

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 42, No. 24

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2023

NO EXCUSES

Talented OSU Roster Seeking Return To Form

By **BRADEN MOLES**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

In all likelihood, last season Ohio State was just a field goal away from winning a national championship. The Buckeyes came up just short against Georgia in the Peach Bowl, with Noah Ruggles' 50-yarder sailing wide left, and it left the Bulldogs moving on to the title game in Los Angeles, where they delivered a 65-7 beatdown of TCU, the largest margin of victory ever in a national championship game.

Given the tight nature of Ohio State and Georgia's semifinal matchup, that team on the winning end against the Horned Frogs could have just as easily been the Buckeyes. But, despite how close Ohio State came, the program has not felt further away from championship contention than it does entering head coach Ryan Day's fifth season.

That's what happens when a team that rests its laurels on winning the Big Ten and defeating Michigan has accomplished neither over the last two seasons, going two years without winning the conference for the first time since 2003-04 and suffering consecutive defeats to the Wolverines for the first time since 1999-2000. Title aspirations will always be there for Ohio State, but when it comes to the program's three major goals – winning the Big Ten, defeating Michigan and winning a national championship – the two former have historically been a prerequisite for the latter.

"When you go back to that last game of the regular season, the rivalry game, we just didn't respond well in the second half when some of those big hits happened," Day said at Big Ten Media Days. "We didn't respond great in the second half of that game. It's



**FOOTBALL
PREVIEW
ISSUE**

SONNY BROCKWAY

BACK TO THE TOP – Ohio State is seeking a return to form this season after consecutive seasons with no national championship, no Big Ten title and no wins over archrival Michigan.

something we talk about a lot, but we're not going to change what we do and how we prepare. There's some things we talked about that we needed to get done in that game, and I'm not going to get into all those

things now, but we have to.

"And so we looked long and hard at the whole game and figured out the areas that we've got to do a better job, specifically. But the emphasis every day needs to be there."

Day did not outright state Ohio State's problems against Michigan, but those obvious concerns – including a lack of physicality up front and allowing explosive plays – were evident over a month later against Georgia, as well. The Buckeyes did a better job of responding to blows from the Bulldogs, though, something Day attributed to a more aggressive nature that he's hoping to take into this season.

"Coming into the Georgia game, we're

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Ohio State AD Smith To Retire In July 2024

By **BRADEN MOLES**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

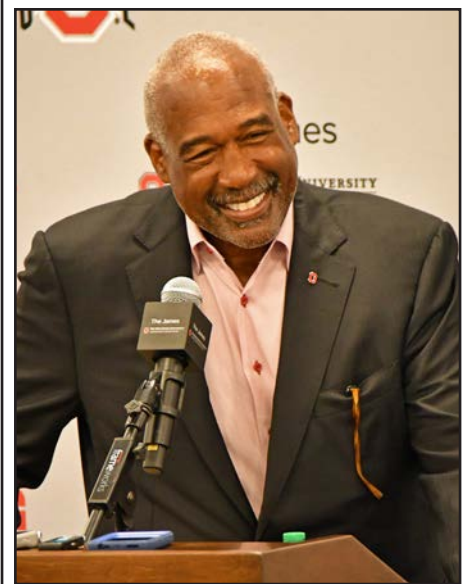
When it was announced that Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith would hold a press conference on Aug. 9, just five days after it was formally announced that Oregon and Washington would join the Big Ten beginning in 2024, it was assumed that Smith would be inundated with questions about the conference's recent additions.

As it turned out, conference expansion was the last thing on anyone's mind once Smith began his press conference.

Stepping up to the lectern at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Smith announced that, effective June 30, 2024, he will be retiring as athletic director at Ohio State, a post he has held since 2005. It will bring to an end the run of the third-longest tenured athletic director in school history, surpassed by only Lynn W. St. John (1912-47) and Richard Larkins (1947-70).

In making his decision to retire, Smith said that he and his wife, Sheila, plan to spend more time with their children,

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SONNY BROCKWAY

HAPPY TRAILS – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, who has held his position since 2005, announced Aug. 9 that he will retire effective June 30, 2024.

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From The Message Board

"Strongest RB. Weakest OL. I think the two-deep is OK everywhere except OL."

– Terrier Buck

"I think the strongest will be the cornerback room. A lot of talent that's back and up-and-comers who look really good. Weakest is probably the O-line. Not because I don't think they can do the job, they are just unproven."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"If the offensive line surprises on the upside, that will override any doubts we have about any other area of this team, including having inexperienced QBs."

"We have talent and depth at RB, linebackers, cornerback and safety, defensive line and wide receiver."

I think our special teams will be good. If they are healthy, the TE room will be good enough.

"Again, it is all about how the offensive line grows as a unit and executes its assignments. The OL needs to give the QBs time and the RBs need running lanes. The Bucks have a tough schedule and the team needs to stay healthy."

– BYRON MCNUTT

"I'm going with the linebackers as the strongest position group. Starting with preseason All-American middle linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, who is on multiple national award lists. At weakside LB, Steele Chambers after moving over from the RB group has shut up the naysayers and ranked second on the team with 77 tackles last year. With solid backups like Cody

Simon, Gabe Powers, C.J. Hicks and Reid Carrico, I feel good about this group of Buckeyes.

"For the position group I am most concerned about, I will have to go with the special teams group. Yes, we have an experienced and pretty good returning punter in veteran Jesse Mirco, however we will have all newbies at the other specialists. The Buckeyes will have a new long snapper, field goal/extra point kicker and kickoff specialist. Also, our special team return game has been very below average for a while now."

"Nationally, the Buckeyes ranked well over the 50th ranked team in all these key special team categories last year: kickoff return (88th), punt return (79th), kickoff return coverage (70th) and punt return coverage (67th)."

– Buckeye Scott

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Keep The Divisions

I read with interest the article regarding league expansion, and the abolishing of divisions, with the two teams with the best records meeting for a league championship. I may be missing something, but I think this scenario is wide open for controversy.

Using this year's Buckeye schedule as an example, let's say Ohio State goes undefeated. Michigan and Wisconsin both end up 8-1 (in the conference), with the only losses coming to Ohio State. Let's assume, obviously, that Michigan and Wisconsin did not play each other. Who plays the Buckeyes in the league playoff?

This is certainly not a highly unlikely scenario. I'm sure (hopefully) that the commission and athletic directors have thought of this, but whatever solution they devise – my best guess would be the margin of loss to Ohio State – there is certainly going to be a lot of controversy, and however things are decided, there will be a lot of unhappy fans. It could also be possible that another 8-1 team, whose only loss was to Ohio State and didn't play Michigan or Wisconsin, could wind up in the mix. Going even further into the weeds, it's possible that there could be three or four teams tied for second with 7-2 records.

I vote to keep the divisions!

Peter Lively
Chaumont, N.Y.

(Tiebreaker scenarios have not been announced yet for the updated Big Ten Championship Game format set to begin in 2024, but based on current rules, tiebreakers would likely be determined first by head-to-head results and then by records against common opponents within the conference. Ed.)

Marginalized Fan

I am having a very difficult time accepting all of the recent changes occurring in the

college football arena, and I don't think I am alone. Big-time college football is disintegrating in real time and morphing into an unwieldy "blob" that stands for nothing! In addition to the various conference realignments and the demise of the Pac-12, the game has been mortally wounded with the transfer portal, name, image and likeness, sports betting, and the end-of-season, 12-team College Football Playoff, rendering September through November a fan dead zone. We consistently hear that the root cause of these changes is money!

Money can become an instrument of change via the little guy, too. To illustrate their dissatisfaction with the current state of college football, fans may consider cutting the cord to the Big Ten Network, curtailing the purchase of season tickets, and stopping contributions to the Ohio State athletic department, and ultimately, the university. These will be signs of desperate and disheartened alumni and fans overall. I see value (and enjoyment) in traditions, school and regional rivalries, popular conference games and championships, fan-based loyalty and school pride (win or lose). In my view, it is incredibly unfortunate that a quest for money is destroying decades of time-honored traditions.

We are now witnessing extraordinary changes in the structure of the Big Ten – or is it soon to be the Big Eighteen Conference (no cachet here), with the possibility of additional schools joining? What has happened to "our" conference and college football? As Jason Gay noted in his Wall Street Journal article (Aug. 8, 2023) – "They Finally Broke College Football."

Joseph H. Huber
Walpole, Mass.

Show The Warts, Too

I am writing in advance of the "Ten Month Fluff Piece" I'm sure BSB is planning for the

departure of OSU AD Gene Smith! Smith did some very good things while at OSU. All I'm saying is show the warts as well!

He cost OSU fans and Urban Meyer a national championship in 2012 by not self-regulating a bowl ban and sending a 6-6 Luke Fickell team to lose a bowl game! He clearly thought (wrongly) that he had the NCAA in his back pocket.

Poor Hiring Practices: Smith will crow about hiring Urban! ANYONE with a brain would have hired Urban! How about spotlighting his terrible hires in baseball, softball, and men's basketball?

Tattoogate: He has dirt on his hands with this, and let (Jim) Tressel be the fall guy for Smith and (then-president) Gordon Gee. Very poor leadership!

Zach Smith: Once again, Smith, not Urban, failed in this scandal. Urban reported the incident, Smith failed to follow through. I'm not sure why Urban was punished at all.

As I mentioned, Smith did do some good things, I'm just not ready to read about him being the second coming for the next ten months.

Pence Roth
Bradenton, Fla.

High Hopes For Buckeyes

This 2023 Ohio State football team could be really special. They have the nation's best receivers in Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Egbuka, Julian Fleming and Xavier Johnson. Then you add Noah Rogers and Bryson Rodgers along with true freshmen Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss. Plus, tight ends Cade Stover, Joe Royer, Gee Scott Jr. and true freshman Jelani Thurman, and you have assembled a lethal All-American aerial attack, second-to-none.

Next, you bring in the running backs: TreVeyon Henderson, Miyan Williams, Dallon Hayden, Chip Trayanum and Evan Pryor. This unit could end up being No. 1 when it's all said and done.

As for the O-line, this unit is being welded

together in the center and both tackle spots. However, both guards Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones are NFL material that will anchor down this new O-line.

As for the starting quarterback, well, you have three games against winnable opponents before you have to name the true starter. Either Kyle McCord or Devin Brown will have separated themselves before traveling to South Bend, Ind.

Now, here is where I hang my hat. This Ohio State defense is going to "crack your concrete." This unit is being built by defensive coordinator Jimmie Knowles. Last year Coach Knowles "fell on the sword" for his players. He took all the blame for giving up the points against Michigan and Georgia.

But now, this Buckeye defense knows why and what they are doing in year two. Tommy Eichenberg, Steele Chambers, Cody Simon and C.J. Hicks are premier linebackers. The D-line with J.T. Tuimoloau, Jack Sawyer, Mike Hall Jr., Tyleik Williams, Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson will be outstanding. Most players are in year three and they are "ticked off." This unit is going to beat the hell out of offenses.

The secondary with Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun, Jordan Hancock, Cameron Martinez, Lathan Ransom, Josh Proctor, Ja'Had Carter and Sonny Styles has the potential to be the best since 2019. Ping-a-ling, baby!

As for me, I have this team 12-0 and winning the Big Ten. After that, the sky is the limit.

Duane Risko
Brunswick, Ohio

If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or email it to bsb@buckeyesports.com. Letters must be signed and include the writer's hometown and a daytime telephone number for verification. Publication priority will be given to those letters that are brief, and we reserve the right to edit letters for publication.

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QB Quandary Aside, Defense Key To 2023

It's difficult to remember an offseason during which there has been so much intrigue surrounding the Ohio State football team.

A change at the quarterback position will do that, and a head coach reluctant to announce his new starter only adds to speculation that perhaps neither Kyle McCord nor Devin Brown is ready for the white-hot spotlight that comes with the territory.

Still, there is precedent for Ryan Day's reasons to demur – at least publicly – upon his choice for C.J. Stroud's successor. Jim Tressel didn't announce Todd Boeckman as his starting quarterback until four days before the first game in 2007, and Urban Meyer waited until the morning of the 2015 season opener to designate Cardale Jones as his starter over J.T. Barrett.

You can go all the way back to 1978 when no one outside the Ohio State locker room knew Woody Hayes had chosen freshman Art Schlichter over incumbent starter Rod Gerald until Schlichter jogged onto the field and into the huddle for the opening snaps against Penn State.

Whether this year's starter is McCord, Brown or some combination of the two really doesn't matter much. If a rebuilt offensive line gives either any kind of time at all to throw the ball, an ultra-talented receiving corps starring Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka will take care of the rest.

Likewise, handing the ball off and watching the talents of TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams lead a stacked stable of running backs will be a luxury for whoever is the starting quarterback.

Speaking strictly for myself, I think we have spent way too much time and effort stressing over the quarterback position. Based upon the way the coach integrated Stroud into his system, and Justin Fields before that, Day has earned the benefit of the doubt with regard to his quarterback. Because he has waited so long to name a starter is perhaps more the fact that Day likes them both rather than any indecision on his part.

Where Day has yet to earn the benefit of the doubt is on the defensive side of the ball. Anyone who has read this column over the past year and half knows I'm not particularly sold on defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and his system of intricacies.

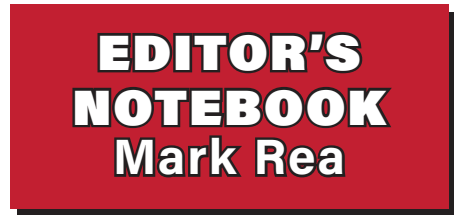
There is little doubt the OSU defense showed improvement last year over its often-patetic performance in 2021, and there is the prevailing thought that what Knowles is teaching takes a little bit of time to take hold. But the cold facts state that while the Buckeyes did play better defensively in 2022, there were glaring problems that began to show themselves during the opener against Notre Dame and were only underscored during the season-ending losses to Michigan and Georgia.

I've used these statistics before, and some who prefer to give Knowles their own benefit of the doubt have accused me of cherry-picking the worst of the worst to make my point. My argument for that is that the numbers don't lie.

For example, last year's defense allowed averages of 7.2 yards per pass attempt and 12.3 yards per pass completion, and that was actually higher than the year before. Part of the problem was the maddening habit of OSU defensive backs refusing to turn their heads to locate the ball while it is in the air, but they also struggled with bringing opposing receivers down after giving up a catch. The Buckeyes surrendered 2,606 yards through the air in 2022, and 1,107 of those yards (42.5 percent) came after the catch.

Knowles is on record as claiming the sur-

render of a big play or two during a game is no cause for alarm, but the Buckeyes gave up 50 plays last season that gained 20 yards or more. Eleven of those went for 50 yards or more, and five went for at least 75 yards. Particularly painful were all of the big plays surrendered to Michigan and Georgia – five of 45 or more to the Wolverines, each of which went for touchdowns, and three more of 45 yards or more vs. the Bulldogs, including a backbreaking 76-yard scoring pass to a wide-open receiver midway through the fourth quarter.



On the biggest stages of the season, in their two more important games, the Buckeyes gave up 1,063 total yards to Michigan and Georgia and allowed each of those opponents to score in excess of 40 points. Never before in the history of the program had an Ohio State defense surrendered 40 or more points in back-to-back games, and not since the disastrous 2011 season had the Buckeyes failed both against Michigan and in the postseason.

Stacked Schedule

Last season's defensive deficiencies aside, Ohio State remains one of the prohibitive favorites to make a fourth College Football Playoff appearance in what will be Day's fifth full season as head coach. The Buckeyes checked it at No. 3 in The Associated Press' preseason rankings while the AFCA Coaches' Poll placed them at No. 4.

Of course, if those rankings are to be believed, OSU will find its path back to the postseason playoff strewn with landmines. Regardless of pundits who make a regular practice to criticize the team's strength of schedule, the Buckeyes will face four opponents ranked among the preseason top 25.

They travel to No. 13 Notre Dame in late September, host No. 7 Penn State and then travel to No. 19/21 Wisconsin on back-to-back Saturdays in late October, and finish the regular season with consensus No. 2 Michigan on Nov. 25. There is also the matter of opening the season on the road at Indiana, and back-to-back games in early October at home against Maryland and at Purdue that could be potential traps. The Terrapins have an offense that can score points with anyone, while the Buckeyes have come home losers three of the last four times they have visited West Lafayette.

That kind of schedule makes it even more imperative that the Buckeyes get off to a good start defensively. And although I've taken my shots at Knowles and his unit, the potential for 2023 is exceedingly bright.

Much of that hope will come from what could be an elite front seven that includes such returning veterans as defensive ends J.T. Tuimolau and Jack Sawyer, tackles Michael Hall Jr., Tyleik Williams and Ty Hamilton, and linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers. Perhaps the only thing separating those players from dominance is consistency.

And speaking of consistency, the secondary will have to play better – a whole lot better – than it did in 2022. In addition to the aforementioned stats regarding efficiency against the pass, OSU defensive backs accounted for only five of the team's 11 interceptions last season, and Tanner McCalister and Ronnie Hickman took four of

those picks with them to the NFL where they are currently Cleveland Browns teammates.

Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock figure to man the cornerback positions along with help from Ole Miss transfer Davison Igbinosun, while the main safeties figure to be holdover Lathan Ransom and former five-star recruit Sonny Styles.

Knowles also continues to tinker with his alignments, including the enigmatic Jack position that apparently is a difficult one to master. The case can be made that a year of Sawyer's college career was wasted as he struggled with the Jack, and Knowles indicated during a late August press availability that he now likes C.J. Hicks at the position.

I will stipulate that Knowles has forgotten more about coaching defense than I will ever know, and I admit I want to see Hicks take the field as much as possible. But I also can't help thinking the five-star prospect would have a more positive effect on the game playing at his natural linebacker position.

Hicks was the nation's No. 2 rated linebacker in his recruiting class as well as a finalist for the high school Butkus Award. Why would you want him anywhere other than linebacker?

Family And Farewells

For the better part of the past 35 years, it has been my honor and privilege to occupy this space in Buckeye Sports Bulletin. During that time, my column has appeared on this particular page more than 700 times, I have written close to three times that many feature stories for BSB, and my fingertips have tapped out approximately 5 million words on various computers.

Most of those words were composed at what was affectionately known as BSB World Headquarters, a corner basement office at 1350 West Fifth Avenue in Grandview, Ohio, a Columbus suburb located little more than a stone's throw from Ohio Stadium.

Elsewhere in this issue, BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz eloquently weaves a story about the building some of us simply called 1350, and how, despite its obvious flaws – including thermostats that never seemed to work, making it boiling hot in the summer and frigidly cold in the winter – various staffs over the years spent countless hours there producing a product of which we have always been immensely proud.

Some worked in that building less than a year. Others, like me, stayed much longer. But we all had one thing in common – we were a family. We laughed together, cried together, argued, cursed and joked together. We got each other through breakups and divorces, celebrated weddings and birthdays, and mourned the passings of parents, spouses and children.

A lot of things happen during the passage of 42 years, the length of time BSB spent at its Grandview headquarters, and it was with more than a little melancholy that I learned the building was to be razed. Therefore, I thought it was only right that many of us gather there to reminisce and mark the final time we'd all be in a place where we had spent so many hours together.

Don't misunderstand me. BSB isn't going anywhere, and I'll continue to occupy this space as long as Frank wants me to. But change is inevitable as we weave our way from the cradle to the grave, and I learned long ago never to say never.

I won't steal any more of Frank's thunder except to say that it's not the change of venue that bothers me or the ugly brick and mortar of 1350 West Fifth Avenue that I'll miss. That's because I carry a thousand memories of that place in my mind, and I cherish every one of them.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Day: Moving OSU-Michigan "Worth A Conversation"

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said at Big Ten Media Days that the idea of moving the Ohio State-Michigan game to earlier in the season is something that is "worth a conversation."

The idea of moving the annual rivalry game from the end of the regular season – where it has been played every season (with the exception of 2020) dating back to 1942 – was brought up considering the possibility that, under the Big Ten's new scheduling format beginning in 2024, the teams might play in back-to-back weeks should Ohio State and Michigan play in the final week of the regular season and again in the Big Ten title game.

"I know that we need to consider the tradition," Day said, "But I think it's worth a conversation on when because I think that's significant just on how the season plays out."

"I think it's worth a long discussion about where that game should be placed," he continued. "If it was the same way it was this past year, we'd be playing back-to-back games and then who knows, maybe even playing again in the playoffs. I think that needs to be taken into consideration."

Day said that while he would not predict that playing in back-to-back weeks would have an impact on the field, as it would already mean that both teams are in the conference title game – not to mention a potential playoff berth once the field expands to 12 teams in 2024 – but did question whether playing in back-to-back weeks could minimize the impact of The Game.

"Even if you played Week 11, Week 10, no matter what, it's going to matter," he said. "But if you know you're playing them in the Big Ten Championship Game already, it could be something we haven't experienced before. I think it's worth a discussion."

Those discussions, according to Day, have already started taking place, as he said Big Ten leadership has already broached conversations about moving Ohio State-Michigan from the end of the regular season to elsewhere in the schedule. While Day did not endorse the idea of moving The

Game, he did add that once those conversations ramp up, he would like to voice his opinion.

"I know that they're talking about it. I just don't think that any hard decisions have been made," Day said. "I don't think they're going to be made here real soon. I just want to be part of those conversations."

OSU At No. 3 In AP Top 25

Ohio State checked in at No. 3 in the preseason AP Top 25 poll that was released Aug. 14, ranked only behind No. 2 Michigan and No. 1 Georgia to begin the season.

The defending national champions received 60 first-place votes, with the Wolverines receiving two and Ohio State getting one first-place nod. Following the Buckeyes were No. 4 Alabama and No. 5 LSU, with No. 6 USC, No. 7 Penn State, No. 8 Florida State, No. 9 Clemson and No. 10 Washington rounding out the top 10.

The Buckeyes were joined in the poll by several conference members, including the Wolverines and Nittany Lions in addition to No. 19 Wisconsin and No. 25 Iowa.

Teams on last season's final poll that were not in this poll include Fresno State, Mississippi State, Pittsburgh, South Carolina, Troy and UCLA, while teams new to this poll include No. 10 Washington, Wisconsin, No. 20 Oklahoma, No. 21 North Carolina, No. 22 Ole Miss, No. 23 Texas A&M and Iowa. The largest drop of a team still in the poll belonged to TCU and Tulane, who each fell 15 spots, and the largest rise was by Texas, which jumped from No. 25 to No. 11 in the preseason poll.

The top five vote getters outside of the top 25 included Texas Tech (101), South Carolina (73), UCLA (66), UTSA (64) and Arkansas (22). Minnesota also received six votes while Illinois earned three.

Day Plans To Remain As OSU's Play Caller

After a brief consideration of giving up play calling duties to offensive coordinator Brian Hartline during spring practice and fall camp, it appears, at least to begin the season, that Day will remain as Ohio State's primary play caller.

"Brian's going to certainly at times make some calls, and we're going to discuss it in between series, but I think early, I'll do the majority of it," Day said Aug. 21 on Ohio State Sports Network's Football Season Kickoff Show. "Brian is going to have an opportunity to call it as well as time goes on, and I think the thing for Brian is that he's done an excellent job of helping organize the offense. He's done a good job of installing for the first time in this preseason. That's a big part of being a coordinator."

Hartline called plays during the spring



BRADEN MOLES

TIME FOR A CHANGE? – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said at Big Ten Media Days in July that moving the Ohio State-Michigan game to earlier in the season is "worth a conversation."

game and also had opportunities to do so throughout scrimmages in the spring and fall camp. He will continue to have a chance to call some plays during the season, but the majority of those responsibilities will continue to fall on Day, who considered giving up some play calling duties this offseason to increase his ability to spend more time elsewhere on the team.

"We're going to do the same thing this fall," he said. "We'll allow an opportunity to call plays, but also will bring it along the right way at the right time. I think it's something that I have a great feel for. There's been times that we've called it and just had great conversation about the thought process and situational football. So it will kind of be a joint effort, but I'm certainly going to be involved."

Day has called plays for Ohio State since 2018, and he continued doing so after becoming head coach in 2019. During that time, he has mostly worked alongside former offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, who left this offseason to become the head coach at Tulsa, leading to Hartline's promotion.

LB Williams II Out For The Season After ACL Injury

Day announced Aug. 14 that linebacker Kourt Williams II will miss the season after suffering an ACL injury during preseason

practice, the second such injury in the past four seasons for Williams.

"I really feel awful for Kourt," Day said. "I feel he can't catch a break. He's such a great young man, so prayers are out to him. We're all rallying around Kourt."

Williams was entering his fourth season with the program and was hoping for a resurgence with a move from safety to linebacker, a move that was already drawing rave reviews from the coaching staff.

"Kourt, he's a guy we always felt would be better off closer to the line of scrimmage," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said before the injury. "We've debated that move for a while. In-house, he's kind of moved back and forth. We just thought it was the right time to move him down fully. He'll still play some Sam linebacker in our 4-3, but Kourt is a first-class young man. It's great to have him at linebacker."

The position change could have offered a reset for Williams, who has seen injuries derail his career at Ohio State. The former four-star prospect missed his freshman season with a torn ACL, and after playing in 11 games during the 2021-22 season, he played in just six games last year while dealing with shoulder injuries that resulted in a trio of surgeries.

"It got to the point where if I tried to shake somebody's hand, my shoulder would come out," he said. "I couldn't catch. It got



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2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2022 Record, Bowl Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	3:30 p.m.	CBS	4-8, not eligible
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	12 p.m.	BTN	7-4
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	4 p.m.	FOX	9-5, 44-23 win over So. Alabama (R&L Carriers)
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	7:30 p.m.	NBC	9-4, 45-38 win over So. Carolina (Gator)
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	8-5, 16-12 win over NC State (Duke's Mayo)
Oct. 14	at Purdue	TBA	TBA	8-6, 63-7 loss to LSU (Citrus)
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	11-2, 35-21 win over Utah (Rose)
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	7-6, 24-17 win over Okla. St. (Guar. Rate)
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	7:30 p.m.	NBC	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	9-4, 28-20 win over Syracuse (Pinstripe)
Nov. 25	at Michigan	12 p.m.	FOX	13-1, 51-45 loss to TCU (Fiesta)

really bad.”

It cost him what could have been a breakout season, and he was instead relegated to the sidelines. But voted as a captain prior to last season, he still made sure to support his teammates even though he was largely unable to see the field.

“It wasn’t easy, but I just wanted to be there for my teammates,” he said. “I didn’t expect to have three surgeries on my shoulders last year, but I did the best I could in that moment. I just wanted to be there for the guys.”

Williams was primarily working at Will linebacker prior to his injury behind fellow linebackers Steele Chambers and C.J. Hicks.

TE Christian Suspended For Banned Substance

Day announced on Aug. 14 that redshirt freshman tight end Bennett Christian has been suspended for the season after testing positive for a banned substance in January under NCAA testing protocols.

“I’d like to share the news today that I took a supplement that contained a banned substance and I will be ineligible to compete

for the Buckeyes for the entire 2023 football season,” Christian said in a statement. “I tested positive this past January under NCAA testing protocols and I will not be eligible again until next January.

“I am sorry that I put myself in this position and even more disappointed to have let down my teammates, coaching staff and family. I accept responsibility for my actions and for this suspension. The Ohio State staff does an outstanding job educating us. This could have been so easily avoided had I reached out to our training staff about the supplement and confirmed it was within policy. That will forever be a lesson learned and something all athletes should be aware of going forward.

“My goal this year is to be the absolute best teammate I can be, and to continue to support this program for which I am so grateful to be a part. I look forward to returning in 2024.”

Christian was entering his second season with the Buckeyes after appearing in just two games last year. While his absence will be a hit to Ohio State’s depth, he was likely not going to factor into plans at tight end this year with incumbent starter Cade

Walter “Ted” Carter Jr. Named 17th OSU President

The Ohio State Board of Trustees on Aug. 22 appointed University of Nebraska president Walter “Ted” Carter Jr. to become Ohio State’s 17th president beginning on Jan. 1, 2024.

Carter, 63, has served in his role at Nebraska since Jan. 1, 2020, and will replace Kristina M. Johnson, who stepped down as Ohio State’s president in May.

“I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to serve as president of Ohio State, an institution founded upon and well known across the globe for research, teaching and an enduring commitment to service,” Carter said. “The work being done across Ohio and beyond to shape the future of research and innovation, workforce development, the arts, health care, college affordability and college athletics is remarkable. These are areas of particular passion for me, and I can’t wait to begin my journey as a Buckeye.”

He arrived in education after a long military career, graduating from the United States Naval Academy in 1981 and the Navy Fighter Weapons School – also known as Top Gun – in 1985. During his time at the USNA, he majored in oceanography and was a four-year letter winner in ice hockey. He has also served as the 62nd superintendent of the USNA

and as the 54th president of the U.S. Naval War College.

During his time at Nebraska, Carter has overseen four campuses with nearly 70,000 students, faculty and staff and has launched the Nebraska Promise, a financial aid program that guarantees full tuition coverage for low- and middle-income students.

“President Carter brings an unparalleled combination of strategic leadership and true service, and we could not be more thrilled to welcome him and his family to Ohio State,” said board chair Hiroyuki Fujita, PhD. “We were absolutely determined to find the next great leader for Ohio State in today’s highly complex and competitive higher-education environment. With input from our university community and the highest recommendations from those who have worked with President Carter during his extraordinary career, I believe we have done just that.”

Until Carter begins next year, Ohio State’s acting president will be Peter Mohler, vice president for research at Ohio State. For more, visit BuckeyeSports.com and look for full coverage of his appointment in the next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, mailing on Sept. 5.

Stover leading the room and Gee Scott Jr. and Joe Royer battling for the backup spot.

WR Tate’s Mother Killed In Drive-By Shooting

Ashley Griggs — the mother of Ohio State freshman wide receiver Carnell Tate — was killed in a drive-by shooting in Chicago the morning of July 16.

Griggs, 40, was identified as a victim of the shooting by the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office. Four others were injured in the shooting that occurred shortly after 2 a.m. in the 4000 block of West Washington Boulevard near Garfield Park. At time of press, police had yet to publicly identify a suspect or report anyone as be-

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“We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program,” BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. “It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now and what we have done the previous 42 years.”

A VIP subscription can easily pay for itself each year with special VIP discounts.

VIP subscribers enjoy a 5-percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the “Fun, Casual Joint,” as well as a gift card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant.

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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The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite-Plus, Elite, Scarlet and Brutus VIP subscribers. **Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman):** Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

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Scarlet VIPs: Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Joseph A. Cusma Sr., Massillon, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Julie Ellis, Apple Valley, Calif.; Mike Freeburn, Columbus; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Dave Hamilton, Canton, Ohio; Richard G. Hannan Jr., Chillicothe, Ohio; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Dave Palmer, Washington, Mich.; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; William Torok, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Gaffney, S.C.; Anonymous, Norwalk, Ohio.

OHIO STATE

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ing in custody.

Tate arrived at Ohio State as an early enrollee this past winter out of Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, where he played his final two seasons of high school football after transferring from Marist High School in Chicago, where he grew up.

"We've all surrounded him and try to help him the best we can," Day said at Big Ten Media Days. "He's a pretty private person. I think football has allowed him a distraction to get his mind off it when he's not in his room or back in Chicago."

Wrestler Sasso Recovering After Shooting In Columbus

Ohio State wrestler Sammy Sasso is continuing to recover after being shot in Columbus on Aug. 18 during a carjacking.

The shooting was reported around 8:30

p.m. in the 1400 block of North High St. According to a police report, Sasso — who has not been formally identified by police as the victim, but has since been confirmed by Ohio State — was approached by two suspects who, following a confrontation, shot Sasso and stole his car before driving away from the scene.

Police were then dispatched and Sasso was taken to the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. No suspects were immediately taken into custody.

"Ohio State student-athlete Sammy Sasso was the victim of a senseless shooting incident Friday evening in Columbus," wrestling coach Tom Ryan said in a statement. "Sasso was transported to The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center (WMC), where he is continuing to be cared for and monitored.

"Our coaching staff, along with members of the wrestling program and Athletics administrators, are grateful for the caregivers at WMC, thankful Sasso's injuries are not life-threatening, and are supporting Sasso and his family. OSUPD is assisting Columbus Police with the ongoing investigation."

According to a report from Lehigh Valley Live, Sasso underwent surgery following the shooting and again the morning of Aug. 19, and he is expected to make a full recovery and should be able to wrestle again. Support flooded in from the Ohio State and wrestling communities, as well as his hometown of Nazareth, Pa., and Sasso released a statement the next day thanking everyone

for their support.

"God bless everyone for their support during this time," Sasso tweeted Aug. 20. "It's been tough as hell but we are steadily improving. I can't thank everyone enough for being in my corner."

Sasso is a two-time Big Ten champion and four-time NCAA qualifier, twice finishing as a runner-up, and he is just the ninth four-time All-American in program history. He is entering his sixth season with the Buckeyes.

OL Henry, Toutant To Medically Retire

Day said on July 26 that offensive linemen Avery Henry and Grant Toutant are medically retiring from the football team.

Henry, who was diagnosed with bone cancer in December during his freshman season, announced in May that his cancer was in remission, and offensive line coach Justin Frye later indicated that a potential return to the field was "way down the road" for the lineman. Henry joined Ohio State as a three-star prospect in the 2022 recruiting class out of St. Clairsville, Ohio.

As for Toutant — whose injury was not disclosed — he was entering his fourth season with the program but never saw the field during his time at Ohio State. He was a three-star offensive tackle out of Warren, Mich., in the 2020 recruiting class.

DE Abor Out Following Undisclosed Surgery

Day confirmed Aug. 9 that defensive end Omari Abor will miss time after undergoing an undisclosed surgery on Aug. 8.

Abor posted on Instagram that he underwent successful surgery, though he did not specify what the injury was for. Asked about Abor's status, Day estimated that it will be "a couple of months" before Abor can return to the field.

"I don't know if I have an update on that," Day said. "He did have a procedure. I don't know if I can get into all the details of that. But it's going to be at least a couple of months, I guess, before he's back."

Abor is entering his second season at Ohio State, though he missed the majority of his freshman season after suffering a knee injury. A four-star prospect out of Duncanville, Texas, Abor was a top-100 recruit in Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class.

Former Northwestern LB Glover Transfers To OSU

Former Northwestern linebacker Nigel Glover, who entered the transfer portal in July ahead of his freshman season, announced Aug. 1 that he is transferring to Ohio State.

A former four-star prospect in the 2023 recruiting class out of Clayton (Ohio) Northmont, Glover was the No. 335 overall prospect and No. 30 linebacker in his class, as well as the 10th-best prospect in Northwestern's class. He initially chose the Wildcats over offers from Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, Washington and Wisconsin, among others, but he did not hold one from Ohio State coming out of high school.

Glover hit the portal after Northwestern's firing of head coach Pat Fitzgerald on July 10 following allegations of hazing within the program. He is one of three players to enter

the portal from the team in recent weeks, while several have decommitted from the 2024 recruiting class. While transferring outside of NCAA-allowed windows normally would not allow a player to be immediately eligible, the NCAA does allow a player to transfer within 30 days of a head coaching change in their program.

Glover is the ninth addition this off-season for Ohio State from the portal, joining cornerbacks Davison Igbinosun and Lorenzo Styles Jr., defensive tackle Tywone Malone, long snapper John Ferlmann, offensive linemen Victor Cutler Jr. and Josh Simmons, quarterback Tristan Gebbia and safety Ja'Had Carter. The expectation is that Glover will be a walk-on to begin his Ohio State career before being put on scholarship for next season.

Freshman LB Reese Moves To Defensive End

After just one week of practice at Ohio State, the coaching staff elected for some experimentation with freshman Arvell Reese, switching him from linebacker to defensive end.

Reese was a summer enrollee with the Buckeyes and a four-star prospect out of Cleveland Glenville, who was named Ohio Division IV Defensive Player of the Year his senior season. Reese worked out with the linebackers during his first practice at Ohio State on Aug. 3, but by the time Aug. 10 rolled around, Reese was coming off the edge.

"Coach (Ted Ginn Sr. at Glenville), during the process of recruiting Arvell, had mentioned that maybe that was something that he foresaw could come down the road, and when Arvell got here, we immediately saw that he has a lot of talent," Day said Aug. 14. "Explosive, twitchy, smart, big, and he did a nice job at linebacker. We felt like maybe taking a look for a week at defensive end, because he's going to get to 255 really fast. He has some twitch and has the strength and has the length of play at defensive end, and maybe as a freshman that may be the best for him."

Day said no final decisions have been made on Reese's eventual position, citing the loss of Williams or potential injuries down the road as a reason to move Reese back to linebacker. But the move to defensive end is in an attempt to help Reese see the field during his first campaign with the Buckeyes.

"We'd like to see if Arvell can get on the field as a freshman, certainly on special teams, but he has a unique skill set," Day said. "We think he's got a bright future, so we're trying to see how this works. He's been great. His attitude has been great, and we'll kind of see how the next week shakes (out)."

Five Buckeyes Earn Preseason AP Honors

Five Buckeyes were selected to the Associated Press Preseason All-American team released Aug. 21.

Headlining the first team was wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, as well as linebacker Tommy Eichenberg. Harrison is coming off a season in which he collected 77 receptions for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns, while Egbuka was not far off with 74 catches for 1,151 yards and 10 scores.

Ohio State Ranks Third In Preseason Consensus Poll

Ohio State suffered the program's only losses last season to Michigan and Georgia, and fittingly, those are the only two schools that the Buckeyes sit behind in Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual consensus poll.

The poll includes rankings from The Associated Press, Athlon Sports, CBS Sports, College Football News, ESPN FPI, Phil Steele, Sporting News and the USA Today coaches' poll, and points are awarded on a 25-24-23 scale, with the No. 1 team earning 25 points, the No. 2 team earning 24 points, and so on. The maximum number of points a team can receive is 200, and the total number of first-place votes is written in parentheses.

Seven of the eight polls had a top three — in varying orders — that featured Georgia, Michigan and Ohio State, which make up our top three. Phil Steele's top 25 was the lone exception with Clemson checking in at No. 2, a clear outlier given the Tigers' next-highest ranking in any ranking was No. 7.

Georgia collected the top spot according to seven publications, but ESPN's Football Power Index rankings — which is a measurement of a team's strength entering a given season relative to other teams — had Ohio State on top, followed by Alabama and the Bulldogs.

Rounding out our top 10 was No. 4 Alabama, No. 5 LSU, No. 6 USC, No. 7 Penn State, No. 8 Clemson, No. 9 Florida State and No. 10 Texas. Other Big Ten teams represented in the rankings include No. 16 Wisconsin and No. 24 Iowa.

New teams in this year's poll include LSU, Florida State, Washington, No. 13 Tennessee, No. 17 TCU, Oregon State (tied with Oklahoma for 18th), No. 20 Kansas State, No. 23 North Carolina, Iowa, and Florida and Tulane, both tied for 25th. Teams in last year's poll that fell out this time around include Arkansas, Baylor, Cincinnati, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, NC State, Oklahoma State, Pittsburgh and Wake Forest.

The Buckeyes will face off against four

Rk.	Team	Points
1.	Georgia (7)	198
2	Michigan	186
3	Ohio State (1)	183
4	Alabama	179
5	LSU	161
6	USC	160
7	Penn State	150
8	Clemson	139
9	Florida State	132
10	Texas	121
11	Washington	115
12	Notre Dame	111
13	Tennessee	105
14	Utah	104
15	Oregon	94
16	Wisconsin	64
17	TCU	51
T-18	Oregon State	50
T-18	Oklahoma	50
20	Kansas State	47
21	Texas A&M	39
22	Ole Miss	38
23	North Carolina	27
24	Iowa	20
T-25	Tulane	16
T-25	Florida	16

teams in the consensus poll, including a road contest at No. 12 Notre Dame on Sept. 23, a home game against Penn State on Oct. 21, at Wisconsin on Oct. 28 and at Michigan on Nov. 25.

— Compiled by Braden Moles

Braden Moles Named BSB Editor

Braden Moles has been promoted to editor of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, effective with the Football Preview Issue, BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz announced.

"Braden has effectively been doing the job of editor for quite some time now and it was only logical that he receive this promotion and recognition," Moskowitz said. "He makes my job easier every day and allows me to concentrate on some of the other functions of a publisher. He also has an outstanding relationship with assistant publisher Becky Roberts and has proved a good leader with the writers and the entire staff."

Moles came to Buckeye Sports Bulletin in November of 2021 after serving as editor of The Register Herald in his hometown of Eaton, Ohio. He has covered football, women's basketball and recruiting for BSB, in addition to other duties.

"I'm thankful to Frank, Becky and the entire staff at Buckeye Sports Bulletin for welcoming me in with open arms when I arrived nearly two years," Moles said. "It's been an incredible experience having the opportunity to write, edit and be part of such a historic publication, and I'm excited to work making Buckeye Sports Bulletin your continued and trusted source for Ohio State sports coverage."

Moles graduated from The Ohio State University in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in journalism and a minor in media production and analysis. Some of his favorite experiences since joining the team at Buckeye Sports Bulletin have been traveling to road games and covering events such as the 2023 NCAA Women's Tournament in Columbus and last season's College Football Playoff semifinal between Ohio State and Georgia in Atlanta.

"I look forward to Braden leading us into our 43rd year and



beyond," Moskowitz said, "and I know he will leave his mark on our products, just as have the others before him."

Moles is only the seventh editor in BSB's 42 years, joining Moskowitz, Jim Wharton, Mark Rea, Steve Helwagen, Jeff Svoboda and Tim Moody.

Eichenberg led the defense with 120 tackles, 43 more than the next-highest tackler on the team. He also added 12 tackles for loss and 2 ½ sacks.

Earning a nod on the second team was offensive lineman Donovan Jackson and defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau. Jackson started all 13 games last season at left guard, while Tuimoloau was a leader on the defense with 28 tackles and 3 ½ sacks.

OL Vimahi Asks For Help Toward Hawaii Wildfires

Wildfires have devastated the Hawaiian island of Maui in recent weeks, resulting in the deaths of over 100 people, nearly 1,000 people missing and several thousand displaced from their homes in the town of Lahaina.

Ohio State offensive lineman Enokk Vimahi, who is from Kahuka on the island of Oahu, just one island over from Maui, on Aug. 15 asked those who are able to consider donating money to help the state, island and town recover from this tragedy.

"I currently don't (have family there), but I do know some friends," he said. "The Red Cross has set up 90999, you just text 'Hawaii' to it and you can donate \$10. If you can, please help out the people over there in Lahaina and in Maui."

Vimahi said he does not personally know anyone who has been affected by the tragedy, but admitted that the events have been on his mind during fall camp.

"It's something I continue to think about," he said. "I was actually about to call my mom a little later, just to see how they are doing and see the continuous impact."

He has spent time with his teammates and coaches at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, and they have helped him cope with the recent events, with the football facility serving as a sanctuary for him to escape from the reality of the still-unfolding tragedy.

"Coach Day always talks about the 'red-line mentality.' When you see the red line before the start of the field and even the field on the outside, when you cross that red line, you focus on the brotherhood, you focus on football, and you focus on the team here at Ohio State," he said.

New Team Members Shed Black Stripes

As of press time, 14 Buckeyes had become "official" members of the team since fall camp began, shedding their black stripes to signify that they've earned their

spot with the program.

First up was Cutler, who lost his black stripe on Aug. 10, the first to do so after fall camp began on Aug. 3. Cutler had been on campus since the spring after transferring from Louisiana-Monroe, battling for the open center spot alongside redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman, though Hinzman ultimately won the job.

Later that same day, Simmons — another transfer, this time from San Diego State — also lost his black stripe, and he went on to win the left tackle job for the Buckeyes after just a couple weeks of practice.

Next up was freshman offensive lineman Luke Montgomery on Aug. 12, who became the fourth freshman — along with safety Malik Hartford, tight end Jelani Thurman and wide receiver Tate — to lose their black stripe, though the latter three did so in the spring.

Montgomery has made a strong impression since getting to Columbus from Findlay, Ohio, entering camp behind on the depth chart but eventually working his way into the two-deep at right tackle behind Josh Fryar. Also that same day, transfer Malone lost his black stripe, continuing a strong start to his Ohio State career.

"He's got game experience," Knowles said. "He's got toughness, he's got savvy. He's just someone you feel comfortable with right away. He can handle things — and the physicality, too."

A pair of freshmen then lost their black stripes on Aug. 15, with cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. and wide receiver Bryson Rodgers officially joining the team. Styles Jr. and walk-on wide receiver David Adolph saw their black stripes removed on Aug. 16, followed by freshman wide receiver Noah Rogers and freshman defensive tackle Kayden McDonald on Aug. 19.

Freshman offensive lineman Joshua Padilla shed his on Aug. 21, and later that day, freshman wideout Brandon Inniss lost his, meaning that every one of Ohio State's incoming receivers have lost their black stripes. The final shed black stripes of fall camp belonged to Carter and Reese, who lost theirs on Aug. 22.

Handful Of Kickoff Times, Networks Reportedly Set

No additional kickoff times or broadcast networks have been made official in recent weeks for Ohio State, though a handful of games have, according to several reports, settled on a time and network to be broadcast this upcoming season.

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47 Ohio State Student-Athletes Receive Degrees

Ohio State University celebrated graduation at summer commencement on Aug. 6 at the Schottenstein Center, and 47 current and former student-athletes were among the honorees receiving their diplomas.

The football and wrestling programs each had the most representatives at summer commencement, with five each. The football program had three former players — Lloyd McFarquhar, Mitch Rossi and Noah Ruggles — earn their degrees, while current players Josh Proctor and Gee Scott Jr. also received their diplomas.

Perhaps the most star-studded graduate was Adelaide Aquilla of the women's track and field team. She recently completed her career at Ohio State, which featured four NCAA national championships in shot put in addition to several program records, not to mention an Olympic appearance in shot put at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Several other national champions were also represented at commencement, including rowers Sarah Asad, Charline Ulmer, Jessy Vermeer and synchronized swimmer Emily Armstrong, as well as Madison Bizal, Riley Brengman, Sophie Jaques and Emma Maltais from the women's hockey program.

The women's basketball team also had multiple graduates, with Madison Greene and Eboni Walker earning their degrees in addition

to Linnae Harper, who played at Ohio State from 2016-18 and returned for her diploma.

The following is a complete list of Ohio State's 47 student-athlete graduates, as well as their majors, in alphabetical order by sport.

Baseball — Jameson Campbell, sports coaching; Justin Eckhardt, sports coaching; Nicholas Erwin, communications; William Pfennig, public management.

Women's Basketball — Madison Greene, sport industry; Linnae Harper, sports coaching; Eboni Walker, communications.

Fencing — Bence Bende, biology; Roscoe Swartz, business analytics.

Field Hockey — Malen Iglesias, sports coaching; Grace Kim, kinesiology.

Football — Lloyd McFarquhar, sports coaching; Josh Proctor, human development & family science; Mitch Rossi, human resource management; Noah Ruggles, sports coaching; Gee Scott Jr., human development & family science.

Men's Golf — Jackson Chandler, sport industry; Neal Shipley, business analytics.

Men's Hockey — Matthew Cassidy, economics.

Women's Hockey — Madison Bizal, public management; Riley Brengman, sport industry; Sophie Jaques, civil engineering; Emma Maltais, bioethics.

Men's Lacrosse — Kyle Lewis, public

management.

Women's Lacrosse — Sarah Klein, human development & family science; Jamie Level, sports coaching.

Rifle — Frank Steyn, public health.

Rowing — Sarah Asad, nursing; Charline Ulmer, art; Jessy Vermeer, sports coaching.

Men's Soccer — Keagan McLaughlin, statistics.

Softball — Sam Hackenbracht, human development & family science; Jaycee Ruberti, kinesiology.

Spirit Program — Jack Sampson, kinesiology.

Men's Swimming — Fabio Dalu, mathematics; Thomas Watkins, computer and information science.

Synchronized Swimming — Emily Armstrong, psychology.

Men's Track and Field — Carlos Aviles, psychology.

Women's Track and Field — Adelaide Aquilla, public management; Alyssa Marsh, public management; Sade Olatoye, bioethics; Jaydan Wood, health sciences.

Wrestling — Malik Heinselman, business analytics; Gavin Hoffman, business analytics; Dylan Koontz, history; Tate Orndorff, business analytics; Kaleb Romero, business analytics.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

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The most notable is that Ohio State's home contest against Maryland on Oct. 7 is reportedly set for a 3:30 p.m. kickoff exclusively on Peacock, NBC's streaming service. It would be the first Ohio State game to be exclusively broadcast on streaming with no linear option.

The Buckeyes are also reportedly set for a noon kickoff on FOX when they travel to Purdue on Oct. 14, the first time Ohio State has visited West Lafayette, Ind., since 2018.

Latest Quarterback News At BuckeyeSports.com

As Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, the Ohio State football team had yet to choose a starting quarterback. The next print edition of BSB, the Sept. 9 issue, will be mailed Sept. 5. Any information on the quarterback situation between now and then will be posted at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers.

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be reporting on any other breaking news and providing additional features at BuckeyeSports.com, as well, along with the latest in football recruiting news. Sept. 1 will also mark the return of the popular staff predictions feature. Each Friday the BSB crew will attempt to forecast the results of the following day's Ohio State game.

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.

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 avail-

able to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site. With the return to the weekly publishing schedule, this feature becomes a way to make sure you have access to all the new in BSB before the next game.

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Ohio State is also reportedly scheduled for a 7:30 p.m. kickoff on NBC when traveling to Wisconsin on Oct. 28, the first game for the Buckeyes in Madison, Wis., since 2016.

Kickoff times that had already been officially announced by Ohio State include Sept. 2 at Indiana (3:30 p.m., CBS); Sept. 9 vs. Youngstown State (noon, Big Ten Network); Sept. 16 vs. Western Kentucky (4

p.m., FOX); Sept. 23 at Notre Dame (7:30 p.m., NBC); Nov. 11 vs. Michigan State (7:30 p.m., NBC); and Nov. 25 at Michigan (noon, FOX).

Kickoff times and networks for Oct. 21 vs. Penn State, Nov. 4 at Rutgers and Nov. 18 vs. Minnesota are expected to be announced within a 12-or six-day window during the season.

OSU To Wear Gray Alternate Uniforms Against MSU

Speaking of that primetime game against the Spartans, Ohio State unveiled a new all-gray alternate uniform on July 21 that is set to be worn for the matchup against Michigan State.

Ohio State's uniform will feature steel-gray jerseys and pants that are slightly dark-

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1983

May the impetus be with you.

For the 1983 Ohio State football team, it was. That was if you called seven straight wins at the end of the 1982 season impetus. Buckeye football coach Earle Bruce did.

"I surely am looking forward to this year," said Bruce in talking about what was in store for his Buckeyes once the bell rang on Sept. 10. "I guess the biggest thing is at the end of last year, we had seven consecutive victories and a very strong, physical-type football team. And that should be great going into the 1983 season because it has left us with a great attitude, a great impetus going into the 1983 season."

35 Years Ago – 1988

It took but a quick glance at his résumé to tell that John Cooper was a winner. He won five Missouri Valley Conference titles in eight years at Tulsa and one Pacific Ten championship in three years at Arizona State.

How many Big Ten conference championships were in his Ohio State future? As many as the 13 captured by Woody Hayes? More than the four recorded by Bruce?

The 21st head football coach in the storied football history at Ohio State University, Cooper said the first championship of his regime may be down the road a bit as he assessed the chances of the 1988 Buckeyes. He said they were a long way from the glorious national championship teams of the past.

"There's no question about it," Cooper said. "I'd rather be loaded and people know about it. But we're not loaded and maybe people think I'm playing a little coy with them. That's not my style at all. I try to be honest with people."

30 Years Ago – 1993

How can a defensive unit say goodbye to three all-league performers who combined for more than 750 career tackles, nearly 10 percent of them behind the line of scrimmage, and expect no drop-off in performance? It wasn't going to be the easiest of tasks, but the Ohio State defensive unit believed it was up to the challenge.

Graduation and the NFL tore the middle out of the previous year's starting lineup from a unit that was the fourth-toughest defense in the country to score against. Nose guard Greg Smith, middle linebacker Steve Tovar and strong safety Roger Harper all had left big shoes to fill.

But the Buckeyes had recruited so well defensively in the previous couple of years that the losses of those three players, in addition to veterans such as Bryan Cook and Derrick Foster, actually may not have had much impact on the unit.

"We won't have a middle linebacker as good as Steve, we probably won't have a nose guard as effective as Greg, and it's not very realistic to expect somebody to step in there and play the way Roger did," said Cooper. "But we have some talented players coming back, and we believe those guys will step up their games a little bit and pick up the slack."

25 Years Ago – 1998

Ohio State had long been recognized as one of the nation's top football programs. However, it had been 18 long years since the Buckeyes had reigned as the country's No. 1 team.

That drought was over, as both the USA Today/ESPN coaches poll and Associated Press media poll named Ohio State the No.

1-ranked team in their respective preseason polls.

"It's been 18 years," said Cooper, who was in his fourth year at Tulsa when the Buckeyes last topped the poll. "It's been too long. That's the obvious thing. But that's our job as players and coaches, to build the best program we can.

"I'm proud and humbled to be the football coach of the team picked No. 1 in the country. Now it's up to us to live up to that ranking."

20 Years Ago – 2003

Summer is usually, hopefully, a quiet time for college football programs. Players work on their own in seven on-seven and conditioning drills, while coaches sift through their schedules, evaluate personnel, study recruiting and maybe, just maybe, even get a little time to themselves.

Ohio State's summer provided no such luxury. Beginning July 13, the day the venerable New York Times published a story alleging academic impropriety within the Buckeye football program, OSU's summer was filled with questions about the integrity of the football program, most of which swirled around the lightning rod that was sophomore running back Maurice Clarett.

Those questions led to the NCAA beginning an investigation into Clarett and the Buckeyes, which subsequently led to OSU holding Clarett out of its fall practice drills until questions about his eligibility had been sufficiently answered.

The Clarett saga – which began with the Times article and moved on to include an alleged falsified police report, an NCAA investigation and surprise involvement from basketball phenom LeBron James and NFL Hall of Famer Jim Brown – had taken a number of twists and turns since the middle of July, when questions first began to surface.

15 Years Ago – 2008

The months of July and August had a number of coaches leave and enter Ohio State. Perhaps the most high-profile change came for the men's lacrosse program, which had head coach Joe Breschi resign to take the head coaching job at his alma mater, North Carolina.

On July 10, Ohio State filled the vacancy when it hired Breschi's top assistant, Nick Myers, to skipper the program.

"I want to thank athletics director Gene Smith, (assistant director of athletics) TJ Shelton and the Ohio State administration for the opportunity to lead the Buckeye lacrosse program," Myers said. "I need to thank Joe Breschi, who did so much for both the Ohio State men's lacrosse program and for me as a coach and person. I really appreciate the support I've received from the players, parents and alumni. I am excited about the bright future we have here."

10 Years Ago – 2013

Head coach Urban Meyer was always going to be one of the star attractions of the annual Big Ten Media Days, but when he arrived at the lectern in front of hundreds of reporters from across the Midwest and country on July 24, he found himself discussing some topics he likely hadn't anticipated a few days beforehand.

Meyer addressed a packed ballroom at the Hilton Chicago just two days after the Buckeyes announced disciplinary action for four players, including starting running back Carlos Hyde and All-America cornerback Bradley Roby. Roby was suspended one game following a disorderly conduct charge for an incident at a bar in Bloomington, Ind., while Hyde was suspended for three

Buckeyes Abound On Preseason Watch Lists

AWARD	CRITERIA	PLAYER(S)
BILETNIKOFF AWARD	Most outstanding wide receiver.	WR Emeka Egbuka, WR Marvin Harrison Jr.
BRONKO NAGURSKI AWARD	Most outstanding defensive player.	LB Tommy Eichenberg, SAF Lathan Ransom, DE J.T. Tuimoloau
BUTKUS AWARD	Most outstanding collegiate linebacker.	LB Steele Chambers, LB Tommy Eichenberg
CHUCK BEDNARIK AWARD	Most outstanding defensive player.	LB Tommy Eichenberg, DE J.T. Tuimoloau
DOAK WALKER AWARD	Most outstanding running back.	RB TreVeyon Henderson, RB Miyan Williams
JIM THORPE AWARD	Most outstanding defensive back.	CB Denzel Burke, SAF Lathan Ransom
LOMBARDI AWARD	Most outstanding lineman or linebacker.	LB Tommy Eichenberg, OL Donovan Jackson, DT Mike Hall Jr., DE J.T. Tuimoloau
LOTT IMPACT TROPHY	Most outstanding defensive IMPACT player — Integrity, Maturity, Performance, Academics, Community and Tenacity.	LB Tommy Eichenberg, DE J.T. Tuimoloau
MACKAY AWARD	Most outstanding tight end.	TE Cade Stover
MAXWELL AWARD	Most outstanding player in college football.	WR Emeka Egbuka, WR Marvin Harrison Jr.
OUTLAND TROPHY	Most outstanding interior lineman.	OG Donovan Jackson, OG Matthew Jones, DT Mike Hall Jr.
PAUL HORNUNG AWARD	Most versatile player in college football.	WR Emeka Egbuka
POLYNESION PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARD	Most outstanding college football player of Polynesian ancestry.	DE J.T. Tuimoloau
RAY GUY AWARD	Most outstanding punter.	P Jesse Mirco
WALTER CAMP AWARD	Most outstanding player in college football.	WR Emeka Egbuka, LB Tommy Eichenberg, WR Marvin Harrison Jr., RB TreVeyon Henderson

er than the traditional uniform's pants, and the uniform will feature Ohio State's home stripe pattern on the sleeves and pants. The Buckeyes will still wear their usual helmets.

Ohio State has worn an alternate uniform in each of the past five seasons and 33 times in total since 2009, holding a 26-7 record in those contests.

OSU Self-Reports Minor NCAA Violations For 2022-23 Season

Ohio State's football program has self-reported a pair of minor NCAA violations in the last year, neither resulting in discipline for the school.

The first violation was for the use of a blocking sled with extra weights during practice on Feb. 13, a period during which teams are not allowed to use sport-specific equipment. They became aware of the violation after a video of the workout was posted on Twitter and were notified by another school's compliance staff, and Ohio State reduced the countable athletics-related activities by 30 minutes from March 5-11.

The second of the violations was due to a recruit meeting off-campus with a former player. The recruit visited Ohio State for the team's home contest against Wisconsin on Sept. 24, and the recruit was taken to a former player's tailgate in a parking lot across the street from campus, deeming the interaction as taking place off Ohio State's campus.

In response, the Buckeyes reduced contact with the prospect and gave a letter of education around the topic to staff members. Both violations are considered Level III infractions, the lowest level for the NCAA.

RB Elliott Signs With Patriots

Former Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott is staying in the National Football League, signing a one-year deal with the New England Patriots on Aug. 14 that includes a base salary of \$3 million and can be worth up to \$6 million with incentives.

Elliott is expected to wear No. 15 for New England, the same number he wore at Ohio State for three seasons. He comes to the Patriots after spending his first seven seasons with the Dallas Cowboys, where he racked up 8,262 total rushing yards and 68 touchdowns. The former Ohio State tailback's most productive years came early in his NFL career, where he was named AP First-Team All-Pro as a rookie in 2016 and earned Pro Bowl honors in three of his first four seasons (2016, 2018, 2019).

The No. 4 overall selection in the 2016 NFL draft, Elliott put forth an historic three-year career at Ohio State. Serving as head coach Urban Meyer's lead running back from 2013-2015, the St. Louis, Mo., native recorded 3,961 career rushing yards, a number that currently ranks third all-time among all Ohio State rushers.

Titans Cut OL Jones After Practice Scuffle

The Tennessee Titans released former Ohio State offensive lineman Jamarco Jones on Aug. 3 after he was asked to leave practice twice over the course of three days.

The first incident came on Aug. 1, when — according to a report from TennesseeTitans.com's Jim Wyatt — Jones was asked to

leave practice after an altercation with defensive tackle Jeffrey Simmons. Jones was again asked to leave practice on Aug. 3 after he delivered a blindside block on linebacker Jack Gibbens, according to the report, that nearly led to a fight between the team's offensive and defensive units.

After practice, head coach Mike Vrabel — who played at Ohio State and was a defensive coach from 2011-13 — took issue with Jones' conduct during practice.

"I think you have to just know how to practice," Vrabel said. "We talk about it all the time about being competitive and going to that line, and not doing anything that could hurt the team. We don't want to see that."

Jones was taken by the Titans in the 2018 NFL draft and had appeared in 36

games with seven starts and was in contention to be the Titans' starting right tackle this season. Ironically enough, the opening was left by former Ohio State offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere, who was suspended for the first six games of the season for violating the league's gambling policy.

Patrick Engels and Braden Moles contributed to this report. For the latest Ohio State news, visit BuckeyeSports.com and the BSB Fan Forum, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Reducing Explosive Plays A Goal For Defense

Continued From Page 1

like, no matter what happens, we're just going to swing and we're not going to worry about 'what if' or anything like that. You felt that aggressiveness from all of us, including me," he said. "When you put so much into that game like so many people do, the minute it goes a little bit off-course, you have to just stick with it. You can't flinch. I think you felt that a little bit in the Georgia game.

"I felt that throughout the whole offseason," he continued. "And now it's going to continue against Indiana this year and then build as the season goes on, because those games get bigger and bigger."

That potential aggressiveness will be led in large part by an impressive cast of returning defenders, who have taken lessons learned last season to heart as they enter a second season under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

"I do see it clicking," Knowles said. "I see players in the right spot. Players understand. And more of the why. You know, why I call a certain thing. I expect all of our guys to be able to answer that. Not just what, or where, or how, but why. You know, what's the purpose behind this call? And they're able to see that now."

Starters return through all levels of the defense, with linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers, defensive linemen J.T. Tuimoloau, Jack Sawyer, Mike Hall Jr. and Tyleik Williams, and defensive backs Denzel Burke and Lathan Ransom all back for Ohio State. Day said those returning leaders have helped to drive the team this offseason.

"That's just a few of the guys. I mean, there's a lot of other guys that have done a great job leadership-wise," he said. "They've driven the offseason. So I think you can just feel that coming from our players. I think you can just feel confidence and I think our guys are anxious to get back on the field and play."

The defense infuses plenty of new blood



SONNY BROCKWAY

TURNING IT AROUND — Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles is hoping to fix the defensive lapses that led to losses in Ohio State's last two games of the season against Michigan and Georgia.

as well, with several returners — including junior cornerback Jordan Hancock and sophomore safety Sonny Styles — all looking to break into the starting lineup, not to mention the transfer additions of senior safety Ja'Had Carter (Syracuse), sophomore cornerback Davison Igbinosun (Ole Miss) and sophomore defensive tackle Tywone Malone (Ole Miss), all expected to be featured heavily in Ohio State's rotation.

These new additions — not to mention another year under the belts of the returning starters — should help to alleviate some

of the problems that plagued Ohio State's defense last year. After allowing just 15.6 points and 271.5 yards of offense per game during the first 10 contests of the season, those averages jumped to 39.0 points and 488.3 yards over the final three games against Maryland, Michigan and Georgia. During those three contests, Ohio State allowed 14 touchdowns, half of which were defined as "explosive" — gaining at least 20 yards — that the coaching staff has made clear this offseason is not acceptable.

"We can't give up big plays like that," Day said in the spring. "That hurt us in the last two games. There's no secret there. Too many big plays. And if we're going to win those games, we can't give up big plays like that. Now was that the only problem? No. But I think Jim knows that, and that's something we've got to get fixed in the offseason."

It's been a work in progress trying to eliminate those big plays that put a damper on an otherwise impressive season on defense, but Knowles has seen exactly that: progress.

"I've seen a conscientious effort on all of our parts to make sure that we fix whatever mistakes happened, learn from those and get better," he said during fall camp. "I've seen myself develop in terms of coverages and defenses that keep the ball more in front and inside and, you know, a development of myself. That's how, I think, a coach grows. You can't be stuck in your ways, so I've done that and looked at everything. We've added to the package or called some things more that put us in a better position to prevent those."

Part of that is in welcoming back a more experienced secondary along with the additions of Carter and Igbinosun to the room, but an underrated aspect of Ohio State's

struggles on the back end was the lack of push up front to disrupt offenses before the ball would leave a quarterback's hands. The Buckeyes finished with just 34 sacks last season — led by 4½ each from Hall and Sawyer — which is the team's fewest (excluding 2020) since accounting for just 28 sacks in 2016.

Last season, there was no shortage of potential explanations for down production from the defensive line. Injuries limited Hall, arguably Ohio State's most unblockable defender, while Sawyer was relegated to the "Jack," Knowles' hybrid defensive end-linebacker role that ultimately was not a strong fit for the Pickerington, Ohio, native. The experiment lasted for just a season, though, as Sawyer has since been moved back to defensive end.

Sacks are not always a perfect indicator of whether a pass rush is excelling, so the unit as a whole is not concerned with those numbers, but at the end of the day, the Buckeyes are hoping to see more pressure this season.

"Now you have four guys who can make an impact," defensive line coach Larry Johnson said. "J.T., Jack or (redshirt freshman Kenyatta Jackson and sophomore Caden Curry) — it doesn't matter who they are — they're not as good unless my inside guys are providing an inside rush. So there's a combination of both. So we don't look at stats. We're looking for unit stats, how we're doing as a unit.

"Are we getting pressure? Are we getting there? I think that's what you have to wait and see how it goes. They could triple-team J.T. and he might not get one sack all season. Is he a bad player? No, so you've got to have that guy or that guy or that guy who can change the game because you can't double-team everybody."

Ohio State's defense will garner plenty of headlines this season — one way or the other, depending on how the unit performs — but that isn't to say the offense doesn't have its fair share of question marks as well.

As Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, Ohio State had yet to name a starting quarterback between junior Kyle McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown. Day has even left open the possibility that the competition could extend beyond the opener at Indiana on Sept. 2 and into the season, though the Sept. 23 date at Notre Dame seems to be a likely game to have a starting quarterback in place.

"You would like to have somebody who's the quarterback to play the whole game," he said on Aug. 21. "But for me to say, 'Hey, this guy should just play the whole game and the other one shouldn't,' that's not the right thing to do because they both deserve to play at this point."

Both McCord and Brown have made their cases for following C.J. Stroud, but the competition has remained close dating back to the spring. Regardless of who ultimately wins the job — assuming that someone *does* win the job, otherwise uncomfortable memories of 2015 may be dredged up — it should be one of the cushiest jobs in the country, even with the expectations that come with being the quarterback at Ohio State.

The Buckeyes have a solid argument for having the nation's best two wide receivers

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COVER STORY

in juniors Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, who combined for 151 receptions, 2,414 yards and 24 touchdowns last season. Beyond that, senior Julian Fleming and sophomore Jayden Ballard would likely be No. 1 receivers at any other school in the country. That isn't mentioning the incoming crop of freshmen – including Brandon Inniss, Bryson Rodgers, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate – which is among the most talented receiving classes in modern recruiting history.

"I think it starts with The Team Up North and the Big Ten Championship Game," Harrison said. "I feel like I've accomplished a lot from an individual standpoint. I think I've played in big night games. I played in – to me – the national championship against Georgia. I've played The Team Up North. But the one thing I haven't done is beat The Team Up North or play in the Big Ten Championship Game. That's my main focus going into the season."

At tight end, Ohio State returns fifth-year Cade Stover, who was voted one of the team's three captains along with Eichenberg and wide receiver Xavier Johnson. Stover is coming off a strong 36-catch, 406-yard outing last season and has capable backups in junior Joe Royer and senior Gee Scott Jr. But perhaps the most depth on the entire team is at running back. Junior TreVeyon Henderson (107 carries, 571 yards, six TDs) and senior Miyan Williams (128, 825, 14) are fully healthy after missing seven combined games last season, while sophomore Dалан Hayden (111, 553, five) and senior Chip Trayanum (15, 92) also return.

Ohio State will also welcome back versa-

tile sophomore Evan Pryor, who suffered a season-ending knee injury in last year's fall camp but is good to go for this season. All told, the unit should provide plenty of relief for the quarterbacks as they get into their groove.

"The running game is going to be very important," Day said. "You think about the first years for Justin (Fields), and for C.J., it was important to have a good running game. We learned a lesson on that in the Oregon game, in my opinion, on offense. You have to be able to run the football. When you get in the red zone, when you get in third-down situations, first and second down, it sets up play-action pass. So it's something that we've been spending a lot of time on, and I like our progress there but we've got to keep building on it."

Questions still remain at offensive line, though a starting five appears to have taken shape with sophomore Josh Simmons at left tackle, junior Donovan Jackson at left guard, redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman at center, sixth-year senior Matthew Jones at right guard and junior Josh Fryar at right tackle. Jackson and Jones are returning starters, but Simmons – who arrived at Ohio State this offseason from San Diego State – has quickly risen through the ranks and established himself as a potential starter.

While it first looked like it would be at right tackle, he and Fryar have since swapped sides, with the pair looking to replace Paris Johnson Jr. at left tackle and Dawand Jones at right tackle. Hinzman, entering only his second season in the program, has also seen a quick ascension while battling with Louisiana Monroe fifth-year

transfer Victor Cutler Jr.

"You're trying to play the shell game to find your five best, and we're really still in the middle of that," said offensive line coach Justin Frye. "You're hoping guys can kind of settle up and finalize that, and we'll get to that soon."

All told, this is one of the most talented rosters that Day has had in his time at Ohio State, and he certainly believes that it is the most mature he's had.

"I like our maturity," Day said. "I think this is probably the most mature group we've had probably since (2019), just across the board. Very, very talented. The focus has been on competition, competing, being tough and being smart. And that's what the team's focused on right now, but very businesslike and, coming off last season's finish, a lot of hunger."

But talent has not been the issue when it's come to consecutive losses to Michigan or last season's College Football Playoff semifinal loss to Georgia. The Buckeyes were at least on even ground with the Bulldogs and undoubtedly – based on a strong run of recruiting under Day – were the better team, at least on paper, than the Wolverines.

The theoretical will become very real, however, when Ohio State takes the field this season. The Buckeyes have taken steps to harness that aggressiveness that gave them a lead against Georgia and, for a time, made it appear as though a national championship would be coming back to Columbus for the first time since 2014.

That title eluded Ohio State and will almost certainly continue to do so until the

Buckeyes achieve what was, at least until the last two seasons, nearly a foregone conclusion – winning the Big Ten and defeating Michigan. Those goals have fueled the team this offseason.

"It started off with the way the regular season ended and then that whole bowl prep leading up to it," Day said. "There was just a lot of focus, a lot of conversation about making sure that we finish the season the right way, and we came up a couple plays short. That was not easy to do. As you replay a few plays here, a few plays there, really in both of those games, it's motivating. Everything we did in the offseason was about competing because, when you're in matchup games, it comes down to a handful of plays. There are times during the season where that's not the case. We can maybe lose a few plays and still win by a few touchdowns. Sometimes that can get unnoticed. Not that it does get unnoticed, but sometimes you don't feel the severity of it until you lose a game like that."

"We've been working hard this offseason to make sure that doesn't happen again, that in every game, no matter who we're playing, we understand that it can come down to a couple plays," he continued. "Certainly in matchup games, we've got to win those games. Explosive plays certainly are what really was our Achilles heel going down to those last two games. We know that. We've talked about it. How much do we talk about the rivalry game and winning at the end of the season? We talk about it every day. We do. We're not going to sit there and let it beat us twice, but it is a motivating factor, for sure."

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Smith Proteges Headline AD Candidate List

Continued From Page 1

grandchildren and extended family.

"I want to thank the leadership of The Ohio State University during my tenure for providing me the opportunity to serve as senior vice president and Wolfe Foundation Endowed athletic director for the past 18 years," Smith said. "The presidents and many members of the board of trustees I have served afforded me the professional opportunity of a lifetime, and I am forever grateful.

"I have always believed that a leader seeks to be the right person at the right time in the life of the institution," he continued. "I believe that July 2024 is the right time to welcome new leadership to build upon what we have achieved and continue to build upon the great tradition of excellence in athletics and business advancement at Ohio State."

Following the retirement of Andy Geiger in 2005, Ohio State and then-president Karen Holbrook looked to Smith to fill those shoes. A native of Cleveland, he played college football at Notre Dame, lining up at defensive end and winning a pair of national championships with the Fighting Irish in 1973 and 1977, the latter as an assistant coach. He began his administrative career at Eastern Michigan, where he was the athletic director from 1986-93, and he then held the same role at Iowa State (1993-00) and Arizona State (2000-05).

"Gene was somebody that I had watched for a long time and thought would be phenomenal at Ohio State," Holbrook said at the time. "On the other hand, I wasn't on the search committee and had no input into it. But when the committee presented me with the final candidate and it was Gene, I couldn't have been happier."

Taking on a challenge as significant as being athletic director at Ohio State, there have been no shortage of troubles during Smith's time with the Buckeyes. From Tattoogate and Jim Tressel's resignation to the handling of domestic violence allegations against former assistant coach Zach Smith and the later suspension of Urban Meyer as well as Smith, Ohio State has had the program's fair share of time in the spotlight and under the microscope with Smith at the helm.

"In my career – not just here but at Arizona State, Iowa State and Eastern Michigan – there's been times I wish I could have done something different," Smith said. "But any leader who says that everything was smooth and that when they look back they wouldn't have changed a decision they've

made, I'm not so sure they're being 100 percent honest."

But for every one of those missteps – real or perceived – Smith has also helped Ohio State's athletic department grow to new heights and continue to evolve amid a changing landscape in college athletics.

The Buckeyes finished third in the most recent Directors' Cup standings and have finished as the top athletic department in the Big Ten nine times in school history, with eight coming under Smith. Ohio State also recently posted the school's highest-ever academic progress rate of 993, and under Smith, Ohio State has seen 115 team and 369 individual conference championships, as well as 32 team and 117 individual national championships, including the school's most recent football title in 2014.

Smith has also helped to guide Ohio State through several recent changes in college athletics, including conference realignment, media rights, the transfer portal and name, image and likeness, among the ever-changing issues. But despite all of these drastic shifts in a relatively short amount of time, Smith said those had no bearing on his decision to call it a career.

"I've always felt, and my mentors have always said, you'll know when it's time," Smith said. "This summer, Sheila and I sat down and she was asking me a million questions, and I just said, 'It's time.' There's a right time for certain leaders and the right time (for) an institution."

In announcing his retirement, Smith thanked Ohio State fans, donors, coaches, support staff and student-athletes he has had the opportunity to work with over the years.

"At Ohio State, we are truly blessed with the best damn fans in the land, and I want to thank Buckeye Nation for its support," Smith said. "Along with Buckeye Nation, I want to thank the leadership of our business community for its support. I am immensely grateful to the network of business leaders who have invested in me and in our success.

"Likewise, I wish to thank the many donors with whom I have had the pleasure of experiences and making special memories. The generosity of Buckeye Nation has been remarkable. I also want to thank the coaches and support staff with whom I've been blessed to work. I have been fortunate to work with some of the best in the business, and I am aware that I stood on their shoulders as we strived to make our department the finest athletic department in the nation.

"It has been my pleasure and my honor to work with my colleagues in the depart-

ment of athletics to create an environment conducive to educating, enriching and supporting the best and brightest student-athletes in the country. There is no question that the student-athletes that I have had the good fortune to serve during my tenure as athletic director were the inspiration each and every day for us all.

"I want to thank my four children and eight grandchildren for embracing the Buckeye experience and participating whenever they can. Most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Sheila, for being so supportive of my career in athletic administration. She has served as my friend, colleague, and emotional support through good times and bad, and I am grateful for her unwavering love and support."

Of course, with Smith announcing his departure, it led to a logical question – could another position be in store for Smith, perhaps as a leader for college football as a whole rather than just one institution? Asked if he would like to become a commissioner for college football, Smith quickly pointed to Sheila, who responded from the corner of the room with a resounding, "Hell no!"

Who's Up Next?

Smith will remain at his post until June 30, 2024, but speculation has already begun as to who might eventually succeed Smith as Ohio State's athletic director.

That decision will ultimately be made by Ohio State's incoming president, Walter "Ted" Carter Jr., who was appointed by the Board of Trustees on Aug. 22 as the 17th president in school history, and he will officially begin on Jan. 1, 2024. Carter, who most recently served as the president of the University of Nebraska, was a four-time letterwinner in ice hockey at the United States Naval Academy, and he went on to serve as superintendent of the USNA and as president of the U.S. Naval War College. Once he takes his post and gets to work finding Ohio State's next athletic director, Smith hopes to offer his input.

"At some point, we do need a leader, and so hopefully when that leader is hired and appointed, I'll be able to connect with them right away," Smith said before Carter's appointment. "They won't be here right away, but hopefully, I'm able to meet them in person somewhere and talk about our program and give that person some recommendations on the characteristics that they might consider as they look for a replacement here.

Once Carter takes over next year, Ohio State has plenty of qualified candidates who will receive interest for the job. Look no further than Smith's "coaching tree," so to speak, of former employees who are now working as Division I athletic directors. That list includes Pittsburgh athletic director Heather Lyke, Washington State athletic director Pat Chun, UCLA athletic director Martin Jarmond and Utah State athletic director Diana Sabau.

Lyke has been athletic director at Pitts-

burgh since 2017, but prior to her time with the Panthers, Lyke spent 15 years at Ohio State in a variety of roles, including associate athletic director for sport administration, associate athletic director for sport administration and senior associate athletic director. Under Lyke, Pittsburgh achieved the school's highest-ever ranking in the Directors' Cup standings, finishing 52nd out of 298 Division I schools in 2022-23.

Chun has been the longest-tenured athletic director among Smith's disciples, spending six years as athletic director at Florida Atlantic from 2012-2018 before taking on the same role at Washington State. Prior to becoming an athletic director, Chun spent 15 years at Ohio State, beginning in the athletics communication office in 1997 before eventually working his way up to executive associate athletics director for external relations prior to his departure. A native of Strongsville, Ohio, Chun also received his bachelor's degree from Ohio State.

Jarmond, a native of Fayetteville, N.C., spent eight years at Ohio State from 2009-2017 as a deputy director of athletics under Smith. He had previously spent six years as an assistant athletic director at Michigan State, and after his time at Ohio State, Jarmond spent three years at Boston College – becoming, at the time, the youngest Power Five athletic director at just 37 years old – and became UCLA's athletic director beginning in 2020.

The other Smith protege working in the Division I ranks is Sabau, though she might be the least likely to depart her current post considering that she only began at Utah State on Aug. 7. She spent over 20 years at Ohio State in various roles before becoming the Big Ten's deputy commissioner and chief sports officer in 2021.

While Smith's disciples offer up a convenient short list, the full list of candidates considered is likely to be much larger.

Potential in-house candidates might include executive associate athletic director Joe Odoguardi, who has been at Ohio State since 2015, and senior associate athletic director Carey Hoyt, who has helped lead Ohio State's name, image and likeness efforts. A job as Ohio State's athletic director would also be a difficult opportunity to turn down for sitting Power Five athletic directors, who may have interest in the position.

Taking a page from the Big Ten's book in hiring former MLB Network executive Tony Petitti as commissioner, Ohio State could also look at candidates from the media sphere who would give the university an upper hand in a rapidly evolving environment in college athletics.

Regardless of who ultimately takes over, Smith is confident that the new athletic director will have a comfortable transition into one of the biggest jobs in the country.

"I just feel comfortable that this team and this culture and everything is right for a new leader, a transition in and not have a whole lot of bumps," he said. "I've always wanted to leave a place better than I found it. But I also want to leave a place that, when the next person comes in, gives them a chance to transition in as smoothly as possible. And they now have that ability with this team."



Heather Lyke

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McCord, Brown In Dead Heat Exiting Fall Camp

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day declined to name a starting quarterback during his Aug. 21 press conference, meaning the Buckeyes will not announce a starting quarterback for the season opener against Indiana by the time Buckeye Sports Bulletin has gone to press. For the latest on Ohio State's quarterback battle, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com.

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The old adage is that if you have two quarterbacks, you actually have none, but that is not a philosophy to which Ohio State head coach Ryan Day subscribes.

"No," Day said on Aug. 21 when asked if he agrees with the saying. "If you had Aaron Rodgers and Tom Brady, would you say that?"

Day's stance is despite the fact Ohio State is in a state of quarterback gridlock. While not deciding between Brady or Rodgers, the program – as of Aug. 21, Day's most recent press conference as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press – has thus far not publicly chosen between junior Kyle McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown to be under center when the season kicks off at Indiana on Sept. 2.

"There's been situations in the past where you have two really good quarterbacks on the roster," Day said. "These things have a way of working themselves out. I met with the quarterbacks and they agreed. There's not one that's that much further ahead. But they both graded out champions in the (Aug. 19) scrimmage, they're both playing very well, so that's really good, and we have confidence in them."

"We've talked about this before – you don't know until you get into the game exactly what you have. Practice is good. Practice gives us a snapshot of what you're going to see in the game, but once you start getting tackled and you're in the situations

Projected Starter(s)

Quarterback
6 • Kyle McCord

6-3 • 215 • Jr.
St. Joseph's (Pa.) Prep

Started one game in 2021 vs. Akron as a true freshman, completing 72.2 percent of his passes for 319 yards and two touchdowns while leading Ohio State to 59-7 win.

Projected Starter(s)

Quarterback
33 • Devin Brown

6-3 • 213 • R-Fr.
Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon

Appeared in just two games last season, taking 15 total snaps with just one – a one-yard rush against Toledo – not a handoff to a running back.

and you're live, that's another thing. So we'll just keep trying to figure it out one day at a time, but I've been in situations – not very many – where you don't have a quarterback and that's not a good feeling. We're going to have a quarterback, and we may have two. If they deserve to play, they're going to play."

It's a process that has been in the works since both McCord and Brown arrived on campus, but only picked up in earnest this past winter following C.J. Stroud's departure for the NFL. McCord backed up Stroud during his two seasons as the starter, but all indications from the program were that while McCord would likely have an edge given his time in the program, the job would be legitimately up for grabs if Brown were to come in and take it.

In the nearly nine months since Stroud announced his entry to the draft, it's become apparent that this is the most serious quarterback competition that Day has had on his hands since arriving in Columbus. There were no questions in 2017 (J.T. Barrett), 2020 (Justin Fields) or last season with returning starters, while the battle in 2018 between Dwayne Haskins and Joe Burrow was decided in the spring after Burrow's broken hand.

Other competitions under Day have offered some intrigue with Fields battling Matthew Baldwin in 2019 and Stroud earning the job over McCord and Jack Miller III in 2021, but those battles were largely viewed as foregone conclusions. Once last

season ended, it appeared that McCord taking over the starting job would be a similarly predictable outcome, but that has not been the case through the spring and fall camp.

"There was a point twice in camp where I thought one was pulling away from the other, and then two practices went by and the other one really played well and the other one kind of leveled off," Day said. "I would let them know, too. Right then and there. I'd say, 'You were pulling away and he just kind of took over a little bit.'

"One thing for sure is they can't take a down off. They can't take a play off. They're pushing each other. That's good. They're running down the stretch against each other and when one pulls away, the other one goes faster. I mean, they're going hard. The bottom line is that finish line isn't right now. We're going to keep going and keep running and give them the opportunity, and we'll just keep evaluating it."

It's become increasingly clear that the evaluation will extend into the season, even if a starter is named ahead of the opener. With Ohio State's first three games of the season against the Hoosiers in addition to home contests against Youngstown State and Western Kentucky, there's little more Day could ask for if he wants a chance to play both quarterbacks ahead of the trip to South Bend, Ind., on Sept. 23 to face Notre Dame.

"I asked the staff this weekend after the scrimmage (on Aug. 19), I just took a straw poll (between McCord and Brown), and it was almost split right down the middle," he said. "So what does that mean? I think it's going to continue to go on this week. We'll go from there. Is there a chance that both of them could play in the first game? I think the answer is yes, there's a chance. But we're going to keep working.

"We don't have to make that decision right now, but I can tell you that I am pleased with their progress, and our staff feels strong with both of them playing. Where it goes, we'll keep putting one foot in front of the other."

This is a situation that may strike fear into the hearts of Ohio State fans who witnessed the 2015 season, with then-head coach Urban Meyer switching between Barrett and Cardale Jones through much the season and neither finding his groove. Day wasn't at Ohio State at the time to witness that controversy, but with the ball now in his court, he feels confident that things will work out in the end for the entire team.

"I know in my heart this thing's going to work itself out," he said. "I'm proud of the way the guys are competing. If I felt any oth-



SONNY BROCKWAY

BATTLING IT OUT – Ohio State junior quarterback Kyle McCord (pictured) is in a battle with redshirt freshman Devin Brown to become the Buckeyes' starting quarterback this season.

er way, I'd say it. But now they're going to have to keep pushing through and competing, and if it goes into the season, it goes into the season."

As for the candidates themselves, it's been clear throughout this process why Ohio State has struggled to choose between McCord and Brown.

Each has had up-and-down days during fall camp, and as Day alluded to, there have been days when one has appeared to take a leap past the other. Brown has shown the highest ceiling in terms of athleticism, with a penchant for throwing on the run and being able to evade in the pocket. McCord is no slouch, either, taking off multiple times in viewing periods afforded to the media, but he showed more consistency when working from a clean pocket.

"Everybody has different skill sets," Brown said. "Not everybody's the same quarterback. I would say I'm a little bit more athletic than Kyle, but at the end of the day, we've both got strong arms, we both can make plays, and he's going to be able to make plays with his legs too, so it is what it is."

Each has been resilient over the past weeks and months, not letting the competition get to them as they each try to become better quarterbacks.

"Not even focusing on the competition, I feel the best I have felt going into a camp before," McCord said. "Obviously I have the most experience I've had going into a camp, and I think now more so than ever, (I'm) just focusing on myself. I know I'll be in a good position if I put the best version of myself out there."

Brown echoed that sentiment, adding that both he and McCord are each just trying to be the best versions of themselves on the field.

"We're not worried about, at the end of the practice, we're not going to be like, 'Oh,

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

he did better than me this day or that,' ” Brown said. “It’s, ‘How did I perform? What did I get better (at) today? What was I really working at today to get better?’ And if I get myself better every day, that’s going to be a really good few months that I built up.”

The focus for Brown is on simply making up time. McCord not only has an extra year under his belt but a start for Ohio State, filling in against Akron in 2021 while Stroud nursed a shoulder injury. In that game, McCord led the Buckeyes to a 59-7 win over the Zips behind a 13-of-18 passing performance for 319 yards and two touchdowns.

McCord has seen the field sparingly since, but Brown was issued another potential blow in the quarterback battle when he suffered a broken pinky finger on his throwing hand the week of the spring game, holding him out of the scrimmage and forcing him to miss a few weeks of throwing, all the more important given that he did not throw a pass last season.

But he remained optimistic despite the setback and doesn’t feel that he’s fallen behind, whether because of the missed spring game or the fact that McCord has already made 12 appearances for the Buckeyes.

“When we’re lined up for the first scrimmage and we’ve got the best defensive line in the country coming at us, it’s a lot different than getting some throws against a lesser team or something like that,” Brown said. “And when it’s their third (team) in the game, too, it’s like, ‘Am I really getting that much out of throwing a pass in the game?’ I’d much rather go out against our guys like Denzel (Burke) and Davison Igbinosun.

“With our receivers like Marvin (Harison Jr.), and being able to go like that in practice, I think it’s way better than having a couple reps in a game.”

Where both signal callers have felt the most growth has been in taking leadership over the team. Despite the fact that just one starting quarterback will eventually be named, it hasn’t stopped either McCord or Brown from establishing themselves as locker room leaders.

“When C.J. was here, you didn’t want to step on his toes, obviously,” McCord said. “It’s his team. But obviously with him being gone, you kind of naturally step up into that role being a little bit more of a vocal leader and letting your voice be heard.”

Brown took his biggest leap in leadership while recovering from his broken finger, as talking to his teammates was just about the only thing he could do.

“I wasn’t able to do much of the lifts,” he said. “But I was able to be in that locker room and in that weight room and vocalize myself and get guys going and push guys and really show guys that I’m here to do this thing.”

Despite taking part in a competition in which both want to stand out individually, the process has only made the other look better as each quarterback tries to keep pace.

“Devin will say this too, I think. We



Devin Brown

definitely pushed each other in the spring, which was good. He brought the best out of me, I brought the best out of him,” McCord said. “It’s been a really healthy competition with each other. When you go out there on the field, I think you’re just focused on one thing and that’s doing your job to the best of your abilities.”

Neither quarterback has shown enough so far to earn the starting nod, but that does not mean that neither has shown himself capable of eventually being under center for Ohio State. Throughout spring practice and fall camp, Day has seen immense growth from both quarterbacks, and he has repeated the message that the program will feel comfortable with McCord or Brown at quarterback, whenever that decision does come.

“In the passing game, I think that they’ve done a nice job of making good decisions,” Day said. “I think they’re getting more and more comfortable being in the pocket and getting the timing of the passing game. That’s not something that just happens. It took Justin Fields a little while. C.J. had a great feel for it. Dwayne, you know, that was something that came pretty naturally to him as well. But I think both of the guys are starting to really feel that rush and anticipate what’s going on.”

Beyond McCord and Brown, Ohio State has easily the most depth at quarterback under Day thus far during his run as head coach. The Buckeyes welcomed in seventh-year quarterback Tristan Gebbia from Oregon State, who is ready to see the field if need be but is looking to kick-start a future coaching career, and freshman Lincoln

Kienholz, who is coming off one of the most impressive prep careers in South Dakota high school football history.

But before Gebbia or Kienholz see the field, Ohio State – whether it wants to or not – will at some point have to decide on a starting quarterback. Whether that’s ahead of the opener or before the Buckeyes travel to Notre Dame, either McCord or Brown will ultimately have to be under center when those games kick off.

Regardless of being decided before the season or a month into it, Day is looking for his eventual starting quarterback to be ready to lead.

“If it’s all equal, you want the guy that has *it*. You want the guy that’s the leader, the guy that’s leading men into the end zone, that on third-and-long or you’re backed up or after a bad play or we’re down by a score, can rally the team or can find a way to go dive into the end zone on fourth down,” Day said. “Think about some of the quarterbacks we’ve had and some of the big plays that they’ve had in big games. That’s what you need in a quarterback, somebody that you can rally around.

“If all things are equal, we want the better leader, the better decision maker, and ultimately, the best competitor. Because playing quarterback is just constantly competing. And there’s going to be good days, there’s going to be bad. You have to be resilient, as we all know, especially being the quarterback at Ohio State.”

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Depth On Display For OSU Running Backs

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In his first seven years at the helm as Ohio State running backs coach, Tony Alford gained a firsthand look at a plethora of pro-bound talent, guiding players such as J.K. Dobbins, Ezekiel Elliott and Mike Weber to 1,000-yard rushing seasons in the Scarlet and Gray.

Now, as he enters his eighth season with the program, Alford is tasked with leading what he said is “without a question” his most gifted group of tailbacks to date. Speaking with the media at the Woody Hayes Center on Aug. 5, Alford noted the abundance of talent and experience that oozes through the Buckeyes’ running backs room, a five-man show that consists of Doak Walker Award watch list honorees TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams, emerging contributors Chip Trayanum and Dallan Hayden and the fully-healthy Evan Pryor.

According to Alford, this unique combination of skill sets and personalities will only elevate those closest to the group as they progress through the season.

“It’s exciting,” Alford said. “It’s great to have depth. Everybody wants depth. And how that gets dispersed, we will figure that out as we go. But it’s good to have depth. And it’s good to have guys. And it’s good to have good players, improving players. And how we manage it, and how we get guys on the field, that will play itself out.”

Perhaps no member of Ohio State’s staff knows the importance of having depth more than Alford. Last season, the Buckeyes saw their top two rushers, Henderson and Williams, miss a combined seven games with injuries, forcing Alford to experiment with several different rushing combinations. With Henderson sidelined the last two games of the year with a broken bone in his foot and Williams logging just 11 carries over that same stretch while dealing with a lower-body injury, Alford assigned the majority of the reps to then-true freshman Hayden and the all-purpose Trayanum, the third and fourth running backs on the depth chart.

While some programs may have faltered after losing their two premier backs, the Buckeye tailback room instead kept rolling, relying on Hayden to lead the team past upset-hungry Maryland on Nov. 19 with a career-high 146 rushing yards and three touchdowns, then leaning on Trayanum a week later to churn out 83 of his 92 yards from all of last season to keep Ohio State in reach of archrival Michigan.

The Buckeyes’ unconventional three-game approach at running back showed Alford, as well as those within the group, how having positional depth can help a team stay afloat through the wear and tear of a long season. Luckily for Ohio State, it is well equipped and even more prepared to do that this season.

“They see that, I don’t have to say it,” Alford said. “They know that everyone is going to have an opportunity.”

“You know you always have to be ready,” Hayden added. “You never know when your number is going to be called. I think everybody who followed our room last year saw that.”

Projected Starter

Tailback
32 • TreVeyon Henderson

5-10 • 212 • Jr.
Hopewell, Va.

Is hoping to return this season to his freshman form, when he rushed for an Ohio State rookie-record 1,248 yards and accounted for 19 total touchdowns.

The Buckeyes plan to utilize all five rushers throughout the season, but they will ultimately rely on the two-man rotation of Henderson and Williams to steer the ship. Henderson burst onto the scene his freshman year in 2021, producing the second-most rushing yards by a first-year Buckeye in Ohio State history (1,248) and setting the freshman record for touchdowns scored (19). However, an injury-riddled campaign last year minimized his impact on the offense, limiting him to 571 rushing yards and six scores in just eight games.

According to Henderson, he is now fully recovered from his foot injury to start his junior season and is poised to return as the Buckeyes’ game-changing lead back.

“I’m just excited to be back,” Henderson said. “You know, to get on the field with my teammates, compete and work hard. I’m just looking forward to a great year. My (foot) feels great. It feels better than ever, probably better than it was before.”

Henderson’s improved health has encouraged those within Ohio State’s staff, most notably head coach Ryan Day. He said on Aug. 14 that he has seen Henderson regain the explosiveness and home-run ability that allowed him to thrive in his freshman season, which Day sees as a testament to the work Henderson put into this offseason.

“Trey has had a great offseason,” Day said. “I think he looks fast. He’s seeing the holes. He’s involved on special teams. Overall, I can’t say enough about the kind of work he’s putting in right now. Now he’s got to go do it. And I know he’s anxious to get back on the field.”

Williams, who elected to return to Columbus for his fourth season with Ohio State, is once again expected to receive significant touches. Since arriving as a three-star prospect in the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, the Cincinnati native has put his stamp on Alford’s tailback room with his bruising running style, accumulating 1,396 rushing yards and 17 scores in his first three seasons in the Scarlet and Gray.

On-field performance aside, Williams has emerged as a veteran leader for his fellow rushers, something that can pay dividends for Ohio State if the younger backs are once again counted on to assume a larger role.

“I just feel like, being an older guy, I’m trying to carry the younger guys with me,” he said. “I’m just trying to keep them under my wing and be more approachable.”

Williams is not the only Buckeye tailback with a wealth of college football experience. Also entering his fourth season is Trayanum, who transferred to Ohio State in 2022 after rushing for 692 yards with 10 touch-



FILE PHOTO

RETURN TO FORM — After an injury-plagued sophomore season, running back TreVeyon Henderson (32) is looking for a bounce-back campaign.

downs in two seasons at Arizona State.

The former Sun Devil, who is originally from Akron, entered the Buckeyes’ program last season with intentions of switching to linebacker, but he was thrust back into a laboring tailback room late in the season due to the previous injuries to Henderson and Williams, not to mention the loss of Pryor in the preseason to a knee injury.

This allowed the then-junior transfer to display his unique versatility and impact the game on all three levels of the field, where he logged 46 plays on offense, 36 on defense and 154 on special teams. Trayanum expressed a desire to return as a full-time rusher this season, but he has not closed the door on welcoming any other opportunity that may come his way throughout the season.

“It was a cool seven months on defense, but running back is where I’ve been at my whole life,” Trayanum said. “It’s definitely a blessing to be back. I mean, I would like to stay in the running back room, but anything I could do to help this team at this point, that’s what I’ll do.”

The veteran presence that both Williams and Trayanum bring to the room should be a benefit for the younger running backs on the roster such as Hayden and Pryor.

Coming in as a four-star recruit, Hayden showed flashes of star potential in his first season in Columbus, emerging as the Buckeyes’ third-leading rusher last season with 553 yards and five touchdowns. Hayden’s talents took center stage on New Year’s Eve, where he served as Ohio State’s starting running back in the College Football Playoff against Georgia and led the team with 43 rushing yards on nine carries. Now as he looks to carve out a more consistent role on the offense, the second-year tailback said he has taken his game to another level, specifically improving upon his physicality throughout the offseason.

“Obviously, I’ve gained way more weight, built some muscle,” said Hayden, who was listed at 187 last season but is up to 205. “I’d say that’s probably the biggest change. I came in pretty light last year, played pretty light. That was one of my main goals was to

gain some weight and gain some muscle.”

Rounding out the Buckeyes’ group of rushers is junior Evan Pryor, a former top-100 prospect who will return to the field this fall after being sidelined for the past year.

He appeared in just four games during his freshman season before choosing to redshirt, but was forced to miss all of last season and spring practice earlier this year after suffering a torn patellar tendon in his right knee last August. Now fully healthy, the battle-scarred tailback is poised to make an impact in his junior campaign – a triumphant comeback that has excited those closest to him in the locker room.

“Man, it’s definitely amazing to see him back,” Williams said. “I’m more than happy he’s back with us. He can definitely help out in a lot of ways.”

Williams declined to reveal the impact his teammate could make come fall, but Pryor said he can bring another layer of speed and explosiveness to the offense. This can come with his home-run hitting ability, something he said he has regained during fall camp, and he also provides an intriguing option in the passing game for Ohio State.

“I feel like I’m the freshest guy in the room, basically,” Pryor said. “I’m back to 100 percent. I feel better than ever out there. So I just feel super fresh. I’ve been doing everything. I feel springy. I just can’t wait to get back out there.”

Pryor’s return provides Alford and the Buckeyes with another layer of talent and character in an already-loaded running backs room. Stacked with a combination of established veterans and versatile, battle-tested youngsters, the group of tailbacks all believe that they are primed to emerge as a constant matchup nightmare for opposing defenses this season.

“I think we have the best room in the country,” Pryor said. “We all bring the same thing to the table. Maybe the scale teeters here and there, (with) bigger, stronger guys, or maybe some of us are better out of the backfield, some of us are better in pass protection, things like that. But all around, talking about all five of us, it’s pick your poison.”

Stover Not Satisfied With Being Comfortable

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Slipping into a worn but still viable pair of shoes is comfortable. Comfortable is nice for footwear, but it's a word new Ohio State tight ends coach Keenan Bailey doesn't want associated with his players.

Keenan, who replaced Kevin Wilson when he took the head coaching job at Tulsa on Dec. 6, believes progress is made through stepping outside the comfort zone. He's particularly interested in applying that theory to standout fifth-year senior Cade Stover, who is on the preseason watch list for the Mackey Award that goes to the nation's top tight end.

Last season when Stover was a Mackey semifinalist, he made 36 catches for 406 yards and five touchdowns. His receptions and yardage totals were the most by a Buckeye tight end since Rickey Dudley had 37 and 575, respectively, in 1995, and Stover's five scores were the most since Jake Stoneburner caught seven in 2011.

Not bad for a player who began his Ohio State career as a defensive end before moving to tight end. He even saw action at linebacker against Utah in the 2022 Rose Bowl.

Stover, the No. 8 linebacker in the class of 2018 out of Lexington, Ohio, saw last season end prematurely during the College Football Playoff semifinal against Georgia. He made a catch across the middle and sustained a hairline fracture in his back on the tackle in the 42-41 loss. He is a fifth-year senior with two years of eligibility remaining, including the COVID season, and opted to return to school.

"I just felt like there was more," Stover said. "As good as the year was, what the team had and everything, there's more left. I just felt uneasy. I don't know if I'd ever forgive myself leaving a place like this, that I've put so much into, on a note like that.

"I just felt there's more to do, and I felt I could be 10 times better than I was, and that's what I'm going to work towards."

That's where Bailey can help. He is new to the role, but he has been a familiar face in the program since joining the Buckeyes in 2016 after two seasons as a recruiting analyst at his alma mater, Notre Dame. Bailey was a special assistant to head coach Ryan Day last season following three seasons as quality control coach for the offense, so he's been around the tight ends.

"We spend more time with each other now," Stover said. "Before he was our coach, I spent the most time with him outside this place. He's super smart and a super good guy. He's a guy you want to go to bat for no matter what, and that's definitely never going to change."

Stover trusts Bailey to make him better in deciding to come back for an additional season at Ohio State, and the coach has a simple approach to reach that goal.

"Get uncomfortable. Two words," Bailey said. "I text him it all the time. I printed it out, put it on his desk. Get uncomfortable. What does that mean? It means if I put Cade in a drill that he can exhale because he knows he's good at it, shame on me, he should have (gone) to the NFL.

"Seriously, if I have him on a route at practice that he's comfortable doing, shame on me because he's not getting better. You don't get better when you're comfortable. So for Cade to come back, we put a plan together before

Projected Starter

Tight End
8 • Cade Stover

6-4 • 251 • Sr.
Lexington, Ohio

Caught a pass in all 13 games with highs of six receptions vs. Penn State (one TD) and 83 receiving yards vs. Toledo.

he decided. And I said, 'I'm going to make you uncomfortable, because that's when you grow.'

"It's drills going up against corners because if you could beat Denzel Burke at the line of scrimmage, you could beat the safety. So putting him in situations where he's constantly uncomfortable, and he might hate it at the time, but he's getting so much better."

Stover has embraced the concept, adding that Bailey has done a good job of pushing him this offseason.

"I'm doing things I've never done before," Stover said. "I'm running way more one-on-ones with the safeties. Up until this year I had never done that before.

"They're good players. Anytime you can go up against guys who are the best in the country at their position, you always feel comfortable about what you can do on Saturdays."

As much as Bailey wants Stover on the field, Bailey understands the physical toll it can take because the tight ends have to be blockers as well, taking on bigger and stronger opponents.

"He averaged 58 snaps a game and that's with our blowouts that he didn't play in the second half," Bailey said. "That's an absurd number for a guy to go four-to-six (seconds), (point) A to B for 50 snaps a game. So, if we can take a number of snaps and divvy that up, then we've got enough depth that I could put guys out there to spell them.

"Cade deserves it and this team needs Cade at his best later in the year, and that's what we're going to get."

Helping Hands

In order to do that, senior Gee Scott Jr. and junior Joe Royer must step up to replace last season's backup, Mitch Rossi.

Recruited as a wide receiver from Seattle Eastside Catholic, Scott has played a total of 25 games for the Buckeyes, appearing in 12 of the 13 games last season and catching five passes for 28 yards with a long of 16 yards against Michigan, but the season ended on a sour note. He was pulled from that game after delivering a head-butt to a U-M player and receiving an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, and that incident and an injury combined to keep him out of the College Football Playoff.

A more reflective and mature Scott is ready for redemption. He received a degree in human development and family science at the summer commencement and said he is planning to pursue another.

"It is a cool achievement," he said. "Nobody can ever take that away from me. Regardless of what happens, I am an Ohio State graduate.

"It's been a concept of getting my mind, body and soul all becoming one," he continued. "It's funny saying, 'Being the best version of yourself,' because the plan being, weeks from

now, hopefully, I'll be a better version of myself than I am now.

"This is the best I've felt going into a camp – going into a season. My heart feels good, my body feels good, my mind feels good and I'm ready to roll.

"At one point in my life, my foundation was built in sports and that's who I was as a person, and so when you take that out, when I'm no longer the football player that I was built in, I'm left with no foundation. This time around, I've built my foundation in my faith and something that's internal and that's never changing, and football is just a fruit of that."

As for on the field, Scott has worked on his blocking because he's not as big as some tight ends at just 240 pounds, lightest among Ohio State's scholarship tight ends.

"Gee is the best blocker he's been," Bailey said. "He is the best route runner he has been. Gee is the strongest he's been, the fastest he's been."

Royer knows all about going against guys bigger than he is, and like Scott, the Cincinnati Elder product is a former wide receiver. When he replaced Stover in the Georgia game, he weighed 243 pounds but has since worked hard to add muscle, up now to 255 pounds.

"Man, I never really realized how much 10 pounds could make a difference but I feel it," he said. "I feel stronger in my legs, being able to drive and move guys. It's definitely helped me.

"One of my first practices here as a freshman, (blocking against defensive end) Zach Harrison, we went back the wrong way about 10 yards and I was like 'Holy s—t, what am I doing?' " He recalled. "That's how the first snap went when my hand was in the dirt."

Bailey is proud that four of his players – Royer, Scott, Stover and walk-on Patrick Gurd from New Albany, Ohio – met the high standards set by Mickey Marotti, the associate athletic director and director of football sport performance.

"We do the summer workouts and Coach Mick ranks guys as far as gold, and gold is the top tier," Bailey said. "Those are guys that if we

want to hit all our goals, we need those guys to rely on. I had four in my room."

Royer redshirted as a freshman in 2020 and played five games the following season. He was on the field for 35 snaps last season, with 28 coming vs. Georgia. He had two catches for 10 yards last season in only five games, missing seven with a groin injury and being away after the passing of his mother.

"It was a rough year, man. I'll put it that way," he said. "It was not a good year for me. But I just try to build from it, learn from it. Just kind of control what I can control. Obviously, you can't really control kind of both of those things that happened. But I'm trying to take positives from each of them and get better any way I can.

"Honestly, I just don't really feel like there's anything that could really go on in my life that would get me to that point again. So when things get tough, I feel like I'm scarred from things like that, calloused in a good way. Obviously, what happened wasn't good, but you know, it kind of built up my mental toughness, being able to fight through certain things."

Stover said Royer has maintained a positive outlook despite facing adversity.

"Joe is kind of the gel of the room," Stover said. "He's the always got a smile on his face kind of guy. Super happy. That's a really good culture guy. And he's a super, super good athlete, too. He'll be a really good player for us."

Junior Zak Herbstreit, son of former Ohio State quarterback and current ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit, is not practicing after being hospitalized in June for a heart issue.

"Zach has been like a second (graduate assistant)," Bailey said. "We've got the best GA in the country."

Other linebackers on the roster include Gurd (6-4, 240), junior Jace Middleton (6-4, 251), sophomore Sam Hart (6-5, 255) and freshman Jelani Thurman (6-6, 258), the latter two on scholarship. Redshirt freshman Bennett Christian was suspended for the season per NCAA rules after testing positive for a banned substance in a supplement he took.



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WR Room Overflowing With Talent In 2023

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since being promoted to wide receivers coach in 2019, newly-minted Ohio State offensive coordinator Brian Hartline has established a high standard for his wideouts that is almost unparalleled in college football.

In just four seasons leading the position, Hartline has molded the talents and character of pro-ready receivers among the likes of current NFL standouts Chris Olave (2018-2021) and Garrett Wilson (2019-2021) along with emerging pro talents Jaxon Smith-Njigba (2020-2022) and Jameson Williams (2019-2020).

This season, Hartline is coaching what might be his best wide receiver room of them all. The Buckeyes' unit is spearheaded by pre-season AP All-Americans Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, while Buckeye journeymen Julian Fleming and Xavier Johnson will also return to make a considerable impact.

The room also features a plethora of young talent, starting with sophomore Jayden Ballard and promising second-years Kojo Antwi and Kyion Grayes, and also adds potentially-transcendent freshmen Brandon Inniss and Carnell Tate. With no shortage of talent at Ohio State, Hartline once again enters the season with lofty expectations and standards for his group.

"I think we have great receivers," Hartline said. "And they've chosen this place for all the right reasons. And we are trying to maximize them as football players and as individuals. And

they are doing a good job doing it.

"We have a room full of guys, and they work together, they learn from each other. And the peer pressure to get it right the first time and consistently get it right really helps their development, really challenges them and helps them maximize what they're capable of. And frankly, it's a very NFL model. You can't be wrong. You can't have a bad day. That's just the reality of it. All these guys know that. They relish in it. They challenge each other."

Ohio State will be breaking in a new starting quarterback this season, but the skilled receiving room can alleviate some of the early-season uncertainties under center, however, starting with the ultra-talented Harrison.

After hauling in just 11 passes for 139 yards and three scores in his true freshman season in 2021, the Philadelphia native quickly blossomed into one of the nation's more dominant wideouts in his sophomore campaign, recording 77 catches for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns. Harrison's 14 scores tied for second all-time in Ohio State single-season history, while his reception and yardage totals ranked fourth – an impressive set of numbers that allowed him to become the Buckeyes' first-ever unanimous All-American wideout.

Despite the scintillating sophomore season, the third-year receiver is wanting more. The projected first-round draft selection said he committed himself to improving his durability and flexibility throughout the offseason with Ohio State's training staff, and he has expressed a desire to move into the slot, a change he sees as a potential matchup nightmare for



SONNY BROCKWAY

HIGH EXPECTATIONS – Ohio State wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. leads a talented receivers room for the Buckeyes that should be among the best in the country.

opposing defenses.

"When you just look at the slot receivers in Ohio State's offense over the past couple years, there's a lot of success," Harrison said. "Dating back to K.J. Hill, Parris Campbell, Jaxon, Garrett for one year and (Egbuka) last year. I think the slot is a very important piece in our offense. Then from a run-blocking standpoint,

I think that's where my size can come into play. You know, we're asked sometimes to dig out linebackers, to block (defensive ends). I can definitely do that in the offense, but then just also just being a mismatch. I like my chances against a safety anytime. I think it just brings a different element to the offense."

An improved Harrison may be a scary sight

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: WIDE RECEIVERS

Projected Starters

Wide Receiver	Wide Receiver	Slot Receiver
18 • Marvin Harrison Jr.	4 • Julian Fleming	2 • Emeka Egbuka
6-4 • 205 • Jr.	6-2 • 210 • Sr.	6-1 • 206 • Jr.
Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep	Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Colombia	Steilacoom, Wash.
Enters the season on the watch list for the Biletnikoff Award after hauling in 77 receptions for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns.	Played through injuries last season to finish third on the team with 533 receiving yards and six touchdowns.	Became just the ninth player in program history to collect 1,000 receiving yards in a season, finishing with 74 catches for 1,151 yards and 10 touchdowns.

for opposing secondaries, but a healthy Egbuka and Fleming can add another layer to the offense. Like Harrison, Egbuka also emerged as one of the nation's top wideouts in his sophomore campaign, ranking ninth in the country in both receiving yards (1,151) and catches of 10 or more yards (46).

He accumulated these stats while nursing a couple of injuries throughout the season, however, that also limited him this spring. On the other hand, Fleming has dealt with a slew of injuries of his own throughout his first three years at Ohio State, mostly to his shoulder, which he claims he dislocated "several" times during a rocky start to his collegiate career.

The former five-star wideout admitted he played through injury all of last year, especially hurting when lifting his arm to catch passes. Fleming prevailed through the pain, however, posting his best collegiate season with 34 receptions, 533 yards and six scores. Despite the combination of injuries, both Egbuka and Fleming proclaimed they are healthy entering their respective junior and senior seasons.

"I feel better than I did last year," Egbuka said. "There were a couple games (last year) where I just had to power through. But this is football, so you're never going to be 100 percent, but my body's feeling good again, and I'm just excited to play."

"I felt like I was 100 percent coming into summer workouts," Fleming added. "The re-

hab was great. We have the best training staff in the country here, so they took it pretty easy. But when we had to ramp it up, we ramped it up, and it's been a really, really good rehab. I'm just constantly taking care of my body the best that I can. Coming in here, getting all the extra treatment, getting all the extra work that I possibly can to stay healthy and constantly be able to be available. Coach Hartline always talks about the best ability is being available, so that's really one of the things I've worked on the most."

While Harrison, Egbuka and Fleming are likely to repeat as Ohio State's top three receivers, the expectation is that Johnson will see the field plenty throughout the season. He is Ohio State's Block "O" recipient and will wear No. 0, and he was also voted as a team captain for the Buckeyes along with linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and tight end Cade Stover.

"I couldn't think of a better person for that award," Hartline said of Johnson. "I know he's made an impact in our room and he impacts those on special teams. You can't say enough about the gentleman with how he impacts others. I'm very proud to have him in our room."

The Ohio State receiving room is filled with experienced, polished and NFL-ready talent, but it also features a unique group of younger wideouts that can put their stamp on this year's roster. Antwi and Grayes – who came in as four-star prospects in 2022 – have both quietly emerged as potential impact players this year,

and Ballard continues to lurk as a potential contributor, but most of the hype this offseason has been garnered by incoming freshmen Brandon Inniss and Carnell Tate.

Inniss – the fifth-best wide receiver and the Buckeyes' highest-rated recruit in the 2023 class – arrived in Columbus from Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage in June, but according to Hartline, he has made a seamless transition to the college ranks in his short time with the program with his football acumen and athleticism.

"Brandon being a guy that, unfortunately, couldn't be here in the summer, you worry about him being behind," Hartline said. "And I haven't felt that lag. He's really caught up to the guys. He's very inquisitive, asks great questions. Sometimes guys ask questions and you're like, 'Gosh, I wish he wouldn't have asked me that question.' The question itself scares you. But he asks some good questions. And so I've been impressed with him."

"I have a lot of comparisons to him in my head. When Chris (Olave) came in June (2018), it just took him a little more time to come in, he just established himself. I see a lot of correlation there with Brandon. He's doing a phenomenal job. He's going to help us a lot this year."

Tate, the ninth-ranked wide receiver in the class who enrolled at Ohio State in January, has experienced a challenging start to his Buckeye career, as his mother, Ashley Griggs, was tragically killed in a drive-by shooting in Chicago on July 16. Playing with a heavy heart, the first-year Buckeye has received a wealth of support from his coaches and teammates since the tragedy, especially from head coach Ryan Day.

"I know he and his mom were very close,"

Day said at Big Ten Media Days. "When you lose someone close to you like that, it takes the rug from underneath you, and I know that happened with Carnell."

"We've all surrounded him and try to help him the best we can. He's a pretty private person. I think football has allowed him a distraction to get his mind off of it when he's not in his room or back in Chicago."

Using the football field as a sanctuary, Tate has worked to become a difference-maker throughout fall camp. With his speed and already crisp route-running ability, the Chicago native has separated himself from the rest of the freshman class, earning rave reviews from those within the program.

"Carnell's going to be special," Harrison said. "Carnell is probably at a better point right now than I was going into my sophomore year. He's amazing. He handles his business. He's always in the right spot, catches the ball and runs great routes. I'm excited to really see what his career looks like. I think he'll be one of the best receivers to ever come to Ohio State."

Beyond Inniss and Tate, the freshman class also includes Bryson Rodgers and Noah Rogers, four-star prospects in their own right, that will all push for playing time this season. Ohio State's unique combination of distinguished veterans and promising young prospects has raised the confidence level of those within Hartline's wide receiver room.

This type of talent and production is expected, however, for a unit that has worked years to firmly place itself among college football's most dominant position groups.

"We always talk about (how) we have to make the difference," Fleming said. "If that's getting open a second earlier, if that's when you're out a second faster, if that's making a 50-50 catch – a 50-50 catch would be 70-30 in our receiver room. That's how we look at everything."

"There's definitely no days off in the receiver room. We had a ton of young kids come in with a ton of talent, and the sky's the limit for them. But everybody comes in, everybody comes in ready to work, everybody comes in trying to take somebody's spot. So that's kind of just something to keep behind you."



SONNY BROCKWAY

FULLY HEALTHY – After a "rocky" start to his Ohio State career, senior wide receiver Julian Fleming is healthy and hoping for a breakout season with the Buckeyes.

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Ohio State Breaking In New Starters On OL

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The quarterback competition at Ohio State rightfully garners most of the attention as the Sept. 2 opener at Indiana nears. By nature, it's a job that draws big-time name, image and likeness dollars and 24/7 coverage.

It's no different as Kyle McCord and Devin Brown vie to be the replacement for C.J. Stroud, but there are other position battles, and none directly affects the quarterbacks more than finding the right combination on the offensive line.

Yet, through nearly three weeks of the fall camp, head coach Ryan Day and offensive line coach Justin Frye weren't ready to commit to a front five, although the picture was getting clearer as practice and scrimmages accumulated.

To be fair, a major overhaul had to be undertaken with the departures of All-Americans Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones and All-Big Ten honoree Luke Wypler, all taken in the 2023 NFL draft. For now, it appears returning starters Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones are at left guard and right guard, respectively.

Redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman has the edge over Louisiana-Monroe transfer Victor Cutler Jr. to replace Wypler, a two-year starter at center. San Diego State transfer Josh Simmons is the likely left tackle starter, besting redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola, and at right tackle, junior Josh Fryar gets the nod although freshman Luke Montgomery

Projected Starters

Center
75 • Carson Hinzman

6-4 • 320 • R-Fr.
Spring Valley (Wis.) St. Croix Central

Played center for the first time during last year's fall camp but has quickly taken to the position. Expected to start the season opener.

has shown well.

"We are evaluating and grading every snap of every guy so that when we kick off against Indiana, we're playing our five, six, seven, eight best." Frye said. "We're hoping the guys can settle up and we can finalize that."

"There's chemistry, there's communication, there's continuity with those guys that we have to get into, but we're getting closer. You don't want to drag it all the way out. We are getting closer to that. They'll know. We'll know."

A hallmark of the offensive line over the years is versatility and adaptability. Fryar spent this spring at left tackle (he played right tackle vs. Indiana last season in his first career start) but was moved to the other side and won the spot.

"He's gone back and forth a little bit," Day said. "He's got flexibility that way. He feels comfortable playing on the right side."

Simmons started at right tackle in the spring and early in fall camp after playing there at San Diego State, but he fits nicely

Left Tackle
71 • Josh Simmons

6-5 • 310 • R-So.
San Diego Helix/San Diego State

Entering first season at Ohio State after two seasons at San Diego State, where he started 13 games last season at right tackle.

Left Guard
74 • Donovan Jackson

6-4 • 320 • Jr.
Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal

Has appeared in 26 games with 13 starts, all at left guard last season. Was voted first-team All-Big Ten by media and second-team by coaches.

Right Tackle
70 • Josh Fryar

6-6 • 313 • R-Jr.
Beech Grove, Ind.

Jones took steps this offseason, including dropping 10 pounds, to improve his mobility and technique

Right Guard
55 • Matthew Jones

6-4 • 315 • 6th-Sr.
Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall

Bided his time at Ohio State for his first four seasons before taking the reins at right guard last season, starting 12 out of 13 games.

opposite Fryar.

"I think he's had some really good practices, and he's shown that he can be the starting left tackle," Day said.

Simmons' expected backup, Tshabola, worked at right tackle during spring ball. Hinzman was not a center until making his first snaps last August, and Cutler played tackle at Louisiana-Monroe except for four games at center in 2021.

It could be unnerving to have all that shuffling along the line considering the Buckeyes are still unsettled on the No. 1 quarterback. The last thing an inexperienced signal caller needs is leaky pass protection or a line that doesn't open holes for the running backs to ease the pressure.

"I don't think that's going to affect the quarterback play," Day said. "I think the progress that's being made there, I don't see that being an issue. I like the way we're trending. I think (Frye) is doing a great job, and I think we have a chance to have a really good O-line."

Others think so, too. Jackson and Jones are on the watch list for the Outland Trophy for best interior lineman on offense or defense, and Jackson is also for the up the Lombardi Award, for outstanding lineman on offense or defense.

In the bigger picture, in ESPN's "Position U" rankings the Buckeyes are second best among the offensive lines behind Alabama and a spot ahead of Wisconsin. Oklahoma is fourth followed by Notre Dame and Michigan. The recognition Ohio State wants at the end of the season is the Joe Moore Award for the "most outstanding offensive line unit," which has been won in

each of the past two seasons by the Wolverines.

Ohio State is not there just yet, but Hinzman sees the potential.

"We just need a little bit of time," he said. "Going into this offseason, what we've been able to put on the field recently has been more than good enough, if not great. I wouldn't be surprised if we make a run at the Joe Moore."

Just Joshing

Left tackle is vital to the survival of a right-handed quarterback because he has to protect his blind side. Having been accustomed to the right, Simmons is ready for a new experience.

"Obviously, when you flip sides, it's going to be an adjustment," he said. "But with the coaching staff and resources here, I know I'll be able to do it."

"There's a lot of expectations. I take it with a grain of salt. Maybe I'm kind of making some progress right now, but I'm still trying to work to get better at it."

Fryar said Simmons has what it takes to dominate, displaying "freaky athleticism."

"Watching film and seeing him go up on a linebacker," Fryar said, "it's kind of scary how he moves."

Frye, in his second season with the Buckeyes, initially recruited Simmons when he was an assistant coach at UCLA and said Simmons is more mature after a couple of college football seasons under his belt.

"That's the thing when you get these guys from the transfer portal," Frye said. "They've known college football. With some of those younger guys that came mid-year, they're just first-year guys. He's been in a locker room."



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PREVIEW: OFFENSIVE LINE

He's played in college football games. So I think the speed of the game is a little slower than for an actual rookie."

Simmons quickly made new friends upon his arrival from San Diego State and acquired a nickname. With the offensive line room already having Josh Fryar and Joshua Padilla, Simmons mentioned that his previous teammates had condensed his first and last names to call him "Jim." That became "Jimmy" to the Buckeyes, though he clarified that he is "Jimmy" on the field and "Josh" off it.

"He's bought into the room. He's bought into the culture," Frye said. "He's around the guys. He works the way he's supposed to. He's still learning to work some of the ways that he needs to, and he's around a good room of guys that know how to do that. He's bought into that. I think that's been the easiest transition for him."

Simmons credits his fellow linemen for making the transfer smooth.

"At some other schools, they'd be like, 'Hey,' kind of test the waters a little bit," he said. "But here it was just open arms. Immediately upon arrival guys were like, 'Hey, you want to go hang out after lifts?' It was amazing.

"I knew what type of program this was. I knew you're going to have to really dive head-first into this and really empty the tank day in and day out, so that's what I've tried to do."

Fryar has played 25 games, including all 13 last season. He was on the field for 224 snaps, peaking at 65 vs. Indiana (his first career start) and 63 against Michigan, but critics point out that he has not been a regular starter.

"I think I'm very prepared," he said. "Honestly, just hearing everybody talking about it and worried about it just gets me more motivated to step up into that position and succeed."

Tshabola, a four-star recruit from West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West in 2021, has alternated between right and left tackle.

"I want to be a guy that can step in and make a switch wherever I'm needed," he said.

Guarded Approach

When Simmons looks for guidance in his new surroundings, he turns to Jackson, who started 13 games last season and played in 26 games his first two seasons.

"He has the best mind," Simmons said. "One of the best minds on the field to pick, especially when it comes to offensive line play. He's played in those big games, so when I'm going against those big-time players, just turn to him."

Jackson embraces being a mentor, especially to the younger players.

"Some guys have more reps. Some guys don't have more reps," Jackson said. "Freshmen are going to be freshmen. They're going to ask questions, and it's just my job to answer them because I've been here for three years now."

Jackson helped Ohio State to a No. 9 ranking nationally in total offense (490.7 yards per game) and No. 2 in scoring (44.2 points per game) last season. The offensive line allowed the sixth-fewest tackles for loss (50.0) and tied for the seventh-fewest sacks (12.0). He tied Johnson and Wypler for the team lead with 827 snaps.

With competition at nearly every position, Jackson has noticed a different vibe to fall camp, his third with the Buckeyes.

"Everyone's learning to the best of their knowledge and absorbing information quickly

and putting the meeting room on the field," he said. "It's a very nice experience. We're trying to get off the rock and run the ball and pass block as effectively as we can as an O-line."

Jones started 12 games last season, missing the Michigan game because of a foot injury. According to Pro Football Focus, he allowed one sack all season.

Having been recruited as a center, he was a spot starter the previous two seasons prior to his first starting nod last year. He opted to use his COVID season to return for a sixth year after redshirting as a freshman in 2018 and playing sparingly the following season.

Montgomery, from Findlay, Ohio, was the second-ranked player from Ohio in the 2023 recruiting class and a four-star prospect. He was one of the first freshmen to lose his black stripe and seems destined to make the two-deep chart. Frye has set no expectations that he will start this season barring injuries, though the coaching staff expects him to see the field at some point.

"He's just another freshman that's bought in that's working really hard," Frye said. "I stopped putting hopes and wishes into those buckets of guys. You just coach them and see where they're at. If you timestamp it, then you might be disappointed and that's a bad way to look at it.

"If they're ready and they're able to help you win the game and it's in that fit then those guys can do that."

Center Of Attention

Hinzman, the ninth-ranked interior offensive lineman in the 2022 recruiting class, from Spring Valley (Wis.) Saint Croix Central, had an auspicious debut snapping in practice a year ago, realizing the defensive tackles he had to go against.

"I looked across the line and saw Mike Hall on my left and Tyleik Williams on my right," Hinzman recalled. "I was like, 'Uh-oh. This is a little bit different.' I snapped the ball straight over Kyle's head."

While his first reps at center did not go according to plan, Hinzman's appreciation for the opposition has changed over time.

"We have such a great D-line," he said. "We have multiple first-rounders on there, so going against them every day is super awesome. I was telling them, 'The best thing about you guys is that I don't have to play you on Saturday.' It's been such a blessing to be able to get that work in."

Cutler is in a similar adjustment period. After redshirting in 2019, he played 29 games for Louisiana-Monroe from 2020-22 and made 21 starts: 12 at left tackle in 2022, seven games at three positions (four at center, two at right tackle, one at left tackle) in 2021, and two at right tackle in 2020.

"I'm getting better every day," he said. "It's something I have to work on. It's feeling more natural. I don't have to think about it all the time where it's like, 'OK, I know I've just got to snap the ball and then block somebody.'"

He's soaking in his new environment and has enjoyed his time since arriving on campus, offering a big difference from his previous environment.

"I literally said to myself, 'Wow, I'm on the No. 3 team in the country now,'" Cutler said. "A year ago today if you, if someone would have told me I would be playing for Ohio State in a year's time, I wouldn't believe them. And now that I'm here, it's just like 'Wow.'"

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Unified D-Line Primed For Dominant Season

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When five-star defensive ends J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer first joined the Ohio State football program in 2021, many assumed it would immediately usher in a new golden age for the usually dominant Buckeye pass rush. With Tuimoloau rated the No. 1 defensive lineman in the country and Sawyer the top overall prospect in Ohio, the duo was expected to instantly wreak havoc on opposing offensive lines, naturally following in the footsteps of former Ohio State greats Joey Bosa, Nick Bosa and Chase Young.

More than two years later, the next great Ohio State defensive line has yet to come to fruition. Tuimoloau has shown flashes of superstardom in his first two seasons, most notably during his stat-stuffing performance last October at Penn State. But he has yet to consistently produce, registering just six sacks during his freshman and sophomore campaigns.

On the other end, Sawyer struggled to make an impact on a Kerry Coombs-led defense his freshman season, recording just nine solo tackles and three sacks. Then, under new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' patented 4-2-5 defense, the Pickerington (Ohio) North product was forced to make a position change to the "Jack," a sudden switch that appeared to stunt his growth and failed to bring out

his natural pass-rushing tendencies.

As the two former five-stars enter their third season in the program, however, the feeling around the duo – as well as the pieces that surround them – has begun to change. With Tuimoloau gaining another year in Knowles' system, Sawyer returning to his defensive end position and a bevy of other talented rushers set to make a considerable impact, the Ohio State defensive line is poised to embark on a dominant season.

"I think a lot of us haven't really had the career we thought we'd have the first two seasons," Sawyer said. "I think it's hard to come in on the defensive line and put up those huge numbers. I don't think a lot of guys do that. I just think collectively as the D-line, if we just put one foot in front of the other every day and try to get better every single day, before we know it at the end of the season, we'll look up and see all those numbers."

"We just want to be a great unit," junior Tyleik Williams said. "We want to be better than last year, of course. We want to be one of the best in the nation. Stop the run, that's one of our big goals. And just create havoc."

As Williams stated, one of the largest points of emphasis for associate head coach/defensive line coach Larry Johnson and his unit this season lies with curtailing the opponents' rushing attack. The Buckeyes' rushing defense ranked 24th

in the nation last season with 121.1 yards allowed per game, but it floundered in the team's last two games, surrendering 7.2 yards per carry and three touchdowns in the loss to Michigan, and 135 total rushing yards and two scores in the College Football Playoff Semifinal loss to Georgia.

In order to prevent this from happening again, Johnson said his group of linemen must commit to stopping the run as a collective unit before they can even think about getting after the quarterback.

"We want four guys, a unit, playing together as hard as we can, we want to stop the run, and then have an opportunity to rush the passer," Johnson said. "That's our goal. That's our goal every year. This is our goal even more this year. We feel like if we can stop the run, we will have a chance to rush the passer. And so when that opportunity avails itself, then we should be ready to go. But we can't do that until we make the team one-dimensional."

Johnson will count on a number of bodies to limit the run, starting with interior defensive lineman Mike Hall Jr. The third-year Buckeye will look to emerge as one of the Big Ten's premier defensive tackles in his third season with the program after a breakout sophomore campaign. Despite being hampered by a lingering shoulder injury which he suffered in the second week of the season, Hall still left his mark on the front four, tallying 19 tackles in 12 games while amassing a team-high 7½ tackles for loss.

Now that Hall is fully healed and on the preseason watch lists for the Lombardi and Outland Trophies, Johnson expects the veteran to take a significant step this fall.

"If he stays healthy and does the things we all ask him to do, he has a chance to do some real things to help our defense," Johnson said. "I think he's in better shape. I think he's in great shape. I think he's in the best shape he's ever been in. He's run-

ning to the ball (which are) those kinds of things you'd like to see from a guy who has that kind of explosiveness."

Johnson and the Buckeyes will also rely on junior Ty Hamilton, the brother of former Buckeye and current Jacksonville Jaguars defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton, to man the inside of the starting defensive line. The Pickerington, Ohio, native has gained 30 pounds (260 to 290) since arriving in Columbus and emerged as a key run stuffer for the defense at the end of last season, starting the last five games of the season and netting at least one tackle in the team's last six contests. This strong finish, according to Hamilton, has left the defensive lineman with an unwavering belief in his abilities as he begins his fourth season with the Buckeyes.

"Confidence has changed the most of my game," Hamilton said. "Coming off last year, coming off of the back half of the season playing pretty well, I think (I developed) that confidence where I can go out and dominate when I need to dominate. So when my number's called, I can get on the field and play."

Hall and Hamilton will likely assume the majority of first-team reps, but a number of other tackles are expected to contribute on the interior this season. That list is headlined Williams, who has collected 37 career tackles and six sacks in his first two seasons. Sophomore defensive tackle and Ole Miss transfer Tywone Malone – who also played on the Rebels' baseball team last year – will also earn playing time this season, along with redshirt senior Jaden McKenzie and redshirt freshman Hero Kanu.

The Buckeyes' commitment to run defense starts with the interior linemen, but their ability to rush the quarterback will mostly be sparked by the defensive ends. Ohio State is anchored by two of the more formidable pass rushers in the Big Ten this season in Tuimoloau and Sawyer, who each have made significant

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Projected Starters

<p>Defensive End 44 • J.T. Tuimoloau</p> <hr/> <p>6-4 • 271 • Jr. Edgewood (Wash.) Eastside Catholic</p> <p>Had an all-time performance against Penn State last season with six tackles, three tackles for loss, two sacks, two interceptions, a forced fumble and fumble recovery.</p>	<p>Defensive Tackle 51 • Mike Hall Jr.</p> <hr/> <p>6-2 • 280 • R-So. Streetsboro, Ohio</p> <p>Limited by injury last season but still finished with 7½ tackles for loss and tied the team high with 4 1/2 sacks.</p>	<p>Defensive Tackle 58 • Ty Hamilton</p> <hr/> <p>6-3 • 295 • R-Jr. Pickerington (Ohio) Central</p> <p>Collected a career-high 15 tackles GET 15 last season, appearing in all 13 games with five starts, including against Georgia in the CFP.</p>	<p>Defensive End 33 • Jack Sawyer</p> <hr/> <p>6-4 • 265 • Jr. Pickerington (Ohio) North</p> <p>After playing at the "Jack" last season, switched back to defensive end during spring practice and is expected to line up with his hand in the dirt this season.</p>
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improvements to their games during the offseason.

Tuimoloau, a second-team AP preseason All-American selection, said he has mostly worked on speeding up the timing of his rush, while also looking at ways to emerge as a more vocal presence in the locker room.

"I think my first step has evolved since my freshman year," Tuimoloau said. "I think that's one thing that can still be a little better, but that's one of the small things I felt like I've been better at. So far, it's still getting my leadership better. I need to keep helping the boys and help them to play to the best of our abilities to be the best unit we can be."

On the other end, Sawyer has used the offseason to improve his physique and overall conditioning, claiming that he lost 6-7 percent of his body fat from a season prior. This, along with the comfort he gained from returning to his natural edge rusher role, can allow the third-year Buck-

eye to play with a rekindled speed and ferocity this season.

"I think this offseason, I wanted to trim up a little bit and lose some body fat, which I did," Sawyer said. "So just getting in shape more, you know, getting my explosiveness back a little more and becoming a little more twitchy again. That was my main focus this offseason."

"I feel very comfortable being back at defensive end. I feel happy about it. When me and Coach Knowles talked about it after the season, that's what I wanted to do, and that's what they thought I was best at, and that's what they thought I was best at, too. So it was great, and it's been good being back at defensive end."

Aside from the two starting defensive ends, Knowles and Johnson also plan to utilize the speed and explosiveness of their younger edge rushers this season.

Redshirt freshman Kenyatta Jackson Jr. is expected to assume a larger role after recording just two tackles in three games as a freshman last season. Jackson, a for-

mer four-star prospect out of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep, opted to redshirt last season but he has turned heads this fall with his raw strength and pass-rushing ability.

Fellow sophomore Caden Curry has also impressed off the edge. The 6-3 defender, who appeared in all 13 games and recorded 14 tackles last season as a true freshman, said he has gained just over 20 pounds of muscle since he first arrived in Columbus. According to Knowles, the continued development of the younger rushers only adds to the potential of the defensive end unit and they have the opportunity to emerge as one of the nation's best as the season progresses.

"Our rushmen have had a great camp," Knowles said. "We have four ends there that I think are as good as anyone in the country. I think the depth there is fantastic. I think you have elite players, you have potentially elite players, J.T., Jack, Kenyatta, Caden Curry, who's just a guy who's go-

ing to show up and make plays. So you've got four really good ends. And I feel like the rush has been strong. We've felt it. We've felt it and seen it during camp."

With a unique combination of veteran run-stoppers, battle-tested pass-rushers and emerging defensive ends, Johnson's deep defensive line unit is primed to wreak havoc on opposing offenses throughout the season. To accomplish that, however, he said his players must ignore their personal aspirations and instead compete as one unified group.

"I think the biggest thing we've challenged our guys, is to really just think, 'Let's be part of a pack, let's be a part of a unit that does everything special,'" Johnson said. "And I think that's the key. We're trying not to say that, 'This guy has this skill, that skill.' How about we put all those skills together and go play as a unit and try to become the best unit in college football."

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Eichenberg, Chambers Return To Anchor LBs

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When it comes to leadership, fifth-year linebacker Tommy Eichenberg is a man of few words, although his teammates swear he's really funny when you get to know him.

He wasn't named a captain for the upcoming season because of his gift of gab, but for his laser focus in training and playing the right way even when battling through broken hands – yes, plural – last season that earned him the nickname “Tommy Two Thumbs” because those were the only appendages not covered by casts.

“He is a barbarian out there, commanding the troops,” senior linebacker Steele Chambers said. “He was racking up 15 tackles a game with two broken hands. That’s just insane.”

Eichenberg shrugged off the description, saying he didn't think about the hindrance all that much throughout the season.

“When you've got a purpose to play for – you play for the team – you don't think about yourself,” he said. “You can do anything. You go out there no matter what because you love playing with those guys.”

The linebackers room is in good hands – or thumbs, as the case may be – because Eichenberg and Chambers opted to return for a second season under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles rather than entering the NFL draft.

Projected Starters

Weakside
22 • Steele Chambers

6-1 • 232 • Sr.
Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic

Has played 37 games for the Buckeyes, first 11 at running back and the past 26 over two seasons as a linebacker.

Middle
35 • Tommy Eichenberg

6-2 • 239 • 5th-Sr.
Cleveland St. Ignatius

His 120 tackles were 43 more than any other Buckeye player last season and the most since linebacker Joshua Perry's 124 stops in 2014.

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

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

In Knowles' two-linebacker scheme, Eichenberg is at the middle (or Mike) position while Chambers, a converted running back, is in the weakside (Will) position. There are variants of that with a third linebacker at times, whether that be a strong-side (Sam) linebacker or Knowles trying to employ the Jack, a hybrid linebacker-defensive end that was a defensive end last season with Jack Sawyer but is likely to be a linebacker this season.

In this new age of the transfer portal, players have options if they don't want to watch and learn. Senior linebacker Cody Simon – who will back up Eichenberg and is in line to enter the game at Sam line-

backer – is of another thought.

“I pride myself in being a team player,” he said. “I love those guys. Those guys are my brothers, every one of them in the room. That’s why we're all so close.”

“It's never like, ‘Man, I wish I was in there instead of him.’ I think anybody who's on the field, we can always produce. It's ultimately on the coach, and whenever he decides I'm going in, I'm going to play my hardest and do whatever I can to help the team.”

Eichenberg was first-team All-Big Ten and second team All-American last season when he led Ohio State with 120 tackles and had 12 tackles for loss and 2½ sacks. His 77 solo tackles were the most for a Buckeye since Ryan Shazier's 101 in 2013.

The Cleveland St. Ignatius product, who did not participate in spring ball but has been healthy for fall camp, has been named to the preseason watch list for the Bronko Nagurski (best defensive player) and Butkus (best linebacker) awards.

“It's great to have Tommy. He's the type of guy that I can yell at, and he'll yell back at me,” Knowles said. “That's the kind of relationship you want. You know if they believe something, you can have an exchange, and that's Tommy because he's passionate. He cares. He never wants to make a mistake so when you have guys like that you have a chance.”

Eichenberg relishes the opportunity to engage Knowles because “he knows how the defense should work,” according to Eichenberg.

“As a player, you kind of think you know, but you really don't know, so it's nice to bounce off ideas back and forth,” he said.

Knowles is grateful that his best linebacker is leading the way when it comes to grasping his system entering the coach's second year leading the defense.

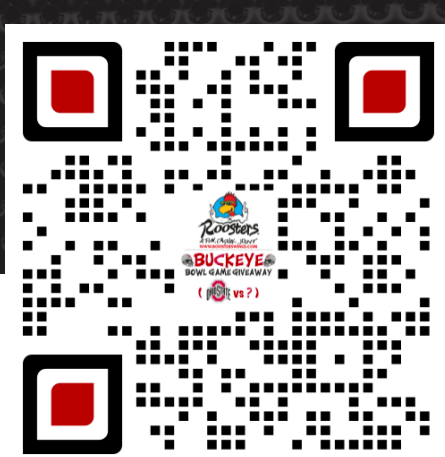
“Tommy figured it out a little more quickly than maybe some other guys that if I made this call, and they ran this play, the ball was going to end up over here,” Knowles said. “That's how you play fast. When you get 11 guys, you can do that, and that's how you get better.”

Eichenberg's teammates appreciate his work ethic and tenacity, leaving no question as to why he was voted a two-time captain.

“I don't think anyone on the defense wouldn't go into battle with him,” Simon said. “He's so tough, and he inspires everyone else in the room. He's playing with broken hands. I can get through it, bruises


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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: LINEBACKERS

and cuts, so anything he does, we'll follow."

It seems to be working with Knowles noting there is less hesitation among the players this season after last year's indoctrination period.

"I do see it clicking," he said. "I see players in the right spot, players understanding and more of the why – you know why I call a certain thing. I expect all our guys to be able to answer not just what, or where, or how but why. What's the purpose behind this call? They're able to see that now. It's the players having a year's worth of knowledge in the scheme."

Eichenberg, Chambers and the rest of the defense are looking for redemption after faltering at the most critical times. The Buckeyes gave up 530 yards and 45 points to Michigan and 533 yard and 42 points to Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

"I won't be over that until we write a new script," Knowles said. "That's the way it should be."

Eichenberg said the second-half let-downs in each game provide motivation.

"If they don't score a point, they don't win the game," he said. "If they don't score, they can't win. I think we really took that to heart."

Line Them Up

Eichenberg and Chambers are the unquestioned starters, but Simon and sophomore C.J. Hicks will be pushing for snaps in what could be a deep unit that could have had even more depth if not for a season-ending ACL injury to fourth-year Kourt Williams II, who moved to linebacker during fall camp.

The former four-star safety sustained his third serious injury in four seasons. Williams missed his freshman season with a torn ACL and as a captain last season played only six games because of shoulder injuries that resulted in three surgeries.

"Really feel awful for Kourt," head coach Ryan Day said. "I feel he can't catch a break. He's such a great young man, so prayers are out to him. We're all rallying around Kourt."

Chambers, like Williams, is a linebacker transplant. He played running back in a combined 11 games from 2019-20 before making the switch to the other side of the ball in 2021, and he has since started 17 consecutive games in the past two seasons.

He finished second on the team in tackles with 77, plus 6½ tackles for a loss and two interceptions last season while ranking third on defense with 665 snaps. Chambers missed spring practice with a toe injury but declared himself fit at the start of the fall camp.

"I feel great. Dangerous," he said. "It was great to be back out there with the boys."

He rejoined a changed team, in his opinion: "I think people are just more confident, especially on the defensive side. I mean, people just know what they're doing. They're just flying around a lot more. There's a lot less guessing."

Among those expected to make a bigger contribution is Hicks, a five-star prospect and No. 1 ranked Ohioan in the 2022 recruiting class from Kettering Alter. He played in 12 games last season with six tackles, and for this season, he has a simple goal: "I want to make a name for myself. I want to show that I can be one of the best linebackers in the country."

With Hicks mostly working at the Jack throughout fall camp, he said he would embrace the hybrid role as a way to get on the field, though he is expected to back up Chambers.

"I feel like (the) Jack would show how versatile I am because I could come off the edge but still drop back and play Will as well," he said.

"He has had a great offseason," Knowles said. "He continues to improve. He's going to play at Will. He's going to play at Jack. We are going to look for ways to get him in the game."

Hicks said the connection between him and Knowles is growing with both entering their second season in the program.

"He's starting to expect more out of me," he said. "I can tell. He and I have that relationship now that we can talk business

but also talk about stuff outside of football and how it correlates to football and the Jack and Will and things like that."

The coaches want to see if Simon can reach another level as well. The No. 9-rated outside linebacker nationally in the 2020 class from Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep played in six games as a freshman for the Buckeyes, mainly on special teams. He started 10 times as a linebacker in 2021 but missed the Rose Bowl game vs. Utah because of a shoulder injury. Last season he was on the field for 234 snaps and had had 32 tackles, including 5½ for loss.

Junior Mitchell Melton, who has flipped between defensive end and linebacker, is most likely to see the field at the Jack role that Knowles occasionally implemented with Sawyer last season with limited success. Melton is working his way back from tearing an ACL during last year's spring game that cost him the entire season.

"We want to get Mitchell back on his feet as a rush end and then eventually work in some Jack with him," Knowles said.

Because Melton was a linebacker and a pass rusher from the line at Good Counsel in Silver Spring, Md., the Jack could be a good fit.

"I definitely succeeded at that kind of position," he said. "There are some similarities. I can be successful."

Sophomore Reid Carrico from Ironton, Ohio, is awaiting his opportunity after playing eight games on special teams last season. Redshirt freshman Gabe Powers played sparingly on special teams and took a redshirt last season.

The Buckeyes also added a linebacker when freshman Nigel Glover of Clayton (Ohio) Northmont transferred from Northwestern before the fall camp.

"We've known about Nigel for a long time," Knowles said of why Ohio State was interested in him. "And really, it's his attitude, the way that he wants to improve, that he's so into the X's and O's. He's that kind of kid. He's the kind of kid that's coachable and wants to learn."

Glover's arrival could mean freshman Arvell Reese, the lone linebacker signed in the 2023 cycle, could move to defensive end or the Jack. Freshmen Alec DeSignore and Jalen Pace round out the roster.

Another addition to the room was the hiring of former Buckeye All-America linebacker James Laurinaitis from Notre Dame to be a graduate assistant working mainly with the linebackers, the position group Knowles coaches in addition to his coordinating duties.

"It'll be great," Knowles said. "I think it's just a bonus. I get to walk around more and be around other positions."

"James is fantastic. He's an Ohio State legend. He's a really good coach and a really good person. With everything he has, he's not an ego guy. He's just genuine. All the Ohio State fans love him, and they should. He is that guy when it comes to just comes being a great representative of everything."

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Secondary Motivated, Healthy Entering Season

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At the beginning of last season, it seemed as if Ohio State's secondary had no problems adjusting to new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unconventional 4-2-5 system.

The Buckeye defensive backs ushered in the Knowles era with a strong showing under the lights, relinquishing just 177 passing yards to Notre Dame quarterback Tyler Buchner and limiting the Fighting Irish offense to just 10 points in the Buckeyes' season-opening victory – a clear message sent to college football that the program's poor defensive outing in 2021 was merely out of character. The secondary would continue that momentum through the heart of the 2022 schedule, holding seven of their next nine opponents to under 200 yards throwing while securing 11 interceptions along the way.

Knowles' smooth-sailing first season would sour toward the end of the campaign, however, as a bevy of cracks began to quickly seep through the Buckeyes' secondary. The regression began during Ohio State's near-upset loss to Maryland on Nov. 19, where it struggled to contain Terrapins quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa through the air, allowing him to complete over 72.2 percent of his passes and throw for 293 yards.

Then, in Ohio State's regular-season finale against archrival and also unbeaten Michigan one week later, the group would falter again, surrendering three scores through the air of 45 yards or more in the final 30 minutes of action – a series of gut punches that would ultimately lead the Buckeyes to a season-defining 45-23 loss.

Ohio State would sneak into the College Football Playoff as the No. 4 seed, but the blemishes within the secondary once again reared their ugly heads. Holding a 38-27 fourth-quarter lead in the Peach Bowl against Georgia, the Buckeyes yielded touchdown passes on back-to-back drives, granting the defending national champions the 42-41 lead and spoiling Ohio State's shot at a national championship. The series of big plays were highlighted by Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett's 76-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Arian Smith, who found the ball downfield as he easily darted past the slipping Lathan Ransom.

The Buckeyes' late-season secondary struggles were no secret during the offseason, serving as a major point of emphasis for Knowles and his defensive backs as they prepared for their second year under his

Projected Starters

Cornerback
10 • Denzel Burke

6-1 • 193 • Jr.
Phoenix (Ariz.) Saguaro

Missed two games last season while dealing with shoulder and right index finger injuries. Finished with 34 tackles and five pass breakups.

Cornerback
7 • Jordan Hancock

6-0 • 187 • Jr.
Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett

Missed the first six games of last season but became a valuable member of rotation. Finished with five tackles in six games.

Adjuster/Free Safety
14 • Ja'Had Carter

6-1 • 203 • Sr.
Richmond (Va.) Henrico/Syracuse

Missed most of the spring with an injury but was healthy for fall camp. Played in 12 games last season at Syracuse with 36 tackles and three interceptions.

Bandit/Strong Safety
8 • Lathan Ransom

6-1 • 210 • Sr.
Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic

Took over at bandit last season for Josh Proctor against ND and never relinquished his spot, finishing with a secondary-leading 74 tackles.

Nickel
6 • Sonny Styles

6-4 • 230 • So.
Pickerington (Ohio) Central

Expected to start for Ohio State despite not turning 19 years old until November. Appeared in 10 games last season, including the Peach Bowl, with nine tackles.

scheme. With a newfound sense of comfort around the system and a retooled, now-healthy position group, the motivated Ohio State secondary room is poised to elevate its level of play and right the wrongs from the season prior.

"I do see it clicking," Knowles said. "I see players in the right spots, players understanding more of the 'Why?' (and) why I call a certain thing. I expect our older guys to answer that. Not just what or where or how, but why? What's the purpose behind this call? And they're able to see that now."

Knowles' adjustments begin at safety, where the Buckeyes are prepared to start two new players at the nickel and adjuster/free safety positions following the departures of Tanner McCalister and Ronnie Hickman.

Expected to assume the nickel role against Indiana is sophomore Sonny Styles, who is breaking into the starting lineup after recording nine tackles in 10 games last season as a 17-year-old reclassified true freshman. Checking in at a physically imposing 6-4 and 230 pounds, Styles has been lauded for his unique versatility throughout fall camp, a trait that can allow him to not only man the nickel position but move around throughout the secondary and play at different levels of the defense.

"He's kind of a unicorn, so to speak," safeties coach Perry Eliano said. "I love the kid."

For Styles, he has fully embraced his unique role in the secondary, emphasizing that it will help him see the field more often and impact the game in several different ways. In addition to his work at nickel, he has also been utilized as the adjuster/free safety and bandit/strong safety.

"My favorite thing is making plays in multiple slots," Styles said. "Going from the half to being in the box to playing in the middle



Sonny Styles

of the field to playing man-to-man, to be able to do it all – I think there's opportunities to make plays anywhere. It's just different kinds of plays based on where I am."

Joining Styles among the new group of Buckeye starting safeties is senior transfer Ja'Had Carter, who brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the room after playing in 31 games for Syracuse from 2020-22. Carter, an honorable-mention All-ACC performer last season, helped transform the Orange into the nation's 14th-best passing defense last year (184.8 passing yards allowed per game) by recording a team-high three interceptions along with another three pass breakups and 36 tackles.

Now at Ohio State, the former Syracuse defender has turned heads with his ability to quickly grasp the 4-2-5 system, all while working his way back from a right knee injury that sidelined him during the end of the spring. These traits have permitted his defensive coordinator to tab him as the team's starting adjuster/free safety come September.

"Ja'Had, being a transfer, has just been a very coachable player," Knowles said. "He's one of those guys (where) you can say something to him to correct it, and then he corrects it immediately on the field. That's rare. So his learning and processing of his system has been great. He understands the game. He sees the whole field. And he processes things quickly."

Carter, like Styles, is also making a case to compete at the other two safety positions this season. He worked at nickel in the spring before his injury, but with his move to adjuster, he believes he is capable of producing in all areas of the field.

"I'm very comfortable," Carter said. "At my previous school, I played everything. So just showing that versatility, that's when I'm at my best, and that's something that I do very well. I feel like I can play back in the post. I feel like I can cover man-to-man. I feel like I can do everything. So wherever I'm needed, that's where I'm going to go."

Carter and Styles are expected to be two first-time starters for the Buckeyes, but OSU will also reclaim the services of Ransom, a four-time letter winner and reigning Jim Thorpe Award semifinalist who will again assume the starting bandit/strong

safety role. The Tucson, Ariz., native mostly operated at the boundary safety position last season, a year in which he ranked third on the team in tackles (74), had three pass breakups and one interception and earned honorable-mention All-Big Ten honors.

Ransom, who returned last season after suffering a broken leg during the team's 2021 Rose Bowl win against Utah, said the amount of game action he logged last season increased his comfort level and understanding of Knowles' defense. It also served as a wake-up call for him to put on weight, something that he, strength coach Mick Marotti and head performance dietitian Kaila Olson have dedicated to improving upon throughout the offseason.

"I really understood and learned last year that (you) have to put on that size to really endure the whole season," Ransom said. "I'm in there hitting lineman, seeing running backs, seeing tight ends, and I think that just takes maturity, on my diet and my lifting, to know that, 'Yeah, it feels good to feel good game one, game two, but how are you going to feel game seven, game eight when you're that many games in?' Those are the really big games of the season."

"I think that just took some maturing of me. I really bought into the weight room and bought into my nutrition. And I felt my body change and I feel great."

Carter, Ransom and Styles are expected to receive the majority of snaps at safety, but Ohio State will also look to senior Cameron Martinez, sixth-year senior Josh Proctor and sophomore Kye Stokes to provide depth for the room.

The safeties serve as the focal point in Knowles' defensive scheme, but the team's group of 10 cornerbacks is also looking to make a larger impact. Last season, the Buckeyes' position group showed little signs of reclaiming their once-patented "Best In America" status, as they failed to record an interception and forced just one fumble in its 13 games. The lack of playmaking has not been forgotten in the cornerback room, and it serves as a motivating factor for the group to return to its once-prominent status.

"We remind ourselves every day," junior Denzel Burke said. "That's not our brand. We're going to bring that back. And it just

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEFENSIVE BACKS

goes on getting better every single day.”

“We’re going to bounce back,” added junior Jordan Hancock. “No interceptions (last year) is kind of crazy. But this year, it’s going to be a turnaround.”

The turnaround for the cornerbacks starts with Burke, who is searching for a bounce-back year after an injury-riddled, often ineffective sophomore season. The freshman All-American in 2021 regressed last year while being hampered with shoulder and right index finger injuries, and he was limited to just five pass breakups as opposed to the 12 he recorded a season prior.

Despite the lack of productivity, Burke remains confident in his abilities entering this season, citing a larger commitment to his health and an extra year of knowledge under Knowles’ system as reasons he can see a jump this year.

“My confidence is probably at an all-time high,” Burke said, “probably the highest it’s ever been. And confidence is a big thing. If you don’t have that, it’s going to be a long day for you. You gain confidence by going out here and guarding Marvin Harrison, Emeka Egbuka every day. They’re going to get you better, and I’m going to make them better, too.”

Likely manning the other sideline at outside corner is Hancock, who has taken the majority of first-team snaps during fall camp. The Suwanee, Ga., native missed Ohio State’s first six games of last season while recovering from a hamstring injury but showed flashes of being a capable starter toward the end of the season. Now healthy and with a full spring and fall camp under his belt, Hancock is primed to make a significant impact.

“The game has slowed down for him,” cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said. “He’s seeing it quicker. He had a chance to go through the spring, and then the preparation throughout the summer. He’s able to process things really fast, see formations, see splits, and be able to diagnose plays. Now, he’s able to beat guys to the spot instead of just play routes, because he has a feel for what’s coming. He has a really good understanding of the scheme.”

Knowles was particularly complimentary of those two likely starters during fall camp, even envisioning a scenario where both Hancock and Burke emerge as shut-down corners as the season progresses. This is something that the defensive coordinator said can elevate the entire defense, from the back end all the way to the front four.

“Both (Hancock) and Denzel have had great springs and great summers,” Knowles said. “So the next step for both of them is to be dominant. I mean, dominant. They both can do it. That changes everything. It allows you to play with everybody else with their eyes on the ball. And then allow those guys – the other nine – to run around and make all those plays. When you can eliminate people on the outside, it makes things a lot easier.”

The cornerback room also increased its depth this year with the addition of Ole Miss transfer Davison Igbinosun (6-2, 190), who has made a convincing case for himself to earn starting reps this season while flashing his unique length and football acumen during fall camp.

Igbinosun comes to Ohio State after just one season with the Rebels, where he start-

ed 10 games and recorded 37 tackles. The Union, N.J., native has impressed the Buckeyes’ staff with his already-extensive knowledge of the game, something that will only get better as he continues to get acclimated to his new team, and he figures to factor into Ohio State’s plans even if he isn’t a day-one starter at cornerback.

“He has some football IQ,” Walton said. “He has some instincts. He’s played the game, so he understands what it is to play high-level football, so he can process it. It was just learning the new terminology, learning the new verbiage, learning where he fits on certain plays. Now, with the spring and summer under his belt, and (with) camp, now that’s all coming together for him. We like where he is at (during) this point.”

The former SEC cornerback is also turning heads with the competitiveness and sheer talent he has displayed on the field. Igbinosun has frequently found himself lined up against Harrison in team drills during practice, a clash where he claims he has been able to hold his own.

“I can check (Harrison),” Igbinosun said. “He’s the best player in the country, but me and him go at it. I feel like going against him makes going against everybody else easier.”

Igbinosun is not the only other Buckeye cornerback who is vying for starting snaps during fall camp. Third-year transfer Lorenzo Styles Jr., who transferred to Ohio State this season after spending two years at Notre Dame as a wide receiver, is expected to earn snaps in the secondary alongside his younger brother, Sonny.

The elder Styles – who lost his black stripe on Aug. 16, just 12 practices into his Ohio State career – has earned praise from Knowles during fall camp, with the Buckeyes’ defensive leader claiming that he possesses natural skill.

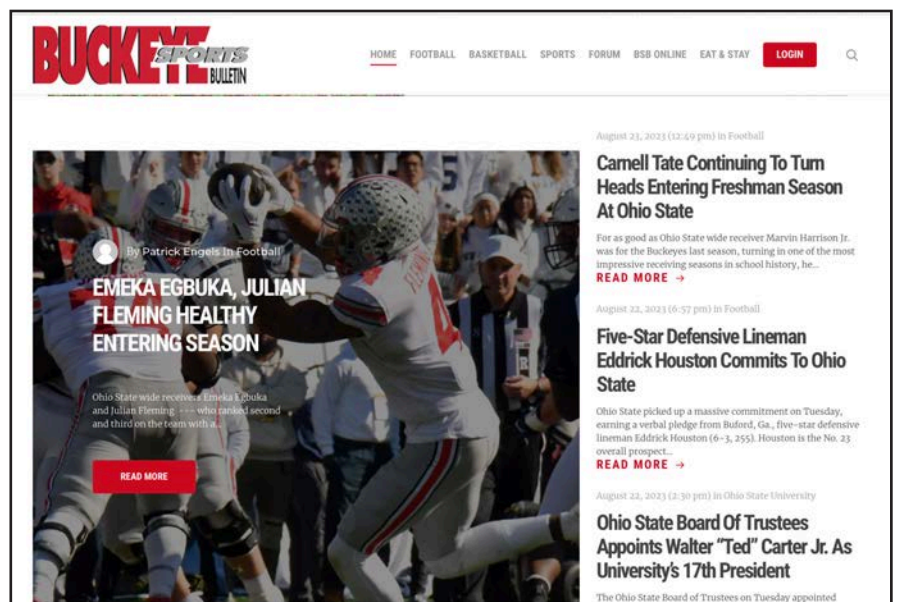
Sophomores Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner have each impressed Walton while earning considerable reps this summer, and freshmen Jermaine Matthews Jr. and Calvin Simpson-Hunt are also vying to see game action. Newcomers at safety include Jayden Bonsu, Malik Hartford and Cedrick Hawkins, with Hartford losing his black stripe in the spring.

“We have a lot of guys that are playing well, that have a good feel for this thing and have been very productive for us,” Walton said. “So we have a good group of guys. And we have some young guys who are doing well. We’re just trying to see what they do best and try to sort it out and just make sure we have them in the right place.”

Equipped with a new-look group of safeties and a highly-motivated and confident cornerback room, the Ohio State secondary will hope to quickly rid itself of last season’s miscues and return to its productive, ball-hawking play. Knowles feels this group is already well on its way to achieving that feat.

“I just see quality,” Knowles said “I see adjustments. I see fits. I hear, more than see, communication. Communication is the biggest thing, particularly with this generation, because they are always on their phones all the time. Our job is to get them to talk to each other.”

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Kicking Battle Only Unknown On Special Teams

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The final memory of Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles sporting scarlet and gray is not a positive one, but don't let that get in the way of recognizing what was otherwise an impressive two-year stint with the Buckeyes.

In program history, Ruggles ranks sixth in extra points (148), ninth in kick scoring (259 points) and has the third-longest streak of consecutive extra points at 134. Furthermore, he holds the program record for field-goal percentage, successfully converting 37 of his 41 attempts (90.2 percent) at Ohio State.

All that to say that replacing Ruggles will not be an easy task, and after relative consistency at the position for the better part of a decade, Ohio State is set to enter the season with some uncertainty at the position. That task of filling in for Ruggles will be done by either – or perhaps both of – sophomore Jayden Fielding and junior Parker Lewis.

"We've got two guys that can get it done and have been doing a great job this camp," special teams coordinator Parker Fleming said. "We're trying to make sure we finalize it the right way and we have the best guy going when it's time to kick the ball, and we've got a little time before we make that decision."

Fleming declined to name a starter during an Aug. 22 media availability, leaving the competition open through the final week of fall camp and entering game week ahead of the season opener at Indiana on Sept. 2.

While Fielding handled kickoffs for Ohio State last season – averaging 61.8 yards per boot with 46 going for touchbacks and three going out of bounds – he has yet to attempt a field goal in an actual game, and that's something shared with every kicker on the roster. Lewis arrived at Ohio State last year after transferring from USC but was only made eligible after the season started, and he did not appear in a game for the Buckeyes.

Both kickers got a chance to kick in Ohio Stadium during the spring game on April 16, with Lewis nailing his lone 38-yarder and an extra point, while Fielding converted an extra point after an Archie Griffin touchdown but missed a field goal from 40 yards out. The Buckeyes also saw extra-point boots during the game from Jake Seibert, who has since transferred to Northern Illinois, and Kent State sophomore transfer Casey Magyar, who offers depth for this season but is not expected to factor into the starting conversation.

As it stands, that's the last that's been seen publicly of the kicking competition, with the special teams unit working off to the side during the two practice viewing sessions afforded to the media during fall camp. And despite over four months gone by since the spring game, Fleming said the competition remains too close to call.

"They've been very close," he said. "They've both done really well this fall. When you have two really good kickers, it makes it a little harder, but that's a good thing."

Projected Starters

Long Snapper
43 • John Ferlmann

6-2 • 228 • R-So.
Phoenix, Ariz./Arizona State

Was Arizona State's long snapper last season after taking a redshirt in his first season with the Sun Devils.

Kicker
23 • Parker Lewis

6-3 • 220 • R-Jr.
Phoenix, Ariz./USC

Made 26 of 35 field goal attempts and 46 of 47 extra points in two previous seasons at USC.

Kick Returner
0 • Xavier Johnson

6-1 • 210 • 6th-Sr.
Cincinnati Summit Country Day

Averaged 22.4 yards per kickoff return on 12 attempts last season with a long of 46 yards.

Punter
29 • Jesse Mirco

6-4 • 220 • Jr.
Fremantle, Australia

Named to preseason watch list for Ray Guy Award, which honors the nation's best collegiate punter.

Punt Returner
2 • Emeka Egbuka

6-1 • 206 • Jr.
Steilacoom, Wash.

Averaged 6.8 yards per punt return on 11 attempts last season with a long of 18 yards.

The coordinator added that beyond simply "making kicks," an important factor in the competition is consistency, and knowing what the team will get from a player when he steps on the field. There's been no indication as to which kicker has offered more consistency, but Fleming believes them both to be special talents and is open to both seeing the field, with one potentially handling field goals and the other on kickoffs.

If Ohio State does split those responsibilities, there's an argument for Fielding or Lewis at either position. Lewis has previously handled kicking duties at USC, previously connecting on 26 of 35 field goal attempts and 46 of 47 extra points. But he was also on kickoffs for the Trojans, collecting 49 touchbacks in 72 kickoffs, so he could conceivably appear at either – or both – spots for Ohio State.

"It's really what's best for the guys and the team," Fleming said. "Two years ago, Noah kicked off and kicked field goals and that was good for him. Then last year Jayden kicked off and Noah kicked field goals. But like I said, we have two capable guys and we're going to use them both to the best of their abilities."

As for the return game, it was not where Ohio State wanted last season, ranking just 79th nationally with 6.7 yards per punt return and 88th with 19.0 yards per kickoff return. The situation was not much better on the other side of the ball, as the Buckeyes allowed 20.4 yards on kickoff returns (70th) and 7.1 yards on punt returns (67th).

Even with those difficulties, not much is expected to change for Ohio State. Fleming expects junior Emeka Egbuka to handle punt returns, while Egbuka or sixth-year Xavier Johnson will return kickoffs. Egbuka averaged 6.8 yards on 11 punt returns last season with (long of 18 yards) while Johnson averaged 22.4 yards on 12 kickoff returns with (long of 46 yards), though Fleming could see a few different faces rotate in at kickoff returns.

"We've got two guys that we really like that have done it," he said. "Emeka did it, X did it, TreVeyon Henderson's done it, too, so there's a bunch of guys that are going to rotate back there. We're going to find the hot hand and get it rolling."

Awesome Aussies

For the potential concerns in the kicking and return game, there are no such questions about Ohio State's punting unit heading into the season.

Led by third-year punter Jesse Mirco,

the Buckeyes averaged 40.8 yards net per punt last season (25th nationally), and after Mirco's average jumped from 42.3 yards in his freshman season to 45.4 yards last year, there's no reason to doubt that he'll keep improving.

"Jesse comes in ready to work every day," said transfer long snapper John Ferlmann. "He's a pro player. Just great. Great to get feedback. When he tells you you're doing a good job, you know you're doing a good job, so it's just butting heads with him, getting better."

Mirco – who is from Fremantle, Australia, arriving at Ohio State from ProKick Australia – got the added bonus this off-season of having a friend join from down under. Walk-on freshman punter Joe McGuire, who joined the team this summer and also got his start at ProKick, has offered some companionship for Mirco as the only other punter on the roster exiting fall camp, not to mention hailing from the same country.

"We've got young Joe," Mirco said. He just got here, so he's come in and is learning and is trying to figure things out. It's good to have another Australian on the team. Someone else that understands everything I'm saying. It's good fun."

Mirco is hoping to provide a similar influence on McGuire that former Ohio State punter Cameron Johnston did for Mirco. While the two did not play together with the Buckeyes, Mirco said he has kept in touch with Johnston, who also came from ProKick, throughout his career.

"For myself, I had Cam Johnston as a bit of a resource and I still use Cam a lot, especially because it's easy to contact Cam since we're in a similar time zone compared to everyone back home," Mirco said. "He kind of showed me the ropes and helped me out when I got here, and I've kind of done the same with Joe and looked out for him the first few days of fall camp. He's been good so far."

Long (Snapper) Way From Home

While Ferlmann is not from Australia like some of his special teams mates, he still had to travel a significant distance to arrive at Ohio State, joining the team in

the spring after transferring from Arizona State, not far from his hometown of Phoenix.

He has big shoes to fill following the departure of Bradley Robinson, who snapped the last three seasons at Ohio State but has exhausted his eligibility. Fleming said that Ferlmann – who redshirted his first season with the Sun Devils before becoming the starting long snapper last season – has made a strong impression since arriving on campus and will slot in as the starter for Ohio State this season.

"He's done a great job coming in and working really hard," Fleming said. "That's the No. 1 job you've got to do is work, and he has. He put his head down and he went to work. He's got some game experience under his belt playing last year at a different school, but he did a really nice job there and we're looking forward to getting started."

Ferlmann said that Fleming was quick to reach out once he entered the transfer portal, and the message from Fleming was clear when trying to convince Ferlmann that Ohio State was the right place for him.

"The pitch for him was to come here, be great," Ferlmann said. "You accomplished some things at Arizona State. Build on that, come out here, play for the Buckeyes and get better gradually and see what happens."

Whether it's the weather or how Ohio State approaches things as a program, Ferlmann has seen plenty of differences from his past stops since arriving in Columbus.

"The biggest difference was the weather," he said. "I came in here, it's freezing cold, I had to get used to it, buy some pants, buy some sweaters. "But definitely just the seriousness, the reverence towards the game here. There's a punishment if you're late. Everyone's on you. You've got to do the right stuff. I really love the fact here that everyone's being held accountable. They do it differently here."

Behind Ferlmann, Ohio State also has sophomores Max Lomonico and Collin Johnson. Lomonico is entering his third season with the Buckeyes, while Johnson – who previously played for Lehigh University – is in his first season.

OSU Names Three Captains, Johnson Gets Block O

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After naming at least six captains in each of the last 10 seasons, Ohio State will enter the 2023 season with just three captains: linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, wide receiver Xavier Johnson and tight end Cade Stover.

Ohio State's captains were selected via a player vote that made Eichenberg and Stover the 16th and 17th two-time captains for the Buckeyes, respectively, while Johnson – who also earned the team's Block "O" jersey – is a first-time captain.

Eichenberg and Stover are returning captains, but Ohio State lost several captains to the NFL and graduation, including defensive end Tyler Friday, quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Kamryn Babb, while linebacker Kourt Williams II – who is out for the season after suffering an ACL injury – was voted a captain last year but not this time around.

Ohio State's three captains are the program's fewest since 2009, when defensive back Kurt Coleman, linebacker Austin Spitzer and defensive tackle Doug Worthington were named captains, and Ohio State had at least six captains in every season from 2013-22. Two defensive captains are also the fewest since only linebacker Joshua Perry and safety Tyvis Powell were named captains on the defensive side of the ball in 2015.

The selection of these captains also provides an interesting wrinkle in that it's the first time since 2006 that all of Ohio State's captains hail from Ohio, with Eichenberg from Cleveland, Johnson from Cincinnati and Stover from Lexington.

The last time that happened, Ohio State gave captaincy to center Doug Datish from Warren, defensive tackles David Patterson from Warrensville Heights and Quinn Pitcock from Piqua and quarterback Troy Smith from Cleveland. Last year's captains featured just Eichenberg and Stover from Ohio, while 2021 captains had defensive end Zach Harrison from Lewis Center and offensive tackle Thayer Munford from Cincinnati. Out of the 24 individual captains named since head coach Ryan Day took over in 2019, only nine are from Ohio.

With these three players set to lead Ohio State this season, here's more information on each of these captains:

Tommy Eichenberg

A repeat at captain is no surprise for Eichenberg considering how effective he was leading Ohio State's defense last season.

Beyond posting a team-high 120 tackles – the most since Perry's 124 tackles in 2014 – and being named first-team All-Big Ten and a near-consensus second-team All-American, Eichenberg's stoic leadership style resonated with his teammates, going hard week-in and week-out despite dealing with two broken hands during the season.

"I called him 'Tommy Two Thumbs' because he barely had two thumbs," linebacker Cody Simon said. "He's so tough, and he in-

spires everyone else in the room. He's playing with broken hands? I can get through it, bruises and cuts, so anything he does, we'll follow."

He has accounted for 186 tackles (18½ for loss) in 31 games over his first four seasons at Ohio State out of Cleveland St. Ignatius. After providing depth in his first three years, Eichenberg started 12 games last season for the Buckeyes.

Despite an opportunity to depart early for the NFL, Eichenberg elected to return for a fifth season with the Buckeyes, and he is expected to be not only a leader for Ohio State's defense, but among the top linebackers in college football this season.

"Tommy is exceptional at learning and diagnosing and putting those two things together," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said. "That's not something everybody can do. Some guys just run around and make plays. Other guys can quote you everything about the defense, but when it comes to actually fitting it with the play, they get hamstrung."

"Tommy is exceptional at blending that learning and diagnosing, and that's what helps you play fast. That's the key to playing fast. Some guys are just fast. But playing fast means you have to know where the ball is going to go."

Xavier Johnson

It's a name that few would have expected would become a captain when Johnson arrived on campus in 2018, but entering his sixth season at Ohio State, there's no doubt that Johnson is among the most influential Buckeyes, both on and off the field.

He arrived at Ohio State out of Cincinnati Summit Country Day in 2018, turning down offers from Akron, Ball State, Bowling Green, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Iowa State, Kent State, Miami (Ohio), Ohio and Western Kentucky and instead opting to walk on with the Buckeyes.

He mostly appeared on special teams through his first three seasons, returning five kickoffs and making eight tackles on returns, though he did receive four carries for 17 yards during the 2020-21 season. He was put on scholarship before Ohio State's home contest against Oregon in 2021, though Johnson did not reveal that news until last season.

"It was one of those things where my main focus was going out and keeping the focus on the game," Johnson said. "So it wasn't a big parade. It wasn't one of those big things where the team huddles up and there's a big celebration. My main focus was going to get that win. We came up a little short, but just wanted to keep everything on the team."

He saw his role expand last season, appearing in every game and playing 207 snaps, fourth most among Ohio State's wideouts. He brought in 13 receptions for 151 yards and two touchdowns, including a pivotal score in the Buckeyes' season opener against Notre Dame.

He also carried the ball 12 times for 146 yards and an additional score while returning 12 kickoffs and totaling six tackles on special teams.



Tommy Eichenberg



Xavier Johnson



Cade Stover

With his role expanding last year, Johnson will continue to be an important factor for Ohio State's offense.

"Xavier's awesome," offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said this spring. "The growth he's had over the last 12-18 months has been awesome – a true offensive weapon. His ability to be an elite receiver and also go in the backfield and carry the football, pick up protections, there's so many things that young man brings to the table, let alone special teams. To me, he's going to play football for a long time."

Johnson will be pulling double duty, as he was also named the team's Block "O" jersey recipient in addition to being named captain and will wear No. 0 this season.

"My goal is to continue to inspire hope in this team," Johnson said. "I'll lead, inspire and help us reach the highest of heights."

He earned the honor for demonstrating "toughness, accountability and the highest of character," with the tradition honoring program great Bill Willis, who played at Ohio State from 1942-44 and was later inducted into the Pro Football and College Football Hall of Fames.

Defensive end Jonathon Cooper first wore the jersey in 2020, followed by offensive lineman Thayer Munford in 2021. Wide receiver Kamryn Babb wore it last season and offered a memorable moment for the Block "O" with his first career reception and touchdown catch against Indiana.

Cade Stover

While Stover started at Ohio State on scholarship, unlike Johnson, the tight end's path has seen just as many twists and turns since arriving on campus in 2019.

Beginning his career with the Buckeyes as a defensive end and later switching between linebacker and tight end, Stover eventually

settled on the latter entering last season, and he turned in one of the best outings by an Ohio State tight end in recent memory. He dominated to the tune of 36 receptions for 406 yards and five touchdowns, with his receptions the most by an Ohio State tight end since Rickey Dudley's 37 catches in 1995.

Stover could have departed for the NFL, but he elected to come back for a fifth season, with his decision in part due to how the season ended. Ohio State's loss to Georgia in the Peach Bowl was challenging for every Buckeye on the roster but especially so for Stover, who was lost in the first quarter with a fracture in his back.

"A lot of it had to do with – I just felt like there was more," he said. "As good as the year was, what the team had and everything, there's more left. I just felt uneasy. I don't know if I'd ever forgive myself for leaving a place like this, that I've put so much into, on a note like that."

Beyond his growth on the field since settling in at tight end, Stover has become a role model for his fellow tight ends and the team as a whole.

"There's not a better guy than Cade," tight end Joe Royer said. "Not a better role model for the younger guys and still me. I look up to him in many ways. He's the hardest worker on the team, does everything right. If you want to have a chance of playing football and being successful, just look at what he does and try to mimic it."

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The Numbers Game

Final 2022-23 Football Statistics

2022-23 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result	Crowd
Sept. 3	(2) Notre Dame #5	W, 21-10	106,594
Sept. 10	(3) Arkansas State	W, 45-12	100,067
Sept. 17	(3) Toledo	W, 77-21	105,398
Sept. 24	(3) Wisconsin	W, 52-21	105,473
Oct. 1	(3) Rutgers	W, 49-10	104,245
Oct. 8	(3) at Michigan State	W, 49-20	72,809
Oct. 22	(2) Iowa	W, 54-10	104,848
Oct. 29	(2) at Penn State #13	W, 44-31	108,433
Nov. 5	(2) at Northwestern	W, 21-7	42,774
Nov. 12	(2) Indiana	W, 56-14	103,888
Nov. 19	(2) at Maryland	W, 43-30	41,969
Nov. 26	(2) Michigan #3	L, 45-23	106,787
Dec. 31	(4) Georgia #1^	L, 42-41	79,330

* OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

^ Mercedes-Benz Superdome; Atlanta, Georgia

Individual Statistics (Cont.)

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPKC	FG	PTS
Noah Ruggles	-74	-75	-	-	17-20	125
Marvin Harrison Jr.	14	-	-	-	-	84
Miyan Williams	14	-	-	-	-	84
Emeka Egbuka	12	-	-	-	-	72
T. Henderson	7	-	-	-	-	42
Julian Fleming	6	-	-	-	-	36
Cade Stover	5	-	-	-	-	30
Dallan Hayden	5	-	-	-	-	30
Xavier Johnson	3	-	-	-	-	18
Mitch Rossi	2	-	-	-	-	12
Steele Chambers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Kamryn Babb	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jayden Ballard	1	-	-	-	-	6
Tommy Eichenberg	1	-	-	-	-	6
J.T. Tuimoloau	1	-	-	-	-	6
TC Caffey	1	-	-	-	-	6
OSU Totals	75	74-75	-	-	17-20	575
OPP Totals	3330	-31	-	-	13-16	273

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	5-5	5-6	7-7	0-2	17-20
OSU Totals	5-5	5-6	7-7	0-2	17-20
OPP Totals	2-2	7-7	4-5	0-2	13-16

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	49	2223	45.4	0	77
Michael O'Shaughnessy	1	41	41.0	0	41
OSU Totals	50	2264	45.3	0	77
OPP Totals	77	3318	43.1	2	75

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Tanner McCalister	3	41	13.7	0	30
Steele Chambers	2	27	13.5	0	15
J.T. Tuimoloau	2	16	8.0	1	14
Tommy Eichenberg	1	15	15.0	1	15
Zach Harrison	1	2	2.0	0	2
Ronnie Hickman	1	8	8.0	0	8
Lathan Ransom	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	11	109	9.9	2	30
OPP Totals	6	55	9.2	1	32

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	11	75	6.8	0	18
Jayden Ballard	1	14	14.0	0	14
Denzel Burke	0	7	0.0	0	7
Xavier Johnson	0	5	0.0	0	5
JK Johnson	1	0	0.0	0	0
Reis Stocksdale	2	-1	-0.5	0	0
OSU Totals	15	100	6.7	0	18
OPP Totals	9	64	7.1	0	22

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	12	269	22.5	0	46
Chip Trayanum	3	29	9.7	0	17
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
Emeka Egbuka	1	25	25.0	0	25
OSU Totals	17	323	19.0	0	46
OPP Totals	37	756	20.4	0	38

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Tommy Eichenberg	77	43	120	12-30	2.5-12
Steele Chambers	45	32	77	6.5-34	2.0-15
Lathan Ransom	49	25	74	3.5-22	1.5-11
Ronnie Hickman	26	27	53	1.5-2	0-0
Denzel Burke	24	10	34	3.0-5	0-0
Zach Harrison	20	14	34	8.0-36	3.5-22
Cody Simon	16	16	32	5.5-21	2.0-16
J.T. Tuimoloau	16	12	28	10.5-39	3.5-26
Taron Vincent	8	17	25	2.5-9	0.5-3
Jack Sawyer	10	14	24	6.5-24	4.5-20
Tanner McCalister	20	4	24	0-0	0-0
Josh Proctor	14	7	21	1.5-1	1.0-1
Tyleik Williams	10	11	21	2.5-7	1.0-2
JK Johnson	16	4	20	0-0	0-0
Javontae Jean-Baptiste	9	10	19	4.5-22	4.0-21
Mike Hall Jr.	9	10	19	7.5-46	4.5-39
Cameron Martinez	9	6	15	0-0	0-0
Ty Hamilton	9	6	15	0.5-3	0.5-3
Cameron Brown	11	3	14	0.5-1	0-0
Caden Curry	11	3	14	1.5-6	0.5-0
Chip Trayanum	8	5	13	0-0	0-0
Jerron Cage	5	7	12	2.5-11	1.5-8
Kye Stokes	8	4	12	1.0-4	0-0
Palaie Gaoteote IV	5	4	9	0.5-1	0-0
Sonny Styles	5	4	9	1.0-2	0-0
Jyaire Brown	4	4	8	0-0	0-0
C.J. Hicks	4	2	6	0-0	0-0
Xavier Johnson	3	3	6	0-0	0-0
Jordan Hancock	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Jaden McKenzie	2	3	5	1.0-1	0-0
Jayden Ballard	1	2	4	0-0	0-0
Kourt Williams II	2	2	4	0-0	0-0
Tyler Friday	2	1	3	0-0	0-0
Kenyatta Jackson	2	-	2	1.0-1	0-0
OSU Totals	469	318	787	86-334	34-205
OPP Totals	483	352	835	50-165	12-82

Fumbles Forced: 10 - Harrison (3), J. Brown, Jean-Baptiste, Hickman, Ransom, Simon, Stokes, Tuimoloau.

Fumbles Recovered: 7 - Gaoteote IV (2), Chambers, Hall Jr., Ransom, Tuimoloau, Vincent.

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	310	195
Rushing	113	73
Passing	171	102
Penalty	26	20
Average Per Game/Rush	192.4	121.1
Average Per Game/Pass	298.3	200.5
Total Offense	6379	4180
Total Plays	876	807
Average Per Game	490.7	321.5
Average Per Play	7.3	5.2
Penalties-Yards	73-624	70-590
Fumbles-Lost	10-4	16-7
Third Down Efficiency	75-166	56-187
Percentage	45%	30%
Fourth Down Efficiency	12-17	9-25
Percentage	71%	36%
Sacks-Yards	34-205	12-82
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:45	29:15

Score By Quarters

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	169	130	149	127	0	575	44.2
Opponents	64	88	20	101	0	273	21.0

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Miyan Williams	128	825	6.4	14	70
TreVeyon Henderson	107	571	5.3	6	41
Dallan Hayden	111	553	5.0	5	45
Xavier Johnson	12	146	12.2	1	71
C.J. Stroud	47	108	2.3	0	44
Chip Trayanum	15	92	6.1	0	24
Emeka Egbuka	11	87	7.9	2	27
TC Caffey	10	66	6.6	1	49
Marvin Harrison Jr.	2	32	16.0	0	18
Jesse Mirco	1	22	22.0	0	22
Mitch Rossi	5	12	2.4	1	8
Cayden Saunders	2	6	3.0	0	5
Kyle McCord	3	4	1.3	0	3
Devin Brown	1	1	1.0	0	1
Team	11	-24	-2.2	0	0
OSU Totals	466	2501	5.4	30	71
OPP Totals	447	1574	3.5	12	85

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	258	389	66.3	3688	41-6	17.77
Kyle McCord	16	20	80.0	190	1-0	176.3
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0	0.0
OSU Totals	274	410	66.8	3878	42-6	177.2
OPP Totals	212	360	58.9	2606	19-11	131.0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	77	1263	16.4	14	58
Emeka Egbuka	74	1151	15.6	10	69
Cade Stover	36	406	11.3	5	38
Julian Fleming	34	533	15.7	6	79
Xavier Johnson	13	151	11.6	2	37
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	5	43	8.6	0	21
Miyan Williams	5	27	5.4	0	12
Gee Scott Jr.	5	28	5.6	1	16
Dallan Hayden	4	23	5.8	0	10
TreVeyon Henderson	4	28	7.0	1	31
Mitch Rossi	2	19	9.5	1	16
Joe Royer	2	10	5.0	0	9
Kaleb Brown	1	5	5.0	0	5
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
Reis Stocksdale	1	12	12.0	0	12
Kamryn Babb	1	8	8.0	1	8
Kyion Grayes	1	2	2.0	0	2
OSU Totals	274	3878	14.2	42	79
OPP Totals	212	2606	12.3	19	76

2023 Preseason Polls

The Associated Press Top 25

Rank	School	2022	Pts.	'22 Rank
1	Georgia (60)	15-0	1,572	1
2	Michigan (2)	13-1	1,490	3
3	Ohio State (1)	11-2	1,400	4
4	Alabama	11-2	1,398	5
5	LSU	10-4	1,276	16
6	USC	11-3	1,245	12
7	Penn State	11-2	1,177	7
8	Florida State	10-3	1,147	11
9	Clemson	11-3	1,032	13
10	Washington	11-2	977	8
11	Texas	8-5	882	25
12	Tennessee	11-2	868	6
13	Notre Dame	9-4	863	18



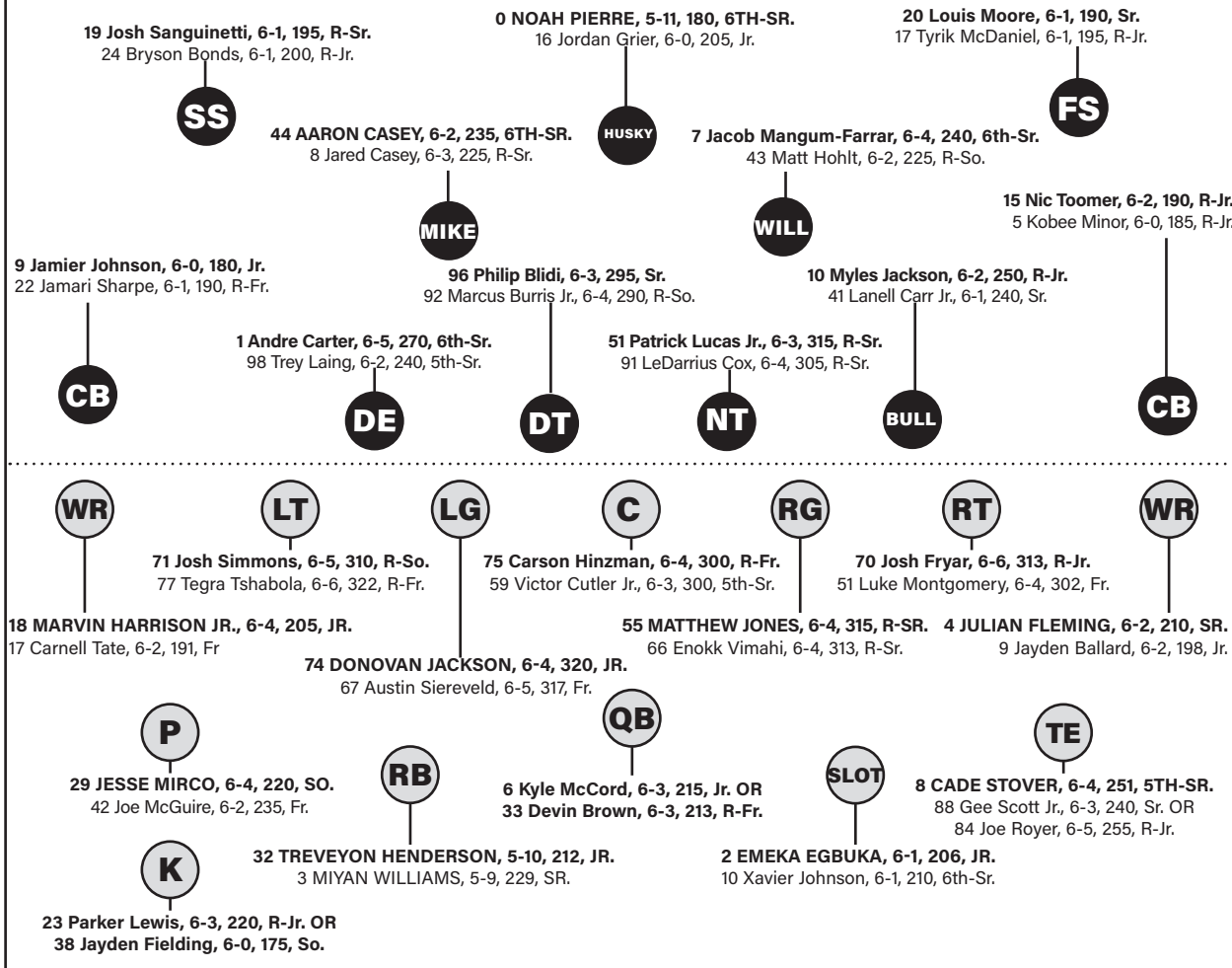
Ohio State vs. Indiana

Saturday, Sept. 2 - 3:30 p.m. - CBS
Memorial Stadium; Bloomington, Ind.

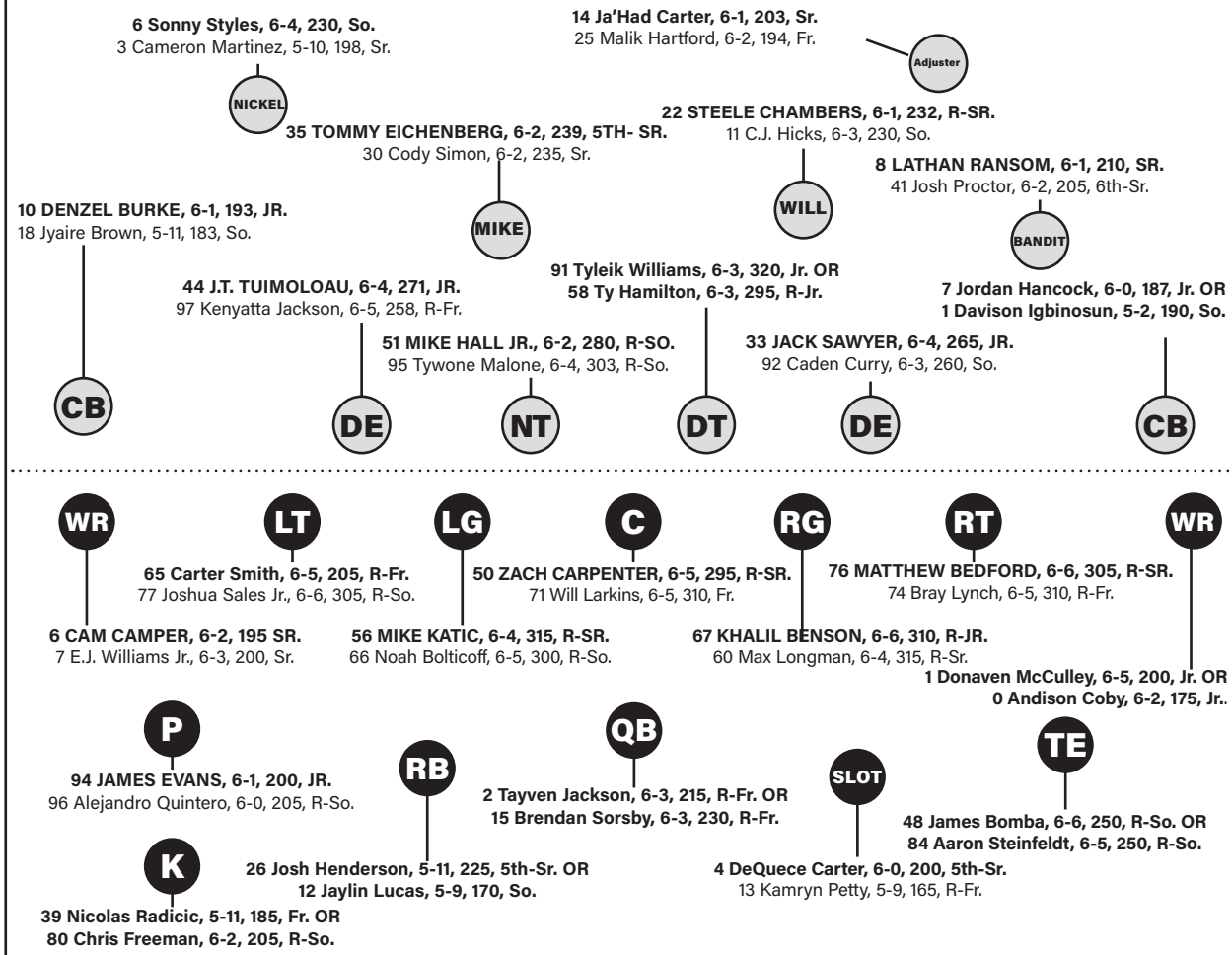


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN INDIANA HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
INDIANA RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes enter the 2023 season with strength and experience among the backs. With a healthy and rejuvenated Treveyon Henderson, a (hopefully) healthy Miyan Williams and potent backups in Chip Trayanum, Dallon Hayden and Evan Pryor, the focal point of the offense early in the season will be the ball carriers to take the pressure off the newbie quarterbacks, Kyle McCord and Devin Brown, as they have the unenviable task of replacing C.J. Stroud behind a retooled offensive line. Still, if Henderson, who was hampered nearly all last season with a foot injury and rushed for only 571 yards (5.3 per carry) in eight games, can return to his freshman form of 2021 (1,248 yards, 6.8) the Buckeyes can have an explosive 1-2 punch with Williams (825 yards, 6.4 and 14 touchdowns in 11 games last season). OSU was 32nd nationally in rushing offense last season (192.4 yards per game). Indiana allowed 175.1 to rank a woeful 98th out of 130 teams. Hoosiers coach Tom Allen brought in more than 20 transfers, many of them on defense. There were 16 defensive players who had more than 200 snaps last season, and all but three are gone. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INDIANA RUSH OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Hoosiers don't appear threatening based on their abysmal stats of last season, but they do possess a potential breakout star in sophomore back Jaylin Lucas, who made himself known mainly with his special teams play but managed to lead the team in rushing yards per carry (5.5) among players with 10 or more totes. He gained 271 yards on 49 attempts, including a run of 71 yards. Josh Henderson returns (398 yards, 4.4, four TDs), and Wake Forest transfer Christian Turner rushed for more than 500 yards in each of the past two seasons. Indiana was 111th in rushing (110.8) while the Buckeyes were 24th defensively, allowing 121.1 rushing yards per game. Those figures include 252 to Michigan and 135 vs. Georgia in losses to end the season. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
INDIANA PASS DEFENSE

The good news: The receivers are pretty, pretty good. Now, the not-quite-as-good news: McCord and Brown are really inexperienced. Back to the positive side, head coach Ryan Day has developed Dwayne Haskins, Justin Fields and Stroud into first-round picks, so there's the expectation he will do likewise again, meaning the likes of Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka (a combined 2,414 yards and 24 touchdowns last season), Julian Fleming (533 yards on 34 catches, 15.7 yards per catch, six TDs) and tight end Cade Stover (406 yards on 36 catches, 11.3, five TDs) will do their magic. The Buckeyes averaged 298.3 yards passing to rank 14th. Indiana's pass defense was 119th (274.2), but the defense got an immediate improvement when defensive lineman Andre Carter transferred from Western Michigan, where he had seven sacks, an interception and two forced fumbles. He has been named to the preseason watch list for the Chuck Bednarik Award for the best defensive player in college football. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INDIANA PASS OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

The Hoosiers are in a similar situation to the Buckeyes with a QB battle among relatively inexperienced throwers as they await the return of Dexter Williams II, who tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee during last season's finale against Purdue. Tennessee transfer Tayven Jackson, the younger brother of Indiana basketball All-American Trayce Jackson-Davis, and Brendan Sorsby are vying for the starting job. One or both will face the wrath of edge rushers J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer and the linebacker duo of Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers. The secondary is eager to make amends for giving up a combined 676 yards and six scores in the final two games. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The aforementioned Lucas is a jewel for Indiana, having last season earned a spot as a first-team All-American as a kick returner. He led the nation with two kick returns for TDs, including a 93-yarder while averaging 28.1 yards a return. Punter James Evans averaged 44.3 yards, but the Hoosiers allowed two punt blocks and three blocked field goals. The Buckeyes return punter Jesse Mirco (49 for 45.4 average) but need to replace Noah Ruggles, who made 17 of 20 field goals last season but missed a 50-yard try in the waning seconds that would have beaten Georgia and sent the Buckeyes to the national championship game. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Indiana will have home-field advantage, allegedly, but Allen may be on the hot seat after going 6-18 (2-16 in conference play) the past two seasons. Indiana presents so many unknowns, particularly on defense, that it's hard to gauge how good, or bad, they might be. **EDGE: EVEN**

STAFF PREDICTION

Last year, the Buckeyes opened at home against Notre Dame with the veteran Stroud at the helm. The Buckeyes don't travel to South Bend, Ind., until the fourth game for their first test this time around. That will allow time for the QB of the future to progress. **OHIO STATE 45, INDIANA 13**

Transfer-Heavy IU Roster Seeking Improvement

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Step aside, Colorado – a new king of the transfer portal has arrived, though Indiana is unlikely to have the “Louis Vuitton luggage” that Deion Sanders is bringing with him to Boulder.

The Hoosiers are coming off a 4-8 season and a 2-7 record in conference play, winning just one of their last nine games after starting the season 3-0 against Illinois, Idaho and Western Kentucky, all at home. Indiana saw struggles on both sides of the ball, failing to surpass 300 total yards in seven of their final nine games and allowing at least 400 yards on five of those occasions.

It has resulted in a dramatic roster turnaround, with over 20 scholarship players entering the portal since last season ended and just as many joining the program via the transfer ranks, with the majority expected to contribute on the two-deep. In total, the Hoosiers return just a pair of defensive starters and four starters on offense, with three of those on the offensive line.

“We have a strong nucleus returning, and we had great success in the portal,” head coach Tom Allen said at Big Ten Media Days. “We’ve been very focused on identifying young men across this country that were the best football players that fit our culture, that wanted to be at Indiana.

“Obviously there is a compressed window to figure that out. We focused a lot on guys we already knew, had recruited previ-

ously or coached, may have coached at a previous school or had a chance to be able to get to know a coach on that staff that was with them every single day. I think that’s very, very important.”

One of those transfers is at the most important position on the field, with the Hoosiers bringing in former Tennessee quarterback Tayven Jackson – the brother of IU basketball star Trayce Jackson-Davis – to compete alongside redshirt freshman Brendan Sorsby, who appeared in just one game during his freshman season.

Jackson is not significantly more experienced, also entering his redshirt freshman season after playing in three games for the Volunteers. The Hoosiers’ quarterback room was depleted following the transfers of Connor Bazalak (Bowling Green) and Jack Tuttle (Michigan) and a dislocated knee in last season’s finale for Dexter Williams II, who likely would have slotted in as the starter this year. But with Williams not expected to return from his injury until later in the season, the onus will be on either Jackson or Sorsby to take hold of the job.

“To me, they both have had things they’ve done well and things where they’ve looked good and things where they’re still growing and learning, so that’s expected,” Allen said. “But at the same time, as they continue to handle the pressure of having this hanging over them, I think that’s also a good thing because that’s part of preparing them for the role they’re going to be in, which is loaded with pressure and loaded

Get To Know ... Indiana

- **2022 Record:** 4-8.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Pistol; Defensive Formation - 4-2-5; Starters Returning - Offense 5, Defense 2, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Tom Allen, 7th year at Indiana, 30-40.
- **Series History:** 96th meeting; Ohio State leads 78-12-5.
- **School Facts:** Location - Bloomington, In.; Enrollment - 32,986; Nickname - Hoosiers; Colors - Red, White; Conference - Big Ten (East Division); Stadium - Memorial Stadium (Surface - FieldTurf; Capacity - 52,626).

2022 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 2	OHIO STATE	3:30 p.m.
Sept. 9	INDIANA STATE	7:00 p.m.
Sept. 16	vs. Louisville at Lucas Oil	12 p.m.
Sept. 23	AKRON	TBA
Sept. 30	at Maryland	TBA
Oct. 14	at Michigan	TBA
Oct. 21	RUTGERS	12 p.m.
Oct. 28	at Penn State	TBA
Nov. 4	WISCONSIN	TBA
Nov. 11	at Illinois	TBA
Nov. 18	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA
Nov. 25	at Purdue	TBA

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Josh Henderson	90	398	4.1	6
Jaylin Lucas	49	271	5.5	2
Dexter Williams II	40	165	4.1	1

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Dexter Williams II	13-38	34.2	184	2-2
Brendan Sorsby	3-6	50.0	8	0-1

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Cam Camper	46	569	12.4	2
Josh Henderson	24	274	11.4	4
D.J. Matthews	23	224	9.7	2

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game - 23.3
 Rushing Yards Per Game - 110.8
 Passing Yards Per Game - 217.4
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game - 328.3

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks	
Aaron Casey	50	36	86	10.5-27	1.5-11
Noah Pierre	25	14	39	4.0-38	3.0-31
Josh Sanguinetti	12	10	22	0-0	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Myles Jackson	1	10	10.0	0
Josh Sanguinetti	1	0	0.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed - 33.9
 Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed - 175.1
 Passing Yards Per Game Allowed - 274.2
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed - 449.3

with expectations and loaded with things that you have to handle being a quarterback at this level.

“I think they’ve both shown that they can do a lot of good things, and they’ve also shown that they’ve got to keep working.”

One thing that could make life easier for Jackson or Sorsby will be Indiana’s experienced offensive line, which returns three starters and will also welcome back right tackle Matthew Bedford, who started last season for the Hoosiers but suffered a season-ending knee injury in the opener against Illinois. Bedford, who has started 28 games, will be joined by redshirt freshman Carter Smith at left tackle and, from left to right in the interior, returning starters Mike Katic, Zach Carpenter and Khalil Benson.

The unit is experienced but struggled last season, allowing 38 sacks (tied for 114th) while the running backs averaged 110.8 yards per game, 111th nationally and 13th in the Big Ten.

“One thing about last year, we noticed where we were going wrong, so you could see toward the end we started to catch on with it,” Benson said. “I think with what we knew toward the end of last season to what we know now, I think the offensive line has made a big jump. ... It’s time for us to step up.”

Shaun Shivers, who left this offseason for the NFL, led the team in rushing with 592 yards, but both Josh Henderson (398 yards, 4.4 per carry, four TDs) and Jaylin Lucas (271 yards, 5.5 per carry, two TDs) return.

Indiana returns the program’s leading re-

ceiver from last season, senior Cam Camper, who had 46 receptions for 569 yards and two touchdowns in seven games before tearing his ACL. While just 10 months removed from his injury, Camper has said the plan is for him to be full go at the start of the season.

“Right now, I’m going through practice as I would if I was not injured,” he said. “Every day I’m taking good strides and I’m making sure my technique is good. I’m continuing to pay attention to detail, watching my teammates and seeing what they do so I can get information from them. Right now, I’m just being a great learner.”

Outside of Camper, however, the receiving room has some questions. Anderson Coby (18 catches, 237 yards, one TD) and Donaven McCulley (16 catches, 169 yards, one TD) are both back, but the Hoosiers lost Emery Simmons (37 catches, 408 yards, one TD), Javon Swinton (12 catches, 122 yards) and Malachi Holt-Bennett (six catches, 90 yards) to the portal while welcoming in E.J. Williams Jr. (Clemson) and DeQuece Carter (Fordham), with Williams expected to back up Camper and Carter lining up in the slot.

Indiana lost tight end AJ Barner (28 catches, 199 yards, three TDs) to Michigan but returns a pair of capable players in redshirt sophomores James Bomba and Aaron Steinfeldt, who combined for 11 catches, 74 yards and a score last season.

The offense has plenty of questions that will need to be answered well into the season, but it pales in comparison to the lack of clarity on Indiana’s defense. The Hoosiers return just two bona fide starters from last

SHEETZ

WHY THE SHEETZ NOT SCORE THE PERFECT M·T·O?

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WELCOME TO MTO TOWN

OHIO STATE VS. INDIANA

season – linebacker Aaron Casey and nickel safety Noah Pierre – and have replaced many of last season's losses – including cornerbacks Brylan Lanier, Christopher Keys, Taiwan Mullen, Lem Watley-Neely and Jaylin Williams; defensive linemen Sio Nofagatoto'a and Richard Thomas; linebacker Cam Jones; and safety Deland McCullough II – through the transfer portal.

Indiana also made changes to the defensive coaching staff, bringing in former Duke defensive assistant and Ohio State analyst Matt Guerrieri as co-defensive coordinator. While defensive play-calling was something handled by Allen last season, he is now prepared to hand those duties over to Guerrieri.

"I chose to call it a year ago because I felt that was best for our program at that time," Allen said. "I've not called it obviously (in the past) with all the different things that are going on, and with the portal and the NIL and just the complexities you now deal with. In order for us to get better and move forward, I wanted to bring somebody in to be able to call that."

Guerrieri's calling of the defense will begin with Casey, who is entering his sixth season at Indiana but is coming off by far his most impressive outing, leading the Hoosiers with 86 tackles (10½ for loss) with 1½ sacks, two pass breakups and two forced fumbles.

"Tremendous growth by Aaron," co-defensive coordinator Chad Wilt said. "We talk about confidence – really, a lot of confidence comes from demonstrated performance. Aaron had a phenomenal season last year, so he just saw his growth and the confidence based on what he did last year. But then the other things he's doing behind closed doors, the unseen stuff, the dirty, hard work in the dark that nobody sees. His preparation, his mental growth, his confidence in himself as a player."

"Yeah, we had Cam Jones last year. Even after Cam got hurt, Cam was still the leader. Well, guess what? Cam's gone. But Aaron and I have had a lot of conversations – he doesn't have to be Cam Jones. He just has to be the best version of Aaron Casey, and the best version of Aaron Casey is an awesome human being."

Sixth-year senior Jacob Mangum-Farrar, fifth-year senior Jared Casey – no relation to Aaron Casey – and sophomore Matt Hohlt are also expected to contribute at linebacker, while junior Myles Jackson and senior Lanell Carr Jr., who joined the program this offseason from West Virginia, will fill in as outside linebackers for the Hoosiers.

Up front, the gem of Indiana's transfer class was sixth-year defensive lineman Andre Carter, who accounted for 132 tackles (28 for loss), 12½ sacks and five forced fumbles in five seasons at Western Michigan. The Hoosiers are also expecting contributions from returning players such as Patrick Lucas Jr. and LeDarrius Cox as well as newcomers Philip Blidi, who had 18 tackles (4½ for loss) and two sacks at Texas Tech last season, and Marcus Burriss Jr., who played in eight games last season for Texas A&M.

"This is the best defensive line I've ever been a part of, to be honest," Carter said. "Collectively, from the ability to play hard and be able to execute and have discipline. There's a lot of transfers that really are looking forward to breaking out this season and having an ultimate repertoire of pass rush moves in their bag, which is going to allow

not only for them to make plays but for me to make plays as well, because they won't be able to key on me. They'll have to key in on everybody on this defensive line because they're playmakers."

The leader in the secondary is sixth-year senior Pierre, who lines up at nickel safety – or "Husky" – for the Hoosiers. He had 39 tackles last season, three sacks and three pass breakups, and the coaching staff has seen him step up not only on the field, but off it as well.

"You could feel from the time he takes the field, in meetings, he has that hungry dog mentality every single day," Guerrieri said. "He's been awesome from that standpoint, and his play continues to rise."

Pierre will be joined at safety by senior Louis Moore and redshirt senior Josh Sanguinetti, with juniors Bryson Bonds and Tyrik McDaniel also expected to rotate in. At cornerback, the Hoosiers will look to juniors Jamier Johnson, Kobee Minor and Nic Toomer – all transfers – to help fill the void left by the exodus on defense.

Making things all the more challenging for a team with so many new faces and moving parts is the first opponent. Indiana will host No. 3 Ohio State for a 3:30 p.m. kickoff on CBS from Memorial Stadium, a series that the Hoosiers have famously not won since 1988. With the exception of a 42-35 win for Ohio State in Columbus in 2020, the last time the Buckeyes won by fewer than two scores was a 34-27 win in Bloomington in 2015, and Indiana keeping the final margin to within two touchdowns has happened just five times since 2000.

It's a daunting opponent for any team, let alone a squad as inexperienced as Indiana at key positions like quarterback, ones that the Buckeyes will be sure to take advantage of. But in a long college football season, getting a game like this out of the way could offer a benefit for a team looking to break in a new roster.

"That's the challenge, right?" Allen said of opening against Ohio State. "You've got to be able to have enough in your arsenal to be effective, but you also have to do a good

job of taking some pressure off the quarterbacks from a decision-making perspective and allowing them to be able to be effective in a hostile environment. Fortunately it's at home, that's a huge plus, but the intensity of the opponent and the speed and the power that we're going to see and how fast things are going to happen is going to be at a high level.

"That's on us as coaches – we've got to do a great job of putting them in positions to maximize whoever's out there on the field and play to their strengths and allow them not to have to feel like they have the weight of everything, carrying all that themselves."

"But there is one way to learn, and that is being thrown in there, and it's going to be that case. I'm excited for their opportunity to be able to showcase. There's no doubt they'll be tested to the highest level you can think of this early in the season, but that's how you grow. I think when you have the right mindset and you've got the right plan, our guys are going to have a chance to be successful."

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Ranked Road Tests A Challenge For Buckeyes

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As Ohio State inches closer to the 2023 season, the prevailing question among the fan base remains centered around how – or even if – the program will match up with arch-rival Michigan come November. Head coach Ryan Day and his team have repeatedly stated that last season's 45-23 loss to Michigan serves as a motivating factor, but before they can even think about seeking revenge against Jim Harbaugh and the Wolverines, they must first make their way through a long 12-game slate highlighted by three challenging road tests.

The Buckeyes open the schedule with three winnable games at Indiana (Sept. 2) and against Youngstown State (Sept. 9) and Western Kentucky (Sept. 16) before their first true road test against Marcus Freeman-led No. 13 Notre Dame on Sept. 23.

Then, after an off week and conference games against Maryland (Oct. 7) and at Purdue (Oct. 14) along with a potentially significant home game with Penn State on Oct. 21, Ohio State is assigned a date at the always-rowdy Camp Randall Stadium on Oct. 28, when they will travel to Madison for the first time since 2016 to face off against Luke Fickell's No. 19 Badgers.

Following Wisconsin on the schedule are battles with lesser Big Ten foes Rutgers (Nov. 4), Michigan State (Nov. 11) and Minnesota (Nov. 18), all serving as a mere appetizer before the highly-anticipated rematch in The Game, held this time at Michigan Stadium on Nov. 25.

As the Buckeyes look to embark on their 2023 journey and attempt to reclaim the Big Ten crown from Michigan, here is a preview of all 12 games on Ohio State's schedule, with a full breakdown of the Indiana game on page 32.

Indiana, Sept. 2 – Last year proved to be another underwhelming season for head coach Tom Allen and his Indiana program. After starting out the year with three-straight victories against Illinois, Idaho and Western Kentucky, the Hoosiers would immediately collapse, losing eight of their final nine contests to drop to a 4-8 record.

Indiana's struggles last season can be attributed to lackluster defense, ranking dead last in the Big Ten at 33.9 points per game. With significant turnaround in the transfer portal, the Hoosiers return two starters, including defensive back Noah Pierre and linebacker Aaron Casey, who earned honorable mention All-Big Ten last season after recording a team-high 86 tackles.

Indiana will also field a new-look offense that has yet to decide on its starting quarterback. Tennessee transfer Tayven Jackson and redshirt freshman Brendan Sorsby have competed for the job this summer, with neither player creating any "separation," according to Allen. Jackson recorded just 37 passing yards and a rushing touchdown in three appearances with the Volunteers last season, while Sorsby played one game and logged eight passing yards and an interception.

Returning for Indiana on offense is senior wideout Cam Camper, who amassed a team-high 569 receiving yards in seven games before suffering a season-ending ACL tear. The Hoosiers also retain near-consensus first-

team preseason All-American kick returner Jaylin Lucas. The sophomore running back, who was also named to the Doak Walker and Paul Hornung Award Watch Lists for best running back and most versatile player, respectively, led the FBS with two kickoff return touchdowns last season while also ranking third on the team with 271 rushing yards.

Youngstown State, Sept. 9 – The Penguins will square off with Ohio State for the first time since 2008 – a game where former Ohio State head coach and former Youngstown State president Jim Tressel led the Buckeyes to a 43-0 trouncing over his future university. Expect a similar lopsided result in the 2023 version of the Tressel Bowl, as the Penguins' FCS roster draws no comparison to the plethora of NFL talent that currently resides in Columbus.

The Penguins are losing arguably their best player in program history in current Denver Broncos running back Jaleel McLaughlin, who amassed an NCAA-record 8,161 rushing yards along with 78 scores while playing for both Notre Dame College and Youngstown State from 2018-2022. To replace the playmaking ability of the transcendent McLaughlin, head coach Doug Phillips and his program are turning to sixth-year wideout Bryce Oliver, who earned first-team All-Missouri Valley Football Conference honors last season after leading the team with 821 receiving yards, the most recorded by a Penguin wideout since 1983.

Throwing to the wide receivers is senior gunslinger Mitch Davidson, who assumed the starting role midway through last season. Davidson powered the Penguins to a 5-2 finish while completing 59.2 percent of his passes for 1,613 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Western Kentucky, Sept. 16 – Although the Buckeyes' previous matchup with the Penguins should be a cakewalk, their next matchup against the Hilltoppers could pose a sneaky challenge for Ohio State.

Coming off a successful 9-5 season with a bowl win over South Alabama, Western Kentucky will return a number of key contributors from last year's high-flying offense. The Hilltoppers ranked second in the Conference USA in scoring offense last season, netting 36.4 points per game, while also ranking first in the league in passing offense (352.1).

These inflated offensive stats were spearheaded by quarterback Austin Reed, who returns under center for Western Kentucky after leading all of college football in total passing yards with 4,746 and finished third with 40 passing scores.

The Hilltoppers have another NFL-caliber player on their offense this season in junior wideout Malachi Corley. Corley earned first team All-Conference USA honors last season after ranking fourth in the nation with 1,295 receiving yards and tied for seventh in receiving touchdowns with 11.

Notre Dame, Sept. 23 – The Fighting Irish will be looking for revenge when they line up against Ohio State under the lights at Notre Dame Stadium.

Notre Dame enters year two of the Freeman era with new leadership on offense, as both last year's offensive coordinator Tommy Rees and starting quarterback Tyler Buchner left the program during the offseason to join Nick Saban at Alabama. The Fighting Irish pivoted by elevating former tight ends coach

Gerad Parker to lead offensive play caller and grabbing sixth-year and former Wake Forest signal caller Sam Hartman from the transfer portal.

Hartman, who is entering his final season of college eligibility, immediately inserts himself into the starting role after registering an historic five-year career at Wake Forest. The Charlotte native etched his name in the ACC record books with the Demon Deacons, setting the conference record for total touchdown passes with 110, and earning the second-most passing yards in ACC history with 12,967.

Although first-round NFL draft selection and tight end Michael Mayer has left the program, Notre Dame will retain a bevy of weapons to complement Hartman on the offense, headlined by junior running back Audric Esteime. Esteime powered the Irish rushing attack with a team-leading 920 yards and 11 touchdowns. Notre Dame will also add Penn State graduate Devyn Ford to the running back mix this season, as well as sophomore Jadarian Price, who is back to "100 percent" health after suffering a season-ending achilles injury last summer.

Notre Dame's defense will also prove to be a formidable group. The Irish will reclaim the services of their three leading tacklers – linebackers JD Bertrand, Jack Kiser and Marist Liufau – who each played a significant role in last year's defense that relinquished just 23.0 points a game. Notre Dame also welcomes Ohio State transfer Javante Jean-Baptiste to the front four, who will now reunite with former Buckeye linebackers coach and current Fighting Irish defensive line coach Al Washington.

Maryland, Oct. 7 – The Terrapins turned in an 8-5 overall record in the competitive Big Ten East last season, earning them their highest win total since 2008 along with a 16-12 victory over N.C. State in the Duke's Mayo Bowl. This year, they will look to continue their momentum behind the leadership of redshirt senior quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa, who returns to the program for his fifth collegiate season after an historic junior campaign.

He completed 67.0 percent of his passes last season for 3,008 yards and 18 touchdowns, earning a second-team All-Big Ten nod. These numbers also propelled Tagovailoa to become the program's all-time leader in career passing yards (7,879) and passing touchdowns (51).

He will once again team up with his top two targets from last season in wide receiver Jashaun Jones and tight end Corey Dyches. Jones racked up 44 receptions for a team-high 557 yards in 13 games, while Dyches averaged 12.7 yards per catch and had three touchdowns.

The Terrapins will also reclaim their top-three leading tacklers on a defense that ranked eighth in the conference last season in scoring defense (23.2 points per game). Safeties Beau Brade and Dante Trader Jr. once again anchor the secondary after registering a combined 147 tackles, four interceptions and nine pass breakups, and sopho-

more linebacker Jaishawn Barham is poised for a breakout year after recording 58 tackles – most among Big Ten freshmen – as well as a team-high four sacks and 6 1/2 tackles for loss.

Purdue, Oct. 14 – The reigning Big Ten West champions enter the season under a new regime, as 37-year-old Ryan Walters assumes head coaching duties from Jeff Brohm, who left the program in December to lead his alma mater Louisville.

Walters comes to West Lafayette as the eighth-youngest coach in the FBS, but he has already accumulated a notable resume. He led a dominant defense over the last two seasons at Illinois and will look to do the same with a Purdue defense that allowed a subpar 27.4 points and 366.9 yards per game last year.

The Boilermakers are losing 10 of their 14 leading tacklers from a season ago, headlined by linebackers Jalen Graham and Kieren Douglas, who departed for the NFL. To make up for the losses, Walters looked to the transfer portal, securing a trio of former SEC defenders including defensive linemen Malik Langham (Florida, Vanderbilt), Jeffrey M'ba (Auburn) and Isaiah Nichols (Arkansas). Former Stanford defensive back Salim Turner-Muhammad will also add to the Boilermakers' secondary, while safety and former three-star prospect Anthony Brown joins the program after sitting out his entire freshman season with Arkansas.

The Boilermakers will also have a new-look offense, losing the likes of fourth-round NFL draft selections and former quarterback-wide receiver pairing Aidan O'Connell and Charlie Jones, along with fifth-round tight end Payne Durham.

Tasked with retooling the offense is Graham Harrell, who comes to Purdue after spending the last season guiding quarterback J.T. Daniels at West Virginia. The new play caller will team up with former Texas signal caller Hudson Card this season, who made three starts for the Longhorns last season while replacing the injured Quinn Ewers and collected 928 passing yards and six touchdowns.

Penn State, Oct. 21 – Head coach James Franklin leads what may be his most talented Penn State team since he arrived at State College in 2014.

The Nittany Lions' star-power begins with their running attack, which is set to be led by stellar sophomores Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton. Last season, the two tailbacks became the first true freshman teammates in Big Ten history to amass 700 or more rushing yards in a single season, with Allen logging 867 and Singleton totaling 1,061.

Blocking for the two sophomore tailbacks is offensive tackle Olumuyiwa Fashanu, who enters the season as a preseason AP All-American first-team selection. The third-year lineman did not allow a sack in 281 pass blocking snaps last year, helping him earn second-team All-Big Ten honors from the coaches and third-team by the media.

Replacing four-year starter Sean Clifford will be sophomore Drew Allar, a five-star prospect and No. 1 quarterback in the 2022 class out of Medina, Ohio. He appeared in 10 games last season for the Nittany Lions and racked up 344 passing yards and four touchdowns.



Marcus Freeman

FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OPPONENT OVERVIEW

On defense, the Nittany Lions are led by another first-team AP Preseason All-American in cornerback Kalen King. The junior defensive back, who will look to assume the No. 1 cornerback role from current Pittsburgh Steelers second-round draft selection Joey Porter Jr., was named third-team All-Big Ten last season after ranking third in the nation with 21 passes defended along with registering 30 tackles, three interceptions and a forced fumble.

King will play alongside his brother, Kobe, who ranked fifth on the team as a linebacker with 41 tackles last season. Kobe King will man the linebacker position alongside sophomore Abdul Carter and junior Curtis Jacobs, who ranked second and third on the team with 56 and 52 tackles, respectively, along with a combined 10 1/2 sacks.

Wisconsin, Oct. 28 – It's officially the Luke Fickell era in Madison. The former Ohio State defensive coordinator and one-time interim coach was named Wisconsin's 31st head coach. Fickell will lead the Badgers' program after a largely successful six-year stint at Cincinnati, where he accumulated a 57-18 overall record and led the Bearcats to their first-ever College Football Playoff appearance.

Now, Fickell leads a Wisconsin team that many project as the favorites to win the Big Ten West this season. The Badgers' strength lies within the defense, which returns four of its top five leading tacklers from last year's unit that ranked sixth in the Big Ten in scoring defense with just 20.2 points allowed.

Headlining the list of returning defenders is redshirt senior linebacker Maema Njongmeta, who earned third-team All-Big Ten honors after leading Wisconsin with 95 tackles – 27 more than the next-highest tackler on the team. Fellow linebackers Jordan Turner and C.J. Goetz and safety Kamo'i Latu – the team's second, third and fifth leading tacklers last season – will also lead the defense after they played in all 13 games last season.

The Badgers will also be under new leadership on the defensive front, however, as Jim Leonhard left the program in June to serve as a senior football analyst at Illinois after spending the last six seasons as defensive coordinator in Madison. Filling in for Leonhard is Mike Tressel, who followed Fickell to Wisconsin after a decorative two-year stint as Cincinnati's defensive coordinator (2021-22). Tressel, the nephew of former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel who runs an unconventional 3-3-5 scheme, helped construct a strong Bearcat defense in 2021 that ranked fifth in the nation in points allowed (16.9) and produced six NFL players.

The Badgers will also field a new-look offense, which welcomes offensive coordinator Phil Longo to the fold. Longo, who has 33 years of coaching experience, brings his high-flying "air raid" system to a program which is historically predicated on its stout rushing attack.

Longo most recently spent four seasons calling plays at North Carolina, helping lead the Tar Heels to the ACC's No. 1 ranked passing and rushing attack (14,781 and 10,074 yards) during his four-year stint. The Badgers will once again be spearheaded on the ground by junior tailback Braelon Allen, who earned consensus second-team All-Big Ten honors after finishing fourth in the Big Ten with 1,242 rushing yards.

They will have a new leader under center, as transfer Tanner Mordecai enters the

fold after a successful stint at SMU. He has experience navigating a high-flying offense with the Mustangs, where he amassed 7,152 passing yards and 72 touchdowns over the past two seasons.

Rutgers, Nov. 4 – Head coach Greg Schiano has inched his program closer to relevance in the Big Ten since returning to the Scarlet Knights in 2019, leading Rutgers to six conference wins in his last three seasons, as opposed to only seven conference victories during the program's first five years in the Big Ten.

If the Scarlet Knights are to take another step forward, they will need to vastly improve their offense. Last season, under offensive coordinator Sean Gleeson, Rutgers was second-to-last in the Big Ten in scoring offense (17.4), and dead last in passing offense (153.9). To fix that, Schiano hired a familiar face to call the offensive plays in Kirk Ciarrocca, who returns to Piscataway after serving as Rutgers' co-offensive coordinator from 2008-2010. Ciarrocca most recently served as Minnesota's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, where he led the Gophers to the Big Ten's fourth-best scoring offense (28.2) last season.

The Scarlet Knights' offense will be once again guided by quarterback Gavin Wimsatt, who looks to rebound after a stale sophomore season. He failed to throw for more than 200 yards in seven of his eight appearances last season, and he'll also be working with a different group of receivers this season, after three of his four top pass catchers from last season graduated.

Potentially winning the top receiving role are transfer portal additions JaQuae Jackson from California (Pa.) and Naseim Brantley from Western Illinois.

On the defensive side, the Scarlet Knights will be anchored by linebackers Deion Jennings and Tyreem Powell, who combined for 162 tackles and four sacks in their respective junior and freshman seasons. Defensive linemen Aaron Lewis and Wesley Bailey, along with defensive backs Robert Longersbeam and Max Melton, also return to the mix. They all started at least 10 games for the program a year ago.

Michigan State, Nov. 11 – The Spartans endured an uncharacteristically-subpar season last year, finishing below .500 for the first time (excluding 2020) since 2016. This recent string of disappointment continued into the beginning of this campaign when projected starting quarterback and two-year starter Payton Thorne transferred to Auburn on May 5, soon followed by the departure of last season's leading wideout Keon Coleman, who opted to leave the Spartans program for Florida State just 12 days later.

Thorne's late exit has forced head coach Mel Tucker to hold an open two-man competition this fall camp between junior Noah Kim and redshirt freshman Katin Houser. Kim, who is entering his fourth season with the program, carries the most experience of the two. He played in four games last season with 174 yards and three touchdowns. Houser is a former four-star prospect out of Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco in 2022, but has played just six snaps and amassed just two

passing yards for the Spartans.

No matter the quarterback, Kim or Houser will be directing a number of their throws to redshirt senior Tre Mosley, who is poised to lead the group of Spartan wideouts after ranking third on the team in receptions (35), receiving yards (359) and touchdowns (four).

The Spartans will also need to clean up their defense, a unit that ranked 10th in the Big Ten in scoring defense (27.4) and relinquished at least 27 points in all seven losses last season. While the secondary is replacing the likes of veteran defensive backs Kendall Brooks, Ameer Speed and Xavier Henderson with a slew of younger players, the Spartans will retain the likes of linebacker Cal Haladay, who recorded a Big Ten-leading 10.0 tackles per game, and defensive end Jacoby Windmon, who led the team with 5 1/2 sacks.

Minnesota, Nov. 18 – The Gophers secured the fourth-best scoring offense in the Big Ten last season and will look to replicate that this year with a new cast of players.

Minnesota will enter a season without signal caller Tanner Morgan under center and running back Mohamed Ibrahim behind him for the first time since the 2018 season, as the two all-time great Gophers have now embarked on their respective professional careers. To make up for these losses, head coach P.J. Fleck will turn to a younger team that has talent across the field.

Projected to start at quarterback for Minnesota is redshirt sophomore Athan Kaliakmanis, who split time with the Morgan throughout last season. Kaliakmanis appeared in 11 of the Gophers 14 games and started five, collecting a 3-2 record as a starter, and completed 54.1 percent of his throws with 946 passing yards and three touchdowns.

He will have the opportunity to throw to six-year veteran Brevyn Spann-Ford, who earned honorable mention All-Big Ten honors last season after a stellar senior campaign with 42 receptions, 497 receiving yards and two touchdowns.

At running back, Fleck and his Gopher offense are expected to pivot to fifth-year transfer Sean Tyler. With Ibrahim gone and Trey Potts – Minnesota's second leading rusher – transferring to Penn State, the Gophers grabbed Tyler out of the transfer portal from Western Michigan, where he spent his first four collegiate seasons and averaged 5.7 yards per carry and had 23 rushing scores. He also caught 43 passes for 338 yards and three touchdowns and is a weapon on special teams, where he averaged 23.9 yards on 40 kickoff returns along with three scores.

Michigan, Nov. 25 – Just like Franklin at Penn State, Michigan's Harbaugh may be fielding his most talented team since returning to his alma mater in 2015.

The back-to-back Big Ten champions possess three preseason AP All-Americans – running back Blake Corum, offensive lineman Zak Zinter and defensive back Will Johnson – and will open the season ranked No. 2 in the preseason AP Poll, receiving two first place votes.

Michigan's success starts with their dominant ground game, which led the Big Ten last season with 238.9 rushing yards per game, fifth in the nation. The Wolverines' success should carry over to this season. They reclaim their two best rushers in Corum and Donovan Edwards. Corum earned a unanimous first-team All-American selection after rushing for the eighth-most yards (1,463) and third-most touchdowns (18) in Wolverines single-season history. He was not the only runner to thrive in the Maize and Blue. Edwards logged 991 yards along with seven touchdowns.

The two elite Wolverine runners will complement quarterback J.J. McCarthy, who returns under center for Michigan after a breakout sophomore season. After splitting reps with Cade McNamara in 2021, McCarthy assumed full control of the starting job this past season, making 13 starts under center and completing 64.6 percent of his passes for 2,719 passing yards, a mark that ranked eighth all-time in Wolverine single-season history.

McCarthy was also tied for sixth all-time in single-season program history with 22 touchdowns, a performance that earned him a third-team All-Big Ten selection from the coaches and a second-team All-Big Ten honor from the media.

The Wolverines return two All-Big Ten defensive selections from a year prior to a unit that ranked seventh in the nation in scoring defense, giving up just 16.1 points per game, with linebackers Junior Colson and Michael Barrett once again manning the middle of the defense after combining for 173 tackles, 11 tackles for loss and 5 1/2 sacks.

The two leaders will join defensive back Johnson, who was named a freshman All-American by numerous media outlets after collecting 27 tackles – including eight against Ohio State – along with three interceptions and six pass breakups.



Greg Schiano

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BSB Staff Cautiously Optimistic Entering 2023

The vibes in Columbus, understandably so, are a bit strange right now.

Despite Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day boasting one of the lead man's most talented squads since taking over the Buckeyes, there's a sense of hesitancy around the program given how each of the past two regular seasons have ended: in defeat to Michigan.

It's even more of a challenge to predict the season for Ohio State given that, as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, Day had yet to announce a starter at quarterback for the season opener at Indiana on Sept. 2. While our writers are mostly confident in whoever ultimately starts between Kyle McCord and Devin Brown, it's still a tenuous situation with which to enter a season.

It's a relatively slow start to the campaign, with matchups against the Hoosiers, Youngstown State and Western Kentucky, but it picks up on Sept. 23 at Notre Dame, and with the exception of a couple of late-season matchups with Rutgers and Michigan State, there are few games that can be comfortably predicted on the Buckeyes' slate.

That being said, what we're here to do is offer predictions for the season, and that's exactly what we're going to do, but hopefully things go a bit better than last year's predictions.

No member of the staff correctly picked last year's Big Ten Championship Game between Michigan and Purdue, with all four writers selecting Ohio State to represent the East Division and writers split in the West Division, with three selecting Wisconsin and another picking Iowa. Despite being burned by the Badgers last season, it's clear our writers have not learned their lesson, with all three unanimously selecting Wisconsin in the West.

Our writers did correctly identify Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud as Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, while Craig

How We See The 2023 Big Ten Race

Here is a look at how members of the BSB staff predict the Big Ten football season:

Patrick Engels			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	10-2	7-2	Citrus
Minnesota	7-5	5-4	Mayo
Nebraska	7-5	5-4	Music City
Iowa	6-6	4-5	GuaranteedRate
Purdue	6-6	4-5	QuickLane
Illinois	4-8	2-7	
Northwestern	2-10	0-9	

East			
Ohio State	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	11-1	8-1	CFP
Penn State	11-1	8-1	CFP
Michigan	11-1	8-1	Orange
Maryland	9-3	6-3	ReliaQuest
Michigan State	6-6	4-5	Pinstripe
Indiana	4-8	1-8	
Rutgers	2-10	1-8	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Marvin Harrison Jr., Ohio State
Defensive POY: Jer'Zhan Newton, Illinois
Coach of the Year: James Franklin, Penn State
Freshman POY: Carnell Tate, Ohio State

Craig Merz			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	9-3	7-2	Peach
Iowa	9-3	6-3	ReliaQuest
Minnesota	8-4	6-3	Mayo
Illinois	6-6	4-5	Music City
Nebraska	6-6	4-5	GuaranteedRate
Purdue	5-7	2-7	
Northwestern	2-10	1-8	

East			
Ohio State	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
Ohio State	10-2	7-2	Orange
Penn State	10-2	7-2	Citrus
Maryland	7-5	4-5	Pinstripe
Michigan State	5-7	3-6	
Rutgers	3-9	2-7	
Indiana	2-10	1-8	

Big Ten Title: Michigan over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Marvin Harrison Jr., Ohio State
Defensive POY: Abdul Carter, Penn State
Coach of the Year: Luke Fickell, Wisconsin
Freshman POY: Malachi Coleman, Nebraska

Braden Moles			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	11-1	8-1	Citrus
Nebraska	8-4	6-3	Mayo
Iowa	9-3	6-3	ReliaQuest
Minnesota	6-6	4-5	Pinstripe
Purdue	5-7	3-6	
Illinois	3-9	2-7	
Northwestern	2-10	0-9	

East			
Ohio State	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	11-1	8-1	Orange
Penn State	11-1	8-1	Peach
Maryland	8-4	5-4	Music City
Michigan State	5-7	3-6	
Indiana	3-9	1-8	
Rutgers	3-9	1-8	

Big Ten Title: Michigan over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Marvin Harrison Jr., Ohio State
Defensive POY: Jer'Zhan Newton, Illinois
Coach of the Year: Luke Fickell, Wisconsin
Freshman POY: Brandon Inniss, Ohio State

Merz and Braden Moles singled out Iowa linebacker Jack Campbell as Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year. All writers had a successful pick with Penn State running back Nicholas Singleton winning Big Ten Freshman of the Year, though no writer was bold enough to select Michigan's Jim Harbaugh as Big Ten Coach of the Year, with votes instead going to Day (three) and Purdue's Jeff Brohm (one).

With the season just around the corner, here are this year's BSB staff predictions.

Engels: Quarterbacks To Define 2023 Season

With a starting quarterback yet to be named, this is uncharted territory for the Buckeyes, as Day has never waited this long to proclaim a starter.

Both Justin Fields (2019) and Stroud (2021) earned the role 12 days before their respective season openers, a benchmark date that already passed this year

on Aug. 21. Day has assured the media throughout fall camp that the lingering competition between McCord and Brown has been a positive one, but as the possibility of both signal callers splitting first-team reps in the season opener against Indiana becomes likelier by the day, the more I begin to raise concerns about the readiness of these two throwers.

Luckily for McCord and Brown, they are surrounded by a whirlwind of NFL-caliber talent at every offensive skill position. In Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, Ohio State has arguably the best one-two collegiate wide receiver combo since LSU's Justin Jefferson and Ja'Marr Chase, and the talent at that position group does not end there. Ohio State also has an NFL-ready tight end in Cade Stover, as well as a deep and experienced running back room spearheaded by TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams. While the wealth of talent on offense can only help the young pair of quarterbacks,

I believe this team will only go as far as either McCord or Brown can take them.

Despite the uncertainty, the starting Buckeye signal caller should be able to ease into his Ohio State career with three cake-walk victories against Indiana, Youngstown State (Sept. 9) and Western Kentucky (Sept. 16). That will change, however, when the Buckeyes travel to South Bend for a Saturday night prime-time matchup with the Marcus Freeman-led Fighting Irish.

Notre Dame will come into the matchup hungry, as they squandered a three-point halftime lead to the Buckeyes last season. And they will also enter with a new and improved quarterback in Wake Forest transfer Sam Hartman, who owns the ACC record for career touchdown passes with 110.

This will not be enough for the Fighting Irish to emerge with the upset win, however, as I envision Ohio State escaping with a last-second victory – and the new Buckeye quarterback making some clutch throws down the stretch to solidify himself as the long-term starter.

Ohio State will then face a potential trap game against Maryland on Oct. 7, which I project to enter the game 5-0. The Buckeyes need to find a way to stop quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa, who gashed Jim Knowles' defense with 293 passing yards and two touchdowns last season, but I believe Ohio State will come out of this matchup unscathed with a double-digit victory.

After another potential trip-up game at Purdue on Oct. 14, the Buckeyes will face their biggest challenge yet when they welcome Penn State to Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21. If not for a superhuman performance from defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, the Nittany Lions might have defeated Ohio State a season ago. Despite a talented roster led by offensive lineman Olu Fashanu and cornerback Kalen King, I simply do not think sophomore quarterback Drew Allar and his still-young team is quite ready to win at Ohio State, as the formidable defensive line will likely stymie their offense.

The Buckeyes are met with another

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significant threat a week later when they travel to the Luke Fickell-led Wisconsin Badgers, whom I have entering this prime-time matchup with a 7-0 record. It will be a difficult road test for whoever the Buckeyes' first-year quarterback will be, but this is the time for the veteran leadership of Harrison, Egbuka, Henderson, Stover and others to take charge. After all, Day said this is the most "mature" team he has had since being promoted to head coach in 2019. In my opinion, the Buckeyes will exit Camp Randall Stadium with another statement road victory.

Day and Ohio State finally catch a break in the schedule with inferior Big Ten opponents Rutgers (apologies to my home state) and Michigan State, followed by a slightly more challenging home bout with Minnesota on Nov. 18. I would assume the Buckeyes would learn from last year's mistakes and not overlook their pre-Michigan opponent, as they did with Maryland last season, so it should be another comfortable win.

That leaves The Game. Day and his team have said throughout the offseason that they have thought about last year's 45-23 loss to the Wolverines every day, so there is no question they will enter The Big House with something to prove.

In the past two seasons, the Buckeyes have been beaten handily by their archrivals in two different ways, first by a bruising Michigan ground game that netted 297 rushing yards through the snow in 2021, then by a series of explosive plays sparked by quarterback J.J. McCarthy in the air and running back Donovan Edwards on the ground that took the top off of Knowles' defense last season.

The Wolverines are stacked once again this year, led by running back Blake Corum, offensive lineman Zak Zinter and cornerback Will Johnson, so it certainly will not be an easy task for Ohio State to reclaim a stranglehold on the rivalry.

But the prevailing question remains: Can Day's Buckeyes match the physicality of Harbaugh's Wolverines? I believe Ohio State will be more physical on the defensive line this season with a healthy Mike Hall Jr. and improved Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer, but I cannot trust an almost brand-new offensive line and inexperienced first-year starting quarterback to survive against Michigan. I'll take the Wolverines to emerge victorious for the third consecutive year, much to the dismay of Buckeye fans across the country.

This will not end Ohio State's Big Ten or national championship aspirations, however, as I have them squeaking in as result of a tiebreaker into the Big Ten Championship Game against Wisconsin due to a midseason loss for the Wolverines at Penn State on Nov. 11.

I believe the Buckeyes will then take care of the Badgers once again in a rematch of the Big Ten Championship Game in 2019, propelling Day and Ohio State to the team's fourth College Football Playoff berth in five years.

Time will tell if Ohio State will earn an opportunity to compete for a national championship, but if McCord or Brown fails to solidify himself as a surefire starter, it will be difficult for the program to have another elite season. Regardless of the result of this year, however, a third

straight loss to Michigan will undoubtedly cast a dark cloud on the program.

Toughest Road Environment This Season: Wisconsin's Camp Randall Stadium.

Breakthrough Players: WR Brandon Inniss, DE Kenyatta Jackson Jr., SAF Sonny Styles, WR Carnell Tate.

Cornerback Most Likely to Neutralize Marvin Harrison Jr.: Penn State's Kalen King, Notre Dame's Ben Morrison.

Underrated Big Ten Teams: Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska.

Merz: Sceptically Optimistic Ohio State Wins The East

Missouri isn't in the Big Ten (unless the conference expanded again since this was written) but I'm in a "show me" state of mind when it comes to predicting what the Buckeyes will do this season.

Even with the track record of Day being a quarterback whisperer with the ability to develop Dwayne Haskins, Fields and Stroud into Heisman Trophy candidates and top-end draft picks, there has to be a bit of skepticism when it comes to the next signal caller.

McCord and Brown waged a battle during the preseason camp but the reality is neither has much field cred that exudes confidence that OSU will be the favorite in every game. It's hard to imagine either quarterback is better than McCarthy, and when was the last time it could be said the Wolverines had the advantage over the Buckeyes at that position?

That's the impression right now, but if Day can work his magic again, the Buckeyes could be looking like a College Football Playoff contender by the time they face Wisconsin, Penn State and Michigan in the second half of the schedule.

That's the hope, but there are several challenges prior to that, notably the game at Notre Dame and the always tricky trip to Purdue three weeks later. In fact, three of the potentially four toughest challenges are on the road, with Penn State (Oct. 21) the lone exception. Does this mean the Buckeyes are doomed to miss the CFP? Not necessarily, but I can't see them going unscathed through the regular season.

A 12-1 record (including the Big Ten Championship Game) that features a win over Michigan would certainly earn a spot in the CFP while a one-loss Buckeyes (with the loss being to Michigan) would need a repeat of last season when things fell their way in the other conference title games and allowed them to be selected for the final four.

I'm waffling between 11-1 and 10-2 for the regular season with another setback vs. U-M in both scenarios. As much as Buckeye fans hate it, the Wolverines are now the king of the conference with as much talent and arguably a better coach.

They also own swagger in the rivalry that used to belong exclusively to the Buckeyes. Think about it – thanks to the cancellation of the 2020 game because of the pandemic, the Wolverines haven't tasted defeat in the series since 2019. There are very few players on their roster who have experienced a loss to Ohio State, just as the number of current Buckeyes with gold pants is slim. Unless Ohio State proves in Ann Arbor it is the big dog in the Big Ten, it must then avoid another

loss.

The games at Notre Dame and Wisconsin are perilous because those teams – each coached by a former Buckeye standout – are expected to be formidable. Also, playing the Boilermakers on their field has produced some spectacular upsets of the Buckeyes over the years so that could be a pothole.

But for the second straight year, I'm picking Penn State as the chief non-Michigan antagonist, even with the game in Ohio Stadium. The Nittany Lions have a history of playing the Buckeyes tough despite losing six straight to them. The scheduling of the game is another factor, sandwiched between trips to Purdue and Wisconsin.

Speaking of away games, the Buckeyes open at Indiana as they did in 2017 when the Hoosiers held a shocking 21-20 lead late in the third quarter before quarterback J.T. Barrett and then-freshman back J.K. Dobbins led a comeback for a 49-21 win.

Many pundits position the Hoosiers for last in the East Division, and there's little reason to think they will push the Buckeyes. The wild card is how an inexperienced Ohio State quarterback will handle the spotlight, but the Buckeyes have many deep and talented backs and an exceptional receiving corps should allay fears.

The Buckeyes open the home schedule with consecutive nonconference breathers against Youngstown State and Western Kentucky. Yawn. Not only are the six games at the 'Shoe two fewer than last

season, but the lone marquee matchup is vs. the Nittany Lions.

They will use their two softies to prepare for Notre Dame in a rematch of last season's opener Ohio State won 21-10 in the coaching debut of Freeman. The Fighting Irish will seek revenge, led by Wake Forest transfer quarterback Hartman. After Notre Dame, the Buckeyes host Maryland before traveling to West Lafayette, Ind., where in 2018, then-No. 2 Ohio State was humbled 49-20.

Penn State follows prior to going to Madison to play Wisconsin's first-year coach and former Buckeye player, assistant coach and interim head coach Fickell in what will be an emotional and electric atmosphere.

One would think the Buckeyes will be able to exhale the next three weeks at Rutgers and home to Michigan State and Minnesota to set up The Game. As for the East winner, Michigan has won two straight Big Ten titles and if the Wolverines can navigate road games at Michigan State – and especially Penn State – they will go into The Game undefeated.

But don't dismiss the possibility that U-M, Ohio State and Penn State could all finish with one conference loss. Fickell's Badgers seem an easy pick in the West coming off the miracles he performed at Cincinnati. Iowa will be its usual good but not good enough, while Minnesota and Illinois will vie for relevance in the weaker of the two divisions.

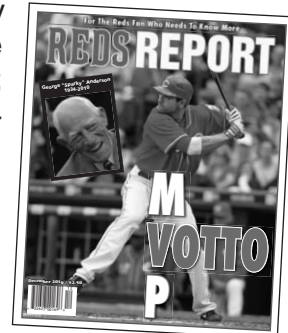
The East will be the probable favorite

Continued On Page 38

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Buckeyes May Need Help For Playoff Berth

Continued From Page 37

in the conference championship, particularly if the College Football Playoff is within reach.

Second-Biggest Conference Game: Michigan at Penn State, Nov. 11.

Top Variation Of A Name: Everybody knows Cade Stover, but the Buckeyes also have defensive linemen Cade Casto and Kayden McDonald, running back Cayden Saunders and defensive ends Caden Curry and Caden Davis.

Two Biggest Questions In The World On Oct. 7: What and where is Peacock? If reports are true that the game vs. Maryland will be exclusively on streaming service Peacock, thousands of Buckeyes fans despite ample advance notice will go into a panic. Likely, they're not following Peacock staples such as England's Premier League Soccer or The Dan Patrick Show. You've been forewarned.

Moles: It All Comes Down To Nov. 25

I wrote last season that I felt confident Ohio State would open the season 11-0, carrying an undefeated record into the season finale against Michigan and ultimately prevailing against the Wolverines in Ohio Stadium after solving the issues that plagued them in the previous season's loss in Ann Arbor.

This time around, I'm sticking with

my undefeated prediction through the first 11 games, but regret to report that I don't have a ton of confidence about Ohio State's date in The Big House on Nov. 25. And why would I? Ohio State has been the more talented team in each of the last two seasons yet lost, and while I believe the Buckeyes still have a better roster, this is among the best teams Harbaugh has had since taking over.

But, while one of Ohio State's key goals will be taking down Michigan, the program's other two goals – winning the Big Ten and winning a national championship – will start to take shape much earlier in the season. The Buckeyes open with what should be an easy trio of wins, traveling to Indiana to open the season followed by home contests against Youngstown State from the FCS ranks and Western Kentucky.

Those wins should be a prime opportunity to break in the program's new starting quarterback – whether it's McCord or Brown – who will be afforded the chance to ease into things with some of the nation's best wide receivers, a retooled yet talented offensive line and a deep group of running backs. Ohio State's offense may not hit the heights of previous seasons under Haskins, Fields and Stroud, but there's no reason it should not still be among the best offenses in the country.

Just as the quarterback is getting comfortable, though, the season then picks

up, with Ohio State traveling to face Notre Dame. Hartman is an intriguing upgrade at quarterback for the Fighting Irish, but with the team losing several defensive starters from last season, I don't think this one will be quite the nailbiter last season's opener was.

After an off week, a home contest against Maryland – if you can find somewhere to watch it, that is – and a road game at Purdue, the Buckeyes' biggest test so far comes into Ohio Stadium with No. 7 Penn State.

By all accounts, this should be one of the most talented teams head coach James Franklin has had since becoming head coach (and receiving seemingly a million extensions) in 2014. Drew Allar is a legitimate weapon at quarterback, Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen provide a one-two punch at running back, and the offensive line – anchored by Fashanu – should be among the best in the Big Ten.

This will be the first significant test for Ohio State's defense looking to right the wrongs of last season. From hearing the talk of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, other assistant coaches and players this offseason, however, I do feel a sense of optimism that a defensive turnaround could be in order, and it should make a statement against the Nittany Lions.

You won't find a better pair of pass rushers than Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer or a better pair of linebackers than Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers, and while the secondary is coming off a challenging season, it's hard not to be excited about the prospect of cornerbacks Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock, Davison Igbinosun and safeties Ja'Had Carter, Lathan Ransom and Sonny Styles all seeing significant playing time.

Hopefully the Buckeyes don't get caught looking ahead to the next week, when they travel to face No. 19 Wisconsin and Fickell, who will likely enter the game with a 6-0 record in his first season with the Badgers. Wisconsin's roster is not necessarily the most talented – there's a reason Paul Chryst is no longer coaching the team – but there's something to be said for what new life can infuse into a program, and even though Ohio State will enter Camp Randall with a talent advantage, this is not a contest to be taken lightly.

Even so, I feel confident Ohio State will come out on top against Wisconsin, as well as the following games at Rutgers (Nov. 4), against Michigan State (Nov. 11) and against Minnesota (Nov. 18). But then comes that pesky Team Up North.

Make no bones about it – the Wolverines, who enter the season at No. 2 in the AP top 25, are fully deserving of their spot. Opinions are mixed on McCarthy, but at the end of the day, he will be more than enough to get the Wolverines to the final week of the season undefeated. Corum and Edwards may rival Ohio State's offering at tailback, while Michigan's offensive line is a likely candidate to threepeat for the Joe Moore Award.

On defense, the Wolverines return plenty of talent with defensive tackle Kris Jenkins, linebackers Michael Barrett and

Junior Colson, as well as defensive backs Johnson, Rod Moore, Makari Paige and Mike Sainristil. As difficult as things have been for Ohio State against Michigan in the last two seasons, this roster is arguably the most talented of them all and by far the most experienced, likely to hold a mental edge going into the game.

For that reason – not to mention the fact it's in Ann Arbor – there's no way I can comfortably predict Ohio State to win this game. Maybe the Buckeyes have made the necessary changes to knock off the Wolverines for the first time since 2019, but the program has displayed confidence heading into each of the last two seasons, and look how that ended up. We're in a place few would've predicted when Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer were at the helm, but when it comes to Ohio State beating Michigan, I'll believe it when I see it.

A loss to Michigan is not necessarily season-ending for Ohio State, as the Buckeyes – if they finished the regular season 11-1 – would still make the Big Ten Championship Game if the Wolverines were to lose at Penn State on Nov. 11 and pick up an upset elsewhere, perhaps at Nebraska on Sept. 30, at Michigan State on Oct. 21 or at Maryland on Nov. 18, just one week before hosting the Buckeyes. And if Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State all finish 11-1 with each team beating exactly one other team from that group, some fun tiebreaker scenarios will take hold that could send any of the three to the conference title game.

But assuming Michigan ends the season undefeated, Ohio State will likely face a tougher backdoor into the College Football Playoff than last season. This time around, Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Oregon and USC are all in contention, with Oregon State, Texas, Utah and Washington also in the discussion.

For as much that had to go right last season for Ohio State to sneak in, even more dominoes would have to fall this year, so beating Michigan is just about the only way the Buckeyes will get close to a playoff berth. Can they do it? With a roster as talented as Ohio State's, sure. Will they? That's another question that, regardless of how the Buckeyes play over the next few months, can't possibly be answered until Nov. 25.

Best Odds For An Upset: Wisconsin vs. Ohio State, Oct. 28; Maryland vs. Penn State, Nov. 4; Maryland vs. Michigan, Nov. 18.

Bench-To-Starter Candidates: SAF Malik Hartford, LB C.J. Hicks, CB Davison Igbinosun, OT Luke Montgomery.

Position Battles Likely To Stretch Into Season: Cornerbacks Jordan Hancock vs. Davison Igbinosun; quarterbacks Kyle McCord vs. Devin Brown; wide receiver Julian Fleming vs. freshman wide receivers Brandon Inness, Bryson Rodgers, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate.

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CB Scott Felt In-State Pull To Join Buckeyes

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After a tough summer on the recruiting trail for Ohio State, it looked, for a brief moment, like things might have gotten even worse on July 30 as Springfield, Ohio, four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-2, 190) was set to announce his decision.

Flanked by family members on both sides and Oregon, Michigan and Ohio State backpacks and hats on the table in front of him from left to right, Scott said, "For the next three to four years, I will be taking my talents to the University of ..." and proceeded to pick up the Oregon apparel before putting it off to the side.

He then picked up the Ohio State hat and flirted with putting it on before also tossing it to the side, leaving only the Michigan apparel left on the table. Half of the crowd – clearly in favor of Scott committing to the Wolverines – began to cheer, while the other half – including his father, a noted Ohio State fan – were less than pleased.

Scott then picked up the Michigan backpack and opened it to reveal an Ohio State jersey with No. 5, his high school number, and announcing, "For the next three to four years, I'll be taking my talents to the University of ... O-State."

Scott had further theatrics with the use of a smoke machine, which then set off fire alarms within the building. But even the sprinkler system going off wouldn't have rained on Scott's parade, with the highly-touted in-state prospect ending a winding commitment with a pledge to the in-state school of choice.

"I feel like just being from Ohio and knowing what they can do for me, they made me feel like I needed, so I went with that right there," he said after committing.

Oregon was around in the end, but it was a recruitment that came down to Ohio State and Michigan. Despite battles on the field, recruiting wars between the programs didn't happen often in the days of Jim Tressell or Urban Meyer – or even in the first couple of seasons under Ryan Day – but the Wolverines have gotten holdier in recent cycles, dipping into Ohio for prep talent.

As Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, Michigan had 27 players in the program's 2024 recruiting class, and four hail from Ohio. That includes four-star offensive tackle Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290) from Avon, Cincinnati St. Xavier four-star defensive lineman Ted Hammond (6-5, 258), Lakewood St. Edward three-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320) and, most notably, Cincinnati Moeller four-star running back Jordan Marshall (5-11, 193), the only one of those prospects who held an offer from Ohio State.

Marshall's pledge to the Wolverines in March was no doubt a blow to the Buckeyes, who lost their first top-100, in-state prospect to Michigan since Alliance Marlington safety Dymonte Thomas (6-2, 191) in the 2013 recruiting class. With the recent optics of Marshall heading a state north, it put even more emphasis on Ohio State to land Scott.

Even before Scott picked up the Michigan backpack at his commitment ceremony, it appeared at points like the Wolverines might be leading for the cornerback. Scott



FILE PHOTO

FEELING THE LOVE – Ohio State added an important commitment on July 30 with the addition of Springfield, Ohio, four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-2, 190) to the program's 2024 recruiting class.

confirmed as much after pledging to Ohio State, admitting that Michigan led in his recruitment following his official visit from June 16-18 and heading into his Ohio State visit from June 23-25.

"I was fully on Michigan at that time," Scott said. "But Coach Day said, 'You forgot you haven't been here in a while.' He reminded me how much I loved Ohio State.

"Knowing the other players, them talking to me and letting me know it's all love," he continued. "My family is close. They can come (visit) whenever, and how much love (Ohio State) shows the alums and all that. It's so much love."

But even as his decision day approached, Scott said he was back and forth between Ohio State and Michigan and did not make up his mind until the day of his announcement. Both programs were in early on Scott, offering him last summer, and he has since taken several visits to both schools, including a pair of games at Ohio State last season – against Notre Dame in the season opener and the loss to Michigan in the regular-season finale.

"It was hard," Scott said. "I'd just stay up and think about it in the shower, laying down, I'd just think about it 24/7. I had to put social media aside for a little bit, but I felt like I could lock in with the decision."

He was so conflicted, in fact, that he had not informed either coaching staff ahead of his announcement, leaving the programs just as much in the dark as everyone else.

"They found out when everybody else found out," he said. "I still hadn't made up my mind. I thought they'll just figure it out when I announce it."

At the end of the day, Ohio State won out, with Scott feeling a strong sense of pride around being from Ohio and having the opportunity to play in Columbus. He also relished the chance to play with Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West

(5-11, 177), who joined the class in June, with Scott adding that West was a big factor in his decision.

"It means a lot to me (being from) Ohio, so I felt like, why not keep it going? It will be (us) two Ohio dudes taking over," Scott said. "I feel like Ohio is slept on a lot, and two players (from Ohio) starting at Ohio State and winning a (national championship), it's big."

Scott also felt a significant pull from four-star offensive linemen Deontae (6-6, 280) and Devontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong from Lakewood St. Edward, who have been relentless peer recruiters in Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class. As Scott now takes

his place among his future teammates, he's hoping to have a similar impact on the recruiting trail.

"I'm trying to have everybody flipped and be a Buckeye," Scott said.

Scott also felt influence from his hometown, with fellow Springfield native and former Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller offering guidance throughout Scott's recruitment.

"That's my guy," Scott said of Miller, whom he honored with his No. 5 jersey. "I was on the phone with him earlier a couple of hours before I announced, and he was on me like, 'Come be a Buckeye.'"

Beyond the chance to represent Ohio State, Scott also looks forward to the opportunity to represent Springfield at the next level.

"It means a lot," he said. "I know there's kids looking up to me. I've had a lot of kids come up to me and say they're playing corner because of me, so to know I'm from here and they can do the same thing, let them know it's not easy to do it, and for me to be able to do it, I feel like anybody else can do it."

As the No. 43 overall prospect and fourth-ranked cornerback in the class, expectations will be high for Scott once he arrives on campus. He had 21 tackles (three for loss) with five interceptions, a pair of pick-sixes and a fumble recovery last season for Springfield, displaying impressive ball-hawk skills and the ability to play in different coverages, though he mostly works as an outside corner for Springfield.

With his commitment behind him, it will be just a few short months before Scott expects to sign with Ohio State and arrive on campus in January as an early enrollee, with hopes to see that skill quickly translate to help him see the field as soon as possible.

"Ohio State is getting a long, athletic, fast competitor that loves the work," Scott said. "I'm not going to be happy until I'm on the field."

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High-Profile Commitments Highlight Summer

It was a hot summer in Columbus and even hotter on the recruiting trail, with Ohio State landing 17 stars' worth of prospects since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

The most high profile was Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265), who announced his pledge to Ohio State on Aug. 22. Houston is the No. 23 overall prospect and fourth-ranked defensive lineman in the class, and he is also the fourth-best prospect in the Buckeyes' recruiting class.

"Ohio State's just been there," Houston said after committing. "(I knew) hanging out with Jack Sawyer and J.T. (Tuimoloau), just the whole weekend (of June 16-18). They're fun, but when they are working, they're working. I told (the Ohio State coaches) when I was on the visit that it was going to be Ohio State for sure."

Houston committed to Ohio State over Alabama, Clemson, Georgia and USC, taking his official visit to Columbus from June 16-18, and he also visited campus last fall.

A two-way player for Buford, Houston totaled 64 tackles (11 for loss) with 10 sacks and 15 quarterback pressures last season, and he also saw snaps at tight end as the Wolves finished 11-1. He has also wrestled and competed in track and field. Houston mostly rushed off the edge for Buford, and defensive line coach Larry Johnson intends to keep him there at Ohio State.

"He said I will always be outside on their

defense," Houston said. "I'm always rushing. I may drop back a couple times, but he's looking for me to rush, use my pass rush moves."

Along with the commitment of Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310) in July, Johnson – assuming both sign with the Buckeyes – will bring his seventh and eighth five-star defensive linemen to Ohio State, with the pair joining the likes of Sawyer and Tuimoloau (both in 2021), Zach Harrison (2019), Taron Vincent (2018), Chase Young (2017) and Nick Bosa (2016).

And while Houston was the highest-ranked prospect who committed to Ohio State, perhaps the most important pledge to the program was from Springfield, Ohio, four-star cornerback Aaron Scott (6-2, 190) on July 30.

Scott's decision came down to Ohio State and Michigan (more on page 39), and it represented a significant win on the recruiting trail for the Buckeyes. He is the No. 43 overall prospect and fourth-ranked cornerback in the class, and he is also the top-ranked prospect in Ohio for 2024. He was not alone in joining the cornerback room, however, as Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star cornerback Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185) pledged on July 6.

Lockhart is the No. 348 overall prospect and No. 27 cornerback in the class, and he committed to Ohio State over offers from Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado, Iowa, Iowa State, Oregon, Oregon State, Texas A&M, Washington and Wisconsin, among others.

"I really felt it was the right fit for me," he told 247Sports. "It feels like family there. It feels like home. They made sure I knew I was a priority for them. That was a big reason, and the family atmosphere. Coach (Tim) Walton and Coach (Ryan) Day really take care of you."

He finished last season with 69 tackles

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.
Eddrick Houston	DL	6-3	265	★★★★★	Buford, Ga.,
Max LeBlanc	TE	6-4	222	★★★★	Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School
Miles Lockhart	CB	5-10	185	★★★★	Chandler (Ariz.) Basha
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
Jeremiah McClellan	WR	6-0	190	★★★★	St. Louis Christian Brothers College
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
Aaron Scott	CB	6-2	190	★★★★	Springfield, Ohio
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

(2½ for loss) with four interceptions and 19 pass breakups. Lockhart and Scott are joined in the class by Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177).

The Buckeyes also added a pledge from St. Louis Christian Brothers College four-star wide receiver Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190) on Aug. 13.

He was offered by Ohio State in September and has made several visits to campus since. He chose the Buckeyes over Missouri and Oregon.

"I like the vibe from the players," McClellan told 247Sports. "I like how Coach (Brian) Hartline treats his players. I like how he teaches them and how they develop their players. I want to go into aviation science,

and I can do that at Ohio State.

"The players love it there. Everyone I talked to there has the same goal in mind, and I really like that."

He hauled in 61 receptions last season for 1,103 yards and 18 total touchdowns (13 receiving), building off a sophomore season with 41 catches for 989 yards and nine receiving touchdowns. While he mostly lines up as an outside receiver for Christian Brothers College, he projects to the slot once he arrives at Ohio State.

He joins a loaded receiver class that includes five-stars Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198) from Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade Madonna-Prep and Mylan Graham (6-1, 170) from New Haven, Ind. While that trio would probably finish as the top receiving class in the country, Hartline has also shown interest in adding Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star wide receiver Chance Robinson (6-2, 190), who is committed to Miami (Fla.).

Despite his commitment to the Hurricanes, Robinson expects to take an official visit to Ohio State this fall, according to 247Sports. He plays on the same seven-on-seven team – South Florida Express – as Smith, and it also featured current Buckeyes like wide receiver Brandon Inniss and Carnell Tate.

OSU Loses On Several Recruits In July, August

While Ohio State had plenty of good news throughout July and August, there was also some bad news in the form of targets heading to other schools.

It was unquestionably a bad stretch for linebacker recruiting, with Ohio State missing on Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-3, 230), who committed to Notre Dame on July 23, and Nashville (Tenn.) Lipscomb Academy four-star Edwin Spillman (6-2, 214), who pledged to Tennessee on July 21.

While Ohio State was never considered in the lead for Spillman before his commitment, the same could not be said for Vil-



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OSU Football 2025 Commitments

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio

OSU Football 2026 Commitment

Player(s) in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	185	★★★★	Cincinnati Withrow

iamu-Asa. The Buckeyes were considered firmly ahead for the four-star prospect following his official visits in June, but when it came time to announce his college of choice, it was clear Ohio State had lost out to a higher power.

“What really stood out is how I would get the best of both worlds,” Viliamu-Asa told On3. “I didn’t have to compromise my education nor opportunity to play football. At Notre Dame I can do both. But honestly man, I couldn’t see myself (at Notre Dame), but I could at the two other schools. But I read Hebrews 11:1, which talks about faith as assurance in the things we can’t see, and going to the mountains really solidified my answer because I felt God wanted me to have faith, which required trusting in what I could not see.”

Ohio State still has Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star linebacker Garrett Stover (6-0, 195) and Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225) committed, but it leaves the Buckeyes – who were looking to take three linebackers – in a difficult spot. With no offers out to any notable uncommitted linebackers, Ohio State could look to circle back to Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas three-star Nicholas Rodriguez (6-1, 190), who committed to Missouri in July, or wait for senior film and assess other targets.

Moving to the defensive line, while Ohio State was certainly happy to receive commitments from five-star defensive linemen Houston and Scott, there were a handful of

misses as well.

At one point or another in their recruitment, it appears Ohio State either led or was near the top for Washington (D.C.) Friendship Collegiate Academy five-star defensive end Dylan Stewart (6-5, 235) and Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star defensive end Marquise Lightfoot (6-5, 220). But as it stands in August, neither is in Ohio State’s class, with Stewart committing to South Carolina on Aug. 1 and Lightfoot opting for Miami (Fla.) on July 3.

Stewart was more of a wild card, but Lightfoot – until the day of his commitment – was believed to lean toward the Buckeyes. Word started trickling out in the hours before his announcement that the Hurricanes may have made a push, and that was ultimately the case. But even though he is committed, that has not stopped Ohio State and Johnson from pursuing.

“He said he wants to stay in touch, make sure I stay in touch with him,” Lightfoot told 247Sports. “He said if I want to change my mind we will still have our relationship. I could go to a (Buckeye) game. Larry Johnson wants me to. He wants me to make sure I’m making the right decision. Ohio State-Penn State is one talked about. That would be possible.”

With the Buckeyes looking to take at least a couple more linemen, Lightfoot could certainly be in the equation, and the Buckeyes are continuing to pursue Lafayette (La.) Acadiana four-star defensive lineman Dominick McKinley (6-5, 290) and are likely to

take a second look at Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive end Booker Pickett Jr. (6-3, 205).

Perhaps the biggest miss of the summer, however, was Buford, Ga., five-star safety KJ Bolden (6-1, 185). He announced on Aug. 5 that he was committing to Florida State, meaning that Ohio State’s biggest target in the recruiting cycle was off the board.

“This last week has been crazy busy for me,” Bolden told On3. “I have been on so many calls throughout the week and it’s been crazy. Over the last few days, I was down to Auburn, Florida State and Georgia. I went back and forth between those schools at different times before deciding Florida State was the right school for me.

“It was tough, and I had a lot of conversations with family and people close to me before I made my final decision. I asked the man above and He told me where I need to be.”

Bolden is the seventh-ranked overall prospect in the class and the top-ranked safety for the cycle. It was believed that Ohio State was in Bolden’s recruitment until the end – especially considering that safeties coach Perry Eliano is a cousin of Bolden – but the Buckeyes ultimately did not even finish in the top three.

Not helping matters was the fact that other safeties offered by the Buckeyes – including five-star Joshisa Trader (6-1, 175) and four-star safety Zaquan Patterson (6-0, 185), both from Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep – have either committed to another school or are likely to commit elsewhere.

Trader pledged to Miami (Fla.) on July 13, while Patterson was scheduled to decide on Aug. 26 between Auburn, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan and Ohio State, but the Buckeyes are not expected to be the pick. With only West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star safety Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185) committed to Ohio State, it leaves the Buckeyes in a challenging spot at safety moving forward with initial hopes of taking at least three in this cycle.

OL Seaton To Take Official Visit

Washington (D.C.) IMG Academy four-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287) told 247Sports that he plans to take an official visit to Ohio State this season, though he has not determined a date yet.

While the Buckeyes cooled off on Seaton following a string of commitments on the offensive line, things have started to heat back up with the early signing period just four months away and new priorities taking shape for recruiting staffs across the country.

Seaton is the No. 39 overall prospect and top-ranked interior lineman in the class, and Alabama, Florida, Oklahoma and South Carolina are considered his other top schools. He also said he’s planning a visit to Oregon.

Along with Seaton, Ohio State continues to push for Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) to help close out the class at offensive line. Ohio State is among the top schools for Baker, the top-ranked tackle in 2024, along with Texas.

Gilbert Decommits From Ohio State

On July 29, the one-year anniversary of Atlanta (Ga.) Douglass five-star safety Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175) announcing his commitment to Ohio State, the 2025 prospect celebrated in an unusual way: by decommitting from Ohio State.

A year after becoming the first member of the Buckeyes’ 2025 recruiting class, Gilbert – who, despite his commitment to Ohio State, never seemed all that interested in playing in Columbus given his continued visits to other schools – officially cut ties.

“First off I want to thank God for all of the blessings he has been sending my way,” Gilbert told On3. “I want to thank my family, friends, and coaches for supporting me through my decision. This was a very hard decision to make but after long talks with

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

It was an up-and-down summer for Ohio State’s recruiting. How do you assess where things are as the season is set to begin?

“I think it’s definitely successful. But if you look at each position group, they’re taking Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes five-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195) now, he was not the guy they wanted. They’re taking him, and he’s good, but that was not the first choice. Running backs, I think they hit a home run there. Wide receiver, I mean, they got three amazing (prospects), no problem there. Their two tight ends, they both look really good.

“That offensive line, to me, it’s suspect right now. But add Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285), and it’s not suspect. I like Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce (6-1, 225) a lot. But I always think, in the last couple of years, what they’re missing is that Ryan Shazier type, and I know those guys don’t grow on trees. You don’t find those guys on every street corner. But still, it’s Ohio State. You should be able to get the best of the best. If you want to win a championship, that’s what you have to do.”

Outside of Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265), who committed to Ohio State on Aug. 22, who do you view as the biggest target left in 2024 for Ohio State?

“Brandon Baker, absolutely. They have to get him. To me, he’s the best offensive lineman in the country. He is a pure left tackle. They have a lot of guys that are kind of tackles but might not be tackles on the roster. Guys like (Josh) Fryar, who I think is a guard, but he’s going to have to play tackle. So that’s huge, they need tackles. There’s a reason they went and got (Josh) Simmons out of the portal.

“Brandon Baker, he’s an NFL No. 1 draft pick, if things go well. If he’s healthy, he works his butt off, he doesn’t get in trouble, he stays focused. He’s got all the tools. He might not be Paris Johnson Jr. but he’s close. He’s that type of player, where he plays as a freshman. I don’t know if he starts, but he’s in the depth chart. And then as a sophomore, junior, he’s All-Big Ten, All-American. I think he’s that good.”

With Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star safety Zaquan Patterson (6-0,

185) set to commit on Aug. 26 and Ohio State seemingly not the pick, where do the Buckeyes go at safety from here?

“At the safety position, they have to be sitting there, telling themselves, ‘Where do we go?’ Just the question you asked me is probably the question Ryan Day is asking (safeties coach) Perry Eliano and (defensive coordinator) Jim Knowles, like, ‘Where do we go from here? Do we still have a shot at Buford, Ga., five-star safety KJ Bolden (6-1, 185)? Is there any reason to think we should continue to recruit him?’ Or is it, ‘That’s over, we’re done, forget it.’

“And it’s the same thing with Zaquan Patterson. ‘Do we have a chance? Do we still think we should go hard after him? Or should we just reset the board, see who’s left out there, and go from there.’ And I don’t really have that answer right now. I don’t know how they’re going to look at this.”

Once senior film begins coming in and Ohio State is taking final stock of their class, what other prospects might the Buckeyes circle back around to?

“They really seemed to like Cincinnati LaSalle

four-star safety Koy Beasley (5-10, 170) early on. He’s committed to Purdue, but you have to think, if they decide they’re going to pivot and go after Beasley, you would have to think the kid would give them a look. I like Koy Beasley. He’s short, but he’s really good.”

“There is a kid from West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West named Taebron Bennie-Powell (6-1, 180), and I think he has a chance to really be special. He’s only a three-star kid. He’s listed as an athlete, but I see him as a safety. He’s committed to Notre Dame right now, so it’s not like you’re going to try and flip him from Akron or something. But I’ve always wondered why Ohio State didn’t throw their oar in the water with Bennie-Powell. I think he’s really special.”

“Westerville (Ohio) North four-star defensive end Brian Robinson (6-5, 255) is interesting. I know he’s had some weird off-field stuff that I know Ohio State doesn’t like, but he’s a talent. And he was down at camp. They spent a lot of time with him. They haven’t offered yet. He’s the guy, if you lose out on all your edge guys, that they might go back on.”

Ohio State Adds First 2026 Commitment

Continued From Page 41

my family and my coaches I now want to say I am opening back up my recruiting and decommit from Ohio State. Respect my decision! Thank you Buckeye Nation for everything and to all the Ohio State coaching staff.”

When Ohio State first offered Gilbert in May of 2022, the program was one of just seven – including Arkansas, Buffalo, Florida A&M, Georgia Tech, Pittsburgh and UAB – to have offered the now five-star prospect. Now, he has offers from schools such as Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas A&M.

He is the No. 25 overall prospect and second-ranked safety in the class. Ohio State also has offers out for Zephyrhills, Fla., five-star safety DJ Pickett (6-2, 170), Galveston (Texas) Ball four-star safety Jonah Williams (6-3, 203), Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star safety Anthony Sacca (6-3, 225) and safety Ethan Long (6-2, 185) from Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School, among others.

Gilbert's decommitment leaves Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) as Ohio State's only commitment in 2025.

TE Target Roberts Decommits From ND

Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 230), a 2025 prospect

who had been committed to Notre Dame since June, announced Aug. 15 that he would be decommitting from the Fighting Irish.

“I have made the decision to decommit from the University of Notre Dame,” Roberts said. “I want to thank Coach (Marcus) Freeman, Coach (Gerard) Parker and Chad Bowden for the opportunity and wish them and the Fighting Irish the best going forward.”

This creates an opening for Ohio State, which offered Roberts in May and was included among his top schools in June before his initial commitment to Notre Dame, a list that included Auburn, Baylor, Clemson, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State and Wisconsin in addition to the Buckeyes and Fighting Irish. Moving forward, Ohio State and Oklahoma are expected to be among his top contenders.

Roberts is the No. 110 overall prospect and second-ranked tight end in the class behind Kingsland (Ga.) Camden County five-star Elyiss Williams (6-7, 235), who is committed to Georgia. The Buckeyes have also shown interest in West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Luka Gilbert (6-8, 233), who said he plans to get up to “a couple of games” at Ohio State this season, as well as Calhoun, Ga., four-star Emaree Winston (6-2, 235).

Buckeyes Add Pledge From 2026 WR Henry Jr.

Cincinnati Withrow wide receiver Chris

Henry Jr. (6-5, 185) became the first member of Ohio State's 2026 recruiting class on July 28, announcing his commitment to the Buckeyes following a visit to campus.

“It just felt like a great day,” he said outside of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. “To be here, it just made it feel (right). I brought my uncle to see, because he was the one telling me to slow down. I was ready. When I talked to Coach Day, it was like no point in waiting anymore. It's just hard to turn down. It's perfect for me and it fits me.”

Henry held additional offers from Cincinnati, Kentucky, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC, among others. Ohio State was one of the earliest on the scene, offering Henry last summer after he had an impressive performance camping with the Buckeyes. Since earning his offer, Henry has made several return trips to Ohio State, including in June when he once again camped in Columbus.

“Hartline told me that I've gotten more smooth with the routes and bigger, of course,” Henry said in June. “I always feel like I'm getting better every time I put the work in.”

He was also on campus on July 28 for a large recruiting event at Ohio State, with dozens of prospects in the 2025 and 2026 recruiting classes in attendance. Asked why he wanted to commit to Ohio State, it was the atmosphere of the Buckeyes that led to him making his verbal pledge.

“The atmosphere. It's the coaches, really,” Henry said. “That's really what it was, the coaches. I love it here. I love the energy and the atmosphere. I love everything about it. They make me feel like a priority every time I talk to them, so that just makes me feel special.”

Playing at wideout is no surprise for Henry, as his father is former NFL wide receiver Chris Henry, who played for the Cincinnati Bengals from 2005-09. After the elder Henry's passing in 2009, Chris Henry Jr. and siblings were adopted by the elder Henry's teammate, Adam “Pacman” Jones, in 2021.

In 247Sports' first rankings for 2026, Henry checked in as the fifth-ranked prospect in the country and the top-ranked receiver in the class, not to mention the top-ranked prospect from Ohio. He was named to the MaxPreps High School Football Freshman All-American Team last season after collecting 29 receptions for 292 yards and five touchdowns.

Henry is one of just three wide receivers in the 2026 class offered by the Buckeyes, joining Malachi Toney (5-9, 165) from Fort

Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage and Brody Keefe (6-3, 185) from Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park.

2026 QB Lewis Pledges To USC

Staying with 2026 prospects, Ohio State already appears to have lost out on a top target in the class, as Carrollton, Ga., quarterback Julian Lewis (6-1, 185) announced his commitment to USC on Aug. 22. He had previously listed the Buckeyes among his top schools along with Alabama, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Oregon, Texas A&M and the Trojans.

“Ohio State throws the ball around,” Lewis told 247Sports. “The past couple years they've had a lot of success. I have a good relationship with C.J. Stroud and had good talks with him. Coach (Corey) Dennis over there. We've talked a good amount.”

Despite those positive relationships, Lewis – the top-rated prospect in 247Sports' recent rankings for 2026 – is now committed to another school. Ohio State's pursuit of Lewis is unlikely to end, however, as he is coming off a freshman season at Carrollton High School in which he threw for 4,118 yards and 48 touchdowns while leading his team to a state championship game appearance.

Lewis is one of three quarterbacks offered by Ohio State in 2026 along with Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School quarterback Jared Curtis (6-3, 210) and Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit's Will Griffin (6-3, 215), who earned his offer after an impressive camp performance in June.

Other Prospects Have Buckeyes In Top Schools

Lewis is the most notable recruit to include Ohio State among his top schools, but plenty of other highly-touted prospects have indicated their interest in the Buckeyes since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

Starting in 2024, Ohio State remains in the fight for Waco (Texas) Connally five-star cornerback Kobe Black (6-0, 190), who had the Buckeyes in his top five along with LSU, Oregon, Texas and Texas A&M. Texas appears to be the favorite, though already having Lockhart, Scott and West in the class at cornerback certainly helps to soften the blow for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State's targets in 2025 just slightly narrowed down their offer lists, with the Buckeyes landing in the top 12 for Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225), Lucas (Texas)



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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

High school football had begun, and taking a look around Ohio, as usual there were plenty of top recruits in the state.

According to USA Today, the top players in the state were Toledo Macomber defensive back Myron Bell (6-1, 195), center-defensive tackle Sylvester Stanley (6-4, 260) from Youngstown East and defensive lineman Chuck Jones (6-4, 280) from Chillicothe, where New England Patriots star Garin Veris prepped.

Other top players included offensive tackle Matt Warth (6-5, 217) out of Zanesville, Robert Smith (6-2, 180), a running back from Euclid Senior, receiver-defensive back John Barker (6-5, 205) from Warsaw River View, quarterback Lance Harp (6-4, 180) from Franklin Furnace Green, linebacker Shane DeSimone (6-0, 180) from Portsmouth, Don Leshnock (6-2, 180), a receiver from Columbus Academy, and running back Bob Christy (5-11, 190) out of Mogadore.

30 Years Ago — 1993

Pity the poor mail carriers in northern Ohio. They probably were facing some overtime in order to deliver all of the inquiries from colleges around the nation to Scott Mutryn and Orlando Pace.

Those two players were generally regarded to be the cream of the high school crop in Ohio that season and each would have his hands full when it came time to decide which college to attend.

Mutryn had quarterbacked Cleveland St. Ignatius to a perfect 14-0 record and another Division I state championship the previous season, while Pace had become one of the country's top-rated line prospects out of Sandusky.

Both players were named preseason All-Americans by all six of the major national recruiting publications, and each led a contingent of some of the best high school talent Ohio had provided in several years.

25 Years Ago — 1998

One day before beginning his senior season at nearby Upper Arlington, running back Jesse Kline had some unfinished business to attend to.

The 6-2, 215-pound Kline appeared at OSU's Aug. 12 freshman practice to commit to the Buckeyes in person. He became OSU's 12th verbal commitment for 1999.

"My feeling while I watched the freshmen was, 'I'll be out here a year from today,'" said Kline, who committed to the Buckeyes over Michigan and Notre Dame. He attended camps at OSU and ND during summer.

"The main thing for Ohio State was the people and the coaching staff. I just felt like these guys would help me to become the person I could be and the best football player I could be. I just had the best feeling at OSU with the coaches and football team."

20 Years Ago — 2003

Tallahassee (Fla.) Lincoln quarterback Joe Bauserman (6-2, 225) committed to the Buckeyes after spending one day at the OSU camp earlier in the summer, but it was entirely possible he might never take the field at Ohio Stadium.

That's because Bauserman, in addition to being ranked the No. 20 pro-style quarterback in the nation by Rivals.com, also was a top pitching prospect. He sported a 90 mph fastball to go along with a developing curve and was expected to be selected in the following summer's Major League Baseball draft.

"I doubt I'd play baseball at Ohio State, but I could go the pro baseball/college football route," Bauserman said. "It's up in the air right now."

As a junior, Bauserman threw for 3,004 yards and 26 touchdowns. He ran a 4.7-second 40-yard dash and was a solid student, holding a 3.5 GPA and a score of 930 on the SAT.

15 Years Ago — 2008

Every year, head coach Jim Tressel extended scholarship offers to a handful of players entering their junior seasons on Sept. 1, the first day he was allowed to do so officially.

This year, Youngstown (Ohio) Ursuline defensive end Jamel Turner (6-2, 200) would be so honored when a written scholarship offer from the Buckeyes was sent his way when the calendar turned to the ninth month of the year. Tressel promised such while Turner was in town for an unofficial visit during the summer.

"I was shocked when they offered me, to tell you the truth," Turner said. "I went down with my coach (Dan Reardon) and a teammate, DeAndre Harris. We were just going down for the day to meet the coaches and check out the facilities. Coach Tressel and I were sitting in his office, and he just kind of said that he was offering me a scholarship."

"He said I will receive a written offer on Sept. 1. I also met the defensive coordinator, Jim Heacock, and he and I got along real well. It's an honor to receive the first offer for any Ohio junior."

10 Years Ago — 2013

Head coach Urban Meyer had plenty of recruiting connections in Florida, and he wanted to continue his success by landing wide receiver Johnnie Dixon of Palm Beach Gardens (Fla.) William T.

Dwyer.

It looked like OSU was already making great progress in Dixon's recruitment, especially because the four-star prospect had already scheduled an official visit to Columbus for the Buckeyes' home game against Wisconsin in the Big Ten opener on Sept. 28.

Dixon would also take official visits to Alabama, Arkansas and North Carolina, but the 5-11, 190-pound prospect didn't try to hide his admiration for the Buckeyes.

"Everything around the Ohio State program is great," Dixon said. "The coaches are great, and the players really want to win there just like at Alabama."

Five Years Ago — 2018

In the midst of the Ohio State independent board's two-week investigation into how Meyer had handled allegations of former wide receivers coach and recruiting coordinator Zach Smith's past domestic violence, Austin (Texas) Lake Travis five-star wideout Garrett Wilson (6-0, 175), a commit in the 2019 recruiting class, shared his thoughts on the matter and said 2018 would be a rousing success for the Buckeyes.

"Talking to my mom (on Aug. 12, a week prior to the investigation concluding), I'm like, 'I don't know why stuff like this has got to happen,'" Wilson told CBS Austin. "She's like, 'Welcome to life.' So some things go wrong, not everything's going to go right."

"At the end of the day, I feel like those kids are going to come back stronger after this. Coach Meyer's going to come back stronger, and they're going to win a (national championship) this year."

One Year Ago — 2022

Atlanta (Ga.) Douglass cornerback Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175) committed to Ohio State on July 29, becoming the first member of the Buckeyes' 2025 recruiting class.

Gilbert was first offered a scholarship by Ohio State in May, and he made an unofficial visit in June. The Buckeyes were one of just seven schools who offered Gilbert, including Arkansas, Buffalo, Florida A&M, Georgia Tech, Pittsburgh and UAB.

"I wanted to commit because I felt like this is where I can see myself playing in the near future," Gilbert said. "It felt like home on my visit there, and I knew that was the place to be."

While there was some reasonable skepticism about a commitment so early — especially from a prospect from Georgia — Gilbert felt the need to join Ohio State's class as early as he did.

"I chose to commit to Ohio State early for a reason," he said. "I felt like I'm needed and wanted there."

Lovejoy three-star tight end Bear Tenney (6-5, 225) and Baltimore (Md.) St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 180), as well as the top 13 for Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star running back Tory Blaylock (5-11, 175) and Tampa (Fla.) Zephyrhills five-star wide receiver DJ Pickett (6-2, 170), and the top six for Georgia tight end Winston.

A notable omission from this list is Findlay, Ohio, four-star quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 215), who announced a top five of Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Penn State and South Carolina, leaving off the Buckeyes.

It's not much of a surprise considering that St. Clair is in Ohio State's class at quarterback in 2025, but it is still notable that an in-state quarterback as highly-touted as Montgomery — the No. 205 overall prospect and 15th-ranked quarterback in the class — appears to be no longer considering Ohio State.

RJ Day Earns First D-I Offer

RJ Day, a 2027 quarterback and the son of Ryan Day, earned his first Division I offer on Aug. 20 following his first high school game, getting an offer from Boston College and head coach Jeff Hafley, a former defensive coordinator with the Buckeyes.

The younger Day is entering his freshman season at St. Francis DeSales High School in Columbus. He helped lead the varsity squad to a comeback 21-17 win over Tri-Valley in his first high school outing, leading to the offer from Hafley.

The elder Day and Hafley worked along-

side each other for a season with the San Francisco 49ers in 2016, and Hafley was Day's choice to come in at defensive coordinator when Day became head coach in 2019. Following one season with the Buckeyes, Hafley departed to become the head coach at Boston College, where he has a 15-20 record in three seasons.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State added long snapper Morrow Evans (6-1, 215) out of Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal as a preferred walk-on to the 2024 recruiting class on Aug. 12. He is the second-ranked long snapper in the class, according to Rubio Long Snapping.

- Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188), who had been committed to Georgia but continued visiting other schools including Ohio State over the past several months, flipped to Alabama on Aug. 8.

- Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Zabien Brown (6-0, 180), who

held an offer from Ohio State, announced his commitment to Alabama on July 9.

- Ohio State offensive line coach Justin Frye has been busy in recent weeks, sending out a trio of offers to offensive tackles in the 2025 recruiting class including New Rochelle (N.Y.) Iona Preparatory School four-star Rowan Byrne (6-6, 290), Mobile (Ala.) C.F. Vigor five-star Micah DeBose (6-5, 315), who is committed to Georgia, and Jacksonville (Fla.) Raines five-star Solomon Thomas (6-3, 278).

- Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star wide receiver Jamie Ffrench (6-1, 185), a 2025 prospect who held an offer from Ohio State, committed to Alabama on July 22.

- The Buckeyes have already issued offers to 20 prospects within 247Sports' top 100 for 2026, highlighted by Lewis; Curtis; Reidsville, N.C., tight end Kendre Harrison (6-7, 235); Scottsdale (Ariz.) Desert Mountain defensive lineman Tony Cumberland (6-4, 250); Pompano Beach (Fla.) Monarch wide receiver Jabari Brady (6-2, 185); Avon Lake, Ohio, offensive tackle Maxwell Riley

(6-5, 263); and Detroit (Mich.) Cass Technical athlete CJ Sadler (5-10, 170), all of whom are ranked among the top 20 players in the class.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting, be sure to regularly visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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SF White Becomes Second Member Of 2024 Class

The Ohio State men's basketball program secured its second commitment for the 2024 class on Aug. 13, garnering a verbal pledge from Ottawa (Ohio) Glandorf three-star small forward Colin White (6-6, 180).

"I've been an Ohio State fan my entire life living in mid-northwest Ohio," White said after announcing his commitment. "And the belief that the coaching staff had in me as a player, that's one of the main things. They believe in my game. They

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

believe in me as a person. And I just love all the guys over there, the coaching staff, Coach (Jake) Diebler and Coach (Chris) Holtmann, they're great. And the style of play really fits me."

White is currently tabbed as the 153rd-best prospect in the class and No. 5 player in Ohio, and he chose the Buckeyes over Butler, Cincinnati, Northwestern and TCU.

He made multiple trips to Columbus before committing, most recently earlier this summer, when he participated in Ohio State's two-day high school team camp held at the Schottenstein Center from June 8-9.

After flashing his versatility as an athletic wing in front of Holtmann and Diebler, White earned an offer from the program over a month later on July 20.

"(Buckeyes fans) are getting a player that is 100 percent committed to Ohio State," White said. "He's going to give blood to Ohio State. He's going to dive on the floor. He's coming in there to win, and he's coming in there to make an impact."

In his first three seasons at Ottawa-Glandorf, White helped lead the Titans to back-to-back OHSAA Division III championship game appearances and took home the Division III Northwest Ohio Player of the Year award in his junior campaign, an honor he shared with incoming freshman center Austin Parks. White has also displayed his skills at the AAU level, competing for Indiana Elite for the past two years, and he averaged 14.3 points, 4.6 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game over the summer while shooting 49.7 percent from the field.

With White's announcement, Ohio



COURTESY OF COLIN WHITE

WELCOME TO THE BUCKEYES — Ohio State landed a verbal pledge on Aug. 13 from Ottawa (Ohio) Glandorf three-star small forward Colin White (6-6, 180), the No. 153 overall prospect in 2024.

State now holds two commitments for the class of 2024. The Buckeyes received their first verbal pledge from Mt. Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy four-star combo guard John Mobley Jr. on Oct. 16. He is ranked the nation's 45th-best prospect and No. 1 player in Utah.

Michigan State's Izzo Sees Bright Future For Holtmann

Two-time NABC Coach of the Year and Naismith Basketball Hall of Famer Tom Izzo extended high praise to Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann while making an appearance on Holtmann's "More Than

Coach Speak" podcast on Aug. 8.

Izzo, who is entering his 29th season as Michigan State's head coach, was complimentary of the job his colleague has done while leading Ohio State through his first six seasons, particularly lauding his ability to garner attention for his program in a university dominated by college football.

"I think you've done a hell of a job there, and it's not an easy job," Izzo said. "You're at a school where football is so big and yet, you're starting to blend it. That's what I did (at Michigan State). Football and basketball can coexist together."

Izzo also recognized Holtmann's ability to shepherd a young Ohio State team through a difficult campaign last season. While the Buckeyes endured a second-half stretch when they lost 14 of 15 games, they ended the season winning five of their last seven games and reaching the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes would still finish below .500 with a 16-19 record, but the legendary Spartans coach said the showing of resilience can serve as a steppingstone for the program as it looks to retain prominence in the Big Ten.

"You did not crumble last year through a tough five, six weeks," Izzo said. "That is

maybe the best thing you did, and you just won't realize it until four or five years from now when you're in a Final Four, winning a national championship. And you're going to look back at that one and say, 'Wow.'"

Since being hired in 2017, Holtmann has guided the Buckeyes to a 237-160 overall record (.597) and four NCAA Tournament appearances, while also earning the Big Ten Coach of the Year award in 2018.

OSU's Opponent Solidified For CBS Sports Classic

Ohio State is slated to square off against UCLA in the 2023 CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 16, a matchup set to tip off at 3 p.m. on CBS. The ninth annual college basketball showcase, which also features blue bloods Kentucky and North Carolina, will be held for the first time at the State Farm Center in Atlanta.

This will mark the fourth time the Buckeyes will face off against the Bruins in the CBS Sports Classic, with the Buckeyes losing their first clash in 2017 and securing victories in 2018 and 2020. Ohio State owns a 4-4 overall record in the showcase, with its most recent appearance ending in an 89-84 overtime defeat to North Carolina at Madison Square Garden last December.

Ohio State will match up this year with a Mick Cronin-led Bruins team that welcomes three potential NBA draft picks to their roster. After reaching the Sweet 16 and amassing a 31-6 overall record last year, the Bruins added freshmen Aday Mara and Berke Buyuktuncel along with junior Utah transfer Lazar Stefanovic, all of whom have appeared in the first round of recent 2024 mock drafts.

The reveal of Ohio State's CBS Sports Classic opponent solidifies a difficult 11-game nonconference schedule for Holtmann's team, which is looking to rebound after last year's disappointing campaign. The Buckeyes' slate also features matchups against 2022 NCAA Tournament teams Alabama, Texas A&M and West Virginia, along with a bout against either Oregon or Santa Clara in the Emerald Coast Classic on Nov. 25.

Former Buckeyes Shine On NBA Summer League Stage

The Ohio State men's basketball program was well represented on the NBA Summer League stage, with several former Buckeyes making significant impacts throughout the two-week slate of games.

The list of Buckeye contributors was headlined by Malaki Branham and E.J. Liddell. Branham, a first-round pick to the San Antonio Spurs last year, notched 15 or more points in three of his four appearances, bookended by 32- and 29-point performances in his first and last games against the Los Angeles Lakers (July 5) and Washington Wizards (July 11). The 20-year-old guard finished his Summer League campaign with a stat line of 21.0 points, 3.5 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game.

Liddell made a return to live game action nearly a year after suffering a season-ending torn ACL in his right knee,



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OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players 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
Colin White	SF	6-6	180	★★★	Ottawa (Ohio) Glandorf

playing in four Summer League games for the New Orleans Pelicans. The second-round draft selection from last year showed flashes of his former self in Las Vegas, scoring double figures in two of his final three contests. This was headlined by his 23-point outing in the Pelicans' 117-114 consolation-round loss to the Philadelphia 76ers on July 16.

The NBA Summer League also featured the professional debut of former Ohio State forward Justice Sueing, who logged his first minutes for the Oklahoma City Thunder on July 11, recording two points, two rebounds and one blocked shot off the bench. Sueing, who signed a contract to join the Thunder's Summer League team on June 23, also appeared in Oklahoma City's consolation-round matchup against the Spurs on July 16, notching eight points on an efficient 4-of-7 shooting to go with a team-high six rebounds.



Justice Sueing

While Sueing saw some time on an NBA floor, Utah Jazz first-round draft selection Brice Sensabaugh was held out of the franchise's entire eight-game Summer League schedule. The Buckeye one-and-done guard failed to see the floor due to continued recovery on his surgically-repaired left knee, which dates back to the Big Ten tournament, where he was ruled out for the season after experiencing knee soreness late in Ohio State's second-round victory over Iowa.

Despite the lack of game action, the Jazz rookie is expected to return to the floor for training camp.

Carmen's Crew Falls Short Of \$1 Million TBT Prize

Making its first appearance since 2021, fourth-seeded Carmen's Crew was unable to claim its second The Basketball Tournament championship, falling in the third round of the \$1 million winner-take-all bracket.

The Ohio State men's basketball alumni team, who competed in the Dayton region and were led by head coach and general manager Jared Sullinger, started the TBT campaign strong with a resounding 80-68 victory over fifth-seeded Team Over-time on July 26. Headlining the list of contributors were brothers Andre and Kaleb Wesson, who posted the team's top two scoring efforts of the night. Andre Wesson netted 13 points on 5-of-8 shooting, while Kaleb Wesson recorded a team-high 16 points and connected on six of his eight shots.

In the second round, the Ohio State alumni team turned in an even more lopsided victory, trouncing eighth-seeded India Rising 82-56 on July 28. Carmen's Crew was led in the win by Javon Bess, Pape Malik Dime and Scott Thomas, who

each recorded 11 points, while Kaleb Wesson notched a double-double with 10 points and a team-high 11 rebounds.

Carmen's Crew's TBT run would end in the round of 16, however, falling to No. 2 seed Friday Beers on July 29 by a score of 72-63. Kaleb Wesson led with 18 points while Thomas chipped in 16, and Dime added a team-high nine rebounds.

Despite the third-round defeat, Sullinger reaffirmed his team's participation in the 2024 version of the tournament, proclaiming "Next year we (are) coming for what's ours," on Twitter. This year's version of the tournament was ultimately won by Team Heartfire, which features

former players from Baylor.

NBA Buckeyes Strike Gold In Free Agency

A trio of former Buckeyes received new and improved NBA contracts during the league's free-agency period held from June 30 through July 6.

Los Angeles Lakers guard D'Angelo Russell earned the most lucrative deal of the three, inking a two-year, \$37 million contract on July 1 to stay with the franchise. The agreement also includes a player option for the 2024-25 season. The former Ohio State one-and-done guard found success in his second Lakers stint after returning to the team via trade on Feb. 8, averaging 17.4 points, 2.9 rebounds and 6.1 assists in 17 games with the Purple and Gold.

A second Buckeye disciple was granted a new contract on the first of July when forward Keita Bates-Diop signed a two-year, \$5 million deal with the Phoenix Suns.

The 2018 Big Ten Player of the Year and Naismith Trophy semifinalist is coming off his best NBA season while playing alongside Branham in San Antonio. Making 42 starts for the Spurs, Bates-Diop netted a career-high 9.7 points and 1.5 assists per game while shooting 50.8 percent from the field.

The NBA free-agency period closed with one of the more recent NBA Buckeyes pocketing a new contract. On July 6, Liddell finalized a three-year, \$6.2 million deal to remain with the Pelicans.

"I'm so thankful, just to the program for trusting in me and sticking with me throughout this whole past year," Liddell said. "I come in and handle my business every day, I do the right things, and I'm happy they see that. And I'm excited to be a part of this program, and I want to help this team for many years down the road."

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Taylor, Parks See OSU's Championship Potential

Ohio State welcomed in three transfers this offseason – forward Taiyier Parks from Michigan State and guards Celeste Taylor from Duke and Kennedy Cambridge from Kentucky – and despite being on campus for only a few months, the expectations have been made clear.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

"I don't necessarily think it's been stated. I think you can tell by when you walk in the gym, just the atmosphere," Taylor said. "It feels like a national championship team once you step on the court, once you step in the locker room. Everybody around you is just – you could tell how motivated everybody is. When they play, when they speak basketball in general. I mean, there's days where we get on top of each other. Me and Tai are new and we're still the ones that are getting after each other and everybody's taking it. And you can tell that they want to win, they want to win every game possible."

"So I mean, it hasn't been stated. You guys will see when you see us play on the court that that's our goal – one of our goals."

Taylor has experienced team and individual success over her career, making it to the Elite Eight at Texas before transferring to Duke, where she won last season's ACC Defensive Player of the Year award and earned first-team All-ACC honors. That defensive acumen – something that has been a major focus for Ohio State over the last few seasons, with players who don't play defense rarely seeing the court – already has her fitting right in with the Buckeyes.

"I think I'm just a hard-nosed player,

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players 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
Seini Hicks	F	6-0		Cincinnati Purcell Marian
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.

very big on working hard and work ethic and just doing whatever it is that my team needs me to do. I'm capable of scoring, I know that, but I don't have to score in order to make an impact on the game," Taylor said. "And so I know that personally, I'm the person that's diving in the crowd for loose balls, the person that's diving on the floor, taking charges. Honestly, just a hustle player."

Joining a team like Ohio State that is coming off the program's first Elite Eight appearance since 1994, Taylor is hoping to help the Buckeyes to take their success even further.

"I guess for me, just being a super senior and just being able to help that and push. I've gotten to that point too, and there's so much more work that needs to be done after that fact," she said. "And so just constantly telling the young girls, because there are a lot of young girls on the team still – there are a lot of older ones, too – just to keep pushing it. You guys made it that far, they did that. Kudos to them, it was great. It was a great run, I loved watching it."

"But just to be a part of it and help in any way that I can, honestly, I'm willing to do whatever it is, because once again, I know what it feels like to get there. And I want to get further than that as well."

Parks – who said she brings "physicality" to the team – echoed Taylor's comments and said the team is hoping to make a Final Four run, and she sees the pieces in place.

"The energy and the vibe is there," she said. "This place gives off a great energy. It's a standard and an expectation, and we're just happy that we have the opportunity to be in this. I just feel like it's going to be good for us."

McMahon Wins Second Gold Medal With Team USA

Ohio State sophomore forward Cotie McMahon helped lead the United States to a win in the FIBA U19 Women's World Cup in July, winning her second gold medal in as many years with the national team in a 69-66 win over Spain on July 23 in Madrid, Spain.

Tied at 66 with under 30 seconds remaining, the United States inbounded the ball on its end and found McMahon on the perimeter before she drove in, pushing her way past a pair of defenders and scoring to give the team a 68-66 lead before making a defensive stand on the next possession to secure the win.

The United States finished 7-0 during the event, with McMahon participating in all seven contests. She averaged 8.9 points, 4.1 rebounds and 2.4 assists per game while shooting 52.1 percent from the field.

In addition to her game-winner against Spain, McMahon finished with a team-high 16 points on 6-of-8 shooting and pulled down six rebounds.

The gold medal was the second for McMahon after winning gold with the U18 team last summer, and this is the third consecutive U19 win for the United States, as well as the 10th overall for the program. She joins former Buckeyes Samantha Prahalis (2009) and Linnae Harper (2013) in taking home U19 gold, while McMahon and Prahalis are the only players in program history to have won gold for the U18 and U19 teams.



Cotie McMahon

OSU Scrimmages Against São José

In preparation for the upcoming season, Ohio State took a trip to Brazil in August for some sightseeing and a scrimmage against São José, a professional women's basketball team.

The women were excited for the trip and the opportunity to get their first taste of competition together as a new team, with the Buckeyes adding Cambridge, Parks and Taylor from the transfer portal as well as freshmen Faith Carson and Diana Collins.

"I'm just happy to be here with my teammates," Cambridge said in a video posted by the team. "We're going to have a great time, get out there and kick some booty, and explore."

Ohio State took part in practice once arriving in Brazil ahead of the scrimmage, and once the contest arrived, head coach Kevin McGuff had a message for the team.

"It's not a regular-season game, but anytime we go on the floor, we want to play the game the right way, we want to play hard, play together, do the things that we do," he said.

While McGuff offered some words of wisdom, it was actually McMahon and fifth-year guard Jacy Sheldon who handled coaching duties during the scrimmage, coaching up their fellow Buckeyes and making substitutions throughout the contest.

Once it was all said and done, Ohio State came away with a 61-41 win over São José, led by 21 points from sophomore guard Kaia Henderson. Other Buckeyes in double digits included senior Eboni Walker (13 points) and junior guard Emma Shumate (10 points), while Carson (6 points), junior guard Taylor Thierry (5), Parks (4) and senior guard Rikki Harris (2) chipped in the remainder.

Senior forward Rebeka Mikulášiková, Taylor and senior forward Karla Vreš played but did not score, while Cambridge, Collins, senior guard Madison Greene – who is continuing her recovery from a knee

injury last season – McMahon and Sheldon did not play.

Nonconference Schedule Continues To Shape Up

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, Ohio State has confirmed three new nonconference matchups for the upcoming season.

Ohio State will travel to the Bahamas from Nov. 20-22 for the Baha Mar Hoops Pink Flamingo Championship, set to face East Carolina on Nov. 20 at 1:30 p.m. and Oklahoma State on Nov. 22 at 6:30 p.m. Other announced teams include Colombia, Florida, Georgia, Penn State, Purdue, Seton Hall and USC, with all games to be broadcast on FloHoops.

The Buckeyes are also set to travel to Tennessee on Dec. 3, completing a home-and-away series with the Volunteers after Ohio State knocked off then-No. 5 Tennessee in last season's opener. The Buckeyes are just 2-10 all-time against the Volunteers, with last season's win the first since an 83-82 win on Dec. 17, 1981.

Ohio State had already announced it will open the season against USC on Nov. 6 at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. Remaining non-conference opponents as well as the team's conference schedule should be announced in the coming weeks.

Newcomers Receive Jersey Assignments

Ohio State has five new members of the team this season, and all have been assigned jersey numbers as they get set for their first season for the Scarlet and Gray.

Starting with the transfers, Cambridge will wear No. 3, Taylor will have No. 12 and Parks will rep No. 14. Freshmen Carson and Collins will wear No. 54 and No. 20, respectively.

No. 3 was most recently worn by Anyssa Jones but is best known for Kelsey Mitchell wearing that number during her time in Columbus. No. 12 was worn most recently by Savitha Jayaraman, while No. 14 has been worn by the likes of Cheryl Perozek (1988-91), Dorka Juhász (2019-21) and Thierry, at least briefly, before she switched to No. 2 last season.

Carson will be just the third to wear No. 54, following Cynthia Dunnigan (1991) and Talia Goudy (1997), while Collins' No. 20 replaces the departed Kaitlyn Costner.

Mikesell Waived By Atlanta Dream

Despite former Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell being picked up by the Atlanta Dream in June, the start to her WNBA career has continued to be a nightmare.

Mikesell – after being drafted by the Indiana Fever with the No. 13 pick in the 2023 WNBA draft – was released by the team prior to the season beginning but was signed by the Dream on June 5. That lasted for not even a month, as Mikesell was released on July 3.

She appeared in just six games for the Dream, averaging 2.8 points, 0.3 rebounds and 0.3 assists, playing just under five minutes per contest. She shot 50.0 percent from the field and 42.9 percent from deep, but it was not enough to secure a roster spot.



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Oregon, Washington Joining Big Ten In 2024-25

The Big Ten is continuing its westward expansion, with Oregon and Washington becoming the latest two schools to join the conference. The two Pac-12 universities were unanimously admitted by the Big Ten Council of Presidents/Chancellors on Aug. 4 and are set to become the league's 17th and 18th member schools starting on Aug. 2, 2024. Both athletic programs will begin conference play in the 2024-25 season.

BIG TEN NOTES Patrick Engels

"We are excited to welcome the University of Oregon and the University of Washington to the Big Ten Conference," Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti said. "We look forward to building long-lasting relationships with the universities, administrators and staff, student-athletes, coaches and fans. Both institutions feature a combination of academic and athletic excellence that will prove a great fit for our future."

"I have a lot of respect for Oregon and Washington," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said on Aug. 9. "They have proven themselves as institutions that invest in their athletic programs. They are valuable institutions to bring into our league."

The Big Ten's admittance of Oregon and Washington comes after negotiations stalled between Pac-12 university leaders and commissioner George Kliavkoff regarding the conference's streaming-centric media rights deal from Apple. The proposal, which was presented to the schools in a virtual meeting held on Aug. 2, would have reportedly granted the universities a base payout of approximately \$20 million, a number that sits well behind the lucrative TV deals within the Big Ten and SEC.

According to multiple reports, the two Pac-12 universities will earn roughly half of the current member schools' allotted payout from the conference's new media rights deal, a historic \$7 billion contract with CBS, FOX and NBC that will launch this season. The schools will receive \$30 million in 2023-2024, with the number set to increase yearly by \$1 million until they earn full shares of the conference's next TV deal, set to begin in 2030-31.

Washington and Oregon are the third and fourth schools to leave the Pac-12 for the Big Ten, joining USC and UCLA, who were unanimously voted into the conference on June 30, 2022. The two Los Angeles-based universities will join the league alongside their long-time conference rivals on Aug. 2, 2024.

With Colorado, Arizona, Arizona State and Utah also transitioning to the Big 12 next year, just four Pac-12 member schools remain – California, Oregon State, Stanford and Washington State.

NU's Fitzgerald Fired Amid Hazing Scandal

Northwestern relieved head football coach Pat Fitzgerald of his duties on July 10 following an investigation that outlined an established culture of hazing within the Wildcats'

football program.

Fitzgerald was initially handed a two-week suspension on July 7 after the investigation confirmed he was "aware of the alleged incidents," that occurred last season. But after the university's student-run newspaper, The Daily Northwestern, reported further, more explicit, details that were confirmed by former players, the 17-year Wildcats head coach was terminated.

The report outlined multiple allegations of harmful, often sexual, acts of hazing that transpired during Fitzgerald's tenure. These practices were headlined by a ritual called "running," where freshmen were reportedly taken to a dark locker room and met by a group of upperclassmen wearing masks, who would proceed to "dry-hump" their younger teammates as a form of punishment for an on-field mistake.

Two unnamed sources in the report described other forms of hazing rituals, including a once-a-year practice known as "the carwash," where players were exposed to, and forced to physically interact with, naked teammates in the shower room.

These allegations, according to Maggie Hickey, independent lead investigator and former inspector general of Illinois, were "largely supported by evidence." Hickey also determined that the culture of hazing has existed within the program for many years, a claim backed by 11 current or former players.

"The head coach is ultimately responsible for the culture of his team," Northwestern president Michael Schill said in a statement released on July 10. "The hazing we investigated was widespread and clearly not a secret within the program, providing Coach Fitzgerald with the opportunity to learn what was happening. Either way, the culture in Northwestern football, while incredible in some ways, was broken in others."

To fill the open position, Northwestern elevated defensive coordinator David Braun to interim head coach for this season. Braun joined Fitzgerald's staff in January after spending four years leading the defense at North Dakota State.

"I never could have imagined, nor did I desire, to become a head coach under these types of circumstances," Braun said at Big Ten Media Days on July 26. "That said, I'm honored to lead this group moving forward."

Northwestern's leadership has tried to move past the incident as best as possible with an eye toward the upcoming football season, but some within the program have made things difficult. On Aug. 9, several coaches and support staffers wore shirts to practice with the phrase "Cats Against The World" that also featured No. 51, which was Fitzgerald's number as a player at Northwestern from 1993-96, resulting in a statement from athletic director Derrick Gragg.

"I am extremely disappointed that a few members of our football program staff decided to wear 'Cats Against the World' shirts," Gragg said. "Neither I nor the university was aware that they owned or would wear these shirts today. The shirts are inappropriate, offensive and tone deaf. Let me be crystal clear: Hazing has no place at Northwestern, and we are committed to do whatever is necessary to address hazing-related issues, including thoroughly investigating any incidents or allegations of hazing or any other misconduct."

After playing at Northwestern and earning two Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year awards, Fitzgerald returned to the Wildcats in 2001 as a defensive backs coach before taking over as head coach in 2006. He posted a 110-101 record and a 65-76 mark in conference play, with two conference championship game appearances, a 5-5 record in bowl games as well as five seasons finishing ranked in the AP poll.

U-M Imposes Three-Game Suspension On Harbaugh

Michigan announced Aug. 21 that head coach Jim Harbaugh will serve a self-imposed three-game suspension to begin this season.

Harbaugh and the NCAA had previously planned on a four-game suspension to begin the season stemming from false statements he made regarding a quartet of Level II NCAA violations committed by the Wolverines' program and subsequent dishonesty with NCAA investigators, which is a Level I violation. The original punishment fell through after the NCAA's Committee on Infractions rejected the suspension.

"While the ongoing NCAA matter continues through the NCAA process, today's announcement is our way of addressing mistakes that our department has agreed to in an attempt to further that process," athletic director Warde Manuel said in a statement. "We will continue to support Coach Harbaugh, his staff, and our outstanding student-athletes. Per the NCAA's guidelines, we cannot comment further until the matter is resolved."

The violations included meeting with two recruits during a COVID-19 dead period, texting a recruit outside the allotted NCAA time period, analysts performing on-field coaching duties and coaches watching players work out over Zoom. These NCAA findings quashed any rumors that Harbaugh was merely being investigated for buying a cheeseburger for a recruit.

"The Michigan infractions case is related to impermissible on- and off-campus recruiting during the COVID-19 dead period and impermissible coaching activities – not a cheeseburger," said Derrick Crawford, NCAA vice president of hearing operations. "It is not uncommon for the (committee) to seek clarification on key facts prior to accepting. ... If the involved parties cannot resolve a case through the negotiated resolution process, it may proceed to a hearing, but the committee believes cooperation is the best avenue to quickly resolve issues."

As is often the case with schools issuing a self-imposed suspension, it is in an attempt to lessen any eventual punishment that might be handed down from the NCAA stemming from Harbaugh's violations, which are still expected to be revisited for next season by the NCAA's Committee on Infractions.

With the three-game suspension, Harbaugh will still be allowed to coach during the week but will not be allowed on the sidelines on Sept. 2 vs. East Carolina, Sept. 9 vs. UNLV and Sept. 16 vs. Bowling Green. He will be eligible to return on Sept. 23 vs. Rutgers.

Wolverines, Gophers Lead Way On B1G Preseason Honors List

The Big Ten Conference announced its 2023 football preseason honors list before

Big Ten Media Days on July 26, selecting five representatives each from the East and West Divisions.

The East Division list is headlined by a pair of key Wolverines offensive contributors from last season in quarterback J.J. McCarthy and running back Blake Corum. McCarthy earned third-team All Big-Ten honors in his first season as Michigan's starter after throwing for 2,719 yards with 22 touchdowns, while Corum will return to the Wolverines' backfield for his senior campaign after earning unanimous first-team All-American honors last season. The Doak Walker Award finalist finished third in the conference with 1,463 rushing yards and second in rushing touchdowns with 18.

The five-player East Division list also includes Ohio State's Marvin Harrison Jr., a unanimous first-team All-American, who is the only Buckeye represented. Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa and Penn State offensive lineman Olumuyiwa Fashanu also represented the East Division. Each earned second-team All-Big Ten nods last season.

The West Division preseason honors list was spearheaded by a duo of Minnesota Gophers in tight end Brevyn Spann-Ford and defensive back Tyler Nubin. Spann-Ford, a senior out of St. Cloud, Minn., led his team with 42 receptions and ranked second in both receiving yards (497) and receiving touchdowns (two) last season, earning him an honorable mention All-Big Ten nod. Nubin, an All-Big Ten second-team selection, is coming off a stellar junior season where he recorded 55 tackles, a team-high four interceptions and one forced fumble.

Rounding out the five West Division representatives are Illinois defensive lineman Jer'Zhan Newton and Iowa defensive back Cooper DeJean, who each received first-team All-Big Ten recognitions, and Wisconsin's Braelon Allen, who many project as one of the top running back prospects in the 2024 NFL draft.

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Expectations High For Ohio State In 2023

The 2023 football schedule looks very promising for Ohio State, which will have a new starting quarterback at the helm.

Whoever emerges as “that guy” should have a chance for early success the first three games until being fully initiated in week number four at 13th-ranked Notre Dame. The Fighting Irish are the toughest away game on paper, with the exception of the regular-season finale in Ann Arbor. The Buckeyes must not stumble in trap games at Purdue and Wisconsin, and they must also take care of business against No. 7 Penn State on Oct. 21 in Columbus.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

There are plenty of outstanding players returning, some key transfers and some exceptional freshmen who will add to the pool of talent for the Buckeyes – enough talent to win the Big Ten championship and beat The Team Up North on Nov. 25.

But you don't win the games on paper, you win the games on turf, and you must be prepared both physically and mentally, each and every week. That's what champions do.

Dogfight At Quarterback

One would expect Kyle McCord to be the heir apparent for the quarterback position vacated by C.J. Stroud. After all, he has the most playing time of any at his position.

Granted, in the 12 games he saw action in the past two seasons, it primarily was in mop-up duty once Stroud and his teammates had put the game away. McCord has performed admirably in his appearances. He has made few mistakes, possesses solid quarterback technical skills, has shown leadership abilities and understands the Ryan Day offense.

Even though McCord has performed his duties well, there are some things he hasn't

had to do in his role as a Buckeye quarterback. He has yet to start a big, must-win game. He has yet to pull his team from behind to secure a victory. He has yet to lead his team to a league title or a spot in the playoffs. I am certain McCord has the confidence he can get the job done.

More important is the question of whether Day and his staff share that confidence. By the time the season kicks off at Indiana on Sept. 2, we should all know the answer.

The battle for the starting spot has narrowed to McCord and Devin Brown, the first time in two years the Buckeyes have faced that dilemma. McCord and Brown are similar in many ways. They both are athletic, both are similar in size, both are scholar athletes, and both led their respective high schools into state playoffs.

The Ohio State coaching staff has to make the tough decision between the two prior to the first game against Indiana. Day will obviously choose the guy he believes can handle the pressures that go along with being a starting quarterback at Ohio State – the man who shows to be the most poised in the pocket, delivers in crucial situations to keep drives alive, and the quarterback that doesn't make critical errors with the football.

Going into the season opener, the starting spot will be determined by practice performance but will be kept by what happens in the game, where it counts.

Offensive Line Must Step Up

A huge part of being successful at the quarterback position is the ability to stay clean in the pocket. The quarterback must demonstrate exceptional pocket presence. It's the job of the offensive line to give him confidence that he will be protected.

That means Buckeye offensive line coach Justin Frye has his work cut out for him to put an offensive line on the field that will help a first-year starting quarterback, whether McCord or Brown, have the time to deliver the football downfield. Frye has the title of running game coordinator, but there is a

premium put on pass protection in Division I football. That especially means keeping the quarterback from getting hit from the blind side, a responsibility largely put on the shoulders of the left tackle since both McCord and Brown are right-handed.

The competition for the offensive tackle position is just as keen as the quarterback battle. There seems to be plenty of talent along with some versatility in terms of players having the ability to line up at least a couple of different positions up front. That crucial left tackle position is most likely to end up going to one of three players: junior Josh Fryar, San Diego State transfer Josh Simmons, or red-shirt freshman Tegra Tshabola. Even though all three could play either right or left tackle, freshman Luke Montgomery from Findlay could be the starter at right tackle.

The interior of the offensive line seems solidified by guards Donovan Jackson and Matt Jones along with center Carson Hinzman, even though Jackson can also play tackle and Jones can play center. The task for Frye is to find the very best combination of five starters.

As important as it is to have sound pass protection, look for the running game to get special emphasis. Look for the Buckeyes to regain some of their swagger at being physical up front due to the talent of the offensive line and the stable of running backs.

Impressive Offensive Skill

In my opinion, Ohio State has the most offensive skill talent in all of college football. With as many as five deep in the backfield, a solid two-deep at receiver and at least three gifted tight ends, the toughest decision for the coaching staff is how to keep everyone happy.

The one-two punch of TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams will be challenging to opposing defenses, that is as long as they stay healthy. Henderson and Williams, along with Dallan Hayden, are dual-threat backs carrying the football as well as catching the ball out of the backfield. Chip Trayanum and Evan Pryor add extra depth to the position.

Marvin Harrison Jr. is likely a top-three pick in the NFL draft next spring and the first receiver taken. Emeka Egbuka is projected as a first-rounder along with Harrison. Whether it's Harrison's high school teammate McCord at quarterback or Brown, having two outstanding receivers the quality of Harrison and Egbuka gives the Buckeyes the ability to make dynamic plays on offense. Adding Julian Fleming, Jaydan Ballard, and Xavier Johnson, as well as a talented group of youngsters, to the passing attack should allow the receiving corps to stay fresh and stretch the field.

Returning tight end Cade Stover had 406 receiving yards and five touchdowns last season along with being an exceptional blocker. He has the potential to be the best tight end in the conference. Joe Royer also returns along with Gee Scott Jr. Both will be especially effective on crossing and option routes against linebackers.

Defense Must Finish

There is no doubt Jim Knowles is a quality defensive coordinator and under him the Buckeyes have made some improvements, but at Ohio State it's not how you start but how you finish.

In the final two games last season, the Buckeye defense gave up 45 and 42 points to Michigan and Georgia, respectively. Even though the defense played solidly, too many big plays in crucial situations along with being dominated up front by our archrivals simply isn't good enough. On the bright side, expectations are high for this season. Some players who could have opted for the NFL decided to stay, and their experience can be vital to a defense which has a chance to make up for last season's late failures.

The linebacking position returns the team's top two tacklers in Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers. Add Cody Simon to the mix, and the Buckeyes should be more than sound at that position.

The defensive line has beefed up with the addition of Ole Miss transfer Tywone Malone. Standouts Mike Hall Jr., Ty Hamilton, and Ty-leik Williams give the defensive interior depth, size and experience. Edge rushers J.T. Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer, who combined for 17 tackles for loss last season, are also returning. Sawyer is expected to play a more traditional defensive end position this year.

To no one's surprise, the secondary must improve this season to help Knowles reach his ultimate goal of making the Buckeye defense “elite.” The ability to disguise coverages, blitz and play sound man-to-man technique must be improved in order to prevent the big plays that plagued the defense, especially the secondary, last year.

Returning to the secondary are corners Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Jyaire Brown, while Davison Igbinosun joins the room from Ole Miss. Safeties Cameron Martinez, Josh Proctor, Lathan Ransom and Sonny Styles along with Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter will be vital to the success of Knowles' safety-driven defense in terms of both coverage and run support.

The offense sells tickets; the defense wins championships.

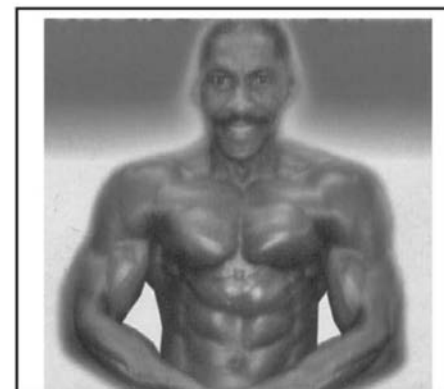


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Here's Hoping For Some Ohio State Success

Here's hoping the new 18-team (for now) Big Ten sticks to its commitment of playing every conference school at least every other year. To do anything less would seal the deal that it is a joke to call it a league.

As we get ready to launch the 2023 football season – the 134th season of playing football at Ohio State – we'll call this the "here's hoping" column. After all, this is the time of the year when everyone is in first place and optimism runs aplenty.



To get started, let's talk about how to make an 18-team conference operate as a league with common threads, and why things can still be somewhat OK for traditionalists. I'm one of those guys who misses the days when the Big Ten really did have just 10 schools, and all it took was a nine-game conference season to play everyone.

But I'm not stuck in the past. I'm OK with the Rose Bowl no longer pitting the best of the Big Ten against the best of the Pac-8/10/12. That's basically been history for years, with the Bowl Championship Series and then the playoffs getting in the way. Creating the College Football Playoff was a move in the right direction for college football.

And, though I miss the old 10-team Big Ten days, I'm fine with the addition of Penn State and Nebraska but not so thrilled about Rutgers and Maryland. (But as that became OK on the football side, it dusted the traditional and ideal basketball schedule with home and away games against every team.)

And I was at least OK with USC and UCLA joining the Big Ten, in part because the league figured out a schedule that worked – keep one or more rivalry games as annual matchups and make sure all others are on the schedule every other year.

That solution must be preserved with the 18-team league. The catch is that every school can now have only one rivalry to make that work, and it's got to be Ohio State-Michigan every year. Sorry, Michigan State, you can no longer play Michigan every year unless the Big Ten moves to a 10-game conference schedule (which would be a good idea – sorry, Youngstown States of the world).

Here's why. If Ohio State played Michigan each year in a nine-game conference schedule, that would leave 16 games available every two seasons. And there are 16 other schools to play. Theoretically, this means one West Coast trip per season to play USC, UCLA, Oregon or Washington, and one visit from a West Coast team to Ohio Stadium each year. Over four years, Ohio State would play at each West Coast venue, and the home fans would get to see them all over the same time span.

The worst thing about this scheduling format is that some schools will make it into the championship game simply because they had easier schedules, maybe avoiding Ohio State, Michigan, USC and Oregon all

in the same season. But with 18 teams, I can't come up with a better solution.

Cash Sport

Here's hoping colleges once and for all drop the charade that college football is about raising a university's profile and enriching student experiences.

Colorado's new coach, Deion Sanders, was quoted soon after the latest conference shake-up as saying the obvious in a blunt way.

"All this is about money," Sanders said. "It's about a bag, everybody's chasing the bag. Then you get mad at the players when they chase it."

Colleges were long ago exposed in this regard in pulling the big bowl games from regular over-air networks like ABC. That shrank the audience (exposure) in exchange for more money from ESPN and such.

Since the start of the BCS era in 1999, according to SportsMediaWatch.com, no game has come close to drawing as many viewers (35.6 million) as the 2006 Rose Bowl between Texas and USC on ABC. Second most is the 2009 season title game between Alabama and Texas on ABC (30.8 million). And third is the Ohio State-Florida title game after the 2006 season (28.8 million on Fox).

Audiences are smaller for cable TV, not just then but now. The five biggest audiences a year ago were on over-the-air broadcasts, led by the estimated 17.1 million who watched FOX's broadcast of Ohio State-Michigan.

31,738-Day Streak

By the time Ohio State takes the field at Notre Dame on Sept. 23, it will have been 31,738 days since the Buckeyes last lost to Notre Dame.

Here's hoping for Buckeye fans that the streak continues. Notre Dame jumped out to a 2-0 lead in this series, winning 18-13 in 1935 and 7-2 in 1936. But in modern times, it's been all Ohio State, starting with the Buckeyes' 45-26 win at home in 1995, followed by the 29-16 win at Notre Dame the next year (making John Cooper 2-0 against Lou Holtz in this series).

The Buckeyes won the Fiesta Bowl against Notre Dame following the 2005 and 2015 seasons, 34-20 and 44-28, and most recently beat Notre Dame 21-10 a year ago.

Special, Special Receiver

Here's hoping that Marvin Harrison Jr. can stay healthy and the Buckeye quarterback, whoever it ends up being, can be as accurate as those who preceded him. That way, Buckeye fans, and any serious fan of college football, can be treated to a full season of one of the freakishly good wideouts in recent times – and perhaps ever at Ohio State.

He's to the receiver position what Chase Young and the Bosa brothers were to the defensive line. And while we're at it, here's to a low number of injuries across college football this year. This game is about the very best showing off the spectacular things they can do.

The Playoffs

Here's to the regular season giving us

clear-cut choices for the playoffs, the last to be played with just four teams.

The playoffs move to 12 teams next year. Yes, there will be debates about who should be the 11th and 12th teams, and who was left out who should be in. But I'd much rather that debate be among teams that realistically are only very long shots to win it all than debates about leaving top-level teams out of the bracket in a limited, four-team playoff.

Going six or seven teams deep should include most every school with a legitimate shot at the title. Going 12 deep should all but guarantee that.

Predictions

• Ohio State will get solid quarterback play this year, but the seven-year streak of having the first-team All-Big Ten quarterback will come to an end. Just a hunch, but seems like it's too tall of an order for yet another first-year starter to be the Big Ten's best.

• TreVeyon Henderson will post his second 1,000-yard-plus rushing season. Only injuries held him back last year, during his sophomore season, as he wrapped up with 571 yards.

• J.T. Tuimoloau will do more than show flashes of his talent on the defensive line. He'll have a breakout season this year as a legitimate superstar.

• Ohio State will enter the Michigan game undefeated. I'm not so sure about Michigan. But U-M will have no more than one loss, meaning it will be a must-win game for advancing to the Big Ten title game. After the last two seasons, no prediction just yet on the outcome of The Game.

• Whatever happens with additional college football conference shakeups, Clemson will still end up with the easiest path – easier than anyone from the SEC or the Big Ten – of getting into the College Football Playoff in coming years because of a far weaker conference schedule.

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Big Ten Title In Jeopardy For Ohio State

Welcome to Ohio State Jeopardy!, the game where important concerns are answered – in the form of a question, of course.

I'll take "Embattled Figures" for \$400, Ken.

Q. This coach, with a 45-6 record and three appearances in the College Football Playoff, has done pretty much everything a coach can be asked to do, yet many in his fan base have decided that he needs to be feeling pressure.

A. Who is Ryan Day?

That's correct! It seems asinine that Day has been getting a decent number of brickbats, especially from what should be a happy Buckeye Nation.

**THE FACTS
MAN
Mike Wachsman**

While not the majority, there is a vocal section of the nation that (wrongly) values a win over Michigan as a bigger prize than making (or winning) the CFP. They have yet to evolve from the Ten Year War of Woody Hayes and Bo Schembechler, when the Buckeyes and Wolverines were playing for bragging rights and a league title. Not to mention the national titles that sometimes hung in the balance.

With the revamping of college football's postseason, it is possible to lose to your rival and not win your league title yet still win the national championship. Standing at the top of the mountain should be the goal each and every year, so Ohio State fans should actually be thrilled that Day has made the CFP three times in four seasons instead of being suspicious about Day being able to get things done.

Let's move on to "Great Debates" for \$600, Ken.

Q. This first-year starter will be under a microscope taking over at quarterback for C.J. Stroud, to the point where his first interception will lead to calls for him to be benched.

A. Who is Kyle McCord?

Maybe! This is one answer that still was unknown heading into the homestretch of fall camp. McCord is the veteran but had not separated himself from redshirt frosh Devin Brown.

Day had hoped to have a starter decided by now, but an injury to Brown that kept him out of the spring game complicated matters. Both quarterbacks showed well at various times in fall camp, but neither gained a consistent edge. The thought going around Columbus was that the longer the battle went on, the more it favored Brown. Not sure where the logic is in that, but know this – whoever gets the job will play well.

Don't believe me? Well, just look at Day's track record with quarterbacks in his time at Ohio State. As offensive coordinator in 2018, he convinced Urban Meyer to move away from the run-pass option spread to more of a traditional passing attack, and Dwayne Haskins set all kinds of Big Ten passing records.

In 2019, Day welcomed Justin Fields, and all he did in two seasons was lead the Buckeyes to two College Football Playoff berths and show off arm talent that had not been

seen in Columbus – until 2021, when Stroud took over.

All Stroud did was make throw after throw after throw and help Ohio State rank first nationally in yards per play on offense for each of the last two years. Stroud had otherworldly arm talent and showed tenacity in a near-upset of Georgia in last year's Peach Bowl. All of that made him the No. 2 pick in the NFL draft, which means Day should get the benefit of the doubt whichever young man he chooses.

Can I have "Underachievers" for \$800, Ken?

Q. This unit was largely responsible for Ohio State not reaching its national-championship goal last season and will require improvement from coordinator Jim Knowles, especially because he is making \$2 million per season.

A. What is the defense?

Correct? It's well-documented that Knowles was brought in to repair a defense that was in disarray and bordering on incompetent in 2021. He had worked wonders at every stop along his coaching path, most recently turning Oklahoma State into a monster stop unit in a league where defense is usually an afterthought. His teams were aggressive and opportunistic, and that led to Okie State being this close to qualifying for the CFP in 2021.

Most Ohio State fans were giddy upon Knowles' hire, and for most of the season that spirit remained. Then came the tail end of the season, and some weaknesses were exposed. From their contest with Penn State on Oct. 29 through the CFP showdown with Georgia, the Buckeyes allowed at least 5.9 yards per play in four of the last six contests, and over 8 yards per play against Michigan and the Bulldogs.

Some of it was a learning curve, which will not be an issue this season, and some of it was the risk-reward component of Knowles' safety-heavy scheme. He favors more safeties for a couple of reasons – they are typically better tacklers than corners, and they can be used in more diverse ways. They can blitz, they can cover, they can play center field. Knowles likes his safeties to be multidimensional, and he has more players available this year who fit that description.

Can I have "On The Line" for \$1,000?

Q. This area, much more than quarterback, will be the real determining factor of how well Ohio State does in 2023.

A. What is the offensive line?

Yes! Many have pointed out the concern at quarterback, but they should be focused more on the glaring holes at offensive tackle, not to mention a new face snapping the ball. Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones spoiled fans the past two seasons as they provided brawn in the run game and security in pass protection. They have both moved on, which leaves untested faces vying for starting roles.

To this point none of the candidates have fostered optimism, though incoming freshman Luke Montgomery has the look of a big-time star. He was in the running for a starting spot and will at worst be in the rotation.

Luke Wypler was one of the best centers in the conference last year, and his surprise decision to jump to the NFL left a void in the middle of the line. Louisiana-Monroe transfer Victor Cutler Jr. and little-used holdover Carson Hinzman were vying for the job.

Whoever wins the vacancies will be tasked

with a lot – holding up against some really good defensive lines and protecting a first-year starting quarterback. Don't be surprised if the Buckeyes lean on the run a bit more than usual early in the season, not only to break in the signal-caller but to gain some cohesion up front.

We have reached Final Jeopardy! and the wagers are in. The category is "Historic Moments." Here is the question.

Q. This achievement, more than any other, would go down in Ohio State annals as one of the greatest ever and would stamp the 2023 Buckeyes in the record books for time immemorial.

A. What is winning a national championship?

Yes! Congratulations! You knew that, should the Buckeyes ride the underdog wave to the top of the college football world, all of the stigma around Day would disappear, and Ohio State would once again elevate to the top tier of college football.

It would be fitting for the Buckeyes to win the final national title of the four-team CFP era as they were the winners of the first, in 2014.

Wolverines Have The Edge In League Race

Make no mistake about it – Ohio State has the most talented team in the Big Ten. But as we have seen in the last two seasons, talent alone doesn't guarantee championships. The talent has to execute and be put in position to succeed, and the Buckeyes have not done either at the most important points of the previous two football campaigns.

There is something to be said for being an underdog, and rest assured Ohio State will use that as fuel during the season. But there are just enough questions in Columbus to give the nod for the Big Ten title to hated rival Michigan.

The Wolverines return most of their important players on offense, and while retooling on defense, there is enough high-end ability to navigate a schedule that will generously be classified as forgiving. U-M won't be challenged until November, when it goes to Penn State before closing out by hosting Maryland (which could be a trap game) and the Buckeyes.

Running backs Blake Corum and Donovan Edwards are dynamite, and if quarterback J.J. McCarthy improves the way many in Ann Arbor believe he will, the Wolverines are serious contenders to win the whole thing.

In the West, Wisconsin has undergone a season of change – in both coach and philosophy. Former Ohio State standout Luke Fickell left the comfort of Cincinnati, where he was king of the Queen City, for a bigger challenge in Mad Town. The Badgers underachieved last year, finishing 7-6 and never winning more than two games in a row.

A new Air Raid scheme on offense – engineered by OC Phil Longo, who has never had an offense finish lower than 19th in six years as coordinator at Ole Miss (2017-18) and North Carolina (2019-2022) – will be a jarring transition for Badgers fans used to seeing their team bludgeon foes with a power run game. There will be an aggressive run game – Longo doesn't want to waste a talent like Braelon Allen – but it will be based a lot more off RPO than the two-back set that has

become a staple of Wisconsin offenses.

So it's Michigan against Wisconsin for the league title, and the Wolverines' experience and talent edge will tip the scales in their favor. This is how one guy sees the Big Ten race shaking out:

EAST

1. Michigan (13-0, 9-0)
2. Ohio State (11-1, 8-1)
3. Penn State (10-2, 7-2)
4. Maryland (7-5, 5-4)
5. Michigan State (6-6, 4-5)
6. Indiana (4-8, 2-7)
7. Rutgers (4-8, 1-8)

WEST

1. Wisconsin (10-3, 7-2)
2. Iowa (9-3, 6-3)
3. Illinois (7-5, 4-5)
3. Minnesota (6-6, 4-5)
5. Nebraska (6-6, 3-6)
6. Purdue (3-9, 2-7)
7. Northwestern (3-9, 1-8)

Offensive Player of the Year: RB Blake Corum, Michigan

Defensive Player of the Year: LB Tommy Eichenberg, Ohio State

Freshman of the Year: WR Carnell Tate, Ohio State

Newcomer of the Year: WR Dante Cephas, Penn State

Coach of the Year: Luke Fickell, Wisconsin

Dandy Dozen

The thing I'm asked most when out and about on my college football travels is who is going to make the College Football Playoff and win the national championship. Oh, I get asked other things – notably by the Missus about helping around the house – but that's not nearly as important, so it goes in one ear and out the other.

No, the really important stuff is centered around college football, and when asked I always have an answer at the ready, in the form of my Dandy Dozen.

It's imperative to know up front that these rankings are a projection of how the season will play out, not how strong the teams are right now. Schedules and conference matter here, where they don't when using Power Ratings or team strength metrics.

12. Texas
11. Washington
10. Clemson
9. Notre Dame
8. Penn State
7. Alabama
6. Ohio State
5. USC
- CFP
4. Florida State
3. LSU
2. Michigan
1. Georgia

When all is said and done, Georgia will have done what has to this point been impossible – win its third straight national title. Yes, there were some losses – notably at quarterback – but there is enough returning talent, especially on defense, and a schedule as soft as a newborn's behind to send the Bulldogs to the top of the mountain once again.

Let the games begin!

A Time To Reflect And A Time To Move On

Most of you are expecting my outlook on this year's Ohio State football team, just as you have read in this space at this time for the last 28 years.

But I am going to ask you to indulge me this one time as I write a column that is perhaps more for myself than you, the loyal reader. It concerns something that I have been giving a lot of thought to over the past several months. If you are not interested, so be it. There is plenty of other space devoted to previewing the 2009 Buckeyes elsewhere in this edition, and I would be disappointed if you didn't find those other stories informative and entertaining.

I wrote that introduction to this column for the August 2009 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. With the exception of 14 years passing, the words pretty much stand as is for the introduction to this "View From 15th and High."

Back then, I was a bit overwhelmed by the fact that, entering my 29th year, I had been "head coach" at Buckeye Sports Bulletin longer than Woody Hayes had been head coach at Ohio State.

"That fact," I wrote at the time, "has truly had a profound effect on me."

I went on to try to look at the ways that my tenure at BSB resembled that of the old coach and his years at Ohio State.

Now, as we enter our 43rd year, I have been at the helm of BSB longer than Hayes, Jim Tressel and Paul Brown combined – minus of course their five national championships (BSB only recognizes Hayes' titles from 1954, 1957 and 1968).

I'll circle back to the Hayes column later. The reason the old introduction is relevant today is Buckeye Sports Bulletin, with me still at the helm, reached another crossroads this month. After spending the first 42 years of our existence in the same building, we were forced out of BSB World Headquarters to make way for one of the ubiquitous apartment buildings that are popping up everywhere in Columbus, especially in the trendy Grandview area that we have called home since long before it was trendy. We were given 90 days to find new offices and clear out more than four decades of junk and memories.

BSB managing editor emeritus Mark Rea, associated with the paper since 1988, was able to gather a very representative group of staffers dating back to our 1981 beginning to say farewell to the building just 24 hours before the mandated Aug. 1 at 5 p.m. deadline for us to vacate the premises. Because they were tearing down the building anyway, each of us signed a wall in the office. We were supposed to sign in order of our time at BSB, but there were representatives from so many eras of BSB that we lost track of the proper order fairly quickly.

As is customary at a BSB gathering, there were some speeches of sorts. Mark spoke and then it was my turn. I became very emotional and it had nothing to do with the building, our longtime home. The building was a dump in 1981 when we moved in and was – with the notable addition of an awning over the front door – pretty much the same dump when we were forced out. Admittedly, though, it was *our* dump, but it was described as "functionally obsolete" when the owners declared that they were

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher



SAYING GOODBYE - Current and former Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members gathered to bid farewell to BSB's home of 42 years. Pictured are (top row, l-r) Steve Helwagen, Terry Gilliam, Patrick Engels, Andy Anders, Mark Rea, Frank Moskowitz, Craig Merz, Bryan McMahan, James Grega, Matt Hager, Jeff Svoboda and Tim Moody; (front row) Braden Moles, Dave Breithaupt, Julie Roy, Nicole Hamilton, Alex Weis, Becky Roberts, Mike Wachsmann and Marcus Hartman. Not pictured: Jeff Rapp, Stacey Stathulis.

tearing it down in favor of more lucrative digs.

I became choked up because I realized the bricks of the building at 1350 W. Fifth Avenue in Grandview were not the bricks that made up Buckeye Sports Bulletin. The people in that room were the bricks that made BSB. A wrecking ball can knock down a functionally obsolete building, but it cannot tear down what those people had built. I wanted to make sure that each and everyone there, as well as the many others who were not there, understood that and how thankful I was for each and every one of them. That included some of the key people who have passed away through the years, such as assistant publisher Karen Wachsmann and longtime BSB advertising rep Jack Woodworth, each solid bricks in our foundation.

Did Hayes remember all of the players who donned the scarlet and gray under his tutelage? He had far more Buckeyes than I have had staffers, and I must admit that while I remember most who have passed through the doors at 1350 W. Fifth Ave. in Grandview, there are a few who escape me now.

I know Hayes must have been proud of those players who went on to great things both on and off the athletic field, just as I am so proud of those people who worked here and now work at The Columbus Dispatch, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer and other fine publications around the country, as well as people who have been successful in other fields.

Was he just as proud of former players who perhaps would not be considered as successful as the others but lived lives by the set of values that Hayes taught and believed in? Did he consider those pupils successful in the game of life? There is certainly

a code that we have tried to teach and live by here at BSB, and I hope that it has stayed with people long beyond their time here.

Closing the office of 42 years in a matter of months was no easy task, and it took a physical and emotional toll on me. Coupled with the emotions of being with people at the farewell whom I had grown with, laughed with, argued with, tackled crises with, and essentially fought in the trenches with, it left me drained. I was unable to move on to Plank's Café on Parsons Avenue, recognized even in the column from 2009 as "the official watering hole for BSB," with the others who said goodbye to the building.

Instead, I sat alone in my chair in my now nearly-empty office – the movers having been there just hours before – resting and reminiscing as the clock for the mandated departure ticked well below 24 hours.

Which brings me to one of the primary things that I think about when I think of Woody Hayes and his 28 years at OSU.

I know exactly how he must have felt as college football turned from primarily a running game to the high-flying game it has become today. Hayes built his teams around power, execution and good, sound defense. It had to bother him as the game seemed to take on an aura of flash with little substance.

In the old days here at BSB, we were able to put together a solid, if not spectacular, team with good chemistry and we would overpower the competition with good, solid journalism. Now, with the advent of the Internet, it seems that bells, whistles and being first with the news are more important than being comprehensive and correct.

One of the few good things coming out of the move is the many interesting things I found as I went through the piles in my office. There were pictures of me with the late

Phyllis Bailey, the longtime athletic administrator, pictures with Woody's wife Anne Hayes, and a picture of me with a young Tommy Plank and his father, the late Walter Plank, proprietors of the previously mentioned Plank's Café. These were pictures that I did not know I had but will treasure.

I found dozens upon dozens of letters from subscribers that I had set aside to write back, but apparently didn't do so. As the chief cook and bottle washer here, despite good intentions, I simply never came up with the time. I hope the fact that I set the letters aside is an indicator that I at least wanted to write back. A special apology to Art Lomax, who sent me a unique Ohio State gift native to New Mexico where he lives. I apparently never sent a thank you note, Art. That's not the way my parents raised me, so please consider this a formal thank you!

And speaking of my parents, I ran across a program from the March 7, 1979, NIT basketball game against St. Joseph's. My dad, a huge college basketball fan, was in town without my mother and I took him to the game. It was my first time in St. John Arena. I don't remember anything about the game, but I remember our seats were in the balcony and I recall how high up we were, yet how we were right on top of the action. I think that's the only time I ever sat in the balcony at the venerable building. More importantly, I remember it as a father-and-son moment with the incomparable Jack Moskowitz. I can't help but think about the fact that my father would have been just 52 at the time and I was only 27.

And then there was the card I found from my mother, the noted author and educator Faye Moskowitz, dated August 29, 2009, which brings this column full circle. It's a little personal, but I am going to share it with you nonetheless.

"Dearest Frank, This is an unabashed fan letter from your admittedly prejudiced mom. This much I absolutely know: Your 'Woody Hayes' column in the Preview Issue was the best thing you've ever written – and you've written some good ones. I was so moved by the delicate balance you achieved, managing personal insights while all the while maintaining focus on Woody. Your essay is one for the archives.

"I've put it away with my precious keepsakes – or say I will put it away after I share it with some friends & family.

"Did I ever tell you how proud I am of you? Just in case – I'm telling you once more.

"Love, Faye

"P.S. Where did you find the time to write it?"

How can you put a value on spending time with current and former staff members who took the time to mark their time with BSB or the card from my mother?

Spending time with and appreciating our loyal staff as we said farewell to our building. Finding pictures with friends and people I greatly respect. Finding keepsakes from my deceased (and sorely missed) parents. Maybe moving after 42 years wasn't so bad after all.

Publisher's note: If you would like a copy of the original 2009 Woody Hayes column, drop me a note at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com.

Reds AUGUST LINEUP!



AUGUST 4-6



FRIDAY // 6:40

- **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Voices of America Country Music Fest**
- **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.



SATURDAY // 4:10

- **Reds Crossbody Bag, presented by LifeCenter**
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last.)
- **Post-Game Faith Concert featuring For King and Country, presented by Ark Encounter**
Concert free to all fans with a game ticket!



SUNDAY // 1:40

- **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/family for details
- **Reds City Connect Poster Series #4, presented by Skyline Chili**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

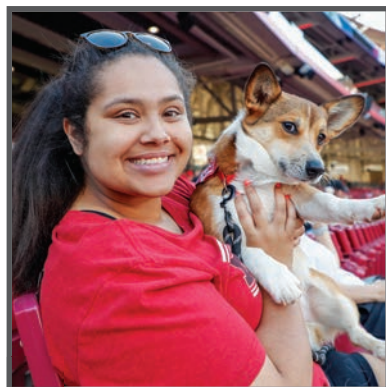
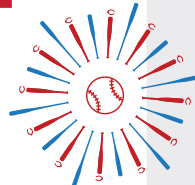


AUGUST 7-9



MONDAY // 6:40

- **Bark in the Park, presented by Purina and Kroger**
Ticket packages available for dogs and their owners with pet activities, samples and more!



TUESDAY // 6:40

- **3-2-1 Tuesdays*, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light**
(At all Tuesday Reds home games, fans can purchase \$3 Buds and Bud Lights, \$2 hot dogs, and \$1 ice cream cups)
*Limit 2 items per transaction

WEDNESDAY // 12:35

- **Business Day Specials**
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!
- **Senior Days**
Visit reds.com/senior for details

AUGUST 15-16



presented by
Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste

TUESDAY // 6:40 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 // 6:40

- **Senior Days**
Visit reds.com/senior for details



AUGUST 18-20



FRIDAY // 6:40

- **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Woodbridge Wines**
- **City Connect Friday**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.
- **Ohio Lottery Post-Game Concert featuring Yacht Rock Revue, presented by Dunkin'**
Concert is free to all fans with game ticket! Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes an exclusive Captain Hat! Available while supplies last at reds.com/Yacht.



SATURDAY // 6:40

- **Jonathan India Bobblehead, presented by Ohio LECET**
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last)

SUNDAY // 1:40

- **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/family for details
- **Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by Cuties**
(To kids 14 and younger in attendance, while supplies last)
- **Run The Bases**
Fans of all ages can line up after the game to run the bases! Priority line for Reds Heads kids club members.



JONATHAN INDIA

(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.com / Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.