

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 43, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 20, 2024

## CALL FOR BACKUP

### Defensive Depth Stands Out In Spring Game

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The final box score of Ohio State's annual spring game, played on April 13 at Ohio Stadium in front of 80,012 fans, showed 34-33 in favor of the offense over the defense.

But those who saw the exhibition may have come away with a different feeling. The defense forced seven stops either by punt or on fourth down and came away with six sacks and four interceptions, routinely making things difficult for all five of Ohio State's quarterbacks who played in the exhibition.

The final may not have reflected the true nature of the contest given the rules for scoring, which gave the offense full points for a touchdown but limited the defense to earning points on defensive touchdowns (six points), turnovers and three-and-outs (three), sacks (two) and forced punts (one). The only points that truly matter, though, are the ones that Ohio State does – or, more importantly, does *not* – give up this season.

"It's really fun to be in games like this," senior cornerback Denzel Burke said. "It's just like a foreshadow of what things are going to be like. We're really excited for what we have to offer. We have all the chips in for this year, man. We want to win it all, and that's the only goal."

Ohio State's defense, as much as any given side of the ball on any team in the country, is a mostly known quantity entering next season. Expectations are high for a reason, with Burke among nearly double-digit junior and senior defenders – including the likes of defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau, defensive tackles Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams, safety Lathan Ransom, among others – electing to return for a final season.

But the last season for many of these Buckeyes also represents the beginning of



JOSH WINSLOW

**SILVER BULLETS** — Ohio State's depth shone in the spring game, with players such as freshman safety Jaylen McClain (left) and redshirt freshman cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt (right) notching interceptions and showing the talent of the defense from top to bottom.

a new era in college football. This season will bring about the first 12-team College Football Playoff, which – if a team also competes in its conference championship game – could have schools playing as many as 16 or 17 games in the pursuit of a national title.

Ohio State has played a 15-game season only once, when it won the national championship in 2014, and has just six seasons when it played at least 14 contests.

College players are known for their youthful exuberance and energy, but nobody would expect a player to make it through the equivalent of an NFL season without collect-

ing at least some bumps and bruises, especially at somewhere like Ohio State where positions like cornerback, linebacker and safety rarely rotate unless games are well in hand.

That's why perhaps the most encouraging thing coming out of the spring game for Ohio State is not that the defense again looks on pace to be one of the nation's best, but *which* defenders were helping put that into action.

Next season's expected starting defensive line of Hamilton, Sawyer, Tuimoloau and Williams – which was without Williams due to an undisclosed reason, though he participated in a media availability following the contest – combined for just three tackles and a sack, courtesy of Sawyer. But those expected to back up the quartet – those like third-year defensive linemen Caden Curry, Kenyatta Jackson Jr., Hero Kanu, second-years Jason Moore and Kayden McDonald and freshman Eddrick Houston – combined for 16 tackles, four sacks and 4½ tackles for loss, led by Houston with six stops and Moore with 1½ tackles behind the line.

"It's nice seeing them build confidence because we're going to need that throughout the season," Williams said. "We're going to need everyone to play if we're going to make this long run. They just have to keep building, we have to keep building and keep going."

That type of experienced depth is a luxury that has not been apparent for Ohio State the last few years, with the defensive line having no more than four or five significant contributors under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. It's a shift that Williams views as a benefit for an overworked trench unit, but a necessary one as Ohio State faces a potentially extended season.

"We've got to stay fresh," Williams said. "We can't be getting tired. Last year we stayed in for a while. We need those guys to step up and not just go in, but contribute, make plays, tackles, sacks and things like that."

But that depth is not limited to just the defensive line. The talent at linebacker was

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## Buckeye Leaves

The spring game on April 13 at Ohio Stadium – which saw the offense come away with a 34-33 win over the defense – lacked star power, with most of Ohio State's starters playing only a series or two before coming out, but there were still plenty of standout performances in the annual exhibition. Here are picks from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves:

**Patrick Engels, BSB:** Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka sat for the entire second half of the spring game, but he certainly made his presence felt during the early portions of the scrimmage. With many of the defensive starters still playing in the first half, he was the most productive wide receiver on the field, finding the open field on many occasions and finishing with four catches for 47 yards. He also had perhaps the highlight of the day late in the second quarter when he hauled in an impressive leaping one-handed catch down the sidelines.

**Braden Moles, BSB:** Ohio State is set to split carries between running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins this season, but freshman Sam Williams-Dixon showed during the spring game that he may deserve a spot in the rotation.

Williams-Dixon led the team with 75 rushing yards and a touchdown, and had a 7-yard reception. He was able to consistently find holes and made it to the outside when necessary, displaying a shifty nature that could make him

valuable for Ohio State, even as a freshman.

**Greg Wilson, BSB:** Freshman cornerback Aaron Scott Jr. deserves a Buckeye leaf for his performance in the spring game. He got on the field early on with the second team and was solid in coverage when he was out there. He finished with six tackles and a pair of pass breakups and almost picked off quarterback Julian Sayin in the third quarter.

It was a solid showing for the early enrollee, who is currently blocked in a very deep cornerback room. However, if he can prove he deserves to play, he could find his way onto the field in some role when the fall comes around. He came in as a five-star recruit from Springfield, Ohio, and to this point has proved he deserved his high rating.

### BSB Subscribers

**PeyoteBuck:** I thought James Peoples had some gusto. Nice catch by Brennen Schramm from Devin Brown. I was glad to see some running from the quarterbacks. Williams-Dixon has my leaves, too.

**Tiffin Buckeye:** Scott was good, I thought the freshman running backs ran hard.

**Terrier Buck:** To paraphrase Duke Ellington, "Spring, it don't mean a thing." I have a hunch that (TC) Caffey will be more productive this season than either of the freshmen running backs?

## From The Message Board

**Ohio State's offense prevailed in the spring game on April 13, earning a 34-33 victory over the defense in the annual exhibition broadcast on FOX. With the spring game concluding the Buckeyes' only set of practices until fall camp, we asked our readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum their thoughts on the exhibition, including how they feel about the team going into the summer as well as it being the first nationally televised spring game. Here are some of the responses:**

"Difficult to tell much from any spring game especially when TV announcers don't even give a play-by-play report. The Buckeyes should be as good as anybody and far better than most other teams. Will they have to win a close game?"

– Terrier Buck

"It's spring, a lot of time to improve."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"It's hard for me to read much into the team performances in the spring game as it's such a controlled environment. It's clear our offensive and defensive stars are still stars and the offensive line I'm still not sure about. Quarterback wise, I didn't see anything to shift my opinion towards any particular player, but I will say (Julian) Sayin can get rid of the ball quickly."

– BuckeyeScott

"I'm sure Ohio State thought that was great exposure for the program to have the game on FOX, but how

beneficial was it to the program to basically feature the announcers. Did those guys call one play during the game? I had a hard time telling who was the quarterback each series because they rarely announced it. Those of us who are not familiar with the numbers of the new players or seldom-used players were at a complete disadvantage while watching the game. This was like a FOX announcers' podcast, rather than a spring game. I hope Ohio State does not agree to this again. It was not fair to the diehard fans."

– Mcarr

"Really thought the O-line would be further along. Defense will be elite."

– Otis johnson

"They say there were 80,000 people there but I always wonder what voodoo math they use to calculate attendance at spring games. It looked like there were more than 25,000 open seats to me. They could easily have had 105,000 there if they had sent out an email before the game letting Buckeye Nation know that it would be easier to follow the game from C Deck or the top of the south stands than on TV, where the spring game was a complete afterthought.

"I hope Gene Smith or Ross Bjork says something to FOX. I am willing to bet that there is some heavy-hitter donor out there who settled in front of his TV and wasn't real happy with the coverage. ... As for the game itself, despite all the weapons on offense, it looked like the defense is much farther along – at least at this point. Loved that pass defense."

– Poster That Harley Built

"This game has been tweaked so much over the years that it is impossible to read anything into it."

– R1TBDBITL

"What does it say about a large QB room of different levels of experience and playing time that no one stood out?"

– PeyoteBuck

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Win One For Ed

I keep hoping I will see another Buckeye championship before I pass on, but being treated for cancer and being 92 years of age, my hopes are fading. Being handicapped doesn't help either. Maybe this will be the year the Buckeyes will find a way to not lose a game when it counts. I've seen it happen too many times.

**Ed Heidenescher  
Bellevue, Neb.**

### Women On The Cover

Shame, shame on (Frank Moskowitz) plus your staff for not putting a photo and article on the

front page of the April 6 issue of the NCAA championship women's hockey team instead of (Jake) Diebler and a cover of the 15th-ever OSU men's new basketball coach. I expected a split cover of (Jake) plus a photo/article of the girls, but no, just a guy who went 8-3 and not a women's OSU team which has won two titles.

There is no excuse at all for the time period. You're a good man, Frank, but you dropped the ball again here. And the article on the girls' NCAA championship in the issue is one page, same as the men's OSU hockey team that won four games in Big Ten play. Come on.

Plus three pages on the women's basketball team. As Herman Munster once said, this is poppycock and balderdash.

**Angelo Palma  
New Boston, Ohio**

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

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

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# Defense Leads Way In Annual Spring Game

After more than 40 years of watching spring football games at Ohio State, about the only thing of which I can be totally certain is that I can't be totally certain of anything I see during a spring football game at Ohio State.

If there was any certitude about the game/scrimmage, attended by more than 80,000 fans curious whether all that NIL wealth spread around during the offseason really did provide the Buckeyes with what some have derisively called "the best college team money can buy," it was that despite a 34-33 "loss," the Gray team (defense) seems ahead of the Scarlet team (offense).

Played on a cool, crisp afternoon under sunny skies, there was just enough wind to play havoc with the passing game, and that led to four interceptions by four different defenders. What the wind had no effect upon was the pass rush, and the defense racked up six sacks among its nine tackles for loss.

Under normal circumstances, that might be cause for alarm regarding an offensive line that largely underperformed last year against tougher competition. But the Buckeyes are blessed with such experienced depth at the front and back ends of their defensive unit that six sacks in a game should not be an anomaly. With the likes of Jack Sawyer, J.T. Tuimoloau, Tyleik Williams and Ty Hamilton returning, six sacks should be a realistic expectation week in and week out.

To be honest, I went into the game wanting to get a look at the team's quintet of quarterbacks but pretty early found myself taking more notice of several individuals on defense.

Among those was Alabama transfer Caleb Downs, who earned a handful of freshman All-America honors last year as well as being named national freshman of the year by several entities. During the game's opening possession, veteran quarterback Will Howard executed a pump fake that would have fooled the majority of college safeties, but Downs continued to track receiver Carnell Tate and walled Tate off from Howard's would-be touchdown pass.

Downs finished his afternoon with two solo tackles and somehow did not get credit for breaking up the pass to Tate. But you can safely put Downs' name atop the depth chart at one of the safety positions this fall, all the time wondering how in the world the Crimson Tide could have let him escape Tuscaloosa.

One play after Downs prevented the touchdown to Tate, the defense got to Howard for the first sack of the afternoon. Howard appeared to be a little late pulling the trigger, but he was also victimized by backside pressure on what appeared to be a coverage sack.

Speaking of coverage, the Buckeyes already have Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Davison Igbinosun as cornerbacks with 86 games of college experience between them, but there is going to have to be some playing time found for second-year man Jermaine Mathews Jr., who appeared to be blanketing everyone he covered. Mathews was credited with four tackles, including one for loss, and a pass breakup.

The fact that linebacker C.J. Hicks registered a game-high eight tackles was encouraging especially since I have been harping upon defensive coordinator Jim Knowles to find a spot on the field for Hicks, a former five-star prospect who has just 16 career tackles (most of them on special teams) as he approaches his third season in the program.

Full disclosure, though. Although Hicks was credited with eight tackles, I don't remember any of them. Perhaps that was a result of my concentration centered elsewhere or the fact that the way the game was played

during most of the first half – more touch than tackle football – allowed the stat-keepers to give tackle credit to the first player close to the ball carrier. Fellow linebackers Sonny Styles and Gabe Powers were credited with six and five tackles, respectively, and I didn't make much note of them, either.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

That is no knock on any of the linebackers. During a game/scrimmage played under rules designed to protect the players, it's difficult to discern much about the play of the linebackers. But the final stats said Hicks had eight stops, so who am I to argue?

All I know is that the time has long since passed for Ohio State to get better play from its linebackers. Yes, I know Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers led the team in tackles last season, and Eichenberg was named the Big Ten's top linebacker in 2023. I also know the Buckeyes have had exactly one linebacker make the All-America first team over the past 15 years, and that was Ryan Shazier in 2013.

For a program that has produced the likes of Randy Gradishar, Tom Cousineau, Chris Spielman and James Laurinaitis, one first-team All-American over the past decade and a half is unacceptable. Maybe Hicks can be the guy to stem that tide.

## Which QB Stood Out?

It was obvious there is a new sheriff in town when it comes to calling offensive plays. The Buckeyes were heavy on play-action, something that was the staple of Chip Kelly teams when he was rolling up big numbers during a successful run at Oregon from 2007-12.

Most fans have forgotten that Kelly's first two seasons with the Ducks were spent as offensive coordinator for head coach Mike Bellotti and that Kelly employed a record-breaking spread offense that averaged around 40 points and 475 total yards per game. He also transformed struggling quarterback Dennis Dixon into the Pac-10 Offensive Player of the Year.

That last part is mentioned only because I thought the quarterback play for Ohio State in this year's spring game was spotty at best and perhaps in need of some transformation.

Presumably because of how he had performed during the previous spring practice sessions, Howard got the honor of starting the game. His first attempt was saved by tight end Gee Scott Jr., who made a twisting catch along the sideline for an 18-yard gain. Unfortunately, that was the longest completion of Howard's afternoon.

Nondescript is the way I would sum up the performance of the Kansas State transfer, who finished 9 of 13 passing for 77 yards and no touchdowns. Howard didn't do much to separate himself from his competition for the starting job, but I didn't see any grievous errors that would lead me to believe he did anything to lose the top spot on the depth chart.

Of course, if you were looking for one of the quarterbacks to jump out from the rest of the pack, you were likely disappointed.

Because of the swirling wind inside the Horseshoe, none of the quarterbacks had much touch on anything long-range. There seemed to be a lot of checkdown stuff – un-

derstandable with quarterbacks who don't have a lot of experience at the college level.

Still, there were some highlights. Devin Brown fired a nice sideline strike to second-year receiver Brennen Schramm and then seconds later turned an RPO into a nice touchdown throw to Schramm. That was part of Brown's 5-for-7 day, good for 66 yards and a score. He also added 24 rushing yards on three carries.

Lincoln Kienholz made a couple of strong throws while on the run and finished with 10 completions in 17 attempts for 71 yards. But Kienholz also threw a pair of interceptions, botched a handoff on his first play from scrimmage and took two sacks.

Julian Sayin, the freshman transfer from Alabama who had a lot of tongues positively clicking this spring, led all the quarterbacks with 85 yards through the air. Sayin seems to have a grasp of Kelly's offense and has what appears to be a quick release. But he is a freshman and he made a couple of freshman mistakes, including an interception and taking three sacks.

Air Noland, yet another five-star prospect, completed 5 of 7 passes for 47 yards with a pick. He had a couple of good throws, a couple of bad ones, and generally had the kind of afternoon one would expect from a true freshman who is making a quantum leap with regard to the level of his competition.

## Other Observations

As I mentioned before, it is difficult to ascertain much from a glorified scrimmage. However, I did note a couple of other things.

Ryan Day is clearly struggling with his decision to cede the play-calling to Kelly. I don't think Day will backtrack on his decision, but more than once during the national telecast did the head coach audibly second-guess what was happening with his offense.

Perhaps the addition of Ole Miss transfer Quinshon Judkins has ignited a fire under TreVeyon Henderson. With no disrespect meant to others who have shared the rushing chores with Henderson in the past, the fourth-year man out of Virginia appeared to be running with a renewed sense of vigor. A healthy and motivated Henderson could team with a workhouse like Judkins to make the Buckeyes even more lethal on offense.

An often-overlooked part of Henderson's game is his receiving – he has 50 career catches for 569 yards and five TDs – and look for Kelly to take more advantage of that this fall. During the spring game, Henderson went over the middle in traffic and, despite absorbing hits from both sides, managed a 6-yard reception from Howard.

Freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith has gotten a lot of love during his first spring, and rightfully so for the 6-3 freshman that observers are already comparing favorably to Marvin Harrison Jr. But what does it say about Ohio State's depth at receiver (even with Harrison gone to the NFL) that a guy like Emeke Egbuka has hardly been mentioned this spring? Egbuka's one-handed stab along the sideline of a Howard pass during the second quarter reminded everyone just how talented he remains. Egbuka needs 1,042 yards to overtake Michael Jenkins' program record of 2,898 career receiving yards.

Kelly paid homage to Woody Hayes on his first play call inside Ohio Stadium. Three running backs broke the huddle in a bunch formation before twisting into a full-house backfield – a formation Woody called the Robust-T and utilized for many years in an attack known as "three yards and a cloud of dust."

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Inniss, Ransom Among 10 Buckeyes Out For Spring Game

Ohio State was without the services of 10 players during its 2024 spring game, including two key Buckeyes who could make significant impacts this season in sophomore wide receiver Brandon Inniss and fifth-year safety Lathan Ransom.

Inniss, who is likely to take on a considerable role at slot receiver this season, was held out due to an apparent lower-body injury he suffered toward the end of spring camp. He was seen in a walking boot during Ohio State's open practice at Ohio Stadium on April 12 and was limited for a considerable portion of the second half of spring practice. But Day said after the spring game that his injury is not long-term, and he was held out only for precautionary reasons.

Ransom missed the scrimmage due to his continued recovery from a foot injury that forced him to miss the final five games of the 2023 season. He has participated in light drills this spring but has mostly been

limited throughout the 15 practices.

Despite missing the spring game, Ransom told the media earlier this spring that he is nearing a return to full health and is excited to make an impact on the defense this season.

"I'm almost full-go," Ransom said. "It's an injury that takes a little bit of time, so I don't want to rush and have a setback or something like that. I'm in there participating in a lot of the (drills) and I'm just competing. I'm just happy to be back on the field with my guys, because I wasn't myself when I wasn't around football."

Joining Inniss and Ransom on the list of inactives were cornerbacks Lorenzo Styles Jr. and Bryce West; linebackers Payton Pierce and Kourt Williams; offensive lineman Miles Walker; safeties Ja'Had Carter and Malik Hartford; and wide receiver Reis Stocksdale.

## Offensive Line Still In Question After Spring Game

Ohio State entered spring camp with numerous question marks on the offensive line, with several starting positions yet to be determined. Like last season, things do not seem much clearer after the spring game, with the Buckeyes mixing and matching at the position throughout the scrimmage.

Starting with the first team, Ohio State began with a front five that included Josh Simmons, Donovan Jackson, Seth McLaughlin, Carson Hinzman and Josh Fryar from left to right. While Simmons and Jackson at left tackle and left guard come as no surprise, the biggest surprise came at right

## 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.) |

guard, where Hinzman started over sophomore Luke Montgomery.

Montgomery had taken the majority of first-team reps at right guard this spring while Hinzman had spent the spring repping at center and competing for the starting job along with McLaughlin. But Montgomery instead appeared only with the reserves during the spring game.

Hinzman was not the only one taking first-team reps at right guard. Sophomore Tegra Tshabola also assumed the role with the first team for some portions of the first half. Tshabola had been lining up at right tackle this spring, where he had been battling with Fryar. Fryar also saw time at right guard this spring but was not seen there during the scrimmage.

Moving to the rest of the second-team offensive line, it consisted of George Fitzpatrick, Austin Siereveld, Joshua Padilla, Montgomery and Tshabola from left to right. While Padilla lined up at center to start, Hinzman also saw time at the position with the twos, and Zen Michalski saw some time at right tackle while Tshabola was taking first-team reps.

Regardless of who assumed first- and second-team reps in the spring game, Day said he and his staff are not ready to make any declarations on who might start this season on Ohio State's offensive line, a unit which gave up six sacks and nine tackles for loss on the day.

"I don't think we're there right now," Day said when asked if he has any projection of how his offensive line will look this season. "(I'll) watch this film and kind of go back, evaluate the entire spring and go from there."

## Ohio State Hires Locklyn As Running Backs Coach

Ohio State and Day made a significant addition to its coaching staff on April 1, hiring Oregon running backs coach Carlos Locklyn to the same position on a two-year deal. He replaces former running backs

coach Tony Alford, who left for Michigan in March.

Locklyn recently completed his second season at Oregon under head coach Dan Lanning, helping the Ducks to a top-30 rushing offense in each of the last two years. There, Locklyn coached tailback Bucky Irving, who entered his name into the NFL draft after back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons, including 1,180 yards and 11 touchdowns this past season for the Ducks.

"When you hear about Carlos' story, it's captivating where he's come from," Day said. "Then you start to listen to his overall knowledge of the position, his aggressiveness in recruiting, the impact he's had on people, the relationships he's had with people. It was an absolute slam dunk hire for us."

A former running back at Chattanooga, Locklyn also spent time as a running backs coach at Western Kentucky in 2021 and held roles at Florida State (2020) and Memphis (2017-19) after several years coaching at the high school level.

Locklyn, who also worked in law enforcement as a corrections officer before getting into coaching, said during his first press conference April 10 that it has been a long journey to get to his current position at Ohio State, an opportunity that he has not taken lightly.

"I'm pretty excited," Locklyn said. "This has been a journey. I've had to pinch myself every morning that I've been here in Columbus, at Ohio State. It's kind of surreal for me. It's a great place, great people, great young men, so I'm excited."

## Knowles, Kelly To Make Over \$2 Million In 2024

Ohio State will back up the Brink's truck for two of its most important assistants this season. Both defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and offensive coordinator Chip Kelly are set to make at least \$2 million, according to contracts obtained by Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

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SONNY BROCKWAY

**GONE PORTALING — Ohio State running back Dallan Hayden was the first portal entry for Ohio State this spring, informing coaches of his intention to enter the portal when it opened on April 16.**

Knowles, who transformed Ohio State's defense into a top-five unit nationally in several different categories last season, will make the most out of the two in 2024, earning \$2.2 million as part of a new three-year contract he earned earlier this offseason.

Kelly's contract is nothing to scoff at, either. The longtime head coach and coordinator is set to earn \$2 million in his first season with the Buckeyes. He signed a three-year deal with Ohio State on Feb. 9 that puts him under contract with the program until the 2026 season.

Knowles and Kelly join a group of five Ohio State assistants who are set to make at least seven figures in 2024. Trailing behind the two coordinators is co-offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who will earn \$1.6 million this season.

Next on the list of top assistant earners are defensive line coach Larry Johnson and secondary/cornerback coach Tim Walton, who both earned raises to \$1.4 million. Offensive line coach Justin Frye is the final coach in seven figures, with his contract expected to stay at \$1 million, the same amount it was last season.

Ohio State has four assistants making

six figures, with Locklyn receiving \$650,000 in his first year with the Buckeyes; new safeties coach Matt Guerrieri at \$425,000; tight ends coach Keenan Bailey at \$400,000; and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis, who will make \$350,000.

### Hayden To Enter Transfer Portal

Junior Dallan Hayden informed Ohio State's staff that he planned to enter the transfer portal when the spring portal window opened on April 16.

Hayden was set for his third season at Ohio State. He played significantly as a freshman, finishing third on the team in rushing with 553 yards and earning a start in the College Football Playoff semifinal against Georgia.

But Hayden's usage decreased last season when Day and the staff made the decision to utilize a redshirt for the then-sophomore, limiting him to three games and just 19 rushing attempts and 110 yards. Most of his production from last season occurred during the Buckeyes' 41-7 win over Purdue, where he racked up a team-high 76 rushing yards and a touchdown on 11 carries while filling in for the injured Henderson and Miyan Williams.

"I understood. It was a mutual agreement, for sure," Hayden said on April 3 when asked about taking a redshirt last season. "Obviously, I wanted to be on the field, because freshman year I played and then got redshirted, so it was tough. But everything happens for a reason."

Hayden is a former four-star out of Christian Brothers in Memphis, Tenn., and was Ohio State's lone signee at running back in either the 2022 or 2023 recruiting classes. He mentioned during his last media availability at Ohio State that former running backs coach Tony Alford — who left the program to serve the same role at Michigan in March — played a significant role in his decision to sign with the Buckeyes, providing another potential reason for his departure.

"I mean, it was tough," Hayden said of Alford's departure. "Coach Alford was a big part of why I came to Ohio State. So to see him leave was sad. But he has a family to take care of. So I completely understand."

### Alford Offers First Comments Since Move To Michigan

Speaking of Alford, he provided some clarity on his decision to leave Columbus for Michigan in his first press conference as a Wolverine on April 10.

Alford, who spent nine seasons at Ohio State before heading north to Ann Arbor in March, told local media that he wanted a fresh start to his career after nearly a de-

cade in Columbus, and that exact opportunity arose at Michigan under head coach Sherrone Moore.

"I thought it was a great opportunity for me," Alford said. "I have so much respect for Sherrone. I've known him for quite a while. I just thought it was time. It might have been time for both parties. I don't know. But I thought it was time and that it was a good opportunity."

"There's a level of toughness here that's been established and that's firm," he added. "The alignment of the staff, what Sherrone has done as far as staff alignment, continuity and togetherness has trickled down to the players. That's the one thing that stood out. It was the alignment of the staff, in particular the offensive staff."

Alford declined to comment on the specifics behind his departure from Columbus — which came after he had already coached the Buckeye running backs in two spring practices — saying only the people who were involved with the decision will know the whole story.

"The people that need to know, they know," he said. "You make moves professionally that are in your best interest, whatever those reasons are. That's what I did, so here we are."

But he did express gratitude to Ohio State for giving him and his family a place to call home for nine years, making his decision to leave a difficult pill to swallow.

"I have to say this. I have so much respect for Ohio State and the Ohio State community and what they presented to me and my family through the years," he said. "It was

not an easy decision. Anytime you are somewhere for as long as I was — for nine years — there were some groups that had been set in professionally and personally. That was difficult. But at the end of the day, it was something I thought I couldn't pass up. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

### McCord Sheds Light On Decision To Transfer

Alford was not the only former Buckeye to offer an explanation behind his departure from the program. Appearing on the Syracuse sports podcast "NoDestination," former Ohio State quarterback and current Syracuse signal-caller Kyle McCord also provided some clarity on his decision to transfer, saying he felt it was time to move on from Ohio State after a conversation he had with the coaches in the days following the team's loss to Michigan.

"We lost The Game, and we were kind of in the same situation we were in (last year)," he said. "We didn't get into the playoff, and then we started quickly having conversations of what the future was going to look like. That's just the reality of college football now, is everything moves so fast with the transfer portal window opening right after the season."

"They thought they should move in one way, and I accordingly thought I should move in another. That's the reality, that's the business. It was on short notice. I didn't know where it was going to be when I put my name in the portal, I just (wanted) to see what was going to happen."

Continued On Page 6



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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

McCord entered the transfer portal just nine days after the Buckeyes' loss to the Wolverines, where he went 18 of 30 with 271 passing yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions, the last interception sealing the game for the Wolverines late in the fourth quarter.

Despite the abrupt ending to his Buckeye career, McCord – who is expected to start under center for Syracuse this season – said he is still grateful for the three seasons he spent at Ohio State and is excited for his next chapter in upstate New York.

"It was fun. It was a great experience," McCord said of his time in Columbus. "I wouldn't trade the way everything went for the world. I feel like everything happened for a reason. For me to go there, and I felt like I played pretty well. But obviously one thing led to another, and I ended up here at another great situation."

## Harrison To Attend 2024 NFL Draft

Former Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. has accepted an invitation to attend the 2024 NFL draft held from April 25-27 in Detroit, where he will be one of 13 projected first-round selections to hear their names called in person by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

Harrison – who is expected to be the first non-quarterback taken, with his likely landing spot being to the Arizona Cardinals at No. 4 – will be joined by some of college football's premier players from last season, including Heisman Trophy winner and former LSU quarterback Jayden Daniels, former North Carolina signal caller Drake Maye, wide receivers Malik Nabers (LSU) and Rome Odunze (Washington) and projected first overall pick and former USC quarterback Caleb Williams, among others.

This is the third straight season in which an Ohio State prospect will attend the draft in person, with wide receivers Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson attending the 2022 NFL draft in Las Vegas, and quarterback C.J. Stroud, wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and offensive lineman Paris Johnson Jr. attending last year's event in Kansas City.

If Harrison is selected in the top five of this year's draft, he will become the highest-drafted Ohio State wide receiver in program history, breaking the previous record held by Terry Glenn, who was selected seventh overall by the New England Patriots in



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**MASTERFUL OUTING** – Ohio State golfer Neal Shipley had the opportunity to participate in the 88th Masters in Augusta, Ga., from April 11-14, even pairing with legendary golfer Tiger Woods for the final round.

1996. He will also become the fourth Buckeye wideout in three years to be selected in the first round, joining Olave (11th) and Wilson (10th) in 2022 and Smith-Njigba (20th) in 2023.

The 2024 NFL draft is scheduled to be-

gin on April 25 at 8 p.m. The second and third rounds of the draft will be held on April 26 beginning at 7 p.m., with the final four rounds starting at noon on April 27.

## Shipley Competes At Masters, Pairs With Woods

Ohio State golfer Neal Shipley earned the opportunity to compete on the sport's grandest stage from April 11-14 when he participated in the 2024 Masters Tournament held at historic Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Ga.

Shipley, a Pittsburgh native who transferred to Ohio State this year after three seasons at James Madison, qualified for the 88th Masters after finishing as a runner-up in the U.S. Amateur Championship held last August. Despite being one of just five amateurs to play at Augusta this year, Shipley certainly made the most of his opportunity.

The 23-year-old began his first major tournament on a strong note, shooting a 1-under 71 in the first round, a mark that was tied for 14th place. Shipley experienced a bit of a setback in the second round, shooting a 4-over 76, but his combined score of 3-over par was enough for him to make the cut and advance to the last two rounds of the tournament.

Shipley became just the fourth-ever Ohio State golfer to make the 36-hole cut at the Masters as a low amateur and the second Buckeye ever to earn the Silver Cup – awarded to the lowest-scoring amateur golfer who makes the final cut – joining legendary golfer and six-time Masters champion Jack Nicklaus in 1960.

He had another setback in the third round, shooting an 8-over 80. But while his second- and third-round performances essentially put him out of contention, Shipley had perhaps his most notable moment in the final round of the tournament held.

Accompanied by his caddie and former high school teammate Carter Pitcairn, Shipley was paired in the final round with five-time Masters champion and 15-time major champion Tiger Woods. Shipley, who

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

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

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## Don't Miss Any Of The Transfer Portal News

The next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the May issue set to be mailed April 30, will be the last issue of our traditional biweekly winter/spring print schedule. With the football transfer portal set to swing open on April 16, the day this issue of BSB goes to press, there is bound to be plenty of news between then and when the portal closes, the day the next BSB hits the mail.

There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest portal news, as well as recruiting news, and coverage of the spring sports such as baseball. All the news is available in real time at our website 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 players potentially coming and going.

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 electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stop-gap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is also free to subscribers.

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was seen numerous times chatting and walking with Woods throughout the final 18 holes, said sharing the greens with a golfing legend like Woods at the Masters was an experience he will never forget.

"Obviously, shooting 80 is never fun, I wasn't too pleased after the (third) round," Shipley said after the tournament. "We went quickly to the practice facility to get some work in, and my caddie came up to me and said, 'Guess who we're going to be paired with tomorrow?' And I was just like, 'No way, is it Tiger?' And he's like, 'Yeah.' I got pretty excited then. That's when the emotions kind of turned around.

"Being out there with Tiger, we were chatty, we talked a lot about golf, (Woods' son Charlie Woods), just normal things. He's such a normal guy, and really cool. He was great to me all day, and I couldn't be more appreciative of him for just being awesome today. It was really cool to be around him. Just the attention he gets and the roars, just the crowds were phenomenal."

Shipley shot a 1-over 73 in the final round – besting Woods' final-round total of a 5-over 77 – giving him a final score of 12-over 300, tied for 53rd on the final leaderboard. Shipley's score was lower than a number of experienced and well-known golfers, including Sergio Garcia, Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas, who all missed the final cut.

Shipley's Masters experience did not end on the green, though. By winning the Silver Cup, he earned an invitation to Butler Cabin, where – alongside longtime CBS broadcaster Jim Nantz and Augusta national chairman Fred Ridley – he watched last year's Masters champion Jon Rahm present the green jacket to winner Scottie Scheffler.

"Playing with Tiger Sunday at the Masters and the whole week I've had, I think I'd have to win one of these to top this week," Shipley said after he left Butler Cabin. "It's definitely been a dream week, but I'm looking forward to being out here soon hopefully."

Following his eventful four days at Augusta National, Shipley – who is expected to turn pro – will return to Columbus and

finish out his final collegiate season. He will gear up to compete in the Big Ten championship held at Columbus' Scioto Country Club from April 26-28.

### Ohio State Adds Center Bradshaw Through Portal

The Ohio State men's basketball team added a significant piece to its frontcourt on April 15 when former Kentucky center Aaron Bradshaw announced he is transferring to the program. Bradshaw, who stands 7-1 and 226 pounds, has three years of college eligibility remaining.

A former five-star prospect in 2023 out of Rahway (N.J.) Camden, Bradshaw entered the portal on April 8 after spending just one season at Kentucky, one of several Wildcats to leave the program after head coach John Calipari left to take the same role at Arkansas on April 10.

Despite being at Kentucky for one year and missing the first seven games of the season while recovering from a foot injury, Bradshaw still made an impact, averaging 4.9 points and 3.3 rebounds in 26 games, including 10 starts. He reached double figures in seven contests and recorded one double-double, racking up 17 points and 11 rebounds in just his second collegiate game against Pennsylvania on Dec. 9.

Ohio State was not initially involved in Bradshaw's recruitment out of high school, but head coach Jake Diebler showed significant interest out of the transfer portal, hosting him on a visit for Ohio State's football spring game on April 13.

Bradshaw now joins an Ohio State frontcourt that already includes last season's starting center Felix Okpara – who stands 6-11 – along with sophomore forward Devin Royal, setting up a potentially formidable three-man lineup in the paint for the Buckeyes next season. Sophomore center Austin Parks and junior forward Kalen Etzler are – barring any further transfers – also set to return.

Bradshaw is the second transfer addition the Buckeyes made this offseason, the first being former South Carolina guard Meechie Johnson, who announced on April

2 that he is transferring back to Ohio State after spending his first two collegiate seasons in Columbus.

### Kacmarek, Smith Shed Black Stripes

Ohio State freshman quarterback Julian Sayin became the fastest freshman signal caller to lose his black stripe with the Buckeyes (more on page 13), but he was not the only Buckeye to lose his black stripe in the final weeks of spring ball. Junior tight end Will Kacmarek and redshirt freshman defensive end Will Smith Jr. both earned the honor on April 5.

Kacmarek receives the distinction after transferring from Ohio University in January. He caught 42 passes for 507 yards and two touchdowns in his two seasons with the Bobcats. Kacmarek will start the season behind tight end Gee Scott Jr., but he has turned enough heads with his performance

this spring to potentially garner playing time at the position.

Smith – the son of the late Will Smith Sr., who played on Ohio State's 2002 national championship team and experienced a nine-year NFL career from 2004-13 with the New Orleans Saints before being shot and killed after a traffic crash in 2016 – shed his black stripe in his second season with Ohio State. He joined the program last year as a four-star prospect out of Dublin, Ohio, but was out for the season with an injury.

Kacmarek and Smith were the seventh and eighth Buckeyes to lose their black stripes this offseason, joining safety Caleb Downs, quarterback Will Howard, running back Quinshon Judkins, McLaughlin, Sayin and wide receivers Brennen Schramm and Jeremiah Smith.


### UCLA's Drevno Hired As Quality Control Coach

Ohio State also made an addition to its support staff since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, hiring former UCLA offensive line coach Tim Drevno on April 3 to serve as a quality control coach.

He spent the last three seasons on Kelly's staff with the Bruins, first serving as an offensive analyst in 2021 and then becoming Kelly's offensive line coach in 2022 following Frye's departure for Ohio State. He was not retained by new UCLA head coach Deshaun Foster, who instead hired longtime NFL assistant Juan Castillo to fill the position.

Drevno, a former starting offensive lineman at Cal State Fullerton, joins the program with over three decades of coaching experience under his belt both in the NFL and college football.

His most notable stints occurred from 2004-17, where he spent 13 of those 14 seasons working alongside former Michigan and current Los Angeles Chargers head coach Jim Harbaugh for San Diego, Stanford, the San Francisco 49ers and at Michigan, where he was the offensive coordinator and offensive line coach.



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# OC Kelly Endears Himself To OSU Faithful

Continued From Page 1

clear, with juniors C.J. Hicks and Sonny Styles – a pair of day-one starters at any other school – battling it out for a single position, but the defense was highlighted in the spring game by a strong performance from Ohio State's secondary.

While the defense did allow 357 passing yards, it allowed just 5.7 yards per attempt. Ohio State's signal callers – led by freshman Julian Sayin, who had 85 yards, followed by Kansas State transfer Will Howard with 77 yards – rarely aired the ball out. Instead, they settled for shorter completions to allow the younger quarterbacks such as Sayin, freshman Air Noland and redshirt freshman Lincoln Kienholz get into a rhythm.

But those quick throws led to even quick-

er interceptions, with redshirt freshman cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt and freshman safety Jaylen McClain – who has been taking snaps at nickel in his first spring – collecting picks off Kienholz and Sayin, respectively.

"It's really just Coach Knowles putting us in that position to turn the ball over," Burke said. "Moving guys around, different looks, different adjustments. Coach Knowles has really done a great job of putting his trust in us, and we have our full trust in him."

McClain is among the safeties who have stepped up this spring along with redshirt freshman Jayden Bonsu, who finished with five tackles in the spring game, in the absence of Ransom and sophomore Malik Hartford, both of whom are nursing inju-

ries. Redshirt freshman Cedrick Hawkins Jr. also finished with five tackles.

Cornerback has shown similar depth. Simpson-Hunt's interception capped off what has been an impressive spring as he looks to break into the rotation alongside Burke, junior Davison Igbinosun and sophomore Jermaine Mathews Jr.

"He's growing every day," head coach Ryan Day said of Simpson-Hunt. "He came in (last) summer, so this is his first full spring.

"For Lincoln, (Simpson-Hunt), Moore, McDonald, those guys all came in the summer. This is their first full year. They still haven't been on campus for a year. Now you're starting to see them get comfortable with the calls, and we've said this before, but

we've got to play depth.

"Good to see Jermaine in there at nickel. Jordan (Hancock)'s going to be the starting nickel in there but he can jump out to corner, so that gives us some flexibility. The other guy who had a good spring until he had to have a procedure done out of caution was Lorenzo Styles Jr. I think there is good depth there, but we're going to need them all."

Day backed off proclaiming that this is the deepest his team has been at corner since he took over as head coach in 2019, but Burke – who is entering his fourth season – did not hesitate to say that this is the deepest and most talented room he's been a part of.

"(This is) probably the best room I've had since I've been here," he said. "The camaraderie is good, we're tight. We do everything together, and the sky's the limit. My job is to just continue to bring the younger guys up and show them what it is and what it means to be on the field and represent BIA (Best In America)."

Ohio State will ultimately rely on the likes of Burke and other upperclassmen in the big moments, but it's the small ones – coming in for a single play or making a spot start if someone is injured – where that capable depth can shine through.

"(It helps us) just knowing that we can rely on them whenever somebody goes down," Burke said. "And (knowing) when they go in there, they're going to do what they have to do."

That top-to-bottom ability to step in and get the job done, giving Ohio State closer to a starting 22 than a starting 11, has Burke excited for what the defense can do this season.

"We're going to be amazing," Burke said. "We have a lot of new installs. A lot of new fronts. The guys are moving around. We might have four or five defensive backs on the field. A lot of different looks. I'm excited for what we're going to do. We're going to dictate what the offense can do this year."

## Kelly Honors Hayes With Opening Formation

Ohio State's offense came onto the field for the spring game in a surprising manner, with Howard under center, tight end Patrick Gurd behind him as the fullback and flanked by tailbacks TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins in the T-formation.

Henderson ultimately received the carry, taking it for 3 yards (though without the cloud of dust). Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly confirmed after the game that it was a nod to legendary coach Woody Hayes, whose offenses with the Buckeyes utilized the formation.

"If it was good enough for Woody, we're going to steal it," Kelly said after the game, "I think our players had a lot of fun practicing that and doing some different things."

For fans of hard-nosed football, Kelly added that it was not a one-off appearance in the exhibition. Even if Ohio State's base offense doesn't run out of the T-formation, it's something he'd like to continue utilizing, especially in short-yardage situations that have consistently challenged the Buckeyes in recent years."

## PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

**Redshirt sophomore quarterback Devin Brown:** Entering the spring as the clear second-string quarterback in the minds of most, it's been an impressive run of practices for Brown (6-3, 213), who has turned what appeared to be a clear-cut decision into a legitimate quarterback battle with Kansas State transfer Will Howard (6-4, 237).

Brown – like Howard – has had his share of ups and downs through 15 spring practices, including the spring game in which he threw just seven passes for 66 yards while adding the team's lone passing touchdown on the day, but he has generally been the most consistent signal caller for the Buckeyes over the past few weeks.

He particularly stood out in front of fans at Ohio State's Student Appreciation Day practice on March 30, delivering several deep balls while drawing a strong reaction from those in attendance. If Brown can make it clear to spectators that he is not to be forgotten in this battle, his coaches are unlikely to forget about him either as he continues a pivotal offseason.

**Junior defensive end Caden Curry:** Curry (6-3, 260) has been a consistent presence this spring for Ohio State, though perhaps more as part of a unit along with the rest of the defensive line rather than an individual standout. But a rising tide lifts all boats, and Curry has been among those who have raised their profiles in the trenches.

There is no question that seniors Jack Sawyer (6-5, 260) and JT Tuimoloua (6-5, 269) will remain as Ohio State's starters at defensive end, but Curry – by being a consistent thorn in the side of the offensive line over the past few weeks, including two tackles and a sack in the spring game – has ensured he will remain a constant in the Buckeyes' rotation on the edge.

"Early on this season, we may play a lot more young players in a situation to make sure we get to the stretch," defensive line coach Larry Johnson said. "I think our older players now understand what we're up against. The thing I will say to you is that we don't have jealousy in the room. We don't have that. We have a bunch of guys that want to win, and if you can help us win, I want you to help us win. That's the attitude in the room."

**Junior linebacker C.J. Hicks:** Hicks (6-1, 193) entered this spring facing an uphill battle, tasked with usurping fellow linebacker Sonny Styles (6-4, 235) – a returning starter from last season, albeit at safety – to see significant time on the field this season.

Time will tell if Hicks will have done enough to beat out Styles for a starting job, though he appeared to take a step closer by starting the spring game at linebacker and finishing with a team-high eight tackles.

But with consistent play over the past few weeks, even putting himself in the conversation as he has done this spring is a significant leap for Hicks as he risked falling between the cracks if he did not stand out in a crowded defense. Even if he does not beat out Styles, it's becoming obvious that Hicks has earned a role somewhere on this defense.

"I think C.J. Hicks has done a phenomenal job," linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said. "You have to keep pressing him and making sure he's really tapping into everything he can offer. I think C.J. sees the opportunity. He's certainly making a case to get on the field this fall. I think it's been a really good spring for C.J."

**Sophomore offensive lineman Luke Montgomery:** A starting job seemed in the cards for Montgomery (6-4, 302) this season, and now that the spring has concluded for Ohio State, it appears that role will be at right guard – that is if he can beat out the competition.

Montgomery repped nearly the entire spring at right guard, with an expected battle at right tackle instead giving way to a relatively drama-free spring on the right side of the line with senior Josh Fryar (6-5, 320) taking the majority of work at right tackle. While it does not mean Montgomery can't still factor in at tackle through the summer and into fall camp, Ohio State's focus has clearly been on developing him on the interior, and it's paying dividends thus far as both his coaches and teammates have been impressed with Montgomery's work at right guard.

"I go against him every day," said Ohio State defensive tackle Hero Kanu. "This man is strong. He's got basketball feet. It's not like you can just do an inside move. He recovers really fast. He doesn't give up on a play. He's going to go in and watch the film. He's doing that every day. You're seeing it on the field. From practice one to now practice nine, you can see the improvement every day."

But Montgomery's positive spring took a bit of a step back in the spring game, when he was relegated to the second team with Seth McLaughlin starting at center and Carson Hinzman shifting over to right guard. It doesn't mean that Montgomery can't still earn a starting job, but it wasn't the momentum he wanted heading into the long stretch of the offseason.

**Junior safety linebacker Sonny Styles:** Styles had as intriguing a spring as anybody on Ohio State's roster as the former safety made his transition to linebacker. But if you didn't know any better, Styles looked like a veteran of the position.

"I think Sonny has made a really smooth transition to linebacker," Laurinaitis said on April 3. "In the early days you had to work on, and Luke Fickell used to say this to us all the time, he would say, 'Be slow until it's time to be fast in the box.' What that means is, you have to have calm feet. He's so used to breaking and going from safety, you have to slow him down. He's so explosive. He's really gotten his footwork under control, but it's a never-ending process. It's been a really smooth transition for Sonny."

Styles appears to be the favorite to beat out Hicks at Will linebacker, which is a testament to his ability given that it's Hicks natural position while Styles has been training in a significant capacity for only the last few months. But he continued looking the part during the spring game, finishing with six tackles while splitting reps with Hicks.

— Braden Moles





JOSH WINSLOW

**TIME TO SHINE** — Wide receiver Brennen Schramm (34) was among several walk-ons who impressed during the spring game, as he hauled in the team’s only receiving touchdown of the afternoon among his three catches.

“It’s a small part of our offense,” he said. “We won’t be in the (T-formation) 21 times in one game, but we may get it in some short-yardage situations. You’ve got a half a yard to get, you’re trying to get your big guys in the game.”

**Walk-Ons Have Their Moment**

Walk-on players have their place at Ohio State, helping to build up depth during practice and fill out the roster for the Buckeyes. But rarely are they afforded the opportunity to see significant time on the field, let alone in front of over 80,000 fans.

That was the case during the spring game, when several walk-on players for the Buckeyes — including running back TC Caffey, wide receivers David Adolph and Brennen Schramm, and safeties Dianté Griffin and Brenten “Inky” Jones — had standout performances at Ohio Stadium, helping lead the offense to a win over the defense.

Adolph, a junior out of Dublin, Ohio, wound up as Ohio State’s leading receiver, hauling in four receptions for 50 yards, while Schramm, a sophomore out of Medina, Ohio, had the lone touchdown reception on the day, an 11-yarder from Devin Brown.

Jones was on the receiving end of a pass from Lincoln Kienholz, though it was to the detriment of the offense as it was one of

two interceptions on the day from Kienholz. Jones is a junior out of Steubenville, Ohio. Later in the second half, Caffey — who is in line for a bigger role this season after an impressive spring — scored one of the team’s four rushing touchdowns.

The walk-ons under center even got their chance to play, and some in more unusual fashion. Chad Ray, a senior from Dublin, completed one of his two passes for 11 yards, while junior Mason Maggs — also out of Dublin — did not throw the ball but instead came in for a two-quarterback set, running the ball twice for 10 yards.

But maybe the biggest highlight of the day — as has been the case in Ohio State’s history — came from a Griffin.

Dianté Griffin, a junior from Lima, Ohio, and the grandson of two-time Heisman Trophy-winning running back Archie Griffin, intercepted the final pass of the exhibition off the arm of Air Noland, taking the pick all the way to the end zone to cap the spring game off with a bang, even if it didn’t count in the official scoring.

It was the second consecutive year that someone from that family scored, after Archie Griffin got into last year’s spring game and scored on a 25-yard rushing touchdown, his first in Ohio Stadium since 1975.

“I guess so,” Day said when asked if it’s now a spring game tradition for a Griffin to score a touchdown. “That was wild.”

**Spring Game Box Score**

**Scarlet 34, Gray 33**

April 13, 2024 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4 | F  |
|-------------------|---|----|----|---|----|
| GRAY              | 9 | 8  | 9  | 7 | 33 |
| SCARLET           | 3 | 10 | 14 | 7 | 34 |

**First Quarter**

SCAR — Fielding, 32-yard field goal, 3:39.

**Second Quarter**

SCAR — Fielding, 32-yard field goal, 6:58.

SCAR — Schramm, 11-yard pass from Brown, 1:33.

**Third Quarter**

SCAR — Peoples, 8-yard rush, 6:51.

SCAR — Williams-Dixon, 22-yard rush, 4:21.

**Fourth Quarter**

SCAR — Caffey, 4-yard rush, 7:22.

Att. — 80,012

Weather — Sunny and cool

Scarlet had ball on offense entire game. Gray was on defense entire game.

**\*Gray was awarded points for certain benchmarks, including touchdowns, takeaways, sacks, three-and-outs and forced punts.**

**Individual Statistics**

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: Williams Dixon 11-75; Noland 5-42; Peoples 10-36; Judkins 4-31; Brown 3-24; Henderson 4-18; Caffey 5-16; Maggs 2-10; Egbuka 1-4; Smith 1-4; Gurd 1-3; Kienholz 4-(-5); Howard 1-(-6); Sayin 5-(-9).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: Sayin 10-17-1-85-0; Kienholz 10-17-2-71-0; Howard 9-13-0-77-0; Noland 5-7-1-47-0; Brown 5-7-0-66-1; Ray 1-2-0-11-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: Adolph 4-50; Egbuka 4-47; Schramm 3-31; Peoples 3-23; Antwi 3-19; Caffey 2-26; Kacmarek 2-24; Mitchell 2-22; Grayes 2-15; Smith 2-12; Gurd 2-11; Henderson 2-9; Ballard 2-7; Middleton 1-18; Scott Jr. 1-18; Williams-Dixon 1-7; Thurman 1-5; Judkins 1-5; Tate 1-5; Rodgers 1-3.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: McGuire 3-33.3-46.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** — GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** — GRAY: Griffin 1-29; McClain 1-7; Jones 1-0; Simpson-Hunt 1-0. SCAR: None.

**SACKS** — GRAY: Melton 1-12; Moore 1-9; Kanu 1-7; Curry 1-6; Sawyer 1-6; Houston 1-4. SCAR: None.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** — GRAY: Moore 1.5-10; Melton 1-12; Kanu 1-7; Curry 1-6; Sawyer 1-6; Houston 1-4; Jones 1-2; Mathews Jr. 1-2; Velazquez 0.5-0. SCAR: None.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** GRAY: Hicks 5-3-8; Jones 4-3-7; Scott Jr. 4-2-6; Styles 3-3-6; Houston 3-3-6; Powers 4-1-5; Hawkins Jr. 4-1-5; Bonsu 3-2-5; Simpson-Hunt 4-0-4; Mathews Jr. 3-1-4; Stover 3-1-4; Melton 3-1-4; Reese 0-4-4; Igbinosun 2-1-3; Griffin 2-1-3; McClain 1-2-3; Rudzinski 2-0-2; McDonald 2-0-2; Sawyer 2-0-2; Hancock 2-0-2; Downs 2-0-2; Kanu 1-1-2; Moore 1-1-2; Curry 1-1-2; Lockhart 1-1-2; Jackson Jr. 0-2-2; Velazquez 0-2-2; Hamilton 1-0-1; Burke 1-0-1; Simon 1-0-1; Mickens 1-0-1; Smith Jr. 0-1-1; Pace 0-1-1; Prater 0-1-1. SCAR: Team 1-0-1.

**Players In The Game**

GRAY — N/A.

SCAR — N/A.

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# Team Gray Has Bright Day In Spring Game

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State put all five quarterbacks on display, but it was the defensive Team Gray that shone in the spring game despite a 34-33 loss to Team Scarlet, the offense, before 80,012 sun-drenched fans at Ohio Stadium on April 13.

While the offense used the traditional scoring system, the defense earned six points for a touchdown, three points for each takeaway and three-and-out, two points for a sack and one for a forced punt. The defense benefited greatly with four picks and six sacks.

Kansas State transfer Will Howard took the first snap of the game for the Scarlet, marking him as the heir apparent to Kyle McCord – for now. He was 9 of 13 for 77 yards.

Howard and sophomore Devin Brown played only the first half. Alabama freshman transfer Julian Sayin and redshirt freshman Lincoln Kienholz quarterbacked both halves while freshman Air Noland took his first snaps in the third quarter.

New offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, the former UCLA head coach, paid homage to Woody Hayes by lining the backfield in a T-formation with running back

TreVeyon Henderson taking the handoff on the first play of the game.

## First Half

Howard completed his first three passes for 27 yards but misfired on a ball to the back of the end zone to Carnell Tate. The drive stalled when Jack Sawyer sacked Howard on a third-and-7 from the Gray 32, forcing a punt and a 3-0 lead for the Gray.

Kienholz took over on the next series, and heralded receiver Jeremiah Smith – the No. 1 overall recruit in the 2024 class – made his first catch for 6 yards to the their own 15, but a Mitchell Melton sack and a punt made it 6-0 for Gray. Smith had two catches for 12 yards for the game, while Melton finished with four tackles.

On the third series, Brown guided the Buckeyes to Jayden Fielding's 32-yard field goal to make it 6-3 with 3:39 left in the first quarter. On the next possession, Sayin had a 17-yarder to TC Caffey, but on third-and-7 from midfield, freshman defensive end Eddrick Houston sacked him. Following a punt, the Gray led 9-3.

The highlight of the day was the one-handed grab by senior wideout Emeka Egbuka along the right sideline on a throw by Howard for an 18-yard gain to the Gray 14. The secondary stiffened and



JOSH WINSLOW

**BUCKEYE DEBUT** – Ohio State quarterback Will Howard (16) was one of six signal callers who attempted a pass in the spring game, and the Buckeye offense came through with a 34-33 win.

## Spring Scholarship Roster – Offense

| QUARTERBACK |              |     |     |           |
|-------------|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.         | Name         | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 18          | Will Howard  | 6-4 | 237 | Gr./1     |
| 33          | Devin Brown  | 6-3 | 212 | R-So./3   |
| 10          | Julian Sayin | 6-1 | 203 | Fr./4     |

**Other scholarship players:** Lincoln Kienholz (R-Fr.), Air Noland (Fr.)

**Comments:** Much like last year, Ohio State appears to have another quarterback competition on its hands this offseason, this time with Howard and Brown duking it out for the starting role. Many close to the program believed the veteran Howard would emerge as the favorite to assume the starting position at the end of spring, but Brown's strong performance in practice and a 66-yard performance in the spring game, throwing the team's only passing touchdown of the exhibition, has tightened the race. In addition to Howard and Brown, Sayin has turned heads with a strong start to his Buckeye career, allowing him to become the second Ohio State freshman to shed his black stripe this season behind wide receiver Jeremiah Smith. Kienholz and Noland will also provide depth to a crowded and talented quarterback room.

| RUNNING BACK |                    |      |     |           |
|--------------|--------------------|------|-----|-----------|
| No.          | Name               | Ht.  | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 32           | TreVeyon Henderson | 5-10 | 208 | Sr./1     |
| 1            | Quinshon Judkins   | 6-0  | 219 | Jr./2     |
| 20           | James Peoples      | 5-10 | 203 | Fr./4     |

**Other scholarship players:** Sam Williams-Dixon (Fr.)

**Comments:** Under the guidance of new running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, the Buckeyes are poised to boast perhaps the best rushing tandem in the nation with Henderson and Judkins leading the way. Henderson is set to reclaim his role as an explosive home-run hitter, while Judkins has impressed in his first 15 practices with the team, allowing him to lose his black stripe earlier this spring. Ohio State's tailback room did experience a significant loss late in spring camp, however, with Dallan Hayden – the Buckeyes' anticipated third running back – entering the transfer portal. This will allow an opportunity for Peoples and Williams-Dixon to earn some playing time, while walk-on TC Caffey could also carve out a role for himself thanks to a strong

spring.

| WIDE RECEIVER |                |     |     |           |
|---------------|----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.           | Name           | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 2             | Emeka Egbuka   | 6-1 | 205 | Sr./1     |
| 17            | Carnell Tate   | 6-3 | 191 | So./3     |
| 4             | Jeremiah Smith | 6-3 | 215 | Fr./4     |
| 11            | Brandon Inniss | 6-0 | 203 | So./3     |
| 9             | Jayden Ballard | 6-2 | 195 | R-Jr./2   |
| 13            | Bryson Rodgers | 6-2 | 185 | R-Fr./4   |

**Other scholarship players:** Kojo Antwi (R-So.), Kyion Grayes (R-So.)

**Comments:** With all-time Buckeye great Marvin Harrison Jr. off to the NFL, Egbuka fills in as the clear No. 1 wide receiver in Brian Hartline's unit. If healthy, he can once again prove himself as one of the better wideouts in the nation out of the slot. Egbuka will be backed up in the slot by Inniss – who has received praise from teammates and coaches this spring for his marked improvement – while Tate is expected to start on the outside. Joining Tate on the outside could be the sensational freshman Smith, who has dazzled this spring with raw talent and athleticism, while Antwi, Ballard and Grayes can also serve as depth pieces. Five-star freshman Mylan Graham will add more talent to the room when he arrives this summer.

| TIGHT END |                |     |     |           |
|-----------|----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.       | Name           | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 88        | Gee Scott Jr.  | 6-3 | 243 | Gr./1     |
| 89        | Will Kacmarek  | 6-6 | 260 | R-Jr./2   |
| 15        | Jelani Thurman | 6-6 | 258 | R-Fr./4   |

**Other scholarship players:** Bennett Christian (R-So.)

**Comments:** Similar to Egbuka and the wide receiver room, the departure of Cade Stover clears the way for Scott to lead Ohio State's tight end room. He flashed at times in the passing game last season but will look to become a better blocker in his fifth year with the program. Scott's status as the starting tight end this season is not guaranteed, however, as the Ohio University transfer Kacmarek has made his presence felt this spring, leading him to shed his black stripe in early April. Thurman can also be in line for some significant reps due to his sheer size and physicality, while Christian and walk-on Patrick Gurd can also make some

noise in the room. Ohio State will also welcome freshmen Max LeBlanc and Damarion Witten this summer.

| LEFT TACKLE |                    |     |     |           |
|-------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.         | Name               | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 71          | Josh Simmons       | 6-5 | 310 | R-Jr./2   |
| 68          | George Fitzpatrick | 6-6 | 313 | R-So./3   |

| LEFT GUARD |                  |     |     |           |
|------------|------------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.        | Name             | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 74         | Donovan Jackson  | 6-4 | 320 | Sr./1     |
| 67         | Austin Siereveld | 6-5 | 320 | R-Fr./4   |

| CENTER |                 |     |     |           |
|--------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.    | Name            | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 56     | Seth McLaughlin | 6-4 | 305 | 5th-Sr./1 |
| 62     | Joshua Padilla  | 6-4 | 296 | R-Fr./4   |

| RIGHT GUARD |                 |     |     |           |
|-------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.         | Name            | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 75          | Carson Hinzman  | 6-5 | 300 | R-So./3   |
| 51          | Luke Montgomery | 6-5 | 308 | So./3     |

| RIGHT TACKLE |                |     |     |           |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| No.          | Name           | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
| 70           | Josh Fryar     | 6-5 | 320 | 5th-Sr./1 |
| 77           | Tegra Tshabola | 6-6 | 327 | R-So./3   |

**Other scholarship players:** Enokk Vimahi (Gr.), Zen Michalski (R-Jr.), Miles Walker (R-Fr.), Deontae Armstrong (Fr.), Devontae Armstrong (Fr.), Ian Moore (Fr.)

**Comments:** Jackson and Simmons are set to reclaim their roles at left guard and left tackle, respectively, but those are the only two positions that appear to be solidified on Justin Frye's front five. Neither Hinzman nor McLaughlin has been named the starter at center yet, even if McLaughlin appeared to have a slight lead exiting the spring. The Buckeyes have also considered moving Fryar from right tackle to right guard, a move that would leave the starting job outside to either Montgomery or Tshabola, or perhaps have the Buckeyes hunting for a portal addition. But if Fryar stays at tackle, Montgomery would be the presumed starter at right guard, with Tshabola able to push either starter on the right side of the line. Freshman interior lineman Gabe VanSickle will also join the room this summer.

## Spring Scholarship Roster - Defense

## DEFENSIVE END

| No. | Name                 | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|----------------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 33  | Jack Sawyer          | 6-5 | 260 | Sr./1     |
| 44  | J.T. Tuimoloau       | 6-5 | 269 | Sr./1     |
| 97  | Kenyatta Jackson Jr. | 6-6 | 258 | R-So./3   |
| 92  | Caden Curry          | 6-3 | 260 | Jr./2     |

**Other scholarship players:** Mitchell Melton (R-Sr.), Josh Mickens (R-Fr.), Eddrick Houston (Fr.)

**Comments:** Sawyer and Tuimoloau had the chance to go pro but decided to come back for one more season. Both had a strong 2023 season with 6½ and five sacks, respectively. Jackson and Curry were likely to take over as the starters if Sawyer and Tuimoloau left, and both appeared primed to step into that role if needed. But with a longer season due to the expansion of the College Football Playoff, they will be needed more than they were last year as rotational pieces to keep the starters fresh for when it matters most. Melton could also factor in if he's able to stay healthy, something that has been a concern during his time at Ohio State, while Houston has received positive buzz during his first spring. The group will be joined this summer by freshman Dominic Kirks.

## DEFENSIVE TACKLE

| No. | Name            | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|-----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 91  | Tyleik Williams | 6-3 | 327 | Sr./1     |
| 58  | Ty Hamilton     | 6-3 | 295 | R-Sr./2   |
| 93  | Hero Kanu       | 6-5 | 305 | R-So./3   |
| 95  | Tywone Malone   | 6-4 | 301 | R-So./3   |

**Other scholarship players:** Kayden McDonald (So.), Jason Moore (R-Fr.), Will Smith Jr. (R-Fr.), Eric Mensah (Fr.)

**Comments:** With defensive line coach Larry Johnson consistently rotating Williams, Hamilton and the outgoing Mike Hall Jr. last season, the return of Williams and Hamilton essentially gives the Buckeyes a pair of returning starters in the trenches. Williams had a breakout season with 10 tackles for loss while Hamilton registered 4½ tackles for loss, outpacing Hall (two TFLs) despite 76 fewer snaps. Additionally, there is good depth at the position. Johnson has talked up both Moore and McDonald this spring, while Kanu is primed for what could be a breakout season.

## LINEBACKER

| No. | Name       | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 30  | Cody Simon | 6-2 | 235 | Gr./1     |

|    |              |     |     |         |
|----|--------------|-----|-----|---------|
| 6  | Sonny Styles | 6-4 | 235 | Jr./2   |
| 11 | C.J. Hicks   | 6-3 | 233 | Jr./2   |
| 36 | Gabe Powers  | 6-4 | 242 | R-So./3 |

**Other scholarship players:** Kourt Williams II (R-Sr.), Arvell Reese (So.), Nigel Glover (R-Fr.), Payton Pierce (Fr.), Garrett Stover (Fr.)

**Comments:** Simon is the only returner at linebacker who got significant time last season. With Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers leaving for the NFL draft and Styles shifting to linebacker, he has the opportunity to contribute at the position. Hicks has been pushing for playing time for a while now and has impressed this spring, so he could see the field sooner rather than later. Powers has also been solid in the spring, and James Laurinaitis said he would play anyone who proves they deserve to be on the field. With a potentially long season, the depth at this position might be needed.

## CORNERBACK

| No. | Name                 | Ht.  | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|----------------------|------|-----|-----------|
| 10  | Denzel Burke         | 6-1  | 193 | Sr./1     |
| 1   | Davison Igbinosun    | 6-2  | 193 | Jr./2     |
| 24  | Jermaine Mathews Jr. | 5-11 | 189 | So./3     |
| 22  | Calvin Simpson-Hunt  | 6-0  | 204 | R-Fr./4   |

**Other scholarship players:** Aaron Scott Jr. (Fr.), Bryce West (Fr.)

**Comments:** Going into last season, the cornerback position might have had the most question marks on the defense with Burke and Hancock coming off down years. But it very quickly has turned into a deep and dependable group after a great year. Burke played lockdown defense the entire year with Igbinosun performing well on the other side of the field. Mathews ended up starting against Penn State in his freshman year and didn't look overmatched, establishing himself as a capable backup and rotational player for this season. Simpson-Hunt could also be a player to watch in his second year in Columbus, while Scott has impressed in spring practice.

## ADJUSTER

| No. | Name           | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 2   | Caleb Downs    | 6-0 | 205 | So./3     |
| 25  | Malik Hartford | 6-3 | 194 | So./3     |

**Other scholarship players:** Jaylen McClain (Fr.)

**Comments:** This is a young position for the

Buckeyes, but with the way Downs performed last season when he was at Alabama, it could be one of the strongest. He was a true freshman All-American, finishing the season with 107 tackles, two interceptions and three pass breakups. Safeties coach Matt Guerrieri said coaching him is like coaching an NFL player since he has so much knowledge of the game and is so physically gifted. Hartford was good enough last season to get some time early in the season, and he will only be better off with another year of experience.

## BANDIT

| No. | Name          | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|---------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 8   | Lathan Ransom | 6-1 | 210 | Gr./1     |
| 3   | Ja'Had Carter | 6-1 | 205 | Gr./1     |

**Other scholarship players:** Jayden Bonsu (R-Fr.)

**Comments:** Ransom suffered a foot injury late last season, and he decided that his NFL dreams would have to wait another year. The problem of giving up big plays that plagued him in 2022 didn't continue into last season, but he didn't play against Michigan, which was one of the teams that exposed the issue. There is not as much depth here as at other secondary positions after Carter struggled in his first season in Columbus, but if Ransom can stay healthy, there's no reason he should come off the field for the Buckeyes. The group will be joined this summer by freshman Leroy Roker.

## NICKELBACK

| No. | Name                | Ht. | Wt. | Cl./Elig. |
|-----|---------------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 7   | Jordan Hancock      | 6-1 | 195 | Sr./1     |
| 26  | Cedrick Hawkins Jr. | 6-0 | 185 | R-Fr./4   |

**Other scholarship players:** Lorenzo Styles Jr. (R-Jr.), Miles Lockhart (Fr.)

**Comments:** Hancock took over at the nickel spot last season, and while there was a learning curve early on, he ended up filling the position well. Now, with a year of experience in Jim Knowles' defense, he should be even better after a season in which he had 41 tackles, two sacks, four pass breakups and a pick-six along with two forced fumbles. Styles took a redshirt last season to make the adjustment changing from a wide receiver to a cornerback and has played well backing up Hancock this spring. But don't count out Hawkins or Lockhart, both of whom have the talent to work their way up the depth chart.

denied Howard on three throws to the end zone, the first two to Smith and the third to Egbuka, resulting in another 32-yard field goal and a 9-6 score with 6:58 left in the half.

Redshirt freshman Calvin Simpson-Hunt picked off Kienholz for a 12-6 Gray lead before Brown rallied. He hit walk-on David Adolph for 25 yards and connected back-to-back with another walk-on, Brennen Schramm, the second an 11-yard slant for the offense's first touchdown with 1:33 left in the half for a 13-12 Scarlet lead.

Just before the half, freshman Jaylen McClain picked off Sayin at the defense's 32 and returned it all the way but it was blown dead, resulting in three points for a 15-13 Gray lead.

Kienholz had the Scarlet on the 21 with 20 seconds left but took a 9-yard sack by redshirt freshman Jason Moore to give the Gray a 17-13 lead, and three plays later Fielding missed a 48-yard field goal to the right at the end of the half.

Brown completed 5 of 7 passes for 66 yards with a touchdown. Egbuka (four catches for 47 yards), Henderson (four carries for 18 yards) and Ole Miss transfer Quinshon Judkins (four carries for 31

yards) did not play in the second half.

## Second Half

The defense continued building momentum out of the half, forcing a stop on the offense's Sayin-led drive, and Kienholz was then intercepted by walk-on safety Brenton "Inky" Jones, and the Gray went up 20-13.

Sayin then took the offense on an eight-play, 56-yard drive capped by an 8-yard run by freshman James Peoples to tie it 20-20.

Noland then entered for the first time. His first completion was to sophomore Kojo Antwi. Noland later scrambled for 17 yards, which led to a 22-yard touchdown run by freshman Sam Williams-Dixon to make it 27-20 for the Scarlet with 4:21 left in the third.

The defense got three-and-out stops on the next two series to close to within 27-26 going into the fourth quarter before Caffey ran up the middle 4 yards for a touchdown to extend the advantage to 34-26 with 7:22 left. During the drive, Noland had a 13-yard pass to walk-on Joop Mitchell, and Williams-Dixon ran for 15.

Defensive linemen Hero Kanu and Caden Curry got sacks on the next series

for a 34-30 score, and on the final play of the game, Noland was intercepted at the goal line by Dianté Griffin, the grandson of legendary Ohio State running back Archie Griffin. The play was blown dead as he raced for a pick-six. The defense got three points rather than six for the one-point final.

## Notes

Sayin led the Buckeyes with 85 passing yards, going 10 of 17 along the way with one interception. Kienholz finished 10 of 17 for 71 yards, Noland added 47 yards on 5-of-7 passing, and walk-on Chad Ray had 11 yards on one completion. ... Alabama transfer Seth McLaughlin started at center with last season's snapper, Carson Hinzman, at right guard. ... Adolph had a team-high 50 receiving yards on four catches, while 20 Buckeyes finished with at least one reception. ... Williams-Dixon led the rushing attack with 75 yards on 11 carries, while Noland added 42 yards and Peoples rushed for 36. ... Linebacker C.J. Hicks had a team-high eight tackles, while Jones finished with seven stops and a tackle for loss. ... The defense finished with nine tackles for loss, with nine players picking up at least half a stop for loss.

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## BSB Quotebook: Scarlet 34, Gray 33

**Senior offensive lineman Donovan Jackson on where he thinks the team is as a whole coming out of spring practice:** "In terms of spring, I would say we like what we put on tape, but there's a lot of things that we don't like that we put on tape. It's spring ball. It's not the end all be all. There's still a lot of things that we have to improve on, but in terms of the plays we ran today, we executed some of them but there's still a lot of things that we need to improve on."

**Senior cornerback Denzel Burke on what he has thought of fifth-year quarterback Will Howard in the spring:** "He's a good quarterback. Makes good decisions. He's a leader, he's a vet, and he makes good decisions with the ball. The sky is the limit for him. The DBs, we clown him sometimes. He's big, like Josh Allen with his size. We're really excited to have him on our team, and his pocket presence is amazing. He feels really comfortable back there."

**Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly on how freshman quarterback Julian Sayin did in the spring as an early enrollee:** "Julian is a very fast processor. He really thinks very, very quickly on his feet. He makes really quick decisions. He doesn't stick on reads, he can progress and he sees things really well for a young player. Not having been exposed to a lot of college defenses – and especially what Jim (Knowles) does. Jim can make a young freshman quarterback cry with some of the stuff he does, but I never saw that with Jules, and it's been impressive his ability to retain."

**Head coach Ryan Day on why the young quarterbacks had so many short completions:** "You try to get into a rhythm for them to get some completions because it all is happening fast, and that's kind of how it works. When you're doing everything for the first time, there's certain things that you're learning and growing and you just want to make things easier for them. But I think overall, with all the guys, I think we at least got some snaps on film."

**Jackson on what it's like working with Kelly:** "It's really fun going through walk-throughs. Obviously, I only get the inside-outside zone, but then when I go back on film, I'm like, 'Whoa, we're in a T-formation.' But everything's a lot more fun. All of the guys are buying in, all the guys are having a lot more fun. Coach Kelly brings his own juice to what we have going on, and every day everyone improves off of it."

**Day on the depth at wide receiver and if young players will need to step up there with the longer season:** "When you have Emeka (Egbuka) and Carnell (Tate), and then Jayden Ballard, Jeremiah (Smith), then you get into Bryson Rodgers, who has done some really good things this spring. I know he had a couple tough plays today, but we think he can really help us next year. We're missing Brandon Inniss. He was having a lot of momentum and



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BEST MAN WINS — Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly (left) came out on top over defensive coordinator Jim Knowles (right) in the spring game on April 13, with the offense earning a 34-33 victory at Ohio Stadium.**

then there was a procedure. We felt like, out of caution, we had to get it done. We didn't want it to linger, so we did that. We'll need him to step up in a big way. We're going to need a couple more guys to step up to build that depth there, because we do have some really good players, but we're going to need them all. It's important that some of those younger guys do step up."

**Burke on who won the battle between the wide receivers and the cornerbacks:** "We definitely won. I know y'all see little highlight tapes, little clips of practice that always just show the receivers winning. But for the majority of spring ball, BIA, we were dominant. We were dominant today."

**Burke on his impressions of Smith and how hard he is to cover in practices:** "He's a generational player. I'm really glad he's on our team, and he's going to help us win games this year. He's a really great player. He makes a lot of great contested catches. He's still young, but the way he handles himself, he's already a pro. He's just helping us get better. He's a different type of player than I've seen in my time here. I feel like he's on a train to be one of the best ever."

**Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles on the depth at safety and how redshirt freshman Jayden Bonsu and freshman Jaylen McClain have done this spring:** "Our depth

was really down at safety this spring because you had Lathan (Ransom), Ja'Had (Carter), Malik (Hartford) and then Lorenzo (Styles Jr.) out, so it opened up opportunities. Bonsu is a guy who really got a lot of reps and you saw him improve. Then McClain, I think, is a great plus. He is a guy that has football intelligence. He's picked it up. Of those incoming freshmen who still should be in high school, he's a guy you're going to point to and you can see right now he's going to be a player."

**Knowles on if linebacker C.J. Hicks has made the strides he needed to this spring to get playing time in the fall:** "I think C.J. has shown that he has talent, and I think it's my job to put him in the best situations for him, because he can be a force. He's much better when he's blitzing or he's directed because he's able to use his athletic ability, but he has certainly shown he's going to be able to help this defense."

**Knowles on how a running quarterback can impact the preparation for his defense:** "It's a ton. It changes everything you do on defense. You see it everywhere, from the NFL on down. If you have a quarterback who can make plays with his feet, your scheme better be designed to take that away and account for it. It changes the way you look at everything when you're game planning."

# Sayin Working Into QB Mix In First Spring

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

In Ohio State's extensive history, just four quarterbacks have started games for the Buckeyes as true freshmen.

The first was Art Schlichter, who completed 49.7 percent of his passes for 1,250 yards, four touchdowns and 21 interceptions, still a school single-season record, as the Buckeyes finished 7-4-1. The next true freshman starter under center was 30 years later when Terrelle Pryor took the reins in 2008 and started nine games. His outing went better than Schlichter's. He tossed for 1,311 yards on a 60.6 percentage, 12 touchdowns and four picks while adding 631 yards on the ground.

Once Pryor's run with the Buckeyes was over, Braxton Miller – then a bright-eyed freshman – took over in 2011 after three games, throwing for 1,159 yards, 13 touchdowns and four interceptions with a 54.1 completion percentage in Ohio State's first losing season (6-7) since 1988. Miller added 715 yards on the ground.

Since Miller started 10 games in that ill-fated campaign, just one true freshman quarterback – Kyle McCord, one game in 2021 – has started a game for Ohio State. But based on the way this spring has developed, that counter may be reset sooner rather than later.

Freshman quarterback Julian Sayin, who enrolled at Alabama in January before transferring to Ohio State following the retirement of Nick Saban, lost his black stripe on April 8 following the Buckeyes' ninth spring practice. In doing so, he became the first freshman signal caller at Ohio State – a list that includes the likes of J.T. Barrett, Joe Burrow, Dwayne Haskins and C.J. Stroud, among others, dating back to Urban Meyer's arrival – to enroll early and lose his black stripe in his first spring.

"He's been in there competing and he's making plays," head coach Ryan Day said on April 10. "The guys know. A lot of times with the black stripe, it's the players. They know. They see it. A guy makes a play or shows up over an extended period of time.

"But nine practices in, you can see that he was making a lot of throws and in big spots, even against the ones. The play speaks for itself. Usually when you get your black stripe off, it's because you've earned the respect of the team, and I think he's done that."

It puts Sayin – a five-star who threw for 7,824 yards and 85 touchdowns in high school – on an intriguing path, and one few would have expected in his first few months at Ohio State.

The Buckeyes brought in Kansas State transfer Will Howard to compete with Devin Brown for the starting job in what appeared, at least in the early spring months, to be a two-man race. Howard brought several years of starting experience from his last stop, while Brown is the longest-tenured quarterback in Ohio State's room, set to enter his third season

with the team.

But with an up-and-down spring from both Howard and Brown and Sayin impressing in practice sessions open to the media – not to mention the strong endorsement of his coaches and teammates – Day acknowledged that Sayin is absolutely a contender to be under center.

"He's in the mix. He is," Day said. "(Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly) really rolls them. It doesn't matter if it's the ones, twos and threes, you get an opportunity to see what guys look like. I think sometimes maybe when you're young, you get the three work, and sometimes it can look like a mess out there. This has been a really good sample size to figure out where guys are at. But Julian's going to compete his tail off and he'll continue to do that and he's got a very bright future. He's going to have a really good summer."

Sayin has impressed his teammates and coaches not only with his throwing and dual-threat ability, which was evident in his strong outing during Ohio State's Student Appreciation Day practice on March 30, but with his preparation when not on the practice field. Brown said that Sayin, along with fellow freshman Air Noland, have both shown strong attention to detail since they arrived on campus in January.

"They're doing well," Brown said on March 4. "They're both trying to figure everything out and also push each other at the same time. That first year, there's a lot going on. It's going to be funny to see when they come out here for spring ball for the first time and the bullets are actually flying how different it is than high school, but they've been doing a really good job.

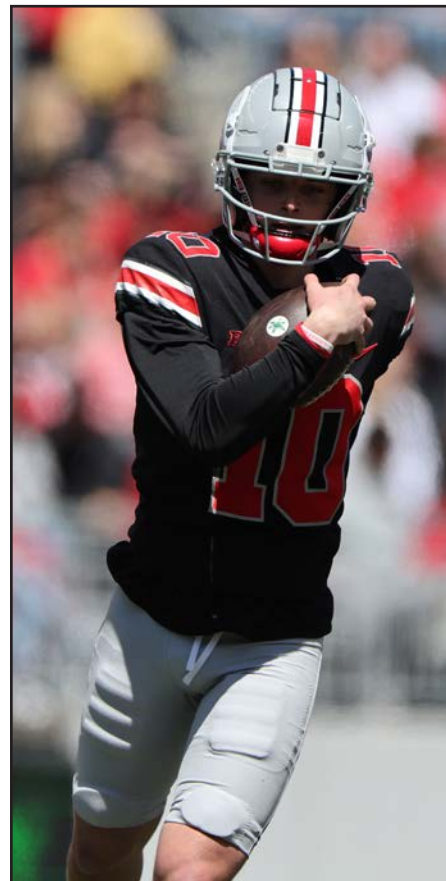
"Their attention to detail in the quarterback room has been a lot better than I've seen in a long time and any quarterbacks that I've ever seen before."

Day said the remainder of the spring and going into the summer, the focus for Sayin will be on improving his strength, maturity and physicality, among other factors, and adding to his overall experience as he continues to go through practice.

"He has a good plan when he gets out there," Day said of Sayin. "He doesn't want to get his hand held. I've been impressed with his approach. Like I said before, he's got a really, really bright future. How fast he gets on the field will be just kind of up to him."

But while Day said Sayin's in-game snaps will come as soon as he is ready, there may be a need for him to get up to speed sooner rather than later. Day and Kelly are hoping to utilize the quarterback run more this season, and as it has become apparent in recent seasons with injuries to Brown and Justin Fields, that can take a toll on signal callers, leading to the backup or even third-stringer getting into the contest for important snaps.

"The mindset for (Sayin) is that he needs to be ready to go play at Oregon," Day said. "He's got to be ready to go play at Penn State. He's got to go be ready to play against The Team Up North. He's got



JOSH WINSLOW

**SAYIN' THERE'S A CHANCE — Ohio State freshman quarterback Julian Sayin has worked himself into the mix of the quarterback battle with a strong spring, according to head coach Ryan Day.**

to be ready to play for the Big Ten and the national championship.

"That's in his mind, because we know the last time the national championship was won, we were on to quarterback three. With the quarterbacks having the ability to run – we haven't done that a lot here. Justin was probably the last one and boy, he really kind of limped into the last couple games because of that, and so we're going to need guys.

"This year, we're going to (run the quarterback) with Chip, so we need depth in that room. His mindset's got to be that, 'I'm playing (this) year,' and if he's the best available at the time then he's going to play."

## Up In The Air

But with over four months left before the start of fall camp, no decisions have been made regarding the depth chart and where Brown, Howard and Sayin – as well as Lincoln Kienholz and Noland – are situated. Even with a muted spring, Howard remains the likeliest option to be under center against Akron on Aug. 31, and while this was not the explosive spring practice some had hoped for from the transfer, Day has seen plenty he likes from Howard.

"One thing about Will is he's working really hard," Day said. "He's in the building early. He's in the building late. He's putting a lot of work in. You can just see that. I think the guys see that. And another

part of all those quarterbacks is, what do the guys think? What do the receivers think? What does the offensive line think? I think he's done a really good job of trying to win those guys over. I think all the quarterbacks have, but you definitely see the hard work there. You see the experience and you see the ability. I think every practice that he's out there, he's learning the offense and feeling more comfortable with it."

Brown has also had his moments, connecting on a handful of deep balls in scrimmages open to the media and arguably turning in the most consistent spring among Ohio State's five scholarship signal callers. But even with three or four quarterbacks capable of being under center next season, Day said the staff has yet to begin zeroing in on a definitive starter.

"I don't think we've narrowed it down," Day said. "But you're seeing guys make certain plays and certain things that are showing up in practice. As we start to get into some of the move-it stuff and you get into situational things, you're starting to just see commonalities. These guys bring great things to the table. Each guy brings either an experience or a skill set that's different from the others. The good news is they all can move, and that's certainly made an impact on the run game and the pass game. There are good things there.

"There are still things that they're improving on. But you're seeing some separation. I wouldn't say that I'm ready to name a starter or anything like that, but there's been good competition and guys have made plays. But I think ultimately what we're looking for is that consistency over time."

Although Day said he did not regret how last year's quarterback competition was handled, with McCord not named starter over Brown until three weeks into the season, he said the remainder of the spring and then leading into the summer should offer a measure of where Ohio State's quarterbacks are heading into fall camp. That should help the staff to narrow down potential options, whether that be Howard, Brown or even Sayin.

"I think the way that it all shook out, I felt like it was a battle even going up until the first game," Day said of last season. "Then it wasn't clear-cut even until we got into a few games. But I think you just keep getting these reps and you just keep compiling these reps and you figure out, as guys get into the situations, how they handle it.

"I think (the spring game) will be another barometer to figure out where guys are at, a good opportunity for some of these guys to get out there and play – Lincoln and Julian, but then also Devin and Will. The more reps these guys get in those types of environments, you see what it looks like and then they grow from there. You're trying to see where they're at, but you're also trying to project where they can be as we head into the summer."

# Smith, Downs As Advertised During Spring Practice

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since head coach Ryan Day assumed head coaching duties from Urban Meyer in 2019, perhaps no team has possessed as much talent and hype as this year's 2024 squad. The Buckeye roster is loaded with NFL-ready veterans and surging newcomers this spring, a unique collection of talent that those within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center are excited to see take shape as the offseason progresses.

"They're as close to NFL players and pro players as I've been around," Day said after Ohio State's first spring practice on March 5. "They're very, very competitive. They can't wait to get the pads on. It's fun to be around guys like that."

This elite talent was on full display this spring, when a number of Buckeyes turned heads throughout the 15-practice schedule, all culminating in a 34-33 win for the Scarlet team in the spring game held at Ohio Stadium on April 13.

Ohio State's defense showed it was capable of matching – maybe even exceeding – the production it had last season, with the unit's collection of returning starters such as Denzel Burke, JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer, among others, along with newcomer Caleb Downs all coming together to flash during practices made available to the media this spring.

The offense was no slouch, either, with the Buckeyes' five-man quarterback room developing chemistry with returning wideouts Emeka Egbuka, Brandon Inniss, Carnell Tate and freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith, as well as the dynamic duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins proving their worth as one of the premier rushing tandems in the nation.

In the end, while the scoreboard may not have indicated it, Jim Knowles' defense earned final bragging rights heading into summer camp with a strong performance in the spring game, as the unit accounted for six sacks and four interceptions on the day.

With 15 practices now in the rearview, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look back at the players who stood out the most this spring while also keeping an eye on some of the top position battles to look out for as the Buckeyes continue into the offseason.

## Top Spring Offensive Player: Jeremiah Smith

It's never easy for a freshman with a boatload of hype surrounding him entering his college career to match those lofty expectations, especially in the early going. But Smith may have exceeded them this spring.

Smith, who entered the program as the top-ranked player in the entire 2024 recruiting class, instantly garnered the attention of on-looking media during the first spring practice on March 5 due to his imposing physique and raw athleticism. His intangibles not only caught the eye of local media early on this spring, but also his teammates and coaches, who gushed over the 6-3, 215-pound freshman's already polished skill set.

"He's a freak," quarterback Devin Brown said March 4. "He's going to be next level. That guy handles things the right way, does everything right in the weight room. I was throwing with him yesterday, and every time I throw with him it's like, 'Jeez, this guy's a stud.' He's going to be a freak. He's just so smooth. He's a big kid. He could snag it literally anywhere. He was making a couple of one-handers yesterday. This kid's just freaky."

Smith's abilities were on full display throughout the spring, but he most notably dazzled during Ohio State's Student Appreciation Day held on March 30. In the 90-minute open practice that included several 11-on-11 drills held in front of fans, Smith was the unquestioned top performer of the day with a number of impressive catches. His most notable snag occurred when Brown found Smith on a deep ball and made the play despite coverage from Burke and Downs.

Day said after Student Appreciation Day that Smith possesses a unique work ethic and maturity at wide receiver – traits that many others in the program have also used to describe Smith this spring – putting him in prime position to crack the starting lineup this season.

"Jeremiah has really stepped in," Day said. "He got his black stripe off real quick. He has a great approach. I'm going to be careful what I say, but he's certainly been a pleasure to watch, and we're all very excited for his future. If he continues on the path he's on, he's going to play a lot of football and will certainly have a chance to start as well."

Smith – who was also seen making an acrobatic one-handed catch in the end zone over cornerback Davison Igbinosun in a video posted on Twitter on April 6 – had a quiet outing in the spring game, hauling in just two catches for 12 yards. But his overall performance this spring still gives him momentum heading into the summer as he attempts to break into the starting lineup.

Regardless of where he ends up on the depth chart, those who witnessed Smith operate in practice know he will find his way onto the field in some capacity this season.

"I feel like Jeremiah is a different caliber," Inniss said. "When you watch him, how smooth

he is and the physical capabilities he brings to the game, he has to play. Some way, he has to play."

## Top Spring Defensive Player: Caleb Downs

Like Smith, Downs rose to the occasion amid great expectations this spring, emerging as a consistent and imposing force in the secondary.

Downs, who entered Ohio State in January following a record-breaking freshman season at Alabama, showed his worth as an aggressive and physical safety throughout spring practice. These traits were most evident during Student Appreciation Day, when he made several plays near the line of scrimmage and generated pressure on Ohio State's quarterbacks.

But while his physical tools may have shone throughout the 15 practices, it was his high football IQ and maturity that had coaches and teammates raving about the sophomore the most.

"Caleb has got great football intelligence," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said March 7. "He picks things up quickly, plays like a veteran. The thing you notice about Caleb is, yeah, he still makes mistakes, but he corrects them immediately. That's what you're always looking for out of players. You're going to make mistakes, but can you correct them by the next play? That's what I've seen so far."

"He fit in the first day he entered the building," Burke added that same day. "His film speaks for itself. He already knows the whole defense. He's already out there with the ones with us. He's that guy, and he's going to do a lot of big things for us."

Ohio State safeties coach Matt Guerrieri said Downs' commitment to watching film has helped elevate the unit, motivating some of his teammates to follow suit and perfect their craft in the film room.

"He's really special," Guerrieri said. "First off, he puts the work in. Talent is a God-given thing. But the discipline and skill that you develop over time in your life, he's been able to do that. He's a really disciplined guy. He's the same every day from a mentality standpoint. He's the same every day from a work ethic standpoint. You see that translate to the field."

"He's probably in the film room more than anybody on the entire defense. He puts that type of effort in, and he's done a great job of pushing the envelope with other guys to make sure the standard is that way."

While Downs has received praise since he arrived on campus, he said he has yet to reach his full potential. He listed pass coverage and communication as two areas of his game that he still thinks he needs to improve upon to make him a more well-rounded safety.

"I think I can improve upon what I did well last year and increase on the qualities that I wasn't as elite at last season," Downs said. "Just being better in coverage, being better in the post, being better in my tackling, being a better communicator with my teammates. All that I think I can offer to the team. But at the end of the day, it has to be a team collective to go do what we want to do."

## Spring Most Improved Player: Josh Fryar

Senior offensive lineman Josh Fryar, like many other Ohio State linemen last year, expe-

## Top Performers At The Spring Game

**Sophomore wide receiver David Adolph** - While all eyes were on freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith heading into the spring game, it was the walk-on Adolph who instead stole the show. He was targeted early and often by the Buckeye gunslingers, leading all pass-catchers with four receptions for 50 yards. Adolph's stat line was highlighted by his contested 25-yard catch over two defenders near the end of the second quarter, which set Scarlet up for their first touchdown score of the game.

**Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka** - After being overshadowed for much of the spring by other receivers on the roster, Egbuka made sure to remind Ohio State fans of his talents as a pass catcher during the spring game. Despite not playing a snap in the second half, Egbuka was still among the top performers on offense, ranking second on the team with four catches for 47 yards. He wowed fans with perhaps the flashiest play of the day when he hauled in an impressive one-handed catch near the sideline in the second quarter.

**Junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun** - Igbinosun is known for his physicality and pass-breakup ability, and those traits were on full display early on in the spring game. He put close coverage on sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate on two separate pass attempts and then deflected a pass away from Smith in the end zone, all coming in the first half alone. He finished with three tackles along with the pass breakup.

**Freshman safety Jaylen McClain** - McClain may not make much of an impact at safety this season as he sits behind several veterans, but his presence was felt during the scrimmage. In his first appearance in front of fans at Ohio Stadium, he picked

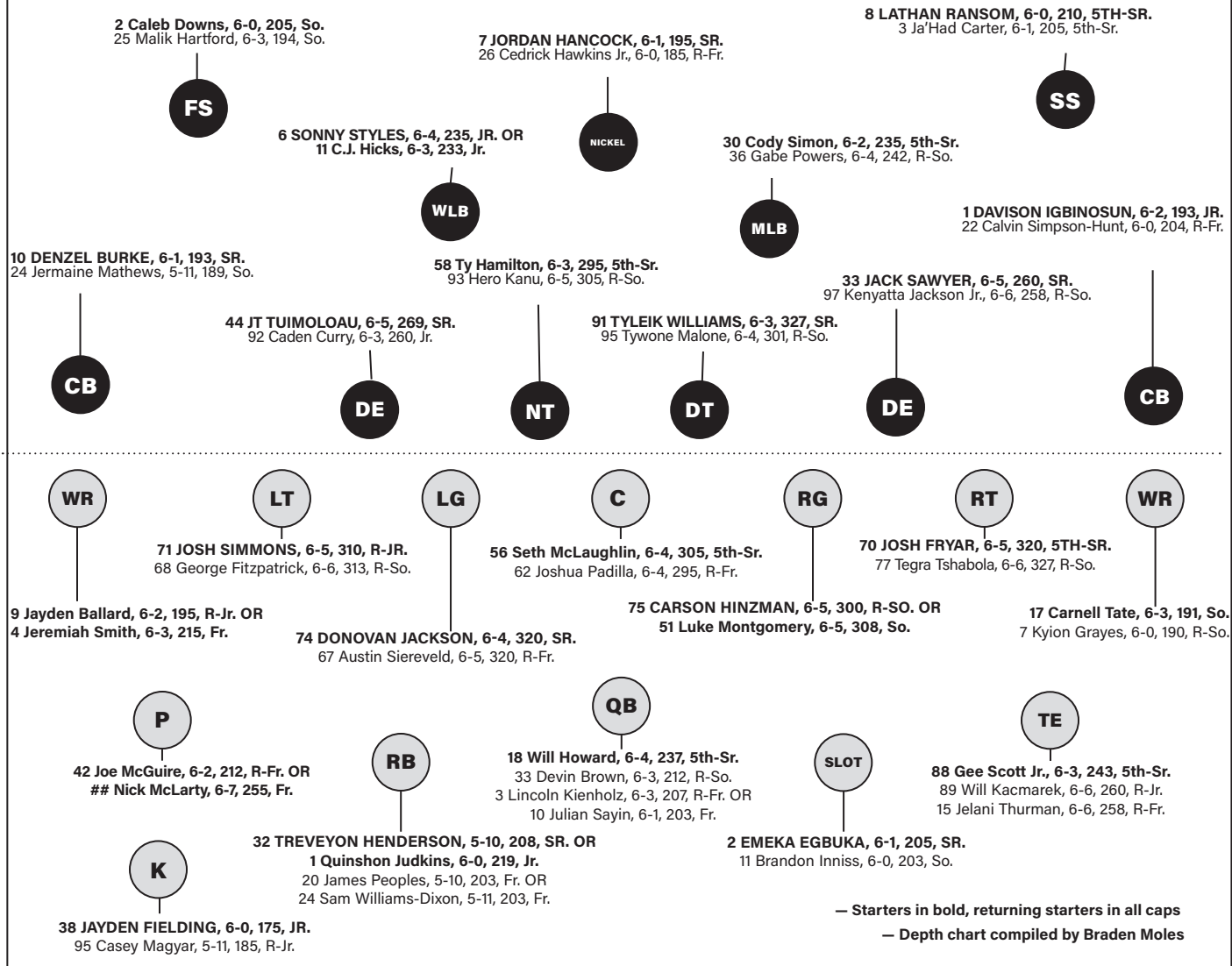
off fellow early enrollee Julian Sayin and tacked on an additional three tackles. It was an impressive performance for the freshman that should give him momentum heading into the summer.

**Sophomore wide receiver Brennen Schramm** - Schramm, a preferred walk-on who shed his black stripe on March 21, played a large role in Scarlet's 34-33 win over Gray. He scored the lone touchdown of the first half off a slant pass from Devin Brown in the second quarter and finished with three catches for 31 yards, putting a cap on a strong spring for the Medina, Ohio, native.

**Freshman cornerback Aaron Scott Jr.** - Scott entered Columbus as the top-rated recruit in Ohio and fifth-best cornerback in the nation for the 2024 class, and those talents were on full display at Ohio Stadium. The Springfield, Ohio, native was all over the field for Jim Knowles' defense, racking up six tackles and adding two pass deflections. He also could have tacked on an interception to that already impressive stat line, with a pass attempt from Sayin nearly reaching the hands of Scott but instead ending up on the turf in the second half.

**Freshman running back Sam Williams-Dixon** - With Dallan Hayden entering the transfer portal, Williams-Dixon made his case to become Ohio State's third-string running back this season after putting together arguably the best offensive performance of the day. After receiving just three carries in the first half, the former three-star tailback exploded in the second half with several impressive runs, a stretch headlined by his 22-yard score in the third quarter where he found a seam through the middle of the defense and gave Scarlet a 27-20 lead. He finished with 75 yards and the score on 11 carries.

OHIO STATE POST-SPRING DEPTH CHART



play fast. Sonny has shown a lot of that.”  
With both Hicks and Styles showing promise at linebacker this spring and combining for 14 tackles in the spring game, Knowles and Laurinaitis seem to still have a competition on their hands at linebacker as they head into the summer.

Laurinaitis, however, sees this potentially ongoing battle as a positive thing for his linebacker room as it looks to build a competitive culture. The former three-time All-America linebacker said it is not only Hicks and Styles who are battling for extensive playing time, but also several reserves such as Arvell Reese and Gabe Powers, both of whom have been praised by Knowles and Laurinaitis for their respective strong springs.

Laurinaitis even said that he envisions a scenario where up to five of his linebackers can receive significant playing time at points this season, which he believes can prove beneficial as they gear up for a potentially extended post-season run.

“Coach Day’s talked about it a lot,” Laurinaitis said. “It’s going to be a long season. I’d say right now, we’re probably at five that I would feel confident rotating out there on the field. That’s going to be week to week. If you display during the week of practice that you’re locked in and somebody else has a bad mental week, well, I can’t reward you with starting if you have six mental errors during the week just because you started last week.”

Other Spots Up For Grabs

- Like last season, the quarterback battle is still an open competition heading into the summer, with Brown, fifth-year senior Will Howard and the surging true freshman Julian Sayin all battling it out for the role. It may have appeared that the starting job belonged to Howard when he first arrived from Kansas State this winter, but that no longer seems to be the case with both Brown and Sayin putting together strong springs. Brown was the first to flash with a few impressive practices in March, but the back end of the 15 sessions belonged to Sayin, who received glowing praise from Day and others for his consistent play and veteran-like qualities.

- Ohio State’s offensive line is still a work in progress, especially on the right side. Sophomore Luke Montgomery and Fryar appear to be the favorites to start at right guard and right tackle, respectively, heading into summer camp. But if Fryar makes the move to the inside, it will leave Montgomery and Tshabola battling on the outside. Tshabola also earned first-team reps at right guard during the spring game.

- Right tackle and right guard are not the only offensive line positions that still need sorting out post-spring. The starting center spot is also still up for grabs, with redshirt sophomore Carson Hinzman and fifth-year senior Seth McLaughlin duking it out for the position. Hinzman started each of Ohio State’s 12 regular-season games last season but was benched in the Cotton Bowl for undisclosed reasons. This prompted Day to seek an upgrade at the position and bring in McLaughlin from Alabama in January. He started every game for the Tide last season but dealt with snapping issues during the team’s Rose Bowl loss to Michigan. While McLaughlin is the presumed favorite to start at center this fall, he split first-team reps with Hinzman throughout the spring.

rienced some inconsistent play in his first full season as the team’s starting right tackle. The veteran Buckeye, who shared that he received a great deal of social media criticism throughout last season, was not afraid to admit that in his only media session this spring.

“I didn’t think it was up to my standard,” Fryar said. “I thought I was thinking too much and not playing.”

To fix those inconsistencies this season, Fryar has taken a different approach, most notably with his physique. While Fryar is listed as 320 pounds this season – seven pounds heavier than last year – he has made significant changes to his diet and cut down on some body fat this offseason, changes that Day thinks have helped his lineman move more freely this spring.

“I think Josh Fryar has really changed his body,” Day said April 10. “His body fat is down. That’s something – his diet and everything – we really hammered during this offseason. That was significant with how quickly his feet are moving, because he’s very sharp at what he does. He’s bending better.”

Day, who said that Fryar had one of the “best off seasons of anybody in the building” earlier this spring, added that his body transformation has helped him emerge as a more versatile piece on the offensive line. That was made evident throughout the spring, where Fryar was seen playing both on the outside at right tackle and inside at right guard, even if tackle seems to be the eventual destination.

“Josh has played some right guard for us this spring to see what that would look like as Tegra (Tshabola) moved out there,” Day said. “We’ve tried some different combinations. I

think Josh can play both positions, but we do feel confident with him right now playing tackle.”

Fryar worked only at right tackle during the spring game but previously said he is gaining more comfort on the offensive line no matter where he plays. He credited that development to his improved conditioning, along with his better understanding of his role on the line, both of which have allowed him to act rather than think on the field.

“Now, I have a better grasp at strength and conditioning, the football part of it, just everything,” Fryar said. “I’m well rounded in that to where I just don’t have to think about it. I just go.”

Fryar said he has grown to like playing at both right guard and right tackle this spring, as each of them requires different skill sets that both he and his coaches think he possesses. But no matter what position he ends up occupying this season, Fryar’s overall improvement is an encouraging sign for the offensive line that is searching for more consistent play in 2024.

Position Battle To Watch: Linebacker

The departures of two-year starters Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg left a significant hole at linebacker for Ohio State this off-season, and as the calendar moves past spring camp and to summer practice, it is still largely unclear who will patch that hole this season.

What is clear is that senior Cody Simon – who experienced a usage increase last season and has assumed first-team reps all spring – will assume the starting role at Mike back-

er. But there are still looming question marks regarding who will end up alongside him at the Will, a position that will either be occupied by C.J. Hicks or the safety-turned-linebacker Sonny Styles.

Hicks took the majority of the starting reps in the first two spring practices made available to the media on March 5 and 7 and also earned praise for the significant improvements he has made to his game since last season, where he was primarily used on special teams.

“I think C.J. Hicks has done a phenomenal job,” linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said April 3. “I think C.J. sees the opportunity, and he’s certainly making the case to get on the field this fall. It’s been a really good spring for C.J. Where he is now, compared to where he was last fall, he’s a much better football player.”

But the competition seemed tighter as the spring rolled on when Hicks began to share first-team reps with Styles, who made the permanent position change from safety to linebacker following the arrival of Downs. Despite not garnering many first-team reps early on this spring, Styles has been lauded for his ability to quickly learn the intricacies and nuances of playing linebacker, something that could put him in position to crack the starting lineup this season.

“It’s a change for Sonny because he’s playing in the box from a low position instead of dropping in,” Knowles said. “Things happen a lot faster. But he’s reacted superbly. He’s a guy who has football intelligence. He understands the scheme. He 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

# Smith Among Early Enrollees Standing Out

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Instead of going through what most high school seniors do in their final semester – worrying about graduating and finding a date to prom – 16 young freshmen decided to enroll at Ohio State early so that they could go through spring workouts with the football team.

Coming to Columbus early likely makes the transition into the season a little easier for the freshmen, getting started with their conditioning and weight lifting to try to get in shape as quickly as possible and being able to experience 15 practices in the spring so that they know some of what to expect for the upcoming season.

Many of the first-year players from the fifth-ranked recruiting class in the 2024 cycle who enrolled early could contribute in some way. They have more time to prove their ability to coaches, and for those who won't contribute, it's more time to develop under the coaches.

Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly has respect for the guys who decide to enroll early since they choose to get thrown into the fire of playing football at Ohio State instead of going through their final semester of high school.

"I am always so impressed with young guys that enroll early, watching how they get acclimated and what they do," Kelly said after the spring game on April 13. "When you look at Julian (Sayin), Air (Noland), and (Jeremiah Smith), they should be in the hot lunch line of their high school and they're out here playing in front of 80,000 people. The whole concept here is we throw them in the deep end and see if they can swim. We don't baby anything."

The biggest standout was none other than five-star wide receiver Smith (6-3, 215), who caught the attention of not only his coaches and teammates but all Ohio State fans who paid attention to the Buckeyes' social media accounts since videos of him making eye-catching receptions were posted seemingly every practice they had.

Five-star quarterback Sayin (6-1, 203), who enrolled early at Alabama before transferring to Ohio State, was another player who performed well enough to make a name for himself in spring camp, and after 15 practices he has firmly put himself in the mix at quarterback alongside Will Howard and Devin Brown.

The Buckeyes will add more players to the locker room over the summer – including wide receiver Mylan Graham (6-1, 185), tight end Max LeBlanc (6-4, 227), defensive lineman Dominic Kirks (6-4, 255), safety Leroy Roker (6-1, 175), offensive lineman Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 315) and tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215) – but for now, the 16 early enrollees are getting a head start on their college careers.

Here is an update from Buckeye Sports Bulletin on how each of the early arrivals have fared in their first spring with the Buckeyes. Players are listed alphabetically.

## OL Deontae Armstrong

The offensive line was one of the few

positions last season where Ohio State had issues. It culminated in a very poor Cotton Bowl performance in which a lack of depth shone through, and the Buckeyes are hoping that adding not just one but two in-state linemen – twins, no less – will help bolster the group.

The first year for Deontae Armstrong, who lined up at left tackle this spring, is going to be about getting to a good size, developing as a player and taking in as much as he can about Ohio State's offense and what Justin Frye wants to see from him. He has already bulked up to 6-6 and 298 pounds since arriving on campus, which is a great place to be as an early enrollee.

## OL Devontae Armstrong

Like his brother, Devontae Armstrong (6-5, 303) is also unlikely to see any significant time on the field this season. This season is going to be all about learning everything he can so that he can be an effective player in the future for the Buckeyes.

He did not suit up for practice the day before the spring game, but he did line up at guard earlier this spring when he participated in drills. While coaches haven't said much about the Armstrong twins this spring, head coach Ryan Day did talk about them when they signed with the Buckeyes in December, and he believes they have a lot to offer the program.

"I feel strongly about the Armstrong twins and the year they had," Day said when they signed in December. "Coming from a great program at (Lakewood, Ohio) St. Edward, what they did as a team this year and they led the way. The guys have been tremendous in terms of their development throughout their high school careers. You're seeing them play their best football and we're very excited for them."

## DL Eddrick Houston

The process of keeping Houston (6-3, 270) committed to the Buckeyes as signing day approached was a stressful one for both Day and defensive line coach Larry Johnson as they fended off schools looking to swoop in at the last minute for the five-star prospect.

When he did sign – after Day left a press conference to take his call – it saved what would have been a tough year on the recruiting trail for the defensive line. Now that he's on campus and has been practicing, Johnson said the freshman is very happy with his choice, but it could be tough for him to get on the field in his first year.

"It's a growth process," Johnson said. "He should be in a classroom and getting ready to go to the prom now. But he's here and he has to go through a growing stage, learn how to play hard. Playing hard in high school and playing hard in college are two different levels. It's full speed ahead. He's got to learn how to do that, and he's got the skill set. He's got the physical skill, so now it's time to learn the game to play at a high level as fast as you can."

He earned some points early on when he got into the spring game and got a sack in front of 80,012 fans, finishing the game with six tackles.

He's stuck behind an extremely deep de-

## Ohio State's 2024 Early Enrollees

| No. | Name               | Pos. | Ht.  | Wt. | Previous School                             |
|-----|--------------------|------|------|-----|---|
| 72  | Deontae Armstrong  | OL   | 6-6  | 298 | Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward                  |
| 73  | Devontae Armstrong | OL   | 6-5  | 303 | Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward                  |
| 96  | Eddrick Houston    | DL   | 6-3  | 270 | Buford, Ga.                                 |
| 13  | Miles Lockhart     | CB   | 5-9  | 193 | Chandler (Ariz.) Basha                      |
| 18  | Jaylen McClain     | SAF  | 6-0  | 192 | Rahway (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep               |
| 90  | Eric Mensah        | DL   | 6-3  | 308 | Stafford (Va.) Mountain View                |
| 69  | Ian Moore          | OL   | 6-6  | 309 | New Palestine, Ind                          |
| 12  | Air Noland         | QB   | 6-2  | 192 | College Park (Ga.) Langston Hughes          |
| 20  | James Peoples      | RB   | 5-10 | 203 | San Antonio Veterans Memorial               |
| 35  | Payton Pierce      | LB   | 6-2  | 223 | Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy                       |
| 10  | Julian Sayin       | QB   | 6-1  | 203 | Carlsbad, Calif./Alabama                    |
| 5   | Aaron Scott Jr.    | CB   | 6-0  | 185 | Springfield, Ohio                           |
| 4   | Jeremiah Smith     | WR   | 6-3  | 215 | Miami Gardens (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep |
| 23  | Garrett Stover     | LB   | 6-1  | 220 | Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut                   |
| 12  | Bryce West         | CB   | 5-11 | 196 | Cleveland Glenville                         |
| 24  | Sam Williams-Dixon | RB   | 5-11 | 203 | Pickerington (Ohio) North                   |

fensive line with Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimolou, Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Caden Curry all on the edge. But if any first-year defensive end could manage to work his way into the conversation with that type of talent blocking him, it could be Houston.

## CB Miles Lockhart

It was a quiet spring for Lockhart (5-9, 193) as one of many cornerbacks in a loaded room, and the depth of that room showed when Lockhart struggled to get much playing time when it came to the spring game or drills in practices that were open to the media. He did finish the spring game with two tackles and a pass breakup, however, getting into the game late.

Lockhart came in as the No. 398 overall prospect and No. 33 cornerback in the class, and Day believes he can slot in at nickel in the future for the Buckeyes.

"Miles Lockhart is a corner that I actually saw play live," Day said in December. "He's going to be a nickel for us as well. Miles is extremely competitive, fits to what Jim (Knowles) wants right there in that nickel position. He can also move out to corner. He is a really nasty, tough player who has jumped in and been a great part of this class."

## SAF Jaylen McClain

Safety is a position that isn't as deep as some of the others on the team, and the addition of McClain (6-0, 192) is already paying dividends. Safeties coach Matt Guerrieri talked about the freshman on April 3 after he had seen him for most of the spring, and one of the things that stood out to him is that along with the talent, McClain is always giving as much effort as possible.

"He's been great," Guerrieri said. "First off, we do a thing where we track how well you run to the ball every practice. It's one of those things we grade. You can talk about all the schematics that you want. Coach Knowles has all of that. But if you're not running to the ball, you're not playing good defense. We track that, and he's one of the guys that every single practice is one of our highest-graded guys running to the ball. He's been awesome from an effort standpoint. He's in early, he puts the work in and he's made a bunch of plays out here."

That hard work paid off early when he

got into the spring game and picked off Sayin, scoring three points for the defense.

"McClain, I think, is a great plus," Knowles said. "He is a guy that has football intelligence. He's picked it up. Of those incoming freshmen who still should be in high school, he's a guy you're going to point to and you can see right now he's going to be a player."

McClain benefited from some extra time at strong safety this spring while usual starter Lathan Ransom continued recovering from an injury and backup Ja'Had Carter was also out. He's unlikely to crack the lineup once Ransom and Carter are healthy, but he factors in as valuable depth for Ohio State based on his spring game performance.

## DL Eric Mensah

Even as one of the only two recruits Ohio State signed on the defensive line, it's likely that Mensah's (6-3, 308) first year on campus will also be spent in a developmental capacity that will hopefully pay off in his later years in Columbus.

One thing that works to Mensah's advantage this year is the depth at the position right now, since Johnson said the veterans on the team are very willing to pull the younger players aside, take them in and try to teach them what they can.

"You don't have to shepherd them. They're already standing next to them talking," Johnson said. "That's the good thing about that group is they coach the young guys really well."

## OL Ian Moore

Moore (6-6, 309) was the highest-rated offensive lineman Ohio State signed this past year as the No. 166 overall prospect and fifth-ranked interior lineman in the class. But after coming out of high school as an interior guy, Moore has lined up at right tackle in spring practice, working into drills third behind Tegra Tshabola and Josh Fryar.

While he isn't likely to see the field much this season, it can still put him in position to compete for a spot in the two deep down the line.

Frye said that for young offensive linemen like Moore, he wants their first year to be completely about getting used to being at the college level since being with the



Buckeyes is such a big jump from being at the high school level.

“That jump from 18-to-19 and 19-to-20-year-old kid, that plays a lot into it,” Frye said. “If you’re (Devontae and Deontae Armstrong) and Ian Moore right now, you’re keeping your head above water. That’s your whole first year. When you sit and talk about a jam combo or a lock or whatever the call may be to Luke (Montgomery), he registers that. It’s not something new because there’s paralysis by analysis. The mental part on top of another year of natural maturity and getting bigger and stronger, that’s always going to help.”

### QB Air Noland

Noland (6-2, 192) was viewed as a strong signing by Ohio State, but he was very quickly overshadowed when Sayin transferred in from Alabama.

He got his share of reps to begin the spring but those gradually fell off as workouts progressed, with Howard, Brown and Lincoln Kienholz taking the majority of snaps. When Noland did get a chance to throw, it was obvious at points that he was going through some growing pains as a freshman, including the last practice before the spring game in which he threw an interception and missed multiple wide-open receivers.

That shouldn’t cause much worry at this point, though, because he was never supposed to see the field this season, and he has plenty of time to develop under Day and Kelly.

He did make his way into the spring game in the third quarter, working against many of the other players down the depth chart, but he did look less overwhelmed. He was able to tuck the ball and run, was hitting open receivers, finishing with 47 passing yards and an interception along with 42 yards rushing. Kelly likes the way Noland can be a running threat.

“Sometimes in our running game, our quarterback really is a blocker,” Kelly said. “He’s responsible for the defender. If the defender’s cheating and fitting in on the run, then his responsibility is to make the defense be honest. Air did that a couple of times today.”

### RB James Peoples

As the highest-rated running back Ohio State signed this cycle, Peoples (5-10, 203) has shown quickly in the spring how he could be useful to the team this upcoming season, especially with the news of Dallan Hayden entering the transfer portal.

He has been doing well at practice, showing his ability to see gaps and get to them, including a 4-yard score in the spring game among his 10 carries for 36 yards. Day thought on signing day that Peoples had a chance to make an early impact on the team with his talent.

“He can do multiple things,” Day said. “He’s strong. He’s got great change of direction. He’s going to be a dynamic player, and I think he’s going to make an impact early on in his freshman year.”

New running backs coach Carlos Locklyn said Peoples was a player he recruited when he was at Oregon, so the way he plays will be nothing new for him, and the relationship the two already have could be useful as well. Peoples will compete to be the team’s third-string running back along with

fellow freshman Sam Williams-Dixon and walk-on TC Caffey.

### LB Payton Pierce

Pierce (6-2, 223) was the No. 203 overall prospect and No. 15 linebacker in his class, and he was someone whom Day was excited about because of his athleticism and how that could translate into him playing the linebacker position at the college level.

But Pierce has yet to have a chance to show that off. He has spent his first spring with the Buckeyes recovering from an ankle injury sustained during his senior season.

However, enrolling early still gave him the ability to learn the defense and feel what it’s like to be at Ohio State as a football player, which will be a big advantage when he is able to get on the field, presumably this fall.

### QB Julian Sayin

One of the only two early enrollees to lose his black stripe during the spring was Sayin (6-1, 203), who seemed to prove that his future at the college level will be bright.

With the quarterback competition still ongoing, Day said Sayin remains in the mix, and while it’s unlikely he will end up being the guy, the fact that he has earned that recognition so early on says something. Kelly has been impressed with him through 15 practices as well.

“Julian is a very fast processor,” Kelly said. “He really thinks very, very quickly on his feet. He makes really quick decisions. He doesn’t stick on reads. He can progress and he sees things really well for a young player. He has not been exposed to a lot of college defenses – and especially what Jim (Knowles) does. Jim can make a young freshman quarterback cry with some of the stuff he does, but I never saw that with Jules, and it’s been impressive his ability to retain.”

Throughout the spring, Sayin made some of the team’s most impressive throws, getting balls into tight spaces, but he also wasn’t immune to making some freshman mistakes, which is to be expected, leading to an overall up-and-down experience.

With a line of 10-of-17 passing for 85 yards and an interception in the spring game – the most passing yards of the quarterbacks who made it into the contest – he showed that the talent is there, and learning from Day and Kelly should refine him into a great player.

### CB Aaron Scott Jr.

Another player who quickly proved he belongs is Scott (6-0, 185). He’s blocked in a deep cornerback room currently, but he worked his way into second-team reps by the end of the spring, where he rotated in during the spring game as well.

He played well in the exhibition, finishing with six tackles and two pass breakups, one of which almost ended up as the second interception before it bounced off his hands. It wasn’t a performance out of the blue, however, as cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said earlier this spring he was excited to see what Scott could do.

“He keeps competing,” Walton said. “He’s made the transition, like what happened with Jermaine (Mathews Jr.) last year. You throw him in the fire, you let them go. You compete, you go, and by the time we get to the end of training camp, you’ll have

it figured out.”

It could be tough for Scott to find a role in the deep secondary in his first season, but if he proves his worth, he could find his way into a rotational role similar to Mathews last season.

### WR Jeremiah Smith

It was a tall task for Smith (6-3, 215) to try to live up to the hype as the No. 1 recruit in the country in just 15 practices, but he seemed to do that as the top offensive player in the spring.

It seemed that every single practice, another video would be posted of Smith making an eye-popping catch that most veterans would struggle to make. With his performance early on in the spring, he became the first player to lose his black stripe, doing so after just four practices, which was also the fastest ever for an Ohio State freshman. Senior wideout Emeka Egbuka has been impressed with his approach to the game as a young player.

“There’s nothing he really can’t do,” Egbuka said. “He runs fast, he jumps high. He’s strong. He’s a natural pass-catcher. He’s very coachable. I do my best to uplift the young guys and give them pointers here and there, and he’s always willing to listen. He always puts his best foot forward every single day.”

At the pace Smith is seemingly acclimating to college football, including two catches for 12 yards in the spring game, it would be a surprise if he does not push for a starting job in his first season in Columbus.

“He’s jumped right in,” Day said. “The talent’s there. The thing that’s been most impressive to me so far is his discipline that he’s already built in his life. Then the skill of playing the position at such a young age as well, and (coach Brian) Hartline and everybody will continue to build on that and grow on that.”

### LB Garrett Stover

Stover (6-1, 220) was the higher-rated linebacker the Buckeyes signed in the 2024 class and is looked to bring the same hard-nosed mentality that his cousin, Cade Stover, brought to Ohio State over the past few seasons.

It’s been a quiet spring for the younger Stover, who has been working out at middle linebacker behind Cody Simon and Gabe Powers. But he finished the spring off with some momentum, totaling four tackles in the spring game.

This figures to be a developmental year for Stover with Simon and Powers firmly ahead of him, but earning some playing time late in contests remains a

realistic goal.

### CB Bryce West

West (5-11, 196) was another good addition at cornerback on the recruiting trail, but West was another player who didn’t get onto the field much in the spring due to an injury.

He did suit up in practice and was seen going through noncontact drills toward the end of the spring, but he didn’t get into any 11-on-11 or seven-on-seven scrimmaging either in practice or in the spring game.

Day said he believed West was one of the best cornerbacks in the country when he signed, and even though West didn’t get to practice in the spring, he tried to learn from some of the best college cornerbacks at Ohio State when he got onto campus.

“Just regular technique. Just follow their movements, because they’ve played the game so they know how to move,” West told Eleven Warriors on March 2. “Coach Walton and them, they can teach you the right things, because in the room is Denzel (Burke), (Davison Igbinosun) – they always quiz me, and it’s paying off and I can translate this to the field.”

### RB Sam Williams-Dixon

One thing that has been a big topic of Ohio State’s spring camp for the coaches has been the extended season with the College Football Playoff now moving to 12 teams.

With a running back room led by TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, it would have been tough in past seasons for a freshman like Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203) to find his way onto the field. But with a possible 16- or 17-game season now, Day and Kelly both believe Williams-Dixon will be needed to keep everyone ahead of him fresh.

“We’re very cognizant of the fact that the playoff situation has changed,” Kelly said. “You have to develop that depth. It used to be maybe you have a pair and a spare, which is what everybody says, but I think you may have to have more than that. You’re talking about 16-17 games. You’re really going to be tested that way. I was really happy with how those young guys have come along here in the 15 training sessions that we’ve had.”

Williams-Dixon has largely answered the call thus far, working behind Henderson and Judkins but alongside Peoples and Caffey. He has as good a shot as either to see the field. He impressed in spring practice, including his performance in the spring game in which he led the Buckeyes with 75 yards on the ground and scored on a 22-yard touchdown.

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# Harrison Highlights OSU's Draft Hopefuls

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

If Ohio State's collection of talent entering the NFL draft feels smaller than usual this year, thank the number of returning juniors and seniors – including cornerback Denzel Burke, defensive linemen Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimolou and Tyleik Williams and running back TreVeyon Henderson, among others – who almost certainly would have heard their name called.

Instead, no more than five or six Buckeyes are expected to be picked in the 2024 NFL draft, scheduled for April 25-27 in Detroit. Six draftees would match Ohio State's total in each of the last two drafts, while five would be the fewest since 2015.

Leading the way for Ohio State is wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., a consensus top-five pick who is projected to land with the Arizona Cardinals at fourth overall and be the first non-quarterback taken in the draft.

His presumed first-round selection will extend Ohio State's streak to three consecutive drafts with a first-round receiver, with Jaxon Smith-Njigba (20th, 2023), Chris Olave (11th, 2022) and Garrett Wilson (10th, 2022) also on that list. Furthermore, Ohio State will have had a first-round pick in every draft dating back to 2016.

Expectations are high for Harrison. Many view him as one of the top two players in the draft along with USC quarterback Caleb Williams.

"Marvin Harrison Jr. is going to be a No. 1 wide receiver right away," FOX broadcaster Joel Klatt said on his podcast. "You can game plan for him as a rookie because he will get open and he will make the catch, in particular, on third down, which is rare. In the playoffs, when he has to fight through tough, contested catches,

he will do it. He can be the catalyst to an overall offense, and that is very rare."

The next Buckeye projected to come off the board is defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr., viewed by most as either a second- or third-rounder. He was not able to participate in drills at the NFL Scouting Combine earlier this spring due to a hamstring injury, but he returned to the field for Ohio State's pro day on March 20.

It was not an extensive showing, but it was an explosive one – also an apt description of Hall's three seasons at Ohio State, where he played in just 28 games but had 10 tackles for loss and six sacks while in and out of the lineup with injuries.

"Some teams say I'm undersized; some teams say I'm just right," Hall said. "But the biggest thing for me is how I separate myself with explosiveness."

Linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and tight end Cade Stover are then viewed as either third- or fourth-round selections. Both have plenty to work on as they make the jump to the next level – Eichenberg's ability in coverage and Stover's blocking have both taken their share of criticism throughout the draft process – but their similar no-nonsense, all-football mentalities make it hard to believe they won't be competing for significant playing time as rookies.

"I'm here to tell you PPF or PFF, whatever the hell it is, (you don't know my scheme)," Stover said. "But yeah, (questions about blocking) seems to be a common theme here ... if you're afraid to miss, you're not going to get anything done. You're going to play passively."

The lone defensive back in the class for Ohio State, safety Josh Proctor could be taken anywhere from the fifth round on. His stock did not appear all that high entering this past season, after he was benched in 2022, but he turned in an impressive sixth year with the Buck-

eyes that put him on the radar for NFL teams.

If there is a sixth draftee among Buckeyes who entered their names into the pool, Steele Chambers is most likely to hear his name called in either the sixth or seventh round. He had an up-and-down career with the Buckeyes, spending time at running back before ultimately making the switch to linebacker, and is viewed by many analysts as a work in progress as he prepares to play linebacker at the next level.

But Chambers' natural charisma – one he showed off during media sessions at Ohio State as well as at the combine – will likely endear him to teams and could give him the chance to be drafted and make an NFL roster this fall.

It is not out of the question, however, that Chambers falls out of the draft entirely given his late projection. Also viewed as potential undrafted free agents are offensive lineman Matthew Jones, wide receiver Xavier Johnson and running back Miyan Williams.

Chambers would likely be a priority free agent should he go undrafted, and the same can be said for Johnson. His versatility was obvious at Ohio State, able to step in as both a receiver and running back for the Buckeyes, but his value at the professional level will be his willingness to step in on special teams, something that can be the difference between making a roster or not.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is highlighting nine potential draftees hoping to hear their names called at the NFL draft. The following boxes contain accolades, projected rounds, quotes from players, recruiting rankings and expert analysis from The Athletic's Dane Brugler, who publishes an annual draft guide breaking down hundreds of prospects.



## STEELE CHAMBERS

Linebacker

6-0 • 229

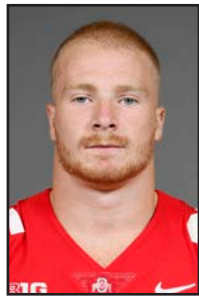
Recruit Rank: Overall 236;  
ATH 11

**ACCOLADES:** After coming out of high school as a running back, Chambers transitioned to linebacker and started there for the last three seasons, collecting 190 tackles, 11½ tackles for loss, two sacks, three interceptions and eight pass breakups. He was also named honorable-mention All-Big Ten in 2022 and was named to the All-Big Ten third team last season.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Sixth to seventh round.

**CHAMBERS SAYS:** "(Ohio State) prepared me for everything. It's prepared me for life. Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach (Jim) Knowles, Coach Mick (Marotti), everything they do, they work to make you a better person on and off the field, so I've got so much gratitude for that place. I can't really explain it."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Chambers needs to continue developing his feel for blocking schemes and cover responsibilities, but his athletic range and play personality are solid foundational traits for the next level. He has the talent to compete for a rotational linebacker and special teams role in the NFL."



## TOMMY EICHENBERG

Linebacker

6-2 • 233

Recruit Rank: Overall 318;  
ILB 19

**ACCOLADES:** Eichenberg was named Big Ten Linebacker of the Year and named to the All-Big Ten first team in addition to earning second-team All-America honors from the FWAA, Sports Illustrated and Phil Steele following this past season. The two-time team captain finished with 258 career tackles, including 120 in 2022.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round.

**EICHENBERG SAYS:** "When I think back on the things that I accomplished, I would have traded any of them just to beat The Team Up North and win the Big Ten and keep going on. I would have traded in everything just to get those. I never really think about things that I accomplished. I always think about my teammates and the games that I thought that we should have won."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Eichenberg isn't a proven playmaker in coverage, but he understands pursuit angles and displays outstanding key/read/flow skills versus the run. He has the talent, football character and feel for the game to earn a starting job during his NFL rookie training camp."



## MIKE HALL JR.

Defensive Tackle

6-2 • 299

Recruit Rank: Overall 53;  
DL 10

**ACCOLADES:** Hall made a significant impact in just 28 career games, finishing with 45 tackles (10 for loss) and six sacks. He earned honorable-mention All-Big Ten recognition in 2022 and followed it up with a third-team nod this past season.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Second to third round.

**HALL SAYS:** "I'm one of those guys who's going to come in and be hungry to play. 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."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Hall was more of a flash player than consistent force, but his quick-twitch movements and natural energy are the ingredients of a disruptive gap penetrator. If he stays healthy, he will be an immediate rotation player and eventual starting three-technique tackle in a four-man front."



## MARVIN HARRISON JR.

Wide Receiver  
6-3 • 209

Recruit Rank: Overall 97;  
WR 14

**ACCOLADES:** Harrison is the most decorated wide receiver in Ohio State history, with his accolades including a fourth-place finish in Heisman voting (2023), the Biletnikoff Award (2023), two unanimous All-America selections (2022, 2023) along with a bevy of other conference and national honors. His career totals of 155 catches for 2,613 yards and 31 touchdowns rank sixth, sixth and third in program history.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** First round.

**HARRISON SAYS:** "The great legacy of Ohio State receivers – think all the way back to Cris Carter, some of the teammates I've had in the past, Chris (Olave) and Garrett (Wilson) and Jaxon (Smith-Njigba) – to even be in that conversation is an honor within itself. It's something I'm super proud of, something I've worked very hard for and just never really thought that I'd actually get there."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Harrison has dominant receiving traits and can win from anywhere on the field because of his athletic gifts, route savvy and adjustment/finishing skills at the catch point. He is among the best receiving prospects to enter the NFL in recent memory, and he has the dedication to his craft to be a playmaking No. 1 NFL receiver and future All-Pro."



## XAVIER JOHNSON

Wide Receiver  
6-0 • 202

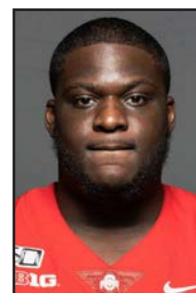
Recruit Rank: Overall 1,138;  
WR 170

**ACCOLADES:** Johnson, a former walk-on who was put on scholarship in 2021, finished his career with 26 receptions for 329 yards and two touchdowns as well as 44 rushes for 353 yards and another score, and he collected 14 tackles on special teams. He was also named a team captain for Ohio State this past season.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Undrafted free agent.

**JOHNSON SAYS:** "You tell the 18-year-old Xavier walking through these doors that's struggling day in and day out to just make it through and keep working that he would get to this moment right here (at Ohio State's pro day), it's surreal. I'm extremely grateful. I'm grateful for the program, grateful for everything that was instilled with me with the Buckeyes."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Johnson's offensive value for the next level might not stand out, but he is the consummate coach pleaser, and his special teams impact could keep him on an active NFL roster."



## MATTHEW JONES

Offensive Lineman  
6-3 • 316

Recruit Rank: Overall 68; OC 1

**ACCOLADES:** Jones started 25 games over the past two seasons for Ohio State, earning a pair of second-team All-Big Ten recognitions as well as an honorable mention in 2021.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Undrafted free agent.

**JONES SAYS:** "I'm a person (who), I get adjusted to things. Right guard, left guard, center, it doesn't matter. Just embrace the discomfort and go with it."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Jones has inconsistent sustain skills because of average balance and core strength, but he offers the functional movements to earn his way onto a roster in the right situation."



## JOSH PROCTOR

Safety  
6-2 • 205

Recruit Rank: Overall 71;  
SAF 7

**ACCOLADES:** Proctor appeared in 53 games during his Ohio State career, finishing with 112 tackles, three interceptions and 17 pass break-ups. He earned an honorable-mention All-Big Ten nod after the 2020 season in which he had 20 tackles and an interception in seven games and earned one this past season after starting 11 games with 47 tackles and one pick.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Fifth round.

**PROCTOR SAYS:** "I've seen so many different schemes, I've learned so many different things. A lot of it is the same, but the terms may be different. I've seen a lot and I know a lot, so I feel like that's helped me over time just mature and grow as a player and learn this game."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Proctor has some hiccups in man coverage, but he sees the field well and offers the range and run-defending skills to work his way up an NFL team's safety depth chart. He has a skill set that should shine on special teams, although everything will depend on his ability to stay healthy."



## CADE STOVER

Tight End  
6-3 • 247

Recruit Rank: Overall 114;  
OLB 7

**ACCOLADES:** Stover, a former linebacker turned tight end, had one of the most impressive receiving seasons by an Ohio State tight end last year, finishing with 41 catches for 576 yards and five touchdowns. He was named Big Ten Tight End of the Year in addition to earning first-team conference honors.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round.

**STOVER SAYS:** "I don't think you can measure what's inside of me, the kind of person I am. I think I'm just scratching the surface of what I can be as a football player."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Stover might never be a top-tier blocker, but he is solid in all phases and will earn NFL paychecks because of his coordinated athleticism to finish at the catch point and move the chains. With his defensive mentality, offensive skills and special teams experience, he projects as an NFL role player with starting upside and valuable versatility."



## MIYAN WILLIAMS

Running Back  
5-8 • 229

Recruit Rank: Overall 624;  
RB 45

**ACCOLADES:** Williams, who earned a third-team All-Big Ten honor in 2022, finished his Ohio State career with 258 carries for 1,554 yards and 20 touchdowns. He tied the program single-game record with five rushing touchdowns vs. Rutgers on Oct. 1, 2022, also finishing with a career-high 189 yards on the ground.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Undrafted free agent.

**WILLIAMS SAYS:** "When I watch (my film) I see myself get better in a lot of different spots as the years went on. I think the best way I got better was probably vision-wise, because my freshman year I was just trying to bounce everything outside. As the years went on, I started actually reading things out."

**BRUGLER SAYS:** "Williams' pro ceiling will be limited by mediocre play speed and decision-making, but if kept on a north-south track, he runs like a powerful ball of butcher knives that can help move the chains. He fits a very specific role in the NFL, so his lack of versatility will limit his landing spots."

# Buckeyes Roll Out Red Carpet For Spring Game

Ohio State hosted nearly 50 prospects for the school's annual spring game on April 13, with recruits from upcoming classes all making their presence felt at Ohio Stadium – a venue the Buckeyes would like many of these blue-chip prospects to play at in the future.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

The list of attendees is compiled from recruits announcing their attendance, recruits spotted by the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff and those reported by other outlets.

Beginning in 2025, all but one of Ohio State's 11 verbal pledges – Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive end London Merritt (6-3, 250) the lone holdout due to a future visit scheduled for this summer – were in attendance, surely making their pitch for several recruits to become future teammates.

As for the uncommitted prospects in the class, visitors included Cleveland Heights three-star defensive lineman Brandon Caesar (6-4, 255); San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) J. Serra Catholic four-star linebacker Madden Faraimo (6-3, 210); Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star offensive lineman Alai Kala-

niuvalu (6-4, 300); Medina (Ohio) Highland defensive lineman Carson Noonan (6-3, 265); Woodbridge (Va.) Freedom three-star running back Jeff Overton (5-11, 187); Baltimore St. Frances Academy three-star defensive lineman Darrion Smith (6-2, 260); Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star offensive lineman Douglas Utu (6-5, 300); and Galveston (Texas) Ball five-star athlete Jonah Williams (6-3, 203).

Williams – viewed as either a linebacker, safety or wide receiver, depending on who you talk to – was the only five-star in attendance from 2025. He is the No. 13 overall prospect in the class, with Oklahoma and Texas the key opposition in his recruitment.

Also expected to attend was Duncanville, Texas, five-star wide receiver Dakorien Moore (5-11, 175), who is committed to LSU, but he had a scheduling conflict and will instead visit on April 27. He is the second-ranked overall prospect and top-ranked receiver in 2025.

Those in attendance from the 2026 recruiting class included Painesville (Ohio) Harvey running back Shahn Alston (5-10, 205); Suwanee (Ga.) Peachtree Ridge four-star cornerback Dorian Barney (6-1, 170); Akron Hoban athlete Ace Brown (6-4, 180); Valdosta, Ga., cornerback Jalon Copeland (6-1, 185); Cleveland St. Ignatius offensive lineman Will Conroy (6-3, 275); Loganville (Ga.) Grayson linebacker Anthony Davis (6-2, 200), who was offered by Ohio State on April 12; Duncanville, Texas, cornerback Braylon

Edwards (5-10, 160); Upper Marlboro (Md.) St. Frances Academy four-star safety Jireh Edwards (6-1, 194); Joppa (Md.) Joppatowne defensive end Zion Elee (6-5, 225); Suwanee (Ga.) Collins Hill defensive lineman Deuce Gerald (6-3, 250); Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 290); Gainesville, Ga., defensive end Xavier Griffin (6-4, 210); and Rolesville, N.C., defensive end Zavion Griffin-Haynes (6-6, 220).

Ohio has one of its strongest collections of offensive line talent in several years, with Conroy and Greer near the top of the list. Greer is the No. 72 overall prospect and No. 12 offensive tackle in the class, and while Conroy is currently unranked, he holds offers from Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas A&M, among others.

Jireh Edwards is also a priority target for Ohio State as the No. 71 overall prospect and fifth-ranked safety in the class. The Buckeyes have made significant inroads in recent years at St. Frances Academy, with four-star cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 175) – a member of Ohio State's 2025 class – hailing from the program.

Also in attendance from 2026 were Cincinnati Moeller tight end Sam Hamilton (6-4, 230); Cleveland Glenville defensive end Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225); Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park wide receiver Brody Keefe (6-3, 185); San Diego Cathedral Catholic quarterback Brady Palmer (6-3, 195), who was offered by Ohio State on April 12; Buford, Ga., four-star defensive lineman Bryce Perry-Wright (6-2, 245); Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 263); Vero Beach, Fla., four-star offensive tackle Micah Smith (6-6, 305); New Orleans (La.) St. Augustine defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270); Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy four-star safety Bralan Womack (5-11, 185); and Jonesboro, Ga., cornerback Jontavious Wyman (6-2, 175).

The talent in the trenches again shines through with the list of visitors, with Riley and

Stewart both important targets for Ohio State.

Riley is the No. 31 overall prospect and seventh-ranked offensive tackle in the class, as well as the top prospect in Ohio. In addition to Ohio State, he has offers from Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State, Tennessee and Texas A&M, among others, and recently picked up an offer from Alabama.

Stewart, meanwhile, has offers from virtually every program under the sun, as he is the top overall prospect in 2026. The Buckeyes got involved with Stewart in November after his sophomore season in which he had 85 tackles (33 for loss), 20 sacks and six forced fumbles.

## Four-Star TE Roberts Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State added a commitment the morning of the spring game from Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 235).

Roberts is the No. 118 overall prospect and fifth-ranked tight end in the class, and he chose Ohio State over Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon and Penn State after visiting Columbus the weekend of April 5. Roberts had previously been committed to Notre Dame but backed off his pledge to the Fighting Irish in August.

"Being back on campus, watching practice, seeing coach Keenan Bailey coach, hearing coach Ryan Day push the team and seeing the team bond, I felt it was time," he told On3. "There wasn't a better fit for me out there. Ohio State checked all of my boxes. Watching practice and meeting coach Chip Kelly were my last two boxes checked, so it was time."

He had 38 receptions for 816 yards and eight touchdowns last season, building on a sophomore campaign in which he had 33 catches for 705 yards and 11 touchdowns. While his talent in high school was most clear as a receiver, he was also an accomplished blocker and will bring versatility once he arrives at Ohio State.



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# OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

## 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                    |
|------------------|------|------|-----|-------|--------------------------------|
| Tarvos Alford    | LB   | 6-2  | 210 | ★★★★  | Vero Beach, Fla.               |
| De'zie Jones     | WR   | 6-0  | 180 | ★★★★  | Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic   |
| Eli Lee          | LB   | 6-3  | 215 | ★★★   | Akron Hoban                    |
| Cody Haddad      | SF   | 6-1  | 175 | ★★★   | Cleveland St. Ignatius         |
| Carter Lowe      | OT   | 6-5  | 290 | ★★★★  | Toledo Whitmer                 |
| Zahir Mathis     | DL   | 6-6  | 225 | ★★★★  | Philadelphia Imhotep Institute |
| London Merritt   | DL   | 6-3  | 250 | ★★★★  | Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy   |
| Na'eem Offord    | CB   | 6-1  | 185 | ★★★★★ | Birmingham (Ala.) Parker       |
| Nate Roberts     | TE   | 6-4  | 235 | ★★★★  | Washington, Okla.,             |
| Devin Sanchez    | CB   | 6-2  | 170 | ★★★★★ | Houston North Shore            |
| Tavien St. Clair | QB   | 6-4  | 210 | ★★★★★ | Bellefontaine, Ohio            |
| DeShawn Stewart  | SF   | 6-2  | 185 | ★★★★  | Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic   |
| Blake Woodyby    | 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 |

### OSU Adds In-State Safety Haddad

Roberts was not the only pledge on April 13. Ohio State also picked up a commitment from Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star safety Cody Haddad (6-1, 175).

"I like how they do everything at Ohio State," Haddad told 247Sports. "It kind of reminds me of my high school, how I feel there. Of course, the football part is fantastic, and then life after football and the connections you have. I like all the coaches and how the staff treats me."

Haddad is the No. 519 overall prospect and No. 30 athlete in the class and committed to Ohio State after previously being pledged to Wisconsin. He committed to the Badgers on Jan. 17, but after the Buckeyes offered just a few days later, he backed off his pledge on April 1.

His commitment came during his visit to Ohio State for the spring game, one of several visits Haddad has taken to Columbus in recent weeks.

Haddad was injured during much of his junior season but still finished with 42 tackles, three forced fumbles and four interceptions, and he should be primed for a big senior season after committing to Ohio State.

Haddad is the second pledge overall at safety, joining Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star DeShawn Stewart (6-2, 185). Ohio State also continues to pursue Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star Faheem Delane (6-3, 195) and Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180).

### QB Commit St. Clair Earns Fifth Composite Star

Bellefontaine, Ohio, quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) will now have a new badge of honor once he signs with the Buckeyes in December: five star.

The signal caller and Ohio State pledge earned his fifth composite star from 247Sports on April 4 and is now considered the No. 19 overall prospect and fourth-ranked quarterback in 2025, as well as the top prospect in Ohio.

St. Clair's jump to five-star status comes after an impressive junior season in which he completed 70.6 percent of his passes for 3,083 yards and 37 touchdowns to just six interceptions. He committed to Ohio State last June as the first member of the Buck-

eyes' recruiting class and has since worked hard as a peer recruiter.

Entering his senior year, he has already thrown for 8,158 yards and 75 touchdowns, and he could become just the 10th player in Ohio high school football history to reach 10,000 career passing yards and 100 career passing touchdowns. That list includes Dusty Aldrich (McComb, 1998-01), Joe Burrow (The Plains Athens, 2012-14), Parker Carmichael (Wooster Triway, 2011-14), Zac Dysert (Ada, 2004-07), Benjamin Mauk (Kenton, 1999-02), Maty Mauk (Kenton, 2008-11), Ryan Radcliff (Sherwood Fairview, 2004-07), Grant Sherman (Kenton, 2010-13), and Justin Zwick (Orrville, 1998-99; Massillon Washington, 2000-01).

St. Clair is now the third five-star in the class and the first on the offensive side of the ball, joining Birmingham (Ala.) Parker cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) and Houston North Shore cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170).

### Ohio State In Top Eight For In-State Safety McNutt

St. Clair is not the only in-state five-star whom Ohio State has its sights set on, however. The Buckeyes continue to pursue McNutt, who included Ohio State among his top eight schools on April 8. Ohio State made the cut along with Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC and has stood out dating back to the early stages of his recruitment.

"They preach brotherhood a lot," he said last summer after camping at Ohio State, "and I know if I come here it's going to be a good relationship."

He has made several visits to Columbus this spring and has a built-in connection with the Buckeyes as his father, Richard, played cornerback at Ohio State from 1999-02.

"(My dad) just said it's a great program," the younger McNutt said. "He played in the 2002 championship (season), so it's just amazing. I didn't grow up in Columbus, but knowing that my family did, all the dogs who have been here, it's a great feeling knowing I could maybe have a chance to (represent) Ohio State."

### New RBs Coach Locklyn Getting To Work On Recruiting Trail

New running backs coach Carlos Lock-

lyn has been on the job for only a few weeks, but he has hit the recruiting trail hard since arriving at Ohio State. But the way he would tell, he's been hitting the relationship-building trail.

"My purpose is to serve and pour into the young men," he said on April 10. "Now, my goals as a football coach, all of them will take care of themselves. I'm just relationship-based, and I'm very detailed in the position."

"I know you all heard me say it before, and I'm going to keep saying it: This is the worst-coached position in football. It's terrible. Guys hire anybody to coach this position who are recruiters. Carlos Locklyn is not a recruiter. I'm an elite relationship builder. But I coach this position. I'm a ball coach. So, that's who I am. I think these kids, I think they've seen it now. I jumped in day one. I'm ready to coach."

Even so, it's been a race rather than a gradual build-up as Locklyn gets to work recruiting – or relationship-building – the next generation of Ohio State running backs.

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went

to press, Locklyn has offered five tailbacks, including Belleville (Ill.) Althoff Catholic four-star Dierre Hill (5-11, 180) and Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School three-star Shekai Mills-Knight (6-1, 217) in 2025 and Marietta (Ga.) Kell's Tyriq Green (6-0, 195), Javian Osborne (5-10, 188) of Forney, Texas, and Pittsburgh Westinghouse's Kyshawn Robinson (5-9, 160), the latter three all 2026 prospects.

Hill, who was named Illinois' Gatorade Football Player of the Year last season after rushing for 1,788 yards and 23 touchdowns, is the No. 104 overall prospect and ninth-ranked back in the class. He has offers from Georgia, Michigan, Notre Dame and Oregon, among others. Mills-Knight – a former teammate of current Ohio State freshman tight end Max LeBlanc, who will join the Buckeyes this summer – has received interest from schools such as Miami (Fla.), Ole Miss and Oregon, as well as in-state Tennessee.

As for the 2026 prospects, none have a composite ranking, but the offer lists can

Continued On Page 22

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# LB Coach Laurinaitis A Strong Buckeye Backer

Continued From Page 21

be telling. Green has offers from Auburn, Georgia, LSU, Ole Miss, Penn State and Tennessee, among others, while Osborne holds an offer from and is favored to land at in-state Texas. Robinson, meanwhile, has picked up offers from Florida, Florida State, Michigan State, Nebraska, Penn State and Texas A&M, among others.

## Laurinaitis Details Recruiting Pitch

Ohio State linebackers coach James Laurinaitis has been on the job officially for only a few months – even if he was the de facto linebackers coach last season – but has taken pretty easily to the recruiting side of things.

He already has commitments in 2025 from Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) and Akron Hoban three-star Eli Lee (6-3, 215), but the pitch for securing commitments like those of Alford and Lee are simple ones, according to Laurinaitis.

“Ohio State presents opportunity in so many different ways,” he said on April 3. “You’re not going to get developed better anywhere else in the country. We have the largest fan base, the largest alumni. I mean,

there’s just opportunity everywhere.”

It’s no wonder Laurinaitis – a three-time All-American linebacker at Ohio State – is able to easily sell the university. He can relate to recruits with his own experience at the collegiate level, not to mention teaching them what it means to play for the Buckeyes.

“You just try to explain your passion for the school that did so much for you, especially being an out-of-state kid and not being from Ohio, realizing how much Ohio State changed my life,” he said. “Now, you communicate that to other young kids who can see it. You try to tell them the vision of where you can get to.

“The fun thing for me is that most of the kids I’m recruiting are way more athletic than I ever was, so I tell them the only way I survived in the NFL for eight years is the fact that I had football intelligence,” he said. “If I can impart that information on kids that are super athletic, well now you’ve got something special.”

## Tight End Targets Gilbert, Schott Commit To Hurricanes

Ohio State lost out on a pair of tight end targets in recent weeks, when West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star tight end Luka Gilbert (6-7, 233) and Leo, Ind., four-star

Brock Schott (6-3, 215) announced their commitments to Miami (Fla.) on April 8 and April 13, respectively.

Gilbert is the No. 254 overall prospect and No. 12 tight end in the class, and he chose the Hurricanes over Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio State, among others. He visited Miami last fall for a game and returned for visits in January and March before his commitment.

“It’s great academically, great football,” he told 247Sports after his visit in March. “It checks basically every single box except maybe distance. The campus is beautiful, great education, great football, great tight end coach, great head coach. Coach (Mario) Cristobal is a great, great head coach – love him.”

Schott, meanwhile, is the No. 226 overall prospect and No. 10 tight end in the class, and he committed to the Hurricanes over the Buckeyes.

“Both schools really showed me I’m a priority, but I think Miami might have pushed that a little more,” Schott told 247Sports. “I feel like my connection is deeper than Ohio State. Tight ends that go to Miami typically get drafted, so that’s two things right there that set Miami a little above them for the tight end room.”

With the commitment of Roberts com-

bined with the losses of Gilbert and Schott, the Buckeyes have offers out to just two uncommitted tight ends – American Fork (Utah) Lone Peak three-star Bear Tenney (6-5, 245) and St. Louis University three-star Landon Pace (6-3, 215), the son of legendary Ohio State offensive tackle Orlando Pace.

## OHSAA Allowing High School Players To Compete In 7-On-7

The Ohio High School Athletic Association announced a significant – and long-awaited – rule change for high school football on April 5, eliminating guidelines prohibiting student-athletes from participating in seven-on-seven competition.

Under the previous rules, student-athletes were not allowed to participate in seven-on-seven competition until May 15, with restrictions kicking back once their fall sports season began. Now, student-athletes are able to participate anytime outside of their regular football season with the exception of a 28-day window after their season ends.

“We have been talking about the football 7-on-7 regulation for some time, and we believe that football should be treated the same as our other team sports, essentially allowing football athletes the same opportu-

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

### 35 Years Ago — 1989

Willie “Chico” Nelson was happy that he decided to attend Ohio State, and the Buckeyes were more than happy to have him.

One of the most coveted high school defensive backs in the state of Florida out of Sarasota High School, Nelson was reportedly OSUs top choice this year when it came to recruiting men to restock the secondary. As things turned out, Nelson was just as happy with the Buckeyes as they were with him.

“I had a really good visit to Ohio State and just decided that was where I wanted to be,” Nelson said. “They were one of the first ones to recruit me, and I just liked everything about the school. So I decided that was where I would go.”

The 6-2, 195-pound defensive back was highly rated by many recruiting services following his junior year. He averaged more than five tackles per game at cornerback in 1987 and also grabbed seven interceptions.

### 30 Years Ago — 1994

Over the past several years, Ohio State coaches lurked along the Florida shoreline in hopes of landing some of the state’s talented football players.

Occasionally the Buckeyes were able to influence one or two of the top prep prospects to migrate north for their college careers. Nelson and Cedric Saunders, senior members of the previous year’s Big Ten co-championship team, as well as up-and-coming linebacker Greg Bellisari were just three of the most recent natives from the Sunshine State who played at OSU.

Now, lineman Jeff Wilson, one of this season’s signees, looked to bring some of the Florida heat with him when he arrived in Ohio in the fall.

A 6-4, 260-pounder who played both offensive and defensive tackle at Deerfield Beach (Fla.) High School, Wilson was a force to be reckoned with on both sides of the football. He said he chose to travel north and attend Ohio State after visiting Georgia Tech and South Carolina because he felt most at ease with the Buckeyes.

“I was real comfortable when I visited Ohio State, and I liked the atmosphere around the campus,” Wilson said. “The people around Ohio State were great. I feel like I can fit in with the team. They’re nice guys.”

### 25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State had added another Ohio prospect to its recruiting class for 2000 in recent weeks when Lima Senior defensive lineman Alphonso Townsend committed after visiting for Ohio State’s junior day on April 17. He joined Alliance, Ohio, lineman Larry Kinard as early verbal commitments for the next year.

Townsend (6-6, 280, 5.0) was among a group of about 60 prospects at OSUs Junior Day. He committed to the Buckeyes by telephone on April 21.

“They had been offering me already,” Townsend said. “I just

decided to go down on Saturday – they didn’t even know I was coming. They welcomed me with open arms.”

### 20 Years Ago — 2004

Cleveland Benedictine running back Raymond Williams, who had captured Ohio’s Mr. Football award less than half a year previous, was facing murder and aggravated robbery charges in connection with the death of teammate Lorenzo Hunter. Jon Huddleston, another member of Benedictine’s Division III state champion team, was facing the same charges.

According to reports from The Plain Dealer and The Associated Press, police said Williams, Huddleston and Hunter attempted to rob Rodney Roberts with Hunter and Williams brandishing fake guns, but Roberts allegedly pulled out a real gun of his own and fired, striking Hunter and killing him. Roberts also was in police custody on a murder charge.

In helping lead Benedictine to the 2003 state title, Williams rushed for 2,099 yards and 27 touchdowns, earning first-team All-Ohio and Division III offensive player of the year honors. He then went on to capture Mr. Football honors as the state’s top prep football player.

*(Editor’s Note: Williams was later indicted and pleaded guilty but was put on probation. He violated probation in 2007 after testing positive for marijuana usage and was sent to prison, according to The Plain Dealer. He later played football at Division II Shaw University.)*

### 15 Years Ago — 2009

Not very often is a five-star recruit who is regarded as the top player at his position taken by surprise by a school in his recruitment. It must have come as a good sign for the Buckeyes, then, that Lamarus Joyner had his eyes opened while on campus to take in the spring game.

“I was pretty stunned by the whole atmosphere at Ohio State,” Joyner said of his first trip to Columbus. “Being able to see practice and spend time with the players was everything I could have hoped for.”

One day before the spring game, the 5-8½, 165-pound Joyner took in an OSU practice and came away impressed with how physical the Buckeyes were.

As a junior at Miami Southwest Miami, Joyner recorded 112 tackles, four sacks and one interception and also had 17 catches for 482 yards and seven touchdowns. On special teams, he returned five kickoffs and one punt for a touchdown.

### 10 Years Ago — 2014

For the most part, Mesquite (Texas) Poteet five-star 2015 outside linebacker Malik Jefferson had stayed mum on his recruitment. But the 6-3, 220-pounder recently admitted that Ohio State – as well as Stanford – were two places to which he hoped to take

official visits.

That was obviously good news for the Buckeyes, who had recently built a pipeline of sorts to the Lone Star State. The nation’s top-ranked outside linebacker denied having any favorites in the race for his services, but it was obvious that Ohio State was in good standing with him at the moment.

“I am blind,” Jefferson said when asked about favorites and if he had thought about making a top-five list. “I am not sure what I am going to do yet. If I wanted to make a top five I could, but it would be very difficult. Hopefully before school starts I can narrow it down. That would be really good to figure out where I want to go before school starts – my top five and my officials.”

### Five Years Ago — 2019

A little over four months after he reopened his recruitment Dec. 4, Lejond Cavazos found his way back home April 12 when he committed to Ohio State. The 6-1, 190-pounder also considered Florida, Georgia, Louisiana State, Miami (Fla.) and Oregon.

The four-star defensive back from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy recommitted to head coach Ryan Day and the Buckeyes after an offseason of re-evaluation. In the wake of former head coach Urban Meyer’s retirement, the Cavazos family stressed its desire to step back and see everything through.

As they built their bond with Day, Lejond’s mother and father, Melba and C.J., grew more comfortable around the first-year head coach and assistants such as new co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley.

### One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State’s offense might have seen some struggles during the spring game on April 15 – Archie Griffin’s touchdown notwithstanding – but there were no issues on the offensive side of the ball when it came to recruiting. The Buckeyes added two commitments on offense that day in Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star tight end Max LeBlanc (6-4, 222) and Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star running back Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203).

First up was LeBlanc, who committed to the Buckeyes almost simultaneously as the spring game began. He marked the first verbal pledge at tight end in this recruiting cycle. LeBlanc was the No. 272 overall prospect and No. 14 tight end, and he committed to Ohio State over his other finalists, including Michigan, North Carolina and Tennessee.

The day’s other commitment from Williams-Dixon came in the hours after the spring game’s conclusion. He selected Ohio State over his other top schools, including Kentucky, Penn State, Rutgers and Tennessee, but since being offered by the Buckeyes in January, it seemed like just a matter of time until the in-state prospect committed to Ohio State, and he did so after attending the Buckeyes’ spring game.

## ASK AN ANALYST

### With Allen Trieu of 247Sports

**Ohio State continues to be in the mix for Duncanville, Texas, five-star wide receiver Dakorien Moore (5-11, 175), who is committed to LSU but is set to visit Ohio State. Do you think the Buckeyes have a chance at pulling off the flip here?**

"I think there's obvious interest on his end since he wants to get to campus. Also, anytime there's a receiver that's looking at Ohio State, that's a position they've had such good success – and Brian Hartline is such a great recruiter there – that I think there's a lot of signs pointing towards it. If I were LSU, I would be concerned about his interest in Ohio State."

**With Tony Alford leaving his job at Ohio State to be the running backs coach at Michigan, what impact do you expect that move to have on recruiting for both the Buckeyes and the Wolverines?**

"First, I think he's a very good recruiter, so he's going to bring that to Michigan. You've already seen them expand their running back recruiting board, and you're seeing him be able to bridge the gap with some of the kids he had relationships with at Ohio State, getting them on campus at Michigan. That goes for Ohio kids like Cleveland Heights four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 210) and Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205). But he's also got guys from other states to come visit Michigan, so I think it will be a positive move for Michigan in the recruiting department."

"For Ohio State, I think Carlos Locklyn, when you're at Oregon, you're going to recruit very nationally, and he's got a big social media presence. I don't think Ohio State is going to

lose interest in transition there. I actually think this is something that's going to end up benefiting both teams. Now in the moment, Tony Alford has brought the relationships he built at Ohio State to Michigan, so that's going to make for some really interesting recruiting battles. I do think it's already changed the tenor of some of those recruitments like Marquise Davis in particular."

"For Bo Jackson, if he ends up leaving the state, he's more likely to go south than he is to Michigan. The SEC schools are more of a threat there. Ohio State has arguably been the leader for a long time, and I don't think that's going to change overnight, but he is giving other schools a chance. He's visiting programs and really taking it all in, but I still think Ohio State has a great chance to land Bo. But that's not one where if he leaves the state of Ohio, he'll join Alford at Michigan. That is more protecting your home turf from the SEC schools at this point."

**Locklyn does not describe himself as a recruiter, but rather a relationship builder. That being said, what do you make of his recruiting, and what can he bring to Ohio State?**

"When you recruit at a program like Oregon, they do a lot of innovative things. They have a lot going for them with their facilities and with the Nike ties, so you learn how to sell some of those things. Oregon's always kind of had a lot of pizzazz when it comes to recruiting. You see social media postings a lot. Kids always enjoy visiting Oregon. I think he brings that type of energy to recruiting. They take it very seriously at Oregon, and you can see that in his personality. They don't bring

coaches on the staff if they don't have some personality and it fits with the vibe of their program, so he brings some of that over to Ohio State."

"In addition to all of the other things he does, I think having recruited in that environment is going to be a positive when he carries that experience over to Columbus. Then, obviously, you open up that part of the country. Ohio State has always recruited coast to coast, but when you have somebody who has parked themselves in the West and recruited in California and places like that, that's going to help."

**What do you make of the OHSAA expanding seven-on-seven opportunities for high school athletes in Ohio?**

"First of all, kudos to Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) and to the kids for taking a stand. The OHSAA (took) a beating, but they also had to be willing to compromise and come to a solution that works. I'll give them credit for that."

"I know there's some people involved in high school sports in Ohio that think it won't be a good thing, but this thing's really evolved around the country. There's other kids in other states playing seven-on-seven. I don't think it's adversely affected those kids. I don't think it's affected their ability to play other sports. There's guys in Illinois and Michigan that I cover who still play basketball (and) play some seven-on-seven, run track and play some seven-on-seven. Ohio has always been known as a great high school football state, and I think this will end up putting their kids on a bigger stage and will create more recruiting opportunities for them."

nities as their peers in other team sports," OHSAA executive director Doug Ute said in a statement. "Most other states already allow it, so there have been a growing number of situations when Ohio student-athletes have had to pass up opportunities in the winter and spring due to our regulations. We want to stress that hitting is still not permitted in the offseason, but this change expands what football players can do outside the season."

The rule change eliminates any prior suspensions that were handed out due to participation in seven-on-seven competition, which directly impacts McNutt, who had received a one-game suspension for competing in a seven-on-seven tournament in February in Miami.

Seven-on-seven football features only quarterbacks, wide receivers and running backs competing against linebackers, safeties and cornerbacks, with offensive lineman not included and tackling eliminated. Many of Ohio State's current stars at receiver – including wideouts Brandon Inniss, Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate, among others – participated in high school, with many playing with the Florida-based seven-on-seven team South Florida Express.

#### Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State cracked the list of top schools for a pair of coveted running backs in 2025, with Cleveland Heights four-star Marquise Davis (6-0, 210) and Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) including the Buckeyes among their top 10 and top 12, respectively.

- Ohio State made the top 12 for Minneapolis Robbinsdale Cooper four-star linebacker Emmanuel Karmo (6-3, 222) along with Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Penn State, USC and Wisconsin. He is the No.

375 overall prospect and No. 42 linebacker in 2025.

- Evans, Ga., four-star offensive lineman Mason Short (6-6, 305) – who held an offer from the Buckeyes – announced his commitment to Georgia on April 5.

- Upper Marlboro (Md.) Dr. Henry Wise four-star defensive lineman Trent Wilson (6-3, 270) – who had an offer from Ohio State – announced his commitment to Oklahoma on April 10.

- The Buckeyes cracked the top 15 for Reidsville, N.C., five-star tight end Kendre Harrison (6-7, 235), the sixth-ranked prospect and top-ranked tight end in 2026. Ohio State was joined on the list by Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and USC.

- In addition to other offers mentioned throughout Recruiting Outlook, the Buckeyes sent out six additional offers – one to a 2025 prospect, and five to prospects in 2026. The lone 2025 offer belonged to Greer (S.C.) Riverside wide receiver Mikkell Skinner (6-3, 210), while the 2026 offers went out to Matthews (N.C.) Weddington four-star linebacker Thomas Davis Jr. (6-2, 205); a pair of twin defensive linemen from Matthews (N.C.) Weddington in Drew Harris (6-2, 225) and Aiden Harris (6-3, 240); Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star athlete Jordan Thomas (6-0, 175); and Princeton (N.J.) Hun School four-star defensive end Luke Waffle (6-4, 230).

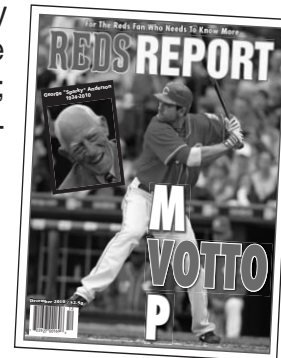
- Penn State added a top-100 commitment in 2025 on April 11, garnering a verbal pledge from Elba, Ala., four-star running back Alvin Henderson (5-9, 200). He is the No. 94 overall prospect and eighth-ranked running back in the class, and he chose the Nittany Lions over Auburn, Florida State and Miami (Fla.), among others.

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# Johnson Returning To Ohio State Via Portal

Ohio State and head coach Jake Diebler added a familiar face through the transfer portal on April 2 when former Buckeye guard Meechie Johnson Jr. announced he is transferring back to the program after spending two seasons at South Carolina.

Johnson, a Cleveland native and close family friend of NBA superstar LeBron James, has one season of eligibility left with his home-state Buckeyes.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

"I am a lifelong Buckeye," Johnson said. "It was my dream to be a Buckeye since I was a little kid. My story didn't go exactly as planned, but that's life. I'm blessed to be able to have this opportunity to get back to where I belong and still have at least the ending I've always dreamed about.

"I know what this team can be, and is going to be, and I want to be a part of that. I want to be a part of something special, something that hasn't been done here in a very long time. I want to win championships, at the highest level, and I want to do it for my home team. I'm coming home."

Johnson initially joined Ohio State in December 2020 after graduating early from Cleveland Heights as a four-star prospect. After making little impact in 17 appearances as a freshman, he saw his role expand his redshirt freshman season, logging 4.4 points, 1.5 rebounds and 1.2 assists in 26 games, including five starts.

He then transferred from Ohio State to South Carolina before the 2022-23 campaign, where he emerged as one of the Gamecocks' top offensive contributors during the past two seasons. He started 62 of 63 games over the past two years, averaging 13.4 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.2 assists, and helped lead the Gamecocks to a 26-8 record this past season, as well as the school's first NCAA Tournament berth since 2016-17.

Johnson will provide a veteran presence to a backcourt that currently includes team leader and top scorer Bruce Thornton and rising sophomore Taison Chatman, both of whom announced on social media that they are returning to the team next season.

### Gayle, Key To Enter Transfer Portal

Ohio State was also on the losing end of the transfer portal in April, when both sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. and senior forward Zed Key announced they intend to transfer from Ohio State after two and four seasons, respectively, with the program.

Gayle, who has two seasons of college eligibility left, was first to announce his decision to leave Ohio State in an Instagram post on April 4. He has since received interest from several schools, including Alabama, Clemson, Creighton, Georgia, Gonzaga and Michigan.

"I'd like to offer my sincere appreciation to the entire Ohio State community," Gayle wrote. "I've made great friends here, and I've had a great experience playing basketball. I

want to thank my coaches and teammates especially, but also a thanks to the administration, my professors, advisors and all support staff. ... This wasn't an easy decision, but after speaking with my family I've decided to enter my name in the transfer portal. I am praying for clarity as I take the next steps in my journey to become a pro."

Gayle appeared in 71 games (46 starts) over the last two seasons for Ohio State, averaging 9.1 points, 3.1 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game while shooting 44.7 percent from the field. He emerged as one of the Buckeyes' top performers this past season, starting in all but one of the team's 36 games – the lone non-start occurring on Senior Day on March 3 – while averaging 13.5 points, 4.6 rebounds and 3.1 assists. He was likely to reclaim his starting role for Ohio State next season, where he would have been an integral part of a talented backcourt.

But with Gayle – as well as fellow guards Bowen Hardman and Scotty Middleton, who also announced they are transferring this offseason – no longer on the team, Diebler and Ohio State will likely have to look further into the portal for some added backcourt help. Ohio State already offered and hosted former Princeton guard Matt Allocco (12.7 points, 2.9 rebounds, 3.3 assists) the weekend of April 13.

Key, who has one year of collegiate eligibility left due to the COVID-19-shortened 2019-20 season, announced his intention to transfer in a social media post on April 6.

"These last four years have been nothing short of a dream come true," he wrote. "From the moment I arrived on campus I felt embraced and accepted in this community, and I'm forever grateful for every moment on and off the court. As the program turns the page to a new era it's time for me to do the same. ... I have decided to enter my name in the NCAA transfer portal as I begin the next chapter of my life and career."

Key, who became a fan favorite throughout his career due to his eccentric personality and "finger guns" and "raise the roof" celebrations, was a fixture on Ohio State's frontcourt for the past four seasons. He appeared in 121 games (49 starts) for the Scarlet and Gray and averaged 7.4 points and 5.0 rebounds per game while shooting 55.2 percent from the field.

After emerging as a reliable presence in the Buckeyes' frontcourt in his first two years in Columbus, Key was gearing up for a breakout season in 2022-23. But Key's upward career trajectory was slowed after he suffered a shoulder injury against Purdue on Jan. 5, 2023, an ailment that ultimately prompted him to have season-ending surgery the next month.

Then-freshman center Felix Okpara took advantage of the extra playing time and earned the starting job at center this season. With Key slotted into a bench role, he saw a considerable dip in usage and production this season, averaging 6.6 points and 4.1 rebounds in 15.4 minutes per game this season. He announced his commitment to Dayton on April 15.

Key's departure clears the way for Okpara and freshman forward Devin Royal – who, like Chatman and Thornton, both announced on social media that they are returning to Ohio State next season – to assume the majority of minutes in the frontcourt.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**WELCOME BACK** – Ohio State's first portal addition of the offseason was former South Carolina and Ohio State guard Meechie Johnson, who played for the Buckeyes from 2020-22.

### Ohio State Secures Pledge From Five-Star Johnson

Diebler and Ohio State secured a big in-state commitment for the 2026 recruiting class on April 10, garnering a pledge from Cleveland Garfield Heights five-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175), the cousin of Meechie Johnson. This marks the first recruit to commit to Ohio State since Diebler was named full-time head coach on March 17.

"First I want to thank God for this opportunity and this blessing to be able to go to college and pick where I want to go," Johnson said during his commitment at Garfield Heights. "I want to thank my family – my dad, my mom, my siblings – my trainers, my family's supporters, everybody who's been with me through this journey, I thank them. With that being said, I will be committing to The Ohio State University."

Johnson, who chose the Buckeyes over schools such as Alabama, Cincinnati, Illinois and West Virginia, among others, is the No. 1 player in Ohio for the class as well as the fourth-best point guard and 24th-best player in the nation. He would be the first five-star to sign with the Buckeyes since D'Angelo Russell in 2014.

Johnson experienced an outstanding sophomore season with Garfield Heights, averaging 23.1 points, 4.5 rebounds, 2.4 assists and

2.0 steals per game while shooting 50 percent from the field and 39 percent from beyond the arc. He led the Bulldogs to a 25-2 record and postseason run to the Division I state quarterfinals this season, all efforts that helped him be named the Ohio High School Basketball Player of the Year by MaxPreps and the Division I All-Ohio Player of the Year by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association.

Johnson was offered by the then-Chris Holtmann-led Buckeyes last May, which made him the first 2026 recruit to receive an offer from Ohio State. Despite Holtmann being relieved of his duties in the middle of February, Johnson still showed his interest and allegiance, attending several games at the end of this season, including Ohio State's upset win over No. 2 Purdue on Feb. 18 in Diebler's first game as interim head coach.

According to Johnson, it was the relationship he built with Diebler that became one of the biggest draws for him to sign with Ohio State, something he said only strengthened when Diebler became the team's interim then full-time leader. This, according to the five-star, only validated his decision to play for the program he grew to love as a child.

"I always wanted to be a Buckeye growing up," Johnson told 247Sports. "That's my dream school. The way that coach Jake Diebler recruited me throughout the process is amazing. He showed me a lot of love and proved that he



## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

really wanted me. He didn't have the job yet so him getting the job and wanting me to commit early, it's like 'why wait.'"

### Diebler Adds Three Assistants To Staff

Ohio State's coaching staff underwent some significant changes since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, with Diebler hiring NC State's Joel Justus as associate head coach and tabbing Baylor's Luke Simons and Grand Canyon's Jamall Walker as assistants all in a span of three days in early April. Diebler also experienced a loss to his staff, with Brandon Bailey leaving the program and joining Holtmann at DePaul.

The 42-year-old Justus joined Diebler's staff on April 8, just days after helping NC State make an unlikely postseason run that included the program's first ACC Tournament title since 1987 and its first Final Four appearance since 1983.

He brings over 20 years of coaching experience to the program, including the last two seasons as an assistant on Kevin Keatts' staff along with seven seasons working under former Kentucky and current Arkansas head coach John Calipari. During his time at Kentucky, Justus was instrumental in the recruiting and development of future NBA All-Stars Bam Adebayo and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, among others.

"Joel is someone I have known for a while, and I'm excited to have him join our staff," Diebler said. "He is a well-rounded coach with great experience in the development and recruiting spaces, while winning everywhere he's been. His vision for building a program

and developing a winning culture is something I was looking for, and I can't wait for him to get started."

Walker, 46, was next to join Diebler's staff on April 10. He comes to Columbus after spending the last four seasons at Grand Canyon as an assistant under head coach Bryce Drew, whom Diebler spent three seasons coaching under at Vanderbilt from 2016-19.

During his time with Grand Canyon, the Antelopes compiled a 94-32 overall record and secured three NCAA Tournament appearances, including this past season where they advanced to the second round after beating fifth-seeded St. Mary's, their first NCAA Tournament win in program history. Walker also spent time in the Big Ten, serving as an assistant at Illinois from 2012-20, and had two coaching stints at Ohio University (2008-09, 2010-12).

"I could not be more happy to welcome Jamall and his family to the Ohio State basketball family," Diebler said. "Jamall's recruiting success, his experience in the Big Ten as well as working with a coach like Bryce Drew were all really important intangibles that I was looking for when filling out a staff. He's got a great defensive mind and a tremendous ability to connect with players. He's going to be a great asset for our program."

Simons, 46, was the final of the three assistants to be hired, joining the staff on April 11, possessing over eight years of collegiate experience.

He spent the last two seasons under Scott Drew (Bryce's brother) at Baylor, serving as director of basketball operations. While he was on staff, the Bears amassed a 47-21 re-

cord and advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament. His career also overlaps with Diebler, with the two coaching together at Vanderbilt from 2016-19 when Simons was the team's director of scouting.

"I'm excited to welcome Luke as he's going to be a great addition to our staff," Diebler said. "He has the ability to connect with players at every level, and his versatility is really important. He's been on staff at the collegiate level, and he has international coaching experience as well. Those experiences are going to be valuable for our program as we move forward."

Justus, Simons and Walker join a Diebler-led staff that includes former USC Upstate head coach and longtime Ohio State associate head coach Dave Dickerson, who rejoined the program on March 25 as an assistant.

### Calipari Expressed Interest In OSU Job

Calipari sent shockwaves through the SEC and college basketball landscape the night before the national championship game when multiple reports indicated he was leaving Kentucky and finalizing a five-year deal to become the next head coach at Arkansas.

Surprisingly, that feeling of shock also reached Columbus, when CBS Sports' Matt Norlander reported later that night that the longtime Wildcats coach expressed "significant" interest in the previously open head coaching position at Ohio State earlier this season before ultimately landing at Arkansas on April 10.

"John Calipari leaving Kentucky has been

on the table going back to February, sources tell CBS Sports," Norlander wrote on Twitter on April 7. "He privately expressed significant/serious interest in the Ohio State job but the timing wasn't right, per source."

Calipari – who helped cultivate a rich pipeline of future NBA talent and boasted a 410-123 overall record with six SEC regular-season championships and a national title while leading Kentucky from 2009-24 – was in the midst of his final season with the Wildcats when he reportedly contacted Ohio State about his interest in the head coaching position.

Around that same time, athletic director Ross Bjork and Ohio State were conducting a nationwide coaching search following Gene Smith's firing of Holtmann on Feb. 14, where the school spoke to just under 50 candidates for the position. Bjork said after Diebler's introductory press conference on March 18 that the Ohio State opening was an attractive opening that piqued the interest of several highly qualified coaches.

"We could've waited on a lot of people," Bjork said. "There are a lot of people who wanted this job. All the people that we talked to – the 49 coaches, the people that we met with in person, the people that we met with on Zoom – this (was) an attractive job."

Now, the 65-year-old Calipari will stay in the SEC and lead a Razorbacks program that is coming off a disappointing 16-17 season under former head coach Eric Musselman, who left the program to lead USC on April 4. Calipari's five-year deal is worth \$7 million annually, a mark that far exceeds Diebler's annual salary of \$2.5 million with Ohio State.

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# Harris Entering Portal After Five Seasons

Ohio State fifth-year guard Rikki Harris announced April 3 that she is entering the transfer portal after five seasons with the Buckeyes.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

"These last five years have been nothing less than a dream come true," Harris said on Instagram. "Everything we have accomplished as a team and program will be held close to my heart, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to be a Buckeye. ... With that being said, I have decided to enter the transfer portal. Closing a chapter is never easy, but with this being my final year of eligibility, my goal is to have the opportunity to play at my fullest potential."

Harris' status has been up in the air since Ohio State's season-ending loss to Duke on March 24. Harris acknowledged that a potential return to the Buckeyes for a sixth season was a possibility but said it was a question better served for head coach Kevin McGuff. When asked about a return for Harris, he said those discussions would take place in the coming days.

"What I do with every player is schedule a meeting," he said. "Sometimes the season ends and it's raw, like, 'I want to come back,' or, 'I don't want to come back,' then a week later once the emotions have gone out of it, you're thinking something different. We'll meet with everybody who has eligibility left and figure out who's coming back and what the right fits are."

Harris appeared in all but one game this season, coming off the bench in every appearance and averaging 4.4 points and 1.7 rebounds in 17.3 minutes per game, most on the team other than the usual starting five. She started 19 games in both 2021-22 and 2022-23 after injuries to Madison Greene and Jacy Sheldon opened up a spot in the starting lineup during those respective seasons but has otherwise been an effective sixth man for the Buckeyes.

With Sheldon and fifth-year guard Celeste Taylor departing the program, a starting role could have been in the cards for Harris at either point guard or shooting guard. Ohio State is returning sophomore guard Kennedy Cambridge, junior guard Kaia Henderson and Greene, as well as welcoming in Montverde (Fla.) Academy five-star point guard Jaloni Cambridge (5-6) as part of the incoming freshman class.

Harris is now the third Buckeye to enter the transfer portal, joining fellow guards Diana Collins and Emma Shumate. She



SONNY BROCKWAY

**THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES** — Ohio State fifth-year guard Rikki Harris entered the transfer portal on April 3, set to play her final year of college basketball elsewhere.

will utilize her final season of eligibility as granted by the NCAA's COVID-19 waiver.

### Ohio State Adds Gray, Petty From Portal

Ohio State made its first transfer addition of the offseason on April 14, when former Oregon point guard Chance Gray announced her commitment to the Buckeyes, and then earned a pledge from former Kentucky forward Ajae Petty the following day.

Gray, a Cincinnati native, entered the portal on April 3 after two seasons at Oregon. She started all 66 games for the Ducks over the past two seasons, averaging 12.0 points, 2.5 rebounds and 2.6 assists on 34.4 percent shooting, including 33.4 percent shooting from deep.

She was named to the Pac-12 All-Freshman Team after averaging 10.3 points, 2.1 rebounds and 2.2 assists in her first year with the Ducks and was an honorable mention on the conference's All-Defensive Team. She scored in double digits in 26 of Oregon's 31 games this season, including two contests where she made six three-pointers.

Petty is from a bit farther away, hailing from Baltimore, and played the last two seasons with the Wildcats after spending two seasons at LSU. The 6-3 forward is coming off a standout senior season with Kentucky where she started all 32 games and averaged a team-high 14.2 points and 10.6 rebounds, the latter mark a significant one for an Ohio State team that averaged 2.4 fewer boards than the opposition this past season.

She posted 18 double-doubles last season, including a 33-point, 15-rebound game on Dec. 3 against Tennessee Tech and a 23-point, 21-rebound performance on Jan. 11 against Vanderbilt.

Gray figures to compete with Greene and Jaloni Cambridge to be the team's starting point guard, though Gray — who stands 5-9 — could move to shooting guard, another position of need for the Buckeyes. Petty, meanwhile, slots in as an immediate starter for the Buckeyes.

### OSU Assistant Brooks Named Head Coach At Utah State

Ohio State assistant coach Wesley

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## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Brooks is moving up the coaching ranks, after he was named the next women's basketball coach at Utah State on April 1.

"Wesley is a great developer of people, not only as high-performing student-athletes, All-Americans and professionals, but as young women in society," said athletic director Diana Sabau, a former deputy athletic director under Gene Smith at Ohio State. "Under his leadership, we look forward to advancing the trajectory of women's basketball at Utah State University."

Brooks has been an assistant coach for the last three seasons under McGuff, helping lead the Buckeyes to three NCAA tournament appearances and the program's first Elite Eight appearance since 1993. He has been involved with coaching former and expected WNBA draft picks such as Taylor Mikesell and Sheldon.

"I'm extremely excited for Wes and his family," McGuff said. "He is a high-character person who will make a positive impact on the student-athletes at Utah State. His high-energy approach will have the Aggies competing for Mountain West championships in the near future."

Prior to his time with the Buckeyes, Brooks had stints as an assistant coach at Michigan, Utah, North Texas, Texas Southern and Robert Morris, with his coaching career dating back to 2005. He takes over a Utah State program that has just two winning seasons in the last 10 years and has never made the NCAA tournament. Former head coach Kayla Ard was fired in early March after her fourth season and finished with a 24-90 record.

"I am thankful and honored that Diana Sabau and President (Elizabeth) Cantwell have given me the opportunity to lead the Utah State women's basketball program," Brooks said. "I am excited and look forward to establishing a program that Aggie Nation can be proud of. Our goal is to win championships."

McGuff will now search for a new assistant coach after having the same staff – including Brooks, associate head coach Carla Morrow and assistant coach Jalen Powell – for the past three seasons. The Buckeyes could consider an internal promotion for Reid Guzdanski, an Ohio State graduate who is the program's current director of recruiting operations and professional development. He has been with the team since 2017-18 after previously serving as a graduate assistant and video coordinator under McGuff from 2014-16.

### VanDerveer Announces Retirement After 45 Seasons

Tara VanDerveer, the NCAA's all-time wins leader, former Ohio State women's basketball coach and head coach at Stanford since 1985, announced her retirement on April 9 after 45 years in coaching.

"Basketball is the greatest group project there is, and I am so incredibly thankful for every person who has supported me and our teams throughout my coaching career," VanDerveer said in a statement. "I've been spoiled to coach the best and brightest at one of the world's foremost institutions for nearly four decades. Coupled with my time at Ohio State and Idaho, and as head coach of the United States National Team, it has been an un-

forgettable ride.

"The joy for me was in the journey of each season, seeing a group of young women work hard for each other and form an unbreakable bond. Winning was a by-product. I've loved the game of basketball since I was a little girl, and it has given me so much throughout my life. I hope I've been able to give at least a little bit back."

VanDerveer has compiled an NCAA-record 1,216 wins over 45 years at Idaho (1978-80), Ohio State (1980-85) and Stanford, having led Stanford to national championships in 1990, 1992 and 2021, as well as 13 appearances in the Final Four.

VanDerveer played college basketball at Indiana and later became an assistant coach for Ohio State's women's varsity team (and head coach of the junior varsity team) before departing to become head coach at Idaho. She completed two seasons there before returning to Ohio State, where she coached for five seasons and led the Buckeyes to their first NCAA tournament berth in 1981-82, and later led Ohio State to the Elite Eight in 1984-85.

Following that season, she left for Stanford, where she carved out a Hall of Fame career with the Cardinal. With VanDerveer departing Stanford, the program plans to promote current assistant coach Kate Paye – also a former player under VanDerveer from 1991-95 – to the full-time position.

### OSU Signee Cambridge Wins State Championship

Jaloni Cambridge will arrive on campus this summer with some hardware after helping lead Montverde Academy to a Florida state championship on April 7.

Cambridge, who previously won a state championship with Ensworth High School in Tennessee as a sophomore before transferring to Montverde this year, finished with 17 points, six rebounds and nine assists in Montverde's 61-53 win over IMG Academy.

She helped lead Montverde to the championship game with 33 points and a buzzer-beater in the semifinals, as well as a 19-point, 14-rebound, 12-assist triple double in the quarterfinals. She averaged 20.4 points, 8.5 rebounds and 6.6 assists this season.

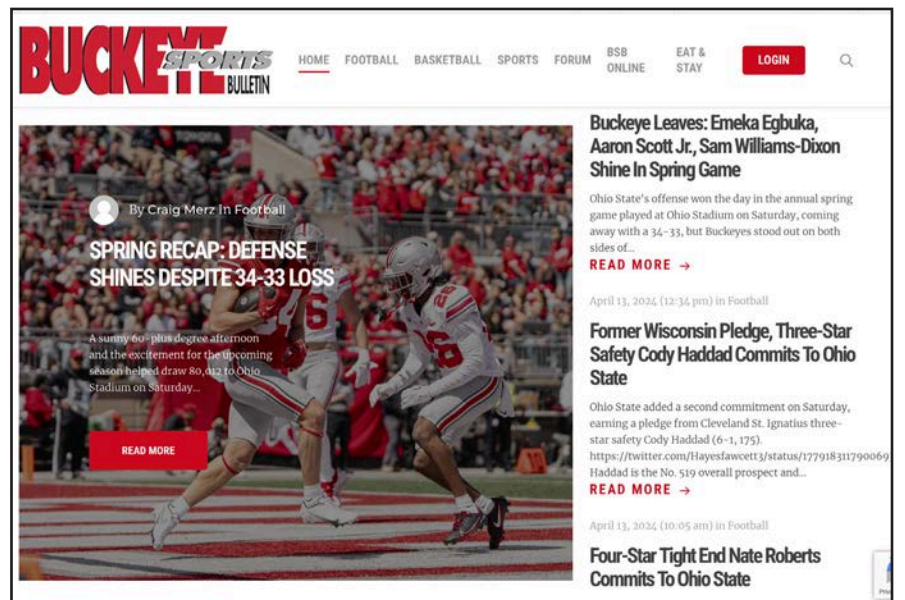
It caps off a standout senior season for Cambridge, who was named MaxPreps and Gatorade's Florida Player of the Year. She is also a finalist for the Gatorade National Girls Player of the Year and Naismith High School Girls Player of the Year.

While she will not be an early enrollee for Ohio State, she figures to factor in as a freshman given her high school pedigree and the significant loss of depth at guard for the Buckeyes with several guards set to leave the program.

*The 2024 WNBA draft was set to begin on April 15 just hours after Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, with Sheldon and Taylor both hoping to hear their names called. For the latest on where they landed, visit [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), free to all subscribers.*

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# Iowa, Purdue Lose National Title Games

A Big Ten basketball team made it to the national championship game in both the men's and the women's bracket with Purdue facing off against UConn on the men's side and Iowa going against South Carolina for the women, but the conference fell short, with both the Boilermakers and Hawkeyes falling to their

he scored 37 points and brought down 10 rebounds. The only other player to reach double digits for the Boilers was sophomore guard Braden Smith, who scored 12 points and dished out eight assists, while four Huskies reached double-digit scoring as UConn shot 48.4 percent from the field.

"I just have to play better," Edey said after the game. "This is just one of those games where I can't go through stretches where I'm not effective, and I had a few of those stretches today. That was the game."

Edey led the Boilermakers to their third ever Final Four appearance (also in 1969 and 1980), where they ended the Cinderella run of No. 11 NC State in a 63-50 win in the semifinals. Edey had another double-double in that win with 20 points and 12 rebounds.

Purdue is still searching for its first NCAA

championship, and it could be an uphill climb for the Boilermakers moving forward with Edey entering his name into the NBA draft. The most recent men's champion from the Big Ten was Michigan State and Tom Izzo in 2000. Maryland also won in 2002, though it was still in the ACC at that point.

Since the Spartans last won it all, Big Ten teams are 0-8 in the championship game. Five different conferences – including the American Athletic Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, Big 12, Big East and SEC – have won the championship since the Big Ten's last title.

Shifting to the women's side, Caitlin Clark and the Hawkeyes also made it to the title game and lost. Clark scored 30 points in the 87-75 loss, adding eight rebounds and five assists.

Guards Kate Martin (16 points) and Sydney

Affolter (12) and forward Hannah Stuelke (11) also made it into double digits, while the Gamecocks were led by center Kamilla Cardoso's 15 points and 17 rebounds.

"(South Carolina) is a tremendous basketball team," Iowa head coach Lisa Bluder said after the loss. "Congratulations to them. I'm proud of my team though. Finishing national runner-up two years in a row is an amazing feat. Nobody thought we were going to be here at the beginning of the year, so that makes it pretty special."

The Hawkeyes got there by beating No. 3 UConn – who made it out of the region Ohio State was in – 71-69 in a down-to-the-wire finish where an offensive foul against the Huskies with four seconds remaining ended up being the game-deciding play.

Along the way in the tournament, Iowa

## BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

top-seeded competition.

Purdue center Zach Edey had his college career come to an end in a 75-60 loss in which

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1984

In what single area did Ohio State need the most improvement if the Buckeyes were going to win the Big Ten and go to the Rose Bowl next season?

The answer was obvious – pass defense.

Any football coach wants improvement in every area, but sixth-year Buckeye coach Earle Bruce had to consider his pass defense a top priority. And he got a well-qualified individual tutoring his defensive backs in the spring.

Gary Blackney replaced Dom Capers, who was now with the USFL Philadelphia Stars, as Ohio State's defensive backfield coach. The 39-year-old Connecticut graduate began his coaching career at Brown in 1970, before going on to Rhode Island in 1973, Wisconsin in 1975 and UCLA in 1978 prior to joining the Syracuse staff.

"He demands a lot out of you," Buckeye defensive back Steve Hill said of Blackney. "He knows exactly what he wants, and he's been trying to simplify things for us."

### 35 Years Ago — 1989

John Cooper enjoyed the game of football. In addition to making the sport his profession, the Ohio State head coach also was an unabashed fan of the game. That was Cooper's capacity during the annual Scarlet and Gray game, held April 29 in front of 28,345 fans in Ohio Stadium.

Beginning his second season at the helm of the Buckeyes, Cooper walked the sidelines of both teams, talked with fans and generally enjoyed himself at the game.

After the contest, won 22-19 by the Scarlet squad, Cooper said it was a good indication of the increased overall depth of his team.

"I thought it was a good game from my standpoint," he said. "It was a good indication of how evenly divided the squad was. I think the players had fun."

### 30 Years Ago — 1994

Hopscoching the United States for the past two decades, Andy Geiger had set foot inside Ohio Stadium exactly one time in his 55 years.

As athletic director at Stanford, he watched in 1982 as John Elway led the Cardinal to a 23-20 come-from-behind victory over Ohio State.

A dozen years later, Geiger accepted the challenge of working in the shadow of the Horseshoe, agreeing to become the seventh athletic director in OSU history.

Although there had been only seven men who occupied the post since 1912, Geiger would be the fifth since 1970 and third since 1984. While Lynn St. John and Richard Larkins were on the job a combined 58 years, Ed Weaver, Hugh Hindman, Rick Bay and Jim Jones averaged only about six each. Some wondered publicly if Geiger would do anything to halt the recent trend, if his hiring was only a stopgap measure as Ohio State tried to emerge from an NCAA investigation of its men's basketball program.

"I reject that notion," Geiger said. "Nothing has been presented to me in terms of this being that sort of appointment. I'm in for a much longer haul than that. I'm not here just for a cup of coffee."

### 25 Years Ago — 1999

With one of the most ambitious schedules in recent memory looming in the fall, the Ohio State football team wrapped up spring practice with a final scrimmage on April 24.

After the scrimmage, in which the defense dominated, Cooper admitted his team needed to dedicate itself to a strong summer of strength and conditioning work in order to fully prepare for the

1999 season.

"The hay is not in the barn," Cooper said after the defense rolled to a 61-16 win under a special scoring system. "All these players will be here this summer working out, getting in condition. Spring practice is over and they don't have to worry about going out there and having contact, but there is an awful lot of work that needs to be done between now and when we play Miami (Fla.) in the Kickoff Classic."

### 20 Years Ago — 2004

It was a dark day for the quarterbacks at Ohio State's annual spring game April 24.

That was not a commentary on the performance of Justin Zwick, Troy Smith and Todd Boeckman, who combined to complete 29 of 52 passes (55.8 percent) for 251 yards and an interception. And it certainly was not an indictment of the weather conditions on that Saturday, as the contest was staged on a beautifully sunny afternoon with the temperature hovering around a comfortable 60 degrees.

No, the quarterbacks' day at Ohio Stadium was dark in a much more literal sense. Each of the three competitors for the job wore a black jersey, forcing them to stay behind the line of scrimmage and attempt to throw completions. To further complicate matters, the black jerseys meant that any quarterback crossing the line of scrimmage would lead to an immediate whistle, signifying that the play would be blown dead.

"We had gone about 160 plays (during the jersey scrimmage April 17) when we had them run around and be live," OSU head coach Jim Tressel said afterward, explaining the rationale for the black jerseys. "We wanted them to stand in and either deliver or unload. We thought we needed a little work on that."

The quarterbacks got their work in, particularly Zwick, who attempted 26 passes to Smith's 15 and Beckman's 11. But it seemed to come at the expense of the offense as a whole, as the spring game was a largely lifeless affair won by the Scarlet, 13-0.

### 15 Years Ago — 2009

Terrelle Pryor had heard the criticism. After taking the reins as Ohio State's starting quarterback just four games into his freshman season, the former top recruit in the country compiled an 8-1 record under center.

Numbers can be misleading, however. With the bruising Chris "Beanie" Wells serving as the focal point of the offense, Pryor was not often tasked with moving the ball through the air. His 1,311 passing yards for the season were the second-lowest mark to lead the Buckeyes in a season during the past 12 years, and he had just one game of 200 passing yards or more.

The rap was out there: The athletic Pryor was more of a runner than a passer, and the Buckeyes would likely be looking downfield less while he was at the helm of their offense.

Then, in front of the largest crowd to ever witness a spring football game, Pryor showed the more than 95,000 fans in Ohio Stadium that he was ready to prove them wrong. He completed 13 of 18 passes for 191 yards and two touchdowns of more than 40 yards. Both throws came in the face of an 18-mile-per-hour wind blowing from the South.

"I thought those were tough conditions, and I thought Terrelle threw it extremely well, especially on a couple of the longer ones," Tressel said. "Those were tough conditions and it was a little bit of a base package that we did, but there was enough stuff that you're going to see those types of things as we go along in the season. To have a day throwing crisp into that wind, I thought was very positive."

### 10 Years Ago — 2014

Urban Meyer knew how far Ohio State had come. He also knew how far the Buckeyes had to go.

Wrapping up his third spring as the Ohio State head coach with an admittedly lackluster spring game exhibition, Meyer failed to let an uneventful afternoon in Ohio Stadium tarnish his team's previous 14 practice sessions. After a 24-2 start to his Buckeye career, Meyer had seen enough to make him believe that the best was yet to come.

"We had a good spring," Meyer said following the Gray team's 17-7 win over the Scarlet on April 12. "I think we're better than we were two years ago, and I'm hoping we're a notch better than we were last year."

### Five Years Ago — 2019

Unlike the previous spring when Meyer named Dwayne Haskins his starting quarterback shortly after the conclusion of spring practice, the competition between Ohio State sophomore Justin Fields and redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin was expected to continue well into fall camp.

"I don't think, right now, that we're going to make a decision on that," head coach Ryan Day said following the Gray's 35-17 win over the Scarlet in the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 13. "I think it will continue through the preseason."

Neither quarterback was exceptional in the contest. Fields completed just 4 of 13 passes for 131 yards and a touchdown for the Gray team. Baldwin split his time between the two teams, meanwhile, and finished the day 20 of 36 for 246 yards and two touchdowns. He also threw two interceptions.

"I think that they both did a good job today," Day said. "They both flashed at times. It's still a work in progress. We've still got work to do. But I thought that they gave some of the receivers a chance. Some of it's hard, when you're not in the tackle situation, is it a sack, is it not? Do we break out? And Justin, he can kind of create on the edge a little bit, so we didn't get a chance to see that as much. I thought Matthew made a couple really nice throws down the field, too."

### One Year Ago — 2023

It had been nearly 50 years since former Ohio State running back Archie Griffin, the only two-time Heisman Trophy winner in the award's history, took home his first trophy in 1974. But it didn't mean that his help wasn't still required in Ohio State's spring game on April 15.

With the Ohio State offense struggling, trailing 34-10 midway through the third quarter, the Buckeyes called in some help in the form of Griffin, who checked in and took a handoff from quarterback Kyle McCord to the house, going 25 yards for the score.

"I still think (Chip Trayanum) was the second leading ball carrier on the day," Day said. "I think the first one was Archie Griffin. It was fun watching him there. I think next year is the 50th anniversary of his first Heisman, so we wanted to make sure he came back for that one. The offense needed a little help at that point, too, right around the 30-yard line, so we felt like we called into the bullpen and pulled in 45, so that was good."

Griffin's touchdown helped spark the Ohio State offense, which turned a 34-10 blowout into just a 40-31 loss by the end of the scrimmage and provided one of the game's highlights.

"It felt great," Griffin said afterward on the Big Ten Network. "Nobody touched me. That makes it feel real good."

## BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

games continued to set records for viewers. The national championship averaged 18.9 million viewers, according to Nielsen – more than the 14.8 million averaged by the men – and peaked at 24.1 million viewers, making it the most-watched women's basketball game on record.

Additionally, the average viewership for the women's title game surpassed every college football game last season besides Michigan's win over Alabama in the Rose Bowl (27.2 million) on Jan. 1, the Wolverines' subsequent win over Washington in the title game on Jan. 8 (25 million), and Ohio State's loss at Michigan on Nov. 25, 2023 (19 million).

### Clark, Edey Sweep National Awards

While neither Clark nor Edey came away with national championships, they did earn some individual awards as they wrapped their respective college careers.

Clark, the NCAA's all-time leading scorer, was named AP Women's Basketball Player of the Year for the second consecutive season, becoming just the sixth player – along with Tennessee's Chamique Holdsclaw (1998-99), LSU's Seimone Augustus (2005-06), UConn's Maya Moore (2009, 2011), Baylor's Brittney Griner (2012-13) and UConn's Breanna Stewart (2014-16) – to earn the award multiple times.

Other awards earned by Clark include the John R. Wooden Award, the Naismith Collegiate Player of the Year, USBWA National Player of the Year and the Wade Trophy, awarded by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. And just days after Clark's collegiate career ended, Iowa announced on April 11 that it plans to retire her No. 22 in the near future.

"You've all inspired me as much as I inspired you," Clark said after the announcement. "You allowed me to live out my dream every single day, and for that, I'm very thankful. It's been very special, and this place will always be home to me."

Clark was expected to be the No. 1 overall pick to the Indiana Fever in the 2024 WNBA draft, which was scheduled for April 15 shortly after Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

Edey saw a similar bevy of awards come his way. He was named AP Player of the Year in addition to earning the Wooden Award, the USBWA's Oscar Robertson Trophy, the National Association of Basketball Coaches Player of the Year honor and the Naismith Collegiate Player of the Year award, among several other honors.

Purdue head coach Matt Painter believes Edey will be remembered among the great players who have played college basketball.

"When you look at his numbers against the greats there's no question he's in the conversation," Painter said after the loss to UConn. "He's also the winningest player at Purdue. We won our league back-to-back years by multiple games, the first time that's happened in the Big Ten since I was in kindergarten."

"I think he was great in how he did it too. People have no idea the burden that you carry when you're as good as he is and you produce like he does. I think he's going to be a terrific NBA player, and we're really proud of him."

### Phelia, Other Big Ten Stars Enter Transfer Portal

Big Ten teams have seen their share of movement in the transfer portal since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

Of the nearly 50 transfers so far on the men's side, the most notable are Purdue's Ma-

#### 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 (22-14, 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; **14** Big Ten tournament at Minneapolis vs. Iowa, W 90-78; **15** Big Ten tournament at Minneapolis vs. Illinois, L 77-74; **19** NIT vs. CORNELL, W 88-83; **23** NIT vs. VIRGINIA TECH, W 81-73; **26** NIT vs. GEORGIA, L 79-77.

#### WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (26-6, 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; **22** NCAA TOURNAMENT vs. MAINE, W 80-57; **24** NCAA TOURNAMENT vs. Duke, L 75-63.

#### MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (14-20-4, 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, L 2-1.

#### WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (35-4-0, 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 COLUMBUS REGIONAL vs. MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 9-0; **22** NCAA Semifinal at Durham, N.H. vs. Clarkson, W 4-1; **22** NCAA Final at Durham, N.H. vs. Wisconsin, W 1-0.

#### MEN'S TENNIS (25-1)

**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, W 6-1; **17** Michigan, W 4-0; **22** NORTHWESTERN, W 4-0; **24** ILLINOIS, W 4-1; **29** Purdue, W 4-0; **31** Indiana, W 7-0.

**April 5** Penn State, W 7-0; **13** MICHIGAN STATE, W 6-1; **14** MICHIGAN, W 4-0; **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.

son Gillis, Rutgers' Clifford Omoruyi, Illinois' Dain Dainja and Wisconsin's AJ Storr, which was reported on in the previous issue of BSB.

Gillis did not start for Purdue this season but came off the bench in all 39 games, averaging 21.1 minutes and 6.5 points per contest. Omoruyi hits the portal after averaging 10.4 points and 8.3 rebounds last season, while Dainja – who has already pledged to Memphis – averaged 6.1 points and 3.6 rebounds for the Illini.

The most notable entry for the women thus far among over 30 entrants is Michigan guard Laila Phelia, who entered the portal on April 9.

Phelia was the leading scorer for the Wolverines last season, averaging 16.8 points per game and also adding 3.6 rebounds, 2.0 assists and 1.2 steals per contest. She was a first-team All-Big Ten selection after her standout performance.

She is one of six Wolverines to enter the portal so far, joining forwards Chyra Evans, Cameron Williams, Taylor Williams and Taylor Woodson.

Other impact players who have entered the transfer portal for the women include Mich-

igan State guard Deedee Hagemann, Penn State guards Leilani Kapinus and Shay Ciezki, and Rutgers forward Kaylene Smikle.

### Northwestern To Play On Practice Field In 2024

Northwestern will have a brand-new Ryan Field to play at beginning in 2026, but in the meantime, the Wildcats will have to make do with a temporary structure at the university's athletic facility over the next two seasons.

The university announced on April 10 that it will play a majority of the team's games at the athletic facility this upcoming season, after the old Ryan Field was demolished following the conclusion of this past season in which the Wildcats finished 8-5 under then-interim (and now full-time) head coach David Braun.

"I am thrilled that we could make this happen," university president Michael Schill said. "It's truly a win for our community. In addition to creating a wonderful fan experience in the lead-up to the opening of Ryan Field, hosting games on campus will reduce the travel burdens for our student-athletes and fans and will make games much more accessible. We also

are pleased to keep the economic benefits of football game days in Evanston."

In the release, Northwestern said it is continuing discussions with other Chicago-area venues about potentially hosting games over the next two seasons. The Chicago Bears' home at Soldier Field was a venue reportedly bandied about, and a report in February said Ohio State's Nov. 16 contest on the road against Northwestern may be played at Wrigley Field.

As for the practice facility, temporary structures will be built to seat fans, but school officials say the capacity will still be much less than Ryan Field's previous capacity of 47,130.

"We talk all the time about providing the ultimate student-athlete experience, and keeping our team on campus while providing a true home-field advantage accomplishes that mission," Braun said. "During a period of exciting transition, playing in a venue that brings the Northwestern community together provides a perfect bridge to the new Ryan Field, and I'm so excited about the gameday experience for our program and the entire Wildcat community."



| MARCH/APRIL               |              |                 |              |              |              |              |
|---------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| SUN                       | MON          | TUE             | WED          | THU          | FRI          | SAT          |
|                           |              |                 |              |              | 29 @STP 7:37 | 30 @STP 3:07 |
| <b>HOME OPENING NIGHT</b> |              |                 |              |              |              |              |
| 31 @STP 3:07              | 2 OMA 6:15   | 3 OMA 6:15      | 4 OMA 6:15   | 5 OMA 6:15   | 6 OMA 2:05   |              |
| 7 OMA 1:05                | 9 @LOU 6:05  | 10 @LOU 11:05AM | 11 @LOU 6:35 | 12 @LOU 7:15 | 13 @LOU 7:15 |              |
| 14 @LOU 1:05              | 16 BUF 6:15  | 17 BUF 12:05    | 18 BUF 6:15  | 19 BUF 6:15  | 20 BUF 4:05  |              |
| 21 BUF 1:05               | 23 @SYR 6:35 | 24 @SYR 6:35    | 25 @SYR 6:35 | 26 @SYR 6:35 | 27 @SYR 1:05 |              |
| 28 @SYR 1:05              | 30 TOL 6:15  |                 |              |              |              |              |

| JUNE         |              |               |              |              |              |             |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| SUN          | MON          | TUE           | WED          | THU          | FRI          | SAT         |
|              |              |               |              |              |              | 1 LHV 5:05  |
| 2 LHV 1:05   |              | 4 @IND 7:05   | 5 @IND 1:35  | 6 @IND 7:05  | 7 @IND 7:05  | 8 @IND 7:05 |
| 9 @IND 1:35  | 11 @IOW 7:05 | 12 @IOW 12:05 | 13 @IOW 7:05 | 14 @IOW 7:05 | 15 @IOW 7:05 |             |
| 16 @IOW 1:05 | 18 @WOR 6:45 | 19 @WOR 6:45  | 20 @WOR 6:45 | 21 @WOR 6:45 | 22 @WOR 4:05 |             |
| 23 @WOR 1:05 | 25 OMA 7:05  | 26 OMA 7:05   | 27 OMA 12:05 | 28 OMA 7:05  | 29 OMA 7:05  |             |
| 30 OMA 1:05  |              |               |              |              |              |             |

| AUGUST       |              |              |              |              |              |            |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| SUN          | MON          | TUE          | WED          | THU          | FRI          | SAT        |
|              |              |              |              | 1 SYR 7:05   | 2 SYR 7:05   | 3 SYR 7:05 |
| 4 SYR 1:05   | 6 @STP 8:07  | 7 @STP 2:07  | 8 @STP 8:07  | 9 @STP 8:07  | 10 @STP 7:37 |            |
| 11 @STP 3:07 | 13 @IOW 7:38 | 14 @IOW 1:08 | 15 @IOW 7:38 | 16 @IOW 8:08 | 17 @IOW 7:08 |            |
| 18 @IOW 2:08 | 20 IND 6:15  | 21 IND 12:05 | 22 IND 6:15  | 23 IND 7:05  | 24 IND 7:05  |            |
| 25 IND 1:05  | 27 @GWN 7:05 | 28 @GWN 7:05 | 29 @GWN 7:05 | 30 @GWN 7:05 | 31 @GWN 6:05 |            |

| MAY          |     |              |              |              |              |              |
|--------------|-----|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| SUN          | MON | TUE          | WED          | THU          | FRI          | SAT          |
|              |     |              | 1 TOL 6:35   | 2 TOL 6:15   | 3 TOL 7:05   | 4 TOL 4:05   |
| 5 TOL 1:05   |     | 7 @IOW 7:38  | 8 @IOW 1:08  | 9 @IOW 1:08  | 10 @IOW 8:08 | 11 @IOW 7:08 |
| 12 @IOW 2:08 |     | 14 LOU 7:05  | 15 LOU 12:05 | 16 LOU 12:05 | 17 LOU 7:05  | 18 LOU 7:05  |
| 19 LOU 1:05  |     | 21 @OMA 7:35 | 22 @OMA 7:35 | 23 @OMA 7:35 | 24 @OMA 7:35 | 25 @OMA 7:05 |
| 26 @OMA 3:05 |     | 28 LHV 7:05  | 29 LHV 6:35  | 30 LHV 7:05  |              |              |

| JULY         |             |             |              |              |              |              |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| SUN          | MON         | TUE         | WED          | THU          | FRI          | SAT          |
|              | 1 @TOL 7:05 | 2 @TOL 7:05 | 3 @TOL 7:05  | 4 TOL 4:05   | 5 TOL 7:05   | 6 TOL 5:05   |
|              |             | 9 @IND 7:05 | 10 @IND 1:35 | 11 @IND 7:05 | 12 @IND 7:05 | 13 @IND 7:05 |
| 14 @IND 1:35 |             |             |              |              | 19 @LOU 7:15 | 20 @LOU 7:15 |
| 21 @LOU 6:05 |             | 23 MEM 5:05 | 24 MEM 12:05 | 25 MEM 7:05  | 26 MEM 7:05  | 27 MEM 7:05  |
| 28 MEM 1:05  |             | 30 SYR 7:05 | 31 SYR 12:05 |              |              |              |

| SEPTEMBER    |            |              |               |              |              |              |
|--------------|------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| SUN          | MON        | TUE          | WED           | THU          | FRI          | SAT          |
| 1 @GWN 1:05  | 2 DUR 6:15 | 3 DUR 6:15   |               | 5 DUR 6:35   | 6 DUR 7:05   | 7 DUR 7:05   |
| 8 DUR 1:05   |            | 10 STP 6:15  | 11 STP 6:15   | 12 STP 6:15  | 13 STP 7:05  | 14 STP 7:05  |
| 15 STP 1:05  |            | 17 @TOL 6:35 | 18 @TOL 12:05 | 19 @TOL 6:35 | 20 @TOL 7:05 | 21 @TOL 5:05 |
| 22 @TOL 2:05 |            |              |               |              |              |              |

## 2024 PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

**TUE.** "TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG" NIGHTS  
- 4/2, 4/16, 4/30, 5/14, 5/28, 6/11, 6/25, 7/23, 7/30, 8/20, 9/3, & 9/10

**WED.** "MILITARY & FIRST RESPONDERS" GAMES  
- 50% off all available tickets (max of 4) for active & retired Military & First Responders  
"DOLLAR DAYS" - \$1 select concession items (4/3, 5/1, 5/29, 6/26 & 9/11)  
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"  
- Students 14 and above can present a valid ID and for \$10 receive a Reserved Seat ticket AND \$5 in Clippers Cash for food, beverage or souvenir purchase

**THU.** "COPA DE LA DIVERSIÓN"  
- Clippers transform into Los Veleros on Thursday Nights  
"THIRSTY THURSDAYS"  
- Beverage Specials on Beer, Margaritas & Soft Drinks  
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"

**FRI.** "\$5 FRIDAY"  
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi  
- \$5 Beers (small) and Wine  
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"

**SAT.** "PARTY-AT-THE-PARK" - Starting on MAY 18  
- Pre-Game live music from 5:30p-6:45p on the Stage on the RF Concourse

**SUN.** "FAMILY DAY & SENIOR DAY"  
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- \$3 Bleacher or \$5 Reserved Seat (60 & over)  
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# Transfer Portal Quiet So Far For Buckeyes

The keys to a successful program used to be the three R's – recruiting, recruiting, recruiting. But in this new era of college sports another R is needed – retention.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

With the advent of the transfer portal and the introduction of name, image and likeness money to entice players, keeping a team intact is a year-round job. It's not enough to bring in a freshmen class to replenish the roster. There's also the dual task of making sure the current players don't leave while trying to fill the gaps with incoming transfers.

That's why Ohio State men's hockey coach Steve Rohlik chuckled when asked by Buckeye Sport Bulletin in late March if his offseason had begun.

"People think when the season's over, everything slows down," he said. "It seems now it speeds up and it's going the other way. It's college athletics. It's changed, and it's going to continue to change."

This is a crucial period with the transfer window open until May 14, but unlike last season's revolving door, it has been serene for the Buckeyes. At this time a year ago, eight players left via the transfer portal, and Rohlik eventually brought in seven transfers to go along with eight freshmen. As of BSB going to press on April 15, no Buckeyes were in the portal and one player had transferred in: Northeastern forward Gunnarwolfe Fontaine (5-10, 175), a seventh-round pick (No. 202) by the Nashville Predators in the 2020 NHL draft.

The East Greenwich, R.I., native had 92 points (30 goals, 62 assists) in 127 games over four seasons with the Huskies. This past season, he scored eight goals and had 19 assists for 27 points in 36 games with four game-winners.

Rohlik knows that retaining as many players as possible is a never-ending pursuit.

"You've got to trust the process you have in place," he said. "To me, you start with an unbelievable staff, support staff and the resources and the development and the opportunities that guys have gotten here to go on to play at the next level."

"We've won a lot of games here over the years, and the guys on the team continue to see what has happened. The proof is that guys are getting opportunities. I think, really, that's No. 1 when we talk to the players about their time here and how they fit."

The Buckeyes last season had defensemen Mason Lohrei (Boston Bruins) and Cole McWard (Vancouver Canucks) and goalie Jakub Dobeš (Montreal Canadiens) leave early to sign with NHL teams. Last month, sophomore forward Stephen Halliday left to join the Ottawa Senators organization and the New York Islanders signed junior forward Cam Thiesing. Also, five seniors – Scooter Brickley, Michael Gildon, Riley Hughes, Mason Klee and Dalton Messina – signed minor-league deals.

## Upon Second Thought

The college hockey season is over so it's time for some spring cleaning with leftover notebooks items:

Rohlik hopes the NCAA will evaluate its video review process. Goals, offsides and major penalties (called or missed) can be challenged. Games are being bogged down and taking longer, but he feels that's not the main issue.

"We've been on the wrong end a few times, and I know other schools in our league have too," Rohlik said. "Video review, to me, means you tried to go in there and get it right. But I can't tell you how many times they've gone and got it wrong for whatever reason. We've got to figure out why, and we've got to figure out how to make it more consistent, make it better."

"But to get calls wrong, I know they're judgment calls and it's a challenge, but when video was initially put in the thinking was, 'Let's get the goals right or wrong, a good goal or bad goal,' but now it's kind of taken over the whole game."

## Brotherly Love

When New Hampshire forward Jake Dunlap was considering a transfer destination after the 2022-23 season, he did not have to look hard for the inside scoop on the Buckeyes since older brother Joe was already there.

Jake, who will be a junior next season, joined him in Columbus, but they had to wait half the season to play together because of an injury to Joe.

"It was definitely difficult for him watching practices, seeing me out there and wanting to be out there with me," Jake said. "One of my goals was to play with my brother in college, one of our dreams growing up, so it's awesome we're seeing it through and making it happen."

Is it hockey all the time when the pair are away from the rink?

"We talk hockey," Jake said. "Obviously,

it's a big part of our life. But for the most part, we're just brothers so we're just joking around having fun together."

Their parents visited from New Hampshire for senior night on March 2 when Joe was recognized, but neither played. Joe had sustained a season-ending injury the previous weekend while Jake was scratched from the lineup after taking a major penalty the night before against Penn State. There is a happy ending, though, because Joe has elected to use his fifth year of eligibility to remain with the Buckeyes next season.

## Brotherly Love, Part II

Freshman goalie Kristoffer Eberly said his decision to attend Ohio State was met with excitement from one fan in Ann Arbor, of all places. His brother, Niklas, was a swimmer at Auburn before transferring to Michigan.

"He just did not like his two years at all there (at Michigan)," Eberly said. "So, when I finally made my decision to come here, he was still at Michigan at the time and he loved my decision. He threw on an Ohio State shirt and he posted all over social media. He was getting a lot of crap from all of his friends. I was like, 'Oh, you can't do this. What are you doing?' He was obviously super happy for me."

"He's such a great guy, and I wouldn't be where I'm at without him because of how competitive he was when we were both younger. He played hockey, but he ended up getting too many concussions and then decided to play a noncontact sport and went into swimming."

## Name Dropper

The question in the BSB world headquarters when sophomore defenseman Damien Carfagna transferred from New Hampshire prior to the 2022-23 season was if he was related to the folks who own the well-known Carfagna's Italian Market in Columbus.

Carfagna said he was told of the culinary

store and restaurant on the northern edge of the city and visited there, but he has no familial connection.

"I think the name Carfagna is pretty popular where my family's from in Italy," he said.

## Take A Seat

Ohio State finished sixth of seven Big Ten schools and 13th out of 64 schools nationally in attendance this past season with an average of 5,321 in 18 games for 69.1 percent of the 7,700 capacity at Value City Arena when accounting for not utilizing the upper levels. The largest crowds were 8,789 on Feb. 3 and 8,131 the previous night, both against Michigan.

North Dakota led the NCAA, overflowing its 11,568-capacity building for an average of 11,612 (100.4 percent), according to USCHO.com.

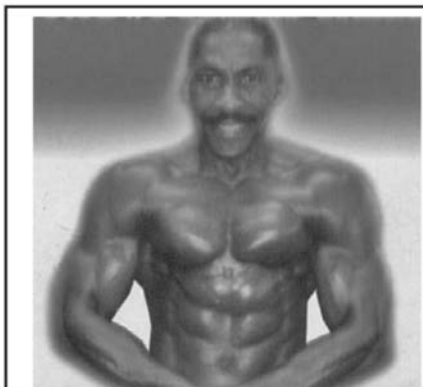
Among conference teams, Wisconsin was second at 10,059 per game (65.5 percent; 15,359 capacity). Minnesota was third with 9,225 (89.9; 10,257), followed by Michigan State in sixth with 6,482 (106.0; 6,114) and Penn State finished seventh with 6,314 (109.2; 5,782).

Michigan drew 5,775 (99.6; 5,800) for 10th while Notre Dame was last in the Big Ten and 17th overall with a healthy 4,921, considering they reached 101.5 percent of the 4,850 capacity.

## Max Effort

Freshman forward Max Montes is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for March after scoring three times and adding one assist in six games.

He scored the final two goals to break a 1-1 tie to give the Buckeyes a 3-1 win in the first game of the best-of-three Big Ten quarterfinal series at Wisconsin on March 8 and had an assist in the second game. In the semifinal at Michigan State on March 16, he tied the game 1-1 at 2:03 of the third period with his ninth goal of the season in the 2-1 loss.



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## VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For March



**Max Montes**  
Freshman Forward  
Hartland, Wis.

# DeVooght Joining OSU's Starting Rotation

With Ohio State already having clinched a series win against Purdue from March 29-31 with 8-2 and 12-10 wins, head coach Bill Mosiello opted in the final game to send out freshman righthander Gavin DeVooght, who had been the best pitcher out of the bullpen for Ohio State up to that point, rather than usual starter Colin Purcell.

## FROM THE STRETCH Greg Wilson

Since he wasn't stretched out enough to start yet, DeVooght ended up going for only 37 pitches and just two innings pitched, but he gave up only one hit and didn't allow any runs. Purcell had been struggling to begin the season, holding a 5.76 ERA through his first six appearances. DeVooght, on the other hand, had just a 1.36 ERA through nine appearances in relief, and Mosiello thought the young arm deserved a shot as the Sunday starter.

"He's a really talented guy," Mosiello said of DeVooght. "It's a little tough for him that we all of a sudden made him a starter, but if he gets it going, he has the upside to be a real starting pitcher. And not only this year, but in the future he's got a chance to be a big-time guy."

Mosiello is still keeping Purcell in an important role, though, as he has made three relief appearances since his last start against Georgetown on March 23.

DeVooght's second start came against Nebraska on April 7, and he was able to go longer with 49 pitches in 2 $\frac{2}{3}$  innings. He gave up three hits and two runs with three strikeouts and a walk, and he helped deliv-

er the lone victory in three games against the No. 23 Cornhuskers from April 5-7.

Mosiello was happy with how DeVooght performed again and said he likes the way the rotation is shaping up if the freshman can continue to perform the way he has been.

"For us to make any hay this season, he's going to really have to develop as a really good starting pitcher," Mosiello said. "Then all of a sudden you've got (Landon) Beidelschies and him are really good book-end guys with (Gavin) Bruni and Purcell in the middle."

Through 32 games as BSB went to press, DeVooght has thrown 23 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings and has a 1.54 ERA, a team best for pitchers with at least three innings on the mound.

### Lipsey Shines In Midweek Games

Junior left fielder Trey Lipsey struggled through the first half of the season, barely keeping his batting average above .200 and not fielding his position well enough for Mosiello to justify keeping him in the lineup. Mosiello gave him time to try to figure it out on the field because he knows the talent is there, but he had to have a conversation with the left-handed hitter and let him know that it was time to make a change.

"I'm not done with Lipsey, but Lipsey has had over 100 at-bats and barely has a .320 on-base percentage," Mosiello said about making the change. "There's a difference between a 10-15 at-bat audition, and then there's 100-something at-bats. So who's the dumb one? Am I just playing you every single day and expecting something



Gavin DeVooght

different?"

Freshman Isaac Cadena started the final two games against Nebraska, going a combined 1 for 9 with a run scored. But when the Buckeyes hosted Bowling Green on April 9 and Morehead State the next day, Mosiello gave Lipsey a chance to prove himself.

"He basically told me I have to be tougher," Lipsey said. "I just wanted to go into this game and be a tough out. Just get better at-bats and get on base. That was the big goal."

He said it wasn't the first time in his life he's had to have a tough conversation with a coach, so he was able to put it out of his mind and try to play his game to the best of his ability.

In his first at-bat against Bowling Green, he drove a ball to deep left center field, about 380 feet, but it was caught on the run on the warning track. He didn't end up with a hit, but Mosiello said good at-bats and hard contact are what he's looking for more than the stats. He believes the numbers will come around if hitters continue to put together good at-bats.

"He's getting two days of at-bats, so I want to see some good competition in the box," Mosiello said April 8. "I don't care about how many hits he gets. I love a lot of hits, but usually, if you compete and have good at-bats, you'll get some hits."

He put together another good at-bat in the bottom of the third, working a full count by fouling off three straight two-strike pitches before watching ball three and turning on a fastball down the right field line for an RBI



Trey Lipsey

double, knocking in center fielder Josh Stevenson to take a 1-0 lead over the Falcons. It ended up as a nine-pitch at bat, and Lipsey said he thought he had a good mindset in that plate appearance.

"Just battle. See a pitch over the plate and swing at it," he said. "You have to be a little more selective with those pitches because you don't want to chase a terrible slider, but I try to take it one pitch at a time and win that pitch."

Lipsey ended up being picked off attempting to steal third, which ended up costing the Buckeyes a run since sophomore shortstop Kaczmar followed him with a double into the right-center gap, but he was able to get on base again.

Ohio State later faced a 4-3 deficit following a grand slam and was able to tie it back up in the bottom of the eighth before Lipsey came up with a runner on and two outs. In the high-pressure situation, he crushed a fastball opposite field that sailed over the left field wall to give Ohio State a 6-4 lead, the eventual final. Mosiello said he loves seeing Lipsey do well and was very happy to see him come through when the team needed it most, but he needs this production to continue.

"It's exciting," Mosiello said. "He's been working hard and he deserves to do well. But like I've told him - he knows how

much I like him. He knows how much I believe in him, but I can't let him continue to play if there isn't any production. It sure was awesome for him to come through."

Against Morehead State, Lipsey continued his hot streak, going 2 for 4 with a double, an RBI and a walk, squaring up multiple baseballs. Mosiello said he saw what he wanted to see in those games and ended up slotting Lipsey back in the leadoff spot for the series against Iowa. In those three games, he went 2 for 12 with two walks, three RBI and a run scored.

### Mosiello Encouraged After Beating Nebraska

DeVooght's performance against Nebraska was one of the lone highlights of the weekend series against the Cornhuskers, as they won the first two games 3-0 and 7-3 before falling 9-3.

The Buckeyes couldn't get any offense going in game one, managing only two hits and scoring no runs. Senior righthander Brett Sears threw a complete game for the Cornhuskers, striking out 10 and not allowing any free passes with 115 pitches. Beidelschies threw 4 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings, giving up six hits and three runs.

"The guy pitched an awesome game on Friday night and set the tempo for them," Mosiello said of the Huskers. "Then we had some really tough conditions, the wind blowing in the first couple of days. That's not the most conducive for great offensive baseball. But we got outplayed, and they're a better club than us right now."

In game two, Bruni went 4 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings and gave up three runs on three hits, followed by Jacob Morin giving up three runs of his own to finish the fifth inning. Purcell came in for the rest of the game, holding Nebraska to just one more run, but the offense totaled only six hits.

With DeVooght on the mound for his second start, Ohio State took game three, highlighted by a grand slam from right fielder Mitchell Okuley in the ninth inning, his first home run of the season. Although he would have liked to take more than one win, Mosiello was encouraged by how the Buckeyes came back from the two losses and beat the top Big Ten team.

"That's a really good club, and I didn't feel overwhelmed," he said. "Some of the positives were the bullpen really came through and had some big innings. It was great. I think it really showed something."

### Recap

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, Ohio State has gone 5-3, dropping two of three to Nebraska, beating Bowling Green and Morehead State, and taking two of three from Iowa. It was also supposed to visit Kent State on April 2 and host the following day, but the series was postponed due to weather. The away contest has been rescheduled for April 17, while a date has not been determined for the Golden Flashes' game at Bill Davis Stadium.

The Buckeyes now hold a record of 17-15 and stand at 5-4 in the Big Ten, putting them tied at fifth in the conference with Indiana.

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# Excitement Building As Buckeyes Exit Spring

The annual spring football game was attended by just over 80,000 Buckeye fans April 13. The sun was bright, the temperature moderate, the wind brisk, and the spirits high among the Buckeye faithful. Everyone wanted to get a preview of the young talent that was recruited by the coaching staff, what differences and twists there might be to the offense under new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, and especially the battle for the starting quarterback position.



Kelly made a huge public relations move, in an effective way, right out the gate by running the traditional T-formation, power off-tackle play which Woody Hayes insisted was the best play in football. Woody called the formation "robust," which meant two tight ends, three running backs, and the quarterback under center. The formation practically put all 11 players within the space of a large phone booth.

It was the first formation and play everyone would learn as a Buckeye on the offensive side of the ball. Not only did you have to know the assignment of the position you played but you were expected to know everyone's assignment, even if you weren't on the field with that formation grouping.

Even the wideouts, who weren't in on "robust" formation, had to know what all 11 players were supposed to do on the play. It was very common for Woody to call a player up to the blackboard to draw up the play, and you better not make a mistake on someone's assignment.

Kelly might have run the play to please us old Buckeyes, but it was indeed a part of his offense at UCLA. That formation and play has made a resurgence in college football, and teams like Penn State and Michigan have it in their short-yardage arsenal.

I am certain Kelly and Ryan Day make offensive decisions together, and Kelly's knowledge and experience will help add to and modify an offense that has been successful under Day. They go back a long way starting with the years Day was Kelly's quarterback at New Hampshire to the times they worked together in the NFL. Time will tell, but the Kelly hire seems to be a smart one.

## Quarterback Battle Narrowing

In a lot of ways, it is very tough to evaluate a spring scrimmage. The offensive and defensive schemes are basic or, as coaches say, "vanilla." There is very little full-go tackling, and for the first units, it was pretty much two-hand tag. It is definitely more fierce in the trenches, but that's about it in terms of physicality.

The goal of the spring game is to entertain the fans, get one more evaluation of the players in terms of techniques and fundamentals, and most importantly, do not get anyone hurt with August camp just four months away.

No fewer than seven quarterbacks were taking snaps pre-scrimmage. All five of the scholarship quarterbacks played with Devin

Brown, Will Howard and Lincoln Kienholz getting the majority of reps with the first two units of offense. It was Howard, the Kansas State transfer, who took the field first, with Brown following when the first team came back out. It seems to be a two-horse race for the top spot between these two at the quarterback position.

None of the quarterbacks set the world on fire, but none was awful. The experienced Jim Knowles defense allowed only one pass over 20 yards for the day. Freshman Julian Sayin threw for the most yards, going 10 of 17 for 85 yards, but threw an interception. Kienholz was 10 of 17 for 71 yards and threw two picks. Howard went 9 of 13 for 77 yards with no interceptions. Brown was 5 of 7 for 66 yards and no picks, and the other true freshman, Air Noland, was 5 of 7 for 47 yards and had one interception.

All of the quarterbacks showed their ability to run the football both by stepping up in the pocket or by breaking contain. It is also apparent there will be more designed quarterback runs this fall than last season, whoever is at quarterback.

The real battle seems to be for the third spot between Kienholz, Sayin and Noland. It will be interesting to see if any of the three decides to transfer in the spring portal. Having patience in today's world of college football doesn't hold much water.

## Defense Impressive

There were double-digit Buckeyes who could have entered the NFL draft but decided to stay another season to up their stock for the pro ranks next year, beat Michigan and make a run for the national championship, and most of them are defensive players.

Knowles is loaded with experience on the defensive side of the ball, and the defense was very impressive in the spring scrimmage. Tight coverage by the secondary and a heavy pass rush by the defensive line forced the Buckeye quarterbacks to escape

the pocket and run the ball more times than wanted.

The scholarship quarterbacks took off 18 times, the vast majority of rushes for the sake of survival to avoid getting sacked or prevent throwing into coverage, and finished with just 46 yards between the five. The defense recorded six sacks, nine tackles for loss and four interceptions.

Returning defensive end Jack Sawyer not only recorded a sack but was a nightmare to block for the offensive tackles. Junior Caden Curry, freshman Eddrick Houston and much improved and healthy Mitchell Melton were three other defensive ends who made sacks. The other two sacks came for interior linemen Jason Moore and Hero Kanu.

The Buckeye secondary blanketed receivers all day. Except for a couple of one-handed snatches by Emeka Egbuka, receivers couldn't shake the tight coverage by the corners. That, along with the pressure put on by the defensive front, forced Buckeye quarterbacks to release the ball much earlier than they wanted or forced them to throw check-down routes. The defense came up with four interceptions, all by some of the less experienced players. Safeties Brenten "Inky" Jones and Jaylen McClain each had a pick along with corners Calvin-Hunt Simpson and Dianté Griffin.

The Buckeye linebacking corps seems to be just as solid as the rest of the unit with the move of Sonny Styles inside, the experience of Cody Simon, and improvement from C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers. Hicks led the way in tackles for the scrimmage with eight.

Knowles has to be looking forward to next fall with the experience he has coming back and the depth that is getting deeper and deeper with the overall talent on the defensive side of the football.

## O-Line Getting Better

Offensive line coach Justin Frye, who ironically worked for Kelly at UCLA, went into spring practice with a solid base of experienced players but several areas of needed improvement for next season.

The biggest question in terms of personnel was going to be at the starting center position. Carson Hinzman would have to battle with Alabama transfer Seth McLaughlin for the starting spot. When the first-team offense took the field, surprisingly, both players trotted onto the field with McLaughlin at center and Hinzman at right guard.

Next time out, it was Hinzman at center and sophomore Tegra Tshabola at right guard. The rest of the starting offensive line returns with Josh Simmons at left tackle, Donovan Jackson at left guard and Josh Fryar at right tackle.

One thing is certain. Continued work against one of the most talented defensive fronts in college football will make the Buckeye offensive line much better in both pass protection and run blocking, the latter being essential since the Buckeyes were eighth in the Big Ten in rushing the football last season. A team can't be dominant on offense if you can't run the football.

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**TIMPOND**, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently

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# Spring Game Leaves More Questions Than Answers

My takeaway from the spring game on April 13 is that the Buckeyes are loaded, but there is one lingering question: Will Ohio State receive the quarterback play needed to contend for a national championship?

## THE EXNER POINT Rich Exner

My hunch is that it doesn't have to be great play, just solid. Given the talent on the roster that is so overwhelming with proven veterans – more so than usual – and the usual collection of young up-and-coming prospects with high expectations, I have little concern about 21 positions on the field.

What we don't know – the spring game provided no clarity one way or the other – is the type of play Ohio State will have at quarterback. The spring game wasn't designed to provide that answer. Will Howard threw just 13 passes. Devin Brown threw even fewer – seven. The battle will play out, or already has, behind the closed doors of practice and possibly during the first three games of the year against lightweights Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall.

As for the rest of the roster, we didn't see much either. But we didn't need to. We just needed to look at the roster suited up for the game for the stunning résumés to sink in.

So many NFL-ready defensive players are back, joined by one of the top freshmen in the country last year in Alabama safety Caleb Downs. By some accounts, Downs was the top-rated player in the transfer portal this past season.

On the offensive side, NFL-ready wide-out Emeka Egbuka (1,151 yards receiving as a sophomore, 1,857 for his career) is the veteran in the room that's filled with promising young talent like Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith.

And the top running back, TreVeyon Henderson, is back with his 2,745 career rushing yards. That normally would make for a strong backfield in itself. But he's joined by Old Miss transfer Quinshon Judkins, and his 2,725 career rushing yards.

Veteran help on the line comes from Alabama transfer Seth McLaughlin, who started 24 games for the Crimson Tide.

What did the spring game tell us? It appears the Buckeyes have very good pass defenders on the back side of the defense. But I didn't see much else that allowed judgment.

The key quarterbacks in the battle to

start the season not only didn't throw many passes, they didn't throw downfield much either. The running backs weren't tackled (smart move), so we really couldn't see how well they can break tackles or how well the defenders can tackle. And there wasn't a whole lot of game strategy.

What the spring game did provide was an opportunity for a lot of people to come into Ohio Stadium to watch football at an affordable price (\$10 a ticket), and an opportunity for the players and coaches to break up the regular practice routine.

We should not have expected more. The spring game is what it is and no more. It's not worth it to risk injuries to play a regular game. (Remember Mike Tomczak's broken leg?) But it is an opportunity for an "outing" at the stadium for those who enjoy that sort of thing.

### New Level For Women's Hoops

Ohio State and every other high-quality women's college basketball program should send a thank you note to Caitlin Clark for the attention she has attracted to the game. The dividends will be paying off next year and beyond.

On the floor, if you didn't get a chance to see Clark, she is a Larry Bird of sorts. There are players at a glance that look far more athletic. But once the game is on, Clark, like Bird did, plays at a different level in so many ways. She can shoot, like Bird. She is smart in positioning herself for rebounds, much like Bird did.

But what impressed me most in watching Clark during the NCAA tournament were her incredible passing skills. The zip on the passes, whether length of the court or pocket passes while driving the lane, was stunning. Her court vision is out of this world. Bird's was as well. But Clark takes that to another level.

And she's popular. Consider this. Ohio State drew 5,684 and 8,333 fans for its two home NCAA tournament games against

Maine and Duke. But when Clark was in town at midseason, 18,660 packed the arena to see OSU's upset of Iowa.

The asking price for championship game tickets in Cleveland – even in the upper rafters of Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse – were in the neighborhood of more than \$500, more than double the cheapest seats for the men's final, though the men's final was in a dome.

I stopped in at the free Saturday practice, surprised to see probably 10,000 to 12,000 fans in the house to witness a shoot-around.

And the TV audience for Clark's final game on ABC not only surpassed that of the men's final but also was larger than every World Series game since 2019, every NBA Finals game since 2017 and all but four college football games last season, media reports said.

Many of those eyeballs will be back to watch the women's college game again, a different style of basketball played below the rim, yet entertaining in its own way.

### An Ode To VanDerveer

Speaking of women's college basketball, the retirement of Tara VanDerveer, the winningest coach in history, brought back old memories from St. John Arena.

As Buckeye Sports Bulletin was launching in the early 1980s, some of the first assignments publisher Frank Moskowitz gave me were feature stories and game photo assignments for the women's basketball team.

I still remember the players. Yvette Angel was a quick point guard out of Buffalo. Another guard, Julie Plank, carried a name well-known on the BSB pages, as Plank's Cafe from German Village was a regular advertiser at the same time. I remember Amy Tucker, tall at 5-11, as being the best player on the roster. She's in the OSU Hall of Fame.

The coach of that team was VanDerveer. She was 110-37 in five seasons at Ohio State, leading the Buckeyes to the NCAA tournament in 1982, 1984 and 1985. VanDerveer then moved on to Stanford, where she won 1,064 more games (some of those with Tucker as an assistant) before retiring this year at the age of 70. What a career.

### Checking In On McCord

Last year's starting quarterback, Kyle McCord, has the stamp of approval at Syracuse from probably the greatest quarterback in Syracuse history.

Donovan McNabb told reporters this spring that "This kid is going to be pretty good," according to Syracuse.com. Syracuse wide receiver coach Ross Douglas was quoted by DailyOrange.com as saying McCord has a lot of NFL characteristics.

"He's always around the building, doing extra, pulling guys along with him," Douglas said. "He's just got to be consistent with it, just like all these guys who want to make it to the next level. It's consistency over time."

The Syracuse spring game is April 20, a week after Ohio State's. Here's wishing a solid season in 2024 for McCord.

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# Devin Can Wait? Will Howard Be Starting QB?

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

The annual Ohio State spring football game ended up being more about what I didn't see than what I did.

I went into the game, first and foremost, wanting to see the quarterbacks and if anyone looked like they were separating themselves from the others. Head coach Ryan Day and new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly gave us a good look at all five of the scholarship quarterbacks. I didn't see one who particularly stood out from the others. Maybe Lincoln Kienholz took a step backward with two interceptions and two sacks. Freshman Air Noland looked a little raw, but he ended up with a line of 5-of-7 passing for 47 yards and caught the attention of the crowd with 42 yards on five carries, granted against a patchwork defense. He did throw an interception, but so did fellow freshman and wunderkind Julian Sayin.

It looked to me like right now it is still a battle between veteran transfer Will Howard and veteran Buckeye Devin Brown. Neither showed me anything that would indicate that one had the edge over the other, though if Kelly is going to incorporate more of the running game into the attack, Brown had the advantage with three carries for 24 yards while Howard was saddled with negative-6 yards rushing.

I think we are looking at a battle down to the wire for the second year in a row. If things remain equal, Day might go with Howard because there were probably promises made and NIL dollars spent to get the Kansas State product to come to Columbus. Will Brown forever be the bridesmaid? Regardless of what happens, I am impressed with his spunk. When they brought Howard in, Brown vowed to put up a fight, and he has. Don't count him out just yet.

The other thing I really wanted to see was spectacular play from freshmen sensations Sayin and receiver Jeremiah Smith, who dominated reports coming out of the previous 14 practices. I was a little disappointed when both of them had pedestrian spring games. Sayin was 10 of 17 through the air with an interception and three sacks and negative-9 yards on the ground. Day's suggestion that Sayin might be in the mix for the starter's role may have been a bit premature, but a coach of Day's experience would not be making remarks like that unless there was some merit to them.

Smith had a quiet spring game with two catches for 12 yards.

But I am smart enough to know that the spring game is just one spring practice session among 15, and when all you heard from the other 14 were rave reviews about the two – from players and coaches – you have to believe that where there is smoke there is fire. I look for successful careers from both of them. I just become a fan sometimes, and I was hoping for fireworks from each of them.

By the way, how much of the middling performance of the quarterbacks was on them, and how much was caused by the deep and talented Ohio State defense? The Buckeye secondary picked off four passes, and the defensive line registered six sacks. I'll go so far as to say the Ohio State defense may be the toughest unit the offense faces all season.

So, who *did* impress me on this glorious Saturday?

Let's start with Emeka Egbuka.

He wowed the crowd with a one-handed catch at the sidelines that was actually the type of catch I was expecting from Smith. Egbuka tied for the lead among spring game receivers in receptions with four catches for 47 yards. I hope the senior's performance was a reminder to some that he is one of the top receivers in the country after a quiet 2023 campaign where he was hampered by an

ankle injury. He still managed 41 catches for 515 yards and four touchdowns. It is easy to forget that in 2022 he caught 74 passes for 1,151 yards (15.6 average) and 10 touchdowns, this despite the fact that he had to share the load with Marvin Harrison Jr., who had 77 receptions, 1,263 yards and 14 TDs of his own.

Also on offense, I had been concerned when Dallan Hayden – the “spare” to the running back “pair” of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins – announced he was entering the portal, leaving a void in the spare department.

I feel a little more comfortable now after freshmen Sam Williams-Dixon and James Peoples turned in solid spring games. Williams-Dixon led all rushers with 11 carries for 75 yards and a 22-yard TD jaunt, and Peoples had 10 carries for 36 yards and a score to go along with three receptions for 23 yards. It should be an interesting battle to see who ends up in the No. 3 slot.

On defense, the up-and-comer who caught my eye was Aaron Scott Jr., who tallied six tackles and two pass breakups from his spot in the secondary. He seemed even more involved than that. He is caught in a very crowded cornerbacks room, but I think it is safe to say he will play this season.

It was also good to see highly touted, but little heard from, linebackers C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers get in on the spring game action. Hicks led all tacklers with eight stops, and Powers had five.

I am a little concerned about how the Buckeyes are going to get both Hicks and newly minted linebacker Sonny Styles on the field at the same time or otherwise. But that's why defensive coordinator Jim Knowles gets paid the big bucks. Styles had six tackles.

Hicks still needs to prove he can play at a high level in actual games. And if you are going to field the best 11 on defense at the same time, it would seem that Styles would be one of those.

In closing, this Ohio State team is loaded. The only potential Achilles' heel I see (once they settle on a quarterback) is a carryover from last year – the offensive line. It's hard to tell if there has been improvement from what is really just a scrimmage and with the offensive line going up against one of the best defensive lines in the country. But it is hard to ignore the six sacks and nine TFLs total given up by the big guys.

One more comment on this year's spring game.

It says a lot when there was as much comment on our Forum on BuckeyeSports.com and among people whom I have spoken to about the FOX broadcast as the scrimmage itself. The complaint is that the FOX crew, including former Buckeye coach Urban Meyer – not to mention Day, who offered his own running commentary – paid little attention to the scrimmage itself, leaving viewers to figure out for themselves what was going on, including who was at quarterback on each series.

I am anxious to see if there is any fallout about this national broadcast. Many people I spoke to said that if the delay weren't so annoying, they would have listened to the radio broadcast instead of the babbling by the FOX crew.

### Colorful Comments

I loved Kelly's remarks about how Sayin has done during his first college spring practice:

“Julian is a very fast processor,” Kelly said. “He really thinks very, very quickly on his feet. He

makes really quick decisions. He doesn't stick on reads, he can progress and he sees things really well for a young player, not having been exposed to a lot of college defenses – and especially what Jim (Knowles) does. Jim can make a young freshman quarterback cry with some of the stuff he does, but I never saw that with Jules, and it's been impressive, his ability to retain.”

After the Jim Tressel and Meyer eras at Ohio State, where bland comments were the order of the day – a tradition not altered much by Day – Kelly has been a breath of fresh air in just his few short weeks here with his colorful quips.

Kelly also showed a sense of Ohio State history, when he opened up the spring game with a formation from legendary Buckeye coach Woody Hayes' playbook – the Robust T.

Former OSU coach Bill Conley, who played under Hayes, has an interesting note on Hayes, Kelly and the formation in his column on page 33 of this issue.

“It was the first formation and play everyone would learn as a Buckeye on the offensive side of the ball,” Conley recalled. “Not only did you have to know the assignment of the position you played but you were expected to know everyone's assignment, even if you weren't on the field with that formation grouping.”

Be sure to check out Conley's full comments.

### Basketball Retention

Am I the only one who raised an eyebrow when Roddy Gayle, Zed Key and Scotty Middleton from the men's basketball team all entered the transfer portal? I thought team chemistry under then-interim coach Jake Diebler was supposed to be one of the reasons Ohio State closed so strongly after the dismissal of Chris Holtmann and the assumption (maybe just by me) that Diebler was going to retain the core of the team was one of the reasons that AD-in-waiting Ross Bjork went out on a limb and took the interim tag off Diebler.

The trio totaled nearly a third of the team's scoring last season.

I can see how Key, who started only two games last season, might have seen the writing on the wall, that his minutes would continue to erode in favor of junior-to-be Felix Okpara at a time when Key is hoping to showcase his skills for a possible pro career. But Key is a popular figure in Columbus who would have provided a veteran presence for the team, and I could have seen him staying, too.

However, Middleton and Gayle were part of the young, but maturing, core of the team. Gayle was third on the team, averaging 13.5 points a game. Middleton averaged only 4.4 points a game but averaged 6.3 points in his eight games under Diebler.

I wonder if Bjork saw or knew this was coming when he pulled the trigger on Diebler?

You can bring in players to replace the departed trio. But can you duplicate that chemistry that turned around the fate of Ohio State basketball and helped earn Diebler the permanent job?

### VanDerveer Retires

Legendary Stanford women' basketball coach Tara VanDerveer retired on April 9 as the winningest coach in college basketball history. Before she took the Cardinal to epic heights, she helped build the foundation of Ohio State's women's basketball program when she led the Buckeyes from 1980-85 before heading to Palo Alto.

Those were the earliest days of not just the

women's basketball program, but of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Things were so different then. You could watch practice every day and afterwards go down and sit on the bleachers and just chat with VanDerveer, which I did on many occasions – no appointments or media availabilities necessary. In fact, I would say of all the coaches who have served at Ohio State in my 43 years here, at the time I was as close with the Hall of Fame coach, along with then-hockey coach Jerry Welsh, as I was with any other.

In recognition of her retirement, we ran a reprint of her sprawling interview from the July 2019 BSB Interview Issue as part of our BuckeyeSports.com Reprint Thursday on April 11. VanDerveer talked of coming from Idaho, where she coached from 1978-80, to Ohio State.

“I said, ‘They have to pay \$20,000 or I'm not going from Idaho to Ohio State,’ ” she recalled. “That doesn't sound like much now, but there was no money in women's athletics. There was no support for women's athletics. But I think Ohio State was one of the leaders. A lot of it might have been almost reluctantly in the beginning because women's sports did change things a lot. If you have to divide up the pie differently, it can ruffle some feathers. It was hard for some other people. But I've always been someone to say, ‘Hey, let's have athletic teams for both men and women.’ ”

With my days with VanDerveer dating back to the time when the women drew in the hundreds, not the thousands, I found a certain amount of irony in the fact that she retired in the same year that Caitlin Clark was taking women's basketball to unprecedented heights. Without pioneers like VanDerveer, there would be no Caitlin Clarks.

### Business Notes

As some of you may have noticed, the post office is preparing to raise rates again, this time by 7.8 percent on average with some of the rates Buckeye Sports Bulletin uses to mail you your BSB going up as much as 16.7 percent, effective July 14 and pending Postal Regulatory Commission approval, which seems likely. This will be the second increase this year alone.

According to the always reliable Wikipedia, postal rates have gone up every year since 2011 with two increases in 2021, 2023 and this year. All of this would be a little more palatable if service hadn't diminished, particularly in this past year.

As I have mentioned many times through the years, postage is far and away our largest expense. We went ahead and painfully absorbed the increase in January in an attempt to protect our readers on fixed incomes. We have not decided how we will respond to the upcoming boost.

Just a suggestion. If you see a BSB offer you like between now and July, you might want to take advantage of it, even if your subscription is not running out just yet. Your renewal will tack right on the end of your current subscription.

Don't forget 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. I have actually been a little bit surprised more of you have not taken advantage of this special offer. 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. 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 of BSB at BuckeyeSports.com.

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 (614) 486-2202.

# Reds APRIL LINEUP!



## MARCH 28-31



### THURSDAY // 4:10

- Opening Day presented by GE Aerospace
- Reds Magnetic Schedule and Car Magnet, presented by PNC (To fans in attendance, while supplies last)



### SATURDAY // 4:10

- Kids Opening Day presented by Cutie's
- Kids Reds Cap, presented by Cincinnati Children's Hospital (Kids 14 & younger in attendance, while supplies last)



### SUNDAY // 1:40

- Family Discount Day, presented by Klosterman Bakery
- Reds Sticker Sheet, presented by Texas Roadhouse (To fans in attendance, while supplies last)



## APRIL 5-7



### FRIDAY // 6:40

- Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show

### SATURDAY // 4:10

- Jake Fraley City Connect Bobblehead, presented by PNC (To fans in attendance, while supplies last)

### SUNDAY // 1:40

- Matt McLain City Connect Bobblehead, presented by TriHealth (To fans in attendance, while supplies last)
- Family Discount Day, presented by Klosterman Bakery



## APRIL 8-11



presented by Kroger

### MONDAY // 6:40

### TUESDAY // 6:40

**3-2-1 TUESDAYS**

- 3-2-1 Tuesdays,\* presented by Budweiser and Bud Light \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!



\*Limit 2 per person per transaction

### WEDNESDAY // 6:40

### THURSDAY // 1:10

- Business Day Special Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!
- Thirsty Thursday Fans can purchase a \$30 package that includes ticket and a \$10 concession credit valid for food and beverages.
- Senior Day Fans 50 and older may purchase select non-premium tickets at half-price in advance of game day only.

## APRIL 19-21



presented by LifeCenter

### FRIDAY // 6:40

- Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show



### SATURDAY // 6:40

- Reds Team Calendar, presented by Kroger (To fans in attendance, while supplies last)



### SUNDAY // 1:40

- Reds Fleece Blanket, presented by Ohio LECET (To fans in attendance, while supplies last)
- Family Discount Day, presented by Klosterman Bakery

## APRIL 22-25



### MONDAY // 6:40

### TUESDAY // 6:40

**3-2-1 TUESDAYS**

- 3-2-1 Tuesdays, \*presented by Budweiser and Bud Light \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!



\*Limit 2 per person per transaction

### WEDNESDAY // 6:40

- Bark in the Park (Ticket packages available for dogs and their owners with pet activities, samples and more in the First Star Fan Zone.)



### THURSDAY // 1:10

- Business Day Special Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!
- Thirsty Thursday Fans can purchase a \$30 package that includes ticket and a \$10 concession credit valid for food and beverages.
- Senior Day Fans 50 and older may purchase select non-premium tickets at half-price in advance of game day only.

(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.com/Tickets