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Vol. 43, No. 7

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 28, 2023

Silver Bullets Make Statement In 20-12 Win Over Penn State

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State's defense, frequently maligned since coach Ryan Day took over as head coach in 2019, has played without a certain swagger over the last few seasons, a swagger that was a trademark of the defenses under Urban Meyer, Jim Tressel and the later years of John Cooper that styled themselves the Silver Bullets.

With the carousel of coordinators, lack of continuity among defensive assistants – sans defensive line coach Larry Johnson – and some misses on the recruiting trail in Meyer's last classes and Day's first classes, the unit has not been up to snuff, at least compared to the team's usual standards over the school's history.

But if No. 3 Ohio State's 20-12 win over No. 7 Penn State on Oct. 21 was any indication, witnessed by 105,506 at Ohio Stadium, that swagger and energy might not just be back, but with it may be the return of those same Silver Bullets who have been missing in action.

"The expectation at Ohio State is to be the best in the country," Day said after the win. "And our defense, I think, has a chance to do that. When (defensive coordinator Jim Knowles) got here, I know that was what he wanted to do. He's done a great job of installing his defenses, especially in the first year, but now he really has a feel for the conference.

"He's taken the next step with their personnel, and the guys are playing with confidence. He does a tremendous job of giving them enough information that they need but not overloading them and allowing them to play fast and confident. That was the most confident and energetic group that I've been around probably since 2019 out there on the field today.

"When the crowd was into it, the whole group had that look in their eye, and they were getting the crowd. There were a cou-



SONNY BROCKWAY

THIRD-DOWN DOMINATION – Ohio State's defense, led by the likes of defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau (44), held Penn State's offense to just one third-down conversion on 16 attempts in a 20-12 win at Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21.

ple of times where I was like, 'Guys, they're about to snap the ball, let's go.' But I loved it. That's the confidence that is building week in and week out."

The key statistic for Ohio State was on

third down. The Buckeyes limited the Nittany Lions to just a single third-down conversion on 16 attempts, the only successful attempt coming on the final drive, a truly unbelievable number that tells the story of Penn State's afternoon on offense. It was not partial toward the Nittany Lions' rushing attack or passing game, either, as the team failed on 11 of 12 passing third downs and all four in which they tried rushing to move the chains.

"That was a combination of the rush and the coverage," Day said. "I thought Jermaine Mathews Jr. played a big-time game for a freshman having to step up without having Denzel (Burke) in there. That was big. If we can play like this, then

that's championship-level defense, and if we can keep growing as a team, then we'll be tough to beat here down the road."

The defense started strong and did not relent, forcing three-and-outs on two of Penn State's first five drives of the game and allowing just 85 yards of offense and a field goal during those same possessions. The Nittany Lions tried to establish the run early with the usually potent duo of Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen, who entered the game combining for 122.8 rushing yards per contest, but were unable to find a rhythm – which, at times, appeared to be due to Penn State's ques-

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Buckeye Leaves

Third-ranked Ohio State picked up one of the team's biggest wins of the season on Oct. 21, utilizing a strong defensive performance to work past No. 7 Penn State at Ohio Stadium. Coming out of the win, here are some choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves:

Patrick Engels, BSB: Ohio State's offensive performance was subpar at best, but they still received some significant production out of tight end Cade Stover. With quarterback Kyle McCord and the offense sputtering through 2½ quarters, Stover helped steer the unit in the right direction with an impressive 30-yard catch down the middle which put the Buckeyes at Penn State's 9-yard line.

Although Ohio State would fail to get any points on the board on that drive, "Farmer Gronk" would come through again early in the fourth quarter with a key 29-yard reception. This would set up for a Jayden Fielding 37-yard field goal to push the Buckeyes' lead to 13-6.

Stover, who finished with four catches for 70 yards, once again proved to be a reliable target for McCord, with yet another strong game in what might be a career year for the tight end.

Braden Moles, BSB: With cornerback Denzel Burke out in Ohio State's biggest game of the season – at least so far – my Buckeye Leaf goes to cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr., who filled in admirably for the injured Burke.

Mathews, who lined up for most of the game opposite Davison Igbinosun, helped the defense limit Penn State and quarterback Drew Allar to just 191 passing yards, while Mathews himself finished with three tackles and a pass breakup.

While the missing presence of someone like Burke would usually be noticed, the Ohio State secondary mostly did not skip a beat with Mathews stepping up to the plate.

Greg Wilson: My Buckeye Leaf goes to Marvin Harrison Jr., who put together yet another 100-yard game, yet again proving that he's the best wide receiver in the country. He finished with a career-high 11 catches for 162 yards and an 18-yard touchdown in the fourth quarter that put the game away and overall was

the main driving force for an offense that struggled immensely to get points on the board.

After a quick start, picking up three catches for 28 yards on the first drive, Penn State's coverage became a little tighter on Harrison, and McCord misfired on multiple throws to him. In a game where it was almost impossible to get the offense going, Harrison was still the bright spot he normally is.

Subscribers

BRYON MCNUTT: Let's give credit to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. He has the defense playing championship football. I've said all season the defense has to win 4-5 games this season. How could it be better? I'd like to see the defense cause a few more turnovers: fumbles and interceptions. Maybe that will happen against Michigan.

Mathews was outstanding filling in for Burke. Having Emeka Egbuka and Tre Henderson would have helped the offense. The offensive line got the job done.

bstu9: The defense is an obvious choice (Penn State had 6 yards in the second half until that last garbage time drive) but also have to give one to Harrison. I don't know if the Bucks win that game without him.

PeyoteBuck: What can we say? Give leaves to the entire defense and an extra large pizza for Knowles with whatever he wants on it. They beat the No. 1 defense in the country. An amazing job. Glad we had a lot of visitors watching.

Tiffin Buckeye: Harrison. Different week, same story

Otis Johnson: "Mirco's Miracle" was the biggest play of the season so far.

John Lanning: Great effort by the defense. Game-ball to all. Harrison was outstanding. Miyan Williams really pushed with second efforts.

BOB CODY: The entire defense and Knowles, and especially J.T. Tuimoloau, the Nittany Lion killer. Marvelous Marvin and Stover. The crowd at the Horseshoe.

R1TBDBITL: The entire defense, of course. Also Stover, who always seems to make a clutch catch.

From The Message Board

Ohio State continued a stretch of tough, grind-it-out games in the team's 20-12 win over Penn State on Oct. 21. With seven games now under the Buckeyes' belts – many of which have required the team to compete deep into the second half – we asked readers in the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum how they think Ohio State will fare at Michigan at the end of the season, another game that could potentially go down to the wire. Here are some of the responses:

"The Bucks will need every player healthy going to Michigan. The offense can't afford to lose anyone, and they need Emeka Egbuka at full go. They need Tre Henderson to be healthy, even if only for limited duty.

"Mathews Jr. was outstanding against Penn State, filling in for Denzel Burke. The defense was nearly flawless: very few unforced errors. Now, if the offense could get to that level of play, and the offensive line keeps getting better, the Bucks have a good chance.

"Could a three-way tie at 11-1 really favor Penn State? Beat Michigan and finish 12-0."

– BYRON MCNUTT

"I am still not confident. I think TTUN is way better than Penn State so the Bucks will need to keep improving and play an A+ game to have a chance."

– bstu9

"TTUN, like PSU, hasn't really played anyone (until us). PSU has a great defense but I thought they were overhyped in most other areas. I feel the same about TTUN. I can't get their lame game against Bowling Green out of my mind. Not that worried. Bucks can do it."

– PeyoteBuck

"I still believe in one game at a time. We've still got to get those counter espionage plays down pat."

– BuckeyeScott

"If the O-line and Kyle McCord continue to improve I think we'll be competitive. I think coach should forget redshirting Dallon Hayden and start him at RB."

– R1TBDBITL

"It depends on whether Jim Knowles is doing the defense with smoke and mirrors and what kind of turmoil the TTUN program is in come late November."

– Poster That Harley Built

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No. 7	Oct. 28	No. 19	April 6
No. 8	Nov. 4	No. 20	April 20
No. 9	Nov. 11	No. 21	May
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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Knowles' Defense Rises To Occasion

Even though his record as Penn State head coach was miserable against top-five teams in general and Ohio State in particular, James Franklin truly believed his team had a golden opportunity to end a six-game losing streak against the third-ranked Buckeyes.

Six opponents had combined for only 48 points, and the Nittany Lions were ranked No. 1 in the country in total defense having allowed an average of only 193.7 yards per game. Just 72.5 of those yards were coming on the ground – making Penn State the nation's No. 2 unit in that category – which seemed a perfect formula to defeat a rushing-challenged Ohio State.

But what gave Franklin an even rosier outlook for his team's chances was an offense that was purring along to the tune of 44.3 points and 426.7 yards per game. Gone was mistake-prone quarterback Sean Clifford, and in his place was sophomore Drew Allar, who was doing things no other Penn State quarterback before him had done.

In addition to owning the program record for career completion percentage, Allar had become the first Big Ten QB since 2000 to throw for 10 or more touchdowns and no interceptions through the first six games of a season. The Medina, Ohio, native who just happened to be Ohio's Mr. Football in 2021, had also been the benefactor of good protection. He had been sacked only four times all season, and never more than once in a single game.

Then, when Ohio State cornerback Denzel Burke was officially ruled out of the game with a leg injury, you can begin to see why Franklin was so optimistic.

But what the Penn State head coach didn't know – and frankly what a still-skeptical swath of Buckeye Nation didn't know, either – was that nearly two years of fine-tuning his quirky scheme is finally beginning to reap dividends for OSU defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

Ohio State proceeded to make Allar and the Nittany Lions look like a mid-level high school offense. Entering the game with a 65.2-percent completion rate, Allar managed to connect on only 42.9 percent of a career-high 42 attempts as the OSU defense took equal turns harassing (four sacks, four hurries) and confusing (six pass breakups) the young quarterback.

After the game, as Knowles sipped on a bottle of water while exuding a sort of satisfied "I told you so" aura, he proceeded to outline the difference between this year's pack of marauders who denied Penn State on 15 of 16 third-down plays and last season's more tentative group that allowed chunk plays in bunches.

"They know the scheme (now)," Knowles explained. "We had to get the stops and get (Penn State) off-schedule, and when we make little adjustments in the scheme (to do that), they pick up on it and that's a big deal. Winning those (third) downs in a game like that is huge, and that only comes with preparation and guys who are knowledgeable about the scheme."

Before the 2023 season began, I wrote these very words: "Anyone who has read this column over the past year and a half knows I'm not particularly sold on defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and his system of intricacies."

That was then, and this is now. Consider me finally sold, and it's not just because of one game. Ohio State limited a high-powered Western Kentucky offense to only 10 points while the Hilltoppers have averaged 33.3 points against their other six opponents. Notre Dame managed to score just 14 while veteran quarterback Sam Hartman threw for only 175 yards. The Fighting Irish have averaged 39.0 points in their other seven games while Hart-

man has averaged nearly 250 yards through the air.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Building upon those performances, what the Buckeyes have done to their last three Big Ten opponents is downright jaw-dropping. I've already listed some of Allar's bona fides while Taulia Tagovailoa of Maryland was the second-team All-Big Ten quarterback last year. Meanwhile, Hudson Card is just getting his feet wet at Purdue, but he does have a 300-yard passing game this season and was completing 63.6 percent of his attempts before he ran into the Buckeyes.

Yet, Ohio State has limited those three quarterbacks to a 45.2-percent completion rate (52 of 115) with only three touchdowns and nine sacks. That, quite simply, is getting it done.

The Buckeyes will be prohibitive favorites against each of their next four opponents, none of which ranks higher than fifth in the Big Ten in either scoring or total offense. Those games should give Knowles a chance to further fine-tune his defense for what everyone anticipates will be another showdown at season's end between undefeated archrivals.

Plays Of The Game

There were two key plays – each in the second quarter and each that went against Penn State – that I thought had a huge impact on the outcome of the game.

The most obvious came when a 60-yard fumble return for a touchdown by Penn State linebacker Curtis Jacobs was wiped out by a defensive holding penalty. That would have given the Nittany Lions a 10-3 lead with 9:20 left in the first half as well as a tremendous amount of momentum. As it was, the Buckeyes retained possession, and Miyan Williams later scored on a 2-yard run to give Ohio State the 10-3 advantage. It was a lead the Buckeyes would never relinquish.

The other key play occurred at the 9:58 mark of the second period when Penn State defensive end Chop Robinson was forced out of the game after taking an inadvertent shot to the head.

Robinson, who was down for several minutes before being able to wobble off the field with the aid of a couple of teammates, was a preseason second-team All-American and coming off a two-sack game against UMass. While he was in the game, Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord was just 9 for 16 for 78 yards. After Robinson's departure, McCord finished with a 13-for-19 flourish for 208 yards.

Short-Yardage Woes

The Buckeyes continue to struggle in short-yardage situations, and I'm going to have to lay the blame for that at the feet of Ryan Day. How can a coach who seems so innovative be so backward thinking when it comes to short-yardage problems?

First of all, all sorts of teams at all sorts of levels have successfully used the quarterback sneak for more than 100 years, and I can't believe how many of today's coaches – including Day – simply refuse to employ it.

Secondly, if you are going to use backup quarterback Devin Brown as your short-yardage solution, at least give the poor guy the op-

tion to throw. The play on which Brown turned his ankle featured a half-hearted fake handoff to running back Chip Trayanum before the quarterback plowed ahead to just inches from the goal line. (It appeared to me that Brown was on top of a Penn State defender and that the football broke the plane of the goal line, but deficiencies in Big Ten officiating is a discussion for another time.)

With two cracks at the end zone from the half-yard line and the 6-3, 215-pound McCord back in the game, it seemed the perfect time for a quarterback sneak. Instead, the Buckeyes lined up in shotgun formation, Williams took a third-down handoff 4 yards deep in the backfield and got snowed under for a loss.

Then after deciding to go for the touch-down on fourth down and calling a timeout just to make sure, Day called for a short pass to freshman Carnell Tate that was successfully sniffed out and then snuffed out by Penn State defenders.

Day is going to bear the brunt of criticism for that call, but I'm going to give him a pass. In reality, it seemed to be a mistake on the part of his quarterback.

Before taking the snap, McCord failed to recognize the Nittany Lions had crowded the side of the field where Tate, fellow receiver Julian Fleming and tight end Cade Stover were lined up in a bunch formation. With four defenders in the area, and only Fleming and Stover to block, Tate never had a chance.

Had McCord noticed that Penn State had no one remaining to seal the left edge, rather than faking a handoff to Williams, he should have given the ball to his running back who likely could have walked into the end zone.

Maserati Marv

I watch a game and get the impression that McCord is exceedingly average at times. Then I look at the final stat sheet, see that he's completed better than 60 percent of his passes and thrown for nearly 300 yards, and I wonder what I'm thinking.

A lot of McCord's success, of course, is the result of working with Marvin Harrison Jr., who is performing at an A-plus level. After a 105-yard performance against Purdue during which he was targeted a career-high 13 times, Harrison was targeted 16 times against Penn State, and he responded with 11 catches for 162 yards and a touchdown.

Stopping Harrison is always going to rank among the top two or three things on an opponent's to-do list. But wanting to stop him and actually accomplishing that are distinctly different things.

"We went into this game knowing that we had to have an awareness and limit the impact of No. 18 in the game, and we had a hard time doing that," Franklin said of Harrison. "The guy's a heck of a player, and you have to give him a lot of credit."

Harrison now has five games this season with at least 100 yards receiving and 12 for his career, a total that is second in program history to David Boston, who had 14. But it's not just the accumulation of yardage. Harrison is a money player. Of his 11 receptions against the Nittany Lions, nine went for first downs, including an 18-yard, game-clinching dagger of a touchdown in the fourth quarter.

With five regular-season games remaining, Harrison is already ninth all-time at Ohio State in terms of receiving yards and needs only 128 more to move up three more spots. Meanwhile, his 23 career touchdown receptions leave him seven shy of joining Boston, Chris Olave and Devin Smith as the only Buckeyes with at least 30 TD catches during their careers.



Ohio State-Wisconsin Set For Prime Time On NBC

Ohio State's road trip to Wisconsin on Oct. 28 will be under the lights, with the contest from Camp Randall Stadium kicking off at 7:30 p.m. EDT, and will be broadcast on NBC, the Big Ten announced on Oct. 16.

This will be Ohio State's first trip to Wisconsin since 2016, when the Buckeyes pulled off a 30-23 win in overtime over the Badgers. A wrinkle this time around, however, is that Wisconsin is now led by head coach Luke Fickell, a former Ohio State assistant and one-time interim head coach in 2011.

The Badgers are off to a 5-2 start this season but received unfortunate news that quarterback Tanner Mordecai suffered a broken hand in Wisconsin's 15-6 loss to Iowa on Oct. 14 and is expected to be out for the foreseeable future, leaving the Badgers to rely on redshirt freshman quarterback Braedyn Locke.

This will be the second primetime game on NBC this season for the Buckeyes in

the first season of the Big Ten's new media rights deal with CBS, FOX and NBC. Ohio State's win earlier this season at Notre Dame was also in prime time on NBC.

Ohio State will also host Michigan State on Nov. 11, set for a 7:30 p.m. kickoff on NBC.

OSU Stays Put At No. 3 In AP Top 25

After the Buckeyes won their second top-10 matchup of the season, beating Penn State 20-12 on Oct. 21, they remain at No. 3 in the most recent AP top 25 Poll released on Oct. 22.

The top two of No. 1 Georgia and No. 2 Michigan remain the same, but Ohio State now holds three first-place votes, with Georgia (38), Michigan (19) and No. 4 Florida State (three) also receiving first-place votes.

Behind the Buckeyes are the Seminoles as well as No. 5 Washington, No. 6 Oklahoma, No. 7 Texas, No. 8 Oregon, No. 9 Alabama and No. 10 Penn State, which dropped from No. 7 after the loss to Ohio State.

There are no other Big Ten teams in the top 25 after Iowa dropped out following a 12-10 loss to Minnesota, though Rutgers – 6-2 and bowl eligible for the first time since 2014 – and Wisconsin also received votes.

No. 17 North Carolina had the biggest fall in the poll, dropping seven spots after suffering a 31-27 loss to unranked Virginia, while No. 15 LSU and No. 16 Missouri each jumped up four spots. The only new team in the poll is No. 25 James Madison of the Sun Belt, which is off to a 7-0 start in the team's second season of FBS competition.

2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	W, 23-3	CBS	2-5, 31-14 loss to Rutgers
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	BTN	4-3, 41-38 win over Illinois State
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	FOX	4-3, 20-17 loss to Jacksonville State
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	W, 17-14	NBC	6-2, idle
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	W, 37-17	FOX	5-2, idle
Oct. 14	at Purdue	W, 41-7	Peacock	2-5, idle
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	W, 20-12	FOX	6-1, 20-12 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	7:30 p.m.	NBC	6-2, 25-21 win over Illinois
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	6-2, 31-14 win over Indiana
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	7:30 p.m.	NBC	2-5, 49-0 loss to Michigan
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	4-3, 12-10 win over Iowa
Nov. 25	at Michigan	12 p.m.	FOX	8-0, 49-0 win over Michigan State

Burke, Henderson, Egbuka Headline Buckeyes Inactives

Ohio State was without the services of three key contributors in its victory over Penn State, with cornerback Denzel Burke, running back TreVeyon Henderson and wide receiver Emeka Egbuka all sitting out of the contest with undisclosed injuries.

Burke appeared to suffer a lower-leg injury in the second half of the Buckeyes' 41-7 win at Purdue on Oct. 14, an ailment that required him to miss the rest of the game and be replaced by freshman Jermaine Mathews Jr. and nickel corner Jordan Hancock. Burke's status against Penn State had been up in the air throughout the week, but he was ruled inactive for the contest in the hours leading up to kickoff.

While Mathews and Hancock filled in adequately for the junior, combining for eight tackles and two pass breakups, Ohio State

head coach Ryan Day believes his starting cornerback is trending toward a return to the field for his team's primetime matchup against Wisconsin.

"It was close this week, so we're hopeful to get him to practice next week," Day said after the PSU game. "And if he has a full week of practice, he'll be ready to go."

Henderson, who missed the Purdue game despite being ruled as questionable with an undisclosed injury, was initially listed as out on the Penn State injury report. His status was later upgraded to questionable ahead of the game, but he ultimately did not play.

The junior running back, who is still the team's leading rusher at 295 yards, was seen participating in team warmups and was dressed in full pads and a helmet at kickoff. But he would not see any action on the field, allowing Miyan Williams – who

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Now is the time for loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers to show their support through our VIP subscription program as we struggle through these times of high inflation, which have affected all small businesses. As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in even the best of times.

"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."

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

And those who donate more than \$125 will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs.

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also missed the Purdue game with an injury – to carry the load in the backfield with 24 attempts for 62 yards (2.6 per carry) and a touchdown.

Despite being listed as questionable on the injury report, Egbuka was held out for the second straight week after suffering what seemed to be a lower-body injury in the fourth quarter of Ohio State's 37-17 win over Maryland on Oct. 7. Like Henderson, Egbuka – who racked up 22 catches for 303 receiving yards and three touchdowns in five games this season – was a participant in pregame warmups and was fully padded before kickoff.

But after he was seen having an extended conversation with offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and walking gingerly to the tunnel, he failed to see any action. The status of both Egbuka and Henderson is unknown heading into the matchup at Wisconsin.

Along with Burke, Henderson and Egbuka, eight other Buckeyes were ruled inactive against Penn State, though most have been listed as unavailable throughout the season. That list includes defensive lineman Will Smith Jr., linebacker Kourt Williams II, running back T.C. Caffey, tight ends Zak Herbstreit and Joe Royer, and wide receivers Nolan Baudo, Kyion Grayes and Reis Stocksedale.

Brown Exits Early With Ankle Injury

While the Buckeyes were riddled with injuries before kickoff, they also endured a key loss during the game when backup quarterback Devin Brown was hurt after rolling his left ankle.

The sophomore Brown, who has seen increased usage as a runner on goal-line and short-yardage situations, suffered the injury on a goal-line rush attempt in the third quarter, where he took a direct snap from the 6-yard line and took it the Penn State 1, only to collide with Nittany Lions linebacker Abdul Carter and safety Jaylen Reed, and he stayed on the ground for a few minutes while being tended to by trainers.

He was then helped to the sidelines and taken to the medical tent for further evaluations before being taken to the locker room. He was then seen after the game wearing a walking boot on his left foot while also holding crutches.

Brown has been used sparingly this season as both a runner and thrower, appearing in just five games for the Buckeyes, completing 12 of his 22 passes (54.5 percent) for 197 yards and two touchdowns, while also adding 35 rushing yards and a score on 19 carries.

Following Brown's injury, seventh-year quarterback Tristan Gebbia – who transferred to Ohio State from Oregon State this offseason – was seen warming up on the sidelines, offering a hint as to who might be next up on the depth chart.

30 NFL Scouts On Hand For OSU-PSU

The National Football League was well represented at Ohio Stadium for Ohio State's highly-anticipated matchup with Penn State, with 30 scouts from 20 teams on hand.

The San Francisco 49ers, Buffalo Bills, Washington Commanders, Detroit Lions, Carolina Panthers, New England Patriots, Las Vegas Raiders and Tennessee Titans

each had multiple scouts on hand, while the Chicago Bears, Cincinnati Bengals, Denver Broncos, Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Los Angeles Chargers, Kansas City Chiefs, Indianapolis Colts, Miami Dolphins, Atlanta Falcons, New York Giants, New York Jets, Minnesota Vikings each had one representative.

The extensive NFL contingency was able to witness a number of strong performances from the Buckeyes' professional prospects, none more impressive than the play of projected top-five pick and junior wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. Playing without Egbuka, who is also projected to be selected in the first round, the All-American wowed onlookers with a career-high 11 catches for 162 yards and a touchdown, giving him his third consecutive game – and his fifth overall this season – with over 100 yards receiving and a score.

The scouts also received a firsthand look at the talents of tight end Cade Stover, who has established himself as a surefire NFL prospect after a strong start to his season. The fifth-year senior once again emerged as one of McCord's top targets, hauling in four catches for 70 yards.

On the defensive end, edge rusher J.T. Tuimoloau was also able to display his NFL skill set with another signature performance against the Nittany Lions. Much like in last year's contest, he provided consistent pressure on Penn State quarterback Drew Allar, recording one sack and one pass breakup with his big plays coming at key times.

He made most of his impact in the fourth quarter, where he sacked Allar for a loss of 8 yards on the Nittany Lions' first play of the period and provided a key pass deflection on fourth-and-4 on the next possession.

Stroud Returns To OSU As "GameDay" Guest Picker

One of the most prolific passers in team history made his return to Columbus when former quarterback and current Houston Texan C.J. Stroud served as the celebrity guest picker for ESPN's "College GameDay," which was on hand for Ohio State's game with Penn State.

Stroud first entered the stadium from the Buckeyes' tunnel with around an hour left before kickoff and was greeted by cheers from fans. He then made his way onto the field during pregame warmups, exchanging pleasantries with several former teammates and coaches, including Day, Harrison, Hartline and McCord, among others.

Stroud then appeared on the "College GameDay" set at the north end of the stadium before kickoff alongside Lee Corso, Rece Davis, Kirk Herbstreit, Desmond Howard and Pat McAfee, where he made his picks and analysis for the Week 8 slate of college football. Stroud had some kind words to say about Day, McCord, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and the Ohio State football program on set, leading him to correctly pick the Buckeyes to prevail over the Nittany Lions.

"You already know who I'm going with," Stroud said. "I'm going with the Buckeyes. I think this game always comes down to third-down and red zone, and I think Coach Day has done a great job with Kyle of slowing him down, catching his rhythm. ... And then Coach Knowles is going to go crazy on defense. I've seen that every day in practice. That's a tough defense to go against, especially on third-down, the blitzes, picking it up."

"Drew Allar is going to have a tough time trying to pick protections and pick everything up. I think we'll come out of this thing a little early. I definitely think our defense is going to maybe even go with a shutout, so I'm definitely going with the Buckeyes."

After he appeared on set, Stroud stayed on the field during the game on the Ohio State sidelines, where he was seen supporting McCord after a string of unsuccessful first-half drives. He also was recognized during a timeout in the first period and waved to cheering fans.

Following the win, Stroud stayed on the field to perform the singing of "Carmen Ohio" alongside his former teammates.

Since his time at Ohio State, where Stroud threw for 8,123 yards and 85 touchdowns from 2020-22, Stroud has made a name for himself in the NFL as the starting

quarterback for the Houston Texans, emerging as the Rookie of the Year Award favorite through the first six games. Heading into Houston's game at Carolina on Oct. 29, Stroud had completed 127 of his 213 (59.6 percent) passes with 1,660 passing yards, while also accounting for nine touchdowns and one interception.

Three Buckeyes Named Midseason AP All-Americans

A trio of Ohio State players earned mid-season All-American honors on Oct. 18, when Burke, Harrison and Stover were named second-team All-Americans by The Associated Press.

Burke has been a standout for Ohio State's defense this season, totaling eight tackles, a tackle for loss, an interception, a forced fumble and a team-high eight pass breakups. Burke was named a second-teamer along with Kentucky's Maxwell Hairston, while Alabama's Kool-Aid McKinstry and Missouri's Kris Abrams-Draine were first-teamers.

Harrison and Stover have led the way for Ohio State's offense, with Harrison hauling in 42 receptions for 766 yards and six touchdowns, while Stover is on track to demolish almost every tight end single-season receiving record for the Buckeyes with 27 catches for 429 yards and three touchdowns.

Harrison earned second-team nods along with Oregon's Troy Franklin and South Carolina's Xavier Legette, while LSU's Malik Nabers, Missouri's Luther Burden III and Washington's Rome Odunze were named to the first team.

The first-team tight end ahead of Stover was Georgia's Brock Bowers, who is expected to miss the rest of the regular season after undergoing surgery, potentially putting Stover in line for first-team All-American honors if he can continue on his pace.

Other midseason honors for the Buckeyes include defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, who was named a midseason All-American by ESPN and a second-teamer by The Athletic. Burke was named to the first team by The Athletic, while Harrison

Continued On Page 6

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OHIO STATE

INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

earned second-team honors from the publication.

Coaches Offer Mixed Opinions On Ohio State

Ohio State is perceived by opposing coaches as a team with multiple question marks on defense and offensive line while having a talented offense with pro-ready skill players, according to an article published by The Athletic on Oct. 17.

In the article published jointly by Nicole Auerbach, David Ubben and Justin Williams, the reporters asked eight coaches whose teams have faced both Ohio State and Penn State this season about the strengths and weaknesses of the two programs – with each of them having differing opinions on the matter, particularly when it comes to the Buckeyes.

Opposing coaches had a mix of positive and negative things to say about Ohio State's defense – which is coming off a superb performance against Penn State and is ranked third in the nation in scoring defense at 10.0 points per, only behind the Nittany Lions (9.7) and Michigan (5.9). According to one assistant who played Ohio State earlier this season, Knowles' unit lacks the talent needed to dominate games.

"Defensively, it's not like they are stacked with dudes," the assistant said. "It's just not the type of Ohio State defense where you throw on the film and think, 'F—, how are we going to block these guys?'"

This is a sentiment that was shared by many of the interviewed coaches. According

to the article, nearly every coach listed Ohio State's secondary as the biggest liability on the team, with one coordinator saying that they fall short of the standard set by the unit in year's past. Through seven games, Ohio State ranks sixth in passing defense with 159.6 yards allowed per game.

"The secondary as a whole probably is not what people are used to seeing," the coordinator said. "They're going to play a ton of man and expect the guys up front to get home and protect the guys on the back end, but when they don't, I think that's where they're vulnerable. I wasn't blown away by the back end."

"Their safeties and corners are actually average, maybe even below average," another assistant added. "I know that's a crazy thing to say about Ohio State, but I think the corners are overrated and the safeties are average."

While the interviewed coaches had negative things to say about Ohio State's secondary, they did think positively of coach Larry Johnson's defensive line. One assistant lauded the play of defensive ends Tuimoloua

and Jack Sawyer, saying they have wreaked havoc on opposing lines so far this season. Through seven games, the tandem has combined for 40 tackles (seven for loss), 5½ sacks and three quarterback hurries.

"The two defensive linemen were frickin' unbelievable," said a coordinator who faced Ohio State. "It was almost like having two receivers out there at defensive lineman. ... Those are two top-tier guys who will be playing on Sundays. I knew Sawyer was a good player but wasn't expecting him to be as explosive as the other one."

The interviewed coaches also had mixed reviews about Ohio State's offense.

While they shared a range of opinions about McCord, with one saying he is "deceptively accurate," they were especially complimentary of Ohio State's pass catchers.

"They've got the best receiver room in college football," an assistant said. "It's comparable to an NFL receiver room. All three of their starters will play on Sunday."

The coaches also were critical of Ohio State's new-look offensive line, which has faced heavy scrutiny so far this season for

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1983

After Ohio State's third game of the season, tight end John Frank's pass receiving statistics looked quite impressive with 16 receptions for 205 yards and two touchdowns. They were good enough that Frank practically could have been presented with All-America honors then and there, no matter what any other tight end did the rest of the season.

But opposing defenses caught on. They began to limit Frank to blocking, attempting to stifle his pass-catching abilities, thus putting a crimp in the Buckeyes' passing attack. In the next three weeks, Frank caught just three passes for 21 yards.

But in a 21-11 win over Michigan State on Oct. 22, Frank showed his All-America capabilities, much to the liking of first-time starting quarterback Jim Karsatos. Frank worked open for five first-half catches and a career-high 115 yards, including a 39-yard scoring pass that gave the Buckeyes a 14-3 halftime lead.

"John Frank played an outstanding football game today," coach Earle Bruce said. "He blocked well, blocked some very good people for a long time. He caught passes all over the field, giving great effort. He is truly an All-American football player."

35 Years Ago — 1988

John Cooper couldn't have been happier if he had won the Ohio Lottery and his team had won the national championship on the same night.

In the closing seconds of the Buckeyes' 13-6 victory at Minnesota on Oct. 22, following a valiant goal-line stand by the Scarlet and Gray's defensive unit, Ohio State's first-year head coach ran wild all over the sideline, hugging anyone and everyone within his reach.

"It's a great relief," Cooper said in the locker room after the game, his emotions spent but a smile still clinging to his face. "It's not over, don't misunderstand me. I'm not very proud to be 3-4, but that's a lot better than 2-5."

30 Years Ago — 1993

Ohio State had dispensed with the various appetizers, vegetables and other garnishes on its plate, and the team began to sharpen its steak knife for the meat of its 1993 menu.

Almost immediately following a 45-24 whupping of former OSU assistant coach Jim Colletto and his injury-riddled Purdue team on Oct. 23, the Buckeyes were ready to look forward to a challenge that awaited them in Penn State on Oct. 30 at Ohio Stadium. It would be the first time the two teams had met with the Lions a member of the Big Ten.

"We realize what's on the line here, and we realize what kind of team Penn State has," cornerback Tim Walton said. "They're going to come in here ready to play. They have one of the better teams in the country, and it's going to be a dogfight all the way to the end. So we'll be prepared and practicing hard, and definitely we'll be ready to go to the bone."

25 Years Ago — 1998

Much of the buzz surrounding the Buckeyes heading into their 36-10 win at Northwestern on Oct. 24 was whether quarterback Joe Germaine had done enough in the season's first six games to merit Heisman Trophy consideration.

After all, The Sporting News hedged its bets a little bit, pre-

dicting an OSU loss to Michigan but also saying Germaine would surface as the compromise choice for the Heisman by season's end.

"We'll take that and run with it," Cooper said when asked whether the school would push a particular player for the game's top honor. "Nobody would like to see him win the Heisman any more than me."

20 Years Ago — 2003

Special teams were truly special, and the defense was equally so as Ohio State rebounded from its first loss in 20 games to post a 19-10 victory over Iowa in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 18.

More than making up for an offense that remained stuck in first gear, the Buckeyes scored a pair of touchdowns on special teams and also tallied a safety on defense while shutting down the Hawkeye offense.

Iowa entered the game averaging 29.7 points and 318.8 yards per game in total offense but was limited to just 219 yards against the Buckeyes. Meanwhile, Iowa star tailback Fred Russell – the country's eighth-leading rusher – was shut down to the tune of just 42 yards on 22 carries after averaging 121.0 per game coming in.

"It was a very physical football game," said OSU head coach Jim Tressel. "I think you saw two of the better defenses in the country out there today."

15 Years Ago — 2008

Ohio State's eighth director of athletics, Gene Smith, told BSB on Oct. 15 that he had signed a contract extension that would keep him in Columbus through 2016.

Smith, who took over for the retiring Andy Geiger in 2005, would receive a base salary of \$648,000 (up from \$600,000) and was eligible for incentive bonuses of up to \$100,000 per year. Those bonuses were tied to achievement by Ohio State athletics teams both on and off the court or field of play.

Smith's new contract also formalized his role as assistant vice president of the university, a position to which university president Dr. E. Gordon Gee had appointed him the previous year and one that was designed to allow Smith to provide leadership and representation to Ohio State in scenarios other than as AD.

"Gene Smith is not only one of the country's finest athletic directors, but he is also one of its most dedicated academic leaders," Gee said upon making the announcement of the new deal. "All of us at Ohio State – our students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends – are very fortunate to have his sound judgment and leadership."

10 Years Ago — 2013

When the new rule regarding targeting defenseless players above the shoulders was announced in February and approved in March, it marked a significant shift in consequences for defensive players deemed to have taken reckless shots near the heads of opponents.

Knowing that it might eventually come into play, Ohio State defensive coordinator Luke Fickell tried to help his players avoid committing the costly infraction.

"We talked about it, and we brought in the Big Ten top guy,"

he said. "We talked about it all through camp, and we have to go back and evaluate and see what it looks like."

On Oct. 19, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina and Clemson all had someone ejected for targeting, and as soon as Ryan Shazier saw Ohio State cornerback Bradley Roby's hit on Iowa tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz in a 34-24 win, he knew his teammate would be handed his walking papers.

"When he threw the flag, I already knew what type of call it was," Shazier said. "I was watching a game earlier today, and it happened in the South Carolina game, so I already knew what the outcome was."

Five Years Ago — 2018

Ohio State junior defensive end Nick Bosa started the first three games of the season before suffering a core muscle injury during the third quarter against TCU. That injury required surgery, and despite an initial expectation that Bosa would try to return this season, he opted to shut down his collegiate career in order to focus on rehabbing ahead of the NFL draft.

The school confirmed the news Oct. 16 via press release, saying that Bosa had opted to withdraw from the university to focus on the next steps in his career. Bosa underwent surgery Sept. 20, five days after the Buckeyes beat TCU, 40-28, in Arlington, Texas.

"I was hopeful that Nick would be able to return to play again for us," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said in a statement. "I know this was an extremely difficult and emotional decision for Nick and his family, and I wish him well as he moves on to get himself 100 percent healthy and ready for his next chapter. I want to thank Nick for the remarkable efforts he gave for this program. He is a first-class young man who we have been honored to coach."

One Year Ago — 2022

With the way C.J. Stroud had been cooking this season, there had been little attention given to his backup in Kyle McCord.

Stroud had played late – at least midway through the third quarter – in all of Ohio State's games, all of which ended in blow-out fashion other than the season-opening 21-10 win over Notre Dame.

This left little opportunity for McCord to see action, appearing in six games with limited responsibilities. Through seven games, McCord was 14 of 18 passing for 165 yards and one passing touchdown, and he had rushed three times for 4 yards. The majority of his contributions, though, had been handing the ball off to the likes of Dallon Hayden or TC Caffey once the first-team offense had left the field.

Day said that the lack of passing reps for McCord – the presumed starter next season once Stroud was off to the NFL – simply had to do with the sanctity of the game.

"It's obviously a good problem to have, don't get me wrong," Day said. "But it's something that you want to make sure you respect the game. But at the same time, you want to get him going a little bit. You start to get inside of five or six minutes in the fourth quarter when you're up in a lopsided game, I just want to make sure I respect the game in that area."

BSB Mail Service Struggles Through Difficult Two-Week Stretch

After some improvement at the end of September, Buckeye Sports Bulletin mail delivery suffered a tough two-week stretch following the postal holiday on Monday, Oct. 9, a day before the issue featuring coverage of the Maryland game was mailed. Many subscribers are still without that paper, and delivery of the issue covering the Purdue game, mailed Oct. 17, showed only slight improvement. With the holiday backlog possibly addressed, we are hopeful for improved delivery of the BSB with coverage of the Penn State game, mailed Oct. 24.

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. This service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is free to all subscribers.

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ly refuted rumors this year that he is considering a return to coaching, though the most recent round of rumors was likely started by the recent head coaching vacancy at Michigan State following the termination of Mel Tucker, which sparked reports that Meyer had interest in assuming the position if offered to him.

Meyer, who coached at Ohio State from 2012-18, returned to Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21 as part of FOX's coverage of Ohio State's game against Penn State, where he predicted the Buckeyes to defeat the Nittany Lions by a score of 20-14.

Ohio State Women Ranked No. 7 In Preseason AP Poll

Following a successful campaign where they finished with a 28-8 record and reached the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993, the Ohio State women's basketball team is once again expected to be among the nation's elite, entering the season ranked No. 7 in the preseason AP top 25 poll released on Oct. 17. The Buckeyes follow No. 1 LSU, No. 2 UConn, No. 3 Iowa, No. 4 UCLA, No. 5 Utah and No. 6 South Carolina.

This marks the Buckeyes' highest preseason ranking since 2017-2018, when the team opened the season at No. 5. It is also the fourth consecutive year when they entered the season ranked within the AP top 25. Ohio State is one of five Big Ten teams ranked within the preseason top 25, joining Iowa, No. 9 Indiana, No. 14 Maryland and No. 23 Illinois, with Nebraska also receiving votes.

Ohio State will open its season on Nov. 6 when it takes on No. 21 USC in Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena as part of the Naismith Hall of Fame Series. The game is slated to tip off at 2 p.m. and air on TruTV. A full preview of Ohio State's season is on pages 32-35.

Patrick Engels, Braden Moles and Greg Wilson contributed to this report. For the latest in Ohio State news, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

its inconsistent play, where the linemen have often missed assignments and committed costly penalties. One assistant coach particularly saw left tackle Josh Simmons and right tackle Josh Fryar as liabilities.

"We felt like we could attack the edges against those guys, especially since the guards were both returning starters," the assistant said. "Attacking the edges against them was definitely in our game plan."

Day Earns Midseason Dodd Trophy Honor

Day was named to the midseason Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year watch list on Oct. 19, an award given to a coach who has success on the field and exemplifies former Georgia Tech head coach Bobby Dodd's coaching philosophy of scholarship, leadership and integrity.

Day is one of 20 coaches on list, including North Carolina's Mack Brown, Air Force's Troy Calhoun, James Madison's Curt Cignetti, Washington's Kalen DeBoer, Missouri's Eli Drinkwitz, Duke's Mike

Elko, Iowa's Kirk Ferentz, Michigan's Jim Harbaugh, Notre Dame's Marcus Freeman, Tulane's Willie Fritz, Ole Miss' Lane Kiffin, Florida State's Mike Norvell, USC's Lincoln Riley, Alabama's Nick Saban, Texas' Steve Sarkisian, Georgia's Kirby Smart, Oregon State's Jonathan Smith, Oklahoma's Brent Venables and Utah's Kyle Whittingham.

Day, who has led his team to a perfect 7-0 record this season with top-10 wins over then-No. 9 Notre Dame and then-No. 7 Penn State, while also eclipsing the 50-win plateau after a win against Maryland, has never received the honor.

He has been named to the midseason watch list before, though, also earning the distinction from 2020-22. Former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel is the only Buckeye coach to take home the award, doing so in 2002.

Return To Coaching Not In Meyer's Future Plans

Former Ohio State head coach Urban

Meyer has struck down rumors of him potentially making a return to coaching, saying that he is content with his current life and has no interest in coming back to lead a team anytime soon.

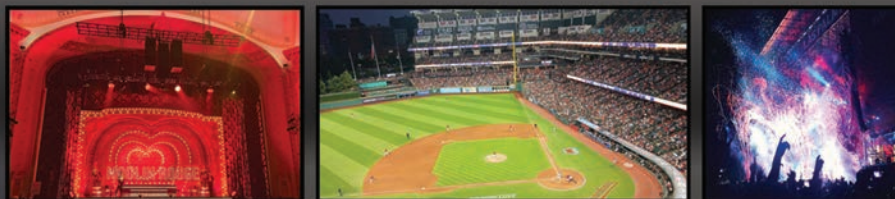
"I have my tight circle of friends, I go to 'Big Noon Kickoff,' and I enjoy my life," Meyer said on "Urban's Take With Tim May" on Oct. 19. "It's not like people are asking me because people who know me know I have no interest. I love what I'm doing."

Meyer's last coaching stint was with the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars in 2021, a tumultuous tenure that lasted just 13 games into the season before he was fired by the franchise on Dec. 16, 2021. After about eight months away from the spotlight, he made headlines again when it was announced that he would rejoin the TV ranks as an analyst on FOX's "Big Noon Kickoff" for the 2022 season, a position he continues to hold this year. Meyer held the same role in 2019 and 2020 before accepting the head coaching job with the Jaguars.

The former Buckeye coach has repeated-

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OSU's Defense Providing Winning Formula

Continued From Page 1

tionable play calling.

Allen rushed for 6 yards on the first play of the game but received just five more carries in the first half. Singleton, meanwhile, busted out two of Penn State's longest plays of the day on back-to-back carries of 20 and 16 yards in the first quarter but received the ball just seven more times for the game. All told, the Nittany Lions finished with just 49 yards on 26 carries, a 1.9-yard average, and stopping that rushing attack was a focus for Knowles heading into the contest.

"They were a team that could drive the ball, and the intermediate passing game, very effective," he said. "We wanted to get them in situations where they had to throw the ball down the field and give our rush a chance to get there. We mixed things up somewhat in the rush. We did the right things early in the series to get them in situations where we could force them to try to throw the ball down the field."

But when forced to the air, the Nittany Lions arguably fared worse, with sophomore quarterback Drew Allar – a Medina, Ohio, native – having one of the worst passing performances in recent history against the Buckeyes, completing just 42.9 percent of his passes (18 of 42) for 191 yards and a touchdown. Furthermore, eight of those completions for 73 yards and the score all came on Penn State's last drive of the game.

"It sucked," Allar said bluntly when asked how he played, with head coach James Franklin adding during his post-game press conference that the team did not put him in situations to be successful.

While Ohio State's offense did not suffer to quite the degree that Penn State's did, it was still slow going for the Buck-



SONNY BROCKWAY

GROUNDING — Ohio State's secondary stifled Penn State quarterback Drew Allar (15) in a 20-12 win on Oct. 21, limiting him to just 18-of-42 passing for 191 yards and a touchdown while batting down six passes, including two by safety Josh Proctor (41).

eyes on that side of the ball, carrying just a 10-6 lead into the half despite the defense dominating on all levels. The offense, which added another field goal at 8:59 in

the fourth, eventually was able to put the game away with an 18-yard touchdown to Marvin Harrison Jr. late in the final frame – with six punts mixed in throughout the

contest – but was only in position to win due to the defense leading the way.

"They're playing tremendously right now," Harrison said. "Penn State, going into the game, they had the best defense in the country, to their fans at least. After this game it's pretty obvious that Ohio State has the best defense in the country right now. Coach Knowles is doing a tremendous job. Guys are stepping up, making plays. I'm super proud of them."

It's a position the defense has gotten used to this season, with an unusually ineffective offense – at least compared to Ohio State's usual standard – requiring the stop troops to step up if Ohio State wants to come out with a win. That was not a challenge the Buckeyes of yesteryear had answered, but it's one that this group is more than up for.

"It means a lot," said cornerback Jordan Hancock, who started in place of the injured Burke. "Maybe in the past couple of years the offense couldn't rely on us, but that's not the case this year. We want to make a statement to the whole country that we can win games on defense. It's super fun because people can doubt us, but I feel like we flipped the script today."

If it's a statement the defense was looking for, then consider it made.

The Nittany Lions totaled just 240 yards for the game, with 73 of those coming on the touchdown drive that ended with just 29 seconds remaining. It was during that drive, with just under a minute remaining,



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SONNY BROCKWAY

THIRD-PHASE FOLLIES — Ohio State's special teams struggled against Penn State, with kicker Jayden Fielding notching his first missed field-goal attempt of the season from 45 yards out.

that Penn State finally converted a third down after failing on 15 previous attempts, with Ohio State nearly posting a shutout in the third-down conversion category. But even so, it was a historical performance, as Penn State's third-down conversion percentage — 6.3 percent — is the lowest for a team ranked in the AP top 25 over the last 10 seasons.

"I think it's a statement, but I think our biggest thing was being consistent and staying consistent, not just showing up against big matchups, showing up in every game," defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau said. "I think for us to do it, we hear a lot about what we were last year. There's barely any talk about what we are this year, and I think that's a lot of our motivation and wanting to continue to be a great defense."

While Tuimoloau wants the Buckeyes showing up for every game, he does have a penchant at this point for putting his game face on when facing Penn State.

After his breakout performance last season — three tackles for loss, two sacks, two interceptions, a forced fumble and fumble recovery in the 44-31 win — he answered the call this time around as well, registering a pass breakup and a pivotal fourth-quarter sack of Allar that eventually forced a punt, one of nine during the game for the Nittany Lions.

"When he gets into those moments where it's like, 'OK, it's a passing situation,' he bumps out a little bit more, because now he knows what's coming," Day said. "Those special players can do that. They turn themselves up just a little bit more in those big, clutch spots, and he did it again today."

Tuimoloau was not the only standout on defense. Sacks were also registered by defensive ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and safety Sonny Styles, while nine Buckeyes finished with at least half a tackle for loss and safety Josh Proctor had a team-high two pass breakups. But it was difficult to highlight just one or two of Ohio

State's defenders in the win, as it seems that almost everyone on that side of the ball has taken a leap this season, which Knowles attributes to time spent in his scheme.

"When I make adjustments during the week, that we had to get stops, we had to get them off schedule, and we make little adjustments in the scheme, they pick up on it," he said. "That's a big deal. Winning those (third and fourth) downs in a game like that is huge. That only comes with preparation and with guys who are knowledgeable about the scheme."

The defense for Ohio State is back to playing freely and with confidence, and with that confidence comes improved play and heightened expectations as the Buckeyes get deeper into the season. But as the defense has stated several times this season — with the sentiment echoed by Knowles — Ohio State will never be satisfied, and even coming off the win over Penn State that would be the highlight of most teams' seasons, the Buckeyes are still looking for more.

"We always feel like we have something to prove," linebacker Cody Simon said. "It doesn't really matter who we're going up against. That speaks to Coach Knowles' mentality. We could be going against our practice team, it doesn't matter. We always have something to prove, and we want to prove people right or wrong. Today's just another steppingstone for us, it's not the end goal. We want to go further, so it's just another building block."

Special Teams Not So Special

Plenty of positive plays came from Ohio State's defense — and even the offense at points, including Harrison's 18-yard touchdown in the fourth quarter that ultimately put the game away — but there was little positive to take away from the Buckeyes' special teams.

Some of the troubles on offense could

have been traced back to Ohio State's usual field position. While the Buckeyes, on average, started at their own 30-yard line, that average also includes starts at Penn State's 33- and 44-yard lines on two fourth-quarter drives after the Nittany Lions turned the ball over on downs.

But of Ohio State's 14 drives, four started within the team's own 20-yard line, including drives starting as far back as the 10- and 7-yard lines. While Jayden Ballard did return three punts for 13 yards in place of Emeka Egbuka, he nearly muffed one, while the Buckeyes did end up turning the ball over in the third quarter after cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. accidentally touched the ball on a punt return intended for Ballard, requiring yet another successful stop from the defense.

As for Ohio State's punting unit, while Jesse Mirco did boot a punt 72 yards — a season high for the Buckeyes, and the 10th longest in program history — it was aided by a long roll, as well as the Nittany Lions' questionable refusal to pick up the ball when it was safe to do so. But outside

of his 72-yarder, Mirco averaged just 42.6 yards on his other five punts, including kicks of just 34 and 32 yards in a game where field position was pivotal.

The Buckeyes also experienced follies in the kicking game. Jayden Fielding missed his first field goal of the year, a 45-yarder late in the fourth that would have put the game out of reach, coming just a week after his first missed extra point of the season.

While the missed kick against Penn State did not impact the final result — and Fielding did make two other kicks on the day, to his credit — it did allow the Nittany Lions to cut the game down to a single possession before their failed onside kick to close out the game.

Mistakes on special teams have yet to cost Ohio State a game this season, but coming out of a big win, it leaves plenty for Day and special teams coordinator Parker Fleming to work on heading into the final stretch of the regular season.

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Harrison A Heisman Hopeful After PSU Game

Entering Ohio State's high-stakes match-up against No. 7 Penn State on Oct. 21, many presumed that standout wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. would be heavily relied upon to carry the load for a depleted Ohio State offense. Playing without the services of the talented Emeka Egbuka – who participated in pregame warmups but was held out of the game with a foot injury – the future first-round NFL draft selection provided just that for his team in the 20-12 win.

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

With the entire Nittany Lion defense – which had entered the game ranked first in the nation in total defense at 193.7 yards per game – focused on his talents, Harrison delivered one of his best performances of his career, hauling in a team- and career-high 11 catches for 162 yards and a score to lead a stagnant offense to victory. For head coach Ryan Day, it is the type of performance that can propel his star wideout to some shiny postseason honors.

"I have to give Marvin Harrison Jr. so much credit," Day said after the game. "To go for 11 catches for 162 yards and a touchdown when I would think most teams, the first thing they look at is, 'How do I take away Marvin Harrison?' We targeted him 16 times. I think he was open on most of those plays, so he showed up in a big spot today again."

"I would argue to say – and I haven't seen everybody play across the country – that it's hard for me to find somebody who's better in the country. I don't know how he gets on these (award) lists or doesn't, but to me, he's one of the most special players in the country."

Harrison, who suffered an ankle injury against Notre Dame on Sept. 23 but has not missed a step, proved to be quarterback Kyle McCord's safety net against the Nittany Lions, with the junior gunslinger often finding Harrison when his unit needed to move the chains most.

McCord hit Harrison on third down on four of his 11 receptions, most notably on his last catch of the game, a third-and-11 in the fourth quarter that resulted in an 18-yard score. He also proved to be a threat in the deep passing game, hauling in throws of 35 and 28 in the second and fourth quarters, respectively.

"I think they called a timeout right before that play, so we were able to talk it over on the sideline," McCord said of the score. "We got the look that we wanted, and he ran a good route and got open, and so it was just my job to get the ball in his hands and let him go to work."

According to his teammates, Harrison's performance, which gave him the fifth game in his career with over 160 receiving yards – and his third this season – has put himself into the thick of the Heisman Trophy race, which has not had a wide receiver win the award since 2020, with Alabama's DeVonta Smith taking home the honor.



SONNY BROCKWAY

MARV FOR HEISMAN – Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.'s campaign for the Heisman Trophy continues to heat up, as he collected a career-high 11 receptions for 162 yards and a touchdown against Penn State.

"If it's truly the award that goes to the best player in college football, I don't see how he's not in the mix," McCord said. "What he's done, especially these last few games, I don't know if we've seen a stretch like that with just how consistent he is, how reliable he is. You guys see it just like I do. He's done a great job, and obviously he's a lot of fun to play with."

Through seven games, Harrison leads the Buckeyes with 42 receptions for 766 yards and six touchdowns.

McCord Takes Step Back Against Nittany Lions

Following what may have been his best overall game against Purdue, McCord may have had his most challenging outing of the

the game-changing scoop-and-score. The play would soon be negated due to a holding call on Penn State cornerback Kalen King, but Day said it was a mistake that cannot happen.

"There was the one sack and fumble that was returned for a touchdown, so if it wasn't a hold there, that would've been a whole different game. We've got to get rid of that stuff," Day said. "It was a hold, I think that's why he double-clutched it, but still. There were some really good things. He kept battling in there and did enough for us to win."

Like Day, McCord was also critical of this play. He said that the turnover could have simply been avoided if he had shown more pocket presence, something he should have known to do given the talent on the Nittany Lions' front four.

"I felt like early on that first drive, I thought we did a pretty good job of moving the ball, made some plays and obviously went down, put a field goal up," McCord said. "But for me, at least, I feel like I needed to ease into the pocket a little bit more. They are a really good D-line."

Despite the sluggish performance at times, McCord would finish strong, completing 10 of his last 13 passes on the day, capped by the 18-yard score from Harrison. While this may have not been his finest moment as the Buckeyes' first-year starter, the struggles he endured during the game – and the way he wriggled himself out of them – can serve as a learning experience for him as he continues to trudge through a difficult Big Ten slate.

"Regardless of how you play, getting a top-10 win is really good, and we'll use this momentum and keep it rolling," McCord said. "I know going back and watching the film, there are going to be plays that I want back. There's good, but there's some things that we have to clean up. I can only imagine how good this team is going to be once we reach that peak potential."

Mathews An Unsung Hero After Burke Injury

With star cornerback Denzel Burke unable to suit up due to an undisclosed lower-body injury, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and his defense turned to an unlikely hero, that being freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr.

Mathews had seen limited time backing up the previously healthy and productive Burke and fellow outside cornerback Davison Igbinosun, a time that did include a pick-six late against Western Kentucky. He was inserted early against Penn State, often finding himself at outside corner alongside Igbinosun and nickel Jordan Hancock. While he was the youngest player on the field for the Buckeyes' mostly-veteran defense, the freshman standout made a significant impact in the victory, totaling three tackles and a pass breakup on the day.

This was a performance that not only Day expected, saying earlier in the week that he was looking for the young corner to make more of an impact, but his defensive coordinator, too. Knowles, who said earlier in the week that Mathews had some "moxie to him," doubled down on that statement after the game, while also adding that Mathews was more than ready for the moment.

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

The entire defense was dominant against Penn State in the game, but one group that led the way was the defensive line. There have been many conversations about the group this season and whether they are playing well enough because of a lack of sacks, but they have put that concern to bed over the past two games. To do it against Purdue is one thing, with three sacks against the Boilermakers, but against the seventh-ranked team in the country is a statement that will worry opposing offenses for the rest of the season. The group finished with three sacks, with another half tackle for loss by Ty Hamilton, as well as three quarterback hurries and 13 tackles. Penn State has one of the best running back tandems in the country in Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton, but they were mostly a nonfactor against the Buckeyes with only 74 combined yards on 18 carries. Stopping the run game starts with the front four, and they were very effective in doing so. They also kept a good amount of pressure on quarterback Drew Allar, forcing him to get rid of the ball quickly. That pressure was dialed up early in the contest, forcing Allar into an uncomfortable situation for most of the game.

What Didn't Work

Penn State came in considered the best defense in the country, but a team that wants to contend for a championship has to be able to deal with that better than Ohio State's offense did. That's not to say the Buckeyes won't be able to down the line, but if the Buckeye defense isn't locking teams down as well as it did against the Lions, what Ohio State did offensively against Penn State won't be good enough. Kyle McCord finished with 286 yards and a touchdown while completing 62.9 percent of his passes, but that tells a better story than how it looked throughout the game. Marvin Harrison Jr. being the best receiver in the country saved the quarterback multiple times, as

McCord was missing receivers through the first half and would have had an interception had Harrison not tipped a pass that was thrown too far out in front of him. Without TreVeyon Henderson, the running game struggled to get going as well. Miyan Williams started the game off fairly strong, but that fizzled out quickly and he finished with only 2.6 yards per carry and 62 yards total. He did have one of Ohio State's two touchdowns but overall was not effective, while Chip Trayanum had just 22 yards on nine carries and Dallan Hayden was nowhere to be seen. As a whole, the offense couldn't get a rhythm going.

Play Of The Game

Midway through the second quarter with the score tied at 3, McCord dropped back to pass and faced immediate pressure, resulting in an attempted escape of the pocket to look for options downfield. But with pressure bearing down, the ball was batted out of his hand and picked up by Penn State linebacker Curtis Jacobs, who ran it back for a 60-yard touchdown, stunning the 105,506 in attendance at Ohio Stadium. The Nittany Lions chased him into the end zone and celebrated taking the lead until they turned around and saw a flag just beyond the original line of scrimmage, which proved to be a holding penalty on Penn State cornerback Kalen King – who did pull on Harrison's jersey – nullifying the score and bringing the ball back to the Penn State 16-yard line, with Williams finding the end zone five plays later. If that play had gone in the Nittany Lions' favor, it would have shifted the momentum entirely to them, taking what would have been a 10-3 lead that was instead flipped to a 10-3 lead for Ohio State. Head coach Ryan Day said the hold was the reason McCord double-pumped on that throw, giving the defense time to knock the ball free, but acknowledged his ball-security issues still need to be addressed.

— Greg Wilson

"Like I said, the kid's got moxie. I don't think he knew how big of a moment it was, and that's not a bad thing," Knowles said. "He just went out and played, made some tackles, didn't flinch at the moment of truth. I'm really proud of him. He's a good player."

Mathews' best moment in the game came on a third-and-8 play in the third quarter, where quarterback Drew Allar attempted to find wideout KeAndre Lambert-Smith down the sideline for a substantial gain. Those hopes would quickly be wiped away by Mathews, who, stride-for-stride with Lambert-Smith, turned his head around and batted the ball to the ground, forcing a key Penn State punt.

"It was awesome," linebacker Steele Chambers said of the play. "Me and Cody (Simon) were talking about a play where it was an underthrown ball, and he just kept his composure, didn't create a (pass interference) or anything. I think that's huge, especially for a freshman. I know I couldn't do that stuff whenever I was his age. That's huge, and that's just a little glimpse of what he's going to have his entire career here."

Mathews' starting reps may be diminished soon with Day proclaiming after the game that he is hopeful Burke will return against Wisconsin. But according to his teammates who have witnessed the blossoming freshman improve each and every practice, he can only continue to carve out an expanded role in this dominant Ohio State defense.

"That kid, he's great," Hancock said. "He came out there and we had the most

confidence in him because we're just super proud of him. We see how he prepares, and he's just a dog, so I'm happy to have him in secondary with us."

"He's a baller," Simon added. "He's fearless. When I was a freshman, I don't know if I had the nerves to go out there and make plays like that. It speaks to his courage and his resilience. He's stepping up and making plays whenever his number is called, and that's all about competitive excellence."

Running Game Still An Issue For Offense

Following an abysmal performance against Maryland on Oct. 7 where Ohio State garnered just 1.9 yards per rush, the Buckeyes received a surprising boost in the running game the following week at Purdue from sophomore Dallan Hayden, who led the team with 11 carries for 76 yards and a touchdown. That kind of production would be nonexistent for Ohio State a week later, however, against an imposing Penn State defensive line.

With Day and the staff deciding to keep Hayden on the sidelines to preserve his red-shirt and TreVeyon Henderson missing his third consecutive game with an undisclosed injury, the Buckeyes' running game struggled to make much of an impact, tallying just 79 yards on 41 carries and a touchdown with a long of 12 yards by Miyan Williams, the team's leading rusher with 62 yards on 24 carries (2.6 per attempt).

Besides Williams, Ohio State also had Chip Trayanum carry the ball nine times for 22 yards (2.4), with a long of just 5 yards.

Day, who has voiced his concerns over

the run game throughout the season, said these particular shortcomings may have been partly attributed to the absence of Henderson, who could have provided them with the explosiveness they often lacked against the Nittany Lions.

Prior to his injury, the junior running back took the top off of defenses on a number of occasions, most notably with a 61-yard scamper in Ohio State's win over Notre Dame.

"We had the No. 1 defense in the country statistically coming in, so we knew it was going to be a little bit that way," Day said. "We didn't run the ball well enough, didn't get enough explosive plays. We certainly could use Tre and Emeka back."

Day specifically voiced his frustration with the offense's inability to put the ball either past the first-down marker or into the end zone on short-yardage running situations on third and fourth down, which has been widely regarded as a weakness all season.

This problem reared its ugly head in a critical red-zone situation in the third quarter, where the unit was unable to cash in a score from the 1-yard line after the loss of a yard on third-and-goal, leading to an incomplete pass intended for Carnell Tate on fourth down that squandered a scoring opportunity.

"We don't score there," Day said. "We had a couple of really nice plays designed for Devin (Brown), and he rolled the ankle there and was out for the game, so that kind of threw us off. We still can't get in on those two third- and fourth-down plays. That would have been a huge difference maker. Overall, just not good enough."

The run game did show a little bit of life with Williams leading the charge. He was especially productive in the first half with runs of 10 and 12 yards along with a 2-yard score, the team's first of the game. But the team's decision to sit Hayden after a strong performance at Purdue still looms large, something Day said may need a second opinion during the week.

"We checked with (running backs coach Tony Alford)," Day said. "And going into the game, we said, 'Tre's not available, where do you think we'll go?' And we felt like if Dallan was available, that we would consider using him. But Tony felt like those were the two best guys to go with at the time. I trust him. He's the running backs coach, but we will re-evaluate it this week and see if that was the right thing to do."



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Marv Marvelous, So Was Defense In Win

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A stout defense didn't allow a touchdown until the final minute while Marvin Harrison Jr. had a career-high 11 catches for 162 yards and a critical fourth-quarter touchdown when No. 3 Ohio State downed No. 7 Penn State, 20-12, before 105,506 in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21.

The combination of 54 degrees, cloudy skies and noon kickoff hearkened to a Big Ten era of defensive games, and the Buckeyes (7-0, 4-0) and Nittany Lions (6-1, 3-1) were happy to oblige. Ohio State led 10-6 at halftime and extended the lead to 20-6 on Harrison's 18-yard score on a third-and-11 with 4:07 to play.

Penn State pulled to within the eight with 29 seconds left when Kaden Saunders had an 8-yard TD catch from Drew Allar. Following a missed two-point try, Carnell Tate recovered the onside kick at the Ohio State 47 to seal the Buckeyes' seventh straight win in the series.

Kyle McCord was 22 of 35 for 286 yards and a TD for the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes were without injured cornerback Denzel Burke, running back TreVeyon Henderson and receiver Emeka Egbuka, but backs Chip Trayanum and Miyan Williams returned from their injuries.

Points Hard To Come By

The Buckeyes forced a three-and-out after Penn State received the opening kickoff at the 25, and Ohio State took a 3-0 lead at 10:49 of the first quarter on a 33-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding but could have had more.

Harrison had three catches for 28 yards, and a 19-yard reception by Trayanum gave the Buckeyes a first down at the 15 before three incompletions followed.

After another PSU punt, OSU was stopped in three plays on its second possession, and a 54-yard punt by Jesse Mirco was



SONNY BROCKWAY

SEND THEM PACKING — Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. collected the lone passing touchdown for the Buckeye offense against Penn State, catching an 18-yard score in the fourth quarter of the eventual 20-12 win.

returned 15 yards to the Penn State 38 by Daequan Hardy.

Nicholas Singleton then ran through gaping holes for 20 and 16 yards to the 26 on consecutive carries. Sonny Styles sacked Drew Allar for a 3-yard loss followed by an incomplete pass, and Singleton's 6-yard run to the 23 to set up a 40-yard field goal by Alex Felkins to make it 3-3 at 5:15.

Early in the second quarter, Mirco pinned the Nittany Lions at the 13 with a 50-yard punt. Penn State gained 4 yards on three plays, and a 54-yard punt by Riley Thompson was returned 10 to the Ohio State 39 by Jayden Ballard.

The Buckeyes took a 10-3 lead at 7:31 of the second quarter when Williams ran for a 2-yard score to cap a Penn State-aided 13-play, 61-yard drive in 5:17.

Williams had five carries for 24 yards, and Cade Stover added a 9-yard grab to help set up a first down at the PSU 25. Coming out of an injury timeout for Penn State defensive end Chop Robinson, the Buckeyes were penalized for an illegal substitution. On third-and-11 from the 26, McCord was strip-sacked by Curtis Jacobs, who scooped the ball and raced 60 yards for a score.

However, cornerback Kalen King was flagged for holding Harrison, nullifying the touchdown and putting the ball on the 16. On third-and-10, Harrison made a 12-yard catch to the 4, and pass interference on King was declined.

Devin Brown was inserted at QB and gained no yards on a run, but Kobe King was called for unnecessary roughness to place the ball on the 2, and Williams scored on the next play.

Felkins' 41-yard field goal on the Nittany

Lions' next series made it 10-6 with 4:16 left in the half. Allar found Theo Johnson for 34 yards to the 28, but on third-and-5 from the 23, Ty Hamilton and Tommy Eichenberg combined to stuff a Singleton run for a 1-yard loss.

Each team punted on their next drives, and the Buckeyes kneeled out the half.

The Buckeyes had 187 yards in the first half (125 passing, 62 rushing) to 161 (91 passing, 70 rushing) for Penn State. McCord was 11 of 21 for 125 yards with Harrison catching five for 75. Allar was 6 of 17 for 91 yards.

Nail-Biter

After dueling punts, OSU's second drive of the half started at its 7 and ended with a fourth-and-27 from the 4. It reached the 21, but a false start, holding call and a sack moved them all the way back. Fortunately for them, Mirco smacked a punt 72 yards with the roll to the 24.

After a Penn State punt, the Buckeyes started from their 35. Harrison had a second-down catch of 16 yards to the Penn State 48, and Julian Fleming's grab went for 9 yards before Stover made a leaping catch for 30 yards to the 9.

Trayanum rushed for 3 yards, and Brown re-entered and went 5 yards to the 1 but was injured and later went to the locker room. On third down, Williams lost a yard. On fourth, a pass to Tate behind the line resulted in no gain, and the Buckeyes gave the ball back on downs.

The defense held, but on the punt, the ball hit Lorenzo Styles Jr., and Tyler Elsdon recovered for Penn State at its 48.

Ohio State forced another punt, with

the help of a second-down, 8-yard sack for J.T. Tuimoloau on the first play of the fourth quarter.

The Buckeyes took a 13-6 lead at 8:59 of the fourth quarter on a Fielding 37-yard field goal after they went 71 yards to the 19 in 4:40.

Starting from the OSU 10, Trayanum lost 3 yards, but Harrison had a catch-and-run for 28 yards, and Stover immediately came back with a 29-yarder to the Penn State 36. Trayanum had three straight runs for a total of 11 yards, and a Harrison catch went for 6 to set up a third-and-3 from the 19, but McCord failed to connect with Fleming, and Fielding went on to add to the lead.

Singleton returned the kickoff 30 yards to the 37. On fourth-and-4 from the Penn State 43, Allar was in the pocket when his pass attempt was disrupted by the rushing Tuimoloau, and the ball fell incomplete to turn the ball over on downs with 7:17 remaining.

The Buckeyes took advantage when Harrison, on third-and-11 from the 18, cut across the middle for McCord's pass and sped to the left pylon for a touchdown to make it 20-6 with 4:07 left. The drive took six plays and 3:10 off the clock.

A 15-yard face-mask penalty on Penn State and an 11-yard catch for Harrison were key in the Buckeyes moving to a first down on the 17 after Williams rushed for 3 yards. But Williams lost a yard and McCord threw an incompletion before the magic between him and Harrison worked again.

The Buckeyes then allowed Penn State to march to the Ohio State 37 with the help of 30 yards in penalties (face mask and roughing the passer). But Allar had an intentional grounding, followed by a false start, two incompletions and a sack by Kenyatta Jackson Jr. for 10 yards on fourth-and-30 from the Penn State 43.

Three runs by Williams netted 6 yards, and Fielding missed a 45-yard field-goal try — his first field goal miss of the season — with 2:41 left.

Penn State drove from its 27 with Dante Cephas' 19-yard catch to the Ohio State 36, a key play before Saunders had an 8-yard TD catch with 29 seconds remaining to complete a drive of 73 yards in 12 plays in 2:12. The two-point conversion pass failed.

Tate got the onside kick, and Ohio State kneeled to end the game.

Notes

Harrison is the first Buckeye to have five 160-yard or more receiving games, breaking a tie with David Boston. ... Ohio State outgained Penn State 365 (286 passing, 79 rushing) to 240 (191 passing, 49 rushing). ... Stover had four catches for 70 yards. ... Williams had 62 yards on 24 carries, and Trayanum's 22 yards were on nine runs. ... Allar was 18 of 42 for 191 yards and a TD. ... Singleton picked up 48 yards on nine rushes. ... Penn State was 1 for 16 on third down and 1 for 3 on fourth. The Buckeyes converted 6 of 16 on third and failed on one fourth down. ... Ohio State had four sacks for 36 yards, Penn State two sacks for 10 yards. ... Eichenberg led the Buckeyes with eight tackles (two solo).



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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 20, Penn State 12

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles on playing against Penn State: "I don't look at stats, but I guess Penn State had a pretty good defense. So we talked to our defense before the game about, 'Hey, you're not just playing Penn State's offense, you're playing Penn State's defense. If they make one play, we have to make two. If they make two, we have to make three.' It's a sense of maturity, leadership, maybe a little chip on your shoulder. We've done a lot of work to have everyone have faith in us, for sure."

Knowles on the linebacker group's performance against Penn State: "That intermediate passing game combined with a really strong running attack, we knew that (the linebackers) were going to be a real focus in terms of making plays. I've always had faith in them, and they're doing the right things. Then it's just that competitive excellence, showing up when we need them the most. Those guys are veterans, and they showed that we can count on them."

Linebacker Steele Chambers on why the defense is playing so well: "Right now what's happening to the defense, it's unlocking this feeling you had whenever you first started playing the game because you're running around, having fun with your friends. I think that's what we're doing. It doesn't feel like we're doing a job. It feels like we're doing what we love."

Chambers on Penn State going 1 for 16 on third down: "I think that's not too shabby at all. Overall, Coach Knowles is calling a hell of a game up top. It's just the defense executing, being on point there as far as communication and just being physical."

Knowles on the defensive line group: "There's a lot of depth there. There's a lot of guys that play. They've really been solid all year. Guys inside are making tackles. We've been getting pressure. Maybe people look at stats only, but I can see the film. I knew we have a really good group, and they showed up."

Defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau on beating Penn State's offensive line: "It feels great. (Left tackle Olu Fashanu) is a great player. He has great feet, great hands. It was going to be a battle, and it was. But just to come out with the win, it's a true blessing. Not too many people are granted and

gifted this opportunity to play in a top-10 matchup game but play against a top-10 (player) across from you."

Cornerback Jordan Hancock on Tuimoloau: "He's always working after practice watching film. He's always in the facility and stuff like that, so we are not surprised by him making those plays because he puts in the work."

Chambers on the stadium being so loud in the win and how that helps them as a defense: "Technically it doesn't. It's harder for us to communicate. They're getting louder when they're on the field, but I guess we have to deal with it. But at the end of the day, we all trust each other even with the noise. It's just a big energy booster seeing Buckeye Nation like that for us."

Head coach Ryan Day on how the defense playing well changes the way he calls a game: "I just think, in a game like this in particular, you have to do whatever you can to win the game. And if you feel like your defense can flat-out win you a game, then you have to make sure that you're doing your part. You can't be selfish in that moment. As much as you'd love to just put the pedal to the metal, the goal is to win the game. Sometimes we forget about that. Now, there are other times where you want to find out what your offense is and challenge yourself and grow and build and put them into situations to grow. I just felt like today, watching the game, that our defense was in control of the game."

Day on why he took a knee to run out the clock at the end of the first half: "I didn't want anything crazy to happen. The fumble return for a touchdown was in the back of my mind. I thought the defense was playing well. I just didn't want to take any chances. It was conservative on my end, but the No. 1 goal, as we talked about, is being 1-0. This is a top-10 game. And at that moment, I felt like the right thing to do was take a knee."

Day on going for it on fourth-and-goal in the third quarter and not converting: "When you're on the 2-yard line like that, I feel like we've got to punch it in. And the way our defense was playing, if we were going to get stopped, I felt like that was 98 yards for them to go if you're playing the numbers on it. Plus, we've got to get in on the 2-yard line. There's no excuse for that, and that's our expectation."



SONNY BROCKWAY

RACKING THEM UP — Ohio State's 20-12 win over Penn State on Oct. 21 was the fifth in five seasons for head coach Ryan Day (pictured), while Nittany Lions head coach James Franklin fell to 1-9 against the Buckeyes.

Wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. on if he felt the team had something to prove against Penn State: "We kind of have a faceless opponent mindset. It doesn't matter if the Denver Broncos come out there and step on the field, we're going to worry about ourselves and worry about how we can execute as an offense, and that's really more important. We have tremendous respect for their defense because they're very well coached and have tremendous players, but we knew we just had to worry about ourselves."

Penn State head coach James Franklin after the loss to the Buckeyes: "As always, I want to give Ohio State a ton of credit. I'm not sure, I'll watch the tape, but I'm not sure if we didn't just watch two of the best teams in college football, specifically on the defensive side of the ball."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 20, Penn State 12

Oct. 21, 2023 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
PENN STATE	3	3	0	6	12
OHIO STATE	3	7	0	10	20

First Quarter

OSU - Fielding, 33-yard field goal, 10:49

PSU - Felkins, 40-yard field goal, 5:15.

Second Quarter

OSU - Williams, 2-yard rush (Fielding kick), 7:31.

PSU - Felkins, 41-yard field goal, 4:16.

OSU - Fielding, 36-yard field goal, 1:32.

Fourth Quarter

OSU - Fielding, 37-yard field goal, 8:59

OSU - Harrison Jr., 18-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 4:07.

PSU - Saunders, 8-yard pass from Allar (pass failed), 0:29.

Att. - 105,506

Weather - Cloudy, 54 F

Team Statistics

	PSU	OSU
First Downs	15	22
Rushing	3	6
Passing	10	13
Penalty	2	3
Rushes-Yards	26-49	41-79
Passing Yards	191	286
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	18-42-0	22-35-0
Offensive Plays	68	76
Total Net Yards	240	365
Third Down Efficiency	1-16	6-16
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-3	0-1
Punts-Avg.	9-43.7	6-47.5
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-1
Penalties	5-32	6-54
Time of Possession	25:36	34:24

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - PSU: Singleton 9-48; Allen 9-26; Lambert-Smith 1(-2); Allar 7(-23).

OSU: Williams 24-62; Trayanym 9-22; Brown 2-5; Johnson 2-4; Team 2(-4); McCord 2(-10).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - PSU: Allar 18-42-0-191-1. **OSU:** McCord 22-35-0-286-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - PSU: Lambert-Smith 6-52; Johnson 2-39; Cephas 2-28; Saunders 2-25;

Wallace III 2-19; Warren 1-11; Clifford 1-7; Singleton 1-6; Allen 1-4. **OSU:** Harrison Jr. 11-162; Stover 4-70; Tate 3-21; Trayanum 1-19; Fleming 1-9; Johnson 1-6; Williams 1(-1).

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - PSU: Thompson 9-43.7-54. **OSU:** Mirco 6-47.5-72.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - PSU: Hardy 1-15. **OSU:** Ballard 3-13; Fleming 1-3.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - PSU: Singleton 1-30; Potts 1-29. **OSU:** Trayanum 1-14.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - PSU: Elsdon 1-0. **OSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - PSU: None. **OSU:** None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - PSU: Dixon 1-5; Isaac 0.5-3; Kobe King 0.5-2. **OSU:** Curry 1-15; Jackson Jr. 1-10;

Tuimolouau 1-8; Styles 1-3.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - PSU: Isaac 2-9; Dixon 2-8; Kalen King 1.5-2; Durant 1-3; Kobe

King 0.5-2; Jacobs 0.5-1; Ellies 0.5-0; Hardy 0.5-0; Wheatley 0.5-0. **OSU:** Curry 1-15; Jackson Jr. 1-10; Tuimolouau 1-8; Proctor 1-3; Simon 1-3; Styles 1-3; Igbinosun 1-2; Hamilton 0.5-1; Eichenberg 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - PSU: Jacobs 5-4-9; Carter 5-4-9; Winston 4-3-7; Kalen King 5-1-6; Kobe King 5-1-6; Hardy 4-2-6; Dixon 3-2-5; Reed 3-2-5; Isaac 1-3-4; Dennis-Sutton 2-1-3; Izzard 1-2-3; Wheatley 1-2-3; Durant 2-0-2; DeLuca 1-1-2; Ellis 1-1-2; Ellies 0-2-2; Elson 1-0-1; Duzansky 1-0-1; Beamon 0-1-1. **OSU:** Eichenberg 2-6-8; Chambers 1-5-6; Igbinosun 5-0-5; Hancock 4-1-5; Simon 3-2-5; Styles 3-1-4; Proctor 3-1-4; Mathews Jr. 3-0-3; Sawyer 1-2-3; Hamilton 1-2-3; Jackson Jr. 1-1-2; Ransom 1-1-1; Williams 0-2-2; Hall Jr. 1-0-1; Tuimolouau 1-0-1; Curry 1-0-1; Trayanum 0-1-1; Carrico 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - PSU: Lambert-Smith, Allen, Allar, Warren, Wallace III, Nourzad, Ioane, Wallace, Fashanu, Wormley, Johnson, Reed, Carter, Isaac, Winston, Jacobs, Hardy, Durany, Dixon, Kalen King, Robinson, Beamon, DeLuca, Singleton, Flowers, McClain, Tracy, Rojas, Vanover, Washington, Dinkins, Ellis, Clifford, Taylor, Potts, Cephas, Dinkins, Wylie, Dennis-Sutton, Fisher, Meiga, Kobe King, Elsdon, Duzansky, Miller, Rulli, Dawkins, Artis, Wheatley, Shelton, Saunders, Isreal-Achumba, Felkins, Ellies, Sahaydak, Wilson, Thompson, Nwosu, Izzard. **OSU:** Johnson, Harrison Jr., Trayanum, Fleming, Jones, McCord, Fryar, Simmons, Jackson, Hinzman, Stover, Igbinosun, Chambers, Sawyer, Eichenberg, Proctor, Tuimolouau, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, T. Williams, Hicks, Carter, Tate, Melton, Mathews Jr., Carrico, Mirco, M. Williams, Simon, Brown, Powers, Fielding, Styles Jr., Griffin, Ferlmann, Gurd, Hall Jr., Michalski, Vimahi, Toutany, Tshabola, Adolph, Scott Jr., Ballard, McKenzie, Curry, 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)	W, 17-14	77,622	
Oct. 7	(4) MARYLAND	W, 37-17	104,974	
Oct. 14	(3) at Purdue	W, 41-7	57,319	
Oct. 21	(3) PENN STATE (7)	W, 20-12	105,506	
Oct. 28	(3) at Wisconsin	7:30 p.m.		
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	155	109
Rushing	44	43
Passing	95	55
Penalty	16	11
Average Per Game/Rush	127.0	100.6
Average Per Game/Pass	304.9	159.6
Total Offense	3023	1821
Total Plays	459	463
Average Per Game	431.9	260.1
Average Per Play	6.6	3.9
Penalties-Yards	46-367	38-348
Fumbles-Lost	6-5	6-2
Third Down Efficiency	39-91	32-106
Percentage	43%	30%
Fourth Down Efficiency	8-14	7-19
Percentage	57%	37%
Sacks-Yards	14-109	12-73
Time Of Possession Avg.	29:35	30:24

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	44	79	55	58	0	236	33.7
Opponents	20	16	14	20	0	70	10.0

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	44	295	6.7	5	61
Chip Trayanum	60	257	4.3	3	40
Miyan Williams	49	158	3.2	3	12
Dallan Hayden	11	76	6.9	1	19
Xavier Johnson	12	68	5.7	0	15
Devin Brown	19	35	1.8	1	8
Emeka Egbuka	4	21	5.3	0	9
Evan Pryor	6	14	2.3	0	6
Marvin Harrison Jr.	1	7	7.0	0	7
Cody Simon	1	-3	-3.0	0	0
Kyle McCord	20	-31	-1.6	0	9
Team	4	-8	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	231	889	3.8	13	61
OPP Totals	234	704	3.0	3	22

Passing						
Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.	
Kyle McCord	131	205	63.9	1937	12-1	161.6
Devin Brown	12	22	54.5	197	2-1	150.7
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	143	228	62.7	2134	14-2	159.8
OPP Totals	118	229	51.5	1117	5-5	95.3

Receiving					
Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
Marvin Harrison Jr.	42	766	18.2	6	75
Cade Stover	27	429	15.9	3	49
Emeka Egbuka	22	303	13.8	3	28
Julian Fleming	17	171	10.1	0	37
Carnell Tate	11	183	16.6	1	55
Xavier Johnson	6	85	14.2	0	40
Chip Trayanum	5	34	6.8	0	19
Miyan Williams	4	42	10.5	0	27
Gee Scott Jr.	4	20	5.0	0	10
T. Henderson	3	45	15.0	0	27
Dallan Hayden	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Brandon Inniss	1	58	58.0	1	58
OSU Totals	143	2134	14.9	14	75
OPP Totals	118	1117	9.5	5	36

Scoring						
TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS	
Jayden Fielding	-29-30	-	-	9-10	56	
Marvin Harrison Jr.	6	-	-	-	36	
T. Henderson	5	-	-	-	30	
Cade Stover	3	-	-	-	18	
Chip Trayanum	3	-	-	-	18	
Emeka Egbuka	3	-	-	-	18	
Miyan Williams	3	-	-	-	18	
Josh Proctor	1	-	-	-	6	
Tyleik Williams	1	-	-	-	6	

Dallan Hayden	1	-	-	-	6	
Devin Brown	1	-	-	-	6	
Brandon Inniss	1	-	-	-	6	
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	6	
J. Mathews Jr.	1	-	-	-	6	
OSU Totals	30	29-30	-	-	9-10	236
OPP Totals	8	7-7	-	-	5-9	70

FG Distance					
0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total	
Jayden Fielding	3-3	4-4	2-3	0-0	9-10
OSU Totals	3-3	4-4	2-3	0-0	9-10
OPP Totals	1-2	0-1	4-6	0-0	5-9

Punting					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long	
Jesse Mirco	24	1061	44.2	0	72
OSU Totals	24	1061	44.2	0	72
OPP Totals	39	1719	44.1	0	60

Interceptions					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
Jermaine Mathews Jr.	1	58	58.0	1	58
Josh Proctor	1	24	24.0	1	24
Lathan Ransom	1	15	15.0	0	15
Denzel Burke	1	0	0.0	0	0
Steele Chambers	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	5	97	19.4	2	58
OPP Totals	2	11	5.5	0	11

Punt Returns					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
Jayden Ballard	6	30	5.0	0	18
Emeka Egbuka	7	23	3.3	0	8
Julian Fleming	3	3.0	0	0	3
OSU Totals	14	56	4.0	0	18
OPP Totals	8	102	12.8	0	29

Kickoff Returns					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
Xavier Johnson	9	208	23.1	0	32
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
OSU Totals	10	222	22.2	0	32
OPP Totals	12	210	17.5	0	30

Def. Leaders					
Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks	
Tommy Eichenberg	32	22	54	2.5-8	1.0-7
Steele Chambers	20	22	42	1.0-1	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	24	9	33	1.5-4	0-0
Lathan Ransom	20	11	31	0.5-1	0-0
Tyleik Williams	12	17	29	6.0-11	1.0-2
Josh Proctor	21	8	29	3.5-5	0-0
Cody Simon	13	13	26	2.5-5	0-0
Sonny Styles	16	10	26	3.0-7	1.0-3
Jordan Hancock	15	6	21	0-0	0-0
Jack Sawyer	8	12	20	2.0-13	1.5-12
J.T. Tuimolouau	9	11	20	5.0-36	4.0-32
Ty Hamilton	8	11	19	0.5-1	0-0
Mike Hall Jr.	6	6	12	1.5-14	1.5-14
Denzel Burke					

Williams Putting Together Breakout Season

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Tyleik Williams came out of Unity Reed High School in Manassas, Va., in 2021 as a four-star defensive tackle prospect, viewed as the 25th best defensive lineman in his class and the No. 166 overall prospect in the country, though it did not receive much attention at the time given that class also featured a pair of five-star defensive linemen in J.T. Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer as well as a top-100 interior prospect in Mike Hall Jr.

But in his third season in Columbus, Williams is showing that he is on that same level as those stars such as Tuimolou ranked above him, and he is currently experiencing a breakout season on Ohio State's defensive line.

"I'm just working harder in practice and in the game," he said. "I took some breaks last year, but I have a bigger role this year. So I have to show up."

And show up he has. Through seven games this season, Williams has accounted for 29 tackles (six for loss) with one sack, four pass breakups and a fumble recovery. His tackles lead all defensive linemen and are tied with Josh Proctor for fifth on the team behind Tommy Eichenberg, Steele Chambers, David Igbinosun and Lathan Ransom.

His six tackles for loss also outpace the rest of the defensive linemen, while his four pass breakups surpass every Buckeye other than Proctor and Denzel Burke, who is also in the middle of an impressive junior campaign.

Because of his performance early on, Williams was named a midseason All-American by ESPN and picked up a second-team honor from The Athletic. The recognition is something he appreciates, but it doesn't mean much to him since there's still so long to go in the season.

"It's a great award," he said on Oct. 18. "I'm not really worried about it right now. I'm just trying to get to Saturday (against Penn State) and get ready for a big game."

The acknowledgement comes immediately after what was one of his best games of his career in Ohio State's 41-7 win at Purdue on Oct. 14. He finished with three tackles – two going for a loss – and two pass breakups, the same total he notched in 13 games last season. Igbinosun joked that Williams is part of the defensive backs' "Best In America" group, something Williams appreciated.

"It's amazing to be a part of two groups," Williams joked. "I take great pride in my defensive back skills, so it's showing up now."

With the tackles for loss against the Boilermakers, Williams extended a streak of five straight games taking someone down behind the line of scrimmage. He also scored a defensive touchdown in the 63-10 win over Western Kentucky, the first of his career, after Burke forced the ball out, which Williams collected at the bottom of a big pile in the end zone for the score.

"It was under Ja'Had (Carter) and I had to yank it a little bit, then I had it," he said. "I don't even know how to explain it. I haven't felt that since Little League, but it's amazing."

Williams always had the potential to be an impact player – in his 247Sports scouting report, Brian Dohn wrote that he had day-three NFL draft potential coming out of high school

–but he hadn't been able to unlock that in his first two years with the Buckeyes. Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles thinks the improvement is as simple as Williams getting more practice.

"It just simply boils down to reps with him," Knowles said on Oct. 10. "The more reps he gets, the better he gets. It's just really staying healthy, the more practice time he gets and the more chances he gets, he gets better."

"The amount of snaps, being healthy, able to utilize his athletic ability, seeing more plays, understanding offense. He's really a smart guy. I think the more reps he gets he's just picking things up and kind of seeing the play before it happens."

As a true freshman, Williams had 16 tackles, five sacks, a forced fumble and two pass breakups. In his sophomore season last year, he jumped to 21 tackles but fell to just one sack and had another two passes defended. Those were positive seasons for a young player, but he was not able to reach his potential given that he had trouble staying on the field.

Williams dealt with a knee injury this year early in camp and has continued to deal with it into the season, but in the past he had issues with his conditioning. He said his conditioning and weight got the best of him earlier in his football career, but he has been able to get that in check, allowing him to get more time on the practice field and stay in games longer.

"I didn't work out for a long period of time, I was just eating," he said on Sept. 20. "I just kept gaining and gaining, and then I started working out. I was pretty big. I had to cut it down."

That weight gain happened amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with Williams' senior season at Manassas canceled. By the time he enrolled at Ohio State, he was up to 360 pounds after being listed as 330 during the recruiting process. He shed much of that weight heading into last year, but he has since learned how to play without the weight and is using that to his advantage.

"I feel good not having to come to the sideline breathing heavy, waiting for someone else to go on for me," he said. "I'm going to stay out there and help my team out as much as I can."

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson said the work Williams got in while he was dealing with his knee injury in August was helpful, adding that the team ran him a lot and made sure his conditioning was where it needed to be so that he could take the next step this season. Johnson focused on the work Williams was putting in after that injury, making sure he took extra reps and snaps whenever he could, and he said Williams bought into it.

"He wasn't sitting around taking a break," Johnson said. "We ran a lot after practice to get him ready, and we put him in the swimming pool, put him on the bicycles, all of those things to make sure we could get him close to where he was. Then my biggest fear was that he didn't do 200 snaps in fall (camp), he didn't get those snaps. So what I did when we came back, I gave him more reps. He got tired, but I knew it helped him."

Williams has been a leader for the defense this year and has learned to use his voice more on the field. He also works harder in practice and in his conditioning to be a leader by example. But he credits the improvement to study-



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE TRENCHES – Defensive tackle Tyleik Williams (91) has been a standout for Ohio State's defensive line this season, totaling 29 tackles with six tackles for loss, a sack and four pass breakups through seven games. He also recorded his first career defensive touchdown on a fumble recovery in the end zone against Western Kentucky on Sept. 16.

ing more and being more willing to dive deep into the film.

"I always watched film – everybody watches film – but I would just watch it here and there, a couple minutes every day," he said. "Now I'm really into it. You can't even get me off the film. I think it helps tremendously."

It also helps that despite his current size of 6-2, 290 pounds, his feet are still extremely quick, an advantage when you have the size and strength to go with it. That explosiveness and speed that Williams has shown – especially this year – has always been an important factor in his game, and he agrees that has always been the case.

"I've been like this my whole life," he said. "I gained a lot of weight. In high school, I was like 270. Then COVID hit and I gained a lot of weight, but I always had quick feet."

His improvement comes in a year when head coach Ryan Day has been much more animated publicly, something of which the players have taken notice. Day said the change in his coaching style is intentional because he believes this team responds to it well.

Knowles also said that different teams need to be coached in different ways, and he does agree that these current Buckeyes need someone to light a fire under them. Williams believes the coaches are right about that and said that the team likes that Day has been tough on them.

"I definitely think they're more hyped up now," he said. "That's what we need as players. We need a fiery coach. We don't need a calm coach. We need a coach screaming, and I think it gets us going."

Day and Knowles' passion has been out in the open, but the work that got Williams to this point happened behind closed doors. He was able to earn the trust of the coaches because of his attitude change and bringing that work over the offseason into the fall.

That work has paid off for Williams so far, but as the snaps continue to pile up, he could just be getting started.

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Ohio State's Peacock Game Drawing Backlash

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's game against Purdue on Oct. 14 was broadcast on NBC's streaming service, Peacock, and it wasn't available to be watched live anywhere else. It was the first Buckeye game that wasn't on live television since 1997.

The change affected Ohio State fans around the country who didn't already have the streaming platform, who had to pay a fee of \$5.99 plus tax for a full month of a service for a product they would use for only one day in many cases.

Scott Kerns, a Buckeye Sports Bulletin reader who has watched every single game he's been able to since 1997, said he refused to pay for Peacock because the Buckeyes were going to be broadcast there for only one game. He was still able to find a radio broadcast of the game in Arizona, but he didn't consider watching.

"I decided we were going to go out for a drive and not suffer having to sit while not being able to watch Ohio State football," he said. "I'm not going to do that. I'm going to draw a line."

Kerns was not the only fan who did not give in to Peacock. Bill DeMora, a state senator in Columbus and an alum of Ohio State, also did not watch the game.

He listened to Paul Keels and Jim Lachey's broadcast of the game on 97.1 The Fan, which he said – while he does enjoy the

radio broadcast – was not the same as being able to watch the game. Backup quarterback Devin Brown's fumble in the second quarter presented a particular issue given that DeMora prefers to have the game on TV with the volume down and the radio broadcast lined up with what he's watching.

"He described something originally," DeMora told BSB. "Paul Keels called it a touch-down on Devin Brown's second dive, and then he said, 'Oh, wait, the ball came out, it's a fumble.' I mean, Paul Keels is a human being, he didn't see it with what his angle was. I had to wait and find out if that was a fumble or not.

"I was clapping because we scored a touchdown, and then, 'Oh, no, we fumbled.' So, it stinks. It stinks.

"Saturday was a disaster for those people that didn't get to watch the game on TV for the first time since 1997. For those that actually paid for it as well, the streaming service was horrible. I heard nothing but complaints. It was buffering, it was delayed, the sound was horrible, the picture was horrible."

Keels told BSB that he wasn't sure whether there were more listeners during the game against Purdue, but he and Lachey were expecting there would be, though it did not change the duo's approach to their broadcast.

"We did expect there to be more listeners for the game since it was on Peacock – there are for most noon games anyways – but that didn't change the way we approached the

broadcast," Keels said. "It was the same thing we try to do every game. It didn't change it whatsoever."

If streaming games continues to become more common, Keels believes the radio call will become an even more important avenue for fans to take in the game, but DeMora would prefer fans have the option to watch along with the broadcast.

He believes the situation was unfair to everyone involved. People who did watch the game had a bad experience, while others – whether it be bars and restaurants that could not afford to broadcast the game or college students looking to watch their classmates – may have been priced out of the game, not to mention those without a way to access Peacock.

Another Buckeye Sports Bulletin reader, Richard Hegadore, already had Peacock, so it was not an extra purchase for him and his wife to watch the game in Florida. But had it been on another streaming service – which won't happen soon but is possible at some point in the future – Hegadore feels as if he would have to make the extra purchase, and he's not even close to the only fan who feels trapped by that decision.

"I would say if that's the only way I can watch the Buckeyes, you've got to do what you've got to do," he said, "but I'm not for it."

Kerns said he's standing by his decision of not giving in, even if it becomes more common for Buckeye games to be accessible only through streaming.

"I have drawn the line on Peacock. I'm not going to join them," he said. "I have Amazon Prime, Apple TV, and Netflix. I'm done. I'm drawing the line on that. I just can't do it."

But for sports bars in Ohio, much of their business comes on Ohio State game days, and they feel they have no choice of whether to show the game, no matter the cost.

Nicole Cox, director of marketing and public relations for Roosters, a popular chain in Columbus and around the state, said they felt forced to get Peacock at all of their Ohio locations or else they were not going to get as much business as a normal game day. She also said she feels terrible for the smaller businesses that were not able to afford the game, missing out on business they might rely on during the football season.

"We are held hostage on if it's going to be on another network," she said. "We have to buy it. To us at this point, it's not an option to not have the game.

"A business shouldn't have to worry about that. We should be able to get the games. That's what restaurants are for. But it was a hefty purchase for us."

It was a stressful process for Roosters to get Peacock installed in time for the game, needing to hire an outside party to come into every location to hook it up and make sure sound would come out through their speakers. Ultimately, Cox said there were no major issues on game day other than the picture not being clear occasionally, or the sound being muffled sometimes.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

"Did it affect our business? No, because people were still watching the games," she said. "But if you were getting down to the nitty gritty of it, yes, there was some (pixelization). It was because Peacock isn't used to broadcasting this, and it's just different."

Cox said on Oct. 19 that it was too early to tell whether the investment Roosters made into Peacock would end up paying off for them, especially since they now have the service for a year, and they will continue to use it for several Ohio State men's and women's basketball games that will be available only through it.

Whether or not it ends up making a profit for Roosters, Cox said it was better than the alternative of not having the game on and fans going elsewhere to watch the game.

DeMora, meanwhile, said he knew of bar owners who had to pay \$3,600 because they had to install Peacock on every TV for a game that lasted just over three hours.

"In this town, if you're a bar owner and you don't have Ohio State football showing, nobody's going to be at your bar," DeMora said. "A small business owner, they either pay some exorbitant fee, or they don't get the game and no one's at the bar, and they're losing revenue. So, there's something to be done."

What DeMora wants to do is give fans who are unwilling or unable to buy a subscription to Peacock an option to watch the game another way. The legislator is pursuing legislation that would make it so publicly funded colleges and universities would not be able to show their games exclusively on streaming services.

Because of the seven-year, \$7 billion media rights deal that the Big Ten signed with CBS, FOX and NBC last year, the money already invested into this and the idea that this will likely happen more often going forward, some people believe DeMora's plan is unattainable.

Steve Williard, another Buckeye Sports Bulletin reader, watched the game at Roosters because he and the friends whom he watches with all refused to get Peacock. He supports the idea of limiting streaming exclusivity but doesn't think it's realistic.

"I think you're living in La-La Land if you don't see this coming. I mean, tickets used to be \$10 to get into the Horseshoe," Williard said. "But that's the way things are going. Ohio State is in it for the money, and everybody is, so I just think that's the way things are."

Kerns brought up the same issue when talking about the game on Peacock, reiterating the point that it's all about the money when it comes to these deals, with current ticket prices reflecting that change.

"You can't go to a game now because it's too expensive," Kerns said. "Now they're going to take our TV away so that only the oligarchs can go to games and listen to games and watch games. I mean, it's got to stop somewhere. Sports really got big because of the fans, but that's being lost here."

Despite the doubts that he will be able to fight the money backing it, DeMora has hope that he will be able to get something done in terms of legislation.

"If nothing else happens," he said, "if the students at public universities across Ohio – Ohio State, Ohio University, Kent State, Miami, Cincinnati, Toledo, Bowling Green, Akron – their students that are going to school, (if) they have the ability to watch all

these sports in their dorm room, at the union and the social areas on campus and not have to pay extra for it, then that's a win. That's something, I think, is the first solution we can come to."

He hopes to make it a reality for not only students on campus, but for people around the state who want to be able to watch games at home as well. He said there are thousands of Ohioans without access to high-speed Internet who are unable to use Peacock even if they wanted to make the purchase, and it's not fair to them to have the game available only by streaming.

"You're basically telling these people, 'Well, you're (out of luck). It's your team, you don't get to watch them because you live somewhere that doesn't have broadband access. So thumb my nose to you, we don't care about you.' That's ridiculous. It's unfair for the little guy."

Buckeye Sports Bulletin reader Tom Snyder was lucky enough to have a friend help him set up Peacock when he first got it to watch "Days of Our Lives," but others might not have someone to help them and might be completely unfamiliar with the technology needed.

"I find that stuff kind of complicated," Snyder said. "I'm sure there's a lot of people that couldn't watch the Ohio State game because they didn't have anybody that could set up the streaming for them."

DeMora said that he has already talked to someone at Channel 4 in Columbus who said they would be willing to pay a fee to Peacock to be able to show the game as well.

"Say they had to pay \$25,000 for the game, make up a number," he said. "Channel 4 would have made money by advertising sales. Peacock's going to make good money by having \$25,000 to have them watch the game, and everybody's happy."

"These corporations are making money hand over fist. The Big Ten is making money hand over fist. And it's time for the Big Ten to start paying attention to the fans and ordinary people. Money is not everything in this world."

DeMora does believe there is a way he can get the issue worked out in everyone's favor, and he is going to continue to try to get to that point. He went to Ohio State and says he is still one of the biggest Ohio State fans there is, so this issue is not only important to him because of the people he represents, but because he is personally so invested as well.

"I only wear Ohio State clothes every day of the year, except if we lose a football game – I wear black for 48 hours in mourning," he said. "Every watch I own says Ohio State. Every tie I own says Ohio State. Every sport coat I own has an Ohio State pin on it. My iPhone case is an Ohio State phone case. I have 17 Ohio State jackets from light to heavy. Every ballcap I own is an Ohio State ballcap. So I am a Buckeye."

He also goes to every single Ohio State game he's able to make, even if it's a road game, and he has missed only four home games since 1980.

The overwhelming majority of the hundreds of people DeMora has talked to about his plan support the idea. He said that he has bipartisan support, and he plans to not go down without a fight.

"Not everything that's changing is always for the better," he said. "And in my mind, I don't like sports on streaming."



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Fickell's First Season At UW No Cake Walk

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Once Luke Fickell was announced as the head coach at Wisconsin on Nov. 27, 2022, following the in-season firing of Paul Chryst, all eyes turned to an event 11 months later – Ohio State's trip to Camp Randall Stadium on Oct. 28. If college football had script writers, none of them could have come up with something as intriguing.

Fickell, the former Ohio State linebacker (1993-96), assistant coach (2002-16) and one-time interim coach (2011), would coach against the Buckeyes for the first time as a Big Ten head coach. And after the job Fickell did as Cincinnati's head coach from 2017-22, going 57-18 and earning the first (and still only) College Football Playoff bid for a non-Power Five team, there was reason to believe he could come in and quickly turn things around for a Wisconsin program that had languished under Chryst, unable to reach the mountaintop of the Big Ten despite playing in the weaker West Division.

If Fickell came in and got the Badgers back to a respectable spot, why would they not be able to compete with Ohio State in Fickell's first season considering he went toe-to-toe with some of college football's best during his time with the Bearcats?

And with a more talented Wisconsin roster – not to mention the addition of offensive coordinator Phil Longo, air raid extraordinaire, and SMU quarterback Tanner Mordecai from the portal – the sky was the limit entering this season. But as it often does, reality set in.

Wisconsin is off to a 5-2 start this season, but it has not come easy. The Badgers' defense has been the team's best unit, by far, allowing just 18.3 points and 334.1 yards per game, but it's Fickell's and Longo's offense that has held the team back in a 31-22 loss at Washington State on Sept. 9 and an embarrassing 15-6 loss at home to Iowa on Oct. 14.

Things were particularly bad against the Hawkeyes, with just two field goals, 324 yards of offense and eight punts to show for 78 plays. Things were made even worse when Mordecai suffered a broken throwing hand in the second quarter of the loss, requiring surgery on Oct. 15 that will keep the sixth-year signal caller out indefinitely.

"There's nobody that's more of a competitor than him," Fickell said. "Just for the sheer reason that he didn't come out when the play happened. Most others probably would have felt the pain and been curious about what it was. There's a guy that his competitive spirit and his emotions probably kept him from feeling what's natural."

After Mordecai's exit, he was replaced by redshirt freshman Braedyn Locke, who transferred to Wisconsin this season after his freshman year at Mississippi State. In relief, Locke threw for just 122 yards and an interception on 15-of-30 passing, and the Badgers finished with 50 passes to just 28 runs in the loss. In Locke's first start, a 25-21 win at Illinois on Oct. 21, he finished 21 of 41 for 240 yards and two touchdowns, both coming in the fourth quarter as he helped the Badgers overcome a 21-7 deficit.

"I don't know that there's a ton of differences," Fickell said of Mordecai and Locke. "I think the biggest difference is just the experience. That was the beautiful thing about Tanner Mor-

decai. Not just his experience with playing, but his experience of being through so many ups and downs, from his original stop at Oklahoma, to SMU, and those things are invaluable.

"Braedyn just has not gotten that type of experience yet, so it makes things more difficult in some ways for him. I'll be honest with you, he's got a great head on his shoulders. There's nobody that's in this building more than him. Maybe Tanner would be the only other one that maybe pushes the envelope of, we've got to get them out of (the building)."

It's a challenging situation for an already struggling offense posting just 26.9 points and 396.9 yards per game, but within those struggles lay a solution for the Badgers: run, run and then run some more. Following the loss to Iowa in which junior tailback Braelon Allen had just five carries for 25 yards in the first half before getting 13 totes for 62 yards in the second, Fickell came to that same realization.

"I thought (Allen) ran as hard and physical in that second half as I've ever seen him," Fickell said. "Obviously, it wasn't enough. Maybe we need to just flat out give it to him some more there in those situations."

Allen had 29 carries for 145 yards and a touchdown in the win against the Illini.

Without an experienced option at quarterback, that rushing attack – good for 180.3 yards per game – could help maintain the status quo for the Badgers, a team that was too reliant on the pass early in the season without enough success in the aerial attack to back up the usage.

Beyond Allen – the former Big Ten Freshman of the Year – the Badgers have also received some contributions from sophomore Jackson Acker (26 carries, 111 yards), who has stepped up in the wake of a season-ending injury to the fifth-year Chez Mellusi. He had 307 yards and four touchdowns through the first four games before being lost to a broken fibula. Helping Wisconsin's case is a quartet of returning starters on the offensive line, with every position except center featuring a returning Badger.

"Where I thought the offensive line played a good game (against Iowa), we need them to play even better," Fickell said. "Braelon's going to have to put some more on his shoulders as well. And I wouldn't say that if I didn't think they could handle it."

Should protection hold up – Wisconsin has allowed 10 sacks this season – Locke will have his choice of Wisconsin's four leading receivers in Will Pauling (37 receptions, 398 yards, one TD) – who followed Fickell from Cincinnati – as well as Chimere Dike (16, 282, one), Bryson Green (17, 218) and Skyler Bell (21, 184, one). Allen has also been a reliable option out of the backfield with 23 catches for 96 yards.

But should Wisconsin find success over the second half of the season – and it does not feature a particularly daunting schedule, with the home contest against Ohio State followed by a trip to Indiana on Nov. 4, home games against Northwestern (Nov. 11) and Nebraska (Nov. 18) and the season finale at Minnesota on Nov. 25 – it will come down to the defense and the ability to take over games.

There's a new coach in Madison, but to the surprise of nobody, Wisconsin's linebackers are still leading the way for the defense. The Badgers are sticking with a 3-4 front under new defensive coordinator Mike Tressel, the nephew

Get To Know ... Wisconsin

- **2023 Record:** 5-2.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Air Raid; Defensive Formation - 3-4; Starters Returning - Offense 7, Defense 7.
- **Head Coach:** Luke Fickell, 1st year at Wisconsin, 5-2.
- **Series History:** 86th meeting, Ohio State leads series 62-18-5.
- **School Facts:** Location - Madison, Wisc.; Enrollment - 49,886; Nickname - Badgers; Colors - Red, White; Conference - Big Ten (West Division); Stadium - Camp Randall Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf; Capacity - 80,321).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Braelon Allen	120	704	5.9	8
Jackson Acker	26	111	4.3	0
Braedyn Locke	6	-3	-0.5	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Braedyn Locke	37-72	51.4	370	2-1

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Will Pauling	37	398	10.8	1
Chimere Dike	16	282	17.6	1
Bryson Green	17	218	12.8	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 26.9
 Rushing Yards Per Game – 180.3
 Passing Yards Per Game – 216.6
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 396.9

2023 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 2	BUFFALO	W, 38-17
Sept. 9	at Washington State	L, 31-22
Sept. 16	GEORGIA SOUTHERNW	35-14
Sept. 22	at Purdue	W, 38-17
Oct. 7	RUTGERS	W, 24-13
Oct. 14	IOWA	L, 15-6
Oct. 21	at Illinois	W, 25-21
Oct. 28	OHIO STATE	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 4	at Indiana	TBA
Nov. 11	NORTHWESTERN	TBA
Nov. 18	NEBRASKA	TBA
Nov. 25	at Minnesota	TBA
Dec. 2	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Hunter Wohler	45	25	70	3.0-7	1.0-1
Jake Chaney	28	16	44	3.5-24	2.0-8
Preston Zachman	20	14	34	0-0	0-0
Maema Njongmeta	18	13	31	5.0-12	2.0-7
C.J. Goetz	11	15	26	5.5-25	3.0-20
Jordan Turner	13	12	25	1.5-7	1.0-7

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Ricardo Hallman	4	123	30.8	1
Hunter Wohler	2	0	0.0	0
Jason Maitre	1	19	19.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 18.3
 Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 137.9
 Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 196.3
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 334.1

of former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, who replaces Jim Leonhard, who got a tryout as interim coach last season for Wisconsin but is now an analyst at Illinois.

Leading the group of linebackers is a pair of returning starters at inside linebacker, including senior Maema Njongmeta – though he has been pushed by junior Jake Chaney – and junior Jordan Turner, while sixth-year senior C.J. Goetz returns at outside linebacker. Sophomore Darryl Peterson fills the other spot on the outside left by Nick Herbig, who had 21 sacks over the last three seasons and was taken in the fourth round of this year's NFL draft.

"We feel like we've got three starting linebackers inside," Fickell said. "Somehow, somehow, we can (rotate) those guys and make sure they're all involved."

All told, they are five of Wisconsin's seven leading tacklers, led by Chaney with 44 tackles – 3½ for loss – with two sacks, though Goetz and Peterson have also combined for 11½ tackles for loss. The defensive line, meanwhile, features fifth-year nose tackle Gio Paez and a pair of returning starters in defensive ends Rodas Johnson – a fifth-year senior – and junior James Thompson Jr., with the trio combining for 7½ tackles for loss and 3½ sacks.

But while the defense has gotten to the quarterback and behind the line of scrimmage plenty, with 18 total sacks and 43 tackles for loss, the front seven has been less effective in stopping the run, allowing 137.9 yards per game and 4.1 yards per carry.

"The run game comes down to everyone being clear on their job," Njongmeta said, "and consistently executing for 60 minutes."

In the secondary, junior Hunter Wohler starts at strong safety. He leads the team with 70 tackles and has two interceptions of his own, with senior Kamo'i Latu a returning starter at free safety. The Badgers also have a sixth-year cornerback in Alexander Smith starting

alongside redshirt freshman Ricardo Hallman.

Smith and Hallman have combined for 36 tackles and 3½ tackles for loss this season, though Hallman has been a ballhawk for the Badgers with a team-high four interceptions, including a 95-yard return for a touchdown in the team's 24-13 win over Rutgers on Oct. 7.

"I think that really deflated them and their momentum and their hopes going into half-time," Hallman said. "That was really big for us because we were able to control the game for the rest of the time, so I think that was awesome. And I think it was awesome for me to be the one doing it because I want to contribute any way I can to this team."

Wisconsin's roster is one that is ready to compete with most of the Big Ten – and certainly the West Division, one where it was favored by many to win coming into this season – but this may not yet be the roster that is ready to contend with Ohio State. Just as it took Fickell time to build up his roster at Cincinnati, it was not likely to be a one-year turnaround in Madison.

But whether it's next year, the year after or at some point down the line, Fickell is looking to take that championship pedigree he learned at Ohio State and continued to craft at Cincinnati, utilizing it to get the Badgers back to winning conference titles, and maybe more.

"I'll tell you this, and you will probably (hear it) every year at the beginning of the year," Fickell said when introduced as Wisconsin's head coach. "We've got one objective and one goal: to play for a championship. I said that when I started at Cincinnati, and that is open-ended, but that gives you a lot of flexibility with the things you do. You have an opportunity in this league. If you are playing for a championship, amazing things can happen."

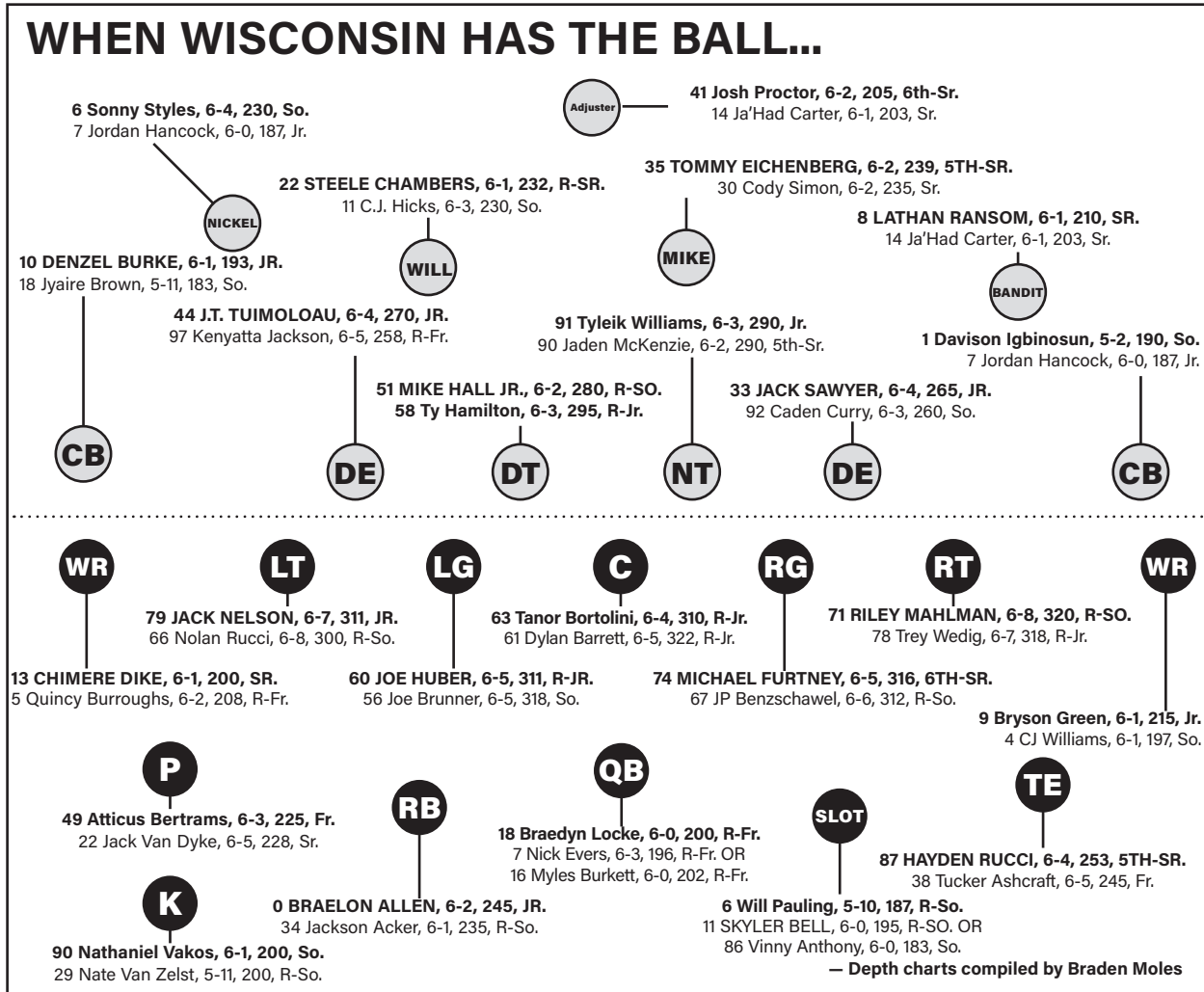
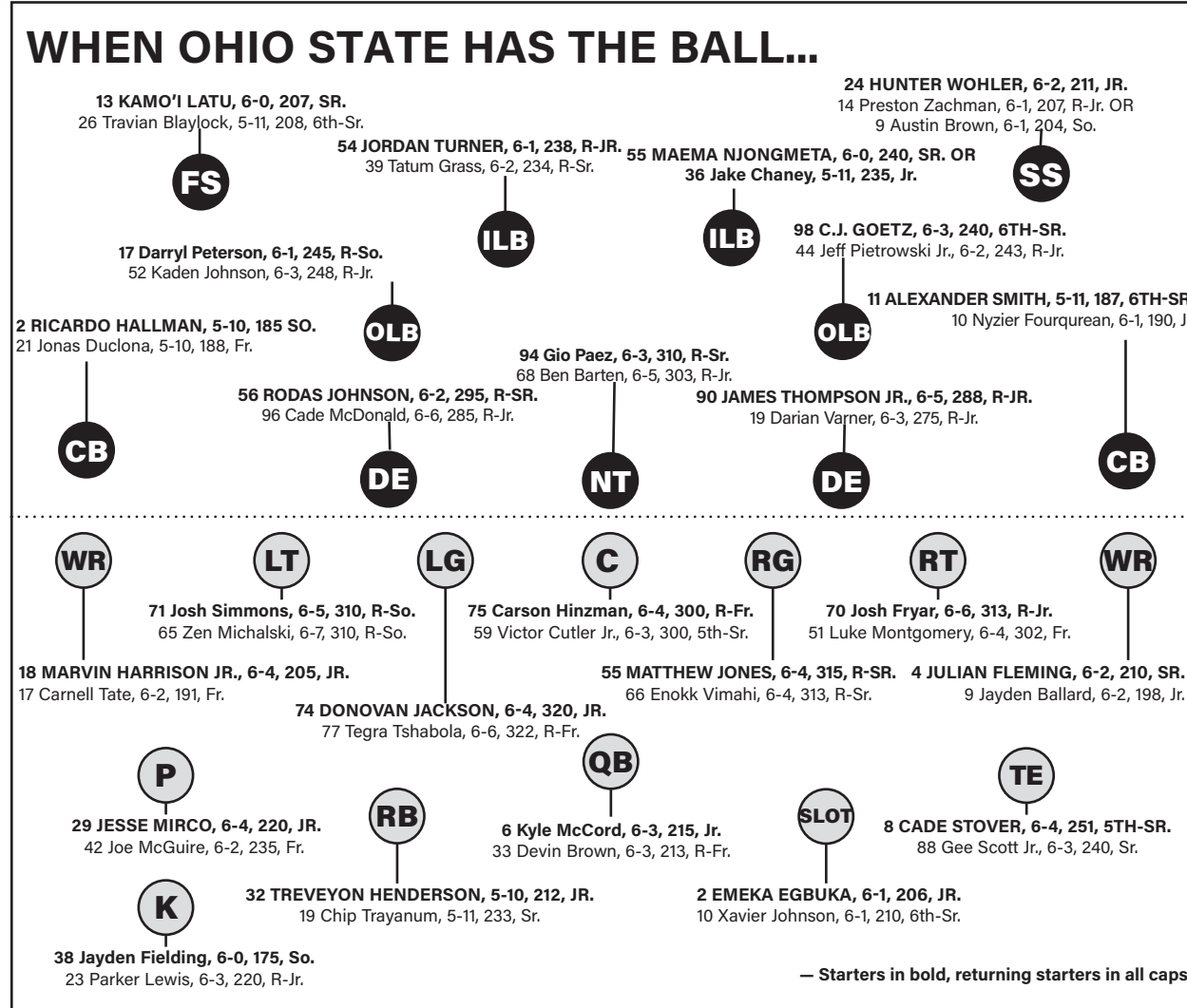


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How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
WISCONSIN RUSH DEFENSE

For the second time in three games, the Buckeyes failed to crack 100 yards rushing, compiling a net of 79 yards on 41 carries for a miserable 1.9 yards per run in the 20-12 win against Penn State on Oct. 21. In fairness, the Nittany Lions have a top-five national rushing defense, and running back TreVeyon Henderson missed his third straight game with an undisclosed injury. Miyan Williams had 52 yards on 13 carries in the first half but only 10 yards on 11 carries after halftime, mirroring the Buckeyes' problems in the second half when they rushed for 17 yards on 21 attempts (0.8). OSU ran for 62 yards against Maryland and 152 at Purdue in the games preceding Penn State. Chip Trayanum managed 22 yards (2.4) vs. the Nittany Lions, but Dallan Hayden (76 yards on 11 carries and a 1-yard touchdown vs. Purdue) did not play while the coaches decide whether or not to burn his redshirt. Designated running quarterback Devin Brown got hurt, and his absence in short-yardage situations was noticeable. Fortunately, Wisconsin isn't as stout as Penn State. They gave up 223 yards on 45 totes (5.0) in a 25-21 win against a middling Illinois team that had little in the way of passing. Illini QB Luke Altmyer ran for 100 yards (6.3), so if the OSU offensive line can get its act together, the ground game will belong to the Buckeyes. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

WISCONSIN RUSH OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Badgers have always had great backs, and that hasn't changed even with a change in coach as former Buckeye player and head coach Luke Fickell took charge this season and is looking for a more balanced offense. The Big Ten's second-leading rusher, Braelon Allen, gained 145 yards (5.0) with a touchdown and a long run of 30 yards in the win against the Illini. Other than him – and maybe he's enough – the Badgers have few options. The Buckeyes are defending the run like a mean bunch. The Nittany Lions have a quality backfield, but they were no match, gaining 49 yards on 26 attempts (1.9). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
WISCONSIN PASS DEFENSE

As long as Marvin Harrison Jr. is in the game, the Buckeyes have a shot. He used a career-high 11 catches to gain 162 yards and a touchdown against PSU. He got almost half his yardage (80) after the catch. His big day, which included two drops among his 16 targets, helped Kyle McCord to 22 of 35 for 286 yards and a TD. McCord was sacked twice and lost the ball on one that would have resulted in a scoop-and-score for the Nittany Lions, except they were guilty of holding Harrison. Imagine what Harrison could do if Emeka Egbuka were healthy to divert some of the attention from him. Wisconsin gave up 100 passing yards to Illinois and is allowing 196.3 passing yards per game, ranking 29th nationally and eighth in the Big Ten. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

WISCONSIN PASS OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

The Badgers scored the winning TD with 27 seconds left against Illinois on a tackle-eligible play. Redshirt freshman Braedyn Locke was 21 of 41 for 240 yards and two touchdowns in his first start for Tanner Mordecai, who broke his hand the previous game against Iowa and had been expected to run the air raid system for new offensive coordinator Phil Longo. Will Pauling had seven catches for 95 yards, coming close to being the first Badger to have 100 receiving yards this season. The Buckeyes made Penn State first-year starter Drew Allar look less than average. He was 18 of 42 for 191 yards and a TD with 29 seconds left. He was sacked four times. The Buckeyes' defense is aggressive and confident. That's not a good combo for the Badgers. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Nathaniel Vakos made a field goal from 41 yards and for the season is 11 of 12, but on another try the holder botched the snap against Illinois, and the return units continue to get dinged for holding penalties. Atticus Bertrams has at least one punt over 50 yards in four straight games for the Badgers. Ohio State's Jesse Mirco had a 72-yard punt against Penn State, and Jayden Fielding made field goals from 33 and 37 yards but missed from 45, and the kickoff unit gave up a return of 30 yards. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Camp Randall Stadium will be rocking, and Fickell will have his troops fired up more than usual to face the Buckeyes. If the Buckeyes survive the raucous atmosphere, they'll have the ultimate preparation for what lies ahead in Ann Arbor in November after prime-time games at Notre Dame and Wisconsin and the showdown against Penn State. **EDGE: WISCONSIN**

STAFF PREDICTION

The Buckeyes have proved they don't mind getting into slug-fests, and that's what it could come down to, but superior talent will prevail. **OHIO STATE 31, WISCONSIN 14**

Fickell Still Remains Loyal Buckeye To Many

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Looking back at the long and storied history of Ohio State football, it is difficult to find a Buckeye – player or coach – who embodies the spirit of the program quite like Luke Fickell. A Columbus native and St. Francis De Sales High School product, the current Wisconsin head coach put his stamp on his hometown school for over two decades, first on the gridiron as a bruising and durable nose tackle from 1992-1996 and then on the sideline in a number of different positions ranging from graduate assistant to interim head coach from 1999-2016.

Fickell's extensive tenure at Ohio State may be a complicated one – one that may yet to be finished – but for those who know the pulse of the program best, the many contributions he has made to the program have not gone unnoticed, and the story of the team cannot be written without him.

"There have been a lot of great players at Ohio State," longtime Columbus Dispatch columnist and former Ohio State football beat writer Bob Hunter told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "It's unbelievable if you actually sit down and try to figure it out. It's impossible to try to rank players because there are so many of them. But if you take (Fickell's) total career, and I'm talking about the player and assistant coach and all of that, he really had a long-term impact on the program.

"It's hard not to think of him as a really important person for the program in general for a long, long period. There are so many guys who were really good players, but there are not many guys who have had that kind of impact."

Fickell's story began long before he graced the Ohio Stadium field, at St. Francis DeSales, a private Catholic high school located in Columbus – about seven miles away from the center of Ohio State's main campus. Before he established himself on the gridiron, the young Fickell first flashed on the wrestling mat, where he carved out a remarkable career that many still deem among the best in Ohio high school history.

From his sophomore year in 1990 to his senior year in 1992, the future Buckeye amassed an unbeaten 106-0 record for the Stallions while also collecting three straight state titles and pinning the majority of his opponents throughout his career.

Fickell's dominance as a wrestler caught the eye of many around the city at the time, including former Ohio State recruiting coordinator and assistant coach Bill Conley, who would soon play a significant role in his recruitment to the Buckeyes as a football player.

"I saw him over at DeSales a couple of times, and he was impressive," Conley said. "I don't think anybody ever got close to beating him."

Fickell's aggressiveness and physicality on the wrestling mat would carry over to the gridiron in high school, where he played and excelled on both sides of the ball. Serving as a tight end, defensive lineman and offensive lineman for three seasons, the wrestling standout earned Division II and Division III first-team All-Ohio honors in his junior and senior seasons while also taking home the 1991 Division III Ohio Lineman of the Year award after recording 75 tackles and 10 sacks. Just like wrestling, Fickell's performance on the grid-



SONNY BROCKWAY

BUCKEYE FOR LIFE – His career has taken many twists and turns, but to most, former Ohio State player and assistant coach Luke Fickell – now the head coach at Wisconsin – still embodies the spirit of Ohio State's football program.

iron made Conley take notice, impressed by the athleticism and strength he possessed as a teenager, a combination that was unique for high school prospects at the time.

"He was a really good football player," Conley said. "He had all the things that you look for in defensive linemen. He could also play tight end, he played both sides of the ball. But we primarily recruited him as a defensive lineman. The things he brought to the table were that he played with great leverage. His core strength was powerful, and of course his wrestling also added to his versatility. He was a real tough guy, physical football player and also a really good student. He had the whole package."

Fickell's performance not only piqued the interest of Conley, but also head coach John Cooper, who, at the time, was leading an Ohio State program that had consistently underachieved and underwhelmed. Taking the reins from Earle Bruce in 1988, Cooper's Buckeyes struggled to string together sustained success in his first five seasons, defined by four straight bowl losses from 1989-92 and an additional four defeats to Michigan from 1988-91. In an effort to turn the program around, Conley said he and Cooper began to alter their recruiting strategy and seek out more versatile prospects on the defensive line, with Fickell at the forefront of that change.

"The thing we did in the early '90s in our recruiting, we knew we had to recruit athletic defensive linemen," Conley said. "Because we had played some teams at the end of the season, the national teams, where guys had really great defensive linemen, like Florida State. We started recruiting more towards the athletic side of defensive linemen. Not just big guys, but guys who can also run and are agile, just overall more athletic guys."

Fickell would provide just what the doctor

ordered. After accepting a scholarship from the Buckeyes in 1992 and redshirting his freshman season due to a season-ending injury, the hometown prospect served as a stalwart on an imposing front four across four straight seasons.

Known as a powerful run-stopper who could also use his athleticism to track down quarterbacks and knock down passes, he recorded 212 career tackles with 26 tackles for loss and six sacks. He also started 50 consecutive games from 1993-1996 – a school record at the time until center Billy Price passed it in 2017, starting 55 consecutive games.

Fickell's playing career was capped by a solid performance in his senior season, finishing with 50 tackles, eight tackles for loss and two sacks, helping a talented defense that featured the likes of Winfield Garnett, Matt Finkes and Mike Vrabel in the trenches.

"Those guys, they didn't put up with anything," Conley said. "There's no offensive lineman ever that knocked them off the ball. I mean, they were physical sons of guns. They were just steady, consistent, physical."

Fickell's warrior-like mentality – highlighted by playing in Ohio State's Rose Bowl win over Arizona State after that 1996 season with a torn pectoral muscle – would help him earn a spot on an NFL roster that offseason, when he was signed by the New Orleans Saints as an undrafted free agent in 1997. But a torn ACL would end his NFL career before it began, an abrupt change of plans that would lead him back to Columbus to begin a career in coaching.

He would immediately rejoin the program in 1999 when Cooper hired him to be a graduate assistant, helping the Buckeyes trek through a disappointing 6-6 season, Ohio State's first non-winning campaign in 11 years.

He would then leave the team to pursue his first real coaching gig at Akron, spending two seasons under head coach and former Ohio State assistant Lee Owens as a defensive line coach, only to return to Columbus in 2002 to serve as special teams coordinator and help lead the defensive line under head coach Jim Tressel.

Fickell's impact on the special teams was felt in his first season, most notably by guiding kicker Mike Nugent to a consensus All-American selection with a single-season OSU-record 28 field goals. This proved to be a critical aspect of the game that helped Tressel and the Buckeyes forge a perfect 14-0 record and a thrilling national championship win over talent-laden Miami in the Fiesta Bowl, the Buckeyes' first national title since 1968.

"He's really smart," Conley said. "Conceptually, he was a natural. He understood the game and the strategy involved with it on both sides of the ball. He could've been successful at any position."

These qualities would soon help the former graduate assistant ascend the Ohio State coaching ladder, with Tressel eventually naming him the program's full-time linebackers coach in 2004, and later the team's co-defensive coordinator in 2005.

Fickell's run of guiding imposing defenses culminated in an American Football Coaches Association Coach of the Year honor in 2010 and a 12-1 season, but his coaching career would soon take a bizarre turn one year later when the program found itself in a pool of controversy. After the NCAA suspended Ohio State players Mike Adams, Daniel "Boom" Herron, DeVier Posey, Terrelle Pryor and Solomon Thomas for the first five games of the 2011 season on Dec. 23, 2010, for selling memorabilia and receiving improper benefits from a tattoo parlor – a scandal later termed "TattooGate" – the football program would be engulfed in an offseason of roster and coaching staff overhaul, with Tressel resigning from his head coaching duties on May 30, 2011, and Pryor leaving the program for good on June 7.

With an unprecedented mid-offseason coaching vacancy to fill and a whirlwind of controversy surrounding the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and president E. Gordon Gee were forced to make a decision on who would run the program amid such turmoil. The answer was the 38-year-old Fickell, who had bled scarlet and gray for two decades and was already slated to act as interim coach while Tressel served an expected suspension.

"For me, it was pretty easy to sit down with him and ask him to take on this leadership role," Smith said while officially introducing Fickell as head coach on June 13, 2011. "You know his great success in teaching and recruiting, and that's represented in the number of student-athletes who have come here and become All-Big Ten players and All-Americans and ultimately went on to the NFL to the professional level. It's recognized in the great years of service he's had here in 10 years (as coach) and as a former player. It's recognized in the respect the high school coaches have in the state and the coaches on our staff have for him. So we're very, very pleased that he's going to step into this role."

While Smith and Gee could have looked outside of the program to fill the massive void left by Tressel – there were rumors that they

would take an early stab at Urban Meyer, who was working as an ESPN college football analyst at the time – the school decided to stay in-house and honor the longtime Buckeye who had paid his dues.

According to Hunter, this decision was made because Fickell had a keen understanding of the pulse surrounding the team and the magnitude of the position, something the selected interim coach had learned during his years as an assistant and as a player.

“He’d been around the program so long, and he knew the pressures of the job and all of that stuff probably better than anybody could,” Hunter said. “Taking over the Ohio State football program is like becoming a CEO of a company or something. It’s not just like somebody becoming the head coach at Big Walnut High School. It’s a little bit different than that.

“But I’m sure that his long-standing association with the program and his loyalty affected the decision. I mean, let’s face it, when you are with a program that long, you know everything, inside and out, about the program at Ohio State. He was totally familiar with the situation and the way everything works, so it made sense that they did that. I just think that for a young guy who had not been a head coach, that was a tough situation to be thrown into.”

This sentiment was shared by current Ohio State football beat reporter Bill Rabinowitz of The Columbus Dispatch. Rabinowitz, who admitted that having his first year on the beat during a time of chaos and scandal was like “jumping into the deep end with a lot of sharks in the water,” said that the program viewed Fickell as the right man for the job because of the calming and recognizable presence he could provide.

“They just needed somebody to hold the program together,” Rabinowitz said. “It seemed on the verge of just fracturing. You had people who were upset that Tressel (was forced to resign). It was just so chaotic. It was just the time when it seemed like the program was, I don’t want to say cratering, because it’s Ohio State, it wasn’t going to crater for long. But it seemed like short-term, they were just aimless and they needed somebody to hold it together. And he did.”

While Fickell managed to limit the outside noise as best he could off the field, the first-year head coach would endure a topsy-turvy season that many Buckeyes fans, and the players themselves, would rather forget. Spearheaded by first-year quarterback Braxton Miller and a group of players Rabinowitz described as far from “close-knit,” the Fickell-led Buckeyes struggled to find consistency early in the season, taking care of inferior teams such as Akron, Toledo and Colorado but suffering key losses such as a 24-6 blowout loss to Miami (Fla.), a low-scoring 10-7 affair to Michigan State and a potentially season-altering 34-27 loss to No. 14 Nebraska where they squandered a 27-6 lead in the third quarter.

Sitting at an underwhelming 3-3, Ohio State showed some signs of life toward the middle of the season. Thanks to the improving play of Miller and the much-needed return of suspended starters Herron and Posey, the Buckeyes would capture key conference wins over No. 16 Illinois, No. 12 Wisconsin and Indiana to inflate their record to 6-3 and make a push toward Big Ten contention. But a trio of losses – a 26-23 overtime loss at Purdue, a 20-14 defeat to No. 21 Penn State and a 40-34 loss to Michigan which ended a seven-game win streak against the Wolverines – would derail any hopes of a positive season.

While a 24-17 Gator Bowl loss to Florida would drag their record down to 6-7, Rabinowitz said the disappointment was not solely on Fickell, who, in his opinion, made the most of an otherwise ill-fated situation.

“They were 6-3, should’ve been 7-3, but it wasn’t a great team,” Rabinowitz said. “I mean, you lost your quarterback. Braxton Miller was not brought in to play as a freshman. And Joe Bauserman, he’s known for one thing, the passing chart, right? He was terrible. And so you have a freshman quarterback who wasn’t ready. You didn’t have your top receiver in Posey for most of the year. You didn’t have your best running back in Herron. Mike Adams was a very good player; you didn’t have him. There was no continuity. You didn’t know when players were coming back. It was just a toxic situation.

“And so Luke was there to try and hold it together, and for the most part, he did. There were certain things that I doubt anybody could have saved from that team, so he held it together as best he could, and that’s a testament to him. But it was also just a thankless situation.”

Fickell’s time as head coach may not have gone as planned – leading him to be notified before the Michigan game that he was no longer in consideration for a full-time head coaching gig and that Meyer would assume the position in 2012, but it would not be the last time he would represent the program on the sidelines. Contrary to the norm, Fickell opted to stay on staff and return to his lesser role as co-defensive coordinator and linebackers coach, allowing a seamless and peaceful transition of power into a new and improved era of Ohio State football.

According to Rabinowitz, Meyer was hesitant to bring Fickell back on the staff due to fears that he would become bitter over losing out on the full-time head-coaching position. But after a few conversations with their families, Meyer would quickly realize that those kinds of feelings were not in his future assistant’s DNA.

“Urban was not going to keep Fickell,” Rabinowitz said. “He was not going to do it. He just thought it was inevitable that he would have an agenda and be resentful, and his ego wouldn’t allow him to go back to being an assistant. And essentially what happened was the wives got together and they got along great. And that kind of started to turn the tide in terms of Urban thinking, ‘Well, maybe he could.’”

According to Meyer in 2016, “The best thing I ever did was keep Luke Fickell.” Under the tutelage of the former nose tackle, the Buckeyes would boast a top-30 scoring defense in four of his five seasons on staff, including a No. 2 finish in 2015 at 15.1 points per game and a No. 3 finish in 2016 at 15.5 points per contest.

Fickell would also play a significant role in Ohio State’s improbable 2014 national championship run, where, according to Rabinowitz, he once again ignored his ego and assumed a smaller role on the team. Meyer instead gave new co-defensive coordinator and safeties coach Chris Ash the majority of play-calling and scheme responsibilities, a situation that he said Fickell handled well and led to one of the more memorable years in recent Ohio State memory.

“The thing about Fickell is that he does not have a big ego,” Rabinowitz said. “Meyer didn’t technically fire Fickell, but everyone knew that Chris Ash was really that main guy with that defense. And yet Fickell became a team player and just said, ‘OK, it’s not about me, let’s keep it together.’ And he did a great job of that. And because he bought in and sublimated his own ego, his players did too. I think Luke Fickell was essential in that 2014 success, just because of

the example he set, the chemistry that he allowed to build with that team.

“He’s a better man than I,” Rabinowitz continued. “I would have been like, ‘You’re demoting me, screw you.’ But he said, ‘OK, this is what it is. I’m not happy with it, but I’m still employed here. I’m loyal to the Buckeyes. This is what they need me to do, and this is what I’m going to do.’”

For Rabinowitz and others that were around him during Fickell’s Ohio State career, these types of sacrifices serve as an embodiment of the commitment and loyalty Fickell had, and still may have, for those inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. Whether it is his contributions as a player under Cooper, his efforts as an assistant under Tressel and Meyer, or even his sacrifices as an interim head coach in 2011, the impact Fickell made on the program – and the love he had for the Scarlet and Gray – is all but unparalleled in Buckeye lore.

“He is just a loyal Buckeye,” Rabinowitz said. “I think that he probably embodies what a lot of people think it means to be a Buckeye in terms of him being a player here, an assistant coach, head coach and then he became an assistant coach again, and the kind of selflessness that he showed, and the sacrifice that he showed and humility he showed. I think Luke Fickell was thought of very fondly by the Ohio State fan base.”

“Ohio State has had so much success for so many decades,” Hunter said. “There are so many great games, great players, great coaches, it gets really hard to make those judgments. But 21 years with the program is a lot. And he has had 20 impactful years with the program, as opposed to just being a guy who was on the team and didn’t play or a guy who was at the bottom of the coaching staff and didn’t do much. He’s been an important part of the program and was an important part of the program for a long time. There aren’t many guys like that.

“A year as an interim head coach, another year as a grad assistant, four years as a player, as a good player, that’s important. I don’t know exactly where that puts him in the overall scheme of things, but it certainly puts him among the people who have had a major impact on the program. And it’s a long-term impact, so he is in a fairly select group of people. I

don’t know how big that is, but there aren’t that many people who have had that much more of an impact on the program.”

Fickell’s illustrious career already puts him among the program’s greats, but his Buckeye story still may be unwritten. The Columbus native has reached the apex of his coaching career after a successful six-year stint as head coach of Cincinnati, where he led the Bearcats to a College Football Playoff berth in 2021, and he is serving in the same position at Wisconsin beginning this season, set to welcome Ohio State into Camp Randall Stadium on Oct. 28.

But for those who have seen him revel in the Scarlet and Gray, a triumphant return to his hometown may not be out of the question.

“I would not presume to speak for Luke, but my guess is that it would be awfully hard to turn down,” Rabinowitz said of the head coaching position at Ohio State. “So much depends on what the situation is in Wisconsin. Is he happy there? Does he feel like they can win a championship there? There are all those other factors. If Ohio State calls, would Fickell listen? I find it hard to believe he would not listen.”

Added Hunter, “I can foresee the possibility that if he had that opportunity, he would want to come back and they would want to hire him. But again, it depends on the timing and depends on the openings. If Ryan Day started winning championships, and he decided he wanted to stay here for 20 years, well, Luke Fickell is never going to be the head coach.

“It’s the same thing as with Paul Brown,” he continued. “When he left during the war and came back, they didn’t really have the job for him. He thought they were going to hold the job for him, and they didn’t. So he goes to the NFL and goes to pro football. Well, if he had come back and been the success that he was in the NFL, they probably would have never hired Woody Hayes because Paul Brown would have been there.

“If Paul Brown had been there for 25 years, Woody Hayes would probably never have been the Ohio State coach, so that’s what I’m saying about Luke. The job has to be there. It has to be the right time. But I always thought that would probably happen someday. And I still think it could well happen.”

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Nugent Had Memorable Season In 2004

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is 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. There will also be looks back at seasons during which an Ohio State player could have (and perhaps should have) won the Heisman Trophy. The following is the seventh installment in our 2023 historical series.

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

The last time a kicker received even cursory mention for the Heisman Trophy came when Dick Kazmeier, who helped lead Princeton to a national championship in 1950, won college football's highest honor in 1951. That came just one year after Vic Janowicz, who handled kicking and punting chores for Ohio State, won the Heisman.

Of course, it helped that in addition to performing their respective teams' kicking duties, Kazmeier and Janowicz also played the quarterback and halfback positions.

Janowicz, of course, is acknowledged as one of the leading do-everything players in Ohio State football history. He played halfback and quarterback on offense, was a safety on defense, handled both the punting and kicking chores, and returned kickoffs and punts. During the 1950 season, he rushed for 314 yards, threw for another 561, punted for nearly a 40-yard average, piled up nearly 1,000 yards in returns, and accounted for 17 touchdowns.

Kazmeier, a native of Toledo, took advantage of Princeton's single-wing offense to put up almost unheard-of offensive numbers for his era. He had a combined 1,827 yards and 22 touchdowns on the ground and through the air in 1951, leading the Tigers to a second straight perfect 9-0 season and No. 6 ranking in the national polls.



FILE PHOTO

KICKERS ARE PEOPLE, TOO — Despite a successful season in 2004 in which he hit 24 of 27 field goals and all 30 extra-point attempts, kicker Mike Nugent said the Heisman Trophy was never on his mind.

Over the course of the nearly 90-year history of the Heisman Trophy, however, kickers have been a mere afterthought.

During the 1976 season, Texas A&M barefoot kicker Tony Franklin booted field goals of 64 and 65 yards during a 24-0 win against Baylor. A year later, Russell Erxleben of Texas kicked three field goals in excess of 60 yards, including an NCAA-record 67-yarder during a 72-15 mauling of Rice. Unfortunately for Franklin and Erxleben, who converted a combined 83 field goals during their college careers, neither garnered a single Heisman vote.

In both cases, the kickers in question were overshadowed by performances from marquee players. After becoming the first major-college running back to compile four seasons of 1,000 rushing yards or more, Tony Dorsett of Pittsburgh easily captured the 1976 Heisman Trophy. The following season, Texas running back Earl Campbell galloped for 1,744 yards and 19 touchdowns, and he ran away with one of the most lopsided votes in Heisman history.

Those are just two examples of how difficult it is to quantify the true value of a kicker when it comes to individual honors

and weighing that value against skill-position players. But if there was ever a college kicker who deserved at least some kind of Heisman recognition in recent years, it would have been Mike Nugent in 2004.

Ohio State was in a transitional year that season, trying to bridge the gap between a team that had won the national championship in 2002 and one that would make back-to-back national title game appearances in 2006 and 2007. No matter how easy the Buckeyes were to overlook in 2004, however, their kicker enjoyed a superlative season.

"I guess nothing is 100 percent impossible, but a kicker winning the Heisman Trophy is probably 99.9 percent impossible," former OSU head coach Jim Tressel told BSB. "Add to that the fact that we didn't have a season up to our standards (with an 8-4 finish), so no one on our team was going to get that kind of recognition.

"But then again, Mike was an All-American for the second time, and he was voted our team MVP that year. How many kickers have been voted their team's most valuable player? Not many."

Nugent told BSB winning the Heisman Trophy was the last thing on his mind that

season.

"Are you kidding me?" he said. "As a kicker, you never think of the Heisman. You just focus on making every kick and trying to help your team win as many games as possible. I think that's any kicker's mindset. As soon as you start thinking about anything else, you lose your concentration, and that's when the football starts going in a different direction than you had planned."

Game-Winning Kicks

It's difficult to ascertain just what criteria Heisman Trophy voters were using following the 2004 season. There were only nine unanimous selections among consensus All-Americans that year, and while Nugent was one of those nine, Heisman winner Matt Leinart was not.

Leinart, the USC quarterback who threw for 3,322 yards and 33 TDs while leading the Trojans to a national championship (that has since been vacated), won a wide-open race for the Heisman that season, narrowly edging Oklahoma teammates Adrian Peterson and Jason White, who likely split their vote.

Peterson rushed for 1,925 yards and 15 touchdowns as a freshman for the Sooners while White, the 2003 Heisman winner, threw for 3,205 yards and 35 TDs. Peterson and White led Oklahoma to 12 straight victories in 2004 but ran into a USC buzz saw in the Orange Bowl as the Leinart-lead Trojans ran away with a 55-19 win.

The remainder of the top vote-getting Heisman roster included Utah quarterback Alex Smith, who led second-year head coach Urban Meyer's team to its first perfect record in 74 years, California quarterback Aaron Rodgers and Michigan wide receiver Braylon Edwards.

Smith threw for 2,952 yards and 32 TDs against only four interceptions, and Rodgers had a more modest 2,566 yards and 24 touchdowns for a Cal team that finished 10-2. Edwards caught 97 passes for 1,330 yards and 15 scores for the Wolverines, who were 9-1 before season-ending losses to Ohio State and Texas in the Rose Bowl.

Meanwhile in Columbus, Ohio State was experiencing an uncharacteristically subpar season. After winning the 2002 national championship and finishing No. 4 in the national rankings in 2003, the Buckeyes lost four times during the 2004 season. That included three straight losses in October, the longest losing streak in the Tressel era.

But while the program was experiencing growing pains, Nugent turned in one of the finest performances a college kicker has ever enjoyed.

He was perfect on all 30 PAT attempts, connected on 24 of 27 field goals, and handled the team's kickoff chores as well, booming 62 kicks in excess of 3,900 yards with 40 of his kickoffs resulting in touchbacks. When opponents did manage to run back one of Nugent's kickoffs, they averaged just 20.5 yards per return.

"There wasn't any surprise about those numbers," former Ohio State linebacker

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A.J. Hawk told BSB. "I've known Mike since sixth grade. We played together all through middle school, high school and college, and he's always been a great athlete. You know, most kickers are not the best of athletes, but Nuge goes against the grain there. The season he had in '04? No surprise. No surprise at all."

The season began with a 27-6 victory against Cincinnati during which Nugent was good on field-goal tries from 27 and 23 yards. Ironically, the only three-point attempt from 50 yards or more that he missed during the season was a 53-yard try in the second quarter while the game was still a 3-3 tie.

The following week, in what was to be something of a harbinger of the tough times that lay ahead, unranked Marshall came to Columbus and gave the No. 9 Buckeyes all they wanted. OSU was holding onto a 21-14 lead midway through the fourth quarter when the Thundering Herd capitalized on a turnover in Ohio State territory and converted it into a game-tying touchdown.

Marshall kicker Ian O'Connor missed a chance to give his team the lead when he pulled a 35-yard field-goal attempt wide left at the 3:17 mark of the final period, but that simply set the stage for some last-second heroics from Nugent.

With the score still tied, the Buckeyes took over possession at their own 45-yard line with just 25 seconds remaining in regulation. Three completions from quarterback Justin Zwick – two to wide-out Santonio Holmes and one to tight end Ryan Hamby – quickly moved the ball to the Marshall 33 before Zwick spiked a pass to stop the clock with five seconds remaining.

An illegal shift against Ohio State – a 5-yard penalty officials inadvertently moved back only 4 yards – pushed the ball to the 37 before Nugent blasted a 55-yard field goal through the uprights to give the Buckeyes a 24-21 victory.

"It was one of those kicks I call a double-breaker," Nugent said. "Every time I hit a solid ball on a long kick, because it's so long, it kind of goes back and forth in the air. It started off dead-center, but then faded outside the uprights a little bit, and I was like, 'Oh, man. I missed it.' But then it came back and just snuck in. It looked like it made it by about two inches."

The 55-yarder tied Gary Cairns (at Illinois in 1966) for the second-longest field goal in program history – Tom Skladany holds the record with a 59-yarder at Illinois in 1975 – and was the first game-winning field goal for the Buckeyes at Ohio Stadium on the final play since John Stungis hit one from 27 yards for a 29-26 win against Illinois in 1943.

"One of my favorite moments happened after that game," Nugent remembered. "I made that field goal, and while everyone was jumping up and down and going crazy, I turned around and there was my mom on the field standing right next to me. She's giving this huge hug, and I'm like, 'How did you get down here?' At the time, you're a college kid and you're not supposed to react to family things like that. You're supposed to be cool. But to this day, that was one of the coolest things that's ever happened to me."

And Nugent was just getting warmed up. On a rainy, mid-September afternoon at North Carolina State, he tied the OSU single-game record of five field goals to help the Buckeyes to a 22-14 win against the previously undefeated Wolfpack. Nugent converted on attempts from 50, 30, 33, 46 and 47 yards and tied the single-game mark originally set by Bob Atha during a 29-10 home win against Indiana in 1981. The 50-yarder also marked the fifth of his career of 50 yards or more, breaking a tie for the program record with Tim Williams (1990-93).

"That's one of those games I always definitely remember," Nugent said. "There wasn't much room on the sideline, and the practice net was right in front of their student section and they were on me, trying to get in my head. I can't really remember some of the things they were yelling, and if I did I probably couldn't repeat them. But it seemed like there was less and less of it after every field goal we hit."

Although he was embarking upon a superlative season, kicking five goals in a single game is never an easy task, and it was made even more so by the conditions. The remnants of Hurricane Ivan that rolled through North Carolina less than 24 hours before kickoff left the Carter-Finley Field a slippery mess. As a result, Nugent traded the plastic cleats he normally wore on his plant foot for screw-in cleats that dug a little deeper into the soggy turf.

"I guess I don't really remember the conditions," he said. "It was just one of those days when you're kind of in a zone. You put your foot on the ball and it just goes. Every kick that day felt like a 25-yarder."

Nugent was in such a zone that it carried over to his kickoffs. N.C. State was able to return just one of his seven kickoffs (for only 21 yards), four of which sailed deep into or out of the end zone. Another bounced off the crossbar of the goalpost, while yet another made it over and through.

"That was the first time that ever happened for me," Nugent said. "It was the first time I ever put a kickoff through the uprights. That was kind of cool."

The feat is even more impressive with the realization that Nugent was kicking off from the 30-yard line. A rule change didn't move kickoffs up to the 35-yard line until 2011.

Following a week off, Ohio State kicked off Big Ten play in 2004 with a rare night game at Northwestern. The Wildcats, in the midst of a 24-game losing streak to the Buckeyes, scratched their way to a 27-17 lead early in the fourth quarter. But a 29-yard field goal from Nugent and a 21-yard touchdown pass from Zwick to Holmes tied the game at 27 to send it into overtime.

The previous year, Nugent had kicked a 36-yard field goal in overtime to give his team a 16-13 win against Purdue. This time, however, the normally-reliable kicker pushed his 40-yard attempt wide to the right during the first overtime period. Not that it would have mattered after Northwestern running back Noah Herron scored a 1-yard touchdown to give the Wildcats a 33-27 upset victory.

Unfortunately, that loss was followed by two more – a 24-13 home defeat against Wisconsin and an ugly 33-7 loss at Iowa during which Zwick suffered a shoulder injury that sidelined him for the remainder of the regular season. The three-game losing streak gave the Buckeyes their first 0-3 start in Big Ten play in 16 years.

Nugent was about the only constant for the team during that stretch. In addition to field goals of 34 and 29 yards against Northwestern, he was good from 42 and 55 yards against Wisconsin.

With sophomore Troy Smith replacing Zwick at quarterback, the Buckeyes finally halted their losing streak with a 30-7 win against Indiana. Nugent was perfect on three field-goal tries during the game, including a 52-yarder.

Following a miss from 49 yards during a 21-10 win against Penn State, Nugent never missed again during the remainder of the 2004 season. That included a 53-yarder against Michigan State – extending his program record to five field goals of 50 yards or more in a single season – as well as 42- and 48-yarders among three during a 37-21 victory against Michigan.

"I was lucky enough to be in a class where the Michigan game was at home during my senior year," Nugent said. "So I got to run through the tunnel one last time and see all the past players and see Coach Tressel at the end of it and just cry my eyes out. And I got to experience that with my parents as well. For them to get to see what I saw every Saturday, and hear the crowd, that was just something I consider myself very lucky to have experienced."

Nugent finished the 2004 season by establishing another OSU record. His four field goals during a 33-7 blowout of Oklahoma State in the Alamo Bowl were the most by an Ohio State kicker in a bowl game, breaking the previous record of three set by Vlade Janakievski during a 17-16 loss to USC in the 1980 Rose Bowl.

Following the season, Nugent was a

unanimous selection by both the media and coaches for the first-team All-Big Ten kicker, and he was also a consensus first-team All-American for the second time in three years. Additionally, he won the Lou Groza Award presented annually to the top placekicker in college football.

He finished his college career with 72 field goals and 356 points, both Ohio State program records that still stand. Nugent's career field-goal percentage of 81.8 was also an OSU record until Noah Ruggles (90.2) broke it last year.

Nugent was selected in the second round with the 47th overall pick of the 2005 NFL draft by the New York Jets, making him the second-highest drafted kicker in 18 years. The Oakland Raiders took Sebastian Janikowski of Florida State at No. 17 overall of the first round in 2000.

Nugent spent 16 seasons in the league, mostly with the Jets and the Cincinnati Bengals. He made 265 of 327 field-goal attempts (81.0 percent) during his career, including 14 from 50 yards or more. As in college, his longest field goal was 55 yards, achieved in 2012 with Cincinnati and matched five years later while kicking for the Chicago Bears.

Since retiring from pro football, Nugent has been sales and marketing director at a Columbus-based building and design firm. He and his wife, Emily, whom he met on the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer in 2008, have two daughters, and he was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in 2019, joining Janakievski and Skladany as the only kicking specialists so honored.

"I feel like it was always a privilege to play at Ohio State," Nugent said. "One of things Coach Tressel used to say was, 'It's not your right to play football at Ohio State. It's a privilege.' I always felt that way. As I look back, it makes me realize how lucky I was to be able to play football for The Ohio State University."



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Smith-Njigba No Stranger To Battling Adversity

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Much like his final injury-plagued season at Ohio State, the rookie season for Seattle Seahawks receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba has not gone as desired. Fortunately for him, there is still plenty of time to display the skills that made him the No. 20 overall pick in the 2023 NFL draft.

Stymied in his first Seahawks' preseason because of a fractured wrist and sitting behind established receivers DK Metcalf and Tyler Lockett, he was not contributing much to the offense.

"It's just a matter of time before he just pops," Metcalf said on Oct. 13.

There was an inkling of that two days later when Smith-Njigba had his best day as a pro to that point with four catches on five targets for 48 yards in a 17-13 loss to the Cincinnati Bengals.

"I had more plays, so that always feels good to be out there," Smith-Njigba said. "I know they have confidence in me to make plays, and they believe in me. They tell me a lot, and I can feel that from them, and I have that (confidence) of myself, too. So I know more opportunities will be schemed up for me and more opportunities will come down the road."

Seahawks coach Pete Carroll praised Smith-Njigba's performance against the Bengals.

"I tried to make a point about it, because I wanted him to hear it too, that he played really well in the running game," Carroll said on Oct. 18. "He was really clean with his assignments. We moved him around quite a bit. He came through on his catches and his

plays. He did a really nice job in the game. This is six weeks in, and he's not wearing a cast anymore. He's not wearing anything on his wrist anymore, and he blocked well, threw his hands in there aggressively.

"I think any passing of judgment up until now was premature. He's just getting going. We love him and he's going to be a really big factor for us."

Through six games, Smith-Njigba had 20 catches for 173 yards (8.7 average), including a 28-yarder for his first touchdown in a 20-10 over the Arizona Cardinals on Oct. 22. As Smith-Njigba tries to shine as the No. 3 receiver, he can lean on his experiences at Ohio State, where he was part of a talented group in 2021 that featured future 2022 first-round picks Garrett Wilson (No. 10 overall to the New York Jets) and Chris Olave (No. 11, New Orleans).

"At the end of the day, you can only control what you can control, go out there and play as hard as you can and do your job and get open," Smith-Njigba said. "But it's always good to do good things out there."

Smith-Njigba has a long way to go to match the first-year exploits of his former teammates. Wilson was the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year last season, when in 17 games (12 starts) he had 83 catches off 147 targets for 1,103 yards (13.3 yards per catch) and four touchdowns. Olave played in 15 games (nine starts) and was targeted 119 times, resulting in 72 catches for 1,042 yards (14.5) and four scores.

Despite the presence of those two, Smith-Njigba had a breakout season for the 2021 Buckeyes, making a school-record 95 catches for 1,606 yards to set a conference mark. He starred in the Rose Bowl that sea-

son when C.J. Stroud connected with him for an FBS bowl record 347 yards, a school-record 15 receptions and three touchdowns.

From that peak came the valley of the 2022 season when a hamstring injury limited him to three games, with five catches for 43 yards. But the numbers didn't matter. Scouts and others in NFL circles knew what Smith-Njigba could do. In fact, Seattle quarterback Geno Smith was one of his biggest supporters.

"I was training with one of my boys, and I was watching his highlights, and I texted Pete, 'Man, we've got to draft this guy,'" Smith said. "Having him as part of that wide receiver group with DK and Tyler and being part of that offense, you can tell how special he is as a player. He's really going to bring that added dimension to our offense. I'm just happy that we got him."

"Jaxon is in a great spot. You think about our offense and the new guys that we're incorporating into the offense – it's going to take some time. We're still figuring each other out, and it's going to take some time."

It's hard enough to break into the NFL with the expectations thrust upon a first-round pick, but Smith-Njigba had the added obstacle of breaking a bone in his left wrist during a preseason game on Aug. 19. He underwent surgery, but extensive rehab allowed him to be available for the Sept. 10 season opener. He never used the injury as an excuse, but Carroll feels it contributed to his slow start.

"I think it's a significant thing, and he was perfect about handling it – admirable and took leadership in that regard early in the season, showing guys that he could overcome and get back out and all of that," Carroll said. "The best is yet to come."

Much like Smith-Njigba had to come back from his hamstring injury at Ohio State, he was up to the task a second time.

"It was a challenge, but we took care of it, and I feel like we made all the right moves," he said. "I definitely feel better each week and can actually do some more stuff with it. So my comfortability is rising every day. I feel close to 100 percent now."

Another factor in Smith-Njigba's lack of production is the Seahawks are a run-first team that more often than not will employ a second or third tight end over a third receiver.

"I think Jaxon has done a good job handling it," Seahawks offensive coordinator Shane Waldron said. "He's been under the big spotlight before. He's had success. He knows what it's like, just waiting for that moment that it works out the right way for

him and not taking anything away from his preparation. He's doing it the right way.

"He's got a really good and balanced mindset about it. I know he's a competitive guy, so like every great receiver, every great skill player in the league, those guys, they want the ball in their hands and to be able to impact the game, and we want that for them."

"We keep working with him, and he'll keep doing a great job. He has a bright and long future ahead of him. I think Jaxon has done a great job of coming out and working hard and doing his thing every single day. I know the unfortunate thing as far as the production goes right now, the opportunities, different coverage contours maybe for a play that's going his way and it doesn't quite work out that way, and a lot of other guys are getting the ball, as well."

Smith continues mentoring his young receiver, having gone through the wringer himself of failing to meet expectations of others during his NFL career with previous stops with the New York Jets and Giants and the Los Angeles Chargers before joining the Seahawks in 2020.

"Expectations can be a mug for a bunch of people," Smith said. "I think the thing that you have to remain confident in is your process, the process over the results. Everyone is looking at the results and seeing numbers and stats, and everyone is big on fantasy."

"The things that he's done within the game to help us win – the blocking in the run game, the way that he's run his routes that allow other guys to get open – that's helping our offense. The process that he's in right now is just continuing to grow as a young player. And the results will come over time."

"I don't think he needs to overthink it. I don't think anyone needs to overthink it. He's a great player, he's a great player on this offense. He's going to make a ton of plays for us, and it just hasn't happened quite yet. That's nothing to worry about. We still have time to figure those things out, and that's what we're doing."

Smith-Njigba is happy for any and all advice from his quarterback.

"Oh, he's been great. I appreciate him," Smith-Njigba said. "I call him a friend. I call him a big bro. He's been helping me a lot."

No one within the Seahawks is surprised that Smith-Njigba overcame early adversity and is making progress because his work ethic has drawn praise.

"He's been doing that in practice ever since he's gotten here," Metcalf said. "I'm just waiting on him to really blossom and just show who he really is out there on the field."

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Michigan Being Investigating For Sign Stealing

The NCAA is investigating the Michigan football program after allegations of sign stealing, as confirmed by the Big Ten on Oct. 19.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

"I want to make it clear that I, and my staff, will fully cooperate with the investigation into this matter," head coach Jim Harbaugh said in a statement. "I do not have any knowledge or information regarding the University of Michigan football program illegally stealing signals, nor have I directed any staff member or others to participate in an off-campus scouting assignment."

"I want to personally assure you that U-M Athletics will offer its complete cooperation to the NCAA in this matter," athletic director Warde Manuel said in an additional statement. "At the University of Michigan, all of us are committed to the highest standards of ethics and integrity for all members of our community. This is the same expectation I have of all coaches, staff and student-athletes. Given the ongoing investigation, I'll have no further comments at this time."

According to a report from ESPN, Connor Stalions – a football analyst with the Wolverines since last season who has since been suspended by the university – is a person of interest in the investigation, with the NCAA seeking access to his computer for the investigation.

The report indicated that while Stalions worked in the recruiting department, he was well-known in the building for spending time deciphering opponents' signals. On Stalions' since-deleted Instagram account, there were photos showing him alongside former defensive play callers Don Brown and Mike Macdonald.

The rule that is alleged to have been broken is NCAA Bylaw 11.6.1, which says that "off-campus, in-person scouting of future opponents (in the same season) is prohibited." While sign stealing itself is not prohibited, it is against NCAA rules to do so by using electronic equipment to record and inform players or coaches of signals during games.

The Big Ten notified Michigan State before its game against the Wolverines on Oct. 21, as well as all of Michigan's future opponents. The Spartans initially told the Big Ten they might not play in the game due to concern for the safety of their players but later confirmed they would play in the 49-0 loss.

"Late Wednesday afternoon (Oct. 18), the Big Ten Conference and University of Michigan were notified by the NCAA that the NCAA was investigating allegations of sign stealing by the University of Michigan football program," the Big Ten said in a statement. "The Big Ten Conference has notified Michigan State University and future opponents. The Big Ten Conference considers the integrity of competition to be of utmost importance and will continue to monitor the investigation. The Conference will have no further comment at this time."

According to The Athletic, a source who

was briefed on the investigation said the Wolverines have been stealing signs from opposing teams using a "vast network," suggesting Michigan knew what play other teams were going to run before it happened.

A Yahoo Sports report said Ohio State was aware of the alleged sign stealing before the teams met last season and "changed things up" before the game to try to combat the issue.

"We heard they had a guy pick plays pretty good and had all this information from not your typical ways of getting the signals," a staff member told Yahoo Sports. "We get into the game, and it's the second quarter. I see him across the field, and he's checking his 11x17 sheet."

Another Big Ten source indicated to ESPN that the allegations – and eventual outcome for Michigan – could have serious ramifications for the program.

"This is worse than both the (Houston) Astros and the (New England) Patriots – it's both use of technology for a competitive advantage, and there's allegations that they are filming prior games, not just in-game. If it was just an in-game situation, that's different. Going and filming somewhere you're not supposed to be – it's illegal. It's too much of an advantage."

Despite Harbaugh's claim that he has no knowledge of the alleged sign-stealing plot, it does not matter if he was not aware according to NCAA Bylaw 11.1.2.1, which says it "places the responsibility on the head coach to promote an atmosphere of NCAA rules compliance within his program and to monitor the activities of his staff to ensure compliance with the rules."

Because of this, it also says that "a head coach is presumed to have knowledge of what is occurring in his program and therefore can be responsible for the actions of his staff and individuals associated with the program."

This is not the only investigation the NCAA is currently conducting on the Michigan football program. The other is over a series of rule violations which relate to recruiting during a COVID-19 dead period, and Harbaugh was also accused of providing misleading information to the NCAA during that investigation into the program.

Harbaugh served a self-imposed three-game suspension as a result of that investigation to begin this season, though he could face additional punishment after this season.

Iowa TE All Out With Torn ACL

Iowa football's already struggling offense was made worse for wear on Oct. 17 when head coach Kirk Ferentz announced that senior tight end Erick All will be out for the season after suffering a torn ACL in the team's 15-6 win against Wisconsin on Oct. 14.

All, who transferred to Iowa from Michigan this offseason, led the Hawkeyes with 21 receptions for 299 yards and a touchdown coming out of the win over the Badgers, accounting for 36.6 percent of Iowa's receiving yards (299 of 816).

"It's just really unfortunate," Ferentz said. "He's done a great job (being a) newcomer to the team. He's just a great addition – such a positive guy. It's just a tough deal, so we'll all support him in his recovery, his road back

and certainly all hope that goes well."

Iowa is already down a tight end this season. Junior Luke Lachey – a Columbus native and the son of Ohio State football color analyst Jim Lachey – was lost earlier in the year after undergoing right ankle surgery. Despite not having played since Sept. 16, Lachey is still second on the team in receiving with 131 yards.

With injuries knocking All and Lachey out for the season, the Hawkeyes will look to senior Steven Stilianos, who has five receptions for 54 yards.

Iowa Women's Basketball Sets Attendance Record

The Iowa women's basketball team held a game at the football team's Kinnick Stadium on Oct. 15, hoping to set a single-game attendance record for a women's basketball game, and their mission was accomplished when 55,646 fans attended the Hawkeyes' 94-72 exhibition win over DePaul in the "Crossover at Kinnick."

The previous record was set by UConn and Oklahoma in the 2002 NCAA championship game which drew 29,619 fans at San Antonio's Alamodome.

"You can have an idea and it could fall flat if nobody shows up," Iowa head coach Lisa Bluder told The Associated Press. "But man, Hawk fans showed up today. Fifty-five thousand, breaking the record, getting to play outside. It was a dream. It really was. It was just fabulous."

Star guard Caitlin Clark, who won national player of the year honors last season after putting up 27.8 points per game, 8.6 assists and 7.1 rebounds per game, had a triple double with 34 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in the exhibition.

"Fifty-five thousand? That's pretty incredible," Clark said. "It's hard to kind of imagine yourself playing basketball in front of 55,000."

Proceeds from the game are being given to Stead Family Children's Hospital, which fans are known to wave to during football games given its proximity to Kinnick Stadium. During a break in the exhibition, a check for \$250,000 was presented to the hospital.

IU Men's Basketball Lands Five-Star Recruit

Montverde (Fla.) Academy five-star small forward Liam McNeeley (6-7, 190) announced his commitment to Indiana on Oct. 15.

He is the No. 13 overall prospect and fifth-ranked small forward in 2024, as well as the third-ranked prospect in Florida. Indiana beat out Kansas in the recruiting process for McNeeley, who said Texas was also in the mix until a few weeks before he committed. He ultimately chose the Hoosiers because he felt they truly wanted him to be there.

"Coach (Mike) Woodson and the whole coaching staff, they've been recruiting me for a long time," McNeeley told Peegs.com. "They've been the most consistent. Their interest has never wavered, and they've just continued to show me how they're going to use me. I feel really comfortable with them."

McNeeley said Woodson's experience in the NBA was a big reason he made the choice to play for the Hoosiers because of the learning opportunities that will be pres-

BIG 2023 Standings

East Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	5	0	1.000	8	0	1.000
Ohio State	4	0	1.000	7	0	1.000
Penn State	3	1	0.750	6	1	0.857
Rutgers	3	2	0.600	6	2	0.750
Maryland	2	2	0.500	5	2	0.714
Indiana	0	4	0.000	2	5	0.286
Michigan State	0	4	0.000	2	5	0.286

West Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Wisconsin	3	1	0.750	5	2	0.714
Iowa	3	2	0.600	6	2	0.750
Minnesota	2	2	0.500	4	3	0.571
Nebraska	2	2	0.500	4	3	0.571
Northwestern	1	3	0.250	3	4	0.429
Purdue	1	3	0.250	2	5	0.286
Illinois	1	4	0.200	3	5	0.375

Oct. 21 Games

Ohio State 20, Penn State 12
Rutgers 31, Indiana 14
Wisconsin 25, Illinois 21
Minnesota 12, Iowa 10
Nebraska 17, Northwestern 9
Michigan 49, Michigan State 0

Oct. 28 Games

Maryland at Northwestern, noon
Indiana at Penn State, noon
Purdue at Nebraska, 3:30 p.m.
Michigan State at Minnesota, 3:30 p.m.
Ohio State at Wisconsin, 7:30 p.m.

ent for him when he's playing under the former pro.

In his junior season, McNeeley averaged 12.4 points, 2.2 assists, 4.0 rebounds and 1.0 steals per game in 25 games. He is the first commitment in Indiana's class, which ranks 10th in the Big Ten.

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Ohio State Rolls Out Red Carpet For PSU Game

Ohio State knew heading into the Oct. 21 matchup with Penn State that it would be arguably the school's biggest recruiting weekend of the season, and the Buckeyes planned accordingly by rolling out the red carpet.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

"Guys have had this circled for a while," head coach Ryan Day said on Oct. 18. "You know, 'When are you coming to visit?' 'Oh, we'll be there for the Penn State game.' That's been going on for the last couple of months, and we'll have big numbers here. It's a great opportunity for families and recruits to see the atmosphere for a big game. You'll have so many people here, a noon kickoff in the 'Shoe, it's going to be rocking.

"We just say all the time, you need to picture yourself playing in this type of environment, and what you do is you find guys

who want to play in this environment, want to play in these types of games."

All told, Ohio State hosted upwards of 80 recruits on campus over the weekend, an enormous undertaking that appears to have gone off without a hitch. While Buckeye Sports Bulletin was not able to confirm every recruit who was in Ohio Stadium, here are the ones we were able to identify as attending the game, as well as some information on the more high-profile prospects in attendance.

Beginning in 2024, every commitment in the class reportedly made it with the exception of West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star safety Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185); Stafford (Va.) Mountain View three-star defensive end Eric Mensah (6-3, 290); and Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot three-star safety Leroy Roker (6-1, 170), though do not think that not making the trip has any bearing on their pledges to Ohio State.

Elsewhere in the class, Ohio State welcomed Clinton, N.C., four-star defensive lineman Amaris Williams (6-3, 270), who is committed to Florida, on an official visit. He is the No. 140 overall prospect and No. 20 defensive lineman in the class, and through six games this season he had 20

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	★★★★★	Bufood, 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.
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

tackles, 13 tackles for loss and four sacks.

Williams has been pledged to Florida since June, but the Buckeyes' recent offer had

him eager to check out Ohio State.

"I want to see Coach (Larry) Johnson, how he coaches, and how he is as a per-

ASK AN ANALYST with Buckeye Huddle's Marc Givler

Following Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive end Booker Pickett Jr.'s (6-3, 205) commitment to Miami (Fla.), how does the board shape up for Ohio State on the defensive line in 2024?

"In reality, they had kind of already moved on over the last few weeks. It wasn't going to happen. Obviously, they're still trying to flip Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star defensive end and Miami (Fla.) commit Marquis Lightfoot (6-5, 220), and they're trying to get Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge four-star defensive end and Kansas commit Deshawn Warner (6-4, 225), so that's kind of the edge focus right now as far as pure edge rushers.

"Clinton, N.C., four-star defensive lineman and Florida commit Amaris Williams (6-3, 270) is on campus (for the Penn State game). Could he be a strongside end? Maybe. He's kind of an end, tackle, flex guy on the defensive line. He's making his official visit (on Oct. 21), and they have a pretty good chance of flipping him coming out of this visit."

One of the most interesting visitors for Ohio State's game against Penn State is Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star wide receiver Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 185), a 2025 prospect who is committed to Alabama and is visiting with several other South Florida Express teammates. Is this something to keep an eye on or is he just supporting his teammates?

"I don't think it's going to be something where they come out of (the Oct. 21 visit) and they flip him, or he de-commits from Alabama. I don't think it's going to be that big of a deal. But it's something because he is coming up here. It's an unofficial visit. It's not like Ohio State's paying for the flight and everything. He had actually told me back in July when he already had his commitment date set and we knew it wasn't going to be Ohio State, and even then, he had told me, 'Yeah, I'm going to visit Ohio State in the fall.' This was, I don't want to say totally expected, but it was something that was possible given what he had previously said.

"He definitely likes Brian Hartline. Hartline hasn't stopped recruiting him. And at the end of the day, he's a Florida kid who committed 18 months before he can sign. Recruiting in Florida can go a little bit differently than a lot of other places around the country. Those are oftentimes recruitments where kids commit and still take visits. You're seeing this with Hollywood (Fla.) Chami-

nade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver and Ohio State commit Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198) on the other end.

"Again, do I think they're going to flip him coming out of the visit? No. Do I think Hartline is going to keep at it? Yes, and I think it is something. Because he can down-play it all he wants, but there (were) a lot of other good games (on Oct. 21). Ffrench could've gone to a lot of different places, and Ohio State was able to get him after he already said he was going to visit Ohio State, even before he committed to Alabama. It's something worth tracking here over the next year, year and a half, but I don't expect an immediate benefit from this."

Ohio State appears to be among the early leaders for Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170). This is a type of prospect - a five-star defensive back - that the Buckeyes have struggled to land in previous classes, so what does the staff need to do differently to give themselves a better chance for prospects like Sanchez, who is scheduled to visit for the Penn State game?

"What they've done here (with Sanchez), obviously they've done a great job. They built great relationships with Devin and his family. He was up this summer, so this isn't his first visit or anything like that. He got a really good look at Ohio State this summer. They really impressed him. Now, he's coming back. They've shown him that not only is the secondary playing at a high level right now, but they've shown him the last year or two that they'll play some young guys. Jermaine Mathews Jr. is playing a little bit. Malik Hartford - even though Sanchez is a corner, not a safety - started a game. Jyair Brown started a game last year at corner as a true freshman. Even Denzel Burke was a true freshman starter.

"They've shown him that if a young guy is ready to play, they're going to play him. In addition to having great connections with him and his family, that's important, too, that they show him that and that they obviously are playing well in the secondary. It's been a down four or five years in the secondary, if we're being honest. It's probably been since 2019 since they've had a really good secondary. And they're getting back to producing some NFL guys back there. Burke has a real chance to be a first-round draft pick, so all of those things are helping them right now.

"They have a real chance with (Sanchez). It's prob-

ably them, Alabama and Texas A&M. There are some other guys, they'll recruit some five-star guys from Texas and Florida where it's like 'Yeah, I don't think so.' But this is one is real."

After a pair of recent 2025 commitments in Cocoa, Fla., three-star wide receiver Jayvan Boggs (6-0, 188) and Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 180), who could you potentially see popping next for the Buckeyes?

"It's always a tough question because you just never know when a kid's going to decide it's time. They're in on a lot of really good Ohio kids: Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), you have Cleveland Shaker Heights four-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180), kind of a legacy recruit. I could definitely see an Ohio kid here the next few months maybe wrapping things up.

"If you look beyond that, another guy I really like them to get - I just don't know if he's going to be next as far as the timing - but they're in really good shape for Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star defensive end London Merritt (6-3, 235). He was supposed to visit (on Oct. 21). I talked to him (that) week, and he booked his flight before his homecoming date was scheduled. After he booked the flight, his school scheduled homecoming for (that) weekend, so he is bumping his visit, which will be his fourth or fifth visit to Ohio State. He's bumping that to the Michigan State game (on Nov. 11).

"They had some big visitors on campus (against Penn State), such as Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star defensive end Justin Hill (6-4, 215), who I don't think is your typical Ohio layup. They're going to have to work for that one, even though I do think they have a great chance there. It's not going to be your 'gimme' that you're used to out of Ohio. He was on campus, and that was a big visit for them. He's one of the top players in Ohio as well. But I tend to lean toward the idea of the next commitment being one of the Ohio kids, maybe Cleveland Heights 2025 four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190) and Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph 2025 four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190). There's probably six or seven Ohio kids it could be, but I would be looking Ohio for the next one."

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

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
Jayvan Boggs	WR	6-0	188	★★★	Cocoa, Fla.
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio
Blake Woodby	CB	5-11	180	★★★★	Baltimore St. Frances Academy

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

son,” Williams told 247Sports ahead of the visit. “The people there, the coaches, the staff, the players, see how they work as a team. I especially want to see how the defensive line plays up front. That’s my position. It can’t just be about the front, it’s about everything around them. You’ve got to look at academics, the vibe, and the people, too.”

In 2025, Ohio State hosted all three pledges in Cocoa, Fla., three-star wide receiver Jayvan Boggs (6-0, 188); Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210); and Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 180).

Uncommitted prospects who visited campus include Conroe, Texas, five-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185); Tampa (Fla.) Plant four-star running back Walter Clark (6-1, 194), who is committed to Florida; Cleveland Heights four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190); Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-2, 182); Detroit Jesuit three-star athlete Elijah Dotson (6-2, 175); San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) J. Serra Catholic four-star linebacker Madden Faraimo (6-3, 210); and Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star wide receiver Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 185), who is committed to Alabama.

Out of that group, Ohio State has been in the driver’s seat for Brew and Davis but continues to pursue a pair of committed prospects in Clark and Ffrench. Clark is the No. 163 overall prospect and No. 16 running back in the class and has been committed to Florida since Sept. 16, while Ffrench – the No. 13 overall prospect and fourth-ranked receiver in the class – has been pledged to Alabama since July.

Ohio State has offered Ffrench and would certainly like to add him to the class, though with Ffrench visiting with several South Florida Express teammates in the 2026 class – more on them later – it remains to be seen if there is serious interest from Ffrench’s side.

Continuing on, other prospects who made the trip include West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star tight end Luka Gilbert (6-8, 233); Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star defensive end Justin Hill (6-4, 215); Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 215); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Byron Louis (5-10, 180); Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290); Jersey City (N.J.) Henry Snyder four-star linebacker DJ McClary (6-1, 211), who is committed to Penn State; Cleveland Shaker Heights four-star cornerback Trey McNutt (6-0, 180); Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola four-star linebacker Elijah Melendez (6-2, 223); La Verne (Calif.) Bonita four-star

linebacker Noah Mikhail (6-3, 205); and West Palm Beach (Fla.) Cardinal Newman four-star wide receiver Naeshaun Montgomery (6-0, 160).

These were important visits for Lee and Lowe, who should be considered on commitment watch at this point. Montgomery, the No. 71 overall prospect and No. 12 receiver in the class, has also started to

emerge as one of offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline’s key targets in the class.

Also in attendance were Philadelphia St. Joseph’s Prep four-star linebacker Anthony Sacca (6-3, 225); Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170); Leo, Ind., four-star tight end Brock Schott (6-3, 215); Cincinnati Mt. Healthy four-star athlete Jai’mier Scott (6-1, 177); Buford, Ga., four-star cornerback Devin Williams (5-11, 168); Galveston (Texas) Ball five-star wide receiver Jonah Williams (6-3, 203); Calhoun, Ga., four-star tight end Emaree Winston (6-2, 235); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star linebacker Nasir Wyatt (6-2, 210); and Indianapolis Ben Davis four-star cornerback Mark Zackery IV (6-0, 164).

That final group of prospects includes a talented crop of defensive backs, including Sanchez, Williams and Zackery. Sanchez is the highest-rated of the bunch, check-

ing in as the seventh-ranked prospect in the class and top-ranked cornerback, and it was important for Ohio State to make a strong impression given that these kinds of battles – highly rated recruits in the secondary – have not gone the Buckeyes’ way in recent cycles.

A handful of 2026 prospects were also in attendance, highlighted by Cincinnati Withrow five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185) and also including Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage quarterback Dia Bell (6-1, 184); Pompano Beach (Fla.) Monarch five-star wide receiver Jabari Brady (6-2, 185); Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star safety Jireh Edwards (6-1, 194); Akron Hoban cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 160); Waxhaw (N.C.) Myers Park wide receiver Brody Keefe (6-3, 185); Avon Lake, Ohio, five-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 263); and Vero Beach, Fla., four-star offensive tackle Mi-

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2024 D-Linemen A Focus For Ohio State

Continued From Page 27

cah Smith (6-6, 295).

Bell is the only one of that group without an offer from Ohio State, though he did camp in Columbus over the summer and had the opportunity to meet with the coaches.

"This has been my dream school for a long time, honestly," he said. "I grew up here. Second grade is when I really got into football, and I lived up here. My dad was working with the Cleveland Cavaliers at the time when LeBron (James) came back, and I just ever since grew up with the school and stuff as I've lived up here."

2024 Four-Star DL Willor Jr. Visiting Later This Season

Ohio State remains among the top schools being considered by Towson (Md.) Concordia Prep four-star defensive lineman Ernest Willor Jr. (6-3, 255), and the Buckeyes are expecting to get an official visit from Willor at some point this fall.

He told 247Sports that the Buckeyes – along with Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Penn State and Virginia Tech – are among the programs that he most often speaks with and ones that he plans to visit in either November or December.

Willor is the No. 83 overall prospect and No. 11 defensive lineman in the class. Through seven games this season, he had 33 tackles, seven sacks and three pass

breakups. As for his interest in Ohio State, it comes down to Johnson, a common factor for defensive linemen considering the Buckeyes.

"Coach Johnson is an old soul type of guy," Willor said. "Like my coaches ever since I've been younger; old souls, don't cuss, they get guys rolling without having to yell, scream or other stuff. He doesn't just say he develops defensive lineman – he shows you. Even at the next level, you can see it."

DE Warner Pushes Back Official Visit

Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge four-star defensive lineman Deshawn Warner (6-4, 225), a Kansas commit who was recently offered by Ohio State, was expected to take an official visit for the Buckeyes' win over Penn State, but that trip will now come at a later date.

Warner's head coach, Mark Carter, told 247Sports that while the official visit was not going to take place against the Nittany Lions, it will be on deck for the future.

"It won't be this weekend (of Penn State), but I think it will be soon," Carter said. "An offer from a school like Ohio State doesn't happen every day. The pedigree they have, the Bosas, Chase Young, he would be crazy not to look at Ohio State."

Carter speculated that Ohio State's home contest against Michigan State on Nov. 11 might be the next target for Warner's visit, though it does not leave much

wiggle room considering the Buckeyes have just two home games remaining this season, the other being Minnesota on Nov. 18. Warner is the No. 325 overall prospect and No. 27 defensive end in the class and has been committed to Kansas since July.

Even with his visit pushed back, Warner still remains at the top of Ohio State's board along with Chicago Kenwood Academy four-star Marquise Lightfoot (6-5, 220), whom the Buckeyes are attempting to flip from Miami (Fla.).

Checking In On Commits' Seasons

With the high school football season approaching playoff time, we're taking a look at some of Ohio State's commitments in 2024 and beyond to see how some future Buckeyes have fared on the gridiron this season.

Arguably the most impressive has been Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198) – recently named the top prospect in the 2024 recruiting class – who had 52 receptions for 781 yards and 11 touchdowns in seven games, on pace to blow past his junior statistics of 58 catches for 1,073 yards and 20 scores.

Staying in the state, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star running back Jordan Lyle (6-0, 180), in eight games, rushed for 588 yards on 56 carries (10.5 per attempt) for seven touchdowns, and he also had nine catches for 116 yards.

Roker had 36 tackles, three interceptions and six pass breakups in seven games.

Sticking in the area, Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195) had played in seven games, completing 64.1 percent (84 of 131) of his passes for 14 touchdowns and four interceptions. Elsewhere in the state, Buford, Ga., five-star defensive end Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) had collected three sacks and four interceptions in six games.

And for those curious about how Buford, Ga., five-star quarterback Dylan Raio-la (6-3, 230) – the one-time Ohio State commitment who has since pledged to Georgia – has fared in his senior season, he has completed 66.1 percent of his passes (76 of 115) for 1,350 yards and 14 touchdowns without an interception.

Ohio State's other running backs in the class – San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star James Peoples (5-10, 192) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203) – are also starting to pick up steam in their senior years.

Peoples missed the first few games of this season, but in his first two games back in recent weeks, he rushed 34 times for 405 yards (11.9 per attempt) and six touchdowns and also had a 23-yard receiving touchdown. Williams-Dixon, meanwhile, had appeared in nine games with 71 carries for 475 yards (7.0 per tote) and four touchdowns.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

While Ohio State head coach John Cooper may have been attracted to other states to pick up the speed he needed to remain competitive in the Big Ten, he should have been able to find all the powerful linemen he needed right there in Ohio.

More than two dozen high school offensive and defensive linemen were rated blue-chip prospects by recruiting expert Tom Lemming, and according to Lemming, Cooper had a chance to lure almost any of them to play for the Buckeyes.

"It's a pretty good year for linemen in the state," Lemming said. "There are some really good ones, including at least three who are among the best in the entire country."

The three top linemen in Lemming's ratings were Rod Smith (6-4, 285) of Cleveland St. Joseph, Chuck Jones (6-4, 285) of Chillicothe and Sylvester Stanley (6-3, 260) of Youngstown East.

30 Years Ago — 1993

Adjusting to the pressures of major-college football wasn't expected to be too difficult for one of the top prep quarterback prospects in the country.

Scott Mutryn, a 6-3, 200-pounder out of Cleveland St. Ignatius, was used to the pressure of big-time football, at least on the high school level. After all, Mutryn was already in his second year at the helm of USA Today's No. 1-ranked high school team and was settling in as one of the top-rated prep quarterbacks in the country.

"It's great," he said. "It's an honor to be considered one of the top schools, but our coaches have kept us focused on our goals. With all the recognition, we try to go out every week with a new challenge. It helps us play better because every team is up for us."

As a junior, he completed 139 of 209 passes for 2,016 yards and 23 touchdowns. He also ran the ball 60 times for 240 yards and scored three times.

25 Years Ago — 1998

With Ohio State's secondary getting a lot of national attention recently – complete with a four-page spread in Sports Illustrated – it was no surprise that some of the nation's best defensive backs were lining up to schedule visits.

Park Forest (Ill.) Rich East defensive back Richard McNutt (6-0, 160) was rated fourth among the nation's top free safety prospects by The National Recruiting Advisor and fourth overall among all DBs by SuperPrep.

He excelled as a cornerback, receiver and kick returner. The previ-

ous year, he had eight interceptions (two for scores) to go with the five he notched as a sophomore. He split time between running back and receiver, catching 25 passes and scoring 13 total touchdowns.

McNutt recently scheduled a Jan. 8 visit to Ohio State. He said OSU and Penn State were his two top schools, although Michigan, UCLA, Stanford, Northwestern, Notre Dame and Purdue were also in the picture.

20 Years Ago — 2003

BSB previously reported on the Ohio High School Athletic Association's investigation into the Cleveland Glenville football program, which stemmed from cornerback Jamario O'Neal (6-1, 190) transferring there from Mansfield Senior.

The OHSAA was investigating whether Glenville committed any recruiting violations in securing the transfer of O'Neal, who was Ohio's top junior prospect and already verbally committed to the Buckeyes.

That investigation had concluded. Glenville was cleared of any violations, and O'Neal, who had played just one game this season after serving a two-game suspension and then being held out due to this investigation, was ruled eligible to compete.

15 Years Ago — 2008

More than halfway through the 2008 season, Ohio State fans were starting to glimpse just how big a shadow Terrelle Pryor cast. Now the starter under center for the Buckeyes as a freshman, the Jeannette, Pa., native had already made his mark on a region known for having produced plenty of football talent.

But while Pryor had been built into an almost larger-than-life figure before he decided to become a Buckeye, the impact of having the nation's top prospect heading to Columbus had little to do with the decision of another Jayhawk to follow him.

One year behind Pryor was running back Jordan Hall, a three-star prospect. A longtime friend of Pryor's, Hall said the chance to reunite with his prep teammate was just one factor of many that helped him select OSU.

"If he had picked a different school, I probably still would have gone to Ohio State," Hall told BSB. "It played a little bit of a role to know somebody up there."

10 Years Ago — 2013

Ohio State's search for a tight end in its 2014 class wasn't over yet. The Buckeyes were one of the final two choices for their top prospect at the position, Manahawkin (N.J.) Southern Regional's Mike Gesicki, but ultimately lost out on the three-star prospect when he verbally

committed to Penn State on Oct. 17.

The 6-4, 235-pounder's commitment to Bill O'Brien and the Nittany Lions came just days after he took in Penn State's quadruple-overtime victory against Michigan in Happy Valley.

"Everyone always told me I'd go on a visit and then I'd know what school I wanted to be at," Gesicki told Scout.com. "I didn't think that was possible."

As it turns out, it was.

Five Years Ago — 2018

As 247Sports' No. 13 overall prospect, No. 2 outside linebacker and No. 1 player in Washington, D.C., St. John's College High School five-star Mekhail Sherman (6-3, 234) was among the top targets for Ohio State and just about every other Power Five program for 2020.

In the Cadets' 31-10 win over Forestville (Md.) Bishop McNamara, though, his junior season took a turn for the worse when he suffered a torn ACL. After Sherman underwent surgery to repair the knee injury Oct. 17, he said head coach Urban Meyer was one of his first calls.

"Urban Meyer was one of the first people I called right after my surgery," Sherman told Lettermen Row, "just him being there for me."

One Year Ago — 2022

The curious case of Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive back Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) had finally come to an end, at least for now, as the 2023 prospect and former Ohio State commit announced on Oct. 13 that he was committing to Florida.

Johnson was the No. 96 overall prospect and No. 7 safety in the class. He committed to Ohio State on April 17, the day after he took an official visit for the Buckeyes' spring game, and made it on June 17 for his first official visit to the school.

Behind the scenes, though, Florida – where Johnson had made an unofficial visit in March – continued to recruit Johnson, and he ultimately took another pair of visits over the summer before decommitting from Ohio State on July 30. After another unofficial visit to the Gators on Sept. 10, Johnson announced his commitment to Florida – something that had been somewhat of an open secret ever since he decommitted from Ohio State – on Oct. 13.

"Just what they do and what they've got going on," Johnson told 247Sports of why he committed to Florida. "They play multiple cornerbacks on the field. I've got a great chance to come in there and compete and get playing time early. I just like what Coach (Billy) Napier is doing and his staff. I like that the staff are genuine people. Coach Napier is real genuine, and Coach (Corey) Raymond keeps it real. That was why I chose Florida."

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Ohio State has two commitments from Indiana – New Haven five-star wide receiver Mylan Graham (6-1, 170) and New Palestine four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295) – and both have had successful outings thus far. Through six games, Graham posted 34 receptions for 496 yards and six touchdowns, while Moore had helped New Palestine's offense to 264.6 rushing yards per game.

As for some of the other secondary prospects, McClain has 65 tackles, a blocked punt and a blocked field goal in seven games, while Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star cornerback Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185) accounted for 33 tackles, two tackles for loss and six pass breakups in six games.

Moving to 2025, St. Clair has been lights out during his junior season. Through nine games, he completed 70.0 percent of his passes (156 of 223) for 1,977 yards and 23 touchdowns to just four interceptions, and he rushed for 273 yards and four additional scores.

A future target for St. Clair in Boggs has been similarly impressive, hauling in 53 catches for 880 yards and 16 touchdowns in seven games. Ohio State's lone 2026 commitment, Henry, has also been a standout with 43 catches for 647 yards and eight touchdowns in nine games.

OSU Among Finalists For 2025 LB Pettijohn

McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 210), a 2025 prospect, has started to narrow down his list of scholarship offers, including Ohio State

among his top 12 schools on Oct. 19.

Ohio State is joined on the list by Auburn, Colorado, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Michigan, Oklahoma, SMU, TCU, Texas and USC. Pettijohn is the No. 37 overall prospect and fifth-ranked linebacker in the class.

"An athletic defender who can play on all three downs, Pettijohn has been the heart of McKinney's defense since moving to inside linebacker in his junior year," wrote 247Sports recruiting analyst Mike Roach. "At roughly 6-2, 210 pounds, Pettijohn's frame should have the capacity to play closer to 230 pounds at the college level.

"A highly-instinctive linebacker who triggers quickly on the run and shoots gaps well, Pettijohn is an exceptional open-field tackler. He takes good angles of pursuit and fits the run well. Having previously played safety, Pettijohn is capable in coverage as well."

Ohio State offered Pettijohn in September amid an impressive junior season, already accounting for 74 tackles, five tackles for loss, a sack and an interception.

OSU Holds Significant Edge Over Other Big Ten Schools

With the early signing period approaching in December, Ohio State's recruiting class still holds a significant lead over other schools in the Big Ten.

Ohio State's class – with 22 commitments and a team score of 303.43 – is second in the country behind Georgia (27 commits, 313.83), but is far-and-away the best in the conference, with Penn State (25 commits, 266.80) the next-closest at

No. 11.

No. 14 Michigan (25 commits, 261.61) is next, trailed by No. 25 Wisconsin (21 commits, 228.20), No. 26 Nebraska (26 commits, 228.00), No. 28 Purdue (24 commits, 221.10), No. 31 Minnesota (23 commits, 211.09), No. 32 Iowa (20 commits, 207.08) and No. 39 Maryland (21 commits, 202.26) all in the top 40.

Illinois (17 commits, 189.62) barely cracks the top 50 at No. 48, followed by No. 51 Indiana (19 commits, 182.83), No. 75 Michigan State (10 commits, 144.22), with Northwestern (10 commits, 124.45) in dead last at No. 87, outflanked on the recruiting trail by the likes of No. 86 UConn (12 commits, 125.01), No. 85 Kent State (16 commits, 125.93) and No. 84 James Madison (15 commits, 127.51).

2026 SAF Edwards Enjoys OSU Visit

Edwards, a 2026 prospect, was on hand for Ohio State's 37-17 win over Maryland on Oct. 7, and the defensive back had a good time in Columbus.

"The visit was a great experience. I loved everything about it," Edwards told Eleven Warriors. "It was a great atmosphere. I would say it's the best visit I've been on since I started going on visits. The atmosphere was crazy and everything a player would want to play in."

It was the third visit to Ohio State for Edwards (with the fourth coming against Penn State), the No. 64 overall prospect and fifth-ranked safety in the class, and he maintains that the Buckeyes remain near

the top of his recruitment during his sophomore season, where he plays across the field at several different safety positions.

"They told me I'm a good fit for the team," Edwards said. "They also told me to keep grinding, keep my head down and stay the course."

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Penn State added a commitment on Oct. 16 from Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star defensive end Jaylen Harvey (6-2, 250), the No. 360 overall prospect and No. 30 defensive end in the class.

- Pickerington (Ohio) Central four-star tight end Tayvion Galloway (6-5, 230) announced his commitment to Purdue on Oct. 16. While Galloway did not have an offer from Ohio State, he did camp in Columbus several times.

- Michigan State lost two commitments since BSB last went to press, including Mount Pleasant, Mich., four-star offensive lineman Andrew Dennis (6-5, 275) and Syracuse (N.Y.) Christian Brothers Academy three-star cornerback Syair Torrence (5-11, 195). The Spartans' 2024 recruiting class now has just 10 commitments, with only four ranked among the top 1,000 prospects.

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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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (7-0, 4-0)

Sept. 2 at Indiana, W 23-3; **9** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 35-7; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY, W 63-10; **23** at Notre Dame, W 17-14.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND, W 37-17; **14** at Purdue, W 41-7; **21** PENN STATE, W 20-12; **28** at Wisconsin.

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

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Oct. 22 at Dayton (Exh.), W 78-70

Nov. 6 OAKLAND; **10** TEXAS A&M; **15** MERRIMACK; **19** WESTERN MICHIGAN; **24** Emerald Coast Classic at Niceville, Fla. vs. Alabama; **25** Emerald Coast Classic at Niceville, Fla. vs. Oregon/Santa Clara; **29** CENTRAL MICHIGAN

Dec. 3 MINNESOTA; **6** MIAMI (OHIO); **9** at Penn State; **16** CBS Sports Classic at Atlanta, Ga., vs. UCLA; **21** NEW ORLEANS; **30** West Virginia, Cleveland, Ohio

Jan. 3 RUTGERS; **6** at Indiana; **10** WISCONSIN; **15** at Michigan; **20** PENN STATE; **23** at Nebraska; **27** at Northwestern; **30** ILLINOIS

Feb. 2 at Iowa; **6** INDIANA; **10** MARYLAND; **13** at Wisconsin; **18** PURDUE; **22** at Minnesota; **25** at Michigan State; **29** NEBRASKA

March 3 MICHIGAN; **10** at Rutgers; **13-17** Big Ten Tournament, Minneapolis, Minn.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Nov. 6 Naismith Hall of Fame Series at Las Vegas vs. USC; **12** IUPUI; **16** BOSTON COLLEGE; **20** Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. East Carolina; **22** Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. Oklahoma State; **26** CORNELL.

Dec. 3 at Tennessee; **5** OHIO; **10** PENN STATE; **15** GRAND VALLEY STATE; **18** UCLA; **22** BELMONT; **30** at Michigan.

Jan. 5 at Northwestern; **11** RUTGERS; **14** MICHIGAN STATE; **17** at Maryland; **21** IOWA; **25** at Illinois; **28** at Purdue

Feb. 1 WISCONSIN; **4** INDIANA; **8** at Minnesota; **11** at Michigan State; **14** NEBRASKA; **22** at Penn State; **25** MARYLAND; **28** MICHIGAN.

March 3 at Iowa.

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., 13th/16.

Oct. 13 Arturo Barrios Invitational at College Station, Texas, Men 8th/39; Women 4th/41; **27** Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wis.

Nov. 10 NCAA Regional Championships at Madison, Wisc.; **18** NCAA Championships at Charlottesville, Va.

FENCING

Oct. 1 OSU DUALS, Men: 5-0; Women: 5-0; **21-22** Garrett Open at University Park, Pa., NTS.

Nov. 4-5 Western Invitational at USAF Academy, Colo.; **19** ELITE INVITATIONAL.

Jan. 20 St. John's Invitational at Queens, N.Y.; **21** Philadelphia Invitational at Philadelphia.

Feb. 3-4 Northwestern Duals at Evanston, Ill.; **24-25** Central Collegiate Fencing Conference Championships.

FIELD HOCKEY (13-5, 4-4)

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, L 4-3; **24** OHIO, W, 3-2; **29** Iowa, W 2-1.

Oct. 1 Indiana, W 3-0; **6** Penn State, L 2-1; **8** Kent State, W 3-0; **13** RUTGERS, L 1-0 SO **15** MARYLAND, L 2-1; **22** BELLARMINE, W 7-0.

Nov. 2-3 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., 2nd/11; **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, 3rd/15.

Oct. 9-10 Illini Invitational at Medinah, Ill., 8th/15

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (2-1-2, 0-1-1)

Oct. 7 Mercyhurst, W 4-3; **13-14** LINDENWOOD, W 4-2; T 2-2; **20** Michigan, L 7-1; **21** Michigan, T 2-2 OT (SW); **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 (5-1, 4-0)

Sept. 29 Colgate, L 3-2; **30** Colgate, W 3-2 (OT).

Oct. 13 Minnesota Duluth, W 5-2; **14** Minnesota Duluth, W 2-0; **20** St. Thomas, W 6-2; **21** St. Thomas, W 7-1; **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 (3-6-5, 1-4-1)

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, W 3-0; **24** Northwestern, L 4-2; **29** Rutgers, W 2-0.

Oct. 3 XAVIER T 0-0; **6** MICHIGAN, T 0-0; **10** Louisville, T 2-2; **15** Indiana, L 2-1; **20** WISCONSIN, L 1-0; **24** Michigan State, 7 p.m.; **29** MARYLAND, 1 p.m.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (9-6-2, 5-4-1)

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, L 2-1; **24** Maryland, W 1-0; **28** INDIANA, W 2-1.

Oct. 1 ILLINOIS, W 2-1; **8** Penn State, L, 2-1; **12** Minnesota, L 2-0; **15** Wisconsin, W 1-0; **19** RUTGERS, L 1-0; **22** MICHIGAN, W 4-1.

MEN'S SWIM & DIVE

Oct. 27 VIRGINIA TECH, 5 p.m.; **28** VIRGINIA TECH, 10 a.m.

Nov. 10 DENISON, 5 p.m.; **16-18** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL; **29-Dec. 2** Toyota US Open at Greensboro, N.C.

Jan. 20 MICHIGAN, 12 p.m.; **26-27** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind.

Feb. 2 PITTSBURGH, 3 p.m. **16-18** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **28-March 2** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

March 10 LAST CHANCE MEET; **13-16** Zone Championships at Louisville, Ky.; **14-16** CSCAA National Invitational at Ocala, Fla.; **27-30** NCAA Championships at Indianapolis.

WOMEN'S SWIM & DIVE

Oct. 27 VIRGINIA TECH, 5 p.m.; **28**

VIRGINIA TECH, 10 a.m.

Nov. 3 AKRON, 5 p.m.; **10** DENISON, 5 p.m.; **16-18** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL; **29-Dec. 2** Toyota US Open at Greensboro, N.C.

Jan. 20 MICHIGAN, 12 p.m.; **26-27** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind.

Feb. 2 PITTSBURGH, 3 p.m.; **16-18** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **21-24** Big Ten Championships at West Lafayette, Ind.

March 3 LAST CHANCE MEET; **13-16** Zone Championships at Louisville, Ky.; **14-16** CSCAA National Invitational at Ocala, Fla.; **20-23** NCAA Championships at Athens, Ga.

MEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 18-24 COLUMBUS CHALLENGER, NTS. **30** ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.

Oct. 1-8 ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.; **19-23** ITA Midwest Regional Championship at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **23-29** Las Vegas Challenger at Las Vegas.

Nov. 1-5 ITA Fall National Championship at San Diego, Calif. **1-5** Big Ten Singles & Doubles Championship at Madison, Wisc.

Jan. 27 VANDERBILT; **28** OREGON/BOISE STATE.

April 26-28 Big Ten Tournament at Madison, Wisc.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 15-17 Debbie Southern Furman Fall Classic at Greenville, S.C., NTS; **21-24** Fall Spotlight at Raleigh, N.C., NTS.

Oct. 1 ITA All-Americans at Cary, N.C.. NTS; **12-16** ITA Midwest Regionals at East Lansing, Mich., NTS; **26-29** UT Home Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn.

Nov. 1-4 ITA Fall Championships at San Diego, Calif.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (7-12, 4-6)

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, L 3-0; **24** Iowa, W 3-0; **27** WISCONSIN, L 3-0.

Oct. 1 MARYLAND, W 3-0; **6** Rutgers, W 3-1.; **7** Penn State, L 3-2; **13** ILLINOIS, W 3-1; **15** PURDUE, L 3-1; **18** Wisconsin, L 3-0; **21** Indiana, L 3-2; **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.

Holtmann Sees Deeper Meaning For Exhibition

Ohio State's 78-70 exhibition win against Dayton at a sold-out UD Arena on Oct. 22 may have provided the program with a unique opportunity to see where it stands against a formidable in-state opponent, but for head coach Chris Holtmann, the game took on a much larger meaning that transcends what occurred on the hardwood.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

The preseason exhibition against the Flyers was part of a four-day charity event coined "The Spotlight" that aimed to raise awareness and education for mental health and wellness in adolescents and young adults. It was a weekend-long event that also included a mental health resource fair and open town hall meeting held at UD Arena on Oct 19, along with a series of programming and public service announcements regarding mental health and suicide prevention that were aired in the arena during timeouts on Oct. 22.

The event was organized by Dayton head coach Anthony Grant and his wife, Christina, who lost their daughter, Jayda, on May 30, 2022, at the age of 20 following a two-year battle with a mental illness. For Holtmann, having his team participate in such an important and impactful event was an opportunity he did not take for granted.



Anthony Grant

"We have a really exciting opportunity coming up here with playing Dayton in an exhibition game," Holtmann said on Oct. 17. "Anthony and his wife, they have a really personal, powerful story around mental health that they have just recently begun to take some time to share. I give them a ton of credit for the courage it has taken to share that personal story.

"Anthony called back in the summer and asked if we'd be willing to play an exhibition game to start the season, to really raise money around mental health and mental health as it relates to teenagers and college-aged kids. And we really jumped in with two feet, because I think it's a great opportunity to raise money, to raise awareness, to also hopefully give Anthony's family some healing in the midst of this."

Holtmann added that his team's involvement in this event can also allow him and his players to create a culture in the locker room and on campus that welcomes all conversations about mental health and wellness. The coach noted the university has done an effective job of encouraging such dialogue since he arrived at Ohio State in 2017, especially given the many resources offered to student-athletes by athletic director Gene Smith and his staff.

"I think it's important to have open di-

alogue about what mental health looks like," Holtmann said. "What taking care of yourself looks like, to normalize this whole process of young people going through the struggles that they go through. When I had a chance to talk to Anthony, he brought some great insight talking about his daughter and what she went through during the years of the pandemic and all the struggles that young people went through there.

"I think each program and each staff here that I'm in contact with – and I talk to Ryan (Day) about it – take it very seriously. I think it's true for young people, it's true for all of us sitting in this room, that it is really important to prioritize that."

All proceeds for the exhibition game were donated to Jay's Light Fund, a fund that honors Jayda Grant and will be used to champion adolescent and young adult mental health and suicide prevention. Together, the university reportedly raised \$500,000.

In the exhibition win, the Buckeyes featured a balanced scoring attack with nine players scoring, led by sophomore guard Bruce Thornton's 21 points on 7-of-9 shooting. Transfer forward Jamison Battle added 15 points and five rebounds, while sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. reached double figures with 12 points.

Buckeyes Face Mixed Reviews From AP, KenPom

With the season quickly approaching, there are a mix of opinions surrounding the caliber and potential of Holtmann's new-look squad.

After a dismal 16-19 campaign last year, the Buckeyes did not receive a single vote in the preseason AP top 25 poll released on Oct. 16. This marks just the second time in the Holtmann era that his team ranked outside the top 25 to start the season, the other occurring last year.

While Ohio State is not represented in the AP top 25, it was viewed more favorably in the more nuanced and analytics driven KenPom preseason rankings. Created by noted college basketball blogger and analytics guru Ken Pomeroy – who has charted the sport's advanced statistics at KenPom.com since 2004 and has since contributed to The Athletic and ESPN – the site puts the Buckeyes as the nation's 35th-best team entering the season. They are the sixth highest-ranked team in the Big Ten in this specific metric, behind No. 1 Purdue, No. 13 Michigan State, No. 19 Illinois, No. 20 Wisconsin and No. 22 Maryland.

Pomeroy also thinks highly of Ohio State's offense, which returns contributing scorers Thornton, Gayle and Zed Key, among others, and welcomes sharpshooting Minnesota transfer Jamison Battle. Pomeroy has the Buckeyes at No. 23 in the nation in adjusted offensive efficiency, which tracks the number of points scored per 100 possessions while also adjusting for the opponent. This also ranks sixth in the Big Ten, trailing Purdue (No. 2), Iowa (12), Michigan



Bruce Thornton

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

State (17), Illinois (18) and Maryland (20).

The Buckeyes have been consistently lauded in the KenPom rankings for their offensive efficiency under Holtmann, ranking as high as No.1 last season in early January.

In other KenPom metrics, Ohio State enters the campaign ranked 48th in the country in adjusted defensive efficiency, which accounts for points allowed per 100 possessions, and is favored to win 19 of the 30 scheduled games so far, not counting the undecided Emerald Coast Classic matchup on Nov. 25 matchup against either Oregon or Santa Clara. The Buckeyes are also slated to finish sixth in the Big Ten with an 11-9 conference record.

Key 2025, 2026 Targets Visit For PSU Game

Ohio State's 20-12 victory over Penn State on Oct. 21 may have proven critical for the football program on the recruiting front with over 80 prospects in attendance, but it was also a key weekend for Holtmann's team as they look to fill in future talent for 2025 and 2026.

According to The Columbus Dispatch, the Buckeyes hosted at least 10 recruits in the 2025 and 2026 classes for the show-down, with many of them being highly touted prospects whom Ohio State is heavily pursuing. Sitting atop that list is Huntington (W.Va.) Prep five-star shooting guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195), who is widely considered one of the top prospects in 2025.

Peterson, who transferred to the basketball-focused preparatory school from Cuyahoga Valley (Ohio) Christian Academy for his junior season, is tabbed as the nation's No. 3 overall player and No. 1 shooting guard. Originally ranked the No. 1 overall player in Ohio before his transfer, the five-star displayed his elite scoring ability during his campaign with the Royals by logging 31.7 points per game, a performance that earned him Division-II first-team all-state honors and the third-most votes for Ohio's Mr. Basketball award.

Ohio State has been in pursuit of Peterson – who grew up in northeast Ohio – for several years, extending him the school's first 2025 scholarship offer in August of 2021, a few months before he even took the floor as a freshman at Cuyahoga Valley. They also have already hosted him for an unofficial visit last fall, and Peterson has since returned the favor, placing Ohio State in his top 16 on Sept. 23, a list that also includes Baylor, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, North Carolina and UCLA, among others.

"My relationship with them is great," Peterson told On3 Sports in July. "They're big on hometown hero talk. They text me and let me know what they see from me in the games, what I need to work on, and how I did."

Peterson is not the only five-star prospect to pay an unofficial visit to Ohio State

on Oct. 21. The Buckeyes also served as host for San Bernardino (Calif.) Eleanor Roosevelt five-star shooting guard Brayden Burries (6-5, 200), who has seen his stock rise after showcasing his potential as a both physical and cerebral backcourt player for the AAU team Strive For Greatness – often coached by LeBron James – this summer. He is currently ranked the nation's No. 22 overall player and third-best shooting guard in 2025.

"The big-bodied guard has a big reputation for being able to put the ball in the hole, but he impacts the game in many more ways," 247Sports recruiting analyst Travis Branham wrote after watching him play this summer. "He particularly showcased his ability to run a team and lead them to a win in a highly competitive matchup."

The Buckeyes, who have not yet offered the five-star, will have some stiff competition in Burries' recruitment if they choose to pursue him. He has also paid visits to blue-bloods Duke and UCLA along with Arizona and Houston. He also holds offers from Alabama, Arizona State, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Texas and USC.

The Buckeyes also hosted some highly-touted 2026 prospects on Oct. 21, headlined by Cleveland Garfield Heights five-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175). Johnson, the top-ranked player in Ohio as well as the nation's No. 24 overall prospect and fourth-best point guard, made his second unofficial visit to Columbus this fall, having previously spent time with the program on Sept. 9 for the football team's home opener against Youngstown State.

Johnson, who received the Buckeyes' first scholarship offer for the 2026 class on May 1, spoke highly of the program and expressed his strong interest in Ohio State after the Sept. 9 visit.

"That's a dream," Johnson told The Columbus Dispatch. "Since I was young, my whole life (goal) 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."

Johnson extended high praise to the Buckeyes, but he has not yet ruled out other schools. He already completed a visit to Cincinnati this fall and also plans to pay a visit to John Calipari's Kentucky Wildcats soon.

In addition to the three five-stars, Ohio State also hosted a number of other 2025 prospects including Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy four-star power forward Niko Bundalo (6-11, 195); Georgetown (Ky.) Great Crossing four-star center Malachi Moreno (6-11, 210); Potomac (Md.) Bullis School four-star center Eric Reibe (7-0, 235); Erlanger (Ky.) Lloyd four-star power forward E.J. Walker (6-8, 220); and Toledo Whitmer shooting guard Antoine West (6-3, 175).

Title-Minded Bucks Looking To Improve Defense

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State's scoring and defensive press last season helped lead to the team's first Elite Eight appearance since 1993, but it was defense within the half court and rebounding that stopped the Buckeyes from advancing further.

And in looking to advance to the Final Four – also for the first time since 1993 – and win a second Big Ten championship in three years, head coach Kevin McGuff took immediate action to help the Buckeyes plug those holes on the roster and has set pre-season No. 7 Ohio State up for legitimate championship contention, perhaps for the first time since his arrival in Columbus.

"I like the additions that we've added, the freshmen, the transfers, and they've integrated themselves into the program very successfully," he said. "That's always where I want to start when we add new people, and so that's gone well. The kids have worked really hard, and our upperclassmen have provided great leadership. Overall, it's been really good."

The most notable of the additions was former Duke guard Celeste Taylor, who is entering her fifth season of college basketball and is the reigning ACC Defensive Player of the Year. The Buckeyes also added former Michigan State forward Taiyier Parks, another fifth-year player who will likely see the starting lineup alongside Tay-

lor, as well as former Kentucky guard Kennedy Cambridge, a depth addition coming off her freshman season.

"We would have taken these kids regardless," McGuff said, "even if we were great defensively last year in the half court, but I think what they bring, their ability will just be better from a personnel standpoint in the half court."

"But we also have to now go out and coach and instill that in the team, and that's got to be a point of emphasis for us because as I reflected last year, probably half-court defense and, at times, rebounding were the things that probably kept us from getting to that next level, in terms of our ability to compete with anybody in the country. It's going to be a point of emphasis for us, and I think our personnel will allow us to be better."

They will be welcomed to Ohio State by a collection of veteran players, with the Buckeyes returning the majority of last season's key contributors, including guards Jacy Sheldon, Taylor Thierry and Rikki Harris and forwards Cotie McMahon, Rebeka Mikulášiková and Eboni Walker. With several new pieces joining the fray, the emphasis for Ohio State this offseason – beyond improving half-court defense and rebounding – was to help acclimate the new arrivals.

"We're really competitive, and we went at it a lot in the summer," Sheldon said.

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.

"We have a lot of newcomers, too, so it's a good time for us to learn how to play with each other, get comfortable with each other, and that's what we've been doing."

"Starting practice (on Sept. 26), I imagine we're going to compete just as much. The special thing about this team is we make each other better. We love competing. We have a lot of people who are really talented on this team, so making each other better is only going to push us more in the long run."



Kevin McGuff

The only significant loss for the group is guard Taylor Mikesell, who led the Buckeyes last season with 17.2 points per game and shot 41.4 percent from three. Ohio State will look for several players – including McMahon, Sheldon and Taylor – to help pick up the slack from deep, but a difficult challenge still awaits in replacing a player of Mikesell's caliber.

"She's a special player and a unique one in that she shot the ball so well," McGuff said. "I think we're going to need some other people to step up, make some shots from the perimeter. I think, knock on wood, Jacy stays healthy, that will take care of part of that."

"But I also think we can be better in some ways. When we add somebody as good as Celeste Taylor on defense, and the other people that we added will provide us probably more depth than we've ever had, and so I think it will be a little different. But we can be as good and hopefully maybe even better."

Taylor will be the biggest factor in Ohio State's defense taking the next step. The Buckeyes allowed 68.4 points per game (274th nationally) while opposing teams shot 42.8 percent from the field (296th), and while the team's offense – which averaged 80.1 points (eighth) and 46.1 percent shooting (15th) – was generally able to carry the load, a more rounded approach will have the team better shaped to contend in March.

"It's a focus every day," Harris said. "We don't go a day without doing defense, of course, but rebounding drills, we do that all the time."

The one part of that defense that did work consistently was how often Ohio State was able to steal the ball away from the opposition. The Buckeyes averaged 11.3 steals per game – 11th nationally and first in the Big Ten – and with the players having another year under their belts of operating in McGuff's aggressive defensive press, they should be even more prepared

to continue racking up steals this season.

"Our defense tends to win us our games," Harris said. "Any team can score if you can't stop them. Then you're just going to get beat, so I think defense for us is a big key, and when our defense is on the right track, then we're always successful."

Rebounding is the other key focus for the team. Despite finishing with a 28-8 record, it often came despite a disadvantage in rebounding margin, with the Buckeyes averaging 2.2 fewer rebounds than their opponents last season, which was 251st nationally and third worst in the Big Ten behind Penn State (3.0) and Northwestern (3.3).

"I definitely think there's a lot of players on this team, especially this year, who are very good defensively," Thierry said. "Obviously, rebounds are pretty important in the game, so I was glad I was able to contribute in that area, but having new additions like Celeste, that's definitely going to help out in that area."

But with the Buckeyes returning a significant chunk of production in McMahon and Thierry, as well as Sheldon fully healthy after missing most of last season with a leg injury, this is not a team that requires several problems being solved. Most pieces were in place for Ohio State to once again contend in the Big Ten based on what returned from last season, but the additions of Taylor and Parks could be what was needed to push the team to the next level.

"It feels like a national championship team once you step on the court, once you step in the locker room," Taylor said. "Everybody around you – you could tell how motivated everybody is. You can tell that they want to win. They want to win every game possible."

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has a position-by-position breakdown of Ohio State's lineup for the 2023-24 season, which opens with a matchup against No. 21 USC in Las Vegas on Nov. 6.

FORWARDS

Cotie McMahon, 6-0, So. (15.1 points per game, 5.5 rebounds per game last season) – After one of the best freshman seasons in team history, where does McMahon go from here? Her teammates believe the only place the reigning Big Ten Freshman of the Year has left to go is up.

"She's a big piece of this team," Harris said. "She brings energy, she can score the ball, and she's been working a lot on her offense again, perimeter-wise, and she's looking really good."

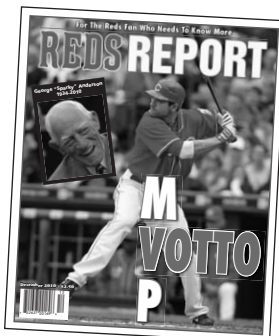
"The sky's the limit for her. She's what, a sophomore? She's only a sophomore, so she has so much room to grow, but she's also just so good already, so the sky's the limit

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2023-24 Ohio State Women's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

<p>2 • Taylor Thierry • G Ht.: 6-0 - Class: Jr.</p>  <p>Led Ohio State in shooting percentage (62.5), rebounds (233) and steals (74) last season while averaging 13.5 points per game.</p>	<p>4 • Jacy Sheldon • G Ht.: 5-10 - Class: 5th-Sr.</p>  <p>Played in just 13 games last season after suffering a leg injury but still returned for Ohio State's Big Ten and NCAA Tournament runs.</p>	<p>12 • Celeste Taylor • G Ht.: 5-11 - Class: 5th-Sr.</p>  <p>Was one of the country's best defensive players last season at Duke and was named ACC Defensive Player of the Year.</p>	<p>14 • Taiyier Parks • F Ht.: 6-3 - Class: 5th-Sr.</p>  <p>Transferred to Ohio State this offseason from Michigan State, where she averaged 8.3 points and 5.2 rebounds last season.</p>	<p>32 • Cotie McMahon • F Ht.: 6-0 - Class: So.</p>  <p>Averaged 15.1 points per game during her first season with the Buckeyes and was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year last season.</p>
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for her. She's going to be great, and she continues to work on stuff that she's not good at so she can become better at it. It's going to be exciting for people to see what she's been doing this offseason."

McMahon's biggest focuses for this season will be cutting down on fouls – she was second on the team with 102 fouls, behind only Thierry's 114 – and boosting her shooting percentages after averaging 51.0 percent from the floor, 26.3 percent from deep and 67.7 percent from the foul line.

But that will come alongside the challenge of taking on a bigger role for Ohio State. With Mikesell's departure, the team will be looking for a new leading scorer, and McMahon is built for the moment after coming on the scene last year. She started all 36 games for Ohio State, finishing in double digits in 20 of the final 23 games of the season, but perhaps her biggest moment came in the NCAA Tournament.

With the Buckeyes facing a monumental challenge in UConn, McMahon logged 23 points, five rebounds, two assists and two steals on 47.1 percent shooting (8 of 17) in the 73-61 win over the Huskies, one of the biggest victories in recent memory for Ohio State. But with those big moments comes increased attention, and with every coach now with a season of film to look back on to find ways to shut McMahon down, she is not backing down from the challenge.

"You have to understand that the scouting report is going to be different," she said. "I'm going to be guarded differently, but I'm going to have to find different ways to score. (So I have to) continue developing my game, my offensive game, my defensive game, and little stuff like that and developing different ways to score."

Rebeka Mikulášiková, 6-4, 5th-Sr. (10.1 ppg, 3.7 rpg) – Last season was a challenging one for Mikulášiková, who has struggled to find a rhythm in any of her previous four seasons with the Buckeyes.

She posted averages of 15.8 points, 5.6 rebounds and 2.2 assists on 54.8 percent shooting and 38.0 percent shooting from deep through the first 15 games of the season – all but two coming in nonconference play – but once the schedule shifted exclu-

sively to Big Ten contests, she averaged just 6.7 points, 2.5 rebounds and 1.2 assists on 40.3 percent shooting and a 27.2 percent clip from beyond the arc.

After missing Ohio State's 83-59 loss to Indiana on Feb. 13 with an injury – a loss in which she was replaced by Walker, who posted a 12-point, 11-rebound double-double on 50.0 percent shooting – Mikulášiková did not start in the remaining 10 games of the season and averaged just 14 minutes in those contests. But McGuff is hoping that the addition of Parks and a more consistent rotation in the post can be beneficial for Mikulášiková, who he felt at times put too much pressure on herself as the only true big on the roster for the Buckeyes last season.

"It's not going to put as much on her, and she can kind of free herself," he said. "She is a really conscientious young woman who wants to do great, and sometimes she takes on some pressure from that, but really I think the biggest thing for her is just to be consistent. She was so good last year at times and then just wasn't quite as consistent at the end of the year, and she knows that. She wants to be consistent. We've got to help her and make sure we put her in good positions, but if she can have a consistently good year, that will be extremely impactful for us."

The biggest stride that Mikulášiková took ahead of last season was her conditioning, and this year, she focused on improving her mind in addition to her body.

"I'm just trying to focus every practice on my mental game, just being present and not getting so mad at myself when something's not going my way," she said. "I'm just trying to work on that and have a positive mindset for my last year."

Taiyier Parks, 6-3, 5th-Sr. (8.3 ppg, 5.2 rpg last season at Michigan State) – Taylor's addition got all of the headlines, but Ohio State grabbing Parks out of the transfer portal may have been one of the best moves of the offseason.

As a physical and athletic player, she provides an immediate boost in areas Ohio State struggled in last season – mainly rim protection and rebounding – while also

bringing in four years of experience playing in the Big Ten. She averaged 7.1 points and 5.5 rebounds over the last four seasons with the Spartans, and in her best statistical season in 2021-22, she averaged 8.5 points and 6.5 rebounds on 52.0 percent shooting.

Parks' ability around the rim is something Ohio State has not had since Doruka Juhász, and she figures to immediately factor into the starting lineup to help give the Buckeyes a more traditional starting five, one that can compete late into the season.

"We've got Taiyier from Michigan State who's a great rebounder, and having her in practice right now, it's just like, I can't see anybody out-rebounding her," Harris said, "so that's just nice for us to have."

Eboni Walker, 6-0, 5th-Sr. (4.9 ppg, 3.6 rpg) – Walker was a late-season revelation for the Buckeyes, stepping into the starting lineup for the final 11 games of the year and averaging 6.3 points, 5.2 rebounds and 2.0 assists, though she did so on just 37.7 percent shooting from the field.

Her best outing of the season helped Ohio State advance in the NCAA Tournament, when she posted a season-high 15 points in addition to seven rebounds and three assists on 57.1 percent shooting in the Buckeyes' 71-69 win against North Carolina on March 20, as well as delivering the final pass to Sheldon for her game-winner.

With a season under her belt in Columbus, Walker – who has stated in the past that she is positionless, willing to step in wherever needed for the team – is likely to settle in off the bench at the four or five for the Buckeyes but should still be a significant

part of the rotation.

"Your first year is always going to be kind of a cushion year," she said. "I was just honored to be a part of such a great team that made that flow much easier. I had to take pressure off myself to help me grow within the program, and I feel like I've really done that. Now I can truly focus on just trying to be better and help my team win games."

Karla Vres, 6-3, 5th-Sr. (0.0 ppg, 0.1 rpg) – Vres said that last season would be about finding her role at Ohio State, but that never seemingly came to fruition as the least-utilized player on the team's roster last year.

Vres appeared in just nine games with a total of 17:34 minutes on the floor – most coming during Ohio State's nonconference schedule – accounting for only two missed shots, a defensive rebound, three personal fouls, three turnovers and a steal.

It was especially confounding considering Ohio State's difficulty at points defending around the rim, an area where Vres could have provided a boost and did so during her previous stop at American. But with her not playing despite limited depth in the post, not to mention the addition of Parks, it's hard to see where Vres might contribute on a regular basis during her final season of eligibility.

GUARDS

Kennedy Cambridge, 5-8, So. (2.7 ppg, 2.3 rpg last season at Kentucky) – Parks and Taylor figure to be immediate starters

Continued On Page 34



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Plenty Of Depth At Guard For Buckeyes

Continued From Page 33

for Ohio State, but Cambridge's addition is one that is looking toward the future. Cambridge appeared in 19 games last season for Kentucky, where she shot 48.8 percent from the field in 14.4 minutes per game.

While she will likely not be a significant contributor this season, her addition is an important one given that all three of Ohio State's losses in the portal this offseason – Hevynne Bristow, Kaitlyn Costner and Mya Perry – are guards, and with the likelihood of Madison Greene, Harris, Sheldon and Taylor all departing after this season, a roster flush with guards could suddenly be short on them this time next year.

For this season, however, Cambridge should see limited action. While listed as a combo guard during her recruitment, she offers a better fit for Ohio State at shooting guard, where she played at Ensworth High School in Tennessee alongside her sister, Jaloni, a five-star point guard in the 2024 recruiting class.

Diana Collins, 5-9, Fr. – One of just two incoming freshmen for Ohio State, Collins was the No. 70 prospect in her class, according to ESPN, and is coming off an appearance for Team Sweden in the FIBA U20 Women's European Championship, where she averaged 11.6 points, 3.3 rebounds and 2.9 assists per game.

Ohio State's logjam at guard may make

it difficult to find meaningful minutes for Collins, but with the potential departures mentioned above, it might be wise to find a role for her this season if she may need to answer the call next year for the Buckeyes at point guard.

"Honestly, I'm just doing what I need to be doing," she said. "Whatever role that I'm put in, just doing that as best as I can, being there for teammates, just all of that."

Madison Greene, 5-8, 5th-Sr. (10.9 ppg, 2.9 rpg) – Ohio State is hoping to see a return to form for Greene, who has suffered two season-ending knee injuries in as many years, but McGuff is not expecting her until after the season begins.

"Jacy will start at the point guard position, and she looks great right now. But Madison is doing really, really well with her rehab, and we anticipate her coming back at some point mid-November to late November," McGuff said. "We're going to certainly be somewhat cautious with that just to make sure we give her plenty of time to not only be healthy and be ready but to be comfortable in coming back, as well."

With Sheldon, Taylor and Thierry all entrenched as starters, it is unlikely that Greene would re-enter the starting lineup for the Buckeyes once healthy, though she would be featured in a small-ball lineup should McGuff opt to tinker with the starters based on a given matchup.

But she can provide significant value

off the bench providing relief for Sheldon. Before Greene's injury last season, she was averaging 10.9 points on 56.0 percent shooting from deep, something Ohio State will need with the loss of Mikesell. And despite playing in only 12 games, she still finished with 60 assists (5.0), fifth most on the team.

Rikki Harris, 5-10, 5th-Sr. (6.6 ppg, 4.1 rpg) – Whenever McGuff is asked about Harris, he often falls back on a certain phrase: high basketball IQ. It's that inherent knowledge of the game that has allowed Harris to step in wherever and whenever over the last two seasons when the Buckeyes have been ravaged by injuries at guard.



Rikki Harris

Last year, those injuries had Harris fill in at point guard following Sheldon and Greene's injuries, and over a stretch of 19 starts in 20 games from Dec. 21, 2022, to March 5, Harris averaged 8.0 points, 4.5 rebounds, 4.3 assists and 1.9 steals for the Buckeyes, showing that she can do it all for Ohio State.

"It was definitely different for me last year," she said. "I played point guard in high school and then went four years without playing it, so it was definitely an adjustment. But I think it was good that Coach was able to see that I could do it. Now he can put me one through four, so I think it's just nice for him that he can trust me and know that I can do that."

Should injuries stay away from Ohio State, it's more likely that Harris will be first off the bench for the Buckeyes at guard given how she is able to impact games once she takes the floor. McGuff also noted that Harris, who is entering her fifth season, has taken on an increased leadership role for the Buckeyes.

"That's the thing I love about her," McGuff said. "Regardless of where we put her, what we ask of her, she always steps up and does something positive for us. She had a really good year last year. She's been really good with her leadership in the offseason, and I think we're going to need that out of her. It's going to be important for us this year."

Kaia Henderson, 5-6, So. (1.0 ppg, 0.3 rpg) – Henderson saw limited action last season as a freshman, appearing in just 13 games and totaling 10 points on 3-of-10 shooting, but Ohio State will have to find a role for her this season as the only returning underclassman guard following the transfers of Costner and Perry.

Her best moments last season came while helping fill the void at guard after Sheldon's initial injury. She had a season-high three points in wins over Ohio on Nov. 17, 2022, and North Alabama on Nov. 27, 2022, and also hit that mark with a made three-pointer in Ohio State's Big Ten Championship Game loss to Iowa on March 5.

A natural point guard, either she or Collins would make logical sense to step into the starting lineup next season, so like the

2023-24 OSU Women's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Nov. 6	USC*
Nov. 12	IUPUI
Nov. 16	Boston College
Nov. 20	East Carolina#
Nov. 22	Oklahoma State#
Nov. 26	Cornell
Dec. 3	at Tennessee
Dec. 5	Ohio
Dec. 10	Penn State
Dec. 15	Grand Valley State
Dec. 18	UCLA
Dec. 22	Belmont
Dec. 30	at Michigan
Jan. 5	at Northwestern
Jan. 11	Rutgers
Jan. 14	Michigan State
Jan. 17	at Maryland
Jan. 25	at Illinois
Jan. 28	at Purdue
Feb. 1	Wisconsin
Feb. 4	Indiana
Feb. 8	at Minnesota
Feb. 11	at Michigan State
Feb. 14	Nebraska
Feb. 22	at Penn State
Feb. 25	Maryland
Feb. 28	Michigan
Mar. 3	at Iowa

* - Naismith Hall of Fame Series, Las Vegas, Nev.
- Pink Flamingo Championship, The Bahamas

other freshmen and sophomores on the roster, any and all minutes she can play could pay dividends down the road.

Jacy Sheldon, 5-10, 5th-Sr. (13.2 ppg, 3.6 rpg) – Among all the offseason moves made by Ohio State, none was more important than being able to welcome back Sheldon, who returns for a fifth and final season in Columbus.

"Making that run last year, we had a really tight-knit group, and I wanted to be a part of that again," she said. "A lot of us are coming back."

"We lost Taylor, which is obviously a huge loss for us, but we've still got a really good group coming back, and I knew we had some really good newcomers coming, too, so that's something I wanted to be a part of. I wanted to chase that run again, chase that title."

Now fully healthy after missing most of last season with the leg injury – though still returning for Ohio State's Big Ten and NCAA Tournament runs – the team is hoping she can return to form. In the three games before she was injured last season, she averaged 14.7 points, 4.3 rebounds, 4.7 assists and an impressive 7.3 steals per game.

But beyond her play on the court, she will continue as a leader for Ohio State, set to cement her legacy during her final season.

"She's such a great player and a great kid, and everything she does and the way she represents our program on and off the court is amazing," McGuff said. "She's the

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

engine that makes our team go in terms of creating pace on offense. She's also incredible with our press and so quick with her feet and her hands, so she's a huge part of what we do. She's had an excellent off-season because she works so hard. I expect her to have an outstanding season."

Emma Shumate, 6-1, R-So. (1.6 ppg, 1.0 rpg) – Ohio State will be hoping for more out of Shumate this season to help fill the void left by Mikesell.

But while Shumate was a noted sharpshooter coming into college, that has not been the case thus far. She shot just 23.1 percent from deep last season, worst among players with at least 10 attempts, while taking the fifth-most three-point tries on the team.

If she can begin providing value with her shot, however, it would offer some versatility for Ohio State considering that she is a force at the rim, collecting 32 rebounds and blocking a team-high 27 shots last year.

"I'm hopeful that Emma can really be impactful for us this year," McGuff said. "She really shoots the ball well, and I think it's hard to compare anybody to Taylor Mikesell, but she could at least soften the blow of losing Taylor if she can have the year she's capable of having."

Celeste Taylor, 5-11, 5th-Sr. (11.4 ppg, 4.8 rpg per game last season at Duke) – There may not have been a player available in the portal who fit better in Ohio State's system than Taylor, who brings a defensive tenacity that few players in the country possess.

Last season, she accounted for 72 steals and was one of the country's best defensive players, ranking sixth in Her Hoop Stats' defensive win shares with 2.8, a statistic which measures the number of wins a player produces through their play on the defensive end.

"She's awesome," Sheldon said. "She's got so much experience under her belt. Defensively, she's amazing. She's going to fit into our system really well. Not only with our press – obviously she's going to make our press better – but she's already helped us improve our half-court defense, and that's something we're going to key in on a lot this year because I think we can be really successful in it."

The one area Ohio State will be looking for Taylor to make a jump is on the offensive end. She averaged just 11.4 points on 39.4 percent shooting from the field and 32.1 percent shooting from deep last season. But a fast-paced offense with opportunities for transition baskets and open threes will give Taylor a chance to refine that part of her game.

"She's just made steady progress over her career," McGuff said, "and I'm hopeful that we can kind of help her take another big step, especially offensively and how we play and highlighting those abilities, because I think it's there. But she's just consistently gotten better, and I'm excited to see what she could do for us this year."

Despite being on campus for only a few months, Taylor has already taken on a leadership role for the Buckeyes, helping to im-

prove not just the team's play on the court, but their communication as well.

"She leads by example in how hard she practices, the intensity that she plays with," McGuff said. "As we aspire to get a little bit better in the half court defensively, she brings that every single day, and I think that's a little bit contagious. She's also a good communicator. She's a mature kid. She's a very mature young woman who communicates with some of our younger people, and it's very helpful to help them grow already."

Taylor Thierry, 6-0, Jr. (13.5 ppg, 6.5 rpg) – Between the dominant play of McMahon and Sheldon, Thierry has seemingly fallen through the cracks at times in terms of receiving her flowers, but she may be the glue that helps keep the team together this season.

She was far-and-away Ohio State's leader in win shares with 6.0. She was not only Ohio State's most efficient shooter, connecting on 62.5 percent of her field-goal attempts, but she was also the team's leading rebounder, nabbing 233, and for good measure also led the Buckeyes with 74 steals.

Her biggest moment came in Ohio State's comeback win over Indiana in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament. She had a 19-point, 12-rebound double-double with three steals in the 79-75 win after trailing by 23 points early in the second half.

"We just had to trust ourselves and trust our shooters and we knew that they were going to come down, and they did," she said. "We made some huge shots."

Given Thierry's strides from year-to-year – jumping from 2.9 points per game her freshman season to 13.5 points last year, beyond improving in almost every other statistical category – another leap could be in store entering her third season.

"I think Taylor Thierry's going to have a great year," McGuff said. "She's an incredible worker. She's very disciplined, she's a great athlete, and she had a great off-season."

CENTER

Faith Carson, 6-4, Fr. – The other of Ohio State's two freshmen is Carson, the reigning Prep Girls Hoops Michigan Player of the Year and Michigan Associated Press Division III Girls Basketball Player of the Year, who averaged 20.5 points, 12.5 rebounds and 5.8 blocks last season.

Those blocks are of particular importance for an Ohio State team that did not have enough of that playmaking ability around the rim. Of the Buckeyes' six leading blockers last season, five were guards, led by Shumate with 27.

More presence in the post with Parks now in the fold means this will be a learning year for Carson, but with the pending departures of Mikulášiková, Parks and Walker, any minutes Carson can accrue this season could be pivotal for next year.

"She's got a lot of skill, and she's got the size and strength that we need," McGuff said. "Now, we do have a lot of post players this year, and she's got a lot to learn in terms of just learning how we do things. But she's got talent, she's got the skill, so hopefully she can make the progress to have an impact this year."



Emma Shumate

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'HOME', 'FOOTBALL', 'BASKETBALL', 'SPORTS', 'FORUM', 'BSB ONLINE', 'EAT & STAY', and a 'LOGIN' button. The main content area features a large image of a football game with the headline 'OHIO STATE STAYS AT NO. 3 IN AP TOP 25'. Below the image, there's a 'Recap: No. 3 Ohio State Downs No. 7 Penn State 20-12' section with a 'READ MORE' link. Another section titled 'Buckeye Leaves: Marvin Harrison Jr., Cade Stover, Jermaine Mathews Jr. Stand Out In 20-12 Win Over Penn State' also has a 'READ MORE' link. At the bottom, there's an 'Availability Report: Denzel Burke Out Against Penn State, TreVeyon Henderson And Emeke Egbuka'.

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Halliday Making His Game Better On The Ice

Stephen Halliday is taking strides, literally, to improve his game in an effort to reach his goal of playing in the NHL.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The sophomore forward led the Buckeyes in scoring last season but knew there were areas he needed to improve. Paramount was his skating. As a big player (6-4, 210), he wasn't the smoothest or fastest gliding across the ice, and he has worked to turn his skating into a positive.

As a fourth-round pick (No. 104 overall) by the Ottawa Senators in the 2022 NHL draft, he has access to the team's staff, and this summer he worked with Shelley Kettles, a former figure skater who is the Senators' technical skating specialist.

"I worked with her every day, almost, for three weeks, four weeks," he said. "I think it made huge strides on my skating. I text her all the time with videos from practice and stuff like that. She's such a huge resource that I'm super fortunate to have.

"She's going to make the trip down (to Columbus), which is great this year for me and Theo," Halliday said in reference to freshman defenseman Theo Wallberg, Ottawa's sixth-round pick (No. 168) in 2022. Both attended

Ottawa's summer development camp for prospects.

Some players seem to be born with natural speed. Others, like Halliday, have to refine their technique. That's where Kettles comes in.

"She had me doing reps in being lower," he said. "Because I'm a bigger guy I kind of do a little straight leg skate. I was skating a little too upright. It's just being lower and getting comfortable being low."

There's a difference between fast and being quick, Halliday added.

"I'm still working on my first couple of steps," he said. "When I get going, I'm pretty fast, but you're never satisfied. I've gotten better, and I'm going to try to continue to do that."

He also spent time over the summer with the Senators' strength and conditioning coaches.

"It was to loosen up my hips a little bit before practice, doing a little bit of extra stuff so I'm more flexible as a big guy, and that always helps me low," he said. "Then obviously, putting on muscle and getting in better shape is always going to make you a little bit lighter and easier to push on the ice. I was doing that this summer, and I think that it's paid off so far."

Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik agrees. Halliday has been reshaping his body since the third of his four junior hockey seasons for Dubuque (Iowa) in 2020-21 before joining the Buckeyes. It was the low point for Halliday, who decided after that season to drop 35 pounds.

"I kind of took it upon myself that I want to play hockey and I want to get better, and that weight was the biggest thing holding me back,

so I felt I definitely addressed it," he told *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* in September 2022.

In his first season at Ohio State, he was honorable-mention All-Big Ten when he had 41 points (nine goals and a team-high 32 assists). Coaches noticed and named Halliday to the pre-season All-Big Ten first team for this season, the only Buckeye on the list.

"He's been able to take the next step," Rohlik said. "I think he's put in a really good summer. He's in better shape, and he studies the game."

Through five games this season, Halliday has four points (one goal, three assists), evidence of taking advice from the Ohio State staff to heart.

"I think that I've done great work over the past couple of summers just building to this point," he said. "It's shown in all the conditioning we've done, all the physical testing. Compared to years past, it's been a lot better."

"I know the coaches challenged me at the end of last year to come in even better shape than it was last year, and I felt like I've done that. So, credit to them for charging me, and then a credit for everyone pushing me, and then obviously credit to myself for doing the work."

Halliday's desire for more quickness is not just physical. The game is faster and decisions have to be made quicker than what he was used to in juniors. Then, it goes to another level in the NHL, and he's talked to Mason Lohrei and Cole McWard about that subject.

The defensemen were sophomores for the Buckeyes last season and are now eyeing NHL careers. McWard debuted for the Vancouver Canucks in April, and Lohrei is expected to do so this season for the Boston Bruins.

"I've been talking to Mason and Cole, especially last year," Halliday said. "I wanted to know what the program was like because they experienced it. The biggest thing they told me was that everything's just quicker and faster every year. They've seen it firsthand in college and now the pros."

Halliday is a self-titled "hockey nerd" who loves to study video and talk shop with anyone he can. He played in a Columbus summer hockey league in late July with several Columbus Blue Jackets players and observed what they did.

"I thought it was really good experience," he said. "It was great to see some competitive hockey and see NHL guys play. (Patrik) Laine has a world-class shot, and I got to see it close up."

"Stuff like that makes you realize how good some of these guys are and honestly probably inspires a bunch of us to try and get better at our shot too. Laine's deception on the shot is a big thing, and I've been trying to watch him."

Laine has one of the hardest shots in the NHL and has been one of the league's most feared scorers, so he's a good player to follow. But Halliday is also friends with a pair of former Michigan players – Kent Johnson and Adam Fantilli – who are in the early stages of their NHL lives in Columbus. Johnson, in his second full season with the Blue Jackets, had a mutual friend at Ohio State who introduced the Wolverine to the Buckeye.

"I'll send him clips of my games, and he relays what he sees," Halliday said of Johnson. "He's a really good source, and he's obviously at the highest level possible, so I have a really good connection there. He actually came to a couple of my games last year, and he's always trying to

help me get better at my game. I'm really lucky to have a guy like that."

Johnson sees a bright future for Halliday.

"He's a great player," Johnson said to BSB. "I like talking hockey with him and talking about little stuff, whether it's on the power play or whatever. It's really cool. I think he's going to be in the NHL soon. He's really good and works really hard."

Halliday played youth hockey in the Toronto area at the same time as Fantilli but doesn't know him as well, although they have crossed paths in Columbus. They played against each other last season in college before Fantilli was chosen third overall in this year's draft. He is now in his rookie season with the Blue Jackets.

"I respect his game, and he's a very good player," Fantilli said.

Another aspect of Halliday's game he is seeking to improve is leadership.

"I'm not a huge vocal guy or anything like that but I think guys will respect that I'll be myself," he said. "I go to the rink and I'm always willing to do extra stuff, and they see me do that. I always want to watch video with guys if they want. That's kind of the leader that I am."

Not Too Late

Much like former Buckeye forward David Gust making his NHL debut for the Chicago Blackhawks last season at age 29, ex-Buckeye goalie Matt Tomkins, 29, played his first NHL game for the Tampa Bay Lightning on Oct. 15, 11 years after being drafted by the Blackhawks.

Tomkins allowed four goals on 37 shots in the 5-2 loss to the Senators. He played in Sweden last season. Tomkins was with the Buckeyes from 2013-17.

"We were just talking about it as a staff," Rohlik said on Oct. 18. "His journey is absolutely unbelievable, not just his perseverance but playing in the Olympics (for Canada) and going overseas and all of a sudden, he gets a chance. It's a pretty amazing feeling."

Bounce Back

After being humbled 7-1 in the Big Ten opener at No. 7 Michigan on Oct. 20, the No. 13 Buckeyes rebounded the next night for a 2-2 tie followed by earning the extra point in the conference standings after winning the shootout 2-1 in five rounds.

"I liked our response tonight," Rohlik said. "We did a lot of good things."

The Buckeyes (2-1-2, 0-1-1 Big Ten) took the lead in the second game on Patrick Guzzo's first goal of the season in the first period before the Wolverines (3-2-1, 1-0-1) scored a pair of power-play goals less than three minutes apart early in the third. Freshman Ryan Gordon got the tying goal at 15:01 with classmates Sam Deckhut and Thomas Weis assisting.

After the scoreless five-minute overtime, which included six saves by Buckeye goalie Logan Terness, Halliday and Gordon scored in the shootout, and Terness made a stop in the bottom of the fifth round for the win.

In the first game, Weis tied it 1-1 in the first period, but U-M scored three goals apiece in the next two periods.

For a recap of the Michigan series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



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Nittany Lions No Match For Ohio State Defense

The 39th game between two of the nation's top 10 teams in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21 had "instant classic" written all over it before the football was even kicked off. Penn State and Ohio State both had been stingy in giving up points and were ranked second and third, respectively, in scoring defense.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

Both programs were averaging over 400 yards per game offensively with Ohio State averaging more yards passing – 308.0 to 223.3 – while Penn State edged out the Buckeyes via the ground, 203.3-135.0. The biggest statistical area of separation between the two teams was in turnover margin and team sacks. The Nittany Lions were plus 10 in turnovers gained compared to just two for Ohio State. Penn State also had sacked the opposing quarterbacks an amazing 27 times to the Buckeyes' 10 sacks.

Even though Ohio State was a slight favorite going into the game, it was apparent the Buckeyes had to emphasize ball security and protecting quarterback Kyle McCord in order to win and remain undefeated.

The Buckeyes would end up walking away with a solid 20-12 victory over the Nittany Lions, and once again head coach James Franklin would return to State College, in a not-so Happy Valley, with another loss to the Buckeyes and Ryan Day. Franklin has done a very good job with the Penn State program but can't seem to break the spell the Buckeyes and, to a lesser extent, Michigan have over him.

The Nittany Lions will get a chance later this season to get back in the Big Ten East race when the Wolverines play Penn State in State College on Nov. 11. The Nittany Lions definitely have the defense to compete with Michigan, but their offense must find a way to put more than 12 points on the board against the Maize and Blue.

Defense Ruled The Day

For avid defensive football fans, Ohio State's win over Penn State was the personification of how a football game was supposed to be played. It was a low-scoring, hard-hitting battle between two heavyweights who left it all on the turf by day's end. The Nittany Lions, the nation's fifth-best scoring offense entering the game, mustered up only 12 points against the Buckeyes, significantly less than their 44.3 average coming into Columbus.

The Jim Knowles defense allowed the Penn State offense only 240 total yards for the afternoon. The Nittany Lions had one late touchdown to go along with two field goals for the day. An offense that had been bulldozing over much weaker opponents was forced to punt nine times due to the Ohio State defense that swarmed to the football like a wake of vultures feeding on its prey. As a matter of fact, Penn State punter Riley Thompson touched the football as many times as running backs Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen each carried the football.

The mighty Buckeye defense showed no mercy on first-year starting quarterback Drew Allar, whom the Silver Bullets sacked four times. Even when the Buckeye defensive front didn't get to Allar, they were able to collapse the pocket and force errant throws. Buckeye defensive linemen Caden Curry, J.T. Tuimolou and Mike Hall each had a hit on Allar as he released the football. A Penn State offense that had a third-down conversion rate of 48.3 percent coming into the game ended up converting just one of 16 third-down attempts, the one conversion coming on their very last drive. Sometimes statistics don't tell the whole story, but they sure did in this game.

The secondary of Ohio State is the most improved unit on the team. They have been able to play a lot of players without losing their ability to dominate opposing offenses. They break quickly to the ball in zone coverage and do an equally effective job when playing man-to-man.

The secondary is much improved in taking proper angles to the football and tackling in space. The Buckeye corners and safeties had five of Ohio State's six passes broken up along with 23 tackles. Jordon Hancock and Josh Proctor had their best games as Buckeyes. Hancock had five tackles, four of which were solo, and broke up one pass while Proctor tallied four tackles, three solos and a tackle for loss and broke up two passes. The entire secondary was outstanding for the afternoon even without their best player, Denzel Burke.

The Buckeye linebacking corps was equally effective as the defensive line and secondary. As was the case in most games this season, Tommy Eichenberg finished the game as the leading tackler with eight stops. Eichenberg, Steele Chambers and Cody Simon were all over the field making solid open-field tackles and harassing Allar when running the blitz.

The Buckeye offense bested the Penn State offense by 125 yards (365 to 240) largely due to the play of Knowles' warriors who kept the Nittany Lion offense on the sidelines a large portion of the afternoon. The Buckeye offense ran a season-high 76 plays and held the football for nearly nine minutes more than the Nittany Lions in terms of time of possession, leading 34:24 to 25:36. Buckeye fans couldn't be more pleased with the way defense shut down one of the most talented and physical offenses Penn State has had in recent years.

Ground Game Must Improve

The Buckeye offense had a major task in front of them going against the nation's No. 1 defense that had been holding opposing teams to just 193.7 yards per game. Day's offense would put up 365 yards for the afternoon, but only 79 of them came on the ground.

The passing attack of the Buckeyes was very solid with McCord spreading the pigskin around to seven different players. McCord completed 62.9 percent of his passes while targeting Marvin Harrison Jr. 16 times and connecting on 11 of those targets.

McCord was efficient and didn't turn the ball over. He is a young, ever maturing quarterback who has the potential to be special. McCord again responded in a big game by managing the offense and making plays at crucial times. Even though McCord wasn't spectacular against the Nittany Lions, he was steady

and by far outplayed Allar, the other first-year starting quarterback who was on the field.

Miyan Williams was the running back on call against the Nittany Lions with TreVeyon Henderson out. In a stable of running backs who can't seem to stay healthy, Williams is, without a doubt, a powerful runner with good vision and enough breakaway speed to be one of the best backs in the Big Ten. Even though his longest run of the day was just a 12-yarder, he helped keep some drives alive and was solid at pass protection.

Ohio State's short-yardage and red-zone running attack was average at best. Ohio State runners averaged 1.9 yards per carry and had too many negative-yardage plays. Five times the Buckeyes were in the red zone but came away with just two touchdowns. Adding to the short-yardage misery, Ohio State was stopped on the 2-yard line going in for a score late in the third quarter, denying the Buckeyes an opportunity to put Penn State all but away for the afternoon.

The Buckeye offense has put some good wrinkles into their short-yardage package the last couple of weeks, forcing opposing defenses to make needed adjustments. The main thing in terms of short-yardage production seems to be in the execution of the particular blocking schemes. Too many times there simply isn't enough push at the point of attack by the offensive line, a misread of the hole by the backs or a breakdown in the blocking scheme itself.

One thing is for certain: The problem

needs to be solved quickly if there is any hope of winning the Big Ten.

Heisman-Worthy Harrison

Harrison has Penn State's number. He caught 10 passes last year in Happy Valley, leading the Buckeyes to a 44-31 victory over the Nittany Lions, and had a career-high 11 receptions for 162 yards and a touchdown in the hard-fought victory this year.

A lot of the credit for the victory in Ohio Stadium goes to McCord for his accuracy throwing the football along with the Buckeye offensive line which gave McCord the needed time to make the completions. The offensive line has had issues in the short-yardage run game but has been exceptional at pass protection this season. The Buckeye line gave up just two sacks to a physical and athletic Penn State defensive front that was averaging 4.5 sacks per game.

Harrison has caught passes in 21 consecutive games and is the first Buckeye in history to have five games of 160 yards or more. He is the whole package when it comes to being a receiver. Harrison is an excellent route runner, is soft and sure-handed, makes acrobatic catches, excels at yardage after the reception and is a very good blocker. A wide receiver has not won the Heisman Trophy since 2020, and you can count on one hand the number who have ever done so, but Harrison may very well be the next.

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Nittany Lions Lack Roar Since Joining Big Ten

So much is made of the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry, as it should be, that it's easy to forget the dominance the Buckeyes have enjoyed over the other power team in football's toughest division.

**EXNER
POINT
Rich Exner**

Did you realize Ohio State has a seven-game winning streak over Penn State? That the Buckeyes have won 11 of the last 12 meetings? And that going back to Ohio State's 2002 national championship season, Ohio State is 18-4 in the series.

And if you go all the way back to 1993 – the year the school then often known as the Beast of the East entered the Big Ten – only in the early years did things go back and forth a bit. The series was 5-4 in the Buckeyes' advantage in Big Ten play from 1993-2001 before Ohio State broke away to win 18 of the last 22. Before Penn State entered the Big Ten, the Nittany Lions were 6-2 in games played from 1912 through 1980.

Yes, Penn State did roll to a 12-0 perfect season in 1994. But that was one of just two outright Big Ten titles for Penn State in 30 seasons (the other being 2016), to go along with co-championships in 2005 and 2008.

What happened, I would argue, was that the introduction to competition for Penn State – still a fine program but not as strong as it may have looked while playing as an independent in the East – has led to the Nittany Lions' struggles at the highest level.

Nine times from 1968 until 1993 Penn State had undefeated or one-loss seasons. The Nittany Lions have had only two such seasons since – the undefeated run in 1994 and an 11-1 record in 2005.

Big Ten Records

Penn State has fit in as a top-tier Big Ten team, just not at Ohio State's level.

I took a look at the 31 seasons of Big Ten football with Penn State (through Oct. 21) to get an idea where Penn State and the others have fit in. The answer is fourth, just a shade behind Wisconsin. Here is the combined standings for those years, ordered by winning percentage in Big Ten games.

1. Ohio State – 205-41-1 (.832) in Big Ten play, 323-66-1 (.829) overall.
2. Michigan – 171-78-0 (.687) and 266-115-0 (.698).
3. Wisconsin – 159-86-3 (.647) and 271-115-4 (.700).
4. Penn State – 158-93-0 (.629) and 262-118-0 (.689).
5. Iowa – 140-110-1 (.560) and 230-148-1 (.608).
6. Michigan State – 131-117-1 (.528) and 218-157-1 (.581).
7. Nebraska – 49-57-0 (.462) and 79-75-0

(.513).

8. Northwestern – 110-139-0 (.442) and 182-187-1 (.493).

9. Purdue – 102-143-3 (.417) and 168-198-3 (.459).

10. Minnesota – 94-155-0 (.378) and 183-187-0 (.495).

11. Maryland – 25-54-0 (.316) and 50-62-0 (.446).

12. Illinois – 77-173-1 (.309) and 139-222-1 (.385).

13. Indiana – 63-186-0 (.253) and 131-226-0 (.367).

14. Rutgers – 16-68-0 (.190) and 39-76-0 (.339).

Add that all together – the 10 teams in the league before Penn State are a combined 1,252-1,228-10 in conference play. Newcomers Penn State, Nebraska, Maryland and Rutgers are a combined 248-272, mainly thanks to Penn State.

Penn State Memories

Despite the lopsided nature of this series, there have been plenty of memorable moments, starting with the crowd atmosphere. Regardless of whether the game is at Penn State or in Columbus, the stadiums are rocking. This year was no exception, even with a noon start.

The mother of one former Buckeye defender once told me how much her son loved playing at Penn State because the place was so electric for night games. I think the same could be said for Penn State players visiting Ohio Stadium.

As for plays on the field, there are many, but for me one play stands out beyond the rest.

It was the game-closer of Ohio State's overtime victory in 2014, en route to the national title that year. I happened to be seated a couple of rows from the top of the stadium and well above the light standards looking down from darkness, when Joey Bosa ran right through a running back/would-be-blocker for the game-ending sack.

It's one of the most amazing plays you'll ever see at a key moment. If you don't recall the play, just Google "Bosa sack Penn State" to find the video. It's worth the effort to watch it.

End Of An Era

This will be the last of the Ohio State-Penn State games as division opponents – one of the casualties of the Big Ten's expansion to 18 teams. This was always a premium game on the schedule, year after year.

The new formatting without divisions means Penn State will not always be on the schedule. But, at least for the short-term, the matchup won't go away.

The newly released Big Ten schedules for 2024 through 2028 have Ohio State visiting Penn State in 2024 and the Nittany Lions returning to Columbus in 2025. However, in 2026 and 2027, they won't play. The series will resume with Ohio State playing at Penn State in 2028.

All that, of course, assumes the Big Ten will remain at "only" 18 teams. What's the chance of that happening?

New Big Ten Schedule

I'm glad that this new schedule was cre-

ated with an opportunity to play all 17 conference opponents at least once at home and once away over the five-year period. I just wish they had made it every four years, which was possible.

The first year has Ohio State playing at Oregon and Penn State and hosting Michigan. That's a grouping of powerful opponents. For example, ahead of Ohio State's win over Penn State, Michigan, Ohio State, Penn State and Oregon were a combined 24-1, ranking Nos. 2, 3, 7 and 9 nationally in the AP top 25 released on Oct. 15.

With so many national powers in the league – as of now – it will be interesting to see how much the schedules will play into determining who makes it to the Big Ten title games each year. I could see heavyweights delivering losses among themselves while someone with a softer schedule in a given year slips into the title game.

I say "as of now" because today's powers may not remain powers.

In season one of this new format, it appears Michigan has drawn the short straw. U-M will be on the road against Washington and Ohio State, while having home games against Oregon and USC.

But in 2025, things likely will be a little tougher for Ohio State, with home games against Penn State and UCLA and away games against Michigan, Washington and Wisconsin.

Back To 2023

If you have been frustrated watching Ohio State drop in the national rankings this year before edging back up while Georgia has struggled more than the Buckeyes and Michigan hasn't played anyone – don't be. Things will sort out, as they always do.

There have been a few – and only a few – legitimate debates about who was put in and left out of the playoffs by the time all the games were played in previous seasons.

Remember, both the AP and the coaches rankings mean nothing. The first College Football Playoff rankings will be released on Oct. 31.

If this season is like most previous ones, the committee rankings will be far more logical than the AP and coaches rankings, and if history holds true, the AP and coaches polls will then fall in line with the committee in the weeks that follow.

Based on performance to date, taking into account quality wins and game control – two factors the committee has leaned toward heavily in previous years – Ohio State has an argument to be the No. 1 team in the country.

The committee may or may not see it that way. But the solid win over Penn State means that Ohio State is much closer to securing a playoff spot. If Ohio State goes into the Michigan game 11-0, that could be enough again, regardless of the outcome of that game. An 11-1 OSU team would very likely have the best, or nearly the best, résumé among one-loss teams.

But of more concern now should be avoiding a slip-up at Wisconsin. Iowa's 12-10 loss to Minnesota should serve as a reminder that nothing is guaranteed.

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Jim Dandy Defense Erasing Some Doubters

This season has essentially been a de facto referendum within Buckeye Nation on the reign of Jim Knowles as defensive coordinator at Ohio State. Knowles arrived last season among much fanfare and with a hefty contract, creating high expectations among a defense-starved fan base (not to mention Ryan Day).

Things started off well enough for Knowles and his troops, with improvement shown on his side of the ball almost immediately. But a stunning collapse at the end of the season, especially against Michigan, left those same fans on edge. Immediately following the season began assurances that Knowles' system required some getting used to by the players and better things were yet to come.

Sure enough, the defense looked much improved to open the 2023 season, but frequently against less than overpowering opposition. However, the defense seemed to get better each week, and in the course of the most recent four games, the Buckeyes stymied two top-10 traditional powers, culminated by their stunningly dominant defensive performance in the critical 20-12 victory over Penn State.

Knowles seems to be winning the referendum, with even the most critical Buckeye fans taking notice. Only five games remain on the regular-season schedule, and it seems that there is only one way that the colorful defensive coordinator can ultimately lose this vote of confidence. You and I both know what that scenario is, so I am not even going to go down that road.

As of now, the Buckeyes find themselves ranked third in the nation in scoring defense (10.0), fourth in total defense (260.1) and – are you ready for this? – sixth in passing defense (159.6). Most importantly, they are 7-0 with two marquee wins on their résumé.

Ironically, the Buckeyes trail Michigan and Penn State in all three of those defensive categories, but the numbers for the Wolverines and Nittany Lions are padded by the strength of their schedules so far.

Here's another way to look at it.

If you take Ohio State's defensive stats against *only* Notre Dame and Penn State, the Buckeyes would still be ranked third nationally in scoring defense (13.0), 14th in total defense (295.5) – one spot ahead of Alabama at 305.6 – and 17th in passing defense (183.0).

That's against two top-10 opponents at the time. That's getting it done.

The stat I can't get over in the game against the Lions is that Penn State converted on just 1 of 16 third-down attempts. That's playing some defense and at key times. In fact, the Lions were 0 for 14 before their final drive of the afternoon. By that point, PSU, trailing 20-6 with just 2:41 to play, was battling not only Ohio State, but the clock. Knowles surely had his stop troops in some sort of prevent defense (they've really been playing that all season) and despite the third-down conversion, which came on Penn State's third-to-the-last play of the game, the Buckeyes forced their opponents to march 12 plays for the score, eating up all but 29 seconds of the game clock.

In fairness to the Nittany Lions, lost in all the jaw-dropping over the third-down conversion rate was the fact the visitors also converted a fourth down on that final drive.

In case you were wondering, Penn State came into the game converting 48.3 percent of its third-down situations.

Another way to gauge the success of Knowles and his defense is to look at the play of the opposing quarterbacks in Ohio State's two biggest

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

games of the season. In the week leading up to the Notre Dame game, all we heard about was Sam Hartman. And in the week leading up to the Penn State game, we heard even more about Drew Allar, who was not only playing well, but he was from Ohio.

Hartman ended up having a pedestrian outing against the Buckeyes, completing 17 of 25 passes for a solid 68.0 completion percentage, but for just 175 yards and only one score with a long of 28, leading his team to just 14 points.

Allar, meanwhile, out-and-out struggled against the Buckeyes, completing only 18 of 42 passes for a lowly 42.9 percent and 191 yards, 73 on the final drive with the game all but out of reach, and one score. He led his team to even fewer points, with 12. He had entered the Ohio State game connecting on 65.2 percent of his passes and averaging 209.0 yards, with the Lions averaging 44.3 points per outing.

Despite all the hype in the press, the Buckeyes made these guys look like run-of-the mill quarterbacks, or in the case of Allar, worse.

"It sucked," Allar admitted of his play.

I did want to give credit to both Hartman and Allar. Neither of them threw an interception against the Buckeyes. Ohio State has just five interceptions on the season. But with the defense playing so well, who is counting? Well, me, I guess. Picky, picky.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the line of scrimmage, Kyle McCord looked slightly off – like he was even struggling – for most of the game. But when you pick up the stat sheet, he had completed 22 of 35 passes (62.9 percent) with a game sealing-touchdown. He, too, was without an interception, though he had the good fortune of having a potential game-changing strip-sack for a touchdown erased by a Penn State defensive holding call.

I think one of the reasons we are sometimes surprised by his final stats for a game is that, as he did against Penn State, he has a tendency to start slowly. Against the Lions, in the first half he was just 11 of 21 for 52.4 percent and 125 yards. In the second half, when the game was on the line, he completed 11 of 14 passes for 78.6 percent and 161 yards and his lone, but game-sealing touchdown.

Buckeye fans are a little spoiled after watching Dwayne Haskins, Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud for the past five seasons. Sometimes McCord's passes don't seem as sharp as those of his predecessors. But he has quietly put together a season where he is completing 63.9 percent of his passes while averaging 276.7 yards a game with 12 touchdowns and only one interception. He is 21st in the county in passing yards per contest and 17th in passing efficiency (161.6), not bad for a first-year starter with limited previous experience (hint to Ryan Day for the future).

With the Buckeye defense playing the way it is, McCord doesn't need to be Haskins, Fields or Stroud. He just needs to manage the game, be a leader and limit costly turnovers. If he does so, I will take my chances the rest of the way, including Nov. 25.

Now about that run game.

Retro Tight End

I know I said in the last issue that I was at least temporarily suspending my traditional tight end watch, because Cade Stover was playing at

an elite level week in and week out. He didn't disappoint again this week, pulling in another four passes for another 70 yards and a sparkling 17.5-yard average, giving him 27 catches for 429 yards and three touchdowns on the season.

Ironically, in the From The Pages Of BSB feature in this issue (see page 6), another top Buckeye tight end, John Frank, is recalled for his efforts in 1983. Frank had reeled in 16 receptions for 205 yards and two touchdowns in the first three games that season, including his famous effort in an upset of Oklahoma in Norman, where he almost single-handedly led the Buckeyes with seven catches for 108 yards and scored from 16 and 15 yards out in the 24-14 OSU victory.

But according to the note in the BSB feature, teams got wise to Frank, and he was fairly quiet after that fast start. In the next three weeks, Frank caught just three passes for 21 yards.

In a 21-11 win over Michigan State on Oct. 22, however, Frank showed his All-American capabilities, much to the liking of first-time starting quarterback Jim Karsatos. Frank worked open for five first-half catches and a career-high 115 yards, including a 39-yard scoring pass that gave the Buckeyes a 14-3 halftime lead.

"John Frank played an outstanding football game today," coach Earle Bruce said. "He blocked well, blocked some very good people for a long time. He caught passes all over the field, giving great effort. He is truly an All-American football player."

Frank would end up with 45 catches for 641 yards and four touchdowns that season, all team highs, proving that there was life at the Ohio State tight end position in the years B.C. – before Cade. At the time that was the third-highest season reception total for any position in Buckeye history.

While Frank did not garner All-American honors that season, as Bruce predicted, he was named All-Big Ten.

The next spring, he was drafted in the second round by the San Francisco 49ers and was a two-time Super Bowl champion for the team.

Unless opposing defenses figure out how to negate Stover the way the opposition did to Frank back in 1983, the current tight end has a good shot to blow by the retro tight end's numbers from 40 years ago. Maybe he'll have a game against Michigan like Frank did against the No. 2 Sooners back in '83.

I Was The Winner

In the more than 42 years of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we have had dozens and dozens of contests and I have called dozens and dozens of winners. The phone call generally goes the same way.

First, the winner doesn't believe it's me and thinks it's a scam. Then I finally convince them that I am the publisher of Buckeye Sports Bulletin and they invariably say the same thing.

"I can't believe it," they say. "I never win anything," which I can relate to because I never win anything either.

I was expecting more of the same, when I called Jack Wyatt of Zoar, Ohio, the winner of the recent Subscriber Special contest with its prize of tickets to the Penn State game and some other goodies from Roosters and City Barbeque to make it a fun trip. But this was completely different.

"As much as I would like to go to the Penn State game," Mr. Wyatt told me, "I'm recovering from a broken hip and have been so for quite some time."

I was briefly taken aback, but not for long, because he was completely upbeat.

We ended up chatting about his injury, Buckeye football, Zoar, and all the time he made me laugh and laugh some more. It was such fun in the middle of a football season workday.

Even without being able to use the tickets, Mr. Wyatt is a winner and I was a winner for being able to spend some time on the phone with him.

Get well soon Mr. Wyatt. Call me anytime. And I hope you enjoyed the game, even if it was only on TV. Look at it this way. At least it wasn't on Peacock.

Trial Giveaway Growing

As you surely know by now (I've beaten you over the head with it), we are offering a no-cost way for readers to help strengthen BSB by providing names and addresses of potential subscribers so that we can introduce them to Buckeye Sports Bulletin with four free trial issues. The promotion is really picking up steam, with more and more subscribers sending in names – many sending multiple names – each week. And they are even heeding our request to send new names, rather than names that we already have.

You, too, can be one of the cool kids.

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 or (800) 760-2862. There is absolutely no cost or obligation to you or the recipient.

Remember. If you are having trouble coming up with a Buckeye fan, try your children or grandchildren. They may end up enjoying BSB and it will give us a leg up among those desirable 18- to 35-year-olds.

Full Disclosure

I thought that BSB mail delivery was getting better, but I have to be honest and say it is not improving the way we would like. After the postal holiday on Monday, Oct. 9, we had perhaps our worst delivery issue ever with the paper covering the Maryland game, which was mailed on Tuesday, the 10th. I know some of you have *still* not received that issue. Delivery of the Oct. 21 issue covering the Purdue game has been only slightly better.

It has been very discouraging for us here at BSB World Headquarters to take the dozens of calls each day about slow or no delivery, but it has been made easier by how gracious and understanding the vast majority of you have been. I am still working hard on it with our postmaster (a BSB subscriber) and I am hoping we may ultimately see some improvement down the stretch.

In the meantime, don't forget that the complete issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers, upon completion of each paper. If you are not already enjoying this complimentary service, see the simple instructions on page 7 of this issue.

You can also upgrade your existing subscription to first-class mail in an envelope for the remainder of football season for just \$17 and \$27 through football recruiting in February. To upgrade, simply reach out to us at the above-mentioned phone numbers or post office box with your check or credit card information. Be sure to mention the "football" or "recruiting" upgrade.

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