

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 19, 2025

Ohio State's Young Roster Starting To Take Shape After Spring Game

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

In the weeks coming out of Ohio State's historic national championship run, it appeared head coach Ryan Day and his staff were planning on having somewhat of a scaled back offseason to take a deep breath and recover after a physically and emotionally draining 2024 campaign.

On Feb. 10 – just 21 days after the Buckeyes' 31-23 title-game win over Notre Dame, the latest championship game in the history of college football – the school announced that it would push back spring practice two weeks later than usual and, perhaps most notably, hold a "Spring Showcase" on April 12 rather than a spring game.

Those who closely follow the program and sport believed the latter meant the Buckeyes would deviate from their traditional Scarlet vs. Gray spring-game format in favor of a more drill-based practice, a formula that schools such as Alabama, Arizona, Oklahoma and Ole Miss adopted this offseason due to injury and transfer portal concerns. Those same concerns also compelled schools such as Michigan State, Nebraska, Texas and USC to cancel their spring games altogether.

But as the weeks went by in the offseason and spring camp finally began, Day and his staff decided not to go down that route. On March 24, Day announced that the team – barring injuries – would play a regular spring game at Ohio Stadium, despite it being called a showcase. Then, nine days later, the school officially nixed the "Spring Showcase" name and revealed a competitive game would be played.

"Game on. We heard from you, Buckeye Nation. The name 'Spring Showcase' didn't capture what this day really means. So we're calling it what it's always been: Spring Game," the announcement from the school read. "Because this is more than a practice – it's a gameday experience built for fans."

The decision to go ahead with the tradi-



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK (O) — Fans accustomed to hearing the names Will Howard, Emeka Egbuka and TreVeyon Henderson during the national championship run got their first look in the April 12 spring game at their potential replacements in quarterback Julian Sayin (10), wide receiver Brandon Inniss (1) and running back CJ Donaldson (12).

tional spring game seemed to be an obvious one for the team as the offseason progressed. Throughout the spring, those within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center suggested that the program is already well behind its competitors due to the long 2024 season and relative inexperience at many different positions, and

they needed to ramp up the urgency and intensity in order to catch up.

That feeling of being left behind by their rivals after winning it all is something first-year Buckeye defensive coordinator Matt Patricia knows well from his championship-winning days with the NFL's New England Patriots.

"In my previous experience, one of the biggest things I tried to always get everybody to understand is the urgency which you need to come back (with)," Patricia said on March 24. "We would always say, 'We're just behind. We're behind everybody else. Everybody else got a jump start. Everybody's a little bit further ahead,' to just try and create that urgency for our team."

"We have to rest. We have to recover. We have to do everything for the body. But we need to have that mindset of, 'It's going

to happen fast.' The offseason is going to be shorter. We're going to be back in it before you know it. And we can't make up that time. So if we have that mentality that we're a little behind everybody else, how do we catch up?"

That perfect opportunity to make up for lost time presented itself during a cool, sunny mid-April afternoon in Columbus, when – in front of 40,136 fans – several young and inexperienced Buckeyes, many of whom will be counted on to produce in a starting capacity this season, earned much-needed meaningful reps inside Ohio Stadium during the spring game.

Day said the scrimmage – which ended

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From The Message Board

Ohio State's offense came away with a 50-31 victory over the defense in the spring game. With the game giving fans a chance to see the 2025 Buckeyes on the field, we asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what their impressions were of this new-look Ohio State team and which players they thought stood out above the rest during the scrimmage.

"Tremendous depth all over. By the end of next season, this team may be better than the 2024 team. Won't be surprised if St. Clair becomes, eventually, the best of the three QBs."

– Terrier Buck

"I really thought the team looked surprisingly the same as last year. Not to say the same amount of talent, but all the positions looked really good. I liked C.J. Hicks on the edge. I really liked Mylan Graham. He's basically Garrett Wilson as far as body type and the way he runs routes smoothly. I thought Sayin looked better than Kienholz on this day."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I don't like to read much into these spring-game performances. At a high-level view, it appears Sayin can indeed sling it and do it with quick reads, Kienholz struggled but got better as the game went on, and St. Clair made some rookie mistakes. The offense looked better than the defense,

which it should have based on the returning talent relative to the defense. Speaking of defense, if you like vanilla ice cream, there was plenty of that to go around."

– Buckeye Scott

"With Judkins and Henderson gone, I was surprised at what appears to be a tremendous amount of depth at running back. Ultimately, they are going to have to settle on a 'pair and a spare' and I will be watching how that plays out. The quarterback battle is interesting but I think it will be Sayin in the end."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I was hoping for a stronger showing from Kienholz but it looked like Sayin stole the show. Kienholz has been in the wings so long and is improving, but I was a bit disappointed. Let the battle continue."

– PeyoteBuck

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State's annual spring game on April 12 had plenty of standout performers on both sides of the ball. Here are picks from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the scrimmage:

Patrick Engels, BSB: It was a bit of a quiet spring for redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin, but he certainly made his presence felt in the spring game by turning in by far the best performance out of any of the three quarterbacks during the scrimmage.

Sayin showed early on exactly why most people familiar with the program regard him as the projected starting quarterback for the Buckeyes in 2025, leading the Scarlet team to three consecutive scoring drives in the first half in his first three appearances. The five-star didn't do much on the first scoring drive, but he made several impressive throws and put great zip on his ball on the final two drives, including a laser down the seam to transfer tight end Max Klare that went for a 26-yard touchdown.

Sayin completed 14 of his 20 first-half passes for 165 yards and one touchdown before adding on another three completions and 10 yards in the second, an impressive outing that should be enough for him to be considered "QB1" heading into the summer.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf for Ohio State's spring game goes to freshman safety Faheem Delane. The top-60 recruit introduced himself to the Buckeye faithful by making an impressive interception of fellow freshman quarterback Tavien St. Clair in the first half. On the play, Delane read St. Clair's eyes well and jumped in front of the intended target, first-year tight end Nate Roberts, before returning the ball down to the 10-yard line.

Delane continued a solid debut performance by making a tackle in the second half. The Buckeye freshman safety is projected to be behind safeties like Caleb Downs, Malik Hartford and Jaylen McClain, but his solid performance in the spring game could earn him more consideration for starting reps.

Cameron Moone, BSB: Although it could prove to be the most action he sees in a game this year, freshman running back Bo Jackson still flashed in the time he saw on the field during the spring game, and he will be the recipient of my first Buckeye Leaf this season.

Seeing reps early in the day for the offense, Jackson racked up an impressive day on the ground, totaling 13 carries for 88 yards and a touchdown – all numbers that either led or tied for the team high. The former four-star back saw action most of the game and had two explosive gains of over 20 yards.

After the game, Jackson earned the praise of his head coach for the work he put in throughout the 15 spring practices, which is a good sign for him as he tries to work his way up the depth chart this offseason.

Greg Wilson, BSB: Redshirt freshman wide receiver Mylan Graham seems like he could be the odd man out of a talented starting group of Ohio State wide receivers. But the five-star has had an impressive spring so far and will likely earn himself some playing time if he is able to continue his performance into fall camp and the season.

That impressive play continued in the spring game. He scored a long touchdown on a slant across the middle early in the second half, running about 40 yards to complete the play by using his great speed to get around the remaining defenders in his way. Graham had no issues getting open the entire day when he was in the game, finishing with a game-high 104 yards and a score on four catches (seven targets).

BSB Subscribers:

Tiffin Buckeye: Julian Sayin and Mylan Graham.

Bob Cody: I would award Buckeye Leaves to Julian Sayin, Mylan Graham, Sam Williams-Dixon, Max Klare, Faheem Delane, Tavien St. Clair, Jelani Thurman, Bo Jackson, Jayden Fielding and CJ Donaldson. Fun game to watch, but as Coach Day said afterward: "a lot of work to do."

Terrier Buck: I'd say Graham, Delane, and Sayin, too but in that order. Graham looks like he could be the second-best WR on the team, possibly.

PeyoteBuck: Does Kienholz get a leaf? I'll give him one since no one else did but Graham and Sayin were looking mighty fine. Give all three of them leaves. They played hard and I'm looking forward to seeing St Clair in the spotlight as he advances. Give him one too.

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

Columbus Sports Publications
1200 Chambers Road, Suite 206
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
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Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$124.95/year.

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2024-25 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 44)

No. 1	Sept. 7	No. 13	Dec. 21
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The next issue (May cover date) will be mailed on April 29.

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

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OPINION

QB Decisions Just Part Of Process

After the latest incarnation of the Ohio State spring football game, I can't help feeling Buckeye Nation would prefer the exhilaration associated with the national championship run had lasted just a little bit longer.

One year after more than 80,000 fans turned out on a cool, crisp, sunshiny afternoon at Ohio Stadium, only about half that number – 40,136 to be exact – showed up this year under similar weather conditions. One might have thought with such turnover from the national title roster, fans would have been more curious to see new players in new positions.

The case could be made that the highlight of this year's proceedings came when several seniors from the 2024 team returned to the Horseshoe to receive a commemorative box containing three jewel-encrusted rings – one for making the College Football Playoff, one for participating in the Rose and Cotton bowl games, and one symbolic of winning the national championship.

As to the spring game itself, not much can ever be gleaned from what is nothing more than a glorified scrimmage. Despite what has been billed by head coach Ryan Day as a neck-and-neck quarterback battle between two-year program veteran Lincoln Kienholz and Julian Sayin, who redshirted last year after transferring in from Alabama, and seven players gone who started on the offensive side of the ball in last season's opener against Akron, the scarlet-clad offense appeared crisp enough to record a 50-31 decision against the gray-shirted defense.

Despite Day's protestations otherwise, I have maintained that it will be Sayin taking the snaps in the season opener against Texas. Whenever there is turnover at the quarterback position at Ohio State, coaches act as if they are contractually obligated in their refusal to name a starter in the spring.

If you remember back before Will Howard achieved the kind of celebrity status that will keep him from having to buy his own adult beverage in Columbus ever again, he was just a Kansas State transfer coming off a non-descript spring-game performance that included 9 of 13 passes for 77 yards, no touchdowns and one interception.

Meanwhile, three-year program veteran Devin Brown had a 5-for-7 day, good for 66 yards and a score, and he added 24 rushing yards on three carries. 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.

After the game, Day stood clear-eyed and claimed nothing had changed regarding his assertion that Howard and Brown (and maybe even Kienholz) were still in the running for the starting job in the fall.

Two years ago, it was the same refrain regarding Kyle McCord and Brown even though Brown missed the final four practices of camp with a finger injury. McCord opened the spring game with a ragged first possession that included a low throw even Marvin Harrison Jr. couldn't catch and a third-down rollout pass that was nearly (and probably should have been) picked off. By the time the spring game was over, McCord had produced numbers that included 18 completions in 34 attempts for 184 yards and one touchdown.

To say Day wasn't completely enamored with McCord was cemented in the fact that the head coach designed special short-yardage packages for Brown that were used sparingly until Brown missed the final five regular-season games with an ankle injury. To say McCord wasn't completely enamored with Day was ce-

mented in the fact that after throwing for 3,170 yards and 24 TDs, he hit the transfer portal between the end of the regular season and the Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

It seems funny in retrospect, but Day didn't even fully commit to C.J. Stroud in 2021 in the battle to replace Justin Fields. In fact, it was Jack Miller who started the spring game that year in front of some 20,000 fans socially distanced throughout Ohio Stadium. Miller wound up completing 17 of 20 throws for 128 yards and an interception, McCord went 12 of 17 for 184 yards and a pair of touchdowns, and Stroud connected on 16 of 22 attempts for 185 yards and two scores.

The so-called battle went on through the summer, and McCord started for an injured Stroud against Akron in the fourth game of the 2021 season, throwing for 319 yards and two touchdowns during a 59-7 rout of the Zips. But Stroud was back the following week and proceeded to throw for more than 8,000 yards and 85 touchdowns during his OSU career before becoming a first-round NFL draft pick and the league's Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2023.

Sometimes, choosing a starting quarterback seems like a no-brainer. Then there are other times when a coin flip is in order.

There wasn't much question in anyone's mind – anyone outside a 100-mile radius of Athens, Ohio, anyway – that Dwayne Haskins was the favorite to succeed J.T. Barrett as Ohio State's starting quarterback in 2018. Haskins had saved the Buckeyes' bacon against Michigan the season before, rallying the team to a 31-20 victory after Barrett aggravated a knee injury.

Urban Meyer's conundrum at the time was that he had three-year program veteran Joe Burrow on the roster, and by nearly everyone's assessment, Burrow outplayed Haskins during the 2018 spring game. Meyer seemed almost tortured by the decision he was going to have to make, probably because he knew he was going with Haskins as the starter which meant Burrow would likely look for greener pastures.

About a month later, Burrow announced he was transferring to LSU, and the rest is college and pro football history.

Not that Haskins was anything less than spectacular for the Buckeyes. He rewrote most of the program's single-season record books in 2018, finishing that season with 4,831 yards, 50 TDs and a third-place finish in the Heisman voting.

Even Fields didn't have a lock on the starting position when he transferred from Georgia before the 2019 season despite an impressive résumé that included five-star status as a high school player and 12 games of experience on the college level. That is because Day, preparing for his first full season as head coach of the Buckeyes, had another five-star prospect named Matthew Baldwin, who had redshirted in 2018 with the expectation of having the inside track on the starter's job the following year.

Baldwin was considered a recruiting coup for the Buckeyes, getting him out of Lake Travis High School in Austin, Texas, the same program that has produced several college QBs, including 2017 Heisman winner and current Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield. Baldwin didn't do anything to hurt his

chances in the 2019 spring game, totaling 20 completions on 36 attempts for 246 yards and two touchdowns.

In the fall, however, it was Fields who embarked upon the first of two seasons as the starter while Baldwin returned to his home state, transferring to TCU for the 2019 season. He wound up never playing for the Horned Frogs, though, as chronic back and knee injuries forced him to give up the game.

Experience Vs. Youth

Sometimes, choosing a starting quarterback seems like a no-brainer. Then there are times when other factors come into play – factors such as experience.

Anyone with any kind of football acumen could tell in 2008 that Terrelle Pryor was perhaps the most athletic quarterback prospect Ohio State had seen since the days of Cornelius Greene in the mid-1970s. But no matter Pryor's almost limitless upside as a freshman, Jim Tressel was reluctant to supplant veteran starter Todd Boeckman, who had led the Buckeyes to the 2007 BCS National Championship Game and been elected a team co-captain.

Therefore, Boeckman took the season-opening snaps in 2008 until a disastrous performance at USC forced Tressel's hand. Pryor started the following week against Troy and remained the starter until being forced out of college football along with his head coach during the Tattoo-gate scandal.

In the aftermath of that scandal, it was left to interim head coach Luke Fickell to pick up the pieces of a fractured program that included a distracted coaching staff. That led to the decision to start Joe Bauserman in 2011 over Braxton Miller, another extremely gifted true freshman, but the very definition of a rough diamond.

With the benefit of nearly a decade and a half of hindsight, it seems ludicrous that Fickell and his staff would have selected the stocky 6-1, 230-pound Bauserman over the lithe Miller, whom Ohio State listed as 6-3 and 210 pounds just a few months after the flashy QB played in high school as a 6-2, 185-pounder.

At the time, however, experience won the battle. Bauserman was about to turn 26 in mid-season after pursuing professional baseball for three years. But he also had three years of experience as a backup for the Buckeyes, including 174 yards and two touchdowns as Pryor's primary backup in 2010. Miller had none of that experience.

Bauserman was nearly flawless in the 2011 season opener, throwing for 163 yards and three touchdowns during a 42-0 win against Akron. Two weeks later during a 24-6 loss at Miami (Fla.), Bauserman was a dismal 2 of 14 for just 13 yards. Two weeks after that, he completed only 7 of 14 attempts for 87 yards while absorbing five sacks during a 10-7 home loss to Michigan State.

That was apparently enough for Fickell, who started Miller the following week at Nebraska, a move that seemed to be working with the Buckeyes enjoying a 27-13 lead in the third quarter. But Miller was knocked out of the game, Bauserman struggled in relief with a 1-for-10 passing performance, and Ohio State eventually dropped a 34-27 decision.

After that, youth finally triumphed over experience. Miller was back in the starting lineup for good the following week at Illinois and embarked upon a decorated career that included being the first player to earn back-to-back Big Ten Most Valuable Player awards since Indiana running back Anthony Thompson in 1988-89.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Seven Players Inactive For Spring Game

The Ohio State football team didn't have everyone available in its spring game on April 12. There were seven players inactive for the scrimmage, a group highlighted by graduate tight end Will Kacmarek, along with sophomore defensive end Josh Mickens, junior safety Keenan Nelson Jr. and red-shirt freshman linebacker Garrett Stover.

Kacmarek is the most notable of the inactives, having played in 12 games last season and hauling in eight catches for 86 yards. The Ohio University transfer, who missed four games due to an upper-body injury he suffered in the Buckeyes' regular-season loss to Oregon last season, was seen riding a scooter and wearing a walking boot on his left foot during pregame warm-ups. Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after the game that Kacmarek's injury is not long term and he expects him to have a full summer.

Day didn't provide any updates on the

other three notable players who missed the spring game. Stover was seen making plays with the second-team unit in practices open to the media, while Mickens was held out for at least two practices and was seen holding a crutch while walking across the field on March 19. It was unclear if Nelson, who didn't record a stat in 11 games in his first season with the Buckeyes in 2024, was practicing this spring.

Also absent from the spring game was senior walk-on quarterback Mason Maggs, freshman safety DeShawn Foster and freshman running back Isaiah West.

OSU Defense Shines On Student Appreciation Day

Exactly one week before the spring game, Ohio State fans got their first opportunity to see the 2025 team in action when students were allowed into the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to see the Buckeyes' 11th spring practice as part of the program's annual Student Appreciation Day. Contrary to the spring game, it was the Buckeye defense that more times than not outplayed the offense.

From the very start of practice, the offense struggled to hold its own. During one series early in the session, graduate cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. nearly picked off redshirt sophomore quarterback Lincoln Kienholz. Not long after, freshman cornerback Devin Sanchez put solid coverage on sophomore sensation Jeremiah Smith to force an incomplection.

Ohio State finally started to move the ball when freshman quarterback Tavien St.

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2024 Record, Bowl Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	TBA	TBA	13-3, 28-14 loss to Ohio State (CFP Semi.)
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Sept. 13	OHIO	TBA	TBA	11-3, 30-27 win over Jax State (Cure)
Sept. 27	at Washington	TBA	TBA	6-7, 35-34 loss to Louisville (Sun)
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	8-5, 24-10 win over Va. Tech. (Duke's Mayo)
Oct. 11	at Illinois	TBA	TBA	10-3, 21-17 win over South Carolina (Citrus)
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	13-3, 27-24 loss to Notre Dame (CFP Semi.)
Nov. 8	Purdue	TBA	TBA	1-11, not eligible
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	7-6, 44-41 loss to Kansas State (Rate)
Nov. 29	at Michigan	TBA	TBA	8-5, 19-11 win over Alabama (ReliaQuest)

Clair entered the scrimmage against the Buckeyes' reserve defenders. On one of his very first drives, he led the Buckeyes down the field for a touchdown by completing several passes, including one where he was nearly sacked, evaded two defenders but still found senior wideout David Adolph for a big gain.

The highlight-reel play was the theme of the day for St. Clair, who behind some inconsistent pass protection often had to maneuver out of the pocket to try to extend plays. On one series, freshman offensive tackle Carter Lowe had all sorts of issues staying in front of Idaho State transfer defensive end Logan George. George was in the backfield immediately on two straight plays, forcing St. Clair to quickly bail out of the pocket.

It was Kienholz though, who not only led Ohio State to its first touchdown but was also the sharpest of the team's three quarterbacks. During the Buckeyes' first touchdown drive, the four-star flashed his accuracy and arm strength, connecting on intermediate passes to freshman wideout Quincy Porter and junior wideout Brandon Inniss. Then in a later drive, Kienholz threw an accurate pass to his fellow third-year wideout Carnell Tate for a 40-yard touchdown.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin struggled at times during the practice. In one play toward the end of the scrimmage, Sayin – pressured by a couple of Ohio State defensive linemen – threw a late pass intended for sophomore receiver Bryson Rogers and was picked off by junior cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. Later on, Sayin couldn't find an open receiver on one play and was sacked by redshirt freshman defensive lineman Dominic Kirks.

Both sides struggled with penalties. The offense committed multiple pre-snap fouls, while the defense was flagged for pass interference and holding. Perhaps the worst error came when sophomore offensive tackle Phillip Daniels got into a minor scuffle with freshman linebacker Riley Pettijohn, resulting in an unnecessary roughness penalty on the Minnesota transfer that backed up the Buckeye offense in the red zone.

Smith Swarmed By Students After Practice

Although there was plenty of action on the field during Student Appreciation Day, by far the most notable moment came after the practice, when hundreds of students sprinted down the Woody Hayes Athletic Center turf to seek an autograph and take pictures with Smith.

The crowd – which began to huddle around Smith while he was stretching alongside his teammates – grew so large over time that an Ohio State police officer had to escort him out of the practice field and into the locker room after a few minutes of signing autographs.

When asked about that sequence of events on April 8, the soft-spoken Smith admitted that he will never get used to the type of attention he receives from fans and others but is appreciative of the support he has received as a Buckeye.

"I don't think I'll ever get used to it," Smith said. "It's a blessing for sure to see everybody come out, all the Buckeye fans, and come up to me and ask for pictures and everything. I wish I could get everybody, but I can't do it. It's too much sometimes."

Smith came into the program as the consensus No. 1 overall recruit in the 2024 class and one of the more highly anticipated prospects in the school's history. His renown has only skyrocketed after he smashed Cris Carter's OSU freshman single-season records by hauling in 76 catches for 1,315 receiving yards and 15 touchdowns. That fame reached an even higher level after his impressive College Football Playoff run and game-sealing 56-yard catch late in the national championship game against Notre Dame.

Day said on April 7 that he is well aware of the intense spotlight Smith is under and even revealed that he and his staff have put a plan in place with the sophomore to help him navigate fame at just 19 years old.

"Jeremiah is a fairly private person, so that is in his favor, but we've talked about it. And every time a situation like (what happened on Student Appreciation Day) comes up, we need to have a plan," Day said. "(Director of player development) C.J. Barnett has a big part in this, and we spoke with Jeremiah, even for that event, about what the plan was.

"He's one of the more high-profile players in the country, and certainly one of the most high-profile people in the state of Ohio now. That's just the reality. I know fans respect that he's still just a young man trying to find his way, and he is. When you look at him, you don't think of it like that. But he is. So we put a good plan together to make sure he has what he needs."

Smith – whom Day called a "magnetic personality" – may be overwhelmed at times by all that comes with being a star receiver at Ohio State, but he is trying to keep his focus solely on how he can take that next step in his development for 2025.

"I'm just focused on spring and going

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There is also no reason to miss any of the latest news between each print issue of BSB. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff

reports on all the breaking news in real time at BuckeyeSports.com. The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin (May cover date) is scheduled to be mailed April 29.

With the transfer portal door about to swing open, the discussion should also be hot and heavy on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, where subscribers and staff members interact.

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into fall camp and getting ready for the season," Smith said. "The expectations are going to be there. That's not really something that's high in my mind right now. I'm just trying to be a leader and focusing on the team."

Downs Dealing With "Nagging" Injury

Lost in all the hoopla surrounding Smith and Kienholz during Student Appreciation Day was the lack of reps given to consensus All-America safety Caleb Downs, who has been limited all spring, opening the door for more playing time for less established players such as Malik Hartford and Jaylen McClain.

Day tipped his hand regarding why Downs has missed time during a March 31 press conference when asked if he was still considering using his star safety as a running back this season, saying that he has been held out some due to a nagging injury he has been dealing with throughout the offseason.

"(Putting Downs at running back) could be up for discussion in the preseason, but not right now," Day said. "He's still coming back from a nagging injury. We want to make sure he's good to go, and he will be."

Downs – who turned in an impressive first season with the Buckeyes in 2024, recording 81 tackles, 7½ tackles for loss, six pass breakups, two interceptions and a 79-yard punt return for a touchdown – downplayed the injury when asked about it a day later after practice. He did not reveal the extent of the ailment and said that he's been held out of some drills due to the large number of snaps he played last season, which turned out to be the most out of any OSU defender (910).



Caleb Downs

"I'm good for the most part," Downs said. "I had the highest snap count on the team last year, so it's just limiting plays."

Downs also said the time he has spent on the sidelines has been utilized well. He has gotten to learn more about the style of a Matt Patricia-led defense and the role he might be required to play on it this season.

"Sitting out has been good for the learning aspect of it," Downs said. "Just learning from Coach Patricia, learning about his defense, how I might fit into that and how we're going to play. With limited reps it's good to see myself in the positions I have been in and be able to watch people play and coach my teammates."

Although Downs has utilized this time away from the field to learn more about Patricia's defense and improve his leadership, it appears he won't be playing that role from the sidelines for much longer after he started the spring game and played multiple series. As Day alluded to, he is expected to be at full strength for fall camp.

Fielding Kicked With Torn Hip Abductor

Another notable football injury was revealed toward the end of spring camp when senior kicker Jayden Fielding told the media on April 8 that he had played through most of the 2024 season with a torn hip abductor in his right leg.

"I was going through a little bit of an injury bug," Fielding said. "I ended up tearing one of my abductors in my (right hip). It didn't make it too easy trying to kick in those games, but I did my best to help the team out."

Fielding said that he first suffered the injury during the Buckeyes' Week 3 game against Marshall, when he memorably boot-ed three straight kickoffs out of bounds for penalties before being benched in favor of the now-departed Austin Synder. Day said around that time that he was not aware that Fielding was going through an injury and

wanted him to better communicate with him, even meeting with him one-on-one to discuss what had transpired.

Day would ultimately give Fielding his job back that next week against Michigan State and for the remainder of the season, but according to the kicker the pain from the injury never went away. This caused him to search for different ways he could play through the injury by going through "trial and error," which he thinks may have led to some of his struggles down the stretch of the regular season.

Fielding most notably struggled in Ohio State's 13-10 loss to Michigan last November, missing two kicks from 38 yards or less.

Despite this forgettable game, Fielding still ultimately produced when it mattered most in the College Football Playoff, making each of his 19 extra points and four of his five field-goal attempts in those four games, including a 33-yarder late in the fourth quarter of the national championship game to seal the win.

Fielding said he finally figured out how to kick through his injury during the team's blowout win in the Rose Bowl, when he drilled a 46-yarder through the uprights early in the second quarter.

"A lot of the pressure that was coming towards me in practice and from the media, it was all kind of compiling, and I had to do something about it. So I had to figure it out," Fielding said.

Now heading into this season, Fielding said he is fully recovered from his injury and is feeling as confident as ever, changes that are evident in the way he has been kicking of late.

"I'm really healthy right now. I feel great," Fielding said. "This is probably the best I've felt in eight or nine months."

"The contact sounds the same, but you can just tell with the ball flight that it goes a lot further and sounds a lot more pure off my foot."

Fielding's improved kicking was on full

display in the spring game, where he made each of his three field goals and all five extra-point attempts.

Six Buckeyes Lose Black Stripes

Six Buckeyes became "official" members of the team since BSB last went to press, with redshirt junior tight end Max Klare, Kirks, walk-on offensive lineman Simon Lorentz, redshirt freshman defensive lineman Eric Mensah, Porter and senior offensive lineman Ethan Onianwa all losing their black stripes before the spring game.

Klare was the first to earn the distinction, doing so on March 31, becoming the first transfer addition to lose his black stripe this year. He is coming off a career-best season with Purdue when he had 51 catches for 685 receiving yards and four touchdowns, earning third-team All-Big Ten.

Kirks and Lorentz both shed their stripes on April 1 after Ohio State's ninth spring practice. Kirks, a former four-star prospect out of Painesville, Ohio, loses his black stripe in his first full spring and second season with the Buckeyes. He was a late addition to the team last season after being the only player to sign on National Signing Day last February, and he appeared in just three games in the regular season while recording one tackle, preserving his redshirt for the 2025 season.

Lorentz, meanwhile, joined the team as a preferred walk-on last fall as a former All-Ohio high school player out of Dover, Ohio, where he was named first-team all-district and honorable-mention All-Ohio as a junior while playing both offensive and defensive line. He has lined up only on the offensive line as a Buckeye and earned third-team reps at center this spring behind Carson Hinzman and Josh Padilla.

Next to earn the honor was Mensah, who did so after OSU's 10th spring practice on April 3. Mensah is in his second season with the team after joining the Buckeyes as an early enrollee last January out of Mountain View High School in Stafford, Va. The former three-star prospect earned just seven snaps last season as a freshman, all coming in the Buckeyes' three first blowout wins over Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall.

Following Mensah was Porter on April 5, who became the first member of Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class to lose his black stripe after OSU's Student Appreciation Day. Porter, who was Brian Hartline's lone five-star wide receiver commit this year, turned heads throughout spring camp due to the smooth transition he has been able to make to the college game, which has allowed him to make several notable catches throughout the 15 practices.

The Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic product and No. 23 overall prospect in the 2025 class continued to impress in the spring game by hauling in four catches for 50 yards.

Onianwa was the final Buckeye to lose his black stripe, doing so after Ohio State's 13th spring practice on April 8. The 6-6, 357-pound behemoth and former Rice offensive tackle was the second 2025 transfer to earn the honor this season, joining Klare.

Onianwa was one of Ohio State's most

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prized transfer additions from this offseason, with some experts touting him as the best offensive lineman in the portal. He was a three-year starter for Rice – playing at right tackle from 2022-23 and at left tackle in 2024 – and projects to stay at left tackle for the Buckeyes this season. That was made evident when he earned the start at the position during the spring game.

Pantoni Signs New Contract With OSU

Ohio State agreed to a new multiyear contract with general manager Mark Pantoni on April 9. The deal will reportedly make him one of the highest-paid general managers in college football.

Pantoni is heading into his 14th season on Ohio State's staff, originally hired by Urban Meyer in December of 2011 before being kept on Day's staff once he took over in 2019. During that time Pantoni has become known as one of the more effective and successful general managers in the sport, helping the Buckeyes build some of the nation's top rosters each year through both recruiting and the transfer portal.

He most notably helped build both Ohio State's 2014 and 2024 national championship-winning rosters, navigating the new NIL landscape in college football this past offseason by bringing in key transfers such as Downs, quarterback Will Howard and running back Quinshon Judkins.

"I have to recognize Mark Pantoni and the work he does," Day said. "He's really adapted. His job has changed so much in the past couple of years. He's killing it right now."

Pantoni, who also helped Florida win two national titles in 2006 and 2008 while on Meyer's staff, will now look to win the fifth national title of his career with the Buckeyes in his seventh season with Day at the helm.

Day Not Interested In Joint Practices

Throughout the spring, Day consistently voiced his desires to have his team compete in an actual spring game rather than a scaled-back, drill-based showcase, and those wishes were certainly granted when the Buckeyes went away from their previously scheduled "Spring Showcase" to play their typical, annual spring game.

Day also made it known that he doesn't want to tweak the format of the spring game, also saying that he isn't in favor of participating in any joint spring practice or scrimmage with other teams due to potential safety concerns that could come with such an event.

"I'd be very, very concerned with practicing against another team when the rules of

engagement aren't clear, or you're not going against one of your teammates that you're trying to take care of," Day said when asked about the possibility of having joint scrimmages in the spring. "I think we all understand what that could be like. When you're playing a 16-game season – I feel like we need to do a little bit better job of making sure, especially with a 105-man roster, that health is one of the most important things as we head into the preseason. So for me right now, it's not something that I would consider."

Day did say that he thinks the NCAA should allow other teams to hold joint scrimmages if they would like to, similar to how NFL teams practice with one another in training camp before squaring off later that week in the preseason. This idea was floated by both Colorado and Syracuse this offseason. They submitted a proposal to the NCAA seeking a waiver that would allow them to hold practices and a scrimmage on the Buffaloes campus this spring.

The FBS Oversight Committee ruled against that proposal due to timing and other concerns, although they did say that they will discuss during a future meeting a concept that could permit joint spring practices for future seasons.

"The rules committee should take a look at that and allow folks to do that, if that's what they want to do," Day said.

Howard Talks CFP Run With Gruden

Howard has had an eventful few months since leading the Buckeyes to a national championship, and the hectic schedule continued on April 7 when he appeared in an episode of former NFL head coach and current Barstool Sports personality Jon Gruden's "Gruden's QB Class." In the 45-minute video posted to Barstool's YouTube channel, Howard discussed many things with Gruden, including his role in the Buckeyes' CFP run.

The topic first came up when Gruden showed Howard a replay of a few Volunteers' shirtless entry onto the field at Ohio Stadium before their first-round clash in Columbus on Dec. 21, despite the temperature inside the stadium being at 25 degrees at kickoff, the third-coldest game in Tennessee history.

According to Howard, the Volunteers' entrance did very little to intimidate the Buckeyes.

"The funny thing is they came out with their shirts off and they ran over to the opposite end zone and immediately put them back on," Howard said. "I was like, 'What the f— are these clowns doing?' At that moment, I knew that we had them."

After dominating the Volunteers 42-17 and throwing for 311 yards and two touchdowns, Howard and the Buckeyes' next challenge was No. 1 overall seed Oregon at the Rose Bowl. Howard said that although the Ducks were undefeated at the time and had already beaten the Buckeyes, he and his team were still confident heading into the game, and that showed when they started the game fast.

"We weren't holding any bullets back, and I loved it," Howard said of the team's start. "That first play of the game, we ran a little pump smoke route, and then (Gee Scott Jr.) ran the little wheel route, and I thought we were going to probably run the smoke first to set it up. And (the coaches) came out and were like, 'No, we're running that first play of the game. We're setting the tone,' and I was like 'F— yeah, let's go.' I love that. ...

"I knew coming into this game we were going to put up a ton of points."

As Howard predicted, the Buckeyes dominated Oregon from the get-go, taking a 34-0 lead late in the second quarter on their way to a 41-21 win to advance to the semifinals.

Howard didn't have much to say about Ohio State's 28-14 win over Texas in the Cotton Bowl, but he did offer more thoughts on the Buckeyes' title-game win over Notre Dame, including his now-famous 56-yard third-and-11 completion to Smith that sealed the title-game win.

Howard, who threw for 231 yards and two touchdowns while completing a CFP championship game-record 13 straight passes to start the game, said that the final throw of his collegiate career – although pressure-packed – was an easy one to make due to the supreme talents of Smith.

"So this is 'dos left 73 grill,' " Howard said while describing the play to Gruden. "And grill is just saying we have go balls outside and Emeka (Egbuka)'s running a middle read inside. And then I just put the ball 42 yards on the red line and let No. 4 (Smith) be No. 4."

Sawyer Throws Out First Pitch For Guardians

Former Ohio State defensive end Jack Sawyer also made his rounds in public over the last few months, including on April 8 when he threw out the first pitch for the Cleveland Guardians before their home opener against the Chicago White Sox.

Sawyer – a Pickerington, Ohio, native – earned the honor of throwing to Steve Colavito – the son of the late Indians outfielder Rocky Colavito – from the mound in front of a nearly sold-out Progressive Field, but his throw never reached the intended catcher. Instead, Sawyer launched the pitch over the head of not only Colavito but also the Guardians' mascot Slider, who was standing behind Colavito.

Sawyer's errant pitch, which was met with some playful boos from the Cleveland faithful, was not what he anticipated would happen heading into the day. Before taking the mound, he joked to The Columbus Dispatch that he would deliver a strike to Colavito, citing his previous baseball background as reason why he would do so.

"I played baseball my whole life up until high school. I had a little rifle," Sawyer joked. "Getting back on the rubber will be like riding a bike – hopefully. I'll probably hit about 80 miles per hour. Throw it right down the pipe."

Luckily for Sawyer, he will shift his focus from the baseball diamond back to the gridiron, where he will continue prepping for the 2025 NFL draft, which will take place from April 24-26 at historic Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisc.

Sawyer is projected to be selected in the second round, according to NFL Mock Draft Database.

Conley Named Ohio Hall Of Fame Coach

Former Ohio offensive lineman/assistant coach and longtime BSB contributor Bill Conley was inducted into the Ohio Central District Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame on April 4.

Conley earns the honor due to his decades spent coaching football in central Ohio at both the high school and collegiate level. After playing four seasons as an offensive guard at Ohio State under Woody Hayes from 1968-71, he dipped into the coaching sphere and led four different Ohio high schools over a 15-year period, coaching at London from 1974-77, Groveport from 1979-81, Middletown from 1982-83 and Dublin from 1988-90. He compiled a 78-39-3 record in those stints.

Conley's success at the high school level earned him a role with Ohio State as an assistant, where he had two separate stints from 1984-87 under Earle Bruce and from 1991-2003 under John Cooper and Jim Tressel. He most notably had the role as recruiting coordinator for the Buckeyes during those years, helping bring in all-time players such as Pro Football Hall of Famers Orlando Pace and Carter – whom he coached at Middletown – among many others.

He also spent time as head coach at Ohio Dominican University from 2010-15, compiling a 46-21 record with one Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference title (2013) and two NCAA Division II post-season appearances (2013, 2014) during that span.

Conley, who is now an analyst for 610 WTVN's and WCMH-NBC4's Ohio State programming as well as a columnist for BSB, will be honored at Plank's on Parsons Avenue in Columbus on April 23 at 7 p.m.

Longtime Ohio high school football coaches Phil Mauro and Pat Sergio will also be inducted into the CDFCA Hall of Fame alongside Conley.

Irvin Claims OSU "Cheated" Miami

It's been nearly 40 years since Pro Football Hall of Fame wide receiver Michael Irvin last played for Miami (Fla.), but clearly he hasn't lost any love for his alma mater. The former Hurricane showed he still was upset about the 2002 team's loss to Ohio State in the BCS national championship.

Accompanied with a photo of him standing one-legged next to an Ohio State sign on the Buckeyes' campus, Irvin took to Twitter to voice his displeasures.

"This is me stomping on the grave of that pass interference ghost that cheated us out of (Miami's) championship," said Irvin. "That's two rings I lost on bad P.I. calls!!!!

The controversial call that Irvin was referring to occurred on a fourth-and-3 play in overtime when, trailing 24-17 from the Hurricanes' 5-yard-line, quarterback Craig Krenzel attempted to find wide receiver Chris Gamble for a game-tying touchdown pass. The pass was incomplete, but Miami defensive back Glenn Sharpe was flagged for pass interference, putting the ball at the 1-yard line. Ohio State scored a game-tying touchdown three plays later on a Maurice Clarett run to extend the game to a second overtime, where they would score a touchdown then stop the Hurricanes on four downs to win the national title with a 32-24 victory and end Miami's chance at an elu-



Will Howard

BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 43 years and what we plan to do in the future."

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

And those who donate \$150 or more will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs. The four largest Elite-Plus donors to the Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP program will have their names listed in each issue as Wachsman Level Elite Plus donors, in honor of the late BSB assistant publisher, Karen Wachsman, and our largest donor will be designated as the Woody Level Wachsman Elite-Plus Donor.

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sive repeat championship.

For Miami supporters like Irvin, a former three-time All-American who played with the Hurricanes from 1984-87, the pass interference call has been the subject of plenty of criticism ever since. That is likely the case because the Hurricanes have yet to reach the national title game since that double-overtime loss, while the Buckeyes have appeared in five and won two in that same span.

Simon, Webster Win B1G Medal Of Honor

A pair of former Buckeye greats were recognized for their athletic and academic triumphs on April 7 during the "Scarlet and Graymies" award banquet when linebacker Cody Simon and women's hockey/field hockey forward Makenna Webster were named Ohio State's male and female recipients of the Big Ten Medal of Honor.

Simon excelled both on the field and in the classroom throughout his five-year tenure at Ohio State. He recorded 259 tackles, 25 tackles for loss, 11 pass breakups, 10

sacks, two forced fumbles and an interception with the Buckeyes from 2020-24, and was instrumental to the team's championship run as the team's leading tackler (112) and Block "O" recipient.

Simon is also a five-time OSU Scholar-Athlete and four-time academic All-Big Ten honoree, and he graduated in 2023 with a degree in finance.

Webster, meanwhile, is one of the Ohio State women's hockey program's all-time great players, leading the Buckeyes to three straight national championship games from 2023-25 and a national title win in 2024 after transferring in from Wisconsin. She ranked fourth on the team this past season with 35 points (12 goals, 23 assists), doing so in just 30 games after joining the team late due to the field hockey season overlapping with the ice hockey schedule. She also earned a spot on the WCHA All-Academic team.

Webster was also a second-team All-American this past season in field hockey and ranks 10th in program history in career points (104), leading the team in the

2024 season with 42 points. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in communication last May.

Other Buckeyes Take Home Awards

Webster and Simon were not the only notable Buckeyes to be recognized at the award banquet held that night at the Covelli Center.

Junior linebacker Sonny Styles was named Ohio State's male nominee for the Big Ten Jackie Robinson Community & Impact Award, a new award given to athletes who make a positive impact in their community in addition to their sport. Styles, in addition to his success on the football field, is also active in the community, partnering with the Huckleberry House, which provides shelter and other resources for at-risk and homeless youth in central Ohio.

"Obviously it's a prestigious award, named after an historic player, Jackie Robinson. So it means a lot just in that case to be in the same mention as him," Styles told Eleven Warriors upon being nominated for

the award. "I'm just trying to spread kindness in the world."

Sawyer took home the Best Play award for his 83-yard scoop-and-score in Ohio State's CFP semifinal win over Texas in the Cotton Bowl, while Howard won the Best Newcomer award after leading the Buckeyes to the championship.

The Ohio State football team was named the university's most outstanding team and best men's team for the 2024-25 academic year, while the Buckeyes' dance team – which won the D1A Jazz national title on Jan. 19, was named the school's best women's team.

A program-record 95 football Buckeyes were also announced as 2024-25 scholar-athletes that night for having a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better. That list included graduating Buckeyes such as Egbuka, Ty Hamilton, Jordan Hancock, TreVeyon Henderson, Howard and Sawyer as well as returners Downs, Arvell Reese, Smith and Tate.

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A total of 805 Ohio State student-athletes were named scholar athletes for the 2024-25 academic year.

Former Buckeye CB Signs With Bears

Former Ohio State cornerback Shaun Wade found a new home in the NFL, signing a one-year, \$1.1 million deal with the Chicago Bears on April 3.

Wade, who played for the Buckeyes from 2018-20 and was a consensus All-American and first-team All-Big Ten selection in 2020, joins Chicago after an underwhelming first

four seasons in the NFL. The Jacksonville, Fla., native and former fifth-round (No. 160 overall) 2021 NFL draft selection by the Baltimore Ravens has played 20 career games in his NFL career, including just six starts.

All of that action occurred with the New England Patriots from 2021-23, where he totaled 26 tackles, two tackles for loss and one pass deflection after being traded to the team from Baltimore before his rookie season.

Wade's best season with New England occurred in 2023, when he started a career-high six games and had his only pass deflection on a Patriots defense that finished with a 4-13 record and ranked 15th in the league in scoring defense (21.5 points allowed per game).

Since that season, Wade has yet to make it back onto the field. He spent the entire 2024 season on former Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh's practice squad with the Los Angeles Chargers, being promoted to the active roster on Oct. 21 only to be released and re-signed to the practice squad on Oct. 24.

Wade is the 14th former Ohio State player to sign with a new team or earn an extension with the same team in free agency, a list that includes names such as cornerback Je-

rome Baker (Cleveland Browns), defensive ends Joey Bosa (Buffalo Bills) and Chase Young (New Orleans Saints), wide receiver Parris Campbell (Dallas Cowboys) and quarterback Justin Fields (New York Jets), among others.

Cornerback Eli Apple, running backs J.K. Dobbins, Ezekiel Elliott and Trey Sermon and cornerback Vonn Bell are among the former Buckeyes who remain unsigned.

Former Patriot CB Butler Helps Out At Practice

Former Pro Bowl NFL cornerback Malcolm Butler wasn't a Buckeye himself, but he got an opportunity to be around the program when he helped out his former defensive coordinator during Ohio State's April 10 practice.

Butler, a two-time Super Bowl champion with the Patriots who played with the franchise from 2014-17 while Patricia was defensive coordinator, was photographed at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center wearing Ohio State gear during the Buckeyes' eighth spring practice alongside Tyler Walton, the son of co-defensive coordinator/secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton, and an apartment staffer.

Although it is not clear what Butler's role

was during that practice or if he is still helping out the program, the Super Bowl-winning cornerback did thank Ohio State for the "experience" in an April 10 Instagram post, tagging the accounts of Day, Patricia and Walton. He also retweeted a post made by an Ohio State fan account that said that "two-time Super Bowl Champ and one-time Pro Bowler Malcolm Butler appears to have a role."

Regardless of what his role was or is on the staff, Butler undoubtedly brought championship experience to a relatively young and inexperienced Ohio State team. He most notably made one of the more memorable plays in NFL history during the Patriots' 28-24 Super Bowl XLIX victory over the Seattle Seahawks in 2014, intercepting quarterback Russell Wilson at the goal line with just 20 seconds left in the game to seal the win. Butler was also on the Patriots team that came back from a 28-3 deficit against the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl LI in 2016, recording two tackles and a tackle for loss in the 34-28 overtime win.

Butler played just four more seasons after that, though, playing his final three with the Tennessee Titans under former Buckeye Mike Vrabel.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

The Ohio State women's basketball team opened the NCAA tournament with its most lopsided victory of the year, a 102-60 whitewash of Holy Cross in front of 5,153 enthusiastic fans at St. John Arena on March 17. The victory was OSU's first in NCAA Division I postseason play in three tries.

The Buckeyes moved on to the East Regional semifinals in Norfolk, Va., where, led by junior center Francine Lewis, who scored 31 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, they met Penn State and won, 81-78, to advance to the finals against the biggest name in the women's basketball – Old Dominion.

With 4:52 to play, Ohio State and Old Dominion were tied, 65-65. To that point, the Buckeyes had done what relatively few outside the confines of Columbus had thought possible – play even with the Monarchs on their home floor.

But the roof caved in on OSU as the Buckeyes scored only three points – three free throws – down the stretch to lose 72-68.

Ohio State finished the season with a school-record 28 wins, compiled a 20-game winning streak, held a spot in the top 10 for 13 straight weeks and won its first two NCAA tournament games

35 Years Ago — 1990

For the first time in Ohio State men's basketball history, two players were selected to receive the team's Most Valuable Player award.

Junior captain Perry Carter and freshman Jim Jackson were named the recipients of the Jerry Lucas MVP award at the team's annual appreciation banquet at St. John Arena on April 4.

Carter and Jackson won the award, named for OSU's only three-time All-American, after leading the Buckeyes to a 17-13 record and a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

OSU head coach Randy Ayers reflected on his first season as Buckeye coach, a year in which Ohio State finished sixth in the Big Ten at 10-8 and lost to eventual national champion Nevada-Las Vegas in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

"I counted back eight months to the time I was hired and it seems like it was 88 months ago," Ayers said. "We had our ups and downs this year, but we always had great support from the athletic department and our fans."

30 Years Ago — 1995

For the 1995 Ohio State football team, it appeared the first "line" of defense would be the defensive line.

Four of OSU's six returning starters on defense comprised the defensive line. Junior defensive ends Matt Finkes and Mike Vrabel, along with junior nose guard Luke Fickell and senior tackle Matt Bonhaus, make up the Buckeyes' most talented and experienced defensive front in recent memory.

"As a group, they're doing all right, but obviously we're looking for improvement from everybody," OSU defensive coordinator Bill Young said. "Just because we've got some good experience on the defensive line, that doesn't mean we can relax and lie back on our past performances."

25 Years Ago — 2000

Just before BSB went to press on April 25, OSU junior guard

Michael Redd held a press conference at The Schottenstein Center to announce his intention to leave school a year early and enter the NBA draft.

"It was a long process and I prayed about it," Redd, who left Ohio State as the program's fifth all-time leading scorer, told a media contingent. "The answer was it was time for me to leave."

There had been speculation that Redd could have put his name in the draft pool and possibly retract it at a later date if he did not like his projected status. But he seemed resolute in his decision.

"It's firm," he said. "I've decided to leave and I'm going to leave. "I thought about staying and there were a lot of people saying I should stay, but I felt this was the best decision for me."

20 Years Ago — 2005

On his first day in charge of a department that oversees around 300 employees and more than 900 student-athletes, Gene Smith spent as much time as he could learning.

He said that there wasn't anything daunting about the prospect of being the eighth athletic director in the history of Ohio State University, but before he could lay out any definitive course of action for the school, he first had to be sure he was sufficiently familiar with the scenario into which he was stepping.

"It's going to take some time and assessment for me to determine what I need to do here that fits The Ohio State University and its culture before I can sit here and say, 'We are going to do this,'" Smith told a gathering of reporters on April 15, his first day on the job.

"There's a lot to learn here. It's a very complex organization. I need time to learn the culture. There are some things, like the budget, that are quantifiable, but there are other things that are not. So I'm going to take my time and do my due diligence."

15 Years Ago — 2010

A \$5.2 million renovation to Ohio State's football practice fields didn't take long to begin.

Demolition began April 9 on the grass field just south of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center that the Buckeyes previously have used for practice sessions, with a bulldozer ripping up the grass in preparation for the installation of a new FieldTurf surface that would mimic the one used in Ohio Stadium all the way down to the field markings.

The newly lighted field – which was set to include an extra 30,000 square feet for drills and workout areas as well as permanent goalposts and new video filming stations wired to the team's video room – would join one existing outdoor turf and two new grass fields, giving Ohio State one of the most up-to-date practice facilities in the country.

"We will have two turf fields and two grass fields, which will really allow us to get things done," Tressel told BSB. "We will also have lights installed, giving us the opportunity to have some nighttime practices if we choose. When the project is done, we will be able to simulate all the game situations we will face during any given Saturday."

10 Years Ago — 2015

Throughout Ohio State's run to the first-ever College Football Playoff championship, Urban Meyer continually opened press conferences by thanking Buckeye fans and students for their support. On April 11, the Ohio State staff expressed that gratitude with more than just words during the fourth annual student appreciation practice.

Approximately 1,900 students and fans packed into the indoor practice field at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to watch the Buckeyes compete in their 11th practice of the spring.

"This football team is a part of the students, and the students are a part of this team," Meyer said to the Buckeyes before the practice. "And together, we are a family."

Ohio State welcomed its family in for an 11 a.m. practice (two hours later than the Buckeyes' normal practice to ensure a better student turnout), and pulled out all the stops as photo opportunities were available with the 2014 College Football Playoff trophy and members of the marching band. Brutus Buckeye was also on hand to get in on the action.

Five Years Ago — 2020

The Big Ten announced on May 4 that all team activities would be suspended until at least June 1 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Conference "will re-evaluate again at that time," a statement from the conference read. May 4 was the original end of the first suspension announced back in March, but as a statement from the league indicated, a lack of significant change in the climate surrounding the coronavirus pandemic had created the need for a longer suspension. The suspension included on- and off-campus recruiting, as the NCAA's dead period rules dictate.

"This is an additional measure to the previously announced cancellation of all conference and nonconference competitions through the end of the academic year, including spring sports that compete beyond the academic year. The conference also has previously announced a moratorium on all on- and off-campus recruiting activities for the foreseeable future," the statement said.

One Year Ago — 2024

Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day made a significant addition to his coaching staff on April 1, hiring Oregon running backs coach Carlos Locklyn to the same position on a two-year deal. He replaced former running backs coach Tony Alford, who left for Michigan in March.

Locklyn had 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 the previous 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."

BSB Quotebook: Scarlet 50, Gray 31

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on how 6-1 redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin's size affects play calling: "When you're not 6-4 like Will (Howard) or Dwayne (Haskins) was, or even 6-3 like Justin (Fields) and C.J. Stroud (were) – Kyle (McCord) was about 6-3 – what does that mean? Well, you're in the trees. You have to find passing lanes. Does it affect how we call plays? Not really. I mean, there are certainly things that are easier to do than others, but at the end of the day, there are a lot of guys his stature who are playing in the NFL and have played a lot of high-level college football, so he's certainly tall enough. But you need to get your elbow up. You need to play big. That means your elbow has to be above your shoulder. You have to see the passing lanes, and all those things are important. We're not allowed to get tipped balls. That's part of the deal when you're a smaller quarterback. I think he's done a better job with his body. I think he's moving better, so that's all good."



Ryan Day

Day on the types of conversations he has with Sayin, redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz and freshman Tavien St. Clair and the expectation put on them as Ohio State quarterbacks: "The quarterbacks can tell you that I have conversations with them on a daily basis, especially when they make mistakes in practice. It's our job, and it's my job to make sure that they understand how hard it is to be the quarterback at Ohio State. The expectation is you're not allowed to lose a game, not allowed to have a bad day. So it's really, really hard. That's just the way it is. But as we know, the rewards are endless, and Will is a great example of that. C.J. is a great example of that. Go through the list. A big trait of quarterbacks is resilience. They keep coming back and they keep learning that if you keep making the same mistake over and over again, it's not good. But all of the guys have been that way this spring."

Howard on Big Ten Network discussing Ohio State's 2025 quarterback room: "I'm excited for them. They have a lot of potential – a lot of young guys with a lot of talent. Those guys are all made up of the right qualities, they have the right makeup. They want to be here. And it takes something to be an Ohio State quarterback. It takes a special, different kind of dude, and all of these guys have it."

Day on what he learned about first-year offensive coordinator Brian Hartline as a play caller after the spring game: "For him to do it for the first time out there was a good process for him. There are some things in there that we have to talk about, but overall, I think he had a good plan. You could tell that he had thought through some of the scenarios in his head, because he had the calls ready to go. And then you find yourself in situations where you're thinking or watching the game as opposed to getting on the next call. That's all part of the (learning) process. But I thought he had a good rhythm today. I thought he had a

good plan. Things moved pretty smoothly overall. Nothing's perfect. But I was not on the headset on purpose, because I just didn't want that kind of distraction for him, and I thought he did a good job. But we'll keep growing. We'll keep learning from it, and then we also have the pre-season scrimmages that we'll have here where (Hartline will) continue to learn and we'll try to get him in more and more situations calling plays. But a big part of it is the organization going into it. If you're organized going in, it's probably going to be well organized during the game."

Day on the performance of the running backs in the spring game: "It's hard to tell with running backs until you're actually taking them to the ground. James (Peoples) and CJ (Donaldson) got a limited amount of reps. You saw Sam (Williams-Dixon run). I thought Bo Jackson really grew as the spring went on. I don't know (how to evaluate them) until we start tackling guys and getting into games with James and CJ. But I feel like they're in command. I think James has the chance to be a special back. He hasn't played a lot of football, but he has great energy. He's really matured. He's very coachable. He's seen the way it's supposed to look. He knows what the standard is. So I feel solid about where we are at. I feel like we have what we need there. We just need to continue to build."

Day on how important it is to get redshirt freshman wide receiver Mylan Graham reps: "It's huge. He's another guy who just needs to play football. His route running is excellent. His athleticism is excellent. His attention to detail is excellent. The biggest thing with Mylan has been just finishing catches, which you saw him do some today. That's been his emphasis. Finish the contested catches, catch it clean, and then put the ball away. He had the big run after the catch. That ball was loose, you could see it. So he's got to learn to tighten that up. But I think he has a bright future here. I think he's grown. He's gotten better. He's serious about his work. He knows what he has to work on, but he has all the tools it takes to be the next great one."

Day on graduate tight end Will Kacmarek's injury status and the other tight ends in the room: "It's not long term (with Kacmarek). We should have a full summer with Will. You could see all the tight ends getting involved today. I think (tight ends coach and co-offensive coordinator Keenan Bailey) has done a nice job of putting that room together. You see the way Jelani Thurman is working. You see the way Nate (Roberts) was making catches. And then you have Max LeBlanc. It's easy to point out how quick Max Klare gets down the field, how quick he is in and out of his breaks, his ball skills. We're going to work really hard this summer on some of his route running and how he does that, but he's going to be a weapon for us here in the fall. I think that whole room has really grown, so they're making a push to be in 12 personnel more this season."



Mylan Graham

Day when asked about how he wants to utilize senior defensive end Logan George this season: "That's going to be a topic of conversation. What's the best fit? How does he fit? What's his role? Because he has strong hands, he has physicality to him. When he first came here during the playoffs, our guys had a hard time blocking him. You could recognize he had heavy hands, and you've seen some of that this spring. But now he's 15 practices in, so we'll see how that fits. We need to figure out how his role is going to be described to him as we come out of the spring."

Day on conversations between him and his position coaches regarding the transfer portal, which was slated to open on April 16: "Well, we just try to go through the spring, get the grades, because we try to grade as many things as we can to figure out where those are at and try to identify where everybody's at in terms of the depth. If there's a hole there that needs to be filled, then we'll go ahead and fill it."

Day on if he has had conversations with his staff about finding depth pieces through the transfer portal this spring: "You talk about your depth a lot, but one of the things for us is, we're two down on the offensive line. There are a couple of positions that we actually don't have our number because of the way it was designed coming out of last year. The portal opened and closed before we were done with our last game. Then it was open for five days after the national championship game. And I know no one feels bad for us, but the whole country got to pick off our players, which they did, and so because of that we weren't able to replace them. So we need to do some of that in our depth chart, knowing that we're going to have to get to 105 (players on the roster this summer), which is a whole different conversation."

Day on what he learned about the team after these 15 spring practices and what he expects moving forward this offseason: "I think the first thing you notice about this team is they compete. They're competitive. They're edgy. Once you get past some of the guys who have played football here with the ones, it quickly gets inexperienced fast. But even the guys who are going to be starters next year, they haven't played a lot of football as starters. They've played football, but not as starters. That's a whole different deal. You have to produce regularly. You have to be able to handle an increased number of snaps at a high level, it's a whole different deal. We've lost talent, but more importantly, we lost experience. Every time you go out there, you're either remembering or you're learning. We have a lot of guys learning right now, we do. So we've got to just accelerate that learning process and figure out what that plan is here this summer and how we do that. Our offseason program still needs to be as hard as ever, and then as we get into preseason, we got to do a great job of making sure we're creating as many game situations as possible."

QB Sayin Shows Off Talents In First Half

Continued From Page 1

in a 50-31 win for the offense over the defense and capped what he described as an edgy three weeks of practice – was not entirely perfect from an X's and O's and production standpoint. But the mere opportunity for his inexperienced team to get on the turf and feel the gameday atmosphere in a simulated game setting was crucial as they head closer to what could be another challenging season with championship aspirations.

"Right from the jump – from the time when we got on the bus to when we finished – I said I was glad we did this," Day said after the game. "I'm glad we did this spring game. I wasn't sure, but it was definitely the right thing to do. I wish we could have stayed out there for another four hours and gotten these reps and gotten these guys some work."

"These guys play 12 to 13 games a year of 11-on-11 padded football. That's it," Day added later on. "Playing 7-on-7, that's great. That's not football. The throws that you're making aren't real because there's a 6-5 tackle and a guy over here that's trying to rip your head off (in a game). So the more we can create those environments for our guys, the (sooner) we will figure it out. You just have to continue to find ways to get out there. I wish we had 15 more practices in the spring to get out there and learn and grow from. But I think there has been progress made."

Sayin Widens The Gap

Perhaps the biggest progress made coming out of the spring game was at the quarterback position. Heading into the scrimmage, many Buckeye fans and media members were under the impression that the competition between redshirt sophomore Julian Sayin and redshirt junior Lincoln Kienholz was heating up, especially after Kienholz emerged as one of the top performers of the entire spring and Sayin put forth a much quieter performance.

But when the two gunslingers entered the field in front of fans for the first time this season, the gap between them seemed to widen a bit. Although Kienholz trotted out to the field first with the starters – both Kienholz and Sayin rotated equally with the ones and twos throughout the game – it was the former five-star Sayin who stole the show, showing off his accuracy and arm strength that many had lauded time and time again when he first arrived in Columbus last season from Alabama.

Sayin's best throws all came during the first half when he impressively drove his team down for a touchdown score on each of his first three turns under center. The Carlsbad, Calif., native didn't do much on the team's first touchdown drive, which featured several runs and ended on a goal-line rushing score from transfer running back CJ Donaldson, but he certainly steered the ship on the second scoring drive. He delivered numerous accurate throws, including a long strike to Carnell Tate on a crossing route in the middle of the field

and a more lofted touch pass to Purdue transfer tight end Max Klare in the red zone that put the scarlet team on the board again.

Sayin followed that up with another solid effort on his third drive, when he found redshirt sophomore Mylan Graham on a tightly contested slant route on third down and then made another touch pass down the seam to tight end Jelani Thurman on the very next play to set up an eventual Bo Jackson rushing score.

When the dust settled at the end of the first half, Sayin had completed 14 of his 20 passes for 165 yards and a touchdown, a strong start to the game that Day felt was needed from his young quarterback after his somewhat up-and-down first 14 practices of spring.

"I thought Julian, for the most part, was in a rhythm early on and moved the team down for a couple of touchdowns, which was good," Day said of his quarterback, who added another 10 yards on three completions in more limited time in the second half. "He made some nice throws."

Sayin was certainly the sharpest of the three quarterbacks during the spring game, but that is not to say that the other two didn't have their moments. Contrary to Sayin, Kienholz struggled to find his rhythm early – most notably airmailing a few passes over the heads of intended receivers – but turned it on as the game progressed. He led Ohio State on back-to-back promising drives at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second,

the latter one ending in a score after he zipped an accurate pass to Graham on a slant route that allowed him to sprint 36 yards to the end zone.

Kienholz finished 12 of 18 with 158 yards passing and two touchdowns, the second score coming in the fourth quarter when he found a wide-open Sam Williams-Dixon on a fade route in the red zone.

"I felt like Lincoln settled down after the first drive or so, made some nice throws," Day said.

True freshman Tavien St. Clair had a similar outing to Kienholz. The highly touted five-star seemed to have his "welcome to college football" moment by throwing two ugly interceptions, one at the end of the first half to fellow first-year player Faheem Delane and then the other on his first drive of the second half to Brenten "Inky" Jones. But, like his red-shirt sophomore counterpart, he finished the scrimmage strong, showing off his dual-threat ability and leading the Buckeyes' third-teamers on a last-second scoring drive in the fourth quarter, finding freshman Phillip Bell in the back of the end zone on a slant route on the last play of the game.

He completed 11 of his 15 pass attempts for 116 yards and the touchdown.

Overall, it was a solid day for Ohio State's three quarterbacks, with Sayin seemingly making the best final impression on the staff heading into the summer. Day, as expected, didn't make any bold declarations on how the

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quarterback competition is shaping up coming out of spring. Instead, he said that while the spring game was a major step forward, there still is a long way to go before they can fully evaluate each signal caller in the room.

“There is certainly a lot to grow from, and this is why we did this,” Day said. “We put a fairly significant emphasis on throwing the ball to see how the quarterbacks were going to respond, so we’ll use this as another evaluation tool. For the most part, we have a chance to have some film to evaluate, see how these quarterbacks handle themselves in front of the crowd, and kind of go from there and build from it.”

Trenches A Mixed Bag

Quarterback is not the only important offensive position group that used the spring game to gain more clarity on who may be ahead on the depth chart. The scrimmage also allowed fans and media to see what the Buckeyes’ starting offensive line could look like heading into Week 1 against Texas.

As expected, there were no surprises on the interior of the offensive line when the starters ran out onto the field to start the game. Reclaiming their role at center, left guard and right guard from the College Football Playoff run were redshirt junior Carson Hinzman, junior Luke Montgomery and red-shirt junior Tegra Tshabola, respectively, who are expected to receive the lion’s share of reps at their positions and produce at a high level, according to their coach.

“The guys who returned, Luke, Carson and Tegra, they’re feeling more comfortable with what we’re doing again,” Day said. “It’s good to have guys who have played, and they obviously played well enough to win a national championship last year. Our expectations are that these guys are All-Americans and first-rounders. That’s why they’re here, and that’s what they want to be.”

The exterior of Tyler Bowen’s offensive line entered the year with a bit more uncertainty, though, due to the departures of All-Big Ten players Donovan Jackson and Josh Fryar, which compelled Day and his staff to head to the transfer portal and search for potential plug-in starters in the role. It appeared the Buckeyes found just that when they added three-year Rice starter Ethan Onianwa and former Minnesota starter Phillip Daniels this winter, but when the spring game came around, it was only Onianwa who was in the starting role, taking the starting left tackle position of which he occupied with the Owls in 2024.

Daniels, on the other end, received mostly second-team reps at right tackle, with redshirt sophomore and offensive line Swiss army knife Austin Siereveld getting the start as he had done in other practices open to the media this spring. Siereveld – who was named one of three “Iron Buckeyes” due to his dedication to offseason workouts and training – had received reps at both tackle and guard positions throughout the spring.

Daniels would earn some time with the first team later in the spring game after replacing Siereveld, as did redshirt freshman Ian Moore at left tackle with Daniels, giving fans a glimpse of how Bowen and the Buckeyes could rotate on the outside of the offensive line this season.

“Our guys have done a good job of having a primary position and a secondary position, so you’re seeing some guys move around,” Day said when asked how he feels about the tack-

le position heading out of spring. “So I think we’re going to have what we need (at tackle), eventually. We’ll probably end up having four tackles (who can play meaningful snaps), and that’s what we need to make it through the season.

“We’ll figure that out in the post-spring meeting. It’s not a finished product yet, for sure. But again, I feel like those guys have made strides. They’ve gotten better. And in the good-on-good situations that we’ve seen this spring, they really competed.”

Ohio State’s first-team offensive line – no matter who was in there – had a fairly uneventful day in the spring game, creating just enough traction to open holes for runners but still not doing enough to fully protect their quarterbacks. Instead, it was the second-team front five – consisting mostly of, from left to right, Moore, true freshman Jake Cook, red-shirt sophomore Josh Padilla, redshirt freshman Gabe VanSickle and Daniels – that had the best outing, consistently creating gaping holes for the running backs and giving up little pressure in pass protection.

These successes were most notable on the unit’s first drive of the game when they allowed several Buckeye running backs to have big gains, including Donaldson, who punched in the previously mentioned goal-line score to cap off the methodical drive.

Although these big runs may seem like a positive for the team in terms of offensive line depth, it could also mean that the defensive line depth is nowhere near where it needs to be at this point of the season, a problem that they did not have to worry about with players such as Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams leading the first team and Caden Curry, Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Kayden McDonald manning the second team.

With those three first-team players now gone and Curry, Jackson and McDonald inserted into the starting role for 2025, the Buckeyes and defensive line coach Larry Johnson are working with a much thinner and less experienced unit this season. That development was on full display during the spring game, when only Idaho State transfer Logan George and senior C.J. Hicks were disruptive off the edge, with the interior on the second team constantly getting beat.

Day said after the game that he was disappointed with the lack of depth the defensive line showed in the spring game, and that they need to take action to get it fixed.

“I think we have to take a hard look at it,” he said. “I don’t think I have the answer right now, but we have to look at it. It seemed to me that there was a lot of knockback on the offensive side of the ball, but I don’t want to make any judgments until I watch the film.”

Day also acknowledged after the game that the defense was running very “vanilla” formations and did not fully tap into the capabilities of a Patricia-led defense. Regardless of the defensive line issues, though, he is content with what Patirica and his staff have accomplished this spring because they have built a solid foundation of plays and designs that they feel confident in heading into the summer.

“We’ve been seeing a lot of different defenses,” Day said. “Today we did not do that. A lot of our install is in so I feel decent about that. If we’re good and dominant, you should be able to play a couple of defenses and play a couple of coverages at Ohio State and win, and win with technique. So that’s the message coming out of the spring. But I feel like we have a good portion of our install done. There’s certainly

Spring Game Box Score

Scarlet 50, Gray 31

April 12, 2025 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
GRAY	4	8	10	9	31
SCARLET	14	10	10	16	50

First Quarter

- SCAR – Donaldson, 4-yard rush (Fielding kick), 9:24.
- SCAR – Klare, 26-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 5:39.

Second Quarter

- SCAR – Jackson, 3-yard rush (Fielding kick), 8:00.
- SCAR – Fielding, 34-yard field goal, 1:59.

Third Quarter

- SCAR – Graham, 51-yard pass from Kienholz (Fielding kick), 10:51.
- SCAR – Fielding, 43-yard field goal, 0:15.

Fourth Quarter

- SCAR – Williams-Dixon, 11-yard pass from Kienholz (Fielding kick), 5:38.
- SCAR – Fielding, 43-yard field goal, 1:10.
- SCAR – Bell, 9-yard pass from St. Clair (Fielding kick), 0:08.

Att. – 40,136

Weather – Sunny, 50 F

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

*Scarlet scored via traditional offense. Gray was awarded points for touchdowns, takeaways, sacks, three-and-outs and forced punts. Stats are unofficial.

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Jackson 13-88; Williams-Dixon 11-64; Donaldson 4-35; St. Clair 5-16; Brecht 2-14; Kienholz 2-6; Peoples 2-6.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Kienholz 12-18-0-158-2; Sayin 17-24-0-175-1; St. Clair 11-15-2-116-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Graham 4-104; Porter 4-50; Roberts 4-41; Inniss 2-35; Thurman 2-35; Bell 3-30; Klare 2-28; Tate 2-26; LeBlanc 2-22; Williams-Dixon 2-21; Smith 2-19; Jackson 2-11; Williams 1-10; Jones 1-7; Adolph 1-5; Donaldson 1-1; Rodgers 1-1.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – GRAY: None. SCAR: N/A.

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: Delane 1-0; Jones 1-0. SCAR: None.

SACKS – GRAY: N/A. SCAR: None.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: N/A. SCAR: None.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – GRAY: N/A. SCAR: N/A.

Players In The Game

GRAY – N/A.

SCAR – N/A.

things we’ll have (to address) this preseason.”

Ring Me Please

While Ohio State’s 2025 spring game offered fans a look ahead at what this team could look like when it takes the field at Ohio Stadium to open the season against Texas, the event also gave them another chance to celebrate the 2024 national championship team.

After the end of the first quarter, the Buckeyes’ 2024 team stood near midfield to receive their postseason hardware, which included three gaudy rings – one for making the College Football Playoff and two for winning the national championship, the latter two being gifted by Ohio State and the CFP.

The Ohio State national championship ring – which was designed by Jostens Inc. – was perhaps the most bling-worthy of the three. Each ring was custom-made for every player, coach and staff member and had their names and numbers engraved on the outside, with the inside of the ring opening up and including both engravings of the final scores of the four postseason games and confetti from the national championship win in Atlanta.

“Man, they’re big, and they did a great job with them,” Day said on an April 10 appearance on 97.1 The Fan. “I don’t know how much bigger these rings can get, you have to drag them around, but it’s really cool to see. The (national championship ring) in particular has all kinds of different cool features to it.”

Aside from the material aspect of the rings, they also represent the hard work each of the players and coaches put into last season’s historic national championship run. Quarterback Will Howard and defensive end Jack Sawyer, who were among a group of several notable NFL-bound Buckeyes who returned to Columbus for the celebration, said that the rings serve as a great reminder of what last year’s team accomplished before they each embark on their professional careers.

“It’s a surreal moment,” Sawyer said. “I love this place.”

“It makes it feel real,” Howard added on Big Ten Network. “It’s been a long time coming for these rings. We’ve been waiting on these things. But it’s a combination of a lot of hard work, a lot of sacrifice and a lot of love. That’s what I see when I look at these things.”

QB Sayin Makes A Statement In Spring Game

By **CRAIG MERZ**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Some players shone. Others didn't. But that's why they play the game or some semblance of it in the glorified scrimmage that drew the curious to Ohio Stadium on April 12.

They came to see the heir apparent to quarterback Will Howard and likely left more impressed by redshirt freshman Julian Sayin than third-year sophomore Lincoln Kienholz while freshman Tavien St. Clair made the expected rookie mistakes while flashing some of his potential.

For the record, the offense defeated the defense 50-31 before an announced crowd of 40,136 on a partly sunny, 51-degree afternoon. The Columbus Dispatch reported it was the smallest non-COVID spring game turnout since 2005.

The offense followed traditional scoring while the D got six points for a touchdown, three for a turnover, three points for a three-and-out, two points for a sack and one point for forcing a punt.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was the awarding of rings to players on the 2024 College Football Playoff championship team.

How It Happened

Kienholz took the snaps on the first series

which ended with a three-and-out.

Sayin, a five-star Alabama transfer, led the next drive and was off-target to an open Mylan Graham in the end zone. Graham, a redshirt freshman, had four catches for 104 yards and a touchdown, according to the unofficial stats provided by Ohio State. On the ensuing play, running back CJ Donaldson Jr. rushed for a 4-yard TD. The series took 11 plays to go 82 yards.

Later, former Purdue tight end Max Klare caught a 26-yard TD pass from Sayin, who was 17 of 24 for 175 yards and a TD. During the 65-yard, seven-play series, Carnell Tate had a 24-yard reception.

Kienholz was in charge for the next two series, which resulted in punts. Sayin returned and led an eight-play, 65-yard scoring drive. A Graham catch went for 18, and Jelani Thurman had one for 23 yards before freshman Bo Jackson ran for a 4-yard touchdown to make it 21-5.

When St. Clair finally got a chance, Sam Williams-Dixon ran for 18, but an interception by Faheem Delane stalled the possession. Kienholz then engineered a drive that culminated in a 34-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding and a 24-10 lead. Jackson ran for 20, and Kienholz had passes of 17 to Graham and 28 more to Brandon Inniss before the kick.

The defense would add two points on a



JOSH WINSLOW

SPRING FORWARD — Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin performed well during the spring game, completing 17 of 24 passes for 175 yards and a touchdown, and is the presumed front-runner to be the starter when Ohio State hosts Texas on Aug. 30.

Spring Scholarship Roster — Offense									
QUARTERBACK					WIDE RECEIVER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
10	Julian Sayin	6-1	203	R-Fr./4	4	Jeremiah Smith	6-3	215	So./3
3	Lincoln Kienholz	6-3	207	R-So./3	17	Carnell Tate	6-3	191	Jr./ 2
9	Tavien St. Clair	6-4	223	Fr./4	1	Brandon Inniss	6-0	203	Jr./2
Comments: With Will Howard off to the NFL draft, Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day are dealing with their most inexperienced quarterback room in years. The longest-tenured player in the room is Kienholz, who has two seasons under his belt at Ohio State. Even with Kienholz being the elder statesman in Billy Fessler's unit, though, Sayin is the presumed favorite to start under center for the Buckeyes' season opener against Texas after turning in a solid spring. Likely trailing Sayin in the depth chart is Kienholz, who has made noticeable improvements and showed those off in the spring game by completing 12 passes for 158 yards. St. Clair has generated much hype as an incoming five-star prospect but will likely start the year on the bottom of the quarterback depth chart.					5	Mylan Graham	6-1	185	R-Fr./4
					21	Bryson Rodgers	6-2	185	R-So./3
					11	Quincy Porter	6-4	196	Fr./4
					Other scholarship players: David Adolph (R-Jr.), Damarion Witten (R-Fr.), Phillip Bell (Fr.), De'Zie Jones (Fr.), Bodpegn Miller (Fr.).				
					Comments: With the All-American Smith and 2024 starter Tate returning, Ohio State's receiver room should be one of the strengths of the offense. Inniss projects to replace Emeka Egbuka at the slot position after a solid 2024 campaign. Former five-star receivers Graham and Porter will compete for playing time, while the veteran Rogers also provides depth in a loaded receiver room. Freshmen Bell, Jones and Miller have all been lauded by wide receivers coach Brian Hartline for their buy-in during spring.				
RUNNING BACK					TIGHT END				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
20	James Peoples	5-10	203	So./3	86	Max Klare	6-4	236	R-Jr./2
12	CJ Donaldson Jr.	6-1	237	Sr./1	89	Will Kacmarek	6-6	260	R-Sr./1
25	Bo Jackson	6-0	210	Fr./4	15	Jelani Thurman	6-6	258	R-So./3
Other scholarship players: Sam Williams-Dixon (R-Fr.), Isaiah West (Fr.).					Other scholarship players: Bennett Christian (R-Jr.), Max LeBlanc (R-Fr.), Nate Roberts (Fr.)				
Comments: Running back is another position where almost all of the production from the 2024 team won't be returning with both TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins off to the draft. Peoples takes over as the likely No. 1 and has the chance to earn the "workhorse" title if he can handle the workload needed. But with a longer season, there will undoubtedly be some rotation, with Donaldson bringing the perfect build to be a power back the Buckeyes will need in goal-line situations. Williams-Dixon will have to compete for the third spot on the depth chart with the freshmen, but Jackson seems to be adapting quickly based on what he has put on the field in the spring. Anthony "Turbo" Rogers will join the group when he enrolls in the summer.					Comments: Ohio State's 2025 tight end room is almost entirely boosted by transfer talents, with Klare (Purdue) and Kacmarek (Ohio) likely leading the way for the Buckeyes at the position. Klare comes to Ohio State after posting 685 yards and four scores with the Boilermakers in 2024 and should prove to be the biggest receiver of targets coming out of spring ball, while Kacmarek and Thurman aid much more in jumbo packages in short-yardage situations. Christian is a proven threat downfield, hauling in a 55-yard touchdown against Western Michigan last season, while LeBlanc, a member of the 2024 recruiting class, has yet to see the field in one of the more beefed-up position groups for the Buckeyes.				
LEFT TACKLE					LEFT GUARD				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
78	Ethan Onianwa	6-6	357	R-Sr./1	51	Luke Montgomery	6-5	308	Jr./2
74	Carter Lowe	6-6	341	Fr./4	58	Gabe VanSickle	6-5	285	R-Fr./4
LEFT GUARD					CENTER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
51	Luke Montgomery	6-5	308	Jr./2	75	Carson Hinzman	6-5	300	R-Jr./2
58	Gabe VanSickle	6-5	285	R-Fr./4	62	Joshua Padilla	6-4	295	R-So./3
CENTER					RIGHT GUARD				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
75	Carson Hinzman	6-5	300	R-Jr./2	77	Tegra Tshabola	6-6	327	R-Jr./2
62	Joshua Padilla	6-4	295	R-So./3	67	Austin Siereveld	6-5	320	R-So./3
RIGHT GUARD					RIGHT TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
77	Tegra Tshabola	6-6	327	R-Jr./2	70	Phillip Daniels	6-5	315	R-So./3
67	Austin Siereveld	6-5	320	R-So./3	69	Ian Moore	6-6	309	R-Fr./4
					Other scholarship players: Deontae Armstrong (R-Fr.), Devontae Armstrong (R-Fr.), Jake Cook (Fr.), Jayvon McFadden (Fr.).				
					Comments: Ohio State's 2025 offensive line is a mix of experienced players and new additions. Montgomery, Hinzman and Tshabola are set to reclaim their starting roles at left guard, center and right guard after starting either all of season or during the national championship run last season, giving first-year offensive line coach Tyler Bowen some stability heading into the year. The tackle position might be a bit less solidified, although transfers Onianwa and Daniels are expected to start on the outside for Week 1. Day and Bowen have both said that they want to have some rotation on the line this season, which could open the door for Siereveld, Moore and Padilla, among others, to earn some starting reps as the long season wears on.				

Spring Scholarship Roster - Defense

DEFENSIVE END				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
92	Caden Curry	6-3	260	Sr./1
97	Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	6-6	258	R-Jr./2
48	Logan George	6-4	249	Jr./2
11	C.J. Hicks	6-3	233	Sr./1

Other scholarship players: Joshua Mickens (R-So.), Zion Grady (Fr.), Dominic Kirks (R-Fr.)

Comments: Losing both starters off the edge in one offseason would normally be a big cause for concern for teams, but with the depth the Buckeyes had at the position last season, there might not be any reason to worry. Both Curry and Jackson could have likely been starters at almost every other Big Ten program last year, and the only question seems to be whether they can handle the much bigger workload they will have. At least in the spring, George's FCS experience seemed to translate to Ohio State well, and Hicks finally getting a chance to make an impact rushing the passer will be an interesting development to follow since it has always been his bread and butter, even when he was at the linebacker position. If both George and Hicks can successfully make their respective transitions, the Buckeyes will be deep at defensive end. Epi Sitanilei will join the group when he enrolls in the summer.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
96	Eddrick Houston	6-3	270	So./3
98	Kayden McDonald	6-3	326	Jr./2
95	Tywone Malone Jr.	6-4	301	R-Sr./1
53	Will Smith Jr.	6-4	288	R-So./3

Other scholarship players: Jason Moore (R-So.), Eric Mensah (R-Fr.), Trajen Odom (Fr.), Jarquez Carter (Fr.)

Comments: After converting from defensive end to defensive tackle during his freshman season, Houston received significant playing time throughout Ohio State's College Football Playoff run. The five-star now seems likely to start at the "3-technique" spot, where he will line up on the outside shoulder of offensive guards. Houston will likely be joined on the inside of the Buckeye defensive line by McDonald, who played in all 16 games for the Buckeyes in 2024. Entering their third and second years in the program, respectively, Smith and Malone are veteran options for defensive line coach Larry Johnson at defensive tackle. Carter and Odom will provide more depth in their freshman seasons. Maxwell Roy will add

more depth when he joins the Buckeyes this summer.

LINEBACKER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
36	Sonny Styles	6-4	235	Sr./1
8	Arvell Reese	6-4	238	Jr./2
26	Payton Pierce	6-2	223	So./3
23	Garrett Stover	6-1	220	R-Fr./4

Other scholarship players: Ty Howard (R-Jr.), Tarvos Alford (Fr.), Riley Pettijohn (Fr.), Eli Lee (Fr.)

Comments: The middle two on the defense represent the most tenured group on that side of the ball for the Buckeyes, if not the entire team, with Styles and Reese leading the way after their impressive 2024 seasons. Reese fills in for the NFL-bound Cody Simon at the Mike. Pierce and Stover should be the first linebackers off the bench after taking second-team reps this spring, while Alford and Pettijohn, both highly ranked in the class of 2025, could see their names move up this offseason. Howard, a Duquesne transfer, provides more depth and experience in James Laurinaitis' room, while Lee will likely begin the season at the bottom of the depth chart.

CORNERBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
1	Davison Igbinosun	6-2	193	Sr./1
7	Jermaine Mathews Jr.	5-11	189	Jr./2
4	Devin Sanchez	6-2	180	Fr./4
5	Aaron Scott Jr.	6-0	185	So./3

Comments: Ohio State seems to have two clear starters this season at outside cornerback, with Igbinosun reclaiming his role for the third straight season and Mathews replacing NFL-bound Denzel Burke on the other side after being an effective reserve his first two seasons with the program. The wild card in the room is the highly coveted five-star and true freshman Sanchez, who has turned heads all spring with his impressive size and skill at just 18 years old. Sanchez will likely be limited to a reserve role this season behind Igbinosun and Mathews but could still see some significant playing time, as could Scott, who played seven games last season and has flashed at times this spring. True freshman Jordyn Woods will join the unit this summer.

FREE SAFETY				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
2	Caleb Downs	6-0	205	Jr./2
10	Faheem Delane	6-1	210	Fr./4

Other scholarship players: Cody Haddad (Fr.), DeShawn Stewart (Fr.)

Comments: Viewed by many as the best-returning defender in college football, Downs is a slam dunk

to start at the back end of the Buckeyes' defense. It's unclear what his role will look like under first-year defensive coordinator Patricia, but under former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles he was mainly in the adjuster spot, which is akin to the free safety position in a standard defense. Freshmen like the top-60 recruit Delane as well as Haddad and Stewart will provide depth behind Downs.

STRONG SAFETY				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
9	Malik Hartford	6-3	194	Jr./2
18	Jaylen McClain	6-0	192	So./3

Other scholarship players: Keenan Nelson Jr. (R-Jr.), Leroy Roker III (R-Fr.)

Comments: While the free safety spot is locked down with Downs returning, the strong safety position comes down to Hartford and McClain, who could very well split time at the spot for some time. McClain logged a more productive 2024 season on the field, but Hartford looks to be in the lead for the role coming out of spring after he took first-team reps throughout spring practice. Delane, the nation's fifth-best safety in the class of 2025, could see rotational time, while Nelson, who did not see any action in 2024, will round out the position as a potential fourth option.

NICKELBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
3	Lorenzo Styles Jr.	6-1	195	R-Sr./1
12	Bryce West	5-11	196	R-Fr./4

Other scholarship players: Miles Lockhart (R-Fr.)

Comments: With a 4-2-5 defense being so common nowadays, the Buckeyes want many of the players in their secondary to be able to be versatile, something that has been one of the big messages from Day out of spring camp this season. With Jordan Hancock off to the NFL draft, Styles is set to take over the role after working his way up the depth chart in the 2024 season enough to see significant playing time as a backup, ending up with 16 tackles with four passes broken up. With that versatility in mind, other cornerbacks or safeties could be in the rotation ahead of West and Lockhart if the two redshirt freshmen haven't made big enough jumps after their first year with the Buckeyes. But West did get into five games last year and didn't seem outmatched when he got onto the field.

sack for a 24-12 halftime score.

Kienholz in the third quarter had his best throw of the day – a 51-yard scoring strike to Graham to go up 31-12.

St. Clair was picked off again, this time by Brenten "Inky" Jones, and later a 43-yard FG by Fielding would extend the margin to 34-21 following St. Clair's 31-yard pass to freshman Phillip Bell.

"Like any spring game you come out of, there is still a lot of work to do," coach Ryan

Day said. "I think some of the young guys got into a rhythm after getting rid of the butterflies early on. It was good to have a game and good to have a nice game and a crowd out there for the guys to play in front of."

A second Kienholz TD, 24 yards to Williams-Dixon out of the backfield, upped the count to 41-22.

"I thought Julian settled in pretty good and made some nice throws and then the same thing with Lincoln after the first couple of

drives," Day said. "The receivers made some good catches. It felt like the offense ran the ball well."

Fielding showed he is fully recovered from a torn hip abductor in his right leg that hindered him most of last season by connecting from 43 yards again to make it 44-24. Idaho State transfer Logan George had two sacks on the next series when the defense cut the deficit to 44-31.

St. Clair completed the scoring on the last play of the game on a 9-yard pass to Bell.

Numbers

Kienholz was 12 of 18 for 158 yards and two touchdowns while St. Clair was 11 of 15 for 116 yards with the TD and two interceptions. ... All-America sophomore receiver Jeremiah Smith had two catches for 19 yards playing only the first two series. ... Tate had two catches for 26 yards, and Inniss had two catches for 35 yards. ... Jackson gained 88 yards and a TD on 13 carries, and Williams-Dixon rushed for 64 yards on 11 totes.

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Siereveld, Mathews Shine In Spring Practice

By **PATRICK ENGELS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Just months after winning his first national title in a decade behind a star-studded roster and coaching staff, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day is ushering in a new era of Buckeye football this offseason.

With 17 players heading to the NFL and three top 2024 assistants – offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and offensive line coach Justin Frye – all leaving for new positions, the Buckeyes are working with an inexperienced and unproven group in 2025. But even with this inexperience, Day said his new-look team bought into the Ohio State culture and competed throughout spring camp, which he thinks is a major stepping-stone as the program moves closer to its highly anticipated season opener against Texas on Aug. 30.

“I’ll say this about this group,” Day said on April 7. “They are competitive. They are edgy. They’ve given great effort on the field. That has been (a constant) in every practice so far. So that is a foundation you can build off of. Now, if we can just keep building and growing, we’ll have something.”

As Day alluded to, Ohio State’s competitive spirit shone on both sides of the ball throughout the 15-practice schedule, which culminated in a 50-31 win for the Scarlet team in the spring game held at

Ohio Stadium on April 12.

The Buckeye defense proved that it could rise to the occasion under first-year coordinator Matt Patricia, with younger players such as Malik Hartford, Eddrick Houston, Arvell Reese and Jermaine Mathews Jr. all making strong cases to claim more prominent roles this year alongside returning starters Caleb Downs, Davison Igbinosun and Sonny Styles.

The offense also showed at times that it could pick up the slack from last year’s championship-winning unit. The Buckeyes’ three-man quarterback room spent the spring gaining more comfort with play-making weapons such as returning receivers Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss, as well as probable first-year starters such Purdue transfer tight end Max Klare and sophomore running back James Peoples.

In the end, it was the offense that finished spring with the most momentum heading into the summer due to their strong performance in the spring game, where they scored six touchdowns and had several positive drives on the day.

With 15 practices now in the books, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look back at the players who flashed the most this spring while also diving into the key position battles that fans will need to keep an eye on as Ohio State moves closer to the start of the 2025 season.

Top Spring Offensive Player: Austin Siereveld

Throughout the offseason, both Day and first-year offensive line coach Tyler Bowen have discussed at length the importance of having positional versatility on the offensive line, with Day even saying that he would like each player in that unit to have a primary and secondary position to start the season.

Coming out of spring ball, no offensive lineman has embraced that objective more than sophomore Austin Siereveld. After starting six games at left guard last season, he earned first-team reps at both the guard and tackle positions throughout camp, including starts at right tackle during both the team’s Student Appreciation Day on April 5 and the spring game.

Siereveld’s ability to line up both on the inside and outside – something Donovan Jackson did last year when he made the midseason move from left guard to left tackle – has certainly left an impression on the Buckeye offensive coaching staff, who have praised him all spring for not only embracing multiple roles but thriving in them.

“I think Austin’s been awesome,” said offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline. “I mean, he’s played every position. He’s moving around and handles it. He’s one of those guys that you watch on film day after day and his name never really gets brought up – in a good way. If you’re on

the line, your name gets brought up when things are usually not going as well, (but) with Austin, when his name is brought up it’s always positive. I’ve been really impressed with him.”

Siereveld, who last played tackle at the high school level at Liberty Township (Ohio) Lakota East, admitted that returning to his old position has been a bit of a struggle for him and it has required him to put some extra time in the film room. But regardless, he said that he is committed to helping the team out in any way possible no matter where he is lined up on Bowen’s unit.

“My role is anywhere,” Siereveld said. “Whether it’s left, right, inside or outside, I feel like they will find me a place for me to play. I’m just trying to get better as a player and a human.”

Siereveld’s selfless mentality has helped him further gain the respect of his teammates, who, along with trainers and other coaches, named him one of three “Iron Buckeyes” for winter workouts, an award given to the players who show “unquestionable physical training dedication, determination, discipline, toughness and leadership.”

These are also qualities that have helped him earn a possible full-time starting role on the offensive line this season for the first time in his career, according to his head coach.

“I think Austin’s had a very good spring,” Day said. “I think he’s a true swing player who can do both guard and tackle, and he’s shown to be able to do that. He’s getting to the point where I think he could start at either guard or tackle.”

Top Spring Defensive Player: Jermaine Mathews Jr.

Much like Siereveld, Mathews played a limited but still important role on last year’s championship team, and it appears he has used that experience to take the next step in his development and emerge as Ohio State’s presumed starting outside cornerback.

With program great Denzel Burke off to the NFL, Mathews has been given the opportunity to emerge as one of the secondary’s top leaders and producers for the 2025 season. According to co-defensive coordinator/secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton, the junior did just that this spring, showing noticeable improvement in just about every aspect of his game to earn a more prominent role on the unit.

“100 percent (he’s improved),” Walton said. “Leadership, sense of urgency, growth and development – he’s improved in all of those areas. The leadership part is big. He’s been accountable. He’s holding other guys accountable, and his play has increased because he’s doing all the little things. He’s had an outstanding spring so far.”

Mathews, who appeared in every game last season and recorded 22 tackles, 2½ tackles for loss and a sack, showed off his improved game during Student Appreciation Day, when he tracked down an errant throw from redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin and hauled in the pass for an

Top Performers At The Spring Game

Freshman safety Faheem Delane – The defense was struggling to keep up with the offense throughout much of the game, but as soon as true freshman quarterback Tavien St. Clair came into the contest for his first snaps, fellow freshman Delane took advantage and was able to jump in front of the intended receiver on a pass to the left sideline for an interception and nearly run it back for a touchdown. The safety room is going to be a tough one to crack – especially for the younger players – but Delane’s interception and multiple tackles in the scrimmage showed that his game should translate well to this level.

Junior defensive end Logan George – Whether George’s impressive FCS play would be able to translate to the highest level of Division I football was a big question when it came to the depth of the defensive line, but he showed in the spring game that it will. Just like at Student Appreciation Day, George was getting into the backfield time and time again against an Ohio State offensive line that was playing very well otherwise. He finished with two sacks for the day.

Redshirt freshman wide receiver Mylan Graham – It’s not often that five-star prospects aren’t the best at their position in their recruiting class, but that is the case for Graham with Jeremiah Smith ahead of him. Graham reminded fans why he was rated so highly at Ohio Stadium on April 12, catching four passes – one for a touchdown on a slant route from Lincoln Kienholz – for 104 yards on seven targets. He had an opportunity for another touchdown earlier in the game when he was wide open in the end zone, but the throw from Julian Sayin went to his back shoulder rather than leading him and it fell to the ground. There were no issues for the speedy receiver when it came to getting open against a good secondary.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin – If there was any concern about the quarterback position going into the spring game, the five-star Sayin put that at ease for the rest of the offseason. He made some impressive throws in the first half of the spring game, leading touchdown drives each of the first

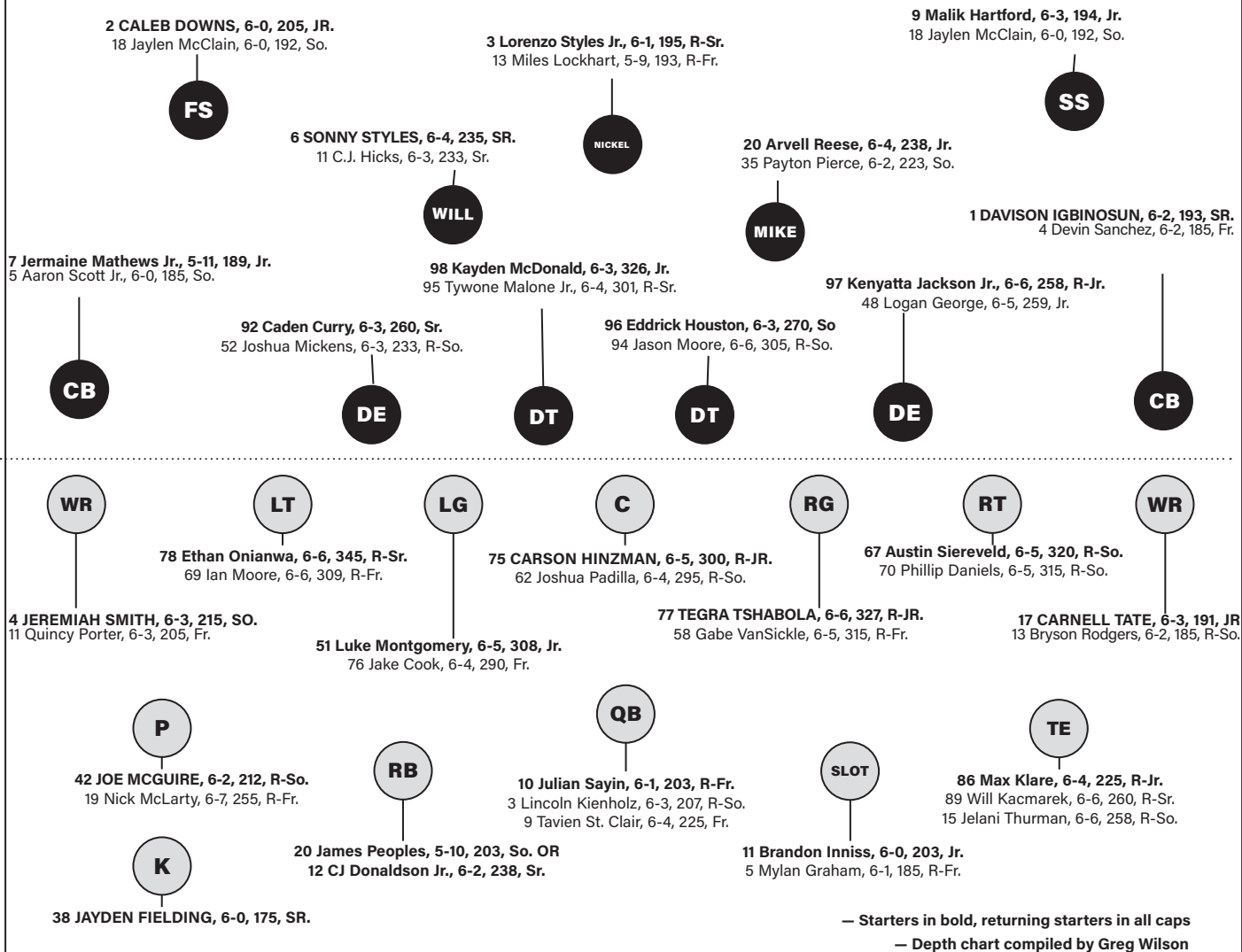
three times he was on the field. He finished the game with 175 yards on 17-of-24 passing for one touchdown, with most of those yards and completions coming before halftime.

Sophomore cornerback Aaron Scott – The cornerback room for the Buckeyes is poised to be very deep yet again. Scott might not be a starter with extremely talented players such as Davison Igbinosun and Jermaine Mathews Jr. in his way, but he showed his worth in the spring game with multiple pass break-ups and good coverage on the talented wide receiver group that Ohio State boasts.

Redshirt sophomore tight end Jelani Thurman – Purdue transfer Max Klare comes into the tight end room as the favorite to start as a talented pass catcher, but Thurman showed that he’s going to be a force to be reckoned with as well. He started the game and was very involved in the passing game in the first half. Thurman had just two catches for 35 yards, but he showed he deserves to be in contention for a big role in the fall. With the depth of the tight end room, Ryan Day mentioned after the game the group is making a push to be in 12 personnel more this season, and Thurman’s improvements have been a big part of that.

Redshirt freshman running back Sam Williams-Dixon – As close as a battle for the third-string running back spot can be, Williams-Dixon and Bo Jackson were both battling hard to be the back who earned that role, and Williams-Dixon edged out the freshman in the spring game. He ran hard and was able to push for extra yards when the ball finally went live midway through the second quarter, finishing with 11 rushes for 64 yards, an average of 5.8 yards per carry, as well as two catches for 21 yards and a score through the air. After entering the transfer portal and then deciding to return, Williams-Dixon might have a spot with the 2025 Buckeyes after all.

OHIO STATE POST-SPRING DEPTH CHART



the huddle as a team leader, all things that have set him up for success this offseason. “I’ve definitely seen a lot of growth from getting in here in June last year to where we see him now,” Fessler said. “It’s just a full year of understanding the offense, a full year of getting a feel for what we’re trying to do and what we’re trying to accomplish. It’s the small, minute details about where my eyes need to be, how I can tie my feet in with my eyes, how I can make sure that I’m not just throwing the ball to the right receiver because that’s where my read dictates is, but I’m also throwing it at the right time, and I have accuracy within that accuracy that I just displayed by putting it on the right shoulder. “So that’s why I’m excited because you’re starting to see more and more of that from Lincoln.”

Perhaps the best indicator of Kienholz’ transformation was during Student Appreciation Day when he was the best-performing quarterback. He delivered a number of accurate strikes to his receivers while taking first-team reps, most notably completing a 45-yard pass down the sideline to Tate that went for one of the few touchdowns all day for the starting unit.

Kienholz’ strong Student Appreciation Day outing is certainly no clear indicator that he is running away with the starting job, however. Brown also outperformed Howard in last year’s event only to lose the competition in early August. But Kienholz’ overall solid spring, culminating in a 158-yard and one-touchdown performance in the spring game where he started slow but finished strong, has at least put him in the mix for the starting role with Sayin, a development that few expected entering the offseason.

Position Battle To Watch: Strong Safety
With program cornerstone Lathan Ransom heading to the NFL and Downs holding his starting spot at free safety, the strong safety role in Patricia’s defense is there for the taking this offseason. And at

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interception near the sideline. According to Patricia, it is these types of plays that best show off Mathews’ unique skill set at cornerback, one which he said he is excited to work with in his first season with the Buckeyes. “Jermaine is a super competitive guy who’s got great ability, speed and quickness,” Patricia said. “And then that position flex, to be able to go outside, inside – it’s been pretty impressive with his skill set to be able to do all that. So it’s been fun.” As Patricia alluded to, Mathews has impressed not only on the outside but also in the slot, where he earned some first-team reps this spring. Mathews said being in the nickel position allows him to better showcase his full skill set at cornerback and impact the game more toward the line of scrimmage. “Playing in the slot gives me a chance to be closer to the ball,” Mathews said. “I get to show that I can just do more other than being on the outside. I could be on the inside as well. So being close to the ball allows me to show that I can do different things.” Mathews didn’t earn any time in the slot and only saw time at outside cornerback during the spring game, but the versatility he showed throughout the other practices should allow the Buckeyes some flexibility on the back-end if injuries are to occur.

Spring Most Improved Player: Lincoln Kienholz
Last season, redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz was stuck near the bottom of Ohio State’s quarterback depth chart,

sitting behind veterans Will Howard and Devin Brown as well as then-true freshman Julian Sayin as the team’s fourth option at the position. This reality could have compelled Kienholz to bolt out of Columbus and pursue a starting role at another school, but instead he decided to stick it out for his third season with the program. At least heading out of spring camp, this decision seems to have paid off for the former multi-sport high school athlete, who has thrust himself into the thick of the quarterback competition alongside Sayin with about four months left until the season opener due to his improved play at the position. “Oh yeah, absolutely,” Day said on April 7 when asked if Kienholz is in the mix for the starting quarterback competition “You saw his potential on some of the throws that he made (on Student Appreciation Day). You saw his athleticism show.” In the few practices and scrimmages that were open to the media this spring, Kienholz – who said he has gone from 185 to 215 pounds since his freshman season – appeared to be throwing a much crisper ball and had more conviction both in the huddle and in the pocket. He said that these improvements can be attributed to him being much more confident and comfortable at the position after two full seasons with the program. “I would say my confidence and leadership (have taken the biggest steps this season),” Kienholz said. “The past few years, I’ve had older guys in front of me, and I learned from them how to be a leader and

take control. Now I’m the oldest guy in the room, so I feel that now and feel more confident. I feel like I need to be a leader for the quarterback room.” First-year quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler also noticed Kienholz’ all-around improvements from last season to this spring. He said that his signal-caller has developed a much better understanding of the offense and has taken full command of

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Hartford, McClain Vying For Safety Spot

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least entering the summer, it appears both sophomore Jaylen McClain and Hartford are entrenched in a battle for the position.

Entering the spring, the consensus opinion among experts was that McClain would likely win the starting job, especially due to him playing two more games (15 to 13) and recording seven more tackles (15 to

eight) than Hartford last season. But those thoughts seemed to change once practices began and Hartford was seen taking first-team reps over McClain and continued to do so for most of camp.

According to his coaches, Hartford earned this extra opportunity due to the significant strides he has taken to improve his game, especially when it comes to how he approaches the game mentally.

"I've seen a big jump from Malik," safeties coach Matt Guerrieri said. "It's all mentality. Physically, you saw the flashes of him as a true freshman, and he's always had that piece right there. But the mentality, the toughness, the grit that he has, that's showing up big-time right now. So I've got big expectations for him."

"I think he's done a really good job of being consistent every day, training his

body," Patricia added. "He's improved a lot. His movement has improved, his strength has improved and he's just a student of the game. He's in here all the time studying and learning."

Although Hartford garnered most of the hype this spring, McClain is still a valid candidate to start at safety for Patricia's defense this season. The sophomore also earned his fair share of first-team reps this spring but was with the second-team defense during the spring game. He was one of the top performers in the secondary on the day, though, breaking up a pass intended for tight end Jelani Thurman in the end zone during the second quarter.

The jury still may be out regarding who will start alongside Downs to begin the year, but Guerrieri said that regardless of who wins the job, he expects both of his safeties to be used in prominent roles this season. He even floated the idea of having Hartford, McClain and Downs all on the field together at the same time this season in special three-safety packages.

"I'm really happy with those two guys," Guerrieri said. "Malik's had a great spring. Jaylen's had a great spring. The competition has been awesome. But it's our job as coaches to package that. If those guys earn the right to be on the field, we've got to put them on the field."

"I think Matt Patricia's the guru of being able to do that throughout his career, what he's been able to do from a personnel standpoint. But I'm very, very impressed and happy with Malik, with Jaylen, the mentality, the performance on the field. It's been really good."

Other Spots Up For Grabs

- Perhaps the only position battle on the offensive line this offseason is at right tackle, where Siereveld and Minnesota transfer Phillip Daniels are jockeying for the starting role. If Siereveld continues to show he can succeed on the outside, it could bump Daniels – who started the final four games at right tackle last season for the Gophers – out of the starting lineup. This would create a front five for Bowen that also includes Ethan Onianwa at left tackle, Luke Montgomery at left guard, Carson Hinzman at center and Tegra Tshabola at right guard. Siereveld earning the start over Daniels in the spring game could signal that he may be in the lead heading into the summer.

- On defense, senior Lorenzo Styles Jr. may not be a shoo-in to start at nickel for the 2025 season. As mentioned earlier, Mathews took first-team reps in the slot this spring, while younger players such as the talented five-star freshman Devin Sanchez and redshirt freshman Aaron Scott also showed that they are capable of playing prominent roles on the team this season. It was Styles who earned the start at nickel in the spring game, but he might still need to show more during fall camp to prevent some of his younger teammates from taking his position in his final collegiate season.

PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

In the March 22 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we highlighted several Buckeyes who needed to step up their games and show marked improvements during Ohio State's 15 spring practices – "On The Spot." With spring camp now wrapped up, BSB checked back to see how these players fared over the last several weeks and if they did enough to get on the field in a larger capacity in 2025.

Junior safety Malik Hartford: Entering the spring, the consensus opinion among those close to the program was that sophomore Jaylen McClain would emerge as the clear-cut starter at strong safety alongside All-American Caleb Downs. Those opinions are no longer coming out of the spring as much due to the emergence of Malik Hartford, who had one of the stronger performances out of any Buckeye defender during the 15 practices.

Throughout spring camp, it was Hartford – not McClain – who earned the majority of first-team reps at the position, and according to those within the program, he has made the absolute most of them. Many of his teammates were quick to laud Hartford for the work he put in during the off-season to improve his game, while his coaches believe that he has added a noted versatility to his game that can allow him to be used in multiple different ways on the defense.

"I really like that there is some flexibility for (Hartford) to be able to play down (at the line of scrimmage) and also play back," defensive coordinator Matt Patricia said. "He has great range in that back end too, which is really good."

Hartford continued to earn first-team reps at safety during the spring game, putting him in prime position for a leading role on Patricia's defense heading into the summer.

Senior defensive end C.J. Hicks: Like his teammate Sonny Styles last year, Hicks was put into the difficult position this offseason of learning an entirely new position on the defense, making the move from linebacker to defensive end for his final season with the Buckeyes.

While a mid-career position change may be a daunting task for some, Hicks has fully embraced the new role this offseason, and after a promising spring, he now positions himself to be a key contributor off the edge on Larry Johnson's defensive line. Hicks said all spring that he has bought into the new role and is excited to make the change to defensive end, and those feelings were on full display when the senior was seen doing extra drills with Patricia after every practice open to the media.

Hicks has also devoted time during the offseason to improving his frame, saying that he has already gone up to 240 pounds and wants to get to 245 by the start of the season to better fit the mold of a typical edge rusher. It's this type of devotion that has his coaches excited for what is to come for the senior this season, where he can make his first real impact on the team in his career.

"It's still early, but I think it's there," Johnson said. "We've just got to continue to work at it. He's got the techniques down good. He can do it."

Junior wide receiver Brandon Inniss: The common expectation coming out of last season was that Inniss would take over for Emeka Egbuka and emerge as Ohio State's starting slot receiver, and that belief has not changed coming out of the spring. Inniss spent the entire camp as the starting slot man alongside outside wideouts Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate, and in that time he showed flashes that he could be a big part of the offense, including in the spring game when he brought in two catches for 35 yards in limited action.

Inniss said that he has come into this season with a different mindset

because the starting role is now there for the taking, and he has done everything in his power to hold onto that role. That includes slimming down to around 200 pounds to become leaner and faster in the slot.

"I feel like my game has definitely enhanced a lot," Inniss said. "I became a lot smarter, I think. I'm playing faster. I lost weight. So I would say I'm definitely playing a lot faster. Everything's slowing down. I know every position."

With a full spring now under his belt as a starter, all the signs point to Inniss making a significant impact in the receiving room and fully showing off his star potential after spending his first two collegiate seasons as a reserve.

Redshirt sophomore quarterback Lincoln Kienholz: Out of all the players on Ohio State's roster, perhaps no player has made the most of spring camp better than Kienholz, who has put himself right into the thick of the starting quarterback competition alongside Julian Sayin.

After spending his first two seasons with the Buckeyes at the bottom of the quarterback depth chart, Kienholz finally got his chance to prove his worth and excelled in the extra opportunity, showing marked improvements in his game while also stepping up as a vocal leader in the huddle.

Kienholz' transformation was most evident during Student Appreciation Day on April 5, when he was the top-performing quarterback of the day, delivering a number of impressive throws – including a 45-yard touchdown strike to Tate – while also showing off his dual-threat ability. He didn't have as sharp a performance in the spring game but put forth a solid performance, completing 12 of his 18 passes for 158 yards and two touchdowns.

It is yet to be seen if Kienholz will pull off the upset and take over as Ohio State's starting quarterback this season. But his impressive spring has at least put him in the running, a challenge he is certainly excited to take on.

"I'd say the quarterback competition feels wide open," Kienholz said earlier this spring. "It feels good because I come to the building every day and strive to be the best quarterback in the nation. Being a quarterback here at Ohio State, there's always going to be pressure, but I think pressure is a privilege."

Redshirt sophomore tight end Jelani Thurman: Throughout his career with Ohio State, the major knock on Thurman has been his inability to produce at a consistent level, showing flashes in some games and practices and then struggling in others. According to tight ends coach Keenan Bailey, those issues have subsided, and he has put the necessary work in to make significant improvements to every aspect of his game.

"He's off the charts, night and day more mature," Bailey said. "I've been really impressed with just his work ethic. He's in here every night getting extra work in. I'm challenging him to learn every position on offense ... and then also be a leader."

"He's not a young guy anymore. He's coaching Nate (Roberts) and (Max) LeBlanc and Max (Klare). And I was like, 'He gets it.' That's awesome. He's being a leader. So I'm super impressed with him."

Thurman's marked improvements earned him some starting reps this spring. He lined up with the starters to begin Student Appreciation Day and did the same in the spring game, catching two passes for 35 yards.

These are all encouraging signs for the third-year Buckeye as he looks to make a bigger difference on the offense this year. But he is still expected to start the season as a backup behind the projected starter Klare, who also took first-team reps and scored a 26-yard touchdown early in the contest.

— Patrick Engels

Sanchez Ready To Work Up From The Bottom

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

When Devin Sanchez signed with Ohio State, he was the No. 8 player in the 2025 recruiting class and the top cornerback in the cycle, according to 247Sports' composite rankings. But the Houston native has already forgotten about that number and understands that if he wants to make an impact with the Buckeyes, he's going to have to work for it just like anyone else.

At North Shore High School – a premier football program in the talent-rich state of Texas – Sanchez was a star cornerback, being named an All-American by MaxPreps and earning an invite to the 2025 Navy All-American Bowl.

That level of football was likely somewhat easy to him by the time he was a senior, but entering a top college program that is coming off its first national title win in 10 years, that's no longer going to be the case for Sanchez. He's starting at the bottom of the pecking order as a freshman and is prepared to climb that anyway he can.

"There's nothing easy about this, coming to a top program, especially coming off a national championship," Sanchez said. "We're pushing for the same thing, trying to go back-to-back. The hardest thing is having to grow up. Coming from high school, I've been the man there for three years, and coming up here, you're at the bottom again.

"The high school I went to is a powerhouse, so I was at the bottom there and worked my way up. I feel like that's just repeating itself here. I'm at the bottom, so I have to work my way up to the top."

That reality hit him fairly early on when at one of the first practices he had as a Buckeye during the spring, he was put into competitions against some of the veteran players and ended up losing to Davison Igbinosun. Sanchez wasn't used to losing and said it was initially tough to swallow.

But immediately after, he decided it wasn't something he was going to get comfortable with.

"If you lose, the coaches see that and they see how you respond to it," Sanchez said. "I had to open my eyes, go into the locker room like, 'OK, I can't let this happen anymore.' I have to grow up."

Fresh off a season in which Jeremiah Smith broke just about every school freshman receiving record there is, fans are eager to see whether Sanchez will be able to do the same thing and burst onto the scene in his first year at Ohio State while also establishing himself as one of the top players in college football.

That's what Sanchez wants for himself as well.

"What (Smith) did as a true freshman, him being able to play and impact the team like he did, obviously I want that for myself," Sanchez said. "So I'm going to push myself to that limit and try to be on the field year one. That's my plan."

But he's also realistic about the situation he came into. Sanchez enters an extremely talented secondary unit at Ohio State that has contributors such as Igbinosun and Jermaine Mathews Jr. returning as the presumed starters and Aaron Scott Jr. and Bryce West both vying for playing time as



SONNY BROCKWAY

EARNED, NOT GIVEN — Devin Sanchez enters his freshman season knowing that his title as the top cornerback in the 2025 recruiting class means very little when it comes to gaining playing time in the talent-rich Ohio State defensive backfield.

well, two highly rated recruits from the 2024 class.

Fans have been very vocal about their hopes for Sanchez this year, which might have the possibility of getting in a freshman's head when he is only months into his time at Ohio State. But Sanchez is tuning that out and not feeling the pressure that hype could create.

"I don't let it get to my head because there's dudes in the room like (Igbinosun), he's going to be a three-year starter," Sanchez said. "Jermaine, a freshman All-American, he's going to play this year too. I can't let what people say on the Net get to me because anybody can say, 'Oh, he's going to play this year.' I actually have to prove it. I have to come out here and earn that spot."

It can be tough for freshmen to make an early impact, which can be easily forgotten after what Smith put on the field in 2024. But co-defensive coordinator and secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton is looking for specific things for Sanchez and other freshmen to pick up as soon as possible.

"The speed of the game with the different formations, the situation of football and being able to apply it," Walton said. "It's faster. There are a lot of moving parts. There are a lot of different personnel groups and there are a lot of different coverages. You have to be able to apply those moving parts, and sometimes it takes guys a while to do that."

Sanchez has been on campus for just over three months, but he's already seemingly worked his way into some sort of important role on the defense during the spring.

At Student Appreciation Day on April 5, when the Buckeyes lined up for an intrasquad scrimmage, Sanchez lined up with many of the defensive starters. Scott was across the field from him at the other

cornerback spot, so he wasn't entirely surrounded by the ones, but it's still indicative of his talent and hard work being recognized early in his career.

Walton recognized the job Sanchez was doing in the spring, but he wouldn't make a final evaluation on the freshman, saying he wanted to see this type of performance over a longer period of time since that's what he would need to do consistently to be able to play.

"He's doing a solid job," Walton said on April 1. "He's learning. He's growing. I'd like to see this stuff over a long period of time, but he's doing well. We're pleased with his progression so far. We just have to see it keep going with all of these guys and see, how does it go when we finish spring ball and then we start moving into camp. Is all of this stuff still applicable?"

His talent is also being recognized by some of his veteran teammates. Junior safety Caleb Downs, who was also a top-10 player coming out of high school before he was a freshman phenom at Alabama, understands what Sanchez is feeling right now and has been impressed with the way the freshman has performed so far.

"When you get to college, it doesn't really matter about your stars. You're at the same type of stature as everyone else," Downs said. "It doesn't matter what you walked in here with. But he's done extremely well. He's learned a lot. He's improved a lot from Day One. It's been great to watch him develop and watch him get better, and he's made some exceptional plays. I hope to continue to see that."

With great players ahead of him on the depth chart, it will be tough for Sanchez to have an immediate impact as his teammates Smith and Downs did in their first college seasons. But there could be a scenario where Sanchez is a player who is too

good to be kept off the field.

First-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia talked about Mathews playing in the slot some in the spring, something he has done before in his OSU career. If Sanchez is so good that he can't be kept off the field, and Mathews is as well, there could be some sort of rotation that allows both of them to earn time on the outside.

However, head coach Ryan Day seems to be trying to slow the pace of the excitement surrounding Sanchez. That's not because he hasn't lived up to the billing of being a top prospect in his first few months, but rather because he is still a freshman who has a lot of learning to do, as most 18-year-old players do. Because of that, Sanchez's most likely path to playing time this season seems to be in a backup role behind Igbinosun and Mathews and alongside Scott.

"He's got the right mindset," Day said. "He's out there competing and doing some good things. He's also making some mistakes and learning from that. He just needs to continue to get reps under his belt and grow from it. But obviously, we all know he has the talent and has a bright future. He's going to be a really good player here."

Regardless of how much playing time he receives his freshman season, Sanchez is not going to shy away from the competition. He came to Ohio State because he knows it is a top program, and he would have to develop into an even better player in order to get on the field.

"Having that grown-man mindset at 18 years old is really important because up here they don't really care about feelings," Sanchez said. "It's about coming up here and being the man that you think you are and having to go out there and prove it."

"I'm a good competitor. I'm always going to try to go out there and try to take what's mine. If it's out there, anybody can have it, and I'm going to be the one that's going to get it."

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Porter, Delane Excel In Early Enrollee Group

By CAMERON MOONE

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

While most high schoolers are beginning to prepare for prom the final weekend of April or first weekend of May with graduation coming a few weeks after, 21 athletes on Ohio State's football team have instead opted to enroll early with the Buckeyes and practice with the team this spring to get a head start on their collegiate careers.

Many of those should-be high schoolers – such as the No. 1 cornerback in the country in Devin Sanchez and five-star wideout Quincy Porter, among others – made strong first impressions on this 2025 Buckeyes' team throughout the 15 spring practices, while others had some expected growing pains in their first college experiences.

Regardless of their performance, the spring still offered these young Buckeyes a chance to acclimate to the college level and begin making their mark on a talented OSU team that is beginning its quest for a second straight national title.

With spring practice now over following the spring game on April 12, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has the full rundown on how the 21 early enrollees fared in their first spring session in Columbus. Players are listed in alphabetical order.

LB Tarvos Alford

Coming to Ohio State as the second highest-ranked linebacker among the three who enrolled early with the Buckeyes, Alford (6-1, 225) enters a linebacker room chock full of experience. But he certainly has the tools to make an early impact alongside fellow freshman Riley Pettijohn.

Alford said his first taste of spring practice has been all about learning the difference in coaching styles from high school to college, something his linebackers coach was helping him accomplish.

"Coach (James) Laurinaitis, he did it big-time (at Ohio State)," Alford said on March 27. "He did it big-time in the league. So I'm just learning from him. He's such a great person, you can relate with him on and off the field. You just love him."

There hasn't been much shared about Alford in his brief time spent in Columbus, although he has left some plays on the field, not an odd occurrence for a freshman getting up to college speed.

"TJ Alford dropped two picks today," Laurinaitis said on March 27. "I was giving him a hard time for it. We don't give them PBUs, we call them MOBPs: it's a missed opportunity for a big play. It's actually a minus. I don't care if the stats give you a PBU or not. That's a minus. We expect you to catch that ball. But they're good plays."

Often installed next to Pettijohn this spring when Ohio State was in a 4-2-5 defensive formation, Alford could see his role expand to a more rotational piece with an impressive fall camp. Regardless, he should see his early time in Columbus as a chance to learn what comes with college football while adding some weight throughout his first season.

WR Phillip Bell

Bell (6-1, 195) had a somewhat quiet



SONNY BROCKWAY

GETTING NOTICED — Freshman safety Faheem Delane has drawn attention for his strong showing during camp and especially in the spring game on April 12 when he had an interception that nearly turned into a pick-six.

spring, but he certainly has the skill set to work his way into being an important pass catcher at Ohio State down the line, coming in as the second highest-ranked wide receiver signing for the Buckeyes this year and being described as an "extremely good route runner" with an ability to "get easy separation down the field" by 247Sports' analyst Greg Biggins. Although the coaches have been somewhat mum on Bell, the acclimation period alone did its job getting freshmen caught up to what Ohio State demands during spring practice.

"We did a good job getting a jump on the guys that just got here, some freshmen," offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said on March 24. "I think the combination of getting things going in January and setting the parameters of how we operate and our expectations and focusing on yourself and your self-improvement really allows those first couple groups to kind of do their thing at practice."

Bell wrapped up his spring in strong fashion, hauling in three catches for 30 yards and a touchdown on the final play of the spring game.

DL Jarquez Carter

Pulling a prospect like Carter (6-1, 285) out of the deep South and his home of Newberry, Fla., was an important grab for the Buckeyes, who needed all the defensive line help they could get after the departures of Tyleik Williams and Ty Hamilton to the NFL draft.

Now in his first spring of college football, Carter has had a quiet spring but has the chance to compete in an arguably wide-open race for a rotational defensive lineman spot. Moving forward in the summer, he will need to make the most of his time spent in meetings and on the practice field to contend for that spot in 2025.

OL Jake Cook

The addition of Cook (6-5, 295) – a hometown product of Westerville, Ohio – will provide depth throughout the season to an OSU team that already has three established members on the interior offensive line.

Regardless of where he ends up on the depth chart this year, Cook's main priority this spring was trying to make the most seamless transition possible from the high school ranks to college.

"You're not in high school anymore," Cook said. "It's not just, 'Go find a man and block him.' Everything is totally more complex. I would say that's the toughest part right now. But I'll get better with that with meetings and going through it every day."

Most of Cook's reps in the spring have come at left guard, a spot that will likely be filled by Luke Montgomery in the starting lineup. But even with his spot being taken already and being just a freshman, the moment isn't too big for the three-star offensive lineman, who spent a lot of time at Ohio State camps looking to get an offer throughout his high school career.

"I'm here now," Cook said. "It's not so surreal. It's just 'I'm here, let's get ready to work. Let's keep improving every day, let's keep stacking days.' I did earn (the scholarship), but now it's just 'We're here now, let's go forward.'"

SAF Faheem Delane

One of the more impressive freshman standouts throughout spring camp, Delane (6-1, 210) has likely played himself into a rotational spot at the position throughout the upcoming season. Delane most notably turned heads in the spring game, making a clean break on a route and coming up with an interception of fellow freshman Tavien

St. Clair, returning it all the way to the 10-yard line for a near pick-six.

While he has made a strong first impression, Delane said he knows it's ultimately about nailing down the basics when trying to excel early in your career, especially throughout a first spring.

"Everybody has to learn everything," Delane said. "You can be put in any place, and to be a versatile player, you have to know everything. You can't come on the field and not know the job (you need) to do. Of course you got cover two, cover four, cover one, but the alignment, the reads, everything is more tedious."

DE Zion Grady

The highest-ranked defensive lineman for the Buckeyes in the class of 2025, Grady (6-4, 246) represents a new wave of pass rushers who are looking to blossom in Columbus. Despite his smaller frame, Grady has all the intangibles to either be a defensive end or outside linebacker for the Buckeyes throughout his time in college.

Grady's high billing has been backed up with his play in spring camp, which has earned the praise of his head coach.

"I've been impressed with Zion Grady as a young player," head coach Ryan Day said. "If he can learn and grow and get better and not get caught up in being a freshman and continue to get better, I think he can help us as a freshman, which would be great."

With his role likely coming on special teams throughout his freshman season, the early lauding from Day could help push Grady into being a rotational piece for the Buckeyes in 2025.

SAF Cody Haddad

Another in-state recruit for Ohio State is Haddad (5-11, 175), who came to Columbus as a three-star prospect and the No. 19 player in Ohio for the class of 2025. Having to compete against the likes of Caleb Downs, Malik Hartford and Jaylen McClain on top of fellow freshman Delane, it is understandable that Haddad has had a quiet spring thus far.

Haddad's freshman season will likely be all about development, with the positional group he resides in already being shored up for the 2025 campaign. Although there hasn't been much said about him so far, his skills as a "versatile player who has played all over the field" should help him down the line his collegiate career, according to 247Sports analyst Allen Trieu.

RB Bo Jackson

Aiming to play like his fellow-running back namesake, Jackson (6-0, 210) has put together an already impressive start to his college career.

After the Buckeyes lost TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins to the NFL draft, the running back position was arguably the most wide-open of any for Ohio State, and Jackson has certainly cemented himself as an option as just a freshman in 2025. In his first spring game, Jackson totaled 13 carries for 88 yards and a touchdown – the lone underclassman ball carrier to score on the ground in the tilt.

Jackson's efforts on the field and ability to

Ohio State’s 2025 Early Enrollees

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
4	Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	185	Houston North Shore
7	Phillip Bell	WR	6-1	195	Mission Viejo, Calif.
8	De’Zie Jones	WR	5-10	185	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic
9	Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	225	Bellefontaine, Ohio
10	Faheem Delane	SAF	6-1	210	Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel
11	Quincy Porter	WR	6-4	205	Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic
15	Zion Grady	DL	6-4	246	Enterprise, Ala.
17	Tarvos “TJ” Alford	LB	6-1	225	Vero Beach, Fla.
18	Bodpegn Miller	WR	6-3	180	Ontario, Ohio
20	Riley Pettijohn	LB	6-2	220	McKinney, Texas
24	Deshawn Stewart	SAF	6-1	195	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic
25	Bo Jackson	RB	6-0	210	Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph
30	Cody Haddad	SAF	5-11	175	Cleveland St. Ignatius
32	Isaiah West	RB	5-10	213	Philadelphia St. Joseph’s Prep
33	Eli Lee	LB	6-3	230	Akron Hoban
71	Jayvon McFadden	OL	6-4	285	Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist
74	Carter Lowe	OL	6-6	341	Toledo Whitmer
76	Jake Cook	OL	6-5	295	Westerville (Ohio) North
83	Nate Roberts	TE	6-5	235	Washington, Okla.
88	Trajen Odom	DL	6-3	285	Matthews (N.C.) Weddington
91	Jarquez Carter	DL	6-1	285	Newberry, Fla.



SONNY BROCKWAY

LEARNING CURVE — Freshman quarterback Tavien St. Clair got his first Ohio Stadium experience during the spring game on April 12 and as expected had his ups and downs. He was 11 of 15 for 116 yards and a touchdown but threw two interceptions.

offensive line going forward.

Like Cook, McFadden has experience at left guard but provides the size and versatility needed to play at either guard spot, which could make him a valuable piece on Tyler Bowen’s line later on in his Buckeye career.

WR Bodpegn Miller

Miller (6-3, 180) already has the athletic background needed to excel at the next level. A Swiss army knife in his high school days who played quarterback, wide receiver and defensive back, he now enters college as a raw pass-catching project with upside due to his frame.

Even with having a mum spring, Miller did see time in the spring game, although he did not record a statistic in the contest. Much like the other freshman wideouts mentioned, he will likely need to focus his 2025 season on getting better and adding some more weight to his tall build while potentially emerging as a contributor on special teams.

Although it’s early in his career, Miller is among a group of first-year wideouts who have earned some respect from those within the unit, including redshirt freshman wideout Mylan Graham.

“I think they’re solid,” Graham said on April 8. “I like all of them. I feel like they all can grow. I know what they’re feeling because I just got here last summer, but I feel like they’re all doing a great job.”

DL Trajen Odom

A three-star recruit out of Matthews (N.C.) Weddington, Odom (6-3, 285) is a Micheal Hall-type project for Ohio State on the interior of the defensive line due to his ability to rush the passer and stop the run at the line of scrimmage.

However, his quiet spring likely points to the fact that he needs time acclimating to the collegiate ranks and getting on par with the standards at a school like Ohio State. Odom and his fellow freshman defensive linemen will need to grow up fast, though, to replace the losses along the defensive line.

“We think all these guys can make a difference early on in the process, and we’re

going to need them to,” Day said.

LB Riley Pettijohn

The highest-rated linebacker for the Buckeyes in the class of 2025, Pettijohn (6-2, 220) has already impressed throughout his first spring in Columbus, rotating in with the second-team linebackers at times this spring, including in the spring game. Pettijohn has a college-ready frame that could see him emerge as a depth piece for Laurinaitis in 2025, but before that he needs to adapt to the play that college football demands compared to high school.

“The most eye-opening (difference) is the game speed,” Pettijohn said. “I’ve got to stay on that film so everything can slow down for me. (Besides that), everything else is good.”

Getting most of his reps alongside Alford, Pettijohn could see his role expand to a two-deep spot with an improved summer and fall camp going forward.

WR Quincy Porter

Arguably the most accomplished freshman so far for Ohio State in 2025, the talented Porter (6-4, 205) was the first member of the 2025 class to lose his black stripe, doing so on April 5. He also put up an impressive stat line in the spring game, hauling in four catches for 50 yards, the most among freshman wideouts in the contest. Hartline said Porter’s quick ascension at Ohio State comes from his ability to make plays at a consistent level.

“(Porter) was starting to make a lot of plays consistently,” Hartline said on April 7. “The consistent level that he’s been as a person, being on time and doing what his job description is on each play. (The process of getting your black stripe removed) starts by being seen by your peers. They start barking, ‘Get a stripe off,’ all those kinds of things. That’s the ultimate sign of respect. And it’s well deserved, based on his peers and the other coaches.”

Playing behind the likes of Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate, Brandon Inniss and Graham throughout 2025, Porter will likely

take heavy reps in just his first spring result from quick maturity and work, Day said after the spring game.

“I thought Bo Jackson really grew as the spring went on,” Day said.

As it stands, sophomore James Peoples and junior West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson will likely see the bulk of the reps for the Buckeyes throughout the 2025 season, but Jackson’s strong play throughout spring should give the Ohio State staff ease with their running back depth going forward.

WR De’Zie Jones

Jones (5-10, 185) hasn’t had quite the spring of his freshman counterpart Porter, but according to Hartline, he has put in the necessary work expected from Buckeye wide receivers in the infancy of their collegiate careers.

“(Jones has) done a good job putting in extra work, trying to get caught up, trying to hold the standard of the room, and the standard being in spring, like, ‘Hey, we’re going to make mistakes, but let’s make that mistake once and continue to learn,’ ” Hartline said on March 24.

Jones did see his number called during the spring game, earning some playing time and snagging a pass for 7 yards. But for Jones and many of his fellow freshman teammates, the hard part isn’t the physical game when acclimating, it’s the mental.

“Learning the playbook was probably the hardest thing for me,” Jones said. “The hand signals and getting that down, because I never did that thing before. So that was pretty new to me, but I’m getting it down pretty fast.”

Entering one of the premier position groups in the entire country, Jones should see his freshman season revolve around losing his black stripe and making an impact wherever he can, either on special teams or as a member of the scout team.

LB Eli Lee

Lee (6-3, 230) already possesses a build fit for college football but will likely need the time and reps it takes to excel at the higher level. According to Laurinaitis, the Akron Hoban product made the most of those limited snaps during the spring.

“The most important thing with young

players is that you’re learning a lot,” Laurinaitis said. “You’re starting to see (growth). When we had an inside drill the other day, Eli had a really natural feel and was physical at the point of attack.”

Just like a lot of other freshmen mentioned, Lee will see more time developing as a player than he will see on the field during games, where he will look to fall back on the details that make a young player better early in their careers.

“You have to get into a routine,” Lee said. “Even off the field – not just practice and how you prepare for things – just the next step up. The next level is just way different. Physically and mentally, I can grow a lot more with time. I’m just going to try to work as hard as I can.”

OT Carter Lowe

Lowe (6-6, 341) is another in-state recruit for Ohio State who has one of the higher ceilings among his fellow freshman peers. Already possessing an imposing frame fit to play on either blind side, Lowe has the chance to compete as a two-deep player behind transfer Ethan Onianwa and redshirt sophomore Austin Siereveld, among others at the tackle positions.

Even with Lowe’s hefty build and versatility – he also played guard this spring – he hasn’t been spared from the usual freshman growing pains.

“(Playing) was a lot easier in high school,” Lowe admitted. “You don’t have to know that much, just in the plays and stuff like that. Obviously, the physicality in college is a lot different. I would say that mostly the concepts (are harder), though.”

Lowe will likely start the season as a reserve but figures to be a pivotal member of Ohio State’s front five in the future.

OL Jayvon McFadden

McFadden (6-4, 285) enrolled in Columbus as the lowest-ranked member of his position group, although he was just one spot lower than Cook in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Being a bit smaller than his freshmen counterparts, McFadden should rely on 2025 being a year of growth and development while the Buckeyes have much of the starting and depth spots locked up for the

Sanchez, St. Clair Have Bright Futures At OSU

Continued From Page 27

be a rotational contributor before making a more noticeable impact in future seasons.

TE Nate Roberts

The only early-enrolled tight end for the Buckeyes this spring, Roberts (6-5, 235) proved his potential as a pass-catching threat for Ohio State during the spring game when he had a tied-for-team high four catches for 41 yards.

Although Roberts sits behind an experienced position room, his play on April 12 gave hope for Ohio State faithful down the line that there could be an expanded playbook featuring a downfield tight end threat. Leading with compliments toward Roberts and his pass-catching skills during the spring game, Day was impressed with the entire tight end group.

“I think that the whole room has really grown so they’re making a push to be in the 12 personnel (two tight ends) more this sea-

son,” Day said.

Even if he doesn’t see much time on the offense throughout 2025, his impressive spring and the fact he’s raised some coaches’ eyebrows should pave the way for Roberts to have a role either on special teams or as a rotational tight end.

CB Devin Sanchez

One of three five-stars in the class of 2025 for Ohio State and the highest-rated safety in the nation, Sanchez (6-2, 185) has the tall task of living up to his blue-chip label, and he has lived up to that billing so far, according to co-defensive coordinator/secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton.

“(Sanchez) is doing a solid job, but he’s learning,” Walton said. “He’s growing. I like to see stuff when this goes over a long period of time, but he’s doing well. He’s picking stuff up. He’s making some plays, but he still has some stuff to learn. We’re pleased with his progression so far and we’ve just got to keep seeing it going.”

Sanchez’s progression has earned some playing time on the second-team defense this offseason, and he even saw some time on the first-team to start Student Appreciation Day. His solid play in these roles have earned the respect of his teammates in the room with him.

“I think Devin is handling things well being a freshman,” junior cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr said. “I think he looks better than me when I came in in the spring. I think (Sanchez) is going to be a very good football player here. He just has to just come on with the little things. But Devin is going to be a great football player.”

Playing behind Mathews, Davison Igbinosun and other established second-year players like Aaron Scott Jr and Bryce West, it will be a tough climb to grab a starting or two-deep spot. But should he live up to his high-rank billing, Ohio State fans could see Sanchez on the field sooner rather than later.

QB Tavien St. Clair

It’s hard to find more of a homegrown prospect than St. Clair (6-4, 225), who spent essentially half of his high school career committed to Ohio State and now finds himself contending to see playing time in just his freshman season. Although it will be a hard task finding his way into a backup role behind Julian Sayin or Lincoln Kienholz, St. Clair possesses all the intangibles necessary to flourish at the collegiate level. But like any freshman, he needs the time under his belt first.

“Everything is new for Tavien,” Hartline said. “It doesn’t matter how early you come in January or not, the speed at which the game is played at, you can’t replicate. So, he’s learning. That’s probably the biggest thing that’s jumped out at me, is that they’re working to try to control the controllables and as the defense changes and things change and picture changes, they’re learning from it and hopefully making each mistake once and moving forward.”

St. Clair put together a decent showing in the spring game, going 11 for 15 with a touchdown and two interceptions. He had some nice throws down the stretch, including the previously mentioned touchdown to Bell.

St. Clair said earlier in the spring that familiarity will help him down the line as he prepares to be the next great gunslinger at Ohio State.

“I was here all the time and got to experience (college football),” St. Clair said on March 19. “So, I had already had good relationships with everybody here. It was a smooth transition, and it’s been good so far.”

SAF Deshawn Stewart

It was a quiet spring overall for Stewart (6-0, 177), who is a member of a loaded three-member safety class. Like many others in their first spring with the Buckeyes, learning the playbook and developing both mentally and physically will be crucial to seeing a role in 2025.

Early enrollment allows Stewart to have a jump over athletes joining later, giving him the chance to know the Buckeyes’ defensive schemes more than someone coming in June. That could further his ability to see some gridiron time late in games in his freshman season.

RB Isaiah West

West (5-10, 213) wears the same No. 32 and bears a similarly striking build as former Buckeye tailback TreVeyon Henderson (5-10, 202), but he likely won’t see the same playing time that Henderson did in his freshman season due to the strong running back room the Buckeyes possess in 2025. He did not log a carry or reception in the spring game, but his position coach said West – as well as any of the other young runners – can earn more playing time by staying patient and embracing any role that is put on them.

“I tell all the young guys, it’s a marathon, not a sprint,” Carlos Locklyn said. “Now, first things first. You better earn a spot on special teams. You earn a spot on special teams then you earn the right to be a Buckeye running back.”

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL

Aug. 30 TEXAS.

Sept. 6 GRAMBLING; **13** OHIO; **27** at Washington.

Oct. 4 MINNESOTA, **11** at Illinois; **18** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 1 PENN STATE; **8** at Purdue; **15** UCLA; **22** RUTGERS; **29** at Michigan.

BASEBALL (8-24, 2-13)

Feb. 14-16 at Arizona State, L 9-8; L 7-6; L 17-10; **21** vs. N.C. State at Jax Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla., W 8-3; **22** vs. Coastal Carolina at Jax Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla., L 10-8 (11 inn.); **23** vs. Alabama at Jax Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla., L 12-10; **28** vs. Auburn at 2025 College Baseball Series in Arlington, Texas, L 13-0 (7 inn.).

March 1 vs. Baylor at 2025 College Baseball Series in Arlington, Texas, L 8-6; **2** vs. Oregon State at 2025 College Baseball Series in Arlington, Texas, L 12-10; **4** ST. JOHN’S, W 12-10; **7-9** VALPARAISO, L 10-7; W 14-4 (8 inn.); W 8-3; **11** EASTERN MICHIGAN, W 13-7; **14-16** at Indiana, L 12-2 (8 inn.); L 8-7 (10 inn.); L 14-3 (7 inn.); **18** MIAMI (OH), W 14-7; **21-23** at Iowa, L 12-0 (7 inn.); L 12-5; L 18-2 (7 inn.); **28-30** OREGON, L 7-0; W 11-10; W 8-6.

April 1 WEST VIRGINIA, L 9-6; **4-6** at USC, L 5-3, L 12-9, L 10-9; **9** KENT STATE, L 8-3; **11-13** MINNESOTA, L 10-5; L 9-2; L 6-4; **15** WRIGHT STATE; **18-20** at Michigan State; **22** AKRON; **23** TOLEDO; **25-27** RUTGERS; **29** CENTRAL MICHIGAN.

May 2-4 MICHIGAN; **6** OHIO; **9-11** at Northwestern; **13** BUTLER; **15-17** ILLINOIS; **20-25** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb.

MEN’S GYMNASTICS (4-4, 1-3)

Jan. 10 West Point Open at Army, 1st/6; **17** GREENVILLE, W 319.700-303.150; **25** at Stanford Open, 1st/3.

Feb. 2 OKLAHOMA, L 322.900-316.300; **9** PENN STATE, W 325.000-323.850; **21** WINTER CUP, NTS; **23** WINTER CUP, NTS.

March 8 at Nebraska, L 325.450-321.450; **15** at Michigan, L 328.100-322.000; **25** ILLINOIS, L 322.450-321.700.

April 4-5 Big Ten Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich., 5th/5; **18-19** NCAA Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.

MEN’S ICE HOCKEY (24-14-2, 14-9-1)

Oct. 6 Niagara (exh.) W, 3-2 (OT); **11-12** AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL, T 3-3; W 5-2; **18-19**

at Wisconsin, W 2-1 (OT); W 2-1; **25-26** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-1; W 2-0.

Nov. 1-2 LAKE SUPERIOR STATE, W 9-3; W 6-2; **8-9** at Michigan State, L 4-2; L 4-1; **15-16** at Lindenwood, W 5-2; W 3-2; **29-30** at Princeton, L 3-1; L 3-1.

Dec. 5-6 PENN STATE, W 4-0; W 4-2; **13-14** NOTRE DAME, W 2-1 (OT); W 3-1.

Jan. 3 vs. Michigan at Wrigley Field in Chicago, W 4-3; **5** at Michigan, L 3-2 (OT); **10-11** MINNESOTA, W 5-1; L 6-1; **24-25** at Penn State, T 6-6 (OT, SL), L 3-2 (OT); **30-31** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-2, L 4-1.

Feb. 7-8 at Notre Dame, W 5-1, W 5-1; **14-15** WISCONSIN, W 4-1, W 4-2; **21-22** at Minnesota, L 4-1, L 6-3; **27-28** MICHIGAN, W 2-1 (OT), L 4-3.

March 7-9 Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals at Nationwide Arena, Columbus, vs. Wisconsin, L 4-1; W 3-2 (OT); W 3-2; **15** BIG TEN TOURNAMENT SEMIFINALS vs. PENN STATE, W 4-3; **22** Big Ten Tournament Final at Michigan State, L 4-3 (2OT); **27** NCAA Regional at Toledo vs. Boston, L 8-3.

WOMEN’S ICE HOCKEY

(29-8-3, 19-6-3)

Sept. 21-22 MINNESOTA DULUTH, L 2-1; L 4-3; **27-28** at Bemidji State, W 8-2; W 3-0.

Oct. 4-5 at St. Lawrence, W 3-2 (OT), W 5-3; **11-12** MINNESOTA, W 4-3; T 1-1 (SOW); **18-19** at St. Cloud State, W 5-1; T 3-3 (SOL); **22** MERCYHURST, W 5-1; **25** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. STONEHILL, W 11-0; **26** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. CORNELL, W 7-3.

Nov. 1-2 at St. Thomas, W 5-1; W 1-0 (OT); **15-16** WISCONSIN, L 4-2; W 3-2; **22-23** at Minnesota State, W 2-1; L 4-1.

Dec. 2 at Mercyhurst, PPD.

Jan. 2 at Wisconsin, L 6-0; **4** at Wrigley Field in Chicago vs. Wisconsin, T 3-3 (OT SW); **10-11** BEMIDJI STATE, W 6-0, W 4-0; **17-18** at Minnesota Duluth, W 3-1; W 2-1; **21** at Mercyhurst W 5-1; **24-25** MINNESOTA STATE, W 5-2, W 4-1; **31** at Minnesota, L 3-1.

Feb. 1 at Minnesota, L 7-3; **7-8** ST. THOMAS, W 5-4, W 5-1; **21-22** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-3, W 3-2; **28** WCHA QUARTERFINALS vs. ST. THOMAS, W 5-1.

March 1 WCHA QUARTERFINALS, vs. ST. THOMAS, W 4-1; **7** WCHA Final Faceoff at Duluth, Minn., vs. Minnesota, L 6-2; **15** NCAA TOURNAMENT vs. ST. LAWRENCE, W 6-1; **21** NCAA Frozen Four at Minneapolis vs. Cornell, W 4-2; **23** NCAA national championship at Minneapolis vs. Wisconsin, L 4-3 (OT).

TRACK & FIELD

Jan. 10-11 McCravy Invite at Louisville, Ky., Men T-3rd/16, Women 2nd/16; **18** Hoosier Horsepower Classic at Indianapolis, NTS; **24-25** Crossroads of America Invite at Indianapolis, NTS; **31** Notre Dame Mevo Invite at South Bend, Ind.; Texas Tech Invite at Lubbock, Texas, NTS.

Feb. 1 Notre Dame Mevo Invite at South Bend, Ind., NTS; Texas Tech Invite at Lubbock, Texas, NTS; **14-15** David Hemery Valentine Invitational at Boston; Clemson Tiger Paw Invite at Clemson, S.C.; **28** Big Ten Indoor Championships at Indianapolis, Men 14th, Women T-12th.

March 1 Big Ten Indoor Championships at Indianapolis, Men 14th, Women T-12th; **14-15** NCAA Championships at Virginia Beach, Va., NTS; **21-22** USF Invite at Tampa, Fla., NTS; **27-29** Raleigh Relays at Raleigh, N.C., NTS; **28-29** Texas Relays at Austin, Texas, NTS.

April 18-19 Tom Jones Invite at Gainesville, Fla.; **25-26** Drake Relays at Des Moines, Iowa.

May 2-3 JESSE OWENS CLASSIC; **16-18** Big Ten Outdoor Championships at Eugene, Ore.; **28-31** NCAA East Prelims at Jacksonville, Fla.

June 11-14 NCAA Championships at Eugene, Ore.

MEN’S VOLLEYBALL (16-10, 11-5)

Jan. 3-4 BRIGHAM YOUNG, L 3-1; L 3-1; **10-11** FORT VALLEY STATE, W 3-0; W 3-0; **17** at First Point Collegiate Challenge in Austin, Texas, vs. Stanford, L 3-0; **18** at First Point Collegiate Challenge in Austin, Texas, vs. UCLA, W 3-1; **31** Big Ten Challenge vs. USC, L 3-1.

Feb. 1 Big Ten Challenge vs. UCLA, L 3-1; **8** LOYOLA, L 3-1; **10** at Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-0; **15** LINDENWOOD, W 3-1; **20** at McKendree, L 3-1; **22** at Lindenwood, W 3-1 **27** at Ball State, L 3-2.

March 1 PURDUE FORT WAYNE, W 3-2; **7-8** at New Jersey Institute of Technology, W 3-0, W 3-0; **13** QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE, W 3-0 **15** QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE, W 3-0; **20** at Loyola, L 3-1; **22** at Lewis, L 3-2; **27** MCKENDREE., W 3-2

April 3 BALL STATE, W 3-1; **5** LEWIS, W 3-1; **11-12** at Quincy, W 3-0; W 3-1; **19** MIVA Tournament Quarterfinals vs. LINDENWOOD; **23** MIVA Tournament Semifinals.

Five-Star WR Henry Shuts Down Recruitment

In a big win for the Buckeyes, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) announced on social media on April 1 that he has shut down his recruitment and will sign with Ohio State.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

“Officially shutting my recruitment down,” his post read. “I’m 100 percent locked in and ready to work.”

With his announcement, he also canceled three official visits he had set to go to Miami (Fla.), Oregon and USC. He will still take his official visit to Ohio State the week-end of June 20.

Henry originally committed to Ohio State on July 28, 2023, and has said that he remained committed since then, though he was taking visits to other schools throughout that time, making it to Eugene, Ore., multiple times for unofficial visits.

Now, the No. 9 prospect and No. 2 wide receiver in the 2026 class says that he will be with the Buckeyes when he heads to college, another big success on the trail for offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

Henry is yet another five-star wide receiver commit for Hartline, adding to his already impressive recruiting résumé since he started as wide receivers coach in 2018. Hartline and Ohio State also get a big win over the Ducks on the recruiting trail since they were likely the biggest threat to flip Henry due to their vast NIL budget.

With his hard commitment to the Buckeyes, it’s very likely that Henry will end up the highest-rated recruit in the 2026 cycle, making him the face of the class much like Jeremiah Smith was in 2024 and Devin Sanchez was this year. Now, Henry will be able to turn his attention to helping recruit the rest of the year.

Four-Star SAF Caldwell Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State’s impressive spring recruiting streak continued on April 3 when Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star safety Simeon Caldwell (6-3, 185) committed to the Buckeyes.

Caldwell, the No. 95 prospect in the country, is the nephew of cornerbacks coach and co-defensive coordinator Tim Walton. He also plays linebacker at The Bolles School and has been recruited by safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis, so it’s unclear whether the Buckeyes have a position in mind for him.

Caldwell is the third top-100 player in the class for the Buckeyes at this point, joining Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) – who committed on March 31 – and Henry. He chose to commit to Ohio State over Miami, Notre Dame and USC. Like Henry, Caldwell has also canceled the other official visits he had scheduled to those three schools.

Caldwell joins Bradford and Avon, Ohio,

four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172) in the 2026 secondary for the Buckeyes, giving them a very good start to building those position groups.

They are also still in good standing with Akron Hoban four-star cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 175), who has been on multiple unofficial visits to Ohio State and has a “crystal ball” from 247Sports’ Bill Kurelic to commit to the Buckeyes.

Three-Star Ohio LB Commits To Buckeyes

The Buckeyes also added a commitment from Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225) on April 4.

Sanna seemed to be leaning toward pledging to Ohio State for a while with the local prospect making multiple spring visits. He ultimately chose OSU over Wisconsin, the only other school he had an official visit scheduled to. He hasn’t said whether he will still make that visit.

Sanna also had offers from Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Purdue and Rutgers, among others.

He was the 10th commitment in the 2026 class and is the No. 451 overall prospect, the No. 35 linebacker and the No. 20 player in the state of Ohio according to 247Sports composite rankings.

In his junior season at Olentangy, Sanna had 97 tackles, 11 of those for a loss. He is one of four defensive commitments to this point for the Buckeyes and is the first who isn’t in the secondary, with Bradford, Caldwell and Weatherspoon each committed as well.

He is also the fifth in-state commit for the Buckeyes, joining Avon Lake four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280); Weatherspoon; Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310); and Pataskala Watkins Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187).

Visitors Swarm ‘Shoe For Spring Game

Ohio Stadium was a popular destination for top recruits on April 12 for the spring game, with talented players from every high school class gathering in the ‘Shoe.

The list of attendees is compiled from recruits announcing their attendance, Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff sightings at the game and reporting from other outlets.

Starting with players already committed to Ohio State, the Buckeyes hosted 2026 prospects Bradford, Caldwell, Henry, Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215), Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O’Connor three-star interior offensive lineman Tucker Smith (6-5, 280), Greer and Riley.

Huntington Beach, Calif., five-star Brady Edmunds (6-5, 215) was there to represent the 2027 class as well.

Prospects from the 2026 class in Columbus who aren’t committed to Ohio State were perhaps most notably Loganville (Ga.) Grayson five-star linebacker Tyler Atkinson (6-2, 210) as well as Newark (N.J.) Malcolm X Shabazz three-star safety and Syracuse commit Zaiden McDonald (6-1, 190); San Francisco Archbishop Riordan four-star

OSU Football 2026 Commitments						
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	
Blaine Bradford	S	6-1	207	★★★★★	Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic	
Simeon Caldwell	S	6-3	185	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School	
Corbyn Fordham	TE	6-4	215	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School	
Sam Greer	OT	6-7	310	★★★★	Akron Hoban	
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	205	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei	
Jaeden Ricketts	WR	6-0	187	★★★★	Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial	
Maxwell Riley	OT	6-5	280	★★★★	Avon Lake, Ohio	
CJ Sanna	LB	6-3	225	★★★	Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy	
Tucker Smith	OL	6-5	280	★★★	Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O’Connor	
Jakob Weatherspoon	CB	5-10	172	★★★★	Avon, Ohio	

OSU Football 2027 Commitments						
Player(s) in the class of 2027 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	
Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	★★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne	
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.	

interior offensive lineman Tommy Tofi (6-6, 320); Buford, Ga., four-star safety Nassir McCoy (6-2, 180); Nazareth, Pa., four-star quarterback Peyton Falzone (6-5, 200); Delaware (Ohio) Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190); Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star running back Derrek Cooper (6-1, 205); Burien (Wash.) Kennedy Catholic four-star defensive end Derek Colman-Brusa (6-5, 267); Venice, Fla., four-star defensive end Asharri Charles (6-2, 230); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180); and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Cameron Brickle (6-2, 305).

Those in attendance from the 2027 class included Harper Woods, Mich., five-star wide receiver Dakota Guerrant (6-1, 185); Cleveland St. Ignatius wide receiver Trey Haddad (6-1, 180), the brother of OSU safety Cody Haddad; Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 200); McKeesport, Pa., four-star running back and Penn State commit Kemon Spell (5-9, 185); Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel four-star defensive end Anthony Sweeney (6-4, 215); Raleigh (N.C.) Rolesville four-star running back Amir Brown (5-10, 200); Martin (Tenn.) Westview running back Asa Barnes (6-0, 190); Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson defensive end Cameron Pritchett (6-3, 231); Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco safety Isala Aisa Wily-Ava (6-2, 195); and Cincinnati Winton Woods defensive end Jaylen Mercer (6-5, 230).

There were also some 2028 prospects on campus, with Jacksonville Bolles defensive lineman Asher Ghioto (6-5, 240) joining his Buckeye commit teammates Cldwell and Fordham, in Columbus along with Covington (Ga.) Newton athlete Kevin Hartsfield (6-0, 190) and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic defensive lineman Jayden Beckley (6-1, 260).

Hartline, Greene Talk Bowen Recruiting

The Buckeyes have had somewhat of a hot streak when it comes to recruiting since the beginning of March, gaining six of their 10 commitments in the class in that time-span.

Three of those pledges have been offen-

sive linemen, which has been somewhat of a surprise with Ohio State bringing in a new offensive line coach in Tyler Bowen, who hasn’t had much time to build relationships with recruits. Regardless, whatever he has done in the short time since early February has been working.

With Riley, Greer and Smith already committed and multiple other high-profile recruits seemingly very interested in Ohio State, Bowen has been able to turn the heads of Buckeye fans quickly after a few years when recruiting at the position might have been lacking, at least in terms of numbers.

His coworker Hartline, who is known as one of the best recruiters in the country, has already taken notice of how well he has done on the trail to this point.

“I enjoy talking to him and being around him as a person, so his ability to connect with guys doesn’t shock me,” Hartline said. “I’ve been very impressed with the amount of young men that have visited and been on campus.

“I just think he’s putting a lot of time into it, a lot of effort, and it’s definitely showing. He’s doing one heck of a job, and we’re just trying to help him out as much as we can.”

Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene agrees that Bowen has done very well so far, saying he wasn’t expecting the offensive line coach to get so many commitments so quickly, naming Riley as the biggest of the three so far.

“Sam Greer was not that big of a deal to me as a Hoban kid. I just didn’t see Sam Greer going to Missouri. It looked like that one was already going to happen,” Greene told BSB. “But Max Riley, I had people telling me that he was pretty well gone to Clemson until Bowen got involved there. So, would they still have Max Riley without Bowen? I don’t think so.”

Despite this strong start, Greene still believes the Buckeyes need to add more offensive linemen to the 2026 class, especially because of some of the relatively down years they have had on the trail the last couple of seasons.

Greene wants to see Bowen be aggressive with some of the top linemen they have

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OSU Wooing Four-Star 'Bama DE Commit

Continued From Page 21

a chance with in the 2026 class, such as Mansfield (Texas) Lake Ridge five-star offensive tackle Felix Ojo (6-6, 275); Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 325); or Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3, 285).

"Now, if you really want to impress me, it's not landing (St. Petersburg, Fla., Lakewood three-star offensive tackle) Chancellor Campbell or (Littleton, Colo., Valor Christian three-star offensive tackle) Kannon Smith," Greene said. "Go get Felix Ojo and you'll really start to turn some heads.

"But to have these three committed right now is great because in the past under Justin Frye, you would see Ohio State with two commits going into the fall, then later in the year you have to take two to three projects to fill out your class. That's not happening right now. They're in on a lot of good O-linemen right now. They have a shot at Darius Gray and Micah Smith. Bowen has proven to be excellent, excellent so far."

OSU Trying For OV From QB Lyons

Ohio State is still without a quarterback in its 2026 class and has been hosting many on visits during the spring, trying to figure out who will fill that role this cycle. Lyons is one of those options whom the Buckeyes have been after lately, but they do have a lot

of ground to make up.

Very soon before he took the offensive coordinator position for the Las Vegas Raiders, former Buckeye OC and quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly was making the rounds in California, visiting multiple different quarterbacks, and Lyons was one of them.

"I actually didn't even know I had an offer until Coach Kelly came out," Lyons told 247Sports. "He called me a week before he came and visited me and said I had an offer. So I've been talking with Hartline and (quarterbacks coach Billy) Fessler, and I'm looking forward to talking with them and Coach (Ryan) Day."

Lyons is the No. 16 player in the country, the No. 4 quarterback and the No. 4 player in the state of California, and he is likely the top quarterback remaining on the board whom Ohio State might still have somewhat of a chance with.

But the Buckeyes still do have a lot of competition for Lyons. He has taken visits to Ole Miss, Michigan, BYU, USC and likely more this spring, and he already has official visits set up to USC, Oregon and BYU.

He is leaving one weekend in June open for another official visit and is basing where that will be on how his spring visits go between Ole Miss, Ohio State and Michigan, so his trip to Columbus was a very important one. As BSB went to press, he hadn't revealed which school would be his fourth official visit.

If the Buckeyes are able to get Lyons to commit in the 2026 class, the Buckeyes'

four-year run of Julian Sayin, Tavien St. Clair, Lyons and Edmunds would be one that any program would be jealous of.

But even though Lyons will graduate from high school with the 2026 class, he is more of a 2027 prospect because he plans to serve a church mission after his senior season, waiting until the spring of 2027 to enroll. That might make the Buckeyes' chances with him even less likely, and recruiting experts seem to favor USC to land his services anyway.

Some of the other signal callers OSU is still after are Ashland, Ohio, three-star Nathan Bernhard (6-5, 227); Falzone; Cincinnati Moeller four-star Matt Ponatoski (6-2, 190); Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star Derek Zammit (6-0, 185); and Omaha (Neb.) Millard South four-star Jett Thomalla (6-4, 185).

The Buckeyes are also still trying to flip Texas commit Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star Dia Bell (6-3, 215), which also seems fairly unlikely, but that isn't going to stop Fessler from trying.

Buckeyes Host Elite 2026 LB

With so many spring visits taking place, many of them can be forgotten as time passes, but some players stand out from the large groups that are in and out of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center every day, like Atkinson.

Atkinson was at Ohio State for his fifth visit to campus and talked with 247Sports

about his interest in the Buckeyes before he was in Columbus. The No. 7 player in the country and No. 1 linebacker seems to have very real interest in Ohio State and Laurinaitis.

"Coach Laurinaitis, he played in the league," Atkinson said. "He played at Ohio State. So for him just to be pouring into me and showing me different things about Ohio State and how they'll use me, it's great."

He also seems to like the addition of defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, who has extensive pro experience on his résumé, including three Super Bowl wins.

"The DC they got, he coached in the league," he said. "You can see where the direction the schools I'm saying are going, but he coached in the league, and me talking to him, it's like he goes based off personnel and what type of players he has. You can tell he's just a genius with the game. He loves football. He's a great guy, and I can't wait to go up there and meet him."

Atkinson doesn't seem to be very close to making a final decision on where he will play college ball, but Ohio State is at the very least one of his top schools. He does have a "crystal ball" from 247Sports' Tom Loy to remain in state and commit to Georgia, but the Buckeyes have already surprised many by earning commitments from top players out of state with a competitive football program as they did with Bradford from Louisiana.

His top schools are Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Georgia, Ohio State, Tennessee

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

30 Years Ago — 1995

The extension of John Cooper's contract paid off with the Buckeyes signing one of the top linebacker prospects in Texas.

Darren Hester, a linebacker out of Dallas Hillcrest High School, was prepared to cancel his visit to Ohio State when he heard Cooper might have been heading to LSU and defensive coordinator Bill Young was possibly on his way to Oklahoma State.

Hester had offers from Colorado and Texas Tech and had scheduled trips to Baylor and Texas, so he was prepared to drop a scheduled visit to Ohio State until he learned Cooper's contract had been extended.

"I almost canceled my visit because of the situation with the defensive coordinator leaving, so I wasn't sure I should take a chance on Ohio State," Hester said. "After everything was settled, they called me and set up a date to visit, and I ended up committing when I visited."

25 Years Ago — 2000

While Nike was holding its recruiting camp at Ohio State on April 15, Michigan was hosting its spring game at Michigan Stadium.

That weekend was usually a good one for U-M to welcome recruits, but Michigan coach Lloyd Carr took note of the sparse showing of recruits on the sideline. It didn't take him long to criticize the Nike Camp at OSU, which attracted several of Michigan's top prospects.

"Quite honestly, I'm not happy with the way this whole thing came down, and we'll find out what happened," Carr told reporters after the spring game.

Like OSU, Michigan remained a Nike outfitted school at the time. Carr was so upset that he threatened to lobby officials to move to a different shoe/apparel provider. The school's six-year, multimillion-dollar deal with Nike expired on Aug. 31.

"I encourage the NCAA to look at this, and if they do allow it, we'll be in the picture, or we'll be wearing different shoes," Carr fumed.

20 Years Ago — 2005

OSU's first verbal commitment of the 2006 recruiting season and one of the top running backs in his class apparently didn't need much more than a couple of months to become a star in Columbus.

While on the sidelines prior to the spring game's kickoff, Chris Wells was beseeched for an autograph by one of the rabid fans in attendance.

"That's a little strange," Wells told BSB, laughing, "but I like it."

Wells fit nicely into the hole at power running back the Buckeyes were hoping to fill in the previous recruiting class. But with his talent, the verbal commitment he made shortly after signing day that year only increased schools' focus on him.

Wells said that he was hearing from Michigan and two-time defending champion Southern Cal "constantly, constantly, constantly."

15 Years Ago — 2010

A scholarship offer from Ohio State was coming, but Tommy Brown had no idea when – not that it made any difference to the future Buckeye.

Brown, an offensive tackle prospect from Akron Firestone who had yet to be ranked by Scout.com, held offers from seven schools but had been hoping for one from OSU. That offer hadn't come until the lineman and his parents made a trip to Columbus on April 3 to take in an Ohio State spring practice.

Once the trip was over, Brown headed back home not only with an offer from the Buckeyes but also having issued a verbal commitment to the program, becoming member No. 8 in the class of 2011.

"I was sitting in the lounge (at OSU) with (Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary cornerback) Doran Grant," Brown told BSB. "My parents were touring the indoor facility and when they were done, (head coach Jim) Tressel called me into his office and started talking to me and my parents. He had us looking at his championship rings and watches and signed footballs from previous players."

"Then he sat me down and said that Ohio State definitely had a scholarship waiting for me."

His response was immediate.

10 Years Ago — 2015

Ohio State lost not only its running backs coach but also a coveted recruiter when Stan Drayton left on Feb. 5 to accept a position with the Chicago Bears. Fortunately for the Buckeyes, Tony Alford appeared to be up to the challenge of replacing Drayton in both aspects of the job.

The former Notre Dame assistant inherited a stable of running

backs that included Ezekiel Elliott, but he also had to navigate the all-important recruiting territory of east Cleveland – a fertile recruiting ground that formerly belonged to Drayton.

"I'm not real familiar with Cleveland right now at this time," Alford told reporters at the team's April 2 practice. "There is great football in the state, great high school football in the state of Ohio, so I'll get into the Cleveland area that I know and I'm going to have to build some relationships with some high school coaches. I am looking forward to that and getting out and meeting all those guys."

Five Years Ago — 2020

Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star athlete C.J. Hicks became the third member of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting haul when he announced his commitment on May 1.

Hicks was considered the 15th-best athlete and No. 162 prospect in his class at the time, having spent time at both running back and safety for the Knights the previous season. The Buckeyes planned to play him at outside linebacker, however.

Hicks had been on Ohio State's radar for roughly a year dating back to when he attended a one-day camp the previous summer. He had maintained contact with linebackers coach Al Washington and offensive coordinator/tight ends coach/area recruiter Kevin Wilson in the meantime, and they invited him to campus for multiple unofficial visits in the fall.

One Year Ago — 2024

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

Roberts was the No. 118 overall prospect and the 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 of 2023.

"Being back on campus, watching practice, seeing (tight ends 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."

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BuckeyeSports.com

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene Of Buckeye Scoop

Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) committed to Ohio State on March 31. Why do you think he decided to go with Ohio State despite being just down the road from LSU? Also, do you believe he will end up with OSU by signing day?

"The second part, I don't know. Because originally, when I put together my 'in, out, maybe list' on Buckeye Scoop, I had him listed early on, and I can tell you right now, he's a Louisiana kid that LSU really wants. What does that mean? It means he's unlikely in my decade-old book. All the best to OSU pulling this kid, he's a player. Now, fast-forward to (April 5), he's committed.

"I love him as a player. I'm cynical enough after doing this for 20 years to wonder, 'Why did he commit now?' Did he fall in love with Ohio State in April? That's unlikely for a kid from the South. Is he committed to bump up an NIL offer from LSU? I don't know. I love the kid as a talent, but it kind of doesn't make sense that he would commit to Ohio State in April. Not so much that Ohio State couldn't get him in the end, but these other kids don't usually commit in March or April. That's unusual.

"But he could be the one-in-a-million kid. I would fight for him. I'd play the game. Whatever way he wants you to play it, I would play it because I'd love to have that kid. He is a great player. So it just seems odd to

me. Just the timeline of how this all took place, it seems weird to me."

The Buckeyes also earned a commitment from Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor three-star Tucker Smith (6-5, 280), the third offensive lineman in the class already. Have you been able to see him play, and what do you make of him as a prospect?

"I've not seen him in person. I went to the film right away as soon as he committed – I never saw it coming. I like him. I hate to criticize anyone else's evaluation, but I think he's a bit better than what his ranking is right now. I think committing to Ohio State is going to get more eyeballs on him from the national recruiting services. I think he's a four-star kid. I get taking him 100 percent. I think this is a class that needs five (offensive linemen) for sure, possibly six. Taking him is great to pair with the two Ohio kids they already have committed. I really like him, and I can see why they took him."

Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225) was another commitment for Ohio State on April 4. What does he add to the 2026 class?

"When I saw the film, he reminds me of James Laurinaitis, so I can see why they took him. That's who he is from his film. I like him. Is he the highest-rated mid-

dle linebacker in America? No, but I think he's someone that Laurinaitis wanted, and obviously Ryan Day went along with it. CJ Sanna, he's a Mike (linebacker) only. He can't play outside. Now, can he be Cody Simon? I think he can, and they won a lot of football games with Cody Simon.

"He's probably not a kid that's going to play as a freshman. But if he hangs in there, does everything he's supposed to do, I can see him getting on the field in year three, and I think he can start for Ohio State."

With Ohio State officially deciding to have a spring game while other schools have canceled theirs, does that give OSU an advantage when it comes to recruits getting to see a simulated game environment in front of fans?

"I don't think so. I mean, I'm still old-fashioned enough to think this thing comes down to comfort and relationships, and that has changed now over the years with NIL. I'm no different than you are, and those kids are no different than we are. We get real comfortable the more money gets thrown at us, so I don't think having a spring game or not really matters. Usually, kids who are high-level recruits who are coming for that weekend, watching a spring game is probably pretty low on their radar of why that school is appealing to them. So I don't think it's that big a deal really."

and Texas, and depending on how the visit went with Atkinson, the Buckeyes could be on his list of schools he wants to take an official visit to over the summer before making his commitment.

Buckeyes Offer Rising Juniors

The Buckeyes have also been busy extending new scholarship offers to 2027 prospects. They offered Mobile (Ala.) Vigor four-star defensive end and Alabama commit Jabarrius Garror (6-3, 215); Cincinnati Anderson four-star linebacker Antwoine Higgins (6-3, 215); Stone Mountain (Ga.) Stephenson four-star defensive end K.J. Green (6-5, 215); St. Joseph (Ill.) Ogden four-star offensive tackle Cameron Wagner (6-6, 280); and Chesterfield (Va.) Lloyd C. Bird five-star defensive end Chris Whitehead (6-5, 210).

Garror committed to Alabama on July 31, but the No. 41 prospect in the country does have some interest in Ohio State according to a report from 247Sports.

"I didn't know it was going to happen," Garror said of his offer. "(Patricia) told me, in their new defense, they have a linebacker coming down like an edge/jack linebacker. That's what he offered me for. I was happy. I'm most definitely going to look at Ohio State. That's been the offer I've been waiting on. I've been thinking a lot about Ohio State."

In his sophomore season, he had 104 tackles, 21½ sacks, 37 quarterback hurries, five passes broken up and four forced fumbles.

Higgins is the No. 4 linebacker in the class, the No. 61 player overall and the third-best player in the state of Ohio. He has 29 Division I offers, including from Alabama, Auburn, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Illinois State, Notre Dame, Oregon, Purdue, Tennessee and Wisconsin, among others.

Green is also highly rated as the No. 43 prospect in the country, the No. 6 defensive end and the No. 6 player in the state of Georgia. He has a few impressive offers among the 18 he has received so far, including Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Texas and USC. His offer came from the Buckeyes when he was on campus for a spring visit on March 29.

Wagner is the No. 76 player in the country, the No. 8 offensive tackle and the No. 1 player in the state of Illinois. He has just nine offers from Illinois, Iowa, Louisville, Miami (Ohio), Nebraska, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State and Purdue, but that list will undoubtedly expand.

Whitehead is the No. 8 player in the country and the No. 4 edge rusher in a class that is deep at the position at the high school level. He has 20 Division I offers so far including from Florida State, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, SMU and Tennessee.

2026 RB Gets OSU Offer

The Buckeyes are still finding talented players whom they haven't been in on in the 2026 class as well, with running backs coach Carlos Locklyn extending an offer to Baltimore Milford Mill Academy four-star running back Damon Ferguson (5-11, 190).

Ferguson is the No. 366 player in the country, the No. 27 running back and the No. 7 player in the state of Maryland. He visited Ohio State over the weekend from April 5-6 and left with an offer.

Ferguson already has official visits set to Indiana (April 25-27), Duke (May 30-June 1), Pittsburgh (June 5-7), Virginia (June 13-15) and North Carolina (June 16-18). He is considering adding the Buckeyes to his already busy schedule of official visits but will need to find time to fit Columbus in.

"We are still building that relationship, but they are the national champs and are

known to get you ready to compete at a high level week in, week out," Ferguson told 247Sports. "As we continue to build, we'll see where it goes. I will be narrowing my list at the end of April or early May to seven or 10 schools and will commit in early July."

It is still a new relationship like Ferguson said, and he is still getting to know the staff at Ohio State. But he did like what he saw when he was at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center during spring practices.

"Coach Day seemed to be a reserved individual, which gives me trust that he believes he has great assistants in place," Ferguson said. "Coach Locklyn was intense, coaches mistakes hard, but he assured you that competing was nonnegotiable. That was great to see because I was raised in that atmosphere at home and my current coaching staff is like that, too."

The Buckeyes didn't have a running back committed in the 2026 class as BSB went to press, but since they signed three in the 2025 class and only CJ Donaldson will exhaust his college eligibility after the upcoming season, it would be surprising if they brought in more than two. They could even find themselves in a situation where they take only one.

Ferguson would be a strong addition to Locklyn's future room, after running for 1,341 yards and 16 touchdowns and catch-

ing six passes and a touchdown through the air in nine games.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Suwanee (Ga.) Collins Hill four-star defensive lineman Deuce Geraldts (6-3, 265) has narrowed down his scholarship list to a top 10 after taking a visit to Ohio State on April 1. He included Clemson, Florida State, Georgia Tech, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Ole Miss and Oregon as his top schools. Geraldts is the No. 63 overall prospect in the 2026 class and the No. 6 defensive lineman and holds 55 Division I offers.

- Burlen (Wash.) Kennedy Catholic four-star defensive end Derek Colman-Brusa has set dates for his official visits and is set to go to Washington from May 2-4, UCLA from May 16-18, USC from June 6-8, Ohio State from June 13-15 and Oregon from June 20-22. He also visited Columbus for the weekend of the spring game. Despite the visit, Colman-Brusa, the No. 170 player in the 2026 class, the No. 17 edge rusher and the top-ranked player in the state of Washington, is expected to commit to his home-state Huskies, holding a "crystal ball" projection to go there from three different 247Sports recruiting experts.

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Egbuka Could Be Quite The Catch In NFL Draft

By **CRAIG MERZ**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

NFL draft-eligible players such as TreVeyon Henderson, Jack Sawyer and Tyliek Williams opted to return to Ohio State for a run at the 2024 national championship, and the rest is history as they accomplished their goal on Jan. 20 with a victory over Notre Dame in the College Football Playoff title game.

Now, those who chose to stay have a chance to be a part of history again at the 2025 draft April 24-26 in Green Bay, Wis.

There are 17 Buckeyes who were either invited to the NFL combine or participated in OSU's pro day, presenting an opportunity to break Georgia's 2022 record of having 15 players drafted, which bettered the former one-year mark of 14 held by Ohio State (2004) and LSU (2020).

It would put Ohio State back in a place of prominence again at the draft. After having six players selected in each of the 2022 and 2023 drafts, only four Buckeyes had their names called last year. Of course, a major reason for the low number was the many players who remained in Columbus.

Leading the way in the 2024 draft was receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. at No. 4 overall to the Arizona Cardinals. The others were defensive tackle Michael Hall Jr. to Cleveland in the second round with the No. 54 pick, tight end Cade Stover in the fourth round to Houston as the No. 123 selection and linebacker Tommy Eichenberg in the next round going to Las Vegas at No. 148.

Harrison extended the Buckeyes' streak of receivers going in the first round to three years: Jaxon Smith-Njigba (Seattle, 20th; 2023), Chris Olave (New Orleans, 11th; 2022) and Garrett Wilson (New York Jets, 10th; 2022).

It seems a sure bet that Emeka Egbuka will not only make it four straight drafts but the Ohio State career leader in receptions (205) should be the first Buckeye off the board.

After playing behind the aforementioned receivers as well as last season's sensation, Jeremiah Smith, it may be time for Egbuka to shine, according to many experts, who have him selected just outside the top 10.

But what was it that Lee Corso used to say? Not so fast, my friend.

Former NFL running back Maurice Jones-Drew, writing for NFL.com, made a hot-take prediction with running back TreVeyon Henderson being selected by the Bears at No. 10.

"I know it would be a surprise to a lot of folks if Henderson is picked in the top 10, but he's my No. 2 RB in the draft (behind Ashton Jeanty of Boise State) and we saw how much success Detroit had with two running backs at the center of Ben Johnson's offense," Jones-Drew said. "Now the new Bears head coach adds a versatile and explosive back to pair with D'Andre Swift, giving Chicago a one-two punch in the backfield. Plus, Henderson excels in pass protection, making him an option on all three downs."

Henderson's backfield partner, Quinshon Judkins, will go to the Denver Broncos with the 51st pick, according to ESPN's Matt Miller: "He has a seek-and-destroy mentality when encountering tacklers in the box, and he has the juice to run away from defenders when he finds daylight. Judkins could pair with a small, speedy back (like he did with Henderson at Ohio State) or be a dominant RB1."

Jones-Drew slotted Egbuka at No. 30 to Buffalo: "The Bills strengthen the supporting cast for reigning MVP Josh Allen by adding a receiver with a high football IQ, great route-running ability and the toughness to make contested catches downfield."

NFL.com draft analyst Chad Reuter rated Egbuka higher at 18th to Seattle.

"Egbuka joins his former Ohio State teammate, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, and though he played primarily in the slot in college, Egbuka will be a playmaker on the perimeter if given the chance," he said.

Meanwhile, The Athletic forecasts Las Vegas trading with Super Bowl champion Philadelphia to take Egbuka with the final pick of the first round.

On The Line

Linemen aren't exciting picks for fans, but they are the foundation, and the Buckeyes were fortunate to have two of the best on the offensive side of the ball in the 2025 draft class.

Left tackle Josh Simmons has allayed fears about his health following an injury during the Oct. 12 game against Oregon. When he went down, guard Donovan Jackson moved into his spot and enhanced his stock in helping the Buckeyes win the title.

NFL.com's Lance Zierlein sees Jackson joining former OSU quarterback C.J. Stroud with the Houston Texans at No. 25.

"The Texans have brought in competition at guard via the veteran market, but Jackson gives them a starting-caliber player with good athletic ability and a championship pedigree who can upgrade the interior pass protection," Zierlein said.

He tabbed Simmons as the 31st pick for the AFC champion Kansas City Chiefs, noting he was rated higher before the injury: "Simmons' fall stops with Kansas City. He has the best size/length/athleticism profile at the left tackle position in this entire draft, which might be too much for Andy Reid and (general manager) Brett Veach to pass on."

Miller has Simmons going 25th to Texas: "Before

suffering a torn left patellar tendon in his right knee in mid-October, Simmons looked like a prime contender to be OT1 in this class. He has experience at both tackle spots with the size and length teams are looking for in a blindside blocker. Simmons moves with poise and balance, almost like a basketball player. His ceiling is very high, and he could be a rare franchise tackle available late in the first round."

Of course, the priority of the O-line is to protect the quarterback. While Will Howard was outstanding in the postseason he doesn't get much love from Miller, who has Las Vegas tabbing him in the fifth round (No. 143).

Reuter views him as a fourth-rounder, 112th to New Orleans.

For the defense, Tyleik Williams could be the top draftee and a perfect fit for the New York Jets at 42.

"He dominates in a phone booth and throws blockers out of his way with violent hands and a strong punch," Miller said of the defensive tackle. "He's not known for his pass rush (2½ sacks in 2024), but there is some upside in that area. Some teams might see Williams' quickness and short arms (32 inches) and slot him as a 3-technique, but his strength and leverage can win when lined up near the center."

Reuter sees defensive end JT Tuimoloau at 50 to the Titans while Williams would be No. 63 to the Chiefs and defensive end Jack Sawyer (74th) joining the Carolina Panthers.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is highlighting the 17 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 and other draft experts.



DENZEL BURKE

Cornerback
5-11 • 186

Recruit Rank: Overall 199;
ATH 9

ACCOLADES: Started four years at Ohio State, setting the record for most starts with the Buckeyes as a defensive back (51), becoming only the third player in program history to start 50 or more games. Was named an All-American twice and earned All-Big Ten honors three times. Finished his college career with 143 tackles, four interceptions and 31 passes defended.

PROJECTED ROUND: Fourth to fifth round.

BURKE SAYS: "I feel like I can play all areas of the game. I can play inside. I can play outside. I can play off. I can fit in any type of scheme. I'm physical, provide great run support, and I watch a lot of film. I've just got a lot more to improve, a lot more to keep working on."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Burke stays aware in zone to balance his eyes between the backfield and route concepts, which forces indecision from the quarterback. Though he has man-cover tools, he is missing a consistent feel, which leads to separation and catches downfield or deep (see Oregon tape). Overall, Burke is missing a true distinguishing trait at a position that's heavily scouted based on the stopwatch and measuring tape, but he plays alert, physical and determined. He has a chance to earn a backup role in the NFL while fighting for starting reps."



EMEKA EGBUKA

Wide Receiver
6-1 • 202

Recruit Rank: Overall 10;
WR 1

ACCOLADES: In 49 career games with Ohio State, Egbuka became the program's leader in all-time receptions with 205. In addition to his program-record total for receptions, Egbuka went for 2,868 receiving yards and 24 receiving touchdowns over his four years with the Buckeyes. Egbuka earned All-Big Ten honors in each of his last three years at Ohio State.

PROJECTED ROUND: First to second round.

EGBUKA SAYS: "You look at some of the best players in the entire league, everybody gets older. No one is immune from aging, so the thing that really keeps you in the game is knowing how to take care of your body and knowing how and when to be open in the NFL, so I think that's a part of my game that's going to translate really well."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Egbuka skillfully attacks the leverage of the coverage with manipulative pacing and footwork to cleanly enter/exit the break point. Although his targets will be more crowded in the NFL, his tracking skills and hand strength will be valuable assets. Overall, Egbuka is a very quarterback-friendly target – not because he is bigger, stronger or faster than defenders, but because he understands detailed subtleties to uncover and command the catch point."



JOSH FRYAR

Offensive Lineman
6-5 • 320

Recruit Rank: Overall 502;
OG 28

ACCOLADES: Played in 52 games over four years. Earned first-team All-Big Ten honors after starting in all 13 games at right tackle as a junior. He was one of two offensive linemen to start all 16 games in 2024.

PROJECTED ROUND: Undrafted free agent.

FRYAR SAYS: "I have confidence in myself. I just keep the underdog mentality. I'm really not afraid of anybody, not going to back down to anybody. So I think that's something that's on my tape, and that's something that I've lived with my entire life."

FOWLER SAYS: "In pass protection, Fryar showed steady growth throughout the season. While he lacks elite lateral quickness, he compensates with sound technique and an understanding of angles and the good ol' leverage battle up front. His hand placement is disciplined, and he does a good job anchoring against pass-rushers that look to win through his chestplate."



TY HAMILTON

Defensive Tackle
6-2 • 299

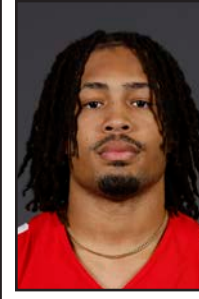
Recruit Rank: Overall 757;
DE 33

ACCOLADES: Hamilton was honorable-mention All-Big Ten in 2023 and 2024. He had career bests last season for tackles (51), tackles for loss (six) and sacks (3½). He was a two-time OSU Scholar-Athlete and a three-time Academic All-Big Ten Conference honoree.

PROJECTED ROUND: Third to fifth round.

HAMILTON SAYS: "I've talked to pretty much every team. I feel like there aren't too many teams sticking out. I'm just happy to be able to be with any team that I get drafted to. I just want to be the person that would impact your team and be a good team player."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Hamilton needs pass-rush development, but he is quick, forceful and urgent to create disruption within the structure of the defense. His coachable attitude and position versatility raise his NFL floor as a role player and potential starter."



JORDAN HANCOCK

Cornerback
6-0 • 195

Recruit Rank: Overall 73;
CB 5

ACCOLADES: Hancock had his breakout season in 2024, earning All-Big Ten honorable mention while totaling 48 tackles, 1½ tackles for loss, one-half sack, eight pass breakups and an interception in 16 games.

PROJECTED ROUND: Fifth to sixth round.

HANCOCK SAYS: "I feel like I could play every position. Most people can't say that. People had questions about my speed because of the position I played, but I scratched that off (at pro day)."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Hancock plays with the size, strength and attitude of an NFL nickel and turned himself from a so-so tackler to an above-average run defender. In coverage, he falls behind too often from press and sees the field better from depth. His best pro position might be as a safety who can provide depth at different spots in the secondary."



TREVEYON HENDERSON

Running Back
5-10 • 202

Recruit Rank: Overall 23;
RB 1

ACCOLADES: Spent four years at Ohio State, breaking into the program's top five of all time in rushing yards with 3,761. Scored 48 career touchdowns, which ranks third all time. Henderson was voted to be a team captain his senior season and was a freshman All-American, and he earned All-Big Ten honors three of his four years and honorable mention the other year.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second to third round.

HENDERSON SAYS: "An area of my game I'm looking to highlight is my pass protection. I feel like that shows what type of player you are – whether that's selfish and you only care about when the ball is in your hands, or if you're unselfish and care when the ball isn't in your hands. Pass protection, it really shows that."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Although his inside vision can get a little messy at times, and he isn't the most graceful working through tight spaces, Henderson can bounce laterally and smash the accelerator to sprint through voids or convert his speed to power as a finisher. As a blocker, he delivers thunderbolts into his target. As a pass catcher, he secures grabs away from his frame and has dynamic ability on option routes."



WILL HOWARD

Quarterback
6-4 • 236

Recruit Rank: Overall 882;
QB 33

ACCOLADES: After a second-team All-Big 12 season at Kansas State in 2023, Howard transferred to Ohio State and had a record-breaking season in Scarlet and Gray throughout his lone season in Columbus. The Downingtown, Pa., native threw for 4,010 yards and 35 touchdowns while earning school records for single-season completion percentage (73.0 percent) and most games in a season with an over 80.0 percent completion percentage (eight) while leading the Buckeyes to their first national title in a decade.

PROJECTED ROUND: Third to fourth round.

HOWARD SAYS: "I feel like my leadership, my intelligence and my arm strength (stand out). I believe in myself. It's not a knock to any other quarterback in this draft. I think I'm the best, and if you don't feel like you're the best to come out this year, then why are you doing this? I feel like I have what it takes to be a QB1 in the NFL, and whatever franchise takes me is not going to regret it."

BRUGLER SAYS: "A well-built athlete, Howard sets up quickly and throws well enough to all levels, doing some of his best work on designed roll-outs and waggles to move his launch point. His aggressiveness as a passer will bite him at times, especially when he locks onto his preferred read. His ability to quickly get deeper into progressions will be crucial at the next level."



DONOVAN JACKSON

Offensive Lineman
6-4 • 315

Recruit Rank: Overall 19;
IOL 1

ACCOLADES: Played in 51 games for Ohio State, earning three first-team All-Big Ten honors in the last three years of his career. Earned a first-team All-American nod in his senior season after switching to offensive tackle midway through the season.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second round.

JACKSON SAYS: "I think my time at tackle certainly didn't hurt. It showed my versatility a little bit, it showed my athleticism as well, so I feel like it certainly helped."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Long considered an interior prospect by NFL teams, his left tackle tape was better than what he showed at left guard, forcing NFL teams to reevaluate his best positional fit. Though not an overpowering drive blocker, Jackson moves well out of his stance with the flexibility/length/strength combination to latch and occupy defenders with his hands."



QUINSHON JUDKINS

Running Back
6-0 • 221

Recruit Rank: Overall 562;
RB 46

ACCOLADES: After playing two seasons at Ole Miss and earning first-team All-SEC honors in both those years, Judkins transferred to Ohio State for the 2024 season and made the most of his opportunity. Despite splitting carries with TreVeyon Henderson in the backfield, he still managed to rush for a team-high 1,060 yards and 14 touchdowns on 194 carries, a stat line that earned him third-team All-Big Ten honors in his lone season in the conference.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second round.

JUDKINS SAYS: "I can run between the tackles and also outside. I have natural, great hands. I haven't seen any running back in today's NFL that can do what I do at my size. That's what I bring, with my skill set, to the game."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Judkins has quick eyes and footwork to react to the blocking geometry, although he often runs like he is starving and must balance his aggressive style with improved patience before attacking the line of scrimmage. His best traits are his play strength and the run toughness to drop his pads, barrel through heavy contact and come out the other side."



SETH MCLAUGHLIN

Center
6-4 • 304

Recruit Rank: Overall 524;
C 11

ACCOLADES: After playing four seasons under the tutelage of legendary head coach Nick Saban at Alabama, McLaughlin turned in an award-winning season in his one and only season with Ohio State. Despite starting just 10 of the Buckeyes' 16 games due to a torn Achilles he suffered before the Indiana game in late November, McLaughlin was named a first-team All-Big Ten selection, consensus All-American and the winner of the Rimington Trophy as college football's most outstanding center for leading a unit that ranked 24th nationally in fewest sacks allowed (1.2 per game), and he helped the team rush for 183.8 yards per game at the time of his injury.

PROJECTED ROUND: Fifth round.

MCLAUGHLIN SAYS: "I know why I love to play football, but I didn't realize how much I would miss football if I didn't have it. And (being without football) reignited a fire in me to get back out there and get my competitive juices flowing. I'm attacking rehab like it's a game on Saturday. I'm just excited to get out there and have another opportunity to play football."

BRUGLER SAYS: "As a run blocker, McLaughlin flashes power in his hands and is agile enough to consistently reach and cut off defensive tackles to seal run lanes. He is stout in pass protection, and although he will misfire with his hands at times, he is quick to recover and stay positioned."



LATHAN RANSOM

Safety
6-0 • 203

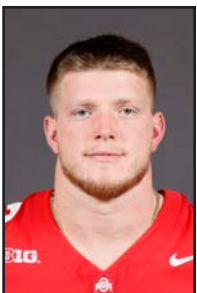
Recruit Rank: Overall 151;
SAF 11

ACCOLADES: Ransom was first-team All-Big Ten and third-team Associated Press All-American for the 2024 season. He tied for the team lead with three forced fumbles and recorded 76 tackles (nine for loss) with a sack and an interception. He decided to return for a chance at a national championship after missing the end of the 2023 regular season with a foot injury.

PROJECTED ROUND: Third to fourth round.

RANSOM SAYS: (On how he measured success in his OSU career) "By the people I impacted. That's how I measure success. (Former Ohio State linebacker) Bobby Carpenter told me and left me with a nugget one time, 'Success is how the room is affected when you leave.' And that's what was my biggest goal, to affect the room and be a leader in every way I could and show them the routine and show them how it needs to be done. And that's how I hope to leave my success here."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Ransom might not have the coverage anticipation to be a true ball hawk, but he sees the field well to key quickly, run the alley and stay on top of everything. If he stays healthy, he has the run-defending range and matchup potential against tight ends to become an NFL starter."



JACK SAWYER

Defensive End
6-4 • 260

Recruit Rank: Overall 5; DL 3

ACCOLADES: Despite a somewhat slow start to his career, Sawyer became cemented in Ohio State history with his 83-yard scoop-and-score touchdown against Texas in the 2024 College Football Playoff semifinal. Sawyer wrapped up his collegiate career with back-to-back second-team All-Big Ten honors and amassed 23 total sacks with 11 passes broken up over his four-year Buckeye tenure.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second round.

SAWYER SAYS: "(The scoop-and-score vs. Texas) is definitely the play everyone brings up. It's just a blessing, man. Knowing that that play helped clinch my team in the national championship, which was our ultimate goal all year, it's special to me for multiple reasons. That was a break that we've been needing and looking forward to all year. And then we break through and win a national championship, which is something that they can never take from us."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Sawyer is strong at the point of attack, with the instincts and effort to consistently factor into the play. Though his hands are powerful, they aren't overly skilled, and his body stiffness leaves him a step slow to shed or unlock counter measures once locked up."



GEE SCOTT JR.

Tight End
6-3 • 243

Recruit Rank: Overall 66;
WR 10

ACCOLADES: Played five seasons at Ohio State, earning four varsity letters after converting from wide receiver to tight end in his freshman year. Scott played in 52 games and started 16 times, catching 47 passes for 393 yards and four touchdowns. He caught 11 passes for 103 yards during the Buckeyes' four-game run to win the national championship, with a career-high four receptions in the first round against Tennessee.

PROJECTED ROUND: Undrafted free agent.

SCOTT SAYS: "On the field, I have my ability to block in space, my route running ability and then maybe the intangible things that maybe you wouldn't see on a stat sheet. My ability to play with other players and be a great leader just in general, not making things about myself but doing everything for the success of the brother on my left and to my right."

MARTINEZ SAYS: "Scott's best fit will be in a multiple tight-end system that emphasizes creating mismatches in the passing game. His background as a receiver and continued development as a route runner make him an interesting chess piece for creative offensive coordinators."



JOSH SIMMONS

Offensive Tackle
6-5 • 317

Recruit Rank: Overall 342;
IOL 25

ACCOLADES: After transferring to Ohio State as the most flagged offensive tackle in the country for San Diego State, Simmons earned the starting left tackle spot for two seasons with the Buckeyes, cleaning up his play before tearing his patellar tendon midway through the 2024 season. He still earned a third-team selection on the All-Big Ten team from the media and was an honorable mention for the coaches.

PROJECTED ROUND: First to second round.

SIMMONS SAYS: "I like to think I'm very ahead in terms of repertoire, pass sets, the way I think of the game, how I diagnose fronts and stuff like that. If you get all that in your head and you can knock that out as soon as before you even step up to the ball, you can play a lot faster."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Simmons explodes out of his stance in pass protection and plays with knee-bend, balance and calmness to govern his movements, shoot his hands and stay square to pass rushers. He isn't an overpowering mauler in the run game, but (Chip) Kelly's offense highlighted Simmons' range when executing pulls, reaches, traps, etc."



CODY SIMON

Linebacker
6-2 • 229

Recruit Rank: Overall 75;
ILB 4

ACCOLADES: Recorded 259 total tackles in five years at Ohio State. Had his career-best season during his fifth year as Ohio State's starting Mike linebacker and had a team-high 112 tackles, including 12½ for loss. Earned a first-team All-Big Ten nod and was named the National Championship Defensive MVP during his senior season.

PROJECTED ROUND: Fourth to fifth.

SIMON SAYS: "I want (NFL teams) to know that I'm a leader, and I want to be able to improve any room that I go into. Whatever linebacker room I end up joining I want them to understand that I'm a hard worker, I always come to work and put my best foot forward and give 100 percent effort."

BRUGLER SAYS: "With his instinctive, competitive play style, Simon limits mental mistakes and shows a natural feel for navigating blocking schemes to drive on the ball carrier. He has the functional athleticism to be a zone-coverage defender, although his lack of dynamic twitch and coverage anticipation will limit him when isolated in space."



JT TUIMOLOAU

Defensive End
6-4 • 269

Recruit Rank: Overall 4;
DL 2

ACCOLADES: Tuimoloau was first-team All-Big Ten his final three seasons. In 2024, he ranked third in the FBS with 21½ tackles for loss and tied for fifth with 12½ sacks and had 61 tackles, three pass breakups and two forced fumbles. He played all 55 games from 2021-24, starting 42 consecutive games. For his career he had 144 tackles, 16 quarterback hurries and 10 pass break-ups.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second round.

TUIMOLOAU SAYS: "Being able to go to Ohio State, a top-notch school filled with a lot of talent, it allowed me to elevate and enhance my skills and work ethic as well. Competing with a lot of guys, which I love to do, being able to do it around my brothers and to have some bragging rights in the locker room. Just competing against them really elevated me and my skillset."

BRUGLER SAYS: "He has a terrific motor and should continue developing his shed timing to improve his run fits. Overall, Tuimoloau's college tape is more good than exceptional, but he is competitive, skilled and doesn't have major deficiencies that would keep him from being a dependable edge presence in the NFL. He is one of the most well-rounded defensive prospects in the class."



TYLEIK WILLIAMS

Defensive Tackle
6-3 • 334

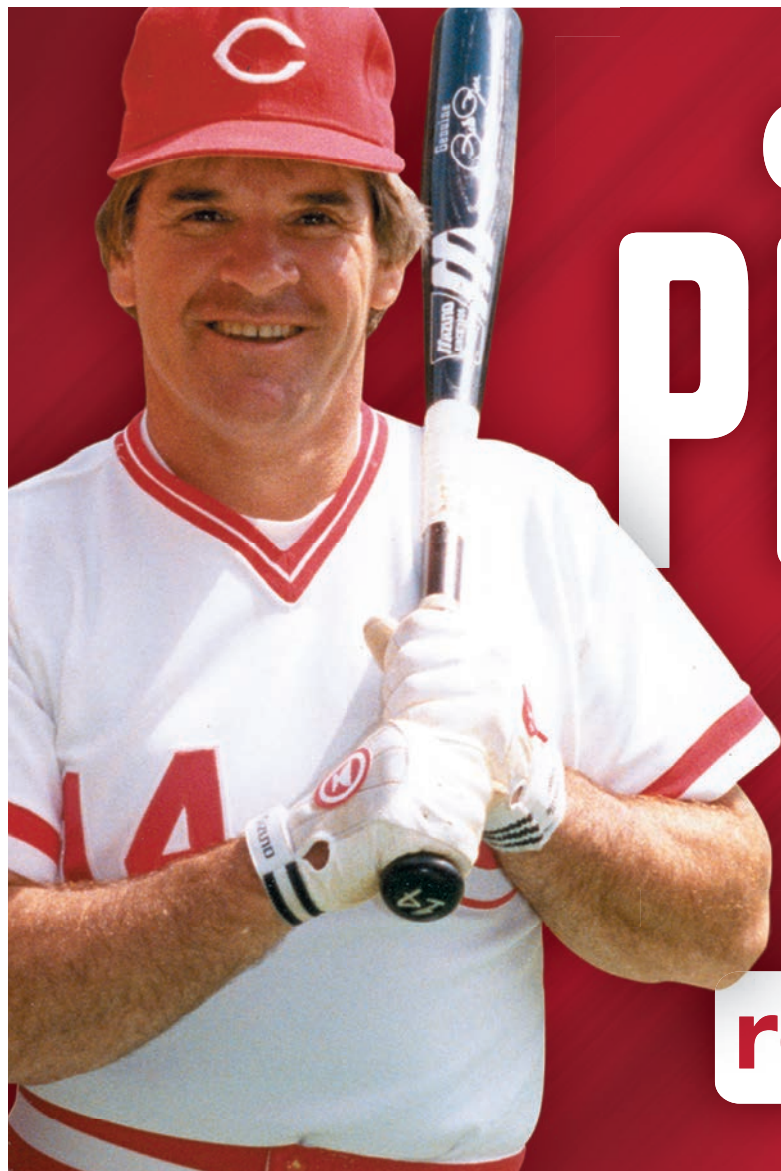
Recruit Rank: Overall 166;
DL 25

ACCOLADES: Williams appeared in 12 or more games in each of his four seasons with the Buckeyes, totaling a combined 136 tackles (56 solo, 80 assisted), 28 tackles for loss, 11½ sacks, 10 pass deflections, one forced fumble and a fumble recovery returned for a touchdown. He earned All-Big Ten honors in each of his last two seasons, including a second-team all-conference nod in 2023 after he recorded 54 tackles and tied for the team high with 10 tackles for loss.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second round.

WILLIAMS SAYS: "I'm just a disruptor. I'm not just going to hold blocks, I'm going to make plays. I'm a student of the game, chill, laid back (person), and I love football. So if you want a guy who is going to come in and work, choose me."

BRUGLER SAYS: "With his initial quickness, Williams can cross the face of blockers or create knockback with his ability to stack, find the football and detach. Aside from his physical capabilities, he has outstanding awareness to identify pre-snap clues and anticipate play design."



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USC, UCLA Eliminated From Women's Tourney

As the NCAA women's basketball tournament progressed, the Big Ten was well represented by newcomers USC and UCLA. No. 1 seed USC was slated to face off against No. 2 seed UConn in the Elite Eight while top-seeded UCLA earned its first-ever spot in the Final Four, taking on the winner of the aforementioned game.

BIG TEN NOTES Cameron Moone

Once the dust settled on the Big Dance, neither Big Ten squad hoisted the national championship trophy.

The Trojans – playing without star sophomore guard JuJu Watkins (23.9 points per game) after she suffered a torn ACL in her right knee early in their Round of 32 win over Mississippi State on March 24 – fell to the Huskies 78-64 on March 31, their second-lowest scoring output of the season.

USC led 11-5 early in the first quarter, but its lack of offensive firepower began to rear its head against a stout Geno Auriemma-led Huskies team after UConn went on a 34-14 run to close out the first half, 13 of those points during that span coming from star senior guard Paige Bueckers.

Despite trailing by as many as 17 points coming out of the half, the Trojans made things somewhat interesting in the third quarter, using an 11-0 run to narrow the Huskies' lead to five, 51-46, heading into the fourth. But 15 combined points from Bueckers and graduate guard Azzi Fudd in the first 5:18 of the final frame paved the way for a 15-5 UConn run that allowed it to cruise to the 14-point victory and end USC's season for the second consecutive year in the Elite Eight.

Despite the loss, the Trojans still fin-

ished with a 31-4 record and 17-1 mark in the Big Ten, their first 30-win season since 1985-86.

Taking on its second Big Ten team in as many games in the tournament, UConn dispatched of the Bruins in even easier fashion, dismantling UCLA 85-51 in the Final Four tilt on April 4. The wire-to-wire victory for the Huskies had them leading 23-13 after the first quarter and 42-22 at halftime.

A strong showing from UCLA first-team All-America center Lauren Betts (26 points, five rebounds and two steals) proved to not be enough against the surging Huskies, who forced 19 Bruins turnovers that led to 27 points and shot 55.0 percent from the field (33 of 60) compared to the 38.5 percent shooting (20 of 52) from UCLA.

UConn continued its dominance in the national championship game two days later with an 82-59 victory over powerhouse South Carolina, giving Auriemma his record 12th title in his 40 years leading the program.

UCLA, meanwhile, still had a historic season despite the loss to the eventual national champions. In addition to making their first-ever Final Four, the Bruins' 34 wins this year (34-3, 16-2) were the most in the program's 44-year history, eclipsing the 28-win season they had in 2010-11.

Weiss' Computer Crime Saga Continues

As Michigan football continues to go through spring practice, former staffer Matt Weiss – who was charged with 24 counts of computer access crimes on March 20 – had “thousands of intimate photos and videos” seized from his various devices and cloud

storage accounts, according to a statement from the U.S. Department of Justice given to his victims on April 8.

It was initially believed that Weiss had access to several thousand accounts belonging to student-athletes through software called Keffer Development Services. After further investigation, that number amounted to more than 2,000 athletes as well as more than 1,300 students or alumni from schools across the United States. Weiss' main effort during the nearly eight-year crime spree was “to find private images, primarily of women,” according to the indictment.

“Thousands of candid, intimate photographs and videos have been seized from the defendant's electronic devices and from his cloud storage accounts. Many show victims naked. Some show victims engaged in explicit sexual acts,” the Justice Department's Mega Victim Case Assistance Program said.

In response to the findings, both John and Jim Harbaugh – John coached with Weiss with the Baltimore Ravens from 2009-20 and Jim at Michigan from 2021-22 – called the accusations shocking.

Weiss has pleaded not guilty to all 24 counts of identity theft and unauthorized computer access.

Terps Hire Texas A&M's Williams To Lead Men's Hoops

Just two days after losing former head men's basketball coach Kevin Willard to Villanova, Maryland found a replacement in Texas A&M head coach Buzz Williams on April 1, giving the Terrapins a career 62.1-percent winner in 18 seasons in the collegiate ranks. Williams' deal is expected to be six years, according to ESPN.

“It is an honor and privilege to be named the head coach of the University of Maryland men's basketball team,” Williams said. “I want to thank President (Darryll) Pines and (interim athletic director) Colleen

Sorem for this opportunity to lead one of the most prestigious programs in the country. In leading this program, I promise to uphold the history of Maryland basketball and make Terp Nation proud with the men who represent this institution.”

The 52-year-old joins Maryland after spending six seasons in College Station, Texas, leading the Aggies to the NCAA Tournament in each of his final three seasons at the helm. Before commanding Texas A&M, Williams had a five-year stint at Virginia Tech, reaching the Sweet 16 in his final season with the Hokies in 2018-19, and had a six-year run at Marquette from 2008-2014, reaching the Elite Eight during the 2012-13 season.

With 11 NCAA Tournament appearances under his belt, Williams takes over for Willard following what was a somewhat awkward exit for the now-Wildcats head coach. Expressing some disappointment over the state of the Maryland men's basketball program, Willard was often quoted on the deficiencies that were present with the team.

“For us to be really successful, x, y and z need to change,” Willard said on March 20. “First and foremost, I need to make sure where we are with NIL and (revenue) share. Over the past two years, we've been one of the worst, if not lowest with NIL the past two years.”

Now with Williams at the helm, Maryland – which reached the Sweet 16 this season and finished with a 27-9 record (14-6 Big Ten) – will see a different team, with talented freshman center Derik Queen declaring for the NBA draft and guard Rodney Rice entering the transfer portal on March 31.

Williams already brought four of his players from Texas A&M with him to Maryland, including rising senior forward Pharrel Payne (6-9, 250), who started 14 games for the Aggies this past season and averaged 10.4 points and 5.1 rebounds per game.

Nebraska Wins Inaugural Crown Tournament

Although it isn't the hardware that every team wants at season's end, the Nebraska men's basketball team captured a tournament title with a 77-66 win over UCF in the College Basketball Crown in Las Vegas on April 6, giving the Huskers an extra \$300,000 in NIL money with the victory.

The Huskers were led by the senior duo of guard Brice Williams and forward Juwan Gary, who scored 21 points and 20 points, respectively, in the championship game. Off the bench, junior guard Connor Essegian tallied 21 points of his own, knocking down four three-pointers.

According to Huskers head coach Fred Hoiberg, the prize money will be split evenly among all Nebraska players, regardless of playing time.

“The players from this year's roster will split that evenly,” Hoiberg said after the win. “I think of it as a playoff bonus for the guys that were part of it this year, from your scout-team guys all the way to your guys sitting out. Everybody had a part in this thing, Jeff Grace and Henry Burt and



Lauren Betts



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BIG TEN NOTES

Nick (Janowski) and Braden (Frager) and Justin (Bolis). The guys that played the majority of their minutes on the scout team this year, that's invaluable, what those guys do for your program."

Nebraska virtually cruised through the Crown, winning each of its four games by at least eight points, including three consecutive double-digit victories over Georgetown (81-69, April 2), Boise State (79-69, April 5) and in the final game against the Knights. Gary and Williams both made the College Basketball Crown All-Tournament team, with Gary taking home MVP honors to close out his five-year collegiate career.

The four-games not only allowed Gary and Williams to finish out their careers in style but also improved the Huskers' 2024-25 record to 21-14, a much better finish for the program after it had lost six of its final seven games of the regular season to fall out of NCAA Tournament contention.

UCF received \$100,000 as the runner-up team in the debut year of the tournament, while Georgetown and Boise State each earned \$50,000 for making the semifinals, bringing the total to \$500,000 in winnings that all go toward NIL benefits.

Spartan's Holloman A Surprise Portal Entry

Following a season in which he averaged 9.1 points per game while starting 16 games, Michigan State junior guard Tre Holloman entered the transfer portal on April 1, joining sophomore forward Xavier Booker and sophomore guard Gehrig Normand as the three Spartans now looking for new starts in their collegiate careers.

Holloman's announcement came just two days after Michigan State fell to Auburn 70-64 in the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament.



Tre Holloman

Holloman ranked second among Spartans in three-pointers made with 48 out of 146 attempts (32.9 percent). He started 16 games in a row, averaging 9.2 points and 4.2 assists in that stretch before being benched in favor of true freshman guard Jace Richardson in February. Holloman was even more effective off the bench, averaging 10.6 points and 3.5 assists per game in his final 14 games, and he was one of the Spartans' significant contributors during their NCAA Tournament run, totaling 40 points and 13 assists.

Holloman's transfer comes as a bit of a surprise due to the memorable showing of loyalty he had during Michigan State's regular-season finale against Michigan on March 9. In the game's final seconds, he confronted a group of Wolverine players who were standing on top of the Spartans' logo at the end of the game, preventing MSU's seniors from kissing the logo as they exited the floor in the victory, which has become a tradition for the program every Senior Day dating back to 1995.

Holloman was assessed a technical foul for the incident, but neither he nor Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo expressed much remorse for the action after the game. Izzo praised Holloman for confront-

ing Michigan after the game and invited him to kiss the floor himself.

"Nobody changes our tradition," Izzo said during the team's on-court celebration of their Big Ten regular-season title. "So Tre Holloman ... I don't want you doing that very often, but this one time, kiss that (logo) like we're supposed to."

Holloman, who was the 110th-best player in the transfer portal according to 247Sports, committed to NC State on April 13 over Baylor, North Carolina and Villanova, three schools he received significant interest from.

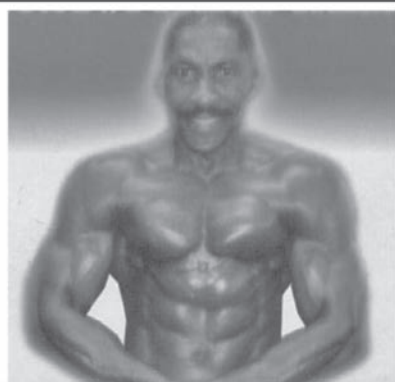
Penn State Falls to BU in Men's Frozen Four

As the final Big Ten men's hockey team remaining in the field, Penn State was seeking its first NCAA championship in its first appearance in the Frozen Four in program history.

Instead, the Nittany Lions will have to wait another year after losing to Boston University 3-1 in the semifinal round on April 10. The loss marks the fourth consecutive season that a Big Ten squad has reached the Frozen Four but failed to win the national championship, joining Michigan in 2022 and 2024 and Minnesota in 2023.

Penn State trailed from horn to horn, keeping the game scoreless through the first period before the Terriers notched two goals in the second frame from senior forward Jack Hughes and freshman forward Cole Eiserman. The Nittany Lions brought the game within a score off the stick of freshman forward Nicholas Degraeves 2:15 into the third period before Boston sophomore forward Jack Harvey added an insurance goal on an empty-netter with just 45 seconds left in the final frame.

With the loss, Penn State wrapped up the season at 22-14-4 and 9-11-4 in the Big Ten in what was the most successful season on the ice in program history. Western Michigan ended up winning the national title on April 12 with a 6-2 victory over BU.

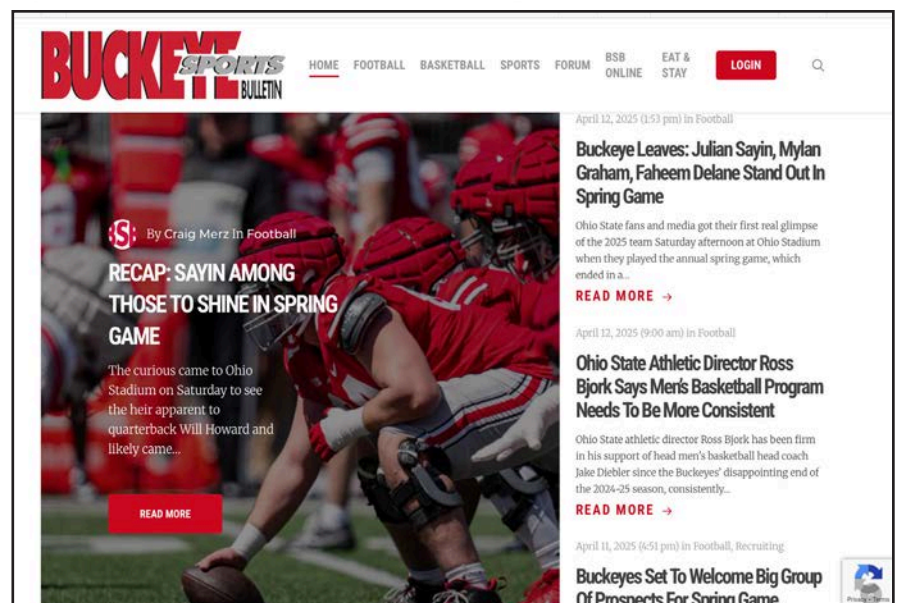


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Thornton Expected To Return For Senior Year

Perhaps the biggest domino of the Buckeyes' 2024-25 offseason fell early on April 3 when head coach Jake Diebler announced that junior guard and three-time team captain Bruce Thornton will likely return to Ohio State for a fourth and final season after going through the NBA draft process.

"Bruce Thornton is coming back," Die-

blen said on a radio appearance on 97.1 The Fan's "Morning Juice." "He's going to go through the NBA draft process – which I'm really excited for him to go through – (to) get feedback. And if he can stay in and be an NBA player, great. Because I think he is an NBA player. Maybe he's not yet. And if he's not, he's going to come back to Ohio State."

Thornton's expected return is a significant one for Ohio State. The Fairburn, Ga., native is coming off the best season of his career, starting each of the Buckeyes' 32 games and leading them in scoring (17.7 points per game), assists (4.6) and minutes played (36.2) on his way to a second-team All-Big Ten honor. He had a similarly productive year in 2023-24 when he started all but one of Ohio State's 36 games and led the team in those same three categories (15.7 points, 4.8 assists, 33.7 minutes) while earning a third-team all-conference nod from media and honorable mention from coaches.

These stats, in addition to his 10.6 points, 2.7 rebounds and 2.6 assists as a freshman in 35 games (all starts), have allowed him to climb up the program record books, currently ranking 21st in OSU history in career points (1,487), 10th in assists (408) and seventh in made threes (159).

Now with another full year in scarlet and gray coming in 2025-26, Thornton has a chance to further climb up those lists. If he maintains his 17.7-point average from this past season, it will take him 35 more games to break Dennis Hopson's scoring record of 2,096 career points, while he also needs just 36 more starts to break William Buford's all-time mark of 137 career starts.

Aside from potentially setting some school records, Thornton will also be searching for more team success in his final season with the Buckeyes, especially in the postseason. He has yet to play in an NCAA

Tournament game in his three seasons with the team, this past year being the closest he's been to the Big Dance after the Buckeyes were among the first four teams out of the field by the NCAA selection committee despite a 2-5 finish to the season.

"This is not how I pictured (my career), but these are the cards I've just been dealt with," Thornton told BSB after the team's 77-70 loss to Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten tournament on March 12. "I'm proud of my journey."

Tilly, Noel Sign With Ohio State

Thornton will look to earn his first berth to the NCAA Tournament while leading a Buckeye backcourt next season that – as BSB went to press – also includes likely starter John Mobley Jr., who also announced he is returning on March 27, as well as rising third-year Taison Chatman and Indiana transfer Gabe Cupps.

Ohio State garnered transfer portal commitments from a pair of all-conference mid-major frontcourt players since BSB last went to press, first getting a pledge from Santa Clara center Christoph Tilly on April 1 and then from Wright State forward Brandon Noel on April 8. Both Tilly and Noel have just one year of collegiate eligibility left.

Tilly is a native of Berlin, Germany, who stands 7-0 and weighs 240 pounds. He joins Ohio State after a strong junior season with Santa Clara in which he started 31 of 31 games and averaged 12.5 points, 4.9 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game while shooting 55.4 percent from the field and 31.5 percent from three (17 of 54). These stats allowed him to earn second-team All-West Coast Conference honors and helped Santa Clara finish the season with a 21-13 record and fourth-place finish in the WCC (12-6 record).

The Broncos also ranked 36th in the country in rebounding margin last season with Tilly as the team's starting center, hauling in 37.9 per game as a team while giving up 32.9.

Tilly, who averaged 9.2 points, 4.1 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game during his three-year career with Santa Clara, told The Columbus Dispatch after committing that he thinks he fills a major need for the

Buckeyes on the inside due to his ability to lead an offense from the inside out.

"At Santa Clara, I played a trigger position," he said. "I'm initiating the offense, and I know that (Ohio State) wanted a five-man who could do that, and they struggled last year with having a five-man doing that. I think that's the perfect fit."

Noel, a Lucasville, Ohio, native, joins Ohio State after a successful junior season with Wright State, where he started 33 of 33 games and averaged a team-high 19.0 points and 7.7 rebounds per game while shooting 55.2 percent from the field and 35.8 percent from three (38 of 106). Noel's efforts helped him earn a second-team All-Horizon League honor after the season.

The 6-8 forward produced for Wright State in each of his first three seasons with the program. He averaged another 14.5 points and 8.0 rebounds on his way to his first second-team all-conference honor in 2023-24 and was named the league's freshman of the year in 2022-23 after logging 13.0 points and 8.7 rebounds per contest.

Noel told the Dispatch that the Buckeyes stood out to him over other suitors due to the foundation Diebler and his program have built so far this offseason, especially when it comes to the key players they have retained for the 2025-26 season.

"As I got to know the staff, I really felt like they have a good vision for Ohio State basketball moving forward," he said. "I really believe in the players they have there, the players they're going to bring in and the coaches that are already there to win games next year. One of the biggest things is the retention they have with their players."

The additions of both Tilly and Noel fill an urgent frontcourt need Diebler and his staff were trying to address through the transfer portal this offseason. The Buckeyes finished the year 13th out of 18 Big Ten teams (230th nationally) in rebounding margin, bringing in 33.7 and giving up 34.0.

Due to Tilly and Noel's versatile skill sets and experience in college basketball, they could both slot into starting roles for the Buckeyes at the center and forward position, a group that also includes rising junior forwards Devin Royal and Sean Stewart as well as rising sophomore center Ivan Njegovan.

Royal – who could start at the "three" position after his strong sophomore season – announced on April 5 that he is returning to the team for 2025-26, while Stewart and Njegovan have yet to make public comments on their basketball futures.

Bradshaw Enters Transfer Portal

Ohio State's 2025-26 frontcourt will not include rising junior forward Aaron Bradshaw, who reportedly requested and received the necessary paperwork to enter the transfer portal on April 1 after spending just one disappointing season with the program.

Bradshaw leaves the team nearly one year after committing to Ohio State last offseason on April 15, 2024, following a one-and-done season at Kentucky, a move that was met with much hype due to his status as a five-star prospect and McDonald's All-American out of Roselle (N.J.) Camden.

Bradshaw was expected by many to lead a new-look Buckeye frontcourt alongside his fellow five-star sophomore Stewart, but those offseason expectations never translated to consistent success during the regular season for the 7-1 forward.

After starting each of the Buckeyes' first four games and averaging a respectable 7.8 points, 4.8 rebounds and 1.8 blocks per contest, Bradshaw's season was abruptly put on pause after he was forced to leave the team due to a university investigation into an alleged domestic incident that occurred at his off-campus house. The investigation forced him to be away from the team for over two weeks and miss seven games.

"Just not being with (my teammates)," Bradshaw said on Dec. 29 when asked by BSB what the most difficult part of him sitting out those seven games was. "I love being with the guys. These are my best

friends, the people I talk to every day, chill with every day."

Because no charges were filed and the investigation was lifted, Bradshaw returned to the team in December and made an instant impact against his former team in his first game



Aaron Bradshaw

back, recording 11 points, two rebounds and two steals while shooting 5 of 6 from the field in the Buckeyes' 85-65 upset win over No. 4 Kentucky on Dec. 21.

But that performance seemed to mark the peak of Bradshaw's season and his now-short Buckeye career. In his final 17 games with the team, he averaged 5.3 points, 2.3 rebounds and 0.5 blocks per game on 50.7 percent shooting (34 of 67) while recording 2.6 fouls per game and fouling out twice. His 44 fouls eclipsed his rebound total of 39 during that same span (24 defensive, 15 offensive).

Bradshaw, who also missed three games in February while dealing with the flu, will now be on his third team in as many seasons and will look to have a more stable role and develop into the player he was projected to be. He had not yet found a new home as BSB went to press.

As for Ohio State, Bradshaw is now the fourth player to enter his name in the portal, joining fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr., junior wing Evan Mahaffey and sophomore center Austin Parks.

Meechie Transfers Back To South Carolina

Speaking of Johnson, the former Buckeye guard found a new – or, perhaps more aptly, old – home on April 1 when he announced on Instagram that he is transferring back to South Carolina after spending the 2024-25 season with Ohio State.

"These past couple months were one of the hardest times in my life. Not even knowing if I wanted to do this anymore," Johnson wrote in an Instagram story that included a picture of him celebrating with South Carolina fans after a win during his last stint with the Gamecocks. "And just when I thought it was over God just restored me."

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Johnson returns to the Lamont Paris-led Gamecocks following an odd one-and-done stint with Ohio State. He started the first 10 games of the year and logged 28.9 minutes, 9.1 points, 2.7 assists and 2.5 rebounds per game before leaving the team in mid-December, not returning the rest of the year and then entering his name in the transfer portal after the season on March 28.

Johnson told the Dispatch that his abrupt in-season departure was due to an urgent mental health issue that he needed to address. Because he left after 10 games due to mental health issues, he is eligible for a mental health hardship waiver that will allow him to play a sixth year of college basketball at South Carolina if it is approved.

"I was just going through a lot mentally," Johnson said. "Mental health is serious. It's something I've dealt with my whole life. It was something that definitely was affecting me. It was my life. There was a lot going on, and basketball being something that you use to be an outlet, I just didn't feel like myself mentally. I just had to focus on my mental health. That was that."

Once Johnson's waiver is approved by the NCAA, he will return to the same South Carolina team he called home from 2022-24, where he averaged a combined 13.4 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.2 assists in 63 games (62 starts). Johnson also led the Gamecocks to their first NCAA Tournament berth in seven seasons and earned second-team All-SEC honors as a senior in 2023-24 after totaling a team-high 14.1 points along with 4.1 rebounds and 2.9 assists per game.

Johnson's career started at Ohio State in 2020-21 as a 17-year-old reclassified freshman, and he played two seasons with the Buckeyes before transferring to South Carolina, then back to Ohio State, and now back to South Carolina again.

"Going back to the same two schools twice this isn't what I imagined nor thought my career would be like, but I serve a perfect merciful and graceful God and I know this is his journey for me," Johnson wrote on Twitter on April 1.

Johnson will look to return to the NCAA Tournament on a Gamecocks team that is coming off a disappointing 12-20 season and 2-16 mark in the SEC.

Bjork Says Program Needs More Consistency

Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork has been firm in his support of Diebler since the Buckeyes' disappointing end to the season, and that did not change when he was interviewed by Eleven Warriors on April 7 during the school's athlete award banquet.

"Jake's the right guy," Bjork said. "He's got the right energy. He relates to the players. He's building this in the modern era."

Although these positive comments were not surprising, he did also offer some critiques for the coach and his team, saying that the program as a whole needs to be more consistent and return to the elite standard it had in previous eras.

"We don't want to tiptoe around Ohio State basketball," Bjork said. "I'm challenging our staff to think of it differently internally. We're not going to tiptoe around Ohio State basketball. We know what the standard is. We have blue-blood elements in our history, and we need to be more consistent."

Bjork – who hired Diebler last spring over more established coaches such as

Dusty May (Michigan) and John Calipari (Arkansas) following his strong showing as interim head coach – admitted that he thinks the administration needs to do a better job at helping Diebler succeed in his role, whether that be creating a better gameday atmosphere at Value City Arena or improving the messaging around the program.

"I think with football, obviously, we have such a great foundation. With basketball, we really need a strategic approach with Jake at the helm, so we need to help him with some of the messaging," Bjork said. "Obviously, roster retention and building is part of that. Gameday atmosphere in (Value City Arena). ...you can't really downsize (the arena), but how do we make it a tighter feel? Is that lighting? Is that seating sections that we look at? How do we get the students more involved? What's our messaging around the program?"

Regardless of how they help Diebler and his program, Bjork maintained that Ohio State has the capability to be a national contender and has shown in the past that it could get it done.

One way the Buckeyes can achieve that is by digging into their abundant financial resources. According to a new study by Indiana University Columbus (Ind.) finance professor Ryan Brewer, Ohio State ranks fourth in all of college basketball in financial value at \$262 million, behind only North Carolina (\$378 million), Duke (\$370 million) and Indiana (\$279 million).

Bjork did not get into specifics about the resources offered to the men's basketball program, but he did point to another way Diebler and his staff can get Ohio State moving in the right direction, by bringing in the best high school players from Ohio and its surrounding area.

Diebler is on the right track in that aspect, bringing in the No. 1 player out of Ohio in the 2025 class, Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160), and the second- and fourth-best prospects in the state for 2026 – Garfield Heights four-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175) and Upper Arlington three-star power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195).

"I remember talking to (former Ohio State men's basketball coach) Thad Matta at one point in time, and I said, 'Hey, what was the secret sauce at Ohio State?' He goes 'Six hours. If we got the best players within a six-hour radius, we're a Final Four team,'" Bjork said.

OSU Withdraws From Early-Season Tournament

Ohio State has withdrawn from the 2025 Battle 4 Atlantis Tournament and will find a different event that better suits its financial and on-court interests, according to multiple reports.

The Buckeyes had been locked into this tournament since 2020, originally signing a contract with the event that February to compete in that year's event before it was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But now it has pulled out of that contract and will not compete in the tournament. Ohio State will have to pay a \$100,000 fine and return any portion of the \$75,000 appearance fee the event was to pay the Buckeyes for participating, according to the Dispatch.

Diebler and the Buckeyes will look to find a new tournament or showcase that will

include an NIL element. Last season, its two showcase games against Texas in Las Vegas and Auburn in Atlanta included an NIL aspect to it, although the specific numbers associated with those events are not known.

Auburn also withdrew from the Battle 4 Atlantis Tournament due to similar reasons, and it will now reportedly play in the 2025 Players Era Festival in Las Vegas, an event that gave the winner \$9 million in NIL payments last season and each team \$1 million. Ohio State will not participate in that tournament but will seek a similar NIL-based event.

Battle Returning To Penn State As Assistant

Ohio State lost one of its 2024-25 assistants to a Big Ten rival on April 1 when Talor Battle reportedly left Jake Diebler's staff to return to his alma mater Penn State. Battle will replace Penn State assistant Jimmy Martelli on head coach Mike Rhodes' staff after he left for the same role at VCU, according to the Centre Daily Times.

Battle, 36, spent just one season at Ohio State after being hired by Diebler last June, working primarily with the Buckeye backcourt. He helped turn that unit into the strength of the team by developing key contributors such as Mobley and Thornton into reliable scoring options.

Battle returns to State College 15 years after wrapping up his decorated four-year career with Penn State (2007-11), where he became the school's all-time leading scorer at 2,213 points as well as a three-time All-

Big Ten selection in his 134 games played (132 starts) in blue and white. The Albany, N.Y., native also led the Nittany Lions to an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2010-11, their first in a decade at the time.

Battle – who also spent two seasons as an assistant at Northwestern, where he coached his younger brother and Wildcats all-time leading scorer Boo Buie – now will be tasked with helping Penn State return to the Big Dance for the first time since the 2022-23 season and just the 11th time in the program's 129-year history.

As for Ohio State, Diebler will now have to find another assistant coach to fill out his 2024-25 staff.

Diebler's staff currently includes associate head coach Joel Justus and assistants Dave Dickerson, Luke Simons and Jamall Walker.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Walk-on guard Colby Baumann told the Dispatch that he will not return to the program and will instead graduate this spring to begin his pursuit of owning and operating his own sports complex. The departure of Baumann – who appeared in 16 games and totaled five points, four rebounds and three assists over his three-year career – likely leaves Ohio State with two open roster spots for the 2025-26 season, assuming senior Kalen Etzler also decides to leave the program and begin his postgraduate career.



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Women's Hoops Program Stuck In Neutral

By **BOBBY GORBET**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite boasting talents such as All-American Jacy Sheldon and All-Big Ten players Cotie McMahon, Celeste Taylor and Jaloni Cambridge, Ohio State has combined for just two NCAA tournament wins in the last two seasons.

Plagued by an apparent lack of team chemistry and inconsistencies on both ends of the floor in 2024-25, Ohio State played its worst basketball at the end of the year for the second straight season. To finish 2023-24, Ohio State entered the postseason with a win over eventual national-runner-up Iowa and the Big Ten regular-season championship under its belt but made quick exits in both the Big Ten tournament and NCAA tournament after losing to Maryland in the conference bracket and being bounced out of NAAs in the second round by No. 7 seed Duke.

It was an all-too-familiar tale for the Buckeyes in the postseason this year. After winning their first 17 games of the 2024-25 season, they stumbled into the postseason winning just four of their final eight regular-season games.

Then, in the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State narrowly defeated Iowa 60-59, before being dominated by UCLA, an eventual Final Four team, 75-46.

Despite the late-season slide, the Buckeyes still held onto a No. 4 NCAA seed, meaning they would host first- and second-round NCAA tournament games for the second year in a row. But just like the year before, the Buckeyes' season ended in front of their home fans at Value City Arena when they lost 82-67 to No. 5 seed Tennessee.

According to The Columbus Dispatch's Ohio State women's basketball beat reporter Brianna Mac Kay, the Buckeyes' once-promising season was ultimately doomed by a lack of team chemistry.

"I just felt like they never connected as a team," Mac Kay said. "It was never like a fluid team playing. It was a bunch of individuals on the court who were really talented. Cotie McMahon was talented, Jaloni Cambridge was talented, and it just wasn't working."

To make matters worse for the Buckeyes, just four days after their season-ending loss to Tennessee, McMahon – a two-time All-Big Ten first-team forward and the team's leading scorer in 2024-25 – entered the transfer portal, and she has since found a home at Ole Miss.

With the Buckeyes seemingly entering into a period of uncertainty following some postseason disappointments and the departure of McMahon, Buckeye Sports Bulletin talked to Land-Grant Holy Land women's basketball beat writer Thomas Costello, Mac Kay and former player and current color commentator for the women's basketball team Kristin Watt to get their outlook on the program.

Disappointing Finish Caps Solid Season

Mac Kay was far from the only one who felt as though the Buckeyes struggled to reach their full potential. Head coach Kevin McGuff himself became frustrated with his



SONNY BROCKWAY

SCHISM — There seemed to be a disconnect among teammates and between coach Kevin McGuff (right) and his players that led to another disappointing end of the season. McGuff was unhappy with the inconsistency, and star player Cotie McMahon (left) seemingly criticized the program for a lack of passion upon announcing her entry into the transfer portal.

team's failure to play their best for an entire game.

"The thing we've been really trying to impress upon them is just consistency," McGuff told reporters during a media availability on March 6 ahead of the Big Ten tournament. "I think our good is good enough, but last year we played more consistently towards 40 minutes for most of the season. This year, we really haven't gotten that. When we've been good, I think we were probably better than last year, but last year's team was way more consistent."

If there was any stretch during which the Buckeyes appeared to play at a high level for all 40 minutes, it was early in the season. Not only did the Buckeyes defeat all of their nonconference opponents – a group composed of 10 mid-majors and just one Power Four team – but in all but one game they won by at least 20 points. Even early in Big Ten play, the Buckeyes had no real issues getting past lesser Big Ten teams such as Illinois, Rutgers and Northwestern.

It wasn't until a Jan. 19 game against a Penn State team that finished the year just 1-17 in the Big Ten that Ohio State suffered its first loss, despite McMahon and junior guard Chance Gray combining for 37 points.

According to Costello, it was in that game that Ohio State's issues with chemistry first started to show.

"It's hard to avoid hindsight when looking at everything because Cotie leaving – I know there's nothing confirmed – but there have been stories that things had not been great team-chemistry wise, with players not getting along and whatnot," Costello said. "But if you just look at some of the games, there was evidence there. The Penn State game was a big part of it, where you had Cotie and Chance Gray playing fantastic. If you had any of them connecting with other people, or if you had strong team chemistry, (other players) are feeding off of that. They should beat Penn State handily."

From there, the Buckeyes never really found their stride. McGuff's group won each of their next three games by 10 points or fewer, and during a road trip to Los Angeles they were defeated by UCLA 65-52 and humiliated by USC 84-63. After winning four of their next five games, they ended the regular season with a 93-90 overtime loss to Maryland.

The Buckeyes may have looked best early in the season, but according to Costello, that was more of a product of their lackluster competition, which in the long run did the team more harm than good.

"Everything before (the Penn State game) was just a really bad nonconference schedule," Costello said. "I don't think they did themselves any favors. They weren't challenged at all."

The Buckeyes' issues with chemistry in 2024-25 are hard to quantify. What isn't hard to quantify is Ohio State's struggles to rebound. With a minus-2.2 rebounding margin, Ohio State finished 254th out of 353 Division-I teams.

"As always, they weren't rebounding," Mac Kay said. "They only had (graduate forward) Ajae Petty rebounding, and your team's never going to win if you don't have someone rebounding."

As Mac Kay pointed out, the Buckeyes' struggles to rebound are nothing new. In 2023-24, McGuff's group was even worse on the glass and finished the year with a minus-2.4 rebounding margin, 257th nationally. The last time the Buckeyes had a positive rebounding margin was in 2019-20, and even that year their 0.6 rebounding margin was only the 167th-best mark in the country.

According to Costello, the Buckeyes' rebounding issues are in part due to the McGuff system, which often has players trying to find their place in the full-court press defense rather than attempting to grab an offensive board.

"McGuff, he's talked about it before,"

Costello said. "There are a couple of ways you can get more possessions. One of them is rebounding, the other one is turning them over. I think McGuff's system relies heavily on the second part, the turning them over part that he's willing to give up rebounds for turnovers."

Scheme and system aside, Watt feels as though the Buckeyes can make improvements in rebounding by simply sticking to fundamentals.

"One of the shortest players on the team was Jaloni, and Jaloni did a nice job of rebounding and that was because of hustle and desire and getting to the ball and knowing where to go," Watt said. "But it also has to do with putting a body on someone, and it's been frustrating not to see someone put a body on someone – basic rebounding X's and O's and you have to want to do it."

McMahon Transfer Concerning For Buckeyes

Dating back to last season, McMahon seemed like the least likely candidate to transfer from Ohio State, as it was during that year McMahon indicated she would spend the rest of her career in Columbus.

"It doesn't stop here," McMahon said last season after winning the Big Ten title. "I have two years to grow with this team and the teams coming in."

In the months leading up to Ohio State's season, McMahon even stepped up as the team's vocal leader. But as the season went on McMahon became increasingly frustrated. Her frustrations began to boil over in the team's loss to Maryland, when she held up her middle fingers to opposing fans from the team bench toward the end of the contest. Shortly after the Buckeyes' loss to Tennessee, McMahon flew through the post-game handshake line while appearing to talk trash to Tennessee players on the other end of the sideline.

"I'm very frustrated, simple as that," McMahon said after the loss.

Then in an Instagram story on March 24, McMahon hinted at a departure from the program saying, "(I) want to be surrounded with people who have the same fight, same passion and love for the game just as much as I do."

With some of her frustration on display down the stretch, none of the three subjects interviewed was surprised to see McMahon ultimately enter the transfer portal, but to Mac Kay, McMahon's apparent opinion of the program expressed via her Instagram story isn't exactly encouraging.

"We all know Cotie McMahon can be a little emotional, but I think the feelings have to come from somewhere," Mac Kay said. "If she's saying, 'I want to be around people who want to win,' and then she leaves, that's a big concern. I don't think the transfer itself would be as big of a concern if it wasn't for everything around it."

Her legacy with the Buckeyes may be more complicated now that she's in the portal, but McMahon's accomplishments in Columbus are undeniable. Averaging 15.1 points per game on 51.0 percent shooting, McMahon won Big Ten Freshman of the Year in 2022-23 and helped lead Ohio State to its first Elite Eight appearance in

30 years. After a slight dip in production as a sophomore, McMahon led Ohio State in scoring, averaging a career-high 16.5 points per game, and even developed a three-point shot, making 37.4 percent of her attempts from deep in her most recent season.

McMahon's on-the-court skill set isn't lost on Costello, but he feels it's possible the team's chemistry will improve in 2025-26.

"Losing Cotie McMahon, you cannot replace her on the roster," Costello said. "There's nobody on the roster who can do what Cotie McMahon did, and looking at the transfer portal, there's no other Cotie McMahon except Cotie McMahon. But I think the fact that other people didn't follow tells you that maybe there was something else going on that (McMahon leaving) could possibly help the team chemistry-wise. Maybe the team chemistry is going to be better.

"Two, it was really only Cotie (who left). There are bigger program problems if Cotie is leaving and then everyone is jumping ship. I think at that point you start to ask serious questions about what is going on at the university and how is the program being run, but that didn't happen."

OSU Program Has Unknown Ceiling

As difficult a blow as McMahon's entry into the transfer portal was, it wasn't the source of frustration for many fans, but rather the tip of the iceberg. In 12 years with the Buckeyes, McGuff has had an undeniable level of success. Ohio State has won 276 of 389 games under McGuff, for an impressive .710 winning percentage, including vacated wins. The Buckeyes have won or shared a regular-season title of the Big Ten four times and made three Sweet 16s and one Elite Eight.

Entering year 13 of the McGuff era, though, it remains to be seen if the Buckeyes can consistently compete with the nation's best teams. If year 12 is any evidence – a year in which Ohio State was defeated three times by eventual No. 1 seeds in the NCAA tournament USC and UCLA, losing those matchups by an average of 21 points – the Buckeyes' chances of becoming a national contender anytime soon don't seem great.

"Absolutely, I can empathize with all of the frustration," Watt said. "I do radio, but I'm also a fan. It's my alma mater, so it is frustrating. It's also, for me, sad because you have this group of people together at one point in time where they can do something great, and this team had that potential. To me, I thought this team had more talent and potential and depth than they did last year, and they still ended up struggling to get to the Sweet 16."

The momentary halt in the momentum of the program is nothing new. In a sport dominated by dynasties, elite coaches and superstar players, Ohio State has always struggled to defeat true national contenders, regardless of who has led the program. Dating back to the beginning of the program, the Buckeyes have made the Final Four only once. According to Watt, each of the Buckeyes' coaches since Tara VanDerveer has had their own issues.

"Tara left at the top. (Nancy Darsch) had the program going strong, and then she struggled with recruiting. That's, I think, the No. 1 reason why she lost her job," Watt said. "(Beth Burns) struggled with relation-

ships with the team, and that was relatively short-lived. (Jim Foster) had great success, and then he left because he just couldn't get over that hump, and he was very close. And then McGuff came in, and he's built a strong program, (but) here we are again, talking about the hump," Watt said.

Getting over the hump is not an easy issue to overcome. As Watt pointed out, there are plenty of programs like the Buckeyes that have struggled to reach the same national-contender plateau.

One prominent obstacle in the way of programs on the rise is obtaining the type of superstar talent so many of the recent Final Four teams have had. As any women's college basketball fan knows, Iowa's recent run of success wouldn't have been possible without Caitlin Clark. UCLA and USC may not have earned their No. 1 seeds in the NCAA tournament this year without the likes of Lauren Betts and JuJu Watkins, and three-time unanimous first-team All-American Paige Bueckers helped Connecticut snap a 10-year national-title drought this year.

But each of the three interviewees agreed that the Buckeyes haven't been lacking in the superstar department.

With four-time All-America guard Kelsey Mitchell leading the team from 2014-18, Sheldon starting at point guard from 2019-24 and McMahon leading the way in 2024-25, Ohio State has had an All-American talent on the roster for the vast majority of McGuff's tenure. The issue, according to Costello, has been surrounding those leaders with other great players.

"Schools like South Carolina and UConn, especially – just talking about the teams in the championship game. You could extend that out to LSU and now, even Tennessee and other SEC programs, they're getting multiple (highly touted recruits) like that a year. South Carolina has eight or nine McDonald's All-Americans on their team, and Ohio State has (one signed out of high school)."

The good news for the Buckeyes is the one McDonald's All-American who signed to the team out of high school has plenty of talent and eligibility remaining. Cambridge, the former No. 2 overall recruit in the 2024 class, lived up to all of the hype in her freshman season. On the way to earning first-team All-Big Ten status, the Nashville native averaged 15.4 points, 4.5 rebounds and 3.9 assists. With three years of eligibility remaining, Cambridge is a player the Buckeyes can build the program around.

According to Mac Kay, in order to do that the Buckeyes have to be proactive in the portal and surround her with other talented players.

"They need a rebounder. They have to get someone a little more dynamic next to Jaloni," Mac Kay said. "It can't just be Jaloni and the Buckeyes. There have to be big pieces coming in or nothing is going to change. It's going to be another second-round exit next year."

In the changing landscape of collegiate sports, talent acquisition requires money, and Costello believes it's unlikely the Buckeyes have as many NIL resources as a program such as USC or UCLA, possibly due to the program's focus on football.

"If I were just looking at the signs, looking at the programs, who you're bringing in, the recruits that you have coming in," Costello said, "I would say Ohio State is not

at the top around USC or UCLA, but I'd say they're close."

With fewer NIL resources and recent struggles as compared to many of the national contenders, it's a tall task for the Ohio State coaching staff to get the program to a point where it's competing for national championships. But Costello said it's hard to complain about the results McGuff has achieved.

"They've had two Big Ten titles in the last four years, they made it to an Elite Eight. They've hosted the (first and second round of the NCAA tournament) the last three years," Costello said. "If you just read off the positives that have happened, I mentioned Jaloni Cambridge is the highest-rated recruit that Ohio State's had in program history.

"If you listed all that out, do you think most schools are going to replace that? No, probably not. This might come off as rash, but does Ohio State care enough to go away from that, try an unknown, or splash huge, huge money on a big-name elite coach? And could you even get them away from their current school? No, I don't think Ohio State

cares enough to do that."

With McGuff seemingly fairly secure in his spot as the Buckeyes' leader, it's easy to see why fans could worry the program has hit a ceiling with him at the helm. But despite all of the limitations the program may have, Watt is optimistic the best is still ahead of the Buckeyes under McGuff.

"I think they have the ability," Watt said when asked if Ohio State could reach the Final Four under McGuff. "They have great recruiters, they have great program backing, they have a great fan base. The difference that we're talking about is one or two games – that's it. It's one or two games and coming prepared for that one or two games. This would have been a stupendous year in the Big Ten for Ohio State but for the fact that you had two of the top-four teams in the country also here.

"Would we be talking this way if Ohio State had won the Big Ten championship? I don't know. But as the competition gets tougher, teams have to get better. I think there's still a lot of upside with this program, and I'm excited to see what that is."

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Bucks Host Visits For Potential Transfers

Ohio State took its first steps in rebuilding for next season when it reportedly hosted former Boston College guard T'Yana Todd on an official visit on April 9.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

Todd, a 6-0 guard out of Vaughan in Ontario, Canada, averaged 12.0 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.5 assists over three years with the Eagles. Her best year was the most recent season, when as a junior she led the team in scoring, averaging 13.7 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game on 43.3 percent shooting.

Todd's biggest strength is her three-point shooting. In 2024-25, Todd made 45.9 percent of her three-point shots, the fourth-best mark in the country.

According to Letterman Row, the Buckeyes will have plenty of competition for Todd. The former Eagle has received interest from other Power Four programs and also visited Tennessee.

A product of IMG Academy, Todd has started in 72 of the 87 games she has appeared in with the Eagles and will have one year of eligibility remaining wherever she ends up.

The Buckeyes also hosted an official visit from Arizona State forward Kennedy Basham, which took place from April 13-14.

In her first year with the Sun Devils after transferring from Oregon, Basham averaged 5.7 points and 6.5 rebounds on 42.9 percent shooting. But standing at 6-7, Basham is more known for her defensive presence.

The Phoenix native averaged a team-high 2.6 blocks per game while starting in 25 of 32 games last season. Basham is somewhat limited offensively and has av-

eraged only 4.4 points per game over her three-year collegiate career while shooting 41.5 percent from the field, but she uses her size well and has averaged 4.3 rebounds per game in three years in college.

Like Todd, Basham has one more year of eligibility remaining.

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes had not received a commitment from any player in the transfer portal.

Cotie McMahon Transfers To Ole Miss

Two-time first-team All-Big Ten forward Cotie McMahon, Ohio State's leading-scorer this past season, officially found her new school. Over two weeks after entering the transfer portal, McMahon committed to Ole Miss on April 10.

In three seasons with the Buckeyes, McMahon averaged 15.3 points and 5.5 rebounds while starting all 97 games she appeared in.

She averaged a career-best 16.5 points per game in 2024-25 but showed signs of frustration down the stretch of the season. After Ohio State's season-ending loss to Tennessee in the second round of the NCAA tournament on March 23, McMahon let reporters know how she felt.

"I'm very frustrated, simple as that," McMahon said.

McMahon will now join an Ole Miss team coming off its second Sweet 16 appearance in the last three years. She has one year of eligibility remaining and is only the latest transfer portal addition by the Rebels. Head coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin has signed five players from the portal, including former UCF guard Kaitlin Peterson, who averaged 21.4 points per game last season.

Cambridge Makes Kelsey Plum's "Dawg Class"

Freshman point guard Jalon Cambridge was honored for her outstanding freshman season on April 9, when she was one of 12 players selected to Kelsey Plum's "Dawg



SONNY BROCKWAY

RECOGNIZED — Ohio State freshman guard Jalon Cambridge was selected by Kelsey Plum for her "Dawg Class" and will attend a three-day camp held by the three-time WNBA all-star to help women college athletes "bridge the gap to a professional level."

Class."

The "Dawg Class" was started by Plum, a three-time WNBA all-star, a current guard for the Los Angeles Sparks and the second all-time leading scorer in women's college basketball history, in partnership with Under Armour.

The camp, designed to "help women college athletes bridge the gap to a professional level" will last three days and, in addition to Cambridge, features other talented guards such as 2025 NCAA tournament Most Outstanding Player Azzi Fudd of UConn, along with three-time All-Big Ten first-teamer Shyanne Sellers of Maryland.

Cambridge's inclusion in the camp comes after an impressive first collegiate season. In 29 games, the former No. 2 overall recruit in the 2024 class averaged 15.4 points, 4.5 rebounds and 3.9 assists on the way to being named the Big Ten Freshman of the Year and making the All-Big Ten first team.

Now with McMahon headed to Ole Miss, Cambridge will likely take on an even bigger role offensively for the Buckeyes next season.

Buckeyes Finish No. 19 In Final Top 25

In the Associated Press' final top-25 poll,

Ohio State finished at No. 19. It is the Buckeyes' fourth straight placement in either the final AP top-25 rankings or the final coaches' poll rankings.

The Buckeyes were included in the top 25 every week the rankings were released after opening the season at No. 14. They were ranked as high as No. 8 after winning 20 of their first 21 games but ultimately tumbled down to No. 15 after losing 4 of 8 games to finish the regular season. After their 82-67 loss to Tennessee in the second round of the NCAA tournament, the Buckeyes ended the year dropping four spots in the final rankings.

The top 25 was led by national champion UConn, which was unanimously ranked No. 1. Elsewhere, Tennessee was ranked at No. 15 in the final poll after defeating the Buckeyes and making it to the Sweet 16.

As a conference, the Big Ten had a solid showing with five teams featured in the final poll including No. 3 UCLA, No. 5 USC, No. 12 Maryland and No. 25 Michigan. The five teams in the final rankings for the Big Ten were tied for the second most in the country with the ACC and the Big 12 and were behind only the SEC, which had eight teams in the final top 25.



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Getting Roster In Order Next On Agenda

One season ends, and the next begins almost immediately.

That's the way it goes in this era of college athletics as coaches try to navigate the combination of recruiting prospects, enticing transfers, retaining current players and facing the reality that NIL (name, image and likeness) is finding its way into hockey.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"It's just turn the page," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik told BSB two weeks after the Buckeyes lost 8-3 to Boston University in the first round of the NCAA Toledo Regional on March 27.

The transfer portal runs from March 30 to May 13, and Ohio State has seen five players exit while bringing in two so far.

"You've got to figure out what your needs are," he said. "Just a really crazy process. It's squeeze everything into a short window and try to get to know guys and figure out what you need. It's not like a nine-month window. It's not getting any easier. I think, if anything, things continue to get cloudier out there when you're looking at a transfer."

When eyeing who's available in the transfer market, the priority is filling a need. That may seem obvious, but sometimes that means passing on a quality player at a different position.

"If you need a goalie, you better get a goalie," Rohlik said. "You can't go out and say, 'We'll just get a D (defenseman) and forget the goalie.'"

An NCAA rule limiting rosters to 26 players that goes into effect for the 2025-26 season will also have an impact. Rohlik usually has 27 or 28 on his team.

"That's a big deal," he said. "Where in the past you might have flexibility to maybe bring in one more forward or one more D, now 26 is 26. So, like I said earlier, need is your No. 1 priority, 'OK, we need this D or that D so we bring in a couple D and then it's looking at who are the top players out there.'"

Another change is the elimination of the bonus year because of COVID-19. The 2024-25 season was the last an athlete could be eligible for five seasons.

The Buckeyes greatly benefited this past season from having five-year players such as transfers Gunnarwolfe Fontaine and Aiden Hansen-Bukata and homegrown players Joe Dunlap and Patrick Guzzo.

Fontaine led the team with 40 points (17 goals, 23 assists). Hansen-Bukata was one of the highest scoring defensemen in the country with 31 points (two goals, 29 assists) and topped the Buckeyes in assists.

Guzzo was a co-captain and Dunlap an alternate captain and both were instrumental in OSU reaching the Big Ten title game. Each spent their entire career with the Buckeyes.

Still, Rohlik is glad to see the bonus year waiver eliminated.

"Honestly, I think it's a good thing," he said. "Now it takes one less thing out of the

mix where you're asking is he staying? Is he going? Obviously, for us, it was fantastic to have those guys. It was a great year by both our fifth-year guys (Guzzo and Dunlap), but I think moving forward it makes things a little bit easier, taking one variable out of the equation."

As a result, there likely will be fewer older players in college hockey, although Rohlik notes that many freshmen come in as 20-year-olds after playing junior hockey.

"You're still going to be able to grab some of those quote, unquote, older guys," he said. "I don't think that's going away, but maybe without that extra year you're not going to see the 25-year-olds, but you still might see 23s and 24s."

Another change for the upcoming season is the ability to bring in players from the Canadian Hockey League system, which for years has been deemed by the NCAA as a professional league because some of its players were drafted and signed by NHL clubs but were allowed to return to their respective junior clubs to develop.

Because of those signees, the entire league and its players were "tainted" by professionalism and thus ineligible to play for a U.S. college program.

That is no longer the case, and more than 1,000 players have become eligible for U.S. colleges beginning with the 2025-26 season.

"Let's say it's a real big unknown," Rohlik said. "It's another source for college teams – more players, bigger pool but more question marks, especially when you haven't done much recruiting up there."

Coming And Going

Of the five Buckeyes who transferred out, only defenseman Theo Wallberg played significant minutes. The sophomore, a sixth-round pick by the Ottawa Senators in 2022, had eight assists in 27 games and was plus-13 this season but did not play the final three postseason games.

He committed to Western Michigan prior to the Broncos winning their first NCAA championship on April 12 by defeating Boston University.

Junior goalie Reilly Herbst played just three games, none in 2024-25, and was the third-stringer behind Kristoffer Eberly and Logan Terness the past two seasons.

Senior forward Caden Brown played just two games this past season with a goal and an assist and has another year of eligibility. Junior forward John Larkin played 19 career games with one goal while freshman forward Dylan Godbout had one assist in 14 games. He transferred to St. Thomas.

The Buckeyes secured the services of one of the top forwards in the portal, senior-to-be Adam Eisele from Minnesota State. He has 59 career points (25 goals, 34 assists) in 107 games and centered the top line last season when he produced 13 goals and 13 assists in 26 games.

OSU assistant coach Paul Kirtland was an assistant at Minnesota State when Eisele was a freshman.

Also arriving will be Alaska (Fairbanks) defenseman Broten Sabo, who had 21 points (eight goals, 13 assists) the past season as a sophomore.

There are five incoming freshmen to date:

forwards Niall Crocker (6-4, 196), Prince Albert, Western Hockey League; Landen Gunderson (6-1, 190), Sioux City, United States Hockey League; and Jake Karabela (5-11, 187), Guelph, Ontario Hockey League; defenseman Bryce Ingles (5-9, 181), Sioux Falls; USHL; and goalie Dawson Labre (6-3, 185), West Kelowna, British Columbia Hockey League.

BSB will have an in-depth look at the roster in the May issue.

Moving On

Junior defenseman Damien Carfagna left school early as a free agent to sign a two-year entry-level contract with the Edmonton Oilers on March 31.

He had seven goals and 21 assists for 28 points last season but was injured in the loss to Boston U. He was assigned to Bakersfield of the American Hockey League while he rehabbed from the injury.

- Fontaine signed with Iowa of the AHL, the top farm team of the Minnesota Wild, on April 2.

- Hansen-Bukata signed a standard amateur tryout contract (ATO) with the Syracuse Crunch (AHL) on April 3. The Crunch are affiliated with the Tampa Bay Lightning.

- Guzzo, OSU's career games-played leader with 171, signed an ATO with the Manitoba Moose on April 4. The Moose play in Winnipeg along with the parent Winnipeg Jets.

- Dunlap also inked an AHL deal. On April 8 he joined Laval, the affiliate of the Montreal Canadiens.

- Senior defenseman Brent Johnson

scored in his first professional game on April 4 with the Wheeling Nailers of the Double-A level ECHL.

"You look at all these guys getting opportunities at the pro level, and to me, that's what it's all about," Rohlik said. "A lot of those guys are going to have their degree in their pocket as well, and (Hansen-Bukata), he's close to putting his master's in his pocket. It's really impressive. I'm excited about their opportunities."

"It's why you come here, to take advantage of the resources that we have, and I really believe in our development process. When you have that many guys getting an opportunity at the next level, you're doing something right."

Once A Buckeye

The Ohio State-Michigan rivalry probably doesn't mean much to the fine folks in Manitoba, but that didn't stop Guzzo, a native of Marysville, Mich., from getting in a few digs.

When asked by the Moose social media staff about fond memories of his time at OSU, he said, "I mean, it was awesome. I'm from Michigan, so obviously being at Ohio State my family still is, 'Why did you end up at Ohio State?' But no, it was great."

He got in a couple of shots talking about playing two outdoor games for the Buckeyes: "Yeah, 2-0 against Michigan so I want to put that out there for sure. The first one at Cleveland was unbelievable ... and then the one at Wrigley (Field) under the lights, great atmosphere. And to get the win against Michigan, it's always a little bit nicer."

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

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Bucks Baseball Suffers Two B1G Sweeps

Ohio State was able to earn its first Big Ten series win against a West Coast team when Oregon visited Columbus for three games from March 28-29, but the Buckeyes didn't have that same luck when they went on the road to Los Angeles, where USC took all three games.

FROM THE STRETCH Greg Wilson

For the first game of the series, it was the same story the Buckeyes have grown accustomed to when Drew Erdmann started on the mound, walking three batters, hitting two and tossing two wild pitches. He gave up five earned runs in the 3²/₃ innings he pitched and had just two strikeouts.

Nik Copenhagen and Gavin Kuzniewski were able to clean up the free bases the rest of the game, not allowing the Trojans to score another run, but the Buckeye offense managed to get only three across the plate on seven hits and two walks.

Catcher Mason Eckelman, who had a .289/.405/.607 slash line as BSB went to press, and shortstop Lee Ellis (.281 average) were the only two Buckeye batters who were able to reach base multiple times.

Eckelman did so with a double and a single while Ellis added a walk and a single to his game.

Ohio State sent five pitchers to the mound for the second game of the series, with Ryan Butler earning the start and giving up three runs in 3¹/₃ innings while walking three and hitting one Trojan batter.

Douglas Bauer, Hunter Shaw, Blaine Wynk and Zak Sigman combined for just two more walks the rest of the contest but had the issue of getting hit, giving up nine and allowing eight more runs to score.

The Buckeyes struck first in the third game of the weekend when Tyler Pettorini launched a home run to right field in the top of the first inning, but that lead didn't last long when the Trojans put up five runs combined in the second and third innings. With Jake Michalak not making it out of the third, the Buckeyes were forced to use six bullpen arms. Those arms pitched well, but it wasn't enough to take the win as Charlie Giese and Zev Salsberg each gave up a run in the bottom of the ninth to fall 10-9 on a walk-off single.

That same luck bled into the midweek game against Kent State on April 9 that the Buckeyes lost 8-3 and the first game of the next conference series against Minnesota on April 11 as well. Both the Golden Gophers and Buckeyes came into the series with a 2-10 conference record, sitting at the bottom of the league and trying to separate

themselves. But Ohio State was not successful in doing so.

"We just didn't play well enough to earn the opportunity to win," head coach Justin Haire said after the game. "They scored nine with two outs – nine of their 10 runs. Six of their guys got on by walk, hit by pitch or error. We couldn't get off the field, and we put up four zeros at the end of the game offensively."

Haire's disappointment with how the pitching and defensive side of the ball performed is nothing new given the gaudy team ERA (8.96) and free bases given up (277) this year. But as he said, the offense struggled to come through when it was most needed as well, even though the opportunity was very much there, according to the head coach.

"The over-the-top righthander (Cole Selvig) and the lefthander (Will Whelan), I mean, they were throwing nothing but fastballs," he said. "Literally in every facet of the game, we just didn't play well enough to earn the opportunity to win. That's frustrating. That's basically the story of the game in a nutshell."

Butler was given the opportunity to keep the game in check, coming in for multiple innings of relief for Erdmann in the Friday game, and he was able to escape some trouble and throw strikes for the most part, giving up just one earned run in nearly four innings of work.

He had been having trouble with consistency over the length of the season but felt good after being able to stay inside the zone for an entire appearance.

"It was nice to come back after my last start," he said. "It's been a rough few weeks for me, just not throwing strikes. It comes through waves. It's the first time I've experienced struggling with throwing strikes at times. Walking guys is not a part of who I am, so it just feels nice to fill up the zone and feel more in rhythm than I have in the past."

The Buckeyes had a strong rally going in the fifth inning, scoring three runs and with Maddix Simpson on second base with two outs representing the tying run. But Simpson ran the Buckeyes out of the inning when he attempted to take third on a pitch in the dirt, not realizing the ball didn't get far away from the catcher and being thrown out to end the rally. The Buckeyes didn't score a run after that inning.

"He's just trying to make a play right there," Haire said. "You never want to make the third out at third base. But hindsight is 20/20, and obviously, I wish he wouldn't have been thrown out there. He wishes he wouldn't have gotten thrown out there. That'll be a learning experience for him and for our guys."

Ohio State went into the next day and lost its seventh straight game, managing to get only two runs across the plate against the Golden Gophers and allowing nine to score. Those runs were largely the product of free bases yet again. Gopher hitters walked 12 times, were hit by two pitches and advanced on three wild pitches in the game, also taking advantage of one error.

In the midst of the ugly performance, right fielder Trey Lipsey provided the Buckeyes with a highlight, robbing what would

have been a three-run home run by scaling the wall and getting the ball in quickly enough to keep the runners on base from scoring. The catch made the "SportsCenter" top 10 for April 12, but OSU still lost 9-2.

The Buckeyes played a close game against Minnesota to try to avoid the sweep, but they weren't able to do so, falling 6-4 due to another sloppy all-around performance. They committed four errors on the day and walked seven batters while hitting three more and adding another wild pitch.

The season as a whole has been a tough one for Haire and the Buckeyes, but he understands that the players want to get into the win column just as much as he does. They just have to figure out how to fix the issues that have been plaguing them, if that's possible at this point of the year with just over a month to go to the Big Ten tournament.

"We've got great kids in our program. We've got guys that care. They care about Ohio State, they care about Buckeye baseball," Haire said. "They put a lot into it. My frustration and their frustration are the same, and it hurts them just like it hurts us. That's part of going through hard things together. You have to fight off adversity. The game will chew you up and spit you out if you let it. Those guys are feeling it right now too."

Ohio State currently sits at dead last in the 18-team conference with a 2-13 conference record. It will have to climb into the top 12 with 15 Big Ten games remaining on the schedule in order to qualify for the conference tournament, which there is a small possibility of doing if they have some help.

Buckeyes To Play At Wrigley Field

Ohio State baseball will get the opportunity to play at Wrigley Field this season when it goes on the road for a three-game conference series against Northwestern.

The first game of the three on Friday, May 9, will be at the home of the Chicago Cubs set for a 6 p.m. Central Standard Time first pitch, making it the second time this season the Buckeyes will have the opportunity to play at a major-league ballfield. The Buckeyes competed in the College Baseball Series at Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, from Feb. 28-March 2, taking three losses that weekend.

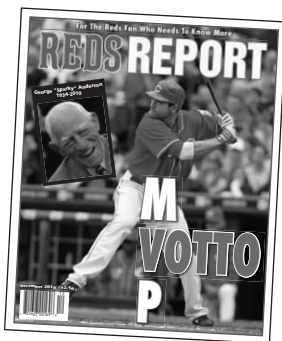
The Buckeyes will get to play just one game at the historic venue – they close out the series with a pair of games at Rocky and Berenice Miller Park in Evanston, Ill. – but join Ohio State's football and men's and women's ice hockey programs, which have also played a game at Wrigley Field this academic year.

Men's hockey won 4-3 over Michigan on Jan. 3, women's hockey won in a shootout over Wisconsin on Jan. 4 after a 3-3 tie through regulation, and football beat Northwestern 31-7 on Nov. 16, so the baseball team will try to keep up the school's winning streak at the venue.

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The Ever Changing Face of Spring Football

No one can deny the fact that college football has changed within the past three decades, and there is no more of an example of that change than the way football programs deal with spring practices and spring games. The days of physical spring practices with a ton of full-go contact are a thing of the past. Due to the lengthened season along with the size and speed of today's athletes, keeping players healthy is a major goal of college football coaches. Those coaches need to get through spring practices without losing players to major injuries prior to the fall season. The NCAA has limited the number of spring practices and the amount of full contact teams can have during that time. College coaches are glad to go along with these limitations.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

One dilemma coaches deal with today is the effect of the spring transfer portal. Coaches need to come out of spring practice with a good idea of who their two-deep lineup is going to be heading into August camp. At the same time, they know some of their players will opt out for a new home as soon as that spring portal opens. Of course, those same coaches may be able to pick up some players during that same portal window. Fortunately for Ohio State, the coaching staff has lost very few top, talented players to the portal while being very selective in bringing in quality transfers. Ryan Day is careful to bring in excellent football talent as well as players who fit in culturally to the program.

Spring game formats have also evolved as much as spring practices in recent years. Many colleges have replaced the typical four-quarter game with a variety of structured activities such as open spring practices, skill contests, showcases, and various options short of a full-contact scrimmage. Some Division I programs have even dropped their spring games altogether. Even Ohio State has very limited contact during its spring game while providing a number of events and fan experiences. As much as the emphasis has changed around spring games, Day has maintained the traditional structure in many ways, short of a full-contact scrimmage.

Quarterback Clarity

The hierarchy at the quarterback position for next fall seems more defined after the spring game. The competition between Julian Sayin and Lincoln Kienholz still exists, but Sayin seems to be inching ahead. Sayin seemed more comfortable at the position showing good timing on his release, accuracy and placement. He put the ball on the money on the out routes and was able to fit it in small windows vertically. Despite being nearly three inches shorter than Kienholz, Sayin

seems to be the more dependable signal caller at this point.

Kienholz did get more relaxed in the pocket as the scrimmage continued. Despite being off target early, his touch and ball placement definitely improved as the game progressed. His ability to escape the pocket under the limited defensive pressure was impressive.

True freshman Tavien St. Clair is No. 3 at the position in these early stages but may have a higher ceiling than both Sayin and Kienholz. He needs to get better at reading coverages and timing his release but can develop into a dual-threat quarterback with experience. He, like Kienholz, got better as the scrimmage progressed. St. Clair needs to display more patience and poise in the pocket, something which should come with time. He is a real talent who just needs more collegiate experience.

Abundance of Offensive Skill

Time will tell if Brian Hartline has the true reins of the offense this fall. He is an excellent position coach and showed a good mix of plays in the spring game. Developing a game plan and calling a game in the heat of battle has yet to be seen, but there is no question he has great football knowledge along with the skilled athletes to help those plans be successful.

Hartline again has a stable of receivers at the position. Emeka Egbuka isn't coming back, but Hartline has the consensus No. 1 wideout in the country in Jeremiah Smith. Smith finished last season with over 1,300 yards in receptions and 15 touchdowns. Adding to Smith are returnees Brandon Inniss and Carnell Tate along with some newer faces who showed promise in the spring game. Among that younger talent were redshirt freshman Mylan Graham and true freshman Quincy Porter. Graham caught four passes for 104 yards, leading the pack in receiving yards. He also tallied a touchdown by showing some breakaway speed in the open field. Porter illustrated sure hands in hauling in four receptions, and his 6-4 frame makes him a natural target for Buckeye quarterbacks.

The tight end position for the Buckeyes is impressive and deep. Leading the returning group is Will Kacmarek, the Ohio University transfer from a year ago. He is both a proven blocker as well as a receiving tight end. Despite being sidelined for four games last season with an injury, Kacmarek was one of the keys to the Buckeyes' success. Jelani Thurman and Bennett Christian also return at the tight end position with Thurman proving to be a solid target hauling in 42 yards in receptions last season. Add newer faces like Max LeBlanc, Purdue transfer Max Klare and Nate Roberts to the mix, and you have a tight end corps that displays physicality and versatility.

Running Back Competition Keen

The departure of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins to the NFL left the Buckeyes with a gaping hole at the running back position with very lit-

tle experience coming back. Sophomore James Peoples is the only returning back with double-digit carries at 49. While CJ Donaldson, the West Virginia transfer, is most likely to carry part of the load in the backfield this fall, freshman Bo Jackson was impressive in the spring game. The controlled scrimmage with limited contact and quick whistles didn't allow a good evaluation of the running back talent to the Buckeye fan base, but you can be assured the pecking order will be determined from the many practice reps in August camp prior to the season opener against Texas.

Defensive Backend Depth

New Buckeye defensive coordinator Matt Patricia comes to the program with a ton of experience, mostly in the professional ranks. How similar his defensive scheme will be in relation to the one Jim Knowles used at Ohio State is yet to be seen. Defensive coordinators are not about to give crucial elements of their system away on a nationally televised spring game where basic fronts and limited coverages are used. One thing is for certain, Patricia inherits some outstanding athletic talent in both the secondary and at the linebacker positions.

There is no better safety in college football returning than Caleb Downs. The Alabama transfer is Mr. Everything in the secondary. He is outstanding in coverage and run support. The Big Ten defensive back of the year anchors a backfield with a decent amount of experience. Malik Hartford also returns at the safety position, and though he never started a game, he was solid in performance with eight tackles and a pass breakup last season. Sophomore Jaylen McClain impressed in the spring game by breaking up a potential touchdown pass to Thurman. At cornerback, Davison Igbinosun, Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Lorenzo Styles Jr. played

in all 16 games last season, and all three were major contributors to the team's success. Styles played well in the spring game displaying mobility and range in pass defense. Patricia has enough talent in the defensive backfield to build on for the fall.

Senior Sonny Styles decided to stick around at linebacker for another season, and his transition to that position has been a huge success. His athleticism and toughness were on display again in the scrimmage. His 100 tackles last season were second only to fellow linebacker Cody Simon. Sonny, along with returners Arvell Reese, Payton Pierce and Michigan transfer Joey Velazquez, should solidify the linebacking position for Patricia this season.

Strength In Trenches Unknown

As good as the returning and new talent looks for the Buckeyes at the offensive and defensive skill positions, it's the abilities of the guys up front that likely will be the key to overall team success in 2025. A great team must own the trenches, and there are plenty of holes to fill on both sides of the ball. It's hard to evaluate the strength, toughness, athleticism, execution and endurance of offensive and defensive linemen in a spring game with so many limitations in such a controlled environment.

The true test for both coordinators and Day is to make all the pieces of the puzzle fit. To put together two units that can make and stop big plays, be consistent in performance, control the line of scrimmage, and match the offensive and defensive schemes to the talent is no easy task. That is what is expected every season at Ohio State, and that is what is expected in the season opener against the Texas Longhorns.



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New-Look Buckeyes Have Talent And Concerns

There is always a nervousness for coaches when they lose veteran leadership and a wealth of talent, but that is lessened a bit when you're the team standing at the top of the college football mountain and owner of the most recent national championship trophy.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Ryan Day finally achieved what many felt he might never, taking the Buckeyes to the national title with a historic run through the first-ever 12-team College Football Playoff. He showed more fire and passion and aggression than at any time in his coaching career in Columbus, and nearly all the calls for his head after the shocking loss to Michigan were silenced when OSU won the crown.

But last season is last season, and this season is approaching fast. There are a ton of new faces in important places, and it may surprise you to know that yours truly has thoughts on many of them coming out of spring practice.

Quarterbacks: Julian Sayin looked to be the most in command of the offense during the spring game, and his release is unequaled by anyone else on the squad. He seems comfortable in the pocket, though I do worry about his slight stature and am concerned about his passes getting knocked down at the line of scrimmage.

Lincoln Kienholz had a shaky start but rebounded nicely, and there was talk that he was the star of the scrimmage a week before the spring game. He has the size you like to see, especially if the Buckeyes

are going to run the football more this season, and as a veteran in the program he will almost certainly be comfortable in a game setting. It appears that there really is a competition, and the hope is that fans don't base starting ability on the spring game alone. The coaches have been watching these guys for 15 practices and will play the one they feel puts them in the best position to win football games.

While he will not play meaningful snaps this season, freshman Tavien St. Clair showed a bit in the spring game, including throwing what may have been the best pass of the day on the game's final play, a tight-window rocket to Philip Bell on a slant into the back of the end zone. His talents are intriguing, but he will need time to acclimate to the speed of the game and learn progressions.

Running Backs: West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson looked more explosive than he did as a Mountaineer, which could be attributed to dropping about 20 pounds since arriving in Columbus. He has great burst and is decisive with his cuts, and he should be a real asset in the backfield. Holdover James Peoples had his moments as well and should make a great 1-2 punch with Donaldson.

Freshman Bo Jackson hinted at big-time potential with a great mix of power and speed – and with a name like that and playing running back he has a lot to live up to. Sam Williams-Dixon had a couple of solid runs as well, and Ohio State is better for him deciding to withdraw from the transfer portal and stick with the team.

Receivers: While there weren't many "wow" moments from this bunch, everyone knows what they can do. Even with the loss of Emeka Egbuka, Ohio State still has the best and deepest receiver group in college football. As long as Jeremiah Smith is on hand, opposing teams will have nightmares figuring out ways to defend him. Carnell Tate would be a No. 1 receiver on just about any other team in America, which easily makes him the best No. 2 in college football.

Brandon Inniss could be ready to show his skills, but the kid that really flashed this spring was Mylan Graham. He did not arrive until summer last year and had a very limited role in 2024, but reports were that he was one of the hardest workers in the offseason, and it showed in the spring game. He has sticky hands and can get upfield in a hurry. He has a chance to be something special. Throw in Bryson Rodgers and freshmen Bell and Quincy Porter and you have a legitimate two-unit rotation, with little drop-off.

Until recently there had been a running joke about Ohio State nabbing big-time tight ends and then not utilizing them during their careers. That changed with Cade Stover, and the next man up looks to be Purdue transfer Max Klare. While secondaries are using two safeties to deal with OSU's wideouts, Klare will get the appetizing matchup with opposing linebackers. He's going to win that every time and should be a real weapon

down the seam. Jelani Thurman looks to have improved as well and has a chance to be a force in his own right. Throw in talented freshman Nate Roberts, and this is an excellent group.

Offensive Line: What's the old saying about there being strength in numbers? Well, the Buckeyes have a ton of bodies up front, and a bunch of them have experience. The interior looked really good, opening holes for some big runs, but the tackles were a bit inconsistent in protection – it was a little concerning given that there was no blitzing or exotic calls from the defensive front. There also were very few outside zone run calls, and they were a staple of last year's ground attack. Whether it's the backs being more geared toward power stuff inside or the coaches being concerned with the tackles holding up, that is a facet of the offense that will need to be examined.

It was nice to see Austin Siereveld out at right tackle after doing most of his work last season at a guard spot. He brings a lot of experience, as do fellow guards Tegra Tshabola and Luke Montgomery and center Carson Hinzman. Freshman Jake Cook got some work with the second unit, playing guard, and Ian Moore was the primary backup at left tackle to Rice transfer Ethan Onianwa. So there appear to be a lot of options, and if new line coach Tyler Bowen can develop as well as he recruits, then this could be maybe the second-best offensive unit for Ohio State this season.

Defensive Line: Normally a strength, this is one group where there is real concern. The unit lacks depth, which means it would not be at all surprising to see Ryan Day dip into the portal and nab a couple of guys. Kenyatta Jackson Jr. looks ready to explode at one end spot, and C.J. Hicks may have finally found a home as an edge rusher. Caden Curry and Eddrick Houston also have gotten their share of playing time and should be solid. Two guys to watch are Idaho State transfer Logan George, who was a problem rushing the passer all afternoon, and Tywone Malone Jr, who made his presence felt inside with a couple of nice run stops.

Linebacker: Once a position filled with star power, linebacker has dropped off a bit in recent seasons at Ohio State. So it will be comforting to know that this could arguably be the best unit for the defense in 2025. Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese are veterans who can find the football and yet are versatile enough to drift back into coverage or rush the passer from the line of scrimmage. Payton Pierce was all over the field and should find a lot of playing time, and freshman Riley Pettijohn has a bright, bright future ahead of him. Freshmen Tarvos Alford and Eli Lee also flashed potential, so this area appears to be teeming with talent and depth.

Secondary: Very few college teams can boast about having two excellent cover corners, but Ohio State is one of them thanks to Davison Igbinosun and Jermaine Mathews Jr. A few people were surprised when Igbinosun chose to re-

turn to OSU, but he knows he needed work on cleaning things up in coverage. While very physical, Igbinosun is looking to refine his technique to reduce the number of pass-interference penalties called against him. He led college football with 16 accepted penalties last season, a few of them in crucial situations. Mathews has looked like a star from the minute he arrived on campus and should be ready to burst onto the scene in 2025. Throw in veteran Lorenzo Styles Jr. and heralded freshman Devin Sanchez, and you have an excellent starting corps. Aaron Scott Jr is one to watch after he was prominent in the spring game.

Caleb Downs is the best defensive player in America and the leader of the unit, and his veteran presence should keep this group from missing a beat. There is some intrigue at the other safety spot, with Jaylen McClain and Malik Hartford vying for a starting role, and freshman Faheem Delane is also in the mix. Like the linebacker crew, the secondary is overflowing with talent and should be one of the best in the game.

FB Not The Only Game In Town

It's easy for other OSU sports to get lost in the wash while spring football is taking place, and that's a shame because there are three teams doing exceptionally well this spring.

The men's tennis team won its 19th straight Big Ten championship when it swept Northwestern on April 13, and that streak is the second-longest conference success in conference history. Only the Iowa wrestling team, which won 25 straight Big Ten titles from 1974 to 1998, has done better.

Coach Ty Tucker is in his 25th season at the helm of the program, and the Buckeyes have been right at the doorstep of winning the national title, making it to the semifinals twice and the finals once over the last three seasons. Heading into 2024-25, Tucker had led the Buckeyes to victories in nearly 88 percent of their matches, and he is largely responsible for molding Ohio State into a perennial powerhouse.

The women's softball team – led by first-year head coach Kirin Kumar – was 33-10-1 following a weekend series at Penn State and had clawed its way into the national rankings at No. 24. This is the fourth straight season of at least 30 wins for the Buckeyes. Ohio State was leading the nation in scoring (8.6 runs per game), home runs per game (2.4) and slugging percentage (.719), and were fourth in doubles per game (1.9) and fifth in walks (195) through April 13.

Not to be outdone, the men's lacrosse team had an 11-2 record and paced the country in winning percentage (.917) through April 13. Senior Alex Marinier was tied for second nationally in goals scored (40) while sophomore goalie Caleb Fyock was second in goals-against average (7.13).



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Upon Further Review: Sayin Will Be Playin'

Anytime there is a quarterback battle heading into a season, it is going to attract attention from the fans and media, and that was particularly true this season with the Ohio State football team coming off of a national championship campaign. Is the next Will Howard in the room?

Heading into this spring, the smart money was on Julian Sayin, the five-star transfer from Alabama who played minimally for the Buckeyes last season, to win the job. As practice progressed, Ohio State coach Ryan Day kept saying that there was a battle going on between Sayin and the more veteran Lincoln Kienholz.

Fans and media members are numb to these kind of statements from Day. If he had C.J. Stroud battling Joe Bauserman for the starting job, the coach would say it was neck-and-neck and would say so until a week or so before the opener. But the reports kept coming about Kienholz and when the doors of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center were thrown open for Student Appreciation Day on April 5, by all accounts it was the veteran who had the better day, with Sayin struggling at times.

So maybe there really is a quarterback battle going on, and a week later, at the revived spring game, interest in the quarterbacks, including decorated freshman prospect Tavien St. Clair, was high.

By the time the dust had settled, most would say that Sayin had the better game, though opinions on Kienholz's play may have been skewed by the fact that he got off to a very slow start. By the end of the scrimmage, all three QBs ended up with solid stat lines. Sayin was 17 of 24 for 175 yards and a score, though he was sacked three times, if you want to call those sacks. Kienholz was 12 of 18 for 158 yards and a pair of touchdowns. And St. Clair was 11 of 15 for 116 yards and a score, though his line was bogged down by two interceptions – the perils of being a true freshman.

Though Kienholz rallied after his slow start, I am going to go with the original smart money and predict that Sayin will be under center when the Buckeyes line up against Texas on Aug. 30. There was nothing in his spring game performance to indicate otherwise. He is lacking in experience, but so was Stroud when he won the starting job in 2021. (Here's my annual plea for Day to play the reserve quarterbacks more during blowouts throughout the season.)

Sayin was 5 of 12 for 84 yards and a touchdown – a 55-yarder to be exact – as a true freshman last season. He carried two times for 24 yards. In Stroud's true freshman year, the abbreviated 2020 season, Stroud's only contribution to the stat sheet was one carry for a 48-yard touchdown, which I find ironic because many said he couldn't run with the football, a notion that I dispute. You can't run the football if your number is not called.

Did any of you recall that Kienholz did not have any stats last season, appearing in just two games? I didn't. And for those of you who hold the freshman Kienholz's performance vs. Missouri in the Cotton Bowl after the 2023 season against him, I do not. He was thrown into an untenable situation with no experience, a game plan designed for second-string quarterback Devin Brown and playing with a team that had no interest in being there. In case you forgot, Missouri was credited with four sacks and eight quarterback hurries in that game.

One other thing about Sayin. Up until a couple of days ago I assumed his stature was similar to that of other recent Ohio State quarterbacks. Suddenly, out of the blue (at least for me), his height (he is listed at 6-1) became a big topic of discussion.

"There are certainly things that are easier

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

to do than others," Day said of being a shorter quarterback, "but at the end of the day, there are a lot of guys his stature who are playing in the NFL and have played a lot of high-level college football, so he's certainly tall enough."

Here are a couple of NFL records that Drew Brees, listed at 6-0, holds: highest passing percentage in a season, 74.4; most passing touchdowns in a game, seven (tie); most consecutive games with a TD pass, 54; and most career 5,000 yard passing seasons, five. And don't forget that Doug Flutie, listed at 5-10, beat Keith Byars for the 1984 Heisman Trophy.

Who Will Call The Plays?

Posters on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum have been calling for Brian Hartline to be promoted to offensive coordinator and to call the plays for some time now. I always tried to caution that just because he is one of the best assistant coaches in the country and one of the greatest assistants in Ohio State history doesn't necessarily mean he would be a great play caller. Because he hasn't done it before, we just don't know.

But the posters got their wish, and Hartline was promoted to offensive coordinator and called the plays during the spring game, where the offense did a lot of marching up and down the field.

But I am concerned about Day's remarks about Hartline and his play-calling after the game. Being the offensive coordinator of the defending national champion is no place to learn on the job.

"For him to do it for the first time out there was a good process for him," Day said. "There are some things in there that we have to talk about, but overall, I think he had a good plan. You could tell that he had thought through some of the scenarios in his head, because he had the calls ready to go. And then you find yourself in situations where you're thinking or watching the game as opposed to getting on (with) the next call. That's all part of the (learning) process."

"But I thought he had a good rhythm today. I thought he had a good plan. Things moved pretty smoothly overall. Nothing's perfect. But I was not on the headset on purpose, because I just didn't want that kind of distraction for him, and I thought he did a good job. But we'll keep growing. We'll keep learning from it, and then we also have the preseason scrimmages that we'll have here where (Hartline will) continue to learn and we'll try to get him in more and more situations calling plays."

Sounds like learning on the job to me.

Two questions. Do you think Day will get the itch and start calling some of the plays? And will having additional duties have any effect on Hartline's incredible talents teaching and recruiting the wide receivers?

About Those Rings

Did anyone besides me think those championship rings passed out at the spring game were garish? Is this all part of the NIL era, with something that ostentatious?

In my 44 years as Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher, I have been around many champions who wear their rings regularly and proudly. But those rings are subtle and sacred to those wearing them. How could you wear one of this year's rings on a regular basis and function with your hand burdened like that. They look like something that Elvis – the Las Vegas Elvis – would have worn.

"Man, they're big, and they did a great job

with them," Day said of the rings. "I don't know how much bigger these rings can get. You have to drag them around, but it's really cool to see. The (national championship ring) in particular has all kinds of different cool features to it."

If I were walking down the street wearing one of those behemoths, I would be worried I would get mugged, though presumably an Ohio State football player can defend himself better than I can.

Women Try To Get Over "Hump"

After this past season, even the most casual follower of the Ohio State women's basketball team has figured out by now that the program is at a crossroads. The team is coming off 11 years with a Hall of Fame coach in Jim Foster and another 12 years with a potential Hall of Fame coach in Kevin McGuff.

That's 23 years (it's hard to believe it was that long ago that Foster came on board), and all the Buckeyes have to show for it is six Sweet 16s and an Elite Eight. In fact, those are the only appearances beyond the first weekend of the NCAA tournament since Ohio State made its only trip to the Final Four back in 1992-93.

There is a much larger gap in women's basketball between the elite teams and the wannabees, for lack of a better term, than in men's basketball. And one common denominator with the elite teams is that they seem to have elite coaches.

Is that where Ohio State is failing? Ohio State's "struggles" (I use quotation marks because Ohio State's struggles are relative) seem to have started when its own elite coach, Tara VanDerveer, left Columbus after a 28-3, 18-0 season with a Big Ten championship and an Elite Eight appearance in 1984-85 to take over the program at Stanford. There, she would win three national championships and make an additional 11 Final Four appearances.

She seemingly left the Buckeye program in good shape.

In Nancy Darsch's first four seasons, her Buckeyes made it to three Sweet 16s and an Elite Eight. But things went quickly downhill after that, with the *huge* exception of the Final Four year, fueled by the elite freshman, Katie Smith. But even Smith couldn't help after that. The Buckeyes immediately fell to 14-14, 7-11 the next season and never made it past the first NCAA weekend under Darsch again.

In our story in this issue on the current state of the women's program, Kristin Watt, who played for VanDerveer and has been on Ohio State's radio broadcast team for as long as I can remember, does an outstanding job, I believe, in assessing the Ohio State coaches since VanDerveer's departure.

"Tara left at the top. (Nancy Darsch) had the program going strong, and then she struggled with recruiting," Watt said. "That's, I think, the No. 1 reason why she lost her job. Beth Burns struggled with relationships with the team, and that was relatively short-lived. Jim Foster had great success, and then he left because he just couldn't get over that hump, and he was very close. And then McGuff came in, and he's built a strong program. And here we are again, talking about the hump."

As I mentioned, Ohio State is at a crossroads. Do they make a pitch for an elite coach who might be able to get the program over the "hump?" Or do they accept that this is where the program is and will be: a Big Ten contender, though now more difficult with the arrival of UCLA and USC, but a secondary player on the national stage?

Or does McGuff, who seems to have at least one more year, prove he was the man to get the Buckeyes over the hump all along?

Inexperienced Men's Coaches

Any regular reader of this column knows that the "From the Pages of BSB" feature is one of my favorites. There is always something that I had forgotten about, and I love the irony one frequently finds with the benefit of years and years of hindsight.

In this issue (see page 8) I found it ironic that 35 years ago, the last Ohio State basketball coach to be hired with no head-coaching experience had just wrapped up his first year at the helm.

As with Jake Diebler, Randy Ayers' first team posted 17 wins. The major difference was that Ayers posted a 10-8 conference record, finishing sixth in the Big Ten (as opposed to Diebler's 10th) and closing with five wins in its last seven regular-season games (there was no conference tournament in those days), good enough to earn a berth in the Big Dance and even win a game against Providence in the opener before being eliminated by eventual national champion UNLV in 1990.

"I counted back eight months to the time I was hired and it seems like it was 88 months ago," Ayers said. "We had our ups and downs this year, but we always had great support from the athletic department and our fans."

I think Diebler had and still has (at least for the time being) the support of the athletic department, but his fan support may have slipped a bit after the Buckeyes' weak finish.

Ayers went on to post a 27-4, 15-3 record the following year, being ranked No. 2 in the nation for the last few weeks of the regular season, winning the Big Ten championship and making it to the Sweet 16 before for falling to No. 20 St. John's. Can Diebler lead Ohio State to that type of turnaround in one year?

In fairness to Diebler, Ayers did not have to deal with the disruption of the transfer portal. His team's 1991 success was fueled by the return of a tremendous core of (in scoring order) Jim Jackson, Perry Carter, Jamaal Brown, Treg Lee, Mark Baker and Chris Jent. Diebler should be that lucky.

In case you were wondering, Ayers was 33 when he was hired as head coach. Diebler was 37.

Beat The Increase

As mentioned in this space the last few issues, we will be raising the cost of upgrading your subscription to first-class mail during football season from \$30 to \$32 to try to ease some of the pressure from the two postal increases last year. On average, it costs us \$3 in postage, handling and the cost of the envelope to mail a copy of BSB first class. That's \$39 for 13 issues, so this is a money-losing proposition for us. Our philosophy has been, better to lose \$9 than lose a subscriber completely, which we have been doing a lot lately due to poor delivery.

We are offering you plenty of time to upgrade to first class from the Football Preview Issue through the Michigan game at the existing rate of \$30 or \$40 through recruiting season in February. Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 to order by credit card. Or you can send your check, money order or credit card information (don't forget your three or four-digit security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Be sure to mention either the "Football Upgrade" or the "Recruiting Upgrade."



2025 SCHEDULE

MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
APRIL 1st HOME OPENING NIGHT Tansky Tuesday "Dime-A-Dog" Night #1						
					28 @TOL 4:05	29 @TOL 4:05
30 @TOL 2:05	31	1 STP 6:15	2 STP 6:15	3 STP 6:15	4 STP 6:15	5 STP 4:05
6 STP 1:05	7	8 @WOR 6:05	9 @WOR 6:05	10 @WOR 6:05	11 @WOR 6:05	12 @WOR 4:05
13 @WOR 1:05	14	15 LOU 6:15	16 LOU 6:15	17 LOU 12:05	18 LOU 6:15	19 LOU 4:05
20 LOU 1:05	21	22 @LHV 6:45	23 @LHV 6:45	24 @LHV 6:45	25 @LHV 7:05	26 @LHV 6:35
27 @LHV 1:35	28	29 STP 6:15	30 STP 6:35	Dollar Day Menu Wednesday Night Games		

MAY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Purchase 2025 Season Seats 20 Games 37 Games Full Season						
				1 STP 12:05	2 STP 6:15	3 STP 4:05
4 STP 1:05	5	6 @IND 6:35	7 @IND 1:35	8 @IND 11:05	9 @IND 7:05	10 @IND 6:35
11 @IND 1:35	12	13 @OMA 7:35	14 @OMA 7:35	15 @OMA 7:35	16 @OMA 8:05	17 @OMA 8:05
18 @OMA 3:05	19	20 @IOW 7:05	21 @IOW 12:05	22 @IOW 12:05	23 @IOW 7:05	24 @IOW 7:05
25 @IOW 1:05	26 @ROC 4:05	27	28 @ROC 11:05	29 @ROC 6:45	30 @ROC 6:45	31 @ROC 6:45

JUNE						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 @ROC 1:05	2	3 TOL 7:05	4 TOL 7:05	5 TOL 7:05	6 TOL 7:05	7 TOL 7:05
8 TOL 1:05	9	10 @BUF 6:35	11 @BUF 6:35	12 @BUF 6:35	13 @BUF 6:35	14 @BUF 6:35
15 @BUF 1:05	16	17 IND 7:05	18 IND 7:05	19 IND 12:05	20 IND 7:05	21 IND 7:05
22 IND 1:05	23	24 @IOW 7:38	25 @IOW 1:08	26 @IOW 7:38	27 @IOW 8:08	28 @IOW 7:08
29 @IOW 2:08	30	\$5 Fridays Pizza Slice & Small Pepsi, Small Draft Beer, or Wine \$5 for all Bleacher, Lawn, and SRO Tickets				

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 1:05	7	8 LOU 7:05	9 LOU 7:05	10 LOU 12:05	11 LOU 7:05	12 LOU 7:05
13 LOU 1:05	14	15	16	17	18 @IOW 8:08	19 @IOW 7:08
20 @IOW 2:08	21	22 BUF 7:05	23 BUF 7:05	24 BUF 12:05	25 BUF 6:35	26 BUF 7:05
27 BUF 1:05	28	29 @JAX 7:05	30 @JAX 7:05	31 @JAX 7:05		

AUGUST						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Post-Game Fun Run Sunday Home Games					1 @JAX 7:05	2 @JAX 6:35
3 @JAX 5:05	4	5 GWN 7:05	6 GWN 7:05	7 GWN 7:05	8 GWN 7:05	9 GWN 7:05
10 GWN 1:05	11	12 @TOL 6:35	13 @TOL 6:35	14 @TOL 6:35	15 @TOL 7:05	16 @TOL 7:05
17 @TOL 2:05	18	19 OMA 6:15	20 OMA 6:15	21 OMA 12:05	22 OMA 7:05	23 OMA 5:05
24 OMA 1:05	25	26 @LOU 6:35	27 @LOU 12:05	28 @LOU 6:35	29 @LOU 7:15	30 @LOU 7:15
31 @LOU 6:05	Thirsty Thursdays Beverage Specials, Thursday Games					

SEPTEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2 IND 6:15	3 IND 6:15	4 IND 6:35	5 IND 7:05	6 IND 7:05
7 IND 1:05	8	9 @STP 7:37	10 @STP 7:37	11 @STP 7:37	12 @STP 7:37	13 @STP 6:07
14 @STP 3:07	15	16 OMA 6:15	17 OMA 6:15	18 OMA 6:15	19 OMA 7:05	20 OMA 5:05
21 OMA 1:05	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

2025 PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

- TUE. "TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG" NIGHTS**
- 4/1, 4/15, 4/29, 5/20, 6/3, 6/17, 7/8, 7/22, 8/5, 8/19, 9/2, & 9/16
- 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
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"
- Students 14 and above can present a valid ID and for \$5 receive a Reserved Seat ticket
- 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 FRIDAYS"**
- \$5 for all Bleacher, Lawn, and SRO Tickets
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi
- \$5 for Beers (small) & Wine
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"
- SAT. "GAMEDAY PROMOTIONS"**
- Visit clippersbaseball.com for Saturday Night Promotions
- SUN. "FAMILY DAY & SENIOR DAY"**
- \$18 Bleacher or \$27 Reserved Family Pass for 2 Adults & up to 4 Kids (18 & under) or Seniors (60 & over)
- \$3 Bleacher or \$5 Reserved Seat (60 & over)
"POST-GAME FUN RUN"



TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG
4/1, 4/15, 4/29, 5/20, 6/3, 6/17, 7/8, 7/22, 8/5, 8/19, 9/2, 9/16

POST GAME FIREWORKS! - 5/24, 6/6, 7/5, 7/26, 8/8, 9/5



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HOME Copa de la Diversión Business Day Special AWAY "TANSKY TUESDAY" DIME-A-DOG FIREWORKS

*All game times listed are subject to change. *All game times are Eastern.

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