstanding, 10+ years, NFL quarterback. Extraordinary natural abilities as a passer."

- Terrier Buck

"After Haskins' performance in The Game the year before, it would have been very difficult for Burrow to beat him out in the spring unless he was decisively better, which I don't recall he was and even then it would have been a battle for Joe.

"As for Haskins in the pros, he had some growing up to do but certainly had the tools."

- Mcarr

"I think Burrow had better chemistry with the coaches at LSU. He certainly developed quickly there, so I think it played out well for all involved. As for Haskins, he needed to right his ship but was very able to do so. We will never know

if he would have. I think he would have."

- PeyoteBuck

"Burrow wasn't overly good his first year at LSU."

- Tiffin Buckeye

"I think some Buckeye fans are blinded by what Joe Burrow has become. Ohio State is in a win-now business and Dwayne Haskins proved he was ready by having a season for the ages in 2018. Sadly, he couldn't play defense to help the Buckeyes have a season for the ages that year. Meanwhile, Burrow would have a competent, learning season at LSU in 2018. Again, I feel like some Buckeye fans think he had his Heisman season the same year Haskins beat him out. NOT!

"As for Haskins in the pros, sadly we will never know. But he certainly had the tools. What if he hadn't been drafted into a dysfunctional organization?"

"I do think we Buckeye fans still embrace Burrow as one of our own and the fact that he ended up with an Ohio team makes it even easier for us to embrace him."

- Poster That Harley Built

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State's annual spring game on April 15 gave Buckeye fans their first glimpse at the roster for the upcoming season. With several standout players in the scrimmage, Buckeye Sports Bulletin asked staff and readers whose performance was worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves.

Andy Anders, BSB: Sophomore linebacker C.J. Hicks gets my Buckeye Leaf after showcasing the athleticism and ability that made him a five-star - mostly in pass coverage.

The Ohio native swatted away and nearly intercepted a third-and-7 pass on the first drive of the scrimmage to force a three-and-out. Then later Hicks broke sharply on a comeback route and got two hands on a well-thrown if ill-advised ball, nearly coming up with an interception but instead settling for another drive-killing pass breakup.

Jack Emerson, BSB: It was a rough day for Ohio State's offense, but running back Chip Trayanum emerged as a bright spot for the unit.

After being held without a touchdown for the first nine drives of the spring game, Trayanum breathed some life into the offense with a 65-yard dash to the end zone for the unit's lone touchdown of the first half. In the first two quarters, Trayanum rushed for 85 yards on six carries, churning out 14.2 yards per attempt.

In all, Trayanum finished the game with 110 yards on eight carries.

Braden Moles, BSB: A focus all spring for Ohio State's defense

has been getting more hands on more footballs, and that practice was evident during Ohio State's spring game.

Cornerback Denzel Burke, who is looking for some redemption this season after not notching an interception during his sophomore campaign, recorded two pass breakups during the spring game and in general seemed to be around the ball nearly his entire time in the scrimmage.

While the exhibition itself is not high stakes, if Burke is the ballhawk this upcoming season that he was in the spring game, Ohio State could be looking at a revitalized secondary.

BOB CODY: I agree with the three above and would add Jayden Ballard, Carnell Tate and Kyle McCord as well.

Most of the time (McCord) was noticeably restrained by the plays called early. He got rid of it when pressure ensued. When the restraints were taken off in the second half, he excelled. As some have mentioned, in a spring game, which is really a practice, you need to look and evaluate each play, and not evaluate it as an entire body of work.

Tiffin Buckeye: Carnell Tate.

BuckeyeScott: Give one to Archie, he's still got it!

PeyoteBuck: No contest, leaves for Archie!

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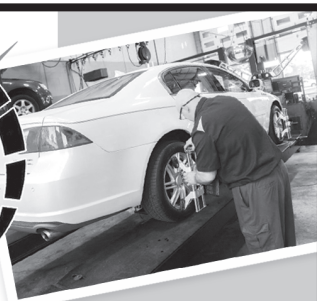
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PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Braden Moles

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsmann 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

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

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Paula Serra Ron Friedman

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No. 12	Dec. 3	No. 24	August

The next issue (June cover date) will be mailed the week of June 10.

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Spring Answer Man Makes Return Appearance

For the better part of 25 years, the completion of Ohio State spring football practices was celebrated in this space by an appearance from “The Spring Answer Man.”

It was a character we concocted here at BSB to try to answer some of the more interesting questions facing the Buckeyes as they transitioned from one season to the next. But with each succeeding head-coaching change, access to spring practice sessions began to dwindle, and there seemed to be no reason to keep the annual feature going. After all, “The Spring Conjecture Man” just doesn’t have the same ring to it.

This spring, however, OSU head coach Ryan Day made six of the 15 practice sessions available for media viewing, so guess who’s back? Just in time, too, because the Buckeyes seemingly have a lot of question marks as they prepare for the 2023 season.

Q. Did Kyle McCord nail down the starting quarterback spot?

A. The third-year QB out of St. Joseph’s Prep in Philadelphia had every chance to distance himself from his competition, and that didn’t happen even with Devin Brown unavailable for the spring game. McCord opened the scrimmage with a ragged first possession that included a low throw even Marvin Harrison Jr. couldn’t catch and a third-down rollout pass that was nearly (and probably should have been) picked off.

By the time the two-hour glorified scrimmage was over, McCord had produced pedestrian numbers that included 18 completions in 34 attempts for 184 yards and one touchdown.

It was not exactly what the 75,122 fans inside sun-splashed Ohio Stadium were looking for, but it wasn’t a complete catastrophe, either. McCord connected on a pretty 37-yard touchdown pass to freshman Carnell Tate early in the fourth quarter, and he threw a nice rollout pass to second-year receiver Kaleb Brown to convert a fourth down.

There just weren’t any jaw-dropping “wow” moments, nothing to make anyone affirm that McCord is going to be the next great Ohio State quarterback.

Q. So, is it time to start pushing the panic button?

A. Perhaps we are expecting too much too soon. After all, McCord has only 58 attempts to show for the first two years of his college career, and there is no doubt the rebuilt offensive line in front of him has yet to mesh. Likewise, he had only a fraction of the firepower he will have at his disposal in the fall since TreVeyon Henderson and Emeka Egbuka sat out the spring game and contributions from the likes of Miyan Williams and Harrison were extremely limited.

Still, the scrimmage was a microcosm of what McCord had shown during spring practice sessions available to the media. While he wasn’t terrible, he wasn’t great, either.

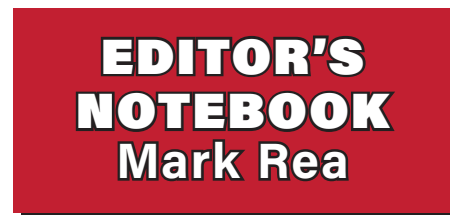
The wild card remains Ryan Day because of his ability to develop quarterbacks. In light of his spring performance, it is worth repeating McCord came to Ohio State as a five-star prospect who threw for nearly 7,000 yards and 88 touchdowns while leading his high school team to three consecutive state championships. The difference between the competition levels at St. Joseph’s Prep and Ohio State can be measured in light-years, of course, but there is little doubt McCord has the ability to take the Buckeyes where they want to go. He just hasn’t shown it yet.

Q. Is there any concern about the offensive line after the loss of three starters?

A. Concern might be an understatement. The offensive line play during the spring game could be described as inconsistent –

and that’s being generous. Only left guard Donovan Jackson and right guard Matthew Jones return from last year’s starting unit, and the other three spots remain question marks.

Second-year center Carson Hinzman



seems to have taken over at that position, but some observers believe that is only because fourth-year man Jakob James missed all of spring ball with an injury. James will rejoin the position battle in the fall.

Neither Tegra Tshabola nor Zen Michalski, a pair of former four-star prospects, seemed able to distance himself from the other at the right tackle spot, leading some to speculate the Buckeyes would be better off either moving projected left tackle Josh Fryar back to the right side or scouring the transfer portal for a more experienced tackle.

Either way, the offensive line is going to have to play better – much better – than it did throughout the spring. You can’t continue to be one of college football’s elite offensive attacks, much less entertain the notion of ending a two-year losing streak to Michigan, without a topflight offensive line that can protect its young quarterback and control the line of scrimmage at crunch time.

Q. Give us something to be optimistic about in terms of the Ohio State offense.

A. The Buckeyes are absolutely loaded at the running back and receiver positions.

Although he missed all of spring camp following foot surgery, Henderson declared himself 100 percent near the end of spring. Likewise for Williams, whose various bumps and bruises were the only thing standing between him and a 1,000-yard season last year.

OSU also has the services of Arizona State transfer Chip Trayanum, whose spring game-high 110 yards included a nifty 65-yard touchdown run that showcased the 5-11, 230-pounder’s ability to split blocks and then run away from defenders. Second-year running back Dallan Hayden was perhaps the busiest non-quarterback in the game, getting 12 carries and catching five passes.

And the Buckeyes still have the services of Evan Pryor, an extremely talented back who sat out spring camp while continuing to rehab the torn ACL that cost him all of the 2022 season.

One running back who saw action during the spring game will unfortunately not be available in the fall. Two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin took a third-quarter handoff and ran 25 yards for a touchdown that produced the feel-good moment of the afternoon. However, the 68-year-old Griffin exhausted his college eligibility a long time ago.

If there is a position in which the Buckeyes are more loaded than at running back, it would be at receiver. Only at Ohio State can the loss of such stars as Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba be sustained without skipping much of a beat. Harrison is already acclaimed as one of college football’s top pass-catchers, and Egbuka is not that far behind.

Some have speculated that Julian Fleming, who was third on the team behind Harrison and Egbuka in terms of receptions and yardage last year, might explore the transfer portal, but that would still leave former walk-

on Xavier Johnson and third-year man Jayden Ballard, who caught four passes in the spring game, including a highlight reel-worthy one-handed stab along the sideline.

A pair of true freshmen also ought to get more than their share of targets. Tate, who had three catches for 45 yards in the spring game, earned staff praises throughout spring camp for his tireless work ethic. And Noah Rogers, who had three receptions for 64 yards, broke four tackles during his 57-yard touchdown catch-and-run in the fourth quarter.

Q. The defense improved last year under Jim Knowles but still has a way to go. Is it making progress?

A. It appeared during most of the spring that the Ohio State defense was ahead of the offense, and that should be welcome news to anyone who witnessed what transpired down the stretch last season when the Buckeyes allowed an average of 531.5 yards and 43.5 points to their final two opponents.

The defense did allow three long touchdowns during the spring game, and that seems problematic for a unit that gave up way too many long plays last year. But each of those touchdowns came against second- and third-team defenders, while the only other touchdown of the day came on Griffin’s run that wasn’t defended at all.

The front six should be the strength of the defense with consistency up front the only thing standing between Ohio State and greatness. Knowles has acknowledged he would like to have more of a rotation at linebacker in 2023, and there is no reason he can’t accomplish that with such notables as Cody Simon and five-star prospect C.J. Hicks backing up starters Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers, each of whom wore down at the end of last season.

Q. What about the secondary? It was sorely lacking at times in 2022.

A. The consensus among most observers this spring was that Ohio State’s cornerbacks have improved greatly from last season, led by a resurgence from third-year corner Denzel Burke. I have to admit that I remain a bit skeptical.

During the first half of the spring game, Ballard got behind the first-team defense, and had McCord not underthrown the ball, Ballard would likely have had an easy touchdown. It was Burke from whom Ballard had gotten loose, and even when the ball was thrown, Burke never turned around to locate the ball. Had he been able to do that, he might have had an easy interception. There were no interceptions in the spring game, and that was a bit alarming given that neither McCord nor counterpart Tristan Gebbia seemed particularly sharp.

In terms of the safeties, it was sometimes difficult to evaluate them in their various lineups. I will note, however, that veteran Josh Proctor seemed to play more assignment football (in other words, he was where he was supposed to be most of the time) than ever before during an OSU career set to begin its sixth season.

One of the players I was most interested in watching during the spring game was second-year safety Sonny Styles, and I wasn’t disappointed. He played the second-most defensive snaps behind Hicks and appeared to show some physicality that has been sorely lacking in recent OSU defensive backfields.

That physical nature of play might even get the 6-4, 222-pound Styles on the field as a third linebacker against opponents with active pass-catching tight ends.

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Archie's Touchdown Serves As Spring Game Highlight

It's been nearly 50 years since former Ohio State running back Archie Griffin, the only two-time Heisman Trophy winner in the award's history, took home his first trophy in 1974. But it didn't mean that his help wasn't still required in Ohio State's spring game on April 15.

With the Ohio State offense struggling, trailing 34-10 midway through the third quarter, the Buckeyes called in some help in the form of Griffin, who checked in and took a handoff from quarterback Kyle McCord to the house, going 25 yards for the score.

"I still think (Chip Trayanum) was the second leading ball carrier on the day," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. "I think the first one was Archie Griffin. That was fun watching him there. I think next year is the 50th anniversary of his first Heisman, so we wanted to make sure he came back for that one. The offense needed a little help at that point, too, right around the 30-yard line,

so we felt like we called into the bullpen and pulled in 45, so that was good."

Griffin's touchdown helped spark the Ohio State offense, which turned a 34-10 blowout into just a 40-31 loss by the end of the scrimmage and provided one of the game's highlights.

"It felt great," Griffin said afterward on the Big Ten Network. "Nobody touched me. That makes it feel real good."

Brown Held Out Of Spring Game After Finger Procedure

Among the several storylines during spring camp, none compared to the attention placed on the Buckeyes' quarterback competition between McCord and Devin Brown.

McCord and Brown each got their fill of first-team reps and continued to progress toward the spring game, with Ohio State's starting quarterback job hanging in the balance. While the spring continued, anticipation grew for the annual spring game, in which McCord and Brown would compete for the job in front of tens of thousands of fans at Ohio Stadium.

However, that growing buzz surrounding the spring game was swiftly snuffed out after Day revealed just three days prior to the game that Brown would miss the match-up due to a fractured pinkie finger on his throwing hand.

"It was a slight little thing in practice," Brown said after the spring game. "I just had a little procedure on it. It was nothing crazy. I'll be back in four weeks or so."

While neither McCord nor Brown was

able to gain much separation from the other during camp, according to Day, the spring game would have served as another battleground between the quarterback tandem had Brown been able to suit up.

Although he was unable to showcase his talents to the Ohio State fan base during the spring game, Brown said he felt he did enough during spring camp to show that he belonged in the race with McCord.

"Obviously, it sucked," he said. "But, at the end of the day, I feel like I had a good few practices in the spring. I felt like I had enough days to still feel good about my spring and not really have to worry about the rest of it."

Brown's injury may harken back to the quarterback battle between Dwayne Haskins and Joe Burrow in 2017 and 2018, with Burrow enduring an injury during fall camp in 2017 and Haskins stepping into the backup role where he did enough to get a leg up ahead of the competition for the starting job in 2018, ultimately causing Burrow to transfer to LSU.

However, even if he is unable to claim the starting job in the fall, Brown said he's committed to the Buckeyes for the long haul, regardless of his status on the depth chart.

Even though neither Brown nor McCord has been identified as the front-runner for the starting job by Day or offensive coordinator Brian Hartline to this point, Brown said the competition moving into the fall is a good thing for him and his development moving forward.

"We're trying to get each other better every single day, and that's all we can ask for," Brown said. "When you're with the best competition, you feel like you have to play your best and bring it every day. At the end of the day, we just want what's best for the team, and whoever is going to win that job is that guy."

In addition to Brown, defensive end Mitchell Melton; linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg; offensive lineman Avery Henry; running backs T.C. Caffey, TreVeyon Henderson and Evan Pryor; safety Kourt Williams; and wide receivers Emeka Egbuka, Julian Fleming and Xavier Johnson were all scratches for the spring game.

Henderson Cleared Following Spring Game

After being held out of the spring game – and for much of spring camp – while recovering from offseason foot surgery, Henderson received some good news on April 16.

The running back announced on Twitter that he was fully cleared to participate in practices from that point forward, marking the first step in his return to the field after missing Ohio State's final two games of this past season.

"So many lessons were learned but I thank the Lord for getting me through this and keeping me lifted," Henderson tweeted. "Officially cleared!! Thank you, Lord, always."

Despite being labeled as unavailable by Day prior to spring camp, Henderson was a constant presence for the Buckeyes on the practice field. He was unable to participate in live contact drills, but he still took reps in individual drills while building back up for full clearance.

Henderson was limited down the stretch for the Buckeyes last season, missing four of their last five games while racking up 571

yards and six touchdowns on 107 carries for the season. Due to injuries, Henderson finished third among the Buckeyes in carries, trailing Miyan Williams (128 carries for 825 yards) and Dallan Hayden (111 carries for 553 yards).

Hartline Released From Hospital After UTV Accident

Hartline was released from the hospital the afternoon of April 17 after sustaining non-life-threatening injuries in a utility vehicle side-by-side accident the morning of April 16.

According to an incident report filed by the Delaware County Sheriff's Office and obtained by Buckeye Sports Bulletin, police were dispatched to Hartline's home near Powell, Ohio, at approximately 1:22 a.m. on April 16. Hartline was the driver of the UTV that rolled over, and the report said Hartline admitted to drinking prior to the accident.

He and a friend unaffiliated with Ohio State were transported to Riverside Hospital after the accident, and Hartline tweeted later that day that he was doing well prior to his release. According to the report, a deputy who attempted to interview Hartline at the hospital following the accident "immediately noticed the strong odor of an alcoholic beverage," though Hartline was unable to be interviewed at the time due to medication administered by the hospital.

The report listed a potential charge of driving while under the influence, but no charges had been filed by the time BSB went to press. Under Ohio law, a person can still be charged with driving under the influence even if it is on their own property.

The accident came just hours after Hartline called plays in Ohio State's spring game, his first opportunity to call plays ahead of his first season as Ohio State's offensive coordinator. Hartline earned the promotion this offseason after five seasons as the Buckeyes' wide receivers coach.

Defensive Line Enjoys Productive Spring

In the past three seasons, questions have surrounded the Ohio State defensive line and position coach Larry Johnson while the unit had seen diminishing returns after an incredible run during the 2010s.

The Buckeyes have seen sack numbers dwindle in the years since the days of the Bosa brothers and Chase Young, and the unit's overall reputation has seen a decline in recent years. But Ohio State's defensive front appears to be back on the right track after an encouraging spring camp by Johnson's unit.

Ohio State's spring game helped paint a picture of the strides the defensive line has made. The unit racked up five sacks while placing quarterbacks McCord and Tristan Gebbia under near-constant pressure during the contest.

"I feel like we have the right people in place in terms of starters or the first group," Day said after the spring game. "Those guys have to play great. That's important. As you take the next step in your progression, it's one thing to be a starter. It's another thing to be a difference-maker. I think we have quite a few guys that can be difference makers (on the defensive line)."

Ohio State certainly hasn't lacked star power up front in recent seasons, and Jack Sawyer – who manned the hybrid defensive

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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)

end/linebacker Jack position last season – and J.T. Tuimoloau are set to man the edges this season. Both Sawyer and Tuimoloau joined the Buckeyes as five-star recruits and have shown flashes of their potential throughout their first two seasons on the team, with Sawyer tying for a team-best 4½ sacks and Tuimoloau collecting 3½ last season.

Sawyer and Tuimoloau headline Ohio State's efforts on the edge, but the Buckeyes have also seen encouraging returns from second-year ends Omari Abor, Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson, with Jackson and Curry each picking up a sack during the spring game.

On the interior, Ohio State also has a run-stuffer in Tyleik Williams and a solid pass-rusher in Mike Hall Jr., while Ty Hamilton serves as a best-of-both-worlds option. While that trio largely took center stage last season, the emergence of Hero Kanu during the spring has been a welcome development, and he capped off camp with two tackles for loss and a sack in the spring game. Williams and Hamilton each added a sack during the contest.

The Buckeyes' defensive front enjoyed a

strong spring, but Day said the unit needs to continue that development into the summer and fall.

"We like to play a lot of depth there," Day said. "It's a long season, so that's an area that we have to continue to see improvement. Guys like Kenyatta Jackson stepped up, and we need more and more of those guys to do that on the defensive line."

AD Smith Voices Confidence In Day

In his four seasons as head coach at Ohio State, Day has led the Buckeyes to a trio of College Football Playoff appearances, a pair of Big Ten titles and a 45-6 overall record (including three wins in 2018).

But back-to-back losses to rival Michigan hang over Day and the Buckeyes. Athletic director Gene Smith told ESPN's Heather Dinich that he's fully behind Day and his vision for the program, calling Day his "CEO."

"My standards are high. Our team standards are high," Smith said. "So we talk about how do we get better and how do we make sure we are able to win the championships that we aspire to win? We look at each individual contest that got in the way of

that, and we're trying to figure out what's the strategy to mitigate that.

"When we lose, it's highly disappointing, but I break things down and look at things objectively, and we have good conversations about what we need to do better."

Smith also pulled the curtain back regarding Day's decision to potentially relinquish play-calling duties, noting that the onus is on Day to make the big decisions for his program.

"His thought process about possibly giving up play calling, he shared that with me without me ever asking that question," Smith said. "When we hired him, I told him, 'You've got to stay in your wheelhouse and call plays. There will be a natural point in time in your career where that changes.' So that's not for me to decide. That's for him to decide."

In addition to the potential change in play calling duties, Smith also mentioned that while there is collaboration in regard to personnel changes, Day ultimately has the final say in the direction the program goes.

"We literally go down every person – not just the coaches, but the support staff – and say, 'OK, is our mix right? Do we have the right person here?'" Smith said. "We may talk about a deficiency here and how do we strengthen that, so it's a collaborative process, but I don't make the decision. I hired him to make those decisions."

While Day and Smith have worked to fine-tune some of the issues that have crept their way into the program, Day told ESPN that he believes that he has the pieces in place to compete for national titles on a yearly basis.

"When you look at the roster, all you want to do is identify, OK, does this look like the teams we've had in the past?" Day said. "Do we have enough talent to reach our goals year after year? And the answer is yes. We definitely have it."

Seibert Latest To Hit Transfer Portal

Ohio State kicker Jake Seibert announced April 17 that he will enter the transfer portal, becoming the first Buckeye since the spring game to eye opportunities elsewhere.

Seibert spent three seasons with the Buckeyes but largely played behind starters Blake Haubeil and Noah Ruggles during his time in Columbus. Seibert went 1 of 2 on field goals – with his lone make coming from 23 yards out against Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship in 2021 – while hitting all 16 of his extra-point attempts as a Buckeye. Seibert has three remaining seasons of eligibility.

"I want to express my gratitude to Coach Day and the coaching staff for believing in me and helping me grow both on and off the field," Seibert said. "Ohio State has provided me with an incredible education and countless opportunities for personal and athletic development, and I will always be thankful."

Seibert's departure leaves Ohio State with a trio of kickers remaining on the roster, with sophomore Jayden Fielding, who handled kickoff duties last season, and transfers Parker Lewis and Casey Magyar as kicking options for the Buckeyes this season.

Meyer Claims Coaching Days Are Behind Him

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer has been a constant presence in coaching rumors over the past two years.

After a failed experiment at the NFL-level, coaching the Jacksonville Jaguars to a 2-11 record before being fired in the midst of a turbulent first season with the organization in 2021, Meyer remains a highly sought

Continued On Page 6

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

after skipper at the college level. However, during a roundtable discussion with fellow Buckeye coaches John Cooper, Day and Jim Tressel at Ohio State's coaches clinic on April 13, Meyer put any thoughts of a coaching return to rest.

"That book's closed," Meyer said. "It's going to be TV and grandfathering."

This isn't the first time Meyer has said he's retired from coaching, though. In 2010, Meyer announced his retirement after a successful run at Florida in which he gathered a pair of national titles, but he ultimately returned to coach Ohio State in 2012. He retired again in 2018 after seven seasons at the helm of the Buckeyes, claiming another national title while in Columbus in 2014, but took the reins in Jacksonville in 2021.

Although he may no longer be coaching, Meyer will still be around the game as a host on FOX's "Big Noon Kickoff" pregame show next season.

OSU Skippers Reveal Greatest Players They've Coached

For much of its history, Ohio State has been a hub of elite football talent and has sent

Last BSB Print Issue Until Early June

This is the last biweekly issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin in our winter/spring print schedule. The next issue of BSB, dated June, will be mailed the week of June 10.

In the meantime, there is no need miss any of the Ohio State sports news. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be reporting on any breaking news and providing additional features at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, 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.

Don't forget, the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports

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hundreds of gridiron standouts to the NFL.

During the roundtable discussion at Ohio State's coaches clinic, Cooper, Day, Meyer and Tressel were all probed as to who were the most talented players they had coached, and each coach answered in much different ways. The most up-front response came from Cooper, and it didn't take long for him to come up with his answer.

"Orlando Pace," Cooper said. "He won the Outland, Lombardi (in his) sophomore and junior years. (He's a) three-time All-American, first player taken in the draft, and an All-Pro for about nine years in a row."

While Cooper was the most direct in his answer, his successor refused to disclose his feelings on the matter.

"I've never gone on record and said who my best player was," Tressel said. "I'm not going to go on record tonight."

Meyer was quick to mention the run of talented defensive ends whom he coached in his time at Ohio State, calling the group

of Joey and Nick Bosa, Jalyn Holmes, Sam Hubbard, Tyquan Lewis and Young "monsters." Meyer also recognized running back Ezekiel Elliott as one of the most talented players he coached.

Day also mentioned Nick Bosa and Young while also giving props to cornerback Denzel Ward, but ultimately settled on wide receiver Garrett Wilson.

"He'd get bored at practice. I mean, I've never seen a guy just catch the ball in midair and just start throwing it behind his back," Day said. "He'd catch a ball and just put it between his legs and then throw it to a manager who's like 50 yards over there. Like, 'What the hell just happened?' He was (NFL) Rookie of the Year this year. He's going to be a really good pro."

Former OSU PA Announcer Althoff Passes Away At 89

Former Ohio State public address announcer Ron Althoff passed away at age 89

on March 29.

He was the public address announcer for Ohio State football and basketball games, gaining the moniker of the "Voice of the Buckeyes" for 17 years. At the same time, Althoff also served as the assistant director of intramural sports at Ohio State, helping facilitate dozens of sporting events on a nightly basis.

Althoff's love for Ohio State started much earlier than that, with the Lewis Center, Ohio, native graduating from the university in 1961 with an undergraduate degree in education. He also attended graduate school in Ohio, earning a Master of Education from Xavier in 1967.

In addition to his accomplishments at Ohio State, Althoff was a pioneer in track and field officiating on a global scale and was named to the USA Track and Field National Officials' Hall of Fame and Ohio Track and Field Hall of Fame. He also helped found the Jesse Owens Track Classic, which

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1983

Second baseman Robbie Cobb had a chance to leave Ohio State with as many as six or even eight major school career baseball records.

The Buckeye infielder entered his senior year with the career doubles record at 39 and after the first 30 games had upped that total to 46.

To that point in the season, Cobb had already broken the OSU marks for runs, hits and bases on balls and had a good shot at breaking the standard for at-bats and RBI. Cobb also had an outside shot at the career triple and home-run record. He was hitting .449 with three home runs, 15 RBI and 37 runs scored as the team headed into May action.

"I'm a little bit more mature this year as a hitter," Cobb said. "Mainly it's waiting and hitting my pitch - not swinging at bad pitches."

35 Years Ago - 1988

Though the two teams combined to pass 47 times in the annual OSU Scarlet and Gray game, coach John Cooper said the Buckeyes were straddling the double, solid yellow line.

"Right now I think we're a middle-of-the-road team," Cooper said after watching the Gray team overcome a 13-0 deficit to post a 21-16 win on April 30 in Ohio Stadium. "Whether we move up or down depends on how much improvement we make. We've got to have the most dedicated summer conditioning we've had anyplace since I've been a coach."

Cooper had just taken his team into the Horseshoe for the first time that spring and was awed by the crowd of 54,302 who attended on a glorious, sunny afternoon. The figure eclipsed the previous year's crowd of 38,000 as the largest draw ever for the annual scrimmage.

"I was tremendously impressed when I walked out to the stadium here and saw this many people come out to watch a ballgame," Cooper said, noting the largest crowd to attend a spring game in his three years at Arizona State was 20,000 at best.

30 Years Ago - 1993

The sun finally came out, and so did the smile on Cooper's face.

With his sixth spring as Ohio State head coach behind him, Cooper allowed himself time to enjoy what might have been one of the most productive springs in his tenure.

Following a 17-10 win by the Scarlet team in the annual spring game that was played mostly on a blustery, overcast day on April 24, Cooper advanced toward members of the media from the winning team's sideline. That was after he had spent much of the game patrolling the Gray bench,

the same one used by the Buckeyes for home games.

"You notice I was on the Scarlet sidelines," Cooper said with a laugh. "I was with the winning team. You noticed that, didn't you?"

25 Years Ago - 1998

It had to be termed a little strange that the University of Cincinnati sent five players through the draft and such "football powers" as Dartmouth, Weber State, Hofstra and Cal Poly were represented while no Ohio State players were taken at all in the 1998 NFL draft, marking the first time since the draft's inception in 1936 that it had gone Buckeye-less.

"I thought some of those guys would be drafted," Cooper said. "I guess those guys know more about it than I do."

20 Years Ago - 2003

Prior to Ohio State's April 18 special teams scrimmage, the outgoing seniors were invited onto the field to receive one of their two national championship rings.

The seniors received rings presented by the Bowl Championship Series. The players were to also receive rings from Ohio State - designed by the players themselves - for winning the Big Ten and national championships.

"This isn't coming off for a while," punter Andy Groom said. "I've finally got this great thing on my hand. It's neat to know I'll always have this and be able to pass it down to my children and grandchildren."

15 Years Ago - 2008

With speculation rampant that he would not return to Columbus for a sophomore season, Kosta Koufos put an end to the uncertainty with a text message.

Mostly, at least. In a message sent to The Canton (Ohio) Repository, the 7-0 freshman said that he was going to test the waters and declare for the NBA draft.

"I am declaring for the 2008 NBA draft but not hiring an agent and maintaining my college eligibility," the message read.

10 Years Ago - 2013

No one had to tell Kevin McGuff the most pressing duty of his new job as women's basketball head coach at Ohio State.

Well aware the contact period for 2014 recruits had started and the spring evaluation period was but a few days away, McGuff had already contacted some of the potential stars in the Buckeye State before he met

with Columbus-area media on April 17 at Value City Arena.

"That's one of the things that make this state so special," said McGuff, who was hired one day earlier as Jim Foster's replacement.

"We have great, great coaches in the state and players from a very young age have an opportunity to be coached at a high level, so I've reached out since the time I accepted the job and that will obviously be a big part of what we do with this program."

Five Years Ago - 2018

Earle Bruce often introduced himself as a football coach, and his Hall of Fame résumé suggests he was one of the best. But while the persona on display for much of his nine-year tenure as Ohio State head coach was mostly that of a one-dimensional Woody Hayes imitator, Bruce had many more layers and textures to a life that touched so many people in so many ways over the years.

Bruce, who died on April 20 at his suburban Columbus home due to complications of Alzheimer's disease, was honored with a public memorial on April 25 at St. John Arena and a private funeral service the following day. During each event, the impact the 87-year-old coach had on his family, friends and former assistant coaches and players was on full display.

"I was a Buckeye from day one," Bruce told BSB in 2017. "When I got there, and I saw that band come out on the field for the first time, I jumped up and shouted, 'I'm a Buckeye! I'm a Buckeye!' It was just something I'd never seen before, and I still remember I got chills when that band came out on the field."

One Year Ago - 2022

Wearing a black No. 7 uniform emblazoned with "Haskins Jr." across the nameplate and a "DH" decal on the back of his helmet, redshirt sophomore quarterback C.J. Stroud directed Team Scarlet down the field on its first drive of Ohio State's 2022 spring game April 16 and capped it with a 29-yard touchdown pass to Jaxon Smith-Njigba, opening the scoring in what would eventually be a 34-26 victory for Team Scarlet in the offense vs. defense scrimmage.

The incumbent starter swapped out uniforms after the play, making sure that former OSU quarterback Dwayne Haskins' last moment in Ohio Stadium - just a week after his death - was, fittingly, a touchdown pass.

"I just wanted to honor his last moment in the 'Shoe," Stroud said of the gesture after the game. "That's a big brother of mine. I just wanted to honor him. I thought it was important for him to go out the right way, and I'm glad his last play at the 'Shoe was a touchdown. I'm excited for that."

most recently ran at Ohio State's Jesse Owens Stadium from April 21-22.

He was an umpire at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and took the step up to a chief umpire for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta in which he also served on the Olympic officials search committee.

Althoff is survived by his wife, Nina, three daughters, six grandchildren and two of his siblings, Robert and Marilyn.

1870 Society Joins OSU NIL Fray

There's a new name, image and likeness collective on the scene at Ohio State. Spearheaded by former Ohio State defensive back Tyvis Powell, 97.1 The Fan general manager Todd Markiewicz, former Ohio State club baseball player Drew Esler and Eleven Warriors founder Jason Priestas, The 1870 Society was announced on April 12 and joined the Ohio State NIL community as the first for-profit collective in the space.

"The Society is named after the founding year of The Ohio State University, highlighting our dedication to upholding the traditions and values that make Ohio State a world-class institution," Markiewicz said. "Our mission is simple: to give Buckeye Nation unprecedented, exclusive access to their favorite teams while creating the kind of earning potential and opportunities that Ohio State athletes deserve and have earned."

"The organization was founded by a group of passionate and experienced operators with expertise in areas such as branding, social media, operations, data science, sales and finance," he continued. "And we are Buckeye fans who recognize that Ohio State is facing a critical challenge. While college athletes now have their NIL rights, the community has not yet fully capitalized on this opportunity."

In regard to its for-profit model, the collective pointed to more flexibility to operate while not facing the same limitations of a nonprofit collective, which is how fellow Ohio State collectives The Foundation and Cohesion Foundation operate.

"Our for-profit designation is crucial in giving The 1870 Society greater flexibility in the way we engage with fans, businesses and student-athletes," a statement on The 1870 Society's website reads. "Nonprofit entities, due to their tax-exempt status, are subject to strict rules set by the IRS, which can restrict how they operate."

"By being a for-profit entity, we are not bound by the same limitations and can be more creative and nimble in responding to the evolving needs of our stakeholders. We are committed to using our flexibility to create a unique and sustainable business model that benefits all parties involved."

Former OSU CB Okudah Traded To Atlanta Falcons

Former Ohio State cornerback Jeff Okudah will have a new home during the upcoming NFL season after being traded by the Detroit Lions to the Atlanta Falcons for a fifth-round selection on April 11.

Okudah will depart the team that drafted him No. 3 overall in the 2019 NFL draft. In three seasons with the Lions, Okudah tallied 124 tackles, 10 pass breakups and a pair of interceptions in 25 games.

During his time in Detroit, Okudah battled several injuries which greatly

hindered his ability to stay on the field, especially in his first two campaigns. His rookie campaign was cut short after he sustained a groin strain during a Week 11 loss to the Carolina Panthers, and his sophomore season was derailed when he suffered a ruptured Achilles in the season opener and missed the final 16 games of the season.

Okudah enjoyed relative health this past season, playing 15 of Detroit's 17 games while amassing a career-high 73 tackles and seven pass breakups. He also scored his first career touchdown at the NFL level with a pick-six against former Ohio State teammate and Chicago Bears quarterback Justin Fields on Nov. 13, 2022.

Now in Atlanta, Okudah will likely fit in as one of the Falcons' top cornerbacks with Casey Hayward and A.J. Terrell owning the starting spots last season.

Men's Tennis Claims Share Of 17th Consecutive BIG Title

With a 4-0 win over visiting Purdue on April 21 and 7-0 win over Indiana on April 23, the Ohio State men's tennis team won the outright Big Ten regular-season championship, the 17th title – either shared or outright – in program history.

The wins moved the Buckeyes to 26-2 and 9-0 in conference play on the season entering the Big Ten tournament in Bloomington, Ind., scheduled to begin on April 28.

The program's streak of championships snaps the conference record that was previously set by Michigan from 1968 to 1983.

MVB Wins MIVA Tournament, Claims Regular-Season Title

The Ohio State men's volleyball team clinched a share of the Midwestern Intercollegiate Volleyball Association regular-season championship on April 8, picking up a 3-0 sweep over visiting No. 10 Loyola Chicago, and went on to win in the finals of the MIVA tournament over top-seeded Ball State on April 22, earning the program's

18th conference tournament crown.

This is the first regular-season MIVA title for Ohio State since the 2018 season, and it marks the 28th regular-season championship in program history. The Buckeyes are sharing the title with Loyola Chicago and Ball State, all finishing with 11-3 records in conference play.

The win over Loyola Chicago – part of an eight-game winning streak for the Buckeyes – helped Ohio State secure the No. 3 seed in the MIVA tournament, with the other top seeds in the tournament, No. 1 Ball State and No. 2 Loyola Chicago, winning out on tiebreakers.

The Buckeyes made good use of their favorable seeding, claiming victories over sixth-seeded Lindenwood, 3-0, on April 15 and No. 7 McKendree, 3-1, on April 19 to advance to the tournament finals against top-seeded Ball State on April 22 where they stunned the Cardinals 3-1 on their home floor in Muncie, Ind.

Up against the top-seeded Cardinals, Ohio State was able to go up two sets to none in the early stages, with the Buckeyes closing on a 4-1 run for a dominant 25-17 win in the second set.

Ohio State's lone dropped set of the contest came in the third, as after the Cardinals took a 17-16 lead, they closed on an 8-3 run to make it 2-1 for the contest and force a fourth set. In that fourth set, the Buckeyes took a 24-17 lead before a kill from opposite hitter Shane Wetzel clinched the tournament title.

Setter Michael Wright was named MIVA tournament MVP behind 147 assists

and 15 digs across the three contests, including a team-high nine digs in the title match. Joining Wright on the All-Tournament Team was outside hitter Jacob Pasteur and Wetzel.

Ohio State's tournament win gives the Buckeyes an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament, marking their 22nd second tournament appearance, where they will take on King University (16-15) on April 30 in Fairfax, Va.

Changes Made To Speed Up CFB Games

The NCAA playing rules oversight panel approved a new set of football rules on April 21 that are expected to speed up the game.

The most notable rule is that the game clock will no longer stop following a first down unless the game is in the final two minutes of either half. The rule change is effective at the FBS, FCS and Division II levels of the sports but has yet to be adopted at the Division III level.

The change is expected to shorten games by an average of seven plays per contest, according to Steve Shaw, secretary-editor of the panel, who personally approved the changes recommended by the NCAA football rules committee.

Other rule changes approved include no longer allowing teams to call consecutive timeouts, and penalties called as time expires at the end of the first or third quarter will now carry over into the next quarter rather than an untimed down being played.

Attention Reds Fans

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Quarterbacks Vow To Stay At Ohio State

Continued From Page 1

a couple drives there and then he was out, and certainly not having Emeka (Egbuka) and Julian (Fleming) and those guys.

"But you saw there were some sparks. I thought the throw to Carnell was an excellent one. But there's stuff that he wants to look to improve on. We'll get on the film and figure out what that was. It's hard out there because there's so much going on. It's going fast because you're calling it back and forth. (Through) 15 practices, there was improvement there."

Not lost on Day was that Ohio State has been without three of its top receivers, with

Egbuka and Fleming out for all of spring camp and Xavier Johnson recently suffering an injury that held him out for the spring game. That can make a quarterback's day difficult when a group as talented as Ohio State's collection of receivers is limited.

Furthermore, Ohio State's offensive line – a work in progress, with both tackle spots and center all up for grabs – has struggled throughout the past several weeks, and that was evident during the spring game with the defensive ends routinely gliding around the edge, giving McCord little time to operate in the pocket.

"Inconsistent," Day said of the offensive line. "I thought that there were some



SONNY BROCKWAY

HEISMAN HIGHLIGHTS — Two-time Heisman Trophy-winning running back Archie Griffin (right) got one more chance to score at Ohio Stadium during the spring game, receiving a handoff from quarterback Kyle McCord (left) and rushing for a 25-yard touchdown as the 50th anniversary of Griffin's first Heisman Trophy approaches.

good things, but we need more consistency there."

For McCord's part, he feels he's taken a step in the right direction this spring and has been able to learn a lot in his first full spring camp of taking starting snaps, adding that he is getting every bit out of the experience that he is putting into it.

"I think the more film you watch, the more reps you get, I think it just helps to take those steps," he said. "I feel pretty good, feel like I came a long way from where I was when I first got here. I feel like I'm in a good spot right now."

But the spring game – whether due to McCord, the receivers, the offensive line or even the defense – was not what Ohio State was hoping to see from the offense, at least if Day was wanting to publicly announce a starter once the spring had concluded. Instead, it leaves the competition still raging as the Buckeyes head into the summer and prepare for fall camp.

As for what that might look like, Brown's injury and subsequent surgery were expected to sideline him for only a few weeks, so he'll be back throwing for Ohio State this summer. But it was still a disappointment for the second-year signal caller to not get his chance to shine in the spring game.

"It's definitely hard knowing I could have been playing out there," he said. "I'd been working for it all spring. But at the end of

the day, I was just happy to cheer on my guys and do what I could."

Brown, in a show of unity along with McCord, took questions at the dais following the spring game despite his inability to participate in the festivities. But over the next few months and leading into fall camp, they will be individually evaluated on everything from their throws on the field to their command in meetings, every aspect contributing one additional piece to the jigsaw puzzle that is finding a starting quarterback at Ohio State.

But don't think just because one will be named the starter that the other plans on transferring out of Ohio State, even with starting quarterback jobs likely available in the portal. Both signal callers pushed back against that idea after the spring game, expecting to hang around for the long haul.

"When I committed here, I made a promise to myself that I was just going to come here and compete," McCord said. "Guys have come, guys can go. But at the end of the day, I think if you're confident in your work, confident in your game, you're going to be in a good spot, regardless of who they bring in."

"You're at a place like Ohio State. You know they're going to bring in the best quarterbacks, you know they're going to bring in really good competition, and you have to earn it every single day."

Spring Game Box Score

Gray 40, Scarlet 31*

April 15, 2023 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
GRAY	0	0	0	0	0
SCARLET	3	7	7	14	31

First Quarter

SCAR – Lewis, 38-yard field goal, 1:02; 10 plays, 45 yards, 5:33 TOP.

Second Quarter

SCAR – Trayanum, 65-yard rush (Seibert kick), 1:39; 2 plays, 65 yards, 0:04 TOP.

Third Quarter

SCAR – Griffin, 25-yard rush (Fielding kick), 5:23; 9 plays, 65 yards, 3:54 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

SCAR – Tate, 37-yard pass from McCord (Lewis kick), 9:44; 7 plays, 65 yards, 8:14 TOP.

SCAR – Rogers, 57-yard pass from Gebbia (Magyar kick), 2:30; plays, 65 yards, 2:28 TOP.

Att. – 75,122

Weather – Sunny and warm

Scarlet had ball on offense entire game. Gray was on defense entire game.

*Gray was awarded points for certain benchmarks, including takeaway touchdowns, takeaways, sacks, three-and-outs and forced punts.

Team Statistics

	GRAY	SCAR
First Downs	0	26
Rushing	0	12
Passing	0	14
Penalty	0	0
Rushes-Yards	0-0	47-223
Passing Yards	0	332
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	0-0-0	35-63-0
Offensive Plays	0	109
Total Net Yards	0	555
Third Down Efficiency	0-0	4-23
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	4-7
Punts-Avg.	0-0	10-31.7
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties	0-0	0-0
Time of Possession	0:00	60:00

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Trayanum 8-110; Brecht 8-47; Hayden 12-30; A. Griffin 1-25; M. Williams 4-14; Gebbia 5-0; McCord 9(-3).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – GRAY: None. SCAR: McCord 18-34-0-184-1; Gebbia 14-24-0-127-1; Maggs 2-3-0-14-0; Trayanum 1-1-0-7-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Hayden 5-27; Ballard 4-27; Rogers 3-64; Harrison Jr. 3-62; Tate 3-45; Thurman 3-25; K. Brown 3-13; Grayes 2-39; Trayanum 2-15; Brecht 2-10; Antwi 1-7; Ray 1-7; Adolph 1-7; Rodgers 1-3; Royer 1-1.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Mirco 5-43.8-64; Team 5-19.6-43.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

SACKS – GRAY: Kanu 1-10; T. Williams 1-10; Hamilton 1-4; Jackson 1-3; Curry 1-1. SCAR: None.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: Kanu 2-11; T. Williams 1-10; Hamilton 1-4; Hicks 1-3; Jackson 1-3; Curry 1-1; Carrico 1-1. SCAR: None.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – GRAY: Powers 5-3-8; Hicks 5-1-6; Styles 2-4-6; Carrico 2-4-6; Kanu 4-1-5; Simon 3-2-5; Igbinosun 3-2-5; Jones 3-1-4; Sawyer 2-2-4; Hartford 0-4-4; Jackson 3-0-3; Martinez 3-0-3; Curry 2-1-3; Stokes 2-1-3; Ransom 2-1-3; Mathews 2-1-3; D. Griffin 1-2-3; J. Brown 2-0-2; Hamilton 2-0-2; Kuwatch 1-1-2; T. Williams 1-1-2; Proctor 1-1-2; McKenzie 0-2-2; Turner 1-0-1; Hancock 1-0-1; Moore 1-0-1; Abor 0-1-1. SCAR: None.

Players In The Game

GRAY – N/A.

SCAR – N/A.

PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

Brown echoed that sentiment, saying that the transfer portal has not crossed his mind since arriving in Columbus more than a year ago.

"I've always been a guy that's going to stick to my word and stick to where I'm at," he said. "And I've always said from the beginning – I came here and I wanted to compete. And if that's not how it goes, that's how it goes. But I'm sticking around. I'm still a Buckeye, and I want to do everything I can to help his team."

Though the reality at the end of the day is that only one of McCord or Brown will start for Ohio State next season, both appreciate what this extended battle is doing to improve their respective games, whether that starting opportunity comes at Ohio State or elsewhere.

"The competition's been great," McCord said. "I mean, we both know what it is. But I think at the end of the day, Devin is definitely making me better. And I think vice versa as well. Even though there's not a winner of the job yet, I think that benefits both of us, honestly. I think it's going to push both of us going into fall camp, and there's still a lot of time until the season."

Defense Having Resurgent Spring

For all the struggles of Ohio State's offense in the spring game, the flip side of that coin was that it continued a dominant effort by defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unit, which has routinely won the day throughout the spring.

The spring game served as a cap for a successful few weeks for the defense, which has made life challenging for Ohio State's offense in an unusual turn of events, at least relative to how the two units have recently performed for the Buckeyes.

"You try to look at it through the whole 15 practices of what you see," Day said after the spring game. "If you're starting to see the secondary getting their hands on some balls, then all of a sudden it doesn't happen for a few days, it's probably not real. We've seen that for almost 15 practices, what you saw today, so that was really good."

"I think the challenge will be increased in the preseason, when we're at full strength (on offense). But you can just see the discernment. Everything's faster. They're moving faster, they're seeing it. I think being year two in the system, adding (Davison Igbinosun) there, you're starting to see the secondary move faster, make more plays and be more decisive."

The Buckeyes racked up an eye-popping 10 pass breakups, with two each from linebacker C.J. Hicks and safety Sonny Styles. Beyond credited pass breakups, coverage was mostly tight for Ohio State's secondary, which allowed the quarterbacks to complete just 56.5 percent of their passes (35 of 62).

Big plays, the type that killed the Buckeyes last season against Michigan and Georgia, were kept to a minimum, with only six plays of at least 15 yards – excluding Archie Griffin's 25-yard rushing touchdown, which registered in the box score but shouldn't count against the defense that allowed the Ohio State legend to walk in for the score.

Turning the defense into a group of ballhawks has been an increased focus for Day, Knowles and secondary coaches Tim Walton and Perry Eliano. Last season, Ohio State allowed a respectable 200.5 yards per

In the April 1 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we highlighted several Buckeyes who had plenty to gain during Ohio State's 15 spring practice sessions. With the spring now in the rearview mirror, we check back to see how those players fared over the last several weeks.

Redshirt sophomore wide receiver Jayden Ballard: Ballard entered the spring needing a noteworthy performance to help separate himself from the pack, and by most accounts, he's taken steps to where he could be in line to make an impact this season.

"This is his time," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after a scrimmage on March 25. "He came in with some really talented guys. But he's talented, too. You can see his speed. You can see his change of direction. Even at the (pro day) workout the other day, he caught a lot of people's eyes. He has the ability, and hopefully if he can continue to make plays like he did today, then he can start producing for us."

Ballard finished the spring game with 27 yards on four receptions, the most catches among Ohio State's wide receivers. With the likes of Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming out for the spring, it offered a chance for Ballard to show his worth, and he's continually stepped up during practice and in Ohio State's scrimmages over the past several weeks.

This is not the first time that Ballard has come out of the spring with raised stock, however. What matters now is taking that momentum into fall camp and working his way onto the field once the season begins, because as Day alluded to, this is Ballard's time, and if he doesn't rise to the occasion this season, it might just pass him by.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Devin Brown: Brown's spring practice came to an unceremonious end when he suffered a finger injury on his throwing hand and underwent a minor procedure on April 12, knocking him out of Ohio State's final practice sessions of the spring, as well as the spring game. Day said the injury is not expected to sideline him for long, and he should be back throwing by the summer.

Up until that point, Brown had mostly kept in step with quarterback Kyle McCord as the two battled to be Ohio State's starting quarterback this upcoming season. Neither quarterback necessarily had an outstanding spring, with the offense as a whole struggling at points throughout the 15 spring practices. But both also looked capable of leading Ohio State's offense if needed.

Even with no showing in the spring game for Brown, McCord's nondescript performance – just 18 of 34 passing with a touchdown – leaves the competition open for the time being. But, without a strong finish to the spring, Brown will need to continue to show out over the coming weeks and months ahead of fall camp opening.

Redshirt sophomore offensive lineman Zen Michalski: Michalski

had the opportunity entering this spring to cement a starting spot at right tackle, but instead, the spring comes to an end with more questions than answers on the offensive line for Ohio State.

Michalski struggled throughout the spring while taking snaps at right tackle, though that issue was not exclusive to him with redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola, who split time at the position with Michalski, routinely beaten on the edge as well. Michalski also missed some time with injury, putting him further behind the eight ball.

It wasn't all bad for Michalski, who would be expected to have some growing pains while getting his first significant action at tackle, as he did find success at points against Ohio State's talented group of defensive ends. Even so, Michalski or Tshabola's inability to lock down one of the starting jobs could also facilitate an addition from the transfer portal, which could be a positive for the Buckeyes but would be an indictment of the current tackles.

Junior defensive end Jack Sawyer: On the other side of the battle between the offensive and defensive line, Sawyer has been among those who have looked rejuvenated during the spring.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said ahead of spring practice that Sawyer would spend his time at defensive end rather than repping at the "Jack," and the coach likes what he's seen over the past few weeks.

"Jack is getting better every day," Knowles said on March 28. "I think that move and staying out of that package this spring has been really good for Jack. He gets to focus on the fundamentals with Coach (Larry) Johnson, and I really like his progress."

Sawyer had four tackles in the spring game and has consistently made life miserable for Ohio State's offensive line. That dominance was missing throughout most of last season, and with the Buckeyes looking for a big year from the likes of Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloua, Sawyer could be in for a big season if he continues to carry this momentum.

Junior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams: Ohio State's interior defensive line hasn't gotten quite the focus of those coming off the edge, but it's still been a solid outing this spring from Williams, defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. and others attacking from the inside.

"I want to dominate," Williams said on March 23. "I feel like it's my turn to step up. Our whole group needs to dominate. We need to implement the Rushmen back into what it's been."

Williams notched two tackles and a sack in the spring game, capping off a positive spring with continued development as he looks to break out this season. In a defensive tackle room looking for leaders, this could be his time to step up entering his third season with the program.

— Braden Moles

game through the air – 26th in the country and sixth in the Big Ten – but struggled to turn that positive coverage into extra possessions, with the cornerbacks not intercepting a single pass.

Cornerback Denzel Burke was culpable as part of that unit, starting the season off slowly before finding his groove in the second half of the campaign, as did most of the secondary, at least until the last couple of games. Burke has taken things to a next level this spring, flying around during practice and showing that he can return to the level he displayed during his freshman campaign.

"The second year in this scheme, (it's) a lot easier," Burke said. "You kind of get a feel for what Coach Knowles is going to call and the trust is there. And I'm really excited. This whole spring, it's probably the most fun I've had in a while on the field. The game is a lot slower. I'm making a lot more plays on the ball, seeing things quicker, reacting quicker. It's a lot more fun."

The defense has since added Igbinosun as well as safety Ja'Had Carter, both in position to compete for a starting job, but many of the same contributors from last season

are back. With some improved technique leading the push, Burke believes the defense is on the rise.

"I feel like we've got to still clean up some of the little details out there, but we've just got to keep flying to the ball, playing hard, play for each other," he said.

"We've got a chip on our shoulder. We have a lot to prove to the world and are really excited for what we have in store for this season. We just have to stay in the moment, keep going, getting 1 percent better every day."

The secondary is just one part, though, of a defense that is looking to allow fewer explosive plays while notching more explosive plays of its own. The defense had five quarterback sacks during the spring game – one each from defensive ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson and defensive tackles Ty Hamilton, Hero Kanu and Tyleik Williams – a feat the Buckeyes accomplished only twice in all of last season.

It continued a strong run for the defensive line in recent weeks that has wreaked havoc on the offensive line and the quarterbacks, at least to the degree that an off-limits quarterback can be impacted by a pass

rusher. And to the credit of the linebackers, one of the only units on the defense that was consistently up to the task last season, they also had a strong spring game, with Gabe Powers, Hicks and Reid Carrico all among the top four tacklers on defense.

This is the type of improvement to be expected entering Knowles' second year at the defensive helm, and the players have picked up on that shift as they look to combine last year's lessons with the momentum from this spring.

"Last year was our first year with Coach Knowles and we were learning the defense a little bit, so now we're kind of refining and learning the nuances and how to play certain plays," linebacker Cody Simon said. "So we're definitely making a lot of strides. And I think we did accomplish our goals for this spring."

"I mean, we were really just dipping our toe in the water with our defense at this time last year. Every time you do something again and again, you build confidence. From front to back, defensive line to (defensive backs), confidence is one of our strong suits right now."

Defense Continues Strong Run In Spring Game

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

It was a beautiful day on April 15 for Ohio State's annual spring game at Ohio Stadium, where the team and fans – all 75,122 of them – got their first look at this upcoming season's edition of the Ohio State Buckeyes.

While most outings in recent seasons on Ohio State's home turf have often featured a high-scoring offense under the tutelage of head coach Ryan Day, it was the Buckeyes' defense (Gray) under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles that won the day this time around, leaving with a 40-31 win over the offense (Scarlet) that struggled to sustain drives.

It was a far cry from the end of last season that had Ohio State's defense fall victim on the ground and through the air against Michigan and Georgia, leaving the Buckeyes with back-to-back losses and a bitter ending to a season with legitimate title aspirations.

But during the spring game, the defense largely took care of business, going up against an offense that, even without TreVeyon Henderson, Emeka Egbuka, Julian Fleming and several other contributors, figures to be among the best outlets the defense will run into for the foreseeable future.

"When you leave the spring, you get a feel for where things are," Day said. "When you start (the) spring, it's hard. I think you hear me say, 'We'll get through the spring and we'll have a better feeling.' Coming out of the spring, I do.

"You saw today, we didn't really give up a lot of explosive (plays), maybe just a couple in the second half. That's important for us. We expect to score a lot of points on offense, and if we can avoid explosive plays, that's a recipe for winning. That was the idea in 2019, and we need to continue to do that. As we come out of the spring, we'll evaluate it, we'll go through



SONNY BROCKWAY

UNDER PRESSURE – Ohio State's defensive ends, including Kenyatta Jackson (97) and Omari Abor (23), were a pain in the side of the Buckeye quarterbacks during the spring game, including signal caller Tristan Gebbia (14).

each position, but there's reason for optimism (on defense) for sure."

Points for the offensive vs. defense scrimmage were scored as follows: standard scoring for the offense, and for the

defense, scores via takeaway touchdowns (six points), takeaways (three points), three-and-outs (three points), quarterback sacks (two points) and forced punts (one point), though the specifics of scor-

ing – due to the loose nature of exhibition – were sometimes not followed.

Quiet Start For Offense

Ohio State's offense struggled to move the ball early, going three-and-out on the first drive of the game with quarterback Kyle McCord. After an incompleteness on first down and a 3-yard gain by running back Miyan Williams, McCord's third-and-7 pass was broken up by linebacker C.J. Hicks, who got his hand up and nearly pulled in the interception.

The Buckeyes then punted on the next drive after moving just 33 yards in nine plays with quarterback Tristan Gebbia at the helm, and the defensive stands established a 5-0 lead for Gray with 10:19 left in the first quarter.

The Scarlet were finally able to move the ball during the game's third drive. Williams started things off with two runs totaling just 2 yards, but McCord found wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. – teammates not only at Ohio State, but in high school at St. Joseph's Prep in Philadelphia – for a 21-yard gain to move the chains. He later found Harrison for gains of 5 and 36 yards – the latter an impressive throw over a pair of defenders in the secondary – to get the offense down to the Gray 22-yard line.

There, McCord fired three consecutive incomplete passes – one each toward tight end Cade Stover, Williams and freshman wideout Carnell Tate, which was broken up by cornerback Denzel Burke – before kicker Jayden Fielding missed from 40 yards out.

Ohio State finally found points on the next drive as running back Chip Trayanum began to show out, rushing for a gains of 9 and 10 yards with a 7-yard reception from Gebbia sandwiched between. After being sacked by defensive end Kenyatta Jackson – netting two points for the defense – Gebbia carried the ball three times for 13 yards to the 28-yard line. Trayanum rushed for 8 yards, and Gebbia completed a 1-yard pass to Kaleb Brown before kicker Parker Lewis hit a 38-yard field goal, making it 7-3 in favor of the defense.

The offense sputtered over the next four drives, going three-and-out on each one. The defense picked up a trio of sacks over those drives from defensive end Caden Curry, defensive tackle Tyleik Williams and Hicks – though Hicks' was later ruled a tackle for loss, but the points still stood – and led 23-3 through the eighth drive of the exhibition.

The Buckeyes were able to move on the next drive, with McCord completing consecutive passes to Dallan Hayden, Brown and wideout Jayden Ballard, while Hayden paced Ohio State on the drive with 9 yards on the ground. After picking up a first down at the Gray 33-yard line, the drive came to a screeching halt as McCord completed a pass to Ballard for just 3 yards, Trayanum ran for no gain and McCord followed it up with a pair of incompleteness to turn the ball over on downs.

The offense quickly responded,

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though, when on the second play of the ensuing drive, Trayanum found a hole on the right side of the line and exploded for a 65-yard touchdown for the game's first touchdown. Jake Seibert, who entered the transfer portal on April 17, tacked on the extra point to make it 23-10 in favor of the defense.

Ohio State's Scarlet squad punted on the next drive, and on the final drive of the half, Gebbia was sacked by sophomore defensive tackle Hero Kanu – who finished with five tackles, two tackles for loss and the sack – to send the scrimmage to the break with a 26-10 lead for the defense.

McCord finished the first half 11 of 22 passing for 114 yards while Gebbia was 8 of 13 for 40 yards, and both were sacked twice. Trayanum led with 85 rushing yards, and Harrison led through the air with 62 receiving yards, while linebacker Cody Simon and cornerback Davison Igbosun each totaled five tackles.

Calling In Some Favors

The defense continued to overpower the offense early in the second half, forcing back-to-back three-and-outs to increase their advantage to 32-10. But on the next drive, the spring game provided perhaps one of the greatest highlights in the scrimmage's history.

After an 18-yard rush by Trayanum to start the drive and McCord later complet-

Continued On Page 12

Top Performers At The Spring Game

Junior cornerback Denzel Burke – After a 2022 season riddled with on-field struggles and off-field injuries to follow up a breakout freshman campaign, Burke was one player who needed a strong spring. In the spring game itself, he gave his best impression of a blanket while covering Ohio State's receivers. He recorded one pass breakup and shut down his matchups throughout the scrimmage.

Fifty-second-year senior running back Archie Griffin – The spring game is usually a time for the youth on Ohio State's football team to stand out, but this time around, the seniors – or in this case, a two-time Heisman Trophy winning senior – got one more chance to shine. Griffin, with next season marking the 50th anniversary of his first Heisman Trophy, stepped into the spring game to score his first touchdown in Ohio Stadium since Nov. 15, 1975, rushing for a 25-yard score in the third quarter to provide a boost for the offense.

Sophomore linebacker C.J. Hicks – The former five-star recruit took advantage of the starting spot afforded him with seniors Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers out at linebacker for the spring, breaking fast on two passes to record pass breakups, nearly interceptions in both cases. He added six tackles including a TFL, tied for second most on the squad behind eight from redshirt freshman linebacker Gabe Powers.

Redshirt freshman defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. – Emerging as a candidate to be the team's third defensive end behind juniors J.T. Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer, Jackson collected three tackles with one sack in the spring game. His quickness off the edge and ability to pressure quarterbacks could be an asset come fall.

Redshirt freshman defensive tackle Hero Kanu – Kanu could be an important piece at defensive tackle for the Buckeyes this season as an obvious candidate to be the fourth man on the depth chart behind Mike Hall Jr., Tyleik Williams and Ty Hamilton, and he flashed some promise in the spring game. Making five tackles, the most of the team's defensive linemen, Kanu picked up a sack and two tackles for loss.

Sophomore safety Sonny Styles – Along with Hicks, Styles is another former five-star sophomore on the defensive side of the ball, and Styles was able to roll in and build off the snaps he played against Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinals Dec. 31. He swatted away two passes while recording six tackles.

Freshman wide receiver Carnell Tate – Other than Archie Griffin's third-quarter touchdown run, the Ohio Stadium crowd may not have gotten louder than it did when junior quarterback Kyle McCord lofted a gorgeous ball up the left sideline to Tate, who separated from his defender and brought in a 37-yard touchdown reception. Tate finished with three catches for 45 yards and the score.

Senior running back Chip Trayanum – Arguably the most impressive offensive performer statistically, Trayanum made a case as to why he might deserve some action behind juniors TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams come fall. He picked up 110 yards on just eight carries, more than doubling the total of any other rusher, while adding a 65-yard touchdown jaunt.

Spring Scholarship Roster – Offense

QUARTERBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
6	Kyle McCord	6-3	215	Jr./2
33	Devin Brown	6-3	213	So./4

Other scholarship players: Tristan Gebbia (7th-Sr.)

Comments: With program great C.J. Stroud off to the NFL, McCord and Brown stepped into a competition for the starting quarterback job during the offseason. Although head coach Ryan Day declared that neither Brown nor McCord was able to get a leg up on the other during spring camp, McCord's status in the battle received a boost after Brown was held out of the spring game due to a fractured pinkie on his throwing hand, sparking comparisons to the two-year contest between Dwayne Haskins and Joe Burrow. Outside of McCord and Brown, Gebbia was also brought in to provide some depth and leadership to the room while he pursues a career in coaching. Freshman Lincoln Kienholz will arrive this summer.

RUNNING BACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
32	TreVeyon Henderson	5-10	214	Jr./2
3	Miyan Williams	5-9	226	Sr./3
5	Dallan Hayden	5-10	203	So./3

Other scholarship players: Chip Trayanum (Sr.), Evan Pryor (R-So.)

Comments: After an injury-riddled 2022 campaign, Ohio State's running back corps remained intact heading into spring camp. However, the injury bug still resided in the room with Henderson, Williams and Pryor all being limited in camp, opening the door for Hayden and Trayanum to take the lion's share of the reps during the spring. The running back room projects to be one of the deepest on the team, with the two-headed monster of Henderson and Williams well supported by a number of potential contributors.

WIDE RECEIVER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	6-4	208	Jr./2
2	Emeka Egbuka	6-1	206	Jr./2
4	Julian Fleming	6-2	205	Sr./2

9	Jayden Ballard	6-2	196	Jr./3
10	Xavier Johnson	6-1	210	Gr./1
17	Carnell Tate	6-2	191	Fr./4

Other scholarship players: Kojo Antwi (So.), Kaleb Brown (So.), Caleb Burton (R-Fr.), Kyion Grayes (R-Fr.), Bryson Rodgers (Fr.), Noah Rogers (Fr.)

Comments: Ohio State largely returned its collection of receiving contributors from last season, with Jaxon Smith-Njigba – who played sparingly last campaign due to injury – being the only departure from the receiving room. In the absence of Smith-Njigba, Harrison elevated himself into one of the nation's best receivers, ending the season as a finalist for the Biletnikoff Award, while Egbuka also emerged as a dangerous receiving threat. Harrison and Egbuka both carry high expectations as Preseason Walter Camp All-Americans, but the depth in the room is also strong with Fleming, Ballard and Johnson all returning. Not to mention, Ohio State has also brought in high-level talent in freshmen Tate, Rogers and Brandon Inniss who will arrive on campus in the summer – to mesh with a solid sophomore class at receiver.

TIGHT END				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
8	Cade Stover	6-4	251	Sr./2
88	Gee Scott Jr.	6-3	240	Jr./2
84	Joe Royer	6-5	252	Sr./3

Other scholarship players: Sam Hart (R-So.), Bennett Christian (R-Fr.), Jelani Thurman (Fr.)

Comments: Stover's return to Ohio State's tight end unit was a welcome one, as the senior decided to forgo the NFL draft, marking a huge win for first-year tight ends coach Keenan Bailey. Stover posted one of the most productive receiving seasons out of a tight end in recent Ohio State history last year and is primed to continue that evolution of his game in 2023. Day said the Buckeyes will also rely on their 12-personnel sets, as they did in 2022, with Scott and Royer battling for the second tight end slot. The freshman Thurman has also emerged as a potential weapon in the red zone for the Buckeyes, standing 6-6 and boasting the necessary length to catch jump balls.

LEFT TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
70	Josh Fryar	6-6	320	Sr./3
68	George Fitzpatrick	6-6	305	So./4

LEFT GUARD				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
74	Donovan Jackson	6-4	320	Jr./2
71	Ben Christman	6-6	315	Jr./3

CENTER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
75	Carson Hinzman	6-4	300	So./4
78	Jakob James	6-5	297	Jr./3

RIGHT GUARD				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
55	Matthew Jones	6-4	312	Gr./1
66	Enokk Vimahi	6-4	310	Sr./2

RIGHT TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
65	Zen Michalski	6-7	310	Jr./3
77	Tegra Tshabola	6-6	327	So./4

Other scholarship players: Victor Cutler Jr. (Sr.), Trey Leroux (R-Jr.), Grant Toutant (R-Jr.), Avery Henry (R-Fr.), Luke Montgomery (Fr.), Josh Padilla (Fr.), Austin Siereveld (Fr.), Miles Walker (Fr.)

Comments: Ohio State's offensive line unit carried the most questions into spring camp, with position battles raging at tackle and center. Fryar will likely fill the void at the left tackle spot while Jackson and Jones return to their starting guard positions, providing the Buckeyes with some clarity as to the makeup of the offensive front. In regard to the center battle, James was held out for the spring, allowing Hinzman to get a leg up on the competition while Cutler continues to make progress with his move inside from tackle. Michalski and Tshabola have emerged as the candidates for the starting right tackle job, but Day mentioned that neither one of them has done enough to claim the role just yet and that transfer portal prospects are not out of the question at the position.

Archie's Touchdown Run A Game Highlight

Spring Scholarship Roster - Defense

DEFENSIVE END

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
44	J.T. Tuimoloau	6-4	271	Jr./2
33	Jack Sawyer	6-4	265	Jr./2
97	Kenyatta Jackson	6-5	252	So./4

Other scholarship players: Mitchell Melton (R-Jr.), Caden Curry (So.), Omari Abor (R-Fr.)

Comments: With two former five-star recruits in Tuimoloau and Sawyer leading the charge, Ohio State's edge rushers have the potential for a much more productive year after no player on the team recorded more than 4½ sacks last season. Zach Harrison is off to the NFL draft, but he stands out as the only departure who played a significant role last season. Jackson has been making waves as a pass rusher in spring practice and could be one to watch, while Curry could factor in at either the defensive end or three-technique position. Melton will see work at the hybrid "Jack" position when it returns this fall. Freshman Joshua Mickens will join the room this summer.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
51	Mike Hall Jr.	6-2	285	Jr./3
91	Tyleik Williams	6-3	320	Jr./2
58	Ty Hamilton	6-3	295	Sr./3

Other scholarship players: Jaden McKenzie (R-Sr.), Hero Kanu (R-Fr.), Will Smith Jr. (Fr.)

Comments: Two are likely to start from the group of Hall, Hamilton and Williams, with Hall guaranteed to be one of them by defensive line coach Larry Johnson early in the spring. Back healthy, he'll look to recapture the momentum he gained in the first half of last season before injuries limited him down the stretch, though it's unclear whether that will be at one-technique or three-technique defensive tackle. Both Williams and Hamilton have significant experience from last season, and they'll call upon it to help replace Taron Vincent. Kanu and McKenzie will work throughout the season to try to earn playing time of their own and will be pushed this summer by incoming freshmen Kayden McDonald and Jason Moore.

LINEBACKER

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
35	Tommy Eichenberg	6-2	239	Sr./2

22	Steele Chambers	6-1	232	Sr./2
30	Cody Simon	6-2	239	Sr./2
11	C.J. Hicks	6-3	230	So./3

Other scholarship players: Reid Carrico (R-So.), Gabe Powers (R-Fr.)

Comments: There's no position with more certainty about its starters on the defense than linebacker. Eichenberg and Chambers return as the team's top two tacklers from last season, while Simon rolled in as the third option at the position in 2022 and will look to do the same in 2023. Former five-star Hicks pushes for playing time of his own – whether at linebacker or the "Jack" position. Powers, another blue-chipper from Hicks' class, could be one to keep an eye on for the future. Freshman Arvell Reese will arrive on campus this summer.

CORNERBACK

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
10	Denzel Burke	6-1	190	Jr./2
7	Jordan Hancock	6-0	187	Jr./2
20	Davison Igbinosun	6-2	187	So./3
18	Jyaire Brown	5-11	180	So./3

Other scholarship players: Ryan Turner (R-Fr.), Jermaine Mathews (Fr.)

Comments: Burke and Hancock are looking for bounce-back seasons, both having dealt with injuries that hindered their production as the corners were partially responsible for surrendering big plays that hurt the Buckeyes toward the end of 2022. Burke looked like a blanket in the spring game, recording a pass breakup and showing good coverage all-around. Igbinosun has been an injection of life through the transfer portal, adding length and physical presence that has popped in practice. Mathews has provided depth since enrolling early as a freshman, and as one of the top corners in his class he could have sky-high potential. He'll be joined this summer by fellow freshman Calvin Simpson-Hunt.

ADJUSTER

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
41	Josh Proctor	6-2	205	Sr./1
37	Kye Stokes	6-1	192	So./3
25	Malik Hartford	6-2	183	Fr./4

Comments: Flipping over from bandit following last season, Proctor has been starting at adjuster through-

out spring practice and will look to recapture the form he found early in 2021 before breaking his leg. He'll replace multi-year starter Ronnie Hickman, who is off to the NFL draft. Stokes, a sophomore, impressed in last year's spring game with nine tackles and two pass breakups. He'll have a chance to push for at least a rotational role while Hartford learns the position from the two of them.

BANDIT

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
12	Lathan Ransom	6-1	207	Sr./2
6	Sonny Styles	6-4	223	So./3
2	Kourt Williams II	6-1	228	Sr./2

Comments: Ransom returns as the team's starter at bandit from a season ago, picking up the third-most tackles on the squad with 74, intercepting a pass and blocking two punts. It was a tumultuous end to the season for Ransom, however, as he allowed some big plays against Michigan and Georgia. Styles is another former five-star the staff is trying to get on the field, whether at bandit – likely his best spot – or elsewhere. Williams was a captain last season but hasn't seen much meaningful playing time to this point in his Ohio State career. Freshman Jayden Bonsu, who arrives on campus this summer, makes sense to eventually play there as well.

NICKELBACK

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
13	Cameron Martinez	5-10	190	Sr./3
14	Ja'Had Carter	6-1	203	Sr./2

Comments: Carter missed the back half of the spring, but he and Martinez should have a spirited competition for the starting nickel spot after Carter transferred in from Syracuse this offseason. He had 138 tackles and five interceptions in three seasons as a starter for the Orange. Martinez did get some experience rotating or filling in for Tanner McCalister, last year's starting nickel for the Buckeyes. Cornerbacks Brown and Turner have both been practicing at the position throughout spring as well in an effort to build depth. Incoming freshman Cedrick Hawkins is a likely candidate to take reps at nickel once he's on campus this summer.

Continued From Page 11

ing 9- and 10-yard passes to Ballard and Hayden, respectively, Ohio State's offense worked down to the Gray 25-yard line before calling in a surprising substitution at running back: two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin. Griffin took the

handoff from McCord and went 25 yards for the score, cutting into the defense's lead to make it 34-17.

After Griffin's score, he took a few moments to celebrate with the team and received a loud reaction from those in attendance acknowledging Griffin's first touchdown at Ohio Stadium since his fi-

nal home game with the Buckeyes on Nov. 15, 1975.

Ohio State's offense turned the ball over on downs on the next drive. After gains by running back Chase Brecht for 20 yards, Gebbia's next two passes fell incomplete, and after a 3-yard gain to Bryson Rodgers, Gebbia's throw on fourth-and-7 to wideout Kyion Grayes went to the turf.

On the following drive the Buckeyes made it down to the opposing 37-yard line as the third quarter ended, and to begin the fourth, McCord connected with Tate for a 37-yard touchdown to make it 34-24 in favor of the defense with 9:44 left in the game.

After several punts, putting the defense up 40-23 with 4:30 to go, Ohio State's offense found one last gasp with Gebbia hitting wideout Noah Rogers for a 57-yard touchdown to make it 40-31 with under three minutes remaining. The offense's final drive, led by walk-on quarterback Mason Maggs, made it just 31 yards in five plays before time ran out.

McCord led the day for the Scarlet squad, going 18 of 34 for 184 yards and a touchdown, while Gebbia finished 14 of 24 for 127 yards and a score. Trayanum led Ohio State on the ground with eight rushes for 110 yards – don't forget about Griffin's carry for 25 yards, though – while Hayden led with five receptions for 27 yards and Rogers hauled in three catches for a team-high 64 receiving yards.

For the Gray, linebacker Gabe Powers led with eight tackles, while safety Sonny Styles, Igbinosun and linebacker Reid Carrico each notched six tackles. Kanu's two tackles for loss led the squad, while Hicks and Styles each recorded a pair of pass breakups.

McCord and Gebbia were sacked a total of five times, with Kanu, defensive ends Jackson and Caden Curry and defensive tackles Ty Hamilton and Williams all picking up a quarterback takedown.



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MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					31 @IOW 7:08	1 @IOW 3:08
2 @IOW 1:08	3	4 CLT 6:15	5 CLT 6:15	6 CLT 6:15	7 CLT 7:05	8 CLT 4:15
9 CLT 1:05	10	11 @WOR 6:45	12 @WOR 6:45	13 @WOR 6:45	14 @WOR 6:45	15 @WOR 4:05
16 @WOR 1:05	17	18 TOL 6:15	19 TOL 6:15	20 TOL 12:05	21 TOL 7:05	22 TOL 4:15
23 TOL 1:05	24	25 @IND 6:35	26 @IND 1:35	27 @IND 11:05AM	28 @IND 7:05	29 @IND 6:35
30 @IND 1:35						

MAY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2 IOW 6:15	3 IOW 6:35	4 IOW 6:15	5 IOW 7:05	6 IOW 7:05
7 IOW 1:05	8	9 @LOU 6:05	10 @LOU 11:05AM	11 @LOU 6:35	12 @LOU 7:15	13 @LOU 7:15
14 @LOU 1:05	15	16 STP 7:05	17 STP 12:05	18 STP 7:05	19 STP 7:05	20 STP 7:05
21 STP 1:05	22	23 IND 7:05	24 IND 7:05	25 IND 7:05	26 IND 7:05	27 IND 7:05
28 IND 1:05	29	30 @IOW 6:38	31 @IOW 12:08			

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JUNE						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 @IOW 12:08	2 @IOW 7:08	3 @IOW 6:08
4 @IOW 1:08	5	6 LOU 7:05	7 LOU 7:05	8 LOU 12:05	9 LOU 7:05	10 LOU 7:05
11 LOU 1:05	12	13 @OMA 7:05	14 @OMA 12:05	15 @OMA 7:05	16 @OMA 7:05	17 @OMA 7:05
18 @OMA 2:05	19	20 @IND 7:05	21 @IND 1:35	22 @IND 7:05	23 @IND 7:05	24 @IND 7:05
25 @IND 1:35	26	27	28 TOL 7:05	29 TOL 7:05	30 TOL 7:05	

JULY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 TOL 5:05
2 TOL 6:05	3 TOL 6:05	4 @NAS 6:05	5 @NAS 6:35	6 @NAS 6:35	7 @NAS 6:35	8 @NAS 6:35
9 @NAS 1:05	10	11	12	13	14 IOW 7:05	15 IOW 7:05
16 IOW 4:05	17	18 @LOU 6:35	19 @LOU 6:35	20 @LOU 6:35	21 @LOU 7:15	22 @LOU 7:15
23 @LOU 6:05	24	25 OMA 7:05	26 OMA 12:05	27 OMA 7:05	28 OMA 7:05	29 OMA 7:05
30 OMA 4:05	31					

AUGUST						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 STP 7:05	2 STP 7:05	3 STP 12:05	4 STP 7:05	5 STP 7:05
6 STP 4:05	7	8 @TOL 7:05	9 @TOL 7:05	10 @TOL 7:05	11 @TOL 7:05	12 @TOL 7:05
13 @TOL 4:05	14	15 @SYR 6:35	16 @SYR 6:35	17 @SYR 6:35	18 @SYR 6:35	19 @SYR 6:35
20 @SYR 1:05	21	22 JAX 6:15	23 JAX 6:15	24 JAX 6:15	25 JAX 7:05	26 JAX 5:05
27 JAX 4:05	28	29 @STP 7:07	30 @STP 7:07	31 @STP 7:07		

SEPTEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 @STP 7:07	2 @STP 7:07
3 @STP 5:07	4	5 SWB 6:15	6 SWB 6:15	7 SWB 6:15	8 SWB 7:05	9 SWB 7:05
10 SWB 1:05	11	12 @TOL 6:35	13 @TOL 12:05	14 @TOL 6:35	15 @TOL 7:05	16 @TOL 5:05
17 @TOL 2:05	18	19 OMA 6:15	20 OMA 6:15	21 OMA 6:35	22 OMA 7:05	23 OMA 1:05
24 OMA 1:05	25	26	27	28	29	30

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Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on his confidence level exiting spring practice: "I do (feel confident). I think the first thing (we needed to work on) was the back end of the defense, explosive plays. You saw today, we didn't really give up a lot of explosives, maybe just a couple in the second half. That's important for us. We expect to score a lot of points on offense, and if we can avoid explosive plays (on defense), that's a recipe for winning."

Day on the approach to play at the line of scrimmage in the spring game: "We were very vanilla on defense today. We didn't blitz one time. So there really isn't a lot of communication (along the offensive line), this is more one-on-one, me against you, technique. That's what, really, the spring is. Then we start getting into schematics more in the preseason."

Redshirt freshman quarterback Devin Brown on he and junior Kyle McCord's position battle: "We're trying to get each other better every single day, and that's all we can ask for, is to push each other. I'd say Kyle would feel the same. When you're with the best competition, you feel like you've got to play your best and bring it every day."

McCord on his feelings leaving spring: "You want to build that chemistry with the guys. I think going with (both) the ones and the twos in the spring is good. That way I'm building chemistry with six, seven, eight receivers, four tight ends, all of that. You're getting good reps with the whole offense. I definitely feel like the spring went well."

Day on Archie Griffin's touchdown run: "That was fun watching him there. Next year is the 50th anniversary of his first Heisman, so we wanted to make sure he came back for that one. The offense needed a little help at that point too, right around the 30-yard-line, so we felt like we called into the bullpen and pulled in No. 45."

Junior cornerback Denzel Burke on his improvements from last year: "My confidence has always been high. I've always known what I can do. It's just a matter of applying it to the game on Saturdays. I took a different approach this year, more of a pro approach just in the way I'm moving on and off the field. It's trans-



SONNY BROCKWAY

UPS AND DOWNS — Ohio State head coach Ryan Day took plenty of positives away from spring ball, such as the improved defense, as well as things for his team to work on moving forward, including solidifying a starting five on the offensive line.

lated to the field."

Ohio State senior linebacker Cody Simon on how James Laurinaitis has boosted the linebacker room: "There's so much knowledge around the game, around playing linebacker. It's tenfold how much it helps. We're so thankful to have Coach in there and all the young guys together."

Simon on the ceiling of the linebacker room: "I don't even know what the limit is. If we do what we do, we lead the defense, we could be top in the country no matter what. That's our goal. It's always our goal to be the best. I couldn't even give you a visualization, just that our goal is to be the best in the country."

Day on sophomore linebacker C.J. Hicks: "He flashed more today. We're still looking for that consistency, but you're starting to see it more and more. He's making plays, he's showing up. And I think Jim (Knowles) and James

are both doing a great job with him."

Burke on Ole Miss transfer cornerback Davison Igbinosun: "A great person. I love that dude. Everyone wants to compete, everyone wants to play. It breeds competition. It's fun having him here. He's a great addition to our unit, and I'm really excited for him."

Day on the team's identity entering this season: "It's something that we wanted to forge early in the offseason, and it's about competing. We've talked long and hard about how there's a difference between hard work and competing. Everybody's working hard. Without it you don't have a chance. But competing means winning or losing, so we had a lot of winner-loser days. We have another message that we want to get into during the summer, (but) we'll get into that down the road. But it's been about competing this spring."

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Spring Game Undergoes Evolution Over Time

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

College football's opening weekend is still months away, but spring is when the college season truly begins to take shape.

Over the years, the complexion of spring football has changed, whether that be the number of practices allowed or the amount of contact in practices, but the ultimate goal of the spring has remained the same.

"You're always trying to improve your team, find what your plan was going to be for next year, and find what their potential was and things of that nature," former Ohio State defensive coordinator Fred Pagac told BSB. "The reason for spring ball is to improve and find out if any of the younger kids have improved to where you were expecting them to be."

Spring camp is an integral part of the college football experience, serving as the premier time for developing players and finding a team's identity. Awaiting each team at the finish line of camp is typically the annual spring game, an intrasquad scrimmage that provides fans with their first glimpse of the upcoming version of their team.

The pageantry and allure of the Ohio State spring game have gone unchanged as the years pass, but the on-the-field product has taken many different forms. Differences in how to split up teams, scoring format and amount of contact, among others, have popped up when it comes to the spring game.

To longtime Ohio State assistant coach Bill Conley, there are three prevailing spring game formats: first team vs. second team, drafted teams that spread out the starting-caliber players over two teams, or offense vs. defense. Ohio State has experimented with each of these formats over time, with famed head coach Woody Hayes opting to play his first team against his second team, while his successor Earle Bruce preferred for the teams to be drafted.

John Cooper and Jim Tressel both utilized the team-wide draft and offense vs. defense formats, while Tressel's successor Urban Meyer also opted for a split-squad game. Under current head coach Ryan Day, the Buckeyes have opted to follow an offense vs. defense format, pitting the units against one another with modified scoring for the defense.

While those are the primary formats that are utilized in spring game settings, Conley said that no spring game is truly the same as there are always little tweaks and changes implemented by the head coach on a year-to-year basis.

"They believed in a one-year philosophy," said Conley, who played under Hayes and coached under Bruce, Cooper and Tressel. "We even buried (the game) at times because a lot of it depends on the depth chart and if you've got a lot of guys hurt, things like that. It's changed. All of the coaches change it."

Conley said he feels the most effective format is to split the roster up into equally talented teams, adding that it gives

an increased competitive aspect to the scrimmage.

"I would try to have somewhat of a game that is competitive," he said. "That's more entertaining for the fans. It's more competitive for the individuals, and they'd get into it more."

Former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin agreed with Conley, and he even served as a team captain himself for one of his spring games under Bruce and helped draft a competitive team for the game.

"We'd just go down in Earle's basement and we did a mock draft, everybody got drafted," Laughlin said. "That was a good way to do it, and that was competitive."

While Laughlin dealt with a more straightforward approach under Bruce, he also said Hayes – despite typically going first team against second team – tried to create situational scenarios to keep his players on their toes.

"Woody always went ones vs. twos," Laughlin said. "A lot of time, Woody loved goal line, so a lot of times he'd get us inside the 10 and then have first team against first team and second team against second team."

Hayes and Bruce took different approaches to the spring game, but Laughlin said the competition level didn't change while pointing to some trash talk he experienced during Hayes' time as head coach.

"I remember one game, I was starting at outside linebacker, and (offensive coordinator) Alex Gibbs comes walking by me, and he says 'Laughlin, you better be ready because we're coming to kick your ass,'" Laughlin recalled with a laugh.

In regard to the current format utilized by Day, Conley said it gives the coaches more control over the contest and allows them to keep players healthy while splitting reps more evenly throughout the roster.

The current format is in line with the overarching changes to the spring camp, most notably in regard to the limited-contact rules that teams are required to follow now. In this season's spring game, Ohio State opted to play the first couple of drives to a "thud" – full-speed but with limited contact – while the rest of the game was played with full contact, with the exception of the quarterbacks.

Several players were also limited despite participating in spring camp, most notably wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., whose day was finished by the end of the first quarter. This year's spring game was drastically different from what Conley experienced during his time as a player and coach at Ohio State.

"When you went to a spring game back in those days, you've got guys like Jack Tatum, and he was a physical player all of the time," Conley said. "Everybody took it more serious. It was a more physical game back then. Your stars really stood out. Rex Kern, at quarterback, he was going to stand out."

"They'd get fired up with the competition. But, again, you have such a fine

line today that you don't want to get your No. 1 guys – especially at skill positions – hurt or dinged up."

The limited contact of this year's spring game reflected the opposite of how Pagac said he would approach the game if he were still coaching.

"I think if you're going to play a game, you play a game. If we're going to have a spring game, which fans are going to come out – if I'm going to have a game, it should be a game," Pagac said. "I think you should hit. It's different nowadays. I coached in the NFL for 18 years too, and it's a little different than it was back in the '80s, '90s and early 2000s."

The major changes have come due to the modernized nature of spring camp as a whole. With the changes in spring practice bleeding into the game, Conley said the limited contact is necessary for the way football is played in the modern era.

"When I was playing, (in) spring practice, we practiced almost every day, from Monday through Saturday," Conley said. "And most of those were full-go practices. As things evolved, those practices in the spring – first of all, they're limited in the number you can have and limited in the number of contact days you can have – they're not as physical as they used to be."

"As a player, almost all of the practices were full go, and the spring game was definitely a full-go kind of thing, but

things have changed. I think a lot of it is because players are bigger, faster and stronger than they've ever been and you can't afford to beat on them that much. That's why the NCAA has limited the number of contact days you can have in the spring."

Despite the limitations surrounding the game in recent seasons, Conley said the game still carries real value for the players from a competition standpoint and for the Ohio State fan base.

"(It was), 'Hey, we're going to have the spring game in the stadium. Relatives can come, fans can come,' and so forth. That motivated them to play at a high level," he said. "It's just as much for the fans. The fans that don't have season tickets, that can't come to every game, it gives them a chance to at least see (the team) on the field and visit the stadium."

Laughlin echoed the sentiment shared by Conley and said the game remains an integral part of the college football off-season and is a steppingstone toward the regular season.

"There's still a value to it," Laughlin said. "It's the end of camp, it's still a spring game and people still like to see it. It's a little bit of a dress rehearsal for a ballgame. It's still a big deal. It's not like a real ballgame, but you might as well have it."

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Ballard, Styles Step Up In Spring Practice

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

Ohio State's offense and defense were in very distinct positions entering this year's 15 sessions of spring practice.

The offense entered the fray with key position battles at quarterback and along the offensive line, with some of its best skill talent out at wide receiver and running back. It allowed some of the backups to get some run in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

For the defense, the entire offseason was about correcting the mistakes that cost the team against Michigan and Georgia at the end of last year, particularly when it comes to limiting explosive plays. The team's cornerbacks struggled for much of the season, and the safeties imploded at the very end, placing an extra impetus on the secondary to take strides.

It was the defense, though, that won the day throughout the spring and during the spring game on April 15, taking home a 40-31 win over the offense. Now that spring practice has wrapped up, BSB is taking a look back at some of the team's biggest standouts and updating some of the Buckeyes' biggest position battles that will continue into fall.

Top Spring Offensive Player: Jayden Ballard

With two of Ohio State's three starting receivers out for the spring due to injury in Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming, junior wideout Jayden Ballard took advantage of some first-team reps and showed an increased level of consistency with the hope he can rotate in with some regularity this fall.

"His play speed has got to continue to grow," said Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline. "He's got some of the best hands on the team. His routes have got to continue to grow. His body language is continuing to grow. The game within the game's

got to continue to grow. So there's still a lot of growth (to be had) there, but he has not taken steps backward.

"Some guys take a step forward, two steps back. He has not done that. He's continued to grow and get bigger, and now he's over 195 pounds, he's running fast, with great ball skills. We've just got to make sure the whole totality of being a receiver continues to grow."

Ballard has always held a reputation as a deep threat, but growing the other areas of his route tree is something that's come with time. He showed some ability to utilize his speed in the short and intermediate passing zones during the spring game, catching four passes (most among Ohio State wideouts in the scrimmage) for 27 yards.

He still holds that deep threat as an ace up his sleeve, however. In an early practice this spring, he caught a long ball from junior quarterback Kyle McCord and took it the distance.

"I'm going to make my opportunities count, make a good impression for Coach (Ryan) Day and Coach Hart," Ballard said.

Ballard's got a bit more experience now in his third year, but that doesn't mean he isn't still taking lessons from those ahead of him. Marvin Harrison Jr., a finalist for the Biletnikoff Award last season and one of the three returning starters, has been one of the main people helping Ballard with his route running.

"I'm an older guy, but I'm still going to try to chase Marvin and be what he is," Ballard said. "(Continue to chase) Chris (Olave), Garrett (Wilson), those types of guys – Emeka, Julian."

If Ballard hopes to split reps with Harrison, Egbuka and Fleming come fall, he needs to reach their level by season's open. In year three with the program and with young talent like freshman Carnell Tate pushing behind him, the pressure is on for Ballard to make an impact. His strong showing this spring could help set the stage.

"At the end of the day, if I'm going to pull a guy off the field to put you on, you've got to do what he does," Hartline said. "I mean, I'm not going to pull the left tackle off and put the next (wide receiver) in so everybody can feel good. So you've got to be able to do that. And if he's deserving of that, he'll be out there."

Top Spring Defensive Player: Sonny Styles

Sophomore safety Sonny Styles is forcing his way onto the field in a crowded safeties room entering just his second year in the program. Though he wasn't a starter in the spring, it seems clear his talent is too great not to be utilized, and it showed throughout the 15 practices.

The five-star prospect out of Pickerington (Ohio) Central cut his teeth in his first major collegiate action on the grandest of stages, playing a handful of meaningful defensive snaps against Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinals.

"It gave me confidence, that trust (the coaching staff) had in me," Styles said. "Getting ready throughout that month we had, it was a good month for me. I think I gained some confidence, almost like (fall) camp



SONNY BROCKWAY

HEATING UP – Ohio State wide receiver Jayden Ballard enjoyed a breakout spring camp and made significant headway toward cracking into the Buckeyes' receiving rotation. He led Ohio State wideouts with four catches in the spring game.

again. The staff putting that confidence in me, giving me that big of a role in that big of a game, that meant a lot."

Now, safeties coach Perry Eliano is trying to find the role Styles is most confident in for this season. While sixth-year senior Josh Proctor and senior Lathan Ransom were the team's two starters at its deep safety spots this spring, Styles rolled in and found his hands on a lot of passes. He got a particular amount of use closer to the box against 12 personnel (one tight end, two running backs) and other run-heavy looks, similar to the spot he played against the Bulldogs.

"You'll see Sonny more in a streamlined position to where he can excel and use his God-given ability," Eliano said. "The beauty of it now is, year two, I've been around the guys, they've been around me. I know exactly what they are and where their strengths are, and we're continuing to close the gap on their challenges."

Styles capitalized on his training-ground momentum with two pass breakups and six tackles in the spring game, the latter number tying for second most on the team. It was the most among Ohio State's defensive backs.

The Ohio native said that he's only been working at two of the team's safety spots this spring, trying to settle into whichever one suits him best. Eliano is still trying to determine the exact best fit for him this year.

"It still remains to be seen (what his role will be)," Eliano said. "We're kind of dabbling in some things. Really and truthfully, we want him to be great at specific things

instead of OK at a lot of things. That's the conversation, what I mean by streamlining. You won't see him in a lot of places. You'll see him stationary in one (or) two spots."

Regardless, Styles is one name on a list of defenders who could help Ohio State's defense improve this season. It will be necessary if the team wants to take back the Michigan rivalry and stake a claim at a national championship.

Spring Most Improved Player: Denzel Burke

Junior cornerback Denzel Burke recapturing the form he found in his breakout freshman season would be a huge boost for Ohio State's defense this year, and if the spring is any indication, he may be on track to do just that.

Improvements on his strength at the catch point and an ability to hang with the wideouts he faced stood out in viewing periods that were open to the media. He followed that up with blanket-like coverage in the spring game, recording a pass breakup.

"Going into this year, it's a personal year for me," Burke said. "I want to prove all the doubters wrong. I'm going to go out there and do what I know I can do and put a lot of great stuff on tape and play hard for my team."

Following a season with 12 pass breakups and an interception in 2021, Burke had his fair share of struggles giving up long completions last year. Injuries played a role in that with his health hurting his efforts throughout the campaign.

"(It impacted me) a lot," Burke said.

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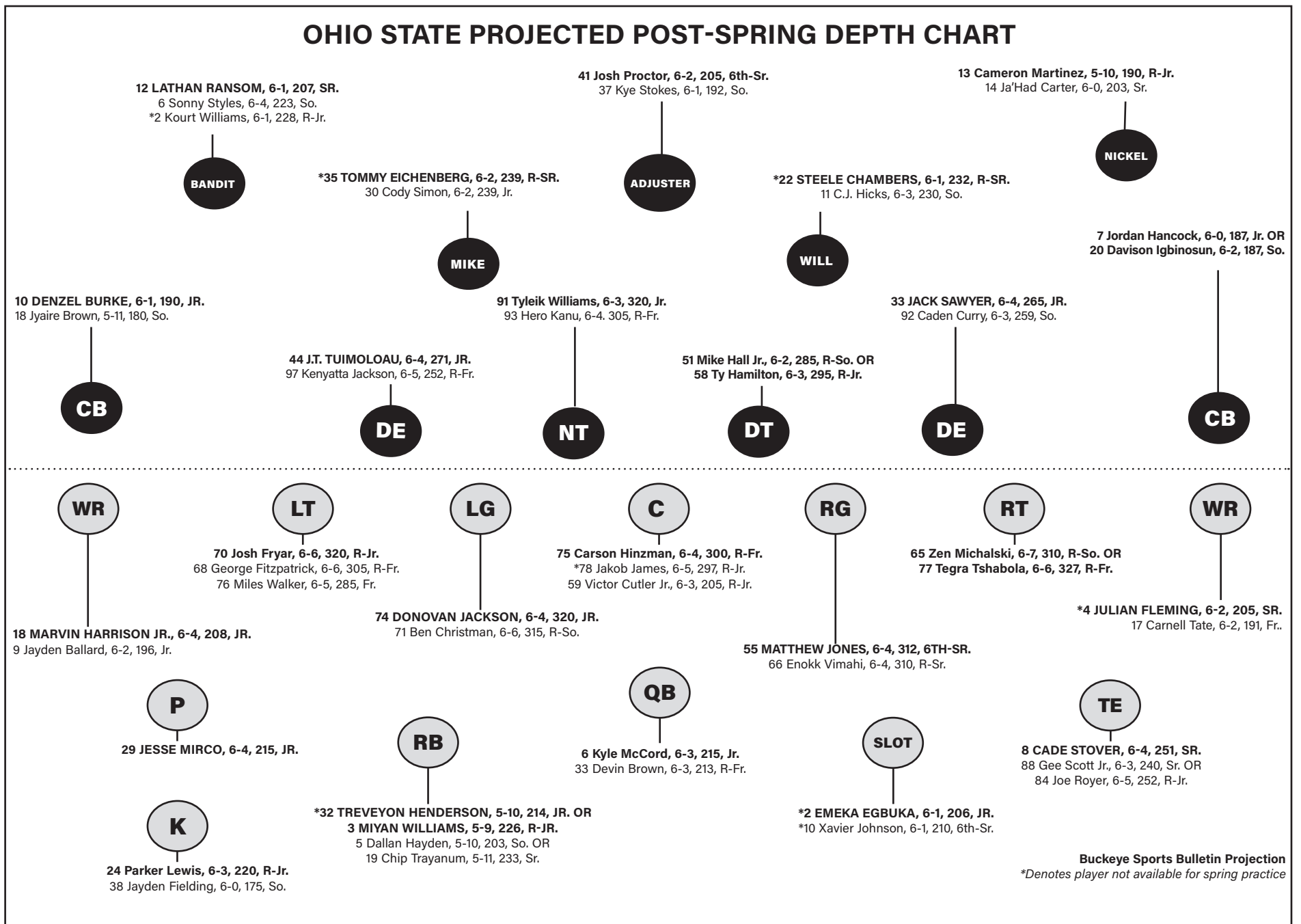
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"Physically, I couldn't do a lot of things. I had a shoulder (injury), I had an ankle (injury), the hand and fingers. So I'm healthy this year, and thank God."

Ohio State cornerbacks coach Tim Walton wants to see Burke take the next step as a leader in addition to his on-field play. That will help evolve his game even further, as it seems exiting the spring that Burke has established himself as the team's top corner.

"He's the guy that has the playing experience," Walton said. "He's the guy that's been around the longest, so you now have to lead the young guys by example and verbally. We just have to take the next step in that and grow."

Position Battle To Watch: Quarterback

Day told the press earlier this spring that he hoped to have a starter named at the sport's most important position by the dawn of summer. It doesn't appear that will be the case, as there continues to be little separation between McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown.

The two both had their moments in the scrimmage sessions open to the media, McCord perhaps having a couple more, but not enough to make a clear determination, and that trend continued in the spring game itself. With Brown out due to a fractured finger on his throwing hand, McCord complet-

ed only 52.9 percent of his passes, going 18 of 34 for 184 yards and a touchdown. That does include a few drops and throwaways.

"I think what you saw in the game is similar to what you saw in practice," Day said. "Some good things, some things that you'd like to see be a little bit better, but he's growing."

Perhaps the best thing Day saw from McCord during the scrimmage was his 37-yard touchdown strike to Tate. McCord threw a tight spiral up the left sideline, and the throw fell right into the freshman's breadbasket in full stride.

"Carnell ran a really good route, the line did a good job in protection. I made a good throw, too," McCord said. "When all those things come together, that's the result, a touchdown. But I think that's a tribute to the other 10 guys and everybody doing their jobs."

McCord also showed some development in the touch department, layering a pass nicely over the Buckeyes' safeties to Harrison for a 36-yard completion in the first quarter.

"That's something that we work on in practice every single day," McCord said. "It's called a one-inch throw. We put a baseball net out there, that (represents) the safety, linebacker, whoever it is dropping back in coverage and you've got to get it over the linebacker, whoever it is, and drop it into the

receiver's hands."

Even though he missed the last week of practice sessions with his injured finger, Brown still places confidence in the work he put in during the first few weeks of the spring. His timeline for full recovery is about four weeks, he stated after the spring game, meaning he'll be back with months still remaining until fall camp.

"Obviously (the injury) sucked, but I think I had 10 or 11 practices before this happened," he said. "I felt like I had enough days so that I still feel good about my spring and not really have to worry about the rest of it."

Several Spots Still Up For Grabs

Offensive tackle remains an important competition as the team seeks to replace last year's All-America bookends in Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones. Senior Josh Fryar held sole possession of the left tackle spot throughout spring, but offensive line coach Justin Frye refused to declare whether the spot was officially his. At right tackle, a battle rages between sophomore Zen Michalski and redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola. Both showed severe lapses in pass protection at points in spring practice, and while Michalski remained the starter through the spring game, the battle will stay open into the fall. Ohio State also hasn't ruled out adding another tackle through the

transfer portal.

- Sticking with the offensive line, what will become a three-man fight at center in the fall remained a two-man scrap in the spring. Redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman started in the back half of spring practice but is also the least experienced. Senior Victor Cutler Jr., a Louisiana-Monroe transfer, moves in from tackle to battle while junior Jakob James missed spring practice with injury but will compete for the spot come fall, especially given that he was Luke Wypler's backup a year ago.

- With Burke's return to form, it appears that he'll have one cornerback spot locked down, but the starter opposite him at the position is still up in the air. Ole Miss transfer Davison Igbinosun and junior Jordan Hancock will both make their bids to start, but it's also a good possibility that all three play a significant role for the defense.

- The void left by the departure of Noah Ruggles' accurate leg at kicker is one the staff is waiting for someone to step up and fill. Jake Seibert transferred out of the room following the spring game, leaving junior Parker Lewis – USC's starting kicker in 2020 and 2021 – and walk-on sophomore Jayden Fielding, who handled the team's kickoff duties last year, as the primary contenders for the position.

Early Enrollees Stand Out In Spring Practice

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The spring can be a stressful time for a high school senior.

The pressures of finding a date to the prom, maintaining a strong GPA and deciding where to attend college all weigh heavily on the mind while the days dwindle toward graduation. Although the everyday difficulties of navigating the final months of high school can be very real for those enduring them, they're nothing compared to the trials faced by Ohio State's 11 early enrollees during the spring.

Deciding to forgo the final few months of their high school lives and move away from their families and friends, Ohio State's early enrollees were instead treated to grueling, early-morning conditioning drills with strength coach Mickey Marotti and intense practice sessions during Ohio State's 15-practice spring camp, ultimately speeding up the acclimation process to life as a collegiate student-athlete.

Arriving on campus in early January, Ohio State's crop of early enrollees received their first taste of action at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, as well as Ohio Stadium during the spring game on April 15, with the aim of being ready to contribute right away as freshmen. There are several members of Ohio State's fifth-ranked recruiting class who could fill the bill of an immediate contributor, and the spring allowed for those potential impact freshmen to flash their abilities to their coaches.

There was no shortage of standout first-year players during the spring, especially on the offensive side of the ball, with wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 191) and tight end Jelani Thurman (6-6, 253) garnering considerable buzz from teammates and coaches. On the defense, cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. (5-11, 182) and safety Malik Hartford (6-2, 183) provided depth to the Buckeyes' secondary while showing potential in camp and the spring game.

Ohio State will also bring in nine additional players during the summer, including five-star wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 198) and four-star defensive linemen Jason Moore (6-6, 280) and Joshua Mickens (6-3, 225).

The Buckeyes will add plenty of talent during the summer, but the experience gained by the early enrollees in the spring will likely give them an advantage entering fall camp in August. Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking an in-depth look at each early enrollee and their development during spring camp.

SAF Malik Hartford

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles has fashioned his defensive scheme as safety-driven, and the Buckeyes' recruiting strategy on that side of the ball followed that tack to a tee in 2023.

The Buckeyes brought in a trio of back-end roamers in Hartford, Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 210) and Cocoa, Fla., four-star Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 175) in the class, affirming the position's importance in Knowles' scheme. Of the three safeties, Hartford was the only

one to enroll early, giving him a leg up on his freshman counterparts heading into the summer and fall.

"Malik has come in and worked," said Ohio State safeties coach Perry Eliano. "You see the talent that you saw when he was at (West Chester, Ohio) Lakota West. He's extremely smart and has a high football IQ. He's a very, very humble young man that has come in, and he's shown flashes of what he can be. He's still learning the game of football on the collegiate level, but I'll tell you what, I've been pleased with what I've seen."

Hartford was the lone freshman safety in tow, but that doesn't mean his path to the field is all that clear. The Buckeyes have plenty of depth at each of their three safety spots, with Lathan Ransom holding down the bandit, Josh Proctor operating at the adjuter and Cameron Martinez claiming the nickel position during spring camp, while promising youngsters Sonny Styles and Kye Stokes, as well as Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter, also seek opportunities.

While a pathway to the field appears to be muddled, Hartford kept his head down and worked, and his efforts during the spring culminated in him losing his black stripe on April 7 – affirming his status as a Buckeye – and having a solid outing during the spring game, totaling four tackles and a pass breakup.

CB Jermaine Mathews Jr.

After having just six scholarship cornerbacks last season while dealing with a rash of injuries, Knowles brought in plenty of help at the position with a pair of freshmen and Ole Miss transfer Davison Igbinosun joining the fray during the offseason.

Like Hartford, Mathews was the lone freshman at his position to attend spring camp – with Waxahachie, Texas, four-star Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-0, 175) to join in the summer – and entered a cornerbacks room rife with competition, with the starting spot opposite Denzel Burke up for grabs. Mathews didn't factor much into that competition this spring, but cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said he's acclimated well to the demands of playing at a program as prestigious as Ohio State.

"He's a young guy that's playing and doing some good stuff out there," Walton said. "It's just a different game than high school. Right now, he should be getting ready to go to the prom, you know what I mean?"

"He's doing fine. I'm glad we've got him. He's energetic, plays hard and has a good upside."

That upside was apparent to anyone who had the pleasure of watching Mathews operate during his time at Winton Woods. As a senior, Mathews was named OHSAA Division II Defensive Player of the Year after racking up 51 tackles, four forced fumbles, four fumble recoveries and six interceptions – three of which he returned for touchdowns – which helped him become the top-rated player from Ohio in the 2023 class.

With his stellar senior campaign, Mathews arrived in Columbus as the highest-rated early enrollee from Ohio State's class, garnering a 0.9756 rating from 247Sports' composite score – edging out wide receiver Noah Rogers' 0.9751 rating.

Ohio State's 2023 Early Enrollees

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
25	Malik Hartford	SAF	6-2	183	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
24	Jermaine Mathews Jr.	CB	5-11	182	Cincinnati/Winton Woods
51	Luke Montgomery	OL	6-4	298	Findlay, Ohio/Findlay
62	Joshua Padilla	OL	6-3	293	Huber Heights, Ohio/Wayne
86	Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	175	Zephyrhills, Fla./Wiregrass Ranch
80	Noah Rogers	WR	6-2	194	Rolesville, N.C./Rolesville
67	Austin Siereveld	OL	6-5	317	Liberty Township, Ohio/Lakota East
53	Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	290	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
17	Carnell Tate	WR	6-2	191	Chicago/IMG Academy
15	Jelani Thurman	TE	6-6	253	Fairburn, Ga./Langston Hughes
76	Miles Walker	OL	6-5	285	Greenwich, Conn./Brunswick

Mathews was able to show off his skill set during the spring game, in which he collected three tackles and a pass breakup.

OL Luke Montgomery

Even before Montgomery (6-4, 298) stepped foot on Ohio State's campus, his impact on the Buckeyes' 2023 class was clear.

Fashioning himself as one of the Buckeyes' primary peer recruiters in the class, Montgomery played a key role in building the group after he committed on Feb. 17, 2022, and he finally saw his efforts come to fruition when he arrived in Columbus in early January as an early enrollee. While Montgomery's prowess as a peer recruiter was an endearing trait entering the spring, his on-the-field presence also had head coach Ryan Day excited before Montgomery even arrived on campus.

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

As Day said, Montgomery's versatility on the offensive line can be an important piece of his game in the future, but his status as a tackle also provided him with a more likely avenue to the field with incumbent starters Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones filling the guard spots.

Although battles raged at both tackle spots along Ohio State's offensive line, Day was hesitant to include Montgomery among the contenders for the positions with Josh Fryar, Zen Michalski and Tegra Tshabola competing for the two openings.

"I don't know if I want to put that all on him, but we're excited to have him in," Day said. "The fact that he's coming in midyear is even more exciting. I think it's a challenge for a young guy, but we're not going to put it past him to go do it."

OL Joshua Padilla

Joining Montgomery on the offensive line is Padilla (6-3, 293), who was rated the second-best offensive lineman in Ohio State's class behind Montgomery.

Day mentioned that Padilla would get his start in Ohio State's center rotation, pointing to his acumen as a wrestler – in which he was the state runner-up as a senior – giving him traits that could help expedite his progression at the position.

"This is a guy whose dad is a wrestling

coach. He was a wrestler," Day said. "He has all the traits you're looking for in a center – the quickness, the ability to leverage the noses and the guys that he's going to have to go against every day. And he's got a toughness about him."

Despite starting out at center, Padilla did not factor into the competition for the starting job between Carson Hinzman, Jakob James – who missed the spring due to an undisclosed injury – and Louisiana Monroe transfer Victor Cutler Jr. In all, Padilla received 19 snaps at center during the spring game, according to snap counts published by Eleven Warriors, while also factoring in as a guard on field goals and extra points.

WR Bryson Rodgers

Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline added another stellar wide receiver haul in the 2023 recruiting class, claiming commitments from four wide receivers – all of whom hold four-star ratings or higher – including Rodgers (6-2, 175).

Though he played out his high school career at Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch, Rodgers has his roots in Ohio, originally hailing from Warren. He was the first of Ohio State's four wide receiver additions to commit to the Buckeyes, kick-starting Hartline's efforts at the position.

"It's a really big deal to any Ohio kid," Rodgers told Cleveland.com last September. "It's always something I dreamed of. Once Coach Hartline granted me that opportunity, it was pretty much a no-brainer."

Rodgers' game is rooted in his speed and agility, helping him in becoming a polished route runner and a difficult cover for opposing cornerbacks. However, his status as the lowest-rated receiver among the four-man class, along with the overwhelming breadth of talent at wide receiver, makes him likely to not factor into Ohio State's receiver rotation for a few seasons.

Despite his current low standing on the depth chart, Day said he sees positive developments in Rodgers' future with the Buckeyes.

"From early on, he jumped on this thing and was a Buckeye all the way," Day said. "I think he's going to have a really bright future here."

Rodgers had a catch for 3 yards in the spring game.

WR Noah Rogers

From one Rodgers to the next – though this one is spelled a little differently – another major addition at wide receiver was Rogers (6-2, 194).

Rogers was the highest-rated early enrollee at the position – the top mark in the class belongs to Inniss, who won't arrive in Columbus until the summer – and flashed his potential quite a bit during spring camp. While fellow freshman receiver Tate stole most of the headlines during the spring, Rogers was still a productive presence at the position.

He flashed his potential during the spring game in which he hauled in three receptions for a team-high 64 yards and a touchdown. The touchdown showed his true potential at the position as he hauled in a reception off a slant from quarterback Tristan Gebbia near midfield before weaving his way through the defense and breaking several tackles en route to the end zone.

Similar to Rodgers, Rogers will likely need to wait some time before he transitions into being a weekly contributor for the Buckeyes, but Hartline said the sky is the limit for the North Carolina native.

"He just really has a ceiling that's not calculable," Hartline said. "He can be that good. It all comes down to what kind of work he puts in. But again, he shows every bit (that) he wants to put the work in. He's a great young man."

OL Austin Siereveld

Another first-year interior lineman in the mix for the Buckeyes during the spring was Siereveld, one of three in-state offensive line signees for Ohio State in 2023 along with Montgomery and Padilla.

Like Montgomery, Siereveld has been touted for his ability to play numerous positions along the offensive line. His 6-5, 317-pound, frame allows him to seamlessly transition between spots on the line, but he was primarily entrenched at guard – with very little wiggle room to rise up the depth chart with Jackson and Jones holding the starting spots – during the spring.

In the spring game, Siereveld received the most snaps of any of the early enrollees along the offensive line, appearing in 28 plays – nine more than Padilla and tackle Miles Walker and 13 more than Montgomery.

"(He's) a very big and strong and powerful guy," Day said. "You can see when you get up on him the size of his legs. I think his family said that they can't find him a pair of pants, so he either wears sweatpants or shorts. That's how big his thighs are."

"But he's very, very powerful and big inside and kind of that road grader you're looking for at guard."

DL Will Smith Jr.

Family ties are what drove Smith Jr. (6-3, 290) to Ohio State.

The son of former Buckeye defensive end Will Smith, a member of the 2002 national championship team, the younger Smith is already well aware of the pressure that comes with playing at Ohio State despite being on campus for just a few months.

"I'm just glad to be here," Smith said after signing with the Buckeyes in December. "I'm finally glad to do it, and I'm just ready for what's next. I think it was (an easy call) for sure. It was the legacy part and just going there and meeting everybody. I just really liked the atmosphere there."

Despite enrolling early, Smith was unable to get a full spring under his belt after an injury derailed his camp. Regardless,

Smith was unlikely to fit into the defensive tackle rotation with several contributors such as Mike Hall, Ty Hamilton, Hero Kanu and Tyleik Williams all expected to play a part at the position.

Though Smith saw limited action during his first spring camp, Day recognized his growth throughout his high school career and added that he fits right in with the direction the Buckeyes are heading moving forward.

"I guess it was a little bit of a risk early on because we didn't quite know for sure (if Smith had the talent to play at Ohio State)," Day said. "But he and his mom quite honestly asked, 'Is he really good enough to be a Buckeye?' And we said, 'If he does these things, we absolutely think he is.' It's a no-brainer now."

"I mean, the way that he played (as a senior), he played hard, he played physical, played with his hair on fire and just had a lot of production. He's coming in early, and we think he has a chance to be a very, very good player for us."

WR Carnell Tate

Despite entering alongside 10 other talented early enrollees at Ohio State, no player made more headway than Tate during the spring.

Tate was the first freshman to shed his black stripe – doing so in potentially record time on March 25 – while also emerging as a reliable receiving threat by taking advantage of a high influx of reps due to injuries to Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming. Boasting strong route-running and ball skills, Tate's transition to the collegiate level has appeared to be as smooth as can be.

"On the field, he's making a lot of plays," Day said. "For a young player, he has a pretty mature route tree, does a nice job at the line of scrimmage, catches the ball strong, makes plays – all really encouraging signs."

Tate's emergence was on display at the spring game, in which he hauled in three receptions for 45 yards and a touchdown. On his score, Tate got past cornerback Jyaire Brown, gaining enough separation for quarterback Kyle McCord to find him in stride. While Tate has flashed on the field, Hartline pointed to his attention to detail as one of the driving factors in regard to his growth as a player during spring camp.

"He's being well-detailed. I would say he's doing a pretty good job of taking meetings to the field," Hartline said. "We talk about techniques and the details of every play, and he's pretty consistent on hitting those. Probably the best thing he's done is the ability to make a mistake, correct it and then move on from it. He very rarely has repeated mistakes, and that's usually a pretty good sign of a good player and a guy that's about his business."

The Ohio State wide receivers room contains plenty of high-level contributors, but Tate may have played himself into consideration for playing time with his solid spring camp.

TE Jelani Thurman

Ohio State entered the spring well-stocked at tight end with the return of incumbent starter Cade Stover, but Thurman has the potential to shake things up in the room.

Possessing a behemoth frame and deceptive athleticism for his size, Thurman carries the prototypical traits that nearly ev-

ery college football coach looks for in a tight end. Thurman was the second freshman to lose his black stripe, trailing only Tate, and tight ends coach Keenan Bailey said much of Thurman's growth has come off the field.

"The best thing he's done is his off-the-field habits," Bailey said. "Jelani and Carnell are two of the first guys in here every day. I'll go into my office at the end of the night and Jelani is in there with our (graduate assistant) Sean Binckes, who's one heck of a coach, and they're going over tomorrow's script or they're watching film learning new things."

"Yes, he's a big, physical and athletic dude and he loves football. But the best thing Jelani has been doing has been his off-the-field habits."

Thurman showed strides as both a receiver and blocker during the spring but will likely play behind Stover, Gee Scott Jr. and Joe Royer when fall camp begins in August. He capped off his breakout spring camp with three catches for 25 yards in the spring game, but Bailey was most impressed with how quickly Thurman got into the speed of things during camp.

"God gave him the talent, (and) we challenge our guys to get skill and discipline," Bailey said. "He's doing things now on film, because he followed the lead of Cade, Gee and Joe. He's doing things now habitually – finishing plus-two, going two extra seconds on blocks – that you don't really see early enrollees do."

OL Miles Walker

Rounding out Ohio State's crop of early enrollees is Walker (6-6, 285).

The lowest-rated offensive line prospect from the 2023 class, Walker spent the majority of his time at tackle during spring camp and even carved out a nice role for himself on the three-deep, earning 19 snaps during the spring game.

While Walker's commitment may have flown under the radar, Day emphasized that he could see a bright future ahead for Walker as a tackle.

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

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Ohio State Recognizes 765 Scholar-Athletes

By BRADEN MOLES

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State recognized 765 student-athletes with Scholar-Athlete Awards at the Ohio State Scholar-Athlete Awards Ceremony on April 10 at the Covelli Center. Those awards recognize Buckeyes who maintained a 3.0 grade-point average or higher for the 2022-23 academic year. Ohio State recognized 788 such athletes last year.

The university also recognized winners of the Big Ten Medal of Honor, with the awards going to Sophie Jaques of the women's ice hockey program and Kaleb Romero of the wrestling program. The honor is given to an outstanding male and female senior student-athlete on each Big Ten campus who has "attained the greatest proficiency in athletics and scholastic work."

Other finalists included Adelaide Aquila (track and field), Nikki Dzurko (synchronized swimming), Emma Goldean (field hockey), Samantha Hackenbracht (softball) and Alessandra Montesano (rowing) for the women and Keagan McLaughlin (soccer) and Jack Myers (lacrosse) for the men.

The baseball program was recognized for having the most improved large-team grade-point average, while rifle had the most improved grade-point average among smaller teams. The top grade-point averages were held by women's ice hockey for large rosters and women's tennis for small rosters.

The rowing team led with 76 scholar-athletes, followed by men's lacrosse with 45, football with 39, women's lacrosse with 37, women's swimming with 30 and the women's ice hockey team with 27 student-athletes honored. The complete list is included below.

Baseball — Andrew Bachman, exercise science; Landon Beidelschies, business; Gavin Bruni, sport industry; Jameson Campbell, sports coaching; Nolan Clegg, air transportation; Justin Eckhardt, sports coaching; George Eisenhardt, sport industry; Marcus Ernst, public management; Josh Ethan Timmerman, sport industry; Jacob Gehring, psychology; Matthew Graveline, real estate and urban analysis; Jonah Jenkins, criminal justice administration; Jaylen Jones, sport industry; Logan Jones, sport industry; Henry Kaczmar, sport industry; Caden Kaiser, sport industry; Kade Kern, sport industry; Joshua McAlister, sport industry; Zachary Mitchell Freeman, real estate and urban analysis; Mitchell Okuley, mechanical engineering; Alonzo Paul, health sciences; Cole Pauley, air transportation; William Pfennig, public management; Hunter Rosson, sport industry; Mason Sawyer, sport industry.

Men's Basketball — Eugene Brown, sport industry; Kalen Etzler, finance; Bowen Hardman, finance; Eberechukwu (Felix) Okpara, economics — business; Brice Sensabaugh, finance; Owen Spencer, biology; Justice Sueing, public management.

Women's Basketball — Madison Greene, sport industry; Rikki Harris, sports coaching; Taylor Mikesell, diversity, equity & inclusion; Rebeka Mikulášiková, consumer sciences; Jacy Sheldon, kinesiology; Emma Shumate, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Taylor Thierry, sport industry; Karla Vreš, consumer sciences.

Cheer — Julia Aepli, finance; William Bertsch, human development & family science; Nathan Chaykowski, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Tristan Cruz, neuroscience; Braden DeLullo, health sciences; Bella Eldredge, marketing; Garrett Fogel, industrial and systems engineering; Brendan Gass, computer science & engineering; William Glover, communication; Emily Hayward, biomedical engineering; Marley Hosier, visual communication design; Maria Law, health sciences; Alexis Markley, sport industry; William Moddeman, public management, leadership, & policy; Pierce Ormond, statistics; Michael Osinski, exploration; Garrett Raney, construction systems management; Karsyn Reader, health sciences; Kyle

Rodriguez, construction systems management; Jack Sampson, kinesiology; Emily Schaaf, biomedical engineering; Brooke Shields, political science; Mikayla Smith, marketing; Joshua Sobacks, biochemistry; Rachel Sorge, exercise science; Patrick Steyn, communication; Noah Subasic, aerospace engineering; Ryan Vespi, exercise science; Madison Yuzwa, pharmaceutical sciences.

Men's Cross Country — Colby Adams, marketing; Kevin Agnew, electrical and computer engineering; Sean Carney, management & industry exploring; Giovanni Copploe, fashion and retail studies; John Cuozzo, mechanical engineering; Alex Dediu, international business; Keegan Freyhof, computer science & engineering (pre); John Good, accounting; Zubin Jha, computer science & engineering; Kaleb Martin, mechanical engineering; Zachary Plotkin, computer science & engineering (pre); Zachary Shultz, city and regional planning; Ivan Slyepkan, health sciences; Keegan Souhan, exploration; Nathaniel Tamminga, physics.

Women's Cross Country — Emma Bucher, primary education; Samantha Coleman, mathematics; Chloe Dawson, Spanish; Audrey DeSantis, exercise science education; Adeline Engel, health sciences; Amelia Figler, history; Dinah Gigandet, speech and hearing science; Allison Guagenti, art education; Rose Hoelzel, computer science & engineering (pre); Ana Karmol, environmental science; Andrea Kuhn, mathematics; Juliana Metz, finance; Mia Mlynek, health sciences; Aniya Mosley, architecture; Carina Napoleon, speech and hearing science; Gianni Napoleon, women's, gender & sexuality studies; Sydney Paul, exercise science education; Daniella Santos, social work; Morgan Schmitt, economics — business; Kathleen Shay, biomedical engineering; Sophia Spencer, health professions exploration; Lindsay Stull, human nutrition; Ava Tenaglia, biology; Akemi Von Scherr, human resources.

Dance — Nina Andrianos, sport industry; Macie Blacklidge, exercise science education; Makenna Blacklidge, exercise science; Marley Blanchard, communication; Brenna Bocik, exercise science; Nicole Boudos, finance; Josie Cahall, communication; Isabelle Davis, exercise science education; Bennet Espinda Banick, health promotion, nutrition & exercise science; Elizabeth Hallum, health sciences; Jenna Kosco, health professions exploration; Sophia MacKinnon, sport industry; Diana Natalicchio, psychology; Jesslene O'Loughlin, neuroscience; Julia Paslawski, marketing; Natalie Quinn, neuroscience; Alina Serafin, health sciences; Abigail Summers, communication; Brooke Thayer, finance; Elizabeth Wagner, communication; Lauren Wainz, health professions exploration; Molly Youngblood, business.

Men's Diving — Clay Chaplin, psychology; Kylie Flory, computer science & engineering (pre); Jack Matthews, international business; Mohamed Noaman, economics; Lyle Yost, spanish.

Women's Diving — Jackie Brenn, health sciences; Mackenzie Crawford, biomedical engineering; Lena Hentschel, journalism; Amanda Ling, teaching and learning; Ciara McGing, health sciences; Blake Skilken, marketing.

Men's Fencing — Ilya Ayupov, psychology; Hank Bauer, environmental engineering; Bence Bende, biology; Stephen Chou, computer science & engineering; Lorenzo Di Francesco Mion, computer science & engineering (pre); Gabriel Feinberg, environmental science; James Flanagan, economics — business; Nowell Gibson, computer science & engineering (pre); Vincent Haney, neuroscience; Clark Kokenge, political science; Anitya Kumar, computer science & engineering; Henry Lange, near Eastern languages & cultures; Wesley Lee, marketing; Solin Li, exploration; Kelly Liu, exploration; Addy Prasanna, exploration; Jack Price, information systems; Maxwell Rodney, communication; Roscoe Swartz, specialized master business analysis; Craig Upton, forestry fisheries & wildlife; Justin Vogler, computer science & engineering; Miles Weiss, environment, economy, development & sustainability.

Women's Fencing — Chandini Antal, accounting; Evie Bustamante, marketing; Karina Dwyer, political science; Kelly Feng, international studies; Miranda Freedman, psychology; Mikaela Guillen, finance; Anna Heiser, management & industry exploring; Katherine Larimer, English; Alina Lee, business; Yeva Mazur, psychology; Daria Myroniuk, psychology; Eleonore Perrier, finance; Kristen Ruscitelli, evolution and ecology; Cara Santos, finance; Zoe Shay-Tannas, industrial design; Jewelia Smith, materials science and engineering; Claire Teresa Galavotti, psychology; Julieta Toledo Ames, film studies; Gabriela Viveros Mendoza, marketing; Talia Weiss, marketing; Catherine Zhou, health promotion, nutrition & exercise science.

Field Hockey — Zella Bailey, nursing; Holland Bell, international studies; Leanne Bough, accounting; Hallie Brost, exploration; Sarah Charley, psychology; Jessica Courtright, business; Abby Danson, construction systems management; Kelly Davis, business; Kather-

ine Fichtner, criminology & criminal justice; Cameryn Forghash, radiologic sciences & therapy; Ali Gordon, communication; Riley Hudson, exploration; Malen Iglesias, sports coaching; Loryn Jordon, psychology; Hanna Killeen, communication; Grace Kim, kinesiology; Erin Little, biology; Megan McKenna, health sciences; Sarah Richards, health sciences; Claudia Thomas, marketing; Janneke Van Stiphout, community leadership; Olivia Wallace, communication; Makenna Webster, communication; Olivia Zettervall, communication; Jenna Zunic, health sciences.

Football — David Adolph, business; Jayden Ballard, sport coaching, rec and physical education; Chase Brecht, marketing; Devin Brown, finance; Reid Carrico, construction systems management; Benjamin Christman, sport industry; Quinton Edison Burke, zoology; Emeke Egbuka, marketing; Jack Forsman, accounting; Kyion Grayes, sport industry; Patrick Gurd, health sciences; Mitchell H. Rossi, human resource management; Marvin Harrison Jr., sport industry; Samuel Hart, marketing; TreVeyon Henderson, sport industry; Zak Herbstreit, marketing; Carson Hinzman, sport industry; Donovan Jackson, sport industry; Xavier Johnson, translational data analytics; Cameron Kittle, construction systems management; Trey Leroux, finance; Parker Lewis, human development & family science; Maxwell Lomonico, human development & family science; Mason Maggs, biology; Kyle McCord, communication; Jaden McKenzie, human development & family science; Zenuae Michalski, sport industry; Jesse Mirco, sport industry; William Mitchell, finance; Elias Myers, sport industry; Bryce Prater, construction systems management; Zachary Prater, construction systems management; Chad Ray, health sciences; Bradley Robinson, kinesiology; Jacob Seibert, finance; Cody Simon, finance; Alexander Styles, business; Kourt Williams, communication; Toby Wilson, sport industry.

Men's Golf — JonErik Alford, kinesiology; Jackson Chandler, sport industry; Tyler Groomes, finance; Maxwell Moldovan, finance; Andrew Mulcahy, finance; Christopher Reed, exploration; Tyler Sabo, finance; Patrick Schmuecking, finance; Neal Shipley, specialized master business analysis; Jacob Tarkany, business; Adam Wallin, consumer and family financial services; Joseph Wilson, finance.

Women's Golf — Jillian Bourdage, aviation management; Faith Choi, sport industry; Kary Hollenbaugh, business; Emily Hummer, accounting; Lauren Peter, sports coaching, rec and physical education; Kailie Vongsaga, sport industry.

Men's Gymnastics — Arthur Ashton, biochemistry; Christian Bartolini, psychology; Justin Ciccone, health promotion, nutrition & exercise science; Caden Clark Spencer, mechanical engineering; Kristian Grahovskki, finance; Jacob Harmon, biology; Kazuki Hayashi, electrical and computer engineering; Donovan Hewitt, political science; Tomohiro Kawada, air transportation; Logan McGlynn, finance; Jakob Murray, electrical and computer engineering; Kameron Nelson, communication; Jadon Roberson, marketing; Tyler Rockwood, finance; Luke Smigliani, hospitality management; Jackson Studley, construction systems management; Thomas Thackston, biology.

Women's Gymnastics — Stephanie Berger, hospitality management; Alexis Edwards, psychology; Claire Gagliardi, educational studies; Savannah Gonzalez, public health — STEM; Mallory Gregory, civil engineering; Kaitlyn Grimes, sport industry; Alexis Hankins, exercise science; Jenna Hlavach, primary education; Ella Hodges, accounting; Sydney Jennings, health sciences; Raina Malas, public management; Colby Miller, real estate and urban analysis; Kaylyn Mintz, criminology & criminal justice; Hannah Oliveros, communication; Madeline Pike, primary education; Emma Pritchard, communication; Nicole Riccardi, finance; Tory Vetter, health sciences; Joselyn Warga, fashion and retail studies.

Men's Ice Hockey — Ronald Brickey, consumer and family financial services; Davis Burnside, sport industry; Matthew Cassidy, economics — business; Mark Cheremeta, finance; Jakub Dobeš, international business; Tyler Duke, sport industry; Joseph Dunlap, economics; Michael Gildon, sport industry; Patrick Guzzo, economics; Reilly Herbst, management & industry exploring; John Kyungju Larkin, science & technology exploration; Jaedon Leslie, finance; Evan McIntyre, economics; Cole McWard, finance; Dalton Messina, sport industry; Chester Regula, finance; Tate Singleton, finance; Ryan Snowden, operations management; Travis Treloar, sport industry; Dominic Vidoli, neuroscience; Gustaf Westlund, economics; Jakob Wise, sport industry.

Women's Ice Hockey — Lauren Bernard, civil engineering; Brooke Bink, communication; Madison Bizal, public management; Riley Brengman, sport industry; Jenna Buglioni, sport industry; Jennifer Gardiner, sport industry; Alaina Giampietro, sport industry; Teagan Grant, consumer and family financial services; Jamie Grinder, economics; Hadley Hartmetz, communica-

tion; McKenzie Hauswirth, biology; Sophie Jaques, civil engineering; Emerson Jarvis, health sciences; Raygan Kirk, environmental science; Quinn Kuntz, health sciences; Paetyn Levis, healthcare leadership & innovation; Gali Levy, biochemistry; Sofie Lundin, health sciences; Emma Maltais, bioethics; Sloane Matthews, biomedical engineering; Sydney Morrow, exploration; Ramsey Parent, biology; Emma Peschel, health sciences; Gabriella Rosenthal, speech language pathology; Lexington Secreto, health sciences; Amanda Thiele, criminology & criminal justice; Makenna Webster, communication.

Men's Lacrosse — Ari Allen, communication; Gavin Begonia, finance; Henry Blake, finance; Drew Blanchard, criminal justice administration; Kyle Borda, diversity, equity & inclusion; Dante Bowen, finance; Cullen Brown, finance; Sam Burns, finance; James Cipolla, health sciences; Connor Cmiel, finance; Jonny Cool, engineering physics; Trent Dicicco, mechanical engineering; Blake Eiland, finance; Sam Faber, health sciences; Taji Flynn, international business; Matt Fritz, business; Oran Gelinias, exploration; Carter Hilleary, communication; James Hogan, communication; Marcus Hudgins, physics; Tate Jones, management & industry exploring; Jason Knox, history; Coleman Kraske, exploration; Richie LaCalandra, sport industry; Greg Langermeier, finance; Kyle Lewis, public management; Griffin Liedel, logistics management; Johnny Maccarone, construction systems management; Dillon Magee, real estate and urban analysis; Alex Marinier, finance; Noah Mendoza, information systems; Matt Mercer, finance; Connor Mitchell, finance; Jack Myers, finance; Garrett Nilsen, communication; Mitchell Pehlke, sport industry; Carson Raney, finance; Mitchell Sandberg, health sciences; Ed Shean, marketing; Justin Sherrer, neuroscience; Colby Smith, bioethics; Jake Snyder, finance; Bobby Van Buren, sport industry; Skyler Wahlund, finance; Stephen Zupicich, finance.

Women's Lacrosse — Regan Alexander, finance; Riley Alexander, marketing; Brynn Ammerman, health sciences; Maddie Barhorst, marketing; Emma Bloshmi, primary education; Katie Chisholm, exploration; Zoe Coleman, marketing; Chelsea Debevec, exploration; Nicole Ferrara, communication; Mackenzie Fitzgerald, political science; Darrien Furiness, exploration; Izze Gill, psychology; Annie Hargraves, health professions exploration; Sarah Johnson, political science; Katie Kaucheck, exploration; Ava Keethler, assistive & rehabilitative tech; Amani Kimball-McKavish, marketing; Sarah Klein, human development & family science; Jamie Lasda, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Margaret Lawler, communication; Jamie Level, sports coaching; Claire Morris, marketing; Cally O'Brien, health sciences; Erin O'Neil, finance; Brooke Papenfuss, human resources; Kiana Perez, pharmaceutical sciences; Bryce Pfundstein, public health; Emily Rezabek, marketing; Casey Roberts, journalism; Whitney Robinson, marketing; Leah Sax, health sciences; Lilli Sherman, sport industry; Annika Spoor, finance; Ashley Turner, sport industry; Brooke Vinson, visual communication design; Stella Wineman, international studies; Kit Zanelli, communication.

Pistol — Katelyn Abeln, public health; Amanda Ackerman, animal sciences; Panagiota Charalampous, sport industry; Abbie Leverett, dental hygiene; Jack Leverett, computer & information science.

Rifle — Philip Becker, aerospace engineering; John Hamilton, air transportation; Elizabeth Hollowell, linguistics; Eva Horgan, philosophy, politics, and econ; Natalie Katsuyama, medical anthropology; Derek Keiser, finance; Viktor Kiss, philosophy, politics, and econ; Joel Potts, finance; Frank Steyn, public health — STEM; Nathan Wehrlein, hospitality management.

Rowing — Ceylan Algan, mechanical engineering; Katelyn Bartos, mechanical engineering; Claire Bauer, marketing; Taylor Benedict, psychology; Ava Bockbrader, communication; Amelia Boes, integrated language arts/English education; Rylea Bott, criminology & criminal justice; Eliana Bujwalo-Nowak, mechanical engineering; Katherine Castaneda, electrical and computer engineering; Caroline Caudill, biology; Natalie Chourova, human nutrition; Olivia Clotten, international business; Kristen Devolve, nursing; Taylor Doherty, biology; Alessandra Flevares, psychology; Ava Fortney, human nutrition; Emilia Fritz, industrial and systems engineering; Saanvi Garg, exploration; Alexandra Gluntz, mechanical engineering; Emma Hall, finance; Ella Harrison, biology; Alaina Hawthorn, architecture; Heather Higgins, biology; Molly Hillman, health sciences; Kathryn Hinton, mathematics; Leandra Hogrefe, physics; Isabelle Huebener, sport industry; Mary Jaskoviak, health sciences; Kira Katterle, biomedical engineering; Valerie Keller, health sciences; Pau Koster, international business; Emily Koziol, psychology; Alexandra Kushnir, environmental science; Annetta Kyridou, exercise science; Maria Kyridou, criminology & criminal justice; Natalie Larivey, biology; Erika Linton, mechanical engineering; Constance Loring, biology; Mara Mangiola, marketing; Regan McElwee, political science; Megan

McNutt, biomedical engineering; Morgan Miller, sport industry; Alessandra Montesano, communication; Mia Mulhearn, neuroscience; Audrey Murphy, health sciences; Megan Murphy, electrical and computer engineering; Gabrielle Nicole Schmidt, psychology; Megan O'Connor, public management, leadership, & policy; Kaitlin Pang, economics; Elizabeth Patrice Paul, biology; Morgan Perce, exercise science education; Darby Pethrick, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Svea Pichner, operations management; Madeline Rappach, business; Natalie Rarick, earth sciences; Giovanna Robson, public management, leadership, & policy; Iman Sattar, neuroscience; Lucy Scott, marketing; Amelie Sens, primary education; Alexis Sherman, pharmaceutical sciences; Emma Shuck, exploration; Jocelyn Spanbauer, psychology; Lydia Stute, sport industry; Halen Swickard, exploration; Abigail Thomas, exercise science education; Tess Thompson, human development & family science; Reagan Toopes, health sciences; Jessie Vermeer, sports coaching; Kathryn Visci, chemical engineering; Sydney Washington, public health - STEM; Wanjiku Watene, animal sciences; Paige Wheeler, biochemistry; Caroline Williams, chemical engineering; Emma Wilson, health sciences; Carlotta Wolff, fashion and retail studies; Morgan Zahner, computer science & engineering.

Men's Soccer - Ashton Bilow, primary education; Marko Borkovic, finance; Tanner Creech, finance; Reed Davis, kinesiology; Connor DesRoches, finance; Chris Dowling, economics - business; Braden Durbin, sport industry; Devyn Etling, kinesiology; Thomas Gilej, economics; Xavier Green, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Nick Isaac, health professions exploration; Jacob Maisonneuve, arts and sciences-BA-undecided; Keagan McLaughlin, statistics; Dyland Onwona-Agyeman, exercise science education; Luciano Pechota, business; Sean Ryan, accounting; Anthony Samways, psychology; RJ Stoller, finance; Owen Sullivan, accounting; Max Trejo, sport industry; Peter Van Euwen, finance; Deylen Vellios, psychology; Tommaso Villa, health professions exploration; Donny Williams, marketing; Laurence Wootton, environment, economy, development & sustainability.

Women's Soccer - Tatum Adamson, biology; Christin Baumbick, health sciences; Sydney Browning, health sciences; Kailyn Dudukovich, mathematics; Kayla Fischer, nursing; Caitlin Foley, communication; Mirann Gacoch, sport industry; Kitty Jones-Black, social work; Nina LeFlore, public policy analysis; Sophia Louder, biology; Maddy Lowe, kinesiology; Peyton McNamara, in-

ternational business; Kine Myhrer Floetre, human development & family science; Brooke Otto, business; Molly Pritchard, health professions exploration; Haley Roberts, health sciences; Katherine Robinson, bioethics; Gabriela Rotolo, political science; Olivia Sensky, occupational therapy; Nicole Sidloski, marketing; Emaly Vatne, kinesiology; Kira Watase, exploration.

Softball - Hannah Bryan, health sciences; McKenzie Bump, sport industry; Hannah Church, English; Tegan Cortelletti, criminology & criminal justice; Kirsten Eppelle, health sciences; Samantha Hackenbracht, human development & family science; Taylor Heckman, human development & family science; Kennedy Kay, animal sciences; Kamryn Kortokrax, communication; Skylar Limon, exploration; Julia Miller, health sciences; Reagan Milliken, human development & family science; Destinee Noury, communication; Meggie Otte, human development & family science; Alexis Paulsen, health professions exploration; Lindsey Potter, sport industry; Mariah Rodriguez, hospitality management; Jaycee Ruberti, kinesiology; Allison Smith, biomedical engineering; Melina Wilkison, sport industry.

Men's Swimming - Alex Axon, finance; Daniel Baltes, atmospheric sciences; William Bansberg, exercise science education; Jack Burroughs, sport industry; Sam Campbell, business; Guillermo Cepeda Balboa, consumer and family financial services; Fabio Dalu, mathematics; Brandon Day, exercise science; Mason Edmund, international business; William Fentress, biology; Bob Fick, finance; Chachi Gustafson, computer & information science; North Hansen, marketing; Karl Helmuth, actuarial science; Jay Johnson, philosophy, politics, and economy; JP Khouzam, exercise science; Pete Krusinski, finance; Matthew Magness, mechanical engineering; Rylan McDaniel, biology; Mario McDonald, exercise science; Alex Metzler, economics - business; Ian Mikesell, mechanical engineering; Luke Paxton, aerospace engineering; Billy Regan, sports coaching, rec and physical education; Shaw Satterfield, finance; Carson Smith, aerospace engineering; Thomas Watkins, computer & information science.

Women's Swimming - Hannah Bach, public health; Leah Baker, biology; Sydney Davids, health professions exploration; Reese Dehen, exploration; Mackenzie DeWitt, speech and hearing science; Jessica Eden, exploration; Allison Fenska, management & industry exploring; Amy Fulmer, biology; Maya Geringer, environmental policy & decision making; Liberty Gilbert, political science; Alyssa Graves,

communication; Paige Hall, biology; Tristan Harrison, communication; Teresa Ivan, health sciences; Morgan Kraus, biochemistry; Anne Krusinski, human nutrition; Mia Lachey, finance; Lucy Malys, speech and hearing science; Meredith Moellering, health sciences; Mairin O'Brien, health sciences; Josie Panitz, marketing; Felicia Pasadyn, bioethics; Sanna Peterson, public management, leadership, & policy; Claire Pophal, marketing; Mia Rankin, philosophy; Catherine Russo, neuroscience; Kyra Sommerstad, health sciences; Sarah Turchanik, sport coaching, rec and physical education; Gwenyth Woodbury, biology; Katherine Zenick, neuroscience.

Synchronized Swimming - Madison Almond, health sciences; Emily Armstrong, psychology; Victoria Carlson, landscape architecture; Marian Cattanah, health sciences; Nicole Dzurko, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Charlotte Gray, biology; Hannah Heffernan, computer & info science (pre); Rose Homoelle, biochemistry; Paige Hopper, accounting; Olivia Malloy, studio art; Reverie Nedde, studio art; Lilly Ortiz, biomedical engineering; Trinity Patton, health sciences; Olivia Schafer, psychology; Emma Spott, animal sciences; Caroline Walsh, marketing; Megan Wong, pharmaceutical sciences.

Men's Tennis - Alex Bernard, sport industry; Andrew Lutschauin, public management; Cannon Kingsley, sport industry; Jack Anthrop, business administration; JJ Tracy, finance; Justin Boulais, sport industry; Preston Stearns, chemical engineering; Reece Yakubov, finance; Robert Cash, chemistry.

Women's Tennis - Kolie Allen, speech and hearing science; Maddie Atway, finance; Megan Basil, political science; Shelly Bereznyak, accounting; Akanksha Bhan, applied economics; Isabelle Boulais, diversity, equity & inclusion; Irina Cantos Siemers, kinesiology; Kathleen Jones, journalism; Lucia Marzal Martinez, kinesiology; Sydni Ratliff, communication; Danielle Schoenly, exploration; Danielle Willson, master of accounting.

Men's Track & Field - Luke Bendick, history; Zidane Brown, construction systems management; Marius Coleman, exercise science education; Daniel Drellishak, finance; Evan Johnson, real estate and urban analysis; Sean Kaminski, finance; Isaac Lefeld, mechanical engineering; Joshua Miller, public policy and management; Armani Modeste, economics; Rehoboth Ogundare, computer & information science; Praise Olatoke, sport industry; Paul Page, finance;

Edward Perozek, marketing; Leo Uusimaeki, electrical and computer engineering; Reign Winston, film studies.

Women's Track & Field - Nya Bussey, health sciences; Avery Clark, information systems; Columba Efi-fiong, real estate and urban analysis; Morgan Fijalkowski, health sciences; Sophia Fong, health promotion, nutrition & exercise science; Marissa Henley, public policy and management; Faith Hunter, sport industry; Abigail Kuhn, finance; Anne Moses, industrial and systems engineering; Chanler Robinson, animal sciences; Jaimie Robinson, sociology; Makenzie Shannon, air transportation; Atinuke Shittu, health psychology/behavior med; Janela Spencer, exploration; Kambi Walker, criminology & criminal justice; Veronica Waugaman, exploration; Jaydan Wood, health sciences; Madison Wyatt, zoology.

Men's Volleyball - Ben Braun, consumer and family financial services; Samuel Clark, mechanical engineering; Hudson Harris, management & industry exploring; Justin Howard, journalism; Dan Hurley, sport industry; Jason Kozak, communication; John O'Riordan, finance; Jacob Pasteur, marketing; Noah Platfoot, finance; Tommy Poole, mechanical engineering; Ben Putnam, exploration; Jack Stevens, civil engineering; Grant Strong, finance; Kyle Teune, finance; Michael Wright, marketing.

Women's Volleyball - Gabby Gonzales, kinesiology; Mia Grunze, kinesiology; Emily Londot, sport industry; Reilly MacNeill, sport industry; Anna McClure, finance; Jenaisya Moore sport industry; Sarah Morbitzer, exercise science; Kylie Murr, kinesiology; Mac Podraza, kinesiology; Adria Powell, biology; Rylee Rader, sport industry; Zaria Ragler, exploration; Sydney Taylor, marketing; Chelsea Thorpe, marketing; Sarah White, child and youth studies.

Wrestling - Carter Chase, computer science & engineering (pre); Dylan D'Emilio, educational studies; Braxton Fries, sports coaching, recreation and physical education; Paddy Gallagher, sport industry; Malik Heinselmann, specialized master business analysis; Carson Kharchla, sport industry; Gavin L. Hoffman, specialized master business analysis; Garrett Lautzenheiser, management & industry exploring; Tate Orndorff, specialized master business analysis; Klay Reeves, kinesiology; Kaleb Romero, specialized master business analysis; Seth Shumate, marketing; Ethan Smith, human resource management; Tyler Stein, health sciences; Hogan Swenski, exploration; Isaac Wilcox, communication.

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Spring Game Brings More Pledges On Offense

Ohio State's offense might have seen some struggles during the spring game on April 15 – Archie Griffin's touchdown notwithstanding – but there were no issues on the offensive side of the ball when it came to recruiting, as the Buckeyes added two commitments on offense that day in Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star tight end Max LeBlanc (6-4, 222) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203).

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

First up was LeBlanc, who committed to the Buckeyes almost simultaneously as the spring game began. He marks the first verbal pledge at tight end in this recruiting cycle. LeBlanc is the No. 272 overall prospect and No. 14 tight end, and he committed to Ohio State over his other finalists, including Michigan, North Carolina and Tennessee.

"I just had a great feeling in general whenever I stepped on campus," LeBlanc told On3. "Ohio State's been my dream school since I started playing football, so when I got the offer, it was a big deal for me. Meeting the players, the coaches and seeing how they are in practice and my relationship with the current players, it was just awesome when I was there."

He was offered by Ohio State in January and visited campus for the first time on March 30, his last trip to a school prior to his commitment, and it left a strong enough impression to secure LeBlanc's verbal pledge. He fills several roles for Baylor School, lining up outside at receiver while also lining up as a traditional tight end, offering the ability to move downfield while also acting as an accom-

plished blocker.

LeBlanc's commitment at this stage puts Ohio State in a solid position to sign the desired two-tight end class, something the Buckeyes have pursued for the last several years but have not been able to pull off. The other key target for the Buckeyes at the position is Cleveland Glenville four-star Damarion Witten (6-4, 215).

The day's other commitment from Williams-Dixon came in the hours after the spring game's conclusion. He publicly selected Ohio State over his other top schools, including Kentucky, Penn State, Rutgers and Tennessee, but since being offered by the Buckeyes in January, it seemed like just a matter of time until the in-state prospect committed to Ohio State, and he did so after attending the Buckeyes' spring game.

"As I think about growing up and dreaming of attending the best university and playing football for the best team in the land, I continue to reflect on my village's sacrifices and my determination to make them proud," Williams-Dixon said in a statement. "With that being said, I would like to announce that I bleed scarlet and gray! I'm committing to The Ohio State University, my hometown school! The Best Damn Team in the Land!"

He is just the No. 680 overall prospect and No. 76 athlete in the class, though he has still been among Ohio State's top targets at running back, with running backs coach Tony Alford developing a strong relationship with the tailback. Williams-Dixon – who will play at Pickerington North this upcoming season after playing his first three years at Millersburg (Ohio) West Holmes – rushed for nearly 1,300 yards and added 500 receiving yards last season while scoring 41 touchdowns.

Williams-Dixon is joined in the class at running back by San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star James Peoples (5-10, 192), who committed to the Buckeyes on April 2. While Ohio State has offers out to other running backs, Williams-Dixon's commitment could conceivably wrap up recruiting at the position for this cycle.

Four-Star LB Pierce Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State also picked up a commitment prior to the spring game, adding a verbal pledge from Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225) on April 11.

Pierce is the No. 152 overall prospect and No. 13 linebacker in 2024, and he chose Ohio State over Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Texas A&M. His commitment is just the second on defense for Ohio State in 2024, along with Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star linebacker Garrett Stover (6-0, 195).

"I think just the type of players that they have on the team and just how competitive the environment is, it just really fits me the way that they're coached, the way they practice and the way their defense is run," Pierce told Eleven Warriors. "I just really think it fits me better than all the other schools I've been recruited to."

"The environment is one I want to be

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
Mylan Graham	WR	6-1	170	★★★★★	New Haven, Ind.
Max LeBlanc	TE	6-4	222	★★★★	Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School
Ian Moore	OL	6-5	295	★★★★	New Palestine, Ind.
Marc Nave Jr.	OL	6-5	315	★★★	Toledo Central Catholic
Air Noland	QB	6-3	195	★★★★	Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes
Payton Pierce	LB	6-1	225	★★★★	Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy
James Peoples	RB	5-10	192	★★★★	San Antonio Veterans Memorial
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	198	★★★★★	Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	SAF	6-0	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North

in. You're with a bunch of guys that want to be the best, have the standard of being the best and are going to college to be the best. I want to be a part of it and lead those guys in my class. I also have great relationships with the coaches. I feel like they not only can make me the best player I can be but also the best person."

Pierce was personally offered by defensive coordinator Jim Knowles back in January and made his first visit to Columbus the weekend of March 25, though the Buckeyes had an upper hand in Pierce's commitment through graduate assistant James Laurinaitis. Though Laurinaitis has been on staff for only a couple of months at Ohio State, he had previously recruited Pierce during his time at Notre Dame, and that relationship helped to secure Pierce's commitment.

"(Laurinaitis) really helped Ohio State," Pierce told 247Sports. "I was super high on Notre Dame, then he went to Ohio State and they kind of became the front-runner. It didn't seal the deal, but that definitely helped Ohio State's chances."

Pierce, who is being recruited at Mike linebacker by Ohio State and Knowles, racked up 131 tackles – 21 for loss – with six sacks and five forced fumbles as a junior and will now look to build on that as a committed prospect to the Buckeyes.

Other key targets at linebacker for Ohio State include Jefferson, Ga., five-star Sammy Brown (6-2, 230) and Nashville (Tenn.) Lipscomb Academy four-star Edwin Spillman (6-1, 216), who recently included the Buckeyes among his top six schools.

OSU Hosts Dozens For Spring Game

Upwards of three dozen recruits descended upon Ohio Stadium on April 15 to take in Ohio State's spring game, generally one of the top recruiting dates on the Buckeyes' calendar considering the amount of prep talent gracing the sidelines.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has put together a list of all prospects either personally seen at the game or reported to have been in attendance. Not every prospect at the game is being actively recruited by Ohio State, and by that same token, just because a prospect wasn't in attendance doesn't mean that they might not end up with the Buckeyes.

Starting off, a handful of currently committed prospects were in attendance. This includes four-star offensive linemen Deontae (6-6, 280) and Devontae (6-5, 288)

Armstrong of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward; New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295); Toledo Central Catholic three-star offensive lineman Marc Nave Jr. (6-5, 315); Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195); and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198).

Freshman defensive end Jason Moore (6-6, 280), a member of Ohio State's incoming recruiting class, was also in attendance ahead of his arrival on campus this summer.

As for the uncommitted prospects in 2024, that list included Laurel (Md.) St. Vincent Pallotti three-star offensive tackle Ryan Howerton (6-4, 295); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Jayden Jackson (6-2, 300); Gahanna (Ohio) Lincoln three-star defensive end Elijah King (6-6, 230); Ironton, Ohio, three-star defensive lineman Noah Patterson (6-3, 265); Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive end Booker Pickett Jr. (6-3, 200); Centerville, Ohio, three-star safety Reggie Powers III (6-1, 195); and Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star running back DeJuan Williams (5-11, 195).

For 2025, the Buckeyes welcomed Pickerington (Ohio) North wide receiver Preston Bowman (6-0, 190); Clayton (Ohio) Northmont four-star wide receiver Dorian Brew (6-2, 185); Franklin (Mich.) Wylie E. Groves offensive tackle Avery Gach (6-5, 275); West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West tight end Luka Gilbert (6-7, 205); Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward linebacker Nate Gregory (6-0, 225); Cincinnati Winton Woods defensive end Justin Hill (6-4, 215); and Akron Hoban linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 215).

Also in attendance were Blue Island (Ill.) Eisenhower athlete Andre Lovett (6-2, 170); Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 200); Cincinnati Winton Woods cornerback Donmiel Rogers (5-9, 150); Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders (6-6, 255); Mission Hills (Calif.) Bishop Alemany offensive tackle Maki Stewart (6-6, 290); Baltimore St. Frances Academy defensive lineman Trent Wilson (6-3, 270); and Calhoun, Ga., tight end Emaree Winston (6-2, 235).

There were several notable prospects for 2026 as well, including Ashland, Ohio, quarterback Nathan Bernhard (6-5, 210); Malvern (Pa.) Prep defensive lineman Cameron Brickley (6-2, 265); Mineral



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(Va.) Louisa County wide receiver Dyzier Carter (6-0, 180); Akron Hoban offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 290); Mineral (Va.) Louisa County running back Savion Hiter (5-11, 182); Cartersville (Ga.) Cass quarterback Brodie McWhorter (6-2, 190); Tampa (Fla.) Wharton offensive tackle Canon Pickett (6-4, 280); Avon Lake, Ohio, offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 263); West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West athlete Cam Thomas (6-2, 200); and Miami True North Classical Academy athlete Dominic Turnbull (6-2, 165).

Day Feels Momentum On Recruiting Trail

Dating back to the commitment of Deontae and Devontae Armstrong of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward back on March 27 and including the recent commitments from LeBlanc and Williams-Dixon, Ohio State has picked up verbal pledges from eight prospects in recent weeks.

That momentum has not been lost on Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, who said things have gone well on the recruiting trail of late for the Buckeyes.

"I think it's a sign of how people view the program and the culture and what's going on here," Day said on April 12. "That's probably what you're seeing right now. Guys are coming on these visits, they're getting around our players, they're getting around our coaches. They see who we are. They see the foundation of the program here. They see not only a program that competes nationally for championships every single year but also has a culture that you want to send your son to be a part of.

"And that, combined with the city of Columbus, with Buckeye Nation, there's a lot of excitement right now. There is momentum."

And while Ohio State's staff is hard at work trying to earn more commitments, the Buckeyes' own recruits have been integral in bringing in the next generation of talent in Columbus. Nearly every member of the class is active on Twitter and Instagram trying to pull other recruits to Ohio State, and Day said this has an impact on the team's recruiting.

"I say it all the time, how cool is that to be able to lead your recruiting class or your side of the ball? And we listen to those guys

because they tell us the real information sometimes," Day said. "The recruits, they put on a different face in front of the coaches, but behind closed doors they're real with the recruits."

OSU, U-M Recruits Get Chippy On Twitter

When it comes to the rivalry between Ohio State and Michigan, it extends to all facets of life, from the gridiron to recruiting and even to Twitter, evidently.

In response to a tweet on April 18 asking which group of committed offensive linemen you would rather take between Ohio State and Michigan, all four of Michigan's offensive line recruits – including Austin (Texas) Vandegrift four-star Blake Frazier (6-5, 260); Avon, Ohio, four-star Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290); Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320); and Kansas City (Mo.) Rockhurst four-star Andrew Sprague (6-8, 290) – responded that they would take the Wolverines. Moore, Ohio State's first commitment on the offensive line in 2024, took exception.

"C'mon now. Hate to start beef but two of those dudes are salty that they didn't get OSU offers and the other two just didn't get them," Moore responded. "I've been to camps with everybody on that list except (Ohio State offensive line commit) Marc (Marc's a dog though) and the Blake kid and I can tell you the Bucks are on top."

From there, Roebuck fired back, "Always comes down to not having that offer. Michigan's got the better offensive line and better coaches. Seems like I wasn't missing out on much ... Go Blue."

Moore then shared an image with a headline that stated it would be a "dream offer" for Roebuck to be offered by Ohio State, and Roebuck responded with an article from 247Sports in which Moore – then fresh off a visit to Michigan, which he did not receive an offer from – said, "Ann Arbor is a beautiful city and Michigan has a great tradition and is a great school."

Moore later deleted his tweets, perhaps a sign that the bickering had gone too far, but it shows that the rivalry is still strong among those coming into their respective programs at either Ohio State or Michigan.

OSU Visited By Georgia Safety Commit Woodyard

Ohio State could potentially be back in the race for one of the top safeties in 2024. Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188) – who committed to Georgia in January – took an unofficial visit to Columbus on April 12.

Woodyard committed to the Bulldogs over his other top programs that included Florida, Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon, Notre Dame and USC. He also has an unofficial visit on deck for Alabama and could take trips to Oregon and USC in the coming weeks and months.

By most accounts, the Buckeyes finished second in Woodyard's recruitment the first time around. He was last on campus for Ohio State's opener against Notre Dame, but with his recruitment seemingly opened up, it's an opportunity for the Buckeyes to get back into things.

Lockhart To Announce Commitment On July 6

Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star cornerback Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185) will announce his college of choice on July 6, and the Buckeyes are in prime position to land his services.

Lockhart is the No. 378 overall prospect and No. 31 cornerback in 2024, and he was offered by Ohio State after camping with the Buckeyes last summer. He visited again the weekend of April 8 and is expected to return for an official visit the weekend of June 16. Oregon and Utah are also expected to receive official visits.

While other schools are involved with his recruitment, Lockhart has often referred to Ohio State as the leader, and there's little reason to believe that the Buckeyes won't receive his verbal pledge this summer.

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

Lockhart plays at both running back and cornerback for Basha High School. During his junior season, he picked up 149 rushing yards on 23 attempts and recorded 69 tackles with four interceptions. He also runs track.

NCAA Gets Rid Of Limits On Official Visits

The NCAA Division I Council approved a proposal on April 13 to eliminate the rule limiting the number of official visits a recruit can take to prospective schools beginning July 1.

Recruits were previously limited to taking five official visits during their recruitment, but there are now no limits on the number of official visits that can be taken. A recruit is limited, though, in that they can only take one official visit per school, though a second official visit can be taken to a school if there is a head coaching change.

"For young people considering where to go to college, visits to campus – both official and unofficial – are an integral part of the decision-making process," said Lynda Tealer, executive associate athletics director at Florida and chair of the Division I Council. "This was an opportunity to modernize NCAA rules in a way that provides greater and more meaningful opportunities for prospects going through the recruitment process."

Recruits are still able to take an unlimited number of unofficial visits to any school of their choosing. The difference between an official and unofficial visit is that schools are able to incur costs for official visits, including accommodations, food and transportation, while unofficial visits are paid for by recruits and their families.

Handful Of New Offers Go Out

Ohio State doesn't issue as many offers this time of year as it does in January or February or during camp season, but there are still some prospects being given a chance to one day attend school and play football in Columbus.

The lone offer in 2024 belongs to Virginia Beach (Va.) Green Run four-star wide re-

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Eleven Warriors' Garrick Hodge

Ohio State added a recent commitment from Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203). What do you make of him as a prospect, and with him slotting alongside San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star James Peoples (5-10, 192) in the class, does this conclude recruiting at running back for this cycle, or could you see Ohio State adding a third at the position?

"I think Williams-Dixon is a very versatile player. He's a guy that can line up in multiple spots and have a lot of success. His sophomore year, he was more utilized as a wide receiver than a running back, so he certainly can contribute in the receiving game. He's also a strong runner, and I'm excited to see him go against more stout competition this year at Pickerington North than he had at West Holmes.

"I don't think his addition would stop them from taking another running back if it's a high-end player, so Ohio State may not be done yet."

What does the addition of Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225) mean for Ohio

State's recruiting efforts on the defensive side of the ball? How do you view him as a prospect, as well?

"Pierce was a player they desperately needed especially with the disparity of offensive to defensive commits at the moment. The Texas player is going to be a guy that likely plays Mike, though he could also be a strong Will linebacker as well. His tackling form is pure, and he seems excited to anchor Ohio State's defensive recruiting along with Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star linebacker Garrett Stover (6-0, 195)."

The Buckeyes received a visit in recent weeks from Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety and Georgia commit Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188). Does Ohio State have a real chance to land Woodyard in the second round of his recruitment despite his pledge to the Bulldogs?

"I think there's some cautious optimism from Ohio State they can flip him. It's obviously going to be tough, but Woodyard is a player they've had a relationship with for years and I wouldn't rule it out."

The NCAA recently decided to eliminate the set number of five official visits that a recruit can take. What im-

pact, if any, might this have on Ohio State?

"I don't think much, to be honest. It may be minuscule in the fact of Ohio State could host a prospect on an official visit later in the year that it wouldn't have before because he already took five and give themselves a better chance, but I doubt you're going to see much of an impact from Ohio State's side of things."

As we get into the summer, who are some of the most important prospects in your view that Ohio State is looking to get on campus for visits?

"Seems like the June 16 official visit weekend will be a big one. Prospects like Buford (Ga.) five-star athlete KJ Bolden (6-1, 185), Jefferson (Ga.) five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-2, 230); Buford (Ga.) five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 255); Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview five-star cornerback Charles Lester III (6-1, 171); Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310); Washington (D.C.) Friendship Collegiate Academy five-star edge rusher Dylan Stewart (6-5, 235) and more are all scheduled to be in Columbus that weekend, so it will be a big moment for the Ohio State recruiting staff."

Buckeyes Hold Top-Ranked Class In 2024

Continued From Page 23

ceiver Keylen Adams (6-1, 175), who is the No. 181 overall prospect and No. 26 wide receiver in the class. He helped lead his team to a 13-0 record last season behind 41 receptions for 1,030 yards and 16 receiving touchdowns.

He is just the 12th receiver offered by Ohio State this cycle and joins the likes of Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon four-star Xavier Jordan (6-1, 165), St. Louis Christian Brothers College four-star Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190) and Tampa (Fla.) Catholic four-star Terrance Moore (6-3, 190) as key targets at wideout.

Four offers recently went out for 2025, including to Fort Pierce (Fla.) John Carroll linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 195); Culpeper (Va.) Eastern View four-star linebacker Brett Clatterbaugh (6-2, 220); Buford, Ga., four-star cornerback Devin Williams (5-10, 155); and San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) J Serra Catholic four-star linebacker Madden Faraimo (6-3, 210).

Alford – unrelated to Ohio State's running backs coach Tony – racked up 103

tackles (six for loss) with two sacks last season and also runs an 11.67-second 100-meter dash. He holds additional offers from Auburn, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Penn State, South Carolina and Tennessee, among others.

Clatterbaugh was on Ohio State's campus the week before the spring game and was personally offered by Day, adding to a list that includes Notre Dame, Penn State, Rutgers, South Carolina and Wisconsin, among others.

"I was speechless," Clatterbaugh told 247Sports of being offered by Ohio State. "We are talking about getting offered by one of the best programs in the country."

Williams and Faraimo are both top-60 prospects, with Williams checking in at No. 55 nationally (fourth at cornerback) and Faraimo landing at No. 40 in the country, and the fourth-best linebacker in the nation. Williams has offers from Alabama, Florida, Michigan, Notre Dame and Penn State, while Faraimo has been given the green light by such schools as Michigan State, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Stanford, Tennessee and USC.

"This is a big offer for me," Faraimo

told 247Sports on April 11. "I've been wanting this one ever since I was young. I haven't visited Ohio State before, but I'm definitely going to get out there later this summer.

"It was actually Coach Knowles who offered me. I've been talking with Laurinaitis for weeks now, but today was the first time I talked with Coach Knowles. We had a good conversation and then he offered, so I'm very excited right now."

Other Notes And Tidbits

- As Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, Ohio State – according to the 247Sports composite rankings – held the top-ranked recruiting class in 2024, ahead of No. 2 Georgia, No. 3 Michigan, No. 4 LSU and No. 5 Florida State.

- Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) is expected to take an official visit to Ohio State the weekend of June 9.

- According to 247Sports, Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-2, 200), a 2025 prospect, is expected to visit Ohio State on June 3.

- The Buckeyes were included in the top five schools for Lancaster, Texas, four-star cornerback Corian Gipson (6-0, 170) along with Alabama, Clemson, TCU and Texas.

- Ohio State was among the top 10 schools for Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy four-star running back Gideon Davidson (6-0, 193), a 2025 prospect, along with Clemson, Colorado, Iowa State, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and USC.

- Former Maryland defensive tackle Anthony Booker, who entered the transfer portal earlier this offseason and included Ohio State among his top destinations, elected to transfer to Arkansas on April 12.

- Waukesha (Wis.) Catholic Memorial four-star offensive tackle Donovan Harbour (6-3, 310), who was offered by Ohio State, committed to Penn State on April 18.

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

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1988

John Cooper saw nothing special in his punting specialists in OSU's spring game. As for placekicking, he said it was adequate.

"The punting is a mystery. Right now this team does not have a punter. Obviously, we're going to lose a lot of sleep between now and when we play in the fall," the Buckeye coach said after watching three punters combine for an average of only 35.2 yards a boot. All but one punt were wobblers with poor hang time.

And so the "Help Wanted" sign was out. Graduate assistant and punting coach Tony Caviglia said since the end of the spring game he had been swamped with phone calls and letters from athletes all over the country who wanted to be Ohio State's punter. He said he would try to get a decent look at five or more punters early in the fall.

Prized recruit Buster Howe punted in high school, averaging nearly 40 yards his senior year. He would "be looked at very closely," Caviglia said. "If he can step in and do the job, great. But we can't look at him until the fall."

30 Years Ago - 1993

Andy Dawson was on top of the world. Going into his senior year of high school as one of the top-rated offensive linemen in Ohio, he had college recruiters' attention. Just when everything was looking great, it all almost ended with a snap.

Dawson, a 6-4, 275-pound tackle out of Shelby, Ohio, broke a bone in his leg while playing in his team's final preseason scrimmage. It caused him to miss his entire senior season while rehabilitating the leg and also caused prospective colleges to lessen their interest.

He said he was prepared to walk on at OSU before he was offered a scholarship.

"Ohio State is close to home. It has a great agriculture campus and a great football tradition," said Dawson, who grew up on a family farm. "I feel I fit right in with the team. They're a great bunch of guys and a lot of great athletes."

Dawson was getting to know his Buckeye teammates better as he graduated from high school early to enroll at Ohio State and participate in spring practice.

25 Years Ago - 1998

An Ohio State quarterback from the state of Michigan?

As unusual as that sounds, it looked like the Buckeyes had succeeded in going into Michigan and nabbing one of that state's top prospects in Utica Ford High School junior Craig Krenzel.

The 6-4½, 205-pound Krenzel became OSU's fourth verbal commitment, joining Columbus Eastmoor defensive back Curtis Crosby, Canton (Ohio) McKinley defensive back Mike Doss and Lebanon, Ohio, tailback Kelton Lindsay. This group was expected to sign letters of intent for OSU in February 1999.

Krenzel announced his commitment to Ohio State April 8, just a matter of days after making an official visit to Columbus for a spring practice session. He returned home and quickly arrived at

a decision, picking Ohio State over the likes of Michigan State, Boston College, Stanford and Duke.

20 Years Ago - 2003

Austintown (Ohio) Fitch wide receiver Miles Williams (6-3, 205, 4.41) became OSU's fourth verbal commitment for 2004 when he committed to the Buckeyes on April 10.

"I talked to (assistant coach) Tim Spencer, and he said he was going to FedEx (a scholarship offer) to my house," Williams said. "He told me to call him when I got the letter saying that it was official. When I called him, I told him that I committed."

Williams' coach at Fitch, Carl Pellini, had recently left to become a graduate assistant at Nebraska, where his brother and former OSU defensive back Bo Pellini was the defensive coordinator.

Because of that connection, Nebraska also was in position to offer Williams a scholarship. West Virginia had offered him as well. He was looking at most of the Big Ten as well as Pittsburgh and Boston College.

15 Years Ago - 2008

A year previous, the momentum held by the Ohio State recruiting class of 2008 kicked into another gear in the immediate aftermath of the spring game. In the span of three days, five-star out-of-state prospects J.B. Shugarts and Michael Brewster issued verbal commitments to the program, as did four-star in-state player Nathan Williams.

After hosting such a talented group for the spring game in 2007 resulted in some big commitments, the Buckeyes invited an even bigger group to the 2008 game held April 19. The goals were the same as the previous year, head coach Jim Tressel said.

"Hopefully we'll get the same type of thing," Tressel told reporters following the spring game draft.

Those proved to be prophetic words when the Buckeyes landed three new verbal commitments: Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway linebacker Dorian Bell (6-1, 220), Indian Head (Md.) Lackey four-star cornerback Darrell Givens (6-1, 178) and Jeannette, Pa, running back Jordan Hall (5-9, 185).

10 Years Ago - 2013

Though Eric Glover-Williams' 5-10, 165-pound frame didn't seem to be the ideal size for a top college running back, Ohio State fell in love with the Canton (Ohio) McKinley product early in the recruiting process.

The bad news for Ohio State was that programs from all over the country had also become enamored with Glover-Williams and his speed, and that earned the running back offers from Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan State, Nebraska, Pittsburgh and Tennessee to go along with the one he earned from the Buckeyes.

And that list was sure to expand considering Glover-Williams was a 2015 prospect.

"I took a few visits this spring," Glover-Williams said. "I was at Tennessee and Ohio State. I want to get back to both schools, and

this summer I also want to visit Alabama, Illinois, Michigan State and West Virginia. I haven't heard much from Alabama, but they want me to come to camp. The same goes with Florida, and I am interested in both."

Five Years Ago - 2018

What's the old adage? April showers bring May flowers?

Well, it was raining recruits in the month of April for Ohio State, as the Buckeyes had a 2019 class that was blossoming into one of the best in the country.

Since BSB had last gone to press, Ohio State landed six more recruits, five coming from the 2019 cycle. Marietta, Ga. offensive tackle Jake Wray (6-5, 290) became the first member of the Buckeyes' 2020 haul when he issued his verbal on April 23.

As for the five recruits for the 2019 class who pledged to the Buckeyes, Mentor, Ohio, four-star defensive end Noah Potter (6-5, 250) ignited the surge on April 16. Roswell, Ga., four-star athlete Steele Chambers (6-2, 215) committed two days later. Ohio State then managed to flip Potomac (Md.) Bullis three-star safety Bryson Shaw (6-2, 175) from Wisconsin on April 28.

The next day, however, is when Ohio State made its biggest splash on the 2019 recruiting calendar to date. Lexington, Ohio, four-star linebacker Cade Stover (6-4, 225) declared to Ohio State on April 29. But no pledge was bigger than the one the Scarlet and Gray secured that night from Austin (Texas) Lake Travis five-star wide receiver Garrett Wilson (6-0, 180).

One Year Ago - 2022

Ohio State rolled out the red carpet for recruits during the spring game on April 16, and the returns started coming in within a day of the exhibition's conclusion. The Buckeyes gained two commitments on April 17, with Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star cornerback Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) and Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch three-star wide receiver Bryson Rodgers (6-2, 170) giving verbal pledges to Ohio State.

Johnson was the No. 270 overall prospect in his class and the No. 29 cornerback prospect, and he chose Ohio State over top schools including Georgia, Oklahoma and USC. The Buckeyes offered Johnson on Jan. 25 and he made his visit to the school for the spring game.

The other commitment that day was Rodgers, who became the first wide receiver in Ohio State's 2023 class. He was offered by the Buckeyes earlier in the year on Jan. 26 and made his first visit to Ohio State on March 8 before making a return trip for the spring game.

He was the No. 365 overall prospect in the class and the No. 47 wide receiver, though the staff was higher on Rodgers than recruiting services, and he was one of just 14 receivers to be offered by Ohio State in 2023. He held offers from several other top schools, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Michigan and Penn State, among others.

Petitti Named New Conference Commissioner

A months-long search and interview process have finally yielded a new commissioner for the Big Ten conference to replace former lead man Kevin Warren.

On April 12, the league announced that former TV and MLB executive Tony Petitti will take over as conference commissioner, with his tenure set to begin on May 15.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

"The Big Ten Conference is in an extraordinary position of strength," read a statement from Darryll J. Pines, University of Maryland president and chair of the conference's executive search committee. "Tony's capabilities to navigate the complexities of changing marketplace environments, history as a collaborative leader, and passion for academics and collegiate athletics made him the right leader, at the right time, for the Big Ten Conference."

Petitti has served in various roles during his career, working in both the media and executive fields in sports. He spent time with ABC Sports and CBS Sports before becoming the president and chief executive officer at MLB Network in 2009. Since 2014, he had served as MLB's deputy commissioner and chief operating officer.

"At this important and transformational time in collegiate athletics, it is truly my great honor to be chosen by the Council of Presidents and Chancellors as the commissioner of the Big Ten Conference," Petitti said. "I am energized to work alongside the best athletics directors, coaches, conference staff and board in the country as – together – we continue to elevate the academic and athletic experiences and resources for our 14, soon-to-be 16, world-class universities with nearly 10,000 incredible student-athletes."

Petitti attended Haverford College in Delaware County, Pa., for his undergraduate studies, where he obtained a degree in economics before moving on to Harvard Law School. He worked for two years at the law firm of Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft before joining ABC Sports in 1988 as a general attorney.

He will have big shoes to fill with the departure of Warren, who helped the conference secure a multi-billion dollar TV deal with Fox, CBS and NBC last August, as well as led the acquisition of USC and UCLA for the conference starting in 2024. Warren left the league to take over as the president and CEO of the Chicago Bears. Big Ten chief legal officer and general counsel Anil Gollahalli will act as interim commissioner until Petitti's arrival.

Petitti becomes the seventh commissioner in Big Ten history.

Six From Big Ten Taken In WNBA Draft

Women's basketball players from the Big Ten littered the WNBA draft on April 10. Six players were taken in total, with three going

in the first round. Former Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell was taken with the first pick in the second round.

Maryland shooting guard Diamond Miller landed near the top of the draft, going second overall to the Minnesota Lynx. Miller had the best year of her career last season, posting 19.7 points per game with 2.9 assists and 2.1 steals.

"She's got a lot of confidence," Lynx head coach and president of basketball operations Cheryl Reeve said. "It's what separates all these players. They believe that – the really good ones – believe that they can do anything, and that's something that I think is enjoyable to coach."

Indiana point guard Grace Berger followed Miller from the Big Ten as the No. 7 overall pick, staying in the Hoosier State and going to the Indiana Fever. She shot a solid 40.7 percent from three this past season en route to averaging 12.9 points and 5.8 assists per contest. She made first-team All-Big Ten on three occasions in her collegiate career.

"I don't know if it will ever feel super real," Berger said after being selected. "Just getting to live out my dream is unbelievable."

Maryland shooting guard Abby Meyers rounded out the league's list of first-round selections, going 11th overall to the Dallas Wings. Meyers spent just one season at Maryland after transferring from Princeton, averaging 14.3 points and shooting 38.8 percent from behind the arc with the Terrapins.

Michigan shooting guard Leigha Brown came off the board three picks into the second round at 15th overall to the Atlanta Dream, joining Mikesell as second-round selections from the Big Ten. Iowa forward Monika Czinano closed out the draft for the conference, going 26th overall with the second pick in the third round to the Los Angeles Sparks.

Purdue's Edey Declares For Draft

Star Purdue center Zach Edey entered his name into the NBA draft pool on April 18, though he will maintain his collegiate eligibility and undergo evaluations before making a final decision on his collegiate future.

"My basketball journey has been unorthodox to say the least, but I wouldn't change a thing about it," Edey said. "From ranked 437 in my class to National Player of the Year, I can't put into words what Purdue University, my teammates, my coaches, and our fans mean to me. Though we fell short of our ultimate goal this season, I loved every second of it."

"With that being said, I'm putting my name in the NBA draft while maintaining my college eligibility. I will evaluate my future after going through the process and look forward to what's next."

Edey was the consensus National Player of the Year this past season in college basketball, averaging 22.3 points, 12.9 rebounds and 2.1 blocks per game for the Boilermakers. He helped guide the squad to Big Ten titles in both the regular season and conference tournament before top-seeded Purdue was upset by No. 16 Fairleigh Dick-

inson in the first round.

The 7-4 center broke the 30-point barrier on eight occasions during the season. According to ESPN, he is ranked the No. 49 overall prospect and No. 5 center in the draft.

Portal Movement Continues In Big Ten Basketball

On both the men's and women's side of things, Big Ten basketball teams have added a few pieces from the transfer portal to improve their outlook for next season. The Ohio State women's team caught arguably the biggest fish of the bunch in former Duke guard Celeste Taylor (more on page 28) but there were contributors reeled in by some of the league's other teams as well.

Sticking with the women, Nebraska landed senior guard Darian White out of Montana State. She has a decorated career as one of the best backcourt players in Big Sky history. She is the only player ever to reach career marks of 1,700 points, 600 rebounds, 400 assists and 200 steals.

"Darian is the perfect fit for our Nebraska women's basketball family," said Nebraska head coach Amy Williams. "She brings a lot of experience in the guard position. Not only was she named first-team all-conference on multiple occasions, but she was twice named the Defensive Player of the Year in the Big Sky. We love that she is motivated on both sides of the ball and capable of making everyone around her better."

Illinois grabbed Camille Hobby, a 6-3 post player out of N.C. State. Starting all 32 games last season for the Wolfpack, she averaged 8.8 points and 4.2 rebounds per contest.

On the men's side, Penn State added its third transfer since new head coach Mike Rhoades took over, earning a commitment from former Temple forward Zach Hicks. The 6-7 Hicks started all 32 games for the Owls last season, averaging 9.6 points and shooting 35.6 percent from three while tacking on 5.1 rebounds a game.

"We are really excited to have Zach and his family join our program here at Penn State," Rhoades said. "He is an exact fit for our style of play and approach. I can't wait to get Zach on campus and get in the gym with him."

Northwestern swapped out forwards, losing senior Robbie Beran but gaining former Denver forward Justin Mullins. Mullins played one season for the Pioneers and averaged 9.8 points, and his length at 6-6 allowed him to swipe 1.5 steals per contest as well.

Illinois scooped up one of the Western Athletic Conference's premier combo guards to round out the list of Big Ten basketball acquisitions, with former Utah Valley senior Justin Harmon, 6-4, pledging to the Fighting Illini on April 10. He scored 14.0 points and picked up 3.8 rebounds per game last season.

Basketball Commit Kante Cancels On U-M

Michigan head coach Juwan Howard's basketball program is down to a single sign-

ee in the 2023 recruiting class after South Kent, Conn., four-star center Papa Kante (6-10, 215) requested a release from his national letter of intent on April 18.

"After a lot of conversations with my family, I have decided to request a release from my NLI to the University of Michigan," Kante said in a statement on Twitter. "Thank you to the coaching staff and Michigan fans for their interest in me. Thank you to all my supporters, friends and family for continuing to show love."

With a reported 7-4 wingspan, Kante originally selected Michigan over fellow finalists Maryland, Memphis, Pitt and Rutgers. He visited the Terrapins on Sept. 17 before committing to the Wolverines on Oct. 20 and signing his letter of intent the next month.

Originally from Senegal, he moved to the United States in 2019 to pursue his basketball career. He was the 108th overall prospect and the No. 13 center in the class.

After losing Kante, Michigan has one signee for 2023 in Dayton Chaminade Julianne four-star shooting guard George Washington III (6-2, 165), who had previously been committed to Ohio State before flipping to Michigan and eventually signing with the Wolverines.

More Football Transfers As Second Portal Window Nears

With spring practice finished for each of the Big Ten's 14 teams, a new crop of players is entering the transfer portal as athletes lose position battles or decide better opportunities are there for them elsewhere.

The second portal window opens on May 1, and players have until May 15 to notify their former school of their intention to transfer if they want to be on another team's roster this fall.

The most noteworthy transfer in recent weeks is that of Penn State cornerback Storm Duck. He has been on campus for only a few months, though, initially transferring to Penn State in January after spending last season at North Carolina. He had 46 tackles, three interceptions and nine pass breakups for the Tar Heels and figured to be a big addition for the Nittany Lions.

Maryland offensive tackle Coltin Deery, who played in 10 games and started two as a freshman last season, is another notable addition to the portal. He joins sophomore offensive lineman Keon Kindred in his intention to transfer. Nebraska wide receiver Alante Brown flashed some potential for the Cornhuskers last season, catching 16 passes for 191 yards, but he'll be with a new team this year.

Other portal entries in recent weeks include Illinois linebacker Shammond Cooper; Indiana cornerback Trevell Mullen; Michigan State linebacker Itayvion Brown, quarterback Hampton Fay and safety A.J. Kirk; Minnesota quarterback Jacob Knuth; Nebraska tight end James Carnie and wide receiver Evan Meyersick; Ohio State kicker Jake Seibert; Penn State offensive tackle Jimmy Christ; Rutgers offensive lineman Brad Harris; and Wisconsin running back Julius Davis.

Ohio State Adds Former Baylor Guard Bonner

Ohio State landed its second transfer portal commitment on April 17, garnering the services of former Baylor guard Dale Bonner.

Bonner, a 6-2, 170-pound guard from Shaker Heights, Ohio, provides the Buckeyes with depth in the backcourt and will likely factor in behind sophomores Bruce Thornton and Roddy Gayle Jr. After spending his first two seasons at Division II Fairmont State, Bonner played his last two years at Baylor and helped the Bears to a 50-18 record over the past two seasons.

COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

Bonner emerged as Fairmont State's leading scorer in each of his two seasons with the program, producing 17.8 points per game as a freshman and upping his scoring output to 21.2 points per game as a sophomore. In his two seasons as a Falcon, Bonner shot 45.8 percent from the field and 40.4 percent from three-point range while dishing out 5.0 assists per game. Bonner was recruited to Fairmont State by current Boston Celtics head coach Joe Mazzulla, who was head coach of the Falcons from 2017-19.

Bonner's standout efforts at Fairmont State led him to Baylor, where he settled into a much different role as a bench contributor for the Bears. Bonner appeared in 60 games with the Bears, seeing noted declines in his scoring efficiency by averaging 3.9 points per game on 38.7 percent shooting – including a 27.4 percent mark from beyond the arc – in an average of 18.3 minutes played. Last season, he produced 4.7 points per game while shooting 44.1 percent from the field and 37.2 percent from beyond the arc, and he dished out 2.7 assists per game in 19.2 minutes a contest.

Now joining Ohio State, Bonner will be one of three Buckeyes with NCAA Tournament minutes under their belts – joining Zed Key and Tanner Holden – and will give Ohio State's youthful backcourt of Gayle, Thornton and incoming freshman Taison Chatman a veteran presence to lean on throughout the season.

Battle Addresses Several Areas Of Need For Ohio State

Ohio State began its transfer portal efforts by garnering the commitment of Minnesota graduate forward Jamison Battle on April 6, filling several pressing areas of need for the Buckeyes.

Standing 6-7 and weighing 220 pounds, Battle provides the Buckeyes with a true power forward, a position that was largely filled by patchwork committee last season with Justice Sueing, Brice Sensabaugh, Isaac Likekele and Eugene Brown III operating out of their natural positions to play the four. In fact, Battle's addition will give the Buckeyes their first true power forward since E.J. Liddell, who led the Buckeyes in scoring in 2021-22.

As Battle fills in at a position where the Buckeyes lacked last season – with Pickerington (Ohio) Central four-star forward Devin Royal (6-7, 210) joining him at the four – his skill set also carries several factors that should provide Ohio State with a boost.

Most notably, Battle gives Ohio State a reliable scoring threat with the Buckeyes set to lose their two leading scorers in Sensabaugh and Sueing, though Sensabaugh could still return after entering the NBA draft while maintaining college eligibility. For his career, Battle has posted 14.4 points per game while shooting 42.0 percent, as well as a 35.0 percent mark from three-point range.

After producing a career year in his junior season with the Gophers, posting career highs in points (17.5) and rebounds (6.3) while tying his best three-point percentage (36.6 percent), he struggled as a senior. Missing much of the offseason – as well as the first four games of the regular season – while recovering from surgery, Battle saw a drop-off from his junior season, producing 12.5 points per game, while his 37.5 percent shooting from the field and 31.9 percent mark from three-point range both were career lows.

Although Battle saw a decline in efficiency last season, his ability to stretch the floor as a three-point shooter – averaging 7.1 three-point attempts per game for his career – will be helpful in spacing the floor for Ohio State's offense as a whole. Battle has shown his release is quick enough to shoot off the catch, but he also goes to a one-dribble pull-up move often to pressure the defender back and give him the necessary space to fire from deep. He utilized this move to hit a game-winning three-pointer against Rutgers on March 2.

Not only does Battle shoot threes at a high rate, but he also has the athleticism to use the threat of his shooting to attack close-outs and open up his midrange game. Despite his larger frame, Battle can put the ball on the floor and get to his spots with relative ease, showing a penchant to shoot from the elbows and the short corner while also going to a running floater when attacking around the rim.

Unlike Ohio State's current option to play the power forward in Key, Battle doesn't necessarily carry much of an offensive post presence. With a limited back-to-the-basket game, Battle prefers to face up his defender and attempt to beat them off the dribble rather than use his strength to open up opportunities in the post.

While Battle provides the Buckeyes with plenty of offensive versatility, he does have his limitations on the other end, as well as on the glass. Battle's rebounding numbers do not jump off the page. He tallied just 5.1 rebounds per game in his two years with Minnesota despite being one of the Gophers' primary frontcourt options.

Defensively, Battle doesn't fare much better. He boasted a defensive rating of 111.4 last season that ranked just eighth on Minnesota's roster. Battle has never averaged more than 0.4 blocks per game, and since joining the Big Ten as a junior, he did not tally more than 0.6 steals per game. While blocks and

steals don't tell the whole story in regard to a player's defense, his poor defensive rating lends credence to his defensive shortcomings.

In all, Battle's addition was much needed for an Ohio State squad that was pining for a natural power forward, as well as finding someone to fill the point production left by Sueing.

OSU Adds Nonconference Opponents To Schedule

Ohio State has continued to fill up its non-conference schedule for the 2023-24 season since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

The Buckeyes announced on April 19 that they will compete in a neutral-site contest against West Virginia in Cleveland, set for Dec. 30, while also reportedly scheduling a home-and-home series with Texas A&M, with the first game set to take place on Nov. 10 in Columbus, according to CBS Sports' Jon Rothstein.

The venue for Ohio State's clash with West Virginia is yet to be announced, but in their last meeting, Ohio State and West Virginia battled in Cleveland's Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse with the Mountaineers claiming a 67-59 win on Dec. 29, 2019.

All-time, Ohio State boasts a 9-8 record against the Mountaineers, but the Buckeyes haven't had much success against West Virginia in recent seasons. Ohio State won the first eight meetings between the squads, a winning streak spanning from 1940-80, but the Mountaineers have claimed eight of the last nine matchups with the Buckeyes' lone win in the stretch coming in a 77-68 victory on Nov. 28, 1995.

The Mountaineers are coming off a mediocre 19-15 season, which culminated in an eighth-place finish in the Big 12.

Ohio State is 0-2 all-time against Texas A&M and has played the Aggies only once since 1957, with the Buckeyes falling, 70-47, during the NIT Preseason Tournament in New York City in 2007.

The Aggies enjoyed a successful campaign this past season under head coach Buzz Williams, going 25-10 and claiming a No. 10 seed in the NCAA Tournament before falling to seventh-seeded Penn State, 76-59, in the opening round. Ohio State and Texas A&M will play at College Station, Texas, during the 2024-25 season.

The only other reported scheduling development in 2023-24 for the Buckeyes is their inclusion in the Emerald Coast Classic, an early-season nonconference tournament in Niceville, Fla., during Thanksgiving weekend. Ohio State is also likely to appear in the CBS Sports Classic – as it has eight times since the event's inception in 2014 – and the Gavitt Games, which pits Big East and Big Ten teams against one another early in the season.

Ohio State's nonconference schedule remains a fluid situation, so make sure to check in with BuckeyeSports.com for up-to-the-minute information regarding the Buckeyes' slate in 2023-24.

Sensabaugh Finding Place In Mock Drafts

After flashing his potential throughout his



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOT COMMODITY – Freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh, who declared for the NBA draft on March 25 while maintaining his college eligibility, has seen his name appear as high as a lottery pick in mock drafts.

freshman season at Ohio State and declaring for the NBA draft on March 25, Sensabaugh has gained considerable attention in several mock drafts.

Sensabaugh's name has been floated from as high as a lottery pick to as low as the second round since he burst onto the scene last season, and as the draft nears on June 22, Sensabaugh is looking to do everything he can to improve his stock. Although much of the pre-draft process is yet to begin, speculation has continued about where Sensabaugh could potentially land, with a return to Ohio State still possibly in the cards after he maintained his eligibility.

After leading Ohio State in scoring last season, producing 16.3 points per game while shooting at an efficient 48.2 percent clip – including a 40.5 percent mark from three – Sensabaugh has become a commodity for a team in need of an offensive punch.

According to The Athletic and ESPN's most recent mock drafts, released on March 28 and April 12, respectively, that team is the Houston Rockets, which each publication predicted would select Sensabaugh with the No. 19 pick in the first round.

"The Rockets ranked as one of the NBA's worst offensive teams this season, in no small part due to their league-worst three-point shooting accuracy," ESPN's Jonathan Givony wrote. "Sensabaugh, a (40.5) percent three-point shooter who can score from anywhere on the floor, posted an eye-popping 27.3 points per 40 minutes. He has work to do in improving his frame and defensive engagement to become a more complete all-around player, but he could bring a dimension the team currently doesn't have at the forward positions."

The Ringer's Kevin O'Connor had Sensabaugh going closer to the bottom of the first round on April 4, with the Utah Jazz taking the Orlando native with the No. 27 pick. To be fair, the No. 27 selection has produced several high-level NBA players in recent seasons, including Boston's Robert Williams, Minnesota's Rudy Gobert, Toronto's Pascal Siakam and Washington's Kyle Kuzma, and O'Connor pointed to Sensabaugh's deep of fence game as his most intriguing aspect to an NBA team.

O'Connor also identified Sensabaugh's defensive shortcomings and his limitations as a playmaker as factors that may be working against the forward at the next level.

"(Jazz head coach) Will Hardy has already shown he's an excellent head coach capable of getting the best out of his players, which makes Sensabaugh an intriguing choice for Utah," O'Connor said. "Though he's a limited defender and playmaker, he's a strong go-to scorer and would be forced to conform on this team to earn minutes."

CBS Sports' Kyle Boone and Gary Parrish each had very different opinions on where Sensabaugh would potentially land. Boone had Sensabaugh as the No. 21 overall pick to the Brooklyn Nets on April 17, while Parrish placed Sensabaugh in the lottery with the No. 11 selection to the Orlando Magic on April 11.

Regardless of his standing in the draft, Sensabaugh also has the option to return to Ohio State and will have until May 31 to withdraw his name from the NBA draft pool. For the latest on Sensabaugh's draft status, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com.

Sueing Competes At Portsmouth Invitational Tournament

After declaring for the NBA draft on March 29, Sueing has already started his journey toward the professional ranks by competing from April 12-15 in the Portsmouth Invitational Tournament, a tournament for departing seniors to showcase their talents in front of NBA and international scouts in Portsmouth, Va.

Sueing was assigned to the Portsmouth Sports Club squad, joining former Indiana forward Race Thompson and North Carolina forward Pete Nance, who spent his first four seasons at Northwestern, in the eight-team, three-day tournament in Portsmouth, Va. In his three games, Sueing posted averages of 9.7 points and 6.0 rebounds while shooting 35.7 percent (10 of 28) from the field.

Portsmouth Sports Club's run in the tournament did not get off to a great start, however. Sueing had seven points and six rebounds in a 96-84 loss to Mike Duman Auto Sales on April 12.

Sueing helped Portsmouth Sports Club get back on track a day later, scoring 15 points and tallying five rebounds to push his squad past Portsmouth Partnership 97-81. The Honolulu native added a block and a steal on the defensive end in the win.

The former Buckeye struggled on his final day of action, scoring just seven points on 2-of-9 shooting and pulling down seven rebounds, but Portsmouth Sports Club came out on top, 112-68, over Norfolk Sports Club on April 15.

Sueing and Portsmouth Sports Club fin-

ished the round-robin tournament with a 2-1 record but could not claim the tournament title as K&D Rounds Landscaping – led by tournament MVP and former Texas guard Sir'Jabari Rice – were crowned champions with a 3-0 record.

Conley, Russell Meet In NBA Play-In Tournament

There was a distinct Buckeye flavor in the NBA Play-In Tournament this season.

Former Ohio State guards D'Angelo Russell and Mike Conley competed against one another for the right to send their teams to NBA playoffs on April 11, with Russell's Los Angeles Lakers prevailing over Conley's Minnesota Timberwolves, 108-102, in overtime. Russell and Conley were the only former Buckeyes to qualify for postseason play this season.

Russell struggled despite the win, scoring just two points on 1-of-9 shooting, and was benched in favor of Dennis Schröder down the stretch and in overtime. Russell distributed the ball well, though, tallying eight assists to just one turnover.

Conley, on the other hand, willed the Timberwolves throughout the game – especially down the stretch – scoring 23 points while boasting 6-of-8 shooting from beyond the arc. Down three with 0.1 seconds remaining in regulation, Conley was sent to the foul line after Lakers center Anthony Davis ran into him on a three-point attempt, and Conley shook off the raucous Lakers crowd to connect on all three free throws and send the game into overtime.

Earlier this season, Russell and Conley were both involved in a three-team trade

which sent Russell from Minnesota to Los Angeles and Conley to Minnesota from the Utah Jazz. Since arriving on their new teams, both players have made an impact.

After acquiring Russell, the Lakers went 12-5 in games he played in during the regular season while he tallied 17.4 points and 6.1 assists per game in his 17 appearances with Los Angeles. This is Russell's second stint with the Lakers, after he was selected with the No. 2 overall pick by Los Angeles in 2016. After issues in the locker room derailed his acclimation process to the NBA, the Lakers traded Russell to the Brooklyn Nets in 2017.

Conley went 12-12 with the Timberwolves after he was acquired, helping Minnesota remain in contention for postseason play. In his 24 regular-season games with Minnesota, Conley averaged 14.0 points and 5.0 assists per game, which was up from his 10.7 points per game in his 43 appearances for Utah this season.

With the win over the Timberwolves, the Lakers secured the No. 7 seed in the NBA playoffs and the right to play the second-seeded Memphis Grizzlies in the opening round. Minnesota was sent to a second play-in game against the Oklahoma City Thunder on April 14, in which Conley produced 14 points and three steals to help the Timberwolves reach the playoffs in a 120-95 win.

At the time of publication, Russell's Lakers held a 2-1 series lead over the Grizzlies, while Conley's Timberwolves trailed 3-1 against the Nuggets.

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Mikesell Selected By Indiana In WNBA Draft

Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell was selected by the Indiana Fever with the No. 13 overall pick of the 2023 WNBA draft on April 10.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Mikesell's selection by the Fever comes after two seasons at Ohio State where she appeared in 68 games, averaging 17.9 points and 3.1 rebounds per game on 45.4 percent shooting from the field and 44.2 percent shooting from deep.

"It's going to be incredible," Mikesell said on ESPN's broadcast after being drafted. "I'm just excited to get to work, be around a ton of incredibly talented players and go ahead and try to be a good addition to the team."

She became one of just 36 players in program history to surpass 1,000 points, finishing her Ohio State career with 1,215 (and 2,253 in five seasons of college basketball). She holds the program record for free-throw percentage with an 87.8 percent mark and has the fourth-most three-point field goals in team history with 230, and her 44.2 percent three-point shooting is second all-time behind Cheryl Perozek (45.8 percent). She also tied a single-game program record earlier this season for the most makes from three without a miss, going 6 of 6 from deep in a win over Minnesota on Feb. 8.

"I don't know anyone that shoots the ball faster off the pass than Taylor Mikesell," said Indiana Fever general manager Lin Dunn. "She's going to be very challenging to defend."

Mikesell, a native of Massillon, Ohio, transferred to Ohio State after stints at both

Maryland and Oregon, but her time with the Buckeyes helped propel her to an eventual selection in the WNBA draft. While Mikesell could have opted for the draft following last season and the Buckeyes' loss to Texas in the Sweet 16, she decided to come back to Ohio State for a fifth and final season of college basketball.

"Me and Jacy (Sheldon) kind of looked at each other and said, 'We can do something really special,'" Mikesell said. "I just remember her saying, 'Dude, you've got to come back.'"

Though Mikesell was not able to play alongside Sheldon for most of the season, with Sheldon appearing in only 13 games due to a lower-leg injury, Mikesell still helped lead Ohio State all the way to an appearance in the Elite Eight.

"I think it's meant a lot," Mikesell said after the loss to Virginia Tech in the Elite Eight. "To being in the position we were last year, kind of driving the reason why I wanted to come back and just being able to put ourselves in that position to get to the Final Four, we had the opportunity. That has meant everything to me."

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said Mikesell has left a significant impact on the program despite her relatively short stint in Columbus.

"She's been such a great kid in our program," McGuff said. "She's a wonderful young person. She's leaving the way you should leave, knowing that you poured every ounce of heart and soul, effort, energy into a program, and that's just who she is and it says so much about her."

Mikesell becomes the first Ohio State draftee since 2018, when the Fever selected Kelsey Mitchell with the No. 2 overall selection and Stephanie Mavunga in the second round. Mikesell now joins a struggling Indiana squad that has missed the playoffs in each of the last six seasons and has not finished with a winning record since 2015. The Fever also drafted South Carolina's Aliyah Boston with the No. 1 overall pick as well as Indiana's Grace Berger (No. 7) and LSU's LaDazhia Williams in the second round.

While the Fever have struggled as a whole, they do have a star in Mitchell, the former Buckeye who is entering her sixth season with the team. Mitchell hit a career high last season in points per game (18.4) and three-point shooting (40.9 percent) and will be a leader for the new draftees.

"I'm very excited to play with her and just to get to pick her brain a little bit about the league and just her journey through the W," Mikesell said. "I got to talk to her a little bit earlier today, and she gave me some advice and told me just to enjoy the moment and just keep being me."

Mitchell had previously said she would welcome the addition of any former Buckeyes to the Fever's roster through the draft, and the hope is now that Mikesell will crack the Fever's opening-day roster to make it two former Ohio State players taking the court.

"Man, that would be great," Mitchell said in January. "I'm a Buckeye for life, so I'm an advocate for any athlete that comes from Ohio State University. I'm an advocate to



PHOTO COURTESY OF CELESTE TAYLOR

BIG PICKUP – Ohio State's first transfer addition this offseason is former Duke guard Celeste Taylor (left), who is the reigning ACC Defensive Player of the Year. She has one year of eligibility remaining.

see one of our own be in that draft."

Mitchell will provide some Buckeye companionship, but Mikesell won't have to go far from home to play, as the Fever is the closest WNBA team to Massillon.

"My hometown and home has meant a lot to me," she said. "Just being close to home with Ohio State has meant so much to have my family in my back yard. I'm excited to be that close to home and have my family ties."

OSU Adds Former Duke Guard Taylor

Ohio State made the program's first transfer addition of the offseason on April 20, and it's a significant one. The Buckeyes added former Duke guard Celeste Taylor, the reigning ACC Defensive Player of the Year.

Taylor (5-11) recently completed her fourth season of college basketball – spending her first two at Texas and most recent two seasons with the Blue Devils – and will be a graduate transfer for the Buckeyes, entering with one year of eligibility remaining and the ability to play right away for Ohio State.

"I can't thank Duke enough for the unwavering support," Taylor said in a statement. "Thank you to all my coaches for giving me a place I can call home and helping me learn and grow. Thank you for being a big part of my journey, Duke."

"Due to unforeseen circumstances, I have decided to do my (graduate) year at

The Ohio State University."

She led Duke this past season with 11.4 points per game while adding 4.8 rebounds, 2.5 assists, 2.2 assists and 2.2 steals per contest. Taylor shot 39.4 percent from the field and 32.1 percent from deep last season, the former a career high.

Duke finished with a 26-7 record last season before falling in the second round of the NCAA tournament in a loss to Colorado. In that loss, Taylor had eight points, 10 rebounds, eight assists and 10 steals, becoming the first player in the women's tournament since at least 2000 to finish with at least eight points, eight rebounds, eight assists and eight steals.

While the Blue Devils struggled to score at times, averaging just 63.6 points per game, which was second in the country behind only Norfolk State (50.7 points). Taylor helped lead this defensive effort, earning first-team All-ACC and ACC All-Defensive Team honors. She was also a finalist for the Naismith Women's Defensive Player of the Year.

A native of Valley Stream, N.Y., Taylor played at Long Island Lutheran before committing to Texas out of high school in the 2019 recruiting class. She was a Big 12 All-Freshman selection in her first season and was named an All-Big 12 honorable mention her sophomore year, when Texas made it all the way to the Elite Eight.

She had previously announced that she would be returning to Duke for her fifth sea-

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son but later opted to enter the portal in early April. She is the fifth Blue Devil to enter the transfer portal this offseason.

Taylor's addition is an important one for an Ohio State team that is losing a starting shooting guard in Mikesell to the WNBA, especially one who shot as well as Mikesell did. While Taylor is not the shooter that Mikesell is, she can more than make up the deficit with her defensive acumen, and it should make for a deadly pairing with Sheldon, who is back for a fifth season with the Buckeyes.

With the addition of Taylor, Ohio State has just one estimated scholarship spot open. This includes the incoming freshman class of guard Diana Collins and center Faith Carson, as well as the departures of Mikesell and guards Kaitlyn Costner and Mya Perry – more on Costner later – with the latter two exiting via the transfer portal.

Juhasz Taken With No. 16 Overall Pick

Mikesell was not the only former Buckeye to hear her name called on draft night. Forward Dorka Juhasz – who played the last two seasons at UConn after spending her first three seasons at Ohio State – was taken with the No. 16 overall pick in the 2023 WNBA draft by the Minnesota Lynx.

Juhasz' selection came after earning second-team All-Big East honors this past season, averaging 14.5 points and 9.9 rebounds per game on 50.3 percent shooting.

While not the top big on UConn's roster – that honor belonged to forward Aaliyah Edwards – Juhasz still appeared in and started 29 games for the Huskies this season, missing several games with a wrist injury.

During her time at Ohio State, Juhasz averaged 13.0 points and 9.6 rebounds on 47.2 percent shooting, appearing in 75 games over three seasons. While her career averages at UConn – 10.6 points, 7.7 rebounds and 2.4 assists on 48.6 percent shooting – were not as strong, she still found plenty of success with the Huskies, appearing in the national title game last season.

Ironically enough, Juhasz' collegiate career came to an end against her former team, with Ohio State taking down UConn in the Sweet 16 on March 25, though she said before the game that she had no hard feelings about her departure.

"I would say I'm excited," she said ahead of the game. "I remember seeing the bracket coming out and Ohio State popped up and everybody was like, 'Ooh, 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, 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."

Costner Latest To Hit Transfer Portal

According to a report from WBB Blog, Costner entered the transfer portal on April 12, marking another Buckeye who will not be on the roster next season. She is the second to enter the portal this offseason, joining Perry.

Costner recently completed her second season at Ohio State but struggled to catch on in any meaningful fashion, playing a combined 128 minutes in 26 games (4.9 per

contest) over her first two seasons.

The staff showed some hope for Costner by playing her a career-high 21 minutes in Ohio State's 93-63 win over Minnesota on Feb. 8 and using her to offer some relief to the Buckeyes' high-minute guards, but Costner took just one shot and committed two fouls in her time on the floor.

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

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

But that was the end of the road for Costner, who made just three more appearances over the final 11 games of the season. She finished the season totaling just two points with three assists, three steals and three turnovers while picking up seven personal fouls.

With the transfer of Costner and Perry, as well as the loss of Mikesell to the draft, Ohio State will return guards Madison Greene, Sheldon and Thierry, all likely to factor in as starters, with guards Hevynne Bristow, Harris, Kaia Henderson and Emma Shumate factoring in for the Buckeyes' rotation.

Hicks Becomes First Commitment In 2024

Cincinnati West Clermont forward Seini Hicks announced April 10 that she has committed to Ohio State, becoming the first member of the Buckeyes' 2024 recruiting class.

"When I started playing basketball (in the) spring of seventh grade going into my eighth-grade year, I would have never thought I would be in the position I am now," she said. "I'll be forever thankful for all the coaches who have helped me throughout this whole process. Coach Ed, Coach Ben, Coach Bryce, Coach Drew and many more.

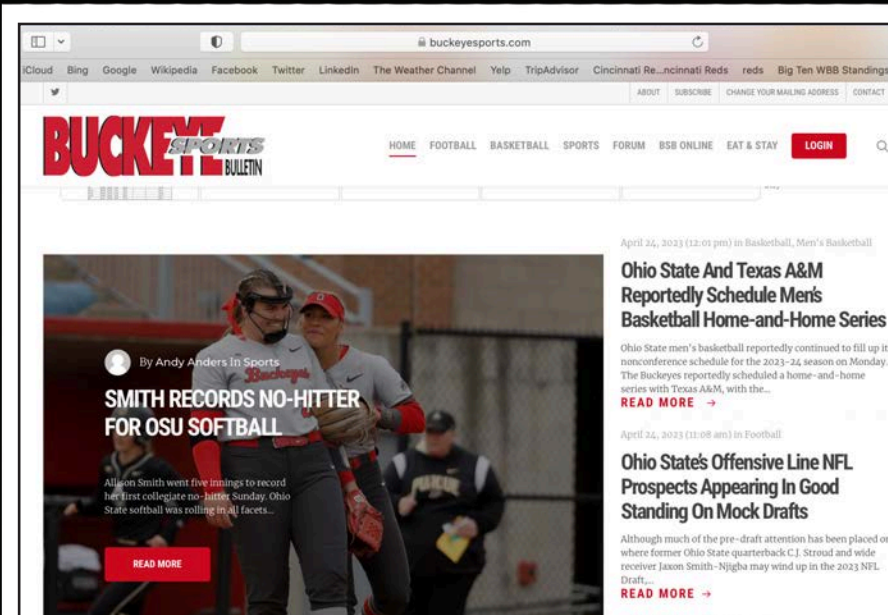
"A big thank you to the Grind Family & Legends U program for believing in me and seeing potential in me, and helping me get to where I am today. With that being said, I will be continuing my athletic and academic career at The Ohio State University."

The 6-0 forward posted averages of 13.0 points and 10.0 rebounds last season for West Clermont, helping lead the Wolves to a 24-1 record and a 16-0 record within the Eastern Cincinnati Conference. She did so on 42.1 percent shooting while adding 2.4 steals, 1.5 assists and 1.4 blocks per game, earning first-team all-district and second-team All-Ohio honors.

Hicks visited Ohio State in September and was offered at that time. She started playing at West Clermont last season after playing two years at Julius Chambers High School in Charlotte, N.C., where she won a pair of state championships.

She is the brother of Cincinnati Withrow wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185), a 2026 football prospect who was offered by Ohio State last summer.

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Buckeyes Saw What It Takes To Be A Champion

Ohio State got a firsthand look at all the qualities that made Quinnipiac the 2022-23 national champions when the Bobcats defeated the Buckeyes in the Elite Eight.

Knowing how they competed against the team that would beat Michigan and Minnesota for the Frozen Four title puts the 4-1 loss in perspective for Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"I think we're as good as anybody there at the end of the year," he said. "I think we played (Quinnipiac) well. When you think about the three Big Ten teams that they played, a lot of people said we played the best against them, and I feel the same way.

"So I guess we can take something away from saying we played our best hockey at the end of the year, but losing to the eventual national champion doesn't make it any easier."

The Buckeyes led the Bobcats, the No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament, 1-0 until late in the first period on March 24. Quinnipiac then scored twice in 15 seconds, added a fortunate-bounce goal with under five minutes left in the third and scored

into an empty net to seal the win despite Ohio State holding a 35-17 shot advantage.

It was a bitter disappointment considering the Buckeyes, just two days earlier in their first tournament appearance since 2019, had steamrolled Harvard 8-1.

"Here's a team that was picked near the bottom of our league (fifth of seven teams) and we are, really, a goal away from a Frozen Four. I'm just really proud of our group," Rohlik said. "From the injuries and everything else, to continue to battle to put ourselves in a spot like we did, it's one of my most satisfying years, to be honest with you."

Quinnipiac's championship run combined excellent goaltending with opportunistic and timely scoring. After downing the Buckeyes, the Bobcats scored three unanswered goals in the third period for a 5-2 win over Michigan in the national semifinal on April 6.

Two days later, Quinnipiac tied No. 1 seed Minnesota 2-2 with 2:47 remaining in regulation and scored 10 seconds into overtime for its first title.

"I don't know if there's anything that separates us from the teams at the Frozen Four," Rohlik said. "Look at how close the games were at the end. It's hard to get to the national tournament, number one. It's hard to get a goal or two away from the Frozen Four. It's the breaks here and there."

Now that the Buckeyes have a taste of the NCAA tournament, defenseman Scooter Brickey said he is excited for next season to start.

"It's definitely the main motivation," he said. "I want to take that next step for the program, a national championship."

That's one reason he is taking advantage of the NCAA provision that allows a fifth season of eligibility because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He also has personal factors. After diminishing playing time over three seasons at Western Michigan, he transferred to Ohio State and this season was a mainstay on the blue line. He feels another season with the Buckeyes can help him secure a pro contract. His father, Scott, played for North Dakota and was drafted by the St. Louis Blues.

"He played on a national championship team and knows a lot about hockey, and he can see it in my game as well," Brickey said.

Join The Club

Speaking of North Dakota, the Buckeyes took a step in retooling the roster that was depleted by players who either exhausted their eligibility, transferred out or left school early to play professionally.

Defenseman Brent Johnson, a third-round pick of the Washington Capitals in 2021, is transferring to Ohio State after the two seasons at North Dakota.

He had fallen out of favor there reportedly because of his defensive liabilities and had not played since Dec. 3. He scored once and had five assists and was a plus-five in 13 games. The previous season, he had three points (two goals, one assist) in 23 games.

Johnson could help offset the departures of sophomore defensemen Mason Lohrei, a second-round selection of the Boston Bruins in 2020, and Cole McWard.

Lohrei signed a professional tryout agreement with the Providence Bruins of the American Hockey League, the top affiliate of the Boston Bruins. McWard signed a rookie contract with the Vancouver Canucks and had a goal in five games with them.

Rohlik hopes Johnson will resurrect his career the way Jake Wise did. Wise had three unproductive seasons at Boston University before playing the past two seasons for the Buckeyes.

Wise, who was chosen in the third round of the 2018 draft by the Chicago Blackhawks, made second-team All-Big Ten this season when he was second in scoring for Ohio State with 39 points (12 goals, 27 assists) in 40 games.

Wise then signed with the Charlotte Checkers (AHL) and in his only game had two assists against the Wilkes-Barre Scranton Penguins on April 15.

"I really like how he approached things since he got here," Rohlik said of Wise. "He was a great team player, but the most important thing for me was he had a smile on his face and he loved playing the game. What he said to me was that the best things about coming here was being part of this program and loving the game again

and having success on the ice."

Johnson (6-1, 180) is one of five transfers into the program since the last issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin when the lone addition was forward Riley Hughes from Northeastern.

Connecticut goalie Logan Terness (6-1, 185) has three seasons of eligibility. He joins the Buckeyes after playing 23 games for the Huskies, one in 2021-22 and 22 this season when he was 10-6-1 with a 2.53 goals-against average and .912 save percentage. He will vie for the starter's job after sophomore Jakub Dobeš signed with the Montreal Canadiens.

Two more defensemen have been added from the portal. Mason Klee (6-2, 195) played four seasons at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) and scored a goal and had six assists in 31 games this season. Notably, former Ohio State defenseman C.J. Regula opted to use his fifth season at RPI.

The other incoming defenseman is freshman Damien Carfagna (5-11, 180) from New Hampshire. He had 16 points (six goals, 10 assists) and two game-winning goals in 35 games this season.

Carfagna's teammate, freshman forward Jake Dunlap (5-9, 160), will be a Buckeye as well after scoring three times and adding four assists in 29 games. Dunlap's brother, Joe, is a junior forward at Ohio State.

Take A Bow

Several former Buckeyes earned honors at the pro level beginning with forward Georgii Merkulov being named to the AHL All-Rookie Team. He netted 55 points (24 goals, 31 assists) in 67 games for Providence.

The Ryazan, Russia, native led all NCAA freshmen in goals (20) in his one season with the Buckeyes in 2021-22, and Rohlik is not surprised Merkulov has continued to shine.

"It was a matter of when and how long it took him to adapt. His skill sets are off the chart. We knew that from day one," Rohlik said. "He's offensively proving what a weapon he is. Hopefully, he'll get the opportunity. It's a tough lineup to crack (in Boston)."

Forward Max McCormick, who played for the Buckeyes from 2010-14, was named to the AHL second team while playing for the Coachella Valley Firebirds, the farm club of the Seattle Kraken. He collected 67 points (28 goals, 39 assists) in 71 games. McCormick has played 93 NHL games for the Ottawa Senators, Carolina Hurricanes and Seattle, garnering 13 points (eight goals, five assists).

"His work ethic is second to none," Rohlik said. "His passion is second to none. He just keeps improving himself year in and year out. He was an absolute beast here. He worked extremely hard."

Also, forward Quinn Preston was named the rookie of the year for the Wichita Thunder of the ECHL, a level below the AHL, after getting 23 goals and 38 assists for 61 points in 62 games. He had 19 points (seven goals, 12 assists) in 31 games for the Buckeyes in 2021-22.

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Seniors Leave Mark For Young Wrestling Corps

Ohio State's wrestling program concluded its 2022-23 season with its highest finish at the NCAA championships since placing second in 2018-19, occupying the last spot on the podium this time around with a fourth-place finish at the tournament in Tulsa, Okla., on March 18.

ON THE MAT Andy Anders

A strong group of seniors, including four starters, are leaving the program, but they do so having helped restore the consistency that head coach Tom Ryan found when his squad recorded five consecutive top-four finishes – including a national championship – from 2014-15 through 2018-19. The team had five All-Americans in 2023.

"The standard is really high, and these guys just stuck together and won some huge matches at critical times in the national tournament and brought home a trophy," Ryan told BSB, "which is something that this group of seniors had never been a part of. It was great to see the seniors go out by getting a trophy, and the way they competed was really, really good at the na-

tional tournament."

With their resolve strengthened after a year in which Ohio State's starters were hampered by injury, the Buckeyes return enough key pieces and have strung together enough great recruiting classes to have an optimistic outlook for next season's campaign. All those factors have Ryan pumped for the future.

"There will be some tough wrestle-offs, but we'll have a really good team," Ryan said. "I'm super excited about this team. Up and down the lineup, we should be good."

Among the most significant departures from Ohio State's program is senior Kaleb Romero. He was in the Buckeyes' fold for six seasons after a decorated prep career for in-state Mechanicsburg High School.

Romero's collegiate tenure was filled with injuries he had to overcome, part of the reason he was named Ohio State's most courageous wrestler by the coaching staff following the 2021-2022 season. He took home a sixth-place finish at NCAAs that year to earn his first All-American honor at 184 pounds, but he followed it up with an even better performance this year, losing only one match to eventual national champion Aaron Brooks to take third place.

After this past season, he received the Big Ten Medal of Honor for his excellence both on and off the mat.

"Kaleb's just a great story," Ryan said. "He was highly recruited, one of the top recruits in the country, multiple-sport athlete. And he had struggles. He struggled, really. Injuries spurred the struggle, and he just kept coming back. That's what I think of when I think of Kaleb Romero. He kept coming back and stayed positive and kept working."

Another sixth-year senior who is on to the next phase of his life is Ethan Smith.

He finished seventh at the NCAAs to pick up his second career All-America finish, going 5-2 at 174 pounds.

"We're going to miss him," Ryan said. "He's been with us for six years, because he took his COVID year, same with Kaleb. That's 25 percent of your life they've been in the Ohio State wrestling room, both he and Kaleb. He's a couple-time All-American, and he was a great example, great leader for us."

The highlight of heavyweight Tate Orndorff's career came in 2020-21, when he went on an improbable run as the No. 21 seed to finish as an All-American in eighth place, knocking off seed Nos. 12, 13 and 7 in his division. He went 3-2 at the championships this season, falling to fifth-seeded Cohlton Schultz of Arizona State, just one win short of All-America status.

"He's a great team guy with a tremendous work ethic," Ryan said. "We'll miss Tate. He loves this sport, trained hard and was a great guy to have in there at heavyweight."

At 125 pounds, senior Malik Heinselman – a four-time NCAA qualifier – rounds out the list of departures from this year's Ohio State squad. He suffered a frustrating end to his collegiate career, ranked in the top 10 of his weight class before an injury ended his campaign.

"He's got a job lined up, I believe, in New York," Ryan said. "It's kind of a bitter-sweet end for him. Just a week before Big Tens, it's determined that he's got an injury that would be too risky if he wrestled. That was tough for him. But he leaves as a four-time national qualifier, multiple-time academic All-American and really was a mainstay for us at 125."

Orndorff and Smith also missed time with injury this season, along with other wrestlers who weren't seniors. That included the team's primary options at 141 pounds, Jordan Decatur and Dylan D'Emilio, the latter still managing an All-American, eighth-place finish at the NCAAs.

"I'm just really proud of the team," Ryan said. "This was a (13-3) season that felt, at times, very heavy because of the number of injuries we had."

One rule change that helped Ohio State push through the lack of a full-strength lineup was the NCAA's allowance of freshmen to start in five events while maintaining their redshirts. Freshman 133-pound grappler Jesse Mendez, the consensus pound-for-pound No. 1 recruit in the coun-

try in the 2022 recruiting class, started all season and finished as the team's fifth and final All-American, but many other Ohio State freshmen benefited from the adjustment to keep their respective extra year.

Nic Bouzakis, Luke Geog and Seth Shumate were among the freshmen who took advantage of the rule change. Shumate in particular saw a boost, getting 14 matches' worth of experience by starting in three open tournaments.

"The rule was fantastic," Ryan said. "It's great for camaraderie, it's great for the young guys that weren't going to get any matches in the way the previous rule was laid out. They filled in and really helped us. Having this really high-level class that was allowed to compete five times helped us a lot."

Those freshmen help make up what should be a talented group returning next season. Redshirt freshman Paddy Gallagher will return at 157 pounds, and junior Carson Kharchla and senior Gavin Hoffman each bring All-American experience back to the table at 165 and 197 pounds, respectively.

"We've got a great, young team," Ryan said. "We'll have a decent combination of guys like Sammy (Sasso) and D'Emilio and Hoffman that have been around the block a couple times, and you'll have (redshirt) freshmen like Nick Feldman, Nic Bouzakis who are in the starting lineup full time for the first time."

The centerpiece of it all will be Sasso at 149 pounds. Ryan confirmed to BSB that the two-time Big Ten champion, four-time All-American and two-time NCAA runner-up is back for a sixth season and one final go-round in Columbus. The latter of those runner-up finishes at the national



Sammy Sasso

championship came this past season. His goal next year will be to take it all.

"He understands the brutality of the Big Ten and the sport," Ryan said. "He wrestled really well at nationals, he was really well-prepared. He was healthy all year. His performance really just fell in line with what we see every day from him, which is a tremendous work ethic."

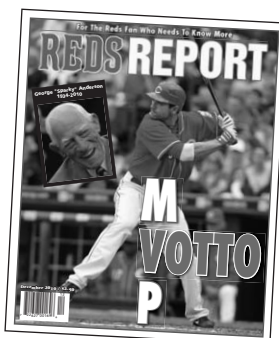
With summer arriving, Ohio State is already preparing to send representatives to the U23 and U20 World Team Trials in Geneva, Ohio. Wrestlers who competed at NCAAs got two weeks off before returning to training, and those who didn't compete got just a week. Thus, the year-round gantlet of collegiate wrestling preparation begins again, and the Buckeyes are hopeful that it can yield even better results next season.

"For most of these guys, a week off just means that they aren't being coached by our staff," Ryan said. "They're still in there working out. These guys don't take too much time off that way. So we're back at it. We're just training. It's on to the next thing."

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Finding Confidence Is Major Focus For Buckeyes

An eight-run fourth inning leading to a 13-8 victory over Maryland (21-14, 6-3) closed Ohio State's series with the Terrapins on April 16, but the prior two games outlined the challenges the Buckeyes have seen since entering Big Ten play. A lack of timely hitting yielded 7-5 and 3-2 losses April 14 and 15, respectively.

FROM THE STRETCH Andy Anders

At 3-12 in conference play as BSB went to press, Ohio State was sitting with the worst record among Big Ten teams, a far cry from its 12-7 mark before the league schedule began.

"I see how (the players) react," head coach Bill Mosiello said. "I see them doing the strangest things that we haven't done before. We were so battle-tested from those first (19) games in the spring, on the road against really good teams. To think, 'OK, boys, this is why we did it, for (Big Ten play)!' Then the way they reacted once we got into Big Ten play. I can't speak for the players, but their actions show me everything. It's not that easy to change how you think."

A serious run of wins would be required for the Buckeyes to grab one of the eight spots available in the Big Ten tournament, as they currently sit five games out of eighth place. After a 21-30 season a year ago and the recent lapses of this campaign, however, Mosiello told BSB that his team needs to build confidence in itself before it can find the wins it desires.

"Who cares about my confidence," Mosiello asked. "What do *they* believe? I've believed in all of them long enough. There comes a time when they better start believing in themselves."

Ohio State outthit Maryland 10-5 in the first contest between the two sides but still lost, stranding 14 runners on base. The Buckeyes trailed 7-3 entering the bottom of the ninth and managed two runs, but runners were left on second and first on a game-ending groundout.

The next loss included a one-out, bases-loaded situation in the sixth inning that Ohio State couldn't capitalize on, short of a walk that handed the team its first run of the contest. A lineout and groundout ended the inning, and the Buckeyes scored just one more run from there. Prior to that, Ohio State had the bases loaded in the fourth inning with no outs, only to fail to score any runs after an infield fly and back-to-back strikeouts.

"That's the stuff that's alarming to me," Mosiello said of the team's lack of situational hitting.

As the first-year head coach has said, the team's recent history of losing seasons has hurt its ability to maintain a winning mentality. Before last year's 21-30 campaign, the Buckeyes scraped past .500 with a 22-20 record in 2021.

"Unfortunately, when you've lost a lot, you learn how to handle losing a lot," Mosiello said. "They act the same regardless. They've had a lot of practice at this, and I haven't. That's why I'm the guy who's not the fun guy to be around doing these interviews because a guy went

one inning or two innings without a run, even though he might have had four base runners.

"Confidence doesn't always develop by success. If a kid doesn't have success, where does he get the confidence? Confidence is a choice of the way they act, and the way they handle themselves and what they believe. So if we're going to wait for success for everybody before we can be confident, we may be waiting the whole season.

"You better have confidence first in your work. Then you better think confidently before you win. Bill Walsh, the famous (San Francisco) 49ers coach, had a saying that champions behave like champions before they become champions. You can't become champion then behave like a champion. You have to behave like a champion to become a champion."

Mosiello added that all the above statements are easier said than done. The front half of this season has been tough on him, and he admitted that his "arrogance" had him believing he could be an immediate success in Columbus.

In the locker room, team leaders such as fifth-year senior catcher Cole Andrews have been trying to help teammates absorb the coaching staff's message of self-belief.

"We've talked a lot about preparation and just making sure we're preparing the right way," Andrews said. "When things don't go the way you want them to, you have to have something to fall back on to be able to have your confidence. A lot of that is in your routines and how you prepare for games every day."

For now, Mosiello isn't focused on the standings or how many games his squad needs to win to make the conference tournament. The way he goes through practice and the season with his players and the team's commitment to development will remain unwavering.

"We could be 35-0 and the approach will never change," Mosiello said. "I haven't even looked at the standings. I haven't paid attention in the past. Worry about one game at a time and play good baseball, and you'll end up being where you want to be."

Two SportsCenter Top 10 Plays In One Week

Ohio State defenders threw up two memorable web gems two days apart from each other on April 12 and April 14, and both made SportsCenter's top 10 plays.

Sophomore second baseman Josh McAlister made the most outstanding of the two, tracking a ball hit into shallow right field from his second-base position and diving backwards in full extension over his shoulder before nabbing the baseball in the tip of his glove. The ball popped back into the air when McAlister hit the ground, but while somersaulting over he managed to secure it from behind his left leg just before it touched the ground.

The highlight in Ohio State's 8-2 win over Bowling Green on April 12 later landed at No. 3 on the SportsCenter top 10 a few hours later.

Senior righthander Nolan Clegg checked in at No. 5 on the SportsCenter top 10 plays on April 14 for his snag, a hotshot back to the mound off the bat of Maryland infielder Kevin Keister. Clegg snared the ball from right beside his belt, sweeping his glove up toward his face then staring at it in awe for a moment before feigning a throw to first.

Ohio State Takes Pair Of Midweek Thrillers

Following the series against Maryland, Ohio State (19-17) faced off with a pair of in-state opponents and won one-run, high-scoring thrillers against each of them.

The Buckeyes battled back-and-forth with Miami (Ohio) on April 18 in Oxford, Ohio, with each team rolling through six different pitchers during a 12-11 victory for the Buckeyes. Freshman reliever Landon Beidelschies picked up his fifth save of the season, shutting down the RedHawks (11-28) in the ninth inning, while sophomore Jake Johnson (1-0) picked up the win.

Ohio State took a 3-1 advantage in the top of the third inning thanks to a two-run single off the bat of freshman shortstop Henry Kaczmar, but a grand slam from Miami first baseman Ryland Zaborowski in the bottom of the frame spurred a six-run onslaught to give the RedHawks a 7-3 lead.

Undeterred, the Buckeyes took advantage of a lack of control from Miami's pitching staff and drew five walks in the top of the fourth, and coupled with five hits, they plated six runs of their own to go up 9-7. Senior first baseman Marcus Ernst tacked on a two-run single in the seventh to expand the edge to 11-8, and Ohio State held on from there to keep its record a winning one on the season.

The Buckeyes then returned home to Bill Davis Stadium on April 19 and came from behind a second time to knock off Dayton, 8-7, with a four-run eighth serving as the highlight. Trailing 7-4 entering the bottom of that eighth, the Buckeyes recorded two outs in short order following a walk drawn by McAlister. But three straight walks after that second out – one of them a nine-pitch grind by junior center fielder Kade Kern – cut the deficit to 7-5.

Then Ernst stepped into the box and smacked the first pitch he saw into right field for a two-run single, tying the contest. Two

more walks plated another, giving Ohio State (20-17) the lead, before senior reliever Jonah Jenkins came on to close and retired the Flyers (12-25) in order, recording his second save of the year.

Nittany Lions Sweep Buckeyes

Despite entering the series with a mere 2-7 record in conference play, Penn State swept Ohio State in three games April 21 through 23 in State College, Pa., and none of the contests was closer than five runs.

The Nittany Lions outscored the Buckeyes by a combined tally of 32-8 in the series. On April 21 they captured a 10-3 win on their home field, jumping out to a 6-0 lead before the close of the third inning thanks in part to a grand slam by senior center fielder Johnny Piacentino in the opening frame. Trailing 9-1 in the eighth, Kern hit a two-run long ball to cut into the deficit a touch, but nowhere near enough in a seven-run loss.

Game two of the matchup was the closest of the bunch, a 7-2 victory for Penn State. The contest was tied 2-2 in the sixth after a five-inning, two-run start from Ohio State pitcher Isaiah Coupet and RBI knocks from left fielder Trey Lipsey and designated hitter Tyler Pettorini.

Axels shattered as the wheels fell off OSU's proverbial wagon in the seventh frame, however. The Nittany Lions piled on five runs against two different relievers, all of it coming after the first two batters in the inning struck out. One of the runs was walked in, one of three free passes issued by the Buckeyes in the inning.

A 15-3 cavalcade by the Nittany Lions closed out the sweep April 23. Ohio State actually held a 3-0 lead in the top of the third inning, but 15 unanswered runs from there – including two that scored on walks and one on a hit-by-pitch – set PSU on cruise control.

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Stroud Draft Noise May Have Been Smoke Screen

The growth of the NFL draft the last few years into a must-see entertainment event has been a bit stunning. Think about it – people are tuning in to watch front-of-fice people whom they have no clue about turn in a card with a name on it, and then

**THE FACTS
MAN**
Mike Wachsman

boo the commissioner when he walks on-stage to announce the selection.

It's about as action-packed as bingo night at the local community center, yet it manages to pull in ratings. Smart money says it's largely because the NFL is a freight train running downhill, an unstoppable behemoth impervious to shifts in viewing habits.

While ratings across the board for other sports have been trending downward in recent years, The Shield has stayed consistently strong. I won't tell people what they should or should not watch, but I will say if they want to truly be entertained, they should pay attention to the lead-up to the draft – that's where the intrigue is.

In the week or so before things get going, teams engage in disinformation campaigns that would make even the savviest political consultants envious.

Witness the recent picking apart of Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud, who until about two weeks ago was seen as a good bet to be the overall No. 1 pick to the Carolina Panthers. It makes sense – he is a top-notch processor and can make NFL throws now better than a few current starters can. Sure, he isn't going to be Justin Fields if the protection breaks down, but as he showed against Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinals, he can move the pocket well enough to buy

time to keep things going and then deliver a strike.

For my money, he's a much safer pick than Alabama's Bryce Young, who is also uncannily accurate but brings along size concerns at just a tick over 5-10 and barely over 200 pounds. Guys that small have almost always washed out. While Young seems to have the smarts to avoid that, it's not a stretch to believe that Stroud does enough things better that he is a fairly easy choice at No. 1.

Not so fast.

Kudos to the team (or teams) leaking the (false) info about Stroud in recent weeks. Ranging from a report that former Notre Dame quarterback Brady Quinn addressed stating that Stroud "stood up the Mannings" when he didn't show up to their passing academy a few years ago to one that said Stroud scored in the 18th percentile on the S2 test, which has replaced the Wonderlic as the league's aptitude quiz, and buzz was created, putting his character and football smarts under the microscope.

It's all bush league, and if it was done by the general public there could easily be a slander lawsuit filed.

First things first – Stroud never stood the Mannings up. Early on in the process, he was invited to be a counselor but told them well before the event that he was going to stay in Columbus and work with his teammates. The story would have been more credible had someone maybe – oh, I don't know – reached out to the Mannings to get their take on things. That one spoke to his character, and Quinn made it sound as if NFL teams were possibly putting up red flags. The only difference is NFL teams vet the prospects 10 times more thoroughly than these reporters vet their sources, which means there is no concern because they know the story is false.

The second issue seems worse on the surface but may not be. It was presented as Stroud scoring in the 18th percentile,

but the creator of the test went on social media and said that there are nine parts to the test and that all of the top (first round projected) guys did exceedingly well. He could have, I suppose, been saying that to cover for Stroud, but the report was later shown to be patently false.

But you know something? Even if it was shown to be true, I saw him pass the toughest test he faced all season back on Dec. 31 against a Georgia defense that took pride in shutting down quarterbacks and high-powered offenses.

Stroud went 23 of 34 for 348 yards and four touchdowns with zero picks. He made a few Bulldog defensive backs – who may be high selections themselves in this draft and the next – look like they were on skates trying to keep up with his passing. Stroud posted a 94.1 QBR, easily the highest mark Georgia allowed all season, and it was Stroud's sixth time that season eclipsing 90.0 on the QBR scale. He finished third for the season in that metric and ahead of USC Heisman winner Caleb Williams, and he flashed big-time skills on a weekly basis.

The smear tactics employed against Stroud are nothing new. A story from USA Today on that subject ran in 2019 with some pretty interesting chatter from GMs.

"April should be known in the NFL as National Liars Month," said Gil Brandt, the Hall of Fame-bound, former Dallas Cowboys personnel guru. "Everybody is trying to create a smoke screen, both ways."

Word will somehow "get out" that a team wasn't impressed with a prospect during interviews or won't send a scout to a player's pro day – ostensibly because they are not interested in said player.

"It increases every year," Brandt said of the agenda-fueled gossip. "There are more smoke screens. More subterfuge. A very interesting time of year."

Former Cleveland Browns general manager Phil Savage said that what gets out is carefully crafted, designed for maximum impact and confusion.

"I think that every GM in the league has a session with their PR director beforehand, determining what they are going to say," Savage said. "There's more strategy. Certain players, there's already a narrative and the mock drafts. Well, if you think the player is overrated and want another player, as a GM you're going to keep pumping that narrative."

Don't believe that this has been going on for years? Brandt tells a story that dates back to 1987, when he was still largely in charge of the Cowboys' drafts.

He suspected one of his scouts leaked information to the media, so he set a bit of a trap. In the days before the draft, he had the Cowboys' draft board arranged so that it would appear that the team was targeting Duke linebacker Mike Junkin with the 12th pick, whom Brandt had no intention

of drafting.

"Two days later, there's a story by Jim Dent (in the Dallas Times Herald) saying that we were going to draft Junkin," Brandt recalled.

The Cowboys ended up selecting Nebraska defensive tackle Danny Noonan in that slot, while Junkin went fifth overall to the Browns, ending up as a major bust (seven starts and 20 games played in the NFL).

One of the more famous smoke screens came in 1983, when news circulated that Dan Marino – easily the best quarterback in that draft – was rumored to have a drug problem, news that dropped him all the way to the 27th pick and the Miami Dolphins. He had a Hall of Fame career and left the game with just about every conceivable passing record, so the teams that believed the news were snookered. Whether or not the Dolphins floated the rumor in the first place may never be known, but it certainly worked out in their favor.

For his part, Stroud didn't seem fazed by any of this. He kept a low profile on social media and seemed to just be waiting for things to happen.

There's talk that Houston, which has the second pick and needs a quarterback, reportedly doesn't love Stroud and may opt for defense or trading out of the spot. That shows the Texans organization to be one of two things: the dumbest franchise in the NFL or the smartest.

If they do either of the two things noted then they fall into the former category. But if they let common sense be their guide and select Stroud at No. 2, they will have fooled everyone with their "public leaks" and gotten a quarterback who can shine for 10 years.

Incidentally, this sort of thing happened to Justin Fields in 2021. ESPN's Dan Orlovsky, who is generally very knowledgeable about quarterbacks, proved that he was nothing close to an information guru when he mentioned on air that he had been told by some people he trusted that Fields' work ethic was questionable.

The words he used were "last in, first out," which anyone who follows Ohio State even a little knows are laughable. Fields was the second-best quarterback in that draft but fell to the Bears at 11th, and he has a chance to take off in his third season after showing flashes in 2022.

While the actual action factor of this year's NFL draft will barely register, the intrigue factor will be high. Will Stroud actually go second, proving that disinformation was indeed in full swing? Could he go fourth to quarterback-needy Indianapolis? Or could he actually fall out of the top five and maybe be the fourth quarterback chosen?

That alone is reason to watch the draft, and a major part of the entertainment factor. Though it *is* fun to see people (deservedly) booing Roger Goodell.

Wherever Stroud lands, rest assured that he (along with Fields) will help to change the narrative surrounding Ohio State quarterbacks and success in the National Football League.



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Springing To The Defense Of McCord's Game

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I was in Cincinnati on business for our sister publication, Reds Report, on the day of the Ohio State football team's spring game, so I taped it to watch later. By the time I finally got around to watching it, I had listened to nearly a week of bad reviews about Kyle McCord's performance. It was rated anywhere from terrible to adequate at best. I didn't hear anyone suggesting we should forget C.J. Stroud or be buying our tickets to the national championship game, scheduled this season for NRG Stadium in Houston on Jan. 8.

The only information I had to back up or refute the critiques was McCord's line from the stat sheet, which was a pedestrian (or less) 18 of 34 – just 52.9 percent – for 184 yards and a touchdown, with three sacks. So, when I finally sat down to watch the game, I was prepared for the worst.

In the end it really wasn't that bad. Oh, he missed some passes badly, but he had some nice ones as well, including his on-the-money 37-yarder to Carnell Tate – one of the big stories coming out of the spring – for a touchdown. Even Stroud couldn't have thrown it any better.

Head coach Ryan Day summed it up as well as I can.

"I think what you saw in the game is similar to what you saw in practice," Day said. "Some good things, some things that you'd like to see be a little bit better, but he's growing."

The thing that impressed me the most about McCord's performance was his chemistry with wide receiver extraordinaire Marvin Harrison Jr., chemistry that no doubt dates back to their days as high school teammates at Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep. They looked crisp on three first-quarter receptions for 62 yards, including a 36-yarder. If there is a guy for a Buckeye quarterback to have a connection with, I would have Harrison at the top of that list.

The thing that I would be most concerned with about McCord's performance really had nothing to do with the presumptive favorite to win the starting job. I am concerned with the fact that McCord, as well as fellow QB Tristan Gebbia, were under duress for most of the afternoon. They were "sacked" a combined five times and totaled 14 rushing attempts between them, frequently after being flushed from the pocket.

I think Buckeye fans should be more worried about the offensive line, with three holes to plug, than McCord. He – or Devin Brown should he come on strong after his finger heals – will do fine once they get their full contingent of skill players on the field and the coaches open the playbook. *How* well the quarterback and those backs and receivers do may be contingent on how well the big guys up front do.

But was the performance of the offense in the spring game a case of seeing the glass half empty when it was really half full?

To me, the real story coming out of the scrimmage was the play of the defense – you know, the defense that when last seen was giving up repeated big plays to Michigan and Georgia. The defense of coordinator Jim Knowles, who went from guru to goat (and I don't mean greatest of all time) in the eyes of Buckeye fans in just a matter of weeks? The defense with the porous secondary? Was it the defense that made McCord and the offensive line look suspect?

On this particular afternoon, the defense was outstanding, especially the much-maligned secondary. And who stood out the most from that secondary? None other than Denzel Burke, the Buckeye – besides Knowles – who probably took the most heat from the fans for the failures of the defense.

Burke played so well, with his blanket coverage, that I was a bit surprised when I checked the final stat sheet and he showed up with only one pass breakup and no tackles. Of course, a

receiver has to catch the ball for someone to tackle him, and Burke, who burst on the scene as a freshman two seasons ago before struggling through an injury-plagued 2022, was having none of that.

"Physically, I couldn't do a lot of things," Burke said of last season. "I had a shoulder injury, I had an ankle injury, the hand and fingers. So, I'm healthy this year, and thank God."

Keep in mind that the defense performed so well in the spring game with the stalwarts from the most consistent defensive unit last season – linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers – on the bench.

Their absence gave us a look at some of the highly-touted linebacker talent from the past couple of recruiting cycles, and those players responded. Gabe Powers (a game-high eight tackles), C.J. Hicks (six) and Reid Carrico (six) combined for 20 tackles, two TFLs and two pass breakups. Veteran Cody Simon, who was the third man in the linebacker rotation last season, chipped in another five tackles, a breakup and a quarterback hurry. That room looks loaded for next season.

Probably the most talked about defender among Buckeye fans this spring was Sonny Styles, with those discussions frequently surrounding the question of which position he might play. Styles did not disappoint playing at safety, registering six tackles and two pass breakups.

Moving back to offense, another freshman who generated a lot of buzz in the spring in addition to Tate was tight end Jelani Thurman. He did not disappoint either, reeling in three passes for 25 yards. Thurman is listed at 6-6, 253. I was surprised at how slender he looked out there. A year in the weight room with Mickey Marotti and Thurman could really be a force.

Some other random spring game thoughts:

- I guess the experiment with Chip Trayanum, who was a running back for two seasons at Arizona before returning to his home state to try his hand at playing linebacker, is over. As mentioned, the linebacker room is loaded. Trayanum led all rushers in the spring game with 110 yards on eight carries and looked sharp on what proved to be the longest play of the game – a 65-yard TD bolt in the second quarter, a play on which I thought the blocking by the offensive line was solid.

With Trayanum's move back to offense, not only is the linebacker room stacked, but so too, it appears, is the running backs room, assuming everyone is healthy. Miyan Williams, TreVeyon Henderson, Dallan Hayden, Evan Pryor and now Trayanum, who carried 14 times for 83 yards against Michigan last season, will all be vying for carries in 2023.

- What a nice touch to have Archie Griffin come out and take a handoff (did you notice his perfect form in receiving the ball from McCord?) and run for another touchdown – something he did 26 times in his Heisman-winning playing days at Ohio State.

In this space last issue, I mentioned that Ohio State's famed Super Sophs should be declared a national treasure. I meant that. But the treasure of treasures is one Archie Griffin. Through the years I have met Archie many, many times and he is always exactly the same – an unpretentious gentleman. If you met him on the street, you would never know that he was college football's only two-time Heisman Trophy winner. I have never seen him tire of the questions, the pictures, the autographs. Just a real

gentleman and a true ambassador for not just the Buckeye football team, but all of Ohio State University.

Again, nice touch.

- Did any of you catch DeVier Posey, who caught 136 passes for the Buckeyes from 2008-11, in the broadcast booth for the Big Ten Network's coverage of the game? I thought he was outstanding. A little quiet, but excellent.

I found his comments on Terrelle Pryor especially interesting. With Pryor at the helm, Posey caught 60 passes in 2009 and 53 in 2010. He raved about Pryor's athletic ability.

Given the difficult ending to Pryor's stay at Ohio State and the several great quarterbacks who have come after him, I think some Buckeye fans forget just how good Pryor was.

Posey hasn't.

Knowles In Year Two

In the last issue of BSB, our Andy Anders delved into the many stops on Knowles' journey to Columbus and determined that it frequently took some time before Knowles' defense took hold at each school along the way. There is little question that the veteran defensive coach is dealing with better talent at Ohio State than he was at previous schools and his vision will hopefully be fulfilled more quickly in Columbus.

The spring game may have been an example of that progress. Not that last season was a complete bust.

Ohio State finished 13th in the country in total defense (321.5 yards allowed), 24th in scoring defense (21.0 points), 24th in rushing defense (121.1 yards) and 26th in passing defense (200.5 yards). Not spectacular numbers, but good enough to challenge for a national title with the type of offense the Buckeyes fielded and will hopefully field again in 2023.

Unfortunately, the last visions of the defense we are left with from 2022 are those from the Michigan and Georgia games, where the Buckeyes gave up 45 points and 530 yards and 42 points and 533 yards – not to mention a bunch of big plays – respectively.

"You're coming in that first year and you're making sure that you make that connection with everybody," Knowles said. "Now is the time for me to use it. I need to use that connection and push, hone down on those techniques, because now we have enough on film to show, 'Look at this technique. It's the same play that we did here. Then we gave it up here.' So, the bear is in the details, and that's what I need to push."

The players seem to see the progress under their mentor.

"The second year in this scheme, (it's) a lot easier," Burke said after the spring game. "You kind of get a feel for what Coach Knowles is going to call and the trust is there. And I'm really excited. This whole spring, it's probably the most fun I've had in a while on the field. The game is a lot slower. I'm making a lot more plays on the ball, seeing things quicker, reacting quicker. It's a lot more fun."

And this from linebacker Simon, who had 10 starts on the dysfunctional 2021 defense:

"Last year was our first year with Coach Knowles and we were learning the defense a little bit, so now we're kind of refining and learning the nuances and how to play certain plays," he said. "So, we're definitely making a lot of strides. And I think we did accomplish our goals for this spring."

"I mean, we were really just dipping our toe in the water with our defense at this time last

year. Every time you do something again and again, you build confidence. From front to back, defensive line to (defensive backs), confidence is one of our strong suits right now."

Sounds encouraging. Check back with me on Nov. 25 from Ann Arbor.

Coop Goes Tressel

As mentioned in our A Look Back at Recruiting feature on page 24 of this issue, 35 years ago, first-year coach John Cooper sounded like Jim Tressel after the spring game, fretting about his team's punting.

"The punting is a mystery," Cooper said after his first spring game, which was attended by a then-unheard of 54,000 fans, excited about a new era in Ohio State football. "Right now, this team does not have a punter. Obviously, we're going to lose a lot of sleep between now and when we play in the fall."

Three punters combined for an average of only 35.2 yards a boot. All but one punt were wobblers with poor hang time.

Trivia time. Who ended up punting for Ohio State in 1988? Answer to come.

Inflation Fighting

Here's the latest update on Buckeye Sports Bulletin's attempt to battle rampant inflation, while keeping BSB within price reach of all readers. We have been informed that another postal increase (postage remains by far our largest expense) is coming in July, the third in a year.

I suggested in this space last issue that those who could afford to do so, might consider paying full price, even if they received a special offer. Many of you ended up doing just that.

On the other hand, we had a (now former) subscriber who paid a deeply discounted rate last year, a rate now defunct because it no longer covers the cost of printing and postage, who absolutely *refused* to pay the \$10 increase on that rate. That's 42 cents an issue. I'm confident the cost of a Big Mac has gone up 42 cents in the past year.

Nearly everyone who has reached out to us at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com has said they are willing to pay more for their Buckeye Sports Bulletin. However, I know there are plenty of you out there who are reluctant or unable to pay more, and I would like to hear from you as to what a good price point is for you or whether you would prefer fewer issues.

For those of you who have been paying the Alumni Rate, be on notice that we have used that same rate for at least 25 years and it is going to increase by \$10. If you have used that rate in the past, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will let you lock in at the old rate for up to three years.

Trivia Answer

Jeff Bohlman was Cooper's first punter at Ohio State.

Former Buckeye defensive lineman Dave Morrill must have heard that Coop had the help wanted sign out because he convinced Bohlman, his brother-in-law, to walk on at Ohio State that season after a brief stint at Kent State, where he saw no action.

The Centerville, Ohio, native punted 50 times that season, for a 39.0 average with 12 kicks inside the 20 and a long of 70. He would punt for two more seasons and was awarded a scholarship for the 1990 campaign. That season he averaged 41.2 yards on 51 punts, with a net average of 36.1.

While those numbers may seem modest now, Bohlman left Ohio State fourth in career punting average with a mark of 40.2, trailing only Buckeye greats Tom Tupa (44.7), Tom Skladany (42.7) and Tom Orosz (41.7).

Reds MAY LINEUP!



MAY 5-7



FRIDAY // 6:40

- Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Woodbridge Wines

- STAR WARS™ Mandalorian Bobblehead Ticket Package, presented by Kroger (Must be purchased through theme ticket package, while supplies last)

SATURDAY // 6:40

- Johnny Bench Funko POP!, presented by Montgomery Inn (to fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last)



SUNDAY // 4:10

- Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery
- Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by Texas Roadhouse (to kids 14 and younger in attendance, while supplies last)



MAY 9-11



TUESDAY // 6:40

- 3-2-1 Tuesdays*, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light (At all Tuesday Reds home games, fans can purchase \$3 Buds and Bud Lights, \$2 hot dogs, and \$1 ice cream cups) *Limit 2 items per transaction

3-2-1 TUESDAYS



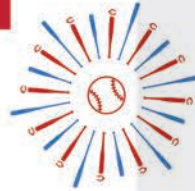
- Bark in the Park, presented by Purina and Kroger (Ticket packages available for dogs and their owners with pet activities, samples and more!)



WEDNESDAY // 6:40

THURSDAY // 12:35

- Business Day Specials (Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!)
- Thirsty Thursdays (Get a lower level ticket & receive \$10 in concession credits for \$30!)
- Senior Days, presented by Meals on Wheels (visit reds.com/senior for details)



MAY 19-21



presented by altafiber

FRIDAY // 6:40

- Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Coca-Cola
- Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight, during the national anthem

SATURDAY // 4:10

- Reds Baseball Card Set, presented by Kahn's (to fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last)
- Military Appreciation Day, presented by CareSource (visit reds.com/military for details)

SUNDAY // 11:35

- Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery
- Reds Poster, presented by PNC (to fans in attendance, while supplies last)

FAMILY SUNDAYS

MAY 22-25



presented by Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste

MONDAY // 6:40

TUESDAY // 6:40

- 3-2-1 Tuesdays*, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light (At all Tuesday Reds home games, fans can purchase \$3 Buds and Bud Lights, \$2 hot dogs, and \$1 ice cream cups) *Limit 2 items per transaction

WEDNESDAY // 6:40

- Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight, during the national anthem

THURSDAY // 12:35

- Business Day Specials, presented by UnitedHealthcare (Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!)
- Thirsty Thursdays (Get a lower level ticket & receive \$10 in concession credits for \$30!)
- Senior Days, presented by Meals on Wheels (visit reds.com/senior for details)

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