

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 2

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 13, 2025

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Julian Sayin had been waiting for this moment.

Sure, it felt good to beat the No. 1 team in the country in his first-ever start at the college level. With that win, Sayin likely earned himself a lot of leeway with both his coaches and Buckeye fans in terms of the performance he could put on the field as he acclimates to his new starting job.

But in some ways, it might have felt even better to be able to finally let loose against Grambling State in a 70-0 win on Sept. 6.

"It was awesome," Sayin said. "I had a lot of fun today. I can't say enough about the receiving room, the running backs and the offensive line. Everyone is doing their part, and I'm making the offense move."

Sayin's day was over by the time he went into the locker room at the end of the first half. He finished with 306 passing yards for four touchdowns and an interception, completing 18 of 19 passes.

He had just 126 passing yards against Texas due to some very conservative play calling by offensive coordinator Brian Hartline, but that wasn't due to the coaches not trusting the young quarterback.

When head coach Ryan Day came out of that game on Aug. 30, he said that he was impressed with what he saw from Sayin and felt like the signal caller could have had more thrown at him by the coaches.

"When you have that first start and you're out there, there are so many things to take into consideration," Day said. "When you're the quarterback at Ohio State and you're playing No. 1 Texas, one of the top defenses in the country, the one thing we didn't want to do was put him in a bad spot. It's not fair to him."

"Coming out of it, quite honestly, he probably could have handled it. But we weren't going to do that because we know it's a long season, and that was the decision that was made."

The rout started early against the Tigers. Midway through the first quarter, after just two drives, Sayin already had 158 yards for two touchdowns on just a



SONNY BROCKWAY

ON TARGET — Julian Sayin threw 19 passes, and all of them were caught. Unfortunately, one was by Grambling State for the only blemish on an otherwise perfect afternoon. He was 18 of 19 and set a program record by completing his first 16 passes in the 70-0 win.

perfect 5-of-5 passing. He hit a wide-open Will Kacmarek for 47 yards up the middle for his first score and found Jeremiah Smith streaking down the right sideline without a defender in sight on the second drive. Smith went 87 yards, 54 of which were after the catch.

The pass to Kacmarek was the first glimpse into what Sayin could do. He made a low, accurate pass to Kacmarek over the line that Day really liked to see.

"The first throw he made for the touchdown to Will, it was a really good throw," he said. "We talk all the time, if the defender's back is turned, he's wide open. He one-inched it right over the top to Will, and Will made a great catch."

The touchdown from Sayin to Smith was the second-longest passing touchdown in Ohio State history, trailing only the 90-yard pass from Kenny Guiton to Devin Smith in 2013 at Cal. It was the third-longest play from scrimmage in school history, also behind an 88-yard rush by Morris Bradshaw against Wisconsin in 1971 and tied with Eddie George's 87-yard run against Minnesota

in his 1995 Heisman season.

Smith said after the game that he was impressed with Sayin's accuracy that he showed all game, saying it was nothing new.

"It's crazy. I've been seeing this since last year in the spring when we first got here," Smith said. "Nothing surprises me at this point. He could make any and every throw, and he controlled the offense at a very good pace."

Sayin also completed his first 16 passes of the game, which is an Ohio State record to begin a contest, passing the mark set by Will Howard in last season's national championship when he completed his first 13 passes against Notre Dame.

Continued On Page 10

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From The Message Board

With a 70-0 win over Grambling State on Sept. 6, Ohio State was able to test some of its depth when starters were out of the game by halftime. We asked readers which players who got into the game late impressed them the most, and why. Here are some of the responses:

"No question that Bo Jackson made an impression. He was quick, shifty and read his blockers well. Also, Mylan Graham appears to be a kid who can get lots of yards after making the catch. Payton Pierce appears ready to be the next man up at linebacker."

— **BuckeyeScott**

"Bo Jackson definitely impressed with 100+ yards and a TD for the No. 3 RB. Riley Pettijohn. When he got his chance, the true frosh showed why he will be special. Isaiah West with a TD. The RB room looks very deep with him and Sam Dixon, who also had a TD."

— **Bob Cody**

"Riley Pettijohn lived up to his ranking, and he was

someone I knew would be good. Bo Jackson. Thank god for Carlos Locklyn because Tony Alford wasn't even recruiting Bo, and he would've ended up somewhere else."

— **Tiffin Buckeye**

"Too many to name in secondary. On offense, Jackson and Graham. On defense, Pierce and Pettijohn, holy cow!"

— **Terrier Buck**

"There were many players whose names I'd forgotten or didn't know. Like everyone else, I'd say Bo Jackson was a star. Isaiah West and Riley Pettijohn were fine performers. I'd say our depth goes all the way to China."

— **PeyoteBuck**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Let 2025 Buckeyes Write Their Story

I was very unhappy with Mr. (Gus) Johnson and Mr. (Joel) Klatt, who, on Aug. 30, continually referenced the OSU-Texas game of last season. What an insult to our 2025 Buckeyes! They are not defending champions! They're going to make their own Buckeye history, God love 'em!

Angela Burdge
Hilliard, Ohio

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

FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

No. 1 Ohio State hosted FCS Grambling State for a 70-0 win on Sept. 6, which gave ample opportunities for players to make an impact. Here are some choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves.

Sam Cipriani, BSB: Ohio State's star wide receiver, Jeremiah Smith, bounced back from a lackluster performance against Texas with a Heisman-like outing against Grambling State and gets my Buckeye Leaf.

Smith opened his afternoon with a catch on the opening drive, before hauling in an 87-yard bomb from quarterback Julian Sayin on the first and only play during the Buckeyes' second drive. Two drives later, Smith brought in a 9-yard touchdown catch to increase Ohio State's lead to 28 early in the second quarter.

Smith ended his day with five catches for 119 yards and two touchdowns – and he only played in the first half.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf is going to freshman linebacker Riley Pettijohn. Pettijohn showed why he was a top-50 recruit out of high school in Ohio State's win.

Pettijohn, who finished the game with two total tackles, made his first impact play on the Tigers' first play from scrimmage in the second half. On the play, Pettijohn was ready to scoop up a fumble caused by Ohio State defensive tackle Kayden McDonald and take it 23 yards for the team's first defensive touchdown of the season.

Then, later in the third quarter, Pettijohn forced Grambling State running back Andre Crews to fumble. Freshman defensive end Epi Sitanilei hopped on the loose ball to give the Buckeyes the football.

Greg Wilson, BSB: After he wasn't able to do much against Texas due to the Buckeyes' conservative play calling, Julian Sayin set the Ohio State record for 16 straight passes completed to begin a game, passing Will Howard's record of 13 that he set in the national championship game against Notre Dame last season.

Sayin finished the game with 306 passing yards for four touchdowns and an interception, completing 18 of 19 passes. He started quickly, with first-quarter touchdown passes to Will Kacmarek, Jeremiah Smith (87

yards, the second-longest TD pass in OSU history) and Carnell Tate before getting another to Smith in the second quarter.

He did throw an interception in the red zone in the second quarter as well, waiting a bit too long to try to hit Tate on an out route in the end zone, but there is no better time for him to learn lessons like that than against Grambling, when his team had a comfortable lead.

BSB Subscribers

Tiffin Buck: Carnell Tate. Again!

BuckeyeScott: I'll give a Buckeye Leaf to Bo Jackson. One hundred eight yards and 12 yards per carry is great, even if it was in mop-up duty. Also, Kayden McDonald for forcing the fumble that was returned for a defensive TD.

PeyoteBuck: Give one to Lincoln Kienholz for showing us we have a good backup.

Bob Cody: When you shut out a team 70-0, many Buckeye Leaves are warranted! Julian Sayin, almost perfect day passing with a stadium record, in spite of the INT, with 300+ yards and 4 TDs. The offensive line that protected Julian Sayin and opened up holes for the running game. Jeremiah Smith – 2 TDs and the stadium record for yards on a pass reception. Will Kacmarek for opening the floodgates for scoring in the game. Carnell Tate and CJ Donaldson both scored TDs in both games. DEFENSE – a shutout and almost shutout vs. Texas. Riley Pettijohn, scoop and score for this promising freshman. Bo Jackson 100+ yards and a TD in the 2nd half is very deserving. Lincoln Kienholz erasing the memory of the Missouri bowl game with a fine performance as Sayin's backup. The entire coaching staff, beginning with Ryan Day. No letdown or hangover after Texas and rising to No. 1. TBDBITL – current and Alumni – a real treat with two ramp entrances and quad Script Ohio. The Grambling Tiger band – entertaining, and definitely lived up to their hype and press clippings.

John Lanning: Very good game/scrimmage. After Texas, it was good to open the offense up under game conditions. Leaves to Sayin for the string of good passes. Tate had several great catches, so he gets one. And finally, Pettijohn gets his for the scoop and score. The 2025 Buckeyes are coming together nicely.

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No. 1	Sept. 6	No. 13	TBA
No. 2	Sept. 13	No. 14	TBA
No. 3	Sept. 27	No. 15	TBA
No. 4	Oct. 4	No. 16	Feb. 14
No. 5	Oct. 11	No. 17	March 7
No. 6	Oct. 18	No. 18	March 21
No. 7	Nov. 1	No. 19	April 4
No. 8	Nov. 8	No. 20	April 18
No. 9	Nov. 15	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 22	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 29	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 6	No. 24	August

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OPINION

OSU Checks (Nearly) All Boxes In Rout

What kind of game plan would you devise if you knew you could probably rest your entire starting lineup and still beat your opponent by three or four touchdowns?

Well, if your name was Ryan Day, you win the coin toss, instruct your captains to take possession of the ball to begin the game, and then proceed to put the offensive hammer down from the get-go.

That is a fair summation of what transpired Sept. 6 inside Ohio Stadium when an Alumni Band Day crowd of 100,624 was treated to a 70-0 wipeout of Grambling State, a hopelessly overmatched Football Championship Subdivision opponent from northern Louisiana.

After purposely paring down the offense during the season-opening win against top-ranked Texas, Day took the training wheels off new starting quarterback Julian Sayin, and the sophomore responded by completing his first 16 pass attempts, a record-setting performance that only whetted the appetite for those in Buckeye Nation passionate enough to believe Ohio State can successfully defend its national championship.

It's difficult to correctly assess Sayin's performance in light of the fact his offensive line provided the kind of protection most quarterbacks only dream about. Still, completing your first 16 attempts is a pretty good afternoon's work no matter who the opponent might be.

The game's first series gave a little insight into how much mercy the Buckeyes would show Grambling, a program far removed from the days when the late Eddie Robinson patrolled the sideline between 1941 and 1997 and piled up 408 victories and nine HBCU national championships. Ohio State opened with a six-play, 83-yard scoring march that featured four passes, the final one a strike down the middle of the field to tight end Will Kacmarek, who gathered in the ball at about the 25-yard line and then easily outraced a pair of defenders to the end zone.

The 47-yard touchdown set the early tone for the game, a mismatch further accentuated when Jeremiah Smith got loose behind the Grambling defense for an 87-yard touchdown reception, the second-longest pass play in program history as well as the longest for the Buckeyes in the 104-year history of Ohio Stadium.

Carnell Tate finished the first-quarter scoring with a twisting 13-yard touchdown catch, making Sayin a perfect 10 for 10 for 218 yards and three scores. After that, it was pretty much window dressing.

Sayin finished with 18 completions in 19 attempts – the third-best single-game completion percentage (94.7) in OSU history – for 306 yards and four touchdowns. And completing his first 16 attempts of the game established a new program record, breaking the one set just last season when Will Howard completed his first 13 throws in the national championship game against Notre Dame.

Backup Lincoln Kienholz came on in relief in the second half and was a not-too-shabby 6 for 7 in the passing department (85.7 percent) for 71 yards and his first career touchdown.

The running game got untracked for a total of 274 yards and a tidy 7.2-yard average on 38 attempts. True freshman Bo Jackson (whose given name is Lamar, so take your pick of talented namesakes) might have earned himself more future carries alongside James Peoples and C.J. Donaldson with a 108-yard performance. It was the first 100-yard effort in a regular-season game for a Buckeye since Quinshon Judkins rushed for 173 yards last year in Week 3 against Marshall.

Smith was Smith with five catches for 119 yards and two scores. It was his sixth career

game with at least 100 yards, a total that already ranks 11th all-time at OSU for the sophomore. Tate was also busy with five receptions of his own for 69 yards and a score.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

And in something of a throwback to the bygone days of John Frank, Ben Hartsock and Jake Stoneburner, the Ohio State tight ends got some passes thrown their way as well. Kacmarek, Jelani Thurman, Max Klare and Bennett Christian combined for seven catches for 107 yards and two touchdowns.

Defensively, I don't know if anyone could have envisioned a better start for coordinator Matt Patricia. In two games, Ohio State has allowed just seven points and 502 yards. And before you pooh-pooh those numbers by bringing up the level of competition provided by Grambling, be advised the Tigers kicked off their season by piling up 466 yards during a 55-7 whupping of Langston in the Shreveport Kickoff Classic. Yeah, Langston is an NAIA program, but you get the idea.

Like Smith on offense, Caleb Downs was his usual self, grabbing his third interception as a Buckeye (to go with the two he had at Alabama in 2023) and chalking up one of the nine tackles for loss for the OSU defense.

Linebackers Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles combined for seven tackles in their limited action, and C.J. Hicks looks like the light is finally coming on for him. Riley Pettijohn forced a fumble and returned another for a touchdown, and Will Smith Jr. appeared to get in on the festivities with a fumble recovery of his own, midway through the third quarter. But in the scrum at the bottom of the pile, Smith's teammate, true freshman Epi Sitanilei, took the ball for his own and was credited with the recovery.

All in all, it was a blowout that likely checked most of the boxes Day wanted to check. There were even enough mistakes – glaring ones such as Sayin's lone incompletion on an ill-advised throw across the field that resulted in an interception as well as smaller ones including missed assignments and blown coverages – that the coaching staff can keep its team's full attention during film study.

Victories, regardless of opposition and how they are achieved, are always to be savored. But you don't have to believe me. Ask Arizona State, Florida, Michigan or SMU, ranked teams that all went down on Sept. 6.

The Numbers Game

- Ohio State scored 70 or more points in a game for the 19th time in program history and the first since a 77-21 victory against Toledo in 2022. The 70-0 final score was the first time the Buckeyes had ever finished a game with that exact score, and it represented the most lopsided shutout victory since a 76-0 wipeout of Florida A&M in 2013.

- The 70-point win was the largest margin of victory for the Buckeyes since a 76-5 win against Miami (Ohio) in 2019. The RedHawks actually led that one, 5-0, late in the first quarter before OSU rattled off 11 unanswered touchdowns.

- The Buckeyes ran their all-time record to 289-1 when scoring 40 points or more in a game. The lone blemish on that ledger was the 42-41 loss to Georgia in the 2022 College Football Playoff semifinals.

- Kienholz had been waiting a long time

for the first touchdown pass of his career, and he finally got it with a 4-yard toss to Thurman in the fourth quarter. It's an obscure stat, but Kienholz became the seventh OSU quarterback since 1960 whose first career touchdown pass was 5 yards or less. The others are Kyle McCord (5 yards to Chris Olave vs. Akron in 2021), Bill Long (3 yards to Arnold Fontes vs. Washington State in 1966), Steve Bellisari (2 yards to Ken-Yon Rambo vs. UCLA in 1999), Bobby Hoying (2 yards to Joe Metzger vs. Northwestern in 1992), Greg Frey (2 yards to Jeff Ellis vs. Syracuse in 1988) and Bill Mrukowski (2 yards to Chuck Bryant vs. TCU in 1961).

- Tate became the 20th player in program history to catch a pass in at least 25 consecutive games. The all-time leaders in that category are Gary Williams (1979-82) and K.J. Hill (2016-19), who each caught at least one pass in 48 straight games. In case you're wondering, Jeremiah Smith has caught a pass in each of his 18 career games for the Buckeyes.

- Jackson became the first OSU player to rush for 100 or more yards in his college debut since J.K. Dobbins ran for 181 yards during a 49-21 win at Indiana in the 2017 season opener. Jackson is also the first true freshman at Ohio State to crack the century mark in rushing since Dallan Hayden rushed for 146 yards and three TDs during a 43-30 win at Maryland in 2022.

- Jackson became the first Ohio State player wearing jersey No. 25 to score a touchdown since Mike Weber had a 2-yard run during a 63-39 win against Michigan in 2018.

- Pettijohn's 23-yard touchdown on a fumble return marked the 18th fumble return for a touchdown of 20 yards or more in program history. The longest is Jack Sawyer's scoop-and-score dagger of 83 yards in last season's playoff semifinal against Texas.

Ridiculous Charade

You might have read somewhere or seen on television that after beating No. 1-ranked Texas on Aug. 30, Ohio State extended to 25 games the nation's longest streak of victories to open a season.

That is incorrect. The streak is actually at 26.

Because the NCAA vacated wins stemming from the so-called "Tattoogate" scandal from 15 years ago, we are supposed to pretend the 2010 season-opening victory against Marshall never happened and therefore cannot be included in the win streak.

I was one of the 105,040 in Ohio Stadium on that sweltering September afternoon when Brandon Saine ran for 103 yards and two touchdowns and Dane Sanzenbacher caught three passes for 113 yards and a score. I can't say much today with total confidence, but I can assure anyone who asks that the 45-7 win against the Thundering Herd did, in fact, happen.

In light of penalties regarding recent NCAA investigations, it seems ridiculous to continue the charade of pretending that the 12 games the Buckeyes won during the 2010 season never happened. (Side note: Did you ever stop to wonder why only the wins were vacated that season, but the 31-18 loss at Wisconsin still counts?)

Whether by friendly petition to the NCAA or through good, old-fashioned litigation, Ohio State should immediately begin pursuing avenues to have those 12 victories reinstated and get all of the team and individual statistics restored to the record books.

Vacating victories and championships was always a hollow punishment just made more so by today's spineless NCAA.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Buckeyes Remain No. 1 In Top 25

Ohio State is still ranked No. 1 in the country after its 70-0 rout of Grambling State on Sept. 6.

The Buckeyes received 57 first-place votes, which is two more than they did in the Week 2 rankings. They were helped by Penn State not putting up as convincing a win against FIU, winning 34-0 and leading only 10-0 at the half.

Ohio State debuted as No. 1 on Sept. 2 after beating Texas in Week 1.

The Nittany Lions (five first-place votes) were still ranked No. 2 in the country with No. 3 LSU (two), No. 4 Oregon (one) and No. 5 Miami (Fla.) finishing out the top five.

After beating Duke 45-19, Illinois jumped to No. 9 in the rankings, with No. 22 Indiana and No. 23 Michigan being the only other Big Ten teams in the top 25. The Hoosiers are coming off a 56-9 win over Kennesaw State and the Wolverines a 24-13 loss to Oklahoma, which jumped

to No. 13. Michigan saw the biggest tumble in the rankings, falling eight spots.

The biggest jump in the rankings was by Tennessee, which jumped seven spots after it beat East Tennessee State 72-17. Both Oklahoma and Utah (63-9 win over Cal Poly) jumped five spots.

Georgia dropped two spots from No. 4 to No. 6 since it struggled to win as big as it probably could have at home, taking a 28-6 victory against Austin Peay.

The rest of the top 10 consists of No. 7 Texas, No. 8 Notre Dame and No. 10 Florida State.

No. 18 South Florida is one of three new teams to the top 25. The Bulls have been the biggest surprise of the 2025 season to this point, beating preseason No. 25-ranked Boise State 34-7 in Week 1 and taking down the No. 13 Florida Gators 18-16 in Week 2. The Gators were not ranked in Week 3.

No. 24 Auburn and No. 25 Missouri also joined the top 25 in the Week 3 rankings.

Jackson Plays Against Grambling State

All of Ohio State's starters were available against Grambling State, though the Buckeyes are still dealing with injuries further down the depth chart.

Heading into the Buckeyes' win over the Tigers, there was speculation on whether redshirt junior defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. – who had gone down with an injury in the third quarter of Ohio State's win over Texas – would be avail-



SONNY BROCKWAY

ON THE FIELD — Defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. (97) was injured during the Texas game but was healthy enough to play against Grambling State in the 70-0 victory.

able for Week 2.

However, Jackson did see the field against the Tigers, though he was largely ineffective and finished without recording any statistics.

Backup defensive tackles Jason Moore and Maxwell Roy, safeties Brenten "Inky" Jones and Deshawn Stewart, tight end Max LeBlanc, running back Anthony Rogers, quarterback Mason Maggs, defensive tackle Ahmed Tounkara and wide receiver Preston Wolfe were all unavailable in the win.

Ohio State-Texas Top Week 1 Game Ever

The matchup between Ohio State and Texas drew a record television audience.

Then-No. 3 OSU's 14-7 victory over the No. 1 Longhorns on Aug. 30 became the most-ever watched Week 1 college football game with an average of 16.6 million viewers. The broadcast peaked at 18.5 million viewers in the second half of the Buckeyes' victory when the Longhorns began to put up a fight on offense.

The game had more average viewers than any regular-season game that was played in the 2024 season.

Ohio State and Texas' clash was also the third-most viewed game ever on FOX, trailing just the 2022 and 2023 renditions of The Game between the Buckeyes and Michigan.

Smith Could See More Return Opportunities

Sophomore wide receiver Jeremiah Smith added to his duties for Ohio State during the Week 1 opener against Texas. The star receiver was out on the field to return a punt late in the first quarter against the Longhorns.

Smith signaled for a fair catch after Texas punter Jack Bouwmeester launched a 52-yarder. Smith didn't go back out for another punt return despite three more opportunities, but head coach Ryan Day announced during his weekly radio show that the plan was for Smith to continue to field punts.

"He'll continue to have an opportunity to be back there because we think that he gives us something back there, as you can imagine, when the ball is in his hands," Day said. "We'll figure out game plan-wise when he's going to be back there. And we'll keep working on giving him an opportunity and working and grinding to make sure that the guys on the return team (set him up well)."

Although Smith didn't crack a big return for the Buckeyes, Day feels like the unit was close to giving the five-star a chance to put his athleticism on display.

"If we had held up just a little bit longer and given him a chance to return that, we were in a pretty good position there," Day said. "We were trying to keep it sort of quiet that he was getting some of that work back there."

Smith didn't get the majority of punt return reps against Texas, as fellow receiver Brandon Inniss took three punts and fair caught one of them. Day said he expects Smith to continue to rotate with Inniss and safety Caleb Downs, who had the Buckeyes' first punt-return touchdown in 10 years in the team's 38-15 win over Indiana last season.

"When you have guys like Brandon Inniss and Caleb Downs and Jeremiah Smith back there, the entire unit believes that they can return it," Day said. "They believe that it can turn into points and change field position. So we're going to

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2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	W, 14-7	FOX	1-1, 38-17 win over San Jose State
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	W, 70-0	BTN	1-1, 70-0 loss to Ohio State
Sept. 13	OHIO	7:00	Peacock	1-1, 17-10 win over West Virginia
Sept. 27	at Washington	TBA	TBA	2-0, 70-10 win over UC Davis
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	2-0, 66-0 win over N'western State
Oct. 11	at Illinois	TBA	TBA	2-0, 45-19 win over Duke
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	2-0, 42-10 win over Middle Tenn.
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	2-0, 34-0 win over FIU
Nov. 8	at Purdue	TBA	TBA	2-0, 34-17 win over Southern Ill.
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	TBA	0-2, 30-23 loss to UNLV
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	2-0, 45-17 win over Miami (OH)
Nov. 29	at Michigan	Noon	FOX	1-1, 24-13 loss to Oklahoma



SONNY BROCKWAY

TRASH TALK BACKFIRES — Right tackle Phillip Daniels (70) got the last laugh on Texas pass rusher Colin Simmons that led to a critical touchdown in the Buckeyes’ 14-7 win on Aug. 30. Simmons called him trash, and Daniels said he “hemmed him up.” Simmons then ripped Daniels’ helmet off on the next play, drawing a penalty that kept the drive alive and eventually gave Ohio State a 7-0 lead.

they’re not a great football team.”

However, not all of Holtz’s remarks about the Buckeyes were critical. He praised the defense for holding the nation’s No. 1 team to just seven points despite the loss of former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles in the offseason.

“I would not be overwhelmed about facing Ohio State, although I was surprised that they lost Knowles, their defensive coordinator. I thought there would be a big drop-off on their defense, but Ohio State’s defense played outstanding football.”

Holtz said he even wrote a letter to Day

Continued On Page 6

keep working like crazy to give these guys a chance.”

Daniels Details Blocking Against Longhorns

In his first start as a Buckeye, sophomore offensive tackle Phillip Daniels held up against an immensely talented Texas defensive line.

On Sept. 3, Daniels discussed how he contributed to the Buckeyes’ win over the Longhorns by drawing a penalty on Texas star pass rusher Colin Simmons.

“I was just chilling. I was like, ‘OK, cool, I’m going to go against him.’ I didn’t really see too much of anything on film,” Daniels said of Simmons. “And then before the play he was like, ‘You’re trash,’ I was like, ‘Huh? Me? I know you’re not talking to me.’ I hemmed him up. He took my helmet off, I’m still going, and had a few choice words.”

The play in question came on a third-and-4 in the second quarter when Ohio State was on the Texas 44-yard line. On the play, redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin attempted to find Inniss down the field, but the pass fell incomplete. However, Simmons knocked off Daniels’ helmet and was flagged for a face-mask penalty that gave the Buckeyes an automatic first down.

The Buckeyes went on to score the

game’s first touchdown after picking up the first down.

“It was cool, after I did all that, the whole stadium erupted,” Daniels said. “It was kind of like a movie, a little bit.”

It wasn’t the most efficient day for the Buckeyes’ offense. The unit totaled only 203 yards in the win, but Daniels and the rest of the offensive line did an excellent job in pass protection and didn’t allow Sayin to be sacked a single time.

Holtz Takes Another Shot at Buckeyes

One of college football’s most iconic coaches has once again taken aim at the Buckeyes.

Former head coach Lou Holtz made multiple comments toward Ohio State during the podcast “Don’t @ Me” with Dan Dakich of Outkick.

Holtz first criticized the Buckeyes, arguing they didn’t deserve the hype because Texas outgained them in yardage, despite an Ohio State win.

“I don’t think Ohio State’s a great football team,” Holtz told Dakich. “I know the schedule is very, very good, but when you’re at home and you’re outgained by well over 100 yards, you just can’t look at it and say, ‘OK, we’re great. We won the game.’ They are 1-0 and that’s the objective they had going in that game, but

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Continued From Page 5

after Ohio State's national championship win but never received a reply, continuing to praise Day's record while voicing skepticism about a conference he believes lacks strong teams.

"Ryan Day can do whatever he wants," Holtz said. "I did write him a congratulatory letter, but I never heard back from him. I'm not sure he could write but, in any event, he's obviously a good coach.

He's a good recruiter. He's a good coach. You look at his win-loss record, it's really tremendous. But let's not get overwhelmed, because the Big Ten doesn't have that many great football teams in it this year. But we'll find out."

Bjork Pushes For Playoff Expansion

Ohio State's athletic director recently sided in favor of the potential expansion of the College Football Playoff.

Ross Bjork told Front Office Sports that he prefers the expanded playoffs, and that even though football-wise Ohio State is rarely going to be at risk of missing a smaller field, he believes an expanded playoff field has high economic upside.

Bjork said that although Ohio State could survive with just four or 12 teams, he noted that more playoff games bring in more revenue for participating teams and conferences and argued that another round of expansion is what's best for the sport.

"Selfishly, Ohio State could stay at four; we could go back to four and most years, probably be OK. At 12, we should be OK. We've got to keep doing our part. I mean, we've got to keep investing and keep coaching and keep recruiting at a high level," Bjork said. "But I'm a believer that for the good of the game, for the health of the game, for content, for high-level matchups, we should expand."

Bjork emphasized that while people often focus on the size of the playoff field, the value of expansion lies in creating more opportunities for high-level football and meaningful postseason games.

"Could we go to 16? Could we go to 20? Could we go to 24? There are proposals out there to go to 28. There's been a couple other proposals to go to 32," Bjork said. "We all get hung up in these numbers – 24, 28. 'Oh my God, they can't do this.' But here's what you cannot argue with: What's wrong with more high-level football? What's wrong with more meaningful postseason content? What's wrong

with keeping the postseason alive for as many teams as possible? So to me, nobody can argue with that piece."

In the interview, Bjork also said the financial implications make playoff expansion appealing, since turning marquee matchups into playoff games would generate more revenue. He stated future expansion will be carefully planned by the conferences, with the Big Ten and SEC expected to lead the way.

He understands why people get hung up on the complexities like championship games and automatic bids, but the priority of college football should be to expand opportunities that enhance the sport overall.

"Now how you get there, (how many) automatic qualifying spots, how many should the Big Ten have and the SEC, that's where everybody kind of gets hung up," Bjork said. "But if you just take high-level content, meaningful content for football – if you take maybe the conference championship weekend and morph

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

The play that lifted Ohio State to a 10-7 triumph over Pitt in the season opener was designed to produce two points. It was executed for an uplifting six points by Buckeye quarterback Jim Karsatos and wide receiver Cris Carter.

"It's called 'end right tight, two-point play,' " said Carter, who dashed into the end zone, headed for the right sideline and latched onto a pass for a touchdown with 4:19 left in the game. "We've been practicing that play all week long."

Whether Carter would be the target or just who or what would transpire was a big question mark as Ohio State called a timeout with 4:24 left in the game and a fourth-and-goal at the Pitt 1.

"When I came to the sideline, (head coach Earle Bruce) asked me if I thought I could get open. He had the play in mind the whole time," Carter said. "He knew what play we were going to run. He just asked me if I could get open and score a touchdown."

35 Years Ago — 1990

As Ohio State was trailing Texas Tech 10-3 in the third quarter with 4:56 remaining on Sept. 8, the Buckeyes gained possession of the ball at their own 23 and began what could be called "The Robert Smith Drive."

After an illegal-procedure penalty moved the Buckeyes back to the 18, Smith touched the ball on four of the next five plays.

Senior quarterback Greg Frey faded back to pass on first down and flipped the ball to Smith in the right flat. The freshman slipped one tackle, then another, and was finally run out of bounds. That run was good for 24 yards and a first down at the OSU 42-yard line.

On the very next play, Frey pitched the ball to Smith, who cut around the right side of the line and broke clear down the right sideline, leaping over would-be tacklers before being run out of bounds again. That run was good for 39 yards and another first down at the Tech 19.

Smith took a one-play breather on the sideline then re-entered the game and took off on an 8-yard draw play right through the heart of the Texas Tech line. On the next play, he topped off the drive with a 2-yard touchdown run as he raced into the right corner of the end zone. The Buckeyes won the game 17-10.

30 Years Ago — 1995

Former Ohio State football stars Carlos Snow, Dan "Big Daddy" Wilkinson and Vinnie Clark were among a group of athletes who allegedly received cash or other favors during their college days as inducements to sign with prospective agents and financial planners.

Jesse Martinez, a former "runner" or recruiter for various agents, made the accusations in a Sept. 10 exposé in The Boston Globe.

Ohio State officials conferred with the NCAA and were confident the transgressions by the former players – even though they occurred while the players were on scholarship aid at OSU – would not result in sanctions against the school.

"Everything is taken care of on that," assistant athletic director Larry Romanoff told BSB. "As far as we're concerned, that's old news. That all had been checked out before."

25 Years Ago — 2000

The OSU-Fresno State game was rare from a standpoint that each team scored a touchdown in the final five seconds of the contest.

But it was OSU's final play touchdown, while the Buckeyes already held a 37-10 lead, that spurred some controversy.

The Bulldogs called a timeout with nine seconds left, then completed a 9-yard pass from backup quarterback Jeff Grady to Marque Davis for their only touchdown.

FSU then attempted an onside kick. OSU's Robert Reynolds recovered at the Bulldogs' 44.

OSU sent a team of reserves, led by debuting quarterback Scott McMullen, for the game's last play. McMullen faked and threw deep to Ricky Bryant for the touchdown.

ESPN commentator Lee Corso blasted the move, saying Coach John Cooper owed an apology to Fresno State's coaches, families and fans. A day later, Cooper responded.

"I'm not going to try and do his job for him, and I'm certainly not going to get into a controversy with Lee Corso," Cooper said. "To me, running the score up is when you leave in your first-team offense, not when you put your reserves in like we did."

20 Years Ago — 2005

For perspective on the immensity of Ohio State's matchup with Texas, BSB turned to no less an expert than Kirk Herbstreit, the Buckeye quarterback-turned-ESPN commentator.

"It's so far above any other nonconference game," Herbstreit had told BSB earlier in the summer. "There's not another game in the same galaxy as that game."

That pretty much summed up where the primetime clash of the titans ranked in the college football world at large. For some time – it had been a decade since this series was agreed upon – supporters of the Buckeyes, Longhorns and college football in general had Sept. 10, 2005, set aside as a date to remember.

When both teams debuted in the top 10 of the national polls in the preseason, it seemed like the only thing that could derail the event was an upset loss in the season's opening weeks, and that pitfall had been avoided for both Ohio State and Texas.

15 Years Ago — 2010

When Cameron Heyward met with the media following Ohio State's 36-24 win over Miami (Fla.), he was asked about his third-quarter interception that killed a threatening Hurricanes' drive.

"I'm still tired," he said, drawing laughter.

No one could blame him. Rarely do 288-pound defensive linemen such as Heyward get the opportunity to rumble 80 yards, but that's exactly the situation he found himself in after picking off Jacory Harris' pass at the 5-yard line and making it all the way to the Miami 15.

"When you drop (into coverage), you just try to play his eyes," Heyward said. "That's what I did, and I was able to make a big play."

"I thought I had a chance (to score). I had some great blocks, and I was just following them."

10 Years Ago — 2015

Urban Meyer was not confident in his offense. It hadn't given him any reason to be.

With Ohio State holding a tenuous 20-13 advantage over visiting Northern Illinois, the Buckeyes were facing a fourth-and-1 at their own 44-yard line. Meyer had a chance to go for the first down near midfield and give his offense a chance to step on the throat of the Huskies. That's an opportunity that the three-time national champion coach had taken more often than not in his

career. Against Northern Illinois, he didn't.

Meyer elected to punt and trust his defense, and it worked as the Buckeyes forced a three-and-out. For the second straight week, the Buckeye offense was largely ineffective in a disjointed, disappointing effort. Against Northern Illinois, Ohio State managed just 13 points on offense and turned the ball over five times.

"I know there's going to be a million questions about the offense," Meyer said before he had a chance to be asked any in the postgame press conference. "And there should be. There's a little discombobulation that's got to get worked out, and we've got good players, good coaches, good scheme."

"We expect much, much higher execution than what we're having right now."

Five Years Ago — 2020

Ohio State would have the chance to compete for a national championship in the fall after the Big Ten announced on Sept. 16 that its council of university presidents and chancellors had voted unanimously to resume the 2020 football season the weekend of Oct. 24.

The decision to reverse course came a little more than one month after the Big Ten announced on Aug. 11 that it was postponing fall sports until the spring amid the coronavirus pandemic. Commissioner Kevin Warren subsequently said the conference would not reconsider, as well, but the Big Ten received substantial backlash from players, coaches, parents, fans and the media for its lack of transparency regarding the decision, particularly as the ACC, Big 12 and SEC each moved forward with their respective seasons.

With the College Football Playoff also announcing it would hold its semifinal and championship games as scheduled, pressure continued to mount for the Big Ten. But things changed drastically when the council of presidents and chancellors met remotely with the conference's return to competition task force on Sept. 13 to discuss new testing programs that hadn't been available when the conference decided to postpone fall sports in mid-August.

One Year Ago — 2024

At the end of the 56-0 win over Western Michigan on Sept. 7, Ryan Day got a glimpse of what that future might hold in scarlet and gray. After backup QB Devin Brown had a few drives when Will Howard was taken out of the blowout, Day decided to get true freshman Julian Sayin into the game for his first collegiate action, and he didn't hold back by forcing the freshman to hand it off every play.

Still on its own side of the field and up by seven touchdowns with just over five minutes remaining in the game, Ohio State elected to go for a fourth-and-1 with Sayin under center. With a fake handoff and blockers to the right, the Broncos completely missed tight end Bennett Christian streaking down the left side of the field. Sayin saw him immediately, and the two connected for a 55-yard touchdown, the Buckeyes' final score of the game.

"We were just trying to get more guys more plays," Day said when asked about the decision to go for it with the game in hand. "There are a lot of guys on our team that deserve plays and deserve reps, and it was close enough that we felt like it was one of those ones we were going to go for. We wanted to continue to get these guys these reps."

BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

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

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.

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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.

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that into the playoffs, if you take bowl games that are part of the system and you call them playoff games, what's wrong with that? And so to me, we need to kind of take a step back. Let's do what's right by the game. Let's add more content. Let's add more value."

Mathews, Hicks Players Of Game Against Texas

Following its victory over Texas, Ohio State recognized its standout players of the game on defense and special teams.

Ohio State named cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. its defensive player of the game and defensive end C.J. Hicks the special teams player of the game for their standout performances in the Buckeyes' victory over the Longhorns.

Mathews finished his day with three solo tackles and played strong coverage but most notably had the game's lone turnover.

With just over three minutes remaining in the third quarter, Texas quarterback Arch Manning had the Longhorns

near Buckeye territory before the Cincinnati native intercepted a pass intended for wideout Ryan Wingo, taking the pick back 5 yards.

Hicks, like Mathews, had three tackles on the day and played a key role in the Buckeyes' steady special teams unit in the game. He also had the rush and near-takedown of Manning on Texas' final offensive play, forcing a throw short of the sticks that ultimately sealed Ohio State's victory.

Ohio State did not name an offensive player of the game.

Jones, Nelson Shed Black Stripes

Since BSB last went to press, two Buckeyes had black stripes removed to become "official" members of the team.

Freshman receiver De'Zie Jones and junior safety Keenan Nelson Jr. both had their black stripes removed on Sept. 3.

Nelson played in 12 games for the Buckeyes last year primarily on special teams. The Buckeyes have two solid starters at safety in Downs and Jaylen McClain,

but Nelson could provide the backend of the team's secondary with solid depth.

Like Nelson, Jones doesn't project to get a large share of snaps at receiver, but the removal of his black stripe is a good sign for the four-star recruit to earn more playing time.

Nelson and Jones became the 20th and 21st players, respectively, to have their black stripes removed since spring practices began.

Five Former Buckeyes In NFL Top 100

Ohio State has five former players who have cracked the NFL's best 100 players list.

Defensive ends Nick Bosa and Cameron Heyward, wide receiver Terry McLaurin, quarterback C.J. Stroud and quarterback Joe Burrow were all named in the NFL Top 100, which ranks the best players in professional football.

Stroud was the second highest-rated of the Buckeyes on the list at No. 39. He enters his third season in the league and

dropped 19 spots from where he was after his rookie season.

Washington's McLaurin, who just received a brand-new three-year contract extension worth up to \$96 million, ranks No. 52 following a career-best season. He had a career-high 13 touchdown receptions while helping lead the Commanders to the NFC Championship.

The 49ers' Bosa, the 2022 NFL Defensive Player of the Year and 2019 NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year, is rated No. 57, which is 30 spots lower than he was in 2024.

The veteran Heyward of the Steelers landed at No. 83 in 2025 after a bounce-back season that had him accumulate eight sacks, 12 tackles for loss, and a career-high 11 passes defended.

Despite never seeing much playing time at Ohio State, Burrow, a Buckeye graduate who spent two seasons with the program, earned the No. 6 spot on the list.

Continued On Page 8

Continued From Page 7

Stroud Says He And Day Had Rocky Relationship

Stroud, the Houston Texans quarterback, admitted that his relationship with Day wasn't always great during his time with the team.

Stroud told Greg Olsen on the Sept. 2 episode of "Greg Olsen's Youth, Inc." podcast that he and Day sometimes experienced tension in their relationship.

Stroud attributed the differences with Day to the average coach-player dynamic, believing that his experience with the coach was both positive and negative at times. But Day called Stroud into his office one day during the season and tried to work things out.

"Coach Day is the perfect example of the style that I wanted, and I didn't want," Stroud said. "And he'll tell you this – we didn't always have the best relationship."

"We didn't know because we didn't spend the time to know one another, so a lot of it was just miscommunication. But one day, out of nowhere, (Day) called me into his office, and we just had a talk for, I would say, six, seven hours."

The heart-to-heart conversation changed the entire course of their relationship, Stroud said.

"At the time, we really didn't get along," Stroud said. "I'm a starter at Ohio State. This is into the season. We were doing well. You'd think everything was fine, and deep down, we both had some things that we had to be men about and put on the table. After that, our relationship has been great. I consider him not only a great coach of mine but also a father figure and somebody who I look at as a friend, as a brother, and somebody I know I can call if I really need him, and he can do the same with me."

Judkins Signs With Browns

After a whirlwind offseason, former Ohio State running back Quinshon Judkins has officially inked an NFL contract.

Judkins, the 36th overall pick in the second round of the 2025 NFL draft, signed a four-year, fully guaranteed \$11.4 million contract with the Cleveland Browns on Sept. 6.

Judkins didn't participate in any of the Browns' training camp after a July 12 arrest for a domestic violence charge in Broward County, Fla. However, following a state attorney's office investigation, it was reported on Aug. 14 that Judkins wouldn't be facing criminal charges due to inconsistencies in the accuser's story.

He is still under NFL investigation for a possible personal conduct policy violation and could face suspension despite prosecutors denying the charges.

Judkins did not play in the Browns' season opener on Sept. 7 due to the ongoing NFL investigation into the domestic violence incident.

With the Browns and Judkins' agreement, Judkins became the last player who was selected in the 2025 NFL draft to sign a contract.

In his lone season at Ohio State in 2024, Judkins rushed for 1,060 yards and 14 scores on the ground, while adding 161 receiving yards and two touchdowns through the air.

OSU Doubles Shine In U.S. Open

Ohio State alums Robert Cash and JJ Tracy reached the doubles semifinals of the US Open played on Sept. 4.

The former Buckeyes defeated No. 10 Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni 6-3, 6-3 in the third round of the tournament.

In the quarterfinals, Cash and Tracy



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

DYNAMIC DUO — Former Ohio State players Robert Cash (left) and JJ Tracy (right) reached the semifinals of the U.S. Open before losing to No. 5 seed Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos in three sets on Sept. 4.

defeated Sadio Doumbia and Fabien Reboul, 6-1, 7-6 in a dominant performance on Sept. 3 to advance to the semifinals.

Cash and Tracy's run ended with four duos remaining when the pair fell to No. 5 Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos 3-6, 6-3, 1-6.

At Ohio State, Cash and Tracy won the national championship as a duo in 2024 and have already had a solid start to their professional careers. Cash and Tracy appeared in other grand slam events this year, including the French Open and Wimbledon, but lost in the first round of

the French Open and made it only as far as the second round at Wimbledon.

Fellow former Buckeye Matěj Vocel was also a quarterfinalist at the US Open. Vocel and his partner, Tomas Machac, advanced on Sept. 2 by defeating Marcus Willis and Karol Drzewiecki in three sets.

Vocel and Mahac then fell to No. 6 ranked Joe Salisbury and Neal Skupski in their Sept. 3 quarterfinals match, 6-7, 3-6.

McCullough Charged For Strangling Girlfriend

Former Ohio State walk-on long snapper Michael Roen McCullough was arrested by police and charged with a felony count of strangulation on Aug. 29, according to documents filed in the Franklin County Municipal Court.

On Sept. 2, Franklin County Municipal Court Judge Eileen Paley set McCullough's bond at \$50,000 and approved a protection order requiring him to stay away from the woman who made the allegations.

According to court documents, police first responded to a call at 9 p.m. on Aug. 29 regarding reports of a domestic violence incident in the 100 block of Marconi Boulevard.

McCullough's girlfriend reported that the altercation had occurred at 9:30 a.m. on Aug. 28, the day before the call was made. She told officers that after she and McCullough had an argument in their vehicle, McCullough punched her in the face multiple times, broke her phone and grabbed her by the throat while pushing her against the car window.

His girlfriend also told police she had no memory of the drive after the incident and regained consciousness after arriving home, court records stated. Officers noted she had a black eye, swollen lip and a bruise on the front of her throat.

McCullough was a member of the Buckeyes from 2018-20.

Football Coverage Up, Cost Of Upgrade Down

Ohio State football season continues, and BuckeyeSports.com, Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 24/7 website free to all subscribers, will be with you every day, from the opening win over Texas to the CFP national championship game in Miami on Jan. 19, 2026.

The next issue of BSB will be mailed on Sept. 16. 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. The always entertaining Staff Predictions appear the Friday before every game. Surprise: All BSB staffers picked OSU to beat Grambling State. Greg Wilson had the closest score at 63-0.

Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively, and it is more so during football season. Staff and readers also discuss games in real time on the Official Game Thread on the Forum.

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon

completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems. This electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way – frequently slowly – through the postal system and is also free to subscribers.

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Sayin Puts On A Show In Rout of Grambling

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A week after a slugfest in beating then-No. 1 Texas to open the season, the new top-ranked team had a breather, to say the least, and took advantage of a lower-division Grambling State to administer a 70-0 thrashing of the Tigers in Ohio Stadium on Sept. 6 behind the wizardry of Julian Sayin.

The redshirt freshman was almost perfect in his two quarters of play before a non-sellout crowd of 100,624 on a partly cloudy, 69-degree late afternoon.

He tossed two scores to Jeremiah Smith in the opening 19 minutes and completed his first 16 passes for 290 yards and four touchdowns as the Buckeyes (2-0) raced out to a 28-0 lead.

The 16 completions in a row to start a game is a Buckeye record. The previous record for completed passes in a row to start a game was Will Howard's 13 in the CFP title game in January.

C.J. Stroud holds the record for consecutive completions with 17 vs. Michigan State in 2021.

Sayin, Smith and other starters did not play in the second half. Sayin was 18 of 19 for 306 yards and those four TDs plus an interception on his 17th attempt.

Smith had five catches for 119 yards, and Carnell Tate added five catches for 69 yards as the Tigers (1-1), an FCS school, were overwhelmed.

Buckeye Blitz

Grambling State offered little resistance on the opening drive of the game when Ohio State showed tempo and imagination to take a 7-0 lead at 12:39 on a 47-yard strike to tight end Will Kacmarek.

Brandon Inniss returned the kickoff 17 yards to the 17. On the first play, he caught a pass for 12 yards to the 29, and two plays later, the receiver took a handoff from Sayin and rambled 8 yards for a first down at the 41. Tate gained 8 on a catch, and Smith's grab for 4 yards earned a first down at the Grambling 47 to set up the ball down the middle to the open Kacmarek at the 25, and he went untouched to cap the six-play, 83-yard series in 2:16.

The second score was considerably quicker, needing only 12 seconds for Smith to go 87 yards on the pass from Sayin at 8:54 after a Grambling punt.

Somehow, the best receiver in the country was alone at the OSU 45, and then it was off to the races and a spot in the record books.

It tied for the third-longest play from scrimmage in Ohio State history and was the second-longest pass play in program history behind a Kenny Guiton to Devin Smith 90-yard TD at California in 2013.

The Buckeyes went 65 yards on seven plays using 3:19 to go up 21-0 at the 4:10 mark.

Starting at the OSU 35 after a punt, James Peoples ran for 12, and tight end Jelani Thurman had a reception of 26 yards to the Grambling 27. Smith followed with a 6-yard catch. Tight end Max



SONNY BROCKWAY

WITHIN REACH — Carnell Tate had to stretch to make the catch for a 13-yard touchdown to make it 21-0 in the first quarter. He had five catches for 69 yards.

Klare's lone catch went for 7 yards to the 14, and Sayin went back to Kacmarek for 8 yards to get to the 6. The QB fumbled for a 7-yard loss, recovered by running back CJ Donaldson at the 13, before Tate made a back-shoulder catch along the left sideline in the end zone.

Sayin to that point was 10 for 10 for 218 yards, or 15 more yards than OSU gained as a team against Texas in the 14-7 win.

Grambling had a chance to get on the board, but Theodore Caballero sent a 36-yard field-goal attempt to the right with 14:24 remaining in the second quarter. The big play was a fourth-and-1 at the 50 when Andre Crews burst through the line for 19 yards.

The Buckeyes quickly responded on their next possession with an 80-yard drive that took six plays and 2:46 to go up 28-0 at 11:38 of the second quarter.

Donaldson ran for 9 before tight end Bennett Christian had a 1-yard catch and Smith a 13-yarder to the OSU 43. Tate then made a 40-yard catch to the 17, and Inniss hauled in a throw for 8 yards. On

the next play, Smith had a 9-yard catch for his second TD.

That made Sayin 15 of 15 for 289 yards. After Caleb Downs made an interception at the Grambling 21, Sayin had a 1-yard completion to Tate before ending his streak when he was intercepted at the 1 by Tyrell Raby.

OSU made it 35-0 with 57 seconds left in the half on a 2-yard run by Donaldson. It began with Tate's 7-yard catch at the OSU 45. Later, Peoples ran for 10 and Donaldson ripped off a 27-yard gain to the 9, and he then carried for 4 yards, 3 yards, and the score at the end of an eight-play, 62-yard 3:19 drive.

The Buckeyes outgained the Tigers 393 to 113 in the half.

More Of The Same

The third quarter did not start well for the Tigers. On the first play, Kayden McDonald forced a fumble, and Riley Pettijohn scooped it up and ran 23 yards to make it 42-0 just 10 seconds into the second half.

Lincoln Kienholz replaced Sayin on

OSU's first offensive series of the third quarter at 12:04, and he guided the Buckeyes 76 yards in 3:40 with the last of nine plays an 11-yard run for the first career TD for freshman Bo Jackson.

Peoples had runs of 9 and 8, and Bryson Rodgers had a 21-yard reception to the 11 prior to Jackson's score.

Pettijohn forced a fumble, Epi Sitanilei recovered it at the Tigers' 41, and three plays later, freshman Isaiah West ran up the middle from 12 yards for his first career score as well for a 56-0 lead at 6:16 of the third. On the previous play, Mylan Graham had a 23-yard catch.

A Thurman 4-yard catch from Kienholz made it 63-0 five seconds into the fourth quarter. The possession lasted 4:24 and used eight plays to go 53 yards. Jackson had five carries for 29 yards on the drive.

Freshman QB Tavien St. Clair made his first appearance midway through a drive that began with 10:39 to play and ended with the Buckeyes' lone punt.

Sam Dixon got the final score with a run from the 1 with 31 seconds left on a drive on which Jackson had a 51-yard run. Jackson also had carries of 7, 8 and 10 to total 76 yards during the series.

After the kickoff, Grambling ran one play for a yard to end the game.

Notes

OSU had 651 yards (377 passing, 274 rushing) to 166 for the Tigers (94 rushing, 72 passing). ... The Buckeyes led in first downs, 32-10. ... Kienholz was 6 of 7 for 71 yards and a TD and ran for 10 yards on two carries. St. Clair was 0 for 2. ... Jackson rushed for 108 yards and a TD on nine carries, all in the second half. ... Peoples gained 59 yards on eight runs, Donaldson ran for 45 yards on five rushes, and West went for 42 yards on eight attempts. ... Payton Pierce led the Buckeye defense with six tackles (two solo).

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If There Was A Letdown, It Didn't Show

Continued From Page 1

His first incompletion didn't come until the Buckeyes were in the red zone and Sayin targeted Carnell Tate on an out route in the end zone. The pass was picked off by Tyrell Raby after Sayin waited half a second too long to get rid of the ball.

Day was asked whether he was fine with Sayin throwing the interception in a blowout since he could see how the QB reacted after the first pick of his college career. Day said that while there is never an interception that he wants to see, he agreed that this game was the time to be able to learn from that.

"You never want to see an interception, but it's good to have some of those learning moments to understand how it all works," Day said. "When you can get some of these first-time things behind you, it's good. But that's it. No more interceptions. Not allowed."

Sayin also gave a very small glimpse into his scrambling ability as well.

He doesn't provide as much in the running game as some past Ohio State quarterbacks have, but he's also not someone who needs to stay in the pocket because he isn't a threat to tuck and run. He did that once against the Tigers, rolling to the right when he didn't have an open receiver and making it back to the line of scrimmage before going out of bounds.

Day was impressed with Sayin's awareness on the play and gave praise for it after the game.

"There was one time when (Grambling) did a nice job on defense of running to a coverage, and there was nothing there," Day said. "Then he scrambled and (didn't lose yards). That's good football. He didn't throw it into a crowd."

While Sayin's stats for the day look very good and he was hitting just about every receiver who was getting open, it's hard to draw any conclusions about a

quarterback when he's going up against an FCS defense. But Day said that even when the Buckeyes are going up against a completely mismatched opponent, they can still learn a lot from what they see out of their players.

"You have to go put it on the field, and regardless of your opponent, you can see good execution," Day said. "Whether it's penalties, assignments, spacing or timing, there's a crispness to anybody you play. I thought it looked right on the field. We'll have to watch the film and confirm that."

Day said on Sept. 3 that he wasn't planning on going from zero to 60 immediately with Sayin, but the game plan against Grambling State did seem like a decent increase in what they were asking of him, which Day confirmed after the game, saying they were "pushing the envelope."

Even so, Day said he saw a lot of positives from the quarterback and believes there is a lot to build on moving forward.

"There were some throws that we had guys pretty open, and then there were some pretty contested throws that I thought he put on the money," Day said. "The (interception), certainly, he wants to have back."

"But we were pushing the envelope a little bit to see how he would respond and throw those because this is all the first time for him. There's no time for learning on the job. We have to go. So we pushed the envelope, throwing the ball early, playing faster. We'll look at it, but you watch how quickly the ball comes out of his hand, you watch how accurate. Those were all positives for him."

Take A Deep Breath

It's been a long time since Day and the Ohio State football program have been able to take a breather like they probably did in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center the week of Sept. 6.

While many take issue with FBS teams



SONNY BROCKWAY

INSAYINLY GOOD — Redshirt freshman Julian Sayin started the game with a school-record 16 consecutive completions and was 18 of 19 in the first half for 306 yards and four touchdowns before watching the remainder of the 70-0 rout of Grambling State from the sideline.

putting FCS teams on the schedule, if any team could justify a game against Grambling in Week 2, it would be this Ohio State team.

Going back through the last seven games the Buckeyes had to play, they had to face off against No. 5 Indiana on Nov. 23 of the 2024 season and against Michigan in what was one of the more heated rivalry games in recent memory to finish the regular season.

After making the College Football Playoff, they had to get through No. 7 Tennessee in the first round, No. 1 Oregon in the Rose Bowl, No. 3 Texas in the Cotton Bowl and No. 5 Notre Dame in the national championship.

Finally, after Day got his team through what was already the toughest six-game stretch in college football history with his first national championship as bragging rights, he began this year with preseason No. 1 Texas and won that game, too, to beat six top-10 opponents in a span of seven games.

Day and the Buckeyes still took Grambling seriously. That much is obvious with

the 70-0 score they finished with. But the game planning and the preparation that go into playing the FCS Tigers, compared to what it takes to get ready for a top-10 team in college football, are two very different things.

The main thing the Buckeyes had to avoid in this game was falling flat due to a lack of respect for their opponent. Day said there was a time during the week of practice leading up to the game when he got slightly nervous about his players feeling that way, but it didn't last long.

"I was looking to see if we had a letdown in practice. Tuesday, there was a general exhale I was a little concerned about, but I think it was more the physicality of the (Texas) game than it was feeling that we have arrived," Day said. "They know this is a long, long season. Our guys look at last year and know this is going to be a long road all the way to December and January. We're nowhere near where we need to be."

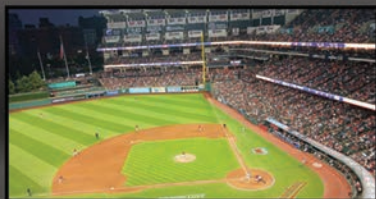
"Then, on Wednesday, we came in and had an excellent practice. There was good crispness to it, there was energy to

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FILE PHOTO

HERE'S TO YOU, MR. ROBINSON — Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson spoke to the Ohio State players about legendary Grambling State coach Eddie Robinson and his impact on college football. Robinson won nine HBCU national championships and totaled 408 victories.

it. Then I thought our 48 hours leading up to the game were pretty businesslike, so that was a good sign.”

All Ohio State had to do to beat the Tigers was play to its own strengths and work in the areas where it had an advantage as a team, which, in a game like that, was at almost every position. The focus during the week, while there surely was some on Grambling State, was likely more on the mistakes the Buckeyes made against Texas. Day said there were many of them to address.

“We have a lot of work to do – a ton,” Day said in his Sept. 2 press conference. “After the emotion of the game, you get back on the film, you get to work and you realize there’s so many things that we have to improve on. That’s where the focus is going to be, regardless of the opponent. We’re (going to be) able to build some confidence moving forward with

some guys who haven’t played a whole bunch of football.”

The Buckeyes have a little bit of a tougher challenge coming up on Sept. 13 with Ohio coming to Columbus. Fifth-year quarterback Parker Navarro will give OSU some good work against a rushing quarterback, which will come in handy in some games down the road.

Even though that is another game the Buckeyes should be able to handle easily, Smith said that they still aren’t taking it lightly.

“I’ve got respect for every opponent I go out there and play, no matter if it’s Grambling, Ohio next week – I still have respect for anybody, because it’s any given Saturday,” Smith said. “If we go out there and play around for a long time, they could end up being in a game with us, and we could end up losing. So I don’t take anyone lightly.”

Sayin added that the games against Grambling and Ohio, as well as the practices in between, are just more opportunities for Ohio State to get better and build toward another long season.

“The whole week we had been talking about, ‘Last week’s done with, and how can we improve, and how can we get better?’” he said. “This week of practice was very important for us, showing up in this game. I think we took a good step forward and got better. It’s all about, ‘How can we improve from Week 1 to Week 2 to Week 3? Just keep stacking days.’”

Robinson Recognized By OSU

Despite the blowout win by the Buckeyes, there was mutual respect between the two teams on the field.

That started with defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who took the time to talk to the Ohio State team about former Grambling State head coach Eddie Robinson, who played an important role in Johnson’s coaching career.

“Larry Johnson just spoke to the team and talked a little bit about the history at Grambling,” Day said on Sept. 3. “He spoke about Eddie Robinson and talked about his experience listening to Coach Robinson at a clinic. After that, he realized he wanted to be a coach because of the impact (Robinson) made on so many people, but also the game of football.”

Robinson coached at Grambling for 55 years, winning 408 games. In that time, he led the Tigers to 17 SWAC titles and nine HBCU football national champi-

onships while managing a streak of 27 consecutive winning seasons (1960-86). When Robinson retired, his 408 wins were the most ever, but he has since been passed by St. John’s John Gagliardi (489) and Penn State’s Joe Paterno (409).

Robinson is the namesake of Grambling State’s football stadium, and he has streets named after him in Grambling and in Baton Rouge, La., because of the mark he made in college football.

He provided countless opportunities for Black football players in a time when that wasn’t as common and sent over 200 players to the American, Canadian and National Football Leagues in his career, including Pro Football Hall of Famers Buck Buchanan, Willie Brown, Charlie Joiner and Willie Davis.

Because of the impact Robinson had on so many lives and on college football as a whole during his time as a head coach, Johnson and Day agreed that they should educate their players on the legendary figure.

“(Johnson) and I spoke before practice, and we thought it was good for our guys to understand that Coach Robinson and Grambling are a big brick in what college football is now,” Day said. “The game wouldn’t be where it is right now without him and without Grambling. I think it’s important for our guys to know what’s come before. We talk a lot about tradition at Ohio State, and Grambling has a great tradition as well.”

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Defense Sloppy Early, Still Manages Shutout

One week after a dominant performance in the team's season-opening win against Texas, Ohio State's defense was similarly productive against outmatched FCS foe Grambling State. The Buckeyes allowed just 166 yards and forced three turnovers in the 70-0 win over the Tigers.

As pretty as the end result looked, the Buckeyes looked sloppy at times in the first half, given the competition. On the first drive of the game, the Tigers were able to pick up an early first down after defensive lineman Eddrick Houston jumped in the neutral zone ahead of a third-and-3.

Junior safety Caleb Downs and cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. had back-to-back tackles for loss to get the Tigers off the field after the penalty. However, Grambling State managed to move the ball down the field two drives later as well.

On a third-and-3 from their own 32-yard line, the Tigers' offensive line created enough of a hole for running back Tre Bradford to pick up 9 yards and a first down. Ohio State had another chance to get off the field on the following fourth-and-1, but multiple defenders missed tackles and Grambling State runner Andre Crews picked up 19 yards.

After a 6-yard pickup on the next play, Houston jumped offsides again to give the Tigers a fresh set of downs at the Ohio State 20-yard line.

The Buckeyes eventually forced a field-goal attempt after Grambling quarterback C'zavian Teasett threw two straight incompletions, and their shutout remained intact when Tiger kicker Theodore Cabalero missed a 36-yard field goal.

In a game against a much less talented team, the Buckeyes' issues didn't cost them a point, let alone a loss, but according to head coach Ryan Day, the team is always trying to avoid self-inflicted wounds.

"The issues are always there," Day said. "It's not about the result. If we're looking at the scoreboard, we're looking at the wrong thing. This is about if we have a discipline issue, a lack of execution, an assignment issue, or a ball security issue. In a matchup game, it comes down to one play, so if we're going to look at the scoreboard after a game like this, we're setting ourselves up for failure. That's really bad. I don't think that's the way our guys are."

The Buckeye defense improved from there, though. On Grambling State's next drive, Downs showed why he's viewed by many as the best defender in college football when he lined up at the line of scrimmage and leaped up to make a high-light-reel interception on Teasett.

Downs' interception opened the floodgates for Buckeye defenders, because on the first play from scrimmage of the second half, defensive tackle Kayden McDonald forced a fumble, and freshman linebacker Riley Pettijohn was at the right place at the right time to scoop it up and return the loose ball for a 23-yard touchdown.

The Buckeyes seemed to have another turnover when redshirt freshman cornerback Aaron Scott jumped in front of Grambling State receiver Nicholas How-

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

ard and nearly had an interception. A replay revealed Scott wasn't able to maintain possession of the ball as he went to the ground, but the Buckeyes still forced a punt shortly thereafter.

The turnover party continued for the Buckeyes in the third quarter when Pettijohn forced Crews to fumble, and freshman defensive end Epi Sitanilei was there to recover.

With the game well in hand after the Buckeyes forced two quick turnovers in the third quarter, the Tigers struggled to find any offensive rhythm. Instead, a plethora of Buckeye youngsters were able to salt away the victory by giving up only 53 total yards in the second half.

"It was good to get some of our depth in there," Day said of his defense. "When you put depth in, sometimes you expect a significant drop-off, and that didn't happen. That was a good sign."

Bucks Gash Grambling With Ground Game

Not surprisingly, Ohio State was more productive on the ground than it had been in Week 1 when it averaged just 2.3 yards per carry against the Longhorns.

Against the Tigers, the Buckeyes totaled 274 rushing yards on 38 carries for an average of 7.2 yards. Although the Buckeyes' offensive attack was mainly the Julian Sayin show in the first half, the Buckeyes leaned heavily on their ground game during the last 35 minutes of game time.

The Buckeye run game really got going on the team's final drive of the first half after Sayin completed two passes for 16 yards. With the ball on the Grambling State 46-yard line, the Buckeyes needed only one run from sophomore back James Peoples and four from CJ Donaldson Jr. to pick up the remaining yards and get in the end zone. The drive was capped by a 2-yard score from Donaldson.

The Buckeyes' running game found a second gear in the second half. Ohio State gained 187 rushing yards on 25 carries with many of its backup players in the game.

Freshman running back Bo Jackson was not only the primary ball carrier for the Buckeyes in the second half but the team's leading rusher in the game.

Jackson ended the game with 108 yards and a touchdown on only nine carries. Although the game had been long decided, the four-star running back had his best play on a third-and-3 run in the fourth quarter. On the play, Jackson picked up key blocks from offensive linemen Jake Cook, Jayvon McFadden and Devontae Armstrong and used his speed to surge past two Grambling State defenders before being tackled after a 51-yard gain.

Jackson was the Buckeyes' leading rusher, but Donaldson and Peoples also



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN A RUSH — A 70-0 blowout of Grambling State allowed Ohio State to go deep into its backfield with three players getting at least eight carries, including James Peoples (20) with 59 yards on eight runs. Bo Jackson led the way with 108 yards on nine rushes, all in the second half.

had efficient performances. Peoples finished the game with 59 yards on eight carries, while Donaldson had 45 yards on five carries.

The competition may not have been as stiff as it was the previous week, but Day was encouraged by what he saw from his running backs and also thinks the team can use the game as a good learning experience.

"I thought that everyone was running hard. But what we want to see is guys breaking tackles and creating explosive runs, and I think there were some in there," Day said. "There are some other ones that maybe we can look at to say, 'OK, how can we do this a little better? How can we break some of these tackles as we're getting to the second level?'"

"But when you're a running back, you're not tackled a bunch in the preseason. CJ is the most experienced out of the group. James hasn't run a ton in a game, and Bo and Isaiah certainly haven't in college games. It's going to be great to get on this film and use this as a learning ex-

perience."

Tight Ends Shine As Receivers

Ohio State's big passing day couldn't have been possible without strong performances from the tight ends. Buckeye tight ends Will Kacmarek, Jelani Thurman, Max Klare and Bennett Christian all had catches on the day and combined for 107 receiving yards and two touchdowns on seven catches.

Kacmarek, who more so than his counterparts is known for his proficiency as a blocker, made the first splash as a receiver. On a first-and-10 from the Grambling State 47, Kacmarek was able to slip past Tigers defenders with a simple go route over the middle. A perfect pass from Sayin hit Kacmarek right in stride, and the Ohio transfer was able to coast into the end zone for his first touchdown with the Buckeyes.

"Will is a great tight end, and that was a great rep by him, great catch," Sayin said after the game. "And our whole tight

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

The Ohio State passing offense seemed to find its stride against Grambling after a quiet performance in its 14-7 victory over Texas in Week 1.

The Ohio State air attack was particularly effective in the opening half of the Buckeyes' 70-0 victory over the Tigers. Quarterback Julian Sayin threw a touchdown pass in each of the Buckeyes' first four drives as he carved up the Tigers' defense with ease.

Sayin opened the game with 16 straight completions before throwing an interception for his lone incompletion of the day. The Ohio State gunslinger finished his afternoon a whopping 18 of 19 with 306 passing yards and four passing touchdowns, while backup Lincoln Kienholz added another 71 yards and a score through the air. Between Sayin and Kienholz, the Buckeye quarterbacks completed passes to 10 different receivers and threw just two incompletions the entire afternoon. Also, unlike the sloppy receiving showing against the Longhorns, there were zero drops from Buckeye pass catchers on Sept. 6.

However, the credit can't solely belong to the quarterbacks and receivers. Ohio State's offensive line consistently gave its quarterbacks ample time to throw and stay comfortable in the pocket. The Buckeyes didn't just click through the air. In total, Ohio State's offense had 10 total touchdowns – five passing, four rushing, and one defensive – as the Buckeyes put up 35 points in each half.

What Didn't Work

In a 70-0 blowout, it's tough to say that there was an area of the game where Ohio State truly struggled against Grambling State, but, as head coach Ryan Day said he preaches to his players on a weekly basis, "the issues are always there."

Early in Ohio State's dominant performance, penalties hindered the Buckeye defense from getting off the field.

Sophomore defensive tackle Eddrick Houston was the culprit of Ohio State's struggles. Houston had two offside penalties that extended two separate Tiger drives – one of which ended up being the Tigers' most productive drive of the game, gaining 56 yards.

Outside of the penalties, the Buckeyes' defensive tackle was still a nonfactor. Houston did not record any statistics despite Ohio State's overall stout performance along the defensive line that held Grambling State to just 94 rushing yards and 166 yards of total offense.

Play Of The Game

Ohio State opened its pummeling of Grambling State red-hot. The Buckeyes scored in just six plays on their first drive of the game, and the trend continued into their next series.

After a Grambling State punt, Ohio State opened its second possession backed up on its own 13-yard line. The Buckeyes opted to pass on the opening play of the drive, and with all day to throw, Sayin stepped up in the pocket and delivered a pass to a wide-open receiver in Jeremiah Smith down the left sideline that traveled 32 yards in the air. The sophomore phenom wideout then took the pass the rest of the way for an 87-yard touchdown, extending Ohio State's lead to 14 with just under nine minutes to play in the first quarter.

The 87-yard pass and catch between Sayin and Smith was the second-longest passing play in program history, trailing only former Ohio State quarterback Kenny Guiton and wide receiver Devin Smith's 90-yard connection against California on Sept. 14, 2013.

— Sam Cipriani

end room, we're very deep at tight end, and they all have different skill sets, but they have a lot of impact on our offense. So that was a great catch by him."

The Buckeyes' depth at tight end was on display later on in the first quarter when third-stringer Jelani Thurman separated from Tiger defenders with a corner route. Once again, Sayin threw an accurate ball to complete the 26-yard catch.

Later on in that drive, Sayin completed two more passes to Buckeye tight ends, including one that went for 7 yards to Max Klare and the other that went for 8 yards to Kacmarek. The Buckeye tight ends weren't as active as receivers the rest of the game, but Thurman, who finished with three catches for 44 yards and a touchdown, had a 4-yard score on a pass from backup quarterback Lincoln Kienholz to begin the fourth quarter.

Although the tight ends were reliable receivers against Grambling State, they played a bigger role as blockers in their season-opening win over Texas. According to Day, the group's versatility is an important weapon for the offense.

"It can be a weapon for us moving forward," Day said. "It gives us a lot more flexibility, not only in the run game, but also in the passing game, spreading you out in play-action, in multiple groupings, which we haven't done as much in the past. We've been mostly 11 (personnel) we've added 12 (personnel), but now you're seeing us do a little 13 (personnel)."

"We probably have more flexibility than we had in the past with these groupings. They're all athletic, and they all can do multiple things. As we start to build what this team looks like on offense, the tight ends are going to be a big part of it, as you can see."

Backups Gain Experience In Second Half

Ohio State's dominant performance meant the team was able to play its backup players for the entire second half, and it wasn't just players such as Jackson and

Pettijohn who made the most of their chances.

At quarterback, Kienholz had an efficient performance in the second half. The sophomore didn't get many opportunities to throw the ball, but he still completed 6 of 7 passes for 71 yards and a touchdown.

Kienholz didn't often throw the ball deep down the field, but he flashed his accuracy and arm strength on a 21-yard completion to sophomore receiver Bryson Rodgers in the third. Rodgers created separation on the play shortly after the ball was snapped with a slant route, but with a safety crashing down on the route, Kienholz still had to fit the ball into a tight window.

Rodgers wasn't the only rotational receiver who made an impact. Redshirt freshman Mylan Graham had a catch for 23 yards, and senior David Adolph also had a reception for 8 yards.

C.J. Hicks, who recently moved from linebacker to defensive end, got on the stat sheet with two tackles, one of which went for a loss, and freshman safety Faheem Delane also logged two tackles.

For a Buckeye team that had question marks about its defensive line depth, Zion Grady's performance was a strong sign. The top-100 recruit logged two tackles and the first sack of his career. Grady's sack came in the third quarter on a third-and-10 when the Tigers attempted to block Grady with a receiver, and the freshman quickly got loose before throwing Grambling State quarterback Ashton Frye to the ground for a 10-yard loss.

According to defensive end Caden Curry, Grady's big play is in part a product of a solid first offseason.

"Zion is a great player," Curry said. "He goes against the best every single day. He's definitely been coachable, and he's definitely been somebody that looks up to me and (Kenyatta Jackson Jr.) as leaders, and he just puts the work in. You definitely see it out there. He earned it."



SONNY BROCKWAY

SWARMING — The Ohio State defense was stingy in the 70-0 win against Grambling State on Sept. 6 as Tigers running back Tre Bradford found. He was met with a wall of resistance led by defensive end C.J. Hicks. Grambling gained 94 yards on 33 carries for a 2.8 average.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 70, Grambling State 0

Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Jeremiah Smith on identifying and fixing the flaws Ohio State found against Texas: "Like (Ohio State head coach Ryan) Day says, the issues are always there. We won the game, but there was always stuff we needed to fix throughout that game. That's what we came in and did this week as well – fixed the issues and went to practice and put it all on the field."

Grambling State head coach Mickey Joseph on his team and pregame comments about the Tigers being outmatched: "First of all, I want to say I'm proud of my players. I'm proud of my coaches. I'm proud of the support staff. And I'm also proud of our band because some people took my comments out of context last week, what I said about (the bands competing). But what was I supposed to do? Come up here and say, 'Hey, we're going to give them everything we have.' If you know me personally, you know what I told my boys. We were going to fight. But this playing field is not even."

Day on Grambling State's performance: "I have a lot of respect for Coach (Joseph), and I thought their team played hard in this game. They were outmatched talent-wise for sure. He expressed that. I give them respect for playing hard and playing for four quarters, all the way to the end, a lot of credit to how hard they played."

Day on throwing the ball downfield early: "Early in the game, it was good to push the ball down the field. (Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin) really had some accurate throws. The ball came out on time, the spacing and timing were good. The protection was good."

Sayin on the passing game opening up: "I think we had a great scheme in our passing attack, and the coaches did a great job of dialing up some great plays, and the offensive line blocked well, receivers caught the ball well, running backs ran hard, and we had some great plays. But (there were) a couple of mistakes we have to clean up."

Day on putting more responsibility on Sayin's plate: "(Against Texas), we



SONNY BROCKWAY

MIXING IT UP — Senior defensive end Caden Curry likes the way new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia has presented opponents different schemes to confuse them. It has worked so far with the Buckeyes allowing just seven points total in two games.

saw a lot more RPOs, you saw a lot of things coming out of his hand. (Against Grambling), we actually started a drive inside the 10- or 20-yard line when we took a shot early and hit it. We were really forcing the issue down there. We're putting it in his hands to manage the game, and I thought he did a nice job."

Sayin on his 16 straight completions to start the game: "I don't think I've done that before, but when you get those completions racking up, it builds confidence. Then the energy from the other players in the offense, when they start seeing we're moving the ball down the field like that, the other guys are bringing energy."

Sayin on how much it helps to have such talented skill-position players around him: "It's a huge impact having the receivers that we do here, having the offensive line being able to protect for that long, and then having the running

backs who not only protect, but then also get out in the route tree. It was awesome to see those receivers make some great plays. They were running great routes, and they're always getting open."

Smith on his mentality and avoiding drops: "I was very hard on myself when I dropped those two passes (in the Texas game). I don't even want to say what I said to myself in my head, but I'm very hard on myself, and I don't like dropping the football. I don't like making excuses for myself, but one of the things I just have to do is catch the damn football."

Smith on what made him so excited for Ohio State true freshman running back Bo Jackson, who scored his first career touchdown and ran for 108 yards: "He's a tough, tough running back. He's fast. He can do it all. He and I were working out together in the offseason, and I was like, 'Yeah, this guy is the next great running back to come through here.'"

Ohio State senior defensive end Caden Curry on the different fronts and groupings the defense can put on the field: "It definitely is hard for an offense to figure out, and it's fun for us to play in because we get to do so many different things and showcase our talents at different levels. It's just one of those things you get to do that you didn't think would be fun at first, but now it's definitely something that we want to do every week."

Curry on Ohio State junior defensive tackle Kayden McDonald's play and work ethic: "He's always putting his work in, day in, day out, just seeing how he's been working all camp and all spring. He's definitely put the work in, I feel like it's just his time and his moment. He's making the play when his number is called."

Joseph on Ohio State's roster and future: "They have a really good football team over there. I'm sure they're going to be playing after January. I know what they look like. I won (a national championship) at LSU, so I know what they look like."

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 70, Grambling State 0

Sept. 6, 2025 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
GRAMBLING STATE	0	0	0	0	0
OHIO STATE	21	14	21	14	70

First Quarter

- OSU** – Kacmarek, 47-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 12:39.
OSU – Smith, 87-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 8:54.
OSU – Tate, 13-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 4:10.

Second Quarter

- OSU** – Smith, 9-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 11:38.
OSU – Donaldson Jr., 2-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:57.

Third Quarter

- OSU** – Pettijohn, 23-yard fumble return (Fielding kick), 14:50.
OSU – Jackson, 11-yard rush (Courville kick), 8:24.
OSU – West, 12-yard rush (Courville kick), 6:16.

Fourth Quarter

- OSU** – Thurman, 4-yard pass from Kienholz (Courville kick), 14:55.
OSU – Dixon, 1-yard rush (Courville kick), 0:31.
Att. – 100,624

Weather – Cloudy, 69 F

Team Statistics		
	GSU	OSU
First Downs	10	32
Rushing	6	14
Passing	2	17
Penalty	2	1
Rushes-Yards	33-94	38-274
Passing Yards	72	377
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	11-22-1	24-28-1
Offensive Plays	55	66
Total Net Yards	166	651
Third Down Efficiency	3-14	5-7
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1	1-1
Punts-Avg.	7-41.7	1-45.0
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	1-0
Penalties	6-40	3-15
Time of Possession	29:05	30:55

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **GSU:** Crews 5-38; Bradford 7-20; McClendon Jr. 5-15; Phillips 3-14; Teasett 4-11; Eaton Jr. 4-0; Frye 5-(-4). **OSU:** Jackson 6-108; Peoples 8-59; Donaldson Jr. 5-45; West 8-42; Kienholz 2-10; Dixon 3-9; Inniss 1-8; Sayin 2-(-7).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **GSU:** Teasett 9-15-1-55-0; Frye 2-7-0-17-0. **OSU:** Sayin 18-19-1-306-4; Kienholz 6-7-0-71-1; St. Clair 0-2-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **GSU:** Knighten 3-13; Jones Jr. 2-19; George 2-16; Bradford 2-9; T. Williams 1-8; Eaton Jr. 1-7. **OSU:** Smith 5-119; Tate 5-69; Thurman 3-44; Inniss 3-29; Kacmarek 2-55; Rodgers 2-22; Graham 1-23; Adolph 1-8; Klare 1-7; Christian 1-1.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **GSU:** Schifano 7-41.7-50. **OSU:** McLarty 1-45.0-45.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **GSU:** None. **OSU:** Inniss 1-8.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **GSU:** T. Williams 1-14. **OSU:** Inniss 1-17.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **GSU:** None. **OSU:** Pettijohn 1-23; Sitanilei 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **GSU:** Raby 1-0. **OSU:** Downs 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **GSU:** None. **OSU:** Grady 1-10; Curry 1-1.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **GSU:** Sykes 0.5-1; Washington 0.5-0. **OSU:** Curry 2-2; Grady 1-10; Alford 1-2; McDonald 1-2; Downs 1-1; Hicks 1-1; Styles Jr. 1-1; Styles 0.5-1; Igbinosun 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **GSU:** Raby 5-1-6; Talley 4-2-6; C. Williams 2-3-5; Guillard 3-1-4; Washington 2-2-4; Banks 2-2-4; Horton 3-0-3; Davis 2-1-3; Q. Wilson 2-1-3; Cage 2-0-2; Jordan 2-0-2; D. Williams 1-1-2; Bush 1-1-2; McWain 1-1-2; Sykes 0-2-2; J. Johnson 1-0-1; Darling 1-0-1; Morgan 1-0-1; Lizer 1-0-1; M. Johnson 1-0-1; Hoff 1-0-1; Francis 1-0-1; Barley 1-0-1; Nnakenyi 1-0-1; Sherrod 0-1-1; Robinson 0-1-1; Smith 0-1-1; Franklin 0-1-1; Smartt 0-1-1; Draper 0-1-1. **OSU:** Pierce 2-4-6; Curry 4-0-4; McClain 4-0-4; Reese 1-3-4; Stover 3-0-3; McDonald 2-1-3; Styles 2-1-3; Styles Jr. 2-0-2; Pettijohn 2-0-2; Delane 2-0-2; West 2-0-2; Grady 2-0-2; Igbinosun 1-1-2; Downs 1-1-2; Hicks 1-1-2; Alford 1-1-2; Mensah 0-2-2; Lee 0-2-2; Tate 1-0-1; Mickens 1-0-1; Carter 1-0-1; Hartford 1-0-1; Kirks 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **GSU:** Teasett, Eaton Jr., T. Williams, Mahoney-Bean, Vigil, Bethea, Meeks, Owens, George, Goward, Knighten, Talley, Robinson, Washington, Franklin, C. Williams, Draper, Cage, Darling, M. Johnson, Raby, Jordan, Jones Jr., Davis, D. Williams, Crews, J. Johnson, Monsanto, Frye, T. Wilson, Schifano, Q. Wilson, Bride, Banks, McCormick, Guillard, McClendon Jr., McWain, Linzer, Barley, Smartt, Pierre-Charles, Williams II, Brown, Therence, Sykes, McConnell, Hoff, Bernard, Caballero, Miles Jr., Boston, Ross, Blount, Phillips, Eagilin III, Morgan, Bradford, J. Scott, Moss, Duplessis, Smith, Joseph, Frazier, Horton, Nnakenyi, Scott, Francis, Bush, C. Scott, Sherrod. **OSU:** Inniss, Sayin, Tate, Peoples, Smith, Montgomery, Siereveld, Daniels, Hinzman, Tshabola, Klare, Styles, Igbinosun, McClain, Downs, Styles Jr., Mathews Jr., Reese, Curry, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald, Delane, Porter, Hicks, West, Donaldson Jr., Rodgers, Atkinson, Thurman, Grady, Nelson Jr., Alford, McLarty, Pettijohn, Stover, Dixon, Jackson, Howard, Pierce, Roker, Kienholz, West, Lee, Miles, Johnson, Hayes, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Griffin, Ferlmann, Sitanilei, Rudzinski, Scott Jr., Graham, DelSignore, Mickens, Smith Jr., Kirks, Kema, VanSickle, Sanchez, Padilla, Terry, Moore, Bell, McFadden, De. Armstrong, Lowe, Cook, Onianwa, Adolph, Roberts, Williams, Christian, Lennon, Odom, Kacmarek, St. Clair, Hartford, Mensah, Carter, Maxwell, Malone, Courville.

Season Statistics

2025 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Aug. 30	(3) TEXAS (1)	W, 14-7	107,524
Sept. 6	(1) GRAMBLING STATE	W, 70-0	100,624
Sept. 13	(1) OHIO	7 p.m.	
Sept. 27	at Washington	TBA	
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	TBA	
Oct. 11	at Illinois (9)	TBA	
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	TBA	
Nov. 1	PENN STATE (2)	TBA	
Nov. 8	at Purdue	TBA	
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	
Nov. 29	at Michigan (23)	12 p.m.	

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

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	43	26
Rushing	18	16
Passing	22	8
Penalty	3	2
Average Per Game/Rush	175.5	130.0
Average Per Game/Pass	251.5	121.0
Total Offense	854	502
Total Plays	120	122
Average Per Game	427.0	251.0
Average Per Play	7.1	4.1
Penalties-Yards	5-30	12-90
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	2-2
Third Down Efficiency	8-19	8-28
Percentage	42%	29%
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-3	2-6
Percentage	67%	33%
Sacks-Yards	3-12	0-0
Time Of Possession Avg.	31:30	28:30

Score								
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.	
Ohio State	21	21	21	21	0	84	42.0	
Opponents	0	0	0	7	0	7	3.5	

Individual Statistics						
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
CJ Donaldson Jr.	24	112	4.7	2	27	
Bo Jackson	9	108	12.0	1	51	
James Peoples	18	79	4.4	0	12	
Isaiah West	8	42	5.3	1	12	
Lincoln Kienholz	2	10	5.0	0	8	
Sam Dixon	2	9	3.0	1	6	
Brandon Inniss	1	8	8.0	0	8	
Julian Sayin	4	-5	-1.3	0	1	
Team	3	-12	-4.0	0	0	
OSU Totals	72	351	4.9	5	51	
OPP Totals	70	260	3.7	0	19	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Julian Sayin	31	39	79.5	432	5-1	209.7
Lincoln Kienholz	6	7	85.7	71	1-0	218.1
Tavien St. Clair	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	37	48	77.1	503	6-1	202.2
OPP Totals	28	52	53.8	242	1-2	91.6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	11	162	14.7	2	87
Carnell Tate	7	118	16.9	2	40
Brandon Inniss	5	37	7.4	0	12
Jelani Thurman	3	44	14.7	1	26
Will Kacmarek	2	55	27.5	1	47
Bennett Christian	2	7	3.5	0	6
Max Klare	2	18	9.0	0	11
Bryson Rodgers	2	22	11.0	0	21
David Adolph	1	8	8.0	0	8
CJ Donaldson Jr.	1	9	9.0	0	9
Mylan Graham	1	23	23.0	0	23
OSU Totals	37	503	13.6	6	87
OPP Totals	28	242	8.6	1	32

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
CJ Donaldson Jr.	2	-	-	-	-	12
Carnell Tate	2	-	-	-	-	12
Jeremiah Smith	2	-	-	-	-	12
Jayden Fielding	-	8-8	-	-	-	8
Will Kacmarek	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jelani Thurman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Sam Dixon	1	-	-	-	-	6
Riley Pettijohn	1	-	-	-	-	6
Bo Jackson	1	-	-	-	-	6
Isaiah West	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jackson Courville	-	4-4	-	-	-	4
OSU Totals	12	12-12	-	-	-	84

OPP Totals	1	1-1	-	-	0-1	7
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FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
OSU Totals	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0
OPP Totals	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-1

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	6	260	43.3	0	55
Nick McLarty	1	45	45.0	0	45
OSU Totals	7	305	43.6	0	55
OPP Totals	11	477	43.4	0	52

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
J. Mathews Jr.	1	5	5.0	0	5
Caleb Downs	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	2	5	2.5	0	5
OPP Totals	1	0	0.0	0	0

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	1	8	8.0	0	8
OSU Totals	1	8	8.0	0	8
OPP Totals	1	3	3.0	0	3

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	1	17	17.0	0	17
OSU Totals	1	17	17.0	0	17
OPP Totals	2	29	14.5	0	15

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Arvell Reese	5	8	13	1.0-1	1.0-1
Jaylen McClain	9	3	12	0-0	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	5	7	12	0.5-0	0-0
Kayden McDonald	3	8	11	1.0-2	0-0
Caden Curry	5	5	10	2.0-2	1.0-1
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	5	4	9	1.0-1	0-0
Sonny Styles	4	4	8	0.5-1	0-0
Payton Pierce	2	5	7	0-0	0-0
Caleb Downs	4	3	7	1.0-1	0-0
C.J. Hicks	2	3	5	1.0-1	0-0
Garrett Stover	3	1	4	0-0	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	3	-	3	0-0	0-0
Eddrick Houston	-	3	3	0-0	0-0
K. Jackson Jr.	-	3	3	0-0	0-0
TJ Alford	1	1	2	1.0-2	0-0
Zion Grady	2	-	2	1.0-10	1.0-10
Faheem Delane	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Riley Pettijohn	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Eli Lee	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Bryce West	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Eric Mensah	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Will Smith Jr.	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Beau Atkinson	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Leroy Roker	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Dominic Kirks	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Devin Sanchez	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Malik Hartford	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Carnell Tate	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Jarquez Carter	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	64	68	132	10.0-21	3.0-12
OPP Totals	62	66	128	2.0-2	0-0
Fumbles Forced:	McDonald, Pettijohn.				
Fumbles Recovered:	Pettijohn, Sitanilei.				

Bobcats Face Tall Task Against Buckeyes

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

With a 70-0 win against Grambling on Sept. 6, the Buckeyes got to take a deep breath for the first time in their last eight games. Now they look forward to playing a MAC opponent with Ohio University coming to town.

But don't sit back too far on Sept. 13 against the Bobcats. Ohio State should still cruise to a win, but it will be a bit more of a challenge than the Tigers provided the week before.

The Bobcats have already matched up against a Big Ten opponent this season, so there is an easier way to measure the competition. They nearly took down Rutgers in both teams' opening weeks, losing 34-31 thanks to multiple special teams blunders that made Ohio State fans wonder if Parker Fleming took the trip down 33 East to look for a new job after the 2023 season.

But the Bobcats competed through 60 full minutes against the Scarlet Knights, who were picked 13th out of 18 teams in the pre-season Big Ten poll.

First-year head coach Brian Smith chose to see the good in the loss.

"I think the thing that's really great is that there are a lot of guys in that room right now who see how they missed this opportunity to win the game and truly believe that they could have and should have won that game at the end," Smith said.

While it should still be easy for the Buckeyes to get past the Bobcats on Sept. 13, they are no Grambling State when it comes to the talent on the field.

Ohio is coming off a MAC championship season, and that is largely due to quarterback Parker Navarro. The senior started all 13 games and threw for 2,423 yards and 13 touchdowns while throwing 11 picks. Where he provided a lot of value was on the ground, running for 1,054 yards and 18 scores.

Smith thinks very highly of Navarro's play-making ability.

"His ability to make plays with his feet

and the confidence he has in his own ability and the faith he has in his teammates is really special," Smith said after the Week 1 loss. "He's very democratic. He's just spreading it around."

In the loss, Navarro completed 21 of 31 passes for 239 yards and three touchdowns while running for 93 yards and another score. He struggled a little more against West Virginia with three interceptions, but he still was able to lead the Bobcats to a 17-10 win in Week 2 with 247 yards and a touchdown on 22-of-31 passing. He also added 87 yards rushing.

He is throwing to returning starter Chase Hendricks, who had nine catches for 115 yards in Week 1, both career highs for the preseason All-MAC pass catcher who moved into the slot this year. Max Rodarte and Rodney Harris II will also get starting reps for the Bobcats.

"Moving Chase into the slot was great for him," Smith said. "It fit his style of play really well. The thing Chase does really well is he can make plays with the ball after the catch. I think he's really grown as he's moved inside and has a better understanding of the offense fully now."

But while the receivers can be weapons for Navarro, it's the tight ends, Jake Bruno and Mason Williams, who made it into the end zone when they played against Big Ten competition. Bruno had two catches for 27 yards and two scores, while Williams had two receptions for 10 yards and a touchdown. Caleb Gossett also contributed two catches for 22 yards.

"I like how hard they play," Smith said of the tight ends. "They're tough, physical kids. I was extremely happy for Bruno, because he's a tough, hardworking kid. He didn't get a whole lot of opportunities last year to get a ton of catches, and to get two touchdowns in the first game, I was excited for him."

Only one starter, left guard Davion Weatherspoon, returns from last season's conference champion offensive line. He will be flanked by left tackle Shedrick Rhodes Jr. and

Get To Know ... Ohio

- **2025 Record:** 1-1, 0-0 MAC.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Multiple; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters returning – Offense 4, Defense 2, Specialists 0.
- **Head Coach:** Brian Smith, 1st year at Ohio, 1-1.
- **Series History:** 7th meeting; Ohio State leads 6-0.
- **School Facts:** Location – Athens, Ohio; Enrollment – 29,625; Nickname – Bobcats; Colors – Green and White; Conference – MAC; Stadium – Frank Solich Field at Peden Stadium (Surface – Field Turf; Capacity – 27,000).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Parker Navarro	27	180	6.7	1
Sieh Bangura	36	152	4.2	1
Duncan Brune	15	51	3.4	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Parker Navarro	43-62	69.4	486	4-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Chase Hendricks	17	236	13.9	1
Max Rodarte	5	81	16.2	0
Eian Pugh	4	51	12.8	0
Caleb Gossett	5	39	7.8	0
Jake Bruno	2	27	13.5	2

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 24.0
Rushing Yards Per Game – 191.5
Passing Yards Per Game – 243.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 434.5

2025 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 28	at Rutgers	L, 34-31
Sept. 6	WEST VIRGINIA	W, 17-10
Sept. 13	at Ohio State	7 p.m.
Sept. 20	GARDNER-WEBB	3:30 p.m.
Sept. 27	BOWLING GREEN	TBA
Oct. 4	at Ball State	Noon
Oct. 18	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	3:30 p.m.
Oct. 25	at Eastern Michigan	TBA
Nov. 4	MIAMI (OH)	7 p.m.
Nov. 11	at Western Michigan	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 18	UMASS	7 p.m.
Nov. 28	at Buffalo	Noon
Dec. 6	MAC Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Jack Fries	6	9	15	0.5-0	0-0
Michael Molnar	3	11	14	2.5-11	1.5-9
Adonis Williams	6	8	14	1-4	0-0
DJ Walker	10	3	13	1-1	0-0
Michael Mack II	6	2	8	0-0	0-0
Tank Pearson	5	3	8	0-0	0-0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 22.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 109.5
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 215.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 324.5

center Nick Marinaro, with right guard Trent Allen and right tackle Jordon Jones also taking starting reps on the line.

The line helped running back Sieh Bangura get off to a good start. Bangura, who started his career at Ohio before transferring to Minnesota and transferring back for 2025, ran for 86 yards on 16 attempts against Rutgers and followed that with 20 carries for 66 yards against the Mountaineers.

Ohio's defense had success stopping the run against the Mountaineers, allowing just 72 rushing yards. It was a successful game plan that helped OU outgain WVU 429 yards to 250 in the contest.

"The job our defense did, the plan that they had to knock out the run was awesome," Smith said. "I think what helped them, too, was then being able to apply pressure when they did have to throw."

In the front four on the defensive side of the ball, the Bobcats could be rotating a few different players into the game after losing so much production the team had last season.

"A lot of D-linemen will play," Smith said. "They'll be up for fairly good rotation. I think when you have a lot of new players, what tends to happen is once the lights go on, you're going to see who gets better, who gets worse, and who rises to those challenges."

He was overall pleased with how the front handled the challenge of the Scarlet Knights in the opening week, including the linebackers in that group.

"I think a lot of them progressed a lot throughout the game," Smith said on Ohio's defensive front. "Especially the two starting linebackers, Michael (Molnar) and Jack (Fries). When you look at how they played in the first half and then how they continued to play in the second half, I think they grew a lot throughout the game."

As a whole, the Bobcats finished with five tackles for loss and one sack in that game. In Week 2, they had seven tackles for loss and four sacks.

Defensive end Anas Luqman, nose tackle Pius Odjugo, defensive tackle Nehemiah Dukes and Kaci Seegars, who roams at the Jack position for the Bobcats, have combined for 23 tackles in the first two games.

In the secondary will be cornerbacks Michael Mack II and Tank Pearson along with safeties DJ Walker and Adonis Williams and nickel Jalen Thomeson. They have yet to force a turnover this season.

"The thing that I think has been really good for us the last three years is how complementary we've been offensively and defensively, where our defense has been very good at stopping the run and eliminating explosive plays," Smith said. "Offensively, we've been very efficient, and we really dominated the clock, and that helps keep them off the field."

Ultimately, the Bobcats are visiting Columbus for this game for the same reason that the Tigers did the previous week. They are getting \$1.9 million from the Buckeyes, more than likely to get beaten badly on a national stage.

Lucky for them, the game will be on Peacock at 7 p.m., which many Buckeye fans will probably refuse to get a subscription to for just one game.

But Smith is happy about the good start the Bobcats have gotten off to and is just hoping to see continued growth from his players moving forward.

"It's a great reflection of the coaching staff that we have (and) the job that they do mentoring and developing our players," Smith said. "And then the respect everyone has for the culture here that's been built for a long time. I'm so extremely proud of the group and the staff."



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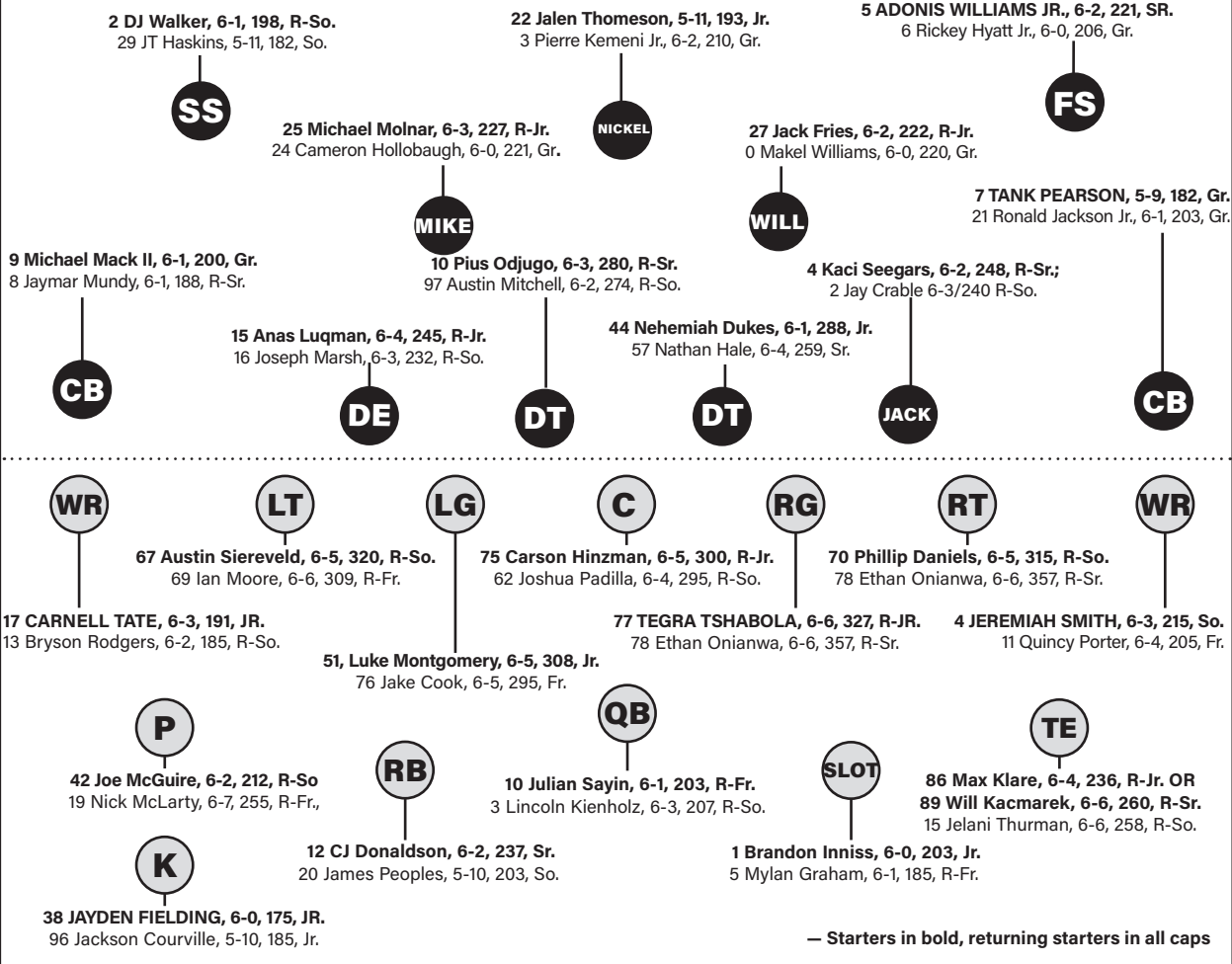
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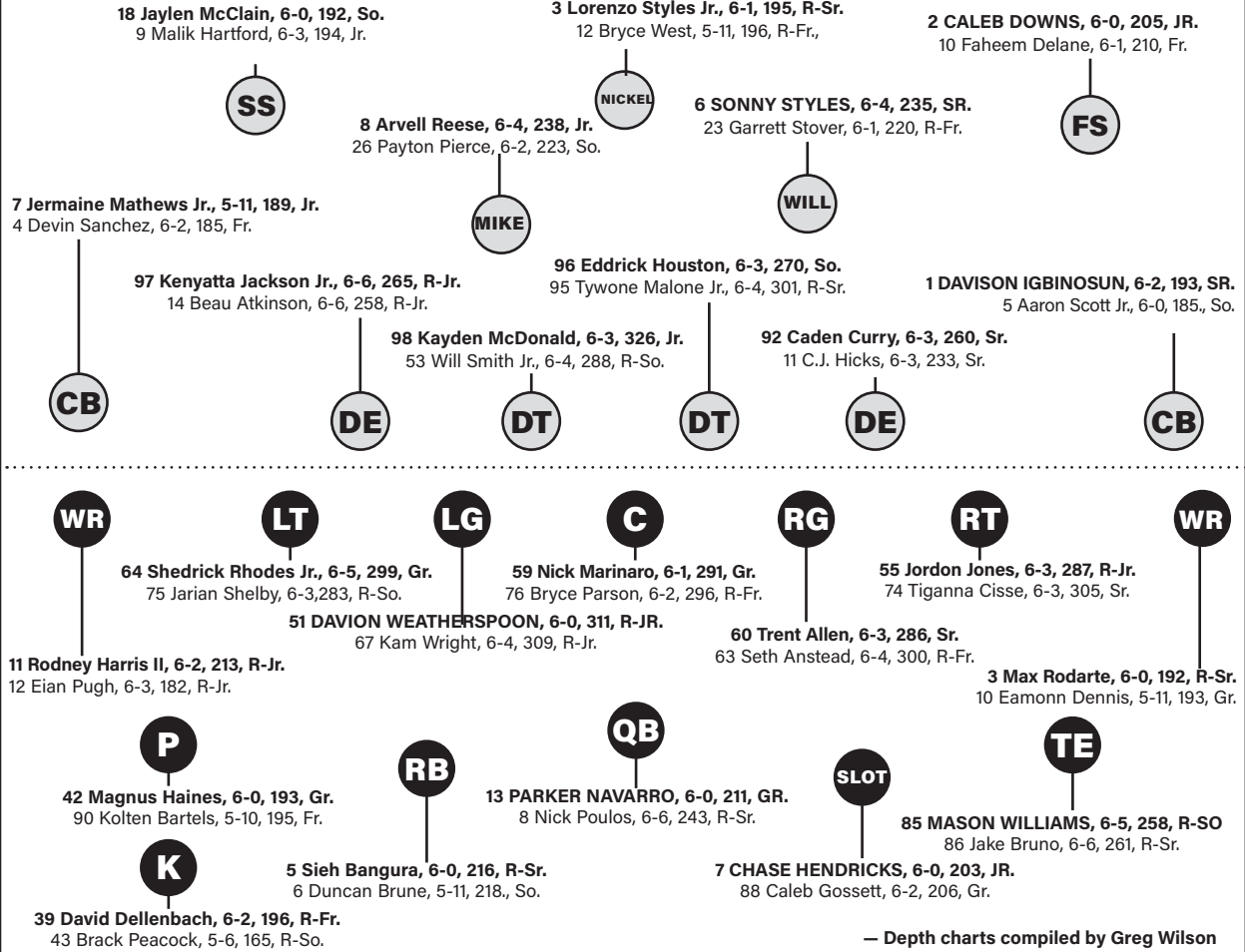


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN OHIO HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO RUSH DEFENSE

Ohio did not ease into the season with a 34-31 loss at Rutgers, followed by a 17-10 upset over West Virginia. Suddenly, the match-up with Ohio State becomes very intriguing. Because the Buckeyes pounded a vastly inferior Grambling State 70-0, it is difficult to know what can be gleaned other than gaining confidence. Nonetheless, OSU ran for 274 yards for a 7.2 average that was aided by freshman Bo Jackson rushing for 108 yards and a touchdown on nine carries, all in the second half. He's likely still the No. 3 back behind James Peoples (59 yards on eight totes) and CJ Donaldson (45 yards, five carries). Ohio's defensive line is mostly new, with Central Michigan transfer Pius Odjugo, Arkansas Pine Bluff transfer Anas Luqman and Walsh transfer Cameron Hollobaugh. The Bobcats allowed Rutgers 147 rushing yards (4.0 average), but West Virginia netted only 72 yards (2.6). The linebackers are solid with Michael Molnar and Jack Fries each recording seven tackles against the Mountaineers. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Ohio features dual-threat quarterback Parker Navarro. Not only did he pass for 239 yards and three touchdowns in the opener, but he also added 93 rushing yards against the Scarlet Knights. He was almost as good against WVU, running 18 times for a team-high 87 yards with a long of 19. The Bobcats' top returning running back is sophomore Duncan Brune from Cologne, Germany, but he is secondary to Minnesota transfer Sieh Bangura, who had 86 yards on 16 carries against Rutgers and 66 yards on 20 attempts and a TD vs. West Virginia when Ohio totaled 182 yards. The Buckeyes might be susceptible to the run. Texas rushed for 166 yards on 37 attempts (4.5). Grambling had 94 yards on 33 carries (2.8), but Andre Crews averaged 7.6 yards for his 38 yards on five runs, including a 19-yarder on a fourth-and-1 from the 50. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO PASS DEFENSE

Let's call it what it was: Julian was "In-Sayin." After a conservative approach against Texas in his first start, Sayin was unleashed and connected on 18 of 19 passes for 306 yards and four touchdowns, although he sat the second half. His only misfire was an interception at the Grambling 1. Jeremiah Smith had an 87-yard TD, but the big story was four tight ends had catches with Will Kacmarek and Jelani Thurman each scoring. Ohio has three quality defensive backs in Adonis Williams Jr., DJ Walker and Tank Pearson. Both Pearson and Walker were named to the Jim Thorpe (top defensive back) preseason award watch list. Pearson last season had a team-high four interceptions. Molnar had 1½ sacks against West Virginia, and Hollobaugh had a key fourth-quarter pick vs. WVU. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Navarro, a returning graduate student, is good at distributing the ball. Eight receivers made catches against Rutgers. He threw for 247 yards and a TD vs. the Mountaineers. While he was 22 of 31, he was picked off three times. His favorite target is Chase Hendricks, whose 121 yards against WVU represented his second straight 100-plus game. Like the Buckeyes, the Bobcats are making good use of their tight ends. They had three TD catches against Rutgers. OSU harassed a pair of Grambling QBs into 11-of-22 passing for a mere 72 yards, and Caleb Downs had an interception. The Buckeyes also had two sacks. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

OSU had no field-goal attempts and one punt against Grambling. Ohio's Magnus Haines had a career-long 49-yard punt vs. WVU. Redshirt freshman Brack Peacock made his first career field goal, a 37-yarder, against West Virginia. Guess who is televising the game this week? Peacock (the streaming service, not his family). C'mon. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INTANGIBLES

If the Buckeyes are looking ahead to an open weekend after this game before starting the Big Ten season at Washington on Sept. 27, the Bobcats' win against West Virginia will have their attention. That should be bad news for Bobcats, but they won't be intimidated. For the Buckeyes, they will get a true indicator of how much they've improved since beating Texas. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

Ohio will try to put its mark on the game early with a nothing-to-lose attitude. The Bobcats aren't nearly as talented, but there's something about an in-state game that will fuel them. Ohio State will be looking to increase pressure on the quarterback, improve the running game against a quality opponent, and come away healthy. **OHIO STATE 38, OHIO 14**

Buckeye Beat Says Patricia's Upside Is High

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

After winning the national championship in January, Ohio State faced some uncertainty about the upcoming season. The Buckeyes lost 16 starters, both coordinators departed within two weeks, and major changes were inevitable.

Brian Hartline was promptly promoted to offensive coordinator, but the defensive coordinator role raised concerns. Jim Knowles left after coaching the No. 1 defense in the country, and there were questions about whether his successor would be able to fill his shoes.

The Buckeyes ultimately chose former Detroit Lions head coach and New England Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, whom many thought was an initially perplexing choice.

However, Patricia quickly silenced the doubters, impressing players, fellow coaches and media members alike. Following Ohio State's 14-7 victory over then-No. 1 Texas on Aug. 30, Patricia has earned national praise for the Buckeyes' stout defensive performance against the Longhorns.

Reporters on the Buckeye beat are encouraged by Patricia's initial performance with the Buckeyes, and while it's still early, many believe the defensive coordinator has the potential to shape Ohio State into yet another top-ranked defense.

The Buckeye defense routinely stifled the Texas offense, leaving the Longhorns' young quarterback, Arch Manning, rattled and looking confused through the majority of the game.

Eleven Warriors deputy editor Dan Hope noted that Patricia's scheme showcased a range of defensive looks and disguised coverages to create confusion for Manning and that Ohio State's defense was able to execute them to a T.

"For game one, Patricia did a great job

of presenting a bunch of different looks that Texas probably didn't see on film and therefore was able to create a lot of confusion for Arch Manning and the Texas offense," Hope said. "On top of that, you just saw guys playing fast. You can do a lot of great things schematically, but if the players can't execute it at a high level, it's not going to matter."

What makes Patricia such a masterful defensive coordinator is his ability to scheme to personnel as opposed to recruiting personnel to a scheme, likely because when he was at the NFL level, he had to work with whatever players were on his roster.

The ability to disguise defenses with seemingly identical looks was Patricia's calling card in New England and allowed for repeated success against professional football's best talent.

Cameron Teague Robinson of The Athletic said Patricia's past with the Patriots was evident in the Buckeyes' scheme against Texas, where he used variations of the same look in disguising coverages to fool quarterbacks.

"It's hard, as an offense, to figure out what you want to look for, what you need to look for in a defense and know what's coming if it's so multiple up front," Teague Robinson said.

However, going forward, Patricia and the Ohio State defense won't always be matched up with a quarterback in his third-ever start.

When the Buckeye defense heads to Champaign, Ill., to face No. 9 Illinois on Oct. 11 or welcomes No. 2 Penn State into Ohio Stadium on Nov. 1 – led by seasoned quarterbacks Luke Altmyer or Drew Allar, respectively – Patricia will need a diverse set of formations and schemes to keep the veteran signal-callers off balance.

Longtime Buckeye reporter Bill Landis said that though Ohio State's defense was hard for Manning in Week 1, it will need to keep evolving to handle teams like the Nittany Lions and Illini, both of which feature experienced offensive lines and quarterbacks.

"The defense was pretty unpredictable in that game, but I think some of the older quarterbacks might see that stuff a little better and some of the more experienced offensive lines," Landis said. "That was the other part about Texas. Texas had four new offensive line starters. Penn State, for instance, has five offensive line starters back. Illinois has five offensive line starters back."

Most of Ohio State's defensive looks stem from basic zone and man coverages, but that's by design. Patricia hopes to make his defenses simple in structure to make it difficult for offenses to pinpoint what coverage they're facing.

Unlike the blitz-happy, ever-aggressive former Buckeye defensive coordinator Knowles, now in the same role at Penn State, whose scheme attempted to artificially create pressures and turnovers, Patricia takes a more Houdini-like approach in his scheme, staying aggressive but challenging opposing quarterbacks to read disguised coverages.

"This is certainly a defense that wants



SONNY BROCKWAY

MASTER OF DISGUISE — First-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia's style is to keep the quarterbacks guessing with various looks that hide the coverages, similar to what he did in the NFL.

to be aggressive," Hope said. "They want to do things to make you uncomfortable. Matt Patricia doesn't want to play a conservative style of defense, where you kind of sit back on your heels and keep things in front of you. He wants to play an attacking style of defense, and I think we saw that against Texas."

The Buckeye beat views Knowles and Patricia as fairly similar schematically, but what sets the former NFL play-caller apart is his knack for tailoring a game plan more effectively to his personnel.

Teague Robinson characterized Ohio State's defense under Patricia as both confusing and versatile, and defensive tackle Kayden McDonald agreed with that sentiment, noting the frequent position changes create endless ways to challenge an offense.

"I think (the defense) is confusing for other coordinators and coaches," Teague Robinson said. "Versatile is a good word. I asked Kayden McDonald after the game, 'What's the difference?' And he said that people just can play so many different positions because they're not really position locked in the spots right now."

Ohio State's defense might keep things simple early on, but reporters expect Patricia to introduce new wrinkles as the season progresses, ensuring opponents,

especially the Buckeyes' toughest competition, stay on their toes.

Hope said that early in the season, when Ohio State faces less challenging opponents, the defense will likely keep things simple, but as the schedule toughens, Patricia will need to roll out more advanced coverages to match up with elite teams and quarterbacks.

"It's going to be important for Matt Patricia and the defense to continue to work. You'd expect that against Grambling and Ohio, they're probably going to keep things pretty vanilla because they don't really need to do a lot of change-ups," Hope said. "But over the course of the season, Matt Patricia is going to have to continue to install new looks so that when you are playing Penn State and quarterback Drew Allar on Nov. 1, he's seeing some different looks that he's never seen before."

Landis said that Patricia will mainly use variations of Cover 2 and Cover 3 zone defenses, allowing Buckeye star safety Caleb Downs more freedom to roam the field and generate playmaking opportunities.

"Even if you look at Patricia's history in the NFL, they were primarily his own team, a lot of Cover 3, deep zone," Landis explained. "Ohio State played a decent amount of Cover 2, with two deep safeties against Texas. I think those two coverages



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es will probably be Ohio State's primary coverages this year. That does allow you to move a guy like Caleb Downs around more. You don't want him locked up in man coverage following people around him. You want him to have the ability to roam, and the way that you do that is to play more zone."

Having a player like Downs at the college level, who can operate as a coach on the field, is a rare advantage most defensive coordinators don't have. Even though Patricia's detailed schemes set the Buckeye defense up for success, Ohio State's impact players cannot be overlooked.

Teague Robinson added that versatility, a quality often emphasized by Ohio State's position coaches, is one of the biggest reasons the Buckeyes' personnel meshes so well with Patricia's system.

"You have Arvell Reese, you have Jermaine Matthews Jr., you have Caleb Downs, who is a unicorn," Teague Robinson said. "Eddrick Houston, who once was an edge rusher and now is a tackle. So you have a lot of versatile pieces that you can do a lot of things with."

"Arvell Reese is playing the defensive line, and Ohio State is putting him in pass coverage. Jermaine Matthews Jr., who can play in the slot and play outside, Lorenzo Styles Jr. can play in the slot and play safety, so that versatility plays perfectly to what Matt Patricia wants to do."

Landis echoed Teague Robinson's sentiment, noting that players such as Downs, along with linebackers Reese and Sonny Styles – who he believes could be the na-

tion's best duo – serve as a built-in safety net for Patricia.

"(Ohio State's personnel) has jelled nicely here with the fact that you have a guy like Patricia, who is such a sharp game planner and is creative with his scheme, but you also have players who are talented enough and smart enough to handle all of that, which is how you put together the performance that you saw against Texas," Landis said.

One underrated aspect of Patricia's arrival in Columbus is the boost he provides in recruiting, a weakness for Knowles, who isn't known for doing much recruiting.

What most college defensive coordinators don't bring that Patricia does is NFL experience and name value. Coaching in the NFL for New England alongside now-North Carolina head coach Bill Belichick and against all-time great quarterback Tom Brady every day in practice can carry weight in a decision for young players.

Hope said that although Patricia's NFL experience is valuable, his enthusiasm for recruiting may prove to be Ohio State's most important asset over time, adding that recruiting was not Knowles' forte.

"That NFL pedigree certainly helps, and that he has shown he's a willing recruiter, and honestly, that's probably an area where he's shown more eagerness so far than Jim Knowles did," Hope said. "Jim Knowles was not known for being a particularly active recruiter, so I think Matt Patricia has given them a little more in that regard, in terms of his eagerness to

get out and recruit and engage with them."

Landis feels that Patricia's NFL résumé is certainly a selling point to recruits, agreeing with Hope that it's one of the biggest ways Patricia differs from Knowles.

"It helps to sell, 'Come to Ohio State and play in an NFL-style defense,' because the offense has been able to sell that for years, since Ryan Day has been here," Landis said. " 'Come play quarterback, come play receiver for Ohio State, and you're going to learn NFL concepts.' I don't know that it's always been the case with Ohio State's defense, but I think that is the case now."

Teague Robinson said that a couple of years ago, Patricia's name value may have carried more importance, but with NIL and money now in play for collegiate athletes, there are more factors than ever that affect a recruit's or transfer's decision to join a team.

"It's a little bit different now than it was before," Teague Robinson said. "I think it definitely helps, but I'm not sure it helps as much as maybe it would have three or four years ago."

What many on the Buckeye beat believe could define Patricia and Ohio State's defense this season is their ability to adjust to each offensive matchup. With his experience against elite competition and an encouraging debut, reporters are optimistic about Patricia's chances for success.

Landis said that with film now available on the 2025 Buckeyes, catching opposing defenses off guard will be more difficult,

but he still believes Ohio State will rank among the nation's top defenses.

"I don't know that the element of surprise will be there from here moving forward, but I still think they can be a very good defense," Landis said.

Having experienced everything at the professional level, Patricia gives the Buckeyes confidence that he can devise a game plan for any opponent, Teague Robinson said.

"An offensive play is going to have to be something extremely creative for it to be something that Matt Patricia hadn't seen on the field or on the film," he said. "You are going to be caught off guard with some things, yes, but it's going to be set to be something really unique, which is good because you feel confident that you can put a game plan together every game, no matter who the quarterback is, no matter who the team is."

With the Buckeye defense appearing fully behind Patricia, he could become a key asset moving forward.

Hope believes Patricia has the potential to be an improvement long-term as defensive coordinator, provided the players keep responding positively to his system.

"I do think there are some things that Matt Patricia is doing differently in terms of his approach," Hope said. "It's maybe being better received among the team, and I think that if he can continue to build off this strong start, there's a chance that Matt Patricia ends up being an upgrade in the long run."



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Downs Does Everything For OSU Defense

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When multiyear starter Lathan Ransom finally ran out of eligibility after the 2024 season, his spot was left open to hopeful starters Jaylen McClain and Malik Hartford.

To those players, and any others in the safety room, safeties coach Matt Guerrieri's message was simple: Take after unanimous All-America safety Caleb Downs.

"Losing Lathan, that will be a critical thing for us, but when you have a guy like Caleb – from who he is as a person, from a leadership standpoint, from a safety skill standpoint – it's easy as a coach to say just watch Caleb Downs, follow what Caleb Downs does," Guerrieri said in March.

It was sound advice from Guerrieri, because since he joined Ohio State, Downs has rarely, if ever, stepped out of line on or off the football field. The Hoschton, Ga., native and former Alabama safety has used his versatility, football IQ and leadership to become an invaluable piece of the Buckeye defense.

"Caleb is unique," Guerrieri said. "His development level is unique, his readiness for college is unique, his football intelligence, his mental makeup, all of those things are unique, so that enhances the entire room."

As a former All-America safety out of Alabama, a top-10 recruit out of high school and someone whom head coach Ryan Day described as "the best high school player he had ever seen," Downs was thought to be one of the most talented players to transfer to Ohio State. At least early on, there were some growing pains for Downs in his first year with the Buckeyes.

In his first three games at Ohio State, Downs lined up at the defense's adjuster position, playing well behind the line of scrimmage and therefore totaling only nine tackles, including one-half for loss. Downs wasn't making mistakes, but he was clamoring for a bigger role on the team and said as much to Day.

Day revealed some of what was said between the two on Downs' podcast "Downs 2 Business," which he hosts with his brother, Indianapolis Colts wide receiver Josh Downs.

"Early in the season, we were in Week 3 and 4, we talked about him starting to return punts. We made a few adjustments, and we just talked and he was like, 'I need to have more of an impact on the game,' and I agreed," Day said. "So we had to make some real changes to make sure that he was having more of an impact on the game."

The conversation between Downs and former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles worked because over the next four games, Downs' presence was much more noticeable, and he totaled 22 tackles, including five for loss. Knowles said Downs was "activated" in a breakout performance against Michigan State and remained that way for the rest of the season.

After playing a substantial role in the team's run to the championship, Downs and the Buckeyes were delivered some bad



SONNY BROCKWAY

MR. EVERYTHING — Whether it's being a coach on the field or lining up at different positions, All-America safety Caleb Downs (2) can do it all and was rewarded with his first interception of the season against Grambling State.

news when Knowles left to take the same job at Penn State.

Even with new leadership in place, Downs' significance to the Buckeyes was not lost on the coaching staff.

"A year ago, we were able to see him in the deep part of the field, the intermediate blitzing, doing different things like that, and then in the offseason, we said, 'What does Caleb do really well? What are the things we want to continue to improve upon?'" Guerrieri said. "It's no secret to anyone that he's a huge piece of how we're built."

It took no time at all for Ohio State's defensive coaching staff to show how much they valued Downs. In their season-opening win over Texas, the Buckeyes lined Downs up all over the field, and although his five-tackle performance in Ohio State's win may not necessarily seem game-changing on paper, Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian said he made all the difference in the game.

"They have a very good secondary, and I thought their ability to disguise coverages in the first half was at an elite level," Sarkisian said after the game. "I wouldn't say a good level, on the elite level. That starts with Caleb Downs. He's very savvy. He's very smart. They're able to hold coverages."

The Buckeyes' disguised coverages had Texas quarterback Arch Manning in a funk. Despite having time in the pocket to throw, the nephew of NFL greats Eli and Peyton Manning looked hesitant, at best, in the first half, completing just 5 of 10 passes for 26 yards.

While new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia's system had a lot to do with Manning's struggles, according to Day, the versatility of Downs and linebackers Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese can make it difficult for opposing quarterbacks to identify what the Silver Bullets are trying to do.

"Arvell, you look at Sonny, you look at Caleb, and you see guys who can do multiple things," Day said. "Then it becomes harder to recognize exactly how you're being attacked. The more versatility you have, the harder it is to take down what exactly is going on in that play. I think our guys take a lot of pride in being in disguised looks pre-snap and then give different looks post-snap."

In the game against Texas, Downs lined up at free safety while also being used at nickel safety, and for some plays, he even was on the line of scrimmage. During the play of the game, when Texas had the ball at midfield needing to convert fourth-and-5

to keep a potential game-tying drive alive, Downs lined up just off the line of scrimmage.

On the play, Downs was assigned to cover Texas tight end Jack Endries, one of the Longhorns' most productive receivers on the day. After Ohio State defensive end C.J. Hicks generated pressure, Manning tested Downs and checked it down to Endries underneath, but the safety blanketed the Longhorns' tight end and stopped him well short of the line to gain.

Downs' versatility is only one reason that an NFL GM in attendance for the Buckeyes' Week 1 win told NFL insider Jordan Schultz, "There's some Earl Thomas and Eric Berry to him. Just a special, special player."

Even more impressive than his varied skill set may be his football IQ, which helps him to predict what the opposing offense is going to do before the play even starts.

"He helps us a lot," Reese said. "Caleb is smart. Sometimes Caleb will be out there calling out plays, so it helps a lot having somebody smart behind you."

Downs, who displayed unforeseen levels of versatility and communication during the first game of his junior season, took perhaps the biggest leap off the field, according to Guerrieri.

"Leadership," Guerrieri said when asked where Downs has grown the most. "I think when you're a young player, take Caleb at Alabama, a highly recruited guy who comes in, earns his stripes as an All-American his freshman year, but you're just a young player. If you're down by 10 at halftime, the guys don't look to you. When he first came here, I respected the way that he went about it."

"He wanted to get to know his teammates. He didn't come in like he was the big dog. There were other veterans in that room, whether it was Denzel Burke or Lathan Ransom, and Caleb kind of came in and built relationships and then let his play and who he is as a person speak for itself."

"From there, you turn it over to you're a third-year player and right, wrong, good or bad, everyone looks at No. 2, and that's a huge growth moment for Caleb to say, 'Hey, I'm a captain of this team – the team's going to go how I go. I'm not just impacting the game through my play, but good or bad, I'm the vocal leader of our team.'"

As Guerrieri noted, Downs' leadership was rewarded by his teammates in the offseason, when he was voted one of four captains. Downs' leadership has been in full effect in the development of McClain, who earned the starting job next to Downs.

McClain, a former four-star recruit out of high school, may not have Downs' freakish abilities, but making his first start against Texas, he flew all over the field just like his counterpart and logged eight total tackles, the third most on the team. According to McClain, his great game was in part thanks to Downs.

"Caleb plays with great instincts. He's very intelligent," McClain said. "He's able to see things that you might not be able to see, which helps me out a lot. He tells me things, I tell him things I see, and he helps us both play faster."

Siereveld Rises To Lead The Offensive Line

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Just a year ago, Austin Siereveld was a name known only to die-hard Ohio State fans.

Listed as the backup left guard to open fall camp in 2024, Siereveld sat behind soon-to-be first-round draft pick Donovan Jackson and was likely to just be a rotation piece on the offensive line.

Then, with injuries sidelining two starting linemen during the season, Siereveld seized the chance to earn the trust of both coaches and fans. He went on to start six games for Ohio State, gradually establishing himself as a dependable presence on the offensive line and ultimately appearing in all 16 games on the Buckeyes' path to the national championship in January.

Despite spending last season at guard – both right and left – Siereveld and the Buckeyes made a significant decision early in the offseason. During spring practices, Siereveld got the majority of his reps at tackle.

After spending the spring and much of the summer thinking he would likely be the starting right tackle, he emerged as the top option at left tackle for the Buckeyes in fall camp.

Though he never imagined starting at left tackle, Siereveld is focused on daily improvement, leaning on his coaches and refining his craft.

"I thought I'd always be at guard," Siereveld said. "But I'm just working every day, working on my craft. The coaches help me out if I ask questions, all that stuff. I'm just working every single day to try to be the best player I can be."

However, the transition was far from instantaneous. It required a full offseason of work for Siereveld to comfortably move from guard to tackle.

Siereveld joined the Buckeyes as the nation's No. 302 overall player in the 2023 class and the 16th-ranked interior offensive lineman, having played in only the triple-option offense at Liberty Township (Ohio) Lakota East High School.

But at Ohio State, Siereveld was exposed to a more modern offense. He said his confidence in the Buckeye offense has grown as he continues to learn, study film, and seek advice from veteran players who have helped him adjust.

"Definitely, my confidence is building," Siereveld said. "In high school, I ran the triple option. I didn't know what an offense really was. So just keep building, keep learning in the playbook, always watching film, always asking questions to the older guys and they really helped me out."

Siereveld redshirted his freshman year with the Buckeyes but made his debut in the 2024 season opener against Akron. Redshirt sophomore center Josh Padilla said in his first season in the program with Siereveld in 2023, Siereveld was more reserved and kept to himself, but now in his third year in the program, he's become a vocal leader, holding teammates accountable while performing at a high level.

"My freshman year, being with Austin, I feel like Austin was just a quiet dude, a guy who stayed in his own lane, did his things,



SONNY BROCKWAY

TACKLING A PROBLEM — Versatility has made Austin Siereveld (67) invaluable on the offensive line. After filling in at the guard spots last season, he was moved to right tackle in the offseason but has since become the starting left tackle.

did everything right," Padilla said. "Austin's a great leader. He's making sure everything's right, putting guys in check, and going out there, balling, playing every single position on the O-line that our coach asked for."

Under the guidance of former offensive line coach Justin Frye, Siereveld made a genuine impact in his second year in the program.

He stepped into the starting group for the injured Jackson to play left guard against Akron and Western Michigan in the first two games of the year. Then he rejoined the ones lineup after Jackson moved to tackle for the game against Penn State on Nov. 2.

He remained in the lineup as a starter at left guard until the Cotton Bowl against Texas and the national championship against Notre Dame, rotating at right guard with Tegra Tshabola in those games.

Siereveld said Frye played a major part in his early improvement at multiple spots along the offensive line, though he was mainly a guard at the time. He noted that the lessons Frye taught played a significant role in his early development at Ohio State.

"Learning the fundamentals of pass protection from day one when I got here," he said of how Frye helped him. "Coach Frye did an awesome job with coaching me and just giving me tips and pointers each day we were working on it."

After the departure of Frye to the Arizona Cardinals just weeks after Ohio State earned a 34-23 victory over the Fighting Irish, Sier-

evel turned to new offensive line coach Tyler Bowen to improve his game.

Siereveld said he feels the constant support he gets from coaches, particularly Bowen, has helped him become the best player possible.

"Whatever I need, he's always there. I ask him questions every day. After practice, he's helping me. In practice, he's always coaching me up and just trying to make me the best player I can be."

Ohio State's offensive staff, including Bowen and Day, started preparing Siereveld for a move to tackle shortly after the arrival of the new offensive line coach.

The 6-5, 325-pound lineman quickly showcased his adaptability and skill during spring practices and the spring game.

Bowen said Siereveld's work at left tackle in the spring showcased his versatility, adding that the staff emphasizes players having primary and secondary positions to give the line depth and flexibility.

"He played left tackle in the spring as well," Bowen said. "We've made a big emphasis on something that we believe in in primary and secondary positions, and that's a good example of that. He bounced around at tackle. He's played guard. I think what you see up front, we're doing that with a lot of nothing set in stone. 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."

He continued, citing Siereveld's dedica-

tion in the weight room during spring and summer as vital for developing his leadership as a lineman, with his high effort accelerating his transition to a new position.

"Coming out of the summer and the spring, with some of the things that he did with Coach Mick (Marotti) in the weight room, you see those things translating on the field," Bowen said. "He's always been a powerful, athletic guy. We've got to get him to play within his technique better."

Padilla believes Siereveld's shift from guard to left tackle shows that he's a player the team can always count on, being the embodiment of reliability.

"It just shows that he's one of those guys that we can lean on," Padilla said. "He's just a dog in general, one of those guys who we can count on."

The weight room is often where linemen show their worth, as they can demonstrate both physical power and leadership qualities.

Day credited the rapid development of several players, including Siereveld, to the daily instruction of strength and conditioning coach Marotti, whose work emphasizes accountability.

"Austin Siereveld becomes an 'Iron Buckeye.' Look what's happening," Day said. "For us, the backbone of our program is what happens in the offseason in that weight room. That is our chopping wood and carrying water in the weight room. When you start to see that happen, you can almost predict what's going to come next."

Siereveld echoed Day, emphasizing that time in the weight room is a very important part of offensive linemen's growth, as their impact is often defined by their strength.

"As an offensive lineman, we have to get developed and we have to put on the weight and the muscle to handle whatever happens in the season and whoever we're going up against," Siereveld said.

Siereveld's growth has earned the confidence of both teammates and coaches, but that trust brings with it a greater responsibility to lead.

The left tackle is embracing that newfound responsibility, stepping up as an emerging leader and serving as one of the Buckeyes' 2025 captains since Aug. 16.

Siereveld was emotional during his press conference after being named captain, expressing gratitude for the opportunity, and said that becoming a captain had been one of his goals since arriving at Ohio State.

"It was an honor that all the players voted me to be captain," Siereveld said. "It was a dream of mine to be a captain, a goal of mine when I was a little kid to play here and be a captain."

Being named captain has required him to step into an even greater leadership role.

He feels captainship means making sure Ohio State's standard is upheld on a daily basis and consistently modeling those expectations both on and off the field.

"I've really had to step up my leadership role even more now," Siereveld said. "I'm one of the leaders of the team now. I have to make sure the standard is set here at Ohio State and just keep going with that."

George Ran Over Boston College In '95 Opener

Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of Eddie George's 1995 Heisman Trophy win this season with a game-by-game look at his march to college football's most coveted award. In this issue, BSB looks at the '95 season opener, a 38-6 win over Boston College.

By MARCUS HARTMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Eddie George did not necessarily enter the 1995 season as a major Heisman Trophy candidate.

In fact, Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher Frank Moskowitz wrote in his weekly column, "The View from 15th and High," he wasn't sure why George wasn't generating more buzz after Ohio State beat Boston College 38-6 to open the season.

"You have to wonder why George doesn't get more national attention than he seems to get. Not only is he big and strong, but he also proved he has great moves against the Eagles," Moskowitz wrote.

The opponent was not the NFL's Eagles from George's hometown of Philadelphia, but he did get an NFL stadium as a stage for the inaugural performance of what would become a memorable campaign.

Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., served as a fitting spot for his first act, though George was just one co-star in Ohio State's 38-6 victory in the 13th Kick-off Classic on Aug. 27.

In fact, he wasn't even around for the final curtain, and if anyone was worried about adding up statistics for a Heisman campaign, they didn't show it.

While George ran for 99 yards, he did so in just three quarters with Ohio State nursing a 25-point lead.

Head coach John Cooper pulled him after just 17 carries, and George expressed no complaints afterward.

"I'll have 13 more opportunities to get it," George said, though his statistics in a bowl game would not count per NCAA rules at the time. "I'm just glad we got the W."

More Than A Runner

George, who entered the season as a known commodity after rushing for a workmanlike 1,442 yards on 276 carries

in 1994 with 12 rushing touchdowns, got the Buckeyes on the board with the first touchdown of the 1995 season.

After a 27-yard run by fullback Matt Calhoun, George rumbled 12 yards over the right tackle for a touchdown in the first quarter, capping an eight-play, 80-yard drive that gave Ohio State a 7-0 lead.

"It's kind of fun to break all the tackles when you finally get to the end zone," George said. "I really wanted to send a statement to our offensive line that, 'This is how we're going to start the 1995 season, and this is how we're going to end it.' We want to be aggressive up front."

George scored his second touchdown on a 9-yard run in the third quarter, but his teammates did plenty in between.

Terry Glenn, a junior receiver from Columbus, was among the breakout players of the game, catching three passes for 105 yards, and senior tight end Rickey Dudley, who had three receptions for 42 yards, caught a 12-yard touchdown pass from Bobby Hoying.

Special teams added a touchdown on cornerback Shawn Springs' 97-yard kick-off return, and Josh Jackson made a 23-yard field goal to round out a complete day for the Buckeyes.

A new offense installed by offensive coordinator Joe Hollis and quarterbacks coach Walt Harris was unveiled against the Eagles, but that also served to highlight George's multitude of skills.

"I think you have to change things with time," George said. "In order to be a productive ballclub, we have to get the ball to some of our best players in our offense. I think we did a good job of that today."

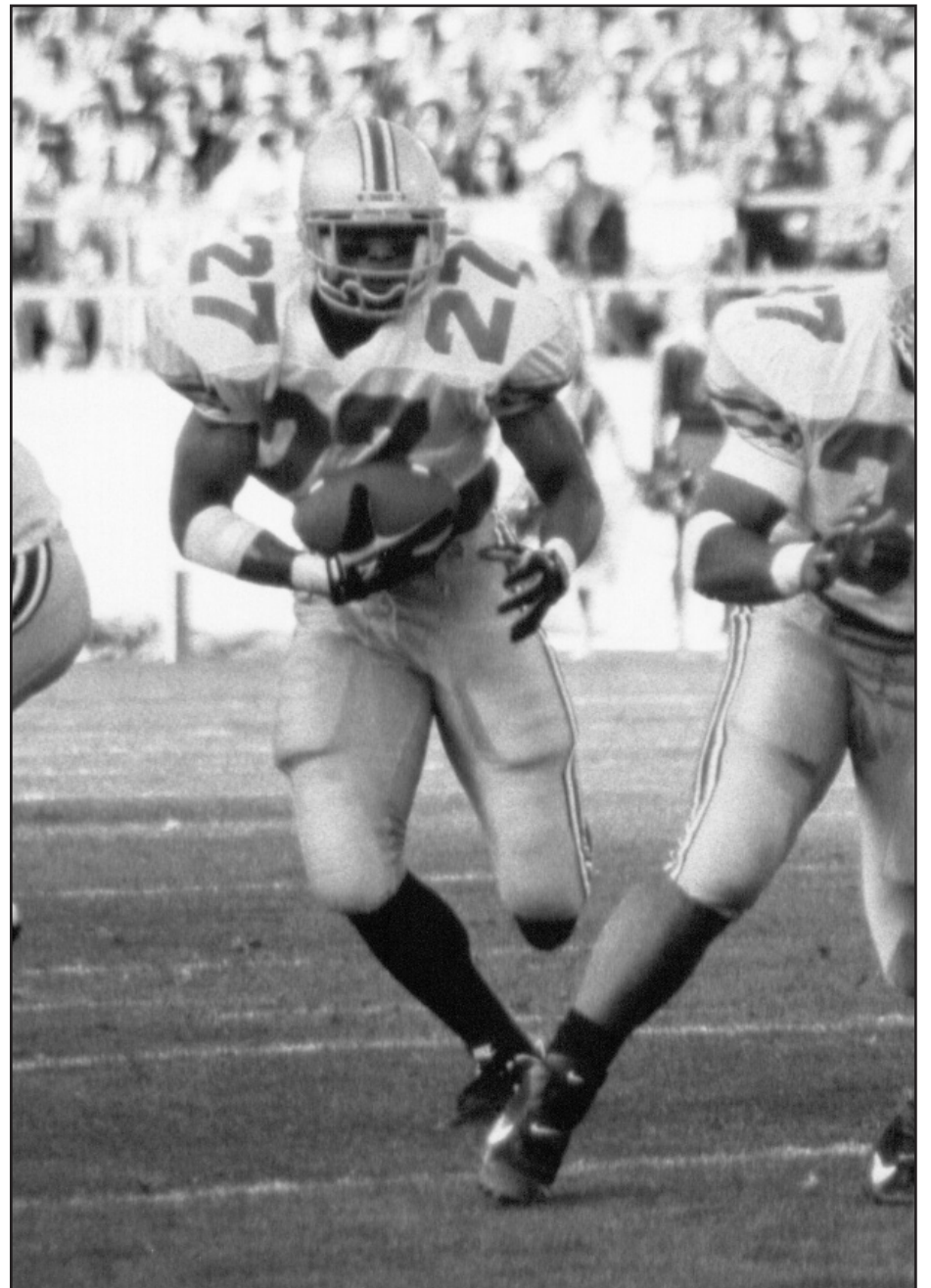
In the opener of his second season as a starter, Hoying completed 17 of 26 passes for 269 yards and a score, and 10 different Buckeyes caught passes (including members of the second-team offense that finished out the fourth quarter).

George was among those players, highlighting the evolution of the offense.

After catching 16 passes for 117 yards as a junior, George hauled in four passes for 58 yards in the season opener in 1995, leading all Buckeyes in catches.

"I didn't know how I would feel, but I was really comfortable with it," George said of the new offense. "Obviously, we worked a lot on it in the spring and the summer. I had faith it was going to work. We installed a lot of new things for this game, and a lot of them worked."

His contributions in the passing game



FILE PHOTO

GOOD START — Eddie George opened his 1995 Heisman Trophy campaign in style with 99 rushing yards and two touchdowns during a 38-6 win over Boston College at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J.

helped George earn Most Valuable Player honors for the game.

"Eddie had a good ballgame," Cooper said. "He had 99 yards rushing and caught several key passes."

"We worked hard on trying to get the ball to our backs. People in Columbus who had the chance to watch us practice know that's something we've really emphasized, and I thought that helped us throughout the course of the ballgame."

Looking Ahead

With win No. 1 under their belts and no game for 20 days, the Buckeyes took an extra day to enjoy the New York City area.

They visited the World Trade Center, New York Stock Exchange and Downtown Athletic Club before taking in a baseball game between the New York Yankees and California Angels.

"Most of them have not been to New York City, so we figured we might as well

reward our players for the hard work they've put in and stay an extra night," Cooper said.

After returning home, the Buckeyes set their sights on a Sept. 16 visit from Washington.

After that, they were set to play at Pittsburgh, host Notre Dame and begin Big Ten play at Penn State.

"They're all tough," Cooper said. "But we've got the Washington Huskies. They don't lose many football games; they're off probation," Cooper said.

"They don't get much tougher than that, but this is a good way to get started."

As another bonus for George, he was among three players voted captains for the season before the game, along with Hoying and senior defensive lineman Matt Bonhaus.

"Not many people have that opportunity to be a captain of a football team of this caliber, so I'm pretty honored," George said.

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (2-0)

Aug. 30 TEXAS, W 14-7.

Sept. 6 GRAMBLING STATE, W 70-0; **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.

FIELD HOCKEY (2-2)

Aug. 17 MIAMI (OH) (Exh.); **24** at Michigan (Exh.); **29** at Ball State, W 7-0; **31** KENT STATE, W 9-3.

Sept. 5 VIRGINIA, L 1-0; **7** SYRACUSE, L, 2-1(2OT); **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.

MEN'S GOLF

Sept. 8-10 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich.; **15-16** Bearcat Invitational at Cincinnati; **29-30** Windon Memorial Classic at Lake Forest, Ill.

Oct. 13-14 Moraine Intercollegiate at Kettering,

Ohio.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Sept. 8-10 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich.; **15-16** Inverness Collegiate at Toledo.

Oct. 19-20 Jim West Challenge at San Marcos, Texas.

MEN'S SOCCER (2-2)

Aug. 9 NOTRE DAME (Exh.); **15** WRIGHT STATE (Exh.); **21** at Virginia Tech, L 1-0; **28** OAKLAND, W 1-0; **31** TEMPLE, W 2-1.

Sept. 5 AKRON, L 2-0; **9** LOUISVILLE; **13** at Butler; **19** at Michigan State; **26** at Rutgers; **29** UCLA.

Oct. 3 WISCONSIN; **10** at Indiana; **14** MICHIGAN; **18** MARYLAND; **24** at Washington; **31** PENN STATE.

Nov. 7 at Northwestern; **12** Big Ten Semifinals; **16** Big Ten Championship.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (4-1-1)

Aug. 6 at West Virginia (Exh.); **9** Ohio (Exh.); **14** CLEMSON, T 1-1; **21** at South Carolina, L 1-0; **24** at UNC Wilmington, W 1-0; **28** at Princeton, W 4-1; **31** ASHLAND, W 3-0.

Sept. 7 at Kentucky, W 2-0; **12** MICHIGAN; **18** WISCONSIN; **21**

NEBRASKA; **25** at Beaver Creek Invitational Northwestern; **28** at in Dayton vs. Ohio; **13** Illinois.

Oct. 5 at Michigan State; **9** OREGON; **12** WASHINGTON; **16** at Rutgers; **19** at Maryland; **26** at Penn State.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (1-3)

Aug. 23 at Kentucky (Exh.); **29** at Canes Classic in Coral Gables, Fla., vs. VCU, L 3-0; **30** at Canes Classic in Coral Gables, Fla., vs. Miami (FL), L 3-0.

Sept. 3 at Miami (OH), W 3-2; **7** FLORIDA, L 3-0; **12**

at Beaver Creek 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.

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Fields Hopes Career Takes Flight With New Team

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Pittsburgh Steelers coach Mike Tomlin recently used the word “unique” several times to describe the abilities of his former quarterback Justin Fields.

That word could also be attached to what Fields faced in the NFL season opener for the New York Jets on Sept. 7, when he had an opportunity to become the first quarterback in NFL history to start and get a win in the opener for one team (Steelers) then beat his previous team to open the following season.

It didn't happen. The Steelers won 34-32.

The irony is that the Steelers' QB was Aaron Rodgers, who started the 2024 opener for the Jets but lost 32-19 to San Francisco.

Maybe the NFL schedule makers have a sense of humor, pitting the quarterbacks against each other to give fans and pundits an early chance to see which team got the better of its major offseason acquisition.

Rodgers was 22 of 30 for 244 yards and four touchdowns. Fields completed 16 of 22 for 218 yards that included a 33-yard TD to former Ohio State teammate Garrett Wilson, who totaled seven catches for 95 yards.

Fields also ran for scores from the 1 and 2 among his 48 yards on 12 carries. Fields, who posted a 20-2 record for Ohio State in 2019 and 2020, is with his third team in as many seasons, and the pressure is on him after agreeing to a two-year \$40 million contract on March 10 that guaranteed \$30 million plus a \$15 million signing bonus.

If he earns his pay, the Jets may have their signal caller for years to come. A disappointing season and, well, it is New York. The media is already conjecturing which quarterbacks will be available in the 2026 NFL draft.

“My expectations are higher for myself, are higher than anybody else's expectations,” Fields said. “I think I've been improving each year I've been in the league, so I look forward to doing the same thing this year.”

It was a trying first season with the Steelers in 2024 after three seasons with the Chicago Bears for the 11th pick in the 2021 draft.

Fields was in preseason competition with another first-year Steeler, Russell Wilson, until Wilson got hurt. Fields had a 4-2 record to start the season while throwing for 1,106 yards with five touchdowns and



FILE PHOTO

STARTING OVER — After losing the QB1 role to Russell Wilson in his only season with the Pittsburgh Steelers in 2024, Justin Fields signed a two-year deal with the New York Jets. He lost the season opener to his former team 34-32 on Sept. 7 but threw for 218 yards and a TD and rushed for two more scores.

an interception. He also rushed for 231 yards and five touchdowns in those games.

When Wilson started the seventh game and the remainder of the schedule, Fields was reduced to package plays and threw just one more pass – an incompleteness. He finished as the team's third-leading rusher with 289 yards on 62 carries (4.7 average) in 10 games and completed 106 of 161 passes (65.8 percent).

It was a far cry from 2022 when his 1,143 rushing yards were the second most by a quarterback in NFL history.

Tomlin anticipated the Jets would utilize Fields' legs against his former team. The opener was Fields' second game against the Steelers. His first was on the road during his rookie season with the Bears. Although they lost 29-27, Fields threw for

291 yards and a touchdown while also running for 45 yards on eight carries.

“You can't talk about the run game without talking about Justin's physical abilities in that area and the challenges that it may present to us. He didn't do a lot of runs by design in the preseason, but it's reasonable to expect them to have a designed running game for him,” Tomlin said. “He had it in Chicago. He had it with us. If you have a guy with his type of talents, it's somewhat common sense to have some designed run game for the quarterback position to make people play 11-on-11 football.”

“He's unique because he is who he is,” Tomlin added. “He's stronger than most mobile quarterbacks. That's a component of his game that I think is unique. He's a really talented guy physically. He's not easy to bring down. He has a solid base about him.”

Tale Of Two QBS

In the days leading to the opener, Fields' departure from the Steel City was a hot topic. The Steelers were lukewarm about their quarterbacks last season, and Wilson not returning was a foregone conclusion. He signed with the New York Giants. However, the Steelers continued to negotiate with the free agent Fields.

But when the Jets released Rodgers, the Steelers became one of the betting favor-

ites to be his next destination, and Fields sought a better deal than what the Steelers offered as well as an opportunity for another fresh start.

“It's free agency. It was not only our decision, it was his decision,” Tomlin said. “It was mutual. There are a lot of moving parts in free agency.”

When asked if he thought about returning to the Steelers for a second season, Fields simply replied, “Yeah, I considered it.”

Fields told newyorkjets.com shortly after signing that he wanted to play for new Jets coach Aaron Glenn, the former defensive coordinator for the Detroit Lions, an NFC North rival of the Bears.

“I've played against him early in my career,” Fields said. “I know how passionate he is about the game, the way he coaches, the way his players play. So I think that was the biggest thing for me. And just the opportunity, the fans, of course, the city. When you win here, there's no better place to win. Those reasons are ultimately why I ended up here.”

Glenn set the tone from the onset when one of his first moves after being hired following the 2024 season was to have Rodgers fly cross country for what the veteran QB expected to be a meeting to get to know the new coach, only to have Glenn tell him the team was moving in a different direction.

Glenn did not want to discuss the situation days before the opener, “It's not relevant to right now,” and neither did Rodgers as the game drew near.

Rodgers downplayed the revenge factor, “I'm just excited it's Week 1,” and was mum when asked if he stays in touch with people in the Jets organization. “I'm not going to tell you that.”

Fields is happy to be throwing to Wilson, who signed a four-year, \$130 million extension in the offseason. Last season, he made 101 catches for 1,104 yards and seven touchdowns, and he averaged 10.9 yards per catch.

Yet, there is concern that the rest of the receiving corps is not very good, and with Fields' passing the weakest part of his game, he could be set up for failure, though his boss would disagree.

“I like the room as a whole,” said general manager Darren Mougey.

“We want to surround Justin with skill players, along with a good line,” Glenn said. “So, anytime you can do that in any offense, with any quarterback, man, that's an A-plus. So that's the plan. That's always been the plan, and that's something that we've talked about before. Let him be a quarterback and surround him with good players.”

Glenn is confident Fields is the right player at the right time.

“I think Justin's a dynamic player, and I think there's more that we can get out of that player and I'm looking forward to that,” he said. “There's a quiet confidence about that man that's unshakable, and even though he's not the most vocal person, he's active with the body language and he's active with one-on-one conversations. If he has to stand in front of the guys

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BUCKEYES IN THE NFL

and say something, he will.”

Field General

Fields’ style contrasts with Rodgers’ more flamboyant leadership approach, said Jets center Josh Myers, who played two seasons with Fields at Ohio State and two with Rodgers for the Green Bay Packers.

“They’re definitely different,” Myers said. Reporters said he paused nine seconds before continuing, “Aaron, he just had so much experience, you know. He could talk on a lot, even with the offensive line. Justin is getting there as well, too. I think it’s a matter of time before he understands on that level. It’s tough, too, because Aaron was in (Green Bay’s) offense for years and years and years, so it’s a little bit different there.”

Most but not all Jets players avoided talking about Rodgers.

“They’re two different players,” said safety Isaiah Oliver. “But Justin, he’s a great leader. Ever since the first day he got here, he was in that role.”

Said center Joe Tippmann, “I would say Aaron’s a little. ... everybody knows who Aaron is. But Justin, he’s a great, great dude, somebody you can tell is putting it on the line for the guys.”

Linebacker Quincy Williams said there’s a different vibe with Fields.

“I feel like everybody’s just making the thing about the team,” he said. “That’s the main thing.”

Fields had a so-so preseason, but Mougey has no doubts about Fields guid-

ing the offense.

“I’ve seen the progress in this camp and look forward to seeing the progress throughout the season as they all come together,” he said. “Obviously, it’s his third stop in three years with three different coordinators and a lot of moving parts, so it does take time. But I like where it’s at and I look forward to watching the progress.”

The Jets took a hit, though, when starting right guard Alijah Vera-Tucker sustained a season-ending triceps injury during practice the week of the opener.

It’s not an ideal situation, but offensive coordinator Tanner Engstrand said the plan for Fields remains the same.

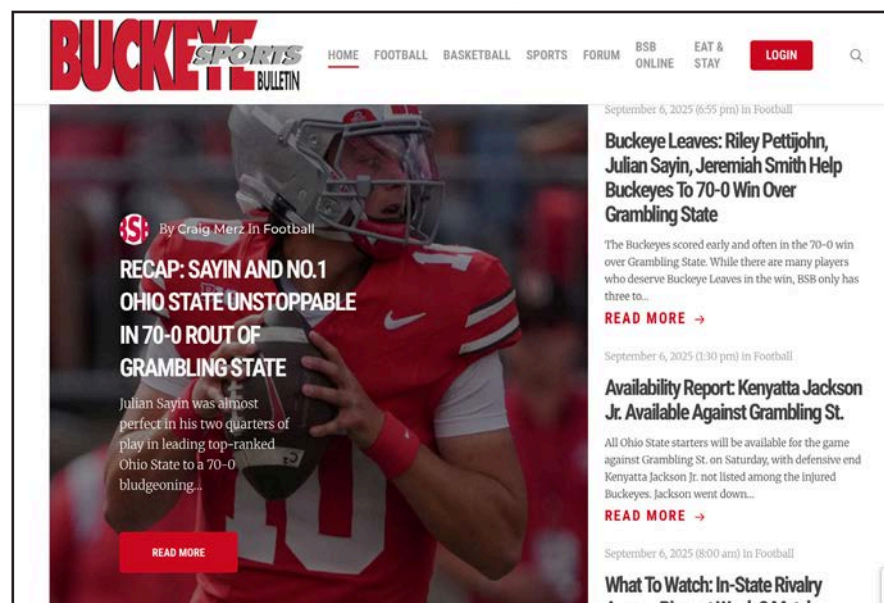
“He’s going to play the way that the defense allows him to play it,” he said. “So, if they’re going to allow him to take a shot down the field, then he’s going to take it. And if they don’t allow him, then he’s going to check the ball down and we’re going to move onto the next play, and we’re all good with that.”

Fields has no problem with the strategy.

“We’re fine with taking 8-yard completions every play, if I’m being honest with you,” he said. “Of course, you want explosives, but we’re not going to force the ball downfield. If they want to get depth on the second level, we’re fine with taking the 8-, 10-yard completion, taking time off the clock, and just driving down the field, and having 10- to 15-play drives. It gets the defense tired. It might not be as exciting on the offensive side of the ball for the fans, but it’s efficient ball.”

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Hawkeyes' Ferentz Ties Hayes' Wins Record

With Iowa's 34-7 victory over Albany on Aug. 30, Hawkeye head coach Kirk Ferentz won his 205th collegiate game as a Big Ten coach, tying legendary Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes' record.

BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

Ferentz was asked about matching the record after the game but chose to brush off the question and emphasize a team win.

"It was just good to get the win," Ferentz said. "That's what we came for."

Iowa quarterback Mark Gronowski, a transfer out of FCS South Dakota State, said that humility is the typical Ferentz response and he always chooses to remain modest.

"You know how humble he is," Gronowski said. "I said something to him about it, and he just kind of shrugged it off."

Ferentz, the longest-tenured active head coach in college football, is in his 27th season with the Hawkeyes and is the program's all-time leader in wins. The 70-year-old has been consistent if nothing else, with only one losing season in the last 24 years and two Big Ten titles to his name, and he was four times recognized as the Big Ten Coach of the Year.

Prior to his time at Iowa, Ferentz coached at Maine for three seasons (1990-92), compiling a 217-146 career record in college football.

He later spent five years in the NFL as offensive line coach for the Cleveland Browns and as offensive line coach and associate head coach for the Baltimore Ravens before taking over with the Hawkeyes.

Ferentz will likely hold the record for a long time. Of the current active head coaches in the Big Ten, Penn State head coach

James Franklin has 102 wins, Illinois head coach Bret Bielema has 97 (including his time with Wisconsin) and Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has 71 wins.

Day is the youngest of the three at 46 years old and would need to keep up his pace of 10-plus wins per year for over 14 more years to catch Ferentz, and that doesn't account for the wins Ferentz has yet to record.

Ducks' Lanning Feuds Over NIL Spending

Oklahoma State head coach Mike Gundy said at his Sept. 1 press conference that the Cowboys had invested "around \$7 million" in their football program over the past three years combined, while pointing to Oregon's significantly larger budget.

"I think Oregon spent close to \$40 million last year alone," Gundy said. "That was just one year. Now, I might be off by a few million."

He continued, stating that regarding non-conference games, multiple coaches believe teams should compete against others with comparable spending. Gundy did acknowledge Oregon's talented roster, while still doubling down on the spending by saying it translated into a strong football program.

"They're spending a lot of money, and they've put a lot into that organization, and you can see they're a good football team," Gundy said.

Oregon head coach Dan Lanning fired back in his press conference on Sept. 1, arguing that winning requires investment, while losing often serves as an excuse for those unwilling to make it.

"If you want to be a top-10 team in college football, you'd better be invested in winning. We spend to win," Lanning said. "Some people save to have an excuse for why they don't."

Gundy later clarified on the radio show "Full Ride" on Sept. 5 that his remarks about Oregon were intended as praise for the program rather than criticism.



FILE PHOTO

HAWK TIE — Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz equaled Ohio State coach Woody Hayes' record of 205 wins as a Big Ten coach with a victory over Albany on Aug. 30. Ferentz, in his 27th season with the Hawkeyes, failed to break the record due to a 16-13 loss to rival Iowa State on Sept. 6 but will have another chance Sept. 13 vs. Massachusetts.

"A little bit of that was taken out of context," Gundy said. "The truth of the matter is, I was being very complimentary of Oregon and their commitment. The other things that had been said that day were that they made a huge commitment to facilities, as we know. They've made a huge commitment to their staff. They've made a huge commitment to their surrounding staff, and then they've made a huge NIL commitment."

Oregon defeated Oklahoma State 69-3 on Sept. 6.

U-M's Barham Misses First Half After Targeting

Michigan missed senior linebacker Jaishawn Barham for the opening half of its matchup against Oklahoma on Sept. 6.

Barham was ejected from then-No. 14 Michigan's 34-17 Week 1 win over New Mexico for a targeting penalty and did not play in the first half of the Wolverines' matchup at No. 18 Oklahoma.

Sophomore Cole Sullivan was one backup whose snaps increased with Barham out, but he still felt sorry for his teammate since he was kicked out of the Aug. 30 con-

test against the Lobos.

"I thought that was an unfortunate call for him," Sullivan said. "I feel bad just because he's one of our leaders. I hate to see him come out of the game. But of course, I had to mentally prepare myself. I figured, maybe, I'd probably be getting some more reps here in the game."

Barham came off the blindside left edge to sack Lobos quarterback Jack Layne, making facemask-to-facemask contact but not leading with the crown of his helmet, instead turning his head in an apparent effort to lessen the impact.

Michigan head coach Sherrone Moore said on Sept. 1 that the team appealed the call, but it was ultimately upheld by the Big Ten.

Moore is using the play as an opportunity to call for changes to the Big Ten's targeting and helmet-to-helmet rules. He expressed disappointment with the decision, noting that several top Big Ten officials, including commissioner Tony Petitti, disagreed with the targeting rule and have called for changes.

"So it was upheld," Moore said. "We don't

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BIG

2025 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Illinois	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Indiana	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Maryland	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Michigan State	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Minnesota	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Nebraska	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Ohio State	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Oregon	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Penn State	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Purdue	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Rutgers	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
USC	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Washington	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Wisconsin	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Iowa	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
Michigan	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
Northwestern	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
UCLA	0	0	0.000	0	2	0.000

Sept. 5 Games

Northwestern 42, Western Illinois 7
Maryland 20, NIU 3

Sept. 6 Games

Indiana 56, Kennesaw State 9
Penn State 34, FIU 0
Illinois 45, Duke 19
Iowa State 16, Iowa 13
Minnesota 66, Northwestern State 0
Oregon 69, Oklahoma State 3
Rutgers 45, Miami (OH) 17
Ohio State 70, Grambling 0
Wisconsin 42, Middle Tenn. 10
Michigan State 42, Boston College 40 (2OT)
Nebraska 68, Akron 0
Purdue 34, Southern Illinois 17
Oklahoma 24, Michigan 13
USC 59, Ga. Southern 20
UCLA 30, UNLV 23
Washington 70, UC Davis 10

Sept. 12 Games

Indiana State at Indiana, 6:30 p.m.
New Mexico at UCLA, 10 p.m.

Sept. 13 Games

Oregon at Northwestern, noon
Central Michigan at Michigan, noon
Towson at Maryland, noon
Wisconsin at Alabama, noon
Houston Christian at Nebraska, noon
Youngstown St. at Michigan St., 3:30 p.m.
Villanova at Penn State, 3:30 p.m.
USC at Purdue, 3:30 p.m.
Norfolk State at Rutgers, 3:30 p.m.
Western Michigan at Illinois, 7 p.m.
Ohio at **Ohio State**, 7 p.m.
Massachusetts at Iowa, 7:30 p.m.
Minnesota at Cal, 10:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

Although he disagreed with the Big Ten's decision, Moore said the Wolverines were keeping their focus on the task ahead and had Barham available for the second half against the Sooners.

"That was the ruling, and we'll continue to work and fight for the game, but completely disagree with it, as did Tony and A.J. with the Big Ten, but we have to move on," Moore said.

When he returned to the game in the second half of Michigan's 24-13 loss to the Sooners, he had six tackles, including half of a tackle for loss.

After the loss, Michigan dropped from No. 15 to No. 23.

Former Iowa, USC Coach Raveling Dies At 88

Former Iowa and USC men's basketball

head coach George Raveling passed away on Sept. 2 at the age of 88 after a battle with cancer.

His family released a statement after his passing.

"It is with deep sadness and unimaginable pain that we share the passing of our beloved 'Coach,' George Henry Raveling, who faced cancer with courage and grace. He transitioned peacefully at 88, surrounded by family as well as love, faith and sacred protection. There are no words to fully capture what George meant to his family, friends, colleagues, former players, and assistants – and to the world. He will be profoundly missed, yet his aura energy, divine presence, and timeless wisdom live on in all those he touched and transformed."

Raveling coached Washington State from 1972-83 before taking over as head

coach for the Hawkeyes from 1983-86, leading Iowa to two straight 20-win seasons and NCAA Tournament berths. He then took the helm of USC from 1986-94, coaching the Trojans to two NCAA Tournament and NIT appearances each, while earning Kodak National Coach of the Year honors in 1992.

Between his time at Washington State, Iowa and USC, Raveling had a career head-coaching record of 335-293.

The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Famer also served as an assistant coach at the 1984 and 1988 Olympics, earning gold and bronze medals, respectively, in those years. The 1984 team that he coached featured a young Michael Jordan. Raveling played a crucial role in convincing the all-time great to sign with Nike, sparking the creation of the "Jordan" brand.

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agree with it. Tony doesn't agree with it. (Big Ten VP) A.J. (Edds) doesn't agree with it. It's a rule we have to change, and we have to look at college football, just for the general – the game," Moore said. "Toughness of the game, how you want to teach tackling, how you want to teach guys that are 6-3 tackling guys that are 5-8. He lowers his head, and it might be even worse.

"He tries to duck to the side, and the guy spins, he misses. There's a way that we have to teach guys how to tackle and what to do, and there was a clear shot earlier in the game where (Layne) had a clear shot and he saw it right through the guy and avoided it. He took one step, and that's what happened."

2027 RB Recruit: Texas Game Was ‘Electric’

Over 100 prospects were on hand for the 14-7 win Ohio State had over Texas on Aug. 30, and Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205) was one of them.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

The atmosphere at the game was described by many as one of the loudest games they had been to in Ohio Stadium, with the crowd of 107,524 fans not letting the Longhorn offense communicate easily through all four quarters of the contest.

Gabriel Georges made note of how crazy the stadium got as well, and he thought the Buckeyes, now ranked No. 1 in the country, played well.

“The atmosphere and vibe were electric,” Gabriel Georges told 247Sports. “You could definitely feel the energy. The stadium was packed and loud. It was a nice vibe.

“The team seems to have good chemistry and looked very confident. Everybody seemed very poised and seemed to be doing their respective jobs. They played like professionals.”

He watched Ohio State beat the No.

1 team in the country but saw a running back room that might be able to use his talent as a back with both elite power and speed. CJ Donaldson had one of the two Buckeye touchdowns in the game, but the run game altogether had just 2.3 yards per carry in 34 rushes (77 yards).

Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn has been in on Gabriel Georges for a while now. The French-Canadian running back was at a one-day recruiting camp of Ohio State’s over the summer, and he received a lot of attention from Locklyn.

At the recruiting camp, he said he likes the style that Locklyn uses to coach his running back room.

“I’m from a family of football players,” Gabriel Georges said in June. “My uncle, he is a coach, and the way he coached me was always, ‘Do this, do that.’ Like military kind of style, like Coach Lock. It’s always like, screaming, ‘Cut.’ So it’s something I’m familiar with, and I really like that.”

As a sophomore in 2024, Gabriel Georges ran for 1,103 yards on 114 carries (9.7 yards per carry) and 14 touchdowns. He ranks as the No. 34 player in the country, the No. 3 running back and the No. 1 player in the state of Tennessee in the 2027 class.

But while he is dominating on the football field, Gabriel Georges has been trying to adjust to life in the States. He had to learn English quickly when he got to Baylor School, which he said playing football

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	

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	★★★★	Tampa (Fla.) Blake	

helped him do faster than he would have been able to otherwise. But he believed the move from Canada to the United States was necessary if he wanted to develop his football game as much as he felt he could with his talent.

“At first (it was difficult), because I play in Tennessee, so the first month was pretty hard for me to understand the coaches,” Gabriel Georges said. “School, at the beginning, was pretty hard. And that Baylor team really helped me learn English faster. Right now, sometimes, I can ask questions, repeat it and understand it better. But it’s kind of hard sometimes.

“In Canada, you don’t really have good exposure for university and stuff. If I would have stayed in Canada, I would never be able to be here (at Ohio State) or be able to do visits. It was (hard), because I’m going to be far from my family and friends. But at some point, it was something I had to do if I wanted to succeed in football and have more exposure and be able to play against good players.”

Where he ends up playing in college will depend on a few factors, but his academics and his running back coach are going to be the two most important factors that go into his decision, he said when he was at the camp.

“The coach,” Gabriel Georges said. “How they play their running backs. That’s the type of thing I look at. I would say school first, because my mom and my dad really want me to go to a great school and want me to get a great degree.

“I think Coach Locklyn is a great coach for that. He’s really showing me on the field and showing me some new drills and some things that I have to correct about myself and how I play football.”

Gabriel Georges has 33 Division I offers, but early on in the process, there seem to be three schools that are separating themselves from the rest. Ohio State is one of them, with Tennessee and Georgia also in the mix.

NCAA To Adopt Single Portal Window

The NCAA Football Oversight Committee voted on Sept. 4 to support cutting the two transfer portal windows to just one 10-day window in January.

The idea has not been officially adopted, and the NCAA Administrative Committee is expected to vote on the matter on Oct. 1.

The two current portal windows run through most of December and then a 10-day window after spring practices.

The effects of one single window will be an extremely hectic January, especially for teams that go deep in the College Football Playoff. Ohio State’s national championship win over Notre Dame was on Jan. 20, 2025, and its semifinal Cotton Bowl win was Jan. 10.

The proposed window from Jan. 2-11 would cause difficulties for both teams that are looking to recruit players in the portal as well as the players on playoff teams who are trying to decide whether



they should stick where they are for the rest of the CFP or enter the portal when it opens.

If a head coach is fired or leaves a team, players would still get a 30-day transfer window.

The Football Oversight Committee is also looking to make the entire month of December a dead period for recruiting, with a contact period held from Jan. 5-31. It also wants the date that recruits can receive official written offers from schools pushed back from Aug. 1 to Nov. 15.

Ohio State Hosts Visitors For Blowout

While the visitor list wasn't as big as it was in the season opener against Texas, the Buckeyes still took the chance to get recruits on campus for their 70-0 win over Grambling State on Sept. 6.

While there are some downsides to a win like that – recruits not being able to see what a big-game environment is like, for one – there are also some positives. Coaches likely had more time to spend with the players who made it to campus before the 3:30 p.m. start, and the visit was likely much more personalized for the few recruits who made the trip.

The following list of recruits was compiled using our own information, reports from other outlets and recruits themselves.

The commits who were in attendance were Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187), Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 315) and 2027 commit Brady Edmunds (6-5, 215), a four-star quarterback from Huntington Beach, Calif.

The only prospect who had an Ohio State offer before coming to campus was Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep 2027 tight end JT Geraci (6-5, 230). Corbin, Ky., three-star defensive lineman Malachi Brown (6-4, 265) made his first trip to Ohio Stadium and was joined by Hartland, Mich., interior offensive lineman William Tobin (6-4, 290) and Columbus Watterson linebacker Jackson Reynolds (6-3, 205) in his class.

Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Brandon Nash (6-2, 185) and Hamburg (N.Y.) St. Francis wide receiver Mason Anderson (5-11, 180), two 2028 prospects, were also on site.

Buckeyes' 2026 Class Ranks Ninth

When Ryan Day took over as head coach for Ohio State over the 2018-19 offseason, there was some trouble when it came to landing a recruiting class that was up to Ohio State's usual standard, which can be the case for any program going through a coaching change. The Buckeyes were 14th in the 247Sports composite team rankings and finished third in the Big Ten behind Michigan (eighth) and Penn State (12th).

However, Day picked that performance up quickly, and since then, he has managed to finish six straight years with a recruiting class in the top five and has finished as the top class in the conference every season.

Usually, the Buckeyes are among the top teams throughout the entire cycle, with

their exact spot varying somewhat until it becomes final after National Signing Day in February. But for the 2026 class, Ohio State is currently ranked ninth with time running out. It also ranks behind USC (No. 2) and Oregon (No. 7) in the conference, with Michigan close behind at No. 10.

With most top 2026 recruits already committed, Ohio State will have some work to do to be considered a top class in the country. After missing on each of Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200), Flowood (Miss) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralen Womack (6-0, 195) and Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3,

285) in the span of four days, all of Ohio State's top targets are off the board.

At this point, if the Buckeyes are hoping to add top-tier talent, it will have to be by flipping some prospects. Despite some worry from the Buckeye faithful about this class, Day still likes the players who are committed to the Buckeyes and said the coaches still have a plan as signing day approaches.

"We're always looking to make sure that we're going to do what's right short term, but also long term," Day said on Aug. 26. "Sometimes it's a floating target in terms of exactly how we need to handle things. We'll continue to work through. It's a long way to signing day, and we have a great

plan moving toward December."

The Buckeyes will also have to make sure to keep their current commits happy enough that they don't flip elsewhere. Possibly the most concerning to Ohio State is Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) still seemingly keeping his options open with LSU, which is near his high school.

Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260), who committed to the Buckeyes in June, will also be important to hold on to since he is the only edge rusher in the class.

Continued On Page 30

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Never Too Early To Woo '28 Quarterbacks

Continued From Page 29

OSU Offers Scholarship To LB

Multiple new Ohio State scholarship offers were revealed since BSB last went to press.

The first was to Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco three-star linebacker Josiah Poyer in the 2027 class. He is ranked by 247Sports composite as the No. 659 player in the country, the No. 47 linebacker and the No. 116 player in the state of California.

The Buckeyes were just the second team to offer Poyer, with the other coming from New Mexico. But one day after the Buckeyes offered him on Aug. 30, Washington became the third team to offer a scholarship. The offer he received from OSU was when he was on campus visiting during the weekend of the Texas game.

Poyer's high school is where the Buckeyes went to get current freshman defensive end Epi Sitanilei, who is Poyer's cousin.

2028 QBs Talk Texas Visit

Ohio State has quarterbacks in the

2026 and 2027 recruiting classes, and with how early the position comes off the board, the Buckeyes are already going after some of the top 2028 signal callers.

Vero Beach, Fla., four-star Wonderful "Champ" Monds IV (6-2, 224) and Detroit Cass Technical five-star Donald Tabron II (6-4, 180) were both on the sideline before the game for their visits.

Both prospects talked with 247Sports after their time in Columbus, and both had only good things to say about what they saw from the program and what they saw on the field.

"Great win for Ohio State against Texas. Ohio Stadium was electric," Monds said. "Everyone from the players to the staff and fans was hype. I was impressed with how comfortable (Julian Sayin) was with his first start against the No. 1 team in the country. He was well prepared. The overall experience was amazing and positive."

Monds is the No. 104 prospect in the country, the No. 7 quarterback and the No. 18 player in the state of Florida. He has 19 Division I offers, including the one he got from Ohio State on Jan. 30.

"The atmosphere in Ohio Stadium was amazing," Tabron said. "The energy from the crowd and the way the Buckeye fans supported their team from start to finish

was impressive. Watching Ohio State get the win over Texas showed me what makes their program so strong. The speed they played with and how disciplined they were on both sides of the ball impressed me the most. It was definitely a great experience."

Tabron is ranked the No. 39 player in the 2028 class, the No. 5 quarterback and the No. 3 player in the state of Michigan. He has 23 Division I offers, although he has not received one from the Buckeyes yet. However, the interest in Tabron is obvious since they hosted him on campus.

Buckeye Commits Shine In Prep Games

Ohio State coaches must have been pleased when they checked in with how their 2026 commits are performing so far this season.

Mission Viejo, Calif., three-star quarterback Luke Fahey (6-0, 185) is one player who impressed over the weekend of the Texas game. He put up a 23-of-26 passing performance for 375 yards and three touchdowns in a 59-14 win over Santa Fe Springs St. Paul. He also added 20 rushing yards and one touchdown in the win.

Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-3, 190) was another top performer in the

class. In a 31-23 win over Huntington North, Guilford was the difference-maker with six catches for 139 yards and two touchdowns.

Ohio State's receiver commits all played well – other than Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei pledges five-star Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) and four-star Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180), whose game was canceled due to Torrance Bishop Montgomery forfeiting the matchup.

Southlake (Texas) Carroll three-star pass catcher Brock Boyd (6-1, 180) managed six catches for 88 yards and a score, while Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial four-star Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) won his game over Thornville Sheridan 42-14. The Buckeyes' lone 2027 wide receiver commit, Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star Jamier Brown (5-11, 170) had four catches for 74 yards in a 38-28 loss to Pickerington Central. He also had 13 rushing yards and a touchdown on the ground.

Wilder finished a 47-0 win over Los Angeles Hamilton with five total tackles (one for loss) and one sack while Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185) had eight tackles and broke up one pass in a 22-21 win over East St. Louis, Ill.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1990

Florida and California had traditionally been hotbeds of recruiting for college football teams, and that climate had not changed for 1990.

Those two states had another bumper crop of potential college stars participating in their final year of high school ball. Ohio State, which had recruited both states extensively in the past, would do so again this year and had a chance to land some of the top names in those areas.

"It's really amazing to see how Ohio State crops up in those states," said national recruiting expert Tom Lemming. "They have really done a good job in the past few years expanding their recruiting base to include states like Florida and California."

Lemming added that teams that desire to become or remain national powers must recruit players from those two regions.

"There are just so many good players in both states," he said. "Naturally, when you go to Florida, you're competing against Florida, Florida State and Miami. Likewise, when you recruit in California, you have the UCLAs, the USCs and the rest of the Pac-10."

30 Years Ago — 1995

Tim Hasselbeck, one of the nation's top prep quarterbacks from Westwood (Mass.) Xaverian Brothers High School, watched OSU's season-opening win over Boston College with mixed feelings.

Hasselbeck's brother, Matt, played for the Eagles in a mop-up role at quarterback late in OSU's 38-6 win. The two schools were among Tim's top five college choices, along with Stanford, Michigan and Notre Dame.

"I actually didn't get to see a lot of it because we were practicing in triple sessions at the time," he said. "When my brother was in the game, it was basically out of hand, so I was cheering for him."

"As far as Ohio State, I was able to look at the quarterback situation. I got to see their backups (sophomores Stanley Jackson and Tom Hoying) play a little bit."

25 Years Ago — 2000

Pat Massey, a defensive end from Cleveland St. Ignatius, was the only Ohio player listed on USA Today's 25-man preseason All-USA team. He was also a Rivals100.com top-100 pick, ranking second among all defensive ends nationally.

Prep Football Prospects of Ohio rated him third overall in the state. As a junior, he had 51 tackles and 13 sacks in helping St. Ignatius claim a Division I state title.

"I think I've got the potential to get a lot bigger," Massey (6-8, 240) said. "I want to become a better player. I play a lot of sports."

"I'm a pretty good athlete, I think. I come off the edge pretty well."

Massey, the brother of OSU lineman Jim Massey, said he had narrowed his choices to two schools, Michigan and Notre Dame, after previously considering Ohio State and Boston College.

20 Years Ago — 2005

Typically, Ohio State welcomed scores of prospects for unofficial visits during the season and saved the majority of official visits for postseason dates.

Ideally, a player would make an unofficial and an official trip to the school, allowing him to take in the gameday atmosphere of Ohio Stadium and spend a great deal of time with the coaching staff – something that's not always possible with the hectic schedule in the fall.

But the Sept. 10 game with Texas was going to break the mold a little bit. A primetime matchup with a topflight opponent didn't just let recruits take in what should be one of the best Ohio Stadium atmospheres in recent memory. It also allowed coaches to spend the early part of their day with recruits.

"I think it definitely is a marquee recruiting game as far as atmosphere and the time during the day you can have with recruits," Ohio State recruiting coordinator John Peterson told BSB. "It will be a big game for us."

15 Years Ago — 2010

The next time James Ross was going to take in a game at Michigan Stadium, he would likely have been more conscious of what he was wearing.

The junior prospect from Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's took in Michigan's season-opening contest against Connecticut while wearing his school's colors of white and red. In the process, he opened himself up to some harassment from the home fans.

"They thought we were Ohio State fans," he said. "We were wearing the same colors. We got some stuff yelled at us and one guy, while crossing the street, flipped us the finger."

10 Years Ago — 2015

Under first-year coach Jim Harbaugh, Michigan was ranked eighth in the Scout.com team recruiting rankings for the class of 2016 as of Sept. 20.

That was an impressive start for the Wolverines' head man, but it also featured an unusual quirk – none of the 22 Michigan commits were from Ohio. If the Wolverines failed to lock up an Ohio native between September and February, it would be just the second time in at least the two previous decades that Michigan signed a class with no Ohioans. The last time since at least

1995 (before which records become harder to locate online) that Michigan shirked the Buckeye State was 2007, the last recruiting class under Lloyd Carr.

Both Rich Rodriguez and Brady Hoke – particularly Hoke – weren't shy about dipping into Ohio's fertile recruiting grounds. But Harbaugh's two head coaching stints came at San Diego and Stanford, schools that recruited either on the West Coast or nationally.

Five Years Ago — 2020

As expected, the NCAA Division I Council extended what was an ongoing college football recruiting dead period through Jan. 1, 2021.

"While the council acknowledged and appreciates the growing desire to resume in-person recruiting by select coaches' associations, council members ultimately concluded the primary concern right now must be protecting the current student-athletes on our campuses," council chair and Pennsylvania athletic director M. Grace Calhoun said in a statement. "We encourage our coaches to interact with prospective student-athletes virtually in this time period."

The dead period – which was originally put in place in March amid the coronavirus pandemic – prevented prospective student-athletes from conducting on-campus visits and coaches from attending their games or practices in the fall. Phone calls and virtual meetings were still allowed, however.

One Year Ago — 2024

While it seemed like Ohio State could have been set at quarterback for the near future, it still wasn't too early to be preparing even further down the line, and the Buckeyes were a favorite for one of the top quarterbacks in the 2027 class.

On Sept. 2, it was revealed that Huntington Beach, Calif., quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200) was down to his final four schools, which were Michigan, Penn State, Ohio State and Texas.

Edmunds was at one of Ohio State's early June camps, which is where he initially received his offer from the Buckeyes, and since then, they had been able to turn themselves into one of the favorites.

"OSU has been one of my dream schools since Day 1," Edmunds told 247Sports. "They have a great group of coaches in the QB room, so it only makes sense as to why they have such a stacked room right now. They're a national contender every year."

ASK AN ANALYST

with Bill Greene Of Buckeye Scoop

Ohio State is down to ninth in 247Sports' team rankings for its 2026 class after finishing six straight years with top-five classes. Do you expect the Buckeyes will be very active this fall, trying to flip prospects they missed on?

"Yeah, I do, and then in a way, I'm not so sure. If you go back and look at the year after Ohio State won its past two national championships, they seem to struggle in the next recruiting class. You would think it would be the exact opposite. You would think everybody would be calling them, clamoring to be a part of this class. It just hasn't worked out that way. I also really like this class, so I don't know if being ranked ninth right now means anything. Plus, we're in early September, and we don't judge classes until we see the final in February. You're at halftime right now in an NBA game, and you might be down five points. I don't know if there's anything to worry about. I really do like this class, by the way. If someone at 247 calls them No. 9 or No. 3 or No. 5, (who cares?). Are you filling your needs? That's what I look at. There are still some holes, but I like this class."

Where are some areas you think they need to improve their 2026 class?

"If you look at the offensive line, I like the guys that they have committed. They need another one, so I think they're going to be active there. I don't think they want four. I think they want five. If you look at running back, you just have Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), the only one committed. I like him, but I like him as the No. 2 guy if you flip Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade Madonna four-star running back Derrek Cooper (6-1, 205) or Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0,

200). At quarterback, I'm not all that thrilled with Mission Viejo, Calif., three-star quarterback Luke Fahey (6-0, 185), but I don't know. I think Tavien St. Clair is their guy going forward.

"They have four D-linemen committed. I don't think any of them is all that special. I don't think any of them are bad. They're just dudes. I think they need an impact pass rusher – Zach Harrison, someone like that. At linebacker, I'm not too thrilled with either of Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225) or Olentangy (Ohio) Lewis Center four-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225). I think they need another one. They have Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185). I think they need two more cornerbacks, and the funny thing is, there are actually three of them in Ohio that I really like, and they didn't get any of them, which is shocking with Toledo Central Catholic four-star Victor Singleton (5-11, 160), Akron Hoban four-star Elbert Hill (5-10, 175) and Avon four-star Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 175). To not get those three guys is kind of weird to me."

As expected, LSU is trying to flip Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207). Do you believe he will stick with Ohio State?

"It's tough to say. Money rules the day. We've seen baseball players leave championship teams and go sign with bad teams. If the money's right, you're going to go. What are they paying him? I don't know. He is from Baton Rouge. That's where he grew up. He also has a brother on the LSU team, so there are a lot of things going on there. I was raised in this business on comfort and relationships. That's what I based everything on until NIL came around.

"Now it's just so different. Now you can have a kid that loves your school, loves the position coach, loves the head coach, but somebody offers more money – I mean, they're no different than we are and no different than guys in the NFL, so it just kind of concerns you. He's from there, his brother is on the team there. If they offer huge money, why would he not go there? I think you have to be worried until you have pen to paper. I think you're going to be worried, because I see reasons why LSU could flip him."

It seems like Carlos Locklyn is all in on Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205) in the 2027 class. Have you been able to see him play? What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I've watched his film, and I love that kid. The thing is, he's now in Tennessee, but he's not from there. He's a Canadian kid, which is really shocking that he's really good. Now, he loves OSU. He loves (running backs coach Carlos Locklyn). I think Ohio State is the favorite. He wasn't born in Tennessee. I don't think you have that home-state thing there. If you make sure the money's competitive, I think they're going to get him. Now, as a player, I love that kid. If you watch his film, to me, he's like a younger J.K. Dobbins with the vision and the cutting ability. There's a lot to like about that kid from his film. Now, I don't know the competition he's playing against, but from what I see of how he handles himself with the football, I love the vision, I love the cutting ability, and that's something that doesn't have to be against Cleveland St. Ignatius to see that. It can be in a scrimmage against a dog crap team, and you can see cutting ability and vision.""

U-M Offers Five-Star RB While On OSU Visit

The rivalry couldn't even take a break when Ohio State was hosting the No. 1 team in the country for its season opener.

While the Buckeyes were busy hosting the large group of prospects on campus for the win over Texas, one recruit who was included in that group received an offer from the Buckeyes' archrival.

East St. Louis, Ill., five-star running back Myson Johnson-Cook (6-2, 220) of

the 2027 class posted a video of him answering a phone call while he was in Ohio Stadium from someone at Michigan who chose then to offer him a scholarship.

Johnson-Cook is the No. 31 prospect in the country, the No. 2-ranked athlete and the No. 2 player in the state of Illinois. He already holds 41 Division I offers after the Wolverines' phone call on Aug. 30, including one from the Buckeyes that he received on Feb. 12 from Locklyn.

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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.

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

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Texas Game Big For Basketball Recruiting

Ohio State hosted over 100 football recruits for the 14-7 win against Texas on Aug. 30. The season opener that many called the best Week 1 matchup ever was also a big draw for men's basketball coach Jake Diebler and his program.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

The Buckeyes hosted OSU commit Marcus Johnson (6-2, 180), a four-star point guard from Garfield Heights, Ohio, on campus for an official visit over that weekend. Johnson, who was Diebler's first recruiting commitment after he became the full-time head coach, seems to be locked in with the Buckeyes.

In the 2026 class, the Buckeyes also hosted Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy five-star small forward Anthony Thompson (6-8, 205) on an official visit. He hasn't commented on how the visit went, but the fact that the Buckeyes were able to get him on campus is a very good sign.

Thompson is the No. 8 player in the country, the No. 2 small forward nationally and the top player in the state of Ohio. He plans to take many more visits to other top schools, but the Buckeyes were the first of those. He is also looking at Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Purdue and Texas, which will be some tough competition to beat.

But the Buckeyes do have the advantage of being in Thompson's home state, where he has played all three years of high school basketball so far. Coaching and play style are two of the bigger things Thompson is looking for in a fit.

"I'm going to look at the play style and

their plan for me. I've played a small forward role my whole life, so that is what I'm most comfortable with," Thompson told Rivals. "I think it allows me to best open up my game inside and out. But I can play however the coach wants me, in multiple different styles. So I'm going to look at the play style and go somewhere I'm comfortable."

As the No. 8 player in the country, Thompson is the highest-rated player to enter his senior high school season playing in the state of Ohio since Jared Sullinger was the No. 3 player in the 2010 recruiting class. Thompson told The Columbus Dispatch that his plan is to commit in the fall and sign during the early signing period.

The Buckeyes also hosted three 2027 prospects during the Texas game, with Chandler (Ariz.) Compass Prep five-star small forward Demarcus Henry (6-6, 190), Mouth of Wilson (Va.) Oak Hill Academy four-star combo guard LJ Smith (6-4, 180) and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star combo guard Joshua Tyson (6-2, 170) each making the trip to Columbus as well.

Henry is the highest-rated of the three as the No. 21 prospect in the country, the No. 8 small forward and the No. 4 player in the state of Arizona. He has just five Division I offers from Cincinnati, Ohio State, Oregon, UNLV and Washington, so Diebler has somewhat of a head start before more top-tier programs get involved.

Henry played part of his freshman year at Cincinnati Withrow before he transferred to Compass Prep, so he does have the in-state connection. He is the younger brother of 2026 Ohio State football commit Chris Henry Jr., a five-star wide receiver from Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei.

Smith is the No. 34 player in the country, the No. 3 combo guard and the No. 1 player in the state of Virginia. He has 17 Division I offers, including offers from In-

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

diana, Kansas, North Carolina and West Virginia, among others.

As a sophomore, Smith averaged 33.1 points, 9.2 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game at Lincolnton, N.C.

Tyson is the No. 79 player in the country, the No. 8 combo guard and the No. 3 player in the state of Ohio. He holds 12 Division I offers, with some from Akron, Cincinnati, Dayton, Kent State, New Mexico, Ohio State and Penn State, among others. He was offered by the Buckeyes over the summer when his high school team was playing at a camp that was held at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes also hosted a 2028 recruit on campus, getting Atlanta Overtime Elite shooting guard Kameron Mercer (6-4, 180) to Columbus for the first time. His father, Craig, talked with the Dispatch about what he thought of his visit.

"It was amazing," Craig Mercer said. "Obviously, the matchup was highly intense, and there was a lot of anticipation going into that game, but overall it was amazing. Great seats, the hospitality, the coaches always coming up to you, 'Do you need anything? Can we help you with anything?' Super nice staff. I feel like we connect really well with Ohio State."

The Buckeyes have gone without a five-star recruit since 2014, when D'Angelo Russell committed to the program, and have landed only six five-star prospects, according to 247Sports' rankings, which began in 2000.

While Kameron Mercer isn't yet ranked, it wouldn't be a surprise to see him be a five-star player as one of the top basketball recruits in the 2028 class. Diebler and associate head coach Joel Justus seem to be

communicating that to the family.

"That's been one of the things that Jake and Joel have been saying is how big this is for Ohio State and the program to potentially have a top-10 recruit," Craig Mercer told the Dispatch. "That it's been a long time since Ohio State's had a top-10 recruit, so they continue to harp on how important Kameron is. It can change the trajectory of the basketball program and all that good stuff."

"They haven't had a top-10 recruit, and I think part of that is because Ohio hasn't had any top-10 guys for them to recruit."

The Buckeyes have more visits scheduled as well. They hosted Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center Tristan Reed (6-9, 230) to campus for an official visit the weekend of Sept. 12 when Grambling State was in town for its 70-0 loss to the football team.

Reed's older brother, Tarris, plays at UConn and was recruited by Ohio State and former coach Chris Holtmann.

"I'm just looking forward to seeing Ohio State," Tristan Reed told 247Sports. "We went on the official with Tarris a few years ago under Coach Holtmann and then my unofficial. It was like a different vibe. It is just a different feeling now because Coach Diebler is the head coach and Coach (Jammal) Walker and Coach (Brian) Walsh are the assistant coaches. I am just excited to get down there and see it all."

He also has visits scheduled to Maryland, Michigan State, Mississippi State and Missouri.

Buckeye Commits Downgraded

The two Buckeye commits in the 2026 class dropped in the rankings in the latest 247Sports update. Both Johnson and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Prolific Prep four-star power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195) were downgraded only slightly.

Johnson was the No. 27 player in the country before the update and dropped to the No. 36 player in the country. He is now the No. 3 player in the state of Ohio and the No. 3 point guard in the country.

Smith fell just four spots, from No. 136 to No. 140. He is the No. 23 power forward and the No. 21 player in the state of Florida in the updated rankings.

Diebler and the Buckeyes are still working hard to add to the class, but even without more prospects included, they are considered the No. 5 team in the country and the No. 2 team in the Big Ten. They are behind No. 1 Florida State, No. 2 Purdue, No. 3 VCU and No. 4 Notre Dame.



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McGuff Speaks On OVI Months After Arrest

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff spoke to the media for the first time since his May 6 arrest for an OVI. During an availability at the Schottenstein Center on Aug. 28, McGuff fielded questions about his arrest and the future of his program.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

"Really a horrible situation, which I take very seriously," McGuff said. "To bring negativity to the university and the people involved in our program was a really terrible situation for me."

Bodycam footage released by the nearby Dublin Police Department on May 13 showed McGuff struggling to answer questions from local police and failing multiple sobriety tests on the night of his arrest.

The longtime Ohio State coach was issued a two-week suspension by athletic director Ross Bjork. The legal ramifications of his arrest are still playing out, though, as his pretrial conference at the Dublin mayor's office was pushed back to Oct. 7.

Because McGuff's arrest occurred during the offseason when many players were not on campus, the Buckeye coach couldn't address the team all at once. Instead, McGuff said he reached out to each player individually.

According to McGuff, his players were very supportive.

"They have been very supportive, and we've been very fortunate here to recruit terrific young women," McGuff said. "I've been fortunate to develop, I think, very positive, healthy relationships with them, so they've been supportive, and they want somebody who can invest and pour into them. I think they've seen that this summer coming out of that situation."

Bjork talked with BSB in July about the support he gave to McGuff. The support given to McGuff from the administration is one reason he feels so happy to be leading the program.

"I want to kind of reinforce just how fortunate I think I am to be the head coach here and how much I love it here and how appreciative I am of the support that I've always gotten from the administration, certainly in a tough time like this," McGuff said. "Probably even more important than all that is just how much I really, really enjoy coaching the young women in our program and how much I believe in what we're doing and how we're doing it. I just want to make sure I'm really ready to make sure I can give everything I can to these players, because that's what they deserve, and I'm looking forward to doing it."

McGuff Says 2025-26 Team To Have New Look

Although Ohio State is returning several key players from its 2024-25 team, including star point guard Jalonni Cambridge and three-point specialist shooting guard Chance Gray, the Buckeyes' team identity



SONNY BROCKWAY

SCARLET AND GRAY — With leaders such as Cotie McMahon and Taylor Thierry no longer with the program and many new faces, women's basketball coach Kevin McGuff is looking for Chance Gray (above) to step up in that capacity in her second season with the Buckeyes after two at Oregon. Gray will wear No. 2 for the 2025-26 season.

may be different, McGuff said.

"We have a completely different team because not only did we lose (former star player Cotie McMahon), but Taylor Thierry, who was here for four years and was really instrumental in our success, and Ajae Petty, who had a really good year last year."

After McMahon left via the transfer portal to go to Ole Miss and both Thierry and Petty left after using up all of their eligibility, the Buckeyes went to the portal to replace their veterans with former Boston College guard T'iana Todd and Florida forward Kylee Kitts. Those additions have changed the Buckeyes' strengths, according to McGuff.

"I would say generally speaking, we're probably not as athletic as we have been in the past, but we might be a little bit more skilled," McGuff said. "(Freshmen) Dasha Biriuk and Bryn Martin can really shoot the ball. T'iana Todd, who transferred from Boston College, can really shoot the ball, and Kylee Kitts, who comes from Florida, has a great skill set at 6-4 and can shoot it as well. I think we're going to look a little different and maybe not make the athletic plays we've made in the past but

maybe hang our hat on a little more of a team game and a little more of our skill set rather than just athleticism."

The Buckeyes' athleticism was one reason that their signature full-court press defense was so effective last season, but even with some new faces on the team, fans shouldn't expect the press to go anywhere.

"We'll still press," McGuff said. "Maybe it's not for 40 minutes every night, but we were working on it today, so that will still be a big part of the identity of this program."

As different as Todd and Kitts may be from some of last year's players, McGuff said his program targeted them, in part, because they filled holes at their respective positions.

"For both Kylie and T'iana, we had a specific need," McGuff said. "T'iana is a very different player than Cotie but will probably play a similar position. Same thing with Kylie. She's very different from Taylor Thierry but very similar in terms of the position, so style of play and need were two really big things that I think helped draw both of them to our program."

With so many new faces on the team

and a void in leadership left by McMahon and Thierry, McGuff is relying on Gray, Cambridge — last year's Big Ten Freshman of the Year — and her older sister, Kennedy, to step up as leaders this season.

"We have great young women, great kids," McGuff said. "Our chemistry and the culture could be a big strength of this year's team, but it's going to take some leadership. I think Kennedy will be a big part of that. Chance Gray really needs to step up. Even though it's only her second year in the program, this is her fourth year in college, and as an Ohio kid, I think she takes a lot of pride in coming back here from Oregon."

"Kennedy and Chance, especially, and I even think Jalonni — even though she's only in her second year as a sophomore, she's such a great player, and she's going to have the ball in her hands so much, she needs to step up as well. Between the three of them, we really are going to lean on them to get the leadership we need."

Petty Signs With Dallas Wings

Petty found a new home in the WNBA on Sept. 2. The 6-3 forward signed a seven-day hardship contract with the injury-riddled Dallas Wings. Petty went undrafted after averaging 9.4 points and 7.2 rebounds per game in her one season with the Buckeyes last year but managed to sign a training-camp deal with the Minnesota Lynx. Petty was waived by the Lynx but now may have another chance to make it in the WNBA with the Wings.

At the time of Petty's signing, the team was just 9-32 and mathematically eliminated from the playoffs.

Petty made her WNBA debut on Sept. 7, only playing in three minutes of the Wings' 91-77 loss to the Los Angeles Sparks. She didn't attempt a field goal, but logged a rebound and an assist.



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THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

That's really the only reason I can think of for fans to turn out en masse for Ohio State's walkover against sacrificial Tiger Grambling State on Sept. 6.

The David vs Goliath storyline is, in theory, an exciting one. It's what fuels the fervor for March Madness

and what gives fans of Group of Five teams hope when the College Football Playoff rolls around. Upsets and miracles have always moved the sports needle, even though they are few and far between.

For every Miracle on Ice or Appalachian State upset at the Big House, a majority of these paycheck games end up as bloodbaths. The predator welcomes in the prey, chews it up, and spits it out, but offers up a payout with a lot of round numbers for its troubles.

This was one of those name-your-score funfests – in this case, 70-0 – that dot too many college football schedules, yet fans seem more than willing to watch. While Ohio Stadium was not full to the brim the way it usually is, it was mostly full. And

that means the powers that be at Ohio State will continue to schedule these contests because they know they have a zealous audience.

For the home fans, it's a chance to see if the Buckeyes can play everyone on the roster – against Grambling State, they nearly did – and to continue on the path to an unbeaten season. After all, fans don't ask who, but how many. One highlight was freshman Bo Jackson scoring his first collegiate touchdown and rushing for 108 yards on nine carries, looking like a man among boys.

In these shark-against-minnow contests, the hope for the minnow is to get back on the bus as healthy as it was when it got off. Grambling State had three players suffer injuries, though none looked terribly serious, which is a good thing. But it is one of the pitfalls of taking on such games – debating whether the paycheck is worth the health of the team. The Tigers still have business to take care of in the SWAC, but if they are not healthy enough when conference season starts, they may wonder whether it was really a good idea to take on the nation's top-ranked team, compensation notwithstanding.

While the App State upset over Michigan in 2007 sent seismic shock waves through college football, it is the exception more than the rule. It's not that FCS teams can't beat their higher-level brethren – it's just that it is almost never the true big boys.

Michigan was an outlier, though there have been a handful of others close to that level – Montana over Washington in 2021, North Dakota State over Iowa in 2016, and Georgia Southern over Florida in 2013,

among them. The usual victims are Mid-American Conference teams or low-end power conference squads.

Oh, to return to the days when non-conference schedules consisted of teams like Boston College, Missouri and Pittsburgh, or that level of team. It gave teams a decent idea of where they stood early in the season. Contests such as this one do very little, except to maybe help a team clean up some mistakes and produce some false confidence.

I am not blaming Ryan Day or the head coaches for these games because they aren't the ones who schedule them. This is squarely on the athletic directors, who value money over the good of the game and the spirit of competition. And every last one of them who schedules these games, especially late in the season – SEC, I'm looking at you – should be held accountable.

So Ohio State moved to 2-0, but what did fans truly find out about the Buckeyes after this shellacking? That Julian Sayin throws a pretty ball? That OSU has fast receivers? That the defense hits hard?

If you want to look for one silver lining about games such as this, it is that fans can actually get into the stadium for a reasonable price. Tickets for the opener against Texas were fetching over \$2,000 on some platforms, but there were resale sites selling Grambling State ducats for as low as \$28 apiece. So if a dad wanted to take his kids, this is the game that is affordable. So there's that.

The question to be asked is this: Does that reason outweigh all the bad ones that games like this bring?

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Don't Sleep On Bucks' Prep No Matter The Opponent

In the spirit of full disclosure, I have to admit I kept nodding off in the second half of Ohio State's 70-0 victory over Grambling State. It wasn't the most compelling of games, and we had a rough week at BSB world headquarters with two publications (BSB and Reds Report) and one less day (Labor Day) to publish them. But each time I woke up, I could see that the Buckeye reserves were working really hard, using the rout as a chance to shine and playing like a shot at the playoffs was on the line. Good plays were being called, and even with a mix-and-match lineup, they were being well executed.

While I was drowsy as the game wore on, I was wide awake at kickoff, and I could see quite clearly that Ohio State had come to play. Not only were the Buckeyes showing great effort, but good plays were being called and they were being well executed.

I bring this up because it would have been easy enough for Ohio State to have a major let-down after the critical and emotional victory over top-ranked Texas the week before. And it was also possible that the vanilla offense that Ohio State showed against the Longhorns was what we were going to get all season. And it was also possible that the workmanlike performance that new quarterback Julian Sayin turned in to win that game was also what we were going to get moving forward.

But instead, Sayin looked like the next C.J. Stroud, and offensive coordinator Brian Hartline looked like the next Chip Kelly with his game plan and play-calling.

"I was looking to see if we had a letdown in practice," Ryan Day said of the week leading up to the Grambling game. "Tuesday, there was a general exhale I was a little concerned about, but I think it was more the physicality of the (Texas) game than it was a feeling that we have arrived. They know this is a long, long season. Our guys look at last year and know this is going to be a long road all the way to December and January. We're nowhere near where we need to be."

As far as the team's performance, which included 651 yards of total offense while allowing only 166, and as far as Sayin's performance, which included 306 yards and four touchdowns on 18-of-19 passing, it is not unreasonable to worry that all these gaudy numbers are the product of the level of competition. You can only play the teams on your schedule. If the opponent is Grambling State, so be it. The effort was there. The execution was there. The play calling was there. Play that way against a better team and maybe the score is only 40-0, but you would still probably come out on top.

I just think that how businesslike the Buckeyes were in a game where there could have been a letdown, a game where the Buckeyes could have played down to the level of their opponent, bodes well for the season. As for Sayin, before even seeing how well he would play against the Tigers, I started to get a good feeling when after the win over Texas with the dumbed-down offense, Day admitted that he underestimated the redshirt freshman quarterback's ability to run a more aggressive attack.

"Coming out of it, quite honestly, he probably could have handled it," Day said after the game.

Ironically, Sayin threw an interception against Grambling State while going turn-over-free against Texas.

We will get a much better idea of where Sayin and the team stand when they host Ohio University on Sept. 13. The Bobcats took Rutgers to the limit in their opener and defeated West Virginia in their second game, so they

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

have seen Power Four schools already this season. I am not going to predict how Sayin or the team do, but I will make this prediction:

The Buckeyes will come prepared and ready to play.

Very Quick Hitters

- One area I would like to see improvement is the pass rush. Against Texas, Ohio State had one sack and no quarterback hurries. Against the lowly Tigers they had two sacks and one hurry.
- There is always discussion about which position group has the most depth. After two games, I would have to lean toward the tight end room.
- Some people seem to think Jeremiah Smith had a bad game against Texas. Against one of the better defenses in the country, a team that was no doubt trying to neutralize Smith, the sophomore receiver still had six receptions for 43 yards. That betters the one catch for 3 yards he had against the Longhorns in the OSU playoff win.

Running Up The Score

In light of the Buckeyes posting the 70-0 score against Grambling State, I found it ironic that two of the entries in the "From the Pages of BSB" feature on page 6 of this issue concerned Ohio State being accused of running up the score, including John Cooper against Fresno State in 2000 and Day himself last season in a play involving Sayin vs. Western Michigan.

I'll let you read the details yourself.

But no one can accuse Day of running up the score this time around. He pulled the starters out at halftime, where it is common to have the regulars play the first series of the second half. And in the fourth quarter, which the Buckeyes entered leading 56-0, Ohio State ran the ball 12 times while passing only three with one completion for 4 yards. You can't expect a team to take a knee on every play for 15 minutes. The Tigers were simply unable to stop Ohio State in the final frame, allowing the Buckeyes to add on 14 more points and 107 more yards.

I am a firm believer that, within reason, you have to give the reserves a chance to get game experience. It is up to the opponent to stop them

"To me, running the score up is when you leave in your first-team offense, not when you put your reserves in like we did," Cooper said of his situation, which involved Lee Corso.

Michigan Sanctions

I ran out of space in this column last issue and didn't get the opportunity to comment on our Bobby Gorbett's look at reaction to the sanctions that were finally handed down against Michigan for the sign-stealing scandal.

In short, the experts Bobby spoke to felt that the penalties Michigan received were light.

I have always figured that Michigan fans didn't really see the whole affair as a big deal. They believed that it was much ado about nothing. They had their national championship. They had their beloved coach Jim Harbaugh—even though he fled the program like a rat fleeing a sinking ship. Screw everyone else.

To me their reaction was all part of what I see as an institutional arrogance.

But that is just *my opinion* – that of an admitted Ohio State fan. I took notice of the

remarks of Tony Garcia, a Michigan beat writer for the Detroit Free Press, who would know the typical Michigan fan far better than I would.

"They're so over it," Garcia said of Michigan fans and the scandal. "They're laughing about it. They don't really care about it. They're like, 'Oh, it's just money. We have tons of money. We've been hit with recruiting sanctions before. That's fine.' Mostly, it's like they're kind of taking victory laps on anybody who was using the last two years to say, 'The hammer is coming, the hammer is coming.' I'd say they're kind of yukking it up."

That sounds like arrogance to me.

And for the record, I never felt the "hammer was coming." Not only are these guys arrogant, but they seem to lead a charmed life.

Elsewhere in last week's issue, here comes former Ohio State assistant coach Tony Alford talking up the Michigan program after the Wolverines landed the top prep running back in the nation, Mineral (Va.) Louisa County's Savin Hiter, who was an Ohio State target.

"This place, this block M, is amazing," Alford said. "It's different. It's one thing to say it's different, I know. Every school you go to, the coach is going to say, 'We're different.' The young men and their families need to come here to really experience it. This place is different. I think the people are different. I think our staff is different. Our head coach damn sure is different. I think when young people sit there, especially with him, they walk out like, 'Yeah, that guy is a real one.' There's not the pretentiousness and the cliques – this place is just different."

The head coach, Sherrone Moore, "damn sure is different." *He cheats*. How do you delete text messages concerning an ongoing investigation and as part of your punishment you get to decide that you are going to coach in your biggest nonconference game of the year against Oklahoma? You think I wasn't thrilled when the Wolverines, with Moore on the sidelines, lost to the Sooners on Sept. 6? Maybe there is some justice in the world.

"There's not the pretentiousness"?

As we used to say over and over again when I was a kid, "Cheaters never prosper."

Or do they?

Differing Debuts, Game Plans

I hope that our readers enjoy our Reprint Thursday feature on the electronic BuckeyeSports.com as much as I do. Each Thursday we dig into the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives and reprint stores from past issues. Sometimes the reprints are topical, and sometimes we simply play what we call Reprint Roulette, where we randomly choose stories to post. I always find something I had forgotten, or something interesting in the reprints.

For the Reprint Thursday on Sept. 4, in response to Sayin's successful – if not flashy – debut against Texas as the Ohio State starting quarterback, we looked back to the starting debut of redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud on Sept. 2, 2021, at Minnesota – a 45-31 Buckeye victory. Stroud would go on to become one of the greatest quarterbacks in Ohio State history.

It was the polar opposite of Sayin's first start, both in terms of his play and the game plan of Day and his coaches.

While Sayin led a buttoned-down attack as designed by his coaches, Stroud led a wide-open offense and, after a slow start, showed

more than a glimpse of the quarterback that he would become.

"C.J. and I had a conversation early on," Day said after the Minnesota game. "He and I decided that we were going to keep swinging, no matter what happened. We were not going to play it close to the vest because that's not the way we do it here. And he responded."

Stroud got off to a somewhat slow start, and Minnesota actually led at the half, 14-10. But the redshirt freshman exploded in the second half, completing 5 of 8 passes for 236 yards and touchdowns of 38, 56, 70 and 61 yards.

Stroud finished the game with 13 of 22 pass completions for 294 yards with the four TDs against only one interception.

"It took a little while, I think, for us to get the rhythm on offense with C.J., but that was his first game," Day said. "That was his first pass on the first play of the game. There's a lot going on there, and when you go into situations like that, you know that it may be a little bit murky early on, and that's what happened."

Four years later, Day changed his tune about not playing it close to the vest "because that's not the way we do it here." His and Sayin's vests could not have been much tighter against top-ranked Texas. Interestingly Sayin entered his first game with more experience than Stroud but facing a tougher opponent in Texas than Stroud's Minnesota. As Day mentioned, Stroud's first pass against the Gophers was his first as a collegian. In Sayin's redshirt season last year, he was 5 of 12 for 84 yards and a score.

The Ohio State offense was back to its "keep swinging" ways when Grambling State came to town.

Upgrade Comes Down

The postal delivery reports from BSB's first weekly issue of the year, the coverage of the Texas game, were mixed, with some subscribers receiving timely service and some – well you know the story. Issues mailed on a week with a postal holiday on Monday such as the Texas wrap-up traditionally mail with mixed results. A better indicator of how things may go this season is the issue you are holding in your hands, coverage of the Grambling game. No "holiday on a Monday" excuse here.

We still encourage readers to consider upgrading to first-class mail either through the Michigan game or through the playoffs and the Recruiting Wrap-Up. While not perfect (it is the United States Postal Service after all), the first-class service is far more consistent than the traditional periodicals-class mail service.

The good news is that now that we are into the season, the cost of the upgrade has come down. You can upgrade to first-class mail through the Michigan game for \$30 and through the playoffs to the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up for \$40. Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 to order by credit card. Or you can send your check, money order or credit card information (don't forget your three- or four-digit security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Be sure to mention either the "Football Upgrade" or the "Recruiting Upgrade."

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