

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 24

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2025

No Looking Back

Buckeyes Look To Repeat As National Champs

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Eight months have passed since Ryan Day hoisted his first national championship trophy, and it's already time for the Buckeyes to move on to a new season.

For Day, the euphoria of winning the national championship didn't last very long, and the reality of today's college football world hit him fast. His offseason started almost immediately after he landed back in Columbus, and with that also began his preparation for the 2025 season.

"When you spend your career on a vision of what you want and a goal, once you accomplish it, there is certainly a feeling of accomplishment," Day said on July 31, the first day of fall camp. "But soon after that, it's just on to the next thing, and that's what the case was. It was great to see our players and our coaches turn the page and move forward."

As Day said, it was the same attitude for the players. Both during spring practices and in fall camp, he talked about how the players on this year's team wanted to take down some of the national championship reminders from the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. The message from the leaders on the team was that they want to make their own mark this year.

"This team has its own identity," Day said. "They want to have their own identity, but they also want to be the first team ever to go back-to-back national championships at Ohio State."

The only team to do go back-to-back in the College Football Playoff era is Georgia, which won in 2021 and 2022. The Buckeyes seemed to have a good chance going



**FOOTBALL
PREVIEW
ISSUE**

SONNY BROCKWAY

ON TO THE NEXT — The time for basking in the glory of winning a national championship is over, and it means nothing when Ohio State takes to the Ohio Stadium field on Aug. 30 against No. 1 Texas. That's the message from Ohio State head coach Ryan Day as he looks forward to a new season and challenges.

into the 2015 season after winning the inaugural CFP championship, but they lost a heartbreaker to a top-10 Michigan State team at home in late November, keeping them out of the Big Ten championship and ultimately the playoff.

Day winning a second straight would make him only the second OSU coach to win multiple crowns, joining Woody Hayes. But even Hayes couldn't do it in back-to-back seasons.

Now, with the 12-team playoff, there could be a more feasible path, even if there are some bumps in the road along the way. With the preseason No. 1- and No. 2-ranked teams in the country on the schedule, it will be a tough path for the Buckeyes to make it there, but one that has the chance to prepare a more inexperienced roster for what it would have to go through in a three- to four-game path through the CFP.

The message from Day has been clear. He doesn't want his team to get complacent and rest on its laurels.

He wants to be just as aggressive in another title run. He has said multiple times, the Buckeyes aren't "defending" national champions. His preferred term is "attacking."

"We're not defending anything. They can't take the trophy away," Day said. "We're looking to attack and win a championship with this team."

It's an attitude that the 2025 team seems to be buying into, and it makes sense that they are. Those who stuck around for their senior seasons in 2024 each had players behind them on the depth chart who likely felt like they were ready to take over as starters.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"Entertainment" A Distraction

At a recent news conference, athletic director Ross Bjork spoke of the need for more "entertainment" during home football games. Hasn't our entertainment for generations been experiencing the best of collegiate football?

This fall, fans will experience bell ringing before the game and on third downs (why?), towel waving (hope the towels don't obstruct your view or whack you), soundtrack music (we already have "The Best Damn Band In The Land") and opportunities for fans to earn Buckeye Leaves (and diminish the meaningfulness of this symbol featured on player's helmets). Is this "coolness" (gimmicks) really warranted?

Shouldn't the emphasis be on appreciating team competition, the thrill of the game and experiencing time-honored entertainment traditions – like chanting "OH-IO,"

signature Script Ohio at halftime, Hang on Sloopy and singing Carmen, Ohio after the game – which provide a shared sense of identity, belonging and history? Why add more to this iconic, successful and impactful formula? Some things just can't be improved upon!

Joseph Huber
Walpole, Mass.

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



From The Message Board

Ohio State enters the 2025 season as the No. 3 team in the AP poll as it prepares to defend its seventh national championship. Despite losing 17 players to the NFL over the offseason, there are still high expectations for the Buckeyes, but there are still going to be opportunities for players to have a breakout season. We asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what their predictions are for the upcoming season and who they expect will be a surprise player for Ohio State.

"My guess is Ohio State might lose one game. It's very difficult to go undefeated nowadays. For surprise player, I'm going to say Mylan Graham."

– Terrier Buck

"Hard to say without a firm roster in place, meaning who the heck is the QB going to be? I predict a lackluster year and I hope I'm wrong. 10-2. Three tough games against Texas, Penn State and TTUN. Might win one of them."

– PeyoteBuck

"If there is good chemistry on the team they should go far, as they have the talent. I'm hoping James Peoples has a breakout year. I don't put much stock in preseason predictions. Last year the 'experts' picked Arizona State to finish last in the Big 12, and they won the Big 12 championship and nearly beat

Texas in the playoffs. But if I had my druthers – REPEAT!"

– R1TBDBITL

"I always think we'll go undefeated, but unfortunately, that rarely happens. If we were to stumble, it would be more than twice. Our talent is excellent and deep; inexperience for a few starters may need a learning curve."

"Surprise players: I look for Beau Atkinson and Will Smith Jr. to be even better than expected."

– Bob Cody

"11-1 record. B1G champs. Breakout player: Max Klare."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"A football Nostradamus I am not. But I know that the Buckeyes will reload with lots of talent and new Buckeye legends will be born! Hopefully some of those are return specialists on special teams!"

– BuckeyeScott

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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BUCKEYE CLIFFHANGERS, a new book from Tim Sullivan covering football seasons from 1916 through the 2024 national championship (Harley to Howard). During that period, the Buckeyes participated in 116 games that were decided in the last minute of play or the last play of the game. This book details the key plays and play makers in each of them. Available on Amazon.com.

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BUCKEYE GAMEDAY Memories: A new book of short stories about humorous gameday experiences in the 1960s through the 2010s by Tim Sullivan. Available on Amazon.com.

FOR SALE: OSU football programs including bowl games, national playoff and championship games. OSU basketball programs, NFL programs, golf, Olympics, NBA, other print sports memorabilia. Call John at (330) 507-7339.

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

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No. 3	Sept. 28	No. 15	Feb. 1
No. 4	Oct. 5	No. 16	Feb. 15
No. 5	Oct. 12	No. 17	March 8
No. 6	Oct. 26	No. 18	March 22
No. 7	Nov. 2	No. 19	April 5
No. 8	Nov. 9	No. 20	April 19
No. 9	Nov. 16	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 23	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 30	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 7	No. 24	August

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OPINION

National Title Repeat For OSU? Well...

Anyone outside a 100-mile radius of Columbus who has looked at the breadth and depth of the talent drain on the Ohio State football program might wonder how anyone in their right mind could believe the Buckeyes have any chance to defend their national championship.

On the surface, the gaping holes left by a host of departed players – 16 of whom earned All-Big Ten mention in one form or another last year – as well as both coordinators would seem to indicate a step backward for the program in 2025.

But to paraphrase an old coach, the cupboard isn't exactly bare.

The Buckeyes return two players – Jeremiah Smith on offense, Caleb Downs on defense – generally acknowledged as the best college football has to offer at their respective positions. And for all the grief he gets for one reason or another, there are about 120 other Football Bowl Subdivision programs readily willing to make a deal with the devil himself if it meant getting Ryan Day as their head coach.

Before we go any further, I am not predicting a repeat run to the national championship. That's mostly because it's so difficult to get the football to bounce your way two years in a row. There's a reason that only three teams since 1980 have gone back-to-back, and it's the same reason that Ohio State has never in its history been able to follow one national title with another.

Yet, as has been proved over and over these past couple of years with the seismic changes in the sport, nothing should be deemed impossible. We all watched Indiana use the transfer portal to go from conference doormat to a College Football Playoff berth and the first 11-win season in program history. We all watched Illinois post its first 10-win season since 2001. And we all watched 19½-point underdog Michigan salvage its swagger by winning a game at the end of the regular season it had no business winning.

So, although I will not predict a repeat of Ohio State's national championship run, I'd be foolish to rule it out. First of all, despite what the growing cacophony of talking heads might try to tell you, there is no head-and-shoulders-above-the-rest power team in college football in 2025.

Texas? For the first time in their storied history, the Longhorns will open a season as the Associated Press' No. 1 team, but they will also be the first top-ranked team to enter its season opener as an underdog with most online betting sites installing the Buckeyes as 2½-point favorites.

Experts argue this is perhaps Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian's best team since arriving in Austin four years ago. But for as much fuss is made about the number of star players Ohio State lost to the NFL, the Longhorns lost almost as many. Texas had 12 players drafted, including five in the first two rounds.

Texas is also in the same situation as Ohio State with regard to the quarterback position. While Day played his annual game of reluctance with regard to naming a starter before finally naming Julian Sayin, Sarkisian has the scion of America's first family of quarterbacks at his disposal. But what exactly is on Arch Manning's college résumé that makes him the current Heisman Trophy favorite? If he was so great, why couldn't he beat out Quinn Ewers for the starting job last year?

Manning, who played very well last year in two starts for the injured Ewers, appears exceptionally gifted. But those two starts came at home against Mississippi State and Louisiana-Monroe, teams that finished a combined 7-17 last season. The 2025 season opener will feature the first road start of Manning's college career – behind a rebuilt offensive line featuring four new starters – in a hostile environment fea-

turing more than 105,000 fans in full throat.

If the youngster comes away from all that with a victory, he will deserve all the accolades that come his way – but not until.

Who Are The Contenders?

The usual suspects such as Georgia, Clemson, Notre Dame, Oregon, Alabama and LSU populate the preseason top 10, but there is one team – a program that hasn't won a national championship in nearly 40 years – that many pundits believe is the other team to beat besides Texas.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Penn State is No. 2 in the preseason AP poll and No. 3 in the coaches' poll (flip-flopping those rankings with Ohio State). That represents the highest preseason spots for the Nittany Lions since they were preseason No. 1 in 1997. They finished No. 16/17 that year.

Give James Franklin his props. Thirty-four victories over the last three seasons represent the winningest three-year span in program history. But while Franklin keeps knocking on the door of greatness, he has yet to find a way to kick it in. His lone Big Ten championship in 11 seasons at Penn State came back in 2016, and he is a combined 4-16 against Ohio State and Michigan.

In terms of playing against the best of competition, Franklin has a .395 winning percentage (17-36) against all ranked teams. When it comes to playing against the best of the best, Franklin is 1-15 at Penn State against top-five opponents. (As a matter of reference, Day is 24-9 with a .727 winning percentage against all ranked teams and 7-6 at Ohio State against top-five opponents.)

So what makes the preseason prognosticators believe Franklin and his team can finally break through this year? Apparently, the reason is similar to why they believe so much in Texas – the quarterback.

Should Manning remain in college past the 2025 season – and his family indicates that he will – Penn State QB Drew Allar is rated among the top quarterback prospects in next year's NFL draft. That's interesting at least to me because when I watch Allar perform, I see a good quarterback but not a great one.

By most measures, Allar had an excellent season in 2024 when he threw for 3,327 yards and 24 touchdowns with a passing efficiency of 153.47. But as good as those numbers were, most of them paled in comparison to other Big Ten quarterbacks including Dillon Gabriel of Oregon, Kurtis Rourke of Indiana and Will Howard of Ohio State.

Perhaps most alarmingly, Allar fell off considerably against better competition. In Penn State's 13 victories, he completed 69.9 percent of his passes with 21 touchdowns and four interceptions. During his team's three losses, his completion percentage dropped to 53.7 percent with just three TDs against four INTs.

There were those who often criticized Allar's receivers for poor routes and dropped passes, and Franklin addressed those concerns by tapping the portal for such receivers as Trebor Pena, who caught 84 passes for 941 yards and nine touchdowns from Kyle McCord last year at Syracuse.

Penn State also has a lethal one-two punch

at running back with Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton, each of whom cracked the 1,000-yard mark last season and combined for 20 rushing touchdowns. (Ohio State didn't seem to have much trouble with either one during last year's 20-13 win, though. The duo combined for only 42 yards on 18 carries, an average of 2.3 yards per attempt.)

But even if Allar plays to the level that most pundits predict and Allen and Singleton each rush for more than 1,000 yards again, I have a tough time believing the Nittany Lions will do anything but take a step or two backward on defense.

I realize that's borderline blasphemy since Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles skipped the national championship celebration in Columbus to take over similar duties on Franklin's staff. But Knowles has some rebuilding to do. In addition to losing All-America defensive end Abdul Carter – drafted third overall by the New York Giants – safeties Kevin Winston Jr. and Jaylen Reed as well as second-team All-Big Ten linebacker Kobe King were taken in the draft.

Additionally, as those of us in Columbus are painfully aware, Knowles favors a scheme that is not easily installed. Yes, Ohio State led the nation in most of the important defensive statistics last season, including fewest average points and fewest average yards allowed. But it apparently takes about three years for the so-called Mad Scientist's system to take hold.

I don't think I have to remind any OSU fan of how the defense got repeatedly torched during Knowles' first season in 2022, but in case last year's national championship run has fogged your memory, the Buckeyes allowed 11 plays of 50 yards or more during that 13-game season. During last year's 16-game title run, the number of such plays the defense allowed dropped to just one – a 69-yard pass from Gabriel to Evan Stewart during the one-point loss at Oregon in mid-October.

Penn State might be the cream of the crop in the Big Ten this season, but as with Manning and his preseason hype, the Nittany Lions are going to have to prove the love they're receiving is justified.

Two-Team Race?

While we're on the subject of the Big Ten, the conference race would seem to be divided into four tiers – Ohio State and Penn State at the top, teams such as Oregon, Illinois and maybe Michigan a notch below that, a host of teams vying for a break-even league record, and as many as four or five bottom-feeders trying to avoid the basement.

Oregon lost a ton of star power with Gabriel, running back Jordan James, tight end Terrance Ferguson and top receiver Tez Johnson not to mention both starting offensive tackles. Additionally, the Ducks had three defensive linemen drafted among the first three rounds.

Meanwhile, Illinois took full advantage of last year's favorable schedule to rack up a bunch of victories despite ranking no higher than 60th in the country in defense and 63rd nationally in offense. One would have to believe they will need to improve on those totals if they are serious about contending for Big Ten honors.

And that leaves the Wolverines, who conveniently forgot they were a mediocre (and that's being generous) five-loss team before flexing some muscle against Northwestern and then overachieving against Ohio State and Alabama. That finish allowed them to check in at No. 14 in the preseason AP poll.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Ohio State Ranked No. 3 In Preseason AP Poll

According to the preseason coaches' poll, Ohio State's matchup against Texas in Week 1 will be between the top two teams in the country, but in the AP top 25, which was released on Aug. 11, the Buckeyes are the No. 3 team in the country.

Texas is ranked No. 1 in the poll, but the Buckeyes were beat out by Big Ten rival Penn State for the No. 2 spot. Rounding out the top five are No. 4 Clemson and No. 5 Georgia.

The Buckeyes received 11 votes for first place, compared to 25 for Texas and 23 for Penn State. Also receiving support with first-place votes were Clemson (four), Georgia (one) and No. 7 Oregon (one).

The Buckeyes are coming off a national championship but lost 17 regular contributors to the NFL. Despite that, the voters still believe they are the No. 3 team in the country, making the matchup against the Longhorns one of the bigger games of the year, even if it is the season opener.

Other Big Ten teams to make the top 25 before the season are Oregon, No. 12 Illinois, No. 14 Michigan and No. 20 Indiana. The conference's six teams in the poll are second to the nine from the SEC.

The top 10 also included No. 6 Notre Dame, No. 8 Alabama, No. 9 LSU and No. 10 Miami (Fla.).

The Buckeyes were still favored by 2.5 points in their Week 1 matchup against the top-ranked Longhorns by most sportsbooks. If Ohio State is still favored over Texas at kickoff time, it would be the first time the preseason No. 1 team has been an underdog for their season-opening game, according to ESPN research that dates back to 1978.

Bjork Introduces "Tradition Evolved"

Since Ross Bjork started as Ohio State's athletic director, one of his biggest goals has been to improve the gameday atmosphere at Ohio Stadium. On Aug. 5, he introduced multiple changes the Buckeyes will be making this year.

The "Tradition Evolved" initiative is a way that Bjork says the program can enhance the atmosphere at football games while still embracing the storied traditions at Ohio State.

Part of that will be using the victory bell before games and getting someone to ring the bell to send the team out of the tunnel. Bjork said that two-time Heisman winner Archie Griffin will be the "victory bell ringers" for the Week 1 game against Texas. Griffin will also help select people to stand in

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2024 Record, Bowl Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	Noon	FOX	13-3, 28-14 loss to Ohio State (CFP Semi.)
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	3:30	BTN	5-7, not eligible
Sept. 13	OHIO	7:00	Peacock	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	at 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	Noon	FOX	8-5, 19-11 win over Alabama (ReliaQuest)

for that role in the future. Bjork wants those people to be former Ohio State football players, famous Ohioans and more.

There will also be 100,000 towels distributed for the Week 1 game against Texas, branded "The Towel." The towel won't be distributed after the first game but will be available for purchase afterward.

"What can we bring to the table that unifies our fans into more passion, more energy?" Bjork said. "We say we have the best fans in the nation, and we want our fans to wave that towel and be energetic every single time."

Bjork used the first game of the College Football Playoff last season against Tennessee as an example for the environment he wants to create at Buckeye games beginning this season.

Bjork said that the fans will also have some incentive to be loud. Fans will be able to earn a virtual Buckeye Leaf that will go on the video board.

"It will be similar to baseball stadiums where they have a strikeout chart," Bjork said. "Block O, our student organization, will have a chart of Buckeye Leaves. Every time we get a third down, we make a false start on third down or somebody has to call timeout because it's too loud."

Bjork also said there will be three color-outs this year for the fans. For the Texas game on Aug. 30, the Buckeyes are doing a "Scarlet the 'Shoe," asking fans to wear

scarlet. The night game against Ohio on Sept. 13 will be a helmet stripe game, and the game against Penn State on Nov. 1 will be a blackout.

As part of Ohio State's gameday changes, "Hang On Sloopy" will no longer necessarily be played by the band between the third and fourth quarters. Instead, Bjork said it will be played when the team needs it the most.

Other changes he announced are a new in-stadium soundtrack, headlined by the song "Ohio" by the band Caamp, a "unique and iconic" entrance for Brutus Buckeye that will change from week to week, a unified Block O student section and new video board content that includes real-time stats, scores and replays with a revamped style.

Bjork said improving the gameday experience is something he wants to continue to do, so these changes won't be the last coming to the stadium, though others might not be until future seasons.

Bjork Believes PSU Game Will Be Noon Kickoff

The Buckeyes may be branding their home game against Penn State as a "blackout" game, but that doesn't necessarily mean it will be played at night.

In an appearance on WOSU's "All Sides" on Aug. 6, Bjork said that he is expecting the Buckeyes' game against Penn State to kick off at noon.



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BuckeyeSports.com Ramps Up For Football Season

Ohio State football season is finally here, and BuckeyeSports.com – Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 24/7 website, free to all subscribers – will be with you every day, from the opening game against Texas on Aug. 30 to the CFP national championship game from Miami Jan. 19, 2026. The next issue of BSB will be mailed on Sept. 2. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting activity.

The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout football season. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com. BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff mans BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on the breaking stories, plus posting additional features.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively and will be even more so during football season. And the popular staff predictions return for the Texas game the afternoon of Friday, Aug. 29 and will run on Friday afternoons throughout the season.

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State head coach Ryan Day touched on the significance of the honor.

"(Strength and conditioning coach) Mick Marotti is the best in the business at building leadership, toughness, accountability, all of those things, and when he stamps them an Iron Buckeye, they have a chance (to make an impact)," Day said. "Jeremiah Smith was the first freshman ever to be an Iron Buckeye. What happened? Austin Siereveld becomes an Iron Buckeye. Look what's happening. For us, the backbone of our program is what happens in the offseason in that weight room. When you start to see that happen, you can almost predict what's going to come next."

"Have there been guys who have done really well and been Iron Buckeyes that haven't played a lot? Yeah, but not many. Those are usually the guys who find a way to get on that field. I say it all the time. 'If you want to be successful here at Ohio State, grab onto Mick and be an Iron Buckeye.'"

Smith, Siereveld and Styles were the three Iron Buckeyes on the team in the spring, and each of them kept up their hard work throughout the summer and were recognized for it yet again. This is the second consecutive season Styles has been a summer Iron Buckeye as well.

Downs, Smith, Styles Earn B1G Preseason Honors

Fifteen players from seven different teams were selected by Big Ten media

Continued On Page 6

"I think we know the Buckeyes drive 'Big Noon Kickoff,' " Bjork said. "We probably know what's going to happen around game time for that one."

"FOX, they love the Buckeyes, and Big Noon is a big deal. They've invested in that time slot. We'll presume it's a noon kickoff."

Ohio State finished the 2024 regular season with six straight noon games, and FOX has already announced that the Week 1 matchup against Texas and The Game on

Nov. 29 will be noon kickoffs.

Currently, the Buckeyes have a night game against Ohio scheduled at 7 p.m. on Sept. 13, which realistically could be the only home night game they get this season. That game is set to be broadcast on Peacock.

Kienholz, Smith, Styles Among Iron Buckeyes

After a summer full of workouts, Ohio

State revealed eight players who were named "Iron Buckeyes."

The eight players included on the list were wide receivers Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate, offensive lineman Austin Siereveld, defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr., quarterback Lincoln Kienholz, safety Jaylen McClain and linebackers Sonny Styles and Payton Pierce.

During a press conference at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Aug. 11, Ohio



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members to earn preseason conference honors, and three Buckeyes made the list, released on July 22.

Styles, junior safety Caleb Downs and Smith – the three Ohio State representatives at Big Ten media days in Las Vegas – all made the 15-player list.

Smith was the only player who was a unanimous selection.

Ohio State was tied for the most players to make the list with Penn State. Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Oregon each had two players while Minnesota had one.

Downs, Smith and Styles were included alongside quarterback Luke Altmyer and outside linebacker Gabe Jacas from Illinois, defensive lineman Mikail Kamara and defensive back D'Angelo Ponds from Indiana, offensive tackle Gennings Dunker and center Logan Jones from Iowa, defensive back Koi Perich from Minnesota, outside linebacker Matayo Uiagelelei and defensive back Dillon Thieneman of Oregon, and

quarterback Drew Allar, defensive end Dani Dennis-Sutton and running back Nicholas Singleton of Penn State.

Price Among 10 Inducted Into OSU HOF

Former All-America offensive lineman Billy Price will be one of 10 former athletes inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in the class of 2025 this fall, the university announced on July 29.

Along with Price, the other nine former athletes to be honored are Bianca Alvarez (diving), Katarzyna Dabrowa (fencing), Veronika Jatsek (women's track and field), Myles Martin (wrestling), Mary Olsen (women's gymnastics), Kim Reeder (softball), Blaz Rola (men's tennis), John "Jack" Varga (rifle) and Alex Wimmers (baseball).

Price was a two-time All-American, including a unanimous selection in 2017, the year he also won the Rimington Trophy. He was also the Big Ten Offensive Lineman of the Year that season.

As a freshman in 2014, Price started all 15 games for the national champion Buckeyes along the way to setting the record for both most starts and most consecutive starts at Ohio State with 55.

During his four years on the offensive line, he helped the Buckeyes to an explosive rushing attack, ranking in the top 20 in the nation each of those seasons, leading the Big Ten in rushing for three straight seasons from 2015-17.

He was selected by the Cincinnati Bengals with the 21st overall pick in the 2018 NFL draft and played for five seasons, also



FILE PHOTO

PRICE OF ENTRY — On July 29, the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame announced that former All-America offensive lineman Billy Price will be among the 10 former athletes inducted into the Hall of Fame in the class of 2025 this fall.

making one-year stops with the New York Giants in 2021 and the Arizona Cardinals in 2022, but he was forced to retire in May 2024 due to a life-threatening blood clot.

The 10 inductees will also be recognized at Ohio Stadium on Oct. 4 at the Minnesota game.

Finebaum Guarantees Texas Win Week 1

Although most sportsbooks are favoring Ohio State in its Week 1 matchup against Texas, ESPN personality Paul Finebaum picked the Longhorns to win the season-opening bout.

While complimenting Texas quarterback Arch Manning, the nephew of NFL greats Eli and Peyton Manning, during an episode of ESPN's morning show, "Get Up," on July 11, Finebaum guaranteed a Texas win.

"I am as married to Arch Manning as an old geezer like me can be to a young, great college quarterback, but I like everything about him," Finebaum said. "The Manning name matters, but it isn't going to matter on that field in a couple of weeks at Ohio State. The experience of being an understudy to (former Texas starting quarterback Quinn Ewers) and understanding (Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian's) system is what's going to get them over the top and probably – well, not probably – definitely beat Ohio State in the opener."

In 10 games last season, Manning completed 67.8 percent of his passes for 939 yards, nine passing touchdowns and two interceptions. Most of his playing time

came in two spot starts when Ewers was out with an injury. Manning, who made brief appearances after Ewers returned as a run-first quarterback, finished the year with 25 carries, 108 rushing yards and four touchdowns on the ground.

The Buckeyes defeated Texas in the 2024 Cotton Bowl on the way to winning the national championship and will attempt to prove Finebaum wrong in front of their home fans.

Smith Vows Never To Lose To U-M Again

In an incredible freshman season, Ohio State star receiver and former No. 1 overall recruit Smith somehow surpassed the immense expectations onlookers had for him.

One thing Smith and the rest of his teammates didn't do was beat Michigan. Instead, Ohio State suffered a 13-10 loss on Nov. 30. But according to Smith, while he is on the team, the Buckeyes will not lose to the Wolverines again.

"I'm not a sore loser, but I hate losing, and losing to That Team Up North was pretty crazy," Smith told The Athletic. "In the end, I think it really helped us play the way we did in the playoffs. But I didn't want to go to Ohio State and lose to That Team Up North. I just hate them, just something about them. For the next two years, I promise you, I will not lose to them. I can't lose to them in the next two years."

Soon after, 2026 Michigan commit and cornerback Dorian Barney made a similar promise to Michigan fans.

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"I will not lose to Ohio State while I'm there," Barney, a former Alabama commit and Ohio State target, told On3's Chad Simmons when he committed to Michigan on July 5.

It's unclear if Barney, a four-star recruit out of Carrollton, Ga., made his remarks in response to Smith, but the two players may go against each other in the 2026 iteration of The Game.

In the meantime, Smith and the rest of the Buckeyes will try to beat Michigan for the first time since 2019 when they travel to Ann Arbor to take on the Wolverines on Nov. 29.

Smith Lauded By Klatt, Opposing Coaches

Ever since Smith started making jaw-dropping one-handed catches in spring practice during his first days in Columbus, he has been on the receiving end of flattering remarks from former players, coaches and media personnel. Heading into his second collegiate season, the praise for Smith hasn't slowed down. During an episode of his "Joel Klatt Show," the FOX sports analyst said Smith was as good a college football player as he has ever seen.

"The best player in college football for next year – I think we can all say this together, by the way – is Jeremiah Smith, the wide receiver for Ohio State," Klatt said. "Never seen anything like this. I played against Adrian Peterson when he was a true freshman at Oklahoma. Those are the only guys I've ever seen – and I've been around this sport my entire life – those are the only two

guys I've ever seen that I'm like, 'Yeah, they could have played, and not only played but succeeded in the National Football League out of high school.' Smith is one of those guys."

Klatt wasn't the only one to give Smith his flowers heading into his sophomore season. During an interview on "The Herd with Colin Cowherd," Texas head coach and former Atlanta Falcons offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian compared Smith to Julio Jones, the former seven-time Pro Bowl receiver with the Falcons.

"It's interesting. I had a chance to coach Julio Jones for two years in Atlanta. He reminds me a lot of him," said Sarkisian, who will coach against Smith in Week 1. "He's so big and physical yet fast, and he covers ground. He's so strong at the point of attack when the ball is in the air. You see his ability to make contested catches."

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti, who was Jones' wide receiver coach at Alabama, took it one step further at Big Ten media days on July 22, saying Smith is better than Jones in some ways.

"He's a freak," Cignetti said of Smith. "He's a great player. He's the greatest at that position I've seen at that age, and he's a weapon. I coached Julio. They're very similar, but (Smith's) a little looser, more flexible, I think. Smith is maybe a hair faster."

Even Michigan coach Sherrone Moore sang his praises during Big Ten media days on July 24.

"He's probably the best college football player that's out there," Moore said. "He's elite."

Former Dolphins DC Added To Staff

Ohio State continued to bolster its coaching staff. The Buckeyes hired former Miami Dolphins defensive coordinator Josh Boyer, Day confirmed Aug. 11.

"We haven't really gotten into exactly what game day will be like, but Josh came here in the spring," Day said. "I knew Josh and have a lot of respect for him as a coach, as a person. He's very intelligent. Josh is going to kind of help me a lot on offense. He's going to go back and forth a little bit."

"We're going to iron out some of those things in terms of game day, but having somebody with his background can really help me on offense to identify what's going on with the other sides of the ball with different structures. He's also going to help (defensive coordinator Matt Patricia)."

Boyer, who coached in New England from 2006 to 2018, worked with Patricia throughout the majority of his tenure with the Patriots. Patricia was the Patriots' linebackers coach from 2006-2010, the team's safeties coach in 2011 and the defensive coordinator from 2012-17.

OSU One Of CFB's Top Spenders

According to a story published by On3's Pete Nakos on July 15, Ohio State's 2025 roster is one of the most expensive in college football.

Nakos asked 17 stakeholders within college football, such as administrators, head coaches, general managers, NIL collectives and agents, "Which 10 programs do you

believe spent the most money to build their 2025 roster?" Fifteen of the 17 stakeholders listed Ohio State as one of the biggest spenders in the sport; only Texas (17 votes) and Texas Tech (16 votes) were listed on more ballots.

Nakos reported the Buckeyes will spend more than \$35 million for their 2025 roster, with Smith set to be the highest-paid non-quarterback in college football.

"On3 reported in January that Smith was offered \$4.5 million to enter the portal," Nakos wrote. "Sources said he's expected to make more than that this season at Ohio State."

Nakos featured a quote in the story from one general manager who inquired about the availability of the first-team All-American.

"I'm not going to lie, we called about him, reached out to his people," an unnamed general manager told Nakos. "They were like, 'It's going to have to be \$7 million.' And I was like, 'Have a great day.'"

Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class was ranked No. 4 nationally by 247Sports' composite rankings, while its transfer portal class ranked No. 24.

Several Buckeyes Shed Black Stripes

Ten Buckeyes became "official" members of the team during fall camp, when they had their black stripes removed.

Freshmen linebacker Riley Pettijohn and tight end Nate Roberts were the first players of fall camp to have their black

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stripes removed on Aug. 5, and they were followed by senior running back CJ Donaldson, a transfer from West Virginia, and freshman cornerback Devin Sanchez on Aug. 6.

Transfers defensive end Beau Atkinson and offensive tackle Phillip Daniels each had their black stripes removed on Aug. 13, and freshman running back Bo Jackson and sophomore punter Nick McLarty had their black stripes removed the next day. Freshman safety Faheem Delane and freshman offensive lineman Jake Cook followed on Aug. 16.

The Buckeyes previously had six players lose their black stripes in the spring, including sophomore cornerback Miles Lockhart, transfer tight end Max Klare, sophomore defensive linemen Dominic Kirks and Eric Mensah, freshman wide receiver Quincy Porter and senior transfer offensive lineman Ethan Onianwa.

39 Buckeyes Receive Degrees At Summer Commencement

Thirty-nine current and former Ohio State athletes received degrees at the university's summer commencement ceremony held at the Schottenstein Center on Aug. 2.

Emily Gackowski's rowing program led all teams with four graduates, while men's hockey, men's swimming, women's fencing and women's swimming each graduated three. Long snapper Max Lomonico was the only member of the football program to receive a degree over the summer.

Other notable graduates include four-time first-team All-Big Ten women's swimmer Katherine Zenick (social work), three-time NCAA qualifier and 2022 All-American wrestler Carson Kharchla (healthcare leadership and innovation), six-time All-American men's swimmer Daniel Baltes (atmospheric sciences), two-time individual NCAA qualifier in track and field and cross country runner Daniella Santos (social work), two-time NCAA qualifier in men's fencing Nolan Williams (psychology) and men's lacrosse honorable mention All-American Gannon Matthews (kinesiology).

The complete list of graduates is be-

low.

Baseball – Spencer Hill, sports coaching.

Men's Basketball – Colby Baumann, sport industry; Demetrius Johnson, sport industry.

Women's Basketball – Chance Gray, communications; Cotie McMahon, human development & family science.

Women's Cross Country – Katherine Castelli, kinesiology; Daniella Santos, social work.

Dance – Danielle Gelin, economics.

Women's Diving – Paola Pineda Vazquez, sports coaching.

Men's Fencing – Maxwell Rodney, master's in supply chain management; Nolan Williams, psychology.

Women's Fencing – Chandini Antal, accounting; Anna Heiser, finance; Emma Hoelzen, pharmacy.

Field Hockey – Zella Bailey, sport industry; Jenna Zunic, health sciences.

Football – Maxwell Lomonico, sports coaching.

Men's Golf – Andrew Mulcahy, kinesiology.

Women's Gymnastics – Stephanie

Berger, hospitality management; Sidney Washington, biology.

Men's Hockey – Gunnarwolfe Fontaine, diversity, equity & inclusion; Aiden Hansen-Bukata, sports coaching; Reilly Herbst, accounting.

Women's Hockey – Amanda Thiele, criminal justice administration; Madelyn Wheeler, sports coaching.

Men's Lacrosse – James Cipolla, master's in bioethics; Ryan Donnery, kinesiology; Gannon Matthews, kinesiology.

Rowing – Rose Biddulph, applied neuroscience; Alessandra Flevares, psychology; Ava Fortney, sport industry; Ry- lie McCall, criminology.

Men's Swimming – Daniel Baltes, atmospheric sciences; Owen Conley, health and rehabilitation sciences; Evan McFadden, aerospace engineering.

Women's Swimming – Alyssa Graves, business administration; analytics; Janessa Mathews, speech and hearing science; Katherine Zenick, social work.

Wrestling – Carson Kharchla, healthcare leadership & innovation.

Having their black stripes removed is the first step toward those newcomers becoming regular contributors on the 2025 team, which many of them project to be.

Carter Joins NCAA Board Of Governors

Ohio State president Ted Carter was appointed to the NCAA's board of governors on Aug. 7.

The appointment, which Carter will serve over two years, makes him Ohio State's first representative on the board since former president Michael Drake was chair of the board in 2019-20.

"Honored to join the NCAA Board of Governors with this distinguished group of leaders in higher ed and athletics," Carter posted on Twitter. "College athletics is a complex and changing landscape, and I'm excited for Ohio State to have a seat at the table. Can't wait to get to work."

The board of governors will be led by ACC commissioner Jim Phillips and is a collection of individuals who help shape the landscape of college sports.

Judge Dismisses Pryor Lawsuit

Former Ohio State quarterback Terrelle Pryor did not win his lawsuit against Ohio State, the Big Ten and the NCAA. A federal judge in Ohio dismissed his lawsuit over denied name, image and likeness compensation on July 18. The former quarterback's claims were deemed to be made outside of the four-year statute of limitations.

The NCAA released a statement that said, "We are hopeful that additional copycat cases will see the same outcome."

As part of the House v. NCAA settlement related to revenue sharing, the NCAA agreed to pay \$2.8 billion to compensate thousands of current and former athletes dating back to 2016 for the commercial use of their names, images and likenesses.

Pryor, a three-year starter for the Buckeyes from 2008-10, was not included in that settlement.

Pryor threw for 6,177 yards, 57 touchdowns and 26 interceptions during his collegiate career and would have likely

commanded large NIL deals. However, NIL deals only became legal in July of 2021.

Pryor still enjoyed a moderately successful NFL career. The former Buckeye appeared in 51 games over seven seasons and had his best season at wide receiver with the Cleveland Browns in 2016-17. That year, Pryor had 77 receptions for 1,007 yards and four touchdowns.

Jenkins Makes Eagles' HOF

Former Ohio State safety Malcolm Jenkins will be immortalized by the Philadelphia Eagles. The professional football team announced on Aug. 13 that Jenkins will be inducted into their Hall of Fame in the class of 2025. His induction into the franchise's Hall of Fame will take place during the Eagles' game against the Bears on Nov. 28.

Jenkins played 12 seasons in the NFL, but his best years came with the Eagles.

After spending his first five seasons with the New Orleans Saints, the team that drafted him with the 14th overall pick in the 2009 draft, Jenkins joined the Eagles. Jenkins was an Eagle from 2014-19 and earned Pro Bowl honors in 2015, 2017 and 2018. During the 2017 season, Jenkins helped the Eagles win their first-ever Super Bowl.

In a statement released to the Eagles' website, Jenkins made it clear how much the honor meant to him.

"It's a huge honor," Jenkins said. "It's confirmation that what I did meant something and had impact beyond what I did on the field. It was about the people that I interacted with and how those people then changed. It's a great testament not only to me, but to everybody that I had a chance to interact with."

Trio Of NFL Bucks Look For New Deals

Former Ohio State receiver Garrett Wilson was one of a trio of Buckeyes to be in the news regarding a new contract. The



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former first-round pick signed a four-year, \$130 million extension (\$90 million guaranteed) with the New York Jets on July 14, which makes him one of the highest-paid receivers in the NFL.

Unlike Wilson, fellow former Buckeye receiver Terry McLaurin didn't have as much success securing a new contract.

McLaurin, who played for Ohio State from 2015-18, held out of the first four days of the team's training camp after unsuccessful contract negotiations with his team, and on July 31, he requested a trade. McLaurin was drafted by the Washington Commanders in 2019 and is currently in the last year of a three-year \$68 million extension he signed in 2022.

The former Buckeye is coming off an impressive 2024 season that had him go for 82 catches, 1,096 yards and a career-high 13 touchdowns. McLaurin's efforts not only helped the Commanders reach the NFC championship game, but they also helped him to earn Pro Bowl honors for the second time in his career.

As BSB went to press, McLaurin had yet to be traded or sign a new contract with the Commanders.

McLaurin's former Ohio State teammate Eli Apple, a cornerback for the Buckeyes from 2013-15, is looking for a new team. Apple signed a one-year deal with the San Francisco 49ers on July 28, but less than two weeks later, he was released on Aug. 7.

Apple, who started in 60 games from 2018-22, has seen his professional career slow down in the last couple of years. After signing with the San Diego Chargers' practice squad last year on Oct. 15 and being promoted, Apple saw action in four games and recorded two tackles and a pass deflection.

Trump Signs Order To "Save College Sports"

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on July 24 that says it "prohibits third-party, pay-for-play payments to collegiate athletes." The order "does not apply to legitimate, fair-market-value compensation that a third party provides to an athlete, such as for a brand endorsement."

It's unclear whether the order will actually have any impact on college sports moving forward. With the recent House settlement and the agreement reached by House plaintiff attorneys, the power conferences and the NCAA that NIL collectives would be treated as normal businesses, there are still many questions about the specifics of how NIL regulations will work moving forward and whether this executive order will affect that agreement.

NCAA president Charlie Baker released a statement on the executive order after it was issued.

"The NCAA is making positive changes for student-athletes and confronting many challenges facing college sports by mandating health and wellness benefits and guaranteeing scholarships, but there are some threats to college sports that federal legislation can effectively address, and the Association is advocating with student-athletes and their schools for a bipartisan solution with Congress and the administration," it read.

The order, which the administration is saying will "save college sports," also gives attention to non-revenue sports, seeking

Buckeyes Abound On Preseason Watch Lists

AWARD	CRITERIA	PLAYER(S)
BILETNIKOFF AWARD	Most outstanding pass catcher.	TE Max Klare, WR Jeremiah Smith, WR Carnell Tate
BRONKO NAGURSKI AWARD	Most outstanding defensive player.	S Caleb Downs, LB Sonny Styles
BUTKUS AWARD	Most outstanding linebacker.	LB Arvell Reese, LB Sonny Styles
DOAK WALKER AWARD	Most outstanding running back.	RB CJ Donaldson
LOTT IMPACT TROPHY	Most outstanding defensive IMPACT player — Integrity, Maturity, Performance, Academics, Community and Tenacity.	S Caleb Downs, LB Sonny Styles
MACKEY AWARD	Most outstanding tight end.	TE Max Klare
MANNELLY AWARD	Most outstanding long snapper.	LS John Ferlmann
MAXWELL AWARD	Most outstanding player in college football.	WR Jeremiah Smith
OUTLAND TROPHY	Most outstanding interior lineman.	DT Eddrick Houston, OL Tegra Tshabola
THORPE AWARD	Most outstanding defensive back.	S Caleb Downs, CB Davison Igbinosun
RIMINGTON AWARD	Most outstanding center.	OL Carson Hinzman
WALTER CAMP AWARD	Most outstanding player in college football.	S Caleb Downs, WR Jeremiah Smith

to support "expansion of opportunities for scholarships and collegiate athletic competition in women's and non-revenue sports."

It does that by requiring athletic departments with budgets of more than \$125 million per year to provide more non-revenue scholarships this academic calendar year than it did the year before, and it "should provide the maximum number of roster spots permitted under the applicable collegiate rules."

OSU Staffer Hired By LSU

Former Ohio State director of player personnel Sam Petitto left the Buckeyes to join LSU.

Petitto, who was first reported by On3 to be making the move to LSU on July 11, is listed as the Tigers' director of scouting and personnel strategy on LSU's website.

Petitto's stint in Columbus wasn't very long. He first came to the Buckeyes from Alabama in February 2024. He spent eight seasons as Alabama's director of personnel operations before joining the Buckeyes, and during that time, he not only helped then-Alabama head coach Nick Saban sign several top-ranked recruiting classes, but he also aided the Crimson Tide in landing current Buckeyes like Downs and redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin.

Petitto, a native of Amite, La., previously was the director of player personnel

at Georgia for two seasons and also spent time at North Carolina, Grambling State and Southeastern Louisiana.

Sawyer Says Sign-Stealing Impacted 2022 Game

Before Michigan was issued its punishment for a sign-stealing operation conducted within the program, former Ohio State and current Pittsburgh Steelers defensive end Jack Sawyer gave his thoughts on the competitive advantage the Wolverines may have gained.

During an appearance on his teammate and fellow former Buckeye Cam Heyward's podcast, "Not Just Football," Sawyer specifically felt like the sign-stealing conducted by the Wolverines made an impact on the 2022 game.

"I'll say this, I think they beat us straight

up last year, obviously, and the year before. But my sophomore year, we left the field, and we were like, 'This feels weird.' We lost by double digits, and it felt like we had beat the s— out of them all game," Sawyer said. "We ran a screen pass that we had never put in – not the formation, not the look, anything. And you see them on the sideline, they're doing (the signals), and we change it, we audible to it or whatever, and when we run it, all the D-linemen as soon as the ball is snapped, the linebackers, everybody, they sniffed it out. We ran a tight end screen from the 25-yard line going in, and they snuff it out on first-and-10."

The play in question came in the first quarter of Michigan's 45-23 win. On a first-and-10 play from the Michigan 25-yard line,

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then-Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud looked for Buckeye tight end Cade Stover, but as soon as Stover flared out for the screen, he was surrounded by several Wolverines.

Stover himself thought the Wolverines’ readiness for the screen call was suspicious.

“We tried to throw a tight end screen in a formation we’ve never used before – like ever – and as soon as I lined up out wide, we had one play from it, I was going to motion back in, they were going to throw a screen to me,” Stover said in September 2024. “And when they start yelling ‘Screen!’ when you’re throwing a tight end screen, that’s when you know, like, ‘What the f— is this? We haven’t run this before.’”

Smith Temporarily Joins Maryland

According to a July 23 report from The Columbus Dispatch, former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith is working with the Maryland athletic department as a consultant.

Smith is helping out Jim Smith, the associate athletic director for marketing and communications with Ohio State from 1995-2000, who started as the Terrapins’

athletic director on July 15.

“You have to have something to keep you mentally active,” Smith told the Dispatch, “and the consulting and board work keeps me mentally active. Obviously, I’m not working 80-plus hours a week.”

Jim Smith worked with Gene Smith at Ohio State from 2016-20 when he led the Buckeyes’ alumni association, but much of his professional experience has been in professional sports, most recently as an executive for the Atlanta Braves.

The two plan on having bimonthly Zoom calls along with other calls if Jim Smith is seeking guidance from Gene, since he was an athletic director for nearly 40 years at the NCAA level. The role is expected to last for about six months.

OSU Men Win Capital One Cup

Ohio State took home the 2024-25 Capital One Cup on July 16 after its men’s sports programs were the best in the country throughout the academic year.

The Capital One Cup is given out annually and honors the best men’s and women’s sports programs separately. It’s the second time the Ohio State men have won the award after the Buckeyes took it home in 2016-17.

“I want to thank Capital One for its stewardship of this important program that ultimately honors student-athletes, coaches and the support staffs who take great pride in what they do,” Bjork said. “We had a highly successful and memorable year on the field in 2024-25, a testament to the hard work, dedication and commitment to excellence that our student-athletes display.”

Ohio State had seven men’s sports programs, including the national championship-winning football team, contribute to its Capital One Cup win by finishing in the top 10 nationally in their respective sports.

Ohio State Ranks Third In Preseason Consensus Poll

Ohio State’s Week 1 opponent is ranked No. 1 in the country by six out of eight top-25 rankings, finishing atop Buckeye Sports Bulletin’s annual consensus poll.

The poll includes rankings from The Associated Press, Athlon Sports, CBS Sports, College Football News, ESPN FPI, Phil Steele, Sporting News and the USA Today coaches’ poll, and points are awarded on a 25-24-23 scale, with the No. 1 team earning 25 points, the No. 2 team earning 24 points, and so on. The maximum number of points a team can receive is 200, and the total number of first-place votes is written in parentheses.

The Buckeyes (182 points) didn’t receive a first-place vote in any of the eight polls, ranking in second according to the coaches’ poll and Sporting News. They ranked as low as fifth in the country according to Phil Steele’s top 25.

The Longhorns (197 points) were kept out of the No. 1 spot by College Football News (No. 2) and Phil Steele (No. 3). Both of those polls had Ohio State’s Nov. 1 opponent, Penn State, in the No. 1 spot instead. The Nittany Lions finished second with 189 points. At No. 4 is Georgia, which was ranked between seventh (Phil Steele) and second (ESPN FPI).

Rounding out the top 10 were No. 5 Notre Dame, No. 6 Alabama, No. 7 Clemson, No. 8 Oregon, No. 9 LSU and No. 10 Miami (Fla.).

Other schools in the Big Ten that are ranked are No. 12 Michigan, which ranged from No. 11 (College Football News) to No. 16 (Sporting News), Ohio State’s Oct. 11 opponent, No. 16 Illinois, No. 22 Indiana and No. 23 USC. Iowa was the only other conference team to receive any points, ranked No. 25 by College Football News.

There are eight new teams in the pre-

Rk.	Team	Points
1.	Texas	197
2.	Penn State	189
3.	Ohio State	182
4.	Georgia	171
5.	Notre Dame	167
6.	Alabama	158
7.	Clemson	151
8.	Oregon	145
9.	LSU	134
10.	Miami	115
11.	Florida	102
12.	Michigan	96
13.	Arizona State	88
14.	Texas A&M	82
15.	South Carolina	80
16.	Illinois	78
17.	Ole Miss	64
18.	Tennessee	60
19.	Oklahoma	58
20.	Kansas State	54
21.	SMU	50
22.	Indiana	46
23.	USC	27
24.	Iowa State	26
25.	Texas Tech	22

season consensus poll compared to last year, with Florida, Arizona State, South Carolina, Illinois, SMU, Indiana, Iowa State and Texas Tech joining the ranks.

A total of 33 teams received votes, with Utah, Missouri, Baylor, Auburn, BYU, Boise State, Louisville and Iowa missing the cut for the top 25.

— Compiled by Greg Wilson

2025 Big Ten Schedule														
	AUG. 30	SEPT. 6	SEPT. 13	SEPT. 20	SEPT. 27	OCT. 4	OCT. 11	OCT. 18	OCT. 25	NOV. 1	NOV. 8	NOV. 15	NOV. 22	NOV. 29
ILLINOIS	WESTERN ILLINOIS (Aug. 29)	at Duke	WESTERN MICHIGAN	at Indiana	USC	at Purdue	OHIO STATE		at Washington	RUTGERS		MARYLAND	at Wisconsin	N'WESTERN
INDIANA	OLD DOMINION	KENNESAW STATE	INDIANA STATE (Sept. 12)	ILLINOIS	at Iowa		at Oregon	MICHIGAN STATE	UCLA	at Maryland	at Penn State	WISCONSIN		at Purdue
IOWA	UALBANY	at Iowa State	UMASS	at Rutgers (Sept. 19)	INDIANA		at Wisconsin	PENN STATE	MINNESOTA		OREGON	at USC	MICHIGAN STATE	at Nebraska
MARYLAND	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	NORTHERN ILLINOIS (Sept. 5)	TOWSON	at Wisconsin		WASHINGTON	NEBRASKA	at UCLA		INDIANA	at Rutgers	at Illinois	MICHIGAN	vs. Michigan State at Detroit
MICHIGAN	NEW MEXICO	at Oklahoma	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	at Nebraska		WISCONSIN	at USC	WASHINGTON	at Michigan State	PURDUE		at N'western	at Maryland	OHIO STATE
MICH. STATE	W'ERN MICH. (Aug. 29)	BOSTON COLLEGE	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	at USC		at Nebraska	UCLA	at Indiana	MICHIGAN	at Minnesota		PENN STATE	at Iowa	vs. Maryland at Detroit
MINNESOTA	BUFFALO (Aug. 28)	N'WESTERN STATE	at California		RUTGERS	at Ohio State	PURDUE	NEBRASKA (Oct. 17)	at Iowa	MICHIGAN STATE		at Oregon (Nov. 14)	vs. N'Western at Chicago	WISCONSIN
NEBRASKA	vs. Cincy at Kansas City (Aug. 28)	AKRON	HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	MICHIGAN		MICHIGAN STATE	at Maryland	at Minnesota (Oct. 17)	N'WESTERN	USC	at UCLA		at Penn State	IOWA (Nov. 28)
N'WESTERN	at Tulane	WESTERN ILLINOIS	at Oregon		UCLA	LOUISIANA MONROE	at Penn State	PURDUE	at Nebraska		at USC	vs. Michigan at Chicago	vs. Minnesota at Chicago	at Illinois
OHIO STATE	TEXAS	GRAMBLING STATE	OHIO		at Washington	MINNESOTA	at Illinois	at Wisconsin		PENN STATE	at Purdue	UCLA	RUTGERS	at Michigan
OREGON	MONTANA STATE	OKLAHOMA STATE	at Northwestern	OREGON STATE	at Penn State		INDIANA	at Rutgers	WISCONSIN		at Iowa	MINNESOTA (Nov. 14)	USC	at Washington
PENN STATE	NEVADA	FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL	VILLANOVA		OREGON	at UCLA	N'WESTERN	at Iowa		at Ohio State	INDIANA	at Michigan State	NEBRASKA	at Rutgers
PURDUE	BALL STATE	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	USC	at Notre Dame		ILLINOIS	at Minnesota	at N'western	RUTGERS	at Michigan	OHIO STATE	at Washington		INDIANA
RUTGERS	OHIO (Aug. 28)	MIAMI (OH)	NORFOLK STATE	IOWA (Sept. 19)	at Minnesota		at Washington (Oct. 10)	OREGON	at Purdue	at Illinois	MARYLAND		at Ohio State	PENN STATE
UCLA	UTAH	at UNLV	NEW MEXICO (Sept. 12)		at N'western	PENN STATE	at Michigan State	MARYLAND	at Indiana		NEBRASKA	at Ohio State	WASHINGTON	at USC
USC	MISSOURI STATE	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	at Purdue	MICHIGAN STATE	at Illinois		MICHIGAN	at Notre Dame		at Nebraska	N'WESTERN	IOWA	at Oregon	UCLA
WASHINGTON	COLORADO STATE	UC-DAVIS		at Washington State	OHIO STATE	at Maryland	RUTGERS (Oct. 10)	at Michigan	ILLINOIS		at Wisconsin	PURDUE	at UCLA	OREGON
WISCONSIN	MIAMI (OH) (Aug. 28)	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	at Alabama	MARYLAND		at Michigan	IOWA	OHIO STATE	at Oregon		WASHINGTON	at Indiana	ILLINOIS	at Minnesota
Big Ten Championship Game • Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis • Dec. 6 • 8 p.m. ET														

2025 Ohio State Football Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
0	Sonny Styles	LB	6-5	243	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
1	Davison Igbinosun	CB	6-2	195	Sr.	Union, N.J./Mississippi
1	Brandon Inniss	WR	6-0	199	Jr.	Hollywood, Fla./American Heritage
2	Caleb Downs	SAF	6-0	205	Jr.	Hoschton, Ga./Mill Creek / Alabama
3	Lincoln Kienholz	QB	6-2	214	Jr.	Pierre, S.D./T.F. Riggs
3	Lorenzo Styles Jr.	CB	6-1	195	Gr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
4	Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	198	Fr.	Houston, Texas/North Shore
4	Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	223	So.	Miami Gardens, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
5	Mylan Graham	WR	6-1	195	So.	Fort Wayne, Ind./New Haven
5	Aaron Scott Jr.	CB	6-0	195	So.	Springfield, Ohio/Springfield
6	Eli Brickhandler	QB	6-2	211	Gr.	Stockton, Calif./Pittsburg H.S. / NC A&T
7	Phillip Bell	WR	6-1	200	Fr.	Mission Viejo, CA/Mission Viejo
7	Jermaine Mathews Jr.	CB	5-11	190	Jr.	Cincinnati/Winton Woods
8	De'Zie Jones	WR	5-10	187	Fr.	Wayne, NJ/DePaul Catholic
8	Arvell Reese	LB	6-4	243	Jr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Glenville
9	Malik Hartford	SAF	6-2	200	Jr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
9	Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	230	Fr.	Bellefontaine, Ohio/Bellefontaine
10	Faheem Delane	SAF	6-1	210	Fr.	Good Hope, MD/Our Lady of Good Counsel
10	Julian Sayin	QB	6-1	208	So.	Carlsbad, Calif./Carlsbad / Alabama
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	243	Sr.	Dayton, Ohio/Archbishop Alter
11	Quincy Porter	WR	6-4	210	Fr.	New Milford, N.J./Bergen Catholic
12	CJ Donaldson	RB	6-2	232	Sr.	Miami, Fla./Gulliver Prep / West Virginia
12	Bryce West	CB	5-11	197	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/Glenville
13	Miles Lockhart	CB	5-9	197	So.	Chandler, Ariz./Basha
13	Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	192	Jr.	Tampa, Fla./Wiregrass Ranch
14	Beau Atkinson	DL	6-6	258	Sr.	Raleigh, N.C./North Carolina / Leesville Road
14	Trey Robinette	QB	6-3	189	Fr.	Washington Court House, Ohio/Miami Trace
15	Zion Grady	DL	6-4	258	Fr.	Enterprise, Ala./Enterprise
15	Jelani Thurman	TE	6-6	250	Jr.	Fairburn, Ga./Langston Hughes
16	Mason Maggs	QB	6-2	226	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
16	Keenan Nelson Jr.	DB	6-0	205	Sr.	Philadelphia/St. Joseph's Prep / South Carolina
17	Tarvos "TJ" Alford	LB	6-1	233	Fr.	Port Saint Lucie, Fla./Vero Beach
17	Carnell Tate	WR	6-3	195	Jr.	Chicago/Marist (Ill.) / IMG Academy
18	Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	201	So.	Rahway, N.J./Seton Hall Prep
18	Bodpegn Miller	WR	6-3	196	Fr.	Mansfield, Ohio/Ontario
19	Nick McLarty	P	6-7	255	So.	Melbourne, Australia/Caulfield Grammar & Punt Factory
19	Jordyn Woods	CB	6-4	193	Fr.	Cartersville, Ga./Cartersville
20	James Peoples	RB	5-10	206	So.	San Antonio, Texas/Veterans Memorial
20	Riley Pettijohn	LB	6-2	231	Fr.	McKinney, Texas/McKinney
21	Brenten "Inky" Jones	LB	6-2	210	Sr.	Steubenville, Ohio/Steubenville
21	Anthony "Turbo" Rogers	RB	5-8	198	Fr.	Montgomery, Ala./Carver
23	Nolan Baudo	WR	5-10	180	Jr.	Chicago, Ill./Marist
23	Garrett Stover	LB	6-1	228	So.	Sunbury, Ohio/Big Walnut
24	Sam Dixon	RB	5-11	206	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington North
24	Deshawn Stewart	SAF	6-0	199	Fr.	Wayne, N.J./DePaul Catholic
25	Ty Howard	LB	5-11	200	Sr.	Cleveland/Villa Angela-St. Joseph / Duquesne
25	Bo Jackson	RB	6-0	217	Fr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Villa Angela-St. Joseph
26	Payton Pierce	LB	6-2	223	So.	Lucas, Texas/Lovejoy
26	Kolton Stover	QB	6-4	198	Fr.	Centerburg, Ohio/Highland
28	Stanley Jackson Jr.	RB	5-11	218	So.	Westerville (Ohio) North/Marshall
28	Leroy Roker III	SAF	6-0	197	So.	Fort Myers, Fla./Bishop Verot
29	Glorien Gough	DB	5-10	197	Jr.	Palos Verdes Estates, Calif./Mater Dei
30	Cody Haddad	SAF	5-11	186	Fr.	Cleveland, Ohio/St. Ignatius
30	Preston Wolfe	WR	6-1	170	So.	Columbus/Hilliard Bradley / Indiana State
32	JJ Sebert	SAF	5-11	190	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Bucknell / Pickerington North
32	Isaiah West	RB	5-10	210	Fr.	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep
33	Eli Lee	LB	6-3	227	Fr.	Akron, Ohio/Archbishop Hoban
34	Bukari Miles Jr.	CB	6-1	192	So.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
34	Brennen Schramm	WR	6-0	190	Jr.	Medina, Ohio/Medina
35	Jaystin Gwinn	SAF	5-10	206	Fr.	Westerville, Ohio/Westerville Central
35	Collin Johnson	LS	6-1	222	Sr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
36	Omar Jah	CB	5-11	181	Fr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
37	Zach Hayes	LB	6-2	222	So.	LaGrange Park, Ill./Nazareth Academy
38	Jayden Fielding	K	6-2	175	Sr.	League City, Texas/Clear Creek / IMG Academy
38	Eli Riggs	LB	6-3	229	So.	Cincinnati/Indian Hill

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
39	Joey Velazquez	LB	5-11	225	Gr.	Columbus, Ohio/De Sales / Michigan
41	Grant Mills	LS	5-10	223	So.	Mooresville, N.C./North Carolina / Cannon
42	Joe McGuire	P	6-2	210	Jr.	Melbourne, Australia/Prokick Australia
43	John Ferlmann	LS	6-3	232	Gr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Boulder Creek / Arizona State
43	Dianté Griffin	CB	5-9	187	Sr.	Lima, Ohio/Lima Senior
44	Epi Sitanilei	DE	6-4	239	Fr.	Ontario, Calif./St. John Bosco
46	Ryan Rudzinski	SAF	6-4	214	Jr.	Columbus, Ohio/Bishop Watterson
48	Logan George	DL	6-4	260	Jr.	Pocatello, Idaho/Highland / Idaho State
49	Gavin Thobe	SAF	6-2	190	Fr.	Bellbrook, Ohio/Bellbrook
50	Alec DelSignore	LB	6-1	225	Jr.	Youngstown, Ohio/Cardinal Mooney
51	Luke Montgomery	OL	6-5	312	Jr.	Findlay, Ohio/Findlay
52	Joshua Mickens	DE	6-3	250	Jr.	Indianapolis, Ind./Lawrence Central
53	Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-4	292	Jr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
54	Dylan Furshman	LB	6-0	210	Fr.	Jupiter, Fla./The Benjamin School
55	Dominic Kirks	DE	6-4	267	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/Riverside
56	Isaiah Kema	OL	6-3	312	Fr.	Lubbock, Texas/Frenship
57	Ian Gecse	OL	6-4	260	Jr.	Grandview Heights, Ohio/Grandview
58	Gabe VanSickle	OL	6-5	316	So.	Coopersville, Mich./Coopersville
59	Ahmed Tounkara	DL	6-0	280	So.	Dublin, Ohio/Scioto
62	Joshua Padilla	OL	6-4	300	Jr.	Huber Heights, Ohio/Wayne
63	Julian Goines-Jackson	OL	6-1	315	Sr.	Zanesville, Ohio/Youngstown State / Zanesville
64	Simon Lorentz	OL	6-1	285	So.	Dover, Ohio/Dover
65	Justin Terry	OL	6-5	324	So.	Pickerington (Ohio) Central/West Virginia
67	Austin Siereveld	OL	6-5	325	Jr.	Liberty Township, Ohio/Lakota East
69	Ian Moore	OL	6-6	312	So.	New Palestine, Ind./New Palestine
70	Phillip Daniels	OL	6-5	315	Jr.	Cincinnati/Princeton / Minnesota
71	Jayvon McFadden	OL	6-3	295	Fr.	Upper Marlboro, Md./Riverside Baptist
72	Deontae Armstrong	OL	6-6	305	So.	Elyria, Ohio/St. Edward
73	Devontae Armstrong	OL	6-5	314	So.	Elyria, Ohio/St. Edward
74	Carter Lowe	OL	6-6	313	Fr.	Toledo, Ohio/Whitmer
75	Carson Hinzman	OL	6-5	300	Sr.	Spring Valley, Wis./Saint Croix Central
76	Jake Cook	OL	6-4	306	Fr.	Westerville, Ohio/Westerville North
77	Tegra Tshabola	OL	6-6	322	Sr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
78	Ethan Onianwa	OT	6-7	331	Sr.	Katy, Texas/Cinco Ranch / Rice
80	Shawn Lodge	WR	5-9	182	Sr.	Akron, Ohio/St. Vincent St. Mary / Presbyterian College
81	Damarion Witten	WR	6-3	206	So.	Cleveland/Glenville
82	David Adolph	WR	6-5	210	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
83	Nate Roberts	TE	6-5	240	Fr.	Washington, Okla./Washington
84	Dorian Williams	WR	6-2	213	So.	Cincinnati/Princeton
85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	250	Sr.	Acworth, Ga./Allatoona
86	Max Klare	TE	6-5	243	Jr.	Guilford, Ind./St. Xavier / Purdue
87	Brody Lennon	TE	6-4	230	Fr.	Cleveland/Gilmour Academy
88	Maxence LeBlanc	TE	6-4	242	So.	St-Bruno, Quebec/Baylor (Tenn.) School
88	Trajen Odom	DL	6-3	295	Fr.	Inglewood, Calif./Weddington (N.C.)
89	Will Kacmarek	TE	6-6	258	Gr.	St. Louis/Country Day / Ohio U.
90	Eric Mensah	DL	6-2	302	So.	Stafford, Va./Mountain View
91	Jarquez Carter	DL	6-1	288	Fr.	Newberry, FL/Newberry
92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	260	Sr.	Greenwood, Ind./Center Grove
93	Maxwell Roy	DT	6-3	301	Fr.	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep
94	Jason Moore	DL	6-6	303	Jr.	Ft. Washington, Md./DeMatha Catholic
95	Tywone Malone Jr.	DT	6-4	309	Gr.	Jamesburg, N.J./Bergan Catholic/Ole Miss
96	Jackson Courville	K	5-10	185	Jr.	Centerville, Ohio/Ball State / Centerville
96	Eddrick Houston	DE	6-3	292	So.	Atlanta, Ga./Buford
97	Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	DE	6-6	265	Sr.	Miami Gardens, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
98	Kayden McDonald	DL	6-3	326	Jr.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett

COACHING STAFF: Ryan Day, Head Coach; Brian Hartline, Offensive Coordinator/Wide Receivers Coach; Matt Patricia, Defensive Coordinator; Tim Walton, Assistant Head Coach/Co-Defensive Coordinator/Secondary/Cornerbacks Coach; Keenan Bailey, Co-Offensive Coordinator/Tight Ends Coach; Matt Guerrieri, Safeties Coach/Pass Game Coordinator; Tyler Bowen, Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach; Larry Johnson, Associate Head Coach/Defensive Line Coach; James Laurinaitis, Linebackers Coach; Carlos Locklyn, Running Backs Coach; Billy Fessler, Quarterbacks Coach; Mickey Marotti, Associate AD/Director of Football Sport Performance; Rob Keys, Special Teams Coordinator; Sam McGrath, Assistant Linebackers Coach; Michael Hunter Jr., Assistant Defensive Backs Coach; Gunner Daniel, Program Assistant - Special Teams; Devin Jordan, Program Assistant - Wide Receivers; Joshua Chorba, Program Assistant - Linebackers; Tony Johnson, Analyst - Running Backs; Charlie Dickey, Program Assistant - Offensive Line; Marcus Johnson, Assistant Offensive Line Coach; Wendy Laurent, Assistant Tight Ends Coach; Austin Fields, Football QC - Offense; Tim Hinton, Executive Director for Football Operations; Bily Yates, Football QC - Defense; Taver Johnson, Analyst, Defensive Backs; Miguel Patrick, Football QC - Defense; Nate Ebner, Football QC - Special Teams; Colin Keanu, Program Assistant - Quarterbacks; Tony Washington Jr, Program Assistant - Defensive Line.

Those programs were football (first), soccer (third), wrestling (fifth), fencing (fourth), tennis (sixth), gymnastics (seventh) and lacrosse (ninth).

The win for the Buckeyes comes with \$250,000 in funding from Capital One that will go towards student-athlete scholarships.

Ohio State women’s sports finished 34th in Capital One Cup standings.

Former OSU Golfer Promoted To PGA Tour

A former Buckeye will be teeing it up on golf’s biggest stage next year. Ohio State alum Neal Shipley secured his PGA Tour card, the Korn Ferry Tour announced on Aug. 13.

Shipley is the third member of the Korn Ferry Tour to receive a promotion to the

PGA Tour for 2026, joining Johnny Keefe and Austin Smotherman. Each of the three will be considered PGA Tour rookies in 2026.

In 2025, Shipley has notched two Korn Ferry Tour wins and, as BSB went to press, was maintaining a streak of five straight top-10 placements.

The Pittsburgh, Pa., product most recently finished tied for eighth at the Pinnacle Bank Championship in Omaha, Neb.

With a third victory in 2025, Shipley would earn immediate elevation to the PGA Tour for the rest of the 2025 calendar year via the Korn Ferry Tour’s three-victory promotion.

In 2024 at Ohio State, Shipley earned unanimous All-Big Ten first-team honors and was named to the PING Midwest All-Region team as one of the top collegiate

golfers in the area.

Closing out his final season at Ohio State, Shipley claimed low amateur honors at the 2024 Masters then repeated the feat that June at the U.S. Open after graduating.

Buckeye Selected In MLB Draft

Former Ohio State pitcher Blaine Wynn heard his name called on July 15, when the Chicago White Sox selected him in the eighth round of the 2025 MLB draft. Wynn, the only Buckeye selected in the draft, received a signing bonus of \$248,700, which was his slot value.

Wynn was injured for most of the 2024 season but showed what he was capable of in his sophomore season with the Buckeyes when he made 21 relief appearances, pitching to an ERA of 3.38 over 40 innings.

Wynn, who was with Ohio State for only two seasons after starting his collegiate career at the University of Findlay, was assigned to the White Sox Arizona Complex League team.

Although Wynn was the only former Buckeye selected in the MLB draft, Tyler Pettorini, an infielder who played for Ohio State from 2022-25, signed with the Philadelphia Phillies after going undrafted.

Pettorini, who started in over 150 games during his Buckeye career, was one of only a few bright spots for a 2025 Ohio State team that finished dead last in the Big Ten. The Wooster, Ohio-native finished the season with a team-best .319 average, and his 10 home runs were tied for the most on the team.

Continued On Page 12



Continued From Page 11

Judkins Arrested, Won't Face Formal Charges

Former Ohio State and current Cleveland Browns running back Quinshon Jud-

kins was arrested on domestic violence and battery charges on July 12 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., but according to a report from NFL insider Jordan Schultz on Aug. 14, Judkins will not face formal charges, as prosecutors declined to move forward with the case.

"This incident was not captured on any video surveillance," the decline memorandum read. "There are no independent witnesses to the incident. Although the victim had photos showing injuries sustained, there were also videos in that same time frame where no injuries were observed to the victim."

According to a police report obtained by the NFL Network's Tom Pelissero, an accuser alleged that Judkins punched her with a closed fist in the mouth/chin area and struck her left arm and thigh. The alleged

incident occurred on July 7, and the accuser had visible bruising on her chin, left arm and thigh on the date of the arrest, according to the police report.

"Finally, there was a delayed report of the incident. The delay is problematic as the victim was alone on numerous occasions without the Defendant, had the ability and resources to make the report without his knowledge, but chose not to do so. For the reasons set forth above, there is no reasonable likelihood of conviction and this case is being declined."

Now that Judkins will not face formal charges, Schultz reported he is expected to return to the Browns in the "near future."

Attention BSB Subscribers

Buckeye Sports Bulletin recently lost

approximately 24 pieces of mail, many of which were first-class upgrades. If your Football Preview Issue came regular mail and you believe you paid for a first-class upgrade or there is any other issue that you notified us of and we appear to not have followed up on, please notify us immediately so that we can quickly get the problem rectified.

Call us at (614) 486-2202 and let us know approximately when you ordered and how you paid. Check numbers or the last four digits of your credit card are helpful. Those affected will receive extra issues to compensate them for their inconvenience.

Again, this problem affects only about two dozen readers.

Brutus Level Donors Recognized Among BSB VIPs

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."

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

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

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

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

And those who donate \$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.

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

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

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

Elite Wachsman Donors (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman): Beth Wachsman, Columbus; Brian Bucher, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.; Fred Krisch, Cleveland; Jim Walton, Naples, Fla.

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Ohio State Names Captains, Styles Gets Block O

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When the Ohio State football team voted on its captains for the 2025 season, senior linebacker Sonny Styles, junior safety Caleb Downs, junior wide receiver Brandon Inniss and redshirt sophomore offensive lineman Austin Siereveld were anointed by their teammates as the leaders in the locker room.

Styles also received the "Block O" jersey, a tradition started in 2020 that is awarded to the player who most embodies toughness, accountability and leadership on and off the field. He becomes the sixth Ohio State player ever to earn the honor and wear the No. 0, joining Cody Simon (2024), Xavier Johnson (2023), Kamryn Babb (2022), Thayer Munford (2021) and Jonathon Cooper (2020).

The Block O honor is named after former Buckeye defensive end Bill Willis (1942-44), who was an All-American and national champion at Ohio State. He would later go on to help break the color barrier in the All American Football Conference when he played for the Cleveland Browns in 1946, also making his way into the Pro Football and College Football Halls of Fame.

Styles is just 20 years old, but he quickly emerged as a leader for this team after the Buckeyes lost 17 players to the NFL following the 2024 national championship season.

"I just try to carry myself the right way with the way I was raised and instill some of those values into the younger guys," Styles said in the spring. "It's easy to be a leader on this team. We have so many great people, not just as players but the people they are and the way they carry

themselves off the field and outside the locker room and things like that."

Downs has been with the Buckeyes for just one full season entering this year after transferring from Alabama, but he has been one of the more important pieces of the defense on and off the field. He is rumored to be one of the players who helped put together the team meeting that reignited the 2024 team after the Michigan loss.

"I was the person I was the whole season," Downs said. "I wouldn't say I did anything more or less (after Michigan) than I did all season, in terms of leadership. But, yeah, everybody had to step up in terms of trying to get the team back on track in terms of where we needed to go."

Inniss is entering his first season as a starter but has been expected to contribute as one of the next great receivers to go through Columbus. He came through in multiple big moments during the 2024 season and has been a vocal leader, even when he wasn't starting.

"Being a leader, it was just instilled in me since I was young," Inniss said during 2024 fall camp. "When I was young, I wasn't really a talker, but I grew into that role as I got older and more comfortable."

Siereveld emerged over this offseason as one of the hardest-working players on the roster, earning a starting spot that at left tackle, confirmed by coach Ryan Day on Aug. 18.

"We're seeing some things out of him this offseason in terms of leadership, just taking on a great voice in that room," Day said. "He was an Iron Buckeye. All these things are leading us to believe that he can be our left tackle moving forward. Again, primary positions, secondary positions, these things are all in play, but we believe that he can do that."



Austin Siereveld



SONNY BROCKWAY

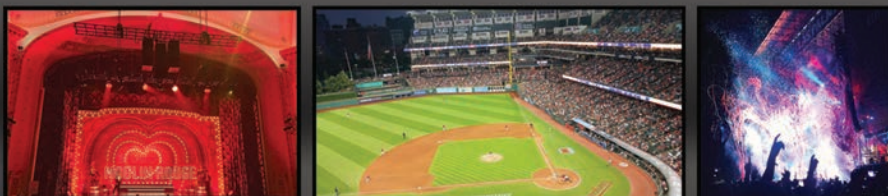
BLOCKBUSTER PLAYER — Senior linebacker Sonny Styles from nearby Pickerington Central High School was not only named one of four captains for the 2025 season on Aug. 16, but he was also the sixth Buckeye player of all time to be awarded the No. 0 "Block O" jersey in honor of former OSU defensive end Bill Willis (1942-44).

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Lack Of Experience To Test Buckeyes' Mettle

Continued From Page 1

Edge rushers Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Caden Curry are the perfect examples of players who were stuck behind established stars last season, despite being in their third seasons. Now they are in their fourth years and have spent a long time in the system developing, and they watched Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau have a major impact on the championship run. After seeing it happen in a year when Jackson and Curry could have likely been starters, they both want to make their own impact.

The Kids Are All Right

One of the things that made Ohio State so good last season was the experience it had on the roster. Quarterback Will Howard, safety Lathan Ransom, tight end Gee Scott Jr., defensive tackle Ty Hamilton and linebacker Cody Simon were in their fifth year of college. The entire defensive line was full of seniors, as was most of the front five on offense as well.

Almost every one of the starters had been in big moments and knew what to expect when they faced adversity. The Buckeyes return just six players who were starters for the entire season last year, so they aren't all battle-tested like the 2024 team was.

Not only is this Ohio State team relatively inexperienced, but it's also very young. It is set to be led on offense by redshirt freshman Julian Sayin, who was named the starter by Ryan Day on Aug. 18. Defensively, it's

a senior who seems to be the leader, with Sonny Styles likely donning the green dot. But even as a senior, Styles is just 20 years old since he reclassified out of high school and joined the Buckeyes early.

The top two players returning for Ohio State are Heisman candidate wide receiver Jeremiah Smith and likely Bednarik Award contender safety Caleb Downs. While they are likely the two most surefire players for the Buckeyes, they are just 19 and 20 years old.

Day had concerns about the in-game experience this team has during spring practices.

"Once you get past some of the guys who have played football here with the ones, it quickly gets inexperienced fast," Day said in April. "But even the guys who are going to be starters, they haven't played a lot of football as starters. They 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 lost talent, but more importantly, we lost experience. We're still talented, but we lost the experience."

The experience of his players hasn't been a common theme for Day to talk about during fall camp, however. There don't seem to be any major concerns about it at most positions for the Buckeyes, except for Sayin, a quarterback, who has played in only four games during his collegiate career.

Is it possible for Ohio State to win back-



SONNY BROCKWAY

HIS TURN — After a competition to be the starting quarterback that lasted through the spring and into the fall camp, redshirt freshman Julian Sayin (10) was tabbed over junior Lincoln Kienholz (3) by coach Ryan Day on Aug. 18.

to-back titles with a young quarterback who doesn't have much in-game experience? Sayin is just 20 years old and hasn't played any meaningful snaps. In the past four seasons, quarterbacks who have led their team to a national championship have been an average of 23 years old (Howard, JJ McCarthy at Michigan, and Stetson Bennett at Georgia winning two straight).

McCarthy was just 20 years old for his win with the Wolverines, so he showed it can be done at that age, but he had also started a full season before that and had more experience than Sayin does currently.

But cases like Howard and Bennett can be chalked up to the COVID era, when players got an extra year of eligibility due to the pandemic, allowing coaches to go into the

portal and take their pick of which ultra-experienced signal caller they wanted to lead their team for the next season.

Sayin taking over as a redshirt freshman is not at all unprecedented in college football. The thought that a team needs a 23- to 24-year-old experienced quarterback in order to win a national championship is a new one that stems from the extra COVID year. In the College Football Playoff era, quarterbacks who were as young or inexperienced as Sayin led their teams to a championship win multiple times.

Examples of that are 2018 national champion Trevor Lawrence, who was 19 years old when he led Clemson to a title (he was 18 for a month and a half of the season). Jalen Hurts and Tua Tagovailoa were both

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19 when they combined to lead Alabama to a championship win in 2017, and some credit can go to 19-year-old J.T. Barrett, who was responsible for the Buckeyes' one-loss regular season in 2014 before the inexperienced 22-year-old Cardale Jones took over for the postseason.

Of the national championship favorites this season, the only quarterbacks with what could be considered meaningful experience are Penn State's Drew Allar and Clemson's Cade Klubnik, who are both 21 years old and have two years of starting experience.

Sayin is not at all an outlier in a quarterback group that includes Georgia's Gunner Stockton (21), Texas' Arch Manning (21), Alabama's Ty Simpson (22), Oregon's Dante Moore (20) and Notre Dame's CJ Carr (19). Each of those quarterbacks has next to no experience.

If you read into Day's quotes about the quarterback battle between Sayin and Kienholz that went on throughout the entire spring and most of fall camp, the head coach seems confident in Sayin.

He compared the battle to 2018 when Dwayne Haskins and Joe Burrow were fighting for a spot in the spring. Burrow transferred to LSU after the spring game, and Day went with Haskins, who at the time had the more natural arm talent of the two. Day compared Sayin to Haskins separately, which at the time hinted at how he might have been leaning in the quarterback battle before he landed on Sayin officially.

"He's very smart, makes quick decisions," Day said of Sayin. "The ball comes out of his hand. He's accurate. I think he's got

good movement. He's got good quickness. He's got twitch in his lower half, but he's got twitch in his upper half. Remember how quick the ball used to come out of Dwayne's hands? It's similar with Julian. I think he's building more and more of a command on the field. Those are all reasons to like him, and he's improved. He knows what it takes."

Knowing what Haskins would go on to do at Ohio State and what Burrow proved to be at LSU and beyond, it seems like there might not have been a wrong decision between Sayin and Kienholz.

First Rodeo

The young players might not have as much experience with big games, but they're going to get it right away. On Aug. 30, Texas comes to town for a rematch of the Cotton Bowl in a game that puts the No. 1 Longhorns and No. 3 Buckeyes up against each other.

Last year's team was able to start with Akron to figure out any growing pains that might come with bringing in so many impact transfers and followed that game with contests against Western Michigan and Marshall before getting into the Big Ten schedule. The Buckeyes don't get that chance this year, which changed the approach to fall camp.

"It affects things a lot," Day said. "In that first game, you can't be learning on the job. We have to flush through as many issues as we possibly can. We have a long season ahead of us, but it can come down to one play."

The opening game has something to do with why Day felt he and the team needed

to move on from winning the title so quickly. He was asked on Aug. 11 if he had slept better after winning the national championship, but he said he hadn't because of the upcoming game.

"No," he answered quickly. "If we didn't open with Texas, then maybe. You want to take a deep breath, but the first game is a monster right out of the gate."

Day named most of his starters publicly on Aug. 18 so that the ones would have two full weeks of preparation just for the Longhorns.

The good news for the loser between Ohio State and Texas is that the 12-team playoff allows for a couple of losses. The Buckeyes lost two games last season and still ended up winning it all. That might seem like a negative overall for college football, but when the two teams come out of their tunnels at Ohio Stadium on Aug. 30, nobody will be thinking about how the game affects their future.

Nobody summed up the significance of the game better than linebackers coach James Laurinaitis, who played in his own home-and-home series against the Longhorns during his time at Ohio State. The game in the 'Shoe happened on Sept. 10, 2005, and Laurinaitis used that to compare to the contest coming up for the Buckeyes.

"I just remember how crazy the 'Shoe was," Laurinaitis said. "The pageantry around it is why college football is so beautiful. Amidst everything, it's No. 1 vs. No. 2 (coaches poll). It's Texas. It's Ohio State. It's the history. It's the burnt orange, the scarlet and gray. What else do you want? All of the eyes are on it."

Even though it is a rematch of a game that happened just eight months before, it will be a completely different matchup, which could end up being an advantage or a disadvantage for Ohio State. This will be offensive coordinator Brian Hartline's first time calling plays, and it will be the first time Matt Patricia is steering a college defense, which means the Buckeyes could look very different on both sides of the ball.

For Patricia, it will be extremely different from what he's used to since in the NFL there are preseason games that don't affect a team's record. His first season at Ohio State will start with the top team in the country.

"I never really appreciated those preseason games in the NFL, but right now I'm wishing we had one," Patricia joked on Aug. 1. "We have to hit the ground running in Week 1 and make sure as a coaching staff that we're on point. It's probably more me being nervous than anything. I'm the one who has to adjust and change, so I think (the players) will be fine."

With how young the team is this year, this type of game has the ability to cause some reasonable nervousness. But Laurinaitis believes that Day is doing a good job at getting the players prepared for what it's going to be like on game day.

"Coach Day has done a really good job at preparing our guys to visualize that now," he said. "Don't wait until game week, visualize it now. Visualize the RVs out there tailgating, visualize hearing the band practicing and getting your mind right for that, what that's going to be like."

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Sayin Prevails In Tightly Contested QB Battle

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After a hard-fought quarterback battle, Ohio State coach Ryan Day officially named redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin the team's starter for its Week 1 matchup against Texas.

"Julian Sayin will be the starting quarterback against Texas," Day said during a press conference on Aug. 18. "It was a close competition. Both guys we all feel confident can win a game for us. I think Julian separated himself over the last week with his consistent play. I feel like our guys are confident with both quarterbacks."

"I think we'll need both quarterbacks. (Redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz) did a lot of great things, but we're going to name Julian the starter and give him the majority of the reps with the ones and go prepare to beat Texas."

When All-Big Ten quarterback Will Howard left the Buckeyes after an outstanding national-championship-winning season, it seemed as though the Buckeyes wouldn't have much of a battle at quarterback in 2025.

Not only was Sayin, the No. 1-ranked quarterback out of the 2024 class, viewed as the most talented option in the room, but last year's backup Devin Brown and top-60 recruit Air Noland entered the transfer portal.

However, at every step of the way, Kienholz – who was previously best known to some Buckeye fans as the bewildered poor freshman Ohio State trotted out in an ugly 14-3 loss in the 2023 Cotton Bowl after Brown's injury – proved to be worthy competition for Sayin.

Back in spring practices, Kienholz may have even pulled ahead of the talented 20-year-old. In practices open to the media, Kienholz was able to show off some of the traits that had him ranked as a top-200 prospect nationally coming out

Projected Starter

Quarterback
10 • Julian Sayin

6-1 • 208 • R-Fr.
Carlsbad, Calif./Alabama

Played in four games last season as the Buckeyes' third-string quarterback and completed 5 of 12 passes for 84 yards and a touchdown.

of high school. It took an efficient 17-of-24 passing performance from Sayin in the spring game to even the race, according to Day.

"I felt like Lincoln going into the spring game was a little bit ahead of Julian," Day said on April 29. "I thought if you just watched the game, Julian probably performed a little bit better than Lincoln, and here we are. We've gone back through, watched the spring practices, looked at the grades. They're very similar, so we'll take it into the summer, and we'll let them play. The more you play, the more these things find a way to work themselves out."

Kienholz didn't let Sayin's impressive spring game performance discourage him. Instead, he put in the hours in the weight room over the summer to be named an "Iron Buckeye." But just as Kienholz may have inched forward, it was Sayin who impressed in the first few days of fall camp. The back-and-forth nature of the battle led Day to feel like the position battle was about as close as it could be on Aug. 7.

"They both have had good moments and moments where they're growing," Day said. "The competition continues. I will say that I've been pleased with the progress. We're not where we need to be, but if they continue to learn from the mistakes they're making and continue to grow off the plays that they're doing well, then it's going to go right down to the wire."



SONNY BROCKWAY

READY FOR TEXAS — Opening the season against top-ranked Texas is a major reason coach Ryan Day named redshirt freshman Julian Sayin (10) the starter on Aug. 18 over redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz. Day wanted Sayin to get as many reps with the first team as possible before the showdown with the Longhorns in Ohio Stadium on Aug. 30.

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

Ultimately, though, in a pivotal first couple of weeks of camp, Sayin continued to be the more reliable option at quarterback, which, according to Day, is the reason the five-star will make the all-important start against Texas.

"You're always looking for consistency and taking care of the football, and when you start with practice one in the spring and then do a study on the entire growth over six months, you see there was a lot of growth made," Day said when asked what led Sayin to winning the job. "You look at the numbers and the production, we felt like he was in a situation where he was ready to go play in this game. We also feel like Lincoln is ready to play, but overall, Julian was more consistent."

In years past, the start of the season didn't necessarily prompt a starting quarterback decision. In 2023, when former Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord and Brown were competing for the job, Day waited until after the first two weeks of the season to finally name McCord the starter. That year, though, the Buckeyes opened the season with Indiana and Youngstown State, and with top-ranked Texas up first in 2025, Day knew his team needed to give one signal-caller plenty of time to prepare.

"In a game like this, you have to prepare, you have to get the reps with the ones, you have to be at your best for the first game of the year," Day said. "If you are splitting reps, I think that's hard to do because you have only so many times in practice where you can rep a play. A lot of times you need three or four reps at the very least in a week of that play to get the different looks, the different coverages and the different leverages."

Sayin Set To Lead Bucks

Like every other quarterback in Ohio State's room, Sayin is short on collegiate experience. Last year, the then-19-year-old true freshman was buried in the depth chart behind not just Howard, but also Brown. And because Howard stayed healthy throughout most of the season, the only in-game reps Sayin had came during the second half of already decided games.

Sayin certainly got out to a hot start, completing his first two passes in Ohio State's 56-0 win over Western Michigan, including a 55-yard touchdown pass to tight end Bennett Christian. But that throw was the highlight of Sayin's season. The rest of the way he completed 3 of 10 passes.

The bumpy finish to his true freshman

season aside, Sayin is certainly not lacking for talent. In his senior season of high school, Sayin threw for 2,347 yards, 24 touchdowns and only one interception. He completed 74.5 percent of his passes and put his mobility, accuracy and rapid release on display, which led analysts to rank him the No. 6 player in the country.

It wasn't just scouts whom Sayin impressed in high school, but also legendary Alabama head coach Nick Saban. Gaining offers from schools across the country, Sayin was recruited hard enough by the seven-time national championship-winning coach to commit to the Crimson Tide out of high school.

It wasn't until Saban retired after the 2023 season that Sayin, who had enrolled at Alabama early, decided to leave the program and join the Buckeyes.

Although Sayin has yet to make a collegiate start, he's already convinced star receiver Jeremiah Smith he's up to the task.

"That arm is different," Smith told The Athletic. "He can make any and every throw. He's just a smart quarterback. Like me, he's a little quiet. But he's starting to come out of his shell. He's definitely going to be a guy. It's going to be scary for opponents."

As one of the youngest and most inexperienced starters on the team, it's easy to see why Sayin may be a little reluctant to dish out orders to his teammates. Sayin himself acknowledged that it's something he wanted to work on this offseason, but so far in camp, he feels he's improving as a leader.

"I feel like I'm developing it," Sayin said. "I feel like it has to be authentic. You can't be someone that you're not. There are definitely different styles of leadership, but I feel like I'm developing that more vocal leadership role."

Despite his natural abilities, there are still plenty of places where Sayin can improve on the field, according to quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler.

"It's as simple as things like our footwork," Fessler said. "Making sure that we're getting to the target, making sure that we're in a spot where our back foot is connected to the ground, it's underneath our back hip and we're powerful and using everything we have from the ground."

"Decision making, getting our eyes in the right spot every snap to know exactly what we're looking at to be able to recognize pre-snap what we think the defense is going to do. Then, post snap, can we confirm that's what the defense does? And having a plan for, 'What if it's not

the look that I thought it was going to be? Now what? Where do my eyes need to be, and how does that affect my decision?'"

By Aug. 18, though, Sayin had already taken plenty of strides in the preseason both as a passer and as a decision-maker, which undoubtedly played a big part in him winning the job.

"He's smart, poised, has good composure," Day said. "He can see it, has good timing, and really has built command and confidence as time has gone on. You see the traits, you see the accuracy, you see the ball getting out of his hands quickly. But he also has the ability to run the offense, get us into the right play, make good decisions, throw it away when we need to and ultimately take care of the football."

Sayin will need to put those traits on display immediately, though, because unlike Howard, who opened his Buckeye career with three straight Group of Five opponents, he will start with the top-ranked team in the country. The urgency that comes with a season-opening top-five clash not only fueled Day to name a starter when he did, but also made it especially important for him and the rest of the staff to apply pressure on a room composed of inexperienced players.

"One thing is for sure, we work them hard in practice," Day said. "It's our job to make sure that they feel like when they're out there on the practice field that it's as game-like as possible. We know that's completely unrealistic in terms of the fans and the crowd, but we do that in terms of the intensity of the practices, what we put on them, and the expectations."

"There's a reason for that – so they can go perform in a situation like this. I shared with (the quarterbacks), when they get in the game, let it rip, go get it, play with confidence, because that's what all the preparation rewards you with is the ability to play with confidence."

Kienholz Provides Valuable Depth

The quarterback competition may not have ended the way Kienholz had hoped, but if Ohio State's 2014 national championship-winning season proved anything, it's that one team can never have enough great quarterbacks. According to Day, the team's decision to start Sayin hasn't affected Kienholz's preparation heading into Week 1.

"He knows in his heart he's going to play this year," Day said Aug. 18. "He's going to prepare to play in the first game, and we know it's a long season. He's a

competitor. I'm sure he wants to play in the first game, but I wouldn't say he's discouraged. I thought he had a good practice out here today. I thought he had good energy. The team knows that we're going to need him, and he knows, so I thought that was excellent leadership on his end, and it's a long season."

Although Kienholz doesn't have much game experience or as much arm talent as Sayin, the fact that he made the QB competition a contested one is a testament to how much he has improved since completing only 6 of 17 passes for 86 yards in that 2023 Cotton Bowl game.

According to Fessler, Kienholz, a fourth-string in the depth chart last season, has already shown growth in multiple departments heading into his redshirt sophomore season.

"His work in the weight room was tremendous, so as an athlete, we've definitely seen that, and then on top of that, we've seen him grow as a leader. He's more vocal. His presence is felt. I think he's playing with a little bit of an edge to him, which is good to see. You have to play that position with a little bit of an edge without ever getting too high or too low, and that's contagious, so we're seeing that right now from Lincoln."

"Mechanically, we're definitely seeing Lincoln get the ball out quickly. He's accurate. I think that his base has improved. There's been a couple of things that in the spring he was working on with this footwork, and we've seen some drastic improvements that way."

Ohio State's quarterback room will be rounded out by true freshman quarterback Tavien St. Clair. The Bellefontaine, Ohio, native is unlikely to make a huge impact this year behind Kienholz and Sayin, but he certainly has the talent to lead the Buckeye offense if his name is called.

St. Clair, ranked No. 7 overall, the No. 3 quarterback and the No. 1 player out of the state of Ohio in the 2025 class, is the biggest quarterback on the team at 6-4, 225. Although he had his share of growing pains, St. Clair also showed his arm strength and athleticism, which has Day excited for what he can do going forward.

"He certainly has the size and the makeup," Day said of his young quarterback at Big Ten Media Days. "He's a great young man. He's very intelligent, he's athletic, he can throw the ball."

"I think he has a really bright future ahead of him."



Tavien St. Clair



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Peoples, Donaldson Lead New-Look RB Room

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Last season's run to the national championship featured no shortage of highlight plays from the running back duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins. Henderson turned on the jets with his 75-yard house call against Texas, while Judkins found the end zone seven times in four playoff games, including a 100-yard outing in the win over Notre Dame.

Those highlights are always fun to look back on when reminiscing about reaching the mountaintop, but they also serve as a stark reminder of what Ohio State needs to replace coming into this season and looking to defend that title.

That task – looking to fill a void of 2,076 yards and 24 touchdowns on the ground – is being charged to another one-two punch in sophomore James Peoples and senior CJ Donaldson, the latter a transfer from West Virginia. It's an unenviable challenge, but one that all involved – including running backs coach Carlos Locklyn – feel is within reach.

"They're getting better," Locklyn said on Aug. 8. "You had one of the best guys to do it last year in Tre. James is getting better at it. CJ, the young fella Bo Jackson, all of them, they know that's a priority. You've got to own the ball and don't give up sacks, and you've got to take pride. That's the standard. They're all getting better."

Donaldson has the most experience, but it's Peoples who returns for his second year in the program. He was a clear-cut third behind Henderson and Judkins last season, appearing in seven regular-season contests and getting carries late in the first-round blowout of Tennessee.

In total, he rushed 49 times for 197 yards and two touchdowns. It was a small sample for someone looking to become a lead back this season, but Peoples has seen growth from when he arrived on campus.

"I'm totally different," Peoples said. "Through training and the guys I sat behind, just learning from them and what I've seen. I've gotten faster, stronger, quicker. Everything has just taken another level up."

In addition to his in-game experience, Peoples said that sitting behind Henderson and Judkins allowed him to mostly take in the game during his freshman season, becoming acclimated to Ohio State's scheme under the tutelage of the veteran duo. But his coaches are continuing to push him beyond just his physical abilities.

"Coach (Ryan) Day, Locklyn, they've been challenging my mental abilities because it's a long season and you've got to be strong up there, it's not just physically," he said. "They're just developing us as people, so all around, I'm just getting stronger."

Donaldson, meanwhile, is entering his fourth season of college football after playing three years with the Mountaineers. Listed as a tight end when he arrived on the scene in 2022 out of Miami, Fla., Donaldson quickly made his impact at tailback, rushing for 2,058 yards and 30 touchdowns in 32 games at West Virginia and adding 32 catches for 190 yards and a score. Considered a bruiser with the

Projected Starter

Tailback
20 • James Peoples

5-10 • 206 • So.
San Antonio/Veterans Memorial

Playing behind the pair of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins last season, Peoples appeared in eight games, rushing for 197 yards and two touchdowns on 49 carries.

Projected Starter

Tailback
12 • CJ Donaldson

6-1 • 232 • Sr.
Miami/Gulliver Prep / West Virginia

Rushed for 2,058 yards and 30 touchdowns in three seasons at West Virginia.

Mountaineers, Donaldson has dropped some weight since arriving at Ohio State, going from 238 pounds last season to 227 pounds as of Aug. 8.

"It definitely helps a lot," he said. "I can accelerate a lot faster right now. It feels great not having all that body fat on me. It allows me to play more downs and be more explosive."

Despite coming in with more experience and a sleeker frame, Donaldson understood that nothing would be given in regard to playing time.

"When I transferred, it was during a rough time," he said. "I came here mostly because of the familyhood and the type of coach I knew I was going to get. The first thing Coach Lock told me was that everything I'm going to get here, I'm going to have to earn it. That was one of the main factors. He told me he was going to challenge me. He's going to bring a different personality and a different animal out of me. I need that challenge. It's important to be challenged."

Donaldson has responded to that challenge, integrating himself into the running backs room and losing his black stripe on Aug. 6.

"I had to earn it," he said of losing his black stripe. "That's one thing Coach Lock told me when I got here: Everything I do, I'm going to have to earn it. It meant a lot. To have an opportunity to be a part of his brotherhood is very special, to be an Ohio State Buckeye."

Peoples and Donaldson fill similar roles to Henderson and Judkins, with the former providing the explosive play ability and the latter able to consistently run through defenders en route to a tough first down. The split in carries will likely be similar as well, with last season's top pairing accounting for 64.6 percent of all carries (80.9 percent if discounting quarterback Will Howard's 105 rushes) and Judkins rushing 194 times to Henderson's 144 carries.

But in trying to replace the duo who helped lead Ohio State to a national championship last season, Locklyn doesn't want



SONNY BROCKWAY

PEOPLES CHOICE — Sophomore James Peoples (20) was the third running back behind TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins last season, but with their departure he is expected to share duties with West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson.

to see the next Henderson and Judkins. He wants to see the first Peoples and Donaldson.

"They've got to fill their own shoes," Locklyn said. "Those things will settle themselves. We're competing out there every day. If you think you have arrived in that room, you're going to get your feelings hurt, because I'm going to make sure I hurt them. You've got to come to work every day. If you don't humble yourself, I will."

Bo Knows

Peoples and Donaldson are set to receive the majority of carries, but another potential contributor on the roster is freshman Bo Jackson. Jackson, a four-star prospect out of Cleveland, has already started impressing his teammates and coaches.

"I thought he really grew as the spring went on," Day said in April after Jackson had 13 rushes for 88 yards and a touchdown (plus two catches for 11 yards) in the spring game.

Opportunities may be limited for Jackson if Peoples and Donaldson can stay healthy and maintain most snaps at running back, though he does offer intriguing upside as a receiving back if Day and Locklyn are looking to get him involved. But he's prepared to step in wherever he's needed to help the team as a true freshman.

"I'm just trying to do whatever's best for the team," Jackson said. "I mean, if that's on the offensive side of the ball, then it is. Or even if it's just on special teams, I'm just trying to do what's best for the team."

Rounding out the room with Jackson are fellow freshmen Anthony "Turbo" Rogers and Isaiah West, sophomore Stanley Jackson Jr., and redshirt freshman Sam Dixon. Dixon initially entered the trans-

fer portal in January but opted to return to Ohio State, stating that he was "listening to the wrong people" when he decided to enter the portal.

Dixon appeared in four games last season, rushing seven times for 53 yards, and is now looking for his opportunity to make an impact.

"For me, it's competitive excellence," he said. "Making a play when my number's called, and when my number's called, just getting out there and doing what I do."

Rogers, meanwhile, has made noise in his own right through fall camp, while West and Jackson – a walk-on and the son of former Ohio State quarterback Stanley Jackson – continue to get acclimated after a few months on campus.

"(I see) a lot of my younger self in them," Donaldson said. "They're just so happy to get on the field. Those guys, they're eager to learn. They just try to soak up as much of the game as possible. Those guys definitely have a high ceiling."

While there may be a clear top four or five within the room, Locklyn believes every guy has the chance to contribute this season – that is, as long as they continue to compete.

"Everybody keeps saying it's two different guys (Peoples and Donaldson), but it's six guys," Locklyn said. "You better compete every day. You keep saying it's two different guys, but there isn't anybody in that room that's right. They haven't done a damn thing here yet. They need to come out where it's, 'I've got to compete. I've got to come out to work every day,' because nothing is going to be given here."

Newcomer Klare Leads Deep and Talented Group

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The headlines are as effusive as they are bold:

“Why Max Klare will break Ohio State’s tight end receiving record.”

“Unreasonable Expectations: Max Klare will be the top-producing tight end in the NCAA.”

“The new powerful weapon for Ohio State to remain the team to beat in the NCAA.”

“How Max Klare Fits in with an Ohio State Offense Already Stocked with Weapons.”

“Player of the Year: Max Klare will outscore all other Buckeye tight ends combined.”

“Projecting impact as Max Klare gives Ohio State dangerous tight end threat.”

Those are predictions and conjectures, of course, but one headline is already true:

“Ohio State’s Max Klare Nominated for John Mackey Award.”

Since arriving in Columbus in January after three seasons at Purdue, Klare (6-5, 243) has caused a stir as he looks to add to the Buckeye arsenal that includes wide receivers Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss with others in waiting.

Klare, who is from Guilford, Ind., but went to high school at Cincinnati St. Xavier, joins a unit that includes graduate Will Kacmarek in his second season at OSU after transferring from Ohio, senior Bennett Christian, junior Jelani Thurman, sophomore Max LeBlanc and 2025 four-star prospects Brody Lennon and Nate Roberts.

Tight ends coach Keenan Bailey is ecstatic with a group that has four holdovers from the College Football Playoff when the Buckeyes won the national championship.

“It’s got to be (the deepest room I’ve had),” Bailey said. “How many guys played in the natty? I mean, we had four or five tight ends. We had all six play in the playoffs. And four of those six are back. So we’ve got tons of guys in that room that have started college football games. And not just against the school down the street – like, big-time moments and big-time games. Yeah, we’re super deep.”

The question is how they will complement the offense.

Bailey wants the tight ends to force wide receivers coach/offensive coordinator Brian Hartline to find ways to get as many of them playing as possible.

“Coach Hart’s going to put the best 11 on the field,” Bailey said. “It doesn’t matter if they’re all running backs or receivers or tight ends. So every day I tell them, ‘Every day you’re competing against the other tight ends in the room. But we’re competing against the receivers and the running backs.’”

But make no mistake about it, the tight ends have a primary role.

“Being a tight end, it’s not just about pass catching,” Klare said in the spring. “You’ve got to block, and I think that’s something that I want to keep developing. And going against these guys (on Ohio State’s defense) every day, running routes and blocking these guys every day, I mean, it’s going to make you better.”

Klare And Present Danger

Klare was the No. 1 tight end in the transfer portal after making 51 catches for 685

Projected Starter

Tight End
86 • Max Klare

6-5 • 243 • Jr.
Cincinnati St. Xavier/Purdue

Third-team All-Big Ten for Purdue in 2024. Has multiple catches in 17 straight games.

yards and four touchdowns in 2024. Gee Scott Jr. led the Buckeyes’ tight ends with 27 catches for 253 yards and two scores last season.

It’s a position that historically doesn’t produce eye-popping stats at OSU but has rewarded several Buckeyes with NFL careers.

“Ohio State produces more NFL talent than almost every other program, including having three tight ends drafted over the last five years,” The Athletic’s Dane Brugler wrote. “However, the Buckeyes haven’t had a tight end selected in the first two rounds in 30 years (Rickey Dudley, No. 9 in 1996). Klare has the talent to change that and become a top-60 pick in the 2026 class.”

Luke Farrell started the trend when he was selected in the fifth round (No. 145) in the 2021 NFL draft by Jacksonville. Jeremy Ruckert went to the New York Jets (third round, No. 101) the following year and Cade Stover in 2024 was chosen by Houston in the fourth round at No. 123 after making 41 catches the previous season for the Buckeyes.

Also, Scott signed as an undrafted free agent with New England on April 26.

“You cut open an Ohio State tight end, he’s going to be a bad dude who goes really freaking hard, and he’s just gritty as all get out,” Bailey said.

Klare could be the next big one. Even though he had only two catches for 13 yards in a 45-0 loss to the Buckeyes last season for the woeful Boilermakers (1-11) he impressed his opponents.

“I feel that Purdue tight end, Max Klare, is going to be a baller and is probably one of the best tight ends that we played, and I think he’s going to be the best tight end coming into the college football season next year,” former OSU safety Lathan Ransom said at the NFL scouting combine in February.

“It’s funny. I actually went to Coach (Bailey) after we played Purdue and was like, ‘Man, if he enters the portal, he’s a guy we should get.’”

Former cornerback Jordan Hancock saw Klare firsthand when he left Purdue to join the Buckeyes as a practice player during their run through the playoffs.

“He gave us a great look in scout (team),” Hancock said. “He’s a great route runner. He can block. But really, his routes – I think he’s going to be a real good passing threat later down the year.”

Klare’s best performance last season was six catches for a career-high 133 yards, and experts expect a lot out of him this season, even though the Buckeyes will be breaking in an inexperienced quarterback to replace Will Howard.

He was one of 46 players named to the Mackey Award (best tight end) watch list as

he seeks to become the first OSU recipient. He’s also on the Biletnikoff Award watch list for the top pass catcher, and he joined fellow Buckeyes Smith, safety Caleb Downs and linebacker Sonny Styles on CBS Sports’ pre-season All-American team.

Klare said it’s been a smooth transition to becoming a Buckeye.

“It feels like home and I can’t ask for a better place to be,” he said.

Bobcat To Buckeye

Kacmarek (6-6, 258) was in a similar spot before the 2024 season following his time in Athens, Ohio, when he made 42 catches for 507 yards and two touchdowns in 29 games over three seasons for the Bobcats.

In 12 games for the Buckeyes in the 2024 season, he played 296 snaps and made eight receptions for 86 yards with a long of 32 yards despite being injured during the sixth game against Oregon and missing the next four games.

“He put in so much work, I was excited to see him have a full season,” Bailey said. “So that was cut short. But, again, on the flip side, it challenged him to be more of a leader and to learn the offense, maybe taking a step back and help mentor a guy like Jelani. And I think that was a huge opportunity for a guy like Bennett and Jelani.”

Catching passes and being helpful to teammates are facets of Kacmarek’s total game.

“He’s the best blocking tight end in the country,” Bailey said.

Kacmarek replied, “I don’t think like that. I just think about doing my job each play. We’re taught – everything is from him, from all the coaches – so we just try to put what we’ve learned on the field every rep. And whatever the outcome is, is whatever it is.”

Unfortunately, he has been hampered in the fall camp by an injury that carried over from spring practices, so he knows how vital it is to practice.

“Everyone here is good,” Kacmarek said. “There’s not a rep that you’re going to take where you’re just going to walk through the play. We all have one goal, and it’s to be the best we can and help this offense go forward.”

Scratching The Surface

If he’s not full-go by the season opener on Aug. 30 against No. 1 Texas, Thurman (6-6, 250) can see more snaps, especially when in a two-tight end formation.

“I feel like we’ve got depth,” Thurman said. “We can do anything we want in our room. We have blockers, we have catchers, we have people that do everything.”

He played 14 games last season when he made four catches for 42 yards and his first career TD, a 1-yarder against Indiana. He also had a 19-yard grab for a first down vs. Penn State.

The Fairburn, Ga., native comes from an athletic family. His mom, Kara Braxton, was a two-time WNBA champion with the Detroit Shock, while his dad, Odell Thurman, played for the Cincinnati Bengals.

The younger Thurman, ranked No. 111 nationally and the fourth-ranked tight end of the 2023 class in the 247Sports composite, is looking for a breakthrough in his third season.

“He’s off the charts, night and day, more

mature,” Bailey said during spring practice. “I’ve been really impressed with his work ethic. He’s in here every night getting extra work in. I challenged him to learn every position on offense. Don’t just be a Y. Be a Y, be an H. Know what the Z’s got. And then also be a leader. He’s not a young guy anymore.”

Thurman is ready for the challenge.

“I feel like every year was my year, but hey, you’re going to see this year I’m ready to come out here and put on a show for the Buckeye Nation,” he said. “I feel like everybody on the field is ready to go put on a show. We’re trying to go back-to-back.”

Tight Group

It was a comeback in 2024 for Christian (6-6, 250) after being suspended for the 2023 season after testing positive for a banned substance.

He earned his first letter by playing in 15 games with starts vs. Penn State and Indiana. His two catches went for 61 yards, including a 55-yard touchdown from Julian Sayin vs. Western Michigan.

“I feel like guys can relate to what I’ve been through, and if someone feels down or something, I’ve been at the bottom, really,” Christian said. “I think guys draw to that, and I’m stepping into that and trying to be a good example for the younger guys.”

One of them is the Canadian (Saint-Bruno, Quebec) LeBlanc, who spent his final two years of high school at Baylor School in Tennessee. He was redshirted during his freshman season of 2024, but LeBlanc (6-4, 242) did play against Western Michigan, Purdue, Northwestern and Tennessee in the CFP semifinal without a catch.

He will be pressed by freshmen Lennon (6-4, 230) and Roberts (6-5, 240).

Lennon, a Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy product, seemed destined to be a Buckeye.

“I always grew up an OSU fan, and my dad went there,” he told Eleven Warriors.

Lennon was the No. 17 tight end in the 247Sports composite, seven spots behind Roberts, who made the move to Columbus from Washington, Okla.

“It wasn’t an easy decision,” Roberts said. “It was a long decision. It’s hard leaving home. But I knew I had to do what’s best for me. The amount of effort that they put into me during my recruiting process was something that I didn’t (get) anywhere else. It was a tough decision, but I knew it was the best decision for me.”

He found a welcoming tight end room.

“They’ve done a great job being leaders for me, just taking me under their wing and making sure I’m doing the right stuff,” he said. “I love the bond that I’ve built with them. Those dudes are with me every single day.”

Those comments don’t surprise Kacmarek: “I feel like our room is super close. We work countless hours outside of practice, working on our fundamentals. We’re a super close unit. We’re always hanging out outside the facility and stuff like that. So I think that plays a big role in the fact that we improve every day.”

Retain And Reload: OSU Returns Elite WR Room

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

There will be no championship hangover for the Buckeye receiving corps.

Ohio State has once again rebuilt its wide receiver unit, assembling one of the nation's top groups by holding onto most of its top talent and adding yet another strong recruiting class at the position.

Most notably, the Buckeyes are bringing back two of their top three wideouts in sophomore Jeremiah Smith and junior Carnell Tate.

Smith returns to Ohio State as a favorite for seemingly every award under the sun. The product of Miami Gardens (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna is not only predicted to win the Biletnikoff Award as the nation's best receiver but is fourth in odds to win the Heisman Trophy as well.

In 16 games with the Buckeyes last season, Smith racked up 76 catches, 1,315 yards and 15 scores, good enough for an average of just over 82 yards per contest.

Smith's spectacular freshman season resulted in a near sweep of available Big Ten awards, winning both the conference's Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year and the Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year in 2024.

Smith, who made an immediate impact as a freshman, emphasized the importance of sustaining that success. He noted that improving his ability to read coverages has been a key area of his on-field development, and he believes he will be even better in his sophomore year.

"Certain games, I hesitated doing certain things, not really going full speed, but this

year I know what to expect and know how to do it," Smith said. "So let's go be scary this year. Being able to identify coverages — that's the biggest thing for sure."

Last season, as a freshman, Smith admitted he struggled to step into a leadership role, relying more on his play than his voice.

This offseason, Smith focused not only on improving his receiving skills but also on becoming a more vocal leader, and his improvements haven't gone unnoticed.

"He's faster, bigger, stronger, and he's more vocal this year," Tate said.

Smith agreed with Tate, noting that he's focusing not only on leading by example but also by using his voice to guide the team.

"I think I got better at it. Using my voice when I have to, not overdoing it, because I'm not the type of person who just talks," Smith said. "I like to lead by example. I think I'm good at it, for sure."

Tate continued, pointing to the departures of Emeka Egbuka and other vocal leaders as motivation for him and Smith to step into leadership roles.

"This is not last year's team," Tate said. "We get to see a lot of young guys. We have to grow up as a team, become more mature, and everybody has to take that next step."

Tate, on the other hand, may be the top No. 2 receiver in the country, although he's receiving minimal attention due to Smith.

The Chicago native brought in 52 catches for 733 yards and four scores in 2024, proving to be a reliable second option alongside Smith.

In total, the pair amassed over 2,000 yards, accounting for just under half of Ohio State's total passing offense, while also adding 20 total touchdowns, including Smith's



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN A CLASS BY HIMSELF — Rarely does the type of freshman hype that Jeremiah Smith received surpass expectations, but that was the case last season. He was the Big Ten's receiver of the year and freshman of the year in 2024 and starts 2025 as a contender for the Heisman Trophy.

rushing score at Michigan State.

With another year of experience, Smith and Tate are widely regarded as the nation's top duo and are poised to give opposing defenses nightmares.

Tate emphasized the value of the next-man-up mentality, a principle consistently instilled in Ohio State's receivers.

"We take all the pride in the world with that," he said. "We know every time we're going to lose a receiver, it's just next man up. We know we're talented enough to pick up what was going on, so we just always believe in ourselves."

This season, junior Brandon Inniss is the one stepping into that next-man-up role.

Inniss, who spent the last two seasons with the Buckeyes buried on the depth chart behind talented receiving groups, is set to join Smith and Tate as the starting slot receiver, taking Egbuka's place.

Inniss was likely ready for a bigger role in his sophomore season, and he proved that multiple times by contributing in big moments such as the win over Penn State when he scored his only touchdown of the season.

But Inniss ranked fourth on Ohio State's depth chart, recording 14 receptions for 176 yards and the touchdown.

Offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline noted that he has watched Inniss develop over the past two seasons and expects his performance to

demonstrate that he can be one of the top receivers in the group.

"I expect Brandon to be one of those guys, and he's shown so far that not only is he capable, but he really wants to be that guy," Hartline said. "His body of work over time will ultimately tell."

With Egbuka off to the 2025 NFL draft, Inniss is stepping into both a starting spot and a leadership role — something Hartline has praised him for.

"I expect to see a great leader," Hartline said. "I expect a guy that did everything he did last year, but then some. Add more to it."

Tate shared a similar view, describing Inniss as one of the key players holding the offense together through his leadership and energy. Tate's view on Inniss was confirmed when Inniss was voted one of four team captains on Aug. 16.

"He's a very important guy. His energy is off the chart," Tate said. "On the catch (Smith made in the fourth quarter of the national championship) on the third down, you look on the sideline and (Inniss) is down there, 10 feet in the air, jumping up and down, celebrating. So, BI is tremendous to all of us. Whenever someone makes a play, he's always there to support us. He's the first one."

Following an impressive spring and fall camp, redshirt freshman Mylan Graham is projected to be the top receiver off the bench, in a similar spot that Inniss was in



SONNY BROCKWAY

GOOD HANDS — After two seasons in a backup role, junior Brandon Inniss (wearing No. 11 last season vs. Northwestern but No. 1 for 2025) is set to be the starting slot receiver to replace Emeka Egbuka, who was the 19th pick in the 2025 NFL draft by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Inniss was named one of the four captains on Aug. 16.

Projected Starters

Wide Receiver
4 • Jeremiah Smith

6-3 • 223 • So.
Miami Gardens (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna

Named Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year and the Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year for the Big Ten in 2024.

Wide Receiver
17 • Carnell Tate

6-3 • 195 • Jr.
Chicago Marist/IMG Academy

Recognized as an "Iron Buckeye" for the first time in his three seasons at Ohio State, awarded for his outstanding performance over the summer in the weight room.

Slot Receiver
1 • Brandon Inniss

6-0 • 199 • Jr.
Hollywood (Fla.) American Heritage

Racked up 15 catches for 234 yards and two scores in two seasons as a Buckeye; also returned kicks and punts in 2024.

last season. Graham emerged as arguably the top offensive performer in Ohio State's spring game, recording four catches for 104 yards and a touchdown.

Smith spoke highly of the Fort Wayne, Ind., native, saying he believes the five-star recruit possesses all the physical tools and just needs to align them mentally.

"Mylan's a dog," Smith said. "He's just got to get the mental side of things right. He's going to be a dog, for sure."

Also in contention as a rotational wide receiver is freshman Quincy Porter.

A product of New Milford, N.J., Porter brought in 57 passes for 969 yards and 11 touchdowns during his senior season at Bergen Catholic High School.

The five-star freshman has shown flashes of greatness throughout fall camp.

In only his second day of camp, Porter drew praise from Ohio State's top receiver. Still, Smith noted that Porter will need to adjust to the faster pace of the college game.

"I think Quincy's doing a good job right now, the first two days he's been making plays," Smith said. "Freshman year camp is pretty hard. I mean, it's your first experience going through, so everything will be coming fast, but I think he handled it in the right way."

Junior Bryson Rodgers is anticipated to see time rotating on the outside behind Smith and Tate.

The 6-2, 192-pound receiver played 12 games for the Buckeyes in 2024, catching five balls for 46 yards.

Redshirt junior David Adolph isn't expected to see significant playing time, but

he's earned two consecutive varsity letters and has appeared in 28 of the Buckeyes' last 29 games on special teams.

Rounding out the Buckeyes' receiving corps are freshmen Bodpegn Miller, De'Zie Jones and Phillip Bell, all of whom are four-

star recruits.

As the season opener against No. 1 Texas approaches, Smith and his fellow Buckeye receivers are preparing for a major early-season test.

"I'm just taking in everything Coach

Hartline teaches us," Smith said. "Coach Hartline is the best at what he does. Why not come here and learn from the best? Anything he throws at us or teaches us, I'm always glued in on what he's teaching us, and I'm always wanting to learn."

Smith said he is ready to prove his doubters wrong after many criticized his performance against the Longhorns after he had just one catch for 3 yards in the 28-14 Cotton Bowl win last season.

"I'm definitely hyped about this one," Smith said. "Especially how things went last year, things people are saying about me, about that game I had last year, about them. So I'm definitely hungry for this."

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Interchangeable Parts Make O-Line Whole

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

Versatility, resiliency and adaptability are words that come to mind when discussing the Ohio State offensive line for the 2025 season.

An example of the first is junior Austin Siereveld, who played both guard positions last season, started fall camp at right tackle, but now seems destined to start the Aug. 30 season opener against top-ranked Texas at left tackle.

“We haven’t decided any positions,” head coach Ryan Day said on Aug. 11. “We usually don’t set the depth chart really until a couple of weeks out. We’ll wait until then to set the depth chart, but right now Austin is working exclusively at left tackle.”

There isn’t any more meaningful endorsement for Siereveld (6-5, 325).

The resilient aspect is personified by senior Carson Hinzman, who has progressed from the ignominy of being booted from the starting lineup for the 2023 Cotton Bowl to recently being named to the preseason watch list for the Rimington Trophy, in the race to be named the best center in the country.

He started the final nine games of the 2024 season after injuries to left tackle Josh Simmons (three games at left guard) and center Seth McLaughlin (six games at center) in helping the Buckeyes to the national championship.

Despite McLaughlin’s injury, he won the 2024 Rimington, and Hinzman has a chance to make it two Buckeyes in a row.

“I’ve been blessed with a lot of adversity

Projected Starters

Center
75 • Carson Hinzman

6-5 • 300 • Sr.
Spring Valley (Wis.) Saint Croix Central

On preseason Rimington Trophy watch list; inherits starting job from 2024 winner Seth McLaughlin.

Left Tackle
67 • Austin Siereveld

6-5 • 325 • Jr.
Liberty Twp. (Ohio) Lakota East

Played in 16 games last season; started six, including two playoff games.

Right Tackle
70 • Phillip Daniels

6-5 • 315 • Jr.
Cincinnati Princeton/Minnesota

Started three games for Golden Gophers in 2024; competing with Rice transfer Ethan Onianwa.

Left Guard
51 • Luke Montgomery

6-5 • 312 • Jr.
Findlay, Ohio

On field for 184 offensive snaps in the four CFP games, including 64 vs. Notre Dame in title game.

Right Guard
77 • Tegra Tshabola

6-6 • 322 • Sr.
West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West

Played in all 16 games last season; top-rated offensive lineman in Ohio in 2021.

coming to Ohio State,” Hinzman said. “This year, especially, it’s been different. It’s a new journey together, and we’ve been so blessed to have such great guys come into the room right now that have helped me elevate my game, elevate my leadership and elevate all the attributes that go into what I want to be this season.”

The third characteristic, adaptability, comes from the players having to adjust to a new offensive line coach in Tyler Bowen. He joined the program in February to replace Justin Frye – who is now with the Arizona Cardinals – after two seasons at Virginia Tech.

His goal during the spring and fall camps was to develop a deep and reliable line in time for the opener.

“There’s depth. There are guys that can play in a game,” he said. “But what five guys, what six guys, what seven guys are going to rotate in that game and play at an elite level, at a level that’s Ohio State’s standard?”

There were still questions to be answered heading into the final weeks of camp.

“Who’s going to roll out there and who

are the guys? I think that’s going to be ever evolving,” Bowen said. “I feel good about the versatility we have, but at some point, we’ve got to be able to line up and say, ‘Hey, I can trust the left tackle, I can trust the right tackle, and I can trust the right guard.’ Moving around is great, but we have to start homing in now.

“We have a lot of versatility. We do have some depth, but we’ve got to be able to perform at a high level on the spot that we settle into, and that’s what we’ve got to figure out.”

Siereveld and Hinzman (6-5, 300) are set at their spots, while junior Luke Montgomery (6-5, 312) at left guard and senior right guard Tegra Tshabola (6-6, 322) are the favorites to start at their respective positions.

The real battle seems to be at right tackle between a pair of transfers in senior Ethan Onianwa (Rice) and sophomore Phillip Daniels (Minnesota).

Junior Joshua Padilla (6-4, 300) could be the backup center and play right or left guard, giving Bowen a solid core of seven, especially at center and guard.

“I think that’s where you have some depth as well,” Bowen said. “Whether that is Ethan transitioning in there and getting reps, Josh Padilla is a guy that’s doing a nice job. He just keeps getting better and better. I wouldn’t say anything is set yet. It’s all still a work in progress.”

Day said on Aug. 5 that he liked the direction Bowen was taking the O-line.

“I would say we’re still developing the starters,” Day said. “Depth, I feel good. I feel like we have guys for the first time in a while where you get into the eighth or ninth or 10th guy and you’re like, ‘I feel like he’s going to play for us this year.’

“Maybe in the past, we didn’t quite feel that way. But the question is, ‘How is this going to play out in terms of the starting five? Who’s the sixth guy in?’ That’s where all the competitions are right now. But the good news is we’ve got a lot of guys to work with.”

The offensive line has been presented with a challenge unlike that of last season, when the Buckeyes had an experienced quarterback in Will Howard and veteran running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins.

Novice Julian Sayin was named the starting QB, while the ball-carrying duties likely will be shared between sophomore James

Peoples and senior transfer CJ Donaldson (West Virginia), with redshirt freshman Sam Dixon and freshman Bo Jackson pushing them.

Hinzman said the line is up to the task.

“We can be such a good group. We can be a group that’s one of the best (in the nation),” he said. “I feel like, tight-knit-wise, I’ve been a part of that before. I think just to put all those pieces together and bring leadership, not only from me, but from a few other guys in the O-line group, it will be really special.”

Center Of Attention

Hinzman started all 12 regular-season games at center in 2023 before being replaced by Matt Jones in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri. When McLaughlin transferred after four seasons at Alabama, he instantly supplanted Hinzman last season.

With McLaughlin trying to make the NFL his career, the job is Hinzman’s again, with an opportunity to become OSU’s fifth Rimington recipient. Pat Elflein (2016) and Billy Price (2017) went back-to-back, joining LeCharles Bentley (2001).

Hinzman, from Spring Valley, Wis., has 21 career starts among his 26 games for the Buckeyes.

“I’m a little older now, bones are a little more sore, but I feel like I’m a completely different player, completely different person,” he said. “I’ve been blessed through all those adverse times, through those teachings and through those hard times. I’ve really learned a lot about myself, a lot about my playing ability, a lot about where I can go as a player, and how much more growth I still have. I still have a really high ceiling for myself that I can reach, and every day we’re trying to raise that floor. I think from two years ago to now, you could go on film and say, ‘That’s a completely different player.’”

He ranked fourth among OSU offensive linemen in 2024 with 596 snaps, and he leads all O-line returnees with 1,369 career snaps. With those numbers comes more responsibility to be a leader.

“I think I’ve been doing a lot better job. I think the leadership on the team as a whole has become such an asset and such a great improvement,” Hinzman said. “My leadership is definitely elevated. I think it still needs to elevate intensely. I can grow so much more than what I am right now.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

MAN IN THE MIDDLE — Senior Carson Hinzman (75) is on the preseason Rimington Trophy (best center) watch list as he replaces 2024 winner Seth McLaughlin to anchor the Buckeye offensive line.

Making A Move

Siereveld has drawn praise for his development in the offseason, which has led him to a pivotal role.

Bowen pinpointed Siereveld's improvement.

"His work ethic. His leadership. Those two things," the coach said. "I mean, coming out of the summer and the spring with some of the things that he did with (strength) coach Mick (Marotti) in the weight room, you see those things translating on the field. He's always been a powerful, athletic guy."

"We've got to get him to play within his technique better. But you can see the things that he generated in the weight room and the leadership and kind of the edge that he brings. You can see that showing up on the field."

Conversely, Siereveld credits his new coach.

"Whatever I need, he is always there. I ask him questions every day, and he is at practice helping me, coaching me up, and just tries to make me the best player I can be."

Siereveld played all 16 games last season with starts against Akron, Western Michigan, Indiana, Michigan and in the College Football Playoff vs. Tennessee and Oregon. When he didn't start in the playoffs, he rotated at both guard positions with Tshabola and Montgomery and finished the season participating in a total of 499 plays.

He's taking nothing for granted.

"Every day I am learning, trying to get better if it is left or right tackle. Nothing is final yet, so we are all repping our primary and our secondary (roles)," he said.

Moving from right to left tackle brings the added pressure of protecting the quarterback's blind side, but he's not worried about the adjustment.

"I don't know, it just becomes natural to me," Siereveld said. "I guess playing basketball in high school helped a lot, and having some good feet, quick feet, that helps too. And then just being coachable plays a big factor, and just always come ready to learn and ready to compete."

Tshabola said, "He's a guy that challenges himself a lot. He pushed himself to be better. He's never satisfied, and he's always looking for different ways to grow."

Like Hinzman, Siereveld knows where he needs improvement.

"Definitely my leadership. I am sort of a quiet guy, but this year I really needed to step up this summer and really be a vocal leader," Siereveld said.

Others have noticed Siereveld's work.

"He's having a great fall camp so far," Peoples said. "We lost Donovan Jackson. He was a huge part of our O-line last year. Because of that, guys stepped up. He's been a leader, being vocal, he's been pushing himself harder in workouts, through the summer, in fall camp. He's really been a leader in that O-line room."

Siereveld exemplifies the type of utility player Bowen relishes.

"We've made a big emphasis, something that we believe in, on primary and secondary positions, and that's a good example of that," Bowen said. "He's bounced at tackle, he's played guard. I think what you see up front, we're doing that with a lot of guys."

"We might have a guy bump within a team period. Those are all things we're mindful of, and we make sure to prepare

them. You want to be in a position where you can go out on a day and put a guy in a spot and then this day he's going to play this spot."

Taking Charge

Findlay, Ohio, native Montgomery came through when the Buckeyes needed him the most during the epic four-game postseason run.

He started at left guard vs. Texas (60 snaps) in the semifinal and Notre Dame (64) in the title game after a combined 60 against Tennessee and Oregon.

He performed well, maybe because he had a chip on his shoulder after limited action during the regular season, including not playing against Iowa and Oregon.

"If I'm being honest with you, I was just pretty pissed off that I didn't get a chance before," he said. "So I was kind of like, 'Here's what I'm going to do. Here's how I'm going to play and we're going to go from here.'"

Montgomery said talks with the staff on where he stands have put him in a good frame of mind.

"That's what it comes down to, having those conversations with your coaches because that's what they're here for," he said. "I wanted to pick their brains on what they saw and why I didn't get a chance, stuff like that. That's what you have to do. You have those conversations, and everyone's on the same page."

"You're not going to know anything if you don't go in there and ask. I thank them a lot for having those conversations with me and being able to open their ears and being open to mine as well. It was great."

He doesn't mind speaking up, and with vets such as Jackson, McLaughlin and Simmons gone, it's his turn to be heard.

"I take a lot of pride in that. I'm a pretty social guy. I haven't been a stranger, and I love making football fun. I enjoy just being able to talk, have energy and bring energy to the games," Montgomery said.

"That's been pretty weird because those are the guys that have really helped me in my years, growing and just getting better and developing. And obviously, when you step into a role from a leadership standpoint, I don't think it hits you instantly. But as camp has gone on, it's really hit me, and it's been pretty cool to just be able to help the young guys out like they did to me."

"I bring a lot of energy, obviously. I love the game. I just wanted to put people in the dirt and have fun. I'm looking to take out ribs, and I'm looking to put people in the dirt every single play."

His Spot

Tshabola played every game last season as he continued his trajectory after a freshman redshirt year in which he played the maximum four games in 2022, followed by all 13 in 2023. He was a steady influence on a line rocked by injuries last season and has shown through camp why he is the favorite at right guard.

"I've got a lot of plays under my belt now, and I'm just a lot more comfortable," he said. "I'm asking pretty good questions with coaches. I'm working with all four of our (line) coaches."

"We're preparing everybody to be able to play everywhere needed. That's something we had to do last year to win the national championship, so we're doing the exact

same thing. Getting guys comfortable being in different places and getting guys comfortable being uncomfortable."

Tshabola feels he has shown the most growth in the mental side of the game.

"One of our coaches used to say, 'You don't necessarily get faster, you don't necessarily get bigger or stronger, you just learn more,'" he said. "You learn what you need to do on certain plays, and you get more confident and gain more knowledge."

He said he is more focused and concentrated on making sure to get the little things right. One way he has improved is through a reading assignment.

"We read a book called 'Chop Wood Carry Water (How to Fall in Love with the Process of Becoming Great),' and the whole book is all about the mundane things every single day and doing them perfectly," he said.

The Right Approach

Daniels (6-5, 315) and Onianwa (6-7, 331) are looking for fresh starts, and the Buckeyes will benefit from their competition at right tackle.

"They're great dudes," Bowen said. "They come out and work. they picked up things really well and we've got to continue getting them going in that direction,"

Onianwa, who played 37 games for Rice from 2022-24, was a right tackle before moving to the opposite side in 2024.

Now, he's even taking reps at the guard spots.

"It's different from tackle for sure, but I have really great coaches and they've been helping me through the process and also amazing teammates," he said. "Luke Montgomery, he's a great guy to talk to about things like guard and everything."

"Honestly, my comfort is wherever Coach Day wants me at. I just want to be a help to the team. Wherever I need to be, I'm going to be."

Daniels, from Cincinnati, returned to the Buckeye state after two seasons with the Golden Gophers. The first was a redshirt in 2023. He played in 12 games last season with starts vs. Illinois, Rutgers and Penn

State.

"I'm not motivated by (Onianwa)," Daniels said. "He's cool. He's my brother, but I'm not motivated by him. I'm trying to help this team and be the best right tackle in the nation."

He was just getting started in his media appearance on Aug. 12.

"I'm just playing faster. I know the plays now, so everything's just clicking. Once I know the plays, I feel like I can kill anybody. I feel like I'm getting better every day."

"When you're beating on people, people don't like to get beat on. They're going to react, and we're going to scuffle. It's just me not reacting. I'm going to start winning and getting into their head more. That's another mind game you can play on Saturday. It's cool or whatever, but I'm just here to get my job done. Sometimes you've got to get dirty."

Daniels also didn't mince words in comparing Minnesota to his current home.

"It's really pro here," he said. "They really try to make sure you take care of your body, set schedules, routine, diet, everything is pro here. Even when we're practicing, you can't take people down and you can't do certain things, so you have to chill. It's pretty cool here."

Line Mates

With Bowen seeking flexibility, it's hard to gauge who the backups are for each position with most linemen getting multiple opportunities.

Padilla, though, appears earmarked at center.

"I think it's just about every day you're going out there and executing. Just playing as hard as you can. Going out there and showing great effort," Padilla said, while praising Hinzman. "I feel like me and him both just piggyback off each other. We see something, we'll definitely tell each other, 'Hey, I think I see this.' And then he'll be like, 'Hey, I think I see that.' And it goes back and forth."

Jake Cook, Ian Moore and Gabe VanSickle are other strong candidates for the second team.




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Buckeyes Set To Reload Defensive Front Four

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State is reloading at nearly every position after its veteran national champion team lost 17 players to the NFL over the offseason. But there's only one position that is essentially starting from scratch after all four starters left.

Jack Sawyer, Tyleik Williams, JT Tuimoloau and Ty Hamilton were all drafted after exhausting their eligibility in Columbus, and now defensive line coach Larry Johnson is tasked with re-creating that production in 2025.

While it might seem like a tall task, the defensive line could still end up being one of the team's strengths yet again this year, which is a credit to how well the Buckeyes were able to recruit and retain players who could have gone elsewhere.

Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Caden Curry are prime examples of players whom nobody would have blamed for looking for another opportunity. Most players arrive on campus and, other than some extreme cases, likely expect to be regular contributors by their third year in the program.

Curry and Jackson entered their third year at Ohio State with Sawyer and Tuimoloau returning for their senior seasons, but the two of them decided to stick around anyway.

"One thing about transferring – if you want it easy, you can go other places, but I always wanted it to be hard," Curry said. "I always wanted to face some adversity. Now that it's my time, it still doesn't feel rewarding because I haven't done anything about it. I have to go out there and do my job to the best of my ability."

Johnson isn't exactly starting from ground zero because of those two, who both played in all four playoff games and got regular snaps throughout the year. Nose guard Kayden McDonald also had a big part on the team last season, really staking his claim for the starting spot in 2025 during last year's Penn State game when he made a huge goal-line stop.

Eddrick Houston earned more and more playing time throughout the season and was even grading better than Hamilton in some of the playoff games, according to PFF.

The Buckeyes supplemented the roster through the transfer portal, adding North Carolina transfer Beau Atkinson and FCS Idaho State transfer Logan George. Help was also added from inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center walls when C.J. Hicks officially switched from linebacker



SONNY BROCKWAY

TIME HAS COME — With JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer drafted to the NFL, senior defensive end Caden Curry (92) is ready for his opportunity. Big things are also expected of sophomore defensive tackle Eddrick Houston (96).

to defensive end.

Where they notably didn't add, other than freshmen in the 2025 recruiting class, was at defensive tackle.

Up The Middle

What isn't a question on the line is the quality of the starters. On the edges, that could be a few different players, but on the interior, McDonald and Houston seem to have those jobs locked up.

What has been a question over the off-season is the depth at those interior spots. After spring practices, that seemed like the area where the Buckeyes needed to add most. They had a chance when Syracuse transfer Maraad Watson entered the portal, but he ultimately chose Texas. It also didn't help that Hero Kanu left Ohio State, also to join the Longhorns.

But Johnson defended his players, saying he doesn't believe depth is an issue. It's just that they might not have the in-game experience since Williams and Hamilton

were ahead of them the last few years.

"Lack of depth means that we don't have it. We have depth," Johnson said. "Lack of experience is what we have. You have to build from within. What we're trying to do is build depth through experience and practice. The bodies are there. They just haven't played football. We have six guys who I think can play."

Depth on the interior has seemed more promising as camp goes on. It seems like Will Smith Jr., Jason Moore and Tywone Malone will each be able to step up and relieve McDonald and Houston when needed. Freshman Jarquez Carter has also been a player who is developing quickly and could get some time on the line at some points this season, though that probably won't be in Week 1.

Houston was injured on the first day of fall camp, and that – if he ends up fully recovering and is ready for Week 1 – might have been somewhat of a blessing in disguise for the Buckeyes. When Houston was sidelined at practice, it forced players down the depth chart to get in with the ones and get more reps than they would have otherwise. That allowed Malone, Moore and Carter to step up at the three-tech position behind Houston.

That depth will have to show up if the Buckeyes are going to have a long season this year. Williams and Hamilton were so effective last season in part because when they were in the game, they were going 100 percent every play, knowing that if they needed a breather, McDonald, Kanu and Houston were ready to fill in.

Now McDonald and Houston will need

the same confidence that Smith, Malone, Moore and Carter can fill in well enough.

"It's about the development of a fundamental skill set going into the first game," Johnson said. "Who can understand how to play the game, how to play a low pass, get off blocks? We're block destruction guys, and we have to learn how to do that first. The guys who can do that and embrace that are going to really have a chance to play."

As for McDonald, he has lost weight since last season and added muscle in its place. That could prove to be important for him since he will be asked to play more snaps than he did per game last year.

He showed up to his media appearance on Aug. 14 in a T-shirt that said "disruptive" in all capital letters, which is exactly what he was last year when he was on the field. He finished the year with 19 tackles (1½ for loss), a quarterback hurry and a pass broken up.

Houston switched from the edge to the three-tech spot in the middle of last season when Johnson decided they could use him there, and now he's there to stay as the starter. The five-star prospect is reaching his potential quickly, but he will have to remain healthy to do so.

He has been wearing a knee brace on his right leg since his injury on July 31 and has slowly begun practicing again. Houston didn't give any more details about his injury other than saying, "I'll be ready Week 1."

He finished last year with seven total tackles and two pass deflections in the 2024 season, and his coach believes he

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Projected Starters

<p>Defensive End 97 • Kenyatta Jackson Jr.</p> <p>6-6 • 265 • R-Jr. Miami Gardens (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna</p> <p>Entering first season as starter. Had 16 tackles and 1½ sacks in his redshirt sophomore season.</p>	<p>Defensive Tackle 98 • Kayden McDonald</p> <p>6-3 • 326 • Jr. Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett</p> <p>Earned a role on 2024's defensive line with 19 tackles, 1½ of which were for loss.</p>	<p>Defensive Tackle 96 • Eddrick Houston</p> <p>6-3 • 292 • So. Atlanta Buford</p> <p>Earned time as a freshman after switching from defensive end. Finished with seven tackles and two pass deflections.</p>	<p>Defensive End 92 • Caden Curry</p> <p>6-3 • 260 • Sr. Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove</p> <p>In three seasons at Ohio State, has amassed 45 tackles, 8½ for loss, 4½ sacks and two forced fumbles.</p>
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has the chance to break out in his sophomore year.

"I think he's got a chance to be really special," Johnson said. "I think he's got a chance. But again, he's a young player learning how to develop. I don't want to put all that pressure on him like he's got to do this. He's just got to play to his ability. If he can do that, he'll give himself a chance to play really, really solid."

Living On The Edge

Maybe the biggest rise in stock this preseason has come from Jackson. It was already assumed that he would at least be a regular contributor, but when Ryan Day, Caleb Downs, Sonny Styles and Jeremiah Smith showed up at Big Ten media days in July, each of them had great things to say about the red-shirt junior, who had 16 tackles and 1½ sacks last year.

"I'd say Kenyatta Jackson has done a very good job," Styles said. "I'm really excited for him. He's going to have a huge year. He's a great dude. He does things the right way every day. He holds everyone accountable, including me. He obviously has all the tools it takes to be a monster defensive end. So I'm super excited for him."

Smith and Jackson are from the same high school, and Smith said he has been waiting for Jackson to get his chance.

"Kenyatta has had it. I saw it in high school," Smith said. "He just had to wait his turn. Now this year, he's going to turn it up a notch, and you are just going to see a monster that I saw in high school that could be a first-round draft pick."

Jackson has also become a leader in the defensive line room and on the defense as a whole. It was a role that Jackson himself said he wasn't quite ready to step into after Sawyer and Tuimoloau were in those roles for his three years in Columbus.

"I did not want to be the leader of this room at first in the winter. It was tough," Jackson said. "I didn't tell anybody this, but there would be times when (strength coach Mick Marotti) and the other coaches would be hard on the D-line, and it would be tough. I would go home and shed tears sometimes, but I stayed with it."

"Jack, JT, Tyleik, Ty, then Zach Harrison, my freshman year. I was in that back row. Now it hit me that I had to be the guy. I have to be one of the leaders in this room."

Curry has been learning under Johnson for three seasons now and will finally have his chance to start after sitting behind Tui-

moloau and Sawyer for the past few years. But being behind them on the depth chart helped Curry's game. He said that whenever he learned something from them, he would add that move to his game.

"Seeing all the great defensive ends before me and learning from them day by day," Curry said. "Working with them every single day and picking up bits and pieces from their game and adding it to mine."

In his first three years, Curry had 45 tackles, 8½ for loss, 4½ sacks, three quarterback hurries and two forced fumbles, and he was a big part of some special teams improvements last season, blocking a punt.

"I've always been a Caden Curry fan," Johnson said in the spring, "because somewhere, somehow, he finds a way to get to the football. And that's pretty special. So I'm looking for great things for him."

They will be joined by Atkinson, who had a good season at North Carolina, but 5½ of his 7½ sacks came in two blowout games against Florida State and Virginia. He will need to be able to translate that level of play to the Big Ten stage now. Johnson is hoping to help make that happen.

"Coach J is super, super good with all of the technique stuff," Atkinson said. "My effort has always been very good, but he's been very helpful in getting some of my technique fine-tuned."

Johnson said Atkinson has been nothing but good for the defensive end group since he got to campus.

"He's a very twitchy guy," Johnson said. "He can run, he's got good length, he's smart and he understands football. He's walked in here and embraced the culture. He's a great guy in the room, and he'll have a chance to help us in the fall."

Hicks has wanted to be an edge rusher for a while now, and over the offseason, he finally made the switch from linebacker after the five-star prospect couldn't force his way onto the field there.

"I'm loving it," Hicks said. "I'm enjoying the pass rush and the position change. I feel like I can show just how versatile I can be. But at the same time, it's still a learning process. I know I don't have everything figured out. I'm constantly asking questions to Kenyatta, Caden Curry and Coach (Matt) Patricia."

Johnson sees the progress that Hicks has made during fall camp and believes there's more in the tank.

"I think the growth is starting to happen," Johnson said. "He can't just be a third-down guy. He has to play first and second downs. Playing on the line of scrimmage against big tackles, that's a transformation of how to do that. But he's done a great job of moving forward, and we have to keep pushing for that."

Defensive assistant James Laurinaitis called Hicks the best blitzzer on the team last year, and his speed off the edge is obvious when he rushes the passer. Johnson compared that specific part of his game to one of the better edge rushers to go through Ohio State.

"Chase Young had that twitch," Johnson said. "He was 6-5. C.J. is 6-3, 243 pounds and it's a different kind of speed. We have to find a way to use that speed in the right situations."

George will also contribute on some

level this season. He was great at the FCS level, with 56 tackles, 18½ tackles for loss, six sacks and six quarterback hurries in 2024, but now he will need to figure out how to produce at Ohio State.

Zion Grady, Epi Sitanilei and Josh Mickens round out the defensive end position. Sitanilei has been one of the freshmen who has stood out at fall camp, but it will still likely be a development year for both him and Grady with the depth in front of them.

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Secondary Set Up For Strong 2025 Season

By **BOBBY GORBETT**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Heading into the 2024 season, Ohio State's secondary, a loaded position group that returned four starters and brought in All-America safety Caleb Downs, was expected to be an area of strength for the Buckeyes. Midway through the 2024 season, though, Ohio State's secondary seemed to be a relative liability. After showing a few signs of vulnerability in the first five weeks of the season against lesser opponents, the Buckeyes' secondary struggled mightily in a 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12.

In their worst performance of the season, Ohio State's defense allowed Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel to throw for 341 yards and two touchdowns while completing 23 of 34 passes.

While Buckeye defensive linemen struggled in the road test, much of the blame went to the secondary in the aftermath of the Oregon game.

Ohio State's defensive backs had no choice but to dust themselves off after the poor midseason performance against the Ducks, and following a solid stretch to close the regular season, the Buckeyes had another chance against Oregon in the College Football Playoff.

During the Jan. 1 Rose Bowl bout with Oregon, the Buckeye secondary and defense wasted no time in showing huge signs of improvement. In the Ducks' first six drives, the Buckeyes forced five punts and a turnover on downs, while the team as a whole surged out to a 34-0 lead, before winning the game 41-21.

The Buckeyes' secondary continued to live up to the "Best In America" moniker the rest of the way in the playoffs, helping the team win its first national championship since 2014.

Overall, it was a sensational year for an Ohio State secondary that allowed only 167.0 yards per game, the third-best mark in college football.

Projected Starters

Cornerback
7 • Jermaine Mathews Jr.
5-11 • 190 • Jr.
Cincinnati Winton Woods

Didn't start for the Buckeyes in 2025 but earned playing time in all 16 games at cornerback and nickel. Finished the year with 22 tackles and his first career sack.

Ohio State's secondary will be faced with the challenge of adjusting to the system of first-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, but once again, the unit is expected to be among the best in college football.

Although Ohio State's cornerbacks are not inexperienced, senior Davison Igbinosun is the group's only returning starter.

Igbinosun, who has started every game for the Buckeyes since joining the program out of the portal for the 2023 season, was a reliable contributor defensively last year.

The 6-2 cornerback logged 45 tackles, including two for loss and two interceptions. Perhaps his best play came during the Buckeyes' important 20-13 victory over Penn State on Nov. 2. The highlight-reel moment came at the end of the first half when Penn State quarterback Drew Allar attempted to find receiver Harrison Wallace III in the back corner of the end zone, but Igbinosun ripped the ball out of his hands and got a foot in bounds for what was a momentum-turning interception.

Igbinosun continued to struggle with penalties last year. His issues with penalties have always plagued him during his collegiate career, but last season was particularly ugly. The Union, N.J., native was flagged 16 times during his junior season with the Buckeyes, making him one of the most penalized players in college football.

During a media availability at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on March 7, Ohio State cornerbacks coach Tim Walton ac-

Cornerback
1 • Davison Igbinosun
6-2 • 195 • Sr.
Union, N.J./Ole Miss

Outside of some issues with penalties, had a superb season in his second year with the Buckeyes, totaling 45 tackles, nine pass deflections and two interceptions.

Free Safety
2 • Caleb Downs
6-0 • 205 • Jr.
Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek/Alabama

Became the 34th different Ohio State player to earn unanimous All-America honors, while recording 81 total tackles, including 7½ for loss. Also had two interceptions and a career-high six pass deflections.

Strong Safety
18 • Jaylen McClain
6-0 • 201 • So.
Rahway (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep.

Had a promising true freshman season for the Buckeyes last year, appearing in 15 games while recording 15 tackles and a pass breakup.

Nickel
3 • Lorenzo Styles Jr.
6-1 • 195 • Gr.
Pickerington (Ohio) Central/Notre Dame

Played 163 defensive snaps last year primarily at the nickel position. First joined the Buckeyes in 2023 after starting his collegiate career at Notre Dame as a wide receiver.

knowledgeed that Igbinosun's penalties were something he could work on but also admitted that some flags are to be expected.

"We'll work on that," Walton said. "Those things happen a little bit. You want to keep learning and grow from it. What happens is we go back through it and look through it. Some of them he has to do a better job with. Two or three of them were questionable calls."

Junior cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. isn't a returning starter on paper, but he certainly feels like one. The 5-11 cornerback earned reps in all 16 games and recorded 22 tackles and a sack last year. Former Ohio State cornerback Denzel Burke has high expectations for what Mathews can achieve this year.

"I expect a lot out of him," Burke said at the NFL scouting combine in February. "He's going to go crazy. Mark my words."

Mathews, a top-50 recruit, has all of the physical traits needed to stay in front of opposing receivers, but it's his maturity and leadership that his head coach praised on Aug. 11.

"I see so much growth in Jermaine, in terms of maturity," Ryan Day said. "He's a very emotional player, but he's learned to keep those emotions in check. Now he's playing with emotion. He's not letting his emotions play with him. He's getting more and more mature, more and more experienced every day, and he's become a great teammate. He builds up guys around him. If he sees something, he calls it out. I have a lot of respect for the way he does that. He doesn't just let it go. He's become one of our leaders, maybe a little bit unexpectedly, but he leads with his heart."

The Buckeyes' nickel position isn't as clear as the boundary corner spots, but Lorenzo Styles Jr., the brother of linebacker Sonny Styles and son of former Buckeye great Lorenzo Styles Sr., is a strong candidate to start at that position. Lorenzo Styles Jr., who started his collegiate career at wide receiver with Notre Dame, transferred to Ohio State before the 2023 season. While learning the ropes of the defensive back position, Styles took a redshirt year and didn't receive much playing time in 2023, but last year, he showed he can make an impact at cornerback.

Playing in all 16 games for the Buckeyes, Styles was on the field for 163 snaps defensively and had 16 total tackles with four pass breakups.

Styles and the Buckeyes' other probable starters may have to fend off true freshman cornerback Devin Sanchez from taking their starting spots. A top-10 recruit in the country in the 2025 class, Sanchez proved he's ready to make an impact on the field during fall camp, when he was one of the first freshmen to lose his black stripe on Aug. 6.

Sanchez may not start immediately in Week 1 as star receiver Jeremiah Smith did last year in his first collegiate season, but he could earn meaningful playing time throughout the season as perhaps the most talented player in the room.

Fellow youngster and five-star Aaron Scott Jr. will also likely earn some playing time, just as Styles and Mathews did last season. Scott, ranked the No. 36 player in the country out of high school, played in only seven games last year and recorded two total tackles and a pass breakup, but with a year of experience under his belt, he is a candidate to earn playing time this year.

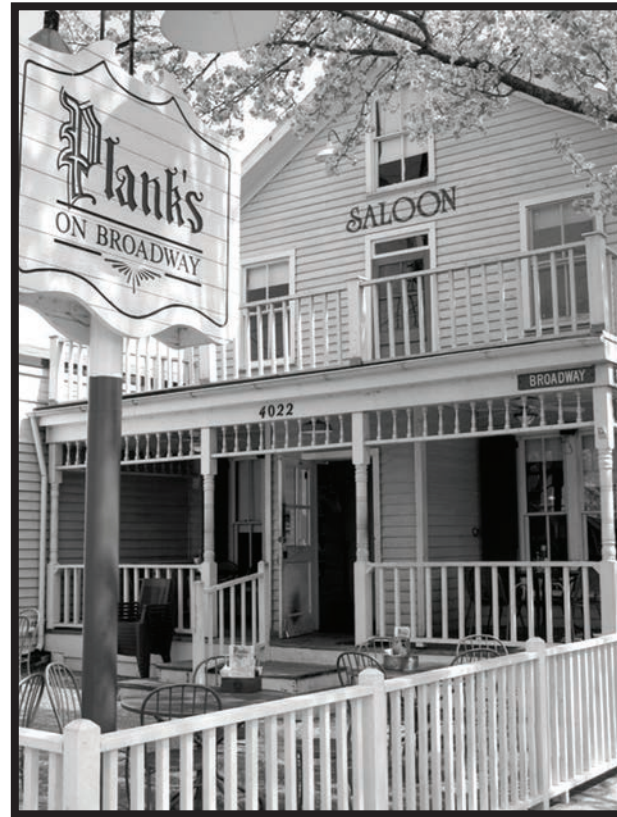
Redshirt freshman Bryce West is in a similar position to Scott. A top-65 recruit out of high school, West played in only five games in 2024 with a tackle and a deflection, but this year could be a valuable depth piece in the cornerback room.

Elsewhere at cornerback, the Buckeyes have rotational pieces such as senior Brenten "Inky" Jones, redshirt freshman Miles Lockhart and true freshman Jordyn Woods.

Downs Sets Tone At Safety

Ohio State couldn't have asked for much more from its safeties in 2024. After an excellent true freshman season with Alabama, Downs lived up to the lofty expectations bestowed upon him in his first season with the Buckeyes.

Playing the adjuster role in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' system, Downs did just about everything for the Buckeyes on the way to becoming the program's 34th different player to earn unanimous All-America honors. His 81 total tackles were the third most on the team, and his two interceptions were tied for the most on the team.



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SONNY BROCKWAY

AIR DEFENSE — With safety Caleb Downs (2) and cornerback Davison Igbinosun (1) returning from the 2024 national championship season, the Buckeyes have a strong foundation to build on in the secondary. Downs, in his first season after transferring from Alabama, was a unanimous All-American.

Veteran safety Lathan Ransom was a perfect match for Downs. Playing the bandit position for the Buckeyes, Ransom racked up 76 total tackles, had an interception and even forced three fumbles last year.

Now, with Ransom being a member of the Carolina Panthers, the identity of Downs' 2025 running mate is uncertain.

From spring to fall camp, Malik Hartford and Jaylen McClain have both been vying for the team's starting job at strong safety, and as BSB went to press, a starter had yet to be named alongside Downs, but according to Day, the unanimous All-American had set the tone for the rest of the room.

"Caleb certainly runs the show back there," Day said. "He communicates well. He has a certain level of confidence that I think rubs off on other guys. I think that's starting to show in both Jaylen and Malik and (redshirt freshman safety Leroy Roker) and the guys back there and in their play."

Hartford and McClain didn't receive much playing time last year, while Downs and Ransom were one of the best tandems in the country, but the then-true freshman was slightly more productive than Hartford.

In 15 games, McClain, who was ranked the No. 373 player out of high school, had 15 total tackles, including one for loss and a pass breakup. He was named an Iron Buck-

eye over the offseason, so that might have him on the inside track to winning the battle over Hartford.

Hartford, a four-star recruit out of high school, had a slightly disappointing sophomore season with the Buckeyes. After making two starts in his true freshman season, Hartford logged only eight total tackles last season in 13 games.

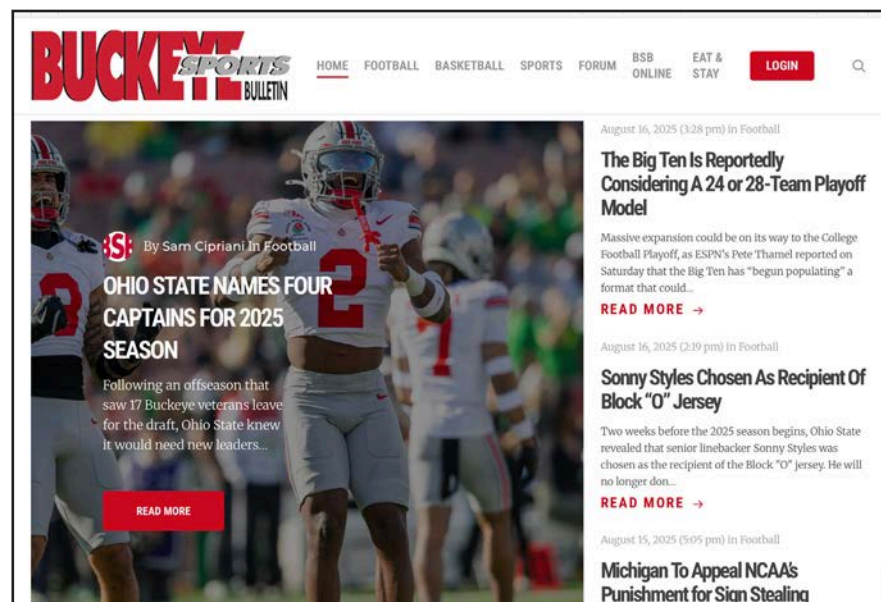
Although Day didn't have much of an update on how the battle was shaking out between the two players on Aug. 11, he mentioned that each player has continued to grow through fall camp.

"We'll see how this week goes, but we're seeing growth from those guys on the back end," Day said. "We're going to need them, because it's an important position."

Hartford and McClain seem to have the biggest chance to start at the safety position alongside Downs, but true freshman safety Faheem Delane is also someone who could make an impact at some point. Delane, a top-60 recruit last year, hasn't yet had his black stripe removed, but he has the sort of talent to force his way on the field.

Joining Delane, Downs, Hartford and McClain in the safety room are true freshman Cody Haddad, senior Keenan Nelson Jr. and freshman safety Deshawn Stewart.

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Styles Leads Loaded OSU Linebacker Room

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

For the past few years, Ohio State has been very strong at linebacker with players such as Tommy Eichenberg, Steele Chambers and Cody Simon going through the system and making their way to the NFL.

James Laurinaitis, one of the top linebackers in Ohio State history, returned to the program to be the linebackers coach in 2024 after spending a year as a graduate assistant. Now that he is already starting to leave his mark on the linebackers room, it looks to be in a very good place moving forward.

Last season, Sonny Styles joined the ranks with Simon when he transitioned from being a safety in his first two seasons after Laurinaitis pushed for the switch when he saw the potential Styles had. He also made sure his voice was heard when other coaches were pushing to move Arvell Reese to the defensive line in his freshman season.

Sophomore Payton Pierce is at Ohio State because Laurinaitis recruited him there, following the coach from Notre Dame to Columbus on the trail. So Laurinaitis' fingerprints are all over the linebacking room this season.

Styles took to the position very quickly and looked like a natural with his build and athleticism, allowing him to thrive in the middle of the defense.

He finished last season with 100 tackles, which was second only behind Simon, had 10½ stops for loss, six sacks and five passes broken up. He was all over the field, and despite his young age – turning 20 just under a week before the Michigan game – he also became a leader on the defensive side of the ball.

“Sonny Styles, I mean, he’s one of the best players we have had in a long time at Ohio State,” head coach Ryan Day said at Big Ten media days. “I just believe he’s going to have a great year this season, and he’s one of our hardest workers and a great leader.”

After spending the offseason fully embracing his new leadership role after the Buckeyes lost 17 players to the NFL, Styles was named the recipient of the “Block O” jersey after Simon had it for the 2024 season.

Now that he has had two full off-seasons and a full 2024 season to adjust to the Will linebacker position, he feels that his game is going to take another step.

“I would say I’m reacting faster right now, playing faster,” Styles said. “I think it’s showing up on tape. You can see me flying around the field. It just comes with more reps and more confidence.”

Even though he projects to be one of the more important pieces of this year’s Ohio State defense, he still believes that he can get better in some ways, and he has been working hard to do that.

“I think (defensive coordinator Matt Patricia) challenged me in a way of like, ‘All right, you’re at the point where you’re smart enough to know exactly what you’re doing and what everyone else is doing, now I want you to figure out what the offense is doing,’” Styles said. “‘You see this



SONNY BROCKWAY

SONNY DAYS AHEAD — Senior linebacker Sonny Styles (6) made the move from the safety position last season and looked right at home in helping Ohio State win the national championship. He was named a captain for the 2025 season and will wear the “Block O” No. 0 jersey.

formation, you see this shift, you see this quarterback looking this way – be able to start predicting where the ball is going.’ I think as a defender, especially as a linebacker, when you get to the point where you’re no longer reacting, you’re predicting what’s going to happen, that’s when you become elite.

“There are still a lot of things I can work on, too, like cleaning up missed tackles, cleaning up some zone drops, which I feel like I’ve gotten better at, but I think the versatility has been something that can separate me from other linebackers across the country.”

Styles enters the season on the Butkus Award watch list, which goes to the best linebacker in the country each year. He also made Bruce Feldman’s “top freaks” list, which chronicles the strongest, fastest and most physical players in college football, at No. 10. But according to people around the program, Arvell Reese deserved to be on that list, too.

“We’ve talked to many people on our defensive staff about Arvell in general. They probably would all use the word freak to describe him,” Laurinaitis said. “Arvell has the ability to cut it loose. He’s almost one of those guys who are positionless. He can work at multiple different spots.”

Reese was initially the fourth ‘backer on the depth chart last year due to an injury he suffered in his freshman season on a kickoff return, but he quickly made his case to be a regular player. He was in a consistent rotation in games by the time the Buckeyes were in Big Ten play, and he remained there all year while C.J. Hicks took a back seat and has since moved to the defensive line.

Reese finished last season with 43 tackles, many of which came in big moments when the Buckeyes needed a stop, and he was able to move sideline to sideline to be near the ball wherever the play went. Not only was he extremely active, but when he

got himself involved, he was a hard hitter as well.

Styles said he has seen Reese grow this offseason in terms of his understanding of the game.

“Mentally, just understanding the game (is where he has grown),” Styles said on Aug. 6. “He’s always had the physical attributes, but him being able to understand the game, play fast and use those physical attributes – sometimes when you don’t understand the game as well, it can hold you back and you’re not able to show your true potential.”

Laurinaitis was practically salivating when talking about what Reese has the capability of doing if he’s able to reach his potential this season at the Mike position.

“It’s just physical. It’s violence at the point of attack,” Laurinaitis said. “His violence and ability to run – he can do a lot of different things that you dream of when you get to the linebacker position.”

It seems extremely likely that there will be packages put together that take advantage of Reese’s versatility this year, which would give Patricia and Laurinaitis the ability to put Reese on the edge to rush the passer and bring in sophomore Pierce, who has also been trending in the right direction this offseason.

Pierce agrees that his game allows Styles and Reese both to play more freely and move around the field, but he said he also has some versatility as well.

“I feel like I’m pretty confident in the box, and that lets them open up and do whatever they want to do,” Pierce said. “This fall camp, I’ve gotten to do a lot of different things, playing different spots and stuff.

“But (Styles and Reese) get to do all the fun stuff, which is sometimes a little boring for me. But if they’re making plays and I’m doing my job at the end of the day, that’s what’s best for the defense. We all just complement each other well.”

Projected Starter

Weakside
6 • Sonny Styles

6-5 • 243 • Sr.
Pickerington (Ohio) Central

Had 100 tackles in first season at linebacker. Named recipient of “Block O” jersey for 2025.

Projected Starter

Middle
8 • Arvell Reese

6-4 • 243 • Jr.
Cleveland Glenville

Forced his way into rotation in 2024 season and had 43 tackles, 3½ for loss and two quarterback hurries.

However it happens, Pierce will see significant time on the field the same way Reese did last year. Laurinaitis said he sees Pierce as a starter just like he does Styles and Reese, praising the willingness he has to put his body on the line to make a play.

“You feel him every single practice,” Laurinaitis said. “He is downhill. You can sense that wrestling background. He has those tough-guy leadership qualities that are similar to Tommy (Eichenberg).

“You know when that ball is run between the tackles, he’s going to go down there and – you’d be surprised if he got through a practice without chips off of his facemask. That’s the way I think the linebacker position should be played.”

Pierce believes the defense can center around the linebackers and even believes that was the case last year as well.

“I feel like in our defense, as linebackers, we always wanted it to be a linebacker-driven defense, and I felt like it was last year,” Pierce said. “That’s always our mentality. I feel like we have more tools this year to do that.”

The depth in the linebacker room includes true freshman Riley Pettijohn, who has impressed in fall camp as expected. Laurinaitis expects to see him on the field in some capacity in Week 1 against No. 1 Texas, even if that is special teams.

“Riley has shown tremendous growth, even from the spring,” Laurinaitis said, “Mentally, he’s studying better, he’s starting to get a feel for how things are done. I expect to see Riley on the field in some form or fashion, whether it’s special teams or whatever it is, in Week 1.”

Garrett Stover will also likely see some reps throughout the season, and Laurinaitis also likes what he has seen from the other two freshmen, TJ Alford and Eli Lee.

“TJ is going to be a really good football player. Eli has shown flashes. I really love my room,” Laurinaitis said. “You have to keep challenging the young guys. (They) have to be locked in mentally.”

Special Teams Hope To Kick It Into Gear

By **GREG WILSON**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After multiple years of disappointing special teams performances, head coach Ryan Day let former special teams coordinator Parker Fleming walk during the 2023-24 offseason. Day divided up the responsibilities Fleming had and assigned those to different position coaches, and the improvements were immediately visible.

Last season, Day announced that safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis would take over punt and kickoff duties while tight ends coach Keenan Bailey and then-wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline would handle the return game.

Quality control coach Rob Keys was responsible for “coaching the coaches” on special teams. He was in charge of breaking down film and keeping special teams organized since he isn’t allowed to directly coach the players.

Brandon Inniss took over punt return duties to begin the season and nearly ended the 10-year-long drought of Ohio State not being able to return a punt for a touchdown the first week he took over those duties. He was unsuccessful, but Caleb Downs finally ran one back in the Buckeyes’ penultimate regular-season game against Indiana on Nov. 23.

The Buckeyes also saw a lot of success when it came to special teams defense, blocking two punts throughout the season.

But despite some of those improve-



SONNY BROCKWAY

FIELDING BETTER — Jayden Fielding (38) struggled at times, including two missed field goals against Michigan, because of a hip injury, but he rebounded to have a strong College Football Playoff run.

Projected Starters

Long Snapper 43 • John Ferlmann 6-3 • 232 • Sr. Anthem (Ariz.) Boulder Creek/Arizona State Third season as a starter since transferring from Arizona State. Handled all kick-snap-ping duties in both 2023 and 2024.	Kicker 38 • Jayden Fielding 6-0 • 175 • Sr. Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy Has made 29 of 37 attempts over the last two seasons. Will also likely handle kickoff duties.	Punter 42 • Joe McGuire 6-2 • 210 • Jr. Melbourne (Australia) Prokick Second season starting as punter after averaging 42.1 yards per kick in 2024.
	Kick Returner 5 • Mylan Graham 6-1 • 195 • R-Fr. Fort Wayne (Ind.) New Haven Has not returned kicks for Ohio State, but return duties would provide a chance for OSU to give Graham more of an opportunity to make an impact.	Punt Returner 1 • Brandon Inniss 6-0, • 197 • Jr. Hollywood (Fla.) American Heritage Had 107 yards returning punts in 2024, which was more than any OSU punt returner in six years.

ments, the Buckeyes still weren’t where they would have liked to be overall when it came to special teams. They ranked 67th in the country in net punting with an average of 39.0 yards per boot, 59th in punt-return average at 8.5 yards per return, 55th in punt-return defense allowing 6.5 yards per return and 132nd in kickoff returns at 10.2 yards per return.

The improvements made last season were a huge step in the right direction for the Buckeyes, but now they will need to take another step forward this season.

Kickin’ It In The ‘Shoe

Last season there were still a number of issues when it came to special teams, many of which were due to mistakes made by Jayden Fielding. In the third game of the season against Marshall on Sept. 21, he hooked three straight kickoffs out of bounds for penalties, giving the Thundering Herd favorable field position.

Fielding later revealed that he was dealing with a hip injury at that point, which he didn’t tell his coaches or the media about that day, but that wasn’t the only problem Fielding had.

In the Michigan game, Fielding made a 29-yard field goal but missed from 38 yards and 34 yards later in the game. The Buckeyes ended up losing that game 13-10. It would be easy to look at the six points that Fielding didn’t capitalize on and place the blame on his right leg, but OSU had a litany of other problems in that contest against the Wolverines that only added fuel to the fire.

Fielding did, however, come through in the playoffs when he was called upon. In the Rose Bowl, he made two kicks in the big win over Big Ten champion Oregon, and he was also 2 for 2 in the national championship win over Notre Dame. One of his kicks sealed the win with 26 seconds remaining.

One thing that Fielding was very consistent with outside of the game against Marshall was not allowing returners a chance on kickoffs. The Buckeyes had 74 touchbacks in 2024, and they tied for ninth in the country on kickoff return yards allowed (16.0 average).

But even though Fielding comes into the 2025 season no longer dealing with an injury, he still faces more competition in the room than he did last year.

Ohio State added Ball State transfer Jackson Courville to the roster in the spring portal. He spent two seasons with the Cardinals and was 26 for 34 on field goals over that span, including making 11 of 13 in the 2024 season. Fielding made 29 of 37 attempts over the past two seasons and 13 of

17 last year.

One thing Courville has going for him that Fielding doesn’t is that he made two field goals from 50 yards or farther with Ball State. The Buckeyes have trotted Fielding out for 50-plus-yard tries only twice, and he missed both of them.

Day hasn’t commented on who will start at kicker in the fall as BSB went to press, but given the stats over the last two years, there is very likely a battle for the role.

Regardless of who wins the job, if there is a competition, adding Courville provides depth if nothing else, in case the starter deals with an issue like Fielding had last year when he played through a torn hip muscle.

Down Under Duel

Going into last season, it was assumed that the big leg of Nick McLarty, who has the ability to literally boot the ball out of the stadium, would get the call in the rare case that the Buckeyes needed to punt. But he reportedly struggled with consistency, which allowed Joe McGuire to earn the job. Going into the 2025 season, McGuire is still the favorite to keep that spot this season until McLarty proves he can be trusted.

But it does seem like the common expectation is that whenever McLarty can figure his game out, he will give the Buckeyes a better leg at the position because of power.

McGuire remained the starter all of last season and didn’t make any major mistakes but also averaged just 42.1 yards per punt. He didn’t even qualify for a national ranking due to a minimum punt requirement to be listed on it, and Ohio State’s offense didn’t need to give the ball away often since it scored so much. McGuire’s average would have slotted in at 52nd in the country.

McLarty had just two tries the entire season with a 35-yard punt against Western Michigan and a 30-yarder against Marshall in the Buckeyes’ next game. Had he been able to show off what he can do in-game those two times, he likely would have had more opportunities. This year, McLarty is hoping to take a big step forward in his second season in Columbus.

“There were expectations with coming in and playing and starting, and I know stuff got said, and it was awesome for me and

it was awesome back home, but the harsh reality was I wasn’t ready,” McLarty said in April. “I think now it’s a steppingstone to see how far I can push myself, and I think this year is a great opportunity to see how far I can take it.”

Run It Back

Inniss and Downs handled most of the punt returns for Ohio State in the 2024 season, and in 20 total tries, they had a combined 205 yards and a touchdown.

Whether Inniss’ role in the return game will be the same this year, now that he will likely be in a starting role offensively, is yet to be seen. However, Downs will likely still be a returner given the success he had last year.

At fall camp practices that were open to the media, Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate, Mylan Graham and Anthony Rogers were all receiving punts along with Inniss and Downs, but it’s unlikely that each of them will get major opportunities in games this year to return.

No return touchdown has been guaranteed by Day this season, as he did last year, but Ohio State still has a long drought when it comes to kick returns. The last touchdown on a kick return by an Ohio State player was when former running back Jordan Hall went 85 yards for a score in the second quarter of a 37-7 win over Michigan when Jim Tressel was donning his scarlet sweater vest on the sideline in 2010.

Graham is a prime candidate to receive kicks for the Buckeyes since he is in similar shoes that Inniss was in last season, and Graham showed off his explosiveness in the open field in the spring game when he had a long touchdown. His speed and elusiveness could end the 14-year drought in kick-return touchdowns.

If Ohio State decides to go the safer route with Inniss and Downs and keep them off the field during punt returns to avoid injuries, Bryson Rodgers could slide into that role, where he could use his athleticism to give the Buckeyes a good chance to improve from last season.

The Numbers Game

Final 2024-25 Football Statistics

2024-25 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011	
Sept. 9	(2) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	102,665	
Sept. 21	(3) MARSHALL	W, 49-14	103,871	
Sept. 28	(3) Michigan State	W, 38-7	71,114	
Oct. 5	(3) IOWA	W, 35-7	105,135	
Oct. 12	(3) Oregon (2)	L, 32-31	60,129	
Oct. 26	(4) NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	104,830	
Nov. 2	(4) Penn State (3)	W, 20-13	111,030	
Nov. 9	(3) PURDUE	W, 45-0	103,463	
Nov. 16	(2) Northwestern	W, 31-7	38,147	
Nov. 23	(2) INDIANA (5)	W, 38-15	105,751	
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	L, 13-10	106,005	
Dec. 21	TENNESSEE	W, 42-17	102,819	
Jan.,1	Oregon	W, 41-21	90,732	
Jan. 10	Texas	W, 28-14	74,527	
Jan. 20	Notre Dame	W, 34-23	77,660	

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

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	332	241
Rushing	135	97
Passing	183	117
Penalty	14	27
Average Per Game/Rush	166.4	87.6
Average Per Game/Pass	263.0	167.0
Total Offense	6870	4074
Total Plays	989	972
Average Per Game	429.4	254.6
Average Per Play	6.9	4.2
Penalties-Yards	72-653	58-467
Fumbles-Lost	15-5	23-9
Third Down Efficiency	81-186	80-29
Percentage	44%	35%
Fourth Down Efficiency	20-28	15-33
Percentage	71%	45%
Sacks-Yards	53-362	16-96
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:18	29:42

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	118	198	166	89	0	571	35.7
Opponents	40	78	31	57	0	206	12.9

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	194	1060	5.5	14	86
T. Henderson	144	1041	7.1	10	66
Will Howard	105	226	2.2	7	19
James Peoples	49	197	4.0	2	18
S. Williams-Dixon	7	53	7.6	0	31
Jeremiah Smith	6	47	7.8	1	19
Emeka Egbuka	8	33	4.1	0	13
Julian Sayin	2	24	12.0	0	19
Devin Brown	7	13	1.9	0	10
Carnell Tate	0	6	0.0	0	6
Mason Maggs	1	3	3.0	0	3
Team	10	-15	-1.5	0	0
OSU Totals	534	2662	5.0	34	86
OPP Totals	530	1402	2.6	13	38

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	309	423	73.0	4010	35-10	175.3
Devin Brown	11	20	55.0	114	1-0	119.4
Julian Sayin	5	12	41.7	84	1-0	128.0
OSU Totals	325	455	71.4	4208	37-10	171.6
OPP Totals	267	442	60.4	2672	10-10	114.1

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	76	1315	17.3	15	70
Emeka Egbuka	81	1011	12.5	10	68
Carnell Tate	52	733	14.1	4	40
T. Henderson	27	284	10.5	1	75
Gee Scott Jr.	27	253	9.4	2	34
Brandon Inniss	14	176	12.6	1	27
Quinshon Judkins	22	161	7.3	2	21
Will Kacmarek	8	86	10.8	0	32
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
Bryson Rodgers	5	46	9.2	0	12
Jelani Thurman	4	42	10.5	1	19
Jayden Ballard	2	18	9.0	0	12
David Adolph	1	10	10.0	0	10
Kojo Antwi	1	8	8.0	0	8
Patrick Gurd	1	6	6.0	0	6
James Peoples	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	325	4208	13.0	37	75
OPP Totals	267	2672	10.0	10	69

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	73-73	-	-	13-17	112
Q. Judkins	16	-	-	-	-	96
Jeremiah Smith	16	-	-	-	-	96
T. Henderson	11	-	-	-	-	66
Emeka Egbuka	10	-	-	-	-	60

Will Howard	7	-	-	-	-	42
Carnell Tate	4	-	-	-	-	24
James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Jack Sawyer	2	-	-	-	-	12
Gee Scott Jr.	2	-	-	-	-	12
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Brandon Inniss	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jelani Thurman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Caleb Downs	1	-	-	-	-	6
Austin Snyder	-	3-3	-	-	-	3
OSU Totals	7976-76	-	-	13-17	571	
OPP Totals	24 16-16	0-2	5-6	12-18	206	

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	2-2	4-6	7-8	0-1	13-17
OSU Totals	2-2	4-6	7-8	0-1	13-17
OPP Totals	2-8	1-1	4-4	5-5	12-18

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	47	1977	42.1	0	61
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	49	2042	41.7	0	61
OPP Totals	87	3674	42.2	2	68

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Davison Igbinosun	2	45	22.5	0	45
Denzel Burke	2	31	15.5	0	31
Caleb Downs	2	7	3.5	0	7
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
Lathan Ransom	1	24	24.0	0	24
Jack Sawyer	1	12	12.0	0	12
Jordan Hancock	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	10	148	14.8	1	45
OPP Totals	10	109	10.9	1	36

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	14	107	7.6	0	36
Caleb Downs	6	98	16.3	1	79
David Adolph	1	26	26.0	0	26
Caden Curry	1	7	7.0	0	7
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
Emeka Egbuka	1	-1	-1.0	0	0
OSU Totals	24	237	9.9	1	79
OPP Totals	11	71	6.5	0	16

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	8	67	8.4	0	19
Brandon Inniss	3	47	15.7	0	18
Jayden Ballard	2	23	11.5	0	23
Emeka Egbuka	1	16	16.0	0	16
OSU Totals	15	153	10.2	0	23
OPP Totals	11	176	16.0	0	25

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Cody Simon	51	61	112	12.5-67	7.0-57
Sonny Styles	48	52	100	10.5-59	6.0-50
Caleb Downs	48	33	81	7.5-13	0.5-2
Lathan Ransom	46	30	76	9.0-23	1.0-2
JT Tuimolouau	35	26	61	21.5-105	12.5-80
Jack Sawyer	25	34	59	9.0-68	9.0-68
Ty Hamilton	14	37	51	6.0-22	3.5-15
Denzel Burke	37	11	48	3.0-3	0-0
Jordan Hancock	29	29	48	1.5-4	0.5-3
Tyleik Williams	16	30	46	8.0-20	2.5-9
Davison Igbinosun	30	15	45	2.0-6	0-0
Arvell Reese	18	25	43	3.5-12	0.5-5
Caden Curry	15	7	22	3.5-47	2.5-24
C.J. Hicks	10	12	22	2.0-14	2.0-14
J. Mathews Jr.	14	8	22	2.5-6	1.0-3
Kayden McDonald	7	12	19	1.5-3	0-0
K. Jackson Jr.	8	8	16	3.0-12	1.5-11
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	10	6	16	0-0	0-0
Jaylen McClain	8	7	15	1.0-1	0-0
Mitchell Melton	6	6	12	3.5-15	2.0-12
Malik Hartford	4	4	8	0-0	0-0
Tywone Malone	1	7	8	1.0-1	0-0
Eddrick Houston	4	3	7	0-0	0-0
Gabe Powers	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Hero Kanu	1	3	4	0-0	0-0
Payton Pierce	1	3	4	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	505	468	973	113.0-508	53.0-362
OPP Totals	546	404	950	60.0-195	16.0-96

Fumbles Forced: Ransom (3), Sawyer (3), Curry (2), Hancock (2), Tuimolouau (2) Hamilton, Simon, S. Styles, .
Fumbles Recovered: Sawyer (3), Hamilton, Igbinosun, Jackson Jr., Ransom, Simon, S. Styles.

2025 Preseason Polls

The Associated Press Top 25				
Rank	School	2024	Pts.	'24 Rank
1	Texas (25)	13-3	1,552	4
2	Penn State (23)	13-3	1,547	5
3	Ohio State (11)	14-2	1,472	1
4	Clemson (4)	10-4	1,398	14
5	Georgia (1)	11-3	1,331	6
6	Notre Dame	14-2	1,325	2
7	Oregon (1)	13-1	1,236	3
8	Alabama	9-4	1,179	17
9	LSU	9-4	1,174	NR
10	Miami	10-3	889	18
11	Arizona State	11-3	791	7
12	Illinois	10-3	713	16
13	South Carolina	9-4	667	19
14	Michigan	8-5	662	NR
15	Florida	8-5	626	NR
16	SMU	11-3	565	12
17	Kansas State	9-4	512	NR
18	Oklahoma	6-7	463	NR
19	Texas A&M	8-5	434	NR
20	Indiana	11-2	423	10
21	Ole Miss	10-3	370	11
22	Iowa State	11-3	309	15
23	Texas Tech	8-5	274	NR
24	Tennessee	10-3	192	9
25	Boise State	12-2	191	8

(First-place votes in parentheses)

Others receiving votes: BYU 156, Utah 144, Baylor 132, Louisville 90, USC 64, Georgia Tech 63, Missouri 33, Tulane 23, Nebraska 23, UNLV 21, Toledo 13, Auburn 10, James Madison 9, Memphis 9, Florida State 8, Duke 6, Navy 5, Liberty 5, Iowa 5, TCU 4, Pittsburgh 3, Army 2, Louisiana 1, Colorado 1

Coaches' Top 25				
Rank	School	2023	Pts.	'24 Rank
1	Texas (28)	13-3	1,606	3
2	Ohio State (20)	14-2	1,565	1
3	Penn State (14)	13-3	1,525	5
4	Georgia (3)	11-3	1,466	6
5	Notre Dame	14-2	1,360	2
6	Clemson (2)	10-4	1,324	T11
7	Oregon	13-1	1,307	4
8	Alabama	9-4	1,210	17
9	LSU	9-4	1,056	NR
10	Miami	10-3	823	18
11	Arizona State	11-3	806	7
12	Illinois	10-3	734	16
13	South Carolina	9-4	665	19
14	Michigan	8-5	580	NR
15	Ole Miss	10-3	573	13
16	SMU	11-3	555	T11
17	Florida	8-5	498	NR
18	Tennessee	10-3	492	8
19	Indiana	11-2	460	10
20	Kansas State	9-4	438	NR
T21	Iowa State	11-3	392	15
T21	Texas A&M	8-5	392	NR
23	BYU	11-2	287	14
24	Texas Tech	8-5	261	NR
25	Boise State	12-2	246	9

(First-place votes in parentheses)

Others receiving votes: Oklahoma 221, Missouri 142, Louisville 126, USC 116, Utah 86, Baylor 76, Auburn 50, Iowa 49, Memphis 34, Army 33, Tulane 31, Georgia Tech 27, TCU 24, Nebraska 19, Syracuse 16, Washington 15, Navy 14, Arkansas 14, Duke 12, Colorado 12, Minnesota 11, UNLV 8, Florida State 8, Kansas 6, Vanderbilt 3, Buffalo 1

2024 Big Ten Year In Review

Final Standings						
	All			Conf.		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Oregon	13	1	.929	9	0	1.000
Indiana	11	2	.846	8	1	.889
Penn State	13	3	.813	8	1	.889
Ohio State	14	2	.875	7	2	.778
Illinois	10	3	.769	6	3	.667
Iowa	8	5	.615	6	3	.667
Michigan	8	5	.615	5	4	.556
Minnesota	8	5	.615	5	4	.556
Rutgers	7	6	.538	4	5	.444
USC	7	6	.538	4	5	.444
Washington	6	7	.462	4	5	.444
Michigan State	5	7	.417	3	6	.333
Nebraska	7	6	.538	3	6	.333
UCLA	5	7	.417	3	6	.333
Wisconsin	5	7	.417	3	6	.333
Northwestern	4	8	.333	2	7	.222
Maryland	4	8	.333	1	8	.111
Purdue	1	11	.083	0	9	.000



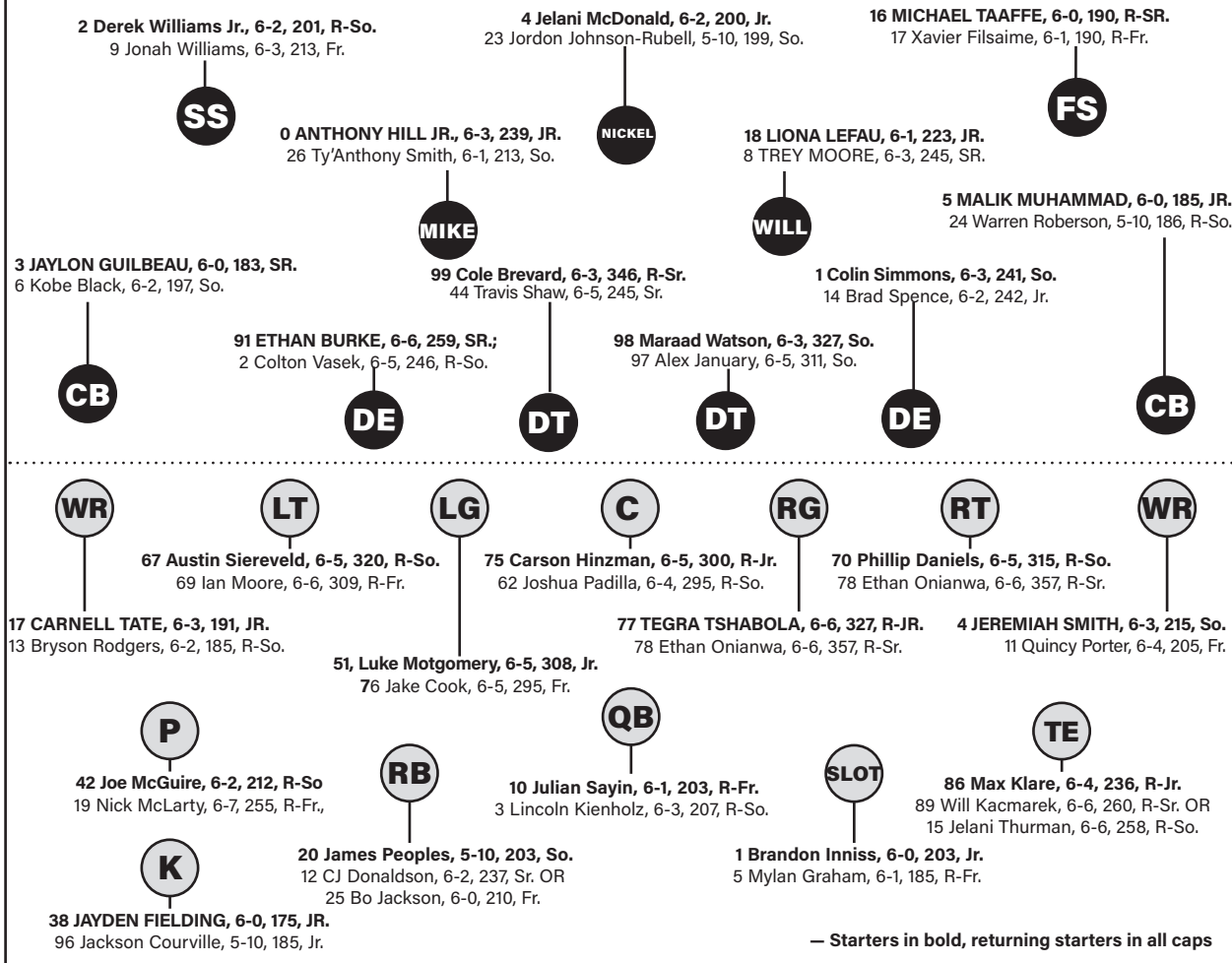
Ohio State vs. Texas

Saturday, Aug. 30 • Noon • FOX
Ohio Stadium; Columbus

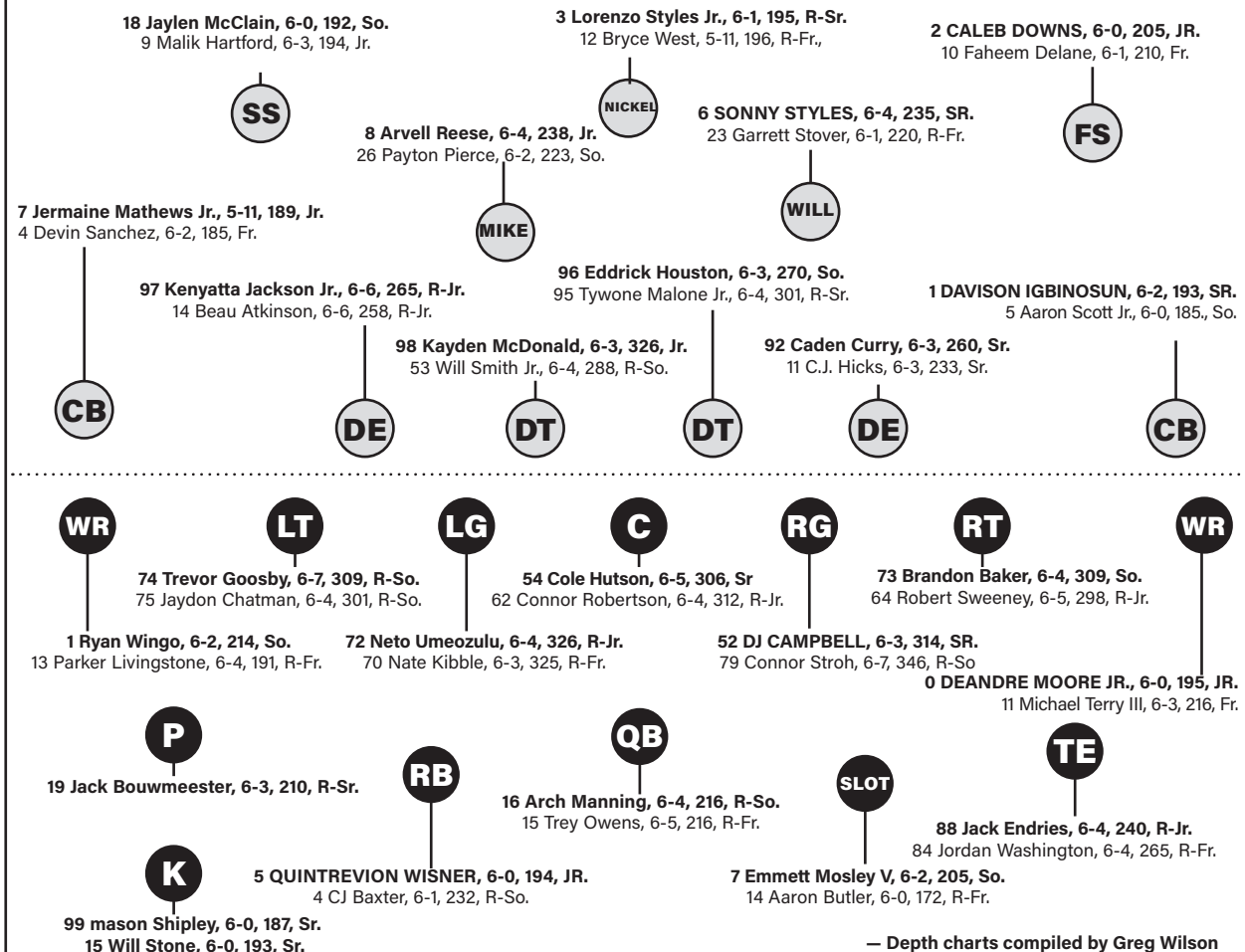


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN TEXAS HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
TEXAS RUSH DEFENSE

Here we go: No. 1 vs. No. 3 with the defending national champion Buckeyes the latter, although they are favored playing at home. So much turnover on the rosters makes it hard to predict what will transpire, as is the case for OSU in the backfield with the departures to the NFL of the dynamic duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, who rushed for 1,016 and 1,060 yards, respectively, for a combined 24 touchdowns. Buckeye fans may be shouting “Power to the Peoples,” James, that is. Last season, the sophomore from San Antonio ran 49 times for 197 yards (4.0 avg.) and two TDs. He is expected to share the load with West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson, who played in 28 games (14 starts) from 2022-24 and rushed for 2,058 career yards and 30 scores. When you have a supporting cast that includes freshmen Bo Jackson and Anthony “Turbo” Rogers, things are going to be alright. Ohio State will try to avoid linebacker Anthony Hill Jr., who had six tackles and one-half sack vs. the Buckeyes in the CFP semifinal on Jan. 10. He is a preseason All-SEC and All-America candidate. **EDGE: EVEN**

TEXAS RUSH OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Longhorns may have a strong one-two punch as well. Quintravion Wisner and Jaydon Blue combined for 1,794 yards and 13 touchdowns last season. Blue was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys, but Wisner (1,064 yards and five rushing TDs in 2024) is joined by CJ Baxter, who missed all of last season with a knee injury. He ran for 659 yards and five touchdowns as a freshman in 2023. The Buckeyes have a new look after the departure of stalwarts such as Jack Sawyer, Cody Simon, JT Tuimolalo and Tyliek Williams. Defensive tackle Eddrick Houston saw limited time last season and had seven tackles (four solo) and will be counted upon heavily to plug the gaps along with Kayden McDonald (19 tackles, seven solo) and others. **EDGE: TEXAS**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
TEXAS PASS DEFENSE

Coach Ryan Day went with Julian Sayin over Lincoln Kienholz to replace Will Howard. The two youngsters combined for just 35 snaps last season. Sayin was 5 of 12 for 84 yards and a TD and rushed for 24 yards on two carries. Kienholz has not attempted a pass or run since the 2023 season. The game will come down to how well the revamped offensive line protects the QB so he can sling the ball to superstar Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate, Brandon Inniss, etc. On the other side, defensive end Colin Simmons was a surprise choice over Smith for the national freshman of the year award. He had 48 tackles, nine sacks and an interception last season. **EDGE: EVEN**

TEXAS PASS OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Arch Manning finally is the starting QB after waiting for Quinn Ewers to leave. He has already been anointed the next Chosen One despite throwing only 95 career passes and making two starts. Last season he was 61 of 90 for 939 yards and nine touchdowns against two interceptions in 10 games. Fifteen of his completions went for 20-plus yards. The Buckeyes must put pressure on him, but he is more athletic than his uncle, Peyton Manning, and can take off and run if necessary. It will be interesting to see if Texas attacks All-America safety Caleb Downs or penalty-prone cornerback Davison Igbinosun. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Jayden Fielding is the incumbent placekicker for the Buckeyes. He was bothered by a torn hip adductor most of the season and missed some easy field goals, including in the fateful loss to Michigan, but rebounded to make 4 of 5 in the postseason. Ball State transfer Jackson Courville made both of his 50-plus attempts last season. Joe McGuire (42.1 avg.) is the expected punter. The Longhorns' Jack Bouwmeester had a 44.7 avg. for Utah last season with 13 punts of 50 yards or more. Texas State transfer Mason Shipley made 15 of 19 FGs with a long of 60 last season. **EDGE: TEXAS**

INTANGIBLES

The teams are so tight competitively, good thing the Buckeyes will have the backing of an amped and well-oiled prime-time crowd. Oh, never mind. OSU's stars will need to shine in the daylight. Remember, Smith had only one catch for 3 yards vs. the Longhorns eight months ago. You think he remembers? **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

A Texas victory in no way would be an upset with the Buckeyes breaking in so many players at key spots. Who will emerge as the new hero? The fans will earn a Buckeye leaf, then demand NIL payments. **OHIO STATE 31, TEXAS 30**

No. 1 Texas Presents Great Challenge For OSU

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the second time in eight months, Ohio State will face off against Texas in one of the biggest games of the season. The previous game between the two teams, a 28-14 win for Ohio State in the semifinals of last season's College Football Playoff that was capped by a game-sealing 83-yard scoop-and-score by senior defensive end Jack Sawyer, doesn't need to be summarized to die-hard Buckeye fans.

The upcoming Aug. 30 matchup between No.1-ranked Texas and No.3-ranked Ohio State is in some ways more highly anticipated than the Cotton Bowl was.

Not only are the Buckeyes and Longhorns both ranked inside the Associated Press' preseason top three, but the season-opening bout will feature some of the best players college football has to offer, including safety Caleb Downs and receiver Jeremiah Smith in scarlet and gray and linebacker Anthony Hill Jr. and defensive end Colin Simmons donning burnt orange and white. Five-star recruit Arch Manning, the nephew of NFL greats Eli and Peyton Manning, will also make his first start against a team ranked inside the top 25.

Texas became somewhat of a dormant blue blood during the 2010s, but the program has gradually been rebuilt by Steve Sarkisian since he took over in 2021.

After leading the Longhorns to a Big 12 championship and a berth in the College Football Playoff in 2023, Sarkisian's program had no problems adjusting to the SEC last season as an expansion team. In addition to going 11-1 in the regular season, Texas made the SEC championship game and was the No. 5 seed in the College Football Playoff.

Entering the 2025 season, the Longhorns look ready to compete for a national title again.

The Texas offense features plenty of new



SONNY BROCKWAY

LEADING THE HORNS — Steve Sarkisian has returned the Texas Longhorns to glory since taking over the program in 2021. They reached the SEC championship in 2024 in their first season in the conference and earned a spot in the College Football Playoff, losing to Ohio State in the semifinal.

pieces, but that group isn't short on talent. Equipped with a couple of top-40 recruits and first-year starters Manning and sophomore receiver Ryan Wingo, the Longhorns shouldn't have major issues replacing quarterback Quinn Ewers or standout receiver Matthew Golden, both 2024 NFL draft picks.

Where the Longhorns didn't have highly touted recruits waiting in the wings to take over for productive starters, they went to the transfer portal to replace talent. Former California tight end Jack Endries and Syracuse defensive tackle Maraad Watson were late additions to the team, joining during the spring portal window, but both players were two of the Longhorns' more prominent additions.

Despite the productivity of Endries or Watson at their former schools, not surprisingly, it was Manning who gained the most attention in Atlanta for SEC media days.

Manning has made only two starts during his first two years at Texas, so despite high expectations, he hasn't had much of a chance to prove himself as the Longhorns' next great quarterback yet.

The former No. 1 overall recruit out of the 2023 class received the majority of his playing time in games against UT San Antonio, University of Louisiana-Monroe and Mississippi State last year when Ewers went down with injury, and in those games, he completed 50 of 72 passes for 806 yards, eight touchdowns and two interceptions.

Manning continued to make appearances in Texas's games once Ewers returned from injury, but he was primarily used as a threat in the run game rather than for his arm.

As a 6-4, 219-pound quarterback who possesses much better athleticism than ei-

ther of his uncles, Manning has all of the physical traits to succeed at the collegiate level, but during his SEC media days press conference, Sarkisian praised Manning's mentality as someone who spent two years developing behind Ewers.

"For Arch, he grew up in this era of seeing high-level football," Sarkisian said. "He's watched Super Bowls. He's watched gold jackets getting put on. He's been to playoff games. He's been recruited at the highest level as the No. 1 player in the country. He watched Quinn navigate through the ups and downs of being a starting quarterback at the University of Texas. We all talk about resiliency and grit and all those things that are needed when adversity strikes, but I think some of that resiliency can come from remaining calm. Arch definitely has that about him."

Manning will have plenty of talented weapons around him, including the only returning 1,000-yard rusher in the SEC, Quintrevion Wisner. Although Wisner was one of the most productive rushers in the conference last year, he was a relative unknown before the 2024 season. It wasn't until training camp rolled around when five-star running back CJ Baxter suffered a season-ending torn LCL and PCL that Wisner, a three-star recruit out of high school, was propelled into the spotlight.

Wisner, who earned third-team All-SEC honors last year, ended his season with a decent performance against Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl, rushing for 46 yards on 17 carries and also reeling in six catches for 42 yards.

Coming off his injury, Baxter has participated in camp and appears ready to share carries with Wisner.

Although the Longhorns' backfield projects to be one of the stronger groups in the SEC, the receivers room may be even better.

"The receiving corps is one we're really excited about," Sarkisian said. "We've had receivers drafted in the first round of the last two years' drafts, but this group is really good. DeAndre Moore is the leader of that group, who played a ton for us last year in the slot. Ryan Wingo was a true freshman last year, who at a lot of other schools probably would have had more opportunities, but when you had the room we had, he was very efficient, had a bunch of catches in critical moments for us. We're excited about him."

As Sarkisian pointed out, the Longhorns have lost multiple starting receivers in back-to-back years. Despite those departures, the Longhorns should have a quality room in 2025. Moore, a junior, is the Longhorns' most experienced option. The Anaheim, Calif., native hauled in 39 catches last season for 456 yards and seven receiving touchdowns, tied for the second most on the team.

Wingo may not have been as productive as Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith in his true freshman season, but he still showed why he was a top-40 recruit in the country out of high school. Often used by Sarkisian as a gadget player, Wingo finished the season with 29 receptions for 472 yards and two receiving touchdowns and also tacked on 100 rushing yards on five carries.

It's still unclear which other receiver will start alongside Moore and Wingo, but Stanford transfer Emmett Mosley V seems to be the favorite. Mosley, who transferred into Texas during the spring window, joins the program after hauling in 48 catches for 525 yards and six touchdowns with the Cardinal last year. Although Mosley was a reliable target at Stanford for most of the year, he found his stride in the team's last three games. In that span, the Chicago native caught 26 passes for 332 yards and five touchdowns.

Another one of the Longhorns' transfer portal additions, Endries, has big shoes to fill. In 2024, the Longhorns had All-SEC tight end Gunnar Helm, whose 60 receptions led the team. As good as Helm was, Endries, a former walk-on at California, has proved he's capable of being one of the better tight ends in the country. After starting all 13 games for the Golden Bears in 2023, Endries was even better last year and led California with 56 receptions, 623 yards and two touchdowns.

Unlike some of their other positions on the offensive side of the ball, the Longhorns have plenty of uncertainty along their offensive line. Replacing all but one of its 2024 starters, Texas will likely rely on a starting group that includes sophomore offensive tackle Trevor Goosby, junior left guard Neto Umeozulu, senior center Cole Hutson, senior right guard DJ Campbell and sophomore offensive tackle Brandon Baker. Campbell is the only returning starter on the line.

Last year's offensive line was inconsistent at times, but the new faces who make up this year's unit aren't expected to be a complete liability for the Longhorns.

Although Campbell has yet to earn all-conference honors, he's a 30-game start-

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Get To Know ... Texas

- **2024 Record:** 13-3, 7-1 SEC.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Pro spread; Defensive Formation – Multiple 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 3, Defense 7, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Steve Sarkisian, 5th year at Texas, 38-17.
- **Series History:** 4th meeting; Series tied, 2-2.
- **School Facts:** Location – Austin, Texas; Enrollment – 51,913; Nickname – Longhorns; Colors – White, Burnt orange; Conference – SEC; Stadium – DKR-Texas Memorial Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 100,119).

Top Offensive Players (2024 Stats)

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Q. Wisner	226	1,064	4.7	5
CJ Baxter	-	-	-	-
Jerrick Gibson	78	377	4.8	4

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Arch Manning	61-90	65.8	939	9-2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jack Endries	56	623	11.1	2
Emmett Mosley	48	525	10.9	6
Q. Wisner	44	311	7.1	1
DaAndre Moore	39	456	11.7	7
Ryan Wingo	29	472	16.3	2
Kaliq Lockett	-	-	-	-

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game — 33.0
Rushing Yards Per Game — 158.8
Passing Yards Per Game — 278.8
Total Offense Avg. Per Game — 437.5

2025 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 30	at Ohio State	Noon
Sept. 6	SAN JOSE STATE	Noon
Sept. 13	UTEP	4:15 p.m.
Sept. 20	SAM HOUSTON	8 p.m.
Oct. 4	at Florida	TBA
Oct. 11	OKLAHOMA	3:30 p.m.
Oct. 18	at Kentucky	TBA
Oct. 25	at Mississippi State	TBA
Nov. 1	VANDERBILT	Noon
Nov. 15	at Georgia	TBA
Nov. 22	ARKANSAS	TBA
Nov. 28	Texas A&M	7:30 p.m.
Dec. 7	SEC Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks	
Anthony Hill Jr.	59	54	113	16.5-62	8-44
Michael Taaffe	40	38	78	5.5-24	2-15
Liona Lefau	38	25	63	5-18	2-12
Jaylon Guilbeau	35	23	58	5.5-14	1-7
Colin Simmons	31	17	48	14-73	9-64
Malik Muhammad	32	4	36	1-1	0-0
Trey Moore	22	13	35	9.5-57	5.5-47

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Michael Taaffe	2	9	4.5	0
Anthony Hill Jr.	1	32	32	0
Liona Lefau	1	6	6	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed — 15.3
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed — 109.6
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed — 173.8
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed — 283.4

of their starting defensive tackles after losing them to the NFL draft. Interior defensive linemen Vernon Broughton and Alfred Collins helped Texas finish 13th nationally in rushing defense in 2024, and projected starters Cole Brevard and Watson will be tasked with doing the same thing.

Watson, who reportedly also considered Ohio State out of the transfer portal, had an impressive true freshman season with Syracuse last year. The 327-pound defensive lineman logged 31 tackles while starting 11 games last season.

Like Watson, Brevard joined Texas out of the transfer portal. Brevard had his career-best season at Purdue last year, totaling 19 tackles, including 5½ for loss and 1½ sacks, on the way to earning All-Big Ten honors.

North Carolina transfer Travis Shaw and sophomore Alex January round out a group that Sarkisian has confidence in.

“The interior D-linemen, man, we’re deep,” Sarkisian said. “That’s probably the biggest thing I can say about that group right now. And we’re playing a lot of guys, which has been good. We’re fortunate in that room right now. We’ve got great depth. I don’t think we’re going to have to overuse guys.”

Hill is not just the Longhorns’ leader at linebacker but may be the team’s best player. After earning All-Big 12 honors in his true freshman season, Hill emerged as one of the best linebackers in the country last year. Hill’s 113 tackles were by far the most on the team, his eight sacks were second only to Simmons, and he also had team-leading totals of four forced fumbles and 16½ tackles for loss.

Hill, who can also come off the edge for the Longhorns, will likely be joined by Liona Lefau as the Longhorns’ other starter at linebacker.

Lefau, a 10-game starter for Texas in 2024, had 63 tackles, including five for loss, last season. Interestingly, the Longhorns also have Trey Moore, a starting edge rusher for the team last year, in their linebacker room.

Moore had a solid season rushing the passer and totaled 5½ sacks. However, with

his 6-3, 249-pound frame, he may have more of a future in the NFL at linebacker rather than at edge. Regardless of whether he regularly starts for Texas, Moore, a versatile athlete, represents a valuable depth piece in the Longhorns’ front seven.

In its secondary, Texas is replacing two of its best players from last season in Jahdae Barron and Andrew Mukuba, who were a big part of the Longhorns ranking seventh nationally in passing yards allowed.

With a number of key players from their 2024 secondary coming back, Texas will hope its secondary is an impenetrable unit again this year.

Junior cornerback Malik Muhammad is a surefire bet to start this year as long as he can stay healthy. Muhammad didn’t record an interception last year for the Longhorns, but he started all 16 games and was a reliable option in pass coverage, breaking up eight passes.

Senior Jaylon Guilbeau is Texas’ next-most experienced cornerback. The Port Arthur, Texas, native appeared in at least eight games in each of his first two seasons. He broke through last year, appearing in all 16 games for the Longhorns and logging career-high totals of 58 tackles, including 5½ for loss and three pass deflections.

The Longhorns’ star position (similar to a nickel) and boundary safety are still in flux, but junior Jelani McDonald and sophomore Derek Williams Jr. are two candidates to start at each respective spot. One guarantee is that All-America senior defensive back Michael Taaffe will start somewhere. Taaffe, in addition to getting reps at safety, has also earned reps at the star position in the Longhorns’ preseason camp. He initially walked on at Texas before becoming an All-Big 12 safety in his redshirt sophomore season.

Playing in all 16 games last year, Taaffe had a career-best season at the Longhorns’ field-side safety position with 78 total tackles, including 5½ for loss, two interceptions and 10 pass breakups.

er and a five-star recruit. Goosby and Hutson gained plenty of playing time as backup players, and although Umeozulu and Baker are probably the most inexperienced players on the offensive line, they were both ranked inside the top 100 as recruits.

The Longhorns’ offense is expected to be a solid unit next year, but the defense, much like it was last year, is expected to be the strength of the team.

Led by veteran defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski, the Longhorns return many of the biggest contributors from a 2024 defense that ranked third nationally in total defense and scoring defense. With a slew of talented and experienced options on defense, Sarkisian had high praise for that unit at SEC media days.

“This is probably the deepest and most talented defense that we’ve had,” he said. “We’ve made incremental growth on the defensive side of the ball now through four years, and we’re going to need to do that again. I think championships are won on the defensive side of the ball, and we’ve got a defensive football team we’re very excited about.”

At first glance, the Longhorns’ defensive line, made up of four players who didn’t regularly start for the team last year, is a question mark. Upon further reflection, though, the defensive line could be the best position group on the team. Edge rushers Ethan Burke and Simmons may not have started many games last year, but each player was an invaluable member of the defensive line by the end of the season.

As one of several players rotating along the Longhorns’ defensive line, Burke especially made an impact in the running game and finished last season with 27 total tackles, including nine for loss. While Burke’s

contributions came as no surprise, considering he earned All-Big 12 honorable mention in 2023, few could have foreseen Simmons’ emergence as one of the sport’s best pass rushers in his true freshman season. The five-star recruit needed limited playing time to record a team-high nine sacks and win national Freshman of the Year honors over many other talented youngsters, namely OSU’s Smith.

The Longhorns’ interior defensive line is a bit more uncertain. For the second year in a row, the Longhorns are replacing both



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BSB Staff Believes OSU Makes Return To CFP

Ohio State's title defense starts on Aug. 30 against Texas, and the Buckeyes are yet again one of the favorites to both win the Big Ten and compete for another national championship.

It has been nearly six years since Buckeye fans witnessed a win over their archrival, and it's been five since they saw their team hoist the conference championship trophy. But before then, OSU has to get through big games against the Longhorns and Penn State and a few other tests.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members Sam Cipriani, Bobby Gorbett, Craig Merz and Greg Wilson all made their predictions for how Ohio State's 2025 season will go, along with players who they believe will earn hardware by season's end and the conference CFP teams.

Here are this year's BSB staff predictions:

Cipriani: Buckeyes Control Own Destiny

Ohio State enters the 2025 season in a unique spot – fresh off January's national championship and still ranked No. 3 in the nation despite losing 16 starters to the draft.

Yes, Ohio State did bring in a top-five recruiting class and multiple impactful transfers, but much of the roster is untested as starters. Star safety Caleb Downs and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, among core returners, have said this year's roster must make its own mark, aiming to achieve all three of its annual goals in a single season for the first time since 2014: beat Michigan, win the Big Ten championship, and capture a national title.

In 2024, Ohio State's offense leaned on veteran quarterback Will Howard and running backs Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson. This year, the Buckeyes turn to a young, inexperienced quarterback and running back group. Quarterback Julian Sayin steps into his first starting role, and if he meets even just part of his sky-high hype,

he'll have one of the nation's best receiving corps to do the rest.

With Judkins and Henderson gone, the backfield will likely run as a committee, with Day rotating running backs by play call. Sophomore James Peoples and West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson should shoulder most of the carries, as Day blends their speed and power.

The Buckeyes get an early chance to prove themselves, kicking off the season with a marquee matchup against No. 1 Texas. If Ohio State can rein in the Longhorns, the Buckeyes will set themselves up for a likely top-five faceoff against No. 2 Penn State at home on Nov. 1. Ohio State's road schedule offers no relief, featuring a trip to Champaign to face Illinois on Oct. 11 before the Buckeyes close the regular season at Michigan in the Big House on Nov. 29.

What could define the Buckeyes' season is the play of their quarterback and running backs. While Ohio State returns several receivers and offensive linemen, its signal-caller and backfield lack experience.

Big Ten Title: Penn State over Ohio State

Offensive POY: Drew Allar QB, Penn State

Defensive POY: Sonny Styles, Linebacker, Ohio State

Coach of the Year: Bret Bielema, Head Coach Illinois

Freshman of the Year: Bryce Underwood, Michigan

Big Ten CFP Teams: Ohio State, Penn State, Oregon, Michigan

Gorbett: OSU Wins First BIG Title Since 2020

Despite returning arguably the best offensive player, wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, and the best defensive player, safety Caleb Downs, in college football and being the defending national champion, Ohio State is not the darling of the media heading into 2025. Instead, it's Penn State, which is



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEXT MAN UP — Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin (10), named the starter on Aug. 18 by coach Ryan Day, has the unenviable task of replacing Will Howard, who guided Ohio State to the 2024 College Football Playoff championship. Sayin won the job over junior Lincoln Kienholz (3).

not only the highest-ranked Big Ten team in the Associated Press' top 25 but was also picked by many to win the conference. To me, that is hogwash. Looking back on the recent history of college football, well-run programs tend not to immediately fade away after winning the national championship.

I believe Ryan Day hasn't just built a well-run program in Columbus, but a regenerative machine, and although the Buckeyes are replacing 16 starters from last year's team, as long as Smith stays healthy, the 2025 group will be more than capable of making another deep playoff run.

Admittedly, there are at least a couple of major roadblocks on Ohio State's schedule, including most notably No. 1-ranked Texas and No. 2-ranked Penn State. Luckily for a talented, albeit slightly inexperienced, team, those games will be played within the confines of Ohio Stadium. In Day's tenure as Ohio State's head coach, the Buckeyes have suffered only three home losses. Although I could see the Buckeyes losing their season-opening bout against the Longhorns on Aug. 30, in what will be Julian Sayin's first start at quarterback, I think Day's team will respond with a Nov. 1 win over the Nittany Lions.

After some midseason road tests against pesky Big Ten foes, Ohio State will travel to Ann Arbor to renew its rivalry with Michigan on Nov. 29, one season after an ugly postgame skirmish between the two teams.

I, like others in the media, foolishly dismissed the Wolverines' chances headed into the 2024 matchup. This year, even though the Buckeyes are the more talented team on paper, I will take the Wolverines to win The Game for the fifth straight time.

As difficult as yet another loss in The Game may be, Ohio State will dust itself off for the second year in a row in the postsea-

son and win its first Big Ten championship since 2020, with another win over Penn State.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Penn State

Offensive POY: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Defensive POY: Dani Dennis-Sutton, Penn State

Coach of the Year: Kirk Ferentz, Iowa

Freshman of the Year: Bryce Underwood, Michigan

Big Ten CFP Teams: Ohio State, Penn State, Oregon and Iowa

Merz: Tough Two Take

I will not make the same mistake again. I will not make the same mistake again.

Looking back on my 2024 prediction, I had the Buckeyes going 11-1 in the regular season with a loss to either Penn State or Oregon. I did not have them losing to Michigan. I mean, who outside of Cheatersville, Mich., would?

"The game will be in Columbus on Nov. 30, and I am not going to pick against the Buckeyes this time," I wrote.

Well, we know what happened.

In my defense, I was spot-on with this: "It would not be a surprise if the second-ranked Buckeyes win the inaugural expanded playoffs just as they earned the first CFP in 2014 by beating Oregon."

I'm done patting myself on the back and have to go against common sense and predict that the Buckeyes will lose at Michigan this season. Until the Buckeyes prove otherwise, there is a mental block every time they play the Cheaters.

I think the Buckeyes will have to work hard to go 11-1 but could easily lose three times and miss the playoffs. I'm wary about breaking in a new quarterback and worried

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about the combination of a heavy turnover on defense and new coordinators on offense and defense.

And then there's the schedule. Opening against No. 1 Texas is as tough as it can get, and the loser will be fortunate that under the 12-team playoff system, it won't be a fatal setback.

I'm going to give OSU the benefit of the doubt that they will prevail – barely – over the Longhorns to give them consecutive wins in Ohio Stadium over UT teams wearing orange, albeit with about a 60-degree temperature differential.

As for the rest of the schedule, I believe *when* you play is just as important as *who* you play when it comes to ranking the hardest to easiest opponents.

That's why I see back-to-back road games vs. Illinois (Oct. 11) and Wisconsin (Oct. 18) as brutal. Illinois looks legit to be a contender for the playoffs if the Big Ten gets the expected four spots.

It will absolutely be a tough test against the Illini, and no matter the outcome, the Buckeyes will be walking into a trap at Wisconsin.

Coach Luke Fickell is on the hot seat in Madison, and he badly needs a signature win over his former school. Don't be surprised if it's a night game at Camp Randall (remember those, Buckeye fans?).

After the two-game trip, the Buckeyes get an all-important open weekend before hosting a Penn State team on Nov. 1 that many have tabbed to be the third straight Big Ten school to win a national title.

Here's my take last year on the OSU-PSU matchup: "At some point, the Nittany Lions will beat OSU." I still feel the same way, and this has the feel of a breakthrough for the Nittany Lions.

Home games Nov. 15 vs. UCLA and Nov. 22 against Rutgers should be tuneups for the Cheaters at the Big Lie.

There you have it. Fudging a bit, between Texas, Illinois, Penn State and the Cheaters, I have the Buckeyes losing twice, but that should be enough to earn a playoff berth again.

Big Ten Title: Penn State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Defensive POY: Caleb Downs, Ohio State

Coach of the Year: Bret Bielema, Illinois

Freshman of the Year: Bryce Underwood, Michigan

Big Ten CFP teams: Illinois, Ohio State, Oregon, Penn State

Wilson: Watch Out For Road Tests

There are three games on the Buckeyes' schedule this season that most people have their eyes on: Texas on Aug. 30, Penn State on Nov. 1 and Michigan on Nov. 29, the last of which is on the road.

Those three are in the crosshairs for very good reason. The Longhorns and Nittany Lions are the preseason No. 1 and 2 teams, respectively, and for whatever reason, Ryan Day seemed to freeze up in the frigid temperatures against the Wolverines only to find himself again during the historic four-game run to a national championship.

Of those three games, I have the Buckeyes losing only one of them, and that is to "Big Game James" Franklin and the Nittany Lions in Ohio Stadium. Franklin has had a

lot of trouble beating not only the Buckeyes but also winning in most matchup games. But I believe the derisive "Big Game James" nickname will get turned on its head this year, and the formula that OSU and Michigan used in the two previous years will work for him as well.

As for Michigan, I think Day has learned his lesson about the rivalry and coaches more freely this year now that he has proved himself on the national level. If he does, field security at the Big House will need to have their eyes on Jermaine Mathews Jr. so that he can't get a Block O flag to midfield, or there might be a replay of last year's postgame.

Two other games to keep a close eye on

are contests in Washington at the end of September and at Illinois in October. The Huskies will prove to be back on track with Demond Williams Jr. at quarterback, and Husky Stadium will prove tough to play in in the Buckeyes' first conference bout with their new West Coast foe.

The Illini will be tough after returning many core players from a 10-win team, including third-year starting QB Luke Altmyer. I expect them to enter that week with a 6-0 record after being tested somewhat by Duke, Indiana and USC.

I won't predict losses in either of those two games because I do believe in Ohio State's talent over whatever else could come into play. If all else is equal, that will be

enough to win those road tests. With that, I also have the pick of OSU and Penn State meeting back up in Indianapolis for Day's chance to give it back to Franklin.

Big Ten Title: Penn State over Ohio State

Offensive POY: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Defensive POY: Matayo Uiagalelei, Oregon

Coach of the Year: James Franklin, Penn State

Freshman of the Year: Dakorien Moore, Oregon

Big Ten CFP teams: Illinois, Ohio State, Oregon, Penn State

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OSU Beat Offers Mixed Takes Ahead Of Season

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Ohio State enters the season boasting one of the most talented yet largely untested rosters in the nation, and with the season rapidly approaching, plenty of questions about the Buckeyes remain unanswered.

To tackle these topics, BSB spoke with four experienced Ohio State beat writers — Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors, Steve Helwagen of 247Sports, Spencer Holbrook of Lettermen Row, and longtime Buckeye beat reporter Tim May — to gather their insights on the most pressing questions entering the 2025 season. Here are four questions for four experts.

Q: Many experts have questioned Ohio State's depth on the defensive line, particularly at defensive tackle. How do you assess the talent within this Buckeye position group, and are there any under-the-radar players who could work their way into a rotational role in the lineup?

May: "I expect (defensive coordinator) Matt Patricia to augment some lacking of proven depth, and maybe even reliable depth in the middle of the defense, by using some of those defensive end types to get some mismatches on the inside, depending on who they're playing, depending on situations."

"I'm really curious about where Beau Atkinson is going to play. Caden Curry, we saw him slide into fullback a couple of times. What I'm saying is, he's a very flexible player in terms of talent, of creating a mismatch, a sudden mismatch. Will Smith Jr., everybody keeps raving about him."

Hope: "Eddrick Houston and Kayden McDonald. I expect them to take the majority of snaps. It seems like Will Smith Jr. is a guy who's coming on behind them to maybe be that third defensive tackle, particularly the top backup at the nose tackle position."

"After them, you look at Tywone Malone and Jason Moore. Those are guys who are both in their third year in the program —

Tywone, in his fifth year of college football. You're really looking for one or both of those guys to step up as that backup three-technique behind Eddrick Houston."

Helwagen: "Beau Atkinson, coming over from North Carolina, has the potential to be an impact player. He's got more career sacks and more production in his career as a college player than anybody on the Ohio State roster, so he just needs to come over to Ohio State and play his best football, and he'll make an impact."

"You feel good about Eddrick Houston and Kayden McDonald, but do you know who's going to be the backups? I think Jason Moore has a chance to be a guy, or Will Smith Jr., even."

Holbrook: "Tywone's going to have a role, Will Smith Jr. is definitely going to have a role behind Kayden McDonald. I'm very intrigued by Jarquez Carter. I think there's a chance for him to make an impact — maybe not in Week 1, but maybe as we get into the year. If Jarquez plays well against Grambling, against Ohio, I think after the bye week, you could see them start to implement him a little more."

Q: What's your prediction for how Ohio State will fare in its season opener against the No. 1 Texas Longhorns?

May: "I think Ohio State will hold sway. I know everybody's fired up about Texas because of Arch Manning. This is a ridiculous environment he's going to be walking into. And I know it would have been even more ridiculous at night. It's still going to be ridiculous. The place is going to be jumping."

"The bottom line is everybody talks about all these players Ohio State lost. Well, Texas had 12 guys drafted, lost several other guys. They obviously picked up some key guys in the portal, and so did Ohio State. So I just go

with the home-field advantage for Ohio State in the sense that I think it will hold sway in some form or fashion."

Hope: "I would pick Texas to win, largely because of the fact that Arch Manning, at least, has some of that big-game experience. He hasn't played a lot, but he's at least played in a couple of games as a starter in relief of Quinn Ewers last year."

Helwagen: "The quarterbacks are going to have a big impact on what happens in that game, as they do in any game. But, particularly in this type of game where you've got great offenses and great defenses on both sides of the ball and tremendous talent on both sides of the play, somebody's got to step up and make the play."

Holbrook: "It's interesting because we talk about Arch like he's a sure thing, but I don't know if that's necessarily the case. He wasn't bad last year when he started in place of Quinn Ewers, but I don't think he was good enough where we can solidify him as a first-round talent and a sure-thing Heisman candidate just yet."

"I also think that it's interesting that Texas is replacing its entire offensive line, and the knock on Ohio State is on the lines, but Texas is replacing just as much on the defensive line and even more on the offensive line. So the battle is actually on the lines, because that will actually determine the quarterback play. People are sleeping on the returning production on the Ohio State offensive line, especially as it concerns the returning production on the Texas offensive line, which is not great."

Q: The Buckeyes return arguably the two best players in all of college football this season in safety Caleb Downs and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith. Which of the two do you believe will have a better season?

May: "This is the best way I can put it. I think Ohio State can survive much more vitally without Jeremiah Smith than it could without Caleb Downs. Caleb Downs is partial to not just in the playing of the defense, but getting guys lined up. I mean, he's a coach on the field who absolutely can bring it."

Hope: "I think Jeremiah is the best offensive player in college football, and Caleb's the best defensive player in college football. So it's hard to rank one over the other. If I had to pick, I'd go with Jeremiah Smith, just because you saw what he did as a freshman. You see that he looks bigger. Everybody says he's faster, he's stronger this year. If he's even better than he was last year — I mean, it's hard to even put words into how good he could be this year. So if he lives up to the hype, I think he's going to be the best player in the country. I think he might win the Heisman."

Helwagen: "That's a tough one, because the defense is going to be leaning on Caleb Downs to be a leader, both spiritually and in production. So I think that's first and foremost, he's got to be a leader by example, and also a leader vocally for that side of the ball."

I would expect him to be a captain.

"Then, for Jeremiah Smith, he just made so many incredible plays with his athleticism last year. Can he live off that again, or is he going to take his game to the next level beyond that? To me, that's what's going to be fun to see with Jeremiah Smith. He had such a great year last year. What can you do for an encore?"

Holbrook: "Downs changes the way you can play defense, just because of how versatile he is. They'll have him in the box some, which makes it easier for Sonny Styles or Arvell Reese to be able to go off the edge. So it changes every layer of the defense."

"Jeremiah, though, changes the way that you run the ball, the way the offensive line can do things. I think he changes the reads for the quarterback. The 'Jeremiah down there somewhere' kind of goes away if he's not there. It also changes the pressure on the first-year quarterback to make better throws. I would go with Jeremiah. I just think he changes every single little detail of the offense with him being on the field vs. when he's not on the field."

Q: What is your season outlook for the Buckeyes in 2025?

May: "This is going to be an Ohio State team that has the distinct possibility of getting better and better as the season goes on. I know every team is supposed to do that, but you see the talent that's available."

"I think Ohio State has a definite chance to play for the Big Ten championship and thus play in the playoffs. And once you get to the playoffs, can you repeat history?"

Hope: "I've kind of gone back and forth on maybe like a 10-2 record or 11-1 record for Ohio State. I expect some growing pains early in the season. You're replacing more than half the lineup from last year, who went and got selected in the NFL draft."

"Are they a team that will win another national championship? I mean, if I were picking right now, I would pick the field over Ohio State, but I do think anything's possible for this team, because the talent is still there for them to be as good as any team in the country."

Helwagen: "The last two times they won the national championship in 2002 and 2014, they brought back veteran teams, and they weren't able to repeat. This team only has nine starters back and lots of youth, including at the all-important quarterback position. You have two guys who hardly ever played with Lincoln Kienholz and Julian Sabin looking for that job. So it's like 'what's going to happen?'"

Holbrook: "I think the ceiling is 12-0, and I think the floor is 10-2. I don't think they'll lose more than two games. If they beat Texas, that obviously gives them the buffer, but if they lose, I think they want to get some things figured out pretty quickly. The young talent will probably take over at that point once they get things figured out after the bye week in September and start with a win at Washington, then they can get the ball rolling. Even if they drop one to either Penn State or Michigan, they'll still finish 10-2."



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Jeremiah Smith

Buckeyes Add Three-Star QB To '26 Class

Ohio State has long wanted to add a quarterback to its 2026 recruiting class and was able to do so on July 3 when Mission Viejo, Calif., three-star signal caller Luke Fahey (6-0, 185) committed to the Buckeyes.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

It didn't take long after his official visit to Columbus the weekend of June 20-22 to realize that he wanted to be a Buckeye. He chose OSU over Oklahoma State, Stanford and Indiana.

Fahey didn't get an offer from Ohio State until he was on campus for his official visit, but it was the one he was waiting for after growing up a fan of the program, he told Eleven Warriors.

"My dad's parents were both students at Ohio State, and they met actually in the library at Ohio State," Fahey said. "In their house, all they did was watch Ohio State, every single sport that was on TV. And then my dad grew up an Ohio State fan, and he kind of molded me into being an Ohio State fan. I've watched so many games over the years, and I've tuned into so many Ohio State sports over the years. I even had a little foam football that was Ohio State that I would throw around with my dad."

It was a good thing the Buckeyes offered Fahey when they did, because he told Rivals after his commitment that his original plan was to call Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti from the airport in Columbus on his flight home to commit to the Hoosiers.

Fahey will be joining his former high school teammate, and current freshman at Ohio State, wide receiver Phillip Bell. At Mission Viejo, Fahey threw for 2,184 yards and 26 touchdowns as a sophomore, adding 496 yards and a score with his legs.

As a junior, he had 1,638 passing yards, 17 touchdowns and a 76.6 percent completion percentage (105 for 137) with no interceptions and 183 rushing yards.

He was ranked by 247Sports composite as the No. 357 player in the country, the No. 25 quarterback and the No. 33 player in the state of California on the day he committed but has since dropped to the No. 573 player in the country, the No. 32 quarterback and the No. 44 player in the state of California.

Ohio State has done well when it comes to recruiting quarterbacks in recent years, with five-star prospects Julian Sayin and

Tavien St. Clair in the room currently for quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler. Fahey will also have to compete with 2027 quarterback commit Brady Edmunds (6-5, 215), a four-star from Huntington Beach, Calif., when he gets to campus a year after Fahey.

But none of that matters to Fahey, who said there will be competition in any program, and he is ready to put in the work it will take to be a quarterback at Ohio State.

"There's nothing going to be handed to you at any school you go to," he said. "So why not give myself the best opportunity and go compete with the best people in the world?"

Three-Star DL Perez Flips To Ohio State

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson earned his fourth commitment within a month on July 4 when Cleveland Glenville three-star defensive lineman Jamir Perez (6-4, 360) flipped his pledge from Florida to Ohio State.

He joined Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260), Richland (N.J.) St. Augustine Prep four-star defensive lineman Damari Simeon (6-3, 275) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Cameron Brickle (6-2, 305) in the defensive line class to this point.

Perez is ranked the No. 724 player in the country, the No. 84 defensive lineman and the No. 31 player in the state of Ohio.

He took his official visit to Columbus the weekend of June 13-15 after originally committing to the Gators on May 18, which was just two days after he took his official visit to Gainesville, Fla. He had also visited Vanderbilt, Wisconsin, Iowa State, Cincinnati and Purdue.

Ohio State still likely hopes to add more to the defensive line in the 2026 class, with its eyes still on Bessemer (Ala.) City four-star defensive lineman Emanuel Ruffin (6-4, 290), who is still uncommitted, among others.

Buckeyes Add Fifth 2026 Receiver

Ohio State likely added its final wide receiver to the 2026 class when Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star Jerquaden Guilford (6-3, 190) committed to Ohio State on July 18.

He's the fifth in the class at the position, joining Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) and four-star Kayden Dixon Wyatt (6-2, 180), along with Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial four-star Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) and Southlake (Texas) Carroll four-star Brock Boyd (6-1, 180).

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	
Favour Akih	RB	6-0	190	★★★★	Delaware (Ohio)	Rutherford B. Hayes
Brock Boyd	WR	6-2	183	★★★★	Southlake (Texas) Carroll	
Blaine Bradford	S	6-1	207	★★★★★	Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic	
Cameron Brickle	DL	6-2	305	★★★	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy	
Simeon Caldwell	S	6-3	185	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School	
Kayden Dixon-Wyatt	WR	6-2	180	★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei	
Luke Fahey	QB	6-0	185	★★★	Mission Viejo, Calif	
Corbyn Fordham	TE	6-4	215	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School	
Sam Greer	OT	6-7	310	★★★★	Akron Hoban	
Jerquaden Guilford	WR	6-3	190	★★★★	Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop	
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	205	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei	
Cincere Johnson	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville	
Jamir Perez	DL	6-4	360	★★★	Cleveland Glenville	
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	
Damari Simeon	DL	6-3	275	★★★★	Richland (N.J.) St. Augustine Prep	
Tucker Smith	OL	6-5	280	★★★	Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor	
Aaron Thomas	OT	6-7	300	★★★	Phoenix Mountain Pointe	
Jordan Thomas	CB	6-1	185	★★★★	Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic	
Khary Wilder	DE	6-4	260	★★★★	Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra	

In 2024, Guilford had 35 catches, 556 yards and three touchdowns after a sophomore season when he had 26 catches, 374 yards and four scores.

At the time of his commitment, he was ranked the No. 315 prospect, the No. 50 wide receiver in the country and the best player in the state of Indiana according to 247Sports composite rankings.

For Guilford, it was an easy choice to commit to offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline since his goals are so big and Hartline has proved to be able to develop players at the position.

"I mean, they've seen the great, and they are the greats (themselves)," Guilford said after his commitment announcement. "So now they're going to get me to the place that I want to be, and that's the No. 1 draft pick or in the first round and be a golden jacket."

According to Greg Smith of Rivals, Guilford took "significantly less" for an NIL deal than he was being offered elsewhere – most likely Ole Miss – so that he could play for Ohio State and be developed by Hartline.

Weatherspoon Flips To North Carolina

The Buckeyes had their first loss from the 2026 class when Avon, Ohio, four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 175) flipped from Ohio State to North Carolina on July 16.

There hadn't been much buzz about the in-state prospect looking elsewhere leading up to his flip, so it was somewhat of a surprise when he announced his intention to be a Tar Heel. He took an official visit to Chapel Hill on June 6, two weeks before he was in Columbus.

Weatherspoon didn't receive an offer from the Tar Heels until Feb. 25, which was nearly two months after he committed to Ohio State.

But now Weatherspoon will play for head coach Bill Belichick, whose coaching résumé is about as extensive as it can be at the NFL level.

"It was a different feeling, meeting Coach Belichick," Weatherspoon told 247Sports. "Knowing that he's the greatest to ever do

it and all the achievements that he has, he doesn't act anything like that. He's humble and caring of the young men under his wing."

Top Recruits To Commit In August

Most 2026 recruits have committed somewhere at this point, but the Buckeyes are still hoping they have some late luck with Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200), Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralan Womack (6-0, 195) and Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3, 285)

Hiter is set to commit on Aug. 19, shortly after BSB goes to press, Womack will commit on Aug. 21, announcing his decision that day at 8 p.m., and Gray is set to announce his decision on Aug. 22.

Continued On Page 38



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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.	

OSU Football 2028 Commitment

Player(s) in the class of 2028 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	
Elijah Newman-Hall	RB	5-11	195	NA	Tampa (Fla.) Blake	

OSU Hopes To Make 2026 Safeties Even Stronger

Continued From Page 37

The Buckeyes aren't out of the race for Hiter at this point, but even though they are included in his top four schools, it feels more like a race between Michigan and Tennessee. He visited Ohio State on May 30, followed by Georgia on June 6, Michigan on June 13 and Tennessee on June 20.

There is a small possibility OSU could get back into the race for the five-star running back. However, with Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190) already committed in the class and three freshman running backs on campus already after adding Bo Jackson, Anthony Rogers and Isaiah West in the 2025 cycle, it wouldn't be a surprise to see running backs coach Carlos Locklyn bring in only one prospect this year.

Womack's top four schools are Auburn, Florida, Ohio State and Texas A&M, and his leanings are a little less clear, though some analysts like the Buckeyes' chances at landing the five-star safety.

For a top prospect such as Womack, however, even if Ohio State is leading this late, there could be bidding wars up until his commitment date on Aug. 21. There is also the chance that he commits to Ohio State and other teams continue to pursue him until the

early signing period as well, so his recruitment is still likely far from over.

The Buckeyes already have Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) and Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star safety Simeon Caldwell (6-3, 185) at the position, so safeties coach Matt Guerrieri is off to a great start in the class, but Womack would solidify the 2026 safety group for the Buckeyes as the best in the country.

Womack is the No. 15 player in the nation and the No. 1 safety, Bradford is No. 36 and No. 5, and Caldwell is No. 101 in the country and No. 6 at the position.

When Gray narrowed his list of scholarships down to five schools, he included Ohio State on that list.

Along with the Buckeyes were Clemson, LSU, South Carolina and Tennessee. The relationship that offensive line coach Tyler Bowen has built with Gray goes back to Bowen's days as the offensive coordinator at Virginia Tech, his previous stop before he joined OSU this offseason.

Bowen has already proved that his impressive recruiting reputation is real, and he can't be counted out for Gray's services. Gray is ranked the No. 30 player in the country, the No. 2 interior lineman and the No. 2 player in the state of Virginia. Currently, some recruit-

ing experts favor LSU over the other four schools on his list, but the Buckeyes have a chance to make up that ground before his commitment date.

Gray took his official visit to Columbus on June 11, which was one of just 10 that he had taken since the beginning of April, and that visit was enough to earn OSU a spot in his top schools.

CSC Stance On Collectives Softens

When the House v. NCAA settlement was finalized in June, it was reported that NIL collectives – such as The 1870 Society and The Foundation at Ohio State – would no longer be able to operate as they previously had been.

But in a report from Yahoo Sports on July 22, Ross Dellenger wrote that the College Sports Commission (CSC) may be softening its stance on collectives, possibly allowing them to be considered legitimate businesses.

So while revenue sharing is now allowed, if a deal between a player and an NIL collective is approved by the CSC's NIL Go clearinghouse, it won't count against a school's revenue-sharing cap.

The CSC originally denied multiple deals from collectives, arguing those deals didn't serve a valid business purpose, but that

stance has changed after House plaintiff attorneys Jeffrey Kessler and Steve Berman took issue with the initial interpretation and sent the NCAA and the Power Four conferences a letter demanding the rejected deals be reinstated.

Ohio State had been waiting for more clarity on the settlement rules, which head coach Ryan Day spoke about at Big Ten Media Days in July.

"I've heard the conversation about a soft cap and some of the different deals and how collectives are going to get looked at in terms of the deals that are made," Day said. "What we don't want to do at Ohio State is make agreements or talk to people about certain deals and have to claw those things back because they don't get cleared. I don't think that's the right look for us at Ohio State. I think some folks are being more aggressive than others. That's their decision. We're always going to be aggressive, but we also want to make sure we're doing things the right way."

Visitors Adding Up For Texas Game

The matchup between No. 1 Texas and No. 3 Ohio State to open the season on Aug. 30 is set to be a big draw for recruits around the country, and the Buckeyes seem to be

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

Ohio State quarterback watchers had to be pleased with the performance of Columbus-bound Tom Bolyard in the annual North-South All-Star football game held in Massillon, Ohio, on July 20.

Bolyard was named the North's most valuable player, completing 4 of 6 passes for 58 yards and a touchdown with no interceptions in a 31-10 victory. He also nailed a 33-yard field goal and handled punting chores, burying one boot at the South 1-yard line as the North overcame an early 10-0 deficit.

35 Years Ago — 1990

If the 45th Ohio North-South All-Star game was any indication, the future of Ohio State football was taking on a much rosier look.

The North team, led by future Buckeye quarterback Joe Pickens, scored on its first play from scrimmage and went on to a convincing 26-0 win over the South stars at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium in Massillon.

Pickens was the only future Ohio State player on the North squad. Playing on the South team were future Buckeye wide receiver Joey Galloway of Bellaire and offensive lineman Mike Dully of Hamilton.

Pickens was named the game's most valuable player for his efforts, which included tossing two touchdown passes and finishing 7 of 13 for 175 yards. He threw two interceptions and fumbled once, but it should be noted that he hadn't played any football for six months, concentrating on baseball instead.

30 Years Ago — 1995

Orrville, Ohio, kicker Dan Stultz became the fourth member of Ohio State's 1996 recruiting class when he committed to the Buckeyes on July 5.

Over the previous two years, Stultz had put up some extraordinary numbers as Orrville's kicker.

In 1994, he hit 50 of 53 extra-point attempts. Two of the three he missed were blocked. He also made 10 of 22 field-goal attempts with a long kick of 48 yards and no misses inside 40 yards. As a sophomore, he hit kicks of 52 and 53 yards. In warmups for a state playoff game, he made a field goal from 68 yards out.

He also put 30 of his kickoffs into the end zone for touchbacks and handled punting duties as well (36.8 average).

25 Years Ago — 2000

There were still six months to national signing day for the 2001 recruiting campaign, but Ohio State had already staked a claim to several of the top prospects in Ohio, if not the nation.

Ohio State pushed its class to nine commitments during July, picking up verbals from two of the Buckeye State's best prospects as well as a hard-hitting safety from Michigan.

The productive month included the surprise commitment of

Canton GlenOak defensive back Dustin Fox, whose brother Derek had just finished a successful four-year run at Penn State.

That news was topped on July 21, when Upper Arlington defensive end Simon Fraser announced he was picking the Buckeyes over Michigan. That same day, Ypsilanti, Mich., safety Jacob Stewart notified the coaches of his intention to play for the Buckeyes as well.

20 Years Ago — 2005

Before the 2005 recruiting class was even in the books, people were talking about the quality of the offensive linemen in Ohio's class of 2006.

Ohio State could finally say it was cashing in on some of that talent.

Nearly six months after extending scholarship offers to three in-state linemen on signing day in '05, on July 31, the Buckeyes secured a commitment from one of those players, Cincinnati Colerain big man Connor Smith.

Of the trio, which also included Pickerington North's Justin Boren and Aaron Brown of Cincinnati Princeton, Smith was thought to be the safest bet to land with the Buckeyes, considering that his father, Joe, was a letter-winning offensive lineman at OSU between 1979 and 1982.

15 Years Ago — 2010

If Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel wanted to keep the pipeline flowing from Cleveland Glenville, he might have had to offer up a few more scholarships.

At least, that was what a quartet of Tarblooders were saying going into their senior seasons. Wide receiver Shane Wynn, quarterback Cardale Jones, linebacker/defensive end Andre Sturdivant and offensive lineman Aundrey Walker each had said they planned to stick together when it came to picking a college.

Wynn, Sturdivant and Walker each had offers from OSU, but the stickiest part of the situation was what to do with Jones. When the Buckeyes landed a verbal commitment from the nation's top quarterback prospect, Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne signal caller Braxton Miller, they told him they would offer only one quarterback in the class.

Jones, listed at 6-5, 230 pounds, said in mid-July that he had not heard that the Buckeyes would not offer another quarterback but added that the comment did not surprise him.

"If I were Ohio State, I would tell (Miller) the same thing because locking down the No. 1 quarterback in the nation is big," Jones said.

"Hey, if it's true, I'll go somewhere else. If not, I'm not saying I would commit to Ohio State or go there for sure. It's all about competing for me."

10 Years Ago — 2015

Although it had long been anticipated, the official announce-

ment that Ohio State would have at least three more years with a Bosa chasing quarterbacks didn't make the news any less sweet.

Nick Bosa, the younger brother of standout defensive end Joey, committed to Ohio State on July 23 by announcing his pledge on Twitter. The brothers both attended Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas, and Nick played the same position and wore the same number (No. 97) as Joey. As such, many expected him to follow in the footsteps of his brother and pledge to suit up in scarlet and gray.

Five Years Ago — 2020

Ohio State continued its strong start to the 2022 recruiting cycle by landing a commitment on Aug. 1 from Marysville, Ohio, five-star linebacker Gabe Powers.

The 6-4, 220-pound Powers was considered the second-best outside linebacker and No. 31 prospect overall in his class. He recorded 90 tackles to lead the Monarchs to the state playoffs in the fall. He picked Ohio State over offers from programs such as Boston College, Florida State, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Notre Dame, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Stanford, Tennessee, West Virginia and Wisconsin, among others.

Powers, who lived roughly 30 minutes northwest of Columbus, made his first trip to campus in August of 2019, at which time he met with Al Washington and director of high school relations Ed Terwilliger. He made two additional unofficial visits over the fall, including the 34-10 win over Michigan State in October and the 28-17 win over Penn State in November, landing an offer from the staff just days before his most recent visit.

One Year Ago — 2024

Ohio State missed out on its top remaining 2025 target on Aug. 17 when Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. pledged his services to Tennessee.

Sanders had been Ohio State's top target for a long time, ever since he showed his interest in the school when he made multiple visits to Columbus during the spring. The Buckeyes originally extended their offer to him back in August of 2022, but despite their best efforts over the past couple of years, they weren't able to beat out the Volunteers.

"Tennessee has done a phenomenal job recruiting me throughout high school, showing me that I'm a priority for their program," Sanders said. "Coach (Josh Heupel) has a phenomenal grip on his program and we're going to do good things in the future as well."

Sanders was ranked the No. 2 player in the class according to 247Sports composite rankings, behind only Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205), who was committed to LSU at the time.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

NIL collectives are going to be considered legitimate businesses now. Does that have an immediate impact on the 2026 recruiting class since the College Sports Commission changed its stance on that so late? Do you think it gives Ohio State the chance for some late flips during the football season?

"I don't think it's going to make much of an impact on 2026. They have 21 guys committed right now. Whether it affects their ability to flip people later in the game, that's a different story there, so I'm anxious to see where they go. If you look at the position groups where they need help, you're looking at running back and cornerback. They need to add, so we're going to see. Everything with NIL, it seems like we learn something new every month. Whether it's going to make an impact immediately, I don't think so, but nobody signs anything for a while now. You have months (to go). I think they're going to be active in trying to flip some kids. There were some guys they missed out on that were right there, so we'll see what happens."

Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralan Womack (6-0, 195) is Ohio State's biggest remaining target who is still uncommitted. What are the Buckeyes' chances of landing him?

"I think they're excellent. Everything is in place for them to get him. If we were doing this three, five years ago, you'd see 10 crystal ball picks in for him. NIL has changed everything. Today, I don't know if there are any crystal ball picks on that kid, which is unbelievable for how great a player he is and how much people know about him. (After BSB's interview

with Bill Greene, Womack received a crystal ball to commit to Auburn from On3's Steve Wiltfong).

"It's more like pro football now. It's free agency. The best offers sometimes come later in the process. I think Ohio State has done more than enough to land this kid. He can see they can put him in the NFL, they can put him in the College Football Playoff, but is that the most important thing anymore like it used to be? If my son were coming out of high school right now, NIL would probably be the number one thing for him, too, so it's changed the game.

"Last time I looked, I didn't think there was one pick on him, and that's almost unheard of. You never used to see that. Three, four, or five years ago, everybody seemed to have a pretty good educated guess. It's a lot tougher today because of the money, and a late offer can come in that just blows that kid away, and he would be foolish not to take it.

"He's so good. He can make the NFL. You can take the USA Today top 25. He can go to any of those schools. If he takes the most NIL money, he's going to end up as a very rich young man before he goes to the NFL."

The game against Texas is going to be a big draw for major recruits, but does it hurt Ohio State that it's a noon game when it comes to out-of-state visitors?

"I think it does. I've always felt that way. It doesn't hurt when you're trying to get the kid from Walsh Jesuit to visit. It hurts when you're trying to get the kid from California to visit. Ohio State's a national recruiting program. This is your signature game. This is where you put your best

foot forward, not when you play Grambling State. It's awful, but TV rules the day now. They pay the freight, and they get what they want, but it definitely hurts. I look back on the last 10-15 years of Ohio State bringing in top recruits, those were always the night games with USC. An early noon game in late August is not ideal, and I'm sure Ohio State doesn't like it, but TV runs the show."

A rolling signing day has been floated, which would allow recruits to sign an agreement when they officially accept a scholarship offer. How would you feel about that change, and what effects would that have on recruiting?

"Yeah, that's a tough one, because so many times Alabama, Georgia, Ohio State, Texas, they re-evaluate where they're at in November. 'Hey, we hit all our targets at wide receiver, we missed at linebacker. Georgia Tech got a kid that I really like, and that kid had a great senior year. Offer him, let's go pick him.'

"So for the kid that signs that contract early, he's locked in with Georgia Tech, and then he gets an offer from Texas. It's like, 'Oh, man.' It's going to limit the power schools from poaching kids when they lose out on guys they really want. It kills the plan-B stuff if those kids are already signed early. I can see it not being a good thing from the players' perspective and from the schools' perspective. For Minnesota, Georgia Tech, Virginia, it's probably a good thing to get those guys locked up, so they can't be poached later on. The lower schools, the mid schools would probably be the only winners in that scenario. It allows them to protect their guys, so Ohio State can't come in and poach someone."

capitalizing as much as they are able to.

The noon kickoff time causes some issues for players coming from farther away, especially if their football seasons are already starting. Any high school player with a late game or practice on Aug. 29 would have trouble making it to Columbus for the game.

But there are still many recruits who have already decided they will be on campus for the matchup.

Committed prospects who plan to be there include Akih; Guilford; Perez; Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School three-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215); Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280); Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225); Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225); Bradford; Caldwell; and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185) in the 2026 class.

Both 2027 commitments –Edmunds (6-5, 215) and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 170) – will also be at the game.

As for prospects not committed to OSU, most who have said they will be on campus are in the 2027 class. Those players are McKeesport, Pa., five-star running back and Penn State commit Kemon Spell (5-9, 205); Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205); Buffalo (N.Y.) Canisius four-star running back Elijah Kimble (5-10, 180); Bedford, Ohio, running back Rayshawn Duncan Jr. (5-8, 195); Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195); McKeesport, Pa., four-star wide receiver Javien Robinson (6-2, 189); Cleveland Glenville wide receiver DeAnthony Crittenden (5-10, 160); Harper Woods, Mich., four-star wide receiver Dakota Guerrant (6-1, 185); and many more.

There are already more visitors who are planning on attending the game, as well as more who will be added to the long list in the days leading up to the matchup against the Longhorns. A complete list of visitors will be

included in the Texas recap issue of BSB.

Pantoni Named Exec Of The Year

At the Personnel and Recruiting Symposium on Aug. 5 held in Nashville, Tenn., Ohio State general manager Mark Pantoni was named the Executive of the Year.

This comes months after Pantoni was given a new contract by Ohio State in April that reportedly made him one of the highest-paid general managers in college football.

Pantoni is in his 14th season on Ohio State's staff as general manager, hired by Urban Meyer in December of 2011. Pantoni has now helped recruit two national championship rosters and adapted to the transfer portal era well, helping add transfers who had a major part in the national championship win last season.

Since Pantoni joined the Buckeyes, he has helped recruit 11 top-five classes of the 13 he has been a major part of. The only two that weren't in the top five were ranked seventh in 2015 and 14th in 2019.

Ohio State's 2026 class, which had 21 members, was ranked No. 9 in the country with the possibility of jumping in the rankings if any of Hiter, Womack or Gray joined.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Texas gained the services of the No. 1 linebacker in the 2026 class, Loganville (Ga.) Grayson five-star Tyler Atkinson (6-2, 210). He ended up not having Ohio State in his final four schools despite the Buckeyes offering him when he was in eighth grade and recruiting him consistently since then. He chose the Longhorns over Georgia, Oregon and Clemson on July 15.

- Ohio State also lost a recruiting battle for Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna five-star running back Derrek Cooper (6-1, 205) when he too committed to Texas on July 20.

- While the Buckeyes already have Edmunds committed in the 2027 class, they still have shown interest in Baton Rouge (La.)

Dunham School five-star quarterback Elijah Haven (6-5, 215). They hosted Haven at a one-day recruiting camp, and now Haven is considering visiting for the matchup against Texas on Aug. 30, according to On3.

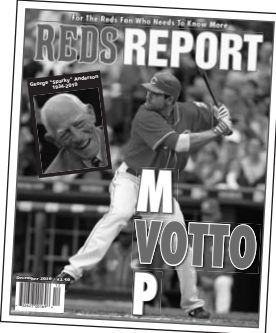
- Now that revenue sharing is officially

under way as of Aug. 1, Ohio State has made its official scholarship offers to its 2026 commits. It's unclear whether actual set numbers were offered to each prospect, but many of the Buckeye commits shared their official offers on Twitter the day they were able to.

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Michigan Sign-Stealing Penalties Revealed

After an investigation that lasted nearly two years, the NCAA has issued its penalties to Michigan for the sign-stealing scandal.

BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

The punitive measures included a 10-year show-cause penalty for former head coach Jim Harbaugh, an eight-year show-cause for Connor Stalions, a three-year show-cause for former quarterback and assistant Denard Robinson and a two-year show-cause for head coach Sherrone Moore. Harbaugh's 10-year show-cause will be added onto the four-year sentence he previously received and is

currently serving.

Moore's existing two-game suspension imposed by Michigan for the 2025 season will also be extended by one game, which he will serve in Week 1 of the 2026 season. Moore will serve his 2025 suspension during Michigan's Week 3 matchup against Central Michigan and Week 4 against Nebraska.

Michigan has been placed on four years of probation, but none of its wins will be vacated, and the program will not face a post-season ban. The university also faces extensive financial damages.

Michigan will receive a \$50,000 fine, plus an additional penalty equal to 10 percent of the football program's budget. The university will also be fined an amount equivalent to the anticipated loss of all postseason competition revenue sharing for the 2025 and 2026 football seasons. In addition, Michigan will pay a fine equal to the cost of 10 percent of

the scholarships awarded in its football program for the 2025–26 academic year.

It's estimated that Michigan's total fines could amount to as much as \$35 million.

The university also received a 25 percent reduction in football official visits during the 2025 season, and a 14-week prohibition on recruiting communications in the football program during the probation period.

The NCAA stated there was overwhelming evidence of an "impermissible scouting scheme" within the Michigan football program and found that Stalions, Harbaugh, Moore and Robinson repeatedly failed to cooperate with investigations regarding that and separate recruiting violations.

Infractions encompassed the destruction of evidence, including Stalions discarding his cell phone in a pond, as well as providing false or misleading information during interviews with the NCAA.

The NCAA also noted Moore's deletion of 52 text messages with Stalions, which he admitted to doing in reaction to the news of the scandal breaking.

The Committee of Infractions investigation panel said, "The true scope and scale of the scheme — including the competitive advantage it conferred — will never be known due to individuals' intentional destruction and withholding of materials and information."

In total, the NCAA charged Michigan with 11 total rule infractions, including six Level I violations, the most significant offenses to NCAA rules.

Harbaugh's responsibility violation and most cooperation failures along with Stalions' scouting scheme — backed by falsified interviews, ticket receipts, and other evidence — was deemed a Level I violation. Recruiting violations, Moore's noncompli-

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

After being bypassed in draft by all 28 NFL clubs, former Ohio State quarterback Mike Tomczak signed with the Chicago Bears as a free agent. He and fellow rookie Ken Cruz (Illinois) were fighting for the third quarterback spot on a roster which already included veteran signal-callers Jim McMahon and Steve Fuller.

During the first few weeks of training camp, Tomczak and Cruz had won the praise of the coaching staff and the players with their impressive performances on the practice field. In fact, they had done so well that the previous year's third-stringer, Rusty Lisch, asked head coach Mike Ditka to place him on waivers during the second week of camp because he figured he didn't have a chance of surviving the competition.

"Both Ken and Mike look very promising," said offensive coordinator Ed Hughes. "They're much better than the other rookies we've had here the past two years. They both have strong arms and good minds."

35 Years Ago — 1990

The combination of an explosive offense and youthful exuberance on defense had the chance to allow Ohio State to make its first Rose Bowl appearance in six years.

John Cooper, who was beginning his third year as head coach of the Buckeyes, told reporters at the 19th annual Big Ten Kickoff Luncheon that he welcomed back his entire offensive backfield (except for Carlos Snow) and his entire receiving corps.

On defense, however, where the Buckeyes had their troubles in recent years, only five starters returned to the positions they manned the season before. OSU's preseason depth chart on defense showed 12 of 22 players on the two deep who were either first- or second-year players.

"It's no great secret that we're an extremely young team," Cooper said. "We'll play an awful lot of redshirt freshmen and sophomores. We don't have that many seniors on this team. We're a young football team, but, nevertheless, we feel like we're a talented team."

30 Years Ago — 1995

Hyperbole followed former Buckeye tackle Korey Stringer to Columbus from Warren Harding High School, and the big man became a two-time All-American.

That same kind of ballyhoo had followed sophomore Orlando Pace from Sandusky, Ohio, growing to a fever pitch when the rookie behemoth took the field on the Buckeyes' first offensive drive in the 1994 season against Fresno State.

That's when the legend of Orlando Pace was born.

Heading into 1995 season, it looked to continue full speed ahead as the 6-6, 320-pound sophomore, more agile and lean than his freshman season, tried to put an indelible stamp on Ohio State and college football as one of the best to ever play the position of left tackle.

If you talked to Pace about the kudos, he would shrug them off the way he did defensive linemen.

"I try not to read a lot of the magazines," Pace said. "People have told me some things, but I don't pay that much attention. I have to go out and play hard regardless of what people think of me."

25 Years Ago — 2000

The Big Ten's football coaches, select players and media contingent made their annual pilgrimage to Chicago for the Kickoff Luncheon and press gathering.

The event signaled the unofficial beginning to the new college

football season.

"When you come to Chicago at this time of year, you know that it's only a short time before you go back and the players report and you get going," said Cooper, who was joined by Buckeyes Steve Bellisari and Rodney Bailey.

Cooper discussed how even the national pundits were having trouble pegging where the Buckeyes would finish that season after the previous year's 6-6 campaign, a showing that left OSU without a bowl appearance for the first time in 11 years.

"Somebody in our office was looking at the different magazines and saw they had us all over the board — anywhere from eighth in the country to seventh or eighth in the league," he said.

20 Years Ago — 2005

After a couple of weeks of tense moments, Ohio State determined that quarterback Troy Smith did not commit any NCAA infractions by working at a quarterback camp in June.

The matter came to light in mid-July when it was reported that Smith had attended a football camp sponsored by Tennessee Titans quarterback Steve McNair.

NCAA rules allowed players to attend educational or charitable activities as long as they didn't miss class and had written permission from the school's athletic director.

Additionally, the rules prohibited players from lending their names or images to commercial products that appeared on promotional material for those events, and any money from those appearances had to go to the educational or charitable agency.

Smith reportedly did not lend his name or image to the promotion of the camps, but the fact that he missed class to attend the camp was a problem.

However, Heather Lyke, Ohio State associate athletic director for compliance, said that the university could not find any violation of NCAA rules in what Smith did.

"We have spent nearly six weeks thoroughly reviewing all the information concerning Troy's employment at Steve McNair's camp," Lyke reported in a university news release. "After talking to a number of key people and collecting the necessary documentation, we were able to determine there were no NCAA rule violations."

15 Years Ago — 2010

In the span of less than 48 hours, the athletic directors at Ohio State and Michigan opened the door to widespread speculation that when the Big Ten announced its divisional alignment for 2011, the Buckeyes and Wolverines would not be in the same division.

That could have had an effect on when the two traditional rivals squared off each year.

For a story published Aug. 19, OSU athletic director Gene Smith told The Columbus Dispatch he was not sure if the Buckeyes and Wolverines would continue playing in the final game of the regular season as they had done every year since 1935.

Though he said he would "jump on the table" if necessary to oppose any proposal that did not guarantee a yearly meeting between the schools, that was as far as he would go in terms of protecting any other aspect of The Game.

"I know one thing for sure, that we're going to play (Michigan) every year," Smith said. "We may end up playing the last game of the year or not. I just don't know that yet."

10 Years Ago — 2015

The college football season had yet to begin, but Ohio State was already making history. The Associated Press released its preseason poll Aug. 23, and as they had been in virtually every

ranking to be released prior to the 2015 season, the Buckeyes were slotted No. 1. Ohio State received all 61 first-place votes, making the team the first unanimous preseason No. 1 in the 65-year history of the AP's preseason rankings.

If the Buckeyes were to repeat as champions, they would have become just the 12th team to win consecutive AP titles since the poll began in 1936. They would have also been the first AP preseason No. 1 to win the title since USC in 2004. TCU was the second-ranked team in the preseason rankings with Alabama, Baylor and Michigan State rounding out the preseason top five.

Wisconsin was the third and final Big Ten team in the rankings, checking in at No. 20, while Penn State and Michigan also received votes. This was the eighth time that Ohio State had been named the AP preseason No. 1 team, but the Buckeyes had not won a national championship in any such season.

Five Years Ago — 2020

There would be no college football for members of the Big Ten or Pac-12 in the fall, after both conferences announced the postponement of fall sports on Aug. 11 due to safety concerns associated with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"The mental and physical health and welfare of our student-athletes has been at the center of every decision we have made regarding the ability to proceed forward," Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren said. "As time progressed and after hours of discussion with our Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases and the Big Ten Sports Medicine Committee, it became abundantly clear that there was too much uncertainty regarding potential medical risks to allow our student-athletes to compete this fall."

While football was the sport most notably impacted, the decision also had an effect on men's and women's cross country, field hockey, men's and women's soccer and women's volleyball.

"While I know our decision today will be disappointing in many ways for our thousands of student-athletes and their families, I am heartened and inspired by their resilience, their insightful and discerning thoughts, and their participation through our conversations to this point," Warren said. "Everyone associated with the Big Ten Conference and its member institutions is committed to getting everyone back to competition as soon as it is safe to do so."

One Year Ago — 2024

True freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith was the talk of fall camp due to his elite five-star ability and rare professionalism, and those conversations only intensified on Aug. 7 when he was named one of 10 "Iron Buckeyes," a distinction given out by Ohio State strength coach Mick Marotti to the players who display "unquestionable training, dedication, determination, discipline, toughness and leadership" during offseason workouts.

This accomplishment was an impressive one even on its surface, but it was even more significant considering he was the first-ever true freshman to earn the honor, a nugget that was revealed by quarterback Devin Brown one day before the distinction was publicly released.

"He just handles everything like a pro," Brown said. "For only being a freshman, how gifted he is, how strong he is, no matter what anybody says about all this hype and all the talent he has, the dude works hard. He works really, really hard. He's an Iron Buckeye. That's never happened as a freshman. The first true freshman to ever do that. So that's just a testament to who he is as a person and who he is as a player."

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.

MEN'S SOCCER

Aug. 9 NOTRE DAME (Exh.); **15** WRIGHT STATE (Exh.); **21** at Virginia Tech; **28** OAKLAND; **31** TEMPLE.**Sept. 5** AKRON; **9** LOUISVILLE; **13** at Butler; **19** at Michigan State; **26** at Rutgers; **29** UCLA.**Oct. 3** WISCONSIN; **10** MICHIGAN; **18** MARYLAND; **24** at Washington; **31** PENN STATE.**Nov. 7** at Northwestern; **12** Big Ten Semifinals; **16** Big Ten Championship.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Aug. 6 at West Virginia (Exh.); **9** Ohio (Exh.); **14** CLEMSON, T 1-1; **21** at South Carolina; **24** at UNC Wilmington; **28** at Princeton; **31** ASHLAND.**Sept. 7** at Kentucky; **12** MICHIGAN; **18** WISCONSIN; **21** NEBRASKA; **25** at Northwestern; **28** at Illinois.**Oct. 5** at Michigan State; **9** OREGON; **12** WASHINGTON; **16** at Rutgers; **19** at Maryland; **26** at Penn State.

WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY

Aug. 17 MIAMI (OH) (Exh.); **24** at Michigan (Exh.); **29** at Ball State; **31** KENT STATE.**Sept. 5** VIRGINIA; **7** SYRACUSE; **12** at Harvard; **14** at Northeastern; **19** at Louisville; **26** at Rutgers; **29** at Delaware.**Oct. 3** MARYLAND; **5** PENN STATE; **12** MICHIGAN; **19** at Michigan State; **24** at Indiana; **26** at Northwestern; **31** IOWA.**Nov. 6-9** Big Ten Tournament at Bloomington, Ind.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Aug. 23 at Kentucky (Exh.); **29** at Canes Classic in Coral Gables, Fla., vs. VCU; **30** at Canes Classic in Coral Gables, Fla., vs. Miami (FL).**Sept. 3** at Miami (OH); **7** FLORIDA; **12** Beavercreek Invitational in Dayton vs. Ohio; **13** Beavercreek Invitational in Dayton vs. Wright State; **19** VIRGINIA; **21** TROY; **26** UCLA; **27** USC.**Oct. 3** at Washington; **4** at Oregon; **9** PURDUE; **12** at Minnesota; **17** ILLINOIS; **19** at Indiana; **24** MICHIGAN; **26** PENN STATE; **31** RUTGERS.**Nov. 2** WISCONSIN; **8** at Maryland; **9** at Rutgers; **14** at Michigan; **16** at Penn State; **21** NORTHWESTERN; **23** MICHIGAN STATE; **28** at Iowa; **29** at Nebraska.

ance and Michigan's failure to monitor were classified as Level II infractions.

Michigan was originally investigated by the Big Ten in October 2023, and Harbaugh was immediately suspended for the final three games of the regular season by Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti.

Petitti believed that punishment was significant enough for the rule violations and wrote a letter to the COI claiming the university shouldn't receive any further punishment.

CMU Gets NOA Related To Stalions

The NCAA sent a notice of allegations to Central Michigan on June 27 regarding involvement in the sign-stealing scandal revolving around Stalions, who was at the center of Michigan's sign-stealing scandal.

The June 27 notice started a 90-day window for the university to respond, which ends on Sept. 25.

Central Michigan received the NOA because of a Sept. 1, 2023, incident when a man who appeared to be Stalions was seen on the Chippewas sideline in sunglasses and CMU gear. The NCAA's original investigation into Central Michigan began on Oct. 31, 2023, when photos surfaced online of the man on the sideline during the loss to Michigan State.

Following the November 2024 release of the Netflix documentary "Untold: Sign Stealer," which dived into Stalions' involvement in Michigan's scandal, Central Michigan delivered a statement on the situation.

"We are aware of inferences made in the new Netflix documentary regarding former University of Michigan football staff member Connor Stalions accessing the CMU sidelines during our opening game last September," it read. "For the past 10 months, CMU has fully cooperated with the NCAA's ongoing investigation, and we will continue to cooperate with the NCAA as it works to complete its investigation."

B1G, Power Conferences Disagree On CFP Format

With the contract ending this season for the 12-team College Football Playoff and a new deal needing to be signed by Dec. 1, prominent figures from both the Big Ten and SEC publicly discussed their current stances on the playoff formats proposed by each of the conferences.

The Big Ten favors a 4-4-2-2-1 format, which would give the Big Ten and SEC four automatic bids, the Big 12 and ACC two bids, and the Group of Five schools one bid.

SEC commissioner Greg Sankey hasn't officially supported a model, but said he doesn't like the 4-4-2-2-1 idea, and has had good conversations regarding the 5-11 model introduced by the Big 12 and ACC. That model would give five automatic bids to the top five conference champions as well as 11 at-large bids.

At Big Ten Media Days on July 22, Petitti held strong on the conference's stance regarding the formatting of a possible 16-team College Football Playoff.

"There are 18 members in the Big Ten, you have 17 possible opponents, and you play nine," Petitti said. "There's a lot of discrepancy. Let alone making comparisons across leagues, there's a lot of issues about how you compare teams inside the Big Ten. Where we came down is we were willing to take that risk."

The Big Ten's proposed format is also slated to include a weekend's worth of play-in games for the conference that would take place during Big Ten championship weekend. The No. 3 and No. 6 teams in the conference would match up against each other, and the No. 4 and No. 5 seeds would face off. The winner of each game would join the two teams that make the conference championship game as automatic qualifiers in the CFP.

Petitti doubled down on the Big Ten's position, believing the power needs to be returned to the conferences rather than the College Football Playoff committee.

"We are open to considering any format ideas that come from our colleagues or the CFP staff," Petitti said, "But to be clear, formats that increase the discretion and role of the CFP selection committee will have a difficult time getting support from the Big Ten."

The Big Ten, however, may have trouble reaching common ground with the other conferences, as it's the only league pushing for automatic bids to make up the playoff field.

Big 12 commissioner Brett Yormark was adamant about his support for the conference's 5-11 model, stating that he feels the format would create the fairest playing field for all teams.

"We continue to believe the 5-11 model proposed by the Big 12 and the ACC is the right playoff format for college football," Yormark said. "We want to earn it on the field. We do not need a professional model because we are not the NFL. We are college football, and we must act like it."

Sankey said that if the conferences are unable to find common ground by December on a 16-team format, college football could stick with the 12-team format for another year.

"We had a different view coming out of (SEC spring meetings) around the notion of allocations," Sankey said. "The Big Ten has a different view. That's fine. We have a 12-team playoff, five conference champions. That could stay if we can't agree."

Miami Files Motion To Dismiss UW Lawsuit

The University of Miami responded to Wisconsin and its NIL collective's case that

alleged that the Hurricanes tampered with one of its players, filing a motion to dismiss the lawsuit on Aug. 8.

Wisconsin's lawsuit, which was filed in June, alleged that Miami had interfered with an NIL deal the Badgers made with defensive back Xavier Lucas, who officially transferred from Wisconsin to the Hurricanes on Jan. 17.

Miami argued in its motion that Wisconsin doesn't have jurisdiction to sue it in the Wisconsin state circuit court. Included in Miami's motion to dismiss the case was sworn testimony from Lucas denying that he made contact with anyone from Miami before he attempted to leave the Badgers.

"Once I returned home, I made the decision to enter the transfer portal and to transfer out of Wisconsin," Lucas' testimony reads. "I made that decision with input from family members and for personal reasons. I had no contact with anyone from or representing the University of Miami regarding that decision, and no representative of the University of Miami influenced that decision in any way."

"Once I decided to attempt to transfer to the University of Miami, I initiated contact with the University of Miami. No one from the University of Miami initiated contact with me. I am unaware of any coach or alumnus of the University of Miami visiting the home of any of my relatives in December 2024 and do not believe that such an event ever occurred."

Miami also plays down the idea that Wisconsin's lawsuit against the program is a "watershed" moment in college sports.

"Plaintiffs would have this Court believe that the very fate of college football hangs in the balance unless this Court acts. ... The Court, it seems, is being asked not merely to resolve a dispute but to save the soul of college sports."

The Big Ten also weighed in on the lawsuit, expressing support for its program.

"The Big Ten Conference is aware of the litigation recently filed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison against the University of Miami and is supportive of UW-Madison's position. As alleged, the University of Miami knowingly ignored contractual obligations and disregarded the principle of competitive equity that is fundamental to collegiate athletics. The Big Ten Conference believes that the University of Miami's actions are irre-

concilable with a sustainable college sports framework and is supportive of UW-Madison's efforts to preserve."

Wildcat Retires To Play Baseball

After three seasons with the Northwestern football program, quarterback Jack Lausch is electing to leave the gridiron and take his talents to the diamond, Wildcats head coach David Braun said at Big Ten Media Days on July 23.

Lausch started 10 games for the Wildcats in 2024-25 as a redshirt sophomore, racking up 1,792 passing yards, 290 rushing yards, and 10 total touchdowns (seven passing, three rushing) throughout his three-year stint as quarterback.

"Jack worked through that throughout the course of May and June," Braun said. "Ultimately, the decision that he made is something that I think everyone involved strongly supported and understood why Jack was making that decision."

The Chicago native will now focus his talents on Northwestern baseball, where he started 43 games during his lone season in 2025 as an outfielder.

In 2025, Lausch ranked fourth among Wildcat starters with a .268 batting average, hit six home runs and was tied for first on the squad with five stolen bases.

Lausch went undrafted in the 2025 MLB draft and has the option to either return for his senior season at Northwestern or pursue professional ball as a free agent.

Prior to receiving an offer from Northwestern, Lausch was originally committed to play baseball for Notre Dame and was ranked the No. 94 overall baseball recruit in the class of 2022 by Perfect Game.

With the loss of Lausch, SMU transfer quarterback Preston Stone will step in as the Wildcats' starting man under center.

Stone is in his fifth collegiate season now with Northwestern after being overtaken as the Mustangs' starter in the 2024 season. In 2023, Stone played in 12 games and threw for 3,197 yards, 28 touchdowns and six interceptions. He threw only 51 passes last season for 421 yards, five scores and one pick.

Two Nonconference Games Added To Schedule

Ohio State has added nonconference matchups against West Virginia on Dec. 13 and a Valentine's Day game against Virginia.

The contest against the Mountaineers will be played in Cleveland as part of the "Cleveland Hoops Showdown" at Rocket Arena, home of the NBA's Cavaliers. It is part of a doubleheader that will also include a game between Ohio University and St. Bonaventure. Tip times for the two games have not yet been announced.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

"Cleveland is a great city full of Buckeye passion and rich basketball tradition," said Ohio State coach Jake Diebler. "I'm excited for our program to participate in the game against West Virginia. We look forward to the stage and atmosphere this game provides and want to continue to reach our fans across our great state and beyond."

In 2023, the same four teams participated in the "Legends of Basketball Showcase," which took place in the same arena. The Buckeyes beat the Mountaineers 78-75 in overtime, which was also the last time the two teams met. It will be the third straight time that OSU and WVU will play in Cleveland, including the 67-59 West Virginia win on Dec. 29, 2019, the game that former Ohio State forward Kyle Young played through appendicitis.

The game against Virginia is set to be played in Nashville, Tenn., at Bridgestone Arena, the home of the NHL Nashville Predators. It will be the Buckeyes' first nonconference game after New Year's Day since the 2009-10 season, when they lost to West Virginia, 71-65, at the WVU Coliseum on Jan. 23, 2010.

Diebler said that he looks forward to the tournament feel that this game could have

due to Virginia being a team that commonly is in the NCAA Tournament field as well as it being so late in the season.

"We pushed for a high-level nonconference game in February, and we certainly got that against Virginia," Diebler said. "As we go through the stretch run of Big Ten play, this game will provide us with a valuable big game, neutral site, and NCAA Tournament-type feel. We are thankful for the work Intersport did to help execute this game and look forward to working with them."

The last time Ohio State had a nonconference game in February was on Feb. 17, 2001, when the Buckeyes lost to Alabama, 85-67, on the road.

This will be the seventh time the Buckeyes and Cavaliers match up, with the series currently tied at three wins apiece. The last time the two teams squared off was on Nov. 30, 2016, when Virginia beat OSU 63-61 in Charlottesville, Va.

It will be Virginia's first season under head coach Ryan Odom after former coach Tony Bennett suddenly retired in October 2024. The Cavaliers are coming off a 15-17 record last season and a first-round loss in the ACC tournament. Odom led VCU to a 52-21 record in the two seasons he was at the helm.

Other significant nonconference games that the Buckeyes already have scheduled are at Pitt on Nov. 28, which is the back end of a home-and-home series – the first of which OSU lost last season. It will also host Notre Dame on Nov. 16, the first game of a home-and-home series. The Buckeyes will also have a neutral-site meeting with North Carolina in the annual CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 20, which takes place in Atlanta.

Transfers At OSU Looking To Win

Ohio State went into the transfer portal again to fill a significant portion of its 2025-26 roster. That approach is necessary these days in college basketball, but it didn't work well for the Buckeyes last season.



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOLDING COURT — Men's basketball coach Jake Diebler added four players from the transfer portal and scheduled some quality nonconference opponents in an effort to get the Buckeyes into the NCAA Tournament for the first time in four seasons.

They missed the NCAA Tournament for the third straight season, but the transfers who are joining the Buckeyes say they came to Ohio State to turn that around.

"I wanted to win," Brandon Noel said. "I came from a winning program at Wright State, and that was something I wanted to continue to do. The vision here and the pieces they had in place made a lot of sense for me to come in and join this and look toward winning."

Along with Noel, the Buckeyes also added Gabe Cupps from Indiana, Josh Ojjanwuna from Baylor and Cristoph Tilly from Santa Clara in the transfer portal.

Each of them had similar things to say about Diebler when asked why they felt that Ohio State was the right place for them.

"He was a very young coach, but there's something that I really liked about him," Tilly said. "He had a lot of energy. He seems like he could understand us younger players. He knows how this generation right now functions with social media and all that. He's just younger, and he told me that he's very active. He practices sometimes and all that, and I really like that."

Cupps said that Diebler was a big reason he came to Ohio State out of the portal, and since he has practiced with the second-year head coach, his decision has been proved

right.

"The way Diebler coaches, he's hard on guys, but he also cares a ton about them," Cupps said. "And he's with us in the trenches a lot. So, I think that's the biggest thing to me is he's not going to ask us to do something that he doesn't truly believe in and that he won't go to the ends of the earth to do himself. That reminds me a lot of my dad in high school with how he coaches. So it's been very comforting to kind of have a sense of familiarity with the coaching style."

In-State Preseason Matchup Added

The Buckeyes also scheduled a preseason matchup. Ohio University will be coming to Value City Arena on Oct. 15 for an exhibition game, according to multiple reports.

The last time the Buckeyes and Bobcats played against each other was Nov. 12, 2013, in Columbus, a game Ohio State won 79-69. Aaron Craft was the leading scorer for OSU in the game with 18 points, adding four assists and four rebounds.

The game will be a good chance for the Buckeyes to see whether the returning contributors will mesh well with the incoming transfers and freshmen. Bruce Thornton, John Mobley Jr. and Devin Royal will get



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OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Marcus Johnson	G	6-2	180	★★★★	Garfield Heights, Ohio
Alex Smith	F	6-9	195	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Prolific Prep

their first chance to match up against another Division I team with transfers Cupps, Noel, Tilly, and freshmen Mathieu Grujic and Myles Herro. It should also be the first time that Taison Chatman is back on the court for a game since his ACL surgery in June 2024.

The Bobcats have competed in the Mid-American Conference consistently since head coach Jeff Boals took over in 2019, winning the MAC tournament in 2021. They went 16-16 last season, with a 10-8 record in the MAC, which was good for a fourth-place finish in the conference.

Boals was an assistant coach at Ohio State from 2009-16 under Thad Matta. He has a 114-76 record in six seasons with the Bobcats.

The exhibition will be open to the public, so fans will be able to see how the Buckeyes fare against mid-major competition this year.

Buckeye Recruiting Efforts Continue

The game against Texas on Aug. 30 is not only a big draw for football recruits, but for basketball prospects as well. The Columbus Dispatch reported that Ohio State will host West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star combo guard Joshua Tyson (6-2, 170) over

that weekend.

Tyson first landed an offer from the Buckeyes in June when he was in Columbus for a prep camp, playing in the Buckeyes' practice gym, where Diebler, associate head coach Joel Justus and assistants Dave Dickerson, Luke Simons and Brian Walsh were all watching him closely.

The Buckeyes don't have a commitment in the 2027 class yet, but Tyson would be a great addition. He is the No. 78 player in the country, the No. 8 combo guard and the No. 3 player in the state of Ohio according to 247Sports composite rankings. As a sophomore, Tyson averaged 15.5 points, 3.2 rebounds and 2.4 assists per game, starting in 23 of 26 games.

The Buckeyes also sent out a scholarship offer to Branson (Mo.) Link Academy five-star point guard Davion Thompson (6-2, 160). Thompson, in the 2027 recruiting class, has just nine offers to this point, four of them from Big Ten schools with Indiana, Illinois and Michigan also offering.

He is currently ranked the No. 16 player in the country, the No. 2 point guard and the No. 1 player in the state of Missouri. The Buckeyes have had trouble competing for some of the top prospects in the country at times, but OSU freshman Amare Bynum also came from Link Academy, so he could

have some impact on Thompson's decision, which is still far in the future.

Another 2027 prospect Ohio State offered was St. Petersburg (Fla.) Gibbs four-star combo guard Oneal Delancy (6-2, 165), who currently holds 11 scholarship offers.

Delancy is the No. 54 player in the country, the No. 4 combo guard and the No. 10 player in the state of Florida. He received his OSU offer after the Buckeyes were present at the EYBL Nike Peach Jam tournament, where Delancy scored 35 points on an 8-for-12 shooting performance from beyond the arc.

NBA Bucks Find New Homes

Two former Ohio State guards have found new homes. D'Angelo Russell signed a two-year deal with the Dallas Mavericks on June 30, and Malaki Branham was traded to the Washington Wizards on July 8.

Russell is coming off a season in which he averaged 12.6 points, 5.1 assists and 2.8 rebounds per game in 58 games. He split his time with the Los Angeles Lakers and the Brooklyn Nets after being traded midway through the season to the Nets and played 29 games for both teams.

He has had a productive NBA career and will have a chance to start for the Mavericks in his 11th pro season since All-Star Kyrie Irving is recovering from an ACL tear he suffered in March. Russell will also now play with Cooper Flagg, the first overall pick in the 2025 NBA draft, for a team that is looking to find its way back to the heights it reached in 2023-24, when they finished 50-32 and made it to the NBA Finals.

Russell's two-year deal with the Mavericks is worth \$13 million.

Branham was traded to the Wizards after spending three seasons with the San Antonio Spurs, who drafted him in 2022. The Spurs got veteran Kelly Olynyk in return for Branham, Blake Wesley and a 2026 second-round pick.

Since his rookie season when he averaged 10.2 points, 2.7 rebounds and 1.9 assists in 66 games, Branham's production has fallen off to the point where he had just 5.0 points, 1.1 rebounds and 0.8 assists per contest last season.

But now he will have a chance to get back to his rookie-level production on a Wizards team that was 18-64 last year, last in the Eastern Conference.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Former Ohio State guard Brice Sensabaugh set a Salt Lake Summer League record with the Utah Jazz, scoring 37 points in a 112-111 win over the Memphis Grizzlies. He was 9 for 14 from the field, knocked down 6 of 9 three-pointers and made 13 of 14 tries from the charity stripe.

- Buckeye commit and three-star power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195) will be transferring from Upper Arlington in Columbus to Prolific Prep, which is moving to Fort Lauderdale, Fla. That is the same school that 2025 OSU target, five-star Darryn Peterson, went to before he signed with Kansas.



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Pretrial Date For McGuff DUI Postponed

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff is still dealing with the legal ramifications of his May 6 arrest for operating a vehicle under the influence. The Buckeye coach was scheduled to have a pretrial conference at the Dublin mayor's office on Aug. 12, but that was rescheduled to Oct. 7.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

Bodycam footage released by the Dublin Police Department on May 13 showed McGuff, who pleaded not guilty to the charge of OVI at a May 13 hearing, struggling to answer questions from local police and failing multiple sobriety tests on the night of his arrest.

According to a statement from Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork, McGuff was issued a two-week suspension after he was arrested.

"Kevin has expressed remorse and is cooperating fully with the legal process and the university," Bjork told The Columbus Dispatch. "We addressed this matter by suspending Kevin for two weeks without pay and by ensuring he is getting appropriate support as needed. Moving forward, we will continue to emphasize the importance of personal responsibility and the privilege of representing Ohio State."

This echoes a similar sentiment Bjork shared with BSB in the July Interview Issue. When asked if he ever thought about firing the Buckeye women's basketball coach, he said no. Bjork also added that McGuff had responded well to the situation and that he hoped to move forward.

"We spent a lot of time with Coach McGuff making sure that one, he's OK personally, how that's affected the job. Kevin has dealt with it head-on," Bjork said. "We feel like we're in a good spot with Coach McGuff. He's done a lot of things to work on himself but also worked with the team. He's back on the road recruiting."

"There are some accountability measures with everything, but we've dealt with that head-on as well. Coach McGuff has responded really well. He's taken ownership. He's taken accountability, and we just need to move forward and continue the support."

OSU To Face UConn, TCU In Nonconference

Ohio State's nonconference schedule is

taking form, and unlike last year, McGuff's squad will face multiple significant tests outside of Big Ten play.

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State scheduled nonconference matchups with TCU and the defending national champion, UConn. For the game against the Huskies, the Buckeyes will travel to Hartford, Conn., where the Nov. 16 contest will be played at Peoples Bank Arena (UConn's off-campus home). The game is part of a home-and-home agreement between the two programs, which will bring UConn to Columbus for a meeting during the 2026-27 season.

Not only are the Huskies the defending national champions, but they are the preeminent brand in women's college basketball. Since legendary head coach Geno Auriemma took over as the leader of the program in 1985, the Huskies have won 12 national championships, the most of any women's basketball program.

The Huskies will be without three-time first-team All-America guard Paige Bueckers this year, but there is no reason to believe they won't be one of the best teams in the country again, led by 2025 NCAA tournament Most Outstanding Player Azzi Fudd.

The Buckeyes' matchup with TCU is a part of the second annual Corretta Scott King Classic and will take place at noon on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Jan. 19).

"I'm deeply honored to announce our participation in the 2026 Coretta Scott King Classic," McGuff said. "This event is a powerful celebration of Coretta Scott King's enduring legacy as a champion for equality, justice and empowerment. It is a privilege for our team to compete in an event that not only showcases the strength and talent of women's basketball but also pays tribute to Mrs. King's profound impact on our society."

The Coretta Scott King Classic is an event that honors the legacy of the woman it is named after, the late civil rights activist and wife of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"The Coretta Scott King Classic is a testament to the enduring power of my mother's legacy," said Dr. Bernice A. King, daughter of Coretta Scott King and CEO of The King Center. "She believed deeply in the transformative nature of education and public engagement, and this event continues to bring that vision to life for a new generation of athletes, fans and leaders."

The event, which will take place at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J., will also feature a game at 2 p.m. between Michigan and Vanderbilt. Both games will be featured on FOX.



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOT SHOT — Former Buckeye Kelsey Mitchell was named to the WNBA All-Star Game for the third time and has picked up the slack for the Indiana Fever in the absence of injured star Caitlin Clark.

The Horned Frogs are coming off one of the best seasons in program history after winning the Big 12 regular-season and tournament championships and making it to the Elite Eight of the NCAA tournament. Although it is replacing star players Haley Van Lith and Sedona Prince, TCU should have another solid team after adding All-America guard Olivia Miles from the transfer portal.

Mitchell Continues To Shine For Fever

As the WNBA regular season winds down, former Ohio State guard Kelsey Mitchell is playing at a career-best level. The former Buckeye was selected to the All-Star game for the third time in her WNBA career after a strong start to the season. At the time of being selected, Mitchell was averaging 19.3 points, 2.9 assists and 1.7 rebounds per game on 45.5 percent shooting. Mitchell had an outstanding performance in the All-Star Game itself. As a representative of Team Clark, named after fellow Fever star guard Caitlin Clark, Mitchell scored a team-high 20 points on 8-of-13 shooting while grabbing two rebounds and recording two assists.

Team Clark lost to Team Collier, named after Minnesota Lynx forward Napheesa Collier, 151-131 on July 19, but Mitchell built off her individual performance in the exhibition in the subsequent weeks of the regular season.

The former four-time All-American at Ohio State, who also broke the Fever's franchise record for the most career three-pointers made during the team's 98-77 loss against the New York Liberty on July 16, scored 95 combined points over her first four games after the All-Star break from July 19-27.

After a quieter three-game stretch from July 30-Aug. 3, Mitchell bounced back, averaging 24 points per game over a four-game stretch from Aug. 5-12. Mitchell has helped the Fever stay afloat while Clark has been in and out of the lineup while dealing with multiple injuries by averaging 20.0 points, 3.2 assists and 2.0 rebounds per game this season as of Aug. 18. Mitchell was one of only four players in the WNBA averaging at least 20 points per game.

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Repeating Championship Is No Easy Task

Repeating as national champions is a tough challenge. Since 2003, only three college football teams have accomplished the lofty goal. USC won national titles in 2003 and 2004.

Unfortunately for the Trojans, they had to vacate their 2004 championship after the NCAA hit the program with sanctions due to running back Reggie Bush receiving improper benefits. In 2011 and 2012, Alabama won back-to-back nation-

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

al championships, and its archrivals, the Georgia Bulldogs, did the same in 2021 and 2022.

It's no secret that the 2025 Ohio State Buckeyes will have some youth at key positions this season. Repeating as national champs is certainly possible, but extremely difficult to do. The Buckeyes lost 16 starters to the NFL from the 2024 squad. The squad lost two regular-season games before making its impressive playoff run. They were, undoubtedly, the best college football team in the nation at season's end.

The 2024 Buckeyes not only had to bounce back from those regular-season losses but overcome some key injuries along the way. They learned how to handle adversity and grow as a team, hitting their peak at just the right time.

The unproven 2025 team does have some key elements to build upon, first of which is the high quality of talent that has been recruited by Ryan Day and staff. Though this year's team doesn't feature a ton of returners, it does have enough skill, speed and size to make a run for the Big Ten title and national championship. The cupboard, however, isn't bare in terms of experience. Over 20 players on the squad have 300-plus snaps in their careers.

Another thing going for the 2025 team is the culture of winning that has been created here at Ohio State. A combination of decades of success and tradition, combined with the recent accomplishments of Day's teams, sets a high-water mark along with high expectations. The returning players will let the new recruits and incoming transfers understand what it takes to play at this level, in this football program. Returners from last season saw the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment it takes to win it all. Can the same be done in 2025? We will see. The challenge is on.

Pressure On Coordinators

Brian Hartline is a familiar face in

Columbus, Ohio. He played here and began his coaching career at Ohio State. He has proved his abilities to teach the fundamentals of wide receiver play and has been a major reason for Ohio State's recruiting success. Hartline has also had a coordinator's title in recent years, but this season, things have changed.

He will take on play-calling responsibilities for the Buckeye offense. That's a ton of pressure, but he knows the game, he knows the system, and he knows the players. His challenge will be to make the right calls under gameday pressure.

For defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, play calling is something he is accustomed to. Patricia has called defenses at the pro level and has been part of three Super Bowl championship teams. He has also been a head coach at the pro level.

Even though he hasn't been at the collegiate level since 2003, he will be the first to tell you the differences between the NFL and college football are minimal, especially in terms of schemes. Even though he doesn't know the players as well as Hartline, he also seems to be a player's coach who emphasizes techniques and fundamentals.

Patricia vows to have a system that matches the talent level and promises an aggressive style of play defensively.

Quarterback Competition Keen

The Buckeyes hit the lotto last season in quarterback transfer Will Howard. Even though Howard had playing experience coming in from Kansas State to Columbus, he proved to be a main catalyst for Buckeye success last season. He played at a higher level than expected and matured as the season progressed.

Day insisted there was a tight battle for the starting quarterback spot this year between Julian Sayin and Lincoln Kienholz, with each having their specific strong points. Sayin is more of the typical dropback passer, while Kienholz is more athletic and can extend plays with his feet. Both have strong arms, are competitive, and football smart.

Sayin was named the starter on Aug. 18 and will meet a huge challenge right off the bat, going against Texas. The coaching staff doesn't have the luxury of experimenting or rotating quarterbacks in the opener against the Longhorns. Neither Sayin nor Kienholz has started a college football game, even though they have appeared in seven games combined.

One thing is for sure: Sayin must mature in the heat of battle, instantly. As for freshman Tavien St. Clair, he has a bright future, but it won't be this season.

Offensive Line Versatility

The offensive line in 2024 was riddled with injuries, and some players played as many as three different spots on the line

throughout the season. The Buckeyes were able to fight through the injury situation and performed at a high level up front, especially in the playoff run.

The experience of playing multiple positions by Carson Hinzman, Austin Siereveld, Luke Montgomery and Tegra Tshabola gives the Buckeye offensive line some versatility and options going into 2025. The addition of transfer offensive linemen Justin Terry, Ethan Onianwa and Phillip Daniels should make the Buckeye offensive front solid. Onianwa and Daniels have a combined 37 starts in terms of game experience.

It's not just tackle-to-tackle up front that counts. The Buckeye tight end position has been bolstered with the addition of Purdue transfer Max Klare. Klare gives the Buckeyes a real threat to opposing defenses in terms of a receiver. Klare is no slouch when it comes to blocking, but his athleticism, sure hands and the ability to make valuable yards after the reception make him special. Add a healthy and experienced Will Kacmarek and an improving Bennett Christian to the mix, and you have toughness and dual-threat abilities at the tight end position.

Downs and Smith

Safety Caleb Downs and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith are arguably the very best in college football at their respective positions. Their pure athleticism, along with speed and skill level, make them difference makers with big-play potential every snap. Downs is especially good in the secondary in terms of closing speed and range. He can cover a lot of territory quickly and has a real nose for the football. He is a physical safety and reliable open-field tackler. He is an outstanding field general for the defense. Downs is like having an extra coach on the field.

Smith gives the offense the same reliability as Downs does defensively. Smith has great hands with the ability to accelerate in the open field. He is an elusive receiver with tremendous body control who makes spectacular receptions look easy.

Both Downs and Smith are definitely first-round picks at the next level. They are leaders by example, by the way they play the game. The defensive secondary of Ohio State and the receiving corps of the Buckeyes should be outstanding this season, with Downs and Smith setting the standard.

Defensive Front Must Step Up

The Ohio State defensive line has been solid the past decade and exceptional last year. Larry Johnson had the defensive front playing at a high level against both the run and pass. The interior was stout, and the edges dominant. As with the entire team, they got better as the season progressed.

Opposing offenses averaged just 2.6 yards per rush and 6.1 yards per pass. The Buckeye defense recorded 53 sacks with defensive ends JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer together responsible for 21½ of those sacks. They do not return,

but Kenyatta Jackson and Caden Curry do, and they have big shoes to fill.

The defensive tackle position is a work in progress with Eddrick Houston, Tywone Malone and Will Smith expected to step up going into the Texas game. Coach Johnson has a huge job in getting the defensive line ready, but Larry Johnson has always met the challenge.

Schedule Fair But Challenging

No team in the country has a tougher opponent than Ohio State, with the Texas Longhorns coming into the 'Shoe on Aug. 30. Several outlets rank Texas No. 1 in the nation right off the bat.

The Longhorns have nine returning starters as compared to six for the Buckeyes. Texas did lose four starters off its offensive line, but it will come in with a more experienced quarterback in Arch Manning. The highly touted Manning played in 10 games last season, throwing nine touchdown passes. The challenge for Texas and Manning is coming into Ohio Stadium in front of a hostile crowd and going against a new defensive scheme under a new defensive coordinator.

The Buckeyes can't afford to rotate a bunch of players in the season opener due to the caliber of the opponent and the importance of the game. Ohio State coaches will have the chance to play more players in the next two games against Grambling and Ohio University.

Tough away games against Washington, Illinois and Wisconsin in the first seven weeks of the season make the 2025 schedule challenging. No doubt the Buckeyes must be ready for the November run when they face Penn State at home on Nov. 1. That's plenty of quality competition for a team that must grow and grow quickly.



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QB Future In Good Hands, Just Sayin ...

Prior to last season, the biggest question Ohio State fans and national media types had was “Will Ryan Day ever win a national championship?”

Well, that one has been answered, so it may be time to look for another question.

And when it comes to questions, the defending national champs have plenty of them.

How will two new coordinators work out? Is the depth along the offensive line that has been talked about real or imaginary? Can the defense still be one of the top units in college football despite losing its entire starting front?

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Those are all legitimate concerns, ones we will not know the answer to until early 2026.

That also leaves out the biggest question, one that has stood the test of time with both fans and media, and which gets nearly all of the coverage in the preseason – what about the quarterback?

Back in the day, when I used to cover the team on a regular basis, reporters would race to ask the coach if there had been any separation between the quarterbacks, or whether he was ready to name a quarterback, or if he had progressed in his second year as a starter at quarterback. It's like the other 10 members of the offense did not exist. Don't get me wrong – it is hard to win in this day and age if your quarterback play is subpar. But to act like it is the only thing that is needed is naive.

When I put together my preseason rankings and predictions, the first position I look at is offensive line. If a majority of guys are returning, then I am more optimistic – even if the quarterback is new. If both the quarterback and O-line return intact, then I am really high on said team. To me, the order of importance is quarterback ever so slightly over offensive line, then defensive line, a distant third.

Ohio State will have a new face under center this season with Julian Sayin winning the QB battle. He is a five-star talent who left Tuscaloosa after Nick Saban retired and who played in mop-up duty last season for Ohio State. He is slighter of frame than Will Howard was but has a quick release and elite ball placement. It's easy to see why he should succeed, though it is not a given.

This time last year, there were still fans who were skeptical about Howard, not realizing that whatever shortcomings he had as a passer – and those diminished by the week – he made up for in leadership. That's an aspect that is right now an unknown for Sayin, though a few folks I have talked to who are in the know about such things say that his approach is much more laid-back. Sort of a California cool, which makes sense as he is a Golden State native. Incidentally, the last OSU starting quarterback from California turned out to be pretty good. You haven't forgotten about CJ Stroud already, have you?

So the job is Sayin's. Some will say that was always going to be the case, but I disagree. Unlike previous seasons, when Ryan Day was merely talking to keep all parties interested, this year's quarterback race was a real battle. There were days when it looked like Lincoln Kienholz would get the nod, while other days Sayin was ahead. This was nothing like the Justin Fields-Chris Chuganov or Fields-Gunnar Hoak or

Stroud-Kyle McCord “competitions.” There was some actual intrigue with this one.

Assuming Sayin lives up to his potential, there are reasons to be excited for the 2025 edition of Ohio State football. A receiving corps unequalled in college football, an excellent tight end room buoyed by the addition of Purdue's Max Klare, an emerging running back star in James Peoples and four guys back along the offensive line – not to mention a new coach for that unit in Tyler Bowen, who comes over from Virginia Tech.

On defense, Ohio State returns Caleb Downs, for whom a case can be made that he is the best defensive player in college football. He is able to do so many things, and OSU fans should see him playing nickel, safety, a hybrid where he lines up just behind the linebackers – heck, maybe he will even be in coverage on slot receivers. The secondary should be a strong suit – watch for Jermaine Mathews Jr. to vie for All-America honors – as should the linebackers. Sonny Styles is following in his dad's footsteps and looking to be an All-Big Ten and All-America performer, and watch for Arvell Reese to really emerge this season.

The defensive line is the one group that gives a bit of pause as nary a single starter returns. That doesn't mean Ohio State is without talent, though. Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Caden Curry have played solid minutes and should be leaders. Kayden McDonald has received raves in fall camp, and Eddrick Houston brought tons of kudos to Columbus from high school. The addition of transfers Beau Atkinson and Logan George helps the depth, and it will be interesting to see whether the light finally comes on for C.J. Hicks, a five-star recruit who has made minimal impact at linebacker but may be more suited coming off the line and getting after the quarterback.

All of this sounds great, but do not forget about Brian Hartline and Matt Patricia, OSU's new offensive and defensive coordinators.

Hartline has been with the program seemingly forever, so the inclination is to think that he can call plays without much problem. Not so fast, my friend. His prior stint as OC in 2023 did not go well, and Day ended up calling the plays. Maybe Hartline learned from that and is now ready. Also fascinating will be whether he leans into more of a pass-oriented approach (since he is a receivers coach) or whether he tries to strike more of a balance. Chip Kelly loved the ground game and used it to set up the passing game. Will Hartline be different?

Patricia has NFL credentials oozing off him, but he is different from Jim Knowles, who left for Penn State. Patricia's unit will not be as aggressive but should be sound fundamentally. In his time in the NFL, he did not call for a lot of blitzing, yet the New England Patriots were often near the top of the league in sacks. He also preaches awareness, and the Pats were also adept at turning foes over. It will be interesting to watch the evolution of the defense under Patricia, for sure. And I wonder – though not really because I know the answer – whether OSU fans will be understanding the first time Arch Manning completes a deep pass?

There is just enough of the unknown for Ohio State to make the 2025 season exciting, and it's probably nice for Day that he won't have to deal with “that” question anymore.

He and the Buckeyes answered that one back in January.

Sizing Up The Big Ten

Preview season means prediction season, and you will find the thoughts of the esteemed

BSB football crew elsewhere in this issue. Not wanting to be considered a spoilsport, I also put together my own predictions for how the Big Ten race will turn out.

Despite being the defending national champion, Ohio State seems to be second in amount of pressure on its shoulders heading into 2025. Penn State bears the burden of huge expectations, but with good reason. The Nittany Lions have followed the blueprint set down by Michigan and the Buckeyes, and they are hoping it means a third straight national title for the Big Ten.

The Nittany Lions have a bunch of returning seniors, many of whom could have gone on to the NFL, and upgraded at important spots, either through the transfer portal or recruiting. The biggest problem for Penn State last season was its receiving corps, but that should be a worry no longer with transfers Kyron Hudson (USC), Devonte Ross (Troy) and Trebor Pena (Syracuse) in the fold. Quarterback Drew Allar looks to be a very high draft pick and should be more comfortable with better weapons to throw to, and the one-two punch of Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen is the nation's best backfield combo.

Oregon will take a small step back with the loss of quarterback Dillon Gabriel, but transfer running back Makhi Hughes should be a powerhouse in the Ducks' offense. The defense should be very good.

USC, Illinois and Nebraska all appear to be upwardly mobile and could, with a few breaks, actually contend for a CFP berth. Fun fact – Huskers coach Matt Rhule has won double-digit games in his third season at both of his previous stops (Baylor and Temple). So it wouldn't be a stretch to see Nebraska hit the 10-win mark.

Michigan lost so much on defense that, even though the unit will still be good, there has to be a step back. Wolverine backers and coaches have said all of the right things about freshman phenom quarterback Bryce Underwood, but I am still waiting to see how he performs on the road in Week 2 at Oklahoma. Those circumstances can rattle even the sturdiest veteran, so if he can bring a victory – or even a respectable offensive showing in a loss – then it's likely that U-M exceeds eight wins.

Indiana will also take a step back but is not going away completely as long as Curt Cignetti is around. The talent is still good, but the schedule is much tougher than it was last season, with roadies to Iowa, Oregon and Penn State and a home contest with Illinois.

Washington's floor appears to be 7-5, but it wouldn't be a complete surprise if the Huskies won nine. The defense has some holes, but quarterback Demond Williams and running back Jonah Coleman are a lethal tandem and will keep UW in every game.

Iowa is Iowa, which means the defense will be stingy and the offense will sputter. A November that includes Oregon, USC and Nebraska won't be easy, though things could be better on offense with South Dakota State transfer Mark Gronowski at quarterback. He has a national championship pedigree and, at 6-3, 230, should be able to stand strong in the pocket.

Minnesota should once again lean on dynamic back Darius Taylor, and the defense could be tough, led by sophomore safety and one-time Ohio State target Koi Perich.

Michigan State is improving, and this may be the year folks learn who Aidan Chiles is. The quarterback had a rocky baptism last year, but the offensive line is stable, and in receiver Nick Marsh, he has one of the best targets in the conference.

UCLA may be better in year two under DeShaun Foster, but the record may not show it with the Bruins facing Utah, Penn State, Indiana, Nebraska, Ohio State, Washington and USC. I am not as sold on quarterback Nico Iamaleava as a lot of people are, though he is an upgrade for the Bruins. Rutgers and Northwestern should both be competitive but lack the rosters to really do much damage.

Wisconsin is an odd situation. Luke Fickell went there, and people were expecting big things, but he is just 13-13 in two seasons and has been hampered by poor coaching hires and injuries at key positions. It sounds like the Badgers will revert to their natural identity as physical and ground-based, which should help. The problem is, there just isn't much to get excited about talent-wise. The receivers don't scare anyone, and Maryland transfer QB Billy Edwards Jr. was more runner than thrower for the Terrapins.

Speaking of the Terrapins, this is the year the bottom drops out for Mike Locksley. He has the youngest team in the league and will need to count on many of those youngsters to play key roles. That's always dicey. The offense could be all right if the quarterback play is solid, but the defense – which allowed over 30 points per game in 2024 – is a liability. Maryland should be fortunate that Purdue is still in the league, because the Boilers have a ton of work to do just to become competitive.

Purdue did get an excellent coach in Barry Odom from UNLV, but with more than 60 transfers, it's going to be difficult to find chemistry. The talent is better, and running back Devin Mockobee would be a known commodity were he at any other Big Ten school. Odom brought in players from Auburn, Georgia, North Carolina, BYU, Arkansas and Notre Dame in hopes of creating a spark. From this vantage point, that spark is a year away at least.

Season Prediction

Ohio State (11-1, 9-0)
Penn State (11-1, 8-1)
Oregon (10-2, 7-2)
USC (9-3, 7-2)
Illinois (9-3, 6-3)
Nebraska (9-3, 6-3)
Michigan (8-4, 6-3)
Indiana (8-4, 5-4)
Washington (7-5, 5-4)
Iowa (7-5, 5-4)
Minnesota (7-5, 4-5)
Michigan State (6-6, 3-6)
UCLA (4-8, 3-6)
Rutgers (5-7, 2-7)
Northwestern (4-8, 2-7)
Wisconsin (4-8, 2-7)
Maryland (4-8, 1-8)
Purdue (2-10, 0-9)

CHAMPIONSHIP: Penn State over Ohio State

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: WR Jeremiah Smith/Ohio State

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: S Caleb Downs/Ohio State

FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR: WR Dakorien Moore/Oregon

COACH OF THE YEAR: James Franklin/Penn State

CFP: Penn State/Ohio State/Oregon

BOWLS: USC/Illinois/Nebraska/Michigan/Indiana/Washington/Iowa/Minnesota/Michigan State

Let the season begin!

Sorry. If History Repeats, Buckeyes Won't

This all started when in two recent editions of our Reprint Thursday, a feature on the electronic BuckeyeSports.com where we reprint stories from the archives of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we had articles previewing the Buckeye seasons (2003 and 2015) after OSU won the national championship in the BSB era.

Then-managing editor Mark Rea wrote in his Editor's Notebook in the August 2003 issue, "Although (OSU coach Jim) Tressel has had to tinker with an offensive lineup that should have returned all 11 starters from last year, and he must hope that former backups and newcomers can fill defensive holes left by the graduations of Matt Wilhelm, Mike Doss, Kenny Peterson, Donnie Nickey and Cie Grant – not to mention punter Andy Groom – the Buckeyes seem to be fully locked and loaded to make a run at a second consecutive consensus title, something that has been accomplished in college football only once in nearly a decade."

It was the names Wilhelm, Doss, Peterson, Nickey, Grant and Groom that caught my attention. These guys were not only talented players, but greatly experienced and great leaders. And I'm thinking the loss of those players after the 2002 season is nothing compared to the talented, experienced players and leaders that Ohio State lost after winning the crown last season.

Now I'm starting to get a little nervous. Great teams like Ohio State recruit both from the prep ranks and the portal to make sure the team has plenty of talent to replace those dearly departed. But to repeat as national champions isn't as simple as just having a talented roster, though Mark seemed optimistic despite all that departed talent and leadership, stating as noted, "The Buckeyes seem to be fully locked and loaded to make a run at a second consecutive consensus title."

In 2003, the Buckeyes ended up finishing 11-2 but fell to Wisconsin and suffered their only loss to Michigan in the Tressel era. In 2015, the defending champions finished 12-1 but suffered a painfully embarrassing loss to Michigan State in the 11th week of the season, keeping them out of the Big Ten Championship Game and the then-four-team playoff. These would be great seasons for most teams and would probably have easily qualified the Buckeyes for today's 12-team playoff, but they will not go down as the crispest seasons in OSU history.

Even coach Ryan Day acknowledges his current team is lacking in experience.

"Once you get past some of the guys who have played football here with the (first team), it quickly gets inexperienced fast," Day said during the spring. "But even the guys who are going to be starters, they haven't played a lot of football as starters. They 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 lost talent, but more importantly, we lost experience. We're still talented, but we lost the experience."

I'm not trying to be Debbie Downer, but all of this has reminded me how tough it is to repeat, with only Georgia doing it in the CFP era – not Alabama, not Clemson, not Michigan, not Ohio State (yet) – just the Bulldogs in 2021 and 2022.

There is more than just the players to consider when examining that 2015 team and looking ahead to the 2025 Ohio State defense of the title.

Following the 2014 championship, offensive coordinator Tom Herman left to become the head coach at Houston. He was replaced by the tandem of Ed Warinner and Tim Beck, who were not up to the standards of Herman, as witnessed by the 14 points in the (offensively) con-

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

troversial loss to the Spartans. The game plan was so bad that even star running back Ezekiel Elliott complained publicly about it.

Under Herman in 2014 the offense averaged 44.8 points per game, including 49 at Michigan State, 59 vs. Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game and 42 each against Michigan, Alabama in the playoffs and Oregon in the national championship game. Under Warinner and Beck in '15, the Buckeyes averaged 35.7 points, though they did score 42 against Michigan and 44 against Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl.

This time around, the Buckeyes are trying to replace two veteran and successful coordinators in Jim Knowles (defense) and Chip Kelly (offense) with Matt Patricia and Brian Hartline, respectively. Neither of the current pair have college coordinator experience. Will this play a factor in the 2025 season as it did in 2015? We'll find out.

For the record, I consider Brian Hartline one of the greatest assistant coaches in Ohio State history. But that doesn't guarantee his success as a coordinator, just as being a great coordinator doesn't guarantee someone will be a great head coach. I take a lot of heat for my wait-and-see attitude about Hartline, but I'll stand by it. Nobody is rooting for Hartline more than I am, based on his contributions to Ohio State. But again, we'll find out. Incidentally, I thought Warinner was a terrific offensive line coach for the Buckeyes before being promoted and struggling as the OC.

All that said, with the mulligans built into the 12-team playoff format, how about this scenario presented by veteran Buckeye beat member Tim May in our "Four Questions for Four Experts" feature found elsewhere in this edition:

"This is going to be an Ohio State team that has the distinct possibility of getting better and better as the season goes on," May said. "I know every team is supposed to do that, but you see the talent that's available.

"I think Ohio State has a definite chance to play for the Big Ten championship and thus play in the playoffs. And once you get to the playoffs, can you repeat history?"

What if Ohio State doesn't repeat as the national champion? Wouldn't that make it a great year to beat Michigan? Would that be the ultimate mulligan or make good? Of course, every year is a great year to beat Michigan – or so I vaguely remember.

And you thought I wouldn't bring up Michigan in this column!

Questions For The Experts

Speaking of "Four Questions for Four Experts," compiled by BSB newcomer Sam Cipriani and found on page 36 of this issue, the experts were asked an interesting question: "The Buckeyes return arguably the two best players in all of college football this season in safety Caleb Downs and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith. Which of the two do you believe will have a better season?"

The consensus seemed to be that Smith would have the better season between the two stars. But May had an interesting answer – doesn't he always – though he didn't exactly respond to the question.

"This is the best way I can put it," May said. "I think Ohio State can survive much more vitally without Jeremiah Smith than it could without Caleb Downs."

Both players will be integral to any title defense, but I agree with May that the Buckeyes

could better survive the loss of Smith than Downs, but not because of the relative abilities of the two – they are both among the elite of the elite. Rather, I believe there is more depth and talent in the receivers room than in the defensive backfield. While there would obviously be a drop-off without Smith, the Buckeyes could still field one of the most talented sets of receivers in the country.

One thing really jumped out at me among the insight from the experts. The name Will Smith Jr. kept popping up. There's a guy I hadn't thought about much in observing the coaching staff trying to rebuild the defensive line. But these guys are the ones who would know. If they keep mentioning Will Smith, I'd keep an eye on him.

Productive Safeties

On our BuckeyeSports.com Forum, I recently wondered whatever happened to safety Malik Hooker, who turned in one of the most sensational seasons I have ever seen from a defensive player in 2016. Boy, you can tell I work football Sundays, because it turns out he has been hiding in the NFL the past eight seasons, playing for Indianapolis and Dallas. In fact, he started all 17 games for the Cowboys last season, recording 81 tackles and two interceptions.

Just to refresh all of our memories about how good Hooker was for the Buckeyes that special season, I thought I would compare his 2016 stats at safety for the Buckeyes to those of Downs last season.

On the ground, the two were comparable.

Hooker had 74 tackles, 5½ for loss and a half sack. Downs, meanwhile, had 81 tackles, 7½ for loss and a half sack last season. He also added a quarterback hurry.

It was on pass defense that Hooker made his mark in 2016. He had seven interceptions and returned them for a 25.9-yard average and took three of them to the house. Hooker broke up another four passes. Downs, meanwhile, had two interceptions for 7 yards and broke up six more passes. Don't forget Downs also took a punt back 79 yards for a touchdown.

Can you imagine a mythical backfield with Hooker and Downs at the safeties? It would make the late Jack Tatum proud.

No Fan Of Big First Games

When a marquee nonleague matchup such as the upcoming Ohio State-Texas clash between a couple of top-three teams comes along, I would prefer that the two teams each had a tuneup contest before the big game to work out some of the kinks. I think that would make for a more representative contest, especially when the two teams are breaking in relatively untested quarterbacks. At least in the case of the game between the Buckeyes and Longhorns, this is the opener for both teams, so no one has an edge. In the epic battle between the two teams in 2005 (No. 2 Texas vs. No. 4 OSU), both teams were playing their second game.

When thinking about this, I immediately flashed back to the old Kickoff Classic, which was played before the start of the regular slate in the New Jersey Meadowlands back in the day.

Ohio State had a big clash with Alabama in the Classic in 1986, falling to the Tide 16-10. The Buckeyes had another big game in New Jersey in 1999, squaring off against Miami and falling, 23-12.

I scanned the Ohio State schedules for the '50s, '60s and '70s and there were no big-time

openers for both clubs. If you are wondering about Art Schlichter's first-game disaster against Penn State in 1978, the Nittany Lions had already played two games when they invaded Ohio Stadium for OSU's season opener, a 19-0 Buckeye loss.

And About That Mail

It wouldn't be a View From 15th & High without me talking about postal delivery. Despite a crushing postal increase on July 13, all indicators are that delivery is only getting worse. Here's a little anecdote. We had terrible delivery of the recent July issue. The paper was mailed on June 30, but we continued to receive calls about missing papers late into the month.

Then, in the first week of August, we received at least a dozen calls from people who had suddenly received their July BSBs. And that's just the people who called. I'm sure there were many, many more of you who were startled to find their papers in their mailboxes some five weeks after it was mailed. That was the Interview Issue, which fortunately is timeless. Football season is here now, and timely delivery becomes more critical.

As always, I want to encourage readers to upgrade their subscription to first-class mail for football season. The cost is just \$35 through the Michigan game and \$45 through the playoffs and the football recruiting wrap-up.

I did want to alert you to changes in our paper replacement policy. In the process of replacing hundreds and hundreds of BSBs last fall – most publications would only credit your account – we found that we were paying \$3 (before the price increase) to replace papers and subscribers would ultimately receive their original paper before the replacement came, thus causing us to pay to mail you the same paper twice.

Under the new policy, we will send a replacement paper to first-class subscribers and readers in central Ohio after seven days from delivery. All other readers will have to wait two weeks before we send the replacement by first-class mail. We regret the necessity of this change.

One other postal note.

We recently lost approximately two dozen pieces of incoming mail. Many of those lost were first-class upgrades. If you believe you paid for the first-class upgrade and your Football Preview came via regular mail, please notify us immediately and we will rectify the problem and add an extra issue for your troubles. In the spirit of full disclosure let me admit that there were only three people in the office who could have lost the mail, and your humble publisher was one of them and a likely suspect.

Farewell To Patrick

Many of you may have noticed that there are no stories from Patrick Engels in this issue. Patrick has moved on to explore other opportunities, including possibly moving back to his native New Jersey, after helping finish the July Interview Issue.

He started at BSB as a paid intern and worked his way up to the assistant editor. All the while his writing and reporting skills improved through his hard work and dedication, ultimately leading to his promotion.

But the thing I will always remember most about Patrick is that he is genuinely a nice guy. He always kept things loose here, especially during the intense pressures of deadline. I wish him the best and hope he finds the opportunity he is looking for.

Patrick, you will always be an integral part of the BSB family.



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