

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

**\$3.00**

PERIODICAL NEWSPAPER  
CLASSIFICATION  
DATED MATERIAL  
PLEASE RUSH!!



Vol. 43, No. 18

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 16, 2024

## Whirlwind Offseason Sets Stage For Big Spring

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

A new starting quarterback. A new offensive coordinator. Another new offensive coordinator. It's been a hectic offseason for Ohio State, but as the calendar flipped to March 5, everyone was able to take a welcome reprieve from the insanity and shift their collective focus to one thing and one thing only: spring football.

It figured to be a significant offseason for the Buckeyes coming off a third consecutive loss to Michigan and a disappointing loss to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl, but it took time to actually begin that work to right those wrongs. While January and February are normally spent deep in recruiting and beginning early preparation for the upcoming season, Ohio State was instead mired in carousels of both the coaching and transfer variety.

In addition to high-profile transfers from the likes of former Kansas State quarterback Will Howard, Ole Miss running back Quinshon Judkins and Alabama safety Caleb Downs – all figuring to factor in significantly to Ohio State's pursuit of a national championship – the program pursued an experienced offensive coordinator who would take play-calling responsibilities off head coach Ryan Day's plate. The move would allow Day to embrace the ever-growing CEO mind-set that has become common throughout college football, opening him up to handle more big-picture elements within the program.

The Buckeyes thought they found an answer in longtime NFL and college coach Bill O'Brien, who was announced on Jan. 19 as the team's next offensive coordinator. But the ink had barely dried on O'Brien's contract with the Buckeyes when Boston College announced on Feb. 4 that it had hired



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SPRING HAS SPRUNG** – Ohio State officially began spring practice on March 5, one of 15 practice sessions that will culminate in the annual spring game on April 13. Over the next few weeks, the Buckeyes will lay the foundation for what they hope is a championship season.

O'Brien – whose family lives in the area – to fill the head coaching position left by former Ohio State assistant Jeff Hafley.

"It was definitely the quickest kind of turnaround I think I've had in offensive coordinators," Howard said on March 4. "But

we totally understand Coach O'Brien had to do what he had to do. It made a lot of sense for him and his family."

Just hours after O'Brien's announced departure, the Buckeyes announced his replacement in longtime head coach Chip Kelly, who elected to leave his head coaching position at UCLA to become the offensive coordinator at Ohio State.

It was surprising due to Kelly's position at UCLA, but beyond that, it made sense given that Day and Kelly go back all the way to their days growing up in New Hampshire, and with Day later playing under Kelly at the University of New Hampshire and coaching under him in the NFL.

"He and I have always had a relationship," Day said on March 5. "Even when

I played for him or worked under him, we worked together and I don't look at it like he works for me. He works with me, and that's just the way I've always been. I love him and have for a long time, and I think he looks at it that way as well.

"We both want to reach a goal just like everybody else. We're fortunate to be around such a great program that has unbelievable tradition but in a place where you know we have what's in place to reach our goals next year, and I think that's what fires us both up, but everybody else on the staff as well."

With the transfers and coaching staff – including other new assistants in Matt Guerrieri for safeties and James Laurinaitis

**Your Mailing Label Goes Here  
Call (614) 486-2202  
Today To Subscribe**

Continued On Page 8

## From The Message Board

"Think it's time for some of the multi-year linemen to get it rolling – guys like Josh Fryar, Zen Michalski, George Fitzpatrick, Enokk Vimahi – to prove they belong or move on. The o-line was the most troubling part of last season. Time to see who is ready and who isn't at that position."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Who needs to have a big spring? The offensive line. Who will I be keeping an eye on? Will Howard. Devin Brown. Sonny Styles at linebacker."

– Poster That Harley Built

"We need to bring back a little Tresselball with special teams."

– R1TBDBITL

"When Marvin Harrison Jr. was a freshman, we didn't know how special he was. It took awhile for him to get regular snaps on offense, partly because of the experience and talent already in the wide receiver room."

"It should not be a surprise that Jeremiah Smith is an elite talent. He is already a man with incredible talent and skills. The wide receiver room is loaded with unique talent but Brian Hartline needs to get Smith involved sooner rather than later. We should see two three-player units rotating (mix-and-match) at the wide receiver positions. Of course, if any of those players refuse

**Spring practice began for Ohio State on March 5, with the Buckeyes taking the field for the first of 15 spring practice sessions that will culminate in the annual spring game on April 13. For this issue, we asked our readers and writers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum which players they're keeping an eye on this spring and which players they feel need to have a big set of spring practices. Here are some of the responses:**

to block downfield, they will lose reps. There might even be dudes ranked seven and eight in the room that can get playing time."

– BYRON MCNUTT

"The starting quarterback, whomever it may be, needs to have a big showing to separate from the herd. Devin Brown is not rolling over."

– Peyote Buck

"Like most, I have to point to and watch the offensive line. There should be a good battle between Howard and Brown at quarterback, if Ryan Day hasn't already made up his mind for Howard. I am curious

to how see C.J. Hicks and Styles do at linebacker. Styles has played and had his moments, but have we seen the best of Styles? And we have barely seen Hicks at all. One area that is hard to evaluate in spring ball but I am also curious about is special teams."

– Mcarr

"This is a big spring for Hicks. If he doesn't even make it a discussion at linebacker, this may end up being another lost season for the former five-star on the bench. At some point he has to force the coaches' hands."

– Braden Moles, BSB

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago – 1984

Pass defense had been a major problem for the Ohio State football team lately, and coach Earle Bruce didn't fool around when he went looking for a new defensive secondary coach to replace Dom Capers, now with the Philadelphia Stars of the USFL.

Joining the OSU coaching staff would be Gary Blackney, who came over from Syracuse with impressive credentials. Blackney, who was a two-year starter at Connecticut, had coached at his alma mater and at Brown, Rhode Island, Wisconsin and UCLA before going to Syracuse in 1980. During his four years with the Orangemen, his teams were consistently strong defending the pass, as well as supporting against the run.

At Brown in 1971, he coached the best pass defense in the Ivy League, fourth best in the nation. His Wisconsin secondary led the Big Ten in 1977 and was ranked third nationally.

At UCLA, he coached All-America defensive back Kenny Easley for two seasons. His 1979 team set a Pac-10 one-game interception record and tied an NCAA season interception record.

### 35 Years Ago – 1989

As the Ohio State men's basketball team struggled to get an invitation to the 1989 NCAA Tournament, members of another Buckeye team were getting together to mark the 50th anniversary of their trip to the NCAA finals.

Members of Ohio State's 1939 team, which came within a game of winning the school's first national basketball championship, were scheduled to gather on March 11 for the first time in a quarter of a century. The team would also be honored that day in St. John Arena at the Buckeyes' game against Minnesota.

"It's something we're really looking forward to," said Dr. Jimmy Hull, a Columbus dentist who was the captain of the 1939 squad. "We haven't had a reunion in 25 years, and it's about time we had another one."

### 30 Years Ago – 1994

Less than a month after the city of Columbus announced plans to build a multipurpose sports arena, Ohio State unveiled its proposal to construct a new arena on campus.

While the city and Columbus mayor Greg Lashutka hoped their planned arena could be built downtown, OSU was steadfast in maintaining an on-campus site for its students.

The proposed arena, which would seat approximately 21,000 fans, was being planned in proximity to Ohio Stadium, St. John Arena and the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. One of the proposed sites was at the northwest corner of Lane Avenue and Olentangy River Road. That was the same site where Ohio State planned to build a new baseball stadium, but athletic director Jim Jones believed both facilities could coexist on the same site.

"I guess what you have to wonder is how big the actual footprint of the proposed arena will be," Jones told BSB. "Then, you would want to know what kind of site work would be around it. But, yes, I believe it would be possible to have both facilities there."

### 25 Years Ago – 1999

Who really knew what would happen when the Ohio State men's basketball team embarked on its first run in the NCAA Tournament since 1992.

There was reason to believe that the Buckeyes, seeded fourth in the South Regional and playing near the home folks in Indianapolis, could out-class Murray State in the first round and out-execute a young UCLA squad in the second to reach the Sweet 16.

And if the Buckeyes (23-8) advanced to the regional semifinals in Knoxville, Tenn., they might be on enough of a roll and so accustomed to playing run-and-gun teams that they just might do something spectacular like up-end top seed Auburn or, gasp, slip into the Final Four.

Then again, it was just as easy to imagine Ohio State – fresh off a hum-

bling defeat at the hands of 11th-seeded Illinois at the Big Ten tournament – being slowed down by the Racers (27-5) and joining the club of famous first-round upset victims.

But that's why they call it March Madness.

"It depends on who you play," OSU coach Jim O'Brien, who had a 5-3 NCAA mark while at Boston College, said toward the end of the regular season. "If we had to play a team with really good size like Michigan, that would be a bad draw. It's all about the match-ups, and who knows what's going to happen once you get into the tournament."

### 20 Years Ago – 2004

Sometimes a team gets hot when it's least expected and it carries on through the end of the season. But the wave the Ohio State women's basketball team was riding into the postseason didn't come from out of nowhere. Once everyone understood just what it was head coach Jim Foster wanted out of them, the light flipped on and victories became the norm.

OSU rode into the Big Ten tournament with a 19-8 mark, winning nine of its last 10 games during the regular season. It became routine to shoot near or over 50 percent while holding opponents below 40 percent. An athletic team from the beginning of the year, the Buckeyes finally tapped into that resource when thinking was replaced by reacting and playing.

"We're a good basketball team," Foster said – high praise from a guy who was constantly looking for improvement up and down the roster. "We can still get better. This is just another step in the experience. The young kids haven't been involved with the postseason before, so that will be something new for them."

### 15 Years Ago – 2009

Aside from the fact that they were huddled around a television inside a basketball arena, Ohio State's men's basketball players found few similarities between Selection Sunday this year and the past one.

Having just made a run to the Big Ten tournament's championship game where they lost to Purdue, the Buckeyes barely had to wait half an hour before learning that they had earned a No. 8 seed in the NCAA Tournament and a first-round matchup with No. 9 seed Siena.

One year previously, the men's basketball team sat in the team video room at the Jerome Schottenstein Center and waited in vain to hear their names called. No invitation to play in the NCAA Tournament arrived, and the Buckeyes found themselves heading to the NIT one year after playing in the NCAA final.

Although they would go on to capture the NIT title in New York's Madison Square Garden, the players who returned this year made a vow: never again.

"We've been saying all year there's no way we're going back to the NIT," sophomore guard Jon Diebler said. "It's been motivation all year for us, especially the guys on last year's team. We knew we let a year slip away."

### 10 Years Ago – 2014

While the announcement of Ohio State's No. 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament should have been cause for momentary celebration in Columbus, Buckeye head coach Thad Matta was instead met with somewhat of an insult from CBS analyst Seth Davis.

"You can't duck them anymore," Davis said on the official selection show, immediately after it was announced that Ohio State would face 11th-seeded Dayton in Buffalo, N.Y., as a part of the South Region's opening round on March 20.

Davis' ribbing of Matta was in reference to a perceived notion that the head coach was reluctant to face in-state opponents on a regular basis. Games against fellow Ohio teams had been few and far between in the Matta era. The Buckeyes' only in-state foe this season was Ohio University, and the previous year the Buckeyes didn't face a single Ohio team.

There would be little incentive for the Buckeyes to give a platform to a team right down the road that they'd be expected to beat, thus giving Ohio State nothing to gain and a lot to lose in any Buckeye State battle. But when Matta first saw that he wouldn't be able to – as Davis put it – "duck" Dayton this year, his first thought wasn't dread. Rather, Matta saw an attention-getter for his team, which he believed would ultimately benefit the Buckeyes.

"I think for this team, it's a great thing," Matta said of Ohio State being paired with the Flyers. "I like that because there won't need to be a wake-up call. There won't need to be a, 'Who is this? Who are they? What conference are they in?' I haven't heard of that guy, or anything like that."

### Five Years Ago – 2019

When the Ohio State football team opened spring practice March 6, things were different. Kind of.

Most notably, Urban Meyer was nowhere to be found. The former Buckeye head coach, who spent seven seasons guiding Ohio State to three Big Ten titles and a national championship, hung up his whistle after the Rose Bowl, transitioning into a role as an assistant athletic director in Columbus.

Dwayne Haskins, the quarterback who broke nearly every single season passing record in program history last year, wasn't there either. He was preparing for the NFL draft, where he was expected to be a top-10 pick in April.

Also missing were such program stalwarts as receivers Parris Campbell and Terry McLaurin, kicker Sean Nuernberger and linebacker Dante Booker – the last two remaining players who appeared in the Buckeyes' national title victory over Oregon back in 2014. A plethora of assistant coaches were gone, too. Alex Grinch was at Oklahoma while Greg Schiano, Billy Davis and Taver Johnson were all coaching in the NFL.

For all those changes and departures, though, things really weren't that different. It was still in many ways the Ohio State program that Meyer built, the program that had become an annual contender on the field and on the recruiting trail and one of the best when it came to off-field support for student-athletes.

That's just the way new head coach Ryan Day wanted it.

"The infrastructure and the culture is what it is," Day said after his first practice officially leading the Buckeyes.

### One Year Ago – 2023

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said following the Buckeyes' first spring practice that defensive lineman Jack Sawyer would line up at defensive end in the spring after playing at the hybrid defensive end/linebacker – or Jack – the previous season.

"Jack will be a defensive end with JT (Tuimoloua)," Knowles said. "He'll work on all those fundamentals of being an end. I think that's important for Jack."

"I feel like he didn't have the improvement or big jump he could have last year because he got involved in the Jack stuff and maybe he wasn't as focused as he could have been to make those improvements at end," Knowles continued. "I want to make sure I keep him at end opposite JT"

Sawyer had an up-and-down season filling in at the Jack, finishing tied for the team high with 4½ sacks while experiencing several quiet outings at the position. Ohio State also saw some brief contributions at the Jack from defensive linemen Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Caden Curry, but Sawyer played the majority of snaps.

With Sawyer moving away from the Jack, Knowles said the position would not be a significant focus over the next few weeks for Ohio State.

"We did not quite use the position as much as I had hoped last year," Knowles said. "It just didn't seem to develop with our personnel, so this spring I just want to focus on the fundamentals of our four-down and getting better at the fundamentals."

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.

**PUBLISHER**  
Frank Moskowitz

**ASSISTANT PUBLISHER**  
Becky Roberts

**MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS**  
Mark Rea

**EDITOR**  
Braden Moles

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

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

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

**ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES**  
Paula Serra Ron Friedman

#### 2023-24 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 43)

No. 1	Sept. 9	No. 13	Dec. 16
No. 2	Sept. 16	No. 14	Jan. 13
No. 3	Sept. 23	No. 15	Jan. 27
No. 4	Oct. 7	No. 16	Feb. 17
No. 5	Oct. 14	No. 17	March 2
No. 6	Oct. 21	No. 18	March 16
No. 7	Oct. 28	No. 19	April 6
No. 8	Nov. 4	No. 20	April 20
No. 9	Nov. 11	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 18	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 25	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 2	No. 24	August

The next issue (April 6 cover date) will be mailed on April 2.

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

#### Wachsman Elite Donor:



# OSU March Madness Focuses On QB Battle

With sincerest apologies to Jake Diebler and Kevin McGuff, who have turned their respective basketball programs into something worth watching this month, it's probably safe to say that the majority of Ohio State sports fans were a little more jazzed March 5 when spring football camp got under way.

Another safe bet is that while most fans expect the Buckeyes to contend for a national championship every season, anything short of hoisting the weird golden cylinder that passes for the College Football Playoff championship trophy next January will be seen as a failure. That's because Ryan Day harvested the cream of the crop from the transfer portal, coaxed more than a half-dozen starters into postponing their NFL careers, and brought former Oregon, UCLA and NFL head coach Chip Kelly to Columbus to coach his quarterbacks and run his offense.

It's not hyperbole to say the Buckeyes are loaded at nearly every position, and that includes the spot that garners the most attention every spring.

Day is in a bit of a unique spot in that, despite all of his portal gains, he lost his starting quarterback when Kyle McCord decided the pastoral, rolling hills of central New York were more to his liking than the white-hot spotlight of Columbus. Kelly, however, has no such problem. He starts fresh with a talented stable of quarterbacks, each of them eager to prove they can excel in Kelly's freewheeling scheme.

By now, most OSU fans know the cast of characters – Kansas State transfer Will Howard, holdovers Devin Brown and Lincoln Kienholz, true freshman Air Noland, and Alabama transfer freshman Julian Sayin. But what will be the pecking order once spring ball is finished and Day and Kelly begin to formulate their game plan for the Aug. 31 opener against Akron?

It's only my guess – as good (or bad) as anyone's – but I sincerely doubt Howard transferred to Ohio State to be a backup. In my estimation, only a failure to grasp the playbook or some kind of injury would prevent him from being the starter.

What kind of changes would that present from last year's offense? For starters, Howard is exceedingly more mobile than McCord. To be fair, McCord played much of last season on a bum ankle, and Day has become a coach reluctant to throw his quarterback in harm's way by running the ball.

Still, Howard is much more inclined to run with the football although he is unlikely to invoke memories of Justin Fields or J.T. Barrett. Despite being sacked 16 times last season, he managed to rush for 351 yards and nine TDs. Those stats tell me Howard does not have a run-first mentality but does have the ability to avoid danger.

As far as his passing is concerned, Howard appears able to do what his team needs him to do. Last season, his game totals ranged from 86 yards during a 38-21 romp at Texas Tech to 327 during a 33-30 overtime loss to Texas. He finished with 2,643 yards and 24 TDs in 12 games, modest numbers especially against most Big 12 competition – a conference not exactly known for its defense.

Standing 6-5 and weighing 242 pounds, Howard is what NFL scouts would typecast as a prototypical quarterback. The Buckeyes haven't had a starting QB who stood at least 6-5 since Cardale Jones, and they haven't had one that tall who could be considered mobile since Terrelle Pryor (who was 6-6) nearly a decade and a half ago.

Howard also brings some intangibles with him from Kansas State, such as knowing what it's like to take coaching from someone

who excels at running an offense. K-State head coach Chris Kleiman spent five seasons as head coach at North Dakota State before taking over in Manhattan in 2019, and four of those five seasons with the Bison produced FCS national championships. Two of those titles were won with Carson Wentz at quarterback, who became the No. 2 overall selection in the 2016 NFL draft.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Viewing a highlight reel of Howard in action shows a quarterback more than capable of throwing an accurate deep ball as well as sticking his back foot in the ground to hurl a fastball over the middle. He also seems to excel at the run-pass option that has largely been missing from the Ohio State playbook since Barrett played his final game in 2017.

Of course, highlight reels feature only a sampling of the best from Howard's four seasons at Kansas State. His lowly 90.4 QB rating and minus-23 rushing yards vs. Alabama in the 2022 Sugar Bowl or his three-interception game last year against Oklahoma State – those kinds of performances typically don't show up on highlight reels.

Nevertheless, Howard accomplished what he accomplished at Kansas State without the benefit of the weapons he'll have at his disposal at Ohio State, which will feature one of college football's best array of receivers even without Marvin Harrison Jr. Add to that his ability to run the football – something that tends to paper over shortcomings along the offensive line – as well as 33 games (including 27 starts) of college experience, and Howard would seem to me to be the one to beat for the starting job.

### Talking The Talk

You have to give credit to a guy like Devin Brown, who seemingly walks to the beat of a different drum. I mean, how much more attention can you bring to yourself than insisting upon wearing jersey No. 33 in tribute to NFL legend Sammy Baugh, a quarterback whose playing career ended more than 50 years before Brown was born.

Brown, who threw for nearly 8,000 yards and 85 TDs while playing high school ball in Arizona and Utah, has been praised for his athletic talents by those who have seen him in practice. But it seems like every time he gets a chance, that athleticism betrays him.

Day devised a special short-yardage package for Brown last season – not much more than a red-zone Wildcat formation, really, but it produced a 2-yard touchdown run during a 41-7 win at Purdue. A week later, Brown rolled his right ankle on a 5-yard gain against Penn State and was sidelined for the remainder of the regular season.

Following McCord's departure after the loss to Michigan, Brown earned the starting assignment against Missouri in the Cotton Bowl but scarcely had time to prove anything before another ankle injury – this one on his left side – sidelined him early in the second quarter of what wound up to be an ugly 14-3 loss.

To be honest, Brown's performance in the bowl game was a mixed bag that likely had as much to do with an underachieving offensive line as anything else. But a 4-for-6 passing per-

formance that netted only 20 yards, along with taking three sacks, was certainly nothing that got anyone excited.

Of course, social media quickly introduced Brown to the brand of withering criticism that likely sent McCord packing – except Brown has decided to handle it differently.

"Honestly, I think people are cowards," he boldly told reporters on the first day of spring practice. "I think people have this thought in their own heads that I'm going to leave and I'm a quitter, but that's never been me. These people live wherever – in their mom's basement – saying stuff about me and they don't know (bleep). Excuse my language, but they don't know anything. They don't know who I am, they don't know who I've been, and that's always who I've been."

"I have all the confidence in the world. I'll never doubt myself. I'll never have any wavers in anything like that. I'm always going to think I'm the best quarterback in the room and the best quarterback in the country, so I'm going to attack it like that."

You have to admit the kid's got moxie. But moxie takes you only so far. Right now, it's time to put up or shut up.

### The Rest Of The Gang

Kienholz appeared in only three games last season and was therefore able to preserve his redshirt, giving him four more years of college eligibility. That fact apparently gives him no illusions about his place on the depth chart heading into 2024.

"If I come in and I'm (the starter), then great," he said. "But if not, then I have another year to build on that. I think we all have the mentality that we all want to come in and be the guy. But I mean, honestly like right now, I don't really have an order of who's going to be who. I'm just going to keep coming in and just keep working hard."

Kienholz barely got his feet wet last season, finishing with 111 passing yards, most of that coming in the Cotton Bowl after Brown was injured. His 6-for-17 performance for 86 yards and a QBR of 77.8 against Missouri was not exactly the stuff from which legends are made, but he should not be dismissed because of such a small sample.

Meanwhile, Noland and Sayin each enter the competition burdened by the expectations that accompany five-star prospects. A quick reminder regarding recruiting stars and their relative meaning: C.J. Stroud, Fields and Pryor were each five-star prospects. So was McCord. Joe Burrow? He only merited four stars from the so-called experts.

What I know about either of the current five-star freshmen is limited.

I know that Noland threw for 10,164 yards and 126 touchdowns at his Georgia high school, his given name is Prentiss Air Noland III, and his middle name came from his father, whose basketball exploits in high school reminded some of Michael Jordan. I also know the younger Noland is left-handed, and the Buckeyes haven't had a lefty start at quarterback since Steve Bellisari nearly 25 years ago.

Sayin threw for fewer yards (7,970) and touchdowns (86) in high school than Noland but also had 218 fewer career attempts. Meanwhile, he comes to Ohio State out of the transfer portal from Alabama, a program whose recent quarterback assembly line has produced the likes of Jalen Hurts, Tua Tagovailoa and 2021 Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young.

If Sayin was good enough for Nick Saban and the Crimson Tide, he ought to be good enough for Day and the Buckeyes.



**Ohio State Begins Spring Practice**

Ohio State officially began spring practice on March 5, holding the first of 15 practice sessions that will culminate in the annual spring game on April 13 at Ohio Stadium.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has compiled all of the key storylines for the Buckeyes as they work through the spring, with the following reports meant to keep you in the know as Ohio State works toward the spring game and the 2024 football season.

**Styles Making Move To Linebacker**

Ohio State junior safety Sonny Styles has long been lauded for his versatility and athleticism, and those traits may propel him to start at another defensive position in 2024.

The 6-4, 235-pound Styles – who primarily played at nickel and boundary safety last season, finishing fifth on the team with 53 tackles – was seen taking second-team reps at linebacker during Ohio State’s first two spring practices on March 5 and 7.

Head coach Ryan Day said after the first practice that while nothing is set in stone regarding where Styles will end up, he is expected to see time at linebacker this season, a position that Day thinks is conducive to Styles’ overall skill set and frame.

“We want to put guys in position to be the most successful they can be,” Day said. “And Sonny has wanted to do whatever he can to help the team. We know that his skill set is versatile, and we’re going to continue to work on that.”

“But you will see him at linebacker. You

will also see him do some other things as time goes on. We think he brings a lot to the table there. He can do so many different things. That’s the exciting part (for me) year in and year out. You have to figure out how you want to utilize them the best. He was working at linebacker, so we’ll watch the film and continue to build that package.”

Styles’ apparent position change this season is likely a result of the team’s transfer portal addition of former Alabama safety Caleb Downs, the reigning SEC Freshman of the Year who is expected to be slotted into a starting role at safety alongside returning bandit Lathan Ransom and nickel Jordan Hancock.

With the Buckeyes’ starting secondary virtually set in stone – cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Davison Igbinosun are also reclaiming their roles – Styles will now look to find a leading role in the middle of the defense, which lost both starting linebackers from last season with Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg off to the NFL. Styles is expected to compete for the Will linebacker position alongside fellow junior and former five-star C.J. Hicks, who has assumed first-team reps in the first two spring practices.

If Styles earns the starting role, he will likely be joined by fifth-year Cody Simon at Mike linebacker, who saw increased playing time last season and recorded 57 tackles, which was fourth on the team despite playing significantly fewer snaps than Chambers and Eichenberg.

**Howard Ready To Thrive Under Kelly-Led Offense**

Although he has spent just two months as a Buckeye, quarterback Will Howard’s start to his Ohio State career has already endured some unique twists and turns.

After transferring to Ohio State from Kansas State on Jan. 4, Howard spent the first few weeks thinking that longtime NFL and college coach Bill O’Brien – who was hired on Jan. 19 as the Buckeyes’ offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach – would be his play-caller. That reality quickly shifted on Feb. 9 when O’Brien packed his bags for Boston College to become the Eagles’ head coach, and just a few hours later, Howard had a new veteran coordinator/quarterbacks coach in former UCLA

**2024 Ohio State Football Schedule**

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2023 Record, Bowl Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	TBA	TBA	2-10, not eligible
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	TBA	TBA	6-7, 35-17 loss to UTSA (Frisco)
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Oct. 5	IOWA	TBA	TBA	10-4, 35-0 loss to Tennessee (Citrus)
Oct. 12	at Oregon	TBA	TBA	12-2, 45-6 win over Liberty (Fiesta)
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	10-3, 38-25 loss to Ole Miss (Peach)
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	8-5, 14-7 win over Utah (Las Vegas)
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	3-9, not eligible
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	TBA	TBA	15-0, 34-13 win over Washington (CFP Champ.)

head coach Chip Kelly.

“The move we made with getting Coach Kelly as quickly as we did showed you how invested Coach Day is this year and how much we’ve invested in this year,” Howard said on March 4, “because that’s a heck of a hire. He’s a really good dude to be around and to learn from.”

Howard said he was excited to get to work with Kelly because of his long-standing track record as an innovative offensive mind. He specifically pointed to Kelly’s successes calling plays for Oregon from 2007-12 as something that impressed him the most. That tenure helped redefine the college game, by operating a high-flying, hurry-up offense that often bewildered opposing Pac-12 defenses with their pace.

“I think the first thing that came to mind was – I thought of those Oregon offenses that he used to run and how prolific they were, how great their run and pass game was,” Howard said.

Howard also lauded Kelly’s ability to run a simplified offense that is predicated on short outside passes, a strategy that he thinks can capitalize on both the talented personnel he is tasked with getting the ball to and the skills he possesses as a thrower.

“His schemes are really, really quarterback friendly,” Howard said. “I think that the things that he does are easy. It’s not a lot of manipulation. It’s, ‘How can we get as many yards as possible without any strain?’ It’s a lot of really good stuff that he’s done.”

“It’s just easy throws. I think he does a lot of good stuff in the (run-pass option) world. Getting the ball out to these guys on the outside that we have and letting them go make plays in space is going to be really big for us this year. Basically, I’m just the point guard out there. I just have to distribute the ball and get yards however we can.”

Howard said that the offense’s success this season – assuming he wins the job – will ultimately come down to how he and Kelly can build chemistry off the field, something he thinks the pair is already well on its way to achieving this spring.

“He’s super down to earth and easy to talk to,” Howard said. “I think that’s one of the most important things that I’ve realized in my time as a quarterback. We spend so much time with our offensive coordinator/quarterback coach, it’s so important to have that relationship. And if you don’t, then things can go sideways. I’ve experienced that.”

“The best thing about him is that he’s just normal. He’s a normal guy. He’s going to sit there and talk with us about whatever’s going on. He’s obviously very smart and football savvy, but what comes first is relating to us and hanging out with us, and that’s big”

**Brown Calls Out “Cowards” Who Think He’s Transferring**

After receiving limited playing time in his first two seasons with the Buckeyes, Ohio State junior quarterback Devin Brown earned a chance to showcase his skills at the Cotton Bowl as the team’s starting quarterback. Unfortunately, that opportunity fell by the wayside when an ankle injury forced him out of the game early in the second quarter after just six passes.

“I was just sick,” Brown said. “I remember sitting there after the game thinking about how I couldn’t help in the game. I wasn’t able to do anything.”

Brown’s chances at earning a starting job this season seemed even more grim in the weeks following the Cotton Bowl loss when Day and his staff reloaded Ohio State’s quarterback room to compensate for the loss of starter Kyle McCord, adding Howard along with five-star freshmen Air Noland and Julian Sayin to the depth chart.

With Ohio State entering the spring with a crowded five-man quarterback room that also includes second-year Lincoln Kienholz – who replaced the injured Brown in the Cotton Bowl – many wondered if Brown would follow in McCord’s footsteps and find an opportunity to start at another school. But Brown says transferring is not in his DNA. Instead, he has chosen to embrace the competition and remain committed to the program.

“(It’s) Ohio State,” Brown said on March 4. “You’re always going to have the best players no matter what. I didn’t care coming in here who was in here. I’ve never cared who’s in here. I’ve said it from the start, I couldn’t care less. I’m going to come and compete. That’s always been my motto. I’ve said it before, through and through – I’m a Buckeye, and I’m here to compete no matter what.”

It’s the same message Brown put out after McCord entered the transfer portal in December, saying he intended to see his time at Ohio State through and that he isn’t scared of competing for a spot. He doesn’t seem to care for people who suggest otherwise about him.

“Honestly, I think people (who think I’m transferring) are cowards,” Brown said. “People have this thought in their own heads that I’m going to leave and I’m a quitter, but that’s never been me. These people live in their mom’s basement saying stuff about me and they don’t know s-t. Excuse my language, but they don’t know who I am. They don’t know who I’ve been, and that’s always who I’ve been.”

Regardless of what the people may say, Brown said that he is approaching this year’s quarterback battle with the same level of confidence he’s had his entire career, a mental-

**A Sacred Trust since 1850**

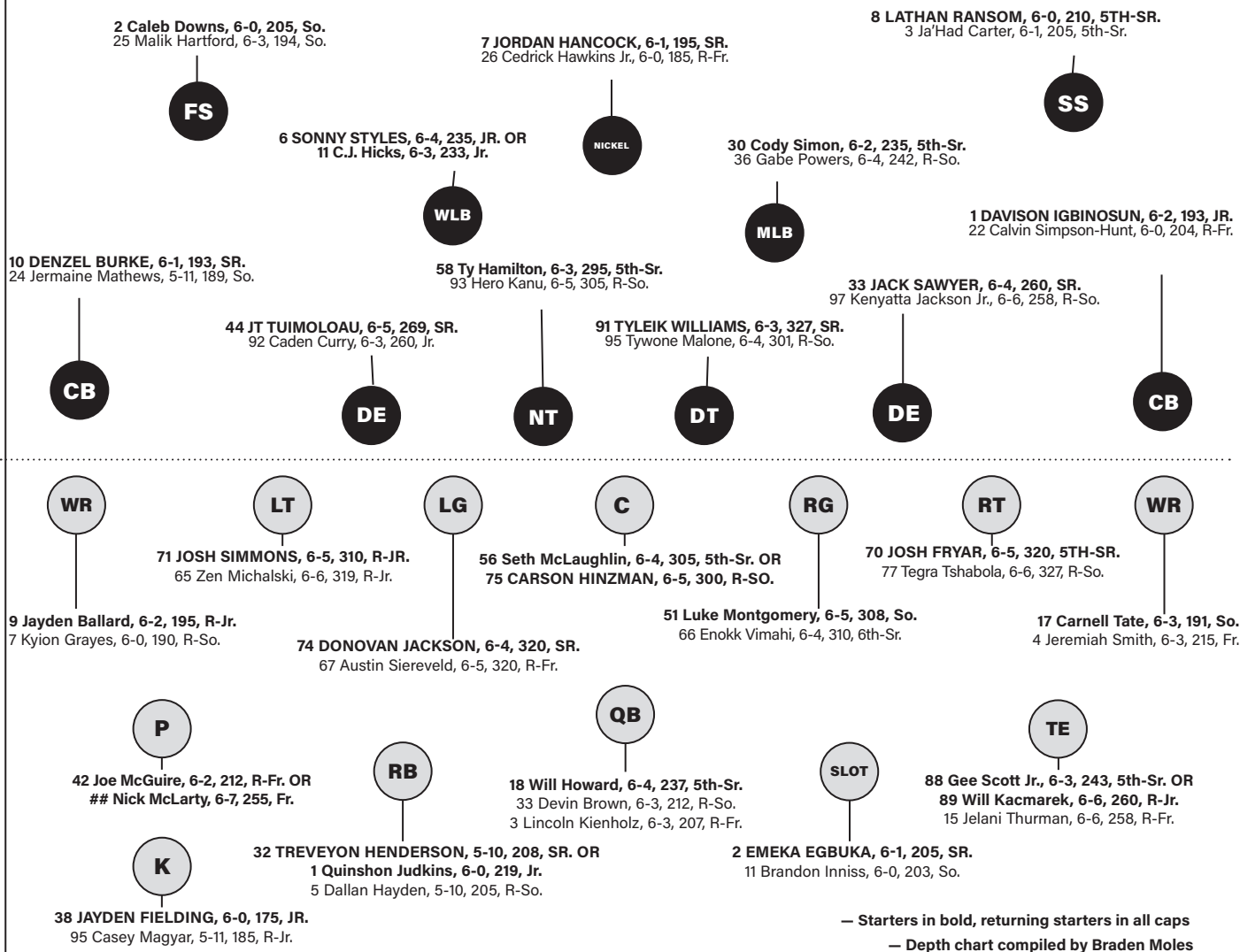


**CATHOLIC CEMETERIES**  
of Columbus

St. Joseph Cemetery Lockbourne  
Resurrection Cemetery Lewis Center  
Holy Cross Cemetery Pataskala  
Mt. Calvary Cemetery Columbus

[catholiccemeteriesofcolumbus.org](http://catholiccemeteriesofcolumbus.org)

## OHIO STATE PRE-SPRING DEPTH CHART



Peoples is No. 20; linebacker Garrett Stover is No. 23; running back Sam Williams-Dixon is No. 24; Pierce is No. 35; offensive linemen Ian Moore, Deontae Armstrong and Devontae Armstrong are Nos. 69, 72 and 73, respectively; defensive lineman Eric Mensah is No. 90; and defensive end Eddrick Houston is No. 96.

Five returning Buckeyes also received new jersey numbers. Kienholz is switching from No. 11 to No. 3; safety Ja'Had Carter is now No. 3 instead of No. 14; wide receiver Bryson Rodgers switched from No. 86 to No. 13; cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt swapped No. 15 for No. 22; and defensive lineman Kayden McDonald handed in No. 56 for No. 98.

### OSU Adds Australian Punter McLarty

Ohio State added another punter to the roster on March 8, when Nick McLarty (6-7, 255) from Melbourne, Australia, announced his commitment to the Buckeyes.

McLarty had been in attendance for both of Ohio State's first two spring practices before announcing his pledge. He will enroll at Ohio State this summer as a freshman and will be on scholarship, making him the only scholarship punter on the roster for the Buckeyes.

"After conversations with Coach Ryan Day, I'm honored to announce I've received and committed to a full scholarship to The Ohio State University," McLarty said on social media. "I'd firstly like to thank Coach Rob Keys and Coach Gunner Daniels for the hospitality while visiting this week and truly believing in me. I cannot wait to work alongside the both of you at OSU. ... To my family and friends who have shaped my development and supported this dream, I am blessed to have you in my life as this new journey begins."

McLarty is now one of three punters on the roster along with sophomore Joe McGuire and senior Jawad, both of whom are walk-ons. All will be competing to replace Jesse Mirco, who started the last three seasons but transferred to Vanderbilt in January.

Continued On Page 6

ty that he also possessed during last year's competition with McCord. Brown felt he was very close to winning the job over McCord last offseason despite a finger injury that forced him to miss part of the spring, even saying that he thought he was ahead in the battle for a while.

That mentality did not ultimately result in him winning the job. But this season, Brown is once again ready to lay it all on the line and embrace another quarterback competition, an opportunity that – despite what the critics may think – he is not running away from.

"I can't wait for football to be here again," he said. "The sour taste I had in my mouth after that game, it's just been sitting inside me and rotting. That fuel has been building in me, and I'm ready to unleash this flame and go out there and do something."

### Hartford, Four Others Unavailable For Spring Practice

Day reported a mostly clean bill of health as spring practice began, with only five Buckeyes expected to be unavailable for the spring.

That list of unavailable Buckeyes includes sophomore safety Malik Hartford, freshman linebacker Payton Pierce, redshirt freshman offensive lineman Miles Walker, freshman cornerback Bryce West and graduate linebacker Kourt Williams II, though none are expected to be long-term injuries.

"It's fair to say that we would expect all those guys back in the preseason," Day said. "But they just won't be participating in the spring. Everybody else – there will be a couple guys maybe that are limited, but everybody

else will be able to go."

Hartford is the most significant loss for the spring. He started a game last season and finished with 10 tackles and two pass break-ups. Hartford was eyeing a starting job this season after the departure of Josh Proctor at free safety, but that role is expected to be filled by Downs.

Williams is the only other unavailable Buckeye who has played thus far in his career, though he is continuing to recover from an ACL injury during last year's fall camp that forced him to miss the entire season. His career at Ohio State has been hampered by injuries, causing the former team captain to appear in just 17 career games.

Walker did not see the field as a freshman and likely would only factor in on the third-team offensive line, while West and Pierce – the latter recovering from an injury suffered during his senior season of high school – are early enrollees who will miss their first spring with the Buckeyes.

### New Buckeyes Receive Jersey Numbers

Ohio State's first day of spring practice came with an updated roster that features numbers for new Buckeyes as well as updated numbers for those already on the roster.

Beginning with the incoming transfers, running back Quinshon Judkins will wear No. 1; Downs will wear No. 2; Howard will wear No. 18; center Seth McLaughlin will wear No. 56; and tight end Will Kacmarek will wear No. 89. Additionally, two transfer walk-ons got their numbers, including punter Hadi Jawad, formerly of Wayne State, and former Michi-

gan linebacker Joey Velazquez, who will both wear No. 39.

All of the Buckeyes' early enrollees also received their numbers. Starting from the lowest number, wide receiver Jeremiah Smith is No. 4; cornerback Aaron Scott Jr. is No. 5; Sayin is No. 10; Noland is No. 12; West is No. 12; cornerback Miles Lockhart is No. 13; safety Jaylen McClain is No. 18; running back James



**Press**  
Pub on 5th  
GOOD FOOD + FINE DRINKS



good food  
**Press**  
fine drinks **Grill**

**Both locations open for lunch & dinner daily!**

**1505 W. 5th Ave**  
Near Grandview Ave  
**614-817-1198**

Monday-Thursday  
11 AM - 10 PM

Friday-Saturday  
11 AM - 11 PM

Sunday  
Noon - 10 PM

**741 N. High St**  
In the Short North  
**614-298-1014**

Monday-Saturday  
11:30 AM - 1:30 AM

Sunday  
Noon - 1:30 AM

KITCHEN UNTIL 1 AM DAILY

**presscolumbus.com**

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

## Henderson Almost Left For NFL In Offseason

Ohio State's senior running back TreVeyon Henderson gathered before assembled media at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on March 4, but if things had been slightly different, he could have instead been coming off an impressive performance at the NFL Scouting Combine.

Henderson announced on Jan. 12 that he was returning for a fourth and final season with the Buckeyes, but it was not a decision he arrived at easily. His announcement came after the Cotton Bowl, but leading into the contest, Henderson was leaning toward departing Columbus after three seasons.

"I was eventually supposed to leave and I was praying on it and things like that, but man, God rescued me in that decision," he said. "I'm so thankful that he rescued me in that decision. Physically, I'm ready to go to the league, but spiritually, my relationship with the Lord and where I'm at with him, I just wasn't ready yet. There's more I still needed to go through here."

Henderson was so set on leaving that he had lined up offseason training that would prepare him for the NFL Scouting Combine and evaluation from those at the next level. But as he prepared for the Cotton Bowl and discussed his next steps with teammates – namely Gee Scott Jr. and Xavier Johnson – Henderson had more to consider once he arrived back in Ohio.

"It's crazy because I came back to Columbus. I was supposed to go to training and everything, but I came back to Columbus," Henderson said. "I just felt like the Lord led me back to Columbus to really continue to pray on it and continue to seek him through it."

"I went to church that day, and I still had my heart set on leaving, but I went to church going into (the new year). The pastor had a sermon, and I felt like God was using the pastor to speak to me to get this message across to me. The Lord put on my heart. He was just telling me, 'This is where I need you to be, right here. This is where you should be.' In the middle of the church, I'm like, 'Man, I'm coming back.'"

## Petitto, Hunter Added To Staff

Ohio State made two additions to its staff since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, hiring former Alabama director of personnel operations Sam Petitto as director of player personnel on Feb. 25, then adding former Tulsa cornerbacks coach/defensive passing game coordinator Michael Hunter as a defensive backs graduate assistant on March 5.

Petitto will be the lead assistant to Ohio State general manager Mark Pantoni. He replaces Marc Votteler in that role. Votteler

## No BSB For Three Weeks Due To Scheduling Quirk

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's winter/spring schedule has been a little quirky this year as we allocated our 24 annual issues to properly cover football recruiting's National Signing Day, as well as the spring game. The next issue of BSB will be mailed on April 2, three weeks from the mailing of this issue. The BSB mailing schedule is always listed in the credit box on page 3 of each issue, and readers will receive 24 print issues, as always.

There is bound to be plenty of Ohio State sports news in the three-week interim, including spring football news, news on the basketball coaching search, reports on the men's and women's basketball tournament action, portal news, recruiting news, and more. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest stories. 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 between staff and readers is bound to be lively with all the above mentioned Buckeye activity.

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.

If you are not already taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's 24/7 website, simply email your name, address and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeye-sports.com, and we will send back easy instructions on how to access the site. Don't forget, subscriptions@buckeye-sports.com is our email address, not the website. We will send you directions on how to access the site.

If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access. If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com, our print schedule, or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

spent just one season with Ohio State and left this offseason to become associate athletic director of player personnel at Mississippi State.

Petitto joins the staff after a long stint in player operations under now-retired Alabama head coach Nick Saban. He spent the last eight seasons as the Crimson Tide's director of personnel operations, helping the program secure five top-rated recruiting classes. Petitto also played a role in Alabama's recruitment of current Ohio State players such as Downs, McLaughlin and Sayin.

Hunter brings a wealth of experience as both a player and coach. Before entering coaching in 2021, Hunter played five seasons of Division I football at cornerback for the Kevin Wilson-led Indiana (2011-14) and then Oklahoma State (2015). He then took his talents to the NFL, where he saw limited action while playing for six different teams from 2016-19.

Hunter earned his first coaching job at Oklahoma State in 2021, serving as the Cowboys' assistant secondary coach for two seasons, his first season being under now Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. Hunter nearly joined Knowles on the Buckeyes' staff in 2022 but instead chose to stay at Oklahoma State. His most recent stint was with Wilson at Tulsa as a cornerbacks coach.

## Fitch Joining LSU's Staff As Senior Analyst

Ohio State also lost one member of its support staff since BSB went to print, with Todd Fitch leaving his analyst role to become a senior offensive analyst at LSU.

Fitch had been on Day's staff since 2021, first joining the program as an offensive analyst and eventually earning his expanded senior advisor/analyst role. He primarily worked with the quarterbacks during his three-year stint with the Buckeyes, where he most notably played a role in developing former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud.

Fitch is the second offensive analyst to leave Ohio State this offseason, joining former senior analyst Joe Philbin, who joined Oakland Raiders head coach Antonio Pierce's staff as a senior offensive assistant after work-

ing primarily with the offensive line for the 2023 season.

The Buckeyes did add an analyst to their support staff this offseason, though, in former Penn State wide receiver Tony Johnson – the son of Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson – who was hired as an analyst/advisor on Feb. 13.

## Ohio State Self-Reports Four Minor Recruiting Violations

According to public records obtained by The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio State's athletic department self-reported four minor NCAA violations dating back to last summer, all on the recruiting front. The violations were all Level III – considered "isolated or limited" – and resulted in mild penalties. Just one of the four violations led to further action by the NCAA.

The first violation occurred on July 28, when Ohio State was hosting "SummerFest," a recruiting event. Following a verbal commitment from wide receiver Chris Henry Jr., a 2026 prospect out of Cincinnati, co-offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline provided Henry's legal guardian with an edited photo from Ohio State's creative staff, which is not allowed until a prospect has entered their junior year.

As a result, Hartline was then prohibited from sending recruiting materials to prospects for a week, and Ohio State was prohibited from sending materials to Henry for two weeks.

Then, on Aug. 18, an unnamed Ohio State assistant coach contacted a player from another school who intended to transfer but had not yet entered his name into the transfer portal. As a result, Ohio State suspended recruiting activities for a week and reduced in-person days and official visits by four and three, respectively. Athletic director Gene Smith also met with the assistant, and Ohio State's staff was provided with a letter of education on tampering.

The next violation occurred in September, when two unnamed boosters took a picture with a recruit on the sidelines at Ohio Stadium and shared it on social media. According to the NCAA, that exchange was prohibited, as only "authorized institutional staff members"

are able to contact recruits and their families. The boosters received rules education and one was prohibited from receiving a sideline pass for the next two games, and after the violation was reported, the NCAA eliminated two in-person recruiting days.

Finally, a violation occurred in January when a staff member commented on a social media post of a transfer announcing their verbal commitment to Ohio State, violating NCAA rule 13.10.1.1, a bylaw that prevents schools from commenting on players until they have signed an aid agreement. While neither the staffer nor the player was named, the commitment was noted as Jan. 19, which is when Downs announced his commitment to Ohio State.

## Arnette Arrested On Gun, Drug Possession

Former Ohio State defensive back Damon Arnette is facing legal trouble again, as Arnette – a former first-round NFL draft selection by the Oakland Raiders and All-Big Ten second-team selection at Ohio State – was arrested in Richardson, Texas, on Jan. 6 and charged with unlawful carrying of a firearm and possession of less than a gram of methamphetamine.

The arrest, which was not brought into the public eye until Feb. 26, is being contested by Arnette's defense team, which is arguing that Arnette was taking a prescribed and "lawful medication" and should not have been pulled over and interrogated by police.

"Legal counsel for Mr. Arnette stated that the recent report that he was arrested for possession of methamphetamines and firearms is simply incorrect," Arnette's legal counsel wrote in a statement on Feb. 26. "Our client, at the time of the stop, was unable to provide law enforcement with his prescription for a lawful medication. The arrest was predicated on Mr. Arnette being unable to prove the medication was prescribed."

Regardless of the validity of the charges, the arrest marks just one of many legal and personal troubles Arnette has faced in the last several years. He played in 13 games for the Raiders before he was released by the team on Nov. 8, 2021, after a video surfaced

of him brandishing a gun and making death threats.

Arnette was briefly signed to the practice squad for the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 15, 2021, but his contract expired on Jan. 9, 2022. He was then given a second chance and signed by the Kansas City Chiefs on Jan. 20, 2022, but was released just nine days later after he was arrested and charged with assault with a deadly weapon, carrying a concealed weapon without a permit and two counts of possession of controlled substances in an incident in Las Vegas.

Then, in July of 2022, in Miami, Arnette was arrested for a second time for possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia and driving on a suspended license. Now, the 27-year-old Arnette faces his third weapon and drug charge, putting him at risk of a more substantial legal punishment.

Prior to his short NFL career and legal issues, Arnette played at Ohio State from 2015-19, appearing in 47 games and recording 140 tackles (four for loss), 22 pass breakups, five interceptions and a forced fumble.

### NCAA Advocates For Helmet Comms, Other Rule Changes

The NCAA Football Rules Committee proposed multiple changes on March 1, including the adoption of a player-to-coach helmet communications system, the use of tablets on the sideline and a two-minute warning. The NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel must approve the recommendations and will meet on April 18 to discuss the proposals.

For helmet communications, only one member of the team would be able to have a listening device in their helmet, and the device's capabilities would end with 15 seconds left on the play clock, consistent with the timing used by the NFL.

The electronic tablets would be able to be used on the sideline and in the locker room to review in-game video replays, and a team would be allowed to have up to 18 of them between the coaching booth, sideline and locker room.

The two-minute warning would also work similarly to how it does in the NFL, working as a break at the two-minute mark of each half.

Two more rules changes were also proposed. One was issuing warnings for uniform violations followed by a timeout being charged upon subsequent offenses from any member of that team. If the violating team is out of timeouts, a 5-yard penalty would be given. Another proposal was that a horse-collar tackle inside the tackle box would result in a 15-yard penalty. The new rule changes, if approved, would be in place for the 2024-25 college football season.

### No BSB Print Issue For Three Weeks

The next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will not be mailed until April 2, three weeks from the mailing of this issue.

Each publishing year, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff has to allocate our 24 print issues to best cover football season, along with winter and spring coverage. This year we had to make some adjustments to properly cover football recruiting's National Signing Day, as well as the spring game, resulting in a pair of three-week gaps in our traditional biweekly winter/spring publishing schedule. This is the second of the three-week print intervals. The BSB mailing schedule, including the next

print date, is always listed in the credit box on page 3 of each issue, and readers will continue to receive 24 print issues.

If you have not already been doing so, now would be a great time to take advantage of our BuckeyeSports.com website.

There is bound to be plenty of Ohio State sports news in the three-week interim, including spring football news, news on the basketball coaching search, reports on the men's and women's basketball tournament action, portal news, recruiting news, and more. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest stories. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

If you have any questions concerning BSB's print schedule or BuckeyeSports.com, give us a call at (614) 486-2202.

### Tennis Coach Tucker Earns 700th Career Win

Longtime men's tennis head coach Ty Tucker earned a significant personal milestone on Feb. 28, earning his 700th career win with the Buckeyes' 4-1 road victory over Baylor.

Tucker, an Ohio State class of 1998 graduate and former two-time All American tennis player, is in his 25th season as head men's tennis coach as well as his 13th season as men's and women's director of tennis.

Since taking over the men's program just one year after he graduated in 1999, Tucker has transformed the Buckeyes into one of

the premier programs in the nation. He owns a 701-102 (.873) overall record – the most wins in program history and third most in Big Ten history – and has led the program to 17 consecutive Big Ten regular-season titles, 14 Big Ten tournament championships and three ITA indoor national titles (2014, 2019, 2024).

Tucker's successes leading the Scarlet and Gray – which also includes an active 23-year NCAA tournament appearance streak – have earned him a bevy of accolades, including an ITA National Coach of the Year honor in 2009 and 16 Big Ten Coach of the Year nods. Tucker is also a member of the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame, earning his induction in 2004.

Tucker is only adding to his already loaded coaching résumé in 2024, leading a veteran Buckeyes group that held a 16-1 record when BSB went to press. Tucker and Ohio State will have their next chance to earn some hardware at the Big Ten tournament from April 26-28 and ending with the NCAA tournament in May.

### Muzerall Wins WCHA Coach of the Year

Ohio State women's hockey coach Nadine Muzerall added to her own trophy collection when she was named Western Collegiate Hockey Association Coach of the Year on March 7.

This marks the fifth time Muzerall has taken home this award in her eight seasons leading the Buckeyes, also securing the honor

in 2017-18 and each of the last four seasons.

Muzerall's WCHA Coach of the Year award only adds to an incredible list of honors and accolades she has collected in her Buckeye career, as she is also the winningest coach in program history with a 192-72-19 record.

Muzerall's ability to lead and cultivate elite talent was on full display this year, with seven Buckeyes on Feb. 29 earning WCHA honors. Graduate defender Cayla Barnes and graduate forward Hannah Bilka earned first-team WCHA nods, while graduate defender Hadley Hartmetz secured second-team honors. Graduate forward Jennifer Gardiner, freshman forward Joy Dunne and senior goalie Raygan Kirk won third-team honors, and freshman forward Jocelyn Amos and Dunne took home all-rookie honors.

Dunne, who led all WCHA freshmen in goals (16), assists (14) and points (30) during league play, was also named WCHA Rookie of the Year. She is the fourth Buckeye to earn that honor, joining Jeni Creary (2002), Hokey Langan (2010) and Emma Maltais (2018).

Muzerall and Ohio State enter the NCAA tournament on with an almost unblemished resume. Holding a 32-4-0-0 overall record – their third straight 30-win season – the Buckeyes have already earned the WCHA regular season. Ohio State is the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA tournament and will begin tournament play on March 16 with a first-round matchup against either Minnesota Duluth or UConn.

## BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

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

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.

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

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

To upgrade your existing subscription to VIP status, with all the benefits that come with that designation, go to BuckeyeSports.com/vip-memberships to pay by credit card, or call us at (614) 486-2202 during regular business hours. If readers have questions about this program, they can call the same number.

The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite-Plus, Elite, Scarlet and Brutus VIP subscribers.

**Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman):** Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

**Elite-Plus Donors:** Roger Albrecht, Columbus; B2, Reston, Va.; Fredrick Bradshaw, Columbus; Brian Bucher, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.; Thomas E. Farish, Port St. Lucie, Fla.; Terry T. Farmer, Lancaster, Ohio; Sander Flaum, New York; Mike Heimann, Ashland, Ohio; Freddie and Joe Huber, Walpole, Mass.; Gregory Jones, Calabasas, Calif.; Don Kersey, Springboro, Ohio; Kris Kersey, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Fred Krisch,

Cleveland; Larry Larson, Ladera Ranch, Calif.; Dan LaVille, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; W. Lee Mackewiz O.D., Bear, Del.; Allen McMillin Jr., Logan, Ohio; Jeff Montgomery, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.; In memory of Hugh and Dixie Rea, Washington Court House, Ohio; In memory of Lisa Rea, Greenfield, Ohio; Jim Reichler, Toledo; The Russell Group United, Columbus; Jim Shindler, Sylvania, Ohio; John Thomas, Kentfield, Calif.; Jm Walton, Naples, Fla.; Bob Weber, Mishawaka, Ind.; Richard Yoss, Woodsfield, Ohio.

**Elite Donors:** Robert Ankerman, Holland, Mich.; Marshall Beck, Sarasota, Fla.; Phillip Blue, Prior Lake, Minn.; In memory of Norwin Brovitz, Oakmont, Pa.; David Cobb, Tipp City, Ohio; Iris Cremean, Walbridge, Ohio; Richard Dunkelberger, Groveport, Ohio; Fred Fingerhut, Phoenix; Chalk Fry DDS, Sarasota, Fla.; Raminder Gill, Colusa, Calif.; Laura Granich, Columbus; Paul E. Hackett, The Villages, Fla.; James Hamilton, Murrysville, Pa.; Joe Helmer, Westerville, Ohio; Curtis High, Beavercreek, Ohio; Carl R. Jeffery DDS, Van Wert, Ohio; Frank Klaus, Pepper Pike, Ohio; Paul Lappert, Columbus; Tom Leggett, Dublin, Ohio; Dr. Jonathan Lucas, Portsmouth, Ohio; Robert Maddux, Cincinnati; Mike from Marietta, Ga.; Col. George R. Nelson, New Albany, Ohio; Theodore Pegram, Eden Prairie, Minn.; Greg Place, Greenville, Ohio; James Robinson Jr., Council Bluffs, Iowa; Charlie Shaffer, Edison, Ohio; Bill Short, Sparta, Ohio; Mark Skinner, Columbus; Kyle Smith, Marietta, Ga.; Dr. Earl Strimple, Washington, D.C.; James Thomas, The Villages, Fla.; Chuck Underwood, Miamisburg, Ohio; Dan van Blaricom, Dublin, Ohio; Beth Wachsmann, Columbus; Elliott S. Wettstein, Waverly, Ohio; J.D. Wientjes, Peoria, Ill.; David J. Young, Supply, N.C.; Edwin Zechman Jr., Sarasota, Fla.; Anonymous, Columbus; Anonymous, Council Bluffs, Iowa; Anonymous, Lancaster, Ohio; Anonymous, Lewisburg, WVa.

**Scarlet VIPs:** William Adams, Willoughby, Ohio; Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Donald Collins, Kenton, Ohio; Joseph A. Cusma Sr., Massillon, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Julie Ellis, Apple Valley, Calif.; Mike Freeburn, Columbus; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Dave Hamilton, Canton, Ohio; Richard G. Hannan Jr., Chillicothe, Ohio; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Dave Palmer, Washington, Mich.; Theodore Pegram, Eden Prairie, Minn.; Bob Redfield, Dublin, Ohio; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; Dr. William Thomas, Gallipolis, Ohio; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Gaffney, S.C.; Anonymous, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Norwalk, Ohio.

# Howard Will Not Be Handed Starting Job

Continued From Page 1

for linebackers – finally in place, the long winter months culminated with the opening of spring practice on March 5.

“No pads, but good to see a bunch of guys running around,” Day said after the first of 15 spring practice sessions that will conclude with the annual spring game on April 13. “There was good energy out there and a continuation of the offseason, which I thought was excellent.

“You can see guys moving around with purpose, but different guys are in different phases of their career. Individually, each guy has different things that they are working on. Some guys are just figuring out what to do, like ‘Where am I going?’ (with the) young guys and some newcomers. And there are guys who have been veterans who have played a lot of football, so they’re working on other things. It was a good first day. Good energy.”

The talent on the field was evident. Along with the impressive incoming transfers, Ohio State’s plethora of returning players

from last season – led by the likes of cornerback Denzel Burke, defensive ends JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer, running back TreVeyon Henderson and wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, among others – made for a who’s who of college football on the practice field at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

But for all of the future NFL draft picks participating in spring practice, Day said it’s the intangibles outside of talent that will determine Ohio State’s future.

“You look at the guys and you see the potential and it gets you really excited,” Day said. “But then as much talent as we have, it’s going to be the issues (not related to talent) that actually help us reach our goals. Once we get on the field, that’s what we focus on.

“It isn’t seeing Jeremiah (Smith) run a go (route). That’s great, but it’s the discipline of knowing what to do, it’s the focus, it’s running to the ball, its effort, its energy. It’s all the things that again, take no talent. That’s going to be the focus. It’s not about the talent anymore. That was the last couple

months. Now we need to acquire the skill and discipline it’s going to take to reach our goals, and that’s what spring is all about.”

Of all those talented players, Howard is perhaps the most intriguing player to track in the coming weeks leading up to the spring game. While Howard brings a starting pedigree from Kansas State, having thrown for 5,786 yards and 48 touchdowns yards and rushing for 921 yards and 19 more scores over four seasons, Day made it clear that everything is earned at Ohio State.

“You don’t just walk into Ohio State and think you’re going to go become the starting quarterback,” he said. “It doesn’t work that way. There’s just too much pride here. What (strength and conditioning coach) Mick Marotti and our strength staff does here in the offseason, there’s just a lot that comes with it. You don’t just show up in the weight room and then go home. There’s a lot of accountability that happens and our guys take a lot of pride in that, and so there’s only one way to do that and that’s to earn it through respect.”

It’s a tall task for Howard as he begins his first spring with the Buckeyes, but he is no stranger to high expectations. Despite being on campus for only a couple of months, he has fully bought into the team’s culture and is hoping to help lead the team to their goals, with that journey starting this spring.

“We embrace it every day,” Howard said. “We know how much is on the line, and we know how much we’ve already given to this season and how much we’ve invested in this team. I think we had a really, really good winter, just the way the guys were bought in, the leadership that we have on this team, the amount of guys that decided to come to this program. It’s exciting. We know what’s on the line. We’re chasing that one percent every single day, and we know that our main goal is to win and to win all of them, and that’s the bottom line.”

## Switching Roles

The transition for Kelly from head coach to assistant coach, despite some strange circumstances, has been a smooth one. Mostly.

“(Day) makes me call him sir, though,” Kelly joked during his introductory press conference on March 5.

Kelly was unusually jovial in his first media appearance with the Buckeyes, at least relative to what you would expect of someone who has been a head coach in the NFL and college ranks for 14 of the last 15 years. But as Kelly explained, the entire reason behind his departure was to regain that pep in his step, something he realized last season that he had lost.

“I do a lot of things other people don’t do,” he said. “I don’t know if that’s right or wrong. But I think it started when we were preparing for our bowl game (against Boise State). Ryan Gunderson, who is a great quarterbacks coach, left to go to Oregon State as the coordinator, so he wasn’t there. I actually coached quarterbacks during the bowl game.

“I hadn’t actually coached a position since 2008, and my wife remarked, ‘I haven’t seen you this happy in a long time.’ And, to me, the best part of football is football. I got to do football and not do some of the things that are involved with the head coaching deal.”

After UCLA’s 35-22 win over Boise State on Dec. 16, Kelly began thinking about his future. While simply quitting was never in the cards – even if Kelly appeared to be on the hot seat entering next season had he stayed – he began exploring opportunities to step back from the ever-growing list of responsibilities that comes with being a head coach at the college level.

“It would have been the right spot to go somewhere and just coach a position again and be back with that group, because I think as a head coach, you sit in on position meetings, but then you’re always getting pulled out,” he said. “There’s other things that are involved with being a head coach, and I think it’s more of a CEO operation right now. It’s the job and the landscape. As we all know, college football has changed.”

Kelly and Hafley – the latter departing for a defensive coordinating job with the Green Bay Packers – appear to be early adopters of a growing movement, with coaches relay-

## PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

**Redshirt sophomore quarterback Devin Brown:** Brown’s second season at Ohio State did not go according to plan, when he lost the starting quarterback job to Kyle McCord and saw the field sparingly. Then, given the chance to start in the Cotton Bowl following McCord’s transfer, he played just a quarter before going to the bench with an ankle injury.

This spring offers a reset for Brown (6-3, 213), though he faces new competition in Kansas State transfer Will Howard, the presumed starter for the Buckeyes heading into the upcoming season. Brown has remained insistent that he will not leave Ohio State – and even if he were to leave, he wouldn’t be able to enter the portal until after the spring – so he will have a chance to show why he should be in the discussion for the starting job.

It will be a tall task for Brown to compete with Howard considering the two have comparable mobility, one factor that did separate Brown from McCord last season, but Brown could have a leg up given his time spent in the program. His attempt to push Howard for the starting job is one of the key storylines this spring for Ohio State.

**Junior defensive end Caden Curry:** The return of Jack Sawyer (6-4, 265) and JT Tuimoloau (6-4, 271) complicates things for the development of the younger duo of Curry (6-3, 260) and redshirt sophomore Kenyatta Jackson (6-5, 258), but the spring will be of particular importance for Curry as he looks to avoid becoming a forgotten man on the depth chart.

He was one of Ohio State’s most impactful freshmen in 2022 with 14 tackles and 1½ tackles for loss but did little to build on that outing this past season with just nine tackles and 3½ tackles for loss in two fewer games played. He also finished below Jackson in snaps (176 to 166) and has one less season of eligibility between the two, with Curry not taking a redshirt.

With the talent in the room – including incoming five-star freshman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 269) – this needs to be a breakout season for Curry as he rotates in for Sawyer and Tuimoloau, and the foundation of that has to begin this spring.

**Junior linebacker C.J. Hicks:** Entering his third season at Ohio State, the former five-star Hicks (6-1, 193) is set for a pivotal set of spring practices.

Despite his pedigree coming into Ohio State, Hicks has yet to get close to the starting lineup. There have been understandable roadblocks during that time, including veterans such as Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers ahead of him on the depth chart, but

Hicks – especially with fellow junior Sonny Styles (6-4, 230) moving to linebacker – is still not a guarantee to see the field for extensive time this season.

His play has not been particularly inspiring in his rare appearances on the field, either, which is why this spring – with more starting reps at Will linebacker up for grabs than Hicks’ past two springs – will be an important one as he tries to find his spot in the lineup. That could be as a starter at Will linebacker, a backup to Styles or at the Jack, which new linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said Hicks could be a candidate to play.

**Sophomore offensive lineman Luke Montgomery:** The left side of the offensive line is set – and center, with the addition of Seth McLaughlin (6-4, 305) – but questions remain on the right side. One of the answers for Ohio State could be Montgomery (6-4, 302).

He factored in more than most expected during his freshman season, coming in on jumbo packages and part of the second-team offensive line. While a shift for Josh Fryar from right tackle from right guard was discussed, he opened spring practice at right tackle, which means Montgomery – at least as it stands now – will have a chance to factor into things at right guard alongside Tegra Tshabola (6-6, 322).

Many view Montgomery as an eventual tackle at the college level, so this may not be the end of Montgomery making a push for Fryar’s job on the right side. Regardless, Montgomery will have the opportunity to compete for a starting job this spring.

**Junior linebacker Sonny Styles:** All others on this list will be fighting for starting jobs, but that is not the case for Styles. The question he does face, however, is where exactly he will line up.

Styles started at free safety last season, but that position will almost certainly be filled by incoming transfer Caleb Downs, the reigning SEC Freshman of the Year. It’s a more natural fit for Downs, which leaves the next-best position for Styles at Will linebacker, a move that coaches have talked about since Styles arrived on campus and was confirmed when spring practice began, with Styles starting practice with the linebackers.

His talent is not in question, as it has been evident dating back to his freshman season when he got in against Georgia in the College Football Playoff. But after spending most of his time at Ohio State in the secondary, this will be an important spring for Styles as he takes his first significant snaps at linebacker.

— Braden Moles



ing that the game is becoming too much to keep up with amid the transfer portal, NIL, the general proliferation of money into the sport and the increasing independence of student-athletes.

“I think sometimes everybody wants to make a narrative of it’s either this or that,” Kelly said. “It’s never that. It’s never all ball. It’s never all recruiting. It’s never all boosters. It’s a mixture of everything. As this position as a head coach keeps moving on, if you look at a lot of them, they all become CEOs. I can’t tell you how many coaches that have called me since I made this decision that said, ‘I’m two years behind you, brother,’ that are thinking the same exact way.”

But the chief priority for Kelly and his family was simply his happiness, with the entire experience giving him a new perspective as he enters the next stage of his coaching career.

“There’s a story about John Lennon when he was a little kid,” Kelly recalled, “and he had an assignment of, ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ He said, ‘I want to be happy.’ Then his teacher said, ‘I don’t think you understand the assignment.’ His mom (responded), ‘I don’t think you understand life.’ So I just want to be happy.”

“I’m really happy coaching a position. I’m really happy to be at this place. It would have taken a special place for me to leave UCLA because I love those players and I love that coaching staff. But to be here with Ryan, we’ve had a great relationship. I’ve known Ryan since he was a little kid, so I think a lot of things just fell into place that way.”

Some may view it as a strange dynamic, with Day – the previous subordinate under Kelly at New Hampshire and with the Philadelphia Eagles and San Francisco 49ers – now calling the shots with Kelly by his side. But Kelly has no problem stepping back from the limelight, with no confusion about who sits at the head of the table.

“I certainly understand my role. I’m not Al Haig,” he joked. “I’m not in charge here. But I understand that and I actually kind of relish it, because I love the scheming part. I love the individual part. I love being in the meeting room with the quarterbacks and trying to gameplan.”

“But everything we do here is collaborative. The one thing that really struck me when I walked in this place is there’s an amazing coaching staff here. If you get a chance to talk to Larry Johnson about football or Tim Walton or Jim Knowles or Brian Hartline or any of these guys that are on the staff here, it’s a very collaborative effort. I think everybody’s on the same page. It’s not our offense and their defense. It’s Ohio State. It’s Ohio State vs. the 12 opponents that we’re going to play during the regular season and then beyond.”

And while neither Day nor Kelly opened up about how play calling will ultimately work in games with Kelly as the offensive coordinator, Kelly did offer up an easy explanation regarding which coach is behind a certain call.

“I still think the play-calling part will be a collaborative effort,” Kelly said. “By that, I mean that if it’s a good play, I called it, and if it’s a bad play, (Day) called it.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

**STEPPING BACK** — New offensive coordinator Chip Kelly (front) — a long-time head coach at both the NFL and college level — is relishing his new role as an assistant coach with the Buckeyes.

*We are committed to your health and safety* 



**Fairfield**  
BY MARRIOTT

**Fairfield Inn & Suites Columbus / Dublin**  
7150 Sawmill Rd, Columbus, OH 43235 • 614-389-3036



**COURTYARD**  
BY MARRIOTT

**Courtyard Grove City**  
1668 Buckeye Place  
Grove City, OH 43123  
614-782-8292



**TOWNEPLACE SUITES**  
BY MARRIOTT

**TownePlace Suites Columbus / Hilliard**  
4079 Lyman Dr, Hilliard OH 43026 • 614-541-9309



**Fairfield**  
BY MARRIOTT

**Fairfield Inn Grove City**  
1722 Buckeye Place  
Grove City, OH 43123  
614-808-8200



 **Best Western.**

**Best Western Hilliard Inn & Suites**  
3831 Park Mill Run Dri, Hilliard, OH 43026 • 614-529-8118

# Linebacker, O-Line Among Biggest Battles

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since being named Ohio State's head coach in 2019, Ryan Day has been blessed with a boatload of talent at his disposal.

From explosive offensive playmakers such as quarterbacks Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud, running backs J.K. Dobbins and TreVeyon Henderson and wide receivers Marvin Harrison Jr., Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson to disruptive defenders like defensive end Chase Young and cornerback Jeff Okudah, this collection of future NFL players has allowed Day to build a sustained juggernaut in college football.

While all but one of these players are no longer on Ohio State's roster, Day may ultimately be fielding the deepest and most talented team of his tenure in 2024. With several starters returning for their fourth or fifth seasons instead of entering the NFL draft and the team welcoming a multitude of high-level transfers and freshmen who are poised to make an instant impact, the program seems blessed with an embarrassment of riches at nearly every position, a luxury Day and his staff acknowledged after the team's first spring practice on March 5.

"During our workouts and mat drills, or seeing some of our team runs is when you think about those types of things," Day said. "You look at the guys, and you see the potential, and it gets you really excited."

"The one thing after day one, I can tell you that there's a lot of skill set out there," offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly added. "That's what gets you excited. You jump out of bed in the morning and you're excited to go to work because of the talent that you get. But the one thing that's the most impressive is the work ethic that goes along with that. It's not just empty talent. You have some kids – all of them, since I've been here – that want to work, so that's what gets you excited."

With this depth and talent, however, also comes competition. With spring practice in full swing and Ohio State's spring game on April 13 quickly approaching, many players within crowded position groups will be looking to separate themselves from their teammates and jockey for a starting role in 2024.

While some of these competitions may spill into the summer, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is diving into three key position battles – linebacker, offensive line and wide receiver – that could go a long way in determining the direction of the program this season. For an extended look at the brewing quarterback battle, check out page 12.

## Linebacker

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' defense is stacked with returning starters, leaving perhaps the lone question mark in the entire unit at linebacker.

Ohio State is losing its two starting linebackers in Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg, who have both begun preparation for this year's NFL draft after serving as stalwarts of the defense for the last two seasons, combining for 355 tackles and 5½ sacks during that span. Those two departures leave a gaping hole at the position heading into spring, one which can be – at least partially – patched up by fifth-year Cody Simon.

Simon, who announced his decision to return for another year on Dec. 12, is in line to assume the starting role at the Mike this season after a productive senior season in which he earned a few spot starts and ranked fourth on the team in tackles with 57 stops. He said on March 7 that he is embracing his new role as the veteran leader of the room.

"It's been a long time coming, but I feel honored," Simon said. "There is a lot of respect and effort that goes into being a linebacker at Ohio State. It's a great honor. I want to honor the guys who came before me, but also play my own way, be a great defender and lead the defense."

Simon will provide a much-needed veteran presence to the middle of the defense, as Ohio State's Will linebacker position will be occupied by either C.J. Hicks or Sonny Styles, both of whom have yet to start at linebacker for the Buckeyes.

Hicks may have the edge, at least for now, in terms of experience at the position. Styles is converting to linebacker after spending his first two seasons at safety – including last season where he spent time starting at both nickel and bandit – to make room for the transfer portal addition of former Alabama safety Caleb Downs.

This reality was reflected in Ohio State's first two spring practices, where Hicks – who is a true linebacker but has garnered mostly special teams reps in his first two seasons, recording just 14 tackles – assumed first-team reps over Styles.

Knowles said on March 7 that Styles' switch to linebacker is permanent, but it may take some time this spring for him to fully adjust to the new position. Knowles is still confident that Styles can make those necessary adjustments this spring, though, because he possesses many traits – mainly his football IQ – needed to excel at lineback-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BATTLING IT OUT** – Ohio State linebacker Cody Simon (right) is a certified starter for the Buckeyes entering this spring, but who will line up next to him in a battle between juniors Sonny Styles and C.J. Hicks is still up for debate.

er, potentially putting him in line to jump Hicks and emerge as the front-runner for the starting job after he gains more reps this spring.

"It's a change for Sonny, because he's playing in the box from a low position instead of dropping in," Knowles said. "So things happen a lot faster. But he's reacted superbly. He's a guy that has football intelligence. He understands the scheme, has played a lot of positions.

"I think he's going to be great, because one of the biggest parts of being a linebacker is you have to know all the pieces around you so you can play fast. And Sonny has shown a lot of that in the first two days."

Day doubled down on Knowles' praise of Styles, saying on March 5 that he is confident he can thrive at linebacker due to his unique versatility and athleticism. These are traits that Hicks also possesses, which could allow him to potentially move to the hybrid linebacker/defensive end "Jack" position if Styles starts at linebacker.

"We want to put guys in position to be the most successful they can be," Day said. "And Sonny has wanted to do whatever he can to help the team. We know that his skill set is versatile, and we're going to continue to work on that."

## Offensive Line

Offensive line was one of Ohio State's most glaring weaknesses last year in large part due to the group's overall inexperience and lack of chemistry, and the unit enters 2024 with a similar set of question marks.

The left side of Justin Frye's offensive line seems intact heading into spring, with senior left tackle Josh Simmons and senior

left guard Donovan Jackson both set to reclaim their respective starting roles. But the same cannot be said for the right side. With Matthew Jones departing for the NFL after serving as Ohio State's starting right guard for the last two seasons, Frye and the Buckeyes will look to fill that hole with another veteran.

The first spring practice had senior Josh Fryar remain at right tackle, where he started last season, and sophomore Luke Montgomery taking first-team reps at right guard. But there has been discussion of moving Fryar to right guard, and Day said on March 5 that Fryar has the tools needed to thrive if he were to shift inside.

"He's very athletic," Day said. "He's somebody who, to me, is very skilled in a lot of areas. We think he has a very, very high ceiling. He played tackle last year and did some good things, and we think he can still play some tackle.

"But we also really want to look at him at guard. One, because that's sort of an open spot right now. And two, we also think with his quickness, he can get on guys quickly, and he can bend, and that's very, very important in that position."

If Fryar were to move inside, it would open up an opportunity for either Montgomery or junior Tegra Tshabola, who took second-team reps at tackle behind Fryar to open spring practice. But if Fryar stays at tackle, Montgomery would be the favorite to line up to his left. Though he would be a first-time starter for the Buckeyes at either position, he was used often last season as a sixth offensive lineman in short-yardage situations.

But Ohio State is hoping to experiment




## TAILGATING'S FINEST

### Upgrade your snacks!

BBQ Sauces • Mustards • Salsas  
Pasta Sauces • Dressings • Fruit Spreads

Find us in select Kroger, Hills, Weiland's and other grocery/specialty stores across the region.  
Can't find us? Ask your store to order us.  
Crafted with pride in Athens County, Ohio

[BrownwoodFarms.com](http://BrownwoodFarms.com) • (866) 589-6456

# OHIO STATE FOOTBALL/ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School							
1	Davison Igbinsoun	CB	6-2	193	Jr.	Union, N.J./Mississippi	46	Jace Middleton	TE	6-4	235	Sr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
1	Quinshon Judkins	RB	6-0	219	Jr.	Pike Road, Ala./Mississippi	46	Ryan Rudzinski	SAF	6-4	213	So.	Columbus/Bishop Watterson
2	Caleb Downs	SAF	6-0	205	So.	Hoschton, Ga./Alabama	48	Max Lomonico	LS	6-3	212	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
2	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	205	Grad.	Steilacoom, Wash./Steilacoom	49	Patrick Gurd	TE	6-4	249	Grad.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
2	Kourt Williams II	SAF	6-1	228	Grad.	Harbor City, Calif./St. John Bosco	50	Alec Delsignore	LB	6-1	225	So.	Youngstown, Ohio/Cardinal Mooney
3	Ja'Had Carter	SAF	6-1	205	Sr.	Richmond, Va./Syracuse	51	Luke Montgomery	OL	6-5	308	So.	Findlay, Ohio/Findlay
3	Lincoln Kienholz	QB	6-3	207	So.	Pierre, S.D./T.F. Riggs	52	Josh Montgomer	DE	6-3	233	So.	Indianapolis/Lawrence Central
4	Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	215	Fr.	Opa Locka, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep	53	Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-4	288	So.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
4	Lorenzo Styles Jr.	CB	6-1	195	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Notre Dame	54	Toby Wilson	OL	6-2	298	Sr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
5	Dallan Hayden	RB	5-10	205	Jr.	Memphis, Tenn./Christian Brothers	56	Seth McLaughlin	OL	6-4	305	Grad.	Buford, Ga./Alabama
5	Aaron Scott Jr.	CB	6-0	185	Fr.	Springfield, Ohio/Springfield	57	Jalen Pace	LB	6-0	232	Sr.	St. Louis/Mary Institute & Country Day
6	Sonny Styles	LB	6-4	225	Jr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central	58	Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	295	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
7	Kyion Grayes	WR	6-0	190	Jr.	Chandler, Ariz./Chandler	60	Caden Casto	DL	6-1	268	St.	Strongsville, Ohio/Robert Morris
7	Jordan Hancock	CB	6-1	195	Sr.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett	61	Caden Davis	DE	6-4	238	So.	Mason, Ohio/William Mason
8	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	210	Grad.	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic	62	Josh Padilla	OL	6-4	295	So.	Huber Heights, Ohio/Wayne
9	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	195	Sr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington	62	Bryce Prater	DL	6-1	270	Sr.	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
10	Denzel Burke	CB	6-1	193	Sr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Saguaro	63	Julian Goines-Jackson	OL	6-1	315	Jr.	Zanesville, Ohio/Youngstown State
10	Julian Sayin	QB	6-1	203	Fr.	Carlsbad, Calif./Alabama	65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-6	319	Sr.	Floyds Knobs, Ind./Floyd Central
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	233	Jr.	Dayton/Archbishop Alter	66	Enokk Vimahi	OL	6-4	310	Grad.	Kahuku, Hawaii/Kahuku
11	Brandon Inniss	WR	6-0	203	So.	Hollywood, Fla./American Heritage	67	Austin Siereveld	OL	6-5	320	So.	Liberty Township, Ohio/Lakota East
12	Air Noland	QB	6-2	192	Fr.	Fairburn, Ga./Langston Hughes	68	George Fitzpatrick	OL	6-6	313	Jr.	Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek
12	Bryce West	CB	5-11	196	Fr.	Cleveland/Glenville	69	Ian Moore	OL	6-6	309	Fr.	New Palestine, Ind./New Palestine
13	Miles Lockhart	CB	5-9	193	Fr.	Chandler, Ariz./Basha	70	Josh Fryar	OL	6-5	320	Sr.	Beech Grove, Ind./Beech Grove
13	Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	185	So.	Zephyrhills, Fla./Wiregrass Ranch	71	Josh Simmons	OL	6-5	310	Sr.	San Diego/San Diego State
14	Kojo Antwi	WR	6-0	194	Jr.	Suwanee, Ga./Lambert	72	Deontae Armstrong	OL	6-6	298	Fr.	Lakewood, Ohio/St. Edward
15	Jelani Thurman	TE	6-6	258	So.	Fairburn, Ga./Langston Hughes	73	Devontae Armstrong	OL	6-5	303	Fr.	Lakewood, Ohio/St. Edward
16	Mason Maggs	QB	6-2	224	Jr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman	74	Donovan Jackson	OL	6-4	320	Sr.	Bellaire, Texas/Episcopal
17	Mitchel Melton	DE	6-4	261	Grad.	Silver Spring, Md./Good Counsel	75	Carson Hinzman	OL	6-5	300	Jr.	Hammond, Wis./Saint Croix Central
17	Carnell Tate	WR	6-3	191	So.	Chicago/IMG Academy	76	Miles Walker	OL	6-5	317	So.	Greenwich, Conn./Brunswick
18	Will Howard	QB	6-4	237	Sr.	Downingtown, Pa./Kansas State	77	Tegra Tshabola	OL	6-6	327	Jr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
18	Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	190	Fr.	Rahway, N.J./Seton Hall Prep	82	David Adolph	WR	6-5	209	Jr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
19	Chad Ray	QB	6-3	212	Grad.	Dublin, Ohio/Scioto	83	Joop Mitchell	WR	6-1	180	Sr.	Wyoming, Ohio/Wyoming
20	Arvell Reese	LB	6-4	238	So.	Cleveland/Glenville	84	Joe Royer	TE	6-5	252	Sr.	Cincinnati/Elder
20	James Peoples	RB	5-10	203	Fr.	San Antonio/Veterans Memorial	85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	260	Jr.	Acworth, Ga./Allatoona
21	Jayden Bonsu	SAF	6-2	207	So.	Hillside, N.J./St. Peter's Prep	87	Reis Stocksdale	WR	5-10	188	Sr.	Morrow, Ohio/Little Miami
22	Calvin Simpson-Hunt	CB	6-0	204	So.	Waxahachie, Texas/Waxahachie	88	Gee Scott Jr.	TE	6-3	243	Sr.	Seattle/Eastside Catholic
23	Nolan Baudo	WR	5-10	180	So.	Chicago/Marist	89	Zak Herbstreit	TE	6-2	240	Jr.	Nashville, Tenn./Montgomery Bell Academy
23	Garrett Stover	LB	6-1	220	Fr.	Sunbury, Ohio/Big Walnut	89	Will Kacmarek	TE	6-6	260	Sr.	St. Louis/Ohio University
24	Jermaine Mathews	CB	5-11	189	So.	Cincinnati/Winton Woods	90	Eric Mensah	DL	6-3	308	Fr.	Stafford, Va./Mountain View
24	Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	Fr.	Pickerington, Ohio/North	91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	337	Sr.	Manassas, Va./Unity Reed
25	Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	194	So.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West	92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	260	Jr.	Greenwood, Ind./Center Grove
25	Kai Saunders	WR	6-3	212	Jr.	Northville, Mich./Northville	93	Hero Kanu	DT	6-5	305	Jr.	Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif./Santa Margarita Catholic
26	Cedrick Hawkins Jr.	SAF	6-0	185	So.	Titusville, Fla./Cocoa	94	Jason Moore	DL	6-6	305	So.	Ft. Washington, Md./DeMatha Catholic
28	T.C. Caffey	RB	5-10	215	Jr.	Hubbard, Ohio/Hubbard	95	Casey Magyar	K	5-11	185	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Kent State
30	Cody Simon	LB	6-2	235	Grad.	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep	95	Tywone Malone	DT	6-4	301	Sr.	Jamesburg, N.J./Mississippi
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	208	Sr.	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell	96	Eddrick Houston	DE	6-3	270	Fr.	Buford, Ga./Buford
32	Brenten "Inky" Jones	SAF	6-2	205	Jr.	Steubenville, Ohio/Steubenville	96	Collin Johnson	LS	6-1	215	Sr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
33	Devin Brown	QB	6-3	212	Jr.	Gilbert, Ariz./Corner Canyon (Utah)	97	Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	DE	6-6	258	Jr.	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	260	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/North	98	Kayden McDonald	DT	6-3	326	So.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett
34	Brennen Schramm	WR	6-0	191	So.	Medina, Ohio/Medina	98	Austin Snyder	K	5-7	194	Sr.	Groveport, Ohio/Findlay
35	Payton Pierce	LB	6-2	223	Fr.	Lucas, Texas/Lovejoy							
36	Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	242	Jr.	Marysville, Ohio/Marysville							
37	Nigel Glover	LB	6-3	221	So.	Clayton, Ohio/Northwestern							
38	Jayden Fielding	K	6-0	175	JR.	League City, Texas/IMG Academy							
39	Hadi Jawad	P	5-11	185	Sr.	Dearborn, Mich./Wayne State							
39	Joey Velazquez	LB	5-11	226	Grad.	Columbus/Michigan							
42	Joe McGuire	P	6-2	212	So.	Melbourne, Australia/ProKick Australia							
43	John Ferlmann	LS	6-3	228	Sr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Arizona State							
43	Dianté Griffin	CB	5-9	185	Jr.	Lima, Ohio/Senior							
44	JT Tuimolou	DE	6-5	269	Sr.	Edgewood, Wash./Eastside Catholic							

**Coaching staff** – Ryan Day, head coach; Chip Kelly, offensive coordinator/quarterbacks; Brian Hartline, co-offensive coordinator/wide receivers; Jim Knowles, defensive coordinator; James Laurinaitis, linebackers; Tony Alford, assistant head coach for offense/running backs; Justin Frye, associate head coach for offense/offensive line; Larry Johnson, associate head coach/defensive line; Tim Walton, assistant head coach/secondary/cornerbacks; Matt Guerrieri, safeties; Keenan Bailey, tight ends; Mickey Marotti, general manager – player personnel; Tony Johnson, advisor/analyst; Brent Zdebski, quality control – defense; Rob Keys, quality control – kicking; Sam McGrath, quality control – defense; Joe Lyberger, quality control – defense; LaAllan Clark, graduate assistant – defense; Mike Sollenne, graduate assistant – offense; Sean Binckes, graduate assistant – offense; Riley Larkin, program assistant – offense; Gunner Daniel, program assistant – special teams; Devin Jordan, program assistant – offense; Gerren DuHart, program assistant – defense; Joshua Chorba, program assistant – defense

with the lineup over the next few weeks to figure out not only the best five on the offensive line, but where those five belong.

“With some of the schemes we’re going to be running, we think Fryar has the skill set in order to do it,” Day said. “Now, he just needs the reps to go prove he can do it. I think we’ll come up for air (after the spring) and figure out what kind of progress has been made, evaluate it, and then go from there.”

The Buckeyes also have a potential battle to consider at center this spring, with sophomore Carson Hinzman and Alabama transfer Seth McLaughlin competing for the role.

Much like in the quarterback room with Will Howard, many on the outside believe the starting center role is McLaughlin's to lose. The veteran, who started each of Alabama's 14 games last season, was brought in this offseason after Hinzman – who started every game at center during the regular season – was held out of the Cotton Bowl for undisclosed reasons.

Despite the tough end to his 2023 season, Hinzman was back taking first-team reps for the Buckeyes at center during Ohio State's first two spring practices, with McLaughlin trailing behind. Day said that Hinzman has worked hard this offseason to

improve his game and is in line to compete with McLaughlin this spring, setting up an intriguing battle.

“He had a really good last couple of months,” Day said. “He was excellent with (strength coach Mickey Marotti). I think having that year of experience has really helped him. His numbers in the weight room are very, very good. So the combination of having a year under his belt and having a good offseason allows him a great opportunity to go compete this spring.

“Again, pads aren't on. So with the offensive line, we won't know anything for a little while. But we've seen strides for him. Improvement, combined with the fact that he played last year a bunch, and we won a bunch of games with him in there, that matters. So I'm fired up to see what he looks like here as we head into the middle of spring.”

### Wide Receivers

Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline is known for having a revolving door of NFL-ready wideouts in his arsenal every season, and it is no different in 2024.

Despite Harrison leaving for the NFL draft – where he will likely be the first non-quarterback taken – the wide receiver room still oozes talent, with senior Emeka Egbuka and promising sophomores Bran-

don Inniss and Carnell Tate all returning.

While Egbuka, Inniss and Tate are all expected to make a significant impact this season in Kelly's offense, Hartline may already have his next superstar waiting in the wings, that being consensus No. 1 overall prospect in 2024 and former five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith.

Smith, who enrolled early at Ohio State after racking up a gaudy 177 receptions for 3,116 yards and 46 touchdowns in three seasons for Opa Locka (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep, has already turned heads this spring, with many of his teammates lauding his combination of athleticism and humility that will put the freshman in prime position to make an instant impact.

“(Smith is a) freak athlete,” Egbuka said on March 4. “One of the quietest dudes I've ever met, not a man of too many words. But he came in and put his head down and he worked. I say this every time to freshmen who come in. All you have to do is shut up, put your head down and work. And that's something he understands.

“There's nothing he really can't do. He runs fast. He jumps high. He's strong. He's a natural pass catcher. I mean, he's a freak.”

“Jeremiah Smith, watch out for him,” cornerback Denzel Burke added on March 7. “This might be a big statement, but just

the way he handles himself, the way he moves and the potential he has, I feel like he might be the next best receiver to come through here. I'm really excited to see what he can do. The sky's the limit for him.”

Smith's rare traits could allow him to assume meaningful reps in his first year with the program, but it also raises the question of whether he already has enough talent and intangibles to usurp time from some of the returning wideouts on the depth chart.

While Egbuka is the clear No. 1 in Hartline's room, Inniss and Tate still need to prove they are worthy of emerging as the second or third options for Ohio State's next starting quarterback. Tate experienced the most production out of the two, ranking fifth on the team in receiving yards with 264 while also finishing with one touchdown. Inniss was less of a factor, hauling in just one catch, though it was a 58-yard touchdown against Purdue on Oct. 14.

With Harrison gone, the door is open for Smith to take the wide receiver room by storm and quickly ascend atop the already crowded depth chart that also features junior Jayden Ballard, third-years Kyion Grayes and Kojo Antwi and sophomore Bryson Rodgers.

# Howard, Brown Jockeying For Position At QB

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It became obvious in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 that the quarterback position could be a potential problem for Ohio State going into 2024 with less-than-stellar performances from then-redshirt freshman Devin Brown and freshman Lincoln Kienholz, and it was swiftly addressed on Jan. 4 by adding graduate transfer Will Howard from Kansas State.

But as it stands, this will be the second straight spring the Buckeyes do not have a definitive starter as Howard continues to acclimate in Columbus. For now, all five quarterbacks in the room – with freshmen Air Noland and Julian Sayin also in the fold – are taking a share of the reps with the starting team so they each have a chance to show what they can do.

“We’re going to let them compete,” head coach Ryan Day said. “It’s hard for us to say to someone like Julian Sayin, Lincoln or Air, ‘Hey, you’ve got to come in here and compete,’ when the first thing they do is take a bunch of reps with the threes. We want to roll you in whatever drill. You’re getting reps with everybody so you can show what you can do.”

While Howard has not been named the starter – and has yet to even lose his black stripe – he is approaching spring practice as if he is the top signal caller since he’s in his final season of eligibility, and he is doing that by trying to learn the offense as quickly as possible.

“I’ve got one more year. I didn’t come here to be nervous or to be timid or anything like that,” Howard said on March 4. “I’m ready to go. The fact of the matter is it might not all be perfect. I might make a few mistakes, but that’s how I’m going to learn, and that’s how we’re going to learn as a team. Nothing’s too big for me. Nothing’s too big for this team, certainly not spring ball. It’s going to be a lot of learning across the board, but I’m excited.”

He is also working hard to make sure he fits in the locker room and keeps the team chemistry since he knows how important that is for the leader of the offense, especially because he’s new in the building. Gaining that trust of his new teammates has been a priority since he arrived on campus.

“A lot of it has to do with hanging out outside the facility, and even in the facility chopping it up with guys I wouldn’t normally talk to,” Howard said. “(In the



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FITTING IN** – Ohio State quarterback Will Howard (right) is entering the spring as the presumed starter for the Buckeyes but will have to earn his position by impressing the likes of offensive coordinator Chip Kelly (left).

past) I’m probably not going to hang with the defensive linemen that much, but I’m trying to hang out around JT (Tuimolou) and Jack (Sawyer) and developing those relationships.”

It’s something of which coaches and teammates are taking notice. Senior wide-out Emeka Egbuka said he and Howard have already become good friends in the short time they have known each other.

“He’s a funny dude, a very likable guy,” Egbuka said. “We hit it off instantly. I’m excited to see what he can do this spring. I feel like he’s a phenomenal talent, a really smart quarterback. And he’s a veteran guy, so I’m hoping he can bring some experience.”

Despite the praise, Howard was behind

Brown when it came to first-team reps in spring practice sessions open to the media on March 5 and 7, so he will need to start proving himself on the field like he’s already been doing off it, and Brown isn’t planning to make that easy.

When Brown spoke before spring practice, he said he wasn’t thinking about transferring and doesn’t care who’s in the quarterback room with him. He’s there to win the spot because he thinks he’s the best guy in there, and competition won’t scare him away.

“I’ve said it before – through and through, I’m a Buckeye, and I’m here to compete no matter what,” he said.

It would not be the first time that an Ohio State quarterback has transferred out after insisting they would stay for a competition – look no further than Tate Martell in 2019 – so whether Brown will stay or not is yet to be seen, but he is adamant that he will be in Columbus and doesn’t appreciate the people who think he won’t stay to fight for the spot.

It’s the type of attitude that Day wants all of his quarterbacks to have. He said that competitiveness Brown showed leaked into the first spring practice they had, and he hopes it continues no matter how the quarterback battle goes.

“I was impressed with how he practiced today,” Day said. “He had a good de-

meanor. He had that same conviction out in practice today. If he keeps building like that, he’s going to have a hell of a spring.”

The battle between Kyle McCord and Brown last spring lasted into the regular season. McCord started the first two games against Indiana and Youngstown State, but Day held off on publicly naming him the starter until a few weeks into the season. When Brown was asked if he would like to know who the starter is by the end of spring, he said it’s not that important to him, and he doesn’t think it hurt the team last year when that battle continued into the season.

“I don’t think it really matters at the end of the day,” Brown said. “If you’re getting reps, that’s all that matters. How we did it last year, we were still taking one rep and two reps, just working with everybody and being able to build a relationship with everybody. It didn’t feel like it was anything that harmed us.”

One thing that Day did say he wants in the quarterback this year is the ability to be a threat to run the ball. It forces defenses to account for that and can open up other options, and if it comes down to it, they can tuck the ball and gain a few yards on their own.

Both Howard and Brown have been advertised as mobile quarterbacks, but Howard has been able to show that he can be effective in the ground game at Kansas State, rushing for 351 yards and nine touchdowns last season with the Wildcats.

The Buckeyes used Brown on the goal line multiple times last season for his running ability, but injuries have impacted him seemingly whenever he takes off with the ball. He was hurt in Ohio State’s win over Penn State on a goal-line run and missed multiple weeks, and when he got his chance to start in the Cotton Bowl, he only lasted four drives before he had to be removed from the game after his cleat was caught in the turf, twisting his ankle.

He said that is a new problem for him, and even though he’s had several injuries in the past year, he does not view it as a pattern.

“There’s been some work with that,” Brown said. “It was just two freak deals. It was just weird. My cleat got stuck in the ground both times. I was injury-free in high school. I never really had any ankle problems or anything like that. Then two times where my cleats got stuck and I got twisted around.”

But whoever wins the battle between Brown and Howard will be running an offense with some new looks under offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, who is set to take over play calling and coaching the quarterbacks, both of which Day is stepping back from – though his influence will certainly still be felt.

In his extended tenure as a head coach at both the college and professional ranks, Kelly has overseen several quarterback battles and believes he knows how to handle them at this point. He doesn’t want to get in the way too much so that chemistry between the players won’t be an issue when they get on the field.

“Every time I’ve been involved in these,

## chocolate café

FINE CHOCOLATES • COFFEES • DESSERTS • SPIRITS & PEOPLE



1855 Northwest Boulevard  
(614) 485-CAFE  
chocolatecafecolumbus.com

**We can cater your tailgate party!**

Parties • Corporate Catering  
Weddings • Baby & Bridal Showers • Tailgates!



## SPRING PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

when they're organic is when it's the best," Kelly said. "I don't think you can anoint somebody or force the issue. There's the team chemistry part of this thing, too, so we're not going to force the issue. At some point in time at every school there's a quarterback battle. You have to let them play it out on the field, and that's where it has to be decided.

"We're really detailed on what practice looks like and how that's going to operate. But I also think you need to let the players go. I don't think you need to put shackles on them and keep them constrained. You've got to let them go and you've got to let them operate."

But even though both Howard and Kelly are new to the team and each other, Kelly has already been impressed with what he knows about Howard in terms of his knowledge of the game and how well he's fit in with his new team.

"You don't have to talk to Will for more than five minutes to know where he's coming from," Kelly said. "He's really focused. He knows he's got a short window left in his college career, and he really wants to capitalize on that.

"The other thing is in the short time that Will's been here, how quickly he's fit in with the entire team and how much the rest of the players respect him. He was one of the gold award winners for his work in the weight room this offseason."

Howard was excited about Bill O'Brien as Ohio State's offensive coordinator when he first came, but when he heard Kelly would be taking over when O'Brien

left for Boston College, he thought back to how he used to follow teams that Kelly coached.

"The first thing that came to mind was those Oregon offenses that he used to run and how prolific they were and how great their run and pass game was," Howard said. "Then, I grew up an Eagles fan and he coached the Eagles. That was really cool. There were a lot of different things that went into it, but as soon as we hired him, he gave me a call that day."

"He does a lot of good stuff in the RPO world," Howard added later. "A lot of the things he's trying to teach us is that we don't have to work harder, we need to work smarter – getting the ball out to these guys on the outside we have, letting them go make plays in space."

But whether Howard or Brown start against Akron on Aug. 31, both of them have the same goal in mind of winning a national championship, just like the rest of the team does, and both are trying as hard as they can to be the one to try to lead this talented team there.

"We know how much is on the line, we know how much we've already given to this season, and how much we've invested in this team," Howard said. "We had a really good winter – the way guys were brought in, the leadership we have on this team, the amount of guys that decided to come back, that decided to come to this program. At the end of the day, we know that our main goal is to win and to win all of them. That's the bottom line."



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NOT DONE YET** – Ohio State quarterback Devin Brown (pictured) is not backing down from his goal of being the starting signal caller for the Buckeyes and is set to battle with newcomer Will Howard this spring.

**DON'T MISS A MOMENT**



**PLANS START  
AT JUST**

**13 GAMES!**

**reds.com / Membership**



# Veteran Defensive Line Looking For More In 2024

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Following a dominant season when it ranked in the top five nationally in several categories, expectations are sky-high across the board for Ohio State's defense entering spring.

While defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unit is loaded with veteran talent at each position, perhaps no position group has more talent and greater expectations than the defensive line.

The Buckeyes have a stable of experienced and motivated rushers leading Larry Johnson's front, with all but one starter opting to return for their senior season rather than depart for the NFL. That group consists of defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau as well as defensive tackle Ty-leik Williams, with the three accounting for 51.8 percent of the team's sacks (14½ out of 28) last season and each earning All-Big Ten selections.

Ohio State has another senior returning in defensive tackle Ty Hamilton, who is expected to take NFL-bound Mike Hall Jr.'s spot on the starting front four this season.

But the group is also loaded with emerging young talent, many of whom are poised to make noise and earn added playing time this season. It is a potentially lethal combination of established veterans and upstart underclassmen that could allow the unit to wreak havoc on opposing offenses, a possibility those inside the group are processing as spring practice begins.

"It's definitely coming together," Hamilton said on March 7. "There's a lot of guys who are really growing up, really pushing up the ranks right now. Anybody (on our defensive line) can play. All the guys are jumping out. All the guys are really working. It's a unit where everybody is pushing hard."

For Johnson's unit, that dominance begins on the edges with Sawyer and Tuimoloau, whose Buckeye careers have seemingly been woven together ever since they first arrived on campus in 2021 as highly coveted five-star freshmen.

The two seniors managed to achieve individual success in their first three seasons amid great pressure and expectations, with the peak coming last season when the pair combined for 86 combined tackles (17 for loss).

While these accolades put them in prime position to declare for the NFL draft this offseason, Sawyer and Tuimoloau felt there was still more to add to their résumé in Co-

lumbus – mainly a win against Michigan and both a Big Ten and national championship – a feeling that ultimately prompted them to return to Ohio State in January for their fourth and final seasons. It was a decision that Tuimoloau said was made in lock-step with his fellow defensive end.

"Jack and I talked a lot (about our decision) – a lot is probably an understatement," Tuimoloau said. "We had so many goals coming in our freshman year. We understood that the goals we had and set for our defense – individual goals and on the defensive line – were just right there and all reachable. And once we thought about that, we became even more motivated to come back and get straight to work."

For the veterans Sawyer and Tuimoloau, that daily chase for greatness began in spring camp, where they have already looked to make improvements to their respective games.

Starting with Sawyer, he is hoping to replicate the success he had toward the back end of last season, when he picked up five of his 6½ total sacks in the final three games.

Sawyer pointed to these successes, which were capped by a dominant three-sack performance in the Cotton Bowl, as an example of him playing looser and reacting to the play rather than thinking. It is a mentality he admittedly lacked while playing at the hybrid defensive end/linebacker "Jack" position in 2022, but one he is looking forward to doing more of this year.

"I felt like I was in a groove, probably the whole second half of the season," Sawyer said. "I felt like myself again. I was just out there playing, having fun with my teammates. When you come here and you expect to hit the field and be a certain way, it's hard to get over that."

"I've known all along what I was capable of. It was frustrating the first few years, not playing up to – for whatever reason – what I was capable of on the field. But once you put that stuff to the side, go out there and play ball like you know how, it's going to take care of itself."

In addition to playing more freely, Sawyer is looking to improve upon his overall technique and flexibility this offseason, something Tuimoloau is also emphasizing at the start of spring practice. He said that despite his previous successes, he is still committed to perfecting his craft, which he thinks will come with working on the little things.

Tuimoloau also mentioned that he wants to react more on the field this season rather

than think, one of many desired improvements he expressed to the media following the Buckeyes' second practice on March 7.

"(I want to get) leaner and more twitchy, just continuing to react quicker and not feel like I'm thinking out there," Tuimoloau said. "I want to be able to run around every Saturday, every time we play, just having that motor under me. For me, that starts in the weight room. Now we're on phase two, where it starts on the field, and then after spring ball, it goes back to square one, back to that weight room and cleaning up areas, critiquing all the small things."

The defensive line will be led in the trenches by another pair of veterans, those being the seniors Williams and Hamilton. Williams, like Sawyer, experienced a breakout season in 2023, earning third-team All-Big Ten honors after recording 53 tackles (10 for loss), three sacks and an impressive five pass breakups, the latter mark tied for third most on the team.

His athleticism and activity were pleasant surprises for Ohio State. Williams had been dealing with weight issues earlier in his career. He started his Buckeye career at 360 pounds and has since dropped to 327, though he still indicated that he needs to get in better shape.

This transformation has not only boosted his performance on the field – putting him in line to start again this season – but it also gave him a new perspective on his impact on the team. Williams said on March 7 that he has embraced his increased leadership role this season and is inspiring his younger teammates to improve every day, a concerted effort that he thinks will benefit the unit in the long run.

"I think you have to set a great example for the young guys," he said. "Just showing them how to practice, how to watch film, how to take care of their body. Because those are the things you're going to need to go on a deep run."

Hamilton – who has two years of eligibility remaining because of a redshirt year in 2020, and the extra year due to COVID-19 – experienced a bit of a letdown season after a strong end to the 2022 campaign. He started each of the last five games in 2022 – including the College Football Playoff loss to Georgia – but was used mainly as a rotational piece on the defensive line last year, recording 38 tackles (4½ for loss) and two sacks.

Despite this relative lack of usage, Hamilton did finish this past year strong in the Cotton Bowl with a career-high six tackles (two for loss) and a sack, giving him optimism heading into this season as he looks to improve upon his game.

"One of the main points of the offseason was to elevate my pass-rush game," Hamilton said. "I think elevating that allows me to fine-tune myself into being unstoppable."

Hamilton added that this improvement can help balance out the production in the trenches, creating a formidable one-two punch between him and Williams on the interior that he thinks could rival any defensive tackle duo in the nation.

"I think us together could be the best in the country," Hamilton said. "I stand by that. Us together, we just (complement) each oth-

er. We have that chemistry and know that we're going to go out and play for each other."

In addition to those four returning seniors, the Buckeyes are also well-stocked with young and emerging talent, many of whom are on the verge of receiving more playing time. One of those younger players who may be ready for an increased role this season is junior defensive tackle Hero Kanu.

He was used sparingly on the interior but flashed at times last season, appearing in 11 games and recording 10 tackles and one sack. This offseason, however, the junior has turned heads due to his work ethic and overall improved skill set.

"He's just a worker," Hamilton said. "He's been working as long as he's been here. He's going to keep trying to find ways to get better every single day. That's what I applaud him for."

Knowles also listed Kanu as a prime candidate to emerge as a fifth defensive lineman in a special "Double Eagle" package, a potentially formidable five-man front that would have Sawyer and Tuimoloau shift to outside linebacker, leaving Kanu, Hamilton and Williams on the interior.

"Hero really flashed last year at times when you go back and watch the film," Knowles said. "So the fact that we play a lot of rushers, I mean, he's a guy who needs to have a good spring for us because he's going to be the next man."

Kanu is one of several younger defensive linemen who can earn more playing time this season with a strong showing this spring. Among those who can potentially flash are fellow juniors Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. on the edge and red-shirt freshmen Kayden McDonald and Will Smith Jr. on the inside – all of whom earned second-team reps this spring – along with true freshman defensive end Eddrick Houston, who has earned significant praise from his coaches in his first few months as a Buckeye.

"He's always working, always wanting to know more," Tuimoloau said of Houston. "I was just in the back (of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center) teaching him certain little keys and assignments, techniques on how to get better. So he's a student of the game as well."

With a unique combination of young talent and motivated veterans, Knowles and Ohio State's front four – maybe even front five, in some situations – has all the tools and intangibles needed to emerge as one of the nation's best. But regardless of this unique depth and talent, those within the room know that it will ultimately come down to turning high expectations into results come fall Saturdays.

"All of us on the defensive line, as a front, we all kind of had our own journey to how we are playing right now," Sawyer said. "And now, it's all about building and not looking back and playing how we know how to play, being confident out there and using our abilities that God gave us. I think that this whole year, you're going to see a whole different level of play from all of us."

www.theredbricktapandgrill.com  
 292 E. Gates St.  
 Columbus  
 (614) 444-2742

**HAPPY HOUR** 3-8pm Mon-Fri  
 Half off all 30 drafts • Half off select appetizers  
 Craft bottle specials all day

**100 Craft Beers!**  
**New Food & Cocktail Menu**  
**Newly Renovated Patio with Fire Pit**  
**Handmade Pizzas & In-House Smoked Meats**

## SCOREBOARD

# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

### FOOTBALL (11-2, 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, L 14-3.

### 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 (19-12, 9-11)

**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, W 67-60; **21** NEW ORLEANS, W 78-36; **30** vs. West Virginia, Cleveland, W 78-75 (OT).

**Jan. 3** RUTGERS, W 76-72; **6** at Indiana, L 71-65; **10** WISCONSIN, L 71-60; **15** at Michigan, L 73-65; **20** PENN STATE, W 79-67; **23** at Nebraska, L 83-69; **27** at Northwestern, L 83-58; **30** ILLINOIS, L 87-75.

**Feb. 2** at Iowa, L 79-77; **6** INDIANA, L 76-73; **10** MARYLAND, W 79-75 (OT); **13** at Wisconsin, L 62-54; **18** PURDUE, W 73-6-9; **22** at Minnesota, L 88-79; **25** at Michigan State, W 60-57; **29** NEBRASKA, W 78-69.

**March 3** MICHIGAN W, 84-61; **10** at Rutgers, W 73-51; **13-17** Big Ten tournament at Minneapolis.

### WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (25-5, 16-2)

**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, W 73-49; **18** UCLA, L 77-71; **22** BELMONT, W 84-55; **30** at Michigan, L 69-60.

**Jan. 5** at Northwestern, W 90-60; **11** RUTGERS, W 90-55; **14** MICHIGAN STATE,

W 70-65; **17** at Maryland, W 84-76; **21** IOWA, W 100-92 (OT); **25** at Illinois, W 67-59; **28** at Purdue, W 71-68.

**Feb. 1** WISCONSIN, W 87-49; **4** INDIANA, W 74-69; **8** at Minnesota, W 71-47; **11** at Michigan State, W 86-71; **14** NEBRASKA, W 80-47; **22** at Penn State, W 82-69; **25** MARYLAND, W 79-66; **28** MICHIGAN, W 67-51.

**March 3** at Iowa, L 93-83; **8** at Big Ten tournament vs. Maryland, L 82-61.

### 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., M 3-2, W 1-4; **21** Philadelphia Invitational at Philadelphia, M 4-1, W 2-3.

**Feb. 3-4** Northwestern Duals at Evanston, Ill.; M 4-1, W 2-3 **24** Central Collegiate Fencing Conference Championships, M: 4-0/1st; W: 5-1, 2nd. **25** Central Collegiate Fencing Conference Championships, NTS.

### MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (14-19-4, 4-18-2)

**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, W 5-3.

**Jan. 5** BOWLING GREEN, W 6-2; **6** Bowling Green, W 4-2; **12** NOTRE DAME, W 3-2, L 5-2; **19** Minnesota, L 5-2, L 6-3; **26** Penn State, L 4-3, L 4-3.

**Feb. 2-3** MICHIGAN, L 4-2, L 4-1; **16-17** WISCONSIN, W 3-2 (OT), W 3-1; **23-24** Michigan State, W 6-2, L 5-2.

**March 1-2** PENN STATE, L 5-2, L 2-1; **8-10** Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals at Madison, Wis., vs. Wisconsin, W 3-1, L 4-2, W 3-1; **16** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals at Michigan State; **23** Big Ten Tournament Final.

### WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (32-4-0, 26-2-0)

**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. 12-13** Minnesota, W 7-0, W 6-1; **19-20** MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 3-0, W 1-0; **26-27** St. Cloud State, W 4-2, W 3-2.

**Feb. 2-3** BEMIDJI STATE, W 11-1, W 9-1; **9-10** Minnesota State, W 3-0, W 6-2; **16-17** ST. THOMAS, W 12-1, W 4-1;

**24-25** Wisconsin W 3-1, L 4-2.

**March 1-2** WCHA QUARTERFINALS VS. BEMIDJI STATE, W 10-1, W 8-0; **8** WCHA Final Faceoff at Minneapolis vs. Minnesota Duluth, W 5-0; **9** WCHA Final Faceoff at Minneapolis vs. Wisconsin, L 6-3. **16** NCAA Regional.

### MEN'S SWIM & DIVE (5-0)

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

**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. 5** Hawaii, W 154-109; **20** MICHIGAN, W 163-137; **26-27** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind., 2nd.

**Feb. 2** PITTSBURGH, W 179-121; **16-18** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL, NTS; **28-March 2** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS, 2nd/1,226.

**March 10** LAST CHANCE MEET, NTS; **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 (6-0)

**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. 5** Hawaii, W 160-96; **20** MICHIGAN, W 184-116; **26-27** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind., 1st.

**Feb. 2** PITTSBURGH, W 202-97; **16-18** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL, NTS; **21-24** Big Ten Championships at West Lafayette, Ind., 2nd/1,358.5.

**March 3** LAST CHANCE MEET, NTS; **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 (16-1)

**Sept. 18-24** COLUMBUS CHALLENGER, NTS. **30** ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.

**Oct. 1-8** ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.; **19-23** ITA Midwest Regional Championship at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **23-29** Las Vegas Challenger at Las Vegas, NTS.

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

**Jan. 21** Eastern Illinois, W 7-0; Xavier, W 7-0; **24** Northern Kentucky, W 4-0; Toledo, W 7-0; **27** VANDERBILT, W 4-0; **28** BOISE STATE, W 4-0.

**Feb. 2** VIRGINIA, W 7-0; **4** WAKE FOREST W 6-1; **11** SOUTH CAROLINA, W 6-1; **16** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. Alabama, W 4-2; **17** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. Harvard, W 4-1; **18** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. Virginia, W 4-0; **19** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. TCU, W 4-3; **24** Notre Dame, W 7-0; **28** Baylor, W 4-1.

**March 6** Illinois, W 4-1; **10** Texas, L 5-2; **13** Texas A&M; **17** Michigan; **22** NORTHWESTERN; **24** ILLINOIS; **29** Purdue; **31** Indiana.

**April 5** Penn State; **13** MICHIGAN STATE; **14** MICHIGAN; **19** Nebraska; **21** Wisconsin; **26-28** Big Ten Tournament.

**May 3-5** NCAA Regional; **10-11** NCAA Super Regional; **16-19** NCAA Championship; **20-26** NCAA Singles & Doubles Championships.



**www.HatemAutomotive.com**  
**service@hatemservice.com**  
**1407 West Fifth Avenue**  
**Columbus, OH 43212**  
**614-486-5277**

**Tom Hatem Automotive**  
*Over 25 Years of Service!*  
**BMW • MERCEDES • MINI COOPER • PORSCHE**

# Harrison Forgoes Most Of NFL Scouting Combine

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

NFL general managers, coaches and evaluators flocked to Indianapolis from Feb. 29 through March 3 to watch the next crop of talent from the college ranks, but one future star not included in that group was former Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.

It had reported ahead of the event that Harrison would not participate in on-field events, but he took things a step further when he did not participate in a scheduled media availability on March 1, disappointing an assembled group of reporters at Lucas Oil Stadium.

"Marvin is not going to be speaking here," an NFL spokesperson told the gathered reporters. "I don't have any other information."

Harrison did have his measurements taken and talked with nine NFL teams interested in drafting him, so it was not a complete no-show by Harrison, but it is part of a growing movement by top prospects to limit their involvement with the NFL Scouting Combine. Former USC quarterback Caleb Williams – widely expected to be the No. 1 overall pick – also did not participate in any on-field drills and skipped medical testing, though he did meet with the media.

In addition to Williams, North Carolina quarterback Drake May and LSU signal caller Jayden Daniels opted out of any drills, while LSU wideout Malik Nabers also did not do any drills at the combine. Georgia tight end Brock Bowers – a likely top-15 pick, and the top tight end in the class – also opted out of any drills, taking away significant intrigue from one of the biggest events on the NFL's calendar.

"We're seeing it become the opt-out generation," an NFL general manager told Yahoo Sports' Charles Robinson. "But I guess we could also ask how many head coaches aren't here, how many general managers ar-

en't here, or get here late and leave early. It might say more about the evolution of the combine than a generation of players deciding what they won't do."

"Every step has been eroded over time," another high-ranking executive said. "Guys opt out of high school games, college bowls, all-star games, combine, pro days. It's the new normal. The arrogance of it all. And it's only going to get worse."

While Harrison was made sparse in Indianapolis, it is not expected to impact his draft stock. Nearly a consensus top-five pick in most mock drafts, the most popular landing spot for Harrison is No. 4 to the Arizona Cardinals.

Many mock drafts also have quarterbacks coming off the board with the first three picks, meaning Harrison has a good shot at being the first non-quarterback selected in April. The highest an Ohio State wide receiver has gone in the draft was Terry Glenn, who was taken seventh overall by the New England Patriots in 1996, a mark that Harrison will likely break.

## Hall Moved On To Support Family

Ohio State welcomed back nearly every member of the defensive line from last season, including ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau and interior linemen Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams. But one lineman who won't be back for another season is Mike Hall Jr., who made a surprising decision – at least publicly – to declare for the draft after just three seasons.

Privately, however, the decision was easy. Hall's priorities shifted the day before Ohio State's 63-10 win over Western Kentucky on Sept. 16 when his son, Michael Hall III, was born.

"That was the day I really became a man," Hall said. "It's not about Mike Hall anymore – it's about my son."

It was challenging to watch as the majority of his teammates decided to return



FILE PHOTO

**ON TO PRO DAY – Former Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., an expected top pick in the upcoming NFL draft, decided against participating in the majority of the NFL Scouting Combine held in Indianapolis from Feb. 29 through March 3.**

for another season, unsatisfied with how things ended for the Buckeyes with consecutive losses to Michigan and Missouri. But for Hall – who said he wishes the best for his teammates moving forward – there was more at stake than the pursuit of championships at the collegiate level.

"It definitely weighed," he said, "but I've just got to do what's best for my family and feed my family first."

The timing makes sense for Hall, but it remains to be seen how talent evaluators at the next level view him after an up-and-down career with the Buckeyes. He took a redshirt during his freshman season but had a standout sophomore campaign, finishing with 7½ tackles for loss and a team-high 4½ sacks, and he was a consistent presence on Ohio State's defensive line.

Hall reached those heights despite limited snap counts over the final half of the season due to injuries. He missed just one game all season but played no more than 19 snaps in each of the Buckeyes' final five games, including just 26 combined snaps in the final two games of the regular season against Maryland and Michigan.

Hall was healthy for most of this past season – even playing a career-high 48 snaps against Missouri in the Cotton Bowl – but was less impactful, finishing with just two tackles for loss and 1½ sacks, and just half a tackle for loss in the final eight games.

"I'll say it went very well," Hall said of

his Ohio State career. "Dealing with injuries here and there, but just to look past that, I really appreciated my time at The Ohio State, for sure. Just coming from Cleveland, it was my dream school."

Hall was limited at the combine, not participating in drills due to a hamstring injury. But even though he could not display his talents on the practice field, he made his pitch to NFL teams about what he can bring at the next level.

"I'm one of those guys who's going to come in and be hungry to play," he said. "I'm not one of those guys who's just going to sit around and be comfortable. I'm always working, and I'm always willing to do whatever it takes to be on the field."

## Stover Defends Blocking Ability

The knock against former Ohio State tight end Cade Stover was never for his receiving ability. The linebacker-turned-tight end finished with 82 receptions for 1,058 yards and 10 touchdowns over the last three seasons – with his first two spent on defense – in one of the more impressive receiving careers for a tight end in program history.

But for all the highlights Stover made as a receiver, fewer exist of him as a blocker. Ohio State's blocking as a whole – especially when it came to the running game – came under fire last season, and Stover



**EL VAQUERO**  
MEXICAN RESTAURANT

**3230 Olentangy River Road**  
**Columbus, Ohio, 43202**  
**(614) 261-0900**  
[www.ElVaqueroRestaurants.com](http://www.ElVaqueroRestaurants.com)

**EVERYDAY**  
**HAPPY HOUR**  
**4 pm-8 pm**



**\$5.00 OFF**  
your total bill of \$25 or more

Coupon valid only Sunday – Thursday. Excludes tax and alcohol. Dine-in and carry-out. One coupon per table. Not valid with any other offers. Valid at all locations with coupon. Expires 3/31/24



**\$6.00 OFF**  
your total bill of \$30 or more

Coupon valid only Sunday – Thursday. Excludes tax and alcohol. Dine-in and carry-out. One coupon per table. Not valid with any other offers. Valid at all locations with coupon. Expires 3/31/24



## Buckeyes At The 2024 NFL Combine

Name	POS	HT	WT	Arm (In.)	Hand (In.)	Wing (In.)	40-Yd. (Sec.)	Vert. (In.)	Broad (Ft.)	3-Cone Drill (Sec.)	20-Yd. Shuttle (Sec.)
<b>Steele Chambers</b>	LB	6-0 ¾	226	30 ½	9 ¼	73 ⅝	DNP	33 ½	9-4	7.13	4.23
<b>Tommy Eichenberg</b>	LB	6-2	233	31 ⅝	9 ¼	77 ⅞	DNP	32 ½	9-8	DNP	4.24
<b>Mike Hall Jr.</b>	DT	6-2 ¾	290	33 ½	10	81 ⅞	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
<b>Marvin Harrison Jr.</b>	WR	6-3 ¼	209	31 ⅞	9 ½	77 ¼	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
<b>Matthew Jones</b>	OL	6-3 ½	290	32 ⅝	9	80 ½	5.21	28	8-7	8.19	DNP
<b>Josh Proctor</b>	SAF	6-1 ½	199	32	8 ¾	78	4.55	32 ½	10-1	DNP	DNP
<b>Cade Stover</b>	TE	6-3 ⅞	247	32 ¾	9 ¾	77 ¼	4.65	34 ½	9-8	DNP	4.45
<b>Miyan Williams</b>	RB	5-8 ½	229	28 ⅝	9	69 ⅝	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP

was caught up in the narrative. He finished with a run-blocking grade of 54.4 from Pro Football Focus, 10th among Buckeyes with at least 50 run-blocking snaps.

Stover, however, calls it a “misconception” that Ohio State was a poor blocking team and pushed back on his low grades.

“I’m here to tell you ol’ PPF or PFF, whatever the hell it is, they don’t know my scheme,” Stover said. “But yeah, that seems to be a common theme going on here. If you’re afraid to miss, you’re not going to get anything done, you’re going to play passively.

“The common theme of we struggled blocking, I think it’s a misconception. I can think of a (expletive) million blocks (he would like to have back) but then again, that’s life. That’s the way it goes. It’s always 100 percent effort, always full tilt, full-time, there’s no doubt about it.”

Effort was never a question with Stover. After playing his first two seasons mostly at linebacker with some time mixed in at tight end, he fully committed to offense for the 2022 season, a series of shifts that might have caused others to look at transfer options.

“I’m happy I stuck with it,” Stover said. “I’m happy I stayed. I think now in this day and age, you’re going to find a lot of different things. You’re not going to find anybody staying for that long and stick it out like me and Tommy (Eichenberg) did, Steele (Chambers).

“You’re just not going to find that. Kids are going to leave and want to play early. Don’t get me wrong, we wanted to play early, but we trusted what they were preaching to everybody in the program, and we got where we are now.”

In retrospect, the positional pinball may have led to less development for Stover than if he had started (and stayed) as a tight end once he arrived at Ohio State. But even though his blocking is still a work in progress, Stover has seen significant improve-

ment in his game over the past few seasons with the Buckeyes.

“The film’s out there,” Stover said. “The film is what it is. I owe it to myself to do this and I owe it to my family to do this. And if you don’t like it, you don’t like it. But I’m going out there, I’m going to do everything.”

And for those doubting him? The two-time captain at Ohio State believes he is just getting started as he prepares for his transition to the NFL.

“I don’t think you can measure what’s inside of me,” he said. “I don’t think you can measure the kind of person I am. I don’t think you can measure how good of a football player I am. I’m just scratching the surface of what I can really be.”

### Williams Recovering From Knee Surgery

Former Ohio State running back Miyan Williams was the first of the Buckeyes’ draft entrants to announce his departure, doing so on Dec. 4 after being ruled out on Oct. 31 with a season-ending knee injury. And in his first media availability since departing college, he made it clear why he elected to leave another year of eligibility on the table.

“I was just finished with college,” Williams said. “I’ve been there for four years. It was a great four years at Ohio State, so I felt like it was just time.”

Williams appeared in six games this past season, rushing 49 times for 158 yards (3.2 yards per carry) with three touchdowns.

But with TreVeyon Henderson as the lead back and Chip Trayanum establishing himself behind Henderson on the depth chart, Williams’ role was diminished after rushing for 825 yards and 14 touchdowns in 2022. Complicating matters was Williams’ health, which took a hit due to repeated issues with his knee that ultimately led to his season ending prematurely.

“I literally played until I couldn’t anymore,” he said. “My knee just kept locking

up and I wasn’t able to run. I went to see the doctor, and he said, ‘Maybe it’s time to get that (surgery).’ ”

Williams’ career may not have matched up to his expectations coming in, but he still finished with 1,554 yards and 20 touchdowns, and he earned a coveted invite to the combine where he got the chance to meet with teams about his future.

And even as his utilization differed from game to game and season to season, Williams still saw marked improvement over his four years with the Buckeyes.

“When I watch my film I see myself get better in a lot of different spots as the years went on,” he said. “I think the (best) way I got better was probably vision-wise, be-

cause my freshman year I was just trying to bounce everything outside. And then as the years went on, I started actually reading things out.”

While Williams could have utilized another season at Ohio State or even contemplated a transfer for his final season of eligibility, he instead focused his efforts on preparing for the NFL. He did not participate in on-field drills at the combine, while he is continuing to recover from surgery, but he made the most of the opportunity.

“Everybody doesn’t get the chance to be where I’m at right now,” Williams said. “A lot of people don’t get a chance to even get invited. It’s definitely a blessing, so I’ve got to make the most of it, just take everything in.”



FILE PHOTO

**ON THE UPSWING** — Former Ohio State running back Miyan Williams’ season-ending knee injury put an end to his career with the Buckeyes, with 1,554 rushing yards and 20 touchdowns in four seasons in Columbus.

# Important Spring Visits On Deck For Buckeyes

Spring has sprung, at least according to Ohio State's schedule, even if the weather has yet to quite reflect that reality in Columbus.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

The Buckeyes officially opened spring practice on March 5 with the first of 15 spring practice sessions, culminating in the annual spring game at Ohio Stadium on April 13. But the next month and change remains one of the busiest times on Ohio State's recruiting calendar, with the program set to welcome upwards of 70 prospects to campus.

Here are prospects expected to visit Ohio State in March, with a list of expected attendees in April – including what should be a large list for the spring game – in the next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

Beginning with those who already made the trip, Ohio State welcomed a handful of prospects for spring practice on March 5. That list included Frankfort (Ky.) Western Hills three-star defensive end Javeon Campbell (6-5, 265); Columbus Marion-Franklin four-star cornerback Dawayne Galloway (6-1, 175); Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-1, 195); West

Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star tight end Luka Gilbert (6-7, 233); and Cincinnati Taft three-star defensive lineman Drayden Pavey (6-3, 305).

Visitors on March 7 included Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star wide receiver Preston Bowman (6-0, 190); Massillon (Ohio) Washington offensive tackle Nolan Davenport (6-6, 260); Melbourne, Australia, punter Nick McLarty (6-7, 255), a 2024 prospect who later committed to Ohio State on March 8; Indianapolis Warren Central four-star defensive end Damien Shanklin (6-4, 230); and Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210), who is committed to Ohio State.

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker Nasir Wyatt (6-3, 215) was scheduled visit on March 9 to wrap up the first round of visits for the Buckeyes.

Out of that first group of visits, Gilbert and Wyatt lead the way in terms of importance for the Buckeyes. Gilbert is one of Ohio State's priority tight ends in the class, while Wyatt – the No. 58 overall prospect in the class – is a top defender on the Buckeyes' board.

Galloway would normally be a significant target for Ohio State given his proximity, but with three top-10 cornerbacks in the class already committed, the numbers may not be there for the Buckeyes to seriously pursue Galloway.

Ohio State's next set of visitors will arrive beginning on March 18, with Austin (Texas)

### OSU Football 2025 Commitments

Players 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
Carter Lowe	OT	6-5	290	★★★★	Toledo Whitmer
Zahir Mathis	DL	6-6	225	★★★★	Philadelphia Imhotep Institute
Na'eem Offord	CB	6-1	185	★★★★★	Birmingham (Ala.) Parker
Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	170	★★★★★	Houston North Shore
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio
Blake Woodby	CB	5-11	175	★★★★	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	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei

Lake Travis defensive lineman Gus Cordova (6-5, 250) and Cypress (Texas) Cy-Fair four-star defensive lineman Landon Rink (6-2, 270) both making the trip. They will be followed by Orlando (Fla.) Jones four-star wide receiver Vernell Brown III (5-11, 170) and Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star defensive end Justin Hill (6-3, 220) on March 19, and Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) – who is committed to Ohio State – and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West athlete Cam Thomas (6-2, 200), a 2026 prospect, the next day.

On March 22, visitors include Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210); Dallas Skyline four-star linebacker Elijah Barnes (6-2, 225); Cary (N.C.) Weddington four-star defensive lineman Trajen Odom (6-5, 265); and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star safety Zech Fort (5-10, 185), a 2026 prospect. The week will then conclude on March 23 with visits from Princeton (N.J.) Hun School three-star defensive lineman Kole Briehler (6-3, 250); Sachse, Texas, five-star wide receiver Kalik Lockett (6-2, 175); Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), who is also committed to Ohio State; St. Clair; and Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga four-star safety Kainoa Winston (5-10, 185).

The wide receivers will likely get the most attention from the round of visitors. Brown – whose father played under Urban Meyer at Florida – is the No. 103 overall prospect and No. 12 receiver in the class and had 70 receptions for 1,363 yards and 10 touchdowns last season. Lockett, meanwhile, is the No. 20 overall prospect and fourth-ranked wideout in the class and had 59 catches for 1,299 yards and 13 touchdowns as a junior.

Alford and Hill also remain priority targets for the Buckeyes, and this is a particularly important visit for Alford, who is expected to announce his commitment on April 30.

Visitors will also flock to Ohio State the final week in March. Recruits expected to arrive on March 27 include four-star running back Jordon Davison (5-11, 203) and four-star linebacker Abdull Sanders Jr. (6-2, 210), both from Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei. On March 28, expected arrivals include Newberry, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jarquez Carter (6-2, 284); Shaker Heights (Ohio) four-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180); Leo, Ind., four-star tight end Brock

Schott (6-3, 215); and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei defensive end Shaun Scott (6-3, 225).

March 30 will be one of the biggest visit dates of the spring, with the Buckeyes expected to host Conroe, Texas, five-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185); Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-3, 195); Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star wide receiver Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 185); Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 250); and McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 205).

Also in attendance on March 30 will be Geneva (Ill.) Community four-star wide receiver Talyn Taylor (6-0, 165) and Upper Marlboro (Md.) Dr. Henry Wise four-star defensive lineman Trent Wilson (6-3, 270), while Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star wide receiver Daylan McCutcheon (6-0, 175) will visit on March 31.

Of the prospects visiting over the final week in March, Ffrench is the highest-ranked target at No. 16 overall in the nation. But Davison and Jackson are also visitors to keep an eye on as the Buckeyes await their first commitment at running back, while the secondary targets – including Brew, Delane and McNutt – will also draw some eyes.

### Changes On Horizon For NCAA Recruiting Calendar

Coaches have been asking for years for the NCAA to adjust the early signing period, and the NCAA's Collegiate Commissioners Association made that move on March 6, voting to move the early signing period to the Wednesday before conference championship weekend.

The early signing period has traditionally started on the third Wednesday in December and lasts for three days. For the upcoming cycle, the early signing period will be from Dec. 4-6.

The changes come after the NCAA Football Oversight Committee proposed a change to the NCAA recruiting calendar that would create three signing periods: the last Wednesday in June, the Wednesday before conference championship weekend and the first Wednesday in February, which would remain as the traditional National Signing Day.

While the decision was made to move

**Shade RESTAURANTS**

- NFL Ticket
- So Many HD, Flat-Screen TVs!
- Friendliest Staff
- GREAT Food

**Shade on the Canal**  
19 S. High St.  
Canal Winchester  
614-837-9873

**Shade on 30th St.**  
850 S. 30th St.  
Heath  
740-788-9287

**Shade on State St.**  
994 E. State St.  
Athens  
740-566-1009

up the December signing period, officials pushed back the vote on adding a summer signing date to June. Moving up the December signing period is intended to break up a busy month for coaches, but Ohio State general manager Mark Pantoni was not in favor of the decision.

"Been pushing for a last week of June signing day for years!" Pantoni wrote on Twitter. "Signing day during conference championship week = bad idea."

The majority of college programs won't have an issue dealing with a signing period ahead of conference championship week-end. But for schools like Ohio State that expect to compete in those games, it could make for a stressful week as coaches prepare for a game and deal with trying to sign recruits over the course of just a few days.

While Pantoni was not in favor of a moved up signing period, he has stated in the past that he does support a summer signing period.

"Something that I've talked to my colleagues about is potentially like a July 1 signing day," he said last year. "It just to me makes sense that you have all these official visits coming into the month of June, and if they're ready to make the decisions then, why can't they just go ahead and sign? At least that clears out another potential group of guys as well."

### Ohio State Makes Cut For 2025 OT Sanders

The top offensive tackle in 2025 – Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 270) – has cut his extensive list of scholarship offers down to six, and Ohio State remains in the running for

the second-ranked recruit in the class.

Sanders released his top six on March 2, with the Buckeyes included along with Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee.

"I just felt like after discussing it with my parents, we felt these were the schools recruiting me the hardest, especially from the beginning," Sanders told 247Sports. "These are the schools I felt most comfortable around when taking my visits, spending time with guys in the locker room and the places I feel can be most successful."

He included Ohio State in his top six, but it is not among the five schools expected to receive a visit from him this spring. Instead, he is set to visit Clemson on March 10, Georgia on March 16, Alabama on March 23, Tennessee on April 12 and South Carolina on April 19.

While a trip to Columbus does not appear on the horizon, Sanders was complimentary of Ohio State as one of his top schools and looks forward to learning more about the program.

"It's a really good program," he said. "They're known for making book-end tackles and developing them to be first draft picks. I enjoy talking to Coach (Justin) Frye and building the relationship with that coaching staff. Out of all the schools I'm looking at, I've spent the least amount of time there. I look forward to getting up there and spending more time with them. I really enjoy them and everything they stand for as a program."

### Safety Target McNutt Facing Suspension

McNutt, Ohio State's top safety target in

2025 and the No. 27 overall prospect in the class, may not be on the field to begin his senior season at Shaker Heights due to a suspension handed down by the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

McNutt was given a one-game suspension for his senior season due to his participation in a seven-on-seven tournament in Florida in January. According to the OHSAA's rule book, "members of an interscholastic football team may not participate in an athletic contest with a non-interscholastic team in that same sport between Aug. 1 and May 14. Any contact football, flag football, touch football and arena football are examples of non-permissible events."

"I think that the rule is unacceptable," McNutt told 247Sports. "It's taking control of the kids and it feels like it's stripping basic rights away. How are you going to tell somebody they can't go and train or play football at all, and at the same time, these other sports they're able to play AAU and everything, but football can't do it?"

McNutt – who also participated in a seven-on-seven event in Los Angeles the weekend of March 8-10 – and his family plan to fight the ruling by the OHSAA, with his mother, LaToya, saying that McNutt is willing to not play his senior season in Ohio.

"At this point, it's all or nothing for us," LaToya added. "Why should he have to sit out one game? You're making us have to face the decision that the No. 1 DB in Ohio may not play football in Ohio his senior year. That's a decision we have to face as a family if OHSAA doesn't make any changes or concessions to modify the rule."

"Trey McNutt is strong. He has a mother that is strong and we will challenge. They will not like it. Even if we have to leave the state of Ohio, the challenge is not going to go away."

Many of Ohio State's recruits and players on the current roster either are currently participating or have participated in seven-on-seven football competition while in high school. It's a rule that coaches and players in Ohio have encouraged officials to change, and OHSAA executive director Doug Ute told Rivals.com that the rule is under consideration.

"That's a rule that's in our general sports regulations for football," he said. "I would say that we have been in conversation the last couple years with our member schools, our coaches association, to evaluate those offseason participation opportunities for student athletes. One of the things we did was move our June 1 date to May 15. That would help some of those combines that are out there."

"Most schools are getting out to the middle of May anyhow, so they're starting their summer there. That is something we did to modify that. We're continuing to have those discussions about what other opportunities should our student-athletes be afforded in the offseason, particularly with football."

### Other Prospects Have OSU In Top Schools

Sanders was the most notable recruit to include Ohio State among his top schools in recent weeks, but he was far from the only one.

Continued On Page 20

## ASK AN ANALYST

### With Allen Trieu of 247Sports

**Shaker Heights, Ohio, four-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) is facing a suspension from the OHSAA due to his participation in seven-on-seven competition. What do you make of this situation?**

"It's super unfortunate. You would love the kids to be able to have the same opportunities as other kids around the country. That's a rule that I would obviously like to see changed. At the same time, he kind of knowingly entered into the situation. He did join the team knowing what the rules in Ohio were. We'll see what happens. I can see a lot of avenues from his appeal could work out for him. I could see him exploring transfer options. But at the end of the day, I think the bottom line is it's time for that rule to change. I can't remember if Ohio is the only state, but it's definitely one of the very few that has that rule, so it's just kind of hanging on to some old ways."

**Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190) has recently set spring visits for Penn State, Tennessee, Ohio State, Alabama and Georgia, among others. Is Ohio State feeling any pressure for Jackson, or is it just a matter of time before the in-state prospect lands with the Buckeyes?**

"There's always some pressure when the kid hasn't committed yet, and he's going to visit schools that have had a good amount of success when they get players on campus. Those schools all have a lot to offer. That being said, I think you'd like to start with a lead, and I think that's the case here. Then you have the proximity advantage. I think there's a lot going for Ohio State."

"When you look back at last year's class of just how

much movement there was, even to the very end, on some of the guys that were committed, nowadays in recruiting you never really rest. All schools recruit with that understanding. I think Ohio State is at least starting off in really great position here, so you just have to hold on through these visits. But I think somebody would have to really, really blow him away to get him away from Ohio State. I think those schools have the possibility of doing that, but I wouldn't say that it's a strong chance right now until he gets to those campuses and we see how he reacts."

**Ohio State is also expected to get a visit from Franklin (Mich.) Wylie E. Groves four-star offensive tackle Avery Gach (6-5, 275), along with Michigan and Michigan State, among a few others. Do the Buckeyes have a legitimate chance at pulling Gach out of Michigan?**

"You know, he and his dad speak extremely highly of Ohio State. They always have. Right now – and this is my educated opinion, he didn't say this – I think if he were to leave the state of Michigan, Ohio State is the top out of state option from where I sit. That said, I do think the two in-state schools are doing a great job. He's a Michigan State legacy. Michigan has done a really good job recruiting him and they've had a lot of success on the offensive line. So there's a lot to offer, but I do think if he were to leave the state, Ohio State is the school that's positioned themselves best."

"He's not a kid who's wasting a ton of time in his recruitment. The fact that he continues to go back to Ohio State tells you the true interest there is. I don't think that kid leaves the Midwest. That's not a kid I can

see going to Georgia. I would think Ohio State will either have him on the roster, or they'll end up playing against him."

**Bellefontaine, Ohio, quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) was recently upgraded to a five-star prospect by 247Sports. Have you seen St. Clair throw in person, and if so, what is your impression of him?**

"Last year – I don't want to toot my own horn too much – but I saw him at Elite 11 in Ohio and (at the Under Armour camp) in Ohio and it was at both of those places where I came back and I was like, 'We are way off on this guy. He is way better than where we've got him (ranked).' And at that point, Ohio State hadn't offered. What's funny is Ryan Day was there at both of those events, I believe because his son was there, and I think that those events also furthered Ohio State's interest in him."

"That just tells you how well he threw at both of those events. Then obviously he's produced in high school. His numbers and his tape are awesome, but then when you saw him throw side-by-side with some of the best guys in last year's class – I remember (Penn State freshman) Ethan Grunkemeyer being at that, Findlay, Ohio, four-star Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 215), some of his peers were at that. To me, I was like, 'This guy is way better than he's being given credit for on a national scale right now.' I've always been super impressed with him and now I know that our staff has seen him at the last couple of events, the Nike Next Ones, and it's really solidified him as a true elite prospect in the class."

# Buckeyes Offer Big-Time 2025 Running Back

Continued From Page 19

Starting with the largest list, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive lineman Kaden Strayhorn (6-3, 285) had Ohio State in his top 12 with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Michigan State, Miami (Fla.), Missouri, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas and USC. Brown had a similarly large list, with the Buckeyes and Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Stanford, Syracuse, Tennessee and UCF.

Barnes' top 10 includes Ohio State in addition to Alabama, Florida State, LSU, Nebraska, Oregon, SMU, Texas, Texas A&M and USC, while Red Oak, Texas, four-star wide receiver Taz Williams Jr. (5-11, 181) had the Buckeyes in his top 10 along with Alabama, Baylor, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Michigan, Penn State, SMU, Texas and Texas A&M.

Before his visit to Ohio State, McCutch-

eon released a top eight that included Florida, Florida State, Ohio State, SMU, Stanford, Tennessee, Texas and USC, while San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) J. Serra Catholic four-star linebacker Madden Faraimo (6-3, 210) had a top four with Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oregon and USC.

## Ohio State Sends Out Four New Offers

Ohio State sent out four new offers – three to 2025 prospects and one to a 2026 recruit – since BSB last went to press.

Beginning in 2025, Ohio State extended offers to Baltimore Paul Laurence Dunbar offensive tackle Joshua Blackston (6-5, 275); Quitman, Miss., four-star running back Akylin Dear (6-1, 200); and Rome, Ga., four-star linebacker Jaedon Harmon (6-1, 215).

Dear is the most notable from the group, checking in as the No. 32 overall prospect and second-ranked running back in the

class. He rushed for 2,016 yards and 27 touchdowns last season, building on a sophomore campaign with 800 rushing yards and 21 scores.

Harmon is the No. 195 overall prospect and No. 26 linebacker in the class, and as a junior, he collected 80 tackles (eight for loss) with five sacks, an interception and three pass breakups. Blackston does not hold a 247Sports composite ranking, but he lined up at right tackle during his junior season and holds additional offers from Boston College, Cincinnati, Maryland, Pittsburgh, Rutgers and Tennessee, among others.

The lone 2026 offer went out to Mobile (Ala.) Cottage Hill Christian Academy linebacker Shadarius Toodle (6-3, 210), who does not hold a composite ranking but had 103 tackles and 10 sacks last season. He has offers from Auburn, LSU, Mississippi State, South Carolina and Washington, among others.

## Other Notes And Tidbits

- As Ohio State's board at cornerback continues to shrink with several commitments and other priority targets, Indianapolis Ben Davis four-star cornerback Mark Zackery IV (5-11, 164) left the Buckeyes off his list of top four schools on Feb. 29, instead including Cincinnati, Florida, Michigan and Notre Dame.

- Cocoa, Fla., four-star wide receiver Jayvan Boggs (6-0, 188), who is committed to Ohio State, was named MVP at an Under Armour Next Camp in Miami, Fla., on March 3.

*For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, visit [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

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

### 35 Years Ago – 1989

When you think of Ohio State linebackers, the names of Tom Cousineau, Marcus Marek and Chris Spielman immediately come to mind. Alonzo Spellman was looking to join that list.

Recruited from Rancocas Valley High School in Mount Holly, N.J., Spellman was rated by many college recruiting experts as one of the best high school players in the United States regardless of position. National recruiting expert Tom Lemming didn't mince words when talking about Spellman. He thought the Buckeyes landed a potential superstar when they signed the New Jersey defender.

"He is already built like an NFL lineman," said Lemming. "He cannot be defended by only one blocker and he has not been tested in high school.

"When you look at Spellman, you can't believe that he is as big as he really is. He looks more like he's about 220 pounds instead of 260. He has the body of a Greek god and hasn't really had much weight training. But he is one of the best players in the nation and one of those who is only going to get better with time."

### 30 Years Ago – 1994

There might have been a collective sigh of relief among the Ohio State coaching staff in early February when Orlando Pace made official what had been speculated for months: He would play his college football for the Buckeyes.

The 6-8, 305-pound offensive lineman out of Sandusky (Ohio) High School chose Ohio State over Michigan and Miami (Fla.) and had verbally committed to OSU head coach John Cooper in December. But he didn't make that commitment public until national signing day.

Widely considered to be one of the top lineman prospects in the country and a great catch for the Buckeyes, Pace admitted that Ohio State was his favorite all along. He just wanted to visit other schools to make sure he was making the best decision for himself.

"I liked Ohio State at first, but I wanted to see if I was choosing Ohio State just because it was my first visit," Pace said. "One reason I chose Ohio State is because of the availability to play early, and I liked the great recruiting class. As the recruiting season wore on, the class got better and better. That sort of sewed things up.

"I liked the players at Ohio State, and the coaches made me feel comfortable. I talked to some of the players and they told me the coaches are fair to you. I also liked Ohio State because it's a nice setting and atmosphere and I'll have a good opportunity to play. There were just a lot of reasons for ending up there."

### 25 Years Ago – 1999

During the most recent recruiting season, Ohio State was fairly efficient in its search to replace Joe Germaine and Mark Garcia at the quarterback position. All three signal-callers whom OSU went after attended the school's football camp in the summer.

Chris Simms, the left-handed quarterback prodigy and son of former NFL quarterback Phil Simms, was on everybody's must-have list – including the Buckeyes' – during the recruiting wars before deciding on first Tennessee then Texas.

But by the time the letters of intent were all mailed in, Ohio State knew that Craig Krenzel of Henry Ford II High School in Utica, Mich., and Scott McMullen of Granville, Ohio, also fit the criteria

for manning the QB position quite well.

Krenzel's situation during the summer camp was more secure than any of the other quarterbacks there, excluding Simms, of course, because he had already verbally committed to OSU in April. Krenzel said it had been a humbling experience for him since national signing day.

"Now I've got my workouts and I'm starting to get my play and some notes from Coach (Tim) Salem, and the more I realize it, I've got to start learning and learning and learning," he said.

### 20 Years Ago – 2004

When the various recruiting services released their rankings of the members of the class of 2005, Ohio figured to have several wide receivers among its top overall prospects.

Warren Harding's Mario Manningham may have been the state's top wideout, but he had already committed to Michigan. Two of the state's other top receivers remained uncommitted, and they were both hearing from Ohio State extensively.

One of those players was Brian Hartline of Canton GlenOak. Standing at 6-2 and 180 pounds, Hartline came from a solid prep program that most recently sent Dustin Fox and T.J. Downing to Ohio State, and he had attracted notice from most of the area's major programs.

"The one I'm mostly hearing from is Ohio State," Hartline told BSB. "I'm also hearing from Penn State, Michigan State, Notre Dame a little bit, and Iowa. Most of the Big Ten."

### 15 Years Ago – 2009

For a long time, it appeared that Devin Gardner was in line to become a quarterback at Ohio State. However, as time went on for the Inkster, Mich., signal caller, it became clear that the Buckeyes were more interested in Nick Montana of Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian.

As a result, Gardner opted to join the other side of college football's most storied rivalry. The four-star quarterback prospect issued his verbal commitment to Michigan on March 12, becoming the fourth member of the Wolverines' class of 2010.

"I was surprised," Inkster coach Greg Carter told The Detroit News. "I thought it would be a last-minute thing. He told me he wanted his mom (Marlene McClellan) to be a part of his football experience. He knows what a Michigan education can do for him in this area when he's done playing."

The Buckeyes never issued Gardner an offer, although Michigan State, LSU, Purdue and Iowa did. As a junior, he led Inkster to the state championship game both on the ground and through the air. Gardner completed 98 of 170 passes for 1,886 yards, 26 touchdowns and seven interceptions and carried the ball 115 times for 1,401 yards and 22 more scores.

### 10 Years Ago – 2014

The annual spring game was less than a month away, but Ohio State wouldn't have to wait that long to bring some big-name visitors to its campus.

The weekend of March 21-23 would have some of the Buckeyes' top targets for the 2015 class come to Columbus for unofficial visits. Of the seven prospects expected to take trips to Columbus, six held offers from the Buckeyes, which could make for an interesting weekend three weeks before the spring game.

One name to watch was that of an in-state product in recently offered Hubbard, Ohio, running back L.J. Scott. A four-star prospect and the No. 9 running back in the 2015 class, Scott had also been offered by Alabama, Auburn, Cincinnati, Kentucky, Michigan State, Tennessee and West Virginia.

Having offered Scott relatively late in his recruitment given his status as one of Ohio's top players, the Buckeyes had some ground to make up with the 6-1, 220-pounder. Speaking to Scout.com, parent network of BuckeyeSports.com, after receiving his Ohio State offer, Scott declined to name a favorite in his recruitment.

"I want to take my time with this, and I don't think a decision will be coming anytime soon," Scott said. "I'm just going to keep doing my work and staying focused on my job. I want to make the right decision, so there's no reason to rush."

### Five Years Ago – 2019

Depending on numbers, Ohio State may have been open to one more quarterback for its 2020 recruiting class, which has included Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral four-star commitment Jack Miller (6-4, 220) since July 1. In the meantime, as they looked to build their depth at the position, the Buckeyes had placed some focus on getting ahead for the next two cycles.

The wave of visits started March 22 with La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy's J.J. McCarthy, who said he planned to take his return trip to Columbus for a two-day visit on March 23 – OSU's fifth practice of spring camp. The 6-2, 180-pounder had come to campus Oct. 6 for Ohio State's 49-26 win over Indiana in Ohio Stadium.

In possession of 22 offers – Ryan Day and company extended one Dec. 11 – McCarthy was among the few signal callers OSU had targeted for the 2021 class. Recruited by (Mike) Yurcich at Oklahoma State before he joined the Buckeyes in his post as passing game coordinator and quarterbacks coach, McCarthy had familiarity with Day and the coaching staff as he built his relationship further.

"I was really interested in OSU prior to him being there," McCarthy said. "Now that Coach Yurcich is there, I couldn't be happier. Between Coach Day and Coach Yurcich, the sky's the limit on how far this offense can go. I can't wait to watch next season."

### One Year Ago – 2023

One of Ohio State's top quarterback targets in 2024 – Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star Air Noland (6-3, 195) – was expecting to announce his commitment within the next few weeks.

The Buckeyes were one of several schools set to receive visits, with Noland visiting Ohio State from March 31 through April 1 in addition to Clemson (March 10-11), Arkansas (March 14-15), Miami (Fla.) (March 23-24), Texas A&M (March 27-28) and Purdue (April 6). Following those trips, Noland was planning to buckle down and make a decision.

"Sometime around April I want to make my decision," Noland told On3. "I definitely want to make my decision before the season, and I think by the time April comes I'll have my mind set on the school I want to go to."

# Clark Passes Maravich, Declares For WNBA Draft

It didn't take long for Iowa superstar Caitlin Clark to get from passing the all-time women's scoring record to also breaking the all-time NCAA record, doing so against Ohio State on March 3 and surpassing LSU's Pete Maravich (3,667 points) for the most in NCAA history, finishing the contest with 3,685 career points.

## BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

"I think the people that have made it the most special, obviously my teammates, my coaches," Clark said to the crowd of 14,998 after the game at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. "But it isn't what it is without all of (the fans).

"I mean that, and I thank you. This is special. I don't know if you guys realize what you're doing for women's basketball and women's sports in general, but you're changing it. You're helping us change it."

The record-breaking shot ended up being a free throw after a technical foul on Ohio State forward Cotie McMahon, tying it with the first and breaking it by draining the second. Clark had previously announced her entry into the 2024 WNBA draft on Feb. 29, making it her final regular-season game with the Hawkeyes.

"It is impossible to fully express my gratitude to everyone who has supported me during my time at Iowa," Clark said through her announcement on Twitter. "My teammates, who made the last four years the best; my coaches, trainers, and staff who always let me be me; Hawkeye fans who filled Carver every night; and everyone who came out to support us across the country, especially the young kids.

"Most importantly, none of this would have been possible without my family and friends who have been by my side through it all. Because of all of you, my dreams came true."

It is expected that Clark will go with the first pick in the draft, which is held by the Indiana Fever for the second straight year. If she is drafted by the Fever, she would join former Ohio State guard Kelsey Mitchell, who is the Buckeyes' all-time scoring leader.

Across three games in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, Clark – whose Hawkeyes took him victory with a 94-84 win in the finals over Nebraska – extended her scoring record to 3,771 career points with NCAA tournament games still to play.

### Big, SEC Leading Way Amid CFB Changes

Before college football could even play a season with the new 12-team format for the College Football Playoff, officials are thinking about changing it yet again with a proposal that emerged on Feb. 28 which would include 14 teams.

The 12-team playoff will happen at least through the 2025 season, but there is strong momentum for the proposed 14-team format to start in 2026, according to a report from ESPN. While there is an effort to come to an agreement in the coming weeks, there is like-

ly to be some pushback, especially from conferences other than the Big Ten and the SEC.

According to Yahoo Sports' Ross Dellenger, those two conferences would hold exclusive rights to the only two byes of the expanded playoff, given to the champion of each respective conference. More reason for the pushback from other conferences is that both the Big Ten and SEC would each receive three automatic qualifiers while the ACC and Big 12 would both get just two automatic qualifiers. The best team from the Group of Five would also get one, leaving just three at-large bids for teams ranked in the top 14 at the end of the season.

There have been other formats proposed, like a format that would give the Big Ten and SEC two automatic qualifiers while the Big 12, ACC and Group of Five would each get one, and there would be seven at-large bids. But regardless of the final format, it seems as if the Big Ten and SEC will be favored in the new setup.

Under the current 12-team format, there are four byes for the four highest ranked conference champions, meaning they could go to any team. In the new proposal, the ACC, Big 12 or Group of Five teams would never be able to get a bye even if they were ranked higher than the Big Ten and SEC conference champions.

In the 14-team playoff, the first round of games would be played matching up the No. 3 vs. No. 14 team, No. 4 vs. No. 13 team, etc., and the games would be played at the home field of the better seeded team, like the first-round games in the next couple of years will be.

More decisions that still need to be made between conferences are a new revenue-distribution model and voting structure, which the Big Ten and SEC are also likely to lead the way in and receive more revenue while wielding more power in governance decisions.

Dellenger reported on March 8 that the revenue model is likely to make distinctions between the Big Ten and SEC as the "Power Two" conferences of college football, while the Big 12 and ACC would be the "Other Two."

In the past, revenue has been split evenly between the five major conferences, each of them getting an equal split of around 80 percent of the College Football Playoff's \$460 million in revenue. Going forward, the current proposal would give around 58 percent to the Big Ten and SEC, split evenly, while the Big 12 and ACC would split around 31 percent of the revenue.

### Purdue's Edey To Enter NBA Draft

After the conclusion of this season, star Purdue center Zach Edey will not be returning for another year with the Boilermakers. Head coach Matt Painter confirmed to CBS Sports' Jon Rothstein on Feb. 27 that Edey won't use his extra year of eligibility.

Edey averaged 24.2 points per game this season and 11.7 rebounds, helping Purdue earn the No. 1 seed in the Big Ten tournament that begins on March 13. The Boilermakers have a double bye and will first take the court on March 15, hoping to earn a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament for the second straight season.

Edey finished last year with 22.3 points, 12.9 rebounds and 2.1 blocks per game and earned several player of the year recognitions, including Naismith College Player of the Year.

If he were to win the award for the second straight year, it would be the first time any player did since Virginia's Ralph Sampson did so in three consecutive seasons from 1981-83. UCLA's Bill Walton is the only other player to win the award multiple times, doing so three times from 1972-74.

Edey is hoping to lead the Boilermakers a bit further in his final season, after Purdue earned a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament last season before falling in the first round to No. 16 Fairleigh Dickinson, just the second No. 1 seed to ever lose its opening matchup. UMBC beat No. 1 seed Virginia in 2018.

### Woodson Returning To IU Next Season

Toward the end of a down year for the Indiana men's basketball program, several outlets reported on March 6 that head coach Mike Woodson will return to the team for the 2024-25 season to lead the program for his fourth year with the Hoosiers.

Neither the university nor Woodson had anything to say on the matter. Following Indiana's 70-58 win over Minnesota the same day the news broke, Woodson was asked about the reports but didn't want to talk about returning for another year.

"I shouldn't have to sit here and discuss my job," Woodson said. "No comment."

During his time with the Hoosiers, Woodson has a 62-39 record and holds a 31-29 record in the conference, which hasn't lived up to the standard the Indiana basketball program holds itself to and has led to questions about Woodson's job security.

The Hoosiers finished the regular season with a 18-13 record, and were firmly outside of the NCAA Tournament bubble approaching Selection Sunday. Indiana had made the tournament each of the last two seasons under Woodson and advanced to the second round last season for the first time since 2015-16.

"I came back to try to put this team in the best position possible," Woodson said earlier this season when he was asked how much longer he plans to coach. "I'm going to continue to do that. I'm almost 66, but I feel good and I still move around. I think that I still think well in terms of the game and I still think I can teach the game.

"There are coaches coaching into their 70s. I don't know if that's something I'll do, but at this point I'll take it a day at a time, a year at a time. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon."

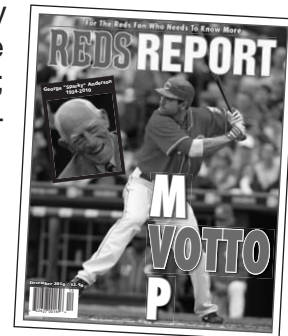
Just one day after the reports that Woodson is returning, incoming freshman small forward Liam McNeeley – a 2024 prospect who signed with the Hoosiers in November – requested a release from his national letter of intent. The 6-7, 210-pound McNeeley was the only recruit in Indiana's 2024 class and was the 15th-ranked player in the country.

## REDS FANS!

### Follow The Reds Year-Round In Reds Report

**R**eds Report is must reading for every Reds fan. Each information-filled issue includes player features; historical articles; extensive minor-league coverage with features on top prospects, complete statistics and farm club updates; box scores and game summaries for every Reds game; complete team and individual statistics; a Reds memorabilia section and much more.

**1 Year (12 issues) — \$45.95**



Send to: Reds Report • P.O. Box 12453 • Columbus, Ohio 43212

Please send me a one-year (12 issues) subscription to **Reds Report** for \$44.95.

My check or money order is enclosed. Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Charge to my:  Discover  MC  Visa  AMEX

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

For Faster Service On Credit Card Orders Call

**1-800-760-2862**

# Key Empties Tank On Emotional Senior Day

Ohio State's dominant 84-61 Senior Day win over rival Michigan on March 3 was an emotional one for many within the Buckeye program, and perhaps no one on the team felt that more than senior forward Zed Key.

**COURT REPORT**  
**Patrick Engels**

The Bay Shore, N.Y., native, who has long been a fan favorite due to his eccentric personality and "raise the roof" celebrations, has endured an up-and-down four-year career with the Buckeyes. Since joining the program as a three-star recruit, Key's career has included everything from a demoralizing upset loss to No. 15 Oral Roberts in the NCAA Tournament in 2020-21, a career-defining 20-point performance against No. 1 Duke in 2021-22 and a season-ending shoulder injury last year that may have contributed to him losing his starting job.

For Key, all those memories – both good and bad – came flowing back on Senior Day, leading to an emotional few hours for the big man.

"There were a lot of emotions today, even yesterday, just thinking about the game," Key said. "Time has flown by so fast. I've been here for four years. I've been to every senior night, and you never think it is going to be you until it is you."

While several different emotions may have been pouring out for Key just before tip-off, he used those feelings to his benefit once he took the court. Making just his second start for Ohio State this season, he helped set the foundation for a blowout rivalry game win in the early minutes of the matchup, throwing down a thunderous tomahawk dunk over Wolverine center Will Tschetter on the second offensive possession of the game.



**TIM SWANSON**  
Certified Personal Trainer

**Flat Stomach • Weight Loss • Strength Training • Cardio Kick-Boxing • Boot Camp**

**614-886-9331**  
foreverfitswan@yahoo.com

## 2023-24 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

### 19-12 Overall (9-11 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 10

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
THORNTON, Bruce	30-30	1009-33.6	157-371	.423	48-154	.312	120-139	.863	11-94	105-3.5	51-1	128	37	1	36	482-16.1
BATTLE, Jamison	30-30	931-31.0	148-314	.471	81-184	.440	56-59	.949	32-112	144-4.8	60-1	37	47	7	13	433-14.4
GAYLE JR., Roddy	31-30	968-31.2	147-325	.452	25-89	.281	109-129	.845	31-109	140-4.5	63-0	95	79	3	25	428-13.8
KEY, Zed	31-2	489-15.8	71-138	.514	3-10	.300	65-92	.707	57-68	125-4.0	61-0	17	23	21	12	210-6.8
OKPARA, Felix	30-29	703-23.4	76-127	.598	0-3	.000	30-47	.638	65-124	189-6.3	83-3	14	29	69	13	182-6.1
MAHAFFEY, Evan	31-30	708-22.8	61-131	.466	2-16	.125	24-38	.632	42-92	134-4.3	78-2	54	31	22	34	148-4.8
BONNER, Dale	31-2	589-19.0	50-154	.325	22-76	.289	22-36	.611	5-64	69-2.2	30-0	36	19	3	21	144-4.6
ROYAL, Devin	28-0	285-10.2	44-81	.543	2-13	.154	28-40	.700	23-35	58-2.1	48-1	10	23	8	9	118-4.2
MIDDLETON, Scotty	28-1	428-15.3	41-110	.373	24-58	.414	10-20	.500	11-30	41-1.5	26-0	18	16	7	8	116-4.1
HARDMAN, Bowen	17-0	74-4.4	10-24	.417	8-20	.400	2-4	.500	0-8	8-0.5	1-0	0	0	0	1	30-1.8
BAUMANN, Colby	4-0	07-1.6	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	5-6	.833	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	0	0	0	0	5-1.3
CHATMAN, Taison	13-0	51-3.9	3-13	.231	2-11	.182	1-2	.500	1-6	7-0.5	8-0	5	5	0	0	9-0.7
PARKS, Austin	9-0	20-2.2	1-1	1.000	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	0-5	5-0.6	3-0	1	1	0	1	3-0.3
ETZLER, Kalen	7-0	14-2.0	0-5	.000	0-4	.000	0-0	.000	1-4	5-0.7	4-0	2	2	0	1	0-0.0
SPENCER, Owen	2-1	06-2.8	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	3-0	0	0	0	0	0-0.0
Team									51-44	95				15		
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6280</b>	<b>809-1796</b>	<b>.450</b>	<b>217-638</b>	<b>.340</b>	<b>473-614</b>	<b>.770</b>	<b>330-795</b>	<b>1125-36.3</b>	<b>519-8</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>2308-74.5</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6275</b>	<b>770-1811</b>	<b>.425</b>	<b>210-602</b>	<b>.349</b>	<b>388-543</b>	<b>.715</b>	<b>323-724</b>	<b>1047-33.8</b>	<b>563-13</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>2138-69.0</b>

sion of the game.

"I just took what the defense gave me at that point," Key said of the dunk. "They didn't rotate over (to me). So I can jump a little bit – a little bit. It was just a great play. It definitely did set the tone, like, 'Look, we're here. We're not going anywhere. We're a tough team.'"

Key's activity was infectious throughout the game. In what will likely be his final game at Value City Arena – he has one year of eligibility remaining due to the COVID-19 pandemic but has not indicated if he will use it – the longtime Buckeye finished with a crowded stat line of nine points, three rebounds, two blocks and two steals.

"Zed's dunk certainly set the tone, but also just how hard and active he played to start the game, I thought, was contagious," said Ohio State interim head coach Jake Diebler. "It gave us a good boost to start the game."

Key seemed satisfied with his Senior Day performance – along with his entire Ohio State career – when speaking after the game, but he also acknowledged that both he and his team still have a lot left to accomplish this season, one which will continue on March 14 with a matchup against Iowa in the second round of the Big Ten tournament.

"I'm really grateful that I chose Ohio State for my college decision," he said. "I love the program, and we just have to keep it going, just keep rolling at this point."

For Diebler, it is this type of love and team-first mindset that makes Key a fan favorite and pillar of Ohio State's culture and program, something that he thinks was gradually cultivated throughout his eventful Buckeyes career.

"I love Zed," Diebler said. "Zed's a great – he's not kid, I almost said kid – he's a great young man. He's the type of guy that you love having over to your house and being around your family. He's a family favorite. The thing about Zed that I'm most proud of is he has shown some real growth since he got here, maybe even more so off the court, which is ultimately what this is about, so I love Zed."

### Bjork Prioritizing Experience In Search For Coach

Diebler has put his stamp on the pro-

gram since taking over for Chris Holtmann on Feb. 14, leading a previously reeling roster to a 5-1 record in the final six games of the regular season, a stretch that included wins over presumed NCAA Tournament teams Nebraska, Michigan State and projected No. 1 seed Purdue.

Despite Diebler's instant success in the head coaching chair, Ohio State – barring an unlikely NCAA Tournament berth – is still expected to make an outside hire, and this sentiment was supported by the man in charge of making this decision. Incoming athletic director Ross Bjork, who assumed his role as an advisor to current athletic director Gene Smith on March 1, told The Columbus Dispatch on Feb. 23 that a candidate's experience, or lack thereof, will be weighed heavily in the school's nationwide search.

"To me, experience matters," Bjork said. "Experience in the chair matters, so having head coaching experience, I just think, gives people such a unique advantage. When you're in that seat and you're seeing it in real time, it makes a difference vs. not seeing it."

Bjork, who has yet to offer a public comment on Diebler's candidacy for the job, added that he feels Ohio State will be able to attract a deep pool of experienced candidates because of the basketball program's status as a recognizable and well-funded brand.

"What I'm hearing is this is a blue-blood type program," he said. "The key word in there is 'type.' We're not necessarily a blue blood based on total history. We've had spurts, and we had some great runs under Thad Matta, but everybody's saying, 'Oh my gosh, this is a blue-blood type program.' That means there's really a lot of high-level interest in our job. That's super exciting to have that opportunity in front of us to get the right person."

Aside from experience, Bjork also emphasized a candidate's ability to recruit and retain players from Ohio as a key qualification in the head coaching search. Recruiting in the Buckeye State will be critical for Ohio State moving forward, with Ohio housing four total top-50 prospects in the 2025 and 2026 recruiting classes, a group highlighted

by Cleveland Garfield Heights five-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175) and Cleveland Richmond Heights five-star forward T.J. Crumble (6-7, 180) in 2026, both of whom have been offered by the Buckeyes.

These efforts can be made easier if Ohio State hires a head coach with Ohio ties, which Bjork said was a bonus but not a requirement for the job. Potential candidates such as Ohio University head coach Jeff Boals, South Carolina head coach Lamont Paris (a Findlay, Ohio, native) and Diebler all fit this description.

While recruiting top-notch talent and having experience are two things Bjork values in a head coach, he said the decision will ultimately come down to who can return the program to national relevance and Big Ten and NCAA Tournament contention, a standard that the program fell short of during Holtmann's seven-year run.

"It's a great opportunity, and we should be competing at the highest level within the Big Ten," Bjork said. "If you're doing that, that means you're a national program and you can make a run into March and the Final Four and eventually win it. That's the goal in all of this."

### Opposing Coaches Weigh In On Ohio State Job

Bjork described the men's basketball opening as a destination-type job for sitting college head coaches, a sentiment that many collegiate coaches across the country seem to agree with.

In a Feb. 29 article published by On3's Jamie Shaw, more than two dozen high-major basketball head coaches were interviewed and offered their opinions on the opening, with the majority of them agreeing that being head men's basketball coach at Ohio State is one of the better jobs in the sport.

Several head coaches pointed to Ohio State's rich access to financial resources and wide fan support as a significant draw, a perk that may only increase under the leadership of Bjork, who is widely considered an elite fundraiser. They specifically recognized Ohio State as a national money-making brand that is well-funded by both the university and boosters.

"(Ohio State) is an upper-tier job in the

Big Ten that comes with a big-time fan base and financial support," an ACC coach said.

"They have a strong operating budget and good fan base with a strong tradition," a Big East coach added. "That would be attractive to anyone."

While many head coaches gushed about the abundance of resources offered to Ohio State – with one Big 12 coach even calling the job "easily the best in the Big Ten" – they also pointed to the talent both currently on the roster and in high school throughout Ohio and the surrounding area as another key perk of the job.

"They have a fertile in-state ground to recruit from," a Big 12 coach said. "Programs in the surrounding areas seem comfortable sending Ohio State their best players."

Despite these benefits, the interviewed coaches also listed a few major drawbacks to the job, particularly with the reality that the men's basketball program's status plays second fiddle to football. While one coach said that this could be a potential advantage of the job because it puts less pressure on the basketball program to succeed – something that Matta may be benefiting from at basketball-centric Butler – others agreed that it puts the program at a disadvantage when it comes to resources and overall fan interest.

"It's a football school," one SEC coach said, "which could make it tough to succeed in basketball. A lot of the resources get allocated away from basketball. That is really the only negative."

Regardless of the pros and cons of the job, each of the interviewed coaches agreed that Bjork and Ohio State should go big-name hunting and conduct a nationwide head coaching search for an experienced head coach this offseason. This would best allow them to reclaim their position as a perennial contender in the Big Ten and beyond.

"They need to go get a sitting high-major head coach," another ACC coach said. "With that, you can almost hand-pick your coach. Someone like (Creighton's) Greg McDermott and (Xavier's) Sean Miller would make sense."

## OSU Has Early Talks With FAU's May

Ohio State is not expected to ramp up its coaching search until after the season ends, but it has reportedly started preliminary talks with one of the sport's brighter young minds.

According to a Feb. 22 report by The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio State has had early discussions with Florida Atlantic head coach Dusty May regarding the open head coaching position, marking the first known conversation between the university and a potential candidate since the job opened up.

May, 47, emerged as an early candidate for the position due to his rapid success leading the Owls. Taking over as head coach at Florida Atlantic in 2018-19, May has transformed his program into one of the more successful mid-majors in the nation, boasting a 125-67 overall record through the end of the regular season – the most wins all-time in program history – and leading them to a Final Four appearance last year as a No. 9 seed with a 35-4 record.

His quick ascension had many experts believing that he would look for a new role

at a Power Five school last spring. But he instead decided to return and signed a 10-year contract extension that reportedly pays him \$1.25 million per year, an amount that increases by five percent each year until 2033.

May – who is in the midst of a 24-7 season at Florida Atlantic that has them on the verge of a second consecutive NCAA Tournament bid – will also reportedly have a buyout of \$1 million if he chooses to opt out of his contract and join a more established Power Five program such as Ohio State. This could be insignificant for May if he ends up with the Buckeyes, however, who – under Bjork's guidance – are expected to offer their new head coach a hefty contract that could be among the most expensive in the Big Ten.

As of 2022-23 men's basketball head coach salary data obtained by USA Today, longtime Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo led the way in the conference with a \$5.7 million base salary, while Illinois' Brad Underwood ranked second at \$4.6 million. Minnesota's Ben Johnson was last in the conference at just over \$2 million, still larger than what May is making this year.

While May currently has no ties to Ohio State, he does have a connection with the Big Ten. Before heading south in his current role at Florida Atlantic and previous assistant coaching stints at Louisiana Tech (2009-15) and Florida (2015-18), May – a Peoria, Ill., native – served as a student manager at Indiana under longtime head coach Bob Knight from 1996-00.

"What I learned from Coach Knight was the value of being a great teacher," May said last March. "Every year I coach I try to be a better teacher. Looking back, it was how simple Coach Knight made complex things."

## Royal Continuing To Progress In Freshman Season

Entering Ohio State as a highly coveted four-star prospect out of Pickerington (Ohio) Central – where he led his team to

two straight Division I state title game appearances and won Ohio's Mr. Basketball in 2023 – freshman Devin Royal was viewed by many as the next Buckeye in line to instantly produce in his first season with the program.

That reality did not necessarily come to fruition early on this season. In the first 20 games of his collegiate career (Nov. 6 through Feb. 6), Royal struggled to make an impact, battling through injury and illness, logging just eight minutes a game and averaging 3.1 points on 51.1 percent shooting along with 1.8 rebounds per contest.

Royal has rebounded from that slow start and shifted into another gear during the final stretch of the regular season. Garnering more playing time from Diebler – who has committed to utilizing more of his bench – Royal has elevated his play in every way, averaging 7.0 points and 2.9 rebounds per contest while shooting an efficient 58.8 percent from the field in the final eight games of the regular season.

Diebler said on Feb. 28 that Royal has developed into a reliable bench scorer because he has begun to ease into the college game and become more comfortable in the Buckeyes' system, a gradual period of development that he expects from young players who are new to the program.

"I think we're starting to see the game slow down for him a little bit, on both sides of the ball," Diebler said. "This year was always going to be a little bit of a transition period for him because he's shifting, positionally, from who he was as a high school player to who he's going to become in college. He has always been tough. He's always had good feel."

"We've been spoiled here the last couple years with some of what freshmen have been able to accomplish. And that's not the norm. And everybody's journey is different. I think Devin has figured out, these last six weeks, how to really run his race well."

Diebler, who added that recruiting Royal

to Ohio State out of Pickerington Central was a "no-brainer" due to his toughness and consistent production on the court in high school, also pointed to the freshman's growing confidence and poise as things that have helped him develop the most during the season. These traits were on full display during Ohio State's come-from-behind 60-57 win over Michigan State on Feb. 25, where Royal logged a career-high 14 points on a perfect 6-of-6 shooting and helped ignite Dale Bonner's game-winning three by successfully inbound the ball to a closely defended sophomore guard Bruce Thornton.

"The most impressive thing he did, though, was taking the ball out of bounds (on the last play of the game) in that moment, in my opinion," Diebler said. "That, to me, showed not just the conditioning improvement, or the physicality improvement, or things like that. It showed that the game is slowing down for him."

Despite the praise, Diebler still sees many areas where Royal can improve upon his game, mainly with limiting his fouling, improving his three-point shooting and playing with more controlled aggressiveness. But based on the work ethic Royal has exhibited in practice, Diebler is confident Royal can make the necessary improvements and turn into an even more productive player for Ohio State down the line.

"It's very similar to (former Ohio State forward and 2022 NBA draft selection) E.J. Liddell," Diebler said. "They're not the same player, but you saw his game expand from one year to the next. I think Devin's showing real growth this season, and he'll add to that this offseason because he works so hard."

"Once that really happens, there's something special to be had there. And he's worked and he's earned the right to improve and play like he has. I think he has a really, really bright future and hopefully some really bright moments here the rest of this season."

## BIG Men's Basketball Tournament

March 13-17 • Target Center • Minneapolis

	MARCH 13	MARCH 14	MARCH 15	MARCH 16	MARCH 17	All Times ET
		No. 9 Minnesota Gm. 3 • Noon • BTN				
		No. 8 Michigan State Gm. 4 • 25 min. after Gm. 3 • BTN				
	No. 13 Rutgers Gm. 1 • 6:30 p.m. • Peacock		No. 1 Purdue Gm. 7 • Noon • BTN			
	No. 12 Maryland Gm. 2 • 25 min. after Gm. 1 • Peacock	No. 12 Wisconsin Gm. 8 • 25 min. after Gm. 7 • BTN		No. 4 Northwestern Gm. 11 • 1 p.m. • CBS		
		No. 10 Ohio State Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN				
		No. 7 Iowa Gm. 9 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN				
	No. 14 Michigan Gm. 6 • 25 min. after Gm. 5 • BTN	No. 2 Illinois Gm. 10 • 25 min. after Gm. 9 • BTN		No. 3 Nebraska Gm. 12 • 25 min. after Gm. 11 • CBS		
	No. 11 Penn State Gm. 13 • 3:30 p.m. • CBS				<b>TOURNAMENT CHAMPION</b>	

# OSU Enters B1G Tourney With Four Straight Wins

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State and interim head coach Jake Diebler continued a late-season surge since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, racking up three additional convincing victories, two of which came by more than 20 points.

The Buckeyes first took care of business at Value City Arena with wins over Nebraska on Feb. 29 and rival Michigan on March 3, the latter a 23-point victory on Senior Day. Then, after a week off, Ohio State closed its regular season with a 22-point road victory over Rutgers.

The winning stretch gave Ohio State a 5-1 record since Diebler assumed interim head coaching duties and a four-game winning streak to end the regular season, a strong finish that earned the Buckeyes an opportunity to garner NCAA Tournament consideration with a strong showing in the Big Ten tournament, which will be held at the Target Center in Minneapolis from March 13-17.

## Battle Leads Bucks To Win Over Nebraska

Ohio State (17-12, 7-11 Big Ten) capped off an eventful month with a 78-69 victory on Feb. 29 in front of 13,090 fans at Value City Arena, defeating Nebraska (20-9, 10-8) behind a season-high 32 points from Jamison Battle.

The Buckeyes, playing undermanned with sophomore guard and leading scorer Bruce Thornton out with a migraine, seemed unfazed by their best player's absence, taking a 39-37 lead into halftime and outscoring the Cornhuskers 39-32 in the second half. Ohio State shot just 42.6 percent from the field on 23-of-54 shooting but connected on 24 of its 28 free throws (85.7 percent), with Battle going 10 for 10 from the stripe.

"The message has been simple and has remained the same the last two games," Diebler said. "When you're a man down, you have to find a way to be a little bit tougher and a little more together. We knew (Nebraska) was going to be on it and we had to give our absolute best, and I'm proud of the way our guys stepped up."

While Ohio State was without Thornton, the Buckeyes did welcome back Battle to the lineup after he had missed the previous game against Michigan State with an ankle injury. This addition proved crucial early on, as Battle scored the team's first 11 points – nine of those coming from triples – to help Ohio State go up 13-6 at the first media timeout.

Battle's fast start was quickly negated by an extended 15-2 Nebraska run that gave the Huskers a 21-15 lead with 11:03 left. Ohio State broke the sequence with a basket from Devin Royal, and after a triple from freshman guard Taison Chatman, the Buckeyes had cut the deficit to 23-20.

Nebraska pushed the lead to 34-27 with a basket from Rienk Mast and back-to-back Husker scores from Keisei Tominaga. Ohio State stayed close in the ensuing minutes with three free throws from sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr., starting a 12-3 run including six by Battle that gave Ohio State a 39-37 advantage at the half with Battle scor-

ing 17 in the first 20 minutes.

The Buckeyes continued to surge out of the break, scoring seven straight points and forcing seven consecutive misses by the Cornhuskers to go up 46-37 with 16:17 left. Nebraska turned the tide with an 8-4 run to trail 50-45, but freshman guard Scotty Middleton answered with a triple to put the Buckeyes back up eight with 12:47 to play.

The teams continued trading blows with the Buckeye lead never greater than eight. A layup and three from Mast sandwiched around a basket by Gayle helped Nebraska cut the deficit to 65-63 with 6:13 left, but Ohio State extended its lead to 69-65 heading into a media timeout with a pair of free throws each from Royal and Battle.

Nebraska then trailed 69-67 with 3:52 left after two free throws from Juwan Gary, but that was the closest it got the rest of the way. Ohio State responded with two free throws by Royal and a Gayle layup to go up 73-67, part of a game-ending 9-2 run for the home team that allowed them to close out the win.

"It's Feb. 29 today, tomorrow is March," Battle said. "I think that's the biggest thing, the madness begins tomorrow. We're not ready to fold. We're not ready to go home. That's the mentality that we have. March is upon us. Let the madness begin."

In addition to Battle's 32 points, Gayle had his first-career double-double with 16 points and 10 rebounds, while Royal (13 points) also reached double figures. Nebraska was led by Mast, who had a double-double with 14 points and 12 rebounds.

Nebraska shot just 38.8 percent from the field (26 of 67) and had just eight foul shots (making seven), compared to Ohio State's 28.

## Buckeyes Bludgeon U-M On Senior Day

Ohio State (18-12, 8-11) picked up its third straight win on March 3 in front of 16,606 fans at Value City Arena, defeating Michigan (8-22, 3-16) 84-61 behind a stifling defensive performance and strong second half on Senior Day.

The Buckeyes forced 18 Wolverine turnovers that led to 27 points and held Michigan to just 36.4 percent shooting (20 of 55) and 27.8 percent from three (5 of 18). Despite having 16 turnovers of its own, Ohio State was equally dominant on offense, shooting 56.3 percent from the field (27 of 48), including an impressive 71.4 percent (15 of 21) in the second half.

"It's The Team Up North," Diebler said. "That's real. We leaned into this game as kind of one game against our rival. We're feeling some momentum, and our guys have earned that."

Opening with a starting lineup that consisted of seniors/fifth-years Battle, Dale Bonner, Zed Key and Owen Spencer to go with Thornton, the Buckeyes started with a bang, getting a thunderous dunk from Key on the team's second possession and later taking a 10-2 lead with 13:09 left in the half on a pair of free throws by Thornton.

"It was a rematch, we lost to them at their place (on Jan. 15)," Key said. "All week leading up to the game, we were like, 'Look, we have to come out with an aggressiveness, with a fire.' And we took that to heart."

Ohio State quickly cooled down with a

Ohio State 78, Nebraska 69												
Feb. 29, 2024 Value City Arena • Columbus												
		1	2	F								
Nebraska (20-9, 10-8)		37	32	69								
Ohio State (17-12, 7-11)		39	39	78								
Nebraska	Total	FG	FT	Reb.								
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Mast	32	5-14	2-2	3-9	1	3	14					
Tominaga	24	3-12	1-2	2-3	1	1	9					
Gary	27	3-12	2-2	0-6	1	4	8					
Williams	23	3-7	0-0	1-1	1	4	7					
Allick	21	2-2	0-0	0-2	2	3	4					
Lawrence	3	5-7	1-1	0-0	5	4	14					
Wilcher	21	3-8	1-1	0-0	0	0	8					
Hoiberg	22	2-5	0-0	1-3	4	2	5					
Diop	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Grace	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Jacobsen	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	26-67	7-8	8-25	15	21	69					
Percentages: FG: 38.8%. FT: 87.5%. Three-point field goals: 10-33 (Tominaga 2-7, Gary 0-6, Lawrence 3-5, Mast 2-5, Wilcher 1-5, Hoiberg 1-3, Williams 1-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 1 (Diop). Turnovers: 8 (Mast 2, Tominaga 2, Lawrence 2, Gary, Allick). Steals: 7 (Williams 2, Tominaga, Gary, Allick, Lawrence, Wilcher).												
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Battle	39	9-18	10-10	1-3	3	1	32					
Gayle Jr.	25	4-8	8-12	3-7	1	2	16					
Okpara	26	1-4	1-1	0-7	2	2	3					
Mahaffey	19	1-1	0-0	1-3	2	2	2					
Bonner	33	0-6	0-0	0-4	3	0	0					
Royal	21	4-6	5-5	2-3	1	2	13					
Middleton	21	3-8	0-0	0-2	0	0	9					
Chatman	4	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	3					
Key	10	0-1	0-0	2-2	1	0	0					
Hardman	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	23-54	24-28	9-34	13	9	78					
Percentages: FG: 42.6%. FT: 85.7%. Three-point field goals: 8-21 (Battle 4-12, Middleton 3-5, Bonner 0-2, Chatman 1-1, Hardman 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Okpara 2, Mahaffey). Turnovers: 13 (Gayle 4, Okpara 3, Mahaffey 2, Bonner 2, Battle, Royal). Steals: 2 (Battle, Royal). Officials: Carstensen, Dorsey, Simons. Attendance: 13,090.												

2:46 scoring drought, and Michigan capitalized with seven straight points to trail 10-9. The Buckeyes broke the skid with a Key fadeaway jumper as the shot clock expired, igniting a 9-2 run that included four straight makes, capped by a Bonner layup.

The Wolverines refused to go away, scoring on each of their next three possessions and later cutting the deficit to just 25-24 with 3:35 remaining on a three by Terrance Williams II. But a Felix Okpara block and Thornton layup on the other end helped put things back in the Buckeyes' favor. Ohio State – powered by three steals – closed the half on a 7-3 run to lead 32-27 at the half.

Ohio State came out of the locker room strong, going on a 10-0 run capped by a Gayle fastbreak basket and holding Michigan without a basket for the first 3:25 to lead 42-27. But the Wolverines responded with a 7-0 run of their own and later found themselves trailing just 46-40 with 12:20 left after an emphatic dunk by Nimari Burnett over Key.

The Buckeyes tried to extend the lead, getting six straight points from Middleton and Gayle to go back up 52-40, but Michigan responded with a 7-2 run in a sequence that started due to Key being called for a technical foul, which gifted the Wolverines two free throws.

But a Thornton three and a Gayle and-one helped settle things down for Ohio State on consecutive possessions, sparking a 13-4 run that put it up 67-51 following an Evan

Ohio State 84, Michigan 61												
March 3, 2024 Value City Arena • Columbus												
		1	2	F								
Michigan (8-22, 3-16)		27	34	61								
Ohio State (18-12, 8-11)		32	52	84								
Michigan	Total	FG	FT	Reb.								
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
McDaniel	36	7-21	4-4	2-2	3	3	19					
Williams II	34	3-7	5-6	0-2	2	0	13					
Burnett	21	4-7	0-2	0-2	0	5	8					
Tschetter	28	2-2	2-2	1-1	0	3	7					
Reed Jr.	33	1-8	2-4	3-6	0	3	4					
Smith	3	2-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	5					
Jackson	14	0-3	2-2	1-1	0	2	2					
Khayat	6	1-1	0-0	2-0	1	0	2					
Hochberg	3	0-0	1-2	1-0	0	0	1					
Washington III	10	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
Howard	7	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0					
Selvala	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Burns	2	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
Totals	200	20-55	16-22	11-18	6	20	61					
Percentages: FG: 36.4%. FT: 72.7%. Three-point field goals: 5-18 (McDaniel 1-6, Williams 2-3, Jackson 0-2, Washington 0-2, Burns 0-2, Tschetter 1-1, Smith 1-1, Burnett 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 2 (Reed, Jackson). Turnovers: 18 (Williams 5, Reed 5, Burnett 2, Howard 2, McDaniel, Tschetter, Smith, Washington). Steals: 6 (Reed 2, McDaniel, Williams, Smith, Jackson).												
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Thornton	32	3-8	10-10	0-5	5	1	17					
Bonner	16	4-4	2-3	0-2	0	0	10					
Key	17	3-5	3-4	2-1	0	2	9					
Battle	28	3-5	0-0	0-2	2	3	8					
Spencer	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	3	0					
Gayle Jr.	28	6-10	3-4	0-3	3	0	15					
Middleton	13	2-2	2-2	0-1	0	1	8					
Royal	17	2-5	2-2	0-1	0	3	6					
Okpara	19	2-2	1-2	0-6	0	1	5					
Mahaffey	15	2-4	0-0	0-2	1	2	4					
Hardman	3	0-1	1-2	0-0	0	2	1					
Baumann	2	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	0	1					
Etzler	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
Parks	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
Totals	200	27-48	25-31	5-26	11	16	84					
Percentages: FG: 56.3%. FT: 80.6%. Three-point field goals: 5-12 (Thornton 1-4, Battle 2-3, Middleton 2-2, Gayle 0-2, Hardman 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Key 2, Royal, Okpara). Turnovers: 16 (Key 3, Middleton 3, Thornton 2, Bonner 2, Battle 2, Gayle 2, Royal, Etzler). Steals: 14 (Bonner 3, Key 2, Battle 2, Gayle 2, Thornton, Middleton, Okpara, Mahaffey, Hardman). Officials: Greenstein, Smith, Szelc. Attendance: 16,606.												

Mahaffey layup with 5:59 left.

Ohio State increased its run to 22-4 with nine straight points and three additional steals out of a timeout. After two free throws by Will Tschetter broke the Wolverines' scoring drought and put the score at 76-53, the Buckeyes continued the second-half avalanche with a triple from Middleton and an old-fashioned three from Bonner to up the lead to 82-53.

With the game squarely in hand, Diebler emptied his bench with 2:46 to play, giving Battle, Bonner and Key a proper send off in their final Buckeye home game.

"(I told the seniors), 'Thank you.' Not just for coming here, but for seeing this season through the way they have," Diebler said. "There were stretches that none of us anticipated being like that, so I told them 'Thank you,' and 'I love you.'"

The Buckeyes were led in the win by Thornton, who finished with 17 points on 3-of-8 shooting, including a perfect 10 of 10 from the charity stripe. Thornton also passed out five assists, while Gayle (15) and Bonner (10) both reached double figures. Michigan was led in the loss by guard Dug McDaniel,



# OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Ohio State 73, Rutgers 51

March 10, 2024  
Jersey Mike's Arena • Piscataway, N.J.

	1	2	F
Ohio State (19-12, 9-11)	30	43	73
Rutgers (15-16, 7-13)	28	23	51

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Gayle Jr.	26	6-11	0-0	0-5	2	2	14
Thornton	34	2-5	6-6	0-5	6	2	11
Battle	28	4-5	0-0	0-0	2	4	10
Okpara	26	4-6	2-3	3-5	0	3	10
Mahaffey	17	0-1	2-2	2-3	4	3	2
Bonner	19	3-7	1-2	0-3	0	1	9
Royal	15	2-4	2-2	0-4	1	3	6
Middleton	16	2-4	0-0	1-3	0	0	5
Chatman	4	1-1	1-2	0-1	0	1	4
Key	11	0-3	2-4	0-2	0	3	2
Hardman	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Etzler	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Baumann	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Spencer	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-48</b>	<b>16-21</b>	<b>6-33</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>73</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 50.0%. FT: 76.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-20 (Bonner 2-5, Gayle 2-3, Battle 2-3, Thornton 1-2, Middleton 1-2, Chatman 1-1, Okpara 0-1, Royal 0-1, Key 0-1, Etzler 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 8 (Okpara 3, Battle 2, Key 2, Mahaffey). **Turnovers:** 15 (Royal 4, Thornton 3, Key 2, Gayle, Battle, Mahaffey, Bonner, Middleton, Team). **Steals:** 5 (Thornton 2, Middleton 2, Okpara).

Rutgers	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Hyatt	28	3-9	3-4	3-1	0	2	11
Omoruyi	16	2-3	6-7	1-6	0	5	10
Fernandes	21	1-5	3-4	0-0	0	2	6
Palmquist	7	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Williams	7	0-2	0-0	0-1	1	1	0
Ogbole	18	3-4	1-5	2-1	0	2	7
Davis	25	2-9	2-3	3-2	0	2	6
Williams	22	2-5	2-3	0-1	1	3	6
Griffiths	30	2-10	0-2	2-3	2	1	5
Simpson	20	0-4	0-0	0-1	1	0	0
Woolfolk	4	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	0
Terry	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	0	0
Morales	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hayn	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>15-55</b>	<b>17-28</b>	<b>13-20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>51</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 27.3%. FT: 60.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-18 (Hyatt 2-5, Griffiths 1-5, Palmquist 0-3, Fernandes 1-2, Williams 0-1, Davis 0-1, Simpson 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Hyatt, Omoruyi, Ogbole, Davis). **Turnovers:** 11 (Fernandes 2, Hyatt 2, Davis, Griffiths, Ogole, Omoruyi, Simpson, Williams, Williams). **Steals:** 8 (Davis 3, Williams 2, Fernandes, Ogbole, Simpson). **Officials:** Riley, Simpson, Szelc. **Attendance:** 8,000.

who finished with 19 points on 7-of-21 shooting.

### Dominant Defense Propels Bucks To Win Over Rutgers

Ohio State (19-12, 9-11) used swarming defense and a dominant second half to win its fourth straight game on March 10, notching a 73-51 win over Rutgers (15-16, 7-13) at Jersey Mike's Arena to close out the regular season.

The Buckeyes held Rutgers to 27.3 percent shooting from the field (15 of 55), including just 23.1 percent (6 of 26) in the second half. This allowed Ohio State to lead for the entire game and outscore the Scarlet Knights 43-23 after halftime.

"I felt like our attention to detail on the defensive side was really good," Diebler said. "Offensively, we didn't let our offense affect our defense. There were times where we went a handful of minutes without scoring. But it didn't affect how hard we were guarding and how connected we were on the other side."

The Buckeyes showed no rust in the early going despite it being a week since their last game. They received back-to-back threes from Battle and Gayle to start the game and held the Scarlet Knights without a field goal

in their first 10 attempts while jumping out to an 11-1 lead.

Rutgers earned its first basket with 12:32 remaining on an Emmanuel Ogbole dunk to trail 11-5, sparking a more positive stretch for the home team when they made three of four shots to cut it to 16-12 with 8:32 left before intermission.

Ohio State reclaimed momentum with a 9-3 run to go up 25-15, but Rutgers answered with five straight points to cut it to 25-20 with 3:50 remaining – a change in momentum that was sparked by a Thornton turnover, his second and the team's eighth of the half.

The Buckeyes went back up 29-20 after two Thornton free throws and a Gayle jumper, but Rutgers closed the half strong with an 8-1 run to trail 30-28 heading into the locker room while holding Ohio State scoreless for the final 2:09 of the half.

Rutgers forced Ohio State into two more turnovers in the first 3:27 of the second half, and the home team trailed 36-33 with 15:44 remaining. But the Buckeyes created some separation with an 8-0 run to lead 44-33, a stretch bookended by threes from Battle and Gayle around a Gayle layup.

Ohio State's lead continued to grow in the ensuing minutes due to its defense. The Buckeyes held Rutgers without a field goal for a resounding 9:48 of game time, lasting from a dunk by Jamichael Davis with 16:48 left until the Scarlet Knights finally broke through with a jumper from Jeremiah Williams with 7:00 left, at which point Ohio State led 58-39.

"I thought it was impressive that we were able to string some baskets," Diebler said. "We knew we had to go on a run or two offensively to help support our defense, and we were able to do that in the second half."

After Williams broke the run, Rutgers guard Aundre Hyatt hit a three to trail 60-43, but Battle made a layup on the other end to quash any chance of a late comeback. Ohio State extended its lead to as many as 27, 72-45, on a pair of Mahaffey free throws at the 2:54 mark, before the Knights scored the final four points of the game.

The Buckeyes were led in the win by Gayle, who scored 14 points on 6-of-11 shooting to go with five rebounds. Thornton (11 points), Battle (10 points) and Okpara (10 points) each reached double figures, while Okpara also grabbed a game-high eight rebounds. Rutgers was led in the loss by Hyatt and center Cliff Omoruyi, who scored 11 and 10 points, respectively.

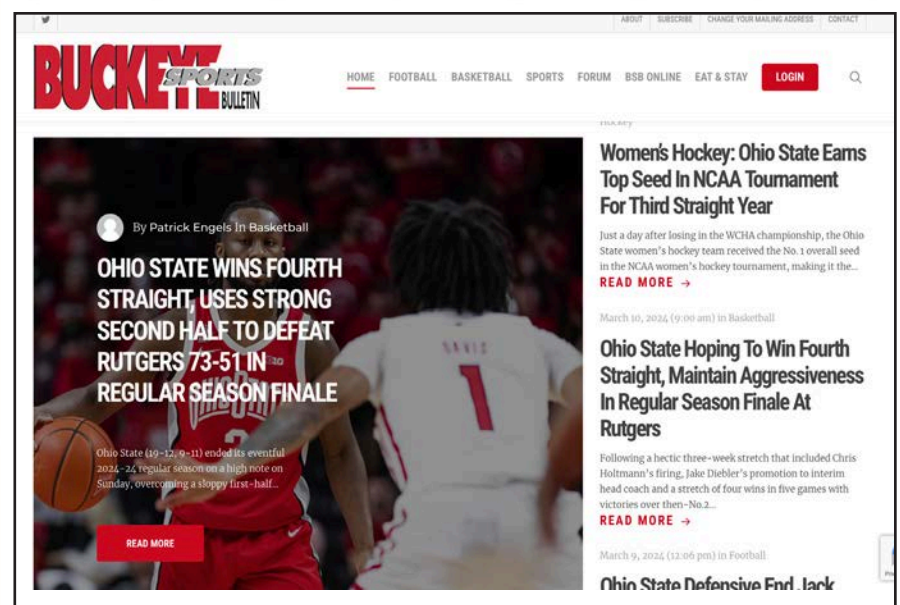
In addition to its strong defense, Ohio State shot well from the floor, connecting on 50 percent of its shots (24 of 48) and 45 percent from long range (9 of 20).

The blowout win over the Scarlet Knights and strong overall finish to the regular season earned Ohio State a single bye and No. 10 seed in the Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes were slated to face No. 7 seed Iowa on March 14, with tip off set for 6:30 p.m. on Big Ten Network.

If Ohio State defeats Iowa, it will have additional opportunities to boost its NCAA Tournament hopes, starting with a quarter-final matchup against No. 2 seed Illinois on March 15 and ending with potential semifinal and championship games before Selection Sunday on March 17.

For more information on Ohio State's Big Ten Tournament run and potential NCAA Tournament chances, visit [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com).

# SEE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING ON BUCKEYESPORTS.COM Free To Print Subscribers



**Buckeye Sports Bulletin has expanded its online presence to a full-service website to complement the 24 annual print editions. Access to BuckeyeSports.com is free to all print subscribers and includes numerous great features like:**

- Daily features, analysis and breaking news stories
- A fan forum where readers can interact with the BSB staff and other subscribers while catching up on the latest Buckeye news
- Rosters, scholarship charts, schedules and commit lists for the football team to keep up to date with the Buckeyes
- Electronic versions of the BSB print editions
- The BSB Quickly archive

**To sign up for this free service send an email to [subscriptions@buckeyesports.com](mailto:subscriptions@buckeyesports.com) and we will send you easy-to-follow instructions on how to enjoy reading Buckeye Sports Bulletin online**

# OSU's McGuff Named Big Ten Coach Of The Year

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff was named Big Ten Coach of the Year on March 5 by both the conference's media and fellow head coaches.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

McGuff and the Buckeyes held a 25-4 record through the end of the regular season (and when voters turned in their ballots). His closest competition was Michigan State head coach Robyn Fralick, who led the Spartans to a 22-7 record through the end of the regular season and a likely tournament berth in her first year in East Lansing.

Currently in his 11th season at Ohio State, McGuff has an overall record of 249-105 in Columbus and has led the Buckeyes to six NCAA tournament appearances, three Big Ten regular-season championships and a conference tournament championship. Last season, he took Ohio State to just the second Elite Eight in program history and the first since 1993.

This is the first time McGuff has been named Big Ten Coach of the Year in his time at Ohio State, and the first for the Buckeyes since Jim Foster won the award in 2008-09.

## 2023-24 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

### 25-5 Overall (16-2 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 8

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
SHELDON, Jacy	30-30	1000-33.3	198-389	.509	57-150	.380	86-99	.869	29-67	96-3.2	57-0	112	72	5	62	539-18.0
MCMAHON, Cotie	30-30	866-28.9	153-335	.457	14-60	.233	102-165	.618	44-152	196-6.5	78-2	66	77	17	35	422-14.1
THIERRY, Taylor	30-30	814-27.1	124-202	.614	13-28	.464	82-107	.766	67-95	162-5.4	68-1	47	30	16	52	343-11.4
TAYLOR, Celeste	30-30	857-28.6	113-277	.408	38-118	.322	41-65	.631	25-98	123-4.1	84-2	103	72	28	70	305-10.2
MIKULASIKOVA, R.	29-29	722-24.9	106-219	.484	39-95	.411	25-28	.893	11-80	91-3.1	51-1	72	50	13	13	276-9.5
HARRIS, Rikki	29-0	503-17.4	38-94	.404	24-71	.338	28-41	.683	6-46	52-1.8	50-0	39	21	6	28	128-4.4
SHUMATE, Emma	26-0	246-9.5	36-81	.444	27-62	.435	5-8	.625	11-15	26-1.0	22-0	9	9	9	5	104-4.0
COLLINS, Diana	17-0	175-10.3	20-66	.303	6-27	.222	8-11	.727	8-13	21-1.2	22-1	4	10	1	8	54-3.2
PARKS, Taiyier	28-0	255-9.1	34-76	.447	0-3	.000	16-28	.571	23-37	60-2.1	40-1	8	15	5	14	84-3.0
GREENE, Madison	22-0	281-12.8	20-58	.345	10-29	.345	11-14	.786	6-14	20-0.9	24-0	35	15	1	23	61-2.8
WALKER, Eboni	22-1	239-10.8	23-52	.442	0-2	.000	10-13	.769	25-31	56-2.5	19-0	27	17	1	8	56-2.5
VRES, Karla	6-0	17-2.9	3-3	1.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	1-2	3-0.5	3-0	1	1	0	0	6-1.0
HENDERSON, Kaia	14-0	66-4.7	6-17	.353	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	1-9	10-0.7	5-0	6	5	0	0	12-0.9
CARSON, Faith	6-0	10-1.7	1-3	.333	0-0	.000	2-2	1.000	1-4	5-0.8	2-0	3	2	0	0	4-0.7
Team									44-58	102						
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6053</b>	<b>875-1872</b>	<b>.467</b>	<b>228-647</b>	<b>.352</b>	<b>416-581</b>	<b>.716</b>	<b>302-721</b>	<b>1023-34.1</b>	<b>525-8</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>2394-79.8</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6060</b>	<b>691-1690</b>	<b>.409</b>	<b>163-547</b>	<b>.298</b>	<b>370-498</b>	<b>.743</b>	<b>318-769</b>	<b>1087-36.2</b>	<b>533-9</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>1915-63.8</b>

"It feels really good," McGuff said on the Big Ten Network after winning the award. "This is a great conference with incredible coaches, so to win this award is really special. Really, it's a reflection of my staff and all the great work they've put into this season, and more importantly, our players who have done an excellent job."

Foster and Tara VanDerveer are the only other coaches to win the award at Ohio State, with VanDerveer doing so twice and Foster winning four times. With the win by McGuff, Ohio State passes Iowa for the most Big Ten Coaches of the Year by a conference.

But McGuff was not the only Buckeye to receive honors. Fifth-year guard Celeste Taylor was named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year by the conference's coaches.

Taylor – also a second-team All-Big Ten selection by the coaches and media, as well as a unanimous member of the All-Defensive Team – averaged 10.3 points, 4.2 rebounds, 3.3 assists and 2.2 steals per game through the end of the regular season. She is helping the Buckeyes hold the opposition to just 63.8 points per game, tied for the best mark in the conference along with Michigan.

She is the fifth winner of Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year from Ohio State, joining Kim Wilburn (2005-06), Shavelle Little (2007-08 and 2008-09) and Amber Stokes (2011-12).

Taylor is joined on the all-conference teams by fellow guard Jacy Sheldon, who was a unanimous first-team selection by the coaches and was also selected first-team by the media. The media also voted Sheldon as a member of the All-Defensive Team.

Through the end of the regular season, Sheldon was averaging a team-high 18.2 points per game as well as 3.8 assists, 3.3 rebounds and 2.1 steals on 51.3 percent shooting.

Sophomore forward Cotie McMahon was the other first-team Buckeye, voted as such by the coaches and media after averaging 14.1 points and 6.4 rebounds through the regular season. Junior guard Taylor Thierry was a second-team selection by the coaches and media, while fifth-year forward Rebeka Mikulášiková was an hon-

orable mention by the media.

In addition to being named first-team All-Big Ten for the second consecutive year, Sheldon was also the winner of Ohio State's Sportsmanship Award, which is given to one player on each team.

### Ohio State Wins Outright B1G Title

Ohio State secured a share of the Big Ten regular-season championship on Feb. 25 with a win over Maryland and took things a step further on Feb. 28, winning the outright conference title with a 67-51 win over Michigan.

"I'm just really proud of this group," McGuff said. "We've got great kids, and they've worked extremely hard. As I told them in the locker room, if you looked at where we were when we played our first Big Ten game to where we are today, we've made incredible progress. We've done that because we've got a group that has focused on the right things every day in practice, focused on the next game ahead and that's it."

This is the 17th regular-season Big Ten title – shared or outright – in program history and the 10th outright conference championship.

"I don't like sharing and neither does this team, actually," McMahon said. "That's not a win. But it felt good to have it just the Ohio State (as conference champions)."

This is the program's first conference title since 2021-22 and the first outright win since 2017-18, though that was later vacated by the NCAA (along with a shared conference title in 2016-17). Prior to those,

## Plank's Cafe



**Jacy Sheldon**  
Senior Guard  
Dublin, Ohio

## PLANK'S LADY BUCK OF THE MONTH FOR FEBRUARY

**PLANK'S CAFE** 743 Parsons Avenue at Sycamore  
(614) 443-6251

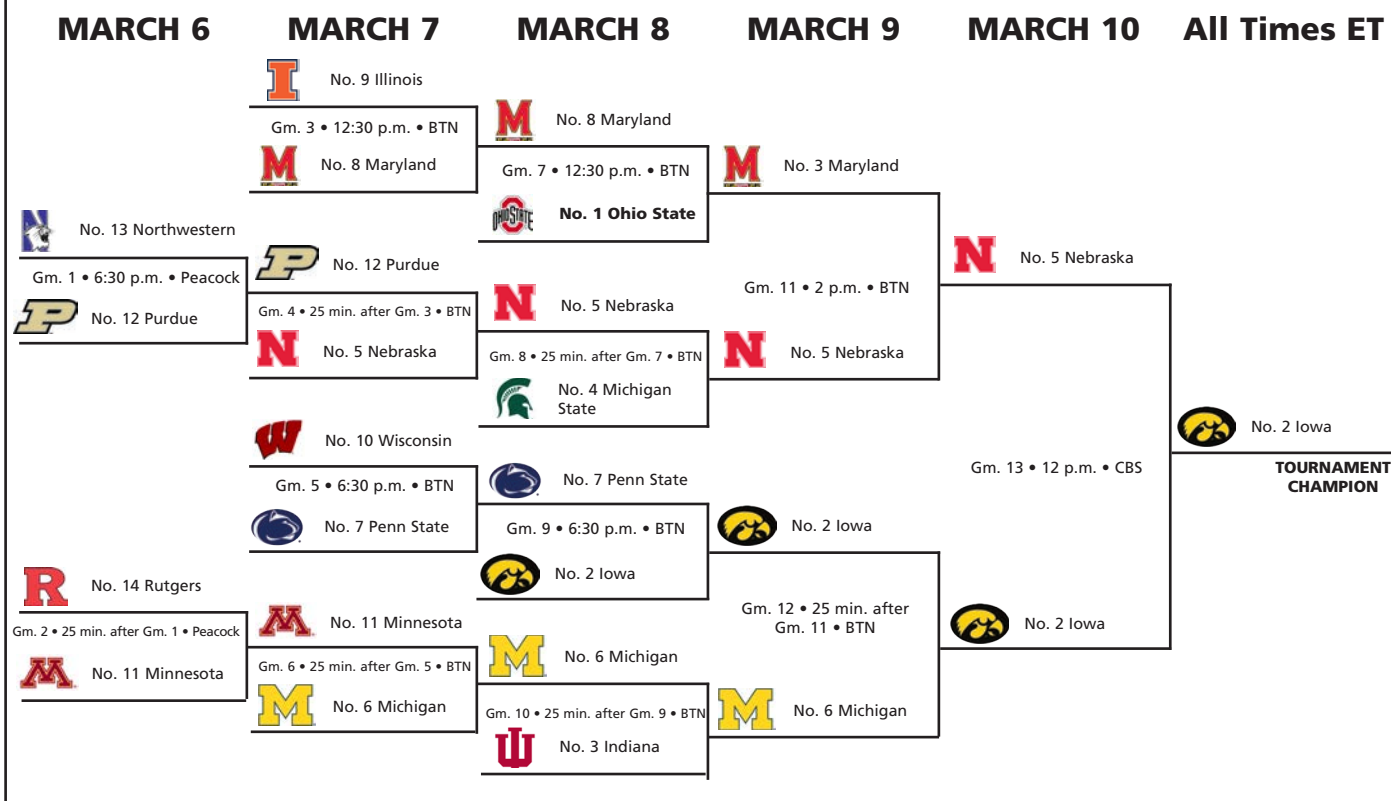
- Open 6 Days a Week
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- We deliver entire menu
- Plenty of parking

**A Columbus Landmark  
Since 1939**

**& PIZZERIA**

# BIG Women's Basketball Tournament

March 6-10 • Target Center • Minneapolis



seed, followed by Ohio State, Stanford and UCLA. In order, the No. 2 seeds were Virginia Tech, Texas, Iowa and USC; the No. 3 seeds were LSU, UConn, NC State and Oregon State; and the No. 4 seeds were Colorado, Indiana, Gonzaga and Oklahoma.

But with the Buckeyes having since lost games to Iowa and Maryland, the hope of a No. 1 seed has gone up in smoke. The latest bracketology from ESPN's Charlie Creme on March 11 had Ohio State as a No. 2 seed, with Iowa jumping the Buckeyes to take one of the top four seeds along with South Carolina, USC and Stanford.

Even so, with Ohio State still projected to hold a top-16 seed, the Buckeyes will get to host first- and (if necessary) second-round games before having to travel to regional sites at either Albany, N.Y., or Portland, Ore.

## Sheldon Is Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month For February

This past month marked the final full month of regular-season basketball for Sheldon, so it seems timely to recognize her as Plank's Lady Buck of the Month for February.

In eight games in February – all wins for the Buckeyes – Sheldon averaged 19.3 points, 5.1 assists, 3.5 rebounds and 1.8 steals, all while shooting 50.9 percent from the field and 43.8 percent from deep.

Four of eight games ended with at least 20 points for Sheldon, including a 25-point outing on Feb. 4 in a 74-69 win over Indiana. She also had six games with at least five assists – including three straight games with six dishes from Feb. 14-25. She shot 60.0 percent or better from the field in three games, and was 81.0 percent (17 of 21) from the free-throw line.

Ohio State had last won the Big Ten regular-season championship in 2009-10 under then-head coach Jim Foster, also an outright win for the Buckeyes.

## Walker Away From Team Indefinitely

McGuff said on Feb. 28 that fifth-year forward Eboni Walker is away from the team, with no timetable for her return for the Buckeyes. Walker was listed as unavailable against Michigan (and later against Iowa on March 3) and was not on the bench, nor was she involved in the postgame celebration for the outright conference championship.

"She's currently away from the team," he said. "I'll just leave it at that, with no certainty about her status moving forward."

She last played against Maryland on Feb. 25 – and also celebrated her Senior Day – though she appeared for just two minutes and was quickly taken out after she fired off a no-look pass that went out of bounds that led to a strong reaction from McGuff on the sidelines.

Walker averaged 4.9 points and 3.6 rebounds in 15.5 minutes per game last season but has seen those averages fall to 2.5 points and 2.5 rebounds in just 10.8 minutes this season. She started once earlier this season against Northwestern on Jan. 5, playing a season-high 25 minutes and scoring 11 points, but she had not scored in any of her last three appearances.

She arrived at Ohio State after two seasons at Arizona State and one season at Syracuse. McGuff had indicated earlier this season that the Buckeyes were looking to get a medical redshirt and another season after she missed most of her lone year with the Orange in 2021-22, but there has been no update on another year of eligibility.

## Sheldon Still A Lottery Pick In WNBA Mock Draft

Sheldon's excellent fifth season with Ohio State has her in a continued position as a lottery selection – one of the top 12

picks – in the 2024 WNBA draft, scheduled for April 15. ESPN's Charlie Creme has Sheldon being selected with the No. 10 overall pick by the Connecticut Sun in a mock draft released on March 1.

"After an injury-plagued 2022-23 season, Sheldon has been strong," Creme wrote. "She projects as one of the top defensive guards in the draft."

Iowa guard Caitlin Clark – who declared for the draft on Feb. 29 despite having another year of eligibility – is the consensus top pick to the Indiana Fever. She is followed by Stanford forward Cameron Brink to the Los Angeles Sparks at No. 2, Tennessee forward Rickea Jackson to the Chicago Sky at No. 3, South Carolina center Kamilla Cardoso to the Sparks at No. 4 and UConn forward Aaliyah Edwards to the Dallas Wings at No. 5.

Sheldon is looking to become just the sixth lottery pick from Ohio State and the first since Kelsey Mitchell in 2018. Mitchell and former Buckeye center Jessica Davenport remain the highest-drafted players in school history, both going No. 2 overall in their respective drafts.

While Taylor is not as highly touted in WNBA circles as Sheldon – and has yet to appear in any mock drafts, at least those looking at lottery picks – she could also come off the board in April. According to a report from The Athletic, before arriving at Ohio State ahead of this season, she had planned to enter last year's WNBA draft and had even selected an agent before deciding to come back for a final season.

## OSU On Two-Seed Line For NCAA Tournament

Ohio State's seeding for the NCAA tournament will not be announced until Selection Sunday on March 17, but the Buckeyes are still expected to land one of the top 16 seeds in The Big Dance.

The NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Committee released their final top-16 seeds on Feb. 29 – one of two midseason

updates before the final committee selection – and Ohio State was one of the four No. 1 seeds, along with South Carolina, Stanford and UCLA.

The Gamecocks – who held a 32-game winning streak through the SEC Women's Basketball Tournament, the longest in the county – were considered the top overall

## Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

**RULES AND RATES:** 20 cents per word, 10 cents for more than one insertion. Minimum order of \$5. No agency discounts. Make checks payable to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express.

All ads are uniformly set with the first two words set in boldface capital letters at no charge. However, no other words may be set in boldface. Anyone planning a larger or more distinct ad may receive our ad rate card upon request.

We reserve the right to request additional information or merchandise be submitted from advertiser prior to acceptance of an ad, and we reserve the right to refuse advertisements considered objectionable.

Deadline is one week prior to publication date. Call (614) 486-2202 or write P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212 for info.

**BUCKEYE GAMEDAY** Memories: A new book of short stories about humorous gameday experiences in the 1960s through the 2010s by Tim Sullivan. Available on Amazon.com.

**FOR SALE:** OSU football programs including bowl games, national playoff and championship games. OSU basketball programs, NFL programs, golf, Olympics, NBA, other print sports memorabilia. Call John at (330) 507-7339.

**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.

**FOR SALE** — OSU-MICHIGAN Game, 1975 - original RADIO broadcast on CD! Woody's last great team & Archie's last UM game as Bucks go 11-0! Three-disk set runs 3½ hours! Listen in your car! \$25 + \$3 S & H. Call 1-630-527-8890!

**WANTED TO** buy: OSU football memorabilia and equipment, programs, pennants, glasses, books, jerseys, helmets, ticket stubs. One item or a hundred. Will travel. Call George at (614) 506-1081.

**WANTED TO** buy: OSU basketball tickets/stubs from the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s & 2000s. Call Mike at (704) 995-0414.

**WANTED TO** buy: OSU football memorabilia, programs, ticket stubs, pennants, championship rings, gold pants, helmets, autographs, game-used equipment, small or large collections. Call Chris at (419) 957-6789.

**BSB PUBLISHER** Frank Moskowitz and other members of the BSB staff are available to speak at your business, social or alumni group meetings. Informative and fun. Call (614) 486-2202 for details.

# Buckeyes Upset Early In Big Ten Tournament

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State had arguably its worst stretch of the season since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, seeing its 15-game winning streak and run in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament both come to an end.

The Buckeyes secured the outright Big Ten regular-season championship against Michigan but then suffered back-to-back losses to Iowa to end the regular season and then to Maryland in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, sending Ohio State home after just one post-season contest.

Ohio State's NCAA tournament seeding will be revealed on March 17 at 8 p.m. on ESPN. With the Buckeyes viewed as a top-four seed entering Selection Sunday – but likely no longer on the one-seed line following the loss to Maryland – Ohio State will host first-round games from March 22-23 and the second round from March 24-25.

Should the Buckeyes advance to the second weekend, the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight will be played at regional sites in Albany, N.Y., and Portland, Ore., with the Final Four and national championship game to be played at Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse in Cleveland.

## OSU Wins Outright BIG Title Against Michigan

Ohio State (25-3, 16-1 Big Ten) secured the outright Big Ten regular-season cham-

pionship on Feb. 28 with a 67-51 win over Michigan (17-12, 8-9), also avenging the team's only loss in conference play to that point.

Ohio State and Michigan were tied at 22 at the half before the Buckeyes outscored the Wolverines 45-29 in the second half and forced 29 turnovers of Michigan that resulted in 30 points for Ohio State in the 16-point win. The win also extended the Buckeyes' winning streak to 15 games, a run that dated back to Jan. 5.

"I'm just really proud of our group," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "They've worked extremely hard, and as I told them in the locker room, if you look at where we were when we played our first Big Ten game to where we are today, we've made incredible progress."

Ohio State and Michigan went shot for shot early, with the Buckeyes holding a 9-7 lead with 6:06 left in a physical first quarter. Sophomore forward Cotie McMahon then knocked down a pair of baskets, but her score with 2:54 left in the frame was the last for the Buckeyes, who missed their final three attempts of the quarter but still led 13-9 due to seven turnovers by Michigan in the first 10 minutes.

The Buckeyes increased their lead to 18-9 with 6:53 left in the second after a three-pointer from Rebeka Mikulášiková and a layup from Taylor Thierry. Celeste Taylor added a layup with 5:52 left, but Michigan then took off on a 10-0 run spanning 4:17 –

during which Ohio State turned it over four times and missed three shots – to take a 22-20 lead with 50 seconds left in the quarter.

Following a timeout by McGuff, McMahon was able to tie the game back up. The Buckeyes did not allow the Wolverines to get a shot on their final possession, entering the locker room knotted up at 22-all.

"We didn't make a lot of strides in the first half and (didn't make) shots we normally make," said Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon. "We knew they were eventually going to fall, but we got our defense going and then our defense led to offense."

Ohio State increased its lead to 28-22 to begin the third, holding Michigan scoreless for the first 3:36 of the quarter. Wolverine forward Cameron Williams broke the run with a jumper, and after dueling threes by Sheldon and Michigan guard Jordan Hobbs, Sheldon hit another triple to put the Buckeyes up 34-27 with 5:00 left.

"We like playing at our pace," Sheldon said. "Michigan plays a little slower. We played at their pace the first half. Second half, I think we were able to speed the game up a little bit, make them a little uncomfortable."

After a timeout by Michigan, McMahon and Taylor scored on back-to-back possessions – the latter a three-pointer – and forward Taiyier Parks knocked down a pair at the line to lead 41-27 with 3:32 left, a 19-5 run dating back to the beginning of the quarter.

The advantage for Ohio State remained between 12 and 14 points for the next few minutes, and after a three-pointer from Hobbs, Sheldon collected a loose ball that she turned into a layup at the buzzer for a 49-38 lead.

The Buckeyes came out hot to start the fourth, making three of their first four shots to take a 55-40 lead, and a trio of free throws from McMahon and Taylor further increased the lead to 58-41 – the largest of the game to that point – with 5:50 remaining. Michigan scored the game's next six points to make it 58-47, but Sheldon hit back with her fourth triple to begin a game-icing 9-0 run to take a 67-47 lead with 1:46 remaining before the final seconds ticked off.

Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 22 points on 8-of-14 shooting, while McMahon had 18 points and seven rebounds. Taylor also added 12 points in the win while Laila Phelia led the Wolverines with 13 points.

## Fouls Fell OSU In Finale At Iowa

Ohio State (25-4, 16-2) suffered its first loss of the calendar year on March 3, falling 93-83 at No. 6 Iowa (26-4, 15-3) to end the regular season.

The Buckeyes trailed 48-46 early in the third quarter but saw a disparity in fouls – 23-11 in favor of the Hawkeyes, including two technical calls on Ohio State – that led to 15 additional foul shots for Iowa and helped the Hawkeyes ice the contest.

"It just felt like we were playing from behind most of the day, because we were," McGuff said. "But every time we would get it to like four (points), it would be a costly turnover, something that wouldn't allow us to really put game pressure on them down the

## Ohio State 67, Michigan 51

Feb. 28, 2024  
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Michigan (17-12, 8-9)	9	13	16	13	51
Ohio State (25-3, 16-1)	13	9	27	18	67

Michigan	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Phelia	38	5-11	3-4	2-3	3	3	3	13	
Hobbs	34	4-7	0-0	0-5	2	3	11		
Hansen	29	3-9	2-2	1-1	1	2	9		
Brett	35	2-5	4-4	2-5	2	2	8		
Evans	19	1-3	0-0	1-3	1	0	2		
Williams	21	4-7	0-0	2-3	0	3	8		
Stuck	12	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	3	0		
Woodson	7	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Crockett	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	1	0	0		
Kampschroeder	1	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>19-46</b>	<b>9-10</b>	<b>9-26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>51</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 41.3%. FT: 90.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-15 (Hobbs 3-4, Hansen 1-3, Brett 0-2, Evans 0-1, Kampschroeder 0-2, Phelia 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Hansen). **Turnovers:** 29 (Hobbs 7, Brett 5, Williams 5, Evans 3, Hansen 3, Stuck 3, Phelia 2, Team). **Steals:** 6 (Stuck 2, Brett, Evans, Hansen, Hobbs).

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Sheldon	40	8-14	2-2	0-3	3	0	22		
McMahon	31	7-12	4-8	2-5	3	2	18		
Taylor	30	4-8	3-5	0-2	6	2	12		
Thierry	30	4-6	0-0	2-2	2	0	8		
Mikulášiková	29	1-6	0-0	0-4	1	4	3		
Parks	12	1-3	2-2	1-1	0	4	4		
Harris	12	0-3	0-0	0-0	2	3	0		
Greene	11	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	1	0		
Shumate	5	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-55</b>	<b>11-17</b>	<b>7-18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>67</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 45.5%. FT: 64.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-19 (Sheldon 4-6, Mikulášiková 1-4, Taylor 1-2, Harris 0-3, McMahon 0-1, Shumate 0-2, Thierry 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 4 (McMahon 2, Shumate, Taylor). **Turnovers:** 15 (Taylor 4, McMahon 3, Mikulášiková 2, Parks 2, Sheldon 2, Greene, Harris). **Steals:** 19 (Harris 4, Taylor 4, Thierry 4, Sheldon 3, Parks 2, Greene, Shumate). **Officials:** Kantner, Suffren, Thompson. **Attendance:** 10,895.

stretch."

It was a significant day for Iowa, which was celebrating guard Caitlin Clark's Senior Day, but Sheldon was undeterred by the 14,998 fans at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, hitting her first two shots. The teams then remained tied at 7-all with 6:16 left in the first after a jumper from Taylor.

Clark – who surpassed LSU's Pete Maravich during the game to become the NCAA's all-time leading scorer – got on the board with a three-pointer to begin an 8-0 run for the Hawkeyes, who took a 15-7 lead after Sydney Affolter knocked down a pair at the line. Rikki Harris broke the run with a three-pointer, but Iowa answered with a 10-0 run to go up 25-10 with 1:50 left in the frame before Ohio State closed on a 9-3 run to trail 28-19 at the end of the first.

The Buckeyes were later able to cut the deficit to 31-26 after a three-pointer from Thierry. Clark scored on back-to-back possessions, but three-pointers from Sheldon and Taylor made it 36-32 in favor of the Hawkeyes with 5:35 left in the half.

The teams traded baskets over the next few minutes, and a triple from Harris with just seven seconds left in the half made it 44-39. But a late shooting foul on Madison Greene and a technical call on McMahon after Clark ran into her led to four straight free throws for the Hawkeyes – including the record-breaker from Clark – who led 48-39



Is proud to be a CBD partner with



For all your wellness needs  
cbdhealth.com



**30% OFF ALL PRODUCTS**

Must present coupon in-store. One coupon per customer. Valid through 2024. Offer only available at Columbus Botanical Depot. Use code "clean15" at check out online

Columbus Ohio's first CBD store.  
Find out today how CBD could help you.



14 W. Pacemont Road  
Columbus, OH 43202

HOURS  
10:30am - 8pm  
EVERY DAY

# OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



SONNY BROCKWAY

**RECORD BREAKER — Ohio State fell victim once again to Iowa guard Caitlin Clark, who had 35 points — and passed LSU's Pete Maravich to become the NCAA's all-time scoring leader — in a 93-83 win over the Buckeyes on March 3.**

going into the break.

"It was something that we aren't proud of, something that we're going to constantly work on with each other. We all get frustrated at times," Taylor said of the technical fouls. "(The final seconds of the first half) set the tone to help us just come together more and just be aware of what's going on around us and trying to stay focused on the main thing."

Ohio State scored the first seven points out of the break to make it 48-46, but a pair of three-pointers from Clark and Iowa guard Gabbie Marshall pushed Iowa's lead back to 54-46 with 6:33 left in the third. Mikulášiková answered with a three-pointer, but back-to-back scores by the Hawkeyes made it 58-49, leading to a timeout by McGuff.

The Buckeyes hoped to build momentum after back-to-back scores by Thierry and Sheldon, but another technical — this time on Harris — sent the Hawkeyes back to the line for three made free throws, beginning a 13-1 run that put Iowa up 71-54 with 2:01 left in the third.

"It's tough. The players sometimes don't feel like they are getting officiated evenly," McGuff said. "So they react. And as I tell them all the time, we can't control that, (but) we can control how we react and the things that we do."

But Ohio State did add three field goals in the final 1:22 of the frame, including triples from Taylor and Sheldon, to cut the deficit to 75-64 entering the fourth.

Ohio State made it 76-67 after a triple from Mikulášiková. Iowa answered with six straight points, and after some dueling baskets, another triple from Clark made it 87-74 with 3:00 left in the contest. Sheldon hit a three-pointer with 1:24 left to cut it to 91-81, but the Hawkeyes were able to close things out at the free-throw line.

The loss was Ohio State's first since Dec. 30 at Michigan and just the second in con-

ference play this season. Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 24 points and nine assists, while Mikulášiková had 14 points on four made three-pointers and a team-high eight rebounds. Clark led Iowa with 35 points and nine assists on 10-of-26 shooting and went 9 of 10 at the line.

## OSU Upset By Maryland In Big Ten Tournament

Top-seeded Ohio State (25-5, 16-2) suffered a stunning upset in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament quarterfinals on March 8, falling 82-61 to eighth-seeded Maryland (19-12, 9-9) at the Target Center in Minneapolis and ending OSU's hopes of winning both the regular-season and tournament titles.

Ohio State led after the first quarter but was outplayed the rest of the way. Maryland shot 42.5 percent from the field to 35.9 for the Buckeyes and held a 55-31 advantage in rebounds, as well as an 18-11 advantage in points off turnovers.

"I thought Maryland played a great game," McGuff said. "They played like a team that might have needed this to get into the (NCAA) tournament, and we played like a team that showed up as the No. 1 seed and everybody was just supposed to lay down. That's not what happened."

Maryland set the tone early, taking an 8-3 lead with 6:28 left in the first with the only OSU points coming on a three-pointer from Mikulášiková. Ohio State responded with an 8-0 run that included two baskets from Thierry to make it 11-8 with 4:49 left.

The Buckeyes eventually increased their lead to 17-12 at the end of the frame after a free throw from McMahon, though it was the only way she was able to score early on, with her first basket not coming until late in the first half. Even from the line, she was just 3 of 6 and missed on all six of her shots from the

## Iowa 93, Ohio State 83

March 3, 2024					
Carver-Hawkeye Arena • Iowa City, Iowa					
	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (25-4, 16-2)	19	20	25	19	83
Iowa (26-4, 15-3)	28	20	27	18	93

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Mikulášiková	33	5-9	0-0	1-7	3	3	3	14	
McMahon	35	5-11	0-2	1-4	1	4	10		
Thierry	35	5-8	0-2	2-5	2	2	11		
Sheldon	40	9-17	2-2	1-1	9	4	24		
Taylor	26	4-10	0-0	0-3	3	4	10		
Harris	16	3-6	1-2	0-1	3	2	9		
Greene	13	2-4	0-0	0-0	1	2	5		
Parks	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>33-65</b>	<b>3-8</b>	<b>7-24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>83</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 50.8%. FT: 37.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 14-30 (Mikulášiková 4-8, Sheldon 4-7, Harris 2-4, Taylo 2-5, Greene 1-3, Thierry 1-1, McMhoh 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Mikulášiková). **Turnovers:** 16 (Mikulášiková 4, Taylor 4, McMahon 3, Thierry 2, Greene, Sheldon, Team). **Steals:** 8 (Greene 2, Sheldon 2, Thierry 2, McMahon, Taylor).

Iowa	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Stuelke	32	9-12	5-8	6-3	2	3	23		
Davis	8	0-0	0-0	0-3	1	1	0		
Martin	37	5-10	0-0	0-9	2	0	11		
Clark	39	10-26	9-10	0-6	9	3	35		
Marshall	35	4-8	0-1	1-0	2	0	12		
Affolter	23	2-4	2-2	2-5	2	3	6		
O'Grady	7	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2		
Feuerbach	14	1-3	2-2	0-0	2	1	4		
McCabe	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Goodman	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>32-64</b>	<b>18-23</b>	<b>11-27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>93</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 50.0%. FT: 78.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-28 (Clark 6-17, Marshall 4-7, Martin 1-3, Feuerbach 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Affolter, Feuerbach, Stuelke). **Turnovers:** 16 (Clark 5, Stuelke 5, Affolter 2, Feuerbach 2, Davis, Martin). **Steals:** 11 (Feuerbach 4, Clark 3, Marshall 2, Davis, Martin). **Officials:** Cross, Camy, Morris. **Attendance:** 14,998.

## Maryland 82, Ohio State 61

March 8, 2024					
Target Center • Minneapolis					
	1	2	3	4	F
Maryland (19-12, 9-9)	12	26	27	17	82
Ohio State (25-5, 16-2)	17	13	22	9	61

Maryland	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Sellers	40	9-17	7-10	2-6	7	3	25		
Alexander	39	7-16	0-0	0-3	1	1	19		
Brown-Turner	31	7-14	4-4	1-8	2	4	19		
Masonius	37	7-8	1-1	5-6	4	2	15		
McDaniel	20	0-10	0-0	2-2	3	4	0		
Kubek	23	1-6	2-2	4-3	0	1	4		
Fisher	9	0-2	0-0	1-1	1	1	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>31-73</b>	<b>14-17</b>	<b>21-34</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>82</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 42.5%. FT: 82.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-19 (Alexander 5-11, Brown-Turner 1-2, Fisher 0-2, Kubek 0-2, McDaniel 0-1, Sellers 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 11. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Kubek 2, Masonius 2, Brown-Turner, Sellers). **Turnovers:** 15 (Sellers 5, Brown-Turner 3, McDaniel 2, Team 2, Alexander, Kubek, Masonius). **Steals:** 4 (Alexander, Kubek, McDaniel, Sellers).

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Thierry	31	5-10	3-3	0-2	2	3	13		
Sheldon	39	5-13	0-0	0-0	3	2	10		
Taylor	39	3-11	0-0	0-2	6	2	7		
Mikulášiková	29	6-9	0-0	2-3	1	2	16		
McMahon	38	3-17	6-11	2-7	3	1	12		
Greene	9	1-1	0-0	0-1	1	2	3		
Harris	9	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	4	0		
Shumate	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Parks	3	0-2	0-0	1-1	0	1	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>23-64</b>	<b>9-14</b>	<b>10-21</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>61</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 35.9%. FT: 64.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-22 (Mikulášiková 4-6, Greene 1-1, Taylor 1-7, Harris 0-1, McMahon 0-1, Sheldo 0-5, Thierry 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 10. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Taylor 2, McMahon, Mikulášiková, Sheldon). **Turnovers:** 13 (Sheldon 4, Mikulášiková 3, Taylo 3, Harris 2, Team). **Steals:** 8 (Taylor 5, Sheldon 2, Harris). **Officials:** Cruse, Daley, Enterline. **Attendance:** N/A.

field in the first period.

After trading scores to open the second quarter, Maryland — behind a trio of three-pointers from Jakia Brown-Turner and Brinae Alexander — took off on an 11-0 run to go up 26-19 with 5:32 left in the half. Sheldon broke the run with a jumper, but the Terrapins extended the lead to 33-24 with 1:36 left on a free throw by Shyanne Sellers.

A furious back-and-forth then took place over the final stretch of the quarter, with five combined baskets — including the first make of the game for McMahon — that ended with a buzzer beater by Sellers to give the Terrapins a 38-30 lead at the half, already holding a 29-15 advantage in rebounds.

"It's really simple — you've got to hit them and grab the ball," McGuff said. "We looked like a volleyball team out there for half the game just batting the ball around. Just hit them, go get the ball and grab it with two hands."

The Buckeyes cut the deficit to 40-35 early in the third after baskets in succession from Mikulášiková and Sheldon. McMahon later made it 42-39 after being fouled, though during the foul, she was also called with an intentional foul after she made contact with Maryland guard Bri McDaniel, but the Terrapins missed both at the line.

Maryland bounced back from the missed free throws with a 9-0 run to take a 51-39 lead with 4:04 left in the third, leading to a timeout by McGuff. Taylor hit a three-pointer out of the break to end the 316 scoring drought, but the Terrapins answered with a three-point play by Faith Masonius to maintain a 54-42 lead with 3:10 remaining.

Maryland continued building momentum

late in the third. After another three-point-er from Alexander, McGuff was called for a technical foul after arguing that a foul should have been called for contact against McMahon. Sellers knocked down both free throws and hit another pair after a shooting foul by Thierry. Thierry responded with an old-fashioned three-point play to cut the lead 63-47 with 1:36 left in the quarter.

Ohio State could have folded at that point, but it instead answered with five points by McMahon to cut the deficit to 63-52 in the span of just six seconds, eventually trailing 65-52 entering the fourth.

Taylor began the fourth hitting a jumper, but Maryland continued to stretch the lead with the game's next six points to hold a 71-54 advantage with 7:45 left. Thierry hit two free throws just 20 seconds later, but Ohio State was then held without a point for 3:40 and Maryland led 76-58 with 3:45 left in the contest before closing things out, extending the lead to as many as 22 points.

"This loss sucks," Thierry said. "It stings. But we're just going to move on to our next game and fix up some of the mistakes we made in this game."

Mikulášiková led the Buckeyes with 16 points, while Thierry had 13 points, McMahon had 12 points and nine rebounds, and Sheldon had 10 points. Taylor dished out six assists.

McMahon finished the game just 3 of 17 from the field.

Sellers led Maryland with 25 points, while Alexander and Brown-Turner each finished with 19 points. Masonius also had a double-double with 15 points and 11 rebounds.

# Ohio State Baseball Playing Free In New Season

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Bill Mosiello's first season as the head coach for Ohio State was a significant improvement over what the team was able to do in the 2022 season, leading the Buckeyes to a 31-25 record – 10 more wins than the previous campaign.

The Buckeyes struggled in Big Ten play, however, finishing just 9-15, and failed to make the conference tournament or the NCAA tournament, but they were able to finish the season with a nine-game winning streak, including a three-game sweep over Michigan to end the year.

One big difference last season was the aggressiveness the team had in every aspect of its game, which Mosiello said is something he has always tried to bring to every team he coaches.

"That's going to be who we are," Mosiello said. "That's what I've always done. That's what we're built to do now. We give great freedom to the players. If you try to take that away from the players and make them play scared, we're never going to become the club that we want to be. That's just part of the game.



Bill Mosiello

We're going to be aggressive but not reckless. We're going to try to pick our spots. We're going to try to run the bases and steal in high-percentage spots."

It started on the base paths, where Mosiello said he gives his players the ability to do what they want. He doesn't get upset if someone gets thrown out trying to take an extra base because he doesn't want anyone ever to feel like they need to let up.

Through 13 games this season, the Buckeyes have 23 stolen bases on 31 attempts, succeeding on 74.2 percent of their attempts. Graduate outfielder Mitchell Okuley, who has two of those steals, said he's never been much of a base stealer, but he fully trusts his coach's approach to the game and has bought into it completely.

"Coach Mo, everywhere he's been he's had success," Okuley said. "So when he's the coach and he's telling you what to do, it's really easy to buy into that and trust what he says. In the past, I haven't had a ton of stolen bases, and I'm not the fastest guy, but sticking to the things Coach Mo teaches us gives you confidence and shows that you're able to get a couple of bags."

Before last season, Mosiello brought the résumé of seven NCAA tournament appearances and four College World Series appearances in nine years at TCU as the associate head coach. The Horned Frogs are a consistent contender on the highest stage, and he intends to bring that type of competitiveness to Columbus, where he wants to have the same success.

The Buckeyes haven't been to the College World Series since 1967 and are in a 20-year drought from making it to the super regional, unable to make it out of the regionals in five appearances dating back to 2003. Mosiello isn't letting that deter him from try-

ing to turn Ohio State into a team that will be there consistently.

## On The Mound

When Opening Day came around and the Buckeyes took the field for the first time in Phoenix, Ariz., against Boston College on Feb. 16, sophomore southpaw Landon Beidelschies stepped onto the hill for just the second start of his college career. He made 24 appearances in his freshman season, but almost all of those were as the stopper in high-leverage situations.

Even last season, Beidelschies may have been the arm that Mosiello trusted most, but he liked what he saw so much that he wanted to try him out as his Friday night starter, and so far he's been happy with the results. He opened the season with somewhat of a rough outing, giving up three runs in four innings pitched in an eventual 9-2 loss, but since then has been lights out.

"He's been outstanding," Mosiello said. "We obviously believed that he was this type of guy or we wouldn't have started him on Friday night. The opener this year was uncharacteristic. He just wasn't sharp. We were a little disappointed, but we weren't second-guessing ourselves that Landon can be a starter. We knew he could.

"Against Arizona State (on Feb. 22), he was outstanding, and then he was even better against Cal (on March 1). Maybe he surprised me a little that he might be a flat-out front-line Friday night guy and maybe one of the elite in the country that he's starting to become."

He came back from that first outing and has since made three more starts totaling 17 innings and giving up a combined five runs. He had a 3.43 ERA through his first four starts and believes he's starting to ease into the starting role, especially since he had been a starting pitcher before college ball.

"It's gone somewhat smooth," Beidelschies said. "I did have that rough Opening Day start where there was a little doubt that crept in like, 'Hey, maybe I'm not made for this.' But deep down I knew I could do it. I had done it in high school. I knew my stuff was good enough. I knew the coaches believed in me, so it was just going out and executing.

"I'm really starting to get in a routine," he added later. "I have things I do in between starts to get my body ready and my mind ready, so I'm definitely starting to ease into a routine."

Behind him in the rotation is junior lefthander Gavin Bruni – one of three Buckeyes named Big Ten Player to Watch in the preseason alongside Beidelschies and infielder Henry Kaczmar – who has also made four starts and has managed a 3.71 ERA in 17 innings of work. It has been an improvement from his 4.87 ERA last season.

He has allowed 12 walks in those 17 innings, so his control has been a work in progress early, forcing his pitch count up earlier in the game than he would hope, but he has been able to get himself out of any trouble for the most part. He led the team in walks by a large margin last season with 42, so he will be looking to bring that overall number down this year.

Righthander Colin Purcell has also been

## 2024 Ohio State Baseball Roster

No.	Name	Position	Year	Height	Weight	B/T	Hometown
0	Zach Freeman	OF	Jr.	6-0	190	L/R	Los Angeles
1	Joseph Mershon	INF	Gr.	5-8	175	B/R	Taylor, S.C.
2	Josh Stevenson	OF	Jr.	6-1	195	L/L	Lafayette, La.
4	Justin Eckhardt	RHP	Gr.	6-2	205	R/R	Sealy, Texas
5	CJ Richard	OF	Fr.	5-8	165	R/R	Cincinnati
6	Henry Kaczmar	INF	So.	5-10	185	L/R	Bath, Ohio
7	Nick Giamarusti	OF	Jr.	6-0	195	R/R	Chicago
8	Isaac Cadena	OF/C	Fr.	5-9	191	L/R	Placentia, Calif.
9	Matthew Graveline	C	So.	6-1	190	R/R	Centerville, Ohio
10	Gavin Bruni	LHP	Jr.	6-3	205	L/L	Alliance, Ohio
11	Gavin DeVooght	RHP	Fr.	6-5	238	R/R	Walled Lake, Mich.
12	Ryan Miller	UTL	Jr.	6-3	200	L/R	Dublin, Ohio
15	Andrew Edrington	RHP	Fr.	6-2	170	R/R	Cincinnati
16	Mason Eckelman	C	Fr.	6-1	215	L/R	Broadview Heights, Ohio
17	Nolan Farley	INF	Fr.	6-3	170	R/R	Encinitas, Calif.
19	Tim Baird	RHP	Sr.	6-2	198	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
20	Christian Pownall	LHP	Fr.	6-0	187	L/L	Russiaville, Ind.
23	Logan Jones	RHP	Sr.	6-4	205	R/R	Canton, Ohio
24	Mitchell Okuley	OF	Gr.	6-2	205	L/R	Powell, Ohio
28	Trey Lipsey	OF	Jr.	6-1	185	L/R	Southfield, Mich.
29	Colin Purcell	RHP	Sr.	6-5	200	R/R	Cypress, Texas
30	Clay Burdette	1B	Fr.	6-2	215	R/R	Cincinnati
31	Jacob Morin	RHP	Gr.	5-10	140	R/R	New Braunfels, Texas
32	Hunter Rosson	UTL	Sr.	5-10	184	R/R	Aledo, Texas
34	Chase Herrell	RHP	Fr.	6-2	195	R/R	Milford, Ohio
35	Landon Beidelschies	LHP	So.	6-3	225	L/L	Canfield, Ohio
37	Zach Brown	RHP	Fr.	6-5	210	R/R	Santa Ana, Calif.
38	Noah Williamson	RHP	Jr.	5-11	205	R/R	Port Matilda, Pa.
39	Max Palinski	OF	Fr.	6-1	210	L/R	Gates Mills, Ohio
40	Jaylen Jones	LHP	Jr.	6-1	210	L/L	Thomasville, Ga.
42	Tyler Pettorini	INF	Jr.	6-0	180	L/R	Wooster, Ohio
43	Hunter Shaw	LHP	So.	6-4	190	L/L	Chelsea, Mich.
44	Alonzo Paul Jr.	C	So.	5-8	172	R/R	Valparaiso, Ind.
45	Will Carpenter	INF	Sr.	6-1	210	L/R	Aurora, Ohio
46	Zach Fjelstad	INF	Fr.	5-11	180	L/R	Orange County, Calif.
47	Zak Sigman	RHP	Fr.	5-10	175	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
49	Isaiah Leeth	RHP	Fr.	6-1	200	R/R	Chillicothe, Ohio
50	Will Henson	INF	Jr.	6-2	180	R/R	Chicago
51	Ben Schechterman	LHP	Fr.	6-0	195	L/L	Aurora, Ohio
52	Blaine Wynk	RHP	So.	6-3	195	R/R	Miamisburg, Ohio
54	Jake Michalak	RHP	Fr.	6-3	210	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
55	Hank Thomas	OF	Sr.	6-5	210	L/R	Oxford, Ohio

**Head Coach** – Bill Mosiello. **Associate Head Coach/Pitching Coach/Co-Recruiting Coordinator** – Sean Allen. **Recruiting Coordinator / Co-Pitching Coach** – Andrew See. **Assistant Hitting Coach/Catching Coach** – Buck Taylor. **Director of Operations/Recruiting & Player Development** – Damon Lessler. **Director of Player Development/Leadership** – Mike Bahun.

## 2024 Schedule

**Feb 16** vs. Boston College at Phoenix.; **17** vs. BYU at Phoenix; **18** vs. USC at Phoenix; **20** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, Ariz.; **22-25** at Arizona State.

**March 1** vs. California at Las Vegas Classic in Las Vegas; **2** vs. Pittsburgh at Las Vegas Classic in Las Vegas; **3** vs. Oklahoma at Las Vegas Classic in Las Vegas; **8-11** at Cal Poly; **14-15** at Marshall; **13** at Cal State Fullerton; **15-17** at West Virginia; **22-24** GEORGETOWN; **26** KENT STATE; **29-31** PURDUE.

**April 2** at Kent State; **5-7** at Nebraska; **9** BOWLING GREEN; **10** MOREHEAD STATE; **12-14** IOWA; **16** WRIGHT STATE; **19-21** at Michigan; **23** at Wright State; **26-28** MICHIGAN STATE; **30** CINCINNATI.

**May 1** AKRON.; **3-5** at Illinois; **7** EASTERN MICHIGAN; **8** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **10-12** NORTHWESTERN; **16-18** at Rutgers; **21-26** Big Ten Championships at Omaha, Neb.

getting the ball at the beginning of games, and the senior transfer from Texas A&M Corpus Christi has been very effective, boasting a 3.86 ERA, and he has also come in relief once. Mosiello appreciates how willing Purcell is to do what is needed of him no matter what.

"He's been what we expect from him, a super competitive strike thrower that has a chance to throw three pitches for strikes," Mosiello said. "He says, 'Whatever it takes, I'm ready to pitch in whatever role that happens to be.' Like our other guys, they pitch whenever they're asked and do whatever it takes for this team to win, and that's another thing I'm excited about."

Chase Herrell has made two starts this

season as well but has pitched to an 11.25 ERA in just four innings of work. The rotation will be between those four players, but for now it seems like the first three spots who will likely start for Big Ten series will be Beidelschies, Bruni and Purcell. Herrell could be the Buckeyes' option for midweek nonconference starts if he's able to work through the struggles he's had early on.

Ohio State feels good about the starting rotation, but depth in the bullpen is a potential concern. There are some pitchers who Mosiello said haven't been into games yet this year because they still need to figure some things out, but when they have long stretches of games in a row, those arms are going to need to step up.

However, there are a few guys Mosiello has some great confidence in such as junior righthander Zach Brown, freshman righthander Gavin DeVooght and sophomore southpaw Hunter Shaw, who have the most innings out of the pen.

"We pretty much do know who our guys are," Mosiello said. "We're not second-guessing any of that. We still have some other guys that haven't gotten the ball yet that we're still trying to figure out, but they're going to get their innings."

"There's still huge competition on the staff to see who gets to make road trips and who's going to pitch, so we're always a work in progress. We're still trying to figure all of those things out, but the guys that have been given the baseball we feel really good about."

DeVooght is off to the best start of the three with a 1.00 in nine innings pitched, striking out seven and keeping the ball in the park so far with no home runs hit off of him. Brown is allowing a 4.91 ERA, allowing a batting average of .364 to this point, so there will likely need to be some improvement to keep his spot as the top arm in relief.

Shaw has had the most trouble in his time pitching this year with a 15.26 ERA, although his control has been solid with nine strikeouts to only four walks. His luck is likely to turn around some if he can keep the ball in the zone and start to miss more bats, as he has allowed a .333 average to hitters.

Blaine Wynk has made six appearances in relief totaling 8 2/3 innings but allowing six earned runs. Justin Eckhardt, Tim Baird and Logan Jones have each come out of the bullpen four times to varying success. Eckhardt – who started six games last season – has thrown 5 1/3 innings and to this point hasn't allowed a run to score when he's in the game.

Baird's 5.40 ERA is only through 1 2/3 innings, so he hasn't had much time to show what he can do on the mound this season, but with games starting to ramp up more arms are going to need to be used so he could start getting in more consistently.

Jones has thrown just two innings, but he has given up 10 runs and at this point will likely only be used when the Buckeyes are down by a few runs late in a game as a bridge to get to the next game.

### In The Dirt, Behind The Dish

While most positions defensively have a regular, first base is the lone exception for the Buckeyes so far.

Junior Ryan Miller has gotten the most opportunity at the corner early in the season but is off to a slow start in his 10 games played, hitting .174 with 14 strikeouts in 23 at-bats. Mosiello said he knows Miller can be very good for this team but he can only give him so much time in the lineup to try to figure out since winning games is still the top priority for the team.

"I'm not a guy that likes to quit on guys," Mosiello said. "I want to get them their at-bats. I think Ryan Miller has a chance to be a really good offensive player, but he's really struggling and there's only so much time."

Mosiello wants to be able to nail down a full-time first baseman because he doesn't like when players can't get into a rhythm, playing in one game and then sitting the next to give someone else an opportunity.

Freshman Nolan Farley has also been

in and out as well as senior Hunter Rosson (.083 batting average this season and .238 last year), but nobody has been able to get anything going thus far. Mosiello knows there's some urgency to get the position figured out.

"Our job is always to win ballgames, and our job is No. 1 as a staff is to have an educated guess on who we think is the guy that's got the best chance to have some upside to have a great offensive year. There's nothing worse than he starts one day then he's out, but he starts the next day and you keep searching. You've got to go with your educated guesses on who you think you've got to give the bulk of the at-bats to."

"We do have some depth. Sometimes it's better to not have depth because then you have to live with guys and they get to play through some things, but we have some. It's crowded over there. So, we've got a lot of things going on. We're trying to keep everybody ready and they're all prepared to go, so that's going to be an interesting deal."

Graduate Joseph Mershon has started in every game but one thus far at second base.



Joseph Mershon

His .293 average is slightly up from .279 last season at Charleston, and he is looking to prove he can stay in this lineup. His eye has improved every year of his college career, taking 41 walks last season which helped him to an on-base percentage of .440, and he has taken nine free passes and has been hit by a pitch getting him to a .431 on-base percentage to this point in the season.

Kaczmar has been as advertised through 13 games at shortstop, leading the team in batting average at .346 (up from .293 last season) and an on-base percentage of .433. He said the aggressiveness and freedom Mosiello wants the team to have in games have leaked into his approach at the plate, although he does have to find a balance so he doesn't get into the box looking to swing at everything.

"There has to be a line between how aggressive you are at the plate and how comfortable you are at the plate," Kaczmar said. "If you go up to the plate and you're super aggressive thinking, 'I have to go attack this guy,' that tends to speed me up during an at-bat."

"You have to find that perfect line between super aggressive and super comfortable. That's what has helped me find that balance. It helps me be relaxed at the plate and try not to do too much, but strike zone discipline is huge. You can have aggression by taking borderline pitches and by drawing a walk."

With Kaczmar on the left side of the infield is junior Tyler Pettorini at third base, who is also off to a very good start with an average of .286 (down slightly from .315 last season) and he has gotten on base at a .390 mark with a home run and a team-leading 10 RBI to his name.

Sophomore Matthew Graveline came on the scene last season, starting 49 games and batting .287, and he has taken the majority of the time behind the plate this season with a .255 average and two home runs. His team-leading 11 walks have been

helping him get on base consistently with a .417 percentage. He has also been solid defensively, throwing out four runners on six attempts and not allowing a passed ball to this point.

### In The Grass

Graduate right fielder Mitchell Okuley has been the biggest surprise for the Buckeyes this season. He's been one of the best hitters on the team to this point, hitting for a .340 average (up from .247 last season) and an on-base plus slugging of .893 with five doubles. He credits a new approach to the game for his hot start since he knows he won't be coming back next season.

"There's never a good time in baseball to be uptight or to be thinking about things," he said. "Especially with this being my last year and knowing that time is running out, I'm doing everything I can to play loose and enjoy the moment. Taking it all in with the guys is crucial, and I think that's been something I've been able to do so far and hopefully, we can keep going."

Okuley has had some trouble early in previous years getting off to slow starts and heating up later in the season, but that hasn't been an issue for him this year. Mosiello couldn't be more happy for the fifth-year player.

"The game knows he deserves this thing. He's worked his tail off," Mosiello said. "He's a heck of a player. I heard the last few years he's gotten off to slow starts over and over, and I know he did last year. It wasn't something we talked about. I pretended like I didn't hear it, but I knew in my heart like, 'I

hope he gets off to a great start.'

"He deserves it so much and it's very contagious for him and the ballclub, so it's awesome to see him swinging the bat so well. That's why he's a captain for us."


Junior Trey Lipsey, though, has gotten off to a slow start as the left fielder. His .214 average and 14 strikeouts aren't where he'd like to be 13 games into the season, but his strong season as a freshman in 2022 – batting .293 with seven home runs – showed he can compete at this level, and he will be looking to get back to that type of production as soon as he can.

Junior Josh Stevenson is trying to cement himself as the center fielder for this team and has struggled at the plate so far with a .167 average, but Mosiello is letting him figure it out on the field, since he has been in all 13 games so far.

The Buckeyes have been on the road for each of their first 13 games, and Ohio State holds a 7-6 record through March 10. They will finish up a road trip in California against Cal State Fullerton on March 13 then head to Morgantown, WV., to face off against West Virginia for a three-game series from March 15-17 before their first home game of the year in Bill Davis Stadium, a three-game series against Georgetown from March 22-24. The players are excited to show the home fans what this team can do this year.

"I really am excited to play at home and get that home crowd going," Kaczmar said. "Especially because I feel like we're going to bring a lot to the table this year and I'm excited to show the fans that."

# BASEBALL TICKETS!



**We have your seats to the season's hottest action!**

For Your Ticket Connection Call:

**DREAM SEATS**  
YOUR TOTAL TICKET SOURCE  
1611 W. FIFTH AVE. COLUMBUS, OH 43212  
**(614) 340-8989**  
www.dreamseats.com

All MLB Games In Stock!

Club & Premium Seats Available!

all events ★ all cities ★ all the time ★ all events ★ all cities ★ all the time ★ all events ★ all cities ★ all the time

# Icers Stun Badgers, MSU Next In BIG Tourney

Who saw this coming?

The players on the Ohio State men's hockey team certainly did when asked two days prior to their Big Ten best-of-three quarterfinal series at Wisconsin about their chances of upending the fifth-ranked team in the country.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Their belief that they could knock off the No. 2 conference seed – even though they were the seventh seed – stemmed from the Feb. 16-17 series in Columbus when the Buckeyes entered with one win in 18 Big Ten games but swept the Badgers.

"We definitely were the underdogs, but I think we like that spot," defenseman Mason Klee said March 6. "I think we know we can beat this team, and it's not really a big factor in our mind. We're just going there to win two games."

Goaltender Logan Terness envisioned an upset.

"Just being able to go on the road and trying to take it from them, if we're able to do that it can be a great feeling," he said. "That's our goal, so we're going to do it."

The Buckeyes (14-19-4) backed their words and pulled off the biggest upset in the short history of the tournament by defeating the Badgers 3-1 in the deciding third game. Ohio State won the March 8 opener by the same score before losing the second game 4-2.

"I'm really excited for and proud of the guys," coach Steve Rohlik said after the series clincher. "We've come a long way. It's the first time a seven seed won a series, and it's because of their hard work and belief. We get to live to fight another day together."

Not only had no seventh seed won a quarterfinals series, but that seed had not won a game (0-11) since the conference expanded to seven teams with the addition of Notre Dame in 2017-18. That necessitated a change from a single-site (St. Paul, Minn., or Detroit) for the six teams to on-campus games beginning with the current quarterfinal series hosted by the highest seed followed by single-eliminations for the semifinals and final, also on campus. The tournament in 2020-21 was single-elimination for all rounds at Notre Dame due to COVID-19.

Ohio State can make more history in the semifinal game at top seed Michigan State on March 16 (6:30 p.m., BTN). No team seeded five through seven has reached the championship game in the 10 previous tournaments. Only four No. 4s have played for the title: OSU in 2014, Penn State in 2017 and 2019, and Minnesota in 2022. Only the Nittany Lions won in 2019.

Despite recent success, Ohio State's only route to making the NCAA tournament is to win the conference tournament and the automatic qualifier that goes with it. It's the first time since the 2015-16 season that the Buckeyes entered the Big Ten tournament

without a possible at-large bid as a fallback in case they don't win the title game.

They received at-large entries into the NCAAs for three straight seasons (2017-19) and would have in 2020 if not for the pandemic. It was also the pathway for the Buckeyes last season when they reached the regional final.

### Digging A Hole

The Buckeyes are in this predicament because of their miserable start. They took to the Value City Arena ice against the Badgers in mid-February with a seven-game losing streak to drop to 9-15-4 overall and 1-15-2 in the Big Ten. The Badgers were 22-5-2, 13-3-1. Yet the Buckeyes won 3-2 in overtime and 3-1.

That was followed by a 6-2 win at No. 4 Michigan State to open the series on Feb. 23. Even in a 5-2 setback to the Spartans the next night, the Buckeyes showed they could be competitive against the top teams in the country. That's why the ensuing final two games of the regular season were puzzling.

Losing 5-2 and 2-1 to Penn State at home on March 1-2 seemed to kill any momentum built from the previous two weekends, especially considering Penn State's plight. Of the Nittany Lions' seven conference wins in 24 games, they won all four meetings with the Buckeyes.

"I actually think we've played some really good hockey here over the last month and a half, so our guys have had a little more confidence and had some results," Rohlik said prior to the playoff opener. "Certainly not this past weekend (vs. Penn State) but come playoff time, it's go time and this is why you prepare. This is why you do all the summer work. This is why you go through all you've gone through all season just to have a chance here for us to go play one of the best teams in the country."

Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, season-ending injuries prior to the Penn State series cost them two of their top forwards in Joe Dunlap and Cam Thiesing. That made the Badgers even more of a favorite, especially at home and with a chip on their shoulders knowing those losses in Columbus helped Michigan State win the regular-season title over them by two points.

But revenge was not to be for the Badgers when it came down to the third game. Davis Burnside scored the first and last goals sandwiched around a tally by Scooter Brickey. Terness made 29 saves and nearly had a shutout as the Buckeyes won a Game 3 in the quarterfinals for a second straight season.

"I think their goaltending was really good this weekend for the most part," Wisconsin forward Mathieu De St. Phalle said. "It just seemed like they were all buying in. I think they really got us with that neutral-zone wedge, and they had a really good game plan going into it."

### Playing To The Max

Behind two goals from Hartland, Wis., native Max Montes, the Buckeyes took the

series opener before a crowd of 8,873 at Kohl Center.

He broke a 1-1 tie at 2:21 of the third period and iced the victory with an empty-net score at 18:13 for the freshman's eighth goal. Terness made 28 saves, the power play was 1 for 2 and the penalty kill went 2 for 2.

"That was a great win on the road against one of the top teams in the country," Rohlik said. "We really had to grind it out for the victory. Special teams were the key."

Defenseman Brent Johnson scored the first goal at 9:08 of the first period for the Ohio State lead, with Riley Hughes and Dalton Messina assisting. William Whitelaw tied it at 11:40.

There was no scoring in the middle period because the Buckeyes were able to escape a penalty kill unscathed despite Matt Cassidy and Patrick Guzzo playing for an extended period without their sticks because they were broken. Guzzo was able to block a shot with his leg to send the puck over the glass for a stoppage.

"(That was) really the turning point," Rohlik said. "It was just positive mojo after that."

Montes must have felt it too, scoring on the power play in the third period to make it 2-1 after a cross-ice pass from Johnson. Montes wrapped up the scoring with Wisconsin's goalie pulled after getting a setup from Michael Gildon.

"I thought they paid the price a bit more than us and won the special teams battle," Wisconsin coach Mike Hastings said. "They were harder and they were rewarded for it."

### Battling Badgers

Even though the Badgers (26-11-2) are assured of making the NCAA tournament, they played with enough urgency to overcome the Buckeyes in the rematch.

Backed by a turnout of 10,837, Christian Fitzgerald scored the first of Wisconsin's two power-play goals for a lead 13:07 into the game. Buckeye forward Thomas Weis, playing in his hometown, made it 1-1 with 59 seconds left in the first period with a power-play goal off a redirect of a Johnson shot. Montes had the secondary assist.

But the Badgers scored twice in the second, and it looked bleak until a Wisconsin clearing pass ended up in the Badgers net and Guzzo was credited with the goal at 9:47 of the third period to cut the deficit to 3-2. Wisconsin's Cruz Lucius then scored into an empty net at 17:44.

Kristoffer Eberly made 33 saves for the Buckeyes. Ohio State was 1 of 2 on the power play, and Wisconsin was 2 for 5.

"It was a tight playoff game," Rohlik said. "It comes down to special teams, and they had a few more opportunities and cashed in. We played hard right to the end."

### Jump Around

Those breaks that seemed to go against the Buckeyes all season turned in their way in the third game starting two minutes in when a shot by Wisconsin's Joe Palodichuk appeared to cross the line. The goal horn went off and the 7,944 fans erupted.

While the puck did get behind Terness,

## BIG Men's Hockey

	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Michigan State	24	52	16	6	2	0	1	1
Wisconsin	24	50	16	7	1	2	2	1
Minnesota	24	41	13	7	4	3	1	0
Michigan	24	36	11	11	2	1	1	1
Notre Dame	24	31	9	13	2	0	1	1
Penn State	24	27	7	14	3	0	1	2
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

**Overall records** — Wisconsin 26-11-2, Michigan State 22-9-3, Minnesota 22-9-5, Michigan 20-13-3, Notre Dame 15-19-2, Penn State 15-18-3, **Ohio State 14-19-4.**

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

it wasn't completely over the line before defenseman Theo Wallberg cleared it.

"It's a game of inches," Rohlik said. "Last night, it was inches the wrong way. Tonight, it worked out in our favor."

The play proved critical when Burnside scored on a rebound of a Stephen Halliday shot during a power play at 6:16 to give the Buckeyes the lead for good.

"When you're playing three (games) in three (days), that first (goal) is really important just for momentum," Hastings said. "They found a way to get the first one, and I didn't think we had enough juice in the tank to get it even."

There was more luck on the second goal by Brickey at 10:04 of the second period when his shot from below the goal line was banked off goaltender Kyle McClellan. The defenseman leads the team with 13 goals.

The desperate Badgers could not crack Terness and pulled McClellan for the extra attacker with 4:48 left in the third period. The strategy backfired when Burnside scored into an empty net at 16:57 to make it 3-0. Wisconsin broke the shutout at 18:07, but the Buckeyes closed out the game for the 1,000th win in program history.

### Statement

The Buckeyes' series win made a lot of people unhappy because it cost the conference the perfect semifinal matchups of No. 1 seed Michigan State vs. No. 4 Michigan and the equally heated rivalry between Wisconsin and No. 3 Minnesota.

Instead, the Golden Gophers host the Wolverines on March 16. The highest seed after the semifinals will host the championship game on March 23.

Ohio State was 1-3 vs. the Spartans this season but is 4-0 in the conference tournament with single-game quarterfinal wins in 2014 and 2016 and a quarterfinals sweep in 2018 in Columbus. Interestingly, the schools are the only ones not to win a Big Ten tournament championship. The Buckeyes reached the final twice, losing in overtime to Wisconsin in 2014 and in overtime to Notre Dame in 2018.

For full recaps of the Penn State and Wisconsin series go to [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



# Mendez Takes Home Big Ten Title At 141 Pounds

After a regular season full of injuries and young wrestlers stepping up in major ways, the Ohio State wrestling team went to the Big Ten tournament in University Park, Md., looking to shock the conference and come out with a team win by upsetting some national powerhouses.

## ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

It was a tough task that the Buckeyes were unable to accomplish from March 9-10, but they did come back to Columbus with one champion as sophomore Jesse Mendez won the conference tournament at 141 pounds over Penn State's Beau Bartlett, 4-1.

Mendez and Bartlett had matched up earlier in the season when the Buckeyes visited the Nittany Lions on Feb. 2 and Mendez lost 4-1 in a sudden victory period after being unable to get a takedown. Head coach Tom Ryan told BSB after that match that Mendez had to attack more, and he was going to take what he learned from the loss and use it later on.

"We've just got to be more attack-minded," Ryan said. "These guys' defenses are so good that you can't just hedge your bet that you're going to score with a one-leg attack and that's it. Sometimes it takes five or six times before you break the code of how you're going to finish. 'He did this to me the first time. He reacted this way the second,' and by the third time, you're ahead of him mentally."

Mendez, ranked second in his weight class for the tournament, said before the match that he was taking that lesson and he would be very aggressive and try to score on the top-ranked Bartlett.

"I go at it with a winning mindset," Mendez told the Big Ten Network on March 9. "I fear no man. You can expect offense. I'm coming. That's my only regret from the last time I wrestled him is I didn't get to his legs enough."

The first period of the bout this time around saw little action, with neither wrestler able to get an advantage over the other. Mendez tried for a takedown two minutes in, but Bartlett was able to defend against it and get away. Mendez also came close to another takedown with seconds left in the first, but the clock ran out before any points were scored.

The second period started with Mendez on bottom, and it took him 35 seconds to escape, but he was able to take a 1-0 lead into the third period.

Bartlett escaped in 16 seconds in the third

to tie up the match. He went for a takedown with 34 seconds left, leading to dueling takedown attempts that culminated in Mendez being flipped by Bartlett, landing on his feet and taking the previously undefeated Nittany Lion down to the mat for three points for a 4-1 lead and the win.

"This is the reason I wrestle," Mendez said immediately after the match. "I want big matches like this. I want to win Big Ten titles, but this means nothing to me unless I get that national title. That's what's up next."

Being able to use what he learned in the loss against Bartlett is part of what makes Mendez a great wrestler, and his determination to be great is what Ryan said separates him from other grapplers he goes up against.

"The difference between an expert and a professional is an expert does it until they get it right, but a professional will do it until they can't get it wrong," Ryan said early in the season. "Jesse falls into that category. He's a professional. He comes at you at a tempo that unless you train at that tempo you can't deal with. It's really nice having someone that wrestles with his intensity. He's the standard."

Winning a championship in the best conference for wrestling in the country and knocking off the No. 1 grappler at his weight class in the nation, Mendez proved Ryan right in that he is the standard, also beating Iowa's Real Woods in the semifinals, who made it to the finals at 141 pounds in last year's NCAA tournament.

"There are so many good guys," Ryan said to FloWrestling before the tournament. "This tournament is a buffet of incredible wrestlers. It's crazy. The UFC cards usually have one great matchup, maybe two, each time they have an event. This is a weekend of the highest wrestling in the world. These are guys that go to the Pan Am's to Junior World Championships. I mean, there are eight to 10 guys at this tournament that could place in the top four in the world."

With the win and the selection show for the NCAA tournament on March 13, Mendez could be looking at the No. 1 seed after taking down those two, who were the only two wrestlers ranked ahead of him in the country by InterMat going into the bracket.

Mendez started the tournament off with a bye in the first round before matching up against No. 7 Mitch Moore from Rutgers, needing just 4:22 to stick him for the pin to move on to the semifinals against Woods. The semis came down to the third period tied 3-3, but Mendez was able to get a takedown with 30 seconds remaining in the bout, getting on top of Woods and throwing him to the mat to secure the 6-3 win and move on to the finals.

Redshirt freshman Nick Feldman also

wrestled his way into the finals of the tournament in the heavyweight division as the No. 2 seed in his bracket, matching up against Penn State's top-seeded Greg Kerkvliet, to whom he had suffered a 12-0 loss earlier this season. Unfortunately for Feldman, those struggles persisted into the conference tournament.

Kerkvliet had not suffered a takedown the entire season, but Feldman changed that early on, taking him to the mat within the first minute of the match. He only secured three seconds of riding time, though, since Kerkvliet was able to escape quickly.

Feldman was taken down just over a minute later when Kerkvliet picked him up and slammed him down to take a 4-3 lead. Kerkvliet – who is better than most at keeping the advantage – earned 1:24 of riding time before the period ended.

Kerkvliet started on bottom for the second period and escaped immediately to take a 5-3 lead, and 40 seconds later he avoided an attack from Feldman and scored another takedown. By the time the second period was over, Kerkvliet already had the riding time point secured, so Feldman needed seven points in the third period to win the match.

He went neutral to start the third and was aggressive going for points, but Kerkvliet's defense was too strong and the final score ended 9-3, giving Feldman the second-place finish.

True freshman Rocco Welsh was the next highest finisher in his respective weight class at 174 pounds, taking third place when he beat No. 6 Jackson Turley from Rutgers, 4-2, as the fifth seed. Welsh was originally supposed to redshirt this season, but he got thrown into action when Carson Kharchla suffered a season-ending injury. Since then, he has been proving he belongs on the big stage against the best wrestlers in the country.

He won his first match of the tournament with a 14-4 major decision over Nebraska's Bubba Wilson before facing off against Edmond Ruth of Illinois, seeded fourth in the class, and losing 4-1 in a sudden victory peri-

od after suffering a takedown.

He got through the consolation bracket with a 20-4 technical fall over Maryland's Dominic Solis, an 11-3 major-decision win over Purdue's Brody Baumann and a 4-1 sudden-victory win over Iowa's Patrick Kennedy, who was the No. 3 seed in the class.

The Buckeyes finished fifth in the tournament with 89.0 points. Penn State left as champions with 170.5 points, followed by Michigan (123.5), Nebraska (118.0) and Iowa (110.5).

## Up Next

Only one event remains on the schedule for the Buckeyes, which they have been counting the days to since the season began. The NCAA tournament will be March 21-23 in Kansas City, Mo., where Ohio State will look to finish better than it did in the Big Ten tournament.

Seven Buckeyes earned automatic bids to the tournament. Mendez, Feldman and Welsh are joined by freshman Ryder Rogotzke (fifth place at Big Ten tournament) at 184 pounds, redshirt freshman Luke Geog (sixth) at 197 pounds, senior Dylan D'Emilio (sixth) at 149 pounds and senior Isaac Wilcox (ninth) at 157 pounds, all of whom will get their chance to compete for a national championship.

The only weight classes that did not earn an automatic bid – and therefore will be seeking an at-large bid, of which all 47 will be announced on March 12 – were at 125 pounds, 133 pounds and 165 pounds, led respectively by redshirt freshmen Brendan McCrone and Nic Bouzakis and junior Bryce Hepner. The selection show for the tournament – including brackets for all 10 weight classes – will be March 13 and will be streamed on NCAA.com at 8 p.m.

For the latest on Ohio State's NCAA tournament seeds, visit [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

## Attention Reds Fans

Here's a chance for Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers who are also Cincinnati Reds fans to enjoy a year of Reds Report, BSB's sister publication covering the Reds, for just \$9.95, a \$36 savings over the regular \$45.95 rate. Take advantage of this special offer for BSB readers and we will also send you a voucher good for two free tickets to your choice of select Reds games this season.

This will be another interesting year for Reds Report readers as our extensive Reds minor-league system coverage becomes more critical with the team in the midst of its rebuilding project. You will also enjoy stories, columns, statistics and box scores for the major-league club.

Just send your \$9.95 to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212 or call (614) 486-2202 for credit card orders. You must mention the Reds BSB Special.

You Can Count On These Services From

## THE QUICKPRINT CENTRE

3535 Fishinger Blvd. Suite 100, Hilliard, OH 43026  
614-488-2683 • FAX 614-488-0059 • [qpoh@aol.com](mailto:qpoh@aol.com)

Offset-Printing	Digital Color Copies	Digital B&W Copies
Typesetting	Ship UPS	Rubber Stamps
NCR Forms	Fax Service	Business Cards
Laminating	Announcements	Binding
Brochures	Wedding Invitations	Labels



Train to be the **BEST** you can be!

Designing fitness programs to meet your personal needs.

### Personal Training

\*\*\*\*\*

### Group Fitness Training

\*\*\*\*\*

### Sports Specific Training

Owned and Operated By:

**Brent Johnson**

614-570-9918

[B-fit.training@hotmail.com](mailto:B-fit.training@hotmail.com)

Located at 2378 East Main Street in Bexley, Ohio

# Some Buckeyes Worth A Few Bucks In The Pros

Mike Conley was back in Ohio recently playing basketball, and it wasn't for an old-timers game or an alumni gathering. It was for a real NBA game on March 8, and Conley was the starting point guard for a team that stood atop the Western Conference standings.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Thirty-six years old and 17 years removed from Ohio State, and Conley is still going like the Energizer Bunny. As I watched Conley log 32 minutes for the Minnesota Timberwolves in an overtime loss to the Cleveland Cavaliers, I couldn't help but wonder: How close is Conley to being the iron

man of iron men when it comes to pro sports careers for former Buckeyes?

The answer I found is that only three ex-Buckeyes have had longer professional basketball, football or baseball careers than Conley, topped by football Hall of Famer Lou Groza at 21 seasons. I looked at the major U.S. pro team sports leagues, so we're not talking about guys like golf legend Jack Nicklaus, who played professionally from 1962 to 2005, or including time in lower-tier leagues.

As for basketball, Herb Williams, has the lead, for now, at 18 seasons. This is Conley's 17th season in the NBA, and he's signed through two more.

That game against the Cavaliers was his 1,162nd game (1,084 regular season and 78 playoff). All but 37 of those games have been starts. Most of the non-starts were in his first two seasons, way back in 2007-08 and 2008-09 for the Memphis Grizzlies.

When I want to find the answer to such

questions, my go-to source is the collection of Sports Reference websites run by the same outfit. There's Baseball Reference, Pro Football Reference, Pro Basketball Reference, college sites and more.

Google it to check them out if you're unfamiliar. Not always 100 percent accurate, but pretty darn close and very well organized. Here's what I found. Records for active players are through March 8.

### NBA Longevity

Williams played 18 seasons, starting in 1981-82 with the Indiana Pacers, adding stops later with the New York Knicks, Dallas Mavericks and Toronto Raptors. After Conley at 17 seasons, John Havlicek is next with 16 seasons for the Boston Celtics beginning in 1962-63.

Based on regular-season games played, Conley is near the top spot, but he'll have to hang around two-plus more seasons to get there. He can, however, be tied for second with Williams at the end of this season. Conley's 1,084 games through March 8 ranks third behind Williams (1,102 games) and Havlicek (1,270).

Closest behind Conley are Jim Jackson (885 games), Jerry Lucas (829), Evan Turner (705), Tony Campbell (690), Kosta Koufos (686) and Jim Cleamons (652).

"Hondo" Havlicek has a wider lead when playoff games are factored in, having been part of so many of the legendary Celtic playoff teams in the 1960s and 1970s. Havlicek played in 172 playoff games, raising his overall total to 1,442, some 280 games ahead of Conley.

### NFL Longevity

Just two ex-Buckeyes have had longer pro football careers than Conley has had so far in the NBA. No. 1 is Groza, who played in 268 regular-season games over his 21 seasons with the Cleveland Browns from 1946-59 and 1961-67.

Groza never played varsity football for Ohio State. World War II got in the way after a season of freshman football. Then he joined the upstart Browns in the old All-America Football Conference (four seasons, followed by 17 in the NFL).

The other is defensive end Jim Marshall, who logged 20 seasons (1960-79) in the NFL, the last 19 for the Minnesota Vikings after a rookie year with the Browns. Yet an argument could be made that he's tied with Groza. Between Ohio State and the NFL, Marshall played a season for the Saskatchewan Roughriders in the Canadian Football League.

Just behind Conley's 17 seasons with 16 years in the NFL are four players: wide receivers Cris Carter (1987-2002) and Joey Galloway (1995-2010), kicker Mike Nugent (2005-20) and punter/quarterback Tom Tupa (1988-2004).

Quarterback Mike Tomczak played 15 seasons (1985-99). And six others lasted 14 seasons: wideout Ted Ginn Jr. (2007-20), defensive back Dick LeBeau (1959-72), defensive tackle Ryan Pickett (2001-14), tackle Jim Tyrer (1961-74), linebacker Mike Vrabel (1997-2010) and defensive back Antoine Winfield (1999-2012).

### Baseball Longevity

Former Ohio State basketball/baseball All-American Frank Howard, who died last fall, played 16 seasons in Major League Baseball from 1958-73, hitting 382 home runs. No MLB career lasted longer among former Buckeyes.

Those closest were pitcher Dave Burba (1990-2004), catcher Johnny Edwards (1961-74), outfielder Larry Hise (1968-82) and outfielder/first baseman Nick Swisher (2004-15).

For games played, it's Howard (1,895), Swisher (1,527), Edwards (1,470), Hise (1,197) and Barry Bonnell (976), according to Baseball Reference. However, the inclusion of Hise is dicey. He apparently attended OSU but never played for the Buckeyes. One account says he was recruited as an Ohio State basketball player but then was drafted by baseball and went to the minors. And a separate account says he attended both OSU and OU to take classes during the baseball offseasons.

As an aside, seeing Bonnell's name pop up reminded me of a funny story. As a kid ahead of a Pittsburgh Pirates game in Three Rivers Stadium one day, I was trying to collect as many autographs as possible. Bonnell, then with the Braves, kindly signed.

When I couldn't read his name, I asked, "What's your name." His comeback: "Buy a program." I deserved that, and was reminded often by my friends who witnessed the exchange. Bonnell was an outfielder/first baseman in the majors from 1977-86.

### Overall

So the list, in terms of seasons in American professional sports leagues is Groza (21 seasons), Marshall (20), Williams (18) and Conley (17).

As for Conley's career, he was the fourth overall pick in the 2007 NBA draft, one of three first-rounders that year from OSU along with Greg Oden (No. 1) and Daequan Cook (No. 21).

Conley has not been a superstar (his one All-Star game was in 2020-21), but he's been very solid. In addition to starting nearly every game he's played, Conley has averaged 14.4 points and 5.7 assists a game over his career.

The first 12 seasons were with Memphis, before being traded to Utah in the summer of 2019 and then to Minnesota in February 2023.

Among former Buckeyes, he ranks second for points (15,638 to Havlicek's 26,395), first for assists (6,221), first for steals (1,498), second for minutes played (34,354 to Havlicek's 46,471), and ninth for rebounds (3,228), well back of Lucas (12,942) in first.

### Big Bucks

Conley in February agreed to a two-year contract extension through the 2025-26 season that multiple reports have said will be worth more than \$20 million over the two years. That's down from \$24.36 million for just this season.

But the new deal will increase his lifetime NBA earnings to \$294.9 million, according to the sports salary website Spotrac.com. For that, Groza cannot compete.

## Ohio State Fans!



**Weekly September through November**  
**Five times from January through mid-March**  
**Biweekly mid-March through mid-May**  
**Monthly December, June through August**

Some Ohio State sports fans need more information on the Buckeyes than they can find in their local newspaper. Buckeye Sports Bulletin is for those fans. By subscribing to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, they receive 24 issues a year featuring:



- In-depth coverage of all Ohio State sports
- The latest comments from coaches and players
- The latest in recruiting information
- Personality profiles
- Features on former Buckeye greats
- Rosters, schedules, statistics, photos
- Check us out on the Web at [www.BuckeyeSports.com](http://www.BuckeyeSports.com)

- 1 Year, \$119.95                       1 Year, First Class Mail, \$189.95  
 2 Years, \$199.95                       2 Years, First Class Mail, \$339.95

I want to know more about Ohio State sports. I am enclosing \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Money Order  Check  MasterCard  Visa  Discover  Amer. Express  
 Credit Card # and Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Credit Card Orders Accepted 24 Hours A Day**  
**Call (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail To: **Buckeye Sports Bulletin**  
**P.O. Box 12453**  
**Columbus, Ohio 43212**  
**[www.BuckeyeSports.com](http://www.BuckeyeSports.com)**

# Buckeye Coaches Sing Praises Of Their Culture Clubs

As one of the last to edit and sign off on BSB copy, I generally read the stories in Buckeye Sports Bulletin shortly before you, the loyal readers, do.

In the previous two issues, I noticed a pattern in quotes from several Ohio State coaches, and I wondered if you saw the same thing?

"What's most important is guys embracing the culture and knowing that when they come into the building every day that they're going to be part of the program that cares about each other," head football coach Ryan Day said in the Feb. 17 Football Recruiting Wrap Up. "We've got a great locker room, a great staff and a fan base that's going to support them."

Added OSU's general manager, Mark Pantoni, "We take great pride. We're very disciplined about who we bring into the program, who's going to fit into the locker room."

Then came the March 2 issue of BSB, which featured a story on the culture of the women's basketball team.

"We've recruited the right kids and put together a team instead of a collection of players," head coach Kevin McGuff said. "That kind of fell apart on us for a year or two, and I think we're just doing a better job of identifying people that fit our program, our culture, our university, and it seems to be working for us right now."

Also in the March 2 issue, BSB introduced the new women's lacrosse coach, Amanda Moore. And what did Moore have to say?

"First and foremost, if we could hold a mirror to ourselves, what is the culture of our program?" Moore asked, "Do we trust one another? Are we living by our standards, our Buckeye sisterhood? Are we asking ourselves to hold each other accountable over the wins and losses?"

The operative word here seems to be "culture" and all of this in the course of just the last two issues of BSB. Do you see a trend?

Is this culture Gene's Smith's legacy to Ohio State, or have the Buckeye coaches been trained in a specific type of coach speak? I hope it is the former.

I found one other thing that Pantoni said really interesting.

"When the kids come on campus, it's like a job interview for them," he explained. "We're looking at how they interact with their parents, how they interact with the coaches, the guys on the team, so we pay a lot of attention to how their body language is, how they shake your hand. Those little things make a big difference of, are they a good fit for the program?"

I was impressed with the detail with which Ohio State recruits, rather than just going after every five-star in sight, regardless of personality. It's a good example for anyone who does any type of recruiting or hiring.

## Speaking Of Five Stars

Recruiting rankings can be a crapshoot. Sometimes the "experts" are on target; sometimes they miss.

Everyone knows that Ohio State incoming freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith was the consensus No. 1 player in the country in this most recent class. Maybe he is, maybe he isn't. Teammates have opinions too, and they can be very candid in their evaluations, when they are allowed to give one.

I was encouraged by remarks about Smith from a couple of veteran Buckeyes from both sides of the ball.

"(Smith is a) freak athlete," wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, a great receiver in his own right, said as spring practice opened. "One of the quietest dudes I've ever met. Not a man of too many words. But he came in and put his head down and he worked. I say this every time to freshmen who come in. All you have to do is shut up, put your head down and work. And

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

that's something he understands.

"There's nothing he really can't do. He runs fast. He jumps high. He's strong. He's a natural pass catcher. I mean, he's a freak."

In Buckeye practice alone, Ohio State cornerback Denzel Burke has defended against some of the best receivers in college football in recent years, including Egbuka. He should know what he's talking about when it comes to receivers.

"Jeremiah Smith, watch out for him," Burke said. "This might be a big statement, but just the way he handles himself, the way he moves and the potential he has, I feel like he might be the next best receiver to come through here. I'm really excited to see what he can do. The sky's the limit for him."

It's not just the remarks on Smith's talent that excite me. It's also the demeanor that Egbuka and Burke depict. Will Smith be just one more great receiver to come off the Brian Hartline production line? And if so, how soon?

## Loquacious Coaches

While Egbuka and Burke were candid and informative in their remarks about Smith, Ohio State coaches in recent years have not always been quite as forthcoming.

Jim Tressel was actually a witty guy, but he generally did not choose to share that playfulness with the media, often giving noncommittal answers to reporters' questions, causing those on the beat to liken him to a politician. Urban Meyer was all football, also seldom giving answers of consequence and coming off as completely devoid of personality. He reminded me of former OSU basketball coach Eldon Miller, who seemingly answered every question with "yes," "no," or "defense." This lack of eloquence hardly endeared him to the press.

But now comes new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, who – judging from his first press conference at Ohio State – is more from the John Cooper school of oratory. Coop was always candid (it got him into trouble at times) and *always* quotable. As I have said many times, I never would have imagined that I would be frequently quoting Cooper, more than 20 years after his departure from Ohio State's head job.

At Kelly's free-wheeling press conference, he quoted the late Beatle, John Lennon, when trying to explain why he would voluntarily step down from a head coaching job at a major university (UCLA) to become an assistant coach to a head coach who for many years worked under him.

"There's a story about John Lennon when he was a little kid," Kelly recalled, "and he had an assignment of, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' He said, 'I want to be happy.' Then his teacher said, 'I don't think you understand the assignment.' His mom (responded), 'I don't think you understand life.' So, I just want to be happy."

Kelly may have gotten a preview of his potential happiness late last season as the Bruins prepared for the L.A. Bowl.

"I think it started when we were preparing for our bowl game (against Boise State)," Kelly explained. "Ryan Gunderson, who is a great quarterbacks coach, left to go to Oregon State as the coordinator, so he wasn't there. I actually coached quarterbacks during the bowl game."

"I hadn't actually coached a position since 2008, and my wife remarked, 'I haven't seen you this happy in a long time.' And, to me, the best part of football is football. I got to do football

and not do some of the things that are involved with the head coaching deal."

As for working for Day, someone he knew back in New Hampshire when the future Buckeye head coach was still a youth, he said the two were on the same page now, though, "(Day) makes me call him sir," Kelly joked.

But the thing that caught the attention of some of the older ones here in the office was his Alexander Haig reference when he explained that he understood the hierarchy now that he worked for his formal pupil (Kelly was Day's offensive coordinator when he was the quarterback at New Hampshire, in addition to being his boss at several coaching stops). For those of you who are now too old to remember, or too young to have ever known, let me explain the incident with Haig to which Kelly referred.

President Ronald Reagan had been wounded in an assassination attempt in March of 1981. Haig, his secretary of state, wrongly told the press that until the return to Washington of Vice President George Bush, "I am in control here."

However, the Constitution is very specific about the order of succession if a president is incapacitated. He or she would be followed by the vice president, the speaker of the House, the president pro tempore of the Senate and *then* the Secretary of State.

Gen. Haig had a long and successful career in both the military and government but will always be most remembered for that gaffe.

The New York Times noted in his 2010 obituary that Reagan aide Lyn Nofziger once said of Haig, that "the third paragraph of his obit" would detail his conduct in the hours after President Reagan was shot.

Interestingly, the Times obit mentioned it in paragraph two.

Woody Hayes, a student of the military and government, might have mentioned something like the Haig incident, but it's not something you hear about every day at a football press conference.

Though Kelly understands his place in the coaching pecking order, he was still willing to joke about Ohio State's offensive play calling, something he was brought in to take off Day's plate.

"I still think the play-calling part will be a collaborative effort," Kelly said. "By that, I mean that if it's a good play, I called it, and if it's a bad play, (Day) called it."

For more on Kelly's first OSU press conference, see the cover story of this issue of BSB.

## Never Too Late For Grads

I am not sure if I already took my traditional look at Ohio State graduates, primarily those from the football team, who received degrees at winter commencement Dec. 17 at the Schottenstein Center. If I have already mentioned the grads, that's OK. You can't laud graduating athletes enough.

Fifteen football players graduated in December, including several big names. Among those receiving their degrees were Egbuka, Lathan Ransom, Cody Simon, Cade Stover and Enokk Vimahi. Also of note were Julian Fleming, Jesse Mirco and Chip Trayanum, all of whom graduated before transferring out of the program.

And I always like to mention athletes who come back to get their degrees. Quinn Pitcock, who lettered for the Buckeye football team from 2003-06, received his degree in consumer and family financial services.

Another graduate of note was Jacy Sheldon of the women's basketball team.

## Defensive Statistical Oddity

Here's a set of stats from last year's Ohio State defense that I found interesting.

Defensive end Jack Sawyer recorded five of his 6½ total sacks in the final three games of the season. His fellow defensive end, JT Tuimoloau was credited with four of his total five sacks in three consecutive games, from Oct. 7 to Oct. 21.

Think what might happen if Sawyer and Tuimoloau fired on all cylinders at the same time. And better yet, what might happen if they were at the top of their games all season, rather than in three-game bursts?

## Three Week Warning

The next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will not be mailed until April 2, three weeks from the mailing of this issue.

Each publishing year, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff has to allocate our 24 print issues to best cover football season, along with winter and spring coverage. This year we had to make some adjustments to properly cover football recruiting's National Signing Day, as well as the spring game, resulting in a pair of three-week gaps in our traditional biweekly winter/spring publishing schedule. This is the second of the three-week print intervals. The BSB mailing schedule, including the next print date, is always listed in the credit box on page 3 of each issue, and readers will continue to receive 24 print issues.

If you have not already been doing so, now would be a great time to take advantage of our BuckeyeSports.com website.

There is bound to be plenty of Ohio State sports news in the three-week interim, including spring football news, news on the basketball coaching search, reports on the men's and women's basketball tournament action, portal news, recruiting news, and more. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest stories. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

Don't forget that the entire edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems. This service is also free to subscribers.

If you have any questions concerning BSB's print schedule or BuckeyeSports.com, give us a call at (614) 486-2202.

## Gift Drive Continues

In the last few issues, I have noted that we are going to be offering a radically-reduced gift rate directed at groups that we feel will either help us or are likely to renew after their initial gift subscription runs out. In our newest gift offer, we are simply trying to do the right thing.

We are offering gift subscriptions for anyone in the active military for just \$19.95, less than the cost of printing and mailing the paper. It's a chance to send a little bit of home to those who serve and protect us. For military members overseas, be sure to send their APO address. For those serving in the States, just use their regular street address. Don't forget, while it may take a few days to get BSB overseas, our Buckeye servicemen and -women will have immediate and free access to each issue to BSB at BuckeyeSports.com with their gift subscriptions.

We are also still offering gift subscriptions to anyone under the age of 35 for just \$19.95.

As always, if you have any questions, give us a call at the above phone number.

