

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 43, No. 3

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 23, 2023

## Ohio State Finds Edge In 63-10 Blowout Of Western Kentucky

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

In a single word, Ohio State's performance through the first two games of the season – wins over Indiana and Youngstown State – can best be described as flat, with nothing overtly positive or overwhelmingly negative coming out of the earliest games on the schedule.

That streak of disjointed starts – and make no mistake that with competition like the Hoosiers and Penguins, back-to-back flat performances certainly qualifies as a trend – seemed to be continuing against Western Kentucky on Sept. 16, as even the 100,217 fans in attendance at Ohio Stadium seemingly could not get the Buckeyes up and ready to play for a sleepy afternoon kickoff against the Hilltoppers.

While Ohio State did find the end zone on the first drive of the game, capping off an eight-play, 75-yard drive with a 21-yard rushing score by TreVeyon Henderson, the next drive gained just 11 yards before defensive lineman Hosea Wheeler exploded off the edge and sacked quarterback Kyle McCord, forcing a fumble recovered by Western Kentucky at the team's 44-yard line.

"The safety was really low and maybe Kyle didn't have a great feel for the angle that maybe Marvin (Harrison Jr.) was coming out at, and so he didn't let it go," head coach Ryan Day said. "Marvin inside released and (McCord) didn't quite see the angle, and then when the sack happened, we needed to just protect it. We can still live with second-and-15, but obviously the fumble is something that we've got to learn from."

Western Kentucky turned the strip-

sack into a plodding 11-play, 31-yard drive that ended in a field goal, and after the Buckeyes scored again – this time a 7-yarder from Henderson – the Hilltoppers looked to stay in the contest after entering as underdogs.

The ensuing defensive drive was emblematic of the season thus far for Ohio State – not a disaster, but a number of missed opportunities. It featured a 34-yard gain for wideout Malachi Corley and pass interference against cornerback Jordan Hancock, culminating in a 2-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Austin Reed to Corley. But three plays prior to the score was a comedy of errors, with no fewer than four Buckeyes failing to capitalize on a fumble forced by safety Josh Proctor before it was collected back by the Hilltoppers.

Those missed opportunities on the drive – and, ultimately, through the first two games of the season – seemed to resonate with Ohio State, as the Buckeyes did not allow those chances on either side of the ball slip through their fingers for the rest of the contest.

In fact, they scored four more touchdowns in the second quarter for a 35-point frame – the team's most in a single quarter since scoring 42 points in the second frame against Miami (Ohio) in 2019 – and didn't allow another point as they dominated the Hilltoppers in a 63-10 win to move to 3-0 on the season.

"We needed to take the next step," Day said. "We know what we're about to jump into here in the middle of the season. We know we have to go on the road next week. That was a good week of work right there. It started Sunday. Tuesday was a really physical day. Wednesday was a great day. Thursday we kept going at it.

"It was all week, because we knew



SONNY BROCKWAY

**READY TO RUMBLE** – Sixth-ranked Ohio State had the team's most complete performance of the season in a 63-10 win over Western Kentucky on Sept. 16, led by the likes of running back TreVeyon Henderson, and it comes at a perfect time with the Buckeyes traveling to No. 9 Notre Dame on Sept. 23.

we had to turn this up, and we needed to build some momentum going into next week," he continued. "I think you saw our team play like that today, and that's what it's going to be moving forward."

Ohio State ultimately finished with nine touchdowns and outgained Western Kentucky's normally high-scoring offense 562-284 on the day while limiting the passing attack to just 5.2 yards per attempt and 204 total passing yards.

The defense forced four turnovers – interceptions from linebacker Steele

Chambers and freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. and fumbles recovered by cornerback Davison Igbinosun and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, forced respectively by Hancock and Denzel Burke – resulting in a performance that had Ohio State firing on all cylinders.

But it was not an unexpected outing for the Buckeyes, at least inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. Several hours before kickoff at Skull Session

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## From The Message Board

**Ohio State finished the tune-up portion of the schedule with a dominant 63-10 win over Western Kentucky on Sept. 16, but it set the stage for a top-10 matchup on Sept. 23, with the sixth-ranked Buckeyes traveling to No. 9 Notre Dame for a prime-time kickoff. Following the win over WKU, we asked our readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what their confidence level was heading into the game with the Fighting Irish in South Bend, Ind. Here are some of the responses:**

### Buckeye Leaves

*Ohio State had the team's best outing of the season so far in a 63-10 win over Western Kentucky on Sept. 16 in Ohio Stadium, with no shortage of Buckeyes stepping up to help move the squad to 3-0. Here are some choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the win:*

**Patrick Engels, BSB:** TreVeyon Henderson continued to show the explosiveness that earned him All-Big Ten honors his freshman season, racking up two runs of 15 or more yards along with a pair of scores to lead the Ohio State rushing attack.

Henderson's 21-yard score in the first quarter was his most impressive, where he bounced to the outside and sped past the secondary to give the Buckeyes their first score of the game. He also once again proved to be a weapon in the passing game, hauling in a pass for 27 yards.

His big night was headlined by his 19-yard gain midway through the third quarter, which brought him over the 2,000-yard plateau for his career, a feat that only 27 other Ohio State rushers have achieved. The junior talkback will only add to that mark if he continues to rush with that same speed and aggression.

**Braden Moles, BSB:** Just days after being named Ohio State's full-time starter for the season, quarterback Kyle McCord backed up the decision with a dominant outing.

The signal caller finished 19 of 23 passing for 318 yards and three touchdowns, including a 75-yard strike to Marvin Harrison Jr. and a pair of scores (15 and 14 yards) to Emeka Egbuka. He recovered from an early miss on a third-down throw to Julian Fleming and was nearly perfect through the remainder of the game.

**Greg Wilson, BSB:** Tommy Eichenberg earned a Buckeye Leaf early when he came out of the gates hot and had six tackles on Western Kentucky's first drive of the game, getting him over the 200-tackle mark for his career at Ohio State. He would go on to make four more tackles and was

a problem for the Hilltoppers the entire game.

Quarterback Austin Reed has been great so far this season, but against the Buckeyes, he couldn't get anything going because of consistent pressure. And when he had to check down, Eichenberg was there to make a quick tackle, a force to be reckoned with on the defense in the game and a large part of why Western Kentucky wasn't able put scores together.

#### BSB Subscribers

**Terrier Buck:** It seemed that Steele Chambers was all over the field in the first half. Jermaine Mathews Jr. probably deserves some recognition for the beautiful pick-six. It won't surprise me if he's a future star.

**Tiffin Buckeye:** McCord. He was calm, cool and collected.

**AnthonyBuckeye:** Chambers for playing like his Coach (James) Laurinaitis and his interception, Tyleik Williams and Eichenberg for a dominating game, Denzel Burke and Josh Proctor for excellent coverage on a good passing team, McCord for the fabulous second quarter, Henderson for being back, Harrison and Egbuka for toying with the opposition, Julian Fleming for exceptional blocking and catches, Chip Trayanum for another champion performance, Cade Stover for energetic catches and yards after the catch, and Mathews for a spectacular entry!

**John Lanning:** The offensive line opened holes and provided protection for McCord. Confidence breeds more confidence. Job well done.

**Poster That Harley Built:** Just about every player played well so I am giving my leaves to the coaching staff for turning things around so quickly and effectively after the lackluster first two weeks.

**BuckeyeScott:** In addition to those already mentioned, Xavier Johnson for his workman-like day returning kicks, receiving and rushing. Also Carnell Tate for his first of many to come touchdown receptions.

"I thought before the season that OSU was more likely to go undefeated than not. The WKU game only increased my confidence slightly."

– Terrier Buck

"The Buckeyes sure gave Notre Dame something to think about after beating Western Kentucky 63-10 as they prepared for the game on Sept. 23. The defense adjusted to the Hilltoppers' high-octane offense and pitched another second-half shutout. Maybe most important, I was glad to see the defense get a taste of getting turnovers. Let it rain!

"Coach Ryan Day finally opened his playbook past the first 15 pages and showed how explosive his offense could be. QB Kyle McCord has a talented arsenal of weapons to choose from and that display has to give him a lot of confidence. His offensive line did a pretty good job also. The offense scored on back-to-back plays in the second quarter and scored three TDs on six plays. That had to impress even the most ardent Buckeye fans.

"That gives me more confidence but more importantly, it needs to give the team confidence going on the road for the prime-time spotlight in South Bend. They can't be complacent. They need to keep getting better as the competition ramps up. Devin Brown needs to continue to work: New York Jets QB Aaron Rodgers showed what can happen when he suffered the season-ending injury on the fourth play of the season."

– BRYON MCNUTT

"I'm hoping today was a sign of things to come. I believe Ohio St. wins."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"It's going to be a dogfight in

South Bend. The Irish want this one bad. The Buckeyes have what it takes."

– BuckeyeScott

"The second quarter of the WKU game removed all doubts about the offense. McCord showed promise to turn out to be the best of Day's Buckeye QBs. The defensive adjustments after the WKU TD were also impressive. The pass breakups by Denzel Burke, Josh Proctor, Jordan Hancock and others were so textbook! I am optimistic that this may be Day's best Buckeye team!"

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Many bright spots from the WKU game. A great tune-up for Notre Dame. We need to keep the aura of 'The Gipper' in check early and be violent along the lines. (Marcus) Freeman likes to play rough like last year. We must pressure (Sam) Hartman and disrupt their timing. It will be a close game. The Buckeyes win in the end."

– John Lanning

"More confident than I was a week ago."

– Poster That Harley Built

"The game against WKU will give the Bucks the confidence they need to win. I have confidence, too, that OSU will defeat Notre Dame."

– PeyoteBuck

"If our secondary can contain Hartman's long balls, OSU has a chance to win. Notre Dame appears to be vastly improved over last year. Not sure yet if we are."

– R1TBDBITL

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Another Marginalized Fan

I have not had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Joseph H. Huber of Walpole, Mass., but we are kindred spirits. I write to congratulate him on his brilliant letter ("Marginalized Fan," August 2023). I couldn't have said it better myself. Amen, ditto, and bravo, Joe! A job well done. But will anybody pay attention?

**Terry Walrath  
Hinckley, 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](mailto: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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**PUBLISHER**  
Frank Moskowitz

**ASSISTANT PUBLISHER**  
Becky Roberts

**MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS**  
Mark Rea

**EDITOR**  
Braden Moles

**ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS**  
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam  
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
David Breithaupt Mark Schmetzer  
Bill Conley Steve Siegfried  
Patrick Engels Jeff Svoboda  
Rich Exner Mike Wachsman  
Craig Merz Greg Wilson  
Bob Roehm

**ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES**  
Paula Serra Ron Friedman

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No. 5	Oct. 14	No. 17	March 2
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No. 10	Nov. 18	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 25	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 2	No. 24	August

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## Buckeyes Are Running Team No Longer

After two weeks of longing, Buckeye Nation finally got what it wanted.

The offense rolled up 562 total yards, starting quarterback Kyle McCord rebounded from some self-inflicted adversity to post the second 300-yard passing game of his young career, and the defense scored two touchdowns of its own and generally held up pretty well against a team that featured the nation's No. 12 passing attack.

About the only thing missing from Ohio State's 63-10 smackdown of Western Kentucky on a sunny Chamber of Commerce afternoon along the banks of the Olentangy River was the lack of a 100-yard rusher for the Buckeyes. If you're scoring at home, that makes five consecutive games (dating back to last year) during which no Ohio State player has cracked the century mark on the ground. That matches a similar streak covering the final three games of the 2021 season and first two of 2022.

Before you think this is the beginning of some screed about the lack of the running game, you can relax. The Buckeyes can go six deep at running back without much drop-off, and five of those players (where are you, Dallen Hayden?) got at least two carries against the Hilltoppers. As a result, OSU totaled 204 yards on the ground while averaging 6.2 yards on each of its 33 attempts.

It's just that the Buckeyes are not a running team anymore. For all of the talk about how much he wants a balanced attack – and what coach doesn't? – Ryan Day is finally beginning to fully embrace his inner Chip Kelly. Nothing underscored that more than the second play of the second quarter.

Ohio State was protecting a 7-3 lead after an opening period that saw Western Kentucky pretty much hold its own as 29-point underdogs. The Buckeyes were five plays into their third possession of the game and facing a third-and-2 situation at their own 41-yard line. Down through the years, most OSU coaches would never think twice about a third-and-2 against a perceived lesser opponent – line up, blow the other team off the ball, and go on about your business.

Things have changed in Columbus, though. Earlier in the game, the Buckeyes faced a second-and-1 at the WKU 43, and TreVeyon Henderson got stuffed for no gain. It was the continuation of a disturbing pattern so far this season that, simply put, underscores a struggle to convert short-yardage situations by running the ball.

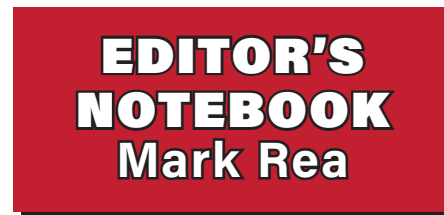
That's not a problem unless you're too stubborn to realize that struggle. But Day apparently had seen enough and this time called for a swing pass to Henderson, who found the sledding much easier in space than between the tackles. The play went for 27 yards and set up the Buckeyes' second touchdown of the afternoon.

Later in the second quarter, after Ohio State had scored twice on one-play possessions – a 75-yard strike from McCord to Marvin Harrison Jr. and a 40-yard bolt by Chip Trayanum – the Buckeyes faced a second-and-3 that resulted in a short flip from McCord that Emeka Egbuka turned into a 15-yard touchdown catch.

During the first half against the Hilltoppers, Ohio State faced 11 short-yardage situations – plays on which 5 yards or fewer were needed to convert a first down – and the Buckeyes converted eight of those plays. Six of those eight conversions were accomplished through the air.

I'm not suggesting Day completely abandon the running game in favor of an all-out passing attack. We saw how that worked for Western Kentucky. And the Buckeyes can obviously still run the ball. Henderson's 21-yard touchdown to kick off the afternoon's scoring was an old-fash-

ioned, textbook sweep during which left tackle Josh Simmons got just enough of a chip on a linebacker and Julian Fleming sealed Hilltoppers safety Talique Allen off the edge as Henderson flew by. On Henderson's second touchdown run, a 7-yard score early in the second quarter, it was an off-tackle play that football teams have been running for most of the last 75 years. Right tackle Josh Fryar took care of two defenders while Fleming neutralized Western Kentucky cornerback Upton Stout at the goal line.



Still, there is nothing wrong with understanding the strength of your team, and that strength right now for Ohio State is throwing the ball.

### Realignment Poster Child

Confused by all of the conference realignment? Does it make any sense to anyone for UCLA, USC, Washington and Oregon to play in the Big Ten? Or for Texas and Oklahoma to jump to the Southeastern Conference? How about Cal-Berkeley joining the Atlantic Coast Conference when the Bears' home stadium is located just three miles from the Pacific coast?

While old-schoolers like me wring our hands and grouse about the almighty dollar ruining college football, Conference USA is probably having a pretty good laugh. Since forming in 1995 following the merger of the Metro and Great Western conferences, C-USA has become the poster child for aligning, realigning and then realigning again.

During the 28-year history of the conference, 32 different universities have held full C-USA memberships at one time or another, including Western Kentucky, one of nine current league members. That number will grow to 10 next year when Kennesaw State completes its transition to Football Bowl Subdivision status.

Before taking on the Hilltoppers, Ohio State had played only one other current C-USA member in football. That was a 45-0 win against New Mexico State in 2009 – except that the Aggies were not yet part of C-USA at that time. They played that game as members of the Western Athletic Conference.

In reality, the Buckeyes had faced Conference USA opponents on seven occasions before dispatching Western Kentucky. OSU took three victories against the University of Cincinnati between 1999 and 2004 as well as wins two weeks apart during the 2012 season vs. Alabama-Birmingham and Central Florida. There were also wins against Marshall (2010) and Florida Atlantic (2019) while they were C-USA members.

Each of those Conference USA opponents has since moved on, some of them more than once. Cincinnati jumped to the Big East in 2005 and then the American Athletic Conference in 2013 before joining the Big 12 this season. UCF joined Cincinnati in the American in 2013 and then joined the Bearcats in their move to the Big 12.

UAB and FAU moved to the AAC this season, and Marshall, which was a member of the Mid-American Conference before moving to C-USA in 2005, is currently in its second year as a member of the Sun Belt Conference.

### Crunching Numbers

During the previously mentioned seven

wins against former Conference USA opponents, it might interest you to know that Ohio State turned in only four 100-yard rushing performances – two of them by one player. Lydell Ross rushed for 130 yards during a 23-19 win at Cincinnati in 2002 and then 140 yards and a touchdown two years later when the Buckeyes handed the Bearcats a 27-6 loss.

Harrison's 75-yard score gave him 20 touchdown receptions for his career, making him only the ninth OSU player in program history to catch 20 or more TDs. He also now has 102 career receptions, making him the 26th Buckeye to crack the century mark in career catches.

Henderson finished with 88 rushing yards against WKU and pushed his career total to 2,010. He is the 30th player in program history to break the 2,000-yard mark on the ground, including Dan "Boom" Herron and Terrelle Pryor, who unofficially reached that milestone before some of their statistics were vacated.

Over the course of the previous 1,351 games in program history, Ohio State had scored 63 points in a game five times but had never beaten any opponent by a 63-10 final score. The last time the Buckeyes scored exactly 63 points in a game was a 63-14 win against Penn State in 2013.

During the 62 seasons between 1950 and 2011, Ohio State scored 60 or more points in a game 13 times. During the succeeding 11-plus seasons beginning in 2012, the Buckeyes have scored 60 or more points a total of 16 times. All-time, OSU is 43-0 when scoring 60 points or more.

It had been a long time – 32 years to be exact – since a player wearing jersey No. 91 got into the scoring column for the Buckeyes. Before third-year defensive tackle Tyleik Williams pounced on a fumble in the end zone against Western Kentucky, you have to go all the way back to Nov. 2, 1991, when defensive end Jason Simmons returned a blocked PAT kick 85 yards for a two-point tally during a 16-9 home loss to Iowa.

True freshman Jermaine Mathews Jr. returned an interception 58 yards for a touchdown against Western Kentucky, the longest pick-six by an OSU defender since Craig Young had a 70-yarder during a 66-17 win against Maryland in 2021.

Williams and Mathews allowed the Ohio State defense to tally a pair of touchdowns in a game for the first time since a 40-28 win against TCU at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. Defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton recovered a fumble in the end zone for one score, and fellow tackle Dre'Mont Jones rumbled 28 yards with an interception against the Horned Frogs.

I know the tight ends are usually BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz's territory, but I thought you (and Frank) would be interested to know that Cade Stover now has two pass receptions of 40 yards or more this season, the first time in 10 years that an Ohio State tight end has accomplished that feat. During the 2013 season, Jeff Heurman reeled in a 40-yard touchdown reception during a 56-0 win at Purdue and then grabbed a 57-yard score during a 40-35 loss to Clemson in the 2014 Orange Bowl. Each of Heurman's TD passes was delivered by Braxton Miller, with the one against Clemson representing the next-to-last of Miller's 52 career scoring strikes as a Buckeye.

The weatherman couldn't have cooperated any better with sunny skies, low humidity and temperatures dropping into the 60s after halftime. Still, the announced attendance of 100,217 was the second lowest in the most recent 13 post-pandemic games at the Horseshoe. The only lower attendance during that span was the 100,067 who turned out last year to watch a 45-12 mauling of Arkansas State.



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Ohio State Holds Steady At No. 6 In AP Top 25

Ohio State turned in the team's best game of the season on Sept. 16 against Western Kentucky, dominating for a 63-10 win over the Hilltoppers, but it wasn't enough to persuade voters to move the Buckeyes up in the AP top 25.

In the most recent rankings released on Sept. 17, Ohio State remained at No. 6, trailing No. 5 USC, No. 4 Florida State, No. 3 Texas, No. 2 Michigan and No. 1 Georgia. The Buckeyes are followed by No. 7 Penn State, No. 8 Washington, No. 9 Notre Dame and No. 10 Oregon, ensuring Ohio State will play in a top-10 matchup next week at South Bend.

Iowa is the only other Big Ten team that landed in the rankings, coming in at No. 24, while Maryland and Wisconsin both received votes. The biggest fall in the poll belonged to Tennessee, which fell 12 spots to No. 23 after a 29-16 loss to No. 25 Florida, and three teams – Oregon, No. 16 Oklahoma, No. 17 North Carolina and No. 18 Duke – jumped three spots.

## Egbuka Confident In McCord As QB1

Ohio State wide receiver Emeka Egbuka's relationship with quarterback Kyle McCord may not be as long-standing as that of his fellow wideout Marvin Harri-

son Jr., but that has not stopped him from extending significant praise toward the newly-anointed Buckeye starter.

Egbuka, who hauled in four receptions from his freshman-year roommate for 57 yards and two touchdowns in the Buckeyes' convincing Week 3 victory over Western Kentucky, indicated that McCord has earned the starting nod this season (more on page 19) due to his relentless work ethic and strong knowledge of the game.

These are traits that the third-year wideout has noticed in his quarterback since they both arrived on campus in 2021, but another area Egbuka has seen McCord grow in has been the signal caller's leadership ability.

"I think an area that he's very much improved in is his leadership," Egbuka said after the win over Western Kentucky. "He's always been poised. He's always thrown a pretty ball. He's always been super smart in the pocket. But you know, leadership was something that you don't necessarily get to see because he's not the starter. I had my questions about it, and he answered all of them. He's a great leader for our offense."

The Steilacoom, Wash., native added that McCord developed this unique football IQ by leaning on the tutelage of head coach Ryan Day, his staff and his former teammates while he stood on the sidelines and awaited his chance over the past two seasons. According to Egbuka, these efforts to learn have better prepared him to thrive on the field this season regardless of the obstacles that may be thrown his way.

"When you get to the game on Saturday, you often get a look that you don't really expect for a certain play call that you might have thought would work," Egbuka said. "But Kyle is prepared for a lot of situations that face him. He's really taken the coaching from Coach Day

## 2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	W, 23-3	CBS	1-2, 21-14 loss to Louisville
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	BTN	2-1, 48-28 win over Robert Morris
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	FOX	2-1, <b>63-10 loss to Ohio State</b>
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	7:30 p.m.	NBC	4-0, 41-17 win over Central Michigan
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	3-0, 42-14 win over Virginia
Oct. 14	at Purdue	TBA	TBA	1-2, 35-20 loss to Syracuse
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	3-0, 30-13 win over Illinois
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	2-1, 35-14 win over Georgia Southern
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	3-0, 35-16 win over Virginia Tech
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	7:30 p.m.	NBC	2-1, 41-7 loss to Washington
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	2-1, 31-13 loss to North Carolina
Nov. 25	at Michigan	12 p.m.	FOX	3-0, 31-6 win over Bowling Green

and Coach (Corey) Dennis, and even C.J. (Stroud) throughout the years, just learning from him so when a play breaks down, you don't really see him get flustered too much. He's able to make something out of nothing, get the ball to his playmakers, and go from there."

Whether it is in practice or on game days, Egbuka noted that McCord's poise and preparedness have spread throughout the team, elevating the play of those around him on a daily basis. One way the Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep product achieves this is by holding his offensive teammates accountable with their film study during each game week.

"Kyle sends me clips all the time," Egbuka said. "Saying, 'Hey, if they're playing you like this, then you've got this.' You definitely have to be on the same page, because it takes one dude out of 11 players like on defense, and one dude misses his coverage, but the ball doesn't go that way, it doesn't really matter. On offense, if someone misses their block, the whole play is screwed. We really have to be on your P's and Q's when it comes to offense, and you have to be on the same page with your quarterback when you're running

routes."

While McCord faces the difficult task of replicating the success and efficiency that preceded him at the position from Stroud (2021-22), Justin Fields (2019-2020) and Dwayne Haskins (2018), Egbuka said his starting quarterback will have no problem living up to this high standard, as his strong work ethic and skill set have put him in prime position to succeed.

"I don't really want to speak on it, but I have an idea of how good I think he can be in my mind," Egbuka said. "The work that Kyle has put in, I wouldn't be surprised if he had some pretty impressive accolades over the season. We're just going to keep stacking days as a team. He's going to keep playing great football like he's been doing. And at the end of the season, you guys will see where he's at."

## Proctor Returns To Action Against WKU

Ohio State reclaimed the services of starting adjuster/free safety Josh Proctor in its victory over Western Kentucky just one week after his name emerged on the team's availability report prior to kickoff against Youngstown State.

The sixth-year Proctor, who sat out the entire game on Sept. 9 with an undisclosed injury, immediately inserted himself back into the starting lineup against the Hilltoppers, assuming the majority of starting snaps at the adjuster.

Proctor, who was named the team's starter moving forward this season on Sept. 5, played a large role in the defense's containment of quarterback Austin Reed and his high-flying Western Kentucky offense. He finished with five total tackles along with two pass breakups, including one in the second quarter that led to a turnover on downs for Reed and the Hilltoppers.

Proctor's efforts have put him at nine total tackles (tied for seventh on the team) and three pass breakups, second behind cornerback Denzel Burke's five batted passes.

## Ransom Plays, Six Out Against WKU

Ohio State welcomed back one safety against Western Kentucky in Proctor but it looked like they might have lost another before the game started. A few hours before kickoff against the Hilltoppers, senior safety Lathan Ransom's name appeared on the team's availability report with an undisclosed injury.

That listing soon became trivial as the



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The Ohio State football team's biggest game of the season to date is coming up when the Buckeyes travel to Notre Dame on Sept. 23. Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers can get the very latest news on the big game by going to the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, where the BSB staff will be posting stories daily, right up until kickoff. The staff will also be offering their predictions for the big game on Friday, Sept. 22.

Predictions will continue throughout the season on the Friday before each game.

Football recruiting is a 365-day-a-year process these days, and the BSB staff has stepped up its coverage of Ohio State's quest for prep talent, so be sure to check in regularly at BuckeyeSports.com. The Ohio State-Notre Dame game is sure to generate recruiting activity.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. This season we will be featuring a look back at the 1998 Ohio State football team on its 25th anniversary. Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day. The discussion is sure to be lively as the big game with the Irish approaches.

With BSB now on its weekly publishing schedule for football season and many readers reporting sluggish mail service, we want to remind readers that the complete edition of each issue is posted at BuckeyeSports.com, immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for

readers having continuing mail problems. There is also immediate coverage after each game, and readers can discuss the game on the Fan Forum, including "The Official Game Thread" with real-time comments from BSB staff members and readers throughout the game. BuckeyeSports.com is free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Those readers not inclined to take advantage of BSB's immediate electronic posting may also upgrade their existing print subscriptions to first-class mail in an envelope through football season for \$25 and through the traditional recruiting season in February for \$35. Just call us at (614) 486-2202 for credit card orders or send your credit card number or check to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Mention either the "Football" upgrade or the "Recruiting" upgrade.

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Lathan," Day said. "I don't know if that was a fourth-down stop (actually second), but that's what we're looking for. Guys flying sideline to sideline, getting their hands on balls in the secondary."

While Ohio State did have the services of the starter Ransom, they were without freshman linebacker Arvell Reese, who had sustained an injury during a kickoff in the Buckeyes' 35-7 win over Youngstown State on Sept. 9. Despite the scratch, coordinator Jim Knowles indicated on Sept. 12 that it was not a long-term ailment.

Five other mainstays on the injury list – wide receivers Kyion Grayes and Reis Stocksdale, tight end Zak Herbstreit, defensive end Will Smith Jr. and safety Kourt Williams II – remained out for Ohio State with long-term injuries, while tight end Joe Royer was a late scratch just ahead of kickoff.

### Second-String Offensive Line Gets First Chance

With Ohio State's game against Western Kentucky out of reach by halftime, Day saw an opportunity to get his second-string offensive line some reps near the end of the game.

The Buckeyes deployed an entirely different front five during the final two drives of the contest. Making his Buckeye debut on the line was Louisiana-Monroe transfer Victor Cutler Jr., who earned his first reps at center, a position in which he was in a tight battle with redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman throughout fall camp.

Continued On Page 6

game neared, however, as the Buckeyes' starting bandit/strong safety was seen leading his team out of the tunnel and being a full participant in pregame warm-ups.

Ransom, who had started each of the team's first two games this season, once again assumed the majority of reps at the position, recording two total tackles as well as a forced fumble in the second

quarter that nearly led to an Ohio State recovery. His aggressiveness impressed Day, who said it helped set the tone for a dominating night for the defense.

"There was a really good hit by

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Flanking Cutler to his left and right were sophomore Zen Michalski at left tackle, redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola at left guard, fifth-year senior Enokk Vimahi at right guard and true freshman Luke Montgomery at right tackle. It was not Montgomery's first appearance of the day, however. He was in as an extra blocker on the first-quarter play in which McCord was strip-sacked by Western Kentucky defensive lineman Hosea Wheeler.

Ohio State gained a combined 42 yards in two drives with its second-string offensive line on the field, a sequence highlighted by productive rushes of 8 and 9 yards from Miyan Williams and Xavier Johnson, respectively. The Buckeyes' second-to-last drive produced the only turnover for the team in the second half, a Devin Brown interception that was corralled by Wheeler.

## Frye Wants O-Line To Play With Violence

Ohio State's offensive line came into the season with three new starters: junior and San Diego State transfer Josh Simmons, senior Josh Fryar, and Hinzman. Donovan Jackson and Matt Jones returned on the inside at guard but haven't played that much with the incoming starters yet, leading to clear issues through the early portion of the season.

Offensive line coach Justin Frye doesn't believe the mistakes the line has been making are mental, but he thinks they need to be playing more aggressively.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**POINT OF ATTACK** — Ohio State's offensive line — including the likes of right guard Matthew Jones (left) and center Carson Hinzman (right) — is looking to solve problems with violence and aggression.

"We've been saying violent," he said. "If you want to really be a tough guy, then be a tough guy all the time. We've got to play more violent. We can't be lines on a page. We're not making too many mental mistakes, which is a positive, but we have too many point-of-attack mistakes that we have to go with, and you can solve that through aggression and violence."

In the Buckeyes' win over Youngstown State, Simmons and Hinzman each picked up a holding penalty in the first quarter, and Simmons also committed a hands-to-the-face penalty that negated what would have been a 17-yard touchdown run from Henderson. Simmons was the most flagged player on the offensive line last season with the Aztecs.

Day knows the group needs to be better moving forward this season, but he also said he and his staff must be able to put the unit in the right situations to thrive in their respective roles.

"The more you put on their plate or the more you put in their backpack, they're carrying more and they can't play as fast," Frye said on Sept. 13. "So that's our job as coaches saying, 'How do we schematically put them in the right situations to go give them those reps?' And then how do you intensify those reps?"

The Buckeye front five showed signs of that wanted aggression against Western Kentucky, helping the offense generate 204 total rushing yards and limiting the Hilltoppers' defense to just one sack, a promising sign for Day and his staff as they move toward the more difficult portion of their schedule.

## ESPN's "College GameDay" Headed To South Bend

Ohio State will travel to South Bend, Ind. to face off against No. 9 Notre Dame under the lights on Sept. 23, and it has officially been announced that ESPN's "College GameDay" will be in attendance

for the matchup. The game will be aired on NBC at 7:30 p.m.

This will mark Ohio State's 57th appearance on the 13-time Emmy Award-winning pregame show, which is the most all-time. The Buckeyes will be looking for their 39th win while featured on the program, which leads every other team.

Lee Corso, Rece Davis, Desmond Howard, former Ohio State quarterback Kirk Herbstreit and others will be on hand for what is another top-10 clash between the two historic programs, a matchup which the Buckeyes have gotten the better of in recent years. Last year's season opener was a 21-10 win for Ohio State over Notre Dame in Columbus, making it their fifth straight win over the program.

"College GameDay" was also in attendance last season, with Corso donning Brutus Buckeye's headgear for the 39th time in his 27 years as GameDay's eccentric game picker. The Buckeyes were also Corso's first-ever headgear selection on Oct. 5, 1996, when he correctly chose Ohio State over Penn State in a 38-7 victory for the Buckeyes.

"He thought I might have some kind of in to try and get Brutus' headgear," Herbstreit said during the Sept. 16 broadcast, which honored Corso for his 400th headgear selection. "I'm telling you, it took three or four different back-and-forths until finally they green-lighted Brutus."

"I'll never forget," Herbstreit added in a pre-recorded program. "Sitting there, and I'm looking over at him, and it's the craziest thing to see Brutus, his head, on Lee Corso, with a tie on and a suit."

The Buckeyes' prime-time game with Notre Dame will mark just the eighth time the two teams have faced off. The last time the Fighting Irish came out of this matchup on top was in the 1936 season when they bested the Buckeyes in what was a low-scoring 7-2 affair in South Bend.

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If you have wanted to show your support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program but are unable to participate at the Scarlet, Elite or Elite-Plus level, now is the time to sign up at the Brutus level for just \$50. Brutus level VIPs are recognized in BSB twice a year, and we will be running the complete list of Brutus VIPs during football season. VIP donors help Buckeye Sports Bulletin stay alive and vibrant.

"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, what we have done the previous 42 years and what we plan to do in the future."

A VIP upgrade can easily pay for itself each year with special VIP discounts and perks.

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 card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant.

As mentioned, 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.

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### Former OSU LB Lee Charged With Cocaine Possession

Former Ohio State and NFL linebacker Darron Lee's legal troubles continue to escalate, as he now faces a felony drug possession charge filed on Sept. 6, according to court records.

The 28-year-old Lee was reportedly accused of possessing two bags of white powder – which was later determined in a laboratory to be cocaine – on April 3, the same day authorities arrested him on suspicion of domestic violence at a home in Dublin, Ohio.

That day, Dublin police were called to the home after Lee was accused of punching a female relative multiple times in the head. Authorities arrested Lee later on April 3. While Dublin police investigated the alleged crime, Lee's name also circulated involving a separate domestic violence incident that occurred in the same home on Oct. 17, 2022. After being arrested, he remained in Franklin Coun-

ty jail until he posted a \$20,000 bond in each case.

That incident, according to court records, involved the mother of Lee's child. In response to these two events, police ordered Lee to keep his distance from both the female relative and the mother of his child.

Lee's domestic violence trial was slated for June, but he did not appear in court. This led Judge James Green to issue arrest warrants for the former linebacker, which remain pending. Lee – who currently resides in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. – is scheduled to appear in court for his drug possession charge on Sept. 21.

Court records indicate a request for Lee to be screened for possible acceptance into a court drug program, which will provide him with counseling and other resources. If Lee completes the program, the drug possession charge can be removed from his criminal record.

Lee, a New Albany, Ohio, native,

played for Ohio State from 2013-2015, totaling 146 tackles, 11 sacks and three interceptions. He played a significant role in the Buckeyes' most recent national championship season in 2014, logging eight tackles and a pass deflection in the team's 42-20 victory over Oregon in the College Football Playoff National Championship.

Lee was then drafted by the New York Jets with the 20th overall pick in the 2016 NFL draft, where he endured a rocky three-year tenure that was capped by him receiving a four-game suspension at the end of the 2018 season for violating the

NFL's substance abuse policy. He finished his career with the Kansas City Chiefs (2019) and Buffalo Bills (2020), recording just 32 tackles in 18 games with those teams.

### Ferlmann, Jones Shed Black Stripes

A pair of Ohio State players became "official" members of the team on Sept. 14, when long snapper John Ferlmann and safety Brenten Jones each lost their black stripes.

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## Continued From Page 7

Ferlmann arrived at Ohio State this offseason out of Arizona State and immediately claimed the Buckeyes' starting long snapper job, and he has made a strong impression on his teammates and coaches in his short time on campus.

"He's done a great job coming in and working really hard," special teams coordinator Parker Fleming said during fall camp. "That's the No. 1 job you've got to do is work, and he has. (He's) 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."

Jones joined the team last offseason as a walk-on out of Steubenville, Ohio. He and Ferlmann are the 26th and 27th players to have their black stripes removed since the end of last season, and they are the first to lose their black stripes since the current season began.

### Four Buckeyes Earn YSU Player Of The Game Honors

Ohio State named four Players of the Game for the team's win over Youngstown State, including Egbuka on offense, linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and Burke on defense and linebacker Cody Simon on special teams.

Egbuka was named Player of the Game for the offense after hauling in five receptions for 94 yards and a touchdown. He was joined on an impressive day for the wide receivers by Harrison, who had seven receptions for 160 yards and two touchdowns.

On defense, Eichenberg led the way with six tackles and notched one of the team's two sacks, with the other going to defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. Burke earned Player of the Game status after hauling in just his second career interception, the first for the cornerback room since 2021, and adding an additional tackle.

Simon was primarily used on special teams against the Penguins, but he did

enter the game at linebacker toward the end of the third quarter. Playing alongside sophomore C.J. Hicks, Simon recorded four tackles on the day, including three in the final period.

### B1G Admits Missed Call On Williams' TD Run

The Big Ten Conference acknowledged that the league's officials called an erroneous holding penalty on running back Chip Trayanum late in the fourth quarter of Ohio State's victory over Youngstown State, a missed call that nullified a 4-yard touchdown run by Williams with 6:51 remaining in the contest, which could have extended the Buckeyes' lead to 42-7.

According to Day, league officials told him after the game that the penalty should not have been called. Trayanum was seen delivering what seemed to be a clean block on defensive back Tyjon Jones, which allowed Williams to bounce to the outside for what seemed like the Buckeyes' sixth touchdown score.

"I got feedback that that penalty was not a hold," Day said on Sept. 12.

This is not the first time this season that Day was notified of a missed call that hindered his team. Big Ten officials also told Day that Harrison should not have been whistled for an illegal touching foul late in the third quarter of Ohio State's 23-3 victory over Indiana on Sept. 2 – a mistake that negated a 24-yard score, though Williams found the end zone three plays later.

Despite the string of missed calls through the first three weeks of the season, Day said that his team must stay focused on only what it can control and not dwell on the calls that may negatively impact them. This is a mentality that paid off for the Buckeyes in their matchup against Western Kentucky, where they came away with a dominating victory.

"It's part of the game," Day said. "We'll worry about just getting our hands tighter and inside and doing a better job on third down."

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1983

No, we're not talking about Eldon Miller's basketball team when we say that the Buckeyes were employing a three-guard offense.

That had been the case the past several years for Miller's wintertime Buckeyes, but this was a different season and a different sport we're talking of now – football.

Coach Earle Bruce, overseer of the largest offensive line in Buckeye football history, was three-deep at both the guard and tackle positions, thus the luxury of rotating players at those positions. One of those players in Bruce's rotation scheme was 6-6, 260-pound junior guard Jim Lachey, a native of tiny St. Henry in Mercer County, Ohio.

"Right now, we're basically using three guards," said Lachey of the offensive line that helped OSU to two big wins (Oregon and Oklahoma) in its first two outings. "There's a lot of competition."

"The way the coaches explained it to us was that we had three starters. Both junior Kirk Loudermilk (6-3, 250) and I can play both sides (right and left guard), and they are keeping junior Scott Zalenski (6-3, 258) on the right side."

### 35 Years Ago — 1988

Greg Frey walked slowly out of the Ohio State locker room and placed a cold can of Coke on a railing. The can promptly fell to the floor and rolled away.

Frey simply shook his head and muttered, "It's been that kind of night."

Exactly one week after his successful college debut as starting quarterback for the Buckeyes, Frey suffered through a nightmarish game when the University of Pittsburgh hounded him mercilessly during a 42-10 rout of visiting OSU on Sept. 17.

"We just didn't play very well. That's all," said the sophomore from Cincinnati St. Xavier. "They didn't do anything that confused us. Pitt is a blitzing team, and we expected them to blitz. We just didn't handle it as well as we should have."

### 30 Years Ago — 1993

It took Butler By'not'e exactly 10 seconds to take a kickoff 89 yards for a touchdown, and just about that long for Ohio State to exert its dominance over Pitt on Sept. 18.

The kickoff return on the game's opening play was one of four touchdowns the Buckeyes scored in the first quarter as they floated to a 63-28 victory over the hopelessly outmanned Panthers.

"We wanted to come out and establish ourselves early," said OSU sophomore quarterback Bobby Hoying. "Obviously, Butler's kickoff return did that. We wanted to put Pitt away as early as we could. I think we accomplished that pretty well."

### 25 Years Ago — 1998

Coach John Cooper went on the offensive in the week leading up to the Toledo game on Sept. 12 with some of the things he felt OSU needed to address. It lingered as athletic director Andy Geiger responded to some of Cooper's suggestions.

Cooper discussed how the university had plans for an academic Success Center, but that project had lagged, and it had been shoved behind higher-profile projects.

"We've got a new baseball stadium, a brand-new arena, they're renovating the stadium, and we've got a hole in the

ground for academics," Cooper said. "I'm not talking behind anyone's back now. And we've been talking about this since John Cooper's been the head coach."

Cooper also stumped for a special wing at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center where players could get academic help before or after practice. Geiger bristled at the suggestion to "partition" athletes off from the student body any more than they already were.

"We could have the dorms and the dining halls and the classrooms and the study hall all at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center," Geiger told The Associated Press. "We could be the University of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center football team."

### 20 Years Ago — 2003

After not playing a single overtime game in the first six seasons after the NCAA decided to install the present tie-breaking format, Ohio State had suddenly become quite comfortable going the extra mile for a victory.

Ohio State first dipped its toe into the overtime pool at Illinois in 2002, and it took just one extra session to defeat the Illini, 23-16. Just two games later, the Buckeyes went to double overtimes before ending the University of Miami's 34-game winning streak with a 31-24 victory in the Fiesta Bowl that topped off the national championship.

On Sept. 13, OSU finally brought its overtime show home for the first time and had to go three additional periods before outlasting North Carolina State by a 44-38 score.

"I think there is a comfort level in our ability and our confidence when we get in these situations," said OSU quarterback Craig Krenzel. "We have been in that position so many times now that we feel like we're comfortable with it."

### 15 Years Ago — 2008

As one of several gameday rituals in the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the University of Southern California doesn't light the stadium's Olympic torch until the beginning of the fourth quarter. By then, Ohio State had long since been toast.

Hoping to erase memories of poor performances in the last two BCS National Championship Games, the Buckeyes instead made it a stumbling three-peat Sept. 13 by absorbing a 35-3 whupping at the hands of the No. 1-ranked Trojans.

After the game, the Olympic torch had been extinguished, but some of the OSU players were still smoldering. On a team in which most players locked most of their innermost thoughts safely away from the media, senior offensive tackle Alex Boone bared his soul for anyone who would listen.

"I'm pissed," Boone said. "Extremely pissed off. I don't know what else to say. You go out there and play as hard as you can ... and then this is what happened?"

"I feel like this is the national championship game all over again. Stupid penalties, stupid mistakes – roughing the passer, holding, offsides, personal fouls. Jesus, what the hell is the matter with us? We need to pull our head out of our a--"

### 10 Years Ago — 2013

Kenny Guiton put up career numbers for the second week in a row, leading an Ohio State offensive juggernaut to 608 total yards in the first start of his college career and engineering a 52-34 victory Sept. 14 over Pac-12 rival California in the Buckeyes'

first nonconference road game of the Urban Meyer era.

Forced into battle because starter Braxton Miller was still nursing a ligament injury in his left knee, Guiton played as if he were the team's Heisman Trophy candidate, completing 21 passes in 32 attempts for 276 yards and four touchdowns while adding another 92 rushing yards. All of those figures represented career-high numbers, and his 368 yards of total offense tied him for the sixth-highest single-game figure in program history.

Later, when asked if he was blown away by those numbers, offensive coordinator Tom Herman replied, "No, I wasn't blown away at all. I see that every day. That guy is the best in the business at what he does, and when I brought him up in front of the team after the game – Coach Meyer has us do that after every game with guys who stood out and played well – I caught myself getting choked up because his story still touches me. I don't know why that gets to me because it's pretty normal now."

### Five Years Ago — 2018

Forty-six days. One-thousand-one-hundred-and-four hours. One-hundred-and-sixty-nine points scored; 62 points allowed. Eleven touchdown passes for quarterback Dwayne Haskins.

There were a lot of ways to quantify Ryan Day's time as Ohio State's acting head coach. He took charge in place of Meyer on Aug. 1, leading the Buckeyes throughout fall camp. Then, on Aug. 22, Day found out that he'd be the top dog in Columbus for a few more weeks – including the first three games of Ohio State's 2018 season.

But for all the numbers associated with his time keeping Meyer's seat warm – which came to an end Sept. 15 – Day was worried about only one number after fourth-ranked Ohio State came from behind to beat No. 15 TCU, 40-28, at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas: three.

"Our goal was to get to 3-0 so that when Coach got back, he had a team that was 3-0," Day said after Ohio State toppled the Horned Frogs. "That goal is accomplished, but we have a lot ahead of us."

### One Year Ago — 2022

After the Buckeyes got the ball back with 8:43 remaining in the game while holding a 70-21 advantage on Sept. 17 over Toledo, Ohio State gave the first two carries of the drive to walk-on freshman running back T.C. Caffey, a native of Hubbard, Ohio, who had lost his black stripe earlier in the week.

Caffey's first carry went for just 1 yard, and his second carry went backward for a 5-yard loss. Facing a third-and-14 in the dwindling contest, the Buckeyes again handed it off to Caffey, who was met after just 3 yards by several Toledo defenders.

The play dragged on for several moments, though, before Caffey burst from the pile, escaping from the Toledo defense and seeing daylight ahead. He broke outside the numbers near the Toledo 40-yard line and shook off a defender without breaking stride, and then he made one more defender miss before taking the ball into the end zone for his first career touchdown, a 49-yard score, to give the game the 77-21 final.

"It was crazy," running back Dallan Hayden said. "I told him I thought he might mess around and make the SportsCenter top 10. That was awesome. I was happy for him."



# Big Second Quarter Leads To 63-10 Rout

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Kyle McCord justified his officially being named the starter by throwing three first-half touchdowns as No. 6 Ohio State exploded for 35 second-quarter points for a 63-10 win against Western Kentucky in Ohio Stadium on Sept. 16.

After head coach Ryan Day tabbed him as the permanent starter over Devin Brown on Sept. 12, McCord was confident and poised – except for losing a fumble on a strip-sack. But he was undeterred, and his later 75-yard touchdown to Marvin Harrison Jr. gave the Buckeyes (3-0) a 21-10 lead and quashed any hopes of the Hilltoppers (2-1) securing an upset as the score would reach 42-10 at the half.

McCord was 19 of 23 passing for 318 yards and his three scores while Harrison finished with five catches for 126 yards and a score, with Emeka Egbuka grabbing the other touchdowns before 100,217 fans on a 76 degree afternoon.

## Big Plays Key Start

Ohio State took a 7-0 lead on the first drive of the game with TreVeyon Henderson rushing around the left edge for a 21-yard score at the 11:32 mark to finish an eight-play drive of 75 yards in 3:20.

The Buckeyes won the toss and elected to receive, a decision Day has attributed to the NCAA's new clock rules limiting Ohio State's possessions. Xavier Johnson returned the kickoff 24 yards to the 25, and McCord opened with a 16-yard pass to Harrison. Two plays later, Egbuka took a swing pass and turned it into a 21-yard gain to the WKU 33.

On fourth-and-5 from the 28, McCord went to Egbuka again for 7 yards, and Henderson breached the end zone on the next play. McCord was 4 for 5 for 43 yards, and Henderson ran for 32 yards on three rushes.

WKU's first drive stalled at the Ohio State 48, 2 yards shy of moving the chains when Austin Reed's fourth-down pass was incomplete. Later, on an Ohio State first down from the Hilltoppers' 41, McCord was sacked by defensive tackle Hosea Wheeler, and defensive end Deante McCray recovered the resulting fumble at the Western Kentucky 44.

Reed completed a third-down pass of 17 yards to Malachi Corley to the Ohio State 39 followed by an 11-yard reception for River Helms.

Western Kentucky's possession fizzled on a costly unsportsmanlike conduct by former Ohio State receiver Blue Smith. On fourth-and-2 from the 20, Reed used a delayed keeper to reach the 16 and pick up the first, but the penalty placed the ball on the 31, and the Hilltoppers settled for a 43-yard field goal by Lucas Carneiro with 1:07 left in the quarter for a 7-3 score. WKU used 11 plays and ran 4:32 off the clock.

Henderson extended the lead to 14-3 at 10:53 of the second quarter, buoyed by his 27-yard catch-and-run to the WKU 32. On the next play, Harrison took the pitch and ran 29 yards to the 3, but a hold on Egbuka moved the ball back to the 35.

On third-and-10, Harrison made a catch for 18 yards. Chip Trayanum rushed for 3 yards and Henderson carried for 4 yards



SONNY BROCKWAY

**2K TRE — Ohio State running back TreVeyon Henderson surpassed the 2,000-yard mark for his career against Western Kentucky, finishing with 88 yards on 13 carries.**

before his jaunt into the end zone. The drive went 82 yards in 12 plays using 5:07.

Western Kentucky responded to make it 14-10, aided by a pass interference on Jordan Hancock to the WKU 42. Corley made a catch along the left sideline for 34 yards to the OSU 24. Two plays later, Davion Ervin-Poindexter rushed for 18 yards to the 6 where his fumble forced by safety Lathan Ransom was recovered by WKU offensive lineman Wes Dorsey.

Needing 2 yards for a score on third down, Corley stepped back from the line, caught the ball and pushed across the line with 8:10 left in the half to complete the 75-yard, seven-play, 2:43 drive.

Ohio State needed just 10 seconds to up the lead to 21-10 because on the first play of the next drive, McCord connected with Harrison for a 75-yard score, career longs for both.

After WKU failed on a fourth-down pass from its own 40, the Buckeyes needed just seven seconds, the time it took Trayanum to race over left tackle for the touchdown with 4:13 left for a 28-10 advantage. On the Hilltoppers' next possession, Smith made a catch for 21 yards to the WKU 48, but he was leveled by Hancock, fumbling the ball away to Davison Igbinosun.

Henderson ran for 6, Cade Stover's catch went for 20 yards to the Buckeye 22 and Henderson rushed for 7 yards before Egbuka's 15-yard reception made it 35-10 with 1:55 left in the half. The series was four plays and 48 yards in 1:25.

Western Kentucky gifted the Buckeyes field position again after failing to convert a fourth-and-10 from the Ohio State 42 with 28 seconds left, and they took advantage when Egbuka was open in the left corner for a 14-yard pass from McCord with eight seconds remaining to extend the lead to 42-10.

"It's chalked up to execution and just doing it time and time again on Tuesday practice and Wednesday practice," Egbuka said. "Western Kentucky, they were bringing a lot

of heat and bringing a lot of pressure today, trying to get those sacks, but when you do that you leave caveats in the defense, so I just found one of those holes and was able to score."

McCord scrambled out of bounds for 4 yards then spotted Stover across the middle, and he did the rest for a 40-yard gain to the 14 to set up the 35-point quarter.

The last time Ohio State scored at least five touchdowns in a quarter was Sept. 21, 2019, in a 76-5 win over Miami (Ohio). The Buckeyes had six touchdowns in that second frame, including four thrown by Justin Fields to K.J. Hill, Binjimen Victor and a pair to Chris Olave, while Fields ran in the other two.

McCord was 13 for 15 for 271 yards, three touchdowns and a fumble in the first half.

## Second-Half Happenings

The defense recorded a score to make it 49-10 at 4:38 of the third quarter when Denzel Burke forced a fumble by Ervin-Poindexter, whose offense was backed up to its own 5. It tumbled into the WKU end zone, and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams pounced on it.

After an interception by linebacker Steele Chambers at the OSU 45, Brown entered and guided the Buckeyes 55 yards in 3:23 and seven plays. Freshman Carnell Tate, who earlier had a 12-yard catch, made it 56-10 with 12:37 to play in the game with a 28-yard reception.

A 58-yard pick-six by Jermaine Mathews Jr. off backup Bronson Barron with 5:26 to go was the final score.

The last series started for Ohio State at its 36 with 3:12 to play. Five rushes later, the game ended on a 3-yarder by Evan Pryor to the WKU 39.

"I think this was probably our most complete game as an offense," McCord said. "We're trying to continue to take strides. I felt like we ran the ball really well. We had success passing the ball, and so it's definitely a good confidence boost going into obviously a big test next week (against Notre Dame). It's all about how we can take that step from Week 3 to Week 4 and continue to get better."

## Notes

Brown was 3 for 4 for 40 yards and the score. ... Henderson gained 88 yards on 13 carries, and Trayanum had 56 yards on five totes. ... Egbuka's four catches were for 57 yards and the two scores. ... Reed was 21 of 37 for 207 yards, a touchdown and an interception. ... Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg had a game-high 10 tackles (nine solo). ... The Buckeyes had 562 total yards (358 passing, 204 rushing) on 60 plays. WKU's 284 yards (204 passing, 80 rushing) came on 72 plays.

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# Buckeyes Show Resolve Against Hilltoppers

Continued From Page 1

inside St. John Arena, Day made a bold proclamation for those in attendance.

"When we come to Skull Session, we come to recognize the best damn fans and the best damn band in the nation," he said. "But today, we've also come to let you know that this team is about to take the next step. We have to take the next step. We're going to turn everything up."

He felt that a big game would be in store for Ohio State based on how the team practiced in the leadup to Western Kentucky, knowing they would need to begin building momentum with a significant challenge approaching the next week at Notre Dame.

"We had a few people come to practice and they said, 'Man, that was as physical a practice as I've seen in a long time.'" Day said. "These guys like to get challenged, and we pushed them hard this week, so that was a good sign that they responded."

That dominant performance began immediately in response to Western Kentucky's touchdown to make it 14-10 with 8:10 left in the second quarter, with Ohio State coming back with a 75-yard touchdown pass from McCord to Harrison on the first play of the next drive.

"I thought I responded well," McCord said. "The strip-sack was my fault. I felt like they brought pressure, and our offensive line did a good job of giving me



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BIG RESPONSE —** After losing a fumble that later led to a Western Kentucky field goal, quarterback Kyle McCord responded by leading Ohio State on five consecutive scoring drives to close the first half.

enough time. I just have to make better decisions. I think after that we responded well.

"The guys around me were just lifting me up and told me, 'You just have to keep going, keep pressing.' And I thought we did that. I followed it up and put some points on the board, so that was good. It was a good way to respond."

The Buckeyes went on to score touchdowns on each of their next three drives, using just nine plays and a combined 1:52 off the clock over those drives to blow the game wide open, suddenly leading 42-10 going into the locker room. The second-quarter scoring output tied their highest-scoring game of the season – just 35 points against Youngstown State – and it's something the team has been waiting to unleash.

"I feel like we've always had that in the tank, and it just comes down to effort and execution," said wide receiver Emeke Egbuka, who finished with four receptions for 57 yards and two touchdowns. "When we don't put points on the board and don't score touchdowns, it's probably something we did. It's not something that the defense did. It's a lack of execution on our part because we believe we have the best offense and the best players in the country."

It was the most complete performance

yet for Ohio State's offense, mostly due to some of the previously mentioned stars. Henderson finished with 88 yards and two scores on 13 carries – surpassing 2,000 career yards in the process – while McCord had an efficient outing, completing 19 of 23 passes for 318 yards and three touchdowns, with Harrison collecting five of those receptions for 126 yards and the career-long 75-yard score. Like Day, McCord attributed the big day for the offense to a good week of practice, with a level of preparation ahead of facing the Hilltoppers that was not present through the first two weeks of the season.

"I know as an offense we felt like there were times where we looked really good, I think, in Week 1 and Week 2, and then there were times where we kind of spun our tires," he said. "And we knew if we went out and we could put together a complete game, it would look really, really good. If we're able to run the ball well, if we were able to pass the ball well, we'd be one of the best offenses, if not the best offense in America."

"I think we realized that the level of preparation in practice wasn't at the point where it needed to be early on in the season. Coach Day really harped on that, and

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the guys responded for sure. I think we had a really good week of practice, and that showed today.”

It was an important time for the offense to start playing like one of the best in the country, as with the first three games of the season in the rearview, Ohio State's focus now shifts to one of the team's toughest tests of the season, set to travel to No. 9 Notre Dame on Sept. 23 in what is one of the most anticipated matchups of the college football season.

The Fighting Irish are off to a 4-0 start this season, earning comfortable wins against their first four opponents – Navy, Tennessee State, NC State and Central Michigan – and looking like more of a well-rounded squad than the one that visited Columbus last season. With the Buckeyes now heading into hostile territory, a dominant win over Western Kentucky helped to build confidence on both sides of the ball for Ohio State.

“I think the biggest thing now is using it, but understanding that it's a different team we're going against,” McCord said. “They have a lot of really good players, they're well-coached, it's going to be an away game in a tough environment. We came out here today and handled our business, but it's going to take even more next week. I think everybody's going to be on a little bit of an edge this week, which is good.”

Day and his players claimed that the team was not looking ahead of Western Kentucky, with preparation for the Fighting Irish beginning immediately after the clock hit all zeroes against the Hilltoppers. But with focus officially shifting toward Notre Dame, everyone is looking forward to a big test in South Bend after tuning up the band to begin the season.

“We love big games,” Egbuka said. “We love matchup games. That's why you come to Ohio State is to play Notre Dame in South Bend. We've already started on them. We weren't looking past Western Kentucky by any means, but this one's a big game. We're going to celebrate this

win, but we're all laser focused and we're ready to play them.”

### Defensive Line Makes Presence Known

An area of improvement for the team was on the defensive line, where the unit was able to consistently pressure Reed and limit the rushing attack to just 80 rushing yards on 33 attempts, good for only 2.4 yards per carry.

The defensive line – and the offensive line, for that matter – have both received some criticism for the lack of push up front, with Larry Johnson's unit struggling to notch sacks through the first two games. Much of that could be explained by the rush-heavy and short-pass offenses faced in Indiana and Youngstown State, but facing an opponent that likes to air things out such as Western Kentucky, the unit finally got a chance to exert some of its will.

“I thought there was a point where they really put their hands in the dirt and

started coming hard,” Day said. “I thought they were into it. I liked their competitiveness. I think they're going to watch it and see some things they can improve on.

“(Reed) does get the ball out quick, too. It wasn't like he was hanging on to the ball a lot. There were a lot of things there to go on and a lot to learn from, but just their overall attitude was really good. They were into it. I felt them out there today, which is a good sign.”

Ohio State had sacks in previous games from tackles Mike Hall Jr. and Hero Kanu – as well as one for Williams in the second quarter against WKU – but the first sack courtesy of a defensive end this season came in the fourth quarter from Mitchell Melton. He was lined up at the Jack, however, leaving the Buckeyes still searching for a sack from a true end with his hand in the dirt like J.T. Tuimolou or Jack Sawyer.

But the overall outing provided some proof of concept for the defensive line

that totaled 5½ tackles for loss against the Hilltoppers but had struggled to make an impact in the box score against Indiana and Youngstown State. And with one big game under their belts, the group is looking to continue making a significant impact for the defense.

“You watch the film and you try to figure out what is real and what isn't,” Day said. “They're anxious. They want to get it more than anybody. What you can't do is then abort your technique or anything like that. You have to make sure that you're continuing to do what you do because it will happen. There will be plenty of opportunities for that.

“I think there will be a lot to learn from here because we haven't really played against a team that maybe throws as much as we've seen previously. We'll get on the film and figure it out, but I think the week of work that they had will be important to replicate this week going into Notre Dame.”

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# McCord Marvels After Earning Starting Job

Kyle McCord's first two series as Ohio State's full-time starter served as a microcosm of the Buckeyes' still-young season.

With the junior gunslinger no longer looking over his shoulder at the upstart redshirt freshman Devin Brown, McCord orchestrated an efficient eight-play, 75-yard touchdown drive to start the Buckeyes' Week 3 game against Western Kentucky on Sept. 16, comfortably connecting on four of his five passes to three different pass catchers.

## GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

Just four offensive plays later, he produced a much different outcome, as his decision to stay in the pocket and stare down Marvin Harrison Jr. caused him to get strip-sacked by Hilltoppers defensive tackle Hosea Wheeler, a costly turnover that stalled the Buckeyes' second drive and temporarily transferred the momentum to their Conference USA opponent.

While some quarterbacks may have faltered after an early-game blunder, McCord instead showed his team exactly why they anointed him as the starter. Following the fumble, the signal caller led his offense to five consecutive touchdown drives, with the final four of the first half taking just nine plays and 2:02 of game action, a blazing string of possessions that was bookended by his 75-yard strike to Harrison – which extended the lead to 21-10 – and his 14-yard connection with Emeka Egbuka at the end of the half which put the game out of reach, 42-10.

McCord's response to the turnover impressed the man who declared him the starter earlier that week. Head coach Ryan Day saw it as not only a strong display of resilience, but a prime example of his ability to command a huddle and take over a game.

"You saw Kyle respond after the turnover,"

## Game Analysis

### What Worked Well

There was some concern over whether the offense wouldn't be as good this season as it has been the past few years with Heisman finalists such as C.J. Stroud, Justin Fields and Dwayne Haskins. But Kyle McCord came out and showed that the high-powered offense fans are used to can still show up. The offense gained 562 total yards, with McCord throwing for 318 yards and three touchdowns. Marvin Harrison Jr. was his leading receiver for the second straight week, this time with five receptions for 126 yards and a long touchdown. TreVeyon Henderson showed up better than he has been this year as well, with 13 carries for 88 yards and two touchdowns. The offense was firing on all cylinders, and after McCord was named the starting quarterback earlier in the week, he was able to find a rhythm. After a slow start and an early fumble, he came back looking like his predecessors did in a Buckeye uniform. What McCord and the rest of the offense showed against Indiana and Youngstown State wasn't going to be good enough going into tougher games like Notre Dame, but he eased the minds of those worried about his ability to generate explosive plays for Ohio State.

### What Didn't Work

Ohio State's defense has been among the best in the country over the first three games of the season, but against Western Kentucky, that sometimes led to the Silver Bullets playing with too much aggressiveness. That worked out several times in the game, especially later

on when they were creating turnovers, but early on that led to receivers getting by the secondary and explosive plays happening against them. The final score was 63-10, so there were not many negatives to highlight, but the Hilltoppers were able to march down the field early in the game because a handful of defenders were trying to do too much early on. A few tackles were missed, and a few throws that could have been defended were caught because of the overaggressiveness. Plays like that were not coming back to hurt them against Western Kentucky, but against better competition, it could be a different story.

### Play Of The Game

Harrison had a career-long reception against Youngstown State, going 71 yards for a score, but he apparently didn't think that was long enough and beat it on the first play of Ohio State's fourth drive against Western Kentucky with a 75-yard touchdown. As the lone receiver on the right side of the field, he went deep and beat defensive back Rome Weber and had no problem after the catch jogging his way into the end zone, giving him his fourth catch of the day and 118 yards before the half. The offense had been slow up to that point, and it came immediately after WKU's Austin Reed and Malachi Corley connected for a touchdown on a wide receiver screen to bring the game within four points. Harrison's 75-yard score lit a fire under the team, which closed on a 49-0 run in the win.

— Greg Wilson

Day said. "That was big. Because that's one of those things you want to watch in a quarterback, is how are they going to respond? Are they going to go into their shell or just keep pushing forward? And he was aggressive on the big touchdown, and then we were able to flip the scoreboard there. We had maybe 35 points there.

"And then also the two-minute drill. I thought about taking a knee, but I said, 'No, we need to find out what he can do in a two-minute drill,' and he pushed it down the field and it was good to see that, because that's going to be something we're going to have to do to win games. He also did it in the Indiana

game at the end of the first half as well, so good signs there."

McCord – who completed 19 of his 23 pass attempts for 318 passing yards and three touchdowns – attributes his quick response in the second quarter to his ability to remain levelheaded through all types of adversity, a trait that has helped guide him through a tight quarterback competition this offseason.

"I think in the moment, and when you're in the game, the biggest thing is just to have that next play mentality and brush it clean and forget about it and focus on the next drive," he said. "But I'll go back and watch the film and obviously will have to grow from that, have to learn from that. Because the defense did a really good job of getting a fourth-down stop so we could get the ball at midfield. And on offense, we didn't score and it's my fault. I think that's one thing that I have to grow upon and just figure out how we can eliminate plays like that."

This poise is something that his teammates have taken notice of so far this season, especially his former freshman-year roommate Egbuka. The third-year wideout, who caught four catches for 57 yards and two touchdowns against the Hilltoppers, said his quarterback possesses an infectious level of focus, through both good moments and bad.

"Kyle would never show it. He doesn't necessarily wear his emotions on his sleeve," Egbuka said. "He does get fired up before games, which is good to see having leadership at the quarterback position, but he doesn't let too many things affect him whether it's outside noise or stuff going on internally. I feel like he goes about his business the same way he does every day. Very poised, very businesslike. He handles his stuff. He was on his P's and Q's today."

While his teammates and coaches have commended his pro-like – and sometimes stoic – maturity, McCord admitted that the

news of him being named the full-time starter served as a relief for the third-year quarterback, as it showed him that he has earned the full trust of Day and his staff moving forward this season.

"I think that's definitely a little bit of a confidence boost," McCord said. "When (Day) gives you the official nod that you're the guy, whether it was subconscious or not, I really didn't think of it that way, but I felt just a little more confident. That could be him naming me the starter or that could be just the more reps and experience and plays I get under my belt.

"But whatever it is, I felt like I took a step in the right direction. But I just have to continue to be on my P's and Q's during the week, and continue to prepare. Obviously we have a big one on Saturday (at Notre Dame), so I'm continuing to get better for that."

### Secondary Meets First Challenge Against WKU

After two games against run-happy offenses, the Buckeyes secondary faced its stiffest challenge yet in Week 3, welcoming Western Kentucky quarterback Austin Reed and his high-flying offense to Ohio Stadium.

With all eyes fixed on how defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unit would perform, they largely delivered, holding Reed to just 207 yards passing – his lowest mark since throwing for only 128 yards in a 20-17 win over UAB on Oct. 21, 2022 – along with a single touchdown in Ohio State's 63-10 blowout victory over the Hilltoppers.

"I think we did really well," cornerback Jordan Hancock said. "They have a really dynamic receiver (Malachi Corley). He's going to be a high draft pick next year, so I feel like we did a great job. That quarterback is really good. They had some explosive plays to start the game, but we tightened up."

Ohio State's defense showed some cracks



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## OHIO STATE VS. WESTERN KENTUCKY

early in the first half, allowing the Hilltoppers to score on two of their first three possessions and keep the game in reach. But the script flipped later in the game thanks to a series of forced turnovers.

The turnover parade was sparked by Hancock. With 3:20 remaining in the second period and the Buckeyes holding onto a 28-10 lead, the junior cornerback punched the ball out of wide receiver Blue Smith's hands, negating a 21-yard yard reception and giving another possession to the red-hot Ohio State offense after it was recovered by Davison Igbosun.

From there on, the secondary forced an additional two Western Kentucky turnovers, first a forced fumble by junior cornerback Denzel Burke in the middle of the third quarter, then a late-game interception – the first of his career – by freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr., both of which resulted in a defensive score for the Buckeyes.

This marked the first time an Ohio State defense reached the end zone twice in one game since Sept. 15, 2018, when both DaVon Hamilton and Dre'Mont Jones scored in a 40-28 win over TCU – the first game coached by Day at Ohio State, albeit in an interim capacity.

"In the second half, the turnovers were huge," Day said. "They hung in there when they were getting the stops at the end of the first half and getting the ball back to the offense. They kind of fed off that. We had some really good momentum going there, good passion – a bunch of guys playing fast, violent. There were some really good collisions going on. There was a really good hit by Lathan (Ransom).

"That's what we're looking for. Guys flying sideline to sideline, getting their hands on balls in the secondary. That (WKU) quarterback's very good. He'll rip it and challenge us, so we'll get on the film and figure out the areas that we've got to get better at."

Despite the ball-hawking display from the Silver Bullets, those within the secondary room feel there is still room for improvement. According to Burke, who said his forced fumble was one of his "best ever," his group must still find ways to elevate their game and play a more consistent brand of football before they embark on the tougher part of their schedule, beginning with the trip to No. 9 Notre Dame on Sept. 23.

"I feel like we played well, played solid," Burke said. "It was a good game. I feel like we still have a lot of stuff to clean up. We're trying to play at a high level, and with these games we want to be able to play at a high level so when these matchup games come we're ready. Next week we're going to South Bend. It's a real one."

### Henderson Eclipses 2,000 Career Rushing Yards

TreVeyon Henderson joined an elite list of Ohio State tailbacks late in the Buckeyes' blowout win over Western Kentucky, becoming just the 28th player in program history to rush for 2,000 career rushing yards.

Henderson, who came into Ohio State's Week 3 matchup against the Hilltoppers just 78 rushing yards shy of the milestone, reached the 2,000-yard plateau on his 13th and final carry of the game, bursting up the middle for a 19-yard gain at the 7:55 mark of the third quarter

With this milestone, the Hopewell, Va., native officially joined an exclusive list of Buckeye backs that includes Archie Griffin (5,589), J.K. Dobbins (4,459), Ezekiel Elliott (3,961), Eddie George (3,768) and Tim Spencer (3,553), among others, to eclipse 2,000 yards.

The 19-yard scamper capped off another productive game for the third-year running back, who is poised to regain his All-Big Ten status after a disappointing and injury-riddled sophomore campaign. Henderson led with a game-high 13 carries for 88 rushing yards and two touchdowns and was also featured in the passing game, collecting a 27-yard completion from McCord on the Buckeyes' first drive of the second half.

While it was a big day overall for Ohio State's offense, Henderson's efforts at Ohio Stadium did not go unnoticed. According to Day, his long runs helped spur the Buckeyes' offense and put them in prime position to move the ball down the field with ease throughout the game.

"When we're running the ball the way we were today, that makes it a lot easier," Day said. "That was big. It was big to get some explosive runs, good to move the line of scrimmage."

Henderson, who stands at 2,010 rushing yards, has logged 191 rushing yards on 30 carries (6.4 per attempt) through his first three games of the season. His four total touchdowns also led all Ohio State running backs and receivers.

### Eichenberg Reaches 200 Career Tackles

Henderson was not the only Buckeye to reach a personal milestone. Early in the first

quarter, fifth-year linebacker Tommy Eichenberg corralled Corley to the turf after an 11-yard gain to give the defensive captain his fourth tackle of the game – and the 200th of his career.

Eichenberg, who finished with a team-high 10 tackles and one quarterback hurry against Western Kentucky, has quickly established himself as one of the nation's top linebackers since earning the starting linebacker role last season.

The Cleveland native started his Ohio State career slowly, racking up just 66 tackles in his first three seasons with the program, but he has since dominated at the position, producing a team-leading 120 tackles – the most since Joshua Perry's 124 tackles in 2014 – along with 12 tackles for loss last year. He's on pace to lead the Buckeyes again this season, too, as his 20 total tackles through three games spearheads the team.

Eichenberg's recent performance – along with his quiet yet intense demeanor – allowed him to gain the respect of his teammates, and they have chosen him as captain for the second consecutive season. According to his fellow starting linebacker Steele Chambers, the impact his running mate has made on this program – both in the record books and inside the locker room – is unquantifiable.

"He's huge, man," Chambers said. "What he means to this team, what he means to this defense, you can't really put into words. The work he puts in all offseason, the vocal leader he is to the team, I would say he's the spirit of the team. Without him, it wouldn't be the same."

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# BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 63, Western Kentucky 10

**Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on how quarterback Kyle McCord responded after his first-quarter fumble:** "He's poised. He doesn't really ride the roller coaster, and I think that's one of his strengths. At that point I just kind of stayed away, asked him what he saw, let him know what I saw. Didn't get upset. I just said, 'All right, we've got to come back and go play now. We've got a long game ahead of us.' I was interested to see how he'd respond. I wasn't going to be conservative at that point. I wanted to really push the envelope because we have to turn it up based on where we're going, so he responded and it was good."

**McCord on if he felt better in the game knowing he was the No. 1 quarterback:** "I think it's definitely nice getting the official nod from (Day). But at the same time, the more experience I can get, the more opportunities, the more reps, the better I feel like I'll be. I just had that mindset going into practice this week and attacking it like a game every single day. I feel like we had a really good week of practice on offense, and I think that showed today."

**McCord on the Buckeyes' run of quick touchdowns in the second quarter:** "I think my job as the quarterback for this team is figuring out how I can keep us on schedule and get the ball to our playmakers. And I think we did a really good job with that today. I felt like the offensive line, the running backs did a really good job on first and second down to run the ball, getting us positive plays to start the drive off. And anytime we can get rolling like that, it's a huge boost to the offense. We can play in front of the chains, we can take shots down the field, and it just opens up the entire playbook."

**Day on if he saw what he wanted to see from the offensive line against Western Kentucky:** "I liked the emotion that we saw, for sure. We'll look at the film and see what we've got, but they were challenged. A lot of guys on our team were challenged this week. It was good to see them respond. I think you could see how fired up they were after some of those drives where they felt like they were getting some movement, and that's what we need out of our offensive line."

**Ohio State wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on being a leader for the offense:** "I feel like being a leader was something that I've never shied away from.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FIRST OF MANY — Ohio State freshman wideout Carnell Tate hauled in his first career touchdown reception against Western Kentucky, courtesy of a 28-yarder from redshirt freshman Devin Brown.**

It's something that I did in high school and middle school and all throughout my years playing football. We have a ton of leaders on the offense so it's not just me, but being able to pick up people when they might be down or in low spirits. You need everybody on offense to be able to do that."

**Egbuka on freshman Carnell Tate's first career touchdown:** "I was so excited for him. He's just a dude who works really hard, comes in day in and day out, who's been through tragedy (the loss of his mother). We were all heartbroken when that happened to him. He was there two days later at the facility doing his workouts, practicing. We all had a heavy heart for him, and just to see him make plays and go about his business the way he has with such grace is super inspiring for me."

**Ohio State cornerback Jordan Hancock on his forced fumble and what it was like to see other takeaways after that:** "Just routine plays, just running to the ball, trying to make a play to switch up the whole momentum of the game. I feel

like after I got that first one, everyone was like, 'Free game,' so it was really good to get that takeaway and change the whole momentum of the game."

**Day on defensive tackle Tyleik Williams' fumble recovery:** "(Mickey Marotti) said it looked like he was burrowing like a dog looking for a bone in the ground. He just kind of went through and found it and it was great. But it's funny, we do talk about that, how when you get into those piles, that ball could be anywhere. You've got to get in there and see if you can be the first guy to get it, and that was great. I was a little disappointed that Steele (Chambers) wasn't able to pick that one up and scoop it, but nobody's more disappointed than him, I'm sure. But great effort by Denzel (Burke) coming up and knocking that one out."

**Burke on if he felt Western Kentucky's pass-heavy offense played into the strength of the Buckeye defense:** "I feel like we weren't really tested as a whole on the back end the first two games and I feel like we got tested this game, and that's kind of what we needed going into Week 4 going against Notre Dame. We're trying to bring (Best In America) back and bring the Silver Bullets back and I feel like we're on a roll."

**Western Kentucky head coach Tyson Helton on losing to Ohio State:** "We came here to try to win. We played on the edge. We did all we could do to try to go out there and give ourselves a chance, and good football teams don't allow you to do that."

**Day on the biggest difference between the first two games and Week 3:** "I just think that the style of the game allowed us an opportunity to go play and compete, but make no mistake about it, we were turning it up this week. We know what we're about to get into. We wanted to build momentum going into next week, and everything was turned up in a big way. We've got to get back to work. Notre Dame starts now. Usually we start it on Sunday, but we're starting to prepare tonight."

**Burke on if he's looking forward to the matchup against Notre Dame:** "Yeah, that's been circled on my list since the beginning of the season. We have a couple more games circled up, but this big one – it's going to be a big one – it's going to test us and we're ready."



# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 63, Western Kentucky 10

Sept. 16, 2023 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
WESTERN KENTUCKY	3	7	0	0	10
OHIO STATE	7	35	7	14	63

### First Quarter

OSU - Henderson, 21-yard rush (Fielding kick), 11:32

WKU - Carneiro, 43-yard field goal, 1:07.

### Second Quarter

OSU - Henderson, 7-yard rush (Fielding kick), 10:53.

WKU - Corley, 2-yard pass from Reed (Carneiro kick), 8:10.

OSU - Harrison Jr., 75-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 8:00.

OSU - Trayanum, 40-yard rush (Fielding kick), 4:13.

OSU - Egbuka, 15-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 1:55.

OSU - Egbuka, 14-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 0:08.

### Third Quarter

OSU - T. Williams, 0-yard fumble return (Fielding kick), 4:38.

### Fourth Quarter

OSU - Tate, 28-yard pass from Brown (Fielding kick), 12:37.

OSU - Mathews Jr., 58-yard interception return (Fielding kick), 5:26.

Att. - 100,217

Weather - Cloudy, 76 F

### Team Statistics

	WKU	OSU
First Downs	15	24
Rushing	5	9
Passing	9	15
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	33-80	33-204
Passing Yards	204	358
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	22-39-2	22-27-1
Offensive Plays	72	60
Total Net Yards	284	562
Third Down Efficiency	3-16	5-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	3-6	2-2
Punts-Avg.	4-41.5	2-37.0
Fumbles-Lost	3-2	2-1
Penalties	3-24	5-40
Time of Possession	32:34	27:26

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** - WKU: Sanders 7-26; Ervin-Poindexter 5-22; Stepp 8-19; Reed 7-14; Young 4-8; Corley 1-0; Barroon 1(-)-9. OSU: Henderson 13-88; Trayanum 5-56; M. Williams 5-23; Johnson 2-13; Pryor 3-12; Harrison Jr. 1-7; D. Brown 2-4; McCord 2-1.

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** - WKU: Reed 21-37-1-207-1; Barron 1-2-1(-)-3-0. OSU: McCord 19-23-0-318-3; D. Brown 3-4-1-40-1.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** - WKU: Corley 8-88; Burt Jr. 3-20; Helms 2-41; Smith 2-30; Ervin-Poindexter 2-10; Stepp 2-5; Messer 1-7; Young 1-6; Barron 1(-)-3. OSU: Harrison Jr. 5-126; Stover 5-90; Egbuka 4-57; Tate 2-40; Fleming 2-17; Scott Jr. 2-1; Henderson 1-27; Johnson 1-0.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** - WKU: Ellard 4-41.5-49. OSU: Mirco 2-37.0-37.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** - WKU: None. OSU: Ballard 1-18.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** - WKU: Young 1-16. OSU: Johnson 2-40.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** - WKU: Wheeler 1-0. OSU: Igbinosun 1-0, Williams 1-0.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** - WKU: Wheeler 1-0. OSU: Mathews Jr. 1-58; Chambers 1-0.

**SACKS (No.-Yds.)** - WKU: Wheeler 1-3. OSU: Melton 1-9; T. Williams 1-2.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** - WKU: Wheeler 1-2; Brackenridge 1-1. OSU: Melton 2-11; Burke 1-5; McKenzie 1-3; Abor 1-2; T. Williams 1-2; Chambers 1-1; Ransom 0.5-1; Sawyer 0.5-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** - WKU: Allen 6-2-8; Cooper 4-2-6; Weber 4-1-5; Lynch 3-1-4; Johnson Jr. 3-0-3; Brackenridge 2-1-3; Evans 1-2-3; Hodge 1-2-3; Springer 2-0-2; Stout 2-0-2; Marshall 2-0-2; Williams 1-1-2; Key 1-1-2; Hayward 1-1-2; Loving 0-2-2; Messer 1-0-1; Wheeler 1-0-1; Baker 1-0-1; Smith 1-0-1; Washington 1-0-1; Davis 1-0-1; Patterson 1-0-1; Guidry 0-1-1; Davis Jr. 0-1-1. OSU: Eichenberg 9-1-10; Chambers 4-4-8; T. Williams 2-5-7; Proctor 4-1-5; Igbinosun 3-2-5; Hancock 3-2-5; Simon 1-3-4; Sawyer 1-2-3; Melton 2-0-2; Ransom 1-1-2; McKenzie 1-1-2; Hall Jr. 1-0-1; Jackson Jr. 1-0-1; Burke 1-0-1; Abor 1-0-1; Mathews Jr. 1-0-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Tuimoloau 0-1-1; Hicks 0-1-1; Hartford 0-1-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** - WKU: Corley, Reed, Burt Jr., Ervin-Poindexter, Smith, Horton, Murphy, Dorsey, Goode, Leslie, Helms, Baker, Allen, Stout, Evans, Brackenridge, Johnson Jr., Cooper, Weber, Springer, Loving, Davis, Veltkamp, Thompson, Barron, Williams, Key, Hutchinson, Carneiro, Barry, Marshall, Washington, Audu, Hodge, Davis Jr., Ward, George, Young, Stepp, Guidry, Hayward, Walker, Griffin, Munson, Ellard, Lynch, Naughton, Jackson, Wibberley, Benjamin, Holiday, Moment, Sanders, Cable, Ondelacy, Messer, Capers, Meyers, Fofanah, Patterson, McCray, Wheeler. OSU: Harrison Jr., Egbuka, Henderson, Fleming, M. Jones, McCord, Fryar, Simmons, Jackson, Hinzman, Stover, Igbinosun, Burke, Chambers, Sawyer, Eichenberg, Proctor, Tuimoloau, Hall Jr., Styles, Ransom, T. Williams, Johnson, Inniss, Hicks, Carter, Thurman, Tate, Melton, J. Brown, Trayanum, Pryor, Lewis, Abor, Mathews Jr., Hartford, Carrico, Mirco, M. Williams, Martinez, Simon, B. Jones, D. Brown, Powers, Fielding, Styles Jr., Ferlmann, Gurd, Montgomery, McDonald, Hamilton, Cutler Jr., Michalski, Vimahi, Fitzpatrick, Hancock, Tshabola, James, Rogers, Adolph, Scott Jr., Ballard, McKenzie, Curry, Kanu, Moore, Malone, Jackson Jr.

## Season Statistics

2023 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Sept. 2	(3) at Indiana	W, 23-3	50,050	
Sept. 9	(5) YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	102,897	
Sept. 16	(6) WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	100,217	
Sept. 23	(6) at Notre Dame (9)	7:30 p.m.		
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	TBA		
Oct. 14	at Purdue	TBA		
Oct. 21	PENN STATE (7)	TBA		
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	TBA		
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	TBA		
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	7:30 p.m.		
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA		
Nov. 25	at Michigan (2)	12 p.m.		

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

### Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	69	37
Rushing	23	12
Passing	41	21
Penalty	5	4
Average Per Game/Rush	156.7	83.3
Average Per Game/Pass	318.0	140.3
Total Offense	1424	671
Total Plays	187	185
Average Per Game	474.7	223.7
Average Per Play	7.6	3.6
Penalties-Yards	16-146	20-175
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	5-2
Third Down Efficiency	12-33	15-46
Percentage	36%	33%
Fourth Down Efficiency	6-8	4-10
Percentage	75%	40%
Sacks-Yards	5-33	3-10
Time Of Possession Avg.	28:27	31:33

### Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	28	52	24	17	0	121	40.3
Opponents	10	10	0	0	0	20	6.7

### Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	30	191	6.4	4	30
Chip Trayanum	19	133	7.0	1	40
Miyani Williams	18	73	4.1	2	8
Xavier Johnson	5	25	5.0	0	9
Evan Pryor	3	12	4.0	0	6
Kyle McCord	5	10	2.0	0	8
Devin Brown	9	10	1.1	0	6
Emeka Egbuka	1	9	9.0	0	9
Marvin Harrison Jr.	1	7	7.0	0	7
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Kyle McCord	53	76	69.7	815	6-1	183.2
Devin Brown	11	20	55.0	139	1-1	119.9
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>66.7</b>	<b>954</b>	<b>7-2</b>	<b>170.0</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>55.8</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>93.8</b>

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	14	304	21.7	3	75
Emeka Egbuka	12	167	13.9	3	28
Julian Fleming	11	100	9.1	0	27
Cade Stover	10	188	18.8	0	49
Gee Scott Jr.	4	20	5.0	0	10
Carnell Tate	4	75	18.8	1	28
T. Henderson	3	45	15.0	0	27
Xavier Johnson	2	6	3.0	0	6
Miyani Williams	2	39	19.5	0	27
Chip Trayanum	1	12	12.0	0	12
Dallan Hayden	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>954</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>36</b>

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	16-16	-	-	3-3	25
T. Henderson	4	-	-	-	-	24
Emeka Egbuka	3	-	-	-	-	18
Marvin Harrison Jr.	3	-	-	-	-	18
Miyani Williams	2	-	-	-	-	12
Chip Trayanum	1	-	-	-	-	6
Tyleik Williams	1	-	-	-	-	6
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	-	6
J. Mathews Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16-16</b>	-	-	<b>3-3</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2-2</b>	-	-	<b>2-2</b>	<b>20</b>

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	2-2	0-0	1-1	0-0	3-3
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>2-2</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>1-1</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>3-3</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>2-2</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>2-2</b>

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	8	342	42.8	0	56
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>42.8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>60</b>

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jermaine Mathews Jr.	1	58	58.0	1	58
Denzel Burke	1	0	0.0	0	0
Steele Chambers	1	0	0.0	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	4	17	4.3	0	8
Jayden Ballard	1	18	18.0	0	18
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	5	103	20.6	0	24
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>

### Def. Leaders

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Tommy Eichenberg	15	5	20	1.0-7	1.0-7
Steele Chambers	10	9	19	1.0-1	0-0
Tyleik Williams	5	12	17	2.0-7	1.0-2
Davison Igbinosun	11	3	14	0-0	0-0
Jordan Hancock	6	5	11	0-0	0-0
Jack Sawyer	4	6	10	0.5-1	0-0
Cody Simn	3	6	9	0.5-1	0-0
Josh Proctor	6	3	9	1.0-1	0-0
Ty Hamilton	4	4	8	0-0	0-0
Sonny Styles	6	2	8	1.5-3	0-0
J.T. Tuimoloau	3	4	7	0.5-1	0-0
Lathan Ransom	4	3	7	0.5-1	0-0
Jaden McKenzie	4	2	6	1.5-6	0-0
Caden Curry	3	2	5	1.0-3	0-0
Hero Kanu	4	1	5	1.0-5	1.0-5
Mike Hall Jr.	3	1	4	1.0-10	1.0-10
Malik Hartford	1	2	3	0-0	0-0
Denzel Burke	2	-	2	1.0-5	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Gabe Powers	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Ja'Had Carter	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Mitchell Melton	2	-	2	2.0-11	1.0-9
C.J. Hicks	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
John Ferlmann	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Jesse Mirco	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Julian Fleming	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Tywone Malone	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Donovan Jackson	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Cameron Martinez	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Omari Abor	1	-	1	1.0-2	0-0



# QB Hartman Provides Boost For Fighting Irish

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Through the first 44:43 of last season's opening contest against Notre Dame, Ohio State's offense struggled to move the ball and the team trailed 10-7, in danger of losing a second consecutive home opener. But the Buckeyes received a gift in that the Fighting Irish were also unable to capitalize, averaging just 2.5 yards per carry for the game while the passing attack – led by quarterback Tyler Buchner and offensive coordinator Tommy Rees – finished with just 177 total yards on 18 passing attempts.

Buchner ended up injured in Notre Dame's next game – a 26-21 loss to Marshall – and was replaced by Drew Pyne, who did not fare much better, finishing the season completing 64.6 percent of his passes for 2,021 yards, 22 touchdowns and six interceptions, while the Fighting Irish offense as a whole finished just 59th in total offense (396.2 yards per game) and 41st in scoring offense (31.8 points per game).

But what might have made a difference for Notre Dame – both against Ohio State and for the season – would have been a player like sixth-year quarterback Sam Hartman (6-1, 212). He transferred to South Bend, Ind., this offseason after five seasons – four as the starter – at Wake Forest, where he threw for an ACC-record 110 touchdowns, and his 12,967 career passing yards were second in conference history behind Phillip Rivers, who threw for 13,484 yards from 2000-03 at NC State.

"It's different," Hartman said this offseason. "It's special here. There's a lot of eyes, which is obvious at this point. You never really know until you're out of it what it means to be in this position. Just as much as I can, I'm trying to soak it in. It's a high-pressure, pivotal season for myself and more than myself – this team and this university."

Hartman's presence has been felt since arriving on campus, as despite just getting there over the summer, he was named one of four team captains for Notre Dame.

"He's been awesome," head coach Marcus Freeman said. "I think he's really gotten those guys in his corner. Sam's just a great teammate and a really great leader. He pushes those guys, but it's from a level of trust. They trust him. That's what I believe to be leadership."

He has largely picked up where he left off at Wake Forest, throwing for 1,061 yards and 13 touchdowns with no interceptions through the first four games of the season, including a 286-yard, four-touchdown performance in a



SONNY BROCKWAY

**REVENGE BEST SERVED COLD — Notre Dame and head coach Marcus Freeman — who played at Ohio State from 2004-08 — will be looking to exact revenge against Ohio State after losing a 21-10 contest in Columbus last season.**

45-24 win at NC State on Sept. 9.

"I've said this before, but he's just so steady," Freeman said after that game. "I know he gets excited when he makes a good play or scores, but he's never too high or too low. It's the same thing you see in practice. Not every practice is perfect for him. But it's the ability for him to just continuously be steady and be positive and say, 'Coach, we're good. We'll get it fixed. Trust me. We're going to get it fixed, go out there, and do our job.'"

It isn't the only change for the offense. Both Buchner and Rees departed for Alabama this offseason, with Freeman promoting tight ends coach Gerad Parker to offensive coordinator. And for Freeman, he was able to learn some valuable lessons from last season's 9-4 campaign – the team's fewest wins since 2016 – that he is hoping to apply in his second year with the Fighting Irish.

"You have a year of experience, and that's what I like to tell people," he said. "Last year, I had a blueprint based on other individuals' experiences being a head coach. I gathered my own ideas but I'd never done it. This year, you can make enhancements based off your own personal experience."

"And that's kind of what we've been through. What I've done, really, is say, 'OK,

what things that I learned from being a head coach last year, what ways can you enhance and give your players a better chance to perform at the level we need them to?' There's no substitute for experience. I guess I'm going to be better next year than I was this year because I'll have two years of experience. That's, to me, more valuable than anything."

Hartman is flanked by last year's leading rusher, junior Audric Estimé (5-11, 227), who is averaging 8.3 yards per carry. Notre Dame lost Logan Diggs (821 yards, four TDs) to LSU, but freshman Jeremiyah Love (6-0, 197) and redshirt freshmen Gi'Bran Payne (5-9, 208) and Jadarian Price (5-10, 206) have provided a solid rotation and all can do different things.

"We have a lot of guys that can help us," Freeman said. "I love what Coach Deland (McCullough) is doing in terms of having certain packages for certain guys and being able to really use all the positive attributes that they have. It takes a great coach but also a great room to continue to be unselfish because there's only one ball. But everybody's embracing a role and really helping our offense perform at a high level."

The running backs will have blocking by an offensive line that returns arguably the three most important positions – junior left tackle Joe Alt (6-8, 322), senior center Zeke Correll (6-3, 306) and sophomore right tackle Blake Fisher (6-6, 312). They will be joined by sophomore left guard Pat Coogan (6-5, 303) and right guard Rocco Spindler (6-5, 314).

Notre Dame returns plenty of talent on the line and in the backfield – not to mention welcoming in Hartman – but will be without tight end Michael Mayer, who was the 35th overall selection in the 2023 NFL draft after three seasons with the Fighting Irish in which he collected 180 receptions for 2,099 yards and 18 touchdowns.

In his stead, Freeman has looked to junior Mitchell Evans (6-5, 251) and sophomore Holden Staes (6-4, 242), who have combined for 11 receptions, 186 yards and four touchdowns – the latter of which have all been courtesy of Staes.

"He adds a big element to the pass game," Freeman said. "We've known Holden's been a tremendous pass threat. We've got to continuously get him better in the run game, and he's committed to that."

Notre Dame's top receiving option last season outside of Mayer is now playing cornerback at Ohio State, as Lorenzo Styles Jr. had 30 receptions for 340 yards and a touchdown before transferring to Columbus this offseason. The only returning receivers with double-digit receptions last season are sophomore Jayden Thomas (6-1, 221) and senior Chris Tyree (5-9, 192), a running back. But the Fighting Irish have several young receivers whom the program is excited about, such as freshmen Rico Flores Jr. (6-0, 205), Jaden Greathouse (6-1, 204) and sophomore Tobias Merriweather (6-4, 204), and with Mayer dominating so much of the offense over the last few seasons, Freeman is embracing the chance to open up the offense.

"I love what we're doing, the ability to spread the ball out," he said. "Last year, you look at the Michael Mayer effect. It was, 'Hey, if Michael Mayer's (in) single coverage, it's going to Michael Mayer.' I think the ability for us to really go through a progression, it really puts the defense at a disadvantage because you can't just double-cover one guy."

"That's the great thing about the weapons we have at tight end, at wide receiver and in the backfield. We're using our backs, too, in the pass game. We're able to go through a progression and not just say, 'This is the go-to guy.' I think that's a reflection of how you see the ball being spread around."

Notre Dame's offense struggled to put up points last season against Ohio State, but the defense limited the Buckeyes to just 395 total yards and 21 points, the team's fewest yards since the national championship loss to Alabama in 2021 and the lowest scoring output since the 49-20 loss at Purdue in 2018. Fortunately for the Fighting Irish, a large portion of that production – 72.0 percent, according to ESPN analyst Bill Connelly's returning production rankings – is back this season.

All four of Notre Dame's top four tacklers return, including senior linebackers JD Bertrand (6-1, 233), Jack Kiser (6-2, 232) and Marist Liufau (6-2, 239). With Bertrand at middle, Liufau on the weak side and Kiser at the "Rover," a hybrid linebacker/safety similar to Ohio State's "Bullet" seen in recent years, the trio combined for 191 tackles (18½ for loss) with five sacks, an interception, a forced fumble and four pass breakups last season.

Liufau has been a particular standout so far, already collecting 17 tackles (one for loss) with a forced fumble through four games.

"When I came in here in 2021, he was an aggressive, physical football player," Freeman said of Liufau. "At times, he could have been out of control. I think last year, he was continuously learning the defense, and when you're thinking, you don't play as fast. What you're seeing this year is a guy that truly understands the defense, the details. Now, he has velocity. We say clarity equals velocity, and he

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## OHIO STATE VS. NOTRE DAME

### Get To Know ... Notre Dame

- **2023 Record:** 4-0.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Pro-Style; Defensive Formation - 4-3; Starters Returning - Offense 4, Defense 9.
- **Head Coach:** Marcus Freeman, 2nd year at Notre Dame, 13-5.
- **Series History:** 8th meeting, Ohio State leads series 5-2-0.
- **School Facts:** Location - South Bend, Ind.; Enrollment - 8,874; Nickname - Fighting Irish; Colors - Blue, Gold; Conference - Independent; Stadium - Notre Dame Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf Revolution; Capacity - 77,622).

#### Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Audric Estimé	63	521	8.3	5
Jeremiyah Love	18	119	6.6	1
Gi'Bran Payne	19	76	4.0	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Sam Hartman	64-90	71.1	1061	13-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jayden Thomas	12	188	15.7	1
Jaden Greenhouse	10	126	12.6	3
Chris Tyree	8	216	27.0	2

#### Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game — 46.0  
 Rushing Yards Per Game - 204.5  
 Passing Yards Per Game - 304.3  
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game - 508.8

#### 2023 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 26	vs. Navy (Dublin, Ireland)	W, 42-3
Sept. 2	TENNESSEE STATE	W, 56-3
Sept. 9	at NC State	W, 45-24
Sept. 16	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	W, 41-17
Sept. 23	OHIO STATE	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 30	at Duke	TBA
Oct. 7	at Louisville	TBA
Oct. 14	USC	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 28	PITTSBURGH	3:30 p.m.
Nov. 4	at Clemson	TBA
Nov. 18	WAKE FOREST	3:30 p.m.
Nov. 25	at Stanford	TBA

#### Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Jack Kiser	17	9	26	1.0-12	1.0-12
Marist Liufau	10	7	17	1.0-2	0-0
Howard Cross III	8	8	16	0-0	0-0
J. Jean-Baptiste	7	8	15	2.0-3	0-0
Thomas Harper	8	7	15	2.0-13	1.0-10

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Clarence Lewis	1	33	33.0	1

#### Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed — 11.8  
 Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed - 107.5  
 Passing Yards Per Game Allowed - 126.8  
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed - 234.3

is extremely clear on his assignments.”

Something to keep an eye on heading into the contest, however, is the status of Bertrand, who missed Notre Dame's 41-17 win over Central Michigan on Sept. 16 with a concussion. Freeman did not offer an update following that game, leaving Bertrand's status in question.

The other lead returning tackler is senior safety DJ Brown (6-1, 202), who had 48 tackles and two pass breakups last season. Junior Xavier Watts (6-0, 204) is another returning starter in the secondary, while seniors Antonio Carter II (6-0, 207) and Ramon Henderson (6-1, 196) are also featured in the rotation. Also starting in the secondary are senior cornerback Cam Hart (6-2, 207) and sophomore Benjamin Morrison (6-0, 185) opposite Hart.

“We're rolling three, four guys at the safety position,” Freeman said. “And they're all playing on a high level. That's a part of that unit strength that we talked about. It's that ability to be unselfish, and you can go through many different positions and talk about that.”

Up front, the Fighting Irish have a familiar face in senior defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste (6-4, 260), who appeared in 45 games over the past four seasons at Ohio State before transferring to Notre Dame this offseason. During his time with the Buckeyes, he racked up 53 tackles (11 for loss) with eight sacks and a forced fumble, and in four games with the Fighting Irish, Jean-Baptiste has already accounted for 15 tackles, two for loss, and four quarterback hits.

There was an easy pull for Jean-Baptiste at Notre Dame, where former Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington — who coached in Columbus from 2019-21 — is entering his second season as defensive line coach for the Fighting Irish.

“He's done a great job,” Washington said this spring of Jean-Baptiste. “He's embraced everything, and I know I've been around him three years, and I know where he's coming

from and he's played a lot of ball. This isn't his first rodeo, but he has taken it upon himself to take those next steps, and he's been great. He's done a really good job.”

Lining up on the opposite edge is hybrid defensive end/linebacker senior Jordan Botelho (6-2, 264), with Notre Dame opting to call him the “Vyper” instead of the “Jack.” The interior of the defensive line is manned by a pair of returning starters in seniors Rylie Mills (6-5, 306) and Howard Cross III (6-1, 288), who have combined for 27 tackles, a sack and three quarterback hits through four games.

After a relatively easy start to the beginning of the season for both Ohio State and Notre Dame — though the Fighting Irish do have an additional game under their belts, for better or worse — the game stands as an intriguing litmus test for both teams. But with Central Michigan on the docket ahead of welcoming Ohio State to Notre Dame Stadium on Sept. 23 for a kickoff under the lights, Freeman did not want to get caught looking ahead.

This offseason, however, Freeman did make it clear what his expectations would be for this contest once the Buckeyes came to town for the first time since a 29-16 loss for the Fighting Irish on their home turf on Sept. 28, 1996.

“The expectation is to win every game you play here,” Freeman said on “The Pivot Podcast” in July. “Listen, we haven't won a national championship since 1988. Every year (we say), ‘Win this national championship.’ That's my goal, too. I want success for two groups. One, it's our players. I want it for our players because they deserve it. That's why they chose Notre Dame. And I want it for our athletic director and our president. They took a chance on me, and there's so much support around here.”



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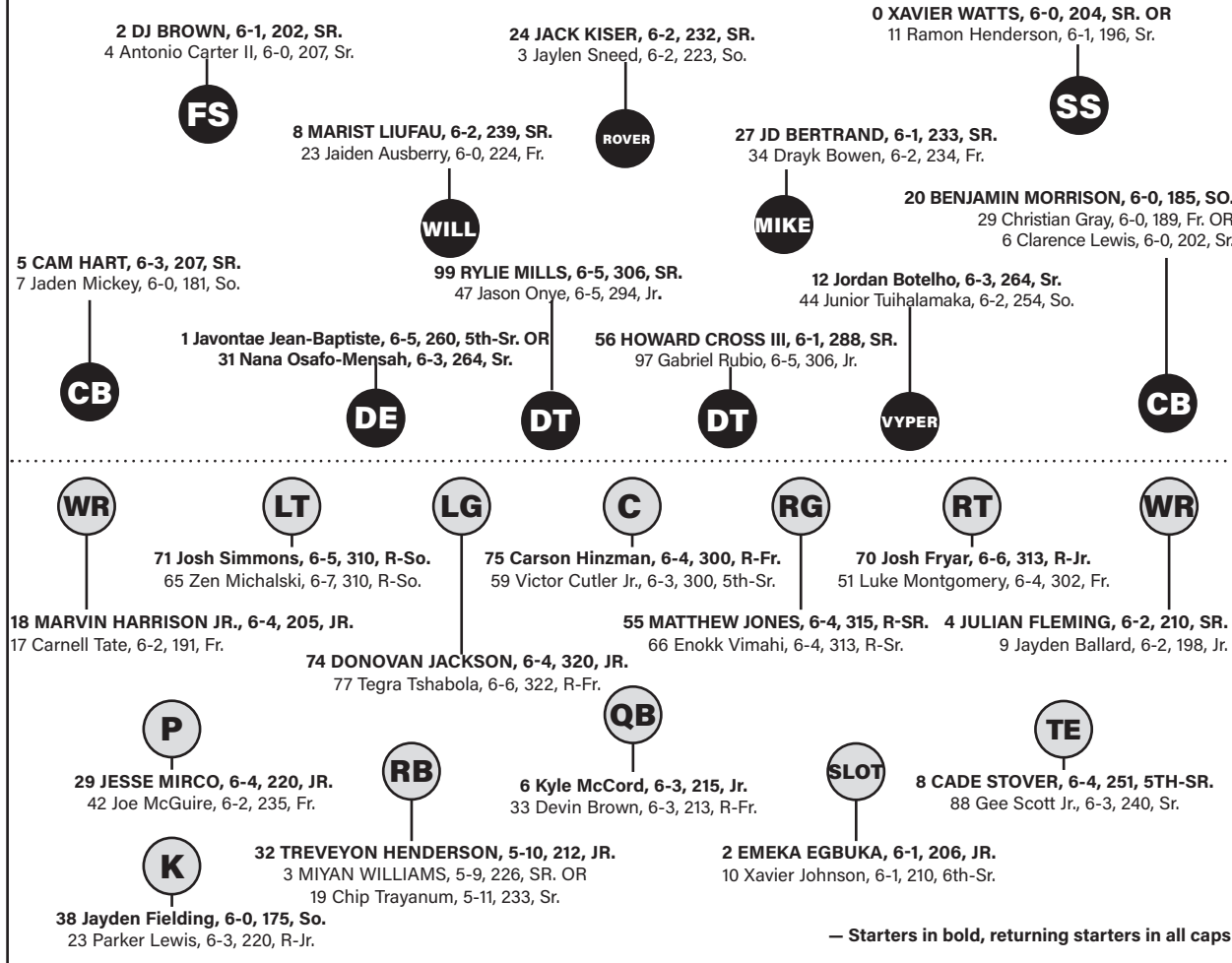
# Ohio State at Notre Dame



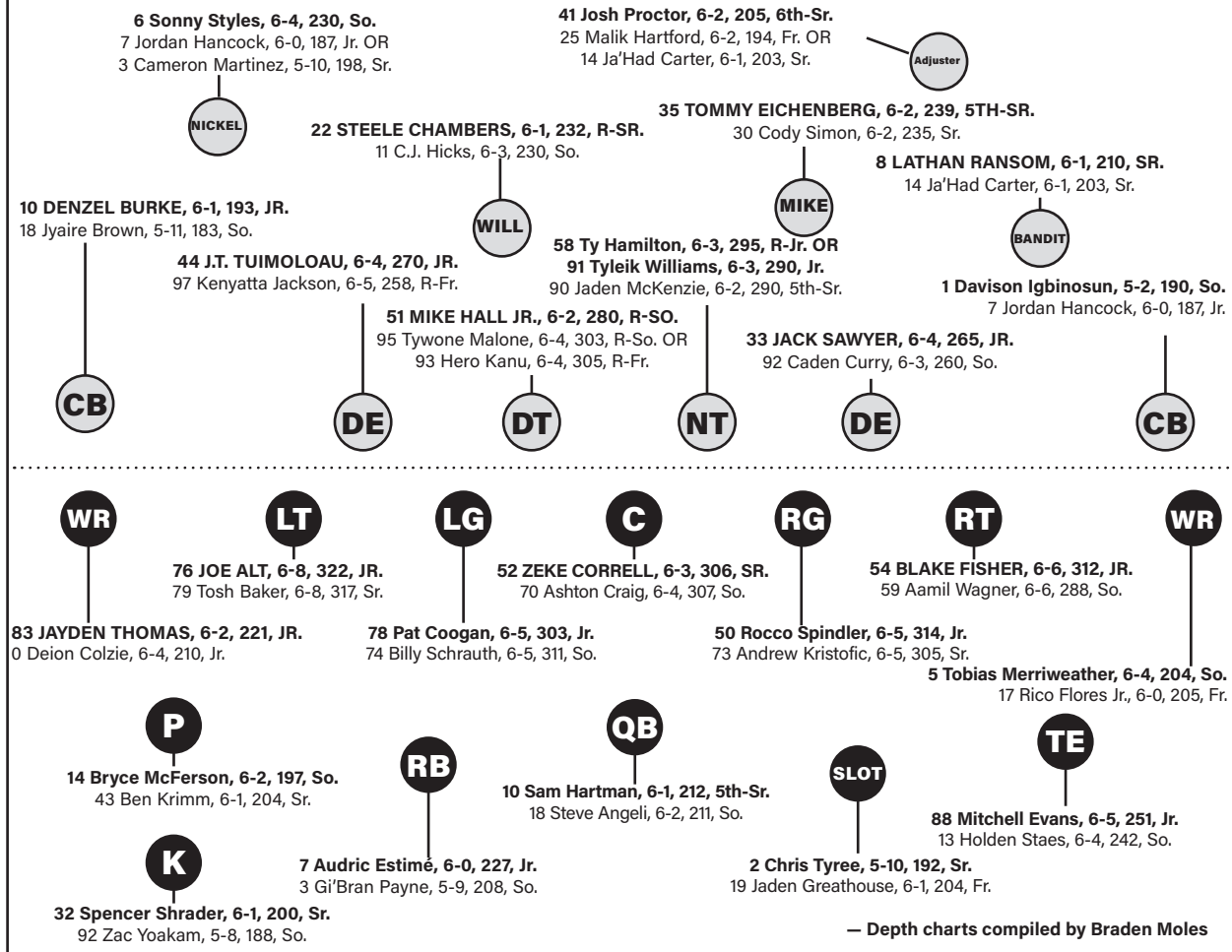
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## Projected Depth Charts

### WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



### WHEN NOTRE DAME HAS THE BALL...



### How We See It

#### OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. NOTRE DAME RUSH DEFENSE

Ohio State fans are feeling better – maybe not a whole lot better – but it's a start after the Buckeyes crushed Western Kentucky on Sept. 16, 63-10. TreVeyon Henderson continues to show he has rebounded from an injury-scarred 2022 season. He's running hard and fast to the tune of 88 yards on 13 carries that included touchdown runs of 21 and 7 yards vs. WKU. Chip Trayanum added 56 yards on five carries with a 40-yard TD. The Buckeyes totaled 204 yards on the ground with 6.2 yards per carry. The Fighting Irish have allowed 107.5 rushing yards per game this season, and in their most recent contest, Central Michigan ran for 131 yards (3.9). Notre Dame has given up 47 points in its four games. **EDGE: EVEN**

#### NOTRE DAME RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Notre Dame run game is complementary to the passing of Wake Forest transfer Sam Hartman. That doesn't mean the Irish are weak in that area. They have averaged 204.5 yards on the ground per game with a 5.9 average per carry. In the 41-17 win against Central Michigan, the Irish posted 236 yards (6.4), led by Audric Estimé as he eclipsed the 100-yard mark for the third straight game. In the fourth quarter, he had runs of 22, 13 and 41 yards on consecutive plays and finished with 176 yards on 20 carries – both career highs. He also had a 72-yard score nullified by a holding call. Ohio State throttled the WKU running game, limiting the Hilltoppers to 80 yards on 33 attempts (2.4). This appears to be a classic battle of the lines which will determine the outcome. **EDGE: EVEN**

#### OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. NOTRE DAME PASS DEFENSE

After Ryan Day gave Kyle McCord full control, he responded with a solid effort, throwing three first-half touchdowns and totaling 318 yards for the game. The one blemish was losing the ball on a strip-sack. His favorite target, no surprise, was Marvin Harrison Jr., who hauled in a career-long 75-yard TD among his 126 yards. Tight end Cade Stover got 90 yards out of five catches that included a 40-yarder. Notre Dame showed some cracks against Central Michigan second-stringer Jase Bauer, playing because starter Bert Emanuel Jr. was ill. Bauer was 10 of 20 for 137 yards but during an 83-yard TD drive had a 31-yard passing play. The Fighting Irish had two sacks. Ohio State allowed one against Western Kentucky. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### NOTRE DAME PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Hartman is the FBS active career leader with 123 touchdowns, three of which came against Central Michigan when he threw for 330 yards with 16 completions on 26 attempts. His TD passes in the first half went for 75 and 76 yards, and he has 13 TD passes this season. His top receiver was Chris Tyree with 88 yards off two catches. The Fighting Irish opened the season with 40-plus points in four straight games for the first time since 1900. OSU passed its first test against a passing quarterback this season by holding Western Kentucky's Austin Reed, the nation's leader in passing yards last season, to 207 yards, a touchdown and an interception. He threw for 589 yards and six scores in his first two games. Jermaine Mathews Jr. had a 58-yard pick-six against backup Bronson Barron. **EDGE: NOTRE DAME**

#### SPECIAL TEAMS

Spencer Shrader has hit 50- and 54-yard field goals in addition to missing from 59 and 56 yards this season and has put a kickoff out of bounds in each of the past two games. Bryce McFerson averaged 49.0 yards on two punts vs. Central Michigan. OSU's Jesse Mirco had two punts for a 37.0 average with one inside the 20 against Western Kentucky. Xavier Johnson gained 40 yards on two kickoff returns. **EDGE: EVEN**

#### INTANGIBLES

Ohio State finally showed its big-play capabilities and should get more against a Notre Dame defense that has shown vulnerability. The Irish can strike quickly as well. The Buckeyes got a needed confidence boost with their showing against Western Kentucky while Notre Dame has been waiting more than a year to avenge last season's loss. **EDGE: EVEN**

#### STAFF PREDICTION

Prime time in South Bend. It's almost as big as playing That Team ... never mind. Prior to Western Kentucky, this would have been a no-brainer to pick Notre Dame to win over the lackluster Buckeyes. Now, it's a toss-up. This could go beyond 60 minutes. **OHIO STATE 34, NOTRE DAME 31**



# McCord's Consistency Led To Starting Role

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

It took about five months longer than head coach Ryan Day would have hoped, but he was finally able to name Ohio State's starting quarterback for this season on Sept. 12, bestowing that honor upon junior signal caller Kyle McCord.

"After reviewing the film, we've decided that Kyle is going to be the starter and (we wanted) to make that distinction," Day said. "We still plan on playing Devin (Brown), but we feel like Kyle has really stepped up and deserves to be the starter."

Day had initially said he hoped to name a starter by the end of Ohio State's spring practice, and then during fall camp, and then before the season opener at Indiana. The Buckeyes missed all of those deadlines, leading to a drawn-out competition between McCord and Brown, a redshirt freshman, that extended through the first two games of this season.

And through that process, Day and the coaching staff were able to settle on McCord due to his "overall consistency" dating back to the spring.

"He made some nice throws," Day said. "He kept the offense going. He came out of the gates playing efficient football, and that's what we're going to look for moving forward. But I would just say overall consistency."

But that extended battle offered Ohio State a more legitimate look at McCord, including a pair of starts to begin the season against Indiana and Youngstown State. In those two games, McCord had 497 passing yards with three touchdowns and a pick, showing progress in the contest against the Penguins in which he threw for all three of his scores. It was after that game that Day said he and the coaching staff felt that McCord was "the guy."

That improvement was just a single step in McCord's development, but it was also one of several the coaching staff has seen from the signal caller. These incremental jumps have led to an increased confidence for McCord, which Day said he's seen continue to build with more reps under his belt so far this season.

"You can see, regardless of the opponent, when you play in Ohio Stadium and you get your second start, you have to see how people are going to react," he said. "I thought he was much more poised in this game (vs. YSU) than the first one, and I think that's natural. We'll see if we can build on that, but bigger challenges are ahead."

Also helping McCord is now having an official title next to his name: starter. It's been presumed through much of the spring, summer and into fall camp that McCord would eventually win the job – and he may have thought as much at points – but Day said that the official declaration was still an important step to take.

"I think, first off, it gives Kyle peace of mind," Day said. "He realizes that he is the starter and he's earned that opportunity. Secondly, he will receive more of the reps. Devin will still get reps in practice, reps with the ones, but Kyle will get a little bit more than he has the last couple of weeks, and I think it's good for the team to have that distinction, to know that Kyle right now is the starter."

That peace of mind extends to Day, who said that having a starting quarterback is one



SONNY BROCKWAY

**STARTING NOD** — Quarterback Kyle McCord has played with poise this season for Ohio State, but that's no surprise to his coaches and teammates, who have seen that methodical nature since he arrived on campus.

less thing on his plate. It's a decision that's certainly dominated his state of mind over the last several months. But it's also an important step for Ohio State's wide receivers, who have dealt with two quarterbacks splitting first-team snaps dating back to the spring. With McCord now set to receive the majority of those reps in practice, the offense – one that has struggled at times to develop a rhythm in the early part of this season – should see a boost with the receivers able to develop more chemistry with McCord.

"I'd say it's good to have your dude, know who you're going to be rocking out with for most of the snaps this season," wideout Emeke Egbuka said. "But our No. 2 guy is ready as well. We have full confidence in him and we've got full confidence in the dude who's taking the one reps. Both are great talents, and we're excited to be moving forward."

The consistency that Day said led to McCord being named the starter is something that's been noticed by his teammates as well. Egbuka said McCord cares more than "just about everybody on the team."

"He's the last one to leave the facility every single day, so he puts in the hours, and he does a lot of hours on film," Egbuka said. "He's a student of the game. He's really smart. So that's one of the most impressive things about him because he's not necessarily a scrambler or anything like that. He just throws a really pretty ball. He's a master of his craft, and he's going to continue to get better day in and day out."

McCord's first significant test, however, is approaching when Ohio State travels to Notre Dame on Sept. 23. Before the Buckeyes' 63-10 win over Western Kentucky, Day said it would be an important game for everyone with the Fighting Irish on deck.

"We have to keep upgrading, keep playing. Kyle's no different," he said. "I think we all want to have a great week of work and we all want to keep getting better. Now we're getting into game three, so we want to keep building

and growing. It's a really important week for us."

In that final tune-up against the Hilltoppers, McCord completed 19 of 23 passes for 318 yards and three touchdowns, an encouraging first outing since being named starter. And he said going into the game knowing he secured the full-time job gave him confidence to perform.

"I think it does help when you have an understanding of how the game's going to go, that you're going to be getting all the reps, and you're going with the ones, and you really don't have to try to think about what's going to happen if you don't put together a drive or anything like that," he said. "And then I think this week, I kind of used that confidence boost and

just just trusting my roles, trusting my reads, trusting my eyes, and I think good things happened. I need to just continue to do that next week."

## Brown And Out

McCord being named the starter certifies another position on the depth chart in that Brown will be Ohio State's backup at quarterback for this season.

He played sparingly through the first three weeks of the season, totaling 139 yards and one touchdown (as well as an interception), but Day is still hoping to keep him involved and engaged as the season progresses.

"We'd like to get him out there and play," Day said. "I think it depends on the opponent, depends on the strategy. There's luck that will come into play each week. I don't think it will be something that we do the same thing every week, but we'll look at the opponent, we'll look at the situation, we'll look at the schematics of it all and see where he fits."

While McCord is unlikely to play himself out of the starting job at this point, any snaps Brown can play will be important given that, due to a potential injury, he could be just one snap away from being Ohio State's starting quarterback after losing out the first time around. This is something Day is cognizant of, but assuming Brown is able to sit and learn this season, the head coach is looking for Brown to work on his consistency under center.

"Devin's a great competitor," Day said. "He wants it really badly, and he knows that he's one play away. He was great (vs. YSU), but at the same time, he's got to get back to work this week and get better in the areas that he needs to improve on."

"I think it's just the overall consistency for him. You can see it but he hasn't played a lot, so we're going to try to get him more and more experience and hopefully the next time he gets out there he's a little bit more poised and has a feel for the game, because the talent is certainly there."

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# Third-Down A Point Of Emphasis For OSU

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's early-season struggles – mainly its poor offensive line play and lack of continuity at the quarterback position – were well-documented through the first two games of the season, but there is another glaring, potentially more costly, weakness that may require more attention as the campaign progresses.

Through their first two games of the season, the Buckeyes' new-look offense mostly fell flat on third down, converting on just seven of its 23 attempts (30.4 percent) an unimpressive number that was tied with Akron for 113th in the country in third-down conversion percentage.

Inexplicably, this trend was exacerbated as Ohio State inched closer to the first-down marker. The Buckeyes fared well on longer third-down attempts of at least 7 yards, moving the chains on three of their nine tries (33.3 percent). The efficiency remained consistent as they moved within 4-6 yards of the marker on third down, converting on two of their six attempts (33.3 percent). Then, when faced with a third-and-3 or shorter, Ohio State severely underperformed, extending drives on only two of their eight tries – just 25.0 percent.

"We've found ourselves this year so far in some third-and-2s and third-and-3s that we haven't converted on offense," head coach Ryan Day said on Sept. 12. "We have to get it

fixed. We have to do a better job of that. We've just been in some situations where we haven't executed very well. In those situations, we expect to. Third-and-long, third-and-extra-long, different story, but third-and-medium, third-and-short, we have to keep drives going."

While the season is still in its infancy – and Ohio State looked better in the 63-10 win over Western Kentucky, converting five of the team's 10 third-down attempts – Day's concerns with his offense's inefficiency are warranted, as these pitfalls had not previously emerged since he arrived as head coach in 2019.

With Day manning the sidelines and Heisman Trophy finalists Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud under center, Ohio State converted on 50.7 percent of its third-down attempts (309 of 610) from 2019-2022, a major strength of those units that allowed them to finish within the top 26 nationally in conversion rate each season, including first in 2019 (55.2 percent) and second in 2021 (52.3). The Buckeyes were also efficient in Day's two years as Urban Meyer's offensive coordinator, ranking sixth in conversion percentage in 2017 (46.5) and 17th in 2018 (46.6).



Carson Hinzman

## Third-Down Conversions Under Ryan Day

Year	Conversions	Attempts	Percentage
2019	101	183	55.2
2020	52	106	49.1
2021	81	155	52.3
2022	75	166	45.2
2023 (3 games)	12	33	36.4

Day may be entering uncharted territory in his Ohio State tenure, but it has not stopped him from working to find an explanation for these struggles. He believes his offense's third-down woes could derive from the unit's lack of chemistry and familiarity on the offensive line, which has three new starters on the front five – redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman at center, junior Josh Simmons at left tackle and senior Josh Fryar at right tackle.

With a trio of inexperienced linemen, the Buckeyes have often been unable to string together positive plays on third down, missing on a number of assignments that have allowed opposing defenders to live in the backfield on short-yardage attempts, while also committing a string of costly penalties that have put the offense in third-and-long. Day has said these lapses on the line have become more scarce after each practice, but he still sees it as an urgent problem that needs to be fixed as the season progresses.

"There were some good plays where I

thought we came off the ball, but overall consistency is something that we're working on and we have to get better," he said Sept. 12 of Ohio State's performance against Youngstown State. "There was some improvement there. But we expect on third-and-1, third-and-2, third-and-3 to execute and get first downs. There were a couple penalties in there. We have to clean those things up."

"On third down, it starts with protection," Day added on Sept. 14. "You can't throw the ball if you don't have protection. And that's important."

Offensive line coach Justin Frye's solution to the problem is more black-and-white. In order for his group to help move the chains, they simply need to flex their physicality and outperform the player who stands in front of them.

"We have to be more complementary there, as a whole," Frye said. "But really, that just starts with us up front. Moving our guy, giving our running back a chance to press, giving the quarterback a chance to read

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something a little better and just executing better.”

The Buckeyes’ third-down lapses may be mostly attributed to their inability to execute up front, but for Steve Helwagen – a reporter for 247Sports and formerly of Buckeye Sports Bulletin – the problem starts before the offense even gets to that marker. He told BSB that it is instead a combination of much larger issues that have plagued the offense.

“It’s a situation where everything is kind of part of the whole,” Helwagen said. “You have to do better on first and second down so that you’re not in such a bad situation on third down. And you also have to be able to establish the pass, that way (the defense) has to honor the pass and not commit extra defenders into the box to stop your running game. If you have a problem in one area, it becomes a problem in other areas.”

Day echoed this sentiment on Sept. 14, saying that they need to place a larger emphasis on the overall efficiency of the offense so they can put themselves in a better position to convert on third down. This, according to Day, can be achieved if they have more productive plays on first and second down – specifically with the run game.

“We’re trying to be efficient on every single play,” he said. “There’s no limitation on where we need to be. We want to be efficient in every run that we have. We’re looking for efficiency in the run game. The higher the number, the better, just like completion percentage.”

Day added that he wants the offense to gain at least 4 yards every time they run the ball, not a lofty goal considering Ohio State

has averaged at least 5.5 yards per carry in each of his previous four seasons.

“That’s everybody’s goal,” said Day, whose team is averaging 5.16 yards per carry through Sept. 16. “And then after that you could go make a play. But we have to get downhill. We have to make 4 yards every play and haven’t done that enough – we haven’t.”



Josh Simmons

Despite the efforts to improve, Helwagen said Day and his players must institute – and execute – these fixes sooner rather than later, as they do not want to be dealing with the same problems that plagued them early in the season while they face stiffer competition, starting with a high-stakes trip to Notre Dame on Sept. 23. Helwagen said he is not confident that they will solve their third-down problems before the game with the Fighting Irish because they have yet to show they are capable of turning it around, but he pointed to the team’s off week following Notre Dame as a potential time to get right.

“Two games is not a large sample size, but at the same time, the caliber of the opponent certainly has to trouble you when it’s Indiana, who I don’t think is going to win a lot of games in the Big Ten, and then an FCS opponent, Youngstown State,” Helwagen said. “I mean, for it to look and feel as bad as it looked and felt, it kind of makes you wonder what’s going to really happen when they play

against top-15 teams. They have several of them on the schedule. To me, there’s a lot to be concerned about.

“I think that, over time, the problems are either going to get solved or they’re going to lose two or three games, and I think that’s pretty evident to me. The other teams that they’re being mentioned with right now – Michigan, Penn State and Notre Dame – they play all of them. Do they compare favorably to the others? I’m not sure if there are a lot of aspects right now where they do. But that isn’t to say that they can’t get it straightened out.

“The open week after the Notre Dame game will be critical for the development of the team, and regardless of what happens against Notre Dame, you can still win the Big Ten and get into the College Football Playoff. That game’s not the end of the world, one way or the other. So I think that it’s going to be a lot of fun these next few weeks to see how they cope with it.”

For Day, the offense’s inability to move the chains on third down is an obstacle he had not yet encountered after he arrived at Ohio State as Meyer’s offensive coordinator. While he is confident that his team can turn the corner and bring their positive practice habits to the field, he sees it as just one of a myriad of issues his team must clean up before it embarks on the more challenging part of the schedule.

“Third down is something that statistically jumps out, but it’s all areas,” Day said. “I can’t sit here and tell you that we’re a finished product in any one area. If you name off all the different areas on the team that we’re

trying to get better, we know that we’re not where we need to be. But it’s like we say, it’s 1.0, 2.0, this has to be our third version of ourselves and it has to improve.”

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# Hancock Splitting Time Between Corner, Nickel

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Jordan Hancock decommitted from Clemson on July 14, 2020, and he would officially commit to Ohio State just five days later. When he was being recruited as a four-star corner out of Georgia, it was primarily as a nickelback – or slot corner – a spot Ohio State felt was important to get back to being the Best in America (BIA) as they called themselves when Shaun Wade was primarily in the nickel spot in 2019.

Since he joined the Buckeyes, he has been playing mostly as an outside corner but has not seen much time on the field because of a hamstring injury that bothered him throughout most of last season. His role was supposed to be bigger than it ultimately was, but after going down in fall camp he had to sit out the first six games and tallied only five tackles over the last six games since he was still feeling the effects of the injury.

Now that he has been able to fully recover, he hasn't been taking his time on the field for granted. And in his third season with the Buckeyes, he has become a significant part of the defense, playing in all three games this season and taking snaps at both outside corner and in the slot at the nickel, the latter starting against Youngstown State when he started seeing more time in the slot as a fifth man in the secondary.

"People forget that when I was getting recruited here it was for that nickel spot," Hancock said. "It's just playing out in fruition like it's supposed to be."

Being able to play both inside and outside as a cornerback makes him more valuable for Ohio State's defense since there are different skills needed to succeed at the two spots. There's a sense from Hancock (6-1, 185) that he would prefer to be an outside corner, like Wade – and most cornerbacks, for that matter – felt, but he's happy to help the team with whatever needs to be done, and he feels he fits well as the third corner in the slot role.

Although it isn't a place he sees himself playing permanently, it's a spot he enjoys lining up at since he gets to guard the fastest players on the field. For the most part, offenses will put their quickest receivers in the slot because of extra space in the middle of the field for them to work, and Hancock believes he's built to defend that type of player well.

"My athleticism, my length, I can get my hands on receivers from further away because I'm kind of lengthy, and then my athleticism just plays a big part in that too."

he said.

Sophomore Sonny Styles has started at nickel in all three games this season and has shown thus far why he was a five-star recruit and got playing time last year in an experienced secondary as a true freshman.

But, when the Buckeyes have needed more pure coverage in the slot, Cameron Martinez had been getting those looks. After Martinez checked in against Youngstown State and was immediately beaten by receiver Max Tomczak for a 36-yard completion, Hancock came into the game in relief of Martinez and stayed there, and after that, YSU's longest pass of the day was an 18-yarder late in the fourth.

Secondary coach Tim Walton thinks Hancock fits well into the role he filled against the Penguins and expects him to stay there, at least for the time being, but he does like to keep the players moving around. In the season opener against Indiana, Hancock was in a three-man rotation with Davison Igbinosun and Denzel Burke as outside cornerbacks, and it's likely that rotation will continue throughout the season, but they like his performance in the slot for now.

"That's how it is right now," he said. "We'll be moving guys around. We just have to always find the right mix. Sometimes things change based on who you're playing."

One thing Walton likes out of Hancock is that he has been tackling well, which was a point of emphasis heading into the 63-10 win over Western Kentucky – where Hancock primarily lined up at nickel, finishing with five tackles, a pass breakup and a forced fumble – since the Hilltoppers spread the field out so much, sometimes sending as many as four or five receivers on routes, and tackling is of increased importance when defending shifty slot receivers.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said as much about Hancock on Sept. 12 when he was asked why he likes him in the slot, and he indicated the team will be using his skill there to help the defense moving forward.

"He's an athletic, competitive guy who showed also from that position a willingness to tackle," he said. "So those guys get into the mix as tacklers. And he showed the toughness also with having the foot speed on the corner, which is ideally what you look for."

"Smart, tough. He's a physical player," Walton added. "He understands the game. He processes things well. He has good cover skills, and he brings some toughness and competitive, disciplined attitude to the secondary."



SONNY BROCKWAY

**LOCKDOWN** – Ohio State cornerback Jordan Hancock (7) has been impressive for the Buckeyes in coverage this season, spending time at both outside cornerback and in the slot at nickel.

Hancock is more than willing to hit someone if he's sent on a blitz or is matched up one on one in the open field, and playing at nickel position requires some involvement in defending the run, so it's even more imperative that tackling is a focus for Hancock. That was evident based on his four tackles (two solo) against Youngstown State at nickel.

"He brings a tenacious attitude," Walton said. "He'll put his face in the fan in the run game. He gives you a complete player in there. He understands – being a high-football-IQ guy – things happen fast, but he can handle the thinking of it."

Knowles said it's possible Ohio State will try to work both Hancock and Styles into the game at the same time – with Styles at the nickel and Hancock at outside corner – to utilize Styles' versatility along with Hancock's length and athleticism, but he doesn't want to take too much time away from Styles at the nickel so he can continue to develop at his position.

As for Hancock, he likes having three corners on the field all at once – usually him, Igbinosun and Burke – because it feels like the opposing offense isn't able to move the ball given the coverage talent in the slot and outside. It has taken work for him to be able to get to the point where he can contribute to corner and nickel, though, since the positions are different.

"I have more gaps to fill, orbit motions, stuff like that," he said. "At corner, you don't really get too many motions like that."

Before he took the field at nickel for Ohio State this season, Hancock put in plenty of work in the film room and in practice to be

able to know how to shut down offenses at nickel. Walton said Hancock has fully embraced the slot position and was able to get comfortable with it in training camp, and since the nickel position is in the middle of the action for so many plays, he was able to be very involved in the preseason and that helped him figure it out faster.

The takeaways haven't come for him yet, but he's hoping that Burke's interception against the Penguins – the first for an Ohio State cornerback since 2021 – will jumpstart the defense to getting more turnovers, something Walton believes is coming.

"It just gives you a little confidence," Walton said. "The group feeds off it. Other guys now are trying to have urgency to get theirs. It makes them feel good. It makes them feel like they want to be a part of that deal."

The rotation of Burke, Hancock and Igbinosun at cornerback – even if Hancock is occasionally lining up at nickel – is making all three better with a consistent presence on the field. "Defensive Back U" is something that's not been seen for a few years at Ohio State, but the current secondary – one focused on bringing back Ohio State's BIA status – has shown potential early this season, with the versatility shown by Hancock a significant part of that effort.

"Everybody knows every single position," Hancock said of the defense this season. "We know the reasoning behind it instead of just playing it, just being a robot. You make plays within the defense, and that's what I really like about this defense."

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# Bosas, Burrow, Buckeyes Making Big Bucks

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There are many factors that led to quarterback Joe Burrow becoming the highest paid player in NFL history, such as leading the Cincinnati Bengals to consecutive AFC North titles, the past two AFC championship games and a Super Bowl at the conclusion of the 2021 season.

Along the way, he's nurtured a "Joe Cool" attitude with his unflustered play and bravado. In short, he continues to be a winner. He was at Athens (Ohio) High School and at LSU, where he won the 2019 Heisman Trophy and the Tigers won the national championship.

Therein lies the rub and a big motivator for Burrow, 26. In between high school and LSU were three seasons at Ohio State from 2015-17, where he redshirted his freshman season and played 10 games the next two seasons.

He famously – or infamously – lost the starting job battle to Dwayne Haskins in the spring of 2018 and transferred to LSU after completing his degree. That lack of success still gnaws at him as he explained on Sept. 9 at a press conference to announce the five-year, \$275 million extension that he agreed to two days earlier.

"I had some unfinished business in Ohio," Burrow said. "My one athletic failure so far in my opinion is my time at Ohio State. I didn't get to play. To come back and kind of redeem myself in that way has been important to me."

His annual salary of \$55 million bettered the \$52.5 million per year deal signed earlier this year by Justin Herbert of the Los Angeles Chargers and those for the Baltimore Ravens' Lamar Jackson (\$52 million) and the Philadelphia Eagles' Jalen Hurts (\$51 million). By the way, in the three-year-old contract for Patrick Mahomes of the defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs, he makes "only" \$45 million a year.

Burrow's \$219 million in guaranteed money is second only to Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson (\$230 million) but ahead of Herbert (\$218.7 million).

The Burrow agreement came one day after former Buckeye teammate Nick Bosa, the reigning NFL Defensive Player of the Year, ended his six-week holdout with the San Francisco 49ers, agreeing to a five-year, \$170 million extension to make the defensive end the highest paid defensive player in NFL history. His average per year salary of \$34 million bests the \$31.6 million for Aaron Donald of the Los Angeles Rams.

Big bucks for Buckeyes is nothing new as noted by Ohio State graduate Albert Breer of Sports Illustrated's Monday Morning Quarterback, calling particular attention to the 2015 team coached by Urban Meyer. Excluding Bosa, who played for OSU from 2016-18, the following players on that roster besides Burrow also made top money in the NFL at their position:

- **Joey Bosa (2013-15):** The defensive end and older brother of Nick signed a five-year, \$135 million deal with the Los Angeles Chargers in July 2020 to surpass the five-year, \$125 million Myles Garrett got from



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BIG MONEY BUCKEYES — Cincinnati Bengals and former LSU and Ohio State quarterback Joe Burrow recently signed a five-year contract extension that will pay him \$275 million, with \$219 million guaranteed.**

the Cleveland Browns less than two weeks earlier to become the NFL's highest paid defensive player at the time.

- **Ezekiel Elliott (2013-15):** In September 2019, his six-year, \$90 million deal with the Dallas Cowboys topped all running backs, supplanting Todd Gurley of the Los Angeles Rams.

Elliott was released by the Cowboys on March 15 in a salary cap move and signed in mid-August with the New England Patriots for a one-year, \$3 million deal with up to \$3 million in incentives. He switched from No. 21 with the Cowboys to the No. 15 he wore for the Buckeyes.

- **Marshon Lattimore (2014-16):** The New Orleans Saints' NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year in 2017 signed a five-year, \$97.6 million contract in September 2021 that included \$58.1 million in guaranteed money. Since then, former Buckeye Denzel Ward (2015-17) of the Cleveland Browns signed a five-year, \$100.5 million contract in April 2022, the largest contract for a cornerback.

- **Michael Thomas (2012-15):** Upon signing a five-year, \$61 million extension in July 2019, he became the highest paid wide receiver in the NFL at the time. Others have surpassed him since, including ex-Buckeye Terry McLaurin (2014-18) of the Washington Commanders. He signed a three-year, \$68.3 million contract extension in July 2022, the 12th-highest value among receivers in the NFL this season.

- Honorable mention from the 2015 team goes to left tackle Taylor Decker (2012-15). His four-year, \$59.65 million extension in 2020 for the Detroit Lions puts him 22nd among offensive tackles in annual average value (\$14.9 million) this season.

With all that talent Breer singled out from the 2015 team – the Buckeyes in the 2016 NFL draft had five first-round picks in Joey Bosa, Decker, Elliott, cornerback Eli Apple and linebacker Darron Lee, as well as six additional draftees – it left many won-

dering why Ohio State didn't win a second straight national championship after claiming the inaugural College Football Playoff following the 2014 season.

The Buckeyes' late-season 17-14 home defeat to Michigan State was the only blemish, but it prevented them from being selected for the playoffs. Cardale Jones, who shared quarterbacking duties with J.T. Barrett that season, suggested on Twitter on Sept. 8 that offensive coordinator Ed Warinner was the problem: "Ask Ed Warner" (sic) was Jones' response to queries as to why the Buckeyes didn't win it all.

In the loss to Michigan State, Ohio State gained just 132 yards, and Elliott had 12 carries for 33 yards and afterward ripped the play calling. Jones posted on social media that the game would be his last in Ohio Stadium despite having another year of eligibility.

## On The Same Page

Nick Bosa and Burrow were college buddies for two seasons in Columbus, and being in different locales has changed nothing. They stay in regular contact and share the same agent, Brian Ayrault. It was natural for his clients to communicate during their respective negotiations.

"It was interesting," Bosa said on 95.7 The Game. "We would shoot texts back and forth and be like, 'You almost there? You almost there?' A lot of it was not much update for weeks on end. Finally, he sent me the 'eyes' emoji and I knew it was time for him. I forget what I sent him when I got it. But it was cool."

The pair signed for a combined \$445 million with \$341.5 million guaranteed. Speaking of duos, the Bosas together will make at least \$224.5 million by the end of the 2027 season. If Joey, 28, and Nick, 25, each play out their contracts, they'll collect a combined \$305 million based on their current contracts.

## Deep Breath For Bosa

Nick Bosa said he was happy to have his most recent deal done before the Sept. 10 season opener against the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"I am definitely thinking that it's going to be a weight off my shoulders and I'm just going to be able to really not think about all the negative thoughts that come along with playing this game," he said. "And just be free out there and play for one reason: to win games."

Bosa – who played 34 snaps and had two tackles and three pressures against the Steelers – admitted the uncertainty leading to the agreement was a burden.

"I like a good schedule, a good routine," he told Breer. "Not knowing was kind of wearing on me, especially as it got closer and closer. It all worked out perfectly. I think this team took pride in starting fast this year because it's been a little slow in the past. We've taken a while to really click on all cylinders."

His teammates were glad to see him in uniform again.

"It's Nick Bosa," safety Tashaun Gipson said. "Everybody was happy to have him back. Not only is he a great player on the field but he's a great teammate. So having that type of leader, having that type of presence on the field with you is always going to be something huge."

Bosa said the coaching staff was confident in his ability to go out there and make plays despite not taking part in the preseason.

"We wanted to keep it under 40 snaps. I think it was 35," he said. "The three-and-outs were perfect for getting me going, so I didn't have to go too long on those drives."

The 49ers won the game 30-7. Burrow didn't fare as well in his first outing after his new deal. The Bengals lost 24-3 at Cleveland, and he went 14 of 31 for 82 yards. He missed over a month of training because of a strained calf, but he did not use it as an excuse.

"It's one week," Burrow said. "Obviously, not up to our standard. Not up to my standard. We have 16 more of them, so we are going to keep trucking. Nobody is panicking here."

"Week 1 doesn't define anybody's season. We've been in this spot before, and we've come back stronger and had a great year."

Still, Burrow felt he needed to change his luck prior to the Bengals hosting the Baltimore Ravens on Sept. 17, so he had his long locks shorn for a fresh look and a restart. It didn't help, as Burrow finished 27-of-41 passing for 222 yards, two touchdowns and an interception in the 27-24 loss, and he also "reaggravated" his calf injury.

No matter if there's an early-season blip, the Bengals are confident they have their quarterback for many years of success.

"My father (Bengals founder Paul Brown) always said that in the NFL, the quarterback is like the key to your car," Bengals owner and president Mike Brown said in a statement about Burrow's contract. "You can have a great car, but you need a key to get the car going and to operate it at a high level. We feel that we have a good one in Joe."



# Buckeyes Set Eyes On National Prize In '98

*Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be offering a variety of historical pieces this fall, including a look back at the 1998 Ohio State football team, one of the better teams in school history, upon that team's 25th anniversary. The following is the third installment in our 2023 historical series.*

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

The top-selling song was "Believe" by Cher, one of the first records to utilize the audio processing software known as Auto-Tune. "Saving Private Ryan" somehow lost the Best Picture Oscar to "Shakespeare in Love," and San Diego became the first city to host a World Series game and a Super Bowl in the same calendar year.

Pop singer Shawn Mendes, NFL quarterbacks Jalen Hurts and Justin Herbert, and pro golfers Sungjae Im and Nelly Korda were born. Singer Barbra Streisand, actress Kate Winslet and tough guy Chuck Norris were among celebrities who got married, and the world lost the likes of singing cowboy Roy Rogers, comedian Chris Farley, photographer/musician/animal activist Linda McCartney, and entertainment icon Frank Sinatra.

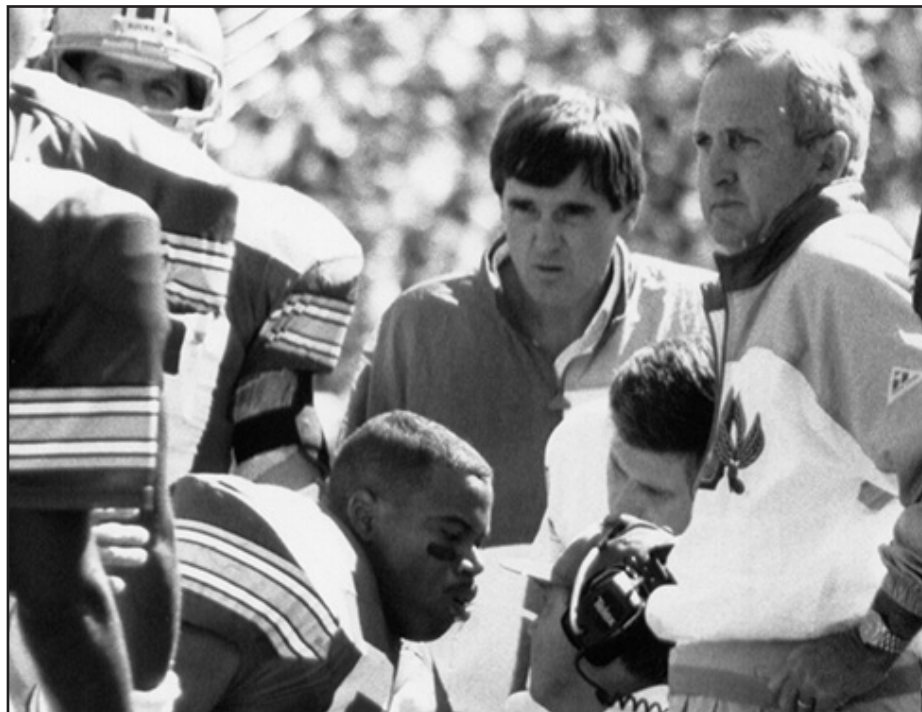
That all happened a quarter-century ago in 1998, the same year you could buy a gallon of gas for a little more than a dollar. A new single-family home in the Midwest was being built for about \$59,000. The cost of an all-day pass to Walt Disney World was \$42, a ticket to a first-run movie was \$4.50, and you could still purchase an Ohio State football ticket for about 30 bucks.

The year also featured such unlikely occurrences in the world of sports as 16-seed Harvard knocking off overall No. 1 seed Stanford in the first round of the women's NCAA tournament, and the double-digit underdog Denver Broncos defeating the defending champion Green Bay Packers in Super Bowl.

What seemed preordained, however, was the undisputed power of the Ohio State football team and what was anticipated to be a march toward the program's first consensus national championship in two decades. The Buckeyes were coming off a 10-win campaign in 1997 in what was supposed to be a rebuilding year and featured a star-laden roster that was the envy of most of their rivals.

"Expectations were very high for that 1998 season, and rightfully so," longtime OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "I think they had something in the neighborhood of 17 starters returning from the year before when they had gone 10-3 and outscored their opponents by more than 200 points. And for the first time since 1980, Ohio State went into the season ranked as the nation's top team."

Still, while anticipation was high for the 1998 season, some long-suffering members of Buckeye Nation weren't so sure. John Cooper had been head coach for a decade – the third-longest tenure in program history – but had little to show for it as far as some fans were concerned. His teams had won a lot of games, but most of them had occurred during the early part of the season, serving only as teasers before championship



FILE PHOTO

**TITLE ASPIRATIONS — A loaded Ohio State roster under head coach John Cooper (right) brought hopes of the program's first consensus national title in three decades in 1998.**

dreams evaporated down the stretch.

Through the first 10 years of Cooper's tenure, his Buckeyes had an impressive 83-17-3 record (a sparkling .820 winning percentage) against every regular-season opponent except one. Unfortunately, that happened to be the only one that mattered in the eyes of many Ohio State fans who simply couldn't stomach a 1-8-1 mark against Michigan much less a 2-7 record in bowl games. Making matters worse was that one of the previous year's losses was a 20-14 loss to the Wolverines, helping Michigan's cause as it went on to beat eighth-ranked Washington State in the Rose Bowl and win The Associated Press' version of the national championship.

But while newspaper columns and radio airwaves were filled with calls for Cooper's scalp, the coach had what he thought was an ace up his sleeve. After a string of victories on the recruiting trail in previous years, the coach and his staff had been pointing toward the 1998 season, believing it would be their best chance at a national championship run of their own.

"We were firing on all cylinders," former OSU recruiting coordinator Bill Conley said of the coaching staff's mind-set prior to the 1998 season. "We had a bunch of veteran players – not just starters but guys who were experienced backups – and we were recruiting at an extremely high level. We just felt like we all were on the same page and that was going to be the year it all came together."

The Buckeyes returned a staggering 70 scholarship players from the year before, including 17 starters – nine on defense and eight on offense.

Headlining the returning starters on offense were wide receivers David Boston and Dee Miller, who had combined to catch 131 balls for 1,951 yards and 19 touchdowns in 1997. The bulk of the offensive line was also coming back, including left guard Rob

Murphy, who had made several All-America lists.

Even the three departing starters on offense had ready-made replacements, players who had starting experience under their belts. Senior Brooks Burris was set to take over at right tackle for Eric Gohlstein, while junior speedster Michael Wiley previously had shared tailback duties with Pepe Pearson and was ready to have the position all to himself.

The same was true with senior quarterback Joe Germaine, who had become a fan favorite while coming off the bench to relieve Stan Jackson in both 1996 and '97. Germaine was now eager to see what he could do as the full-time quarterback.

"I can remember thinking during (fall) camp that no one was going to be able to touch us," Germaine told BSB. "I looked around and it seemed like we had an All-Big Ten guy or an All-American at almost every position. We couldn't wait to get started."

On defense, the Buckeyes were equally loaded with the likes of consensus All-America linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer, the reigning Butkus Award winner, as well as talented cornerbacks Antoine Winfield and Ahmed Plummer in addition to hard-hitting safeties Damon Moore and Gary Berry. Ohio State also had both kicking specialists back – All-Big Ten punter Brent Bartholomew and placekicker Dan Stultz.

OSU seemed the odds-on favorite to win its first outright Big Ten championship in 14 years and contend for the program's first national title since 1968. Moore was even quoted as saying not only should the Buckeyes win the Big Ten, "if we don't win the national championship, I'll be really disappointed."

But while Cooper privately believed what most of his players and coaches believed, he had been around long enough to know just how easily promising seasons could go off the rails.

"It was true that we had a lot of people coming back, and we knew we had a good team," the former head coach said. "But we'd had good teams before and somehow just couldn't get over the finish line. We knew we were going to be good, but we also knew we had a lot of work to do. Good things don't just happen. You have to make them happen."

## Recruiting Victories

With so many scholarship players returning, Cooper and Conley were forced to narrow their focus regarding the 1998 recruiting class. As a result, the OSU staff concentrated heavily on signing the best available players and came up with a class that featured a remarkable percentage of future starters.

Eleven members of the 14-player class introduced on signing day in February 1998 would become starters, including five who started for at least three seasons – quarterback Steve Bellisari, center LeCharles Bentley, defensive tackles Mike Collins and Ryan Pickett, and safety Donnie Nickey.

Because of the numbers crunch, the Buckeyes signed only three of the top 10 players in Ohio, including defensive end Kenny Peterson of Canton McKinley, who was the No. 1-rated player in the state. But Cooper and his staff were extremely successful targeting such out-of-state talent as Florida products Bellisari (Boca Raton) and Pickett (Zephyrhills) as well as defensive back Derek Ross of Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwest, running back Jonathan Wells of River Ridge (La.) Curtis and defensive lineman Julius Yeast of Harrodsburg, Ky.

"I think we were a little more selective this year," Cooper said on signing day. "When you start going around the country and know you're only going to sign 14 or 15, your pool is not going to be as big. Also, we had to go a little bit farther out this year because there were not that many numbers in the state."

"Our philosophy is that we start recruiting in Columbus and then go as far as we need to go to sign the best football players we can. That makes it very competitive for us because we're going after the very, very best."

The coach would have liked two more highly regarded linebackers in his class, but Jashon Sykes of Sierra High School in Los Angeles opted to play for Colorado while Shamar Finney of Shelby (S.C.) Crest – rated the nation's No. 1 linebacker prospect – chose Penn State over OSU, Florida and Florida State.

Small numbers typically equal downgrades nationally, and most recruiting experts followed that pattern, ranking Ohio State's class only third best in the Big Ten behind Michigan and Penn State and the No. 16 consensus pick in the nation. Still, the pundits gave the Buckeyes credit for doing as well as they did under the circumstances.

"That was the best class they could probably have gotten with the numbers they had to operate under," said longtime SuperPrep magazine publisher Allen Wallace. "They got some unbelievable defensive help and a couple of the best in the South. That shows the clout of the Buckeyes because that's a



tough place to recruit.”

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming also said the OSU class of 1998 was a very good one with its only deficiency being its quantity.

“It was an excellent class,” he told BSB at the time, “but it does hurt when you can’t take a full load. Most years, you can bring in 56 guys for visits and recruit nationally right until the end. The fact they couldn’t do that this year did hurt them.”

Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr followed his team’s 1997 share of the national championship with an excellent recruiting effort, signing a 19-member class in 1998 that included quarterback Drew Henson, receivers David Terrell and Marquise Walker, running back Justin Fargas and defensive end Cato June.

The news got better for Ohio State in the weeks following National Signing Day. Offensive lineman Ivan Douglas of Cleveland Benedictine, who had postponed his decision, signed with the Buckeyes over Michigan State, while the 1999 recruiting effort got an early boost with the verbal commitment of Canton McKinley safety Mike Doss.

When spring practice began April 1, the focus was on fundamentals and overhauling a running attack that had become something of an afterthought as Ohio State piled up yardage through the air. Second-year offensive coordinator Mike Jacobs made it clear his primary goal was to concentrate on giving Wiley as well as backups Joe Montgomery, Derek Combs and Jermon Jackson as many springtime reps as possible.

“I don’t think you can be one-dimensional in this league and win,” Cooper said. “If you can’t run the football, you’re going to face a nickel defense. If you can’t throw the football, you’re going to face eight or nine people up front. Consequently, you’ve got to have balance.

“We can throw the football at Ohio State. I think that’s been established already. But we want to be able to run the ball effectively, too.”

Short-yardage situations were of particular focus during the spring.

“We have to do a better job of running the football in short-yardage situations,” Cooper said, noting his team was only 5 for 14 on fourth-down conversions the year before. “We had the ball first-and-goal at the 7-yard line against Florida State in the Sugar Bowl and didn’t score. A number of times, we had fourth down and went for it and didn’t make it. We have to do a better job in those situations.”

While the running backs got more than their share of work, the Buckeyes entered spring for the first time in several years without a quarterback controversy. Senior Mark Garcia as well as redshirt freshmen Austin Moherman and David Priestley were still on the roster, but the clear-cut starter was Germaine.

“Joe Germaine is our quarterback, and there is no question about it,” Cooper said, a sentiment shared by Jacobs, who added, “We’re ready to roll right now with Joe being our starter.”

With so many starters returning and Cooper’s coaching staff intact from the year before – a rarity during the coach’s tenure – spring practice remained devoid of much drama. About the only exception was Katzenmoyer’s initial refusal to talk to the me-

dia stemming from what he thought to be poor treatment received following a DUI arrest in late February. By the time spring camp had ended, however, even that was a thing of the past.

“It seems like we’re a lot closer as an entire team this year,” Katzenmoyer said following the spring game. “We seem to have one major goal, and that’s a national championship. Everybody realizes it will take a lot of work to get there.”

The work began with a competitive spring game witnessed by 41,397 fans on a 70-degree late April afternoon in Ohio Stadium. As promised by Cooper and Jacobs, the emphasis was on the running game, and the Scarlet and Gray teams combined to rush for 274 yards on 65 carries.

However, Stultz wound up the star of the game by kicking seven field goals as the squads combined to go 0 for 7 inside the red zone.

“That was disappointing,” Cooper said. “I didn’t want this game to turn into a kicking contest, but that’s what happened. We have to score more touchdowns when we get inside the red zone.”

Ironically, the outcome was decided by the passing game when Moherman connected with sophomore wideout Reggie Germany on a 25-yard touchdown pass with 2:57 remaining to give the Scarlet team a 20-15 victory. Further complicating things was the fact Moherman and Priestley clearly outplayed their veteran counterparts, combining to complete 10 of 18 attempts for 209 yards and two touchdowns. Germaine was 9 of 14 for 101 yards and one interception while Garcia connected on just 10 of 25 attempts for 115 yards with three picks.

“I was disappointed with the way we pass protected,” Cooper said, “but we also threw some bad balls. We threw four interceptions and lost the ball once on a fumble. You turn the ball over like that and you get beat.”

### Preseason Title Favorites

When the Buckeyes reconvened in August for fall camp at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, it was as the consensus No. 1 team in the nation. Most newspapers and magazines installed Ohio State as college football’s best team, and preseason polls from the AP and USA Today/ESPN followed suit, placing the Buckeyes atop the national rankings for the first time in 18 years.

“I’m proud and humbled to be the football coach of the team picked No. 1 in the country,” Cooper said. “Now it’s up to us to live up to that ranking.”

The news wasn’t all good, however. The once-promising career of offensive lineman Jefferson Kelley was officially over because of chronic shoulder problems while Priestley asked for and was granted a transfer after he had fallen to fourth string on the quarterback depth chart. He eventually reconnected with former OSU quarterbacks coach Walt Harris at Pittsburgh and played three seasons for the Panthers.

Injuries and transfers were only the tip of the iceberg for Cooper’s program, however, as it came under fire for perceived academic deficiencies among some of its elite athletes. Chief among them was Katzenmoyer, whose photo appeared on the cover of Sports Illustrated’s annual College Football Preview issue. SI ranked the Buckeyes its preseason No. 1 team but placed a huge

asterisk on the cover alongside a headline that read, “If Andy Katzenmoyer makes the grade.” Within the issue’s pages were two articles making light of the junior linebacker’s summer course load, which included golf, music and AIDS awareness classes.

Katzenmoyer wasn’t the only All-American from Ohio State in academic hot water. Murphy had fallen behind while he rehabbed from knee surgery, while Moore was in summer school taking a pair of remedial five-hour courses.

Still, it was Katzenmoyer who took the brunt of the criticism.

“At the time, it bothered me because I knew that I wasn’t a dumb person or unintelligent,” he said. “But it kind of never went away and put a chip on my shoulder. I would like to say that I don’t hold grudges, but that bothered me for a long, long time.”

Katzenmoyer was eventually ruled academically eligible just 48 hours before the season opener, and he spearheaded a 34-17 victory at No. 11 West Virginia in front of a rowdy crowd of 68,409 at Mountaineer Field.

While the Buckeyes were piling up 549 yards of total offense, the vaunted West Virginia running attack was limited to only 78 yards, most of that coming in the first half. Star running back Amos Zereoue, who had finished 10th in the 1997 Heisman Trophy balloting, carried 20 times for 77 yards, but his seven attempts in the second half resulted in a net of minus-3 yards.

Wiley easily outdueled Zereoue by rushing for 140 yards and one touchdown while Germaine threw for 301 yards and a pair

of scores. Boston had seven receptions for 129 yards, while Miller caught six passes for 110 yards and a touchdown.

Katzenmoyer had a relatively quiet opener with just four tackles, but Winfield registered eight tackles and knocked down a pair of passes. West Virginia QB Marc Bulger managed to throw for 232 yards and two touchdowns, but he was also intercepted once, sacked once, and hurried a number of times.

“They have a lot of weapons on offense,” Mountaineers head coach Don Nehlen said, “but their defense is something special. I don’t see many weaknesses on that team. They’re going to be tough for anyone to beat.”

That was a familiar theme for the Buckeyes, who were barely challenged during the first three weeks of the season. After dispatching West Virginia in the opener, Ohio State rolled to a 49-0 win against in-state rival Toledo before erasing a halftime deficit against No. 21 Missouri and coasting to a 35-14 victory. Katzenmoyer registered 12 tackles against the Tigers, including 10 solos – both career-high totals.

September ended with an off week before the Big Ten opener against seventh-ranked Penn State. It was to be the marquee college game of the week with the ESPN College Gameday crew in attendance.

“That was the one we had circled from the beginning,” Conley said. “That was the one where we were going to find out if we were as good as we thought we were.”



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# OSU Flips Three-Star DT Mensah From VT

Ohio State picked up a bit of a surprise commitment on Sept. 15, when Stafford (Va.) Mountain View three-star defensive end Eric Mensah (6-3, 290) announced he was flipping his pledge from Virginia Tech to the Buckeyes.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

Mensah is the No. 802 overall prospect and No. 53 defensive lineman in 2024, and he had been committed to the Hokies since July. He took an official visit to Ohio State for the team's 35-7 win over Youngstown State, a trip during which he decided that Columbus would be the right move for him going forward.

"I feel relieved," he told 247Sports. "I was with Hero (Kanu) walking from one of the dorms, and he was just telling me about Ohio State. Some of the things he was telling me, I was like, 'Wow.' And just walking around a big community environment, it felt so good.

"Some of the things he was telling, especially when I asked him serious questions, more in-depth questions, and the way he was answering them was really good, and the game environment was

good, too."

Mensah also felt a connection to Ohio State's coaching staff, appreciating the way that defensive line coach Larry Johnson coaches his players.

"I watched him coach the defensive line on game day, and he even put up my film and started telling me some of the things I was doing," Mensah said. "He got really deep into it with footing, placements, how my technique was. It was really good having a coach tell me like this, the small things because the small things matter."

Mostly lining up in the interior for Mountain View, Mensah notched eight sacks and three forced fumbles last season. He joins Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310) in the interior for Ohio State's class, while Buford, Ga., five-star Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) will line up on the edge.

Even with three players already committed on the defensive line, Ohio State is still looking to take at least one more player for that group, though options are mostly limited outside of Towson (Md.) Concordia Prep four-star defensive end Ernest Willor Jr. (6-4, 250) and Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive end Booker Pickett Jr. (6-3, 205).

"I wish I knew (what position) they see Mensah at," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I saw him as a defensive tackle, but

if they see him as a defensive end, then you better get some more inside players. I think he has to be an inside player. I don't see him as a speed rusher on the outside, and I don't think they have one in this class. I think that's what they need.

"They need a big, long, fast burner on the end, and I don't think they have one on this roster, let alone in this recruiting class. I think that's really what they need. They need to get back to sacking the quarterback again 50 times a year instead of 35 times a year. And I think they need a blazer to come off the edge. And it's not Mensah, so we'll see. I'm sure they're not done. They need probably two more defensive linemen.

"You have to see who starts showing up at games that we didn't expect, like who comes out of nowhere. Who's somebody that's not on the radar that shows up for an official visit or for a game visit? I don't think they like Westerville (Ohio) North four-star defensive end Brian Robinson (6-5, 255). I don't know where they're going here defensive line-wise. I think they want five in this class, and so they're going to have to take a few more here. The Mensah thing almost told me that they don't really think there's a big number of guys left on the board."

One defensive line target off the board for Ohio State is Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Aydin Breland (6-5, 290). While the Buckeyes had only been loosely

connected with Breland, he made things official on Sept. 13 when he trimmed his list of scholarship offers down to just Georgia, Miami (Fla.) and Oregon.

With Mensah's commitment, Ohio State holds the nation's second-ranked class, according to the 247Sports composite rankings, with a team score of 303.36, behind only Georgia's 315.95. The Buckeyes also have the second-highest average player rating of .9355, also trailing the Bulldogs at .9366.

## OSU Looking At Largest Class In Several Years

With just two three to go until the early signing period begins on Dec. 20, Mensah's commitment already brings Ohio State to 22 committed prospects who would be expected to start on scholarship should they sign with the Buckeyes.

Ohio State is continuing to pursue several positions in the class – including both the offensive and defensive lines, safety and wide receiver – and could be looking to add as many as three or four more verbal pledges, which could make for the team's largest class since signing 26 players in the 2018 recruiting class.

The Buckeyes signed 21 players in each of the last two cycles, along with 23 players in 2021, 25 players in 2020 and an unusually low class of just 17 players in 2019. Ohio State also signed 26 players in 2015.

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## 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	297	★★★★	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
Eric Mensah	DL	6-3	290	★★★	Stafford (Va.) Mountain View
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
James Peoples	RB	5-10	192	★★★★	San Antonio Veterans Memorial
Payton Pierce	LB	6-1	225	★★★★	Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy
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

### WR Smith Dishes On OSU Future

In an extended interview with 247Sports, Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198) – coming off an outstanding performance early in the high school football season in which he had 16 receptions for 316 yards and three touchdowns – discussed his future with the Buckeyes once he arrives on campus.

His ambitions may seem lofty considering he's only in his senior year of high school, but Smith views Ohio State's usage of Marvin Harrison Jr. as a potential blueprint.

"The way they used him this year and last year," he said. "Moving me around, finding mismatches and stuff like that. I went up there (for YSU). They have a plan for me when I get up there. I'm just going to thrive and go up there and be the best version of myself."

Smith said that it's "all love" between him, head coach Ryan Day and offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

"I'm just happy to be coached by these two guys, Coach Hartline and Coach Day," Smith said. "They're some great coaches. I love them. I love their families. They just love my family and everything. I just love going up there. I love being coached by them. I can't wait."

And despite consistent contact from Miami (Fla.), Florida and Florida State, Smith said he remains locked in with Ohio State while not wanting to burn any bridges in the process.

"Just continue building that relationship with coaches," he said. "You never know when you might need them one day, so I don't ever want to burn a bridge with a coach because you never know what might happen in Ohio. Coaches might leave, I might end up transferring in the portal, might need a coach and stuff like that. I just want to build every relationship I can."

### LB Riggins Has OSU In Top 10

Ohio State is among the top schools

for Forney, Texas, four-star linebacker Kelvin Riggins (6-0, 205), a 2025 prospect who included the Buckeyes along with Baylor, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Texas A&M.

Riggins is the No. 201 overall prospect and No. 22 linebacker in the class. He visited Ohio State in the spring – a visit in which he earned his offer from the Buckeyes – and is planning to return for a game at some point this season.

Through three games of his junior season, Riggins has totaled 12 tackles – four for loss – with a sack, building on a sophomore campaign in which he collected 55 tackles – 12 for loss – with 4½ sacks.

He is one of 17 linebackers offered so far by Ohio State this cycle – by far the most of any position group – with Vero Beach, Fla., four-star Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210), Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola three-star Elijah Melendez (6-2, 223) and San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) Hills three-star Weston Port (6-1, 215) already standing out as some of the Buckeyes' top targets.

### Ohio State Offers 2025 LB Pettijohn

Speaking of 2025 linebackers, Ohio State's lone offer since BSB last went to press was issued to McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 205).

He is the No. 54 overall prospect and ninth-ranked linebacker in the class, and he holds additional offers from Arkansas, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC, among others.

He collected 42 tackles (five for loss) last season along with three sacks. Through three games this season, he's already accounted for 36 tackles (three for loss) and an interception, and he will likely begin to rise up the rankings soon.

Pettijohn had previously told 247Sports that Florida, Texas and USC were the schools leading his recruitment, though Ohio State is certainly expected to be a factor moving forward.

## OSU Football 2025 Commitment

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

### 2026 OT Riley Enjoys OSU Experience

Avon Lake, Ohio, five-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 263) – the No. 14 overall prospect and fourth-ranked tackle in 2026 – got his first taste of Ohio Stadium for the Buckeyes' win over Youngstown State, and it was a positive one for one of the top emerging prospects in his class.

"I thought it was a pretty fun experience overall," Riley told Eleven Warriors. "I got to share it with my mother and grandmother. It was fun to experience that with them. Obviously, Ohio State got the win, but there's always room for improvement, which is what Coach Day was saying in the locker room. I thought the offensive line overall played pretty well."

"It was pretty cool (to be there). I decided when I was in seventh or eighth grade that if I was going to go to an Ohio State game, I wanted my first game to be on a recruiting visit."

Riley – who said he spoke with offen-

sive line coach Justin Frye during his visit – also holds offers from Florida State, Kentucky, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Tennessee and Wisconsin, among others, though the Buckeyes held the distinction of issuing just the third Division I offer for Riley back in the spring.

Riley is one of five offensive tackles offered by Ohio State in 2026, along with Akron Hoban four-star Sam Greer (6-8, 290); Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Cumberland Valley four-star Tyler Merrill (6-5, 310); Da'Ron Parks (6-5, 282) of Hurricane, W.Va.; and Vero Beach, Fla., four-star Micah Smith (6-6, 295).

### OSU Hosts Double-Digit Prospects For WKU

Ohio State will not play another home game until hosting Maryland on Oct. 7, so the Buckeyes made sure to fit in some important visits on Sept. 16 when hosting

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# OSU Pushing For Former Irish TE Commit

Continued From Page 27

Western Kentucky for the 63-10 win at Ohio Stadium.

Starting in 2024, the Buckeyes hosted a pair of commitments in Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star linebacker Garrett Stover (6-0, 195) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203).

Also, according to a report from Buckeye Huddle, Ohio State hosted Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star wide receiver Chance Robinson (6-2, 190) – who is committed to Miami (Fla.) – on an unofficial visit. Robinson remains an intriguing option as offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline looks at potentially adding a fourth receiver for Ohio State's class to join Smith; New Haven, Ind., five-star Mylan Graham (6-1, 170); and St. Louis Christian Brothers College four-star Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190).

For the 2025 prospects, Ohio State welcomed Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) – who is aiming to attend every home game this season as a Buckeye commit – in addition to Cincinnati Elder three-star linebacker Maddox Arnold (6-2, 225); Clayton (Ohio) Northmont five-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185); Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star athlete Cody Haddad (6-1, 175); Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Jo-

seph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190); Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School four-star safety Ethan Long (6-2, 185); Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290); and Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 235).

Long is being recruited by several Big Ten schools, including Michigan, Michigan State and Penn State in addition to Notre Dame, so it makes sense that he will be in attendance on Sept. 23 when the Buckeyes travel to South Bend, Ind.

“Coach (Perry) Eliano is another safeties coach I bonded with a lot,” Long told 247Sports. “He understands me. I understand him and we just connected right away so we love working with each other. He’s one of those coaches that just gets the players and understands the game and he knows what it takes to get to the next level.

“He really looks out for your best interest and just wants the best for you. So I think that’s why he’s one of the best.”

Elsewhere in that group, Roberts, the No. 116 overall prospect and second-ranked tight end in the class, is of particular interest to Ohio State following his decommitment from Notre Dame on Aug. 15, and the Buckeyes appear to have hit his visit out of the park.

“My visit was outstanding,” Roberts told 247Sports. “It was great meeting with Coach Day and Coach (Keenan) Bai-

ley, talking about Ohio State football, what it means to be a Buckeye and what they are doing with their tight ends.

“I had the opportunity to be around the guys in meetings and at practices, which was great. Then game day was incredible – the energy on campus, the Skull Session in the arena across from the stadium, the atmosphere in the ‘Shoe with 100,000-plus fans. Great culture with great people. The experience was really focused on what it was like to be a part of the program, and I really appreciated that.”

In 2026, the Buckeyes welcomed their lone commitment in the class in Cincinnati Withrow five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185) in addition to four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 290) and cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 160), both from Akron Hoban; Cartersville (Ga.) Cass quarterback Brodie McWhorter (6-2, 190); Toledo Central Catholic cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160); and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West athlete Cam Thomas (6-2, 200).

## U-M, Penn State Lose Key Commitments

Penn State and Michigan each took hits to their 2025 classes in recent weeks, with Toms River (N.J.) North four-star offensive tackle Jaelyne Matthews (6-5, 290) and Buford, Ga., three-star linebacker Mantrez Walker (6-0, 215) decommitting

from the Nittany Lions and Wolverines, respectively.

Matthews, the nation's ninth-best offensive tackle and No. 1 player in New Jersey, became Penn State's first commit in the class of 2025 on Jan. 31, choosing the Nittany Lions over Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Ohio State and Rutgers. But after indicating that he wants more time to weigh his options and paying a visit to Maryland the weekend of Sept. 9, the four-star lineman is back on the recruiting trail.

“After careful consideration, I have decided to respectfully decommit from Penn State,” Matthews wrote on Twitter on Sept. 12. “This has been a difficult decision, as I have the utmost respect for the university, its coaches, and the entire Penn State community.

“After much reflection and discussion with my family and mentors, I believe it is in my best interest to explore other options for my academic and athletic future. This decision was not made lightly, and it comes after countless hours of thought and contemplation.”

Penn State is still in the mix to land Matthews, but he is planning to visit Colorado at the end of September, as well as Boston College, Georgia, Rutgers and UConn later this season. Texas has also offered since he opened his recruitment back up.

Walker, the nation's 385th-best prospect and 37th-best linebacker, original-

## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago — 1988

Chuck Jones was one of those high school players who immediately got your attention. At 6-4, 290 pounds, Jones got the attention of most of his opponents, too.

A senior defensive tackle and fullback at Chillicothe (Ohio) High School, Jones was being touted as one of the best defensive linemen in the nation.

“He is the best high school football player I have ever seen or coached in my 19 years of coaching,” said Chillicothe head coach John Sines. “He invokes that kind of reaction simply because he’s just that good.”

Ohio State topped the list of the schools in which Jones was most interested. However, the Buckeyes were by no means a lock on securing the big lineman for next year’s team, with Miami (Fla.), Michigan and UCLA also being considered.

### 30 Years Ago — 1993

After a year on the sidelines, Marcus Ray was out to prove he had what it took to play high school football again. At the same time, he hoped to prove to scouts that he had what it took to play on the major college level.

A 6-0, 195-pound tailback and linebacker from Columbus Eastmoor, the same high school that produced Archie Griffin, Ray was coming into his senior season making up for lost time. He showed promise as a sophomore and was ready to start as a junior before being hobbled by an ankle injury while playing summer basketball. As a result, he was lost for the 1992 season.

“Being injured was hard,” he said. “I saw things happening on the field I thought I could have changed if I was in the game. I feel I owe it to my team and to everyone in Columbus and the state to have a big year.”

### 25 Years Ago — 1998

Kannapolis (N.C.) Brown tailback Nick Maddox (5-11, 190), who received plenty of contact from Ohio State once the calling period began for football coaches on Sept. 1, rushed for 2,346 yards in 1997. He scored 45 touchdowns – 34 rushing, five receiving, four on punt returns and two on kick returns.

“I think my biggest secret is I work hard at it in the weight room,” Maddox said.

He beat out acclaimed seniors Shamar Finney, a Penn State linebacker signee, and Julius Peppers, now a defensive end at North Carolina, for the state Associated Press Player of the Year

honor. He refused to list his top five schools, saying, “I have no idea. I haven’t made a list.”

However, he confirmed he was interested in Ohio State. “They call a lot,” he said.

### 20 Years Ago — 2003

For excitement on the field and the best an Ohio Stadium crowd had to offer, you couldn’t have hoped for much more than what you got at the Horseshoe on Sept. 13 during the Buckeyes’ three-overtime thriller with North Carolina State.

Fortunately for OSU’s recruiting efforts, several top prospects were in attendance to take in all of the game’s dramatics. Topping the list among out-of-state visitors was linebacker Kyle Williams (6-2, 217) of Bolingbrook, Ill., who was in Columbus on an unofficial visit.

“It was an exciting game,” Williams told BSB. “I liked the team’s attitude. They played like champions.”

### 15 Years Ago — 2008

It might have taken a few days longer than it had the previous year, but Ohio State landed its first verbal commitment for the next season.

After receiving an offer on Sept. 1 – the first day college coaches were allowed to formally extend scholarships to high school juniors – Youngstown (Ohio) Boardman defensive end J.T. Moore (6-3, 216) pulled the trigger 11 days later and became verbal commitment No. 1 for OSU’s class of 2010.

Before his school day ended, Moore placed a call to Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Heacock. Heacock passed the phone to OSU head coach Jim Tressel, and Moore informed the pair of his intention to become a Buckeye.

“They talked to me about how excited they are to have me commit,” Moore told BSB. “They were glad to have me commit and be on board. It’s a great experience and an honor to be the first commit. It’s just a great feeling.”

### 10 Years Ago — 2013

A win against San Diego State wasn’t the only victory Urban Meyer picked up on the weekend of Sept. 7.

Less than 48 hours after the Buckeyes’ dismantling of the Aztecs, the Ohio State head coach received word that Sparta (N.J.) Pope John XXIII receiver Noah Brown (6-2, 215) would be joining his 2014 recruiting class. The four-star prospect witnessed the

42-7 Buckeye victory in person while enjoying a visit that ultimately brought an end to his recruitment.

“I knew after the game when I was having dinner with Coach (Urban) Meyer and really getting a chance to speak to him and get to know him as a person,” Brown told Scout.com. “Right then and there after that talk, I knew it was the place I wanted to go.”

### Five Years Ago — 2018

After their 52-7 win over Westerville (Ohio) Central on Sept. 14, two of Pickerington (Ohio) North’s top players told BSB they planned to take in Ohio State’s Sept. 22 matchup against Tulane – Meyer’s first game back on the Buckeyes’ sideline after being suspended for three games.

Chris Scott and Jack Sawyer had emerged on OSU’s radar for beyond 2019. Scott (6-3, 175) and Sawyer (6-5, 220) were, respectively, among Ohio’s best for 2020 and 2021. Scott, a three-star wide receiver for 2020, had heard increasingly from Ohio State since the Sept. 1 quiet period began. Sawyer, on the other hand, had become the Buckeyes’ biggest target early for 2021.

As a recipient of a rare OSU offer as a freshman in high school, Sawyer looked forward to seeing Meyer on his first trip back to campus since he camped in June.

“I’m looking forward to it a lot, a lot,” said Sawyer, whom Ohio State extended a scholarship to April 6. “I really like Coach Meyer and the way he coaches. Obviously, he’s one of the best – probably ever – and I just can’t wait. I’m excited to see him.”

### One Year Ago — 2022

Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep five-star defensive end Keon Keeley (6-6, 242), despite being one of the top remaining uncommitted prospects in the class, had been able to keep his recruitment relatively quiet, though he was likely aided in that by being committed to Notre Dame for the majority of his time as a recruit.

Following his visit to Ohio State for the season opener against Notre Dame, he had little to say about the trip, though he had since opened up about his top three schools of Alabama, Florida and Ohio State.

“I could see myself at each of the schools,” Keeley said. “They’re all great universities, and I feel like they all have strengths in different areas and they’re all great areas. Just being able to sort out those things will help me decide.”



# ASK AN ANALYST

## with Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

**Ohio State added a surprise commitment on Sept. 15 when Stafford (Va.) Mountain View three-star defensive lineman Eric Mensah (6-3, 290) flipped from Virginia Tech. What did you think of this move?**

"I never saw this coming. I didn't even know they were really interested in him. I know he's listed somewhere, I think Rivals, as a defensive end. I sure don't see him as a defensive end. I see him as an inside player. I don't know, it was just not a name that I had tracked at all, so I was kind of surprised by it. He's probably ranked properly and they must see something that others don't see. He's not a kid out there with offers from Alabama, Georgia, Texas, so I don't know. It's surprising to me, I'll be honest with you.

"To me, he would be similar to Jaden Mackenzie. That would probably be my comparison. I mean, he is who he is. I don't think he's a guy that Alabama or Georgia would beat the doors down to get.

"As soon as I saw the name, I immediately went to watch the film. And it's like, man, he's just a guy to me. But they know more than I know. They know what they need more than I know what they need. But I sure don't see him as a defensive end. He looks like he's going to get pretty big. He's an inside guy. But we'll see, we'll see how he pans out."

**Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) is set to announce his commitment on Sept. 24. With his decision date quickly approaching, where do you feel Ohio State stands?**

"Well, I loved where they were when it appeared that it was a two-team battle between Ohio State and Oregon. He had an older brother who played at Oregon. I really felt good about Ohio State going against Oregon there. There was a good relationship with Justin Frye, and I just thought that matchup really favored Ohio State. Now Texas made it a three-team race, and the Texas NIL thing is real. That has me concerned for Ohio State.

"I think Oregon is out, I really do. Even though a lot just think that because his brother played there that he's going to go there, and I don't. It's probably a Texas and Ohio State battle. We'll see. I was told that NIL was going to play a huge part, and that Texas has made a pretty interesting NIL commitment to him. So we'll see how that goes.

"I don't know if there's been one crystal ball pick made yet. I don't think anyone really has a good handle on this."

**What would it mean for Ohio State to land Baker, and how would the Buckeyes pivot for the offensive line recruiting if he commits elsewhere?**

"They need him. They need him so bad. This might be the most important recruit in this class. I can make a case for him. Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) is up there. Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310) is up there too, just because of the positions they play. Defensive linemen are at a premium. But I can make the case that Brandon Baker's the most important recruit in this class. They need him. They have to do what they have to do to get this kid. If it's strictly NIL, then you better empty the bucket, because he has a chance to be a Paris Johnson Jr. three-and-out type. He could start as a freshman next year. I think he's that type of player. He's really good. And he's a guy who plays in a high-level program, playing big-time competition, and his best football is still ahead of him. Brandon Baker, to me, is probably the guy they need the most in this whole recruiting class. I love receivers, just like everybody. Love the skill guys. But you have to have players up front.

"They can get receivers. They have no problem getting receivers. If Opa-Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185) decommitted today, it would not be that big of a deal. Brian Hartline will replace him. But Brandon Baker, those guys aren't growing on trees. There's no Brandon Baker in this recruiting class right now. So it would be a huge

win if Ohio State can pull him.

"They're still in it, kind of, for Washington (D.C.) St. John's four-star Jordan Seaton (6-6, 295). I think Jordan Seaton is an inside guy, though. I don't see him as a tackle. They would take both of those guys, they would go to six on the offensive line. But man, I don't know if there is a pivot from Brandon Baker. You could pivot and find the offensive line equivalent of Mensah. You can find those kids. You're not going to pivot and find another Brandon Baker in America in this class. He's the No. 1 lineman in the country to me, and I don't think it's even close."

**When it comes to Ohio State's committed prospects in 2024, who has impressed you so far through the high school football season now that we're a few weeks in?**

"I mean, Smith, he's out of this world. I would take Brandon Baker over him if I could only get one. But he is so special. San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star running back James Peoples (5-10, 192), I haven't looked at his game film yet, but going into the season, he was a guy that I thought was out of this world looking at his junior tape. I have not seen his senior film yet. But he was the guy that really stood out to me.

"Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive linemen Devontae (6-5, 288) and Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong are good. They're really, really good players. Neither of them are Brandon Baker, but they're good – well coached, fundamentally sound, so I like them. But I'd like them better if they had Brandon Baker alongside them. I have been impressed with those guys, though. I like them a lot.

"James Peoples has a chance to be J.K. Dobbins. He's special as can be. Jeremiah Smith can be a faster, maybe more athletic, Marvin Harrison Jr. You can't go wrong with that kid. He's so good, it's unbelievable. So those are the ones that have really, really stood out to me. And then Eddrick Houston is a stud, Justin Scott is a stud. Those are five-star type kids, in my opinion. It's a good class."

ly pledged to the Wolverines on Feb. 11. But after receiving an additional 11 offers from schools such as Colorado, Louisville, Miami (Fla.) and Stanford in the months following his commitment, he has also opted to explore his options.

"First off, I would like to thank the Michigan staff for allowing me to represent their university as a student-athlete," Walker wrote on Twitter on Sept. 11. "After lots of talks with my mom and dad, I have come to the decision to announce that I will be decommitting from the University of Michigan."

Walker, who has yet to indicate if he is keeping Michigan in consideration, completed a visit to Tennessee the weekend of Sept. 9 and plans to see head coach Deion Sanders and Colorado for the Buffaloes' highly-anticipated contest against USC on Sept. 30.

That was not the only blow for Michigan on the recruiting trail, however, as in the 2024 class, the Wolverines saw four-star defensive linemen Jacob (6-5, 230) and Jerod (6-3, 265) Smith of Corbin, Ky., flip to Kentucky on Sept. 15. Jerod Smith is the No. 224 overall prospect and No. 26 defensive lineman in the class, while Jacob Smith checks in as the No. 239 overall prospect and 19th-ranked edge rusher.

### Other Notes And Tidbits

- As a reminder, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285), Ohio State's top remaining target in 2024, is set to announce his commitment on Sept. 24, with full coverage in the next issue of BSB.

- Temple (Texas) Lake Belton five-star wide receiver Micah Hudson (6-0, 190), a 2024 prospect who held an Ohio State offer, committed to Texas Tech on Sept. 11.

- According to a report from 247Sports, Brew has withdrawn from Northmont and is expected to move to Texas to play high school football, though the report did not clarify what high school he will play at. Brew has lived in Ohio but was born in Houston.

- Miami (Fla.) Central five-star defensive lineman Armondo Blount (6-3, 250), a 2025 prospect who held an offer from Ohio State, committed to Miami (Fla.) on Sept. 14.

*For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*



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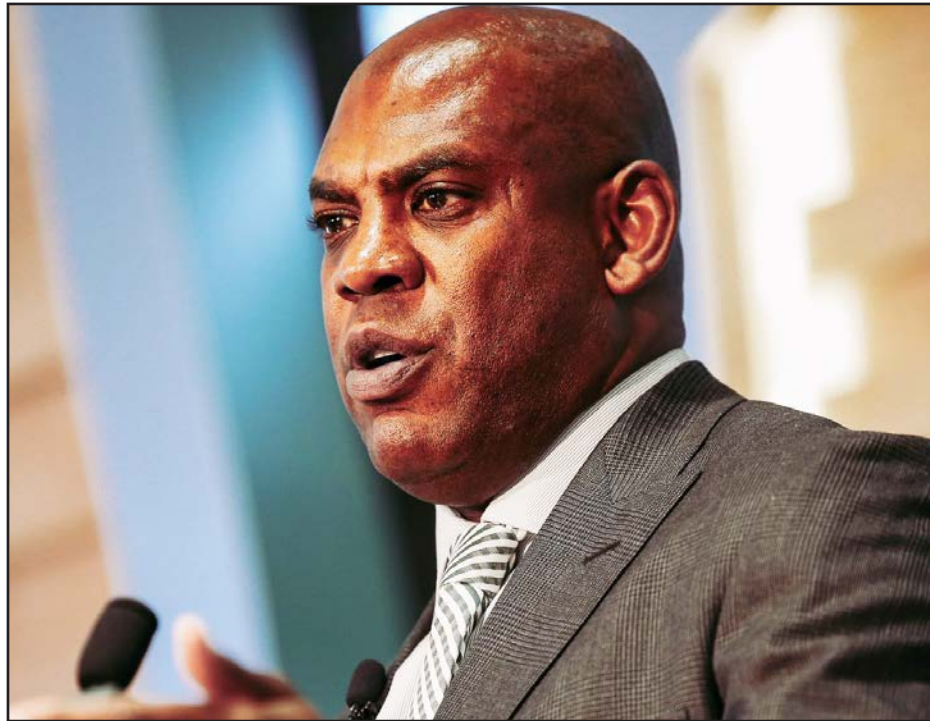
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# MSU's Tucker Declares Innocence, Tracy Responds

Suspended Michigan State head football coach Mel Tucker continued to proclaim that he is innocent of the claims made against him that say he sexually harassed renowned rape survivor and activist Brenda Tracy during an April 2022 phone call, stating in a Sept. 11 statement that the allegations made against him are contrary to what transpired between the two parties.



FILE PHOTO

**SUSPENDED — Michigan State head football coach Mel Tucker, who is suspended without pay while the university investigates claims that he sexually harassed noted rape survivor and activist Brenda Tracy, said in a statement on Sept. 11 that the allegations are “completely false,” while Tracy said Tucker is attempting to deflect blame and halt the hearing process around the allegations.**

“Yes, I did have a late-night intimate conversation with Ms. Tracy in April 2022,” he said. “Again, as even Ms. Tracy’s statements to the investigator confirm, this conversation had nothing to do with the University and was outside of the scope of Title IX or any University Policy.”

“While I am saddened by Ms. Tracy’s disclosure of the sensitive nature of this call, let me be perfectly clear – it was an entirely mutual, private event between two adults living at opposite ends of the country. She initiated the discussion that night, sent me a provocative picture of the two of us together, suggested what she may look like without clothes, and

never once during the 36 minutes did she object in any manner, much less hang up the phone.”

Tracy, who claimed in her Title IX complaint that she “sat frozen” for several minutes after the incident took place, issued a statement in response to Tucker’s, saying on Sept. 11 that his words were an attempt to both deflect blame onto the victim and halt the hearing process.

“This is just more of the same DARVO (deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender), deflection, victim blaming and lies that I’ve been dealing with now for months,” Tracy said. “Coach Tucker has been delaying and trying to stop the investigative process since the beginning. He can’t afford to go to a hearing that determines credibility of the participating parties. I believe this statement is his way of getting out of participating in the hearing. Oct. 5 and 6 I will be present for the hearing and make myself available for cross-examination by his attorney Jennifer Z. Belveal. I invite him to do the same.”

According to multiple reports, Tucker’s fate with the football program will likely be decided upon the completion of the Oct. 5-6 hearing. If the university decides that Tucker was in violation of the school’s sexual harassment policy and opts to fire him for cause, the remainder of his 10-year, \$95 million contract signed in November of 2021 would be voided.

In Michigan State’s first game since Tucker’s suspension, led by interim head coach Harlon Barnett, the Spartans suffered a 41-7 home loss to then-No. 9 Washington, allowing a program-record 713 yards of offense.

“Our team bought in to Coach Barnett,” Spartan offensive lineman J.D. Duplain said. “We trust him fully, we trust everything he says. I think we had good unity going into this week. I think the guys were bought in. I think everyone was mission-focused. We just made

## BIG 2023 Standings

### East Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Ohio State	1	0	1.000	3	0	1.000
Penn State	1	0	0.000	3	0	1.000
Rutgers	1	0	1.000	3	0	1.000
Maryland	0	0	0.000	3	0	1.000
Michigan	0	0	0.000	3	0	1.000
Michigan State	0	0	1.000	2	1	0.667
Indiana	0	1	0.000	1	2	0.333

### West Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Minnesota	1	0	1.000	2	1	0.667
Iowa	0	0	0.000	3	0	1.000
Wisconsin	0	0	0.000	2	1	0.667
Purdue	0	0	0.000	1	2	0.333
Illinois	0	1	0.000	1	2	0.333
Nebraska	0	1	0.000	1	2	0.333
Northwestern	0	1	0.000	1	2	0.333

### Sept. 15 Game

Maryland 42, Virginia 14

### Sept. 16 Games

North Carolina 31, Minnesota 13  
Wisconsin 35, Georgia Southern 14  
Louisville 21, Indiana 14  
Penn State 30, Illinois 13  
Iowa 41, Western Michigan 10  
Duke 38, Northwestern 14  
Rutgers 35, Virginia Tech 16  
**Ohio State 63**, Western Kentucky 10  
Washington 41, Michigan State 7  
Nebraska 35, Northern Illinois 11  
Syracuse 35, Purdue 20  
Michigan 31, Bowling Green 6

### Sept. 22 Game

Wisconsin at Purdue, 7 p.m.

### Sept. 23 Games

Louisiana Tech at Nebraska, 3:30 p.m.  
Rutgers at Michigan, noon  
Florida Atlantic at Illinois, 3:30 p.m.  
Maryland at Michigan State, 3:30 p.m.  
Akron at Indiana, 7:30 p.m.  
Minnesota at Northwestern, 7:30 p.m.  
**Ohio State** at Notre Dame, 7:30 p.m.  
Iowa at Penn State, 7:30 p.m.

too many mistakes. And we’re going to go back and watch the film. We’re going to learn from it, because the best teams, they learn from games like this. We’re going to get better.”

### U-M’s Howard Undergoes Successful Heart Surgery

Michigan men’s basketball coach Juwan Howard underwent a successful heart procedure on Sept. 15 to cut out an aortic aneurysm and repair Howard’s aortic valve.

Howard — whose conditions were identified following a routine medical check — is expected to fully recover in six-to-12 weeks, according to Dr. Himanshu Patel, who performed the surgery, and Howard could return to Michigan’s basketball program in four-to-six weeks.

“I feel so grateful and blessed that this surgery was performed at University of Michigan Health,” said Howard. “My wife, Jenine, and our family appreciate the world-class care that has been provided to us. Dr. (Kim) Eagle, Dr. Patel, Dr. (Stanley) Chetcuti, and all of the

**BIG TEN  
NOTES  
Patrick Engels**

“Brenda Tracy’s allegations of harassment are completely false,” Tucker said in the statement made through his lawyer. “The proceedings initiated by Ms. Tracy are devoid of any semblance of fairness for any matter of this importance, and the University’s ‘hearing’ scheduled for Oct. 5-6 is so flawed that there is no opportunity for the truth to come out.”

“I have been ripped from the team that I love, without any meaningful opportunity to tell my side of the story other than this press release,” he continued. “I ask everyone to consider carefully the undisputed facts outlined and reserve judgment until the full truth comes out.”

According to a USA Today article published on Sept. 10, Tucker was the subject of a university sexual harassment investigation that reviewed a Title IX complaint made by Tracy alleging that Tucker masturbated without her consent during a 36-minute phone call on April 28, 2022. Although this prompted the university to suspend Tucker on Sept. 10 while they wait for the hearing to determine if he violated the school’s sexual harassment and exploitation policy, Tucker sees a different side to the story, doubling down on his claim that the two had developed a romantic relationship and were instead having an “intimate” conversation.

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FILE PHOTO

**GET WELL SOON — Michigan men's basketball coach Juwan Howard underwent a heart procedure on Sept. 12 and is expected to return to the Wolverines in four-to-six weeks.**

staff at the Frankel Cardiovascular Center are so talented and performed like champions throughout this process. I am going to work very hard in my rehabilitation to be stronger than ever by the time our upcoming season is upon us."

While Howard recovers, associate head coach Phil Martelli will serve as interim head coach. Saddi Washington and Howard Easley will remain in their roles as assistant coaches, while Jay Smith — director of player personnel and development — will be temporarily elevated to the team's third assistant coach.

"We are extremely grateful Juwan's proactive procedure was a success and that he is resting comfortably," athletic director Warde Manuel said. "We will continue to support Juwan, Jenine and his family as well as the program throughout his absence. All of us at the athletic department have Juwan in our thoughts and prayers. We look forward to Juwan's return when he feels that he has fully recovered."

Howard, who played at Michigan from 1991-94, is entering his fifth season as the Wolverines' head coach, with a 79-48 overall record (46-31 in conference play) through his first four seasons.

**Jackson Named Hoosiers' Starting Quarterback**

Indiana head football coach Tom Allen announced on Sept. 11 that redshirt freshman Tayven Jackson would serve as the team's starting quarterback for the rest of the season.

"Tayven Jackson is going to be our starting quarterback," Allen said. "I'm excited for the opportunity for him. We just felt like that there was a poise to that part of it for Tayven and the ability to move our team down the field, because at the end of the day that's all it comes down to, is being able to score points."

"It was a dream come true," Jackson said after being named the starter. "It's everything that you want to hear from a coach. Coming in here, it's been a struggle, it's been hard, going through a quarterback battle. But that's life. So it was a relief"

Jackson, who transferred to Indiana this year after spending his first season with Tennessee, was entrenched in a tight quarterback competition with redshirt freshman Brendan Sorsby throughout fall camp and into the first

two weeks of the regular season.

Sorsby started the Hoosiers' season opener against Ohio State on Sept. 2, going 8 of 16 with 58 yards and no touchdowns, while Jackson came in relief, completing just 1 of 5 passes for 24 yards. However, Jackson earned the start under center a week later in Indiana's 41-7 rout of FCS Indiana State on Sept. 8, connecting on an efficient 18 of his 21 passing attempts for 236 yards and a 10-yard rushing touchdown.

Jackson, the brother of former Indiana basketball All-American and current Golden State Warrior Trayce Jackson-Davis, entered the collegiate ranks as a four-star prospect and two-time state champion at Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove. He appeared in just three games for the Volunteers as a true freshman, completing three of his four passes for 37 yards along with a rushing touchdown.

In his second start against Louisville on Sept. 16, he completed 70.6 percent (24 of 34) of his passes for 299 yards, a touchdown and an interception, though the Hoosiers suffered a 21-14 loss after falling behind 21-0 to begin the game.

**Big Ten Scolds Ragaini After Critical Comments**

The Big Ten Conference announced on Sept. 13 that Iowa sixth-year senior wide receiver Nico Ragaini had been issued a public reprimand for violating the conference's sportsmanship policy following an expletive-filled comment he made on Sept. 12 regarding the officiating in the team's 20-13 win over Iowa State on Sept. 9.

"The Big Ten Conference expects all contests involving a member institution to be conducted without compromise to any fundamental element of sportsmanship," the release wrote. "Such fundamental elements include integrity of the competition, civility toward all, and respect, particularly toward opponents and officials."

Ragaini, who logged just two catches for 8 yards in the Hawkeyes' victory, was particularly displeased with the officials' no-call late in the second quarter which led to an interception by Iowa State sophomore defensive back Jeremiah Cooper. Ragaini believed Cooper should have been called for pass interference, a gripe he made clear while speaking to the media three days later.

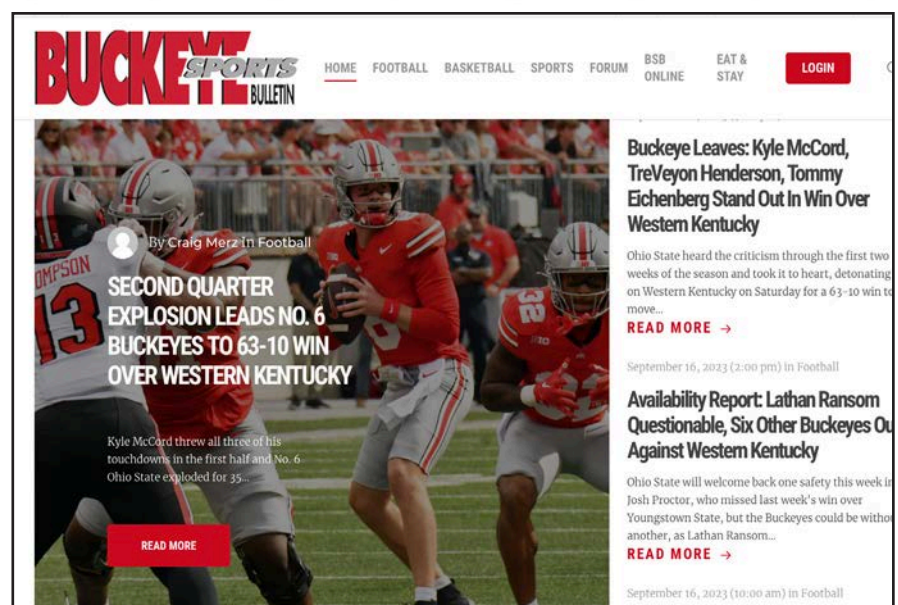
"Was it pass interference? What, is the NCAA or Big Ten going to fine me if I say that's a horses-t f--ing call or what? Yeah, I don't know," Ragaini said "I probably shouldn't have dropped an F-bomb in there but God—. Jesus. It's whatever."

Ragaini added that while he believed Iowa State's defensive backs were getting away with a lot of physical play throughout the contest, it is simply a part of the game that often does not get flagged.

"I don't know if you would consider that hand-fighting," Ragaini said. "I don't know, we're taught to fight through it because it's football. There's holding on every play. I'm sure our line holds on every play. Just have to fight through it and try and contest the catch. The ball doesn't lie. We got the pick-six on the next play."

The Big Ten stated that the public reprimand would be the only punishment for the Hawkeyes veteran wideout, saying that the conference "considers this matter concluded."

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# OSU Impresses Five-Star Big Man Quaintance

The Ohio State men's basketball program inched one step closer toward securing a premier frontcourt prospect to close out its 2024 class, after Raleigh (N.C.) Word of God Christian Academy five-star center Jayden Quaintance (6-9, 230) reportedly completed a "really good" visit with the Buckeyes the weekend of Sept. 9.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Quaintance – the nation's seventh-best prospect and second-best center who reclassified to the class of 2024 from 2025 this summer – spent a significant portion of the weekend with head coach Chris Holtmann and his staff, according to The Columbus Dispatch, where they discussed his potential fit with the program and reviewed film of the coveted center playing for the AAU team Thad Nation in Tennessee. He also received a tour of the campus and attended the football team's Sept. 9 home opener against Youngstown State, where he was greeted by former Buckeye standout forward Jared Sullinger before the game.

"With Jayden being a Cleveland kid, Ohio State was a must-visit," Jayden's father, Haminn, told the Dispatch. "But I think I liked it a lot more than I thought I would, to be completely honest."

According to Haminn Quaintance, he and his son were particularly impressed with Holtmann and his staff's willingness to review Jayden's film and be transparent with their plans to utilize the five-star big man if he decides to commit. This, according to Quaintance, showed them that the program is committed to bringing along his son, which can bode well for the Buckeyes' chances of landing him.

"They had edits up of Jayden playing in the

Nike EYBL league and Adidas 3SSB Circuit," the elder Quaintance said. "It was good, man. That's a lot of stuff to look at, too. It's good to see they're really taking what they're doing seriously. They have a plan."

Ohio State – which originally offered him on May 25 – was Quaintance's first official visit on his recruiting trail, but he plans on traveling to other Power Five schools this fall before making a decision. He was scheduled to take an official visit to Missouri on Sept. 22 and also has trips scheduled to Cincinnati on Oct. 13 and Kentucky on Oct. 20, according to 247Sports. Quaintance also has not yet ruled out forgoing the college ranks for the G League Ignite, a professional development program that allows top prospects to prepare for the NBA rather than playing in college.

For Quaintance and his family, however, the Buckeyes are still firmly in the mix to land the five-star. In addition to the eye-opening visit, Haminn Quaintance said he and his son were enticed by the program's ability to develop top recruits into well-rounded, pro-ready prospects.

"Holtmann had two back-to-back one-and-dones that weren't projected to be one-and-dones or weren't even five-stars coming in," he said. "He showed how they outperformed where their draft status was when they came in. That showed how they develop guys. He went into detail about some of the stuff they do with the guys and some things he saw."

### 2025, 2026 Targets Also Make Visits

Quaintance was not the only highly-touted prospect to pay a visit to Ohio State during the weekend of Sept. 9. The Buckeyes also welcomed a pair of 2025 targets in Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy four-star power forward Chris Nwuli (6-7, 200) and Richmond Heights, Ohio, four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160).

Nwuli was teammates with Ohio State 2024 commit and four-star combo guard John Mobley Jr. (6-0, 150) at Las Vegas Bishop Gorman and has followed him to Wasatch Academy for his junior season. He is currently tabbed as the nation's 29th-best prospect, seventh-best power forward and second-best player in Utah. Despite being a four-star prospect, Nwuli has reported just six offers, including Ohio State – which extended him a scholarship on Nov. 3, 2022 – along with Arizona State, Louisville, San Diego State, UCLA and Washington State.

Jones, the nation's 52nd-best prospect and No. 2 player in Ohio, led Richmond Heights to a 29-0 record and second consecutive OHSAA Division IV state title last season while averaging 20.1 points per game – an effort that allowed him to be named Ohio Division IV Player of the Year. Extended a scholarship by Ohio State on June 9, 2022, he currently holds offers from other schools including Cincinnati, Dayton and Michigan State, among others.

Holtmann and his staff also hosted a pair of 2026 backcourt prospects that weekend in Garfield Heights, Ohio, five-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175) and Saline, Mich., four-star point guard Jonathan Sanderson (6-2, 170).

Johnson, the No. 2 overall player in Ohio, is the cousin of former Ohio State and current

## 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

South Carolina point guard Meechie Johnson Jr. He is also ranked the nation's 25th-best prospect in the class and the fourth-best point guard. Johnson, who told the Dispatch that he has visited Ohio State multiple times, received the Buckeyes' first scholarship offer for the class of 2026 on May 1. Although he holds other offers from schools such as Alabama, Illinois and West Virginia, he said Ohio State has solidified itself toward the top of his list.

"That's a dream," Johnson told the Dispatch. "Since I was young, my whole life was to play for Ohio State. That's my dream school. Coaches showing love, the environment, visiting there and seeing the field and everything, it's very amazing for me because I really like the school a lot."

Sanderson – the nation's 44th-best prospect and No. 2 overall player in Michigan – is the son of current Michigan basketball strength and conditioning coach and former Ohio State forward Jon Sanderson (1997-1999). He excelled in his first high school season, earning all-state honors after averaging 19.3 points, 6.0 rebounds, 4.0 assists and 1.5 steals per game, while also shooting right around 91 and 46 percent from the free-throw and three-point lines, respectively.

This performance helped him earn an offer from Holtmann and his program on Sept. 11, one of eight others for the standout sophomore.

### Holtmann Relying Less On Freshmen In 2023-24

Last season, Holtmann called on a quartet of freshmen – center Felix Okpara, forward Brice Sensabaugh and guards Bruce Thornton and Roddy Gayle Jr. – to make immediate impacts, with each first-year averaging at least 15.5 minutes and making 78 combined starts last season for the Buckeyes.

This year, however, Holtmann sees a much different role for his freshman class. Appearing on Land-Grant Holy Land's "Bucketheads" podcast on Aug. 31, Holtmann indicated that he wants to be much less reliant on his four freshmen – this time around, center Austin Parks, forward Devin Royal and guards Taison Chatman and Scotty Middleton – for this season. He would rather focus on their development before granting them significant minutes.

This was an issue that Holtmann said he specifically encountered last year with Thornton, who led the team with 30.5 minutes per game.

"I don't know that for any of those guys, we are going to need to rely on as much as we relied on Bruce last year," Holtmann said. "And in some ways, that was almost unfair to Bruce. But I don't know if there's anybody that will require that degree of reliance of 31 minutes a game. It's too much."

Holtmann mentioned that all four freshmen have aspects of their game that they need to get better in before they see significant action on the court this season, specifi-

cally mentioning Chatman, Parks and Royal as needing to make the largest jump. He did list Middleton, a former four-star and top-60 prospect, as one freshman who could make his presence felt.

"Scotty, I think right now, up to this point, has shown the ability to be the most complete on both ends in terms of his impact," Holtmann said. "I think he's shown the ability through practice to impact both ends the most. We'll see if that stays consistent."

### List Of 2024 Targets Continues Shrinking

Ohio State may have recently hosted one of the more highly-touted prospects in the 2024 class in Quaintance, but it may have a difficult time signing a third commitment if it is unable to land the five-star prospect.

The Buckeyes fell out of contention for a top-60 prospect on Sept. 11 when Hillside (N.J.) Patrick School four-star small forward Jaiden Glover (6-6, 190) trimmed his preferred list of schools down to four – Creighton, Seton Hall, St. Joseph's and St. John's – leaving Ohio State no longer in the mix. Glover, the nation's 56th-best prospect and No. 4 player in New Jersey, indicated earlier this summer that a potential visit to Columbus was in the works and that he was enticed by the program's recent string of one-and-done players. But a visit would never come to fruition, and the four-star would eventually commit to St. John's on Sept. 12.

This news came just days after Holtmann and his program were forced to take another 2024 prospect off their recruiting board when Houston PSAT-XEA Academy four-star center Trent Burns (7-3, 210) – the nation's 77th-best prospect and 13th-best center – removed Ohio State from his list of preferred programs. With both Burns and Glover no longer on the radar, the Buckeyes' search for a final 2024 frontcourt pledge has likely been whittled down to three.

Joining Quaintance on the list of potential commitments is Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic four-star center Jacob Cofie (6-9, 225) and Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star center Aiden Sherrell (6-10, 215).

Cofie, the nation's 81st-best prospect and No. 1 player in Washington, included Ohio State in his list of final four schools on Aug. 26, along with USC, Virginia and Washington. He has previously said that the Buckeyes have been in contact with him for a long time. Sherrell, the No. 22 overall prospect in the class who was elevated to five-star status in September, placed Ohio State on his list of five schools on July 22 and visited the Buckeyes on June 11.

If any of the three prospects is signed, he would join a 2024 class that already includes a pair of backcourt Buckeyes in the previously mentioned Mobley and Ottawa (Ohio) Glandorf three-star small forward Colin White (6-6, 180).

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# Transfers, Freshmen Fitting In OSU's Culture

Ohio State has four outgoing players – including guard Taylor Mikesell – from last year's roster while five new players will take the court this season, including transfer guards Celeste Taylor (Duke) and Kennedy Cambridge (Kentucky), as well as forward Taiyier Parks (Michigan State), and a pair of freshmen in guard Diana Collins and center Faith Carson.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Luckily for the Buckeyes, they return no shortage of veterans, including the likes of fifth-year guards Jacy Sheldon and Rikki Harris, junior guard Taylor Thierry and fifth-year forwards Rebeka Mikulášiková and Eboni Walker, not to mention sophomore forward Cotie McMahon. With plenty of returning players, it's been easy to continue building the culture and chemistry – even with new faces – that the team put plenty of emphasis on last season.

"We have a lot of freshmen and a lot of transfers," Sheldon said in July. "A lot of the transfers are really experienced and fit in really well, getting chemistry already. And the freshmen are fitting in just fine, too. It's cool to see them get better just the couple of weeks they've been here. But just kind of learning how to play with each other – for all of us, the transfers and those new freshmen – is going really well, and I'm excited to see it continue."

Thierry is entering her third season with the Buckeyes, and she views helping those newcomers as part of her job as a leader for the squad.

"I'm definitely excited," she said about this season. "I can't believe I'm already here for my third year, so it's kind of been going by fast. I'm just using my experience right now and what I've worked toward, especially being here and just helping others, the newcomers, and making sure they're comfortable."

She said while the team's chemistry is doing well and the players are clicking with each other during practice, the team's culture – something head coach Kevin McGuff has lauded over the past several seasons – is not something that needs to be built back up from year to year.

"I just think there's a lot of personalities on this team, and we all click well with each other," she said. "We're all just here to compete with each other and want the best for each other, and we're just pushing each other. I think that kind of helps us click together, and honestly, I don't think there's a whole lot of culture to regain. I think it's just going to build on itself."

That culture – one built on competition and holding each other accountable – is one that was appealing to Taylor,

who wanted nothing else when deciding to transfer out of Duke following an assistant coaching change. She was looking for any sort of stability after very little during her first four years in college, with two seasons each spent at Texas and Duke.

"For me personally, coming out of high school I actually really loved Ohio State, but it just wasn't the right fit at the time for me. So when I got my fifth year, I had a coaching change at Duke with one of my assistant coaches and I'm really close to (Ohio State) assistant coach Jalen Powell. She's known me since I was a little kid. It was kind of a no-brainer choosing where I wanted to do my fifth year.

"Throughout my entire (college) career I've had three coaches already. This will be my fourth coach in five years. I've been used to change. I've been trying to get comfortable with things changing, and so I've had a lot of different coaching styles, a lot of different offenses, a lot of different defenses. So I think it being my fifth year, just having that versatility and different styles has helped me a lot."

Taylor said she has loved her experience already in just a few months at Ohio State – from practice to the workouts and just meeting everyone – adding that her teammates have been quick to pick each other up when someone is feeling down.

"There's sometimes as a college student, you're tired, there's days where you're not feeling it," she said. "You're not all there. One of your teammates is down or one of your teammates doesn't feel like working out today, and just having everyone else around you that they want to put in that work, they come in the gym ready to get better, and I think it's just that mindset of just wanting to come in and compete and get better every day, because they know what it's like to make that run, and obviously they all want to go further."

"Having that mindset of that culture, I think it's really important and has definitely helped me. I think I have that kind of mindset, in a way, but just having everybody have that mindset, that's what helps teams make it far in the tournament."

Parks said Ohio State's culture is one that she didn't particularly feel at her last stop, so it's been a nice change of pace and everyone has welcomed her with open arms.

"Everybody has one of those days where you don't feel like it," she said. "I feel like this team is very good at picking each other up. I feel like I didn't really get that at my previous school, so just having that change, I feel like that's going to help us a lot, even connecting more as a team and help us in the long run."

## Sheldon, Parks Are No Strangers

Speaking of Parks and Sheldon, this season will not be the first time the pair has taken the court together. Sheldon said she and Parks grew up together during their days on the AAU circuit before join-

## 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 Lemmälä	C	6-6		Espoo (Finland) Tapiolan Honka
Ava Watson	G	5-7	★★★★	Buford, Ga.

ing forces at Ohio State.

"I grew up (with Taiyier)," Sheldon said. "We played AAU together, so I've known her about as long as since I've been little. Playing with her is fun, I know her game really well. Being on her team rather than playing against her is going to be way more fun. I think she's going to be able to build her game here, too."

"We're really going to push her and obviously our coaches are going to push her to get better, but I'm excited to see her playing with our playing style."

Parks has plenty of experience playing opposite Sheldon, as well, as she has played in four games for the Spartans against Ohio State. In those four contests – one during the 2019-20 season and the other three in 2021-22 – Parks combined for 31 points on 13-of-27 shooting (48.1 percent) in 77 minutes on the floor while adding 32 rebounds, a presence that the Buckeyes will certainly be looking for this season.

After playing with and against Parks, Sheldon was quick to reach out to the forward once she entered the transfer portal in April.

"She did text me," said Parks, a native of Cleveland. "She dropped an 'eye' emoji, so I did take Ohio State into consideration. They were recruiting me before I got to Michigan State – they were actually one of my top schools, so it was a no-brainer."

## Carson Enjoying Transition To OSU

Carson, one of Ohio State's two incoming freshmen, has been on campus for only a few months but has enjoyed her time in Columbus thus far.

Coming out of Buchanan, Mich. – about a four-hour drive from Ohio State – Carson did not have any ties to the school growing up but has since taken to everything that comes with attending Ohio State.

"I didn't have any ties (to Ohio State)," she said in a video posted by the team on Twitter. "Growing up in Michigan ... not a ton of fans there, but when I came here I instantly loved it. I love the city, I love the people here, the fan base."

Carson held other offers from schools such as Michigan State, Pittsburgh, Ole Miss and Xavier, but it was during an official visit to Ohio State during her recruitment that she was sold on being a Buckeye.

"My first couple of offers I didn't really process it, but once you go on a visit and you see the fan base, the community, it's a different experience," she said.

With so many veterans on the team, there's no shortage of leaders who have helped guide her first few months at Ohio State ahead of her freshman season, and it's been a positive experience thus far for the out-of-state product.

"I loved it," she said of her practices. "It's definitely different. Everyone on the team is so good and talented. Honestly, I feel like I've learned so much, and I've only been here two or three months."

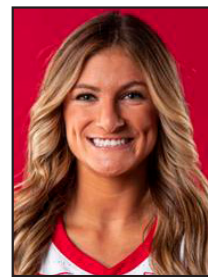
## Other Notes And Tidbits

- Assistant coach Wesley Brooks was at Edmond Memorial High School in Edmond, Okla., on Sept. 12, which is home to Janiyah Williams (5-9), a five-star guard in 2025.

- In some notable women's college basketball news, LSU head coach Kim Mulkey – whose Tigers won last year's national championship – finalized a new 10-year, \$36 million contract on Sept. 8, making Mulkey the highest-paid coach in women's college basketball and setting a new mark for the richest total contract in women's college basketball history.



Taylor Thierry



Jacy Sheldon

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# OSU Putting Together Puzzle Of New Season

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

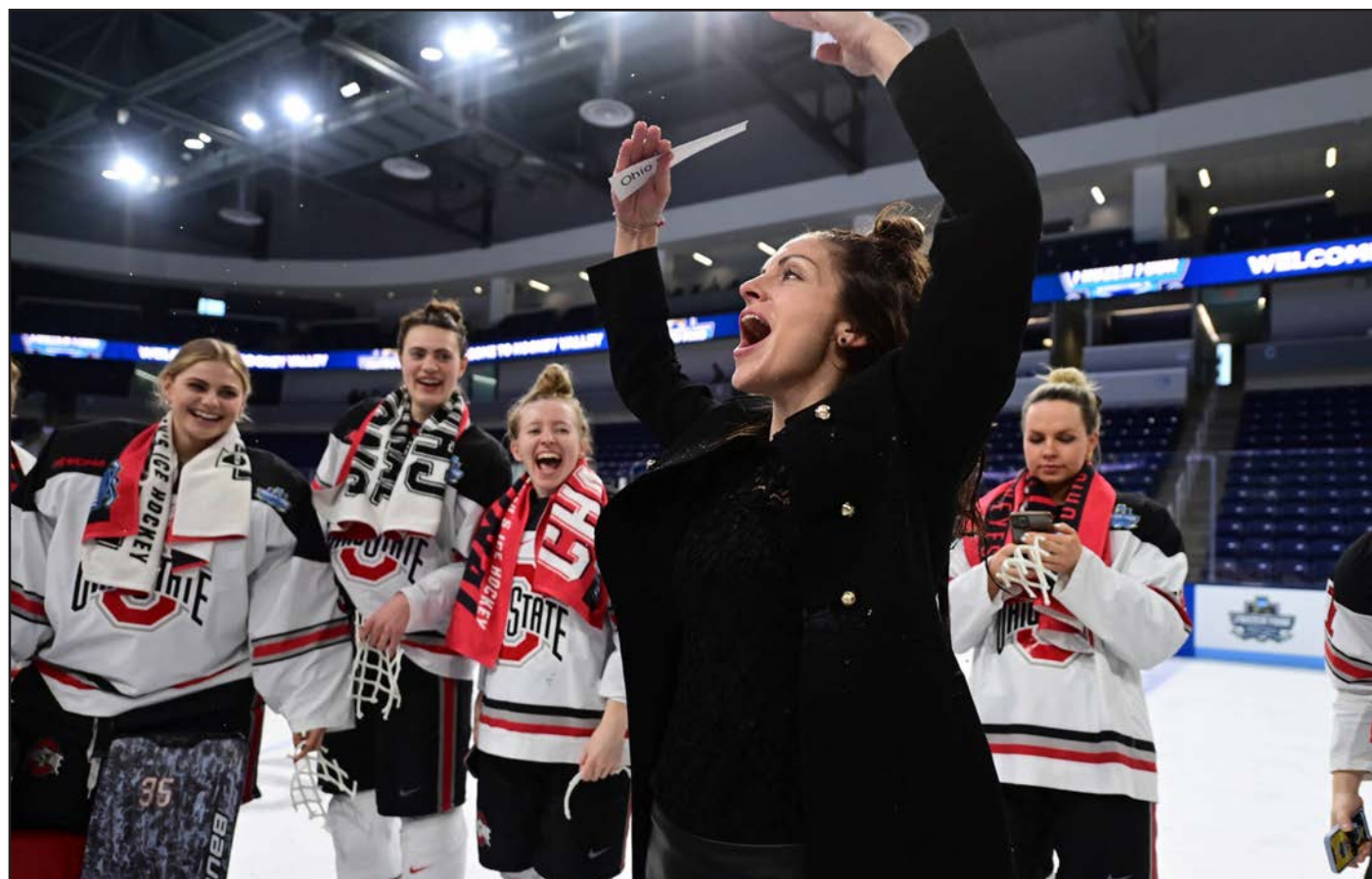
A year after winning their first national championship – the first step in turning the program into a powerhouse in women's college hockey, a goal of head coach Nadine Muzerall since she arrived on campus ahead of the 2016-17 season – Ohio State matched up against Wisconsin on March 19 in an attempt to go back to back, looking to break into an elite club by winning consecutive national championships.

The Badgers scored in the first period, just 6:32 into the contest, and that was the only goal of the game, with Wisconsin's Cami Kronish stopping all 31 shots sent her way to send the Buckeyes home just short of a second national title. Ohio State still finished with a 33-6-2 record and won the school's first Western Collegiate Hockey Association regular-season crown.

On that team were such players as defenseman Sophie Jaques, who won the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award, given to the top player in Division I women's hockey, and was named WCHA Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year. She was joined by a trio of graduate forwards in Olympic gold medalist Emma Maltais, Paetyn Levis (who won Frozen Four MVP during OSU's title run) and Gabby Rosenthal, who tied for second on the team with 21 goals.

"When I look back on my seven years at Ohio State, at where it was and where it is now, it's because of these women that took a chance to come to Ohio State when it was nothing," Muzerall said after the loss to Wisconsin. "I've learned a lot from them and I'm forever thankful for what they taught me as a coach."

Those four difference-making players who contributed heavily to back-to-back championship appearances – along with eight others from last year's roster – are gone this season, as are just over half of the points earned (218 of 432, 50.5 percent).



FILE PHOTO

**BACK TO THE TOP** – Ohio State's women's hockey team is seeking the program's third consecutive national championship game appearance, though the Buckeyes are looking to replace a significant chunk of their roster.

Impact players returning include points leader and graduate forward Jennifer Gardiner, senior forwards Makenna Webster and Jenna Buglioni and starting senior goalkeeper Amanda Thiele.

Gardiner's 57 points last season – only two away from the program record set by Maltais in 2019-20 and tied by Jaques in 2021-22 – came from 21 goals and 36 assists. After Webster's field hockey season finishes, she will be able to join the team for

her senior season. In her junior campaign, after joining late, she contributed 39 points from 15 goals and 24 assists.

Buglioni is another returning forward who made major contributions, totaling 12 goals and 15 assists for 27 points. Despite the significant turnover on Ohio State's roster, she feels the returning players combined with several new additions have set the team up for success.

"Our team is going to be fast, we're going to be physical, we're going to be really hard to play against," she said. "We're going to have four full lines coming at teams every night consistently. We're pretty deep. We just have a lot of experience from returning players, from our transfers coming in, and even all of our freshmen have a lot of experience, too. I think it's going to be a really good year for us."

The coaches across the league agree. Ohio State was voted into a tie with the Badgers for No. 1 in the preseason WCHA coaches' poll, closely followed by Minnesota and Minnesota Duluth. This is only the sec-

ond time the Buckeyes will begin the season as No. 1, with last season after winning the national championship being the first.

The players lost will be hard to replace on the ice given how much production they accounted for last season, but the Buckeyes were able to bring in some talented new faces through the transfer portal and in recruiting, with four talented freshmen – forwards Jocelyn Amos, Jordan Baxter, Joy Dunne and Delaney Fleming – joining the program. Assistant coach Kelsey Cline is still confident the team can make a return to the same heights it has reached over the past few seasons.

"We're always bringing in kids that are very good kids, No. 1, but have that hockey aspiration for themselves," she said. "All those puzzle pieces come together. The great thing about our team is that they're all about the team first. So working together, trusting our systems, trusting the coaches and doing what they do well within that is where all the pieces fall together and the team comes together. It's always a beautiful

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## OHIO STATE WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

puzzle for us and the team, but it's a fun process when everyone's on the same page of what they want."

Buglioni also described the upcoming season as a puzzle for Ohio State, and it's an apt description considering the number of moving parts. With so much roster turnover, it's tough to learn who fits where when they haven't been together for long, but that puzzle has already started taking shape considering three of the pieces were voted to the preseason All-WCHA team.

Gardiner is joined by Thiele and graduate defenseman Cayla Barnes, who transferred from Boston College, on the preseason team. Ohio State's three representatives tie them with Wisconsin for the most, with Minnesota also represented with one player on the team.

Barnes is a two-time Olympic medalist, taking home gold with Team USA in 2018 and earning a silver medal in 2022. Over four seasons with Boston College, Barnes appeared in 131 games with 75 points – 20 goals and 55 assists. She'll be joined by a fellow Eagle in graduate forward Hannah Bilka, also transferring in from Boston College, who received a vote for preseason WCHA Player of the Year, though the honor was ultimately won by Wisconsin defenseman Caroline Harvey.

Bilka spent four seasons with the Eagles before making her way to the Buckeyes this offseason, and she led Boston College last season with 41 points – 12 goals and 29 assists. Cline said the team is excited to bring in such great talent through the transfer portal.

"All of our transfers, whether it's been this year or the past years, a really big piece of it on the front end is making sure we're recruiting kids that are going to fit our program and culture regardless of their hockey talent," she said. "Cayla and Hannah, they have a lot of international experience and a lot of experience coming from Boston College. I think they're extremely excited to be a piece of the puzzle to help us get back to being the national champions."

"Not only what they add to our hockey team, but what they add to the culture with their personalities, that just enhances our team culture," Buglioni added of the duo.

Another new addition expected to make an impact quickly is Dunne, who was voted preseason WCHA Rookie of the Year. Cline said Dunne's family background has shaped her into a great player who behaves like a veteran on and off the ice, with high-level talent to go with it.

"She comes in with a lot of experience both from a skills standpoint, but also a physical standpoint," Cline said. "That will translate extremely well – especially in the WCHA – with how skilled and physical it is. She has a really good starting point to be able to transition well. Her strengths from the offensive side – being able to drive the net, her shot, how powerful she is – will be really fun to see."

The goalkeeper position is one where there wasn't any change during the offseason, with all four on the roster returning from last season.

Thiele played in 26 games with a 91.4 save percentage and finished with a 20-4-1-4 record, tying Andrea Braendli for the most wins in a single season for a Buckeye goalie, and her average goals against per game of 1.81 was good for third best in the WCHA.

Senior Raygan Kirk had the second most time in net with a save percentage of 91.2 and a record of 8-2-1-2 in 11 games. Graduate Quinn Kuntz also returns to the team, posting a 5-0-0 record and a 96.1 save percentage last year. Sophomore Lexington Secreto didn't see the ice in her first season with the Buckeyes.

"We're extremely lucky to have the goalie group that we do," Cline said. "They're a really close group. They support each other, they push each other, and it's great to have goalies that have experience – especially in the WCHA with it being such a tough league. We're lucky to have that experience back."

The Buckeyes were far and away the best team in the WCHA when it came to power plays last season, converting the chance into a goal 32.7 percent of the time. But just 12 of Ohio State's 34 power-play goals last season were from players returning this year. Face-offs will also be very different for the Buckeyes as Rosenthal and Maltais, who both won over 60 percent of their opportunities last season and took by far the most on the team – 828 for Rosenthal and 715 for Maltais, won't be returning.

"Losing Gabby Rosenthal in the face-off dot is a big loss to our team," Buglioni said. "In the summer, (we've been) working on that, not only from a center aspect, but having our wingers be intentional in the face-off circle. It's really important to start off each play with possession."

Whether it's something as big as replacing the likes of Jaques, Levis, Maltais and Rosenthal or simply figuring out who is taking point on power plays this season, it's all part of the continued work being done to solve the puzzle referenced by coaches and players. But those around the league are already showing them the respect of preseason rankings and honors, and seem to think that the pieces are going to fit well.

"I'm super excited to see how all of the pieces of the puzzle come together," Buglioni said. "We're going to be able to have a lot of different line combinations working, so I'm excited to see once we get our first games coming."

### 2023-24 Ohio State Women's Hockey Roster

No.	Name	Yr.	Pos.	Ht.	Hometown	Last Team
1	Raygan Kirk	Sr.	Goalie	5-8	Ste. Anne, Manitoba	Robert Morris
4	Stephanie Markowski	Gr.	Defenseman	5-8	Edmonton, Alb.	Clarkson
5	Delaney Fleming	Fr.	Forward	5-4	Rochester, Minn.	Shattuck St. Mary's
6	Hadley Hartmetz	Sr.	Defenseman	5-5	Phoenixville, Pa.	Boston College
7	Emma Peschel	So.	Defenseman	5-10	Edina, Minn.	Benilde-St. Margaret's
8	Makenna Webster	Sr.	Forward	5-3	St. Louis, Mo.	Wisconsin
9	Hannah Bilka	Gr.	Forward	5-5	Coppell, Texas	Shattuck-St. Mary's
10	Jenna Buglioni	Sr.	Forward	5-3	Port Moody, B.C.	Greater Vancouver Comets
11	Kenzie Hauswirth	Gr.	Forward	5-5	Farmington, Minn.	Quinnipiac
12	Jennifer Gardiner	Gr.	Forward	5-6	Surrey, B.C.	Greater Vancouver Comets
13	Riley Brengman	Sr.	Defenseman	5-5	China, Mich.	Belle Tire
15	Olivia Mobley	Sr.	Forward	5-9	St. Louis Park, Minn.	Quinnipiac
16	Joy Dunne	Fr.	Forward	5-11	O'Fallon, Mo.	St. Louis Lady Blues
17	Jocelyn Amos	Fr.	Forward	5-7	Ailsa Craig, Ontario	London Devilettes
19	Lauren Bernard	Sr.	Defenseman	5-7	Madison, Ohio	Clarkson
20	Kelsey King	Gr.	Forward	5-8	Elk River, Minn.	Minnesota State
21	Kiara Zanon	Sr.	Forward	5-5	Fairport, N.Y.	Penn State
22	Sloane Matthews	So.	Forward	5-6	Plymouth, Minn.	Wayzata H.S.
23	Cayla Barnes	Gr.	Defenseman	5-1	Eastvale, Calif.	Boston College
27	Jordan Baxter	Fr.	Forward	5-7	Coquitlum, B.C.	Delta Hockey Academy
28	Sofie Lundin	So.	Forward	5-5	Helsingborg, Sweden	Djurgarden IF
30	Amanda Thiele	Sr.	Goalie	5-10	Milford, Mich.	Belle Tire
34	Lexington Secreto	So.	Goalie		New Windsor, N.Y.	CT Polar Bears
35	Quinn Kuntz	Gr.	Goalie	5-7	Warroad, Minn.	Warroad Warriors

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# Buckeyes Perfect Fit For Newcomer McBrayer

Nathan McBrayer lived the summer of his dreams and hopes those experiences will help him this fall when the freshman defenseman from nearby Dublin begins his first season for the Ohio State men's hockey team.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Having grown up a Buckeye and Columbus Blue Jackets fan, he got a taste of both worlds when he first attended the NHL team's development camp from July 2-5.

"It was awesome," McBrayer said. "I remember when I was younger watching some of these guys play, and now they're on the ice as coaches. I'm just grateful to be able to have an opportunity to come out here and play and perform in front of everybody."

Several weeks later, he got to play with – and against – his future Ohio State teammates in the Cap City Summer Elite League where current and former Blue Jackets, collegians and junior players were split among four teams for a seven-game schedule akin to the summer leagues for basketball.

McBrayer (6-0, 195) played for the Ohio

AAA Blue Jackets as a youth and spent the past two seasons with Muskegon (Mich.) of the United States Hockey League. Although he went to the Buffalo Sabres' development camp in the summer of 2022, the most recent one was special.

He attended numerous Blue Jackets games at Nationwide Arena over the years and even won a signed jersey in a promotion shown on the video board. He started playing hockey at the age of 3 after attending a Blue Jackets game, and his first time skating was at the OSU Ice Rink. McBrayer watched and learned as local players such as Sean Kuraly, Jack Roslovic and former Buckeye Carson Meyer made it to the NHL.

"Just seeing what they did then and how they're doing now, it's just cool to see, especially Carson," McBrayer said.

Meyer is the first Columbus-area product to play for the AAA Blue Jackets, Ohio State and the Blue Jackets.

"Just him and the others and what they're doing, you're saying to yourself, 'You know, it's possible to do it from here,' and now I want to be like that to the younger guys coming up through the program now," McBrayer said. "I have a younger brother (Zac) who's 12 and I know he looks up to me and some of his teammates do as well, and I just try to do the best I can every time I'm on the ice and around the rink."

In order for McBrayer to attain his goals, the next stage begins at Ohio State,

where it seemed he was destined to go.

"It has been my dream school ever since, I mean, I was born at the Ohio State hospital (Wexner Medical Center)," he said. "So I just grew up being a Buckeye, and it was an easy decision whenever they called me about coming here."

"I've been going to football games and hockey games since I was a little kid, my grandpa's tailgates and season tickets to the football game. I was always around campus."

McBrayer could have eschewed the college route to play junior hockey but that was not a serious consideration.

"Just being from Ohio and Ohio State was the biggest thing," he said. "I want to get my education. My mom went there, and my two grandparents went there. My family all went there. They said they had the best time of their lives there, and I trust the coaching staff there to get me ready for the next level. It was just an easy decision from there to pick Ohio State."

As such, he is well-versed in the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry and got a firsthand experience during the development camp with the Blue Jackets' 2023 NHL draft picks Adam Fantilli (No. 3 overall) and Gavin Brindley (No. 34), both from Michigan, also attending.

"I loved representing Ohio State. There were definitely a few cracks going back and forth," McBrayer said with a smile. He and Brindley were paired for a few one-on-one drills and did some friendly jousting.

"I can't be light on my skates and let him get the best of me.' That's what was going through the back of my mind," McBrayer said. "We started some little comments here and there about Michigan, Ohio State, but he's a great guy, they're both great guys. I'll be excited to compete against Gavin."

Fantilli is a cinch to make the Blue Jackets while Brindley has returned to the Wolverines for another season. McBrayer, meanwhile, is one of 15 newcomers – seven defensemen – for the Buckeyes, which includes eight freshmen and seven transfers (two graduate students).

Ohio State opens the season at Mercyhurst on Oct. 7 prior to hosting Lindenwood on Oct. 13-14 at Value City Arena. The Buckeyes were 21-16-3 last season to earn an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament, their first appearance since 2019. They would have made it in 2020 but the postseason was halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Last season, Ohio State beat Harvard 8-1 in the opening round before a 4-1 loss to eventual national champion Quinnipiac in the regional final.

The season preview will be in the next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

### A Different Voice

McBrayer was not the only Buckeye at the development camp, as women's coach Nadine Muzerall was an instructor at the invitation of Blue Jackets director of player development Rick Nash.

"I'm very humbled to be here and have been asked by Rick Nash to come out and join the boys," she said July 4.

"As a woman coaching in a dominant

men's game, I think it's a good stepping-stone, maybe, to get our fingerprint on what the future can look like for women and the opportunities that it's providing.

"They're very nice boys. Very grateful. I was given fist pumps after every practice and they'd say, 'Thanks very much.' And they listen and they look you in the eye when you tell them something and I think their body language has been very coachable, too."

As much as she was teaching, she learned a few things also.

"I think in hockey coaching, a lot of it is just stealing drills, so I'm getting a lot of ideas," she said. "Tempo. I think that's been a big thing for me, too, is the pace and moving from one thing to another quickly, which I think is really good. It keeps the kids on their toes. And just how they run things behind the scenes has been informative to me."

Ohio State senior forward Jenna Bugli-  
oni was in the stands to watch her coach in action.

"It's such a good opportunity for Coach Muzz," she said. "She's such a skilled coach. We see that every day, and it's really good for her to get an opportunity to come out here and show her stuff in an NHL organization."

Muzerall led the Buckeyes to the 2022 national championship and a runner-up finish to Wisconsin this past season, and Fantilli is a fan.

"Obviously, her résumé speaks for herself," Fantilli said. "What she has been able to do at OSU is awesome. And being on the ice with her and picking her brain and having a conversation with her, obviously she's world class. Just being on the ice with her, it was a lot of fun. I know she has a lot of knowledge to give us, so I was just trying to pay attention to what she says and have a lot of fun out there."

Muzerall returned the compliments. She and another coach were talking after practice and noticed that Fantilli was the one picking up the pucks and putting them in a bag.

"He seems like a leader at such a young age," she said of the 18-year-old. "You know, he's their No. 1 pick so I think that he has really good characteristic traits of a good leader. ... even though he's from Michigan."

Ah, there it is. Muzerall said she didn't mention that she has won a national championship with Ohio State while the Michigan duo in camp didn't but, "Rick Nash brought that up, so they do know. I was going to wear my (championship) ring, but I said I won't do that."

She hinted she had a surprise for Fantilli on the last day of camp, and let's just say his wardrobe got a couple of colors he wasn't used to wearing.

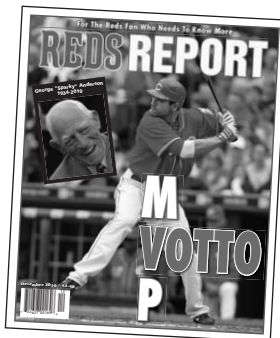
The Buckeye women open the season at Colgate on Sept. 29-30. They will play three series on the road before the home-opening series Oct. 27-28 against Minnesota at the OSU Ice Rink. Games will be ticketed for the first time this season. (For more on the women's hockey team, see pages 34-35.)

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# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## FOOTBALL (3-0)

**Sept. 2** at Indiana, W 23-3; **9** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 35-7; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY, W 63-10; **23** at Notre Dame.

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

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

## CROSS COUNTRY

**Sept. 1** Wright State Mike Baumer Cross Country Classic at Dayton, OH, Men: 1st/15; Women: 1st/10; **9** Badger Classic at Wisconsin, Men 3rd/6; Women 5th/7; **29** Sean Earl Lakefront Invitational at Chicago, Ill.

**Oct. 13** Arturo Barrios Invitational at College Station, Texas; **27** Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wisc.

**Nov. 10** NCAA Regional Championships at Madison, Wisc.; **18** NCAA Championships at Charlottesville, Va.

## FIELD HOCKEY (8-1)

**Aug. 25** Lehigh, W 5-2; **27** Lafayette W 4-1.

**Sept. 1** NEW HAMPSHIRE, W 4-1; **3** BUCKNELL, W 2-1; **4** UC DAVIS, W 5-0; **8** Louisville, L 2-1; **10** STANFORD, W, 6-0; **15** MICHIGAN, W 5-1; **17** Michigan State, W 2-1 (OT); **22** NORTHWESTERN, 1 p.m.; **24** OHIO, 1 p.m.; **29** Iowa, 4 p.m.

**Oct. 1** Indiana, noon; **6** Penn State, 5 p.m.; **8** Kent State 1 p.m.; **13** RUTGERS 3 p.m.; **15** MARYLAND, 1 p.m.; **22** BELLARMINE, 1 p.m.

**Nov. 2** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **3** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **5** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.

## MEN'S GOLF

**Sept. 8** Maui Jim Collegiate at Scottsdale, Ariz., 6th/15; **9** Maui Jim Collegiate at Scottsdale, Ariz., 5th/15; **10** Maui Jim Collegiate at Scottsdale, Ariz., 4th/15;

**Oct. 2-3** Hamptons Invitational at East Hamptons, N.Y.; **30-31** Cal Poly Collegiate at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.

## WOMEN'S GOLF

**Sept. 11-12** Dick McGuire/Branch Law Firm at Albuquerque, N.M., 10th/16; **17-18** Mary Fossum Invitational at Michigan State.

**Oct. 9-10** Illini Invitational at Medinah, Ill.

## MEN'S ICE HOCKEY

**Oct. 7** Mercyhurst, 7 p.m.; **13-14** LINDENWOOD; **20** Michigan, 6 p.m.; **21** Michigan; **27-28** Nebraska-Omaha, 8:07 p.m.

**Nov. 3-4** MICHIGAN STATE; **10-11** Notre Dame; **24-25** PRINCETON.

**Dec. 1-2** Wisconsin; **8-9** MINNESOTA; **30** MERCYHURST.

**Jan. 5-6** Bowling Green; **12-13** NOTRE DAME; **19-20** Minnesota; **26-27** Penn State.

**Feb. 2-3** MICHIGAN; **16-17** WISCONSIN; **23-24** MICHIGAN STATE.

**March 1-2** PENN STATE; **8-10** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals; **16** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals; **23** Big Ten Tournament Final.

## WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

**Sept. 29** Colgate, 6 p.m.; **30** Colgate, 3 p.m.

**Oct. 13** Minnesota Duluth, 4 p.m.; **14** Minnesota Duluth, 4 p.m.; **20** St. Thomas, 4 p.m.; **21** St. Thomas, 3 p.m.; **27** MINNESOTA, 6 p.m.; **28** MINNESOTA, 3 p.m.

**Nov. 3** Bemidji State, 7 p.m.; **4** Bemidji State, 4 p.m.; **17** WISCONSIN, 6 p.m.; **18** WISCONSIN, 3 p.m.; **24** ST. LAWRENCE, 6 p.m.; **25** ST. LAWRENCE, 3 p.m.

**Dec. 1** ST. CLOUD STATE, 6 p.m.; **2** ST. CLOUD STATE, 3 p.m.; **9** MINNESOTA STATE, 6 p.m.; **10** MINNESOTA STATE, 2 p.m.

**Jan. 12** Minnesota, 7 p.m.; **13** Minnesota, 3 p.m.; **19** MINNESOTA DULUTH, 6 p.m.; **20** MINNESOTA DULUTH, 2 p.m.; **26** St. Cloud State, 4 p.m.; **27** St. Cloud State, 2 p.m.

**Feb. 2** BEMIDJI STATE, 6 p.m.; **3** BEMIDJI STATE, 3 p.m.; **9** Minnesota State, 7 p.m.; **10** Minnesota State, 4 p.m.; **16** ST. THOMAS, 6 p.m.; **17** ST. THOMAS, 3 p.m.; **24-25** Wisconsin.

**March 1-2** WCHA Quarterfinals.

## MEN'S SOCCER (1-3-2)

**Aug. 24** CAL STATE NORTH-RIDGE, T 1-1; **27** UC DAVIS, L 2-1.

**Sept. 1** at IU Classic in Bloomington, Ind., vs. Seton Hall, L 1-0. **4** WASHINGTON, T 1-1; **9** Butler, W 1-0; **15** PENN STATE, L 3-0; **19** KENTUCKY, 7 p.m.; **24** Northwestern, 2 p.m.; **29** Rutgers, 7 p.m.

**Oct. 3** XAVIER 7 p.m.; **6** MICHIGAN, 7 p.m.; **10** Louisville,

7 p.m.; **15** Indiana, noon; **20** WISCONSIN, 7 p.m.; **24** Michigan State, 7 p.m.; **29** MARYLAND, 1 p.m.

## WOMEN'S SOCCER (4-2-2)

**Aug. 17** MIAMI (OHIO), W 3-0; **20** BUFFALO, L 2-1; **24** Memphis, L 6-1; **27** Montana, T 2-2; **31** OAKLAND, W 6-0.

**Sept. 7** OHIO, W 4-1; **10** AUBURN, W, 2-0; **17** Michigan State, T 1-1; **21** NEBRASKA, 6 p.m.; **24** Maryland, 1 p.m.; **28** INDIANA, 7 p.m.

**Oct. 1** ILLINOIS, noon; **8** Penn State, 1 p.m.; **12** Minnesota, 7 p.m.; **15** Wisconsin, 2 p.m.; **19** RUTGERS, 6 p.m.; **22** MICHIGAN, 1 p.m.

## WOMEN'S TENNIS

**Sept. 15-17** Debbie Southern Furman Fall Classic at Greenville, S.C.; **21-24** Fall Spotlight at Raleigh, N.C.

**Oct. 1** ITA All-Americans at Cary, N.C.; **14** Buckeye Invite at Columbus, Ohio; **20** ITA Midwest Regionals at Ann Arbor, Mich.

**Nov. 2** ITA Fall Championships at San Diego, Calif.; **4** ASU Thunderbolt Invitational at San Diego, Calif.

## WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (3-6)

**Aug. 25** at NKU Tournament in Highland Heights, Ky., vs. Northern Kentucky, W 3-0; **26** at NKU Tournament in Highland Heights, Ky., vs. Bowling Green, W 3-2; **27** at NKU Tournament in Highland Heights, Ky., vs. East Tennessee State, W 3-0.

**Sept. 1** SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC VS. GEORGIA TECH, L 3-1; **2** SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC VS. GEORGIA TECH, L 3-1; **8** Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in Stanford, Calif., vs. Stanford, L 3-0; **9** Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in Stanford, Calif., vs. Oregon, L 3-1. **14** Texas, L 3-1; **15** Baylor, L 3-2; **22** Nebraska, 9 p.m.; **24** Iowa, 3 p.m.; **27** WISCONSIN, 8 p.m.

**Oct. 1** MARYLAND, noon; **6** Rutgers, 7 p.m.; **7** Penn State, 6:30 p.m.; **13** ILLINOIS, 7 p.m.; **15** PURDUE, 1 p.m.; **18** Wisconsin, 8 p.m.; **21** Indiana, 8 p.m.; **25** Northwestern, 6 p.m.; **29** Michigan, 2 p.m.

**Nov. 3** MINNESOTA, 6:30 p.m.; **4** INDIANA, 7 p.m.; **8** MICHIGAN STATE, 7 p.m.; **12** Maryland, 1 p.m.; **15** Illinois, 9 p.m.; **18** Minnesota, 8 p.m.; **24** PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; **25** RUTGERS, 7 p.m.

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# True Measuring Stick Has Arrived For OSU

There may not be a countdown clock in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center documenting the number of days, hours, minutes and seconds until the Buckeyes face Notre Dame, but it's been on the minds of fans since before the 2023 season kicked off.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Ask just about anyone in Buckeye Nation what would make them happiest, and they would be unified in saying a victory over Michigan, followed closely by a victory over the Fighting Irish. They also might put a trip to the College Football Playoff, but many seem to (misguidedly) have that farther down on their list, even though the goal every season is to compete for and win the national title.

Few teams are more polarizing than Notre Dame, to the point that even with zero connection to South Bend or the football team, many fans revel in its failure. Maybe it's because back in the early days of college football the Irish were the only true "national" brand, the one that the networks would talk about in mythical terms as all that was good and right with college football. The Notre Dame brand was so huge that it is still to this day the only school to have a Heisman Trophy winner – Paul Hornung in 1956 – despite finishing with a losing 2-8 record.

Hornung was the Golden Boy, from the Golden Dome, and all of America knew who he was. Even non-sports fans could identify him. It was a brilliant job of marketing but also pointed out that Notre Dame was part of the college football elite. And for a sport still finding its way, that brought out a lot of resentment.

The bloom has come off of the rose a little bit for Notre Dame, simply because it hasn't been a true player in the national championship chase since the days of the BCS. Yeah, the Irish have made the College Football Playoff

a couple of times but were blown out on both occasions.

Still, Notre Dame is, like Ohio State, a blue blood in the sport, and a showdown with the Buckeyes will have a ton of eyes watching. The players know this all too well.

"We love matchup games," wideout Emeka Egbuka said. "That's why you come to Ohio State, to play Notre Dame in South Bend."

While his charges were putting the fear of God into the hearts of an overmatched Western Kentucky outfit, Ryan Day was already switching his focus to the West – roughly 260 miles.

"We wanted to build momentum into next week, and everything was turned up in a big way, so we need to get back to work," Day said. "Notre Dame starts now. Usually, we start on Sunday, but we're starting to prepare tonight."

It's an interesting matchup, for reasons beyond sheer brand value. It will be the first true test the Buckeyes have faced. Admit it, right now no one really knows whether the Buckeyes are good enough to compete for the national title. They appear to be progressing and looked as close to complete against WKU as they have all season. But the level of competition has been laughable, so this will be the first real test.

As they often are, the game will be decided in the trenches. Notre Dame boasts one of the best offensive line units in all of college football. The Irish average 5.9 yards per carry through four games, good for 14th in the country, and have allowed quarterback Sam Hartman to be sacked just four times.

Hartman may be the missing piece for Notre Dame, which last season was an offense that preferred bullying foes with brute force. Hartman has changed that, and the Irish have reeled off 29 plays of 20 yards or more – third best in the land, and nine more than the Buckeyes, the team with the reputation for having a big-play offense.

As anyone who follows Ohio State knows, there was an issue late last season with the Buckeyes giving up explosive plays. Ohio State has allowed just five gains of 20 or more yards this season, which ties for fifth in America, and are among a dozen teams yet to allow a gain of 40 yards or more this season.

As important as the line play will be, this aspect of the contest could be even more important. Notre Dame will take shots downfield, and how well Ohio State does preventing big gains will go a long way toward gaining a victory.

There has been a lot of talk about Ohio State's lack of sacks and a belief that the defensive ends are not playing well. That's just noise, as the numbers say otherwise. Before you say, "Whoa, Facts Man, you're crazy. The numbers show there aren't many sacks," rest assured that there is more to affecting the quarterback than sacks.

Pressures are nearly as important, and Ohio State showed on numerous occasions against Western Kentucky that it could affect Austin Reed simply by getting in his face. That pressure led to misfires, which led to panic, which led to failed drives.

Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolouau have each done an excellent job affecting opposing passers. In grading from Pro Football Focus, Sawyer has a pass rush grade of 91.7 while Tuimolouau is just a notch behind at 90.8. They have combined for 17 pressures and a dozen hurries, and in true pass-rush sets they are winning at a rate above 30 percent.

WKU was the first real opportunity for Ohio State to face a team wedded to the passing game, and the Buckeyes affected the veteran Reed often enough that the usually high-powered Hilltoppers managed to complete just 56.4 percent of their passes for 204 yards.

When asked about how his top defensive ends are handling not having any sacks through three weeks, Day said you must watch film to figure out what's real and what isn't.

"It will happen," he said. "There will be plenty of opportunities for that. They really put their hands in the dirt and started coming hard. I thought they were into it. I felt them out there today, which is a good sign."

Ohio State will go into South Bend as a slight favorite and should not be spooked by the atmosphere as it has won 16 of its last 17 regular-season road games under Day. The evolution should continue, and the results from the win over Western Kentucky should provide much more optimism than the prior

two weeks did.

But it won't be determined how good Ohio State is until the late hours of Sept. 23. And you don't need a clock to know that.

## Let The Man Deal It

It was nice to see the chains taken off Kyle McCord.

After a couple of weeks of conservative play calling – and a few missed opportunities – McCord averaged 13.8 yards per attempt and threw a nice deep ball to high school teammate Marvin Harrison Jr for a 75-yard scoring strike that woke up the crowd and the team. McCord looked much more in control of the offense than in the first two contests, and his passes seemed to have more zip and better placement.

He seemed unfazed by a fumble on the second drive of the game, which showed Day that the decision to make him the starter was the correct one.

"That's one of those things you want to watch in a quarterback – how are they going to respond. Are they going to go into their shell or just keep pushing forward?"

Day liked that McCord stayed aggressive after the turnover and showed no signs of being gun-shy with his decision-making or passing.

"He's poised," Day said. "He doesn't really ride the roller coaster, and I think that's one of his strengths. At that point, I just kind of stayed away and asked him what he saw and let him know what I saw. He didn't get upset. Just said, 'All right, got to come back and go play. We've got a long game ahead of us.'"

McCord was helped by improved play from the offensive line, which had also been subject to its share of criticism early in the season. After struggling in short-yardage situations, Ohio State converted all four of its chances on third-and-3 or less.

The Buckeyes averaged 6.2 yards per carry, and the backs had massive holes to run through for the bulk of the afternoon. That Ohio State ran the ball with such ease played a role in McCord feeling more comfortable.

"When we're running the ball the way we were today, that makes it a lot easier," Day said. "And that was big."

Incidentally, if folks want to believe that McCord is still a liability, that's their prerogative. They would be wrong, however, as he currently leads the Big Ten and sits ninth nationally in total QBR (87.2), a quality metric used by ESPN to paint a more complete picture for a quarterback than passing efficiency does.

With all aspects humming against the Hilltoppers, Ohio State goes into Notre Dame week much more confident, with a bit of a swagger.

## The Best Interest Of The League?

This may seem like a minor quibble, but it's odd that the Buckeyes are going head-to-head on the schedule with league mates Iowa and seventh-ranked Penn State on Sept. 23.

It's always been an assumption that a network and league want as many total eyes as possible on a product. Yet it seems to be a disservice to make Big Ten fans choose between a pair of games involving ranked, unbeaten teams. Rather than forcing them to choose, why not air one game in the mid-afternoon window and one game in the evening window?

Maybe there isn't anyone else agitated by this, but it just seems a bit backward.

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# Quarterback Status No Longer Day To Day

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

The mail service for Buckeye Sports Bulletin has been so bad that Ryan Day had already named Kyle McCord the starting quarterback before most of you read my rant in this space about the coach being wishy-washy about McCord's status as starter following the Youngstown State game. Even though Day and the United States Postal Service combined to make my complaint somewhat obsolete by the time you read it, I stick by my comments from the last issue.

Just to recap, or in case your BSB *still* hasn't arrived, this is what Day said after the 35-7 victory over the Penguins, in which McCord was 14 of 20 for 258 yards, three TDs and no interceptions, when asked about his quarterback's status:

"We'll look at it over this weekend and try to see if he's taken that step and where we're going," he said of McCord. "I'm not ready to make a decision right now."

First of all, I thought he had already made the decision, naming McCord the starter heading into the opener with Indiana. Not that it is any of the public's business, but I had no idea that the competition with McCord and Devin Brown was still going.

In fact, I feel like I am the only one who didn't get the memo that the competition was continuing. Read through this edition of BSB and it seems like all of the participants, including McCord, believe he wasn't declared the starter until now. So, what exactly happened on Aug. 29 when I thought Day had declared McCord the starter?

"This is something that's a little uncharted territory for me," Day said at the time, "but you just go on what you see every day in practice. And I think that Kyle's consistency in the last couple of weeks has allowed him to be the starter and he deserves that. But I also think Devin deserves to play in the game as well. So how much, all that, that's still to be determined, but we've at least come up with that conclusion here."

Saying that Brown "deserves" to play, is a lot different than saying McCord was not the starter. I have always been of the belief that once you win a job, it is yours to lose.

As I stated in the last issue, McCord had done nothing to lose the job and Brown had done nothing to win it in the first two games. As coaches always say, "We'll have to look at the film," but I am not sure what Day could have seen on the film in the two days leading up to "naming" McCord the starter for the second time that he couldn't have seen from the sidelines on game day. An Ohio Stadium crowd of 102,897, along with millions watching on television, saw it – McCord was the starter.

Help me here, dear readers. Am I the only one who thought McCord had been named the starter heading into the Indiana game?

With a huge game with Notre Dame coming up, why put any extra distraction in front of the player tasked with leading the Buckeyes to victory by, apparently, keeping him in limbo?

Day seems to agree with me.

"I think, first off, it gives Kyle peace of mind," Day said after naming him the starter a second time. "He realizes that he is the starter and he's earned that opportunity. Secondly, he will receive more of the reps. Devin will still get reps in practice, reps with the ones, but Kyle will get a little bit more than he has the last couple of weeks, and I think it's good for the team to have that distinction, to know that Kyle right now is the starter."

Receiver Emeka Egbuka, in lauding his quarterback, suggested after the blowout of Western Kentucky that the "fans had been skeptical" of McCord.

I don't believe that was the case at all. I think the fans – and media members – figured McCord was going to be the starter from the moment C.J.

Stroud indicated he was declaring for the NFL back in January. If there was any skepticism, it was perpetuated by Day when he strung out the spring and fall camp battle.

After three games, I am very comfortable with McCord under center. He doesn't seem to be getting better every game, he seems to be getting better every *quarter* and that gives me great optimism heading into the trip to South Bend.

Against the Hilltoppers, he was 19 of 23 (that's 82.6 percent for those of you without a calculator) for 318 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions. Those are Stroud-like numbers. He had the one strip-sack in the first quarter that resulted in a Hilltopper field goal, making the score 7-3 in favor of OSU. But McCord responded like a true starter – a good starter – leading his team to 35 points in 16 minutes, scoring by air and on the ground, including directing a 58-yard scoring drive in the final 28 seconds of the half, giving the Buckeyes a 42-10 lead heading into the locker room.

In case you were wondering, through three games last year, Stroud was 62 of 85 (72.9 percent) for 941 yards, 11 TDs and no interceptions. McCord is 53 of 76 (69.7 percent) for 815 yards, six scores and one interception – maybe not up to a Heisman finalist's numbers, but a solid stat line by anyone's definition.

Just so you don't think I am picking on Day – as long as he came up with the right quarterback, I guess I don't care how he got there – I did want to praise him for getting McCord out of the game, *in the third quarter, no less*. This is in contrast to last season when he repeatedly left Stroud in the game, well after it was under control, risking injury to his star player while denying reps for McCord, his key reserve.

Would McCord have more easily won the battle in the spring or fall if he had gained more experience last season?

This time around, he not only gave Brown more than a quarter's worth of action, but he actually let him pass the ball, including a sweet 28-yard touchdown pass to Carnell Tate, rather than just having him hand the ball off and run out the clock, as was so often the case with McCord last season. I even thought we might see Tristan Gebbia or Lincoln Kienholz.

If McCord plays well against Notre Dame, which I believe he will, maybe Day will name him the starter a third time when Penn State comes to town on Oct. 21.

### Quick Hitters

- Ah, the tight ends. Cade Stover seems to be getting better and better. After reeling in a 49-yard reception in the opener against Indiana, he added a 40-yard reception against WKU, as part of a five-catch, 90-yard game. Elsewhere in this issue, managing editor emeritus Mark Rea points out that the two long catches mark the first time since 2013 that an Ohio State tight end has had two catches of 40 yards or more, when Jeff Heurman turned the trick.

Stover now has 10 receptions for 188 yards for the season, and his 18.8-yard average is second only to Marvin Harrison Jr.'s 21.7-yard mark among Buckeyes with five catches or more.

Stover had a fumble at the end of a 28-yard catch in the third quarter, which Tate was able to cover, but I think the miscue was offset by Stover's block on Chip Trayanum's 40-yard scoring run before the half.

- Seeing as I complained last issue that TreV-

eyon Henderson risked injury for only an extra yard or two by hurdling over a Youngstown State player, I should point out that he pulled his hurdling act against Western Kentucky but gained several extra yards on his leap vs. the Hilltoppers. Still, I think it is a high-risk, minimal-reward proposition.

- Funny how a 63-10 victory quieted Day and company as far as limited possessions caused by the new clock rules. Everybody plays by the same rules. Deal with it.

As far as speeding up the game, the contest with Western Kentucky took 3:33, the longest of the season, to date. By comparison, only five games last season, under the old rules, were longer. Wisconsin took 3:59, Maryland 3:48, Georgia 3:40, Penn State 3:39 and Michigan 3:36. As you can see, most of these were big games, which translate into more ads.

- God bless Day for understanding simple math.

In more than 40 years of writing this column, I am sure I have mentioned, probably more than once, that the notion of the "three yards and a cloud of dust offense" has always troubled me. Run the ball for three yards, three times and you will be facing 4th-and-1 every time. Somehow, I don't see Woody Hayes being as willing to go for it on fourth down as often as today's coaches are willing to do.

Elsewhere in this issue, Day says, "We have to make 4 yards every play and haven't done that enough, we haven't."

Now I'm no Albert Einstein, but you run three plays of 4 yards and you get a first down every time.

Ohio State and Western Kentucky went for it on fourth down a combined eight times, converting five. The Hilltoppers were 3 of 6 and the Buckeyes 2 of 2.

- While defensive ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolou continue to remain fairly quiet when it comes to the stat sheet, interior linemen Tyleik Williams and Mike Hall continue to wreak havoc on opposing offenses. Against WKU, Williams had a big day with seven tackles, a sack and an entertaining fumble recovery for a touchdown. Hall was limited to just one tackle, but on the young season he has a 10-yard sack among four tackles. Williams is third on the team with 17 stops to go with two TFLs and his sack and fumble recovery.

Sawyer is sixth on the team with 10 tackles and a half TFL, and Tuimolou is 11th on the team with seven stops and also has a half TFL. Both seemed to mount more pressure against the Hilltoppers but have yet to register a sack.

The Notre Dame game would be a great time to dent that line on the stat sheet.

### Low-Cost Help

I'm not going to change my "we're all in this together" message too much from the last couple of issues as Buckeye Sports Bulletin and its readers try to buck the trend of the decline in print and battle soaring inflation.

We remain humbled and grateful in light of the number of BSB readers who have either upgraded to VIP status or paid full price for their subscriptions, even when offered a discount. Those readers who are pitching in with a little bit extra are trying to underwrite those who *can't* afford to pay full price. But, as stated in the last issue, everyone can help, even those of you who are cost-sensitive.

With the Notre Dame game and the meat of

the Big Ten schedule coming up, now is a great time to send four free trial issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin to any Buckeye fans that you know who are not enjoying the paper already. I'm a little surprised at how tepid the response to this call to action has been. Think of how many new readers we could introduce BSB to if each subscriber sent in just one name and address, or more. Don't know any Buckeye fans (seems unlikely)? Send the four free issues to your barber shop, your local library or your local high school library.

Send your names and addresses to BSB at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, mail them to PO Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212, or give us a call at (614) 486-2202. There is absolutely no cost to you or the recipient. In fact, we will even pay for the phone call if you would like at (800) 760-2862.

Remember, if you have already sent us a name, there is no reason to send it again. We will reach out to those people on our own.

Speaking of high school libraries, to add some real new blood to the circulation list, consider sending a gift to your children or grandchildren. We are offering a special price of \$29.95 on subscriptions for readers under the age of 35 for one, two or three years – a \$90 discount over the regular rate for up to \$270 savings. Many of those potential readers may have never read a newspaper. Use the same addresses as above.

Thanks again for all the support, and stay with us as we build Buckeye Sports Bulletin together.

### That Team Up North

Speaking of VIPs, one of our most loyal readers, Fredrick Bradshaw, stopped by our new BSB World Headquarters the other day and made a generous VIP donation. Not only is Mr. Bradshaw a huge Buckeye fan, but he is also a graduate of Colorado State and still keeps tabs on his alma mater, which I was reminded of as he was wearing his CSU gear.

"You guys have a big game this week," I said, referring to the upcoming game with Colorado, which had suddenly been thrust into the national spotlight thanks to Buffaloes coach Deion Sanders.

"Yep, they are our second biggest rival," Mr. Bradshaw said, "after That Team Up North."

I got sucked in, hook, line and sinker, thinking he was somehow merging his two loves and referring to Michigan. But after the proper dramatic pause, he said:

"Wyoming."

Did you know that the Cowboys were Colorado State's biggest rival? I certainly didn't.

According to the always reliable Wikipedia, it is the longest rivalry in each school's history, starting in 1899, and is known as the "Border War" or the "Battle for the Bronze Boot."

Since 1968, the schools have battled for the Bronze Boot traveling trophy. The bronzed battle boot was worn in Vietnam by CSU alum Dan Romero.

Colorado State is probably best known by Buckeye fans for the four-year stint by Earle Bruce as head coach from 1989-92, a stint that included a stay by Urban Meyer as an assistant coach as well as a 1,000-yard rushing performance by current OSU running backs coach Tony Alford.

In case you missed it, the Rams more than acquitted themselves against Sanders and the Buffaloes, taking their second biggest rival to double overtime before falling 43-35.



# Reds

# SEPTEMBER LINEUP!



## SEPTEMBER 1-3



**FRIDAY // 1:10**

**FRIDAY // 6:40**

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Staffmark**

• **City Connect Fridays**  
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.

• **Military Appreciation Days, presented by CareSource**  
Visit [reds.com/Military](http://reds.com/Military) for details

**SATURDAY // 6:40**

• **Reds Tote Bag, presented by Jeff Wyler Automotive Family**  
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last.)

**SUNDAY // 12:10**

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**  
Visit [reds.com/Family](http://reds.com/Family) for details

• **Reds City Connect Hunter Greene Poster, presented by Toyota**  
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

• **Sesame Street Ticket Package**  
(Elmo bobblehead only available through theme ticket package, while supplies last)



## SEPTEMBER 4-6



**MONDAY // 4:10**

**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



• **Senior Days**  
Visit [reds.com/Senior](http://reds.com/Senior) for details

**WEDNESDAY // 6:40**

• **Bark in the Park, presented by Kroger, Good 'n' Fun, and DreamBone**  
Ticket packages available for dogs and their owners with pet activities, samples and more!



## SEPTEMBER 8-10



presented by  
**Jelly Belly and Kroger Sweet Spot**

**FRIDAY // 6:40**

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Rozzi Fireworks**

• **City Connect Fridays**  
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.

**SATURDAY // 6:40**

• **Nick Lodolo Bobblehead, presented by Every Watch Has a Story**  
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last)

• **Ohio Lottery Post-Game Concert featuring Lady A, presented by Dunkin'**  
Free to all fans with game ticket! Upgrade to field passes at [reds.com/Concerts](http://reds.com/Concerts)

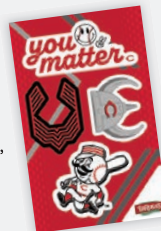


**SUNDAY // 1:40**

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**  
Visit [reds.com/Family](http://reds.com/Family) for details

• **Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by LaRosa's**  
(To kids 14 and younger as part of Family Sundays, while supplies last.)

**FAMILY SUNDAYS**



## SEPTEMBER 18-20



presented by **NABISCO**

**MONDAY // 6:40**

**TUESDAY // 6:40**



• **3-2-1 Tuesdays\*, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light**  
(At all Tuesday Reds home games, fans can purchase \$3 Buds and Bud Lights, \$2 hot dogs, and \$1 ice cream cups)  
\*Limit 2 items per transaction



**WEDNESDAY // 12:35**

• **Business Day Specials**  
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

• **Senior Days**  
Visit [reds.com/Senior](http://reds.com/Senior) for details

## SEPTEMBER 22-24

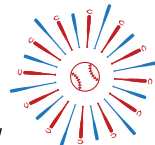


presented by  
**Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste**

**FRIDAY // 6:40**

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show**

• **City Connect Fridays**  
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.



**SATURDAY // 6:40**

• **Reds Team Photo, presented by Homemade Brand Ice Cream**  
(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](http://reds.com/family) for details

• **Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by Chick-fil-A**  
(To kids 14 and younger as part of Family Sundays, while supplies last.)

• **Fan Appreciation Day**  
Lucky fans will win prizes throughout the game! Postcard entries accepted.



**(513) 381-REDS (7337)**



**reds.Com/Tickets**

\*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.