

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 5

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 11, 2025

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Usually, it's Jeremiah Smith playing Batman for the Ohio State offense. He is the headliner and the player whom so many come to see in action. But it was Robin who stole the show in Ohio State's 42-3 win over Minnesota on Oct. 4.

On a day when he set multiple personal bests in the receiving game, junior pass catcher Carnell Tate reminded the nation that Ohio State's wide receiver room isn't thought to be the best in the country only because of the otherworldly talent of Smith.

Tate finished the game with nine receptions, 183 yards and a 44-yard touchdown catch, with almost all of that production coming in the first half of the game.

Nine catches were a career best for Tate, topping his mark of seven catches in the Cotton Bowl win over Texas last season. One hundred eighty-three yards far surpassed his previous best of 102 in last year's close win over Nebraska. He also had his longest catch since 2023 with a 48-yarder in the first quarter. But it didn't take long to top that with a 49-yarder early in the second.

Even with all of that, Tate still thought that he could have been better. He was hard on himself for not converting a third-and-9 on the first Buckeyes' drive of the game when he brought in a 3-yard catch and slipped before he was able to fight for the first down.

"It was a great connection tonight. It could have been better," Tate said. "I fell on the third down. That's an important call in the game. I have to be better. Overall, the connection was good. It can always be better."

Tate's touchdown came in the second quarter on a 44-yard go route. He was wide open and cleanly brought in a nearly perfect pass from quarterback Julian Sayin, who was on point with his deep ball in the game. Tate had just one man defending him, with the Golden Gophers trying to play man defense against the Buckeyes at times. That ended up not working out.

"We were just shocked that they came out in man," Tate said. "So they tried us in man, and we made them pay for it."

With a talent like Smith across the field from him, Tate might not get as much atten-



In Good Hands

Carnell Tate Sets Career Highs In 42-3 Win Over Minnesota

SONNY BROCKWAY

MAKING A TATEMENT — Carnell Tate, the other half of Ohio State's dynamic duo along with Jeremiah Smith, reminded the Minnesota Golden Gophers that trying to contain him in man-to-man coverage was a lesson in futility as he set career bests for catches (nine) and receiving yards (183) that included a 44-yard touchdown in the 42-3 rout on Oct. 4.

tion at times. His previous career high of seven receptions against Texas in the play-offs is a good example of that.

The Longhorns sold out to shut Smith down in the game, which they were extremely effective at doing. He had just one catch for 3 yards in the game. But when so

much attention goes to forcing Smith out of the game plan, only so much can be done to keep Tate from becoming a problem.

Head coach Ryan Day understands the advantage that having so many good receivers who can get open gives his offense.

"That's the thing, because someone can say, 'Hey, we're going to put four guys on Jeremiah.' And he has to go out there and play," Day said. "When you have someone like Carnell and (tight end) Max (Klare) and some of our running backs, and we get the running game going, then you have to figure out how you want to make these adjustments. Then it opens things back up for Jeremiah."

But when there are so many talented receivers who can take over games, that means the others might not be getting the

ball as much, even though they all want to be the one making plays.

Day also appreciates the unselfishness that his offense has shown this season, with so many mouths to feed in what is looking more and more like one of the better offenses in the country.

"I can't say enough about Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate, Brandon Inniss, Max Klare," Day said. "All of these guys are very prideful. All of them want the ball. All of them have expectations. To see the unselfishness each week of a bunch of guys that just want to win, that's winning football in a day and age that there's a lot going on."

Tate has had to play that role often in his

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Continued On Page 10

FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State looked like a complete team in its 42-3 win over Minnesota, with both the defense and offense looking like a top unit in the country when they were on the field. 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: For Ohio State's lethal aerial attack in its 42-3 Week 6 victory over Minnesota, I'm giving my Buckeye Leaf this week to Julian Sayin.

The Buckeyes' redshirt freshman quarterback seemed very comfortable in the pocket for Ohio State, completing 23 of 27 attempts for 326 yards and three touchdowns in arguably his strongest performance of the year. His 326 yards were just 21 off a career high that he earned in Ohio State's 37-9 win over Ohio in Week 3.

Sayin seemed to have the Ohio State pass game in late-season form, throwing seven completions of more than 15 yards and four passes of over 30 yards, including a 44-yard score to wide receiver Carnell Tate midway through the second quarter to give Ohio State a 21-3 lead.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf is going to junior linebacker Arvell Reese after another dominant performance from Ohio State's defense. The Buckeyes held the Golden

Gophers to just three points and 162 total yards in the win, and Reese was at the forefront of the unit's impressive day.

Reese finished the game with four tackles and the team's only sack. The sophomore linebacker's sack came in the first half when Minnesota had the ball at its own 25-yard line on third-and-10. On the play, Reese knocked over Minnesota offensive tackle Greg Johnson and tackled Minnesota quarterback Drake Lindsey 6 yards behind the line of scrimmage to force the Golden Gophers to punt.

Reese's strong performance was the latest development of what has been a stellar season. After the Minnesota game, Reese is tied for the team lead in total tackles with 29, and his three sacks are tied for the second most on the team.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf was an easy choice, with junior wide receiver Carnell Tate setting multiple career highs in the win over the Golden Gophers. For some of them, he didn't even need two full quarters of football to surpass his previous highs.

He finished the game with nine catches, which was more than the seven he had last season in the Cotton Bowl, and he had 183 yards, far surpassing the 102 mark he set against Nebraska in 2024. Tate had three receptions of over 40 yards, including a 48-yarder in the first quarter and a 49-yarder at the start of the second quarter.

He also added one touchdown on a go route midway through the second quarter, which had him over 150 yards at that point already. He was

the favorite target for Sayin, with 10 throws in his direction.

BSB Subscribers:

Tiffin Buckeye: Carnell Tate.

John Lanning: My leaves go to: Carnell Tate for an outstanding day of football, Arvell Reese as he continues the dominance on defense, and Davison Igbinosun for a solid lockdown versus the pass.

PeyoteBuck: Carnell Tate gets a big leaf, and Sayin for his military precision passing should grab one, too.

Bob Cody: A bevy of Buckeye Leaves earned on Saturday night's wipeout of Minnesota!

Offense: Carnell Tate (Wow!), Jeremiah Smith (Wow!), Julian "85 percent" Sayin, Max Klare, the entire offensive line, with a special mention to former Gopher Phillip Daniels.

Defense: Matt Patricia and the entire defense, once again, with a special mention to Arvell Reese.

Special teams: Brandon Inniss to Lorenzo Styles Jr., causing the entire stadium to "Oooh and ahhh!"

Luckeeman: Carnell Tate was spectacular! The entire defense has given up only 25 points in five games!



From The Message Board

Penn State lost its second straight game, falling to 0-4 UCLA on Oct. 4, making its path to the College Football Playoff a very difficult one moving forward. We asked subscribers on the BSB Fan Forum if they think the Nittany Lions can still make the CFP and what they think Penn State's biggest problem is.

"Yes, they might make the playoffs. A lot of football is still to be played, and other teams may get tripped up. However, they must run the table from here and hope they come out of Columbus with a win over an undefeated Ohio State. Now, do I think that is plausible? No, I don't. The Buckeyes are firing on all 2025 Silver Bullets! As far as why and what, it's Karma."

— **BuckeyeScott**

"They make the playoffs only under the highly unlikely scenario that they run the table. In reality, they're toast, and so is James Franklin, with Jim Knowles right behind him."

— **Bob Cody**

"No way they're making the playoff, and Franklin needs to be fired. They can't win big games, and they never have been able to win big games. They will lose a couple more

before it's all said and done."

— **Tiffin Buckeye**

"Doubtful, but possible. Many teams have two losses already. Although coaches tend to get too much blame when teams lose, Franklin probably is a better human being than a coach. He's had decent QBs but has had difficulty developing them. Also, the OL has usually not been a strength during his tenure. It's difficult to make a

living in the B1G with teams like OSU, Mich, and USC usually good."

— **Terrier Buck**

"With loss No. 3 on the horizon when PSU plays OSU, I'd say chances are slim. But it's college football, anything can happen. That's why it's great."

— **PeyoteBuck**

"If Penn State runs the table, they will be in the playoffs."

— **R1TBDBITL**



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PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

EDITOR
Greg Wilson

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsmann 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS
David Breithaupt Braden Moles
Samuel Cipriani Bob Roehm
Bill Conley Steve Siegfried
Rich Exner Jeff Svoboda
Bobby Gorbett Mike Wachsmann
Craig Merz

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Paula Serra Ron Friedman

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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 Defense Flexes Muscle Vs. Gophers

There are at least two things it would have been difficult for members of Buckeye Nation to grasp heading into the 2025 season – that Matt Patricia was the absolute right fit as defensive coordinator and that this year's defense could somehow be better than the unit that helped lead Ohio State to last year's national championship.

With the possible exception of a few curmudgeonly holdovers, nearly everyone agrees that Patricia was a home-run hire for Ryan Day and that Patricia's fresh approach with a mostly revamped lineup has led to some pretty impressive performances against the first five opponents of the season.

I don't know how many friends and acquaintances told me over the summer how skeptical they were that Patricia could continue what Jim Knowles started last season. After all, the Buckeyes finished last winter's title run as the nation's No. 1-rated unit in terms of total defense (254.6 yards per game) and scoring defense (12.9 points per game) before Knowles ran off for presumably greener pastures (and paydays) at Penn State.

About three weeks after Knowles announced he was leaving, Day hired Patricia, a guy with whom the New England Patriots won three Super Bowl championships, the last two with him serving as defensive coordinator for Bill Belichick. But then came a disappointing three-year stint as head coach of the Detroit Lions along with the fact Patricia hadn't coached on the college level since three years as a graduate assistant at Syracuse in the early 2000s.

How could the 50-year-old Patricia possibly relate to a new generation of college players with their eyes as much on NIL money as winning football games? As things have transpired to this point, the answer to that question is pretty well. Pretty well indeed.

Despite losing eight starters from last season – each of whom has played in the NFL this season as rookies – there is a case to be made that Ohio State is better defensively now than it was a year ago.

Through five games, the Buckeyes have given up an average of 215.8 yards (third in the country) and just 5.0 points per game (No. 1 in the nation). No team has scored double digits against them, marking the first time in 52 years that Ohio State has allowed nine or fewer points to its first five opponents. The 1973 team was so stingy, it didn't allow an opponent to crack double digits for the first eight weeks of the season.

Suffice it to say that offenses have evolved over the last 52 years, perhaps making what this year's defense has accomplished so far even more noteworthy than what the '73 team did. Throw out the game they played against Ohio State, and here are this year's opponents' scoring averages – Texas (35.3), Grambling State (34.0), Ohio (29.8), Washington (47.8) and Minnesota (33.5). Compare that with the first five opponents in 1973 and their season-long scoring averages – Minnesota (23.6), TCU (17.2), Washington State (22.7), Wisconsin (19.6) and Indiana (13.7).

Here's another interesting stat. After five games, the Ohio State defense has allowed its opponents to get into the red zone on only eight occasions. And in those eight trips, the opposition has a total of three field goals and no touchdowns. That is the very definition of stingy.

What has Patricia done to raise the level of the OSU defense? For one thing, he applies an NFL mentality in terms of making adjustments. Too often on the college level, coaches spend so much time devising their game plans throughout the week that they are reluctant to deviate from it come game time. Patricia

seems unafraid to scrap what it isn't working, and that was on full display against Minnesota.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Gophers head coach P.J. Fleck, who typically uses any means necessary to gain the upper hand on an opponent, instructed his team to take the ball after winning the opening coin toss. The strategy appeared to work when Minnesota, led by redshirt freshman quarterback Drake Lindsey, came out at its own 25-yard line and strung together a 13-play, 66-yard drive that resulted in a 27-yard field goal and a 3-0 lead.

Not only did Lindsey gain some confidence against the boisterous Ohio Stadium crowd of 105,114, but the Gophers ate away nearly seven minutes of game clock before the OSU offense ever took its first snap.

But after Lindsey completed each of his first seven pass attempts for 64 yards on that first possession, he was limited to just 8 of 19 for 30 yards the rest of the way. Minnesota totaled 66 yards and averaged 5.1 yards per snap on its first possession and afterward managed only 96 on nine possessions, averaging a measly 2.5 yards on the rest of its offensive plays.

When you combine that kind of lockdown defense with a first-year starting quarterback who is getting more and more comfortable with each passing week (no pun intended), it is a lethal combination.

Sayin On Display

I don't know what more Julian Sayin could do to win over any holdouts regarding his talent as a college quarterback. One might tend to dismiss the redshirt freshman QB because of his stable of ultra-talented receivers. But someone has to deliver those passes for Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate to showcase their talents, and so far this season, Sayin has been that someone.

In five games this season, he has already topped the 300-yard mark three times, the latest his 326-yard effort against Minnesota. He has now thrown for 1,313 yards this season, making him only the fifth OSU quarterback in program history to reach the 1,300-yard mark in the first five games of a season. He joins J.T. Barrett (1,354 in 2014), Dwayne Haskins (1,464 yards in 2018), Justin Fields (1,407 in 2020) and C.J. Stroud (1,699 in 2021 and 1,376 in 2022) in that category.

On display during his team's 42-3 wipeout of the Gophers were a host of throws that showcased nearly everything in Sayin's arsenal. There was a drop-in-the-bucket throw to Tate that resulted in a 44-yard touchdown in the second quarter and a frozen rope to Smith to open the fourth quarter that turned a simple slant pattern into a 9-yard score.

But perhaps the most impressive throw Sayin delivered during the game did not result in a touchdown.

Late in the third quarter, with his team holding a 28-3 lead, Sayin faded on a first-and-10 play that started at his own 40. The OSU quarterback stared down Minnesota defensive lineman Karter Menz and delivered a 29-yard strike to tight end Max Klare a split-second before Menz firmly planted Sayin into the Ohio Stadium turf. Sayin rolled over and popped back up to his feet before eventually finishing the drive with his 9-yard laser to Smith.

After that play, any lingering question about Sayin's toughness should have been laid to rest. Any lingering question about Sayin as a possible Heisman Trophy candidate might have been flushed as well.

With the Gophers often double-teaming Smith, Tate was able to enjoy a career day with nine catches for 183 yards and a touchdown. Smith still managed to do what most great players do. Despite being the primary focus of the Minnesota defense, he was able to get loose long enough to record seven catches for 67 yards and two scores.

If I have had any gripes about the OSU passing game so far this season, it is that the talented group of tight ends has not been as much a part of it as it could be. Klare grabbed five receptions for 63 yards – his biggest output so far since his transfer from Purdue – but he was the only Ohio State tight end to get in on the receiving action.

The rushing attack accounted for only 133 yards, but the running game was a mere afterthought as Day and his offensive staff sought to open up the playbook for Sayin. The fact that the Buckeyes have a running back named Bo Jackson merely underlines the wealth of talent on the offensive side of the equation.

Brutus Vs. Goldy

Ohio State and Minnesota first squared off against one another in 1921 but have played only 56 times in the subsequent 104 years. The Buckeyes have lost only seven of those contests, and just three times when the game was played in Columbus.

The most recent loss came in 2000 when the Gophers spoiled homecoming at Ohio Stadium with a 29-17 victory. Minnesota QB Travis Cole threw for 243 yards and two touchdowns, with Ron Johnson on the receiving end of eight passes for 163 yards and one score. Running back Tellis Redmon added 118 yards and a touchdown on the ground as the Gophers outgained the Buckeyes by a 381-200 margin.

The outcome proved to be a pivotal one in the tenure of John Cooper as head coach at Ohio State. The Buckeyes were coming off a disappointing 6-6 record in 1999, but Cooper had apparently righted the ship. His team rattled off five straight victories to begin the 2000 campaign and had risen to No. 5 in the national polls.

But the loss to unranked Minnesota began a death spiral for the Buckeyes. After a win at Iowa the following week, they dropped three of their final five games including a 38-26 loss to Michigan and an embarrassing 24-7 loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl. One day after the bowl loss, Cooper was fired after 13 seasons as head coach of the Buckeyes.

For the other two home losses to the Gophers, you have to go back to the 1940s.

Seventh-ranked Minnesota rolled into Columbus in 1940 and rolled back out with a 13-7 victory. The Gophers finished that season with an undefeated 8-0 record and earned the first of two straight national championships.

Nine years later, fifth-ranked Minnesota pitched a 27-0 shutout in Ohio Stadium, their largest margin of victory in the series. One of the team MVPs that season was All-Big Ten end Bud Grant, who went on to a Pro Football Hall of Fame coaching career with the Minnesota Vikings. Grant is also a member of the Canadian Football League Hall of Fame due mostly to his four Grey Cup championships as head coach of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Ohio State Remains No. 1 In AP Poll

For the sixth week in a row, Ohio State is ranked No. 1 in the Associated Press' top-25 poll. The Buckeyes' placement atop the poll comes after they dismantled Minnesota 42-3 on Oct. 4.

Ohio State was one of three teams to receive first-place votes in the poll. The Buckeyes received 40 first-place votes, while No. 2 Miami, coming off a 28-22 road win over No. 25 Florida State, received 21 first-place votes and No. 3 Oregon garnered five first-

place votes, losing 11 after its off week.

Other teams ranked inside the top 10 are No. 4 Ole Miss, No. 5 Texas A&M, No. 6 Oklahoma, No. 7 Indiana, No. 8 Alabama, No. 9 Texas Tech and No. 10 Georgia.

No. 15 Michigan and No. 17 Illinois were the only other Big Ten teams ranked. Michigan and Illinois both moved up five spots in the ranking after respective wins over Wisconsin and Purdue.

The Wolverines and Fighting Illini were two of the six teams to move up five spots in the poll. Meanwhile, the biggest faller that stayed inside the top 25 was No. 22 Iowa State. The Cyclones dropped eight spots in the rankings after losing on the road to Cincinnati 38-30.

Texas and Penn State were both ranked inside the top 10 of last week's rankings but were dropped out of the poll entirely after suffering defeats to sub-500 foes. No. 23 Memphis and No. 24 South Florida were the two newcomers in the top 25.

OSU Mainly Healthy Against Minnesota

Ohio State had all of its starters available

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	W, 14-7	FOX	3-2, 29-21 loss to Florida
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	W, 70-0	BTN	3-2, idle
Sept. 13	OHIO	W, 37-9	Peacock	3-3, 20-14 loss Ball State
Sept. 27	at Washington	W, 24-6	CBS	4-1, 24-20 win over Maryland
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	NBC	3-2, 42-3 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 11	at Illinois	Noon	FOX	5-1, 43-27 win over Purdue
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	2-3, 24-10 loss to Michigan
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	3-2, 42-37 loss to UCLA
Nov. 8	at Purdue	TBA	TBA	2-3, 43-27 loss to Illinois
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	TBA	1-4, 42-37 win over Penn State
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	3-2, idle
Nov. 29	at Michigan	Noon	FOX	4-1, 24-10 win over Wisconsin

again for its Saturday night game against Minnesota, but junior wide receiver Bryson Rodgers was listed as questionable for the contest and didn't play in the game.

Rodgers hasn't seen the field much for the Buckeyes, sitting behind multiple talented pass catchers, but he has managed two catches for 22 yards in two games this season.

Senior defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. came into the game healthy but went down with an injury in the first half after he laid a hit on Minnesota quarterback Drake Lindsey. Jackson didn't return to the game. Read more on his injury in the BSB game notebook on pages 12-13.

Other than Rodgers, Ohio State was without cornerback Brenten "Inky" Jones; quarterback Mason Maggs; defensive linemen Eric Mensah, Jason Moore, Max Roy and Ahmed Tounkara; running back Anthony Rogers; safety Deshawn Stewart; and wide receiver Preston Wolfe.

Hicks, Hartford To Redshirt

According to an Oct. 5 report from Eleven Warriors, senior linebacker C.J. Hicks and junior safety Malik Hartford are both expected to redshirt this season after neither played in the win over Minnesota.

Both had played in the first four games for Ohio State, so they won't be eligible to appear in any more regular-season games with the Buckeyes.

Over the first four games, Hicks played just 50 snaps for Ohio State, totaling six tackles (two solo) and one tackle for loss. He's been the Buckeyes' fourth defensive end on the depth chart, behind senior starters Jackson and Caden Curry as well as backup transfer Beau Atkinson.

With the absence of Hicks for the remainder of the season, it could clear room for freshmen Zion Grady and Epi Sitanilei as well as junior transfer Logan George to earn playing time.

Like Hicks, Hartford also began fall camp with a chance to take Ohio State's starting role. However, the West Chester, Ohio native was beat out by sophomore Jaylen McClain for the strong safety role next to free safety Caleb Downs.

Hartford recorded just two tackles for the Buckeyes this season and had yet to see any action on the first team alongside Downs, McClain and nickelback Lorenzo Styles Jr.

Hicks and Hartford will both remain with the team through the season and could even potentially see playing time in the College Football Playoff due to the NCAA's rule that exempts postseason games from the four-game limit for redshirts.

Curry Earns Honors After Record-Tying Game

Ohio State's defense dominated in its 24-6 win over Washington on Sept. 27, and Caden Curry was at the forefront of the performance with 11 tackles, five tackles for

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loss and three sacks.

Curry earned a bevy of honors for his performance, including being named Defensive Player of the Game by Ohio State, Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week and the Bronko Nagurski, Bednarik and Walter Camp national Defensive Player of the Week.

His five tackles for loss tied an Ohio State single-game record that has been reached by seven other players before. The most recent to have five tackles for loss in a game was Chase Young in 2019.

Also accomplishing the feat as a Buckeye were Ryan Shazier (2013), John Simon (2012), Antonio Smith (2006), Andy Katzenmoyer (1996), Jayson Gwinn (1993) and Judah Herman (1991). Curry was made aware of his accomplishment only after the game.

"I didn't know that, but it's truly a blessing, and I just have to thank the man upstairs for that," Curry said.

Defensive tackle Kayden McDonald also had a stellar outing against Washington. He finished the game with two sacks and seven total tackles, including three for loss. McDonald shared Bronko Nagurski Defensive Player of the Week honors with Curry for his performance.

On the other side of the ball, center Carson Hinzman and left guard Luke Montgomery were both named Offensive Player of the Game thanks to a performance in which the line gave up just one sack and helped a strong rushing attack.

Two players were also named Special Teams Player of the Game, with Aaron Scott and Jayden Fielding earning the honor. Scott had a hard tackle on a kickoff late in the game that stopped a hopeful Washington kickoff return in its tracks short of the 20-yard line.

Fielding nailed a field goal in the win, but possibly more impressively, on another kickoff return that had a chance to be taken back for a touchdown, he made a solo tackle to force the Huskies' offense to take the field.

Illibuck Battle Set For Big Noon Kick

The game time for Ohio State's Week 7 matchup against Illinois was revealed on

Sept. 29.

The Buckeyes will face off against the Fighting Illini at noon Eastern on FOX on Oct. 11 when they visit Champaign, Ill., for the first time in 10 years in hopes of keeping the Illibuck trophy.

The last time the Buckeyes matched up against Illinois was in 2017 when the Illini visited Ohio Stadium for a 52-14 OSU victory.

The No. 5 Buckeyes were led in that game by quarterback J.T. Barrett, who had 11 completed passes on 19 attempts for 141 yards and two touchdowns. Dwayne Haskins got in the game later and completed 5 of 8 throws for 77 yards and a touchdown. Joe Burrow also got an opportunity to take a few snaps in the blowout but threw two incompletions.

Mike Weber led the run game with 108 yards and two touchdowns on 11 carries, while J.K. Dobbins and Barrett each also picked up a score with their legs. Binjimen Victor (two) and Marcus Baugh (one) had receiving touchdowns.

The two teams have matched up a total of 102 times, with the Buckeyes leading the overall series 68-30-4. The last time Illinois won was Nov. 10, 2007, when a No. 1 Ohio State team was beaten 28-21 by unranked Illinois. The Illini were led by a four-touchdown performance from quarterback Isaiah "Juice" Williams, who completed just 12 passes. Todd Boeckman threw three interceptions for the Buckeyes. Ohio State currently holds a six-game win streak over Illinois.

The only other game time revealed at this point is Ohio State's noon matchup against Michigan in the last week of the regular season.

Day Says Daniels Gives OSU Edge

Ohio State's clash against Minnesota wasn't just a standard Big Ten game for the Buckeyes' right tackle, Phillip Daniels, but also one against his old team.

Daniels transferred to Ohio State after playing in 12 games for the Golden Gophers

Continued On Page 6



SONNY BROCKWAY

GOOD FIT — Right tackle Phillip Daniels (70), here talking to Jeremiah Smith (4), played against his former team on Oct. 4 after transferring from Minnesota following the 2024 season.



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

last year. Through the win over the Gophers, Daniels has been a part of an offensive line that's helped the Buckeyes rush for 858 yards on 167 carries.

Individually, Daniels has done well protecting quarterback Julian Sayin but has struggled with penalties at times. Day said on Sept. 30 that so far, he likes what he's seen from Daniels.

"He's made great progress," Day said. "He is a tough guy. He plays tough. He's right on the edge of it sometimes, which, as a coach, is great until a flag comes out, and then it's not great. We love the intensity, we love the passion, we love how hard he plays. He gives us an edge."

Although Daniels was Ohio State's highest-graded offensive lineman in the team's wins over Texas and Ohio, Day said he has even more room to grow.

Against Minnesota, Daniels was able to keep his fierce competitiveness under control, with no flags against him. In the game, he was part of an offensive line that allowed zero sacks and helped the team rush for 133 yards and three touchdowns on 30 carries.

Special Teams: All Hands On Deck

Day said on Sept. 30 that special teams is an area where he and the Ohio State staff have collaborated to clean up sloppy play by a unit that's shown flashes of strong potential.

Day said there are many moving parts to

8

Next BSB Print Issue Set To Mail Oct. 14

The next copy of Buckeye Sports Bulletin mails Oct. 14. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin print edition to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting activity. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability and following all the Ohio State's sports activity. 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. All staffers had good predictions for the Minnesota game, but each underestimated the Buckeye defense. Sam Cipriani had it 45-6, Bobby Gorbett 38-7, and Greg Wilson 35-7.

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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Ohio State's special teams, with the majority of the team and coaches participating in the unit in some way, shape or form.

"Everybody's involved," Day said. "We meet here on Tuesday morning at 7 a.m. with everybody involved with special teams. Offensive, defensive line, quarterbacks aren't involved, coordinators aren't involved, but everybody else is. So we have an army of people here working on special teams."

"(Special teams coordinator) Rob Keys heads it up. He does punt returns. He's sort of the point man there. And then each position is coached up by somebody individually."

The punt return team has been the area where Ohio State has struggled the most.

The Buckeyes' field goal unit has argu-

ably been the only Ohio State special teams group with no questions or early-season hiccups. Fielding has made 4 of 5 field-goal attempts while going a perfect 21 for 21 on extra-point attempts.

Ohio State often staffs its special teams with underclassmen, using the unit as a proving ground before they transition into larger roles on offense or defense.

Day said Scott is one of those younger players who will be earning more playing time because of his effort on special teams, noting his work on kick returns, especially.

"We try to find young guys to get in there," Day said in the week after the win over Washington. "Aaron Scott's a player to me, the play that he made in the game through the last couple of weeks. The last 13 times

that we've run down on kickoff, he was the first guy to the 30-yard line. Then he gets in the game, and he makes that hit inside the 20-yard line. Why? Because for the last 13 times, he was the first guy to the 30-yard line."

Overall, Day believes the special teams play must become more consistent – though he feels that the effort is certainly there.

Day emphasized the importance of the unit, noting that it needs to be a difference-maker for the Buckeyes.

"Special teams have to be an advantage for us," Day said. "We put a lot of work into it. We got a lot of buying in the program through coaches and players. We say our best players play, and if we decide to pull somebody out, it's because we decide to."

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Day Says Scott To Play More

After Day emphasized Scott's tremendous effort on special teams, he said that Scott has earned more playing time.

"Aaron Scott's going to start playing more football around here," Day said.

He emphasized the idea that special teams is how players at Ohio State cut their teeth, and when Scott spoke to the media Oct. 1, he expressed a similar sentiment about the importance of special teams.

Scott said he's embraced that mindset throughout the season, noting that his effort on special teams can influence both his development and the team's success.

"Coach Day is big on special teams and just doing the right thing," Scott said. "I feel like that's how our culture is. He feels like every play matters, and I took that to the game and was like, 'If I get a chance to make a play, I'm going to make it.' Whatever role they gave me, I was going to try to do it to the best of my capability."

Though it wasn't always a seamless transition for Scott as he's grown into his role, he said he's been able to play more freely this season as he has grown more comfortable within the defensive system.

"Last year with our defense, I was thinking slow. The playbook was way harder, and mentally, it was just harder, and I wasn't moving as fast as I wanted to," Scott said. "This year, I feel like I'm playing full speed."

Inniss To Remain Punt Returner

Perhaps the Buckeyes' biggest special teams gaffe this season came on a punt return from the team's leading punt returner and wide receiver, Brandon Inniss.

During Ohio State's win over Washington, Inniss seemed like he was going to give the Buckeyes good field position on a lengthy return in the first quarter. However, Inniss's 32-yard return ended with him fumbling the football.

Inniss has also struggled with decision-making at times as the Buckeyes' punt returner. Still, he leads the Buckeyes with 76 punt return yards on six attempts.

Day said Inniss has shown the potential to be a playmaker, and he has trust in him to do so but emphasized that ball security must come first.

"Brandon needs to hold on to the ball. Whether it's offense or special teams, we're going to get that fixed, and we believe in Brandon," Day said. "If Brandon didn't fumble that ball, I don't think anybody is asking if he was the right guy back there. So he needs to hang on to the ball because he's had two good returns here the last two games, and that's the bottom line."

Star receiver Jeremiah Smith is the only other Buckeye who has had a punt return, but Smith's one return went minus-6 yards. Downs also proved he could be effective on punt returns last year, when he finished the season with 98 yards on six returns. The

Continued On Page 8



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOLDING ON — Brandon Inniss has been the main punt returner, but a fumble against Washington and some questionable decisions whether to fair catch have put him under scrutiny. However, his lateral to Lorenzo Styles Jr. for a 36-yard gain after a punt may have improved his standing.



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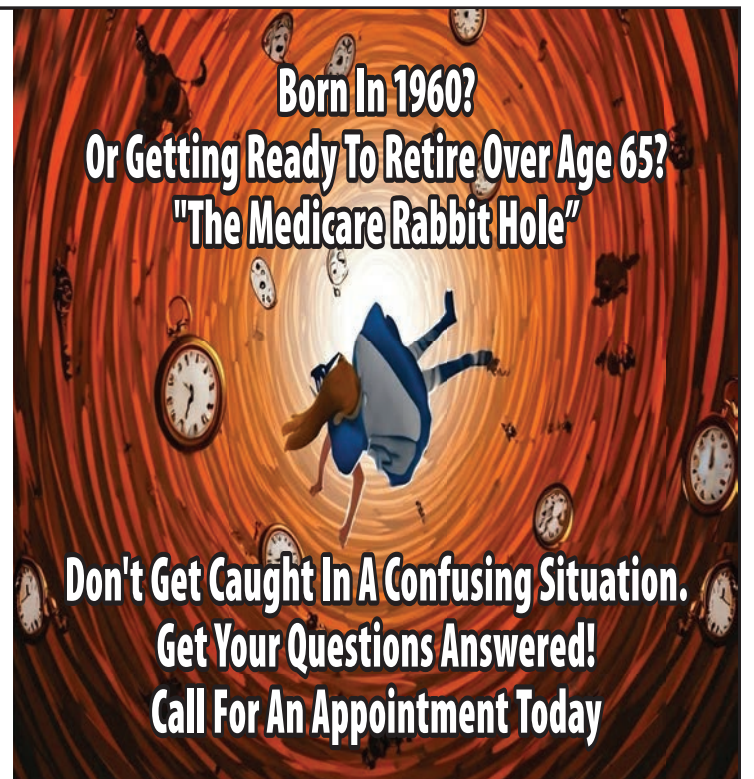
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Continued From Page 7

vast majority of those yards came on a 79-yard return for a touchdown in Ohio State's 38-15 win over Indiana.

Senior cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. also proved he could make a play with the ball in his hands as a returner in the Buckeyes' win over Minnesota.

On a punt return play in the second half, Inniss fielded the punt at around midfield

and lateralled the ball to Styles across the field, who went for 36 yards before being tackled.

Egbuka Earns Rookie Honors

One month into his NFL career, former Ohio State wide receiver Emeka Egbuka is already being recognized for his contributions on the field.

Egbuka has been an important piece of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' offense since the first week he was on the field, and he was recognized for that when he was named the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month for September.

In Week One against the Atlanta Falcons, he had four catches for 67 yards and two touchdowns, the second of which ended up being a game-winner.

He hasn't slowed down much from there, with four catches for 29 yards and a score in Week Two against the Houston Texans in a 20-19 win over his former Buckeye quarter-

back C.J. Stroud.

Then in Week Three, he was held out of the end zone but still had six catches for 85 yards, before his most recent performance of four catches for 101 yards in a 31-25 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles. The majority of his Week Four yardage came on a 77-yard touchdown connection with quarterback Baker Mayfield.

"There've been a lot of adjustments it has taken to go from college to the NFL," Egbuka said on Oct. 1. "There is not specifically one I can point at. Just taking the steps to be able to learn from my mistakes and grow each and every week. It is a very long season (and I have) to be able to not stay the same week in and week out. I have to continue to grow."

Redd Rings Victory Bell

For the second straight home game, a former Ohio State basketball player rang the Buckeyes' victory bell pregame.

Guard Michael Redd received the honor of being the victory bell ringer before Ohio State's win over Minnesota. Clark Kellogg did so before the Buckeyes' 37-9 win over Ohio on Sept. 13. The recognition comes after the two were honored on Sept. 4 by the Basketball Hall of Fame. Kellogg received the Curt Gowdy Award, while the 2008 Olympic Team USA, which Redd was on, was also recognized.

A product of West High School in Columbus, Redd played three seasons at Ohio State from 1997-2000, dominating in each of his campaigns with the Buckeyes.

Redd averaged 19.6 points, 6.2 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 1.6 steals per game in his time at Ohio State. He earned Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors in 1998, making his way to first-team All-Big Ten honors just two years later in 2000.

After his junior year at Ohio State, Redd chose to forgo his senior season, entering the draft, where he was selected

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

It was one play that, in many ways, did in the Ohio State football team when it traveled to Illinois on Oct. 5.

Was it a pass or a handoff? Was it called a shovel pass or a shuttle pass? Whichever, it burned the Buckeyes to no end as they dropped a 31-28 decision to the Illini.

Illinois quarterback Jack Trudeau would shove the ball ahead to running backs Thomas Rooks, Ray Wilson or Greg Wycoff after fading back to pass – something like a draw play, but with the back getting a running start. The play was not in the line of thinking of the Buckeyes. They had not seen it. They did not stop it.

"They did throw a play at us that caused us some problems," said OSU coach Earle Bruce in somewhat of an understatement. "That shuttle pass was a fine play that got good yardage for them. That was a good play for them. We hadn't seen that."

35 Years Ago — 1990

It was a different John Cooper who met with reporters following Ohio State's 31-20 loss to Illinois on Oct. 6, a defeat that cost the Buckeyes their Big Ten opener for the third straight year.

With his team committing six costly turnovers in addition to getting an attempted field goal blocked and returned for a touchdown, one might have expected Cooper to be rightfully downcast. Instead, the OSU head coach remained upbeat about the positive aspects of his team's performance against the Illini.

"I thought we played hard today," Cooper said. "We just didn't play good enough. In the first half, I thought we played about as well on both sides of the ball. We had a lot of total yards in the second half but had only three points to show for it.

"But we played hard today. Real hard. I'm not sure we played smart, especially in the second half, but we played hard. Some of those guys played their hearts out. I'm real proud of them. I think we made a lot of improvement (after last week's 35-26 loss to USC) to this week's game."

The reason for Cooper's sunny disposition was the fact that the Ohio State offense seemed to run on all cylinders for the first time this season. Against Illinois, a team generally considered to have one of the finest, perhaps the best, defenses in the Big Ten, the Buckeyes rolled up 487 yards in total offense.

30 Years Ago — 1995

Prior to Ohio State's Big Ten opener at Penn State, a Pennsylvania bank circulated blue buttons saying, "The Buckeyes Stop Here."

However, Ohio State's stop in Happy Valley was more like a profitable run to a bank machine. The end result was a substantial withdrawal in the amount of a major win.

The fifth-ranked Buckeyes used a quick-strike, six-play, 58-yard scoring drive in the waning moments to forge a 28-25 win over 12th-ranked Penn State in their Oct. 7 game at University Park, Pa.

Cooper, whose Buckeyes had derailed four ranked teams in their five games on the year, was jubilant after the game.

"What a great victory for the Buckeyes," Cooper said. "It doesn't get much bigger than that, guys, over here in Happy Valley."

25 Years Ago — 2000

Ohio State's offensive line had come under heavy criticism after the opening game against Fresno State when the Buckeyes failed to convert two goal-line situations and another short-yard-

age set on the FSU 40-yard line.

But three games later, everything seemed to be working with the goal-line offense. The Buckeyes punched it in against Penn State with runs of 1 yard by fullback Jamar Martin, 1 yard by Derek Combs and 3 yards by Jerry Westbrook in the 45-6 win on Sept. 27.

"That gives us great confidence," Martin said. "We had trouble the first week, and everybody was talking about our goal-line offense. But since then, we've had a lot of sustained drives and we're scoring.

"I think people should be intimidated by what we're doing right now."

OSU unveiled a new formation, called "Con-Jumbo" for Martin's goal-line plunge. On the play, Martin and backup fullback Jesse Kline lined up in an offset-I formation with Kline as the lead blocker. OSU's three tight ends, Darrell Sanders, Tim Cheatwood and Ben Hartsock, were also involved with Hartsock acting as an H-back.

"I think they were surprised when we came out because we hadn't done that before," Martin said.

20 Years Ago — 2005

If a picture is really worth a thousand words, then the Ohio State football team got an earful in the week leading up to their conference opener against Iowa on Sept. 24.

All over the team's training facilities were photos of the scoreboard at Kinnick Stadium following the previous year's meeting between the Buckeyes and the Hawkeyes. The score – 33-7 in favor of the home team – was on display for all to see.

As if anyone needed a reminder.

"You can't forget something like that," said OSU senior co-captain Nick Mangold. "When you get punched in the mouth like that, you're going to remember."

Perhaps there would be pictures of the Ohio Stadium scoreboard floating around Iowa City next year. They would read OSU 31, Iowa 6 after the Buckeyes' manhandling of the Hawkeyes in both teams' Big Ten opener.

15 Years Ago — 2010

For a few anxious moments, Ohio State's hopes for both a Big Ten and national title were lying in a heap near the Illinois sideline.

With the Buckeyes clinging to a 14-10 lead in the opening moments of the second half, junior quarterback Terrelle Pryor was flat on his back after going down untouched near the home sideline. After being escorted to the locker room, the offensive leader for the Buckeyes and contender for the Heisman trophy returned to action and helped his team scratch out a 24-13 road victory in its Big Ten opener against Illinois.

Pryor suffered what both he and head coach Jim Tressel termed a strained quadriceps muscle in his left leg. Neither expected the quarterback to miss time the week after, pointing to his return in the contest as proof.

10 Years Ago — 2015

For the first time in 2015, fans in Ohio Stadium got treated to a proper shrug.

The previous season, defensive end Joey Bosa amassed 13½ sacks on his way to All-American honor and offered up with his now-signature shrug after each one of them. Entering the contest with Maryland, however, Bosa had just half a sack on the sea-

son, sharing a quarterback takedown with redshirt freshman Sam Hubbard against Northern Illinois.

On a third-and-5 in the fourth quarter against the Terrapins, Bosa brought down a quarterback on his own for the first time that season.

"We were all so pumped," Hubbard said. "He's been so close so many times. It's ridiculous. I think the quarterbacks are purposely throwing the ball away so he doesn't get a sack sometimes, but he's relentless. He got after the quarterback so much. We're so happy that he got home once."

Following the sack, which resulted in the loss of 3 yards and forced Maryland into a fourth down, Bosa raised his shoulders ever-so-slightly and turned his palms to the sky, offering a lackluster shrug that had been a long time coming.

Five Years Ago — 2020

Even if a pick had been made in the battle for Ohio State's No. 2 quarterback position behind Justin Fields, quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis wasn't tipping his hand in a media availability on Oct. 13.

The first-year Buckeye assistant stuck strictly to the company line, complimenting the play of all three contenders – freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud and senior Gunnar Hoak – but refusing to name an official backup with the start of the 2020 season just over a week away.

"I think that's something that we'd evaluate," Dennis said when asked about who the backup would be when Ohio State took on Nebraska. "Coach (Ryan) Day, myself, Coach (Kevin) Wilson, we'd all go in and we'd talk about it, but let's just hope that we get to keep Justin Fields."

"Gunnar Hoak, first off, he's a guy who's been around," Dennis explained when asked for an evaluation of his backup room. "He's seen a different college offense before, so he's seen a lot of football. He's extremely talented. He's kind of the older guy in the group, obviously.

"And then Jack and C.J., they're literally just pedal to the metal, trying to learn everything they can and just soak it in."

One Year Ago — 2024

After strong performances in Ohio State's 49-14 win over Marshall and 38-7 win over Michigan State, it seemed as though senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka had returned to his highly productive sophomore form. In Ohio State's 35-7 win over Iowa, the veteran receiver looked as though he had reached new heights.

Egbuka didn't necessarily stretch the field with long receptions, but he certainly showed up when the team needed him the most in the red zone. He finished the game with a game-high nine catches for 71 yards and a career-high three touchdowns.

Egbuka's standout performance was just the latest addition to his impressive senior résumé that already included five touchdowns on the year and 433 yards receiving.

"I think Emeka is one of the best receivers in the country," Day said after the win over Iowa. "It hurt him last year to have the high ankle sprain. But you think about where he was the year before and now what he's doing, you just see a complete player. He's the captain of our team. He's a warrior. He does all the dirty work, like he did in the Michigan State game. But then to see him come back and have three touchdown catches – and all three of those were contested – was huge."

Former OL Price Inducted into Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame

Former Ohio State offensive lineman Billy Price was one of 10 Buckeye athletes from 10 different sports inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame on Oct. 3 at the Covelli Center.

Price expressed gratitude for the recognition that not only celebrated his own career but also embodied Ohio State's tradition and standards set by those who came before him.

"It's a huge honor, something you can't take lightly," Price said. "Think about the program and the greats that have come before you. I know that our facility is decorated with Hall of Famers and first-round draft picks. So to be among them, it's a great honor."

Price's induction served as a reminder of the legacy he left at Ohio State, where he helped anchor the offensive line during one of the program's most successful stretches from 2014-17.

The Austintown, Ohio, native spent his first four years as a Buckeye at guard before switching over to center in his senior campaign.

After sitting out his first season on the roster, Price started at guard as a redshirt freshman for Ohio State. During that 2014 season, he and the Buckeyes embarked on a championship run, claiming the inaugural four-team College Football Playoff championship.

Price reflected on Ohio State's title-winning season in 2014, stating that the semifinal Sugar Bowl victory over No. 1 Alabama was his favorite memory during his time as a Buckeye, while adding that he still shows Buckeye fans the hardware he earned from the championship to this day.

"I think that's pretty special," Price said. "Again, that brand of football is different at that time, in that game. We ran downhill, and we controlled the line of scrimmage. We had some freak athletes on those teams. So (it was) super special. I show my neighbors the rings all the time. People are like, 'Hey, I heard you got one of these rings. Can we see it?' Again, it's pretty special."

As a senior in 2017, Price was a unanimous All-American, winning the Rimington Trophy as the nation's top center and the Jim Parker Trophy as the country's best offensive lineman. Price also was a second-team All-American in 2016, a two-time first-team All-Big Ten honoree (2016-17), and a one-time third-team All-Big Ten selection in 2015.

Price was also a two-time captain for Ohio State in 2016 and 2017.

He said he was proud to carry on the tradition of elite Ohio State centers, embracing the responsibility and leadership that came with the position.

"First of all, I take great pride in being a Rimington winner, again, something that you don't take lightly – the best in the nation. To have that lineage, especially going through the legacy, I think that there's a little bit of grit. I know in my position, and in Pat (Elflein's) position, playing guard and then going to center, having the full well-roundedness about understanding the offense and being the representation of that unit, for that team, and definitely an ounce of leadership. You're the guy. Everybody's looking at you. You set the demeanor. You set the



FILE PHOTO

CENTER OF ATTENTION — Billy Price (54) was among the 10 newest members of the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame to be recognized on Oct. 3. A member of the 2014 College Football Playoff national championship team, in 2017 he was named an All-American along with winning the Rimington Trophy as the nation's best center and the Jim Parker Trophy as the best offensive lineman.

tone."

After he finished his career at Ohio State, Price was selected with the 21st overall pick in the first round of the 2018 NFL draft by the Cincinnati Bengals. He spent three years with Cincinnati from 2018-20, and he was named to the Pro Football Writers Association All-Rookie Team in 2018.

After his time with the Bengals, Price then made one-year stops with the New York Giants (2021) and Arizona Cardinals (2022). Price also spent time in the offseason or on practice squads of the Las Vegas Raiders (2022), New Orleans Saints (2023) and Dallas Cowboys (2023).

Price announced his retirement from football on May 25, 2024, after suffering a pulmonary embolism on April 24, 2024.

Price reflected on what it truly means to be an Ohio State alum.

"It's being special," he said. "It's being authentic and genuine and very proud. 'Hey, where did you get your undergrad degree?' I went to The Ohio State University. There's a pride element to that."

Price joins John "Jack" Varga (rifle, 1973-77), Mary Olsen (gymnastics, 1984-87), Veronica Jatsek (track and field, 2006-08), Kim Reeder (softball, 2006-09), Alex Wimmers (baseball, 2008-10), Bianca Alvarez (diving, 2008-12), Katarzyna Dabrowa (fencing, 2011-13), Blaz Rola (tennis, 2011-13) and Myles Martin (wrestling, 2016-19) as the Ohio State Hall of Fame class of 2025.

The inductees were recognized during Ohio State's 42-3 win over Minnesota on Oct. 4 at Ohio Stadium.

— Sam Cipriani

43rd overall in the second round of the 2000 NBA draft. He went on to play 11 seasons in the NBA, mostly with the Milwaukee Bucks.

Redd is the fourth Buckeye to ring the victory bell this season after Archie Griffin (Texas, Aug. 30), John Cooper (Grambling State, Sept. 6) and Kellogg.

Dingler Sends Tigers To ALDS

Ohio State baseball is well-represent-

ed in the MLB playoffs this year. Former Buckeyes Dominic Canzone and Dillon Dingler both made the American League Division Series with the Seattle Mariners and the Detroit Tigers, respectively.

One of Canzone or Dingler is guaranteed to make it into the ALCS, because the two teams match up against each other in the division series.

Dingler already made his presence felt for the Tigers in the wild-card round. In his team's 6-3 Game Three win over the

Cleveland Guardians on Oct. 2, Dingler hit a go-ahead solo home run that put the Tigers up 2-1 in the top of the sixth inning, a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

Dingler, a Buckeye from 2018-20, is in his first full MLB season after debuting midway through last year.

The Tigers' catcher slashed .278/.327/.425 over 126 games. So far in the playoffs Dingler was off to a slow start despite the heroic homer. He had a playoff slash line of .071/.278/.286 as BSB went to

press.

Canzone, a Buckeye from 2017-19, was similarly effective this year. The Mariners' outfielder hit .300 in 82 games and also had a career-high 11 home runs.

In the ALDS, Canzone went 0 for 4 in his team's 3-2 Game One loss. He was on the bench for Game Two with the lefthander Tarik Skubal on the mound. Dingler was 0 for 8 in the first two games. The series between the Mariners and Tigers was tied 1-1 as BSB went to press.

Their Unselfishness Makes Receivers Lethal

Continued From Page 1

career at Ohio State.

He came into Columbus as a four-star recruit, likely with the talent to compete for a starting spot on most rosters in the country. But that, of course, wasn't the case at Ohio State. As a true freshman in 2023, he was behind wideouts Marvin Harrison Jr. and Julian Fleming. He had to earn his way into playing time, as every Ohio State player does, but it can be harder to crack the two-deep in wide receiver coach Brian Hartline's room.

Tate got used to doing "the dirty work," as Day called it after the win over Minnesota. But even so, he still managed 18 receptions for 264 yards and a touchdown as a freshman, shining most in a two-game span against Purdue and Penn State when he combined for six catches and 100 yards.

Then for his sophomore season, one of the most hyped recruits ever, Smith, joined the wide receiver room and immediately became the No. 1 receiver on the team. There was also Emeka Egbuka, who finished the 2024 season with the most receptions on the team and had over 1,000 yards. Even though he was starting, Tate was still the odd man out, not getting his chance to shine often.

Because of that, nobody understands better than Tate that it's not always going to be his turn to take over a game, which he has been fine with. Day said the maturity of Tate and Smith to realize that they can help each other by doing their respective jobs is a big part of why the two can both be successful.

"When you have mature guys who understand that, that gives you a chance as well," Day said. "So we have to continue to communicate that and make sure they understand. But when there's more attention over here, it's great to see that we can utilize it over there. When you can't, that's when you're in trouble. We have to make sure



SONNY BROCKWAY

ATTRACTING A CROWD — Wherever Jeremiah Smith (4) goes, the standout draws attention, usually to the benefit of the other receivers. His seven catches went for 67 yards and two touchdowns in the 42-3 victory over Minnesota.

we're balanced in the end."

Day still made sure to remind everyone who the best offensive player in college football is, in his opinion. Smith still finished the game with seven catches for 67 yards and two touchdowns.

"I don't think it's even close that Jeremiah Smith is the best offensive player in college football," the coach said. "If it's close, I'd like to know who it is. But when you're a receiver, it's different than when you're a quarterback. Coverage can dictate different things,

but Jeremiah just keeps playing over and over again and has an unbelievable attitude. I know the fans appreciate that, but it's also good to hear how he practices every day.

"And the same thing with Carnell. Carnell has seen Jeremiah do a lot of different things, and now you're seeing Carnell take the next step. But he does that every day in practice. He does a lot of the dirty work. He does a lot of the blocking. Now you're seeing him show up."

Tate made it clear that it is something

that he understands.

"I mean, we're always pushing each other to make a better play. Also, we're always pushing each other to get each other open," Tate said. "If JJ doesn't do his job, I can't get open. If I don't do my job, JJ can't get open."

When Egbuka was drafted by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers with the No. 19 overall selection in the 2025 NFL draft, it gave the Buckeyes a streak of five straight years that a wide receiver has been selected in the first round.

With Smith still having two more years to go before he was eligible for the draft, many were doubtful that the team would be able to keep that streak going in the 2026 draft. But now that Tate is one of the top targets on the team, he is showing that it is a very real possibility that he is just the next wideout to go in the first 32 picks after this season.

That begs the question: Does Ohio State have the best two wide receivers in college football? Tate thinks the answer is a resounding yes.

"I know that, for sure," Tate said.

Day Keeps Bucks Locked In

Right before Ohio State was about to kick off against Minnesota, two other contests featuring top-10 teams playing against unranked opponents were winding down.

No. 9 Texas was beaten by Florida in an ugly offensive performance by the Longhorns. No. 7 Penn State was in Los Angeles getting beaten by the newly added Big Ten bottom-feeder UCLA, which was not only 0-4 going into the game but was seemingly in shambles with its head coach being fired, and its offensive coordinator being let go.

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SONNY BROCKWAY

TOP OF THE ROCK — The 42-3 triumph over Minnesota on Oct. 4 gave coach Ryan Day a winning percentage of 88.2 (75-10) to Knute Rockne's 88.1 percent (105-12-5) for the highest winning percentage in college football history. The legendary Rockne coached Notre Dame from 1918-30.

Penn State was taken down 42-37 in the game, which was enough for the AP voters to leave it out of the top 25, along with Texas.

Related to the Nittany Lions losing to the Bruins, former Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unit has now given up 72 points in the last two games Penn State has played. The first was a 30-24 double-overtime loss to No. 2 Oregon, which might have felt a little familiar to Knowles. Except this time, it wasn't at Autzen Stadium, it was at the Lions' home field.

One can't help but look at what Ohio State's defense has done under new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia and compare the two, with the Buckeyes giving up a total of 25 points in the first five games they have played (5.0 points per game).

But importantly, those two games should remind Buckeye fans yet again of a luxury they have had in watching Day coach Ohio State. His teams come prepared in almost every game that they are big favorites to win.

Day was asked how he is so consistent in getting his teams ready for contests like the one against the Golden Gophers, a game that was never in question.

"The first thing is, it has nothing to do with our opponents," Day said. "It sounds cliché and boring, but it's true. We don't save things for other opponents because maybe we circled them on our (calendar) – it's about our training. And we believe that if we train harder than anybody else in the country and prepare harder than anybody else in the country, that shouldn't matter who we play.

"I'm just always on alert. I've been coaching now for a while, and you never want to be in a situation where you go into a game and a game catches you off guard because you felt like you weren't on it, or that you weren't hungry and desperate. When you watch teams that are that way, you see what you get," Day said, possibly referring to Penn State's loss.

The only game that a Day-led team has lost to an unranked opponent was the 13-10 stunning fall against Michigan last season. That loss famously led to a players-only meeting for the Buckeyes that many believe led to the playoff run. And while that might have worked for last year's team, Day seems to have taken a lesson from that and never wants that to be the reality for the Buckeyes again.

Because of that, he is making sure he hyper-focuses on the mistakes Ohio State is making, even in big wins, so that those mistakes don't become issues later on in the season.

He talked about freshman running back Bo Jackson's touchdown when he reached over the goal line, saying that it could result in a fumble in the future. He also mentioned backup quarterback Lincoln Kienholz missing an open gap on a run that didn't materialize earlier in the contest.

"Those are the things that, when you're chasing greatness, you have to be all over and you have to take them seriously," Day said. "It can't be after a loss when all of a sudden everybody starts sitting up straight in meetings, or you're going to get burnt. Like they say in the Navy Seals, 'When you

think you got it, you're about to get it.' And we're far from where we need to be. So we have to stay hungry every day."

While Day didn't mention the loss to the Wolverines as a direct motivator for that idea, senior linebacker Sonny Styles said that game is part of that philosophy.

"I think we felt that last year, losing to The Team Up North, especially that one, that was a game we felt like we shouldn't lose," Styles said. "I think there's been such a high urgency of the issues are there, and we have to be urgent to correct them. Every Sunday, we come in and say, 'What would this be like if we lost that game?'"

While Ohio State sits at 5-0 with a couple of tough games on its schedule remaining, the Buckeyes can take a look at Penn State and Texas, both with two losses and both also with tough games remaining, for motivation to keep that attitude.

"It's about an identity. If your identity is that you want to be great and you want to be consistent, whatever those things are, you have to do that every week," Day continued. "Otherwise, that's not who you are, it's just what you can be. We talk to our guys a lot about that, but there has to be buy-in. Our guys do buy into that."

Day Best Of All-Time, For Now

With the win over Minnesota, Day became the head coach with the highest winning percentage in college football history with his record of 75-10 (88.2 winning percentage). He surpassed Notre Dame legend Knute Rockne, who headed the Fighting

Irish from 1918-30, where he had a record of 105-12-5 (88.1 winning percentage).

Day joked after the game that he was hanging up the headset and riding off into the sunset with his record.

"I'm glad you brought that up, because this is the last game that I'll ever be coaching at Ohio State," said Day when asked about the record. "I'm going to hang it up, and I'm going to walk off right now. I've appreciated being the coach here."

Day still trails Rockne in national championship victories three to one, but still being active, he has the chance to chase down Rockne's mark.

But that also means that Day is barely clinging to the top win percentage, and in today's college football, he will have to play more great teams in the College Football Playoff, where it will be tough to win four in a row as he did last season.

Day continued, paying respect to the legend Rockne, but also giving much of the credit to the players on the field and the coaches he is surrounded by.

"It has everything to do with the players and the coaches in this place. But when you recognize how long some of those coaches coached and you recognize what they went through and the seasons and the different changes, you can just appreciate how long they coached.

"Some of these seasons here are like dog years at Ohio State, and I'm just fortunate to be here. I know what the obligation is, I know what the expectation is, and so do these players and coaches. So we'll just keep swinging away."

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Defense Stuffs Minnesota Rushing Attack

The Ohio State defensive front held strong in the Ohio State football team's win over Minnesota on Oct. 4. The unit held the Golden Gophers to their second-lowest rushing total of the season, just 68 rushing yards on 25 attempts for an average of just 2.7 yards per carry.

Ohio State allowed just three Minnesota carries of 10 or more yards, all by Golden Gophers running back Fame Ijeboi. Those three carries – 13-, 12- and 11-yard rushes – constituted over half of Minnesota's total rushing yards on the evening.

Ohio State senior linebacker Sonny Styles, who finished his night with a team-high eight tackles, said he felt the defense's preparation and its trust in the coaching and one another allowed them to perform at a high level when it mattered most.

"I think you sink back to the level of your training," Styles said. "I think we trained that way in camp, in spring ball," he said. "(Defensive coordinator Matt) Patricia has kind of instilled that mindset into us. We're always one out there, and we're just going out there as loving brothers. I think you see it out there when guys are making plays. I think you see guys who are more excited about other guys making plays (than themselves), and that's just huge. We love each other, and we love to see each other do well."

Styles' older brother, cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr., emphasized the idea of the defense playing as a unit, adding that he feels the practice Ohio State puts in on a weekly basis allows the Buckeyes to build chemistry.

"That comes from all the tough times we went through in practice," Lorenzo Styles said. "I mean, the practices are kind of harder than the game, so going through the weight room, training in the winter, going through ups and downs as a defense – I think it's just brought us closer together. Then even through the season, where they brought it all the way down there and we had to get a stop. So just knowing we can do

GAME NOTEBOOK Sam Cipriani

that and we've done it before just continually gives us confidence."

On Minnesota's first drive, a 13-play, 66-yard march that resulted in a made field goal, the Golden Gophers accumulated over a third of the team's total offense. Minnesota earned 111 total yards in the first half before the Buckeyes held the Golden Gophers to just 51 in the final two quarters.

Sonny Styles reflected on the Buckeyes' first-half performance, stating that the defense flipped a switch after the break, which he said was due to Patricia energizing the defense during halftime.

"We looked at a few plays that we messed up on, and then we just talked about just choking them out and not giving them any life," Styles said. "We thought we let them drive down the field that first drive, and it was a little too easy. Coach Patricia fired us up and said we needed to go smash these dudes, and I think that's what we did in the second half."

Ohio State allowed just those three points from Minnesota. Kicker Brady Denaburg drilled a 27-yard field goal on the Gophers' first possession before the Buckeye defense stiffened, shutting down the Gophers' offense for their final nine drives. Through five games, the Ohio State defense is allowing just 5.0 points per game – the nation's best mark.

Head coach Ryan Day said he was impressed with his defense's ability to stay poised throughout the game, adding that even with Minnesota in the red zone, Ohio State was calm and composed.

"(Minnesota's) offense was driving the ball down the field early, but there was still no panic by the coaches or the players," Day



SONNY BROCKWAY

FLEETING FAME — Minnesota running back Fame Ijeboi is about to meet linebacker Sonny Styles head-on – a frequent occurrence. Styles led the Buckeyes with eight tackles as they limited the Golden Gophers to 68 rushing yards, 52 of them on 13 carries by Ijeboi, in the 42-3 win.

said. "We forced them to kick a field goal then played great the rest of the game."

Frosh RB Jackson Earns First Start

For the first time this season, freshman running back Bo Jackson earned the start for Ohio State. Jackson had another solid outing in his first career start for the Buckeyes.

After rushing for 108, 109 and 80 yards in consecutive games, Jackson rushed 13 times for 63 yards and scored Ohio State's second rushing touchdown of the day on a 5-yard rush up the middle with 5:45 to play in the third quarter, barely stretching the ball across the goal line just before he was brought to the ground. Jackson rushed for an average of 4.8 yards per carry for the Buckeyes and added one catch for 11 yards.

Despite a solid performance from Jackson, Day said Jackson must protect the football better going forward, as Ohio State must eliminate any potential for fumbles.

"I'll just say it. Bo Jackson reaches the ball out on second down – that's a problem," Day said. "We should not be reaching the ball out. That's going to be a fumble down the road. I'm just going to call it out for what it is. That's an issue. If the ball was fumbled, then we're in a different situation right now."

Wide receiver Carnell Tate, who led the

Buckeyes with a career-high nine catches for 183 yards, said he's taken notice of Jackson's playmaking ability and the explosiveness he brings to the offense.

"Bo has been very impressive," Tate said. "When the ball is in his hands, he's electrifying. So I'm proud of him, happy for him, rooting for him all the way."

Senior running back CJ Donaldson Jr., who started the previous four games for the Buckeyes, was rather ineffective against the Golden Gophers.

The West Virginia transfer had just three carries for 3 yards on the night, though Donaldson did rush for Ohio State's first score of the game, a 1-yard touchdown rush that put the Buckeyes up 7-3 as time expired in the first quarter.

Excluding a 33-yard carry by running back James Peoples deep into the fourth quarter, Ohio State's rushing attack was largely slowed by Minnesota. The Buckeyes kept the ball on the ground 30 times for a total of 133 yards.

Peoples finished his day with seven touches for 59 yards, earning all but one of his touches on the Buckeyes' second-to-last drive of the game that resulted in a 1-yard touchdown run by backup quarterback Lincoln Kienholz. Despite nearly doubling the Golden Gophers' rushing total (133-68), Ohio State had just one more 10-plus-yard carry than Minnesota (4-3).

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

One week after having zero passing plays that went over 20 yards in its win over Washington, Ohio State had no issues hitting the deep ball against Minnesota. In the 42-3 win on Oct. 4, the Buckeyes hit five completions of over 20 yards.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin, who finished the game completing 23 of 27 passes for 326 yards, often connected with junior receiver Carnell Tate deep down the field.

All three of Sayin's completions of 40 or more yards in the game went to Tate. Sayin's first deep completion came when the Buckeyes were trailing in the first quarter. Facing an early 3-0 deficit with the ball at their own 19-yard line, Sayin had plenty of time to throw and lobbed up a perfect pass that hit Tate in stride for a 48-yard completion.

It was a career-best performance for Tate. He finished the game with game-high and career-high totals of 183 receiving yards on nine catches and also had a touchdown.

Previously this year, the Buckeyes had three or more passing plays of 40-plus yards in only one other game, that being their 37-9 win over Ohio on Sept. 13.

What Didn't Work

It did not matter much, considering Sayin was having one of his best performances as a Buckeye, but Ohio State's running game struggled to find a consistent rhythm, especially in the first three quarters. Ohio State finished the game with 133 rushing yards on 30 carries for a respectable average of 4.4 yards per carry. However, 60 of those 133 yards on the ground came in the fourth quarter, when the game was already decided. Entering the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes were averaging just under 3.5 yards per carry.

For the first time this season, Ohio State sent true freshman running back Bo Jackson out with the offense first. He was the Buckeyes' leading rusher and went for 63 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries. As he's done all season, Jackson fought hard for every yard when he had the ball in his hands, but he and the rest of Ohio State's runners failed to hit on many explosive plays early on. The Buckeyes' longest runs of the first three quarters were two separate 10-yarders by Jackson that

occurred midway through the first and late in the penultimate frame.

Senior running back CJ Donaldson Jr. wasn't used much in the Buckeyes' win. Donaldson, who scored his fourth touchdown of the season at the end of the first quarter, was mainly used in short-yardage situations. While Donaldson did his job, he finished the game with just three carries for 3 yards. Both totals were season lows. Redshirt freshman running back James Peoples was similarly limited early in the game, but in the fourth quarter he broke through for the Buckeyes on the ground. Peoples entered the fourth quarter with just one carry for three yards, and on one play in the third quarter, which was likely designed to go to him, he ran on the wrong side of Sayin and couldn't take the handoff.

Sayin was forced to take a 1-yard loss on the broken play. Still, Peoples was much improved in the fourth quarter, when he totaled 56 yards on six carries. Peoples also had the team's longest run of the game, a 33-yarder in the fourth quarter that set the Buckeyes up for their sixth touchdown of the game.

Play Of The Game

In a game full of memorable catches from Tate, the best and perhaps most impactful one was his 44-yard touchdown in the middle of the second quarter.

The Buckeyes' lead was only 14-3, and with a little over eight minutes left in the half, it seemed like the Golden Gophers weren't completely out of it. On the play, Tate ran a simple vertical route, but it worked to perfection. Tate zoomed past Minnesota defensive back Za'Quan Bryan to create plenty of separation and give Sayin a large window to throw the ball. Sayin took full advantage of Tate's speed by throwing a perfect pass that the junior receiver barely had to slow down to catch. Tate's score gave the Buckeyes a comfortable 21-3 advantage and removed pretty much all hope Minnesota may have had of pulling off an upset.

— Bobby Gorbett

Sayin Becoming More Comfortable

Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin produced yet another solid outing for the Buckeyes. The sophomore gunslinger ended his night completing 23 of his 27 pass attempts for 326 yards and three touchdowns.

Sayin said that each game he plays, he feels more comfortable finding his rhythm within the offense as both his confidence and chemistry with his teammates continue to grow.

"I think each and every week, I'm just getting more comfortable as an offense, as a group," Sayin said. "Then just individually, seeing things and processing it, seeing my guys kind of make that break and anticipating the window."

That comfort was evident against Minnesota, where Sayin looked poised and decisive pushing the ball downfield. Sayin seemed particularly in tune on his deep throws, completing seven passes of more than 15 yards against Minnesota. In the first half alone, Sayin tossed passes of 48, 31, 49 and 44 yards, the last of which resulted in a touchdown to Tate, the quarterback's second passing score of the night.

Day expressed a similar sentiment to Sayin, noting that the sophomore's increased command of the offense is a result of both his preparation during the week and his poise in live game situations.

"You're seeing his confidence improve every week," Day said. "How we do it, everything is thought out. Not everything always goes to plan, but we're very deliberate in how we try to bring along our quarterbacks."

"Sometimes we have to put them in situations that maybe they're not ready for, but when you have a defense like we do right now that's playing the way that we do, you can bring them along a certain way. You're

seeing Julian playing with more and more confidence. We wanted to put more on his plate this week. We thought he had a good week of practice."

Buckeyes Pull Off Trick Play

What initially appeared to be a routine punt return for wide receiver and return man Brandon Inniss in the third quarter quickly evolved into something far more unexpected – the Buckeyes' first true gadget play of the season.

After Inniss fielded the ball at Ohio State's 44-yard line, he took a few steps forward, drawing in the Minnesota defense, before throwing a bullet behind him to Lorenzo Styles, who took the backward lateral 36 yards down the field to the Golden Gophers' 20-yard line. The Buckeyes' trick play broke down the coverage of Minnesota's special teams unit and sparked a three-play touchdown drive that culminated in Jackson's touchdown rush.

Day said Inniss' and Styles' unique skill sets sparked the idea for the trick play. The head coach cited the duo's past as a quarterback and wide receiver as what brought him confidence to give the trick play a shot.

"(Inniss) is a guy who played quarterback out of necessity in high school, and we saw something that we liked. Lorenzo played wide receiver at Notre Dame. So we thought that maybe if we had the right look in the right situation on the right hash that we could set something up," Day said.

"It doesn't always work the way you draw it up, but it was good to see the guys execute it and put it on the field. You can use special teams as an advantage like that. I think it was just under 40 yards of field position. That's a big return for us. We have to keep trying to figure out ways to make an impact on special teams, but that

was well executed."

Outside of the trick play, Inniss returned one punt for the Buckeyes for 10 yards.

Styles said it was rewarding to see the play come together the way it was designed, especially as the unit prepared for the perfect moment to catch an opposing defense off guard.

"It's something we've been working on for a little bit, get on the field and then execute that today," Styles said. "I really wanted to take that to the house, so I was kind of upset about that, but great to execute that today."

Although Styles wasn't pleased that he was unable to return the punt for a touchdown, the graduate cornerback showcased one of his better performances against the Golden Gophers, totaling three tackles (one solo), one-half tackle for loss and a pass breakup for Ohio State.

DE Jackson Leaves With Injury

For the second time in Ohio State's first five games, senior defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. suffered an injury that caused him to sit out the remainder of the game for the Buckeyes.

With just under five minutes remaining in the first quarter, Jackson flew off the edge unblocked, reaching Minnesota quarterback Drake Lindsey just quick enough to force an errant throw. After the play, Jackson lay face down on the ground before having the Ohio State training staff help him stand and walk off the field.

Following his injury, Jackson was seen pedaling on the exercise bike on the Buckeyes' sideline. However, Jackson's helmet was taken by Ohio State staff, and he did not return for the rest of the game.

Day said he was happy to see Jackson cheering on his teammates, despite the in-

jury, though he did not give an update about what the defensive end's injury was or the severity of it.

"It was good to see Kenyatta up and moving around, supporting his teammates during the game," Day said. "We'll take a look at it and have an update, hopefully soon."

Jackson also went down in the Buckeyes' 14-7 Week 1 victory over Texas, although he returned for each of Ohio State's last three contests. Through five games, Jackson has racked up six tackles (two solo), one sack and a pass breakup.

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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 42, Minnesota 3

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on quarterback Julian Sayin's performance:

"With Julian, some of the throws downfield were very accurate. He made decisions and again saw it well. But when you can be accurate underneath and get the ball out quickly, but then also down the field, that's when our offense can really be clicking on all cylinders. We're going to watch this film and see some things that we're frustrated with. We know where we need to go. We have to keep getting better. You keep hearing me talk about that, but that's just the way it goes. You have to upgrade every week."

Sayin on the Buckeyes connecting on deep passes:

"We had a great game plan from the coaches, and they put us in position to take those shots down the field. It all starts with the offensive line. They did a great job protecting, and receivers made some great plays down the field, so I think it all clicked. But we're not where we want to be as an offense yet. We're still growing and developing every day."

Ohio State receiver Carnell Tate on his 44-yard touchdown reception:

"Everybody was excited for me. It was a one-man route on that play. So everyone's like 'You've got to go win.' So I did that."

Sayin on Ohio State's ability to avoid upsets:

"You see the upsets around college football. Our practices every day are intense. We're going against the best defense in college football. The competition out there is just so intense that it brings out the competitive spirit in everyone, the juice and everything. The coaches harp on us. Like Coach Day says, 'Once you think you got it, you're about to get it.' I think you don't want to say, 'I've got it.' You want to keep getting better."

Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck on Ohio State's defense:

"That was pretty dominating. They have really good players, they have a really good scheme, they complement each other very well, and they put you in that phone booth."

Ohio State cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. on defensive coordinator Matt Patricia's impact on the defense:

"He just gives us confidence as a defense. He tells us what we're about to run, we're situationally aware, and I'm very appreciative of him as a coach."

Ohio State linebacker Sonny Styles on his brother's 36-yard punt return:



SONNY BROCKWAY

BEST WISHES — Ohio State coach Ryan Day (right) greets Minnesota coach P.J. Fleck after the Buckeyes' dominating 42-3 win in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 4. Fleck called OSU an exceptional team and its defense one of the best he's seen in 13 years.

was awesome. Once I knew the play was coming, once I saw the setup, I thought he was about to score. He said his legs were a little tired. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt."

Sonny Styles on Ohio State's red-zone defense:

"When you get down there, you have to button up, tighten up a little bit. I think we were a little frustrated with them driving down the field a few times, but if you're getting down in the red zone and teams can't score, that's winning football."

Fleck on his decision to go for it on fourth-and-1 from Minnesota's own territory in the first half:

"It was 14-3 at the time, it was fourth-and-1, I can punt it, but would you rather have (Ohio State score) a 90-yard touchdown or a chance to get a first down? I think they showed (they were capable of) that the rest of the game, I knew that prior to maybe that happening. We're the ones studying the film for 60-70 hours per week, so I knew that was going to be something we had to aggressively do. At 14-3, it's a huge call in the game, but it's the right call."

Sonny Styles on what it feels like to play on Ohio State's defense:

"It's awesome. It feels like we're on the attack, not like we're on our heels. We're on the attack all the time. We

know the different looks we give the offenses kind of keeps them on their heels, keeps them a little bit confused. It just feels good. I think we're all confident in what we're doing. We all know our jobs. And I think we're really just growing in terms of football knowledge."

Day on what he saw from Ohio State's second-teamers and younger players:

"Every time you're on the field, it's an opportunity. We're all looking to build trust. When we put you in the game, the players need to build trust in each other, but also, you're looking to build trust with the coaches. Whatever you do with the opportunity, you have to take advantage of it. The second-team offense went out there and went down the field. That was a great opportunity. Lincoln (Kienholz), I won't get into the details of the first run, but we gave him a chance to redeem himself. Like in 'Dumb and Dumber,' he totally redeemed himself. That was good to see. Some of those guys, it was good to see them get in the game and take advantage of their opportunity."

Tate on what the win tells the nation:

"We're just telling the nation, 'We're here.' We're going to continue to get better each and every week and play an Ohio State brand of football."

Sayin, Tate And Defense Shine In 42-3 Win

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Minnesota coach P.J. Fleck said after the Golden Gophers were thrashed 42-3 by No. 1 Ohio State in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 4 that trying to stop the Buckeye offense was like “picking your poison.”

Well, he got a heavy dose of Julian Sayin and Carnell Tate with a spoonful of Jeremiah Smith.

Sayin threw for 326 yards and three touchdowns, and Tate had a career-high 183 receiving yards plus a touchdown before a prime-time crowd of 105,114.

The Golden Gophers (3-2, 1-1 Big Ten) led 3-0 before the Buckeyes (5-0, 2-0) responded for a 21-3 halftime lead with Tate hauling in a 49-yarder to set up a Smith 6-yard TD reception for a 14-3 score before Tate's 44-yard touchdown catch.

Sayin was 23 of 27, Tate had a personal-best nine catches, and Smith had 67 yards and two touchdowns off seven receptions.

The victory gave Ryan Day a 75-10 record (88.2 percent) to become the all-time career winning percentage leader in major-college history, moving ahead of Notre Dame's Knute Rockne's 88.1 percent from 1918-30.

Gopher It

Minnesota won the toss and elected to receive. The move paid off with a 27-yard field goal by Brady Denaburg for a 3-0 lead at 8:05.

After a touchback, the Gophers called a timeout before the first snap then reeled off two first downs prior to a 25-yard catch by an open Jameson Geers to the OSU 29.

Jalen Smith later made a catch for 10 yards to the 10 at the left boundary that initially was ruled out before it was overturned after a review.

Drake Lindsey threw an incompleteness and a 1-yarder to Le'Meke Brockington to set up third down. Lindsey was pressured and couldn't make the completion to Javon Tracy at the 3, setting up the field goal.

Starting from the 25, Ohio State had an 8-yard pass to Tate and runs of 10 and 5 by Bo Jackson, plus a 13-yard reception by Smith to the Minnesota 39. Jackson ran for 1, but Sayin's pass to Smith at the 5 was a little behind him and broken up. Tate was open on third down but had to leap for the pass and fell untouched at the 35 for a 3-yard gain, and Jayden Fielding missed a 53-yard field-goal try.

On Minnesota's first play from the 35, Kenyatta Jackson Jr. got to Lindsey to force an incompleteness, but the defensive end was injured. The Buckeyes forced a three-and-out, and the punt went out at the 9.

The Buckeyes used their big weapons to take a 7-3 lead on CJ Donaldson's 1-yard rush.

Once again, Tate was the choice on first down, and his grab went for 7. Jackson ran for 2, and Donaldson plowed his way for 1 and the first down.

Sayin then led Tate beautifully down the left sideline for a 48-yard advancement to the Minnesota 33. On the next play, Tate and Smith lined up together on the right. Smith stopped his route at the 27 as Tate continued. Smith made the catch and took it to the



SONNY BROCKWAY

ON TARGET — Playing behind an offensive line that didn't allow a sack, Julian Sayin picked apart the Minnesota defense. The redshirt freshman was 23 of 27 for 326 yards and three touchdowns.

2. From there, Donaldson ran for 1 (his TD was overturned) then carried it in to complete the 91-yard, seven-play, 3:41 drive on the final play of the quarter.

The Buckeyes led in yards, 131-74 (Minnesota had just 1 rushing yard), while Sayin was 6 of 7 for 110 yards after 15 minutes.

OSU got the ball back at the 20 after a 53-yard punt and went to work with the Sayin-Tate connection working again on first down. This time, Tate made a catch 12 yards downfield and turned it into a 49-yard scamper to the Minnesota 31. Jackson followed with a rush of 9, and James Peoples replaced him to pick up 3 and a first at the 19.

After an incompleteness to Smith, tight end Max Klare made his first catch for 11 to the 8. Jackson got 2 on the ground, but Sayin was off target to Tate to set up third down. Sayin found Smith cutting toward the left boundary in the end zone and put the ball in his hands for a 6-yard TD and a 14-3 score at 11:01. The series went 80 yards on eight plays and used 2:56.

Minnesota, after a touchback, got a 10-yard reception from Pierce Walsh to the 35. On fourth-and-1 from the 44, the Gophers lined up to run a play, but the Buckeyes took a timeout before stuffing Darius Taylor for no gain, giving the ball to the Buckeyes.

“It was a huge call but the right call,” Fleck said.

It took eight seconds for Tate and Sayin to leave their mark again for a 21-3 lead at 8:04. On first down, again, Tate lost his man at the 10 and waited for the ball to float to him a yard into the end zone.

After another Minnesota punt to the 29, Sayin threw to Tate for 4, and Smith added 5 on his catch. Jackson on third-and-1 went for 6, and Klare caught a 6-yarder to the 50. After a toss to Brandon Inniss netted just 2, backup QB Lincoln Kienholz entered, but his keeper lost 1 yard and the Buckeyes punted.

Tate in the first half set his personal best

in yards (163) and tied his career mark of seven catches. Sayin was 14 of 17 for 237 yards with Smith making four catches for 55 yards.

Ohio State totaled 277 yards, only 40 of them rushing, while 90 of Minnesota's 111 yards were through the air.

Razzle Dazzle

The Buckeyes began on offense in the third quarter, and Tate made catch No. 8 good for 16 yards. He stretched to pull in the pass and managed to stay in bounds. The drive stalled, however, with the help of a holding call. A 42-yard Joe McGuire punt and an illegal block-in-the-back penalty gave Minnesota a starting point at the 8, and the Gophers gained nothing in three plays.

That's when the fun began. Tom Weston's 48-yard punt was fielded by Inniss at the OSU 44 near the Minnesota sideline. He lateraled across the field to Lorenzo Styles Jr., who ran for 36 yards to the 20 before being pushed out.

Jackson did the rest. He made a catch for 11, ran for 4, then rushed up the middle for the score, although it had to go to review to overturn the call that he was down at the 1. The Buckeyes led 28-3 at the 5:45 mark.

A 58-yard punt and a 10-yard Inniss return put the Buckeyes at their 28. The drive started with Tate's catch for 4. Three plays later, Sayin was hit on his follow-through but still connected with Klare for 29 yards to the 31.

Jackson ran for 9, and on third down after an incompleteness, Sayin had a sneak for 3. Jackson gained 10 to the 9 on the last play of the third quarter, and on the first of the fourth, Sayin drilled Smith on a slant for the TD at the 14:55 mark. The 72-yard series took nine plays and 4:14 for the 35-3 advantage.

Minnesota drove to a fourth-and-10 from the OSU 23 and Fleck elected to stop rowing the boat and try a 41-yard field goal that

Denaburg sent wide right with 9:26 to play.

With Kienholz taking over, the Buckeyes marched 77 yards in 5:37 and nine plays, the last his 1-yard run for a 42-3 lead with 3:49 left.

James Peoples had a 13-yard run, and Quincy Porter had a 15-yard catch followed by Peoples ripping off 33 yards to the 16. He then had three straight runs for a combined 11 yards to the 5 before losing a yard. Kienholz went 5, then the final yard.

Minnesota's last possession ended in a punt to the 21 with 15 seconds left, and Kienholz took a knee for a 2-yard loss to end the game.

Ohio State, under first-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, has allowed 25 points and two touchdowns this season.

“That's one of the best defenses I've ever seen in 13 years,” Fleck said. “I mean that because I never met Coach Patricia. I got a chance to see him after the game. But it's not just the players and the depth that's exceptional. I mean, that's off the charts. It's some of the best I've seen. But it's the schematic pieces that make it so complex, where every single play is a different front, structure, blitz structure, coverage structure.”

Notes

Ohio State totaled 474 yards (341 passing, 133 rushing). Of Minnesota's 162 yards, 66 came on its opening drive. The Gophers had 94 yards passing and 68 rushing. ... Jackson rushed for 63 yards on 13 carries. Peoples gained 59 on seven totes. ... Kienholz was 1 for 1 for 15 yards and ran three times for 5 yards. ... Klare made five catches on six targets for 63 yards. ... The Buckeyes had one sack by Arvell Reese for 6 yards and did not allow any. ... Minnesota was 1 for 11 on third down; the Buckeyes were 7 for 10. ... Sonny Styles led the Buckeyes with eight tackles (four solo).

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 42, Minnesota 3

Oct. 4, 2025 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
MINNESOTA	3	0	0	0	3
OHIO STATE	7	14	7	14	42

First Quarter

MIN – Denaburg, 27-yard field goal, 8:05.

OSU – Donaldson Jr., 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:00.

Second Quarter

OSU – Smith, 6-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 11:01.

OSU – Tate, 44-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 8:04.

Third Quarter

OSU – Jackson, 5-yard rush (Fielding kick), 5:45.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Smith, 9-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 14:55.

OSU – Kienholz, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 3:49.

Att. – 105,114

Weather – Clear, 77 F

Team Statistics

	MIN	OSU
First Downs	11	21
Rushing	5	9
Passing	5	12
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	25-68	30-133
Passing Yards	94	341
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	15-26-0	24-28-0
Offensive Plays	51	58
Total Net Yards	162	474
Third Down Efficiency	1-11	7-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	0-0
Punts-Avg.	7-50.9	2-43.0
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties	2-12	4-35
Time of Possession	28:08	31:52

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **MIN:** Ijeboi 13-52; Taylor 8-12; Davis 2-8; Brockington 1-2; Lindsey 1-(-6).

OSU: Jackson 13-63; Peoples 7-59; Kienholz 3-5; Donaldson Jr. 3-3; West 1-3; Sayin 2-2; Team 1-(-2).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **MIN:** Lindsey 15-26-0-94-0. **OSU:** Sayin 23-27-0-326-3; Kienholz 1-1-0-15-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **MIN:** Geers 1-25; Smith 3-19; Brockington 4-15; Davis 2-14; Walsh 1-10; Taylor 1-6; Bierman 1-5; Biber 1-1; Loya 1-(-1). **OSU:** Tate 9-183; Smith 7-67; Klare 5-63; Porter 1-15; Jackson 1-11; Inniss 1-2.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **MIN:** Weston 7-50.9-58. **OSU:** McGuire 2-43.0-44.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **MIN:** Perich 1-(-3). **OSU:** Inniss 2-10; Styles Jr. 0-36.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **MIN:** None. **OSU:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **MIN:** None. **OSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **MIN:** None. **OSU:** None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **MIN:** None. **OSU:** Reese 1-6.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **MIN:** Williams 1-2; Brown 1-1; Bryan 1-1; Nestor 1-1; Kissayi 0.5-1; Baranowski 0.5-0. **OSU:** Reese 1-6; Grady 1-2; McDonald 1-1; Pierce 1-1; Styles 1-1; Atkinson 0.5-2; Curry 0.5-1; Mathews Jr. 0.5-1; Styles Jr. 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **MIN:** Perich 3-6-9; Williams 3-5-8; Baranowski 3-4-7; Bryan 3-3-6; Brown 5-0-5; Nestor 4-1-5; Kingsbury 3-2-5; Green 2-1-3; Roberson 2-0-2; Eastern 0-2-2; Howard 0-1-1; Gerald 1-0-1; Lawrence 1-0-1; Gerlach 1-0-1; Carrier 1-0-1; Hicks 0-1-1; Becker 0-1-1; Kissayi 0-1-1. **OSU:** Styles 4-4-8; Pierce 2-5-7; Igbinosun 4-1-5; Downs 2-2-4; Reese 1-3-4; Curry 2-2-4; Styles Jr. 1-2-3; Mathews Jr. 1-1-2; Atkinson 0-2-2; Grady 1-1-2; McClain 2-0-2; Mickens 0-2-2; Smith Jr. 2-0-2; McDonald 2-0-2; Scott Jt. 1-0-1; Thurman 0-1-1; George 1-0-1; Malone 0-1-1; Houston 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **MIN:** Roy, Johnson, Ray, Marshall, Beers, Lindsey, Taylor, Bierman, Geers, Biber, Smith, Perich, Bryan, Brown, Nestor, Smith, Howard, Eastern, Logan-Redding, Baranowski, Williams, Gerlach, Brockington, Karmo, Ijeboi, Tracy, Menz, Green, Gerald, Lanier II, Lawrence, Loya, Kelly, Walsh, Roberson, Parrish, Redding, Davis, McMillan, Rainer, Garden, Seidl, LeCaptain, Weston, Lutz, Stendel, Finnessy, Carrier, Kingsbury, Hicks, Nelson, Nkele, Soukup, Simpson, Becker, Denaburg, Kissayi. **OSU:** Montgomery, Siereveld, Daniels, Hinzman, Tshabola, Sayin, Jackson, Klare, Kacmarek, Smith, Tate, Igbinosun, Mathews Jr., Downs, Curry, Jackson Jr., McDonald, Malone, Styles, Reese, Pierce, Inniss, Styles Jr., Kienholz, Scott Jr., Graham, Sanchez, Bell, Delane, Hicks, Porter, Donaldson Jr., West, Lockhart, Atkinson, Thurman, Grady, Nelson Jr., Alford, Peoples, Pettijohn, Stover, Roker, West, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Sitanilei, Rudzinski, George, Mickens, Smith Jr., VanSickle, Padilla, Terry, Moore, Onianwa, Adolph, Roberts, Christian, Odom, Carter, Courville, Houston.

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	W, 37-9	105,765
Sept. 27	(1) at Washington	W, 24-6	72,458
Oct. 4	(1) MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	105,114
Oct. 11	(1) at Illinois (17)	12 p.m.	
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	TBA	
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	TBA	
Nov. 8	at Purdue	TBA	
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	
Nov. 29	at Michigan (15)	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	114	61
Rushing	46	30
Passing	63	25
Penalty	5	6
Average Per Game/Rush	171.6	91.4
Average Per Game/Pass	279.8	124.4
Total Offense	2257	1079
Total Plays	303	281
Average Per Game	451.4	215.8
Average Per Play	7.4	3.8
Penalties-Yards	20-175	23-176
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	3-3
Third Down Efficiency	26-48	13-64
Percentage	54%	20%
Fourth Down Efficiency	3-6	5-13
Percentage	50%	38%
Sacks-Yards	14-87	2-12
Time Of Possession Avg.	31:54	28:06

Score								
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.	
Ohio State	31	52	45	59	0	187	37.4	
Opponents	3	6	9	7	0	25	5.0	

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Bo Jackson	348	360	7.5	2	64
James Peoples	35	195	5.6	0	33
CJ Donaldson Jr.	45	193	4.3	4	27
Isaiah West	9	45	5.0	1	12
Lincoln Kienholz	6	23	3.8	1	8
Jeremiah Smith	1	17	17.0	1	17
Carnell Tate	2	16	8.0	0	8
Sam Dixon	3	9	3.0	1	6
Brandon Inniss	1	8	8.0	0	8
Julian Sayin	12	7	0.6	0	12
Team	5	-15	-30	0	0
OSU Totals	167	858	5.1	10	64
OPP Totals	159	457	2.9	0	34

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Julian Sayin	101	126	80.2	1313	13-3	197.0
Lincoln Kienholz	7	8	87.5	86	1-0	219.1
Tavien St. Clair	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	108	136	79.4	1399	14-3	195.4
OPP Totals	71	122	58.2	622	2-2	103.2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	35	463	13.2	6	87
Carnell Tate	24	435	18.1	4	49
Max Klare	11	137	12.5	1	29
Brandon Inniss	9	73	8.1	0	12
Jelani Thurman	5	59	11.8	1	26
James Peoples	5	27	5.4	0	10
Will Kacmarek	4	67	16.8	1	47
CJ Donaldson Jr.	4	26	6.5	1	9
Bo Jackson	4	37	9.3	0	11
Bennett Christian	2	7	3.5	0	6
Bryson Rodgers	2	22	11.0	0	21
David Adolph	1	8	8.0	0	8
Mylan Graham	1	23	23.0	0	23
Phillip Bell	1	15	15.0	0	15
OSU Totals	108	1399	13.0	14	87
OPP Totals	71	622	8.8	2	67

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	7	-	-	-	-	42
Jayden Fielding	-	21-21	-	-	4-5	33
CJ Donaldson Jr.	5	-	-	-	-	30
Carnell Tate	4	-	-	-	-	24
Bo Jackson	2	-	-	-	-	12
Will Kacmarek	1	-	-	-	-	6
Max Klare	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lincoln Kienholz	1	-	-	-	-	6

Jelani Thurman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Sam Dixon	1	-	-	-	-	6
Riley Pettijohn	1	-	-	-	-	6
Isaiah West	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jackson Courville	-	4-4	-	-	-	4
OSU Totals	25	25-25	-	-	4-5	187
OPP Totals	2	1-2	-	-	4-6	25

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	2-2	2-2	0-0	0-1	4-5
OSU Totals	2-2	2-2	0-0	0-1	4-5
OPP Totals	3-3	0-1	1-2	0-0	4-6

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	9	381	42.3	0	55
Nick McLarty	1	45	45.0	0	45
OSU Totals	10	426	42.6	0	55
OPP Totals	28	1259	45.0	0	58

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	3	4	1.3	0	4

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	6	76	12.7	0	32
Jeremiah Smith	1	-6	-6.0	0	0
OSU Totals	7	70	10.0	0	32
OPP Totals	2	0	0.0	0	3

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	2	20	10.0	0	17
OSU Totals	2	20	10.0	0	17
OPP Totals	5	100	20.0	0	41

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Caden Curry	18	11	29	8.5-40	5.0-35
Arvell Reese	11	18	29	3.0-9	3.0-9
Sonny Styles	13	15	28	1.5-2	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	12	12	24	0.5-0	0-0
Kayden McDonald	12	11	23	6.0-25	3.0-20
Jaylen McClain	17	4	21	0-0	0-0
Payton Pierce	5	14	19	1.0-1	0-0
Caleb Downs	11	8	19	2.0-2	0-0
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	10	7	17	1.5-1	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	8	2	10	0.5-1	0-0
Will Smith Jr.	4	4	8	0-0	0-0
Tyhone Malone	2	5	7	0-0	0-0
Beau Atkinson	3	4	7	2.5-12	1.0-9
K. Jackson Jr.	2	4	6	2.0-6	1.0-4
C.J. Hicks	2	4	6	1.0-1	0-0
Zion Grady	3	2	5	2.0-12	1.0-10
Eddrick Houston	-	5	5	0-0	0-0
Riley Pettijohn	2	3	5	0-0	0-0
Garrett Stover	3	1	4	0-0	0-0
Faheem Delane	2	1	3	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	1	2	3	0-0	0-0
Aaron Scott Jr.	3	-	3	0-0	0-0
TJ Alford	1	2	3	1.0-2	0-0
Devin Sanchez	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Eric Mensah	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Bryce West	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Logan George	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Eli Lee	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Malik Hartford	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Jarquez Carter	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Dominic Kirks	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Leroy Roker	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
James Peoples	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Jayden Fielding	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Jelani Thurman	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Carnell Tate	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	155	148	303	33.0-114	14.0-87
OPP Totals	176	134	310	10.0-21	2.0-12
Fumbles Forced:	McDonald, Pettijohn, Styles.				
Fumbles Recovered:	Pettijohn, Sanchez, Sitanilei.				

Curry Bides Time Before Breaking Through

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State senior defensive end Caden Curry was the youngest of six brothers in his family. As he told the Big Ten Network on Oct. 2, he earned what he could in the hectic environment.

"It was definitely chaotic," Curry said. "I got the last of everything, and I had to fight for what was mine."

That experience couldn't have been too different from Curry's first three years at Ohio State. Buried in the depth chart behind two All-Big Ten pass rushers, JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer, Curry had to fight hard for every opportunity he received.

Whether it be on special teams or as a pass rusher earning his stripes in garbage time, Curry's relentless attitude ensured that when Tuimoloau and Sawyer finally departed to the NFL, his coaching staff had no choice but to put him on the field with the rest of the starting defense.

Through five games of the 2025 season, Curry's hard work is paying off. With team-high totals of five sacks and 8½ tackles for loss so far this season, Curry has been the Buckeyes' most disruptive pass rusher.

"Like everybody, he's had his own journey," coach Ryan Day said of Curry during "Buckeye Roundtable" on 97.1 The Fan on Sept. 29. "He's had his ups and his downs, but he stuck with it. And as we all know, that's a huge part of having success in this game is being resilient. Caden's a great example of somebody that has put the hard work in. He's a great teammate, he's done a lot of great things on special teams, and now you're seeing him play at a very high level, and the production is significant."

Curry's inability to get on the field over Tuimoloau and Sawyer had nothing to do with a lack of talent. The 6-3, 260-pound pass-rusher was a four-star recruit coming out of Center Grove High School in Greenwood, Ind. It was there that he totaled 28 sacks and 83½ tackles for loss in his career and drew interest from not just the Buckeyes, but other premier programs such as Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, Texas, Tennessee and USC.

Like many freshmen at Ohio State, Curry went from being perhaps the best player on his high school team to being only one of several supremely talented players at his position. With not only Sawyer and Tuimoloau getting snaps at defensive end, but also first-team All-Big Ten pass rusher Zach Harrison earning playing time, Curry was rarely on the field at defensive end for the Buckeyes as a true freshman.

Earning most of his playing time on special teams that first year, Curry probably surpassed whatever modest expectations were bestowed upon him, totaling 14 tackles, including 1½ for loss.

With Sawyer and Tuimoloau coming into their own as pass rushers during the 2023 season, it was a similar story for Curry as a sophomore. Although he recorded his first solo sack, Curry finished his true sophomore campaign with only nine total tackles.

Still, with Sawyer and Tuimoloau being top-10 recruits out of high school and a year



FILE PHOTO

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART — Sitting behind Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau for three seasons was frustrating for Caden Curry (92), but the senior defensive end has made the most of his opportunity this season, leading the team in sacks and tackles for loss.

older than Curry, few would have expected him to make a tremendous impact in his first two years with the program. However, what was less predictable was that both Sawyer and Tuimoloau would return to Ohio State for their senior seasons. While Sawyer's and Tuimoloau's decisions to return for one more year was great for Buckeye fans and coaches alike, it meant one more season in which Curry would spend much of his time on the bench.

"It's kind of the same ups and downs every player here has to go through because you're playing at one of the best football programs in the nation," Curry said of his slow start to his Buckeye career. "You have to go through the freshman process. You have to go through not starting when you want to. You have to go through everything like that."

"It's kind of just what it is with today's day and age, where you can definitely get up and get out if you need to. You have to stick with it, and you have to go through those highs and lows. That's what I feel like I've had to go through, and it's just paid off for me."

Rather than pouting about his inability to solidify himself as a starter, Curry attacked all of his opportunities with his usual high motor. Curry had his best season as a pass rusher as a junior and finished with a career-high 2½ sacks and 3½ tackles for loss.

Curry's effort to make plays also showed up on special teams. During Ohio State's dominant 45-0 win over Purdue, Curry blocked a punt to set up the team's first touchdown.

The persistent attitude that Curry played with throughout his tenure with the Buck-

eyes on defense and special teams is something that was instilled in him from a young age by his father.

"That's just how I played the game all my life," Curry said. "My dad coached me when I was little. He definitely would never let me take a play off. He would never let me give up on a play because he said anything can happen, and that's just how I am. It's that switch I have, and it's my identity."

Without a penalty for entering the transfer portal and finding a new school, many in Curry's position would have departed Columbus after not starting for three seasons, but emboldened by the connections he had made within the program, Curry decided to stay in Columbus.

"The coaches here, the coaching staff, Coach Day, Coach (Larry) Johnson," Curry said when asked what made him want to stick it out at Ohio State. "When (first-year defensive coordinator) Matt Patricia came in, he definitely got me to stay close. My defensive line. The brothers and the connections I've made definitely made me not want to go anywhere else."

Curry wasn't the only defensive lineman who had to occupy a reserve role while Sawyer and Tuimoloau had their stretch in the spotlight. Kenyatta Jackson Jr., a fellow defensive end and member of the Buckeyes' 2022 recruiting class, is one of just seven members of the class still left on the team.

Curry said with so many players from his class gone after entering the portal, those who have stayed, including Jackson, are bonded forever.

"We definitely kept a strong connection

together, because we knew we were some of many," Curry said. "I feel like the ones who did stay and the ones that are here, we definitely love each other, and it's definitely a bond that we'll have forever, because we're so tight."

Although his current numbers are eye-popping, it wasn't necessarily a perfect start for Curry and the rest of the defensive line. Ohio State's defense was dominant in its 14-7 season-opening win over Texas, but Curry failed to record a sack and the team had but one from Arvell Reese.

He bounced back with a sack in each of Ohio State's next two games against Grambling State and Ohio, but it wasn't until Week 4 that he had his breakout performance. In Ohio State's 24-6 win over Washington on Sept. 27, Curry had a career-high three sacks and tied the program's single-game record with five tackles for loss.

Not only was Curry the Buckeyes' highest-graded defensive player in the game, according to Pro Football Focus, but he also earned Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week honors along with National Defensive Player of the Week honors from Walter Camp and The Football Writers' Association, among several other outlets.

Perhaps no one was happier to see Curry finally receive his flowers than his head coach.

"Caden is somebody who has played a lot of football here, special teams-wise, and has made a lot of plays," Day said on Sept. 30. "Now he's a key contributor. He's had his ups and downs along the way, but in this program, between what goes on the field, what goes on in the weight room, what goes on off the field here, if you hang in there and continue to put one day in front of the other and build resilience up, you're going to get maximized."

Curry continued to excel for Ohio State in its 42-3 won over Minnesota on Oct. 4. He had four tackles (two solo) and ½ tackle for loss.

There's still a long way to go for the Buckeyes, who haven't played even half of the games on their 2025 schedule. Still, Day said Curry's arrival as the team's marquee pass-rusher isn't just pivotal for Ohio State, but also an encouraging sign for younger players also fighting for opportunities.

"Caden, to me, is a great example for some of the younger players that it doesn't always go exactly the way you think it might, and there are ups and downs along the way, but he has come out the back end stronger for it," Day said. "If we're going to reach our goals this year and get to where we need to be, we need Caden to be the playmaker he is right now for us. He plays with a high motor and just has a great feel for the game."

In his interview with Big Ten Network, Curry showed off his humility when asked about his success. He credited his mentors, his older brothers, with making him tough and strong and helping him get to where he is today.

"Letting them mentor me growing up and having them show me the way of how to play the game — it's all of our success, it's not just mine," Curry said.

Jackson Aims To Be Latest Elite Freshman Back

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It wasn't expected before the season, but it seems running back Bo Jackson could join a relatively small list of true freshmen who have led the Buckeyes in rushing, including such players as Archie Griffin (1972), Robert Smith (1990), Maurice Claret (2002), J.K. Dobbins (2017) and TreVeyon Henderson (2021).

Jackson wasn't even thought to be a part of Ohio State's running back rotation before the season. In fact, the four-star out of Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph didn't play in Ohio State's 14-7 season-opening win over Texas, as redshirt freshman running back James Peoples and senior runner CJ Donaldson Jr. split carries in the win.

However, Jackson showed off his explosiveness in the second half of Ohio State's 70-0 win over Grambling State in Week 2, and he started to get carries as soon as the beginning of the second quarter of Ohio State's 37-9 win over Ohio.

Then, after another impressive performance against the Bobcats, Ohio State's coaching staff perhaps tipped their hand in regard to how they feel about their running back room. In a tough road environment against a solid Washington team, Jackson got 17 carries, eight more than Donaldson and 14 more than Peoples.

With Jackson emerging as Ohio State's premier running back, BSB sat down with Pat Murphy and Steve Helwagen of 247Sports,

along with longtime Buckeye beat writer Tim May, to look back on other prominent freshman running backs.

Griffin Was First Freshman Standout

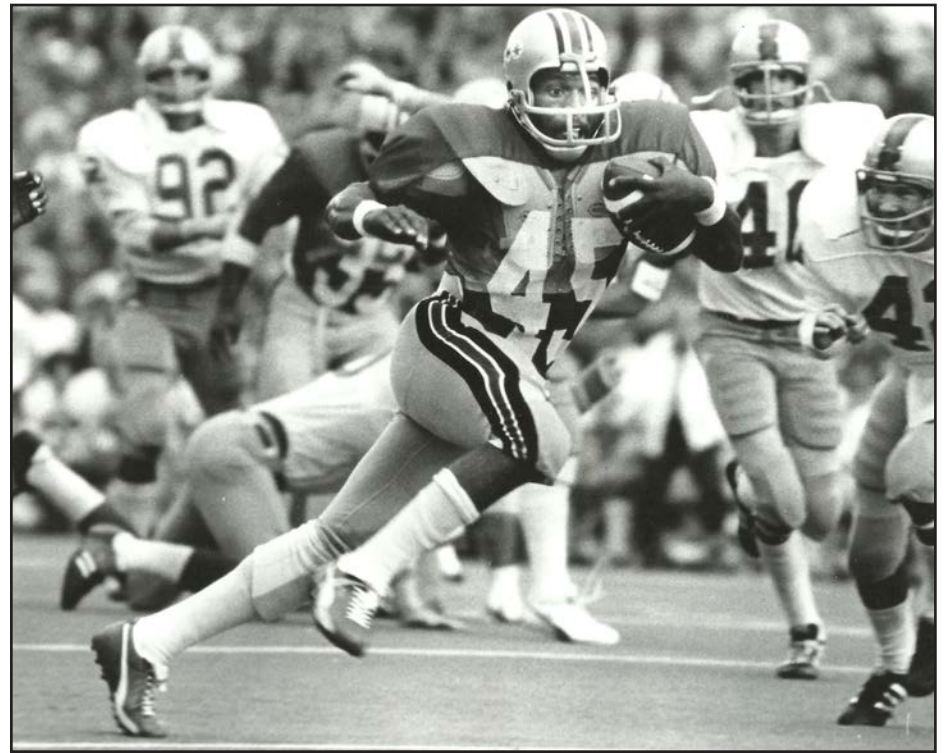
Griffin wasn't the first freshman running back to make a huge impact just because he was one of the more talented runners in Ohio State history but also because, until his freshman season in 1972, NCAA rules prohibited true freshmen from playing.

The new rules worked well for both the Buckeyes and Griffin. The eventual two-time Heisman trophy winner had a team-high 867 rushing yards, and the Buckeyes went to the Rose Bowl after a 9-1 regular-season finish and win over Michigan.

According to Helwagen, then Ohio State coach Woody Hayes couldn't help but love Griffin, even if he made the occasional freshman mistake.

"It was kind of a new thing with coaches managing that," Helwagen said. "Griffin opened the season as the No. 3 running back, and he had a fumble in the first game against Iowa, but Woody Hayes loved him. He just loved him. They get into the second game, and they're playing North Carolina, and they call his number, he goes in the game and sets a record for most rushing yards in a game by an Ohio State player. It was his second game, and he broke a record that was (decades) old. The legend was born that day."

It is easy to see why Hayes had an affini-



FILE PHOTO

THE BEST — Archie Griffin took full advantage of the new NCAA rule in 1972 that made freshman eligible to play varsity football. He led the Buckeyes with 867 yards to set the initial standard for all ensuing freshman running backs.

ty for the young running back. As Helwagen pointed out, even as a freshman, Griffin possessed a rare combination of strength and speed that gave opposing defenses fits.

"He wasn't as big and strong as Earl Campbell, and not quite as shifty as Barry Sanders, but he had a little bit of both of them in his game," Helwagen said. "He ran low to the ground, he had a good center of gravity and great footwork, good lateral movement and good vision. When he got in the open field, a lot of times, it was — forget about it. Not that he was going to outrun everybody, he just had the shiftiness and the ability to create his own lane. He was uncanny. He really was. He doesn't get the credit he deserves 50 years later, but that's just because most people don't even know about him."

Griffin had a very decorated season for the Buckeyes, especially for a true freshman in the early 1970s, but he wasn't given nearly as many carries as former Buckeye fullback Champ Henson. Despite averaging 5.4 yards per carry to Henson's 4.1, Griffin finished the season with just 159 totes while Henson had 193. According to May, the Buckeyes may have been better served by giving the ball more to Griffin.

"Archie kind of got robbed a little bit through his career, especially inside the 10-yard line," May said. "They would go to a robust, and almost all the time, the fullback got the ball for the touchdowns."

By the end of the season, Griffin seemed to earn more carries when he had 20 attempts in the Rose Bowl loss to USC compared to Henson's seven.

Smith's Speed Assists OSU In 1990

It took 18 years for the Buckeyes to have another true freshman starting running back, but Smith was worth the wait. One of the most highly touted recruits in the country out of high

school, Smith used his track speed to rush for a career-high and then-single-season freshman rushing-record total of 1,126 yards and eight touchdowns.

It wasn't the easiest year for the Buckeyes, who went just 7-4-1 in their third year under John Cooper, but Smith won Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors.

"Carlos Snow had been the starter previously. I think he had an injury in 1990 and wasn't able to play, so they had a need," Helwagen said. "Robert Smith was clearly the best option, and he came in, and he's very intelligent, so making the transition physically and mentally was not a problem for him. He stepped right in, and they didn't miss a beat with him at the running back position."

Smith's career took an unforeseen turn after his freshman year. After a dispute with an assistant coach about academics, Smith left the team to participate in only track. Smith eventually returned for the 1992 season and earned second-team All-Big Ten honors after rushing for 819 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Although Smith may not have fully lived up to his potential with the Buckeyes because of his missed sophomore season, it's hard to dispute that he was one of the best freshman running backs the Buckeyes have ever had.

"He was fast, with a smooth, long stride," May said. "He had a good freshman year, not astounding, but you could tell he was special, because if he got in the open field, he was going places."

Clarett Helps Buckeyes Win Title

Like Smith, Clarett was a talented freshman who had no problems contributing early for the Buckeyes.

Clarett's Buckeye career was cut short due to a litany of off-field issues, but as a freshman, he was a premier playmaker. Clarett rushed for 1,237 yards, then a school record for a true

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Athens
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freshman, and had 18 total touchdowns.

The Buckeyes always found themselves in close games that year, but with Claret's help, they won their first national championship since 1968.

According to Helwagen, Claret came into the year hungry to help the Buckeyes.

"It is different nowadays," Helwagen said. "Guys graduate early and enroll. This was over 20 years ago. I don't want to say he was the first guy who ever did it, but he was one of the first few who graduated early and was there. He was there in the spring of 2002, and he came to campus, and he sat down with Mike Doss, who was one of the leaders on the team, a senior, captain and safety, and said, 'I want you to tell me everything I need to know to be one of the main contributors on the team as a freshman.' And so, those are the little things that he did to get himself ready to be a player on the team."

Claret's preseason preparation worked, because on the way to earning Big Ten Freshman of the Year and All-Big Ten first-team honors, he got out to a fast start with a 175-yard, three-touchdown performance in the Buckeyes' 45-21 opening win over Texas Tech. Unlike Smith, though, Claret wasn't one of the faster guys on the team. Instead, he had to rely on his frame and vision to pick up tough yardage.

Two games later he carried 31 times for 230 yards in a 25-7 win over Washington State.

"He could always find the hole," May said. "He had a massive lower body, and he was hard to tackle, and he had burst speed. He didn't have great pure breakaway speed, but he had burst speed, which is hard to explain to somebody. He could kind of turn on the jets, turn them off, turn them on. It was just fun to watch it that way, and he was elusive. So you put all that together, it's a pretty tough guy to tackle."

That season was the last Claret would play for the Buckeyes.

Dobbins Breaks Claret's Record In 2017

Claret's single-season freshman rushing record stood for 15 years until J.K. Dobbins arrived in Columbus.

The top-50 recruit was coming off an injury that took place during his senior year of high school, but that didn't prevent him from rushing for 1,403 yards on 194 carries. Like Smith, Dobbins earned playing time in part because of an injury to another running back – Mike Weber had suffered a hamstring injury in the offseason – and according to Murphy, few expected him to do much before the season.

"Unlike a guy like TreVeyon (Henderson), who had a lot of hype coming in, like we knew Dobbins was going to be a solid running back, no doubt, but I don't think a lot of people expected him to come in and carry the load the way he did that season," Murphy said. "He didn't have a senior year of film that we were watching, and he was coming back off that injury."

Dobbins showed no signs of rust in that first game. In Ohio State's 49-21 win over Indiana, he rushed for 181 yards on 29 carries. Although the Buckeyes suffered a humiliating 55-24 loss to Iowa in the middle of the season that virtually took them out of contention for the College Football Playoff, Dobbins didn't slow down after his debut.

He didn't get over 20 carries another time that season, but Dobbins rushed for at



SONNY BROCKWAY

BRIGHT FUTURE — Freshman Bo Jackson leads Ohio State in rushing with 360 yards through five games despite not playing in the season opener against Texas.

least five yards per carry in all but two of the Buckeyes' games that year. He finished with a 7.2-yards per carry average.

"He was one of the guys that I think was able to do some of that pass blocking stuff," Murphy said. "Obviously, he got better at it as his career went on, but he was able to do that. He was explosive, and he could see things well, which I think is always helpful for a young running back. If you're just fast, but you're not able to read blocks or things like that, you can make some plays, but they really have to design things for you. He was a guy who I think understood the offense pretty well for a freshman and could make plays that were maybe a little bit beyond his years."

Dobbins ended his Ohio State career second only to Griffin (5,589) in career rushing with 4,459 yards on 725 carries. He is also the only Buckeye to rush for 2,000 yards in a season with 2,003 yards on 301 carries in 2019.

Henderson's Year Highlighted By 270-Yard Game

Henderson also didn't play his senior season of high school, but not due to injury. His season was canceled due to COVID. Like Dobbins, he joined a team without a clear-cut starter at running back in 2021. Henderson took full advantage of the opportunity to start as a true freshman and rushed for 1,248 yards and 15 touchdowns on 183 carries for an impressive average yards per carry of 6.8.

"Some running backs come along, and they're really big on getting into the middle of the fray and sort of going where the pile goes, maybe finding a little bit of a hole through there, but TreVeyon had an ability to see the crack and then explode through it, and it didn't happen every play, as we well know," May said. "He was kind of like a Ferrari man. I'm talking about the Formula One car, not the sports car. He was tough to get a handle on, and he was tough to run down."

Henderson's explosiveness not only played a part in him earning All-Big Ten second-team

honors but also helped lift the Buckeyes to their second Rose Bowl win in four years.

Henderson, a five-star out of high school, broke Griffin's freshman single-game rushing record in Ohio State's 41-20 win over Tulsa. He rushed for 277 yards and three touchdowns on 24 carries.

"You could tell right away, like, 'OK, this kid, you've heard about the recruiting hype, but he's got something special there,' " Murphy said of Henderson. "There's just that juice when he gets the ball in his hands, and like other guys, he had to do some other things. I don't think he had his first start until the third game of the season, but it was clear pretty quickly that he was going to be a guy who was going to be able to make an impact, whether he was starting or not."

It was obvious Henderson wasn't rusty heading into his freshman year at Ohio State. According to Helwagen, Dobbins and Henderson missing their respective senior seasons may have helped them early on in college.

"I think it can help with a running back, because you're only going to take so many hits in your career, whether it's high school, college and the NFL. At some point, the injuries accumulate, the hits accumulate on the running backs. So there is a school of thought that you want to get your work in, and you've got to play and everything else, but at the same time, if you can avoid taking heavy hits, that can help you. I think there is something to be said for that. If their bodies were completely healthy coming off of injuries or not playing, I think that that probably had a part in their success in that first year."

Experts Say Sky Is The Limit For Jackson

It may be unfair to expect Jackson to have the type of freshman season that other Buckeye freshman runners have had, but his production through five games is not to be ignored. Following Ohio State's 42-3 win over Minnesota on Oct. 4, Jackson was leading

the Buckeyes with 360 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 48 carries.

Jackson made his first start of the season against the Golden Gophers. He went for 63 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries in the game.

Although Helwagen said Jackson hasn't put his open-field abilities on full display so far this year, he is reminiscent of Claret with his physicality.

"I think he's physical like Claret," Helwagen said. "I don't think they want to see him early in the season take a ton of hits or try and run through a lot of guys, but I know he's got that ability if he needs to. What he's doing in his first few games with his ability to take a 4-yard gain and turn it into a 6- or 8-yard gain, that is a special quality that very few backs have, and that's one of the things that helps set him apart. Already, we're seeing that against older defensive players, he is still finishing runs and getting as much yardage out of it that you can get, so that's something."

Many freshmen who have come before Jackson have had the physical tools to get on the field but haven't managed to make an impact. That is why it is significant, according to Helwagen, that Jackson has a sort of maturity similar to that of Smith when he entered Columbus.

"Coming from good football programs in high school, I think that helps," Helwagen said. "He comes from (Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph), which is usually a very successful football program that plays at a high level and plays great competition. I look at it across the board: football maturity, an understanding of the game, and then people who aren't afraid, no matter how young they are, to go in and make a difference."

"Some guys come in as freshmen, are just happy to have a uniform and a helmet, and other guys are wired like, 'I was a great high school player. I'm going to be a great college player, and I'm going to be a great college player as a freshman.' That is probably the common denominator that we've seen out of these guys over the years who have come in and found success in their first year. It's that they're not taking no for an answer. They won't be kept off the field, regardless of who's ahead of them."

According to Murphy, in the age of social media, when collegiate athletes can hear from detractors as soon as they open up their phones, mental toughness is as important as ever.

"Most of these guys, even if you're playing in Texas like J.K. was, you're playing in front of bigger crowds, but you're not playing in front of 100,000 people," Murphy said. "And there's the social media stuff that you have to deal with. As an Ohio State player, when things go wrong, that's something that you can't really prepare a kid for. So you have to have the right mindset of, 'Look, I can go out in front of 100,000 people and I'm not going to be overly nervous and cause issues because of that.'"

Although Jackson's career is young, there hasn't been much for naysayers to complain about so far. According to Helwagen, the young running back has the potential to accomplish a lot with the Buckeyes.

"He's very good, and I think the sky is the limit for what he can do in three years as a starter or mainstay at Ohio State," Helwagen said. "I think he's setting himself up to have a really good career at the running back position."

Fighting Illini Eyeing A Statement Win

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

If experience really is the best teacher, then Illinois should be the smartest team in the Big Ten.

Head coach Bret Bielema was able to bring back 16 starters – second most of any team in the FBS –from the Fighting Illini’s 2024 season when they went 10-3, the program’s first 10-win season since 2001. Last year’s squad finished at No. 16 in the AP top 25 and No. 20 in the College Football Playoff rankings, and pundits expected a jump in performance in Bielema’s fifth season with the program thanks to that returning experience.

After starting this season as the No. 12-ranked team in the country, nonconference wins over Western Illinois (52-3), Duke (45-19) and Western Michigan (38-0) had the Illini up to No. 9 in the rankings with a road game at No. 19 Indiana.

Despite the rankings, the Hoosiers were favored in the game, and it quickly became obvious why that was the case. After 30 minutes of game time, Illinois was facing a 35-10 deficit, which only got worse when the teams came out of their locker rooms for the second half.

The Hoosiers ended up with a 63-10 win, with the Indiana pass rush making a big difference in the contest.

That was obvious by the minus-27 rushing yards that third-year starting quarterback Luke Altmyer was tagged with thanks to seven sacks on the day.

The Illini and Altmyer came back a week later against No. 21 USC and showed that it was at least somewhat a fluke that they were beaten so badly by Indiana, winning 34-32 over the Trojans. The quarterback was 20 of 26 for 328 yards and two touchdowns in the game.

Bielema knew that Altmyer would be fine because he sees the way the veteran prepares for games every week.

“The thing I love about working with Luke is, Luke just works and takes care of his day,” Bielema said. “His preparation detail, he’s got his own little study in our building where he can get alone and watch film on his own, and he just does a great job of putting himself in preparation mode to get ready for Tuesday’s practice, execute Wednesday, make corrections Thursday, get the game plan together.”

The offensive line – which consists of senior J.C. Davis at left tackle, senior left guard Josh Gesky, senior center Josh Kreutz, junior right guard Brandon Henderson and senior right tackle Melvin Priestly – also made improvements in that week after showing some weaknesses against the Hoosiers, notably helping put together a two-minute drive where the Illini just ran the football effectively to end the game.

“I saw the emphasis on some of the things we do well up front, some of the

combo doubles, some movement at the line scrimmage,” Bielema said. “I just thought we were playing too much in our back yard. We needed to play more in their back yard. So we worked all week.”

But if the Buckeyes’ pass rush is as strong as it has been at times this season, then it could be a point of attack for Ohio State when they go to Champaign, Ill., on Oct. 11.

But while the offensive line was able to get some push at times in the run game against the Trojans, the ground game hasn’t been one of the biggest strengths of this Illini team. They are 99th in the country in rushing offense through six weeks, with an average of 130.7 yards per game.

In Illinois’ 43-27 win over Purdue on Oct. 4, when it should have been able to take advantage of a mediocre rush defense, the team leader, Ca’Lil Valentine, had 95 rushing yards and a touchdown, but overall, the Illini had a total of 117 rushing yards on 41 totes, a 2.9 average.

In games like the one it won against Purdue, Illinois didn’t play at its best, but that was still enough to take a win back home. Bielema understands that won’t be enough on Oct. 11.

“Just, for me as a head coach, to be in a position that maybe if we don’t have our best day, you still feel like you can win a lot of games. Obviously, that’s not going to be the case on Saturday against Ohio State.

“You’re going to have to bring your best. But you know what? We train for this moment 365 days a year. We’re not going to do anything different this week. I don’t need anybody to take superhuman vitamins or do anything. I just need them to execute and be at their best.”

Altmyer will be throwing to wide receivers Hank Beatty, Collin Dixon and Hudson Clement. Beatty leads the group with 32 catches in six games for 569 yards and two touchdowns. But it’s been receiver Justin Bowick who has found the end zone the most, with four touchdowns on 11 catches for 135 yards.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Illini line up in a base 3-4, with three transfers on the line in James Thompson Jr., Curt Neal and Tomiwa Durojaiye. The team as a whole has sacked the quarterback 15 times in six games.

The four starting linebackers have been Gabe Jacas, Malachi Hood, Dylan Rosiek and Alec Bryant. Rosiek leads the way for the position group in tackles with 25 total, also with two tackles for loss, a pass broken up, an interception, a quarterback hurry and a forced fumble, showing he can do a little bit of everything.

But it’s Jacas who will be trying to get into the backfield more often for the Illini. Of his 20 tackles, five are for loss and 4½ of those are sacks. He has also hurried the quarterback three times and forced two fumbles.

Bielema compared Jacas to a famous Wisconsin defender he used to coach during his time with the Badgers.

“He’s got (that) country, hand-strength thing – grown-man strength,” Bielema said. “It kind of reminds me – I had a play-

Get To Know ... Illinois

- **2025 Record:** 5-1, 2-1 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – Multiple 3-4; Starters returning – Offense 8, Defense 7, Specialists 0.
- **Head Coach:** Bret Bielema, 5th year at Illinois, 33-23.
- **Series History:** 103rd meeting; Ohio State leads 68-30-4.
- **School Facts:** Location – Champaign, Ill.; Enrollment – 60,848; Nickname – Fighting Illini; Colors – Orange and Blue; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Gies Memorial Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 60,670).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Kaden Feagen	79	316	4.0	5
Ca’Lil Valentine	61	323	5.3	3
Aidan Lougherty	22	131	6.0	2

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Luke Altmyer	109-148	73.6	1,573	12-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Hank Beatty	32	569	17.8	2
Collin Dixon	18	311	17.3	2
Hudson Clement	13	136	10.5	0
Justin Bowick	11	135	12.3	4

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 37.0
Rushing Yards Per Game – 130.7
Passing Yards Per Game – 267.2
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 397.8

2025 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 29	WESTERN ILLINOIS	W, 52-3
Sept. 6	at Duke	W, 45-19
Sept. 13	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 38-0
Sept. 20	at Indiana	L, 63-10
Sept. 27	USC	W, 34-32
Oct. 4	at Purdue	W, 43-27
Oct. 11	OHIO STATE	Noon
Oct. 25	at Washington	TBA
Nov. 1	RUTGERS	TBA
Nov. 15	MARYLAND	TBA
Nov. 22	at Wisconsin	TBA
Nov. 29	NORTHWESTERN	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks	
Matthew Bailey	24	7	31	1.0-2	0-0
Miles Scott	22	9	31	2.0-7	0-0
Dylan Rosiek	11	14	25	2.0-3	0-0
Torrie Cox Jr.	11	9	20	0-0	0-0
Gabe Jacas	8	12	20	5.0-21	4.5-20
Malachi Hood	13	6	19	1.0-2	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Dylan Rosiek	1	0	0	0
Tanner Heckel	1	1	1	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 24.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 135.5
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 252.3
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 387.8

er at Wisconsin that reminds (me of him) a lot of times: J.J. Watt. J.J. was a stand-down defensive end. Gabe plays on his feet. But when he was in a three-point stance last year, kind of at that true D-end – that four-technique, five-technique – he was the most productive player in college football in the reps that he had there.”

At cornerback, Illinois will likely bring out Torrie Cox Jr. and Kaleb Patterson to

start the game with Matthew Bailey and Miles Scott at safety.

The secondary will be an area that Ohio State could attack with its talented wide receivers, depending on how Illinois ends up trying to stop the Buckeye offense. The Illini



Bret Bielema

are 111th in the country in passing yards allowed, giving up 252.3 yards per game, while Julian Sayin has had multiple 300-plus yard games this season and seems to be getting more comfortable in the Ohio State offense each passing week.

That was where Indiana was able to beat Illinois badly with Hoosier quarterback Fernando Mendoza going a very efficient 21 of 23 for 267 yards and five passing touchdowns. Star Indiana wide-out Elijah Sarratt carved up the Illini secondary for nine catches for 92 yards and two scores.

Part of that was because the secondary faced injury after injury in the contest, along with an ejection for targeting.

“I’ve never been a part of anything like that,” Bielema said. “We lost, I believe, six of our seven top DBs.”

Bielema is pulling out all the stops for Ohio State, knowing he is likely going to need everything. That includes calling for the fans to be there and be loud to try to give the Buckeye offense a little trouble.

“Fans, I need you. If we’ve ever needed you in my entire coaching career since I’ve been here at Illinois, we’ve got No. 1 rolling into town and they’re a very good football team,” he said. “And we need our Illinois fans to show up early. I know it’s an early game, but we need to show up early and put on an environment in that stadium that should be fun to play.”

Bielema is with his third Big Ten team now, also having stints as an assistant at Iowa and as the head coach at Wisconsin, and he believes the trophy games, like the Ohio State-Illinois fight for the Illibuck trophy, make the conference special. He’s looking for his second straight trophy after winning the Cannon trophy with the victory over Purdue.

“It’s a part of something that comes before you’re here, and it goes on after you’re gone,” Bielema said. “I think that’s what makes the Big Ten really special and unique.”

After losing badly to Indiana earlier in the season, Illinois is going to need a statement win at some point if it wants to be back in contention for the College Football Playoff. Bielema knows this game will be a chance to make that statement.

“We’re doing a lot of good things,” he said. “I think the key for us this week is obviously an unbelievable opportunity with Ohio State, and we’ve just got to get our guys healthy, get some guys fresh. We’ve got to be very, very smart in our plan.”



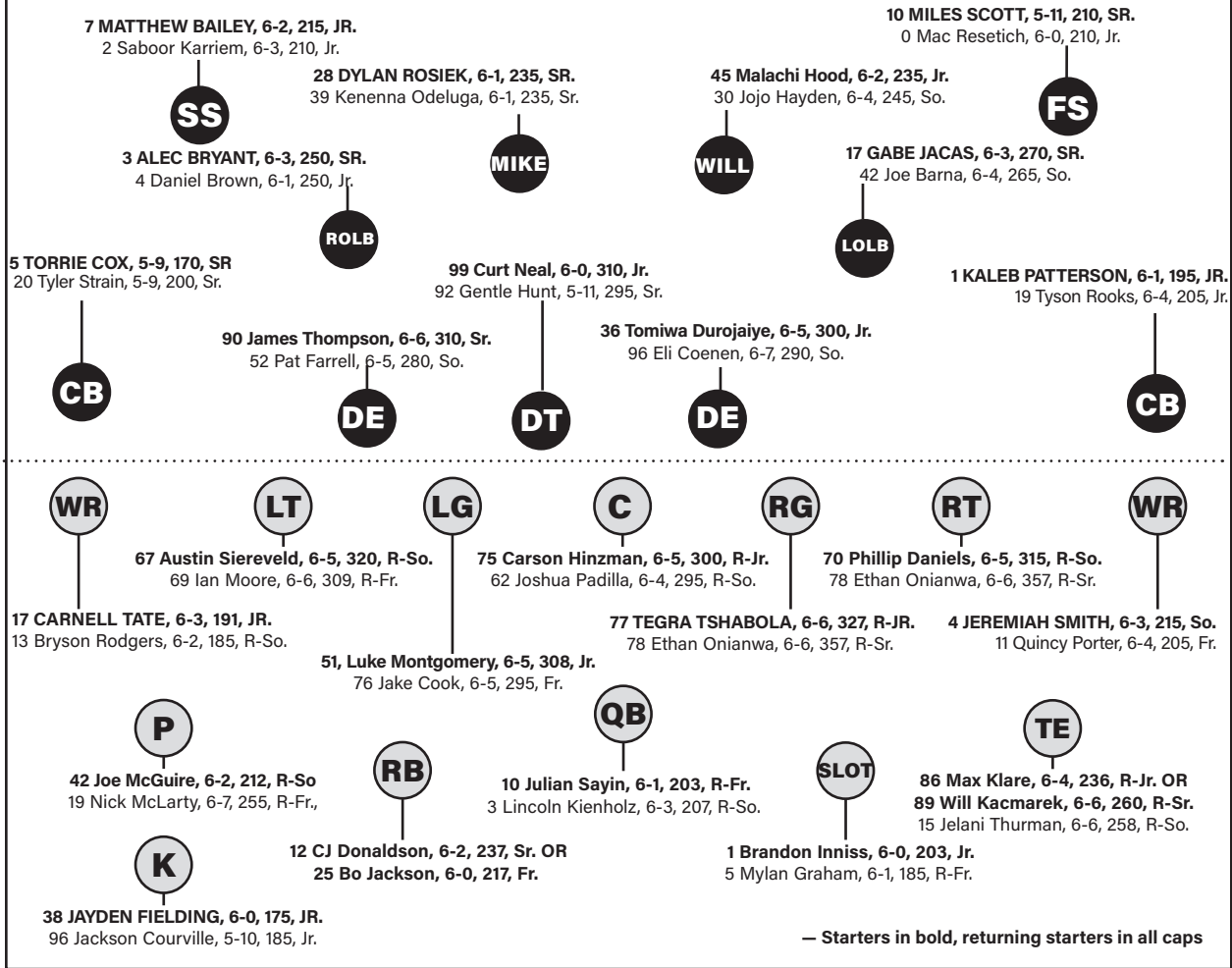
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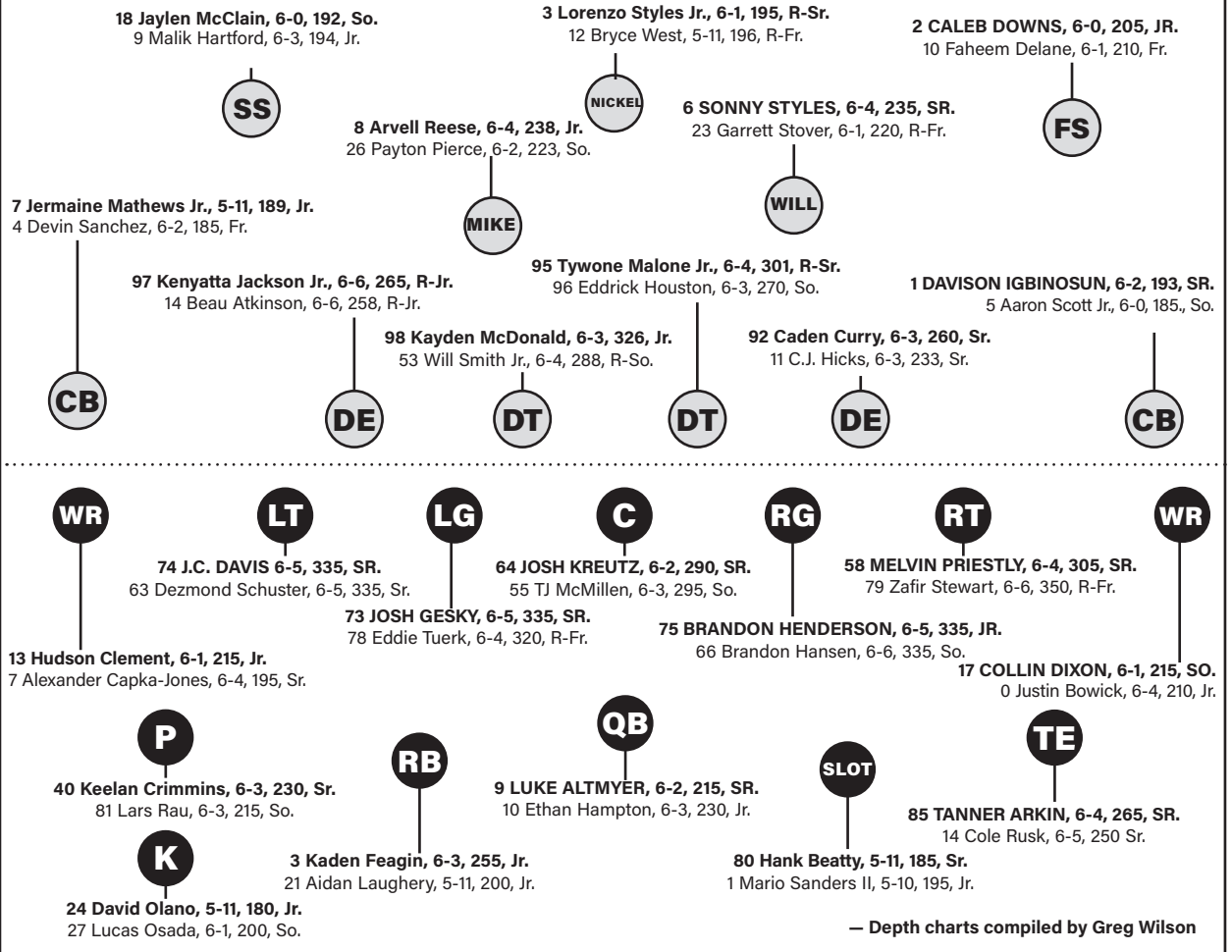


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN ILLINOIS HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. ILLINOIS RUSH DEFENSE

Inconsistent Illinois seems to be on the upswing after a 43-27 road victory against Purdue on Oct. 4. It came two weeks after the Illini were shellacked 63-10 at Indiana, followed by a 34-32 home victory over USC. Even in the win against Purdue, the Illini showed vulnerabilities in their pass defense and red-zone offense against a weak opponent. The Buckeyes had a decent game against Minnesota, but the running numbers were inflated by the fourth-quarter mop-up. Bo Jackson is the top back with CJ Donadson getting the hard yards near the goal line when needed. Jackson averaged 4.8 yards per carry for his 63 yards vs. the Golden Gophers. James Peoples had 56 of his 59 yards (8.4) in the fourth quarter when he got a 33-yard gain. Having a deep backfield will come in handy at some point, maybe this week. Illinois knows how to get to the ball carriers and will try to create havoc. The Illini recovered two Boilermaker fumbles to give them eight for the season to rank best in the nation, but it was not a sterling effort the last time out when Purdue gained 151 rushing yards (6.0), including a 41-yard TD by Antonio Harris. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

ILLINOIS RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Illinois ran for only 117 yards – 13 below its season average – on 41 carries for a measly 2.9 average. Purdue was allowing 157.3 yards. Of course, when the passing game was so good (more on that later), the run wasn't necessary, but it will be against the Buckeyes. On the positive side, Ca'Lil Valentine ran for 95 yards (4.3) with a 25-yard touchdown for the Illini. The OSU defense is just sick, having allowed just 25 points and zero rushing touchdowns. Minnesota ran for 68 yards while averaging 2.7 yards per rush. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. ILLINOIS PASS DEFENSE

Julian Sayin was popping again, going 23 of 27 for 326 yards and two touchdowns to Jeremiah Smith and one to Carnell Tate, who had a career game with 183 yards off nine catches. Smith added 67 yards from seven receptions, and tight end Max Klare, a Purdue transfer, had his best game as a Buckeye with five catches for 63 yards. Sayin was not sacked and was barely pressured, though the one time he was rocked, he completed a 29-yarder to Klare. The Illini secondary is suspect and just asking to be tested. Purdue's Ryan Browne went 30 of 50 with 302 yards and one TD pass, a 60-yarder for a score with 1:13 left in the first half. Michael Jackson III caught 14 of the 17 passes thrown his way for 94 yards. Preseason All-America linebacker Gabe Jacas has 4½ sacks and has forced two fumbles. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

ILLINOIS PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Quarterback Luke Altmeyer threw for a career-high 390 yards on 19 of 22 completions with a 62-yard TD to Hank Beatty, who had five catches for 186 yards (37.2). He totaled 294 yards off 20 catches in 2024 as the No. 3 wide receiver. Injured center Josh Kreutz did not play but could have in an emergency. Illinois has three turnovers this season and has thrown just seven interceptions over the past two seasons. Did we say the Buckeye defense was good? After allowing 66 yards on the opening drive that resulted in a field goal, the Gophers gained 96 yards the rest of the game. Minnesota QB Drake Lindsey was 15 of 26 for 94 yards. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

David Olano went 5 for 5 on field goals against Purdue with a long of 45. He is 11 of 12 this season after making 17 of 20 last season. He hit the 34-yard winner vs. USC. Beatty is a dangerous returner. The Buckeyes pulled off a trick punt-return play when Brandon Inniss threw across the field to Lorenzo Styles Jr., and he took off for a 36-yard gain. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Bret Bielema has the Illini moving in the right direction in several categories. They had five penalties for 42 yards vs. USC and just four for 31 yards against Purdue. The Illini will do everything in their power to keep the game close until the end. They are 11-4 in one-score games since 2023 and 6-1 in the past two seasons. **EDGE: ILLINOIS**

STAFF PREDICTION

This feels like a tricky one against an inferior opponent. The Illini need to make a statement that they can be taken seriously after the Indiana debacle, but the Buckeyes are clicking in all phases. It will be interesting if the coaches take the shackles of Sayin for this road test. **OHIO STATE 38, ILLINOIS 7**

OSU Struggles Against Illini In Early Cooper Era

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Following the departure of Ohio State's Hall of Fame head coach Earle Bruce after the 1987 season, there was uncertainty around the Buckeye program.

Ohio State, which was coming off a 6-4-1 record, turned to former Tulsa and Arizona State head coach John Cooper as the program's next leader.

With lofty expectations for a program that had dominated the past three decades under Bruce and Woody Hayes, Cooper struggled in the first half of his tenure, failing to regularly beat the Big Ten's powers.

The Buckeyes couldn't get past their archrival Michigan, failing to defeat the Wolverines in Cooper's first six attempts, but there was another team that seemed to have Ohio State's number: Illinois, opponent of the current Buckeyes on Oct. 11.

Ohio State struggled mightily against Illinois from 1988-94, going just 1-6 in Cooper's first seven matchups. A perfect storm of Illinois' surge in talent, Ohio State's regression, and the Buckeyes' lingering mental block allowed the Fighting Illini to embark on a dominant stretch during that time.

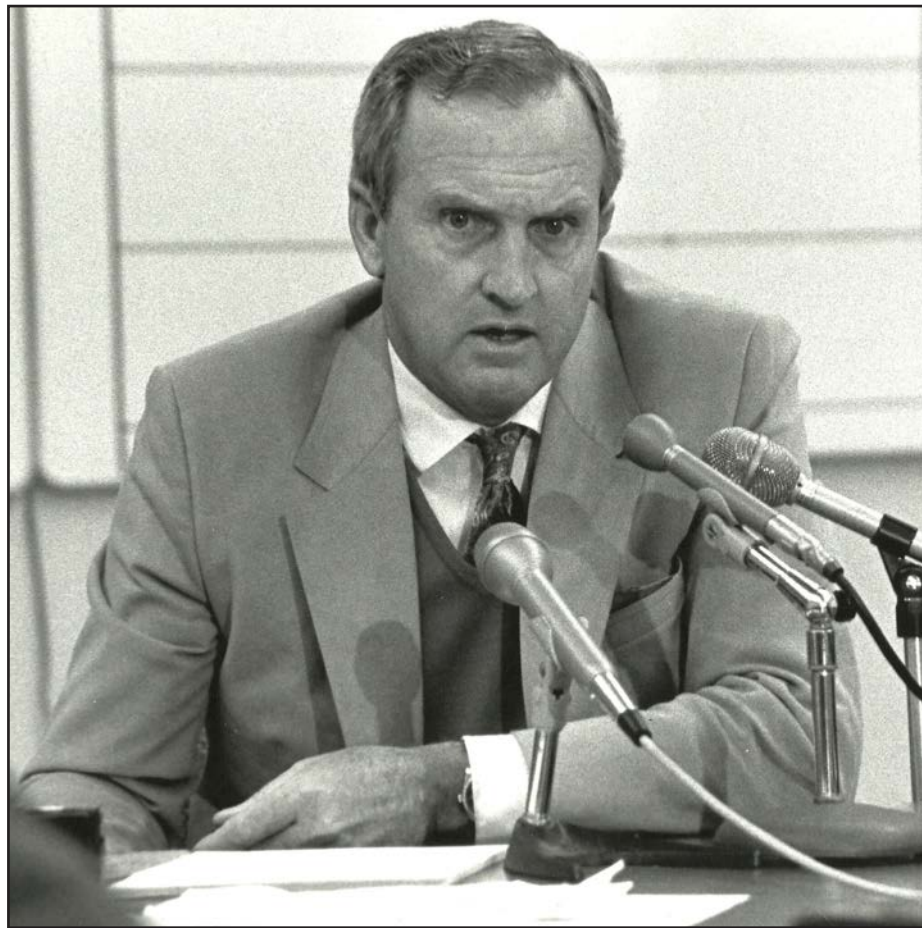
Buckeye Sports Bulletin managing editor emeritus Mark Rea said that after Bruce was fired by Ohio State on Nov. 11, 1987, the lack of talent and high-profile recruits left on the Buckeyes was glaring, putting the program in a difficult position for the years immediately following his departure.

"God bless Earle, but he left the cupboard pretty bare," Rea said. "He was old-style. He did it the way Woody did it. He liked to recruit from his rocking chair and didn't really go out much past Ohio. Times were changing. Even back then, a lot of the talent was migrating to Florida, Texas and California. Earlier, he wasn't that interested in recruiting out that far, so things got a little fallow. When Cooper got here, I think he made the famous quote that the cupboard was bare, and everybody got on him for it. But he wasn't wrong."

In Cooper's first season as the head coach in 1988, Ohio State finished the season 4-6-1, the program's first losing season in 22 years. The Buckeyes were led by quarterback Greg Frey, who ended his season with an 8-13 touchdown-to-interception ratio, and running back Carlos Snow, who was the Buckeyes' leader in scrimmage yards with just 858 on the season.

After a somewhat promising 2-1 start, including a comeback victory against LSU in Week Three, Ohio State was dominated by a mediocre 6-5-1 Illinois squad 31-12 in Ohio Stadium, a loss that caused the Buckeyes to sputter to the finish, falling in five of their last eight contests.

It was an even worse outcome for Ohio State in 1989. Though the Buckeyes improved significantly from the year prior, so did the Illini. Illinois ended its season with a 10-2 record, the program's third 10-win season in its history. After starting the season 2-1 once again, Ohio State was no match for an Illini squad that finished the season as the Associated Press' No. 10-ranked team, falling in the conference



FILE PHOTO

THE ILL IN ILLINI — Playing Illinois was not a good feeling in the early years of the John Cooper era beginning in 1988. Not only could he not beat Michigan, but the Buckeyes also went 1-6 vs. the Illini in Cooper's first seven tries.

opener in dominating fashion, 34-14.

Both the 1988 and 1989 Illinois teams were led by quarterback Jeff George, who threw for 4,674 yards and 28 touchdowns during that span on an Illini offense that was an early adopter of a pass-happy attack that was uncommon at the time.

Longtime Ohio State beat reporter Tim May said George was one of the best college quarterbacks he's ever seen, as the gunslinger played a major role in Illinois' two wins over the Buckeyes in the late '80s.

"I think Jeff George was pound-for-pound the best (collegiate) throwing quarterback I've ever witnessed," May said. "They had a string of pretty good quarterbacks during the '80s and '90s."

"Illinois had good plans offensively. They embraced the forward pass better than anybody in the Big Ten at that time, but they did it with some pretty talented players. So they were equipped to beat you if you were off your game a little bit. Even if you ran your game during those years, they were still equipped to beat you."

Although May attributed the Illini's success to a strong offense, specifically its quarterback and offensive line, Illinois also showcased a tough, gritty defense that was stacked with talent.

Former Ohio State recruiting coordinator Bill Conley said Illinois' defensive unit was as talented as ever throughout that span, citing multiple defenders, including star linebacker Dana Howard (1991-94), who seemed to give the Buckeyes problems.

"Their defensive talent was really strong," Conley said. "They always had a good defensive front and linebackers. They could run, they were fast, they were athletic, and they outplayed somebody when they needed to. Dana Howard, he made plays all the time, a very athletic guy. He's the one who really stands out. But it seemed like they had a different hero each game."

As Cooper attempted to pick up the pieces left behind by Bruce in the first years of his tenure, Buckeye reporters believe one could simply point to a recruiting and talent disparity as the main factor influencing Illinois' dominance over Ohio State.

May said in the wake of Bruce's firing, Ohio State was no longer operating in the same echelon as the nation's elite, even if it still produced standout individual players.

"Recruiting clearly fell off in terms of the talent," May said. "It wasn't a super dramatic fall-off, but it was a fall-off for sure, which took you out of the top tier. So they still had damn good players in the late '80s like Greg Frey, linebacker Steve Tovar and center Jeff Uhlenhake, who played in '88, and he was one of four guys drafted from that team. So the bottom line was talent."

Rea expressed a similar notion, adding that Ohio State's struggles in the late 1980s through early '90s weren't limited to Michigan but also extended to Illinois.

"It was something different every year," Rea said. "Everybody wants to talk about Cooper's record against Michigan, and as abysmal as it was, he actually had a worse record against Illinois the first six, seven

years, at least."

While Illinois simply was more talented than an Ohio State program that was rebuilding in the late '80s, the Buckeyes finally seemed to find their footing as a program in the '90s.

Although Ohio State was improving rapidly, what came from the Buckeyes' first two losses against Illinois in the Cooper era seemed to be a mental block. In winnable games against equally or less talented Illini rosters, Ohio State seemingly found new ways to shoot themselves in the foot in the Buckeyes' next three contests against Illinois in the '90s.

The first of those three games had Illinois defeat Ohio State 31-20 in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 6, 1990, as the Buckeyes found themselves in scoring territory multiple times before turning the ball over. Ohio State had a whopping six turnovers, which included two fumbles, including one from freshman running back Robert Smith on the Buckeyes' first play from scrimmage, while Frey had a career-high four interceptions.

Ohio State even led 20-17 midway through the third quarter, until a 1-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Jason Verduzco gave Illinois a four-point lead. The Buckeyes had a chance to cut Illinois' advantage to one before Illinois blocked Ohio State kicker Tim Williams' 51-yard field-goal try, and defensive tackle Mike Poloskey scooped up the football and lateraled it to safety Quintin Parker, who took the pitch 45 yards for the score, sealing Illinois' victory.

Conley said what made Illinois' defense so difficult for Ohio State was its ability to make timely plays often, having a knack for making a play when it mattered most.

"Illinois was consistent and made big plays," Conley said. "They seemed to make big defensive plays when they had to. And again, anytime we had momentum, it seemed like they snuffed it out."

May had a similar view, adding that Illinois' defensive front was relentless in applying pressure and forcing Ohio State out of rhythm on offense.

"Defensively, they jumped gaps, got after you up front and disrupted a lot of things," May said.

In 1991 and 1992, Ohio State's mental struggles proved costly. The Buckeyes lost by just a combined five points over those two years. Both losses came down to field goal attempts in the final minute of the game. In 1991, it was a 41-yard field goal by Illini kicker Chris Richardson with 36 seconds left to defeat the Buckeyes 10-7. The following year, Ohio State had an opportunity to clinch a late victory over Illinois. Trailing 18-16 with 44 seconds remaining, Williams missed his game-winning field-goal attempt from 44 yards out just left of the goalpost, and the Illini knelt out the clock to secure a two-point victory.

Those narrow defeats exemplified that very struggle, as Ohio State consistently put itself in a position to win, only to falter in the most crucial moments, Rea said.

"You get into a situation where they were 4-6-1 in Cooper's first year, and they just forgot how to win," Rea said. "I know

that's a cliché, but if you think it's a big cliché, ask (current head coach Matt) Rhule out in Nebraska about finishing games. You have to relearn how to win, and once you win one of those games, the monkey's off your back. But until that happens, it just seems like something happens. Whether it's a fumble or a blocked kick or somebody making a field goal at the end of the game, it's just one more deflating loss after another."

Despite the Buckeyes' fifth straight loss to Illinois in 1992, there was a light at the end of the tunnel for Ohio State – freshman running back Eddie George.

Conley said Ohio State's two fumbles – including George's goal-line miscue that was returned for a touchdown – ultimately cost the Buckeyes in their 1992 matchup against Illinois.

"The game in 1992, for example, there's one we should have won," Conley said. "We fumbled twice going inside the 5-yard line, and we moved all up and down the field and all that stuff. But they scooped one up and went 96 yards (for a touchdown). We fumbled, the ball rolled around, and defensive back Jeff Arneson picked it up off the floor and took it back 96 yards for a touchdown."

Ohio State finally broke through in 1993, earning a 20-12 victory over Illinois in Champaign on the back of an early 11-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Bobby Hoying to wide receiver Joey Gallo-way and a fumble on an Illini punt attempt that wide receiver Terry Glenn jumped on in the end zone for a score.

Rea attributed Ohio State's change in fortune against Illinois to a natural shift that came once the Buckeyes regained their footing under Cooper, both in recruiting and on-field talent.

"Eddie turned the tide," Rea said. "Ohio State started getting better. They started recruiting better people, and Illinois was just Illinois. They just kind of chugged along the way they were. All of a sudden, Ohio State's got all these studs, and it goes from losing 10-7 or 18-16 to (winning) 41-3, 48-0, 41-15, 41-0."

The following year, in 1994, Ohio State, which was 4-1 to begin the season, fell back to its old ways, with a 2-2 Illinois squad defeating the No. 17 Buckeyes for the sixth time in seven years, 24-10.

May said that during the early Cooper era, Ohio State seemed to invent new ways to fall short against both Illinois and Michigan.

He noted that this wasn't unique to the Buckeyes, but part of the strange quirks of college football, where certain matchups defy explanation – particularly when one team gets into the other's head.

"I mean, I've seen that off and on through covering college football and stuff for 40, 50 years. Some teams just have the other team's number for whatever reason. It doesn't make sense, and you have to let things play out sometimes."

After Cooper became settled into his tenure, the recruits came rolling in, causing a trickle-down effect that led to Ohio State's better teams in the mid-'90s, Conley said.

He believes Ohio State's turnaround began with recruiting, which quickly elevated the Buckeyes into perennial contenders in the Big Ten and nationally once again.

"The recruiting aspect is No. 1, because

we were getting some of those classes we had in the mid-'90s. We were easily No. 1 or 2 in the nation several times," Conley said. "So we were bringing a lot of players from (Ohio), we went and started hitting Florida hard, which we hadn't done enough of in the past, and started getting some really, really good recruits spread around the country. We started getting a national name by then, and with ESPN coming on the scene and expanding, some more teams were being shown on television. So the exposure we got was really good, and we had some really good years there."

From 1995 and beyond, Ohio State's overall increase in talent was finally showcased in full form. The Buckeyes flexed their muscles with a 41-3 thrashing of the Illini, backed by a program-record 314 yards by George, in a contest that many believe was the running back's "Heisman moment" in 1995.

After his final carry in the 1995 victory, George stood on Ohio State's bench and shouted, "This is our house," – a symbolic moment that stood as a turning point in the Buckeyes' rivalry with the Illini.

From 1995-98, the Buckeyes began to emerge into the power Ohio State fans know today. Ohio State churned out four straight 10-win seasons, as the Buckeyes defeated Illinois by an average of over 38 points during that stretch.

May called Illini's dominant 6-1 record from 1988-94 "the golden era" of Illinois football, stating that their success was a combination of a down period for Ohio State and some of the best years of football Champaign saw, but as the Buckeyes improved, the momentum quickly turned in their favor.

"The bottom line is, Ohio State got better as a program in terms of depth of talent," May said. "That was the big turning point."

Conley attributed the shift in tides to the Buckeyes needing to "learn how to win again," continuing with the sentiment that the increased recruiting efforts also were a major contributor to Ohio's success.

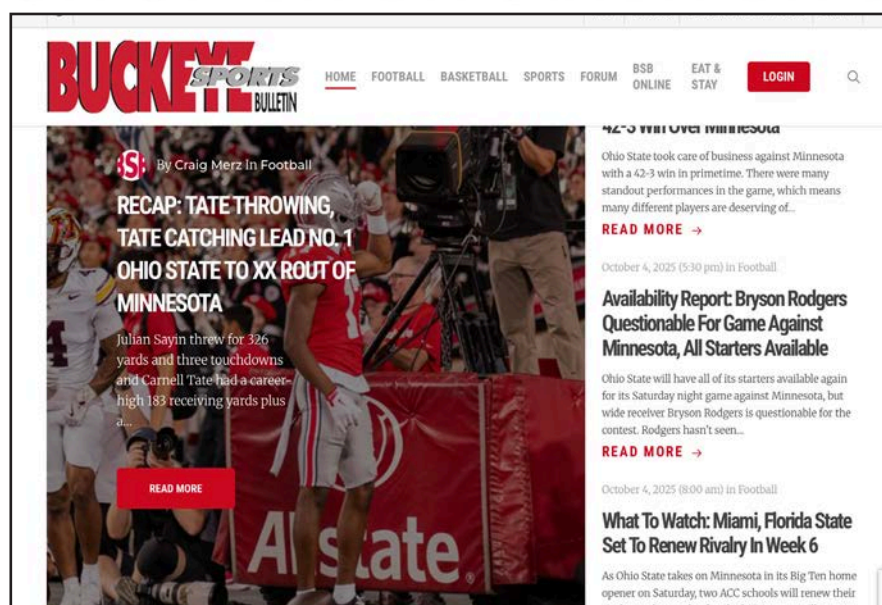
"I think the difference is the culture of winning and getting over the hump," Conley said. "We were getting better players, but it just started to jell at that time. One thing we did in recruiting that was a little bit different, we really put a big emphasis on defensive speed, more defensive speed than we ever had recruited, because that's what we saw in the teams like Miami at that time and Florida State."

Rea said that the Buckeyes had to figure out how to grow as a program to exorcize their demons against Illinois.

"It was just the talent gap. They played as hard as they could, but the talent gap just was tremendous," Rea said. "I think Cooper once said, 'If we think we could just get on the bus or get off the bus and just roll that silver helmet out there and everybody's going to genuflect, that ain't going to happen.' I think that's what happened in those years. It just got to a point where Ohio State was very good. They were still good enough to have winning records, but to take the next step, they had to get better. They had to recruit better. That took a while, but you saw that finally happen."

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George's Heisman Campaign Took Off Against Irish

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 Ohio State's much anticipated 45-26 win over Notre Dame on Sept. 30, 1995.

By MIKE WACHSMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Few things in Ohio State football lore top the Buckeyes beating Michigan.

But Eddie George's performance against Notre Dame in 1995 has to be mighty close.

The chiseled back was instrumental in the Buckeyes rebounding from a 10-0 deficit at home to beat the Fighting Irish 45-26 in Columbus on Sept. 30, finishing with 207 yards and a pair of touchdowns on 32 carries.

George got stronger as the game went on, and by the time the teams left the field, the Buckeyes were exultant while the Irish were exhausted.

The pregame hype was equal to that of a Buckeye-Wolverine game, and why not? The Buckeyes and Irish had not faced off on the gridiron since 1936. Elite, blue-blood matchups such as this in the nonconference do not take place very often, so it was not surprising that OSU fans far and wide were going to make the most of it.

George already had one touchdown in his back pocket when he brought out his biggest heroics. With the Buckeyes clinging to a 35-26 lead early in the fourth quarter, George took a pitch at his own 20 and raced through a gaping hole cleared by fullback Matt Calhoun and rambled 61 yards before being knocked out of bounds at the Irish 19.

"That was a toss sweep, Student Body Left," George said. "They got the blocks, I read the hole and just tried to go for the flag."

While he did not quite make it on that play, he was able to hit pay dirt moments later on a tough 3-yard run to give the Buckeyes more breathing room on their way to a convincing victory.

The shot of George sprinting away from seven Irish defenders has become one of the most hallowed images in Ohio State history. How can one be certain? Well, when it is commemorated in a mural at John Glenn International Airport in Columbus, it becomes obvious.

Years later, George's performance and the outcome of the game still resonate.

"Notre Dame was the standard at the time," George said in later years after his Ohio State career had concluded. "They were still a top-25 team in the country. They were very capable of winning ballgames. Coached by Lou Holtz, a disciplined football team, focused and talented."

If George was merely a middle-of-the-pack runner in the Heisman Trophy race heading into the showdown with the Irish, he was much closer to the front of the line after it was over, at least to observers who are paid to opine on such things.

For his part, George stayed locked in on team mode.

"I really don't know about the Heisman," George said. "All I know is I played the game today against Notre Dame, and I did my job to the best of my ability. If I'm up for it, that's great. If not, we've got to play Penn State next week, then Wisconsin and Purdue and it goes on and on."

The Buckeyes saw something in Notre Dame's defensive alignment that made them think a big play was coming, and the execution could not have been any better when the play was finally called.

"We had been going so heavy with motion to twins and running the off-tackle play to twins, especially to the wide side of the field," offensive coordinator Joe Hollis said. "The last two times, they had taken their defensive linemen and slanted into him. That particular time, they rolled into three-on-two coverage, and once we hit the crease there was nobody there."

"We said we were going to decide to run it. I thought that was probably our best opportunity based on what we had seen the last two series, and Eddie popped it."

Hollis said that even though he saw something in the Irish scheme, it was not a given that the Buckeyes would call the outside run.

"Those calls are tough because you don't want to do anything stupid when you're ahead," he said. "But that first-and-10 is so important because second-and-4 is a pretty simple call. We said we were going to make the decision to run it. I thought that was probably our best opportunity based on what we had seen the last two series."

Given the inauspicious beginning to George's career in 1992, which included a pair of fumbles that were vital in helping Illinois upset the Buckeyes in Ohio Stadium, there was no bigger fan of the turnaround than OSU head coach John Cooper.

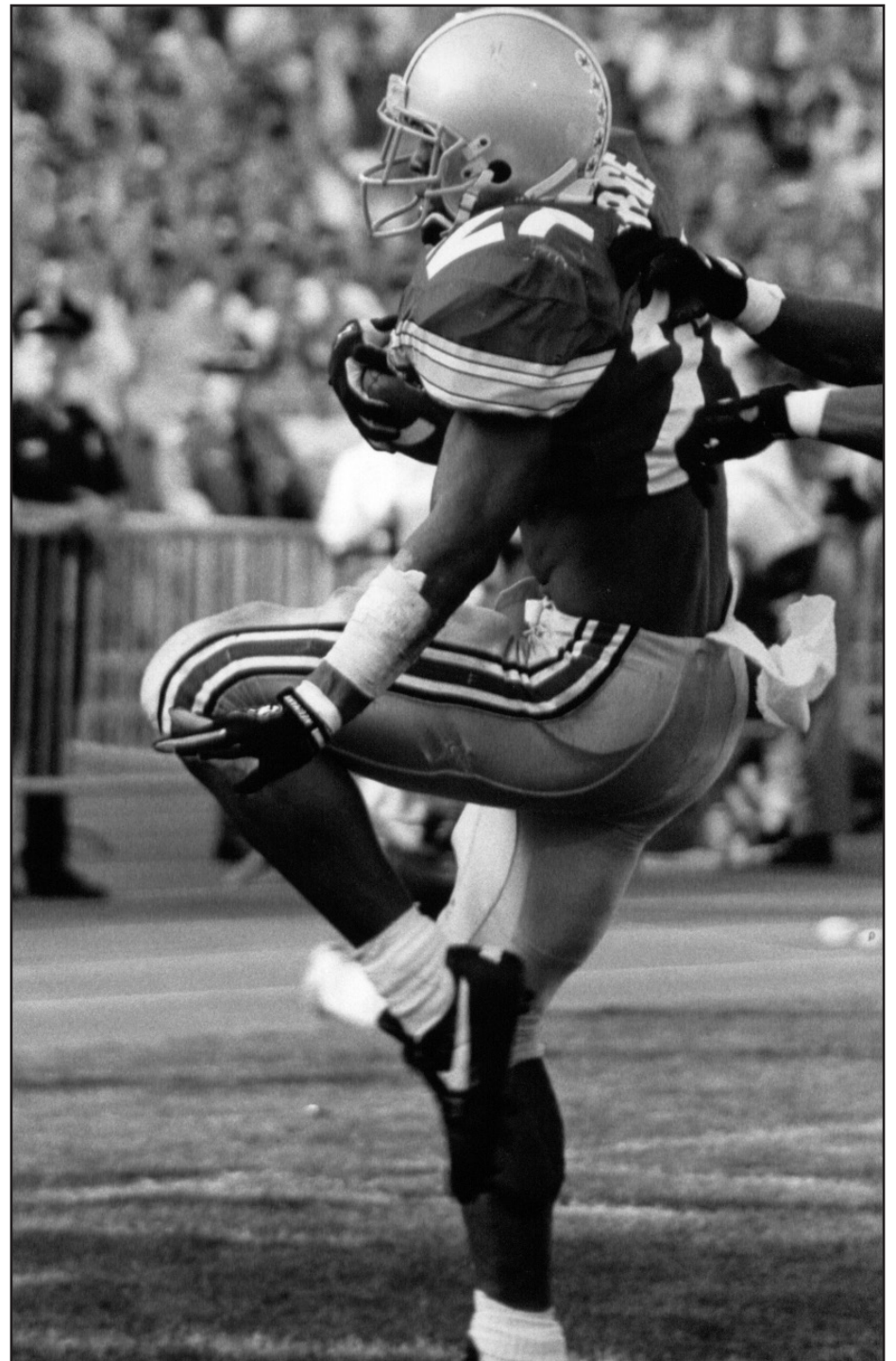
"Eddie has done it all year long," Cooper said. "This is four ballgames in a row, and if he doesn't jump right into the middle of that Heisman race now, I don't know what it takes. He's done everything we've ever asked of him. The stat I like is that he hasn't turned it over all year long. I knock on wood when I say that because that's the reason we're winning games."

With his performance against Notre Dame, George had rolled up an impressive 640 yards and six touchdowns on 109 carries through four contests.

It is possible the Buckeyes were a little too amped up at the start, as the Irish scored the first two times they had the ball and took a 10-0 lead. But thanks to George and receiver Terry Glenn, who brought the crowd to its feet with an 82-yard catch-and-run touchdown in the closing moments of the third quarter, the Buckeyes gained momentum and ended up running away with the game.

"We didn't panic," George said. "We're a veteran ball team. We had been in that situation before, and we just had to relax and play our game. In the second half, they were making mistakes, and we were able to capitalize on them."

Holtz had a great view of George as he raced up the sideline on his backbreaking run and had nothing but praise after the game.



FILE PHOTO

BY GEORGE — Eddie George thrust himself into the 1995 Heisman Trophy conversation with a scintillating performance against Notre Dame. He rushed for 207 yards and two touchdowns in the 45-26 victory. His 61-yard run in the fourth quarter left over half the Fighting Irish defense in his wake and was immortalized by a photo.

"That was a great performance," Holtz said. "He ran well, never fumbled the ball and made some big plays. He's a great back."

Years later, George was asked about the iconic play and said that to this day, people come up to him and say it was one of their favorite moments as an Ohio State fan.

"I remember '19 toss' to the left side, and Orlando (Pace) was playing left tackle," George said. "I pretty much took the pitch and saw a lane on the inside and stretched it enough to create a natural lane. Once I kind of got through that hole, I burst toward the sideline and tried to have the back-side safety run longer than he was used to running."

Notre Dame did a solid job of keeping George in check over the first 30 minutes, holding him to just 77 yards and no touch-

downs. But in a narrative that would unfold repeatedly during the 1995 season, George picked up steam and left defenders and fans incredulous in the second stanza.

George downplayed his performance and chose to hype up his teammates following the win over the Irish.

"We gained some confidence today," George said. "Beating Notre Dame is a tremendous feeling for us. I know we still have room for improvement, and we're going to just keep working hard. As long as we do that, the good things will come."

Modesty aside, George went from good to great that day against one of the most storied programs in college football. But it was just a taste of what was ahead.

Being Marvelous Marv Is Not Always Easy

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Everybody in Arizona is talking about Marvin Harrison Jr., but not always in a good way, in his second season with the Cardinals.

Since being drafted fourth overall in 2024, the former Ohio State star has not lived up to the lofty expectations of some “experts” that he would immediately be better than his namesake, Hall of Fame receiver Marvin Harrison Sr.

While the younger Harrison posted decent numbers in his rookie season – 62 catches on 116 targets for 885 yards (14.3 avg.) and eight touchdowns – there was a feeling he didn’t live up to his draft position.

What really got critics going was his Week Three performance this season against San Francisco on Sept. 21, when he dropped a wide-open throw from Kyler Murray on a deep crossing route, then failed to haul in a pass he had to leap for in the end zone.

Afterward, he curtly said, “I’m not doing my job at a high enough level at the moment.”

In 2024, he dropped five passes in 16 starts. This season, he had four through four games.

He was also not the threat he was at Ohio State in his three seasons when he caught 155 passes for 2,613 yards (16.9) and 31 touchdowns in 38 games to become a two-time unanimous All-American before declaring for the NFL draft following his junior season.

Harrison made four catches for 98 yards in the 22-21 loss against the Tennessee Titans on Oct. 5.

For the season, has 20 catches for 306 yards (15.3) and two touchdowns to bring his career totals to 82 receptions for 1,191 yards (14.5) with 10 TDs in 22 games.

Former Cardinals offensive coordinator (2007-08) Todd Haley told bolavip.com before the Tennessee game that Murray and the staff needed to make sure they don’t shy away from getting the ball to Harrison.

“The quarterback generally wants to throw it to the guy he can trust, so (Harrison) has to hold up his end of the bargain, but when guys know the ball is going to keep coming, it takes a little pressure off them and they start to gain confidence,” Haley said. “If I’m game-planning, every play, the first read would start with him. It’s not going to go to him every time, because the defense can dictate that, but I’d try. (Tight end) Trey McBride is awesome. I think he’s great. But the ball is going to come to him naturally as things break down. That’s the way it works for tight ends. (McBride) is going to get his eight, 10, 12 targets organically with how the game plays out.”

Harrison last season caught only 0.3 percent more passes than expected, per Next Gen Stats. This year, in the first four games, he was 2.9 percent below the expectation.

His receiving problems got worse before they got better in the fourth game vs. the Seattle Seahawks in a standalone Thursday night game on Sept. 25.

He and Murray were not on the same page, and Harrison appeared to stop on a



FILE PHOTO

CATCHING FIRE — Former Ohio State star receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. had a rough start to his second season with the Arizona Cardinals with several publicized drops, but he seemed to regain his form and confidence in the second half against Seattle on Sept. 25 and had another strong performance vs. Tennessee on Oct. 5.

route that resulted in an interception, and a second pick occurred when Harrison bobbled a pass into the hands of Ernest Jones. There was also a play where Murray threw a stop route while Harrison continued on a fade, and on the same drive, he threw at Harrison’s feet on a curl route.

Harrison was targeted six times in the first half but had one catch for 8 yards, and the home fans were booing him.

“It wasn’t clicking,” Murray said. “Was not clicking.”

Redemption

But the duo found a rhythm in the second half, and Harrison caught five passes for 58 yards to finish with six catches for 66 yards.

Four of those receptions for 42 yards came in the fourth quarter, including a 16-yard TD with a high degree of difficulty because it was slightly off target.

“I feel like when you got a guy making plays like that, it obviously gives you confidence to keep going back at him, keep going to him,” Murray said on Oct. 1. “My confidence didn’t waver. Obviously, we had the two mishaps in the first half, but I count on him. He knows that. He knows I’ve got full faith in him. I’m going to continue to.”

Harrison is his own worst critic, and those around him say he dwells more on the plays he didn’t make rather than accentuate the positive ones.

“I love the way that he fought back and continued to play hard and continued to make plays,” Murray said. “Obviously, he’s probably going to go home thinking about that (expletive). But at the end of the day, again, it’s football. We all make mistakes. But he continued to battle. I’m excited.

“He needs me, I need him. This is a team sport, four-quarter game, and I understand

he’s not coming out of the game. I don’t want him to come out of the game.”

Cardinals coach Jonathan Gannon also liked how Harrison reacted to adversity.

“The response was fantastic,” Gannon said. “I thought he came and lit it up in the second half. He wants to help the team win. He gets down on himself. He’s got to let that go and control the controllables, which for him is just play fast. Control your effort, your mode of play and play fast, and I thought that’s what he did.”

Harrison was emotional after the touchdown catch, kneeling in the back of the end zone with his head down, visibly relieved.

“I was thanking God, really,” Harrison said. “I always thank him, but that one meant a little more to me.”

It was important for offensive coordinator Drew Petzing to let Harrison know after one of his drops against the Seahawks that he still believed in him.

“My message to him, right after the play, was ‘I’m not treating you different, I’m not calling it different,’ ” Petzing said. “He’s as good of a player as there is in this league in my mind. We’re going to need him to make big plays. And I said that to him, I looked him right in the eyes and said, ‘We’re going to be good. You’re going to be good, and we’re going to need you to get back into this game.’

“His size, his length, his ball skills, the ability to go up and get the ball in some of those situations is really a great asset for us.”

The Cardinals almost pulled off a victory against the Seahawks, rallying to tie it 20-20 on Emari Demercado’s touchdown. Harrison was instrumental on the drive with an 18-yard over-the-shoulder catch with 1:16 left in the game.

“It does not surprise me,” Cardinals tack-

le and former Ohio State teammate Paris Johnson Jr. said. “People say it was him starting to bounce back, but that’s just the real Marv. I think certain plays, we’ll look back and they will be a blip on the radar. He’s a killer and he works and he’s consistent, and he’ll continue to show that.”

By the way, Harrison and Johnson are among six former Buckeyes on the roster along with linebacker Baron Browning, cornerback Denzel Burke, offensive lineman Josh Fryar and linebacker Cody Simon.

Murray said no one is down on Harrison.

“Everybody on that team and in that locker room has been in that situation where you just feel like (expletive) after a play,” he said. “You feel like you let everybody down, or you missed a play you feel you should have made.

“You’re in front of thousands of people, everyone is watching on TV, prime time. We’ve all been there. There is nothing anyone can actually do. The pats on the back almost make you more frustrated.”

Harrison appreciates the encouragement.

“I see both sides of it,” he said. “You don’t want anyone feeling sorry for you so that they keep coming up to you. But sometimes it is nice to be supported by your teammates.

“They see the work I put in throughout the week. They see the practices. They know what I am capable of. It means a lot to have their support and that they trust me.”

Potential There

He has a firm ally in former Cardinals receiver (2004-2020) Larry Fitzgerald, one of the best to ever play the position.

The future Hall of Famer (he is first-time eligible in 2026) is second in NFL history to Jerry Rice in receptions (1,549 to 1,432) and receiving yards (22,895 to 17,432).

“The second half of that game (vs. Seattle) was the best thing that could have happened to him,” Fitzgerald said on SiriusXM. “He had the two drops early in the game – one that led to an interception. He could have very easily put his head in the sand, and that could have gone really bad.

“But he came back and made play after play when his number was called in that second half. It showed me that this guy’s got a lot of fight, got a lot of high football resolve and character. It’s in his DNA. There’s nobody that works harder than he does.”

Fitzgerald later amplified his remarks on the Maggie & Perloff show on Infinity Sports Network: “You have to think he’s in his second year. I mean, he’s a baby. He’s learning. When I got in the league, I had the great fortune of playing with Anquan Boldin, so all the pressure was not on my shoulders.

“And when (Harrison) walked in that door, he was asked to be the Messiah. And that’s unrealistic to do that to a young man. And he’s gotten better.

“You watch his tape, the way he’s getting out of his breaks, the way he’s able to high-point plays, he’s gotten significantly better. You just want to see him be a little bit more consistent catching the football, but I like his trajectory.”

Conference Exploring Private Capital Funding

The Big Ten is in discussions for a private capital deal worth upwards of \$2 billion, according to an ESPN report, which has been confirmed by multiple other out-

BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

lets.

The Big Ten is reportedly exploring a private capital partnership along with a 10-year extension of the league's grant of rights, which would essentially tie the schools together through their media rights through 2046.

Pete Thamel and Dan Wetzel reported that the conference is looking to receive unanimous support from its 18 schools, though multiple of the Big Ten's biggest names, including Ohio State and Michigan, have yet to agree.

The Big Ten is currently considering three different private capital entities, though the conference has yet to vote on which organization it will sign with.

The league is working to create a new commercial entity, which has a working title of “Big Ten Enterprises,” to manage revenue streams like media rights and

sponsorships. This structure could allow the conference to raise capital without ceding control or board seats to outside investors, something school leaders have been wary of.

The Big Ten also plans to issue up-front payments to schools based on a multi-variable formula tied to athletic budgets, with a tiered revenue-sharing structure favoring larger programs like the Buckeyes and Wolverines.

“Think of it this way – the conference is not selling a piece of the conference,” a Big Ten source told ESPN. “Traditional conference functions would remain 100% with the conference office – scheduling, officiating and championships. The new entity being created would focus on business development, and it would include an outside investor with a small financial stake.”

A statement from the Big Ten said the review is part of a long-term effort to adapt to the ever-changing environment of college athletics and ensure the conference maintains leadership and financial stability moving forward.

“Our membership has clearly expressed the need to modernize the operations and structure of our conference to ensure that the Big Ten remains best positioned to offer the highest level of athletic and academic excellence in a rapidly evolving landscape,” the statement read.

“Over a year ago, we initiated a comprehensive evaluation of our practices to

identify partnerships that could secure the financial stability of our member institutions and allow us to not only protect but expand opportunities for our student-athletes. This is an ongoing process, and we remain committed to finding a path that strengthens the conference for the future.”

UCLA And OC Sunseri Part Ways

Just five days before UCLA's matchup with Penn State, the Bruins and offensive coordinator Tino Sunseri mutually agreed to part ways, the team announced on Sept. 30.

The move followed the firing of head coach Deshaun Foster, who was fired on Sept. 14 following UCLA's 0-3 start to the season.

Sunseri didn't last long in the position, as this was his first year as the head of the Bruins' offense. In four games, he led a unit that was 117th in the country with 321.3 yards per game and third-to-last in the country in points per game with 14.3. The Bruins were ahead of two MAC schools, Massachusetts and NIU.

Despite cleaning house, previously 0-4 UCLA managed to pull off possibly the biggest upset of the 2025 college football season so far.

The winless Bruins took down No. 7 Penn State 42-37 at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena, Calif., on Oct. 4, knocking the Nittany Lions (3-2, 0-2 Big Ten) out of the AP poll while earning a marquee victory.

Jerry Neuheisel, the son of former Washington head coach Rick Neuheisel, was promoted from tight ends coach/assistant head coach to offensive coordinator and play caller following the departure of Sunseri and Foster.

The newly promoted offensive coordinator was carried off the field by his UCLA players and said that he always had faith in his players despite a shaky start to the season.

“Last night, I knew we had a chance,” Neuheisel said. “It was the most enthusiastic 0-4 team you’d ever seen in your life. And all of a sudden, you get this delusional optimism like, ‘We might have a chance at this thing.’”

PSU LB Rojas Out Long Term

Penn State linebacker Tony Rojas went down with an unspecified injury he sustained in practice, and he is set to miss significant time for the Nittany Lions.

The extent of Rojas' injury and how long

BIG

2025 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Ohio State	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Oregon	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Michigan	2	0	1.000	4	1	0.800
Illinois	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
USC	2	1	0.667	4	1	0.800
Maryland	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
Nebraska	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
Washington	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
Iowa	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
Minnesota	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
Northwestern	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
UCLA	1	1	0.500	1	4	0.200
Michigan State	0	2	0.000	3	2	0.600
Penn State	0	2	0.000	3	2	0.600
Rutgers	0	2	0.000	3	2	0.600
Purdue	0	2	0.000	2	3	0.400
Wisconsin	0	2	0.000	2	3	0.400

Oct. 4 Games

Michigan 24, Wisconsin 10
Illinois 43, Purdue 27
UCLA 42, Penn State 37
Washington 24, Maryland 20
Northwestern 42, Louisiana-Monroe 7
Nebraska 38, Michigan State 27
Ohio State 42, Minnesota 3

Oct. 10 Game

Rutgers at Washington, 9 p.m.

Oct. 11 Games

UCLA at Michigan State, noon
Ohio State at Illinois, noon
 Northwestern at Penn State, 3:30 p.m.
 Nebraska at Maryland, 3:30 p.m.
 Indiana at Oregon, 3:30 p.m.
 Iowa at Wisconsin, 7 p.m.
 Michigan at USC, 7:30 p.m.
 Purdue at Minnesota, 7:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

he'll be sidelined have not been disclosed.

Through four games, Rojas was the Nittany Lions' second leading tackler (25) while racking up 4½ tackles for loss, two sacks and one pass breakup.

Before the injury, Penn State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said Rojas had shown the growth and physicality needed to thrive in the Big Ten, adding that he was happy with the linebacker's play early on.

"I've been impressed," Knowles said during the Nittany Lions' off week on Sept. 17. "He has high-level linebacker traits in terms of his physical skills, and he's play-

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ing a lot more physically than I saw on film in the past.

“He’s learning the scheme, which can allow him to know where the ball is going to be before it gets there. So he can play even faster. But he’s got real speed and playmaking ability that you look for from a linebacker at this level. I’ve been pleased with what I’ve seen so far.”

Though Penn State’s linebacker depth becomes significantly thinner, head coach James Franklin believes the Nittany Lions can fill the hole left by Rojas’ injury.

Franklin said senior linebacker Dom DeLuca will be a player asked to step up in Rojas’ absence, and freshmen ’backers Cam Smith and Alex Tatsch are depth pieces who also have the potential to rotate in.

“What’s helpful is we have these Sunday scrimmages, so we’ve had a chance to evaluate those guys each week,” Franklin said. “Early on, Tatsch was getting a little bit more time with the varsity. We’re giving Cam an opportunity now as well.”

Finebaum: “Big Ten In Driver’s Seat”

On the ESPN morning show “Get Up” on Sept. 30, SEC Network analyst Paul Finebaum gave Heather Dinich and host Mike Greenberg his thoughts about which conference he believes has the best chance to hoist the College Football Playoff trophy at the end of the season.

After Greenberg referenced the betting favorites to win the national title, which had Ohio State (+500), Oregon (+650) and Penn State (+750) as the three betting favorites, Finebaum – who is one to beat his chest about SEC dominance in the sport – admitted that the Big Ten had the best chance to produce a championship in 2025.

“If you’re being honest about college football, and I’ve tried to be honest here, even if it hurts, the Big Ten is in the driver’s seat right now,” Finebaum said. “There’s no getting around it. The SEC is a mix and a mess. The good news for the SEC is it’s late September.”

Those odds changed after Week Six, with Ohio State now at +450 and Oregon at +500. After Penn State’s loss, its odds are at +3000. Alabama, Miami and Georgia aren’t far behind the top two at +700, +800 and +900, respectively.

To begin the season, there were six SEC teams ranked in the top 15 of the AP poll. As of Oct. 4, all six of those SEC schools have already lost a game, with Texas, Florida and South Carolina all dropping out of the top 25 with at least two losses. The conference now has just four undefeated teams remaining (No. 4 Ole Miss, No. 5 Texas A&M, No. 6 Oklahoma and No. 14

Missouri).

Finebaum cited the unpredictable nature and parity of the SEC as why he’d give the advantage to the Big Ten as of now.

“The SEC is a mix and a mess,” Finebaum said. “You’re trying to decide whether Ole Miss or Alabama are the best teams right now, and they both have their flaws. Texas, we’ll find out more about, but as of this moment, those numbers are indicative of where we are now.”

Oregon RB Hughes Requests Redshirt

Oregon transfer running back Makhi Hughes asked to redshirt the remainder of the season for the Ducks. One of the top-ranked transfer running backs in the nation out of Tulane, Hughes made little impact for No. 3 Oregon through five games.

Head coach Dan Lanning said Oregon will honor Hughes’ request to redshirt.

With the redshirt, Hughes will retain a year of eligibility, marking the second time he’s sat out a season. He previously did so in 2022, when an injury earned him a medical hardship waiver.

Hughes was expected to compete for the starting role before falling down the depth chart in camp and early in the season. The former Tulane star did not travel for Oregon’s win over then-No. 3 Penn State and, in turn, asked to redshirt for the season.

Hughes had received just 17 carries and rushed for 70 yards, while catching two passes for 24 yards. He ranked fifth of Oregon running backs in touches through five games behind fellow running backs Di-erre Hill Jr., Jayden Limar, Noah Whittington and Jordon Davison.

Oregon has had the No. 14 rushing offense in the country with 239.4 yards per game on the ground and 15 rushing touchdowns, seven of which are Davison’s.

Coming out of Tulane, Hughes was the seventh-ranked transfer running back available in the 247Sports rankings. In 2024, he ranked No. 10 in the country with 1,401 rushing yards for the Green Wave, and in 2023, he wasn’t far behind from a production standpoint, rushing for 1,378 yards and seven touchdowns.

B1G Leads In Heisman Odds

After six weeks of college football, four Big Ten stars were inside the top six in Heisman odds for BetMGM.

As of Oct. 5, Oregon quarterback Dante Moore was tied for the top odds to win the Heisman Trophy, while Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith was ranked third, Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza was fifth and Buckeye quarterback Julian

Sayin was at No. 6.

After Oregon secured a 30-24 double-overtime win over then-No. 3 Penn State on Sept. 27, Moore’s odds skyrocketed to first, jumping from +2000 to start the season to +500 odds, which is tied for the odds leader with Miami (Fla.) quarterback Carson Beck. In the Ducks’ victory over the Nittany Lions, Moore was 29 of 39 with 248 yards and three touchdown passes. Moore and the Ducks were off in Week Six.

Moore has been a difference maker for Oregon early, passing for 1,210 yards and 14 touchdowns and just one interception on a 74.6 completion percentage through five games.

After Ohio State’s 42-3 win over Minnesota, Smith sat at third in the Heisman odds and had another strong campaign for Ohio State, bringing his odds up to +700 from the +1300 odds he held preseason.

Ohio State’s star wideout has amassed 35 receptions for 463 yards and six scores, while adding one rush for 17 yards and a touchdown.

Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson is also included in the top six, sandwiched between Smith and Mendoza at +800 odds.

Mendoza, who has been spectacular for the Hoosiers through five games, saw a huge drop in odds, going from the odds-on favorite at +650 to +1300. The drop in odds wasn’t due to anything Mendoza had done, however. Indiana was off in Week Six while Smith, Beck and Simpson’s odds got better, making Mendoza’s chances worse.

The California transfer had thrown for 1,208 yards and 16 touchdowns and had tossed only one pick while leading No. 8 Indiana to a 5-0 record and a dominating 63-10 upset win over then-No. 9 Illinois.

Sayin’s odds increased from +1700 before Week Six to +1500 after the Buckeyes’ dominant win over the Golden Gophers. The sophomore quarterback completed 23 of his 27 attempts for 326 yards and three touchdowns.

Transfer WR Jackson Leaves IU

Indiana wide receiver Makai Jackson has left the team after only four games with the program and intends to enter the transfer portal in order to maintain a year of eligibility.

Jackson had transferred to the Hoosiers over the offseason from Appalachian State, where he appeared in 25 games for the Mountaineers in two seasons, totaling 73 catches for 1,163 yards and seven receiving touchdowns while rushing for 90 yards and a score on five carries.

Jackson was initially expected to have a chance to make an impact for the Hoosiers, but the 6-0, 200-pound receiver has simply not produced. The transfer receiver ranks 11th out of 12 on the Indiana roster in receiving yards in 2025.

Jackson appeared in four of the five early-season contests for Indiana and brought in three catches for 15 yards over that span.

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

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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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Recruits Burrow Into OSU For Minnesota Game

Ohio State had its second prime-time game of the season on Oct. 4, and while the Minnesota Golden Gophers and Ohio Bobcats might not be the type of opponent that teams like Texas and Penn State present, it was still a big recruiting weekend.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

Of the prospects who were in Ohio Stadium to watch the Buckeyes beat Minnesota 42-3, few of them were in the 2026 class since the Buckeyes have filled much of that class. But they are still trying to fill it out in some areas with a couple of flip candidates.

Prospects from the 2026 class who were on campus were Baltimore St. Frances Academy three-star cornerback Khmari Bing (6-0, 190); Ponte Vedra Beach (Fla.) Nease four-star safety Jacob Curry (6-1, 208); Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 325); and Buford, Ga., four-star defensive end Dre Quinn (6-4, 228).

Bing is the only one of the three who is still committed elsewhere. He pledged to Maryland on Aug. 5, 2024, and has been committed ever since. But the fact that he was at Ohio State shows that he is at least willing to hear what other schools have to say.

Curry was committed to Northwestern previously, decommitting on Aug. 26. There is some competition for his services. He took an official visit to Oklahoma on Sept. 20 and has another scheduled to Florida State on Oct. 11.

Quinn was committed to Clemson until the recent start to the 2025 season, in which the Tigers started 1-3, after which Quinn decommitted. He also took an unofficial visit to Tennessee 12 days before his decision, so that could be a hint where he might be leaning in his recruitment. But Quinn is the No. 395 player in the country, the No. 35 defensive end and the No. 42 player in the state of Georgia.

Smith was close to choosing Ohio State before he committed to UCLA on June 7, but he ended up with the Bruins. He is the No. 200 player in the country, the No. 12 interior offensive lineman and the No. 28 player in the state of Florida, and the Buckeyes hope that UCLA's poor start to the season will help sway Smith to Columbus.

Prospects who are committed to Ohio State who were on campus were Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star safety Simeon Caldwell (6-2, 195), Cleveland Glenview four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225), Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185) and Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260).

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	
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	Glenview
Jamir Perez	DL	6-4	360	★★★	Cleveland	Glenview
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.	
Angelo Smith	S	5-10	170	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.)	Chaminade-Madonna

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

The 2027 class was well represented at the game. On the offensive side of the ball, Ohio State hosted St. Charles (Mo.) Francis Howell Central four-star tight end Jack Brown (6-5, 215); Texarkana (Texas) Texas High four-star offensive tackle Qua Ford (6-5, 285); Kalamazoo (Mich.) Loy Norrix three-star offensive tackle Jakari Lipsey (6-5, 290); Columbus Watterson three-star offensive tackle Davis Seaman (6-5, 270); Landsdale (Pa.) Catholic four-star interior offensive lineman Terrance Smith (6-6, 260); McDonough (Ga.) Ola four-star running back Caden Waye (5-11, 185); and Kalamazoo (Mich.) Central four-star offensive tackle Dewey Young (6-5, 285).

On the defensive side of the ball, Indianapolis Franklin Central four-star edge rusher Jayce Brewer (6-5, 240), Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Raylaun Henry (6-2, 180) and Yorktown, Ind., defensive end Chris Wilson (6-6, 235) were on site for the game.

The Buckeyes also had some 2028 and 2029 recruits on campus, with Detroit Cass Technical three-star wide receiver Mylan Griggs (6-1, 172), Indian Head (Md.) Henry E. Lackey four-star defensive lineman Tyzon Swann (6-4, 235) and Kendallville (Ind.) East Noble linebacker Austin Phillips (6-2, 200) in attendance.

Transfer Portal Could Buck CSC

The NCAA still has not landed on a date for the single transfer portal window, but

while that debate goes on, NIL collectives are preparing for more unregulated spending in the portal this winter.

Many third-party collectives have begun to bypass the NIL Go clearinghouse, according to a report from On3's Pete Nakos. Nakos' sources with knowledge on the matter told him that it's just a starting point for collectives bypassing the College Sports Commission (CSC).

A source from the ACC told On3 that while there have only been a few schools that have bypassed the clearinghouse, there is a group of others that are ready to make the jump, with the next opportunity to spend coming in the portal this winter.

"I have a deal valued at over \$20,000, and if they don't move on the deal soon, I'm never using the system ever again," the source said. "Nobody has had a productive conversation with them yet."

According to the House v. NCAA settlement, the CSC is supposed to review every third-party NIL deal that is valued at \$600 or more and either approve or deny it.

Earlier in the summer, the CSC released guidelines that would have handicapped third-party collectives, like Ohio State's "The 1870 Society" and "The Foundation." However, those guidelines were walked back quickly.

"The rules created by the House settlement around third-party NIL deals are actively in place and enforceable and apply to all current NCAA Division I student-athletes," the CSC told On3 in a statement. "Pay-for-



ASK AN ANALYST

with Bill Greene Of Buckeye Scoop

Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School three-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215) flipped to Florida State on Oct. 3. Did you see that coming, and what should Ohio State do at tight end in the 2026 class?

"Fordham, I think if he flipped, it was going to be to Florida State. I don't think he's a guy that's out there snooping around other schools. His dad played at Florida State, and they pay, and that factors in. If the money is right, why wouldn't he go there? When you look at Ohio State, they have a lot of guys getting playing time right now, and after this year, Will Kacmarek will be gone, Max Klare should be gone to the NFL, Bennett Christian will be gone. Then it leaves Jelani Thurman, Nate Roberts, maybe Brody Lennon, Max LeBlanc, so if Fordham stayed in there, Ohio State has shown they will put three on the field and play multiple guys. I think that's appealing, but then it comes down to the legacy part of that.

"I think Ohio State should really go back and take a run at Mansfield (Ohio) Lexington four-star tight end Brayden Fogle (6-3, 230). He's committed to Georgia. If you look at Georgia, they have Bowdon, Ga., five-star tight end Kaiden Prothro (6-6, 210) committed, and I think he's the best tight end in the country. How does Fogle feel about being No. 2 in the Georgia class, while he can come to Ohio State with two or three guys leaving and two unproven guys coming back in Lennon and LeBlanc? I would take Fogle over Fordham if both were free agents and available."

Where else do you believe Ohio State will go to fill out its 2026 class?

"On the offensive side of the ball, I think they need

another running back, and I like Delaware (Ohio) Ruth-erford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), but I think they need another running back there. They only have four offensive linemen committed, and I was told way back in the summer that they were looking to take six on the offensive line. I think they're good on the defensive line. They have a kid visiting (for the Minnesota game), Ponte Vedra Beach (Fla.) Nease four-star safety Jacob Curry (6-1, 208). I think they would take him. If you look at defensive back, they have two safeties committed, and they're both really good. At cornerback, they have Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185) committed, but that's not enough. You can't bring in one corner-back. You need three."

Texarkana (Texas) Texas High four-star offensive tackle Qua Ford (6-5, 285) visited for the Minnesota game. What do you make of him as a prospect and what are the Buckeyes' chances to land him?

"They offered him a while ago, so they know about him. They've been looking at him. He's a high-upside kid. He's a long-arm kid. His body is not developed yet. He looks lean, which I love in tackles. I don't like big monster tackles because they're going to put on weight, and you're going to have to move him inside. He's a tackle, for sure, and I really like him. His film is good. If you look at his ranking, it's all over the board. I think 247Sports has him almost as a three-star. Then, if you look at the composite, he's darn near a five-star. I see him in the middle of those two rankings. I see him as a solid, high four-star kid. I would take him in a minute. He's going to be a developmental kid, as most of

the offensive linemen you bring in are, but he's a tackle for sure. He's probably going to be a left tackle with long arms and quick feet. There's nothing not to like about that kid, so I would fight for him. If you're splitting up your NIL dollars, he'd be getting them from me."

Who were some other visitors to look out for who were at the Minnesota game?

"Curry is kind of a combo-safety-linebacker kid. He's going to grow into a linebacker, though he was committed to Northwestern and decommitted. He was coming with his parents. That's a high alert visit to watch. They have two linebackers committed, but he's different than the other two, so I think they would take him, and I would take him. I like everything about that kid. His film is good. I usually hate those combo-safety-linebacker kids, because it usually seems like they can't play either position, but I think he grows into a linebacker and is perfect in the spread era. 20 years ago, you couldn't play that kid at linebacker, but in this game, absolutely.

"Then the other one is Baltimore St. Frances Academy three-star cornerback Khmari Bing (6-0, 190). He's committed to Maryland. He's a corner and they need corners. He'd be on high alert for me. His film is good, not great. I wouldn't call him one of the best corners in the country, but I think there's talent there. It's a position of need, to me, so you have to fight for this kid. If he's visiting while he's committed to Maryland, that tells you all you need to know. If he's willing to visit as a commit to Maryland, that tells me he's wide open. You don't take business if you're super committed."

play deals are not allowed under the rules and will not be approved in NIL Go. There is no safe harbor for breaking these rules, and there will be eligibility consequences for student-athletes who do not follow them."

One collective spoke with On3 about how it expects spending to go this offseason.

"Plenty of schools will be ready to pay before the portal opens," a collective told On3. "Rev-share is just the new floor of paying athletes. At this rate, the system is going to be killed by Christmas."

A separate collective told On3 that it doesn't believe the CSC should be able to decide what is a valid business deal and what isn't.

"Who are they to determine what a valid business purpose is? If they really want this thing to work, they need to approve more than they deny," an SEC collective previously told On3. "They need to give everybody some grace and not be iron-fisted."

According to data released by the CSC in September, 8,359 deals had gone through the system and 6,090 deals were cleared out of those. The total value of cleared deals was \$35.42 million of the \$79.8 million in proposed deals.

On3 also reported that the CSC is establishing an anonymous tip line for anyone to report programs that are bypassing the rules. But On3 reported that isn't going to slow down teams this offseason.

"Cash is going to be promised out in January, and that's how teams are going to put together winning rosters in 2026," a source said.

Fordham Flips To Florida State

Ohio State has lost one of its commitments from its 2026 recruiting class, with three-star tight end Corbyn Fordham flipping

to Florida State on Oct. 3.

Fordham goes to high school at The Bolles School in Jacksonville, Fla., so it doesn't come as much of a surprise that an in-state program was looking to take him away from the Buckeyes. He had been committed to Ohio State since Nov. 28, 2024.

His father, Todd, was also a lineman for the Seminoles, so that and multiple visits to the campus before he committed to Ohio State were enough to convince him to flip to FSU.

Fordham is ranked the No. 627 player in the country, the No. 33 tight end and the No.



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77 player in the state of Florida.

Now, without Fordham, Ohio State doesn't have a tight end committed in its 2026 class. With Will Kacmarek and possibly Max Klare leaving after the season, the Buckeyes will likely want to add future depth in the room over the offseason.

They could pivot to trying to flip a player they were involved in the recruitment, like Dunlap, Ill., four-star Mack Sutter (6-5, 230), who is committed to Alabama, or Mansfield (Ohio) Lexington four-star Brayden Fogle (6-3, 230), who is one of three tight end commitments to the Bulldogs.

Sutter is the No. 90 player in the country and the No. 6 tight end, and tight ends coach Keenan Bailey made a recent stop at Sutter's school during Ohio State's off week to check in on the four-star. Fogle is the No. 120 player in the country and the No. 7 tight end.

It's also possible that the Buckeyes might not take a tight end in the 2026 class if they don't believe they have the right fit. Kacmarek and Klare are both former transfer portal additions, so it's not like the team hasn't had success using that avenue at the position before.

Continued On Page 30



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Buckeyes Make Offer To 2027 Running Back

Continued From Page 29

Freshman Nate Roberts has also shown some promise and earned early playing time despite the depth at the position.

Akih Back From Injury

Ohio State commit Akih was injured in the first game of his 2025 senior season, but he returned on Sept. 26 for Delaware Hayes.

In his first game back, Akih scored a touchdown that required a stiff arm and a spin to get to where he wanted to be.

“I really fought through adversity this game,” Akih told 247Sports after the game. “I had one touchdown, and I was really excited to get back. All the hard work paid off. I know my senior season isn’t going the way it’s supposed to, but I know at the next level, (running backs coach Carlos) Locklyn’s got me. I’m very excited for the future.”

Akih had no time to get going before his injury. It occurred on his first carry of the season in the opener for Hayes.

Akih said he is planning to enroll early at Ohio State and be on campus by Dec. 4, which would allow him to travel with the team for any postseason competition like many of the players in the 2025 class did last

year. He might end up being the only running back in the 2026 class, but some recruiting experts have wondered whether Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205) might reclassify from the 2027 class to 2026. Gabriel Georges has Ohio State, Georgia and Tennessee competing for his services, but he thinks highly of the Buckeyes and Locklyn.

Gabriel Georges is the No. 21 player in the 2027 class, the No. 2 running back and the No. 1 player in the state of Tennessee. His ranks would likely drop some if he were to reclassify, but with his talent, it’s possible that it wouldn’t be very far.

'27 Prospect Brewster Commits To Texas Tech

Cedar Hill, Texas, five-star defensive lineman Jalen Brewster committed to Texas Tech on Oct. 4 as Ohio State was beating Minnesota.

It wasn’t much of a surprise that Brewster chose the Red Raiders, but Indiana, Ohio State and Texas A&M were also in the running in the final days for Brewster.

Ohio State reportedly made a hard push to try to get Brewster in the final days before his commitment, but it wasn’t enough. How-

ever, Brewster won’t be signing for a while, and any team that wants to try to flip him will have ample time to try to convince him.

Brewster’s last visit to Ohio State since he received his offer from defensive line coach Larry Johnson was in June for a one-day recruiting camp, and he had not been back. He took unofficial visits to Indiana and Texas A&M in late September.

He is the No. 9 player in the country, the No. 1 defensive lineman and the No. 3 player in the state of Texas.

Buckeyes Make Scholarship Offers

Ohio State has made more scholarship offers since BSB last went to press.

One of those offers was to Kansas City (Mo.) North three-star linebacker Kobe Rhymes (6-1, 220), who is in the 2027 class. He is the No. 367 player in the country, the No. 24 linebacker and the No. 3 player from the state of Missouri.

Rhymes has 17 Division I offers, including ones from Arizona State, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Philadelphia St. Joseph’s Prep four-star linebacker Brandon Lockley (6-2, 216) also

received a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes.

He is the No. 331 player in the country in the 2027 class and the No. 13 player in the state of Pennsylvania. He has 23 Division I offers after the Buckeyes gave him one, a list that includes Alabama, Georgia Tech, Indiana, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Wisconsin.

Lockley is from the same high school that current Buckeye running back Isaiah West attended. It is also where former Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord and wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. are out of.

Another player who was offered by Ohio State was Swainsboro, Ga., four-star line-backer Ja’Bios Smith (6-3, 195), who is the No. 105 player in the country, the No. 7 line-backer and the No. 15 player in the state of Georgia in the 2027 class.

He has 19 Division I offers from Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Vanderbilt, among others.

It wasn’t just linebackers coach James Laurinaitis who was making scholarship offers. Offensive line coach Tyler Bowen made an offer to Loganville (Ga.) Grayson four-star interior offensive lineman Jordan Agbanoma

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1990

Ohio State’s stable of young, talented quarterbacks could grow for the next season if the Buckeyes could successfully recruit Bob Hoying of St. Henry, Ohio.

Hoying, a 6-4, 200-pound senior whom national recruiting expert Tom Lemming listed as one of the top 10 high school football players in Ohio, had already narrowed his list of prospective colleges to three: Ohio State, Illinois and Arizona State.

“Right now, Ohio State and Illinois are the two main schools, and Ohio State has the edge by a little bit, but not much,” Hoying said. “I was at Illinois this summer, and I liked it a lot. It’s nice.”

Hoying said he was not concerned that Ohio State recruited two highly touted quarterbacks the previous year, Joe Pickens of Cleveland St. Ignatius and Preston Harrison of Columbus South.

“Anywhere you go, you have to beat out somebody they recruited last year,” Hoying said. “Wherever you go, you have to beat somebody out, so it won’t have any bearing on which school I choose.”

30 Years Ago — 1995

Ohio State got some good news on the recruiting front with the commitments of Hamilton, Ohio, tight end Mike Gurr and Dublin Scioto defensive back/return man Rolland Steele.

Gurr and Steele became the fifth and sixth verbal commitments in OSU’s 1996 recruiting class.

They were both among a group of about 40 high school prospects who attended OSU’s win over Notre Dame on Sept. 30. That scene, where the Buckeyes prevailed in a charged environment, was impressive, Gurr said.

“It was awesome. It was just a great game,” he said.

Gurr said Ohio State, located about 90 miles northeast of his hometown, was a natural choice for him. He made his commitment public on Oct. 4.

“I just felt like I was at home up there. That and they have a great football program,” he said.

25 Years Ago — 2000

With the tight end position seemingly in need of a bona fide blue-chip recruit at Ohio State, it still didn’t look as if the Buckeyes had sought out Andree Tyree of London (Ohio) High School to play that position.

At that point a tight end, Tyree would likely move to an interior lineman position if he remained on offense or settle somewhere along the defensive line if he were to end up on that side of the ball for OSU.

As one of London’s defensive leaders at middle linebacker the previous season, he logged 76 tackles, including seven sacks for the Red Raiders. Tyree spent the summer adapting to the defen-

sive end position he was manning in his senior campaign.

“Well, actually, I moved my position a little bit because of my commitment,” Tyree said. “It’s probably about 50-50 as far as helping the team and toward my commitment, too. I moved from inside linebacker to defensive end because that’s probably where I’m going to play in college.”

20 Years Ago — 2005

While defensive end Robert Rose and defensive back Ray Small of Cleveland Glenville had long had Ohio State scholarship offers and were high on the Buckeye wish list, several other Tar-blooders were still doing what they could to try to earn OSU offers.

One such player was defensive back Royce Adams. He was ranked just 42nd in the state of Ohio by Rivals.com, but he had several high-caliber scholarship offers, including Iowa, Purdue, North Carolina and Syracuse.

He had played primarily cornerback and as a return man in the early going for the Tarblooders but told BSB in the week leading up to his team’s Sept. 24 matchup with Warren Harding that he was hoping to up his performance.

“I’ve been playing all right this year, but I’m going to pick it up a little more,” Adams said. “I’m going to try to make a little bit more plays.”

True to his word, Adams scored a touchdown on a 2-yard run in Glenville’s 34-0 shutout of the Raiders.

15 Years Ago — 2010

One of the latest offers extended by the Buckeyes went to a player with a familiar last name. Junior offensive lineman Jacoby Boren of Pickerington (Ohio) Central landed his OSU offer on Sept. 29.

Were he to accept, Boren would become the third member of the Boren family to join the program. Older brothers Justin and Zach were starters for the 2010 Ohio State team.

As such, the youngest Boren said he was excited about the opportunity to follow in their footsteps.

“I’m going to wait a while and see how things go, but I’m definitely considering it,” Jacoby said. “I know they have four commitments already and that’s great for Ohio State. The offer caught me off guard, but I was hoping it would happen. It would be great to play with Zach again, even though it would only be for one year.”

10 Years Ago — 2015

Ohio State appeared to be in the market for one or two more defensive backs in the class of 2016, and the Buckeyes remained in the hunt for one of the best ones in the country.

Jordan Fuller, a four-star cornerback out of Old Tappan (N.J.) Northern Valley Regional, cut his list down to eight schools, which

he said contained no leader and no order. Alphabetically, the remaining schools for Fuller were Michigan, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State, Rutgers, TCU, UCLA and Virginia Tech.

Fuller’s brother Devin played wide receiver at UCLA and his father, Bart, played safety for TCU, but Scout.com recruiting analyst Brian Dohn said he currently considered Fuller’s recruitment a battle between Ohio State and Penn State.

Five Years Ago — 2020

Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end JT Tuimoloau included Ohio State in his top seven on Oct. 1 along with Alabama, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, USC and Washington.

Tuimoloau was considered the second-best strongside defensive end and No. 2 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded 64 tackles, 15 tackles for loss and 11 sacks to lead the Crusaders to their second consecutive state title the previous season. He also played tight end at Eastside Catholic, where he hauled in 18 passes for 235 yards and four touchdowns, including the game-winner in the championship game.

Tuimoloau had never been to Columbus, but the Buckeyes were widely considered the favorite in his recruitment thanks to his relationship with defensive line coach Larry Johnson and freshman wide receiver Gee Scott, his former high school teammate. Had he been able to take an official visit over the summer as he initially planned, many prognosticators believed he would have already committed to Ohio State.

One Year Ago — 2024

Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na’eem Offord had been rumored to be a potential flip candidate from the Buckeyes’ 2025 class, with both Auburn and Oregon recruiting him very hard since his Feb. 2 commitment to Ohio State. He had taken official visits to those two schools and Alabama since he pledged his services to OSU.

After his game on Sept. 27, Offord talked to the Hoover Sun in a video posted to Twitter while wearing orange sleeves, an Auburn towel and wristband, and an Oregon windbreaker.

“I’m still locked in with Ohio State,” Offord said. “I’m just showing love to all of the schools still recruiting me.”

He was originally scheduled to visit Ohio State for the game against Iowa on Oct. 5 but canceled that plan to go watch his brother play instead. He said he would try to get to Columbus for the game against Nebraska on Oct. 26.

That visit could be one of the more important ones on the schedule all season for the Buckeyes, especially if cornerbacks coach Tim Walton was able to convince Offord to remain with the Buckeyes.

(6-3, 295).

He expected an offer from Ohio State to come at some point since he is a highly rated player in the 2027 class, but he wasn't expecting it as soon as he got it.

"It was great," Agbanoma told 247Sports. "It really came as a surprise. I know I'm a highly rated recruit, but I still thought the Ohio State offer might come later. I'm really grateful for this opportunity. It means a lot to be offered by a school that just won the natty last year and one of the best teams in the country."

Agbanoma is the No. 68 player in the country, the No. 4 interior lineman and the No. 7 player in the state of Georgia, according to 247Sports composite rankings.

He has 20 Division I offers, including from Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nebraska, Purdue, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas A&M, among others.

Just receiving an offer from the Buckeyes has made the program one of the top choices for Agbanoma early on in his process.

"They're pretty high," Agbanoma said. "They're a team with a high standard, and I don't want to go to a team without a high standard. They're already ahead of (a few other offers)."

He said he wants to commit somewhere in July 2026 before the start of his senior season.

flipped from the Wolverines to Ole Miss. Barney had been committed to Michigan since July 5, soon after he took an official visit to Ann Arbor. He also took an official visit to the Ole Miss campus before that and has now decided that the Rebels are the right fit for him.

• The Buckeyes made the top 12 list for 2027 prospect Fort Mill (S.C.) Catawba Ridge five-star cornerback Joshua Dobson (6-1, 175) when he narrowed his schools down on Sept. 30. Along with Ohio State, Dobson included Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, Notre Dame, LSU, Penn State, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Tennessee. Dobson is the No. 7 player in the country, the No. 2 cornerback and the No. 1 player in the state of South Carolina in his class and would be a major addition for the Buckeyes if they can remain in the running.

• Ohio State was also in the top six for 2026 recruit Jared Doughty (6-6, 300), a three-star offensive tackle from Atlanta Banneker. He also included Alabama, Auburn, Florida State, Georgia and Kentucky on his list, so it will be tough competition to beat out for Doughty's services. He is the No. 914 recruit in the country, the No. 76 offensive tackle and the No. 96 player in the state of Georgia. His recruitment has ramped up very quickly since his senior season of football started, which is when his offers from each of his top six schools came. He has official visits scheduled to five of the six, with Kentucky currently the odd one out.

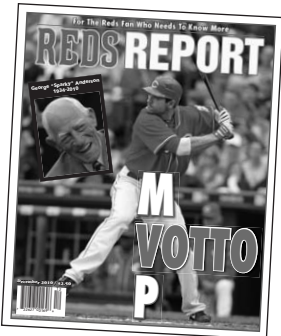
Other Notes And Tidbits

• Michigan lost one of its top recruits in the 2026 class when Carrollton, Ga., four-star cornerback Dorian Barney (6-1, 180)

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (5-0)

Aug. 30 TEXAS, W 14-7.

Sept. 6 GRAMBLING STATE, W 70-0; 13 OHIO, W 37-9; 27 at Washington, W 24-6.

Oct. 4 MINNESOTA, W 42-3; 11 at Illinois; 18 at Wisconsin.

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

FIELD HOCKEY (6-5, 2-1)

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, L 2-1 (2OT); 14 at Northeastern, W 2-0; 19 at Louisville, L 3-2; 26 at Rutgers, L 2-1 (OT); 28 at Delaware, W 4-0.

Oct. 3 MARYLAND, W 2-1 (OT); 5 PENN STATE, W 2-0; 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., 10th/15; 15-16 Bearcat Invitational at Cincinnati, 6th/18; 29-30 Windon Memorial Classic at Lake Forest, Ill., 3rd/16.

Oct. 13-14 Moraine Intercollegiate at Kettering, Ohio.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Sept. 8-10 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 9th/15; 15-16 Inverness Collegiate at Toledo, 1st/12.

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

MEN'S SOCCER (5-5, 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, L 1-0; 13 at Butler,

W 4-0; 19 at Michigan State, W 3-2; 26 at Rutgers, L 2-0; 29 UCLA, W 2-1.

Oct. 3 WISCONSIN, L 1-0; 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 (5-1-6, 1-0-5)

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, T 0-0; 18 WISCONSIN, T 0-0; 21 NEBRASKA, T 0-0; 25 at Northwestern, T 0-0; 28 at Illinois, W 3-0.

Oct. 5 at Michigan State, T 1-1; 9 OREGON; 12 WASHINGTON; 16 at Rutgers; 19 at Maryland; 26 at Penn State.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (3-9, 0-4)

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 Beaver Creek Invitational in Dayton vs. Ohio, W 3-0; 13 Beaver Creek Invitational in Dayton vs. Wright State, L 3-2; 19 VIRGINIA, L 3-2; 21 TROY, W 3-2; 26 UCLA, L 3-2; 27 USC, L 3-0.

Oct. 3 at Washington, L 3-1; 4 at Oregon, L 3-0; 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.

“Dr.” Diebler Not Changing High Expectations

When Ohio State head coach Jake Diebler met with the media on Oct. 1 to preview the season, he talked about how much his first full season at the helm of the Buckeyes helped him learn about being a coach.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

It was a year that Ohio State dealt with a couple of strange situations, with Aaron Bradshaw in and out of the lineup in the first half of the season due to an alleged domestic incident and Meechie Johnson leaving the team after 10 games so that he could transfer back to South Carolina. It was also plagued by a luck rating that was 334th in the country out of 364 teams, according to KenPom ratings.

Dealing with those things, Diebler said he learned a lot in his first year as a head coach, saying that having to figure out how to adjust midseason made it feel like he was getting his doctorate in coaching.

“When you consider the whole picture of last year, it was like getting a doctorate in coaching,” Diebler said. “When I went into the start of the season, you never – you anticipate that things change and you anticipate adversity, but I don’t think anybody could have anticipated all the stuff we dealt with.

“Then, on top of that, 11 out of our 32 games were decided by two possessions or less. So, I’m not afraid to stand up here and say that I’m a better coach now than I was at this time last year.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

LOOKING AHEAD — Ohio State men’s basketball coach Jake Diebler is setting the bar high with expectations of Big Ten championships and Final Four appearances becoming the norm even though the Buckeyes have not made the NCAA Tournament since the 2021-22 season.

But even though last year might not have gone as Diebler would have envisioned his first season at the helm of the Buckeyes going, he isn’t going to let that affect what he expects out of his future teams.

Diebler pointed the media contingent toward the back wall of the practice court, where a banner hangs acknowledging Ohio State’s 20 Big Ten championships (22 Big Ten championships including vacated wins) and 10 appearances (11 including vacated wins) in the Final Four.

The head coach said he understands that the last time the Buckeyes reached those heights is now over a decade ago, but that doesn’t mean the expectations for the program have changed. Diebler said that he is trying to do whatever it takes to get Ohio State back to being one of the best college basketball programs in the country.

“I don’t apologize for having high expectations,” he said. “I’ve been very consistent with that from the day I got this job, much to the dismay of people who would say, ‘You’re setting the bar too high.’ Ohio State basketball belongs as one of the best programs in the country.

“However, talking about it isn’t enough. We’ve got a lot of work to do to get there. I’m disappointed with how we finished last year, for sure. But we don’t go into the season wanting to do that. We’re not setting a lower bar because the program hasn’t been there.”

Diebler Attacked Three Improvement Areas

Diebler talked about other reasons on the court that the team might have been on the wrong side of so many one-score games and allowed so many comebacks to happen late in games last year.

“If you really dive into the analytics of last year’s team, there were some clear deficiencies we had,” Diebler said. “First and foremost, it started with rebounding on both sides of the ball.”

As a team, Ohio State grabbed 33.7 rebounds per game compared to 34.0 for its opponents, which includes nonconference/mid-major opponents early in the season. The mark of 33.7 rebounds per game was tied for 12th in the Big Ten.

In the offseason, Diebler made size a priority, getting center Christoph Tilly (7-0) and forwards Josh Ojianwuna (6-10) and Brandon Noel (6-8) out of the portal, and he said that junior forward Devin Royal will spend more time on the perimeter than he did last year.

Diebler also said that the team needs to stop sending opponents to the free-throw line as much as they did last season.

“Another issue was the free-throw rate of our opponents, and I think a big part of that was inexperience,” he said. “You don’t fully understand and appreciate how valuable experience is until you don’t have it. There were simple things where maybe you’re a half-step late just because you haven’t seen that stuff for two or three years in a college career. That mattered.

“There were also times that we struggled transferring what we worked on to game time. In this league, you have to be able to change in the flow of a game. You can’t change who you are, but you have to be able

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

to adjust. We struggled at times to do that, and (it resulted in more fouls).”

The Buckeyes were 343rd in the country in personal fouls per game, with an average of 19.6, which was far behind conference-leading Maryland at 15.3 (55th). Ohio State had the worst average fouls per game in the Big Ten, closest to Washington, which was 17th in the league with 18.4 fouls per game.

Diebler’s last major point of emphasis over the offseason was getting assists, which wasn’t quite as big a problem as the foul rate, but the Buckeyes were still 206th in the country in assists per game at 13.2. They were still 16th in the Big Ten, ahead of only Rutgers (12.9, 228th) and Washington (12.9, 233rd).

He believes the team this season is already showing that they could be better off at setting each other up to score.

“We had an efficient offense, and quite honestly, we had to call more set actions than I would prefer to, but that’s what fit our team as the year went on,” Diebler said. “This team is really gifted at playing off each other, reading situations. Our assist rate in practice has been a major, major improvement.

“We’ll see how that translates, but right now we know what’s coming as a defense and still, a lot of our field goals are assisted.”

Diebler Met Bjork’s Expectations

Now, after a full year of being the official head coach of the program, Diebler’s performance was graded by athletic director Ross Bjork, who was also in his first year at Ohio State.

Bjork’s review – obtained by Buckeye Sports Bulletin via an open-records request – said that Diebler met expectations in his year-end review, which the review says “should be celebrated” since Ohio State has such high expectations of its coaches.

“Coach Diebler continues to provide great leadership and energy for our basketball program while continuing to learn and grow in his role as a head coach,” read Bjork’s review. “We all understand what he inherited and have worked with Coach on making sure we have the right resources and support to get our program back in contention for Big Ten titles and long runs in the NCAA Tournament. Coach Diebler has put together the right staff for success, and all of the investments will continue to pay off in recruiting, style of play and success on the court.”

Bjork’s review continued with how he believes Diebler’s program can take the next step.

“Focusing on high-level recruiting, player development, roster retention, revenue-share cap management, academic success and having good young men in the program will be the keys to success. As Coach continues to grow in his role and adapts to the evolution of college athletics, he will continue to garner all the necessary attributes of being

a great head coach and what it takes to compete at this level. We will support Coach with all the tools to compete as we move forward.”

Diebler took over as the interim head coach for the Buckeyes when Chris Holtmann was fired on Feb. 14, 2024. Diebler was able to lead that team to an 8-3 finish and a run in the NIT that ended in the quarterfinals against Georgia, which led OSU to hire him full time, Bjork’s first major move when he came to Columbus.

Then in his first full season, the Buckeyes had a 17-15 record and were 9-11 in the Big Ten, losing in the first round of the conference tournament and missing the NCAA Tournament for the third straight season.

Diebler wrote in his performance review that he believes the 2024-25 season was a step forward for the program.

“It was important for us to take a step forward in year one of our program, and we did. This year provided growth for me and our program as we navigated a great deal of adversity throughout,” Diebler’s self-review read. “Improvements in offensive and defensive efficiency, pace of play and NET rankings were achieved and position us to be better next season in a significant way. We were able to set the foundational culture this year in a way that provides a pathway for a real jump in years to come. Disappointed we did not reach that goal, but we were able to have a great offseason regarding roster management and player development.

“Roster retention was critical moving forward and was a huge success for our program this spring. That same culture also helped our program achieve one of the best GPAs in recent memory with a cumulative score of 3.23. My commitment and our program’s commitment to return Ohio State Basketball to the level of our tradition’s peak remains the mission. Year one was a positive step but we still have work to do.”

White, Ojianwuna Still Not Practicing

Sophomore forward Colin White and Ojianwuna both were injured last season and had to have surgery – Ojianwuna with a torn ACL, and White getting surgery for an undisclosed injury that held him out of some games last season – and neither of them has returned to practice yet.

White has been able to participate in some basketball activities, but at an open practice on Oct. 4, he wasn’t a full participant. He is, however, farther along than Ojianwuna is in his recovery process.

The Baylor transfer still had a bit of a limp when he was walking around at the Oct. 1 media day and told BSB that he wants to do his rehab right rather than try to get back to the court as soon as possible.

“I’m just taking it step by step. I’m not in a rush,” Ojianwuna said. “I’m just attacking my rehab every day. I take that as my own practice every day.”

Tilly Adds Needed Size To Ohio State Roster

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

There are countless differences between Santa Clara, Calif., and Columbus, and new Ohio State center Christoph Tilly is well aware of that. But when he's on the hardwood, it's the same game he's been playing his whole life.

Tilly spent his first three years in college with Santa Clara, where the 7-footer averaged 9.2 points, 4.1 rebounds and 1.5 assists in 86 total games (59 starts) with the Broncos.

After transferring to Ohio State over the offseason, Tilly said there were some adjustments he made, but ultimately, the location where he ended up took a back seat to where he felt the most comfortable on the court.

"(Coming to Columbus) was different for sure," he told BSB. "Santa Clara was a smaller school, so it was a big difference coming here with the football team, and in general, it's a bigger college. But it's not really that crazy to adjust to. I came for basketball, so that's all I really cared about."

Tilly has enjoyed his time in Columbus so far, partly because he spent it getting to know his new teammates and coaches.

"I really love it. I had a great summer with the guys, the coaches and I had a lot of fun," Tilly said. "But also, besides basketball, Columbus has been treating me very well."

One reason it might have been a little easier for Tilly to adjust to a brand-new school nearly 2,500 miles away from where he began his college career is that it wasn't the first time he made a change like that.

Tilly was born in Germany but moved to Chile when he was 6 years old. After picking up basketball and playing for German national teams while he was growing up, he decided to go to Santa Clara.

He said that it was a tough decision to leave California since he had been there for a few years and had developed his skills and grown comfortable on the court there. But that doesn't mean he wasn't ready to take what he felt was the next step for him.

"Without them, I wouldn't be here today because they helped develop my game and helped me be who I am today," Tilly said of Santa Clara. "Obviously, it's not easy. I've been there for three years. That's Cali. It's nice, so it was a hard decision. But I'm still happy with the decision."

There were multiple reasons he decided to go to Ohio State, but it was head coach Jake Diebler and the coaches recruiting Tilly who made the decision a little easier on him.

"It was the coaches, to be honest. They gave me a good feeling," Tilly said. "Ohio State was the first school I talked to after I entered the portal, and they gave me a good feeling. I didn't talk to many schools because I already had my plan. But at the end, it was just a gut feeling. The coaches were real to me. They were honest with me. They had a good philosophy. That's why I chose here."

He also said that Diebler cared about more than just how Tilly fit with the team on the court.

"He was talking a lot about personal



SONNY BROCKWAY

BIG ADDITION — Santa Clara transfer Christoph Tilly brings a big presence (7-0, 240) to a program that was 12th in rebounding in the Big Ten last season. The German-born center grew up in Chile before playing three seasons at Santa Clara.

stuff. He really wanted to get to know me as a person, not only as a player," Tilly said. "So that helped me. But we talked about the play style, how he wants me to play and how they want to play this year."

Practices have been going on since late September, so Tilly is learning how to play with his new teammates, and both he and Diebler said that it's going well so far. But the chemistry on the court just over a week into practice didn't come without some work over the offseason.

With there being so many transfers in college basketball and so much turnover on most rosters, it can be tough to create chemistry for a team that hasn't been together long and won't be together long.

But Diebler made sure that his team built relationships with each other, which Tilly said made them closer as a group.

"The coaches did a great job with that," Tilly said. "They really pushed us all together and made us spend time together outside of the gym. That was really helpful to get to know each other. We all like each other. Everyone's very close, and everybody loves each other."

Tilly is also a good fit on the court.

Diebler went into the portal over the offseason with specific ideas of what he wanted to do with the team he planned to have in the 2025-26 season. With major returning contributors Bruce Thornton, John Mobley Jr. and Devin Royal coming back to play for the Buckeyes again, the coach had a very

good starting point. But filling out the roster around them was a necessity.

Tilly believes that his game fits well with returning guards Thornton and Mobley, and he believes that the three complement each other well.

"It opens up everything," Tilly said. "It makes scoring easier for me, but also, when I score, it makes it easier for them. It's been fun playing with those two guys, but also all of the other guys. We have good chemistry already, and we've been playing really well together."

One thing Diebler knew he needed was size, since the team was tied for 12th in the Big Ten in rebounding last season with just 33.7 per game. The 7-0 Tilly brings the size and ability to crash the boards needed to check that box.

Diebler said on Oct. 1 that bringing down more boards was the first thing he tried to address over the offseason, measuring his squad against others in the conference.

"First and foremost, it started with rebounding on both sides of the ball," he said. "We were one of the worst teams in the Big Ten at second-chance points per game, and then we were one of the worst teams in the Big Ten at defensive rebounding percentage. That certainly was a size issue for us last year."

"Last year, we were going into a lot of Big Ten games at 6-6 and 6-8 at the four and five (positions) with two guards who are under 6-3. This year, when you look at the lineups

we can put on the floor, it's just significantly bigger. It's not only taller, but more physical."

Each of Tilly, Wright State transfer Brandon Noel (6-8, 240) and Baylor transfer Josh Ojianwuna (6-10, 230) helped address that concern. But with Ojianwuna still recovering from a torn ACL he suffered with the Bears last season, his return timetable is unclear, making Tilly's presence in the paint even more vital for the Buckeyes.

Diebler also wants to play with a fast-paced offense that can spread the floor and be a danger from anywhere, and Tilly has shown the ability to work in that type of offense as well.

When Tilly first met with the media in July, he knew that he had things he wanted to work on over the offseason. Those aligned with the needs of the team.

"Something (to work on) is my shot," Tilly said. "I need to shoot more, and obviously, when I shoot more, I want to shoot better, better percentages. And then just rebounding and my overall game. Pushing the ball in transition, playing in the low post, creating for my teammates, running the offense."

Both Diebler and Tilly believed that the senior would be a great fit for the Buckeyes.

"I can do everything the team needs me to do," Tilly said. "I can shoot it, I can play-make. I love to create for my teammates. I get them open shots. But also, if they need me to, I can score too, and I can pass."

Diebler also noted Tilly's emergence as one of the leaders in the locker room, despite the short amount of time he's been with the team.

"He's figuring out where he's comfortable," Diebler said. "And the beautiful thing about this team is he can be the best version of himself. The way we're playing, he fits perfectly into the system we're trying to play this year. But also from a leadership standpoint. You have some bigger, louder voices in terms of leadership on this team."

Tilly has goals of playing professional basketball, and he believes that Santa Clara helped him get to a good point after three seasons. But he knows the challenge at Ohio State could be a tougher one for him as a player, and that is one that he's ready for.

Diebler also has high expectations for the team, hoping to make it back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the 2021-22 season when the No. 7 seed Buckeyes lost in the Round of 32 to No. 2 seed Villanova, 71-61.

He became familiar with what it takes to play at Ohio State when he matched up against the Buckeyes in the 2023 Emerald Coast Classic in Niceville, Fla. The sophomore started for the Broncos in that game and had seven points in 16 minutes on 2-of-6 shooting. He also added two rebounds to the box score. But the Buckeyes walked out of that contest with an 86-56 win.

"You come here and you're going to get what you deserve," Tilly said. "You've got to work for everything, and I was ready for that for sure. I wanted that. I wanted that challenge. That was part of why I entered the portal. I wanted a new challenge."

As the season approaches, Ohio State will rely on Tilly to turn that work ethic into results on the court.

Icers Not Satisfied Just Making NCAA Tourney

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The ending of the 2024-25 season is the beginning point for this season when the Ohio State men's hockey team seeks a second consecutive trip to the NCAA tourney.

It was there in March when the Buckeyes' better-than-expected season came to a crushing end with a first-round loss to Boston University, which followed a double-overtime defeat at Michigan State in the Big Ten title game.

"Obviously, it wasn't the ending we expected," junior forward Riley Thompson said. "But I think a lot of people had us not even making it to the tournament or making it to the Big Ten championship, so it's just fuel for us. We know we can get there. We're pretty excited."

Junior defenseman Nathan McBrayer said dwelling on the final games of last season is not productive other than using it for motivation.

"We think we have a great team right now, and we think we can do a lot of special things, even more than what we did last year," he said. "We have a sour taste in our mouth from last year, and we've been telling all the new guys, too, what it feels like to be in that situation and not get it done."

What is overlooked is that the program made a spectacular turnaround from the 2023-24 season when the Buckeyes were 14-20-4 overall and 4-18-2 in the Big Ten.

Last season, they went from being voted seventh (last place) in the conference in the preseason coaches' poll to a No. 9 ranking nationally entering the NCAAs.

The Buckeyes (24-14-2, 14-9-1 Big Ten) were third in the conference, earning Steve Rohlik his third Big Ten Coach of the Year award in his 12th season.

He has never been one to worry about polls or his own standing in coaching circles. His attention is always on what is immediately ahead and how to best prepare.

"With so many new guys each year now and so many changes to college hockey, college athletics in general, I think there's always a starting point," he said. "We know we play in the best league in the country and know our nonconference schedule is as good as anybody's. We've just got to really focus on the little things and getting better every day. You take care of that before we start looking at the big picture."

Revamped

There are 11 newcomers among the 26 players on the roster, the latter number a



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

FOUR LETTER MEN — (l. to r.) Riley Thompson, Davis Burnside, Adam Eisele and Nathan McBrayer were voted captains by their Ohio State men's hockey teammates. Davis will wear the captain's "C" while the others are assistants. He is the 19th Buckeye to have the "C" at least twice.

reflection of a new NCAA edict limiting the size of a team. Rohlik has carried two or three more than that in the past.

Six of the 11 are freshmen, while one of the five transfers – Adam Eisele from Minnesota State – is a graduate.

"I think your expectations every single season is we should win a national championship," junior forward Max Montes said. "I just want to go back to the (NCAA) tournament and make the Frozen Four. You can ask every single guy in the room, and that's their goal, to get in the national championship. We have such a great culture here, and I think we're going to make a good run."

The breakdown of the roster has three goalies with junior Kristoffer Eberly and freshmen Sam Hillebrandt and Dawson Labre.

Half of the eight defensemen are new, with three transfers and freshman Bryce Ingles.

There are five incoming players, three of them freshmen, among the 15 forwards.

Rohlik said it's a challenge to assimilate

the roster with so much turnover.

"We had 10 new guys last year, 11 new guys this year," he said. "We as coaches have got to be on our toes and take advantage this month to kind of simulate some schematic stuff and work on our skills and things like that."

"There's been years where you lose three guys or four guys and you're off and running. Certainly, this year, similar to last, you've got a lot of guys that have been in the program for one or two years. That's it. So, there's a lot of teaching, a lot of slowing down right now."

By class, there are six each of freshmen and sophomores, 10 juniors, three seniors and Eisele, the graduate.

The Buckeyes return four of their top 10 scorers, with Thompson leading the way with 33 points (17 goals, 16 assists) in 40 games in his first season after transferring from Alaska Anchorage to finish second on the team behind Gunnarwolfe Fontaine, now playing in the Toronto Maple Leafs organization.

Senior Davis Burnside also had 33 points (14, 19), and Montes recorded 26 (14, 12) to place sixth. OSU lost a lot of firepower from the defense, with Aiden Hansen-Bukata placing fourth with 31 points (2, 29) and Damien Carfagna's 28 (7, 21) right behind him.

Eberly enters the season as the incumbent in net after the departure of Logan Terness. They split duties for much of the season before Terness (12-10-1, 2.46 goals-against average, .917 save percentage in 25 games) took over down the stretch. Eberly, in 17 games, posted a 12-4-1 record (2.28, .915) and two shutouts.

Reclassified

It's a new era in NCAA men's hockey with the seismic shift in policy allowing bringing in players from the Canadian Hockey League system, which for years had been deemed by the NCAA as a "professional" league because some of its players were drafted and signed by NHL clubs but were allowed to return to their respective junior clubs to develop.

Because of those signees, the entire league and its players were "tainted" by professionalism and thus ineligible to play for a U.S. college program.

The CHL is composed of the Western Hockey League, the Ontario Hockey League and the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League.

College Hockey Insider reports that at least 325 CHL players have committed to schools for the season, including the most significant recruit in NCAA hockey history when Gavin McKenna signed with Penn State on July 8. He was playing for Medicine Hat of the WHL, so the impact was felt all across Canada.

The 17-year-old is a generational talent who will have NHL teams tanking this season in order to get the best odds to draft him in June 2026. The Nittany Lions reportedly paid between \$500,000 and \$750,000 for his commitment.

Ohio State has four CHL commitments for this season and several more in future prospect classes.

Hillebrandt comes from the Barrie Colts in the OHL, and forward Jake Karabela was with the Guelph Storm (OHL). Defenseman Sam McGinley played the past two seasons for the University of New Brunswick in Canada after four seasons in

2025-26 Ohio State Men's Hockey Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown
1	Dawson Labre	Goalie	Fr.	6-3	190	Les Cedres, Quebec
2	Chris Able	Defenseman	So.	6-1	198	Libertyville, Ill.
5	Ethan Straky	Defenseman	Sr.	6-0	187	Palm Coast, Fla.
7	Chris Romaine	Defenseman	So.	6-0	190	Boston, Mass.
8	Nathan McBrayer	Defenseman	Jr.	6-0	195	Dublin, Ohio
9	Riley Thompson	Forward	Jr.	6-4	222	Ottawa, Ontario
10	Thomas Weis	Forward	Jr.	5-10	180	Madison, Wis.
11	Jake Rozzi	Forward	So.	6-0	182	Kirkland, Quebec
13	FÉlix Caron	Forward	So.	6-0	180	Terrebonne, Quebec
15	Adam Eisele	Forward	Gr.	6-2	208	Lake Elmo, Minn.
16	Max Montes	Forward	Jr.	5-8	165	Hartland, Wis.
17	Landen Gunderson	Forward	Fr.	6-2	195	Plymouth, Minn.
19	James Hong	Forward	So.	5-10	177	Irvine, Calif.
21	Bryce Ingles	Defenseman	Fr.	5-9	195	Port Huron, Mich.
23	Davis Burnside	Forward	Sr.	6-0	185	Scottsdale, Ariz.
24	Niall Crocker	Forward	Fr.	6-3	195	Delta, British Columbia
25	Sam Deckhut	Forward	Jr.	5-11	195	San Diego, Calif.
27	Sam McGinley	Defenseman	Jr.	6-3	198	Calgary, Alberta
28	William Smith	Defenseman	Jr.	6-1	195	Toronto, Ontario
29	Ryan Gordon	Forward	Jr.	6-0	185	Stone Mountain, Ga.
30	Sam Hillebrandt	Goalie	Fr.	6-1	177	Port Huron, Mich.
49	Jake Karabela	Forward	Fr.	5-11	187	Guelph, Ontario
60	Kristoffer Eberly	Goalie	Jr.	6-4	208	Pinckney, Mich.
63	Nathan Lewis	Forward	So.	6-6	210	Shorewood, Ill.
73	Broten Sabo	Defenseman	Jr.	6-2	205	Rosemount, Minn.
91	Jake Dunlap	Forward	Sr.	5-9	175	Windham, N.H.

Head Coach — Steve Rohlik
Associate Head Coach — JB Bittner, **Assistant Coach** — Paul Kirtland, **Assistant Coach** — Carter Krier, **Director of Hockey Operations** — Layne LeBel, **Equipment Manager** — Tim Adams, **Strength & Conditioning** — Taylor Brown, **Athletic Trainer** — Jason Rule, **Performance Dietitian** — Caroline Riewe, **Lead Sport Psychologist** — James Houle, PhD

the WHL, and forward Niall Crocker comes from the WHL's Prince Albert Raiders. Rohlik likened the current situation to the early stages of the transfer portal and name, image and likeness (NIL). "It's really the unknown right now," he

said. "You see such a ton of movement right now in junior hockey, all over the place. 'What's the right place for me to go? What's the right place for me to play?'"

"It's no different than all the colleges are starting to try to build relationships with the Canadian league right now, which we've never had that relationship. So now it's in a hurry to build relationships."

"Are they trying to keep players? Do they want colleges up there? There's a lot of things going on right now. Talk to me 12 months from now, and I could maybe give you a better answer of where things are going to land."

Return Investment

While Ohio State has earned some national respect this season by being voted No. 16 in the USCHO.com poll, the Buckeyes were tabbed for sixth in the Big Ten by its coaches.

It's a testament to the strength of the conference. Michigan State was picked for the top spot in the Big Ten and third nationally behind defending national champion Western Michigan and Boston U.

Penn State was chosen second (No. 5 nationally), followed by Minnesota (No. 8) and Michigan (No. 12). Wisconsin (No. 20) was balloted fifth in the Big Ten ahead of OSU. Unranked Notre Dame is viewed as a last-place team.

The only Buckeye chosen as a preseason All-Big Ten was Eberly on the second team.

"When I first got here, I was a kind of sloppy, all-over-the-place kind of goalie," he said. "But with (goalie coach Carter Krier)

we've really worked on just keeping things tight, keeping things together, and just working on my patience and trying not to scramble around the net. Sometimes you have to make desperation saves, but just trying to keep your position as much as you can."

"I'm the older guy, and I have to step up my game. That ultimately starts in practice and how I get ready before practice. Hopefully, I'll be the upper (classman) guy that puts our two younger guys under my wings."

Hillebrandt was on Team USA for the 2024 and 2025 World Junior Championships, which won back-to-back gold medals. He played 76 games for Barrie in three seasons.

"He's been at the highest level as far as the World Juniors go, so he brings a little bit of that experience," Rohlik said. "College is a whole new game, so we'll see what the next adjustment is."

Labre had a season-ending lower-body injury for West Kelowna of the British Columbia Hockey League and underwent surgery in December 2024.

"Obviously, he had most of the year off, so you've got a wild card how someone bounces back," Rohlik said. "But I give him a lot of credit for what he did in rehab this summer to put himself in a spot where he's 100 percent out there right now. Good for him. He put the time in, so he's back. He didn't play a lot of games last year, which is unfortunate, but for him to be healthy is the

Continued On Page 36



Roosters

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Scoring By Committee An Ohio State Staple

Continued From Page 35

best part about it."

Right Mix

The Buckeyes were hit hard on the blue line when not only Hansen-Bukata and Carfagna used up their eligibility, but so did Brent Johnson, while Theo Wallberg transferred to Western Michigan.

McBrayer, sophomores Chris Able and Chris Romaine and junior William Smith return, but there is experience among the transfers. Senior Ethan Straky had 21 points (4, 17) in 107 games over three seasons for Colorado College. McGinley totaled 21 points (3, 18) in 39 games and was a plus-44 in two seasons for New Brunswick.

Broten Sabo scored nine goals and had 15 assists for 24 points in 60 games in two seasons with Alaska Fairbanks and was a 2025 Division I Independent Hockey All-Star.

"Ohio State's a really good school, obviously, and a good hockey program," he said. "I'm a good two-way defender. I can help on offense, and I've shown I'm sound on D, just trying to help all around."

Ingles was an alternate captain for Sioux Falls (United States Hockey League) in 2024-25 with 30 points (5, 25) in 56 regular-season games.

"I think it's very competitive back

there," Rohlik said. "I think all eight can play, which is a good thing."

Replacements

Fontaine was the go-to guy last season, scoring the late tying goal in an elimination game against Wisconsin in Game 2 of the Big Ten semifinals and assisting on the winner by Thompson, then the next week scoring the overtime winner vs. Penn State to send the Buckeyes to the championship game where he scored the tying goal with 2:21 left in regulation before the Spartans' double-OT victory.

Who among the forwards will step up this season when the Buckeyes need a goal?

"Good question," Rohlik said. "I don't think we need one guy to. I think we need a handful. You've heard me say it a zillion times. Again, it can be no different. This year, we're going to win because of depth. But with a roster limited now to 26, you don't have the luxury like in the past with 28, 29 guys, and you have injuries. We've always seemed to be dealing with some of that."

"But I do like our depth. I don't think we're going to have one guy fill Gunnar's shoes. I do think we're going to have a handful fill those shoes."

He mentioned Burnside, Montes and Thompson as candidates.

"We have a lot of confidence," Burnside

said. "We have a ton of good players coming back, and the new guys we brought in are exceptional as well. So far in practice, we've been able to build a lot of chemistry with different guys. It's looking really positive for this year, and we're just looking to have a good start."

Karabela, a fifth-round (No. 149) pick in the 2022 NHL draft by the Washington Capitals, collected 171 points (66, 105) in 249 regular-season games for Guelph.

He feels fortunate in the timing that allowed him to attend Ohio State.

"Once the (NCAA) rule changed last October, everything kind of went from zero to 100 really quick," he said. "It was kind of feeling like you're 16 again and going through juniors and talking on the phone and stuff like that, doing all these interviews."

"I sat down and talked to my family, and we decided we wanted to go Big Ten. Then once Ohio State reached out, it seemed like a great fit, perfect fit. I was coming from a small town (Guelph) growing up my whole life and kind of wanted to be a part of something bigger, and it seemed like a perfect situation."

Respect

Eisele, another newcomer, fit in quickly. Having received a bachelor's degree in sports management in spring 2025 from Minnesota State, he was looking for another opportunity after getting 59 points (25, 34) in 107 games over three seasons.

His new teammates think so highly of him that they voted him one of the three alternate captains to Burnside, who will wear the "C" as captain for the second straight season.

The other alternates are McBrayer and Thompson.

"I think last year I was just soaking it in and learning from the previous leaders," Thompson said. "I think those guys did a good job. Obviously, you got Burnside coming back as a captain, which is great for him, just to have that honor again. It's pretty special."

Burnside is the 19th Buckeye to wear the "C" twice.

"Anytime you could get a letter, especially when your peers vote, it's a huge honor, and something that I don't really take any more lightly than last year. If anything, it's more of an honor," he said.

Davis is one of only three seniors, plus Eisele, but Rohlik said he focuses on quality, not quantity.

"It's always nice to have that older group. It's always nice to have the veterans," Rohlik said. "We might not have a huge group of seniors, but we do have some guys that have played some games here, so we've got to lean on that."

One thing that changed the roster landscape was the end of the COVID bonus that allowed an extra season of eligibility, leading to more five- and sometimes six-year players, especially in the portal. That means fewer older players, but as Rohlik noted, the NCAA is considering a fifth year for all athletes.

"It's still the wild, wild West," Rohlik said. "Without the COVID kids, the av-

erage ages should come down, but that's depending on what new rules come out. If there's a five (seasons) in five years, it could be right back where we are."

Recognition

The new NCAA/CHL rule has already made an impact. The NHL Network televised McKenna's debut on Oct. 3 against Arizona State, and it likely won't be the last. Expect the Big Ten Network to showcase him as well.

"I think it's fantastic for college hockey to understand that we do have a fantastic development model for these Canadians that maybe thought there never was an opportunity to go that route. I think that's a really good thing," Rohlik said.

McKenna is not the only standout coming to the Big Ten via the new policy. His freshman teammate, Jackson Smith, was the 14th pick by the Columbus Blue Jackets in June. He is the first first-rounder to play for the Nittany Lions.

Michigan State lost Isaac Howard, who had won the Hobey Baker Award as the best player, when he signed with the Edmonton Oilers, but they quickly reloaded with Philadelphia Flyers 2025 first-round pick (No. 6) Porter Martone after playing for Brampton (OHL) last season.

Another Blue Jackets prospect, Cayden Lindstrom, missed nearly all of the 2024-25 season for Medicine Hat after back surgery, but the No. 4 pick in the 2024 draft opted to attend Michigan State this fall.

Many Blue Jackets fans will be following the Spartans and Nittany Lions closely. Penn State visits Value City Arena on Oct. 30 and 31, while the Buckeyes host MSU on Jan. 9 and 10.

The Buckeyes open the season at home vs. Northern Michigan on Oct. 10 (6:30 p.m.) and 11 (5 p.m.).

Revised

The Big Ten tournament has been changed to eliminate the best-of-three first-round quarterfinals.

Instead, the regular season will end on March 6, a Friday, with the one-game quarterfinals hosted by the higher seeds in the 2 vs. 7, 3 vs. 6 and 4 vs. 5 matchups on the following Wednesday (March 11).

The No. 1 seed gets a bye into the semifinals, which will be held on March 14. The top seed and the highest advancing seed from the quarterfinals will host. The championship game on the weekend of March 20-21 will be hosted by the highest remaining seed, with the winner getting the automatic qualifier for the NCAA tournament.

Michigan State is the two-time defending tourney champion. The Spartans had not won it until 2024, leaving Ohio State as the lone program without a title. Besides last season's double OT, they also lost in the championship game in 2014 and 2018, both in overtime.

For a recap of all games for the 2025-26 season go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



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Agnew Brothers Set Pace For Bucks In 2025

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For Jack and Kevin Agnew, running has been a part of their lives for as long as they can remember, and what began as a childhood hobby quickly became a lifelong passion. The pair of brothers have been running competitively since elementary school and have since joined the Ohio State track and field and cross country squads.

Now in their third and fifth years at Ohio State, Jack and Kevin have developed as teammates, siblings, and athletes, drawing on a lifetime of running to help shift the culture and power the Buckeyes toward a strong season.

Since their childhood in Bellbrook, Ohio, the brothers have been surrounded by running.

Kevin, the older of the two Agnew brothers, is in his fifth year as a Buckeye and said he and his younger brother ran for their local cross country club as early as elementary school.

"There was a running program – the East Catholic Striders was a Youth Track Club," Kevin said. "We ran pretty young, probably first grade."

While the Agnew brothers found themselves interested in running, particularly long distance, early on, athletics have always been in their blood.

Jack and Kevin's father, John, is a former Ohio State student-athlete from 1980-85, participating on both the Buckeyes' cross country and track and field teams.

John also ran at Archbishop Carroll High School prior to his time at Ohio State, before becoming the head track coach there for 22 years and coach of the cross country team for 40 years as of the 2025 season.

Kevin said that while their father always supported his and Jack's decisions to pursue long-distance running, he never pressured them into it, and the brothers' passion developed on its own.

"He never really pushed for it, but he coached the high school, and just being around the team a ton growing up, we always had a lot of fond memories of that," Kevin said. "So it just seemed like a good way that we wanted to get more involved with the sport, because we had all those fond memories of it."

The Agnew brothers didn't inherit their athletic ability only from their father.

Jack, a sophomore, said both his father and his mother, Christine, have been doing various distance running and events all of their lives.

"Mom and Dad ran when we were growing up all the time," Jack said. "They ran marathons, so that kind of lifestyle we just grew up into, so it's just how we are."

Although the Agnews lived only a few hours from Ohio State and had a father who once participated for the Buckeyes, Kevin said the decision wasn't as straightforward as many assumed. He explored his options, though he did narrow his search to schools within Ohio.

Ultimately, Kevin picked Ohio State, citing several factors as to what swayed his decision: staying close to home, joining one of college athletics' premier programs and brands, and having the chance to follow in his father's footsteps.

"I definitely am pretty family-oriented, so I wanted to stay relatively close to home. So I didn't look outside of Ohio," Kevin said. "In terms of opportunity, I thought Ohio State had the best opportunity. I think what really set them apart was that this is the biggest brand in sports. There's so many people who support the Buckeyes. Being a part of the family legacy, too. I always thought it was cool that my dad ran at Ohio State, so continuing his footsteps was cool as well."

Cross country head coach Sara Mason Vergote said it was Kevin and Jack's competitive nature that made them stand out as recruits.



Kevin Agnew

"I recruited Kevin during the COVID year. So we didn't have a lot of opportunity to see him race," Mason Vergote said. "Obviously, he had run the times and had been successful at the high school level. Honestly, before I called him, I was unaware of the fact that

his dad had run at OSU until he told me, but Kevin, throughout the recruiting process, besides having the talent, just showed extreme maturity, even as a high schooler.

"As far as Jack goes, I knew the Agnew family through recruiting Kevin, and then I watched Jack win a state championship at the Ohio cross country state championships in a pretty dramatic fashion. So they both have the talent, but they also have a certain competitive drive that attracted us to recruit both of them."

With Kevin heading off to Ohio State in 2021 for his freshman season, the brothers were separated for the first time in their lives.

In the pair's first year apart, the two had very successful seasons. As a junior at Carroll, Jack was the 2021 cross country state champion, while Kevin placed 71st at the Big Ten championships and 69th at NCAA regionals for the Buckeyes.

However, despite the brothers' strong individual campaigns, they both said they felt like a part of them was missing.

Kevin said when he got to Ohio State, he realized he had taken for granted just how much effort Jack puts into his craft. He added that he was surprised to learn that some of the veteran habits his brother showed in high school weren't common among everyone.

"It made me very appreciative of what an athlete and competitor he is," Kevin said. "There were so many things that I just saw that I thought were given, or that's just something an athlete does."

"Jack does all the small things. He eats right, he rolls, he stretches, all that type of stuff that behind the scenes that keeps you working really hard, as well as in race, he's a very fierce competitor, so that was definitely something that kind of pushed me to be more of a leader on the team and try and assert those things, or not assert, but encourage others to follow kind of what the model Jack had built as a runner for me."

On the other hand, Jack said it was a major change to go from living with his brother every day to being apart.

"That was definitely different," Jack said. "We share a room at home, so it's just a very

different living arrangement and how everything functions, and just day to day. Life is so different when you're not in the same place, because we do so many things together, and we run together when we talk and things like that. So that was a big difference. It wasn't as fun, I'd say, to not be on a team there."

After two years, the brothers reunited.

Heading into the 2023 season, Jack committed to Ohio State, joining his brother on both the cross country and track and field teams to become teammates once again.

Kevin said he believed having his brother back on his team was a game-changer, not just for him personally but for the whole squad, giving a sense of trust and motivation that elevated everyone around them.

"As soon as Jack was here, it was just a totally different shift. There's someone I could definitely trust to give the right effort or to run with, and same with races. I knew that was one guy I would always be able to depend on out on the course," Kevin said. "So even before he came here, in recruiting, I was telling all the other guys, 'We really need him to have a good time and want to come here, because he's really, really good.'"

Kevin said that he and Jack aimed to change the team's culture upon their arrivals in 2021 and 2023, hoping the entire squad would adopt the same togetherness and hard-working mentality that the brothers embody.

"When I first came on the team, the culture was quite a bit different," Kevin said. "There was a lot of partying. The team was somewhat split. It was just a weird environment to start.



Jack Agnew

So I think taking that, and then each year, we've gotten better and more towards a team that's very unified. The culture change has been evident to the coaches as well. "I don't think we were as disciplined as we could have been," Mason Vergote said. "Then, Kevin came on to the program the first year that I started working with the men, and Jack came into the program the year that I first started working exclusively with the men. So I feel like when Kevin came in, he's a very bright and mature guy, he saw some things that we could be better at as a team. He kind of set the tone for that, so he's always been a leader in somebody that the younger guys look up to."

Kevin said knowing that he and Jack can rely on each other during the toughest parts of a race makes them stronger competitors and sets the tone for the rest of Ohio State's team.

"I know that if I'm able to work with my teammates in a race, it will just be a lot more successful for both myself and the team," Kevin said. "Trying to fight through an 8K or 10K alone is very challenging, so being a part of a team is just a huge advantage. Making sure that we use that, I think, will help propel us to finishing even better than we did the year prior."

In his first four seasons with the Buckeyes, Kevin has done just that. He has participated in the 1,500-meter, 3,000-meter and 5,000-meter events for the track team, while also running in cross country events, including the 6K and 8K.

He excelled not only in races – improving his times for NCAA regionals and the Big Ten championships in each of his attempts – but off the field, being selected for the academic All-Big Ten team in each of the last three seasons.

Like Kevin, Jack also competed in the 3,000 on the indoor track and 5,000 on the outdoor course, as well as running the 6K and 8K distances for the cross country teams. Jack had a breakout performance in the Tommy Evans Invitational on Sept. 4, 2024, earning Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors by leading Ohio State to a team title as he finished second in the 6K with an 18:13.1 mark.

Following his standout performances as a redshirt freshman, Jack said he is eager to carry that momentum into the season both on and off the course.

Jack said he is looking forward to bonding with his brother and team on the Buckeyes' road trips this season.

"For college meets you travel, so you get to see a lot of cool places, and you get to go places you've never been before, which is really cool," Jack said. "I enjoy doing that with my friends, and you also get to race, which is really fun."

While Jack expressed his excitement for the experiences that come with traveling during the season, both brothers agree that the best part is being able to share those moments.

Kevin said he loves having Jack as a teammate but added he and his brother share a bond that goes far beyond the track, spending the majority of their time together and supporting each other in every aspect of life.

"I would definitely say Jack is my best friend," Kevin said. "We spend the most time outside of racing, doing pretty much everything together. We live together now, but even when he was in the dorms, we'd hang out on weekends and stuff like that or talk or call, that type of stuff."

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Buckeyes In Cruise Control In Week Six

Down 3-0 in each of the last two games, there was never a worry. Nor was there a worry when the Buckeyes were up just 7-3 at half-time at Washington.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

This Ohio State team is steady, strong and consistent in so many phases of the game – maybe more so than any other OSU team in recent years.

They have been methodical victories more than flashy ones. That's the 2025 Buckeyes to date.

Joel Klatt, the former Colorado quarterback and superb TV analyst whom Buckeye fans are fortunate to have on so many broadcasts, made a great analogy during his midweek podcast leading up to the Minnesota game.

Klatt compared the Buckeyes to great sprinters, like Usain Bolt – the type of runner who speeds along at such a smooth, consistent pace that you really don't realize how fast he is going until you see the separation between him and his competitors at the end.

He's right.

Take the Buckeye defense. Rarely do the Buckeyes come with five or six rushers in search of a game-turning sack. Instead, they seem content to wait out the quarterback while the defensive backfield does its job. Sometimes yards are gained. But at the end of the day, there are single-digit points on the scoreboard – every time. Five points a game allowed leads the nation.

The Buckeyes have permitted just two touchdowns all season long. Part of that is due to the great play by the first-rotation players. But, unlike in many seasons past, the reserves have been holding the line late in blowouts – speaking to the depth and talent throughout the roster.

On offense, while quarterback Julian Sayin has been precise, the receivers have been solid on short plays and spectacular on big-gainers. And the running game has been coming around behind Bo Jackson.

Jackson is not the runner, at least yet, of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, but he's been solid enough in this offense.

Mistakes for the young quarterback? Knock on wood, but zero interceptions in the last two games after three interceptions through Week Three. And each game, coach Ryan Day and/or offensive coordinator Brian Hartline have been widening the playbook for Sayin.

The response? He was 23 of 27 passing (85.2 percent) for 326 yards and three touchdowns against Minnesota. That was after 22 of 28 (78.6 percent) for 208 yards and two touchdowns at Washington.

The Buckeyes are in a very good place heading into a stretch of games at Illinois, at Wisconsin and at home against Penn State.

Penn State's Disaster

The same cannot be said for Penn State. Where does the program go from here, after a humiliating 42-37 loss to previously winless UCLA?

The gut punch of the second straight loss for Penn State wouldn't be so bad if expectations were not so high at State College, and really across much of college football, for the team this year.

So much was said of Penn State's national championship hopes, in part because of players deciding to return for another year and in part because of the hiring of Buckeye defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. He's the guy, you'll recall, who skipped out on the national championship celebration in Ohio Stadium before his hiring at Penn State was announced.

Knowles' Penn State defense has now given up 42 points and 30 points in its last two games, while his replacement in Columbus led a defense that gave up three field goals and zero touchdowns over the last two weeks.

Can Penn State right itself? Sure. But not to the level of the national championship Penn

State country was dreaming about.

Win or lose in Columbus on Nov. 1, this team's ceiling for the season is far lower than anticipated.

Big Ten's Big-Time QB Play

A strong argument can be made that the best quarterback play in the country is taking place in the Big Ten, not by looking at passing yards, but by looking deeper at the passing statistics that tell us more about who is doing the best at executing what they are being asked to do.

Through the Minnesota game on Oct. 4, only one Big Ten quarterback – USC's Jayden Maiava – ranked among the top 14 in the country in terms of yards per game.

Yet for other measures that factor in more than just heaving the ball downfield a lot, the quality of the Big Ten shows up.

For passer efficiency, the calculation that takes into account yards per play, completion percentage, touchdowns and interceptions, five Big Ten quarterbacks were among the top six nationally.

And for completion percentage, six of the top 10 were from the Big Ten.

Ohio State's Julian Sayin scores high in both passing efficiency and completion percentage.

This should be of little surprise. No Ohio State quarterback has finished lower than 13th in passer efficiency since J.T. Barrett was 55th in 2016. And all but one OSU QB since Barrett were in the top 10, the exception being Kyle McCord at 13th in 2023. The common thread: Ryan Day.

Here's how this season's statistics break down.

The passing efficiency leaders are Carlos Del Rio-Wilson of Marshall (206.5), followed immediately by five straight passers from the Big Ten – Fernando Mendoza of Indiana (197.8), Ohio State's Sayin (197.0), USC's Maiava (191.1), Luke Altmyer of Illinois (189.7) and Dante Moore of Oregon (183.5).

Sayin leads the nation in completion percentage (80.2 percent). Moore is fourth (74.6). Nebraska's Dylan Raiola is sixth (74.2 percent). Altmyer is seventh (73.6 percent). Demond Williams Jr. of Washington is ninth (73.3 percent), and Mendoza is 10th (73.0 percent).

Yet for yards, after USC's Maiava at No. 2 (317.4 yards per game), the next Big Ten quarterback is Rutgers' Athan Kaliakmanis at 15th (279.8).

Quarterback Class Of 2024

There were generally regarded to be three five-star quarterbacks in the 2024 recruiting class. Here's an update on how they are doing

this season.

- Sayin, Ohio State – 5-0 and No. 3 nationally in passing efficiency at 197.0
- Raiola, Nebraska – 4-1 and No. 18 nationally in passing efficiency at 166.9
- D.J. Lagway, Florida – 2-3 and No. 86 nationally in passing efficiency at 129.9.

Of course, to be fair, Sayin is surrounded by the best talent. But he's doing the job with that group.

As for the top-rated quarterback in the 2025 class, Michigan freshman Bryce Underwood is 4-1 and ranked No. 85 nationally in passer efficiency at 130.1.

A National Top 10

Now that we're this far into the season, enough information is available to start making educated guesses about a national top 10. Here's where I see things standing:

1. Ohio State (5-0) – No reason yet to think otherwise.
2. Oregon (5-0) – Impressive victory at Penn State, but how impressive now? Regardless, this team and OSU are looking like the cream of the 2025 crop.
3. Miami (5-0) – If there's a third team to include with the very best, before a separation to the next group, it's Miami. Veteran quarterback. Multiple solid wins in beating Notre Dame, Florida and Florida State. And what appears to be a smooth path for the rest of the regular season.
4. Texas A&M (5-0) – This might not be the best SEC team at the end of the season. I'm still waiting to see more from Georgia and Alabama. But the Aggies have wins over Notre Dame, Auburn and Mississippi State in the last three weeks.
5. Indiana (5-0) – The Hoosiers keep surprising. Their losses in convincing fashion to Ohio State and Notre Dame last year showed they were not first-tier. But they just might be a little closer this season.
6. Oklahoma (5-0) – It's still wait-and-see time with the Sooners. Their best win is 24-13 at home over Michigan.
7. Alabama (4-1) – The Tide still has time to recover from their opening day loss at Florida State. The win over Georgia was solid evidence that Alabama is on its way.
8. Georgia (4-1) – The Bulldogs have the talent, so they remain in the hunt for a national title.
9. Ole Miss (5-0) – Still unconvinced Ole Miss will end up any higher than this at the end of the season.
10. Illinois (5-1) – Expect this to be a short-lived appearance in the top 10.

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Buckeyes Gopher A Walk All Over Minnesota

As the Ohio State football team was preparing to host Minnesota on Oct. 4, I was confident the Buckeyes were going to win (I'm sure Penn State was confident they were going to win as well), so I had to come up with something to watch for in the game in order for me to get maximum entertainment.

Minnesota is one of that large group of middle-of-the-pack Big Ten teams that are good, but not quite good enough to contend for the conference title or a spot in the playoffs. They were a perfect measuring stick for what I was going to look for on this particular Saturday: to see if the Buckeyes were improving by the week. The Gophers were a spunky, well-coached team that might even have been able to test the Buckeyes.

As it turned out, after the first few minutes, they didn't really challenge the Buckeyes, and I think the home team continues to look better each week. Keep improving and Ohio State will be more than ready for Michigan and the post-season challenges beyond.

I took a little grief for this on our "Live Game Thread" at our BuckeyeSports.com Forum, where I expressed some concern about Ohio State's brief slow start. Get off to a slow start, and no matter how good you are, you can find yourself in a dogfight. The Nittany Lions found themselves trailing 27-7 to winless UCLA at the half, and they could never dig out of that hole and suffered a shocking 42-37 loss. The Buckeyes, meanwhile, quickly snapped out of their Gopher-induced funk and played as well as they have all season, which was well.

A quick look at the stat sheet showed a lot to be pleased with.

The OSU aerial attack was top-notch. Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate continued to prove they are one of the best receiving tandems – or most likely *the* best – in the country. The Buckeyes racked up 341 yards through the air and averaged 14.2 yards per reception.

A few more performances like that from Julian Sayin and we won't be worrying about his inexperience anymore. He impressed me in any number of ways against the Gophers, but most so when he took a direct hit from an unblocked Minnesota defender and hung in there long enough to complete a 29-yard strike to tight end Max Klare. That's a tough quarterback.

Some could point to the Buckeyes' performance on the ground as only adequate, with 133 net yards and a modest 4.4-yard per carry average. That should improve as Bo Jackson, who as most of us predicted would happen is now the starter and is playing against fresh first-stringers, not the mop-up team, gets used to his new and improved role. While not as spectacular an average as those he was posting late in blow-outs, he still posted a 4.8-yard per carry mark. Three of those and you've got yourself a first down. Jackson is still averaging 7.5 yards per run for the season.

There's not much more I can say about the defense. Football, like any team sport, comes down to who scores the most points, and Ohio State gave the Gophers only three of them and has given up an average of 5.0 points in its first five games. You aren't going to lose many games if you are giving up less than a touchdown per contest.

Not surprisingly, after giving up only 25 points on the season, the Buckeyes are No. 1 in the country in scoring defense. They are also No. 3 in the country in total defense at 215.8 yards per game after yielding 162 yards to the Gophers.

For a snarky comparison, Penn State under the brilliant defensive coordinator Jim Knowles is No. 29 in the country in total defense at 306.2

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

yards and 30th in scoring defense at 17.8.

Defensive coordinator Matt Patricia has been getting plenty of kudos for the job he's done replacing Knowles, and rightfully so. But what about the job new offensive coordinator Brian Hartline has done? Many, including myself, wondered how Hartline would do in his first time calling the plays. Count me in as a believer, and it is only going to get better as he brings Sayin along.

Ohio State's play against the Gophers was great. The Buckeyes even made a play on special teams, their traditional Achilles' heel. It was a 36-yard razzle-dazzle effort featuring Brandon Inniss and Lorenzo Styles Jr.

What more can I ask? What more?

Beat Michigan. (That may be the first time I have mentioned it so far this season!)

History Repeats Itself

Any longtime reader of this column knows that I love our feature "From the Pages of BSB." I love looking back at events from the Ohio State sports scene with the benefit of years of hindsight. A note in this issue's entry of the feature from 25 years ago sounded awfully familiar to me.

"Ohio State's offensive line came under heavy criticism after the opening game against Fresno State when the Buckeyes failed to convert two goal-line situations and another short-yardage set on the FSU 40-yard line," it reads.

"But three games later, everything seemed to be working with the goal-line offense. The Buckeyes punched it in against Penn State with runs of 1 yard by fullback Jamar Martin, 1 yard by Derek Combs and 3 yards by Jerry Westbrook in the 45-6 win on Sept. 27.

" 'That gives us great confidence,' Martin said. 'We had trouble the first week, and everybody was talking about our goal-line offense. But since then, we've had a lot of sustained drives, and we're scoring.

" 'I think people should be intimidated by what we're doing right now.'

"OSU unveiled a new formation, called 'Con-Jumbo' for Martin's goal-line plunge. On the play, Martin and backup fullback Jesse Kline lined up in an offset-I formation with Kline as the lead blocker. OSU's three tight ends, Darrell Sanders, Tim Cheatwood and Ben Hartsock, were also involved with Hartsock acting as an H-back."

Sound familiar? Ohio State doesn't generally use a fullback anymore, but as is the case now, the tight ends were greatly involved in 2000. With all due respect to national champion tight end Ben Hartsock, I would take this year's crew over Darrell Sanders, Tim Cheatwood and Hartsock from 2000.

Speaking of this year's tight ends, did anyone notice that in OSU's 42-3 win over Minnesota, Klare was the only tight end targeted? Buckeye quarterbacks had targeted five different TEs, counting Klare, previously.

Klare has seemed to be coming along. He had five catches for 63 yards against the Gophers after two for 26 yards in the game before against Washington. In the first three games of the season, the Purdue transfer had just four catches total. I don't think Ryan Day brought Klare in (i.e. paid him his NIL money) to sit on the bench.

On the season, Klare has 11 catches, third

on the team behind only Smith and Tate, for 137 yards (12.5 average) and a score.

Why Not Ohio State?

I've been listening to too much sports talk radio lately on my half-hour drive to and from work each day. My listening is more a comment on what a vast wasteland Columbus radio is than my interest in the frequently inane commentary offered on these sports stations. But as they rattle off the football scores of the day, I can't help but notice, college or pro, that they say this game was won on a 54-yard field goal and that one featured a kicker nailing one from 62.

Do any of you besides me ever wonder why Ohio State can't find a kicker who can nail one for three points from the 50 or beyond? There have to be guys on the Oval who have that much leg.

I thought about it again when Jayden Fielding lined up to try a 53-yarder in the first quarter against Minnesota. I was rooting for him – after his touchdown-saving tackle against Washington, I will always root for him – but he missed left.

I took a quick look back to the Buckeye kickers since COVID.

In 2020 Blake Haubeil was 5 of 7 with a long of 43, including 2 of 3 from 40-49 yards and no attempts from the 50 or beyond. Then came the Noah Ruggles years. Ruggles was 20 of 21 in 2021 with a long of 46, including 4 of 4 from the 40s and no tries from 50-plus. He continued his accuracy in 2022 with 17 connections on 20 attempts. He was 7 of 7 from within the 40s but missed both his attempts from the 50s, including his infamous miss from 50 yards out in an attempt to beat Georgia in the playoffs.

Many Buckeye fans blamed Ruggles for the loss. I didn't. That kick was beyond his range. I knew it, you knew it, and Ryan Day knew it. Ruggles was a machine. He just needed the Ohio State offense to gain him 5 or 10 more yards.

Fielding is 17 of 22 as a Buckeye with a long of 46. He has failed on both of his long-range attempts, including the one against the Gophers. You have to go back to 2019 when Haubeil nailed one from 55 yards as time ran out in the first half at Northwestern to find the last time Ohio State hit a field goal from long range.

Tom Skladany still holds the Ohio State record for longest field goal at 59 against Illinois in 1975. I believe Tom is still around town. I wonder if he has any eligibility left?

If not, it's time to start scouring the Oval.

Sullingers To Be Honored

OSU basketball season is rapidly approaching, and the Agonis Club of Columbus is offering a great way to get in the mood.

In a different take on their annual Agonis Club Person of the Year Banquet, this year the event will honor "Persons" of the Year, the Satch Sullinger family – Satch, JJ, Julian and Jared.

Join M.C. Paul Keels and many other local and Ohio State names at the banquet and meet and greet to be held at Villa Milano at 1630 Schrock Road in Columbus on Wednesday, Oct. 22.

James "Satch" Sullinger is a retired educator and high school basketball coach from Columbus City Schools. He is a state champion,

Naismith Award winner and Ohio Coach of the Year Award winner, and he was named National High School Coach of Year in 2010.

J.J. Sullinger played for Ohio State and coach Thad Matta (a former Agonis Club Person of the Year). Julian Sullinger played for Kent State and then embarked on a coaching career that has led him to Duquesne University, where he is an assistant men's basketball coach. Jared Sullinger led Ohio State to the Final Four and played in the NBA for the Boston Celtics and Toronto Raptors.

Doors open at 5:45 p.m., and the meet and greet runs from 6-7. There will be a silent auction and cash bar, with dinner served at 7 p.m.

Tickets can be purchased at www.agonis-club.org for \$75 per person, \$125 per couple and \$500 for a table of eight, and they include dinner and the meet and greet. Sponsorship opportunities are also available starting as low as \$75.

For information on sponsorships or any other questions, email Tom Sappington at agonis-clubcolumbus@gmail.com.

I Like Stats, But . . .

I grew up reading the backs of baseball cards, so I am someone who likes sports statistics. But lately it seems like there is a statistic for everything. It hasn't really improved my enjoyment of the various sports. And I admit that I don't always understand the numbers that are being thrown out there.

In Court Report found on page 32 of this issue, it was mentioned that one of the reasons the Buckeye basketball team struggled at times last season was "it was plagued by a *luck rating* that was 334th in the country out of 364 teams, according to KenPom ratings."

I don't recall the "luck rating" on the back of any of my basketball cards. So, I looked it up. Do you really want to know?

"Luck, which is the deviation in winning percentage between a team's actual record and their expected record using the correlated gaussian method. The luck factor has nothing to do with the rating calculation," according to KenPom, "but a team that is very lucky (positive numbers) will tend to be rated lower by my system than their record would suggest."

Well, now that will certainly add to my enjoyment of the game.

Frank's Special Offer

I continue to be troubled by subscribers who have been with us for decades and are not renewing their subscriptions to BSB because they are unhappy with their mail service. I am ready to put my money where my mouth is.

Take advantage of the Texas Beater-Inflation Beater Special with its \$20 off any level BSB subscription, and I'll upgrade you to first-class mail in an envelope through the Michigan game for free – a \$25 value.

Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or send your check or credit card info to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Credit card users remember to include your three- or four-digit code. A one-year subscription (regularly \$124.95) is \$104.95, and two years (regularly \$199.95) is just \$179.95. Either will include the first-class upgrade through the 2025 Michigan game, and if you act quickly you will also be entered to win a Penn State weekend with game tickets Nov. 1, a \$50 College Traditions gift card, tailgate treats from the popular City Barbeque and a victory celebration at Roosters – a fun, casual joint.

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