

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 42, No. 23

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

July 2023

OSU AD Gene Smith Leads Way In Unstable Time For College Sports

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith has served in his role since 2005, with over 18 years on the job at this point, but the last handful of athletic seasons may have provided the most challenge thus far in his tenure.

Beyond the obstacles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years, college athletics has continued to change with the introduction of the transfer portal in 2018 and the addition of the one-time transfer rule and adoption of name, image and likeness, both in 2021. All of these developments have made for a complicated landscape, one that Smith and the rest of Ohio State's athletic department have been tasked with working through despite being in unfamiliar territory.

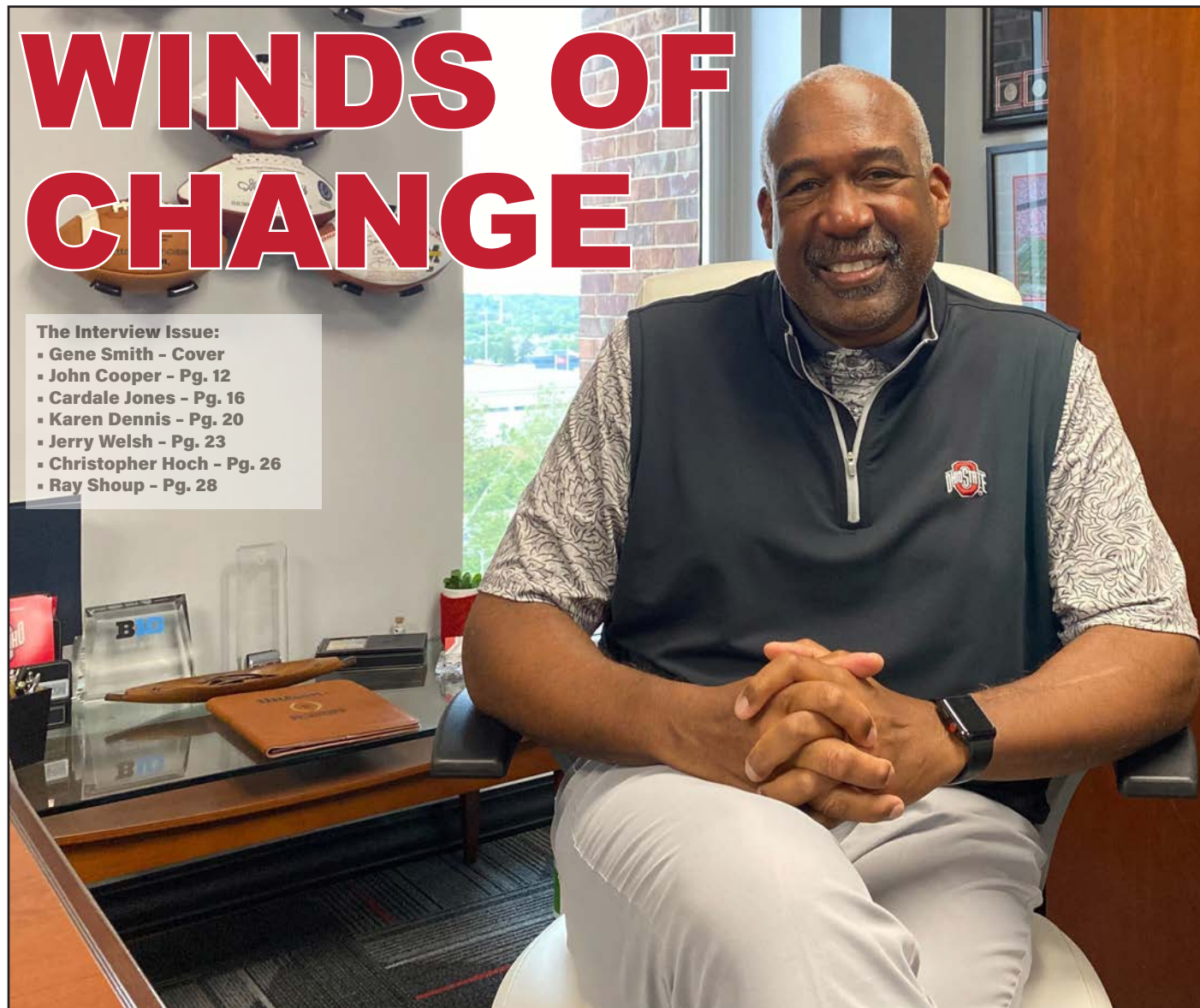
On the field, Ohio State football and head coach Ryan Day have seen the tides of the rivalry shift with consecutive losses to Michigan. The basketball programs have moved in opposite directions, with the men's team under coach Chris Holtmann suffering the squad's first losing season since 2003-04 and the women, led by coach Kevin McGuff, making the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993. The school's Olympic sports also saw plenty of success, with national runners-up and individual national championships throughout college sports.

Smith spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin on June 13 in his office at the Fawcett Center to kick off the annual Interview Issue, touching on a variety of topics and reflecting on the year that was for Ohio State athletics.

WINDS OF CHANGE

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BRADEN MOLES

LEADING THE CHARGE — Despite all of the changes to college athletics in recent years, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith has kept the Buckeyes on top, posting record revenue for the athletic department last year.

BSB: How do you feel about the health of the athletic department, and how do you assess the 2022-23 athletic season for Ohio State?

Smith: "We are really proud of our student-athletes and our coaches and support staff. It's really been a good year, competitively. We're top five again (in the Directors' Cup), and then academically, student-athletes did a great job. Our academic perfor-

mance rate is the highest it's ever been in our history. We're really proud of that being at 993. We did exceptionally well — you have to compliment our (Eugene D. Smith) Leadership Institute staff and our coaches.

"Ninety-five percent of our graduates were placed, so they either have jobs or are going pro or are going to grad school, with a large number going to graduate school. That's becoming the new trend now, is getting that secondary degree. So overall, a really good year, so I'm really excited about what our programs accomplished."

BSB: The athletic director's contributions are important to the program

in terms of the Directors' Cup standing, and you would probably agree that the university's president is just as important to establishing that. Kristina M. Johnson resigned and recently completed her last day. What was your working relationship like with her, and where is Ohio State in the process of hiring a new president?

Smith: "My working relationship with Kristina was outstanding. We know she had an affinity for athletics as a former athlete herself and Veronica, her spouse, being a former

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From The Message Board

"It's not easy to compare NIL and the portal. NIL is about money, the portal isn't. I think the latter is more helpful to the student-athlete in finding a niche to grow in. Once you find that, you can start thinking about NIL. I think NIL is the bigger distraction – dollar signs make everyone dizzy."

– **PeyoteBuck**

"The portal has been the most beneficial to athletes because it is open to everyone. The further you get down the line, the less NIL has an impact on your run-of-the-mill athletes. As for the athletic departments, I think NIL is most

disruptive because of the lack of structure and guidelines. It's hard to compete when you don't know what you are and are not allowed to do and you know there are other schools out there that are pushing the limits."

– **Poster That Harley Built**

"My view of NIL hasn't changed. It's just not something I really care about. The transfer portal I feel has been a joke since they offered a one-time free transfer."

– **Tiffin Buckeye**

"This is an easy one for me.

The conversation is constantly evolving around name, image and likeness as well as the transfer portal. We asked our staff writers and subscribers if they feel NIL or the portal has been most beneficial to student-athletes, and which has been more disruptive to the athletic department. Here are some of the responses:

If you are on the NIL high end, making hundreds of thousands of dollars or more, NIL has been most beneficial for you. If you are on the low end, grabbing a few NIL dollars here or there, the portal is more beneficial. You've had some time in college to evaluate where you stand among the players in the program you recruited to. If you don't stack up, now you can choose a school more suited to your needs or abilities.

"As far as athletic departments, they've always had to deal with athletes transferring. The players just had to sit out a year. In fact, the transfer process – coming and going – is more organized now. NIL is the problematic one. How do you compete when everyone is playing by different sets of rules? Besides, who wants to deal with money-making 18-22 year olds? You might as well be in the NFL."

– **Mcarr**

"For the average student-athlete, I would say the transfer portal has been more of a benefit. At the end of the day, the majority of student-athletes are seeing little, if any, NIL compensation, while student-athletes across every sport are able to take advantage of the transfer portal, for whatever reason they may choose to enter it.

"As for the athletic departments, NIL has absolutely been more disruptive. It seems at this point that almost every program was caught off guard when NIL was introduced in 2021, and most are just now getting their feet back under them and able to get ahead of NIL rather than just reacting to changes. The portal has been significant, but NIL has been felt everywhere."

– **Braden Moles, BSB**

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No. 1	Sept. 10	No. 13	Dec. 17
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No. 3	Sept. 24	No. 15	Jan. 28
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No. 5	Oct. 8	No. 17	March 4
No. 6	Oct. 22	No. 18	March 18
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No. 10	Nov. 19	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 26	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 3	No. 24	August

The next issue (August cover date) will be mailed the week of Aug. 26.

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Looking Ahead To OSU's 2023 Campaign

By the time you read this, there will be fewer than 60 days until Ohio State kicks off its 2023 season, a campaign the Buckeyes hope will erase nightmarish memories of being kicked in the teeth by their archrivals and then taking it to the eventual national champions before falling excruciatingly short.

Before embarking upon any kind of redemption cruise, though, Ohio State will need to break in a handful of new starters at key positions – not the least of which is quarterback – and avoid the pitfalls and pratfalls during what could be a rather interesting 12-game regular season.

Here are thumbnail previews of Ohio State's opponents for the upcoming season.

Sept. 2 at Indiana – For the fourth time in seven seasons, the Buckeyes will kick off their season against a Big Ten opponent, and for the second time during that seven-year span, the opener will be in Bloomington. That's probably OK with Ohio State since the Hoosiers have lost 28 straight in the series.

Since coming within a whisker of making it to the Big Ten title game in 2020, Indiana has won only 6 of 24 games overall and is just 2-16 in conference games over the past two seasons.

Head coach Tom Allen, ready to begin his seventh season, could be facing a win-or-else scenario. He took over his own defensive play-calling duties last year, but the Hoosiers still ranked dead-last in the Big Ten in points allowed for the second year in a row.

Sept. 9 vs. Youngstown State – Back when Jim Tressel was head coach of the Buckeyes, it made a certain amount of sense to play the Penguins. After all, Tressel had won four Division I-AA national championships at YSU.

Now, it seems ludicrous for a perennial title contender to entertain a team from a lower division, especially when that team's 7-4 record in 2023 marked its first winning season in five years.

This marks the third overall meeting between the two teams with OSU winning the previous two by a combined score of 81-6.

Sept. 16 vs. Western Kentucky – If you think the Buckeyes throw the ball a lot, you haven't seen Western Kentucky. While Ohio State racked up 8,830 yards through the air over the last two years, the Hilltoppers piled up 11,001 passing yards. That simply means we'll get an early-season glimpse of how much the OSU secondary has improved.

WKU features one of the most prolific quarterbacks you've probably never heard of. Austin Reed began his college career at FCS member Southern Illinois before transferring to West Florida and leading the Argonauts to the 2019 Division II national championship. Last year at Western Kentucky, he threw for 4,744 yards and 40 TDs.

This is the first-ever meeting between the two programs. Current members of the reconstituted Conference USA are 0-1 against Ohio State, with the only meeting a 45-0 blowout against New Mexico State in 2009, when the Aggies were members of the old Western Athletic Conference.

Sept. 23 at Notre Dame – Former Ohio State linebacker Marcus Freeman got off to a shaky start during his first year as head coach of the Fighting Irish, but victories in six of his last seven games – including a huge win against No. 5 Clemson in early November – helped soothe a nervous alumni base.

Sometimes-spotty quarterback play plagued the Irish at times last season, but that shouldn't be a problem in 2023. The transfer portal netted Sam Hartman, who threw for 7,929 yards and 77 touchdowns the last two seasons at Wake Forest.

The game features only the eighth meeting ever between the two college football titans

with the Buckeyes winning each of the last five, including a 29-16 win in 1996 on their most recent visit to South Bend.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Oct. 7 vs. Maryland – The Terrapins are likely happier than any other program to see the Big Ten do away with divisions. Since joining the conference in 2014 and getting locked in the same division with Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State, the Terps are just 3-22 against the Buckeyes, Wolverines and Nittany Lions.

That's unfortunate, too, because it masks the improvement Maryland has made in recent years. The program is coming off back-to-back winning seasons for the first time in nearly a decade and postseason victories in successive seasons for the first time since the early 2000s.

For the Terrapins to continue to improve, they will need to keep quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa healthy. He fought a nagging knee injury last year but still managed to throw for 3,008 yards and 18 TDs while earning second-team All-Big Ten honors.

Oct. 14 at Purdue – If there is a trap game on the schedule, this could be it. Sandwiched between home games against division rivals, the Boilermakers have made a cottage industry out of knocking off Ohio State when it's least expected.

The Buckeyes lead the all-time series by a healthy 40-15-2 margin, but Purdue has pulled off four victories – each time as an unranked team – over the last 10 meetings. The exclamation point, of course, was the 49-20 wipe-out of the second-ranked Buckeyes in 2018 on OSU's most recent visit to West Lafayette.

Purdue is coming off a West division championship but suffered back-to-back losses to end the 2022 season (defeats by a combined margin of 106-29) after six-year head coach Jeff Brohm bolted for his alma mater Louisville. Former Illinois defensive coordinator Ryan Walters was hired in mid-December as Brohm's successor.

Oct. 21 vs. Penn State – The Nittany Lions finished an 11-2 campaign last season with a 35-21 win against No. 7 Utah in the Rose Bowl and are picked by several pundits to perhaps do even better in 2023.

For them to accomplish that, however, will mean exorcising their particular demons that reside in Columbus. Since joining the Big Ten for the 1993 season, Penn State has lost 13 of the 15 games it has played in Ohio Stadium.

James Franklin begins his 10th season in Happy Valley looking to replace four-year starting quarterback Sean Clifford, but that probably just means an increased workload for running back Nicholas Singleton, who ran for 1,061 yards and 12 touchdowns in 2022 while winning Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors.

Oct. 28 at Wisconsin – For the first time since 2016, the Buckeyes will make their way to Madison where an old friend is waiting. Luke Fickell, who played for Ohio State from 1993-96 and then was on the coaching staff for 15 years including 2011 when he served as interim head coach, took over the program at Wisconsin after a successful six-year run at Cincinnati.

Fickell has insisted he has no desire to change the culture in Madison, and it seems his new players have embraced that approach.

Three-year starting quarterback Graham Mertz transferred to Florida, but the Badgers managed to hang onto several other star players, including running back Braelon Allen, who has rushed for 2,510 yards and 23 touchdowns over the past two seasons.

For Wisconsin to truly flourish under Fickell, the new head coach is going to have to figure out how to beat his alma mater. Since a 31-18 upset win at Camp Randall Stadium in 2010, Wisconsin has lost nine in a row to the Buckeyes by an average margin of 18.3 points per game.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers – Scarlet Knights head coach Greg Schiano swears his team is making progress, but it's not showing up on the bottom line. Last year's 4-8 finish gave the former Ohio State defensive coordinator a 12-22 record in three seasons during his second stint at Rutgers and extended the program's overall streak to eight straight losing seasons.

The talent gap is a cavernous one between Rutgers and such programs as Ohio State, and that was reflected once again last season when the Buckeyes rolled to a 49-10 victory in Columbus.

Since joining the Big Ten in 2014, the Knights have lost each of their nine meetings against OSU and have been outscored by a 477-98 margin.

Nov. 11 vs. Michigan State – It's possible Sparty is experiencing buyer's remorse after signing head coach Mel Tucker to that 10-year, \$95 million contract extension following the 2021 season. MSU dropped to 5-7 last season, and in a handful of games, the Spartans were not even competitive.

That included a 49-20 home loss to the Buckeyes last season during which OSU piled up 614 total yards. In three tries against Ohio State, Tucker's team have been outscored by a 157-39 margin and outgained 1,790 yards to 687.

Tucker has spent much of his career on the defensive side of the ball, and the Spartans did improve numbers-wise on defense last year. But they still ranked near the bottom of the Big Ten in most defensive stats, and that must change if they expect to make any kind of noise in the title chase.

Nov. 18 vs. Minnesota – No one outside of the Twin Cities pays much attention to the Golden Gophers, but what P.J. Fleck has managed to accomplish in six seasons as head coach is certainly worth noting.

Fleck's 44 victories already rank fifth all-time among Minnesota head coaches. He's won all four of his team's bowl game appearances and is coming off back-to-back seasons with nine victories. That last time the Gophers enjoyed two seasons in a row with at least nine wins was a six-year streak that came in 1900-05.

For Fleck to become a full-fledged miracle worker, however, he needs to work some magic against Ohio State. The Gophers have lost 12 in a row to the Buckeyes since a 29-17 shocker in Columbus in 2000 under Glen Mason.

Nov. 25 at Michigan – Give the devil his due. Jim Harbaugh has taken a team that was unranked to begin the 2021 season and led it to back-to-back outright Big Ten championships for the first time in 30 years.

How has Harbaugh done it? It seems that he has gone back to the way Big Ten games used to be won – with a powerful running game and smothering defense. The Wolverines led the league in rushing offense for the second year in a row and ranked in the top third in nearly every defensive category.

Specifically, Michigan is threatening Ohio State's conference supremacy with recruiting victories off the field and back-to-back wins on the field for the first time in more than two decades. That's a trend the Buckeyes want to – and quite frankly need to – bring to an end.



OSU Learns Conference Opponents For 2024, 2025

The Big Ten announced several scheduling updates on June 8 for the 2024 and 2025 football seasons, including every team's home and away opponents and the conference's new scheduling model.

Beginning with the 2024 season, in which USC and UCLA will begin play in the Big Ten and bring the conference up to 16 teams, the league will be doing away with divisions, which have been in place since

the 2011 season.

The Big Ten will now feature a nine-game conference schedule with both guaranteed and rotating matchups. The annual game between Ohio State and Michigan is among those guaranteed. With the elimination of divisions, the Big Ten Championship Game will be played between the two teams with the best records.

"Those two teams demonstrated through their body of work that they've earned an opportunity to compete in the championship game," said Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith. "When you run the gantlet for the regular conference season and you end up being No. 1 and No. 2 in the standings, you've earned that right. So I'm excited about having no divisions. I think divisions served us well, in our history and our transition to this space. Now, this opportunity to play a semi-round robin is actually better."

With Ohio State and Michigan's protected rivalry to remain in the final week of the regular season, it leaves the possibility – if the teams have the conference's best two records – that the Buckeyes and Wolverines would

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)

play in back-to-back weeks.

"We agreed to that for the betterment of the whole, the betterment of the league, relative to our overall scheduling format, and our television partners," Smith said. "At the end of the day, we needed to accept that as a possibility."

Other protected games include UC-

LA-USC, Minnesota-Wisconsin, Indiana-Purdue, Michigan State-Michigan, Iowa-Minnesota, Illinois-Northwestern, Iowa-Nebraska, Maryland-Rutgers, Iowa-Wisconsin and Illinois-Purdue, leaving Penn State as the only team without a protected matchup.

In that first season with USC and UCLA in the conference, Ohio State will host Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Northwestern and Rutgers while traveling to face Michigan State, Minnesota, Penn State and UCLA. The Buckeyes also have nonconference matchups scheduled against Southern Miss on Aug. 31, Western Michigan on Sept. 7 and Marshall on Sept. 21, with an off week scheduled for Sept. 14.

The 2025 football season will have Ohio State host Indiana, Maryland, Nebraska and USC, and travel to face Illinois, Michigan, Northwestern, Purdue and Wisconsin, making it so that Ohio State will have played every team in the conference over the two-year period.

The Buckeyes also have nonconference games against Texas on Aug. 30 and UConn on Oct. 18, with one conference game still to be scheduled. The 2025 season will be the first time Ohio State and Penn State have not played since the 1992 season, the final year before the Nittany Lions joined the Big Ten.

Ohio State Finishes Third In Directors' Cup

The final standings for the LEARFIELD Directors' Cup were announced on June 13, and Ohio State's athletic department took home a third-place finish with 1,210.75 points, trailing only Texas (1,306.50) and Stanford (1,339.00).

The Directors' Cup recognizes success for an athletic department by scoring each university based on the final placement of each athletic program in their respective sports. Ohio State's best standing was a trio of second-place finishes in 2010-11, 2015-16 and 2016-17. This is the ninth time the Buckeyes have been the top team in the Big Ten, with eight coming under Smith.

Ohio State had 23 programs compete at their respective NCAA championships, with 11 finishing among the top 10 at their respective sports. Those top-10 finishers on the women's side included ice hockey (second), volleyball (fifth), basketball (fifth), swimming and diving (sixth), gymnastics (ninth) and tennis (ninth). Top-10 men's finishers included tennis (second), football (fourth), wrestling (fourth), volleyball (fifth) and gymnastics (ninth). The coed fencing team also placed fifth at their championship.

The rest of the top programs were rounded out by USC (1,073.00), Georgia (1,072.50), Michigan (1,045.75), Virginia (1,032.50),

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With the \$50 Brutus VIP upgrade, Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers will have their names and cities listed in two different issues annually as supporters of BSB.

Those who add \$100 to their subscriptions will have their names and cities listed in all 24 issues each year as BSB Scarlet patrons. Those who donate \$125 will be designated as Elite patrons in each issue. And those who donate more than \$125 will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs.

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North Carolina (1,030.50), Florida (1,001.50) and Tennessee (1,000.75).

Ohio State Removes St. John Arena Scoreboard

Ohio State removed the 14,000-pound scoreboard at St. John Arena in June due to a lack of athletic competitions and the difficulty in finding parts.

The scoreboard was installed at St. John Arena in 1987 by Whiteway Sign Company, which went out of business in 2014, requiring Ohio State to utilize spare parts to keep the scoreboard in working order.

St. John Arena began hosting men's basketball games in the 1956-57 season and later added women's basketball, hosting both teams until The Schottenstein Center opened ahead of the 1998-99 season.

Ohio State intends to recycle around 11,000 pounds of the structure, with the other 3,000 pounds – consisting of the corner scoreboards – expected to be placed in Value City Arena and the Covelli Center. Barring any surprises, this means the last athletic event to take place in St. John Arena was a 66-50 loss for the women's basketball team on Dec. 28, 2019, while the last event for the men was a 71-52 win over Kent State on Nov. 25, 2019.

Smith told Buckeye Sports Bulletin that while no plans are in the works for St. John Arena right now, it will remain as the location for the Skull Session pep rally prior to home football games as well as a weight facility for several athletic programs.

Ohio State TE Zak Herbstreit Recovering After Hospital Stay

Ohio State tight end Zak Herbstreit, who was hospitalized in June with what was later revealed to be a heart issue, was released on June 21 but faces a "long process" in his recovery.

During an appearance on "The Pat McAfee Show" on June 22, Zak's father, Kirk, said

that Zak experienced a "setback" on June 16 that had kept him in the hospital with a heart issue, but he had since returned home to begin his recovery.

"We brought him home yesterday, which is great, but it's not like – normally you get out of the hospital and you're cured and everything's good," Kirk Herbstreit said. "He's in good spirits, he's home with us, where his mom can take really good care of him."

"This is just going to be a long process to kind of see how his heart responds to some of the medications that he's on. This is a three- or four-month kind of thing to kind of see how it recovers."

Zak Herbstreit was initially diagnosed with pneumonia, with doctors believing that he had fluid in his lungs, but an echocardiogram showed issues when scanning his heart that the elder Herbstreit said "came out of nowhere."

"He had very few symptoms," Kirk Herbstreit said. "You would never know that he was dealing with what he's dealing with."

Zak is entering his third season with the program, joining Ohio State in 2021 as a preferred walk-on out of Nashville (Tenn.) Montgomery Bell Academy.

Laurinaitis, Ward On CFB Hall Of Fame Ballot

The National Football Foundation released the names on the 2024 ballot for induction into the College Football Hall of Fame on June 5, and a pair of former Buckeyes – linebacker James Laurinaitis and offensive tackle Chris Ward – are up for consideration.

Laurinaitis played four seasons at Ohio State from 2005-08, totaling 365 tackles (24 for loss), 13 sacks, nine pass breakups and nine interceptions in 51 games. He was a two-time Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, three-time consensus All-American and three-time first-team All-Big Ten honoree. He also won the Lott Trophy in 2008, the Butkus Award in 2007 and the Bronko Nagurski Tro-

phy in 2006.

After an eight-year run in the NFL with the St. Louis Rams and New Orleans Saints, Laurinaitis broke into coaching, joining Marcus Freeman at Notre Dame as a graduate assistant last season. He returned to Ohio State this offseason to work with the linebackers and has already made a strong impression since he returned to Columbus.

"It's good to have someone come in, who can work with them individually, technique-wise, and maybe do some different things than I've done," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said. "Whereas I may have coached something one way, he can say, 'Well, you know, this is how I did it,' or, 'This is how we did it in the NFL. This is what helped me make plays.' He can say, 'I made a lot of plays using this technique.' So the system's going to be the system, but he can bring a lot of new things to our players, and that will be good for them."

Ward is a two-time first-team All-American and three-time first-team All-Big Ten selection, playing at Ohio State from 1974-77. He helped the team to a share of four Big Ten titles during his time with the Buckeyes and also blocked for two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin. This is the fifth time on the ballot for Laurinaitis and the sixth time for Ward.

The class will be announced early next year and will be inducted on Dec. 10, 2024, at the 66th NFF Annual Awards Dinner in Las Vegas.

Ohio State Sells Most Season Tickets Since 2011

Ohio State's home opener against Western Kentucky on Sept. 9 is still a couple of months away, but fans are already poised to fill Ohio Stadium this fall.

According to a report by The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio State has sold 55,233 season tickets through May 26 to the general public, faculty and staff in anticipation of the 2023

football season. This marks the most season tickets sold since 2011, when 55,749 season tickets were purchased.

Ohio State has seen a steady increase in season-ticket sales since the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, when fans across the Big Ten were unable to attend games due to health and safety restrictions. In 2021, the university sold 42,373 season tickets, and that number jumped to 53,606 season tickets distributed last season.

The consistent uptick in sales could be attributed to Ohio State's revamped ticket pricing model, which was placed into effect last season. This modernized Buckeye Club model divides Ohio Stadium into six pricing zones, with each zone differing in its annual per-seat contribution and ticket price based on its proximity to the field.

For the 2023 season, the lowest price for a public season ticket without a per-seat contribution is \$398. Conversely, the most expensive season ticket price comes in at \$944, coupled with an additional per-seat contribution of \$1,500.

Ohio State will play just six home games during the 2023 season, down from eight last season, including Western Kentucky and Youngstown State in the nonconference as well as Maryland, Michigan State, Minnesota and Penn State in Big Ten play.

Moore Announced As Women's Lacrosse Coach

Ohio State has found new leadership for the women's lacrosse program, announcing June 27 that Amanda Moore will be the team's next coach.

Moore comes to Ohio State after seven seasons as the head coach at East Carolina. She got her start in coaching as an assistant at Ohio State from 2009-10 then also spent time at Boston College (2011) and Duke (2012-

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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16). She played collegiately at North Carolina from 2005-08. Moore replaces former coach Amy Bokker, who was fired in May following a 23-32 record over the last four seasons.

"We are thrilled to bring Mandy and her family back to Columbus," said Janine Oman, senior deputy athletics director. "Her plan and vision for Buckeye women's lacrosse stood out throughout the interview process. We are excited for her to meet the team and get started. The future is bright for the program under her leadership."

During her time at East Carolina, Moore posted a 35-59 record, including a 10-8 mark this past season, and had 17 players earn all-conference selections during her tenure

with the Pirates. She becomes the fourth head coach in Ohio State's history, joining the likes of Sue Stimmel (1996-2010), Alexis Venechanos (2011-19) and Bokker (2020-23).

"I would first like to thank Gene Smith, senior vice president and athletics director, and Janine Oman, senior deputy athletics director and SWA, for this tremendous opportunity to be the next women's lacrosse head coach at The Ohio State University," Moore said. "I would also like to thank the interview committee, coaches and support staff for their time and authenticity during the interview process. My immediate sense, after meeting with so many Buckeyes, was a confirmation that the people and student-athletes at Ohio State are truly world-class."

"The Ohio State University was my first job in the collegiate coaching profession. The experience working for Ohio State and Sue Stimmel, the founder of the women's lacrosse program, cemented my love for leading and teaching student-athletes. The opportunity to come back as the fourth women's lacrosse head coach is a full-circle moment. I look forward to connecting with each era of Buckeye lacrosse and forging our next path as a program with the current group of young women."

Jaques, Trotter Named OSU Athletes Of The Year

Sophie Jaques from women's ice hockey

and James Trotter from men's tennis are Ohio State's 2023 Athletes of the Year, the university announced on June 28.

Jaques recently completed her final season with the women's ice hockey team, helping lead the Buckeyes to a runner-up finish nationally, the program's first Western Collegiate Hockey Association regular-season title and a program-record 33 wins. She became the first player from Ohio State to win the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award, which recognizes the top player in Division I women's ice hockey, and she is just the second defenseman to earn that honor.

Jaques had a team-high 24 goals and added 24 assists, and she led the nation in power-play goals, earning first-team All-America and All-WCHA honors. She was named WCHA Player of the Year and Defenseman of the Year. This is the second consecutive season that Jaques was named one of Ohio State's Athletes of the Year.

Trotter, meanwhile, was the 2023 NCAA doubles champion alongside Andrew Lutschau, and he was named the International Tennis Association's Most Improved Senior. He earned All-American honors in singles and doubles, and became part of just the second doubles national championship team in Ohio State history. He posted records this season of 29-1 in singles matches and 22-8 in doubles.

Ohio State Leads In Revenue, Expenses

According to a report by USA Today, Ohio State led all collegiate programs in both revenue and expenses during the 2022 fiscal year.

The athletic department reported \$251,615,345 in revenue and \$225,733,418 in expenses, with the revenue total establishing a new record for Ohio State's athletic department.

Other programs with the highest reported revenue were Texas (\$239,290,648), Alabama (\$214,365,357), Michigan (\$210,652,287) and Georgia (\$203,048,566). For Ohio State, the revenue total included \$62,982,851 in contributions, \$59,649,921 in ticket sales, \$48,908,898 in media rights and \$30,088,073 in royalties, licensing, advertisements and sponsorships.

As for the programs with the highest expenses, that group was made up of largely the same schools, including Texas (\$225,153,011), Alabama (\$195,881,911), Michigan (\$193,559,375) and LSU (\$192,770,399).

Ohio State's expenses included \$42,240,992 in coaching compensation, \$39,514,342 in support staff compensation, \$28,900,288 in direct overhead and administrative costs, \$24,564,657 in athletics student aid, \$19,128,187 in athletic facilities debt, leases and fees, \$11,823,427 in payments

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1983

New Ohio State assistant football coach Jim Tressel knew all about adjusting to new players and new co-workers. After all, his appointment to OSU in January was his fourth move in nine years.

And he believed he had settled into OSU quite well.

"It's something everyone has to adjust to," Tressel said. "The first year you're with your guys you have to be flexible. You've got to understand, they've had a good coach before you and there are some things they really respond to. You've got to seek them out."

Tressel took over in early January for former OSU quarterbacks and receivers coach Fred Zechman, who took the head coaching position at New Mexico State in mid-December. A lifelong Buckeye fan, Tressel grew up in Berea, Ohio, and was an All-America quarterback at Baldwin Wallace in 1974.

35 Years Ago — 1988

Former Ohio State coach Earle Bruce left the ranks of the unemployed when he accepted the head coaching position at the University of Northern Iowa on June 29. Bruce had originally been contacted by former OSU basketball coach Eldon Miller, then entering his third year at UNI, who asked Bruce to give some suggestions as to a replacement for retired coach Darrell Mudra. Bruce, himself, ultimately became a candidate for the job.

"I came up and met the UNI president, I met the vice president, I met the selections committee and the athletic administration and I liked what I heard," Bruce said. "I liked what I saw. Iowa has been good to me. In the six years I was at Iowa State, I was well known. If this job had come open in any other state, I probably would not have applied."

Bruce inked a four-year pact with a base pay of \$64,000 annually.

30 Years Ago — 1993

With an off-season of discontent coming directly on the heels of a troubled regular season, Ohio State basketball head coach Randy Ayers was looking forward to putting the past couple of months behind him.

After back-to-back Big Ten championships, the Buckeyes experienced growing pains and found life without Jim Jackson a bit tough as they tumbled back in the conference pack and then stumbled out of the blocks in the National Invitation Tournament.

After the season ended, things got worse. In late May, the NCAA charged the program with 17 recruiting violations involving incoming guard Damon Flint, ruling him ineligible to play for the Buckeyes. A couple of weeks later, two of the team's major inside forces – senior center Lawrence Funderburke and junior forward Antonio Watson – underwent minor knee surgery.

25 Years Ago — 1998

As the final months of construction began on the Jerome Schottenstein Center and Ohio State braced for a mammoth renovation project at Ohio Stadium, Andy Geiger was enjoying himself.

Geiger, OSU's athletic director, was overseeing these two major projects, which combined would cost at least \$256 million. That was big money, even for one of the nation's largest universities. But Geiger

was convinced Ohio State was winning big by planning so well for its future.

"I'm like a child in a candy store," Geiger said. "I'm having the best time I've ever had. By and large, I'm really pleased with the staff. The human infrastructure is in great shape as far as coaching and the administration."

Geiger admitted there was some risk involved. The OSU athletic department would be on the hook for over \$200 million in long-term bonds, a debt planners said would be paid off primarily with revenues from luxury suites at both facilities as well as other fundraising efforts.

"If we generate between \$8-10 million a year at the stadium through incremental income through the new facilities and ticket prices, we will maintain the program we've got and pay our bills," Geiger said.

20 Years Ago — 2003

Those among the many who took a chunk of the Ohio Stadium field during the on-field celebration following the Michigan game could credit themselves with at least helping the higher-ups at Ohio State with the decision to redo the Horseshoe's field.

Truth be told, the OSU people who oversaw the field that had been put in after the stadium floor was lowered during renovation in 2000 were never entirely happy with it.

"The field had a problem," Geiger said. "It was a bluegrass substance and this is a little north for a pure bluegrass field. It never quite dried out. There was a fungus or a slime that was always there. It wasn't a bad field. But it wasn't the field we wanted to have."

The field they wanted to have was perennial rye, which was different from the Kentucky bluegrass that was installed after renovation.

15 Years Ago — 2008

It was no coincidence that on the east wall of the office of Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith hung a large, aerial photo of the campus area with the athletic facilities centered in the frame.

Smith said that when he arrived at Ohio State in 2005, he quickly became familiar with the master plan of facilities put together by the athletic department in the 1980s.

"I came in here and that's one of the first things that I looked at," Smith said. "That's why I put this (photo) on the wall, so I could keep in my mind where our current facilities are and which ones I would have to address over time."

While Ohio State had made tremendous upgrades – two-thirds of the Buckeyes' varsity teams played or practiced in a fairly new or renovated venue – the wheels had been put in motion to fill in the remaining gaps.

The department had worked with the HNTB Corporation, a Kansas City-based architecture consulting firm, to design an updated master plan of facilities that would help guide future planning of the sporting venues in which Ohio State plays.

10 Years Ago — 2013

When Dr. E. Gordon Gee announced his retirement at Ohio State on June 4, the school president made it clear he wouldn't be needing an extended goodbye.

"I'm not a victory lap guy," he said at an on-campus press conference after making it clear he would be done as of July 1. "I have had more transition than any guy in America, and the last thing I want to do is be queen for a day."

Of course, Buckeye Nation wasn't going to let its popular – and occasionally controversial – leader go out that quietly. Gee was feted just about everywhere he went in his final month in charge of Ohio State.

That couldn't have come as much of a surprise. During his tenure, his second at Ohio State, Gee pulled off as impressive a trick as can happen at Ohio State – the university president was as popular across the Buckeye State as the head football coach since taking over in 2007.

The bespectacled, bow-tie-clad, self-deprecating president was swarmed by admirers whether he was attending on-campus parties on a Friday night, taking in a football game in his trademark Block "O"-dotted dress pants or on one of his many trips around Ohio.

Five Years Ago — 2018

On June 13, the NCAA Division I council approved a couple of proposals that gave student-athletes more autonomy while simultaneously giving athletic institutions less.

College athletes would be allowed to transfer without the permission of the university or coach, and the school would be obligated to enter the athlete's name in a national transfer database within two business days.

Once a name was in the database, any coach could contact the athlete. Previously, athletes had to receive permission from their current school to be contacted by another school before they could receive another scholarship. The rule change, which began Oct. 15, applied to all Division I sports.

"As long as they keep it that you have to sit a year, I think that's good," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said, referring to student-athletes who had yet to graduate and decided to transfer. "I'm not a big fan of all the transfers. That's an easy way out. But I get it. I'm a big fan of the graduate transfer. If they fulfill their obligation, go. But I also understand the other part."

One Year Ago — 2022

Flanked by family members in the Barclays Center green room, former Ohio State guard Malaki Branham's childhood dream came true.

Branham's NBA dreams were realized when league commissioner Adam Silver called his name as the No. 20 overall selection, a pick that belonged to the San Antonio Spurs. Branham said his focus was on soaking the experience in.

"It felt like I was just trying to take it all in, just trying to embrace the moment and have fun with it," Branham said at his introductory press conference on June 26. "My dream came true that night. And there was a lot going on, but I was just super happy and excited!"

BSB Print Readers Facing Lengthy Gap

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the big Football Preview Issue, will be mailed in late August. This marks the largest gap in our annual publishing schedule.

In the meantime, there is no need to miss any 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. Regular readers of BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers, will have noticed the increased emphasis on recruiting by the BSB staff.

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 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.

If you are not already taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's 24/7 website, simply email your name, address and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, and we will send back easy instructions on how to access the site. Don't forget, subscriptions@buckeyesports.com is our email address, not the website. We will send you directions on how to access the site.

If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access.

If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com, feel free to call us at the above number.

made to visiting opponents, \$10,545,312 in team travel expenses, \$6,963,625 for in-game expenses and \$3,384,022 in recruiting expenses.

IRS: Donations To Nonprofit NIL Collectives Not Tax Exempt

In a memo released by the Internal Revenue Service on June 9, the organization said that donations made to nonprofit – or 501(c)(3) – name, image and likeness collectives should not be considered tax exempt, meaning donors would no longer be able to write off donations.

"It is the view of this Office that many organizations that develop paid NIL opportunities for student-athletes are not tax exempt and described in section 501(c)(3) because the private benefits they provide to student-athletes are not incidental both qualitatively and quantitatively to any exempt purpose furthered by that activity," the memo states.

Since NIL collectives began popping up across the country in the years since NIL was approved by the NCAA in 2021, many have been granted nonprofit status by the IRS. This new ruling, though, means that many collectives – including The Foundation, a nonprofit Ohio State NIL collective – would no longer be able to offer the ability to give tax-deductible donations.

Cohesion Foundation, another Ohio State NIL collective, is also a nonprofit organization, and president Gary Marcinick told The Athletic's Cameron Teague Robinson that the new memo is "a game-changer and potentially a game-ender" and added that if the Cohesion Foundation were to lose tax-exempt status, it would dissolve after completing the organization's contracts.

"I don't want to operate in the gray," Marcinick said. "We don't want to navigate with any ambiguity. For us, it's just not where we want to be. Between the IRS and the president of the NCAA saying he agrees with the IRS, that's enough for us to say let's conclude our obligations and let this evolve in a different way. We have made a tremendous impact, but it's unfortunate there are bad actors out there. Some of the good people are going to get swept out."

Teague Robinson's report also said, via The Foundation co-founder Brian Schottenstein, that the collective would likely transition to a limited liability company, operating in essentially the same fashion but without the ability for donors to get tax write-offs.

Warrant Issued For Lee After Missed Court Appearance

According to Franklin County court records, an arrest warrant was issued for former Ohio State linebacker Darron Lee following a missed court appearance on June 26 surrounding previous charges of domestic violence and assault.

In April, Lee was arrested and charged with two counts each of misdemeanor assault and misdemeanor domestic violence, occurring at his home in Dublin, Ohio, in separate instances on Oct. 17, 2022, and on April 3 of this year. The latter incident resulted in police being called after Lee reportedly struck a female relative several times in the head. Lee's case was originally scheduled for a jury trial on June 5, but following a continuance by Judge James Green, it was moved to June 26, when Lee failed to appear.

Lee played at Ohio State for three seasons from 2013-15 and was a member of the Buckeyes' 2014 national championship team. He was taken in the first round of the 2016 NFL draft by the New York Jets and also spent time with the Kansas City Chiefs, Buffalo Bills and Las Vegas Raiders.

NFL Hands Out Gambling Suspensions For Berry, Petit-Frere

Former Ohio State players Rashod Berry and Nicholas Petit-Frere were among several players suspended by the NFL on June 29 after violations of the league's gambling policy.

Berry, who was with the Indianapolis Colts but has since been released, was suspended indefinitely for betting on an NFL game, while Petit-Frere – who is entering his second season with the Tennessee Titans – was suspended six games for betting on a non-NFL game at his team's facility, which is also against the rules.

Berry and Petit-Frere are the latest players caught up in gambling problems, as the NFL has handed out indefinite suspensions to six players at this point. Smaller suspensions also hit three additional players, including former Ohio State and Alabama wideout Jameson Williams, who was suspended six games from the Detroit Lions.

Philbin To Be Paid \$266,667 In Analyst Role

According to contract details released by Ohio State, the newly-hired Joe Philbin – the former NFL head coach who will be a senior

advisor/analyst for the Buckeyes – will be paid \$266,667 for his services during the upcoming football season.

Philbin, who will be Ohio State's highest-paid analyst, brings nearly 40 years of coaching experience to Ohio State, working as an offensive line coach and offensive coordinator at the college and professional level. He was the head coach for the Miami Dolphins from 2012-15, during which he coached current Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline, who said in May that Philbin has been a phenomenal addition.

"I think both from the former head coach, offensive coordinator, (offensive) line play, the wealth of knowledge when it comes to football," Hartline said. "I mean, there's (a) litany of things that he brings to the building – how approachable he is, how coachable to coaches he's going to be. There have been so many positives to having Joe on this staff."

Six Buckeyes Named Phil Steele Preseason All-Americans

Phil Steele's College Football Preview was released in June, and six Ohio State players were included among the list of preseason All-Americans.

Junior wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. and senior linebacker Tommy Eichenberg both made first-team All-American, while junior guard Donovan Jackson, junior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka and junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau each made second-team. Junior running back TreVeyon Henderson rounded out the Buckeyes' selections with a third-team nod.

Harrison was one of three finalists for the Biletnikoff Award a year ago, given annually to the nation's best receiver, hauling in 77 passes for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Eichenberg recorded the most tackles by an Ohio State player since 2014 last year, with 120 takedowns and 12 tackles for loss on the campaign. He added an interception, which he returned for a touchdown, and three pass breakups.

Headlining the list of second-teamers is Tuimoloau, who had one of the best individual defensive performances in team history against Penn State. After a strong year starting at guard, Jackson is drawing national eyes with his second-team selection.

Egbuka rounds out the list of Buckeyes Phil Steele selected to his second-team pre-

season All-America list, having caught 74 passes for 1,151 yards and 10 scores a year ago. Henderson is picked for a bounce-back season by Steele's magazine after injuries left him short of the production he hoped for last go-round.

Moldovan Makes Cut At U.S. Open

Ohio State men's golfer Maxwell Moldovan made his second appearance in the U.S. Open in as many years from June 15-18, but this time around, the Buckeye product made the cut after missing by just four strokes last year.

Moldovan shot 71 in each of the first two rounds at the Los Angeles Country Club, finishing two over par and one stroke ahead of the cut line.

"It was pretty special," Moldovan told the Akron Beacon Journal. "Last year, I remember a pretty sour taste in my mind leaving Brookline (Mass.) after only playing two rounds. This year, I had a ton of motivation to make the cut and play all four rounds. I made a 4-foot putt on the 36th hole. Looking at the leaderboard, I knew it needed to go in. It was a heck of an experience and something I'll never forget."

Moldovan shot 76 and 79 over the final two rounds, finishing 65th in the 156-golfer field at 17 strokes over par and fourth among amateurs, with his placement above such golf greats as Phil Mickelson, Justin Rose, Adam Scott and Jordan Spieth.

The Uniontown, Ohio, native is entering his senior season at Ohio State, looking to cap off an impressive career that has included back-to-back unanimous first-team All-Big Ten honors as well as All-America status in each of the last two seasons.

Meyer Signs Deal With Columbus Blue Jackets

Former Ohio State men's hockey forward Carson Meyer signed a one-year, two-way contract with the Columbus Blue Jackets on June 23, allowing him to split time between the Jackets and their American Hockey League affiliate, the Cleveland Monsters.

Meyer, who was drafted by the organization in the sixth round of the 2017 NHL draft, made his debut for the team in the 2021-22 season and has since appeared in 27 games with one goal and three assists. He has spent the majority of his time in the Blue Jackets' system with the Monsters, registering 34 goals and 39 assists over 117 games.

Prior to his professional debut, Meyer played in 137 collegiate games between Miami (Ohio) and Ohio State from 2016-20, totaling 42 goals and 47 assists. During his time with the Buckeyes, he had a four-goal outing against Wisconsin on March 6, 2020, the first in the program since 1992.

According to The Athletic's Aaron Portzline, Meyer's one-year deal is worth \$965,000, with \$775,000 from the NHL and \$190,000 from the AHL, with \$210,000 of that guaranteed.

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

Smith Upholding “High Standard” At OSU

Continued From Page 1

athlete. They were heavily involved in what we do from a recruiting point of view, from a going-to-contests point of view. My working relationship with her was outstanding.

“But the search, I’m not really sure where we are right now. I know the (job) profile went through the process of getting feedback from all the different stakeholders and had a number of focus groups meeting. The advertisement is out and the search firm is searching and working with our board to try and find somebody.”

BSB: It’s been a couple of years since we last spoke to you. In that time, the football program has had two losses to Michigan and no Big Ten titles. What have your conversations been like with Coach Day around getting Ohio State back to where it needs to be in the rivalry and the conference race?

Smith: “Nothing’s changed relative to our goals. We all obviously want to win all of our games and beat The Team Up North and win the conference championship and then win a national championship. That’s never changed. That’s our goal. It’s a high standard, it’s a high bar, but that’s who we are and that’s what we chase.

“It’s funny, we don’t really talk about the goals because the goals are there. They don’t change. So we get more granular. What type of things do we need to do to position ourselves and make sure we have an opportunity to meet those goals? That gets down to recruiting, that gets down to roster management, that gets down to your support staff and your coaches and everything around personnel management, your operations. It gets down to his role. As we all know, he’s trying to move himself more to a CEO-type role and delegate some of the duties that he’s historically had, like possibly some level of play calling. Those are the things that we’ve talked about, is what we need to do to position ourselves.

“I tell people all the time, if we don’t beat Indiana, that Team Up North game won’t mean a whole lot to us, so we’ve got to focus on the things that we need to focus on this time of year. We’ve got camps going on, so we’ve got to make sure that Mickey (Marotti) has, for example, everything he needs in place from a strength and conditioning point of view, because he had some personnel losses. Some people moved on, so we need to replace them with the right people so that when this time of year hits, he has his team ready and they can go and work on strength and conditioning, so when we hit August, we’re ready to roll.

“The conversation – I know that the public probably wants me to talk about the Michigan game, but you’ve got a lot of games before you get to that. That game is important. There’s no question, we’ve got to win it. We’ve got to win the Big Ten championship. But we’ve got to beat everybody else.”

BSB: I was going to ask you about Day wanting to be more of a CEO for the program. How have you seen that manifest since the season ended, and do you feel it’s a challenge for him to give up some of that responsibility?

Smith: “We talked about that when he



FILE PHOTO

NEW ARRIVALS — Over the past year, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and former university president Kristina M. Johnson helped guide the Buckeyes through the addition of USC and UCLA to the Big Ten.

was first hired. That’s his wheelhouse. We all have a comfort level where we’re pretty good, and we’re self-aware that we’re good at this and we don’t want to leave it. We knew it would be an evolution and we talked about that at the beginning and said that there’ll be a time. After the Georgia game, he began to self-reflect, look back at the season, and that’s when we started the conversation about, ‘OK, maybe it’s time to delegate some of those offensive duties.’ Ultimately, he won’t get out of it, let’s be clear, but he may not have to do as much during the week in offensive prep that he would normally do, so he can maybe do some other things.

“He is an unbelievable leader relative to dealing with the individual student-athletes, so now he may have more time to provide them those one-on-ones that they desire, or their parents or whatever it might be. We started this conversation when he first got hired. This year, we started the conversation right after the Peach Bowl after he did some self-reflection.”

BSB: In your role as athletic director of a major college program, do you find it difficult to delegate some of your responsibilities?

Smith: “Not anymore. This is my 19th year here and my 39th year as an athletic director. I’m 68, (and I started at) 29 as an athletic director, so over time you develop your leadership skills. Early on at Eastern Michigan for the eight years I was AD there, I realized that delegation was very important for me to be able to free up time for me to have an opportunity to focus on my ultimate talents and skills. When you get to a point in leadership where you have confidence in your teammates around you, then it’s easier for you to delegate.

“I’m blessed. I have some very good

people that I am fortunate to work with every single day, and so I need to delegate to them, which also helps them grow, because they may aspire to be athletic directors or they just may aspire to be the best that they can be where they are. If I don’t give them things, they’ll never grow, and so it’s big for me to delegate and see that growth and then ultimately take advantage of the talents and skills that they all bring to the table. It’s not difficult for me anymore. It used to be at the beginning because I was kind of a micro-manager, and years ago I grew away from that and recognized that I needed to delegate.”

BSB: You mentioned the Peach Bowl earlier. Ohio State comes up just a field goal short of going to the national championship game. Overall, how do you assess the season for the football team?

Smith: “It was a great season. You look back to a lot of different games – you know, we had eight home games. I look at it from a wins and losses point of view like everybody else, but I have to keep in mind everything else when we hosted eight home games, five in a row. I think about my ushers and my ticket operation and my event management people, my facility people, my marketing people, all those types of people for five weeks in a row, which actually started out with Notre Dame. When you think about that workload, it’s pretty significant, five weekends in a row to host 100,000 people and work very diligently to ensure that they’re kept safe. I look at how well we did with program sales, concessions, keeping people safe, limited number of ejections. It was a good year from that perspective.

“Now with the team, relative to wins and losses, I was proud of how they came out of the chute and beat Notre Dame. That was a

big win for us. And then it also developed to a point where we had young men – you just think about the individual players who ultimately emerged and became outstanding in their position. I mean, who would have projected at the beginning of the year that C.J. (Stroud) would be second and Paris Johnson (Jr.) would be sixth in the (NFL) draft? So I look at that development. But our goal is to beat The Team Up North and win the conference championship and win the national championship.

“We were, to your point earlier, two points away, basically, from winning that national championship. I believe that had we gotten to the finals, we would have beat TCU, and so it was close. Disappointing from that point of view. But overall, when you look at it, we were in the (College Football Playoff). You always want to be in the hunt, and so we were in the hunt but didn’t get it done. That’s a disappointment. Defensively, we’ve got to get better in certain situations, and our offense was prolific, but at the end of the day, it’s a total team effort, special teams, all that stuff. It was a great season overall, but we fell short relative to those particular goals.”

BSB: This next football season will be the last without USC and UCLA in the Big Ten. Where is the league in the process of integrating those teams, and how excited are you to add USC and UCLA to the schedule starting in 2024 and 2025?

Smith: “I’m excited. Trev Alberts, the AD at Nebraska, one of my good friends, shared publicly how tough the schedule is going to be now, but I’m excited about it. It adds something new to our conference. The business part of it, everybody knows, but I think that there’s something new that will be good for us. We’ve been to USC before and played there before, but going to USC as a conference member is a little different, and same with UCLA. I’m looking forward to that from that novelty point of view. That will be pretty cool.

“We’ll probably change our nonconference schedule philosophy a little bit as it was done with Washington and that move. We’ll see what the future holds with the new CFP model and how that actually works. Strength of schedule may matter in a different way, so we’ve got to watch that, but I’m excited about it.”

BSB: Speaking of that new CFP model, you had said originally that you were against hosting playoff games at Ohio Stadium in December, and you’ve since come out and said that you would be fine with that. What led to your change of mind there?

Smith: “Looking at the landscape and understanding, operationally, how difficult it would be to get an indoor facility with all the uncertainties as you lead up to that, then doing some historical view of our weather patterns over the last 10 years (changed my mind). We did have two years that were pretty tough, but at the end of the day, we can handle (the weather).

“We’re still a speed team, so the idea that it won’t impact us is really not true. We’ve got to make sure that the field, whatever the condition, is in the best shape it can be for us.”

BSB: You mentioned the playing sur-



FILE PHOTO

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE — Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said that men’s basketball head coach Chris Holtmann (pictured) is the “coach of the future” for the program.

face. There’s been a lot of debate lately about turf vs. grass – would you give any consideration, with some of the injury concerns raised about playing on turf, to potentially changing Ohio Stadium’s playing surface to grass at some point in the future?

Smith: “You always keep that as a possibility. At this point in time, we haven’t thought about it a whole lot, but you always keep that as a possibility. We would have to sacrifice a number of different things. There’s no way I would have approved five concerts in the stadium this year. We just had (Buckeye Country Superfest) and we’ve got four more in August, and particularly back-to-back, I would’ve never done that with (grass).

“That’s the management issue, is when you have a multi-million dollar facility that is so iconic in Ohio, you want to make sure you maximize its use beyond football. We’ll always keep our eye to that. We have one of the best turf management programs in the country here in Ohio State, so those experts are there. As these studies continue to emerge, you know, we’ll keep track of them. You could never say no, but there’s always that possibility.”

BSB: Moving on to men’s basketball, the team finished the regular season with a 13-18 record and had a run in the Big Ten tournament. How do you assess the season?

Smith: “Obviously, we wanted to win more games, and I was really disappointed (with) some of the games that we lost that were so close like North Carolina. There

were a number of games that we had a lead – Purdue – and we didn’t finish it off, but that gave me a perspective of where we are. Those end-of-the-game situations, you need a level of maturity and, for lack of better definition, alpha dogs that get you to where you need to go.

“I knew going into the year it would be challenging but really emphasized more and more with Chris about playing those young puppies and getting them a chance to get minutes on the floor and get them experience. They’re so talented. It was a top-five class. The shift to make sure we got them playing time was critical. We saw that at the end of the schedule. Once they played more they came together, and so I feel good about the results of the efforts.

“I felt great about Chris’ on-floor coaching. He’s a very good teacher. But we needed to get to a point where our roster was being managed appropriately, and I feel that happened, so I’m really excited about the future, too.”

BSB: In the midst of a significant losing streak, you said that Holtmann is the “coach of the future” for the program. Why do you believe that’s the case?

Smith: “He’s a good teacher. At the end of the day, when you look at all of our coaches, first and foremost, they’re teachers. And that’s what a lot of people miss is the facilities are their classroom. That’s where they teach. That’s where he worked with Bruce Thornton on being a better point guard and being a leader of the team, and teaching them leadership skills. You know, working with Felix (Okpara) – people haven’t seen it

yet, but he’s already a totally different player. Having that one-on-one conversation (of) this is how you improve, these are the things you need to work on, these are the things you need to do – having that conversation, that’s teaching.

“Then it shifts to in-game, putting the players in position to win, whatever you’re running offensively, whatever you’re running defensively. I’ve watched him over the years here, even during this tough season, the positions that our players were in. Had they been more experienced, it would have positioned them better. I think he’s a good teacher.

“People aren’t giving him the respect he deserves. From a recruiting point of view, we’ve had two top-five classes back-to-back and two one-and-dones. We’ve got to get to a point where those one-and-dones are two-and-dones (laughs). We would have had a different team if Malaki (Branham) came back, or next year we’d have a different team if Brice (Sensabaugh) came back. We’ve got to get to that point, and I think we’re there. We have a group of young men that really bought in and they’ll be our leadership for the future, and then (focus on) these freshmen coming in and molding them the right way.”

BSB: Ohio State took down the scoreboard at St. John Arena recently. What plans, if any, are there for the venue at this time?

Smith: “Really no plans beyond making it the best workout facility that we could possibly have. Many of our Olympic sports, our men’s and women’s track team, women’s

ice hockey team, our swimming programs are the ones who use it the most. Making that a really good weight room like it has been the last couple years.

“We just needed to take that scoreboard down instead of chasing parts and asking my teammates to try and find parts to make the thing work. It made no sense anymore when the company has gone away, so we took it down. But there’s no definitive plans. We’ll still hold Skull Session in there. Taking St. John down is a long way away.”

BSB: Sticking with basketball, it was the first run for the women to the Elite Eight since 1993. What have you made of the job that Coach McGuff has done there?

Smith: “He has done a great job. You look back over his tenure, he has done a great job in personnel management, his assistant staff. It’s the best it’s ever been. His support staff is outstanding. So when you look at that personnel management, from that perspective, he’s evolved, and they’re really good. Then the talent is exceptional. We’ve had outstanding recruiting classes over the last few years, and he’s managed the portal well. Taylor (Mikesell), perfect example, Celeste (Taylor) from Duke. There’s some young people there that are really talented.

“I liked the fact that he committed to a style of play that players like to play. A lot of players don’t want to press the whole game. I like what he did, and they have a chance to be exceptionally good next year, so I’m

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Smith Excited About Growth In Women's Sports

Continued From Page 9

proud of the culture he's created. Our culture wasn't where it should have been in the early years, but now it's a really outstanding culture."

BSB: The athletic department reported an 82 percent increase in attendance for the women's team, which is among the biggest in the country. How have you seen women's basketball and women's sports as a whole grow in your time at Ohio State?

Smith: "It's really nice. We just celebrated Title IX last year, and that brought a lot more attention and awareness to women's sports, that national promotion around celebrating Title IX. And then, ultimately, we had unbelievable performances by a lot of student-athletes. People began to pay more attention to it, and it pulled people in. We did the attention and awareness marketing campaign through Title IX celebration, which wasn't the intent – it was to celebrate Title IX – but then people started paying attention and then you had good teams.

"Our women's volleyball team came out of the chute and they were good again and people started to pay more attention. It's great to see across the country. I haven't heard yet what the viewership was for the Oklahoma softball team that won (53 consecutive) games. I mean, it's crazy. Women's softball is a cool sport to watch, so fast. When people start to watch women's sports and see the high quality of play and the strong fundamentals that exist, you get more people that stay with it.

"I'm excited about it. Now, can we continue it? Yes, I think we can. But it's effort. We've got to do a good job coming out of the chute, whatever our schedule is for women's basketball, for example. We've got to push that hard and encourage people to put it on their calendar and put it on their schedule just like they do for football or men's basketball. We'll get it going."

BSB: Moving into the Olympic sports, Ohio State had runner-up finishes in men's tennis and women's ice hockey, with several individual national championships. How important to Ohio State's bottom line is the success of Olympic sports?

Smith: "It's huge. Only football and men's basketball are profitable, but every other sport generates revenue, two different ways. You mentioned women's basketball had an 82 percent increase (in attendance). Their revenue increased – not profitable – but their revenue increased. We haven't been charging for softball, but we will. They had a good season, not a great season, but a decent season, and so it's always good to the bottom line, financially, when those sports do exceptionally well.

"It gives us some metrics from a donor point of view that people are passionate about a certain sport. Women's tennis, men's tennis, when they do exceptionally well, those donors who are interested in that individual program give more to give them an opportunity to get over the hump. It's really targeted and focused from that perspective. Every coach has what we call a discretionary account, so they raise a lot of money in it. Camps become more exciting



FILE PHOTO

ADAPTING ON THE FLY – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith (right) said the Buckeyes are in a "great spot" when it comes to name, image and likeness after a "clunky" start following NIL's adoption in 2021.

and interesting, so all those things spin off."

BSB: You've had a few different leadership changes in some of the Olympic sports with baseball, women's golf and women's lacrosse in the last couple of years. When you are hiring for one of those positions, how, if at all, is that process handled differently from hiring for something like football or basketball?

Smith: "It's interesting. That's a great question. It's handled differently because in football or basketball, it's usually just me. I might have one or two people that are confidants that might help me, but the reality is the other sports are more broad. Women's lacrosse, for example, we have a committee. We have two student-athletes on that committee. The candidates will come in and they'll meet with some of our head coaches, be with the committee, tour, those types of things. Football, basketball, I usually just go get them.

"It's different from the process point of view, but the attributes are the same. We're looking for high-value people. We want people with integrity and people who understand the value of respect, and so we're looking for values and great character, and then we're looking at their technical talents and skills, so that's a lot of work. The Olympic sports are actually more challenging, depending on the sport, because it's a different culture around it."

BSB: Speaking of lacrosse, the men's and women's teams recently completed

their first season in the new Ohio State lacrosse stadium. How important is it for a program and their success to have a place to call their own?

Smith: "It's huge. You look at lacrosse, and it's one of the fastest growing sports in this country. In Ohio, over the last 10 years, it has really grown unbelievably. Having a facility that's their own, that's uniquely designed for them, is huge, for the players we have and then for recruiting. It also takes pressure off the Woody (Hayes Athletic Center). We were playing women's contests in the Woody, our men's team was practicing in the Woody, so it takes that pressure off that turf, and it actually opens it up for the scheduling of the other sports to be more spread out as opposed to back-to-back-to-back all the way up to midnight.

"(June 16-18), we'll host four contests, I believe, that are four pro teams (from the Premier Lacrosse League) playing in that facility. It's great exposure for our university, our community, and the economic impact in our community."

BSB: Plans have recently been approved for the new men's and women's hockey facility, with construction starting next year with an estimated opening date in 2026. Where is progress on that, and are there any other facility announcements or upgrades in the works right now?

Smith: "We probably won't start construction next year. The way it works for us

is we fundraise for our facilities, and then we create, along with the Institution. We're not 100 percent sure until the architects and construction manager actually gives us, probably in October, what it will look like and that we'll know exactly what our number is. So while we're fundraising towards that right now, we don't know exactly what it will be. Then it's going to take us a while to fundraise for whatever that number is. I don't anticipate us having a shovel on the ground next year – 2025, maybe. But I'm excited about it.

"Probably the only other one that we're studying right now that we don't have everything for is the Woody Hayes. We like to tell people when I started here, we didn't have a creative department, we didn't have a recruiting department, we didn't have the number of people in video services. The personnel has grown over the years, so we've always tried to work everything in that square footage, that footprint. We've exploded outside of that right now.

"The Woody Hayes facility is old. If you go in right now, you look at it, it's beautiful because we've got LED lights, we painted the walls, all that type of stuff. We put good lipstick on it. But the mechanicals, the electrical, all those are challenges and we pray that it doesn't rain. Those things are our challenges for that facility, so at some point, we're going to have to add on to that facility, build a new facility attached to it, and so we're looking at it right now."

BSB: Moving into the college landscape as a whole, Tony Petitti was recently hired by the Big Ten as commissioner. What has your first impression been of him since he's been on the job?

Smith: "I knew Tony (before he was hired). I didn't know him in this type of role, but I knew Tony from my days at Iowa State and him being with CBS when I was on the (NCAA Division I Men's Basketball) committee. He's just a good human being. Great values and easy to trust. He's doing a great job transitioning in. I like how he's restructuring his organization.

"I like the fact that first and foremost, he focused on his people, which is the heart and soul of everything we do. He didn't come in and focus on all this other stuff. He focused on his teammates and made sure that he had them structured. Getting back to your earlier question, he had the trust in them, structured the way he wanted to so he could delegate and then go work on our TV contracts or go work with the CFP or establish relationships with the right people. I like the way he's transitioning in. I have a lot of confidence that he will do a great job."

BSB: Maybe the biggest change over the last couple of years in athletics has been name, image and likeness. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in NIL since it was introduced, and how do you feel Ohio State has responded to continue to capitalize?

Smith: "It was clunky at the beginning. It was new. It wasn't the perfect situation. But I think over time as we learned more about how it should be structured, the collectives emerged, they learned more, (and) I think we're in a great spot right now. I really

do. But changes will continue to emerge. It's a matter of how we shift with whatever those changes are. The IRS just came out with their statement about (501(c)(3) NIL collectives) not being tax deductible, so you shift. You have to deal with that. There will be something else. I have no clue what it will be.

"We all focus on football and basketball and all that, but if you look at our Olympic sport athletes, they're killing it. Many of our Olympic sport athletes are on partial scholarships, so they leave with debt. Now they have an opportunity to mitigate that debt. Rightfully so, we've got to focus on football and basketball, but what people don't pay attention to or see is what our student-athletes are doing in different sports, and they're killing it. It's fun to watch."

BSB: You recently backed a bipartisan bill, the Student Athlete Level Playing Field Act, introduced in Congress that aims to create a federal standard for NIL in college sports. What are you looking for in terms of regulation around NIL?

Smith: "We need a way to preempt all of the state laws that have emerged. I lost track of how many – Texas, I think, was the last one (to introduce new laws). Everyone's creating laws that make it an uneven playing field around NIL. We need federal legislation to bring some consistency to it. I like the fact that Charlie Baker, our NCAA president, is searching for a way to create transparency, or a national registry, a contract and a standard so some of these young people aren't taken advantage of, and that's happening. Some stories have emerged, but there's more out there that's going to

emerge.

"I like the fact that he's doing that, but I'm looking for enforcement capacity. What does that look like? Who are the investigators? And actually making sure that we minimize how these young people are taken advantage of. The national registry for agents, making sure that they're certified, and they're actually good at what they do so they're not just taking advantage of these kids. That's what I'm looking for. Capitol Hill is not my world. I don't know what they can get done, but I'm hopeful they can get something done."

BSB: You've talked over the last year or so about the entire model of college football changing, and some in the sport – including Alabama head coach Nick Saban – have discussed the possibility of players being employed and paid directly by schools. Where do you stand on that issue if it does come up in the next couple of years?

Smith: "I'm not a supporter of our student-athletes being employees. I think that there's unintended consequences. Sounds good, but there's a list of things that they would have to adhere to that right now they have the freedom from. Being taxed – they get room, board, books, tuition and cost of attendance. At the end of the day, their tax status changes. They're at-will employees at that point in time. That's not what this is all about.

"Could the model change where the compensation model, the scholarship changes? Sure. But at the end of the day, that would impact our Olympic sports. People never pay attention to it, (but) the Olympic Games

in Paris next year, north of 80 percent of those young people that will compete come from the college platform. When we get excited about a basketball player being drafted or a football player being drafted, I also get excited about our student-athletes in the Olympics. When we had the Olympics in Tokyo (in 2021), I was tracking all of our kids. Our fencers, Emma (Maltais) in ice hockey. It was just the coolest thing.

"I think whatever model emerges, if it requires some type of more institutional compensation in some form or fashion, we need to understand, just like the conversation we had earlier, the impact that it has on Olympic sports, and the impact on the football and basketball players. What does that mean to them from a tax point of view and from their circle of care? Right now, all the things that we provide them, I'm not so sure as employees that they will have the ability to have access to it. I don't think that's the model. Should it be different? Probably. But I'm concerned about financially what it will do to the department and what it does to all of our Olympic sports."

BSB: As for your career, you're contracted through 2026. You've said in the past that you take things on a year-by-year basis, so how do you feel heading into this next athletic season?

Smith: "That's a good question for my wife (laughs). But I feel good. I feel good about where we are. My health is good. Obviously, I wish we had a president that I would have these conversations with. I serve at the pleasure of the president, and so that is meaningful to me who that person is, and so I'll wait and see, but I feel good. I love

our coaches. I love our student-athletes, our support staff. We've got great people. But I have some goals I want to accomplish. So yeah, I feel good."

BSB: When you're posting on social media, it's usually about Ohio State or spending time with your family and your grandkids. In a role as time-consuming as athletic director, how do you find time for those little things in life?

Smith: "It's hard. It's trying to reach some harmony, balance around my life. This is a good time of year for me because things are slowing down. But during the year, it's really hard because I try to go to as many events as I can. I stay in touch with my grandkids, stay in touch with my children. That's where those posts come from. That's important for my personal harmony. My wife and I and our family have a shared (website) where photos go up. (We've got) three of our grandkids in Vancouver, Canada, right now, so at the end of the day, I get a chance to see them going through that experience. That fulfills me that they're able to do that. Then I might grab (a photo) and tweet it out.

"All of us need to find harmony in what we do in our lives and invest in ourselves. You can't be the best you can be if you don't come to work every single day energized and excited about the day. But it's not just about the work that gets you there. It's about everything else around you. For me, if I don't work out five days a week, I'm not the best person to be around. There's a lot in there, but it's intentional. It's very intentional for me to find time for myself to invest in myself."

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Coop: 'Good Feeling' About OSU, College Game

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

It's been 35 years since Ohio State athletic department officials strayed from the family and hired Tennessee-born John Cooper to take over the university's football program.

Not since the 1934 hiring of TCU head coach Francis A. Schmidt had the Buckeyes employed a head football coach who wasn't either an Ohio native, Ohio State alum, or both. And like Schmidt more than a half-century before him, Cooper arrived in Columbus armed with an impressive résumé, a ready smile, and a seemingly endless supply of homespun homilies that he delivered rapid-fire with a rich Southern drawl.

The new coach initially came off as some yokel who could have stepped out of 1960s television comedies "Green Acres" or "The Andy Griffith Show," but his résumé told a much different story. After spending 14 seasons as a college assistant, Cooper became a head coach and won five straight Missouri Valley Conference championships at Tulsa before helping Arizona State win its first-ever Pac-10 title in 1986, a season capped by a 22-15 victory against a Bo Schembechler-coached Michigan in the Rose Bowl.

Despite getting off to a ragged start at Ohio State, Cooper lasted a total of 13 seasons – the third-longest tenure in program history behind Woody Hayes and Dr. Jack Wilce – coached 22 first-team All-Americans, including 1995 Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George, produced 111 victories, captured three Big Ten championships, and led the Buckeyes to their first Rose Bowl win in nearly a quarter-century.

Unfortunately, his tenure was also marked by a number of excruciatingly tough losses to Michigan, and following the 2000 season, Cooper met the same fate as nearly every one of his predecessors. He was fired.

In between, though, the coach did something for which he will likely never be credited because of his 2-10-1 record against Michigan. He transformed the Ohio State football program from its stodgy we-do-it-this-way-because-Woody-did-it-this-way approach to a more streamlined program better equipped to recruit nationally as well as perform on a significantly higher level.

How far had Ohio State football fallen when Cooper took over in 1988? The answer is debatable since predecessor Earle Bruce had produced four Big Ten championships while averaging exactly nine wins per season during his nine-year tenure. But for all intents and purposes, the Scarlet and Gray brand was one that was in danger of falling into mediocrity. OSU had finished among the top five teams in the final Associated Press poll only once during the 12-season span from 1976 to 1987.

Cooper's personality was most definitely a 180-degree turn from Hayes or Bruce, and his shoot-from-the-lip style was a beat

reporter's dream. But the new coach soon discovered that his easygoing nature and brutal honesty could be used against him, especially as loss after agonizing loss in the final two games of the season began to pile up year after year. The coach's legacy at Ohio State could not be chronicled without mentioning his record against the Wolverines as well as a 3-8 mark in bowl games.

However, a record of 106-25-3 (a stellar .802 winning percentage)

in all other games cannot be ignored, nor can the fact the coach overhauled the entire OSU program from top to bottom.

Cooper ditched what had been for generations a mostly plodding offense, replacing it with a higher-octane attack designed to stretch opposing defenses to their breaking point. He expanded the Buckeyes' recruiting footprint, making vital inroads into such fertile high school states as Florida and Texas. And he oversaw a makeover of the weight and conditioning program, making it the envy of college football.

Successors Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer and Ryan Day have taken each of those things to higher levels, but the seeds for what has become one of college football's most impressive programs on the field, in the weight room, and on the recruiting trail were planted by Cooper.

Since his dismissal from the Buckeyes following the 2000 season, the coach, who was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 2008, has dabbled in a number of endeavors including stints as a television analyst and NFL scout. But as he celebrated his 86th birthday on July 2, the pursuits he enjoys most these days are golf and spending time with his family. He also remains an avid follower of the sport he spent nearly six decades playing and coaching.

That was the starting point for a phone interview with Cooper from his suburban Columbus home.

BSB: During the 20-plus years since your coaching career ended, the landscape of college football has changed quite a bit. The BCS has morphed into the College Football Playoff, which will expand its field to 12 teams in 2024. Conference alignments are changing, transfers from school to school are unlimited, and millions of NIL dollars are being made available to players. What is your opinion about all of these changes?

Cooper: "I have a good feeling about college football and the brand of football we're seeing today. The players are as good or better than they've ever been, the coaches are as good or better than they've ever been, the facilities are obviously better than they've ever been. But as far as these conferences expanding and schools moving around, I don't know. Like the Big Ten bringing in UCLA and USC, I have to admit that I don't really understand that. That's a long way to travel to play a game.

"But let me say this. I love college football, and I have a tremendous amount of



FILE PHOTO

NATIONAL STAGE — Former Ohio State football coach John Cooper led the Buckeyes into a new era, overhauling the program — from recruiting to the weight room — and securing a 111-43-4 record over his 13 seasons at the helm from 1988-00.

respect for the university presidents and the athletic directors and the coaches, and if they're for this – and obviously they are – and it benefits college football, then I'm for it, too. But from strictly a personal opinion, I probably wouldn't even have expanded from the 10 or 11 teams we had in the Big Ten when I was coaching. I thought our conference was pretty good the way it was. I would prefer to play everybody in the league every year and determine your championship that way."

BSB: Do you think things such as conference realignment, the transfer portal and NIL money makes it easier or harder to coach college football these days?

Cooper: "Three things I tell people you have to do when you become a head coach: recruit, recruit and recruit. I don't care how many teams are in your league, or how many different uniforms you have, or anything else. The team with the best players usually wins the football game.

"There are nearly 40 million people living in California and thousands of high

schools in the state playing football, so is it any wonder why a team like USC has been so good for so long? When I got to Arizona State (in 1985), our team was loaded, and a lot of those players were from California. Naturally, you have to go in there and compete with UCLA, Cal-Berkeley and Stanford, but those schools are much tougher to get into academically. With the kind of talent they have swimming around their area, don't ever feel bad for Southern Cal. And it doesn't matter what league they've been in or what league they're going to be in. They'll always have good players.

"If I were to rank the teams that right now are in the strongest positions as far as recruiting is concerned, I'd start on the West Coast with USC and then move eastward with Texas and Texas A&M. Then in the South, obviously you have Alabama and Georgia, and LSU is in a really good situation right now because they're beginning to keep all their good in-state high school players. I probably should include Clemson in there somewhere. And then in the Big

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: JOHN COOPER

Ten, you obviously have Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State. I'm probably leaving somebody out, but that's a pretty good top 10 right there."

BSB: Those are all recognizable names that have dominated the sport over the past two or three decades.

Cooper: "And that's my point. They've all been good ever since I've been coaching college football, and it ain't likely to change anytime soon. I don't care what you're talking about, whether it's changing conferences or NIL or whatever. Those teams are all good because they're located in places where they're playing the best high school football. Like I said, the team that usually wins is the team that has the best players."

BSB: Recruiting the best available talent is obviously a key component to a successful program. But you also have to keep with the times in terms of coaching talent and state-of-the-art facilities, don't you?

Cooper: "No question. And that's why I can't say enough good things about Gene Smith. I think he's done an excellent job as athletic director of giving the coaches what they need to compete on a high level.

"When I came here in 1988, our coaching staff was the eighth-lowest paid staff in the Big Ten. We lost assistant coaches to other schools, and that should never happen at Ohio State. Now, I'm not talking about an assistant leaving to become a head coach. I'm talking about going from being an assistant coach here to being an assistant coach somewhere else. My defensive backs coach in 1991 and '92 was Larry Coyer, a guy who went on to coach in the NFL for 10 or 12 years. He left here to become an assistant coach at East Carolina. Now, nothing against East Carolina, but are you kidding me? There is no way an assistant coach at Ohio State should ever leave to go be an assistant coach somewhere else.

"That's not a problem today, and I give Gene credit for that. He's given coaches what they need to compete. The bar for excellence is set pretty high here as everybody knows, and you'd better have good players, good coaches and whatever else it takes to stay up with Alabama and Georgia and Southern Cal and Michigan. But in my opinion, we have all those things. We're going to be good again this year, and we're going to continue to be good for the foreseeable future."

BSB: How did you get into coaching? Was it something you thought about when you were growing up in Tennessee?

Cooper: "I never thought about it growing up, to be honest with you. I always tell the story that our little-bitty town was so small that we had to go toward town just to hunt. Where I came from, back there in the hills of eastern Tennessee, very, very few people went to college. As a matter of fact, I don't know of anyone in my high school senior class that went to college. You basically went to school, got out, got a job and that's what you did for the rest of your life.

"I was one of six kids. My dad was a carpenter who said, 'I'll get you through (high) school, and after that you're on your own.' But that was OK because I didn't think I was going to college. I didn't have a clue what I was going to do, but I was pretty sure college wasn't going to be part of my future."

BSB: Why didn't you envision yourself

as college material?

Cooper: "Because I was a little-bitty guy from a little-bitty school. I played all three sports my high school had – basketball, baseball and football – and eventually worked my way up from team manager of the football team to being a starter at quarterback and safety. Then after my senior season, I got to play in an all-star game and ended up being named most valuable player in that game. That was when I first thought that maybe football was a way I could go to college.

"But on that all-star team, there were guys going to Tennessee, Georgia Tech, Alabama – schools like that, and I thought, 'Gosh almighty, I'm MVP of the game. Why aren't they recruiting me?' I did have a couple of small offers from places like East Tennessee State and Wofford, but people were telling me, 'Johnny, you ought to be playing at Tennessee.'

"Well, that would have been a dream because I grew up idolizing the Volunteers. We used to bum rides into Knoxville, and I sold Cokes at Shields-Watkins Field (now Neyland Stadium). Growing up, I could have told you every University of Tennessee football player, his height, weight, hometown and what position he played.

"Of course, I know why they weren't recruiting me. I only weighed about 160 or 165 pounds, and that wasn't very big even back then. I was pretty sure of myself, though, so I was ready to walk on at Tennessee and earn myself a scholarship. Then I showed up to register there, and those lines were a mile long. ... I got to thinking that I didn't have any money and I was dating (future wife) Helen, so I turned around and left and got myself a job."

BSB: What kind of job did you get?

Cooper: "I spent the next couple of months working different odd jobs, and then I decided that fall to enlist in the Army. I'd been helping my cousin remodel a house, and at lunchtime one day, we got this wild idea to go volunteer for the draft. I always remember the date was Oct. 8, 1956, because that was the same day (New York Yankees righthander) Don Larsen pitched his perfect game in the World Series.

"I went into the service in November and went to Fort Chaffee in Arkansas for basic training. I came home for Christmas, Helen and I got married on Christmas Eve, and then I went back to Arkansas to finish my training. Then they shipped me off to Stuttgart, Germany, where I spent the next 15 months while Helen lived with her folks in east Tennessee.

"During my off time, I sat around with nothing to do, and my mind started thinking about what I was going to do after the Army. I spent most of my time either writing to Helen or writing letters to schools that I thought maybe would give me a scholarship to play football when I got out of the service. I didn't get much of a response until one day I got a reply from Phil Dickens, who was head coach at Indiana at that time. He said they might be interested and that he would have one of his assistants get in touch with me.

"That assistant turned out to be Lou McCullough (who would later spend eight years as defensive coordinator on Hayes' staff at Ohio State, including the 1968 national championship season). But a lot of time passed, and by the time Coach Mc-

Cullough finally made contact with me, he had left Indiana and joined the staff at Iowa State.

"He sent me a letter saying that if I could get an early release from the Army, and be in Ames, Iowa, by a certain date, he would give me a partial scholarship. To be honest with you, I'd never heard of Ames, Iowa, and I don't think I even answered that letter because I was looking for a full scholarship. I was going to East Tennessee State and stay close to home.

"Anyway, a couple of weeks went by, and I got a letter from my mother telling me that this coach at Iowa State had contacted her and wanted to know why I hadn't answered his letter because he was offering me a full scholarship. I immediately wrote a letter to Coach McCullough telling him that I would go to Iowa State if I could have a full scholarship, but if not, then leave me alone because I was going to East Tennessee State. A few days later, I got a special delivery letter with my scholarship offer.

"So, I got my early release from the Army, drove through Knoxville to pick up Helen, and off we went to Ames, Iowa."

BSB: You had a pretty nice career at Iowa State. You were a member of the legendary "Dirty Thirty" as a sophomore and then served as team captain and won team MVP honors during your senior year.

Cooper: "Yeah, but it wasn't an easy road. My first year, there were more than 100 players on that football team. But that didn't last long. You talk about boot camp. Basic training in the Army was nothing compared to this. They'd slap you upside the head, kick you in the rear, threaten to take away your scholarship – lots of things they wouldn't dare try today.

"There were players dropping out left and right because you went full-go in full gear every day of practice. But they couldn't run me off. I was a poor, old country boy, and if I had quit, I would have had to go back home and get a job.

"Out of those 100 players in camp, they ran off all but about 30 of us. Then one day, while we were walking off a muddy field,

one of the trainers said, 'Here they come. Here comes the Dirty Thirty.' That's where that nickname came from. We weren't very big, but you couldn't intimidate us. We beat some pretty good teams, too. We beat Nebraska. We beat Colorado. We beat Kansas State. And my last two years, we beat Oklahoma twice in a row."

BSB: Did you entertain any thoughts about playing professionally?

Cooper: "No. I wasn't that good. In fact, by the time I was going to graduate, Helen and I were ready to go back home where I thought I'd be a high school teacher and maybe coach a little bit. But I was in (Iowa State head coach Clay Stapleton's) office one day after the season was over when he leaned back, put his feet up on the desk, and said, 'John, I think you'd make a hell of a coach. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to stay here at Iowa State and coach my freshmen team next year.'

"I knew that position didn't pay anything, but I told him I'd take it if I was treated like a real member of the staff. I told him I wanted to be able to sit in on all his meetings and learn as much as I could. I basically wanted him to teach me how to be a football coach. He agreed to that, so I graduated in the spring, immediately enrolled in graduate school and began work as the freshman coach at Iowa State.

"I thought I'd stay there a year and learn everything that I could, and then Helen and I could go back home. We'd already started a family (son John Jr. was born during that time) and we were ready to go back to the Knoxville area."

BSB: So what happened?

Cooper: "I was over in the intramural department one afternoon when the phone rang and it was Coach Stapleton. He asked me how I'd like to go to Oregon State as an assistant coach. I thought, 'Oregon State? I don't know anybody there. I'm not going to Oregon State. I'm going back to Tennessee and getting me a high school coaching job.'

"But then Coach Stapleton started

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Cooper Found Success At Tulsa, Arizona State

Continued From Page 13

talking about he had been an assistant at Oregon State under Tommy Prothro, who at that time everybody knew as one of the most brilliant college coaches around. So, Helen bought me a new sports coat and a new tie, and I flew off to Corvallis, Oregon, of all places for an interview.

"Well, Coach Prothro and I immediately hit it off. What was supposed to be only an hour interview session went well past midnight as we talked football strategy. I found out that we had a lot in common, and by the time I left, I had my first full-time assistant coaching job.

"Johnny is 3 months old, I've got an old, beat-up car, and we all pile in and head for Corvallis about 2,000 miles away. Helen – bless her heart – she's the only girl in her family, and I think she must have cried half the way out there. She thought she was headed back home to be the wife of a Tennessee high school football coach, and all of a sudden she was on her way to Oregon."

BSB: Did that first full-time coaching job live up to your expectations?

Cooper: "And then some. You know, Coach Prothro is in the (College Football) Hall of Fame and is considered one of the great analytical coaches of his time. I was his defensive backs coach for two years at Oregon State, and then we all packed up and moved to UCLA, and I was his defensive backs coach for another two years there.

"During our first year at UCLA, we were picked to finish last in the (Pac-8) conference but wound up shocking everybody when we came from behind to beat USC in the last game of the regular season and then upset Michigan State in the Rose Bowl.

"That year, Michigan State had one of the best collections of players on one team that I've ever seen. They had Bubba Smith and Gene Washington, George Webster and Clint Jones – guys who played years and years in the NFL. They were No. 1 in the country, and everybody thought they were unbeatable. Heck, they'd already beaten us earlier in the season, and I think they were favored by 13 or 14 points against us in the Rose Bowl.

"I remember we scored two early touchdowns. Michigan State muffed a punt that led to one of them, and then we scored again after an onside kick. But we were barely hanging on when they scored late in the game to make it 14-12. But on a two-point conversion, our defensive back by the

name of Bob Stiles threw himself at Michigan State's fullback and knocked him out cold. We hung on from there in what had to be the biggest upset in the history of the Rose Bowl. I mean, if we had played Michigan State 25 times that year, they would have probably beaten us 24."

BSB: You stayed with Prothro one more year and then took assistant jobs at Kansas and Kentucky. It seems like you were continuing to chart a path that would lead back to Tennessee.

Cooper: "That's pretty much what I was doing. I moved from UCLA to Kansas and then from Kansas to Kentucky because I was trying to get back closer to home. But when I was at Kentucky, they were not operating within the rules. And I don't want to even mention his name, but I didn't think my head football coach did things the right way. I didn't think he treated me right, and I didn't have great respect for him. So I told myself, 'I'm leaving. I'm getting me another job.' It wasn't like we didn't have a good team, though. My last year there, we were 9-1. I just didn't like the way things were being handled. I knew I wanted to be a head coach, and I thought I was ready, so I decided I'd take matters into my own hands.

"I knew the University of Tulsa was looking for a new head coach, so I called them and told them I'd like to be their next head football coach. Helen told me, 'You're just kidding yourself. You don't know anybody at Tulsa.' But I got a call back, saying they'd like to talk to me. So, I got every piece of information I could find about Tulsa like who was on the board and who was really doing the hiring, and I found out who the important people were who were going to make the decision.

"The head of the booster club was a guy by the name of Mickey Whitney, and another guy on the selection committee was named Buddy LaFortune. There was a park in Tulsa named after him, so I figured he must be important. I met with both of them along with members of the selection committee, and then that was it.

"But I got up early the next morning and decided, boy, I wanted that job in the worst way. So, I looked up Mickey Whitney's number in the phone book, and I called him to tell him how much I appreciated them considering me and how much I thought I could help their football program. And then I looked up Buddy LaFortune's number, called him, and told him the same thing.

"Then I'm getting ready to go out the door to the airport when the phone rang, and it was Mickey Whitney calling me back,

telling me to postpone my flight and come down to his office and talk some more. He sent his driver out to pick me up, I rode into downtown Tulsa and we talked in his office for a couple of hours.

"Finally, he asked me, 'What time does your plane get back to Lexington?' I told him about 6 o'clock, and he said, 'Well, when you get back, you'll have a phone call from the university president asking you to become our next coach.' I didn't even get to meet the president when I was at Tulsa, but when he called me, I didn't wait for an introduction. He offered me the job and I accepted.

"When I was at Tulsa, I couldn't have been treated any better. I was the athletic director and head football coach, Johnny was playing high school football and his team won the state championship, and then he turned down several scholarship offers from bigger schools to stay home and play for me.

"And we had a good, solid program. We played a bunch of good teams on the road and beat them. We beat Air Force, Kansas State, Kansas, Virginia Tech, the University of Florida in Gainesville. We scored more points against Texas Tech than any nonconference team ever did. And we did that in Lubbock. We recruited pretty well, too, and that was at a time when Barry Switzer was at Oklahoma, Jimmy Johnson was at Oklahoma State and Lou Holtz was at Arkansas. I was extremely proud of what we accomplished at Tulsa."

BSB: What made you leave?

Cooper: "I never thought I would leave there, to be honest with you. At that point in my career, I was happy in Tulsa and I figured I'd probably finish my career there. I didn't go out and seek interviews anymore, but I guess I let it be known that if some school wanted to talk to me about a coaching job, I was willing to listen."

BSB: And that's when Arizona State entered the picture?

Cooper: "That happened real fast. Their coach, Darryl Rogers, had become head coach of the Detroit Lions, so they called me and asked if I would be willing to meet with them. I flew to Denver to meet the Arizona State president and athletic director, and then flew on to Phoenix the next day for a press conference to announce I was taking the job. It turned out to be a good move. We came close to winning the conference my first year and then did win it as well as the Rose Bowl the following year.

"We didn't just have a good football team at Arizona State that year. We had a great football team. In my opinion, we had the best team in the country that year. People sometimes ask me, 'Did you have anybody from that team that played in the NFL?' and I just laugh. You look at that roster and we must have had at least a dozen guys who played in the NFL for a long time.

"We had Randall McDaniel, who is in both the college and pro halls of fame. We had cornerback Eric Allen, who is in the Philadelphia Eagles Hall of Fame. I'll tell you how good that team was. Trace Armstrong, who played 15 years in NFL and had more than 100 career sacks with the Bears and Dolphins and Raiders – he was

a backup defensive tackle for us that year."

BSB: It sounds like you had a good thing going at Arizona State. What enticed you to make the move to Ohio State?

Cooper: "Again, just like at Tulsa, I wasn't looking to make a move. I was 50 years old and had a great situation at Arizona State. We'd won a championship, we'd won a Rose Bowl, we'd been to three straight bowl games, I had a long-term contract, and things were going good.

"Then we heard the Ohio State job was open. And it was open and it was open and it was open, and every day we'd sit around and wonder who was going to get that Ohio State job. The defensive coordinator on my staff at the time was Larry Marmie. He was from Ohio and he loved Ohio State, and he said, 'Coach, why don't you go after that job?' I said, 'Because I'm happy here. I have a good situation here.' But he kept on and kept on, saying, 'You ought to give them a call.'

"I said, 'But I don't know anyone at Ohio State. Why would they want me?' That was the end of it, or so I thought until (OSU associate athletic director) Bill Myles called me and wanted to know if I'd be interested in talking to them about the job. I never did know whether Larry had anything to do with that. But I agreed to talk to them, and so I flew to Dallas to visit with (athletic director) Jim Jones and (university president) Ed Jennings.

"Again, it was pretty simple. I told Ohio State what I needed in my contract to leave Arizona State and basically told them if they wanted to agree to those things, I was their next coach. If not, no hard feelings because I was happy where I was. A little time went by, Jim Jones called to offer me the job, we played Air Force and beat them in the Freedom Bowl, and after the game was over, I was on my way to Columbus."

BSB: You won your first game with the Buckeyes, but the honeymoon was over the following week after a 42-10 loss at Pittsburgh. That eventually led to a 4-6-1 record, the first losing season at OSU in 22 years and your first losing season since your first year as head coach at Tulsa. Did you think maybe you'd made a mistake leaving Arizona State?

Cooper: "No. Never. We thought maybe it would take a little time to build the kind of program that we wanted to build and that the fans at Ohio State wanted us to build, but we knew we'd get there with hard work. That was what made us successful at Tulsa, that was what made us successful at Arizona State, and I knew that was going to make us successful at Ohio State. Our strength and conditioning program was making us better. We were recruiting all over the country. Our players had bought into our system. We knew it was only a matter of time."

BSB: Still, Ohio State fans are anything but patient, and as the program-building took more and more time, the criticism got hotter and hotter. How did you handle that?

Cooper: "I have always prided myself in treating people the way I wanted to be treated. You can't control the way people treat you. That's their business. But you can control the way you treat people, and I think I

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always treated people the way I wanted to be treated. You're going to have good times and you're going to have some not-so-good times, but nobody else is going to control how happy you are. Only you can do that.

"As far as the criticism was concerned, I think a certain amount of that goes with the territory. It wasn't like I didn't know where they were coming from. They wanted to win, and I knew that. What I don't think some of them realized was the fact that they didn't want to win any more than I did.

"Over time, we kept having good years, but they weren't great ones. We won a lot of games, and we won championships and we won a Rose Bowl. But when you're at Ohio State, you can't consider it a great season unless you beat Michigan. No one knows that any better than John Cooper."

BSB: You had so many recruiting triumphs at Ohio State. Have you ever tried to compile a list of the best Buckeyes you ever coached?

Cooper: "People have asked me that from time to time, and it's hard especially when you consider the players we had like Joey Galloway, David Boston, Robert Smith and Eddie George. Gosh, I don't know how you can put one of those guys in front of the others. But probably the best football player I ever coached in my life – and I'll probably offend some other people – but I don't know how you would ever find a better player than Orlando Pace. You know, Eddie was a great, great player, and nobody loves Eddie George more than John Cooper. But Eddie didn't start for us until his junior year. You talk about a self-made football player, man. Eddie is the hardest-working football player I ever coached by far. But in terms of the best football player, I think it's Orlando Pace.

"I know I left out some people. You have to mention Mike Vrabel – tenacious, hard-nosed, smart, great work ethic. You've got guys like Antoine Winfield and Joe Germaine, Danny Wilkinson, Luke Fickell, Damon Moore, Bobby Hoying. And Andy Katzenmoyer. You talk about an athlete. Holy cow! If he hadn't gotten hurt, he would have been another Dick Butkus in the NFL. We had some great, great players. What a privilege that was to coach those great players."

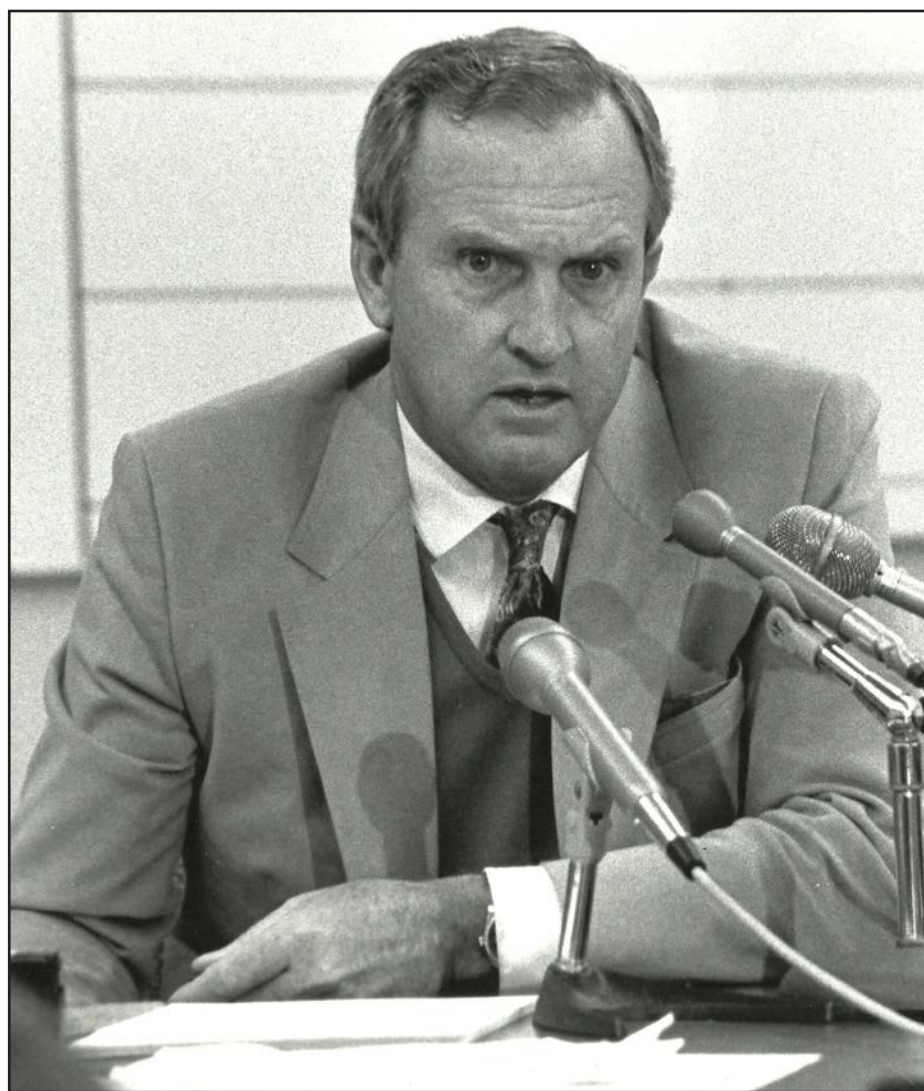
BSB: Does it bother you that an otherwise excellent tenure as head coach at Ohio State is tarnished by your record against Michigan?

Cooper: "That was our record, and I won't run from it. Not that I could if I wanted to because there's always somebody that wants to talk about it. It's brought up all the time. But, hey, it's not like we lost those games to bad teams. We never lost to a bad Michigan team.

"Look, I'm proud of what we did at Ohio State, and I'm proud to continue to live in Columbus. You know, Ohio State is the pinnacle of our profession. I don't know of a better job in college football than coaching the Buckeyes. I coached here for 13 years, and to last that long, you must have won some games. This was the greatest job you could have, and I have always been proud to have been part of the great tradition that is Ohio State football."

BSB: Prior to your dismissal following the 2000 season, did you have an inkling the university was interesting in making a change?

Cooper: "I don't know. We'd had a change



FILE PHOTO

ALL-TIME GREATS – During the tenure of former Ohio State head coach John Cooper, he coached several program greats, including David Boston, Eddie George, Andy Katzenmoyer, Orlando Pace and Mike Vrabel, among others.

in athletic directors, and we'd had a change in university presidents. When you've been a coach as long as I had been, changes like that were something that didn't escape your attention. The guy that hired me was Jim Jones and the president at that time was Gordon Gee. Then Jim left and the guy they brought in didn't hire John Cooper. Then Dr. Gee left, and the next thing you know ... Well, say what you want to, but most athletic directors want to bring in their own guy."

BSB: Did you ever think about pursuing another head coaching job?

Cooper: "Sure, I thought about it. I was pretty close to 200 career wins, and that was important to me for a while. But I was into my 60s by then, and I got to talking to my younger brother about it when he said, 'Why do you want 200 wins so bad? So they can put it on your tombstone? Big deal.' The more I thought about that, the more I knew he was right."

BSB: Do you ever miss coaching?

Cooper: "Oh, I did at one time because I had done it for so long. But to be honest, I haven't really had time to miss it. Between family and other things I like to do, I really don't know when I'd have to time for anything else.

"I've been blessed to have a membership at Scioto Country Club, one of the most beautiful golf courses in the world, and for years I played at least three or four times a week. I would play with Dr. William Mielly, who was a dentist around here for years and years. We were always first off the tee

"I miss it, but Helen had full knee replacement surgery and I've been staying home and taking care of her. She's just now beginning to walk again outside. We walk about three miles a day four times a week when we're healthy. Now, we've built back up to about two miles a day.

"And I still try to keep up with the Buckeyes. Coach Day has been real nice to me just like Coach Tressel and Coach Meyer before him. During spring ball this year, I went to watch practice maybe a couple of times a week. I usually just stand there on the sideline and try to keep my mouth shut. (Laughter.)

"But my family is what I enjoy most. Other people talk about retirement and moving to Arizona or Florida or some such place, but I still live in the same house I've lived in for 33 years. They can't run me out of this town. I've been here too long. (Laughter.) I came here in 1988, and everybody was saying, 'What's he doing here? He doesn't know anything about Ohio.' And now I've been here longer than any of them. And I'm going to stay here the rest of my life.

"My daughter Cindy has two girls. One of them graduated from Miami (University) and is working at (the home office of) Abercrombie & Fitch over in New Albany, and the other is a sophomore at Ohio State and she's studying medicine. Both are straight-A students and I'm very proud of them. My son Johnny lives a mile from me and has two boys, 14 and 9, and I'm very proud of them, too.

"I've been married for 65 years to my high school sweetheart. My daughter and her family live right next door, my son and his family live only about a mile away. ... My whole family is right here in Columbus, and I love it. Nothing is more important to me than my health and my family, and fortunately I have been blessed on both accounts.

"Every day I wake up, I know I'm going to have a good day. And you know what? I wouldn't trade places with anybody."

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Jones Leading NIL Efforts After Playing Career

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Cardale Jones will be forever immortalized in Buckeye lore for being the man under center during the team's immaculate three-game run to the first-ever College Football Playoff national championship in 2014.

Jones started the year as the team's third-string quarterback, but a season-ending injury to Braxton Miller before the campaign started and another to J.T. Barrett during the Michigan game put Jones in position to step up and lead Ohio State to a 59-0 win over No. 11 Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game.

From there, an upset 42-35 victory over No. 1 Alabama in the CFP semifinals and a dominant 42-20 win over No. 3 Oregon in the title game gave the Buckeyes the crown. Jones became part of a season-long quarterback battle with Barrett in 2015 before leaving for the 2016 NFL draft, where he was selected in the fourth round by the Buffalo Bills and played in

one career NFL game. He spent the 2020 XFL season with the DC Defenders before COVID-19 cut the league's inaugural campaign short.

Jones has since been working to grow Ohio State football and athletics through his work with The Foundation, one of the school's top name, image and likeness collectives, which he cofounded with longtime Buckeye donor and real estate developer Brian Schottenstein.

BSB caught up with Jones on June 27, reminiscing on the team's improbable 2014 run and discussing his present and future work in the NIL space.

BSB: Starting at the beginning, Ohio State has pulled as much talent from Cleveland Glenville as about anywhere in the country. That pipeline has resurged lately with three commitments in the last two classes. As someone who played there, what about Glenville's culture breeds talent for Ohio State?

Jones: "It's just a hard-nosed, rugged culture that Coach (Ted) Ginn Sr. and that staff

CARDALE JONES



FILE PHOTO

12 GAUGE — Former Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones, who helped lead the Buckeyes to their most recent national championship in 2014, is now helping the team off the field, working with The Foundation.

have installed. Those players, (and others from Glenville) before their time and even before my time, that's ultimately providing an opportunity to be recruited at a national level for them. That goes back to Coach Ginn's relationship with Coach (Jim) Tressel from back in the day.

"They know how to help develop young men to be not just great athletes, but great young men as well."

BSB: Going back to your recruitment specifically, Luke Fickell was still the interim head coach when you committed in 2011. Was there ever any hesitancy for you in committing when the program was in a state of uncertainty?

Jones: "Yes and no. It was just not knowing what the following season would entail for the coaching staff and the guys I had built a relationship with on that staff for the 2½ years to that point. Coach Nick Siciliano, the quarterbacks coach at the time, was a guy that I became very fond of as a coach. Coach Tressel, clearly, as the head coach, his departure did have an effect on the recruiting side of things.

"I softly started to entertain the other offers that I had and have a conversation with them. I didn't know what state the football program would be in. This was before the bowl ban and the scholarship limitations and stuff like that. But it clearly didn't make a big enough impact to where I chose somewhere else."

BSB: Bellefontaine, Ohio, three-star Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) in 2025 is the first in-state quarterback commit for Ohio State since Joe Burrow, and if he ends up starting in Columbus, he'll be the first in-state starting quarterback since you. How satisfying was it as an Ohio kid to start at Ohio State?

Jones: "It was great, because I grew up watching the Buckeyes. I never thought about it to that extent. I just thought, 'Oh, it would be great playing for a university and having an opportunity to win a national championship at a university.'

"But looking back on it, having been away from it for six, seven, eight years almost at this point, it's a big deal. I would argue (Ohio) is driven by the Ohio State Buckeyes, and being a hometown kid in that position – it means so much more to me now than being an 18- to 22-year-old kid being in it, not realizing how big it was."

BSB: Being from Glenville, did you ever connect with fellow alum Troy Smith?

Jones: "A few times. When I was there, Troy Smith was in the NFL and doing some things, transitioning from the league. But he was one of the first calls I got going into the national championship week. He wanted to do everything in his power as a resource to make sure I didn't feel the way he felt after they didn't cap off their season (with a national championship in 2006). And those are the words that came out of his mouth, I'm not paraphrasing.

"It meant a lot, because he's a guy that I didn't have too much of a relationship with at that time, but he wanted to extend a helping hand to me to make sure that I got the goals and our team got the goals that we set out to achieve."

BSB: That segues perfectly into some questions about the 2014 national title run. You were a redshirt sophomore that season and entered fall camp third on the depth chart. Where was your head at about your college football career that spring?

Jones: "Going into that spring – I knew I was a competitor. I felt very comfortable competing and being there. But it felt a little

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INTERVIEW: CARDALE JONES

different. I always knew I had the ability.”

BSB: I'm sure you've gotten this question many times since, but as Barrett is being carted off the field and you're entering the game against Michigan, what is going through your mind?

Jones: “I'm just thinking about doing what I have to do. It's 'next man up' mentality. That's the thing that our coach did a great job of instilling in all of us, just next man up.”

BSB: Few performances in Ohio State history have been as impressive and dominant as the 59-0 win over Wisconsin. From the offensive side of the equation, you had three long touchdown passes to Devin Smith that helped stretch the defense vertically as Ezekiel Elliott ran for 220 yards. How did you develop that connection with Devin so quickly?

Jones: “Outside of playing together in the (Big 33 Football Classic in Pennsylvania) out of high school, just getting more work in after practice and during practice. I knew my strengths were a little bit different from J.T.'s as far as the things I was really good at. (Smith) did a great job of not just helping the team, but helping me personally be in position to take advantage of some of the things I brought to the table.”

BSB: You had multiple key first-down runs in both the Alabama and Oregon games in that year's College Football Playoff. Do you think you caught both those teams off-guard with your legs?

Jones: “I think so. I think I caught them off-guard with everything. There wasn't any significant film on me up until that point, so both teams were going out thinking, 'Bigger guy, probably not as mobile or as agile as the other two guys prior,' and they probably weren't expecting too much on the (quarterback) run.”

BSB: Speaking of running, you had a reputation for being almost unstoppable on quarterback sneaks. What was the key to your success in those situations?

Jones: “It was really about believing and trusting the guys up front. We had a great interior offensive line – we had a great offensive line, period. We had Taylor Decker, Chase Farris, Darryl Baldwin, Pat Elflein, Billy Price, Jacoby Boren, a few other of those reserves that were in that rotation. I trusted and believed in those guys.”

“A lot of those gritty runs and tough, hard-nosed runs – not just for the running back but for the quarterback as well – those guys recommended and called for those plays because they knew what type of group we had (up front) and they knew what type of runners we had behind them. So I'm going to give those guys all the credit for that.”

BSB: What was the significance of beating Alabama for the program? How did the win over Alabama compare to the win over Oregon?

Jones: “As far as a program win, I don't think we went into the game thinking like that. They were another team in our way of getting to the ultimate goal, and I'm pretty sure they looked at us the exact same way.”

“Yes, there were some stereotypes around that time in college football about the Big Ten not playing well against SEC schools. But all that crap goes out the window when you try to put yourself in position to win a national title. Especially the first College Football Playoffs, and what was on the line for our program and our university. And theirs as well.”

BSB: The team beat Oregon 42-20 de-

spite having a minus-three turnover margin, and even the one turnover that the Ducks had was after the game was well in hand. Does that speak to the dominance of that 2014 team to win the title game so handily after so many self-inflicted wounds?

Jones: “Hell yeah (laughs). I've said this many times – that game could have easily been a 67-point game for us without some of the boneheaded mistakes that we had. And it's no knock on Oregon at all, that was a great team. But it was just our night. I feel comfortable enough to say there weren't too many teams in the country on any level that could have beaten us during that (three-game) stretch, and I feel very confident in that.”

BSB: Being almost nine years removed from it now, how has being a part of that team and accomplishing what you did changed your life?

Jones: “It's just changed in the way of being connected to those guys that were a part of that team. That's something that we did together that can never be taken away from us. Then the impact on the first College Football Playoff and having the ability to say that we were the first team to do it.”

BSB: Now that you're in your role with The Foundation, do you ever look back and think about how much money you could have made off NIL deals the following year?

Jones: “I try not to look at it – yes (laughs).”

BSB: During the 2015 season, what was it about you and J.T.'s quarterback competition that made it drag out so long into the year?

Jones: “That would be a question you guys would have to ask the coaches (laughs).”

BSB: You declared for the draft after that season. In your eyes, what's the most difficult part of going from college to the NFL as a quarterback?

Jones: “The speed of the game and everything that consists of it. It's just like getting a promotion in a job where you are just an employee, then you go to a manager, then a CEO. There's just more on your plate.”

BSB: If you could go back and do it over, would you come back for an additional season?

Jones: “No, I still would have left after the 2015 season.”

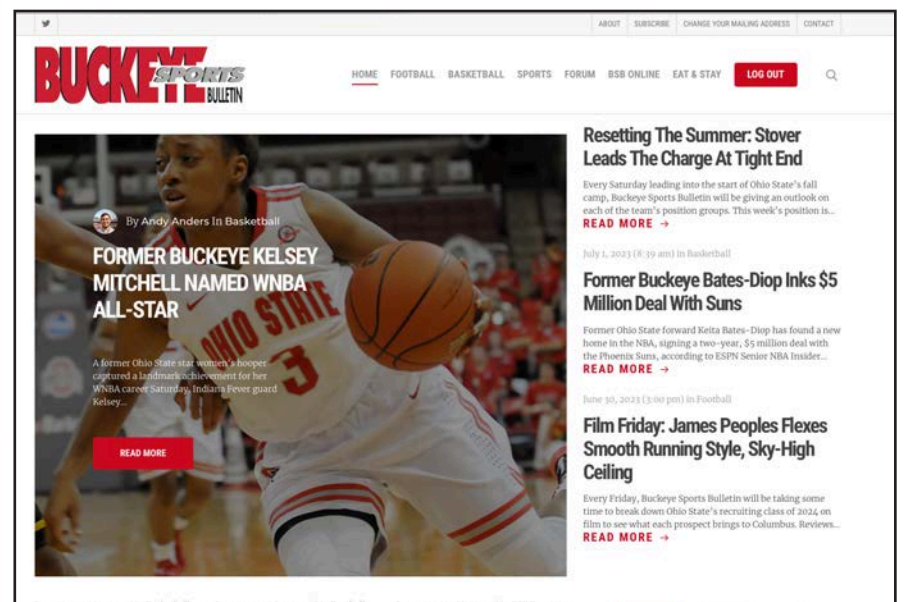
BSB: Is there any reason it's been difficult for Ohio State quarterbacks to break through in the NFL, or is it simply bad luck, do you think? Obviously C.J. Stroud and Justin Fields can change that, but compared to the success of its quarterbacks at the collegiate level, Ohio State hasn't produced much in terms of NFL quarterbacks to date.

Jones: “I wouldn't say either. When you're talking about playing in a game and in a position where there's (only one starter per team), I don't think there's any school out there that can say that 'Oh yeah, over the last 50, 60 years, we've produced all these great quarterbacks at the next level.' I think that's a question you can ask Georgia (too).”

“There's not many schools I can think of off the top of my head that are producing a lot of quarterbacks at a high level. Even from a school, and I wouldn't consider them a quarterback development school, it's Alabama with Tua (Tagovailoa) and Jalen (Hurts). So

Continued On Page 18

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Continued From Page 17

I don't think that's an Ohio State thing or any (specific reason).

"You have so many factors that determine someone's success in any career. Baseball, football, basketball, journalism, whatever it is. That's like saying, 'Ohio State produced 150 guys with journalism degrees every year, but only two are at ESPN.' Do you think that's a problem with Ohio State? Or do you think that the journalism program at Ohio State is not as good because they can't produce a good writer that's going to go on ESPN? There's just so many other factors that go into someone's success outside of what program they come from."

BSB: What stands out in your memory from the one NFL game you played in?

Jones: "Even though it was mop-up duty and it wasn't as competitive – last game of the season, nothing was really on the line – what stood out were the similarities of college when it came to the speed, the size, the physicality, the attention to detail. That's what stood out. But really, you can only practice so much and play in so many preseason games,

sometimes that doesn't translate to the real games. But that's the biggest memory I have from that, is that it was very relatable to playing in college."

BSB: What was your experience like playing in the XFL for the DC Defenders in 2020?

Jones: "It was great. We had a great fan base, played with some great coaches and some great players that I feel close with to this day. It was an opportunity to be back under center and be the guy. It was fun."

BSB: Describe your emotions when the league was suspended midway through the season due to COVID-19.

Jones: "I was devastated, just because we were starting to hit our sweet spot in the middle of the season, getting ready to play one of the best teams in the other conference (the Dallas Renegades). A lot of us were using that opportunity as a back door to get back into the NFL.

"When that was cut short because of the pandemic, it was devastating but it was also understandable given how little information we had about COVID-19 at the time. Safety is always going to be first when it comes to

this sport, and also talking about the safety of people around you, possibly causing harm to them when it comes to the sport. It's a decision that was made not just with our league, our sport, but globally."

BSB: I'd like to delve into the origins of The Foundation a little bit. How did you connect with Brian Schottenstein, and what made you decide to start a collective?

Jones: "Brian, outside of the collective, we've been really good friends. He's one of my closest friends, way before this even came about. It was his idea in the beginning, just really wanting to do more for the program and more for the student-athletes in the football and basketball programs.

"One night he reached out to me and asked if I would do it with him. I thought it was a great idea, and I thought he was one of very few people I would start a business venture with, let alone a nonprofit, because I had an idea of how much time, effort and energy this would demand of us. Knowing my schedule at the time and his schedule at the time, if he was ready to make that commitment, I could make that commitment and sacrifice as well.

"With all that being said, we definitely didn't realize it would take this much time, effort, energy and resources. If we would have known it was going to be like this in the beginning, I'm not 100 percent sure we would have done it (laughs). But we're here now. And we're not going anywhere."

BSB: What does your ongoing role look like at The Foundation?

Jones: "As general manager, I pretty much run the day-to-day parts of it when it comes to our charitable partners, our student-athlete partners, the communication side of things. Brian Rolle is more responsible for the behind-the-scenes development and the success of The Foundation when it comes to our networking, our event planning, our coordination, our fundraising, stuff like that.

"We have two other board members and partners, Bill Lewis and Ron Stokes from the O Foundation that we merged with. That was a basketball-specific collective, and they pretty much took over our basketball division. They've put a lot of time, effort and energy into this as well. So I think we have a great team of people that our hearts, our goals, our minds are each other's and we're trying to provide the best opportunities possible for our athletes."

BSB: Has working with athletes in the NIL space changed your perspective on college football and collegiate athletics in general in any way?

Jones: "No, not really. I understand that it's a business now. I understand that NIL is a huge factor in college athletics now, and in some cases it may be the deciding factor in these decisions with some of these guys in the transfer portal and recruits. But it hasn't changed my perspective on it. It's a business. It's always been a business. Now the student-athletes are a huge part of that when it comes to those decisions because they know how it can affect them personally and financially."

BSB: From your perspective, how competitive is Ohio State in NIL right now? What more could the program and collectives be doing to maximize their efforts?

Jones: "Ohio State is very competitive when it comes to the NIL space, offering some things and being able to put their brand against any brand in the country. I would love

to see the athletic department support The Foundation more. You see that, around the country, some of the other athletic departments are – I wouldn't say partners – but really supporting their collectives and pushing their collectives' brands and their missions throughout their alumni base to continue to gain notoriety and support.

"At the end of the day, I don't know how other collectives are set up around the country and here in our own back yard. But one thing I can say about The Foundation is that 99.99 percent of everything raised goes to our student-athletes outside of a very small marketing budget. Then clearly we use funds to put on events to continue to raise funds. But that number Ryan Day alluded to a couple years ago of his roster costing \$13 or \$15 million, I don't think we get there as a collective without more support from the athletic department, starting with the athletic director on down."

BSB: The IRS recently came out and said that nonprofit NIL collectives should not be tax exempt. How does this affect The Foundation?

Jones: "It doesn't. It doesn't really affect us immediately, but we are making strides and moving in the right direction to better serve our supporters and our donors when it comes to supporting The Foundation, which will ultimately support the football and basketball programs. It's just another hurdle we'll have to cross when we get there, but we are taking strides to cross that hurdle sooner rather than later."

BSB: During your first year at Ohio State, you questioned on Twitter whether football players should be required to attend classes and said that they "ain't come to play school." I know that tweet didn't necessarily reflect your feelings on academics, but looking back now that you have a degree from Ohio State and are helping student-athletes in your current role, what is your view of that whole situation?

Jones: "My thoughts are still the same about it – it's funny. It was a boneheaded decision that an 18-year-old kid made on social media, but at the end of the day it's still funny and it's still very relatable.

"At the end of the day, you look at the student-athletes these days, when these kids commit to their universities and have their signing days, they're not saying, 'I'm committing to the engineering program at Ohio State or (Ohio State's Fisher College of Business).' They're saying, 'I'm going to play football here, I'm going to play basketball here, I'm going to swim here, I'm going to run track here for the next three to five years.' That's what they're doing.

"I'm not saying they're not in it for the education. Education is a huge factor in it, because I do understand and know that your education is going to take you a lot further than athletics. It's a tweet we can continue to debate about, why student-athletes go to these universities, but you still can't take away from the fact that at a place like Ohio State, we take our athletics and our academics very seriously here. And that tweet was not a reflection on what the whole athletic department or football program thought of academics. It was just a boneheaded decision an 18-year-old kid made.

"But it's still funny, and nothing is ever going to change my mind about that."

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MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					31 @IOW 7:08	1 @IOW 3:08
HOME OPENING NIGHT						
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

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Dennis Blazed Trails In Track And Field Career

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For someone who originally didn't want to coach at the conclusion of her playing career, former Ohio State track and field and cross country program director Karen Dennis left an incredible legacy when she retired in 2022.

She coached international and Olympic teams, won 12 Big Ten Indoor and Outdoor team championships in her 20 seasons with the Buckeyes and developed eight Olympians and eight individual national champions.

Dennis started her career at her alma mater, Michigan State, where she served as an assistant for four seasons before becoming head coach of the Spartans from 1981-1992. After another 10 seasons as head coach at UNLV, Dennis took an assistant coaching job in Columbus in 2003, was promoted to be women's head coach in 2006 and then program director in 2014.

Following what she feels was one of her crowning achievements in 2022 – winning both the men's and women's Big Ten Outdoor Championship – she decided to call it a career. It was the first time Ohio State had won both, and the first time a Big Ten team had done it in 25 years.

Dennis spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin on June 21, giving plenty of anecdotes, highs and lows from her career, insight into what makes a track and field program run and what she expects for the future of Ohio State's squad.

BSB: You've been the Big Ten Track and Field Coach of the Year 12 times, been enshrined in three halls of fame, coached 140 Big Ten champions across individual events and relays and eight national champions. Is it daunting to look back on all the achievements spread across your decades-long career?

Dennis: "It's not at all daunting. At the end of the day, you're humbled by it because you know it took a lot of student-athletes who trusted you and trusted your staff. It took a lot of commitment from the folks that I was fortunate enough to be able to hire to assist me. So it's not at all daunting, it's just gratifying."

BSB: Starting at the very beginning,

how did your experiences competing at Michigan State in the 1970s shape your coaching style?

Dennis: "I came in during the pre-Title IX era, then once we merged into the NCAA it became the post-Title IX era. I got a chance to experience athletics with the (the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women), which was a very successful organization on a very shoestring budget. Because of the federal law of Title IX, all institutions that received federal funding had to have some degree of equity with sport programs (between men and women). So once Michigan State decided to put the women under the umbrella of the NCAA, that was a bittersweet period for women.

"Prior to that, women in leadership possessed about 90 percent of the coaching positions as well as the administrative positions. When the NCAA took over, that changed. A lot of women lost their positions or were demoted. Not necessarily fired, but demoted to subordinate roles to men. That's why I call it bittersweet because I lost my mentor, (Dr.) Nell Jackson, who was a former Olympian. She was in the 1932 Olympics and a former Olympic head coach as well as an academic scholar. When she came over to Michigan State from Illinois during the transitional period of the AIAW, she was one of the advocates for maintaining separation for women's athletics. She kind of foresaw that, even though the men promised bigger budgets and more exposure, she also knew that it would come at a cost.

"I was preparing myself for an administrative role under her leadership. When she was demoted at Michigan State, she left and went to another institution. The athletic director at Michigan State (Doug Weaver), just out of desperation, needing some new leadership, he asked me to stay on and be the women's head track coach. I had just finished my master's degree in sports administration.

"I didn't plan on coaching. As a matter of fact, I did not want to coach. But my grassroots track club mentor James Bibbs, he was hired by Michigan State in 1968. It was right after the riots in Detroit, and I think Bibby was trying to make the athletic department at Michigan State a more diverse athletic department by having more minorities. So Coach Bibbs was



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

HAPPY TRAILS – Former Ohio State track and field director Karen Dennis retired following the 2022 season, capping off a 45-year coaching career that included multiple stops.

hired as the first black coach at Michigan State University. That's where culture and athletics and Title IX – it was a dichotomous, complex era.

"He encouraged me to stay and help maintain some stability in the program. So I agreed, because I didn't want to see the women have a coach that they didn't know. And since I had come from the players' ranks, I had decided to stay for about a year. Well, 45 years later, I retired as a track coach (laughs).

"What kept me there is that I was recruiting women and they did not want to come to Michigan State. They did not want to come to me, I found out later, as a female coach. So that became a very personal resentment on my part. It wasn't my skills, it wasn't the university, it was my gender. Because I was a woman, other girls did not want to come to a woman as a coach. So I made up my mind that these girls needed to see women in a coaching capacity, so that they, in turn, could accept women in coaching positions.

"So that's why I stayed, really, because I got pissed off (laughs). I was losing recruits to schools and to people that I knew were not going to treat these women and develop them better than me and better than Michigan State.

"Once I was able to convince a few women to come and we started having success – Odessa Smalls was the first

one, she was a great sprinter out of New York. She's the one that enlightened me. She said, 'Karen, it's not that I don't love you, I've just never had a woman coach.' I'm like, 'OK, so that's the deal.' She ended up trusting me and she came (to MSU) and she won (a conference-record 13) Big Ten championships, and as a result, then other women started coming in. That's how we were able to build the program at Michigan State and win the first of only two national champions at Michigan State."

BSB: With Title IX and those early recruiting struggles in perspective, how far has women's track and field come as a collegiate sport since your days as a player?

Dennis: "It's progressed in terms of numbers and, of course, opportunity. I was the first woman who got a scholarship at Michigan State. My scholarship was \$300 a year. I thought that was a big deal. When you have nothing and you get something, then you think it's more than what it is.

"But now, I've witnessed women's opportunities grow. The budget has, of course, increased, which allows women to not sleep four to a room, two to a bed. Our women have their own beds and don't have to share it with anybody now.

"Not to mention the scholarship availability. I've recruited women who told me, 'I can't go to college, Karen.' And I'm like,

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'Why?' 'Well, nobody in my family went to college.' 'OK, so you become the first one to go to college.' So through scholarship funding, being able to recruit women to come to university – whether it's Michigan State or Ohio State – I know that's transformative. I know that it's going to change their life and it's going to change the life of their families in a way that is going to pay decades of benefits. It will increase their earning potential as well as their generational wealth. And that's huge."

BSB: How is coaching a sport like track and field, where people participate in different events, different from a sport like football or basketball where everyone is competing together?

Dennis: "Track is an individual sport. So, what happens with track – I have a personal philosophy and I probably acquired it from Dr. Jackson – it's important to me that every person, and at the time more so women because that's who I was coaching, women had the opportunity to pursue the degree of their choice. When you have a team sport like basketball, everybody has to practice at the same time in order to learn the plays, build chemistry with everyone you're playing with.

"With track and field, the good news is that, let's say you have students – and I have had students that wanted to go into nursing or wanted to go into science or architecture, and their rotations or projects were during my practice time. All of my coaches have always known that we will change the practice time for an individual who has to be at a lab or has to be at something associated with their academic degree program. I'm not going to tell this kid you can't be a nurse or you can't be an architect or you can't be an engineer because you've got to come to track practice. That's a philosophy I could never subscribe to."

BSB: Technology and scientific research have also come a long way in the past 40 years as it relates to athletic performance. What were the biggest shifts you saw in track and field and cross country in terms of how athletes train, diet and recover as a result of those advancements?

Dennis: "Recovery is a big deal. It probably wasn't respected as earnestly as it needed to be back in the old days. The recovery was, you finish your workout, you may cool down a little bit and then you go home (laughs). You eat whatever is at home. But now, we are much more sophisticated about the nutritional components that the body needs in order to recover.

"Right now, Gene (Smith) started (fuel) zones. Now they have a whole kitchen, because students don't want to take time to eat, especially to go back home and eat. So we have an athletic director like Gene Smith say, 'Fine, I'm going to bring the food to you.' They have salad bars, they can write to tell the nutritionists what kinds of food they like. There's plenty of vegetables there, plenty of fruit there. There's protein there, there's shakes there, there's wraps there. There's no reason for a kid to come to practice and say, 'I didn't eat.' And you can tell when their body is depleted of nutrients, because they just don't have energy.

"So those days are over. Students no longer have to sacrifice time to go home,

or they may not have the money – because everybody's not on a full scholarship, some students aren't on any scholarships, they come out because they love the sport, they want to be a part of it – so they may not necessarily have funding to be able to eat properly. So those things have changed. Between the help the students get with the fuel zone and just proper nutrition, that helps them mentally so they aren't coming to practice depressed or exhausted.

"And that's another area that the athletic department has become more in-tune to is one's mental capacity, one's emotional fitness. Serving the student is a holistic endeavor. You've got to fuel their mind, their bodies and sometimes their soul in order to get optimal performances out of them. And it takes a team of people like nutritionists, psychologists, coaches who buy into your vision, to grow the program and to be successful."

BSB: Does Ohio State treat Olympic sports differently than other schools? What is Smith's attitude toward those sports, and how did you get along with him?

Dennis: "Gene's been a champion for me from day one. I've known him since he was an athletic director at Eastern Michigan and I was at Michigan State. I ran into him at Eastern Michigan, we had a track meet and he was moving hurdles. I didn't know who he was. I was helping move hurdles – track never seems to have enough officials, because there are a lot of events and a lot of bodies and equipment to move around.

"So I just happened to say, 'Hi, my name is Karen Dennis, I coach at Michigan State.' And he said, 'Oh, I'm Gene Smith, I'm the athletic director here (laughs).' It's funny because, since then, I've never known an athletic director who was out on the track moving hurdles. That's how I initially met him. Then, of course, he went on to Iowa (State) and some other places. When he came to Ohio State – Gene has three daughters and his wife was an Olympian. So I knew he had a strong and sincere affinity for women and for the development of women. I thought it was a good thing for him to be there.

"Right now, there's certain projects that he's been involved in. It's important to get a women's hockey arena going. I'm always keeping the indoor track on his radar. But at the same time, it all gets back to money. Some sports have a stronger donor base. Men's volleyball has a strong donor base, women's hockey, all you need sometimes is one or two people that have \$1 million and they want to use it as cornerstones for your facility.

"Track, by nature, most track kids, their families aren't wealthy. We just don't have a large donor base, but we're hoping to change that. But at the same time, Gene has made some sincere efforts to improve the indoor facility, primarily with the subflooring in that building. That building, Jesse Owens ran in that building, so it's old. Our athletes were getting a lot of injuries as a result of a poor subfloor of the track and the tight radius. Our athletes are bigger now, they're stronger now, they're faster now and the radius of the track is tight. The lanes are tight. We just have incurred too many injuries, so he's invested into im-

proving that facility until something better comes along.

"If we're going to be one of the best teams in the nation, then we've got to be able to have the facilities to attract the personnel. Our locker room, we took over the women's volleyball locker room and that was a big jump up from where we were. But then when you go over to volleyball, you realize how plush the volleyball people have it.

"We're always trying to be on the come up, and at some point, I don't know if we'll ever be there completely, but Gene recognizes the deficiencies, to be honest about it. He recognizes our deficiencies and he appreciates what he's done despite those deficiencies. And I don't use those deficiencies as any excuse, either. This is what we have, and we're still going to have to beat some people (laughs)."

BSB: You served as head coach for the 2000 U.S. Olympic women's track and field team in Sydney. How did that selection process play out? What was your reaction when you found out you were chosen for the role?

Dennis: "I had missed out on making an Olympic team (as an athlete) and I did my best, so I never had any regrets about it. You've got to be in the top three – I think I was fifth in the 200. But I never had any regrets, because I did my best. I just got beat by some of the best women in the world.

"For me, it felt like an opportunity to serve my country. Some people join the military and they serve that way. That's

the way I likened my appointment to the Olympic team. It gave me a chance to represent the United States and to serve my country.

"I was, of course, honored but it was the hardest job I've ever had to not get paid. It's a two-year commitment, getting to know people, going to all the different countries to locate training venues and practice areas. I felt like I wasn't really prepared, and ever since then I've told the folks – and I'm still part of women's track and field's executive committee to select (coaches) – it's important that you have that experience as an assistant coach (for Team USA) before you go in as the head coach. We're doing that more so now to assure the success of all the coaches as well as the personnel. It's a big job, but at the same time, it's something that I enjoyed. But I wouldn't want to do it again."

BSB: What attracted you to Ohio State when you were first offered an assistant coaching position in 2002?

Dennis: "I had been at UNLV, and it was time for my contract to be renewed. The athletic director at UNLV told me that they weren't renewing my contract. I couldn't understand, because I'd just come off the Olympics and I'd had my best recruiting class. We did well. I've got (kids) academically that are doing well.

"But what I've learned is that new athletic directors come in, they come in wanting to bring their own people. And that's what happened. And I knew the person

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Dennis Gave Ohio State National Recognition

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that succeeded me, I knew who the person was going to be. I just knew.

“So it’s funny, when that door closed, (Ohio State track and field coach) Russ Rogers called within a week. I was at home and he called and said that his longtime assistant had left and was going somewhere else, and asked if I would come to Ohio State to help him with his program. I thought it was perfect. I said sure.

“First of all, it gave me the opportunity to coach men as well as women. Previously, I had only coached women. So it was just timing. The universe, the stars all aligned in the right place. So I came to Ohio State as an assistant coach for men and women. And I could see that the landscape of track and field was changing to where men’s and women’s programs were becoming combined, and if I was ever going to have a shot in a leadership position at a combined program, I needed to have some experience coaching men.”

BSB: What’s the biggest way the Ohio State track and field program changed in your 20 years being involved with the team?

Dennis: “We’ve gained national recognition. When I first took over the women, we were last in the conference. I felt like, ‘OK, we’re last, nowhere else to go but up.’ So that’s the trajectory that I assumed, and I assumed it because I can’t live with being the worst. That was my emotional reaction to being last. ‘I can’t live like this.’

“So everything had to change. The quality of student-athlete that we brought in had to change, the culture of training had to change. I had to bring in coaches who knew that we were the worst team but wanted to accept the challenge of becoming better. So I told Gene when I be-



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

CLEARING HURDLES — Ohio State went from a program at the bottom of the Big Ten to one that saw significant success over the tenure of former Ohio State track and field director Karen Dennis.

came the head women’s coach, I promised him that, in five years, I was going to win a (Big Ten) championship. And the fifth year was when we won our first championship.

“I still get chills when I think about that, because I wanted to make sure that our program, first of all, could make him proud and make the university proud and that our students could be proud of themselves. So when we started winning, then

the men’s coach left and took another job and the guy that was the interim head coach, he took a job somewhere else. Gene and I talked about it and I knew that there were few women in the country who had the directorship of both programs. We talked about it and he told me to put a plan together. I put a plan together, we talked about it, and within a couple of hours he called me and said, ‘Let’s go.’

“From that point on, some of the veteran guys on the team decided they didn’t want to be coached by a woman. I said, ‘Fine, you can leave.’ And they did. And we got better.”

BSB: You announced your retirement shortly after both the Ohio State men and women won the conference championship in 2022. What made you decide it was the right time to hang it up?

Dennis: “You know, I believe as an educator, we prepare our youth for the future. I felt like that was my job. I’ve done this for 45 years, I have some great assistant coaches, and I think it’s their time. As an educator, older people need to move over and let young people have a chance. Let them do it themselves.

“That’s why. I felt like I had trained students, I trained coaches. Now I want you all to go out and lead your own programs. And I’m very pleased to say that most of them have. I’ve got several coaches out there who came up under my program or my leadership and now they’re running their own programs. And I’m so proud of that.”

BSB: You also saw Adelaide Aquilla become the first Ohio State women’s track and field athlete to win multiple national championships in her career right at the end of your tenure. What

separated her from other athletes you worked with during your career?

Dennis: “Adelaide is just one of those people – she worked hard, hard, hard. She came in on a minimal scholarship. She loves Ohio State. I thought (throwing coach) Ashley (Kovacs) did a good job with her, then when Ashley left, we didn’t try to keep (Adelaide) here. We let her make her decision as to whether she wanted to stay at Ohio State. She loves Ohio State. She’s from Ohio. She decided to stay. She and (new throwing coach) Travis (Coleman) hit it off well.

“I watched her at the Big Ten Indoor Championships. She fouled out. I went and found Adelaide and told her, ‘If you don’t ever score another point, your legacy is solid here at Ohio State.’ Then she went on to the NCAA Indoor Championships and won. Now that’s special. She’s come along when the throws are getting more notoriety, and she works hard and she loves it. You have to love it if you’re going to be willing to put your body through the kind of rigorous training that’s required.”

BSB: At the time of your retirement, you said, “I have coached for a long time and there are still things in life I’d like to do.” What are some of those things now that you’ve retired from coaching?

Dennis: “I’m learning to swim (laughs). At some point I want to go to Europe and take a culinary class. I want to travel and see some of the world on my time, so that’s what I’m doing.

“When I walk around my neighborhood, I can stop and say hello to my neighbors. Before I couldn’t, because I was always running.”

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Former Coach Welsh Enjoys Skate Into Retirement

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

While this is one of many articles in Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual "Interview Issue" it was quite different for me when I phoned former Ohio State men's hockey standout and later longtime Buckeye head coach Jerry Welsh.

The time spent on the phone wasn't an interview, per se, but more like a conversation between friends, even though our talks over time since his departure as coach in the mid-1990s were few and far between.

In fact, when we talked in September 2018 prior to his induction into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame – joining Paul Pooley (1994), Bill McKenzie (2001), Jamie Macoun (2005), Hugo Boisvert (2013) and Paul Tilley (2015) – it had probably been nearly a decade since our previous conversation.

Welsh, 73, was an Ohio State teammate of McKenzie on the 1972 Central Collegiate Hockey Association tournament champion – one of two tourney titles in program history (the other in 2004) – and McKenzie would later become an assistant coach for Welsh, who coached Pooley, Macoun and Tilley.

Nearly five years ago, Welsh said he approached his hall of fame ceremony with "mixed emotions." He was still bitter about the way his tenure ended with his resignation on Feb. 14, 1995, after then-athletic director Andy Geiger said his contract would not be renewed.

As much as that stung, he was steeled by the knowledge that he helped keep the program afloat while others like Kent State, the University of Illinois Chicago (or Chicago Circle as it had been known) and even Notre Dame, for one season in 1983-84, moved away from varsity status. There was a time when the Ohio State administration considered a similar fate in the late 1980s, and legendary Michigan coach Red Berenson openly opined to kick Ohio State out of the CCHA.

During Welsh's tenure, the Buckeyes played in the cramped and outdated OSU Ice Rink (built in 1961) with an ice surface 15 feet shorter than a standard rink, and it seated only 1,400.

He had 17 scholarships to offer, and for a time only 15, when other schools issued 20. Early on, he couldn't hire a full-time assistant because of budget constraints, and even after taking the Buckeyes to a No. 1 ranking for the first time in program history in November 1984 and earning top-10 ranking five times from 1979-84, he was one of the lowest paid coaches in Division I hockey during that period.

Welsh, who became coach at his alma mater at age 25, was 328-381-56 (.465) at Ohio State. In his first 11 seasons, he recorded a 239-163-21 (.589) mark. His last winning season was a 23-19-1 record in 1985-86. Over his final 8½ seasons, the Buckeyes were 89-218-35 (.321) in 342

games.

That was then. This is now. Welsh and his wife, Paula, retired several years ago after operating the Garden Grove Bed & Breakfast near the shores of Lake Michigan.

Welsh is enjoying life. When I phoned him on the afternoon of June 22, he said he usually doesn't answer a number he doesn't recognize but he saw the 614 area code and figured it was "some old fart from Columbus who dialed the wrong number."

We chatted briefly like old times.

My first job for BSB in November 1981 was covering his team, and little did I know then, nor did he, that we were about to enter a golden era that wouldn't be repeated for decades until the Buckeyes moved into the shiny new Value City Arena.

I could tell he was enjoying retirement when, as we were planning a time to hold a more extensive conversation, he said, "I'm retired, so I'm going to say what day is today?"

The next day, a Friday, I called him after his pickleball – yes, pickleball – workout. Throughout our talk he often had questions for me about how I was doing, where I was working and even reminded me of my fitness routine during my marathon days (a lifetime ago).

We spent an hour discussing the good, bad, and ugly times with the Buckeyes and his thoughts on the still unfilled promises for a new rink for the men's program.

He also expressed his lack of fandom other than following his grandchildren's sports. A granddaughter played four years of soccer at the UNC Wilmington and is getting her master's at Richmond. Her brother, Welsh's oldest grandson, played tennis at Western Michigan for four years and is using his fifth year of eligibility at the University of Indianapolis.

Welsh occasionally makes his way to Columbus and on his most recent visit went to a Columbus Blue Jackets game with former OSU Ice Rink manager Duke Johnson.

BSB: Yesterday, you said to call today after pickleball – how was it?

Welsh: "I was drilling with a kid. Well, he's not a kid. He's probably 30. I'm playing in a pickleball ladder league on Monday nights, and I met him in that.

"There's a fairly prestigious – at least locally in Grand Rapids – tournament where the pros will make a stop. It's called the Beer City Open (July 18-23). He's playing singles so he wants me to come out now and drill with him, so I went out and spent two hours prepping for playing singles. I got as much out of it as he did. ... Yes, I've resorted to pickleball."

BSB: So, does that mean you're still coaching?

Welsh: "I'm getting back into it (joking). I warned him before. Most people don't know any of my background of playing or coaching, in fact not even the guys I play hockey with.

"After not even putting my feet in my

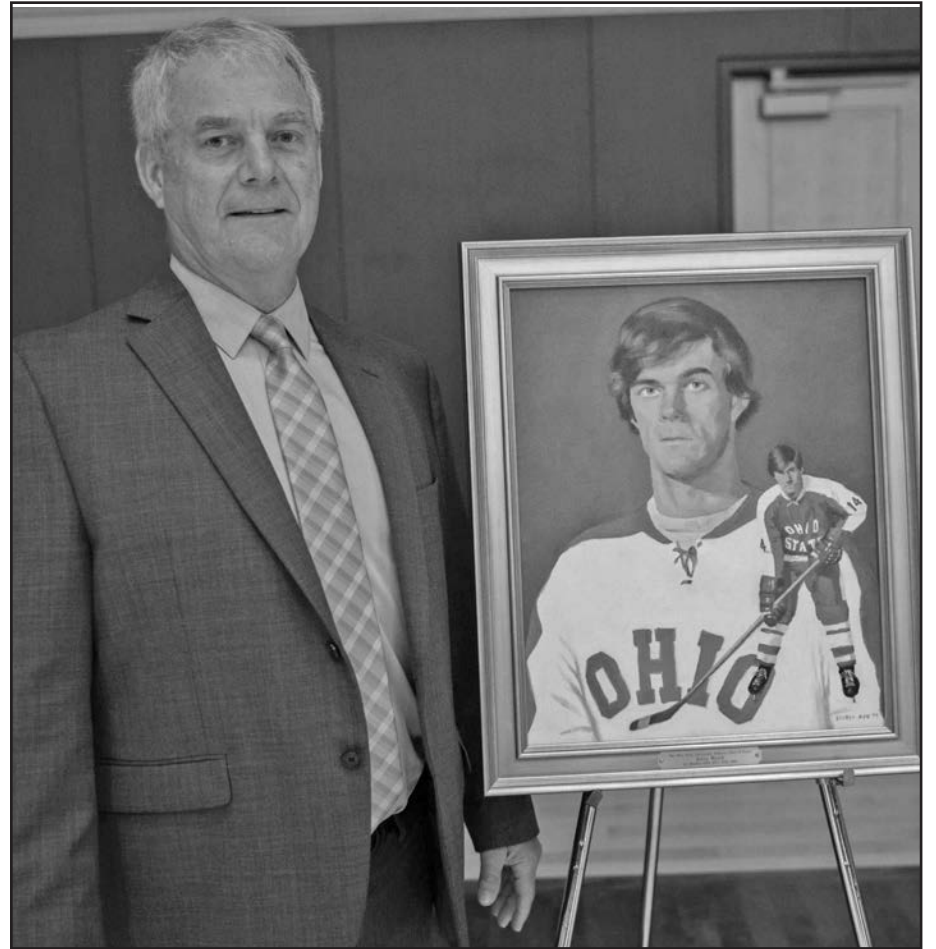


PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

HALL OF FAMER – Former Ohio State men's hockey coach Jerry Welsh was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in 2018.

boots for 10 years I started up recently playing hockey again just for the calorie work. I'm trying to be anonymous as I walk around. I've been pretty good at it, but I did mention what my history was, I spent a little time on my coaching as a preamble, but I would not try to assert myself too much."

BSB: Where are you living?

Welsh: "I'm actually in Holland (Mich.). I can be at the rink in Grand Rapids, where the (Detroit) Red Wings' minor-league team plays, in probably 20, 25 minutes.

"There's a lot to do here. I've been surprised how much. I thought we'd be going into Grand Rapids once or twice a month, but we have stuff going on.

"I'm still trying to get my arms around the 'retirement mode' and schedule. The Bill McKenzies of the world that retired before us keep telling me to slow down, leave something for tomorrow, it's a mind-set you have to take. I retired 10 years behind those guys. I've got a lot of catching up."

BSB: You mentioned the rink in Grand Rapids. So you must still be playing?

Welsh: "I went back to playing in what everybody calls a beer league, a pretty good bunch of guys.

"What surprised me a little bit about Holland is it's just as much of a tourist area as where we were before, a little over an hour from downtown Chicago. Holland is a Dutch orientation town. It's the same lake, the western shore of Michigan on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. Nice sandy beach, dunes everywhere but it's got a lower population and more stuff going on than our previous home.

"I was shocked to find they had pickleball courts. I went over there early on when we moved here because I had started to play pickleball before. I went over to the courts and I bumped into a guy and he talked me into coming out. But he also was asking where do you live, what do you do? Then he said there's a rink 15 minutes from here, a double rink, very nice and there's 100 guys 50 and over playing hockey. A hundred guys 50-plus playing hockey in Holland? Really? So, I decided to try it. I'm not really enjoying it as much as I should but it's more exercise than pickleball and tennis for sure.

"And I picked up another hobby, like I needed a hole in the head. Now also I'm weekly – seasonal – racing remote control sailboats. It doesn't do anything for my calorie burn, but it is in the mode of things that I'm having fun with.

"Obviously, in hockey, softball, any of those kinds of sports, my best game or match is decades behind me, whereas in tennis and pickleball and this racing, I've got a learning curve. I'm getting better and sometime in the not-too-distant future I'll peak and that's a fun thing for me to kind of pursue, something new that I can work on and see some progress and all that.

"I don't need another friend or another trophy. Mostly it's for exercise, but I'm competing. I'm accused of being a competitor, but I keep it toned down. But that's a big part of my retirement now. Golf has fallen back. I don't play badly but I don't play even once a week anymore so that's another sport that

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Welsh Still Hoping For New Men's Hockey Rink

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my best game is behind me for sure. I'm not acquiring new skills.

"What else is different about me? I've always been this a little bit, but I'm not a big fan of crowds. I haven't been to many events. I've never been a rah-rah fan, but in terms of a sports spectator. I do watch stuff on TV and watched a little bit of hockey this year, too, but I used to watch baseball in October and maybe Opening Day but I can't be accused of doing that anymore. The sheer weight of college football, I can't pay attention to it. I don't even do (March Madness) like I used to. In terms of why I like sports, I'm more of a participant now than a fan. I wonder why that is. I can't really put a thumb on it.

"I don't really have anyone to follow anymore. Paul Pooley is still the associate head coach at Notre Dame and Smitty (Dave Smith, another former player of his) is the head coach at RPI. These guys are long in the tooth now too.

"At that point there's not many that I associated with that are still in hockey so I don't have a team to watch out of interest in hockey. Most of the coaches have moved on. I'm definitely on the outside looking in.

"I don't feel guilty about it, but when people meet me, or an acquaintance or even a friend that I haven't seen for a long time they can't believe – of course I'm living in Michigan so I am surrounded by maize and blue

and a little bit of green and white, but back where I was there was a lot of Irish – I don't bleed scarlet and gray. I'm a casual fan. I pull for the Big Ten for sure and I want Ohio State to beat Michigan, but I'm not going to wrestle you for the last piece of pizza at the party.

"There's a hard-core scarlet and gray group in Grand Rapids. I helped get that started back when I was still coaching, it's so old. They're very active. They're very good at raising funds, sending kids to school.

"Being surrounded by Michigan people, everybody thinks the Ohio State fan is the worst in the country. They say, 'I'm sure you've had that experience,' and I say that's not my experience but I guess you could say that if you want. But if you guys get a mirror... You're not free of guilt yourself.

"I was playing tennis the other day and had a pair of shorts that had just a little logo on it there, and the other guy couldn't see it, but they were scarlet shorts and I had a gray top. The other thing Michigan people do is they don't go anywhere without either a hat or hoodie, something Michigan (on it). Most of them never went there. They just grew up a fan, but they're quick to put it on and quick to say, 'You aren't an Ohio State fan, are you?' I say I once was. I answered it casually like that.

"So, anyway I was about to serve and I stopped my service motion and he was about to return and I said, 'You don't want to

hang around winners, do you?' That's what I usually say when a Michigan fan asks me if I root for Ohio State: 'Don't worry if you don't have a problem being seen with a winner.'

"They certainly don't have the statistics the past 10 or 12 years. They're oblivious to that. Don't screw up our relationship by putting facts in there."

BSB: It's been 40 years since the 1983-84 season, where Ohio State went 30-10-1 and reached No. 1, starting with a 13-0-0 record.

Welsh: "Heck, I can't believe it's been that long since I played.

"I remember a few years back I got a call from Bill McKenzie, and he said we're thinking about doing something for our 40th and I thought it was for his wedding anniversary but he was talking about the 40th year of that championship team. We did do something with that and the 50th has now come and gone.

"That '83-84 team certainly was a peak year in what was a peak two- or three-year period. We were No. 1 in the country at one point, but that was short-lived because we went down on a Tuesday night and screwed up at Miami (Ohio) and we lost our No. 1 status to a lesser bunch at that point.

"It was the only time in my career when I look back at it. ... I spent my whole career trying to overachieve and I managed to do it early in my career but I couldn't keep up with it once they cut me back from 17 to 15 scholarships. It seemed like it dumped me right back in the middle of the pack instead of competing for the second, third or fourth spot.

"When you're talking '81-84, those couple of years were probably the only times that I had played night after night for a while with the best team. Those were the only times I could make that point. Otherwise, we don't have the best team. Maybe we have the best plans, we can outperform them, we can outwork them and often we did.

"Our opponents would blame the rink when we won those years – big, bad Buckeyes. Come on, we had Paul Pooley and Andy Browne (the first and fourth all-time leading scorers, respectively, in program history). We were the big, bad Buckeyes. Back when I inherited them in '75 we were, but by the time we got to '83, we were not bad in terms of the big, bad stuff.

"We had more talent than everybody else, but they would never give us credit for winning. They would always take it back to that damn rink, that substandard size and that's why they're losing. OK, then how do you explain that we were winning on the road? Again, don't throw facts at me, you're screwing up the conversation."

BSB: When you were recruited, you were promised a new rink?

Welsh: "Ask Harry Neale (his first coach at Ohio State) about that. He's still alive. I don't think he was really thinking he was trying to recruit me by putting that out there, but yeah, that was 1969 they were saying they thought they were only a couple years away from a new rink and I think they believed it at that point."

BSB: Ohio State approved plans in February for a new 3,000-seat hockey facility for women's games and practic-

es and for men's practices. It doesn't appear there are any plans, though, for a new hockey venue for the men, like Notre Dame or Penn State.

Welsh: "I don't know, or they're going to have to change their outlook and decide to make it a multipurpose building, meaning for men and women. Hopefully, the only thing they can do is just to try to make it a 6,000-seat thing and have both teams play there.

"Somebody ought to be able to do the math and decide what would be worth it? How many dates do you need? But you still have to have somebody as an advocate for what you're trying to do. Somebody's got to get in there that speaks hockey and sees the value that way.

"People have mentioned how different the (OSU Ice Rink) is now (regulation ice surface, improved infrastructure and appearance) but it's not great where the women are playing and I've said that a number of times – they won a national championship (in 2022) out of that rink. I know they've put lipstick on the pig since I've been there but still, to think that they were able to recruit enough people to win a title is incredible."

BSB: You described your induction into the hall of fame as "mixed emotions" because of the way your coaching career ended. With added time, what are your feelings now on the way it was handled?

Welsh: "The last time I talked with anybody in athletic administration it was Andy Geiger, who was the one that decided not to renew me and not give me a chance with some resources to boost me a little bit.

"He came down and talked over my shoulder at Joe Louis (Arena in Detroit) during the CCHA tournament several years after I left because I was living there. He came down and patted me on the shoulder and leaned over from the row behind to say, 'You know what, I didn't do right by you.' I didn't know what to say. He had me tongue-tied for the first time. I didn't want to say what was on my mind, didn't want to give a quick response because it wouldn't have done a lot of good. It was a lose-lose thing and it's like, 'Well, yeah. You think you're telling me something I don't know?'

"So that was the last time I spoke with anybody in the administration, but previous to that there was a time after our season was over or something, there happened to be a meet-and-greet with (associate AD) Bill Myles in his office. I think at the time he was my direct report after Archie (Griffin) was for a period of time.

"Remember back then, we were doing pretty well with attendance. The women's basketball was not doing well with attendance in a pretty nice building (St. John Arena). They were getting half of their attendance from giving tickets away over at (a grocery store) where you'd go get your groceries and get tickets to the women's game and they televised (ads) for it. Where we got nothing in the way of marketing, they got as much as they could probably do. We still outdrew them and (Myles') parting words to me were, 'Do you think hockey will ever be as big as women's basketball at Ohio State?' It was a serious question. I mean, he was serious. Again, I'm stuck for an answer as far

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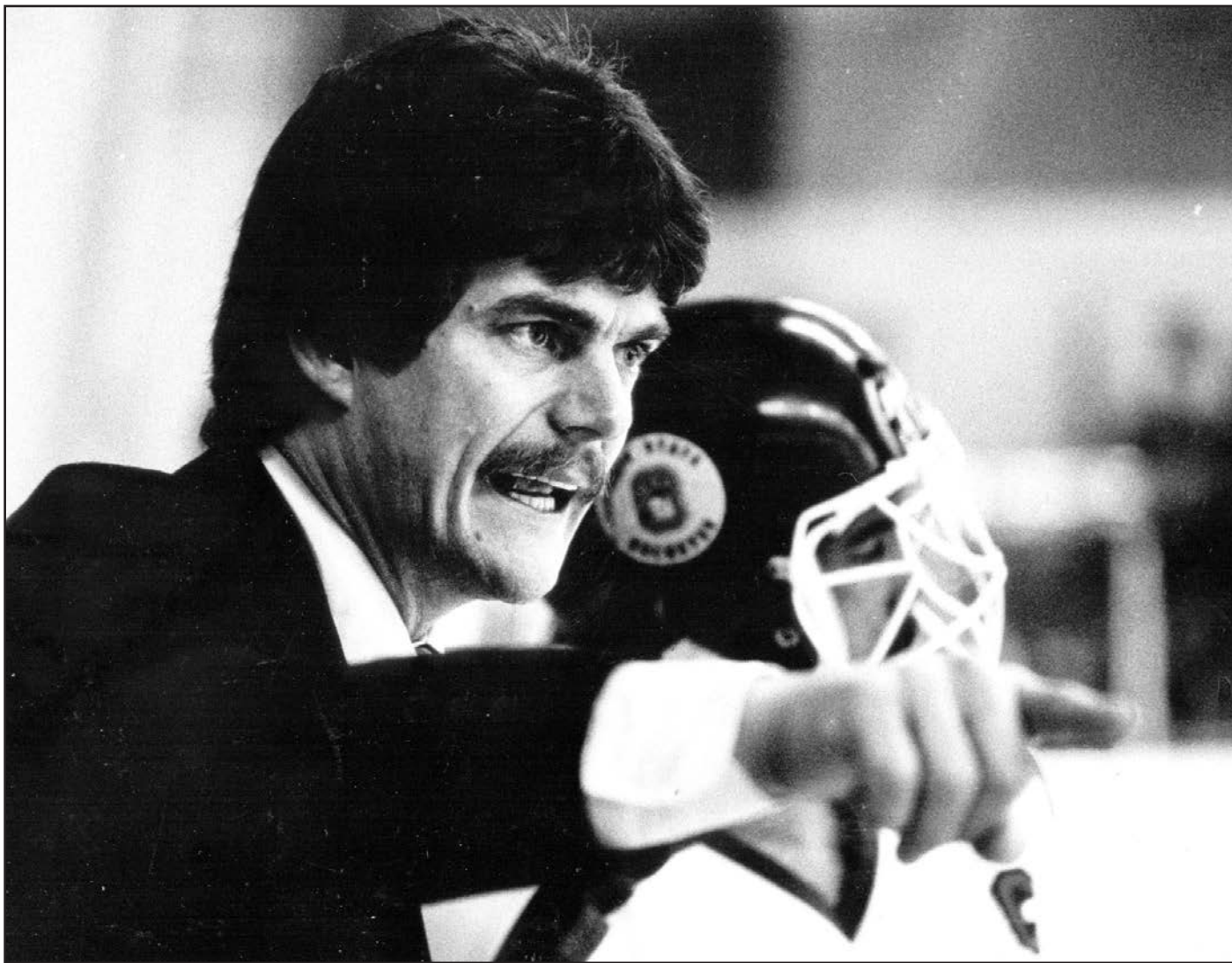


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FILE PHOTO

OLD GUARD — Former Ohio State men's hockey coach Jerry Welsh got his start as a coach at the university in 1975, posting a 328-381-56 record over his 20 seasons with the Buckeyes.

as the administrator's mind. Are you really thinking that?

"You can tell those two stories and summarize my experience with Ohio State athletics. It was what it was. You get a little more mature and move on. Now that they've got some resources and the experience they have, they've had some success, and it's good to see that."

BSB: Going back to your early days at Ohio State, you followed a line of quality coaches who would later leave their marks at the professional level.

Welsh: "You start with Glenn Sonmor. He was an NHL coach, (World Hockey Association) as well. And then after him came Harry Neale for five years. Same thing again. Then you went to Dave Chambers. He went on to do some NHL stuff. So, you've got three guys in the very infancy of Ohio State hockey that had a pretty strong history that nobody really would know about.

"People would say 'How the hell can you leave playing hockey at 25 years old and have anything to offer as a coach?' Well, in juniors I played for three coaches in a couple of years. In college I played for three coaches in four years. And I played for four coaches in two years as a pro. Even if they were all bad, you learn what not to do."

BSB: Speaking of coaches, you had George Burke (who died in 2013 at age 86) on your staff for many, many years. What did he mean to you and to the program?

Welsh: "From a historical standpoint, he was totally overlooked when you would

look at his contributions and how everyone felt about him. I would think he would get similar affectionate comments from the staff, the managers, trainers and anybody around him. They all would have a soft spot for George Burke for sure.

"George was an assistant coach when I was recruited so he was part and parcel of the Harry Neale/George Burke tandem that recruited me and then he was still there as an assistant coach when I came back to coach so I didn't have any money to change it. The guy is there, it's mostly volunteering, anyway, while working 40 hours-plus a week as a claims manager in an insurance company.

"The role of an assistant coach, I can't speak for every case but in a lot of cases, the head coach does what the head coach is doing. Sometimes the role is reversed but usually not, and an assistant coach is the one that has the tighter relationships with the players and gets to know what the needs are, and he certainly did that. That was his nature, and you really didn't want to take that away from him because he was good at it.

"But everybody you talked to, any two-some, threesome, any small cocktail group of alumni that had more than a year with George will have a lot of funny stories to tell you, a lot of warmhearted stuff he did to help you. He was extremely helpful.

"He was a father figure for everybody, and I valued that role he played. Back then he was an old-school hockey guy that the kids would beg me not to let him take prac-

tice. If on the road and on the way back on a bus (and) word got out that (I) was going to be dropped off over here and (I'm) going to Minnesota recruiting and George was going to have practice on Monday or Tuesday, they would beg me to do something to change that routine.

"He wasn't a good practice manager. He'd start a drill, maybe it'd be analogous to starting some kind of gut-wrenching skate, and then he would lose track, get caught in conversation with the trainer and the guys are busting themselves back and forth and they had to kick him to stop the drill. There were so many funny stories.

"We could have hired somebody that had a little stronger X's and O's and some innovation. You wouldn't call him innovative by any means, but he became innovative by staying the way he was. Everybody changed around him, but he still had stuff to offer as late as it went for him and was heavily valued.

"Anybody who said his name had a smile and were probably happy to tell you some Burkisms. I would put him on par, maybe not as universally known, as Yogi (Berra)."

BSB: Do you have any you remember?

Welsh: "Most of them you can't say. I know that I find myself mentioning a couple of things now and again realizing that that's a Burkism.

"I think he got to Columbus by way of hockey and ended up doing some refereeing. I think that was kind of the genesis of George Burke and Ohio State hockey. He was in the area based on his hockey playing,

met Bernadette and stayed in Ohio and got a job in the insurance industry. He was also refereeing in the IHL (International Hockey League) and he was not well thought of by a lot of the players. They were throwing things at him left and right, throwing sticks at him from the penalty box as he was skating by.

"He was also refereeing some college games. In fact, even when I started coaching, we were hiring our own referees before the CCHA got going. So, Harry Neale needed somebody to do the games so he hired George to referee some of our games.

"Harry would tell the story that George was so bad that he had to hire him as a coach to get them off the ice as a referee. That's how George became an assistant coach at Ohio State. I don't know how much truth there is in it, but there is some truth."

BSB: Your thoughts on NIL and the transfer portal.

Welsh: "First off, I feel very fortunate I don't have to deal with it. You've got the NIL, the portal and just start at the top and say recruiting in general. There's a lot of guys that love recruiting but if you survey most of them – whether it be football, basketball, hockey for sure – recruiting is obviously a huge, huge part of a successful program. You have to be successful in recruiting. Now a lot of that's been mitigated by people building programs on the portal. It's just a different type of recruiting, but recruiting is something that would not cause you to want to get back behind the bench.

"I've been asked if I want to get back behind the bench. Quick answer: I had 21 years, close to 21 years, it's done. NIL and the portal is not something I would cherish to have to deal with as a coach. If you're coaching, it's there and you have to deal with it. You have to figure out how to be better than the next guy doing that.

"I guess the first and last comment about that whole thing is more theoretical. Where did the student-athlete go? Where did amateur athletics go? If you're dealing from those two perspectives then you're starting to lose that diehard fan when you start mentioning those words. ... I don't know if that place no longer exists, or something will swing back to where there is amateur athletics again."

BSB: You mentioned how the current situation seems like the NCAA is trying to play catch-up in regulating athletics, just as it was when you were coaching.

Welsh: "They just kept throwing in more rules to try to figure out how to get the cheaters corralled. Most of that stuff really pertained to a couple of sports. Hockey didn't have enough money to cheat.

"You can't legislate integrity, I don't think, but they tried to do it and now they've got something that doesn't really fit in the mold of amateur athletics, and is that right for the college rowing team, Alabama football vs. the Wesleyan rowing team? You've got to be fair and balanced, and how do you not treat them the same?"

"I don't know where the drive is coming from – obviously, follow the money – but at one time college athletics was and should still be something other than the money. There needs to be a level playing field. The recruiting was bad enough. We had haves and have nots. The haves are still getting more, and the have nots are getting less."

Marching Band Continues Growth Under Hoch

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State's football program is mostly known, understandably so, for the team's display on the gridiron dating back to 1890. But just as synonymous with that program as the actual football team is the Ohio State marching band – claimed by most as “The Best Damn Band in the Land,” which has operated alongside the football team every step of the way.

In fact, the band itself predates the football team's first outing, beginning in 1878 to provide music for the university's ROTC program. And in the 145 years since, the Ohio State marching band has become one of college football's greatest spectacles, entertaining the 100,000-plus fans at Ohio Stadium with memorable traditions such as the ramp entrance, Script Ohio and consequent i-dotting, as well as the band's distinctive halftime performances.

Leading the way for the band is Dr. Christopher Hoch, who was named interim director in 2015 following the firing of then-director Jon Waters. Hoch was later named full-time director in 2016, filling the position ever since for the Ohio State marching band.

Hoch attended Ohio State as a student, participating in band during his time in college, and has since earned five degrees from Ohio State, teaching in the university's School of Music in addition to his band responsibilities.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin caught up with Hoch on June 29 to discuss his upbringing in music, his favorite moments from over the years and what all goes into a performance by The Best Damn Band in the Land.

BSB: How did you get involved in music?

Hoch: “I started playing trombone when I was in fourth grade. Dad had played trombone, we had one laying around and band opened up, so I picked it up and started playing – and I hated it. I quit after my first year.

“Three years later – I was going to St. Paul School in Westerville, a Catholic school, but when it came to high school, I decided I wanted to go to the local public high school, Westerville North. Mom and Dad said, ‘Well, if you're going to leave all the people you know, you have to be involved in an activity. How about band?’ So I picked the trombone back up, and the high school band director there trained me up and taught me, and once I started high school band I absolutely fell in love with it.

“It was my first passion from freshman year forward, and I carried that on to Ohio State, eventually made the marching band at Ohio State and became a music education major, and the rest is history.”

BSB: Once you graduated from high school, was there any question for you as an in-state kid about going to Ohio State, or was that always a goal?

Hoch: “I applied to other places, mainly because my parents made me, but there was

no question in my mind I was going to Ohio State. I wanted to be in the marching band.”

BSB: You tried out for the band your freshman year at Ohio State but did not make it. How difficult was that for you, and how did you persevere past it?

Hoch: “It was, musically, the first time I'd ever not achieved what I set out to do, so it was pretty devastating. I'll admit, when my name wasn't called that first year, I called my parents and I couldn't get a sentence out between the sobs. It was really difficult. When kids don't make the band now, I completely understand how they feel. I've been through it before, so I'm able to have a connection in that way now that I'm on the other side of things.

“But I remember going home after those tryouts a couple days later and telling my Mom and Dad, ‘Well, hey, there's other opportunities. I'm going to play in the athletic band. I'm going to play in the jazz band.’ And I did, just to keep my chops up, and then next year I went out and gave it everything I had and I made it.”

BSB: Having been on both sides of those band tryouts, what makes that such an intense process, and how does it result in the best lineup for each band?

Hoch: “We're unique in the way we do our tryouts at the end of the summer. A lot of schools do them before the summer starts so they have their group in place. But we do that because there's an entire summer's worth of training sessions that lead up to that point, and those students – they started every Tuesday and Thursday back the first week of June. It's completely voluntary. Anybody that wants to come or is able to come is always welcome to attend. But it's geared towards preparing people for those tryouts, so by the time they hit tryouts, most of those students are absolutely ready to go and ready to march in the Ohio State marching band. It's a matter at that point of picking the very best of all of those students who are already capable.

“Now, on the downside, obviously, you've got some really good people that don't make the band at the end of the summer, so we make sure there's opportunities for them to keep playing because we want them to do what I did – come back and try out again, eventually make the marching band.”

BSB: Once you did end up making the band your sophomore year, what was your experience and what were some of your favorite memories?

Hoch: “It was fantastic. Favorite memories ... I mean, my very first game, my very first performance, was a night game against Washington (on Sept. 16, 1995) and marching into the stadium down the ramp under those lights, I'll never forget. My second year was the big Rose Bowl win in 1997, that's one game I'll never forget, that comeback at the end of the game.

“I unfortunately had to endure four out of five losses to that Team Up North. But that one win in 1998 was something that sticks in my mind as like, ‘That was the greatest thing in the world.’ My time in band, obviously those memories center around the football



PHOTO VIA TWITTER

DIRECTING SUCCESS – Dr. Christopher Hoch has been director of the Ohio State marching band since 2016, putting together no shortage of memorable performances from The Best Damn Band in the Land.

games, but the people I met, the people I still am closest with, are the people I met during those years in the marching band. It goes beyond just the football and the performances. It's all about the people.”

BSB: You mentioned the rivalry with Michigan. Does the band feel that same competitive sense that the football team does when you're going out on the field and you're seeing the other team on the sideline?

Hoch: “Oh, there is no doubt about it. We feel that rivalry just as much as anybody. I know the team feels it probably more than anybody, but we're right up there. Every single band student's heart is fully into that. They step up their performances more for that game than for any other game, and they cheer louder and play louder in the stands more for that game than for any other game. It's intense. It's a great thing.”

BSB: What do you feel the relationship is between the band and the football team? Is every band member a full-fledged, crazed fan for the football team?

Hoch: “It varies to degrees in terms of how invested band members are into the minimal aspects of the game, like every play. It's like anything else – some people understand it a lot, some people don't. But I think every single person in the band is invested in how our team plays and the outcomes of the games.

“We have a good relationship with the team, with the coaches, with the players. They come through our Skull Session every single week, they always give a shout-out to The Best Damn Band in the Land. During ri-

valy week, we went over to the Woody Hayes (Athletic) Center and we performed for the team and they joined us for a Script Ohio. It's really cool. We have a good time with them.”

BSB: You have five degrees from Ohio State and teach in the School of Music. Along with your passion for music, where did this passion for teaching come from?

Hoch: “First and foremost, it's in my blood – both Mom and Dad are teachers, so I come by it honestly, I suppose. My goal, when I got out of high school, was to be in the Ohio State marching band. My goal was not necessarily to teach. In fact, I wanted to be anything but a teacher. When I first got out, I spent my whole life growing up listening to my parents, and their discussions about what teaching was like. I thought, ‘I don't want to have anything to do with that.’ But once I got into the marching band, once I got going, I realized music was my true passion, and the way to get a job in music was through music education, was to teach.

“When I actually got into teaching, I found that not only did I enjoy it, but I was good at it, so I stuck with it. I am a teacher, that's what I do, so it's part of who I am.”

BSB: You were named interim director in 2015 and then became full-time director in 2016. Given the challenges for the program at that time around the firing of Jon Waters, how difficult was that transition into a leadership role for the band?

Hoch: “It was really difficult, first and foremost, on the students. They struggled through that a little bit, and it was difficult on the staff to navigate through that time. But if I've learned nothing else, it's that the stu-

dents we have are resilient. They adapt, and they're flexible. When it comes right down to it, their passion is for the quality of the Ohio State marching band, and they were not going to let it fail.

"Between the staff at the time and the students who were involved, it was neat to see us come through the other side of that with the same quality of performances. They're in a really good culture in the band. Those kids stepped up and made it happen."

BSB: It feels like the band is obviously about the performances, but it also seems like a lot of development of life skills and taking those lessons from being in the band.

Hoch: "Absolutely. That's been part of the program since that time. We have a pretty robust life skills program, where we bring people in to teach some of those things, and the students are responding. A lot of that stuff now is student-led, so they're taking ownership of it, which is great to see."

BSB: Getting into a few specific performances, the Ohio State marching band performed at Wembley Stadium in 2015 during an NFL game. How did that come together, and what was that experience like?

Hoch: "Our director of bands at the School of Music got an email from NFL Europe asking if we were interested, so he passed it along to me. How could you not be interested? After some quick work back and forth, the budget was approved – the NFL paid for everything – and so it was pretty easy on our end because they took care of everything.

"We had a really good staff and administrative team in place that could handle a lot of the logistics for transporting 260 people overseas. It was a great experience for us."

BSB: Is that among the biggest crowds you've ever performed in front of?

Hoch: "Ohio Stadium, game in and game out, is some of the biggest crowds we've ever performed for. Most stadiums don't seat 100,000 people. We're spoiled in what we have at Ohio Stadium. That was a huge crowd (at Wembley) and the folks over there, there were a lot of people that saw us online on YouTube and certainly in Wembley Stadium.

"We did a parade through Regent Street there, and tons of people packed the parade route and got a chance to see us. They treated us so well. The people over there, the NFL people were fantastic. They treated us well. It was a great experience, and a lot of people over there got to see us, which was great. Ultimately, the biggest crowds we get to perform for are our own people, which is a cool thing."

BSB: You've also had the opportunity to perform at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Rose Bowl a few times over the last couple of years. How satisfying is it for you to be able to reward the hard work of the students with those types of experiences?

Hoch: "It's incredibly satisfying. I look forward to being able to do more of that. Over the last few years, we had some plans in place going into 2020 for some things, but obviously that got derailed. We're getting back on board looking at opportunities, further opportunities to continue those kinds of performances."

BSB: Speaking of that 2020 season, the

marching band conducted virtual auditions for that season's band. How difficult is it to assess auditions in a virtual format vs. being there in person listening to them?

Hoch: "They're two completely different things. There isn't any comparison. All we were able to do in 2020, students submitted audio recordings of their audition, so we couldn't judge any of the marching fundamentals, we couldn't judge any of the visual aspects of their skills – just their musical skills. That was fine, because quite honestly, that whole summer, we hadn't been able to do any of our summer sessions, any of our summer rehearsals because everything was shut down. Students wouldn't have had an opportunity to learn our fundamentals anyway.

"We took the best players that year, and then we trained them through the course of the season. It was certainly a really challenging year, but I'm proud of what they did."

BSB: I wanted to ask about the "Tribute To Classic Video Games" performance during the 2012 homecoming game that went viral. I'm a video-game nerd, so I'm curious what went into the creation of that performance.

Hoch: "I am a fan of classic Nintendo, old video games, and so I will admit to being the same, something of a video-game nerd, particularly with the older stuff. The arranger of the show, John Brennan, and I worked together on that show. He did all the musical arrangements, I did all the drill writing for that. Both of us had a familiarity with the music and with the concepts (so) we were able to create something that connected with everybody. That's still one of my favorites in my career there."

BSB: Building off that, what are some of your other favorite performances that you've been able to put together?

Hoch: "People ask me that all the time, and year to year it changes because we're always doing something new, something different. We've done some cool ones over the years. That video-game show is one of my favorites. A couple years ago in 2021, we did a tribute to 'Rush' that brought fans from all over the world. I never imagined it would hit as big as it did. That sticks in my mind.

"I'm a baseball fan, so we did a baseball show back in 2016. We put a whole diamond on the field and even had people dressed in hot dog costumes and racing around the diamond. We had a lot of fun with that show. There have been a lot, and all different. Whether it's a video-game show or a movie show or a sports show or a classical show, I mean, we've done all kinds, and there have been good ones from all different kinds."

BSB: Going into a given football season, how early do you guys start planning your list of performances that you're going to do?

Hoch: "It's a year-long process. In fact, for this season, we started at the end of January. We have a meeting with any students who have ideas that are interested. We do a full student meeting. We usually have about 60 or 70 show up, and many of them will contribute full halftime show concepts that we'll take down and then over the next few months – February, March, April – the staff meets probably every other week to narrow down those concepts and fine-tune what we're going to do, so we have our show concepts picked out by April.

"Then we send those concepts off to our music arrangers who will write the music, and that's sort of where we are right now. We're waiting for the music to come in from our arrangers. Once July hits, our percussion instructor starts writing percussion parts, I start writing drill, and a couple of our graduate students will be writing some drill. All of that stuff starts to come together in July and then August and then through the course of the season."

BSB: I assume those concepts and performance ideas are locked up in Fort Knox until those get announced.

Hoch: "Absolutely correct. We do try to reveal those, give little hints on our social media about what's coming up in a given week. But especially right now, a lot of people are curious to know what we do. But I can't reveal that until all of the music is in, we're sure we've got what we've got, and quite honestly, copyright is a thing. We have to make sure we have copyright on all that stuff first."

BSB: What does a football game day look like for you at Ohio Stadium?

Hoch: "We report six hours ahead of kickoff. We do all of our stretching and warmups and so forth. During the beginning of that six hours, we'll watch video together of our dress rehearsal and then we will go outside, we do a uniform inspection, make sure the students look good, they look professional and are doing what they're supposed to do there.

"Then we will do a quick rehearsal outdoors, a final run-through of pregame and halftime performances to make sure everything is ready to go. Then we'll have a meal together, and then Skull Session happens and then from Skull Session, we march over to the game and you know the drill from there."

BSB: During the band's most popular tradition, Script Ohio, it ends with the dotting of the "i" by a sousaphone player. How does that process work for determining who does that from game to game?

Hoch: "The senior sousaphone players have the first choice of i-dot. They are the ones who are eligible to dot the i. It's a very competitive process. The senior sousaphone player who has marched the most performances has first choice on what game he or she wants to dot.

"We have a system in the Ohio State band of alternates and regulars. So, the regular block you see in a halftime show, for example, is 195 students. The pregame block is 192, which means there's 28-30 alternates who are there for every performance. Those alternates are full-fledged members of the band, and they have the opportunity to challenge into the regular block every week.

"But the sousaphone player who has been an alternate the least number of times has the first choice of what game they want to dot, and then it goes down the line from there."

BSB: You've had two guest i-dotters during your time at Ohio State, including former football head coach Earle Bruce in 2016 and Anthony Violi, a trumpet player and former band member, in 2018. How does that process work for determining a guest i-dotter?

Hoch: "The invitation is extended by the senior sousaphone students, the dotters who are going to be dotting that year, because they are giving up one of their dots to allow somebody else to be able to do that. That's

how it worked with the Earle Bruce dot, and we've had some discussions about getting a couple other folks involved with an honorary i-dot, but quite honestly, we are still recovering – we lost seven dots in 2020 because we couldn't perform at the game, so we're still trying to (catch up).

"After 2024, we will be completely caught back up again with all the students that needed to dot the i. At that point, starting in 2024, we may look for the opportunity to bring somebody special in to do that. It is up to those sousaphone players. Of course, I can make suggestions to them, as I did with Earle Bruce. The Anthony Violi dot was in conjunction with the alumni band, so they were instrumental in getting that to happen. I'm hopeful to be able to do that again."

BSB: This upcoming Ohio State marching band will be the 146th for the program, and every year it seems like there's a new wrinkle. How do you balance innovation within the program while still respecting the tradition that the band has been built on?

Hoch: "It is a challenging thing that we think about – the staff, all of us – think about every single year. How can we continue to get better at what we do? How can we continue to entertain our audiences even as times change, but still be true to our roots? True to our tradition? There are certain things that define who we are that are never going to go away – the ramp entrance, the Script Ohio, 'Hang On Sloopy.' Things like that are going to continue to be a part of the pageantry of Ohio State football.

"But what we do at halftime is the No. 1 thing that changes year to year, and trying new things is something we've never been afraid of. We're willing to give it a shot if we think it's a good idea, and if it works, we continue to roll with it and try different things.

"We've done different kinds of music over the years, different kinds of drills over the years. Last year, for instance, we did a fully integrated and combined show with the Iowa band that went off really, really well. We may try to continue to do more of that thing. You've got to not be afraid to try different things."

BSB: Given the band's reputation for being built on that tradition, what has the process been like for you, since you've been at Ohio State, watching the band develop into one of the most innovative programs in the country and getting all this recognition for the work that's been done?

Hoch: "For me personally, it's very rewarding because I have such a deep connection, having been a member of the band. So much of my college experience was defined by my experience in the marching band. To be able to have some input into the future of the organization, it's special, but it's a huge, huge burden and a huge, huge responsibility. It's a pressure I feel every single day. When I walk into that stadium, knowing what the expectation is, knowing what people want to see when the band takes the field or what people expect to see when the band takes the field, there's a lot of pressure that goes along with that.

"But it's a matter of keeping that in perspective. It's a matter of making sure, first and foremost, that the pressure, that expectation, doesn't become the most important thing. That it's secondary to the experience of the students and what the students are able to do as part of the marching band."

Shoup Helped Ohio State To Only Baseball Title

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ray Shoup is a member of an exclusive club at Ohio State. He was an outfielder for the 1966 national championship baseball team, the only in program history.

Much like men's basketball, which reached the title game three times from 1960-62 but came away with only one title in 1960, the baseball Buckeyes' crown came in the middle of a three-season run in the College World Series from 1965-67. They have not been back since.

The 1966 team was led by Steve Arlin, the Buckeyes' first two-time All-American. He played parts of six seasons in the majors with San Diego and Cleveland and was elected to the College Baseball Hall of Fame in 2008.

Shoup, 77, recounts playing with Arlin as well as his high school and college teammate Bo Rein, a two-sport star in baseball and football who was as colorful off the field as he was talented on it. Rein died on Jan. 10, 1980, at 34 in an airplane accident shortly after being named head football coach at LSU.

BSB caught up with Shoup, who led the Buckeyes in batting (.323) in 1967 as a senior and was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in 1996, as he and his wife, Ginny, were driving to visit relatives in central Pennsylvania on June 26. She had nearly as many baseball stories and memories as her husband.

They are still involved in the sport in a way because a grandson, Jake Cook, is a baseball player at Southern Mississippi.

BSB: What are you doing and where

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**RAY
SHOUP**

are you living?

Shoup: "I'm retired from Bell South, which is now again AT&T. After baseball I worked for them for about 28 years. We live in the north Georgia mountains (Jasper, Ga.)."

BSB: How long have you been there?

Shoup: "Well, we've actually been in the house we live in nearly 20 years, which is the longest we've ever lived in one location."

BSB: I can imagine with your baseball career you moved a lot.

Shoup: "Yeah, we had 35 different addresses or something like that. I've got you on speaker. My wife's in the car with me. So, we're just moving along here."

Ginny (laughing): "I'm trying to keep him from lying."

BSB: How did you end up at Ohio State?

Shoup: "I grew up in Niles, which is outside Youngstown. My high school coach's name was Paul DeMont, and he'd played some pro ball and he got to know (OSU coach) Marty Karow through the coaches association stuff. He got Marty interested in me and me in Ohio State. He took me down there for an interview with Marty, and Marty said, 'Well, we'd like to have him but all we can give him is a half scholarship.' Before I can say anything, Pepper (DeMont) said he's not coming here for half a scholarship. I about swallowed my tongue, you know."

"So, we talked a little bit and the next thing I knew I was going on a football scholarship. I had broken my leg my senior year in high school so I missed all but this one whole game of a doubleheader and I broke my leg in the second game. But anyway, my freshman year I wound up on a football scholarship."

"That was back in the days when they had unlimited scholarships, and I guess Marty went to Woody (Hayes) and said we have to have this guy but we don't have any money. So, they put me on a football scholarship. (OSU assistant football coach) Tiger Ellison actually signed my scholarship papers."

"The following year, of course, freshmen weren't eligible to play baseball then, weren't eligible for anything, so my sophomore year they moved me onto a baseball scholarship and I was on a full ride for baseball."

BSB: In 1965, your sophomore year, you went to the College World Series and lost 2-1 to Arizona State in the title game. Arizona State had a heck of a team, right?

Shoup: "Yeah. They had Sal Bando and Rick Monday and several others. Monday was the first player drafted in the major-league draft (during) the '65 season."

"My junior year, we had a really good team that year and went back to Omaha and were fortunate enough to win the whole thing."

"Actually, it was a round-robin tournament. It wasn't like it is now, and we had beaten Southern Cal and Southern Cal had



FILE PHOTO

CHAMPIONSHIP PEDIGREE — Former Ohio State outfielder Ray Shoup is part of an elite club, a member of the Buckeyes' only baseball national title team in 1966.

beaten us and Oklahoma State had one loss (to Ohio State), so the three of us each had one loss and we had to flip a coin to see who got the bye. Oklahoma State got the bye and we had to play Southern Cal again and we beat them that night (1-0) and then came back and beat Oklahoma State 8-2 the next day and won the national championship."

BSB: What was special about that team, and how much was a carryover from 1965 to give you the confidence in 1966?

Shoup: "Obviously, just the experience of going to Omaha and playing in the World Series was a big boost for everybody. But we had like 10 players on that team that wound up being drafted. I mean, we really had a good team. We probably had the best team in the country."

Ginny: "And Steve Arlin."

Shoup: "Yeah, we had Steve Arlin, which made all the difference, but we had Chuck Brinkman, Russ Nagelson, Bo Rein. Bo and I went to high school together, and then we roomed together as freshmen in the dorm with a guy named Ray Stevens, who also played baseball. Then Stevens and I moved, Bo couldn't move out. Woody made them stay in the dorms for a couple of years."

"We just had a really good team, and let me tell you, we had two guys kind of drop in for one year and they really made a differ-

ence in the team. They were both tremendous players, our shortstop Roger Sexton, and Bob Baker played outfield with me and then they both were gone the next year. They just played one year and they both hit about .340 for the year or something like that (Sexton hit .358 to lead the team). Things just fell together for us. It's just the way it has to be when you win, you have to have a lot of luck too."

BSB: How comforting was it to have Arlin on the mound?

Shoup: "That was a big boost because you knew when he pitched you had a pretty darn good chance of winning."

BSB: People probably don't realize you returned to the College World Series the next season in 1967 as well.

Shoup: "Yes, we did. We weren't nearly as good that year, but we went back. We lost to Houston in the second game (after losing the College World Series opener 1-0 to Auburn in the double-elimination tournament) and it rained like crazy and I fell down in the outfield. I missed a line drive that went clear to the wall and (future Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder) Tom Paciorek got an inside-the-park home run and beat us — one of those memories you don't like."

BSB: Sorry for bringing that up.

Shoup: "That's all right. You have to live with it."

BSB: There hasn't been an Ohio State

team to make it back since.

Shoup: "They've had some good teams in the '90s, good teams, good players and big-league players but just didn't seem to be able to get it together."

BSB: Is that surprising?

Ginny: "We live in the South and we see how much more they get to practice and play."

Shoup: "It's disappointing and surprising, both. We'd like to be at the top of the Big Ten all the time. You can't win it every year. We have to be competitive and being one of the top three or four teams in the conference every year."

BSB: What was it like to play for Karow?

Shoup: "Marty was a hard-nosed old baseball guy. A lot of small ball. He liked to run, bunt and steal. He played defense."

"I think you may have heard this story. Nagelson hit a line drive off his forehead in batting practice one time. We thought he got killed but he didn't and shook it off. He was out there pitching batting practice the next day."

"He was just a tough guy. He basically only knew the starters. He didn't know the rest of the team. He would be out there on the pitching mound and he'd call out the names of starters that he wanted out there and then say all you others to the other field."

"Well, all the other guys took on the name of the AYO's – for All You Others. There was a group that was all the starters, the regulars and then there was the AYO's. They still go by that when we get together for reunions."

BSB: What are some Bo Rein stories?

Shoup: "Bo was a heck of an athlete. Let's say that for sure, for starters. Good baseball player, real good baseball player, but he was a good football player, too."

"He and I grew up together from little guys and had a lot of recruiting trips together. When he went for football, a lot of times I went along for baseball, and I'm sure Woody wanted Bo really bad because he wasn't getting the top players in north-east Ohio, which was the Youngstown-Warren-Niles area. Niles had really good high school football teams and he really wanted Bo. He was pulling out the stops for him, and I'm sure that's why I got put on scholarship, my football scholarship, because he knew Bo and I were friends and he figured he didn't want to lose this guy because I might lose Bo in the meantime."

"Bo and I lived together off and on different years and were always close friends. There are so many ball Bo Rein stories, you just can't even imagine."

"We went to the (Cleveland) Browns game from campus one time, there were about four of us and Bo couldn't find one of his shoes when we got there. We had never gotten out of the car and he didn't have one of his shoes. We just went to the game. He wore one shoe to the game."

"Ray, who I mentioned lived in the dorm with Bo and I, the three of us went to Anchorage (Alaska) to play summer baseball up there, and Woody asked Bo if he would take Woody's son, Steve Hayes. So, we did. Steve went with us and stayed with us up there for oh, I don't know, two, three, four weeks. I don't remember how long but he didn't like it. We brought him back to the airport and he came home and Bo and I stayed up there but while we were there,

they were having a labor dispute so they couldn't give us the jobs that we were supposed to get, so we all came back early."

BSB: After Ohio State, you were selected by the Minnesota Twins in the June 1967 amateur draft. You played in the minors with Bert Blyleven, a future Hall of Fame pitcher. What was that like?

Shoup: "That's kind of a cute story, too. Blyleven, obviously, was very good. He was kind of like Arlin. He was dominant, but his success was more of a curveball, where Arlin's was more power, slider and fastball, a power pitcher."

"Blyleven's first year in pro ball in Orlando (in 1969), he joined our team and I got to be pretty good friends with him. He was real young, baby-faced guy but he would throw that curveball. Right-handed hitters would fall down and get out of the way of the ball and it would be a striker."

Ginny: "When he was pitching for Orlando, Ray hit one of his few home runs to win the game for him, his first one in A-ball. He had played in low A-ball for a little bit and then they sent him up to Orlando, so that that was kind of a neat story to be able to tell."

Shoup: "When Blyleven got elected to the Hall of Fame (in 2011), I thought I had driven in the first run in his first professional game. Ginny kept a lot of these albums, the stories and all the press clippings so I went back and dug that stuff out and lo and behold, I had not driven in the run in his first professional game. But I was going to send him the story from the paper, just remind him and see if I heard from him again. He had quite a professional career."

BSB: You mentioned how you "introduced" yourself to Los Angeles Dodgers Hall of Fame manager Tommy Lasorda early in both your careers when you had nine straight hits in a series for Orlando against his team.

Shoup: "Yeah. After the third game, Lasorda came over and talked to me and told me what a great thing that was. He was this really good guy. Then, later, when I played Triple-A ball in Portland in the Pacific Coast League, he was the manager at Spokane, so I got to talk to him a couple of times there again. I reminded him of Orlando and he said he remembered."

"I was in the Army Reserves at that time and I was traveling back to Orlando for weekend drills and the Twins were flying me back there. I had to rejoin our team in Spokane and I came into the airport and was going down the sidewalk outside pulling my suitcase and there comes this bus and it stopped. The door opens and Lasorda's (like), 'Oh, that's Shoup. You going to the ballpark?' I said yes and he said, 'Come on, get on the bus. We'll give you a ride,' so I got on the bus and they took me out there."

"Later on, he emceed our reunion. I think it was the 25th-year reunion of our national championship team, so I got to talk to him again there. He was friends with John Havlicek and that's how we got him to come back to be the emcee for the baseball team."

BSB: It pays to know people, just like the time you were telling me you and your wife were in Nashville for dinner after the Grand Ole Opry and you learned the owner of the restaurant knew Lasorda. You let the waiter know you'd like to speak to the owner, who at the time was entertain-

ing guests at a table, but as it turned out it wasn't that simple, I gather.

Shoup: "The waiter told me he'd like to meet you but he doesn't come to anybody's table. I said OK. After a little bit, he comes back over and said (the owner) would like for you to come over there and say hello to him. So, I went over there where he was sitting and I talked to him for a little bit. And as it turned out, he was kind of a hard guy to get away from, he was real talkative. Ginny was already still sitting at our table. We already ordered our food. So, I excused myself and went back to our table."

"I little bit later the waiter comes over with a telephone and he had some names and numbers on the phone highlighted and he said push this button and it said, 'Tommy.' It was Lasorda's cell phone number."

"So, I pushed the button. The phone rang and the guy answered and I said, 'Tommy?' He said, 'Yes, who is this?' And, of course, I explained to him who I was and the times we interacted, he said, 'Oh, I think I remember you.' He was in Arizona for spring training. We chatted again a little bit on the phone and then I never saw him again and then he passed away just a few years ago (in 2021). What a great ambassador for baseball. I mean, he was baseball."

BSB: You do have stories to tell.

Shoup: "I forgot to tell you the highlight of my professional career was in the International League at Syracuse (1971), and I played in the International League World Series (Governors' Cup playoffs), which was a huge event for Triple-A."

Editor's Note: The Chiefs lost in the

playoffs to the Rochester Red Wings.

"(Rochester) had a major-league ball-club the next year. There were like 10 players from that team that went up to the Baltimore Orioles. But I had like 12 hits in five games or something in that series. It was a big deal. I was with the (New York) Yankees organization then."

"Another good story. (Longtime MLB player and manager) Don Zimmer was the manager in Key West when I played in the Florida State League, and I had a really good year that year. I won the batting title and the MVP of the league. We were in Key West, the game was close – I think they were ahead if I remember it right – but they were ready to decide whether they were going to pitch to me and Zimmer came out to the mound."

"They decided to pitch to me. Well, damn if I didn't hit a home run. I hit the ball over the right-center field fence, and we won the game. So, I go in after the game and the clubhouse boy says, 'Who's the guy that hit the home run?' They pointed to me and he said come out here, you've got to see this."

"Well, the ball had hit the windshield of Don Zimmer's car and went through the windshield and the ball was laying on the front seat. It was a Corvair. You remember the old Corvair? That was one of my highlights too."

BSB: Did he make you pay for the window?

Shoup: "No. No one said anything about that. I don't know whatever happened."

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St. Clair Answers Call At Quarterback In 2025

Ohio State has found a quarterback in 2025, earning a commitment on June 21 from Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star signal caller Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210).

St. Clair's commitment comes after a busy spring and summer at Ohio State. He was offered by the program in May and then made several visits to campus for recruiting camps throughout June, where he routinely impressed those in attendance in drills and competitive outings.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

It showed a significant improvement for St. Clair compared to his camp experience last summer, a full year before he would pick up his offer. In the last year, he's developed from a quarterback on Ohio State's radar to one who is now in the class for the Buckeyes, choosing the school over the likes of Alabama, Michigan, Penn State and Tennessee.

"I'm kind of just taking what the defense gives me," St. Clair said of his improvement over the last year. "I'm not necessarily trying to make all the perfect throws. I'm just going out there and playing, not really thinking as much. I'm here with my team, trying to get better and make the throws when they're there."

His impressive camp experience came after a successful sophomore outing at Bellefontaine, throwing for 2,453 yards and 25 touchdowns to just four interceptions. While considered just the No. 238 overall prospect in 2025 – as well as the No. 17 quarterback – his development and the relationship with Ohio State over the last year have both parties comfortable with a verbal pledge entering his junior year.

He is the first in-state quarterback to commit to Ohio State since Joe Burrow did so in the 2015 recruiting class out of Athens, and if he were to start a game with the Buckeyes, he would be the first in-state quarterback to do so since Cardale Jones, out of Cleveland Glenville, in 2015.

"The tradition, quarterback development, things like that," St. Clair said of what drew him to Ohio State. "What's going to put me in the best position to go to the NFL?"

Putting St. Clair in position to go to the NFL will be in the hands of head coach Ryan Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis, both of whom St. Clair said he has a great relationship with. Dennis in particular has spent a lot of time with St. Clair, sticking close to him throughout the last month when St. Clair has visited Ohio State.

"I'd say it's mostly his style of coaching," St. Clair said of what he likes about Dennis. "He's really relaxed and he knows what he's talking about. I mean, the quarterback development here is better than anywhere else, so learning from him is nice."

St. Clair's commitment likely marks the end of Ohio State's pursuit of Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205) and Findlay, Ohio, four-star quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3,

205), the other two signal callers offered by the Buckeyes for 2025. As for the rest of the 2025 class, St. Clair is just the second commitment for Ohio State, joining Atlanta Douglass five-star safety Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175), who committed last July.

Glenville Prospects West And Witten Commit To Ohio State

Ohio State added a pair of commitments on June 24 from Cleveland Glenville, earning verbal pledges from four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177) and four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215).

The duo committed to the Buckeyes during their official visits to Columbus. West was first up, and he is the No. 45 overall prospect and fourth-ranked cornerback in 2024. He is also the top-ranked prospect in Ohio for the cycle, and he committed to Ohio State over Michigan and USC, his other top schools.

"I just felt that was the place I needed to be," West told Eleven Warriors. "(With) all the development that's come through Ohio State and the Glenville pipeline with all the first-rounders they've had, and you've got a (defensive backs) coach like Coach (Tim) Walton. He's been in the league for so many years and coached guys like Jalen Ramsey – you'd love to play for a guy like that."

West intercepted four passes last season and helped lead Glenville to a 15-0 record and the first state title in program history. He was named a Junior All-American by MaxPreps in the process. His interception totals point to West's impressive ball skills, and his physicality and speed – with a 10.93 second 100-meter dash – offer versatility for defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

West is the first cornerback in Ohio State's class, with the Buckeyes also pursuing Waco (Texas) Connally five-star Kobe Black (6-0, 190); Springfield, Ohio, four-star Aaron Scott (6-0, 170); and Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185), with the latter two joining West for his official visit.

Witten, meanwhile, is the No. 347 overall prospect and No. 17 tight end in the class, and he held additional offers from Cincinnati, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas, among others. His official visit came just a couple of weeks after participating in an Ohio State recruiting camp, where Witten got the chance to deepen his relationship with the coaching staff – specifically tight ends coach Keenan Bailey.

"My biggest takeaway from camp was how Coach Key really singled me out, because I told him I wanted to improve on my speed cuts and my blocking," Witten said. "He pulled me to the side, one-on-one, and showed me some things. It was just by myself improving my blocking and my route running."

The ability of Ohio State to forge a relationship with Witten was especially important considering the departure of tight ends coach Kevin Wilson following last season, as Wilson would have been involved in offering back in September.

"The day (Bailey) got the job, he hit me up and told me, 'I want you. You're No. 1 on my board and I'm not going to stop recruit-

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
Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	185	★★★★	West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep
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
Justin Scott	DT	6-4	310	★★★★★	Chicago St. Ignatius
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	198	★★★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	LB	6-0	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Bryce West	CB	5-11	177	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville
Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Damarion Witten	TE	6-4	215	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville

ing you until you're a Buckeye," Witten said. "For me, that was a big deal because I've never had anyone tell me that I was No. 1 and that I'm needed."

Witten offers impressive pass-catching ability for Ohio State's offense. While he needs to improve as a blocker and is undersized for the position – most tight ends on Ohio State's roster are at least 240 pounds, with Witten currently checking in at just 215 – his athleticism should excite Bailey and the rest of Ohio State's coaching staff. He is the second tight end commitment in Ohio State's class, joining Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star Max LeBlanc (6-4, 222), who joined the class in April.

West's and Witten's commitments signal a potential reopening of the pipeline to Ohio State from Glenville, a program that has sent plenty of talent to the Buckeyes over the years. Those names include the likes of defensive backs Christian Bryant, Marshon Lattimore and Donte Whitner, linebacker Chris Worley, offensive lineman Bryant Browning, quarterbacks Jones and Troy Smith and wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr.

Five-Star DT Scott Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State added a surprise commitment on July 2, earning a verbal pledge from Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive tackle Justin Scott (6-4, 310).

Scott is the No. 14 overall prospect and third-ranked defensive lineman in the class, and he represents the first five-star defensive lineman to commit to the Buckeyes since defensive ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolouau in 2021.

After originally setting a commitment date back in January – with Notre Dame viewed as a heavy favorite to land his services – Scott pushed back his commitment and took official visits over the summer to Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan and Ohio State, with his trip to the Buckeyes from June 23-25 the last visit before his commitment.

"When we came back from the Michigan visit, the whole family was set on them," he told On3. "I was ready to commit to Michigan. And then we went to Ohio State, and the one thing that pushed Ohio State over the top was getting coached by coach Larry Johnson.

"He has a plan for me. Coach (Johnson) sat down with me and my family, pulled out the plans he has for me for my freshman, sophomore and junior year. He looked me in the eyes and told me that if I'm not out of that school in three years, he did something wrong. Him being the greatest, I believe it."

Scott is the first commitment in the trenches for Johnson, who is starting off with a bang as he begins to build his class. The Buckeyes were awaiting word the evening of July 3, shortly after Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, as Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star defensive end Marquise Lightfoot (6-5, 220) was set to announce his commitment. For news on Lightfoot's choice, go to BuckeyeSports.com.

As for the class, Scott is the fourth five-star commitment for Ohio State, joining Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198), New Haven, Ind., wide receiver Mylan Graham (6-1, 170) and Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195), who has received his fifth composite star from 247Sports.

The Buckeyes solidified their second-place position in the 247Sports team rankings and picked up ground on Georgia in first, with 279.46 points to the Bulldogs' 301.09. With five fewer commits than UG, Ohio State is a contender to finish atop the recruiting rankings come signing day.

Four-Star SAF McClain Commits To Ohio State

Fresh off his visit to Ohio State from June 9-11, West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star safety Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185) announced his commitment to the Buckeyes on June 12. He is the No. 239 overall prospect and No. 20 safety in 2024, and he represented the first commitment in the defensive backfield for Ohio State in the recruiting cycle.

"What led me to commit to Ohio State was how my relationship with the coaches was beyond football," McClain told On3. "Also, Coach Day has a standard for his program and how he wants to win championships and develop NFL players."

McClain – whose other top programs included Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State and USC – didn't receive an offer from Ohio State and Eliano until March. He made

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
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio

his first visit to the school in the spring and returned to campus for his official visit that solidified his pledge.

He posted a combined 154 tackles and two interceptions in his past two seasons of high school football and was also a two-way player, lining up at receiver. He also runs track for Seton Hall Prep. Other targets at safety for Ohio State include Buford, Ga., five-star KJ Bolden (6-1, 185), Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188) and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star Zaquan Patterson (6-0, 185).

News And Notes From OSU's Recruiting Camps

Ohio State held six recruiting events in June – five one-day camps and a high school seven-on-seven competition – and Buckeye Sports Bulletin has updates from every session that saw prospects flock to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, including who stood out, who got offered and who is on Ohio State's radar. BSB staff writers Andy Anders and Patrick Engels contributed to this notebook by conducting interviews with several prospects.

June 8: The first day of camp had several impressive prospects take the field, including Clayton (Ohio) Northmont four-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185) and Cocoa, Fla., four-star defensive end Javion Hilson (6-4, 225) in 2025 and Cincinnati Withrow wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185) in 2026, all of whom hold offers.

This was the second camp outing in as many years for Henry – the son of late Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Chris Henry – who camped with the Buckeyes last year ahead of his freshman season at Withrow, earning an offer in the process. This time around, he flashed with impressive route-running ability and dominated the majority of his one-on-one reps.

“(Offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline) told me that I’ve gotten more smooth with the routes and bigger, of course,” Henry said. “I always feel like I’m getting better every time I put the work in.”

Many of Henry's one-on-one competitions were against Brew, who is the No. 32 overall prospect, fourth-ranked corner and top-ranked prospect from Ohio. He was offered by Ohio State in January and is a legacy – though not via the football program.

“I grew up watching Ohio State,” Brew said. “My mom (Donica Merriman), she ran track. She's in the Hall of Fame at Ohio State. It's one of my dream schools, and it's just crazy that I'm getting recruited and I'm building that great relationship with Coach Walton.”

Brew looked strong in his individual drills and also had the opportunity for a private workout with Walton, furthering the relationship between the two, with Brew adding that Walton is a “great coach” and a “great guy.”

“He's hard on the technique,” Brew said. “He emphasized that a lot, and that's what

I like about him. I focus on my technique. That's what I work on a lot and he does that too, so I feel like that's a great match for me.”

One interesting wrinkle was the appearance of Youngstown (Ohio) Fitch four-star defensive end Brian Robinson (6-5, 255), a 2024 prospect. He does not hold an Ohio State offer and is considered a Michigan lean, but he still visited the camp to spend time with his teammates and Johnson, though he did not work out with the other campers.

“I will probably come back here,” Robinson said. “(Ohio State and I) had a good conversation, just sitting down and seeing how I've been. They told me I looked good and I have great measurables. I'm blessed whether I get (an offer) or I don't. I'm still blessed.”

Offers from the first day of camp went to Tampa (Fla.) Plant four-star running back Waltez Clark (6-2, 194) and Indianapolis Ben Davis four-star cornerback Mark Zackery IV (6-0, 194) in 2025 and Akron Hoban cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 150) in 2026.

June 12: At Ohio State's next one-day camp, the skill positions continued to impress, with Graham, who is committed to Ohio State in 2024, as well as Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star running back Jordan Davison (5-11, 210), a 2025 prospect, both working out with the Buckeyes.

Graham flashed plenty of speed throughout drills and one-on-ones, with his route running standing out as he seemed uncoverable throughout the afternoon. Hartline has said he could see Graham playing inside or outside, and his skills on display showed why Hartline views him as having versatility.

“Every time (Hartline and I) talk about it, he's like, ‘I peg you as an outside guy, but I don't want to force you to the outside,’” Graham said. “He said I'm pretty good as a Z, single-side wide receiver, coming in motion, things like that.”

Davison, meanwhile, received plenty of one-on-one attention from running backs coach Tony Alford and ran extra rotations in drills. He is the No. 31 overall prospect and top-ranked running back in his class.

“I had a great time,” Davison said. “Getting to feel Coach Alford out and seeing how he coaches, (and) he pushed me today. That's a big up for Ohio State. I want a coach that can push me and that will push me to be the greatest I can be.”

Someone who could block down the line for Davison is Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), a 2025 prospect who also camped and had a strong performance. Lowe was offered by Ohio State in January and is continuing to build his relationship with offensive line coach Justin Frye.

“I had a really fun time,” Lowe said. “I come out here every year to compete and get better. I really think I did that today. We did a lot of stuff with run blocking that we don't do at my school, so that's something I can take home and improve on. I have a really good relationship with (Frye). I love talking with him, I love speaking to him. He does a really good job coaching the offensive line, and I

have a lot of respect for him.”

Coming out of the camp session, Ohio State offered Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Cumberland Valley offensive tackle Tyler Merrill (6-5, 310) and Vero Beach, Fla., offensive tackle Micah “Champ” Smith (6-6, 295), both in 2026. Merrill holds additional offers from Iowa State, Nebraska, Penn State and Pittsburgh, among others, while Smith has picked up offers from schools such as Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.) and Ole Miss.

“I started hearing from the Ohio State staff a few weeks ago to get up here,” Smith said. “Now they're going to start recruiting me because they offered me today. It's how professional they are, how they can get you to better places in life, on and off the field.”

June 14: Prospects from Cleveland stood out in the next camp session, including Witten and Cleveland Shaker Heights four-star cornerback Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) in 2025.

McNutt is the son of former Ohio State cornerback Richard McNutt, who played for the Buckeyes from 2000-02 and was a member of the 2002 national championship team. The younger McNutt is the No. 98 overall prospect and No. 12 cornerback in his class.

“It's a great feeling,” McNutt said of camping at Ohio State. “This is my second time here, and I'm having a great time just building relationships. I didn't grow up here in Columbus, but knowing my family was here, it is a great feeling. It's great to know I could have a chance to (represent) Ohio State.”

On defense, Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-5, 220), a 2025 prospect, was also a standout. He was offered in May by Ohio State and impressed during his first ever visit to campus, dominating the field in one-on-one and individual drills and getting some one-on-one time with Johnson.

“It was great,” Mathis said. “He talked with me about my work ethic. I love this coaching staff. They did me well, helped me out with some reps. I lost some reps then I won some reps so it was pretty good for me just to come down here.”

Mathis has long looked up to Johnson for the work he has done sending defensive ends into the NFL, including Joey and Nick Bosa as well as Chase Young, who Mathis said grew up just a couple of hours from where he plays high school football.

“He had a big impact on me, because Chase Young was coming from the DMV (D.C.-Maryland-Virginia),” Mathis said. “Myself, I'm from Philadelphia, so just to be so close to home and see his big impact on the world. Then Larry Legend (Johnson) had both of the Bosa brothers (Joey and Nick). I've got that love and respect for him.”

Following that camp session, Ohio State offered several 2025 prospects, including offensive tackle Matty Augustine (6-7, 260) and safety Ethan Long (6-2, 185) from Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School; Cocoa, Fla., wide receiver Jayvan Boggs (6-1, 175); and Pembroke Pines (Fla.) West Broward four-star wide receiver Joshua Moore (6-3, 205), as well as Boca Raton (Fla.) West running back Javian Mallory (5-11, 200), a 2026 prospect.

June 15: The quarterbacks then had their day, with several impressive signal callers showing up to camp. That group included Montgomery, San Antonio Claudia

Taylor Johnson four-star Ty Hawkins and St. Clair in 2025 as well as Orlando (Fla.) Lake Nona's Carter Emanuel (6-0, 180) and Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit's Will Griffin (6-3, 215) in 2026.

The main story was Montgomery and St. Clair. The quarterbacks held a private workout with Dennis and Day prior to camp beginning, going through a variety of drills and impressing those in attendance.

“It's always fun to compete against Ryan (Montgomery) and them, but just some coaching tips that I got today from Coach Dennis (were big),” St. Clair said. “I mean, he's always helping me just refine my mechanics and stuff like that. Every time I get to learn from somebody like Coach Dennis or Coach (Todd) Fitch or Coach Day, it's big-time.”

Perhaps the most impressive performance, though, came from Griffin, who added Ohio State to an offer list that includes Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan and Pittsburgh. His arm strength was shown off on several throws that were effortlessly delivered downfield, going throw-for-throw with the more experienced signal callers.

“It was fantastic,” Griffin said. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, especially learning from two coaches that know all about the position and football, so that was great. I'm really good friends with Tavien. Ryan (Montgomery) was here earlier and I made some new friends. Competition makes each other great, and all of us got better today.”

It was also a big day for 2025 running backs, with several high-profile ball carriers – including Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star Tory Blaylock (5-11, 175), Cleveland Heights four-star Marquise Davis (6-0, 190) and Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star Bo Jackson (6-1, 190), all of whom have been offered – impressing those in attendance.

Davis led most of the running back drills, showing off his skill in individual drills and dominating in one-on-one competition. Blaylock, who made the trip from Texas, had a similarly impressive outing.

“I had a great time competing out here with some of the best coaches and best athletes around me,” Blaylock said. “It was a great experience to be out here, and I enjoyed myself. Coach Alford and Coach Day are some of the best coaches in the nation. They set the standard. (Alford) always pushes me to be better.”

While there were not as many notable campers on the defensive side of the ball, one standout was Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star defensive end London Merritt (6-3, 230) in 2025. He showed good use of his feet and impressive explosion on his pass-rushing reps, and he continued to develop his relationship with Johnson.

“I really built a good relationship with him the first time I visited,” Merritt said. “It was a great time. We sat down and went over my film. He did things that no other coaches have done at colleges, so it really stood out to me.”

In addition to Griffin, offers included Orlando (Fla.) Jones three-star wide receiver Vernell Brown III (6-0, 165), Fulshear (Texas) Katy Jordan running back Chad Gasper (5-11, 190) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG

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Prospects Impress At June Recruiting Camps

Continued From Page 31

Academy four-star offensive lineman Kaden Strayhorn (6-3, 285) in 2025 and Pompano Beach (Fla.) Monarch wide receiver Jabari Brady (6-2, 190) in 2026. Griffin became the third quarterback offered by Ohio State in 2026, joining Julian Lewis (6-1, 175) out of Carrollton, Ga., and Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School's Jared Curtis (6-2, 200).

June 20: Perhaps the most touted camper yet made it to Ohio State's campus, with Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) working out for the Buckeyes that day.

Sanchez is the No. 7 overall prospect and second-ranked cornerback in 2025, and he holds additional offers from Alabama, Georgia, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and USC, among others. He backed up his ranking at camp, smoking the competition with Ohio State's coaches looking on.

Those same coaches – including safeties coach Perry Eliano and Walton – have given plenty for Sanchez to think about in regard to Ohio State as a potential landing spot for

the five-star prospect.

"An Ohio State cornerback, he's good at everything," Sanchez said. "You can press, you can play off, that's what they like to do. I feel like if you can do all of that and you can be great at it, you've got a chance to be on that wall (of great players). There's not that many schools that call themselves DBU, and Ohio State is probably one of the No. 1 schools, just looking at the guys in the league. It speaks for itself."

Sanchez said Ohio State helps to prepare defensive backs for the NFL with the level of talent that exists in the wide receivers room, offering a chance to go up against what should be several future NFL receivers.

"I feel like every receiver they've got is NFL-ready," Sanchez said. "Going against them every day in practice, and then you get to the league, it's almost like you're already there because you've been seeing it every day in practice."

Also impressing at camp were Franklin (Mich.) Wylie E. Groves four-star offensive tackle Avery Gach (6-5, 275) and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star tight end Luka Gilbert (6-7, 233), priority targets

in 2025. Both have already been offered by Ohio State.

"It was great," Gilbert said of the camp. "It was an honor to be at the best college in college football and play for the most electric tight ends coach in the nation. (Coach Bailey) is a great coach, I'd love to play for him, and I could definitely see myself being his player one day."

Following camp, Ohio State sent out offers to Chicago Simeon four-star defensive end Christopher Burgess (6-4, 230) in 2025 and Waxhaw (N.C.) Myers Park wide receiver Brody Keefe (6-3, 185) in 2026.

June 21: After the final one-day recruiting camp, Ohio State closed out camp season with a seven-on-seven tournament, featuring only quarterbacks, running backs, wide receivers and defensive backs from a variety of high schools throughout the country.

It was another competition between Montgomery and St. Clair, with the two quarterbacks' teams meeting in the finals, with Findlay coming out on top, though St. Clair would wind up committing to Ohio State later that day. Other notable in-state programs competing included Centerville,

Ironton, Clayton Northmont, Columbus Hartley, Lewis Center Olentangy Orange and Pickerington North.

Outside of the quarterbacks, the biggest standouts were on the "house" team, which is made up of prospects from several different schools, with Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Byron Louis (5-10, 180) and Pflugerville (Texas) Weiss four-star wide receiver Adrian Wilson (6-2, 165) both having strong individual outings.

Wilson is the No. 85 overall prospect and No. 14 wideout in 2025, while Louis is the No. 182 overall prospect and No. 17 running back in the class. Louis was offered last May, but Wilson has yet to receive an offer. Given the attention that Hartline paid to him, it may not be long before an offer is on the table, and Ohio State would be hard to beat for Wilson, who committed to TCU on June 25.

"Ohio State's been my dream school, so if I got the opportunity to go here, this would probably be where I go," Wilson said. "I'm just trying to get that opportunity right now."

Louis was similarly impressed with Ohio State, hoping to stand out among a crowd-

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

The big news emanating from the OSU sports scene was the eligibility status of the incoming freshman class. Toledo Rogers lineman Corey Pargo (6-3, 280) was ineligible for the season, according to NCAA guidelines, failing to meet minimum standards on his entrance exam.

Cornerback Buster Howe (6-0, 180), a Zanesville product and Ohio's Mr. Football, was still awaiting results of his test, which was taken June 11. Tony Goodgame (6-2, 230), a fullback from Roxbury, N.J., achieved a passing test score, even though he didn't take the test until May, and Patrick Rogan (6-2, 218), an outside linebacker from Urbana, Ohio, corrected a problem with his core curriculum and also would be eligible.

30 Years Ago — 1993

Ohio State head coach John Cooper was already focusing on ways to get his team to the Rose Bowl for the first time in almost a decade.

But while Cooper was busy formulating game plans that would get the Buckeyes to Pasadena, he was also huddling with new recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff, trying to design a formula for keeping the best high school talent in Ohio from going elsewhere to play college football.

The previous year, Ohio provided a good crop of solid Division I prospects, and seemingly every college in the country came to the Buckeye State to mine talent. As a result – as happened frequently – OSU was unable to keep every player it wanted to sign.

This season, the state was packed with talent again with at least a half-dozen players expected as the early favorites to contend for "Mr. Football" honors.

The state's top offensive lineman was tackle Orlando Pace (6-8, 300, 5.0) out of Sandusky. A starter at both offensive and defensive tackle the previous season, Pace was being compared favorably to current OSU lineman Korey Stringer. He ran extremely well, bench pressed in excess of 300 pounds, and averaged 18 points and 20 rebounds the previous season in basketball. He had been named to virtually every preseason All-American team and figured to make quite a few postseason squads as well.

25 Years Ago — 1998

Although it did not net any of the verbal commitments it had in years past, Cooper said his summer football camp was still a smashing success.

Between the three sessions of camp and the June 26 seven-on-seven tournament, the OSU coaching staff hosted in the neighborhood of roughly 2,300 players.

"This was the best camp we've ever had in terms of numbers, the quality of the people, the instruction and the organization," Cooper said. "The coaches did a nice job offensively, defensively and with the fundamental drills."

"For the players, it was a chance to come in and learn about our program and our system. They get to come in and see our facilities." There were a number of talented players from across the country

in attendance, topped by Franklin Lakes (N.J.) Ramapo quarterback Chris Simms (6-5, 210), Kalamazoo (Mich.) Loy Norrix linebacker T.J. Duckett (6-3, 240, 4.55) and Houston Lamar safety Gerome Sapp (6-0, 190, 4.5).

20 Years Ago — 2003

A record 3,800 campers attended one of the various sessions of the Ohio State football summer camp, up from an estimate of 3,000 a year ago.

"I think a lot of it is due to (the national championship)," said OSU recruiting coordinator Bill Conley, who served as the camp director. "But it just keeps getting bigger every year. The numbers keep going up every year."

Of course, OSU was hopeful that the camp would be a benefit for the Buckeyes on signing day. They welcomed in all five of the state's top five prospects for the final day of the advanced camp. Plus, they secured one verbal commitment in West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West offensive lineman Steve Rehring (6-8, 320, 5.3) and neared another with Columbus Independence running back Erik Haw (5-11, 210, 4.21).

15 Years Ago — 2008

While on hand June 20 for Ohio State's annual one-day senior advanced camp, Dublin (Ohio) Scioto cornerback Bradley McDougald (6-1, 190) had no grasp of the big picture.

On hand simply to go through drills under the direction of the OSU coaches, McDougald would wind up being one car in what was a recruiting train that was chugging at a rapid pace in Columbus.

"If there was a buzz, I didn't hear anything about it," he told BSB. "We went down there and we all liked what we saw at the same time and we got along with each other real well as if we were going to be future teammates. I think everybody just liked it and was ready to be a Buckeye."

Ohio State entered the camp with 17 verbal commitments, including two gained in June, then landed six more in a five-day span beginning June 20, including Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway four-star cornerback Corey Brown (6-0, 189) and Naples, Fla., four-star running back Carlos Hyde (6-0, 230).

10 Years Ago — 2013

If it seemed Ohio State's 2014 recruiting class was coming together slowly at the beginning of June, head coach Urban Meyer proved there was never any real reason to fret.

That's because the Buckeyes picked up five verbal commitments in June – four of which came in the span of a week – and all of a sudden the class Meyer had assembled in 2014 was as impressive as any in the country.

Ohio State earned a verbal commitment from Buckner (Ky.) Oldham County kicker Sean Nuernberger (6-2, 220) on June 11 to break a commitment-less spell that had lasted for nearly a month. This time, there wouldn't be another drought.

Meyer struck again June 20 when he landed a pledge from defensive end Jalyn Holmes (6-5, 235) of Norfolk (Va.) Lake Taylor,

which started a wave of momentum that carried over to the following day when quarterback Stephen Collier (6-4, 210) of Leesburg (Ga.) Lee County issued his commitment to the Buckeyes.

After Collier's pledge, Ohio State added Indianapolis Cathedral wide receiver Terry McLaurin (6-0, 175) to its class June 23 before finishing out the month with a bang by grabbing one of the premier offensive tackles in the country in Jamarco Jones (6-5, 285) of Chicago De La Salle on June 27.

Five Years Ago — 2018

Ohio State locked up the No. 8 overall prospect in the 2020 recruiting class when Cincinnati St. Xavier five-star offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. committed June 28. He chose OSU from a lengthy offer list that included schools such as Alabama, Clemson, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State and many others.

The 6-7, 285-pound Johnson had been on Ohio State's recruiting radar since Dec. 8 when he received an offer from his home-state school during an unofficial visit to campus. He made multiple return trips to Columbus with the most recent coming on the weekends of March 30 and April 14.

Johnson was the second-best offensive tackle in the nation and was the top-rated player from the state of Ohio in the 2020 cycle. He gave Ohio State two commitments at offensive tackle to that point in the 2020 haul, joining Marietta, Ga., four-star Jake Wray (6-5, 290) – the younger brother of OSU freshman tackle Max Wray.

Johnson had football pedigree as well. His father, Paris Johnson Sr., earned first-team All-MAC honors as a strong safety at Miami (Ohio). Johnson Sr. was a fifth-round selection of the Arizona Cardinals in the 1999 NFL draft. He also played for the Miami Dolphins, Carolina Panthers and Dallas Cowboys.

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State, in a matter of three days from June 20-22, earned commitments from three top-50 wide receivers, cementing wide receivers coach Brian Hartline's status as an elite recruiter and establishing one of the greatest four-man receiver classes in not just Ohio State history, but throughout the annals of college football.

The festivities began with Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 185), the No. 28 overall prospect and the No. 3 wide receiver in 2023, who committed to the Buckeyes on June 20.

The next day, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star wideout Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190) ended any speculation by committing to the Buckeyes that afternoon.

With the cancellation of Rolesville, N.C., four-star Noah Rogers' (6-2, 180) official visit the weekend of June 17 due to travel issues, it didn't appear that a commitment would be imminent, even if he was viewed as an eventual take for Ohio State's class.

But Rogers, on the afternoon of June 22, committed to Ohio State to give the Buckeyes their third top-50 wide receiver in the 2023 class. He was the No. 50 overall player and No. 9 wide receiver in the class.

ASK AN ANALYST

With BuckeyeScoop's Bill Greene

June was a big recruiting month for Ohio State, landing three prospects. Starting off with West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star safety Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185), what do you see in terms of his skill set?

"I like him at safety. I don't think he's Buford, Ga. five-star KJ Bolden (6-1, 185) or Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188). I feel like they need one of those two guys. They're going to take two safeties in this class, at least, and you need to add to McClain. He's a good complementary player, but I don't think he's one of the big guns that they're going to need at safety."

One of the big guns they did land in June was Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177), winning a recruiting battle with Michigan to get him. How big was his commitment for the Buckeyes, and what does he bring to the table?

"It's huge. If you look at what they put out on the field last year in terms of coverage, they were not very good. (Former Ohio State corner) Cam Brown's career is over, he didn't get drafted, which is a direct hint (from the NFL). It's not like having Jeff Okudah and Shaun Wade and Damon Arnette. The NFL is telling you what you had on the field last year."

"Bryce West can cover. He's smart as heck. He comes from a great family. There's just so much to like about him. I love the fact that he can sink his hips, change direction. If you want to play man-to-man – and (Ohio State defensive coordinator) Jim Knowles does – you want Bryce West on the field rather than the guys they had out there last year, who should not be put in a position to play man-to-man. They just couldn't do it."

"But Bryce West can cover, man. He can cover anybody. So I love getting him. It's huge for what they want to do defensively."

Cleveland Glenville four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215), the last of the team's three June commitments, stands out with his physicality and athleticism on film. What do you see in him?

"He's a big, strong, long athlete that hasn't really developed yet. I don't think he's a guy that will step on the field as a true freshman and be an impact player, but he's a guy that they're taking and hoping that they can develop him as a player."

"The skill set is pretty impressive. If you see him at a camp and his height, weight, 40-yard dash time, change of direction drill, the cone drill, it's all really impressive. So I think the raw skills are there. It's just that you're going to have to bring it out of him, develop him."

Glenville has produced three Ohio State commitments in the past two classes (West and Witten, plus freshman linebacker Arvell Reese) after what had been a bit of a dry spell. Can you contextualize the importance of that pipeline re-emerging for Ohio State?

"It's huge. There was a drop-off, but (Glenville coach) Ted Ginn Sr. went through a near-death experience, surviving pancreatic cancer. The odds of surviving that are astronomically against you. So there were some down years there, but it was mainly because his health really just didn't allow him to be Ted Ginn. He was more concerned with staying alive, and that probably took away from his football focus."

"Now, he's a picture of health when you see him. He looks great, and the guys are flowing back to Glenville again. It's huge for Ohio State because he loves Ohio State, and he doesn't make any bones about it. He really feels that an Ohio kid who has an Ohio State offer should stay in-state, play for Ohio State, live in Ohio, develop the contacts that you will at Ohio State. When Glenville is good, it really helps Ohio State."

Outside of the commitments, June was a huge official visit month for the Buckeyes, and they appeared to hit home runs with a lot of top targets. Generally, it seems that visits have gone better for Ohio State this year. Is that the sense you get, and what adjustments have the coaching staff made to facilitate that?

"Last year, if you look at that defensive staff, Perry Eliano, Tim Walton and Jim Knowles were all brand-new. (Offensive line coach) Justin Frye was brand-new. They got hired after the bowl game, so it's kind of tough at that point to establish relationships and build the foundation of your recruiting class."

"When I looked at things last year, I was willing to give the new guys a pass in recruiting, just because they had such a late start. The people they were going against had six months of developing relationships ahead of them. That's not the case this year, and we might be seeing that."

"But it's too soon right now. I try not to get hyped about all the good visits, because the kids they're trying to recruit, they're visiting everywhere. They leave those visits, they all say the same thing, 'It was a great visit, the coaches are great.' So you've got to land them. It's good that you're in the mix for Buford, Ga. five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 255) and Washington (D.C.) Friendship Collegiate Academy five-star defensive end Dylan Stewart (6-5, 235) and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star linebacker Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-3, 230). It's great that you're in the mix for those guys. But you've got to land them. Coming in second doesn't do you any good in recruiting."

"So I'd agree that they're set up to finish with a great class. They're right where they want to be with these kids. Now they've got to close on them and you've got to get them. Especially on the defensive side, they've got their work cut out for them right now. They've got to get some big hits."

ed group of running backs vying for limited spots in the 2025 class. Beyond improving on the field, he's been using his time at camp to grow closer to Alford.

"A lot of me and coach Tony Alford's conversations are more of just getting to know each other," Louis said. "It's not all football based, just getting to know how he is a person, how he is as a human, as a father, and how he will be able to change my life off the field, not just on the field, and build me to be the man that I want to be."

Noland Impresses At Elite 11 Finals

Noland, who committed to Ohio State in April, turned in an impressive performance at the Elite 11 Finals from June 15-17 and was named one of the country's Elite 11 quarterbacks.

Noland competed alongside several talented quarterbacks – including Carlsbad, Calif., five-star Julian Sayin (6-1, 195), who is committed to Alabama and won MVP for the event, and Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School four-star Jady Davis (6-1, 202), who is committed to Michigan – and was able to stand out from the pack, impressing in all three days of competition.

On the first day of competition, Noland finished as the day's third-ranked quarterback, completing 17 of his 20 passing attempts and finishing eighth in a competition that measured a quarterback's velocity and release time. He was the third-ranked signal caller on the second day as well, completing 15 of his 20 passes and finishing eighth in an accuracy challenge.

Noland wrapped up work at the Elite 11 on the third day ahead of his official visit to Ohio State, and he was named the third-best quarterback at the Elite 11 by 247Sports and the fifth-best quarterback by On3.

Noland is the No. 34 overall prospect and fourth-ranked quarterback in the class, and he is the fourth Ohio State quarterback in recent years – including C.J. Stroud, Kyle McCord and Devin Brown – to participate in the event.

Prospects Announcing Commitments In July, August

With the next issue of BSB – our annual Football Preview – not mailing out until late August, there are plenty of prospects to keep an eye on between now and then who have either set a commitment date or are expected to commit in the next month or two.

Beginning with prospects who have announced commitment dates, that list includes Lightfoot on July 3, shortly after BSB went to press; Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star wide receiver Elijah Moore (6-4, 190) on July 4; Lockhart on July 6; Aaron Scott on July 30; Bolden on Aug. 5; Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 255) on Aug. 22; and Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star wide receiver Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 175), a 2025 prospect, on July 22.

Ohio State is currently considered the favorite for Houston, Lightwood and Lockhart, with Florida State on top for Moore. Scott's decision is expected to come down to Ohio State and Michigan, with the Buckeyes viewed as having a slight lead coming out of Scott's official visits to both programs. Ffrench, meanwhile, is deciding between Alabama, Florida State, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Penn State.

As for Bolden, he is considered a toss-up between Georgia and Ohio State. Considering that Bolden is the No. 6 overall prospect and top-ranked safety in 2024, it would be a massive addition for the Buckeyes to steal Bolden out of his home state of Georgia,

and Ohio State – including Eliano, who is Bolden's cousin – has given Bolden plenty to think about.

Prospects who are expected to decide in the coming weeks, at least as BSB was going to press, but have not set a date include West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial four-star offensive tackle Guerby Lambert (6-6, 280) and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star linebacker Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-3, 230). Ohio State made a strong impression on Viliamu-Asa during his official visit from June 23-25 and potentially leads in his recruitment, though Lambert is viewed as a lean toward Notre Dame.

Other prospects expected to announce in July or August include five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) and four-star cornerback Zabien Brown (6-0, 180), both from Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei, as well as Nashville (Tenn.) Lipscomb Academy four-star linebacker Edwin Spillman (6-1, 216) and Washington (D.C.) Friendship Collegiate Academy five-star defensive end Dylan Stewart (6-5, 235).

Baker or Stewart are the likeliest to end up in Ohio State's class, though it remains an uphill battle for Baker, with Georgia, Texas and USC all vying for his services, but Stewart is considered a lean toward Ohio State. The Buckeyes are not considered in the lead for any of the other prospects, with Brown leaning toward USC and Spillman being heavily recruited by Tennessee, but Ohio State is still among the top choices for all.

While a commitment may not be on the immediate horizon for other prospects, some have stated they intend to commit before their senior seasons of high school football begin, including St. Louis (Mo.) Christian Brothers College four-star wide receiver Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190), who is con-

sidered a lean toward the Buckeyes.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Just a single non-camp offer was issued in recent weeks, going out to Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Kevyn Humes (5-11, 185) in 2025. Humes later included Ohio State among his top schools along with Alabama, Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Notre Dame, Oregon and Tennessee.

- A pair of Ohio State targets committed elsewhere on July 3, with Deerfield Beach, Fla., four-star defensive end Elias Rudolph (6-4, 205) headed to Michigan and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas three-star linebacker Nicholas Rodriguez (6-1, 190) pledging to Missouri. Just a few days prior, Ohio State lost out on Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star safety Jordon Johnson-Rubell (5-10, 180), who committed to Texas on July 1.

- Centerville, Ohio, three-star safety Reggie Powers (6-1, 195), who was offered by Ohio State, committed to Michigan State on June 14. He had previously visited Ohio State in the spring and was expected to return for an official visit this summer that never came to fruition.

- Jefferson, Ga., five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-2, 230) announced his commitment to Clemson on June 5 over Ohio State and others. He is the No. 16 overall prospect and second-ranked linebacker in 2024.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all BSB subscribers.

Sensabaugh Taken No. 28 Overall By Utah Jazz

Former Ohio State forward Brice Sensabaugh was selected by the Utah Jazz with the No. 28 pick in the 2023 NBA draft on June 22.

Sensabaugh, the nation's 86th-best prospect in the 2022 recruiting class, came to Columbus as a four-star recruit from Lake Highland Prep School in Orlando, Fla., where he was named Florida's Gatorade Player of the Year and Mr. Basketball as a senior.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

The 6-6, 235-pound forward quickly established himself as a capable scorer at the collegiate level, reaching double figures in points in each of his first six games. Sensabaugh's hot offensive start garnered the attention of head coach Chris Holtmann, who inserted the freshman into his starting lineup just nine games into the season.

From there, Sensabaugh emerged as one of the top freshman scorers in the nation, becoming one of the Buckeyes' lone bright spots during an otherwise disappointing season. A period of offensive struggles halted the forward's efficiency toward the end of the regular season, but Sensabaugh finished his lone collegiate campaign with a team-high 16.3 points per game, a mark that ranked third among all freshmen and fifth all-time among Ohio State first-year players.

The forward also became the first Ohio State freshman to lead his team in scoring since D'Angelo Russell netted 19.3 points per contest in the 2014-2015 season.

While Sensabaugh donned the scarlet and gray for just one season, his unique offensive skills allowed those around him, most notably his head coach, to see the potential he possessed.

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

Sensabaugh's elite scoring ability and imposing physical play allowed him to earn two Big Ten accolades in his only Buckeye season, and he earned all-freshman and third-team All-Big Ten honors. His freshman campaign was cut short by a knee injury, forcing him to miss the final two games of the Big Ten tournament, that required surgery during the offseason. The ailment also prevented him from participating in NBA pre-draft workouts until he was cleared late in the spring.

Despite the injury, the former Buckeye has received some high praise from draft experts across the sports media landscape, with some describing him as a "mini-Carmelo Anthony."

"I think he's one of the best shooters in this draft," ESPN's Jay Bilas said after Sensabaugh was selected. "He's just wired to score. He's born to score."

With Sensabaugh's No. 28 selection, Ohio State has now produced a freshman first-round draft pick for the second straight year after current San Antonio Spurs forward Malaki Branham was selected with the No. 20 overall pick in 2022.

Sensabaugh will join fellow Jazz first-round picks Taylor Hendricks and Keyonte George on a retooled roster searching for its first playoff series win since 2021.

"As a young guy, I'm just ready to come in and be a sponge and learn as much as I can as early as I can," Sensabaugh said during his introductory Jazz press conference on June 26. "Whatever they ask of me, I'm going to do. And if my role expands, then so be it. But I'm definitely going to work. I want to maximize my potential, so I don't want to settle for less than what I'm capable of."

Sueing Added To OKC Summer League Roster

Former Ohio State forward Justice Sueing will suit up for the Oklahoma City Thunder's summer league team starting July 3, agreeing to a contract to join the roster on June 23.

The longest-tenured Buckeye on last year's team, Sueing transferred to Ohio State in 2019 after two seasons at California, where he combined to average 14.1 points and 5.7 rebounds per game. Although he was forced to sit out the entire 2019-20 season due to NCAA transfer rules, Sueing made an instant impact in his redshirt-junior campaign.

Starting in each of Ohio State's 31 games in 2020-21, the Honolulu native helped lead the team to a 21-10 overall record and a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament, using his two-way skill set to rank third on the team with 10.7 points per game.

Sueing's successful redshirt-junior season was followed by a disappointing year marred with injuries. After producing 12 points and seven rebounds in the team's first two games, the 6-6 forward was forced to miss the rest of the season with an abdominal injury. The ailment continued to hamper Sueing in the offseason, preventing him from resuming basketball activities until the end of August.

Earning an extra year of eligibility due to his injury, Sueing returned to the Buckeyes in his sixth and final collegiate season. On a new-look Ohio State team that featured six freshmen and four transfers, Sueing emerged as a key leader in an inexperienced locker room, serving as a team captain for the second consecutive season.

On the court, he quickly returned to his old form. In his first game played in 360 days, Sueing netted a team-high 20 points on 8-of-14 shooting to lead the Buckeyes to a 91-53 victory in their season opener against Robert Morris.

In a difficult 16-19 campaign filled with inconsistent team play, Sueing found individual success, ranking second on the team with 12.3 points per game along with a third-best 5.2 rebounds per contest and 64 total assists.

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2024 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
John Mobley Jr.	G	6-0	150	★★★★	Mt. Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy

OSU Adds Longtime NBA Assistant Bailey As Coach

Ohio State took steps to bolster the program's coaching staff this summer, hiring longtime NBA assistant Brandon Bailey as an assistant coach in June.

Bailey, a native of Chicago, enters Columbus after spending over a decade in the NBA in the coaching and scouting ranks. His most recent coaching stint occurred last season with the Detroit Pistons, where he served as an assistant and player development coach.

Prior to his stint in Detroit, Bailey spent the majority of his NBA coaching career with the Boston Celtics, where he first joined the organization as a video intern in 2011. Bailey then worked his way up the ranks, eventually earning a position as head coach of the Celtics' G League affiliate, the Maine Red Claws, from 2017-19. He helped develop current NBA players such as Boston Celtics center Robert Williams and Sacramento Kings forward P.J. Dozier.

After two seasons with the Red Claws, Bailey found his way back into the NBA ranks, joining the Celtics as an assistant coach under Brad Stevens from 2019-21 and then as an advanced scout under Ime Udoka in 2021-22.

Bailey, who will be unable to recruit on the road for Ohio State, will bring his defensive prowess to a team that struggled to guard last season.

Ohio State's hiring of Bailey comes after a recent NCAA ruling permitted college programs to employ five assistant coaches starting July 1. Bailey will now join associate head coach Jake Diebler and full-time assistants Mike Netti and Jack Owens on Holtmann's staff, leaving room for one more full-time assistant coach.

Ohio State Solidifies Nonconference Schedule

Ohio State finalized its nonconference schedule for the upcoming men's basketball season on June 20, headlined by some notable Power Five matchups.

"This is the best and most challenging overall schedule we have put together in a few years," Holtmann said. "This is all in addition to our tremendous home slate of Big Ten opponents."

After opening the season at home against Oakland on Nov. 6, the Buckeyes will face an immediate challenge, hosting Texas A&M on Nov. 10. The Aggies, led by reigning SEC coach of the year Buzz Williams, finished in second place in the conference last season with a 15-3 record, the program's most wins in the conference since joining in 2012.

After two more home games against Merrimack on Nov. 15 and Western Michigan on Nov. 19, Ohio State will head south for the Emerald Coast Classic.

The event will be held from Nov. 24-25 at Raider Arena in Niceville, Fla., and the Buckeyes will first match up with Alabama

in the semifinal round on Nov. 24 before concluding their Emerald Coast Classic schedule on Nov. 25 with a matchup against either Oregon or Santa Clara.

Ohio State will return home to face Central Michigan on Nov. 29 and Miami (Ohio) on Dec. 5 or 6 before its next Power Five challenge, with the Buckeyes set to play in the CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 16 along with Kentucky, North Carolina and UCLA.

After a home bout against New Orleans on Dec. 21, the Buckeyes will conclude their nonconference slate with a matchup against West Virginia in Cleveland. The two teams previously met at Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse in December 2019, with the Mountaineers upsetting then-No. 2 Ohio State 67-59.

This year's version of the matchup will see a new leader guiding the Mountaineers, however, as Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame coach Bob Huggins resigned from head coaching duties on June 18 after being charged with driving under the influence a day prior. Huggins will be replaced by Josh Eilert, who was named interim head coach on June 25.

Carmen's Crew Returning To TBT

Following a one-year hiatus, Carmen's Crew will return to The Basketball Tournament stage this summer, featuring a retooled roster consisting of players from both the Thad Matta and Chris Holtmann eras.

The Ohio State men's basketball alumni team, which formed in 2017 under its original name Team Scarlet & Gray and claimed the championship in 2019, will compete in the winner-take-all, single-elimination tournament for the sixth time.

The team, which earned a No. 4 seed in the Dayton Region, will once again attempt to take home the \$1 million prize under the tutelage of former Ohio State forward and two-time consensus first-team All-American Jared Sullinger, who is entering his fourth

year as general manager and head coach.

Unlike previous years, Carmen's Crew will possess a younger roster that includes five players from the Holtmann era. Headlining the quintet of former Buckeyes is 6-8 forward Kyle Young, who will play

in his first tournament with the team after five seasons at Ohio State.

Joining Young among the recent Ohio State alumni are brothers Andre and Kaleb Wesson, who played for the Scarlet and Gray from 2017 to 2020; C.J. Jackson, who started 71 games at guard from 2016 to 2019; and Keyshawn Woods, who played just one season and made 15 starts as a graduate guard during the 2018-19 season.

According to Sullinger, this influx of



Brice Sensabaugh



Kyle Young

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

young former Buckeyes can rejuvenate a Carmen's Crew team looking to rebound from two straight disappointing tournament runs. Both the 2020 and 2021 teams failed to make it out of their region, with the 2020 squad falling in the first round as the tournament's No. 1 overall seed.

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

Although Sullinger is losing familiar faces from the Matta era such as Aaron Craft, Jon Diebler and David Lighty, he will welcome back the team's unquestioned leader and most productive player, former Ohio State forward and two-time second-team All-Big Ten selection William Buford.

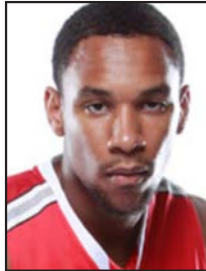
Buford, who currently ranks tied for third place on Ohio State's all-time scoring list after starting for Matta from 2008-2012, spearheaded Carmen's Crew through their 2019 championship run, claiming TBT MVP and knocking down a game-winning free throw in the team's 66-60 championship-game victory against the Golden Eagles.

Aside from Buford, former Buckeye center and fellow Matta disciple Trevor Thompson will also join the roster. Thompson started 48 games for Ohio State from 2015-2017, averaging 8.5 points and 7.0 rebounds a game.

Carmen's Crew will also welcome four

players from outside of the Ohio State fraternity: Columbus native Javon Bess, who played four collegiate seasons at Michigan State and Saint Louis; Malik Dime, who played at Washington from 2015-2017; Jalen Tate, the brother of former Buckeye forward and current Houston Rocket Jae'Sean Tate; and Scott Thomas, an Ashley, Ohio, native who started 93 games for Bowling Green from 2008-2012.

Carmen's Crew will look to start their latest run at a TBT championship on July 26 at University of Dayton Arena when they take on the No. 5 seed in the Dayton Region, Team Overtime, in the first round, featuring a roster consisting of former and current players on the professional developmental league Overtime Elite.



Jared Sullinger

Buckeyes Look To Add In 2024 Class

Entering the summer, Ohio State has claimed just one commitment for the class of 2024, landing Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy four-star guard John Mobley Jr. (6-0, 150) in Oct. 2022. With many top prospects still on the board, Holtmann and his staff have begun to show increasing interest in some notable players.

Headlining the group of 2024 prospects who have maintained contact with Ohio State is Milwaukee (Wis.) Lutheran five-star small forward Kon Knueppel (6-5,

205). Currently ranked as the nation's 21st-best player and the top player in Wisconsin, Knueppel made a visit to Ohio State from June 12-13.

Knueppel has gained steam in his recruitment this summer, making additional visits to Louisville, Marquette and Wisconsin in June. The rising senior holds 15 offers, a list that also includes Alabama, Michigan State, USC, Virginia and Wisconsin, among others.

Knueppel, who averaged 19.7 points and 9.2 rebounds his junior season, said Holtmann and his coaching staff have liked what they have seen from him so far.

"For them, they see me as a culture fit," Knueppel told 247Sports' Dushawn London before his visit. "They like how I play the right way, play hard and do the little stuff. That's what they want in their program going forward."

In addition to Knueppel, the Buckeyes also welcomed another 2024 prospect to Columbus this June in 6-10, 215-pound four-star Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep center Aiden Sherrell.

Sherrell, who is the nation's 36th-best prospect, completed an official visit with the Buckeyes on June 11. The Detroit native, who has visited Alabama, Michigan State, Oklahoma and UNLV, said he was impressed with what Ohio State had to offer.

"Everything went well," Sherrell told 247Sports on June 12. "I enjoyed getting to see the campus and talk with the coaches about the plan they have for me. They let their young guys play, and they develop guys very well. I could see myself playing there."

Sherrell will spend the summer playing

for the Nike EYBL's Vegas Elite, where he shares the floor with Mobley.

Ohio State's search for added 2024 talent does not stop at Sherrell and Knueppel. The Buckeyes are interested in Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island Lutheran five-star forward V.J. Edgcombe (6-5, 180), who hails from the same high school as current Buckeyes forward Zed Key. Ohio State extended an offer to Edgcombe on Feb. 6, but the rising senior has since seen a jump in interest since earning the National Interscholastic Basketball Conference Player of the Year award and securing the league's scoring title at 17.3 points a game.

Edgcombe now holds 17 offers, a list that includes Alabama, Indiana, Miami (Fla.) and Villanova, among others.

To help make up for the losses of four-star centers James Brown (6-9, 210) and Tyler McKinley (6-9, 220) from Branson (Mo.) Link Academy and Dayton Centerville four-star guard Jonathan Powell (6-6, 170), who chose North Carolina, Cincinnati and Xavier over the Buckeyes, respectively, Ohio State has extended a new offer this summer.

On June 26, the Buckeyes offered a scholarship to Houston PSAT-XEA Academy four-star center Trent Burns (7-2, 210). Ranked the nation's 19th-best center and Texas' fifth-best player, Burns has shown an ability to excel as a stretch-five center, making him an intriguing target for several Power Five programs.

In addition to Ohio State, Burns also earned offers from Penn State, Purdue and Texas A&M in June, making visits to both the Boilermakers and Aggies' facilities.

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Buckeyes Add Trio Of Verbal Pledges In June

The Ohio State women's basketball added a trio of 2024 commitments since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, earning verbal pledges from Concord (N.C.) J.M. Robinson four-star forward Ella Hobbs (6-4); Buford, Ga., four-star combo guard Ava Watson (5-7); and Finnish center Elsa Lemmilä (6-6).

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Hobbs was up first, committing to Ohio State on June 11. According to ESPN, she is the 83rd-ranked prospect in the country, and she selected the Buckeyes over Miami (Fla.), Michigan, North Carolina and Virginia Tech.

Hobbs started her career with her hometown J.M. Robinson but played this past season at 1 of 1 Prep in Charlotte, where she averaged 16.1 points, 6.1 rebounds and 1.4 blocks per game. For her senior season, Hobbs will transfer back to J.M. Robinson, playing alongside her younger sister, Camri, who is a 6-1 wing in the 2026 recruiting class.

Watson, meanwhile, issued her pledge to the Buckeyes on June 17. Considered a four-star prospect and the No. 47 recruit in the nation, according to ESPN, Watson chose Ohio State over her other top schools, including Florida State, Georgia, Louisville and Texas A&M.

She averaged 24.0 points, 6.0 rebounds, 5.2 assists and 4.3 steals last season for Buford, helping lead the Wolves to the state semifinals and earning MaxPreps Junior All-American status as an honorable mention. An accomplished three-point shooter for Buford, Watson displays prowess operating in transition and working on the defensive end, which makes her a strong fit with Ohio State's style of play that led to an Elite Eight

berth last season.

As for Lemmilä, the 6-6 prospect holds dual Finnish and United States citizenship. She plays for Tapiolan Honka, a basketball club in Espoo, Finland, and she averaged 15.8 points, 10.0 rebounds, 3.4 assists and 2.4 blocks in 27.9 minutes per game last season while shooting 54.7 percent from the field. She appeared in 27 games with 16 double-doubles and had a double-double in 10 of her final 11 games of the season.

She also played with Finland in the U18 European Championship last year, averaging 12.9 points, 9.0 rebounds and 2.0 blocks in six games, with Finland going 3-3 at the event.

Center has been a position of trouble in some recent years for Ohio State, with a lack of consistent playmakers at that spot since Dorka Juhasz transferred to UConn. But the Buckeyes are looking to bolster that spot with the addition of incoming freshman Faith Carson (6-4) as well as the transfer addition of Taiyier Parks (6-3) from Michigan State.

At 6-6, Lemmilä is expected to be the tallest player on Ohio State's roster since center Lisa Blair, also standing at 6-6, played for the Buckeyes from 2012-15.

The trio are joined in Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class by Cincinnati West Clermont forward Seini Hicks (5-11), who committed to the Buckeyes in April. Hobbs and Lemmilä figure to factor in at the post for Ohio State, while Hicks can operate at either forward spot, with Watson likely to step in at shooting guard.

Big Ten Announces Conference Slate For Upcoming Season

The Big Ten announced on June 22 the full slate of conference opponents for every women's basketball team for the upcoming 2023-24 season.

Ohio State will play home-and-away series against Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Michigan State and Penn State while hosting Nebraska, Rutgers, Wisconsin and Indiana, and traveling to play Illinois, Purdue, Northwestern and Minnesota. The Buckeyes finished fourth in the conference last season, posting a 12-6 record in Big Ten play and a 31-7 record overall, making the team's first run to the Elite Eight since 1993.

Dates and times for these games, as well as Ohio State's full nonconference slate, will be announced later this summer.

OSU Reports 81.9 Percent Increase In Attendance

Fans flocked to The Schottenstein Center to check out the Ohio State women's basketball team this past season, helping the Buckeyes post one of the largest year-to-year attendance increases in the country.

After totaling 52,385 attendees (3,274.1 per game in 16 contests) in the 2021-22 season, Ohio State drew 101,233 attendees (5,954.9 per game for 17 contests) this past season, marking a 93.2 percent growth in total attendance and an 81.9 percent improvement in per game attendance.

The 5,954.9 fans per game is the highest mark for the program since averaging 6,874 fans in 17 games during the 2005-06 season at Value City Arena. The highest benchmark in program history remains the 8,411.0 fans

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2024 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.				
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School/Previous Team
Ella Hobbs	F	6-4	★★★★	Concord (N.C.) J.M. Robinson
Elsa Lemmilä	C	6-6		Espoo (Finland) Tapiolan Honka
Ava Watson	G	5-7	★★★★	Buford, Ga.

averaged at St. John Arena during 1993-94.

Ohio State's most-attended game of the season was the team's 83-72 loss to Iowa on Jan. 23, which had 9,955 fans pack into the arena and was considered a sellout. It marked the 10th-largest crowd to take in a women's basketball game at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes also had nine games this season surpass 6,000 fans in attendance. These numbers are in stark contrast to the most-attended game of the 2021-22 season, which saw 5,683 fans in a 59-42 win over Wisconsin on Feb. 20. Half of Ohio State's 16 home games in that season had under 3,000 fans in attendance.

Mikesell Makes WNBA Debut

After being signed by the Atlanta Dream, former Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell made her formal WNBA debut on June 9 in a 106-83 loss to the New York Liberty.

Mikesell played five minutes off the bench, finishing with six points on 2-of-3 shooting, with all of her attempts coming from beyond the arc. She also added an assist for the evening.

Mikesell was taken with the 13th overall pick in the 2023 WNBA draft by the Indiana Fever but was cut just prior to the season beginning. She had appeared in one preseason game for the Fever prior to being cut but was able to catch on with the Dream to continue her professional career. The Dream are off to a 6-8 start through June 30 and have been among the WNBA's worst three-point shooting teams, so Mikesell's addition could be an important factor.

In her first five games for the Dream, Mikesell averaged 3.4 points and 2.0 assists per game on 50.0 percent shooting, including a 42.9 percent clip from deep.

During her time at Ohio State, Mikesell – who transferred to the Buckeyes from Oregon – was a two-time first-team All-Big Ten selection, and in her final season at Ohio State, she made the preseason and midseason watch lists for the Ann Meyers-Drysdale Award, Naismith Trophy and Wooden Award.

Mitchell Earns Dawn Staley Community Award

Former Ohio State guard and current Indiana Fever star Kelsey Mitchell was named the recipient of the Dawn Staley Community Leadership Award on June 5, honoring her for her positive impact and dedication to her community.

The award – which honors WNBA Hall of Famer and South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley – recognizes a WNBA player who “best exemplifies the characteristics of a leader in the community where they work or live.” Mitchell was recognized for her work in the Cincinnati community, where she lived prior to attending Ohio State, as well as in Indianapolis, where she has played since 2018. She also founded the KelzHoop Foundation,

which helps support student-athletes with limited opportunities in competitive sports.

“As a player in the WNBA, we are always pushing to be recognized for what we can accomplish both on and off the court,” Mitchell said. “The Dawn Staley Community Leadership Award is the pinnacle of what it means to be ‘more than an athlete.’ It is upon all of us to inspire the next generation to be the best people they can possibly be throughout all of our communities. I will carry the responsibility as a Dawn Staley Community Leadership Award winner with immense pride.”

Mitchell was selected by a committee of WNBA players. As part of her honor, the WNBA is making a \$10,000 donation to the KelzHoop Foundation on behalf of Mitchell.

Mitchell made more headlines on the court after receiving the award, hitting a game-winner for the Fever in a 92-90 win over the Chicago Sky on June 15. The shot prompted memories on Twitter from some former Ohio State football players who participated in pickup games with Mitchell during her time with the Buckeyes.

“Funny story,” wrote linebacker Jerome Baker. “Freshman year at Ohio State I was at the rec (center) with some of the older guys and she was there also. They told me to guard Kelsey. I was thinking it would be an easy guard. She proceeded to cook me the WHOLE GAME. I don't think I ever played basketball again at OSU.”

Quarterback Cardale Jones said, “Remember it like it was yesterday,” while defensive end Tyvis Powell recalled, “That's funny because luckily she was on my team when I played with her. And she threw me one of the coldest dimes I've ever received!”

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State will open the season on Nov. 6, set to face USC at T-Mobile Arena in Paradise, Nev. The Buckeyes have yet to announce any other nonconference opponents, though they are expected to play at Tennessee, as well as participate in the Baha Mars Pink Flamingo Championship from Nov. 20-22.

- Ohio State guard Celeste Taylor, who transferred to the team this offseason from Duke, was selected to represent Team USA in the U24 3x3 Women's Series. The three-on-three team will compete this summer to qualify for the 2023 FIBA 3x3 Women's Series Final from Sept. 16-17 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

- Training camp begins on July 2 in Colorado Springs, Colo., for Ohio State forward Cotie McMahon and the rest of the USA Basketball U19 Women's National Team. After training camp concludes, the team will compete from July 15-23 in Madrid, Spain.



COURTESY OF AVA WATSON
TOPFLIGHT TALENT - Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff added significant talent to his 2024 recruiting class in June, including Buford, Ga., four-star shooting guard Ava Watson (pictured).

Eight Big Ten Hoopers Selected In NBA Draft

The 2023 NBA draft was held June 22 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., and five Big Ten basketball players heard their names called in the first round, with another three coming off the board during the second round.

BIG TEN NOTES Andy Anders

Michigan was the first Big Ten school to have a player taken, with guard Jett Howard going 11th overall to the Orlando Magic. Howard – the son of former NBA All-Star and Michigan head coach Juwan Howard – was a one-and-done in Ann Arbor, declaring for the draft after his freshman season. He averaged 14.2 points, 2.8 rebounds and 2.0 assists in his lone season with the Wolverines, shooting 36.8 percent from three.

Howard was followed by teammate and point guard Kobe Bufkin at 15th overall, who will play for the Atlanta Hawks in his rookie campaign. After coming off the bench as a freshman, Bufkin made waves in his second season at Michigan by scoring 14.0 points per contest and adding 2.9 assists.

Indiana point guard Jalen Hood-Schifino heard his name called two picks later, going 17th overall to the Los Angeles Lakers. Another one-and-done, Hood-Schifino was the Big Ten Freshman of the Year last season, averaging 13.5 points, 4.1 rebounds and 3.7 assists.

Iowa power forward Kris Murray went 23rd overall to the Portland Trail Blazers, concluding his three-year career with the Hawkeyes. He averaged the most points last season of any Big Ten cager taken in the draft, collecting 20.2 points per game for Iowa.

Ohio State forward Brice Sensabaugh rounded out the Big Ten's first-round selections, going to the Utah Jazz at No. 28 (more on page 34).

In the second round, Penn State saw point guard Jalen Pickett taken 32nd overall by the Indiana Pacers, and shooting guard Seth Lundy went 46th overall to the Atlanta Hawks. Indiana power forward Trayce Jackson-Davis finished things off, going 57th to the Washington Wizards.

Iowa Guard Clark Wins Honda Cup

The trophy shelf of Iowa women's basketball point guard Caitlin Clark is going to collapse at this rate, after she collected yet another award on June 26.

Clark was named the recipient of the Honda Cup as the Collegiate Woman Athlete of the Year, which was announced at the Collegiate Women Sports Awards. Clark is the first Big Ten women's basketball player ever to receive the award.

The All-American averaged 27.8 points – her third consecutive season averaging at least 26.0 points – with 8.6 assists per game, shooting 38.9 percent from three. She guided Iowa to a conference champi-

onship with her play, which almost pales in comparison to her performance in the NCAA tournament. At that stage, Clark scored more points than any player ever has in an NCAA tournament during Iowa's six-game run, including both men's and women's collegiate basketball, tallying 191 points for the tourney.

She also recorded the most assists in a single NCAA tournament in women's basketball history, gathering 60 helpers over the span of her team's NCAA runner-up run. She came one assist shy of equaling the men's record as well, bested only by former UNLV guard Mark Wade's 61 in five games in 1987.

Clark – who is returning for her senior season with the Hawkeyes – swept every national player of the year award following the season, winning the most prestigious honor in the sport, the Wooden Award, along with the Naismith Trophy, Wade Trophy, Associated Press Player of the Year and USBWA National Player of the Year.

"I think she's the most phenomenal basketball player in America," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said during the NCAA tournament. "I just don't think there's anybody like her, in so many regards – not only scoring but passing the ball, handling the ball."

Clark, Edey Named Athletes Of The Year

Speaking of Clark's overstuffed trophy case, she also took home honors as the 2022-23 Big Ten Female Athlete of the Year. And in a sweep from the sport of basketball, the Big Ten Male Athlete of the Year was Purdue men's basketball center Zach Edey.

Edey, much like Clark on the women's side, swept every major national player of the year honor, including the prestigious Wooden Award. He posted 22.3 points per game, dominated the Big Ten in rebounds, with 12.9 boards per game while only one other player – Jackson-Davis – averaged double digits with 10.8 rebounds. The

mark was good enough to place Edey second nationally in rebounding, trailing only Kentucky center Oscar Tshiebwe (13.7 rebounds).

Edey had previously been named Big Ten Player of the Year, helping guide Purdue to both a Big Ten regular-season crown and tournament title.

There was a chance for him to be selected in the 2023 NBA draft, and he tested those waters for a while but ultimately decided to return to the Boilermakers for his senior season in 2023-24 after going through the scouting process.

Nebraska Softball Gets Star Pitcher From Portal

A two-time national champion and All-American is being added to the roster of Nebraska's softball team for next season.

Former Oklahoma pitcher Jordy Bahl announced her intention to become a Cornhusker on June 15, citing a desire to play closer to home. Originally from Papillion, Neb., she grew up within an hour of Nebraska's campus.

"After two years of wonderful memories, I'm excited for two more representing the Cornhuskers," Bahl said in a social media post. "This state, these people and this 'N' are all things I'm excited, proud and thankful to be a part of."

Bahl was the ace on the staff of the Oklahoma softball team, which won both the last two national championships with Bahl on the roster, as well as the one the year prior to Bahl's arrival in 2021. In two seasons she held an ERA of just 0.99, posting a 44-2 record with 15 complete-game shutouts and five saves in relief. She netted 397 strikeouts during the two campaigns as opponents managed a meager .153 batting average against her.

She originally committed to play at Nebraska during her recruitment before decommitting and heading to Norman, Okla. After two successful seasons, however, she

made the decision to come to Lincoln after all.

"I've always been a big homebody, so even in my freshman year I had pretty strong feelings of homesickness," Bahl said at a press conference on June 21. "But pretty much every freshman does, so I was just like, 'Every freshman is going to be homesick.' My second year, instead of those feelings going away they continued to worsen. So that's when I started knowing, I guess, that my heart was always at home (in Nebraska)."

Nebraska finished 36-22 this season with a 13-10 mark in conference play, suffering a 5-2 loss in the regional round of the NCAA tournament to Oklahoma State.

Four Future BIG QBs Compete In Elite 11 Finals

Along with Ohio State commit and Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195), three additional quarterbacks who are committed to play football at Big Ten schools competed at the Elite 11 Finals from June 15-17.

The most notable was the Michigan commit who will rival Noland for the duration of their collegiate careers: five-star Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School prospect Jady Davis (6-1, 195). Davis was an Ohio State target at one time but chose the Wolverines on March 31 and further showcased his skills at the competition.

Penn State commit Ethan Grunkemeyer (6-2, 190), a three-star from Ohio State's back yard at Lewis Center (Ohio) Olen-tangy, also earned recognition as part of the Elite 11. Three-star Nebraska pledge Daniel Kaelin (6-2, 198) of Bellevue (Neb.) West also made the list after his performance at the camp.

Carlsbad, Calif., five-star Julian Sayin (6-1, 195) – who is committed to Alabama – took home the Elite 11 MVP.



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Smith's Statements On Michigan Hit The Mark

Have you ever been right and wrong at the same time? It's not easy to accomplish, but it can be done. Proof?

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Gene Smith, in an early June appearance on a podcast for Eleven Warriors, was asked about playoff expansion, night games at Ohio Stadium and the elimination of divisions, which means that there is potential for Ohio State and Michigan to play in back-to-back weeks. He was also asked about the mood in Columbus after the Wolverines had taken the last two contests in the rivalry, and he said something interesting.

"It's so funny, everybody's so focused on just one game," Smith said. "We were basically one point away from being in the national championship game, and I think had we got that two points we needed to convert and ultimately played TCU, I feel confident we would have performed well and won a national championship. I'm not so sure about all this chatter."

He is 100 percent correct, of course. At least to sensible Ohio State fans. There is a faction out there – and this is going all the way back to when I was just Facts Boy – that believes beating Michigan makes any season successful. While that's incorrect, it is out there. Think about it – there are some who would rather go 8-4 but beat the Wolverines than go 11-1 and lose to them. Really?

The goal every year is to win the national championship. First and foremost, teams want to take home the Big Prize. Offshoots of that goal are winning your league and beating your rival. If given a choice between losing to Michigan but making the College Football Playoff or beating U-M but being left out, the former is an easy choice.

Someone recently chided me on Twitter for having that mind-set, said I must be young and not have lived through the rivalry in the 1990s. I assured him I had, but that I was more of a realist and understood that sometimes on the way to big achievements, there will be stumbles. And where the stumbles occur matter much less than how they are dealt with.

Anyway, Smith was correct in his statement – but was also wrong because that's

not something you can say out loud to Buckeye Nation. He didn't do a great job of reading the room and understandably got pushback from many on social media.

Those same people are probably thrilled with expanding the CFP, which already takes some of the shine off The Game because the loser will get a muligan every year. There won't be serious repercussions from defeat because both teams will make the 12-team field, barring an unexplainable seven- or eight-win season.

The way things are set up currently, the regular season is an every-week elimination tournament. Win and keep going. Lose once and you're on the edge. Lose twice and you're gone. That's as it should be. Expansion minimizes those factors, so if you're pro-CFP expansion, you cannot be upset about the possibility of an OSU-UM rematch in the Big Ten title game a week later because it "upsets tradition." An expanded CFP already does that.

While I don't embrace Smith's stance on the expanded CFP (he supports it), I do agree that you can't win it if you aren't in it. And if you're in it following a loss to your rival, so be it. But you have to play well every week, not just against your hated enemy.

"I haven't really talked specifically about Michigan," Smith said. "We have a lot of other games before we get to them. So right now, you're focused more on developing your roster and developing your team. ... The 'Team Up North' game won't matter a whole lot if we go over and not do what we're supposed to do (against Indiana). So, we've got to take care of business there."

Twice The Rivalry?

With USC and UCLA entering the league in 2024, the Big Ten will do away with divisions and have a 16-team free-for-all.

There will still be nine league games, but no longer will all of the strength in the conference be concentrated in one division – right now the East. There will be better conference races and more teams involved, and it could even happen that the Buckeyes and Wolverines play again just seven days after their regular-season finale. That would not be a bad thing.

Given that the league will still have Penn State, as well as the California newcomers, the OSU-UM rematch probably won't happen as often as "traditionalists" fear. According to research by the Michigan sports information department, at

least a share of the conference championship or division title has been on the line 49 times since the teams began playing the last regular-season game annually, starting in 1935. That included 24 times they decided the champion between themselves on the final Saturday of the season.

Were the new format in place since '35, the teams would have had an estimated 24 immediate rematches, including the past two seasons and eight times during the "10-Year War" from 1969-78 when Woody Hayes coached Ohio State against his former pupil Bo Schembechler at Michigan. That, however, was a different era, when OSU and U-M were clearly a cut above the rest of the conference. It's more wide-open these days, which means that while a rematch could happen, it won't be a given.

"It was important to know those two teams demonstrated through their body of work that they've earned an opportunity to compete in the championship game," Smith said of adopting that format after the league used divisional play from 2011-2023. "When you run the gantlet of the regular conference season and you end up being No. 1 and No. 2 in the standings, you've earned that right. So, I'm excited about having no divisions. I think divisions served us well in our history and our transition to this space, but now this opportunity to play a kind of semi-round robin is actually better."

More Is Sometimes Less

Smith was also asked about the Big Ten's deal with NBC, which will include a weekly Saturday night game and a few contests that will be available only on Peacock, NBC's streaming-only option. That could pose a problem for those who don't have multiple streaming options, but it sounds as though there won't be too many times when OSU will appear only on that platform.

"I don't anticipate it happening in football this year," Smith said. "Might it happen in basketball? Sure. A large majority of our contests will be linear, but you know, we might end up with some Peacock games in basketball. So, we have to be ready for that."

Smith also felt that the time was right for the conference to incorporate a streaming package into its media rights. As more leagues make at least some of their media rights streaming-exclusive – the NFL will have a Wild Card playoff game exclusive to Peacock this season as well as its weekly Thursday night regular-season games on Amazon Prime Video – Smith believes the Peacock deal will allow the Big Ten to test the streaming waters but still keep the majority of games on broadcast or cable.

"We had to get into it to some degree," he said. "We were not going into it wholesale, but we have to get into it. And so I think having a platform like NBC, for a linear partner, and then they control the Peacock part of it, gives us a chance to test the waters in that. And so I'm excited about it."

"As we play across conferences, we

need to be aware that there may be some conferences where that's the majority of their television deal. If you go out West, that might be it."

One negative Smith mentioned was that Ohio State was not going to be brought into the world of November night games. Maybe he's missed the few night games the Buckeyes have hosted, but the atmosphere for those contests is well above noon or mid-afternoon kickoffs. There is already a faction of fans who attend games who don't cheer and complain when someone stands up, and Smith apparently is concerned about how a night game will affect them.

"I always think about that couple in Canton, Ohio, who's 70-something-years-old, season-ticket holders," Smith said. "We really create a problem for them (with) how we announce our game times. But for them to have to make a decision to come to a night game the Saturday before Thanksgiving, I would prefer to take that burden off them. Normally they can come to a noon game or a 3:30 kick and get back home as opposed to trying to get a hotel room."

Here's a solution, Gene – keep the night game, let the couple sell or give their tickets to friends or family and then attend another game that is scheduled for a more agreeable time. Ohio Stadium should be an intimidating place for opponents to play but has become less so over the years due to a couple of factors – increasing prices and lack of turnover in the fan base.

While there are exceptions to every rule, most of the older fans I have seen in my more recent trips to Ohio Stadium are the ones who go because "that's what we've always done." They pay attention, but don't really get into it. Let some newbies have a chance every now and again to make the stadium electric and frightening. As it stands, it's mostly artificial noise and loud cheering only on big scoring plays.

There is also a certain cachet to playing in prime time – the game seems more important, even if it isn't. But it sounds like Smith will be hard to move off this hill.

"We will not do it in the future at home. We might do it away," he said. "If a colleague calls from another school and says, 'Hey, would you be willing to play a night game at our place?' we have to make that call. Both athletic directors have to agree on that. And so usually I would talk to Ryan (Day) and see if we're interested in doing that, and we will say yes or no."

"It depends on who it is, where it is or what time our team might get back. That always plays a role into their plan. If there's a second Saturday in November and we're somewhere and our team doesn't get back until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, that might be a problem."

What he's saying is that there is no possibility of Ohio State and USC hooking up in prime time in November, that it will be your standard-issue mid-afternoon or noon kickoff. Whoopee. Right and wrong at the same time.

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Interview Issue Offers Chance To Reflect, Reminisce

Welcome to Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual Interview Issue. It is always one of my favorites, and I hope the readers enjoy it as well.

Athletic director Gene Smith returns to his traditional slot on the cover, giving what amounts to a State of the Department interview after a year hiatus due to illness.

A couple of notes about Ohio State basketball caught my attention as Smith fielded his questions. He demonstrated that he is a hands-on administrator when talking about men's head coach Chris Holtmann and this past year's challenging season.

"I knew going into the year it would be challenging but really emphasized more and more with Chris about playing those young puppies and getting them a chance to get minutes on the floor and get them experience," Smith said of the team's freshmen. "They're so talented. It was a top-five class. The shift to make sure we got them playing time was critical. We saw that at the end of the schedule. Once they played more, they came together, and so I feel good about the results of the efforts."

After a nine-game losing streak, the Buckeyes closed by winning five of their last seven, including three straight in the Big Ten tournament.

As far as women's head coach Kevin McGuff, Smith suggested that the Buckeyes might have turned a corner with their first trip beyond the Sweet 16 in decades.

"I like what he did, and they have a chance to be exceptionally good next year, so I'm proud of the culture he's created," Smith said. "Our culture wasn't where it should have been in the early years, but now it's a really outstanding culture."

Many women's basketball observers felt that McGuff's teams had underachieved previously, especially given that Hall of Fame coach Jim Foster had been fired with arguably better results. Smith seems to acknowledge those earlier problems.

In a related matter, it appears that the days of the Ohio State basketball teams playing occasional games at historic St. John Arena are over after the giant scoreboard at the venue was taken down. But the beloved building might not be facing the wrecking ball just yet, despite the demise of the scoreboard.

"We just needed to take that scoreboard down instead of chasing parts and asking my teammates to try and find parts to make the thing work," Smith explained. "It made no sense anymore when the company has gone away, so we took it down. But there are no definitive plans. We'll still hold Skull Sessions in there. Taking St. John down is a long way away."

Finally, as many fans continue to fret that Ohio State is losing the NIL arms race, Smith offers these words of reassurance:

"It was clunky at the beginning. It was new. It wasn't the perfect situation. But I think over time, as we learned more about how it should be structured, the collectives emerged, they learned more, (and) I think we're in a great spot right now. I really do. But changes will continue to emerge. It's a matter of how we shift with whatever those changes are."

Special thanks to former OSU football coach John Cooper for taking ample time to chat with BSB managing editor emeritus Mark Rea for this issue. Coop is the same as ever: candid and quotable – traits that frequently got him in trouble, but made him a reporter's dream. The College Football Hall of Fame coach could have given lessons to such coaches as Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer on how to give reporters quotes they can actually use.

Reading the interview, it occurred to me that Cooper is an example of someone playing out the "American Dream." As Mark leads Cooper

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

per through his career, we see how the coach uses skill, a little bit of hustle and a little bit of luck to rise from humble beginnings to the pinnacle of his profession.

"I always tell the story that our little-bitty town was so small that we had to go toward town just to hunt," Cooper said. "Where I came from, back there in the hills of eastern Tennessee, very, very few people went to college. As a matter of fact, I don't know of anyone in my high school senior class that went to college. You basically went to school, got out, got a job and that's what you did for the rest of your life."

Cooper goes on to detail about how he wound up in college, got into coaching and then recalls his upward trajectory through the coaching ranks. I was impressed with his recollection of details, some of them more than 50 years ago.

I don't want to spoil the interview so I am not going to get into a lot of detail here. However, Cooper's legacy at Ohio State remains his opening of recruiting areas across the country, making the Buckeyes a national brand. I include his quote about the best who played for him because it reminds us of the type of talent he brought to Columbus.

"People have asked me that from time to time," the coach said of the best Buckeye he ever coached, "and it's hard especially when you consider the players we had like Joey Galloway, David Boston, Robert Smith and Eddie George. Gosh, I don't know how you can put one of those guys in front of the others. But probably the best football player I ever coached in my life – and I'll probably offend some other people – but I don't know how you would ever find a better player than Orlando Pace. You know, Eddie was a great, great player, and nobody loves Eddie George more than John Cooper. But Eddie didn't start for us until his junior year. You talk about a self-made football player, man. Eddie is the hardest-working football player I ever coached by far. But in terms of the best football player, I think it's Orlando Pace."

"I know I left out some people. You have to mention Mike Vrabel – tenacious, hard-nosed, smart, great work ethic. You've got guys like Antoine Winfield and Joe Germaine, Danny Wilkinson, Luke Fickell, Damon Moore, Bobby Hoying. And Andy Katzenmoyer. You talk about an athlete. Holy cow! If he hadn't gotten hurt, he would have been another Dick Butkus in the NFL. We had some great, great players. What a privilege that was to coach those great players."

One more quote from Coop because it illustrates how much coaching football – and all sports to a degree – has changed over the years. Cooper was talking about how he wound up a member of the "Dirty Thirty," a legendary team at Iowa State.

"My first year, there were more than 100 players on that football team," he recalled. "But that didn't last long. You talk about boot camp. Basic training in the Army was nothing compared to this. They'd slap you upside the head, kick you in the rear, threaten to take away your scholarship – lots of things they wouldn't dare try today."

"There were players dropping out left and right because you went full-go in full gear every day of practice. But they couldn't run me off. I was a poor, old country boy, and if I had quit, I would have had to go back home and get a job."

And speaking of change on the college athletics scene, I highly recommend reading our interview with former track and field coach Karen Dennis, an interview some of you might

skip over because it involves track and field. I was a little skeptical about the interview at first myself, primarily because I was not that familiar with Dennis.

But the interview with our Andy Anders does a nice job of chronicling the changes in women's athletics through Dennis' time first as an athlete and then as a coach.

"What kept me there is that I was recruiting women and they did not want to come to Michigan State," Dennis said of her early days as a coach at her alma mater. "They did not want to come to me, I found out later, as a female coach. So that became a very personal resentment on my part. It wasn't my skills, it wasn't the university. It was my gender. Because I was a woman, other girls did not want to come to a woman as a coach. So I made up my mind that these girls needed to see women in a coaching capacity, so that they, in turn, could accept women in coaching positions."

In a rare crossing of interviews in an Interview Issue, Dennis talked of the first time she met Smith, her future boss.

"Gene's been a champion for me from day one," she said. "I've known him since he was an athletic director at Eastern Michigan and I was at Michigan State. I ran into him at Eastern Michigan. We had a track meet and he was moving hurdles. I didn't know who he was. I was helping move hurdles – track never seems to have enough officials because there are a lot of events and a lot of bodies and equipment to move around."

"So I just happened to say, 'Hi, my name is Karen Dennis. I coach at Michigan State.' And he said, 'Oh, I'm Gene Smith. I'm the athletic director here.' It's funny because since then, I've never known an athletic director who was out on the track moving hurdles. That's how I initially met him."

The Gene Smith of today talked during his interview about how he has learned through the years to do a better job of delegating.

"This is my 19th year here and my 39th year as an athletic director," he said. "I'm 68, (and I started at) 29 as an athletic director, so over time you develop your leadership skills. Early on at Eastern Michigan, for the eight years I was AD there, I realized that delegation was very important for me to be able to free up time for me to have an opportunity to focus on my ultimate talents and skills. When you get to a point in leadership where you have confidence in your teammates around you, then it's easier for you to delegate."

I guess that means we won't see Smith moving hurdles around at the Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium, though I have no doubt he would go down and move them if he had to.

And speaking of an athlete and a coach, Jerry Welsh was both during his Hall of Fame career in Columbus.

I have readily admitted in this space through the years that I sometimes "suggest" questions to ask our interview subjects. I am the one who suggested Craig Merz ask Welsh about longtime OSU assistant coach George Burke.

"From a historical standpoint, he was totally overlooked when you would look at his contributions and how everyone felt about him," Welsh said of Burke, for and with whom he played and coached. "I would think he would get similar affectionate comments from the staff, the managers, trainers and anybody around him. They all would have a soft spot for George Burke, for sure."

I am one of those people who has a "soft

spot" for Burke, who passed away in 2013, which is why I suggested the question. Thanks, Jerry, for the anecdotes about George. I really didn't know that much about his history. I just knew he was a really good guy.

And speaking of good guys, don't miss the interview with national champion baseball player Ray Shoup, a good friend to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. I especially enjoyed his encounter with longtime Major League Baseball manager Don Zimmer – or at least his car, a Corvair no less.

Finally, I thought Ohio State national championship quarterback Cardale Jones had an interesting take on the notion that Buckeye QBs have lacked success in the NFL.

"When you're talking about playing in a game and in a position where there's (only one starter per team), I don't think there's any school out there that can say that, 'Oh yeah, over the last 50, 60 years, we've produced all these great quarterbacks at the next level.' I think that's a question you can ask Georgia, too," Jones noted.

"There's not many schools I can think of off the top of my head that are producing a lot of quarterbacks at a high level. Even from a school – and I wouldn't consider them a quarterback development school – it's Alabama with Tua (Tagovailoa) and Jalen (Hurts). So I don't think that's an Ohio State thing or any (specific reason).

"You have so many factors that determine someone's success in any career. Baseball, football, basketball, journalism, whatever it is. That's like saying, 'Ohio State produced 150 guys with journalism degrees every year, but only two are at ESPN.' Do you think that's a problem with Ohio State? Or do you think that the journalism program at Ohio State is not as good because they can't produce a good writer that's going to go on ESPN? There's just so many other factors that go into someone's success outside of what program they come from."

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We were pleased and humbled at the number of you that went ahead and paid full price despite the savings offer. Reader Don Collins from Kenton, Ohio, included this note with his full payment: "I enjoy my paper very much. I look forward to every one. Hope this little bit helps."

Thank you to all of you who feel the same way.

A Passing Too Young

We are saddened to report the passing of Brynn Roberts, daughter of BSB assistant publisher Becky Roberts, at the tender age of 23. She had experienced some health issues recently but was getting stronger every day and seemed in a very good place.

In one of life's strange twists, while doing some research recently, I found the note in this space celebrating her birth. Brynn practically grew up in this office, and I will always recall her sleeping on the floor in her mother's office as a child or bantering back and forth with the affable Dave Breithaupt while the two of them worked on BSB mailings as she got older.

While we grieve her loss, we celebrate her all-too-short life.

Reds JULY LINEUP!



JUNE 30–JULY 2



FRIDAY // 5:10

- **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Ruoff Mortgage**
- **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.)



- **Military Appreciation Day, presented by CareSource**
Visit reds.com/military for details

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.)



JULY 14–16



presented by **Kroger**

FRIDAY // 7:10

- **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by PNC**
- **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.



SATURDAY // 7:10

- **Bronson Arroyo Bobblehead, presented by PNC**
(Celebrating Bronson Arroyo's induction into the Reds Hall of Fame. Pregame ceremonies will honor Bronson Arroyo, Danny Graves and the late Gabe Paul as the Reds Hall of Fame Induction Class of 2023. 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 First Student**
(To kids 14 and younger in attendance, while supplies last)



JULY 17–20



MONDAY // 7:10

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



WEDNESDAY // 7:10

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, presented by UnitedHealthcare**
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

JULY 21–23



FRIDAY // 7:10

- **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show**
- **Pride Night Ticket Package**
(Must be purchased through theme ticket package, while supplies last)



- **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.



SATURDAY // 4:10

- **Adult Reds Hawaiian Shirt, presented by Budweiser**
(To adult fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last)



SUNDAY // 1:40

- **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**
- **Reds Baseball Cards, presented by Topps**
(To kids 14 and younger in attendance, while supplies last)



(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.com/Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.