

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 43, No. 10

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 18, 2023

## OSU Wallops MSU 38-3 As Regular Season Winds Down



# Stretch Run

SONNY BROCKWAY

**ROUNDING INTO FORM** — Behind a stellar day from quarterback Kyle McCord and wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. (18), Ohio State turned in one of the team's best performances of the season in a 38-3 win over visiting Michigan State on Nov. 11.

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Among the adages and cliches that Ohio head coach Ryan Day will utilize throughout a season, one that he often falls back on is once the calendar flips to November, it is time for the Buckeyes to start playing their best football.

"We want to be playing our best football down the stretch," Day said on Oct. 31.

"This time of year you want to be enhancing the things you're doing well and improving the things that you feel like you need to improve on."

That was a sentiment echoed by defensive line coach Larry Johnson at Skull Session before the team's home matchup with Michigan State on Nov. 11.

"Our goal is simple: to play our best football in November," he said in front of the gathered crowd at St. John Arena. "That is our goal. That is what we're going to do tonight in front of you: play our best game."

Call it an educated guess by Johnson or call him a prophet, but don't call him wrong.

Ohio State came out in front of 105,137 fans under the lights at Ohio Stadium, wearing gray alternate uniforms for the first time since 2017, and played the team's unquestioned most complete outing of the season, delivering a 38-3 beatdown of the visiting Spartans after leading 35-3 after the first half.

"I think that's the kind of start we've been shooting for all year, getting out of the gate, putting points up on the board and being consistent that entire (first) half," quarterback Kyle McCord said. "They took some of the starters out pretty early in that second half, but I think this was a pretty complete game."

"I thought we could have maybe finished a little better on those final drives I was in. (With) the defense giving up three points and then the offense starting fast, I feel like we definitely got off on the right foot and just kept down there rolling. I would say it's probably one of our more complete games."

It was clear from the outset that the Buckeyes were playing with a different gear. It was the first time in nearly two months — since Ohio State's 17-14 win at Notre Dame on Sept. 23 — that all of Ohio State's regular offensive starters were available, with wideout Emeka Egbuka playing and running back TreVeyon Henderson looking fully healthy after missing several games and tight end Cade Stover returning after being out the previous week at Rutgers.

Though not all of Ohio State's offensive struggles in recent weeks can be hand-waved away by return from injuries considering the amount of overall talent on the field, it was a welcome change to play with a full deck of cards.

"I feel like we're getting all of our pieces out and you're starting to see our identity forge a little bit on offense," Day said. "Sometimes it takes a little bit longer to figure that out, and I think you're seeing

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Continued On Page 8

# FAN FORUM

## Buckeye Leaves

*Ohio State turned in one of the team's most complete performances of the season in its 38-3 win against Michigan State on Nov. 11, leaving no shortage of players who stood out in the victory. Here are some of the choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves:*

**Patrick Engels, BSB:** My Buckeye Leaf goes to tight end Cade Stover, who returned with a bang for the Buckeyes after missing last week's game against Rutgers.

Stover's presence was felt early and often for Ohio State's offense, where he corralled an impressive seven catches for 79 yards in the first half alone. Stover seemed to be Kyle McCord's first read early in the game, and it showed when he made a number of sure-handed catches towards the middle of the field.

No catch for Stover was bigger than his 18-yard touchdown at the end of the first half, though. The veteran tight end found a seam through the middle of the field and hauled in an impressive back-shoulder catch from McCord for the score, giving the Buckeyes a convincing 35-3 lead at halftime from which they would never look back.

**Braden Moles, BSB:** Freshman safety Malik

Hartford got just his second career start, filling in for the injured Josh Proctor, but Ohio State's secondary did not skip a beat with Hartford in the game, so he gets my Buckeye Leaf.

Hartford finished with four tackles – all solo – including a third-down stop in the second quarter. While he did pick up a pass-interference penalty later in the game, it was the lone mistake on the day for the first-year Buckeye, who should be able to build on this positive performance moving forward.

**Greg Wilson, BSB:** Marvin Harrison Jr. was back to showing off his skills as the best wide receiver in college football, and it didn't take long. The Buckeyes scored three touchdowns in their first three drives, and each of them were from Harrison.

The first was a rushing touchdown, the first of his career, for 19 yards to put Ohio State up 7-0. The second was a 26-yard over-the-shoulder catch that could have been one of the best catches of many other receivers' careers, but for Harrison it was just another day. The third was at the beginning of the second quarter, and with a one-on-one matchup, he created multiple yards of space for the easy score.

He finished with seven catches for 149 yards and two touchdowns – as well as the rushing score – and was the leading receiver on the team yet again.

## Subscribers

**Tiffin Buckeye:** Marvin Harrison Jr. – need I say more?

**BuckeyeScott:** McCord with his best game of the year. His ceiling is high.

**John Lanning:** Pick the tree clean and give the team leaves. Best overall game so far.

**R1TBDBITL:** Xavier Johnson for 71 all-purpose yards and (drum roll, please) the O-line, who gave up zero sacks and only two tackles for loss.

**Michael Bauer:** When the Buckeyes win like that, everybody gets a leaf!

**Mcarr:** In a game like that, you could give a leaf to almost everybody, but it is hard not to give special recognition to the often-maligned McCord. Not only did he end up with a great stat line, but he comfortably used all of his weapons at hand – and there are a lot of them – and had no picks, no sacks and no intentional grounding penalties. I am hopeful he is rounding into form at just the right time.

**PeyoteBuck:** I give my leaves to McCord. He was on a roll and made some amazing passes. And the comeback kid Cade Stover earned his keep. The whole team functioned as one.



## From The Message Board

**Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord turned in perhaps his best performance of the season in the Buckeyes' 38-3 win over Michigan State on Nov. 11, throwing for a career-high 335 yards and tying a career high with three touchdowns passes. We asked readers in the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what their assessment has been this season of Ohio State's junior signal caller. Here are some of the responses:**

"If Kyle is kept clean, he is the best QB in the B1G 10. Fans are way too hard on the kid. I'm glad he's the QB for this team."

– **Tiffin Buckeye**

"Critics of Kyle McCord forget that he didn't have the fall camp first-team snaps to himself. He has also had some ankle issues. The OL has also taken time to play together. Considering these, McCord's performance has been awesome. He has the potential to turn out to be the best of Ryan Day's college QBs."

– **AnthonyBuckeye**

"For most of this season, Kyle McCord has reminded

me of a more talented Craig Krenzel. No matter how many mistakes, when a play absolutely had to be made, Kyle, like Craig, came through with the perfect pass. And much like in the 2002 season, I have fretted on the edge of my seat as the Buckeyes strained to pull away to wins. The MSU game was different; it seemed like all the lights came on for McCord, and once that happens for a quarterback, they usually stay on for good. His footwork was outstanding, which led to precision passes, which led to a dominant win. If McCord can take that precision to Ann Arbor (and the O-line can buy him time), the Buckeyes win!"

– **Michael Bauer**

"He's still a work in progress. As the O-line improves, Kyle improves. He needs to run away from pressure and tuck and run occasionally."

– **R1TBDBITL**

"Obviously his best performance of the season. But when you consider that inconsistency has been his Achilles heel, I'm not going to get too high, just as I have not gotten too low after some of his lesser performances. Let's see if he can string two great performances together – or better yet, three!"

– **Poster That Harley Built**

"Kyle McCord's only problem is that he follows the

names of Dwayne Haskins, Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud, all NFL first-round draft picks. You have to remember that this is Kyle's first year as a full-time starter. As the year has progressed so has his performance. I'm confident in his future as the Buckeye QB."

– **BuckeyeScott**

"I think this game against MSU gave McCord more confidence and refined his technique. I like his cool demeanor. He will need it when we travel North."

– **PeyoteBuck**

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No. 1	Sept. 9	No. 13	Dec. 16
No. 2	Sept. 16	No. 14	Jan. 13
No. 3	Sept. 23	No. 15	Jan. 27
No. 4	Oct. 7	No. 16	Feb. 17
No. 5	Oct. 14	No. 17	March 2
No. 6	Oct. 21	No. 18	March 16
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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# Did The Real McCord Just Stand Up?

Back before the Earth had cooled and dinosaurs still roamed free, I spent several care-free summer afternoons and evenings watching game shows with my grandmother.

One of her favorites was “To Tell the Truth,” a show featuring four celebrity panelists tasked with determining which of three contestants was telling the truth about their identity. Once the panelists had asked a series of questions and then selected which contestant they thought was telling the truth, the show’s announcer would say, “Will the real (person’s name) please stand up?”

I feel like perhaps Ohio State fans have been playing their own version of that old game show for much of this season, particularly regarding the starting quarterback.

Just one week after playing every bit the wide-eyed role of first-year starter, Kyle McCord turned in the finest performance of his college career so far, leading the Buckeyes to a 38-3 rout of visiting Michigan State.

Granted, the Spartans entered the game ranked 10th in the Big Ten in pass defense, but McCord was free and easy from the get-go on his way to a 24-for-31 performance for a career-best 335 yards and a career-best matching three touchdowns.

McCord had already been putting up excellent numbers. It was his fifth game this season with three touchdown passes and third with 300 or more yards. But the prevailing notion was that McCord’s numbers were more the product of his supporting cast – most notably Marvin Harrison Jr. – than anything particular the quarterback was doing.

The consistency hadn’t been there, either. After throwing for 286 yards during a 20-12 win against Penn State on Oct. 21, McCord’s yardage totals decreased each of the next two weeks, bottoming out at 189 against a Rutgers defense that on Nov. 11 gave up 223 yards through the air to an offensively-challenged Iowa team during a 22-0 loss to the Hawkeyes.

And there were the sacks McCord had taken – 14 for the season, 11 of them during a single four-game stretch – and the errors in judgment such as throwing interceptions into tight coverage and committing intentional grounding penalties.

Against Michigan State, however, there was none of that. From the team’s opening possession when he led the Buckeyes on an eight-play, 75-yard touchdown drive, McCord delivered a performance the kind of which we’d only seen in brief spurts.

As Harrison was scoring two first-quarter touchdowns, including the first rushing TD of his career, McCord was connecting on 11 of 13 attempts for 130 yards. That nearly equaled his game totals from the previous week against Rutgers.

The onslaught continued with three more scoring drives in the second quarter, including another touchdown pass to Harrison and one to tight end Cade Stover. By the time the game had reached intermission, Ohio State held a commanding 35-3 lead and McCord was 21 of 25 for 263 yards and three touchdowns.

The Buckeyes took their collective foot off the gas pedal in the second half, but McCord was no less productive. A perfect throw to Harrison down the middle of the field on the team’s first offensive play of the third quarter netted 57 yards to help set up a field goal, after which there were a couple of throws the OSU quarterback might like to have back.

Still, it was a performance that featured no sacks for the first time since way back against Youngstown State, and there were a couple of instances when McCord avoided a loss by simply throwing the ball at a nearby receiver’s feet. That is a ploy repeatedly used over

the years by seven-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback Tom Brady, and not only does it prevent a sack, it takes intentional grounding out of the equation.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Don’t misunderstand. I am in no way comparing Kyle McCord to Tom Brady. I’m simply stating the fact that McCord appears to be on his way to becoming more comfortable with playing quarterback at the elite collegiate level, a position that requires more than playbook knowledge and arm strength.

OSU head coach Ryan Day said during postgame comments that McCord’s footwork was much-improved and that “the game is slowing down for him. You’re beginning to see that happening.” If the head coach approves, you’re obviously doing something right.

So, perhaps after enduring several weeks of growing pains, the real Kyle McCord is ready to stand up when it matters most.

### Random Thoughts

- In addition to McCord’s performance, one of the best things about the victory against Michigan State was the lack of penalties. The Buckeyes weren’t flagged until late in the third quarter when freshman safety Malik Hartford was hit with a pass interference call that was dubious at best. OSU finished the game with a season-low three penalties for 25 yards.

- The outcome marked the 33rd time in program history the Buckeyes had scored exactly 38 points, but the first time they had ever taken a 38-3 victory. The last time Ohio State scored 38 points in a game was a 38-25 win at Penn State in 2020.

- Harrison joined Gary Williams and Chris Olave as the only Ohio State receivers to break the 100-yard mark in back-to-back seasons against Michigan State. Williams caught four passes for 113 yards and two touchdowns during a 48-16 win at MSU in 1980, and followed with five catches for 104 yards and a score during a 27-13 home win in 1981. During a 52-12 road rout of the Spartans in 2020, Olave grabbed 10 balls for 139 yards and a TD, and a year later had seven catches for 140 yards and two scores when the Buckeyes rolled to a 56-7 home win.

- Stover tied his career high with seven receptions, finishing with 79 yards and a touchdown. Stover now has 75 career catches, which pushed him past Jeff Ellis (70, 1987-91) into second place on OSU’s all-time list for tight ends. John Frank (1980-83) is the career leader among Ohio State tight ends with 121 catches.

- It must be a thing for Ohio State receivers (and some DBs) to attach colorful mouthguards to their facemasks and then never use them. I honestly don’t know how Harrison can concentrate on making the kind of catches he makes with his guard constantly flapping in his face. At least Harrison only has one, though. True freshman Carnell Tate, who had two catches for 26 yards vs. Sparty, has two mouthguards dangling from his facemask.

- Speaking of Harrison, he most likely is the best college football player in America this year, but that doesn’t mean he’s going to win the Heisman Trophy.

ESPN’s brand might have been slipping the past few years, but the network still hosts

the Heisman presentation ceremony and continues to hold tremendous sway with Heisman voters. Channel surfing during one of the approximately 10,000 commercial breaks in the OSU-Michigan State telecast, I caught an ESPN graphic supposedly handicapping the Heisman race.

The graphic featured five quarterbacks – Bo Nix of Oregon, J.J. McCarthy of Michigan, Carson Beck of Georgia, Jordan Travis of Florida State, and apparent current frontrunner Michael Penix Jr. of Washington – over which announcers were discussing another couple of candidates. Harrison’s name was never mentioned.

Hopefully, the Ohio State receiver can at least get an invitation to New York as a finalist. But as long as ESPN continues to be the national mouthpiece for the award, the Buckeyes have won their last Heisman for the foreseeable future.

- With a modest 63 yards on 13 carries, TreVeyon Henderson saw his personal streak of 100-yard games end at three. Still, Henderson moved up one spot to 20th on Ohio State’s all-time rushing list with 2,467 yards. That is one yard more than 1955 Heisman Trophy winner Howard “Hopalong” Cassady. Next up for Henderson on the career rushing list is Jim Otis (2,542, 1967-69).

- The Buckeyes had 20 first downs in the first half, and finished the game with a season-high 25. That was the most first downs for the team since totaling 26 during a 43-30 win at Maryland last season.

- File this away for future late-game reference. From 41 yards or closer, Ohio State kicker Jayden Fielding is a perfect 11 for 11 in field-goal attempts this season. From 42 yards or farther, Fielding is 0 for 2, including a 45-yard miss that sailed wide left against Michigan State.

- Since Veterans Day became a national holiday in 1938, Ohio State now has a 12-1 record when playing on Nov. 11. The only blemish on that ledger is a 19-12 loss at Michigan State in 1972, a defeat during which the undefeated and third-ranked Buckeyes turned the ball over five times and were held to just 176 total yards. The Spartans were unranked with a 3-4-1 record heading into that game.

Notable Veterans Day wins include a 61-0 whitewash at Chicago in 1939, one of many lopsided victories during the tumultuous seven-year OSU coaching career of Francis A. “Close the Gates of Mercy” Schmidt, and a 41-3 pounding of Illinois in 1995 during which Eddie George ran for a then-program record 314 yards on his way to winning the Heisman Trophy.

- In my humble opinion, the Big Ten’s three-game “suspension” of Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh for whatever role he played in his program’s sign-stealing scandal seemed hastily put together and wholly inadequate. The quotation marks around the word suspension are intentional. Harbaugh can be with his team and coaching staff throughout the week, work on game-planning, play-calling, and everything else a head coach does. He just can’t patrol the sideline for three hours on Saturday. If Harbaugh is truly guilty of what the Big Ten says he is guilty of, that punishment is really no punishment at all.

- Finally, after watching Michigan offensive coordinator and interim head coach Sherrone Moore’s profanity-laced postgame interview with Fox sideline reporter Jenny Taft, I was reminded of the old quote attributed to legendary college basketball coach John Wooden: “Win with humility, lose with grace, and do both with dignity.”

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Home Finale Against Minnesota Set For 4 p.m.

The Big Ten announced on Nov. 11 that Ohio State's Nov. 18 home finale against Minnesota will kick off at 4 p.m. and will be broadcast on the Big Ten Network.

This will include Senior Day festivities for the Buckeyes, who are hoping to finish the season with an undefeated 6-0 home record.

Ohio State now knows kickoff times and networks for every game left in the regular season. It had already been announced that the Buckeyes will kick off at Michigan on Nov. 25 at 12 p.m. on FOX. Should the Buckeyes make it to the Big Ten Championship Game, that has also been announced as an 8 p.m. kick on FOX.

The Buckeyes hold a 47-7 record against the Gophers and have won the last 12 games dating back to 2001, with the last loss coming in Columbus – a 29-17 defeat – on Oct. 14, 2000.

## Three Key Defenders Miss MSU Game

Ohio State continued to be marred by inju-

ries leading up to its game against Michigan State on Nov. 11, with linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safeties Josh Proctor and Lathan Ransom all missing the contest with injuries.

Eichenberg, who has been a stalwart on Ohio State's defense this season with a team-high 75 tackles, appeared to suffer an injury to his arm late in the Buckeyes' win over Rutgers. He was seen jogging to the locker room with trainers in the fourth quarter and came back a few minutes later with ice on his arm.

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles indicated on Nov. 6 that his starting linebacker would be good to go against the Spartans, saying that he would "play with one arm" if he had to, but he was ultimately kept out of the matchup.

To replace the injured Eichenberg, the Buckeyes turned to senior Cody Simon, who filled in with five tackles, which tied for the team high with cornerback Davison Igbino-sun. C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers also saw some action for the Buckeyes at linebacker during the fourth quarter, with Hicks recording two tackles (one for loss) and Powers earning a stop of his own.

Proctor was also injured against Rutgers, where he suffered an apparent head ailment after colliding with Scarlet Knights' running back Kyle Monangai in the third quarter, a hit that would help aid Ohio State's game-changing 93-yard pick-six from Jordan Hancock.

The veteran safety, who was on the ground for a few minutes before walking to the medical tent, spoke to reporters after the game and said that he felt OK. But like Eichenberg, Proctor was ultimately kept out of the contest.

The Buckeyes looked to true freshman

## 2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	W, 23-3	CBS	3-7, 48-45 loss to Illinois
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	BTN	6-4, 34-0 loss to South Dakota State
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	FOX	5-5, 38-29 loss to New Mexico State
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	W, 17-14	NBC	7-3, idle
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	W, 37-17	FOX	6-4, 13-10 win over Nebraska
Oct. 14	at Purdue	W, 41-7	Peacock	3-7, 49-30 win over Minnesota
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	W, 20-12	FOX	8-2, 24-15 loss to Michigan
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	W, 24-10	NBC	5-5, 24-10 loss to Northwestern
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	W, 35-16	CBS	6-4, 22-0 loss to Iowa
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	W, 38-3	NBC	<b>3-7, 38-3 loss to Ohio State</b>
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	4 p.m.	BTN	5-5, 49-30 loss to Purdue
Nov. 25	at Michigan	12 p.m.	FOX	10-0, 24-15 win over Penn State

Malik Hartford to fill in for Proctor's starting role for the majority of the game at free safety/adjuster. He logged four tackles in relief.

Ohio State was also without starting bandit safety Ransom for the second straight game. He has been sidelined since being carted off the field after suffering what appeared to be a noncontact leg injury during the Buckeyes' 24-10 victory over Wisconsin on Oct. 28. The injury forced Ransom to stay back in Columbus while the team traveled to Rutgers.

The Buckeyes turned to sophomore Sony Styles to slide from nickel to the bandit, and he filled in well with three tackles (one for loss) and a second-quarter sack. Hancock replaced Styles at the nickel, totaling three tackles and a pass breakup.

Other than those players, Ohio State was also without defensive linemen Jason Moore and Will Smith Jr., tight end Joe Royer and wide receiver Kyion Grayes, while tight end Zak Herbstreit, wide receiver Reis Stocksdale, linebacker Kourt Williams II and running back Miyan Williams are out for the season.

While the Buckeyes were riddled with injuries against the Spartans, they did return two of their most productive players on both sides of the ball in cornerback Denzel Burke and tight end Cade Stover. Burke had missed two of the last three games with a lower-body injury. Stover, on the other hand, was forced to sit out against Rutgers while nursing a right knee ailment.

The standouts did not miss a beat, though. Burke continued to serve as a shutdown cornerback for the Buckeyes in prime time, totaling two tackles and a tackle for loss, while Stover logged seven catches for 79 yards and one touchdown.

## Brown Hurt During Warmups, Hall Sidelined Vs. Spartans

The Buckeyes continued to be plagued by injuries both before and during the game against Michigan State when backup quarterback Devin Brown appeared to re aggravate his ankle injury in pregame warmups and defensive tackle Michael Hall Jr. was forced to exit the game for good in the second quarter after suffering an unknown ailment.

Brown was seen walking with a limp on the field after going through a brief period of un padded pregame warmups. He would be kept out of the remainder of the Buckeyes' warmups and did not enter the game despite the lopsided margin.

The redshirt freshman quarterback has been used primarily as a runner in short-yardage and goal line situations this season, but he suffered his injury on one of those designed plays on a goal-line rushing attempt against Penn State. The ailment forced Brown to be

ruled inactive for the Wisconsin game, but he was taken off the injury report a week later against Rutgers, where he was a full participant in pregame warmups.

To fill in for the injured backup Brown, the Buckeyes turned to true freshman Lincoln Kienholz, who was brought into the game on Ohio State's first drive of the fourth quarter to relieve McCord. They chose to bring Kienholz in over seventh-year Tristan Gebbia, who was earning second-string reps in pregame warmups against the Badgers. Kienholz completed two of his three pass attempts for 18 yards.

Hall's injury seemed to occur in the middle of the first quarter when he was visibly shaken up between plays. He stayed in the game for the next play but did not return on the next drive after being taken to the locker room for evaluation. He remained out for the rest of the game, although it is unclear if that was simply out of precaution due to the Buckeyes' large lead.

Ohio State turned to Ty Hamilton to line up at Hall's defensive line position for the majority of the game. He recorded three tackles (one for loss) on the night. The Buckeyes also looked to get creative with their defensive line personnel, occasionally moving Jack Sawyer from the edge to the interior alongside J.T. Tumoloau, making room for either Jaden McKenzie or Caden Curry to play at the other edge position.

## Buckeyes Still No. 1 In CFP, No. 3 In AP

Ohio State opened on top of the College Football Playoff rankings on Oct. 31, and a 35-16 win over Rutgers in which the Buckeyes trailed at the half was not enough for the committee to move Ohio State off the top of the rankings the following week.

The Buckeyes stuck at No. 1 in the College Football Playoff rankings released on Nov. 7, ahead of No. 2 Georgia. No. 3 Michigan and No. 4 Florida State. No. 5 Washington and No. 6 Oregon are the first two teams out.

"(Football judgment and résumé), they're not mutually exclusive," committee chair and NC State athletic director Boo Corrigan said after the rankings were released. "It's not one or the other. As we look through it, you can tell by our rankings right now with Ohio State (at No. 1), with the big wins they've had, including last week over a top-20 defensive team over Rutgers."

Ohio State and Michigan are joined by No. 10 Penn State and No. 22 Iowa, the only other Big Ten representatives, which set the stage for a top-10 matchup on Nov. 11 in State College, Pa., a game that resulted in a 24-15 victory for the Wolverines. Also in the top 10 are No. 7 Texas, No. 8 Alabama and No. 9 Ole Miss.

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WELCOME TO MTO TOWN

## Another Sincere Note From Publisher Frank Moskowitz

We are now 10 weeks into football season, and I regret to report that I am disappointed concerning my hoped-for improvement in the BSB mail service. It seems like every time we make a little progress, another holiday comes along. In this case it was Veteran's Day, where no mail service eliminated the last chance for subscribers to get their BSB before the Michigan State game. It will most likely also create a mail backlog for the following week.

I am sad to report that we had our first subscriber call and say bluntly, "When my subscription runs out, I am not going to renew because you cannot get me my paper on time." We get it. In fact, it is a backhanded compliment because it means readers want their BSB.

The only thing I can honestly suggest at this point is logging in to BuckeyeSports.com and reading BSB there until your paper arrives. No one understands more than me that this is not a substitute for your pa-

per. But it can be a stopgap. We also suggest readers upgrade their subscription to first-class mail for the remainder of football season for just \$9. With Thanksgiving (no mail) coming before the Michigan game, this is your best bet to receive the paper before kickoff.

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In the AP poll, voters still did not see Ohio State as the No. 1 team in the country, putting them at No. 3 behind No. 2 Michigan and No. 1 Georgia, with No. 4 Florida State and No. 5 Washington rounding out the top five. No. 6 Oregon, No. 7 Texas, No. 8 Alabama, No. 9 Louisville and No. 10 Oregon State round out the rest of the top 10.

### Frosh CB Simpson-Hunt Loses Black Stripe

Ohio State freshman cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt became the latest "official" member of the team on Nov. 8 after shedding his black stripe.

Simpson-Hunt, a summer enrollee out of Waxahachie, Texas, was the No. 62 overall prospect and eighth-ranked cornerback in the class, and he got his first action for the Buckeyes in their win over Rutgers, primarily appearing on special teams.

Simpson-Hunt continued that positive momentum against the Spartans, coming in mostly on special teams again. He is the 17th freshman and 32nd overall player to lose his black stripe since spring practice.

### Day Refutes Report That OSU Shared Signs

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day pushed back on reports that the Buckeyes shared Michigan's signs with Purdue before last year's Big Ten Championship Game, stating on Nov. 8 that his program had no involvement in any of those rumored efforts.

Several reports earlier in the week said that Ohio State – along with Rutgers – shared signs with Purdue, though it is unclear whether or not sign sharing between teams is

considered against the rules of the Big Ten's sportsmanship policy.

While meeting with reporters, Day said that Ohio State had no involvement in sharing signs with Purdue.

"Nobody here did any of that," he said. "We went through and made sure we asked all the questions and got our compliance people involved. None of that came back at all. I can answer very strongly that did not happen."

Rutgers coach Greg Schiano was also asked about the allegations on Nov. 8.

"I'm very confident in the way we handle our business," he said. "I'm not going to get into specifics that are not my issue. This is not my issue. I'll let the people handle it whose issue it is. ... Quite frankly, I'm a little bit ticked off we have to talk about this. This isn't our problem."

Michigan took care of Purdue in last year's Big Ten Championship Game, defeating the Boilermakers 43-22 to earn a College Football Playoff bid a day later.

### Day Says ST Coordinator Fleming's Job Is Secure

Ohio State's special teams unit, led by coordinator Parker Fleming, has received its fair share of criticism this season, mainly for its consistent string of miscues on punt and kick coverage and returns. That scrutiny may have reached a new apex during the second quarter of the Buckeyes' win over Rutgers, when punter Jesse Mirco rolled out to his left and opted to run for the first down instead of punt, only to be tackled 3 yards short of the line to gain, giving the Scarlet Knights the ball at the Ohio State 32-yard line.

It was a special teams blunder that was

all-too common for Day – dating even back to last year's contest against Rutgers – leading him to say on Nov. 7 that these types of plays simply cannot happen again.

"The ball should have been punted," Day said. "It never should have been run in that situation. Ultimately, I'm the head coach, so it comes back on me. But it needs to be communicated better, and it's unacceptable."

Despite the harsh words directed toward the special teams unit, Day still expressed a strong belief in Fleming's coaching abilities, while also proclaiming that his job remains secure.

"I think we're going to stay where we are right now," Day said when asked if we would make a coaching change in the middle of the season. "I'm there every day. I'm watching how things are taught. We all need to be a part of it, as a coaching staff. If I felt there was something that was not being taught right or done right, then I certainly would intercede. But I'm in those meetings, I see what goes on. We just need to do a better job. But like anything, we'll continue to evaluate it and make

sure that we're doing what's best for the players."

Day, who hired Fleming as special teams coordinator in February of 2021, said he has seen his third-year coach thrive as a teacher this season in practice, specifically citing his leadership skills and coaching acumen as two things that make him a valuable asset to the team.

"I watch Parker every day and I see the way he coaches," he said. "I think he's a great teacher and a great coach. I can tell you that he works as hard as anybody in the building."

In addition to lauding Fleming's coaching skills, Day also said that the team's special teams miscues this season stem from a combination of things that do not entirely put the coordinator at fault. Day mentioned that communication between the special teams unit and the coaching staff has been especially lackluster this season, which is something that he says ultimately falls on the entire coaching staff, not just Fleming,

"We're all being evaluated every single time we're out there, and it's everybody that's involved in special teams," Day said. "It's not just the coordinator, although he's ultimately in charge, and I'm ultimately in charge, so you put it back on me. But clearly everybody who is in charge of special teams – because there's a lot of coaches that are involved with that in the meetings – can all do a better job. We'll just keep pushing to make it better, but we know what the expectation is."

### Former OSU QB Stroud Wins AFC Offensive Player of the Week

Following Houston Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud's record-breaking outing in a 39-37 win over Tampa Bay on Nov. 5, the former Ohio State signal caller was named AFC Offensive Player of the Week.

Stroud threw for a rookie-record 470 passing yards while completing 71.4 percent (30 of 42) of his passes, and he tied another rookie record by throwing for five touchdowns, including a 15-yard score with just six seconds remaining to put the Texans ahead.

Stroud's performance sent shockwaves through the NFL, with many players and for-

Continued On Page 6

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

mer Ohio State teammates lauding the rookie gunslinger for his comeback performance. His play also caught the eye of his former head coach, who said on Nov. 7 that Stroud has earned this fast start to his career with his hard work and determination.

"I think he deserves all the success that he's receiving," Day said. "This is somebody who went through kind of a tough time during the draft process. A lot of people kind of questioned him in certain ways, and you never saw him react in any way.

"I thought he's handled himself like a pro. The guys on that team voted him captain. For a rookie (to be named captain) right out of the gate is tremendous. He walked in and endeared to that organization. And now you're starting to see him perform on the field.

"He's given that organization hope, and you're seeing it. I think it's the same thing Garrett Wilson did with the New York Jets last year, he gave them hope. It was great to see him quickly jump into that role and have the

success he's had. There's still a lot of football ahead of him, though."

Stroud followed up his award-winning performance with another solid outing against Joe Burrow and the Cincinnati Bengals on Nov. 12, where he completed 23 of his 39 passes for 356 yards and one touchdown.

Through nine games this season, Stroud has completed 62.0 percent (173 of 279) of his passes for 2,270 yards and 14 touchdowns. He was previously named the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Month in September.

## Burrow Sets Record Straight On Ohio State-LSU Debate

Speaking of Burrow, the former Buckeye and current Cincinnati Bengals quarterback offered his own opinion on the years-long debate over whether Ohio State can "claim" him as its own quarterback.

Burrow, who was asked, "Does Ohio State claim you as a quarterback?" ahead of the Bengals' matchup against Stroud's Texans on Nov. 8, initially joked that you would have to ask Buckeye fans to get the real answer. But he added that he has always made his stance clear on the topic, pledging his allegiances to both Ohio State and LSU – albeit in different ways.

"I don't know," Burrow said. "You'd have to ask them. I always say I went to school at Ohio State and played football at LSU. That's how I think about it."

Burrow, who grew up in Athens, Ohio, played three seasons at Ohio State under head coach Urban Meyer from 2015-2017, appearing mostly in relief of quarterbacks Cardale Jones and J.T. Barrett, completing

29 of his 39 pass attempts for 287 yards and three touchdowns – two passing and one rushing – and no interceptions.

Burrow has still shown his support for Ohio State despite his stellar career at LSU. He was most recently in attendance for last year's season opener against Notre Dame, where he took in pregame warmups from the sidelines alongside fellow Buckeye alumni Ezekiel Elliott, Sam Hubbard, Terry McLaurin, Curtis Samuel and Chase Young, among many others.

## Former OSU WR Thomas Arrested

Former Ohio State and current New Orleans Saints wide receiver Michael Thomas was arrested on a misdemeanor of simple battery and criminal mischief on Nov. 10 following an alleged altercation with a construction worker near Thomas' home in Kenner, La.

According to Kenner police, Thomas made verbal threats toward a project manager who was working on building a home in Thomas' neighborhood and parking his car across the street from his house. The worker told both police and reporters that the interaction had been building for two weeks after Thomas repeatedly made it known that he did not want the construction crew to park their cars across the street from his home, even threatening that he would get a "brick or a bullet in his car" if the vehicles were not moved.

Those tensions boiled over at around 5:30 p.m. on Nov. 10 when the man claimed Thomas threw two bricks at his car's windshield, shoved him to the ground and knocked his cell phone out of his hands after realizing the worker was recording him during his outburst. The brick caused "little if any damage" to the vehicle.

"I don't understand why or how, I just wanted to be left alone to do my job," he told WDSU in New Orleans. "He drives up, and I see him get out. And I was like, 'I don't know what he's doing, I'm just worried about my job site.' And he walks up to this big pile of sand, grabs a brick and he throws it at my car. So I grabbed my phone and I started recording him. And he saw that I was recording him and grabbed my phone and just grabbed and pushed me."

Around an hour and a half after the incident at around 7 p.m., Thomas was put into a Kenner Police patrol car and arrested on simple battery and criminal mischief charges. The Saints wide receiver was reportedly cooperative with police and was booked without incident. He was released from jail at around 10 p.m., according to Kenner Police.

The Saints said on Nov. 10 that they are aware of the incident, but they did allow Thomas to play in their Nov. 12 matchup against the Minnesota Vikings, though he played in just one drive before exiting with an injury.

## Hancock Named Thorpe Award National DB Of Week

Hancock earned some national recognition after his game-changing performance against Rutgers when he was named the Thorpe Award National Defensive Back of the Week on Nov. 10. The Thorpe Award is named after legendary football player and Olympian Jim Thorpe and is awarded annually to the best defensive back in college football.

Hancock, who has mostly seen time at the nickel position this season, made arguably one of the more significant plays of the season thus far in the third quarter of the Buckeyes' road win over the Scarlet Knights when he corralled a deflected pass from quarterback Gavin Wimsatt and returned it 93 yards to the end zone. His interception return was not the only impact he made in that game. He also proved to be a pest in the open field, tallying five tackles.

Hancock has been increasingly relied upon by Knowles and his defense as the season rolls on after the unit has succumbed to several injuries in the secondary this fall. This usage has allowed him to be one of the more productive players on the defense, where he has recorded 33 tackles, a sack, five pass breakups, two forced fumbles and the interception.

## Eichenberg, Stover Up For Honors

The midseason awards continue to pile up for Ohio State this fall, with Eichenberg being named one of 12 semifinalists for the Butkus Award, which honors the top linebacker in the country, and Stover being among one of nine candidates for the John Mackey Award, which recognizes college football's best tight end.

Eichenberg finds himself on the midseason list of top linebackers for the second consecutive season, the only player to do so these last two years. The senior earns this honor after serving as the unquestioned team leader this season on a defense ranking second nationally in scoring defense at just 9.9 points per game.

In nine appearances this season, Eichenberg has tallied a team-high 75 tackles (2½ for loss) along with a sack, four quarterback hurries and a forced fumble.

Eichenberg is one of 12 semifinalists for the Butkus Award including Texas' Jaylan Ford, North Carolina's Cedric Gray, Iowa's Jay Higgins, Missouri's Ty'Ron Hopper, Penn State's Curtis Jacobs, Alabama's Deontae Lawson, Notre Dame's Marist Liufau, Clemson's Jeremiah Trotter Jr., Washington's Edefuan Ulofoshio, Mississippi State's Nathaniel Watson and NC State's Payton Wilson.

Stover, who also finds himself as a semifinalist for his award for the second year in a row, has put forth a stellar season of his own, serving as an elite run blocker in the run game and one of McCord's favorite and most dependable targets in the pass game. Although he missed the Rutgers game, he still ranks second on the team to only Marvin Harrison Jr. with 34 catches for 508 yards and four touchdowns.

Stover joins an exclusive group of John Mackey Award semifinalists that also includes Michigan's A.J. Banner, Georgia's Brock Bowers, Colorado State's Dallin Holker, North Carolina's Bryson Nesbit, Texas' Ja'Tavin Sanders, Kansas State's Ben Sinnott, Penn State's Theo Johnson and Oregon State's Jack Velling.

Finalists for both the Butkus and John Mackey Awards will be announced later in November, while the winners will be crowned at the ESPN Home Depot College Football Awards on Dec. 8.

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## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1983

The quickness, agility and intelligence it takes to play point guard were all there. The only thing Ron Stokes was short on was height.

"My height is not a problem. I had to play against tall players in high school, so I didn't have to make much of an adjustment when I came here," said Stokes (5-11), a junior who played at Canton McKinley High School with current Buckeye teammate Troy Taylor.

"The biggest change was in becoming more of a control player, because the players in college are taller and more talented," Stokes added.

### 35 Years Ago — 1988

Sophomore quarterback Greg Frey moved up another notch on the Ohio State all-time passing list with his performance in the Buckeyes' 34-12 win against Wisconsin on Nov. 5.

Frey completed 12 of 23 passes for 206 yards and two touchdowns. The yardage gave him 1,788 for his career, moving 20 yards ahead of Bill Long (1966-68) for ninth place on the Buckeyes' all-time passing list. He needed just 212 more yards to become only the eighth OSU quarterback in history to throw for more than 2,000 yards in his career.

The top passers in school history were Art Schlichter (7,547), Mike Tomczak (5,569), Jim Karsatos (5,089), Don Unverferth (2,518), Rex Kern (2,444), Cornelius Greene (2,348), Tom Tupa (2,252) and John Borton (2,129).

### 30 Years Ago — 1993

One of the traditions of Wisconsin football fans at Camp Randall Stadium had been to throw marshmallows at the opposing team members. In recent years, however, students had become a little more vicious, stooping to freezing the marshmallows with coins inside of them so they would travel farther distances when thrown.

According to Ohio State head coach John Cooper, a man who loved tradition in college football, the marshmallow-throwing is a tradition that needed to be stopped.

"I mean this sincerely," Cooper said. "No football team, whether it's Ohio State or Michigan or any football team that comes in here, should have to be subjected to having marshmallows thrown at them with all those coins in them. I mean, that should be stopped.

"I can show you one in my locker room that has at least 20 pennies inside it. Marshmallows are OK in fun. But when you start throwing coins in them, that should be stopped. That should absolutely be stopped.

"I'm surprised you guys haven't written more about this. Look at this thing. I mean, this thing has so much money in it I may take it to the bank and cash it in."

### 25 Years Ago — 1998

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger was enthusiastic about the first exhibition game for the men's basketball team, and it wasn't just because it was a 32-point win.

The exhibition win over the One World All-Stars Nov. 3 served as the first public event in the school's brand-new Jerome Schottenstein Center.

"This is a dream come true for an opening night, especially knowing what the last month has been like," Geiger said. "It's just been fantastic the way the staff, the contractors and everybody pulled together."

The OSU exhibition was not intended to open the arena — an NBA exhibition with the Chicago Bulls had been ticketed for Oct. 30. But with that league in an ongoing labor dispute, the Buckeyes got to christen their own \$110 million arena.

### 20 Years Ago — 2003

With Michigan State throwing the ball on 56 of its 73 offensive plays, clock problems in the first quarter and a frightening injury to Spartans offensive lineman Stefon Wheeler in the third quarter, the Ohio State football team's 33-23 victory on Nov. 8 took a substantially longer than normal time of three hours and 42 minutes to complete.

So by the time the Buckeyes were making their way to the Ohio Stadium interview room to meet with the media, it was already well-known that No. 6 Miami (Fla.), one of the teams OSU needed to leapfrog in order to possibly work its way into a second straight Bowl Championship Series title game, had been upset at home by Tennessee.

Word of the Volunteers' 10-6 victory, though, apparently had not reached Buckeye head coach Jim Tressel. When asked if he had any response to the Hurricanes' loss, Trestle responded quizzically, "Miami... Florida?"

He even half-apologized for not knowing the result of the game, saying, "I've been busy this afternoon."

### 15 Years Ago — 2008

The Ohio State offense broke out against Northwestern in a 45-10 win on Nov. 8 despite not having one of its most talented and productive wide receivers.

Ray Small, a junior from Cleveland Glenville who was second on the team in receptions and led the Big Ten in punt return average before the victory over the Wildcats, did not make the trip to Evanston because of an indefinite team suspension issued the previous week.

Ken Small, the player's father, confirmed the suspension to BSB the evening of Nov. 5 and indicated he did not believe his son would ever again don the scarlet and gray and that he had been dealt with unfairly.

"This thing goes back and forth, but we thought we had resolved all the issues with the coaching staff at Ohio State," Ken Small said. "Ray's biggest problem was while he was in the so-called doghouse earlier it was because he was late to a couple classes and late to a team meeting and I think he fell asleep in one of the meetings."

### 10 Years Ago — 2013

Coming off an open week and preparing to face the struggling Fighting Illini on Nov. 16, the Ohio State football team still managed

to give college football fans across the country something to discuss.

What appeared to be another run-of-the-mill media session on Nov. 11 took a 180-degree turn when junior wide receiver Evan Spencer was asked how he thought the third-ranked Buckeyes would fare against the top teams in the nation.

"Well I guess I'm a little biased," he said with a laugh, "but I think we'd wipe the field with both of them (No. 1 Alabama, No. 2 Florida State). But that's just my bias speaking."

### Five Years Ago — 2018

In late July, former Ohio State wide receiver Brian Hartline took over as the team's interim receivers coach after Urban Meyer fired Zach Smith. Hartline had been a graduate assistant for a year following a successful NFL career, but he hadn't been a position coach before this season.

Ten games into the new campaign, Hartline's players were excelling as Ohio State marched toward record numbers in the passing game. The development of those receivers, though, was only part of Hartline's job.

In addition to being a coach on and off the field for the current players, Hartline was also tasked with stepping in for Smith — previously one of the team's top recruiters — in helping to land the top high school prospects in the nation. So far, so good, Meyer said.

"He's done very well," Meyer said, noting that he would make a decision down the line on whether Hartline would keep the job full time.

### One Year Ago — 2022

In most cases, a fourth-quarter touchdown to increase a team's lead to 56-14 would largely be forgotten, but Ohio State's eighth score against Indiana on Nov. 12 was one that would be remembered in Columbus for quite some time.

With under nine minutes remaining in the game, Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud took the snap out of the shotgun before rolling to his right and firing a pass toward the front right corner of the end zone, finding fifth-year wide receiver Kamryn Babb for the game's final score. The 8-yard touchdown also doubled as Babb's first career catch.

For Babb, the moment was the culmination of a nearly constant rehabilitation process, as he endured four ACL tears since his senior year of high school. Even this season, Babb found himself sidelined for Ohio State's first nine games due to a lower-body tweak.

But Babb's determination and faith led him back to the field and into that moment. As faith was a central fixture of Babb's life, he immediately fell to his knees following his score and bowed his head in prayer, as his ultimate goal was finally realized.

"The past five years, what's been a dream of mine is whenever I catch a touchdown, whenever that moment is, to get on my knees and give praise to Him, to Jesus Christ, because that's the only hope that I truly have," Babb said.

# Offense Turns In Season-Best Performance

Continued From Page 1

us play with more and more confidence. I kind of felt like something like this was right around the corner. We were knocking on the door. I'm counting on this to continue to push us forward with the momentum to finish this season the way we should."

Having all those pieces opened things up for the offense, which avoided one of the dreaded slow starts that have plagued the team in seemingly every game this season.

Ohio State established the run on the team's first drive of the game, rushing five times for 48 yards and a touchdown, and went quickly on the next drive with McCord completing passes of 12, 19 and 26 yards. Day and offensive coordinator Brian Hartline mixed in both on the third drive of the game, rushing five times and passing eight times on the 84-yard drive.

The result of all three possessions? Touchdown, Marvin Harrison Jr., for an early 21-0 lead. The wideout – who continues to build his sleeper campaign for the Heisman Trophy, now up to 59 receptions for 1,063 yards and 12 touchdowns – had seven catches for 149 yards, two receiving scores and his first career rushing touchdown on a 19-yard reverse.

"The rushing one (was my favorite)," Harrison said. "We've called that play three times in my career so far and I've come up short the other two times, and I finally got in the end zone this time and it was my first

rushing touchdown of my career. That's definitely going to be a special one for me."

Harrison was his usual self, but every aspect of Ohio State's offense seemed to be firing on all cylinders. McCord finished 24 of 31 passing for 335 yards and three touchdowns, one of his best outings of the season. The running backs – led by Henderson's 63 yards on 13 carries – averaged 5.5 yards per attempt. And the much-maligned yet improving offensive line did not allow a sack of McCord as the Spartans finished with just two tackles for loss, both coming in the second half with the game well out of reach.

It's the type of performance that has been teased all season. The occasional deep shots to Harrison, the glimpses of a healthy Henderson and a handful of picture-perfect passes by McCord have all hinted at an offense lying in wait, just waiting for the opportunity to break out. Just one game – not to mention against one of the worst teams in the Big Ten – does not fully announce the offense as back to the program's usual standard, but it offers an important building block as the regular season winds down with just two games to go.

"Coming off last week, we really focused on, 'We've got to be playing our best in November.' You play for championships in November and December. This is where it all counts." Day said. "We wanted to take a step this week, and when things get bigger, the focus gets more narrow, and it was just



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FINDING A RHYTHM** — Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord finished with a career-high 335 passing yards and tied a career high with three touchdowns passes in the Buckeyes' 38-3 win over Michigan State.

about playing as hard as we possibly can and executing at a high level."

And if the offense is able to build momentum off this performance? Look out, because the defense had no interest in letting off the gas against the Spartans. The Silver Bullets allowed just a second-quarter field goal and 182 total yards of offense by Michigan State, the fewest yards allowed by Ohio State since holding Indiana to 153 yards in the season opener, and it's the fewest points allowed since a 42-0 shutout of Cincinnati on Sept. 7, 2019, just the second game for Day as the Buckeyes' full-time head coach.

It was a three-level effort. Ohio State got tackles for loss from defensive backs Denzel Burke and Sonny Styles – important con-

tributions considering the Buckeyes were without safeties Josh Proctor and Lathan Ransom due to injury – as well as defensive linemen Caden Curry, Ty Hamilton and Ty-leik Williams.

Linebacker Cody Simon, meanwhile, filled in for the injured Tommy Eichenberg, who was out with an arm injury, and tied for the team lead with five tackles (three solo) and a pass breakup, and sophomore linebacker C.J. Hicks added a tackle for loss.

It was yet another suffocating performance for Ohio State's defense, which is now allowing just 9.9 points and 262.2 yards per game.

"We had a big focus on just playing hard this week," said Styles, a sophomore safety.

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“Obviously we have to still execute and do all the things. We made a big focus on just playing really fast, playing really hard. We came out and did that. We had some guys down this week, and guys were able to step up and execute.”

So where does Ohio State go from here? From all sides, it’s a potentially season-defining win in terms of getting things on track, especially for the offense that has needed a get-right game for several weeks now. And it inspires confidence that Ohio State’s goals – including beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten Championship Game and winning a national championship – remain in sight with just two regular-season contests remaining.

“This is what I’ve been talking about all year, just continuing to improve and grow each week, and now that we’re in November, I think we have to play our best football now,” McCord said. “I think the urgency has been passed down from the coaches to the players, and as an offense, we knew that this had to be a good week for us and a step in the right direction. I think it was, especially in that right half. We were rolling.”

“I would have liked to finish a little better in the possessions I had in the second half, but overall, it was definitely a step in the right direction.”

**Big Ten East Tiebreaker Now Out The Window**

Michigan will be without head coach Jim Harbaugh – at least on the sideline – for the rest of the regular season, including when it hosts Ohio State in Ann Arbor on Nov. 25, as a result of discipline from the Big Ten

surrounding the team’s sign-stealing scandal.

And Michigan added some additional drama ahead of that game by ensuring that the only way the Buckeyes can go to Indianapolis for the Big Ten Championship Game is to knock off the Wolverines on their home turf.

There was previously a chance that, should Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State each finish 11-1 and go 1-1 against the other two, it would lead to a three-way tie atop the Big Ten East standings with a fairly unusual tiebreaker: the combined record of each team’s three cross-division opponents in the conference.

In the event of that three-way tie, it would have had Michigan relying on Minnesota, Nebraska and Purdue, Ohio State putting hopes behind Minnesota, Purdue and Wisconsin and Penn State depending on Illinois, Iowa and Northwestern to determine who might represent the Big Ten East in the Big Ten Championship Game.

Through 10 games, the Nittany Lions’ Big Ten West opponents had a combined 18-12 record, far ahead of the 13-17 record of both the Buckeyes’ and Wolverines’ cross-division schedule. But Michigan made sure that no tiebreaker will be needed to decide the conference when it defeated Penn State 24-15 at Beaver Stadium on Nov. 11.

“It’s been a crazy 24 hours, but at the same time, our team is built for this,” said offensive coordinator Sherrone Moore, who doubled as Michigan’s acting head coach. “Our staff is built for this. We’re all built for this.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

**DOMINANT DEFENSE — Ohio State’s secondary, led by junior cornerback Denzel Burke (R), limited Michigan State to just 88 passing yards in a 38-3 win for the Buckeyes.**

Without the possibility of a tiebreaker, assuming both the Buckeyes and Wolverines make it through the penultimate regular-season game on their respective schedules – home against Minnesota for Ohio State and at Maryland for Michigan – it will be winner takes all for the division and a trip to the Big Ten Championship Game, not to mention a ticket to the College Football Playoff. But don’t tell any of that to Ohio State, because it is not listening.

“We’ve done a good job of blocking out all the noise, and regardless of what people are saying with the rankings, at this point in the year it’s pointless,” McCord said. “We know at the end of the day we still have a lot of football in front of us, and especially in November, that’s when championships are won. If anything, the team’s done a good job of putting the blinders on, in a sense, and not letting any of that outside noise creep in.”

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# Harrison Shines In Prime Time Against Spartans

Against Rutgers on Nov. 4, Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. struggled to get involved, totaling an uncharacteristic four catches for just 25 yards, albeit still ending up with two red-zone touchdowns. This time around, in front of 105,137 fans at Ohio Stadium on Nov. 11 vs. Michigan State, the wideout put his imprint on the Buckeyes' offense early and often.

## GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

It didn't take long for Harrison to make a difference in Ohio State's 38-3 win over the Spartans. Following a few positive runs from TreVeyon Henderson and some pitches-and-catches from Kyle McCord to Cade Stover on the first drive of the game, Harrison put his first stamp on the game, taking a reverse pitch and sprinting 19 yards down the sideline and into the end zone. It lifted the Buckeyes to an early 7-0 lead and gave Harrison his first career rushing touchdown.

Just four offensive plays later, Harrison's impact would be felt again, this time in a much more conventional way. After the Buckeyes marched all the way to the Spartans' 26-yard line in just three plays, McCord launched a pass down the sidelines to his favorite target. While it seemed for a moment that Harrison was tightly covered by Spartans defensive back Chance Rucker, he created enough separation to find the end zone, somehow managing to get his right foot in bounds to make the acrobatic diving catch.

Unfortunately for the Spartans, Harrison's night – and even his first half – would be far from over. After hauling in two more gains of 25 and 12 yards on the Buckeyes' third drive of the game, he found the end zone yet again off a crisp slant route. The 9-yard catch gave him three touchdowns in as many drives, giving him a signature performance as he continues to

make a case for the Heisman Trophy.

"That award is for the most outstanding player, not the player with the most stats," head coach Ryan Day said. "He certainly made a major impact on this game, had three touchdowns – two passing, one rushing – but really only played a half of football."

Harrison's night would end early, but it didn't come without another highlight-worthy play in the second half, this time a 57-yard catch on Ohio State's very first offensive play coming out of the locker room where he zoomed past a Spartans double-team. His night was over after that drive, giving him seven catches for 149 yards and the three scores.

Harrison said this versatile stat line was a product of the work he has put in during the offseason to expand his game, particularly with lining up at different positions to get even more involved on offense. This was something the receiver said he worked on with Day before the season, which is finally coming to fruition.

"I've learned a lot," Harrison said. "In spring ball, I got to play (in the) slot pretty much the whole spring with Emeka (Egbuka) being out. So it's just enhancing my game as much as I can. I think last year, obviously, I was kind of an outside guy. Now this year, I'm showcasing more of my ability, and I can do many things on the field. Credit to Coach Day – he's done a tremendous job of getting me the ball. All thanks to him, really."

Harrison's versatility allowed him to accumulate some historic milestones against the Spartans. In this game alone, Harrison became the first-ever Ohio State wide receiver to have two 1,000-yard seasons and the second Buckeye – joining David Boston – to have 14 100-yard receiving games. He also moved past Cris Carter into fourth-place all-time with 29 career touchdown receptions. It's a series of records that could put him not only in prime position to reach Ohio State's "Mt. Rushmore" but also to earn college football's top award, something his quarterback said he deserves.

"I can't really quantify how impactful he is to this offense," McCord said. "I think there's one-on-one situations he wins, I think there's



SONNY BROCKWAY

**WELCOME BACK** – After missing the previous week's win over Rutgers, tight end Cade Stover returned against Michigan State and tied a career high with seven receptions for 79 yards and a touchdown.

situations where he takes two defenders with him if they want to double him and somebody else is open. I think he does a good job blocking, too. He does so much for the offense, and I think I said this about a month ago. If it's truly the award that goes to the best player, he has to be right there in contention."

### McCord Bounces Back With Strong Performance

Harrison was not the only Buckeye to put forth a strong outing against the Spartans. He was also joined by his former high school teammate and quarterback McCord, who bounced back after a difficult performance against Rutgers with arguably his best game of the season.

McCord, who has received criticism this fall due to his inconsistent play and recent ball security issues, was clicking on all cylinders from the get-go. In the first half alone, he connected with eight different receivers and completed 21 of his 25 passes for 263 passing yards and three touchdowns. These stats were far better than what McCord mustered up against Rutgers a week prior, where he totaled just 189 passing yards for the entire game and accounted for an interception and a fumble, albeit with three touchdown passes.

Day attributed these early-game successes to some improved mechanics from his quarterback, particularly with the balance of his legs and lower-body. This allowed McCord to find a groove early and often, where he seemed comfortable in the pocket and delivered a number of accurate and well-timed throws to Harrison and his other talented pass-catchers.

These throws were headlined by his back-shoulder touchdown throw to Stover in the beginning of the second quarter and his 57-

yard bomb to Harrison, where he hit Harrison directly in stride, a throw that has not always been easy this season.

"I thought his feet moved better during the game just watching the rhythm in the game," Day said. "He started off pretty good in the Rutgers game, and then he started off a little better in this game. The game's slowing down a little bit for him. You can see that happening. Not that it's all perfect all the time. It's not. But when his feet are right and he's found the rhythm in the game, that's when he's playing at his best. He threw some really nice balls tonight."

McCord echoed these sentiments from his head coach, adding that he had been working with Day and his offensive staff on his footwork all throughout the week leading into the game. This work, according to McCord, finally came to fruition under the lights against Michigan State, becoming a promising sign for the improving signal caller.

"I felt like my footwork was definitely better today," he said. "That's something that we focused on during the week was just being on a good base, having my weight distribution right, and then I think the offensive line did a great job today as well in pass protection. I don't really think there was a time today where I dropped back and had pressure in my face, so I was able to step into the throws the way I wanted to. I think that's a credit to the boys up front."

Like Harrison, McCord's final stat line – 24 of 31 with a career-high 335 passing yards and three touchdowns – could have been even more inflated if he had played the entire game. He was replaced by freshman Lincoln Kienholz during the Buckeyes' first drive of the fourth quarter in an effort to get the freshman more reps.



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# Game Analysis

## What Worked Well

One of the biggest concerns with the team this season has been that the offense hasn't been able to get off to fast starts. There have been several games where it seems like there should be more points on the board for the Buckeyes, and games that should be put away early are much closer than they should be. That wasn't an issue against Michigan State, and it was clear from the get-go with five touchdowns on six drives in the first half, the first three all scored by Marvin Harrison Jr. The only other game that Ohio State's offense dominated as it did against the Spartans was when it put up 63 points against Western Kentucky on Sept. 16, a team known more for its offense than defense. The Buckeyes finished with only 38 points against MSU after leading 35-3 at the half, but head coach Ryan Day said he made a point of not playing impact players for any time in the second half. TreVeyon Henderson and Cade Stover didn't see the field after halftime, and Emeka Egbuka and Harrison were out there for only one drive. Scoring only a field goal in the second half isn't anything to be concerned about since Day managed the lineup differently with more important November games coming up soon.

## What Didn't Work

There's not much that didn't work for Ohio State in this game, but there were multiple times when defenders couldn't finish a play that would have driven the stake deeper into the Spartans' chest. A few bad passes from Michigan State quarterback Katin Houser could have

been picked off but were dropped or batted away instead, and there were several opportunities for tackles for loss that would have turned the game even more into the Buckeyes' favor, but they weren't able to finish those plays off. That was completely fine against Michigan State, a team with just one win in the Big Ten. But those plays are going to be pivotal when it comes to Nov. 25 against Michigan when the opportunities are fewer and farther between. A dropped pick or a missed tackle in that game could turn into a drive that goes down for a score.

## Play Of The Game

The Buckeyes' second drive started on their own 39-yard line after a missed 56-yard field goal by Michigan State. It took them only four plays to score. The touchdown was a 26-yard, over-the-shoulder completion to the right side of the end zone to Harrison with Spartans cornerback Chance Rucker all over the receiver. He caught the ball as he was falling to the turf but had the wherewithal to still get one foot down for the score. The catch would have been the best catch of most other receivers' careers, but it was just another day for Harrison, who seems to have at least one play per game that proves he is the best wide receiver in college football. That catch put the Buckeyes up 14-0, and while it didn't shift any momentum since they had control the whole game, it made the game feel secure as early as 6:56 left in the first quarter.

— Greg Wilson

But the overall performance can serve as a major steppingstone for the junior as he inches closer to the biggest start of his career thus far on Nov. 25.

## Stover Returns With A Bang After Injury

During the Buckeyes' win over Rutgers, Stover was seen pacing up and down the sidelines as the offense endured its struggles. The frustration was palpable even from the press box, where it was becoming increasingly clear that he was wanting to get into the game.

That would never happen for the star tight end, however, who was kept out of the entire contest as a precaution while he recovered from a minor knee injury. Stover made his awaited return to the field just one week later at home against the Spartans, though, where he made an instant impact and served again as one of McCord's most reliable and sure-handed weapons.

Stover did all of his damage in the first half. He hauled in an impressive seven catches for 79 yards in the first 30 minutes of action, a dominant stretch where he mostly thrived as a safety blanket for McCord. Stover moved the chains on four of his seven receptions, which went for 9, 12, 19 and 18 yards, respectively. His last catch proved to be the most crucial, though, where he contorted his body to haul in a low back-shoulder pass from McCord in the end zone to give the Buckeyes a comfortable 35-3 lead heading into halftime.

McCord, who has often looked to Stover in crucial third-down and short-yardage situations this year, said he was more than happy to get his tight end back for the prime-time matchup with the Spartans. He sees Stover as a critical piece to the continuity of the Buckeyes' offense because of his ability to run crisp routes and serve as a leader for the unit.

"He is just a big target," McCord said. "He runs his routes extremely well. His attention to detail is outstanding, and I think on top of that, he's a force in the run game, too. I think the way

he blocks, the way he runs routes, the way he's just selfless on the field, the whole offense benefits from that."

Day also raved about Stover's play after the game, saying that his talents are especially felt when the team needs them most. He thinks his tight end makes the largest impact in the run game and in difficult passing situations, two areas that will be critical later in the season when they face off against Michigan and any other potential postseason opponents.

"For one half of football, seven catches, (79) yards and a touchdown, that's a good night," Day said. "He is strong inside in the run game, makes a huge difference. I thought Gee (Scott Jr.) and Pat (Gurd) did a nice job when they were in there as well, but Cade is strong in there. And then he's become a weapon in the passing game. He's in a situation where he's in a one-on-one a decent amount, and he's a big target and he's making contested catches. I think Kyle feels comfortable throwing to that big target.

"Even when he is covered like he was in the two-minute drill, he's a big guy that you can throw him open like that and he's going to make that catch. He's another guy who is, when we're working at full capacity, a big part of our offense."

In nine games, the fifth-year tight end has corralled 34 receptions for 508 yards and four touchdowns, all of which rank second on the team behind Harrison.

## Depth Tested On Defense After Key Starters Sit Out

The Buckeyes were without a trio of important defenders in their blowout win over the Spartans, with linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safeties Lathan Ransom and Josh Proctor all appearing on the injury report as inactive before the game. The team turned to a number of reserves to plug the holes left by the injured trio, a large group of replacements that mostly answered the call.

To replace the injured Eichenberg at middle

he's going to execute. He's a great leader. I think he's one of those like, Mr. Perfect Guys. He does everything right."

In the secondary, the absence of Ransom and Proctor forced Knowles to shift around his personnel against the Spartans. Replacing Ransom at the bandit for the majority of the game was Styles, who shifted over from the nickel position. This move prompted cornerback Jordan Hancock to take most of the starting reps at the nickel, with true freshman Malik Hartford filling in for Proctor at the adjuster.

Those three players proved to be crucial in the Buckeyes' near-shutout, combining for 10 tackles, one sack from Styles and a pass breakup from Hancock. Simon said he was especially impressed with the play of Hartford, who showed poise after entering the starting lineup.

"He's a young, talented player," Simon said. "I mean, there's not many freshmen out there who are going out and playing high-level football. He's super smart, and he's going to get better every play, so I'm excited for him."

In addition to the four mentioned players, Knowles also got the opportunity to insert a number of his younger reserves into the lineup at the end of the game. The Buckeyes received extended play in the fourth quarter from former high-profile prospects such as linebacker C.J. Hicks and cornerback Jyaire Brown, while they also got to see more action from promising youngsters, including cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. and defensive end Caden Curry.

Day said allowing these less experienced players to get playing time can pay off in the future if the Buckeyes continue to be hit by the injury bug later this season. He thinks these players would be more ready for the moment if their number is to be called when it matters most.

"It was great to see some guys step up," Day said. "You never know how this thing is going to shake out, and you have to have guys play and, even at the end of the game, to be able to get some guys some reps. Those are precious reps because you just never know when guys are going to have to be put in those situations. I think back to down the stretch run last year – running back, tight end. It was a lot of times where we needed guys to step up, and so we'll watch the film and figure out who did that today."



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# Harrison, McCord Lead First-Half Blitz For Win

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State got off to an atypical fast start, and it paid off when the top-ranked Buckeyes cruised to a 38-3 win over Michigan State before 105,137 fans in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 11.

Marvin Harrison Jr. and Kyle McCord ensured the Buckeyes would put the woeful Spartans to bed early by helping the team score on five of the six possessions in the first half for a 35-3 lead.

Harrison caught two touchdowns and ran for another and McCord passed for a career-high 335 yards and three touchdowns to warm the hearts of the fans who sat through the 45-degree kickoff and exited in swarms in the final quarter with the game well in hand.

Harrison, in the previous game against Rutgers, had four catches for 25 yards and touchdowns of 4 and 2 yards, but he exploded against the Spartans (3-7, 1-6 Big Ten). He made seven catches for 149 yards before being pulled early in the third quarter with the score 38-3.

Harrison opened the scoring with his first career rushing touchdown to help the Buckeyes (10-0, 7-0) to one of their most efficient first halves of the season.

McCord was 24 of 31 and tied his career best for touchdowns. Tight end Cade Stover tied a career high of seven catches for 79 yards and a score – all in the first half.

Ohio State has won eight in a row against the Spartans.

## All Cylinders Clicking

Harrison gave the Buckeyes the 7-0 lead at 11:20 of the first quarter with a 19-yard run for his first rushing score on his fourth career carry.

The Buckeyes started from the 25 after the opening kickoff, and TreVeyon Henderson ran for 5 and 13 yards. Stover returned from missing one game due to an injury and had a 7-yard reception followed by a 4-yard



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NO SURPRISE — Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. had yet another outstanding outing in the Buckeyes' 38-3 win over Michigan State, finishing with three total touchdowns, including his first career rushing score.**

tote for Xavier Johnson.

After a bad snap forced McCord to throw the ball away, a pass interference against the Spartans on a ball intended for Emeka Egbuka moved the chains to the MSU 35. Henderson gained 7 yards, and Stover had another catch for 9 to the 19.

Harrison scored on a reverse, starting from the left and taking a handoff from McCord before sprinting to the right pylon

to complete the eight-play, 75-yard drive in 3:40.

Michigan State responded from its 25 with Montorie Foster Jr. catching a pass for 11 yards and Katin Houser later completing a 20-yarder to Alante Browne to the OSU 44. The defense held, and Jonathan Kim's 56-yard field-goal attempt was short.

Harrison went back to his usual method of scoring to make it 14-0 at 6:56 with a 26-yard reception. Stover started the series with his third catch for 12 yards. Henderson rushed for 4 yards, and Stover's next grab went for 19 to the Spartan 26.

On the next play, Harrison sneaked his foot inside the right sideline in the end zone to pull in the perfect toss from McCord. The Buckeyes traveled 61 yards in 1:30 and four plays.

Harrison's 9-yard catch made it 21-0 two seconds into the second quarter on a series encompassing 13 plays, 84 yards and 5:37 off the clock.

The Buckeyes' third possession included Harrison's 25-yarder to the OSU 47 and a 9-yard Julian Fleming catch. On third-and-4 from the 21, Harrison hauled in a 12-yarder to the 9. Henderson was stopped for no gain on the final play of the quarter before Harrison scored on the following snap.

The Spartans used a fake punt to keep their next drive alive but ended up punting to the 2 from the OSU 43. MSU's trickery came on fourth-and-1 from its 48 when Jar-en Mangham took a direct snap and rambled 5 yards.

After an OSU punt, Kim nailed a 53-yard field goal to make it 21-3 at the 5:38 mark. The Spartans began from their 45 after

Ohio State punted from its own 9, and they used a 7-yard rush by Nate Carter and a 10-yard catch for Christian Fitzpatrick to get within Kim's range.

The Buckeyes went 70 yards in six plays and 2:08 to go up 28-3 with 3:30 left in the half. Catches of 13 and 12 yards for Harrison and Egbuka, respectively, put the ball at the MSU 40. Johnson came out of the backfield to make a catch-and-run of 31 yards, and Henderson on the next play ran for a 9-yard score.

McCord connected with Stover for an 18-yard touchdown with 15 seconds left before halftime to make it 35-3. It took eight plays to go 74 yards in 1:26. There were numerous big gainers along the way.

Henderson caught a pass for 10 yards, Carnell Tate pulled in a 19-yarder and Stover made a catch of 9 yards to the MSU 26. Henderson then carried the ball for 8 yards, and Stover scored immediately after that.

The Buckeyes outgained the Spartans 360-118 in the first half with McCord going 21 of 25 for 263 yards and three touchdowns. Ohio State scored on five of six possessions.

"That's what we need to do," Harrison said. "It starts with scoring points in the red zone, that was big. We can't settle for field goals in that area. So when we score touchdowns and not field goals, I think that's definitely the fast start that we're talking about."

## Quiet Second Half

The Buckeyes' first drive of the second half wasted a 57-yard catch for Harrison to the 20 and resulted in a 36-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding at 11:56.

After the big play, Chip Trayanum got 2 yards rushing, but two incompletions followed.

Freshman Lincoln Kienholz replaced McCord early in the fourth quarter and was 2 of 3 for 18 yards on his first career throws, with both completions going to tight end and fellow freshman Jelani Thurman.

Fielding missed a 42-yard field goal with 9:15 left in the game. Each team had two drives after that. The Buckeyes finished the game with Evan Pryor rushing for 4 yards to the MSU 43.

"It's great," linebacker Cody Simon said of reserves getting to play. "College football is a tough sport to play in, and to be able to celebrate with your guys, to be able to make big plays, that's not easy to do. It's awesome to celebrate with guys who don't usually get the opportunity and can make big plays."

## Notes

Ohio State was without linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safeties Josh Proctor and Lathan Ransom due to injuries. ... Harrison became the first Ohio State receiver to have two 1,000-yard seasons. ... He had 1,263 yards last season and is up to 1,063 yards this season. ... The Buckeyes led in total yards 530 (353 passing, 177 rushing) to 182 (88 passing, 94 rushing). ... Houser was 12 of 24 for 92 yards. ... Davison Igbino-sun and Simon each had three solo and two assisted tackles to lead the Buckeyes with five stops, and Igbinosun added two pass breakups. ... Ohio State was 5 of 11 on third down, and Michigan State was 2 of 14.

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# BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 38, Michigan State 3

**Head coach Ryan Day on junior wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. and the offense getting off to a fast start:** "It was great to have everybody back. It was great to have Cade (Stover) back, see (TreVeyon Henderson) running, it was good to have Emeka (Egbuka) and Julian (Fleming) out there. Certainly Marvin made some big-time plays early on in the game that really got us going. I thought the reverse was really well executed by the guys up front."

**Day on how he handles Harrison getting double coverage so much:** "We want to get everybody involved. You saw Cade have seven targets, and sometimes you design a play where you think it's going to go somewhere and it goes somewhere else. I think Julian Fleming's playing really good football right now, too, and the ball hadn't quite gone his way a couple times, but it's going to. Same with Emeka. Every week he's getting stronger, and we know what he can do."

**Harrison on whether winning the Heisman was one of his goals coming into the season:** "No, it honestly wasn't in my head at all. I just wanted to beat Michigan and go to the Big Ten championship. I've been saying that all year, so those are the two goals I've had before the season even started. I'm thankful to even be in the conversation, but there's a lot of football left to be played. And I'm just trying to do my best to help the team win."

**Harrison on if his connection with junior quarterback Kyle McCord is getting stronger:** "Yes, definitely. We played with each other in high school, but it is totally different in college. The players are better. The schemes are different. And we're still trying to adjust. We've played 10 games now. We're still developing the chemistry and just giving each other different looks in practice, trying to be on the same page as much as we can. It's been great, though. It's been super exciting playing with him again, and we're going to continue our connection on the field."

**McCord on how he was able to be consistent against Michigan State:** "First, the game plan. I think we were super clear in the game plan, thought we had a great week of preparation and knew how we wanted to attack them, and then I think the guys around me did a great job. I mentioned the O-line earlier. I thought they had a really good game, especially in pass protection. I feel like there was a clean pocket all night and obviously the receivers going out and making some really good contested plays. I think on third down, too, we were really efficient tonight. Anytime on third down you can be efficient and keep the chains moving, points are going to follow."

**Day on getting young players in at the end**



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NEXT MAN UP — Senior linebacker Cody Simon (center) played a pivotal role in Ohio States' 38-3 win over Michigan State, filling in for injured linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and tying a team high with five tackles.**

**of the game and who impressed him:** "A young guy that flashed was (freshman cornerback) Calvin Simpson-Hunt on that screen play. What a great play for him to show up there. Now the coaches see that, they say, 'Wait a minute now, maybe we should be looking at this guy.' That's kind of how Carnell (Tate) came on and you see Brandon (Inniss) made the play in the Purdue game. That's part of it. It's a great opportunity, and we'll look at those snaps and see where we're at."

**Harrison on if a lighter week of practice helped him in this game:** "Yeah, it's week 10. That helped tremendously. Not just me, but for many other players who are dealing with some injuries and are trying to battle it out. Throughout the whole week, we're trying to get as healthy as we can for Saturdays, because Saturdays are obviously the most important. So for (Day) to do that for us, and for us to perform the way we did, it shows our maturity as a team."

**Sophomore safety Sonny Styles on his sack:** "It was just a little boundary pressure we had, so I ended up coming out free. It's pretty difficult when our D-line is that good, and then you've got me blitzing. It makes it hard for them to try and pick me up."

**Styles on if it was hard to focus against a struggling Spartan team:** "For us it's not really hard to focus. We're so focused on our goal, and every week, whoever's in front of us is keeping us from that goal, so it's really no challenge to focus. We're just

focused on getting where we need to go."

**Senior linebacker Cody Simon on what the key to shutting down Michigan State was:** "I think it's our mentality, just not to break. We bend, don't break. You can let up a play, but it's all about the next play. And getting a stop is so important in today's game with the limited amount of possessions and limited amount of plays. So getting those stops was really important for us, and every situation is super important."

**Day on if he would have run the clock out in the second half if this weren't a late-season game:** "Probably not. We know what's ahead of us. Tre didn't play in the second half, Cade didn't play in the second half, Emeka and Marvin only played a drive, and then we started to get other guys in there. This has been quite a run for us, so it was good to get those guys out of the game and cut their numbers down, because we know where we need to be here."

**Michigan State interim head coach Harlon Barnett on how he kept his players engaged in the game after Ohio State got off to a big early lead:** "When we kicked the field goal, I said, 'We're going to walk them down.' I'm trying to always encourage. I'm always believing we can win some type of way all the way to the end. It's just a mindset, and our guys have bought into that to a certain extent. They were probably stunned initially, then they were like, 'OK, let's go,' and they shook it off. We just have to sustain drives and have to execute better."

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# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 38, Michigan State 3

Nov. 11, 2023 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
<b>MICHIGAN STATE</b>	0	3	0	0	3
<b>OHIO STATE</b>	14	21	3	0	38

### First Quarter

**OSU** - Harrison Jr., 19-yard rush (Fielding kick), 11:20.

**OSU** - Harrison Jr., 26-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 6:56.

### Second Quarter

**OSU** - Harrison Jr., 9-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 14:58

**MSU** - Felkins, 53-yard field goal, 5:38.

**OSU** - Henderson., 9-yard rush (Fielding kick), 3:30.

**OSU** - Stover, 18-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 0:15.

### Third Quarter

**OSU** - Fielding, 36-yard field goal, 11:56.

**Att.** - 105,137

**Weather** - Cloudy, 45 F

### Team Statistics

	MSU	OSU
<b>First Downs</b>	11	25
<b>Rushing</b>	5	8
<b>Passing</b>	5	16
<b>Penalty</b>	1	1
<b>Rushes-Yards</b>	29-94	32-177
<b>Passing Yards</b>	88	353
<b>Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)</b>	13-25-0	26-34-0
<b>Offensive Plays</b>	54	66
<b>Total Net Yards</b>	182	530
<b>Third Down Efficiency</b>	2-14	5-11
<b>Fourth Down Efficiency</b>	2-2	0-0
<b>Punts-Avg.</b>	8-40.4	3-43.0
<b>Fumbles-Lost</b>	0-0	0-0
<b>Penalties</b>	5-36	3-25
<b>Time of Possession</b>	28:48	31:12

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** - **MSU:** Carter 11-52; Mangham 9-35; Houser 7-6; Joiner 2-1. **OSU:** Henderson 13-63; Johnson 4-40; Trayanum 7-35; Pryor 7-20; Harrison Jr. 1-19.

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** - **MSU:** Houser 12-24-0-92-0; Schorfhaar 1-1-0-(-4)-0. **OSU:** McCord 24-31-0-335-3; Kienholz 2-3-0-18-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** - **MSU:** Henry 3-11; Fitzpatrick 2-23; Joiner 2-14; Parachek 2-6; Morris 2-3; Brown 1-20; Foster Jr. 1-11. **OSU:** Harrison Jr. 7-149; Stover 7-79; Tate 2-26; Thurman 2-18; Henderson 2-14; Fleming 2-12; Trayanum 2-12; Johnson 1-31; Egbuka 1-12.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** - **MSU:** Eckley 6-42.0-58; O'Shaughnessy 2-35.5-48. **OSU:** Mirco3-43.0-44.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** - **MSU:** Henry 1-(-2). **OSU:** Ballard 1-11.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** - **MSU:** None. **OSU:** None.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** - **MSU:** None. **OSU:** None.

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

**SACKS (No.-Yds.)** - **MSU:** None. **OSU:** Styles 1-3; Williams 1-1.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** - **MSU:** Talley 1-4; Brule 1-3. **OSU:** Curry 1-3; Styles 1-3; Burke 1-2; Hicks 1-2; Hamilton 1-1; Williams 1-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** - **MSU:** Haladay 7-2-9; Brule 6-1-7; Mangham 2-4-6; Spencer 5-0-5; Grose 3-2-5; Kimbrough 4-0-4; Harmon 3-1-4; Hall 2-1-3; Talley 1-2-3; Sami 1-2-3; Hansen 0-3-3; Wright 1-1-2; Rucker 1-1-2; Thompson 0-2-2; Brown 1-0-1; Dunn 1-0-1; Jones 1-0-1; Schott 1-0-1; Barrow 0-1-1; Willie 0-1-1. **OSU:** Igbinosun 3-2-5; Simon 3-2-5; Hartford 4-0-4; Williams 1-3-4; Styles 3-0-3; Hancock 2-1-3; Chambers 2-1-3; Mathews Jr. 2-1-3; Hamilton 1-2-3; Hicks 2-0-2; Burke 1-1-2; Curry 1-1-2; Sawyer 1-1-2; Malone 1-1-2; Kanu 1-0-1; Powers 1-0-1; Brown 1-0-1; Hall Jr. 0-1-1; Tuimoloau 0-1-1-1; McKenzie 0-1-1; Prater 0-1-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** - **MSU:** Brown, Houser, Henry, Carter, Brown, Samac, Duplain, VanDeMark, Boyd, Foster Jr., Morris, Mangham, Kimbrough, Grose, Rucker, Haladay, Harmon, Spencer, Thompson, Brule, Barrow, Young, Mangham, Brown, Fitzpatrick, Schorfhaar, Jones, Franklin, Willie, Wright, Joiner, Schott, Alexander, Edwards, Lewis, Crump, Wilson, O'Shaughnessy, Millikin, Talley, Morse, Hall, Coyne, Brunning, Carr, Lepo, Gates Jr., Wigenton, Phillips, Fincher, Nelson, Masunas, Parachek, Nickel, Eckley, Kim, Hansen, Rusnak, Dunn, Sami. **OSU:** Harrison Jr., Egbuka, Henderson, Fleming, Jones, McCord, Fryar, Simmons, Jackson, Hinzman, Stover, Igbinosun, Burke, Chambers, Hartford, Simon, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hall Jr., Styles, Hancock, Williams, Johnson, Inniss, Hicks, Turner, Kienholz, Stokes, Carter, Thurman, Simpson-Hunt, Melton, Tate, J. Brown, Trayanum, Reese, Pryor, Abor, Mathews Jr., Carrico, Mirco, Powers, Fielding, Ferlmann, Gurd, Montgomery, Mickens, McDonald, Hamilton, Cutler, Prater, Michalski, Vimahi, Fitzpatrick, Tshabola, James, Rogers, Adolph, Rodgers, Scott Jr., Ballard, McKenzie, Curry, Kanu, Malone, Jackson Jr.

## Season Statistics

2023 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Sept. 2	(3) at Indiana	W, 23-3	50,050	
Sept. 9	(5) YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	102,897	
Sept. 16	(6) WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	100,217	
Sept. 23	(6) at Notre Dame (9)	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	W, 24-10	76,453	
Nov. 4	(3) at Rutgers	W, 35-16	53,703	
Nov. 11	(3) MICHIGAN STATE	W, 38-3	105,137	
Nov. 18	(3) MINNESOTA	4 p.m.		
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
<b>First Downs</b>	218	156
<b>Rushing</b>	71	61
<b>Passing</b>	129	77
<b>Penalty</b>	18	18
<b>Average Per Game/Rush</b>	138.6	112.4
<b>Average Per Game/Pass</b>	290.2	149.8
<b>Total Offense</b>	428.8	262.2
<b>Total Plays</b>	649	649
<b>Average Per Game</b>	428.8	262.2
<b>Average Per Play</b>	6.6	4.0
<b>Penalties-Yards</b>	60-474	51-440
<b>Fumbles-Lost</b>	7-5	9-3
<b>Third Down Efficiency</b>	56-126	44-149
<b>Percentage</b>	44%	30%
<b>Fourth Down Efficiency</b>	9-17	10-26
<b>Percentage</b>	53%	38%
<b>Sacks-Yards</b>	19-133	17-111
<b>Time Of Possession Avg.</b>	29:51	30:08

### Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
<b>Ohio State</b>	68	107	79	79	0	333	33.3
<b>Opponents</b>	20	31	21	27	0	99	9.9

### Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	103	648	6.3	8	61
Chip Trayanum	75	311	4.1	3	40
Miyan Williams	49	158	3.2	3	12
Xavier Johnson	21	142	6.8	0	27
Dallan Hayden	11	76	6.9	1	19
Devin Brown	19	35	1.8	1	8
Evan Pryor	13	34	2.6	0	6
Marvin Harrison Jr.	2	26	13.0	1	19
Emeka Egbuka	5	25	5.0	0	9
Jesse Mirco	1	2	2.0	0	0
Cody Simon	1	-3	-3.0	0	0
Kyle McCord	29	-57	-2.0	0	9
Team	6	-11	-1.8	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>1386</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>1124</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>45</b>

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Kyle McCord	191	288	66.3	2687	20-4	164.8
Devin Brown	12	22	54.5	197	2-1	150.7
Lincoln Kienholz	2	3	66.7	18	0-0	117.1
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>2902</b>	<b>22-5</b>	<b>162.9</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>1498</b>	<b>7-6</b>	<b>93.1</b>

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	59	1063	18.0	12	75
Cade Stover	34	508	14.9	4	49
Emeka Egbuka	27	344	12.7	3	28
Julian Fleming	21	202	9.6	0	37
Carnell Tate	16	254	15.9	1	55
T. Henderson	14	184	13.1	0	65
Gee Scott Jr.	9	62	6.9	1	14
Chip Trayanum	9	53	5.9	0	19
Xavier Johnson	8	116	14.5	0	40
Miyan Williams	4	42	10.5	0	27
Jelani Thurman	2	18	9.0	0	14
Dallan Hayden	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Brandon Inniss	1	58	58.0	1	58
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>2902</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>1498</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>36</b>

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Marvin Harrison Jr.	13	-	-	-	-	78
Jayden Fielding	-	42-43	-	-	11-13	75
T. Henderson	8	-	-	-	-	48
Cade Stover	4	-	-	-	-	24
Chip Trayanum	3	-	-	-	-	18
Emeka Egbuka	3	-	-	-	-	18

Miyan Williams	3	-	-	-	-	18
Josh Proctor	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jordan Hancock	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
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42-43</b>	-	-	<b>11-13</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9-9</b>	-	-	<b>10-16</b>	<b>99</b>

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	4-4	5-5	2-4	0-0	11-13
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>4-4</b>	<b>5-5</b>	<b>2-4</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>11-13</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>5-6</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>4-6</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>10-16</b>

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	36	1548	43.0	0	72
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1548</b>	<b>43.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>2401</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>60</b>

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jordan Hancock	1	93	93.0	1	93
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
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jayden Ballard	8	47	5.9	0	18
Emeka Egbuka	7	23	3.3	0	8
Julian Fleming	1	3.0	3.0	0	3
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>35</b>

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	9	208	23.1	0	32
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
Caden Curry	1	-5	-5.0	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>

### Def. Leaders

Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks	
Tommy Eichenberg	38	37	75	2.5-9	1.0-7
Steele Chambers	27	30	57	1.0-1	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	31	14	45	1.5-4	0-0
Cody Simon	17	25	42	2.5-5	0-0
Tyleik Williams	16	25	41	9.5-17	3.0-6
Sonny Styles	24	16	40	4.0-10	2.0-6
Josh Proctor	23	12	35	4.0-6	0-0
Lathan Ransom	21	13	34	1.5-5	0-0
Jordan Hancock	22	11	33	1.0-10	1.0-10
Jack Sawyer	14	18	32	2.5-13	1.5-12
Ty Hamilton	12	16	28	2.5-9	1.0-7
J.T. Tuimoloau	10	18	28	5.5-37	4.0-32
Mike Hall Jr.	6	11	17	2.0-15	1.5-14
J. Mathews Jr.					

# Young Finds Old Friend In Trade To 49ers

By CRAIG MERZ

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Chase Young felt like he was in familiar surroundings the moment he stepped into the San Francisco 49ers' training facility following the defensive end's trade from the Washington Commanders on Oct. 31.

Not only was he reunited with his college partner in quarterback sacks, Nick Bosa, but there was a sense of being in the right place at the right time.

"I wasn't mad," Young said of the trade. "Nah, Nick is here. (He's) always been a big brother to me even at Ohio State.

"The spirit in the locker room. The spirit of the coaches. You know, it's just different. ... It's kind of that same thing at Ohio State where it's like you're expected to win, and it's just like that vibe of, 'We're going to win.'

"So it definitely reminds me of Ohio State. I'm just excited to be blessed with the opportunity to be with this franchise. The culture, the vibe is a lot different. I definitely know that I'm in a building with winners."

The Commanders were 4-5 at the time he spoke while the 49ers were 5-3 despite losing three straight. Young, the second pick in the 2020 NFL draft, never lived up to expectations with Washington, in part due to injuries, and the team struggled during his time there. The Commanders won the NFC East in 2020 with a 7-9 record and lost their lone playoff game during Young's tenure. He was named the Rookie Defensive Player of the Year.

He tore the ACL in his right knee and ruptured his patellar tendon in 2021, limiting him to nine and three games, in '21 and '22, respectively, when Washington was 7-10 and 8-8-1. By comparison, Bosa, the No. 2 pick in 2019, has had one losing season with the 49ers, played in a Super Bowl, won the Defensive Rookie of the Year award, is the reigning Defensive Player of the Year and the highest paid defensive end in NFL history.

Young's comments contrasting the culture of the two franchises seemed aimed at his former team. Washington coach Ron Rivera sidestepped Young's words when asked on Nov. 8.

"I think first and foremost is that, to me, as far as I'm concerned, I'm excited about our football team," Rivera said. "I like the things that we're doing. I like the direction we're headed. I think, culturally, it's a really solid place. We're still learning and growing. We have a young quarterback that's learning and growing for us. I do think that for the most part, things can be very bright for us if it continues to go in the right direction."

"As far as Chase is concerned and his comments, I really appreciate who he is for us and who he was for us. He did some nice things, and I just wish him all the luck in San Francisco."

While Rivera took the high road, his comments immediately after the trade indicated what he was really thinking.

"Well, I think that more so than anything else, as we put this plan together, I think it's really what we felt was in the best interest of our football team going forward," Rivera said. "We had a plan going into this, the front office put together what those offers

were, and we sat down and talked about the best way to go with it, the best direction, and then sat down with ownership, and everybody was aligned when we were done talking about it."

Behind the scenes the Commanders may have been happy to be rid of Young, according to two reports. Mike Silver of the San Francisco Chronicle wrote: "Young, according to several Commanders coaches and other organizational sources, was viewed as an undisciplined player who developed bad habits such as deviating from assignments in an effort to make splash plays."

And there was this from a Commanders source, according to Ben Standig of The Athletic: "The team views the trade of Young as a potential addition by subtraction."

Washington tipped its hand when it declined the fifth-year option for Young, making him a free agent after this season. Concerns about his right knee factored in the decision.

"I'm not even worried about that right now," Young said of his contract. "I'm just worried about learning this playbook and just being the best player that I can be."

That Washington was willing to let him go to the 49ers for only a 2024 third-round compensatory pick shows how much his stock had dropped in the organization.

Yet, that contrasts with stories that several teams besides San Francisco were trying to trade for Young. Reports suggested that the Jacksonville Jaguars and Baltimore Ravens were also pursuing him.

## Starting Over

The 49ers were ecstatic to get Young not only for his potential, but also if he signs elsewhere for the 2024 season, they get a compensatory pick, possibly in the third round, which would replace the pick the 49ers sent to Washington.

San Francisco general manager John Lynch told reporters on Nov. 1 that he had continuing talks with his Washington counterpart, Martin Mayhew.

"Martin and I touched base quite a while ago, maybe two weeks ago," Lynch said. "I was gauging the likelihood that (Young) would be available. Martin thought that there was a good chance that would be in play."

"We've been tracking Chase for some time, and Martin did a really good job. Martin kept us in the loop because we were looking at a variety of things."

Thus ended a rocky relationship between Young and Washington. The franchise selected him rather than quarterbacks Tua Tagovailoa or Justin Herbert because the Commanders had picked former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins in the first round the previous year.

Rivera and his staff were hired several months before the 2020 draft but didn't really have a say in the matter because owner Daniel Snyder wanted Young. He justified the pick as a rookie with 7½ sacks, four forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries. Young had less of an impact in 2021 with just 1½ sacks in the first nine games before injuring his knee.

He was still recovering in 2022 and had



FILE PHOTO

**GOOD TO SEE YOU — Former Ohio State defensive ends Chase Young (pictured) and Nick Bosa, who were teammates in 2017 and 2018, are reuniting with the San Francisco 49ers after Young was traded to the team on Oct. 31.**

no sacks in three games. Young missed the first game this season, but in seven games before the trade he had five sacks, 15 combined tackles, nine quarterback hits and six tackles for loss.

Now that he will be playing with Bosa, Young's career may be rejuvenated. They played together at Ohio State in 2017 and 2018, and in that first season, Bosa had 8½ sacks while Young had 3½ as a sophomore. In 2018, Young recorded 10½ sacks and Bosa four, but he was injured in the third game and sat the rest of the season before declaring for the draft.

"Even in college, we never thought that we would ever be able to play with each other again," Young said. "I think it's going to be just like in college, just a race to the quarterback kind of. It's going to be real fun, that's all I know."

Bosa was excited when he heard of the trade.

"(Tight end) George (Kittle) called me and let me know, and then I FaceTimed (Young) right away," Bosa said on Nov. 2. "It was just shocking, honestly. We didn't ever expect to play together. It's a little weird seeing him walking around this building."

"We kept in touch, but obviously we're both doing our own thing, but we were really close at Ohio State and it's good to have him back."

When asked about Young's strengths, Bosa said, "Speed off the edge, good length, playmaking ability, everything that he is as a player. People forget you when you get injured, but he's really young, and he's got a long career ahead, and I think we're lucky to have him."

Even players Young is expected to challenge for playing time were happy to welcome him.

"I was surprised," defensive end Randy Gregory said. "I know there was talk about possibly adding some more players to the mix, and obviously we're in win-now mode. We went big and (hope to) get back on the

right side of things with the season and see how long we go into the year.

"I was excited when we got him," added Gregory, who was acquired via a trade with Denver in October. "I've been a big fan of him since he was playing in college. A lot of these guys, I've been watching for years and they may not even know that. I've always prided myself on being a fan before a player, so anytime you can get a guy like that on the team, it's a big deal."

"He's an explosive athlete, does a lot of things well. There's a reason why he's the player he is. He gets after the quarterback, all the things we look for on the D-line. A young guy, a lot of talent, a sponge — he's out there trying to learn the details of the new position and things like that, so it's fun to have him out there."

Gregory said Young is a quick learner.

"Everything he does is how we want to play football on this D-line, so he'll be able to jump right in," he said.

San Francisco head coach Kyle Shanahan agreed by stating Young would be available against Jacksonville on Nov. 12 after the 49ers were off the previous weekend.

"I think he's going to jump in right away," Shanahan said. "Hopefully he'll pick up the stuff throughout the week and is going to be out there a good bit on Sunday."

"I think anytime you go to a new place, that's always a little weird for people, football players just like anybody else. You want to go in there and meet everyone and stuff, but I think it's always nice to have someone you've known prior to kind of show you the ropes and understand who you are, let other guys know, and it's just an easier transition for people."

In his first game for the 49ers, Young had one assisted tackle and a half sack, which was combining with Bosa for a strip-sack of Trevor Lawrence in the 49ers' 34-3 win. Bosa pried the ball from Lawrence as he was going to the ground. Bosa had three tackles (two solo) and 1½ sacks.

# McCord's Story Still Unwritten This Season

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Over the last few seasons, the Ohio State football program has been blessed with what seemed to be an embarrassment of riches at the quarterback position. With Dwayne Haskins (2018), Justin Fields (2019-20) and C.J. Stroud (2020-22) steering the ship, the Buckeyes positioned themselves as an almost unstoppable force on the offensive side of the ball, moving down the field with ease and averaging at least 41.0 points per game in each of the five seasons.

These team successes would also translate to some sparkling stat lines for the three gunslingers. In those five years, Haskins, Fields and Stroud combined to throw for a whopping 18,327 passing yards and 198 touchdowns to just 29 interceptions while completing 1,344 of their 1,942 passes, an efficient 69.2 percent.

If that was not enough, their collective résumé would also include three Big Ten championships (2018-20), three College Football Playoff appearances (2019-20, 2022) and four trips to New York for the Heisman Trophy ceremony (Haskins in 2018, Fields in 2019 and Stroud in 2021-22).

"Those guys, they were just spot on," former Ohio State quarterback and national champion Rex Kern told Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

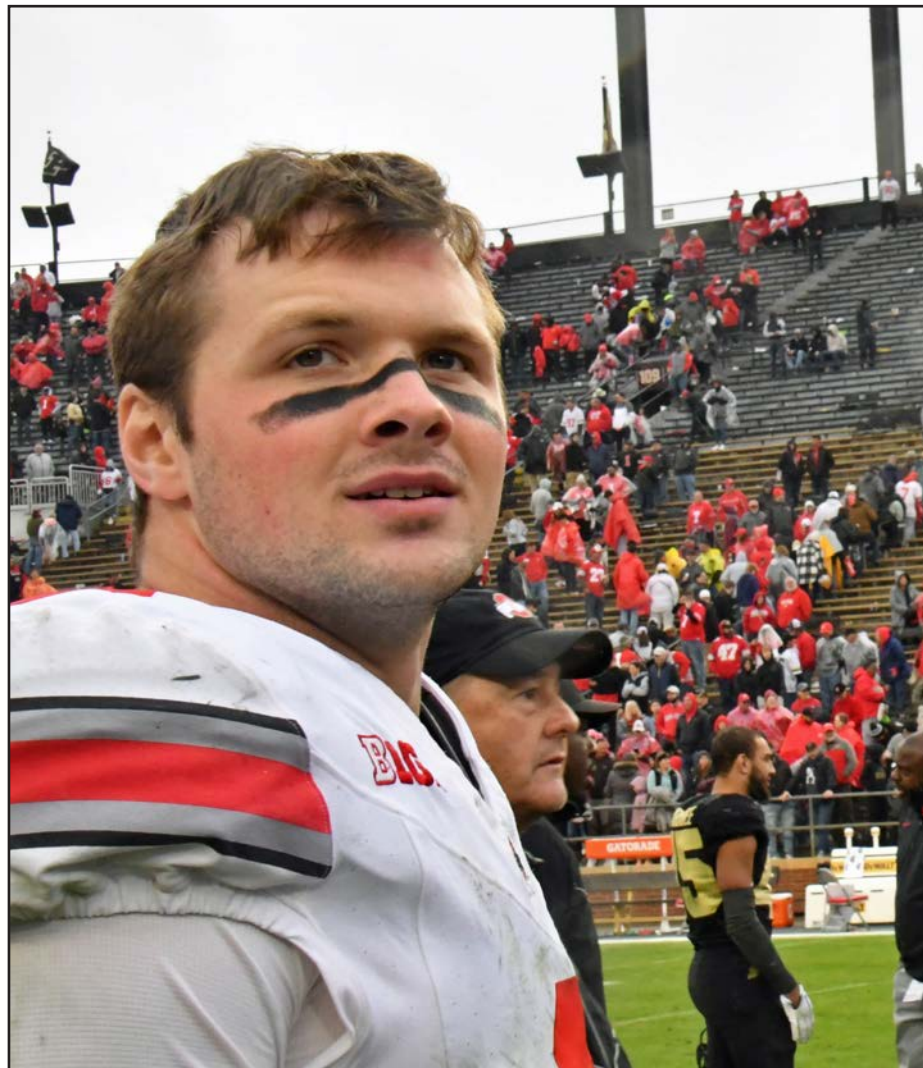
While many spoiled Ohio State fans were expecting this trend of exemplary quarterback play to continue this year, that has yet to be the case through the first 10 games of the regular season. With junior Kyle McCord now under center, the Buckeye offense has taken an obvious step back in production and explosiveness, averaging just 428.8 yards and 33.3 points per game through Nov. 11, putting them on pace to have their worst offensive showing since averaging just 24.5 points and 318.2 yards in 2011.

These offensive issues may very well be attributed to a reshaped and inexperienced offensive line along with a bevy of injuries to key skill players, but a lot can also be placed on McCord, who has struggled at times with his accuracy and timing while also developing a ball security problem that has ended a number of drives.

"Regardless of what any coach or anyone from the outside world has to say, nobody is harder on me than I am," he said. "I'm my own biggest critic. I know if this team is going to accomplish the things we want to accomplish, I have to take my game to the next level. I don't think that's a secret. So I take it as a challenge every single day."

McCord has built a solid stat line through 10 games – 191 of 288 (66.3) for 2,687 passing yards, 20 touchdowns and four interceptions – but his struggles and lack of consistency have caused fans and observers to develop some concerns as the final stretch of the regular season approaches. But are these criticisms out of line or are they warranted?

"I think the problem is that we are in such a mindset that we focus on what he doesn't do well, that looking at what he does well is maybe something we don't



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SHOWING GROWTH – Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord has displayed week-to-week improvement during his first season as the Buckeyes' starter under center.**

spend enough time in doing," BuckeyeHuddle reporter Kevin Noon said. "I think he does a good job – often, not always – of stepping up in the pocket and keeping plays alive, as much as you can for a quarterback that is not known for being a runner or a scrambler. He's certainly not a (Maryland quarterback) Taulia Tagovailoa or anything like that in terms of his escapability. But he's solid."

McCord's pocket presence and mobility were on full display when it mattered most this season in Ohio State's instant classic against Notre Dame on Sept. 23. With the Buckeyes trailing the Fighting Irish 14-10 with 1:26 remaining in the game, he orchestrated a 15-play, 65-yard touchdown drive, standing tall in the pocket and delivering a number of accurate strikes on third and fourth down to extend the game.

On that drive alone, McCord completed third-down passes of 23 and 21 yards along with a fourth-down conversion of 7 yards, a series of game-changing plays that brought the Buckeyes all the way down to the Notre Dame 1-yard line and led to the game-winning touchdown score from running back Chip Trayanum.

Kern, who had some signature wins of his own – a 27-16 Rose Bowl win over running back O.J. Simpson and No. 2 USC on Jan. 1, 1969, being at the top of the list – said McCord's performance at No-

tre Dame Stadium that night, along with his second-half performance against Penn State on Oct. 21, was also an impressive showing of confidence and poise. These are two qualities that are usually at the core of a championship-winning quarterback, a development that could excite Buckeye fans as they take a closer look at McCord's overall performance.

"For him going into South Bend and getting a last-second touchdown, what great poise, what a great drive our offense had on that," Kern said. "And he continued to do that in the Penn State game. It wasn't the last-minute drive, but they had very successful drives, very methodical, and I just thought those two games really built his confidence level as well."

"Penn State's always a tough win, and doggonit, we have a Buckeye who's coaching over in South Bend, but we'll take that win over there. We decided to play and when we did, we made our presence known. And that shows a lot of growth in his quarterbacking abilities."

Kern added that McCord's growing confidence and command of the huddle come as a result of greater continuity and play from his offensive line. He thinks that as the season progresses and the offensive line has improved, McCord's comfort has improved too, allowing him to be more confident as the weeks go by while he throws from a

cleaner pocket.

"I'd say he's improving from week to week, which is a really good sign," Kern said. "I think it's because his offensive line is getting a lot better week to week. Because an old-dog quarterback, if linemen don't give you much protection, you're not going to be able to see those great wide receivers we have. I think Kyle has had more confidence in his offensive line, which makes him sit back in the pocket until those great wide receivers can get open. I think he's progressing exceedingly well."

Kern added that having a strong trust in his offensive line benefited his personal career at Ohio State as well, something that especially served him during his national championship victory over the Trojans. Kern, in his first year as the Buckeyes' starting quarterback, admitted that he was initially intimidated by USC's formidable defensive line. But that went out the window once the teams took the field. Kern's offensive linemen were up for the challenge and helped him ease some nerves and gain confidence, allowing him to throw for two fourth-quarter touchdowns and win Rose Bowl MVP.

"My offensive center, Johnny Muhlbach, he was only about 5-10, maybe 205 pounds. And our two guards were maybe 6-1 or 6-2, 195-205 pounds. But then we had these two monster tackles, All-American Dave Foley and All-American Rufus Mayes. And it was amazing that from the get-go, our offensive linemen handled USC right from the beginning. Boy, we just marched down the field, and our offensive line just drove them off the ball and kept driving them off the ball until the end of the fourth quarter."

"When you can have that kind of confidence in your offensive line, you can just do anything. If I made a stupid call, it could even turn out looking good just because of the protection and the drive blocking. It just builds your confidence as a quarterback, and of course everybody's looking at the quarterback for the confidence."

Kern was complimentary of McCord and his performance this season, but Noon and Ohio State beat writer Marcus Hartman of the Dayton Daily News were more critical of the first-year starter. Both alluded to some of McCord's most glaring weaknesses that have hindered his performance so far this season, with Hartman pointing to the quarterback's inconsistent throwing mechanics and pocket awareness, and Noon listing his overall inconsistent play and hesitation when going through his progressions.

"His weakness is having breakdowns in his mechanics, which will kind of lead him to not be accurate sometimes," Hartman said. "And then when he sees the (pass) push, maybe he gets out of there a little bit too fast sometimes, especially early in the season. But I don't think it's anything that's unusual for a guy that's building experience."

"He gets off in a lot of games to slow starts," Noon added. "Sometimes he's a little too quick to check down and not get through his progressions. But some of that also could be predicated by inconsistent line play. And let's remember that everything doesn't necessarily fall right on the



shoulders of the quarterback when it comes to talking about the passing game in general. It takes multiple people to make all of that work.”

These pitfalls have seemed to become more common as the season progresses, where he was unable to put forth a complete performance in three consecutive games against Penn State, Wisconsin on Oct. 28 and Rutgers on Nov. 4. He may have accomplished that a week later on Nov. 11, however, where he – along with the entire offense – put forth arguably his best showing this season against Michigan State at home under the lights, completing an impressive 24 of his 31 passes (77.4 percent) for a season-high 335 yards, three touchdowns and no turnovers.

Despite the productive night against the Spartans, McCord has still shown a large enough sample of poor decision-making and lack of ball-security that is worth noting. He threw two costly interceptions against Wisconsin and another against Rutgers while also putting the ball on the turf once against the Badgers and against the Nittany Lions, the latter returned for a touchdown but called back due to a holding penalty.

Hartman said these mistakes were alarming and could prove costly if they continue to mount as the team inches closer toward the Nov. 25 clash with Michigan and postseason play.

“He and the offensive line both – when it’s bad, it’s really bad,” Hartman said. “So it’s a little more jarring when something does come back to hurt you. It sticks with you a little bit more. In Wisconsin, those were really big mistakes. And the one big

mistake he made against Rutgers, (head coach Ryan) Day pretty much gave him a pass on right away. But that can cost you a game when you get down to it.”

Despite the late-season struggles, McCord’s season story is still far from being written. With two regular-season games left on the schedule along with a Big Ten Championship Game and College Football Playoff potentially on the horizon, there is an opportunity for McCord to take his game to another level and ease some of the criticism from fans. This is something Hartman said can help propel McCord to new heights by January, putting him in prime position to not only emerge as one of the better quarterbacks in the nation, but put his name in consideration for the NFL draft in the offseason.

“He could go on a big run in the next five games (beginning against Michigan State) and look amazing,” Hartman said. “That happened with Dwayne. He really got hot at the end. Stuff happens, especially with the way college football is now with the playoff being two games and the conference championship game. Beyond that, the biggest game of the year is against Michigan, so it’s still right there for him to be the Big Ten Quarterback of the Year and be a Big Ten championship-winning quarterback and take them to the playoff. Who knows what happens when you get there? I don’t think there’s a juggernaut team out there, so that’s still on the table.

“Or maybe he’ll fall short and won’t win any of those things and maybe there will be a quarterback competition next year. Maybe he won’t be so good at the rest of the year that he’s the automatic starter. It’s all still

out there. If he ends up like Rex Kern, then he won’t have to worry about sharing snaps with (Devin) Brown next year. All the possibilities are still out there.”

While McCord’s report card is still incomplete, the sample size he has put out on the field in the first 10 games of the season has allowed Hartman, Noon and Kern to all view the first-year quarterback in a mostly positive light. Despite his recent struggles, the trio feels McCord has received an unfair share of criticism this season, with fans and those close to the program grading his play on a curve simply due to the outstanding quarterbacks who preceded him.

“There’s no question about it,” Hartman said. “I’m sure he’s better than Bobby Hoying was when he was in his first year. And he’s been better than (Terrelle) Pryor or Braxton (Miller). He’s been better than Steve Bellisari. I actually looked at all the numbers for first-year Ohio State quarterbacks before the season, and I’m sure he’s still in the top five or six.

“He’s been average, or maybe even a little above average, but average is not what Ohio State fans are used to seeing. He doesn’t have the same pure throwing motion that Haskins and Stroud had, but when it’s all lined up, it looks pretty good. He has a pretty good arm when everything is right. So he has all the tools, he just needs to kind of get it together.”

“Candidly, I would think (he is graded unfairly),” Kern added. “McCord has stepped into his own. People are going to have criticisms, and that’s an unfair comparison to me. That’s completely unfair, but yet our fans are going to do it. As long as they love

the Buckeyes and still sing the battle cry, I don’t care who they want to compare him to.”

McCord’s play has also convinced the trio that he has the capabilities to lead the Buckeyes to their first national championship since 2014. In order to accomplish this, though, he will need to limit the mistakes that have plagued him this fall and use his stellar defense and explosive playmakers to his advantage.

“We have seen that to win a national championship in the CFP era, you better be able to put 40 points up on the board,” Noon said. “Has Ohio State been able to do that much of that? No. But I think there’s a lot to that. I mean, there’s an inconsistent running game that’s starting to come together with a healthy TreVeyon Henderson. We’re starting to see some better offensive line play, so some of those things could come into place.

“Going back 21 years with the 2002 team, let’s remember, McCord is a much better quarterback in terms of quarterbacking than what Craig Krenzler was, and Ohio State won a national championship. But that may as well have been 500 years ago in terms of football evolution.

“For me, I want a quarterback that certainly makes plays but doesn’t make mistakes. I’m not saying that you have to come out there and necessarily be (USC’s) Caleb Williams, who has not sniffed the national championship, or (North Carolina’s) Drake Maye, who hasn’t even sniffed the College Football Playoff. I think there has to be the right mixture of offense and defense, and I think that McCord does provide enough for Ohio State to be in that conversation.”

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# Gophers Backsliding In Fleck's Seventh Season

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck has used his mantra of "row the boat" – built on controlling what you can control and making sacrifices – to take the team to new heights over the last few years, but the Golden Gophers appear to be without a pair of oars this season.

Through 10 games, Minnesota is 5-5 with a big win over then-No. 24 Iowa – the team's first since 2014 – but just as confounding losses to Illinois, Northwestern and Purdue, going with the theme of a Big Ten West that just doesn't make much sense this season.

Minnesota could end up with anywhere between five and eight wins this season, but regardless, the Gophers will finish with their fewest wins – excluding 2020 – since Fleck's first two seasons when he went 5-7 in 2017 and 7-6 in 2018. With Iowa largely running away with the Big Ten West despite the Gophers' previous win over the Hawkeyes, Fleck is focused only on a strong finish for Minnesota.

"You've got to take it one game at a time and take it as one-game championship seasons because when you get to November, the people that don't win in November don't have a chance," he said. "We're all at a point where every game matters. As we told our team, we've made it to November where it matters. Now what we do with that, is up to us."

Like many of the Gophers' peers in their division, they have won games on defense, rarely helped and often hindered by the team's scoring – or lack thereof – on offense. Minnesota is averaging just 22.5 points per game – which is 100th nationally but still eighth in the Big Ten – and 318.6 yards per contest, which ranks similarly poorly at 111th in the country and ninth in the conference.

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The struggles have largely happened when attempting to pass the ball. Sophomore quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis – who took over for longtime starter Tanner Morgan, who rewrote the record books for the Gophers in six seasons with the team but exhausted his eligibility after last year – has completed just 52.2 percent of his passes this season for 1,582 yards and 13 touchdowns while throwing seven interceptions.

But after a challenging start to the season in which he completed just 55.9 percent of his passes for 797 yards, six touchdowns and six interceptions through six games, his coaches believe he is beginning to settle in.

"He's playing the quarterback position," said offensive coordinator Greg Harbaugh Jr., who is no relation to Jim Harbaugh. "That's the best way that I can describe him now, as he was just 'a quarterback' early in the year. Now he's playing the position. He's handling the situations. He's handling the day to day."

"How do you continue to change your process so your process gets better so you can achieve your goal? That's where he's changed so much. Learning, taking criticism, taking coaching. He has always been coachable. I want to make sure that it's clear, but now if he makes a mistake, he knows I can get on him. He knows if he does something, I can praise him and he's not going to let that get to his head. He's the same guy every single day now."

"And the leadership is coming. The respect from all of his teammates is coming, where you have to earn that and you have to earn that by how you play."

Senior Daniel Jackson is the team's leading receiver with 45 catches for 681 yards and seven touchdowns, followed by fifth-year senior Corey Crooms Jr. (26 catches, 334 yards). Sixth-year tight end Brevyn Spann-Ford (23 catches, 226 yards, two TDs) is the only other receiver of note for the Gophers, and he has started to catch on down the stretch.

"I can't say enough about just how he's practiced since the bye week," Harbaugh said. "I told him on the field during the bye week that one of my goals as a coach these last six games is to get him going. And I owe it to him as I got to coach him last year, and then obviously being charged with the offense. I want to get him going, and I want to make sure he has an impact – for him as an individual, but it also makes us better as a team."

Minnesota's best option this season has been running the ball, with four rushers accounting for at least 200 yards. The rushing attack has been led by true freshman Darius Taylor, who has carried the ball 103 times for 591 yards and four touchdowns during his first season in Minneapolis, but he has not played since suffering a leg injury against Iowa on Oct. 21, and his status remains up in the air against Ohio State.

If Taylor is not able to go, the Gophers would look to either sophomore Jordan



P.J. Fleck

## Get To Know ... Minnesota

- **2023 Record:** 5-5.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Pro Style; Defensive Formation - 4-3; Starters Returning - Offense 3, Defense 3.
- **Head Coach:** P.J. Fleck, 7th year at Minnesota, 49-31.
- **Series History:** 55th meeting, Ohio State leads 47-7-0.
- **School Facts:** Location - Minneapolis, Minn.; Enrollment - 52,376; Nickname - Golden Gophers; Colors - Maroon, Gold; Conference - Big Ten (West Division); Stadium - Huntington Bank Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf; Capacity - 50,805).

### Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Darius Taylor	103	591	5.7	4
Jordan Nubin	81	393	4.9	2
Sean Tyler	58	227	3.9	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Athan Kaliakmanis	129-247	52.2	1582	13-7

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Daniel Jackson	45	681	15.1	7
Corey Crooms Jr.	26	334	12.9	0
Brevyn Spann-Ford	23	226	9.8	2

### Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 22.5
Rushing Yards Per Game – 160.4
Passing Yards Per Game – 158.2
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 318.6

Nubin (393 yards, 4.9 yards per carry, two TDs), redshirt senior Sean Tyler (227, 3.9) or redshirt freshman Zach Evans (213, 4.3, one TD).

The other wrinkle for Minnesota's offense is Harbaugh himself. He has taken over play-calling duties for the Gophers this season after previous offensive coordinator Kirk Ciarrocca left for the same position at Rutgers.

"I've seen a ton of growth," Fleck said of Harbaugh. "Nothing rattles Greg. Greg's always got an answer. He's always got a solution. We have some challenges offensively. But they're always finding solutions. They're always solution driven. That's what I appreciate about him."

"You never know from a first-time play caller what that's going to be, and I told you, there's always three things I always evaluate: Is it coaching, scheme, or personnel? And I'm really pleased with where we are."

But as stated, most of Minnesota's success has come on the defensive side of the ball. The Gophers have allowed just 12.4 points in their wins this season and have been particularly stout up front, allowing only 137.4 rushing yards per game, which is 45th nationally and 10th in the Big Ten.

"I think they're playing really well together, and you're playing really hard," Fleck said. "I think they've gotten better with the fundamentals and techniques."

Defensive ends Jalen Logan-Redding and Danny Striggow line up on the outside, combining for 8½ sacks and 10½ tackles for loss this season, while defensive tackles Kyler Baugh and Deven Eastern anchor the inside. Striggow, a senior, has been a particular standout with seven tackles for loss and six sacks.

It's a veteran group up front but less so at linebacker, where the Gophers – due to

### 2023 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	NEBRASKA	W, 13-10
Sept. 9	EASTERN MICHIGAN	W, 25-6
Sept. 16	at North Carolina	L, 31-13
Sept. 23	at Northwestern	L, 37-34
Sept. 30	LOUISIANA	W, 35-24
Oct. 7	MICHIGAN	L, 52-10
Oct. 21	at Iowa	W, 12-10
Oct. 28	MICHIGAN STATE	W, 27-12
Nov. 4	ILLINOIS	L, 27-26
Nov. 11	at Purdue	L, 49-30
Nov. 18	at Ohio State	4 p.m.
Nov. 25	WISCONSIN	TBA
Dec. 2	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

### Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
M. Baranowski	23	29	52	5.0-16	1.0-3
Tyler Nubin	31	18	49	1.0-11	1.0-11
Darius Green	27	21	48	3.0-5	0-0
Jack Henderson	35	12	47	3.0-9	1.0-6
Devon Williams	27	17	44	2.0-6	1.0-5
Danny Striggow	26	15	41	7.0-43	6.0-41

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Tyler Nubin	4	14	3.5	0
Jack Henderson	2	17	8.5	0
Tre'Von Jones	2	11	5.5	0

### Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 25.8
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 137.4
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 226.6
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 364.0

a handful of injuries and departures this past offseason – are starting redshirt freshman Maverick Baranowski and sophomore Devon Williams. To their credit, the duo has combined for 96 tackles, seven tackles for loss and two sacks, but there have been some growing pains.

"Young guys want you to give them the answer," defensive coordinator Joe Rossi said. "I want them to figure out the answer. When they get to that point, then they really know it."

Minnesota's defensive backfield has been average this season, allowing 226.6 passing yards per game and giving up 18 passing touchdowns. Cornerbacks Justin Walley, a returning starter, and Tre'Von Jones line up on the outside, with fifth-year senior Tyler Nubin at free safety and sophomore Darius Green at strong safety. Depending on the matchup, the Gophers will also utilize a nickel with either sixth-year linebacker Ryan Selig or senior defensive back Jack Henderson.

Minnesota's season has not gone to plan, with Fleck set for his first true disappointment since he took over for the 2017 season. But despite these challenges the team has gone through – and the ones that likely lay ahead with a matchup at Ohio Stadium on deck – he feels his team continues to show growth.

"You're watching growth," he said. "That's what I want to see from the team. I'll be judged on wins and losses, and it's your job to judge us and say the things you say rightfully so, but I'm more interested in them growing as people, because I know then, they'll grow as players. Our guys are committed to doing that, and I'm really proud of what they've done."



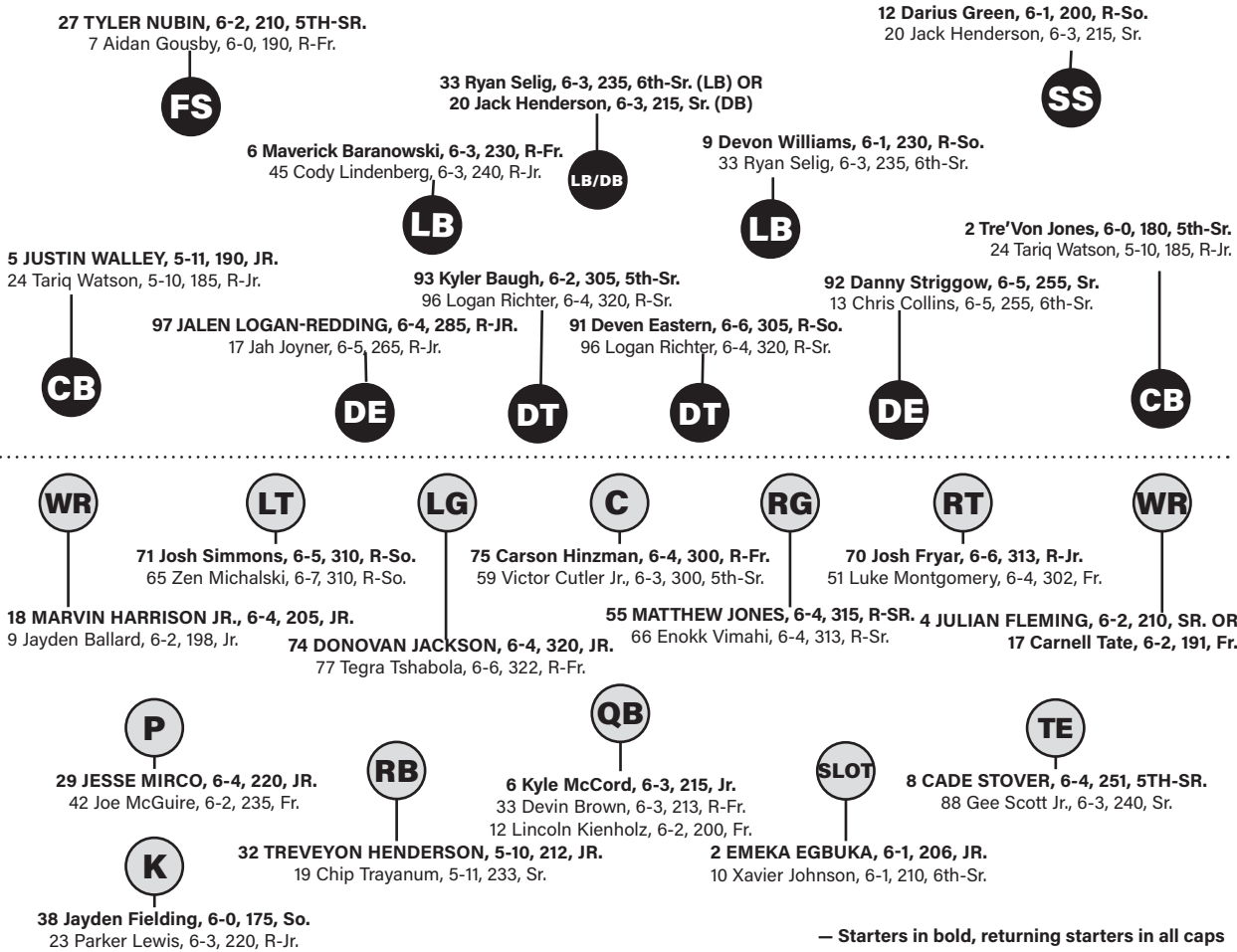
# Minnesota at Ohio State

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## Projected Depth Charts

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



### How We See It

#### OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. MINNESOTA RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes quickly dispatched Michigan State with a 35-point first half en route to a 38-3 win on Nov. 11 and did so with an efficient running game that featured a new twist that will give future opponents (OK, Michigan) something to think about. Tre'Veon Henderson rushed 13 times for 63 yards (4.8 average) and a 9-yard touchdown, but more importantly, he was not needed in the second half. As had been stated many times, the Buckeyes need him healthy for games down the stretch (OK, Michigan). The swerve by coach Ryan Day was the 19-yard reverse for Marvin Harrison Jr. for his first career rushing touchdown on just his fourth career run. Overall, the Buckeyes ran 32 times for 177 yards (5.5). Minnesota (5-5, 3-4 Big Ten) is a mess. Hampered by injuries, the Golden Gophers were manhandled by Purdue 49-30 on Nov. 11. Purdue had 604 total yards, including 353 on the ground (8.0) with Devin Mockobee of the Boilermakers gaining 153 yards on 17 carries (9.0) and Tyrone Tracy Jr.'s 122 yards coming on 15 totes (8.1). Mockobee had a 65-yard run and Tracy a 33-yard jaunt. Minnesota is 45th nationally allowing 137.4 yards per game rushing. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### MINNESOTA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Despite their woes on defense, the Gophers did a decent job carrying the ball against the Boilers, running for 115 yards on only 27 carries for a 4.3 average. Jordan Nubin carried 16 times for 89 yards with a long of 19, and Zach Evans added a 16-yarder. The Buckeyes are 21st in rush defense (112.4) and were helped by giving up just 94 yards (3.2) to the Spartans, although Nate Carter reeled off a 27-yarder in the first quarter. However, he gained only 25 yards on his other 10 runs. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. MINNESOTA PASS DEFENSE

Kyle McCord was 24 of 31 for a career-high 335 yards with all three touchdowns coming in the first half. Harrison was targeted nine times and made seven catches for 149 yards and two touchdowns of 26 and 9 yards and also had a 57-yard reception. He was rested after the first series of the third quarter. Tight end Cade Stover in his return from missing a game due to an injury also made seven catches, tying his career high, for 79 yards, including an 18-yard touchdown. Of note, the Buckeyes did not allow a sack. Minnesota was without injured standout linebacker Cody Lindenberg, and his replacement, Maverick Baranowski, left early in the first quarter. True freshman linebacker Matt Kingsbury made four tackles in his collegiate debut. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### MINNESOTA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Athan Kaliakmanis was 18 for 42 for a season-high 292 yards and tied his career high with three touchdowns (20, 27, 4 yards) and was sacked once in the loss to Purdue. He struggled in the second half, going 7 for 20 for 88 yards. He's thrown six touchdowns with no interceptions in the past two games. Daniel Jackson caught seven passes for 119 yards with a long of 35 yards. Ohio State limited Michigan State to 88 passing yards even without injured safeties Josh Proctor and Lathan Ransom. The Buckeyes also had two sacks for 4 yards. The 182 total yards allowed by the defense was the second lowest of the season after 153 vs. Indiana in the opener. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### SPECIAL TEAMS

Minnesota kicker Dragan Kesich made field goals of 38, 39 and 42 yards and missed from 39. Mark Crawford averaged 43.2 on four punts with a best of 50. Ohio State's Jayden Fielding hit from 36 but missed from 42 yards. Jesse Mirco's streak of not running off a fake punt reached one game. He averaged 43.0 yards on three boots. **EDGE: EVEN**

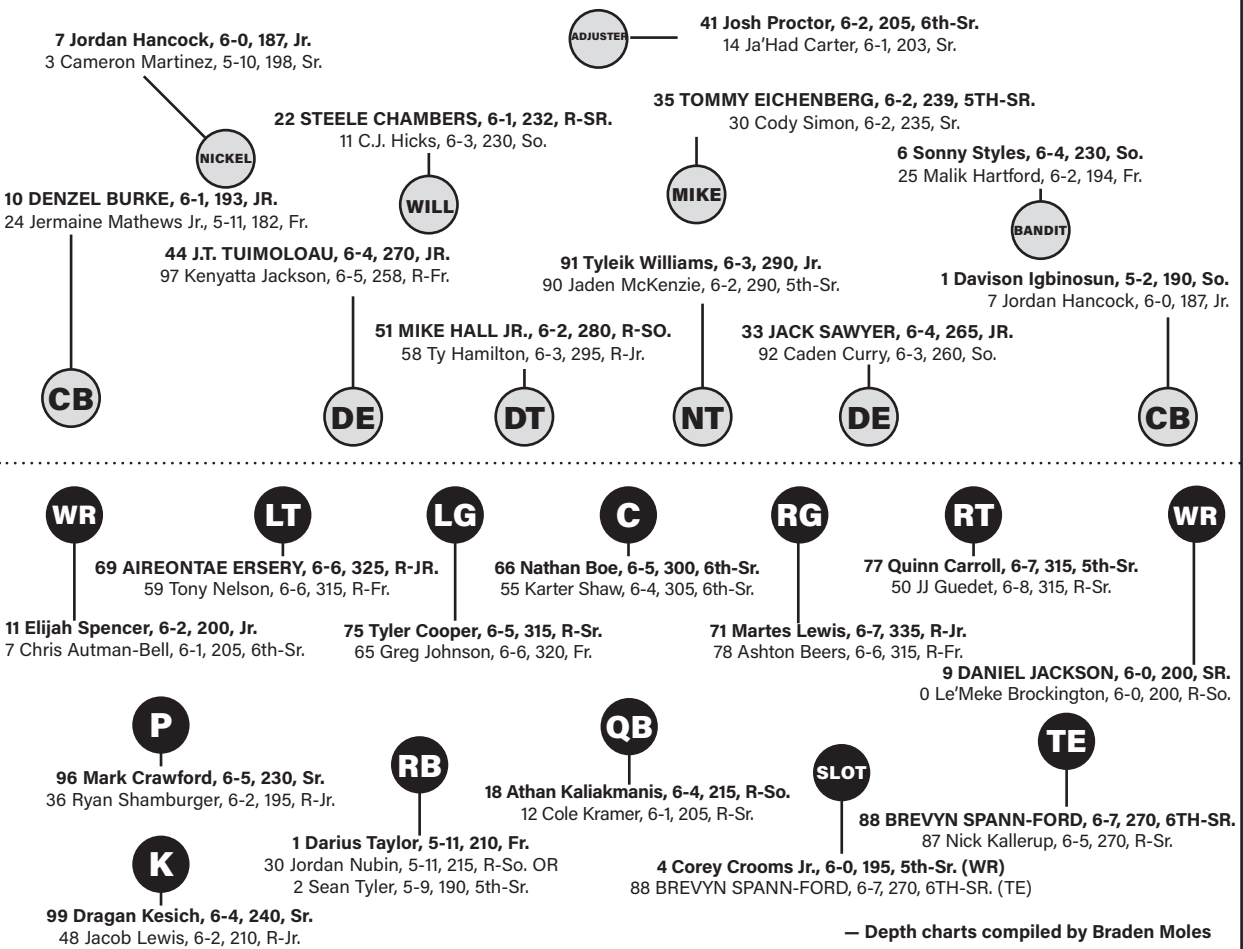
#### INTANGIBLES

Minnesota is trying to row upstream without an oar and needs a win in its final two games to be bowl-eligible, but the Gophers are banged up and have issues in all phases of their game. The Buckeyes got a confidence-boost from their first-half offensive assault on MSU, and the defense played well all four quarters. The only hurdle is to not be looking ahead (OK, Michigan). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### STAFF PREDICTION

Senior Day is always special, and with a 4 p.m. start, the mythical noon snooze won't be an excuse. The goal is to repeat the Michigan State plan: Put the game away early, avoid injuries and get the starters out as quickly as possible. **OHIO STATE 42, MINNESOTA 7**

### WHEN MINNESOTA HAS THE BALL...



# Back-To-Back Bitter Pills Follow '61 Season

*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 10th installment in our 2023 historical series.*

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

It usually didn't take much to put Woody Hayes in a bad mood, but the legendary coach's demeanor during the days and weeks following the 1961 season was borderline volcanic.

Ohio State had just captured the Big Ten championship by polishing off Michigan with its largest margin of victory in the series in more than a quarter-century, star fullback Bob Ferguson had helped cement his Heisman Trophy candidacy by rushing for 152 yards and four touchdowns against the Wolverines, and Hayes began his annual postseason speaking tour content in the knowledge his team would be playing in the Rose Bowl for a chance to claim another national championship.

But within the span of just seven days, the Ohio State Faculty Council voted to decline the Rose Bowl invitation while Ferguson was denied the opportunity to become the first Black player to win the Heisman, edged out by a fellow running back with lesser stats playing for a three-loss team.

To say Hayes was incensed would be understating the obvious. Yet the ramifications of the back-to-back bitter disappointments might have altered the course of Ohio State football history in the years to come.

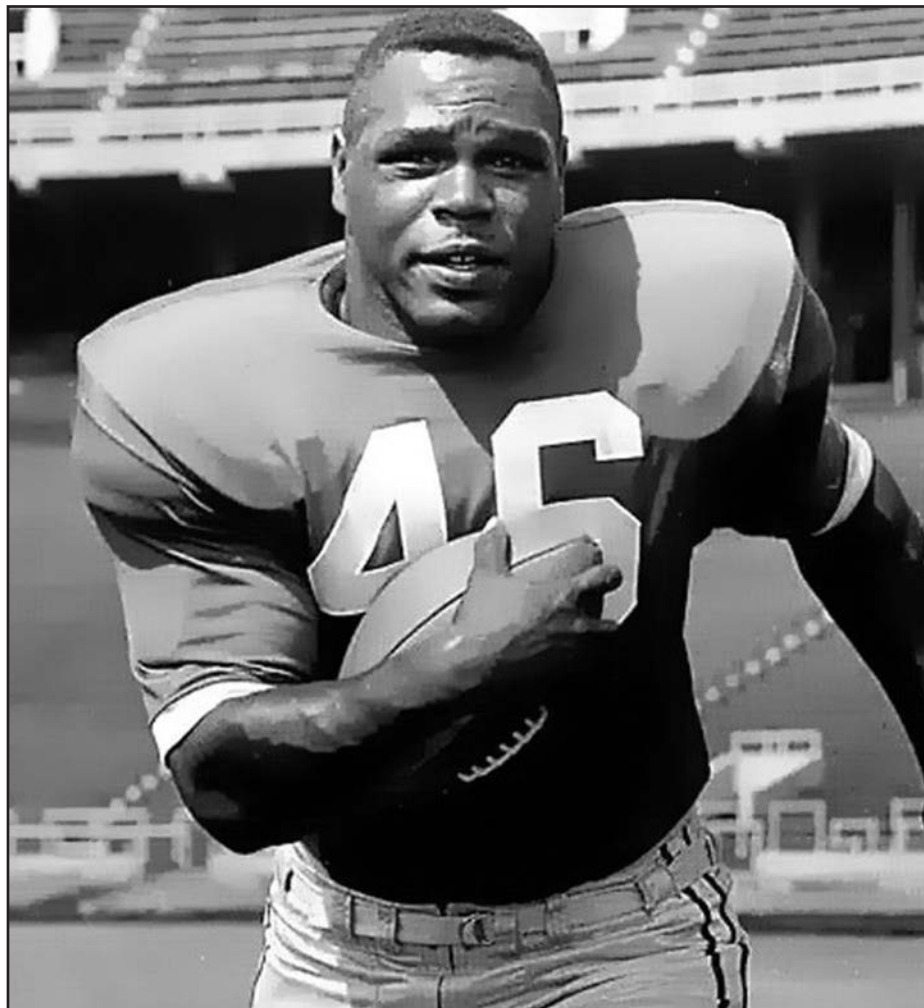
"After the faculty council voted the way it did, opposing teams used that as a recruiting tactic against Ohio State," longtime OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "Other coaches, especially those in the Big Ten, told prospective players that Ohio State was anti-Rose Bowl and that Coach Hayes didn't really have the support of his school. That hurt Woody very deeply, both personally and professionally.

"There is no doubt that it hurt his program. Just look at the team records immediately after 1961. Ohio State lost at least three games in four of the following six seasons, and in one of those seasons (1966), the Buckeyes had a losing record. That happened only twice in the 28 years Woody Hayes was head coach at Ohio State."

Entering the 1961 season, the 48-year-old Hayes was beginning his 11th season as Ohio State head coach squarely on the hot seat. After winning three Big Ten championships and two Rose Bowls within a four-year period between 1954 and 1957, the Buckeyes had fallen on hard times. Their most recent three seasons had produced a middling 16-8-3 record, nothing better than a third-place finish in the conference standings, and Hayes was feeling the heat.

## A Different Era

More than 60 years ago, the Ohio State campus was decidedly different than it is



FILE PHOTO

**SUPERSTAR — Fullback Bob Ferguson finished second in Heisman Trophy voting in 1961 despite rushing for 938 yards, more than the 823 rushing yards of Syracuse's Ernie Davis, who took home the award.**

today. For example, the university had only about 25,700 students in 1961 with an annual tuition of \$300. Today, enrollment has swelled to more than 66,000 with the cost of annual tuition set at about \$12,500 for in-state students and approximately three times that amount for those coming from outside Ohio.

Things were decidedly different in the athletic department as well. The department's annual budget in 1961 was about \$1.7 million compared to more than \$225 million today.

In terms of the football program, national championships were tertiary. The No. 1 goal of any Hayes team was to win the Big Ten with goal No. 2 being a trip to the Rose Bowl. The team came first, but individual honors were treated with the respect they deserved because Hayes knew such accolades were valuable recruiting tools.

The Buckeyes began their 1961 season with a 7-7 tie against a TCU team that was on its way to a 3-5-2 season, an outcome that touched off another round of calls for Hayes' ouster. But when the team rebounded with eight straight victories, including a season-ending 50-20 pounding of Michigan, it seemed the coach was going to have the last laugh.

But only four days after the regular season ended, the Ohio State Faculty Council voted to reject an invitation from the Tournament of Roses committee to play in the

Rose Bowl. And then, exactly one week after that disappointment came the news from New York City that Ferguson had narrowly lost the Heisman Trophy race to Syracuse running back Ernie Davis.

One disappointment can be easily explained. The other? Not so much.

The Buckeyes finished with an 8-0-1 record and were ranked No. 2 in the country in the major national polls behind undefeated Alabama. But the Big Ten's longtime contract with the Rose Bowl had lapsed, meaning the bowl invitation had been sent directly to the school rather than the league office. Conference rules at the time said the university's faculty had sole control over the bid.

Faculty members at Ohio State had long been worried about academics taking a back seat to athletics — with particular regard to Hayes and his football program — with longtime OSU Alumni Association secretary Jack Fullen eagerly serving as the tip of that spear.

Fullen, who had targeted Hayes as early as the mid-1950s for what the alumni secretary often termed as the tail (football) wagging the dog (academics), worked every angle he could think of to undermine the football coach. In several cases, not much persuasion was needed.

During the 1959-60 academic year, Ohio State held a symposium attended by a handful of U.S. Senators. During a tour of

the campus, when asked his thoughts about the school, one Senator reportedly replied, "Well, I don't know much about Ohio State, but I do know you have a good football team here."

Several professors blew a gasket with one telling a reporter, "We're upset over the fact that the image of Ohio State is that the school is merely an appendage to the football team. When we go away for meetings, we're kidded about this by people from other schools. We don't dislike football, but the feeling is that things are out of proportion."

Fullen had all the ammunition he needed. With the alumni association secretary fanning the fire against playing in the Rose Bowl, the faculty council met as a group and, after considerable debate, voted 28-25 to turn down the invitation to Pasadena.

Hayes got the news just before he was to appear at the old Hollenden Hotel in downtown Cleveland for a speaking engagement. When reporters told him of the faculty council vote, the coach dropped his bags and disappeared for the next hour and a half, reportedly roaming the streets of Cleveland in an attempt to compose himself.

When he returned to address his audience, Hayes said simply, "I don't agree with those 28 no votes, but I respect their integrity — if not their intelligence. We have to accept defeat under pressure and that may help us now, although it is difficult to explain to the boys when, after 15 years, the Rose Bowl is jerked out from under them."

University students were less gracious about the news. They flooded the streets of Columbus in a protest described by Sports Illustrated as "the most hell that has been raised in Columbus since V-J day."

Members of the faculty were burned in effigy, the Ohio Statehouse was surrounded, windows were broken, and professors were besieged and browbeaten. It likely didn't help matters when The Columbus Dispatch, in what was termed an act of dubious public service, printed a list of those faculty members voting against the Rose Bowl trip, complete with addresses, salaries and amounts of money spent during the year on out-of-state travel at state expense.

Finally, after two days of protest, football co-captain Mike Ingram — at the behest of Hayes — commandeered a police bullhorn on the campus oval and implored students to return to their dorms.

"They're not going to change their minds," Ingram barked, "and we might as well face it. We're not going to the Rose Bowl. The team did all the damn work, and if they can accept the decision, you certainly can. Now, go home before somebody gets hurt."

Outwardly, Hayes adopted a conciliatory tone toward the faculty council's vote. Behind closed doors was another matter. He seethed against Fullen, vowing to do everything in his power get the alumni association secretary fired. But Fullen was too well-insulated and remained a campus fixture until 1967 when he retired after 40 years as the longest-serving alumni association leader.

## Heisman Disappointment

The decision not to play in the 1962

Rose Bowl hit the team's 18 seniors the hardest. Among them was Ferguson, who had enjoyed a superlative season.

The bell cow in a talented Ohio State backfield that included halfback Paul Warfield and fullback Matt Snell, the 6-0, 217-pound Ferguson began his senior season with a 35-carry performance that netted 137 yards during the 7-7 tie against TCU. Two weeks later, he ran for four short-yardage touchdowns during a 44-0 rout of Illinois.

But it was during a 10-0 victory at Northwestern in mid-October when Ferguson really began to go on a tear. It began with 157 yards on 24 carries against the Wildcats, continued the following week with 124 yards on 20 attempts during a 30-21 win at Wisconsin, and culminated with 144 yards and a touchdown during a 29-13 home victory against Iowa.

That three-week stretch, which saw Ferguson average 141.7 yards per game as well as 6.0 yards on each of his 71 carries, pushed the Ohio State fullback squarely into what was shaping up to be a three-man race for the Heisman Trophy. His main competition was Davis, who was coming off a junior season during which he had rushed for 877 yards on only nine games, and Texas tailback Jimmy Saxton, a 5-11, 160-pound speed demon with a penchant for making big plays.

Still, neither Davis nor Saxton seemed to be on par with Ferguson.

Through the first six games of the 1961 season, Ferguson had rushed for 636 yards and five TDs for a 5-0-1 Ohio State team ranked No. 3 in the national polls. Davis had scored eight touchdowns for the unranked Orangemen through six games but had rushed for only 461 yards. Meanwhile, Saxton had 481 yards and six touchdowns – three of them covering 70 yards or more – through six games while flourishing in Texas head coach Darryl K. Royal's wing-T offense.

Heisman Trophy officials always kept a tight rein on any kind of speculation regarding the award, and while the oversized hype of today was still far in the future, a handful of publications dutifully charted the race. Sports Illustrated ran weekly features with updated stats from the previous Saturday's games while Sport magazine and the Chicago Tribune attempted to handicap the race with each placing Ferguson as the leader heading into the final stages of the season.

The tide might have turned in late October when Ferguson managed only 49 yards on 14 carries during a lackluster 16-7 win at Indiana. That same weekend, Davis totaled 119 yards and a touchdown during Syracuse's 28-9 win against a dismal Pitt team on its way to a 3-7 finish.

By mid-November, it seemed to be anyone's race.

Ferguson rebounded with 101 yards and two touchdowns during a 22-12 home win against Oregon, while Davis sat out most of his team's 51-8 blowout of Cornell, carrying only four times for 49 yards.

The following week, though, Ferguson seemingly cemented his Heisman chances. While Davis was held to 95 yards during a 17-15 loss to Notre Dame and Saxton was knocked out of the game during a 6-0 upset loss to TCU, Ferguson enjoyed a dominant performance against archrival Michigan.

Carrying the ball 30 times for 152 yards, the OSU fullback scored his team's first touchdown on a 19-yard scamper and later added a trio of 1-yard TD plunges as the Buckeyes ran away with a 50-20 victory.

Reports from inside a jubilant Ohio State locker room indicated that Hayes congratulated Ferguson on his performance, going so far as to suggest the name of a downtown Columbus tailor where the fullback might rent a tuxedo for the Heisman Trophy presentation ceremony. The coach later denied those reports, especially after the final tally was announced.

In one of the closest ballots in the history of the award, Davis tallied 824 overall votes to win the Heisman while Ferguson finished second with 711 votes. Saxton was third with 551 followed by Minnesota quarterback Sandy Stephens with 543.

Ferguson and his 938 yards on the ground outpaced both Davis (823) and Saxton (846), but Davis' razor-thin edge in the voting might have been determined by his 16 pass receptions for 157 yards and two touchdowns. In Ohio State's run-dependent offense, Ferguson caught only one pass all year, and it went for no gain.

Back in Columbus, Hayes had experienced a second disappointment within a week. When asked about the outcome, the coach offered terse congratulations to Davis, but behind the scenes, he blamed his own university's sports information department for Ferguson not winning the award.

"Coach Hayes let us know that he didn't think we did enough to get Bob's efforts recognized on a national scale," former OSU sports information director Marv Homan told BSB in 2011. "He let us know that in no uncertain terms. He said he held us responsible when Bob Ferguson did not win that Heisman Trophy."

Homan, who had been an assistant in the sports information office since 1949, said there hadn't been any campaigning for previous Heisman wins with which he had been involved – Vic Janowicz in 1950 and Howard "Hopalong" Cassady in 1955 – because at the time, open campaigning from schools was frowned upon, especially in the Big Ten. But then he was summoned to Hayes' office along with department director Wilbur "Bill" Snyp. "The longer we were there, the more upset Coach Hayes became," said Homan, who died in 2021. "We told him we had never outwardly campaigned for awards such as the Heisman because there was an unwritten rule in the Big Ten against that sort of thing. I think it was also mentioned that it wasn't really our job to do that. Coach Hayes did not agree. He told us that, in his opinion, it was very much a part of our job, and that if we didn't like it, he'd do something about it. It was a message that was received loud and clear."

Unfortunately for Hayes and his Buckeyes, the faculty council vote to turn down the Rose Bowl invitation after the 1961 season hamstrung the OSU recruiting effort for several years. In fact, it would be eight years before Ohio State placed another player among the top three in the Heisman voting when quarterback Rex Kern came in third in 1969. Fullback Jim Otis finished seventh and defensive back Jack Tatum was 10th that same year.

By that time, Hayes and his program

were back on solid footing, and his sports information department knew what was expected of them come postseason awards time. Beginning with the 1969 voting, OSU players finished in the top 10 of Heisman voting on eight occasions over a five-year period, culminating in 1974 when junior tailback Archie Griffin won the first of his record two trophies.

Griffin won his first Heisman by one of the widest margins to that time, garnering 1,920 points to 819 for USC running back Anthony Davis, who finished second. The following year, Griffin's margin was victory was just as lopsided – 1,800 votes to 730 for runner-up Chuck Muncie of California.

"And you know what?" Homan said. "What Coach Hayes had told us in 1961, and the way we kind of changed our outlook as far as awards and honors were concerned, I think that kind of set the tone many years later when Archie convincingly won his two Heismans. Our office did some pushing, of course, but Coach Hayes was the one who led the cheerleading when Archie was a ju-

nior and it carried on that following year.

"Now, I don't know that I can tell you that Bob Ferguson falling short of winning the Heisman Trophy in 1961 led directly to Archie Griffin becoming the only two-time Heisman winner in history, but I honestly don't know that wasn't the case, either."

As far as Ferguson was concerned, he always remained pragmatic about his Heisman runner-up finish in 1961. Interviewed by BSB just before his death in 2004, he reiterated that team goals always came first during his era.

"Winning the Big Ten and playing in the Rose Bowl," Ferguson said. "Those were the top goals as far as Woody was concerned. When they voted us not to go (to Pasadena) after the '61 season, that was tough to take. At the time, I was much more disappointed about that than not winning the Heisman."

"As the years have gone by, though, I sometimes think to myself and say, 'Man, that trophy would look good in my house.' But, like a lot of other things in life, I guess it just wasn't meant to be."

# Ohio State Fans!

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# Media Reacts To U-M's Sign-Stealing Scandal

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Michigan sign-stealing scandal has dominated headlines over the last few weeks, and it culminated – at least for now – with an in-game coaching suspension of head coach Jim Harbaugh for the remainder of the regular season.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers know how Ohio State and its fans feel about the scandal, but here are some reactions from media members across the country on Michigan's sign stealing, Harbaugh's suspension, the Wolverines' 24-15 win over Penn State and how the Big Ten has handled things so far:

"Michigan didn't need a judge, a jury, a sign-stealer, a passing game or even its coach.

"The No. 3 Wolverines had everything they needed to beat No. 10 Penn State 24-15 at Beaver Stadium, capping what might have been the strangest week in Michigan history. This will be remembered as the week Michigan and the Big Ten went to war, the week Jim Harbaugh got suspended, the week Michigan players showed up at the stadium hoping for a last-minute court order that would allow Harbaugh to join them.

"... Michigan isn't a victim here. There is little doubt the Wolverines benefited from Stalions' scheme to send amateur scouts to film other teams' signals. The question is whether the Big Ten has the authority under its sportsmanship policy to suspend Harbaugh while the NCAA's investigation remains ongoing.

"Unless you're a Michigan fan or a rival Big Ten coach, it's hard to root for either side in this dispute. The Big Ten has managed to make Michigan look sympathetic, but even so, there were plenty of people around the league who would have been happy to see Penn State put an end to Michigan's 22-game conference winning streak.

"Penn State, now 3-17 against top-10 opponents under coach James Franklin, isn't the team to call when you're looking to take down a bully. After another team swung at Michigan and came up empty, one thing remains clear: The Big Ten has a Michigan Problem, and no number of suspensions or investigations will make that problem go away.

"Imagine the roar inside Michigan Stadium if Harbaugh can coach in two weeks against Ohio State. Imagine commissioner Tony Petitti handing Harbaugh the Big Ten championship trophy on the stage in Indianapolis. Instead of being dragged down by their scandal, the Wolverines have turned it to their advantage.

"It made us stronger," running back Blake Corum said, blood dripping from a gash on the bridge of his nose. "Obviously, we wanted Coach Harbaugh to be here today, but we did it for him today. We've been going through a lot lately, but it's only brought us closer together."

"Michigan's goal is to win a national championship. Players talked about it openly before the season, and the Wolverines have managed to stay on course despite a constant swirl of controversy.

"The 'Michigan against the world' men-

tality was already in motion thanks to a previous NCAA investigation and the three-game suspension Harbaugh served to start the season. If players felt targeted before, imagine how they feel now that their coach has been suspended twice in one season."

– **Austin Meeks,**  
**The Athletic**

"At Michigan, Connor Stalions allegedly ran a smash-and-grab sign-stealing operation. Ohio State, Rutgers and Purdue, meanwhile, were reportedly operating the equivalent of a criminal conspiracy. It was pure white-collar stuff.

"In the end, they both allegedly stole, or participated in the stealing of, the same thing – information on opponents' play signals in an effort to secure an advantage. It's just that one was a ski mask bank robbery. The other was an inside job, cleanly wiring the money to the Caribbean.

"Forget all the noise. Forget the grandstanding coaches screaming for Jim Harbaugh's head. Forget if Michigan deserves all the scorn. Forget even what or when the punishments should be. Whatever it is, just make it even, because the actions of Connor Stalions and the actions that Ohio State, Rutgers and Purdue allegedly engaged in are the exact same thing.

"Yes, the exact same thing.

"Stalions sent friends out to film the sideline signals of future Wolverine opponents. He then got the video and allegedly worked to decipher the play calls. It appears one time he even stood on a Central Michigan sideline comically wearing what looks like spy glasses to scout Michigan State.

"These were blatant, brazen acts. While stealing signs isn't against NCAA rules, advanced scouting is. Stalions was clearly engaging in that.

"(On Nov. 4), however, Michigan presented the Big Ten with evidence that someone on the Rutgers football staff provided Michigan's defensive signals to Purdue in advance of the Boilermaker-Wolverine 2022 Big Ten title game. Meanwhile, someone at Ohio State handed over U of M's offensive signals.

"So in the Big Ten championship, both teams had the other's signals, both of which were gathered via advanced scouting. (Michigan won, 43-22.)

"In Michigan's case, the 'advanced scouts' were Stalions' band of iPhone-toting buddies. In Purdue's case, the 'advanced scouts' were the professional coaching staffs of two other Big Ten teams that had just played the Wolverines, and thus could battle-test the signs they stole as accurate.

"Which would you rather have? Raw cell phone footage that still needs to be broken down, or highly experienced coaches just handing over their work? Everyone would choose the Purdue option."

– **Dan Wetzel,**  
**Yahoo Sports**

"Harbaugh has been ripped away from his team, the news coming down after the team's takeoff for State College, Pa. Which is ridiculous on its own. At least let the guy avoid the bumpy flight and get his lawn mower prepped for the weekend.

"Like the one he served to start the sea-

son for alleged recruiting violations, it's not a full suspension. He can still be with the team during the week. It's a strange half measure. Which Harbaugh might defy anyway with a court order."

"And when it's all over, if Michigan wins the national championship, as the Wolverines appear equipped to do, that championship comes with no asterisk. Unless the footnote says: 'The Wolverines achieved this under extraordinary duress.'

"But (Harbaugh's) 2023 team? It deserves everything it earns from here. Michigan football is in its post-scandal existence. Michigan football is an Italian restaurant my wife and I used to frequent. Let's call it Il Segnale.

"Several years ago, Il Segnale had health-code violations that made the news. It shut down for a couple of days. When it reopened, we were there that day. Were our past meals at Il Segnale tainted? Should they have been vacated? Maybe. But we enjoyed them. And if you want to be certain of a restaurant kitchen's cleanliness, go to the one that just got health-code violations."

– **Joe Rexrode,**  
**The Athletic**

"It wasn't pretty, but in Michigan's first true exam of the season (against Penn State), it was a statement just the same, and proof that two things can be true.

"U-M can be cheaters (allegedly) and the best. Contrary to the popular narrative, these ideas are not mutually exclusive.

"The Wolverines should be punished if they broke the rules, as it sure appears they did. Even supposing there are teams that are just as adept at stealing signs, all of Michigan's whataboutism and deflections are getting tired.

"At the same time, while the timeline of the sign-stealing allegations lines up with U-M's revival, I have a hard time buying that fraud was the missing ingredient that elevated the Wolverines. Way too reductive. Bottom line: They have a hell of a team, with excellent coaches.

"The comments keep coming about why they're good, how they're good,' Harbaugh said of his team last week. 'I mean, they're just good. If you know football and you watch our guys play, I've said it before, there's 20, 22, 23 guys that will be playing on Sundays next year. ... It's just really good players. If you know football, just watch the game. Turn on the tape. That's why they're so good. They're good at it.'

"None of this is to say the criticism is unjust. As an institution, Michigan brought the heat and suspicions on itself.

"But let's just wait and see. I hear there's a big game coming up in two weeks."

– **Dave Briggs,**  
**The (Toledo) Blade**

"Tony Petitti has no idea how badly he just botched his job, but here is a hint: In a meeting last week, Michigan's regents discussed possibly leaving the Big Ten if Petitti suspended coach Jim Harbaugh without what the school considered due process, a person familiar with those discussions told Sports Illustrated.

"That may sound like an empty threat, but the fact it was even discussed should tell

you how angry Michigan is right now about how Petitti has handled this. The process that led to Harbaugh's three-game suspension was a clumsy execution of mob justice, and it is by no means over. Michigan is expected to take the Big Ten to court (Nov. 10) to try to allow Harbaugh to coach (Nov. 11).

"Michigan should be angry. Petitti fell for the dodge. He got suckered into thinking he is standing up for the integrity of the game, when he is really just revealing how little he knows about college football. The Big Ten commissioner suspended Harbaugh for three games, including the two most important ones of the season, for a sign-stealing scheme, even though:

"1. There is no public evidence that the Wolverines benefited more from the scheme than they would have from stealing signs legally. Maybe it exists, but where is it? If Stalions got all the signs from a friend on another staff (more on that below!), that would have been legal. As SI and other outlets reported last week, that is exactly what Ohio State and Rutgers did last year, when they furnished Purdue with a sheet with all of Michigan's signs before Purdue played Michigan in the Big Ten title game.

"2. Nobody has shown that Harbaugh knew staffer Connor Stalions was using illegal means (videotaping opponent's signs in person in other stadiums) to get information; Harbaugh explicitly denied it; and, though some fans are convinced that Harbaugh orchestrated the scheme, other coaches have said privately that they highly doubt he knew anything about it.

"3. The NCAA's letter regarding its investigation only supports Michigan's argument that Stalions acted alone. There is nothing in there that indicates he told anybody above him how he was getting his information.

"4. Michigan players found out 20 hours before their biggest game of the year so far, at Penn State, that the conference suspended their coach. A Michigan source says the Big Ten did not even inform the school until a half hour after ESPN reported the news. That is the sign of a commissioner who has no idea what he is doing.

"If college football were a sport of reasonable people who prioritized fairness above all else, then the NCAA would finish its investigation, release everything it had, and it would be possible to reach the conclusion that somebody in Harbaugh's program broke a rule, he didn't know, and the penalty would be in proportion to the crime. Instead, college football is full of people claiming to be pristine and complaining that somebody else is dirty. Harbaugh has done that himself, and now others have done it to him. A lot of people fall for that trick. It's just incredible that one of them is the commissioner of the Big Ten.

"A more adept commissioner would have issued a fine and announced that he retained the right to administer further punishment at the conclusion of the NCAA investigation—and then told angry coaches that he was treating Harbaugh as he would treat them. Instead, Petitti got played."

– **Michael Rosenberg,**  
**Sports Illustrated**

"The Big Ten announced (Nov. 10) that Michigan's Jim Harbaugh, who has rather

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

ludicrously claimed to have no idea what was going on, will be banned from coaching the final three games of the regular season.

“That would keep him off the sideline for two huge games: a contest against No. 9 Penn State and the Nov. 25 showdown against No. 3 Ohio State, two games that will surely go a long way toward determining who’s left standing for the four-team playoff.

“This is no defense of Harbaugh, but college football’s intransigence is the real issue here. The NFL is coming up on the 30th anniversary of allowing quarterbacks

to use a radio-equipped helmet to communicate with the sideline, eliminating the need to send in plays via signals or substitutions. Fifteen years ago, the pros expanded the system to permit use by a defensive player.

“Why, in all that time, hasn’t such an obvious, well-tested system found its way to college football? Especially with the rising popularity of no-huddle, up-tempo offenses, which has put an added burden on the cumbersome process of signaling in plays?

“The powers-that-be keep pointing to concerns that the wealthiest programs could gain a competitive advantage, but the NCAA could surely provide the necessary

regulation to ensure all top-division schools were using the same system.

“At the very least, it should be the norm in the Power Five conferences, which are essentially NFL franchises that don’t have to pay their players, rolling in more money than they know what to do with.

“There are people who can afford to do these kinds of things, and they’re the great programs that a lot of people watch on TV,” Alabama coach Nick Saban told ‘The Pat McAfee Show’ on ESPN. ‘For those who play in leagues like we do, who have the funds to do it in the SEC or the Big Ten or the Big 12, whatever it is, we should be able

to do it.’

“Frankly, if schools had spent a fraction of the time they’ve devoted to nonsensical realignment and landing the next mega-television deal, this potential problem would’ve been resolved years ago.

“Which makes it hard to take the uproar over Michigan’s actions all that seriously, given signal-stealing has long been an accepted part of the game and we’re not sure how much of an advantage there is to be gained anyway.”

– Paul Newberry,  
The Associated Press

# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

### FOOTBALL (10-0, 7-0)

**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, W 24-10.

**Nov. 4** at Rutgers, W 35-16; **11** MICHIGAN STATE, W 38-3; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

### FOOTBALL 2024

**Aug. 31** SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.  
**Sept. 7** WESTERN MICHIGAN; **21** MARSHALL; **28** at Michigan State.

**Oct. 5** IOWA; **12** at Oregon; **26** NEBRASKA.  
**Nov. 2** at Penn State; **9** PURDUE; **16** at Northwestern; **23** INDIANA; **30** MICHIGAN.

### MEN'S BASKETBALL (1-1)

**Oct. 22** at Dayton (Exh.), W 78-70  
**Nov. 6** OAKLAND, W 79-73; **10** TEXAS A&M, L 73-66; **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.

### WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (1-1)

**Nov. 6** Naismith Hall of Fame Series at Las Vegas vs. USC, L 83-74; **12** IUPUI, W 108-58; **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., Men 7th/12, Women 5th/14.

**Nov. 10** NCAA Regional Championships at Madison, Wis. Men 15th/30, Women 5th/33; **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., Men: 4-1, Women 4-1; **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 (14-6, 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** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich., vs. Penn State, W 4-3; **3** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich., vs. Northwestern, L 3-1.

### MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (3-5-3, 0-5-1)

**Oct. 7** Mercyhurst, W 4-3; **13-14** LINDENWOOD, W 4-2; T 2-2; **20-21** Michigan, L 7-1; T 2-2 OT (SW); **27-28** Nebraska-Omaha, T 2-2 OT (SW); W 4-0.

**Nov. 3-4** MICHIGAN STATE, L 6-0; L 6-4; **10-11** Notre Dame, L 4-1, L 3-0; **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 (9-1, 8-0)

**Sept. 29-30** Colgate, L 3-2; W 3-2 (OT).

**Oct. 13-14** Minnesota Duluth, W 5-2; W 2-0; **20-21** St. Thomas, W 6-2; W 7-1; **27-28** MINNESOTA, W 4-3 OT; W 6-5.

**Nov. 3-4** Bemidji State, W 9-1; W 5-0; **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.

### MEN'S SOCCER (6-6-6, 3-4-1)

**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, W 3-2; **29** MARYLAND, W 4-1.

**Nov. 3** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals Vs. Michigan State, W 1-0; **8** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals vs. Penn State, T 1-1.

### WOMEN'S SOCCER (9-8-2, 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.

**Nov. 11** NCAA Tournament at Pitt, L 6-0.

### MEN'S SWIM & DIVE (2-0)

**Oct. 28** VIRGINIA TECH, W 193.5-178.5.

**Nov. 10** DENISON, W 186.0-103.0; **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 (3-0)

**Oct. 28** VIRGINIA TECH, W 226.0-135.0.

**Nov. 3** AKRON, W 222.5-77.5; **10** DENISON, W 180.0-108.0; **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, NTS.

**Nov. 1-5** ITA Fall National Championship at San Diego, Calif., NTS; **1-5** Big Ten Singles & Doubles Championship at Madison, Wisc., NTS.

**Jan. 27** VANDERBILT; **28** OREGON/BOISE STATE.

### 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., NTS.

**Nov. 1-4** ITA Fall Championships at San Diego, Calif., NTS.

### WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (10-15, 7-9)

**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, W 3-0; **29** Michigan, L 3-1.

**Nov. 3** MINNESOTA, L 3-1; **4** INDIANA, W 3-1; **8** MICHIGAN STATE, W 3-0; **12** Maryland, L 3-0; **15** Illinois, 9 p.m.; **18** Minnesota, 8 p.m.; **24** PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; **25** RUTGERS, 7 p.m.

# Harbaugh Suspended From In-Game Coaching

The Big Ten announced on Nov. 10 that Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh has been suspended from in-game coaching for the rest of the regular season amid the sign-stealing investigation into the Wolverines' football program, though Harbaugh

## BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

will be allowed to coach Michigan during the week and will presumably return to the sideline for any postseason games.

In a statement from the Big Ten, it said Michigan violated the league's sportsmanship policy by "conducting an impermissible, in-person scouting operation over multiple years, resulting in an unfair competitive advantage that compromised the integrity of competition."

Later the same night, Harbaugh and the university requested a temporary restraining order that would have allowed Harbaugh to remain on the sidelines and stop the suspension before hearing arguments from the Big Ten.

That wasn't granted, however, before Michigan matched up against Penn State on Nov. 11, where the Wolverines took home a 24-15 win over the Nittany Lions in Beaver Stadium without Harbaugh. In his place against Penn State was Michigan offensive coordinator/offensive line coach Sherrone Moore. It was Harbaugh's fourth game this season where he wasn't allowed on the sideline after a self-imposed suspension for the first three games of the year after facing punishment from the NCAA for possible recruiting violations.

The hearing for the temporary restraining order was scheduled for Nov. 17, and the university provided a brief statement.

"We look forward to presenting our case next week where we intend to demonstrate that the Big Ten has not acted legally or fairly," the statement read.

In the Big Ten and commissioner Tony Petitti's letter to Michigan outlining the notice of disciplinary action, it said the NCAA joined both Michigan and the Big Ten on a call to say it "knew and could prove" that a staff member – first reported and later confirmed as former recruiting analyst Connor Stalions, who resigned on Nov. 4 – participated in an "in-person, advance scouting scheme; purchased and forwarded tickets for games involving future (Michigan) football opponents; and video recorded signs used by future opponents."

Some of the proof the NCAA showed the Big Ten was the "master spreadsheet" that the NCAA had received during the investigation. It included information such as which games had already been scouted, which ones they intended to scout, names of people who were assigned to different locations, and monetary amounts needed for past and future games.

Petitti said the Big Ten could not prove that Harbaugh knew about the sign stealing that was going on in his program, but the Big Ten still decided to suspend him

because he "embodies" the Michigan football program. Michigan president Santa Ono, after previously asking the Big Ten to allow due process, responded to the suspension with a statement.

"Like all members of the Big Ten Conference, we are entitled to a fair, deliberate, and thoughtful process to determine the full set of facts before a judgment is rendered," Ono said. "Today's action by Commissioner Tony Petitti disregards the Conference's own handbook, violates basic tenets of due process, and sets an untenable precedent of assessing penalties before an investigation has been completed. We are dismayed at the Commissioner's rush to judgment when there is an ongoing NCAA investigation – one in which we are fully cooperating."

"Commissioner Petitti's hasty action today suggests that this is more about reacting to pressure from other Conference members than a desire to apply the rules fairly and impartially. By taking this action at this hour, the Commissioner is personally inserting himself onto the sidelines and altering the level playing field that he is claiming to preserve. And, doing so on Veterans Day – a court holiday – to try to thwart the University from seeking immediate judicial relief is hardly a profile in impartiality."

Petitti said it "could not be clearer" that Michigan violated the sportsmanship policy, pushing back on the idea that the conference hasn't been fair to Michigan. Petitti said that not punishing the Wolverines would be playing favorites and the conference "does not take action towards its members based on prejudice and bias."

Also in the letter, Petitti said that Michigan's reply to the initial warning that the Big Ten intended to punish the university didn't deny any wrongdoing and it only gave "procedural and technical arguments designed to delay accountability."

The NCAA got involved after the punishment, providing its own statement on the matter.

"When the Association has reason to raise time-sensitive issues with schools and leagues concerning competitive integrity, it has and will continue to do so," the statement read. "The NCAA received consent from the school before sharing the information referenced in the document. NCAA investigative and infractions processes will continue in this matter."

In considering any potential punishment, Petitti also factored in not only the competitive advantage Michigan gained, but that the risk of injury could be greater in the games in which Michigan knew opponent's signs.

"While the Conference is currently not aware of any physical injuries that resulted from the impermissible scheme, numerous coaches and athletic directors from other member institutions expressed concerns to me about the increased risks of injury to student-athletes resulting from the scheme," the letter read. "I have a responsibility to give serious consideration to those concerns. I find it credible that impermissible advance scouting increases the risk of injury to student-athletes be-

cause if you know what play your opponent is running, then you also know where your opponents' players will be on the field. Although the University attempted to downplay and disregard these safety concerns in its response, I am not willing to do so."

Petitti added that the NCAA calling the Big Ten to let the conference know the investigation was happening was a sign of how serious the matter was, calling it extraordinary that they let the conference know.

"The NCAA stated and believed that the disclosure was necessary due to the unprecedented scope of the then-alleged scheme and because of the significant impact the impermissible scheme could have on competition during the current football season," the letter read. "It was also extraordinary that the NCAA President arranged for and participated in the call, underscoring not only the severity of the allegations but the immediate impacts."

Judge Timothy P. Connors, who is a law school lecturer at Michigan, will rule on the university's temporary restraining order request. In the request, Michigan argued that the Big Ten "breached a contract, succumbed to pressure, and threw procedure out the window in pursuit of summary punishment," and said the suspension of Harbaugh would irreparably harm the team's chances of success.

"The harm to the University's student-athletes would be irreversible," it reads. "Now 9-0 on the season, it is undisputed that the team is in contention for the National Championship. Standing between the student-athletes and a chance at this extraordinary opportunity are three Big Ten Conference games against Penn State, the University of Maryland, and Ohio State University. ... These are once-in-a-lifetime events: The games cannot be replayed."

Another argument Michigan provided was that other teams are stealing signs as well, so punishing them would be unfair. Petitti and the conference "vehemently (reject) any defense by the University or any other Conference member that cheating is acceptable because other teams do it too" and said it had received no proof that other teams were stealing signs illegally.

### MSU's Izzo Frustrated After Loss To JMU

The Michigan State men's basketball team, which checked in at No. 4 to begin the season in the AP top 25, suffered a 79-76 loss at home to unranked James Madison to begin the season, and head coach Tom Izzo expressed some pointed frustration after the defeat.

"There will be some adjustments," Izzo said. "We didn't show much leadership."

The Spartans were 26 of 72 (36.1 percent) from the field, with senior guard A.J. Hoggard (2 of 11), junior guard Jaden Akins (2 of 10) and graduate forward Malik Hall (2 of 12) combining for only 17 points. Guard Tyson Walker, who scored 35 points on 12-of-26 shooting, didn't receive much help from other starters, who combined for just 21 points.

"I don't have very good leadership right now," Izzo said. "That's one thing I said at

## BIG 2023 Standings

### East Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	7	0	1.000	10	0	1.000
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>
Penn State	5	2	0.714	8	2	0.800
Maryland	3	4	0.429	6	4	0.600
Rutgers	3	4	0.429	6	4	0.600
Indiana	1	6	0.143	3	7	0.300
Michigan State	1	6	0.143	3	7	0.300

### West Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Iowa	5	2	0.714	8	2	0.800
Nebraska	3	4	0.429	5	5	0.500
Minnesota	3	4	0.429	5	5	0.500
Northwestern	3	4	0.429	5	5	0.500
Wisconsin	3	4	0.429	5	5	0.500
Illinois	3	4	0.429	5	5	0.500
Purdue	2	5	0.286	3	7	0.300

### Nov. 11 Games

Illinois 48, Indiana 45 (OT)  
Maryland 13, Nebraska 10  
Michigan 24, Penn State 15  
Purdue 49, Minnesota 30  
Northwestern 24, Wisconsin 10  
Iowa 22, Rutgers 0  
**Ohio State 38, Michigan State 3**

### Nov. 18 Games

Purdue at Northwestern, noon  
Michigan State at Indiana, noon  
Michigan at Maryland, noon  
Rutgers at Penn State, noon  
Illinois at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.  
Minnesota at **Ohio State**, 4 p.m.  
Nebraska at Wisconsin, 7:30 p.m.

the first press conference this year. I don't have a good answer why three juniors and seniors played like they played, but I also don't care, because I'll play some freshmen. Let the controversy begin."

Izzo was upset with how the entire team played other than freshman forward Coen Carr, who shot 5 of 6 from the field, scored 14 points and brought down six rebounds.

"About the only guy I thought played well was Coen," Izzo said. "He played awfully well. I'm really big on giving guys a chance, but there were some things that happened that – we'll see."

Michigan State responded with a 74-51 win over Southern Indiana on Nov. 9, and nine players saw at least 17 minutes on the court with Akins and Hall scoring 13 and 12 points, respectively. Hoggard played 21 minutes, a 13-minute decline from the game against James Madison, scoring just four points on 2-of-7 shooting with four assists.

Things do not figure to get easier for the Spartans, either, as it has neutral-site games against No. 2 Duke on Nov. 14 and No. 12 Arizona on Nov. 23. Izzo is in his 29th season at Michigan State and has made the NCAA Tournament every season – excluding 2020, when it was canceled – since 1997-98 and won the national championship in 1999-00, which still remains the most recent Big Ten team to win it all.



# Engel One Of Best Runners In OSU History

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Crossing the finish line at the 20:47.9 mark in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 27, Addie Engel won the women's cross country Big Ten championship, just the second in program history — the first coming last season, also won by Engel.

Engel said some of the runners she was going against had great finishing speed, so she had to get ahead of them early on if she wanted to win.

"I knew I had to make a move a little earlier, just knowing the competition that I had to race and how strong they were at closing," she told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I knew I would have to go a little bit earlier if I was going to have a chance."

Cross country coach Sara Mason Vergote said the course was messy that day, so the runners had to approach the race differently than they would if the conditions were perfect. Audrey DeSantis, one of Engel's teammates, even lost a shoe in the mud early on.

"It was a disaster," Mason Vergote told BSB. "We had a girl lose a shoe. It was a battlefield out there. Addie will tell you that one of her flaws as a runner is she's a little bit clumsy. She's fallen more than once in a race. Our biggest concern going into that race because of the mud on the hills was her staying on her feet. We took more of a conservative approach."

But Engel was able to run a clean race and cross the finish line in first place. Mason Vergote had some very high praise for the long-distance runner.

"She's hands down the best runner to ever come through Ohio State," said Mason Vergote, who has been at Ohio State since 2013. "In the '70s, '80s and '90s we had some really good men come through the program. She's hands down the best woman that's ever come through the program. I don't really have anybody to compare her to."

"She's somebody that will always insert herself with the leaders and somebody that's always in the conversation to win."

Engel, who is in her fourth season at Ohio State and runs indoor and outdoor track in addition to cross country, took the kind words to heart but gave Ohio State and her coaches credit for getting her to this spot.

"That really means so much," she said of the praise. "I'm just so grateful that this program has been able to do such great things for me, and I've had the support that I have throughout all my years here so far. I'm really grateful for it all."

At Central Catholic High School in Springfield, Ohio, Engel won the Division III state title her senior year, posting a record time of 17:47 at National Trail Raceway, a 5k course, and won state championships in track and field in both the 1,600-meter and the 3,200-meter races at what would become a familiar venue in Ohio State's Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium.

Mason Vergote said she wasn't sure what to expect out of Engel when she first came to Ohio State, but she knew it was going to be good. Even though Engel won multiple state championships, Mason Vergote believed they could get even more out of her because she wasn't focused only on running in high school.

"I don't know that anyone knew how

good she was going to be coming out of high school," Mason Vergote said. "She was obviously the Division III state champion several times. But what people don't know is that during cross country season, in high school, she was also playing on the soccer team because the school was so small, they didn't have enough girls to play to field a team. And she didn't run a step in the winter. She swam competitively, so she just had a lot of untapped potential when she got to us."

And that much became obvious to Mason Vergote and the other coaches in Engel's freshman year when she participated in outdoor track and field and ran in the 5000-meter race at the Big Ten championships.

"It's very difficult to score on the track as a true freshman in this conference," Mason Vergote said. "It was really hot. There were some big studs in that race, and she just stuck her nose in it. She probably died 1,000 deaths during that race and hung on for eighth place and scored one point. We won the women's championship that year. That's where I was like, 'OK, we have something pretty special here.'"

Mason Vergote said Engel did need some coaching as a freshman, but only to hold her back from overworking herself. She wanted to run her hardest every day. Other than that, she tries to stay away from Engel's process because of her advanced racing instincts. But the coaching and support Engel got at Ohio State were some of the reasons she came to Columbus.

"I loved the people, the coaches and support that I had met beforehand, and I really liked the team atmosphere coming in," she said. "I also knew that I wanted to go to a school that I would love being at even if running wasn't always going perfectly so that I would still be happy in other aspects."

Engel expressed a similar sentiment when she talked about how she wants to be remembered at Ohio State. Her freshman year happened during the COVID-19-impacted season, so she has another year of eligibility remaining. But she already knows she doesn't

only want to be a name in the record books.

"I want to be remembered for not just the stats on paper and everything," she said. "I want to be known as a supportive teammate and selfless for doing what I can for others and being a supportive person."

Being a good teammate is something Engel said she works very hard at, and Mason Vergote said that much is obvious given the way the other runners respect her. Engel believes it's important to help the younger runners that are coming into college for the first time because of how dramatic a shift it can be coming out of high school.

When Engel started at Ohio State, she said some of the upperclassmen helped her with the same thing when she first arrived on campus.

"I find it really important to be a calming presence for some of them, especially the younger ones when they come in, because it is such a big transition for them from high school to college," she said. "The competition, every aspect is changing for them coming into collegiate athletics, and just college in general — helping them to stay calm and give a sense of confidence to them that they are here for a reason."

"She's probably one of the most loved girls on the team," Mason Vergote said. "We have a very tight knit women's team, but she is somebody who could be very selfish in her pursuits, but she's somebody that will always put the team before herself."

The NCAA Great Lakes Regional Championships were held in Madison on Nov. 10, and Engel placed second with a time of 20:07.4, 40 seconds faster than her time on Oct. 27, finishing behind only Olivia Markezich of Notre Dame, who finished in 19:55.1.

The NCAA championships are up next for Engel and Daniella Santos on Nov. 18 in Charlottesville, Va., a course that the Buckeyes have run already once this year, where Engel finished 11th with a time of 16:35.6.

"It will definitely be nice to run the course before the race to prepare because we did get to see it," she said, "but I think it will be good to refresh a little bit knowing that this will be another good, tough course."

"These last few races, I just want to trust in myself and trust in my teammates and put us in a spot where we can do everything that we can to get the best results."

But whether she is able to win that race or not, Engel's impact on Ohio State's cross country program has already been solidified.

"She has reset the standard of excellence for us," Mason Vergote said. "We're the only school in a long time to have three women in the top seven at the cross country (joined by Andrea Kuhn and Santos) championships. She has helped elevate (her teammates) as well. She certainly will leave behind a legacy of excellence, but more than anything, just being a great teammate and being kind to everybody."

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# Top-Ranked 2025 CB Sanchez Committing Jan. 6

Ohio State will know sooner rather than later if it will land one of the program's most sought-after recruits in 2025. Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) is set to announce his commitment on Jan. 6, 2024, at the All-American Bowl.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

Sanchez is the No. 6 overall prospect and top-ranked cornerback in the class, and he will decide between Alabama, Ohio State and Texas A&M.

"There's a lot about Ohio State that I like," Sanchez told 247Sports. "Coach (Perry) Eliano, Coach (Tim) Walton, Coach (Ryan) Day and just the fan base. They are loving people. They're going to welcome you. They want you. Coach Day, ever since I've been there – I've been there three or four times – it felt like home all the times I went.

"The relationship I have with Coach Walton is different from all the coaches. We talk about football, talk about life. There are certain things other coaches don't talk about. I can see myself in that fit and see myself under Coach Walton and him getting me to the next level."

Sanchez has taken several visits to Ohio State over the past year, including

for a recruiting camp over the summer and for the Buckeyes' 20-12 win over Penn State on Oct. 21. Heading into his decision, Ohio State appears to be a heavy favorite, with Sanchez viewing Columbus as a place where he can be developed for the next level.

"An Ohio State cornerback, he's good at everything," Sanchez said this past summer. "You can press, you can play off – that's what they like to do. I feel like if you can do all of that and you can be great at it, you've got a chance to be on that wall (of great players). There's not that many schools that call themselves DBU, and Ohio State is probably one of the No. 1 schools, just looking at the guys in the league. It speaks for itself."

Ohio State already has a commitment at cornerback for 2025, with Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 175) pledging to the Buckeyes in October. Ohio State is also continuing to look at Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) and Indianapolis Ben Davis four-star Mark Zackery IV (5-11, 164).

### Seaton, Jones Reschedule Visits Due To Playoffs

Before Ohio State can fully shift focus to 2025, there's still some business to attend to in 2024 with the early signing period set to begin on Dec. 20, just over a month away. One area of concern is in the trenches, where the Buckeyes will be looking to reschedule a pair of official visits that were expected for the 38-3 win over Michigan State on Nov. 11.

Both Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287) and Bay City, Texas, four-

OSU Football 2024 Commitments						
Players in the class of 2024 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	
Deontae Armstrong	OL	6-6	280	★★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward	
Devontae Armstrong	OL	6-5	297	★★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward	
Mylan Graham	WR	6-1	170	★★★★★	New Haven, Ind.	
Eddrick Houston	DL	6-3	265	★★★★★	Buford, Ga.,	
Max LeBlanc	TE	6-4	222	★★★★	Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School	
Miles Lockhart	CB	5-10	185	★★★★	Chandler (Ariz.) Basha	
Jordan Lyle	RB	6-0	180	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas	
Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	185	★★★★	West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep	
Jeremiah McClellan	WR	6-0	190	★★★★	St. Louis Christian Brothers College	
Eric Mensah	DL	6-3	290	★★★	Stafford (Va.) Mountain View	
Ian Moore	OL	6-5	295	★★★★	New Palestine, Ind.	
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	
Leroy Roker	S	3-1	170	★★★	Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot	
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	

star defensive lineman Carlon Jones (6-3, 270), who is committed to Nebraska, were expected to take their official visits but were forced to reschedule due to competing in their respective high school football state playoffs.

The Buckeyes are in contention for Seaton along with Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Oklahoma, Oregon and Tennessee, but the fact that he has not made it to Columbus since the spring does not have him considering Ohio State any less.

"I've got to get back to Ohio State and see where my head's at," Seaton told 247Sports. "Ohio State is always in the mix."

No dates are yet in mind for either Seaton or Jones, but with just one home game remaining against Minnesota on Nov. 18 and a few weeks after that before the early signing period begins, the clock is ticking for Ohio State to get these targets on campus.

### Buckeyes Offer NU OL Commit VanSickle

Ohio State sent out an offer on Nov. 6 to Coopersville, Mich., three-star interior lineman Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 283), who has been committed to Northwestern since May.

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

### 30 Years Ago — 1993

The Nov. 13 clash with Indiana marked the last time this season Ohio State could show off its program and nationally ranked football team in jam-packed Ohio Stadium to wide-eyed high school football recruits. As OSU improved to 9-0-1, it was unknown whether the coaching staff improved its standing in the recruiting race.

Recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff had been successful all season at getting recruits to make unofficial visits to home games. But his hands were tied as a high number of quality in-state and out-of-state players were engaged in postseason playoff games.

"We had 23 recruits here, which is actually a good number considering the playoffs are going on," Petroff said. "We'd like to have more, of course, but that's not bad."

Among the big names missing were Scott Mutryn and Eric Gohlstin of Cleveland St. Ignatius. Mutryn was considered one of the best quarterback prospects in the country and was considering the Buckeyes along with Florida, Penn State, Boston College and others. Gohlstin was equally impressive as an offensive lineman. The 6-5, 295-pound tackle was Buckeye lineman Juan Porter's cousin and reportedly was leaning hard toward OSU.

### 25 Years Ago — 1998

Quincy (Fla.) Shanks offensive lineman Alex Jackson (6-5, 285) was ranked among the nation's top 10 offensive guards by The National Recruiting Advisor.

He was scheduled to visit Ohio State on Nov. 21 for the Michigan game. But because of playoff game commitments, he would have to move it to Dec. 4. He also planned to visit Kentucky on Nov. 14 and Georgia Tech on Dec. 11.

"I grew up loving Ohio State," he said. "I'm a big Orlando Pace fan, and I pattern my game after him. There's just something about that team. I like the silver and red."

### 20 Years Ago — 2003

Another weekend of Ohio high school football playoff action

had come and gone, and some of Ohio State's recruiting targets were moving on, while some saw their prep careers come to an end.

Lakewood St. Edward, featuring junior Buckeye offensive line commitment Alex Boone, pulled off the biggest victory of the Nov. 7-8 weekend, upsetting Warren Harding, the No. 2 team in the nation according to USA Today, by a score of 21-13.

Harding didn't help its cause with 13 penalties, and wideout Mario Manningham, one of Ohio's top junior prospects, fumbled three times in the second half.

"We did not deserve to win, by no means," Harding coach Thom McDaniels said.

### 15 Years Ago — 2008

Jeannette, Pa., running back Jordan Hall (5-9, 185) was keeping the Jayhawks' hopes of a second consecutive state title alive. In a 46-7 win against New Kensington with former teammate Terrelle Pryor on hand, Hall rushed for four touchdowns.

In a Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League Class AA quarterfinal game, Hall then added three more scores as Jeannette defeated Beaver, 57-28.

### 10 Years Ago — 2013

In the world of recruiting, nothing's official until it's official, a lesson that has both helped and hurt the Ohio State football team on the recruiting trail in the past.

While the Buckeyes were typically the team getting players to back out of their oral commitments to opposing schools, it was OSU who was left saying goodbye when Gary (Ind.) West Side wide receiver Lonnie Johnson (6-3, 180) opted to go back on his verbal.

"I've officially decommitted from OSU," Johnson posted to Twitter on Nov. 11. "Sorry fans, but it happened."

Johnson, a three-star prospect and the No. 72 wide receiver in

2014, planned to take visits to Cincinnati, South Florida and Western Michigan.

### Five Years Ago — 2018

According to reports from multiple scouting services, Ohio State was in Arizona on Nov. 8 as the Buckeyes offered running back Bijan Robinson (6-0, 200) of Salpointe Catholic in Tucson.

Robinson was an Arizona legacy. His uncle Paul played for the Wildcats and went on to have a six-year NFL career including four full seasons with the Cincinnati Bengals. Bijan had been offered by Arizona, Alabama and Oklahoma among others in the past two years. During the season, he had taken unofficial visits to Michigan (Sept. 15) and UCLA (Oct. 22), where both schools had offered him scholarships.

Robinson was the 247Sports composite's No. 36 overall prospect, No. 5 running back and No. 2 player in Arizona for 2020.

### One Year Ago — 2022

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225), who had been committed to Ohio State since April 12, continued taking visits to other schools throughout the fall.

He made an unofficial visit to Miami (Fla.) on Nov. 5 when the Hurricanes hosted Florida State, and he was at Florida the weekend of Nov. 12 to watch the Gators take on South Carolina. Despite being committed to Ohio State for seven months, communication appeared consistent with the other schools.

Fletcher said Miami head coach Mario Cristobal texted him every day, and he had said publicly that he was locked in with Ohio State but had not turned down the Hurricanes' advances.

"It's just really those two," Fletcher said in October of Ohio State and Miami (Fla.). "Those are the two talking to me. But you know, I'm still committed to Ohio State."

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

### OSU Football 2025 Commitments

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jayvan Boggs	WR	6-0	188	★★★★	Cocoa, Fla.
Eli Lee	LB	6-3	215	★★★	Akron Hoban
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

VanSickle is the No. 860 overall prospect and No. 61 interior lineman in the class, and he holds additional offers from Bowling Green, Central Michigan, Indiana, Miami (Ohio), Northern Illinois and Western Michigan. He took an unofficial visit for the win over Penn State and made his official visit to Ohio State for the win over Michigan State.

It's been a rapidly developing recruitment, but Ohio State's pursuit of VanSickle has little bearing on Seaton, considering that VanSickle is strictly an interior prospect and Seaton could be a guard or tackle.

Plus, with the decommitment in September of Toledo Central Catholic three-star Marc Nave (6-5, 315), the Buckeyes are looking at adding at least one or two more recruits on the offensive line to join four-stars Devontae (6-5, 297) and Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward and New Palestine, Ind., four-star Ian Moore (6-5, 295).

#### OSU Offers Minnesota Safety Commit Perich

VanSickle is not the only prospect Ohio State is trying to flip. The Buckeyes also sent out an offer on Nov. 6 to Esko (Minn.) Lincoln Secondary four-star safety Koi Perich (6-1, 195), who has been committed to Minnesota since April.

Perich is the No. 142 overall prospect and No. 11 safety in the class, and he holds offers from Florida State, Michigan, Washington, Wisconsin and USC, among others. He totaled 75 tackles, three interceptions, four forced fumbles and two sacks last season for Lincoln while adding over 1,600 all-purpose yards on offense with 26 touchdowns.

He is also a noted multi-sport athlete, running track, where he won a state title in the long jump as a sophomore, and playing basketball along with football. On the hardwood, he has already reached 1,000 points at Lincoln.

Perich told 247Sports that although he would likely not attend either of Ohio State's last two home games, he will still attempt to visit Columbus after Lincoln's season has finished.

Adding an additional safety has always been a consideration for the Buckeyes with West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185) and Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot three-star Leroy Roker (6-1, 170) as the only safeties in Ohio State's class.

#### Pierce Named Semifinalist For High School Butkus Award

Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star line-

backer Payton Pierce (6-1, 225), who committed to Ohio State in April, is in line for one of the nation's top honors, revealed as a semifinalist on Nov. 6 for the High School Butkus Award.

The award – named after linebacker Dick Butkus, who died on Oct. 5 – is given to the nation's best high school linebacker, with the winner to be announced on Jan. 27, 2024.

Pierce is one of 12 honorees, along with Jefferson, Ga., five-star Sammy Brown (6-2, 230, Clemson); Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star Aaron Chiles (6-3, 220, Florida); Fairfax, Va., four-star Kris Jones (6-2, 220, Georgia); and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-3, 230, Notre Dame), among others.

#### Playing Time For Ohio State's Freshmen Impacting Recruiting

Ohio State has seen several true freshmen step up this season – albeit most due to injury – but Day said it's having a noticeable impact on the team's recruiting, as the staff can show prospects that early playing time is a possibility.

"It's huge," Day said on Nov. 8. "The response we've gotten from the recruits is excellent. Here, they see it. They're looking really close. Because it's one thing to say it, it's another to actually see it. So we make sure that they see it."

Few freshmen should come into Ohio State expecting to play immediately, because it's largely a rare occurrence for freshmen to see more than limited time. But the staff has shown this season that it is not afraid to call on freshmen when needed.

Wide receiver Carnell Tate has seen plenty of action on offense for the Buckeyes while cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. has been a constant in Ohio State's secondary, along with safety Malik Hartford, and all have answered the call when forced into the game.

#### Ohio Stadium Packed For Prime-Time Tilt With Spartans

Buckeye Sports Bulletin published a preliminary list of visitors for Ohio State's win over Michigan State in the previous issue, but since we last went to press, that collection of recruits changed drastically,

Continued On Page 28



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# Quarterfinals Begin For OHSAA Playoffs

Continued From Page 27

with some additions and subtractions from the list.

A large collection of Ohio State's current pledges in 2024 were scheduled to be in attendance. The list of prospects not committed to the Buckeyes included Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star wide receiver Chance Robinson (6-2, 190), who is committed to Miami (Fla.), VanSickle and Clinton, N.C., four-star defensive lineman Amaris Williams (6-3, 270), who is committed to Florida.

This is the latest in Ohio State's attempt to flip several prospects from other schools' recruiting classes. This was the second visit for Williams to Ohio State this season – this one unofficial following his official visit for the Buckeyes' win over Penn State – while both Robinson and VanSickle were on official visits to Columbus.

In 2025, two of Ohio State's four pledges were scheduled to be in attendance, including Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) and Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 215). Uncommitted prospects in attendance included Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210); West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West three-star linebacker Grant Beerman (6-4, 215); Mission Viejo, Calif.,

four-star wide receiver Phillip Bell (6-2, 195); Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star wide receiver Preston Bowman (6-0, 190); Savannah (Ga.) Calvary Day School three-star wide receiver Edward Coleman (5-10, 180); Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star cornerback Faheem Delane (6-3, 195); Richmond (Va.) Trinity Episcopal School three-star cornerback Terrance Edwards (6-1, 180); Cleveland Glenville defensive end Jameil Hamm (6-3, 225); and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Byron Louis (5-10, 180).

Also on hand were Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225); Canton McKinley four-star athlete Dante McClellan (6-3, 200); Cleveland Shaker Heights four-star athlete Trey McNutt (6-0, 180); Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 235); Mansfield (Ohio) Ontario quarterback Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180); Cincinnati Mt. Healthy four-star athlete Jai'mier Scott (6-1, 177); Pickerington (Ohio) North running back Michael Taylor (5-11, 185); Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star offensive tackle Douglas Utu (6-5, 270); and Calhoun, Ga., four-star tight end Emaree Winston (6-2, 235). Also in attendance was Mobile (Ala.) C.F. Vigor five-star offensive tackle Micah DeBose (6-5, 315), who is committed to Georgia.

There was a handful of 2026 prospects in attendance as well, including Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School five-star quarterback Jared Curtis (6-3, 210); Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit four-star quarterback Will Griffin (6-3, 215); Lilburn (Ga.) Parkview five-star safety Zelus Hicks (6-2, 180); Akron Hoban cornerback Elbert Hill IV (5-10, 160); Boca Raton (Fla.) West running back Javian Mallory (5-11, 200); Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Cumberland Valley four-star offensive tackle Tyler Merrill (6-5, 310); West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West athlete Cam Thomas (6-2, 200); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage wide receiver Malachi Toney (5-9, 165), who is committed to Miami (Fla.); and Bolingbrook, Ill., quarterback Jonas Williams (6-3, 185).

## OHSAA Playoffs Enter Quarterfinals

The third week of the Ohio High School Athletic Association playoffs are in the books, and several teams featuring Ohio State commitments and potential pledges down the line won, earning a trip to regional finals/state quarterfinals. Here's a look at some notable results from the third-round games played the weekend of Nov. 11.

**Division I, Region 1 – No. 6 Medina (10-3) vs. No. 2 Cleveland Heights (11-2):** The football season came to an end for Cleveland Heights and four-star running

back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190), a target of Ohio State in 2025, as they suffered a 21-20 loss to Medina.

Trailing 21-14 in the fourth, Cleveland Heights drove down the field and scored with 32 seconds remaining in the game but elected to go for two, and the conversion failed, with the game then ending after a failed onside kick. Davis finished with 199 yards and a 25-yard touchdown on 28 carries.

**Division I, Region 1 – No. 4 Canton McKinley (9-4) vs. No. 1 Lakewood St. Edward (11-1):** Four-star offensive linemen Devontae (6-5, 297) and Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong helped lead St. Edward to another dominant win in these playoffs. The Eagles delivered a 41-17 beatdown of Canton McKinley.

St. Edward led 18-3 after the first and 34-3 heading into the locker room. The Eagles move on to play No. 6 Medina (10-3) on Nov. 18.

**Division I, Region 2 – No. 12 Springfield (8-6) vs. No. 1 Lewis Center Olen-tangy (11-2):** Ohio State cornerback commitment Aaron Scott (6-2, 190) and Springfield continued a run of upsets this postseason, knocking off top-seeded Lewis Center Olen-tangy by a 37-24 score in the third round of the playoffs.

Springfield took a 3-0 lead but Olen-tangy – led by four-star quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer (6-2, 190), a 2024

## ASK AN ANALYST With BuckeyeHuddle's Marc Givler

**Ohio State sent out an offer on Nov. 7 to Coopersville, Mich., three-star offensive lineman Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 283), who is committed to Northwestern. What do you make of the offer, and what do you think it might mean for the Buckeyes' chances of landing Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287)?**

"Gabe (visited on Nov. 11 for the Michigan State game), an official visit. Seaton's visit is postponed until further notice. They're going to try and get him back on campus. We'll see how that goes. My understanding from people I've talked to is that Gabe is more of a swing player, so think maybe Josh Fryar as a guy who can play guard and play tackle. I think they could make room for both. You could argue that VanSickle would replace Toledo Central Catholic three-star interior lineman Marc Nave (6-5, 315) in the class and they will still have room for Seaton. But they definitely need another body in this class, so they're going to make sure that if they strike out on Seaton they have another body."

**What do you make of VanSickle as an overall prospect?**

"The first thing is that he is versatile. He has size. He can play outside. He has length, but he is also a guy you could move inside if you need him to. That's the biggest thing I think Ohio State sees is the flexibility there. He's a good athlete, gets up to second level and can execute those second-level blocks on linebackers or safeties. He plays pretty hard, plays physical, so those are some of the things I see. And you know if he's committed to Northwestern, he's smart."

**Another prospect recently offered by Ohio State was Esko (Minn.) Lincoln Secondary four-star safety Koi Perich (6-1, 195), who is committed to Minnesota. Do the Buckeyes have a solid chance of pulling off a flip here?**

"It's interesting. He's an in-state kid. He's committed to in-state Minnesota, and those have historically not always been easy. Minnesota has done a pretty decent job of keeping guys like that home over the years. But he told me he's going to visit (Ohio State) once the season's over. They're in the playoffs right

now, so I don't know if that'll be (against Minnesota), or maybe they can sneak something in during December, but he said he's going to try and visit.

"He has blown up. Florida State offered him, USC offered him, so he has turned into a hot commodity here the last couple of weeks. He's a very athletic kid, great athlete, runs track, plays basketball. This is a situation where I don't think they have to take another safety, but if they can find a guy that they really like, I think they would do that. This kid's been on a hot streak right now with recruiting, I think some people have him as a top-100 prospect at this point. He's been on a rocket ship here the last few months with his recruiting stock."

**You got to see Cincinnati Withrow five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185) in person for Withrow's 16-7 win over Cincinnati Winton Woods on Nov. 3. What did you see from him, and what do you make of him as a prospect?**

"I've seen a lot of him over the past year. To me, he's exactly what you would think a five-star receiver would look like as a sophomore. He's 6-5 but he looks like he's taller every time I see him. I think he's pushing maybe even 6-6 at this point. The thing I noticed this year that wasn't there last year is his ability after the catch. On almost every catch he made (against Winton Woods), he was able to turn those catches into 5, 10, 15 more yards after the catch with really impressive open field moves. He's getting faster. He's running away from people. Again, he's doing all that at 6-5, 6-5-plus, so he's really becoming a complete receiver. He's not just a jump-ball player. He's not just a guy who is just going to overwhelm smaller defensive backs. He's now becoming someone who is a threat after the catch. He's blocking, he's doing everything. So he is, for me, the best receiver to come out of Ohio in a really long time. You'd have to go really far back. I think the last receiver who was going to be ranked as highly as Henry is going to be was probably Ted Ginn Jr."

**Anyone else who stood out from that game?**

"It was a great game. There were a lot of good prospects. From an Ohio State perspective, Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star edge rusher Justin Hill (6-4, 215) is going to be one

of the top players in Ohio in the class of 2025. He is kind of like a linebacker/edge, but he's going to be an edge. One of the positive developments there for him is that everyone is now realizing he's going to be an edge, so he's putting his hand in the dirt, he's standing up on the outside, playing defensive end at this point. That wasn't always the case last year. They figured out what he's going to be. He's incredibly athletic. Incredibly explosive. And he has the type of frame at 6-4, he's going to play up in the 240s-250s, maybe even low 260s in college. So he has some weight to put on. But he is just a freak athlete. He blocked a punt and recovered it for a touchdown, which was Winton Woods' only points of the game. He's a special talent. He's easily a top-five player in Ohio in the class. I think he's probably a top-two or three player in Ohio.

"The other guy I love is Withrow four-star wide receiver Quintin Simmons Jr. (6-0, 175). He's a 2025 receiver, a year ahead of Henry. He's a much different player, but probably the most dangerous player in Ohio with a ball in his hands. They limited his receiving. There wasn't a whole lot of offense in that game.

"This didn't show up in the box score because it got called back, but he had a kickoff return touchdown. Winton Woods has a ton of team speed, and Simmons just beat everyone to the edge and out-ran everybody. I've been at two of their games this year and he's returned a kick for a touchdown in both games. In fact, he has actually returned three. He had a punt return touchdown the first time and he also had a kickoff return called back. But it's like every time he touches the ball, it could be a touchdown. He is a 10.5 100-meter guy, just blazing speed. And he's only been playing receiver a couple years. He was a quarterback through little league and in middle school, so the sky's the limit there.

"Withrow four-star cornerback Terhyon Nichols (6-0, 180) is an outstanding player. He's committed to Kentucky (in 2024), and I tend to think that's going to stay that way. I just don't think it's going to happen with Ohio State right now. Winton Woods has a freshman tailback in Isaiah Garrett (a 2027 prospect) who we're going to be hearing a lot about these next few years."

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

prospect committed to Penn State, and future three-star Cincinnati tight end Gavin Grover (6-6, 220) – responded with a 15-yard touchdown pass and later led 18-9 at the half, a score that held until early in the fourth.

Once the scoreboard switched to the final quarter, it was all Springfield. Scott got the Wildcats back into the game with a 5-yard rushing touchdown, and after Olentangy responded with a rushing score of its own, Springfield rattled off 20 unanswered points, including another rushing score by Scott, for the win.

Springfield's dream postseason will continue into the quarterfinals against No. 6 Dublin Coffman (10-3) on Nov. 18.

**Division I, Region 3 – No. 3 Pickerington North (11-2) vs. No. 2 Hilliard Bradley (12-1):** Pickerington North and three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203) suffered a tough 19-0 loss to Hilliard Bradley in the third round of the playoffs, held to minus-6 rushing yards for the game, and the team missed out on the regional finals for the first time since 2017.

**Division I, Region 4 – No. 3 West Chester Lakota West (11-2) vs. No. 2 Cincinnati Princeton (12-1):** Lakota West and four-star tight end Luka Gilbert (6-8, 233) are moving on after notching a 19-7 win over higher-seeded Cincinnati Princeton.

The Firebirds got two interceptions from defensive back Finn Mason, the latter returned for a 28-yard touchdown late in the fourth for the clinching score. Lakota West will play No. 5 Cincinnati Moeller

(9-4) in the quarterfinals.

**Division II, Region 5 – No. 4 Painesville Riverside (9-3) vs. No. 1 Akron Hoban (11-1):** Lee and two 2026 targets in offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 290) and Hill are moving on to the state quarterfinals after a 21-0 win over Painesville Riverside.

The Knights will play No. 2 Cuyahoga Falls Walsh Jesuit (12-1) on Nov. 18, with Jesuit's only loss of the season coming earlier this year against Hoban, which won 57-7 on Sept. 29.

**Division II, Region 8 – No. 3 Cincinnati Withrow (12-1) vs. No. 2 Troy (11-2):** Withrow and five-star wide receiver and Ohio State commitment Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185) took down Troy, the No. 2 seed in the region, by a 42-14 score and will now look to knock off No. 1 Cincinnati Anderson (12-1) on Nov. 18.

**Division III, Region 11 – No. 7 Bellefontaine (11-2) vs. No. 3 Granville (12-1):** St. Clair continued his impressive junior season, leading Bellefontaine to a 29-21 win over previously undefeated Granville.

After a 48-yard touchdown by St. Clair, Granville was able to take a 15-14 lead at the end of the first before the Chieftains responded to go up 21-15 entering the locker room. In the third quarter, St. Clair threw another touchdown pass – this one a 31-yarder – and completed a two-point conversion to lead 29-15 entering the fourth before Bellefontaine ran out the clock.

Bellefontaine will now move on to play the top-seeded team in the region in No.

### OHSAA GAMES TO WATCH, QUARTERFINALS

- No. 1 Lakewood St. Edward (11-1) vs. No. 6 Medina (10-3)
- No. 1 Akron Hoban (11-1) vs. No. 2 Cuyahoga Falls Walsh Jesuit (12-1)
- No. 2 Cleveland Glenville (10-2) vs. No. 1 Sandusky Perkins (12-0)
- No. 3 Cincinnati Withrow (12-1) vs. No. 1 Cincinnati Anderson (12-1)
- No. 3 West Chester Lakota West (11-2) vs. No. 5 Cincinnati Moeller (9-4)
- No. 7 Bellefontaine (11-2) vs. No. 1 Columbus Watterson (12-1)
- No. 12 Springfield (8-5) vs. No. 6 Dublin Coffman (10-3)

1 Columbus Bishop Watterson (12-1) on Nov. 18.

**Division IV, Region 14 – No. 3 Shelby (10-3) vs. No. 2 Cleveland Glenville (10-2):** Glenville – led by a pair of Ohio State commitments in cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177) and tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215) – moved a step closer to repeating as state champions with a dominant 50-14 win over Shelby in the third round of the playoffs.

Glenville led 29-0 early in the second quarter and returned the opening kickoff in the second half to initiate a running clock for the rest of the contest.

The Tarblooders will now face No. 1 Sandusky Perkins (12-0) on Nov. 18.

#### Other Notes And Tidbits

• Ohio State still trails Georgia in the composite rankings for the 2024 class, in a close second with 304.99 points behind the Bulldogs' 314.49 points, though

Georgia has 27 commits to 22 pledges for the Buckeyes. Georgia also holds a slight edge in average player rating at .9354, with Ohio State at .9353.

• Miami (Fla.) Edison four-star cornerback Jett White (6-2, 160), a 2025 prospect, included Ohio State among his top 10 schools along with Alabama, Florida, Florida State, Louisville, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Oregon, Penn State and USC, and will announce his commitment at the All-American Bowl.

• Purdue picked up a commitment in 2025 on Nov. 7 from Akron East three-star running back Ziaire Stevens (5-10, 185). He held additional offers from Boston College, Cincinnati, Indiana, and Pittsburgh, among others, and he is the third pledge in the Boilermakers' class.

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# Mobley, White Put Pen To Paper On Signing Day

Ohio State officially welcomed two new players into its program on Nov. 8 when Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy four-star combo guard John "Juni" Mobley Jr. (6-0, 150) and Ottawa (Ohio) Ottawa-Glandorf three-star small forward Colin White (6-6, 180) signed their national letters of intent to play for the Buckeyes.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

"We're really excited to welcome Juni and Colin to the Ohio State family," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "It's always great when we can add players with Ohio roots to the Buckeye family. They are two high-character guys who both know how to win at a high level."

Mobley grew up in central Ohio and committed to the Buckeyes over schools such as Arizona State, Creighton and LSU, among others, in October 2022 after calling Ohio State his dream school. He enters Holtmann's program as the nation's 47th-best overall prospect and sixth-best combo guard in the class, as well as the No. 1 overall player in Utah.

Mobley transferred to Wasatch Academy in June after a sparkling junior season at Las Vegas Bishop Gorman, where he averaged 20.1 points, 4.0 rebounds, 4.0 assists and 2.0 steals for the Gaels. He has also impressed on the AAU circuit, most notably at this past summer's Nike Peach Jam, where he recorded 20 or more points in three contests while competing for Las Vegas Elite. He also connected on 18 of his 34 three-point attempts, a major strength for the new Buckeye that Holtmann said can allow him to make an instant impact next season.

"Juni is as good a shooter as we have added since we've been here," Holtmann said. "He is dynamic shooting the ball, and he's maybe the best kid at his age I've seen shooting threes off the bounce. He can really shoot the ball and score the ball. His size doesn't limit him because he has great range. He's just a fantastic offensive player, and he's grown in other areas of his game."

Holtmann said Mobley has a great opportunity to continue expanding his overall game at Wasatch Academy, where he will be challenged to work out the kinks in his play and learn to play against, and even alongside, more college-ready prospects.

"(Going to Wasatch Academy) certainly helps him," Holtmann said "When you're a kid like Juni is, and most of our guys are, they're the best player on their team in high school. And there's real value in that. But I think there's also real value in going and playing against a kind of competition that Juni will play against, where he will be really well-coached and play with other good players. So you understand that when you get to college, you have to figure out how to make your strengths add value to the team."

White, who grew up just under two hours away from Columbus, was a late pickup for the Buckeyes. After flashing his potential in Ohio State's two-day high school team camp held at Value City Arena from June 8-9, he received an offer from the program a little over a month later on July 20. He then announced his verbal pledge to Ohio State on Aug. 13 over Butler, Cincinnati, Northwestern and TCU.

Holtmann said White's patience with the team stood out to him during the recruitment process, which serves as a testament to his humility.

"To Colin's credit, I think he was very understanding," Holtmann said. "We were also very transparent with him during that whole process. We just told him that it was going to be a smaller class and we just wanted to continue to evaluate. We said, 'Hey Colin, we just want to make sure, if we bring you in, that we know you're going to be a guy that we feel like can really impact our team and our roster.' And when we felt like that, we were all in."

"He's a good player and a prideful kid, so I understood where he was coming from too, like 'Coach, is it going to happen or not?' But I'm just really glad we got to the point where we were able to see him and evaluate him, because I think he's really going to help our program."

On the court, White comes to Ohio State as the nation's 168th-best prospect, 33rd-best small forward, and No. 7 player in Ohio, and he has flashed on both the AAU and high school stage.

He helped lead Ottawa-Glandorf to back-to-back OHSAA Division III championship game appearances in his sophomore and junior seasons, and White even took home the Division III Northwest Ohio Player of the Year award last season after averaging 20.1 points, 5.8 rebounds and 4.0 assists per game. He has also competed for the AAU program Indiana Elite for the past two seasons.

"We just love what Colin is going to bring, we really do," Holtmann said. "He's tough,

## OSU Men's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2024 who have signed 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

he's a physical player. He has good length, good positional size. He's shot it better these last couple years. He's going to really help our program, and he loves Ohio State."

## Five-Star Center Quaintance No Longer Considering OSU

It may have seemed like Ohio State was on the verge of securing a big-time prospect to the 2024 class after Raleigh (N.C.) Word of God Christian Academy five-star center Jayden Quaintance (6-9, 230) placed the Buckeyes in his top four list of preferred schools on Nov. 6. But that dream proved to be short-lived when Quaintance whittled his list down to two schools – Kentucky and Missouri – just four days later on Nov. 10.

Quaintance, who grew up in northeast Ohio and is the nation's eighth-best prospect, second-best center and No. 1 player in North Carolina, had shown significant interest in Holtmann's program, even making Columbus his first stop on his recruiting trail this fall for an official visit during the weekend of Sept. 9.

His dad, Haminn, said after the trip that Ohio State was a "must-visit," but the five-star has shifted his focus to the SEC, where Kentucky is now viewed as the favorite to land him.

"Coach Calipari has been showing a lot of love, and Coach Chin (Coleman), too," Quaintance told On3 after trimming his list down to two schools. "Coach Cal has already come to Word of God twice to see me. We've been able to build a good relationship."

Despite losing out on a highly-touted prospect, Holtmann previously said that he was already anticipating a small class in 2024, compared to the four-man class of Taison Chatman, Scotty Middleton, Austin Parks and Devin Royal a year prior. This is a development Holtmann said was due to this year's roster already having a strong contingency of young and developing players, something Holtmann did not want to significantly add to next season.

"This was and is always going to be a smaller class," Holtmann said. "At one point, we thought it could just be a one-person class because we're obviously a really young team currently. So when you have the amount of youth we have right now, is it really wise to have another young class? We just didn't feel like that was smart. So we were probably going to stick with one or two guys. And the reality is that we are just thrilled with (Mobley and White)."

## Thornton Earning High Praise After Fast Start

Ohio State sophomore guard Bruce Thornton was viewed throughout the off-season as the Buckeyes' unquestioned leader and No. 1 scoring option for this year, and through the first two games of the season, he has answered the call.

In the Buckeyes' 79-73 season-opening

win over Oakland on Nov. 6 and 73-66 loss to No. 15 Texas A&M on Nov. 10, the second-year guard has been Ohio State's most consistent scorer, averaging a team-high 20.5 points per game on 11-of-31 (35.5 percent) shooting. Thornton has also embraced the role of Ohio State's floor general, ranking second on the team with seven total assists.

Holtmann said after the Oakland win that his guard is able to put his imprints on the game in a number of different ways when he is on the floor, even when he is struggling shooting. This has prompted him to give Thornton considerable playing time through the first two games of the season, where he has played 65 of the team's first 80 minutes.

"I don't care if he's 0-for-10, he has to be able to take the 11th good one for this team," Holtmann said. "And he has the freedom to do that. If it's a good look, he needs to take that for us, I don't care if he's 0-for for the night. He brings other things to the team to help his team win. He's going to be on the floor a lot, and he's going to make a lot of big shots for us."

Thornton's fast start – which was headlined by his clutch three-point basket against Oakland with 2:05 remaining to extend the Buckeyes' lead to 71-67 and a career-high 24-point performance against Texas A&M – may not have come as a surprise to his teammates and coaches. But his play has certainly opened the eyes of the opposition.

After the games against Oakland and Texas A&M, head coaches Greg Kampe and Buzz Williams, respectively, raved about the talents of Thornton, with Kampe highlighting his shooting and Williams touching on his ability to thrive off the dribble.

"He's a man," Kampe said. "He's confident and he makes big shots. I love guys that make big shots. The way he played in that Big Ten tournament last year – the first game of the year, you get to watch way too much film. I haven't watched any of Illinois (Oakland's opponent after Ohio State), and I won't go to bed tonight because that's all I'll do. But I watched months of Ohio State. And Thornton kept me up."

"They had such success attacking us off penetration, and we did a really poor job in that regard," Williams said. "But I think No. 2 (Thornton) was probably the catalyst of that. He's just a hard guard. He was literally responsible for (30.8) percent of their baskets, and that doesn't count that he made (60.0) percent of their free throws. He's just a hard guard."

## Slimmer Key Embraces New Role Off Bench

Following an injury-shortened campaign, Ohio State senior center Zed Key has taken on a new role to start his fourth season for the Scarlet and Gray. He has come off the bench for the Buckeyes in their first two games, something that he has not often

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SONNY BROCKWAY

**LEAN AND MEAN** — Ohio State center Zed Key transformed his body over the offseason, dropping from 253 to 235 pounds, and it's paying dividends already for the big man this season.

had to do in his Ohio State career. Key started all but eight of his 54 appearances in his sophomore and junior seasons.

Despite his changing role, Key has still managed to make the most of his opportunities, where he has provided the team with a significant energy boost and served as a formidable force in the paint. In 45 minutes of game action so far this season, Key has corralled a team-high 15 rebounds and averaged 12.5 points per game on an impressive 75.0 percent shooting.

Key attributes his immediate impact to the major weight transformation he underwent in the offseason, when he slimmed down from 253 to 235 pounds. He said this change has allowed him to feel more loose and athletic on the court, which he thinks showed on a crucial and-one basket late in the second half against Oakland where he spun past Grizzlies forward Trey Townsend and slammed home a momentum-shifting dunk.

"I felt great out there," Key said after the win. "I'm going to give it to the strength and conditioning staff. We put together a plan and stuck with it, and I felt great out there. When I got into the game, I tried to dunk on somebody, which was crazy, I don't know why I did that. But I feel great out there. I'm

able to feel more athletic, more agile, so I'm glad I lost this weight.

"I felt a little quicker on that," he added. "I felt a little bit like the wind was whipping through my ears a little bit more."

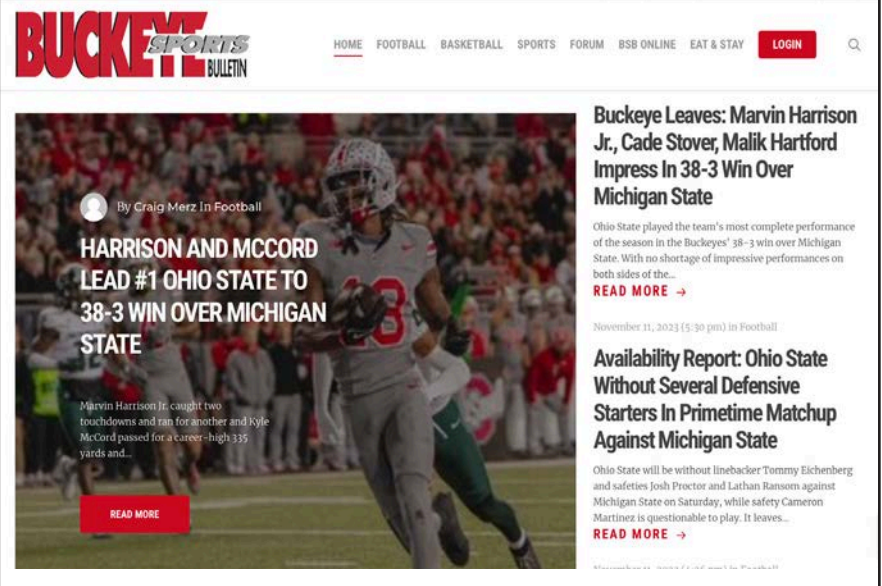
Key's activity in the paint continued into the Texas A&M game, where he contributed 8 points on 4-of-5 shooting in 18 minutes of action while also collecting seven rebounds — with four of them being on the offensive glass — a total that was tied for the most on the team with sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr.

Holtmann, who joked after the Oakland game that he "wasn't sure how to respond" to Key's comments on the dunk, said that he is happy to see the veteran Key return to form and contribute in this new role — and new frame — which he knows was a long time coming after a long and arduous injury recovery.

"He is lighter, for sure," Holtmann said. "I do think it's helped him be able to play maybe a little bit longer stretches. When he got heavier towards the end of last year, and some of it was just his injury, he could only play about three minutes before we had to pull him out. So it's good to see him (play). I think he can play for longer stretches, not carrying as much weight."

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# Ohio State Avoids Upset In Season Opener

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It may not have always been pretty, but Ohio State started its campaign on a winning note. The Buckeyes (1-0) used a strong second-half performance and some timely baskets from sophomore guards Bruce Thornton and Roddy Gayle Jr. to stave off Oakland (0-1) on Nov. 6 at Value City Arena, winning in their season opener 79-73 in front of 9,244 fans.

With a starting lineup of guards Thornton, Gayle and Evan Mahaffey, forward Jamison Battle and center Felix Okpara, Ohio State found itself in an early hole against the stingy Golden Grizzlies, falling behind 6-0 after back-to-back threes from Oakland guards Jack Gohlke and Blake Lampman. The Buckeyes faced a deficit throughout the majority of the first half that swelled to as many as seven points, the last time 21-14 with 11:24 left in the half.

The Buckeyes stayed within reach, though, outscoring the Golden Grizzlies 20-14 over the remainder of the half. This run allowed Ohio State to take a brief 34-33 lead with 2:05 remaining after a Thornton three-pointer, only for the lead to disintegrate about a minute later after a jumper from Oakland guard Trey Townsend to trail 35-34 at the half.

Ohio State's early struggles could be attributed to poor shooting, where it was seemingly unable to figure out a smothering Oakland zone defense. The Buckeyes made just 11 of their 28 shots (39.3 percent) in the first 20 minutes of game action, while also making just 3 of 15 (20.0 percent) three-point attempts. Conversely, the Grizzlies caught fire in the early portion of the game, connecting on six of their 12 attempts from three in the first half, with four of those coming from the tandem of Lampman and Gohlke.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SUPER SOPHOMORE — Ohio State sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. tied for the team lead with 17 points in the Buckeyes' 79-73 win over Oakland to begin the season.**

"Boy, they gave us a lot of fits with their zone and their three-point shooting," head coach Chris Holtmann said. "But I give our guys a ton of credit. They found a way to get some stops and make the necessary plays down the stretch."

Ohio State was able to stay in the game mostly due to the efforts of Battle and Thornton, who accounted for 16 of the team's 34 first-half points. The team was also strong on the inside, outrebounding the Grizzlies 21-14 in the first frame and garnering 11 points from the frontcourt tandem of Zed Key and Okpara.

After trading buckets for the first eight minutes of the second frame, the Buckeyes found themselves in another daunting hole after a layup by Oakland's DQ Cole pushed the Grizzlies lead to 52-47 with 10:41 remaining in the game. But the momentum immediately shifted thanks to an 11-0 run from the Buckeyes, which gave the team a convincing 58-52 lead with 7:32 left.

This sequence of plays was sparked by a personal 9-0 run by Gayle, including a thunderous alley-oop dunk from Thornton that gave the Buckeyes their first lead of the half, 53-52, one that they would never relinquish.

"It's funny, that was the first lob that Bruce and I ever connected on," Gayle said. "So that was a very special moment for me. Obviously, plays like that change the course of the game. So being able to use my athleticism and my ability to give the team energy, I'll do anything for that. Bruce made an amazing play on defense, I just ran the floor, and he found me."

The Grizzlies did not go down without a fight, though. Thanks to the shooting prowess of Gohlke and the play of Townsend, Oakland would stay within reach of the Buckeyes up until the last three minutes of the game, with the lead shrinking to as little as 68-67 with 2:34 remaining after another three-pointer from Gohlke.

But a corner three-pointer from Thornton with 2:05 remaining followed by a pair of missed three-point attempts by Gohlke helped create some much-needed separation, extending the lead to 71-67 and putting away the game for good.

The Buckeyes were led in the win by Gayle, Thornton and Key, who recorded 17 points each on a combined 14-of-29 shooting, while Key and freshman forward Scotty Middleton led with eight rebounds each. Oakland was led by Gohlke, who had 18 points on 6-of-18 shooting, all attempts from beyond the arc, while Townsend added nine rebounds to go along with 17 points.

Ohio State took 30 trips to the line in the game, connecting on 24 (80.0 percent) with Thornton connecting on all eight of his tries.

## OSU's Upset Bid Falls Short Against No. 15 Texas A&M

Ohio State suffered its first loss of the season on Nov. 10 at Value City Arena in front of 12,704, succumbing to poor shooting and rebounding to fall 73-66 to No. 15 Texas A&M.

The Buckeyes (1-1) were entrenched in a tight back-and-forth battle with the Aggies (2-0) in the first half, with the lead changing eight times through the first 20 minutes and neither team leading by more than seven points after Ohio State opened with a 7-0 lead on a three by Thornton and buckets by Mahaffey and Battle.

But after Ohio State went up 33-28 with

## Ohio State 79, Oakland 73

		Nov. 6, 2023			Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio		
		1	2	F			
Oakland (0-1)		35	38	73			
Ohio State (1-0)		34	45	79			
<b>Oakland</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FG</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>Reb.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>PF</b>	<b>Pts.</b>
Watts	19	0-5	0-0	0-0	3	3	0
Conway	14	1-2	3-4	0-2	1	5	5
Gohlke	36	6-18	0-0	0-2	0	3	18
Townsend	38	7-16	2-2	4-5	4	3	17
Lampman	39	5-9	0-0	0-2	0	3	14
Jones	22	0-2	1-3	3-2	3	4	1
Cole	16	3-6	0-0	2-2	0	2	8
Price	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Polk	4	0-0	2-2	0-0	0	5	2
Hunter	11	2-3	3-4	0-0	1	1	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-61</b>	<b>11-15</b>	<b>9-15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Percentages: FG: 39.3%. FT: 73.3%. Three-point field goals: 14-35 (Gohlke 6-18, Lampman 4-7, Cole 2-4, Townsend 1-2, Hunter 1-2, Watts 0-2). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 9 (Townsend 4, Cole 2, Hunter 2, Jones). Steals: 5 (Cole 2, Watts, Gohlke, Jones).</b>							
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FG</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>Reb.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>PF</b>	<b>Pts.</b>
Gayle Jr.	30	6-11	5-7	1-6	5	1	17
Thornton	34	3-11	8-8	0-1	2	0	17
Battle	32	3-8	1-1	1-6	2	2	9
Mahaffey	14	0-0	0-0	1-2	1	4	0
Okpara	13	3-4	0-0	0-1	1	4	6
Middleton	28	4-7	3-4	5-3	1	0	13
Bonner	16	0-4	0-0	0-3	2	2	0
Royal	6	0-0	0-1	0-2	0	0	0
Key	27	5-7	7-9	3-5	0	4	17
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-52</b>	<b>24-30</b>	<b>11-29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Percentages: FG: 46.2%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 7-25 (Thornton 3-7, Battle 2-7, Middleton 2-4, Gayle 0-4, Bonner 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Battle, Okpara, Royal). Turnovers: 13 (Gayle 3, Battle 2, Mahaffey 2, Okpara 2, Thornton, Middleton, Bonner, Key). Steals: 4 (Thornton, Mahaffey, Middleton, Bonner). Officials: Szalc, Beaver, Smith. Attendance: 9,244.</b>							

1:58 left in the half, the Aggies scored the final six points of the first frame to lead 34-33 heading into the locker room.

The back-and-forth nature of the contest extended until there was 7:32 left in the game, with the teams tied 53-53 on a basket by Thornton. But a jumper from Texas A&M guard Wade Taylor IV 16 seconds later gave the Aggies a 55-53 lead, which was the 19th – and final – lead change of the game. This sparked a strong finish for the Aggies where they outscored the Buckeyes 18-13.

"Give A&M credit, I thought they played really well," Holtmann said. "Their guards played well, so give them credit for the win. I thought our guys did some really good things. We just have to do a few things a little better."

The Buckeyes attempted to mount a late comeback after a Thornton three-point play cut the deficit to 63-60 with just 2:54 remaining, but the final surge was cut short due to some dominating play from Texas A&M guards Tyrece Radford and Taylor, with the Aggies closing the door for good on a Taylor floater that extended the lead to 68-62 with 1:17 left.

Ohio State's late struggles stemmed from an extended period of inadequate shooting and rebounding. In the second half, the Buckeyes shot just 36.4 percent from the floor (12 of 33) and failed to make a three-point basket. They also allowed the Aggies to gather eight offensive rebounds in the final 20 minutes of the game, a trend that was part of a game-long struggle for the Buckeyes as they allowed the Aggies to gather 16 offensive rebounds that

## Texas A&M 73, Ohio State 66

		Nov. 10, 2023			Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio		
		1	2	F			
Texas A&M (2-0)		34	39	73			
Ohio State (1-1)		33	33	66			
<b>Texas A&amp;M</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FG</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>Reb.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>PF</b>	<b>Pts.</b>
Hefner	27	1-3	1-2	1-1	1	0	4
Wade	30	8-21	4-6	0-2	4	4	21
Leveque	4	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0
Coleman	36	8-14	4-4	4-7	2	1	20
Radford	34	8-17	4-6	2-3	0	2	21
Carter	18	0-1	0-1	0-2	0	0	0
Lawrence	6	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	2
Garcia	26	1-3	2-2	7-6	0	5	4
Washington	13	0-1	1-2	0-4	0	4	1
Obaseki	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	1	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-63</b>	<b>16-23</b>	<b>15-26</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Percentages: FG: 42.9%. FT: 69.6%. Three-point field goals: 3-18 (Hefner 1-1, Radford 1-5, Taylor 1-9, Carter 0-1, Lawrence 0-1, Washington 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 1 (Garcia). Turnovers: 6 (Taylor 2, Radford, Lawrence, Garcia, Team). Steals: 3 (Taylor 2, Carter).</b>							
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FG</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>Reb.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>PF</b>	<b>Pts.</b>
Gayle Jr.	36	4-12	1-2	2-5	6	2	9
Thornton	31	8-20	6-9	0-2	5	2	24
Battle	23	4-8	0-0	2-2	0	5	10
Mahaffey	30	2-3	2-2	1-4	0	3	6
Okpara	22	1-3	1-2	0-3	0	2	3
Middleton	16	1-5	0-1	0-0	0	2	2
Bonner	16	2-5	0-0	0-0	0	2	4
Hardman	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Royal	7	0-1	0-0	1-2	0	1	0
Key	18	4-5	0-1	4-3	0	2	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>26-62</b>	<b>10-17</b>	<b>10-21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Percentages: FG: 41.9%. FT: 58.8%. Three-point field goals: 4-19 (Thornton 2-8, Battle 2-5, Gayle 0-3, Middleton 0-1, Bonner 0-1, Royal 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 10. (Okpara 4, Royal 3, Mahaffey 2, Middleton). Turnovers: 8 (Gayle 2, Battle 2, Middleton, Bonner, Royal, Key). Steals: 2 (Thornton, Battle). Officials: Dorsey, Daily, Corner. Attendance: 12,704.</b>							

led to 19 second-chance points, as opposed to just nine second-chance points on 12 offensive boards for the Buckeyes.

"Texas A&M is a physical team," Battle said. "It's just constantly knowing you have to go to the glass and make sure that your man is boxed out. And I think that's something where we had the emphasis on it, we just didn't do our best job executing it. And I think that's something we have to learn from."

As for its shooting, Ohio State's shortcomings fell on the three-point and free-throw lines. The Buckeyes mustered up just four three-point makes on 19 tries, a lowly 21.1 percent, and shot just 10 of 17 (58.8 percent) from the charity stripe. Conversely the Aggies iced the game with nine makes in 12 attempts from the free-throw line in the second half (16 of 23 for the game) and also shot 15 of 32 (46.9 percent) from the floor in the second half.

The Buckeyes were led in the loss by Thornton, who finished with a career-high 24 points on 8-of-20 shooting while also tacking on two rebounds and five assists, while Battle fouled out with 10 points. Gayle passed out six assists, and Okpara had four blocks.

The Aggies were spearheaded by Radford and Taylor, who netted 21 points apiece on a combined 16-of-38 (42.1 percent) shooting, while forward Henry Coleman III had 20 points and 11 rebounds.

Ohio State will look to get back in the win column on Nov. 15 when it welcomes Merrimack (1-1) to Value City Arena.



# Ohio State Inks Four In 2024 Recruiting Class

Ohio State signed all four members of the team's 2024 recruiting class during the early signing period from Nov. 8-15, adding a sharpshooting guard, a versatile wing and two future post players for the Buckeyes.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

The first member of Ohio State's class was Cincinnati Purcell Marian forward Seini Hicks (6-0), who committed to the Buckeyes on April 10.

"We're super excited to add Seini Hicks to the program," head coach Kevin McGuff said. "She's a great young woman and is going to add so much to our team and culture, but also an exceptional athlete who I think is just starting to scratch the surface of her game."

Hicks averaged 13.0 points and 10.0 rebounds on 42.1 percent shooting last season for West Clermont, though she will play her senior season at Purcell Marian. She is the sister of Cincinnati Withrow five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 185), who is committed to the football team's 2026 recruiting class.

Joining the class in June were Concord (N.C.) J.M. Robinson forward Ella Hobbs (6-4), Flowery Branch (Ga.) Buford guard Ava Watson (5-8) and Helsinki, Finland, forward Elsa Lemmilä (6-6). Hobbs, who pledged on June 11, is the No. 92 overall prospect in the class, according to ESPN, and averaged 16.1 points, 6.1 rebounds and 1.4 blocks per game last season.

"Ella's going to bring a tremendous amount to our program," McGuff said. "She's a great kid. She's a big, strong physical presence around the basket, but she's also got the perimeter skills to be really effective in our system."

Watson, ESPN's No. 51 overall prospect in the class, followed shortly after on June 17. She averaged 24.0 points, 6.0 rebounds, 5.2 assists and 4.3 steals last season for Buford.

"Ava Watson's going to be a terrific player at Ohio State on both ends of the floor," McGuff said. "She's a great defender who will be exceptional in our press. She's also a great scorer and is going to add some outside shooting we really need."

Lemmilä – who holds dual Finnish and United States citizenship and pledged to the Buckeyes on June 27 – is perhaps the most intriguing of Ohio State's additions. She averaged 15.8 points, 10.0 rebounds, 3.4 assists and 2.4 blocks last season while shooting 54.7 percent from the field for Tapiolan Honka, a basketball club in Espoo, Finland.

She appeared in 27 games with 16 double-doubles and had a double-double in 10 of her final 11 games of the season. She also played with Finland in the U18 European Championship last year, averaging 12.9 points, 9.0 rebounds and 2.0 blocks in six games, with Finland going 3-3 at the event.

"Elsa's going to be a tremendous player

## OSU Women's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2024 who have signed to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School/Previous Team
Seini Hicks	F	6-0		Cincinnati Purcell Marian
Ella Hobbs	F	6-4	★★★★	Concord (N.C.) J.M. Robinson
Elsa Lemmilä	C	6-6		Espoo (Finland) Tapiolan Honka
Ava Watson	G	5-7	★★★★	Flowery Branch (Ga.) Buford

at Ohio State," McGuff said. "She's incredibly talented. She's a great athlete, she can score around the basket, but she's also got great perimeter skills that are going to be a great fit in our system."

At 6-6, Lemmilä is expected to be the tallest player on Ohio State's roster since center Lisa Blair, also standing at 6-6, played for the Buckeyes from 2012-15.

### Three-Point Shooting A Work In Progress

If a three-point shot was being attempted by somebody other than fifth-year guard Jacy Sheldon's during the 83-74 loss to USC on Nov. 6, odds were that it was not going in.

After two years of electric three-point shooting with former Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell leading the charge, the Buckeyes' presence from beyond the arc remains a work in progress without Mikesell's sharpshooting on the roster. And that was evident against the Trojans with nobody other than Sheldon able to develop a rhythm from deep.

Ohio State finished just 5 of 21 (23.8 percent) from deep, but Sheldon accounted for two of those makes on five attempts, meaning the Buckeyes outside of Sheldon were just 3 of 16 (18.8 percent) from beyond the arc. They actually got off to a solid start in terms of three-point shooting in the loss, connecting on 4 of 10 attempts in the first quarter with two makes by Sheldon and triples from fifth-year guard Celeste Taylor and sophomore forward Cotie McMahon, but Ohio State was unable to sustain that pace.

After fifth-year guard Rikki Harris knocked down a three-pointer with 4:47 left in the second quarter, that was it. Ohio State did not make another triple for the remainder of the contest, failing to convert on the team's final 10 attempts of the game.

"I think it's sort of a collective effort from our team, but I think the biggest thing in the second quarter is we just had too many threes in a row, and we weren't getting balanced in the offense," McGuff said. "When we got into the second half, I thought we got the right distribution of shots around the rim and open threes."

"But in general, over the course of the game, we just didn't take advantage of the opportunities we got, and USC did. That was a big key in this game."

It was a particularly challenging night for Taylor, who was just 1 of 5 from deep, 1 of 8 from the field and 4 of 8 from the free-throw line in her first outing as a Buckeye. It was also tough going for McMahon, who had one triple on three attempts but had a poor night shooting overall, finishing just 3 of 11 from the field.

But those shooting struggles are not a

concern for McGuff, who believed Ohio State had plenty of opportunities that it will need to take advantage of moving forward.

"I told them in the locker room, I think when we watch the film, we're going to be satisfied with the opportunities that we got on offense," he said. "But we've got to take advantage of them. Cotie and Celeste have shown their ability to do that, and it just didn't happen today. I think that was a big key. Both teams really got pretty good shots and they took advantage of it way more than we did, and that was a big difference."

### Freshman Guard Collins Sees Big Minutes Vs. USC

With 2:16 left in the first quarter of Ohio State's season opener against USC, the Buckeyes made somewhat of a surprising substitution, when freshman guard Diana Collins entered the game for Sheldon.

It was not a one-off, either. Collins wound up playing 15 minutes including six in the fourth quarter that remained tight until the final minutes of the contest, and she finished with two points, a rebound and three fouls on 1-of-6 shooting.

"She's got a very bright future," McGuff said. "She's a really talented player. She's had good experience playing with the Swedish national team. She's good at both ends of the floor, too. She can defend. She's also a good offensive player."

Playing freshmen – especially guards – for extensive and significant minutes has not been the standard for McGuff, especially in recent seasons with veteran guards such as Madison Greene, Harris, Mikesell



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BIG DEBUT – Ohio State freshman guard Diana Collins played 15 minutes in the Buckeyes' season opener against USC.**

and Sheldon on the roster. But it opens up opportunities to rest some of the usual heavy-minute guards and gives Collins a chance to acclimate in her first season with the Buckeyes, with a look toward her future at Ohio State.

"I just think the more we invest in her early in the season," McGuff said, "she's going to make significant improvements and really impact our team this year."

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# Ohio State Dropped By USC In Season Opener

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State's first loss last season did not come until Jan. 23, 2023, when the Buckeyes were 20 games into the campaign. But this time around, Ohio State did not get past the season opener before experiencing defeat against USC, though it did respond with a win over IUPUI in the Buckeyes' home opener to begin the season 1-1.

The seventh-ranked Buckeyes suffered an 83-74 loss to No. 21 USC on Nov. 6 in Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena, succumbing to the Trojans and star freshman guard JuJu Watkins, who finished with 32 points on 11-of-18 shooting.

Ohio State was down 46-28 at the half after a poor start but responded to take a 58-56 lead heading into the fourth before running out of steam in the final frame.

"In the second quarter, our physical and mental energy was really poor," head coach Kevin McGuff said. "Bad turnovers, no energy on defense, and we didn't really give ourselves much of a chance. We came out and played really hard in the second half, but we ended up expending so much energy in that third quarter to get back in the game, and we didn't have enough to complete the comeback."

Ohio State – with a starting lineup of guards Jacy Sheldon, Celeste Taylor and Taylor Thierry, as well as forwards Rebecka Mikulášiková and Cotie McMahon – worked to an 11-6 lead with 5:47 left in the first, but the Buckeyes missed three of their last four shots of the opening frame and led just 18-15 after 10 minutes.

USC shot poorly in the first quarter, hitting just 35.3 percent from the floor (6 of 17), but the script quickly flipped in the second. The Trojans opened the frame on a 7-2 run to take a 22-20 lead with 8:07 left in the half, leading to a quick timeout from McGuff.

But the break did little to help the

Buckeyes, as they committed five turnovers over the next three minutes while the Trojans increased their lead to 30-20 with 5:02 left in the quarter, and after a three-pointer by Ohio State's Rikki Harris, USC went on a 16-5 run to close the half for a 46-28 lead going into the locker room.

The Trojans increased the lead to 53-34 with 7:07 left in the third, but Ohio State began to build momentum by getting into the paint, drawing a series of fouls that all resulted in successful trips to the free-throw line to cut the deficit to 53-42 with 4:18 remaining.

Those continued trips to the paint gave way to several baskets, and the Buckeyes scored layups on three consecutive possessions to make it 55-48. Ohio State then stepped up on the defensive end, forcing turnovers on USC's next five possessions to take a 56-55 lead before a Sheldon layup made it 58-56 heading into the fourth.

But the big comeback led to some tired Buckeyes. The Trojans made five of their first six shots in the final frame to take a 69-62 lead with 6:39 left in the game. After drawing within six points, 76-70 with just under two minutes to play, the Buckeyes were forced to foul as USC closed things out at the line.

"We get the benefit of learning a lot about our team," McGuff said. "What we did well and more importantly what we didn't do well and where we need to focus our energy and attention in terms of improvement. You don't get that if you're playing easy games."

Sheldon led Ohio State with 28 points on 10-of-19 shooting with four rebounds and five steals, while Thierry added 16 points and a team-high eight rebounds. Watkins led the charge for the Trojans with her 32 points while Rayah Marshall added 18 points and 17 rebounds.

Ohio State shot just 39.7 percent (23 of 58) from the field and 23.8 percent from deep (5 of 21) compared to 50.8 (30 of 59) and 31.6 percent (6 of 19) for USC, and the Trojans held a 43-28 advantage on the boards.

## OSU Rolls IUPUI For First Win

Ohio State (1-1) picked up its first win of the season on Nov. 12, taking care of business in a 108-58 victory over visiting IUPUI in front of 4,933 at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes utilized a strong performance at the free-throw line, finishing 86.1 percent (31 of 36), and were stifling on the defensive end, forcing the Jaguars into 28 turnovers that Ohio State turned into 43 points.

"I thought we played hard today but our execution was better," McGuff said. "We took care of the ball better, we moved the ball better, and it resulted in much better shots than we got (against USC)."

After struggling from beyond the arc in the Buckeyes' season-opening loss to USC, they made an effort to correct that early against IUPUI.

Mikulášiková connected on her first

USC 83, Ohio State 74										
Nov. 6, 2023 T-Mobile Arena • Las Vegas, Nev.										
	1	2	3	4	F					
Ohio State (0-1)	18	10	30	16	74					
USC (1-0)	15	31	10	27	83					
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Mikulasikova	21	2-5	4-4	1-3	1	1	8			
McMahon	34	3-11	0-0	1-4	2	4	7			
Thierry	33	5-6	6-6	2-6	0	3	16			
Sheldon	37	10-19	6-6	2-2	2	2	28			
Taylor	35	1-8	4-8	0-3	2	5	7			
Harris	17	1-2	2-3	0-0	1	4	5			
Parks	5	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	1	0			
Collins	16	1-6	0-0	1-0	0	3	2			
Walker	2	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	0	1			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>23-58</b>	<b>23-29</b>	<b>7-21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>74</b>			
<b>Percentages: FG: 39.7%. FT: 79.3%. Three-point field goals: 5-21 (Sheldon 2-5, Harris 1-2, McMahon 1-3, Taylor 1-5, Collins 0-3, Mikulasikova 0-2, Thierry 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 14 (McMahon 5, Sheldon 4, Taylor 2, Thierry 2, Mikulasikova). Steals: 10 (Sheldon 5, Taylor 2, Thierry 2, McMahon).</b>										
USC	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Marshall	36	9-14	0-2	4-13	2	4	18			
Davis	34	2-5	0-0	5-4	2	3	4			
Watkins	31	11-18	9-10	1-5	5	4	32			
Forbes	37	3-9	3-7	0-4	1	4	11			
Padilla	38	1-5	5-6	0-0	3	3	8			
Bigby	17	3-6	0-0	0-3	0	3	8			
Samuels	5	1-2	0-0	0-0	1	0	2			
Akunwafo	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>30-59</b>	<b>17-25</b>	<b>13-30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>83</b>			
<b>Percentages: FG: 50.8%. FT: 68.0%. Three-point field goals: 6-19 (Bigby 2-5, Forbes 2-5, Padilla 1-5, Watkins 1-2, Davis 0-1, Samuels 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Marshall 3, Watkins). Turnovers: 20 (Watkins 5, Forbes 4, Davis 3, Marshall 3, Padilla 3, Akunwafo, Bigby). Steals: 9 (Marshall 6, Bigby, Padilla, Watkins). Officials: Morris, Robinson, Enterline. Attendance: N/A.</b>										

three-point attempt of the game, and Thierry then made back-to-back shots – the first with her foot on the three-point line, and the second from beyond the arc – to give Ohio State an early 9-2 lead.

The Buckeyes later extended that lead to 17-7, but IUPUI forward Jazmyn Turner responded with five straight points to cut the deficit to 17-12. But with the Jaguars later trailing 22-14, things were made more difficult for IUPUI as it lost Turner, the team's leading scorer last season, with 1:31 left in the first quarter after she suffered an apparent ankle injury and went to the locker room. She left the game with seven points on 3-of-4 shooting and two rebounds.

Ohio State was boosted by eight makes from the free-throw line – three courtesy of Sheldon – and 10 turnovers by IUPUI to take a 24-16 lead into the second quarter.

"We were much more aggressive," McGuff said. "We really had a lot more pressure on the ball, and we were kind of flying around. We were sprinting up the court when the ball got ahead of us, and we weren't doing that against USC."

In the second frame, the Buckeyes opened on a 14-2 run – predicated by five turnovers by the Jaguars in the first three minutes of the quarter – to take a 38-18 lead with 7:07 left in the half. The Buckeyes continued to bolster their lead by getting to the free-throw line, where they connected on 14 of 15 attempts in the quarter to lead 59-31 going into the half.

Ohio State 108, IUPUI 58										
Nov. 12, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio										
	1	2	3	4	F					
IUPUI (1-1)	16	15	14	13	58					
Ohio State (1-1)	24	35	25	24	108					
IUPUI	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Urlacher	20	1-1	1-3	1-4	0	3	3			
Turner	7	3-4	1-1	0-2	0	1	7			
Johnson	30	2-5	0-0	0-2	2	2	5			
Davidson	29	7-16	6-8	3-2	2	2	23			
Lewis	30	1-8	0-0	0-1	2	2	2			
Jones	26	1-5	0-0	0-1	1	1	3			
Wolterman	20	3-6	0-2	2-1	0	4	6			
Stinson	15	1-4	0-0	1-1	0	4	3			
Hocevar	17	1-4	3-4	1-2	2	3	6			
Blank	7	0-1	0-0	1-1	1	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>20-54</b>	<b>11-18</b>	<b>12-20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>58</b>			
<b>Percentages: FG: 37.0%. FT: 61.1%. Three-point field goals: 7-19 (Davidson 3-5, Hocevar 1-3, Johnson 1-4, Jones 1-2, Stinson 1-3, Lewis 0-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Hocevar, Urlacher). Turnovers: 28 (Hocevar 4, Turner 4, Johnson 3, Jones 3, Lewis 3, Team 3, Wolterman 2, Stinson 2, Urlacher 2, Blank, Davidson). Steals: 5 (Johnson, Jones, Lewis, Stinson, Turner).</b>										
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Mikulasikova	13	4-5	1-2	1-2	4	0	10			
McMahon	21	7-11	8-10	2-0	0	0	22			
Thierry	17	3-3	4-4	1-1	0	2	12			
Sheldon	20	2-5	7-8	1-2	3	3	11			
Taylor	22	5-9	1-2	1-1	4	2	11			
Harris	20	0-1	2-2	1-3	1	0	2			
Parks	14	4-6	4-4	2-3	0	4	12			
Collins	21	3-7	2-2	1-2	1	1	9			
Walker	19	2-6	0-0	1-2	4	3	4			
Shumate	13	2-7	0-0	0-2	2	2	5			
Henderson	12	2-4	0-0	0-2	0	1	4			
Vres	6	2-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	4			
Carson	3	0-1	2-2	1-3	1	1	2			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>36-67</b>	<b>31-36</b>	<b>13-25</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>108</b>			
<b>Percentages: FG: 53.7%. FT: 86.1%. Three-point field goals: 5-16 (Thierry 2-2, Collins 1-3, Mikulasikova 1-1, Shumate 1-4, McMahon 0-2, Sheldon 0-1, Taylor 0-2, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Mikulasikova 2, Harris, Shumate, Thierry). Turnovers: 8 (Parks 2, Carson, Collins, Harris, Henderson, Sheldon, Walker). Steals: 11 (Taylor 4, McMahon 2, Harris, Mikulasikova, Parks, Sheldon, Thierry). Officials: Inouye, Howell, Marsh. Attendance: 4,933.</b>										

McMahon had the busiest first half at the charity stripe, finishing with seven makes on nine attempts and going into the locker room with 15 points.

The second half was much of the same for the Buckeyes, who outscored the Jaguars 49-27 over the final two quarters. Ohio State, which led by as many as 54 points in the fourth quarter on a jumper by Karla Vres, was afforded the opportunity to clear out the bench as well, with 13 players getting into the game and each scoring at least a point.

Ohio State was led by McMahon, who had 22 points on 7-of-11 shooting, while forward Taiyier Parks added a team-high five rebounds to go with 12 points.

Thierry (12) and Sheldon and Taylor (11 points) also finished in double digits for the Buckeyes, who shot 53.7 percent (36 of 67) from the field. IUPUI was led by guard Katie Davidson, who had 23 points on 7-of-16 shooting, including three makes from deep.

Ohio State will play just one more game before Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes to press again, hosting Boston College on Nov. 16 for a 7 p.m. tip on Big Ten Plus.



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# First-Year Forward Gordon Not Typical Frosh

Ryan Gordon is a 21-year-old freshman forward who thinks and plays hockey like someone older and more experienced. That's not surprising because he has seen hockey at the highest level for much of his life as the son of a former NHL head coach.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"He's been around a lot of hockey," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "He's sat at the table and talked hockey a little bit, and someday he might be a coach. I love his approach to the game. I love his work ethic and his passion for the game. That, to me, is his driving force."

Gordon's father, Scott, was a goaltender for Boston College for three seasons from 1982-86 and had a pro career that ended in 1994 in the Double-A level ECHL but included 23 games in the NHL for the Quebec Nordiques (now Colorado Avalanche).

Scott was a longtime minor-league coach but was head coach for the New York Islanders from 2008-11 and interim head coach for the Philadelphia Flyers during the 2018-19 season. He is currently an assistant coach for the San Jose Sharks. Ryan hails from Stone Mountain, Ga., where his mother, Jennifer, has a ballet studio. Scott played for and later coached with the Atlanta Knights of the International Hockey League in the mid-1990s.

"My brother and I would stay with my mom most of the time," Gordon said. "We'd make trips up to see my dad pretty frequently when he was (coaching) in Providence (R.I.) or with the Islanders for a bit."

He is the typical coach's son.

"I think just being around my dad all the time and learning from him and being at the rink all the time since I was a kid, you get to see all of the things the pros do and see what it takes to get to the next level," he said.

His older brother, Erik, played at Holy Cross, but Ryan opted for Ohio State.

"It's hard to turn it down once you see it," Ryan said of OSU. "I got to go on a visit back in October (of 2022). I was pretty locked in on Ohio State from the start, but as soon as I saw it, it was a no-brainer. About four days after my visit, I gave (assistant coach J.B. Bittner) a call."

Gordon had one point through 11 games, but it was an important one. The Buckeyes were blown out 7-1 in the series opener at Michigan on Oct. 20. They played better the next night but still trailed 2-1 in the third period when Gordon scored the tying goal off assists from fellow freshmen Sam Deckhut and Thomas Weis with 4:59 left in regulation.

"It was a pretty cool moment," Gordon said. "I don't think many teams have faith in their freshmen that late in the game. The coaches put us out there with faith in us, and we got the job done, so it was a good feeling."

The game was tied after the five-minute overtime before Gordon scored the winner

in the fifth round of the shootout. Rohlik was glad to see him rewarded.

"He loves the game," the coach said. "He studies the game. He works extremely hard. He's as honest as the day's long in practice and in games. When you do those things, they're going to pay off. His best hockey is ahead of him. He's doing everything he can for the team."

Despite Gordon's extensive background in hockey, there is still an adjustment period to college coming out of junior hockey.

"It's really fast and it's smart," he said. "Everyone out there is smart, and they're making the right plays all the time, and if you don't make the right play, other teams are going to capitalize. You've got to try to make the right play as much as you can and try to minimize mistakes."

As a center, Gordon loves taking faceoffs and is winning about half his draws. When asked what makes a good faceoff specialist, he was honest in his answer.

"Cheating. Cheating as much as you can get away with," he said. "That's how the pros do it. If you're not cheating, you're going to lose. That's how it is. You can watch any pro and they're trying to cheat the dot as much as they can."

It's an art to anticipate the drop of the puck and get your blade of the stick on the puck before the opponent.

"You just look at how he takes faceoffs and his thought process and you certainly can tell he's been around the game," Rohlik said.

Gordon sees himself as a player who can be relied on not only to win faceoffs in key moments but to make an impact in the defensive zone.

"I've got a little bit of an upside on offense, but I think my biggest strength is being a responsible forward that can help break pucks out and play that two-way game," he said.

Gordon played baseball and lacrosse growing up, but by age 15 he knew hockey was his calling. He was a pitcher and shortstop but a torn rotator cuff, incurred while playing hockey, ended his participation in baseball.

"I didn't really have the option to play baseball anymore," he said. "I loved it. It was fun, but I think I knew that hockey was what I was most passionate about."

### First And Foremost

The Nov. 4 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin chronicled the exploits of former Buckeyes Mason Lohrei and Matt Tomkins, who in separate games set NHL achievements on Nov. 2.

Tomkins, in his second NHL start at the age of 29, became the first OSU goalie to face the hometown Columbus Blue Jackets when the Tampa Bay Lightning lost 4-2. In Boston, Lohrei, a defenseman, made his NHL debut for the Bruins to become the first Louisiana-born player in the league. Four nights later, Lohrei, less than eight months after finishing his sophomore season with the Buckeyes, scored his first NHL goal in his third game to help the Bruins to a 3-2 win at the Dallas Stars.

Meanwhile, the next night Tomkins made 23 saves for his first win – 5-3 at the Mon-

treau Canadiens. To do it in the city where two of his goalie idols played was icing on the cake.

"It's so unique to get the first one here because, two things, Patrick Roy was actually the reason I became a goalie at 10 years old in the first place, and then, Carey Price was my favorite goalie growing up so it is an extra special thing to do it here in Montreal and, yes, it's incredible," Tomkins said.

"Obviously, at the end, it's nice to hear that horn and see the guys coming towards you to celebrate and big smiles and to come in the room and get the game puck and all that. All of these little pieces just add up to making it one of the best days of my life, so it's really, really special."

It had been 4,154 days since he was selected by the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2012 NHL draft. His 11 years between being drafted and his first win tied for the fourth-longest span in NHL history. He also became the 32nd goalie to earn his first win at age 29 or older. He said the reaction from his teammates will be treasured.

"It's a unique story for sure," said Tomkins, who played for the Buckeyes from 2013-17. "Obviously, all of the guys know my path in getting here, and I think it made them want it for me that much more so really, really cool."

"Reflecting back on the road to get here, I took the long way, for sure, but it's made it that much more rewarding to be part of this group and contribute and obviously get the first win. There's been a lot of stops along the way and a lot of people helping and encouraging and supporting. You think of everyone, but obviously first and foremost my family, they've been there since day one and given me this opportunity to be here."

The perspective for Lohrei was com-

pletely different. He had an assist in his first game, and it seemed with his offensive skills it was only a matter of time before he scored. It happened in the first period for the Bruins' 2022 second-round pick.

"I mean, unbelievable," he said. "You work your whole life to be here, and you always dream about scoring your first goal. It's pretty cool to check that one off the list."

He gave the puck to his father, David, who was in the building for the historic moment.

"Ever since I went to juniors, I scored my first goal and gave him the puck," Lohrei said. "Same thing in college, now this one will go to him too."

### No Luck

The No. 19 Buckeyes (3-5-3, 0-5-1 Big Ten) ran their losing streak to four games after 4-1 and 3-0 losses at Notre Dame on Nov. 10 and 11.

Notre Dame (6-3-2, 2-0-2) scored three times in the second period of the opener and added a fourth midway through the third before transfer Caden Brown scored his first point as a Buckeye for the final.

The Fighting Irish scored once in each period the next night, including into an empty-net goal with 2:12 to play. Ohio State's Logan Terness made 28 saves.

### Up Next

Ohio State will be off the weekend of Nov. 17-18 before returning to Value City Arena from Nov. 24-25 to host Princeton, with both games set for 5 p.m. on Big Ten Plus.

For a complete recap of the Notre Dame series, go to [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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# OSU Wrestling Facing Major Lineup Changes

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State wrestling offseason was one with a tragic story. Sammy Sasso, set to enter his sixth season with the Buckeyes after coming in second place in the NCAA championships last season, was shot in a carjacking outside the university on Aug. 18.

Sasso underwent emergency surgery to reconstruct his colon and another surgery to remove the bullet near his spine, which caused "severe nerve damage," and he spent 41 days in the hospital before returning to the team facility on Sept. 28. He hopes to wrestle again, but coach Tom Ryan said it will be a long process ahead for Sasso, who remains in a wheelchair following his release from the hospital.

He will continue to be with the team this season, but they will have to contend on the mat without the veteran Buckeye. Last year with Sasso, the Ohio State wrestling team – following a fourth-place finish in the Big Ten and 14th-place finish at the NCAA championships in 2021-22 – was back to being one of the top squads in the nation, finishing fourth in the Big Ten and NCAA championships.

Many of the same names will be back in the lineup, but there will be several changes for the Buckeyes with a handful of wrestlers moving up and down weight classes and others having graduated from the program. Associate head coach J Jagers said on Nov. 1 that even though the coaches had not seen this team in live action, he is confident heading into this season.

"We can evaluate practice and guys look good," he said. "But until it actually happens out in competition, it's just the unknown. It's exciting and scary at the same time. We're just cautiously optimistic, but we like what we see in house."

Ryan is back for his 18th season and will be joined by Jagers and assistant coaches Bo Jordan and Logan Stieber, a room they

feel good about when it comes to leading this team.

"We have almost 60 years of coaching experience among the four of us," Ryan said. "These guys have coached, they won national titles as freshmen. We've coached three freshmen champs. This staff is extremely knowledgeable."

The Buckeyes enter the season at No. 8 in the National Wrestling Coaches Association poll and have a wrestler ranked in all but one weight class by InterMat, the exception coming at 125 pounds. The team got off to a strong start with four wrestlers winning a title at the Clarion Open on Nov. 5, and against Virginia Tech to open dual season on Nov. 10, the Buckeyes upset the No. 5-ranked Hokies 24-12.

With the season in full swing, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is breaking down every weight class for Ohio State. InterMat rankings are from Nov. 7, and match results are as of Nov. 10.

**125 pounds** – There will be a new starter at 125 after Malik Heinselman, who wrestled at 125 for the Buckeyes last year until he was sidelined with an injury, graduated. Brendan McCrone, a redshirt freshman, is expected take over as the new starter for the weight class, at least to begin, and he said he's ready to take on the new challenge after preparing over the offseason.

"I went to a lot of opens, a lot of different tournaments that helped me get a feel and take my lumps and also get some wins under my belt," he said. "It's definitely something that was needed, and it definitely helped me improve my wrestling. It showed me where I was at and showed me how much harder I needed to work to be in the spot that I'm in."

McCrone posted a 9-4 record last season and was 0-2 in Big Ten matches, and he went 3-0 at two events, including the MSU Open on Nov. 5, 2022, and the Bob Del Rosa Ohio Intercollegiate Open on Nov. 13, 2022.

McCrone said Heinselman was a great resource last year to get him adjusted to what

college wrestling would be like, but now that the wrestling spot is wide open and he has been given the opportunity to secure it, he's working as hard as he can to prove he deserves to stay there.

"It's just staying hungry every day," he said. "I have to just keep my foot on the gas. My goal is to be the starter, to make a name for myself and to make an impact for this team."

Ryan said the class isn't settled yet, and there hasn't been anyone that has separated themselves between McCrone, sophomore Peyton Fenton and freshman Vincent Kilkeary.

"We're looking for separation right now, and there's not much separation," Ryan said Nov. 1. "It's a tricky space to be in a little bit because we believe in all of them. But someone's going to have to step up and take the spot. It'll go on as long as it needs to until we get a sufficient answer as a staff."

McCrone was 4-2 at the Clarion Open. He opened with wins by pin and decision, and after losing by 14-5 major decision to Columbia's Nick Babin, No. 25 in the class, he added additional wins by pin and decision before dropping a 6-1 decision.

Fenton was also 4-2, getting beaten by major decision twice, and Kilkeary was 3-2 at the event. After the Clarion Open, the staff decided to start McCrone against Virginia Tech, where he upset Eddie Ventresca, the No. 4 wrestler in the nation, 11-3.

**133 pounds** – Another redshirt freshman, Nic Bouzakis, is ranked No. 14 at 133 pounds by InterMat. The coaches agreed that he has grown since last year when he wrestled just 11 matches – three unattached – and is making better decisions when he is on the mat.

"He's used to doing whatever he wants," Stieber said. "Picking people up, throwing them down with no thought of what happens next and knowing he's going to pin his opponent, crush his opponent. He's just making good decisions out on the mat."

Bouzakis agrees with his coaches that he has grown since last year, and that has been due to help from the staff.

"I've gotten a lot better at it, just focusing on positions and listening to my coaches," he said. "When I first came in, I was still that little rascal running around just being an idiot half the time. But now I think I've gotten a lot better, more maturity, more focused on my craft."

He said his weight management was out of control in his first year at Ohio State, but now he's been much better about staying at weight, and he feels strong where he is.

"I want to prove myself," Bouzakis said. "I want to show that I belong at Ohio State. I want to go out there and just give it everything I have. I want to work hard, and I want to be one of those guys that's feared out there."

Bouzakis came in fourth place at the Clarion Open, going 3-2, and against Virginia Tech he fell to No. 7 Sam Latona 7-5.

**141 pounds** – Jesse Mendez is also in his second year with Ohio State but is also a returning starter for the Buckeyes.

He's moving up a weight class for this season after going 19-9 last year at 133 pounds, but after wrestling in the 65-kilo division (143.3 pounds) for the U20 World Cham-

pionships over the offseason and bringing home a silver medal, he believes he's prepared for the challenge.

"I feel really, really good at 141," Mendez said. "I thought it was going to be a little bit too big of a jump at first, and then wrestling 65 kilos at Worlds was just wonderful. I think I have a good shot at a title."

Mendez, ranked No. 5 in the class, finished sixth at the NCAA championships last season. Jagers said he wears his heart on his sleeve outside of matches, but when he gets on the mat, he's an extremely consistent competitor and always ready to work hard for a win.

"Somebody that can have a national tournament the way he did with three overtime matches in a row, you've got to be pretty even-keeled," Jager said. "When he comes off the mat, if he didn't win by a lot, he's ticked off. If he crushes the guy, he's happy as can be. But he's stoic, and within those seven minutes, he does a really good job."

Mendez made it to the 141-pound finals in the Clarion Open, but so did his teammate Brandon Cannon, and the two agreed to a no-contest outcome considering Mendez had already defeated Cannon by a 5-2 decision at the team wrestle-offs on Oct. 26.

To open dual season against Virginia Tech, Mendez defeated Hunter Mason in an 18-3 technical fall victory, showing the dominance that was expected of him early on.

**149 pounds** – Redshirt senior Dylan D'Emilio, ranked No. 5 in the nation in his weight class, will have big shoes to fill, taking over for Sasso as the starter at 149 pounds.

D'Emilio, who is moving up from 141 pounds, where he finished eighth in the NCAA championships last season, has a 51-34 record over the last three seasons and was named an All-American last year. He said it's nice to already have that recognition under his belt because he can focus on trying to win a national championship this year.

"That pressure is done," D'Emilio said. "Now I can just wrestle free and keep my sights on a title. Obviously last year I was trying to win a national title too. But having that All-American accomplishment out of the way, now it's a clear vision."

Jagers has been impressed with D'Emilio since he came to Ohio State out of high school and believes he's gotten better every single year since then. He said D'Emilio has gotten better at avoiding bad situations on the mat.

"Dylan has just been so consistent, and you've just seen his arc just constantly going up. He's getting better," Jagers said. "Within a season, he gets better as the season goes on. What has made him jump levels is just really understanding who he is as a wrestler, where his sweet spots are, where he wants to keep the match."

D'Emilio has already started his time at 149 pounds off well, going undefeated in the Clarion Open and winning by a 12-4 major decision in the finals over Pitt's Finn Solomon, ranked No. 24 in the class. Against Virginia Tech, he dropped his bout to No. 4 Caleb Henson 10-5 by decision.

**157 pounds** – A returning member of the starting lineup is No. 16 Paddy Gallagher. As a redshirt freshman, Gallagher was 13-11 with two wins by major decision and two by



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## OHIO STATE WRESTLING

technical fall. Stieber thinks the former No. 1 recruit is ready to break out this season.

"The last four to six months," Stieber said, "he started to really believe, 'Hey, I should do this. I need to stick in the areas where I'm good at, and I need to keep fighting for what I want,' rather than just saying, 'Hey, let's just go wrestle.' He believes a little bit more this year than he did last year, and more than he did his freshman year."

Gallagher agreed and said this offseason has been important for him in terms of changing the way he thinks about his preparation.

"It was a big offseason for me, not just wrestling wise but mindset wise, and developing better habits on and off the mat," he said. "Those are really starting to translate to on the mat."

Not only has his approach become better, but Gallagher said he has also looked back at his past season and made improvements on the mat as well, becoming a better wrestler when it comes to the small things by diving into the film.

"I made a lot of rookie mistakes last year going from high school to college," he said. "It's almost a new sport, really. I evaluated my whole season last year, and a lot of those matches I studied where I'm good, where I'm not good. I'm getting better staying where I'm good."

Gallagher is already 5-1 in the new season after going 5-0 at the Clarion Open and finishing with a 7-4 loss in a decision to No. 6 Bryce Andonian at Virginia Tech.

**165 pounds** – Junior Bryce Hepner has been dealing with injuries for much of his time at Ohio State and still is at the beginning of this season. He's ranked No. 18 in the country at 165 pounds but hasn't been on the mat for either the wrestle-offs or the start of the season. When he is able to get back to the mat, Hepner feels like he will be ready.

"It's a little depressing when you're on the bike and people are on the mat," he said. "I've started to get on the mat a little bit more, and I don't feel like I have lost any steps. If anything, I can find the silver linings in it and use it to my advantage and realize that when I come back, I'm going to be fresh and other people might not be."

For now, senior Isaac Wilcox earned the starting spot. He is another wrestler bumping up a weight class from last season. Wilcox isn't ranked by InterMat, but Ryan is confident in whoever is on the mat at 165, and Wilcox is no exception.

"He's so consistent in the room, and he's been healthy," Ryan said. "We feel really good about that weight class. Wilcox is an anytime, anywhere, any place guy. 'Put me in, Coach, I don't care which weight. I'm grateful to be here and I want to go in there.'"

Wilcox has fluctuated between different weight classes, being ready for whatever the coaches needed from him, and has won matches at 157, 165 and 174 pounds at Ohio State. He said that has made him feel like he can compete with anyone.

"It's given me a little confidence, winning matches up a weight class," Wilcox said. "It goes to show that I'm doing the right things. As long as I wrestle my best, I feel like I can beat a lot of guys out there."

Wilcox advanced to the finals in the Clarion Open but fell in his last bout to No. 33 Noah Mulvaney by an 8-7 decision, finishing in second place. Against Virginia Tech, Wilcox pulled off an upset, beating No. 16 Con-

nor Brady by decision 6-5.

**174 pounds** – Redshirt senior Carson Kharchla, like Hepner, has also dealt with injuries for much of his time at Ohio State, but he is healthy going into this season and has been named the starter at 174 pounds, up from 165. He is looking forward to a healthy season.

"My whole season was riddled with injuries (last year)," he said. "That was kind of the theme of it. I'd be wrestling for two weeks and then off for 2-3 weeks not wrestling. That was definitely tough, but just knowing what was ahead and that I had more to give pushed me through that."

The seventh-ranked Kharchla started off the Clarion Open winning three straight to get to the semifinals but was injured and had to forfeit his next two matches. He was back against Virginia Tech but was defeated by No. 3 Mekhi Lewis 4-2 by decision. Despite dropping the match in the dual, Stieber thinks Kharchla is going to have a great season.

"He thinks most of the time that he can beat everybody," Stieber said. "His wrestling skills are really, really good. He wrestles in a very relaxed state, and he hits you with some good skills. In college wrestling, sometimes you have to push a little bit more. That's been the focus, and then the training, pushing through and adding more attacks in."

**184 pounds** – In another weight class that isn't settled yet, redshirt freshman Seth Shumate was the starter to begin the regular season after beating freshman Ryder Rogotzke by a 13-8 decision in the wrestle-offs. No. 11 Gavin Hoffman is also in the mix since he decided to move down from 197. The coaches all feel very comfortable regardless of who is on the mat.

"We're in a fortunate situation where we feel like we have more than just one guy, and we have confidence in all three," Jagers said. "Ryder is most likely going to redshirt, because we have Seth and Hoffman without a redshirt. But if we need to plug him in there at 184 for a dual because we get to use five dates, we will. We have confidence in him."

Hoffman, in his sixth season with the Buckeyes with a 64-40 record, said he is switching to 184 because the injuries he suffered last year made him realize his time in the sport is limited, and he wanted to give himself the best possible chance to win a championship.

"It's been a lifelong dream of mine to be a national champion, and I have to put myself in the best position to do so," he said. "I don't know how much longer my body will hold up in this sport. I have to give it everything I have. I've got to have no regrets at the end of it, and I feel like the move down is ensuring that no matter what the outcome is, I'll be satisfied."

Shumate is in just his second year with the Buckeyes, going 2-2 last season and staying off the mat enough to redshirt. At the Clarion Open, he was 2-2, falling in 3:32 to Rogotzke, who finished the event in fifth place, in his final match.

Rogotzke ultimately got the start against the Hokies, taking home a win over the No. 21-ranked wrestler in the 184-pound weight class, Sam Fisher, by fall in 5:35.

**197 pounds** – Redshirt freshman Luke Geog is starting in the 197-pound weight class. He gained over 20 pounds since arriving on campus and made the switch to the

higher weight class early last season but had mixed results, according to Jordan.

"He made that move up last year," Jordan said. "He wrestled a few matches there last year and it was a little rocky. I think he wasn't quite as big as he is now. He's grown into the weight. But he's big, strong. He looks good."

Despite not being on the mat much in his first year, finishing with an 8-2 record, he earned a No. 19 ranking in the country from InterMat going into the new season. Geog said he needed to improve his cardio over the offseason because the extra minute in a match going from high school to college takes a lot more work than he was expecting. After getting some time last season and working at his cardio over the course of the offseason, he feels ready to go.

"Getting those matches last year was good experience for me to get the feel of duals and then traveling with the team to outside competition," he said. "It got me a feel for what college wrestling is like, and it helped me put in some work this summer to get ready for this year."

He didn't wrestle at the Clarion Open, but the two behind him in the weight class who did – freshman Cole Robertson and sophomore Mike Misita – both lost their only two matches there, so if Geog can stay healthy, the spot seems to be pretty safe for him.

Geog took the mat against Virginia Tech, finishing with an upset over No. 14 Andy Smith by an 11-7 decision in the dual.

**Heavyweight** – At heavyweight is redshirt freshman Nick Feldman, who is ranked No. 20 in the country by InterMat. After an inju-

ry-riddled season where he didn't get onto the mat, he has already earned a starting spot, beating sophomore Hogan Swenski 20-4 in the wrestle-offs.

Feldman said he's excited about getting back on the mat this season and, while missing a season was tough, he thinks it made him better.

"I like the saying that adversity breeds character," Feldman said. "I got to watch all these guys scrap, and I was so excited for all of them, but I was just so jealous that it couldn't be me. I sat there and I said, 'All I can do now is make the most of what I'm doing now so when I get back on the mat I can be the best I can possibly be.'"

Ranked the No. 1 pound-for-pound wrestler in 2022 out of high school, Feldman had a serious neck injury that required surgery, and the journey to be back for wrestle-offs was one that took over a year. Ryan said his dedication to his recovery and coming back to wrestle for this team is indicative of who he is as a wrestler, and a person.

"Nobody can will that in somebody else," Ryan said. "But it was a testament to just what he wants for his life. He deeply loves this, and he's super excited about (the Clarion Open). He was super excited about the wrestle-offs. As people were watching in the stands, it's like, 'Oh, it's just a seven-minute match.' For him, it was a 365-day emotional challenge."

At the Clarion Open, Feldman went 5-0, winning his first ever event at the college level. Against Virginia Tech, he pulled off another upset for the Buckeyes, winning 3-2 by decision over No. 16 Hunter Catka.

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# Michigan Wheeling, Dealing And Sign Stealing

Nov. 11 was a day that should have Buckeye fans feeling good as the showdown with Michigan looms at the end of the month.

**EXNER  
POINT  
Rich Exner**

The Ohio State offense, now nearly fully healthy, seems to be clicking into gear, playing at near perfection under the lights until the 38-3 game was fully out of hand against Michigan State. Meanwhile, earlier in the day at Penn State, we finally got a look at Michigan against some competition. And while the Wolverines were solid in their victory, they didn't play Penn State as well as Ohio State did a month earlier.

Put all this together, and I'd say – at this point – Ohio State should be the favorite in Ann Arbor on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Not a big favorite, but at least a slight favorite. Until Nov. 11, I'm not so sure there was enough evidence to make such a statement, even with Ohio State's deserved No. 1 national ranking.

Yes, the Buckeye defense has been great all season, even while weathering a slew of injuries. But the offense was too often erratic. The running game looked awful at times. Kyle McCord's play left many wondering whether his ceiling was high enough.

At the same time, Michigan was plowing through its schedule in impressive fashion. The schedule, however, until Nov. 11 was one of the very worst in the nation. So what did anybody really know about Michigan? Michigan's play at Penn State proved it is very good, but at the same time, Michigan was not overwhelm-

ing at Penn State.

Compare Michigan's win 24-15 win over Penn State to Ohio State's 20-12 win on Oct. 21. They were a lot alike, to be sure. But I'd say Ohio State handled Penn State more convincingly. The Buckeyes put away Penn State earlier before giving up a last-minute touchdown. The Michigan-Penn State game was basically a one-score affair nearly the entire way. But that's splitting hairs.

The point here is that we didn't see Michigan blow out Penn State where Ohio State couldn't. What we learned is that Michigan is not invincible, something we weren't certain of until this point because of Michigan's schedule.

Meanwhile, back in Columbus, Ohio State was doing to Michigan State what it should do to Michigan State – blowing the Spartans off the field, as Michigan did earlier. While a number of key defensive players sat out with injuries, the offense was back nearly at full strength.

Emeka Egbuka was back at receiver. Cade Stover was back and making a big impact at tight end. TreVeyon Henderson again showed there are no concerns about the running game when he's on the field. Marvin Harrison Jr. was his usual Heisman candidate self.

But perhaps the most important sighting of all was the play of McCord. Yes, Michigan State is weak. But what McCord did should not be overlooked. There were times this season when he seemed to be staring down receivers and/or taking too long to make decisions. That was not the case against Michigan State.

There were other times this year when he didn't seem accurate, missing open receivers, making their catches more difficult than needed to be or getting picked off. That was not the case against Michigan State. In fact, I counted just two off-target throws. One was in the first half and the other with about 10 minutes

to go in the third quarter. For the night, McCord completed 24 of 31 passes for a career-high 335 yards and three touchdowns. Some of those passes, including his second touchdown to Harrison, were especially good throws.

Michigan's J.J. McCarthy is the odds-on favorite to be the first-team All-Big Ten quarterback this season. He had a similar game to McCord's against Michigan State, completing 21 of 27 passes for 287 yards and four touchdowns.

The toughest defense both Ohio State and Michigan have faced this year is Penn State's. Against Penn State, Michigan avoided throwing the football. McCarthy completed seven of just eight pass attempts for 60 yards. Running back Blake Corum led the ground game with 145 yards rushing on 26 attempts.

Ohio State played Penn State without Henderson and had difficulty running the football. Miyan Williams was the leading rusher with 62 yards, but it took 24 attempts to get those yards. Meanwhile, McCord completed 22 of 35 passes for 286 yards and a touchdown.

Ohio State's defense, you'll recall, stopped Penn State on its first 15 third-down plays. The Buckeyes outgained Penn State 365 yards to 240. Of that total, 73 of Penn State's yards came when the game was already over, on its last drive. Illustrating how the Michigan-Penn State game was tighter, Michigan outgained Penn State just 287-238.

All this is why Ohio State fans should be feeling better after the games of Nov. 11. Ohio State is heading in the right direction, and Michigan is beatable.

Imagine if things had gone the other way. What if the Buckeyes' offense had sputtered, regressing instead of showing progress, and at the same time Michigan blew Penn State off the field? In that scenario, Ohio State fans would be dreading the trip to Ann Arbor.

That's not the case. This game is looking like it could be a great one.

## The Cheating Scandal

The Big Ten sent a message but went light on the punishment for Michigan.

Ohio State played games without Urban Meyer. Michigan already this season has played games without Jim Harbaugh. And neither lost in that situation.

Yes, you would prefer to have your head coach on the sideline. But Harbaugh can still coach all week, set the game plan and provide detailed instructions to the assistants.

Given that the Big Ten determined Michigan (not necessarily Harbaugh) cheated, and given that Michigan in its response didn't dispute that, instead questioning the timing of the discipline and the procedures to arrive at it, I thought forfeited games would have been involved.

It will be very interesting to see what punishment the NCAA will levy when it gets around to wrapping up its investigation. And it will be interesting to see whether Harbaugh will still be at Michigan whenever this occurs.

## Avoiding A B1G Mess

The Michigan win over Penn State guarantees the Big Ten won't be dealing with a messy situation in determining the East representative in the league title game.

Should Penn State have beaten Michigan, and Michigan beaten Ohio State, there would have been a three-way tie among one loss teams. Only one, determined by goofy tie-breakers and not head-to-head competition, would have gone on to meet a multi-loss Big Ten West champion.

Now, it will be the Ohio State-Michigan winner. Starting next year, there will be no divisions. The top two teams will play for the title, regardless of geography.

## Playing On Sundays

C.J. Stroud certainly looks like a strong candidate to be the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year. He set a rookie passing record in throwing for 470 yards and engineering a last-minute, game-winning touchdown drive on Nov. 5.

His quarterback rating heading into the games of Nov. 12 ranked above Lamar Jackson and Patrick Mahomes, among others. He was fourth among NFL regulars.

Garrett Wilson won that award last season as a receiver for the New York Jets, and watching Harrison score three touchdowns and again go over 100 yards receiving against Michigan State raises an interesting question: Will Ohio State produce an NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year for three straight seasons? If Harrison lands with an average or above quarterback next year, I would think he would have a good shot at that award.

That can't hurt recruiting.

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# Complete This: OSU Looked Great Vs. Sparty

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

The consensus seems to be that Ohio State, and its offense in particular, played its most complete game of the season against Michigan State in the 38-3 victory on Nov. 11. The wins against Notre Dame and Penn State earlier in the season may have been more dramatic or more significant, but for all-around good play, it would be hard to top the team's performance against the Spartans.

Michigan State may not have been as strong an opponent as either the Irish or the Nittany Lions, but you can only play the opponent on your schedule on a given Saturday. This time it was Michigan State, and the Buckeyes looked sharp in defeating the Spartans. Sometimes, in fact, a team can look sloppy when playing a lesser opponent, especially with the most important game of the season only weeks away. Not Ohio State, not this time.

It also seems to be the consensus that quarterback Kyle McCord played his most complete game of the season. He looked relaxed, he looked in command and he utilized all of his weapons at hand – and ample arsenal as the Buckeye offense is getting back to good health.

The Buckeyes even kept the penalties under control, being flagged just three times for 25 yards despite averaging 6.0 per game for 47.4 yards, 68th and 46th in the country, respectively.

It seems like the Buckeyes are rounding into form at just the right time.

But before we get too carried away with The Game rapidly approaching, let me remind you that the last time we were talking about the Buckeyes playing a complete game was after the 41-7 win at Purdue. Next came the big win over Penn State, but the Buckeyes went into a bit of a tailspin after that. And while I thought McCord had been improving each week throughout the season, I believed he had taken steps back in recent games against Wisconsin and Rutgers.

With only Minnesota and Michigan left on the docket, there is not time to reverse another tailspin, should it occur.

I like the way Ryan Day and his staff are handling things. They are working to have the team not only peak with their playing, but also peak health-wise. Players who could have played in the past few games were given a little bit longer to heal. In the past, Day would have left his starting quarterback in much longer than he left McCord in against the Spartans. Most of the other important players were gradually sent to the bench as well. No need to lose a key player in a game the Buckeyes are leading by several touchdowns.

Let's be real here. The chances of P.J. Fleck and his Golden Gophers rowing past Ohio State on Nov. 18 are slim. It's all about Michigan. Day will toe the company line about taking things one game at a time and not looking past Minnesota. But we all know the reality. For so many reasons, this is shaping up to be one of the biggest Ohio State-Michigan games in years and a must-win for the Buckeyes.

Day knows it, the players know it and we know it.

### Sign-Stealing Saga Continued

Allow me to ramble a little bit about the situation with the Michigan football team.

First of all, if I hear, "Everybody does it" one more time, I am going to scream. What a lame defense.

I can hear my mother's voice so clearly, with one of her most oft-used sayings "If (insert the name of any of my childhood friends) jumped off a cliff, would you jump too?"

I am a big baseball fan, and you always hear of coaches who are experts at figuring out the

opposition's signs. But there is a difference between figuring out someone's signs and having a well-organized electronic effort to decipher signals. And even if everybody does it (probably not to that degree and effort), it's still against the rules.

I used the analogy of people speeding on the freeway in this space previously, something all of us (even me, a notoriously slow driver) do. If you drive by those troopers hiding in the median at 75, chances are they are not going to do anything. Their radar is set above that speed and you are going to slow down on your own as soon as you see them anyway. Now you blow by them at 85 or 90, the troopers are coming after you.

If you are a team that can figure out some of an opposing team's signals, you can fly under the radar, so to speak. If you have a massive, organized and visible sign-stealing operation, the troopers are coming after you. The only question is how costly will be the ticket?

In the case of Michigan, the cost seemed pretty low. On the surface, a three-game suspension for coach Jim Harbaugh might look like a stiff and appropriate penalty. But when you consider that Harbaugh can coach all week and is suspended only from the sidelines on game day, this was less than a slap on the wrist. Don't forget that when Ohio State suspended Urban Meyer for his handling of the Zach Smith situation in 2018, he was banned from all football activities. (With that defense, he was probably happy he was at home.)

I feel like Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti was being pressured by the other conference members to do something and being pressured by the perpetrators to give the school due process, i.e., extend things out as long as possible to give the Wolverines a chance to win the Big Ten and a possible national championship.

It seems like the powers that be at Michigan see this as the school's best shot at a title in years, and they will do anything within their ability to stall things until after the regular and postseason. The fact that a potential championship might be tainted seems of little concern to those people up north. And as I understand it, the worst is yet to come when the NCAA finishes its investigation.

By then, Michigan will have whatever hardware it is going to earn this season and Harbaugh will probably be gone, by choice or by penalty.

John Lanning, a poster on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum, made an interesting point about our neighbors, who present themselves as the academic and intellectual leaders of the Big Ten, if not the nation.

"Where is Michigan's president on this?" Lanning asks. "He must know that the evidence is there that signs were stolen. How would he deal with a professor that plagiarized an article for publication? Students are usually failed for plagiarism. I would think the professor would be dealt with harshly immediately. It's an embarrassment to the university. No different here. The 'Sign stealing' is stealing, plagiarizing, another team's game plan. No work of their own, just steal. I am also surprised that UM professors aren't more vocal about paying a football coach millions to either allow this to go on or is too incompetent to know. It seems Santa Ono, UM president, is now complicit rather than dealing with this embarrassment."

I also remain perplexed by the defense of Harbaugh and the Wolverines by many in the

national media (see pages 22-23). Everyone acknowledges that Michigan cheated, but to many it is no big deal.

Why the defense of Michigan? Why the defense of Harbaugh? I didn't know that they were so beloved.

After the Wolverines beat Penn State, Jonas Knox, a commentator on FOX Sports Radio, went so far as to say, "It was a win for the good guys." Does that make Penn State the bad guys?

And speaking of Penn State, does anyone besides me feel like Lions coach James Franklin is the John Cooper of State College. Cooper had many, many great victories in his time at Ohio State but struggled to defeat rival Michigan.

Franklin has had a successful run at Penn State. He has led the Nittany Lions to many wins with a .694 victory percentage but struggles to beat his rivals. Franklin is 3-7 against Michigan and 1-9 against Ohio State. Take away those 20 games and Franklin has a .788 winning percentage in State College, better than even Joe Paterno's .749.

I am as anxious as the next person to see what penalties the NCAA doles out to Michigan when all is said and done.

I am not an expert on football and signals, but culprit Connor Stalions would have had to relay his stolen signs to someone to get the message to the players on field. That means that there was somebody on the coaching staff who was involved. And Stalions was making \$55,000 a year. Where did he get the money for his escapades? It will be interesting to see if he expensed them, which would be public record. That would be two smoking guns right there.

But I know how an entity outside of the Big Ten commissioner or the NCAA could inflict the ultimate penalty. If Ohio State defeats Michigan on Nov. 25, all of this posturing and stonewalling will have gone for naught.

The team (and its fans) that laughs last, laughs best.

### Quick Hitters

- I'm sure I have mentioned this before about Marvin Harrison Jr. His pass-catching ability is obvious. But there are plenty of receivers out there who can make great catches. One of the things that makes him a cut above the other great ones is the incredible foot control he has, getting one down right before going out of bounds, such as he did on his first touchdown catch of the game against the Spartans. To execute that maneuver not only takes foot control but also requires an awareness of where the sideline is. He has that awareness.

Harrison, as a receiver, has always been a long shot for the Heisman. With the return of TreVeyon Henderson at running back and the other available weapons on the Buckeye offense, there is no reason for McCord to force the ball into Harrison in double coverage. It's doubtful that Harrison could run up the stats necessary for him to win what has become a quarterback's award, and it's more important for the Buckeyes to, as Cooper used to say, "win the surest way." But trophy or not, anyone who follows college football knows how special Harrison is.

As a related aside, be sure to check out Mark Rea's piece (see pages 20-21) on Bob Ferguson failing to win the Heisman Trophy in 1961. It's an interesting tale of which I was not aware.

- The Buckeyes might be rounding into form, but there still seem to be issues with the special

teams. Michigan State successfully pulled off a fake punt against the Buckeyes. Kicker Jayden Fielding, one of the hottest commodities on the team in the early going this season, missed a 42-yard field goal. His longest make of the season is just 41 yards. I am beginning to worry that, like Noah Ruggles before him, his range is limited.

Gaffes on special teams could prove much more costly against Michigan than they did against Michigan State.

### Quick Hitters (Rutgers)

With the passing of Frank Howard and Bob Knight, I ran out of room in this space last issue and failed to mention a couple of things.

- Henderson's 65-yard catch-and-run against the Scarlet Knights was truly a thing of beauty. Henderson changed speeds, he changed directions, and he demonstrated why he is a threat to go all the way anytime he touches the ball. Who knows what numbers he might have put up if he had been in full health for all of what almost certainly will be just three years in Columbus?

- There are certain Buckeye losses – huge upsets – that stand out more than others. If you mention "Iowa and Purdue" to a Buckeye fan, for instance, he will immediately recognize that you are talking about the two biggest upsets in the Urban Meyer era, in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

I would have to say that the 1998 upset of the top-ranked Buckeyes by Michigan State and Nick Saban was the biggest upset of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin era. Ohio State was that good in 1998, and the Spartans were that mediocre.

I remember a lot of that game very clearly. The thing that is most vivid to me is that I thought Ohio State was going to win that one, right up until the end. Ohio State marched all the way down to the MSU 15 for a first down with no timeouts, but 1:29 to go. Just two seasons previous, quarterback Joe Germaine had converted in a similar situation in the Rose Bowl to beat Arizona State. But after three incompletions and a fourth-down interception, this time it was not meant to be.

"When we were playing zone, they went through us like Grant took Richmond," Saban said of the final drive. "When they got it to the 15, we knew we had to stiffen up and put the pressure on them. Our corners came through with flying colors."

Complete coverage of that infamous game can be found at BuckeyeSports.com under the "Online" tab under "Reprints."

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