

Head Honcho In Houston

Stroud Set To Lead Texans As Highest-Drafted QB In OSU History

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Traditionally, it has not been easy going for former Ohio State quarterbacks once they make their transitions from college football to the NFL.

Since the NFL common draft era began in 1967, the Buckeyes have had 17 – or 18, if you count Joe Burrow – signal callers selected in the NFL draft entering this year's event. Little success is shared among them, as ironically, former quarterback Mike Tomczak – who was an undrafted free agent – has had arguably the most successful professional career of any Ohio State quarterback so far.

Outside of Tomczak, who had 16,079 passing yards and 88 touchdowns in 15 seasons, just a few quarterbacks, including Kent Graham, Terrelle Pryor and Tom Tupa – the latter two starting at quarterback before switching to wide receiver and punter, respectively – have lasted more than a few seasons in the NFL. The list of those who played four seasons or fewer is even longer, including the likes of Rex Kern, Joe Germaine, Craig Krenzel, Troy Smith and even Art Schlichter, who was the fourth overall pick to the Baltimore Colts in 1982.

Ohio State's latest quarterback draftees have shown promise, with Dwayne Haskins seemingly set for a resurgence with the Pittsburgh Steelers before his untimely passing and Justin Fields in position to begin his third season this fall with the Chicago Bears. In his previous two years, Fields has thrown for 4,112 yards, 24 touchdowns and 21 interceptions while rushing for 1,563 yards and 10 additional scores, and he became the third quarterback in NFL history (along with Michael Vick and Lamar Jackson) to rush for 1,000 yards in a season, doing so in 2022.

However, the competition still remains wide open for a quarterback from Ohio State at the professional level to definitively be named the best the program has offered to the NFL. As the Buckeyes' quarterback recruiting has continued to excel with head coach Ryan Day at the helm, it offers more chances for a signal caller to finally hit at the next level, but Ohio State's most recent shot might be the program's best.

Quarterback C.J. Stroud, the two-time Heisman finalist and Ohio State's second all-time leading passer (in yards, touchdowns and completion percentage), was taken with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2023 NFL draft by the Houston Texans, becoming the highest-drafted quarterback in program history.

"I know that it's meant to be," Stroud said, "and I know that with this franchise it's going to be something that I'm really going to take very, very seriously, and I'm going to work my tail off to get some wins."

Stroud was the second player off the board after former Alabama quarterback Bryce Young was taken with the first pick by the Carolina Panthers, a team Stroud had been seriously involved with throughout the pre-draft process. However, as the draft inched closer and closer following Stroud's pro day – one in which he wowed scouts and team executives in attendance with a near picture-perfect day – his stock seemingly began to fall as questions came up surrounding his performance on a cognitive test, though Stroud's leaked results were thrown into question after the test's creator said reported results were not true.

Regardless of whether Stroud performed poorly or not, it dominated the conversation in the weeks leading up to the draft, leading to Day's appearance on ESPN's "College

Continued On Page 10



SONNY BROCKWAY

LEAVING A LEGACY — Ohio State quarterbacks have struggled to translate collegiate success to the NFL for most of the program's history, but C.J. Stroud could be the one to turn around the fortunes of Buckeyes in the NFL.

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FAN FORUM

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Brown's Buckeyes

Nostalgia reminds me that coach Paul Brown had a truly great Buckeye football champion in 1942. Some of the luminaries on that first national championship were All-Americans Bill Willis, Lindell Houston, Bob Shaw and Gene Fekete. Other brilliant performers were Dante Lavelli, Paul Sarringhaus, Les Horvath and Touchdown Tommy James. Lou Groza was on the freshman team. All played in the NFL or pro leagues except Horvath who had his career as a dentist.

This collection of talent boasted a 9-1 record and victory over a potent Michigan eleven. The Big Ten championship of that era would be competitive with any modern club of

distinction.

Ed Easterly III
Nicholasville, Ky.

(Horvath played with the Los Angeles Rams for two years before rejoining Brown in Cleveland for one season in 1949. Publisher)

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From The Message Board

We're less than 100 days away from Ohio State's season opener against Indiana on Sept. 2, and anticipation is starting to build toward the Buckeyes' 2023 campaign. We asked subscribers what they are most looking forward to when the season kicks off in Bloomington. Here are some of the responses:

"Looking forward to how the offensive line performs, a healthy and improved running game, and defensive secondary improvement."

– R1TBDBITL

"It comes before you know it and leaves before you know it. I am most interested in the quarterback room this season. I'm anxious to see Devin Brown doing anything on the field. I hope Ryan Day gives him more (playing) time than he gave Kyle McCord."

– Peyote Buck

"What I'm most looking forward to would be a balanced and dynamic offense, with healthy players everywhere. The thing I am most interested in is the play of the offensive line, because I think all the other units on both sides of the ball will be good or outstanding."

– Terrier Buck

"How the offense flows with a

new quarterback and three new offensive line starters. Defense to keep improving."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"The hoped for improvement in the defense in the mad scientist's second year. The offense will sort itself out."

– Mcarr

"I'm curious to see who calls the plays and how Hartline does (and what he does) as offensive coordinator. Will added responsibilities (if he really has any) affect his recruiting?"

– Poster That Harley Built

"I am interested in seeing the development and depth of our offensive line!"

– Luckeeman

"Looking forward to an improved, stifling defense and an offense that hums through the air and the ground."

– BOB CODY

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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No. 2	Sept. 17	No. 14	Jan. 14
No. 3	Sept. 24	No. 15	Jan. 28
No. 4	Oct. 1	No. 16	Feb. 11
No. 5	Oct. 8	No. 17	March 4
No. 6	Oct. 22	No. 18	March 18
No. 7	Oct. 29	No. 19	April 1
No. 8	Nov. 5	No. 20	April 15
No. 9	Nov. 12	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 19	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 26	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 3	No. 24	August

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Here's What You Missed From Previous Columns

During much of the BSB printing schedule, especially during Ohio State football season, I often find I write too much for the column space I am afforded. As a result of being too garrulous or prolix (fancy words for long-winded), some material gets left behind on the cutting room floor.

Until a few years ago, what was trimmed contributed to a trash pile that cluttered my computer files. That's when I decided to share my leftovers, updating them wherever necessary.

Therefore, through no fault of your own, here's what you have missed over the last several months.

Another NCAA Misstep

From the same fine folks who thought free agency (aka the transfer portal) and funneling unfettered gobs of money into the pockets of 18-year-olds (aka the name, image and likeness legislation) comes the idea of blowing up divisional structure in college football conferences under the guise of competitive balance.

Several Football Bowl Subdivision conferences have either done away with or are considering the elimination of separate divisions with a variety of issues – i.e. the College Football Playoff, reverberations from NIL, renegotiation of TV deals – impacting their thinking.

The NCAA (those guys again) recently eliminated its policy requiring conferences to have divisions in order to hold a football championship game, a move followed quickly by the Pac-12's decision to do away with its North and South divisions. Last year about this time, the ACC became the latest conference to scrap divisions in favor of a new scheduling format, making the 2022 season the final year for the Atlantic and Coastal divisions.

The SEC appears on course to eliminate divisions as well, and the Big Ten will likely not be far behind. Proponents of the change believe it will address what has been a competitive imbalance in the conference.

Since its inception in 2011, the Big Ten Championship Game has been dominated by programs in what is now its East Division. Only twice – Wisconsin in 2011 and 2012 – has a team currently in the West won the title game, and in 2012 the Badgers actually finished third in their "Leaders" division behind Ohio State and Penn State. But since both the Buckeyes and Nittany Lions – each of whom defeated Wisconsin during the regular season – were ineligible for postseason play in 2012, the Badgers and their 7-5 regular-season record advanced to the title game where they rolled to a 70-31 win against Nebraska.

Since divisional realignment in 2014, every Big Ten title game winner has come from the East.

When the conference initially split into divisions for the 2011 season, the original Legends and Leaders structure (perhaps the most inane division names ever devised in the annals of sports history) at least had a case for greater parity. But it was scrapped for a more traditional geographic alignment that made rivalry protection easier and also left four of the conference's strongest programs (Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State and Penn State) clustered in the East.

Indiana, Maryland and Rutgers, the East's other three members, have struggled for consistent success in part because of that imbalance. Over the nine seasons since realignment, the Hoosiers, Terrapins and Scarlet Knights have combined for a 60-170 conference ledger. That is a winning percentage of .261 – or perhaps more accurately, a losing percentage of .739.

Similar gaps between the haves and have-nots occur in virtually every other conference, but the NCAA would have us believe that scrap-

ping divisions will somehow enhance the chances of Indiana, Maryland and Rutgers knocking off the top-tier teams.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

I would argue just the opposite will be the result. Not only will the chances of Indiana, Maryland and Rutgers getting to the conference title game be diminished, so, too, will the opportunities of Wisconsin, Iowa and Northwestern.

There is another problem. Using a formula that pits the top two ranked teams against one another in the championship games, matchups from four of the six most recent full seasons – discounting the pandemic-riddled 2020 campaign – would have featured Ohio State-Michigan rematches (in 2016, 2018, 2021 and 2022).

I have enjoyed the traditional regular-season finale between the Buckeyes and Wolverines my entire life, and I would hate to see anything diminish the greatness of the rivalry. I just can't imagine playing one another twice in the same season, quite likely on back-to-back weekends, would be a good idea.

Two Barking Dogs

While on the subject of Rutgers, this was trimmed from the column I wrote in the wake of Ohio State's 49-10 win against the Scarlet Knights last October. For those of you keeping score at home, since Rutgers joined the Big Ten in 2014, the Scarlet Knights are 0-9 against the Buckeyes and have been outscored by a 477-98 margin.

In this particular instance, I was analyzing the sideline kerfuffle that ensued after OSU's Jesse Mirco executed a fake punt early in the fourth quarter with the Buckeyes holding a 39-point lead.

Mirco, the second-year native Australian who often employs the same tactic of many of his countrymen by running to his right before kicking, simply saw daylight ahead and couldn't resist taking off. Maybe the shot he took from Rutgers defender Aron Cruickshank was a cheap one, and maybe it wasn't. Maybe Cruickshank was frustrated about being held to two catches for 16 yards after piling up 102 yards and a touchdown on three receptions against the Buckeyes last year.

Not up for conjecture, of course, was that the tackle occurred clearly out of bounds, triggering what could have been an ugly melee along the Ohio State sideline. Rather than devolving into fisticuffs, the situation ended with Ryan Day and Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano barking at one another like a couple of junkyard dogs separated by a chain-link fence.

After the game, Schiano told reporters he did not take offense to the fake punt, only that he crossed the playing field to make sure his players extracted themselves from the situation and that the tempers didn't flare any hotter. He seemed a bit sheepish, as did Day during the midfield handshake after the game, that the two coaches exchanged heated words.

"I have the utmost respect for Ryan," Schiano said. "We're good friends. We're good. There's no problem there between us. ... It was literally just two competitive guys that were protecting their players."

Day had basically the same take, saying, "(It was just) one coach defending their side, the other coach defending theirs. No hard feelings at all."

Good enough for me.

Fun With Trivia

On the BSB Fan Forum at BuckeyeSports.com, ardent poster Terrier Buck began a thread a few months back about former All-America defensive back Arnie Chonko, who played for Woody Hayes from 1962-64. According to Terrier's recollection, Chonko also played some quarterback for the Buckeyes, and it turns out that Terrier's recollection was on the money.

Chonko, who was a star quarterback at Parma (Ohio) Senior, played only a handful of snaps at the position for Ohio State but still managed to pull off the rare feat of completing a pass and intercepting one in the same game. It occurred during a 20-20 tie with Illinois in 1963.

How rare is completing a pass and making an interception in the same game while playing for the Buckeyes? So rare that only Chonko and Mike Sensibaugh have done it since 1960. Sensibaugh accomplished the feat during the 24-14 loss at Michigan in 1969, a game in which he intercepted a pass and also completed one off a fake punt.

There have been only five OSU players since 1960 who have completed a pass and made an interception in the same season. The most recent was Steve Bellisari, who turned the trick in 1998. The others are Bill Mrukowski (1960), Paul Warfield (1963), Chonko (who did it in 1963 and '64) and Sensibaugh.

(No) Fun With Numbers

I didn't really want to compile the list, but some things stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb after Ohio State's loss to Michigan in November. Such as:

- Never before in the previous 117-game history of the series had Michigan ever scored 40 points or more in back-to-back games against the Buckeyes.
- C.J. Stroud became the first OSU starting quarterback to lose back-to-back games against the Wolverines since Bellisari in 1999 and 2000.
- Donovan Edwards rushed for 216 yards, the second-best total for a Michigan player in the series. Tim Biakabutuka holds the game record with 313 yards during his team's 31-23 win in Ann Arbor in 1995.
- Michigan's 22-point margin of victory was its largest in the series since a 28-0 home win in 1993. It was the Wolverines' largest win in Columbus since a 22-0 win in 1976.
- Day became only the fifth head coach in Ohio State history to lose at least two of his first three games to Michigan. The others were A.E. Herrnstein (0-3, 1906-08), Wes Fesler (0-2-1, 1947-49), Woody Hayes (1-2, 1951-53) and John Cooper (0-3, 1988-90).

Getting Picky

Right before spring football practice began, I decided to do a little numbers crunching with regard to the performance of the Ohio State defensive backfield last season.

Did you know the active OSU leader in career interceptions among defensive backs is Josh Proctor with two?

For all the talk about Ohio State being DBU, the Buckeyes haven't had a defensive back finish his career with double digits in interceptions since Malcolm Jenkins totaled 11 picks from 2005-08.

For all the talk about how the secondary was much-improved last season – an assertion with which I would argue – defensive backs accounted for only five of the 11 interceptions the Buckeyes totaled last season.

Another problem: OSU defensive backs apparently don't know what to do with an interception when they do happen to grab one. The 2022 season was the first since the disastrous 2011 campaign that contained no interception returns by defensive back for touchdowns.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Sensabaugh Remaining In 2023 NBA Draft

Ohio State men's basketball will have its second one-and-done prospect in as many years.

Forward Brice Sensabaugh, who declared for the 2023 NBA draft while maintaining college eligibility on March 25, will stay in the draft pool and forgo his remaining collegiate eligibility. The deadline for collegiate prospects to decide whether to return to college or continue their professional pursuits took place on May 31.

In his lone season with the Buckeyes, Sensabaugh led Ohio State in scoring with 16.3 points per game while shooting 48.2 percent from the field, including a 40.5 percent mark from deep. He was named to the Big Ten All-Freshman team and also earned a spot on the All-Big Ten third team. He joined Ohio State out of Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep as the No. 65 overall prospect in the 2022 recruiting class.

Sensabaugh has drawn favorable draft positioning from several NBA mock drafts.

ESPN slots Sensabaugh in at No. 25 to the Memphis Grizzlies while The Athletic projected him to land at No. 21 to the Brooklyn Nets. CBS Sports' Kyle Boone and Gary Parrish had differing opinions on where he would fall, with Boone agreeing with The Athletic's prediction of Brooklyn selecting him at No. 21 while Parrish had Sensabaugh six spots higher, with the Atlanta Hawks claiming his services at No. 15.

Sensabaugh will join San Antonio Spurs guard Malaki Branham as the second one-and-done from Ohio State in the past two seasons. He will also join a host of former Buckeyes at the NBA level, including Los Angeles Lakers guard D'Angelo Russell, Minnesota Timberwolves guard Mike Conley Jr., San Antonio Spurs forward Keita Bates-Diop and Houston Rockets forward Jae'Sean Tate.

OSU Brings In Trio Of Transfers

The Ohio State football team gained several important additions from the transfer portal since BSB last went to press, with the Buckeyes securing the services of San Diego State offensive tackle Josh Simmons, Notre Dame wide receiver/cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. and Ole Miss defensive tackle Tywone Malone.

Simmons' commitment to Ohio State came on April 30, just a few days removed from an official visit to campus. He had previously entered the portal in April after two seasons with the Aztecs and has three years of eligibility remaining for the Buckeyes.

He figures to immediately factor into Ohio State's battle on the offensive line,



FILE PHOTO

BEST OF LUCK — Ohio State forward Brice Sensabaugh will remain in the 2023 NBA draft pool, making him the second one-and-done player in as many seasons for the Buckeyes.

where a definitive starting five has yet to be established. He started all 13 games last season at right tackle for San Diego State, now boasting the most starting experience among the tackles on Ohio State's roster.

While Josh Fryar is likely to hold down one of the open tackle spots following the departure of Paris Johnson and Dawand Jones, the other spot – whether at left tackle or right tackle – is up for grabs, with the battle between Zen Michalski and Tegra Tshabola undetermined heading into the summer.

Like Simmons, Styles joined Ohio State fresh off an official visit, committing to the Buckeyes on April 29. He is the older brother of current Ohio State sophomore safety Sonny Styles, and their father, Lorenzo Sr., played linebacker at Ohio State from 1992-94. Styles entered the portal on April 21 after two seasons with the Fighting Irish, appearing in 26 games (eight starts) and hauling in 54 receptions for 684 yards and two touchdowns.

While Styles' receiving acumen was on display at Notre Dame, he switched to cornerback during spring camp and is likely to remain at that position now that he has transferred to Ohio State, which originally recruited Styles as a defensive back.

He was the No. 115 overall prospect in the 2021 class out of Pickerington (Ohio) Central and was the fifth-ranked prospect out of the Buckeye State. He will have two seasons of eligibility remaining.

Malone entered the portal on April 19 after two seasons with the Rebels, committing to Ohio State on May 9. He played in just one game during his freshman season but saw action in 13 games last season, totaling 10 tackles, a sack and two pass breakups. His transfer saga had him visit Miami (Fla.) and Ohio State before selecting the Buckeyes.

Out of high school at Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic, Malone was the No. 63 overall prospect and No. 11 defensive lineman in the 2021 recruiting class, as well as the top-ranked prospect out of New Jersey. He was also a highly touted baseball prospect, viewed as the No. 15 player in New Jersey

and No. 25 first baseman in the nation, according to Perfect Game.

He played in seven baseball games for the Rebels last year, collecting four hits, two home runs and four RBI in nine at bats. Prior to entering the transfer portal, he played in six games this season, with one home run in 10 at bats, but he is not expected to play baseball at Ohio State.

Malone offers additional depth at defensive tackle for the Buckeyes, joining a room that will feature Mike Hall Jr., Tyleik Williams, Ty Hamilton and Hero Kanu, among others. He is the second transfer addition this offseason from Ole Miss along with cornerback Davison Igbinosun.

Hartline Comments On UTV Accident

Ohio State offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline spoke to the media on May 30 for the first time since being hospitalized in April after a utility vehicle side-by-side accident.

According to a report released by the Delaware County Sheriff's Office, police were dispatched to Hartline's home near Powell, Ohio, on the morning of April 16. He was the driver of the side-by-side involved in the crash that rolled over, and the report said he admitted to drinking prior to the accident. Hartline was hospitalized following the accident after suffering minor injuries but was released from the hospital the next day and said he's feeling good more than a month after the accident.

"There's nothing I can really say," Hartline said. "All I would say is that in hindsight, I probably would have rather went to bed than rode in a side-by-side."

Hartline has not been charged for the incident and added that any potential discipline from Ohio State would be handled in-house. Promoted to Ohio State's offensive coordinator role in January, Hartline said he will use the incident as an opportunity for growth moving forward.

"Everything provides a learning opportunity," he said, "and I would say it was a learning opportunity."

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2023 Ohio State Football Schedule					
Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2022 Record, Bowl Result	
Sept. 2	at Indiana	3:30 p.m.	CBS	4-8, not eligible	
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	12 p.m.	BTN	7-4	
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	4 p.m.	FOX	9-5, 44-23 win over So. Alabama (R&L Carriers)	
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	7:30 p.m.	NBC	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	7:30 p.m.	NBC	5-7, not eligible	
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	9-4, 28-20 win over Syracuse (Pinstripe)	
Nov. 25	at Michigan	12 p.m.	FOX	13-1, 51-45 loss to TCU (Fiesta)	

Ohio State Adds Philbin As Offensive Analyst

Ohio State added some professional firepower to its offensive coaching staff on May 23, hiring former Miami Dolphins head coach Joe Philbin as an offensive analyst.

ESPN's Pete Thamel reported that Philbin will work closely with offensive line coach Justin Frye. Philbin has an extensive history as an offensive line coach at the college level, with stints at Iowa, Harvard, Northeastern and Ohio.

Philbin has spent the last 19 years in the NFL, including a four-year run as head coach for the Dolphins, in which he posted a 24-28 record from 2012-15. He also served as the offensive coordinator for the Super Bowl-winning Green Bay Packers in 2010, and his most recent stop came with the Dallas Cowboys, where he served as the offensive line coach from 2020-22. While with the Dolphins, Philbin coached Hartline, who was a receiver for the Dolphins from 2009-14.

"Having Joe has been great," Hartline said on May 30. "The perspective he gives, the wealth of knowledge that he has as a position coach, head coach, football coach,

I think everyone in the building can learn something from him.

"It's pretty cool in my perspective, to see and be around Coach Philbin again in a different light and in a different way. I'm very happy he's here. He's a great addition to our staff."

Henry Announces His Cancer Is In Remission

Ohio State offensive lineman Avery Henry, who was diagnosed in December with osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer, announced on May 11 that his cancer is in remission.

Henry said that following four more treatments he will be "officially done" after beginning treatment at Ohio State's James Cancer Hospital in January. Henry was at the James Cancer Hospital on May 10 with several teammates, speaking to others going through treatment and encouraging them in their fight against cancer.

Henry, a native of St. Clairsville, Ohio, was in the middle of his freshman season at Ohio State when he was originally diagnosed. At the time, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said that Henry would have the

program's full support in his fight.

"(We're) trying to give Avery as much space as we can during this time, but also know that he's got a whole team behind him that's going to help him through this fight," Day said in December. "Our culture is built on fight, and he's in for a fight."

Henry remained with Ohio State's program during his treatment, even making the trip to Atlanta for the Buckeyes' College Football Playoff semifinal matchup against Georgia.

Now, he'll be able to begin working toward a return to the field for Ohio State after announcing his remission. Frye said that the Buckeyes will lean on the guidance of Henry's doctors to forge a safe return to the field for the sophomore lineman.

"It's all going to be based off the doctor's orders and what's good and safe and healthy for him," Frye said. "But being around his guys and being involved as much as he can is going to be a top priority for us.

"We're still in the thick of it right now with him until we figure out what's the best plan of action medically with him."

Smith Issues Support For Federal NIL Bill

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith is backing a bipartisan bill introduced on May 24 that looks to create a federal standard for name, image and likeness in college athletics.

The bill – also known as the Student Athlete Level Playing Field Act – was introduced in May by Ohio Representatives Mike Carey and Greg Landsman, though it was originally introduced in April 2021 by former Rep. Anthony Gonzalez, who played at



Avery Henry

Ohio State. According to a press release, the legislation hopes to "create an even playing field" for NIL given that states have different laws surrounding NIL.

"The Student Athlete Level Playing Field Act will establish one federal standard for NIL, protect the college recruiting process, and bring transparency to the NIL landscape," Carey said. "Conflicting NIL rules at the state level created an uneven playing field for universities and student-athletes. Through this legislation, we will grant student-athletes the right to capitalize off their own name, image, likeness, while preserving the integrity of college sports for current and future college athletes."

The bill would establish the Covered Athletic Organization Commission, which would make recommendations to Congress on rules surrounding NIL. The 13-member commission would be made up of athletic directors, administrators, coaches, former athletes and sports marketing professionals appointed by leaders in Congress.

As part of Carey and Landsman's updates to Gonzalez' original bill, it would require NIL deals worth over \$500 to be overseen by a Federal Trade Commission clearinghouse. Other notable aspects of the bill include prohibiting universities from restricting student-athletes' abilities to participate in NIL deals, continuing to prohibit inducements in recruiting, and ensuring that student-athletes are not considered employees by universities.

"I'm pleased that student-athletes now have the opportunity to benefit from their name, image and likeness," Smith said. "At Ohio State, our NIL programming assists student-athletes as they capitalize on their hard work, generate income for necessary expenses, and learn marketing and financial literacy skills. However, NIL laws and regulations remain inconsistent from state

Continued On Page 6

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

to state.

"Representative Carey's work to bring forth consistent, national NIL regulations will further protect student-athletes and bring order to NIL policies and procedures nationwide. On behalf of Ohio State, I want to thank Representative Carey for this significant and important legislation."

Carter Back To Full Strength After Injury In Spring Camp

Transfer safety Ja'Had Carter's acclimation to Ohio State took a hit when he suffered a right leg injury during the Buckeyes' spring practice on April 1, forcing him to miss the last handful of practice sessions as well as the spring game.

Carter was helped off the field, but Day indicated that it was not expected to be a long-term issue. Now, nearly two months later, Carter is back to work for the Buckeyes, and safeties coach Perry Eliano said on May 30 that Carter is back to 100 percent.

"Very unfortunate," Eliano said of Carter's injury. "Even though he's played a lot of football coming from where he's came from, we do things a little different – the teaching, the progression, and just getting a true evaluation of who Ja'Had is for myself."

"I hate that it happened. It's unfortunate, and he's back to 100 percent. He's done everything that we've asked him to do to this point."

Carter had impressed in limited action prior to his injury after transferring to Ohio State from Syracuse, where he was a three-year starter for the Orange. Carter was competing with Cameron Martinez at nickel safety throughout the spring, with the Buckeyes looking to replace the departed Tanner McCalister.

With Carter back in the fold, that competition will continue through the summer and into the fall, and the coaching staff is excited to see how he continues to grow for the Buckeyes.

"He's a good football player," Eliano said. "He's coachable, he wants to learn, and he's a worker. He's what we thought (of) when we went out and wanted to bring in a transfer safety. I've been pleased at this point. The only way you truly get better is to play the game, and so it was unfortunate that he got hurt. But like I said, he's back 100 percent. He's in drills, he's in workouts, and I'm excited to see his growth this summer."

Dennis Provides Update On Race For Starting QB Job

There was extensive competition during spring camp, but Ohio State was unable

to name a successor to quarterback C.J. Stroud.

Junior Kyle McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown competed for a majority of spring camp until an injury to Brown's throwing hand held him out of the final few practices of camp and the annual spring game. With an inconclusive finish to spring camp, Day, Hartline and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis opted to allow the contest to bleed into the fall.



Kyle McCord

"I still think we're in the process where – I know everyone wants to talk about the quarterback competition – but we're still in the process of worrying about yourself and getting better," Dennis said on May 30. "When you worry about yourself and you maximize who you can become, the other stuff takes care of itself."

While the competition was impacted by injury during the spring, Dennis said Brown is back to full strength and getting back into the swing of things. Although Dennis refused to disclose if there was any separation between the two gunslingers, he recognized that this competition is unique to what he's seen before during his four years at Ohio State.

"I think, just like what makes every team different, every team has certain things and every guy has certain traits, every guy has certain weaknesses," Dennis said. "It's a

good battle with a bunch of good quarterbacks and they're competing every day."

Dennis gave pitches for both quarterbacks, pointing to McCord's arm talent and handle of the offense next to Brown's athleticism and arm strength.

"Kyle is an accurate kid with a big, strong arm that understands the offense," Dennis said. "With our offense, we do a lot of things, especially at the quarterback position, so getting the reps has been important for him."

"Devin, he's an athletic kid. Same thing – big arm and a lot of talent. At the end of the day, with both of those guys, they wouldn't be at Ohio State competing for the starting job if they didn't have elite traits and characteristics."

Several Kickoff Times Announced For 2023 Season

Ohio State's 2023 schedule started to take shape since BSB last went to press, with several kickoff times and TV assignments being announced.

The Buckeyes will play in three separate time slots on three separate channels during their first three weeks of the season. Ohio State will open its season with a 3:30 p.m. kick on Sept. 2 at Indiana, with the game set to be broadcast on CBS. The Big Ten Network will carry the following week's contest against Youngstown State on Sept. 9, which is set to start at noon, while FOX broadcasts Ohio State's matchup with Western Kentucky on Sept. 16 at 4 p.m.

Ohio State will play on its fourth network in the fourth week of the season, with its marquee matchup at Notre Dame set for a

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7:30 p.m. kickoff on NBC on Sept. 23.

Only two other start times have been announced with the Buckeyes set to host Michigan State on Nov. 11 at 7:30 p.m. on NBC and The Game against Michigan reclaiming its noon slot on FOX on Nov. 25.

Buckeyes Add To Future Schedules

Ohio State announced several football scheduling updates on May 10, making changes to the slate for the 2024 and 2029 seasons.

In 2024, Ohio State is moving a previously scheduled matchup with Western Michigan on Sept. 21 to Sept. 7 and replacing that original date with a newly announced game against Marshall. Along with a previously scheduled date with Southern Miss on Aug. 31, 2024, that completes Ohio State's non-conference schedule for the 2024 season.

The Buckeyes hold a 1-0 record against both Western Michigan and Marshall, both wins at Ohio Stadium. Ohio State defeated Marshall 24-21 on Sept. 11, 2004, and also had a 45-7 victory on Sept. 2, 2010, but that win was later vacated.

The Thunder Herd played their first season in the Sun Belt last year, and Ohio State holds an all-time 2-0 record against teams from that conference. The Buckeyes' lone game against the Broncos was a 38-12 win on Sept. 26, 2015. Ohio State has a perfect 29-0 record against competition from the Mid-American Conference.

Ohio State also announced a new pair of nonconference matchups for the 2029 season, with the Buckeyes set to host Nevada on Sept. 1 and Charlotte on Sept. 8. These are the first nonconference games announced for Ohio State's 2029 football slate.

Other notable nonconference matchups in the next few years include home-and-home series with Texas in 2025-26, Alabama in 2027-28, Georgia in 2030-31 and Oregon in 2032-33.

Men's Tennis Finishes As National Runner Up

The Ohio State men's tennis team came just one match short of winning the program's first outdoor national title on May 21, after the third-seeded Buckeyes suffered a 4-0 sweep by No. 5 Virginia in the national championship at the USTA National Campus in Orlando, Fla.

The Cavaliers won the doubles point to start things off, with Ohio State's Robert Cash and Justin Boulais falling 6-3 to Inaki Montes and William Woodall at first doubles and Andrew Lutschau and James Trotter suffering a 6-2 loss to Chris Rodesch and Jeffrey von der Schulenberg at second doubles.

Cannon Kingsley and JJ Tracy did pick up a 6-3 win at third doubles for the Buckeyes, but Ohio State still fell down 1-0 to begin the match. Virginia then won four of the first six sets in singles play, with Ryan Goetz, Rodesch, Montes and von der Schulenberg all taking their opening sets, while Ohio State had Jack Anthrope and Alexander Bernard claim their first sets.

While Anthrope and Bernard provided some hope, Ohio State's chances of a national title grew slim after von der Schulenberg picked up a 6-2, 6-1 win over Tracy and Rodesch won 6-4, 6-2 over Boulais. Bernard then lost his second set, and Virginia was able to clinch the title with Montes earning a 6-4, 6-2 win over Kingsley.

Next Print Issue Of BSB Mails Week Of July 8

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, dated July, will be mailed the week ending July 8. This will be our popular Interview Issue. That will be followed by the Football Preview Issue in late August.

In the meantime, there is no need to 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 Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed and is available to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

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The Buckeyes had previously defeated the Cavaliers twice during the regular season, but Ohio State was unable to complete the season sweep of Virginia to win the national title. This was Ohio State's third shot at an outdoor national championship under head coach Ty Tucker, after the Buckeyes previously fell in the national title game to USC in 2009 and to Wake Forest in 2018.

Ohio State ended the season with a 34-3 record and a 9-0 mark in conference play. Entering the match against Virginia, the Buckeyes had been on a 19-match winning streak.

OSU PA Announcer Kennedy Passes Away At 59

Longtime Ohio State public address announcer Bob Kennedy died at age 59, the school announced on April 30.

Kennedy had been the "voice" of the Buckeyes for the last 23 years, most notably as the public address announcer for Ohio State football games since 2003. He has also handled public address responsibilities for baseball, field hockey, soccer, volleyball and women's hockey, among others.

"Bob had a big heart and he loved his Buckeyes," said Jerry Emig, Ohio State associate athletic director for communications. "And he loved his PA jobs. He was a true professional at his craft and a friend to us all. He knew the local media, our administrators, coaches and student-athletes, and he certainly knew the histories well of many Ohio State sports, and he loved to talk about them."

Kennedy was also the athletics public address announcer at Otterbein University, his alma mater, as well as for the Columbus Clippers. He graduated from Otterbein in 1987 with a bachelor's degree in speech communication.

Trio Of Former Buckeyes Find Transfer Homes

With a wealth of talent occupying the Ohio State wide receivers' room, a pair of former Buckeye pass catchers sought greener pastures in the transfer portal, while an offensive lineman also found a new home in the portal.

Starting with the receivers, sophomores Caleb Burton and Kaleb Brown entered the portal on April 25 and May 1, respectively, with both players finding new homes soon thereafter. Burton went south, joining Auburn on May 6, while Brown stayed in the Big Ten, announcing his commitment to

Iowa on May 4.

Burton did not appear in a game last season for Ohio State, leaving him with four seasons of eligibility with the Tigers. He began picking up some steam in practice near the end of his freshman season, losing his black stripe on Dec. 20, but was unable to catch on in the Buckeyes' loaded receiver room.

He was a four-star prospect out of Austin (Texas) Lake Travis and the No. 132 overall prospect and No. 22 wide receiver in his class. Burton will have an opportunity to see the field early at Auburn, as the Tigers' receiving corps did not see a single receiver surpass 500 receiving yards last season.

Brown had recently completed his first season at Ohio State, appearing in four games and bringing in one reception for 5 yards. He was the highest-rated of the Buckeyes' four wide receiver signees in the 2022 recruiting class, coming out of high school as the No. 79 overall prospect and No. 13 wide receiver.

While Iowa's offense has had an anti-receiver reputation for the last several years, with no wideout on the team surpassing 400 receiving yards last year, it could be a new dawn for the Hawkeyes, who welcome in Brown in addition to former Michigan quarterback Cade McNamara and tight end Erick All. Without significant returning production at wideout, an opportunity exists for Brown to take a big leap entering his second season of college football.

Kojo Antwi and Kyion Grayes still remain from the class at wide receiver, though all have been pushed by the incoming freshmen receivers, including Carnell Tate, Noah Rogers and Bryson Rodgers, not to mention the arrival of Brandon Inniss this summer.

As for the offensive line transfer, former Buckeye Ben Christman – who entered the portal on April 26 – announced on May 7 that he will transfer to Kentucky.

Christman arrived at Ohio State in the 2021 recruiting class as a four-star prospect out of Richfield (Ohio) Revere. He redshirted his first season with the program and appeared in just one game this past season, getting some late snaps in the Buckeyes' blowout win over Indiana.

With Donovan Jackson and Matthews Jones both returning as starting guards this season for Ohio State, Christman was left to compete for a backup job entering his third season with the program. Instead, he'll now have three seasons of eligibility to use with the Wildcats and head coach Mark Stoops.

Ohio State Fires Women's Lacrosse Coach Bokker

Ohio State women's lacrosse head coach Amy Bokker was fired by the school's athletic department on May 15 after four seasons leading the program.

"The Ohio State University Department of Athletics has informed women's lacrosse head coach Amy Bokker that she will not be returning as coach of the team for the 2024 campaign," a release said. "Bokker had one year remaining on her current contract."

Associate head coach Gabby Capuzzi Solomon will serve as interim head coach.

"I want to thank Gene Smith and the Ohio State University for this opportunity," Bokker said. "My family and I have enjoyed being a part of this spirited community during these past four years. I wish future success to the student-athletes and the program."

Bokker became the third head coach in Ohio State women's lacrosse history in June 2019, helping the team to a 5-4 record before the remainder of the season was canceled due to COVID-19. The Buckeyes suffered a down year coming back from the pandemic in 2021, going 4-9, but rebounded

Continued On Page 8

Help BSB Grow

Loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers frequently ask us what they can do to help keep BSB vibrant in this increasingly electronic age. One of the things readers can do is introduce BSB to new readers who might find our Ohio State sports content interesting.

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Continued From Page 7

to have their second winning record in Bokker's tenure with a 9-7 finish. That included three straight losses to close the campaign, however.

That trend of sluggish finishes carried into this past season, where Ohio State lost 10 of its final 11 games to finish 5-12 with a first-round exit in the Big Ten tournament. Bokker's career record adds up to 23-32 in Columbus, with a 6-18 mark in conference play.

"On behalf of the department, I want to thank Amy for her leadership of our women's lacrosse program over the last four years," Janine Oman, Ohio State senior deputy director of athletics said. "She has provided special memories and experiences to our student-athletes during this time."

Bokker has 26 total years of head coaching experience, with a career record of 268-193. Her final season at Ohio State was the team's first at the brand-new Ohio State Lacrosse Stadium, a recently-constructed lacrosse-specific facility.

Riep, Wint To Continue Football Careers

Former Ohio State defensive backs Amir

Riep and Jahsen Wint announced over the weekend of May 27 that they will continue their college football careers.

Riep and Wint were dismissed from Ohio State in February 2020 after being arrested on charges of rape and kidnapping, but both were acquitted of all charges in February of this year.

Riep announced that he has committed to Lincoln University, which will be entering the program's third season of play this year. He was at Ohio State from 2017-19 prior to his dismissal, playing in 40 games for the Buckeyes and totaling 33 tackles, six pass breakups and three interceptions, including a career-high three tackles in each of his final three games.

He was a four-star prospect out of Cincinnati Colerain in the 2017 recruiting class, viewed as the No. 186 overall prospect and No. 26 cornerback in the class. He will have two seasons of eligibility remaining.

As for Wint, he announced that he will be transferring to Marshall for his remaining two seasons of eligibility. He spent four seasons at Ohio State from 2016-19, playing in 35 games and totaling 39 tackles and a sack. Wint was a three-star prospect out of Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall, checking in as the No. 871 overall prospect and No. 61 athlete in the 2016 recruiting class.

Perry Joining NBC Football Coverage

Former Ohio State linebacker Joshua Perry is set to join NBC this fall as an analyst for the network's Big Ten football coverage.

Perry will be joining Maria Taylor, who formerly served as the host on "College GameDay," as part of NBC's studio show which will travel to the sites of games several weeks during the season. He will join NBC after serving as an analyst for the Big Ten Network, working in both studio and game coverage with BTN. He was nominated for a Sports Emmy in 2021 in the Emerging On-Air Talent category.

Prior to his television career, Perry helped the Buckeyes to the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship Game during his four-year run at Ohio State from 2012-15. While with the Buckeyes, Perry racked up 296 tackles, 18 tackles for loss and 7½ sacks, and he emerged as the No. 102 overall pick to the San Diego Chargers in the 2016 NFL draft.

Perry spent two seasons in the NFL, playing for the Chargers and Indianapolis Colts, where he collected 22 tackles.

FBS Players To Appear In NCAA Football Game

When EA Sports' new college football vid-

eo game hits the stands next summer, it will feature the name, image and likeness of current players, including those from Ohio State.

According to a report from ESPN, EA Sports will work with OneTeam Partners to "facilitate collegiate athletes' name and likenesses" into the game, which will be the first NCAA football game released since 2014. All eligible FBS players will be able to opt into the game and will receive compensation, though the amount and how players will receive payments is still to be determined.

If a player does not want to appear in the game, EA Sports would create a generic avatar to replace them. For those appearing in the game, EA Sports could include face scans of athletes, though a representative told ESPN that it would not be possible for every athlete due to the number of players who would appear.

As it stands, more than 120 teams have agreed to be in the game, and EA Sports will be able to use assets from all 10 FBS conferences as well as the College Football Playoff.

Andy Anders, Jack Emerson and Braden Moles contributed to this report. For the latest Ohio State news, visit BuckeyeSports.com, available to all BSB subscribers.

From The Pages Of BSB**40 Years Ago — 1983**

When OSU linebacker Clark Backus transferred to Ohio State from the University of Colorado in the spring of 1980, his first assignment was not as a linebacker, but at a more indistinct position – scout team fullback.

Backus wasn't bothered, mind you. In fact, he played so well on the scout team that he was in that position when fall practices began. But after an enlightening meeting with linebacker Curt Curtis, Backus knew fullback was not the position for him.

"The first few days of fall practice, Marcus (Marek), Glen (Cobb) and I think Rich (Czyzynski) got hurt," Backus said. "One day, I was doing pass protection and Curt Curtis sort of knocked my head around. I went up to Coach (Earle) Bruce and said, 'Coach, you're looking kind of low in the linebacking situation, and I'd like to move over there.'"

35 Years Ago — 1988

If you looked at the 1988 Ohio State baseball roster, you would have seen many of the same names as were on the 1987 roster. The 1988 team, however, posted a 32-28 record, 16-12 in the Big Ten. The year before, the Bucks were just 19-27 and 4-12 in league play, worst among conference schools.

According to first-year coach Bob Todd, the difference between 1988 and 1987 may have been more mental than physical.

"When we first came in here, the overall attitude of the team wasn't one of a positive nature, one where the players felt like they could win ballgames," Todd said. "We worked very, very hard on that all year long – to change the overall team attitude."

30 Years Ago — 1993

What was initially termed an infraction "secondary in nature" exploded into a full-blown NCAA investigation of the men's basketball program at Ohio State regarding improprieties in the recruiting of Cincinnati Woodward star Damon Flint.

As a result of that investigation, the 6-5 Flint, rated by many recruiting services as one of the top 10 or 15 high school players in the nation, was ruled ineligible to play for the Buckeyes. A few days later, he signed with the University of Cincinnati.

The investigation turned up 17 violations committed by the OSU coaching staff – primarily head coach Randy Ayers and former assistant coach Paul Brazeau – many of which seemed trivial in nature.

"I've thought about it, to be honest," Ayers said of resigning. "But I think people are entitled to mistakes, and we certainly made a mistake in this situation."

25 Years Ago — 1998

Several publications came out with early predictions on the 1998 college football race, and Ohio State was in the thick of things in each poll.

Football Digest worked its way farthest out onto the limb as far as Ohio State was concerned. That monthly pigskin magazine picked the Buckeyes for the national championship in its college football preview.

"Could this finally be the year for Ohio State's beleaguered John

Cooper?" FD's Thomas O'Toole and John Lindsay wrote. "Could the Buckeyes actually win their first national title in 30 years and finally take the pressure off Cooper, who has won 51 games in the last five years but still can't reach his ultimate goal?"

20 Years Ago — 2003

After dropping three of four to Minnesota, ending Ohio State baseball's outside shot at the Big Ten regular-season title, the Buckeyes returned to Minneapolis for the Big Ten tournament and went 4-1, beating host and No. 1 seed Minnesota twice on the final day to claim the tournament title and the automatic NCAA tournament berth that goes with it.

The Buckeyes' improbable postseason thrill ride continued at the Auburn NCAA Regional, where the Buckeyes went 3-0, knocking off Clemson 10-8 on May 30 and then beating host and top-seed Auburn, the No. 4 national seed, May 31 and June 1, to win the regional and advance to the Super Regional for the first time since 1999.

"We don't have (reigning Big Ten Pitcher of the Year Scott Lewis) and we go to Minneapolis on the road and show a great deal of heart and character and win a Big Ten tournament," Todd said. "And then you turn around and have to go to Auburn, Ala., and play the 13th-ranked team in the country (Clemson) and the fourth-ranked team in the country (Auburn) and beat them. I just think that this is an outstanding show of character."

15 Years Ago — 2008

When Kevin White left his post as director of Notre Dame athletics to take the same job at Duke on May 31, little time passed before Gene Smith's name was raised as a potential successor.

Within hours the topic had reached Internet message boards, such as BSB's at BuckeyeSports.com, and several news agencies included Smith in lists of hypothetical candidates. Smith, though, had little to say on the subject.

Reached at the Memorial Tournament in the Columbus suburb of Dublin not long after White made his move, Smith told The Columbus Dispatch he did not comment on such issues.

"I'm happy where I am, and I don't even touch that stuff," Smith said.

10 Years Ago — 2013

Ohio State University President Dr. E. Gordon Gee had let his mouth get past him several times in the past, but never before did the heat on the administrator rise to the level of late May after The Associated Press published inflammatory remarks Gee made about Roman Catholics, the SEC, multiple other universities, former Wisconsin head coach Bret Bielema and others during an Athletics Council meeting in December 2012.

According to the AP, the Ohio State board of trustees was already aware of the comments and had instituted a remediation plan in response before the article was published.

Gee issued an apology via Twitter, saying, "I am truly sorry for my comments – such attempts at humor do not reflect Ohio State's values, nor my role as its president," but a firestorm had already erupted in response.

OSU Recognizes 191 Student-Athlete Graduates

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio Stadium was the site on May 7 for Ohio State's spring commencement ceremony, with 191 current and former student-athletes receiving their degrees.

The rowing team led all programs with 21 graduates, with men's lacrosse (17), men's ice hockey (12) and women's swimming (10) all celebrating double-digit graduates. Rower Alessandra Montesano, who received her degree in communications, was a member of the 2020 Italian Olympic team that earned a fourth-place finish in the Tokyo Olympics, and she helped lead Ohio State to a Big Ten championship this past season.

Other decorated graduates include diver Lyle Yost, who won an NCAA championship on the one-meter board in March and was named NCAA Diver of the Year, and women's gymnastics' Lexi Edwards, who finished sixth overall at the 2023 NCAA championships and become Ohio State's first women's gymnast to earn All-American honors in over a decade.

The football team had seven graduates, highlighted by current linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg and former Buckeye quarterback Justin Fields, who returned to Ohio Stadium to receive his degree in consumer and family financial services.

The complete list of graduates is included below.

BASEBALL: Joey Aden, sport industry; Cole Andrews, diversity, equity & inclusion; Nolan Clegg, air transportation; Marcus Ernst, public management; Jonah Jenkins, criminal justice administration; Caden Kaiser, sport industry; Wyatt Loncar, communications; Mitchell Milheim, mechanical engineering.

MEN'S BASKETBALL: Eugene Brown, sport industry; Andre Wesson, economics.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: Karla Vres, consumer sciences.

CHEERLEADING: Eric Bowell, exercise science; Braden DeLullo, health sciences; Garrett Fogel, industrial and systems engineering; Alexis Markley, sport industry; Brooke Shields, political science.

MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY/TRACK: John Good, accounting/economics-business; Zachary Shultz, city and regional planning.

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY/TRACK: Allison Guagenti, art education; Andrea Kuhn, mathematics; Kathleen Shay, biomedical engineering.

DANCE: Makenna Blacklidge, exercise science; Nicole Boudos, finance; Sophia MacKinnon, sport industry; Natalie Quinn, neuroscience; Abigail Summers, communications; Brooke Thayer, finance.

MEN'S DIVING: Jacob Fielding, psychology; Mohamed Noaman, economics; Lyle Yost, Spanish.

WOMEN'S DIVING: Jacqueline Brenn, health sciences; Amanda Ling, language, education and society.

MEN'S FENCING: Stephen Chou, computer science and engineering; James

Flanagan, economics-business; Benjamin Levitt, finance.

WOMEN'S FENCING: Evelin Bustamante, marketing; Julieta Toledo Ames, film studies.

FIELD HOCKEY: Leanne Bough, accounting; Sarah Charley, psychology; Delaney Lawler, communications.

FOOTBALL: Donovan (Steele) Chambers, finance; Thomas Eichenberg, real estate and urban analysis; Justin Fields, consumer and family financial services; Jaden McKenzie, human development and family science; Michael O'Shaughnessy, consumer and family financial services; Bradley Robinson, kinesiology; Kourt Williams II, communications.

MEN'S GOLF: JonErik Alford, kinesiology; Patrick Schmuecking, finance.

WOMEN'S GOLF: Lauren Peter, physical education; Aneka Seumanutafa, human development and family science.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS: Donovan Hewitt, political science; Luke Smigliani, hospitality management; Jackson Studley, construction systems management.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS: Elexis Edwards, psychology; Ella Hodges, accounting; Sydney Jennings, health sciences; Colby Miller, real estate and urban analysis; Miriam Perez, communications; Sarah Rowland, health sciences.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY: Mark Cheremeta, finance; Michael Gildon, sport industry; Jaedon Leslie, finance; James Marooney, economics-business; Dalton Messina, sport industry; Chester Regula, finance; Kamil Sadlocha, communications/human development and family science; Tate Singleton, finance; Ryan Snowden, operations management; Dominic Vidoli, neuroscience; Gustaf Westlund, economics; Jakob Wise, sport industry.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY: Brooke Bink, communications; Jennifer Gardiner, sport industry; Teagan Grant, consumer and family financial services; Hadley Hartmetz, communications; McKenzie Hauswirth, biology; Quinn Kuntz, health sciences; Paetyn Levis, healthcare leadership and innovation; Ramsey Parent, biology/psychology.

MEN'S LACROSSE: Clifford Blanchard IV, criminal justice administration; Kyle Borda, diversity, equity & inclusion; James Cipolla, health sciences; Samuel Faber, health sciences; Andrew Guagenti, real estate and urban analysis; James Hogan, communications; Caton Johnson, political science; Jason Knox, history; Connor Mitchell, finance; John Myers, finance; Garrett Nilsen, communications; Mitchell Pehlke, sport industry; Carson Raney, finance; Justin Sherrer, neuroscience; Jacob Snyder, real estate and urban analysis/finance; Skylar Wahlund, finance; Stephen Zupicich, finance.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE: Jane Cowley, communications; Molly Erneston, agribusiness and applied economics; Nicole Ferrara, communications; Chloe Johnson, psychology; Ava Keethler, assistive and rehabilitative technology; Claire Morris, marketing; Carolyn O'Brien, health sciences; Bryce Pfundstein, public health; Emily Rezabek, marketing; Ashley Turner,

sport industry.

PISTOL: Katelyn Abeln, public health; Amanda Ackerman, animal sciences.

RIFLE: Natalie Katsuyama, medical anthropology; Joel Potts, finance.

ROWING: Katelyn Bartos, mechanical engineering; Claire Bauer, marketing; Erin Byrne, neuroscience/psychology; Natalie Chourova, human nutrition; Kristen Devolve, nursing; Alaina Hawthorn, architecture; Molly Hillman, health sciences; Kathryn Hinton, mathematics; Valerie Keller, health sciences; Brianna Knight, natural resources management; Pau Koster, international business; Megan McNutt, biomedical engineering; Alessandra Montesano, communications; Megan Murphy, electrical and computer engineering; Kaitlin Pang, economics; Elizabeth Paul, biology; Tess Thompson, human development and family science/sport industry; Kathryn Visci, chemical engineering; Oliver Williams, public policy analysis; Emma Wilson, health sciences; Morgan Zahner, computer science and engineering.

MEN'S SOCCER: Channing Chasten, communications.

WOMEN'S SOCCER: D'awncey Jones-Black, social work; Emaly Vatne, kinesiology.

SOFTBALL: Tegan Cortelletti, criminology; Meggie Otte, human development and family science; Taylor Pack, human development and family science.

MEN'S SWIMMING: Ruslan Gaziev, economics; Alfred Hansen, marketing; Jay Johnson, philosophy, politics and economics; Matthew Magness, mechanical engineering; Ian Mikesell, mechanical engineering; James Ward, communications; Lain Weaver, environmental science.

WOMEN'S SWIMMING: Emily Albrecht, history of art; Leah Baker, biology; Amy Fulmer, biology; Kennady Kilger, biology; Morgan Kraus, biochemistry; Meredith Moellering, health sciences; Jose-

phine Panitz, marketing; Felicia Pasadyn, bioethics; Sarah Turchanik, psychology/physical education; Aislinn Walsh, communications.

SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING: Nicole Dzurko, environment, economy, development and sustainability; Mackenzie Finn, nursing; Rose Homoele, biochemistry; Paige Hopper, accounting; Olivia Malloy, studio art; Reverie Nedde, studio art; Trinity Patton, health sciences; Olivia Schafer, psychology; Louisa Strutynski, marketing.

MEN'S TENNIS: Cannon Kingsley, sport industry; James Trotter, sport industry.

WOMEN'S TENNIS: Kolie Allen, speech and hearing science; Akanksha Bhan, master of applied economics; Isabelle Boulais, diversity, equity & inclusion; Kathleen Jones, journalism; Lucia Marzal Martinez, kinesiology; Danielle Willson, master of accounting.

MEN'S TRACK AND FIELD: Luke Bendick, history; Clarence Foote-Talley, communications; Joshua Miller, master of public administration; Rehoboth Ogunbare, computer and information science; Tanner Watson, sport industry.

WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD: Nya Bussey, health sciences; Jaimie Robinson, sociology.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL: Justin Howard, journalism; Jack Stevens, civil engineering; Matthew Tompkins, finance; Michael Wright, marketing.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL: Gabby Gonzales, kinesiology; Jenaisya Moore, sport industry; Kylie Murr, kinesiology; Mac Podraza, kinesiology; Cecilia Rocafort, aerospace engineering.

WRESTLING: Carson Kharchla, sport industry; Samuel Sasso, sport industry; Tyler Stein, health sciences.

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Stroud Offers Hope For Struggling Houston

Continued From Page 1

GameDay” ahead of the draft to defend his quarterback.

“First off, it’s really based off eye reaction, and then reaction based on pressing buttons on what you see on a screen,” Day said. “There’s 10 different tests that go along with this. To just take a number that’s been thrown out there and leaked, which they told me, all of them weren’t exactly accurate – it’s a little irresponsible because there’s not a lot of context that goes with what’s going on. So it was great for me to learn what went on with that test.

“He’s got a huge ceiling. He’s not a finished product by any means. I know that when I was in the NFL, I was always looking for guys that weren’t finished products. So only three years in college, when you look ahead (to) where he is going to be in five-to-10 years, I think you’re going to see a quarterback that’s got a lot to grow.”

Stroud was similarly not all that concerned about the talk, and for good reason as he ended up going just one pick later than some expected.

“People are going to talk, good, bad, ugly, sad,” he said. “But I’m just going to continue to be myself, continue to be a great man of God, continue to lead, and now that I’m a Texan, I’m going to continue to do it the Texan way.

“I want to thank (the Texans) for the opportunity. They took a trust in not only me, but (fellow first-round draft pick Will Anderson Jr. out of Alabama) as well. And I think I’m going to bring just myself. So everything I’ve been through, it’s not for no reason. I think that’s why I went through it, just to get to a team like this and be able to flip it around and win games and do as best as I can.”

Winning games wasn’t much of a problem for Stroud at Ohio State. He posted a 21-4 record during his two seasons as a starter for the Buckeyes. It didn’t start smoothly, though, as his debut at Ohio Stadium in 2021 ended in a 35-28 loss to Oregon, and after a shaky outing in a win over Tulsa, he sat out Ohio State’s win over Akron while nursing a shoulder injury that had hampered him through the first few games.

He was able to rebound, turning in a spectacular season for Ohio State, though the team had struggles in some of Stroud’s biggest games. He finished with no wins and a pair of losses against Michigan – the first back-to-back losses to the Wolverines since the 1999 and 2000 seasons – and did not win a Big Ten championship.

Ohio State also fell short in Stroud’s lone College Football Playoff appearance, though few would blame Stroud for the Buckeyes’ loss after he had arguably one of his strongest games against Georgia, finishing 23 of 34 passing for 348 yards and four touchdowns without an interception.

Those tests pale in comparison, though, to the ones experienced by Stroud in his personal life. His father went to prison when Stroud was in middle school and has remained there since, leaving Stroud’s mother, Kimberly, to raise him and three other siblings.

“I’m battle-tested,” Stroud said. “I think



FILE PHOTO

NEW HOPE — The Houston Texans have struggled to find a consistent answer at quarterback since the franchise’s inception in 2002, but former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud might be what the team has needed.

God has put a lot of trials and tribulations in my life, and it’s not for no reason. It’s to lead people to Him and of course to get me ready for what I have to go through. I’m wearing the armor of God. I’m scarred up. But at the same time, that’s what you want. You want somebody who’s been through adversity, somebody who’s going to persevere through issues.”

All those factors – not to mention his stellar ability on the field – made it a no-brainer for the Texans to select Stroud as the new face of the franchise. Given that the team was picking at the top of the draft, Stroud will step into a situation where he is expected to be a day-one starter for what has been an underperforming squad in recent years.

The Texans – who joined the NFL in 2002 in what remains the league’s most recent expansion – have historically underperformed, largely due to playing in the AFC South during Peyton Manning’s run with the Indianapolis Colts. Beginning in 2011 – the year that Manning was forced to sit out while dealing with a neck injury, followed by his subsequent departure for the Denver Broncos – the Texans began a stretch of six division titles in nine seasons, largely led by a dominant defense and superstar pass rusher J.J. Watt, but the team was unable to advance past the divisional round of the playoffs.

Since the team’s last division crown in 2019, the Texans have a combined 11-38-1

record over the last three seasons, and head coach DeMeco Ryans – who was hired this offseason after two years as defensive coordinator with the San Francisco 49ers – will become the team’s fifth head coach in the last four years, including interim titles. It’s an opportunity for Stroud to not only come in and be the team’s starting quarterback from day one, but it’s a chance to provide some hope to a franchise that has had little reason of late to cheer.

Quarterback Deshaun Watson, whom the Texans selected in the 2017 NFL draft, had four standout seasons with the team with three Pro Bowl appearances as well as leading the NFL in passing yards in 2020. But Watson then requested a trade following that season and sat out the entire 2021 season in the midst of an investigation of sexual assault allegations against over 20 women, which reportedly happened during massage appointments. He was later traded to the Cleveland Browns before being suspended for 11 games during the 2022 season, but it signaled a fresh start for the Texans, and Stroud’s selection gives the franchise a new face to get behind as the team looks for a turnaround.

“My message to the Texans fan base, I’d say get ready. We’re bringing it, man,” Stroud said. “I don’t know what it’s going to look like when we first get there, but we’re going to work. And I think that’s what it’s about. Putting in the work, making sure that

when our numbers are called that we make the play, that we try to do as best we can to get back to the top like they were a couple years ago. We want to bring wins on wins on wins.

“We’re not going to be perfect. That’s something that I want to talk about, just not be perfect. Just being ourselves, man. And really, if that’s what it is, I don’t think there’s (any) limit on what me and Will can do. I’m not going to put limits on what we can do (in) our rookie season. We can turn this whole thing around. There’s a really special feeling as I go to Houston.”

Stroud has yet to sign his rookie contract at time of press, though it is estimated to be a four-year, \$36.3 million deal with a \$23.4 million signing bonus, according to Spotrac. He began his rookie minicamp on May 12 and has already made an impression on his teammates and coaches, but it’s a learning period right now for Stroud as he transitions from Ohio State’s offense to the Texans’ system.

“The most important thing for me is for those guys to have just a general understanding of the terminology, offense and defense terminology,” Ryans said. “Learning the offense, it’s like learning a new language, so then you have to learn how to speak that language and speak it fluently, especially for C.J. stepping in the huddle and making the play calls. How much and how quickly can they grasp the terminology and be able to communicate that effectively on the field?”

Despite coming in with the expectations that Stroud has – not only as the second pick in the draft but after an impressive couple of years with the Buckeyes – there’s an acknowledgement that Stroud has plenty of work to do to get where he wants to go and where the team wants him to be to become the next big thing for the Texans.

“There’s certainly things that he’s going to have to work on,” said Texans general manager Nick Caserio. “There’s some things that he’s really probably never seen defensively, what some of the other teams are going to do. He’s going to have to learn our vernacular, our vocabulary of how we call plays.

“Our offense is probably a lot different than what he did with Coach Day at Ohio State. It doesn’t mean one’s better or one’s worse. It just means you’re essentially starting over.”

Having to work to get where he wants to go is not foreign to Stroud, who welcomed the opportunity at Ohio State and will move forward, taking what he learned at the college level to prepare him for what will hopefully be a long and prosperous career at the next level.

“To be honest, at Ohio State, what kind of gravitated me towards them was that nothing was promised,” he said. “Everything has got to be earned. It was a thing that you had to earn to be a first-round draft pick.

“When I work out in the weight room, that’s what I look at – I look at first-round draft picks, I look at all the Heisman finalists, all these things I want to accomplish, and to be able to kind of accomplish a couple of things at Ohio State and now that I’m in the league now, I just want to do more. I know that it’s just the beginning.”



2023 PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

TUE. – “TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG” NIGHTS
- 4/4, 4/18, 5/2, 5/16, 5/23, 6/6, 7/25, 8/1, 8/22, 9/5 & 9/19

WED. – “MILITARY & FIRST RESPONDERS” GAMES
- \$5 Reserved Seats for active & retired Military & First Responders
Buy up to 4 tickets at \$5 each
“DOLLAR DAYS”

THU. – “COPA DE LA DIVERSION”
- Clippers transform into Los Veleros on Thursday Nights
“THIRSTY THURSDAYS”
- Beverage Specials on Beer, Margaritas & Soft Drinks
“COLLEGE ID NIGHT”
- \$10 includes Reserved ticket AND \$5 in Clippers Cash for food, beverage or souvenir purchase

FRI. – “\$5 FRIDAY”
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi
- \$5 Beers (small)
- \$5 Wine

SAT. – “PARTY-AT-THE-PARK” - Starting on MAY 20
- Pre-Game live music from 5:30p-6:45p on the Yueng-Wing Stage on the RF Concourse

SUN. – “FAMILY DAY & SENIOR DAY”
- \$18 Bleacher or \$27 Reserved Family Pass for 2 Adults & up to 4 Kids (18 & under)
- \$3 Bleacher or \$5 Reserved Seat (60 & Over)
“POST-GAME FUN RUN”

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#ClipShow



MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
HOME OPENING NIGHT					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						

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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	

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		

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			

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					

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

*All game times listed are subject to change. *All game times are local.

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Aggressive Portal Strategy Paying Dividends

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

Since college football’s transfer portal was introduced on Oct. 15, 2018, Ohio State’s strategy regarding one of the sport’s biggest changes in recent memory has largely remained consistent: proceed with caution.

Through the first four years of the portal, the Buckeyes took in just nine transfers from other programs. The first – and undoubtedly the most important – was quarterback Justin Fields from Georgia, who turned into a two-year starter and a Heisman finalist for Ohio State.

The Buckeyes also added Rutgers offensive lineman Jonah Jackson and Kentucky quarterback Gunnar Hoak in 2019, and the lone addition in 2020 was Oklahoma running back Trey Sermon, who led Ohio State in rushing that season. In 2021, the Buckeyes added North Carolina kicker Noah Ruggles and USC linebacker Palaie Gaoteote IV.

Ohio State’s portal additions in 2022 included a starter in Oklahoma State safety Tanner McCalister, as well as depth pieces with Arizona State linebacker-turned-running back Chip Trayanum and USC kicker Parker Lewis, though like Gaoteote, he was not eligible to play until midway through the season and ultimately has yet to make his debut.

In total, Ohio State’s nine transfers amounted to five starters and important depth additions in Hoak and Trayanum, though Gaoteote failed to make an impact with the Buckeyes and the jury remains out on Lewis until he takes the field. But, using the portal sparingly to fill important needs shaped Ohio State’s strategy around transfers, preferring to build depth and competition the old-fashioned way.

“We really haven’t spent a lot of time focusing on the transfer portal,” Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said in May of last year. “I

think if you want to sustain the program for a long period of time, I think recruits and their families, when you recruit them and talk to them about the plan for them to develop in your program, they want to see that happen. And they really don’t want to see a transfer come in and jump somebody in line.”

In the matter of just a year, though, Ohio State has completely flipped the script on the portal. After taking nine players in the first four years, the Buckeyes – in just the four months since this past season concluded – have added eight new players: Syracuse safety Ja’Had Carter, Louisiana-Monroe offensive lineman Victor Cutler, Arizona State long snapper John Ferlmann, Oregon State quarterback Tristan Gebbia, Ole Miss cornerback Davison Igbinosun and defensive tackle Tywone Malone, San Diego State offensive tackle Josh Simmons and Notre Dame cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr.

Even as Ohio State’s usage of the portal has ramped up this offseason, Day maintains that the Buckeyes – as they’ve done since the portal opened – are being mindful in their increased focus on the portal.

“We’ve been very careful to add pieces here,” Day said this spring. “But we know it’s a necessary thing, and so we have to sit down at the end of spring and identify what positions we feel good about. Where do we have depth that we feel strong about, because we know we’re going to lose guys along the way and guys are going to have to step up.

“If it’s somebody that we feel like is at a starter level and we’re OK there, that’s great. If we feel like there is someone there that isn’t at starter level, then maybe you need to add a piece. If we feel like it’s a depth issue, then we’ll add somebody.”

Ferlmann, Igbinosun and Simmons fall in the camp of potential starters for Ohio State. Exiting last season, Ohio State did not have a long snapper with Bradley Robinson exhausting his eligibility and Mason Arnold transferring to Michigan State, so Ferlmann’s addition was a logical one. Taking on Igbinosun also made sense considering the departure of cornerback Cameron Brown in the secondary, with no returning cornerbacks on Ohio State’s roster outside of Denzel Burke displaying the level of play last season that made it an easy decision to slot them in as a starter.

It’s a similar situation for Simmons, who was brought in after the Buckeyes left the spring without a clear answer at right tackle, with neither Zen Michalski nor Tegra Tshabola claiming the job in recent months. Carter could also make a push for a starting job in fall camp after missing part of the spring with an injury, though his path to the field is not as clear with several safeties – including Cameron Martinez, Josh Proctor, Lathan Ransom, Kye Stokes and Sonny Styles – all in the hunt for a starting job.

Cutler, Gebbia and Malone were clear depth additions for Ohio State, while Styles is unlikely to factor in during his first season in Columbus as he continues his transition from wide receiver to the secondary. Every transfer fills a need for Ohio State, whether it’s as a starter or in the two-deep. But the focus for the Buckeyes has remained on making sure that these new transfers fit not only

Buckeyes Through The Transfer Portal

Year	Player	Position	Previous School
2019	Justin Fields	QB	Georgia
	Jonah Jackson	OL	Rutgers
	Gunnar Hoak	QB	Kentucky
2020	Trey Sermon	RB	Oklahoma
2021	Noah Ruggles	K	North Carolina
	Palaie Gaoteote IV	LB	USC
	Parker Lewis	K	USC
2022	Tanner McCalister	SAF	Oklahoma State
	Chip Trayanum	RB	Arizona State
	Ja’Had Carter	SAF	Syracuse
2023	Victor Cutler	OL	Louisiana Monroe
	John Ferlmann	LS	Arizona State
	Tristan Gebbia	QB	Oregon State
	Davison Igbinosun	CB	Ole Miss
	Tywone Malone	DT	Ole Miss
	Josh Simmons	OL	San Diego State
	Lorenzo Styles Jr.	CB	Notre Dame

on the field, but match with the culture that the team is building.

“There’s a lot of vetting going on,” said Mark Pantoni, Ohio State’s general manager for player personnel. “We want to make sure, most importantly, that they’re a great fit because we feel like we have a great culture and great players here. We want to make sure it’s all going to mesh well. We don’t want to bring someone in that’s going to cause a disruption.”

As mentioned, Day doesn’t want to recruit players just to see them get passed up by incoming transfers. But the reality across college football has turned into the portal becoming a necessity to stay ahead with the number of talented players who are routinely stepping away from their current schools.

Now a standard at most programs, Ohio State has a full-time staffer – Billy Homer – whose main focus is the transfer portal and scouting potential collegiate talent. He has previously served as an assistant director of player personnel at Florida and was a personnel assistant with the San Francisco 49ers.

“That’s his full-time job,” Pantoni said. “He’s in charge of the portal. December and January (were) very hectic for him. He’s done a great job for us to be ahead of the curve and doing a great job with his evaluations to find guys who might be a great fit.”

While only existing for a few years, the portal – in many ways – has gained a similar importance to the recruiting of high school players. While not quite as many as the 20 incoming freshmen on scholarship, the Buckeyes still have eight incoming transfers, which is a significant part of Ohio State’s roster considering that several may secure starting jobs.

With fewer transfers than recruits but higher stakes associated with bringing in transfers – related to both their impact on and off the field – Day said that recruiting potential transfers is just as challenging as those coming out of high school.

“Even when you bring somebody in, you don’t really know,” Day said. “You think you know. It’s like in recruiting – if we knew all the time then we wouldn’t be worried about this. You try to do the best you can to evaluate it.

“We put so much, probably more than anybody else in the country, into the guys

who have been in the program for a few years, and that matters. They understand the culture.”

That culture is the crux of why Ohio State has largely slow-played the portal, at least until this offseason. With several pressing needs on the offensive line and in the secondary, the additions have helped to not only identify some potential starters but to build on depth, and at the end of the day, create more competition, which was a focus for Ohio State throughout the spring.

“We do want competition,” Pantoni said. “We’ll never (not) take a guy because we’re scared that we may lose anybody here. But we do want to make sure it’s going to be an upgrade. We don’t want to just bring guys in to bring guys in, and the worst thing you can do is bring in a guy and they expect to start and that doesn’t happen because that can ruin a locker room as well.”

Significant roster turnover via the transfer portal has worked in some cases, such as Michigan State’s 11-2 outing in 2021 or USC’s 11-3 record in head coach Lincoln Riley’s first season last year. But the Spartans fell back down last season with a 5-7 record, and it remains to be seen how a program like Colorado will perform after turning over essentially the entire roster under first-year coach Deion Sanders.

While Ohio State will never be at a point where it is taking 20 or 30 transfers like some other programs have, Day has said that the Buckeyes – as evidenced by this offseason – will continue to adjust their strategy.

“To say we’re just going to go recruit 15 transfer guys and bring them in just to say we’re bringing in 15 transfer guys? No, we’re not going to do that,” Day said in December. “But every year, maybe you take one, maybe you take five, maybe you take 10. I don’t know. We’ll have to continually figure that out on a year-to-year basis.”

Ohio State has mostly found success with a minimal number of transfer additions, at least relative to some other programs, but as the Buckeyes’ usage of the portal begins potentially increasing, the program still expects to find fits both on and off the field.

“The guys we’ve hit on in the past have been home runs,” Pantoni said, “and hopefully we continue to hit on those.”

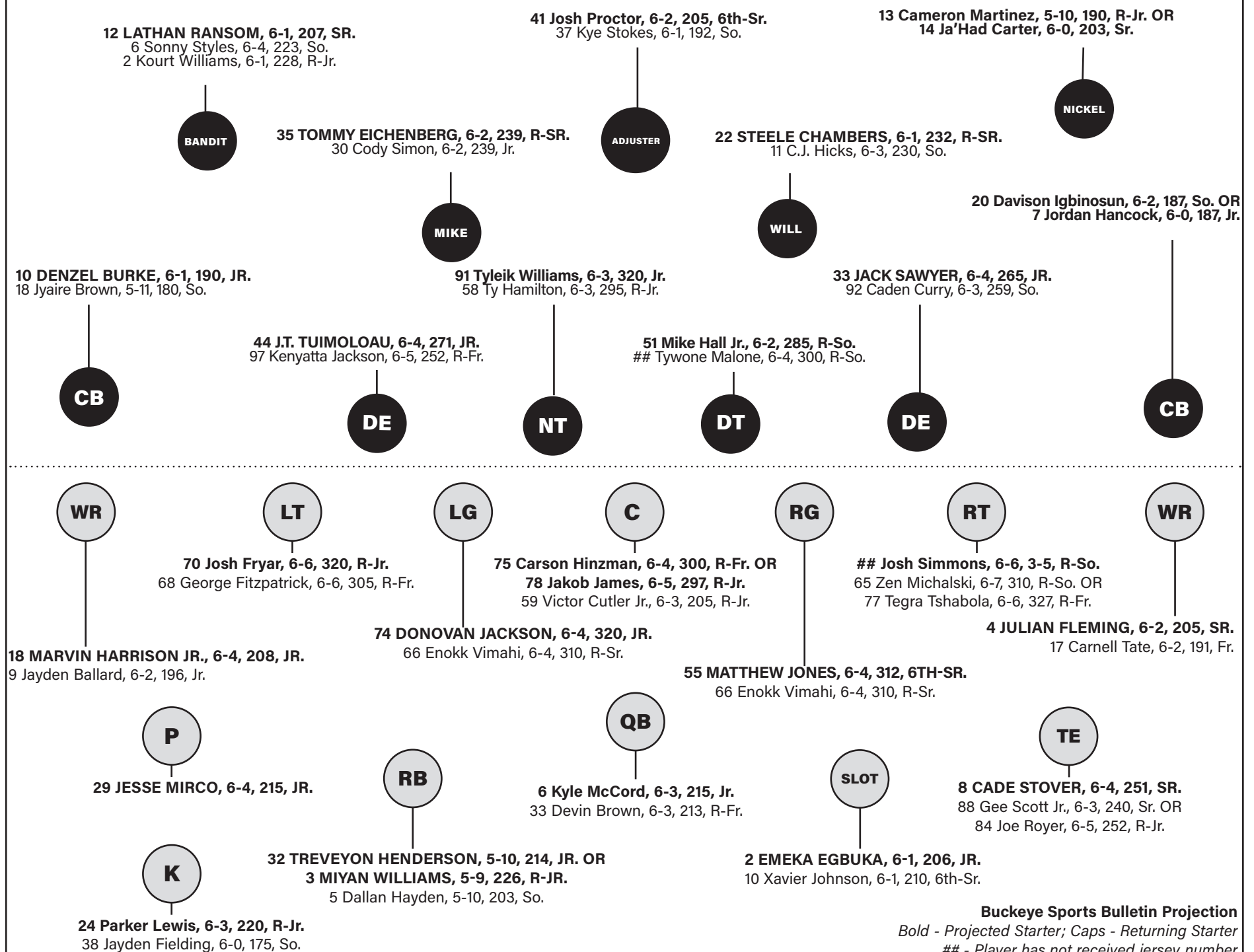
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OHIO STATE PROJECTED 2023 DEPTH CHART



Breaking Down The Ohio State Depth Chart

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, there have been plenty of developments with Ohio State's roster that throw into question what the Buckeyes' depth chart might look like once the team reconvenes for fall camp and as the season approaches, and BSB is offering insight on who might take the field when the Buckeyes kick off at Indiana on Sept. 2 and who will be on the bench as capable backups behind the starters.

Beginning with the biggest additions in recent weeks, Ohio State added San Diego State offensive tackle Josh Simmons, Ole Miss defensive tackle Tywone Malone and Notre Dame cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. Simmons is expected to immediately factor into the starting lineup for Ohio State, whether that be at left or right guard, but the inability of the team to find a consistent starter at right tackle between Zen Michalski and Tegra Tshabola makes it likely that Simmons will line up on the right side.

"He's got a great frame," offensive line coach Justin Frye said. "He's got good length. He's got twitch. He's got burst. He's got a lot of tools that you look for. I offered him out of high school at my last place (UCLA) because I felt

like he had a chance to be a really good player. So it's not something like a guy just popped on the scene. He's been a player."

As for Malone and Styles, those are both depth additions, but Malone figures to factor into the two-deep at defensive tackle with only Mike Hall Jr., Tyleik Williams and Ty Hamilton truly established in defensive line coach Larry Johnson's rotation. Styles will take longer to make his debut for the Buckeyes, as the former wideout began training at cornerback only this spring with the Fighting Irish, but cornerbacks coach Tim Walton is excited to bring Styles in.

"We've just got to see how it goes, but so far I've been impressed with him," Walton said on May 30. "He's a mature guy that works hard and has a good brain on his shoulders. Good size, good speed. Obviously has the genes and man, he loves to play football!"

Updates have been few and far between for other position battles, but quarterbacks Kyle McCord and Devin Brown are continuing to battle throughout the summer, and transfer safety Ja'Had Carter is back from an injury suffered in the spring. He is expected to compete with

Cameron Martinez at nickel, but we have him behind Martinez entering the summer.

Lathan Ransom is expected to maintain his starting role at boundary safety, and while Josh Proctor took the majority of first-team snaps at free safety in the spring, sophomore Sonny Styles has continued to receive praise from the coaching staff. Recent word from defensive coordinator Jim Knowles about Styles' development indicates that he will compete with Proctor to be one of Ohio State's starting safeties.

"I learned that Sonny can handle a lot," Knowles said on May 30. "He's more adept at playing in a high safety position than you would think for a bigger guy."

At cornerback, Jordan Hancock took the majority of first-team reps throughout the spring, but the expectation from us is still that transfer Davison Igbinosun – who was a standout in his freshman season at Ole Miss – will ultimately line up alongside Denzel Burke as a starter in the secondary.

— Braden Moles

Ohio State Has Six Selected In 2023 NFL Draft

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For the second consecutive year, Ohio State saw a down performance with just six players taken in the 2023 NFL draft, with an identical split to last year's draft with five offensive players picked and just one selection on the defensive side of the ball.

While it continued a relatively poor stretch for Ohio State in the draft, tied for the fewest Buckeyes taken in a draft since only five were selected in 2015, the Buckeyes were able to continue streaks of having at least five players drafted (dating back to 2014) and having at least one player drafted (dating back to 1998).

Despite the noise about S2 scores and a potential fall in the draft, quarterback C.J. Stroud ended up as the second overall pick off the board, going to the Houston Texans after the Carolina Panthers selected Alabama quarterback Bryce Young with the first pick.

"I know that it's meant to be," Stroud said after being drafted. "And I know that, with this franchise, it's going to be something that I'm really going to take very, very seriously and I'm going to work my tail off to get some wins."

The Texans then traded back up to No. 3, taking Alabama defensive end Will Anderson to pair a defensive pick with Stroud, and the top five was rounded out with Florida quarterback Anthony Richardson going No. 4 to the Indianapolis Colts and the Seattle Seahawks selecting Illinois cornerback Devon Witherspoon at No. 5.

It didn't take long for another Buckeye to come off the board, when the Arizona Cardinals – who had traded out of the No. 3 spot – moved back up to No. 6 and took offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr., who became the first offensive lineman off the board. Arizona was the same landing spot for Johnson's father, a safety out of Miami (Ohio), in the 1999 NFL draft.

Wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba was next off the board for Ohio State, taken with the No. 20 overall pick by the Seattle Seahawks as the first receiver selected. He became the third first-round receiver from Ohio State in the last two drafts, joining Garrett Wilson (No. 10, New York Jets) and Chris Olave (No. 11, New Orleans Saints) from last year's draft.

"Their success gives me so much confidence," Smith-Njigba said. "Those guys are great players, and seeing what they do is awesome and I have a ton of respect for them. Them being in my ear giving me advice just gives me all the confidence in the world to compete and know that I belong in the league and I can dominate."

It was a wait for Ohio State's next selection, skipping the second round entirely, but defensive end Zach Harrison finally broke the drought after being taken by the Atlanta Falcons with the No. 75 pick in the third round. He was the first and only defensive selection for the Buckeyes, though he was the highest-drafted defensive player for Ohio State since linebacker Pete Werner was taken with the No. 60 overall pick by the Saints in 2021.

Offensive tackle Dawand Jones, once viewed as a fringe first-round selection, fell all the way to the fourth round before being selected by the Cleveland Browns with the No. 111 overall pick. Center Luke Wypler suffered a similar fall, going from a projected third-round pick to the sixth round, where he was picked up by the Browns with the No. 190 overall selection.

Following the draft's conclusion, safeties Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister signed as undrafted free agents with the Browns, while cornerback Cameron Brown did so with the Los Angeles Chargers and defensive tackle Jerron Cage signed with the Saints. Fullback/tight end Mitch Rossi and defensive tackle Taron Vincent received minicamp invites with the New York Giants and Buffalo Bills, respectively, with Vincent parlaying that into an undrafted free agent contract with the Los Angeles Rams.



FILE PHOTO

TOP MARKS — Former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud became the highest-drafted quarterback in program history at the 2023 NFL draft, taken second overall by the Houston Texans.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has compiled draft boxes for 11 former Buckeyes who were either drafted or signed as undrafted free agents, including their pre-draft mea-

surables, the team that selected them (and that team's 2022 record), where they were selected, expert's takes and where they project on their team's depth chart.



C.J. STROUD

Quarterback
6-3 • 213

Recruit Rank: Overall 42; QB 2
Pro Day 40: Did not run



DRAFTED: Round: 1 Pick: 2

2022 RECORD: 3-13-1

EXPERT'S TAKE: "The Texans ranked last in yards per play and 31st in total offense last season. Houston needed a quarterback, and after significant posturing and speculation, the Texans did the smartest thing possible: They drafted a quarterback and it was the right one."

"Much was made about C.J. Stroud's lack of running ability, but that's somewhat overrated because he could do far more damage through the air. Stroud posted (among) national highs in touchdowns (41) and yards per attempt (9.5) while completing 66.3 percent of his throws. At Ohio State, Stroud (6-3, 214) was surrounded by some of the best receivers in college football history, and he let them make plays."

"Stroud has great touch, and the Texans now can build around him. Though the Houston brass might have preferred a defender for defensive-minded head coach DeMeco Ryans, drafting Stroud is a step in the right direction." – Scott Dochterman, The Athletic

DEPTH CHART: C.J. Stroud, Davis Mills



PARIS JOHNSON JR.

Offensive Tackle
6-6 • 311

Recruit Rank: Overall 9; OT 1
Pro Day 40: Did not run



DRAFTED: Round: 1 Pick: 6

2022 RECORD: 4-13

EXPERT'S TAKE: "The offensive line needed some youth, with Kelvin Beachum turning 34 years old and D.J. Humphries playing only eight games last season. In Johnson, Arizona gets an easy-moving pass protector with really good striking power at the point of contact. And as a run-blocker, his quickness shows up in zone-blocking schemes."

"I really love his awareness and think he's going to be a high-level starter for a long time. Toss in versatility – Johnson started 13 games at tackle and 13 games at guard – and you have a potential franchise cornerstone. With Kyler Murray coming off a torn ACL, that's huge." – Todd McShay, ESPN

DEPTH CHART: D.J. Humphries, Kelvin Beachum, Paris Johnson Jr.

**JAXON SMITH-NJIGBA****Wide Receiver**
6-0 • 197Recruit Rank: Overall 29; WR 5
Pro Day 40: 4.48 seconds**DRAFTED:** Round: 1 Pick: 20**2022 RECORD:** 9-8**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Seattle landed the top receiver in the class way back at No. 20. It needed a reliable third option alongside DK Metcalf and Tyler Lockett, and there was no better available in this class. JSN was limited to three games in 2022 because of a nagging hamstring injury, but he went for 1,606 receiving yards in 2021. Go back and watch that tape to see what he can do."

"And here's the thing: Smith-Njigba posted those numbers with first-round talents Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave lined up next to him. Now he goes to Seattle where he can operate again out of the slot and stand out in a similar way, with Metcalf and Lockett taking some pressure off him."

"What makes Smith-Njigba so special? For one, I love his route-running detail – the way he sells and tempos the route and how well he accelerates out of his cuts. You can just tell by watching the tape that he has a feel for the game and uses those instincts to beat defensive backs. But he also has terrific hands, body control and after-the-catch ability. This is going to be a dangerous offense if Geno Smith can repeat what he did last season." – Todd McShay, ESPN

DEPTH CHART: DK Metcalf, Tyler Lockett, **Jaxon Smith-Njigba****ZACH HARRISON****Defensive End**
6-5 • 269Recruit Rank: Overall 12; DE 2
Pro Day 40: Did not run (hamstring injury)**DRAFTED:** Round: 3 Pick: 75**2022 RECORD:** 7-10**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He plays hard, he plays tough. I really like how physical he plays. He has great length, uses his hands really well, keeps blockers off him. The motor is what stood out the most, running to the football, the toughness, getting off blocks, fighting to get to the ball. That excites you when you watch him." – Ryan Nielsen, Atlanta Falcons DC

"Immediately, the size sticks out, the length. The second thing is the play demeanor and the effort he plays with. We're talking about a great person, we're talking about somebody that loves football, is passionate for it. He is a hard worker."

"He really fits the ethos of what we're trying to build from a football character standpoint, a personal character standpoint, getting into the community. He'll fit right into that room simply because he fits in with the guys we have along the lines of loving it, going to work every day, and the consistency of the person and the personality of what you're getting every day is something that excites you." – Ryan Doyal, Atlanta Falcons area scout

DEPTH CHART: Calais Campbell, Grady Jarrett, Timmy Horne, Ta'Quon Graham, **Zach Harrison****DAWAND JONES****Offensive Tackle**
6-8 • 374Recruit Rank: Overall 1043; OT 86
NFL Combine 40: 5.35 seconds**DRAFTED:** Round: 4 Pick: 111**2022 RECORD:** 7-10**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "We've seen him for a couple of years. He's had a very good career at Ohio State. Massive human being. I think you guys will really enjoy him when you get to stand next to him and talk with him and see what he's all about. He's a player that we're very excited about. It's a premium position, so we're excited to get him in the building."

"For a guy his size, he's so nimble and agile. If you guys watch his high school basketball highlights you'll see how he moves. There's a lot of good highlights of him out there pulling, doing things that we ask our guys to do. For a guy that size, the athleticism and the quickness really stands out on tape. We think he can do a lot of things well that we do in our system, and again, I'm really looking forward to seeing him develop as a player." – Dan Saganey, Cleveland Browns director of player personnel

DEPTH CHART: Jack Conklin, Jedrick Wills Jr., James Hudson, **Dawand Jones****LUKE WYPLER****Center**
6-2 • 302Recruit Rank: Overall 109; OC 2
• NFL Combine 40: 5.14 seconds**DRAFTED:** Round: 6 Pick: 190**2022 RECORD:** 7-10**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Wypler (was) the first interior offensive lineman drafted by the Browns this year and stays in-state after starting for Ohio State the past two seasons. Intelligence is typically the first qualifier associated with the soon-to-be 22-year-old, but his shorter arms and smaller stature essentially guarantee he'll be either a guard or, more likely, a center at the NFL level." – RotoWire Staff

"We thought Luke was very productive for a very good Ohio State offensive line. We think he has quickness and movement ability. I think what drew us to him, we thought he was a really good pass protector, and particularly when he was isolated in one-on-one situations. That's what really appealed to us in that regard."

"(Then) his visit with us – he's incredibly smart, incredibly driven, so we were excited to take him off the board in the sixth round." – Andrew Berry, Cleveland Browns GM

DEPTH CHART: Ethan Pocic, Nick Harris, **Luke Wypler****CAMERON BROWN****Cornerback**
6-0 • 197Recruit Rank: Overall 323
Pro Day 40: 4.53 seconds**DRAFTED:** Undrafted Free Agent**2022 RECORD:** 10-7**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Brown's entrance into the professional ranks comes on the heels of a long and injury-riddled career. Brown played in five different seasons but only appeared in one game in two of them while also never reaching 10 games played in any season at OSU. He did stay relatively healthy in his final two seasons and appeared in most of the Buckeyes' games in 2021 and 2022, where he emerged as a veteran leader of the unit."

"As for his stats, they definitely don't jump off the page: just 55 career tackles, 12 pass deflections and one interception. But he really did develop into a dependable defensive back by the end of his collegiate career, which was enough to talk pro teams into giving him a shot at the next level."

"Again, staying healthy will be key for him. But if he can, his past play shows a dependable defensive back who can hold his own in coverage and excel in run stoppage. There's a lot of optimism Brown can stick somewhere on the field as a defensive back in the NFL." – Alex Weber, On3

DEPTH CHART: Asante Samuel Jr., Michael Davis, Ja'Sir Taylor, J.C. Jackson, Deane Leonard, Kemon Hall, Michael Jacquet, **Cameron Brown****JERRON CAGE****Defensive Tackle**
6-2 • 311Recruit Rank: Overall 235; DT 14.
Pro Day 40: 5.31**DRAFTED:** Undrafted Free Agent**2022 RECORD:** 7-10**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Interior defender with average size, good length and below-average tape. The Ohio State scheme didn't ask Cage to make many plays, but he might not have had the play strength or talent to do so if needed. He has decent feet and plays with effort through the snap, but it appears he won't be able to control blockers or threaten the pocket often enough to make it as a pro." – Lance Zierlein, NFL.com

"Cage possesses the measurables and playing style to be a defensive tackle in a four-man line at face value, but he's been minimally productive and never impacted the game at Ohio State. Cage possesses an upside, but he must quickly kick it into gear to have a career in the NFL." – Tony Pauline, Pro Football Network

DEPTH CHART: Nathan Shepherd, Bryan Bresee, Khalel Saunders, Malcolm Roach, Prince Emili, **Jerron Cage**

NFL DRAFT WRAP-UP



RONNIE HICKMAN

Safety
6-0 • 209

Recruit Rank: Overall 115; SAF
10 • Pro Day 40: Did not run



DRAFTED: Undrafted Free Agent

2022 RECORD: 7-10

EXPERT'S TAKE: "In the passing game, Hickman shows above-average speed that translates into deep-coverage ability and range. In coverage, he shows fluid movements and a quick backpedal but can struggle to change direction. Concerns include his body positioning in coverage, ability to play man-to-man and inability to consistently make a play on the ball. Hickman does not show explosive change-of-direction, leading to losing positioning to make turnover-worthy plays. He often takes bad angles in man-to-man coverage that his speed cannot make up for."

"Hickman is a quality backup at the free safety position in the NFL. He brings above-average overall speed, movements and range but lacks the agility or quickness in short-area scenarios to be a starting NFL safety. Hickman is best fit in zone schemes and lacks the ability to produce in man situations or cover tight ends." – Bleacher Report Scouting Department

DEPTH CHART: Juan Thornhill, Grant Delpit, D'Anthony Bell, Bubba Bolden, **Ronnie Hickman**, Tanner McCalister



TANNER MCCALISTER

Safety
5-10 • 191

Recruit Rank: Overall 618
Pro Day 40: 4.44



DRAFTED: Undrafted Free Agent

2022 RECORD: 7-10

EXPERT'S TAKE: "McCalister spent one season in Columbus as a transfer from Oklahoma State, jumping at the chance to spend one more season with Buckeyes defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, who previously coached at Oklahoma State. He immediately claimed the nickel safety role in Knowles' safety-driven defense and played practically every meaningful snap the position was on the field."

"His 510 snaps turned into 24 tackles, one pass breakup and a team-high three interceptions, two of which came in a 54-10 win over Iowa. He was among the Buckeyes who didn't receive an invite to the NFL combine. But he used Ohio State's pro day to put up impressive testing numbers."

"McCalister's role on an NFL team should be similar to what he was in college as a nickel safety or slot cornerback." – Stephen Means, Cleveland.com

DEPTH CHART: Juan Thornhill, Grant Delpit, D'Anthony Bell, Bubba Bolden, Ronnie Hickman, **Tanner McCalister**



TARON VINCENT

Defensive Tackle
6-1 • 304

Recruit Rank: Overall 34; DT 2
Pro Day 40: 5.09 seconds



DRAFTED: Undrafted Free Agent

2022 RECORD: 5-12

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Vincent is a player who has an incredible football heritage but has not quite mastered his positional role in the NFL just yet. That's perfectly OK. A year ago, the Rams claimed defensive lineman Larrell Murchison, who promptly arrived and put up two quarterback sacks so quickly that he appeared to be a veteran in this Rams defensive front."

"While I would not project Vincent to make an immediate contribution, I do believe that he may very likely end up on the Rams' 16-player practice squad. He has a tremendous work ethic, has the ability to gobble up blockers to free up his teammates to make plays, and is very twitchy on the defensive line." – Bret Stuter, FanSided

DEPTH CHART: Aaron Donald, Bobby Brown III, Kobie Turner, Desjuan Johnson, Larrell Murchison, **Taron Vincent**

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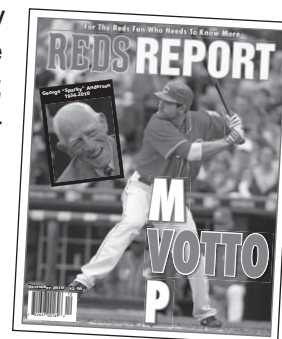


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Johnson Finds His Motivation Off The Field

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On April 18, 1999, the Arizona Cardinals selected Paris Johnson, a safety out of Miami (Ohio), with the No. 155 selection in the fifth round of the NFL draft.

Johnson's professional pursuits didn't amount to much, with the Chicago native retiring from the NFL without taking a single snap for the Cardinals or any other of the three teams for which he appeared on the practice squad. However, Johnson's brief stint with Arizona set a standard for his son, also named Paris, to follow.

The younger Johnson outgrew his father both in size and stature, emerging as one of the nation's top offensive tackles in the 2020 recruiting class before becoming a consensus All-American at Ohio State. During his three seasons with the Buckeyes, Johnson proved he was one of the best players in college football, and NFL scouts quickly recognized his ability.

Johnson's football pursuits came full circle on April 27, when he was selected with the No. 6 overall pick in the NFL draft by his father's team, the Cardinals, as the first offensive lineman off the board. Johnson's relationship with his father has waned over the course of his life, but he recognized the track he was set on from a young age.

"I don't have a connection with him at all," Johnson said in an appearance on The Shop. "He grew up in the west side of Chicago. There was gang-banging and stuff like that. He went to JUCO, then he went to Miami University and he still made it to the league as a fifth-round pick. Against all those odds, he still made it. So to me, I used it as motivation from afar."

That motivation to grow beyond his father's accomplishments fueled Johnson from a young age and lit the fire that helped him become a top-10 selection in the draft.

"Growing up, hearing stories about my dad and what it was like when he grew up, I'm thinking, 'He went fifth round, I'm going first round.' That was my mindset as a kid," Johnson said. "That probably kind of skewed the perspective of how hard it was. So for me, I always figured if I do the stuff he didn't do, and I do stuff that's right, I'd be able to make it work."

Overshadowing his father wasn't the only motivation that drove Johnson through his dominant high school and college careers. A drive to take care of his mother, Monica Daniels, set Johnson on the course of becoming an elite football player.

Johnson's emergence began at St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, where through three seasons as a Bomber, he elevated himself to the No. 1 tackle prospect and No. 7 overall player in his class. While with St. Xavier, Johnson committed to Ohio State and then-head coach Urban Meyer prior to his junior season.

Shifting tides in the Ohio State coaching staff at the conclusion of the 2018 season led Johnson to rethink his decision, with Meyer stepping down and then-offensive coordinator Ryan Day taking over as head coach. Although Johnson – who transferred across town to play at Princeton High School his senior season – never formally

decommitted from Ohio State, he kept his options open, visiting with schools such as Georgia and LSU, just to be sure he wanted to remain a Buckeye.

Johnson's second recruitment ended the same as his first. He affirmed his commitment to Ohio State and ultimately signed with the Buckeyes on Dec. 18, 2019, noting that the decision was an important step in his goal of financially supporting his mother.

"I want to give a special thanks to my mother, who as a single mother has provided me with more than I could ask for. She's incredible and I'm blessed to have her," Johnson said during his signing day speech. "Mom, I'm one step closer to transitioning from you taking care of me to me taking care of you."

The excitement surrounding Johnson's commitment was a two-way street, with Day emphasizing his enthusiasm in landing the talented tackle despite the unorthodox process.

"With Paris, we sat down with him and Monica and just said, 'Listen, we want to just kind of start from scratch,'" Day said on National Signing Day. "We literally wiped the slate clean and started from scratch. We just got to know each other and spend time with each other."

"Over time, that relationship and trust grew to where it is right now. We had an emotional conversation earlier this morning, just talking about how we're finally here and we made it. Again, I just thank them for their loyalty."

Johnson was already highly motivated out of high school, but he added even more to his plate before stepping foot on Ohio State's campus. Johnson laid out three long-term goals for his Buckeye career: earn a tree in Buckeye Grove for becoming an All-American, graduate from Ohio State in three years and be selected in the first round of the NFL draft. Johnson also went one further, expressing a desire to win at the highest level.

"Getting a Buckeye tree is probably the biggest thing on my list," Johnson said prior to his freshman season. "First-round draft pick, that's (also big). But as far as college, I want a Buckeye tree and I want at least two national championships."

Johnson received the opportunity to play for a national championship right off the bat, with the Buckeyes coasting into the College Football Playoff National Championship Game during the COVID-shortened 2020 season. Johnson didn't register a single start during the eight-game campaign but still appeared in five contests, including the national championship against Alabama, largely at guard.

His shift to the interior bled into his second season at Ohio State. In an effort to get the best five players on the field, then-offensive line coach Greg Studrawa committed to keeping Johnson out of his natural position, where he started for all 13 games during the 2021 campaign. When it came to Johnson's move inside, Studrawa praised his mentality and desire to see the field as factors for Johnson's swift adjustment to the position.

"There's a little bit of difference sometimes between tackles and guards as far as athleticism and finesse and toughness and

grit," Studrawa said. "And Paris is such a student of the game. He studies the game. He's in my office, sometimes I have to kick him out because I'm sick and tired of seeing him. He's in there every day wanting to know this and wanting to know that, how do I get an edge on this? So his attention to detail and his toughness and the 'I want to play, Coach' is why he's made the transition so smooth so far."

Johnson was brought in to play tackle, but he recognized the value of his stint at guard, emphasizing the opportunity to gain versatility along the offensive front as an experience he can use down the line in his playing career.

"The biggest opportunity that I have starting at guard is that I get to show versatility, and I feel like that adds a lot of value," Johnson said. "And I feel like the biggest thing now, I'm not draft-eligible after this season, so my biggest thing this season and next season is what does the team need so we can get to where we want to be."

"When you play professional football, unless you're a veteran guy, you can't just be, 'I'm just a left tackle. I'm just a right tackle.' If somebody goes down, you're going to need to be able to play tackle and guard, left and right in the league, with the amount of people that travel. So I feel like if anything, this is just preparation to being able to just move around and be flexible, and I feel like the league would appreciate that when it's time."

Despite being out of position, Johnson excelled at guard, helping an Ohio State offense that finished first in the nation in yardage (561.5 yards per game) and scoring (45.7 points per game) in 2021.

Johnson's opportunity to anchor the Ohio State offensive line finally came during his junior season, moving back outside to his natural position at left tackle. Back home on the edge, Johnson emerged as a consensus All-American – earning his spot in Buckeye Grove – while the Ohio State offense remained a dangerous unit, scoring 44.2 points per game, ranking second in the nation.

Johnson's experience at guard help set the standard for the Cincinnati native upon his move to tackle, as he had lessons to build on from the season prior, according to Day.

"The key for Paris was that he was willing to go in at guard and get a full year under his belt," Day said. "A lot of guys see themselves as just a tackle. If he'd seen himself as just a tackle, he'd have zero experience really, maybe a few snaps here or there. But he was more prepared to play this season at tackle because of that experience. I think it goes to show who he is as a person."

While Johnson's on-the-field accomplishments loom large over his career, he was just as impressive away from the gridiron. Before even arriving on Ohio State's campus, Johnson had already created a charitable foundation, the Paris Johnson Jr. Foundation, which aimed to help homeless veterans and disadvantaged student-athletes. Johnson's Foundation was honored with the Armed Forces Merit Award – which is presented annually to an individual or group in college football that makes an im-



FILE PHOTO

LEAVING A LEGACY – Former Ohio State offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. was taken sixth overall in the 2023 NFL draft by the Arizona Cardinals, the same team that selected his father, a safety out of Miami (Ohio), in the 1999 NFL draft.

pact on the military community – on Nov. 11, 2022.

Johnson also was a well-regarded student while at Ohio State, completing his undergraduate degree in journalism in just three years. During his educational pursuits, Johnson wrote for the Ohio State student newspaper The Lantern as a diversity and inclusion reporter.

"Paris Johnson is just a tremendous young man," Day said. "I think that's why we get into coaching. In today's day and age, there are a lot of things that happen, a lot of things that go into it. To see his growth, what he's done on the field and off the field, his impact at Ohio State has been tremendous."

Johnson ultimately went 3 of 3 when it came to the trio of goals he set for himself prior to the beginning of his Ohio State career, capping off his successful run as a Buckeye as a first-round selection in the NFL draft.

With his collegiate pursuits behind him and his professional career ahead, Johnson's motivation remains the same. When his playing career is all said and done, Johnson wants to be able to say he rose above his father's stature.

"My dad was a fifth-round pick here," Johnson said. "I know my family had high expectations, and unfortunately, he didn't meet those expectations. I feel like 24 years later, God's been preparing me the whole time and my whole life to be able to do what a Cardinal is supposed to do at that standard."

"I'm trying to do what he couldn't. That's what I want to bring to the team, do what he couldn't do. I want to make this name great in the hall of Cardinals that came before me."

OSU Draftees Expected To Make Early Impact

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Another NFL draft brought along another crop of Ohio State-produced talent.

For the eighth consecutive season, the Buckeyes had at least one player drafted in the first round. In the 2023 NFL draft, three who spent their collegiate careers in Columbus were scooped up on the event's first day: quarterback C.J. Stroud, offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Those three names were called as part of six Ohio State selections in total, with several other former starters joining teams as undrafted free agents.

With that in mind, BSB is providing a full rundown of how the Ohio State media and some NFL front-office personnel feel that the former Buckeyes fit with their new teams.

Texans Building Around Stroud

Following months of speculation about exactly when and to which team former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud would be selected, the Houston Texans scooped up the two-time Heisman Trophy finalist with the second overall pick in the first round.

Stroud won't be entering the best of situations, as expected for a team taking a signal caller with such a high selection. It's been since 2019 that the Texans won more than four games in a season, with a combined record of 11-38-1 over the past three years. Head coach Lovie Smith was one-and-done as 38-year-old DeMeco Ryans takes over following two years as defensive coordinator for the San Francisco 49ers.

It's clear that the Texans are pushing to put a team around Stroud in short order. After selecting Stroud with the second pick, they traded back up from the 12th overall pick to the third overall pick, send-

ing the 33rd overall pick and next year's first- and third-round picks to the Arizona Cardinals for the rights to move up and select Alabama edge rusher Will Anderson Jr.

That's a lot of draft capital invested in one player, but in a league so focused on getting after the quarterback, having an edge defender who recorded 17½ sacks in a single season in the SEC is probably a good idea to anchor a defense. Still, such win-now moves put added pressure on Stroud to work out early.

"It's always tough to be the guy that's going to be the savior of a program," said Buckeye Huddle reporter Kevin Noon. "I think Stroud is going to have even more pressure on him because of what the Texans did in the draft and trading a king's ransom to go out and get the No. 3 pick as well. That means that future drafts may not be as impactful, in theory."

The Texans also picked up some offensive help for Stroud on day two, taking Penn State center Juice Scruggs in the second round and moving up a second time to grab Houston wide receiver Nathaniel "Tank" Dell in the third round.

The Texans don't have a great track record under center, with only three quarterbacks having surpassed 10,000 passing yards in the franchise's 21-year history. The team went through a carousel at the position after the departure of two-time pro bowler Matt Schaub in 2013, eventually picking up Deshaun Watson in 2017, though contract disputes and legal troubles due to allegations of sexual misconduct have since led to Watson joining the Cleveland Browns.

"The Texans have not had the best history of quarterbacks," said Eleven Warriors Ohio State football writer Dan Hope. "I think there was probably some school of thought that maybe it would be better for C.J. if the Texans didn't draft C.J. But I think ultimately it's going to be on him



FILE PHOTO

TRENCH BROTHERS — Three Ohio State offensive linemen heard their names called in the 2023 NFL draft, including Luke Wypler (left), Paris Johnson Jr. (right) and Dawand Jones (not pictured), with Jones and Wypler going to Cleveland and Johnson headed to Arizona.

to make it work, and I think he's capable. If you look at the quarterbacks the Texans have had, I think he's the most talented quarterback they've ever had aside from Deshaun Watson."

Beyond stepping into a traditionally challenging quarterback situation, another struggle that awaits Stroud is his receiving corps in Houston. The Texans' best weapon in the passing game last season was six-time 1,000-yard receiver Brandin Cooks, who paced the team with 57 receptions for 699 yards, but he was dealt to the Dallas Cowboys this offseason.

Houston has since picked up veteran receiver Robert Woods, who had three consecutive seasons with the Tennessee Titans with at least 85 receptions and 900 yards from 2018 through 2020, but he tore his ACL in 2021 and had a down year in 2022 with just 527 yards. Beyond Woods, the Texans will have no receivers or tight ends on their roster who have so much as eclipsed the 600-yard plateau in an NFL season.

"They're pretty weak, by NFL standards, at receiver," Hope said. "That's something that's going to be an adjustment for him when you go from throwing to Chris Olave, to Garrett Wilson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Marvin Harrison Jr. — his NFL receivers might legitimately be worse than what he had at Ohio State."

Johnson, Smith-Njigba Have Clear Roles

Johnson came off the board next for Ohio State, going sixth overall to the Ar-

izona Cardinals. A lot of emotion came with that pick for Johnson, as it is where his dad played and where he has always wanted to play (more on page 15).

Looking specifically at his fit with the Cardinals, there's a reason that Arizona quarterback Kyler Murray called for his selection on Twitter and that the team traded back up from the No. 12 pick to take Johnson.

"You think about what the NFL wants in an offensive tackle, the prototype at that position — I think Paris fits it physically," Hope said, "both in terms of his size and in terms of his athleticism."

Johnson was the first offensive lineman taken in the draft, a development that didn't shock experts given his physical tools and versatility.

"It didn't surprise me, even though I heard other names that could go ahead of him, including Peter Skoronski of Northwestern," Noon said. "But Paris is your prototypical NFL tackle. He certainly had a lot of success playing in the collegiate game, and additionally his year of playing guard (at Ohio State) gives him the flexibility to slide inside if that's ever called upon him. I think Arizona is a great landing spot for him in that he's somebody you pencil into your starting five and revisit that again, maybe, in 10 years."

A selection by the Seattle Seahawks with the 20th overall pick ended what has been a tumultuous year-long journey to realize the first-round hype Smith-Njigba generated in his sophomore season.

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gle-game receiving performances in college football history against Utah in the Rose Bowl, a contest in which Smith-Njigba hauled in 15 passes on 16 targets for 347 yards and three touchdowns, the Texas native entered last season with potential Heisman Trophy hype. An injured hamstring on the first series of the season against Notre Dame on Sept. 3 derailed his efforts, though.

Smith-Njigba tried twice to return to the field, playing less than a half of football against Toledo on Sept. 17 and Iowa on Oct. 22, but was eventually shelved for the entire year with just five receptions for 43 yards. While getting taken 20th in the draft is an achievement to be lauded, he might have come off the board even higher with another year of production.

"I would have to say it probably did (affect his draft stock)," Hope said. "You just think of the fact that Garrett Wilson went 10th (in the 2022 NFL draft), Chris Olave went 11th, Jaxon Smith-Njigba was more productive than them the year before and then he ends up going 20th."

The Seahawks' brass echoed Hope's sentiments, viewing Smith-Njigba's slight slip down the board as a fortuitous bounce for their team. He was still the first wide-out taken, though, starting a string of four consecutive receivers from pick Nos. 20-23.

"We were blessed that he was there at that pick," Seahawks general manager John Schneider told "The Rich Eisen Show" on May 11. "He's a plug-and-play guy. He's only there (at 20) because of the hamstring issue he had throughout the season last year."

"Great hands, obviously we know about him as a competitor. You can watch that Rose Bowl game, it's time after time. It's one of the more impressive things I've ever seen."

Hope said that being primarily viewed as a slot receiver at the next level also

could have caused a slide for Smith-Njigba. His 4.48-second 40-yard dash is good but not elite, while his agility times in the three-cone drill and 20-yard shuttle were among the best in this year's prospect pool. One doesn't break the single-season receiving record at Ohio State without great ball skills, but his overall size could limit his ability to win 50/50 balls on the outside.

But those few drawbacks won't matter much to the Seahawks, who are drafting Smith-Njigba specifically to play the slot. He'll round out a receiving trio that features a pair of pro bowlers – D.K. Metcalf and Tyler Lockett – to his flanks.

"He's a really good fit because of the fact that he can play the slot," Noon said. "There's not going to be this pressure to play him outside too. He certainly has the ability to play outside, but his more natural position is inside."

Upside In Day-Two And -Three Picks

Rounds two through seven of the draft featured as many Ohio State players combined – three – as round one, but that doesn't mean there weren't some names taken who could be of help to their teams going forward.

With just 13 sacks in 46 games in Columbus, defensive end Zach Harrison never quite put up the elite pass-rush production expected of him when he exited Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange as a five-star prospect. But the 6-6, 272-pound edge-setter still possesses outstanding athleticism at that size, enough that the Atlanta Falcons took him with the 75th overall pick in the third round. Noon feels that Harrison could play well above his draft position.

"Ohio State has had some guys drafted a little lower than expected or maybe gone a little unnoticed on the defensive side of the ball," Noon said. "But when you look at

the Dre'mont Jones, Baron Browning, Pete Werner types, they've certainly had plenty of talent and while they had production at Ohio State, they maybe were not fully appreciated only to get to the NFL and have everything start working out."

Offensive tackle Dawand Jones came off the board next to open the Buckeyes' day-three selections, chosen 111th overall in the fourth round by the Cleveland Browns. Jones had been mocked as high as a late-first round or early-second round pick but saw his stock slip in the spring. After being listed at 6-8, 359 on last year's Ohio State roster, Jones weighed in at 374 pounds at the NFL Scouting Combine, and he declined to participate in testing at either the combine or Ohio State's pro day.

"One of the things that certainly seems like it hurt him were just the questions about his weight," Hope said. "There were definitely some concerns from NFL teams about conditioning. One of the things that he's come out and said is that he had suffered an injury during the process, which is why he didn't do anything at his pro day."

Regardless, Cleveland director of player personnel Dan Saganey called Jones a player the Browns are "very excited about."

"For a guy his size, he's so nimble and agile," Saganey said. "If you watch his high school basketball highlights, you'll probably see how he moves. There's a lot of good highlights of him out there pulling, doing the things that we ask our guys to do."

Another offensive lineman selected by the Browns rounded out Ohio State's draftees, with center Luke Wypler going 190th overall in the sixth round. Wypler stayed in Columbus for just three seasons, a rare interior offensive lineman to head to the NFL as soon as possible.

"I was most surprised with Wypler of all Ohio State's players, even more so than Dawand, just how far he fell (in the draft)," Hope said. "He seemed like somebody going into the draft that was really solidly in that third-, fourth-round range. I'm not sure why he fell as far as he did, to be honest. There didn't seem to be any obvious red flags."



FILE PHOTO

THE BIG PEACH — Former Ohio State defensive end Zach Harrison will take his talents to the next level for the Atlanta Falcons, who selected Harrison with the No. 75 pick in the 2023 NFL draft.

"In terms of it being a mistake (for him to leave early), though, I do have some issues with that narrative. One thing that has always been a pet peeve of mine when people talk about that over the years is this idea that when a player returns to a school, his draft stock is automatically going to improve. It can go either way there, and I know Luke has been asked about it several times and every time he said he felt this was the right decision for him."



FILE PHOTO

SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE — Former Ohio State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, selected at No. 20 in the 2023 NFL draft by the Seattle Seahawks, will look to continue a strong legacy of Buckeye receivers in the NFL.

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Ohio State To Challenge Draft Records In 2024

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

After back-to-back drafts in which Ohio State saw just six prospects taken – five on offense and just one on defense in both cases – the Buckeyes could be in for a historic outing at the NFL draft next year.

Ohio State's record for players taken in a single draft is 14, achieved in 2004 with the likes of cornerback Chris Gamble, defensive end Will Smith, quarterback Craig Krenzel and wide receiver Michael Jenkins, among others. That mark was matched by LSU in 2020 but was surpassed in 2022 by Georgia, which had 15 players selected in last year's draft, and that remains the record since the draft became seven rounds in 1994.

If all goes according to plan for the Buckeyes, both the program and national records could be in jeopardy, with Ohio State expected to send double-digit draftees to the NFL next year, with more potentially in tow depending on how the season goes for several players.

Here is a look at how things might shake out for the Buckeyes in next year's draft, scheduled to take place from April 25-27, 2024, in Detroit.

Rash Of Receivers

The drafting of Jaxon Smith-Njigba at No. 20 overall to the Seattle Seahawks gave Ohio State a third first-round receiver in the



SONNY BROCKWAY

GOING EARLY — Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. is widely expected to be the top receiver off the board in the 2024 NFL draft, and he is projected as high as a top-three selection.

last two drafts, and the Buckeyes are set to add more in next year's draft.

Not only is Marvin Harrison Jr. unanimously considered the best wide receiver in his class, but some consider him the best overall prospect, with a shot to become the first wide receiver to be taken in the top three since the Detroit Lions drafted Cal-

vin Johnson with the second overall pick in 2007.

The junior wideout had 1,263 receiving yards and 14 touchdowns last season, and while he won't have C.J. Stroud throwing to him again, there's little reason to believe that Harrison will miss a beat with either Kyle McCord or Devin Brown leading the way. The same can be said for Emeka Egbuka, another expected first-round receiver who will look to build on a successful sophomore campaign entering his third season with the program.

Harrison and Egbuka will represent Ohio State in the first round, but they're unlikely to be the last wideouts from the school to be selected. Julian Fleming is back for his fourth season, reaching career highs last year in games played (11), receptions (34), receiving yards (533) and touchdowns (six), and another season as a top-three receiver for Ohio State will boost his stock should he stay healthy.

Xavier Johnson is not a name that has appeared on many draft boards as yet, but offensive coordinator Brian Hartline said in March that Johnson is "easily a top-four-round draft pick next year," and a breakout season could accomplish that goal for the former walk-on who is back with the Buckeyes for a sixth and final season.

While unlikely to depart for the draft this soon, sophomore Jayden Ballard will be draft-eligible after this season. Though Ballard has yet to contribute in a meaningful way on the field, he was a standout at Ohio State's pro day in March, so evaluators at the next level will have their eyes on the speedy wideout if he is able to continue momentum from the spring into the upcoming season.

Eligible Offenders

In addition to the wide receivers, Ohio State could send plenty of other offensive talent to the draft next year. The most likely first-round selection is running back Trevon Henderson, who is set to be healthy entering this season after undergoing foot surgery in the offseason.

Henderson's injury hampered him through much of last season, forcing him to miss five games and limiting him to just 571 rushing yards and six touchdowns on 107 carries, with his carries ranking third on the team behind Dallan Hayden (111) and Miyan Williams (128). But if he can return to the heights of his freshman season in which he rushed for 1,248 yards and 15 touchdowns, he could set himself up to become the highest-drafted running back from Ohio State since Ezekiel Elliott went fourth overall to the Dallas Cowboys in 2016.

Speaking of Williams, he elected to return for a fourth season as a Buckeye with the hope to split carries with Henderson, though it remains to be seen how those carries shake out with Hayden and Chip Trayanum in the room, as well as Evan Pryor returning from injury. That being said, Williams might have been drafted this year had he departed, so he will likely hear his name called should he leave after the season.

One wild card in the draft could be McCord. There are several steps that need to be taken before McCord gets to declaring for the draft – first of all, he needs to win the starting job, something that was unable to be wrapped up in spring practice – but if he ultimately wins the job and has similar production to the last few quarterbacks to start at Ohio State, he could become the fourth signal caller from the school taken in the last six drafts.

Another Buckeye on offense expected to be drafted is tight end Cade Stover. The tight end – and former defensive end and linebacker – is returning for a fifth season with Ohio State after posting 36 receptions for 406 yards and five touchdowns, with his receptions checking in as the most for an Ohio State tight end since Rickey Dudley had 37 in 1995.

Trench Warriors

Ohio State has not had a defender selected in the first round since the 2020 NFL draft, when defensive end Chase Young and cornerbacks Jeff Okudah and Damon Arnette all went in the first round, but the

Buckeyes could be in position to break that streak next year.

Defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau was a force for Ohio State's defense last season with 3½ sacks and 10½ tackles for loss to go with a pair of interceptions and a forced fumble. His breakout performance against Penn State – six tackles, three tackles for loss, two sacks, a forced fumble, a fumble recovery and a pair of interceptions, one returned for a touchdown – suggested he might be the next great defensive end to come out of Ohio State.

He was complemented on the defensive line by defensive end Jack Sawyer and defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr., who combined for nine sacks and 14 tackles for loss. Even so, it was a relatively disappointing year for the duo, as Sawyer spent most of the season at the "Jack," but he moved back to defensive end full time this spring in an acknowledgment that the position shift was not working out.

"Jack is getting better every day," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said in March. "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."

Hall, meanwhile, was dominant when he was in the game for Ohio State, but a combination of injuries and personnel decisions limited his ability to make an impact. With Sawyer playing with his hand in the dirt and Hall healthy heading into the season, the

hope for Ohio State is that both can flourish entering their third seasons with the program, and if they stand out enough, the draft could be in their immediate future.

Elsewhere on the defensive line, tackles Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams are entering their fourth and third seasons, respectively. While neither has the production yet to be comfortable entering the draft, breakout seasons as veterans in the defensive line room could put them in position to be drafted should they depart after next season.

Speaking of the trenches, offensive lineman Matthew Jones will be out of eligibility following next season, and a strong season could put him in a position to be drafted. Donovan Jackson could depart from Ohio State given that he will be draft-eligible after next season, but sticking around for 2024 would also make sense for his development track.

Standout Secondary

Ohio State's secondary will be looking for a rebound in next year's draft after cornerback Cameron Brown and safeties Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister all went undrafted in this year's event, but cornerback Denzel Burke could be just what the Buckeyes are looking for to put the BIA back in the draft.

Last season was not what most expected for Burke after a standout freshman campaign. But after a challenging start to the season and dealing with injuries, Burke did begin to bounce back and had a strong finish to the season.



SONNY BROCKWAY

STRONG UNIT — In the 2024 NFL draft, Ohio State linebackers Tommy Eichenberg (pictured) and Steele Chambers could become the first Buckeye linebackers drafted since Pete Werner and Baron Browning in 2021.

ish to the season.

Several mock drafts have Burke listed as a potential first-round selection – which would have been no surprise after his freshman season – but for him to become Ohio State's most recent first-round secondary pick since Okudah and Arnette, he will need to take that momentum from last season and this spring and build on it as the leader of Ohio State's corners.

"He's having an excellent spring so far," cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said in March. "So glad with his progression, glad with his process. We just have to keep it going."

Elsewhere in the secondary, safety Lathan Ransom opted to return for a fourth and likely final season at Ohio State. In hindsight, his decision was a smart one considering the fate of his secondary teammates who entered the draft, and an additional season as a starter will give him a significant chance to boost his stock.

Transfer safety Ja'Had Carter could also be in line to depart after this season, though his situation is muddled given his injury that held him out for a good chunk of the spring. He enters the summer still in Ohio State's two-deep but is not yet a projected starter. If he is able to secure a starting job, though, his three years at Syracuse and a year under his belt with the Buckeyes could make him a one-and-done candidate in Columbus.

Another potential draftee is Josh Proctor, who will exhaust his eligibility after next season and will need a significant boost to

his stock to hear his name called. While he exits the spring as a starter for Ohio State, that was the case last spring, and it took just one play in the opener for Proctor to get pulled for Ransom, and he then rarely saw the field.

Lavish Linebackers

Sticking with the defense, Ohio State could have two linebackers selected in next year's draft should Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg both depart after next season.

Ohio State is welcoming the return of Eichenberg, who elected to stay for a fifth season with the Buckeyes after posting a team-high 120 tackles (12 for loss) last season with 2½ sacks and an interception. He would have been drafted had he departed, but returning for an additional season will further boost his stock as one of the top linebackers in college football this season.

As for Chambers, the running back-turned-linebacker still has work to do to become a linebacker prospect at the next level, which spurred his decision to come back for a fifth season. But another season as a starter in Knowles' defense could put Chambers in position for an early-round selection in next year's draft.

"I feel like I've progressed in just my knowledge of the game, but I think there's a lot more that I need to learn," Chambers said in December. "I feel like I'm pretty premature as far as linebacker savviness."



SONNY BROCKWAY

FIRST-ROUND HOPES — Ohio State defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau is hoping to become the first Buckeye defender taken in the first round of the NFL draft since defensive end Chase Young and cornerbacks Jeff Okudah and Damon Arnette in the 2020 NFL draft.

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Ohio State Set For Full Summer Dance Card

Summer is a time that most can reserve for pool parties and barbecues, but for Ohio State, there will be little time to celebrate as the calendar is expected to be filled with recruits taking their official visits to Columbus.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Braden Moles

The Buckeyes are expected to host upwards of three dozen prospects for official visits over four weekends in June, with a mix of already committed prospects and those Ohio State is still fighting for all expected on campus at one point or another. This list is the latest information – a mix of our information, word from recruits them-

selves and reports from other outlets – available as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

Beginning the weekend of June 2-4, Ohio State welcomed in a pair of commits in Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star tight end Max LeBlanc and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Jordan Lyle (6-0, 180) – more on Lyle later.

As for the uncommitted prospects who stopped by, that list included North Richland Hills, Texas, four-star offensive lineman Daniel Cruz (6-4, 295); Lafayette (La.) Acadiana five-star defensive lineman Dominick McKinley (6-5, 290); Olney (Md.) Good Counsel three-star wide receiver Elijah Moore (6-4, 190); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas three-star linebacker Nicholas Rodriguez (6-1, 190); and Melissa, Texas, four-star defensive lineman Nigel Smith II (6-5, 260).

Another expected visitor that weekend

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
Jordan Lyle	RB	6-0	180	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas
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	★★★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	LB	6-0	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North

was Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Cardinal Gibbons three-star tight end Colton Heinrich (6-4, 232), but he ultimately committed to Georgia on May 22, with the visit to Ohio State never taking place.

The following weekend of June 9-11 is expected to feature a larger group of visitors. Beginning with committed prospects, Ohio State will host offensive linemen Deontae (6-6, 280) and Devontae (6-5, 297) 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); San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star running back James Peoples (5-10, 192); Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star linebacker Garrett Stover (6-0, 195); Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198); and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star athlete Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203).

Uncommitted prospects include Virginia Beach (Va.) Green Run four-star wide receiver Keylen Adams (6-1, 175); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285); Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star defensive end Marquise Lightfoot (6-5, 220); Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star defensive end Darien Mayo (6-7, 247); St. Louis Christian Brothers College four-star wide receiver Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190); Orlando (Fla.) Jones four-star defensive lineman D'antre Robinson (6-4, 300); and Nashville (Tenn.) Lipscomb Academy four-star linebacker Edwin Spillman (6-1, 216).

Baker is the No. 32 overall prospect and top-ranked offensive tackle in the class, and he would be the first top-ranked tackle to commit to Ohio State since Paris Johnson did so in 2020. Baker has an official visit scheduled for Georgia on June 23, and Oregon and USC are also likely to receive visits.

On the other side of the ball, Lightfoot and Mayo are important visits given that Ohio State – as has been the case in the last several recruiting cycles – is off to a slow start on the defensive line.

The weekend of June 16-18 will feature no committed prospects but no shortage of recruits still considering Ohio State, including Waco (Texas) Connally five-star cornerback Kobe Black (6-0, 190); Buford, Ga., five-star safety KJ Bolden (6-1, 185); Santa

Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Zabien Brown; Chattanooga (Tenn.) Brainerd four-star athlete Boo Carter (5-10, 184); Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek four-star defensive end King Joseph Edwards (6-5, 242); Lancaster, Texas, four-star cornerback Corian Gipson (6-0, 170); and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star safety Jordon Johnson-Rubell (5-10, 180).

Also in attendance will be Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 255); West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial four-star offensive tackle Guerby Lambert (6-6, 280); Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star cornerback Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185); Washington (D.C.) Friendship Collegiate Academy five-star defensive end Dylan Stewart (6-5, 235); and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188).

Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview five-star cornerback Charles Lester III (6-1, 171) was originally supposed to visit that weekend, but he canceled the trip before announcing that he will be focusing on Alabama, Florida State and Georgia.

As for the big names in attendance, Bolden is unquestionably the most important target for Ohio State as the No. 8 overall prospect and top-ranked safety in the class. Ohio State has a built-in advantage with Bolden in that he is the cousin of Ohio State safeties coach Perry Eliano, but the Buckeyes still face stiff competition from Alabama, Auburn, Clemson and Georgia, where Bolden has official visits scheduled for the summer.

Woodyard is also of note, considering he is a top-100 safety who has been committed to Georgia since January. Despite his pledge to the Bulldogs, Woodyard has continued to show interest in other schools, including Alabama and USC in addition to the Buckeyes. If Woodyard does make the official visit, it will be his fifth trip to Ohio State and the second since he committed to Georgia.

Ohio State is already off to a solid start on the offensive line with four commitments in the trenches, but a tackle like Lambert would be a significant boost for offensive line coach Justin Frye's unit. Clemson, Michigan and USC are the other key contenders for Lambert, who is the No. 49 overall prospect and No. 3 offensive tackle in the class and will be making his first visit to Columbus.

The lone committed prospect the weekend of June 23-25 will be Lucas (Texas)

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OSU Football 2025 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jontae Gilbert	SAF	6-1	175	★★★★★	Atlanta Douglass

Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225). Uncommitted visitors will include Jefferson, Ga., five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-2, 230); Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star defensive end Jaylen Harvey (6-2, 235); Centerville, Ohio, three-star safety Reggie Powers (6-1, 195); Deerfield Beach, Fla., four-star defensive end Elias Rudolph (6-4, 205); Springfield, Ohio, four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-0, 170); Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310); Irvington, N.J., four-star safety Vaboue Toure (6-1, 185); Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star linebacker Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-3, 230); Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177); and Cleveland Glenville four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215).

Brown and Justin Scott are the highest-rated prospects who will be on campus that weekend, but the most important targets for Ohio State will be the number of in-state prospects making their way to Columbus. That group includes Powers, Aaron Scott, West and Witten, with the Buckeyes hoping to bring all into the fold in 2024.

Aaron Scott and West are both top-100 cornerbacks, and Michigan is widely viewed as the biggest competition for the pair out-

side of Ohio State. Powers would also play in the secondary, and those are all positions of need in the class as the Buckeyes have just two defensive commitments at time of press, with both at linebacker (Pierce and Stover).

This will be one of several trips that all four have already taken to Ohio State, but if there's one weekend to keep an eye on for a potential flurry of commitments, this would be the weekend to do so. For the latest on summer visits and commitments, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com.

Ohio State Adds Four-Star RB Lyle

As for Lyle, he announced his commitment to Ohio State on April 29, becoming the third running back in the class for the Buckeyes.

Lyle is the No. 325 overall prospect and No. 28 running back in 2024, and he joins Peoples and Williams-Dixon, though the latter technically holds an athlete designation and could potentially play in Ohio State's secondary.

Lyle's committed to Ohio State over his other top schools that included Alabama, Florida State, Georgia and Miami (Fla.). He previously visited Ohio State in March and had the official visit June 2.

"Really what led me to Ohio State was

the genuine love and development of the players that I saw," Lyle told On3. "The coaches are extremely great people that want the best out of you, and I would love to be around people like that.

"When I went up there on a visit, the practice had so much energy and emotion. I would definitely want to see myself in that type of environment. Ohio State has always been a dream school of mine since Zeke (Elliott) played. I can't wait to join the Buckeye Nation."

He rushed for 1,015 yards and 12 touchdowns on 91 carries last season for St. Thomas Aquinas – also the alma mater of Ohio State alums Joey and Nick Bosa – and helped lead the squad to a 14-0 record and a state title.

Noland Invited To Elite 11 Finals

Noland, who committed to Ohio State in April, will represent the Buckeyes in the Elite 11 after being named a finalist on May 13.

The Elite 11 is a nationwide quarterback competition that helps to determine the top signal caller in every recruiting cycle. Noland won out in the Atlanta Regional, earning an automatic invite over other quarterbacks in attendance, including Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star Jady Davis (6-1, 202), who is committed to Michigan, though Davis later earned an at-large invitation.

Noland is the No. 59 overall prospect and No. 6 quarterback in the class. The lefthander threw for 4,095 yards and 55

touchdowns during his junior season, helping lead Langston Hughes – also the school of current Ohio State freshman tight end Jelani Thurman – to a state title and a 15-0 record.

Other notable quarterbacks invited to the finals next month in Los Angeles include Saline, Mich., four-star CJ Carr (6-3, 195, Notre Dame); Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star Colin Hurley (6-0, 213, LSU); Winter Garden (Fla.) West Orange three-star Trever Jackson (6-3, 185); Savannah (Ga.) Benedictine Military School four-star Luke Kromenhoek (6-4, 185, Florida State); Phoenix Pinnacle five-star Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220, Georgia); and Carlsbad, Calif., five-star Julian Sayin (6-1, 195, Alabama).

Bulldogs Earn Pledge From Raiola

Speaking of Raiola, the former Ohio State commitment has selected his next school, announcing his pledge to Georgia on May 15.

Raiola is the top-ranked player in the 2024 recruiting class, committing to Georgia over Nebraska and USC, among his other favorites in the second round of his recruitment. The first round, of course, ended in a verbal pledge to Ohio State last summer, but Raiola decommitted from the Buckeyes in December.

"I'm attracted to the culture and the standard at Georgia and the more time that went by the stronger I felt about it," Raiola

Continued On Page 24

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Five-Star WR Smith Locked In With OSU

Continued From Page 23

told 247Sports. “There was a lot of silence and a lot of quiet and I just learned a lot throughout this whole process of who I can lean on and depend on and another thing I loved: Georgia is not built on one person or one position group. It’s a complete program I get to be part of.”

SEC Schools Continue Pursuit Of WR Smith

Jeremiah Smith has been committed to Ohio State since December, but it hasn’t stopped other schools from continuing to recruit the standout receiver. Such is life as the No. 2 overall prospect and top-ranked wideout in 2024.

The programs most active in trying to pull Smith away from Ohio State have been Florida and Georgia. Smith took official visits to both schools in recent weeks, visiting Georgia the weekend of May 19 and Florida the weekend of June 2.

“Georgia is the school I’m watching in the Jeremiah Smith sweepstakes after Ohio State,” wrote 247Sports recruiting analyst Steve Wiltfong, “with what Georgia has done on the field with two straight national

championships.”

Smith is a peer recruiting target of Raiola, who initially helped to sway Smith to Ohio State prior to Raiola’s decommitment. But Smith has insisted that he is steadfast in his commitment to the Buckeyes, utilizing his official visits as a means of enjoying the recruiting process that comes with being a five-star receiver.

“Ohio State, you all don’t have any concern right now,” Smith told BuckeyeHuddle on May 15. “I am locked in until anything happens with any of the coaches like Coach (Brian) Hartline or Coach (Ryan) Day, but I doubt that happens. I am pretty much locked in. I am not going anywhere.”

Commits Impress At Under Armour Camp

Several of Ohio State’s 2024 recruiting class took part in a one-day camp on May 7 at Fortress Obetz, a multisport complex in Obetz, Ohio, with six future Buckeyes – including the Armstrong brothers, New Haven, Ind., five-star wide receiver Mylan Graham (6-1, 170), Nave, Stover and Williams-Dixon – participating in the event.

Graham and Williams-Dixon both came away with MVP honors, earning individual

awards in their respective position groups, and Graham came away with an invite to the 2024 Under Armour All-American Game in January in Orlando, Fla.

“I felt great,” Graham said. “I feel like I could have done a little better on a few more of my reps. I don’t lose any of my reps, but I still feel like I could have done a little bit better. I really just came here to have fun and get better.”

A number of 2025 prospects with Ohio State offers also impressed, as Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190); Findlay, Ohio, four-star quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 205); and Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-3, 205) all earned MVP honors at their respective positions.

Viliamu-Asa Has OSU In Top Three

One of the top linebackers in 2024 has Ohio State among his top schools, with Viliamu-Asa including the Buckeyes in his top three along with Notre Dame and USC.

Viliamu-Asa is the No. 109 overall prospect and No. 8 linebacker in his class, and he was the first prospect in 2024 offered by

Ohio State way back on April 13, 2021. He has already visited Ohio State four times, most recently during the spring, and will be back this summer from June 23-25.

“I’ve always loved Ohio State,” he told On3. “I’ve been in Columbus multiple times, and every time is special. It’s a comfortable feeling whenever I step on campus knowing I’m around a great program with great people and great intentions. Playing in the ‘Shoe and being the next great Buckeye linebacker has always been appealing.”

With Payton and Stover already in the fold at linebacker, Ohio State is hoping to add at least one more, with Sammy Brown, Rodriguez and Spillman the other top targets at the position.

Other Prospects Have Ohio State Among Top Schools

While Viliamu-Asa was the most notable prospect in recent weeks to include Ohio State among his top schools, he was not the only recruit considering the Buckeyes one of his finalists.

Adams had Ohio State in his top five along with Alabama, Pittsburgh, South Carolina and Virginia Tech. He is the No. 183 overall prospect and No. 27 wideout in

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

30 Years Ago — 1993

One of the last recruits signed by Ohio State during the season’s campaign was a little-known quarterback out of Griffin, Ga. And, if predictions from the recruiting experts came true, the Buckeyes might have saved one of their best for last.

Tommy Willis, a standout throughout his career at Griffin High School, became the fourth quarterback to commit to the Buckeyes. However, Willis was coming to Ohio State to play wide receiver, not quarterback.

There was little doubt about his athleticism or quarterbacking skills. During his senior season, Willis passed for over 900 yards and nine touchdowns and rushed for 774 yards and 11 touchdowns. Adding all of his touchdowns passing, running and returning kicks, Willis accounted for 45 scores in his prep career.

At 6-2, 195 pounds with 4.35 speed in the 40-yard dash, Willis had all the physical attributes to play wide receiver, a position he had coveted for years.

25 Years Ago — 1998

National Signing Day for college football was still eight months away, but that hadn’t stopped Ohio State from rapidly filling up its 1999 recruiting class.

St. Henry, Ohio, offensive lineman Matt Zahn, a 6-7, 350-pound behemoth, became the latest OSU commitment when he gave his verbal on May 11. He became OSU’s 10th commitment in a class that could number anywhere from 16 to 20 players.

It would appear that Ohio State – apparently with eight more commitments than any other school – was jumping the gun. But recruiting coordinator Bill Conley saw it differently.

“We are cautiously optimistic,” Conley told BSB. “We have some really nice commitments from some good players. At the same time, we know we have to continue to recruit those players and keep them in the fold.

“It really helps us narrow the field down. Now we can concentrate on certain positions and certain athletes.”

20 Years Ago — 2003

Although he was recognized by many going into the 2003 season as the premier prep wide receiver prospect in Ohio and one of the best in the country as well, Fred Davis (6-4, 210) of Toledo Rogers High School did pretty well for himself as a running back during his junior campaign.

Davis rushed for 1,090 yards and 16 touchdowns and added 610 yards receiving with nine more scores through the air. His one punt return for a touchdown gave him a gaudy 26 touchdowns for the year.

“Fred’s just one of those guys that when he touches the ball something big always happens,” said Rogers head coach Rick Rios. “Yes, he’s big and he’s got speed and all that, but Fred is just one of those guys that when the ball is in his hands, he’s electrify-

ing. He’s just one of those kids that’s got a nose for the end zone.”

Davis, who said that he’d like to play somewhere close to home so his family could see him play, wasn’t disguising his feelings toward OSU in any way.

“I like Ohio State the most,” Davis said. “I like the coaches and I like (head coach Jim) Tressel. He’s a good coach. There’s a good chance I could be a Buckeye. I really like Ohio State, and that’s the only school that I’ve really took the time to look at so far. So basically my eyes are mainly on Ohio State right now.”

15 Years Ago — 2008

Plenty of high school recruits are touted as the next so-and-so as their raw abilities are compared to those displayed by some earlier high-level college players who went on to have standout careers.

The OSU coaching staff had reason to be excited, then, when James Jackson issued a verbal commitment to the program May 12. For starters, the wide receiver out of Grand Ledge, Mich., was listed as a four-star prospect and the No. 20 wideout in the country by Scout.com.

As a junior, Jackson caught 31 passes for 430 yards and carried the ball 40 more times for 337 yards. Plus, he had been timed at 4.31 seconds in the 40-yard dash and ran the 100-meter dash in 10.56 seconds.

But when it came down to it, the coaching staff saw qualities in the 5-11, 175-pound Jackson that reminded them of a certain former Buckeye with game-changing abilities.

“I’ve heard the comparisons that he reminds the staff a lot of Teddy Ginn when he first came,” Grand Ledge head coach Matt Bird told BSB. “I would say James is still a raw talent. He’s got great speed, he’s a student of the game, and he’s getting better and better.”

10 Years Ago — 2013

Perhaps the start of the construction of Ohio State’s 2014 recruiting class hadn’t gone as quickly as many anticipated, but head coach Urban Meyer got a big boost May 23 when the Buckeyes earned a commitment from four-star outside linebacker Dante Booker (6-3, 233) of Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary.

Rated by Scout.com as the No. 9 outside linebacker in the class, Booker chose Ohio State over scholarship offers from such programs as Illinois, Indiana, Louisville, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

“I think I knew the moment I got the Ohio State offer that I would commit to them,” Booker told BuckeyeSports.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene. “I just kind of knew the whole time and waited for the right time. There really wasn’t a reason to wait, but I just wanted to take it slow and be sure. I wanted to weigh all my options.”

Five Years Ago — 2018

With well over 400 high school football players from the region in competition May 5 at Massillon (Ohio) Washington’s Paul Brown Tiger Stadium, Nike’s The Opening Regional Canton showcased some of the top talent in the country.

Among them, a handful of top targets for Ohio State were on display. In fact, upon the conclusion of camp, three of those on the recruiting radar for the class of 2019 earned invitations to The Opening Finals.

Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange five-star defensive end Zach Harrison, Chicago Phillips Academy four-star tight end Jahleel Billingsley (6-4, 230) and West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star outside linebacker Lance Dixon (6-2, 213) made up the trio of priority prospects for the Buckeyes headed to the June 30 through July 3 finals in Frisco, Texas.

The 247Sports composite considered Harrison the No. 2 overall player, No. 2 weakside defensive end and No. 1 player in Ohio. The 6-6, 240-pounder looked and performed the part as arguably the top prospect in the class of 2019 with the way he displayed his speed and burst off the line of scrimmage.

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State found its quarterback of the future. Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 225), one of 2024’s top prospects, committed to Ohio State on May 9 – also his birthday – wrapping up a fast and furious recruitment that would add another high-profile signal caller to the Buckeyes’ quarterbacks room.

Raiola had been quiet in the weeks leading up to his commitment, last on campus for Ohio State’s spring game April 16. That was his second visit in as many weeks, also visiting Columbus the weekend prior. He was the No. 8 prospect in his class and the No. 3 quarterback, according to the 247Sports composite rankings, but several recruiting services had him ranked as the top quarterback in the class.

He held over 25 offers from Power Five schools, electing to commit to Ohio State over the likes of Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Oregon and USC, as well as Nebraska where his father, Dominic, was a former All-America center who played from 1998 to 2000 before a 14-year career in the NFL with the Detroit Lions.

“Start with the head man, Coach (Ryan) Day,” Raiola told 247Sports. “I think what he does with quarterbacks is special. The way he molds a young man going into this world, I think that’s a huge factor. Just the personal relationship I have with them and built with them, it’s very personable and you can ask them any question, you can go to him whenever you want. His office is next to the locker room, and he says he has an open-door policy and that means a lot.”

ASK AN ANALYST

With 247Sports' Allen Trieu

Ohio State has said it may take an earlier exit from national recruitments that it believes revolve solely around NIL. What do you make of this strategy, and is it sustainable if Ohio State wants to stay among the top programs in recruiting?

"Personally, I like the strategy because it's a very real way to recruit a kid, saying, 'We're going to recruit you with substance, and not just NIL and with money. We're going to recruit you with our program, our academics and with football,' which is what this still is about.

"I also wonder what the shelf life of NIL is, especially at the current level with the amounts that the prospects are getting. If these prospects don't turn out, will the value of giving a bunch of NIL money to a high school kid drop over the years? I think we all still are learning NIL. The schools are learning it, the analysts are learning it, the recruits are learning it and it can go a lot of different directions in the next few years. I think that the strategy right now is a good one because we're still in a learning and discovery phase with NIL."

As we get into the summer, who are some of the most important prospects that Ohio State is bringing on campus for camps and visits?

"Springfield (Ohio) four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-0, 170), he's an in-state guy. I think Michigan has been picking it up in that recruitment and Oregon's right there. Same thing with Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-

11, 177). I think you want to keep those guys at home. When you have your rival in Michigan coming after them, I think that those are important ones for Ohio State to win.

"Lafayette (La.) Acadiana five-star defensive lineman Dominic McKinley (6-5, 290), a five-star guy, so that speaks for itself, he's coming on campus. Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310), the same thing in a position of need. And then you have Jefferson (Ga.) five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-2, 230), who is the number one linebacker in the country, scheduled to take an official visit at the end of June.

"I think when you look at Ohio State's class right now, it's really strong on the offensive side of the ball. I think you have some very high-end defensive guys coming in June, though, and I think they need to win a couple of those recruitments. If they do, that could push this class up towards No. 1."

What do you make of the in-state talent for Ohio State in 2024? Who are some prospects from Ohio who may fly under the radar in the class?

"I think it's a really good class. We've been able to have some regional events in the state here recently, and those kids have competed and done a really, really good job.

"Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph three-star defensive lineman Dominic Kirks (6-5, 250) won MVP at the Under Armour camp recently, but prior to that, I don't know that he had a lot of national appreciation and now I think he's kind of play-

ing his way up the ranks.

"I like Dayton Trotwood-Madison three-star quarterback Timothy Carpenter (6-4, 200), I don't think he gets the national attention he deserves. But he's a big, fast prospect who we thought did really, really well at the recent Under Armour camp."

With Michigan hanging around the top of the 2024 recruiting rankings and Ohio State trailing closely behind, how have you seen the on-the-field rivalry translate to recruiting in recent years?

"I think you're seeing it a lot more in this cycle. I think it took two sustained seasons of Michigan going into the playoff and winning the Big Ten championship to be able to start to push Ohio State. You see that a little bit more now with the Ohio kids they've gotten in this class, guys like Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193).

"And I also think that Michigan's added some good recruiters to its staff, one of them being co-defensive coordinator Steve Clinkscale, who did a good job in the state of Ohio when he was at Kentucky. I think his presence along with the success Michigan's had is now producing some recruiting battles, where we talk about Aaron Scott choosing between Michigan and Ohio State, even though Oregon's in there, also Bryce West looking at Michigan and Ohio State. You didn't see as much of that in recent years."

2024, and he had 41 receptions for 1,030 yards and 16 touchdowns last season for Green Run.

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star defensive lineman Aydin Breland (6-5, 290) had the Buckeyes in his top 10 along with Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Nebraska, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC. He is the No. 33 overall prospect and No. 6 defensive lineman in the class.

Ohio State landed in the top five for Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Jayden Jackson (6-2, 300), along with Florida, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma and Texas. Elijah Moore, the No. 481 overall prospect and No. 66 wideout in the class, had Ohio State in his top schools along with Florida, Florida State, Maryland and Michigan, and he has official visits planned to all five over the summer.

"Coach Hartline likes me a lot," Moore told 247Sports. "Coach Day likes me a lot. It's a receivers' school, and I want to be the best, so they said I should go there. If I want to be the best at my position, they advised me to go to Ohio State."

Also from Good Counsel, Mayo had the Buckeyes in his top six along with Clemson, Maryland, Michigan, South Carolina and USC.

"Coach Larry Johnson is a big piece of why Ohio State is one of my top schools, and they are building something special there," Mayo told On3.

Other prospects with Ohio State in their top schools include Brookline (Mass.) Dexter School four-star offensive tackle Liam Andrews (6-5, 260); Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater four-star cornerback Cai Bates (6-2, 180); McKinley; Johnson-Rubell; Cincinnati Withrow four-star cornerback Terhyon Nichols (6-0, 180); Powers; Rodriguez; Rudolph; Aaron Scott; Justin Scott; and Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star defensive end London Merritt (6-3, 230), a 2025 prospect.

Buckeyes Send Out New Offers

Recruiting never stops, and that is evident by the number of offers Ohio State has sent out in recent weeks to prospects in 2024 and beyond.

Beginning in 2024, the Buckeyes have recently offered Tucker, Ga., linebacker CJ Jackson (6-4, 225); Nichols; and D'antre Robinson. Nichols is a local product, checking in as the No. 329 overall prospect and No. 29 cornerback in the class, and he holds additional offers from Cincinnati, Kentucky, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State and Pittsburgh, among others.

In 2025, Ohio State has offered Dallas Skyline four-star linebacker Elijah Barnes (6-2, 215); Melbourne (Fla.) Eau Gallie defensive lineman Brandon Brown (6-2, 275); Savannah (Ga.) Calvary Day School wide receiver Edward Coleman (5-10, 180); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Daryus Dixon (6-1, 180); Miami (Fla.) Belen Jesuit Prep four-star defensive lineman Davion Dixon (6-2, 290), who is committed to Notre Dame; Cocoa, Fla., four-star defensive end Javon Hilson (6-4, 225); Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star offensive lineman Alai Kalaniuvalu (6-3, 275); Rabun Gap (Ga.) Nacoochee School four-star cornerback Onis Konanbanny (6-2, 170); Fulshear (Texas) Katy Jordan four-star wide receiver Andrew Marsh (6-1, 173); Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-5, 220); and Jersey City (N.J.) Henry Snyder four-star linebacker DJ McClary (6-1, 185).

Further offers include West Palm Beach (Fla.) Cardinal Newman four-star wide receiver Naeshaun Montgomery (6-0, 160); Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185); Katy (Texas) Paetow four-star cornerback Deyjhon Pettaway (5-10, 165); Oak Lawn (Ill.) Brother Rice four-star linebacker Christian Pierce (6-0, 210); DeSoto, Texas, four-star running back Deondrae Riden (5-10, 195); Dallas South Oak Cliff four-star linebacker Kelvion Riggins (6-0, 205); Washington, Okla., four-star tight end

Nate Roberts (6-4, 225); Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star defensive lineman Maxwell Roy (6-3, 271); Dallas South Oak Cliff four-star linebacker Jayden Shelton (6-0, 200); Bellefontaine, Ohio, three-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210); Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star offensive tackle Douglas Utu (6-5, 270); Jesup (Ga.) Wayne County four-star linebacker Tavion Wallace (6-1, 197); Red Oak, Texas, four-star wide receiver Taz Williams Jr. (6-0, 175); Tampa (Fla.) Bay Tech four-star wide receiver Dallas Wilson (6-3, 180), who is committed to Oregon; and Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga four-star safety Kainoa Winston (6-0, 185).

St. Clair is the third quarterback offered by Ohio State in 2025 along with Montgomery and Underwood, and he holds additional offers from Cincinnati, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa State, Minnesota, Penn State, Pittsburgh and Tennessee, among others. He threw for 2,453 yards and 25 touchdowns last season for Bellefontaine.

"It's really exciting," St. Clair told 247Sports. "Being a kid from Ohio and getting an offer, it was surreal. I've had the longest relationship with Ohio State. I'll get back down there in June. We didn't discuss a camp date, but I'll at least get there for the team 7-on-7 camp."

The Buckeyes offered a handful of prospects as well in 2026, including Nashville Christian School quarterback Jared Curtis (6-2, 200); Reidsville, N.C., athlete Kendre Harrison (6-8, 230); Orange (Calif.) Lutheran linebacker Talanoa Ili (6-3, 215); Lawndale (Calif.) Leuzinger linebacker Samu Mola (6-3, 230); and Vero Beach, Fla., athlete Efreem White (6-2, 155).

Curtis holds additional offers from Alabama, Auburn, Florida State, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame and Texas A&M, among others. He is the second quarterback offered by Ohio State in 2026 along with Julian Lewis (6-1, 175) of Carrollton, Ga., who was offered in January.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- UAB transfer safety Jaylen Key, who had originally scheduled an official visit to Ohio State after announcing the Buckeyes as one of his top six transfer destinations, wound up canceling his visit to Columbus before committing to Alabama.

- Ohio State added a pair of preferred walk-on commitments since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, including Mason (Ohio) William Mason defensive lineman Caden Davis (6-5, 220), a former Army commit, as well as Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney linebacker Alec DelSignore (6-2, 205).

- Clearwater (Fla.) Academy International three-star defensive lineman Sean Sevellano Jr. (6-2, 315), who included Ohio State among his top four schools, canceled his visit to Ohio State ahead of his commitment to Notre Dame on June 2.

- Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Ify Obidegwu (6-1, 185), a 2024 prospect who held an offer from Ohio State, announced his commitment to Oregon on May 7.

- Rochester (Mich.) Adams four-star tight end Brady Prieskorn (6-6, 225), who held an offer from Ohio State, committed to Michigan on April 25.

- Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon four-star wide receiver Xavier Jordan (6-1, 165), who held an Ohio State offer, committed to USC on May 1.

- Penn State added a commitment on May 20 from Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer (6-2, 190), who held additional offers from Boston College, Cincinnati, Indiana, Minnesota and Northwestern, among others.

- Indiana added a commitment on May 21 from Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison three-star quarterback Timothy Carpenter (6-4, 200).

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

Hartline At Height Of His Recruiting Might

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Brian Hartline's wide receivers room has been fully loaded with extra weapons in the Ohio State coach's arsenal since he took over in 2018.

Three of the Buckeyes' six primary receivers that season left following the campaign, including Parris Campbell after he posted the first 1,000-yard receiving season in Columbus since 2002. Since that time, there have been four such seasons under Hartline's tutelage.

Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Garrett Wilson developed into first-round draft picks, and now that they have departed, Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka are waiting in the wings as likely future first-rounders themselves.

Recruiting is the biggest reason the room has been able to reload so well. In the last six cycles – including the class of 2024 – Hartline has signed or currently holds commitments from seven five-star prospects in the 247Sports composite and 16 receivers ranked among the top 100 prospects regardless of position nationally.

"He's one of the best in the entire country," 247Sports Midwest football recruiting reporter Allen Trieu said. "And that's not just as a receivers coach. I think when you talk about just general assistant coaches and recruiters at any position at any school, he's got to be one of the first names that come up."

Thus far, one could make an argument that the 2024 cycle might finish as Hartline's best. With two five-stars already committed, including the nation's No. 1 wideout and No. 2 prospect in Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna five-star Jeremiah Smith, the parade of weapons that's run through the Ohio State receiving room looks to continue for years to come.

"Success breeds success," said Buckeye Huddle reporter Kevin Noon. "He came in, essentially, under Ryan Day because he got elevated to the full position and everything else. And Ryan Day runs a very pass-friendly type of offense. So Brian Hartline inherits that in terms of what he is recruiting his position for."

"Then when you have the combination of talented receivers – whether they came in as a five-star like Garrett Wilson or a three-star like Chris Olave – come in and flourish under the system, it becomes a no-brainer for receivers once the pattern is set that as long as they're good enough, they should have similar results."

There are not many prospects who are as can't-miss as Smith. Standing 6-3, the 198-pound wideout has already shown a tendency to make highlight-reel catches, leaping over the backs of opponents and making perfect high-points and sideline grabs. He has surprising agility and burst for someone his height, allowing him to separate out of his breaks.

"He's already polished, which is something you don't throw around much with a young receiver," Noon said. "But he already seems to possess great ball skills. He already seems to possess solid body control. Then with his God-given abilities of his size



SONNY BROCKWAY

RECRUITING MASTERMIND — Ohio State offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline has built up a reputation as one of the nation's best recruiters in his seven years with the Buckeyes.

and his speed and his catch radius, you put all that together, it just creates the perfect storm, and that storm is named Jeremiah Smith."

Trieu also sees Smith as the total package at the position. He went so far as to say he wouldn't be surprised if Smith challenged Phoenix Pinnacle five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 220), a former Ohio State commit, for the No. 1 spot in the composite prospect rankings.

"When you're not just big but you can run routes, you have the body control of a smaller (receiver) but also run past a defensive back, you can still go up over the top and win a contested ball – it's not rocket science when you have a guy who has all of those qualities," Trieu said. "He has just about every tool in the toolbox. That's why he's our No. 1 wide receiver prospect."

Smith has already started developing bonds with some of the pass catchers currently at Ohio State, and the incoming freshman he's closest with is former Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star Brandon Inniss (6-0, 198). They met at a young age and have seen their bond grow since playing for the same 7-on-7 team, South Florida Express.

"Brandon, (he's) like a big brother to me," Smith told Buckeye Huddle on May 15. "I've known him since I was 9, 10 years old, (when) we started playing flag football together. We went from flag to SFE. We've made a great relationship with each other, and we've been good since then."

Smith has already been putting in work as a peer recruiter as well, keeping an active presence on Twitter to interact with fellow top prospects publicly as well as privately. That's been a feature of Ohio State's 2024 class in general, an effort spearheaded in large part by twins Deontae (6-6, 280) and Devontae (6-5, 297) Armstrong, both four-star offensive linemen out of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward.

Smith and one of the Armstrong twins met up with Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star quarterback and Ohio State commit Air Noland (6-3, 195) at the spring game on April 16 and discussed their vision for the class. All were adamant about bringing in other top seniors.

"We were just talking about how we want to be the No. 1 class all-time, really, and

guys we want to have in this class," Smith said. "Picking them out, talking about who we want and stuff like that. Me and Air – I think he's already learning the offense – I feel like we're going to be good. I'm going to ask Coach Hartline if I can start learning the playbook too."

Joining Smith as Ohio State's other five-star wide receiver commit is New Haven, Ind., product Mylan Graham. He averaged 23.9 yards per reception on 48 catches last season to finish with 1,149 yards and 13 touchdowns.

On tape, his ability to clear defenses out with his speed and acceleration to make big gains after the catch are a plus, making him a great future candidate for a slot receiving role. But his other attributes at the position shouldn't be discounted.

"He's really sudden, which is a little bit different than speed," Trieu said. "He's really quick in a short area. He's got burst. He can change directions and create separation, and I think that's arguably even more important than just being able to run fast in a straight line. His side-to-side (movement) is excellent, and you see that with how open he gets. And it's really stark in person when you see him run routes."

"Don't sleep on what he's capable of doing," Noon said. "While it may not look as natural as it does with Jeremiah, he's still a very smooth and solid athlete that is able to do a lot of things when he's out there running routes and catching balls."

Graham is an example of two of the keys to Hartline's recruiting success: his ability to scout and identify talent and how early he forges strong relationships with recruits. He's been able to get his pick of receivers as he's cranked out first-round picks.

"It is that ability to evaluate talent," Trieu said. "Being where he is and the success that Ohio State has had at the wide receiver position, he can get anybody he wants. But they're not just going after the very top of the board. He does trust himself on the evaluations."

When he landed his offer from the Buckeyes, Graham hadn't been offered by anyone else. Ohio State can normally play the waiting game with recruits given the program's national brand, but Hartline finds his guys early and jumps on them without hesitation.

"He started recruiting me about midway

through my sophomore year," Graham said at the Under Armor Next football camp in Obetz, Ohio, on May 8. "Then I went to (Ohio State's) camp last year, June 1, and I really balled out, did my thing. Then he ended up offering me. It was my first offer but he didn't really care about that. I was a no-star, no-offer type of guy. He didn't really care. He saw some potential in me that he'd like to coach. I really thought about that when I ended up committing."

By the time he pledged his services to Ohio State on April 4, he was a five-star recruit. Graham currently sits as the No. 4 receiver nationally and is considered the 17th-best player regardless of position, and he's the top prospect from Indiana.

"When they offered Mylan Graham, he was considered a national guy, but definitely not to the level he is now," Trieu said. "They identified him as a top prospect, and over time that evaluation has proven to be correct based on what we've seen with Mylan. Everybody has caught up now, too, with that evaluation, but he's been a top target of Ohio State's for a long time."

Those evaluations and Hartline's ability to identify talent are at the crux of his success, according to Trieu, in addition to his ability to handle all that talent once it is on campus.

"They've always had a stocked wide receiver room under him, and he's able to manage expectations and manage a bunch of talented bodies in one place," Trieu said. "He does just about as good a job as I think you can possibly do at the position."

When it comes to his own peer recruiting, Graham has his eyes on a few specific targets. Chief among them is St. Louis Christian Brothers four-star wide receiver Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190), one of the top targets left on Ohio State's board.

"Jeremiah McClellan, and then some (defensive backs) out of Ohio," Graham said of players he has been recruiting. "I really tried to get Air really hard as well, and we ended up getting him."

Other top targets include Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna five-star Joshua Trader (6-1, 175), if he elects to play on offense rather than the secondary, as well as Virginia Beach (Va.) Green Run four-star Keylen Adams (6-1, 175) and Olney (Md.) Good Counsel three-star Elijah Moore (6-4, 190), another potential diamond in the rough whom Hartline has offered.

Trieu said the run that Hartline has been on at wide receiver is among the best he's seen at any program since he started covering recruiting more than 17 years ago. He compared it to the Alabama running backs rooms over the last decade or so, which have included Heisman Trophy winners Derrick Henry (2015) and Mark Ingram (2009) and have had five first-round and three second-round NFL draft selections since 2010.

It's a run that is not in any danger of stopping, though, because if Smith and Graham follow the developmental track of many others who have come under Hartline's tutelage at Ohio State, the team's quarterbacks should have plenty of weapons to throw to in the future.

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2023 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 at Indiana; **9** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

BASEBALL (31-25, 9-15)

Feb. 17 vs. UConn at Venice, Fla., W 3-0; **18-19** vs. UConn at Sarasota, Fla., L 9-6, L 8-6; **20** vs. UConn at Port Charlotte, Fla., W 10-5; **23** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz., L 1-0; **24** vs. Gonzaga at Phoenix, Ariz., L 11-9 (10 innings); **25** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz., L 7-5; **26** vs. Gonzaga at Phoenix, Ariz., W 8-2.

March 3 vs. Mississippi State at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas, W 8-3; **4** vs. Cal at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas, L 16-1; **5** vs. Oklahoma at Frisco Classic in Frisco, Texas, W 12-9; **11-12** at Cal State Bakersfield, W 17-5; W 19-6; W 9-5; **14** at Marshall, canceled; **15** at Marshall, W 5-1; **17** DAYTON, W 7-2; **18** DAYTON, canceled; **17** DAYTON, W 12-8; **21** WRIGHT STATE, L 3-0; **22** TOLEDO, W 6-4; **25** at Indiana, L 14-6; **26** at Indiana, L 9-6, L 7-5; **28** XAVIER, L 8-1; **31** MINNESOTA, L 3-2.

April 1-2 W 6-2, L 6-2; **4** KENT STATE, W 7-6; **7-9** at Michigan State, L 7-1, W 13-2 (7 innings), L 16-3 (7 innings) **11** AKRON, W 15-1 (7 innings); **12** BOWLING GREEN, W 8-2; **14-16** MARYLAND, L 7-5, L 3-2, W 13-8, ; **18** at Miami (Ohio), W 12-11; **19** DAYTON, W 8-7; **21-23** at Penn State, L 10-3, L 7-2, L 15-3; **26** at Kent State, L 10-5; **28-30** ILLINOIS, W 10-2, L 7-0, W 15-9.

May 2 at Wright State, L 3-1.; **5-7** at Iowa, L 16-9, L 15-3, W 5-2; **9** UCF, W 2-0; **10** CENTRAL MICHIGAN, W 13-5; **12-14** UNC GREENSBORO, W 6-1, W 5-1 (7 innings), W 9-2; **18-20** MICHIGAN, W 7-3, W 9-5, W 7-2.

MEN'S GOLF

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

March 6 Colleton River Collegiate at Bluffton, S.C., 11/12; **7** Colleton River Collegiate at Bluffton, S.C., 8/12; **13** Sea Island Invitational at St. Simons Island, Ga, 1st/13.; **13** Sea Island Invitational at St. Simons Island, Ga. 2nd/13; **27** Valspar Collegiate at Stuart, Fla., 5th/16; **28** Valspar Collegiate at Stuart, Fla., 4th/16.

April 2 Calusa Cup at Naples, Fla., 3rd/9; **3** Calusa Cup at Naples, Fla., 7th/9; **4** Calusa Cup at Naples, Fla., 7th/9; **21** ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE, 1st/17; **22** ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE, 1st/17; **23** ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE, 1st/17; **28** Big Ten Championship, 4th/14; **28** Big Ten Championship, T5th/14; **29** Big Ten Championship, Canceled.

May 15 NCAA Auburn Regional, T5th/13; **15** NCAA Auburn Regional, 5th/13; **16** NCAA Auburn Regional, 4th/13; **26** NCAA Championship, T12th/30; **27** NCAA Championship, T20th/30; **28** NCAA Championship, T15th/30; **29** NCAA Championship, 15th/30.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Feb. 12 Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., T2/16; **13** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif.,

T4/16; **12** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., 6/16; **26** Westbrook Invitational at Peoria, Ariz, T2/14; **27** Westbrook Invitational at Peoria, Ariz, 2/14.

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

April 3 Silverado Showdown at Napa, Calif., 10th/17; **4** Silverado Showdown at Napa, Calif., 9th/17; **5** Silverado Showdown at Napa, Calif., 9th/17; **15** LADY BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL, 1st/14; **16** LADY BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL, 1st/14; **21** Big Ten Championship at Pittsburgh, 2nd/14; **22** Big Ten Championship at Pittsburgh, 1st/14; **23** Big Ten Championship at Pittsburgh, 3rd/14.

May 8 NCAA Regional, 2nd/12; **9** NCAA Regional, T5th/12; **10** NCAA Regional, 6th/12.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 14 Windy City Invite at Chicago, Ill., 3rd/6 (394.900); **21** at Navy Open, 1st/6 (405.350); **28** at Michigan, L 409.200-404.000.

Feb. 11 ILLINOIS, W 401.000-399.200; **24** at Winter Cup at Louisville, Ky., NTS; **26** at Winter Cup at Louisville, Ky., NTS.

March 4 at Army, W 409.950-387.600; **11** TRI-MEET, 3rd/3 (397.600) vs. PENN STATE (404.450) & OKLAHOMA (410.000); **17** Tri-Meet at Nebraska, 2nd/3 (401.750), vs. Nebraska (410.400) & Greenville (384.050); **31** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS, 5th/5 (405.500).

April 1 BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS, NTS; **14** NCAA Championships at State College, Pa., 4th/6 (404.492); **15** NCAA Championships at State College, Pa., NTS.

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

Jan. 8 OHIO STATE QUAD MEET, 1st/4 (196.775) vs. KENTUCKY (196.575), ARIZONA (194.950) AND GREENVILLE (181.425); **16** at Georgia Quad Meet at Athens, Ga., 1st/4 (196.250) vs. Georgia (196.125), Rutgers (194.675) and Fisk (190.100); **22** IOWA, W 197.225-196.900; **28** at Michigan, L 197.075-196.350.

Feb. 5 MARYLAND, W 197.575-196.475; **13** at Illinois, W 196.825-196.475; **17** at Penn State, W 196.725-196.125; **25** at B1G Five Meet., 3rd/5 (196.750).

March 3 BRIGHAM YOUNG, W 196.700-195.575; **5** TRI-MEET, 1st/3 (197.600) vs. ILLINOIS (196.875) AND KENT STATE (196.025); **10** at Cal Quad, 3rd/4 (196.900); **18** Big Ten Championships at Iowa City, Iowa, 4th/10 (196.975); **30** NCAA Regional, 2nd/4 (197.350).

April 1 NCAA Regional, 3rd/4 (197.750); **13** NCAA Regional Semifinal, NTS.

MEN'S LACROSSE (5-9, 1-4)

Feb. 4 AIR FORCE, W 15-7 **11** CLEVELAND STATE, W 19-12; **19** NORTH CAROLINA, W 8-5; **25** vs. Virginia at Naples, Fla., L 17-6.

March 4 CORNELL, L 16-13; **11** at Notre Dame, L 16-3; **14** DETROIT MERCY, W 19-6; **19** at Denver, L 17-12; **26** RUTGERS, W 11-7.

April 2 at Penn State, L 17-9; **7** , L 12-11 (OT); **15** at Johns Hopkins, L 17-8; **21** at Michigan, L 19-14; **29** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals vs. Michigan, L 14-10.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE (5-12, 0-6)

Feb. 10 ROBERT MORRIS, W 18-6; **12** TEMPLE, W 10-9; **17** at San Diego State, W 10-4; **19** at USC, L 18-10; **25** DENVER, L 11-4; **28** CINCINNATI, W 13-12 (OT)

March 4 at James Madison, L 16-7; **9** MICHIGAN, L 14-12; **12** COLORADO, L 14-10; **18** JOHNS HOPKINS, L 11-8; **25** at Penn State, L 13-3; **28** LOUISVILLE, W 16-6.

April 4 at Marquette, L 13-12; **8** at Maryland, L 18-7; **15** NORTHWESTERN, L 17-11; **20** at Rutgers, L 13-12 (OT); **29** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals vs. Maryland, L 11-7.

SOFTBALL (33-20, 12-11)

Feb. 10 at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. Georgia, L 11-4; **11** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. Boise State, W 8-2; **11** at UCF Invitational at Orlando, Fla., vs. UMass, W 1-0; **17** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Notre Dame, L 7-2; **18** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Notre Dame, W 6-5 (9 innings); **18** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Clemson, L 5-1; **19** at Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Clemson, S.C., vs. Clemson, L 10-0 (5 innings); **24** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. Cal State Northridge, W 12-0 (5 innings); **25** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. Oregon State, W 6-0; **25** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. San Diego State, W 5-4; **26** at Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. Utah, L 9-1 (5 innings).

March 10 at Conway, S.C., vs. Coastal Carolina, L 6-4; vs. Canisius, W 8-0 (5 innings) **11** at Conway, S.C., vs. Houston Christian, W 5-4; vs. Canisius, W 5-0 **14** at Charleston Southern (DH), W 2-1 (9 innings), W 13-2; **15** at College of Charleston, W 5-4; **17** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Cleveland State, W 10-0 (5 innings); **17** at Greenville, N.C., vs. East Carolina, W 7-0; **18** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Presbyterian, W 5-2; **18** at Greenville, N.C., vs. East Carolina, W 9-2; **19** at Greenville, N.C., vs. Cleveland State, W 10-0 (5 innings) **21** KENT STATE, W 4-3; **26** MICHIGAN, L 3-1 (10 innings), W 11-2 (5 innings); **27** MICHIGAN, W 8-7, **29** at Dayton, W 17-6 (5 innings); **31** at Indiana, L 17-9 (6 innings).

April 2 at Indiana, L 6-5, L 10-7; **4** OHIO, L 1-0 (9 innings); **7-9** RUTGERS, L 6-5, W 3-2, W 4-3 (9 innings); **11** at Penn State (DH), W 9-5, W 4-1; **14-16** at Illinois, W 11-0 (6 innings), L 13-9, W 9-1 (6 innings); **18** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 10-2 (5 innings); **21-23** PURDUE, L 6-3, W 12-9, W 9-0; **28-30** MINNESOTA, L 7-1, L 10-6, L 7-0.

May 5-7 at Nebraska, W 2-1, L 4-3, W 6-4; **10** Big Ten Tournament vs. Rutgers, W 7-4; **11** Big Ten Tournament vs. Minnesota, L 3-2 (8 innings) .

MEN'S TENNIS (34-3, 9-0)

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

Feb. 3 TEXAS A&M, W 7-0; **5** TEXAS, W 4-0; **9** at Wake Forest, W 4-3 **11** at Virginia, W 4-1; **14** BAYLOR, W 4-0; **17** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Illinois, W 4-0; **18** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Texas, L 4-3; **19** ITA Indoor National Team Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Virginia, W 4-0; **25** NOTRE DAME, W 7-0.

March 8 at South Carolina, L 4-1; **15** at UCF, W 4-0; **19** MICHIGAN, W 4-2; **24** at Northwestern, W 4-1; **26** at Illinois, W 4-0; **31** NEBRASKA, W 7-0.

April 2 WISCONSIN, W 6-1; **7** at Michigan State, W 7-0; **9** at Michigan, W 4-2; **15** PENN STATE, W 4-0; **21** PURDUE, W 4-0; **23** INDIANA, W 7-0; **28** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals vs. Indiana, W 4-0; **29** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals vs. Illinois, W 4-1; **28** Big Ten Tournament Finals vs. Michigan, W 4-0.

May 6 NCAA 1st Round vs. ETSU, W 4-0; **7** NCAA 2nd Round vs. Louisville, W 4-0; **13** NCAA Super Regional vs. Arizona, W 4-2; **19** NCAA Quarterfinals vs. Georgia, W 4-3; **20** NCAA Semifinals vs. TCU, W 4-0; **21** NCAA Championship vs. Virginia, L 4-0.

WOMEN'S TENNIS (22-8, 10-1)

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

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

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

April 5 KENTUCKY, W 4-2; **7** NEBRASKA, W 4-0; **9** IOWA, W 4-0; **14** at Michigan State, W 4-1; **16** at Michigan, L 4-1; **22** at Rutgers, W 4-0; **23** at Maryland, W 4-0; **28** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals vs. Nebraska, W 4-1; **29** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals vs. Illinois, W 4-0; **30** Big Ten Tournament Finals vs. Michigan, L 4-2.

May 5 NCAA Tournament 1st Round vs. Xavier, W 4-0; **6** NCAA Tournament 2nd Round vs. Vanderbilt, W 4-2; **12** NCAA Super Regional vs. Stanford, L 4-1.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (23-10, 11-3)

Jan. 5 CENTRAL STATE, W 3-0; **7** PENN STATE, L 3-1; **14** at Patriot Invitational in Fairfax, Va., vs. Grand Canyon, L 3-2; **15** at Patriot Invitational in Fairfax, Va., vs. George Mason, W 3-1; **20** MARYVILLE, W 3-0; **21** MISSOURI S&T, W 3-0; **26-27** PRINCETON, W 3-1, W 3-2.

Feb. 3 at Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in State College, Pa., vs. UCLA, L 3-1; **4** at Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in State College, Pa., vs. USC, W 3-1; **9** MCKENDREE, W 3-1; **11** LEWIS, W 3-0; **16** at Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-1; **18** at Loyola Chicago, L 3-0; **24** at Quincy, W 3-0; **25** at Lindenwood, L 3-2.

March 4 CHARLESTON, L 3-1; **10-11** at BYU, L 3-1, L 3-2; **15** at Ball State, : 3-0; **18** BALL STATE, W 3-2; **21** at Penn State, W 3-2; **24** LINDENWOOD, W 3-1; **25** QUINCY, W 3-0; **30** at Lewis, W 3-0.

April 1 at McKendree, W 3-1; **6** PURDUE FORT WAYNE, W 3-0; **8** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-0; **15** MIVA Quarterfinals vs. Lindenwood, W 3-0 **19** MIVA Semifinals vs. McKendree, W 3-1; **22** MIVA Finals vs. Ball State W 3-1; **30** NCAA Play-In vs. King, W 3-0.

May 2 NCAA Quarterfinals vs. Penn State, L 3-1.

Conference's New TV Deal Not What It Seemed

The seven-year, \$7 billion TV contract for Big Ten football between the conference and CBS, FOX and NBC that was former commissioner Kevin Warren's crown jewel prior to his exit appears to be much less of a done deal than was formerly indicated.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

With the kickoff to football season and the first round of games on the television deal just three months away, the Big Ten still does not have completed contracts with the networks, according to a report from ESPN's Pete Thamel. Insiders have indicated that new commissioner Tony Petitti and his team are engaged in bargaining with TV executives, and the NBC prime-time deal in particular still has "outstanding issues," which the conference is still trying to work through while maintaining the deal's value.

"These deals aren't done, and they aren't what they were represented to be from the standpoint of the NBC deal and the availability of all members to participate in November games in prime time," an industry source told Thamel.

In the months since Petitti took over, school presidents, chancellors and athletic directors have become disgruntled over the money that is starting to bleed from the once billion-dollar per-year contract. More than \$70 million of the deal is already gone, according to Thamel's sources.

The Big Ten will have to pay back nearly \$40 million to FOX because Warren gave NBC the 2026 Big Ten Championship Game without having the authority to do so. Another \$25 million will be owed to FOX for lost games in 2020, as the two sides were unable to come to an agreement on how to recoup lost revenue from the pandemic-impacted season. Tens of millions of dollars of value from the above-mentioned NBC deal remain in flux.

Many of these issues stem from the fact that the Big Ten itself does not possess the game inventory in this latest deal – the Big Ten Network does – which is majority-owned by FOX. Pushback from Big Ten member schools on playing night games in November is also holding the deal up, as it's hard to maintain prime-time value without

having marquee games in prime-time slots. Warren and his staff didn't obtain permission from the conference's athletic directors before negotiating November night games as part of the deal.

"NBC was surprised, and I was surprised," Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel told Thamel. "We had not discussed, and I had not discussed with anyone in the league to change the tolerances we had agreed upon years ago."

Television executives appear to be pointing the finger right back at school administrations, who signed off on the deal without expressing their late-game concerns before, Thamel's industry sources said.

Compromises are being made by some Big Ten schools to maintain the value of the NBC deal, however, with the larger brands agreeing to some unforeseen scheduling adjustments. Ohio State, for its part, will play the latest-ever night game in Ohio Stadium history when it plays Michigan State in prime time on Nov. 11. Penn State plays on the road at Michigan State off a short week on Black Friday on Nov. 24.

"This is what he's walking into right now," another industry source said of Petitti. "Tony is trying to save it, and what Penn State and Ohio State are doing is actually trying to minimize the losses."

It seems as though both sides hope to reach an agreement before the beginning of the football season.

"We're excited to start our Big Ten deal this fall," an NBC Sports spokesman told ESPN. "We had a great relationship with Kevin Warren, and same with Tony Petitti. We're confident that any and all outstanding issues are well on their way to being resolved."

Iowa AD Barta Retiring In August

Iowa will need a new athletic director after 17 years under the stewardship of Gary Barta, as he announced that he will be retiring Aug. 1, with deputy athletic director and chief operating officer Beth Goetz set to take over as interim athletic director.

"It has been an absolute privilege and honor to serve in this role the past 17 years," Barta said on May 26. "I'm humbled to have worked beside, and on behalf of, so many student-athletes, coaches, staff, donors, fans and community leaders over the past two decades. The success enjoyed by our student-athletes and coaches during my entire tenure, and especially the past several years, has been impressive and re-



SONNY BROCKWAY

WELCOME BACK — Purdue center Zach Edey, the reigning consensus National Player of the Year, announced on May 31 that he would withdraw from the NBA draft and return to the Boilermakers for another season.

cord-breaking on so many levels."

Barta was named Iowa's athletic director in 2006 and had been the second-longest tenured athletic director in the Big Ten behind Ohio State's Gene Smith, who took his post in 2005. Under Barta, Iowa has seen success in several sports, including football – where the Hawkeyes have posted nine consecutive winning seasons – and both basketball programs, of which the women recently competed for a national championship. Iowa's wrestling program has also taken home four national titles under Barta from 2008-10 and in 2021.

While the Hawkeyes have experienced success on the field under Barta, his athletic department has also seen its fair share of controversy. In 2017, the university paid out over \$4 million to a group of Black former Iowa football players who sued for discrimination, and in total, Iowa has paid out more than \$10 million in lawsuits since 2017. More recently, athletes from several programs were part of an investigation into sports wagering.

Barta's contract was set to expire on June 30, 2024, but he opted to retire 10 months earlier than the end of his deal, which included more than \$1 million annually in total compensation.

"This decision didn't come suddenly, nor did it come without significant thought,

discussion and prayer," Barta said. "As I've reflected, I came to the conclusion there's never a good time to step away, because there's always more to be done. That said, I'm confident this is the right time for me and for my family."

Schembechler's Son Resigns Amid Controversy

It took mere days after the hiring of Glenn "Shemy" Schembechler – son of late Michigan head football coach Bo Schembechler – for his Twitter likes to force his resignation.

Schembechler had been hired as the team's assistant director of recruiting on May 18, looking to help oversee the team's talent acquisition efforts. He'd previously been an NFL scout for decades, working for the Chicago Bears, Kansas City Chiefs, Washington Commanders, Las Vegas Raiders and Seattle Seahawks at various points in his career.

In the three days following his hiring, however, Schembechler's likes on Twitter came into the public eye. Several of his liked tweets indicated that slavery and the segregated era of the "Jim Crow" South helped to further the Black community economically. According to Yahoo! Sports, hundreds of racially insensitive Twitter likes were collected over the years.

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Schembechler issued his resignation on the evening of May 21. His Twitter account has since been deactivated after thousands of likes were removed.

"Any words or philosophies that in any way seek to underplay the immeasurable suffering and long-term economic and social inequities that hundreds of years of slavery and the 'Jim Crow' era caused for Black Americans is wrong," Schembechler said in the statement, which was issued through a public relations firm. "I was wrong. We must never sanitize morally unsanitary, historical behaviors that have hindered the Black community, or any other community. There are no historical silver linings for the experience of our brothers and sisters."

Schembechler is the second Michigan football staffer to be severed from the program in recent months after former co-offensive coordinator Matt Weiss was fired in January due to a police investigation involving computer access crimes.

A source with knowledge of the situation told ESPN that Schembechler went through a thorough background check while being interviewed by the Wolverines, but his Twitter likes did not come to surface until afterward.

"We are aware of some comments and likes on social media that have caused concern and pain for individuals in our community," Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel and head football coach Jim Harbaugh said in a shared statement. "Michigan Athletics is fully committed to a place where our coaches, staff and student-athletes feel welcome and where we fully support the University's and Athletic Department's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion."

Final NBA Draft Decisions Made

May 31 was the deadline for basketball players to withdraw from the 2023 NBA draft, with many who tested the waters by entering their names into the pool and going through the scouting process coming to a final decision about whether they would be trying to go pro or staying at the collegiate level next season.

Perhaps the biggest announcement as it relates to the Big Ten was that of Purdue center Zach Edey, who swept every major National Player of the Year award last season. The 7-4 post powerhouse decided to return for his final year of eligibility with the Boilermakers, fresh off a season in which he averaged 22.3 points, 12.9 rebounds and 2.1 blocked shots, all team highs.

Two of Michigan State's three potential departures return, bolstering the team's starting lineup along with the nation's No. 4 recruiting class. Four-year starting forward Joey Hauser, who finished second on the Spartans with 14.4 points per game last year, is gone, but returning are guards A.J. Hoggard and Jaden Akins. Hoggard recorded a team-high 5.9 assists per contest last season and tacked on 12.9 points, while Akins was one of the team's best sharpshooters, making 42.2 percent of his three-point attempts to go with 9.8 points per game.

Illinois also got a pair of its veterans back, with forward and last year's leading rebounder Coleman Hawkins returning to Champaign along with leading scorer and

guard Terrence Shannon. Shannon averaged 17.2 points per game last season, while Hawkins was at 9.9 points to go with 6.3 rebounds.

Among others returning after testing the NBA waters are Nebraska guard Keisei Tominaga, who shot 40.0 percent from three and scored 13.1 points per game, and Rutgers center Cliff Omoruyi, the team's leading rebounder with 9.6 boards per contest and tied for the team lead in scoring with 13.2 points.

As far as confirmed departures go, Northwestern guard Chase Audige is off to pursue his NBA dreams. He averaged 14.1 points and 2.9 assists per game in what proved to be his final season with the Wildcats.

Love Lost In Ann Arbor

Michigan's basketball team had arguably the biggest transfer portal acquisition of any Big Ten men's hoops squad this off-season when it landed former North Carolina guard Caleb Love, but the union between the two parties lasted just more than a month.

Following an "admissions issue" with the university, according to The Michigan Insider, Love decommitted from the Wolverines on May 17 before committing to Arizona on May 31.

"Caleb is a tremendously talented guard who has significant experience playing college basketball at a high level," Arizona coach Tommy Lloyd said. "We look forward to helping Caleb grow his game at Arizona."

Love was the nation's No. 7 overall prospect in the 247Sports composite exiting high school, a five-star point guard out of St. Louis Christian Brothers College. An early entry into the NBA draft seemed a good possibility for Love, especially after he averaged 15.9 points with 3.6 assists per game and shot 36.0 percent from three as a sophomore in 2021-22.

North Carolina made the national championship game that season with Love in tow, ultimately losing to Kansas. He decided to return for his junior year, putting

up similar numbers to the previous season with 16.7 points per game and 2.8 assists. His overall field-goal percentage only marginally improved from 37.1 to 37.8 percent year-to-year, however, leaving work to be done on his efficiency.

Following a disappointing campaign last season with no NCAA Tournament berth for the Tar Heels, Love decided to enter his name into the transfer portal. He selected Michigan as his destination on April 7.

"Yes, I will play for Michigan next year! Stay tuned! Go Blue," Love said on Twitter at the time.

It turns out that he will not. Michigan coach Juwan Howard is now down to two transfer additions for his program heading into next year (forward Tray Jackson and guard Nimari Burnett), neither of whom was a regular starter for his former team. Michigan lost three players to the portal, including center Hunter Dickinson (Kansas), its leading scorer, rebounder and shot blocker each of the past two seasons.

Northwestern Wins Women's Lacrosse Title

The Big Ten managed to produce a national champion in at least one sport this spring.

Northwestern's women's lacrosse team opened its season with a 16-15 downer of a loss to then-No. 5 Syracuse, but it proved to be the only loss the Wildcats recorded in what became a 21-1 season highlighted by a Big Ten and national championship.

A dominant 18-6 win over No. 1 overall seed Boston College sealed the title for the

Wildcats on May 28. Graduate attacker Izzy Scane, who scored 99 goals on the season to lead the entire country, netted four tallies to help secure the victory.

"I don't even really know how to put it into words," Scane said after the team returned to campus. "I've been crying like every 10 minutes. We've just been having the most fun possible. This group has done a great job of enjoying the little things all season. This, obviously, is a big thing. Celebrating it with everyone has been awesome. Everyone's just so happy and emotional and proud of each other. It's a lot of hard work that went into it. It's a great feeling."

It took Northwestern four games to complete its run through the 26-team NCAA tournament. After receiving a bye through the first round, the Wildcats got a rematch of their Big Ten semifinal game against Michigan and narrowly escaped with an 8-7 victory.

No other team came within seven goals of beating Northwestern the rest of the tournament. It smoked No. 8 Loyola Maryland 16-6 and No. 5 Denver 15-7 in the semifinals to reach its above-mentioned title tilt with the Eagles.

The Wildcats previously took the Big Ten title, beating No. 10 Maryland 14-9 in that championship game. Scane led the way once again with four goals.

The national crown makes eight in the history of the Northwestern women's lacrosse program, which won five in a row from 2005-09. It is the first for the Wildcats since 2012, and the eight total are second most all-time behind Maryland's 14 titles.



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Ohio State Secures Commitment From Mahaffey

Ohio State added its third transfer of the offseason on May 3, garnering the commitment of former Penn State wing Evan Mahaffey.

Joining the Buckeyes with three remaining seasons of eligibility, Mahaffey provides Ohio State with some needed depth on the wing. Boasting a 6-6, 200-pound frame, Mahaffey played both guard and forward for the Nittany Lions while producing 2.8 points and 1.7 rebounds per game last season in 9.4 minutes per contest.

COURT REPORT Jack Emerson

Although he didn't see the floor much during his lone season in State College, Mahaffey has the potential to grow into a solid rotational piece for the Buckeyes. Prior to joining the Nittany Lions, Mahaffey was a consensus three-star recruit out of Cincinnati Moeller, where he averaged 15.7 points, 7.1 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 1.6 blocks per game as a senior and also shot 63.8 percent from the field.

Mahaffey's standout performance with the Nittany Lions came on Jan. 11, when he hit all four of his field-goal attempts to produce a career-high 12 points in an 85-66 win over Indiana. While at Penn State, Mahaffey also played at Ohio State once, scoring four points and pulling down three rebounds in the Nittany Lions' 75-71 win over the Buckeyes on Feb. 23.

He is the third transfer addition for Ohio State this offseason, joining former Minnesota forward Jamison Battle and Baylor guard Dale Bonner. The addition of Mahaffey put Ohio State at the 13-scholarship limit.

OSU's Nonconference Schedule Coming Together

Ohio State's upcoming nonconference slate has started coming together, highlighted by a trip to the Emerald Coast Classic in Niceville, Fla., from Nov. 24-25.

The Buckeyes will open the tournament against Alabama in the semifinal on Nov. 24 at 7 p.m. The Buckeyes would then play either Oregon or Santa Clara in the championship or third-place game, depending on the results of both matchups, with the championship set for 7 p.m. on Nov. 25 and the third-place game to tip off at 4 p.m.

It will mark the seventh all-time meeting between the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide, with the last matchup resulting in a 54-48 win for Alabama on Nov. 29, 2002. The Buckeyes and Crimson Tide have split their six all-time matchups, but Alabama has claimed the last two games. Ohio State is also 2-0 against Oregon and 1-1 against Santa Clara.

The Crimson Tide are coming off one of the best seasons in program history on the court, capturing the SEC title with a 31-6 record en route to a Sweet 16 appearance as a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, but the team was surrounded by controversy throughout the season after sophomore Darius Miles was arrested and charged with capital murder in January. Alabama had plenty of success on the court last season, but the Tide will be without star forward Brandon Miller, who is expected to be a top-three pick in the NBA draft in June.

Prior to leaving for Niceville, Ohio State will host contests against Texas A&M on Nov. 10, Merrimack on Nov. 15 and Western Michigan on Nov. 19, which doubles as the campus game for the Emerald Coast Classic. The Buckeyes will also play in a neutral-site matchup with West Virginia in Cleveland on Dec. 30.

Big Ten Slate Set For 2023-24 Season

Not only has Ohio State started to fill out its nonconference schedule in recent weeks, but the Buckeyes also found out their Big Ten slate for next season.

The Big Ten released the single- and double-play opponents for each team, with the Buckeyes seeking a resurgence in conference play after producing a lowly 5-15 mark last season – the worst record in head coach Chris Holtmann's six years at Ohio State.

In regard to single-play opponents, Ohio State will host Illinois, Maryland and Purdue without making return trips – allowing the Buckeyes to dodge a trio of very hostile road environments – and will play Iowa, Michigan State and Northwestern only on the road this season. The Buckeyes were 2-1 at home against their single-play home opponents, while they were 1-2 on the road against their single-play away opponents.

Ohio State will play home and away matchups against Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Penn State, Rutgers and Wisconsin this season, rounding out



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOMEcoming — Former Ohio State guard Eugene Brown III announced on April 25 that he will transfer to Georgia Southern and return to his home state to continue his college basketball career.

their 20-game conference slate. Game dates and times will be announced at a later date.

Trio Of Transfers Find New Homes

Three of Ohio State's outgoing transfers from this offseason have found their new homes after entering the portal in recent months.

Guards Eugene Brown III and Tanner Holden both returned home, in some fashion, with Brown heading back to his home state by committing to Georgia Southern on April 25, while Holden transferred back to Wright State – where he spent the first three seasons of his college career – on May 16. Forward Seth Towns, who stepped away from the Ohio State program before last season due to recovery setbacks from back surgery, also swapped teams, committing to Howard on May 19 after entering the transfer portal on May 15.

Last season, Brown missed the first 11 games due to a concussion but ultimately appeared in 22 games, making one start as a small-ball center against Minnesota on Jan. 12. Despite standing 6-7, Brown spent most of the season as a center off the bench, averaging 2.2 points and 1.6 rebounds per game while shooting 53.1 percent from the field.

For his career, Brown posted career averages of 2.2 points and 1.7 rebounds per game while playing 10.9 minutes per contest. He graduated from Ohio State with a degree in sport management during spring commencement on May 7. Brown now joins a Georgia Southern squad that is coming off a 17-16 season, which included a 9-9 mark in Sun Belt play.

Holden entered the transfer portal on April 26 after a disappointing season in Columbus, which saw his role dwindle as the season wore on. In the Buckeyes' first 19 games, Holden averaged 16.4 minutes per game while factoring into Ohio State's guard and forward rotations, but his minutes plummeted to an average of 6.9 per contest over the final 16 games, of which Holden appeared in only eight. He finished the season by averaging 3.6 points and 2.4 rebounds per game while shooting 47.8 percent from the field and 50.0 percent from three, though it came on only 14 total attempts.

Prior to joining Ohio State, Holden emerged as one of the nation's most elite scorers while at Wright State. In his first three seasons as a Raider, Holden produced averages of 16.1 points and 6.9 rebounds per game while shooting 53.0 percent from the field. He garnered a pair of All-Horizon League first-team honors



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while helping Wright State to a pair of Horizon League regular-season titles and conference tournament titles in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Wright State had a considerable drop-off this past season without Holden, falling from a 22-14 record in 2021-22 to an 18-15 mark. The Raiders went 10-10 in conference play before being bounced in the second round of the Horizon League tournament.

Towns, meanwhile, sought a new home after playing one season for the Buckeyes in 2020-21.

In his lone season with the Buckeyes, Towns appeared in 25 games – in which he averaged 10.8 minutes per game – and produced 3.8 points and 2.2 rebounds per game. Towns, a Columbus native, began his collegiate career at Harvard after a successful preps career at Northland High School, where he blossomed into the No. 125 player in the 2016 recruiting class.

Towns was a standout at Harvard, where he emerged as the Ivy League Player of the Year in 2017-18, but a devastating knee injury during the 2018 Ivy League championship held him out for the next two seasons. With the Crimson, Towns appeared in 58 games and posted averages of 14.2 points and 5.0 rebounds. Towns completed an undergraduate degree in sociology while at Harvard.

Entering his eighth season of college basketball, Towns now joins a Howard team that is coming off of a 22-13 campaign in which they secured the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference tournament title and an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. The Bison fell to No. 1 seed Kansas 96-68 in the opening round of the tournament on March 16.

Ohio State Pursuing Ali And McKinley In 2024

Ohio State's 2023 recruiting class is expected to arrive on campus in the coming month, and Holtmann and his staff have now turned their attention to 2024.

The Buckeyes have seen a pair of positive developments on that front, with their efforts heating up for a pair of four-star prospects in Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy small forward Amier Ali (6-8, 175) and Branson (Mo.) Link Academy center Tyler McKinley (6-9, 220).

Ali, who ranks as the No. 41 overall player and No. 13 small forward in the class, placed Ohio State in his top eight, along with Alabama, Arizona State, Arkansas, Florida State, Kentucky, Michigan and Texas, on April 24. Ali took an official visit to Ohio State on May 6 after also taking one to Florida State on Feb. 27.

A Columbus native, Ali is currently playing on the Nike Elite Youth Basketball League circuit for Houston Hoops, where he has continued to develop his game for the next level. During the first two sessions of EYBL play, Ali averaged 11.7 points, 4.6 rebounds, 1.0 assists and 1.1 steals while shooting 44.1 percent from the field.

"2024 four-star wing Amier Ali has been a bit of a polarizing prospect since emerging as a top-50 talent in his age group," On3's Jack Pilgrim said. "Standing 6-foot-8, he's a quick-trigger shooter with limitless range and confidence. Physically,

he's got the tools to be a high-level player in college with pro potential. Tools, sure, but not the consistency you're looking for."

McKinley hails from the same high school as Ohio State sophomore center Felix Okpara. He placed the Buckeyes in his top seven on May 15, along with Alabama, Cincinnati, Michigan State, Tennessee, Virginia Tech and Xavier. McKinley hails from Cincinnati and began his high school career at Walnut Hills High School.

He ranks as the No. 59 overall player and No. 9 center in the class. As a sophomore at Walnut Hills, McKinley posted averages of 17.2 points, 7.4 rebounds, 2.9 assists, 1.6 steals and 1.3 blocks while shooting 68.6 percent from the field.

"Tyler McKinley is a strong-framed power forward," On3's Jamie Shaw wrote. "He is not afraid to mix it up and has an understanding of what his game is. At 6-9, McKinley has soft hands and is an active rebounder. While he is a below-the-rim defender, he understands angles and has good footwork and a motor. McKinley finishes well around the basket and knocks down his free throws. He plays with a lot of energy and does not shy away from contact. There is a throwback nature to his game, and while he is still developing the range on his jump shot, there are a lot of tools to carry into the highest level of the college game."

McKinley has taken an unofficial visit to Ohio State at this point in his recruitment and said that "playing for Ohio State would be a dream."

James Commits To USC Over Ohio State

Los Angeles Sierra Canyon five-star combo guard Bronny James, one of the most polarizing prospects in the 2023 recruiting class, has finally made his collegiate decision.

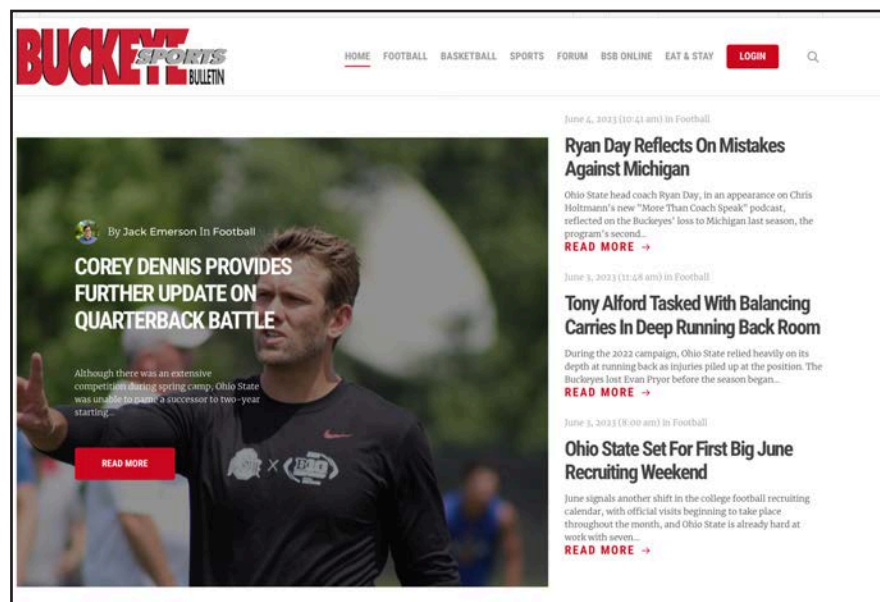
The son of Los Angeles Lakers star forward LeBron James announced on May 6 that he will play his college career at USC, selecting the Trojans over Ohio State and Oregon. James has seen his recruiting ranking rise throughout his senior season, gaining his fifth composite star from 247Sports and growing into the No. 22 player and No. 5 combo guard in the class.

James (6-3, 190) visited Ohio State once during the recruiting process, taking an unofficial visit during the weekend of the Buckeye football team's season opener against Notre Dame on Sept. 3, 2022. At the conclusion of his high school career, James competed in the McDonald's All-American Game on March 28, producing 15 points on 5-of-8 shooting.

The Buckeyes were considered to be one of James' three finalists, but Ohio State signaled that it was no longer in the running when it added Mahaffey, which filled its scholarship limit.

James joins a stellar USC recruiting haul, which includes the class' No. 1 overall prospect in five-star guard Isaiah Collier (6-3, 190) as well as four-star center Arrinten Page (6-9, 220), both out of Wheeler High School in Marietta, Ga. The Trojans boast the third-ranked recruiting class in 2023, while Ohio State checks in at No. 8, according to 247Sports.

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Reality Of Transfer Portal Impacts Ohio State

By **JACK EMERSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The world of college sports was flipped on its head when the transfer portal was introduced in 2018, allowing student-athletes to transfer to new programs without penalty during their undergraduate careers.

There are several safeguards in place, including the one-time transfer rule, but the portal has exploded in recent years, with thousands of student-athletes finding new homes each passing cycle. College basketball has not been immune to the impact of the portal, with more than 1,700 Division I players hitting the portal between the end of the season in April and June 1.

Some of the sport's top names swapped allegiances during the offseason, including Hunter Dickinson (Michigan to Kansas), LJ Cryer (Baylor to Houston) and Kel'el Ware (Oregon to Indiana), showing the wide-reaching nature of the portal's influence.

While players have been given more freedom to seek opportunities elsewhere, the portal has also become an added obstacle for coaches in regard to roster construction. Each coach takes a different approach to the portal, whether that be filling a few areas of need or completely overhauling the roster with new blood.

Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann has largely fallen into the category of using the

portal to bolster a roster that he has built through recruitment, placing a particular focus on continuity within his program. Since the portal's introduction, Holtmann has not brought in more than three scholarship transfers in a cycle, with each transfer intended to fill a specific need.

With the reality of the transfer portal, as well as Holtmann sending a trio of players to the NBA in the last two seasons including a pair of one-and-dones, the task of building a roster in this current age of college basketball has grown immensely for Holtmann and his staff.

"College basketball is not like college football where you're going to get a good player and keep them for three years," Holtmann said prior to this past season. "I wish it was like that in a lot of ways, but it's not like that, nor will it ever be. There's going to be, naturally, a little more roster turnover, and in some cases, significantly more. We've been really fortunate in that we have not had any significant attrition."

Holtmann has a consistent approach to the transfer portal, but the results of his pursuits haven't been all that fruitful as a whole. Only three of the 11 transfers under Holtmann have played more than one season for the Buckeyes, while just one – former Penn State guard Jamari Wheeler – saw an increase in usage at Ohio State, which registers how often a player ends a possession with the ball in their hands. Only Wheeler



FILE PHOTO

TRANSFER TRAVAILS — Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann (right) has navigated the transfer portal with varying success since taking the reins of the program in 2017, taking in transfers such as forward Seth Towns (left).

and CJ Walker, formerly of Florida State, saw their Player Efficiency Rating improve in their time with the Buckeyes.

With most of Holtmann's transfer players seeing declines after arriving at Ohio State, Eleven Warriors men's basketball reporter Griffin Strom said he feels that responsibility for those struggles is spread between the players and coaches.

"No transfer he's brought in has ever been *the* guy for any of these teams, and no transfer he's brought in has ever led Ohio State in scoring," Strom said. "There's certainly been promising guys that have come in, but not all of them have panned out super well. That kind of becomes clearer when you start looking year by year and look at the numbers that a lot of these guys have put up at Ohio State."

Although the portal was not yet introduced upon his arrival to Ohio State for the 2017-18 season, Holtmann quickly went to work seeking reinforcements from outside the program. His first transfer coup came a little over a month after his hiring on June 9, 2017, with Holtmann securing the services of Michigan graduate transfer guard Andrew Dakich.

Dakich's addition signaled the pattern regarding Holtmann's approach to the portal, with Holtmann adding depth at point guard, with C.J. Jackson already filling the starting point guard role. Dakich appeared in 34 games with one start, averaging 3.0 points and 2.1 assists per game.

Similar to his first offseason with Ohio State, the transfer portal wasn't implement-

ed yet ahead of Holtmann's second season in Columbus. But Holtmann made a pair of solid transfer additions with Walker and Wake Forest graduate Keyshawn Woods. The duo of Walker and Woods were two of the four Buckeyes to see their minutes per game increase after transferring to Ohio State, joined by Wheeler and former West Virginia guard Sean McNeil.

Walker was forced to redshirt a season before he could suit up for the Buckeyes, but Woods made an immediate impact. He was in and out of the starting rotation in 2018-19, but he was certainly impactful, averaging 8.1 points and 2.5 assists per game in 35 appearances. Woods' defining moments in a Buckeye jersey came during the Big Ten tournament and NCAA Tournament, with Woods averaging 15.8 points per game on 52.1 percent shooting – including a 37.5 percent mark from deep – during the four-game stretch.

Woods may not have been *the* guy during the regular season, but he was the most impactful Buckeye down the stretch that season, and Holtmann recognized as much.

"He's played with more juice these last two weeks, and he's played so confidently," Holtmann said after Ohio State's win over Iowa State in the opening round of the 2019 NCAA Tournament. "He's led our team in such a unique way that I don't know that I've had a fifth-year guy kind of take the reins of a team as much as he has."

Walker was one of three Ohio State transfer additions to play multiple seasons








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for the Buckeyes, starting at point guard in the scarlet and gray during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 campaigns. While with the Buckeyes, he appeared in 58 games and made 41 starts, producing 9.1 points and 3.9 assists per game, well above his production during his first two seasons at Florida State, in which he averaged 6.5 points and 1.9 assists per game.

Despite playing just half of his collegiate career at Ohio State, Walker gained a serious love and respect for the program and its fan base.

"I take this seriously, playing for Ohio State. It means a lot," Walker said ahead of his Senior Day. "I've met a lot of people since I got here that helped me get to where I am today. I just want them to remember me playing hard, putting my team first and diving on the floor, all of the little things that you don't see in the box score. I just want to be remembered as the ultimate leader and great overall point guard that wins and gets the job done each and every night."

All in all, Ohio State's 2018 transfer haul was one of the more impactful groups of Holtmann's six-year tenure with the Buckeyes. But Holtmann's addition of California forward Justice Sueing ahead of the 2019 season may be his best individual add from the transfer market.

Though the transfer portal had been implemented by the time Sueing committed to Ohio State, he was still required to redshirt his first season with the Buckeyes because immediate transfer eligibility had not yet been approved by the NCAA. Sueing spent three seasons with the Buckeyes – the longest of any Ohio State transfer, though he played only two games in his second season due to an abdominal injury – and posted averages of 11.4 points and 5.3 rebounds in 68 games.

While Sueing was inconsistent at times, especially during his final season with the Buckeyes in which he shot career lows of 42.4 percent from the field and 28.9 percent from deep (not including his brief 2021-22 season), Strom pointed to Sueing as Holtmann's best addition from the portal while at Ohio State.

"Justice Sueing was a guy that, I think, took a lot of heat, especially this past season because I think people expected more out of him," Strom said. "But, statistically speaking, he's been the most successful transfer guy so far."

Prior to the 2020-21 season, Ohio State took a big swing in the portal with the addition of Harvard forward Seth Towns, the 2017-18 Ivy League Player of the Year. Towns was an elite talent in two seasons with the Crimson, averaging 14.2 points and 5.0 rebounds in 58 games. But in the 2018 Ivy League Tournament Championship, Towns suffered a serious knee injury that held him out for the next two seasons.

Towns played just one season for the Buckeyes, appearing in 25 games in a rotational role and averaging 3.8 points and 2.2 rebounds per game while playing just 10.8 minutes per contest. He tried to play again in 2021-22, but offseason back surgery held him out for the entire year. After another setback during the lead-up to this past season, Towns stepped away from the Buckeyes, but he is set for a return to the sport after transferring to Howard in May.

"I don't know what anyone's expectations

necessarily were for him given all of the injury issues," Strom said. "But he was obviously the Ivy League Player of the Year and put up big numbers at Harvard, so you kind of thought, 'If he can resemble his former self to any extent, this might be a pretty nice addition.' The injury issues just kept prevailing there."

Holtmann also kicked off a three-season stretch in which he brought in a guard from a mid-major school, adding Jimmy Sotos from Bucknell. Sotos was followed in this trend by Louisiana guard Cedric Russell in 2021 and Wright State's Tanner Holden in 2022. All three transferred into Ohio State as double-digit scorers in major roles at their previous schools, but upon their arrival to the Buckeyes, they became deep bench pieces.

In the cases of Russell and Holden, both showed flashes of being potential high-level contributors early in their respective seasons. Russell scored 12 points and hit several important shots down the stretch to help Ohio State unseat then-No. 1 Duke on Nov. 30, 2021. Holden hit a miraculous three-pointer at the buzzer to push the Buckeyes past Rutgers on Dec. 8, 2022. But both faced a similar fate as they saw their roles decrease entering the bulk of Big Ten play, with Holden falling almost entirely out of Ohio State's rotation.

Holtmann used the same rationale to defend his decision around Russell and Holden's playing time, claiming that neither player was quite ready for the demands of the Big Ten. The similar nature of Russell and Holden's Ohio State careers was noted by Strom, who said the Buckeyes may have been adding too much mid-major talent at the time.

"Every year in the transfer portal, or just in college basketball in general, there's guys that do big things in mid-major programs and then they can end up transferring to a blue-chip program and take their career to the next level," Strom said. "It just depends on who that guy is and what their ceiling is. I think Ohio State has taken swings on guys like that, who have done really well against lesser competition, but they just haven't panned out for Ohio State."

With Holtmann adding a trio of high-major prospects through the portal for the upcoming season in Minnesota forward Jamison Battle, Baylor guard Dale Bonner and Penn State forward Evan Mahaffey, Strom said he believes Holtmann is beginning to veer away from his strategy of claiming mid-major projects.

"Ohio State has kind of adapted its approach to the transfer portal because of that. When you look at guys they brought in most recently, they didn't take a guy like that," Strom said. "I think some of those decisions (this year) were absolutely informed by the misfires with some of those mid-major guys in years past."

Ohio State also added high-major talent in 2021 and 2022, with Wheeler and Indiana center Joey Brunk joining Russell in 2021 and McNeil and Oklahoma State guard Isaac Likekele coming in with Holden in 2022.

Wheeler started in all 31 of his games with the Buckeyes and was the only transfer to see an increase in his usage rating and PER after joining Ohio State. He posted a career-best 7.1 points per game in his lone season with the Buckeyes, shooting 45.8

percent from the field and 38.8 percent from deep.

But Wheeler's calling card was his defense coming into Ohio State, appearing on a pair of Big Ten All-Defensive teams for Penn State, but he fell short of that mark in his lone season with the Buckeyes. Brunk didn't amount to much for the Buckeyes but did spark an 80-69 win over Michigan State on March 3, 2022, with a season-high 18 points.

Moving into last season, Likekele and McNeil both brought Big 12 pedigrees to the Buckeyes, but the duo as a whole had varying results. McNeil filled his role as sharpshooter well, shooting 36.9 percent from deep en route to averaging 9.7 points per game – his fewest since his freshman season with the Mountaineers – but defensive shortcomings and offensive inconsistency hampered McNeil during the year.

Likekele arrived in Columbus with the expectation that he would be an all-around threat for the Buckeyes. As a Cowboy, he became the only player in program history to register at least 1,000 points, 600 rebounds and 400 assists during his career, while also being a well-respected defender. But Likekele never quite got into a rhythm with Ohio State, averaging career lows in points (3.8), rebounds (4.0), assists (2.8) and field-goal percentage (38.8 percent).

Ohio State's transfer portal pursuits in the last few seasons haven't been all that fruitful for Holtmann, but the Buckeyes' incoming transfer class provides some promise.

Battle joins Ohio State as an adept scor-

er, producing double-digit scoring in all four of his collegiate seasons, posting a career average of 14.4 points per game while shooting 42.0 percent from the field and 35.0 percent from deep.

"You could look at Battle as potentially the most immediately impactful transfer that Ohio State has brought in," Strom said. "That's going to be a big component to Ohio State's success – it's what can they get out of Jamison Battle?"

With Holtmann claiming a big name in Battle, the additions of Bonner and Mahaffey fly somewhat under the radar. Bonner was a depth piece for Baylor during his two seasons with the Bears and will likely slide into a similar role with the Buckeyes behind sophomores Bruce Thornton and Roddy Gayle Jr. Mahaffey is something of a chameleon, with his positional versatility allowing him to play both in the front court and back court, and is also on the same track as Ohio State's sophomore class after transferring into the program after just one season with the Nittany Lions.

Despite the addition of three Power Six contributors, Strom felt that Ohio State's efforts in the cycle could have been stronger.

"It's a solid class, for sure," Strom said. "Overall, you could say maybe the class left a little to be desired. If Ohio State really wanted to make a big splash, maybe if you were a Buckeye fan, you would have preferred one of the two other guys besides Battle to be a little bit more of a heralded transfer portal prospect, so that you're coming into the season with two guys that you're expecting to really produce rather than one guy."

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Additions Of Parks, Cambridge Complete Roster

Ohio State has added two players out of the portal since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, receiving transfers from former Michigan State forward Taiyier Parks and former Kentucky guard Kennedy Cambridge.

Parks was first up, announcing May 4 that

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

she had committed to Ohio State as a graduate transfer. A 6-3 native of Cleveland, she entered the portal in March after four seasons with the Spartans, where she averaged 7.1 points and 5.5 rebounds on 50.8 percent shooting. She posted 8.3 points and 5.2 rebounds on a career-high 57.5 percent shooting last season, appearing in 29 games for Michigan State with 11 starts, averaging 18.5 minutes per game.

She played high school basketball at North Royalton High School and was a four-star recruit from the 2019 recruiting class, averaging 19.0 points, 16.0 rebounds, 3.0 steals and 3.0 blocks in her junior season while earning first-team all-conference honors. She missed her senior season due to an injury.

Parks provides a significant boost in the post for Ohio State, an area where head coach Kevin McGuff and the Buckeyes have struggled in recent years with a smaller lineup consistently taking the court.

Those deficiencies were especially evident this past season when it came to defending in the post. In Ohio State's season-ending loss to Virginia Tech, 6-6 center Elizabeth Kitley dominated, finishing with 25 points and 12 rebounds on 9-of-14 shooting and adding three blocks while not leaving the floor for the entire game.

Those types of post players had also hindered Ohio State earlier in the season – Indiana's Mackenzie Holmes averaged 23.7 points and 5.3 rebounds on 76.3 percent shooting in three games against the Buckeyes, while Iowa's Monika Czinano averaged 24.0 points and 5.5 rebounds on 88.0 percent shooting in two games against Ohio State.

But Parks' addition could help to dispel those issues moving forward for McGuff. She attempted just one three-pointer in her four seasons at Michigan State, meaning she plays more like a traditional post, one that Ohio State has not had since Dorka Juhasz was on campus in Columbus. Having someone on the roster who can hound the paint has been a sorely missed aspect on the Buckeyes' roster of late, but Parks should be able to fill that role with ease.

Parks' rebounding puts her above the rest, with her 152 rebounds last season split evenly among offensive and defensive boards. Furthermore, she had an offensive rebounding rate of 14.3 percent, which puts her in the 98th percentile according to Her Hoop Stats, meaning she is already among the best rebounders on Ohio State's squad.

As for her defense – an area where Ohio State doesn't want any of the starting five to fall behind, as a weak link makes for a weak defensive press – Parks averaged 2.5 steals per 40

minutes and posted a defensive player rating of 86.0 last season, which puts her in the 84th percentile according to Her Hoop Stats.

Parks will compete for playing time with returning forwards Rebeka Mikulasikova and Eboni Walker, the latter of whom started the final 11 games of the season for Ohio State, but Parks' height and proven ability as an effective player in the post give her a leg up as a potential starter for next season.

A starting lineup of guards Jacy Sheldon, Celeste Taylor and Taylor Thierry with forwards Cotie McMahon and Parks offers a much more traditional lineup than recent small-ball lineups the Buckeyes have used, and it gives Ohio State more of a fighting chance deeper in the season when those deficiencies in the post have spelled trouble for the Buckeyes.

Cambridge was Ohio State's other addition, announcing her transfer to the Buckeyes on May 24 after just one season with the Wildcats.

Cambridge appeared in 19 games for Kentucky last season with one start, averaging 2.7 points and 2.3 rebounds on 48.8 percent shooting in 14.4 minutes per contest. She posted a career-high nine points on two occasions, doing so in her first college game on Dec. 4, 2022, in a win over UNC Greensboro and in a loss to Ole Miss on Feb. 13.

The 5-8 guard is from Nashville, Tenn., and joined Kentucky in the 2022 recruiting class as a four-star prospect. She played at Ensworth High School in Nashville, averaging 14.8 points, 4.6 rebounds, 3.6 steals and 3.0 assists per game her senior season.

Another wrinkle to her addition is that her younger sister, Jaloni, is a 5-6 point guard and the top-ranked prospect in the 2024 recruiting class, according to ESPN. She was named Gatorade Tennessee Girls Basketball Player of the Year last season after averaging 26.9 points, 7.6 rebounds, 4.3 steals and 3.8 assists for Ensworth.

Parks and Cambridge make for three transfer additions this offseason for Ohio State, joining former Duke guard Taylor, the reigning ACC Defensive Player of the Year, who announced her transfer to Columbus in April.

While Taylor and Parks are expected to immediately impact the Buckeyes, headed to Columbus with multiple seasons under their belts, Cambridge will enter her sophomore season as an important depth addition for Ohio State at guard after losing guards Hevynne Bristow, Kaitlyn Costner and Mya Perry to the portal this offseason.

McGuff Makes First Comments On Transfers

During an alumni event on May 11 at the Covelli Center, McGuff gave his first thoughts on the transfer additions Ohio State has made this offseason.

"We added Celeste Taylor out of Duke, who's going to be a graduate transfer," he said. "She was first-team All-ACC this year and she was the ACC Defensive Player of the Year, so we're excited about that."

"We just added Taiyier Parks, who was the starting center at Michigan State last year," he continued. "She'll provide us with some depth and some physicality around the basket."

With those additions looking to help Ohio

State build on last seasons' run that saw the Buckeyes advance to the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993, McGuff is looking forward to what Ohio State will be able to put on the court here in just a few months.

"We're really optimistic about the coming season and building on the success that we've had," he said.

Mikesell Waived By Fever, Signs With Dream

Former Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell was waived by the Indiana Fever on May 17 just days before the team's season opener, though she was later picked up by the Atlanta Dream on June 5 after two weeks on the open market.

Mikesell was selected by the Fever with the No. 13 overall pick (first in the second round) of the 2023 WNBA draft. She reportedly had a strong preseason camp with the team, but after playing for 14 minutes in the Fever's first preseason game, Mikesell did not play in their preseason finale on May 13.

Mikesell is one of several players cut by the Fever to get down to the WNBA's mandated 12-person roster, including Destanni Henderson, who was on last year's team, and LaDazhia Williams, who was taken with the No. 17 pick in this year's draft.

Small rosters in the WNBA, at least relative to their NBA counterparts, have led to several surprising cuts in recent weeks. The Fever had previously cut Emily Engstler, last year's No. 4 overall pick, and the Dallas Wings have already cut former Maryland guard Abby Meyers, whom the team selected with the No. 11 pick in this year's draft.

The Dream were off to a 2-3 start to the season through June 2 and have shot just 34.8 percent from deep as a team, so Mikesell's hot shooting hand could provide an immediate impact as she tries to catch on at the professional level.

McMahon Makes USA U19 Roster

After several days of tryouts in Colorado Springs, Colo., McMahon was announced on May 15 as a member of the USA Women's U19 National Team that will compete for a gold medal this summer.

The FIBA U19 Women's World Cup will be played in Madrid, Spain, from July 15-23. The USA is in Group B, along with Chinese Taipei, Germany and Mali. The USA is 4-0 against Mali and defeated Germany in their only matchup in 2019, while the USA has yet to play Chinese Taipei.

McMahon is one of 12 players on the roster along with Madison Booker (Texas), Aaliyah Del Rosario (LSU), Jadyn Donovan (Duke), Joyce Edwards (uncommitted), Hannah Hidalgo (Notre Dame), Londynn Jones (UCLA), Chloe Kitts (South Carolina), Talana Lepolo (Stanford), Kiki Rice (UCLA), Grace VanSlooten (Oregon) and Allie Ziebell (uncommitted).

The USA's head coach is Joni Taylor (Texas A&M), with DeLisha Milton-Jones (Old Dominion) and Teri Moren (Indiana) serving as assistant coaches.

McMahon was on last year's USA Women's U18 National Team, helping lead the United States to a gold medal in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and now she'll go for her second gold medal in as many offseasons. The USA has

won the gold medal in eight of the last nine U19 World Cups and in each of the last two years.

Bristow Transfers To James Madison

James Madison announced May 17 that Bristow will join the team as a graduate transfer after three seasons with the Buckeyes.

Bristow, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., began her collegiate career at Providence, where she appeared in 29 games during her freshman season before transferring to Ohio State before the 2020-21 season. Originally planning to redshirt her first season with the Buckeyes, Bristow wound up appearing in four games and scoring five points.

She played in 11 games the next season (with one start), averaging 3.2 points and 2.4 rebounds per game, but she played just 8.8 minutes per contest, struggling to consistently catch on in the rotation. She saw increases in essentially every statistical category this past season, averaging 3.6 points and 3.0 rebounds in 10.5 minutes per game, and hit double digits on two occasions, including a career-high 11 points in a win over Wright State.

Ohio State was largely unable to find a role for her down the stretch, though, as she played in just four of its final nine games of the season with Sheldon back in the lineup after returning from injury. One game she did play in was Ohio State's tournament opener against James Madison, where Bristow had four rebounds in five minutes.

"Hevynne is a special player, person and athlete," said James Madison head coach Sean O'Regan. "She got to see us up close and in person when we played Ohio State in the NCAA tournament, and she could really see herself here with us. I have watched her since she was a junior in high school, and her potential is off the charts. I'm super excited to get her on the court with us and help her get to where she belongs."

Bristow has one season of eligibility remaining as a graduate transfer. She is the third Buckeye to enter the portal this offseason, joining Costner and Perry, the latter announcing her transfer to Florida Atlantic on April 28.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- McGuff said during an alumni event on May 11 that Ohio State's nonconference schedule for the upcoming season will include a home game against Boston College and a game at Tennessee, completing home-and-home series with both programs.

- As part of that update, McGuff also said the Buckeyes will play in the Bahamas, which likely indicates that Ohio State will participate in the Battle 4 Atlantis Women's Tournament from Nov. 18-20. The field currently includes Arizona, DePaul, Michigan, Middle Tennessee State, Mississippi, South Dakota and Virginia Tech, with other teams to be announced.

- Ella Hobbs, a 6-4 center in 2024 out of Charlotte (N.C.) Jay M. Robinson, will announce her commitment on June 11, deciding between Miami (Fla.), Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio State and Virginia Tech.

- Berry Wallace, a 6-1 guard in 2024 out of Pickerington (Ohio) Central who was offered by Ohio State, announced her commitment to Illinois on May 6.

Lutschaunig, Trotter Triumphant To End Season

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Andrew Lutschaunig has already replayed the moment in his head thousands of times.

He's hunched over in ready position at a tennis net in Orlando, Fla., tied 40-40 as he and his longtime friend and teammate James Trotter prepare to serve for their one shot at match point. Sweat beads down his brow as he tries not to ponder the possibility this next point brings.

"I knew where he was going to serve, and I knew it was either going to be an ace or a fault," Lutschaunig said. "I was just praying that it went in. I remember that feeling. That's the moment I keep playing, just hearing the sound of the ball hitting his racket."

Trotter lofted the ball over his head and smashed it across the court. It found its way over the net, bounced precisely on the line separating both service boxes and flew past both opposing players to clinch a national championship for the Ohio State pair. Lutschaunig tossed his hat to the ground and paced circles in disbelief as Trotter let out a triumphant yell.

"It still, honestly, hasn't fully set in yet," Lutschaunig told BSB on June 2. "It still feels pretty crazy. Our second year in school, we won the Big Ten individuals (doubles) tournament, and I thought that was the greatest thing that would ever happen in my (college) tennis career."

After falling one win short of their team's ultimate goal, losing in the national championship match to Virginia mere days before, the two Ohio State seniors had knocked off the nation's No. 3 doubles pairing in Texas' Cleeve Harper and Eliot Spizzirri to win the NCAA Doubles National Championship on May 28.

"I'm able to say that my last shot I ever hit for college was an ace to win the national championship," Trotter said. "So that obviously feels nice."

Lutschaunig and Trotter's history playing doubles together dates back to their respective second years at Ohio State – both just completed their fifth – winning the Big Ten tournament in their first competitive action. Having that experience and bond with each other helped springboard their tournament run, and all the adversity they'd experienced elsewhere made tournament pressures seem a lot less daunting.

"Both of us have been fighting for each other, for our teammates," Trotter said. "That really helped us grow our relationship. Even during COVID, when I didn't get to see any of my teammates, including Andrew, we kept each other accountable to get hours in. I really trusted Andrew, him playing by my side, because I knew the hours, the work he put in. I saw it every day. I wouldn't have had any other guy fight with me in my last tournament."

That didn't mean that their partnership for the NCAA Tournament was a done deal, however. In fact, with just two days separating the team event from the doubles tournament, Lutschaunig didn't know who his partner would be.

He had about as successful a doubles season as one can possibly achieve at the



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

DOUBLE TROUBLE — Ohio State men's tennis was able to end the season on a positive note, as the doubles pairing of James Trotter (left) and Andrew Lutschaunig (right) took home the NCAA Doubles Championship on May 28.

NCAA level, as he also captured an ITA Indoor National Championship in the fall. That crown didn't come with Trotter at his side, however – it was junior J.J. Tracy. Afterward, the duo was ranked among the top doubles pairings in the country and posted an 11-1 record together during the season before some mix-ups based on dual-meet matchups.

Trotter couldn't participate in ITAs because he took the fall off to return to Japan, his home country. Following his return, he and Lutschaunig renewed their collaboration, posting a 13-8 record prior to the NCAA tournament, ranking 16th nationally.

After an open conversation between the three players and coach Ty Tucker, as either tandem would qualify for the tourney, Trotter's experience both overall and with Lutschaunig specifically made him the go-to.

"In the end, it just came down to the fact that I've been going to war with James for four years now," Lutschaunig said. "We've been playing doubles for a very long time, and we played it all year. We've been through some really tight matches this year as well. That was obviously a tough situation, but I just think, in the end, James, especially being the older guy, deserved a shot at it."

Lutschaunig and Trotter's ultimate goal, as was every player on Ohio State's team this season, was to win the NCAA Outdoor Team National Championship. Despite multiple indoor titles in school history, the Buckeyes have still never won an outdoor title, though they hold multiple runner-up finishes.

The heartache of another such runner-up finish after a run that included wins over multiple top-five opponents weighed on Lutschaunig and Trotter's shoulders entering their individual competition. For Trotter doubly so, because he was also competing in the singles tournament, where he won

two matches to earn All-American status. Both had to work through the emotions of the team's loss quickly after losing the doubles point in that match.

"We all wanted to win the team tournament, because that's what we trained for as a school," Trotter said. "We got to the finals, the doubles point, I think we had six or seven deuce points that we lost. Those little things could have changed the outcome. But we couldn't do anything, so I just moved on. Especially for me, I had a match the next day (in the singles tournament) so I just had to focus on trying to get All-American in singles and doubles."

With any of that emotional pain came physical pain for Lutschaunig, too. All season he'd been playing through a nagging shoulder injury, a torn labrum he picked up two years ago, one that doctors told him eventually required surgery. This past January he started "messing up" the rotator cuff in the same shoulder as well. In March, he scheduled his surgery for two days after he knew the doubles tournament would end.

"I got carried a lot by adrenaline," said Lutschaunig, who had successful surgery to repair the injury on May 30. "The whole time we were in, it still is kind of surreal to me to be in that situation, because it took me so long to get over that hump of contributing to the team on the court. When I got on the court, I still felt it, obviously. I usually serve first because James is so dominant at the net, but in one of the matches James served first to save the arm for one extra game. I felt it with everything I was doing, but I was able to adapt to the pain."

Then came plenty of in-match adversity in the NCAA tournament as well. Under the NCAA format, if teams split the first two sets in tournament play, rather than play a full decisive third set, a "super tiebreak" is played. The first to 10 points wins the entire match and advances.

Lutschaunig and Trotter faced this situation not once, but twice in the tournament. The first was the most nerve-racking of the two, a 10-8 victory to win 6-2, 6-7 (7-1), 10-8 over Illinois' Hunter Heck and Karlis Ozolins, ranked 37th nationally. Their next win in a super tiebreak came in the next round, the national semifinals.

Against No. 64 Daniel De Jonge and Tim Zeitvogel of Pepperdine, Lutschaunig and Trotter pulled out a come-from-behind 3-6, 7-6 (7-2), 10-4 victory.

"We've actually had a lot of success in most of our tiebreaks," Lutschaunig said. "The tennis we like to play – obviously it starts with the serve, being two big guys. I always try to tell myself to take it one changeover at a time, because when you're playing first to 10 points, if you say that to yourself out loud at 1-1 or 1-0, it starts to get a little stressful. So I try to break it up, first to three, then first to six, then 10."

Against Harper and Spizzirri in the final, a super tiebreak wasn't required for the Buckeyes, who won in straight sets 6-4, 6-4. That didn't mean there wasn't drama.

The second of those two sets was knotted up at 4-4 with Harper and Spizzirri on serve. Ohio State had just two more chances to break if it wanted to serve for the match prior to a second-set tiebreak. Responding to the pressure, they swept the game.

With the Buckeyes back on serve, however, the Longhorns took three straight points to give themselves four chances at a match-extending break, as games in collegiate tennis don't have to be won by two points. But the title-taking tandem battled all the way back to knot the game up 40-40, and with one shot at match point, Trotter smashed his ace through the Texas line.

"I just told myself (after we went down 0-40), 'I'm just going to hit it as hard as I can and trust my serve and go for it,'" Trotter said. "If we lose that game, we lose it, but I just didn't want to lose that game with me trying to make the serve on the defensive."

From the team's perspective, Lutschaunig and Trotter's accomplishment served to soften some of the blow of losing to Virginia in the team final, a team that Ohio State beat twice previously in the season.

"At Ohio State, and probably every other school too, you really only think about the team event," Lutschaunig said. "That's the one that we go for, so obviously everyone was crushed to not get that one, especially since we were so close to getting it. But they were very supportive of us, and everyone was texting us and the coaches were super happy for us. It was a great day."

Lutschaunig returns for Ohio State in 2024, making use of a COVID-19 waiver to stay in Columbus for a sixth year. Trotter will now turn professional, his eligibility exhausted, but it's hard to think of a better way for a collegiate player to go out.

"I'll miss the five years that I fought, every match, at Ohio State for my teammates," Trotter said. "I'll definitely miss that, but it feels good to go out that way."

Former Player Kirtland Returns As Coach

College athletics are looking more and more like professional sports with players having “free agency” (transfer portal) to play wherever they want while earning big bucks (name, image and likeness).

So it wouldn't have been surprising if there was a listing under transactions that read: “Ohio State men's hockey traded as-

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

sistant coach Luke Strand to Minnesota State for assistant coach Paul Kirtland.”

It didn't happen that way, obviously, but the result was the same with the ex-Buckeye player Kirtland returning home after Strand was named the head coach at Minnesota State to complete a topsy-turvy cycle in the coaching circles.

Strand, who spent one season with the Buckeyes as a replacement for Steve Miller – who joined the Minnesota staff as an associate head coach last summer – took the Minnesota State job when Mavericks head coach Mike Hastings assumed the same position at Wisconsin following the firing of Tony Granato in April. Minnesota State associate head coach Todd Knott joined Hastings at Wisconsin while Kirtland's contract was set to expire on June 30.

The opportunity to rejoin a program Kirtland played for from 2009-12 was alluring. Also, his wife, Colleen (née Dean), was a second-team All-America gymnast (2012) in an Ohio State career that spanned from 2009-13. They have a son, Cian.

“The Ohio State University is very special to my family and me,” Kirtland said. “I couldn't be more excited to return to a place that has positively impacted my life in countless ways.”

During Kirtland's two years at Minnesota State, the Mavericks made the NCAA tournament each season, including losing the 2022 championship game to Denver. He spent 2020-21 on Yale's staff, but the team did not compete during the season because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to that, he was an assistant at Sacred Heart.

Kirtland, 35, also has coaching experience at the junior hockey level in the North American and United States leagues, and before that, he played in the Double-A level ECHL for the 2012-13 season. He skated in

49 games for the Buckeyes over three seasons, scoring three goals. Kirtland was Academic All-Big Ten and an Ohio State Scholar-Athlete who earned a degree in business administration in 2013.

Kirtland played for head coach John Markell his freshman season and Mark Osiecki the next two. Current Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik was Osiecki's assistant those seasons.

“We are excited to add Paul to our staff,” Rohlik said. “His character, work ethic and ability to develop players will be a huge asset to our program.”

The Buckeyes were 21-16-3 last season, finishing third in the Big Ten. They received an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament and beat Harvard 8-1 before losing 4-1 to eventual national champion Quinnipiac in the regional final.

Strand had a big hand in the Buckeyes' success by coaching the top NCAA penalty kill (88.7 percent) and national leader in shorthanded goals (10).

Bucking The Trend

Over the past few months, In The Crease has concentrated heavily on the most recent players in the program and rightly so, with three of them signing NHL contracts and others deciding to either stay at Ohio State for another season or transferring.

It's been a busy offseason as far as the roster for 2023-24 transitions, but two other “old” Buckeyes besides Kirtland have been in the news.

Matt McIlvane (2004-08) moved one step closer to coaching in the NHL when he was named April 25 as the head coach for the San Diego Gulls of the American Hockey League, the top affiliate of the Anaheim Ducks. The 37-year-old spent many years coaching in Europe after a short stint in the minor leagues ended.

Zac Dalpe is four years younger, but unlike McIlvane and Kirtland, the former Buckeye (2008-10) is playing and has a chance to win the Stanley Cup with the Florida Panthers vs. the Vegas Golden Knights.

Dalpe's story is one of perseverance. The 2008 second-round pick (45th overall) of the Carolina Hurricanes turned pro after two seasons with the Buckeyes in which he had 70 points (24 goals, 36 assists) in 76 games. His last season was Kirtland's first with the Buckeyes.

It has been a journeyman's career for Dalpe, who has played 168 NHL regular-season games (16 goals, 16 assists for 32 points) in 12 seasons with the Hurri-

canes, Vancouver, Buffalo, Minnesota, Columbus and Florida in addition to playing for six AHL teams where he has accumulated 498 games.

He is seen by the Panthers as a perfect mentor for their



Zac Dalpe

young players at Charlotte of the AHL and was happy in that role as captain, but injuries at the NHL level enabled him to appear in 14 games for Florida this season during the regular season.

“Zac is a natural leader, and his impact on our franchise is felt on and off the ice,” Panthers general manager Bill Zito said in a statement on March 27 when announcing a two-year, two-way (NHL/AHL) contract extension. “A high-character athlete and relentlessly competitive forward, we are grateful for his continued dedication to our organization.”

All the years of persistence paid off for Dalpe in the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs as the No. 8 seeded Panthers pulled off one of the bigger upsets in Stanley Cup history by defeating Boston in seven games.

The Bruins had set league records for wins and points and were heavy favorites over the Panthers, who didn't qualify until the final days of the season. Dalpe did not play the first three games of the series but was inserted in the fourth game because of an injury. Two games later, he made his mark.

The Bruins had just scored two unanswered goals and were leading 4-3 in the third period with a chance to close out the series when Dalpe – in his sixth career playoff game (three with Minnesota in 2016) – scored his first postseason goal at 7:21 to tie it, and the Panthers won the game 7-5 to send the series back to Boston for a seventh game.

“That's something you dream about as a kid, scoring in the Stanley Cup playoffs,” Dalpe said. “I like to think I work hard, especially when no one's watching, and then when you get on the stage, hopefully you get a shot on net and it goes in, so luckily it did.”

“That's kind of the game, right?” Florida coach Paul Maurice said. “Zac Dalpe, big goal. He'll never forget that goal. That's not one of 30. That's a tying goal in a closeout game, an elimination game for us, that gave us a chance. He's a great story.”

Dalpe has remained on the fourth line with disciplined play and checking in order to keep his dreams of playing in big moments alive.

“I've never been a guy, I guess for lack of a better term, that has thrown in the towel,” he told FloridaPanthers.com. “As your career goes on and the years get piled on and the surgeries come and go, maybe it creeps in your mind a little bit. But as a young kid, you always wanted to do the things that I got to do. I wouldn't say I eliminated them, but they were tucked away deep in my psyche, for sure.

“Have I been a mainstay in the (NHL)?

No. But I've gone 12 years with playing at least one game and made a good living out of it. I take great pride in that.”

Different Route

McIlvane had visions of playing in the NHL like Dalpe but wasn't as heralded, being an eighth-round selection (251st) in the 2004 draft by the Ottawa Senators.

He had 52 points (15 goals, 37 assists) in 156 games for the Buckeyes and was captain as a senior. He bounced around the minors from 2008-12, even playing 14 games in Germany, before injuries turned his focus to coaching.

McIlvane started in the ECHL as an assistant with Orlando in 2012-13 then went back to Germany to EHC Red Bull München, serving as an assistant coach from 2014-18 and associate coach for the 2018-19 season. He was an assistant for Germany when it won a silver medal at the 2018 Winter Olympics.

He spent the past four seasons coaching EC Red Bull Salzburg of the ICE Hockey League, the top-tier league in Austria, which also includes teams from Hungary, Italy and Slovenia, and led the team to back-to-back titles in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 seasons. His regular season was 94-42-22-19 (.650 percent), and he was 31-8 (.795) in the post-season.

“It's vital that players have a steady, confident voice here every day,” Anaheim general manager Pat Verbeek said. “Enthusiasm and a vision is important for these players. I think the winning pedigree and reputation Matt has is important. For me, players can't question his know-how. It's instant credibility.”

McIlvane loved his time overseas but couldn't pass up the offer by the Ducks.

“We were very comfortable in our life in Europe,” he said. “My son speaks fluent German. My daughter is picking it up – she was in kindergarten this year. The word is opportunity. An opportunity like this doesn't come along often. There aren't too many NHL organizations that have a brighter future than the Anaheim Ducks. That was very exciting to us.”

Big Bucks

Former Ohio State defenseman Mason Lohrei signed a two-year entry-level contract (\$925,000 per season) with the Boston Bruins on May 10.

He finished his second season with the Buckeyes in March at the NCAA tournament before signing an amateur tryout agreement with the Bruins' Providence affiliate in the AHL. The Bruins selected him in the second round (58th) in the 2020 draft.

Lohrei is the third Buckeye from the 2022-23 team to sign an NHL contract, joining defenseman Cole McWard (Vancouver) and goalie Jakub Dobeš (Montreal). Also, goalie Matt Tomkins (2013-17) signed a two-year, two-way contract with the Tampa Bay Lightning on May 10 after playing the past two seasons in Sweden. He was 2-1-0 for Canada at the 2022 Winter Olympics and played in the ECHL and AHL before going to Europe. He has yet to make his NHL debut.

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Strong Close To Season Offers Hope For Future

There's no doubt Ohio State baseball had its share of ups and downs in its first season under head coach Bill Mosiello.

Capturing some hardware early in the season by winning the Frisco Classic and going 12-7 prior to conference play, the Buckeyes showed early signs of improvement off a 21-30 campaign in 2022, their worst record since 2017.

FROM THE STRETCH Andy Anders

Fast-forward one month and the team was 3-12 in Big Ten play, all but eliminated from contention for one of the eight spots in the conference tournament. The squad went 8-14 in Big Ten play a year ago.

"For whatever reason," Mosiello said, "we were 22-10 in nonconference games. We played a really nice nonconference schedule and for some reason some of the old Big Ten things that we've had the last few years reared their ugly head."

With no postseason on the table, though, the culture of winning that Mosiello has been trying to build started to pay dividends in the final stretch of the year. Ohio State won a conference series for the first time in its campaign, taking two of three against Illinois from April 28-30, lost three consecutive contests, and then responded with a nine-game winning streak to close the year, finishing with a 31-25 record.

"We've just got to keep working on the culture, keep recruiting high-integrity players, then just keep developing our system," Mosiello said. "There's some statistical things we did. We stole 50 more bases than last year. Our defense, the number of errors, we cut it way down. I just can't say enough, I have to do a better job at every single thing, and I know how lucky I am to have this opportunity to make a huge turnaround (for a program)."

The winning tear started by enacting some revenge at the tail end of a road series with Iowa, the Buckeyes winning 5-2 following 16-9 and 15-3 losses, despite having to roll through a crop of relievers rather than utilize a starting pitcher to open the contest.

That bled into a break from conference action for the Scarlet and Gray. Another group of relievers shut down UCF in a 2-0 victory as freshman Landon Beidelschies recorded his second consecutive save. None of the remaining seven wins in the winning streak required such a close. It didn't take long for Mosiello to think of what bolstered the Buckeyes' stretch of great play.

"It was one thing: pitching, pitching and more pitching," he said.

The Scarlet and Gray rolled their relievers throughout the season, a product of both wanting to get players experience and a lack of true standouts in the bullpen. Mosiello feels the rotation not only helped his pitchers maintain their confidence despite none standing out, but also aided in their development as the season progressed.

"Those games really started getting that



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

FINISHING STRONG — Despite slumping through much of Big Ten play, Ohio State baseball finished the season on a nine-game winning streak to push its record to 31-25 on the campaign. Left-hand pitcher Isaiah Coupet was a significant part of that success, leading the team with a 3.55 ERA.

bullpen going, and (pitching coach) Sean Allen did an awesome job staying the course, staying with the process," Mosiello said, "developing them, working hard with them. The whole staff, really, it was awesome. The pitchers didn't have pressure on themselves about (playing time). They were going to keep getting the baseball."

Ohio State beat Central Michigan 13-5 and swept a three-game series against UNC Greensboro from May 13-14, its first such series against a nonconference opponent since March 17-19 against Dayton.

Then came a huge triumph to close the season, a three-game sweep of rival Michigan. Entering the series, the Wolverines held a Big Ten record of 13-8 compared to the Buckeyes' 6-15. One would have thought those marks were swapped based on the results of the series. Ohio State easily beat Michigan in each contest, winning by scores of 7-3, 9-5 and 7-2. It was the first sweep of the Wolverines for Ohio State since 2016.

With a 31-25 overall record to end the year, Ohio State posted its best tally in four seasons. The nine-game winning streak was the longest by the program since 2009. Mosiello felt the team made strides in pitching and defense in particular. It still didn't meet his personal expectations, but he's eager for the future.

"My arrogance and belief, I thought we'd win 40, 45 games and be playing (in the NCAA tournament) right now. I really did. But we just didn't get to a high enough level, didn't play to a high enough level."

Time will tell how the Buckeyes build on their first year under Mosiello. But playing for pride at the end of the year after conference and national ambitions were already derailed, Ohio State showed it might have some material to construct with going forward. Much of its young core will be back in 2024, including players such as junior ace starting pitcher Isaiah Coupet, defen-

sive anchor and freshman shortstop Henry Kaczmar, and batting average leader and sophomore infielder Tyler Pettorini.

"We won 10 more games than the team did the previous year. We ended on a nine-game win streak," Mosiello said. "We have a bunch of high-character kids. We made some personnel changes, we have a good, great recruiting class coming in, (and) we're going to be really active in the (transfer) portal for arms."

Transfer Portal Turntables

Four players announced their respective transfers from Ohio State's program in the week following the team's season. Only one played a significant role in the 2023 season — sophomore infielder Josh McAlister.

McAlister started at second base for much of the season for the Buckeyes, posting a .954 fielding percentage. He had two defensive gems that made SportsCenter's Top 10 plays.

His hitting numbers took a nosedive as the season progressed, however, and he finished with a .200 batting average that was worst on the team by 31 points, and his slugging percentage of .355 was second worst. McAlister did manage four home runs and eight stolen bases, but it seemed that better opportunities were there for him elsewhere after Nick Erwin took over at second base toward the end of the season.

Two relievers are gone from the bullpen, with sophomore Jake Johnson being the most utilized of the two, posting a 4.82 ERA in 18⅓ innings of work. Sophomore Jacob Gehring, the other pitching transfer out of the program, held a team-worst ERA of 10.07 in his 19⅓ innings.

Mosiello's strategy is to attack the transfer portal to find the best pitching depth he can, so it made sense that Ohio State would lose some of its own hurlers to make room.

"If we can hit on a few guys, then I think

we can really turn our pitching staff around immediately, and we will take probably two position players, probably one outfielder and one infielder in the portal," Mosiello said. "I have opportunities to take millions of them, but I like our group (of recruits) coming in, so it's that catch-22."

The final transfer out of the program is freshman infielder Andrew Jones, who made two appearances and recorded two plate appearances with a walk, a strikeout and a run scored.

Mosiello feels the transfer portal has been a net positive due to the freedom and opportunity it gives players, even if it is nerve-racking to navigate as a coach.

"All I really care about is the kids and the players, giving them the best opportunities," he said. "The transfer portal is great for them. From a coaching standpoint, it's a nightmare and you have a million different guys that are calling you because they want to be part of your program and picking the guys is really tough. A lot of times you're getting somebody else's damaged goods. A lot of times they're in the portal for a reason. So it's really complex, but I do like the portal for the players."

Lessons Learned In Year One

This wasn't just the first year at Ohio State for Mosiello, but it was his first season as a head coach altogether.

He holds decades of experience as an assistant, even being an assistant head coach while also serving as hitting coach at TCU from 2014 through 2022. But no matter how prepared he thought he was to lead a program, he found out he still had plenty to learn this season, especially being at a school with as much athletic backing and prestige as Ohio State.

"I have to get better in every aspect," Mosiello said. "I thought I already knew all the aspects (of being a head coach). I paid great attention at my other stops, and nobody's worked for better head coaches than I have. I always learned from them. They always made me a big part of the program, and they always leaned on me."

"There's just so much that goes on, especially at Ohio State. I'm trying to raise money for our discretionary fund, budgeting, different aspects," he continued. "Those things are crazy. Like, man, I didn't realize how much time I'd have to spend doing that and meeting different alumni. The alumni, beside recruiting and getting players, are the lifeblood of our program."

Another major thing Mosiello took away from this campaign was that he has to delegate more of the team's day-to-day responsibilities moving forward. He expressed great confidence in his staff and wants to hand more development over to them so he can focus on big-picture items.

"I'm used to being the hitting coach," he said. "I'm with the players all the time, doing all those aspects. I'm still going to be a huge part of it, but I can't be there early with them and do all the things. I'm meeting with donors, having different meetings. I can't over-see and be involved with the hitters as much as I used to be. I feel like I short-changed them a little bit."

Sizing Up Quarterbacks From Different Eras

It's been 45 years since Art Schlichter arrived at Ohio State, beginning the passing era of Buckeye football. Schlichter was so good in college that he ended up being the fourth overall pick in the 1982 NFL draft, and no Ohio State quarterback was picked higher until C.J. Stroud went second to the Houston Texans this spring.

THE EXNER POINT Rich Exner

But Schlichter's numbers, though impressive, pale in comparison to the gaudy stats of the recent quarterbacks, all first-team All-Big Ten quarterbacks for seven years running. Schlichter played in a different era, when passing was far less frequent and scores weren't as high. Given that, how do you really compare the likes of Stroud, Justin Fields and Dwayne Haskins to Schlichter and all the other quarterbacks in between?

I've come up with one way to take a stab at it — strictly for passing. It doesn't factor in each player's running ability or how well they ran the offense. But it does offer one way to level the playing field from era to era when it comes to throwing the football.

Let's call it "inflation adjusted passer rating."

What I did was take the stats of every Ohio State starter (the one with the most passing attempts each year) from Schlichter through Stroud. Then I "inflation adjusted" their passer ratings to 2022 levels — the math behind this is explained toward the bottom. So who's the best of the bunch?

By this measure, Fields in 2019 had the best season of an Ohio State passer. He finished third in the nation in passer rating that season, the same year Joe Burrow finished No. 1. Fields threw for 3,273 yards and 41 touchdowns while being picked off just three times — the fewest number of interceptions for any Ohio State starting quarterback over the last 45 years.

The 2021 version of Stroud finished second in this rating, followed by Haskins (2018), Bobby Hoying (1995) and Schlichter (1979). All pretty good quarterbacks, but some of these would not be ranked nearly as high if you just defaulted to pure numbers. That's why I like this as a different look at things, and why I can't argue too much with the results.

Here are all 45, ranked in order by the adjusted rating, and including their actual stats.

No. 1 — Justin Fields (2019): 189.4; Actual stats: 238 of 354, 3,273 yards, 41 TDs, 3 INTs, 181.4 rating.

No. 2 — C.J. Stroud (2021): 185.6; Actual stats: 317 of 441, 4,435 yards, 44 TDs, 6 INTs, 186.6 rating.

No. 3 — Dwayne Haskins (2018): 184.0; Actual stats: 373 of 533, 4,831 yards, 50 TDs, 8 INTs, 174.1 rating.

No. 4 — Bobby Hoying (1995): 182.6; Actual stats: 211 of 341, 3,269 yards, 29 TDs,

12 INTs, 163.4 rating.

No. 5 — Art Schlichter (1979): 182.0; Actual stats: 105 of 200, 1,816 yards, 14 TDs, 6 INTs, 145.9 rating.

No. 6 — J.T. Barrett (2014): 179.0; Actual stats: 203 of 314, 2,834 yards, 34 TDs, 10 INTs, 169.8 rating.

No. 7 — Troy Smith (2005): 178.2; Actual stats: 149 of 237, 2,282 yards, 16 TDs, 4 INTs, 162.7 rating.

No. 8 — C.J. Stroud (2022): 177.7; Actual stats: 258 of 389, 3,688 yards, 41 TDs, 6 INTs, 177.7 rating.

No. 9 — Justin Fields (2020): 176.9; Actual stats: 158 of 225, 2,100 yards, 22 TDs, 6 INTs, 175.6 rating.

No. 10 — Art Schlichter (1980): 176.0; Actual stats: 122 of 226, 1,930 yards, 15 TDs, 9 INTs, 139.7 rating.

No. 11 — Troy Smith (2006): 175.6; Actual stats: 203 of 311, 2,542 yards, 30 TDs, 6 INTs, 161.9 rating.

No. 12 — Jim Karsatos (1985): 173.0; Actual stats: 177 of 289, 2,311 yards, 19 TDs, 8 INTs, 144.6 rating.

No. 13 — Joe Germaine (1997): 171.4; Actual stats: 129 of 210, 1,847 yards, 16 TDs, 9 INTs, 151.9 rating.

No. 14 — Greg Frey (1989): 170.0; Actual stats: 144 of 246, 2,132 yards, 13 TDs, 8 INTs, 142.3 rating.

No. 15 — Terrelle Pryor (2010): 169.4; Actual stats: 210 of 323, 2,772 yards, 27 TDs, 11 INTs, 157.9 rating.

No. 16 — J.T. Barrett (2017): 168.3; Actual stats: 240 of 371, 3,053 yards, 35 TDs, 9 INTs, 160.1 rating.

No. 17 — Joe Germaine (1998): 167.4; Actual stats: 230 of 384, 3,330 yards, 25 TDs, 7 INTs, 150.6 rating.

No. 18 — Mike Tomczak (1982): 166.7; Actual stats: 96 of 187, 1,602 yards, 8 TDs, 11 INTs, 134.2 rating.

No. 19 — Braxton Miller (2013): 165.4; Actual stats: 162 of 255, 2,094 yards, 24 TDs, 7 INTs, 158.1 rating.

No. 20 — Mike Tomczak (1983): 162.1; Actual stats: 131 of 237, 1,942 yards, 13 TDs, 13 INTs, 131.2 rating.

No. 21 — Todd Boeckman (2007): 161.7; Actual stats: 191 of 299, 2,379 yards, 25 TDs, 14 INTs, 148.9 rating.

No. 22 — Craig Krenzel (2002): 160.6; Actual stats: 148 of 249, 2,110 yards, 12 TDs, 7 INTs, 140.9 rating.

No. 23 — Mike Tomczak (1984): 160.5; Actual stats: 145 of 244, 1,952 yards, 10 TDs, 11 INTs, 131.1 rating.

No. 24 — Terrelle Pryor (2008): 157.0; Actual stats: 100 of 165, 1,311 yards, 12 TDs, 4 INTs, 146.5 rating.

No. 25 — Stanley Jackson (1996): 155.7; Actual stats: 87 of 165, 1,298 yards, 12 TDs, 5 INTs, 136.7 rating.

No. 26 — Art Schlichter (1981): 155.0; Actual stats: 183 of 350, 2,551 yards, 17 TDs, 10 INTs, 123.8 rating.

No. 27 — Steve Bellisari (2001): 154.9; Actual stats: 119 of 220, 1,919 yards, 10 TDs, 7 INTs, 136.0 rating.

No. 28 — Bobby Hoying (1994): 152.4; Actual stats: 170 of 301, 2,335 yards, 19 TDs, 14 INTs, 133.2 rating.

No. 29 — Jim Karsatos (1986): 150.5; Actual stats: 145 of 272, 2,122 yards, 13 TDs, 10 INTs, 127.3 rating.

No. 30 — Braxton Miller (2011): 148.5; Actual stats: 85 of 157, 1,159 yards, 13 TDs, 4 INTs, 138.4 rating.

No. 31 — Braxton Miller (2012): 148.5; Actual stats: 148 of 254, 2,039 yards, 15 TDs, 6 INTs, 140.5 rating.

No. 32 — Tom Tupa (1987): 148.3; Actual stats: 134 of 242, 1,786 yards, 12 TDs, 10 INTs, 125.5 rating.

No. 33 — Cardale Jones (2015): 148.2; Actual stats: 110 of 176, 1,460 yards, 8 TDs, 5 INTs, 141.5 rating.

No. 34 — Greg Frey (1990): 144.5; Actual stats: 139 of 276, 2,062 yards, 16 TDs, 16 INTs, 120.7 rating.

No. 35 — Bobby Hoying (1993): 143.0; Actual stats: 109 of 202, 1,570 yards, 8 TDs, 8 INTs, 124.4 rating.

No. 36 — Kirk Herbstreit (1992): 143.0; Actual stats: 155 of 264, 1,904 yards, 4 TDs, 6 INTs, 119.7 rating.

No. 37 — J.T. Barrett (2016): 142.9; Actual stats: 233 of 379, 2,555 yards, 24 TDs, 7 INTs, 135.3 rating.

No. 38 — Craig Krenzel (2003): 142.9; Actual stats: 153 of 278, 2,040 yards, 15 TDs, 10 INTs, 127.3 rating.

No. 39 — Terrelle Pryor (2009): 140.5; Actual stats: 167 of 295, 2,094 yards, 18 TDs, 11 INTs, 128.9 rating.

No. 40 — Steve Bellisari (2000): 136.8; Actual stats: 163 of 310, 2,319 yards, 13 TDs, 13 INTs, 120.9 rating.

No. 41 — Greg Frey (1988): 131.9; Actual stats: 152 of 293, 2,028 yards, 8 TDs, 13 INTs, 110.2 rating.

No. 42 — Steve Bellisari (1999): 129.1; Actual stats: 101 of 224, 1,616 yards, 12 TDs, 9 INTs, 115.3 rating.

No. 43 — Kent Graham (1991): 127.3; Actual stats: 79 of 153, 1,018 yards, 4 TDs, 6 INTs, 108.3 rating.

No. 44 — Justin Zwick (2004): 124.3; Actual stats: 98 of 187, 1,209 yards, 6 TDs, 6 INTs, 110.9 rating.

No. 45 — Art Schlichter (1978): 119.4; Actual stats: 87 of 175, 1,250 yards, 4 TDs, 21 INTs, 93.3 rating.

How It Was Calculated

Here's the geeky stuff for nerds. Skip to the next section if such details aren't for you.

As a baseline, I took the rating of the nation's 10th-rated quarterback each year, averaged those over three years, and then adjusted the numbers by a percentage to make that average equal to the average over the last three years. (Passer ratings have trended up over time.)

Then I used the same percentage to adjust the rating for the Ohio State quarterback each year and ranked them from one to 45 by this inflation-adjusted rating. I used the 10th-ranked quarterback instead of the nation's leader each season to determine the adjustment, because the leader ratings were more erratic and sometimes extreme outliers.

The quarterback rating takes into account several factors, most positives such as completion percentage, yards and touchdowns. But interceptions can really hurt in the ratings. That's the main reason that Schlichter's freshman season ranks worst in this list (4 TDs and 21 INTs) and why



FILE PHOTO

PASSING PIONEER — Former Ohio State quarterback Art Schlichter is widely regarded as having ushered in the passing era while with the Buckeyes, steering the program's philosophy away from Woody Hayes' typically run-heavy offense.

Fields' sophomore season ranks at the top (41 TDs and 3 INTs.)

Why Start With Schlichter?

For anyone under the age of about 55, this may come as a surprise, but passing really wasn't part of Ohio State football before Schlichter.

The 1977 starter, Rod Gerald, attempted 114 passes the entire 12-game season, completing 67. The leading receiver on that 1977 team, running back Ron Springs, had 16 receptions for 90 yards for the season, though fullback James Harrell added slightly fewer receptions (14) for a team-leading 348 receiving yards.

Cornelius Green was a three-year starter from 1973 through 1975, attempting 46 passes as a sophomore, 97 as a junior and a whopping 121 as a senior.

National Rankings

During this period, only eight times did an Ohio State quarterback rank in the top five nationally for quarterback rating. Those are heavily tilted during recent history, with Stroud finishing first in 2022 and second in 2021, Barrett placing second in 2014, Fields landing third in 2019 and Haskins finishing fourth in 2018.

But there are others from different eras mixed in. Hoying was second in 1995, Smith was fourth in 2005, and Schlichter was fifth in 1979.

BSB Will Always Give Best Bang For Bucks

You may not have known this, but Buckeye Sports Bulletin has generally printed in the wee hours of the morning. I have always gone on the road to help out on the printing and the mailing – for years in Miamisburg, Ohio, and now in Indianapolis. It has always been my treat to myself to stop at a McDonald's on the way back and have a sausage biscuit. Quite tasty and only a dollar. Toss in a senior coffee and you have a breakfast that you can eat in the car for less than two bucks.

Well let me tell you about my day the last time we printed BSB back in May. I went for my sausage biscuit and it was now up to \$1.79. Even my English-major math tells me that is a 79 percent increase. If my English-major math is wrong, you still get the point. As regular readers of this column know, we have been struggling at BSB with this very type of inflation for months, especially with the cost of printing and mailing. And you also know that I have been fretting over an appropriate subscription price response.

That evening I took my usual walk on trendy Grandview Avenue near BSB world headquarters, and I happened to peek into trendy Lion Cub's Cookies, which was bustling. I checked the menu on the wall and a cookie was \$4.25. *That's for one cookie!* Not a dozen. *One!* That's roughly the cost of a single issue of BSB at full price, and many of you are paying less than full price through the various promotions we offer during a typical year.

I decided right then to just rip off the bandage – for the readers and for us – and implement our price increase.

Thank you to the many readers who have reached out over the last few months to let me know your feelings about BSB pricing. The vast majority of you who responded made it quite clear that you were willing to pay whatever the price to keep BSB “vibrant and viable” and you did not want us to decrease the number of annual issues as an alternative. In fact, when we asked for those of you who could afford to do so to pay full price, even when you were offered a promotional discount, it was quite reassuring when so many of you went ahead and paid full fare. One of the readers who responded to me was quite adamant that we not make a small price adjustment and then have to come back to the readers with another increase in just a short time. He suggested that we, as I call it, “rip off the bandage.”

However, I know there is a large group of you who are sensitive about the price and apparently elected not to voice your opinion. We know you are out there because we monitor this type of thing and we know who responds to what price point. We will continue to offer discounts for those readers and simply ask that those who *can* afford to do so pay full price or take advantage of our VIP program and invest in the future of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

We are going to offer *all* subscribers one last chance to take advantage of our two most popular promotions, the Holiday Three-For-One and the Win The Big Game Special, at the existing rate and you can renew for up to three years.

Watch your mailbox.

And a reminder for those of you who have been taking advantage of the Alumni Rate, which hasn't been raised in decades. That price will be going up by \$10 a year. You can lock in at the old rate for up to three years if you act now.

The entire staff and family at Buckeye Sports Bulletin thank all of you for your support over the last 42 years.

Draft Musings

There is plenty of NFL draft coverage in this issue of BSB. It was a bit of feast or famine for Buckeyes moving on to the pros, with three Ohio State players, led by second overall pick C.J.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Stroud, being taken in the first round and only three more taken over the final five rounds. It was the second year in a row that six Buckeyes were selected.

Sometimes numbers tell a story without additional narrative required. In each of the last two drafts, five players on the offensive side of the ball were selected and only one each year from the defense.

I'm sure you were as intrigued and perplexed by the up-and-down (mostly down) nature of Stroud's projections in the weeks and days leading up to the draft. In the end, Stroud went about where we all expected him to go, though if he had been the actual No. 1 pick as was suggested earlier in the process, few of us would have been surprised.

I wonder if Stroud was paying for the sins of previous OSU quarterbacks and their collective pro failures when his name was banded up and down. But looking at results from QBs in the Ryan Day era, Justin Fields, while perhaps polarizing among talent evaluators, has been fairly productive in his stay with the Chicago Bears, given the relative ineptitude of the franchise. As for Dwayne Haskins, we will never know what might have been as he evolved in the more nurturing environment of the Pittsburgh Steelers vs. the chaotic environment when he was in Washington.

I can't help but wonder if these scouts and front-office personnel are looking at the same Stroud that I am. Did they see his film? Did they see the Georgia game? Do you pay more attention to the S2 test (whatever that is), on which Stroud reportedly performed poorly, or do you pay attention to what you see on the field? When I watched him, it is not like I was comparing him to mediocre competition. In just the last couple of years I have had Haskins and Fields as measuring sticks, and Stroud stacked up.

I know. I'm no expert.

However, I am sure I mentioned this when it happened. In the middle of the 2022 season, Buckeye great quarterback Rex Kern called to tell me how impressed he was with Stroud. Believe me. It's not every day that Rex calls so *he* must have seen something in Stroud. Do the pros overthink things?

It reminded me of when linebacker Chris Spielman came out of OSU in 1988. Spielman was not drafted until the second round by Detroit, presumably because he was deemed too small and too slow. Hadn't the scouts watched him play the previous four seasons? Any Buckeye fan knew that size or speed was not going to hamper Spielman, and he went on to a 10-year career that was ultimately curtailed by a serious neck injury, as well as his wife Stefanie's cancer, or it surely would have been longer.

In 2021, Spielman was selected for the Pride of the Lions, which recognizes the greatest players in franchise history. Not bad use of a second-round pick.

Let's hope Stroud has similar success with the Houston Texans or beyond.

When it comes to Buckeyes and their draft projections, the other big story was the fall of offensive tackle Dawand Jones and center Luke Wypler. Jones had been projected as a possible first-round pick and Wypler as high as the second round. Instead, they fell to rounds four and six, respectively.

Both players declared for the draft with eligibility remaining, causing many Buckeye fans to question whether the pair – especially Wypler – would have been better served as far as their pro

aspirations by returning to Ohio State in 2023.

With that in mind, I was intrigued by a comment from Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors in this issue when he was analyzing the fall of Wypler in the draft.

“In terms of it being a mistake (for him to leave early), though, I do have some issues with that narrative. One thing that has always been a pet peeve of mine when people talk about that over the years is this idea that when a player returns to a school, his draft stock is automatically going to improve. It can go either way there, and I know Luke has been asked about it several times and every time he said he felt this was the right decision for him.”

Trivia Time

Speaking of the Lions, here's a trivia question that popped up on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum that I bet most veteran Detroit fans will be able to answer. In the early to mid-'60s, the Lions featured a defensive secondary with all four players having a last name that started with L. Three of those players went on to be elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Can you name them? Obviously, there is an Ohio State connection or I wouldn't be asking the question.

Answer to come.

My Graduation Tradition

Each semester, I take a look at the list of athletes graduating from Ohio State, looking for football players or other notable competitors.

The list of gridiron graduates, which used to feature a bunch of walk-ons and a couple of modest contributors, seemed to have been trending upward in quality and quantity of late. But the spring commencement marked the second straight graduation where just seven Buckeye football players received their diplomas, with the linebacking corps leading the way. Both returning starters, Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg, walked across the stage. Also of note, Fields graduated as well. I always like to mention athletes who earn their degrees after departing for the pros or just leaving in general after their eligibility is used up.

The basketball team, which I think has had an uptick in graduates, also has such a graduate in Andre Wesson, who last played in the 2019-20 season. Eugene Brown, who entered the transfer portal after the season and is headed to Georgia Southern, also graduated.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin not only runs graduating athlete lists, but other academic lists such as the scholar athletes. Ohio State generally refers to Buckeyes by their given names on these lists, and I always notice when an athlete has a different “real” name.

I have to admit that I always thought Steele Chambers' real name was Steele. Almost as good a name for a linebacker as Tuf Borland. But apparently, at least according to the list sent out by Ohio State, Chambers' first name is Donovan. Who knew?

In all, 191 athletes graduated at spring commencement. The complete list can be found on page 9 of this issue.

Collectives And Experiences

Two things that I will readily admit: I don't fully understand NIL collectives and I steal a lot of my material for this column from the above referenced BuckeyeSports.com Forum, where readers and staff members frequently find interesting stuff to share.

Such was the case when the infamous poster PeyoteBuck went to the website of Ohio State collective THE Foundation and clicked on “experiences.” I share the results because he sheds some light on how this collective raises money. How they distribute it to athletes remains a bit of a mystery to me.

On the lower end, for \$2,500 you can get signed memorabilia from your favorite player. On the high end, you and a friend can join the team on its walk to Ohio Stadium for \$20,000. There are plenty of opportunities in between. For \$3,500, four to six people can have a private tour of the Woody Hayes facility. For \$5,000, you and three guests can have dinner with your favorite Ohio State player or coach. And for even greater exposure to the team, you and a friend can attend the Friday night team meal at the OSU Golf Course for \$10,000.

There are plenty of other options. To see for yourself, go to thefoundationohio.com.

As for me getting ideas from the Forum, I encourage you to jump aboard. It's a place where your posts are equal to that of the staff. The conversation can range from the interesting to the inane, but it is always entertaining and informative.

If you have had problems getting on board, just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and the affable Dave Breithaupt will help get you started. You might even end up with one of your posts featured on the Fan Forum, which appears on page 2 of each issue.

Trivia Answer And More

The players in the Detroit Lions backfield whose last names all started with the letter L were Yale Lary, Dick “Night Train” Lane, Gary Lowe and, of course, Ohio State's own Dick LeBeau. Lary, Lane and LeBeau are all enshrined in Canton, as are other members of that defense including defensive tackle Alex Karras and linebacker Joe Schmidt. That's quite a defense at a time when the NFL West Division was really tough with great Lions, Green Bay Packers and Baltimore Colts teams.

In poking around on this subject, I came across a list of the “11 Most Beloved Lions,” as compiled in 2011 by Dean Holden, a columnist writing about the franchise. His list has a heavy Buckeye flavor with 2½ of those listed being associated with Ohio State.

No. 9 is LeBeau.

“He was one smooth operator,” Holden wrote. “A playmaking corner his entire career, LeBeau's greatest asset was his ability to read, anticipate and break on a route. That's the kind of ability that led to 62 career interceptions. LeBeau was also an NFL iron man. His 171 consecutive games played as a cornerback is still an NFL record.”

No. 8 was Spielman.

“Spielman, in his prime, was one of the most feared players in football. He was a mean, old-school, ‘back down from no man’ type of player, whose work ethic and toughness endeared him to the city of Detroit.”

Ah, the Spielman we all know and love.

And finally, No. 5 was tight end Charlie Sanders. Sanders went to Minnesota, but his son Charlie Jr., was a running back with the Buckeyes in the '90s, thus making Sanders Sr. the “½” of my “2½.”

“In Sanders' day, tight ends were supposed to look a lot like slightly smaller offensive tackles. Sanders became the team's ‘secret weapon,’ and he set a Lions' record of 336 career receptions, which he held for two decades before Herman Moore topped it in 1996.”

I love it when the Buckeyes make their presence felt in That State Up North. Now if they can just do it on Nov. 25.

Reds JUNE LINEUP!



JUNE 2-5



presented by **Hoxworth**

FRIDAY // 5:10

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show,**
presented by Ohio Lottery

• **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their
Nike City Connect uniforms for all
Friday home games.



• **Zac Brown Band**
Post-Game Benefit Concert 4-ALS,
presented by Ohio Lottery,
Amylyx Pharmaceuticals,
and Snyder's of Hanover
benefitting Hop On A Cure Foundation



• **Hunter Greene Baseball Card**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

SATURDAY // 4:10

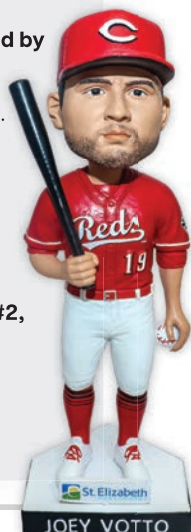
• **Joey Votto Bobblehead,** presented by
St. Elizabeth Healthcare
(To fans in attendance as part of
Super Saturdays, while supplies last.
Special gold edition randomly
distributed to 1,900 lucky fans!)

SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays,**
presented by **Klosterman Bakery**

• **Reds City Connect Poster Series #2,**
presented by **Ohio LECET**
(To fans in attendance,
while supplies last.)

MONDAY // 7:10



JUNE 6-8



presented by **Hoxworth**

TUESDAY // 7:10 3-2-1 TUESDAYS



• **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

• **Military Appreciation Day,**
presented by **CareSource**
Visit reds.com/military for details

• **Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight,**
during the national anthem

WEDNESDAY // 7:10

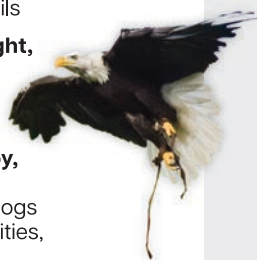
• **Bark in the Park,** presented by,
Good 'n' Fun and DreamBone
Ticket packages available for dogs
and their owners with pet activities,
samples and more!

THURSDAY // 12:35

• **Thirsty Thursdays**
Get a lower level ticket & receive \$10
in concession credits for \$30!

• **Senior Days**
Visit reds.com/senior for details

• **Business Day Specials**
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in
concession credits for only \$20!



JUNE 19-21



presented by **Hershey**

MONDAY // 7:10

TUESDAY // 7:10

• **Cincinnati Zoo**
Fritz Bobblehead Ticket Package,
presented by **Skyline Chili**
(Must be purchased through
theme ticket package,
while supplies last)

• **Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight,**
during the national anthem

• **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 // 12:35

• **Business Day Specials**
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in
concession credits for only \$20!

• **Senior Days**
Visit reds.com/senior for details



JUNE 23-25



presented by **United Dairy Farmers**

FRIDAY // 6:40

• **Fireworks Friday**
Post-Game Show,
presented by
Tire Discounters



• **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their
Nike City Connect uniforms for all
Friday home games.

• **Ohio Lottery**
Post-Game Concert
featuring **Quinn XCII,**
presented by **Dunkin'**

SATURDAY // 4:10

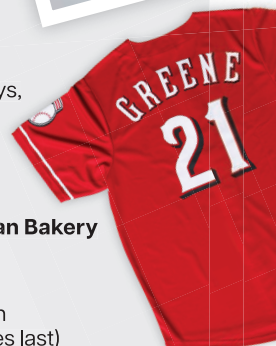
• **Hunter Greene**
Replica Jersey,
presented by **Kroger**
(To fans in attendance
as part of Super Saturdays,
while supplies last.)

SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays,**
presented by **Klosterman Bakery**

• **Kids Sticker Sheet,**
presented by **Graeter's**
(To kids 14 and younger in
attendance, while supplies last)

• **Run the Bases Day**
(Fans of all ages can line up
after the game to run the bases!)



JUNE 30-JULY 2



FRIDAY // 7:10

• **Fireworks Friday**
Post-Game Show



• **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their
Nike City Connect uniforms for all
Friday home games.

SATURDAY // 1:40

• **Patriotic Floppy Hat,**
presented by **Bally Sports Ohio**
(To fans in attendance
as part of Super Saturdays,
while supplies last)

SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays,**
presented by **Klosterman Bakery**



• **Reds City Connect Poster Series #3,**
presented by **Hit Seekers Sports Cards**
(To fans in attendance,
while supplies last.)



(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.Com/Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.