

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 43, No. 13

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Dec. 16, 2023

\$3.00

PERIODICAL NEWSPAPER
CLASSIFICATION
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TIGERS IN TEXAS

OSU Set For Cotton Bowl Vs. Missouri On Dec. 29

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

In each of Ohio State head coach Ryan Day's previous four seasons at the helm, the Buckeyes' postseason destination has offered no shortage of intrigue.

Ohio State had clearly qualified for the College Football Playoff in 2019 and 2020 and sweated out the committee's final rankings last year before learning it would have a chance to compete for a national championship in a semifinal matchup against Georgia. Even in 2021, when it was clear the Buckeyes were out of the running for the playoff, they still were the clear choice to represent the Big Ten in the historic Rose Bowl.

But this time around, no such honors were in store for Ohio State. With the Buckeyes' 30-24 loss to Michigan to end the regular season and wins by Alabama, Florida State and Texas on conference championship weekend, it ensured that Ohio State did not qualify for the College Football Playoff. The pairings instead feature No. 1 Michigan vs. No. 4 Alabama in the Rose Bowl, while No. 2 Washington will face No. 3 Texas in the Sugar Bowl.

Georgia finished above Ohio State in the final College Football Playoff rankings – the Bulldogs checked in at No. 6 – eliminating the Buckeyes from Orange Bowl contention, leaving either the Cotton Bowl, Fiesta Bowl or Peach Bowl as the Buckeyes' bowl destination. As announced on Dec. 3, No. 7 Ohio State will look to close the season with a win over No. 9 Missouri in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 in Arlington, Texas, set for an 8 p.m. kickoff on ESPN.



SONNY BROCKWAY

FINISH STRONG — Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day finished seventh in the final College Football Playoff rankings and will look to end the season on a positive note with a victory over No. 9 Missouri in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29.

"I know (Missouri head coach Eliah Drinkwitz) does a great job in all three phases," Day said. "He's always done a great job on offense. Defensive coordinator (Blake

Baker) has done a great job as well and their scheme and what they're doing.

"They play a tough schedule in the SEC. They have got to bring it every week and have some really good wins this year against Tennessee, Kentucky and South Carolina, so we know they're a very good team. Anytime you're playing that type of schedule and winning like they are – both offensively and defensively, statistically, they are ranked very high. That's what you expect when you get into a bowl game like this. It will be a great challenge for us."

The challenge exists for Ohio State on

Continued On Page 10

McCord Among 14 Buckeyes To Enter Portal

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The NCAA transfer portal officially opened once the calendar flipped to Dec. 4, and it took about six hours before perhaps the most shocking entry into the transfer portal in recent memory was announced.

Just before 6:30 a.m., it was reported and later confirmed by several outlets that Ohio State junior quarterback Kyle McCord – the Buckeyes' starter throughout this past regular season – had entered his name into the transfer portal, ending his tenure at Ohio State after three seasons and just one year as the starter for the Scarlet and Gray.

McCord was the biggest name in a group of 14 Buckeyes, including wide receiver Julian Fleming, who announced entrance into the portal. (More on that below.)

"I'm extremely thankful for my time at

Continued On Page 18



SONNY BROCKWAY

SHOCKER — Former Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord made waves on Dec. 4 when he announced he was entering the transfer portal after three seasons with the Buckeyes.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nailed It

Mark Rea, your column in the Nov. 25 issue (“Michigan? America’s Team?? LOL”) was outstanding! All the information that you provided was second-to-none. Your take adds strength to the article. I was on the radio weeks ago as a guest on 1100 AM radio with Dennis Manoloff and on WHBC 1480 AM radio with Kenny Roda and Jeff Turk talking about this cheating scandal as soon as the story began to break. Most people that I talked to downplayed this because they had no idea about sign-stealing rules. That is why your article hit home, big time. Great job. Keep this story alive.

Duane Risko
Brunswick, Ohio

To Clarify

I appreciate Patrick Engels’ article in the Dec. 2 issue on the importance of The Game. I also want to thank

him for interviewing me for the article.

But I want to clarify that I did not express an “internal conflict” about whether beating Michigan is more important than qualifying for the college football playoffs. I have no conflict in my mind about whether beating Michigan is more important than qualifying for the college football playoffs. To me, beating Michigan is about 10 times more important than making the playoffs.

Steven Brown
Port Charlotte, Fla.

Three Is Enough

The number three occurs in the nursery rhyme, Three Little Pigs. A triangle has three sides. A clock records either 3 a.m. or 3 p.m. A baseball player is called out after three strikes. In football, a field goal is worth three points. (On Nov. 25), “That Team Up North” kicked three

field goals. This victory for Michigan has left disappointed Buckeye fans, coaches and the team, who have lost their three-year bragging rights. We will survive and hope to break that three-season slump because the 2024 Big Ten season adds four teams from the West Coast. This competition for a Big Ten title and a national championship should be interesting for any team that wins the “bragging rights.” Go Bucks!

Nelson Bell
Toledo

Mail Service

I’ve been a BSB subscriber since the 1980s when I was stationed in New Mexico. I just read a note from your publisher Frank Moskowitz regarding the issues BSB is having with the mail service. I just want to give you a heads-up. I live 20 miles east of St Louis. I just received yesterday (Dec. 4) the Nov. 18 issue re-

capping the MSU game, and this is with first-class postage. I still enjoy receiving the Bulletin, though. Each issue always has some excellent articles! Keep up the fine work. I hope you get the mail situation ironed out.

Dan Roberts
O’Fallon, Ill.

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



From The Message Board

The transfer portal has taken the world by storm over the past few seasons, but this year has been an entirely different beast with 14 Buckeyes (at time of press) having announced their entry into the portal, including a pair of starters in quarterback Kyle McCord and wide receiver Julian Fleming. We asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum their thoughts on the transfer portal and how it’s impacting Ohio State and college football. Here are some of the responses:



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“Although Ohio State has benefitted from the transfer portal more than it’s been hurt by the portal in the past, I think in general, the transfer portal is sometimes good for the players, but probably bad for both Ohio State and college football generally.

“Where is the camaraderie and esprit de corps and ‘all for one and one for all’ when players come and go at the drop of a hat?”

– Terrier Buck

“I would like the portal a lot more if Ohio State did better with it. It’s not the players Ohio State loses, though McCord was an odd blow. But the Buckeyes don’t seem to get enough relief through the portal. Last season we needed a Jonah Jackson and got Victor Cutler and Josh Simmons. Davison Igbinosun was a good pick-up but Ja’Had Carter did not pan out as initially advertised. With a power program and NIL money to dole out, the Buckeyes should be doing better.”

– Poster That Harley Built

“Frankly ‘The Portal’ has been a mixed bag of results for The Buckeyes. We have gotten great transfers like Justin Fields, and not so impactful transfers like Cutler. However, player portal transfers clearly have had positive effects for some teams, for example: USC (Caleb Williams), Colorado (Travis Hunter, Shedeur Sanders), Oregon (Bo Nix) and Washington (Michael Penix Jr.). It’s a brave new world in college football. If the Buckeyes want to be successful in today’s college gridiron scene, they need to manage ‘The Portal’ at the highest level, just like any other aspect of their football roster

management process.”

– BuckeyeScott

“Want to know why 14 Buckeyes are transferring out? Because they can! The portal is only one of the many bone-headed changes the NCAA has made in the last few years. Young athletes no longer feel the loyalty, camaraderie, and dedication needed to devote to a team. Don’t get the NIL you’re looking for? No problem – transfer out. Don’t make the starting lineup? No problem – transfer out. Not getting enough playing time? No problem – transfer out. When they got rid of the one-year sitting out penalty, they opened the floodgates. I am in no way blaming the athletes. They are just doing what the rules allow.”

– R1TBDBITL

“The portal is a double-edged sword. It giveth and taketh away. It confirms what we already knew which is that players want to be seen at their best advantage to make more money in the NFL. It’s a brotherhood of money. OSU can use it to its advantage if it can navigate it.”

– PeyoteBuck

“People make it sound like scholarship athletes were completely stripped of freedom prior to the portal. Not so. They could always transfer. They just had to sit out a year. If somebody wanted out badly enough, they would just sit out the year. Or they could do like Joe Burrow did and graduate early. His reward? A transfer without penalty.”

– Mcarr

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1200 Chambers Road, Suite 206
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$119.95/year.

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2023-24 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 43)

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No. 10	Nov. 18	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 25	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 2	No. 24	August

The next issue (Jan. 13 cover date) will be mailed the week of Jan. 9.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

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Portal, NIL Ruining College Football

Anyone who has read this column over the past few years knows I am no fan of the transfer rules and Name, Image and Likeness legislation as currently constructed. They are examples of good ideas run amok because the NCAA had neither the inclination nor the fortitude to include good-sense guardrails to prevent college football from becoming an offshoot of the National Football League.

So, rather than allowing student-athletes access to transfer once without penalty during their five-year window of college eligibility and giving them a share of the revenue they help to produce with regard to the actual product on the field, what we have is a Wild West show featuring more than 1,500 football players jockeying from one program to the next – some for the second, third or fourth time – and truckloads of NIL money being handed out on such a scale that bidding wars erupt for high school prospects who have yet to set foot on a college campus while established players might find it more lucrative to stay and play on the college level than to move on to the pro ranks.

Therefore, the naivete of the NCAA has produced a system that is not only ridiculous, it's so stupid it's going to do what no university president, conference, booster or television executive could do over the past century. It's going to ruin the sport.

How much time, effort and financial resources are being absolutely flushed down the toilet on recruiting, development, tutoring, mentoring and counseling of players who look at a depth chart and decide they're neither patient enough nor good enough to ever make the top two? How can you put a price tag on the benefits of the nutritional, wellness and medical programs for players who never really stopped to ponder what it might be like to play college football on its biggest stage?

It's one thing for Joe Burrow to earn his degree at Ohio State and then decide a graduate transfer is in his best interest as his eligibility window narrows. It's quite another to watch Quinn Ewers receive NIL money before he ever took a college snap, accept all the aforementioned benefits including one-on-one tutelage from Ryan Day, accepted as one of the best quarterback coaches in the game, and then return to his native Texas to guide the Longhorns into the College Football Playoff. That sour taste in your mouth is not imagined.

As of this writing, Ohio State had 14 players in the transfer portal. Three – running back Chip Trayanum, offensive lineman Victor Cutler and kicker Parker Lewis – are in the portal for the second time. Others, top-rated prospects such as defensive end Omari Abor, running back Evan Pryor, and offensive lineman Jakob James, were sidelined by injuries during much of their brief careers in scarlet and gray.

Then there are the prospects who were given a chance – such as safeties Cam Martinez and Kye Stokes, and cornerback Jyaire Brown – and couldn't do anything with that chance, or those like cornerback Ryan Turner and linebacker Reid Carrico who could never make a dent in the rotation at their particular positions.

Then there are the more curious cases.

Tight end Joe Royer was blocked on the depth chart behind Cade Stover and Gee Scott Jr. and played a total of only 79 snaps over the past two years. But he logged a career-high 28 snaps last season against Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinal after Stover was sidelined with an injury. Didn't that give him a clue that his playing time would increase in 2024 with fifth-year senior Stover out of the picture?

Wide receiver Julian Fleming has spent four seasons with the Buckeyes after coming to Columbus from northeastern Pennsylvania as a five-star prospect. Despite various injuries conspiring to prevent him from realizing his full potential, plus the fact he has shared the position with an impressive array of former and future NFL first-round draft picks, Fleming has managed to total 79 receptions for 963 yards and seven touchdowns at Ohio State.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Yes, highly-regarded prospects such as Carnell Tate as well as Brandon Inniss, Bryson Rodgers and Noah Rogers are already on the team, and more top receiver recruits are on the way, but one would have thought Fleming would be WR1 for the Buckeyes in 2024 – that is, unless Marvin Harrison Jr. returns with some outlandish NIL package in hand. (More on that later.)

Then, there's quarterback Kyle McCord, who won the starting job in fall camp and held firm control of the position for the rest of the season. There were times when he seemed tentative – more Joe Bauserman than Joe Germaine – but there were other times when he filled every bit the role of a solid college quarterback.

His final stats didn't jump off the page like a Dwayne Haskins or C.J. Stroud, but throwing for 3,170 yards and 24 touchdowns is nothing to sneeze at, either. You might be interested to know McCord carried a 161.63 efficiency rating, good enough for second in the Big Ten and 13th nationally, while his QBR of 83.7 was eighth best in the nation, ahead of Heisman Trophy runner-up Michael Penix Jr. of Washington and last year's Heisman winner Caleb Williams of USC, projected by many to be the overall No. 1 pick in the 2024 NFL draft.

So, what is McCord doing in the portal?

There are those who would have us believe McCord's father wanted assurances from Day that his son would face no competition for the starting position in 2024. Others suspected Day was never really that comfortable with McCord as his starter, using the 2023 season as a stopgap to get to better times with a better fit at quarterback. Still others portray social media criticism as a reason for McCord wanting to escape the white-hot spotlight that accompanies being the starting quarterback at Ohio State.

Each of those suppositions could hold at least a kernel of truth, but speculation is what we use as spackling for what we do not know. Perhaps we'll never know the real reason McCord transferred out of the program. But when all is said and done, does it really matter?

A more solid, forceful set of NCAA rules governing transfers might have prevented McCord from looking elsewhere. Whether or not that would have been a good thing for him and for Ohio State is anyone's guess.

But at least it would have preserved the contract between student-athlete and university, the bond first agreed upon when a national letter of intent is offered and then signed. What we are teaching young people today is that agreements are made to be broken, that their word has no meaning.

College football, despite all its imperfections, was always a sport in its purest form. For the better part of a century, coaches were seen

as tutors rather than titans, and most players played for the glory of the old alma mater rather than individual plaudits. Then the gusher of money started to flow, and we have the almost unrecognizable sport of today.

I will continue to follow the game, and I'll report on it as long as Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher Frank Moskowitz wants me to. But I must confess, my heart isn't in it nearly as much as it used to be.

Paying To Play

It was never going to be easy to come up with an equitable system to monetarily compensate college athletes – especially those on full scholarships – for their contributions to their respective programs. But as with the transfer portal, the NCAA ceded its power and fecklessly allowed individual universities and conferences to come up with their own mechanisms for the distribution of NIL riches.

In some cases, high school prospects are being offered million-dollar deals as part of the recruiting process. Colorado, rich in glitz and glamour with head coach Deion Sanders pulling every PR string imaginable, but still poor in terms of the bottom line (a 4-8 record overall and a Pac-12 worst conference mark of 1-8), recently won a bidding war with Tennessee, Ohio State and several other schools for the services of five-star offensive tackle Jordan Seaton of IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla. We don't know how much Coach Prime's program ponied up for Seaton, but we do know the youngster had a seven-figure NIL deal on the table from Tennessee.

On the other side of the spectrum are rumors that Ohio State and its NIL partners are trying to put together a package that would keep Harrison and running back TreVeyon Henderson in Columbus for one more season.

Estimates are that Harrison earned close to \$2 million this past year in NIL money while Henderson's haul was something in the neighborhood of \$670,000. But it would take much more than that to keep those star players in college.

Should he declare for the NFL draft, Harrison is projected as a top-five selection. The most recent receiver selected among the top five picks was Ja'Marr Chase of LSU, who went to Cincinnati with the No. 5 overall selection in 2021. Chase is currently working on a four-year contract worth \$30.8 million that included a signing bonus of nearly \$20 million.

Henderson is currently projected as a late second-round pick or early third-round selection. Zach Charbonnet of UCLA went to Seattle late in the second round of last year's NFL draft and signed a four-year contract worth \$6.8 million that included a \$2 million signing bonus.

While the oft-injured Henderson would likely benefit from another year at the college level, I'll believe Harrison's return to Ohio State when I see it. I understand the Heisman Trophy finalist would like to have a win against Michigan and a Big Ten championship on his college résumé, but his entire life has been centered on a singular purpose – becoming an NFL receiver on par with his Pro Football Hall of Fame father.

Even if Ohio State can somehow find the extraordinary amount of money it will take for Harrison to remain a Buckeye, what's the point? The moment you start to pay players exorbitant amounts of money is the moment your sport becomes a professional enterprise.

We already have one NFL. Do we really need another?

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Harrison Finishes Fourth In Heisman Trophy Voting

Ohio State junior wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. finished fourth in Heisman Trophy voting on Dec. 9, receiving 20 first-place votes, 78 second-place votes and 136 votes for third place for a total of 352 points.

He finished behind winner and LSU quarterback Jayden Daniels (2,029 points), Washington quarterback Michael Penix Jr. (1,701 points) and Oregon quarterback Bo Nix (885 points). Daniels won after a spectacular season, totaling 3,812 passing yards, 1,134 rushing yards and 50 total touchdowns.

Harrison is now the fifth Buckeye in six years to emerge as a finalist for the Heisman Trophy, joining quarterbacks Dwayne Haskins (2018), Justin Fields (2019) and C.J. Stroud (2021, 2022) along with defensive end Chase Young (2019). His fourth-place finish is also the highest ever for an Ohio State wide receiver and the highest for any wide receiver since Alabama's DeVonta Smith won in 2020.

Harrison received most of his votes in the Midwest, where he garnered 106 points from voters. The next-most came in the Mid-Atlantic region with 88 votes, while he tallied a combined 158 points from the Northeast (54), Southwest (40), Far West (39) and South (25).

The junior wideout received the fourth-most votes in the nation due to the strong regular season he put together at Ohio State this season. Appearing in all 12 games, Harrison led the team with 67 catches for 1,211 receiving yards and 14 touchdowns, marks that also ranked 34th, ninth and tied for second in the nation. His receiving yard total ranks fifth all-

time in Ohio State single-season history, trailing Jaxon Smith-Njigba (1,606, 2021), David Boston (1,435, 1998), Terry Glenn (1,411, 1995) and Harrison himself, totaling 1,263 receiving yards last year.

Harrison further etched his name into the Ohio State history books this year, becoming the first player in program history to surpass 1,000 receiving yards in two separate seasons, while also setting the school record for most 100-yard games with 15, previously held by Boston.

Quarterback Troy Smith is still the latest Buckeye to win the Heisman Trophy, winning the award in 2006. Six Buckeyes have earned college football's top honor, including Les Horvath (1944), Vic Janowicz (1950), Howard Cassady (1955), Archie Griffin (1974, 1975), Eddie George (1995) and Smith.

Harrison Secures Biletnikoff Award

Harrison was unable to take home college football's most prestigious award, but he did earn a significant honor on Dec. 8 when the Tallahassee Quarterback Club named him the Biletnikoff Award winner, given annually to college football's top wide receiver.

He is just the second Buckeye wideout to earn the award and the first since Glenn in 1995 during the award's second year of existence.

Harrison, who was a finalist for the award last year but lost out to Tennessee's Jalin Hyatt, won the award by the slimmest of margins. He beat out LSU's Malik Nabers by one vote, tied for the closest margin in the award's history, while Washington's Rome Odunze finished third.

Before heading to New York to attend the Heisman Trophy ceremony, Harrison said he would have been honored to accept the award and he would use the distinction to honor the talented wide receivers who came before him.

"I always said I always wanted to win it for Zone 6, Wide Receiver U," Harrison said on Dec. 7. "You always have those conversations about us and other schools like LSU, Alabama. To add the Biletnikoff Award winner to the long list of great receivers we have at Ohio State, that's what would mean the most to me."

2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	W, 23-3	CBS	3-9, 35-31 loss to Purdue
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	BTN	8-4, 40-7 win over Duquesne
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	FOX	7-5, 41-28 win over FIU
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	W, 17-14	NBC	9-3, 56-23 win over Stanford
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	W, 37-17	FOX	7-5, 42-24 win over Rutgers
Oct. 14	at Purdue	W, 41-7	Peacock	4-8, 35-31 win over Indiana
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	W, 20-12	FOX	10-2, 42-0 win over Michigan State
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	W, 24-10	NBC	7-5, 28-14 win over Minnesota
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	W, 35-16	CBS	6-6, 42-24 loss to Maryland
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	W, 38-3	NBC	4-8, 42-0 loss to Penn State
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	W, 37-3	BTN	5-7, 28-14 loss to Wisconsin
Nov. 25	at Michigan	L, 30-24	FOX	13-0, 26-0 win over Iowa
Dec. 29	vs. Missouri	8 p.m.	ESPN	10-2, 48-14 win at Arkansas

Harrison, Burke, Mathews Named All-Americans

Harrison added two more national honors on Dec. 6 when Pro Football Focus and The Athletic selected the wideout to their 2023 All-America teams. He earned first-team nods from both outlets and was the only Ohio State player to receive the honor.

Harrison was one of three wide receivers to earn the distinction by both publications, joining Nabers and Odunze. Harrison was the only Buckeye to earn first-team honors by either outlet, but the Buckeyes did see some representation from the defense on The Athletic's list in junior cornerback Denzel Burke, who was named a second-team All-American by the publication.

Burke turned in a career year with the Buckeyes after struggling for the majority of his injury-riddled sophomore season. He had a team-high nine pass breakups along with 19 tackles (two for loss), one interception and one forced fumble.

Burke and Harrison were not the only Buckeyes to receive All-America honors, though. Freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. was selected as a freshman All-American by College Football Network on Dec. 3, the only Buckeye first-year player to receive the distinction.

Appearing in 11 games with one start, the defensive back turned heads with his raw athleticism and football acumen in his inaugural

collegiate season, recording 13 tackles, three pass breakups and an interception that was returned for a touchdown.

Harrison Still Mulling Future As Cotton Bowl, Draft Loom

Despite already establishing himself as one of the top wide receivers in Ohio State history and a projected top-five pick in the 2024 NFL draft, Harrison's future with the program was still uncertain as of press time.

When asked on Dec. 7 if he had made a decision on whether he would return for his senior season with the Buckeyes, enter his name in the NFL draft or participate in the Cotton Bowl, he said he was still weighing all of his options. Failing to beat Michigan and appear in the Big Ten Championship Game – two of his main goals this season – are significant factors that he must reflect upon before he moves forward in his career.

"I'm still undecided," Harrison said of potentially entering the draft. "Coming into this year, I wanted to beat The Team Up North and win a Big Ten championship, and obviously I did not do that this year, so I think there's great motive to come back if that's what I decide to do."

"That's something I definitely want to do in my Ohio State career, and not having done that yet, it definitely opens the door for me to come back. But I'm undecided, and I'm really just taking it day by day at this time."

Assuming Harrison leaves for the NFL, he will likely be the first non-quarterback taken. Most publications have him as either the second or third overall selection, with either USC quarterback Caleb Williams or North Carolina quarterback Drake Maye picked first overall.

Regardless of whether or not he has played his last game for the Buckeyes, Harrison said he is honored to have already left a lasting legacy on the program and be named alongside some of the all-time best Buckeye pass-catchers.

"It definitely means a lot," Harrison said. "It's still something that I haven't thought of recently. There's such a great legacy of Ohio State receivers. I think about Cris Carter and then some of the teammates that I've had in the past – Chris (Olave) and Garrett (Wilson) and Jaxon. To even be in that conversation is an honor within itself."

"It's something I'm super proud of, something that I've worked very hard for and never really thought that I'd actually get there. I just worked hard and hoped to see what happens and didn't really have any goals in mind. But to be able to be at the end of the road now and look back on everything, that definitely is special."

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

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

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

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

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who reached an agreement with the program on Dec. 2.

RB Williams To Enter NFL Draft

Ohio State senior running back Miyan Williams announced on Dec. 4 that he will enter his name into the 2024 NFL draft, ending his four-year Buckeye career. He has two years of eligibility remaining.

"It's time for me to embark on my next chapter and making my dreams of playing in the NFL a reality," Williams wrote on Twitter. "I have decided to enter my name in the 2024 NFL draft. As I take these next steps in life, I will forever be a Buckeye for life."

Williams, a former three-star prospect out of Cincinnati Winton Woods, became a fixture in Tony Alford's backfield for four seasons with his bruising running style and elusiveness out of the backfield, finishing his career with 1,555 rushing yards and 20 touchdowns on 258 carries. His best season came in 2022, when he helped relieve TreVeyon Henderson in the backfield and became Ohio State's leading rusher with 825 yards and 14 touchdowns on 128 carries.

Williams' collegiate career ended on a sour note this season, however, when Day announced on Oct. 31 that Williams would miss the rest of the season after undergoing a procedure on an injured knee. Before his season-ending surgery, though, Williams had already taken a major step back in his production, falling to third on the depth chart behind Henderson and Chip Trayanum. He finished his senior season appearing in just six games and totaling 49 carries for 158 yards and three touchdowns.

According to NFLMockDraftDatabase.com, Williams is projected to become an undrafted free agent. His departure only adds to the already significant roster overhaul in Ohio State's running backs room, with Trayanum and Evan Pryor announcing their transfers

Continued On Page 6

Knowles, Bailey Drawing Interest From Other Teams

Two of Ohio State's assistants earned consideration for an elevated coaching position at other schools in recent weeks.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles met with Duke on Nov. 29 for the open head coaching job, and tight ends coach Keenan Bailey emerged as one of three finalists to fill East Carolina's open offensive coordinator role, with both since filled by other candidates.

According to a report from The Athletic's Nicole Auerbach, Knowles was one of three Power Five defensive coordinators to meet with Duke on Nov. 29, joining Penn State's Manny Diaz and N.C. State's Tony Gibson. The vacancy has since been filled by Diaz, who reached an agreement with Duke on Dec. 7 to become the program's next head coach.

Despite not earning the position, Duke's pursuit of Knowles caught the attention of OSU head coach Ryan Day, who said on Dec.

3 that he was not surprised to see his defensive coordinator garner head coaching interest from other schools due to his success leading Ohio State's defense this season.

"He communicated with me that they had reached out," Day said. "I know he was still in the mix there and having communications. We'll deal with it, but that's part of this time of year with job searches. I'm sure our guys will continually be sought after. Jim is a great coach, and he'll continue to have opportunities."

Bailey's interview with East Carolina came after he helped the development of those within Ohio State's tight end room. In his eighth year in the program, and just his first year as a full-time assistant, Bailey helped mold Cade Stover into one of the nation's best all-around tight ends, racking up career highs in receptions (41), receiving yards (576) and touchdowns (five) and winning the Big Ten's Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year Award.

While East Carolina showed interest in hiring Bailey, the program's open offensive coordinator position was filled by former Ole Miss co-offensive coordinator John David Baker,

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TIM POND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently offered his publication entitled "Coaching Youth Basketball: Coaching the Coaches" for sale on Amazon.com. Access to this instructional manual was previously limited to attendees of his basketball clinics and camps only.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

from the program, leaving just two scholarship players in the backfield in Henderson and sophomore Dallan Hayden, although Henderson's future with the program is also unclear with a potential NFL draft decision looming.

Ohio State also has some reinforcements coming in this year's recruiting class, including San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star James Peoples (5-10, 192), Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St Thomas Aquinas four-star Jordan Lyle (6-0, 180) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203), all committed ahead of the early signing period that begins Dec. 20.

Brown Suggests He's Committed To Program In Cryptic Tweet

Ohio State's quarterbacks room may be in a state of flux after starting signal caller Kyle McCord announced his transfer on Dec. 4, leaving the Buckeyes with just two scholarship quarterbacks – redshirt freshman Devin Brown and freshman Lincoln Kienholz – on the roster. But Brown suggested that he may be here to stay at Ohio State, posting a cryptic tweet on Dec. 5 that referenced one of the more bold moments in world history.

Brown's tweet included a picture with no caption that depicted Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés' decision to burn and sink the ships he and his around 600 sailors had used to arrive by sea in Mexico in 1519.

According to historians, this action served as a message to his crew that they were not turning around and were there to stay in Mexico. With Brown's future at Ohio State unclear,

the quarterback's tweet suggests that he may be adopting that same mindset and committing to Day's program for the long run.

Brown will have the opportunity to compete for the starting quarterback role at Ohio State if he chooses to stay with the program next season alongside Kienholz and Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes five-star Air Noland (6-3, 195), along with other potential transfer additions at the position.

In his first two seasons with the Buckeyes, Brown has appeared in seven games and completed 12 of his 22 passes (54.4 percent) for 197 yards, two touchdowns and one interception. He also has proved to be a weapon in the run game, attempting 20 carries for 36 yards and a touchdown.

Eichenberg, Proctor Accept Invitations To Senior Bowl

The Senior Bowl announced on Dec. 4 that two standout Ohio State defenders – linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safety Josh Proctor – had accepted their invitations to the Senior Bowl, which is set for Feb. 3, 2024, at Hancock

No BSB Print Mailed Until Jan. 9

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be mailed on Jan. 9, 2024. But there is bound to be plenty of Ohio State sports news in the interim, including more news of comings and goings through the portal, last-minute recruiting news as the early signing period approaches, opt-outs and other bowl preparation news, NFL draft declarations and plenty of basketball action. There will also be coverage of the Cotton Bowl itself, with the BSB staff reporting live from Texas. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest news. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff mans BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on the breaking stories, plus posting additional features.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, where the discussion is bound to be lively with all the player movement.

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of

each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for the readers having continuing mail problems. This service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is also free to subscribers.

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All of us at Columbus Sports Publications wish you a joyous and peaceful holiday season, and we look forward to serving you in 2024.

Whitney Stadium in Mobile, Ala. These decisions all but end the two defenders' Ohio State careers of five and six years, respectively.

Eichenberg decided to come back to Ohio State for this season and took full advantage of the extra year. He served as the unquestioned leader of Ohio State's defense, recording a team-high 80 tackles despite missing two games with an arm injury. The Ohio State team captain also had 2½ tackles for loss, one sack, four quarterback hurries and one forced fumble.

Entering the Cotton Bowl, Eichenberg had a career 268 total tackles (21 for loss), 3 ½ sacks, two interceptions, five pass breakups, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. If he decides to enter the 2024 NFL draft – where he is expected to be a day-two selection – Eichenberg will finish his career as a two-time team captain, two-time first-team All-Big Ten selection and the Butkus-Fitzgerald Linebacker of the Year this season.

Proctor's decision to return for a sixth and final season also turned out to be a beneficial one. He had by far his best season in the Scarlet and Gray with 41 tackles in 10 games, along with four tackles for loss, eight pass breakups and a pick-six.

Proctor, the longest-tenured Buckeye on the roster alongside offensive lineman Matthew Jones, has exhausted his collegiate ability. Entering the Cotton Bowl, Proctor has 106 career tackles (6½ for loss), three interceptions, 14 pass breakups and one forced fumble. According to NFLMockDraftDatabase.com, Proctor is projected to become an undrafted free agent.

Ohio State-Michigan Most Watched Game Since 2011

Ohio State's Nov. 25 matchup with Michigan was one of the more highly-anticipated games this season, and that hype was reflected in the television ratings.

The Buckeyes' 30-24 loss to the Wolverines garnered 19,065,000 million viewers on FOX, making it the most-watched regular-season college football game on any network since 2011, according to FOX Sports. The matchup was also the second-most watched edition of The Game behind the 2006 matchup between the two programs dubbed "The Game of the Century," which garnered more than 21 million viewers.

Ohio State's loss to Michigan almost doubled the ratings of the second-most watched game this season, with Oregon's 42-6 win over Colorado on Sept. 23 – also broadcast on FOX – trailing far behind with 10.03 million viewers.

The matchup fell just short of No. 1 LSU and No. 2 Alabama on Nov. 5, 2011, which had more than 20 million viewers tune in to see the Tigers beat the Crimson Tide in overtime by a score of 9-6. This also marked the second time this season that an Ohio State game had the most viewership in a given week joining the Buckeyes' thrilling 17-14 win over Notre Dame that was aired on NBC and gained 9.98 million viewers.

In 11 games broadcast on non-streaming networks – excluding Ohio State's Oct. 14 game on Peacock – the Buckeyes garnered a total of 85.8 million viewers on four networks (BTN, CBS, FOX, NBC), according to

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2023 Big Ten Individual Award Winners

Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award: Dick Butkus, Illinois
Ford-Kinnick Leadership Award: Richard Coachys, Indiana
Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year: Marvin Harrison, Jr., Ohio State
Nagurski-Woodson Defensive Player of the Year: Jer'Zhan Newton, Illinois
Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year: Dillon Thieneman, Purdue
Hayes-Schembechler Coach of the Year (coaches vote): David Braun, Northwestern
Dave McClain Coach of the Year (media vote): David Braun, Northwestern
Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year: J.J. McCarthy, Michigan
Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year: Marvin Harrison Jr., Ohio State
Ameche-Dayne Running Back of the Year: Blake Corum, Michigan
Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year: Cade Stover, Ohio State
Remington-Pace Offensive Lineman of the Year: Olumuyiwa Fashanu, Penn State
Smith-Brown Defensive Lineman of the Year: Jer'Zhan Newton, Illinois
Butkus-Fitzgerald Linebacker of the Year: Tommy Eichenberg, Ohio State
Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year: Cooper DeJean, Iowa
Bakken-Andersen Kicker of the Year: Dragan Kesich, Minnesota
Eddleman-Fields Punter of the Year: Tory Taylor, Iowa
Rodgers-Dwight Return Specialist of the Year: Cooper DeJean, Iowa

Sports Media Watch.

NCAA Proposes New Subdivision

NCAA president Charlie Baker proposed on Dec. 5 the creation of a new subdivision within Division I that would allow highly-resourced schools to compensate student-athletes through trust funds and name, image and likeness agreements.

The groundbreaking proposal, which was sent to all Division I schools, recommended that the implementation of a new subdivision would allow more lucrative universities to pay athletes through an "enhanced educational trust fund," where schools that opt in would invest at least \$30,000 per year per athlete for at least half of the school's eligible players.

In this format, schools in the new subdivision could create their own rules separate from the rest of Division I, a change that Baker said could allow them to make quicker decisions and change certain policies pertaining to scholarship limits and roster sizes, among other things.

According to the letter, each school in the subdivision will also need to adhere to standard Title IX principles, which ensure that both male and female athletes are compensated equally. The letter also said that once an athlete obtains the trust fund payment from the institution, he or she can use the money however they want.

"It kick-starts a long-overdue conversation among the membership that focuses on the differences that exist between schools, conferences and divisions and how to create more permissive and flexible rules across the NCAA that put student-athletes first," Baker wrote. "Colleges and universities need to be more flexible, and the NCAA needs to be more flexible, too."

The proposal also laid out groundwork on how these changes could change the current landscape of name, image and likeness. Baker wrote in the letter that, under this format, any Division I school could enter into an NIL deal

directly with its athletes, something that is forbidden under the current landscape of college athletics.

Although it is unclear how or when the NCAA would vote on this proposal, Baker ended his letter by asking Division I leaders for feedback. According to The Athletic, "multiple" Division I athletic directors expressed a desire to move forward with this proposal, stating that it could serve as a necessary conversation starter toward further monetizing collegiate athletics. One of those leaders seemingly in favor of the proposal is Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, who wrote in a tweet on Dec. 5 that he fully supports Baker's efforts.

"Thank you, (Charlie Baker), for your leadership," Smith wrote. "I am 100 percent supportive of your efforts. Intercollegiate athletics needs the proactive and forward-thinking you are providing. Thank you for this letter!"

Under this proposed format, schools joining the Division I subdivisions would continue to compete against each other for NCAA championships, except for in FBS football, which is governed by the College Football Playoff.

According to The Athletic, the highly-resourced schools Baker refers to in his letter are those within the money-making Division I conferences – that being the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 and SEC.

Stroud Named AFC Offensive Player Of The Month

Former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud continued to earn recognition for his stellar rookie season with the Houston Texans when the National Football League named him both the AFC Offensive Player of the Month and NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month on Nov. 29.

Stroud is the first-ever Ohio State quarterback to win an NFL Player of the Month award and just the second-ever rookie to take home the honor, joining current Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson, who won with Houston in 2017.

Stroud, who is considered the favorite

to take home the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year honor, turned in another impressive performance behind center for the Texans in November. In four games, he completed 106 of his 154 passes (68.8 percent) for 1,446 yards, 10 touchdowns and four interceptions. He also became the first rookie quarterback in NFL history to throw for 300 yards in four straight games.

Stroud also won NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month in September after he averaged 302.0 passing yards and totaled four touchdowns in his first three games, all without throwing an interception. Stroud is now the third former Ohio State player to win two NFL Rookie of the Month nods in one season, joining cornerback Marshon Lattimore and defensive end Joey Bosa, who achieved the feat in 2017 and 2016, respectively, on the defensive side of the ball.

Through 13 games, Stroud has completed 275 of 441 passes (62.4 percent) for 3,631 yards, 20 touchdowns and five interceptions, with his passing yardage total leading the league.

If Stroud is crowned NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year, he would become the second straight Buckeye to take home the award, joining New York Jets wide receiver Garrett Wilson. Former Ohio State running backs George and John Brockington also won the award in 1996 and 1971, respectively.

Former Buckeye George Named Pro Football HOF Finalist

Speaking of George, the former Ohio State running back was named on Nov. 28 as one of 25 modern-era player semifinalists for the Pro

Football Hall of Fame class of 2024.

"It's such an honor to be considered for the NFL Hall of Fame," George said. "(It's) something that's completely out of your control. You try not to think about it, but to be considered for this – a semifinalist – is tremendous. I'm just truly, truly floored and honored."

"This is not an easy fraternity to get into. Just to be considered for it is an accomplishment unto itself."

George, who was named a semifinalist for the second straight season, had a decorated nine-year NFL career playing for the Houston Oilers/Tennessee Titans (1996-2003) and Dallas Cowboys (2004). A four-time Pro Bowl selection, one-time first-team AP All-Pro (2000) and NFL Rookie of the Year (1996), he rushed 2,865 times for 10,441 rushing yards and 68 touchdowns, numbers that rank 16th, 28th and tied for 38th in NFL history.

George did most of his damage with the Oilers/Titans, where he is the current record holder for career rushing yards in franchise history with 10,009 yards. These efforts allowed him to be inducted into the team's Ring of Honor in 2008.

George has already been inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2011 after a distinguished four-year career at Ohio State. Playing for head coach John Cooper's Buckeyes from 1992-1995, the Philadelphia native racked up 3,768 rushing yards on 683 attempts along with 44 touchdowns, marks that all rank fourth, third and third in program history.

His best season occurred in his senior

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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campaign in 1995, where he had 1,927 rushing yards and scored 24 touchdowns on his way to a Heisman Trophy. Those efforts allowed him to be selected by the Oilers with the 14th overall pick in the 1996 NFL draft.

If inducted by the 12-person committee, George will be the 12th Buckeye to receive the ultimate distinction in pro football, joining Paul Brown (1941-43), Cris Carter (1984-86),

Sid Gillman (1938-40), Lou Groza (1943), Dante Lavelli (1942), Dick LeBeau (1956-58), Orlando Pace (1994-96), Jim Parker (1954-56), Ed Sabol (1935-37), Paul Warfield (1961-63) and Bill Willis (1942-44).

Londot, Rader Returning For Fifth Season At OSU

Two key seniors on the Ohio State women's volleyball team – outside hitter Emily Londot and middle blocker Rylee Rader – will return to the program to fulfill their fifth and final seasons of eligibility. The two veteran Buckeyes had an extra season of eligibility granted by the NCAA due to their participation in the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season.

Londot, who won Ohio State's second-ever AVCA Freshman of the Year Award in 2020, has made her mark on head coach Jen Flynn Oldenburg's program in her four seasons.

She has recorded 1,718 kills and 960 digs over her career, while also recording 4.16 kills and 4.70 points per set, marks that rank third and fourth in program history, respectively.

She is also coming off a stellar senior season where she was named to the AVCA All-Region Team for the fourth time in her career and became a unanimous selection for the All-Big Ten first team after leading the conference in both kills per set (5.06) and points per set (5.51).

Londot now has the opportunity to build upon her already decorated résumé in her fifth season, something she said she could simply not pass up.

"It's always been in my mind to be a Buckeye forever," Londot told The Columbus Dispatch. "I can't see myself playing somewhere else, only at Ohio State."

Like Londot, Rader has also established herself as one of the best players to come through the program. A four-time All-Big Ten selection, Rader possesses the highest attack percentage of any player in program history with a minimum of 500 kills at 39.1 percent. She also has 876 kills and 216 digs in her career.

"I want to end on a really good note," Rader said.

Diver Yost Wins National Title At Winter Nationals

Ohio State diver Lyle Yost took home hardware on Dec. 6 when he claimed the Winter Nationals title on the one-meter springboard while competing at the event in Knoxville, Tenn.

Yost placed second in the preliminaries before finishing with an aggregate score of 743.65 in the finals. His final score also earned him a spot on Team USA for the World Aquatics Championships in Doha, Qatar, in February.

Janie Boyle and Ciara McGing also placed at the Winter Nationals in the women's platform dive, with Boyle finishing 13th with a 477.80 score and McGing finishing 10th with an overall score of 503.10. Diver Jack Matthews placed 12th in the three-meter springboard finals with a score of 616.15.

This is not the only time Yost has earned a championship in his Ohio State career. He secured an NCAA title on the one-meter board on March 23 with an overall score of 443.95, becoming the first Buckeye since 1988 to take

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1983

The Ohio State football team may have gotten the second choice of bowls out of the Ohio State-Michigan game, but that second choice wasn't too bad.

If the Buckeyes had won, they would have been off to the Sugar Bowl to play third-ranked Auburn (9-1). Instead, Ohio State would go to Tempe, Ariz., to play Pitt (8-2-1) in the Buckeyes' second Fiesta Bowl appearance.

"After we lost to Illinois, the Fiesta Bowl was the only (major) bowl that really wanted us," tailback Keith Byars said. "After we won a few more games, the Sugar Bowl came in.

"The Sugar Bowl made the Fiesta Bowl a consolation prize. I think that's a good major bowl. I'm happy to be playing in it. I would have liked to play in the Sugar Bowl, but it just didn't come out that way. We have to go to the Fiesta Bowl and end the season on a good note."

35 Years Ago — 1988

There is nothing that will set a home crowd on fire faster than a player charging down the court and putting down a thundering, two-handed, in your face, to your disgrace dunk.

It may turn the crowd on, but according to Ohio State head basketball coach Gary Williams, the dunk was behind poor shot-making skills of young players.

Williams made the comments following the Buckeyes' 84-62 victory over Lafayette in St. John Arena on Dec. 10. During the victory, only sophomore Perry Carter and freshman swingman Chris Jent dunked successfully for the Buckeyes.

"What does a dunk mean to me? A dunk means two points and that's all," Williams said. "Personally, I think it holds a player back as far as the development of shot-making is concerned."

30 Years Ago — 1993

Ohio State backup defensive end Jayson Gwinn was killed the morning of Dec. 12 in a car crash at the intersection of Olentangy River Road and Lane Avenue.

Gwinn's car, a 1984 Volkswagen Jetta, was traveling northbound on Olentangy River Road when it was struck on the driver's side at the intersection of Lane Avenue by an eastbound vehicle. The impact flipped Gwinn's car, which then hit a pole and guard rail on the opposite side of the intersection. He was pronounced dead at the scene at 3:27 a.m.

Gwinn was heading back toward the team hotel on Olentangy River Road, where the Buckeyes were staying while preparing for the Holiday Bowl, after getting medical assistance for OSU teammate Marvin "Obie" Stillwell, who was shot in the buttocks following an altercation at Faze II, a bar on North High Street.

Ohio State head coach John Cooper was notified of Gwinn's death by telephone by associate athletic director Bill Myles. Cooper met with Gwinn's family, then met the team at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, where some clergy and a psychologist counseled team members.

"Your first reaction is one of shock," Cooper said. "Yesterday he's here practicing football, he's here running wind sprints, he's laughing and enjoying life. All of a sudden, he's gone."

25 Years Ago — 1998

Ever since a Nov. 7 defeat at the hands of Michigan State, the Ohio State football team had resigned itself to the fact it likely would not qualify for the national championship game in the Fiesta Bowl.

And despite upsets to previous unbeaten UCLA and Kansas State on Dec. 5, the Buckeyes came up short in their bid to make the first Bowl Championship Series title game. While Tennessee and Florida State would play for most, if not all, of the marbles at the Fiesta Bowl, the Buckeyes (10-1) would tackle Big 12 champion Texas A&M (11-2) in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 1 in New Orleans.

"We're not unhappy to be playing Texas A&M in the Sugar Bowl," said Cooper, whose Buckeyes were making a second consecutive Sugar Bowl trip. "Obviously we would love to be playing for the national championship, but we are happy to be in the Bowl Championship Series.

"You don't need any more motivation than playing on prime-time television in a major bowl like this."

20 Years Ago — 2003

As Ohio State made preparations for its Fiesta Bowl test against Kansas State on Jan. 2, at least three members of the coaching staff were being mentioned as candidates to fill Division I head coaching vacancies.

Defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio was reportedly a candidate to replace Rick Minter at Cincinnati. Meanwhile, linebackers coach Mark Snyder and defensive backs coach Mel Tucker both had been mentioned as possible successors to Lee Owens in Akron before the Zips hired Pittsburgh offensive coordinator J.D. Brookhart.

Snyder was also rumored to be under consideration for the defensive coordinator job at South Carolina under Lou Holtz.

When asked about losing valuable assistants, head coach Jim Tressel replied, "That's the nature of the business and the nature of the calendar. If a guy is going to get a great opportunity as a head coach, he's going to have to go."

15 Years Ago — 2008

A January trip to Arizona might not be a bad consolation prize for Ohio State or Texas, but the fact remained that both had harbored realistic national championship hopes at one time or another this season. But the Buckeyes and Longhorns, who would lock horns in the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 5 in Glendale, Ariz., took decidedly different directions to disappointment and, ultimately, the desert.

With nine starters returning on each side of the ball, Ohio State began the year ranked No. 2 in the Associated Press poll and as one of a handful of teams expected to contend for a national championship. Tressel downplayed those ratings at the Big Ten's annual media gathering to kick off the season in July in Chicago, where a media panel covering the Big Ten chose the Buckeyes as preseason favorites to win the conference.

"I think an assumption that you make with 20 returning starters is that you're already at a certain level," Tressel said. "I think that would be a false assumption. You have to go back and make sure fundamentally we are very, very good."

That theme – fundamentals – would be revisited throughout the season as the Buckeyes struggled to live up to expectations, as would, early in the season, the idea of erasing the feeling of losing consecutive BCS National Championship Games and winning back some national respect.

10 Years Ago — 2013

It seemed to happen every year.

A team shows up to a BCS bowl game and it's clear that it doesn't want to be there. Whether it's after having higher hopes of playing for a national championship dashed or facing a seemingly inferior opponent who doesn't excite it, the team typically under-

performs, underdelivers and more or less embarrasses itself on the national scene.

Having had its national title game hopes erased with a 34-24 loss to Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 7, Ohio State seemed potentially to fit the bill of such a squad as it headed to the Orange Bowl. But inside the locker room, the Buckeyes (12-1) came up with plenty of reasons they were excited to be taking their talents to South Beach to face 10-2 Clemson.

"We've been fighting the last two years for a lot of things," Ohio State linebacker Ryan Shazier said. "We just wanted to get to a bowl game and win championships, and I still feel like the Orange Bowl is going to be our championship. We're trying to finish the season out strong."

Five Years Ago — 2018

So came the end of one of the most decorated coaching tenures in program history – one of the most successful careers in the history of the sport, in fact.

The school officially announced Urban Meyer's retirement early on Dec. 4 before holding a press conference in the afternoon. When the time came to give his first remarks as the soon-to-be-former head coach, Meyer took a moment to wish his grandson, Troy, a happy second birthday before expanding on his decision.

"I'm honored to have represented my home state and this great university the past seven seasons," Meyer said. "I want to thank Buckeye Nation, our students and faculty, our state high school coaches, (athletic director) Gene Smith for giving me this opportunity, my awesome family and most importantly our staff and student-athletes for all they've done during this time.

"My goal has always been to make this one of the premier and most comprehensive programs in America. It's always been a goal to see a healthy, strong program handed to an elite coach and person to make it even better."

Meyer went on to congratulate Ryan Day, who is taking over as a head coach for the first time in his career, a move that is almost unprecedented in the history of Ohio State football.

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State needed help to make the College Football Playoff, and the stakes were clear in Columbus, where ratings showed that over a quarter of televisions in Ohio's capital were tuned in to watch Utah take down USC on Dec. 2, which seemingly secured a spot for the Buckeyes.

Meyer opined on FOX's postgame show that Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham likely would never have to pay for a meal if he found himself in Columbus, and Whittingham responded, "Coach Day, you're welcome."

The Buckeyes were revealed as the No. 4 seed in the College Football Playoff committee's final rankings on Dec. 4. Ohio State trailed No. 3 TCU, No. 2 Michigan and No. 1 Georgia, setting up a matchup between the Buckeyes and Bulldogs in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta on Dec. 31, with kickoff set for 8 p.m.

"It's hard to explain the range of emotions that have gone on here over the last seven days," Day said after the participants were announced. "But we saw our name go up there on the board and know that we're going to have an opportunity to play.

"I said it before, it's like a second lease on life. A couple days ago we were on life support a little bit, our season was, and now there's a two-game season ahead of us. There's unbelievable excitement right now. Guys are just bouncing around the facility."

Final CFP Rankings		
Rk.	Team	Record
1	Michigan	13-0
2	Washington.....	13-0
3	Texas	12-1
4	Alabama.....	12-1
5	Florida State	13-0
6	Georgia	12-1
7	Ohio State	11-1
8	Oregon.....	11-2
9	Missouri	10-2
10	Penn State.....	10-2
11	Mississippi	10-2
12	Oklahoma	10-2
13	LSU	9-3
14	Arizona	9-3
15	Louisville.....	10-3
16	Notre Dame.....	9-3
17	Iowa.....	10-3
18	NC State.....	9-3
19	Oregon State.....	8-4
20	Oklahoma State	9-4
21	Tennessee.....	8-4
22	Clemson.....	8-4
23	Liberty	13-0
24	SMU	11-2
25	Kansas State.....	8-4

home the honor.

Yost's efforts last season also earned him multiple personal accolades, including CSCAA Diver of the Year and one-meter, three-meter and platform first-team All-American selections. He also showed prowess in the classroom, becoming the first-ever Buckeye to win the Arthur Ashe Jr. Male Sports Scholar of the Year award.

OSU Aces Graduation Success Rate Report

Ohio State recorded its school-best single-year and four-year rolling scores in the 2023 Graduation Success Rate report released by the NCAA on Dec. 6.

The Buckeyes' single-year score of 94 was the highest in school history, eclipsing the previous record set by Ohio State athletes in 2021 with a score of 93. These two scores, along with its 92 score in 2022, mark the best three-year stretch for the university, while the four-year rolling score of 93 (2013-2016) is also an all-time best.

“This year’s GSR report gives strong evidence of priority placed on academic success by OSU’s student-athletes,” faculty athletics representative John E. Davidson said. “Attaining all-time highs in both the single-year and multi-year scores shows that their dedication in the classroom is on par with their competitive success.”

Ohio State had 11 teams finish with a graduate success rate of 100: women’s cross country/track and field, women’s fencing, field hockey, men’s golf, women’s golf, women’s lacrosse, women’s soccer, synchronized swimming, men’s tennis, women’s tennis and men’s volleyball. The university also had 13 of its 16 men’s teams and 14 of its 15 women’s teams improve or maintain their GSR. This included the football program, which finished with a program-best score of 87, one more than their 86 mark set last year.

“The importance of academic achievement is at the heart of the Ohio State athletics culture,” Davidson said. “It starts at the top, articulated and reinforced by Athletics Director Gene Smith, and resonates throughout the organization, from the way coaches recruit to the passionate commitment of the academic support staff in SASSO.”

Patrick Engels, Braden Moles and Greg Wilson contributed to this report. For the latest in Ohio State news, visit [BuckeyeSports.com](#).

2023 All-Big Ten Football Teams

Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media. Ohio State players are in bold.

Coaches Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE:
QB – J.J. McCarthy, Michigan
RB – Blake Corum, Michigan
RB – **TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State**
WR– Isaiah Williams, Illinois
WR* – **Marvin Harrison, Jr., Ohio State**

C – Drake Nugent, Michigan
OG – Zak Zinter, Michigan
OG* – **Donovan Jackson, Ohio State**

OT – LaDarius Henderson, Michigan
OT – Olumuyiwa Fashanu, Penn State
TE – Colston Loveland, Michigan

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE:
DL – Jer’Zhan Newton, Illinois
DL – Mason Graham, Michigan
DL – **JT Tuimolou, Ohio State**
DL – Chop Robinson, Penn State
LB – Jay Higgins, Iowa
LB – **Tommy Eichenberg, Ohio State**
LB – Abdul Carter, Penn State
DB – Cooper DeJean, Iowa
DB – Will Johnson, Michigan
DB – Tyler Nubin, Minnesota
DB – **Denzel Burke, Ohio State**

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
K* – Dragan Kesich, Minnesota

P – Tory Taylor, Iowa
Returner – Cooper DeJean, Iowa

OFFENSE HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Isaiah Adams, Julian Pearl, Josh Gesky, Josh Kreutz, Kaden Feagin, John Paddock; INDIANA: Zach Carpenter, Donaven McCulley; IOWA: Mason Richman, Rusty Feth, Erick All, Leshon Williams; MARYLAND: Corey Bullock, Roman Hemby, Kaden Prather, Jeshawn Jones; MICHIGAN: A.J. Barner; MICHIGAN STATE: J.D. Duplain, Nick Samac, Nathan Carter; MINNESOTA: Quinn Carroll, Nathan Boe, Brevyn Spann-Ford, Darius Taylor; NEBRASKA: Bryce Benhart, Ben Scott; NORTHWESTERN: A.J. Henning; PENN STATE: Caedan Wallace, JB Nelson, Sal Wormley, Theo Johnson, KeAndre Lambert-Smith, Drew Allar; PURDUE: Gus Hartwig, Tyrone Tracy Jr., Devin Mockobee;

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:
Taulia Tagovailoa, Maryland
Kaytron Allen, Penn State
Kyle Monangai, Rutgers
Roman Wilson, Michigan
Daniel Jackson, Minnesota
Deion Burks, Purdue
Hunter Nourzad, Penn State
Trevor Keegan, Michigan
Matt Jones, Ohio State

Karsen Barnhart, Michigan
Aireontae Ersery, Minnesota
Cade Stover, Ohio State

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:
Kenneth Grant, Michigan
Kris Jenkins, Michigan
Adisa Isaac, Penn State
Nic Scourton, Purdue
Aaron Casey, Indiana
Junior Colson, Michigan
Bryce Gallagher, Northwestern
Tarheeb Still, Maryland
Mike Sainristil, Michigan
Dillon Thieneman, Purdue
Kalen King, Penn State

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
James Turner, Michigan
Jayden Fielding, Ohio State
Ryan Eckley, Michigan State
Daequan Hardy, Penn State

RUTGERS: Hollin Pierce; WISCONSIN: Tanor Bortolini.
DEFENSE HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Xavier Scott, Dylan Rosiek, Seth Coleman, Keith Randolph Jr.; INDIANA: Andre Carter; IOWA: Sebastian Castro, Quinn Schulte, Nick Jackson, Logan Lee, Joe Evans, Yahya Black; MARYLAND: Beau Brade, Ja’Quan Sheppard, Jaishawn Barham, Quashon Fuller; MICHIGAN: Makari Paige, Josh Wallace, Braiden McGregor, Josaiah Stewart, Jaylen Harrell, Derrick Moore; MICHIGAN STATE: Jaden Mangham, Cal Haladay, Simeon Barrow, MINNESOTA: Justin Walley; NEBRASKA: Isaac Gifford, Quinton Newsome, Tommi Hill, Omar Brown, Nash Hutmacher, Ty Robinson; NORTHWESTERN: Rod Heard, Xander Mueller;

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:
Kyle McCord, Ohio State
Nicholas Singleton, Penn State
Braelon Allen, Wisconsin
Emeka Egbuka, Ohio State
Will Pauling, Wisconsin

Logan Jones, Iowa
Connor Colby, Iowa
Nick DeJong, Iowa
Josh Priebe, Northwestern
Delmar Glaze, Maryland
Josh Fryar, Ohio State
Tyler Warren, Penn State

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:
Michael Hall, Jr., Ohio State
Jack Sawyer, Ohio State
Tyleik Williams, Ohio State
Dani Dennis-Sutton, Penn State
Ruben Hyppolite II, Maryland
Mike Barrett, Michigan
Luke Reimer, Nebraska
Rod Moore, Michigan
Johnny Dixon, Penn State
Daequan Hardy, Penn State
Hunter Wohler, Wisconsin

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Drew Stevens, Iowa
Alex Felkins, Penn State
Tommy Doman, Michigan
Tyrone Tracy Jr., Purdue

OHIO STATE: Davison Igbinosun, Josh Proctor, Lathan Ransom, Sonny Styles, Steele Chambers, Ty Hamilton; PENN STATE: Jaylen Reed, Kevin Winston Jr., Kobe King, Curtis Jacobs; PURDUE: Sanoussi Kane, Kydran Jenkins, Isaiah Nichols; RUTGERS: Max Melton, Mohamed Toure, Aaron Lewis; WISCONSIN: Ricardo Hallman.

SPECIAL TEAMS HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Isaiah Williams, Caleb Griffin; INDIANA: Jaylin Lucas, James Evans; MICHIGAN: Semaj Morgan; MICHIGAN STATE: Jonathan Kim; NORTHWESTERN: Jack Olsen; PENN STATE: Nicholas Singleton, Riley Thompson; RUTGERS: Jai Patel.

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Bryce Gallagher, Northwestern
Abdul Carter, Penn State
Sebastian Castro, Iowa
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Kalen King, Penn State
Hunter Wohler, Wisconsin

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
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Ryan Eckley, Michigan State
Daequan Hardy, Penn State

Jr.; RUTGERS: Bryan Felter, Gus Zilinskas, Hollin Pierce, Johnny Langan; WISCONSIN: Will Pauling.

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Jeshawn Jones, Maryland
Tanor Bortolini, Wisconsin
Connor Colby, Iowa
Josh Priebe, Northwestern
Delmar Glaze, Maryland
Karsen Barnhart, Michigan
Corey Dyches, Maryland

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:
Keith Randolph Jr., Illinois
Joe Evans, Iowa
Mason Graham, Michigan
Kenneth Grant, Michigan
Nick Jackson, Iowa
Xander Mueller, Northwestern
Steele Chambers, Ohio State
Tarheeb Still, Maryland
Josh Proctor, Ohio State
Dillon Thieneman, Purdue
Ricardo Hallman, Wisconsin

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Jai Patel, Rutgers
James Evans, Indiana
Jaylin Lucas, Indiana

Lathan Ransom, Michael Hall, Jr., Sonny Styles; PENN STATE: Daequan Hardy, Dani Dennis-Sutton, Dvon Ellies, Jaylen Reed, Johnny Dixon, Kevin Winston Jr., Kobe King, Zane Durant; PURDUE: Kydran Jenkins, Sanoussi Kane; RUTGERS: Aaron Lewis, Deion Jennings, Flip Dixon, Max Melton, Mayan Ahanotu, Mohamed Toure, Robert Longerebear.

SPECIAL TEAMS HONORABLE MENTION ILLINOIS: Caleb Griffin, Hugh Robertson, Isaiah Williams; IOWA: Drew Stevens; MARYLAND: Braeden Wisloski; MICHIGAN: James Turner, Semaj Morgan, Tommy Doman; MICHIGAN STATE: Jonathan Kim; MINNESOTA: Mark Crawford; NORTHWESTERN: Jack Olsen; **OHIO STATE: Jayden Fielding;** PENN STATE: Nicholas Singleton, Riley Thompson; PURDUE: Tyrone Tracy Jr.; WISCONSIN: Nathaniel Vakos.

* - additional honorees due to ties

OSU's Depth In Flux For Cotton Bowl

Continued From Page 1

several fronts. The Buckeyes will be facing off against a motivated Missouri team looking for its first 11-win season and bowl win since 2014.

The Tigers are 25th nationally in scoring offense (34.1 points) – led by running back Cody Schrader, who leads the country with 124.9 rushing yards per game – and 42nd in scoring defense (22.3 points), presenting some well-rounded competition for Ohio State. It's an opportunity Missouri is not taking lightly.

"We were fortunate to be the first announcement of the selection show for the New Year's Six," Drinkwitz said. "When you see your name up against Ohio State, again, that's a blue-blood, national brand, and to have an opportunity to play them is very special."

"I know for me as the head football coach, in my wildest dreams, I don't know that I ever thought about being able to coach in the Cotton Bowl vs. Ohio State. It's something I'm going to be very present in and really enjoy the moment."

The other significant hurdle for Ohio State is the unknown, that being who may or may not take the field against Missouri.

Given that the Buckeyes have played in either the College Football Playoff or Rose Bowl dating back to 2018, the usual opt-outs that are common this time of the year have largely been avoided for Ohio State. But this time around, there's an expectation that some Buckeyes set to depart the program will likely not play in the Cotton Bowl.

Day said shortly after Ohio State's selection that the Buckeyes "expect everybody to play," though it's unclear if he was referring to any potential injuries or players who face a decision regarding opting out. It's likely Ohio State will be without at least a handful of contributors, with wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau and linebacker Tommy Eichenberg among the names who could opt out, though Harrison said on Dec. 7 he had not made a decision.

"We have a team meeting tonight," Day said on Dec. 3. "We're going to go through the schedule. I think our guys are excited to play the game. We'll talk through all that, and we'll continue to meet with guys along the way. We already had meetings last week, all really positive. I think guys know that they want to have something to show for the season but also have an opportunity to continue to put good games out there."

Perhaps the biggest question mark, though, is at quarterback. With junior Kyle



FILE PHOTO

NEXT IN LINE? — Ohio State redshirt freshman Devin Brown is looking at a significant role in the Cotton Bowl following the transfer of Kyle McCord.

McCord announcing his transfer out of the program on Dec. 4 – just one day after Day declined to speculate whether McCord might start for Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl or beyond – it leaves the Buckeyes with just a pair of scholarship quarterbacks in redshirt freshman Devin Brown and true freshman Lincoln Kienholz, who combined to attempt just 27 passes all season.

The stars seemingly align for Brown to get the first start of his career on a significant stage, and if he is under center for the Buckeyes, his teammates have confidence in his ability to lead Ohio State to a win in the Cotton Bowl.

"He dealt with some injuries in the middle of the season, so he lost some reps there, but I think the bowl practice is going to be great for him, help him get back into rhythm," Harrison said. "He started practic-

ing more towards the end of the year. He's definitely ready. He had that chip on his shoulder that he's always had when he came in here, so I'm excited to see what he can do on the field as well."

Regardless of who plays, however, Day has clear goals beyond simply winning when it comes to the Cotton Bowl. As much as the postseason contest serves as a cap for this current season and this current group of Buckeyes, it will also help Ohio State begin building momentum toward next season, offering a chance for some who didn't play much in this campaign but may step into an extended role next year.

"We had the situation a couple of years ago in the Rose Bowl, and it did build some momentum into the next year," Day said. "We always want to be playing for a championship this time of year, but we're going to finish things and do things the right way. Bowl practice is an opportunity for some of the younger guys to get out there, almost like a spring practice, to continue to develop some of those guys. We'll finish this thing the right way."

But while the Cotton Bowl serves as an opportunity for Ohio State's depth to shine, Day said the Buckeyes will ultimately do what it takes to win the game and end the season on a positive note after an otherwise disappointing finish.

"We want to win the game," Day said. "Certainly the reps in practice leading up to the game will be spread around pretty good,

but when it comes to playing in the game, we want to win the game, and that's the No. 1 thing. Again, the Cotton Bowl is a great bowl and we have a really good opponent, so we're going to put the best guys out there to win the game."

Michigan Loss Still Weighing On Program

Ohio State's focus has since shifted to Missouri and the Cotton Bowl, but the loss to Michigan to end the regular season is still felt throughout the program as it looks to move on from the third defeat to the Wolverines in as many seasons.

"A lot of our guys were certainly disappointed last week," Day said on Dec. 3. "We did have practice last week. We got together, we had a team meeting. We knew that there was going to be a new target this week. We weren't sure what it was going to be. There are a lot of prideful guys on our team. They're going to use this opportunity to finish this season the right way or build momentum for next year."

In the time since the loss to Michigan, Day said the team has had the chance to go back and assess what went wrong in Ann Arbor. While the defensive lapses and mistakes on offense – namely two interceptions by McCord – and special teams leave almost everyone culpable, Day said the game came down to just a few key plays.

"We talked about it last year that it can come down to a couple plays and downs in the last possession or two," he said. "It's extremely frustrating for everybody to not finish it the way that we wanted to. Just a couple of things here and there and you're on the losing side of the game."

"There are certainly things that we look back on over and over again, and that goes the other way. We get it done at the end of the game, we get off the field or we finish off a couple (of drives) – we had the three-and-out and then we didn't finish the last drive. It came down to the last possession, and to not get it done, it leaves a mark. It's not something to just get over, because as we know, that's the No. 1 goal year-in and year-out."

Day reiterated – as he did after the previous two losses to Michigan – that a defeat at the hands of the Wolverines leaves scars on the program, ones felt by everybody on the team who all take ownership of the losses.

But with a chance to finish the season with a win over Missouri in the Cotton Bowl, even if it won't erase the loss to Michigan, Day said the team will continue to soldier on in hopes of a strong finish for the campaign.

"No one's going to feel sorry for us, so you've got to push forward," he said. "That's life, and so we're going to do that. There's always a lot of life lessons, and this is another great one for our guys to learn about how you handle yourself during adversity."

"You learn a lot about the guys that are around you, and as a dad, as a husband, as a brother, as a teammate, you have to handle yourself the right way and move forward. Not that it's easy – we're not just going to move on like it's just another game. It's not. But the world is not stopping for us, so we've got to keep moving, and that's what we're going to do."

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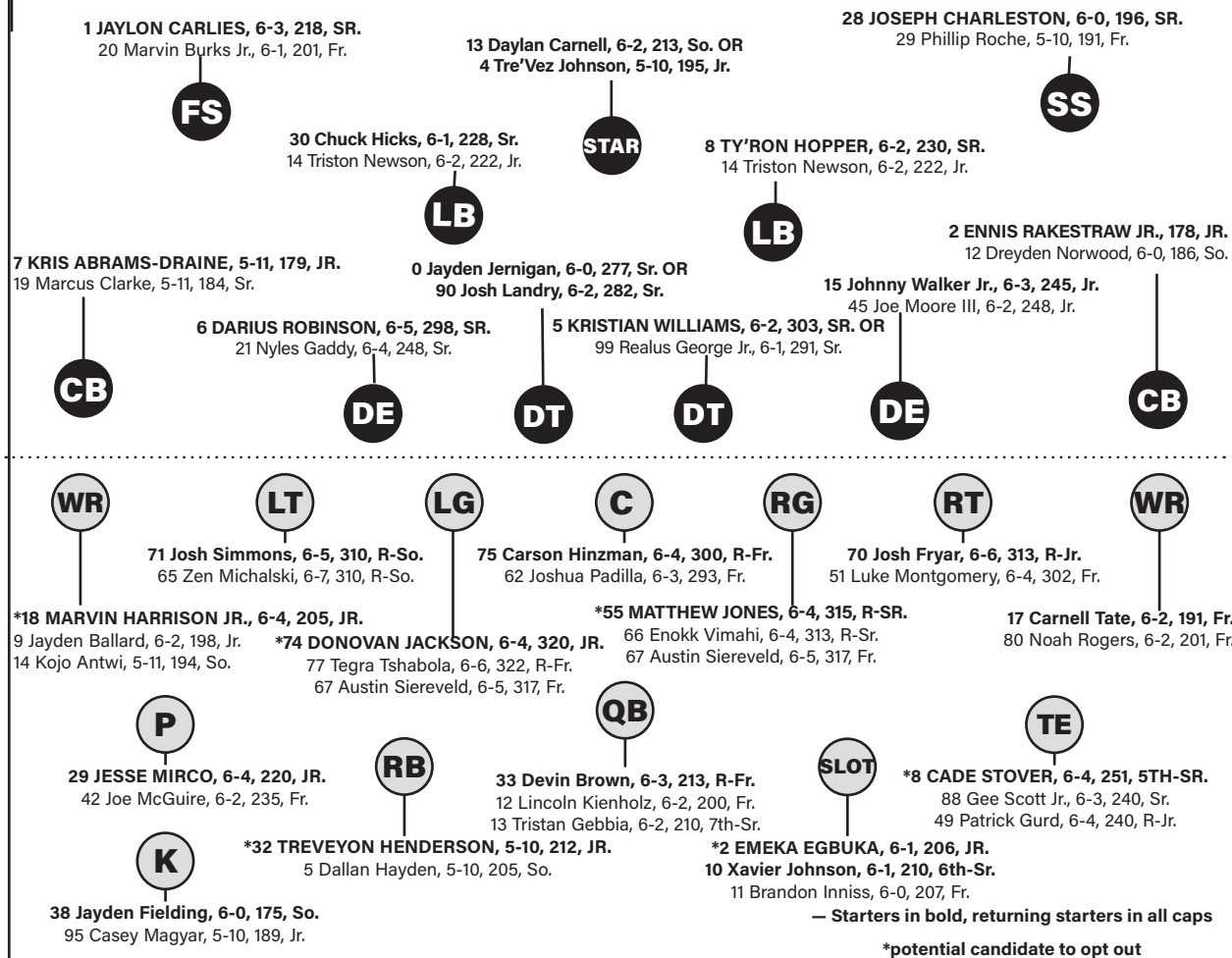
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Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. MISSOURI RUSH DEFENSE

Will the last one out of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center please turn off the lights? It does seem that everyone has abandoned the good ship Buckeye following another loss to Michigan with more than a dozen players either opting for the transfer portal or declaring for the NFL draft. As you read this, another two or three more may have defected, but for now the running game has the one player it absolutely must have. Tre'Veyon Henderson may be headed to the draft, but for now it appears he's hanging around and will be even more invaluable due to the uncertainty at quarterback.

He ran for 854 yards (6.2 average) and 11 touchdowns. His 137 carries were 52 more than Chip Trayanum with the next most, despite Henderson missing three games. Speaking of Trayanum (373, 4.4, three TDs), he's off to the transfer wonderland as is Evan Pryor (49, 2.6). The oft-injured Miyan Williams (158, 3.2, three) is headed to pros, he hopes. That leaves Xavier Johnson (155, 6.7) and Dallan Hayden (110, 5.8, one) as the scholarship backups. Ohio State is 84th nationally in rushing at 142.3 yards per game with 20 touchdowns. Missouri allows 125.0 yards to rank 31st and has yielded only eight scores on the ground. As long as Henderson is available and healthy, the Buckeyes should be in good shape, but if he is not and the quarterback(s) falter and the Tigers stack the box, it could be a long night for the Buckeyes.

EDGE: EVEN

MISSOURI RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

This will be a prime matchup. Cody Schrader is one of the top backs in the country going against the No. 22 defense. The Buckeyes have allowed 112.5 yards and five touchdowns on the ground. Schrader led the SEC and was third nationally in rushing. His 1,499 yards came on 247 carries (6.1). He scored 13 times and was tops in the country at 124.9 yards a game. Schrader has scored in nine straight games and capped the regular season with a season-high 217 yards vs. Arkansas. The Buckeyes must be wary of quarterback Brady Cook, who has a long run of 25 yards and scored eight times on the ground. As a team, Mizzou is only 52nd in rushing (169.4).

EDGE: EVEN

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. MISSOURI PASS DEFENSE

Here's where the stats don't matter. Yes, the Buckeyes were 21st in passing offense (282.7) and threw for 26 touchdowns against seven interceptions, but nearly all those numbers were collected by Kyle McCord. But he gathered his 3,170 yards, 65.8 percent completion rate and 24 scores to six picks and hopped on the portal train out of town to destination unknown. Left in his wake are redshirt freshman Devin Brown (12 of 22, 54.5 percent, 197 yards, two TDs, one interception), who is better known for his running, and freshman Lincoln Kienholz (4 of 5, 80.0 percent, 25 yards, no TDs or INTs). Whom they will throw to is in question. Heisman Trophy finalist Marvin Harrison Jr. (67 catches, 1,211 yards, 18.1 average, 14 touchdowns) said Dec. 7 he was undecided if he would return for his senior season, so he may not suit up. Emeka Egbuka (35, 452, 12.9, four) could opt out, while Julian Fleming (26, 270, 10.4) is in the portal. The Buckeyes still have, for now, tight end Cade Stover (41, 576, 14.0, five), though he could conceivably opt out as well. Missouri is vulnerable. The Tigers are 62nd in pass defense (222.2), 38th in total defense (347.2) and 42nd in scoring defense (22.3). Defensive end Darius Robinson had 12 tackles for loss and 7½ sacks, and cornerback Kris Abrams-Draine has 12 pass breakups to go with four interceptions.

EDGE: MISSOURI

MISSOURI PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Cook has completed 66.4 percent of his 351 passes for 3,189 yards and 20 touchdowns to six interceptions. His favorite target is Luther Burden (83, 1,197, 14.4, eight). He averaged 99.8 yards a game. The line is anchored by left tackle Javon Foster. His father, Jerome, was a defensive end and tackle for Ohio State from 1979-83 and played four seasons in the NFL with the Houston Oilers, Miami Dolphins and New York Jets. The Buckeyes are first in the nation in pass defense (147.4).

EDGE: OHIO STATE

SPECIAL TEAMS

Mizzou split the punting duties between Luke Bauer (42.1 average) and Riley Williams (40.0). Harrison Mevis made 24 of 30 field goals, including a 61-yarder among his 3 of 5 from 50 yards and beyond. Jesse Mirco punted poorly against Michigan (three for a 36.7-yard average), and Jayden Fielding missed from 52 in that game. He was 15 of 18 for the season with a long of 47.

EDGE: MISSOURI

INTANGIBLES

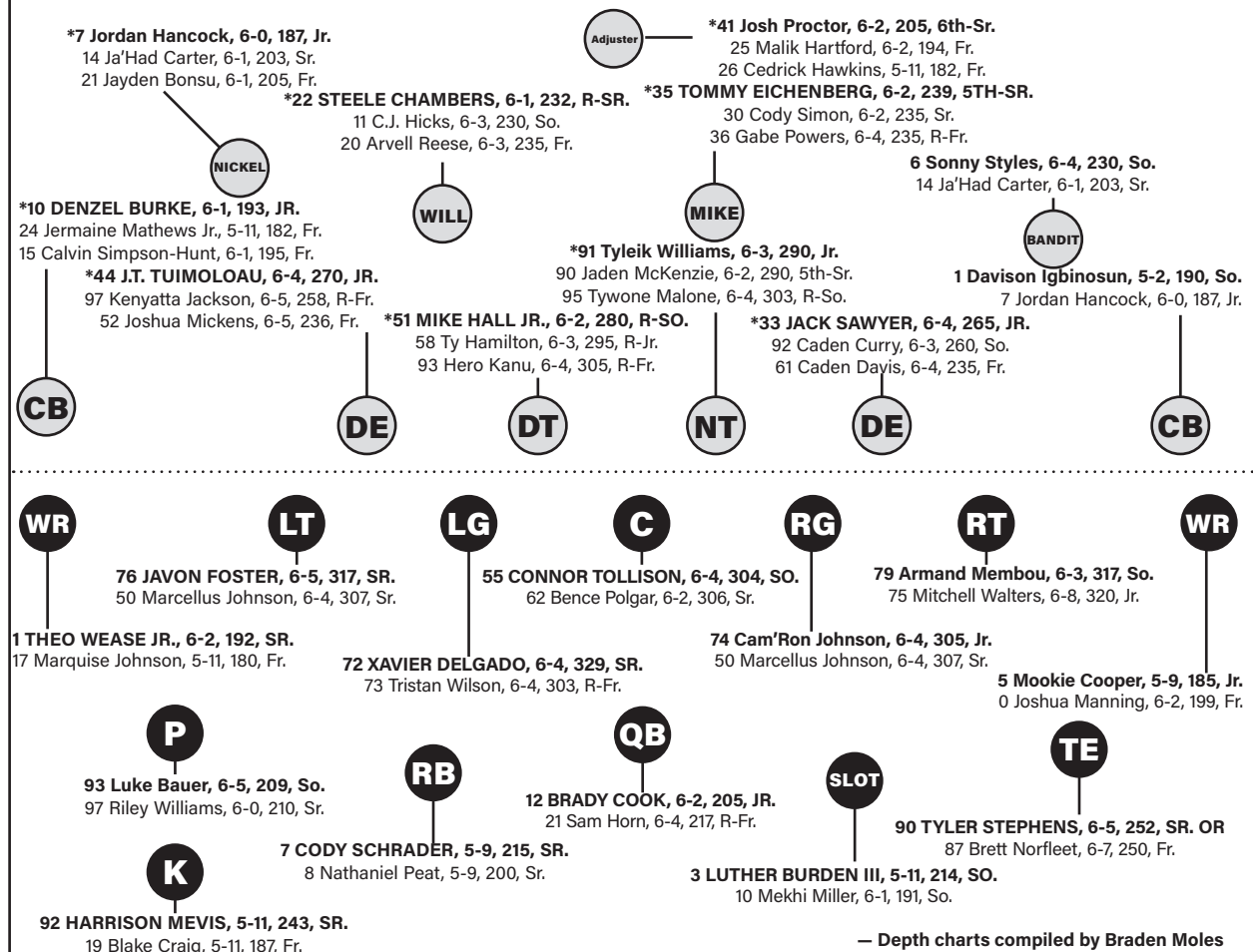
This game has little sizzle for Buckeye fans and likely the players. There's only one school that begins with MI that anyone in these parts cares about, and it's not Missouri, or even Minnesota. The Buckeyes' roster is in flux, and the McCord transfer was a bombshell. Ohio State was lucky last season that it had motivation post-Wolverines to beat Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

EDGE: MISSOURI

PREDICTION

Missouri wants to play in the Cotton Bowl. The Buckeyes? Not so much. Will their advantage in talent be enough? **OHIO STATE 26, MISSOURI 24**

WHEN MISSOURI HAS THE BALL...



OSU Facing Real ‘America’s Team’ In Missouri

By BRADEN MOLES
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

“America’s Team” is a moniker officially attributed to few teams but claimed by many more. The NFL’s Dallas Cowboys are referred to as such, but others – such as Michigan and head coach Jim Harbaugh – believe they are deserving of such recognition.

“(Michigan has) to be America’s team,” Harbaugh said. “America loves a team that beats the odds, beats the adversity, overcomes what the naysayers and critics and so-called experts think. That’s my favorite kind of team.”

It’s a bold claim, but one that may be wrong on several levels. The best argument for a real “America’s Team” – at least in college football – does not belong to Michigan, but instead Missouri, Ohio State’s opponent in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 in Arlington, Texas.

All the signs are there. The upstart Tigers (10-2, 6-2 SEC) have far exceeded preseason expectations, utilizing an under-the-radar group – including junior quarterback Brady Cook and senior running back Cody Schrader – to finish second in a crowded SEC East behind only Georgia, the two-time defending national champions. Missouri’s only losses came to the Bulldogs, a 30-21 defeat at Georgia, and a 49-39 home loss to LSU and Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Jayden Daniels.

The Tigers have gotten to this point – ranked ninth in the nation, set to face the seventh-ranked Buckeyes – with just the 10th-best roster in their conference, according to 247Sports’ team talent rankings, but the perceived disadvantage in talent is what has pushed Missouri and head coach Eliah Drinkwitz this season.

“Earlier in the week I heard a coach (Harbaugh) talk about being America’s team,” he said on Nov. 24. “I don’t know about all that conversation. They’ve got so many different good things going for them – some good, some maybe they stole illegally. ... We’re America’s team. We’re a team built on underdogs.”

“We’re the story that people should be really proud to be behind. I’m just proud to coach this football team, and it ain’t about me. It’s really about this brotherhood, those guys coming together, those coaches – and they’re coaching their butt off for each other.”

The player that best embodies this attitude is Schrader. Despite leading the SEC with 1,499 rushing yards this season – and finishing eighth in Heisman Trophy voting, the first Tiger to finish in the top 10 since quarterback Chase Daniel in 2007 – Schrader was put on scholarship for Missouri only in January after transferring to the school before last season from Division II Truman State, where he played from 2018-21.

Get To Know ... Missouri

2023 Record: 10-2.

Team Information: Offensive Formation – Pro-Tempo; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 7, Defense 8, Specialists 1.

Head Coach: Eliah Drinkwitz, 4th year at Missouri, 27-21.

Series History: 13th meeting; Ohio State leads 10-1-1.

School Facts: Location – Columbia, Mo.; Enrollment – 31,121; Nickname – Tigers; Colors – Black, Gold; Conference – Southeastern (East Division); Stadium – Memorial Stadium (Artificial, AstroTurf; Capacity – 62,621).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Cody Schrader	247	1499	13	6.1
Nathaniel Peat	76	317	3	4.2
Brady Cook	94	253	8	2.7

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Brady Cook	233-351	66.4	3189	20-6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Luther Burden III	83	1197	14.4	8
Theo Wease Jr.	45	639	14.2	6
Mookie Cooper	34	429	12.6	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 34.1
Rushing Yards Per Game – 169.4
Passing Yards Per Game – 273.5
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 442.9

2023 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	SOUTH DAKOTA	W, 35-10
Sept. 9	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	W, 23-19
Sept. 16	KANSAS STATE	W, 30-27
Sept. 23	MEMPHIS	W, 34-27
Sept. 30	at Vanderbilt	W, 38-21
Oct. 7	LSU	W, 49-39
Oct. 14	at Kentucky	W, 38-21
Oct. 21	SOUTH CAROLINA	W, 34-12
Nov. 4	at Georgia	L, 30-21
Nov. 11	TENNESSEE	W, 36-7
Nov. 18	FLORIDA	W, 33-31
Nov. 25	at Arkansas	W, 48-14

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Joseph Charleston	38	22	60	0.5-0	0-0
Ty/Ron Hopper	36	19	55	6.0-20	3.0-15
Jaylon Carlies	30	23	53	3.5-16	1.0-9
Chuck Hicks	26	23	49	10.0-47	2.0-28
Daylan Carnell	27	21	48	5.0-19	2.0-11
Kris Abrams-Draine	36	11	47	2.5-6	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Kris Abrams-Draine	4	9	2.3	0
Jaylon Carlies	2	0	0.0	0
Marcus Clarke	2	0	0.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 22.3
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 125.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 222.2
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 347.2

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Athens
740-566-1009

It’s been a long journey for Schrader, who has earned accolades such as first-team All-SEC honors as well as the Burlsworth Trophy, which goes to the most outstanding player who began his career as a walk-on, and that upstart attitude is reflected in how he carries himself on the field for the Tigers.

“The whole recipe of this whole thing is work,” he said. “You have to be able to hit a person in the mouth for four quarters, and either they’re going to fold or I’m going to fold. And I’m determined not to fold.”

It’s an attitude that has permeated throughout the team. Few would have expected that Schrader would ever lead a ninth-ranked team in the country in the Cotton Bowl against Ohio State, but he’s here, and so are the Tigers.

“I think this team is meant to play on big stages,” he said. “I think we proved that all year, and nothing’s going to change no matter what bowl game we go to.”

Schrader is not the only player, however, who has battled adversity for Missouri. Cook is in his fourth season with the Tigers, and it was mostly tough sledding over the three preceding years, including last season in which he threw for 2,739 yards and just 14 touchdowns to seven interceptions.

Cook has been outstanding for Missouri this season, throwing for 3,189 yards and 20 touchdowns to just six picks, while also rushing for eight scores. But it didn’t stop antsy fans earlier this season from loudly booing Cook before early-season home contests.

“I hear it. I mean, it’s hard,” he said in September. “This is my dream school. All I want to do is play quarterback here.”

“It pissed me off when we booed our

starting quarterback to start the game,” Drinkwitz said. “That pissed me off. He went out there and played his butt off for this university and this team. They need to get behind him. We need to get behind the young man.

“You want to boo me? Fine. You’re going to boo the starting quarterback? Bull crap. I’ll say it again. Should never happen.”

It didn’t. He helped Missouri run over the majority of the SEC this season with five 300-yard passing games and five games where he completed at least 72.0 percent of his passes, and he even threw for a season-high 411 yards in the Tigers’ loss to LSU.

“What Cook has done in the face of all kinds of noise has been pretty incredible,” Drinkwitz said. “I made him compete for his job again all of fall camp. I made him compete in the first game for his job. And all he’s done is ignore the noise and have a belief in himself – self-confidence and a belief and said, ‘OK, I’m open to you coaching me.’”

Helping Cook dominate has been star wide receiver Luther Burden III – a St. Louis native – who shocked most a couple of years back when he committed to Missouri as a five-star prospect and the top-ranked receiver in the 2022 recruiting class. He has lived up to the billing so far, collecting 83 receptions this season for 1,197 yards and eight touchdowns, operating as a safety blanket for Cook.

“(His growth) has been everywhere, from top to bottom,” Drinkwitz said. “I think it’s just maturity. We talked to him a lot about, when you mature off the field, the product on the field becomes much better.”

Missouri’s receiving corps also includes Theo Wease Jr. (45 catches, 639 yards, six

OHIO STATE VS. MISSOURI

TDs), who transferred from Oklahoma this past offseason, as well as former Ohio State wide receiver Mookie Cooper (34, 429). Schrader is a weapon out of the backfield with 22 catches for 191 yards, while tight end Brett Norfleet has 17 receptions for 195 yards and three touchdowns as a true freshman and was named to the SEC all-freshman team.

The Tigers also have a veteran offensive line, with returning starters at left tackle (senior Javon Foster), left guard (senior Xavier Delgado) and center (sophomore Connor Tollison), with junior Cam'Ron Johnson and sophomore Armand Membou filling in at right guard and right tackle, respectively.

They have helped allow Schrader to rush for a nation-best 124.9 yards per game and have allowed just 20 sacks this season after allowing 27 last season.

"We're going to keep coming back and smacking people in the mouth, and that is what I keep saying about this offensive line," Schrader said. "That is the biggest change from last year to this year is that these guys want to dominate teams. We're seeing that this year."

The passing and rushing attacks are working in tandem to score 34.1 points and account for 442.9 yards per game, both ranking 25th nationally. The Tigers have been less dominant on the defensive side of the ball, however, allowing 22.3 points (42nd) and 347.2 yards (38th), including three games this season where it allowed at least 30 points.

One of the biggest challenges on the defensive end was the loss of sixth-year linebacker Chad Bailey, a two-time captain for

the Tigers who had at least 55 tackles and 5½ tackles for loss in 2021 and 2022 but played in just five games this season before being ruled out with an abdominal injury.

In Bailey's place has been senior Chuck Hicks, who has filled in well with 49 tackles, 10 tackles for loss and two sacks. Starting alongside Hicks is senior Ty'Ron Hopper, who is second on the team with 55 tackles and has six tackles for loss, three sacks and three pass breakups in 10 games this season.

Assisting Missouri up front has been stellar play from the defensive line, including senior Darius Robinson and junior Johnny Walker Jr. on the edge and seniors Realus George Jr., Jay Jernigan, Josh Landry and Kristian Williams all rotating in the interior.

Walker has added eight tackles for loss and four sacks, while the four interior linemen have combined for 11½ tackles for loss and four sacks. Robinson has been a particular standout, though, collecting a team-high 12 tackles for loss and 7½ sacks after deciding to come back for an additional season at Missouri and doing so at defensive end after previously playing at defensive tackle.

"Darius is a very serious and mature young man," Drinkwitz said. "He's only been playing football since he was in the 11th grade. Every year, he takes another step in the process. That was part of our sell to him. 'Come back for another year. You've still got so much room to grow.' Then we've asked him to change positions and develop some position flexibility, which he's done."

All told, the front six (or seven, when the

Tigers are utilizing linebacker Daylan Carnell at their flex position rather than safety Tre'Vez Johnson) have limited the opposition to just 125.3 rushing yards per game, 31st in the country, and Missouri's defense has 35 sacks this season, tied for 15th in the nation.

While Missouri's secondary does not have quite as impressive statistics – allowing 222.2 passing yards per game, good for 62nd nationally – it is a veteran unit, with all four members – junior cornerbacks Kris Abrams-Draine and Ennis Rakestraw Jr., and senior safeties Jaylon Carlies and Joseph Charleston – returning starters for the Tigers.

Charleston leads the defense with 60 tackles, while Abrams-Draine has a team-high four interceptions this season.

"He's extremely consistent, both physically on the field and emotionally," defensive coordinator Blake Baker said of Abrams-Draine. "He never gets too high, never gets too low, really lets the game come to him. He plays within the scheme, and when the opportunity presents itself, he's made the play."

Rakestraw's status is of potential concern for the Cotton Bowl – one of the only real questions on Missouri's roster in terms of availability, with no players expected to opt out – due to an undisclosed injury. His loss would be a significant one, as he has 35 tackles and four pass breakups this season.

But, after both Abrams-Draine and Rakestraw elected to return to Missouri this season, a win in the Cotton Bowl would be a perfect wrap on their time with the program.

"(Abrams-Draine) made me feel confident that we're going to do this thing together again," Rakestraw said before the season. "I'm back, and now I'm going to do it again."

Special teams are another area where this game could be decided. Tigers kicker Harrison Mevis has connected on 24 of 30 attempts this season, including a 61-yard field goal – one that might have been good from 65 yards out – that gave Missouri a 30-27 win over then-No. 15 Kansas State on Sept. 16, a potential omen of things to come this season.

"It's what they brought me here to do," Mevis said. "I'm an operation kicker. I'm supposed to go in and make those kicks for the team and help us win. It's a testament to the offense for putting me in position to go do that."

Missouri is viewed as a slight favorite heading into the Cotton Bowl given the uncertainty on Ohio State's roster, ranging from the quarterback position following the transfer of Kyle McCord and the status of several others on the roster who could opt out and declare for the NFL draft. But even if the Tigers are expected to win over a depleted Buckeye squad, Missouri will act as it has all season – as the underdog.

"It's a tremendous honor to be selected for the New Year's Six," Drinkwitz said. "I'm just very appreciative of the committee. What a tremendous matchup with Ohio State in a great location in Dallas, an area where we have a lot of friends, a lot of alumni. It's a really awesome opportunity for our program."

"I'm sure most people will write us off," he added. "We'll embrace it."

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INSIDER

Ohio State Makes Third Cotton Bowl Appearance

When No. 7 Ohio State heads to Arlington, Texas, to play against No. 9 Missouri in AT&T Stadium on Dec. 29 in the Cotton Bowl, it will be the third time the Buckeyes

have made an appearance at this bowl destination.

It will also be head coach Ryan Day's first time in the bowl as lead man of Ohio State – though he was co-offensive coordinator last time the Buckeyes were at the Cotton Bowl in 2017 – and he said he is honored to have the opportunity to play in it.

"We have a tremendous amount of respect for the Cotton Bowl," he said on Dec. 3. "We were there in 2017. We played USC and had an opportunity to recognize the Cotton Bowl was one of the most hospitable bowls. It's kind of a gold standard on hospitality, the way that they set up the events during the week, the way that our families were treated."

"The city of Dallas was great, and certainly the venue, AT&T Stadium, was tremendous. We're certainly looking forward to returning to the Cotton Bowl."

The most recent appearance in the bowl was in 2017 when Ohio State and quarterback J.T. Barrett – in his final game as a Buckeye – notched a 24-7 win over USC and future first-round quarterback Sam Darnold behind 180 yards of total offense from Barrett. The Buckeyes forced four turnovers,

including an interception by defensive back Damon Webb and forced fumbles by cornerback Kendall Sheffield and defensive linemen Tyquan Lewis and Jalyn Holmes.

Ohio State's first appearance in the Cotton Bowl was on Jan. 1, 1987, when the Buckeyes won 28-12 against Texas A&M. Linebackers Chris Spielman, who had two interceptions, and Michael Kee each had a pick-six in the win while quarterbacks Jim Karsatos and Tom Tupa combined for 13 completions for 219 yards, with six of those completions going to Nate Harris for 105 yards.

Ohio State has played Missouri 12 times – all in the regular season – and holds a 10-1-1 record over the Tigers. The teams last played on Sept. 19, 1998, in a 35-14 win for Ohio State in Columbus. A 31-10 win for the Buckeyes on Sept. 27, 1997, in Columbia, Mo., was the only game in the series not played in Columbus.

OSU Misses Final Four-Team Playoff

It was of little surprise, but the College Football Playoff committee made it official on Dec. 3 when it announced that Ohio State would play in the Cotton Bowl and that the Buckeyes had missed the College Football Playoff for just the second time in five seasons. The Buckeyes were previously in the playoff in 2019, 2020 and 2022 under Day.

Ohio State finished seventh in the final College Football Playoff rankings, with No. 6 Georgia and No. 5 Florida State just missing out on the playoff. The top four consisted of No. 1 Michigan, No. 2 Washington, No. 3 Texas and No. 4 Alabama, setting up a matchup between the Wolverines and Crimson Tide in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., and the Huskies and Longhorns in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, both on New Year's Day.

This is the final year of the four-team playoff before it expands to 12 teams next season, meaning that Ohio State made the four-team field five times in 10 seasons but just twice – in 2014 and 2020 – advanced to the College Football Playoff National Championship Game, winning it all in the first year of the playoff.

In the first 10 seasons, Alabama made the most appearances with eight, including this season – with six (so far) resulting in title game appearances – followed by Clemson with six and the Buckeyes' five trips. Oklahoma (four appearances), Georgia (three), Michigan (three), Washington (two) and Notre Dame (two) were the only other teams to make multiple trips, while Cincinnati, Florida State, LSU, Michigan State, Oregon, TCU and Texas each made one appearance.

But with the playoff expanding to 12 teams – with automatic spots guaranteed for the top six conferences and six at-large bids – most of the teams listed above will be in annual contention for the expanded field.

Both Teams Expect To Be At Full Strength

Despite the potential for opt-outs or players potentially nursing injuries, Day said that the Buckeyes are expecting to be at full strength going into the Cotton Bowl.

"I'm expecting everybody to play," Day said Dec. 3. "We've had to play depth this year. That's a great opportunity for guys to step up. That's what this bowl practice is going to be about is trying to get young guys a bunch of reps. They're going to utilize every rep that we possibly give them. But I think our guys will be ready to roll here."

Day's comments, however, came before the exodus to the transfer portal that has resulted in 14 players departing Ohio State's roster, leaving the ranks somewhat thin heading into the Cotton Bowl. Furthermore, with several players projected to enter the NFL draft, there's the possibility some could opt out of the game. There haven't been any players to opt out as of Dec. 11, but there is still plenty of time for them to make that decision.

Missouri head coach Eliah Drinkwitz also said his team would be at full strength other than a couple of injuries – particularly cornerback Ennis Rakestraw Jr. – that could keep some players out when the game comes. He is not expecting any opt-outs for the Cotton Bowl but said the team will be supportive if someone makes that decision.

"Our team plans to play, and I plan on hav-

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ing our team at full strength,” he said. “We have a couple of injuries that could prevent certain players from playing.

“But in visiting with the seniors prior to the announcement of this game, it was our plan as a senior group to finish one more game together. Each individual student-athlete has to do what’s in their own best interest. We all recognize that this game, these players have a business side to it, too. As coaches, we respect that. I know as players, they respect it.”

Drinkwitz also said their game plan won’t change regardless of whom Ohio State ultimately winds up putting on the field at AT&T Stadium.

“As far as our preparation, we’re preparing to play a very good opponent,” he said. “The thing about playing a team like Ohio State is if they have a player opt out, there’s multiple players behind them that are very talented that are ready to step up. I don’t necessarily think you can worry so much about who’s playing. You’ve got to worry and prepare for the scheme.”

Cotton Bowl An Opportunity For Ohio State’s Depth

Once it was announced that Ohio State would match up with Missouri in the Cotton Bowl it was clear that it would be a chance for Ohio State to flex its depth, with several players expected to opt out in advance of entering their name into the NFL draft.

But that depth became even more important after Ohio State had 14 players – including Kyle McCord and Julian Fleming, among others – enter the transfer portal once it opened on Dec. 4.

While Day indicated that the Buckeyes would be at full strength when asked about potential opt-outs, it’s still expected that the likes of Marvin Harrison Jr. and other expected draft entries have played their final games at Ohio State.

It opens up a significant opportunity for Ohio State’s younger players, who will get a chance to go up against a top-10 team on a big stage in the Cotton Bowl.

“Anytime you get to a point like this in the season and you’re playing against an opponent that has the type of record and résumé that Missouri has, you’re going to get challenged,” Day said on Dec. 3. “It’s a great opportunity for our defense to go against a very good opponent. There may be opportunities for guys to step in, not unique to the season.

“Bowl practice is a great opportunity. It’s three phases for us. We have our fundamental phase. We have our game-plan phase. Then we actually have our practices down at the site. We’ll work on those three phases and look to develop our fundamentals with the young guys and really enhance and allow our older guys to make sure they stay sharp.”

Depth at quarterback, wide receiver and in the secondary are certainly expected to be tested after losses in the portal and due to expected opt-outs, but opportunities will exist across the field for younger players to step up. A chance to work for nearly an entire month leading into the Cotton Bowl – not to mention the chance to play in the game – will boost the Buckeyes not just in their bowl destination, but once work begins for next season.

“It will be a really good week – or a good

month – of preparation and practice for some of our younger guys to get out there but also possibly get in the game,” Day said. “We’ve seen that in the past. Certainly in the Rose Bowl (after the 2021 season) where some of the younger guys were able to get into the game and that propelled them into the offseason and into the winter program.”

OSU Underdogs In Cotton Bowl

When it was announced that Ohio State and Missouri would play each other in the Cotton Bowl, the Buckeyes opened up as 6½-point favorites. But in the days since, with several players transferring out of Ohio State, the Buckeyes are no longer favored in the game.

As of Dec. 11, the Tigers are viewed as a 2½-point favorite over the Buckeyes. It is the second time this season – including before Ohio State’s loss to Michigan – that the Buckeyes are viewed as underdogs heading into a game. And with other potential opt-outs for Ohio State as the Cotton Bowl approaches, the odds may swing even further in Missouri’s favor.

Ohio State is 8-4 as an underdog in all games dating back to 2012, and was previously 4-0 as an underdog in the regular season until this year’s loss to Michigan. Former head coach Urban Meyer was known for winning as an underdog, collecting a perfect 7-0 record when the opponent was favored during his tenure.

This will be the sixth game in which Day and his Buckeyes are an underdog, and he holds just a 1-4 record in the previous five.

Those games include vs. Clemson in 2019 (L, 29-23), vs. Clemson in 2020 (W, 49-28), vs. Alabama in 2020 (L, 52-24), vs. Georgia in 2022 (L, 42-41) and vs. Michigan this season (L, 30-24).

Day, Drinkwitz Have Mutual Respect

Going into the Cotton Bowl, both coaches are ready to compete to their team’s best ability and do whatever it takes to win in what should be a competitive battle, but Day and Drinkwitz both spoke very highly of each other before they face off in Arlington.

“A great opponent, Missouri,” Day said. “Coach Drinkwitz does a great job. I’ve always had a tremendous amount of respect for him, and I’m looking forward to competing against him.

Drinkwitz echoed a similar sentiment about Day, saying he has followed his career for a long time and pays attention to how he coaches so he can draw from it.

“I think he’s a tremendous football coach,” Drinkwitz said. “I have followed his career. I have a lot of respect for the way he’s gone about his business, working out from Boston College, from the NFL having opportunities there to being the offensive coordinator at Ohio State.

“I think he’s one of the elite coaches in college football. He does a tremendous job offensively. He’s one of those teams that I like to watch and see what they’re doing because I know they’re always on the cutting edge. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the person that he is as well as the football coach.”



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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 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	W, 37-3	104,019	
Nov. 25	(2) at Michigan (3)	L, 30-24	110,615	
Dec. 29	(7) vs. Missouri (9)	8 p.m.		

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

Team Statistics							
	OSU					Opp	
First Downs	263					184	
Rushing	85					75	
Passing	156					90	
Penalty	22					19	
Average Per Game/Rush	142.3					112.5	
Average Per Game/Pass	282.7					147.5	
Total Offense	5100					3120	
Total Plays	774					757	
Average Per Game	425.0					260.0	
Average Per Play	6.6					4.1	
Penalties-Yards	66-522					55-489	
Fumbles-Lost	8-5					10-4	
Third Down Efficiency	70-151					50-173	
Percentage	46%					29%	
Fourth Down Efficiency	9-17					13-29	
Percentage	53%					45%	
Sacks-Yards	22-144					19-121	
Time Of Possession Avg.	29:32					30:28	
Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	78	120	103	93	0	394	32.8
Opponents	27	38	31	36	0	132	11.0

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	137	854	6.2	11	75
Chip Trayanum	85	373	4.4	3	40
Miyan Williams	49	158	3.2	3	12
Xavier Johnson	23	155	6.7	0	27
Dallan Hayden	19	110	5.8	1	19
Evan Pryor	19	49	2.6	0	6
Devin Brown	19	35	1.8	1	8
Marvin Harrison Jr.	2	26	13.0	1	19
Emeka Egbuka	5	25	5.0	0	9
Jesse Mirco	1	2	2.0	0	2
Cody Simon	1	-3	-3.0	0	0
Kyle McCord	32	-65	-2.0	0	9
Team	6	-11	-1.8	0	0
OSU Totals	398	1708	4.3	20	75
OPP Totals	399	1350	3.4	5	45

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Kyle McCord	229	348	65.8	3170	24-6	161.6
Devin Brown	12	22	54.5	197	2-1	150.7
Lincoln Kienholz	4	5	80.0	25	0-0	122.0
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	245	376	65.2	3392	26-7	160.0
OPP Totals	187	358	52.2	1770	8-7	97.2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	67	1211	18.1	14	75
Cade Stover	41	576	14.0	5	49
Emeka Egbuka	35	452	12.9	4	28
Julian Fleming	26	270	10.4	0	37
T. Henderson	19	229	12.1	0	65
Carnell Tate	17	260	15.3	1	55
Xavier Johnson	11	147	13.4	0	40
Gee Scott Jr.	9	62	6.9	1	14
Chip Trayanum	9	53	5.9	0	19
Miyan Williams	4	42	10.5	0	27
Jelani Thurman	2	18	9.0	0	9
Joe Royer	1	5	5.0	0	5
Evan Pryor	1	2	2.0	0	2
Dallan Hayden	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Brandon Inniss	1	58	58.0	1	58
OSU Totals	245	3392	13.8	26	75
OPP Totals	187	1770	9.5	8	36

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	49-50	-	-	15-18	94
Marvin Harrison Jr.	15	-	-	-	-	90
T. Henderson	11	-	-	-	-	66

Cade Stover	5	-	-	-	-	30
Emeka Egbuka	4	-	-	-	-	24
Chip Trayanum	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
OSU Totals	50	49-50	-	-	15-18	394
OPP Totals	13	12-12	-	-	14-20	132

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	5-5	6-6	4-6	0-1	15-18
OSU Totals	5-5	6-6	4-6	0-1	15-18
OPP Totals	5-6	2-3	4-6	3-5	14-20

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	41	1755	42.8	72	0
OSU Totals	41	1755	42.8	72	0
OPP Totals	67	2841	42.4	71	0

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jordan Hancock	2	133	66.5	1	93
J. Mathews Jr.	1	58	58.0	1	58
Josh Proctor	1	24	24.0	1	24
Lathan Ransom	1	15	15.0	0	15
Denzel Burke	1	0	0.0	0	0
Steele Chambers	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	7	230	32.9	3	93
OPP Totals	7	53	7.6	0	19

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	3.0	0	3
OSU Totals	16	73	4.6	0	18
OPP Totals	10	135	13.5	0	35

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	11	250	22.7	0	32
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
Caden Curry	1	-5	-5.0	0	0
OSU Totals	13	259	19.9	0	32
OPP Totals	14	251	17.9	0	30

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Tommy Eichenberg	40	40	80	2.5-8	1.0-7
Steele Chambers	36	39	75	1.5-3	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	34	18	52	1.5-4	0-0
Tyleik Williams	19	31	50	10.0-19	3.0-6
Sonny Styles	29	19	48	4.5-13	2.0-6
Cody Simon	18	27	45	3.0-6	0-0
Jack Sawyer	20	24	44	7.0-26	3.5-20
Josh Proctor	29	12	41	4.0-6	0-0
Jordan Hancock	25	13	38	1.0-10	1.0-10
J.T. Tuimoloau	11	23	34	6.0-39	4.0-32
Lathan Ransom	21	13	34	1.5-5	0-0
Ty Hamilton	14	18	32	2.5-9	1.0-7
Mike Hall Jr.	7	14	21	2.0-15	1.5-14
Denzel Burke	13	6	19	2.0-7	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	9	4	13	0-0	0-0
Jaden McKenzie	4	6	10	1.5-6	0-0
Malik Hartford	5	5	10	0-0	0-0
Hero Kanu	8	2	10	1.0-5	1.0-5
Caden Curry	5	4	9	3.5-23	1.5-17
C.J. Hicks	5	3	8	1.0-2	0-0
Gabe Powers	6	1	7	1.0-3	0-0
Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	3	3	6	2.0-11	1.5-11
Ja'Had Carter	2	3	5	0-0	0-0
Tywone Malone	3	2	5	0.5-1	0-0
Mitchell Melton	3	-	3	3.0-13	1.0-9
C. Simpson-Hunt	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Omari Abor	1	1	2	1.0-1	0-0
Ryan Turner	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Cameron Martinez	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Jyaire Brown	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Donovan Jackson	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Reid Carrico	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Matthew Jones	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	385	336	721	64-237	22-144
OPP Totals	454	280	734	51-189	19-121

Fumbles Forced: Hancock (2), Sawyer (2), Burke, Eichenberg, Ransom, Styles.
Fumbles Recovered: Igbinosun (2), Tuimoloau, T. Williams.

Missouri Season Statistics

2023 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Aug. 31	SOUTH DAKOTA	W, 35-10	50,434	
Sept. 9	MIDDLE TENNESSEE ST.	W, 23-19	57,645	
Sept. 16	KANSAS STATE (15)	W, 30-27	62,621	
Sept. 23	MEMPHIS	W, 34-27	45,085	
Sept. 30	(23) at Vanderbilt	W, 38-21	26,332	
Oct. 7	(21) LSU (23)	L, 49-39	62,621	
Oct. 14	at Kentucky (24)	W, 38-21	61,654	
Oct. 21	(20) SOUTH CAROLINA	W, 34-12	62,621	
Nov. 4	(14) at Georgia (1)	L, 30-21	92,746	
Nov. 11	(16) TENNESSEE (14)	W, 36-7	62,621	
Nov. 18	(11) FLORIDA	W, 33-31	62,621	
Nov. 25	(10) at Arkansas	W, 48-14	59,847	
Dec. 29	(9) vs. Ohio State (7)	8 p.m.		

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

Team Statistics			
	MIS	Opp	
First Downs	265	222	
Rushing	110	85	
Passing	135	114	
Penalty	20	23	
Average Per Game/Rush	169.4	125.0	
Average Per Game/Pass	273.5	222.2	
Total Offense	5315	4166	
Total Plays	803	770	
Average Per Game	442.9	347.2	
Average Per Play	6.6	5.4	
Penalties-Yards	86-669	89-729	
Fumbles-Lost	8-2	21-9	
Third Down Efficiency	68-153	64-165	
Percentage	44%	39%	
Fourth Down Efficiency	8-12	11-17	
Percentage	67%	65%	
Sacks-Yards	35-348	20-124	
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:08	29:51	

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Missouri	86	125	73	125	0	409	34.1
Opponents	55	44	71	98	0	268	22.3

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Cody Schrader	247	1499	6.1	13	52
Nathaniel Peat	76	317	4.2	3	19
Brady Cook	94	253	2.7	8	25
Luther Burden	6	11	1.8	0	6
Mookie Cooper	1	3	3.0	0	3
Marquise Johnson	1	3	3.0	0	3
Sam Horn	3	-1	-0.3	0	6
Jamal Roberts	1	-1	-1.0	0	0
Luke Bauer	1	-11	-11.0	0	0
Team	13	-40	-3.1	0	0
MIS Totals	443	2033	4.6	24	52
OPP Totals	388	1500	3.9	8	41

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Brady Cook	233	351	66.4	3189	20-6	158.1
Sam Horn	3	6	50.0	54	1-1	147.3
Luke Bauer	1	1	100.0	39	1-0	757.6
Team	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
MIS Totals	237	360	65.8	3282	22-7	158.7
OPP Totals	240	382	62.8	2666	22-9	135.7

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Luther Burden	83	1197	14.4	8	56
Theo Wease	45	639	14.2	6	77
Mookie Cooper	34	429	12.6	0	41
Cody Schrader	22	191	8.7	0	43
Brett Norfleet	17	195	11.5	3	27
Marquis Johnson	12	333	27.8	3	76
Mekhi Miller	11	148	13.5	1	31
Nathaniel Peat	6	81	13.5	1	49
Tyler Stephens	5	49	9.8	0	20
Daniel Blood	2	20	10.0	0	16
MIS Totals	237	3282	13.8	22	77
OPP Totals	240	2666	11.1	22	61

Injury Ends Stellar Rookie Season For Jones

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Dawand Jones is a giant of a man who is hard to hide, but the former Ohio State offensive tackle fell through the cracks of the 2023 NFL draft until going to the Cleveland Browns in the fourth round as the No. 111 pick.

The Browns have counted their blessing since because Jones (6-8, 375 pounds) has become integral to their injury-plagued offense that has cobbled an 8-5 record through the 31-27 win against the Jacksonville Jaguars on Dec. 10.

Unfortunately for Jones, he became a casualty as well when the Browns announced on Dec. 11 that Jones sustained a season-ending knee injury in practice four days earlier. He was on the inactive list for the game against the Jaguars.

"I've seen Dawand make great strides on and off the field," Browns head coach Kevin Stefanski said. "I thought he got better as the season went on. I'm disappointed for him. He played well in a lot of these games and he's a young player that I think will just continue to get better."

Browns guard Wyatt Teller added, "I'm sad for Dawand. I've been praying for him."

Jones was thrust into the starting right tackle job after Jack Conklin suffered a season-ending knee injury in the opener. Now, Jones is added to the list of O-linemen out for the season which includes tackle Jedrick Willis and guard Drew Forbes.

"It's one of those things. It's been a crazy season," Teller said of the latest bad news.

In Jones's first 11 games (he did not play against the Baltimore Ravens on Nov. 12 because of a shoulder injury), he played 712 snaps with only two penalties and three sacks attributed to him. Among the league's four rookie tackles with at least 500 snaps, Jones had allowed the fewest penalties and sacks.

"He sees things better now, and getting more experience has been positive for him," said offensive line assistant coach Scott Peters. "Being consistent is the biggest issue we've been working through, and I think we've seen some positive gains there, too."

A highlight was the 13-10 win vs. the Pittsburgh Steelers on Nov. 19 when he allowed no pressures and no sacks despite going head-to-head 19 times against line-backer T.J. Watt.

"I always want to rise to the occasion," Jones said. "I feel like my junior year vs. Michigan, going against (Aidan) Hutchinson, I failed. It's out there for everyone to see. I think after that it did change for me, because I never wanted to feel that again. My mentality changed, everything changed."

His teammates see that on the training field.

"He practices so hard," center Ethan Pocic said. "I saw him grow every day. He is doing a great job and is open for criticism."

Speaking of disparagement, Jones got plenty of it after entering the draft following four seasons at Ohio State. He played

41 games for the Buckeyes with 27 starts: one against Michigan State in the COVID 19-shortened 2020 season, 13 at right guard as a junior in 2021 and 13 at right tackle as a senior.

Last season – when he did not allow a sack in more than 700 snaps – he was named a first-team All-American by CBS Sports and was a second-team All-Big Ten pick by the coaches.

"It was time for me to enter the NFL draft, and I was projected to go first or no later than second round," Jones said. "But that didn't happen because teams passed on me."

He wowed scouts at the first practice for the Senior Bowl but later in the week left without an explanation. He was out of shape at the NFL Combine, and his stock dropped further when he neither worked out nor agreed to a weigh-in at Ohio State's pro day in late March, a month before the draft.

Jones told ClevelandBrowns.com that he went through turmoil when three uncles died during that period. His cousin, Christy, also died of breast cancer a week before the draft.

"I only told the Bengals and the Eagles what I was enduring at that time," Jones said. "I thought one of those two teams would draft me definitely, but they passed on me because I wasn't in shape during interviews."

His cousin's death particularly hit him hard because she wanted to see him drafted. Jones later found a way to honor her memory.

"I wore cleats this past weekend for her," Jones said on Oct. 26. "I wrote the quote she used to always say to me. She knew that I wanted to go pro and always supported my dreams of being on the big stage. I loved her so much. She would always tell me from a young age that I was special and was going to the league."

"I never even told (the Browns) on my visit what I was going through, but they took the time to ask me about my life, what was going on, show me that they cared. I didn't know I was going to land here, but I definitely remembered that. I had a couple deaths around me. My weight got up. I missed some workouts. I went through a stretch where it felt like I had funerals every Friday and Saturday. I was sad, I was (overeating) and I just felt low. It was just a sad time in my life, and I was trying to fight through it at the exact time I was taking pre-draft visits."

Character Assassin

There was another reason teams looked at him warily prior to the draft. He said it was a personal and vindictive attack from one team that leaked information from a standard pre-draft interview where he said his dream was to play in the NBA, not the NFL.

He was a standout basketball player at Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis and had seriously considered going to Kent State on a basketball scholarship.

"I told the truth," Jones said. "They asked me, if you had to redo it, what would you pick? And I was honest. I gave an honest

answer, and I said that when I was a high school kid, I probably would have picked basketball over football."

"But my senior year (of high school), that started to change. So (four years) later I gave an honest answer, just like I'd been doing at Ohio State when reporters asked me when did I really start becoming a football player. It probably wasn't until my junior year of college. That's the real answer, but people weren't trying to hear it."

"I feel like I always thought I'd be a pro athlete. At the time, I probably wasn't fully in love with football, but it worked out."

He explained himself further in another interview but with a slightly different timeline.

"One of the reasons I chose Ohio State was definitely to help me get to the NFL, but I feel like I didn't really see it in myself until my sophomore year," Jones said. "That was my biggest jump. I caught up with the speed of the game."

"And I think the biggest thing now is just me continuing to catch up to the speed of the game. In the NFL, you're going against the best of the best every week."

Jones was crestfallen that he fell so far in the draft, particularly when the Indianapolis Colts drafted offensive tackle Blake Freeland of BYU at No. 106, five spots before Jones.

"By then I just was praying that I'd hear my name called," Jones said. "It wasn't like a lot of anger or really wondering then, it was more just being happy if any team took me. It was just crazy that nobody really believed in me."

"There were teams that had a chance. Most of them had three or four chances to draft me and they just went with a different guy. Blake is a great guy. I wish him the best, and I'd never talk down on him. It would have been nice to be a hometown guy there with the Colts, but it didn't happen, and I used that to motivate me."

The Right Fit

Browns general manager Andrew Berry said Jones, in a short amount of time, has proved his critics wrong.

"Dawand has done a nice job coming into some really challenging circumstances in the first half of the first game in his rookie year," he said. "He hasn't had a chance to catch his breath. He's played some really good pass rushers, and he's done well."

"Dawand has taken advantage of every resource that we've had within the organization, and particularly for that young man, the way he came into the organization with a lot of what I would (call) anonymous criticism, kind of attacking his work ethic, his character, he really has been fantastic. He's done a really nice job for us, and he should be commended for coming in and being prepared when his number was called much earlier than any of us anticipated."

Jones is appreciative of Berry.

"He took a chance on me after everyone passed on me based on my performance during Pro Day," Jones said. "I see him every day and dap him up."

Jones had to get in shape during training camp and worked his way to earning the trust of the coaches. In 148 pass-block-



FILE PHOTO

GET WELL SOON — Former Ohio State offensive tackle Dawand Jones was off to a solid start in his rookie season with the Cleveland Browns but was ruled out with a season-ending knee injury on Dec. 10.

ing snaps in three preseason games, Jones didn't allow a sack.

"Dawand has completely taken to what (offensive line coach Bill) Callahan has taught him," guard Michael Dunn said. "He wants to become a great player, and he has been improving every week. It's impressive to see how quickly he learned and got adjusted."

When Jones' number was called in the season opener, he answered.

"It's easy to say you're preparing every week when you know you're not a starter or you're probably not going to play much, but right away the starters told me to just be ready and so I did," he said. "I feel like I was as ready as I could be. So I've made some rookie mistakes, but also I knew the game plan. I've done the work."

Peters said the injury to Conklin forced Jones into a sink-or-swim mode, especially considering the Browns have lost running back Nick Chubb and quarterback Deshaun Watson to season-ending injuries and backup quarterback Dorian Thompson-Robinson has missed games as well.

Stefanski liked what he saw from Jones.

"Certainly, when you have a player that size, it makes life harder to get to the quarterback for those defensive ends," Stefanski said prior to the injury. "It's just a bigger body to go around or through."

"Like a lot of young players, Dawand is getting better. Not to say that it's perfect, and it's not going to be perfect, but I think he's getting better. I think he understands the amount of work that goes into a week to get ready to prepare for some of these edge rushers."

McCord's Transfer Leaves Hole At QB In 2024

Continued From Page 1

Ohio State," McCord said in a statement. "Playing in the scarlet and gray was truly an honor. I'm grateful for all of the lifelong relationships I've made along the way here in Columbus. My teammates, my brothers, I'm appreciative for each and every one of you. Thank you to Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach (Corey) Dennis, Coach (Todd) Fitch and the rest of the staff and support team.

"Buckeye Nation, your passion is what makes playing in Columbus special. With that being said, I've decided to enter the transfer portal to explore other opportunities."

It leaves Ohio State in an unenviable position of not knowing who might take the reins at quarterback next season. It could be Devin Brown or Lincoln Kienholz, who will be entering their third and second seasons, respectively, with the Buckeyes. It could be five-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 185) out of Fairburn, Ga., who will arrive on campus in January.

The more likely option, though, is just as McCord is utilizing the portal, Ohio State will look at the portal and see what options are out there at quarterback, whether it be an expected starter or someone who will compete with the other quarterbacks on the roster.

But how did Ohio State arrive at this situation, with McCord opting for supposedly greener pastures after joining Ohio State as a five-star recruit out of high school and waiting his turn behind C.J. Stroud, continuing to grow under Day's tutelage?

McCord had an up-and-down outing in his lone season under center for the Buckeyes, completing 65.8 percent of his passes (229 of 348) for 3,170 yards, 24 touchdowns and six interceptions. His passing yards and completion percentage represented the seventh- and sixth-best single-season marks in program history, and those marks came despite McCord not even entering the season as Ohio State's definitive starter.

He underwent a public battle with Brown before this season, with Day unable to name a starter after spring practice or fall camp. Too close to call, the battle extended through the first two games of the regular season with both signal callers seeing the field, and Day eventually named McCord the starter on Sept. 12.

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

So we're going to go ahead and make that distinction."

McCord showed promise in his first game as the full-time starter, throwing for 318 yards and three touchdowns in a 63-10 win over Western Kentucky, and he followed it up by engineering a 15-play, 65-yard drive against Notre Dame to set up Chip Trayanum's game-winning touchdown in a 17-14 win over the Fighting Irish.

"To win the game in a two-minute drill, that's what great quarterbacks do," Day said after the game. "And for his first top-10 road game, to be put in that situation and come through says a lot about his future. There were some big-time throws in there. He hung in there. He was poised. What a great win for our program."

McCord continued to take care of business through the first seven games of the regular season, leading the offense through slow starts and lack of production from the running game while TreVeyon Henderson was out for several games.

"From Week 1 to Week 7, looking at it from the grand scheme of things, I feel like, personally I've just gotten more comfortable," McCord said. "More comfortable in the system, more comfortable in my leadership role, just more comfortable in all facets of the game. At the same time, as good as it is that we're 7-0, I think there's so much room for improvement for not only myself, but the offense and the team. I think that's exciting."

But the honeymoon period for McCord's time as a starter began to end during Ohio State's 24-10 win at Wisconsin on Oct. 28. He threw two interceptions in the game and aggravated an ankle injury that he had suffered against Notre Dame, one that would afflict him for the remainder of the season, though it never caused him to miss a snap.

McCord's ball security and general passing ability then went under the microscope, as while just four of his passes were picked through the first nine games of the season, several would-be interceptions were dropped, and he was prone to occasionally sailing the ball past open receivers. He also faced pressure due to an offensive line that struggled in the early stages of the season, resulting in more than a few fumbles hitting the turf.

But to McCord's credit, most of those issues were in the first half of games. Ohio State's offense had a penchant for starting games slowly, and McCord often turned things around in the second half after he settled into the flow of a given contest. This was especially evident in wins over Mary-



FILE PHOTO

PORTAL COMBAT — Former Ohio State wide receiver Julian Fleming announced his entry into the transfer portal on Dec. 4 following four seasons with the Buckeyes.

land, Penn State and Rutgers, where the Buckeyes either trailed or were in a closer-than-expected battle before taking over in the final two quarters.

But despite the improvement McCord saw throughout the season, the tenor of his campaign — right or wrong — took a downturn after he threw two interceptions and completed just 60.0 percent of his passes in Ohio State's 30-24 loss to Michigan to end the regular season and extinguish any hopes of an appearance in the College Football Playoff.

"Games like this come down to one or two plays, and you prepare all offseason, you prepare all year long and your season really comes down to a handful of plays, whether you make them or you don't," McCord said after the game. "The margins of error, especially in games like this, are slim. It was obviously not the result we wanted."

Despite defensive lapses and some admitted coaching miscues against Michigan, most of the blame after the game went to McCord, who took a metaphorical beating from fans and media in the week following the loss. After Ohio State's bowl destination was announced — a date with Missouri in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 — Day defended McCord for his development throughout the season, even if it didn't end how anybody wanted.

"I think there were a lot of really good things this year," Day said on Dec. 3. "I think starting off at the beginning of the year, you can see some of the good things that were

going on, and I think as time went on, Kyle got better as the season went on. He had those ankle injuries that he worked through. He showed toughness there. Certainly in the Notre Dame game, he played really well down the stretch.

"I think there was growth there, for sure, and I think he's a good quarterback, I do. After every year, you kind of evaluate everything and try to figure out what to do next. But I think there was a lot of progress made this year."

But it did not stop Day — who likely had some inkling at that point that McCord would be entering the portal — from confirming that Ohio State would explore potential options at quarterback, whether it was those already on the roster or potential transfer additions. And with McCord — Day's hand-picked quarterback in the 2021 recruiting class — finding a different school for his final year of eligibility, everything will be on the table for the Buckeyes.

"When you come up short, the bottom line is you've got to look at everything because you didn't get it done, and that's the thing that is just sobering here," Day said. "At 11-1, you come up short on the last possession, it's just not good enough. You've got to look at everything, and we will look at everything."

Fleming Headed Elsewhere For Final College Season

McCord's portal entry was shocking for Ohio State, but another surprise was the de-

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COVER STORY

parture of senior wide receiver Julian Fleming, who also announced his entry to the portal on Dec. 4 and will find a new school for his final year of college eligibility.

Fleming was Ohio State's highest-rated signee in the 2020 recruiting class, checking in as the No. 3 overall prospect and top-ranked receiver among his peers, but his career with Ohio State has been filled with stops and starts.

He was not afforded spring practice as a freshman due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and he then missed spring practice in his sophomore year following offseason shoulder surgery. That same season, he missed four games due to a hamstring injury, and all told, he had just 19 catches for 160 yards and a touchdown through his first two seasons.

But in his junior season, with an injury holding Jaxon Smith-Njigba out for most of the year and forcing Emeka Egbuka to play in the slot, Fleming started outside and posted career highs in receptions (34), yards (533) and touchdowns (six), ranking fourth, third and third on the team, respectively. He described his first three seasons as "rocky" prior to this year, but with him fully healthy entering this season, expectations were high for Fleming.

"With two bionic shoulders and everything put back together, I'm excited for him to have a great year," offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said in August.

But the amount of talent in Ohio State's receivers room – featuring Marvin Harrison Jr., Egbuka, Xavier Johnson, freshman Carnell Tate and even tight end Cade Stover – made it difficult for Fleming to stand out. He finished with 26 catches for 270 yards (just 10 ahead of Tate) and no score, with his receptions and yards both ranking fourth on the team.

While Fleming likely would have slotted in as a starter next season for Ohio State, he still would have competed with Tate, soon-to-be sophomore Brandon Inniss or even incoming five-star freshman Jeremiah Smith to be featured for the Buckeyes like Harrison and Smith-Njigba have been over the past few seasons.

Other Buckeyes Hit The Road

As stated above, Fleming and McCord are two of 14 Buckeyes who have entered their name into the transfer portal as of Dec. 11. Here's a brief recap of others who are set to depart Ohio State for another school:

- **Omari Abor, DE** – Abor entered the portal after two seasons with the Buckeyes and has three seasons of eligibility remaining. He redshirted last season, appearing in just one game, and saw the field in five games this season, finishing with two tackles and a tackle for loss. He has the sixth-most snaps among Ohio State's defensive ends.
- **Jyaire Brown, CB** – Brown entered the portal after two seasons at Ohio State and has three years of eligibility remaining. He redshirted this season, appearing in just four games as freshmen cornerbacks Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Calvin Simpson-Hunt appeared to pass him on the depth chart.
- **Reid Carrico, LB** – Carrico appeared in 19 games over three seasons, mostly appearing on special teams, and has two years

of eligibility remaining. He was a four-star prospect in the 2021 class out of Ironton, Ohio.

- **Victor Cutler Jr., OL** – Cutler entered the portal with one year of eligibility remaining after just one season with the Buckeyes. He transferred to Ohio State this past offseason from Louisiana-Monroe and competed for the starting center job in fall camp that went to redshirt freshman center Carson Hinzman. He then appeared in just five games for the Buckeyes as a backup.

- **Jakob James, OL** – James recently completed his fourth season with the program and has two seasons of eligibility remaining. He was another offensive lineman in the battle for the starting center job along with Cutler and Hinzman but lost out on the job, mostly appearing on special teams this season.

- **Parker Lewis, K** – Lewis entered the portal with one year of eligibility remaining after two seasons with the Buckeyes. He transferred to Ohio State from USC before last season and saw the field for just two kickoffs this season after sophomore walk-on Jayden Fielding beat him out for the team's placekicking job during fall camp.

- **Cameron Martinez, SAF** – Martinez is in the portal after four seasons at Ohio State and has two years of eligibility remaining. After playing in 13 games in both 2021 and 2022, Martinez saw the field for just three games this season as a backup at nickel safety. In four seasons, he appeared in 29 games with 40 tackles, an interception, four pass breakups and half a tackle for loss.

- **Evan Pryor, RB** – Pryor entered the portal after three seasons at Ohio State and has three years of eligibility remaining. He played in four games in his freshman season, rushing 21 times for 98 yards. He missed all of 2022 with a knee injury, and though healthy this season, he was buried on the depth chart behind Henderson, Miyan Williams, Chip Trayanum and Dallan Hayden, rushing just 19 times for 49 yards.

- **Joe Royer, TE** – Royer recently completed his fourth season with the Buckeyes and has two years of eligibility remaining. He appeared in 14 games for Ohio State, collecting four receptions for 24 yards.

- **Kye Stokes, SAF** – Stokes is in the portal after two seasons at Ohio State and has three years of eligibility remaining. After an impressive outing in last year's spring game, he saw the field in eight games last season, finishing with 12 tackles and a forced fumble. But with no shortage of safeties on the roster, Stokes appeared in just three games this season.

- **Chip Trayanum, RB** – Trayanum entered the portal after two seasons with the Buckeyes and has one season of eligibility remaining. He arrived at Ohio State following two seasons as a running back at Arizona State and had planned to play at linebacker, but injuries forced him back to running back, where he had remained since. He rushed 100 times for 465 yards and three touchdowns while at Ohio State, including the game-winner in Ohio State's 17-14 win at Notre Dame earlier this season.

- **Ryan Turner, CB** – Turner is yet another second-year defensive back to hit the portal. He redshirted last year and appeared in just two games this season for Ohio State. He has three seasons of eligibility remaining.



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Media Reactions To McCord Entering Portal

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

To the surprise of most Ohio State fans – and college football fans around the country – junior quarterback Kyle McCord announced on Dec. 4 that he would enter the transfer portal to look for a new school for the 2024 season.

Since then, there have been criticisms directed at McCord, head coach Ryan Day and the transfer portal itself. Before McCord's departure, Day did not commit to McCord as his starting quarterback for next season, or even the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 after it was announced that's where the Buckeyes would be playing to finish the year. Whether that had any impact on the quarterback's decision or not, it was a choice that sparked plenty of conversation.

Here are some reactions from the media in and outside of Columbus after McCord announced his decision:

"As for Day, the quarterback whisperer – whose whisper grows fainter with the McCord experiment falling short – cannot be blamed for wanting to move in a different direction, if indeed such is the case. Watching how he interacted with McCord during games, one gets the feeling Day was never satisfied with his QB's decision-making. It did not require being a lip reader to decipher Day's frustration with what McCord was seeing, or not seeing, on the field. It was rare to see Day scream at C.J. Stroud or Justin Fields the way he harangued McCord.

"Not that the criticism was unjustified. It's just that there were too many times when coach and quarterback were not on the same page. It could be that Day's method of development fell on somewhat deaf ears, or that Day has become so accustomed to working with NFL-caliber talent that McCord presented too much of a drop-off. It

also could be that Day signed the wrong quarterback. If so, that swing and miss is on him, not the player.

"My big question with McCord always was whether he could show the type of consistent top-shelf ability needed to lead OSU to a Big Ten title and beyond. I had my doubts. It is fair to assume he would have improved during the offseason, but with a ceiling lower than what Day is accustomed to, it also is fair to be suspicious of whether the improvement would have been enough to offset the looming losses of talent that includes Marvin Harrison, Jr., Emeka Egbuka, Julian Fleming, Cade Stover and TreVeyon Henderson.

"There also was the issue of McCord's legs. Look around college football (and, increasingly, the NFL); a quarterback must be able to run, if not to daylight at least from trouble. Mobility is not just an asset but a requirement. McCord displayed decent poise in the pocket and showed some signs of evading the rush, but not enough to bail out the offense against playoff-caliber defenses. Not being an elite thrower, McCord's legs needed to be an X factor instead of an X-out factor."

– **Rob Oller,**
The Columbus Dispatch

"Happy marriages do not end in divorce, which should tell us something about McCord's surprise separation from Ohio State football as dawn broke on the transfer portal (on Dec. 4).

"Day earned some benefit of the doubt with one record-shattering season with Dwayne Haskins, providing an obvious soft landing spot for Fields' transfer and catching late-blooming lightning in a bottle with Stroud. Day's influence in the performance of those quarterbacks cannot be ignored. Neither can how badly the McCord episode unfolded, down to its conclusion.

"Asked to assess his quarterback's play immediately after The Game, Day focused on turnovers and the loss. By the time he spoke at a Selection Sunday press conference (on Dec. 3), the response remained the same. With candor McCord likely found unsettling, Day could not answer whether the quarterback would operate as the starter against Missouri in the Cotton Bowl.

"A chicken-before-the-egg question persisted. Did Day speak with such lack of commitment toward McCord because he knew Monday's announcement was coming, or did the way Day spoke prompt McCord's decision?

"McCord did not deliver pristine quarterback play. He started games off too slow and looked too shaky in the pocket well into the season. But his overall performance ranked in the upper tier of the sport. There is no guarantee whoever succeeds him will do better.

"However, if McCord believed he deserved the same starter guarantee that Stroud received over him after the 2021 season, that would qualify as perhaps his worst read of the season."

– **Nathan Baird,**
Cleveland.com

"When it comes to the departure of McCord, either the quarterback was told he'd again have to compete for the job he thought he'd won in August, or that the Buckeyes were going to bring in a QB from the portal – or both.

"For now, the job is (Devin) Brown's to lose. He's been in the system longer than (Lincoln) Kienholz and has played meaningful snaps as a Buckeye. McCord could return and get back into the mix, but that seems unlikely at this point.

"What's more likely is that Day finds some competition for Brown and Kienholz in the portal. There are plenty of options out there, including signal-callers with winning pedigrees.

"One clear thing is that Day realized he couldn't keep doing things the same way. He needed to mix things up. And so here we are with a mini-exodus from Columbus into the portal, including the starting quarterback. Change is coming."

– **RJ Young,**
FOX Sports

"McCord's announcement actually saddened me when thinking about the current state of college football because the pressure to win and compete for championships is at an all-time high with conference television contracts and name, image and likeness deals for players.

"Many fans often say that athletes know 'what they signed up for' when coming to a powerhouse program like Ohio State; however, in the midst of all the high expectations to be in the national championship conversation every season, I think that many often forget that these players are college kids navigating their lives through all of the difficulties and challenges they face in the scrutiny of the public eye.

"I pray that McCord finds success at his next school, and as a Buckeye fan I'm sorry that he did not have more time here to pursue his dreams. Unfortunately, in a similar manner like Florida State, McCord did not always pass the eye test on the field, and in this fierce win-at-all-costs era of college football, there just wasn't enough time for him in Columbus."

– **Jessica Johnson,**
The Columbus Dispatch

"Day came to Columbus to chase something that was probably never meant to be caught, and three straight times he caught lightning in a bottle. That level of success was never attainable. But it's what he wants and that comes with doing whatever is necessary to find that.

"Sometimes that's taking a highly-rated quarterback in every cycle, which to this point he's achieved. Only once has he failed to sign a quarterback who wasn't a top-50 recruit (Kienholz). Other times it's making it very clear you're willing to move on from your starting quarterback, knowing there is a good chance he'll head for the transfer portal.

"Day has unrealistic standards for his quarterback room, and on three separate occasions he's met those expectations. Now he has no choice but to maintain them even if that means taking a significant risk every

offseason to do so."

– **Stephen Means,**
Cleveland.com

"Perhaps the most stunning entry into the transfer portal came (Dec. 4), when McCord announced that he is looking for a new school. McCord started every game this season and led the Buckeyes to an 11-1 record. He completed 65.8 percent of his passes and threw for 3,170 yards. He had 24 touchdowns and just six interceptions.

"At any prior point in the history of Ohio State football, coaches and fans would've looked at that season and seen a bright future as McCord continued to develop. Instead, everyone is looking back on the Michigan loss and declaring McCord incapable of winning the Big Ten, let alone a national title.

"I think he's a good quarterback, I do,' Day said (on Dec. 3), hardly a ringing endorsement of McCord. 'After every year, you evaluate everything and try to figure out what to do next.'

"That's football in 2023. Day isn't wrong. He needs to put the best players he can on the field, even if that means finding his own transfer to replace McCord. The man is 57-7 as a head coach, yet in Columbus, much of the discussion is about his 0-3 mark against Michigan the past three seasons. Fans don't have much patience, either.

"So now Day can try to find a quarterback he truly believes in. And McCord can find a program and coach that truly believe in him."

– **Dan Wetzel,**
Yahoo Sports

"When at his best, McCord shows off elite arm talent. He can sometimes get rushed in the pocket, which impacts his feet, but he has a strong arm and throws the ball on a line in tight windows. When he wasn't pressured this season, McCord ranked seventh nationally in pass efficiency rating, per TruMedia. Don't let the loss to Michigan or some of his inconsistencies fool you: McCord has talent.

"But Ohio State had offensive line issues this season and McCord struggled against pressure, ranking 94th in pass efficiency rating by completing 39.2 percent of his passes. It's definitely not up to the caliber of an Ohio State starting quarterback. That also trickled over to his progressions on the field. McCord had a tendency to look at his first target, and if it wasn't there he was either pressured or checking it down to a running back. The check downs are fine, but he missed people running open downfield. He seemed to find a rhythm as the games went on, but those issues hurt Ohio State in the first halves of games. You never knew from drive-to-drive whether you'd get the elite arm talent or the quarterback who wasn't comfortable in the pocket.

"McCord may have seen the writing on the wall that Day was going to look into the transfer portal at quarterback options and perhaps did not want to go through another QB competition in Columbus after already winning one last summer."

– **Cameron Teague Robinson,**
The Athletic

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (11-1, 8-1)

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, W 37-3; **25** at Michigan, L 30-24.

Dec. 29 vs. Missouri in Cotton Bowl at Arlington, Texas.

FOOTBALL 2024

Aug. 31 AKRON.

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 (8-2, 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, W 76-52; **19** WESTERN MICHIGAN, W, 73-56; **24** Emerald Coast Classic at Niceville, Fla. vs. Alabama, W 92-81; **25** Emerald Coast Classic at Niceville, Fla. vs. Santa Clara, W 86-56; **29** CENTRAL MICHIGAN, W 88-61.

Dec. 3 MINNESOTA, W 84-74; **6** MIAMI (OHIO), W 84-64; **9** at Penn State, L 83-80; **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 (8-1, 1-0)

Nov. 6 Naismith Hall of Fame Series at Las Vegas vs. USC, L 83-74; **12** IUPUI, W 108-58; **16** BOSTON COLLEGE, W 88-66; **20** Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. East Carolina, W 79-55; **22** Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. Oklahoma State, W 75-57; **26** CORNELL, W, 83-40.

Dec. 3 at Tennessee, W 78-58; **5** OHIO, W 85-45; **10** PENN STATE, W 94-84 (OT); **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.

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, Men 4-2, Women 2-4.

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.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (5-8-4, 0-8-2)

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, W 6-3, W 4-3.

Dec. 1-2 Wisconsin, L 3-0, L 6-1; **8-9** MINNESOTA, L 5-4, T 1-1 OT (SW); **30** MERCYHURST.

Jan. 5 BOWLING GREEN; **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 (16-2-0, 13-1-0)

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; **17-18** WISCONSIN, W 3-0, W 2-1 OT; **24-25** ST. LAWRENCE, W 11-0, W 5-1.

Dec. 1-2 ST. CLOUD STATE, L 2-1, W 6-2; **9-10** MINNESOTA STATE, W 6-1, W 4-1

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 SWIM & DIVE (2-0)

Oct. 28 VIRGINIA TECH, W 193.5-178.5.



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Nov. 10 DENISON, W 186.0-103.0; **16-18** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 2nd; **29-Dec. 2** Toyota US Open at Greensboro, N.C., NTS.

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, 1st; **29-Dec. 2** Toyota US Open at Greensboro, N.C., NTS.

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-Amercian Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.

Oct. 1-8 ITA All-Amercian 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 VOLLEYBALL (11-18, 8-12)

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.

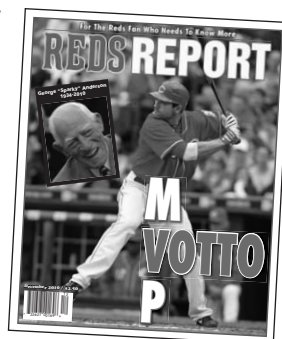
Oct. 1 MARYLAND, W 3-0; **6** Rutgers, W 3-1; **7** Penn State, L 3-2; **13** ILLINOIS, W 3-1; **15** PURDUE, L 3-1; **18** Wisconsin, L 3-0; **21** Indiana, L 3-2; **25** Northwestern, W 3-0; **29** Michigan, L 3-1.

Nov. 3 MINNESOTA, L 3-1; **4** INDIANA, W 3-1; **8** MICHIGAN STATE, W 3-0; **12** Maryland, L 3-0; **15** Illinois, L 3-2; **18** Minnesota, L 3-0; **24** PENN STATE, L 3-0; **25** RUTGERS, W 3-1.

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Several Buckeyes Face NFL Draft Decisions

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The break between the regular season and bowl season is often when players start to decide whether they will return for another season or depart for the NFL draft, and that process is expedited this season for Ohio State after it learned on Dec. 3 that it will play in the Cotton Bowl vs. Missouri instead of the College Football Playoff.

Running back Miyan Williams has already declared for the NFL draft in the time since the Buckeyes' bowl destination was announced, and others are expected to follow suit leading up to the game, regardless of whether they will take the field in the Cotton Bowl.

But decisions still exist for a handful of Buckeyes who could return for another season or try their hand at the NFL draft, though last year's results – with Ronnie Hickman going undrafted and Dawand Jones and Luke Wypler both falling further than expected – may cause some to exercise caution as they weigh their options.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look at which Buckeyes have decisions to make regarding an extra year with the program or departing early for the NFL. Draft projections are according to NFLMockDraftDatabase.com.

Wide Receivers

Little attention should be given to any discussion of junior wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. returning for another season with the Buckeyes. While Harrison has made good-intentioned arguments for why he could come back for an additional year, noting that he has yet to defeat Michigan or win a Big Ten championship, the expectation from all circles is that this will be Harrison's final season at Ohio State.

There is another receiver on the roster, though, who does have a decision to make. Fellow junior wideout Emeka Egbuka has



FILE PHOTO

DECISIONS, DECISIONS — Ohio State junior wideout Emeka Egbuka will have to decide soon whether he wants to stay with the Buckeyes for an additional season or enter his name in the NFL draft.

yet to announce whether he will return for another season or depart for the draft, and there's an argument to be made either way.

Egbuka finished with 35 receptions for 452 yards and four touchdowns in nine games during the regular season, one where he was limited by injuries in what should have been a dominant season. Instead, he finished the regular season third on the

team in receptions, yards and touchdowns behind Harrison and tight end Cade Stover.

With the departure of wide receiver Julian Fleming to the transfer portal, Egbuka would be a clear top option for Ohio State and whichever quarterback is under center next season.

That being said, if he were to depart for the draft, he is still widely considered a top-10 receiver, with many considering him a mid- to late-first-round selection. But an additional year with the Buckeyes as Ohio State's featured receiving option could elevate his stock to new heights.

"Egbuka has breakaway speed and is an expert at finding space in the middle of the field without losing any juice," The Athletic's Nick Baumgardner wrote. "Capable of playing inside or out, Egbuka also plays with terrific body control."

Defensive Linemen

Ohio State's defensive line could be looking at a major overhaul after this season with the number of players in the trenches who might depart the program.

Junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau is at the top of the leaderboard when it comes to Ohio State's defensive linemen, projected as a first-round pick after collecting six tackles for loss, a team-high four sacks and two pass breakups this season.

"Tuimoloau is quicker than he is fast, with all sorts of twitch," Baumgardner wrote. "His pass-rush arsenal is advanced, diverse and polished, and his awareness around the line of scrimmage allows him to get his hands on a number of passes/strips.

His work on the edge as a run defender does leave a bit to be desired, but he's still just a true junior."

Tuimoloau is likely gone, but the rest of Ohio State's draft-eligible defensive linemen are anyone's guess. Junior defensive end Jack Sawyer seemed primed for a return to the Buckeyes about midway through this season after a slow start to his campaign, but he may have played his way into the draft after collecting 6½ tackles for loss and 3½ sacks over the last seven games of the regular season.

He is projected as a third-round pick along with junior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams. Williams was arguably Ohio State's most impactful defensive player this season, competing in all 12 games and totaling 50 tackles, 10 tackles for loss, three sacks and five pass breakups, doing a little bit of everything for defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unit.

Sawyer and Williams are both expected to be second-day selections – either in the second or third round – so having to wait to hear their names called would not be a concern. But a return to Ohio State and another pair of dominant seasons might just propel both to first-round consideration among NFL brass.

Redshirt sophomore Mike Hall Jr. is another defensive tackle who could depart, though he seems more likely than his fellow trench warriors to stay for at least another season. After collecting 7½ tackles for loss and a team-high 4½ sacks last season, he had just 21 tackles, two tackles for loss and 1½ sacks in 11 games this season.

Linebackers

Like the defensive line, linebacker is another position where the Buckeyes could be looking at replacing a majority of their production.

Fifth-year linebacker Tommy Eichenberg has already announced his participation in the 2024 Senior Bowl on Feb. 3 in Mobile, Ala., confirming he will not utilize his additional year of eligibility at Ohio State. He is projected as a day-two selection.

"Tommy really took the next step here this year, really helped himself I think, coming back for his senior year," head coach Ryan Day said on Dec. 3. "A lot of it had to do with his ability to diagnose plays, get the defense into checks, tie the front end to the back end and then just show up, play really hard."

"I think Tommy is one of the best linebackers in the country and has an opportunity to play himself – even in this last game – into one of the top linebackers coming out this year in the draft. But as a captain, he's been a great leader for us, and his production speaks for itself."

In addition to Eichenberg's departure, Ohio State's other two top linebackers from this season – seniors Steele Chambers and Cody Simon – have decisions of their own to make.

Both are projected as undrafted free agents, though Chambers has just one year of eligibility remaining and could potentially be pushed for his starting job, which could make jumping to the NFL a more intriguing option.

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FILE PHOTO

SENIOR SWAN SONG — Ohio State senior linebacker Cody Simon (R) could test the NFL draft waters, but a return for a fifth season with the Buckeyes seems likely with a starting role in the cards next year.

Simon, meanwhile, is still on the rise, and a likely starter for the Buckeyes next season — alongside either Chambers or

soon-to-be junior C.J. Hicks — and stands to gain more by returning for a fifth season at Ohio State. He finished the regular season

with 45 tackles — sixth most on the team despite mostly coming off the bench — and had three tackles for loss, more than either Chambers or Eichenberg.

Odds And Ends

A few other Buckeyes have decisions to make regarding their draft status, and the most important outstanding decision awaited is from running back TreVeyon Henderson.

With the departure of Williams to the draft and transfer portal entries of Evan Pryor and Chip Trayanum, the tea leaves are indicating a return for Henderson could be in the works. It would be a significant boost for the Buckeyes after he showed a return to his freshman form this season, rushing 137 times for 854 yards and 11 touchdowns in nine games.

But with the diminishing value of running backs in the NFL, Henderson may be better served making the jump and getting a head start on his NFL career rather than utilizing another season in college with more tread coming off the tires. Furthermore, another season limited by injuries could further harm Henderson's current second-round stock, leaving him plenty to consider as the deadline approaches.

Another starter on offense in junior left guard Donovan Jackson also appears to be leaning toward a return, though he's given no official indication as to his decision.

If he were to depart, Jackson — following a down year for Ohio State's offensive line — is projected as a fourth-round selection with the potential for a later selection considering the fall of Jones and Wypler in

last year's draft. With depth a concern for the Buckeyes on the offensive line, a return would be in the best interest of both parties.

On defense, a part-time starter who could be exploring options is junior cornerback Jordan Hancock. He appeared in all 12 regular-season games with 38 tackles, a sack, two interceptions and four pass breakups, splitting time at outside cornerback and nickel safety, and was third among Ohio State's defensive backs with 542 snaps.

A senior season seems likely for Hancock, though he did leave some wondering if he may try his hand at the NFL following Ohio State's 38-3 win over Minnesota on Nov. 18. After the win, he tweeted out, "Last one in the shoe, had to," in response to a video of Ohio State's unsportsmanlike conduct penalty following a celebration.

It's possible Hancock was referring to the last game in Ohio Stadium of this season, but he is one to watch as draft declarations begin to trickle in over the next few weeks.

Senior safety Lathan Ransom has also given no indication as to whether he will enter the draft. But given the way his season finished — missing the last four games after suffering a lower-body injury — he could be enticed to come back for a final season.

As a fifth-year tight end, Stover is another who could theoretically come back given that he has another season of eligibility, but considering how close the decision was last season when he elected to come back, it's likely this will be Stover's last season with the Buckeyes.

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Second Halves Derailing Bucks Against U-M

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

From 2012-2019, Ohio State routinely dominated its archrivals on the final college football Saturday of the regular season. With Urban Meyer at the helm from 2012-2018 and Ryan Day taking over in 2019, the Buckeyes defeated Michigan in The Game an impressive eight times in a row, with five of those wins coming by double digits – and three of the victories (2015, 2018, 2019) coming by 23 points or more.

The eight-year stretch marked a historic period of success for the Buckeyes in the rivalry, as it was the longest win streak by either program since Fielding H. Yost's Wolverines defeated Ohio State nine times in a row from 1901-1909.

"You never lose to those pricks," Meyer told the team during their Rose Bowl and Gold Pants ceremony on April 11, 2019. "Ever. You work on it every day. I don't give a s-t if you're from California or Texas or whatever. As soon as you say you're a Buckeye, this is part of your life for the rest of your life. You don't lose to those pricks. You beat them every day. Every day."

While a similar type of disdain for Michigan may still permeate the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in this current era of Ohio State football, the results of the last three iterations of The Game have not backed up Meyer's parting words to the program.

Since 2021, what had been an annual drubbing of its rivals has instead turned into a three-year run of disappointment for Ohio State, when Jim Harbaugh's Wolverines have flipped the script on Day's Buckeyes with three straight program-defining wins, with two of the victories coming by at least 15 points.

The recent losses to Michigan have been mostly attributed to a trio of second-half collapses, where Ohio State has consistently fallen flat in the game's final 30 minutes. Ohio State stayed within reach of Michigan in the first half for each of the three losses, even holding a 20-17 lead heading into the locker room in 2022. But the second halves told a much different story, where the Buckeyes were outscored 72-31 in the rivalry over the last three seasons en route to a trio of crushing losses.

Ohio State's second-half shortcomings may have differed in all three defeats, and there are also many factors to consider when analyzing what went wrong– most notably Michigan's alleged sign-stealing scheme that gave it an apparent scouting advantage in 2021 and 2022. However, the results of the games still signify a concerning trend in Day's program that the team needs to address if they want to turn the rivalry back in their favor.

But how exactly did each game turn south on the Buckeyes in the second half? Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with three Ohio State beat writers – Dayton Daily News' Marcus Hartman, 247Sports' Steve Helwage and Eleven Warriors' Dan Hope – who each had boots on the ground during all three second-half collapses.

Ohio State's late-game heartbreak against Michigan began in 2021, when then-second-year quarterback C.J. Stroud



FILE PHOTO

SECOND-HALF STRUGGLES — Ohio State's losses to Michigan over the past three seasons have largely been sparked by defensive lapses in the second half, with players such as Wolverine running back Blake Corum (right) taking advantage.

and his high-flying offense squared off against a hungry 10-1 Wolverines team looking to return to the win column in The Game for the first time since 2011. Despite temperatures hovering around 30 degrees at kickoff and a steady snow falling, the No. 2-ranked Buckeyes looked poised to increase the win streak to nine games early on, taking a 10-7 lead with 9:12 left in the first half after Stroud found wide receiver Garrett Wilson down the sideline for a 25-yard score. But according to Hartman, the team lacked energy in the first two quarters and seemed unprepared to build upon the streak with a hard-fought road victory, a mentality that he thought came back to bite them in the game's final 30 minutes.

"Michigan was more motivated in 2021," Hartman said. "I do think (Ohio State) got a little fat and happy. Supposedly the flu went through the team in 2021, but they literally looked like they didn't practice."

The Buckeyes played well enough to remain in reach entering halftime, heading into the locker room trailing just 14-13 after a 30-yard field goal from Noah Ruggles. But things took a turn for the worse in the final two frames, where Ohio State was seemingly outclassed and outmuscled in every aspect of the game.

Ohio State's struggles started on the defensive end, where the unit allowed Michigan's imposing offensive line to control the

line of scrimmage. This paved the way for the Wolverines' running back trio of Blake Corum, Donovan Edwards and Hassan Haskins to rush for 175 yards on 16 carries – a 10.9-yard average – in the second half, while also adding four scores from Haskins, all of which helped Michigan create some separation and eventually cruise to a convincing 42-27 win.

According to Hope, the Buckeyes' inability to stop the run – along with their inability to run the ball themselves – during the last two quarters of that game ultimately allowed the Wolverines to end the streak and come away with the upset victory. This was a result he thinks may have been attributable to Ohio State's lack of toughness and physicality in the trenches during that half, which he said became a major reference point for Day two seasons later.

"I think it's pretty simple," Hope said. "They couldn't stop the run, and they couldn't run the ball. That was very much the story of that game was that Ohio State just got dominated in the run game on both sides of the ball, and that was why the game got away from them."

"There was kind of a question, at least coming out of that game, about the team's toughness and physicality that year. When Ryan Day brought up in his Notre Dame postgame press conference (earlier this season) that 'We had one bad half,' that was

the half he was referring to, that second half against Michigan, where they basically just got their a-- kicked on both sides of the ball. People still have those physicality and toughness narratives about the team, and I don't think that's really accurate if you're assessing the last three years, but I think it was accurate in that game."

Hope mostly pointed to the Buckeyes' faults in their rushing defense that led to the loss in 2021, but Hartman said much of the blame for the second-half collapse – one he called an "all-system failure" – can also be placed on the offense. He argued that the team's one-dimensional approach on offense – one they possessed all season – allowed Michigan and its talented pass rushers to toy with Stroud and the Buckeyes' offensive line as the game progressed. Ohio State rushed for just 5 yards on 16 carries, a 0.3-yard average, in the second half, a development Hartman thinks helped future NFL defensive ends Aidan Hutchinson and David Ojabo zero in on the quarterback and sack Stroud a combined three times in the final two quarters.

"In 2021, they didn't run the ball at all in the second half of the year," Hartman said. "They became a lot more one-dimensional, which makes the pass rush better. So when it's just one-on-one against an NFL defensive end, you're going to lose that. If you're just dropping back all the time, you just become a sitting duck back there. Day did not develop a running game to the point that he could trust it in the last month or six weeks of the season. That really came home to roost against Michigan, and the weather obviously didn't help."

Ohio State's lack of toughness up front and predictable offensive scheme may have been the leading factors in its 2021 second-half struggles against Michigan, but the collapse in 2022 in Columbus told a much different story.

Once again led by Stroud and his talented pass-catchers – this time sophomores Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka – the No. 2-ranked Buckeyes looked like they were inching toward a revenge victory early on. They marched down the field on their very first possession to take an early 7-0 lead and then scored on two of their final four offensive possessions in the first half – excluding a kneel down from Stroud just before halftime – to take a 20-17 advantage into the locker room.

Unlike the season prior, the Buckeyes were limiting Michigan's run game, holding the Wolverines to just 10 yards rushing on 11 attempts in the first two quarters, a 0.9-yard average. But Ohio State also allowed two long passing touchdowns of 69 and 75 yards by Cornelius Johnson in the second quarter, a trend that only worsened for Jim Knowles' defense coming out of halftime.

Despite the big plays – of which the Wolverines added another with a 45-yard touchdown in the third quarter – the Buckeyes stayed within reach early in the fourth, trailing just 31-23 with 7:23 remaining after a seven-play, 52-yard drive ended with a 27-yard Ruggles field goal.

But Ohio State's hopes of a comeback were quickly quashed just 12 seconds later when Edwards took a handoff from J.J. McCarthy, found a gaping hole near the

right hashmark and streaked past a diving Lathan Ransom for a 75-yard touchdown. Then, after another long Ohio State drive led to a Stroud interception, Edwards put the game to bed with another explosive run, this time an 85-yard touchdown, giving the Wolverines a resounding 45-23 lead.

Helwagen was quick to point to these two significant runs as the difference in the game. He recalled the plays as a stunning sequence of events that occurred due to a lack of execution and some coaching blunders from Knowles and his unit, which he said served as a microcosm of the defense's lapses all half.

"I don't know how you can explain what happened late in the game," Helwagen said. "Donovan Edwards ripped off two really long touchdown runs. They just caught Ohio State in some bad defensive calls with no safety in center field to stop the run. And he gets through the first line, and there's nobody there. It looked almost identical, those two plays. Terrible calls by the defense. Between the bad play calls and the mistakes from the defensive backs, Ohio State could not stop Michigan.

"And then offensively, C.J. Stroud picked a bad day to not have one of his better games. He had an interception toward the end of the game when they're trying to get a comeback going. It was one of the worst losses in Ohio Stadium, probably in two decades, for Ohio State. Just a miserable day all the way around."

The Buckeye offense also failed to make the big play in the second half of the game, generating just 177 total yards of offense and three points in the final 30 minutes, and even when Ohio State did have a positive play – a 24-yard pass to Chip Trayanum midway through the third quarter – it was immediately negated by a holding penalty and unsportsmanlike conduct call that killed the drive.

According to Hartman, Ohio State's inability to put together explosive plays and string together positive drives was a result of Day and his staff abandoning the run game in the second half, a development that again made Stroud and the offense more predictable for Michigan.

"I hardly even remember (Ohio State) having the ball in the second half," Hartman said. "Nothing sticks out to me with what Ohio State did offensively in the second half. In the first half, they were moving the ball up and down the field, running and passing. And (Day) kind of went away from the running game, even though it was working. And then that obviously creates a larger disadvantage. Michigan wants you to run the ball some, so you have to do it, because they're going to play guys in coverage all the time anyway."

Despite the obvious inefficiencies in both Day's offense and Knowles' defense, Helwagen said there is another factor at hand that could have played a significant role in Ohio State's second-half collapse – that being Michigan's alleged sign-stealing efforts. Helwagen pointed to former Wolverines' staffer Connor Stalions and his elaborate scheme – one that was caught on video during last season's matchup – as something that could have stymied the Buckeyes' offense after halftime in each of the two seasons he was on staff.

"There's definite evidence," Helwagen said. "Channel 10 here in Columbus had

a video clip of C.J. Stroud looking for the signal and him receiving the signal. And then it showed everybody on the Michigan sideline reacting to what it was going to be – a pass – and lo and behold, it was a pass. If the defense knows what's coming, it definitely helps the bottom line.

"I think there is definitely some merit to the fact that Connor Stalions and his scheme were in full force in 2022, perhaps in 2021. And it would take somebody that can investigate deeper than I can to give you the exactitudes of it. But to me, I think it's almost a certainty that they knew something about Ohio State and what they were trying to do."

Stalions' antics were not present in this year's version of The Game, after he resigned from his position on Nov. 3. Also not present was Harbaugh, who was suspended by the Big Ten for the final three games of the regular season as a result of the ongoing sign-stealing investigation. But even without these two fixtures on the Wolverines' sidelines, the Buckeyes still reverted to their old habits and turned in another subpar second-half performance against their rivals.

Like the previous two seasons, Ohio State kept it close with the Wolverines before halftime, entering the locker room trailing just 14-10. The score could have been even closer, though, if Day had attempted to move his offense deeper into Wolverine territory on the final drive of the first half instead of winding the clock down and attempting a 52-yard field goal on fourth-and-2, one that kicker Jayden Fielding hooked left.

But the Buckeyes were once again unable to break through in the second half and come out on top, mostly due to a series of late defensive lapses. Ohio State's vaunted defense, which entered the game giving up just 9.3 points and 252.9 yards per game, held Michigan's versatile offense to just 119 total yards in the first half, with only 34 coming on the ground.

Knowles' unit showed some cracks in its armor in the final two frames, though, where they allowed the Wolverines to score on all four of their possessions – excluding a McCarthy kneel-down to end the game – and gain 219 total yards of offense to Ohio State's 185, with 122 of those yards coming by way of the rush.

According to Hartman, Ohio State's uncharacteristic defensive lapses were most apparent during Corum's 22-yard touchdown run late in the third quarter. On that play, he broke through a hole on the left side of the line and reached the end zone to break a 17-17 tie and give the Wolverines the 24-17 lead, a lead that they never relinquished.

Hartman pointed to this play as the most important moment of the game, one that swung momentum back in Michigan's favor and eventually propelled them to a 30-24 win and third straight victory in the rivalry.

"When you look back at it, it'd be that Corum touchdown (that led to Michigan coming out on top)," Hartman said. "Ohio State's offense looked great there on the last drive, and then not only did Ohio State's defense give up a drive, but they give up a touchdown. Michigan had no explosive runs all year, so that was inexcusable to give that up. If they force a field goal there, they can come back and take the lead. That

touchdown was like maximum momentum for them.

"And that was a completely preventable play. They didn't do anything special on that play. It was just Steele Chambers in the wrong gap, and then Sonny Styles misses a tackle. Neither of those things should happen. Those are both completely avoidable mistakes. And that's a 22-yard touchdown run. If they force a field goal there, then I think the game feels a lot different in terms of the way they're trying to come back."

Corum's third-quarter touchdown run gave Michigan the energy boost it needed to come out on top, and Hope said it was the defense's inability to get off the field that ultimately put the nail in Ohio State's coffin. He said these shortcomings were a product of Knowles overcompensating from his mistakes in 2022 and playing more conservatively this year, a change in philosophy that ultimately came back to harm him in the biggest moments of the season.

"Defensively, it was a different failure," Hope said. "If you don't include the kneel-down at the end of the game, Michigan scored points on every drive (of the second half). So when Ohio State needed its defense to be able to get off the field, it couldn't. That was a change from the whole year. Because when you look back at the Notre Dame game, the Penn State game that were both really close, when Ohio State needed its defense to make a big play to get off the field, it did. But it wasn't able to do that against Michigan, so that was certainly a factor.

"To some degree, I almost think you could say it was an overcorrection from last year. Ohio State might have been too conservative on defense, and they weren't really doing anything aggressive to try to make game-changing plays. They were just letting Michigan slowly pick them apart and drive down the field. We saw for the first 11 games of the year that bend-but-don't-break style defense worked really well for Ohio State."

While Ohio State's second-half lapses in this year's edition of The Game were far less severe than the collapses of the previ-

ous two seasons, Hartman said Knowles' conservative coaching style down the stretch serves as a microcosm of a more tentative approach that has spread through the coaching staff – as well as the entire team – since their first defeat to the Wolverines in 2021.

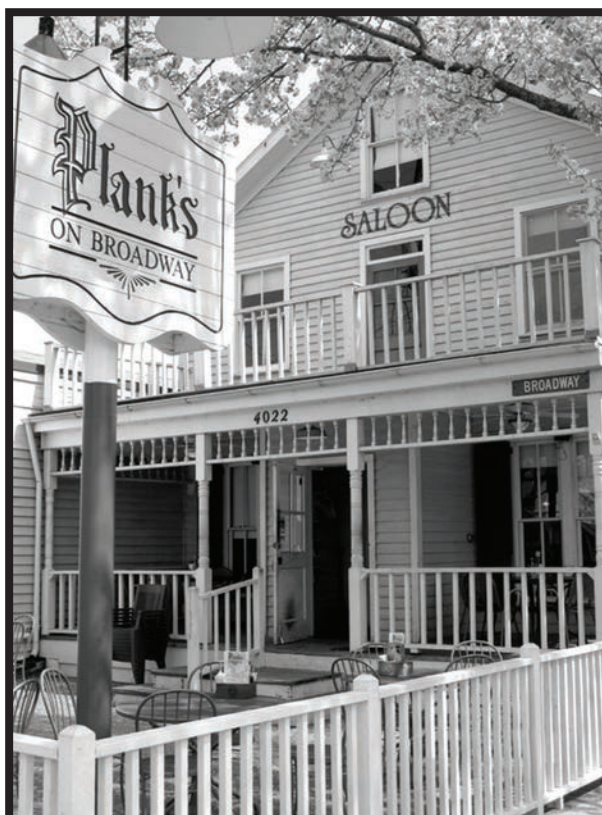
He mentioned that three consecutive losses have weighed heavily on the entire program and forced them to focus more on limiting mistakes and less on making aggressive, winning plays while facing off against their archrivals, a mental block that he thinks has ultimately led to the team's late-game collapses in each of the past two seasons..

"Since (2021), they've been chasing their tails, which is exactly the cycle they were in during the '90s where they're fighting themselves mentally," Hartman said. "If this was a thing where each team had won five of the last 10, you'd be like, 'That's just how it goes.' But everything is magnified because of losing the two previous two games. I do think that they made more mistakes because they're mentally shot. Michigan is just more confident, so they go into it believing that something will work out, and then they make it happen. Whereas Ohio State is looking for something to go wrong, so they don't play up to their best."

This is a mentality, according to Hartman, that the entire program must rid themselves of if they want to return to their winning ways in the rivalry – and also avoid making any significant changes to their leadership in the near future.

"They need to just go in with more confidence," he said. "In 1998, when they finally beat Michigan in a game that mattered, they got off to a big start. They punched them in the mouth and then controlled the game. They were better. So they need to just be able to execute better in the first half and take control of games (in the second half), and sometimes it just comes down to playing with confidence and being able to do it, just getting it done. Sometimes there's really no secret formula to it.

"Somebody just needs to make something happen."



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Change Needed In OSU's Approach To The Game

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When he coached at Ohio State, John Cooper was infamous for his inability to beat Michigan, finishing his career with a 2-10-1 record against the Wolverines, a stain on the history of the rivalry fans would rather forget. Jim Tressel was then hired in 2001, ushering in a new era when he went across enemy lines into Ann Arbor and won 26-20, starting a streak in which he would win nine out of 10 against Michigan.

That run of success continued with the Urban Meyer era of Buckeye football, as he boasted a 7-0 record over the Wolverines in his time at the helm. In total, Ohio State enjoyed a win in 17 out of 19 games from 2001-19, a dominance never seen before in the over 100-year history of the rivalry. Former players such as fullback Vaughn Broadnax, who played for the Buckeyes from 1980-83 and was 2-2 against Michigan, watched those years with amusement.

"It was great," he said. "We had the Michigan players and fans hiding in their realms like cicadas. They would come out every 10 years to chirp."

But since 2020, when The Game was canceled due to COVID-19 issues at Michigan with the Buckeyes favored by about 30 points, the luck has completely turned around, and the Wolverines have taken each of the last three games. Head coach Ryan Day is 1-3 against Michigan and head coach Jim Harbaugh, with only a 56-27 win in 2019.

"Now it's been three years straight," Broadnax said. "We've got to stop the chirping."

After a 42-27 loss in 2021, a 45-23 loss last year in Columbus and a 30-24 loss this season in which the Buckeyes never held the lead, the Cooper comparisons are flowing with unpleasant memories of the Scarlet and Gray taking a back seat in the rivalry leaving a sour taste in the mouths of Buckeye fans.

Both Day and the fans want to get back to beating the Wolverines like they were throughout the Tressel and Meyer eras of Buckeye football, but former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin (1977-79) doesn't think it's an easy road to get there, especially since Michigan is just a better football team than it has been for most of the 2000s.

"There's no question Michigan's better than they used to be," he said. "When Tressel was there, they had a couple of decent teams and then they got that coach, Brady Hoke, then they weren't that good. Even the first few years that Harbaugh was there, they weren't the same team. Now it's back to even."

Laughlin also suffered three straight losses to Michigan during his time at Ohio State, with the Buckeyes falling to the Wolverines from 1976-78, the last three years of Woody Hayes' tenure as head coach.

In his final season, Hayes – known for his distaste for Michigan – was as uptight as he normally was during the week of the rivalry game. He didn't approach the game any differently even though he was looking at the possibility of a third straight loss to the Wolverines.



FILE PHOTO

WINNING WAYS — Former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud is among several players who have now left the program without a win over Michigan, but the Buckeyes are looking to turn the tide in the rivalry after three consecutive wins by the Wolverines.

"Michigan week was huge," Laughlin said. "He was always very tight for Michigan week. He was tight as a drum. Nobody laughed. Nobody told any jokes. Everybody was buttoned-down serious. I don't think he did anything different. Michigan just had some great athletes then."

But the next year – with Earle Bruce now at the helm – Laughlin said going into The Game that he felt more pressure to get that win because of the losing streak, and because it was his last year in scarlet and gray.

"There was a lot of pressure on us," he said. "(Bruce), he downplayed it. We all knew we needed to beat them, and we had a better team. There's always pressure, but I don't think there was any undue pressure. Earle was very confident that we were going to go beat them."

In that game, Laughlin had a significant part in stopping the streak of losses when he blocked a punt that was returned for a touchdown by Todd Bell. That put the Buckeyes up 18-15, the eventual final score.

"I remember being on the ground looking up and seeing Todd running, and I'm like, 'Holy cow.' " Laughlin said. "Although I didn't say holy cow. I was like, 'You've got to be kidding me. He's going to run for a touchdown, and I just blocked the punt against Michigan, and we're going to win the game. Are you kidding me?' I couldn't believe it."

But those types of moments have not been felt in Columbus in several years at

this point. Eleven Warriors beat writer Dan Hope believes one of the issues could be that Day isn't originally from Ohio, instead hailing from New Hampshire, so he was not introduced to the rivalry and what it means until he started coaching in Columbus, unlike the coaches before him – like Hayes, Tressel and Meyer – who grew up with that knowledge.

"Urban Meyer took The Game as seriously as anyone," Hope said. "He's made it very, very clear over the years just how much beating Michigan means to him. That intense laser focus on beating Michigan, and it being something Ohio State absolutely had to have happen. He had that at a different level than Ryan Day does."

"Some of that has to do with the fact that Urban Meyer grew up in Ohio rooting for the Buckeyes, whereas Ryan Day didn't. I do think that it's a fair thing to say that inherently deep down, it meant more to Urban Meyer than it does to Ryan Day."

While there might need to be an adjustment in how Day approaches the rivalry if that's true, losing three straight games may just be the thing that changes his attitude. Broadnax believes the exact thing happened to Harbaugh after he lost his first five games in the rivalry.

"2020 allowed Michigan to regroup after deciding not to play because of COVID," Broadnax said. "They made some internal changes themselves because Jim Harbaugh

didn't really focus on the importance of the rivalry in his first few years, so he made a change. He started mimicking some of the things that Ohio State does, having a count-down clock to the game and focusing on Ohio State every day until the game."

Laughlin said he didn't question the decisions Day made in the loss this year to Michigan, but he was one of few. Broadnax believes the coach wasn't himself during the game and was coaching scared, something he needs to fix going forward if he wants Ohio State to get back to its winning ways against the Wolverines.

"It's just an attitude adjustment," Broadnax said. "This last game was so frustrating because we didn't attack coming out of the first half. We stopped the aggressiveness. If you're going to be aggressive, you have to be aggressive offensively and defensively in a rivalry game. If you're going to let it rip, let it rip during that game, because the most aggressive team that makes the fewest mistakes wins."

"I truly feel he understands the importance of the game and the rivalry. But sometimes people, they shrink up. Ryan has not allowed himself to be the confident play caller, the aggressive play caller he is in these recent years. You've got to call plays to put the opponent on their heels, and for whatever reason we're not doing that. We have to find a remedy for that, and that's of course with the coaching staff."

Looking back at his playing days under Bruce, who went 5-4 against Michigan, Broadnax said they would pull out all the stops so they could come out on top, which he did twice in his four years as a Buckeye. He said Bruce was always an aggressive coach, but even more so when it came to the rivalry game because they wanted to win it so badly.

"When you have an Ohio State-Michigan game and you have a coach that understands that rivalry, gets fired up, runs aggressive plays," Broadnax said, "I'm not going to toot my own horn, but we were playing Michigan at home, and it was fourth-and-1 at the 6-yard line. Earle Bruce is not going to kick a doggone field goal against Michigan."

"He's going to give the ball to a fullback and let him run, get that first down and run for the touchdown. You have to have that type of aggressiveness and confidence in your players that you're going to get it done, because if a coach doesn't have confidence, the team is not going to have confidence."

But beyond Day and Ohio State's approach to The Game and all that comes with the rivalry, another problem, according to 247Sports' Steve Helwagen, is some of the players themselves and how the team was built. He believes that needs fixed for Ohio State to get itself back on top of a rivalry between two top teams in all of college football.

"You're not good enough on the defensive line, you certainly weren't good enough on the offensive line this time around," Helwagen said. "You've got to improve those two areas first and foremost, going forward as a program. In 2024, 2025 whether you're playing Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, whoever you're playing, you've got to improve this program. It's not where it needs to be to win a national championship coming off

"We've got to understand the importance of the rivalry and the bragging rights," Broadnax said. "These guys that played three years, they don't have a pair of gold pants. Well, it's on them and the coaching staff because they had the talent to win. The players at Ohio State have to understand the rivalry between Michigan and Ohio State and not talk about it – do something about it."

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IU Hires Cignetti Away From James Madison

Indiana announced on Nov. 30 that it had hired James Madison head football coach Curt Cignetti to fill the same position for the Hoosiers. Indiana had previously fired former head coach Tom Allen on Nov. 26.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

"I am excited to lead this program forward and change the culture, mindset and expectation level of Hoosier football," Cignetti said. "I want to thank director of athletics Scott Dolson and president Pam Whitten, and I look forward to working with both in building something special at IU. Both share my vision and belief that big things are ahead for the IU program."

The former West Virginia quarterback has been in coaching since 1983, with assistant stints at Pittsburgh, Temple, NC State and Alabama and head coaching jobs with Division II Indiana University of Pennsylvania and FCS-level Elon. He led James Madison to an 11-1 record this season, with the only loss a 26-23 defeat to Appalachian State in overtime on Nov. 18.

In his five seasons with the Dukes, Cignetti finished with a 52-9 record, and he led James Madison to a 19-4 mark over the

program's first two seasons at the FBS level.

"I am very excited to welcome Curt Cignetti as the head football coach at Indiana University," Dolson said. "We had a very talented and deep pool of candidates, and Curt stood out thanks to an incredible track record of success over more than four decades in college football. As a head coach he's succeeded everywhere he's been, and as an assistant he has been a part of championship cultures while working alongside some of the game's best coaches."

Cignetti will take over an Indiana team that finished 3-9 with a 1-8 record in the Big Ten, with its only wins coming over Indiana State and Akron in the nonconference schedule as well as an upset of Wisconsin. The majority of Cignetti's staff at James Madison is joining him at Indiana, with offensive line coach Bob Bostad as the only coach retained from Allen's staff.

Cignetti already got onto the good side of the Hoosiers fans when he attended an Indiana basketball game and spoke to the crowd.

"Hey, look, I'm super fired up about this opportunity," he said at Assembly Hall on Dec. 1. "I've never taken a back seat to anybody and don't plan on starting now. Purdue sucks ... but so does Michigan and Ohio State. Go IU."

Since Allen's firing, 24 players have already entered the transfer portal, including running back and kick returner Jaylin Lucas; offensive linemen Matthew Bedford,

Kahlil Benson, Zach Carpenter and Carter Smith; wide receivers Cam Camper and Donaven McCulley; and quarterback Brendan Sorsby, among others.

U-M Seeking Five-Year Extension For Harbaugh

According to a report from Sports Illustrated's Richard Johnson on Dec. 7, Michigan is looking to work out a five-year, \$55 million extension with head coach Jim Harbaugh that would make him among the highest-paid coaches in all of college football.

Johnson also reported that a potential hangup in the extension is that Michigan wants Harbaugh to commit in writing that he will not pursue a job in the NFL – which Harbaugh has shown interest in over the last two offseasons – during the course of his contract.

The reported extension comes as Michigan awaits any potential punishment from the NCAA regarding the team's sign-stealing scandal and recruiting violations committed under Harbaugh. A previous report from The Athletic's Bruce Feldman said that Harbaugh could be suspended for the entire 2024 season.

In nine seasons under Harbaugh, Michigan has posted an 87-25 record and has won three Big Ten Championship Games in addition to earning three berths to the College Football Playoff – including this season – though the Wolverines have not notched a win in their previous tries.

Michigan Wins Third Straight Big Ten Title

In the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 2, Michigan cruised to an easy 26-0 win over Iowa to win the conference title for the third straight season and secure the No. 1 spot in the College Football Playoff.

Quarterback J.J. McCarthy was 22 of 30 passing for 147 yards, while Blake Corum rushed for 52 yards and two touchdowns on 16 carries. Iowa's Deacon Hill threw for just 120 yards while the Hawkeyes struggled to get the run game going as well, rushing for 35 yards on 24 carries, just 1.5 yards per carry.

It was the first time that Harbaugh had been allowed on the sidelines since serving a three-game suspension for the final three games of the regular season as a result of Michigan's sign-stealing scandal.

"It made me feel super great," Harbaugh said after the win. "I've got one question for the Michigan Nation: 'Who's got a better team than us?'"

This also marked the last Big Ten Championship Game featuring the East vs. West format, with the top two teams in the division-less conference set to play next year, meaning the East Division will finish with a perfect 10-0 record in the Big Ten Championship Game.

Nittany Lions Fill Out Coaching Staff

Penn State has undergone several staffing changes since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, hiring Kansas' Andy Kotelnicki as its offensive coordinator to replace Mike Yurcich and seeing the depar-

BIG 2023 Standings

East Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
x-Michigan	9	0	1.000	13	0	1.000
Ohio State	8	1	0.889	11	1	.917
Penn State	7	2	0.778	10	2	0.833
Maryland	4	5	0.444	7	5	0.583
Rutgers	3	6	0.333	6	6	0.500
Michigan State	2	7	0.222	4	8	0.333
Indiana	1	8	0.111	3	9	0.250

West Division

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
x-Iowa	7	2	0.778	10	3	0.833
Northwestern	5	4	0.556	7	5	0.583
Wisconsin	5	4	0.556	7	5	0.583
Nebraska	3	6	0.333	5	7	0.417
Minnesota	3	6	0.333	5	7	0.417
Illinois	3	6	0.333	5	7	0.417
Purdue	3	6	0.333	4	8	0.333

x - denotes division champion

Dec. 2 Game

Big Ten Championship at Indianapolis
Michigan 26, Iowa 0

ture of defensive coordinator Manny Diaz, who accepted the head coaching job at Duke on Dec. 7.

Yurcich – a one-time passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach at Ohio State in 2019 – was fired on Nov. 12 after struggles to put together much offense against Ohio State and Michigan this season. Kotelnicki's deal is for four years and \$7.1 million.

"I would like to thank Coach (James) Franklin and (athletic director) Dr. (Patrick) Kraft for this incredible opportunity to join Penn State football," Kotelnicki said in a statement. "It is a tremendous honor for me and my wife, Lindsey, to become part of a program with such a rich history of success and a tremendous family environment with an elite leader in Coach Franklin."

"I am excited to get to work with the tremendous staff and student-athletes we have at Penn State. I would also like to thank Coach (Lance) Leipold, the coaching staff and the student-athletes who I've had the wonderful opportunity to work with at Kansas and wish them nothing but the best."

The Jayhawks finished the regular season 8-4, and the offense ranked 29th in scoring offense (33.6 points) and 28th in total offense (434.0 yards) despite losing starting quarterback Jalon Daniels early in the season.

"We are excited to welcome Andy, his wife, Lindsey, son, Maximus, and daughter, Joy, to Penn State," Franklin said. "Our search process for an offensive coordinator was extensive, and throughout it, Andy's name kept rising to the top of the list. Not only were we impressed with Andy's history of successful offensive production, but he has a proven ability to win at all levels and play to the strength of his personnel."

"In his 18 years as a play caller, he has a track record of coming into a program and improving offenses, especially through ex-



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BIG Conference Bowl Matchups

Las Vegas Dec. 23 • 7:30 p.m. ABC  Northwestern (7-5) vs. Utah (8-4)	Quick Lane Dec. 26 • 2 p.m. ESPN  Minnesota (5-7) vs. Bowling Green (7-5)	Pinstripe Dec. 28 • 2:15 p.m. ESPN  Rutgers (6-6) vs. Miami (Fla.) (7-5)	Cotton Dec. 29 • 8 p.m. ESPN  Ohio State (11-1) vs. Missouri (10-2)	Peach Dec. 30 • Noon ESPN  Penn State (10-2) vs. Ole Miss (10-2)
Music City Dec. 30 • 2 p.m. ABC  Maryland (7-5) vs. Auburn (6-6)	ReliaQuest Jan. 1 • Noon ESPN2  Wisconsin (7-5) vs. LSU (9-3)	Citrus Jan. 1 • 1 p.m. ABC  Iowa (10-3) vs. Tennessee (8-4)	Rose (CFP Semifinal) Jan. 1 • 5 p.m. • ESPN  Michigan (13-0) vs. Alabama (12-1)	

plosive plays, third-down conversions and red-zone success. We are thrilled to have Andy and his family join us in Happy Valley.”

As for Diaz, he coordinated a defense that allowed just 223.2 yards and 11.4 points per game, numbers that ranked first and third in the country, respectively.

“We are grateful and humbled for this opportunity and could not be more excited to be the head football coach at Duke University,” Diaz said. “Duke University is an elite institution in every facet, and we are excited to be a part of it. I’m beyond excited to get to work.”

This will be Diaz’ second stint as a head coach, after he led Miami (Fla.) from 2019-21 but was fired after just a 21-15 record in three seasons.

According to a report from The Athletic, names under consideration to replace Diaz include Penn State co-defensive coordinator/safeties coach Anthony Poindexter, Minnesota defensive coordinator/linebackers coach Joe Rossi and the recently-fired Allen.

NU’s Braun Wins Big Ten Coach Of The Year

Northwestern head coach David Braun – who took over as interim head coach this season after former coach Pat Fitzgerald was fired due to Northwestern’s hazing scandal – was named Big Ten Coach of the Year on Nov. 29 after leading the Wildcats to a 7-5 record.

The turnaround for Northwestern comes after a 1-11 finish last season, representing the biggest record improvement in the FBS this season.

Braun had the interim tag looming over him for most of the season, but it was removed on Nov. 15 after he led the Wildcats to a 24-10 win over Wisconsin. They finished the season with three straight wins and a second-place finish in the Big Ten West.

The Wildcats are also bowl-eligible for the first time since 2020 and will play in the Las Vegas Bowl against Utah on Dec. 23.

MSU’s Smith Raiding Oregon State Staff

Jonathan Smith was announced as

Michigan State’s head coach on Nov. 25 after six seasons and a 34-35 record as Oregon State’s head coach. He has already set foot in East Lansing, Mich., and is bringing assistant coaches from the Beavers with him.

Coaches coming to Michigan State from Oregon State include defensive backs coach Blue Adams, running backs coach Keith Bhonapha, offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Brian Lindgren, offensive line coach Jim Michalczyk, defensive line coach Legi Suiatua and tight ends coach Brian Wozniak, in addition to a few lower-level coaches.

But the additions don’t end with Smith’s staff. When the transfer portal opened on Dec. 4, Oregon State quarterback Aidan Chiles announced that he would be transferring away from the Beavers, and Michigan State is a favorite to land him after the coaching staff moved there.

Chiles spent his freshman season as a backup to DJ Uiagelele, who also entered the transfer portal with his head coach gone and the Beavers no longer playing a Pac-12 schedule moving forward. As the backup, Chiles got into nine games and was 24 of 35 passing for 309 yards and four touchdowns. He came into Oregon State as a four-star prospect and the No. 152 overall player and No. 12 quarterback in the 2023 recruiting class.

Michigan State has seen three quarterbacks – Katin Houser, Noah Kim and Sam Leavitt – enter the transfer portal since the regular season ended, so Chiles will likely be the favorite for the starting position if he lands with the Spartans.

Iowa DC Parker Wins Broyles Award

On Dec. 5, Iowa defensive coordinator Phil Parker was named the winner of the Broyles Award, which is given to the best assistant coach in college football each year.

“Phil Parker is an incredible football coach, and I am extremely pleased that he has been recognized for his career success by the Broyles Committee,” head coach Kirk Ferentz said. “We simply would not have

achieved the success we have as a program without Phil’s dedication and leadership. Since 1999, we have benefited from Phil’s expertise and tenacity.”

The Hawkeyes ranked fourth nationally in scoring defense at 13.2 points per game and were fifth in total defense at 274.8 yards per game.

Parker, who has been Iowa’s defensive coordinator since 2012, is just the sixth coach from the Big Ten to win the Broyles Award – first awarded in 1996 – including Jim Herrmann (Michigan, 1997), Jim Heacock (Ohio State, 2007), Pat Narduzzi (Michigan State, 2013), Tom Herman (Ohio State, 2014) and Josh Gattis (Michigan, 2021).

Rutgers Men’s Basketball Adds Two Five-Stars In 2024

To finish off a historic recruiting season, the Rutgers men’s basketball team added a commitment on Dec. 6 from Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep five-star combo guard Dylan Harper (6-6, 210), the No. 2 overall

prospect in 2024.

He is the fifth member of the Scarlet Knights’ recruiting class that ranks third nationally, and Harper joins a fellow five-star prospect in Powder Springs (Ga.) McEachern small forward Ace Bailey (6-8, 195), the third-ranked prospect in the class.

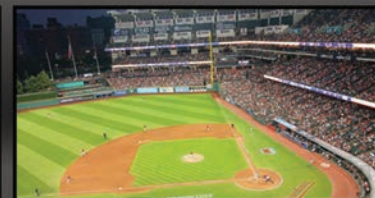
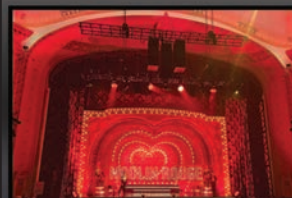
“I have a deep connection with the staff over a long period of time,” Harper told ESPN. “Head coach Steve Pikiell, associate head coach Brandin Knight and assistant coach TJ Thompson – staying at home means everything for me. It is exciting for me knowing everyone who got to see me grow up like my family, friends and coaches can see me play. Knowing that I can make a stamp in my home state has always been a thing for me.”

Harper’s older brother, Ron Harper Jr., also played at Rutgers before moving on to the NBA. His dad, Ron Harper Sr., won five NBA championships, so Harper is just the latest outstanding player in the basketball family.

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Ohio State Ready For Early Signing Period

College football's early signing period is slated for Dec. 20-22, allowing incoming freshmen to sign their national letter of intent with their college of choice, and it's expected to be as crazy as ever with the transfer portal and name, image and likeness continuing to complicate every aspect of the recruiting process.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

"Rosters move a lot, year in and year out, much more than they ever have before," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said on Dec. 3. "We're certainly busy working on that."

Some prospects will hold off on signing with a college, waiting for National Signing Day on Feb. 7, 2024, though it's become more of a formality than a celebration of college football in recent years with most prospects opting for the early period.

So with that, the majority – if not all – of Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class is expected to sign on the dotted line during the early signing period, signaling their in-

tention to play for the Buckeyes. With the next few weeks expected to be hectic on the recruiting trail, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com for the latest on Ohio State's recruiting efforts, as well as full coverage of the early signing period.

In the meantime, here's a full position-by-position preview of what the early signing period will look like for Ohio State, including targets expected to sign and those still being pursued by the Buckeyes in addition to other schools. Information is up to date as of Dec. 11.

Quarterback: Ohio State is set at quarterback in the class with Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes five-star Air Noland (6-3, 195), who is the No. 35 overall prospect and fourth-ranked quarterback in the class and recently earned his fifth star from the 247Sports composite rankings.

Whichever quarterback Ohio State elects to bring in for a given class is always important, but the Buckeyes' selection in 2024 – in this case, Noland – takes on an increased emphasis with a shaky quarterback situation for Ohio State moving forward with Kyle McCord's transfer. Assuming he signs, he would be one of just three scholarship quarterbacks – along with red-shirt freshman Devin Brown and freshman Lincoln Kienholz – expected on the roster for next season, though a portal addition is

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	6-1	170	★★★	Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot
Aaron Scott	CB	6-2	190	★★★★	Springfield, Ohio
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	198	★★★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	LB	6-1	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Gabe VanSickle	OL	6-5	283	★★★	Coopersville, Mich
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

possibly in the cards.

It's unlikely that Noland – an expected early enrollee – will come in and compete for the starting job, but he may be only an injury or two away from seeing the field as

a true freshman for the Buckeyes.

Running Back: Ohio State has three running backs pledged entering the early signing period – San Antonio Veterans Memorial four-star James Peoples (5-10,

ASK AN ANALYST

With BuckeyeScoop's Bill Greene

With the advent of the transfer portal, how much does that impact what Ohio State does on the recruiting trail?

"I don't know that it affects too much on recruiting. They have 23 guys committed now. It does open up more room, but yet, I think it opens up more room to go to the transfer portal and get immediate help. They're probably looking at bringing in 26, 27 guys, and I don't think this makes them go to 35 or something like that. Every guy that leaves now has already had time in the program, for the most part, and then you're looking to get immediate help (to replace) those guys. The guys that go into the portal, they're going to replace them with portal guys."

Speaking of the portal, what are you hearing about who or what positions the Buckeyes might target?

"Well, they're going to have to do something at the quarterback position. I'll be shocked if next year it's Devin Brown, Lincoln Kienholz and Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes five-star quarterback Air Noland (6-3, 195). You could bring in Cam Ward (Washington State) or Riley Leonard (Duke) just to get through a year and give the other younger guys a chance to develop a little more, or they could go after someone like Dante Moore (UCLA). But if you do that, you're really risking the other guys taking off – not so much Air Noland – but Lincoln Kienholz and Devin Brown.

"Those guys could accept a one-year rental type-deal. They could tell them, 'Look, we don't think you guys are ready yet. You will be ready in another year. We're going to bring in Cam Ward for one year.' That would work. That's the No 1 thing to keep an eye on right now.

"And then the second thing is, you have a lot of guys in the portal right now from Ohio State, and we really don't know about the early NFL guys, and that's going to hit here really soon. This roster may not look anything next year like it looks right now. It could be a mass exodus for the NFL. I could see another five or six leaving. It's pretty crazy right now. Then you have to see who plays in the bowl game, who puts themselves into the draft. I've done this for almost 25 years now, and this is

one like I've never seen before, and we're only halfway through.

"Who are they losing off that defensive line? It could be all four of those guys. I wouldn't be shocked if Jack Sawyer, J.T. Tuimoloau, Tyleik Williams and Mike Hall Jr. all left. You lose all four of those guys, you better go get some help. Tommy Eichenberg is leaving. Are they happy with their linebackers? I don't know. Are Cody Simon and Steele Chambers good enough to be your starters with C.J. Hicks? Maybe. But with the defensive line, you can't lose four starters. And I still think they need offensive line help, too. Does Cade Stover leave? There's a lot of moving parts right now.

"The running back room has gotten some losses there, too. Is Tre Henderson leaving? Does Dallan Hayden stay? It's almost impossible to answer these questions right now just because there's so much in flux right now. It's the most instability I think I've ever seen at Ohio State, and a lot of it is caused by NIL and the transfer portal. I don't think it indicates a huge cultural problem at Ohio State. I think it's free agency's year."

The loss of Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive tackle Justin Scott (6-4, 310) is obviously a significant one for the Buckeyes. What did you make of his flip to Miami (Fla.) and how does Ohio State go from here when it comes to the defensive line?

"I don't think they saw it coming at all. I think they were stunned by it, and I was stunned by it. He is a monster. You don't replace guys like that. You don't lose Justin Scott and then say, 'Oh, that's OK, we'll get Bay City, Texas, four-star defensive lineman Carlton Jones (6-3, 285).' There's no comparison between those two guys. They may end up with Carlton Jones, but you don't replace Justin Scott. I mean, that was a killer. If you were going to list who they couldn't lose in this recruiting class, he might have been at the top of the list.

"I don't know where you go from there. Those guys don't grow on trees. Those monster defensive tackles, you just can't find them, and they had the best in the country. He ditches them two weeks before signing day, good luck with that one. That is a killer loss. I would trade Opa Locka (Fla.) Chami-

nade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198) to get Scott back. I would give up all three of those wide receivers in the class to get Scott back. You just can't find those guys. That was murder there. That one hurts.

"They're looking at Clinton, N.C., four-star defensive lineman and Florida commit Amaris Williams (6-3, 270), who they have a shot at. They're looking at Towson (Md.) four-star defensive lineman Ernest Willor Jr. (6-3, 255). But those guys are both defensive ends to me. Carlton Jones is the guy I think they're probably going to get. He decommitted from Nebraska. He's not Justin Scott, but they need bodies. You have two guys committed right now on the defensive line. Buford, Ga. five-star Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) is a monster. Stafford (Va.) Mountain View three-star Eric Mensah (6-3, 290) is kind of a project-type. Right now, to be sitting there with two defensive line commits, that's not good. And losing Justin Scott, it's hard to put that one into words. They have to pull some rabbits out of the hats here."

With just a few weeks until the early signing period, are you envisioning a strong finish for Ohio State?

"Not really. You look at the guys that they have landed recently: Coopersville, Mich. three-star interior offensive lineman Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 283), Fort Myers (Fla.) three-star safety Leroy Roker (6-1, 170). To me, they're just guys. Those are not guys that Ohio State thought they were going to have to take in this class. Roker may be a good player, but he's not Buford, Ga., five-star safety and Florida State commit K.J. Bolden (6-1, 185). He's not Waco (Texas) Connally four-star safety Kobe Black (6-0, 185). Those are guys that they thought they had a shot at.

"And then on the offensive line, when you're looking at Santa Ana (Calif.) five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) and guys like that, and then you end up taking VanSickle, that's not a kid they thought they were going to have to take this year.

"It's a good class, no doubt about it. Do I agree that it is the No. 2, No. 3 class in America? I don't think so. I think there are a lot of projects in this class. But it's a darn-good class, regardless of whether they are No. 2, No. 3, No. 5 or No. 6 in the country."

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

192), Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star Jordan Lyle (6-0, 180) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203) – but things are far from settled with this group.

While there's no concern about Peoples and Williams-Dixon signing with the Buckeyes, Lyle has continued to communicate with Miami (Fla.) and is viewed as a potential flip to the Hurricanes at some point in the coming weeks. Ohio State will continue working to keep Lyle committed, but momentum has been building with Miami for some time.

There are no clear targets for Ohio State if Lyle were to flip, so Peoples and Williams-Dixon would likely be the only incoming freshmen in that scenario. But with the draft departure of Miyan Williams as well as the transfers of Evan Pryor and Chip Trayanum, the portal could be an option to build depth at running back.

Wide Receiver: All eyes are on Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198), the top-rated prospect in the class who has been committed to Ohio State since last December.

Despite being pledged to the Buckeyes, there has been a nonstop push by Miami (Fla.) and Florida State to flip Smith and keep him in his home state. All indications, though, are that Smith is expected to sign with the Buckeyes.

Joining Smith in the class will be a fellow five-star in Mylan Graham (6-1, 170) of New Haven, Ind., and St. Louis Christian Brothers College four-star wide receiver Jeremiah McClellan (6-0, 190). The Buckeyes had pursued Fort Lauderdale St. Thomas Aquinas four-star Chance Robinson (6-2, 190), who is committed to Miami (Fla.), but he has since reaffirmed his pledge to the Hurricanes.

Tight End: Ohio State is set at tight end with Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star Max LeBlanc (6-4, 222) and Cleveland Glenville four-star Damarion Witten (6-4, 215) expected to be the first two-tight end class for the Buckeyes since signing three (Luke Farrell, Jake Hausmann, Kierre Hawkins) in 2016.

But with the transfer of Joe Royer and the expected departure of Cade Stover, the Buckeyes could look in the portal for a veteran option to add to the room.

Offensive Line: Ohio State has four pledges on the offensive line – all of whom are expected to sign – but it was not the finish the Buckeyes and offensive line coach Justin Frye envisioned in the trenches.

The Buckeyes have commitments from Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive tackle Deontae Armstrong (6-6, 280) and three-star interior lineman

Devontae Armstrong (6-5, 297); New Palestine, Ind., four-star interior lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295); and Coopersville, Mich., three-star interior lineman Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 283), who flipped to Ohio State from Northwestern in November.

But Ohio State has missed on arguably all of its top targets, including Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285), who is committed to Texas, and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star interior lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287), who is committed to Colorado – more on him later. And while he was not a priority target, now from a numbers perspective, the loss of Toledo Central Catholic three-star interior lineman Marc Nave (6-5, 320), who flipped from Ohio State to Kentucky, also hurts the Buckeyes.

With just one high-profile target – Moore is Ohio State's top-rated offensive lineman at No. 136 in the class and sixth among interior linemen – the Buckeyes are expected to be active in the transfer portal at essentially every position on the offensive line.

Defensive Line: On the flip side of the trenches, things have not gone much better on the defensive line, though help could be on the way.

Ohio State has pledges from Buford, Ga., five-star defensive end Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) and Stafford (Va.) Mountain View three-star defensive lineman Eric Mensah (6-3, 290) but suffered a decommitment on Nov. 29 from Chicago St. Ignatius five-star defensive lineman Justin Scott (6-4, 310), who flipped to Miami (Fla.) – more on him later.

With Ohio State's top-rated defensive player no longer in the class, the focus shifts to Clinton, N.C., four-star defensive lineman Amaris Williams (6-3, 270), who is committed to Florida, and Bay City, Texas, four-star defensive lineman Carlon Jones (6-3, 285), who recently decommitted from Nebraska. Both appear favorites to land with the Buckeyes, which would help soften – but still not eliminate – the blow from losing Scott.

Williams is the No. 85 overall prospect and No. 12 defensive lineman in the class, while Jones is No. 409 overall and No. 45 at the position.

Ohio State also appears out of the running for Towson (Md.) Concordia Prep four-star defensive lineman Ernest Willor Jr. (6-3, 255), who did not take an expected trip to Columbus the weekend of Dec. 9-10. Wisconsin is viewed as the favorite to land him now.

Linebacker: Ohio State is set at linebacker with Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut four-star Garrett Stover (6-0, 195) and Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star Payton

Pierce (6-1, 225), though a high-profile name from earlier in the recruiting cycle has resurfaced as a potential target for the Buckeyes.

Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (6-3, 230), who surprisingly committed to Notre Dame in July after being viewed as a lean toward Ohio State, has been noted by several recruiting experts as being back in contact with the Buckeyes.

While it's unlikely to see Viliamu-Asa flipping to Ohio State, it is something to keep an eye on as the early signing period approaches.

Cornerback: There is not a position in the class for Ohio State that is more set than cornerback, with the Buckeyes set to sign three talented players at the position. That includes Springfield, Ohio, five-star Aaron Scott (6-2, 190) – who recently earned his fifth star from the 247Sports composite rankings – Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177) and Chandler (Ariz.) Basha four-star cornerback Miles Lockhart (5-10, 185).

Safety: Ohio State has two safeties committed in West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star safety Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185) and Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot three-star safety Leroy Roker (6-1, 170), but the Buckeyes continue to pursue options at the position.

The key target remaining for Ohio State is Esko (Minn.) Lincoln Secondary four-star Koi Perich (6-1, 195), who has been committed to Minnesota since April. But following his official visit to Ohio State the weekend of Dec. 9-10, the Buckeyes are

absolutely considered in the thick of it for Perich. He is the No. 140 overall prospect and No. 8 (No. 11) safety in the class.

Special Teams: The only expected addition for Ohio State on special teams for this cycle is at long snapper, with the Buckeyes set to add a preferred walk-on in Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal long snapper Morrow Evans (6-1, 225).

He is considered a five-star prospect by Rubio Long Snapping, and the scouting organization considers him the second-ranked long snapper in the class.

All told, Ohio State could be looking to sign as many as 25 or 26 scholarship players when the early signing period begins, though those numbers will largely be determined by how things break down on the defensive line and at safety, and assuming the Buckeyes hold onto their players being pursued by other schools.

Transfer Portal In Full Swing

Recruiting is heating up not only for prospects in high school, but those who have already cut their teeth in the collegiate ranks. The NCAA transfer portal opened on Dec. 4, and as of Dec. 11, over 1,500 players – including 14 from Ohio State – have announced their intention to find a new school.

But just as a handful of schools are attempting to pull in former Ohio State players, the Buckeyes have been busy themselves in trying to scout those from other schools that have entered their name into

Continued On Page 32

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Continued From Page 31

the portal.

One of the key positions Ohio State is reportedly targeting is at quarterback, which makes sense considering the Buckeyes' starter from this season, Kyle McCord, is in the portal himself. According to a report from 247Sports, Ohio State has been in contact with former Washington State quarterback Cameron Ward (6-2, 223) and former Duke signal caller Riley Leonard (6-4, 212), and it is one of several schools involved with both players who have a year of eligibility remaining.

Ward – who began his career at Incarnate Word before transferring to the Cougars for the last two seasons – threw for 3,732 yards and 25 touchdowns this year to just seven interceptions, though fumbles have been an issue for him. Both USC and Nebraska have reportedly been involved with Ward, who – according to a report from The Athletic's Stewart Mandel – could demand up to \$2 million in NIL packages at his new school.

Leonard, meanwhile, appeared in just seven games this season while dealing with several injuries. But in his first season as a starter last year, he threw for 2,967 yards and 20 touchdowns to just six interceptions, and he also rushed for 1,224 yards and 19 touchdowns over three seasons with the Blue Devils.

While Ohio State is viewed among the favorites for Ward, Notre Dame is considered the team to beat for Leonard.

The Buckeyes have also been connect-

ed with former UCLA quarterback Dante Moore (6-3, 210) – who recently completed his freshman season with the Bruins – but appear more likely to take a one-year rental rather than a potential multi-year starter who could jeopardize current quarterback continuity on the roster.

One position Ohio State could be looking for a long-term starter, however, is on the offensive line. And if the Buckeyes are seeking an option specifically at offensive tackle, there are two obvious targets already in the portal, including former Indiana tackle Carter Smith (6-5, 305) and former Texas A&M tackle Chase Bisontis (6-6, 320).

Smith started all 12 games at left tackle this season for the Hoosiers and was the 10th-best offensive tackle in the Big Ten this season, according to Pro Football Focus. He has already taken a visit to Virginia Tech and reportedly has visits set up for Ole Miss and Kentucky, according to 247Sports' Steve Wilfong, but Ohio State – if it wants to get involved – has an advantage in that Smith is from Powell, Ohio, just north of Columbus.

Bisontis, meanwhile, is a former top-100 prospect who started all 12 games of his freshman season at right tackle for the Aggies. Ohio State was heavily involved in Bisontis' initial recruitment and figures to be involved again this time around.

Ohio State also appears busy scouting the defensive line for potential prospects. The Buckeyes have already offered and are expected to host former Middle Tennessee State lineman Marley Cook (6-2, 298) for

a visit the weekend of Dec. 16-17. In five seasons, he had 61 tackles, 19 tackles for loss and 10½ sacks for the Lightning.

The Buckeyes have also reportedly been in touch with former UTSA defensive end Trey Moore (6-3, 235), former Texas A&M defensive end LT Overton (6-5, 265) and former Michigan State defensive tackle Derrick Harmon (6-5, 320), of whom Harmon has already taken a visit to Ohio State the weekend of Dec. 9-10.

Five-Star OT Seaton Commits To Colorado

Ohio State lost out on Dec. 7 when Seaton announced he had committed to Colorado over Alabama, Florida, Maryland and Tennessee, in addition to the Buckeyes.

Seaton is the No. 16 overall prospect and top-ranked offensive tackle in 2024, and his pledge to the Buffaloes and head coach Deion Sanders came as a surprise considering Seaton had previously left Colorado off his list of top five schools.

There was some hope that Seaton may have been seriously considering Ohio State after he took an official visit to Columbus the weekend of Dec. 2-3 but he had taken several visits to Boulder, and based on his comments while announcing his commitment, he was impressed by what Sanders had to offer.

"You've got to believe in Coach Prime," Seaton said. "Having the opportunity to play with somebody who has done it at the highest level, gold jacket level, very few can say they did that. I've got two Heisman Trophy candidates – Shedeur Sanders and

Travis Hunter. They're amazing. You know how they go.

"If you (are not) rocking with us and you say you're a dog, you claim you're a dog, why are you not coming to Colorado? Why are you not helping somebody who looks like you?"

Five-Star DL Scott Flips To Miami (Fla.)

Ohio State suffered a significant blow to the 2024 recruiting class just weeks before the early signing period when Justin Scott announced his flip to Miami (Fla.) on Nov. 29. Scott is the No. 13 overall prospect and third-ranked defensive lineman in the class.

His initial pledge to Ohio State in July appeared to come out of left field, but Scott seemed locked in with the Buckeyes following an official visit in June.

"Going into the visit, my family was heavily set on Michigan," he told On3. "Throughout the (Ohio State) visit they were really still set on Michigan. But towards the end of it, Coach (Larry) Johnson sat us down & went over an in-depth plan that they had for me."

Scott had previously taken an official visit to Miami (Fla.) over the summer and also spent a week with the Hurricanes in the spring that planted the seeds for his eventual flip.

"I'm feeling really good," he told 247Sports after his spring visit. "I'm super comfortable here now. This is my second time here, basically spent the whole week here. I'm getting super comfortable here."

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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

Fact: Ohio State was going to lose center Jeff Uhlenhake to graduation next year. Fact: Cleveland St. Joseph High School senior Rodney Smith was considered one of the best center prospects in the Midwest. Fact: It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out how hard the Buckeyes would work in order to land Smith's services.

"He is certainly the Midwest area's top offensive lineman," said recruiting expert Tom Lemming. "He can play offensive tackle, offensive guard or offensive center. He can be a super pulling guard or an All-American center in college."

30 Years Ago — 1993

If Ohio State planned to continue strengthening its passing attack in upcoming seasons, Dee Miller would be a key acquisition.

Miller, a 6-1, 200-pound wide receiver from Springfield (Ohio) South, was considering Ohio State along with Tennessee and Michigan. He was widely considered to be one of the top prospects in the state and the Midwest.

He was on hand during the Ohio State-Indiana game on Nov. 13 and said he had a good time as the Buckeyes defeated the Hoosiers to earn a share of the Big Ten crown.

"I liked the whole program," Miller said. "I got along with the players and coaches, and it was nice. I really liked it there, but I just felt I owed it to myself to take a couple of other visits."

25 Years Ago — 1998

Ohio State welcomed a total of 21 players in for official visits over the first two weekends of December.

But the biggest news was the fact that one key prospect had not made an official visit.

Without warning on Dec. 8, Franklin Lakes (N.J.) Ramapo quarterback Chris Simms canceled his Dec. 11 visit to Ohio State and saw Penn State. It was unclear whether Simms, judged by nearly every recruiting service as the nation's top quarterback prospect, would reschedule his OSU visit.

He seemed to be leaning toward Penn State. Besides his official visit and a summer camp stay, Simms had reportedly been to State College, Pa., six other times.

20 Years Ago — 2003

As most Buckeye fans knew, Cleveland Glenville defensive back Ted Ginn Jr. was the most highly-rated prospect in OSU's sights. He had long been considered Ohio's top prospect and recently moved up to No. 2 in the nation among all players, according to Rivals.com.

The 6-0, 170-pounder had been to Ohio State a number of times but still appreciated the chance to be entertained by the Buckeyes while spending time with the other prospects in town for the weekend.

"It went fine," Ginn told BSB. "There wasn't anything new because I've been down there before so many times, but it was a good trip."

15 Years Ago — 2008

With just a few spots left up for grabs in this year's class, the OSU coaching staff took another step toward filling the class of 2010 by securing its second verbal commitment.

Youngstown (Ohio) Ursuline four-star defensive end Jamel Turner (6-2, 200) held a press conference on Dec. 16 to announce that he had picked the Buckeyes. As it turned out, though, his final decision had been made some time prior.

"I had my mind made up before," he said. "I just wasn't telling anybody. I wanted to wait for the right time, and I felt that the right time was now."

10 Years Ago — 2013

Just a few minutes after committing to Ohio State, four-star Hinesville (Ga.) Liberty County linebacker Raekwon McMillan apologized to Urban Meyer. And for good reason.

Announcing his college choice in front of a national audience on live television, McMillan picked up a white Alabama hat and stared at its crimson "A" before reaching for a scarlet Buckeyes cap and placing it on top of his head.

"I think I'm going to roll with Ohio State," McMillan said during his announcement, which aired live on the NBC Sports Network.

And with that, the Buckeyes landed arguably their most important commitment of the 2014 class as the fifth-ranked middle linebacker in the country.

Five Years Ago — 2018

On Dec. 19, the Zach Harrison saga was expected to end. The five-star defensive end from Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange was slated to make a decision at the start of the early signing period, issuing his letter of intent to one of three finalists without holding a ceremony. Those included Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State.

Harrison was the 247Sports composite's No. 4 overall prospect, No. 1 strongside defensive end and No. 1 player in Ohio for 2019. He had been at the top of the Buckeyes' board in this class for years, drawing out his recruitment after an initial announcement was scheduled to be made Aug. 14, Harrison's birthday.

Between the month-long investigation at OSU involving Meyer concerning assistant coach Zach Smith and Harrison's overall indecisiveness, he pushed his decision back until after Orange's season finished. On Aug. 24, BSB had spoken exclusively with Harrison after Orange's 27-26 win over Worthington (Ohio) Kilbourne. Harrison, at the time, said he was torn between his three finalists.

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State landed a signal caller shortly before the early signing period began, adding Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185) on Dec. 14. Kienholz was committed to Washington before flipping to the Buckeyes.

Kienholz was the No. 204 overall prospect and No. 14 quarterback in the class and had been committed to the Huskies since June before flipping to Ohio State. Things developed rapidly between him and Ohio State after he visited Columbus for an official visit the weekend of the Michigan game and was offered just days later.

Head coach Ryan Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis then put a full-court press on Kienholz, making several trips to South Dakota to secure the quarterback's commitment.

"I think their past culture and tradition with their quarterbacks," Kienholz said of why he committed. "That's huge. Also their success they've had with their quarterbacks and success they've had with their football team as well."

Perich, Jones Take OSU Official Visits

Ohio State had a pair of 2024 targets on campus the weekend of Dec. 9-10, hosting Jones and Perich on official visits just weeks before the early signing period.

The Buckeyes had been trying to get Jones on campus for months now ever since offering him in October, and it was a hit for the four-star prospect once he was finally able to make it to Columbus for his first visit.

"It was great," Jones told 247Sports. "Coach Johnson is very smart and develops NFL talent at a high level."

Jones is also being recruited by Alabama and USC, with a visit scheduled for the latter for the weekend of Dec. 16-17, though he could conceivably cancel his visit with the Trojans should he decide that Ohio State is the right fit.

Perich, meanwhile, remains committed to Minnesota and is also considering Florida State, but he was equally impressed with Ohio State on his visit.

"I mean, the culture at Ohio State University is different," he told 247Sports. "You can feel the energy as soon as you step in the building. It's a switch, and I think that's really cool."

Four Future Buckeyes Win State Championships

The OHSAA High School Football Playoffs concluded on Dec. 3, and four future Buckeyes earned state championships in their respective divisions. Here are the results from the Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, Ohio:

Division I — No. 12 Springfield (10-6) vs. No. 1 Lakewood St. Edward (14-1): The Armstrong brothers and St. Edward overcame Aaron Scott and Springfield to secure the Eagles' third consecutive state championship in a 31-21 win.

The Armstrongs anchored an offensive line that helped running back Brandon White go for 243 yards and three touchdowns, and the Eagles finished with 305 total rushing yards.

Division II — No. 3 Akron Hoban (13-2) vs. No. 1 Massillon Washington (16-0): Another future Buckeye who did not succeed in his quest for a state championship was three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 215), a 2025 pledge to Ohio State, as Hoban suffered a 7-2 loss to Massillon.

Lee and the defense offered up Hoban's only points of the game with a second-quarter safety, while Hoban's offense fumbled the ball away twice. Even then, Hoban had the ball with a chance to score facing fourth-and-8 at Massillon's 17-yard line with just 1:22 left but turned the ball over on downs after an incomplete pass.

"We expected what we saw (from Massillon)," Hoban head coach Tim Tyrrell told the Akron Beacon Journal. "Our biggest problem was we had turnovers. You cannot have turnovers. I said it all week to our team: 'If you turn the ball over, you are not going to win.' We turned the football over."

Division IV — No. 4 Kettering Alter (12-4) vs. No. 2 Cleveland Glenville (13-2): West and Witten helped lead Glenville to the school's second consecutive state championship in a 38-3 win over Alter.

The Tarblooders led 26-3 at the half in the dominant win. Witten led Glenville with five receptions for 86 yards and two touchdowns, while West helped limit Alter's offense to just 61 passing yards and 130 total yards of offense.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- The NCAA Division I Oversight Committee on Nov. 30 announced a pair of rule changes. The first increases the number of official visits a school can host during an academic year from 56 to 70, and the sec-

ond prohibits schools from arranging photoshoots for prospects on unofficial visits. Administrators had spoken out about the workload required to conduct photoshoots given the large number of unofficial visits that schools will host.

- Toms River (N.J.) North four-star offensive tackle Jaelyne Matthews (6-5, 290), a 2025 prospect, included Ohio State among his nine schools on Dec. 1 along with Georgia, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Penn State, Rutgers, Tennessee and Texas. He is the No. 95 overall prospect and No. 10 offensive tackle in the class.

- Ohio State sent out three new offers since BSB last went to press, including

to Sachse, Texas, four-star wide receiver Kaliq Lockett (6-2, 175) and Palatine, Ill., four-star defensive lineman Jaylen Williams (6-6, 265) in 2025 as well as New Orleans St. Augustine five-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270), who is the second-ranked player in 2026.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news and up-to-the-minute information on the early signing period, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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OSU Sees Win Streak End In Happy Valley

By **PATRICK ENGELS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State won three consecutive home games against Central Michigan on Nov. 29, Minnesota on Dec. 3 and Miami (Ohio) on Dec. 6 before suffering a disappointing road defeat to Penn State on Dec. 9, giving the Buckeyes a 3-1 record since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

The loss to the Nittany Lions snapped a seven-game winning streak for head coach Chris Holtmann's squad while also handing them their first conference loss of the season, which came just six days after their first Big Ten victory over the Gophers.

Thornton, Buckeyes Throttle CMU For Fifth Straight Win

Ohio State (6-1) cruised to its fifth straight win on Nov. 29, using a dominating first-half performance from Bruce Thornton and a strong overall defensive showing to defeat Central Michigan (2-5) 88-61 in front of 8,223 fans at Value City Arena, which was the second-lowest attendance for a men's basketball regular season game in the venue's history.

Thornton turned in another masterful performance with 25 points on 9-of-14 shooting, including 19 points in the first half alone. He helped the Buckeyes shoot 55.6 percent from the field (15 of 27) in the first half and reach at least 80 points for the third straight game.



Bruce Thornton

"There were some really good moments tonight, and then some moments where we need to get a lot better," Holtmann said. "We had some really good leadership from some guys and some really good stretches of play, and then some other ones where we could have been better."

Ohio State got things rolling early on, connecting on three of its first four baskets to break out to an early 7-2 lead. But the Buckeye offense began to stall, missing three of their next five shots as Central Michigan took a 12-11 lead with 12:40 left after a three-point make from Chippewa forward Jemal Davis. But the momentum quickly changed due to Thornton, who put the team on his back with a personal 7-0 run to lead 18-12.

Central Michigan refused to go away, though, and after a pair of Jamison Battle free throws, the Chippewas embarked on a strong 9-2 run that cut the deficit to just 22-21 with 6:35 left in the half. But that was the closest they got for the rest of the game, as the Thornton show only continued.

The standout sophomore racked up another seven straight points, extending the Buckeyes' lead to 29-21. That run soon extended to 15-0 thanks to four straight points from Felix Okpara, two free throws from Dale Bonner and another Okpara basket, putting the Buckeyes up 37-21 with 2:59 left in the half before leading 41-29 heading into the break.

The Buckeyes started the second half

much like they did the first, accounting for the frame's first nine points to inflate the lead to 50-29. After Central Michigan guard Anthony Pritchard broke the run with a layup, Ohio State took off again with 11 straight points to hold a 61-31 advantage with 12:18 left in the game, a sequence that was sparked by five straight points from sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr.

The Chippewas tried to get back in the game with a few Ohio State starters out of the game, going on an extended 26-13 run to trim the deficit to 74-57 with 4:31 remaining. But that momentum was finally quashed by a three-point basket from Battle, which jump-started a quick 7-0 run, allowing the team to cruise the rest of the way for a 27-point victory.

"I thought we were not at our best in the second half," Holtmann said. "We just weren't very good in some of those stretches. I didn't think we were playing the right way, honestly. We just need to get better with that."

The Buckeyes were led in the victory by Thornton, and Okpara had a career-high 14 points and a game-high nine rebounds, while Battle (12), Gayle (11) and Devin Royal (11) also reached double figures in scoring. Central Michigan was led in the loss by Davis, who had 15 points on 4-of-7 shooting.

Clutch Shooting Propels OSU To Win Vs. Gophers

Ohio State continued its winning ways on Dec. 3, benefiting from a balanced scoring attack and fending off a dominating outing from Minnesota forward Dawson Garcia to defeat the Gophers 84-74 in the team's Big Ten opener before 10,481 in Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes (7-1, 1-0 in Big Ten) had three starters – Thornton (26), Battle (25) and Gayle (16) – reach double figures, while the team connected on nine of their 17 three-point shots (52.9). They also held Minnesota (5-3, 0-1) to 48.3 percent shooting from the field (28 of 58) and 28.6 percent from three (4 of 14) while forcing 13 turnovers that led to 16 points.

"This was a hard-fought Big Ten win," Holtmann said. "I'm proud of our guys. It's a good win for our guys, a good way to start 1-0 (in the Big Ten). We survived a little run, but I'm proud of our guys for making plays."

Like many games this season, Ohio State jumped out to a strong start, hitting on three of its first four shots and making five free throws to take an early 14-2 lead. After Minnesota responded with a 10-5 run, Ohio State took off again due to Thornton, who scored on back-to-back possessions, including an old-fashioned three-point play, to increase the team's advantage to 24-12.

Ohio State's lead inflated to 30-12 after a made layup from Bonner, capping an extended 11-0 run. After a series of traded baskets from the two teams, the Buckeyes had an 8-0 run to put the team up 42-20 with 2:39 left in the half. Minnesota scored the final eight points of the first half in the final 2:17 of action, but Ohio State still held a comfortable 42-28 lead heading into the locker room.

Minnesota continued to trim the deficit to start the second half with two trips to the

Ohio State 88, Central Michigan 61,										
Nov. 29, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus										
		1	2	F						
Central Michigan (2-5)		29	32	61						
Ohio State (6-1)		41	47	88						
Central Mich.										
Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.				
Taylor	30	5-10	1-1	2-3	1	1	12			
Pritchard	26	4-14	0-1	1-1	4	5	9			
Butler	29	2-5	3-4	0-1	0	0	8			
Vasko	22	1-6	1-1	1-2	1	2	3			
Harding	13	0-1	0-0	2-2	0	3	0			
Davis	29	4-7	5-7	1-1	1	1	15			
McMillan IV	16	5-9	1-2	0-2	0	2	12			
Oduor	8	1-1	0-2	0-1	0	1	2			
Simpson	27	0-2	0-2	0-3	0	3	0			
Totals	200	22-55	11-20	716	7	18	61			
Percentages: FG: 40.0%. FT: 55.0%. Three-point field goals: 6-16 (Davis 2-3, Butler 1-2, Taylor 1-3, Pritchard 1-3, McMillan 1-1, Vasko 0-2, Simpson 0-2). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 5 (Taylor 2, Butler, Davis, Oduor). Turnovers: 15 (Pritchard 4, Davis 3, Simpson 2, Vasko 2, Taylor, Butler, Harding, Team). Steals: 6 (Taylor 2, Pritchard 2, Vasko, Davis).										
Ohio State										
Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.				
Thornton	31	9-14	4-4	0-4	2	3	25			
Okpara	22	6-6	2-4	4-5	0	3	14			
Battle	29	4-12	2-2	1-7	0	2	12			
Gayle Jr.	30	4-8	2-2	0-5	3	11	11			
Mahaffey	22	0-7	0-0	3-1	5	0	0			
Royal	11	4-5	2-3	2-0	1	2	11			
Bonner	26	1-5	6-7	0-2	2	2	8			
Key	16	2-6	1-1	4-2	0	2	5			
Hardman	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2			
Chatman	7	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	1	0			
Parks	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0			
Etzler	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Baumann	1	0-0	0-0	1-1	0	0	0			
Totals	200	31-66	19-23	15-27	17	18	88			
Percentages: FG: 47.0%. FT: 82.6%. Three-point field goals: 7-24 (Thornton 3-7, Battle 2-6, Gayle 1-3, Royal 1-1, Chatman 0-1, Key 0-1, Bonner 0-2, Mahaffey 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Okpara, Battle, Key). Turnovers: 8 (Gayle 3, Okpara, Royal, Bonner, Chatman, Team). Steals: 4 (Okpara, Gayle, Mahaffey, Bonner). Officials: Siler, Green, Carstensen. Attendance: 8,223										

Ohio State 84, Minnesota 74										
Dec. 3, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus										
		1	2	F						
Minnesota		28	46	74						
Ohio State		42	42	84						
Minnesota										
Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.				
Garcia	38	12-25	12-14	3-7	1	2	36			
Hawkins	37	3-7	2-4	0-0	5	2	10			
Ola-Joseph	20	3-7	0-2	2-2	1	3	7			
Carrington	12	0-0	0-0	1-0	1	3	0			
Ihnen	7	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	3	0			
Christie	27	5-8	0-0	0-3	0	4	11			
Payne	31	3-6	0-0	3-4	3	1	6			
Mitchell Jr.	24	2-5	0-0	0-0	1	3	4			
Fox	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1	0			
Totals	200	28-58	14-20	9-17	13	22	74			
Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 70.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-14 (Hawkins 2-5, Ola-Joseph 1-2, Christie 1-3, Ihnen 0-1, Dawson 0-3). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 2 (Ola-Joseph, Mitchell Jr.). Turnovers: 13 (Hawkins 3, Garcia 2, Ola-Joseph 2, Carrington 2, Christie, Payne, Mitchell Jr., Fox). Steals: 8 (Hawkins 3, Garcia 2, Mitchell Jr. 2, Payne).										
Ohio State										
Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.				
Thornton	33	8-12	9-10	1-1	5	2	26			
Battle	34	7-12	7-7	2-5	0	3	25			
Gayle Jr.	35	5-8	4-5	1-3	2	3	16			
Okpara	28	1-3	1-2	1-7	1	2	3			
Mahaffey	22	0-4	0-0	4-1	2	4	0			
Middleton	16	3-4	0-2	0-1	0	0	8			
Key	15	1-3	2-2	1-2	0	3	4			
Bonner	15	1-5	0-0	0-2	1	0	2			
Royal	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Totals	200	26-53	23-28	10-22	12	18	84			
Percentages: FG: 38.2%. FT: 49.1%. FT: 82.1%. Three-point field goals: 9-17 (Battle 4-6, Middleton 2-3, Gayle 2-3, Thornton 1-3, Bonner 0-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 6. (Okpara 5, Battle). Turnovers: 13 (Gayle Jr. 4, Key 4, Mahaffey 2, Thornton, Battle, Okpara). Steals: 8 (Thornton 3, Mahaffey 3, Gayle, Bonner). Officials: Breeding, Anderson, Lenox. Attendance: 10,481.										

final blow came from Gayle, who increased the Buckeyes' lead to 81-70 with just 1:53 left with a triple from the wing, giving the team the separation they needed to hang on to the 10-point victory.

"That was just straight confidence," Thornton said. "I have confidence in everybody to make those types of shots in practice, and we work on it nonstop. When you have that type of confidence and that type of (belief) in your teammates, you feel like every shot is going to go in. That's what I tell myself."

The Buckeyes were led in the win by the trio of Battle, Gayle and Thornton, who scored 35 of the team's 42 second-half points, including the team's final 24 points of the game. The Gophers were led by Garcia, who scored a career-high 36 points on 12-of-25 shooting, including 12-of-14 shooting from the free-throw line. He also had a game-high 11 rebounds. His point total was the most ever by an opposing player in Value City Arena history.

Buckeyes Bully RedHawks For Seventh Straight Win

Ohio State's winning streak improved to seven games on Dec. 6 at Value City Arena in front of 9,098 fans, when they defeated in-state foe Miami (Ohio) 84-64 behind another balanced scoring night and a strong outing in the paint.

The Buckeyes had six players – Gayle (15 points), Thornton (14), Battle (13), forward Zed Key (13), Bonner (11) and soph-

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 84, Miami (Ohio) 64

Dec. 6, 2023
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	F
Miami (Ohio) (4-4)	26	38	64
Ohio State (8-1)	39	45	84

Miami (OH)	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Hunter	37	6-16	0-0	1-1	2	3	15
Mabrey	34	5-8	0-0	0-0	0	3	13
Morris	26	5-6	1-1	6-4	4	2	11
Ipsaro	25	3-6	2-2	0-5	1	3	8
Bultman	21	2-5	2-2	0-1	0	3	6
Potter	11	2-6	2-2	1-1	1	2	6
Elmer	23	1-5	2-2	1-1	0	0	5
Yofan	13	0-1	0-2	1-0	1	2	0
Kotecki	9	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Anderson	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	24-55	9-11	10-14	9	19	64

Percentages: FG: 43.6%. FT: 81.8%. Three-point field goals: 7-12 (Hunter 3-4, Mabrey 3-4, Elmer 1-1, Potter 0-1, Ipsaro 0-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Morris 2). Turnovers: 17 (Morris 4, Mabrey 3, Ipsaro 3, Hunter 2, Potter 2, Yofan, Kotecki, Team). Steals: 5 (Ipsaro 2, Bultman 2, Potter).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Gayle Jr.	32	4-9	7-8	1-3	3	0	15
Thornton	29	4-9	3-4	0-1	2	1	14
Battle	25	5-10	2-2	2-0	3	2	13
Mahaffey	22	4-7	1-1	2-2	1	1	10
Okpara	16	1-2	0-0	3-4	0	0	2
Key	23	5-9	3-6	7-3	4	3	13
Bonner	19	3-9	2-2	0-3	1	1	11
Middleton	16	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	3	3
Royal	12	1-3	1-2	2-2	1	2	3
Chatman	5	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	1	0
Parks	1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-62	19-25	17-20	16	14	84

Percentages: FG: 45.2%. FT: 39.1%. Three-point field goals: 9-23 (Bonner 3-6, Thornton 3-7, Mahaffey 1-1, Battle 1-3, Middleton 1-3, Gayle 0-1, Key 0-1, Chatman 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 4. (Battle, Mahaffey, Okpara, Key). Turnovers: 10 (Mahaffey 2, Key 2, Bonner 2, Gayle, Battle, Okpara, Chatman). Steals: 5 (Thornton 2, Mahaffey 2, Gayle). Officials: Barlow, Bonner, Whetstone. Attendance: 9,098

Penn State 83, Ohio State 80

Dec. 9, 2023
Bryce Jordan Center • State College, Pa.

	1	2	F
Ohio State (8-2, 1-1)	41	39	80
Penn State (5-5, 1-1)	29	54	83

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Thornton	32	4-11	6-7	0-1	4	3	17
Battle	34	5-10	0-0	2-2	3	3	13
Gayle Jr.	27	3-8	2-2	2-1	4	2	11
Okpara	20	4-5	1-2	3-5	0	3	9
Mahaffey	31	2-5	1-2	2-3	6	3	5
Key	19	4-7	4-6	4-7	1	0	12
Middleton	16	3-7	1-2	0-5	0	1	9
Bonner	21	2-7	0-1	0-4	3	3	4
Totals	200	27-60	15-22	13-28	21	18	80

Percentages: FG: 45.0%. FT: 68.2%. Three-point field goals: 11-26 (Gayle 3-4, Thornton 3-6, Battle 3-8, Middleton 2-5, Bonner 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Okpara, Mahaffey, Middleton). Turnovers: 16 (Battle 3, Gayle 3, Mahaffey 3, Bonner 2, Thornton, Okpara, Key, Middleton, Team). Steals: 2 (Battle, Gayle).

Penn State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Clary	33	7-17	4-6	2-3	1	2	19
Hicks	29	4-7	1-2	2-4	1	1	11
Wahab	22	4-5	2-2	3-2	0	2	10
Baldwin Jr.	35	4-11	0-0	2-1	5	4	9
Johnson	19	0-5	1-3	0-2	1	2	1
Dunn	20	7-11	0-3	2-2	1	1	16
O'Boyle	25	4-5	3-3	1-3	0	2	15
Kern	14	1-2	0-0	0-1	2	4	2
Mitchell	3	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	31-65	11-19	12-18	11	18	83

Percentages: FG: 47.7%. FT: 57.9%. Three-point field goals: 10-24 (O'Boyle 4-5, Hicks 2-4, Dunn 2-4, Clary 1-3, Baldwin 1-5, Mitchell 0-1, Johnson 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 1 (1). Turnovers: 8 (Kern 3, Hicks 2, Clary, Wahab, Dunn). Steals: 10 (Baldwin 3, Dunn 3, Clary, Wahab, O'Boyle, Kern). Officials: Garrison, Dorsey, Szec. Attendance: 9,732.

"We've been inconsistent with (finishing first halves strong) this year," Holtmann said. "Doing that gives us momentum, and it makes me not want to yell at them at the start at halftime, which is always nice. You always want to go into the locker room as a happy coach."

The RedHawks opened the second half strong, going on a quick 7-3 run to trim the deficit down to 42-33. But the Buckeyes took momentum back with makes from Battle and Mahaffey that helped kick-start a 9-2 run, giving them a convincing 51-35 lead with 15:25 remaining.

Miami responded with two baskets to cut the deficit back down to 51-39. But a three-pointer from Middleton and an alley-oop dunk by Key off an assist from Battle helped cool things down, leading to an extended 15-5 run to take a 66-44 lead with 6:55 left. From there, Ohio State increased the lead to as many as 26 points in the eventual 20-point victory.

Ohio State was led in the win by the scoring trio of Gayle, Thornton and Battle, who combined for half of the Buckeyes' points on a combined 46.4 percent shooting. Mahaffey had an Ohio State career-high 10 points, while Key added a game-high 10 rebounds.

The RedHawks were led by Hunter, who had 15 points on 6-of-16 shooting. Sophomore guard Ryan Mabrey and sophomore forward Jaquel Morris also reached double figures with 13 and 11 points apiece, the latter adding 10 rebounds.

Buckeyes Blow 18-Point Lead To Snap Streak

Ohio State's seven-game win streak came to a disappointing end on the road

against Penn State on Dec. 9, blowing a double-digit second-half lead to fall to the Nittany Lions 83-80 at the Bryce Jordan Center with 9,732 looking on.

The Buckeyes (8-2, 1-1) led by as many as 18 points in the second frame but saw their lead quickly dissolve in the game's final minutes after a ferocious rally from the Nittany Lions. Penn State (5-5, 1-1) outscored Ohio State 46-25 in the game's final 15:31 – sparked by an 11-0 run midway through the half and 25 combined points from guards Kanye Clary and D'Marco Dunn – to storm back and come away with the dramatic three-point win.

"We just didn't defend well enough," Holtmann said. "Give them credit. I thought our guys did some really good things, got a good look there at the end. We'll learn from this and move forward."

Before the second-half collapse, Ohio State was firing on all cylinders. It hit on five of its first six attempts – with three of those baskets coming from beyond the arc – to jump out to a 13-7 lead. It then misfired on its next six shots as Penn State eventually took a 17-16 lead, but the Buckeyes soon answered back with a 10-3 run to reclaim a 26-20 advantage. This stretch helped turn the game firmly in the Buckeyes' favor and they later went ahead 34-24 with 6:13 left following Middleton's second triple of the half.

Penn State trimmed the deficit, trailing just 36-29 with 4:32 left, but the Buckeyes finished strong on both ends. They held the Nittany Lions scoreless for the remainder of the period to gain a comfortable 41-29 advantage heading into the locker room.

Ohio State continued to build upon its strong play coming out of halftime, embarking on an 11-6 run to take hold of a commanding 52-35 advantage with 16:23 left in the contest.

Penn State made seven of its next nine shots, taking off on a 16-7 run that cut the deficit to single digits for the first time in the half, down just 59-51 with 11:24 remaining.

Ohio State's lead continued to falter in

the ensuing minutes when a three-pointer from Dunn cut the deficit to just 64-62 with 7:23 left, capping off an 11-0 run for the home team that lasted over three minutes. The Buckeyes then responded with five points from Gayle and two from Thornton to go back up 72-66 with 4:30 left. But the Lions battled back again, this time tying the game at 74 after a three-point basket from forward Leo O'Boyle.

The game was later tied at 76 with just 58 seconds left, but following an Okpara turnover, Penn State delivered the game's biggest play when guard Ace Baldwin Jr. connected on a clutch three-pointer to give the Nittany Lions a 79-76 lead with 32 seconds left. After Thornton and Hicks trad-



Roddy Gayle Jr.

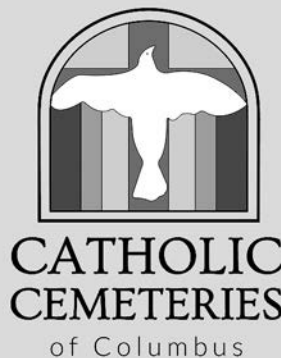
ed free throws, Ohio State had one last gasp down 80-78, but a corner three-point attempt from Battle with nine seconds left bounced off the rim and resulted in an Okpara foul, giving Penn State two more free throws and

allowing the Nittany Lions to hang on to the dramatic win.

Ohio State was led in the loss by Thornton, who scored 17 points on 4-of-11 shooting, along with 6-of-7 shooting from the free-throw line. Battle (13), Key (12) and Gayle (11) all reached double figures, while Key had a game-high 11 rebounds.

Penn State was led by Clary, who finished with 19 points, while Dunn (16), O'Boyle (15) and forwards Zach Hicks (11) and Qudus Wahab (10) reached double figures.

Ohio State will play five games before BSB goes to press again. The Buckeyes will face UCLA in the CBS Sports Classic in Atlanta on Dec. 16 (3 p.m., CBS), return home to face New Orleans on Dec. 21 (6 p.m., Big Ten Plus), play a neutral-site matchup against West Virginia in Cleveland on Dec. 30 (7 p.m., FOX), host Rutgers on Jan. 3 (7 p.m., BTN) and travel to face Indiana on Jan. 6 (8 p.m., FOX).

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Gayle, Thornton Emerging As Lethal Tandem

Ohio State sophomore guards Roddy Gayle Jr. and Bruce Thornton came into the season with lofty expectations, with head coach Chris Holtmann making it known throughout the offseason that the team would need to rely on the duo if they wanted to have a bounce-back year.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Through the first month of the campaign, the tandem has met – and maybe even exceeded – the standards put on by their coach, where they have taken significant steps in their respective games to emerge as one of the Big Ten's top back-court duos.

Starting each of the team's first 10 games, the guards have put their imprints on Ohio State's strong 8-2 start to the season, with Thornton and Gayle respectively ranking first and second in average minutes (31.3, 30.1), points per game (18.5, 14.3) and assists (43, 38).

The duo has also shown a knack for putting the team on their backs when they need them most, which was particularly evident during the Buckeyes' upset win over then-No. 17 Alabama on Nov. 24. That night, they accounted for 52 of the team's 92 points on 60.9 percent shooting, both reaching career highs with 29 points for Thornton and 23 points for Gayle.

This strong start has infused confidence into the two young guards that was not always seen during last season's struggles, allowing them to send a strong message to not only the Big Ten, but all of college basketball.

"I feel like we're one of the best back-courts in the country," Thornton said. "When Roddy and I are on the court together, I feel like we can make any play at any given time."

Gayle and Thornton's impact on the offensive end has been felt all season, where they have helped the team average 80.8 points per game, good for fourth in the conference. But Holtmann said on Nov. 29 that they have also made their presence known on the defensive end, an area where he thinks the two guards have made the most improvements this season.

"(Thornton and Gayle's production on offense) opens up a lot of stuff," Holtmann said. "But you can't minimize that both those guys can be solid-to-plus defenders, as well. Roddy, when he's playing well, has the ability to impact the ball defensively with his size and length and physicality. Bruce needs to continue to do that, and he's also done a better job with rebounding on the defensive end."

"It's not just about what they bring on the offensive end. They do have the ability to be dynamic on the defensive end. But we recruited those guys to be complete players, and we're hoping that that's

what they're growing into. That just gives you the flexibility to be able to be a better and more complete team."

Gayle and Thornton's rapid emergence has turned the heads of many across the Big Ten and college basketball, but for the two guards, it is a progression into stardom that has been building since they both arrived on campus last season. They said their successes so far this year are a product of the connectedness they have developed together both on and off the court, one that Gayle said will only intensify as their Ohio State careers progress.

"I feel like the chemistry between each other is growing every day," Gayle said. "Me being able to play off him, especially when he's hot, opens up a lot more opportunities for me. We've gotten off to a great start, and it's a long season, but I think it will be special for us."

Battle Finds Success Against Former Team

Ohio State fifth-year forward Jamison Battle faced off against some familiar faces when the Buckeyes welcomed Big Ten foe Minnesota into Value City Arena on Dec. 3, a program that the veteran wing spent two seasons with prior to transferring to Columbus this offseason.

At Minnesota, Battle averaged 15.1 points and 5.1 rebounds in 55 games (all starts). In his first game against his old team, the forward delivered his best all-around performance of his Ohio State career, notching a season-high 25 points on 7-of-12 shooting and a perfect 7 of 7 from the line while also adding seven rebounds and a blocked shot in the 84-74 win.

Battle, who also connected on four of his six three-point attempts, said after the game that although he did feel some extra emotion throughout the night while going up against his former teammates, he ultimately saw this as another opportunity for him and his team to put another tally in the win column.

"Obviously, playing against the team that gave you an opportunity (to play) in high-major basketball is a little emotional," Battle said. "But for me, it was going out there and just playing another game. I wanted to win this game, win the first Big Ten game, and continue to build off this good start of the season that we've had."

Holtmann said after the game that Battle had success against Minnesota due to his ability to put his team first and his desire to perform against his former teammates and coaches second. The coach added that Battle's decision to focus more on the overall team's efforts and less on his individual performance is something a lot of collegiate players struggle with, regardless of age and experience.

"Jamison has great respect for their players and their coaches," Holtmann said. "He's told me that a number of times. But when you're a player, one of the greatest lessons to learn is when you lose yourself in your team playing well, you typically play pretty well. It's a challenge for young players, it's a challenge for old players, because they want to succeed. It's a hard thing to

get yourself to do, particularly when you're playing in a game like this one where you want to play well. And I thought that was his focus, and as a result he did play really well."

Battle said this team-first mentality stems from the love and respect he has gained for his new teammates since arriving on campus this offseason, a feeling he thinks is mutual and was on full display against the Gophers.

"My teammates have the utmost trust in me, and that showed tonight," Battle said. "They had my back the whole game. That's what I really appreciate about this team is that we're so connected. Regardless of what happens, we're always going to be a family off the court. We're always going to be family on the court, so we just have to keep it at that and keep working."

NET, Other Metrics Think Highly Of Buckeyes

The Buckeyes are well-represented in a number of metrics, most notably in the first NET rankings of the season, which is an algorithm used by the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee and updated daily, rewarding teams who have quality wins.

Ohio State was at No. 25 in the NET rankings on Dec. 7, which was the fourth-highest ranking in the Big Ten behind only No. 4 Purdue, No. 21 Wisconsin and No. 22 Illinois.

The NET also showed that the Buckeyes have a 1-1 record in "Quad 1" matchups, which includes home games against teams ranked within the top 30 of the NET, neutral-site games against teams within the top 50, and away games against teams within the top 75. The Buckeyes' lone Quad 1 victory came against No. 12 Alabama, while their loss came at home against No. 13 Texas A&M on Nov. 10.

Ohio State is also highly regarded in the analytics-driven KenPom rankings. As of Dec. 7, the site had the Buckeyes as the 24th-best team in the nation, making them the fourth-highest ranked team in the Big Ten behind No. 2 Purdue, No. 13 Wisconsin and No. 14 Illinois.

The Buckeyes' improved offense, which has scored 75 or more points in nine of their first 10 games, is also noted by KenPom. They ranked 15th in the nation in adjusted offensive efficiency, which measures the amount of points scored per 100 possessions while also adjusting for the opponent. Ohio State had the third-highest adjusted offense in the Big Ten, trailing Purdue (fourth) and Wisconsin (14th).

Ohio State's strong start on the defensive end, where it has held its first 10 opponents to 67.3 points per game on just 42.4 percent shooting, has also impressed KenPom, though not as much as its offense. It ranked 59th out of 362 teams in adjusted defensive efficiency, which calculates points allowed per 100 possessions while adjusting for the opponent.

The Buckeyes had the eighth-highest adjusted defensive efficiency in the Big Ten, trailing Purdue (eighth), Illinois (11th), Michigan State (15th), Rutgers (17th), Maryland (20th), Wisconsin (22nd) and Indiana (47th).

Former Buckeye Lane Makes Broadcast Debut

Ohio State saw a familiar face return to Value City Arena for its 88-61 win over Central Michigan on Nov. 29 when former Buckeye guard and team captain Joey Lane served as the Big Ten Network's color analyst for their broadcast of the contest. The game marked Lane's TV broadcasting debut, an opportunity he said he was eager to jump at.

"I remember I was driving (when I was first informed of the opportunity) and I said something to the effect of, 'I don't know what I have going on that day, but it's not as important as this so count me in,'" Lane told The Columbus Dispatch.

Lane, who was accompanied by play-by-play announcer Connor Onion on the broadcast, received a warm reception from fans during the game. He was recognized on the jumbotron during the under-eight-minute TV timeout in the first half.

Lane scored just 33 points in 36 games while playing for both head coaches Thad Matta and Holtmann at Ohio State from 2015-2019 but became a fan favorite due to his efforts in leading the "Towel Gang," a group of Buckeye reserves who became known for their eccentric celebrations from the bench during games.

Lane has attempted to stay close to the sport of college basketball through the media industry since his playing days. He has served as the co-host of the Ohio State sports podcast "Drive The Lane" with Andrew Zoldan since its creation in 2019 and has also made occasional radio appearances on 97.1 The Fan.

The former Buckeye guard earned another broadcasting opportunity on Dec. 6 when he served as the color commentator for Ohio State's 84-64 win over Miami (Ohio), which was streamed exclusively on Big Ten Plus. Lane is slated to call another home game against New Orleans on Dec. 21, which will also be streamed on Big Ten Plus, with tip-off set for 6 p.m.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State led the entire Big Ten in three-point field goal percentage when Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, connecting on 40.4 percent of their attempts from beyond the arc, and is third in free-throw percentage at 76.1 percent.

- Former Ohio State guard Duane Washington Jr. was waived by the New York Knicks on Nov. 27. He did not appear in a game for the franchise and sustained a right thumb injury on Nov. 26 that will require him to be re-evaluated at the end of January. Washington was still a free agent when Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

- Los Angeles Sierra Canyon three-star shooting guard and Ohio State 2025 target Bryce James (6-4, 180) made his debut for the Trailblazers on Nov. 30. James, the son of four-time NBA champion and all-time scoring leader LeBron James, recorded six points, three assists, two steals and one block in 15 minutes in Sierra Canyon's 86-24 win over Moorpark High School.

Shumate Heating Up Off The Bench For OSU

Replacing a player like Taylor Mikesell is not an easy task, as Ohio State has discovered through the early part of this season.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

The Buckeyes still have four players averaging at least double digits – including seniors Jacy Sheldon (17.0 points) and Rebeka Mikulášiková (10.1), junior Taylor Thierry (13.3) and sophomore Cotie McMahon (16.9) – but the team's outside shooting has taken time to adjust, with McMahon and Thierry each taking more attempts from deep this season to help offset the loss of Mikesell.

Celeste Taylor, who has started every game at shooting guard this season, is shooting just 34.2 percent from the field and 20.7 percent from deep. But another potential option at shooting guard who has stepped up early in this season has been redshirt sophomore Emma Shumate, who has made the most of her time coming off the bench for the Buckeyes.

"We've seen her do this a lot in practice, so now she's starting to do it in games and have confidence in herself, because I'm confident right now," head coach Kevin McGuff said on Dec. 5. "I want her to have confidence in herself."

It has all stemmed from a message the team has sent to Shumate – a noted sharpshooter at Newark High School just east of Columbus – since she transferred to Ohio State from West Virginia. After redshirting the 2021 season, she finally saw the floor last year, averaging 11.1 minutes per game and attempting just 52 total three-pointers, connecting on just 12 for a 23.1 percent clip from deep.

Neither the shooting volume nor the percentage was what Ohio State expected from Shumate, so her coaches and teammates made it clear that they believed in her ability as a shooter and stressed a simple objective to her: shoot.

"It's replaying in there now, for sure," she said. "Shoot the ball. I just feel like I'm getting more confident in my shot and my ability to make it. I would say it's very much mental for me."

Shumate has scored in five of her eight appearances this season, including a career-high 22 points in Ohio State's 85-45 win over Ohio on Dec. 5. In the win, she connected on six of her 10 attempts from beyond the arc, and overall she is averaging 6.8 points on 45.5 percent shooting from deep this season.

The increased role for Shumate has opened up opportunities for Ohio State on the offensive end with another perimeter threat, while Shumate has also staked her claim on the defensive end with three blocks and one steal.

"It's fun to get out there and play with my teammates," she said. "I think we have a really good team this year, and just adding what we can, being in helpful ways we can."

Shumate is one of several Buckeyes – along with freshman guard Diana Collins and sophomore guard Kaia Henderson – who have seen increased playing time early in this season, priming them to play a role as Ohio State gets into Big Ten play. And as they see more time on the court, Shumate sees it as a benefit for the entire team.

"I just think the more practice we get in, the more games we get in together, more reps, I think we just know each other better and I think we're getting better every day," she said.

Mikulášiková Reaches 1,000 Career Points

In Ohio State's 78-58 win at Tennessee on Dec. 3, fifth-year forward Rebeka Mikulášiková finished with 18 points and eclipsed 1,000 career points with the Buckeyes.

Mikulášiková is the 37th player in program history to surpass 1,000 points and the first since Sheldon did so during the 2021-22 season. The program leader remains Kelsey Mitchell, who collected 3,402 points from 2015-18.

Mikulášiková is off to her best start at Ohio State, averaging 10.1 points on 52.4 percent shooting and 43.5 percent shooting from deep, which is second on the team behind Shumate. She has also cut down on her personal fouls, committing just 10 through nine games (1.1 per game) compared to 2.2 per game last season.

"She stretches the defense," McGuff said. "For our center to be able to shoot threes like that, it makes them come out and it gives us a little more space to play. It's really, really important with just the

style of play that we have on offense."

Sheldon 10th In WNBA Mock Draft

After an impressive start to this season for Sheldon – who is averaging 17.0 points, 3.8 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 2.3 steals per game on 52.5 percent shooting from the field and 40.5 percent shooting from beyond the arc – she is continuing to build momentum for the WNBA draft in her final season with the Buckeyes.

In a 2024 WNBA mock draft released by ESPN on Dec. 7, Sheldon was listed as the No. 10 overall selection to the Connecticut Sun.

"After Sheldon was limited to just 13 games due to a leg injury last season, we're seeing more of the 2021-22 version of her again," wrote ESPN's Michael Voepel. "That's great news for the Buckeyes and her WNBA prospects. Sheldon is a high-energy player who can change games with her defense."

At the top of the draft, Voepel had the Indiana Fever selecting Iowa guard Caitlin Clark with the No. 1 overall pick, followed by UConn guard Paige Bueckers at No. 2 to Phoenix, Stanford forward Cameron Brink at No. 3 to the Los Angeles Sparks, South Carolina center Kamilla Cardoso at No. 4 to the Seattle Storm and UConn forward Aaliyah Edwards at No. 5 to the Dallas Wings.

Sheldon made the decision to return to Ohio State for a fifth season after battling

through injuries through much of last year. Prior to a lower-leg injury that cost her the majority of last season, she was projected as a first-round selection. But, through the early stages of this season, she is continuing to play her way into better positioning.

She is looking to become the second Buckeye drafted in as many years after Mikesell was taken with the 13th overall pick in last year's draft by the Indiana Fever, though Mikesell was cut before the season began. She also spent time with the Atlanta Dream but was waived in July and has not resurfaced on a roster.

Mikulášiková Is Plank's Lady Buck of the Month

For many of the same reasons stated above – and for being a key in Ohio State's 8-1 start to the season – Mikulášiková is Plank's Lady Buck of the Month for November.

In six games during the month – a 5-1 record for Ohio State – Mikulášiková averaged 8.7 points, 1.8 rebounds and 1.7 assists on 51.4 percent shooting from the field and 30.0 percent shooting from deep, and she reached double digits in three of those contests.

Continuing this level of play will be a focus for Mikulášiková as Ohio State begins to get into the brunt of Big Ten play, but it's a positive start to the season that she can build on as the Buckeyes roll into December and beyond.

Plank's Cafe



Rebeka Mikulášiková
Senior Forward
Nitra, Slovakia

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Ohio State On Eight-Game Winning Streak

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State picked up a trio of huge wins since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, delivering a road beatdown of Tennessee on Dec. 3 followed by home wins over Ohio University on Dec. 5 and Penn State on Dec. 10 to open Big Ten play with a win.

The trio of victories moved the Buckeyes to 8-1 on the season, with eight consecutive wins since the season-opening loss to USC.

Standout performances from sophomore forward Cotie McMahon and fifth-year forward Rebeka Mikulášiková helped lead No. 16 Ohio State (6-1) past No. 20 Tennessee (4-4) in a 78-58 road win on Dec. 3, just the third 20-point home loss for the Volunteers over the program's past 50 seasons.

Ohio State led wire-to-wire against Tennessee, going up by as many as 22 points as it shot 41.1 percent from the floor (30 of 73) compared to just 35.1 percent shooting for the Volunteers (20 of 57). The Buckeyes also held a 45-36 advantage in rebounds – 17 on the offensive end, the most since grabbing 19 on Feb. 2, 2020, in an 80-74 win at Nebraska – while forcing 20 turnovers.

“I knew rebounding would be a huge key,” said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. “We emphasized offensive rebounding all week because what happens is they’re so big around the basket that when you drive it, their post players do a good job to come over and contest shots, try to take it away, allowing the person they’re guarding to (open up).”

Tennessee coach Kellie Harper said before the game that her team spent an entire day in practice preparing for how Ohio State likes to increase pace in transition and with the Buckeyes’ defensive press, but that extra work was not evident early on. Ohio State forced a turnover on the Volunteers’ second possession that led to an early layup by McMahon.

After Tennessee closed the deficit to just 9-7, the Buckeyes responded with an 11-0 run – with four points from McMahon and a triple from Mikulášiková – to lead 20-7 with 3:59 left in the quarter. But the Volunteers took advantage of poor shooting by the Buckeyes, who missed their last eight shots of the quarter, and Tennessee utilized an 8-0 run to trail just 20-15 going into the second frame.

The teams were slow coming out of the break, combining to hit just one of nine shots to begin the second quarter until Tennessee guard Tess Darby and McMahon traded three-pointers, giving Ohio State a 27-20 lead with 6:46 left in the half. After makes at the free-throw line from fifth-years Eboni Walker and Celeste Taylor, baskets by McMahon and fifth-year guard Jacy Sheldon increased Ohio State’s lead to 39-23, capping off a 13-2 run.

The Volunteers looked to carry some momentum into the locker room with a late three-pointer by guard Avery Strickland, but Sheldon hit a layup at the buzzer to make it 43-28 going into the half. Ohio State forced 10 turnovers by Tennessee in the first half that led to 16 points while the Volunteers shot just 32.1 percent from the floor.

“I think every game is different,” Taylor said. “So, whatever they give us on offense, we just adjust in our press defensively.”

The Buckeyes hit 3 of 4 baskets coming out of the half, and after Tennessee broke the scoring run with a triple by guard Destinee Wells, Mikulášiková responded with a three-pointer of her own – her third of the game – to give the Buckeyes a 52-31 lead. With the three-pointer, Mikulášiková became just the 37th player in program history to surpass 1,000 points for the Scarlet and Gray.

The Volunteers took off on an 8-1 run, but as Ohio State did all evening, it responded, this time with a triple from Sheldon that kick-started a 10-5 run to lead 63-44 entering the fourth. Taylor started off the fourth quarter with a three-pointer – three of 15 points on the night, a high with the Buckeyes in addition to 12 rebounds for a double-double – and added another basket, a steal and assist to junior guard Taylor Thierry to put the Buckeyes up 74-52 with 4:21 remaining before Ohio State closed things out.

“I thought we looked really connected out there today,” McGuff said. “Both ends of the court, we did a really good job playing together.”

Ohio State was led by McMahon, who fouled out with 19 points on 6-of-16 shooting, while Mikulášiková had 18 points and Sheldon added 13 points, in addition to Taylor’s double-double. The Volunteers were led by Wells, who had 11 points on 4-of-9 shooting.

Ohio State limited Tennessee to just 18.5 percent shooting from three (5 of 27).

Buckeyes Batter In-State Bobcats

Ohio State (7-1) had a dominant home victory over the visiting, in-state Ohio Bobcats (2-4) on Dec. 5, cruising to an 85-45 win in front of 4,950 fans at Value City Arena behind a career-high 22 points off the bench from guard Emma Shumate.

The Buckeyes hit 46.0 percent (29 of 63) of their attempts from the floor and 37.9 percent from deep (11 of 29), including six makes from beyond the arc by Shumate on 10 attempts.

“We’ve seen her do this a lot in practice, and she’s starting to have confidence in herself,” McGuff said of Shumate. “I’m confident in her right now, and I want her to have confidence in herself.”

Neither team presented much interest in scoring in the early stages of the game, however, as Ohio State led just 4-3 at the first media timeout with 4:58 left in the first quarter. To that point, each team was 1 of 7 from the field, with each make coming from deep.

The Buckeyes continued to play well on the defensive end coming out of the break but finally found a groove on the offensive end, with McMahon scoring back-to-back baskets. Those scores began a 12-0 run coming out of the timeout to take a 16-3 lead, but the Bobcats did add a triple in the closing minute to make it 16-6 going into the second frame.

Mikulášiková added her second triple of the game to begin the second quarter. It was answered by another three-pointer by

Ohio State 78, Tennessee 58								
Dec. 3, 2023								
Food City Center • Knoxville, Tenn.								
		1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (6-1)		20	23	20	15	78		
Tennessee (4-4)		15	13	16	14	58		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Mikulášiková	20	7-10	1-2	0-4	2	4	18	
McMahon	29	6-16	6-6	2-5	3	5	19	
Thierry	35	4-10	1-1	1-3	1	3	9	
Sheldon	38	6-15	0-2	3-4	6	1	13	
Taylor	35	6-12	2-4	6-6	3	2	15	
Harris	18	0-2	0-2	0-1	1	3	0	
Parks	13	1-4	0-0	1-1	0	2	2	
Walker	8	0-2	2-2	1-1	0	1	2	
Shumate	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Henderson	2	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Collins	1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Vres	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Totals	200	30-73	12-19	17-28	16	21	78	
Percentages: FG: 41.1%. FT: 63.2%. Three-point field goals: 6-22 (Mikulášiková 3-5, McMahon 1-3, Sheldon 1-5, Taylor 1-4, Harris 0-1, Henderson 0-1, Parks 0-1, Thierry 0-1, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Parks, Sheldon, Taylor, Walker). Turnovers: 12 (McMahon 3, Sheldon 3, Taylor 3, Mikulášiková, Team, Walker). Steals: 11 (Sheldon 4, Thierry 3, McMahon 2, Taylor 2).								
Tennessee	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Puckett	23	5-8	0-0	2-4	0	3	10	
Hollingshead	26	2-3	1-2	0-7	3	0	5	
Spear	20	0-9	0-0	1-0	2	1	0	
Powell	17	1-4	0-0	0-1	1	3	2	
T. Darby	29	2-11	0-0	1-2	1	4	6	
Wynn	16	1-2	4-6	1-3	1	1	6	
Wells	27	4-9	2-2	0-3	3	1	11	
Striplin	12	1-3	2-2	0-1	0	1	5	
Key	16	3-4	3-6	1-3	1	2	9	
Strickland	12	1-4	1-2	0-2	0	0	4	
E. Darby	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Totals	200	20-57	13-20	9-27	12	16	58	
Percentages: FG: 35.1%. FT: 65.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-27 (T. Darby 2-9, Strickland 1-3, Striplin 1-1, Wells 1-2, Hollingshead 0-1, Powell 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Striplin 5, Key 2). Turnovers: 20 (Puckett 3, Striplin 3, Wells 3, Hollingshead 2, Powell 2, Team 2, T. Darby, Key, Spear, Strickland, Wynn). Steals: 7 (T. Darby 2, Hollingshead, Key, Powell, Wells, Wynn). Officials: Bethel, Camy, Greene. Attendance: 8,723.								

the Bobcats, but Ohio State responded with a 10-0 run – with five points coming from Mikulášiková – to go up 29-9 with 5:49 left in the half.

The Bobcats got their first points in the paint with 5:14 left in the second quarter on a layup by Jaya McClure, but Ohio State – or more aptly, Shumate – responded with three consecutive three-pointers to put it up 38-11 with 2:21 left in the half. She then added another for good measure to help give the Buckeyes a 42-13 lead going into the locker room.

“It’s fun to get out there and play with my teammates,” Shumate said. “We have a really good team this year and adding what we can and being helpful in the ways we can – it’s fun.”

In the first half, Ohio State shot 47.1 percent from the field (16 of 34) and 43.8 percent from deep (7 of 16) while holding the Bobcats to 19.2 percent shooting from the field. The Buckeyes also forced 17 turnovers that resulted in 23 points.

Ohio University began showing some life in the third quarter, shooting 54.5 percent from the field during the frame (6 of 11), but it was still outscored 24-16 in the quarter and faced a 66-29 deficit entering the fourth. Ohio State was able to clear out

Ohio State 85, Ohio University 45									
Dec. 5, 2023 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	3	4	F			
Ohio U. (2-4)		6	7	16	16	45			
Ohio State (7-1)		16	26	24	19	85			
Ohio U.		Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
McClure	30	3-9	2-2	0-2	3	3	9		
Williams	22	2-7	0-0	0-2	1	4	5		
Watkins	15	2-7	0-0	0-1	0	2	5		
Dennis	12	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
Alper	13	0-2	0-0	1-5	1	4	0		
Tabeling	20	2-2	0-0	0-2	1	0	6		
Barnett	7	2-5	0-0	0-0	0	1	5		
Fantroy	19	2-4	0-0	1-3	0	1	4		
Johnson	10	1-2	2-2	0-1	0	1	4		
Mace	18	1-4	0-0	0-4	0	4	2		
Guice	8	0-2	2-2	0-0	2	1	2		
Lafler	16	0-6	0-0	0-2	0	1	0		
Baxter	10	0-2	0-0	0-2	0	1	0		
Totals	200	16-54	6-6	5-25	8	23	45		
Percentages: FG: 29.6%. FT: 100.0%. Three-point field goals: 7-21 (Tabeling 2-2, Barnett 1-4, Dennis 1-1, McClure 1-3, Watkins 1-2, Williams 1-2, Alter 0-1, Fantroy 0-1, Guice 0-1, Lefler 0-3, Mace 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 1 (Watkins). Turnovers: 26 (Mace 8, Fantroy 3, Lafler 3, McClure 3, Tabeling 3, Alper 2, Team 2, Guice, Williams). Steals: 8 (Dennis, Fantroy, Johnson, Lafler, Mace, Tabeling, Watkins, Williams).									
Ohio State		Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Thierry	24	5-9	5-6	3-1	1	1	15		
McMahon	18	6-9	1-3	1-6	1	2	14		
Mikulášiková	17	4-7	3-3	1-6	3	0	13		
Taylor	26	1-9	2-2	1-3	7	3	5		
Sheldon	21	1-4	0-0	0-1	2	1	2		
Shumate	22	7-12	2-2	2-1	2	1	22		
Henderson	10	3-3	0-0	0-3	2	0	6		
Collins	8	1-4	1-2	0-0	0	3	4		
Parks	19	1-2	1-2	1-6	0	0	3		
Walker	15	0-1	1-2	1-2	1	2	1		
Harris	18	0-3	0-0	0-3	2	2	0		
Vres	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	29-63	16-22	13-33	21	15	85		
Percentages: FG: 46.0%. FT: 72.7%. Three-point field goals: 11-29 (Shumate 6-10, Mikulášiková 2-3, Sheldon 1-2, McMahon 1-4, Taylor 1-3, Harris 0-3, Sheldon 0-2, Thierry 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Taylor 2, Parks). Turnovers: 19 (Taylor 6, Sheldon 5, Collins 2, McMahon 2, Team 2, Henderson, Parks). Steals: 15 (Taylor 5, Thierry 5, Mikulášiková 2, Collins, McMahon, Sheldon). Officials: Harris, Knight, Garland. Attendance: 4,950.									

the bench in the final frame, outscoring the Bobcats 19-16 for the final margin as 10 Buckeyes scored in the win.

In addition to Shumate's 22 points, Thierry had 15 points. McMahon (14 points) and Mikulášiková (13 points) also finished in double digits, with each providing a game-high seven rebounds in addition to seven boards from fifth-year forward Taiyier Parks.

McClure led the Bobcats with nine points on 3-of-9 shooting as Ohio shot just 29.6 percent (16 of 54) from the floor and 33.3 percent (7 of 21) from deep while committing 26 turnovers.

OSU Takes Down PSU In Overtime

Ohio State (8-1, 1-0) overcame a 13-point second-half deficit and overtime in a 94-84 win over No. 25 Penn State (7-3, 0-1) on Dec. 10 in front of 6,032 fans at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes trailed 53-40 just one possession into the third quarter but outscored Penn State 54-31 the rest of the way – including a 14-4 run in overtime – to begin Big Ten play with a win and continue an eight-

Ohio State 94, Penn State 84

Dec. 10, 2023

Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	OT	F
Penn State (7-1)	26	24	18	12	4	84
Ohio State (8-1)	26	14	19	21	14	94

Penn State	Total	FT	Reb.				
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Brigham	31	4-4	0-0	2-8	0	5	8
Ciezki	42	7-17	2-2	3-3	4	3	19
Kapinus	20	3-7	2-3	2-2	1	5	8
Pinto	10	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	5	0
Marisa	41	11-21	3-5	0-8	3	1	28
Valladay	19	3-5	2-4	0-0	1	5	8
Murray	27	2-3	0-0	0-2	4	3	6
Hall	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Oden	18	1-6	2-2	0-3	1	2	5
Lavelle	15	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	3	2
Totals	200	32-66	11-16	7-29	14	33	84

Percentages: FG: 48.5%. FT: 68.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-18 (Ciezki 3-7, Marisa 3-6, Murray 2-3, Oden 1-1, Kapinus 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Brigham). **Turnovers:** 20 (Kapinus 4, Brigham 3, Ciezki 3, Oden 3, Marisa 2, Valladay 2, Hall, Lavelle, Pinto). **Steals:** 8 (Kapinus 2, Murray 2, Pinto 2, Ciezki, Marisa).

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Thierry	38	2-6	3-4	3-1	2	3	7
Sheldon	45	8-13	13-14	0-5	3	4	31
Taylor	39	5-12	1-4	2-9	4	4	13
Mikulášiková	33	3-9	0-0	2-2	2	1	8
McMahon	39	11-18	5-14	0-8	0	2	27
Greene	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Harris	16	0-1	3-4	1-2	3	1	3
Shumate	5	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Parks	7	2-2	1-2	1-0	1	0	5
Totals	200	31-64	26-42	12-29	15	16	94

Percentages: FG: 48.4%. FT: 61.9%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-20 (Mikulášiková 2-5, Sheldon 2-4, Taylor 2-7, Harris 0-1, McMahon 0-1, Shumate 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Sheldon). **Turnovers:** 13 (Thierry 4, McMahon 3, Mikulášiková 3, Sheldon 2, Team). **Steals:** 7 (McMahon 3, Mikulášiková, Sheldon, Taylor, Thierry). **Officials:** Inouye, Daley, Hobbs. **Attendance:** 6,032.

game winning streak.

"The Big Ten is one of the best conferences – if not the best – out there," Sheldon said. "If you don't come out ready for any game, you're going to get beat. This is a ridiculous conference with a lot of really good teams, a lot of really good players, so it's exciting. It's good to have the first one under our belt but a lot more to come."

The Buckeyes missed on five of their first six shots to begin the game, but the Nittany Lions did not score until there was 6:08 left in the first quarter before eventually tying the game up at 7-7 following a three-pointer by senior guard Makenna Marisa.

The Buckeyes then scored on three consecutive possessions to go up 13-7, at which point redshirt senior guard Madison Greene – who missed the majority of last season with a knee injury – checked in for the first time this season with 3:39 left in the frame, though she did not record a statistic other than a missed shot in four minutes.

The teams continued battling until another three-pointer from Marisa kick-started a furious scoring run over the last two minutes – including six made field goals – that led to a 26-26 tie entering the second quarter.

McGuff was forced to call a quick timeout after Penn State opened on a 7-0 run to begin the second. Out of the break, Taylor broke the run with a three-pointer, but the Nittany Lions responded with an 8-0 run – including two triples – to take a 41-29 lead with 6:33 left in the half, requiring another timeout from McGuff.

Things went better for the Buckeyes out

of that break, as they embarked on a 9-1 run to cut the deficit to 42-38 with 4:16 left in the second. But Penn State then held Ohio State scoreless for nearly the remainder of the half, with a layup from McMahon the Buckeyes' only points in the final four minutes as the Nittany Lions took a 50-40 lead into the locker room.

Ohio State's difficulty in defending the three continued into the third. Penn State guard Shay Ciezki hit a triple on the Nittany Lions' first possession of the half to go up 53-40. The Buckeyes kept pace throughout the quarter, and after trailing 61-51 with 3:17 left, they took off on an 8-0 run to cut the deficit to just 61-59 with 1:55 left in the frame. Penn State responded with another triple, however, and eventually led 68-59 entering the fourth.

"You've got to really be on point defensively, individually and as a team, and when we weren't, they made us pay," McGuff said. "So we've got to get better defensively. If we want to win games like that – we won today, but we were certainly vulnerable to losing."

Ohio State was able to retake the lead after starting the final frame off with a 10-0 run – including triples by Sheldon and Mikulášiková – to take a 69-68 lead with 6:23 left. Later, Marisa completed an and-one play following a foul by McMahon that gave the Nittany Lions a 76-75 lead with 2:03 remaining.

McMahon was then able to get to the line herself and hit a pair of free throws to regain a 77-76 lead, and on Ohio State's next possession, Taylor connected from downtown to make it 80-76 with just 43 seconds remaining. Marisa then scored on the ensuing possession for the Nittany Lions, and they tied the game after a steal by forward Chanaya Pinto and layup by guard Taylor Valladay with just 11 seconds left to send the game to overtime.

But after being down for most of the contest, Ohio State dominated the extra period, outscoring Penn State 14-4 over the final five minutes of play to secure the win, with McMahon and Sheldon combining for the entire overtime scoring output.

"We didn't want to go into another overtime," McMahon said. "We didn't even want to go into (the first) overtime. We just said, 'Hey, let's bury them in the ground this quarter so we don't have to worry about anything.' That's what we did."

Sheldon and McMahon led the Buckeyes with 31 and 27 points, respectively, while Taylor also reached double digits with 13 points and added a game-high 11 rebounds. Marisa had a team-high 28 points for the Nittany Lions on 11-of-21 shooting and was 3 of 6 from deep, part of an impressive three-point shooting performance – 9 of 18 – for Penn State.

The Buckeyes will play five games before BSB goes to press again. Ohio State will host Grand Valley State on Dec. 15 (6 p.m., Big Ten Plus), UCLA on Dec. 18 (6:30 p.m., FS1) and Belmont on Dec. 22 (1 p.m., Big Ten Plus) before traveling to Michigan on Dec. 30 (12 p.m., FOX) and Northwestern on Jan. 5 (TBD, Big Ten Plus).

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website. The main headline is "MARVIN HARRISON JR. FINISHES FOURTH IN HEISMAN VOTING". Below the headline is a photo of Marvin Harrison Jr. and a quote from Greg Wilson. To the right, there are two more headlines: "Buckeyes Blow 18-Point Lead Fall To Penn State 83-80 To Snap Seven-Game Win Streak" and "Marvin Harrison Jr., Tyleik Williams, Denzel Burke Name Walter Camp All Americans".

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Scooter Becomes Shooter For Buckeye Icers

Scooter Brickey is a defenseman with the heart and mind of a forward and is finally showing off his offensive skills in his final season for Ohio State.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The fifth-year senior was third on the team in points entering the home series against Minnesota on Dec. 8-9. That's good and bad. The Buckeyes (5-8-4, 0-8-2 Big Ten) have struggled to score, having been shut out three times, but it's not for lack of trying from Brickey. He had an assist vs. the Golden Gophers and through 17 games has five goals and six assists for 11 points. Compare that to 24 points (six goals, 18 assists) in his previous 99 games that included three seasons at Western Michigan and last year for the Buckeyes.

"The coaches are really putting me in the right spots so that my teammates are setting me up and making unbelievable passes to me to get that opportunity of scoring those goals," he said. "It's just a matter of putting them away."

"I've got (sophomore forward Stephen) Halliday giving me backdoor passes. So they're bound to go in at some point. I've been lucky enough to find that balance between coaches, awesome teammates and confidence. You put those three together and it's been the big thing that's been changing for me."

It could also be in his nature to score. He comes from a hockey background and started skating at age 2. His father, Scott, won a hockey national championship at North Dakota and was drafted by the St. Louis Blues. His sister, Sydney, was an accomplished hockey player as well but switched sports to play golf for Northern Illinois.

All through his childhood and early teens, Scooter was a forward until about age 15 when his team was down to three defensemen and he answered the call.

"My sister played defense, and I watched her for many years so I thought I can jump back there," he told BSB last season. "I ended up doing really well back there. My coach loved having me there. I stayed there the next year and went to juniors, and the rest is history."

Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik is pleased but not surprised that Brickey has increased his point production.

"You go back to juniors, I mean, he had ability then, and prior to that he was a forward so he had a little bit of offensive ability there," the coach said. "Here, he's just been in the right position. When you're confident in your abilities, you've got a little swagger."

"He's been on the power play and got a couple of goals there, but also even strength, he's just finding himself in those spots and he can shoot the puck, so it's nice to see."

Skating Up Ice

Rohlik's system encourages the defenseman to be involved in the offense. That's what Brickey likes to hear.

"The game is evolving," Brickey said. "Defensemen are a big part of the game and joining the play. A lot of teams that are successful are having their (defense) join the play very hard and aggressively."

"Obviously, there's the side of it where you can't be too aggressive, but the way they teach us here, they're giving us great examples and showing us great video on when to go and not to go. Just reading the activation has been huge, and the coaches have been a big help guiding us in that direction."

Brickey (6-4, 215) showed he's not afraid to stick-handle through traffic, weaving his way around several players to score a highlight goal against Michigan State on Nov. 4.

"I give my coaching staff a lot of credit," Rohlik said. "It's really all about the development here, and they do a lot of skill stuff be-

fore and after practice. You see guys coming in here off the bus (from the OSU Ice Rink) an hour after practice. That's because we have guys here who really want to learn and develop."

Brickey also deserves plaudits for trying to improve his game. He played in the Cap City Summer Elite League in the Columbus area over the summer. The first-time venture brought professional players – many from the Columbus Blue Jackets – collegians and junior players together for competitive games.

"That was a blast," he said. "Being with the pro guys in their everyday life, just seeing how they handled themselves is pretty amazing. It's something to watch and try to take into this year, which I've been trying to do, trying to guide guys in the right direction. It's been great because you're able to learn so much there and you come here and are able to put it to use."

Brickey, who was named captain this season, took advantage of the bonus season due to the pandemic. He didn't have the experience he wanted at Western Michigan, where he played 59 games (10 as a junior), and felt another season in Columbus would be beneficial.

"My long-term goal is to be a pro hockey player, and I think it was best for me to come back and get all those games and continue to get better," he said.

His other objective was to help the Buckeyes return to the NCAA tournament for a second straight season. That seems far-fetched at the moment, but Brickey isn't giving up hope.

"We're just insanely close to being a really good team," he said. "Scoring has been our issue right now, and if we start finding a way to get it in, it's going to be a game-changing thing."

He noted the Buckeyes were 27th in the PairWise rankings which are used as a parameter for selecting the 16-team NCAA field.

"That's insane," he said. "To be that (high) without winning a conference game is pretty big. So if we put a couple of wins together, we're going to shoot up, and that's going to

give the team a lot of confidence."

Looking Back

The Buckeyes went 0-3-1 since the last issue of BSB. They lost 3-0 and 6-1 at Wisconsin on Dec. 1-2. The following weekend, they fell to Minnesota 5-4 in the opener and tied 1-1 at Value City Arena.

In the series opener vs. Wisconsin, the Badgers took a 1-0 lead at 9:13 of the first period on a goal by Zach Schulz. The score remained that way until Christian Fitzgerald doubled the lead at 13:47 of the third period, scoring unassisted after a turnover, and Cruz Lucius iced the win with an empty-net goal at 19:33.

Logan Terness made 26 saves for the Buckeyes while Wisconsin's Kyle McClellan had 29. Ohio State was shut out for the third time in seven games.

The next night, UW went up 2-0 when David Silye scored on the power play at 17:23 followed by a shorthanded goal from Owen Lindmark at 19:38 of the first period. Then, at 3:18 of the second, Quinn Finley converted a penalty shot for a 3-0 lead.

It was 4-0 before Ohio State's Patrick Guzzo got one back with a man-up goal at 8:11, tipping a Davis Burnside shot with Max Montes also assisting, but the Badgers (12-4-0, 6-2-0) scored twice in the third period.

Seasons Beatings

The Buckeyes ended their pre-holiday schedule on somewhat of a positive note after a 5-4 loss in the opener to the No. 10 Golden Gophers followed by a 1-1 tie the next night with the Buckeyes picking up the extra shootout point.

Freshman goaltender Kristoffer Eberly was the star of the weekend for the Buckeyes. Having played 20 minutes in his debut on Dec. 2 vs. Wisconsin, he replaced Terness over the final 40 minutes of the opener against Minnesota (9-5-4, 5-4-3) and stopped 10 of 12 shots.

He made his first start the following game, and he made 23 saves and didn't allow a goal in three rounds of the shootout. Davis Burnside scored in the first frame of the shootout for the Buckeyes to provide the winning margin. Teammate Cam Thiesing scored a goal in each game.

Next

The Buckeyes are off until hosting Mercyhurst at 5 p.m. on Dec. 30. They're home for Bowling Green on Jan 5 at 7 p.m. and finish the nonconference schedule the following night at Bowling Green at 7:07 p.m.

Take A Bow

Brickey is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for November. The Burtchville, Mich., native had seven points (three goals, four assists) in six games.

Brickey had two goals against Michigan State on Nov. 4, a career-high three points (one goal, two assists) vs. Princeton on Nov. 24 and two more helpers the next night against the Tigers.

For complete recaps of the Wisconsin and Minnesota series, go to BuckeyeSports.com, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For November



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Multiple Weight Classes Still Not Settled

Ohio State has already competed in two tournaments and five duals as of Dec. 10, but despite consistent starters at 125, 165 and 184 pounds, coach Tom Ryan is adamant these three weight classes are still up for grabs.

"We're looking for someone to convince us that they're better in a wide range of competition," Ryan told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "They'll figure out a way to win better than the other guy. It's close. They're all very close."

ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

Redshirt freshman Brendan McCrone has been impressive at 125 pounds early on in the season with an 11-5 record and some upsets, namely his win over then-No. 4 Eddie Ventresca when the Buckeyes beat Virginia Tech in a dual on Nov. 10. Despite the early success, Ryan still believes that freshman Vincent Kilkeary is right on McCrone's heels in the weight class.

It's a line that Ryan needs to walk carefully, because if Kilkeary isn't going to be the starter for the season, Ryan hopes to be able to redshirt him. That would allow Kilkeary to wrestle for the team in only five events, so he has to prove himself in matches that are unattached while McCrone continues to start.

At 165 pounds, senior Isaac Wilcox started the year with the spot after winning a wrestle-off over redshirt freshman Carter Chase and has a 9-4 record. Junior Bryce Hepner was out with an injury to begin the year, but he's back now and is right behind Wilcox.

Hepner made his debut against Hofstra on Nov. 19, winning by technical fall 18-2, but in a wrestle-off during the team's off week, Wilcox earned the spot for himself with a 3-2 decision over Hepner. Ryan said they are watching Wilcox closely, and there are places he could improve if he wants to continue to start for the team.

"Isaac cannot afford to make little mistakes in matches," Ryan said. "He doesn't have the offensive power. He's not going to be in 30 positions to score. He might get three or four, and he's got to get them. (At the Cliff Keen Invitational), there were some bright spots, but he was in the round of 16, had the kid in the air and didn't finish. That's a 90 percent success ratio. That's a three-foot jumper to win the NBA championship. It's a two-foot putt and we didn't get it."

It is a crowded weight class for the Buckeyes at 184 pounds with three wrestlers – freshman Ryder Rogotzke, redshirt freshman Seth Shumate and sixth-year Gavin Hoffman – who Ryan believes would be able to compete whenever he needs them to. Shumate took down Rogotzke in the wrestle-off to start the year and earn the spot.

Shumate had the spot until Hoffman was able to wrestle at 184 pounds after waiting the amount of time required by the NCAA when moving down a weight class after making the switch from 197 pounds. Hoffman made the change because he believes it is his best chance to win a national championship, and Ryan still believes that is a possibility for Hoffman.

"When your body goes from 210 pounds to 190 pounds in a few weeks, you have a strength deficit," Ryan said. "You have a body awareness deficit. You just don't feel normal, because it's not normal. But time helps. Time at 190 will become normal to him. There's no way to force feed this. It's going to take time."

Early in the season is the time to work things like this out, and the Buckeyes have been doing fine even if they are not at the strength they could be at later down the road. They have started 4-1 in duals with the upset win over then-No. 3 Virginia Tech and three perfect duals, shutting out Edinboro, Columbia and Hofstra.

Ryan is optimistic because their weaknesses are being identified early in the season, and they are coachable ones. He believes they will be even better because of it when Big Ten duals and NCAA championships come around.

"I wouldn't expect us to be physically ready the way we will be in March," Ryan said. "But technically, there's just some things – I wish these mistakes were not being made. I'm not overly pleased where we are technically, but there's no alarm at all, because we've identified some issues. I saw some things that we've got to get better at. I'm glad they were exposed now and not in March when you can't fix it, the season's over. As a staff and as a team, we're all optimistic about what needs to be fixed."

Mendez A Champion At Cliff Keen Invitational

Ohio State competed in the Cliff Keen Invitational in Las Vegas from Dec. 1-2 and returned to Columbus with a third-place finish, while sophomore Jesse Mendez brought home a championship in the 141-pound division.

As a team, Ohio State finished with 123.5 points behind only Iowa State (130.5) and Nebraska (125.5), with six Buckeyes placing individually.

Ryan said the team used the tournament as a way to gauge where the team was at this point with so much season left to go, and he was happy with what he saw.

"We went to this big challenge of the Cliff Keen, which is a great early midseason challenge with the number one priority being: 'Do we have any leaks in our boat?' " he said. "Where are the places that that we need to patch? Do we have them? When you're in a tournament like this, you typically will see areas that you need to work on, and the tournament went well. We were a couple points out of first place. But the big thing was that we learned so much in places that we need to improve. It's good learning."

Three wrestlers made it to the semifinals for Ohio State, but Mendez was the only one to make it out of the first match on day two of the tournament and compete for a championship. He wrestled three times on day one with two technical falls – including one over No. 14 Vince Cornella of Cornell and one pin to earn a spot in the semifinals.

Mendez had a tough road ahead of him in the semifinals, facing No. 4 Brock Hardy of Nebraska. It wound up as the first match in the tournament he didn't win by fall or technical fall, but he still got the 11-3 major-decision win to move on to the finals.

In the finals against No. 7 Ryan Jack of NC State, there were no points awarded in the first period of the match. Mendez started up in the second period, and Jack escaped to lead 1-0 into the third period. Mendez escaped 10 seconds into the third and had a takedown for the final 5-2 margin.

Mendez hadn't lost a match for Ohio State this season through the Cliff Keen tournament. Ryan said it's because of the dedication and hard work that he has been putting in to get better in every aspect.

"He loves the sport. He loves to compete. He loves to perform," Ryan said. "It's a performance from him every time. He's diligent. He just keeps getting better. We saw him as a true freshman last year, and now you're seeing a guy who's got a full year and a half in the room. He's developing more and more skills in different positions, which is making him very hard to beat. His defense has improved, and his top game has improved tremendously."

Redshirt freshman Nic Bouzakis was the only Ohio State wrestler to drop his first-round match, moving to the consolation bracket on the first day in Las Vegas. But he responded with seven consecutive wins, including a win over No. 14 Domenic Zaccone of Campbell to finish third in the weight class.

Ryan thought Bouzakis could have won the tournament at 133 pounds, but he's happy with how he responded after losing in a match he thought was winnable.

"Nic, to me, was the best guy in the weight," Ryan said. "He didn't win the weight, but he did the best thing you could have after losing. He wasn't really ready in his first match the way he should have been, and he got beat in a match where he had plenty of chances to score but just didn't get it. Nic is a team guy. Nic has

pride. It's personal. He cares. And when you have all those things, you typically fight back for the bracket. He came back roaring for the bracket."

In addition to Bouzakis and Mendez, other placers included redshirt senior Carson Kharchla (third, 174 pounds), redshirt senior Dylan D'Emilio (fourth, 149), redshirt freshman Nick Feldman (sixth, heavyweight) and sophomore Paddy Gallagher (seventh, 157).

Mendez was the only wrestler who didn't lose for Ohio State, but Ryan felt each wrestler as a whole has been good about how they have come back to their next match after a loss.

"They're learning there's trust being built," Ryan said. "When you lose, which pretty much everyone does at one point or another, we're still going to love you. Life doesn't change. You're not treated differently. I think that releases some of the stress that an athlete can have in wanting to satisfy their coaches and their family, their parents. You will be treated the same. We're going to dissect what happened, we'll put an action plan together and we're going to help you follow through on this plan. That's the job as a coach."

OSU Suffers First Dual Loss To Pitt

The Buckeyes were upset by No. 18 Pittsburgh when they returned home to the Covelli Center on Dec. 10.

Six out of the 10 weight classes lost in the 21-13 upset, including Mendez, who fell in his bout 4-2 after a takedown in the final seconds of the third period. It was his first loss of the season in either a tournament or a dual for Ohio State.

Feldman suffered an injury at the Cliff Keen Invitational and medically forfeited his placement match, and he remained out for the dual against the Panthers. Hogan Swenski took his place at heavyweight, losing 12-2 when the Buckeyes needed a tech fall or a pin to beat Pittsburgh.

For a full recap of every weight class for this dual and every other Buckeye wrestling event, visit BuckeyeSports.com.

Up Next

Ohio State will finish out the calendar year with duals against Northern Iowa, Lock Haven and NC State on Dec. 19 in Nashville before returning to the Covelli Center to host Cornell on Jan. 5.

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Ohio State Could Use Helping Of Holiday Cheer

The holidays are already challenging – finding a parking space, dealing with an overflow of people, hoping that the packages you ordered online arrive in time for Christmas. Imagine how much more it is for a football program attempting to navigate NFL decisions, bowl game opt-outs and players looking to transfer.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Ohio State is experiencing all of that, making for a pretty turbulent run-up to a Cotton Bowl date with the Missouri Tigers. This seems like your classic “all about perspective” showdown – on one hand you have the Buckeyes, still smarting from their loss in the Big House and now dealing with roster attrition and questions about culture, and on the other you have the Tigers, who seem thrilled to be in a New Year’s Six game and want to show that they are not a fluke.

It has the makings of what many observers would consider an upset, and that makes this a crucial contest for Ohio State and, more importantly, Ryan Day.

The coach came under fire for some of his decisions in the Michigan loss, and there is still a lingering thought from many in Buckeye Nation that because he is an “outsider” he doesn’t get the rivalry with the Wolverines. Losing three straight will do that, and while the loss still stings, there’s nothing that can be done about it until next season.

Day’s more immediate problem is getting his team to focus on a game it may not view as important and constructing the roster so that not only does Ohio State have its best chance to win, but also to provide optimism for the 2024 season. There will be enough new faces in the lineup to make the Cotton Bowl serve as kind of an audition – none more so than at quarterback.

That position took center stage after the blindside that starter Kyle McCord was throwing his name into the transfer portal. While McCord had his inconsistencies this season, he wasn’t nearly as bad as fans made him out to be, and there looked to be some room for growth in 2024.

The buzz is that his decision was made after a conversation he and his father had with Day regarding status for next year. Word is that the McCord’s camp wanted assurances that he would be the guy. Day wasn’t ready to make that declaration, which is prudent and well within his rights as the guy who runs the program. No assurances meant no McCord, and the decision was made to jump into the transfer portal.

This is bad for both parties – for McCord because it shows a lack of willingness to work, to confront adversity and show that you can overcome and improve. It’s also a bad look for a young adult who apparently allows Daddy to make his decisions for him. I get the sense that this isn’t really what McCord wanted, but something he was forced to do by those around him. That’s doing

him a big-time disservice, as it conveys the message that when something becomes difficult, your best course of action is to run from it and seek the easy path.

It’s also bad for the Buckeyes because they probably weren’t counting on having to revamp the game plan for a new quarterback. Neither Devin Brown nor Lincoln Kienholz got much playing time during the season, but now both could be in the spotlight against Missouri as they attempt to show they have the goods to take over the position. What little was seen didn’t provide much optimism, but maybe with a full complement of bowl practices and getting comfortable with teammates things will be different.

There seems to be a lot of concern from fans about losing players to the portal, at least when it comes to numbers.

As of this writing, Ohio State had 14 players in the transfer portal. That seems like a high number until you consider that, outside of McCord, wide receiver Julian Fleming and running back Chip Trayanum, most are backups who had been passed on the depth chart or who saw younger, better players coming in the next recruiting class and felt now was the time to get out.

It’s a bit surprising that the Buckeyes have not been, to this point, major players in the transfer portal. There certainly seems to be a need at quarterback, and there are more than enough candidates to bring in as a bridge between McCord and the future.

Going into 2024 with a largely unproven signal-caller is risky, and should the Buckeyes pass on adding depth, it could be a sign that Day is unwilling to concede that maybe he made a mistake in the handling of the position. He’s a quarterbacks coach, and it’s probably not in his thought process that he could be wrong about the position. Not bringing in a veteran to compete for the job and maybe put the Buckeyes in better position to contend for the national championship next season would seem to be, from here anyway, a big whiff for Day.

Thinking that you can’t have possibly misevaluated a player or that everything is fine because you say so is hubris and often leads to a big fall. Going into the spring with Brown, Kienholz and recruit Air Noland seems to be banking quite a bit on faith.

Day needs to be careful with his comfort level, especially with all that’s gone on in the program lately. The loss to Michigan, players leaving, recruiting misses – all of it is important, and with a new athletic director coming aboard over the summer, Day will have to be on notice that his biggest backer – Gene Smith – is no longer in the building. What do new ADs like to do? Put their stamp on a program by making a big hire in the football program. Day needs to make sure he doesn’t give whoever takes over any reason to consider making a change.

Winning the Cotton Bowl would be a solid first step and would make for a much happier disposition when hearing strains of “Auld Lang Syne” as the clock ticks out on 2023.

The Last Time

The Cotton Bowl will be the final appearance for a host of Ohio State seniors, but it

may well be the last time for a few other key players, too.

The recent trend of players opting out of bowl games when they are touted as first-round picks likely continues for a couple of Buckeyes, as Marvin Harrison Jr. and Denzel Burke will almost certainly not play.

There are anonymous reports floating around social media that Harrison is “really weighing” his options and that there is an opportunity to make “NFL money” through NIL should he return. Figures like \$20-25 million for a return have been thrown around. Don’t believe for a second that’s true.

For one thing, Ohio State’s NIL collectives have not been organized enough to make that happen. And even if they were, that still wouldn’t match what Harrison would be able to make as a top-three NFL draft pick. The way the league’s rookie contracts work is that dollar amounts are determined by where a player is selected. No haggling, no discourse. There’s a set amount, and for a top-three pick it’s been in the area of \$35-38 million for a four- or five-year contract.

So even if it was possible for OSU’s NIL arm to rustle up \$20 million, it would fall short of the entirety of an NFL rookie deal, and it also would still leave the possibility for injury. So Harrison would make his NIL money then have his NFL value reduced and likely have a shorter shelf life. There is zero benefit to playing in a game that doesn’t allow for a chance at a national title, so folks should enjoy him supporting his team on the sideline. Heck, maybe even wave to him and wish him a happy new year.

Burke is in the same boat, though less certain to be a first-rounder. He played well enough that he should be somewhere in the mid-to-late first round, so it would be hard to blame him if he sat out. What isn’t clear, though, is which other underclassmen might opt out.

Coming into this season there was a lot of hype around J.T. Tuimoloau, and while he had an OK season, it wasn’t anything to write home about. He had been mocked in the first round in early draft projections, but the most recent projections do not include him. Same with Jack Sawyer. It would probably benefit both guys to play, especially if they are thinking about making the jump, because Missouri has an excellent offensive line. Make plays against the Tigers, and your stock increases.

Another to watch is Emeka Egbuka. He didn’t have the hoped-for season due to injury and McCord’s inconsistency. He could still be a first-rounder, but he could also be Ohio State’s unquestioned top receiver should he decide to return for the 2024 campaign. If he plays, it could be a sign that he is leaning toward a return, so watch reports leading up to game day to see what his intentions are.

And then you have TreVeyon Henderson. Folks who have followed this space know that Henderson is a personal favorite due to his combination of power and speed. Running backs are not valued nearly as much by the NFL as they used to be, so there isn’t much chance Henderson would be a first-rounder. It won’t be a surprise if he

plays, nor if he returns for the 2024 season.

Think about it. Trayanum transfers, which doesn’t make sense unless he knows that he wouldn’t be the Buckeyes’ top ball carrier next season. It’s likely that Trayanum knows what Henderson’s future plans are, and with him around, the best Trayanum could hope for is a committee approach. He wanted to go someplace where he could be the main ball carrier, so he won’t get any kind of smoke from this corner.

If his departure is a sign that Henderson is back for next season, that’s a huge bonus that most OSU fans weren’t counting on. He and Dallan Hayden would make an excellent one-two punch and would be one less worry for a team that looks to be losing a decent amount of talent in the offseason.

Let’s Go Bowling

The Big Ten has the distinction of having the only sub-.500 bowl team for this year’s bowl season, with 5-7 Minnesota among the nine league teams qualifying for a bowl game.

I’ve said for years that cutting the bowls down to 15 or 20 would make them special once again, an actual reward for a solid season rather than a showcase for mediocrity, which is what many are.

My real wish would be to get rid of the playoff system altogether to determine the national champion. The bowl games would have minimal (maybe no?) opt-outs, and teams would actually try to win instead of having it be a showcase for the following season. You would attract fans to attend and then let a combination of a committee and computers choose the two best after the bowls to play for the big prize.

Instead, we begin a 12-team playoff next year, which will fix nothing and likely cause just as many problems as the four-team event is believed to have. But that’s next year.

As far as this year goes, this is one person’s read on how the Big Ten will fare in the postseason. Remember that these games are hard to project without knowing which players will be sitting out or going into the transfer portal.

Las Vegas Bowl: Utah 28, Northwestern 17

Quick Lane Bowl: Minnesota 20, Bowling Green 18

Pinstripe Bowl: Miami (Fla.) 23, Rutgers 15

Cotton Bowl: Missouri 28, Ohio State 27

Peach Bowl: Penn State 24, Ole Miss 16

Music City Bowl: Auburn 31, Maryland 21

ReliaQuest Bowl: LSU 36, Wisconsin 20

Citrus Bowl: Tennessee 14, Iowa 12

Rose Bowl (CFP Semifinal): Michigan 27, Alabama 24

Sugar Bowl (CFP Semifinal): Texas 33, Washington 28

CFP National Championship: Texas 31, Michigan 23

May everyone in Buckeye Land have an outstanding holiday season and a safe and joyous New Year.

Pulling The McCord On Buckeye Career Startling

In my nearly 43 years at Buckeye Sports Bulletin, I have to say I don't ever recall being blindsided like I was by Kyle McCord's decision to enter the transfer portal. Oh, maybe there was something back in the BSB dark ages, but I don't recall it now. I don't know of anyone who wasn't at least surprised by McCord's decision. Maybe Ryan Day. That seems to be a subject of great speculation.

I was looking forward to McCord returning next season and showing vast improvement over what would at the least have to be considered an adequate season, and that might be minimizing his efforts. We have become so spoiled – almost jaded – by the incredible string of quarterback success we have witnessed since Day's arrival, starting with Dwayne Haskins and continuing through Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud.

We end up being disappointed when a mere mortal – in his first year as a starter no less – takes over under center.

Sure, I wish that McCord started games quicker. I wish that he was more accurate with some of his throws. I wish that he didn't throw as many interceptions or near interceptions as he did. But I thought for much of the season he got better every week, and just as Bogey and Ilsa Lund will always have Paris, we will always have the Notre Dame game. I'm not sure that Haskins, Fields or Stroud could have done any better in that final march to victory.

Like Stroud before him, McCord leaves without a victory over archrival Michigan.

With all the speculation swirling as to why he chose the portal, I can't help but wonder if after the intense criticism he received following the Michigan game, maybe he wanted to go somewhere where his efforts, the efforts of a 21-year-old college student, were more appreciated.

Much of the speculation centers around the notion that McCord was unhappy because Day wouldn't guarantee him the starting job next season. And much of that notion centers around statements that Day made at his Cotton Bowl press conference concerning McCord's status.

I may be the only one wondering this, but I wonder if Day's comments about McCord came because of the awkward position the coach was in. I don't know exactly how the process of entering the portal works, but I am hard-pressed to believe that McCord woke up on Dec. 4 and in the early hours of the morning just announced he was in the portal. He had to have let someone at Ohio State know in advance because there must be procedure.

Meanwhile, less than 24 hours previous, Day is in front of a crowd of reporters, all of whom, like me, think McCord is coming back. What is Day going to say? "Oh, by the way, Kyle McCord is entering the portal." That's not his news to deliver. He instead gives an awkward answer, and Buckeye Nation was off and running. And so too, as it turns out, was McCord.

"A chicken-before-the-egg question persisted," Cleveland.com's Nathan Baird says elsewhere in this issue. "Did Day speak with such lack of commitment toward McCord because he knew Monday's announcement was coming. Or did the way Day spoke prompt McCord's decision?"

At least Baird acknowledges that there is a possibility that I am not crazy.

Before the news of McCord's transfer broke, I was going to lead this column with a look back at the recent loss to Michigan, something we have done elsewhere in this paper as well. I was going to say, as I am now, that in retrospect the game was not as bad as it may have seemed. If it hadn't been the third straight loss for the

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Buckeyes, Ohio State fans would have been unhappy, but they would have acknowledged that it was a hard-fought game which went down to the wire, and it was just Michigan's time to win. After all, the Wolverines had 17 losses dating back to 2001.

I was also going to say that the loss was not McCord's fault. There was plenty of blame to go around. But in big-time college football, the blame generally goes to one of two people – the head coach or the quarterback. Or in the case of Ohio State, one of *three* people – the head coach, the quarterback or defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

Unfortunately for McCord, his interception at the end of the game was the most visible gaffe and the gaffe that broke the camel's back.

But in looking back at the game, I have decided that the actual turning point in the fierce battle came just before what would prove to be McCord's final play as a Buckeye.

Ohio State had battled back to within three with plenty of time to go on a Marvin Harrison Jr. 14-yard touchdown reception from – who else – McCord. Momentum, and 8:05 of clock, seemed to be in OSU's favor.

But Michigan, which had been held to just 119 yards of total offense in the first half, proceeded to march 56 yards on 13 plays, with the drive resulting in a James Turner field goal to make the score 30-24. The Wolverines ate up seven minutes on the drive and forced the Buckeyes to use all of their timeouts.

Michigan converted four first downs and had no play longer than 6 yards other than a 14-yard run by Blake Corum. Knowles had succeeded in his season-long quest to not be beaten by the big play like the Buckeyes had in The Game the year before.

But in this case his defense had won the battle with no big plays but was about to lose the war.

McCord was left with only one minute to rally the Buckeyes and, as mentioned, no timeouts. Everyone in the Big House knew what was coming, and even though he moved the Buckeyes 44 yards to the Michigan 37, he eventually threw the fatal – and as it turned out his final – interception.

"To some degree, I almost think you could say it was an overcorrection from last year," Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors said of the Buckeye defense on that final Wolverine drive. "Ohio State might have been too conservative on defense, and they weren't really doing anything aggressive to try to make game-changing plays. They were just letting Michigan slowly pick them apart and drive down the field. We saw for the first 11 games of the year that bend-but-don't-break style defense worked really well for Ohio State."

But against their archrivals, it didn't.

Freewheeling Frank

Just some things I think about:

- Speaking of Knowles and trying to limit big plays, when did long gainers become "explosive" plays or "explosives"? I swear, last year they were just big plays. How do these words change overnight and everyone gets the memo but me? I mean they change in an instant. Do you have to watch SportsCenter and somebody starts the word there and the next morning everyone is using it?

I am editing copy here at BSB and suddenly all of the writers are using words and phrases that I have never seen before but then I am see-

ing everywhere. Does explosive replace "chunk play," another phrase that caught on overnight, or are those different?

- One that thankfully seems to have *not* caught on is announcer Gus Johnson's "Maserati Marv" moniker for Marvin Harrison Jr. Johnson seems to be the only one to call Harrison that, and it feels like he thought if he kept repeating it everyone would be calling him that. I just found it irritating.

Is Maserati a reference to Harrison's speed and performance or a reference to a car he might drive with his NIL or future NFL money?

Of course, for everything that just pops up, there are things that simply, and quickly, disappear.

- What ever happened to those little Ohio State car flags – or flags for any team for that matter – that everyone had back in the day? You would drive up Rt. 315 on game day and virtually everyone had their little Ohio State flags flapping in the wind. When was the last time you saw a set of those?

- I didn't realize that of the 12 games that Ohio State and Missouri, the Buckeyes' opponent in the Cotton Bowl, have played through the years, only one was at Missouri, played on Sept. 27, 1997. I remember that game well because the Tigers featured a strong option attack led by quarterback Corby Jones. With the Buckeyes trailing 10-7 and less than eight minutes to go until the half, Ohio State linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer put a legendary hit on Jones, and the Tigers' option running game was "nowhere near as effective" after that, according to BSB at the time.

"That was probably one of my top three hits of my career," Katzenmoyer said after the game. "It feels great. I think he was more aware of us after that."

The Buckeyes would go on to win the game 31-10. Jones ended up with 95 yards rushing on 18 carries, but 78 of those came before the hit. After that he had just 17 yards on seven carries.

- The current Missouri squad features offensive lineman Javon Foster, son of former Buckeye defensive lineman Jerome Foster.

The elder Foster was the subject of one of our more famous pictures. The photo, which ran in BSB's 1982 Holiday Bowl wrap-up, features the elder Foster unwinding in the Jacuzzi at the team hotel, with a huge boom box in the background after Ohio State's 47-17 pasting of BYU, led by future college and NFL Hall-of-Fame quarterback Steve Young.

Foster and his defensive mates sacked Young four times and could have had several more if the quarterback hadn't continually demonstrated his elusiveness.

"He did that on his own ability," Foster said at the time. "He was *GREAT*. He was great at scrambling and staying on his feet. A couple of times I thought for sure I had him and he came out of my arms. One time he got the ball off and he was still in my arms and he did that with a couple of other guys too."

Foster earned first-team All-Big Ten honors in 1982. He had 77 tackles that season, third on the team, with 11 TFL and four sacks.

That was my first *"real"* bowl game and I remember it fondly. That was back when there were a limited number of postseason games and most of them were played in warm-weather destinations like San Diego, a great town. I say my first *"real"* bowl game because the year before, year one for Buckeye Sports Bulletin, I drove with BSB columnist Rich Exner down

to the Liberty Bowl in Memphis. Not quite the same thing.

The Buckeyes finished 9-3 that 1982 season (Earle Bruce was coach, so of course) but I still maintain that at the end of that season, with hard-hitting wins over Michigan and BYU, the Buckeyes were playing as good a football as any team in the nation.

Penn State, then an independent, was national champion that year after beating No. 1 Georgia and Heisman Trophy winner Herschel Walker in the Sugar Bowl.

- Ohio State apparently reached out to the public for suggestions to replace recently departed Kristina M. Johnson as president, before settling on Walter E. Carter Jr. According to The Columbus Dispatch, two hundred people responded, and the name most offered was that of former Ohio State football coach and president of Youngstown State University, Jim Tressel. If I had known about the call for names, I would have offered E. Gordon Gee, but I could have lived with Tressel.

- Am I the only one who finds it bizarre that Michigan is talking with embattled coach Jim Harbaugh about a contract extension? The guy was suspended for half of the team's regular season games this year and is facing who knows what future punishment from the NCAA for his possible role in the sign-stealing scandal.

It is just one more example of how the school, from administrators down to students, has just completely ignored the ramifications of the scandal since the time the story broke. It's like they are in an alternate universe.

In our BuckeyeSports.com Reprint Thursday feature, we recently offered stories covering Tressel's firing over Tattoo-gate and Urban Meyer's suspension over the way he handled the Zach Smith domestic situation. At Ohio State, they don't fool around.

The stories, which were reprinted on Nov. 30, are archived at BuckeyeSports.com for your information and convenience.

I never thought I would say this, but "Roll Tide."

- Ohio State players departing without ever beating Michigan might want to note the words of former Buckeye offensive lineman Dawand Jones in a story in this issue.

"I always want to rise to the occasion," Jones said. "I feel like my junior year vs. Michigan, going against (Aidan) Hutchinson, I failed. It's out there for everyone to see. I think after that it did change for me, because I never wanted to feel that again. My mentality changed, everything changed."

If it doesn't bother you that you left Ohio State with no gold pants, you probably chose the wrong school.

BSB Gift Giving

While we are still taking free trial requests from BSB subscribers for their family and friends, right now our emphasis is on holiday gift giving. Watch your email or mailbox for money-saving BSB gift offers.

If you have not received such an offer, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 and we will find an offer for you.

Remember, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is the gift that gives 24 times a year.

See You In 2024

This is the final BSB print edition until the Jan. 13, 2024, issue.

I know I speak for the entire Columbus Sports Publications staff when I wish all of you a wonderful holiday season, and I wish all of you a healthy and prosperous New Year.



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