

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 8

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 8, 2025

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

With Ohio State leading 38-14 with just over nine minutes to go in the game against Penn State, Buckeye fans let their feelings about Jim Knowles be known, with the help of whoever was controlling the video board at Ohio Stadium.

Loud boos rang through the 'Shoe when a camera found the current Penn State and former Ohio State defensive coordinator in the coaches' box and displayed his face live as he watched over the dismantling of his defense on his former home field.

The director of the board then switched to a camera that was on Knowles' replacement, Matt Patricia, who was still roaming the sideline, scheming how to finish the game out. The boos quickly changed to a deafening cheer for the man who has helped the Buckeye defense allow an average of just 6.9 points per game through eight contests.

The scoreboard went back and forth between those shots of Knowles and Patricia for about a minute, letting the fans have their fun with the former defensive coordinator, with the game already in hand, the score holding at 38-14 for the Buckeyes' Nov. 1 victory.

For the coaches and the players at Ohio State, head coach Ryan Day hinted at his press conference on Oct. 28 that there could be some bad blood between the program and Knowles.

"We try not to take these things personal, but we are human," he said.

He gave a much longer answer when asked about Knowles and whether his leaving was any different because it was to go to a Big Ten rival. Day made sure to mention the impact Knowles had on the program for the three seasons he was in Columbus, which ultimately culminated in the No. 1 defense in the country helping win the national championship.

"Like any relationship, when it breaks off, sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad," Day said. "But there really hasn't been much communication (with Knowles since he left). He did a great job when he was here, helped us win a national championship, and kind of left it at that."

Right before his quote, which hinted that



PICK 'EM APART — Behind the blocking of left guard Luke Montgomery (51) and left tackle Austin Siereveld (67), Julian Sayin shredded the Penn State defense for 316 yards and four touchdowns while completing 20 of 23 passes in the 38-14 win over Penn State on Nov. 1.

the move was taken personally, Day noted that moves like Knowles' might start becoming more common with the NFL-ification of college football in the past few years.

So, going into the game, it was largely left up in the air how Day and the Buckeyes felt about Knowles. The captains pitched in on Oct. 29, with linebacker Sonny Styles noting that college football is a business and he understands why Knowles made the decision he did.

But after the game, Day said that he felt there was no extra motivation gained for the Buckeyes with their former coach up in the coaches' box for the opposing team.

Junior safety Caleb Downs confirmed that it wasn't on the mind of the players.

"There's going to be people on the other side of the field every game," he said. "The fact that he was over there, we just knew that he was going to try to do the best

for his team, as we're going to try to do the best for our team. So really, it didn't matter much. We've just got to go out there and execute. We execute, it doesn't matter who is on the other side."

Maybe that's because nothing more needed to be said after the way the Buckeyes handled Knowles' unit with ease throughout most of the 60 minutes of the game, and it began right away.

On the first drive of the game for the Buckeye offense, Julian Sayin and Co. carved up Knowles' unit. It opened with a 20-yard pitch and catch from Sayin to Car-

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FAN FORUM



From The Message Board

Ohio State scored 38 points and had 480 total yards against Jim Knowles’ Penn State defense on Nov. 1. Since Knowles left the Buckeyes for a Big Ten rival over the offseason, we asked the subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum if the win over the Nittany Lions feels more satisfying since the offense played so well against Knowles’ unit. We also asked if they still respect what Knowles did in his time at Ohio State.

“It was a little more satisfying for me than if someone else had been the DC at Penn State. We don’t know the full story of why he left OSU. I’m beginning to think that his success at OSU in 2024 was more the result of the talent he had to work with than his coaching acumen. I think he still belongs in the top 10 percent of college DCs, but not in the top 1 percent. Probably overrated and overpaid.”

—Terrier Buck

“I appreciate Knowles reviving the defense after he was hired, although it took time. I don’t appreciate the why and how he left, especially during our fan appreciation day ceremony. The so-called ‘genius’ got schooled by Matt Patricia.”

— Bob Cody

“Jim who???”

— BuckeyeScott

“Any respect I had for him was gone the moment he pulled his crap and the way he left. I’m glad they thoroughly dominated him.”

—Tiffin Buckeye

“Our game today was a continuation of what appears to be further reps of a game plan for a 16-game season. Don’t get too excited. Stay in your lane and get your job completed. Knowles was irrelevant. He’s not a great play caller. If he has great talent, he seems to do well, but many others would also. He hides up in the box

“I don’t think you can discount that he was our DC while winning a national title, but his influence on the Penn St. game was a nothingburger.”

— R1TBDBITL

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State pulled away in the second half for a 38-14 win over Penn State in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 1, improving to 8-0 and 5-0 in the Big Ten. 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 leading the Buckeye defense with a career-high 12 total tackles in Ohio State’s victory over Penn State, I’m giving my Buckeye Leaf to linebacker Arvell Reese.

The junior backer played a crucial role in thwarting the Nittany Lions offense, which accrued just 200 yards of total offense. Reese finished his outing with five solo tackles, one sack and tied for the team lead of 2½ tackles for loss.

Reese’s most impactful play came late into the third quarter with the Penn State offense set up for a third-and-10 on its own 31-yard line. The Cleveland native flew off the edge, catching Nittany Lions quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer off guard for an 11-yard sack.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf is going to junior receiver Carnell Tate, who continued his stellar season in Ohio State’s win.

Tate finished the game with five catches for a game-high 124 receiving yards and a touchdown. As he’s done all season, Tate scorched opposing defenses with his explosive catches. The Chicago native had a career-long catch of 57 yards but made arguably his biggest play on a 45-yard touchdown catch.

Tate’s touchdown catch came in the second quarter when Ohio State’s lead was only 10-7. On the second-and-7 play, Tate cut past Penn State cornerback Zion Tracy before adjusting to a slightly underthrown pass by redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin, making the catch and reaching the ball into the end zone.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf is going to Julian Sayin, whom I expect to see at the top of every list of Heisman odds for at least the next week after this contest.

Even though Sayin was already playing as one of the best quarterbacks in the country, it seems like he is still improving every week. If any Buckeye fans wished that the redshirt freshman would look downfield more often for Jeremiah Smith or Tate, hopefully they were

watching this game, because he was finding his star receivers with deep passes often.

He finished the game 20 of 23 passing (87.0 percent), somehow raising his completion percentage, which was at 80.0 percent before this contest. His 20 completions went for 316 yards and four touchdowns.

BSB Subscribers:

Tiffin Buckeye: Tate and Smith.

Luckeeman: Julian Sayin, Jeremiah Smith (what a catch!), and Kenyatta Jackson Jr.!

John Lanning: Interesting game. Quick start, then they took their foot off the pedal. After the half, all Buckeyes all the way. My leaves to:

1. Arvell Reese. He was everywhere.
2. Jeremiah Smith. A straight pass or a bunker pass, he’ll catch it.
3. Bo Jackson. He is starting to see the alleys.

Bob Cody: Buckeye Leaves for Julian “80 percent completions” Sayin, Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate, Bo “100 yards” Jackson and Bennett Christian on offense.

On defense, Buckeye Leaves earned by Arvell Reese, Kenyatta Jackson, Jaylen McClain, Sonny Styles, Kayden McDonald and Caleb Downs.

Redemptive leaf for CJ Donaldson for the TD in the third after the strip fumble in the first half.

PeyoteBuck: It’s sounding like a broken record. I’ll give leaves to the usual suspects and their supporting cast. Sayin, Smith, Tate, Bo Jackson. Sayin’s passes are like drone attacks on munitions factories. Smith is an octopus, Jackson a bulldozer. Tate is Mr. Eveready. Unstoppable. Brandon Inniss gets a nod, too.

BuckeyeScott: Please give Caleb Downs a Buckeye Leaf for this game and all future games. I can assure you he will earn it!

R1TBDBITL: A leaf for each of the plays that should make the Heisman highlight films this year.

1. Smith’s spectacular catch off the tipped ball for a TD and
2. Sayin’s 9-yard scramble to keep a drive alive (There will be plenty of passing clips).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Jerry Lucas Statue Well Deserved

I am glad Ohio State is honoring Jerry Lucas with a statue. He was the star on a team loaded with outstanding basketball players. I am the same age as Jerry. I listened on the radio to most basketball games in his three-year career. I always said that after his team won the NCAA championship his sophomore year, it was unfortunate they lost the championship games the next two years to Cincinnati. Sometimes the better team doesn’t win. Had they won three consecutive years, his team would no doubt have been considered the greatest college basketball team of all time.

After their senior season, they toured Ohio playing against local all-star teams. I was present in the Bluffton College gymnasium when the team played. I was thrilled to see my hardwood heroes in person. The gym was packed. They played as hard as if it was for the national championship. The first thing I remember is that Lucas stole the ball from the guard

at midcourt, and in a few loping strides, he made a layup (not a dunk), turned and ran back down the court to play defense. He and his teammates all hustled. Lucas never wasted a moment on the floor. He was an athletic, fluid player.

Bill Herr
Bluffton, Ohio.

Refuse To Cancel Despite Mailing Issues

Publisher,

I doubt if anybody will ever understand why the postal service, for over a year now, keeps messing up deliveries of BSB to its subscribers. I also don’t understand at all why, in your column, you say long-time subscribers have cancelled their subscriptions because of the late delivery problems when you offer a couple other alternatives.

I thought long and hard about first-class postage as I’m on social security for life, but it has been well worth it as I now receive BSB on Wednesday

or Thursday. As a former news carrier for 25 years, I know all too well how hard the news business can be. You and your fellow employees do a great job with BSB in every way, and you deserve a lot better than what you are dealing with when it comes to some of your subscribers. You and your people work too hard to be treated that way. You deserve a lot better.

Jim Pugh
Bellbrook, Ohio

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



Vol. 45, No. 8

Nov. 8, 2025

www.BuckeyeSports.com

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

Columbus Sports Publications
1200 Chambers Road, Suite 206
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$124.95/year.

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2024-25 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 45)

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

The next issue (Nov. 15 cover date) will be mailed on Nov. 11.

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

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OPINION

OSU Responds Well To A Little Adversity

Football teams often act differently to the taste of their own blood. Some shy away from it, shrinking from the first sign of adversity and retreating into a shell. Others seem to use it as a red badge of courage, reveling in an opportunity to prove they can take a punch and continue to move forward.

After vanquishing seven opponents in a row with relative ease, Ohio State faced a wounded but still prideful Penn State team that came to Columbus on Nov. 1 on the opposite end of the college football spectrum. While the Buckeyes were protecting a personal 11-game win streak, the Nittany Lions had lost four games in a row for the first time in a full season in nearly 20 years, a streak that had cost 12-year head coach James Franklin his job in mid-October.

Installed as 18½-point underdogs and forced to play true freshman Ethan Grunke-meyer at quarterback with three-year starter Drew Allar sidelined for the remainder of the season, Penn State nevertheless was opportunistic enough to score a pair of first-half touchdowns and remain well within striking distance of the Buckeyes, trailing by a 17-14 deficit at halftime.

Not only had the Nittany Lions scored those two touchdowns, but they had punctured holes in the perceived invincibility of an Ohio State defense that hadn't allowed a first-half touchdown to any of its first seven opponents in 2025. Moreover, both of Penn State's scores came against the Buckeyes' No. 1-ranked red-zone defense.

One of Ryan Day's in-game objectives is to be the aggressor during the final four minutes of the first half and the first four minutes of the second half, and his team quite literally fumbled the first part of that assignment against the Lions. Normally reliable CJ Donaldson was stripped of the football as he was trying to gain extra yardage with 1:48 remaining until the break, a fumble that led to Penn State's second touchdown with just 20 seconds remaining. Donaldson's miscue also led to a clearly agitated Day bolting to the locker room.

Whatever was said or implied in that locker room obviously had its desired effect.

The Buckeyes took the second-half kickoff and marched 75 yards in just five plays – capped by a 1-yard touchdown plunge from Donaldson – while the defense suddenly became unrelenting. After the Nittany Lions totaled 140 yards in the first half, their first 18 plays of the second half netted them exactly 2 yards.

By that time, the Buckeyes had padded their 17-14 halftime lead into a 38-14 runaway with redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin once again taking center stage. Teaming with the NFL talent of Jeremiah Smith, Sayin threw for 316 yards and four touchdowns, his fifth game this season with at least 300 yards and three scores.

Even more impressive was Sayin's completion rate against Penn State's pass defense, which entered the game ranked No. 5 in the country. His 20-for-23 performance against Penn State marked his fourth game this season at 85 percent accuracy or better. Only 16 Ohio State quarterbacks have ever completed 85 percent or more of their passes in a single game (with a 10-attempt minimum), and Sayin already has a full 25 percent of that total.

Even the OSU running game got itself somewhat back on track with a 164-yard outing, the most against any Big Ten opponent so far this season. That total is a bit skewed because nearly a third of it came on freshman Bo Jackson's 51-yard bolt early in the fourth quarter. Throw out that run and the Buckeyes rushed for only 113 yards on 31 attempts, an average of 3.6 yards per carry.

There were glimmers of a reliable running attack sprinkled throughout the game. Jackson's run, of course, which allowed him to finish with 105 yards and eclipse the century mark for the third time this season. Donaldson converted a couple of short-yardage third downs including his touchdown. And Sayin displayed some heretofore unseen mobility, including a 9-yard scramble on third-and-5 at his own 30. The second-quarter run sustained a possession that ended with a 45-yard touchdown strike to Tate that gave the Buckeyes a 17-7 lead at the time.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

But Ohio State these days supplements its passing attack with an occasional run – not the other way around, and here's hoping Day stays true to that mentality when his team reaches the end of November.

To Run Or Not To Run

I am about as old-school as you can get in terms of playing lockdown defense and how that remains the foundation for winning championships. Devising ways to prevent your opponent from crossing the goal line has been the bottom line for just about every coach from Walter Camp and Knute Rockne through Woody Hayes, Ara Parseghian, Bear Bryant and Tom Osborne up to and including newly minted College Football Hall of Famers Urban Meyer and Nick Saban.

As far as offense is concerned, however, things never stay the same and Ohio State fans who continue to whine about the relative lack of production from this year's running game had better get used to it.

There was a time, of course, when the Buckeyes – especially during the days of three yards and a cloud of dust – recruited mostly run-blocking behemoths to clear the way for bulldozers the likes of Jim Otis, John Brockington and Pete Johnson as well as gazelles like Archie Griffin.

Beginning in 1973 when Griffin rushed for 1,577 yards as a sophomore, Ohio State boasted a 1,000-yard rusher in 10 of 12 seasons. During the 1975 season, Griffin and Johnson each eclipsed the 1,000-yard mark.

As recently as the eight-year span between 2012 and 2019, the Buckeyes had a 1,000-yard rusher each year capped by the program-record 2,003 yards gained by J.K. Dobbins in 2019.

Since Day has been head coach, however, the running game has taken a back seat to an aerial attack that has not only produced a ton of yardage and touchdowns, but two quarterbacks and five receivers taken in the first round of the NFL draft just since 2021.

Not that Day forsakes the running game. TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins each topped the 1,000-yard mark during last year's national championship run, but that was more a product of an elongated 16-game season. It might interest you to know that Judkins rushed for 100 yards or more in a game only twice last season while Henderson never once cracked the century mark. Judkins and his average of 66.3 yards per game represented the lowest to lead the team since Braxton Miller averaged 59.6 during the disastrous 2011 season.

Before taking on Penn State, Ohio State ranked 72nd nationally in rushing offense with

an average of 151.7 yards per game. The average ticked up only slightly afterward to 153.3 yards per game while the national ranking slipped to No. 74. If that worries you, it really shouldn't. Among the next three opponents, Purdue ranks 91st in the nation in run defense while Rutgers is 115th and UCLA is 124th.

For what it's worth, last year's OSU team finished 57th in rushing with an average of 166.4 yards per game and still won the national championship – thanks in no small measure to a No. 1-ranked defense and Will Howard completing 75.2 percent of his passes for 1,150 yards and eight touchdowns during the four-game playoff.

Cherish Your Time

Within the space of just a few days in late October, the Ohio State football family lost two standout centers – Bob Maggs, a two-time first-team All-Big Ten performer in the mid-1980s, and Nick Mangold, who won first-team All-America honors in 2005 before an 11-year career with the NFL's New York Jets that included seven trips to the Pro Bowl.

I probably should have known the 61-year-old Maggs better since he was closer to my age, but we simply had better media access to the entire team when Jim Tressel was head coach, and therefore I became well-acquainted with Mangold during his time with the Buckeyes.

Mangold's 6-4, 307-pound frame cut a ferocious figure on the football field, but he was atypical of most athletes with their worn-out "one-game-a-time" approach to the media. He could be pensive, analytical and funny at the same time, and some of my most enjoyable moments working the OSU beat in those days were spent listening to Mangold spin stories about his teammates.

During an interview session before the 2005 Fiesta Bowl game against Notre Dame, he teased former high school teammate A.J. Hawk about his impending fame, his flowing blond hair and his girlfriend (now wife) Laura Quinn, the sister of Fighting Irish quarterback Brady Quinn.

"A.J.'s got it all," Mangold said with a wry grin as the nearby Hawk squirmed in his seat. "Fame, fortune and a supermodel for a girlfriend. One day I want to be his pool boy or his gardener. Or maybe just the guy who gets his groceries. I just hope he remembers all the little guys he stepped on while he climbed the ladder to success."

After his 11 seasons in the league, Hawk embarked upon a broadcasting career, first with his own podcast and since 2019 as co-host of "The Pat McAfee Show" on ESPN. Meanwhile, Mangold settled into family life in New Jersey with his high school sweetheart, Jennifer, and their four children.

On Oct. 14, Mangold took to social media to reveal that he had been battling chronic kidney disease since 2006 and that he was in need of a kidney donor. "I always knew this day would come," he wrote, "but I thought I would have had more time."

Time. We always think there will be more of it before that childlike hopefulness collides with stark reality. Over the years, I have written several times about loss – some of it personal, some in a broader sense – and if I have learned anything about the subject, it is that no matter when it happens and no matter the circumstances, the loss of a loved one is the hardest thing with which we will ever deal during our lifetimes.

I've written this before, but it bears repeating from time to time. Cherish your time with loved ones and never take it for granted. You never know how much of it you have left.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

OSU Remains At No. 1 In Latest AP Poll

Ohio State's placement atop the Associated Press' top-25 rankings didn't change on Nov. 2 when the Week 11 poll results were revealed.

With a 38-14 win over Penn State on Nov. 1, Ohio State ranked No. 1 in the AP poll for the ninth straight week.

The Buckeyes received 54 first-place votes, while No. 2 Indiana (11 votes) and No. 3 Texas A&M (one vote) were the only other teams with first-place votes.

The top 10 was rounded out by No. 4 Alabama, No. 5 Georgia, No. 6 Oregon, No. 7 Ole Miss, No. 8 BYU, No. 9 Texas Tech and No. 10 Notre Dame.

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, No. 20 USC and No. 21 Michigan were both ranked after picking up wins. No. 24 Washington also jumped into the top 25 for the first time this season, even though it was off for the week.

No. 11 Oklahoma and No. 13 Texas were the biggest risers in the top 25 after each team picked up wins over currently ranked foes. Texas, which defeated No. 15 Vanderbilt 34-31, and Oklahoma, which defeated No. 23 Tennessee 33-27, each jumped up seven spots in the poll.

Tennessee was the biggest faller in the rankings. The Volunteers dropped nine spots after their loss to the Sooners.

Houston was the only team to drop out of the rankings. The Cougars suffered a 45-35 home loss to West Virginia.

Styles Returns Against PSU

Ohio State's starters were all available heading into its matchup with Penn State. Returning for the Buckeyes was nickel-back Lorenzo Styles Jr., who missed Ohio State's 34-0 victory over Wisconsin despite not being listed on the injury report prior to the game.

In his absence, freshman cornerback Devin Sanchez started at outside cornerback, and junior corner Jermaine Mathews Jr. moved inside to play nickel. However, in the Buckeyes' win over the Nittany Lions, Ohio State reverted to the lineup they played for the first five games of the season, starting Styles at nickel with Mathews on the outside.

Though Ohio State's starters were fully healthy, the Buckeyes were without reserve defensive end Logan George and wide receiver Quincy Porter against the Nittany Lions.

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	W, 14-7	FOX	7-2, 34-31 win over Vanderbilt
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	W, 70-0	BTN	6-3, 13-10 win over Alabama A&M
Sept. 13	OHIO	W, 37-9	Peacock	5-3, idle
Sept. 27	at Washington	W, 24-6	CBS	6-2, idle
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	NBC	6-2, 23-20 (OT) win over Michigan State
Oct. 11	at Illinois	W 34-16	FOX	6-2, 35-13 win over Rutgers
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	W, 34-0	CBS	2-6, idle
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	W, 38-14	FOX	3-5, 38-14 loss to Ohio State
Nov. 8	at Purdue	1 p.m.	BTN	2-7, 21-16 loss to Michigan
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	TBA	3-5, idle
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	3-5, 35-13 loss to Illinois
Nov. 29	at Michigan	Noon	FOX	6-2, 21-16 win over Purdue

Purdue Game To Kick At 1 p.m.

The Buckeyes' matchup against Purdue on Nov. 8 will be a 1 p.m. kickoff on the Big Ten Network.

The unusual start time will take place in West Lafayette, Ind. The last time the Buckeyes went to Purdue was in 2023 to beat the Boilermakers 41-7 on Oct. 14. Kyle McCord threw for 276 yards and three scores in that game, one of them being current junior wide receiver Brandon Inniss' first career touchdown.

The two teams matched up last year as well, and Ohio State shut out the Boilermakers 45-0 in Ohio Stadium. Will Howard threw for three touchdowns in the game and rushed for another.

The only other kickoff time that has been revealed this season is the noon kick against Michigan on Nov. 29.

any Buckeye offensive lineman.

Urban Meyer Rings Pregame Victory Bell

Ohio State's matchup with Penn State might not have been the type of highly anticipated game many thought it would be before the season, but the Buckeyes had a huge name as their victory bell ringer: former head coach Urban Meyer.

Meyer coached Ohio State from 2012-2018 and had an 83-9 record as the leader of the program. He led the Buckeyes to a national championship in 2014, and under Meyer's leadership, Ohio State went 7-0 against Michigan, won three Big Ten championships and never lost more than two games in a single season.

Meyer, whose teams went 6-1 against Penn State, joined former Buckeye two-time Heisman trophy winner Archie Griffin, former football coach John Cooper, and former NBA players Clark Kellogg and Michael Redd as victory bell ringers.

OSU Still Evaluating Right Guard Spot

It has not been an easy start to the year for Ohio State junior guard Tegra Tshabola. The second-year starter at right guard has struggled to find consistency on Ohio State's offensive line and has seen his playing time decrease over the last few weeks. In Ohio State's wins over Illinois and Wisconsin, Tshabola started each game but was rotated with sophomore interior offensive lineman Josh Padilla.

At his weekly press conference on Oct. 21 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said Ohio State was going to evaluate its right guard position during the off week.

"We're looking at everything," Day said. "We're looking at the stats not just of the last game, but the first half of the season, and figure out who and what gives us the best chance to win. We're going to evaluate everything and make sure we're doing what's right by the team."

Against the Badgers, Tshabola allowed two quarterback pressures, and according to Pro Football Focus, he was the Buckeyes' lowest-graded run blocker and pass blocker. Tshabola's struggles may be why Padilla played 26 snaps, his highest total this season to that date.

Padilla has taken advantage of his opportunities. In the Buckeyes' 34-16 win over Illinois on Oct. 11, Padilla played only 14 snaps, but he was the highest-graded offensive lineman (67.5).

He followed that up with an even better performance in Ohio State's 34-0 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 18, according to PFF. He finished the game with a 74.1 overall grade, which was the second-best mark of

DC Patricia Says OSU Has Been Amazing

Ohio State's defense is playing at a historic level through eight games, and perhaps no one is happier about the success of that unit than first-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia.

Filling in for Day on his radio show on Oct. 23, Patricia talked about how much he has enjoyed his tenure with the Buckeyes so far.

"It's been unbelievable," Patricia said. "This place is amazing. The fans are great, the stadium atmosphere, just all of it, the walk – my kids are in awe. They've seen some really cool things in sports, but this has been unbelievable for them."

Patricia has done an outstanding job leading the Buckeyes through eight games. Ohio State's defense ranked No. 1 in the country, allowing only 6.9 points per game, and the 214.8 yards per game they've given up is the best mark in the country.

"It brings you a lot of joy to be out there with them and watch what they can do on game days," Patricia said of his defense. "They work so hard during the course of the week. It's great to see that work come to fruition on game days."

Before coming to Ohio State, Patricia hadn't coached at the college level in over 20 years. Patricia said his relationship with Day and current co-defensive coordinator/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton played an important role in his decision to join Ohio State's staff.

"My relationship with Coach Day was first and foremost," Patricia said when

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Buckeye Family Loses Pair Of Beloved Star Centers

Bob Maggs and Nick Mangold, two men described as "Gentle Giants" and each of whom was a celebrated center on Ohio State championship football teams, passed away within two days of one another in late October, leaving behind grieving family and friends as well as a host of memories two decades apart for Buckeye Nation inhabitants.

Maggs was twice named to the All-Big Ten first-team offense and earned All-America honorable mention while helping lead the Buckeyes to a league co-championship in 1986 and an upset of eighth-ranked Texas A&M in the 1987 Cotton Bowl.

Maggs, who died unexpectedly Oct. 23 at the age of 61, was a prep All-American at Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney, where he helped win a state championship as a senior.

"The moment Bob put his hand on the ball, everyone in the stadium knew that all was well up the middle for the Scarlet and Gray," said former OSU assistant coach Steve Devine, who was in charge of centers and guards on Earle Bruce's staff from 1984 to 1987. "He honored the game with his play and pursuit of excellence. You could always count on Bob on or off the field. He cared about the right things and always put family, friends and teammates first. I had the honor to coach him, but to say that Maggsie didn't need much coaching is a fair statement."

After his football career, Maggs had a long and successful career as a sales consultant for an Ohio-based roofing company. He and his wife, Marcy, had three children, including current Ohio State walk-on quarterback Mason



Bob Maggs

Maggs, who is a two-time Academic All-Big Ten selection.

Two days after the passing of Maggs, Mangold lost a lengthy battle with kidney disease. The married father of four was just 41 years old.

"I have an unbelievable amount of respect for Nick as a man and as a football player," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said during his Oct. 27 press conference. "We talk about leaving legacies behind. When you hear that name in this building right here, people stand up straight. This is a guy who had a tremendous amount of character and left a lot of that behind."

Mangold was a three-sport star at Kettering (Ohio) Alter High School and earned All-Ohio honors in football as a senior. He was not given a star rating in high school by either Rivals.com or Scout.com but was nevertheless selected to play in the prestigious U.S. Army All-American Bowl in 2002.

"He didn't need any stars," former OSU recruiting coordinator Bill Conley told BSB. "His size was almost perfect for the position, and then when you watched how he played the position and how he finished plays, you knew he was going to be something special. He was a quiet leader – leading mostly by example – and just extremely valuable to the team. He was a great football player and an even better young man."

Mangold joined Ohio State in the fall of 2002 and was the backup to starting center Alex Stepanovich on the national championship team that season. Mangold stepped into a starting role the following year when Stepanovich suffered a knee injury, and when Stepanovich returned, he switched to a guard



Nick Mangold

position while Mangold remained at center.

He went on to earn first-team All-America honors in 2005 and then parlayed an excellent performance in the 2006 Senior Bowl into a first-round selection by the New York Jets.

That same year, Mangold was diagnosed with kidney disease due to a genetic defect. Despite that affliction, he played 11 NFL seasons with the Jets, earning two All-Pro honors and making seven trips to the Pro Bowl. Mangold started each of the 164 games in which he played in the league and was penalized only 11 times for holding over 4462 snaps – a career average of just one holding call every 405.6 snaps.

In 2022, Mangold was inducted into the Jets Ring of Honor, and he is currently one of 52 modern-era players under consideration for enshrinement into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Less than two weeks before his death, Mangold had announced via social media that his kidney disease had advanced to the point that he was seeking a transplant donor.

"After a rough summer, I'm undergoing dialysis as we look for a kidney transplant," he wrote. "Unfortunately, I do not have any family able to donate at this time, so that is why I am reaching out to you, our NY Jets and Ohio State communities. I am deeply grateful to anyone that would consider donating."

In the wake of Mangold's passing, social media was flooded with tributes from former coaches and teammates mourning his loss.

"Nick Mangold was everything you could wish for as a teammate, player, son, friend, husband, father and American," wrote former OSU head coach and current Ohio lieutenant governor Jim Tressel. "(He was) loyal, hardworking, selfless, caring, and loving. ... Love that man. We lost a great one."

- Mark Rea

asked why he decided to come to Ohio State. "Coach Walton and I coached together a long time ago. My decision to come back to college was one that I thought about for a long time. Being in the NFL was great. I was very lucky, very blessed, but I just missed that mentoring, that teaching, being able to help young men and be influential to their growth."

Downs Named Semifinalist For Thorpe Award

Ohio State star safety Caleb Downs has been named a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award for the second straight season. The award is given to the best defensive back in college football each year.

Downs was a finalist last season and is one of 15 to be named a semifinalist this year.

Downs has managed 39 total tackles (25 solo), with three tackles for loss, two interceptions and a quarterback hurry in eight games.

Last year, with 81 tackles, 7½ tackles for loss and two interceptions, Downs was the Big Ten Defensive Back of the Year and a unanimous first-team All-American. He was also a finalist for the Bednarik Award, given to the nation's best defender.

The finalists for the Thorpe Award will be released on Nov. 25 before the winner is announced on Dec. 12.

Sayin Earns Honors After Wisconsin Game

After the best statistical performance of his young career against Wisconsin, Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin was named both the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week and Freshman of the Week. He was also recognized nationally, earning Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Week honors.

Sayin was 36 of 42 passing (85.7 percent) against the Badgers for a career-high

393 yards. He also tied his high of four passing touchdowns in the game.

In the first quarter, Sayin completed 14 of 15 passes for 169 yards and two touchdowns, both to junior wide receiver Carnell Tate, who finished the game with six catches for 111 yards.

"I think it's what the game called for," Sayin said. "They were very stout in the box, and we saw the ability to take advantage of plays outside with the RPO game, and I think the receivers did a good job of spacing it out and catching. I think they made some great plays, making guys miss after."

After the game, Sayin became one of the front-runners for the Heisman Trophy, which Tate thinks Sayin is well deserving of.

"He's the truth," Tate said. "He's the Heisman winner. No question, ifs, ands or doubts. Each and every week, he goes out there to prove to us why he's a Heisman winner."

Sayin was already a down-ballot candidate for the Heisman Trophy due to his early-season performance, but the game he had against the Badgers skyrocketed him into being one of the top candidates, along with Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza and Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson.

This was Sayin's third time being named Big Ten Freshman of the Week, adding to his performances against Grambling State on Sept. 6 and Minnesota on Oct. 4. It's the first time he was named the conference's Offensive Player of the Week.

On the season, Sayin has completed 176 of 218 passes for 23 touchdowns and three interceptions. He has not thrown an interception against a Power Four team. He is No. 1 in passing efficiency (197.1) and completion percentage (80.7), and his 23 touchdowns are third in the nation.

Sayin was also named to the watch list for the Manning Award.

After initially being left off the 2025 preseason watch list, Sayin was among 22 new players added during the midseason update.

The Manning Award, which was created by the Allstate Sugar Bowl to honor Archie, Peyton and Eli Manning, is the only quarterback award that factors in bowl-game performances. The finalists for the award will be announced on Dec. 4, 2025, with the winner to be named following the conclusion of the College Football Playoff.

Sayin, Tate Top PFF Grades Vs UW

For the third straight week, Sayin was Ohio State's highest graded player according to Pro Football Focus' weekly ratings.

Sayin earned a 91.4 grade against Wisconsin, which was ranked third among quarterbacks in Week 9, and his 92.3 passing grade was the best of all FBS quarterbacks this season. Sayin is also now the only Buckeye to record an "elite" grade or a rating above 90 multiple times this season.

Sayin's favorite target of late, Tate, was the Buckeyes' second-highest-graded player (82.5). The contest was Tate's second

two-touchdown game in his three years at Ohio State and the second-best yardage total of his career.

Linebacker Payton Pierce was Ohio State's best defensive player (80.8) according to PFF. He finished his outing against the Badgers with two tackles.

The two players on Ohio State's right side of its offensive line, Tshabola and right tackle Phillip Daniels, were the Buckeyes' two worst graded players with at least five snaps. Tshabola earned the worst rating on the team with a 42.1 grade on 44 snaps, while Daniels had a 44.7 grade on 70 snaps. Left tackle Austin Siereveld led all offensive linemen with a 75.4 grade on 70 snaps.

Inniss Picks Sayin For Heisman

Ohio State hasn't had a player win the Heisman Trophy since quarterback Troy Smith in the 2006 season, but Inniss thinks that streak ends this season with Sayin.

Inniss said that while the redshirt-freshman quarterback has gained national attention, the longer he continues his impressive performance this season, Sayin

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hasn't changed his approach to the game.

"He's been the same. Julian is Julian," Inniss said. "He comes in here and he works every day. His head doesn't get too big. He's very humble. He's definitely going to win (the Heisman) for sure."

After the Buckeyes took a conservative offensive approach to begin the season

against Texas, they have brought Sayin along slowly, which seems to have paid off to this point.

Sayin is looking like he could threaten to set the all-time record for best completion percentage in a college football season. His 80.7 percent completion rate would set that mark over former Oregon quarterback Bo Nix's 77.45 percent in 2023 with the Ducks. But with at least five games to go this season, Sayin will have to keep up his historic pace to reach that.

Inniss thinks that Sayin will prove to be able to keep up his performance.

"They'll see it the rest of the year," Inniss said. "There's all these other quarterbacks up there with him, but he's different. He's the best, and they'll see."

Tate Gifted Gloves By NFL HOFer

Following Ohio State's win over Wisconsin, Tate received a special gift in the mail on Oct. 24 for his standout catch in

the game.

Hall of Fame wide receiver and current ESPN analyst Randy Moss – who hosts the "You Got Mossed" segment on "Monday Night Countdown" and "Sunday NFL Countdown," showcasing the best jump-ball skills in all of football – gifted Tate a pair of custom receiver gloves printed with the segment's slogan and signed by Moss himself.

During the wide receivers' film study, offensive coordinator Brian Hartline showed his receiver room Tate's highlight before surprising the Chicago native with the gloves.

Just under nine minutes into the first quarter, Ohio State was backed up on third-and-11 before Sayin unleashed a 33-yard bomb to Tate, who went up and over two Wisconsin defenders in the back of the end zone to secure the touchdown catch.

Through eight games, Tate has amassed 39 receptions for 711 yards and seven touchdowns.

LeBron Gifts Buckeyes OSU-Themed Cleats

Los Angeles Lakers forward and Ohio State superfan LeBron James has once again made a generous donation to Ohio State. James, a longtime Buckeye fan and Akron native, gifted the Ohio State football team custom white, scarlet and black cleats before its win over Penn State.

In the video posted to Twitter, James expressed his appreciation for Ohio State before showcasing the custom Buckeye cleats.

"Ohio State means a lot to me," James said in the video. "If you've followed my journey, I'm a big-time football fan. I played football all the way through high school. It's always been fulfilling to me and an honor for me to be able to give back. So when the Ohio State Buckeyes play Penn State, I've got a special gift for you all."

This isn't the first time James has bestowed his riches upon the Buckeyes. He has donated both cleats and Beats head-

BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

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

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

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

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

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The next print issue of BSB does not mail until Nov. 11. 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 of the Ohio State sports activity. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com.

BuckeyeSports.com 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. For the Penn State game, Sam Cipriani saw it 33-10, Bobby Gorbett 20-10, and Greg Wilson 28-9.

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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yards leader, totaling 948 receiving yards, while averaging a whopping 118.5 yards per game. Smith-Njigba has recorded 117 more yards than the NFL's second-leading receiver, Ja'Marr Chase of the Cincinnati Bengals. He's also added four receiving touchdowns.

Day then shifted his focus to Egbuka, a receiver he had the chance to develop over four seasons at Ohio State. Egbuka could have left for the NFL draft after his junior season but decided to return to the Buckeyes for one final year of development and to finish Ohio State's unfinished business.

Day expressed the importance of getting a full four years of development at the collegiate level, citing Egbuka's experience as what has fueled his strong rookie season.

"Emeka is a great example of somebody that could have gone to the NFL after three years and had a good career, but he decided to come back and win a national championship, and after four years of college play, he was so much more prepared for the NFL, and you're seeing an immediate impact," Day said.

Egbuka was eighth in the league with 562 receiving yards, despite fighting through a hamstring injury. The Buccaneers rookie is averaging 70.3 yards per game, and is tied for eighth in the NFL with five receiving touchdowns.

Nicklaus Wins \$50M In Defamation Suit

Ohio State golf legend Jack Nicklaus has won \$50 million in a defamation lawsuit against his former business partners. A six-person jury in Palm Beach County, Fla., ruled on Oct. 21 that Nicklaus Companies had damaged the reputation of Nicklaus.

According to the lawsuit, Nicklaus claimed that people at the company spread false stories that the former golfer had considered a \$750 million deal to join the LIV Golf League, backed by Saudi Arabia, and that he was no longer mentally fit to man-

Continued On Page 8

phones to Ohio State's football and men's and women's basketball teams.

PSU QB Fulfills Dream Of Playing In 'Shoe

Penn State quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer, who went to high school at Olentangy in Lewis Center, Ohio, said on Oct. 28 that he was thrilled for the opportunity to play in Ohio Stadium, calling it "a dream come true."

"Since I was a kid, I dreamed about playing in that stadium, so it's going to be cool to go back home and be able to have the chance to do that," Grunkemeyer said. "Obviously, everyone around where I'm from is a Buckeye fan. Coming here, I've obviously grown to be a huge Penn State fan, so going back will be super fun. I always watched the Penn State-Ohio State games, and I think that just is a dream come true, being able to play in it."

Coming out of Olentangy, Grunkemeyer was the No. 7-ranked quarterback, the fifth-ranked player in Ohio, and No. 105 overall prospect in the class of 2024. Despite being so close to campus, Grunkemeyer never received an offer from Ohio State.

Day gave high praise to Grunkemeyer and his family on Oct. 28, stating that the young quarterback's character and work ethic have stood out since his time at Olentangy.

"I think he's a very talented young man," Day said. "Anybody you speak to in the Olentangy High School or in the area growing up, he's got a great family. He's a great leader and a very intelligent, competitive player that has a bright future in the game."

Day added that while Grunkemeyer's start against Ohio State will be just the second of his career following Drew Allar's season-ending injury two weeks ago, he believes the redshirt freshman has plenty of potential.

"This is just his second start, but you

can see the talent on the field," Day said. "You can see that he's got leadership skills. And he obviously had a great career here while he was in high school, and I think very, very highly of him."

In the game against the Buckeyes, Grunkemeyer completed 19 of 28 passes for 145 yards and an interception.

Day Commends Egbuka, Smith-Njigba

During an appearance on "The Insiders" with NFL Network's Tom Pelissero on Oct. 21, Day lauded former Buckeye wide receivers Emeka Egbuka of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Jaxon Smith-Njigba of the Seattle Seahawks.

Day said he had the opportunity to meet with Smith-Njigba during Ohio State's trip to Washington, adding that seeing his former receiver thriving at the next level and still connected to the Buckeye program was a special moment for him and the team.

"We had a game at Washington this past month, and it was great to see Jaxon there," Day said. "I mean, he looks great. Just to see him around the team, on the sideline, it gave us all a bolt of energy because Jaxon is a great competitor, and he has a great personality. It doesn't take long to get around him just to see how electric he is, and he makes those around him better."

Through eight games played, Smith-Njigba was the NFL's receiving



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age his affairs because he was suffering from dementia.

The defense claimed that the company executives never tried to defame Nicklaus, and the case was a business dispute. They said that Nicklaus' reputation wasn't damaged and that they would not have tried to damage his reputation since the company shares the Nicklaus name.

The owner and executive chairman of

Nicklaus companies, Howard Milstein, and executive Andrew O'Brien were named as individual defendants in the case, but they were not found personally liable.

Earlier this year, Nicklaus companies filed a lawsuit against Nicklaus to try to prevent the golfer from using his name, image and likeness to promote his golf course design business, but that case was dismissed by a New York judge, allowing Nicklaus to continue to design golf courses under his own name.

The legendary golfer commented on the lawsuit nearly a week after the ruling.

"I did this thing more for my family than for me," Nicklaus told The Palm Beach Post. "My legacy that I will have through the years will be very important to my family. I'm 85 years old. How long will I be around? I don't know. It's not about me. It's about the future and family."

Former Buckeye Sanders Dies At Age 84

Ohio State lost another former player when Daryl Sanders, a member of the

1961 Ohio State championship team, died of a heart attack on Oct. 5 at the age of 84.

Sanders played under former head coach Woody Hayes and was coached by future Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler, who was the offensive line coach in Columbus at the time.

Sanders played right tackle for the Buckeyes in 1961 when the team finished the year ranked No. 1 by the Football Writers Association of America. That team led the Big Ten in rushing (279.3 yards per game), total offense (371.5 yards per game) and scoring (29.8 points per game).

In 2011, Sanders told BSB that his favorite memory of that season was beating Michigan 50-20 in Ann Arbor.

"You always remember beating Michigan at Michigan," he said. "That's one of those things you remember for the rest of your life."

But more so, Sanders appreciated the relationships he built at Ohio State, keeping ties with his former teammates for years after he left the school.

"Fifty years ago, Woody said some of

the men in this room are your best friends for life, and it's true," Sanders told BSB 14 years ago.

Sanders was selected in the first round of the 1963 NFL draft by the Detroit Lions as the No. 12 overall pick. He started at left tackle for the Lions from 1963-66.

Penn State Prize Winner Named

Rick Zagar of Auburn Township, Ohio, was the winner of Buckeye Sports Bulletin's Ohio State-Penn State Weekend contest.

Mr. Zagar not only won a pair of tickets to the game, but he also won a \$50 College Traditions gift card, tailgate treats from the popular City Barbeque and a victory celebration at Roosters – a fun, casual joint.

While there are many Roosters locations around Columbus and the state, Mr. Zagar and guest had the option to celebrate near Ohio Stadium with the recent reopening of the Olentangy River Road location after a lengthy remodeling following a fire in July of 2024.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

To hear Pepper Johnson tell it, there were "gremlins" at work as the Ohio State defense did its best to stop the pesky Gophers of Minnesota on Oct. 26 in a 23-19 Buckeye win.

Gopher quarterback Rickey Foggie completed his first 11 passes, drove his team downfield to where he personally could score two touchdowns and literally had a field day against the Buckeye defense.

"We were disappointed that we couldn't stop him," Johnson said. "But it was like they had a little man in our defensive huddle. We tried to play the pitch, and the quarterback would keep it. We play for the quarterback to keep it, and he would pitch it, or he'd run the fullback up the middle. That's the way they were hurting us on that nine-minute drive."

35 Years Ago — 1990

To say that Ohio State's offense had been running on all cylinders the last two weeks was like saying that Babe Ruth was a pretty good power hitter.

They were both gross understatements.

After landing a 52-23 haymaker on Minnesota, a team which had previously been undefeated in three Big Ten contests, the Buckeyes sailed uncontested into fourth place in the conference 1½ games behind co-leaders Iowa and Illinois and just a half game back of the Gophers.

More importantly for Ohio State had been the way the team had moved from the nether regions of the conference standings into the upper division.

The Buckeyes had done it by bludgeoning two straight opponents. Nearly no one was convinced after a 42-2 pasting of Purdue on Oct. 20, since the Boilermakers had been racked by defensive injuries. But the effort against Minnesota was something a bit different.

30 Years Ago — 1995

On a day when such Buckeye greats as Tom Cousineau, Butch Reynolds and Kelly McCormick were inducted into the OSU Athletic Hall of Fame, a whole team of Buckeyes were bucking for their place in history.

Well, at least the Buckeyes who played in the first half.

Ohio State had rolled up a school-record 56 first-half points and then put the plane on autopilot and coasted to a 56-35 win over 25th-ranked Iowa on Hall of Fame Day on Oct. 28 at Ohio Stadium.

The win improved OSU's mark to 8-0 overall and 4-0 in Big Ten play and allowed the Buckeyes to keep pace in the conference with Northwestern (7-1, 5-0), which eked out a 17-14 win, spoiling homecoming for rival Illinois.

25 Years Ago — 2000

In the wake of Ohio State's stunning home defeat to Minnesota on Oct. 21, the newspaper columns, radio talk shows and Internet message boards were ablaze with criticism of quarterback Steve Bellisari and the OSU offense.

After all, Bellisari was just 11 of 28 passing for 130 yards in the 29-17 loss to the Gophers.

But the junior captain from Boca Raton, Fla., rebounded in a big way to spearhead OSU's 38-10 win at Iowa on Oct. 28. Bellisari had career highs in completions (17), passing yards (315) and touchdowns (three) as the Buckeyes routed the hapless Hawkeyes.

Likewise, his two main receivers, Reggie Germany and Ken-Yon Rambo, came up big at Iowa as each notched his first touchdown catch of the season.

"I don't think there's a question that we executed the passing game better today than we did last week," said OSU coach John Cooper after his team improved to 6-1 overall and 3-1 in Big Ten play.

20 Years Ago — 2005

Ted Ginn Jr. hadn't had much to smile about in 2005.

After adorning many of the preseason college football magazines and getting hyped as a possible Heisman Trophy candidate, things began going south for the Ohio State sophomore in August.

His father, Ted Sr., had a health scare right before the season began, then opposing teams started to key on him – both as a receiver and a kick returner – leading to diminished stats and questions about everything from his ability to his psyche.

Through it all, however, Ginn appeared to remain upbeat even though his 100,000-watt smile seemed to have lost some of its luster.

The smile was back in full view on Oct. 22, though, after the speedster accounted for 279 all-purpose yards in the Buckeyes' 41-10 blowout of Indiana.

"I never got down on myself," Ginn said. "But it's always good for your confidence when you can make a play. I gained a little bit today, and I think the team gained a lot."

15 Years Ago — 2010

The Ohio State football team kept itself alive in the hunt for the Big Ten and perhaps national titles and washed out the taste of two recent losses with a 49-0 blasting of visiting Purdue.

The victory handed the Boilermakers their first conference loss of the season and improved No. 11 OSU to 3-1 in the league and 7-1 overall. In the process, the Buckeyes avoided becoming the second team in Jim Tressell's tenure as head coach to endure a losing streak while also exacting some revenge on a stunning upset suffered the previous season at the hands of the unranked Boilermakers.

Before Ohio State hosted Miami (Fla.) in the second week of the season, junior quarterback Terrelle Pryor said he planned to watch that game again to remind him what it felt like to suffer a loss.

"I hate losing," he said later in September. "I can't really explain it to you. I don't want to feel that way again. I never thought I would feel that way. It's a sport. We all hate losing."

10 Years Ago — 2015

Two weeks after delivering a knockout blow against Rutgers in its most lopsided win of the season, Ohio State left its game against Minnesota bruised and battered.

Without the quarterback who had finally seized the starting job in a 49-7 demolition of the Scarlet Knights, the Buckeyes looked flat in a 28-14 win over the Golden Gophers. In what had become a recurring observation for the 2015 season, Ohio State didn't play its best. The team that entered the season with historic expectations looked pedestrian at times under the bright lights of Ohio Stadium on Nov. 7.

Cardale Jones, starting for the suspended J.T. Barrett at quarterback, was sacked four times on the night. Running back Ezekiel Elliott cleared the century mark on the ground once again,

but nothing came easy for the junior as his long run of the night was just 15 yards and his average of 4.4 yards per carry was the second lowest of the season.

"The hard thing is, we don't want to just survive, we want to thrive around here," linebacker Joshua Perry said. "We know how serious it is in November. The Big Ten, we've got tough games coming up. It's going to be tough for everybody, but we know that you can't really achieve your goals at the end of the year if you're not playing well in November."

Five Years Ago — 2020

Every time Ohio State travelled to Penn State, the Buckeyes were met by one of the most intimidating atmospheres in college football. More than 110,000 screaming fans clad in white, shaking their pompoms and creating a deafening roar that makes it difficult for even the best quarterbacks to communicate with their teammates.

That year, though, the seats were mostly empty, aside from the cardboard cutouts in the student section and family members scattered across the stands. But had the stadium been full, it wouldn't have taken Ohio State very long to silence the crowd during its 38-25 win on Oct. 31.

On the first play from scrimmage, sophomore wide receiver Garrett Wilson took a handoff on an end-around and raced 62 yards down the sideline to the Nittany Lions' 13-yard line. Two plays later, sophomore running back Master Teague powered his way into the end zone to give the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead just 1:17 into the game.

"I thought, offensively, we got off to a good start," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "I thought we had good balance, and we controlled the ball."

One Year Ago — 2024

Day had won a lot of games as head coach at Ohio State – 63 of them to be exact – but he might not have ever been more jubilant about one than he was after taking down No. 3 Penn State on Nov. 2 in front of a Beaver Stadium-record 111,030 fans.

After the 20-13 win, Day walked around the field with a giant smile spread across his face, hugging every Ohio State coach and player in sight to celebrate the big victory, embracing his offensive coordinator and mentor Chip Kelly as soon as he emerged from the tunnel and excitedly shaking him around before wrapping him up in another hug.

After the loss at Oregon on Oct. 12, there was a lot of talk about Day's ability to win "the big game" – specifically top-five matchups, in which the head coach had a 2-7 record coming into State College – and how he was leading one of the most talented teams in recent college football memory to an underwhelming season.

Like Day and most other head coaches normally do, he tried to ignore the outside noise and continue to push forward, but it was obvious after the game that the win against the Nittany Lions had a major impact on him, and he acknowledged that when he spoke to the media.

"There's probably a lot there to unpack and I'm not going to get into all of it, but there's a lot that goes into being the head coach at Ohio State," Day said. "You can say you ignore everything that goes on, but your players read it, your coaches read it, your staff members read it, your families read it, and you have to stay strong in those moments. But that entire team, our families, they all believed."

Buckeyes Air It Out To Roar Past Nittany Lions

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When the outcome surprisingly was still in doubt, No. 1 Ohio State went to its biggest stars to repel a challenge from Penn State.

Long pass plays from Julian Sayin to Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith led to a pair of touchdowns to start a string of 21 unanswered points in the second half to turn a three-point halftime lead into a 38-14 victory at Ohio Stadium on Nov. 1.

The crisp, sunny 51-degree day after Halloween provided plenty of treats for the 105,517 fans.

Sayin threw for 316 yards with four touchdowns, and Smith and Tate each had more than 100 yards to back a defense that dominated the final two quarters for the Buckeyes (8-0, 5-0).

Tate and Smith both had 57-yard catches to set up a 1-yard run by CJ Donaldson Jr. and a 1-yard catch by Bennett Christian, respectively, to make it 31-14 in the third quarter.

OSU has beaten the Nittany Lions (3-5, 0-5) nine straight times. PSU has lost five straight overall.

Sayin was 20 of 23, Tate had 124 yards and a score off five catches, and Smith made six catches for 123 yards and two touchdowns, including a wild one-handed grab at the goal line off a deflection to make it 38-14.

One Big Mistake

Penn State, after the opening kickoff, punched the Buckeyes in the mouth on the first play of the game when Kaytron Allen took off on a 26-yard run to the OSU 49. But three plays produced just 7 yards, and interim coach Terry Smith, replacing the fired James Franklin, decided to punt on fourth-and-3.

A 31-yarder put the ball at the 11, and Sayin methodically picked apart the defense for an 89-yard drive that took 11 plays and 6:10 off the clock for a 7-0 lead at the 6:15 mark when he found Smith for a 14-yard touchdown on third down.

Sayin was 6 for 6 for 71 yards, and Smith had three receptions for 42 yards during the drive.

It started with a 20-yard pass to Tate. Bo Jackson, after a 4-yard loss on his first carry, followed with a 9-yard gain. Smith's 18-yard catch moved the ball to the PSU 46. On second down, Smith's grab on a slant for 10 yards set up a first down at the 33.

Jackson ran for 8 and Donaldson for 4. Tight end Max Klare got 6 yards on a catch, and Donaldson ran for 1 to the 14 before Sayin lasered a pass to Smith across the middle at the 2 and he took it in.

The next OSU possession began at its 25 after a 43-yard punt. It resulted in a 22-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding at 14:08 of the second quarter.

On the second snap, a roughing-the-passer penalty placed the ball at the OSU 41. The next play went for 29 on a Brandon Inniss catch to the 30.

Sayin had his first incompleteness on his eighth pass when he threw the ball away under pressure. Isaiah West ran for 11 then 1. Inniss' catch for 7 meant a third-and-2 from the 11, and Donaldson burst through for 5 yards. He lost 1 yard on the final play of the



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO STOPPING HIM — The sight of receiver Carnell Tate burning the defense has become commonplace this season. He has eight catches of 40-plus yards, including a 57-yarder and a 45-yard TD against Penn State on Nov. 1 when he had five receptions for 124 yards.

quarter in which the Buckeyes led in yards 142-40, and Sayin was 8 of 9 for 107 yards.

Tate had a reception for 3 to the 4 to open the second quarter, but a third-down pass was incomplete.

The Nittany Lions responded with a strong 75-yard, 15-play, 7:50 drive to pull to within three at 10-7 at 6:18 on a 3-yard, third-down run by Nick Singleton.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer, in his second start replacing the injured Drew Allar, moved the Nittany Lions down the field just as he dreamed of growing up in nearby Lewis Center, Ohio.

He had a third-down completion of 9 yards to Devonte Ross to the PSU 35, a 16-yarder to Singleton and another third-down toss to Liam Clifford to the 24. A jet sweep to Singleton gained 13 to the 9.

After two runs, PSU faced a third-and-goal from the 3, and Singleton ran left for the score.

It was the first TD allowed by Ohio State in a first half this season.

Sayin's 45-yard TD pass to Tate made it 17-7 with 3:41 left in the half.

That wasn't the most important play. The Buckeyes were in danger of giving the ball right back to Penn State when Sayin on third-and-5 from the 30 had to scramble for 9 yards to keep the drive alive.

He then hit Smith for 13 to the PSU 48, and Jackson ran for 3 before Sayin lofted a pass to Tate at the 3 and he dragged the defender into the end zone.

A 63-yard punt into the end zone by Gabe Nwosu gave the Buckeyes the ball at the 20 with 2:00 left, but disaster struck on the first play when Donaldson was stripped of the ball and Chaz Coleman recovered it at the 22 and made a return of 9 yards to 13 with 1:48

remaining.

Two runs by Allen netted 4 yards to the 9, and a shovel pass to him gained 8 to the 1 before Allen pushed his way in to make it 17-14 with 20 seconds left to stun the stadium. It took four plays and 1:28 to go the 13 yards.

OSU had 221 total yards to 140 for the Nittany Lions in the first half. Sayin was 11 of 14 for 168 yards while Grunkemeyer went 7 of 12 for 64 yards. OSU rushed for 53 yards, Penn State 76.

Bombs Away

The Sayin-Tate connection led to a quick 24-14 lead at 12:18 of the third quarter after starting from the 25 following a touchback.

Will Kacmarek had a 14-yard catch before Tate got behind everyone to haul in a pass at the 20. He made it to the 4 before being tackled for a 57-yard gain, his eighth this season of 40-plus yards.

Jackson got 3 yards on two carries. Donaldson came in and got the needed yard going over left tackle.

Penn State had to punt after a third-and-6

play from its 37 when Kenyatta Jackson Jr. sacked Grunkemeyer for a loss of 8 yards. A 55-yard punt to the 16 ensued.

Ohio State needed seven plays and 4:31 to go 84 yards for a 31-14 score at 3:21.

A screen pass to Inniss gained 6 yards prior to a 57-yard catch for Smith to the 21. A pass in the backfield to Tate lost a yard, and a toss to Inniss lost another, but OSU got a reprieve on third down when Sayin threw to Klare at the goal line, with the result being a pass interference call on PSU to give the Buckeyes a first down at the 8.

Jackson got 2, and Donaldson got 5 more to the 1. Sayin faked a handoff and rolled right to spot Christian for the TD in the back of the end zone.

PSU's next series ended with an 11-yard sack by Arvell Reese at the Nittany Lions' 20.

Penn State's next drive, which followed OSU's first punt, died at the PSU 14 when Kenyatta Jackson had a sack of 14 yards.

The Buckeyes made it 38-14 with 9:43 to play on a dazzling 11-yard catch by Smith after Bo Jackson scorched the defense with a 51-yard run.

Smith was on a post pattern when the ball was tipped to the 1. He was in midair when he used his right hand to snare the ball and carry it into the end zone.

"See ball. Get ball," Smith said.

The Nittany Lions later had a first-and-goal from the 9 with the aid of an unnecessary roughness penalty on All-America safety Caleb Downs for a high, hard hit on Khalil Dinkins. He was also called for targeting but avoided being ejected and missing the first half vs. Purdue on Nov. 8 when the targeting call was overturned.

On fourth-and-7, Downs made an interception in the end zone with 4:29 left.

The Buckeyes then had seven carries for 38 yards before Sayin lost 2 on a kneel down to end the game at the PSU 42.

After halftime, the Buckeye defense held Penn State to 60 total yards, including minus-21 yards rushing.

Notes

The Buckeyes gained 480 yards with 164 coming on the ground (5.1 average per carry). PSU totaled 200 and had 55 yards on 31 carries for a 1.8 average. ... Grunkemeyer was 19 of 28 for 145 yards and an interception, and Clifford, a wide receiver, had one incompleteness. ... The Buckeyes had four sacks for 39 yards. Arvell Reese, who had 12 tackles (five solo), had a sack for 11 yards, Jackson's two went for 22, and Eddrick Houston got one for 6 yards.

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Many Jumping On Sayin Heisman Trophy Train

Continued From Page 1

nell Tate and didn't stop there.

Sayin was 6 of 6 throwing the ball for 71 yards and a 14-yard touchdown to Jeremiah Smith, who had three catches for 42 of those yards.

Since Knowles would have known the Ohio State offense well after being in Columbus for three seasons, there were questions going into this game about whether the Buckeyes were going to be able to remain as efficient offensively as they have been, or if they would have to change anything they were doing to counter that.

There seemed to be some truth to that idea. On the drive, offensive coordinator Brian Hartline sent his unit onto the field in many different formations, making substitutions often to change the personnel groupings on the field.

At one point, the Buckeyes lined up in what looked like a goal-line formation at the Penn State 25-yard line, a play that ended in 4 yards on the ground for CJ Donaldson Jr.

But Day said that the Buckeyes made sure they weren't changing their offense because of who they were going against and said it was more about confusing the defense on the field, which seemed to be the case at times on the first drive when the Nittany Lions were taking extra time to get lined up across the line of scrimmage.

"We wanted to change up the looks and the personnel groupings and make the defense a little bit uncomfortable and not be able to anticipate what they were getting," Day said after the game. "We certainly weren't going to reengineer our offense based on the team that we were going against. We found ourselves in some different formations, and then we shifted and moved it around so that they couldn't really nail us down."

Ultimately, it didn't seem to matter how uncomfortable the Nittany Lions' defense was. Whether it was the scheme thought up and called by Knowles or the fact that the Buckeye wide receivers are too tough to keep in check, Ohio State mostly did what it wanted to on that side of the ball for much of the contest.

The Buckeyes finished with a total of 480 yards, and it was the same three players who dominated the first drive who were in control the rest of the game as well.

Sayin finished 20 of 23 passing for 316 yards and four touchdowns, while Smith had six catches for 123 yards and two touchdowns and Tate had five receptions for 124 yards and a score.

Out of the three, it was Sayin who stood out the most. Through eight games, Sayin continues to be one of the most efficient quarterbacks in the country, and with his

87.0 percent completion rate against Penn State, he moves one step closer to breaking the all-time season national record of 77.45 percent.

But even though the 80.7 completion percentage shows up next to Sayin's name when you check the Buckeyes' season stats, he didn't take sole credit for it.

"It's really a team stat because of the way the offensive line has to block and the way that the receivers have to catch the ball," Sayin said. "We had a (tipped pass) today, and Jeremiah ends up catching that. It's stuff like that where the receivers do a great job, and the running backs do a great job in pass protection. The offensive line gives me time to go through my reads. It's really a team stat."

If the Buckeyes end up accomplishing all of their goals, they are only halfway through what would be a 16-game season, but through the first half of that, Sayin continues to improve every week.

"Julian's getting more and more confidence every day," Day said. "He works at it. The preparation that he puts in in that quarterback room is starting to show. His mind works as quick as the ball comes out. He's obviously accurate."

Day couldn't help but smile postgame when talking about his quarterback, which he did for nearly half the time he was at the lectern for his press conference. But Say-

in deserved the recognition for the way he played.

The game helped him jump into first place for betting odds to win the Heisman Trophy above Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza and Alabama signal caller Ty Simpson.

Asked if Sayin is the best quarterback in the country, Day bit his tongue and decided not to make any bold proclamations on the matter, noting that the full season of work is what matters most when making a claim like that.

"I shouldn't say that I don't know what else is out there. I've watched them from afar. There are some really good quarterbacks across the country this year. There's a lot of good quarterbacks in the conference," Day said. "It will be told when the season is over. It's easy to make proclamations on where guys are in Week 8, Week 9 and Week 10. But we have to see what the season holds for us and the progress that's made, and then we'll go from there."

But the head coach couldn't hold back from showing some support for his quarterback.

"I do think that if Julian continues to play the way that he's playing, he deserves to be in the (Heisman) conversation at the very least," he said.

Sayin has also already received some



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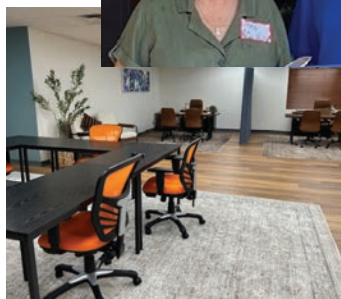
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SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT JUST A PASSER — If Julian Sayin is going to win the Heisman Trophy, it will be because of his arm, but his legs may well win games. He had a critical 9-yard scramble in the second quarter to keep a drive alive that led to a 45-yard touchdown pass to Carnell Tate and a 17-7 lead against Penn State.

support from his teammates, with Tate and Brandon Inniss both saying they believe he should win the Heisman. Downs added to that after the win over Penn State, and if Sayin's play continues, he likely won't be the last.

On Downs' podcast "Downs 2 Business" on Oct. 29, Sayin appeared and said he believes that Simpson should win the award, but Downs disagreed and still does.

"I made the correction at that moment, but J-Cool (Sayin) for the Heisman, that's what I'm going with," Downs said. "He's played on an elite level. You saw the explosive plays we had today, and he played at an elite level, even the third down when he broke the pocket."

While Sayin was working with pinpoint accuracy in the passing game, it may have been his legs that helped him put together his most impressive play.

In the second quarter, Penn State rushed four but got into the backfield quickly when left tackle Austin Sieraveld was beaten, which has seldom happened this year. Sayin ran around the rush and evaded another potential tackler to find an open hole up the middle and run for a first down.

The play came on a third-and-5 in the second quarter when the Buckeyes were up just 10-7 after Penn State answered a 22-yard field goal with a touchdown. Had Sayin been caught in the backfield and brought down, the Buckeyes would have been forced to punt since they were still on their own

side of the field, and Penn State might have taken advantage of the momentum it had.

Day was extremely impressed with how Sayin was able to come up big on that play.

"I think one of the biggest plays of the game was the scramble he had," Day said. "I would love to see him have two hands on the ball there, but that was a big scramble in that spot. You didn't know where the game was going. That's what happens in those games. You fumble the ball in the first half, and it's a three-point game at halftime. If you don't get that first down, who knows where the game goes."

It was one of many examples of Sayin having a good feel for the pocket and knowing when it's collapsing on him, which many quarterbacks aren't able to master. But even in his first year starting at the college level, Sayin has shown that he already has that feel, which had Day smiling after the game about the man he has at the quarterback position.

"That's something that's very hard to teach, when you can feel the rush and not have your eyes on it," Day said. "Your eyes can be down the field, and you can anticipate what's happening, and the ball comes out. I'd like to tell you that we coached that, but we don't. He has that feel. That's something that makes quarterbacks special, and he has that trait."

His 9-yard run ultimately led to a 45-yard touchdown pass to Tate, which looked very similar to many other connections the two

have had so far this season.

But after a Donaldson fumble and a Penn State touchdown due to the short field it was left with, the Buckeyes went into the half up just 17-14.

At that point, it felt like some of the other Ohio State-Penn State games in years past, that the game was up for grabs for whichever team was ready to take it in the second half.

It was the Buckeyes who came out of the locker room and grabbed the advantage. Sayin and Tate did so quickly.

On the second play of the third quarter, the two connected yet again for a deep pass, this one a 57-yarder that ended up being stopped 4 yards short of the goal line. Donaldson finished the drive with one of his 1-yard tumbles into the end zone, and it was all Buckeyes from there on.

The next time Ohio State got the ball, Sayin launched yet another 57-yard pass, this one to Smith, which landed the Buckeyes a yard outside of the Nittany Lions' red zone.

After being on the receiving end of multiple deep balls thrown by Sayin this season, Smith was asked if his current quarterback is the best he has ever played with at throwing the deep ball. Smith answered in the affirmative.

"Yeah, he's probably the best that I've been around at throwing the deep ball," he said.

Sayin is becoming one of many great quarterbacks to have gone through Ohio State, which is becoming a more common happening with Day as head coach. But Day didn't take credit for the development of the

signal callers, giving it to his coordinators and position coaches, as well as the players who are actually putting the performance on the field.

"It comes down to everybody involved. It starts with (Hartline) as the coordinator, and it goes down to (quarterbacks coach) Billy (Fessler) as the position coach and everybody involved with it," Day said. "Then it goes to Julian and the guys who play the position."

It was partly the past success stories that Day has had with quarterback development that brought Sayin to Ohio State when legendary Alabama head coach Nick Saban retired.

"When you see guys like Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud throwing to guys like Garrett Wilson and (Chris) Olave when I was growing up watching it – it definitely influenced me because of the quarterback development that's here with Coach Day and then the receivers that we have here, who are just able to make plays whenever the ball is in the air."

Just in case anyone forgot about Ohio State's elite wide receivers while the Sayin praise was happening postgame, Day made sure to remind everyone that the Buckeyes have the best receiving corps in the country, in his opinion.

"By the way, when I said that about Julian Sayin, I also feel like Carnell and Jeremiah – if there's two better wide receivers in the country, I'd like to see them," he said. "They deserve to be up for a lot of awards too, as we're getting towards the end of the season."



OSU Overcomes Turnover To Dominate PSU

Ohio State's 38-14 win over Penn State on Nov. 1 was the classic tale of two halves. In the first half, the Buckeyes struggled in the trenches, had a costly turnover, and uncharacteristically had some defensive issues when the Nittany Lions got in the red zone.

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

The first-half woes meant the heavily favored Buckeyes led only 17-14 at halftime over Penn State.

"I think it's a great example for everybody that when you turn the ball over, especially down there, you put yourself at risk," said coach Ryan Day of Ohio State's first half. "All the work that gets put in can be all for naught if we don't take care of the football. It's a lesson learned. We came in at halftime, and we were up by three. You would have thought we were down by 21."

The Buckeyes' turnover came right before halftime, when the game was going as predicted to that point. Holding a 17-7 advantage with only two minutes left before halftime, Ohio State appeared poised to add to that lead.

However, on a first-and-10 run, senior running back CJ Donaldson Jr. was met at the line of scrimmage by Penn State linebacker Amare Campbell, who stripped the ball loose. Nittany Lion defensive end Chaz Coleman was there to hop on the loose ball and set up his offense in good field position at Ohio State's 13-yard line.

Ohio State's defense, which hadn't given up a first-half touchdown all season heading into the game, couldn't bail out the offense. The Buckeyes were stout enough on first and second down to force a third-and-6,

but Penn State converted when redshirt freshman quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer flipped the ball to senior running back Kaytron Allen for an 8-yard gain.

One play later, Allen gave the Nittany Lions their second touchdown of the half with a 1-yard plunge.

"We felt like we were playing well in certain areas, but they got a couple of first downs on us, we fumbled and they scored," Day said. "It was a little frustrating. We wanted to be at least winning by 10. Then to turn around and only be up three, it was like, 'You've got to be kidding me.'"

"We were getting the ball to start the second half, and we were going to be somewhat aggressive, but not reckless (to finish the first half). We wanted to finish with the ball or points. So for us to fumble on that first play, that was very frustrating."

Despite the negative ending to the first half, Day said his message to the team in the locker room was simply to hang on to the ball.

"The message at halftime was that if we take care of the football, we're going to win the game," Day said. "If we turn the ball over some more, we're going to be in this thing until the fourth quarter, so that was the first thing. The second thing was that we needed to have a great drive to come out in the third quarter, and that great teams win in the second half. So that was really it."

That message seemed to work. Not only did Ohio State avoid turnovers for the rest of the game, but on its first drive of the second half, it marched right down the field for a five-play, 75-yard scoring drive.

On the drive, Sayin connected on his first two passing attempts, including a 57-yard strike to Carnell Tate, to get Ohio State inside Penn State's 5-yard line, which set up Donaldson to redeem himself with a 1-yard score.

"We were kind of disappointed with how the last drive (of the first half) went since we ended up turning the ball over," Sayin said.



SONNY BROCKWAY

TURNOVER ON DOWNS — Junior safety Caleb Downs (2) stopped a late Penn State scoring threat with an interception in the end zone after getting a reprieve from the officials earlier in the drive. He was flagged for targeting and unnecessary roughing for his hit on receiver Khalil Dinkins. The targeting call was overturned, meaning Downs was not ejected and will not have to sit the first half vs. Purdue on Nov. 8.

"Coming out of halftime, we knew what we were doing, and we knew we could move the ball. We were excited. We took a shot on the second play. We hit it and kept the momentum going."

The Buckeyes didn't look back after pushing their lead to 10. In a dominant second-half effort, Ohio State scored three touchdowns and allowed Penn State to get past its own 40-yard line on only one drive, its final possession of the game.

The Buckeyes outscored Penn State 21-0 in the last 30 minutes of the game and outgained them 259-60.

Run Game Still A Mixed Bag

Although Ohio State comfortably defeated Penn State, it still struggled to find consistency with its run game. The Buckeyes finished the game with 164 rushing yards on 32 carries for a solid average of 5.1 yards per carry, but as has been the case throughout much of the season, many of those yards came in the fourth quarter.

Ohio State ran for 100 yards on 12 carries in the final 15 minutes of the game after entering the final quarter having totaled just 64 yards on 20 carries (3.2 yards per

carry). Still, Day didn't seem panicked after the game when asked about the status of his team's run game.

"We really fit some runs up late and were physical late," Day said. "That was good. Sometimes the run game takes a little time. Was it perfect? No. But I thought the guys played hard and there was a lot of good play in there."

Freshman running back Bo Jackson was Ohio State's leading rusher in the game. He went for 105 yards on 13 carries (8.1-yard average). Jackson was largely responsible for the Buckeyes' late-game production on the ground. He went for 79 yards on five carries in the fourth frame, including one that went for 51 yards.

Jackson's long run came when the Buckeyes had a comfortable advantage, but it was still an impressive play from the freshman runner and Ohio State's offensive line. On the first-and-10 play, junior offensive linemen Austin Siereveld and Luke Montgomery teamed up to create a large hole on the left side of the line.

Jackson surged through the hole and left Penn State safety Zion Tracy in the dust to hit the big gain.

Jackson may have been Ohio State's most

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Ohio State's passing offense was dominant in the Buckeyes' 38-14 victory over Penn State on Nov. 1 at Ohio Stadium. Quarterback Julian Sayin looked calm and collected in the win, completing 20 of 23 passes for 316 yards and four touchdowns. Sayin, who was already leading the nation with an 80.0 completion percentage, bested his current average, completing 87.0 percent of his passes against the Nittany Lions. The Carlsbad, Calif., native recorded a near-perfect 99.1 quarterback rating and 259.8 passer rating in what was another statistical masterpiece. It also marked Sayin's second straight game with four touchdown passes and no interceptions.

The two main beneficiaries of Sayin's meteoric rise – wide receivers Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith – also ravaged the Penn State secondary. Smith racked up six catches for 123 yards and two scores, while Tate caught five passes for 124 yards and a touchdown. Each of the receivers also added a 57-yard reception from Sayin in the third quarter. The two catches ultimately sparked touchdown drives that allowed Ohio State to extend its lead to 17 heading into the fourth quarter. In total, Sayin completed six passes of 15-plus yards and three passes of over 45 yards.

What Didn't Work

Right out of the opening quarter, Penn State's ground attack came out firing, as Ohio State's rush defense struggled to generate pressure against the Nittany Lions' backfield. On Penn State's first offensive play, running back Kaytron Allen took a handoff 26 yards, and though the drive halted following the senior's long rush, the Nittany rushing attack still had solid production throughout the first half. Penn State rushed 19 times for 76 yards and an average of 4.0 yards per carry in the first half.

Though the numbers don't jump off the page, the Nittany Lions managed to score two touchdowns on the ground against a stingy Buckeye red-zone defense. The first Penn State score came

on a 3-yard touchdown run by senior running back Nicholas Singleton. Then, just before halftime, the Nittany Lions capitalized on an Ohio State mistake. Penn State linebacker Amare Campbell forced a fumble from Ohio State running back CJ Donaldson Jr., starting Penn State's drive on the Buckeye 13-yard line. Four plays later, Allen was in the end zone for a 1-yard rushing touchdown.

The Penn State touchdowns marked the first and second times Ohio State had a first-half touchdown scored against it this season.

The Buckeye defense rebounded to hold the Nittany Lions to minus-21 yards rushing in the second half.

Play Of The Game

After Caleb Downs said that Julian Sayin wasn't as mobile as Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow when Sayin appeared on Downs' podcast on Oct. 29, the redshirt-freshman quarterback proved the All-America safety wrong with a game-changing play with his legs.

Ohio State's offense found itself with a third-and-5 with just over 5:30 left in the first half when Sayin dropped back to pass. Within seconds, defensive end Dani Dennis-Sutton screamed off the edge, blowing past left tackle Austin Sierreveld with a swim move. Sayin stepped left to evade the rush before cutting inside to juke out linebacker Keon Wylie, who had also found his way into the pocket. Sayin then scampered up the gut for 9 yards to secure an Ohio State first down.

Sayin's third-down scramble ultimately extended a crucial touchdown drive. Three plays after Sayin's rush, he tossed a 45-yard touchdown pass to Tate to increase Ohio State's advantage to 10.

— Sam Cipriani

productive runner, but it was another running back-by-committee approach against Penn State. The Buckeyes had four running backs carry the ball at least four times.

Jackson, Donaldson (seven carries for 17 yards and a touchdown), sophomore James Peoples (four carries for 19 yards) and freshman Isaiah West (four carries for 13 yards) all shared the workload.

Caleb Downs Rebounds From Late Hit

Ohio State received a strong performance from junior safety Caleb Downs, even if it easily could have been cut short. Downs finished the game with five tackles, including one for loss, and had an interception.

However, the Hoschton, Ga., native made an error when Penn State was driving in the fourth quarter. On a first-and-10 play with just under seven minutes to go, Grunkemeyer attempted to find senior tight end Khalil Dinkins. The ball sailed incomplete on the pass, but Downs left his feet and hit Dinkins, lowering his shoulder into the receiver after the ball had already flown over his head.

On the field, Downs was flagged for unnecessary roughness and targeting, which would have suspended him from the first half of Ohio State's next game against Purdue, but after a review, the officials picked up the targeting portion of the penalty.

FOX rules analyst Mike Pereira certainly seemed to think the hit was worthy of a targeting penalty and said, "I look at this and say, 'This is why they put the rule in.'"

Luckily for Downs and the Buckeyes, the replay officials disagreed with Pereira.

"God gave me one right there," Downs said after the game when asked about the referees overturning the targeting call. "I'm really just appreciative of the moment, and he showed mercy."

Still, Downs' unnecessary roughness penalty put the Nittany Lions in the red

zone for the third time in the game. Needing a stop to hold its eighth straight opponent under 20 points, Downs made amends for his penalty.

On fourth-and-goal from Ohio State's 7-yard line, Downs read the eyes of Grunkemeyer and drifted in front of Dinkins to come up with an interception in the end zone.

"I was surprised when they put the running back out of an empty set," Downs said. "I was thinking either they're going to throw a screen to him or something else. And then once I got my eyes back to the quarterback, he threw the ball up, and then at that point, it was just go get it."

Bucks Contain Grunkemeyer In Win

They may not have gotten out to a great start, but the Silver Bullets managed to ruin Grunkemeyer's homecoming party in the win.

Playing in his native state for the first time as a college player, Grunkemeyer was largely held in check by Ohio State's defense. The native of nearby Lewis Center, Ohio, who said he dreamt of playing in Ohio Stadium as a child, threw for 145 yards on 19-of-28 passing and threw the late-game interception.

Making only his second start of the season, in place of fellow Ohio native Drew Allar who is out for the season with a broken ankle, Grunkemeyer was kept off balance like many other quarterbacks who have faced Ohio State.

Early on, the Nittany Lions managed to occasionally move the ball. Allen totaled 63 yards on 16 carries in the first half. The Buckeyes looked particularly vulnerable during one drive in the second quarter when Penn State went 75 yards in 15 plays to score its first touchdown of the game. Not only was it the first touchdown Ohio State had given up in the first half of any game all season, but it was only the fifth touchdown

the Silver Bullets had conceded this year.

After giving up another score from a short field and allowing Penn State to total 140 yards in the first half, Day said defensive coordinator Matt Patricia made some changes at halftime to put the unit in a better position.

"The defense was excellent and really stepped up," Day said. "There were a couple of third downs early on that were frustrating. But I thought Matt changed it up a little bit, the guys played physical, got to the quarterback, and changed up the looks in the back end."

It didn't take long for Patricia's changes to make a difference. On Penn State's first drive, the Buckeyes brought up a third down a few plays into the quarter and got off the field when the secondary covered the Nittany Lions' receivers, giving senior defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. ample time to sack Grunkemeyer.

The next Penn State drive ended similarly. After the Nittany Lions faced another third-and-long, it was junior linebacker Arvell Reese who tracked Grunkemeyer down well behind the line of scrimmage to force another Penn State punt.

Jackson and Reese were the stars of the game for the Buckeye defense. Jackson finished the game with four total tackles, including 2½ for loss and a career-high two sacks, while Reese had a career-high 12 tackles, including 2½ for loss and one sack.

Reese, who for the season leads Ohio State with 54 tackles, received plenty of praise from Downs after the game.

"He's playing at an unprecedented level, and I'm excited for him," Downs said. "And he's just staying focused on the moment, doing what he does."

Before the season, there was some concern that Penn State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, who led Ohio State's defense from 2022-24, could use his knowledge of Ohio State's defense to help the Nittany Lions, but Downs said the defense was aware

of that possibility in the lead-up to the game.

"I don't really think he would know Coach Patricia's defense, but I think he'd know the personnel really well, so that was something that we were going to have to work through with him telling them our strengths, weaknesses and stuff like that," Downs said. "But at the end of the day, it all goes back to execution. If we execute what we're supposed to execute, it doesn't really matter what he tells them."

The stats show the Silver Bullets certainly executed. In addition to holding Penn State to its lowest scoring total of the season, the Buckeyes ended the game allowing just 200 total yards after a dominant second-half effort.



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Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin and the receivers' strong offensive performance, particularly on deep balls: "Some of Julian's deep balls were just excellent in this game. We saw how they were playing us in the first half, and we thought we had a chance to get behind them, so we called those plays. Julian and the receivers did a great job."

Penn State interim head coach Terry Smith on the Nittany Lions' struggles covering Ohio State's receivers, especially Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate: "(There was) a lack of pass rush, lack of DBs covering. There's times we're in man, there's times we're in cover three. It was a point of emphasis. It was the key to victory. You cannot let them be on you. Now, credit to those guys. They are the two best guys in the country. Just watching these guys live, and I don't mean this disrespectfully to the past Ohio State receivers, these two are better than all of them, and those guys are all good. They put it on film, and they were outstanding today. We could not cover them."

Sayin on if he agreed that Smith and Tate are the two best receivers in the country: "One-hundred percent, those guys are the two best receivers in the country, and they show it every Saturday. I see it in practice on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when they go make plays against the best defense in the country. I think it shows up within our week, and then it shows up on Saturdays. Those guys do such a great job putting in the hard work in the offseason and being leaders within the team and the weight room."

Smith on whether there are any receivers better than he and Tate: "We're the best in the country. Nobody's better than us. Even Brandon Inniss, as well. We're the best receiver corps in the country. The whole receiver group has talent. We just go out there each and every weekend and put it all on the field."

Sayin on if Ohio State would be able to throw deep passes every play with the talent the Buckeyes have on offense: "Definitely not. We definitely have to be strategic, and I think our coaches did a great job of, when we're calling the shots, we got some good looks into it today. If it's not there, we have to check the ball down. When we checked it down, our receivers did a great job of catching and knifing."



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO ONE CLOSE — Jeremiah Smith once again demonstrated against Penn State that he is a cut above everyone else with a spectacular one-handed touchdown and a 57-yard catch among his 123 receiving yards.

Smith on Ohio State taking advantage of its limited deep shot opportunities: "When we get the chance to, in the right coverage, like Coach Day says, if we take our shots, we have to hit them. We don't get too many of those, but today we got a lot of them. We had to take advantage of them."

Smith on Sayin's tipped ball that he caught for a touchdown: "See ball, get ball. The defender tipped the ball, and I didn't want Julian Sayin to throw an interception, so he couldn't grade out a champion. I just made the play."

Sayin on what it means to toss a touchdown pass to tight end Bennett Christian: "A guy like Bennett, he is someone who does a lot of the dirty work for our offense. If we're running power, he kicks out a defensive end. To see him get in the end zone, it's a great job. We practiced that play. It rarely goes to him. I think I hit him once in practice, and I was pretty fired up when we hit it. The first touchdown pass ever of my career, when I was a freshman, was to Bennett, so it's awesome to see plays like that happen, and it fired me up."

Day on if his players had extra motivation to perform well with Jim Knowles coaching for Penn State after coaching the Buckeye defense last season: "Honestly, no. I didn't feel any of that."

Maybe when the season started and I was looking ahead, I thought maybe that would come into play. But it just didn't. I don't think any of our coaches or players were distracted by that."

Downs on if he had to play against the Buckeye offense in a game: "We talked about this on my podcast ('Downs 2 Business') a little bit, if we had to play against our offense in a game. I feel confident in our defense and everything, but they would provide a challenge."

Sayin on his thought process during his 9-yard scramble in the second quarter: "First thing, I have to keep two hands on the ball. I had one hand on the ball, which is dangerous. They were playing a coverage where they were doubling Jeremiah and doubling Carnell, and we didn't have a ton of man-coverage winners on that play. I had to go make something happen. I kept my eyes up to see if we could pop open, but I ended up taking off. Then, in the back of my mind, I was thinking about the sticks, and thinking about where we need to get to, so if I had to go, not slide, and go pick it up with my legs and run through some contact for the first down."

Terry Smith on Penn State's performance dropping off in the second half: "It was a game of two halves. Through the first half, we came out and fought valiantly. We got the critical takeaway late in the second quarter, and our offense converted. We scored two touchdowns in the red zone against a team that's No. 1 in the country in that area. Then we came out in the second half, and the third quarter set the tone for them. They got 14 points, and we just never could respond. I'm super proud of our guys for fighting to the end. They didn't quit, but we have to learn how to finish."

Day on the positive effects of the crowd for Ohio State: "I do want to say before we're done how great the crowd was. The crowd was in the stadium early, and they were rocking early. This season, I think (athletic director Ross Bjork) has done a great job with the gameday atmosphere, and I just feel like everybody understands when (the opposing team has) the ball how to be loud. They're playing off the players, and when the players need the crowd, the crowd is there. It gives our guys energy, and I could feel it in the second half, so I just want to thank the crowd."

OSU's Offensive Ceiling Hinges on Run Game

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With one of the nation's most talented rosters, the top-ranked Ohio State football team has few holes in its lineup.

Ohio State boasts arguably the best defense in the country, with impact playmakers at every position, as well as an elite passing attack led by star quarterback Julian Sayin and the wide receiver duo of Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate.

But there has been one area where Ohio State consistently hasn't been up to snuff in 2025: the run game.

Despite a backfield featuring a wide variety of skill sets among a group of both veterans and newcomers, Ohio State has yet to solve the issues with its sputtering rushing attack. Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke to three former OSU coaches and players to identify the 2025 Buckeyes' problems with the ground game, suggest what they can do to fix it, and predict just how good Ohio State can be with a productive run game.

Former Buckeyes running back Vaughn Broadnax, who rushed for 972 yards and totaled 14 touchdowns over his four-year career at Ohio State from 1980-83, said he feels the biggest issue with the Buckeye rushing attack stems from a lack of identity.

"Now, first off, if you want a running game, your running game has to have an identity," Broadnax said. "With our offense right now, we can be an offensive juggernaut with the passing game. But it seems to me, in my opinion, that you kind of limit the rushing opportunities when you compact the offense like they are. When you compact the offense and you're bringing in the 12 or 13 personnel, two, sometimes three tight ends, the defense knows that you're probably not going to pass the ball, so they collect at the line of scrimmage. When you have the defense compacted and the offense is compacted, you're basically running into a scrum."

A lack of identity has been evident in the Ohio State run game. The Buckeye rushing attack has been up and down through seven games, as Ohio State has cycled through a diverse group of running backs. The run game has been led by freshman Bo Jackson and senior CJ Donaldson and backed up by sophomore James Peoples and freshman Isaiah West. As a team, Ohio State is averaging 153.3 yards per game, which ranks just 74th among FBS schools.

Former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin believes Ohio State's struggles with the ground game aren't the fault of the running backs themselves, but simply a problem of scheming and a lack of push and holes created from the offensive line, particularly in short-yardage situations.

"It's definitely not the backs," Laughlin said. "You've got to have a hole. When Archie (Griffin) ran, they opened giant holes for him, and that's why he won two Heismans. I've watched Bo Jackson for the last couple of years, because my buddy is the athletic director at (Villa Angela-St. Joseph) there in Cleveland. So I've been watching him, and he can flat-out fly through the hole. He's had a couple where he could have broken them.

"If they get him a few more cracks, you



SONNY BROCKWAY

FEEL THE RUSH — Freshman Bo Jackson has emerged as the go-to runner, leading Ohio State with 538 yards along with two touchdowns. He is also an effective receiver, making 11 catches for 114 yards.

just probably have to hold your blocks a little bit longer, and you've got to get more push off the offensive line. I don't think they've been good on third-and-2 or fourth-and-1."

Former Ohio State guard and recruiting coordinator Bill Conley expressed a similar sentiment, pointing to the Buckeyes' inconsistencies with short-yardage situations.

"I think it is sporadic. You have a pretty good 7-, 8-yard gain and then a 1-yard gain or something like that," Conley said. "The thing we've got to do – and I'm sure the coaches say this – we've got to be able to run short yardage. If you need 2 or 3 yards, you've got to be able to get 2 or 3 yards, and that has to be like a guarantee. We struggle a little bit there."

In Ohio State's season-opening win against then-No. 1 Texas, the Buckeyes rushed for just 77 yards as a team on 2.3 yards per carry. In the victory over the Longhorns, cracks in the rushing attack showed as the Buckeyes were unable to break off for an explosive run. An 8-yard Donaldson rush was Ohio State's longest of the game.

However, the run game showed signs of life when Ohio State produced 274- and 225-yard outbursts in blowouts against Grambling State and Ohio, respectively. Those victories marked Jackson's emergence in the Buckeye offense, with the rookie breaking out with 108- and 109-yard performances.

Ohio State's run game has been on a

downward trend since its 70-0 blowout over Grambling State. The Buckeyes' rushing total decreased in every game from that win over the Tigers through the win over Wisconsin on Oct. 18, and Ohio State rushed for less than 150 yards in each of its first four Big Ten games.

Against Wisconsin, the Buckeyes put out their lowest output since Week 1, running for just 98 yards on 3.5 yards per carry. Ohio State ran the ball on just 40.0 percent of its offensive snaps – its lowest rushing rate of the year – and it also marked the first game Ohio State didn't record a touchdown on the ground.

However, the Buckeyes snapped their stretch of sluggish rushing outings against Penn State on Nov. 1. Powered by Jackson's 105 yards on the ground (helped by a 51-yard carry in the fourth quarter), Ohio State totaled 164 rushing yards in the 38-14 win.

Before the fourth quarter of that game, the Buckeyes had managed just 64 yards on the ground on 20 carries. So, Jackson's fourth-quarter 51-yarder saved them from another underwhelming-looking box score.

For some, the issue doesn't lie with the running backs themselves.

In terms of running backs' individual production, Laughlin was particularly high on both Jackson and Donaldson.

"I think Bo Jackson's going to be great, and the other kid they got from West Virginia (Donaldson), I think he's damn good,"

Laughlin said. "They all look good to me, the backs. So I don't think that's the problem. And like Woody always said, you have to have a pair and a spare to run the ball."

The veteran Donaldson began the season as the starting running back with Peoples as the No. 2 back, though that quickly shifted after the Buckeyes' nonconference slate. Jackson eventually emerged as the lead back, while Donaldson slid into the secondary role – a combination that balanced Jackson's speed with Donaldson's power.

Jackson has been the most effective rusher of the bunch, totaling 81 carries for 538 yards and two scores on the ground. Donaldson, however, has rushed for 266 yards on 4.0 yards per carry and seven rushing touchdowns, serving as the primary back for short-yardage situations.

Conley said that Ohio State doesn't have any "bad" running back options.

"Bo Jackson is probably the premier straight runner, but Donaldson can run anything, catch out of the backfield," Conley said. "The other guys, they're not bad either. But I really think Donaldson and Jackson are showing they are the two premier guys right now."

Though Jackson and Donaldson have cut their teeth early, Buckeye head coach Ryan Day has been adamant about continuing to adjust and improve the run game on a weekly basis, even if that means giving his younger players a heavier workload.

Among those benefiting is West, who was a rare bright spot against Wisconsin with 55 yards on nine carries. He and Anthony "Turbo" Rogers were players Broadnax said could make an impact when used in the right situations.

"You run the running backs that bounce forward, and I think Bo Jackson is evidence of that," Broadnax said. "Isaiah West has shown some flashes. So I think we have good backs. I'd like to see Turbo Rogers in there to add some quickness, maybe run some screen passes, things like that."

Ohio State hasn't shied away from involving its running backs in the passing game.

Jackson has totaled 11 catches for 114 yards, Donaldson amassed eight receptions for 56 yards and one score, and Peoples has caught seven passes for 36 yards, which rank fifth, sixth and eighth on the team, respectively, behind Ohio State's top four pass catchers.

With the passing game finding its rhythm, Ohio State may not feel much pressure to adjust its ground game, especially as the Buckeyes have leaned more toward the air in recent weeks. Between Sayin, Smith and Tate, the Buckeyes boast one of the country's most talented pass attacks.

Broadnax said if Ohio State is struggling to rush the ball, the offense's ability to stretch vertically should provide more openings for Sayin to find the Buckeye running backs out of the backfield – particularly Donaldson and Jackson, both of whom have proved to be comfortable receiving the ball.

"CJ Donaldson is literally a wide receiver turned tight end now turned running back," Broadnax said. "He has great hands. Bo Jackson has shown flashes of his catching ability, so utilize those guys in the passing game, because if they're not blocking, they



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE ZONE — West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson Jr. is averaging only 4.0 yards per carry, but often he gets the call near the goal line as evidenced by his seven touchdowns.

can catch the ball. You can't double-cover Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate at the same time. Somebody has to be open – the tight end or the running back or another receiver. So learn how to distribute the ball to whoever's open, and if you get 5 yards, great, or if you get 40, take it."

Conley echoed a similar sentiment, stating that as the season progresses, opposing defenses will eventually have to pick their poison between pass and run with the Ohio State offense.

"As the season goes on, teams are going to have to make a decision," Conley said. "Let's face it, you can't defend everything. We're making sure we're getting a lot of yards via the air right now, so teams are going to have to do something to try to take away some of the passing game. If they do that, it opens up the running game. So I think the best is yet to come, and as long as they keep getting better, I think that's the key."

Along with the passing attack, Ohio

State's defense has been consistent enough that the run game hasn't become a major concern yet.

Defensive coordinator Matt Patricia has fostered a championship-level defense. Ohio State has allowed just 6.9 points per game, which ranks No. 1 in the FBS through eight weeks. The Buckeye defense is also allowing just 214.8 yards per game, the nation's best mark.

Broadnax said that while Ohio State's defense remains as strong as ever, the Buckeyes' offense can't depend on it to mask their own inconsistencies, adding that they could do a better job taking advantage of opposing defenses offensively.

"We have the tools to attack any defense out there," he said. "One of my concerns in the past has been this kind of stubbornness. That is, we're going against the top-ranked rushing defense, so we've got to prove that we can run against that defense. And if we're going against the last-place passing defense, we don't exploit it. We have to focus on what we can do well for the team we're playing."

Laughlin mentioned former Alabama head coach Nick Saban, citing the challenges of winning with a struggling offense in an era that's seeing more scoring than ever.

"I don't think you can rely on the defense that much," Laughlin said. "Even Nick Saban said it a few years ago. You can't win games 17-7 anymore."

Though the ground game hasn't been as strong as it has in previous years, Conley said Ohio State's rush offense isn't truly having a down year as many say it is.

"I don't think it's nearly as bad as some people are making it out to be, because they're still averaging 150 yards rushing per game," Conley said. "Some of that was against some easier teams, but everybody has easy teams on their schedule. But if you say, 'Can you average 150 yards a game?' That's pretty good."

While the Buckeyes' overall rushing totals may not jump off the page, their output is average given how infrequently they run the ball.

The Buckeyes' 264 total carries are 114th nationally. That lack of carries can

partially be attributed to Ohio State's offense running just 61.5 plays per game, which ranks near the bottom of pace of play. The Buckeyes are also averaging 4.64 yards per carry, which ranks 46th in 2025.

Broadnax said that Ohio State often tries to force its run game, when instead using the pass to open up the run could lead to faster starts – similar to the 2017 season, when the Buckeyes averaged 243.2 rushing yards per game and ranked seventh nationally in total offense with 506.0 yards per game.

"A lot of times you run first to open up the passing game, but I think in this day and age, it might be best to pass first to open up the running game," Broadnax said. "I remember Mike Weber getting injured and J.K. Dobbins stepping up. Well, we threw the ball to open up those rushing lanes, and it was successful. So get a little more mixture of that. Do what you do well, and the rest will follow."

Though each had differing opinions on the problems with the run game, one idea was clear among Broadnax, Conley and Laughlin. They all believe that if Ohio State can get its rushing attack going, the sky is the limit for the Buckeyes in 2025.

Conley said he believes that with one of the nation's top defenses and an improved run game, Ohio State could be well on its way to a national championship.

"Barring injuries, I think they can be one of the great ones," Conley said. "I think they definitely have the ability to win the national championship again, and if they keep playing defense like this in today's game of modern football – (two teams) got over 10 points in a game. Nobody does that anymore."

Laughlin culminated his thoughts by expressing full confidence in Ohio State's potential, emphasizing that the Buckeyes' potential success ultimately hinges on the ground game.

"If they can run the ball, they can beat anybody. I don't see anybody out there that's going to beat them," Laughlin said. "When you get up against a good team, I think if they can run the ball, I think they can win it all."



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Purdue Struggling Through Rebuilding Year

By **GREG WILSON**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Looking at Purdue's record this season (2-7, 0-6 Big Ten), it would be easy to be convinced that first-year head coach Barry Odom's team hasn't improved from last year's disaster of a season.

Former head coach Ryan Walters led the Boilermakers to a 5-19 record over the two seasons he was at the helm of the program, with the 2024 campaign ending with a 1-11 record, which was enough for Purdue to move on to a new head coach.

The 15-game conference losing streak the Boilermakers hold after getting beaten 21-16 by Michigan was nearly ended on Oct. 25 before Rutgers pulled off a stunning strip fumble that led to a game-winning field goal.

Even after that loss, Odom was clear that he still believes in what he's doing in West Lafayette, Ind.

"I still stand, and I've got strong belief in what our foundation is becoming," he said. "I have strong belief in this program, and I have no doubt it's going to be a special place that we win consistently. We're just not there yet."

That game might have been Purdue's best chance this season to break its Big Ten losing streak with No. 1 Ohio State, Washington and No. 2 Indiana left on the schedule.

But while Odom and the Boilermakers wish this season had gone a little differently, this was never supposed to be a year in which they took a major step forward.

The Boilermakers added 54 players through the transfer portal over the off-season, and that is reflected in the starting lineup for the team. Only two starters return of the 22 offensive and defensive starters. Those two players are quarterback Ryan Browne and running back Devin Mockobee.

Browne hasn't played well this season, leading to some controversy regarding whether he will be benched. Odom stuck with Browne until he suffered an injury against Northwestern on Oct. 18.

Backup Malachi Singleton took over in that game and completed 11 of 20 passes for 187 yards. He also threw two touchdowns on 2-of-3 passing in the loss against Rutgers.

On the season, Browne has completed 163 of 266 passes (61.3 percent) for 1,822 yards and nine touchdowns while throwing seven interceptions.

Both quarterbacks provide some sort of rushing threat. Browne has run 57 times for 158 yards and four touchdowns, while Singleton has 35 rushes for 177 yards and a score.

Offensive coordinator Josh Henson believes that when the Boilermakers are at their best, they can be a dangerous offensive team, but he has yet to see the consistency required for them to get to that



Barry Odom

point.

"We've been able to run it and throw it at times with ease," Henson said. "I think the identity of the offense right now is that we're not finishing drives. Everything we're doing, I love, and I think we're doing it really well and at a really high level at times. We're just not being consistent."

Mockobee came into the season with a long-shot chance at becoming the all-time leading rusher at Purdue, needing over 1,100 yards to do so, but he's not on pace to break that with 521 yards in nine games. He has added four touchdowns on a total of 125 attempts.

Mockobee is also involved in the pass game, catching 18 passes for 215 yards and one touchdown.

The Boilermakers' top pass catchers have been wide receivers Michael Jackson III out of the slot, along with Nitro Tuggle and EJ Horton out wide. Jackson leads the way in catches by more than double, with 50 grabs for 456 yards and just one score.

Tuggle has been able to find the end zone four times through the air on 24 catches for 348 yards.

The Purdue offensive line is full of new starters for the program, with Joey Tanona at left tackle, Jalen St. John at left guard, Bradyn Joiner at center, Ethan Trent at right guard and Bakyne Coly at right tackle.

The unit has given up 1.78 sacks per game this season and led a rushing offense that is tied for 86th in the country with 141.2 yards per game.

At 107th in the country in scoring offense (22.1 points per game), it's going to be very tough for the Boilermakers to work against an Ohio State unit that is No. 1 in the country in scoring defense (6.9 points per game). Last season, Ohio State shut Purdue out, 45-0, at Ohio Stadium, and if current trends continue, there could be another one coming when the Buckeyes visit Ross-Ade Stadium this year.

However, despite the record, it hasn't been all bad for Purdue's offense. The unit has done fairly well in many matchups, scoring 27 points against Illinois on Oct. 4 and 30 points against Notre Dame on Sept. 20.

But in those two games, the defense gave up 43 and 56 points, respectively, so even when the offense performs, the defense has still struggled to find its footing, especially against ranked teams.

The defense will have a tough time matching up with Ohio State's offense, which is one of the most efficient units in the country. The Boilermakers are tied for 95th in total defense going into the game against the Buckeyes, allowing 395.0 yards per game, and have allowed 27.0 points per game, which is 87th in the nation.

Between those two games against the Fighting Irish and Illinois, Purdue had an off week to try to figure its defense out, and whatever they tried didn't seem to work too well.

"It's never fun. No one ever wants to sit there and evaluate something and say 'OK, where are all the problems?' " Purdue defensive coordinator Mike Scherer

Get To Know ... Purdue

- **2025 Record:** 2-7, 0-6 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Multiple; Defensive Formation – Multiple 3-3-5; Starters returning – Offense 2, Defense 0, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Barry Odom, 1st year at Purdue, 2-7.
- **Series History:** 60th meeting; Ohio State leads 42-15-2.
- **School Facts:** Location – West Lafayette, Ind.; Enrollment – 57,310; Nickname – Boilermakers; Colors – Old Gold and Black; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Ross-Ade Stadium (Surface – Grass; Capacity – 61,441).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Devin Mockobee	125	521	4.2	4
Malachi Thomas	39	206	5.3	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Ryan Browne	162-266	61.3	1,822	9-7
Malachi Singleton	19-33	57.6	271	3-2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Michael Jackson	50	456	9.1	1
Nitro Tuggle	24	348	14.5	4
EJ Horton	19	208	10.9	0
Devin Mockobee	18	215	11.9	1

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 22.1
Rushing Yards Per Game – 141.2
Passing Yards Per Game – 234.1
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 375.3

2025 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 30	BALL STATE	W, 31-0
Sept. 6	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	W, 34-17
Sept. 13	USC	L, 3-17
Sept. 20	at Notre Dame	L, 56-30
Oct. 4	ILLINOIS	L, 43-27
Oct. 11	at Minnesota	L, 27-20
Oct. 18	at Northwestern	L, 19-0
Oct. 25	RUTGERS	L, 27-24
Nov. 1	at Michigan	L, 21-16
Nov. 8	OHIO STATE	1 p.m.
Nov. 15	at Washington	TBA
Nov. 28	INDIANA	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Tahj Ra-El	41	40	81	2.5-6	0-0
Mani Powell	36	45	81	8.5-28	3.0-16
Charles Correa	28	50	78	6.0-20	3.0-14
Myles Slusher	32	20	52	2.0-7	1.0-6
Alex Sanford	14	23	37	2.5-3	0-0
CJ Nunnally	19	13	32	7.5-42	5.0-38

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Myles Slusher	1	18	18.0	0
Smiley Bradford	1	0	0	0
Hudauri Hines	1	0	0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 27.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 160.6
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 234.4
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 395.0

said. "You've got to look at yourself."

If Ohio State fans have been waiting for more explosive plays, it could be against the Boilermakers when they start coming. According to cfbstats.com, the Buckeyes are seventh in the country in plays that have gone for 40 yards or more, with 16, and Purdue is tied for 129th in the country when it comes to the number of 40-plus-yard plays allowed, with 14 given up in nine games.

With how much the Boilermakers had to rely on the transfer portal to fill out their roster this year, more than half of the starting defense is filled by players who transferred into the program over the offseason

On the defensive line, the Boilermakers have CJ Madden and CJ Nunnally IV coming off the edge and Jamarrion Harkless and Demeco Kennedy on the interior. With five sacks on the season, Nunnally leads the team. He has a total of 32 tackles, 7½ of which are for loss, also adding seven quarterback hurries and two forced fumbles.

As a transfer out of Akron, Nunnally is used to the results Purdue has had on the field this season but has been trying to get the team to continue to work at its craft.

"We've got to keep chopping at it, coming to work every day, just ready, attacking and having that effort and not stopping, no matter the result," Nunnally said after the loss to Rutgers.

Two transfers man the linebacker po-



CJ Nunnally IV

sitions, with Mani Powell at the Mike and Charles Correa at the Will. The two have combined for 159 tackles this season with 14½ tackles for loss and six sacks.

The defensive unit as a whole has just six takeaways this season, three interceptions and three fumble recoveries. Strong safety Myles Slusher and nickel back Smiley Bradford have two of the team's three interceptions. Bradford has emerged as one of the better defenders in the unit and has earned a lot of credit from his defensive coordinator.

"There was some competition there with him and some other guys earlier in the year," Scherer said. "But anytime it's time to go, you can count on Smiley, and that's why he's out there."

Also in the secondary are free safety Tahj Ra-El and cornerbacks Tony Grimes and Hudauri Hines.

Purdue certainly didn't get the result it was hoping for in its loss to Michigan on Nov. 1, but Odom's team showed signs of life in the five-point loss. Not only did the Boilermakers hold the ranked Wolverines under 400 yards, but they also forced two turnovers.

An 11-play, 63-yard game-ending drive by Michigan ultimately sent the Boilermakers home with their seventh straight loss of the season, but don't expect Odom's group to roll over against the Buckeyes when the two teams square off on Nov. 8.

"I do think we've got a locker room full of guys that are going to fight and do everything they can to try and go win a game," Odom said. "We'll keep on swinging. We'll keep on digging. We'll keep on trying to find a way to get into the winner's circle."



Ohio State at Purdue

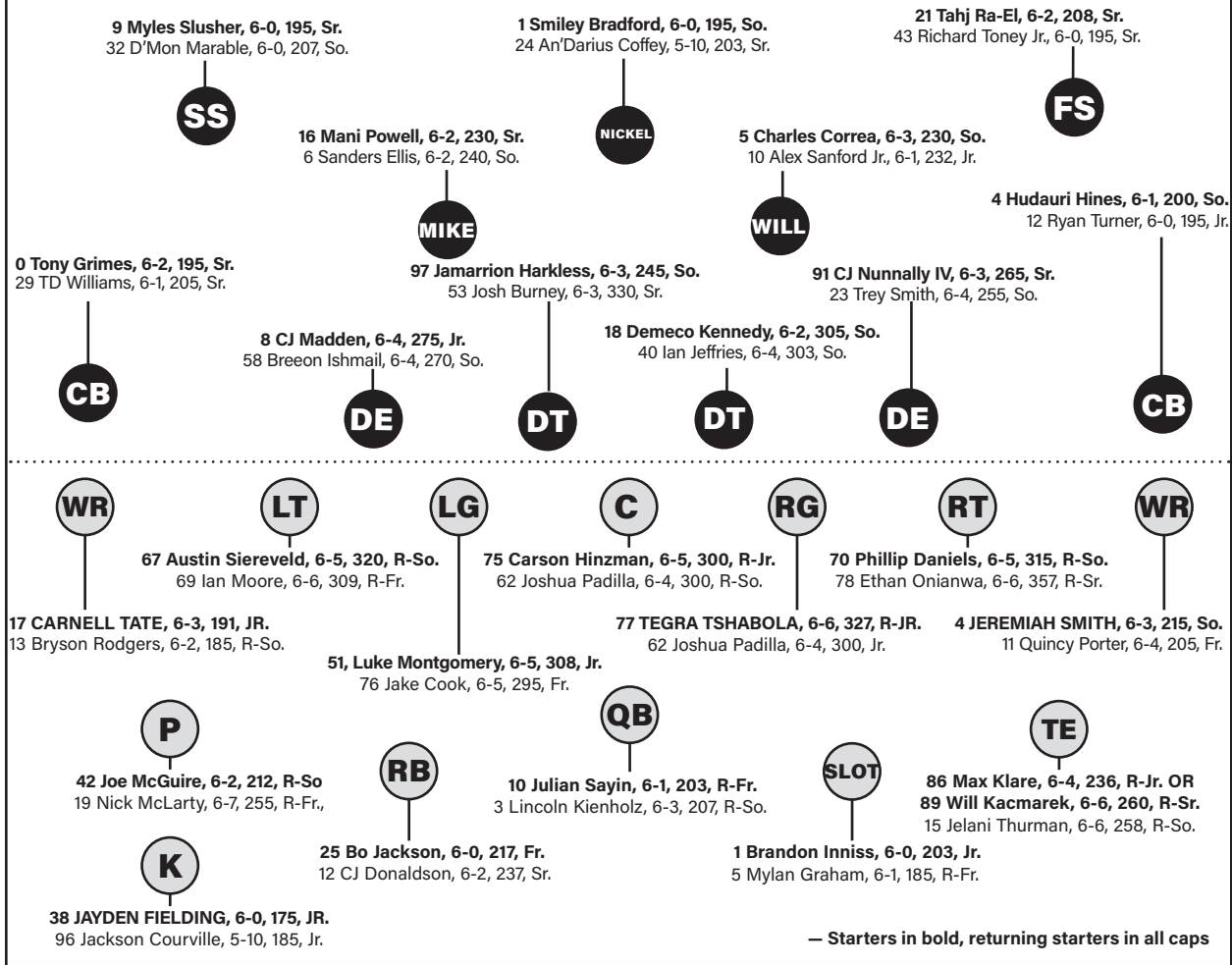
Nov. 8 • 1 p.m. • BTN

Ross-Ade Stadium; West Lafayette, Ind.

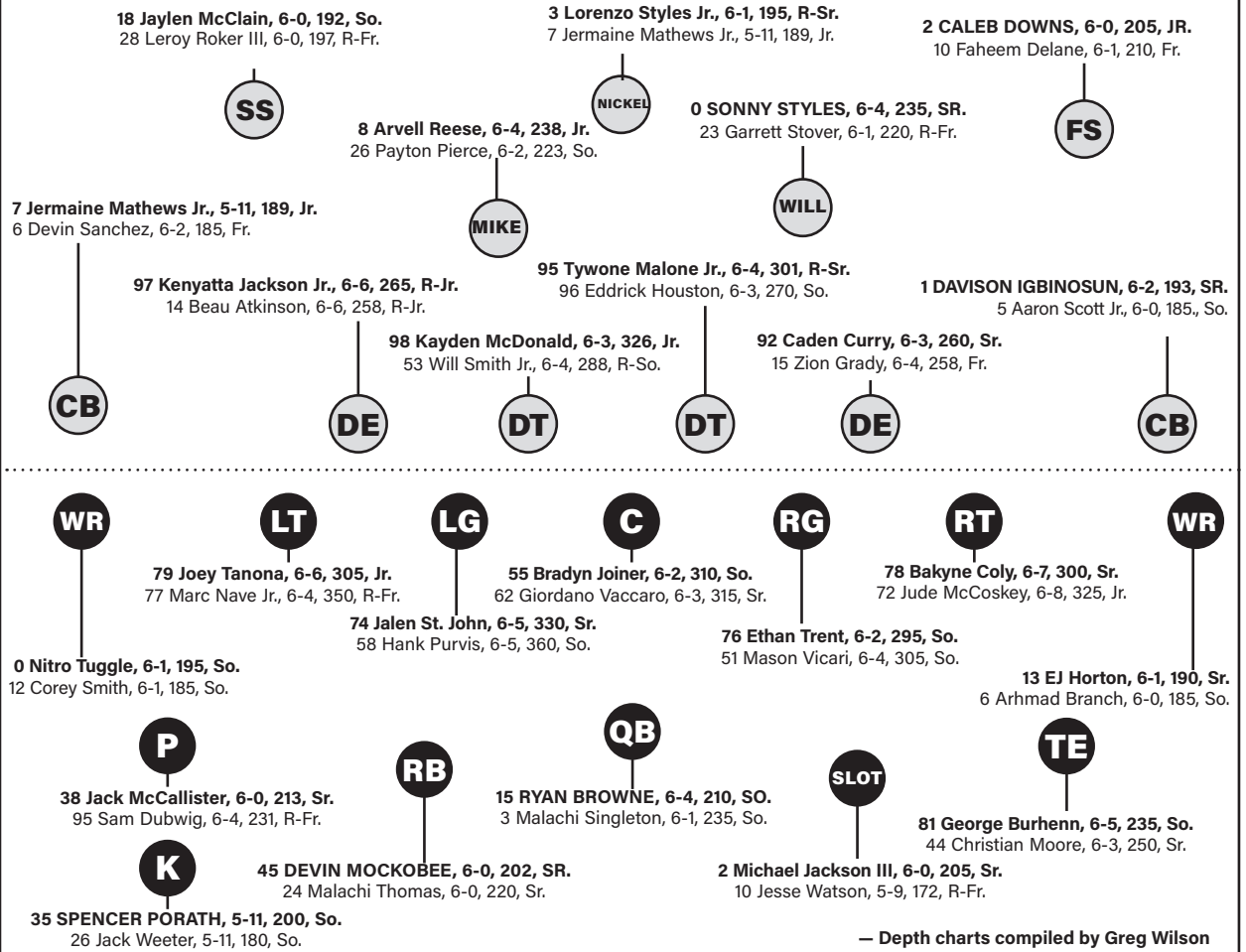


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN PURDUE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. PURDUE RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes rushed for 164 yards (5.1 yards per carry) in the 38-14 win over Penn State, boosted by a 51-yard run for Bo Jackson, part of his 105 yards on 13 carries (8.1). CJ Donaldson Jr. scored from the 1 in the third quarter after a costly fumble late in the second quarter led to a Penn State touchdown. Purdue has lost seven in a row but pushed Michigan to the limit at the Big House before losing 21-16. The Boilermakers had entered the game with the 75th best rushing defense, about middle of the pack with an average of 149.0 yards per game. Their scoring defense was worse, 92nd (27.8 points). The Wolverines ran for 253 yards (6.5) with Jordan Marshall gaining 185 yards (7.4) with three touchdowns and a long of 54 yards. Purdue senior linebacker Mani Powell, who was born in Columbus but raised in Arkansas, is one of the top tacklers in the country. He, linebacker Charles Correa and defensive back Tahj Ra-El have combined for more tackles than any trio in the country. Impressive, but it also means the Purdue defense is on the field a lot because it can't make stops. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PURDUE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Purdue doesn't run the ball very well, ranking 86th (141.2) after the loss to U-M, but the Boilermakers gained 138 yards despite Devin Mockobee not playing because of an ankle injury. He ranks in the top 10 in Purdue history in 100-yard rushing games (fourth), rushing yards (fourth), all-purpose yards (seventh) and rushing touchdowns (ninth). In his absence, Malachi Thomas rushed for 68 yards (4.5), and Antonio Harris gained 54 yards (4.9). Harris had a 2-yard TD run and a long of 20 vs. the Wolverines. The Boilermakers have five players with at least 125 yards for the first time since 2005. Ohio State had the seventh-best rushing defense nationally (81.8), giving up a mere 55 to a Penn State team that was averaging a healthy 169.6 rushing yards. Kaytron Allen had 26 on the first play of the game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. PURDUE PASS DEFENSE

Julian Sayin had another near-perfect game with more touchdowns (four) than incompletions (three), hitting 20 of 23 for 316 yards. Jeremiah Smith (six catches for 123 yards, two TDs) and Carnell Tate (five, 124, one touchdown) were darn near unstoppable. Purdue's pass defense is weak, ranking 91st with 234.4 yards per game allowed, but Michigan's Bryce Underwood was only 13 of 22 with an interception and was sacked twice. CJ Nunnally IV leads the team with five sacks and forced a fumble for the second time this season. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PURDUE PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Let Browne do it. Quarterback Ryan Browne started eight games for the Boilermakers last season, transferred to North Carolina for the spring semester, then transferred back to Purdue for the summer semester. Based on him playing against Michigan (19 of 24 for 133 yards and a TD), we assume he hasn't left again. His favorite target is Michael Jackson III, who made six catches for 58 yards vs. U-M. The Buckeyes, giving up 133.0 yards to rank third in the country, saw redshirt-freshman Ethan Grunkemeyer throw for 145 yards, but Caleb Downs picked him off. The Buckeyes also had four sacks for 39 yards. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Purdue's Jack McCallister is one of the better punters in the conference and is the leader in dropping them inside the 20. Spencer Sporath is 11 for 12 on field goals with a career-long 50-yarder vs. the Wolverines. Jayden Fielding made a 22-yard field goal, and Joe McGuire's one punt traveled 43 yards for OSU. **EDGE: PURDUE**

INTANGIBLES

Purdue is still living off the 49-20 rout of the No. 2 Buckeyes in 2018 in West Lafayette. That is where the hope lives that a repeat is in the offing. The Boilermakers are improved from last season under first-year coach Barry Odom and gained confidence despite the loss to Michigan. OSU coach Ryan Day has done a good job of not overlooking opponents such as Purdue that seemingly have no chance. If the Buckeyes can start the game like they played in the third quarter vs. Penn State, then the game will be over quickly. **EDGE: PURDUE**

STAFF PREDICTION

The Buckeyes will avoid a letdown and will enforce their will on a spirited but less talented bunch of Boilermakers. Sayin will continue his Heisman push, and the defense will be hungry for another dominating effort. **OHIO STATE 42, PURDUE 13**

1973 Defense Led OSU To Undefeated Season

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Through eight games this season, Ohio State has been close to a flawless team. Not only are the Buckeyes undefeated and almost unanimously viewed as the No. 1 team in the country, but they've won seven of their first eight games by at least 18 points. The Buckeyes may not have a weakness, but their strength has undoubtedly been a defensive unit, which easily ranks No. 1 in the country in both scoring defense and total defense.

The Buckeye defense has been so good, it has even drawn comparisons to Ohio State's 1973 defense, a star-studded unit that forced four shutouts and gave up just 4.3 points per game in the regular season.

With dominant defense at the forefront of the minds of many Buckeye fans, BSB talked to former Ohio State tight end Fred Pagac (1971-73), fullback Champ Henson (1971-74) and guard Bill Conley (1968-71) to look back on Ohio State's 1973 season.

Linebackers Lead Loaded 1973 Defense

No unit can be truly elite without great players, and the 1973 Buckeyes were no exception. Featuring several eventual first-round picks and NFL contributors, Ohio State simply didn't have a vulnerability that opposing offenses could attack.

"We had 11 really, really good football players," Pagac said. "I mean, those were big-time players, and they were tough asses, and they all were very athletic. Every one of those guys was very athletic. They all could run, and they weren't nice guys when it came to contact."

The loaded Buckeye defense had four regular contributors who went on to be first-round picks in the NFL draft, two of them being safety Tim Fox and ball-hawking cornerback Neal Colzie.

The Buckeyes' strength was at linebacker, though. Not only were starting linebackers Randy Gradishar and Rick Middleton selected in the first round of the 1974 NFL draft, but they were both named first-team All-Big Ten in 1973.

Gradishar, a unanimous All-America selection that year, led the team with 134 total tackles, which included six for loss. Middleton, meanwhile, was nearly as effective. He totaled 92 tackles and had two pass breakups.

Fellow starter Vic Koegel wasn't selected until the 12th round of that year's NFL draft, but he was no slouch. Koegel had 96 tackles, the second most on the team, and also had four pass breakups.

"Great leadership by example, especially the way they played," Conley said of Ohio State's linebackers. "Here's the thing about Gradishar and Middleton – Koegel wasn't quite as tall – but those two guys were tall guys, and they were more slender linebackers instead of being bulky linebackers, so they could run."

"That's what reminds me so much of this year's defense is that they really ran to the ball. I mean, a lot of silver helmets to the ball, it seemed like every play. They were fast, they were athletic and physically



FILE PHOTO

BUCKING BRONCO — Linebacker Randy Gradishar led a stout defense in 1973 that allowed just 4.3 points per game in the regular season. The three-time first-team All-Big Ten honoree went on to have a stellar career for the Denver Broncos from 1974-83 and was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2024.

tough."

In a defense full of stars, Gradishar was by far the biggest name. A three-year starter at Ohio State, Gradishar earned first-team All-Big Ten honors every year of his career. Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes even said Gradishar was "the best linebacker I ever coached at Ohio State."

Gradishar followed up his time at Ohio State with a very successful NFL career. Playing with the Denver Broncos from 1974-83, Gradishar was a seven-time Pro Bowler, five-time All-Pro and the League's Defensive Player of the Year in 1978.

Despite all of those honors, he had to wait over 40 years after his career ended to make the Pro Football Hall of Fame, getting elected in the class of 2024. According to BSB managing editor emeritus Mark Rea, Gradishar's inclusion in the Hall of Fame was long overdue.

"If you're old school, and if you know anything about that Broncos defense, the Orange Crush, he was in the center of all of it, and for him to just now get into the Pro Football Hall of Fame is kind of ridiculous," Rea said. "That guy was certainly one of the best defensive players in his era, and I think you could make a case for him being one of the best linebackers of all time in the NFL."

Even with Gradishar being a superstar, the success of the linebackers wouldn't have been possible if not for the effectiveness of defensive linemen Van DeCree or fellow All-Big Ten honorees Pete Cusick and Jim Cope, according to Henson.

"When your players are so good and so talented on defense, they don't have to help each other and can just play their own position, and that's what they could do," Henson said. "And every guy just was really good at what they did, and they were all schooled to play the blocker first, find the ball, make the play, and play their position."

The Buckeyes were also elite on the back end. Led by Colzie, Ohio State allowed just 91.2 passing yards per game and gave up just three touchdown passes all season.

Colzie had four interceptions and returned two of them for touchdowns. Middleton, Gradishar and Fox also had two interceptions each. Managing all of the Buckeyes' talent was longtime defensive coordinator George Hill, who, after his time with the Buckeyes, had multiple stints as a defensive coordinator in the NFL.

According to Pagac, the key to Hill's success was having his players focus on fundamentals.

"Fundamentals, teaching, expectations,

I think those were the three things that he built our defense on," Pagac said. "Accountability (too), guys doing what they're supposed to do and getting the job done."

'73 Defense Goes For Four Shutouts

Just like in 2025, Ohio State's defense started incredibly well. The Buckeyes gave up only 20 total points in their first eight games for a remarkable average of 2.5 points per game allowed.

Most impressive was that Ohio State had four shutouts in a span of five weeks during the middle of the season. The Buckeyes' ability to keep the opponent completely off the scoreboard was in part due to the team's proficiency at creating big plays, according to Conley.

"They had a ton of turnovers that year," Conley said. "Colzie got some interceptions, they had those linebackers, who caused fumbles, and in that game against Michigan, as a matter of fact, Colzie had an interception and a fumble recovery. Here's the other thing I remember, too, that they played great red-zone defense. They were phenomenal inside the 10-yard line, and teams couldn't get in the end zone."

For any shutout to stay intact, though, a defense needs to be great for the entire game. And because Ohio State was so dominant, that often meant the backups on defense needed to keep up the work of the starters.

The good news for the Buckeyes was that talented young players like Bob Brudzinski and Doug Plank were ready at any moment to make an impact off the bench.

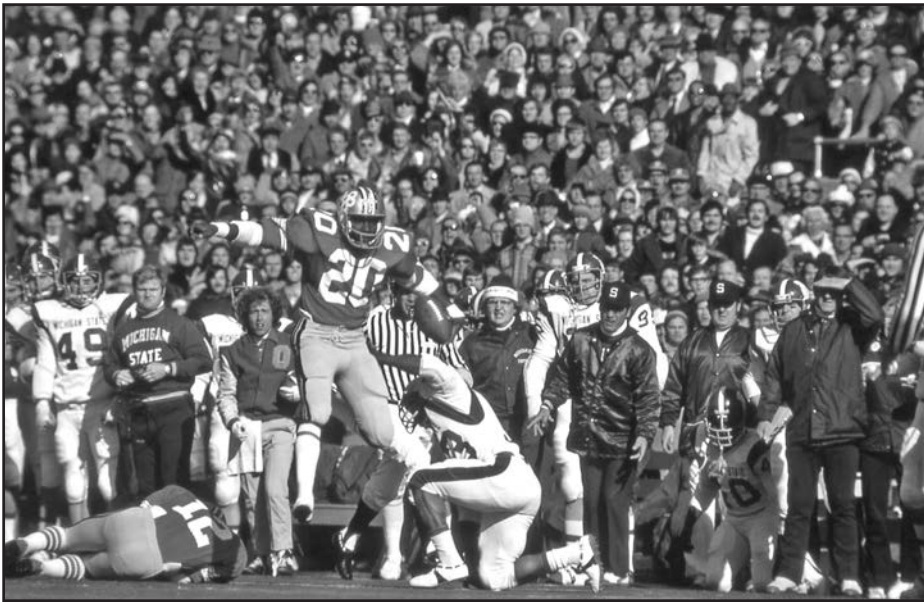
"You have to remember something," Pagac said. "We had a lot more players back then. I mean, we were two deep across the board and had good football players two deep across the board. Injuries happened – and people got injured back in those days – and the next man up would come in and play his heart out."

Henson said Ohio State's depth was on full display in practices, which was often the most competitive atmosphere for the Buckeyes.

"There was a lot of competition," Henson recalled. "When the backups needed to play, they played fantastically as well, but there was a lot of competition and everybody really had to be at their best, not only in the games, but in practice all week long. It was the same way on offense. There was so much talent on those teams when I was there, which was a luxury that most coaches couldn't afford. I think the best game in the Big Ten during the season was our Tuesday scrimmage or our full goal line. There was no doubt in my mind."

"I know that offense and defense both, we liked to get the upper hand because we wanted the other guys to play. A lot of times, we were like, 'Come on, Coach, we're far enough ahead, let the other guys play.' And I think that's a testament to the kind of guys that were on that team."

If the 1973 Buckeyes had one superpower, it was getting out to a lead. In fact, the Buckeyes outscored their opponents 73-3 during the first quarter over the entire season. According to Conley, the Buckeye de-



FILE PHOTO

NEAL BEFORE THEE — Cornerback Neal Colzie (20) was the catalyst for a secondary that allowed 91.2 passing yards per game and conceded just three passing touchdowns in 1973. He had four interceptions that season, returning two for TDs.

fense was so sharp to start games because of its conditioning.

"I think that's what was expected of them," Conley said of Ohio State's strong starts. "That's what they prided themselves on. If you ever watched Ohio State's defensive practices back then, those guys would go through a long practice, and then they would sprint, and they would sprint and they would sprint. Those guys had to be the most in-shape defense in the country. They were always running so much."

The Buckeyes' hyper-talented defense didn't need much help, but that is exactly what they received from the complementary offense. Even for 1973, the Buckeyes were old-fashioned in their offensive attack. Hayes' offense attempted only 87 passes and completed 35 of those attempts.

That didn't mean the Buckeyes weren't effective on offense, though. Instead, Ohio State effectively relied on its running game, even though Henson, an All-Big Ten fullback in 1972, was sidelined for much of the season with a knee injury. The Buckeyes converted linebacker Bruce Elia to carry the rock in short-yardage situations as a fullback and also gave sophomore running back Archie Griffin plenty more touches.

Both of those moves worked out perfectly. Griffin led the Big Ten in rushing yards and yards per carry, while Elia finished the season with 14 touchdowns, the most in the Big Ten.

As Henson pointed out, the effectiveness of Ohio State's offense also worked to give the defense a rest and keep opposing offenses off the field.

"Coach Hayes' philosophy was he'd rather have a 90-yard drive that took 25 plays than a 99-yard run. When you do have those long, sustained drives, Coach always said that your offense has to have a cumulative effect where you just batter them and wear them down, and of course, that gives your defense a nice rest when you can do those things," Henson said. "Sometimes, we scored so fast that they were right back on the field again. We all complemented each other every day. I think when it came down to it, Woody probably got his first pick of athletes to put on offense, but I think we

were pretty evenly divided as far as talent at every position. We just had so much talent that the offense would not be better than the defense."

While both sides certainly had plenty of talent to go around, Henson recalled a couple of instances when the defense started to get the better of the offense in practice, even if they had an unfair advantage.

"We grew up in a time where you questioned the authority a little bit, and we kind of pushed Coach Hayes over the limit a couple times," Henson said. "In scrimmages and during practice, the defense would like nothing more than to blow everything up, so Coach Hayes was going to go on a tirade. When the offense would run a play, everybody who wasn't in the play had to stand behind and watch your position, even if — especially if — you were injured, you had to watch your position."

"And so the coach had a manager write on a blackboard the play that he would call in the huddle, and he would show everybody so that they could watch their position and anticipate what they would do if they were in there, but we found out that they had some spies who would look at the blackboard and telegraph to the defense what we were going to do, just to blow everything up to make the coach lose his mind. It was so much fun."

The Buckeye defense didn't allow 10 points in a single game until the offense steamed over Iowa in a 55-13 win in the ninth game of the season, and the backups uncharacteristically failed to keep up the dominant effort by the defense.

It wasn't until a season-ending game against Michigan that Ohio State matched up with an opponent remotely close to its talent level. In the game that featured two undefeated teams, the Buckeyes had the edge in the first half. Fueled by a strong performance by Griffin, Ohio State surged in front 10-0.

In the second half, though, Ohio State's defense showed vulnerabilities for the first time all season. The Buckeyes gave up 209 yards in the second half as Michigan scored 10 fourth-quarter points to tie the game. It took multiple late missed field goals by the Wolverines for the Buckeyes to escape Ann

Arbor with a tie.

"They threw the ball a little bit, so I think they ended up with around 100 yards (99) throwing the ball," Conley said. "Their quarterback, (Dennis) Franklin, was a good athletic quarterback. It was one of those games where you don't want to make mistakes, especially playing up there, but (Ohio State) probably buckled up a little soon, because we had a 10-0 lead at halftime."

The tie between the Buckeyes and Wolverines necessitated a vote between conference officials to determine which team would go to the Rose Bowl.

To the chagrin of then-Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler and plenty of Michigan fans, the vote went in favor of the Buckeyes.

"Both teams ended up with the same exact regular-season and conference record, and so when the vote came out, and primarily, I think because Michigan had more yards in that game and played well late, a lot of people thought they were going to get the bid," Conley said. "It was a close vote, and the deciding vote, I think, might have been the Michigan State athletic director, which didn't make the Michigan people very happy. I don't think they've ever forgiven them for that."

Ohio State took full advantage of the opportunity to go to the Rose Bowl. The Buckeyes dominated a talented USC team 42-21 to win their only Rose Bowl of the 1970s.

"I think we definitely had the upper hand on them, and we got up on them a little bit, and again, (USC was) loaded with talent," Henson said.

Time Takes Its Toll On Legacy Of '73 Team

Despite Ohio State's dominant Rose Bowl performance, the team was ranked one spot below No. 1 Notre Dame, which finished the season 11-0.

Henson said Ohio State has no one but itself to blame for missing out on the honor of being national champions.

"We should have been national champions, but we weren't," Henson said. "The game against Michigan — and then even

after that, we had really had a great game there against Southern California — I think we were pretty close. We probably finished second that year, but it was nobody's fault but our own. A damn tie on top of it all."

Still, Conley, Pagac and Henson agreed the 1973 defense is one of the best in the history of the program.

"I think it's right up there," Conley said. "It has to be in the top five since I have followed football, which is a very long time, but they were outstanding. That team that year, I don't think there's any doubt they were the best defense in the country."

As good as the defense was, Ohio State's 1973 team as a whole isn't often mentioned as one of the great teams in Buckeye history. According to Rea, the legacy of the team has been somewhat diminished over time.

"Everybody's mind fades over time, and it was a different game back then," Rea said. "There are a lot of people who think Ohio State football started when Jim Tressel was hired, there are a lot who think it started when Urban Meyer was hired, so out of sight, out of mind. There were a lot of guys on that team who were studs, Neil Colzie and Van DeCree. If you told the average Buckeye fan, 'What do you think of Arnie Jones or Vic Koegel?' they would say, 'I never heard of them.' It's tough, but 50 years ago, time fades all memories."

"I think the reason they don't get that recognition is because of the time frame, but I'm glad people are looking at them now in the context of what this year's defense is doing."

The 2025 Buckeyes still have a long way to go before the season is over, but it's no surprise they are drawing comparisons to the best defenses in Buckeye history. Ohio State has allowed just 6.9 points per game, following its 38-14 win over Penn State on Nov. 1, by far the best mark in the country.

"I think if they finish strong, athletically, they should have the talent," Conley said when asked if the 2025 defense can be as good as the 1973 defense. "But in the game of football, it's how you finish, not how you start."

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OSU Unleashes Not-So-Secret Weapon Reese

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Before Ohio State's fall football camp kicked off on July 31, linebacker Arvell Reese was a name circulated among diehard Buckeye fans, sparking both intrigue and uncertainty.

Those who watched Ohio State in 2024 had seen flashes of Reese as a sophomore during the Buckeyes' march to winning the national championship. And with the loss of starting linebacker and captain Cody Simon to the NFL draft in April, it was known that Reese would likely be the main candidate to step into a larger role.

Still, before he took the field against Texas in the season opener, Reese wasn't exactly a fixture in the national news. Few could have predicted his rapid rise to being one of the country's premier linebackers.

Now a junior, Reese has propelled himself into national conversations, earning high praise from Buckeye coaches and teammates alike for his rare blend of length, speed and power that's made him a dominant force on Ohio State's defense in 2025.

Following Ohio State's 37-9 victory over in-state rival Ohio on Sept. 13, Buckeye defensive coordinator Matt Patricia highlighted Reese's diverse skill set that makes him an elite linebacker.

"He can rush the passer, and he's certainly dynamic if you can get him around the quarterback for sure," Patricia said. "He's big and long and can run and chase these guys down. So we are just continually asking him to do different things. He's done a great job of just understanding that and being put in positions. There's a lot of calls on the field where he might be changing some of the assignments based on different looks that we have, and his ability to do that has really been outstanding."

Though Reese has exploded onto the gridiron for Ohio State this season, his transition from a highly touted recruit to a star Buckeye has been a slow burn.

Reese comes from Glenville High School in Cleveland, playing for a football program that has been a pipeline to Ohio State throughout the 21st century. The four-star prospect was ranked just the 213th player nationally and the 22nd-best linebacker in the 2023 class coming out of high school.

Reese said he felt pride in following the tradition of players from his high school who went on to become Buckeyes, calling it a goal of his.

"I take a lot of pride in the (pipeline of Glenville to Ohio State)," Reese said. "I've been playing since I was 5 years old. So I was hearing all those names growing up, and that's something I wanted to do."

As a freshman at OSU in 2023, Reese didn't see the field on defense, instead cutting his teeth on special teams as head coach Ryan Day has recommended for young players. Reese played in just 58 snaps in his rookie season, all of which came on special teams. However, Reese's season hit an early setback just two games in when he sustained a concussion against Youngstown State, forcing him to miss the next five games and limiting him to only six

games overall.

At times during that freshman campaign, Reese was moved from his native linebacker position to defensive end, where he was used as an edge rusher on Ohio State's scout team.

Reese said that despite playing defensive end on the scout team for only a short period of time, he felt that playing along the defensive line was a natural fit for him.

"I was only a defensive end for like two weeks," Reese said. "So it's really just my natural ability off the edge."

Though his play at defensive end was just for a limited time, Day said he felt Reese's early reps at defensive end set the stage for his versatility going forward. This season, Reese has played out of the normal linebacker spot in the middle of the field, has rushed the passer from the edge of the line and has even moved to the interior, not losing any effectiveness in any area of his game wherever he plays.

"Arvell went from linebacker to playing on the scout team defensive end, and now he's back at linebacker," Day said. "These guys have a history of playing multiple positions. That's exciting because whether it's coverage, blitzing off the edge, playing man to man, lining up on an offensive lineman in pass rush, those types of things, there's just a lot you can do with that."

Before the 2024 season, Reese reflected on his freshman year, citing the challenges of never feeling truly involved since he had no snaps on defense.

"I feel like last year I was just here," Reese said that September. "I wasn't really involved. It wasn't really difficult. I knew I wasn't seeing the field. It was because of what I was doing. I wasn't really into the playbook. I was really all over the place."

Reese's sophomore campaign was his first time taking in-game snaps with the Buckeye defense. Though with a stacked unit, Reese was slotted into a backup role behind starters Simon and Sonny Styles, who had just made the transition from safety to linebacker.

The 6-4 Reese beefed up to 240 pounds, and despite being the third linebacker on the depth chart, he still made a major impact for Ohio State in 2024. Reese was perhaps the most valuable reserve for the Buckeyes, playing in all 16 games on Ohio State's journey to the national championship while ranking 12th on the team (first among nonstarters) with 43 total tackles (18 solo), 3½ tackles for loss and a half sack.

Although he didn't start at all, Reese felt that a season watching a polished veteran and leader such as Simon on and off the field was monumental for understanding what it takes to win games.

"I learned a lot from those guys, especially Cody," Reese said. "Cody played in my position, so me being behind him, I could just watch him and just learn from him. Seeing what he was doing in walk-throughs, I'm locked in learning."

With the loss of Simon to the NFL draft, Reese entered the 2025 season with a strong chance to lock down the opening for the second linebacker spot next to Styles.

An impressive fall camp allowed him to do just that, as he began to turn heads with

his explosive play.

Linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said Reese is almost a "positionless" player as his skill set gives him the ability to thrive in multiple roles, adding that he and Patricia have worked to instill that confidence in the junior.

"Coach Patricia loves him, believes in him deeply, which I think has helped boost his confidence," Laurinaitis said during fall camp. "We talked to many people on our (defensive) staff about Arvell in general. They probably would all use the word 'freak' to describe him."

"For right now, early in camp, we're trying to get really good at the fundamentals, but Arvell has the ability to cut it loose. I think that's when you describe freak. He's almost one of those guys that's positionless. He can work at multiple different spots. Now, a lot of that might come down to game planning, but he definitely has the talent level to do multiple things for us."

Reese shared similar feelings, adding that the belief Laurinaitis and Patricia have in him helped push him to new heights.

"Coach Laurinaitis has made me realize that I could really do it and actually play (to my potential)," Reese said. "He always says if I just put the time in, I can do it. He's always seen something in me."

That confidence has been evident as Reese has elevated his play to become a force to be reckoned with in 2025.

Reese opened the season with a career-high nine-tackle performance against then-No. 1 Texas, recording the game's only sack on quarterback Arch Manning.

Following the Buckeyes' 14-7 victory over the Longhorns, Reese said he felt his strong spring had fueled his play in the fall and into the season opener.

"I had a pretty good spring, and that pretty much instilled in me that I could actually do it," Reese said.

Through eight games in 2025, Reese had already passed his tackle total of 2024, with a team-leading 54 takedowns (28 solo). Additionally, Reese has lived in the backfield, with Patricia using the versatile linebacker as a chess piece all over the field. Reese ranked second on Ohio State to defensive end Caden Curry with nine tackles for loss and 6½ sacks.

When asked about how he chooses to implement a player as versatile as Reese, Patricia said he tries to keep defenses on their toes as much as possible by putting the linebacker in a variety of different spots.

"I'm just trying to put a little bit of uncertainty in the offense to figure out what exactly he is doing on this play," Patricia said. "I think that's the biggest thing that you can do with guys that have that multiple ability on the field."

Reese's counterpart in the middle of the field, Styles – with whom he's formed arguably the nation's top linebacker duo in 2025 – said Reese's biggest area of improvement since last season has been his understanding of the game.

"I would say mentally just understanding the game (is where Reese has grown the most)," Styles said. "He's always had the physical attributes, but it's important for him to be able to understand the game and play fast and use those physical attributes."



FILE PHOTO

MAKING A NAME — Junior linebacker Arvell Reese has moved into a starting role for the first time this season and is quickly drawing attention for his play. He leads the team in tackles and is second in sacks.

Reese has seemingly shown up in Ohio State's biggest games, flexing his muscles by tying what was a career-best nine tackles while adding 1½ sacks in the Buckeyes' 34-16 triumph over then-No. 17 Illinois in Champaign on Oct. 11.

He then surpasses his career-best tackle mark against Penn State on Nov. 1, recording 12 tackles, 2½ tackles for loss and a sack in the 38-14 win.

"I'm always around the ball. I'm sideline to sideline," Reese said. "I think I can do a lot of different stuff on the field, too."

Reese's uncanny ability and strong early-season performances have thrust him into first-round draft talks, with Pro Football Focus' most recent mock draft having the linebacker selected as high as eighth overall, a draft position that would almost certainly guarantee that Reese wouldn't be back in Columbus for his senior season.

But while Reese is at Ohio State playing as one of the best defenders in the country, the coaches are making sure to both use him as much as they can and appreciate the fact that he has developed into the player he is this year. Laurinaitis called Reese's skill set a dream for him and the Ohio State coaching staff.

"It's violence at the point of attack, and the ability to run," Laurinaitis said. "He can do a lot of different things you dream of when you get to the linebacker position."

Hinzman Restores Confidence To Lead O-Line

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

He may have taken an unconventional route, but junior center Carson Hinzman has established himself as an essential piece of Ohio State's offensive line.

Hinzman went through plenty of growing pains as a young Buckeye and mainly struggled when he was thrust into the starting lineup as a redshirt freshman in 2023. However, Hinzman wasn't discouraged by his turbulent start. Instead, he has steadily improved his game to become an All-Big Ten caliber player in the middle of Ohio State's front.

"He's become an excellent football player," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said of Hinzman before the Buckeyes' 34-0 blow-out win over Wisconsin. "His communication. He's playing with great confidence. He keeps everybody together up front. And I thought he's handled some of the environments he played in well so far this season."

Ranked the No. 177 player, the No. 9 interior offensive lineman, and the No. 3 player out of Wisconsin, Hinzman was a talented high school player, but it didn't always seem like he'd end up as a Buckeye. In fact, the lineman grew up worshipping Wisconsin football.

"Every birthday, my mom would paint something on the windows, and she'd always paint Bucky the Badger on the windows," Hinzman said. "I would dress up like a Wisconsin Badger fan my whole life. I always carried around a Wisconsin lunch pail until I graduated high school. Everything I had was Badger my whole life."

It took an impressive recruiting effort from former Ohio State offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and a missed phone call by former Wisconsin offensive line coach Joe Rudolph for Hinzman to become a Buckeye.

"One night we were coming back from one of my sister's games or something like that. We were in the car, and I was like, 'Let's call him,' " Hinzman said of Rudolph. "It was really, really late, and I don't think Coach Rudolph answered at the time. I was like, 'You know what, let me think about it.' I thought about it more, and obviously I committed (to Ohio State)."

It was a big recruiting win for a Buckeye program in desperate need of quality offensive linemen. And after he redshirted in 2022, Hinzman was already in a position to contribute in 2023. He beat out Vic Cutler, a transfer from Louisiana Monroe, to be the team's starting center, but he was not necessarily ready for the opportunity.

With Hinzman starting at center, Ohio State finished the regular season averaging just 142.3 rushing yards per game, the 84th-best mark in the country.

Hinzman made his first return to his home state that year, when Ohio State beat Wisconsin 24-10 on Oct. 28, but that wasn't necessarily an individual performance he is very proud of.

"It was rough," Hinzman said. "I had no idea, really, what I was doing. I was just kind of playing ball and hoping nothing went wrong. You watch it, you get a little red in the face. You have to turn it off for a little bit and get back to it."



FILE PHOTO

CENTERPIECE — Junior Carson Hinzman has earned his way to becoming the starting center in an up-and-down career and now is a veteran anchor for the offensive line.

Hinzman, who struggled with confidence throughout the season, struggled in practice in the lead-up to Ohio State's 14-3 loss to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl.

Despite spending the entire regular season as a starter, Hinzman didn't play a single snap against Missouri, with former Buckeye Matt Jones getting the start at center.

Hinzman didn't quit on Ohio State after a tumultuous end to the 2023 season, and even after the Buckeyes added former Alabama center Seth McLaughlin through the transfer portal, he stayed on the roster.

Hinzman made improvements during the offseason, and even though he didn't earn a starting spot to open the season, he was in a position to get back on the field when the Buckeyes suffered several injuries along the offensive line.

He performed well coming off the bench for Ohio State at guard in Ohio State's 20-13 win over Penn State last season and was one of four offensive linemen named a Player of the Game by Ohio State. That made it no surprise when Ohio State's coaching staff tabbed him to take over at center after McLaughlin suffered a season-ending injury before the Buckeyes' 38-15 win over Indiana.

"Well, I see some confidence in him," Day said of Hinzman in November last year. "I

think he's learned a lot from Seth this year. I think they've been great together. I think he gained a lot of confidence coming out of the Penn State game. He's playing with a lot of confidence. He has experience there at center, so he's done it."

Former Ohio State guard Donovan Jackson also noticed improvements in Hinzman's mentality during the 2024 season.

"He's always been physically gifted," Jackson said. "Weight room numbers through the roof. Zebra numbers, fast, everything like that. I feel like mentally he's matured, and his confidence level is a lot higher than last year. He's always had the intangibles, and now he just has confidence in himself, and we have confidence in him to go out and do what he needs to do. I feel like he's grown as a player and as a man."

Still, there was a bit of a learning curve for Hinzman and the rest of Ohio State's offensive line at the end of the regular season. The group was no match for a loaded Michigan defensive line that included eventual first-round picks at defensive tackle, Mason Graham and Kenneth Grant. The Buckeye offense had its second-worst performance of the season on the ground and picked up only 77 yards on 26 carries (3.0-yard average).

However, in the College Football Playoff, the Buckeyes found their stride. Despite going against some of the best defenses in the country in the four straight games, Ohio State averaged 158.0 rushing yards per game, the third-best mark of any team in the playoffs. Ohio State's offensive line was also solid in pass protection. The Buckeye front gave up just four sacks over four games.

With McLaughlin departing the program, Hinzman was slotted back into the starting lineup and looked almost unrecognizable as compared to the redshirt freshman who shakily made his way through the 2023 season.

In Ohio State's 24-6 win over Washington on Sept. 27, he and redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Sayin handled the adversarial road crowd impressively well. Not only did the Buckeyes go for 149 rushing yards on 34 carries, but they committed just one pre-snap penalty. For his efforts, Hinzman was named a player of the game along with left guard Luke Montgomery.

"Luke and Carson were both the players of the game, which has never happened before here," Day said. "I felt like on the road, they handled themselves like pros. Luke was looking back to get the signal. His back is to the defense. Carson is making the calls and in a loud environment. And the two of them, I thought, handled that excellently. And I thought it had to do with their approach. Going into the off week, and the way they handled it, that took a lot of pressure off of everybody, including the quarterback."

Hinzman was the second-highest graded player by Pro Football Focus in the Buckeyes' win over Washington. He received an 80.3 grade, making him Ohio State's highest-graded offensive player.

Hinzman also submitted a solid performance in Ohio State's 34-16 win over Illinois, so when he made the journey back up north to take on his childhood team this year, his confidence was at an all-time high.

"I'm just excited to go and play with a lot more confidence than I had back then," Hinzman said before the Buckeyes' win over Wisconsin. "I have a lot of trust in what we have going on here right now."

It wasn't a perfect performance for Hinzman or Ohio State's other offensive linemen. The Buckeyes rushed for only 98 yards. However, Sayin was sacked only once despite attempting a season-high 42 passes.

Although Hinzman said he can always get better for the Buckeyes, he knows he's come a long way from where he was when he got to Columbus.

"I wouldn't say that there was a specific time or something like that," Hinzman said when asked if there was a moment he developed his confidence. "I think just over time, building that confidence through repetitions of being consistent, and whether it's calls or actions that we do on the field, it kind of builds that confidence. Being in a position where I'm at now, I obviously have a lot of room to grow, a lot to learn, and a lot more confidence. As of right now, I feel like I'm in a pretty good spot."

George Gets 100 For Sixth Straight Game

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is 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 28-0 win over Purdue on Oct. 21, 1995.

By MARCUS HARTMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's 28-0 win over Purdue in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21 was not the most memorable of the 1995 season.

Coming in the rain and on the heels of three straight tough contests – including two on the road – it was one the Buckeyes just wanted to get under their belts and move on.

The week was still an important one in Eddie George's Heisman Trophy-winning season for another reason.

Heisman Push Begins

George finished the day with 104 yards on 23 carries. He scored a touchdown on the ground and caught five passes for 56 yards, but he also fumbled near the goal line and was stuffed at the 1-yard line to prevent him from having a bigger impact on the scoreboard.

Nonetheless, hitting the century mark for a sixth straight game was meaningful, especially since the drumbeats were getting louder that he should be considered among the favorites for the Heisman Trophy.

That was thanks in part to the school deciding to push him for the award with postcards it sent out across the country.

"It was our staff's idea," said OSU sports information director Steve Snapp. "We wanted to do something to keep his name in the forefront, and we thought that was a pretty good idea. We wanted to change the theme every week and make it interesting,

so when people got it, they would look at it, not just toss it away."

The decision to feature George in a Heisman campaign had the potential to be controversial. Not only had it not been done at Ohio State since 1984 for Keith Byars, but it also meant potentially downplaying the seasons being had by teammates Bobby Hoying and Terry Glenn.

Not that either of them saw it that way, of course.

"We're not concerned about that at all," said Hoying, Ohio State's standout senior quarterback. "We just go out and do whatever we need to do. If we're successful the rest of the year, Eddie's definitely going to be considered for the Heisman.

"It doesn't bother me at all. If I had a vote, I'd vote for Eddie. Everybody's going to say it doesn't matter, but it really doesn't matter for me. If we keep doing what we're doing, we'll all be up for some postseason awards."

Glenn, a junior receiver who had already started breaking Ohio State records by that point in the season, shared similar sentiments.

"Right now I'm really not thinking about all that," the Columbus native said after breaking the single-season Ohio State record against Purdue with his 12th touchdown catch of the season. "I'm thinking about getting my education and helping this team go to the Rose Bowl."

Team goals were also top of mind for George, who was sure to spread the praise around for an offense averaging more than 35 points per game and equally dangerous on the ground or through the air.

"I think the overall success of the team and our offense in general has been a big help," George said. "Guys like Bobby, Terry, (tight end) Rickey Dudley, and the supporting cast, they've highlighted me in a way because I get the ball so much, only good things can possibly happen. It feels good to be up for it, but I'm still only a candidate. I'll be happy if I win it. But I'm still going to stay focused and do what I've been doing."

Turnovers Slow Scoring

Offensive coordinator Joe Hollis wasted no time getting George involved against the Boilermakers.

The senior tailback got the ball on four straight plays after Mike Vrabel blocked a Purdue punt and Central McClellion recovered at the Purdue 24-yard line less than three minutes into the contest.

He went right for 7 on first down then cut back to the right side for 8 more on second.

After taking a pitch around left end for 8, he went right up the middle for the last yard and a touchdown.

"I kind of figured that on a day like today, we weren't going to throw it as much," George said. "On that first drive, we had the ball in good field position, and we wanted to set the tone. We were not going to be denied. We wanted to attack them early and see how they would adjust. I think we established that pretty well on the first drive by attacking them right off the bat."

The Buckeyes moved the ball much of the afternoon despite the conditions, but they had three drives deep into Purdue territory that ended with turnovers.

"We should have been up 28-0 at half-time in my opinion," said head coach John Cooper.

They actually held just a 14-point edge at the break, but Ohio State cornerback Ty Howard set the offense up with good field position again with an interception near midfield early in the third quarter.

Then George went to work again, rumbling 19 yards on the fourth play of the drive to give the Buckeyes first-and-goal at the 7. Then Hoying took over, finding Glenn in the corner of the end zone for a touchdown with 10:56 left in the third quarter.

That connection finished the scoring one drive later when Hoying found Glenn in the middle of the end zone from 12 yards out with 5:26 to go in the third quarter.

The defense took it from there, harassing a hobbled Purdue offense missing starting quarterback Rick Trefzger and No. 1 tailback Corey Rogers all afternoon. The Boilermakers finished with only 259 yards, and Ohio State posted its first shutout since blanking Houston in the fourth game of the 1994 campaign.

Star fullback Mike Alstott ran for 109 yards on 26 carries for Purdue, but that counted as a win in the book of OSU line-backer Greg Bellisari.

"We played sound up front, and if you do that, you're pretty much going to stop anybody," Bellisari said. "If he doesn't have a chance to run downhill at you, he can't go anywhere."

Freshman cornerback Antoine Winfield, who was in the game for an injured Shawn Springs, secured the goose egg with a tackle of the Purdue quarterback at the 2-yard line as time expired.

"That young guy, Winfield, is making some plays," Cooper said.

George Nears Thousand

George ran his season's yardage total to 990 and could likely have passed the 1,000-yard mark for the second consecutive year if he had not exited the game early because of the score.

He was coming off being named the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week for his performance at Wisconsin, where he ran for 141 yards on 26 carries and scored two touchdowns.

That was his second time being so honored following his 200-yard effort against Washington in the second game of the season, and Cooper said he wouldn't mind helping George pad his stats when the opportunity arose.

"If he has a chance to get some good stats, I might leave him in to get 100, 150, 200 yards," Cooper said. "I don't know if he can win it just by playing steady. He's going to need impressive stats."

George also had the endorsement of Archie Griffin, the two-time Heisman Trophy winner who was an assistant athletic director at OSU.

"Certainly you're going to look at the person and try to get someone who's living right and try to get someone who represents the Heisman very, very well because it's a family," Griffin said. "I only get one vote, but I'm sure going to make it count."

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Stroud Has Faith In Himself And Texans

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

C.J. Stroud has never been shy about expressing his faith. Anyone who has followed the Houston Texans quarterback since his days at Ohio State knows it wouldn't be an interview with him if it doesn't start with praising God and Jesus Christ.

Some are put off by what they feel is Stroud and other athletes shoving religion down their throats. Others find it refreshing that he expresses his beliefs, while others are of the opinion that he should just answer the darn questions.

But faith doesn't have to involve a deity. Stroud is convinced a subpar start to the 2025 season was an aberration, and he expected to return to the form that made him the AP NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2023.

He had a drop-off in performance last season, and there were skeptics who questioned his ability to turn around a team that lost its first three games this season while scoring just 38 points.

After rebounding for victories over the Tennessee Titans (26-0) and the Baltimore Ravens (44-10), the Texans had a chance to show they were a threat to win the AFC South on Monday Night Football on Oct. 20 but an ugly 27-19 loss to the Seattle Seahawks energized Stroud's critics after he went 23 of 49 for 229 yards with a touchdown and an interception.

"First, I've got to point to myself," he said, "missing a couple of throws. I've got to work through the pressure. They're going to bring some blitzes. We've got to just do some things to run some different schemes, I think would help. I just think that we didn't catch a rhythm.

"It starts with me, and I've got to do a better job of distributing the ball. When I have good pockets, I've got to make sure I'm getting the ball out on time and to the right guys. I look inward, and then there are some other things we'll watch film and get better at."

Outsiders may have had their doubts, but inside the Texans' locker room, they had faith in Stroud.

"We have C.J. as our quarterback, and he's the best," defensive end Will Anderson Jr. said. "I believe in him, and I think he's going to lead us to a Super Bowl one day."

Stroud rewarded that confidence by leading the Texans to a 26-15 win over the San Francisco 49ers on Oct. 26.

Even without injured leading receiver Nico Collins, Stroud was 30 of 39 for 318 yards, two touchdowns and an interception. It was his first 300-yard game of the season.

"One of his best games ever," Texans coach DeMeco Ryans said afterward. "The way he operated today was very clean football, and I'm proud of where he is. We just have to continue to stay with this every week."

The Texans had possession of the ball for 41 of the 60 minutes and finished with 475 total yards – their most in a game since Nov. 12, 2023, against the Cincinnati Bengals.

nati Bengals.

Given time in the pocket, he was able to pick apart the defense. He was not sacked for the first time in the regular season since Week 5 of the 2023 season.

"I know what I can do," Stroud said postgame. "I know I'm a top guy in this league when I'm rolling. I've just got to keep that going.

"This is a long season. It's a marathon, it's not a sprint. If we keep stacking, who knows? We can do whatever we put on the field. I think today was a step in the right direction."

Texans tight end Dalton Schultz has seen Stroud mature as a quarterback.

"Since he got here, dude, you give him a clean pocket and space to throw, kid's going to light it up," Schultz told Sports Illustrated's Albert Breer. "He's built like that. He's wired like that. He's a competitor. And I think he's come such a long way evolving his process, becoming more patient the older he gets, being willing to take a checkdown. He's come a long way into being willing to take a good play that could turn into a great play."

That patience was evident in Stroud completing passes to nine receivers vs. the 49ers.

"It's always good to get a little motivation," the QB said. "We didn't have our best outing against Seattle, and I think that was just motivation to do the right thing. I think I've always got to find motivation every week, regardless if we do good or bad.

"I think that was one of the keys. And every time you simplify it one play at a time, everybody doing their job, it kind of makes the game a little easier."

Taking Stock

At the same time as Stroud was beating San Francisco, his former OSU teammate Justin Fields quarterbacked the New York Jets to their first win of the season, 39-38 over the Bengals.

Afterward, Fields was emotional in describing his feelings. He had been benched the previous game, and Jets owner Woody Johnson publicly criticized him, saying, "It's hard when you have a quarterback with a rating that he's got. If we can just complete a pass, it would look good."

Fields said he choked up walking off the field after the win.

"I was damn near about to start crying," he said. "Not because we won, but because of the goodness of God. Just how everything works for the greater good, everything that I've been through this past week, everything that we've been through as a team these past seven weeks."

He talked of days before, lying down in a closet, crying and worrying about losing his faith. He said text messages from his sister and stepmom gave him reassurance.

"It was just a sign from God for me to keep going and that I'm in the right place," Fields said. "Yesterday, I was just praying

over and over again, just one. One win. But all that to say is, God is real. God is good. And everything that we go through in this life is for a purpose."

Stroud was asked about Fields at his media availability on Oct. 29.

"I'm just so proud of my brother, his growth with that and just his vulnerability," Stroud said. "It's hard.

"Everybody thinks it's so easy what we do, probably. It's really hard because you've got personal life, you've got football life, you've got family and all these different things, and then, everything's talked about. Even internally for him, he had people talking about him that you would hope would not, and they did that. But for him to still have the courage to speak up about his

walk, I think it was dope. I'm just super proud of him."

Stroud, who was Fields' backup in 2020, said he's had similar doubts and struggles in his career.

"We've all probably had our moment. You're not exempt because it's football," Stroud said. "You have those moments, and I think the more you can be honest with God and more honest with yourself, I think it's room for improvement."

Stroud, the No. 2 pick in the 2023 NFL draft, had a sensational rookie season in helping the Texans reach the playoffs after the franchise had an 11-38-1 record and failed to reach the playoffs the previous three seasons.

His 4,108 passing yards on a 63.9 percent completion rate were the third most by a rookie quarterback in NFL history, and his 23 touchdowns to five interceptions led the league in touchdown-interception ratio, making him the youngest player in NFL history to lead the league in pass touchdown-interception ratio in a season.



C.J. Stroud

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Restraining Order Against OHSAA Granted

A Franklin County judge has granted a temporary restraining order against state rules barring high school athletes from entering into deals to profit from their name, image and likeness, ruling in favor of Ohio State commit Jamier Brown.

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

The five-star 2027 wide receiver from Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne sued the Ohio High School Athletic Association, arguing that he, and other high school athletes throughout the state of Ohio, should be able to profit from NIL.

Franklin County Common Pleas Court Judge Jaiza Page issued the temporary restraining order on Oct. 20, which nullifies OHSAA's prohibition for now.

"This is a significant ruling not only for Jamier but high school athletes across the state of Ohio," said Luke Fedlam, Brown's attorney. "There are 44 states that allow high school athletes to enjoy that benefit through NIL."

Brown's attorneys argue that Brown has already missed out on over \$100,000 of potential NIL profits. Ohio is one of six states in the country that doesn't allow high school athletes to make money from NIL. OHSAA members rejected a rule change on NIL deals in 2022.

Fedlam defended the idea of NIL at the high school level, claiming there isn't a way it will get out of control like some say it has at the college level.

"It's important for folks to understand high school NIL is different from college NIL," Fedlam said. "There are guardrails that have been in place that protect the integrity of sport and competition. In college,



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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
Khmari Bing	S	6-0	190	★★★	Baltimore St. Frances Academy
Brock Boyd	WR	6-2	183	★★★	Southlake (Texas) Carroll
Blaine Bradford	S	6-1	207	★★★★★	Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic
Landry Brede	OT	6-5	280	★★★	Mentor, Ohio
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 Glenville
Jamir Perez	DL	6-4	360	★★★	Cleveland Glenville
Jaeden Ricketts	WR	6-0	187	★★★★	Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial
Maxwell Riley	OT	6-5	280	★★★★	Avon Lake, Ohio
CJ Sanna	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy
Damari Simeon	DL	6-3	275	★★★★	Richland (N.J.) St. Augustine Prep
Tucker Smith	OL	6-5	280	★★★	Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor
Aaron Thomas	OT	6-7	300	★★★	Phoenix Mountain Pointe
Jordan Thomas	CB	6-1	185	★★★★	Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic
Khary Wilder	DE	6-4	260	★★★★	Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra

OSU Football 2027 Commitments					
Player(s) in the class of 2027 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.					
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	★★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.
Angelo Smith	S	5-10	170	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
Mason Wilt	OT	6-5	265	★★★	St. Clairsville, Ohio
Kellen Wymer	OT	6-5	265	★★★★	Liberty Center, Ohio

OSU Football 2028 Commitments					
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
Jameer Whyce	DL	6-4	270	★★★★★	Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison

we have seen collectives for NIL to recruit and retain. That does not exist at the high school level. Most states have the regulations that do not allow collectives and how they can transfer and maintain eligibility."

The OHSAA board of directors approved language for an NIL proposal that was set to be voted on in May, but this lawsuit will likely accelerate the process.

"The OHSAA anticipated the judge making an initial ruling today on the NIL lawsuit to set the timeline moving forward," said OHSAA spokesperson Tim Stried. "The OHSAA is finalizing communications regarding the next steps for our member schools and will send out details on (Oct. 21)."

With the ruling, high school athletes in the state of Ohio will now be able to temporarily ink NIL deals, which many are already trying to do.

Brown tweeted a statement after the news of his lawsuit came out.

"I'm being raised by an amazing single mom who's always doing her best to keep things steady while helping me chase my goals on and off the field," it read. "Like what's allowed in other states, I want to be able to use my name, image and likeness to help my family financially and get the extra after-school academic help and football training that can help me maximize my potential. NIL can help make that possible

for me and many other student-athletes in Ohio."

Buckeyes Add Two 2027 Linemen

On Nov. 2, the day after beating Penn State 38-14, Ohio State added two offensive line commitments in the 2027 class, both of whom were on a visit for the win over the Nittany Lions.

Both in-state prospects, Liberty Center four-star offensive tackle Kellen Wymer (6-5, 265) and St. Clairsville three-star offensive tackle Mason Wilt (6-5, 295), announced their pledges to the Buckeyes within one minute of each other on Twitter. Wilt's post came first, right at 2 p.m., and Wymer's soon after, at 2:01.

Both were also offered a scholarship by Ohio State on the same day, June 23, when they attended a summer recruiting camp.

Wymer is the No. 216 player in the country and No. 5 in the state of Ohio, according to 247Sports composite rankings. Wilt is ranked No. 426 in the country and No. 15 in the state.

The two commitments add to what has been an impressive year for offensive line coach Tyler Bowen in recruiting. He has been able to land five offensive linemen in the 2026 class and now has begun adding in the 2027 class while he tries to flip a few prospects to finish off the 2026 cycle.

Wymer grew up a Michigan fan, he told 247Sports in June, which is when he got his scholarship offer from the Buckeyes. But when that offer came, he immediately began to consider playing in scarlet and gray rather than maize and blue.

"In all honesty, I grew up a Michigan fan, but after going to Ohio State and listening to their video before camp, I got chills," he said. "In that moment, I knew I could see myself playing here and being a Buckeye."

Buckeyes Host Loaded Group Of Recruits

While the game against Penn State on Nov. 1 didn't end up being quite as big an event as it was expected to be at the beginning of the season, the Buckeyes still managed to gather some important visitors on campus for the win over the Nittany Lions.

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

From the 2026 class, the Buckeyes hosted Fullshear (Texas) Katy Jordan three-star defensive lineman and North Carolina commit Jimmy-Phrisco Alo-Suliafu (6-3, 265); North Forney, Texas, four-star quarterback and Tennessee commit Legend Bey (5-11, 175); Harrisburg, Pa., four-star offensive tackle and Penn State commit Kevin Brown (6-5, 270); and Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland four-star cornerback and Florida State commit Jay Timmons (5-11, 185).

Ohio State commits who were back on campus were Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190); Southlake (Texas) Carroll three-star wide receiver Brock Boyd (6-1, 180); Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-8, 315); Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 240); Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280); and Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225).

From the 2027 class, Ohio State hosted a stacked visitor list that, on the offensive side of the ball, included Brentwood (Tenn.) Academy five-star wide receiver Kesean Bowman (6-1, 174); Detroit Stevenson interior offensive lineman Braden Chaffin (6-5, 255); Cincinnati Moeller four-star offensive tackle Kalel Johnson (6-7, 281); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas five-star offensive tackle Mark Matthews (6-6, 300); Germantown, Wis., four-star offensive tackle Cole Reiter (6-7, 295); Columbus Watterson three-star offensive tackle Davis Seaman (6-5, 270); McKeesport, Pa., five-star running back Kemon Spell (5-9, 205); Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland four-star wide receiver Khalil Taylor (5-11, 180); Wilt; Norco, Calif., four-star wide receiver Blake Wong (6-1, 170); and Wymer.

On the defensive side of the ball in the 2027 class, the Buckeyes hosted Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star linebacker Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220); Raleigh (N.C.) Cardinal Gibbons four-star cornerback Xavier Hasan (6-0, 180); Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit five-star linebacker Kaden Henderson (6-2, 200); Chicago Mount Carmel four-star linebacker Roman Igwebuike (6-3, 220); Cibolo (Texas) Steele four-star safety Eli Johnson (6-3, 200); Euless (Texas) Trinity five-star cornerback

ASK AN ANALYST

with Allen Trieu of 247Sports

Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison five-star defensive lineman Jameer Whyce (6-4, 270) committed to Ohio State on Oct. 16, the Buckeyes' second pledge in the 2028 class already. Have you been able to see Whyce play? What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I mean, he's elite. He's got an older brother, Trotwood-Madison three-star defensive lineman Jamarcus Whyce (6-2, 265), who's committed to Purdue and we think is a really good player. I've seen him a couple of times, too. Jameer's got some physical gifts that his older brother doesn't have. That's why he's been recruited a lot more heavily. He's got size, length, and is very athletic. And it's not a problem for Ohio State getting defensive linemen. They obviously have had a really good run of defensive linemen. But interior defensive linemen, I find, are the most valued positions in football at every level right now. Big guys who have the type of athleticism and strength combination that's needed to play there at a high level, they're rare. So when you have one in your state and he's ready to go and commit this early in the process, he's just a very rare bird. There's no question that he's an elite national prospect.

"He's got size, and he can move at that size. He can play off the edge, too. He's a really athletic edge guy who's moved inside more and will continue to move further that way as he gets bigger."

Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195) narrowed his scholarship list down to 12 schools, with Ohio State included. Where do you think the Buckeyes stand in Sales' recruitment, and what are their chances of landing a commitment from him at some point?

"It's not out of pocket to say that if he stays in the Midwest and closer to home, that Ohio State is the school that has the best chance to keep him in the Midwest and in Big Ten country. That being said, his recruitment is so national, and right now, the Southern schools are coming hard at him. Alabama is a threat, Miami (Fla.) is a threat. Right now, I think the Southern schools kind of have the buzz with him. But anytime Ohio State's involved with a wide receiver, they're going to be in it to the very end, and he knows all the things that Ohio State can offer him.

"He's been up there. He's connected with Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate and those guys. So he sees what they're doing. Ohio State's going to be a real factor, but that one's going to be a battle. It's changed hands a couple of times. Early on, he said Michigan was his leader. He likes them, and even him announcing a top 12, that still tells you that he's not ready to narrow it down any further. So that one's still got a long way to go, and Ohio State's going to be right in it until the very end."

Ohio State commit Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 170) was granted a temporary restraining order against the OHSAA in his NIL lawsuit. Do you believe that when the OHSAA votes again that it will allow players to profit from NIL in Ohio? If so, will that keep more prospects in the state?

"I found it's trending towards that they will allow it, and I think that's a good thing. There are a lot of states around the country that already allow it. It's going to be big for the kids in Ohio, and I do think it's going to help Ohio State keep some of those kids at home,

because right now, those guys can leave and get their NIL deals earlier. That's trending in the right direction for that to happen, and I do think it would end up being a positive for Ohio State when it comes to recruiting in-state kids."

With head coach James Franklin fired from Penn State, many Nittany Lion commits are reopening their recruitment. Who are the players there that you believe Ohio State has a chance with?

"I thought you were going to ask me about transfers. I thought you would ask me about (freshman Penn State defensive end) Chaz Coleman. So why don't I just get that out of the way first and say that I do think Ohio State's going to look at some guys on the actual roster that will be interested in maybe transferring. Chaz is the one that makes sense right away. Ohio State tried to recruit him at the end of the process. After he committed to Penn State, they tried to flip him and were unsuccessful. I think they're going to have a chance to maybe, on the back end of this, come back around and maybe get Chaz back home (in Ohio).

"As far as the guys in Penn State's (recruiting) class, the guys that are still committed, I don't see any real, obvious ones there that Ohio State's going to go after. Some of the guys that have already reopened their recruitment, looking at Penn State's class, I don't necessarily see a ton of guys that I think Ohio State's going to go after. I think they can wait and see how their class develops. But at least from the guys I've covered, I don't see a very obvious guy in Penn State's class for Ohio State to attack."

John Meredith III (6-2, 175); Waxahachie, Texas, five-star safety JayQuan Snell (6-3, 198); Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star defensive end Rashad Streets (6-4, 230); and Argyle (Texas) Liberty Christian five-star linebacker Cooper Witten (6-2, 210).

The Buckeyes also hosted a few 2028 prospects, one of whom was Ohio State commit Tampa (Fla.) Blake four-star running back Elijah Newman-Hall (5-11, 195). The others were Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School five-star defensive lineman Asher Ghioto (6-5, 240) and Bolingbrook, Ill., five-star edge rusher Darieon Prescott (6-6, 220).

Buckeyes Could Target UF, LSU Commits

The streak of head coaches getting fired midseason continued when Florida head coach Billy Napier was next on the chopping block on Oct. 19 and Brian Kelly was fired from LSU on Oct. 26

After Napier was relieved of his duties, multiple Gator commits gave updates on their status with the program, with mixed answers.

Ohio State had been a finalist for multiple Florida commits earlier in the 2026 recruiting cycle, and now, if Buckeye coaches want to, they will have the opportunity to poach some of the prospects who are having second thoughts with an uncertain future.

One of those prospects is Duncanville, Texas, four-star edge rusher KJ Ford (6-4, 245). When he committed on July 11, the Buckeyes were one of his top three, along with Florida and Texas A&M, with Ohio State thought to be No. 2 on his list.

When On3 talked to Ford about his status with Florida, Ford remained committed to the program but was paying attention to the direction it went with its new coach.

"I mean, (I'm) still with Florida right now," Ford said. "(There's) still hope out there. But other schools are still trying to contact me, hoping I flip."

It's unclear whether Ohio State has been in contact with Ford since Napier was fired, but it may not matter, with Ford hinting that his commitment might be more about his position coach with the Gators.

"It depends who the coach is," Ford added. "It depends. Position coach, you've got to look at things."

Another recruit the Buckeyes could check in on is Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star running back Carsyn Baker (6-1, 195), who at one point was predicted by On3's Steve Wiltfong to commit to Ohio State. Of course, Baker ended up in Florida's 2026 class after he took an official visit to Gainesville, Fla., and canceled an official visit he was going to take to Columbus in June.

Baker is the No. 172 player in the country, the No. 14 running back and the No. 24 player in the state of Georgia.

Ohio State has been in contact with Winter Garden (Fla.) Windermere four-star cornerback CJ Bronaugh (6-1, 166) since Napier was fired. There is more on him below.

As for LSU commits, the Buckeyes were one of the final schools considered for Suwanee (Ga.) Collins Hill four-star defensive lineman Deuce Gerald (6-2, 275). He is the No. 92 player in the country, the No. 10 defensive lineman and the No. 11 player in the state of Georgia.

Before he committed to the Tigers on Aug. 2, his top five schools also included Ohio State, Michigan, Oregon and Ole Miss.

Gerald is a great addition to the defensive line wherever he goes, proving that by becoming the all-time sack leader in the state of Georgia with 51. He still has more time to go in his senior season, but as of Oct.

28, Gerald had 336 career tackles, 106½ tackles for loss and 128 quarterback hurries. His 51 sacks broke the record of former NFL linebacker Lorenzo Carter.

The Buckeyes have also been predicted to land Wisconsin running back commit Tyrone (Ga.) Sandy Creek four-star Amari Latimer (5-11, 230), who recently visited Ohio State for the Minnesota game on Oct. 4.

Coaches Visit Prospects Over Off Week

With recruiting for the 2027 class beginning to heat up, where head coach Ryan Day went over the off week could be a look into who the priority targets are for Ohio State.

On Oct. 24, Day first stopped at Columbus Academy to see four-star defensive lineman Reinaldo Perez (6-5, 245), who earned an offer from the Buckeyes over the offseason.

Perez went to five recruiting camps in Columbus during the summer, hoping to earn an offer from his hometown Buckeyes, and finally did from defensive line coach Larry Johnson at his last appearance.

Before he got that offer, Perez told BSB at one of the camps that he had been dreaming of earning one from Ohio State.

"It would be an honor," Perez said on June 10. "Watching the Buckeyes play against Michigan, winning the national championships that they've won, I'd be honored to receive an offer from them. Being a hometown kid from Columbus, being able to have an offer (from Ohio State), that's really big."

Perez is the No. 201 player in the country, the No. 22 defensive lineman and the No. 4 player in the state of Ohio.

Later that same day, Day made a stop to see Chattanooga (Tenn.) The Baylor School five-star David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205), who has seemingly been the Buckeyes' top

running back target since he camped in Columbus over the summer.

Gabriel Georges has consistently said that he has a great relationship with running backs coach Carlos Locklyn and likes the way he coaches his players.

The Buckeyes are still fighting with Tennessee and Georgia for Gabriel Georges' commitment and will continue to push hard for it throughout the recruiting process. He is the No. 18 player in the country, the No. 2 running back and the No. 1 player in the state of Tennessee.

According to 247Sports, offensive line coach Tyler Bowen also made what could prove to be an important visit over the off week. He went to see Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3, 285), who was a major 2026 target for the Buckeyes before he committed to South Carolina on Aug. 22.

Since then, Gray's primary recruiter with the Gamecocks, offensive line coach Lonnie Teasley, was fired from his position with the program during what has been a disappointing season for South Carolina.

There doesn't seem to be a ton of momentum to flip Gray at this point, but in case the five-star has second thoughts about his commitment, Bowen is making sure the Buckeyes are still on his radar.

Gray's top five schools were the Gamecocks, Buckeyes, Clemson, LSU and Tennessee when he pledged. He is the No. 30 player in the class, the No. 2 interior lineman and the No. 2 player in Virginia.

Five-Star OT Almost Chose Buckeyes

Mansfield (Texas) Lake Ridge five-star

Continued On Page 28

Buckeyes Come In Second For Texas Tackle

Continued From Page 27

offensive tackle Felix Ojo (6-6, 275) made an appearance on “The Inside Scoop,” a recruiting show on the Rivals YouTube channel on Oct. 21.

While he mostly talked about Texas Tech, where he has been committed since July 4, he did mention Ohio State, saying the Buckeyes were very close to landing him on his commitment day.

“There was most definitely a second place (team),” Ojo said. “If I didn’t commit to Texas Tech, I probably would have committed to Ohio State. They were second in the running with Texas at three.

“What made me go to Texas Tech was the relationships. They were my third offer. I’ve been talking to them since the beginning. Even when I wasn’t that interested in Texas Tech, they were pushing for me.”

OSU Makes Top Schools Lists

Many different recruits have narrowed their scholarship lists down and included

Ohio State since BSB last went to press.

East St. Louis, Ill., four-star defensive end Myson Johnson-Cook (6-2, 220) is one of those prospects. He is down to 12 schools, with Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, LSU, Miami, Missouri, Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Texas on his list. Johnson-Cook is the No. 35 prospect in the 2027 class, the No. 2 athlete and the No. 1 player in the state of Illinois.

The Villages (Fla.) Charter four-star running back Tranard Roberts (6-0, 195) is down to five schools, including Auburn, Miami, Michigan, Ohio State and Tennessee on his list. He is the No. 208 player in the country, the No. 16 running back and the No. 19 player in the state of Florida.

Roberts is not the top running back target in the 2027 class for the Buckeyes, with both Spell and Gabriel Georges considering Ohio State. But Roberts could be a very good addition to the depth at the position behind one of those two blue-chip prospects should he land with the Buckeyes.

Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195)

has narrowed his list down to 12 schools. He included Alabama, Indiana, LSU, Miami, Michigan, Missouri, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas A&M. Steve Wiltfong of On3 reported that Ohio State and Alabama are the current front-runners for the five-star, which likely comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the work of Ohio State offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

Meredith, who visited Columbus for the Penn State game, is down to 11 schools. He is considering Alabama, Georgia, LSU, Miami, Ohio State, Oregon, SMU, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Texas and USC. Meredith is the No. 1 player in the 2027 class and would be a huge addition for the Buckeyes if they are able to continue to stay in the race for his services.

The Buckeyes were also included in the top 10 for West Boca Raton, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jamar Thompson (6-3, 305). His full list included Florida, Louisville, LSU, Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Oregon and Texas. Thompson is the No. 92 player in the 2027 class,

the No. 8 defensive lineman and the No. 8 player in the state of Florida.

Buckeyes Make Offers During Off Week

The Buckeyes were busy making scholarship offers during the off week, hoping to start to build relationships that will lead to commitments in the future. Here’s a quick look at each of the prospects who got offers from Ohio State since BSB last went to press.

- **Winter Garden (Fla.) Windermere four-star cornerback CJ Bronaugh (6-1, 166)** – Bronaugh is a 2026 Florida commit who could be having second thoughts about his decision since the Napier firing. He is the No. 109 player in the country, the No. 13 cornerback and the No. 14 player in the state of Florida. He has been committed to the Gators since June 18 and chose them over Florida State and Nebraska. He was previously committed to the Cornhuskers, decommitting on June 17. Bronaugh has already set up an official visit to Columbus on Nov. 15, when Ohio State matches up against UCLA.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1990

Fourteen weeks and counting until national signing day. Would you believe that four of the country's top seven tailbacks listed Ohio State as one of their favorite schools?

The competition for playing time was going to be extremely rough with Robert Smith, Raymont Harris and Butler B'ynote' all having three years of eligibility remaining after the 1990 season.

That didn't even count Dante Lee, with two years left after the season, and the impending return of Carlos Snow, who could come back for his final year of eligibility in 1991.

Nevertheless, Marquette Smith of Winter Park, Fla.; Stephen Pitts of Middletown, N.J.; Tyrone Wheatley of Dearborn Heights, Mich.; and Ki'Jana Carter of Westerville South had all indicated their interest in the Buckeyes.

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming rated Marquette Smith as the top tailback in the country. Pitts was ranked No. 2, Wheatley was fourth, and Carter was seventh.

30 Years Ago — 1995

The early commitment of Westerville (Ohio) South linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer could have signaled a snowball effect for Ohio State's 1996 recruiting effort.

The Buckeyes had 10 verbal commitments after getting the good word from Katzenmoyer and Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy wide receiver Vanness Provitt.

OSU had room for about 15 more players in the class. The OSU coaching staff might have been able to take a selective posture from then on, especially since the Ohio State name was popping up on the lists of players from coast to coast.

"I think they will probably get a few more commitments before the official visits start," said Bill Kurelic of The Ohio Football Recruiting News. "Once the visits start, they should be able to be fairly selective as to who they offer a scholarship to."

Katzenmoyer, a member of USA Today's "Super 25" and a consensus All-American, would help the Buckeyes finish with a highly rated class.

25 Years Ago — 2000

Ohio State was still recruiting a number of top seniors around Ohio and, certainly, around the country.

But the Buckeyes were also already forming opinions on and making offers to a number of top junior prospects. If reports were correct, the Buckeyes had already offered at least five and perhaps more of the state's top junior prospects.

The most high-profile junior prospect in Ohio was Justin Zwick, the quarterback at Massillon Washington who was already within distance of the state career passing mark. Zwick had transferred to Massillon the previous summer after spending his first two years at Orrville, where he helped the Red Raiders win the Division III state title in 1998.

Ohio State and Kentucky had already offered and may have been the top two schools in the running for Zwick, who had attended a game at OSU earlier in the season.

20 Years Ago — 2005

The month of September was a big one for Dexter Larimore as the defensive tackle out of Merrillville, Ind., added Ohio State and Michigan to an offer list that previously included Indiana and Illinois.

Since then, things had been relatively quiet on the Larimore front. But he told BSB that he had scheduled two football official visits – one to Michigan on Nov. 12 when it played Indiana and one the first weekend of December to Ohio State.

Heading to Ann Arbor for a game against the Hoosiers seemed like rather odd timing for an official visit, but it was one of Larimore's only options. A top-notch heavyweight wrestler who was also being recruited in that sport, he returned to the mats soon after football season, and Buckeye running backs coach Dick Tressel got first dibs on Larimore's open weekend.

"What really happened is since I have wrestling right after the season, I had only one weekend after the season that I could do it," Larimore said. "Doc was the first one to get my schedule and make sure he got one after the season."

15 Years Ago — 2010

Nick O'Leary would likely be a recognizable name for Buckeye fans even if he wasn't the grandson of legendary golfer Jack Nicklaus. As a five-star tight end prospect from Palm Beach (Fla.) Dwyer, he earned national headlines for his actions following a controversial loss on Sept. 6 to Cleveland Glenville while playing in Ohio Stadium.

The tight end was suspended for two games after making an obscene gesture at the Tarblooders as they celebrated their victory. Replays later showed that O'Leary's team had scored a winning touchdown in the final seconds that was waved off by game officials.

Although O'Leary held a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes, he had eliminated them long ago. In an interview with CultureMap.com, Nicklaus said his grandson was never going to his alma mater because Ohio State apparently wanted him to switch positions.

10 Years Ago — 2015

The long and dramatic dance between Kareem Walker and Ohio State was finally over. Walker, a five-star running back out of Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic, decommitted from Ohio State on Nov. 3.

"It is after much consideration, thought and meeting multiple times with my family and coaches that I'm rescinding my verbal commitment to Ohio State," he wrote in a note posted to Twitter. "At this point, the relationship has changed. I've wrestled with this for a few months and truly wanted it to work out. However, I do not think it is fair to Ohio State or myself to remain committed when my heart is telling me otherwise.

"I will be taking my visits and ultimately making a decision that will best serve me and my family. I will not be commenting on my recruitment until after I submit my LOI and enroll for spring semes-

ter. I need to focus on my team, my grades and my play."

The loss of the nation's No. 2 running back and No. 25 overall prospect dropped Ohio State to No. 2 in the team rankings for the class of 2016 according to Scout.com, one spot behind LSU and one ahead of Alabama, as of Nov. 8.

Five Years Ago — 2020

Ohio State appeared to be on the verge of landing a commitment from the nation's top-rated signal caller, as Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers decommitted from Texas on Oct. 28 and subsequently received several 247Sports crystal ball predictions in favor of the Buckeyes.

"With the (recruiting) process being abnormal this season, I tried my best to keep an open mind to all possibilities," Ewers said in a tweet that evening. "However, the more I've considered, the more I've come to realize I didn't explore all options as thoroughly as I would have liked. Therefore, I've decided to decommit and reassess the situation before making such an important decision on my future.

"I would like to thank the University of Texas for their belief in me and my abilities. I understand this year has been challenging for the coaches and administrators as well, so I appreciate their understanding and wish them the best in the future. My family and I also thank Texas Longhorns fans for their interest and support. I will soon have a firm decision on where I will spend the next few formative years of my life and career, and I look forward to sharing that with you."

One Year Ago — 2024

Michigan had seemed to have its 2025 quarterback locked up this cycle, with Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot four-star Carter Smith committed to the Wolverines since November 2023, but there had been recent reports they were looking to upgrade shortly before the early signing period and could be spending big to do so.

According to On3's Pete Nakos, Michigan was going after Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood and had reportedly approached him with a sizable NIL package that was worth north of \$5 million, which was similar to the amount offered by LSU, the team to which he was committed.

Barstool Sports owner and avid Wolverines fan Dave Portnoy said in September that he would be willing to spend up to \$3 million in NIL to get Michigan a quarterback, and that could have been a big part of the package that was offered to Underwood.

"Michigan, I will be your quarterback guy," Portnoy said. "I'll talk to (head coach) Sherrone (Moore), 'Who do you guys want? Who's in there?' Give me a group. I'll go get him. I will sign them. A million, two million, whatever it is.

"I'm going to get us a top-10 quarterback in the portal coming out every year. A top-10 quarterback."

RECRUITING

• **North Crowley, Texas, defensive back/wide receiver Braylen Cunningham** – Cunningham is a 2029 prospect, and the Buckeyes are trying to get in on his recruitment early. He isn’t ranked on any recruiting sites at this point, but with the early attention, it’s only natural to expect that when he is, he will be near the top of his class.

• **Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek three-star linebacker Braxton Rembert (6-5, 200)** – Rembert is currently committed to Wake Forest and has been since June 23, but the Buckeyes are attempting to flip the 2026 prospect. He is ranked the No. 1,371 player in the country and the No. 138 player in the state of Georgia. Rembert plays at the same high school that current Buckeye safety Caleb Downs came out of.

• **Dallas Life Oak Cliff wide receiver Sukora Cooper Jr. (6-1, 165)** – Also a 2029 prospect, Cooper has no ranking on any recruiting websites. He has eight total Division I offers, with Baylor, North Texas, Penn State, Sacramento State, SMU, Texas A&M and Texas State all offering, along with the Buckeyes.

• **Pensacola (Fla.) Booker T. Washington running back Omari Murray** – Murray is a 2028 prospect and was offered by running backs coach Carlos Locklyn. He is not yet ranked on recruiting sites.

• **Cypress (Texas) Cy Ranch three-star defensive lineman Amari Vickerson (6-3, 300)** – A 2027 prospect, Vickerson is the No. 407 player in the country, the No. 45 defensive lineman and the No. 59 player in the state of Texas. He already has 38 Division I offers, a list that includes Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Penn State, Texas, Texas A&M and many others. His father, Kevin, played at Michigan State from 2001-04 and had a 10-year career in the NFL.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• Spell, who recently decommitted from Penn State’s 2027 class after James Franklin was fired, will visit Michigan on Nov. 29 when Ohio State is in Ann Arbor. Spell is the top running back in the class and has been in contact with Ohio State as well, although the Buckeyes aren’t currently one of the top candidates to land his commitment.

• Shakopee, Minn., three-star linebacker Blake Betton (6-2, 200) has set up three November visits, according to 247Sports Midwest recruiting analyst Allen Trieu. Betton will be at Missouri on Nov. 8 when the Tigers host Texas A&M. Betton has also scheduled a visit to Columbus on Nov. 15 when the Buckeyes host UCLA before a visit to Michigan on Nov. 29 for The Game.

• Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Raylaun Henry (6-2, 180) has set a commitment date for Nov. 15 and is choosing between Alabama, Indiana, Ohio State, Penn State, Tennessee and Texas A&M. The No. 69 prospect in the country in the 2027 class is currently favored to choose the Aggies, according to a crystal ball prediction from 247Sports national recruiting analyst Brian Dohn.

• Hampton, Ga., four-star linebacker Kamarui Dorsey (6-3, 200) committed to Texas A&M on Nov. 1. He had Ohio State as one of his final seven schools, along with Florida State, Georgia, Georgia Tech, LSU, Tennessee and Texas A&M. He is the No. 41 player in the country, the No. 5 safety and the

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (8-0, 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, W 34-16; **18** at Wisconsin, W 34-0.
Nov. 1 PENN STATE, W 38-14; **8** at Purdue; **15** UCLA; **22** RUTGERS; **29** at Michigan.

MEN’S BASKETBALL

Oct. 26 Ohio (Exh.), W 103-74.
Nov. 3 IU-INDY; **7** PURDUE-FORT WAYNE; **11** APPALACHIAN STATE; **16** NOTRE DAME; **20** WESTERN MICHIGAN; **25** MOUNT ST. MARY’S; **28** at Pittsburgh.
Dec. 6 at Northwestern; **9** ILLINOIS; **13** at Cleveland Hoops Showdown in Cleveland vs. West Virginia; **20** at CBS Sports Classic in Atlanta vs. North Carolina; **23** GRAMBLING STATE.
Jan. 2 at Rutgers; **5** NEBRASKA; **8** at Oregon; **11** at Washington; **17** UCLA; **20** MINNESOTA; **23** at Michigan; **26** PENN STATE; **31** at Wisconsin.
Feb. 5 at Maryland; **8** MICHIGAN; **11** USC; **14** at Nashville Hoops Showdown in Nashville, Tenn., vs. Virginia; **17** WISCONSIN; **22** at Michigan State; **25** at Iowa.

March 1 PURDUE, **4** at Penn State; **7** INDIANA; **10-15** Big Ten Tournament in Chicago.

WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

Nov. 9 COPPIN STATE; **13** BELLARMINE; **16** at UConn; **19** KENT STATE; **24** at Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. Belmont; **26** at Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. TBD; **30** NIAGARA.
Dec. 7 at Northwestern; **11** NORTHERN KENTUCKY; **14** TOLEDO; **18** NORFOLK STATE; **22** WESTERN MICHIGAN; **28** UCLA; **31** at Purdue.
Jan. 4 RUTGERS; **7** at Illinois; **11** at Maryland; **14** PENN STATE; **19** at Coretta Scott King Classic in Newark, N.J., vs. TCU; **22** INDIANA; **25** at Iowa; **29** Wisconsin.
Feb. 1 NEBRASKA; **5** at Washington; **8** at Oregon; **15** MARYLAND; **18** at Minnesota; **22** USC; **25** MICHIGAN.
March 1 at Michigan State.

CROSS COUNTRY

Sept. 5 at Mike Baumer Classic in Dayton, Men 2nd/13, Women 1st/13; **12** at Spartan Invite in East Lansing, Mich., Men 3rd/16, Women 6th/17; **26** at Gans Creek Classic in Columbia, Mo., Men 2nd/26, Women 26th/31.
Oct. 17 Arturo Barrios Invite in College Station, Texas, Men 4th/32, Women 10th/37; **31** Big Ten Championships, Men 10th/15, Women 10th/18.
Nov. 14 NCAA Great Lakes Regional Championship in Evansville, Ind.; **22** NCAA Championship in Columbia, Mo.

FENCING

Oct. 11 OSU OPEN, NTS; **12** OSU DUALS, M 4-0, W 4-0.
Nov. 8-9 OSU ELITE INVITATIONAL; **22-23** Western Invitational at USAF Academy, Colo.
Jan. 17 St. John’s Invitational in Queens, N.Y.; **18** Dave Micahnik Penn Invitational in Philadelphia; **31** Schiller Duals in Evanston, Ill.
Feb. 1 Schiller Duals in Evanston, Ill.; **21-22** CCFC Championships in Granville, Ohio.
March 8 NCAA Midwest Regionals in Cleveland; **19-22** NCAA Championships in South Bend, Ind.

FIELD HOCKEY (7-9, 3-5)

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, W 1-0; **19** at Michigan State, L 4-3; **24** at Indiana, L 2-1 (OT); **26** at Northwestern, L 7-0; **31** IOWA, L 3-2 (2OT).

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 Inter-collegiate at Kettering, Ohio, 9th/14.

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, 10th/14.

MEN’S ICE HOCKEY (4-4, 0-2)

Oct. 10-11 NORTHERN MICHIGAN, W 5-2; W 3-1; **17-18** at UConn, L 3-2, W 4-2; **24-25** SACRED HEART, L 2-1 (OT); W 3-0; **30-31** PENN STATE, L 3-2, L 4-3.
Nov. 14-15 at Wisconsin; **21-22** at Michigan; **28-29** at Arizona State.
Dec. 4-5 MINNESOTA.
Jan. 2-3 BOWLING GREEN; **9-10** MICHIGAN STATE; **23-24** at Notre Dame; **30-31** MICHIGAN.
Feb. 6-7 at Minnesota; **13-14** WISCONSIN; **20-21** at Penn State; **27-28** at Michigan State.
March 5-6 NOTRE DAME; **11-21** Big Ten Tournament.

WOMEN’S ICE HOCKEY (9-1-0, 7-1-0)

Oct. 3-4 at Colgate, W 5-3; W 9-4; **10-11** BEMIDJI STATE, W 6-0; W 2-1; **18-19** at Minnesota W 4-1; L 6-3; **24-25** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-1; W 4-2; **31** at St. Thomas, W 3-2 (OT).
Nov. 1 at St. Thomas, W 8-0; **14-15** MINNESOTA STATE; **21-22** at Minnesota-Duluth; **28** at D1 in DC Tournament in Washington, D.C., vs. Clarkson; **29** at D1 in DC Tournament in Washington, D.C., vs.Colgate.
Dec. 5-6 WISCONSIN.
Jan. 2-3 PENN STATE; **9-10** at St. Cloud State; **16-17** at Minnesota State; **23-24** ST. THOMAS; **30-31** MINNESOTA-DULUTH.
Feb. 7-8 at Wisconsin; **13-14** MINNESOTA; **20-21** at Bemidji State; **27-March 1** WCHA First Round.

MEN’S SOCCER (6-9, 3-6)

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, L 4-2; **14** MICHIGAN, L 3-1; **18** MARYLAND, L 4-0; **24** at Washington, L 5-0; **31** PENN STATE, W 1-0.
Nov. 7 at Northwestern; **12** Big Ten Semifinals; **16** Big Ten Championship.

WOMEN’S SOCCER (8-4-6, 4-2-5)

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, W 1-0; **12** WASHINGTON, L 1-0; **16** at Rutgers, W 4-2; **19** at Maryland, W 3-1; **26** at Penn State, L 2-0; **30** Big Ten Tournament vs. Illinois, L 1-0.

MENS SWIM & DIVE

Nov. 7-8 Raleigh Rumble in Raleigh, N.C.; **18-21** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL.
Dec. 3-6 US Open at Austin, Texas.
Jan 17 MICHIGAN; **23-24** Texas Invitational at Austin, Texas; **31** PITTSBURGH.
Feb. 13-15 OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **25-28** Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wis.
March 8 LAST CHANCE MEET; **9-11** NCAA Zone Diving Championships, TBD; **13-15** CSCAA National Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla.; **25-28** NCAA Championships at Atlanta.

WOMENS SWIM & DIVE

Nov. 7-8 Raleigh Rumble in Raleigh, N.C.; **18-21** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL.
Dec. 3-6 US Open at Austin, Texas.
Jan 17 MICHIGAN; **23-24** Texas Invitational at Austin, Texas; **31** PITTSBURGH.
Feb. 13-15 OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **18-21** Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis.
March 8 LAST CHANCE MEET; **9-11** NCAA Zone Diving Championships, TBD; **13-15** CSCAA National Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla.; **18-21** NCAA Championships at Atlanta.

WOMEN’S VOLLEYBALL (3-17, 0-12)

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, L 3-0; **12** at Minnesota, L 3-0; **17** ILLINOIS, L 3-1; **19** at Indiana, L 3-1; **24** MICHIGAN, L 3-0; **26** PENN STATE, L 3-1; **31** RUTGERS, L 3-0.
Nov. 2 WISCONSIN,, L 3-0; **8** at Maryland; **9** at Rutgers; **14** at Michigan; **16** at Penn State; **21** NORTHWESTERN; **23** MICHIGAN STATE; **28** at Iowa; **29** at Nebraska.

WRESTLING

Nov. 2 Clarion Open at Clarion, Pa.; **9** at Tennessee-Chattanooga; **15** National Duals Invitational at Tulsa vs. Wyoming; **20** KENT STATE.
Dec. 3 BELLARMINE; **12** NC STATE; **21** Collegiate Duals at Nashville, Tenn.
Jan. 4 at Oregon State; **11** INDIANA; **23** at Minnesota; **25** at Nebraska; **30** WISCONSIN.
Feb. 1 MICHIGAN; **6** IOWA; **13** at Penn State; **15** at Maryland.
March 7-8 Big Ten Championships at State College, Pa.; **19-21** NCAA Championships at Cleveland.

U-M, Moore Withdraw NCAA Infractions Appeals

Michigan and head coach Sherrone Moore withdrew their appeals in the NCAA infractions case related to the sign-stealing operation. Moore and the Wolverines were issued punishments in August relating to the illegal advanced scouting operation, which was led by former Michigan staffer Connor Stalions and took place from 2021-23.

BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

"After careful consideration of the prolonged impact of an appeal on Michigan and our student athletes, we have withdrawn our appeal of the NCAA's infractions decision and penalties," the university said in a statement on Oct. 27.

The university had announced on Aug. 15 that it planned to appeal the decision.

"In a number of instances, the decision makes fundamental errors in interpreting NCAA bylaws; and it includes a number of conclusions that are directly contrary to the evidence – or lack of evidence – in the record," the university said in a statement at the time.

However, Moore dropped his appeal on Sept. 29, while Michigan dropped its appeal on

Oct. 6, according to the NCAA Division I Infractions Dashboard.

Michigan will have to pay a fine equivalent to its postseason revenue for this season and next season, plus 10 percent of its football budget and 10 percent of its football scholarships for this season.

According to reports, the fine could cost Michigan over \$30 million. Michigan was also issued four years of probation, a 25 percent reduction in 2025-26 official visits for recruits and a 14-week prohibition on recruiting communications during the probation period.

Moore, who was issued a two-year show-cause order, served a two-game suspension during this season and will sit out of Michigan's season opener next year against Western Michigan.

CMU Receives Penalties For Stalions Incident

Central Michigan will serve two years of probation and will pay a fine of \$30,000 for the 2023 incident of Stalions appearing on the sideline of a Chippewas game against Michigan State.

In addition, former head coach Jim McElwain and three other staffers were given show-cause penalties. McElwain will serve a two-year show-cause penalty, as will former equipment coordinator Nate Mason and director of recruiting Mike McGee.

Former quarterbacks coach Jake Kostner

will receive a four-year show-cause order due to the fact that he was the one who reached out to Stalions and asked Mason and McGee to get Stalions Central Michigan coaching gear and a sideline pass.

The NCAA found that Mason and McGee provided "false or misleading" information to enforcement staff before ultimately cooperating later on in the process.

Central Michigan released a statement on the case, accepting responsibility as a program, and noting that the NCAA said that the Chippewas "demonstrated exemplary cooperation" during the investigation.

The fine for Central Michigan is \$30,000 plus 1 percent of the program's budget.

McElwain also received a suspension from 30 percent of regular-season games during the first year of his show-cause and 20 percent of games during the regular season of the second year of the penalty.

Kostner will be restricted from all athletics-related activities during the first year of his four-year show-cause order, with a suspension from 50 percent of regular-season contests during the second year.

Rhule Inks Two-Year Extension

Amid speculation that he might be leaving to fill the head coaching vacancy at Penn State, Nebraska head football coach Matt Rhule signed a two-year extension to remain with the team through 2032 on Oct. 30.

Each of the additional two years of Rhule's extension are valued at \$12.5 million, the same as the final year (2030) of the previous deal. Like his previous deal, the extension will remain 90 percent guaranteed.

The deal also increases Rhule's buyout from \$5 million to \$15 million in an effort to eliminate any potential of taking another job in the offseason.

Following the firing of Penn State head coach James Franklin, it was speculated that Rhule could be the top candidate for the Nittany Lions' job. Rhule not only has a strong relationship with Nittany Lions athletic director Pat Kraft, but Penn State was also his alma mater.

However, Rhule quickly shut down these rumors.

"This is not a jumping-off job," said Rhule of Nebraska in an appearance on the "Pat McAfee Show" on Oct. 16. "This is a destination job. This is one of the greatest places in the world."

Rhule expressed his belief in Nebraska and his desire to bring the Cornhuskers back to the program's previous powers.

"I absolutely love it here," Rhule said. "I just want us to continue to take the steps needed for us to turn this thing into a beast and have players all across the country want to come here with the best facilities. We have elite fans."

The extension only further solidifies his commitment to rebuilding the Cornhusker football program.

In three seasons at Nebraska, Rhule has amassed an 18-16 record while taking the Cornhuskers to their first bowl game since 2016 last year following a 6-6 regular season.

In 2025, Rhule had led Nebraska to a 6-3 record after losing to USC, 21-17, on Nov. 1. If he can lead the Cornhuskers to a 10-win season, it would be their first 10-win season since a 10-4 finish in 2012.

Raiola Suffers Broken Leg

In the loss to the Trojans, Nebraska quarterback Dylan Raiola suffered a broken fibula in his right leg after being rolled up on a sack in the third quarter.

Three minutes after the halftime break, Nebraska was driving at the Trojans' 23-yard line when Raiola attempted to evade pressure from multiple USC defenders. His efforts were to no avail as USC defensive end Anthony Lucas brought him down from behind, and the sophomore quarterback's leg was caught under the Trojan defender.

Raiola was down on the field for multiple minutes before being helped off by Nebraska training and medical staff. He did not return in the contest.

The severity of the injury was unknown at the time, though ESPN's Pete Thamel reported on Nov. 2 that Raiola sustained the broken fibula and he will miss the remainder of the season.

Raiola completed 10 of 15 passes for 91 yards and a touchdown against the Trojans before going down early in the third quarter.

It was freshman signal caller TJ Lateef who came in to replace Raiola after the injury. Lateef finished the game 5 of 7 passing for 7 yards while rushing six times for 18 yards. Rhule has not said whether Lateef will be the permanent replacement for Raiola.

Through nine games, Raiola threw for 2,000 yards and 18 touchdowns with six interceptions. Raiola also had the nation's fourth-best completion percentage, connecting on 72.4 percent of his throws.

Wisconsin AD Voices Support For Fickell

Following a tumultuous start to the season that's had Wisconsin open the year with a 2-6 record – tied for the worst mark in the Big Ten through Oct. 25 – Badger athletic director Chris McIntosh doubled down on his backing of football head coach Luke Fickell.

McIntosh took to Twitter to voice both his frustration and continued support for Fickell and the Badger football program.

"Coach Fickell sees the potential in what this team can be, as do I, and he shares the same disappointment and frustration," McIntosh said in the Twitter post. "Our student-athletes continue to stand and fight with character and pride as they battle through this moment of adversity, and they deserve all our support."

This was the second time McIntosh expressed his belief in Fickell. He previously called for a meeting of Wisconsin reporters following the Badgers' 27-10 loss to Maryland in Camp Randall on Sept. 20, when students chanted "Fire Fickell" multiple times throughout the defeat, which has continued after that game.

During the meeting, McIntosh stated that the current product of the football team is not the identity of Wisconsin's program.

"I don't think there's anyone in the building that thinks that where we are at this moment in time, right now, this is what Wisconsin football is," McIntosh said.

Though McIntosh expressed disappointment in the Badgers' recent results, he said he continues to see strong effort from the players and coaches each day and felt it was important to voice his support as the program works to

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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Deadline is one week prior to publication date. Call (614) 486-2202 or write P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212 for info.

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.

FOR SALE — OSU-MICHIGAN Game, 1975 - original RADIO broadcast on CD! Woody's last great team & Archie's last UM game as Bucks go 11-0! Three-disk set runs 3½ hours! Listen in your car! \$25 + \$3 S & H. Call 1-630-527-8890!

WANTED TO buy: OSU football memorabilia and equipment, programs, pennants, glasses, books, jerseys, helmets, ticket stubs. One item or a hundred. Will travel. Call George at (614) 506-1081.

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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BIG
2025 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	6	0	1.000	9	0	1.000
Ohio State	5	0	1.000	8	0	1.000
Michigan	5	1	0.833	7	2	0.778
Oregon	4	1	0.800	7	1	0.875
USC	4	1	0.800	6	2	0.750
Iowa	4	1	0.800	6	2	0.750
Minnesota	4	2	0.667	6	3	0.667
Washington	3	2	0.600	6	2	0.750
Northwestern	3	2	0.600	5	3	0.625
UCLA	3	2	0.600	3	5	0.375
Illinois	3	3	0.500	6	3	0.667
Nebraska	3	3	0.500	6	3	0.667
Maryland	1	4	0.200	4	4	0.667
Rutgers	1	5	0.167	4	5	0.444
Penn State	0	5	0.000	3	5	0.375
Wisconsin	0	5	0.000	2	6	0.250
Michigan State	0	6	0.000	3	6	0.333
Purdue	0	6	0.000	2	7	0.222

Oct. 25 Games

Nebraska 28, Northwestern 21
Indiana 56, UCLA 6
Rutgers 27, Purdue 24
Washington 42, Illinois 25
Iowa 41, Minnesota 3
Oregon 21, Wisconsin 7
Michigan 31, Michigan State 20

Nov. 1 Games

USC 21, Nebraska 17
Ohio State 38, Penn State 14
Illinois 35, Rutgers 13
Indiana 55, Maryland 10
Michigan 21, Purdue 16
Minnesota 23, Michigan State 20 (OT)

Nov. 7 Game

Northwestern at USC, 9 p.m.

Nov. 8 Games

Nebraska at UCLA, 9 p.m.
Maryland at Rutgers, 2:30 p.m.
Indiana at Penn State, Noon
Washington at Wisconsin, 4:30 p.m.
Oregon at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.
Ohio State at Purdue, 1 p.m.

All times Eastern

nor Ted Kellner – the co-founder of Fiduciary Management Inc. in Milwaukee – also apparently believes the Badgers should keep Fickell around.

In an interview with the Wisconsin State Journal, Kellner expressed his support for both the current head coach and McIntosh.

“I don’t get angst as a lot of people do,” Kellner said. “Do I wish we were doing better? Sure. Does Luke want to be doing better? Of course. But the decision on whoever we have at coach should reside only with Chris McIntosh, and I think he’s a very good athletic director. I think things will be vastly different next year on a number of fronts, as it pertains particularly to football.”

While that might not be the most glowing review of the former Buckeye player and coach, Kellner continued on Fickell and the decision to keep him around.

“I think Luke’s a good coach,” Kellner said. “His résumé would say that. But I’m not the guy, nor is anybody else, whether it’s a fan or (media member), I don’t think that we’re qualified to make decisions on that. Chris McIntosh is smart, and he knows what he’s doing. If I’m the boss or the overseer, or chancellor or whoever, Chris is smart and he’s good. I believe that Luke Fickell is a good football coach.”

In terms of what Kellner may have meant when he said that things will be different for the program next season, he very well could have been talking about funding backing the football team.

“It will change a lot next year, I think,” Kellner said. “The portal will change next year. I think the playing field for us financially, those two things will change dramatically.”

Purdue Loses 15th
Straight B1G Game

Purdue’s struggles in Big Ten play continued, adding two more losses since BSB last went to press to extend its conference losing streak to 15.

On Oct. 25, Purdue suffered a heartbreaker to Rutgers, falling 27-24 on a game-winning 30-yard field goal by Scarlet Knights kicker Jai Patel as time expired.

Purdue led 17-7 in the third quarter, scoring a quick touchdown right out of the half, and even secured a 24-21 lead on a 14-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Ryan Browne to wide receiver Nitro Tuggle with just under five minutes to play.

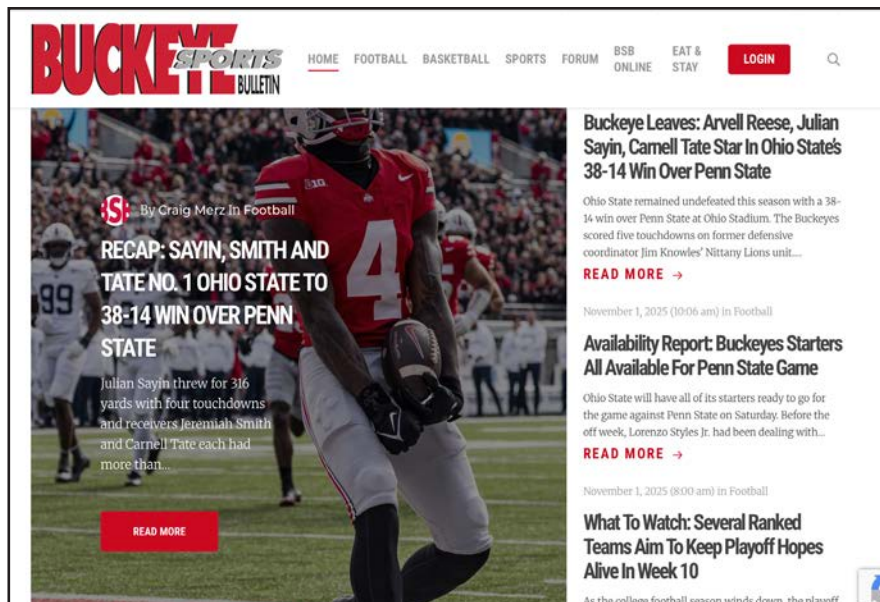
However, after the Boilermakers took back the lead, Rutgers kicked a field goal to tie the game at 24 with just over a minute left in the contest. Matters only got worse as the Scarlet Knights stripped the ball away from Browne on the lone play of Purdue’s final drive, which set Rutgers up with a short field goal to win the game.

Then on Nov. 1, No. 21 Michigan handed Purdue its 15th straight loss, 21-16, in the Big House.

With the loss, Purdue fell to 2-7 on the season and is on the verge of its second straight year without a win against a Power Four team. The Boilermakers are also in danger of going their second straight season without a win against a Big Ten opponent, as Purdue culminates its conference play with a perilous three-game stretch.

The Boilermakers first host No. 1 Ohio State on Nov. 8 before heading to Washington on Nov. 15 and then back home on Nov. 28 to host No. 2 Indiana.

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OSU Balanced In Scrimmage Win Over OU

Ohio State held an open-door scrimmage against Ohio on Oct. 26, beating the Bobcats and former Buckeye assistant coach Jeff Boals 103-74 at Value City Arena.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

The Buckeyes spread the scoring out well, with each of the five starters – Bruce Thornton, John Mobley Jr., Devin Royal, Brandon Noel and Christoph Tilly – reaching double-digit points. As a team, OSU shot 35 of 58 from the field (60.3 percent) and 10 of 25 from three-point range (40.0 percent).

Noel led the way with 18, many of his baskets coming on backdoor cuts to the hoop, where his teammates found him for an easy layup or dunk.

The Wright State transfer was a great scorer with the Raiders for three seasons, but much of it happened by creating a shot for himself. Buckeye head coach Jake Diebler noted after the game that the adjustment Noel has had to make to try to get himself open without the ball has been something he has done well early on in Columbus.

"One of the biggest adjustments for him coming from Wright State to Ohio State was being able to play without the ball," Diebler said. "He had the ball a lot and manufactured

a lot of buckets for himself. Being able to play off others was a transition he had to make, and he's done it really well."

Noel said he knows that he can rely on his teammates to find him when he gets open, giving them credit for assisting him so often and drawing the attention necessary for him to find an open lane to cut into.

"The common theme with most of my buckets today is that our guys are pulling in multiple defenders," Noel said. "They're drawn in, and that's what allows me to move around and sneak behind some guys. We're all moving off each other, and that's a good chemistry thing."

Ohio State outrebounded the Bobcats in the game, 40-31, but allowed 14 offensive boards. But Ohio managed only nine second-chance points off those rebounds, finishing the game shooting 35.8 percent from the field (24 of 67).

"We're in this place where we're rebounding well at times, but we're not really rebounding as well as we can be," Diebler said. "Part of it is we're getting ourselves in rotation a little too much, and that's putting us at a disadvantage on the glass. We've got to shore some of that up defensively."

"Part of that is a communication thing. In (the closed-door scrimmage against Tennessee on Oct. 18), we didn't communicate well enough defensively. It's been the last part of our chemistry translating to the court."

Tilly was all over the place in the win. At basketball media day on Oct. 1, Diebler said that the 7-0 transfer from Santa Clara was going to be doing more dribbling and shooting than he's used to, but he wants Tilly to be able

to help the Buckeyes spread the floor.

Against the Bobcats, Tilly showed his potential in multiple areas, finishing the game with 14 points, seven assists and five rebounds, which he managed in just 23 minutes of play. Had the game counted, that assist total would have been the highest of Tilly's college career. His career high is six, which he managed one time on Jan. 25, 2025, in a 94-71 win over Pepperdine.

Diebler called Tilly a "high-level decision maker," crediting him after his seven-assist performance, which led the team in the game. But the head coach has been impressed with everything Tilly has been able to provide across the board.

"We love his versatility," Diebler said. "We thought he should have been a little more aggressive at the top of the key. I wanted him to take some threes. He's been ultra-aggressive from three and has shot it really well."

Tilly said that for a year when he was younger, his coach made him play point guard so he could learn to see the floor better, which he believes helped him get to where he is as a player now.

"If I see somebody open who has a better shot than I do, I'm passing the ball," Tilly said. "It's not only me, but the teammates I have around me. They know I can pass, so every time I catch the ball, they're trying to get open somehow, and they know that I'll find them."

The two non-starters who reached double digits were sophomore center Ivan Njegovan (10) and freshman forward Amare Bynum (13). Diebler noted before the season that last

year's depth wasn't as good as he would have liked, but he is encouraged by what he has seen this year from Njegovan and Bynum.

"You're seeing development (from those two)," Diebler said. "I've been really impressed with Ivan, especially, and his development since July. For Amare, I thought the most important thing that he displayed today was his confidence, which sometimes young players don't do at a really high level."

Coming out of the scrimmage, Tilly said that the team knows of two areas it needs to work on before the season begins.

"We noticed we have to work on our rebounding and defense," he said. "We've done a pretty good job most of the time, but you want to be as perfect as you can on defense."

The Buckeyes forced 16 turnovers and scored 23 points off those turnovers, but the offense turned the ball over 14 times and allowed 26 points off them.

Last season, the Buckeyes were 98th in the country with 10.9 turnovers per game, and they are looking to improve on that mark but are still getting used to the faster pace at which they are trying to play.

Boals was very complimentary of the Ohio State team. The two teams didn't play against each other last season, but Boals watched the Buckeyes from afar and believes he already sees big improvements from what he saw last year.

"I really like this team. I thought they were really hard to guard," Boals said of the Buckeyes. "They have a lot of different pieces, a lot of skill pieces. I don't want to say night and day

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THANKS A MILLION

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
Alex Smith	F	6-9	195	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Prolific Prep
Anthony Thompson	F	6-8	205	★★★★★	Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Acad.

different from last year, but they're night and day different from last year. I look forward to following them."

Buckeyes Land Five-Star Commitment

The Ohio State basketball team gained a huge commitment in the 2026 class when Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy five-star small forward Anthony Thompson (6-8, 205) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Oct. 21.

Thompson is the highest-rated prospect to commit to Ohio State since Jarred Sullinger in the 2010 recruiting class. He's also the first five-star recruit the Buckeyes have landed since D'Angelo Russell in the 2014 class.

Thompson is ranked the No. 8 player in the country in his class, the No. 2 small forward and the No. 1 player in the state of Ohio. He chose the Buckeyes over Indiana.

Adam Finkelstein, the director of basketball scouting at 247Sports, spoke highly of Thompson as a player.

"He's got a chance to keep climbing (in the rankings). We are talking about a 6-8, lefty forward with a massive 7-3 wingspan," said Finkelstein in a video posted to Twitter after Thompson's commitment. "He has a very rare overlap of length and shot-making ability. In fact, his tough-shot-making ability is his calling card because he's got that high release, which is virtually unblockable.

"Within the last six months, we've seen him add new dimensions to his game. His right hand has dramatically improved. We're seeing a new level of bounce, and the body language and motor have gotten more consistent. If that continues this year at Western Reserve Academy, he has a chance to keep rising in the national rankings. An outstanding pickup for Jake Diebler and Ohio State."

Thompson joins four-star power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195) in the 2026 recruiting class.

Diebler has done well recruiting in the state of Ohio. Smith recently transferred to Prolific Prep in Florida, but he was at nearby Upper Arlington when he committed to the Buckeyes.

Johnson Decommits From Ohio State

The first commitment Diebler got when he officially took over as head coach was Garfield Heights, Ohio, four-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-2, 180). But after being committed to Ohio State since April of 2024, Johnson decommitted from the Buckeyes on Oct. 27, just six days after Thompson's pledge.

For those six days, Ohio State had the No. 3 recruiting class in the country according to 247Sports rankings, but with Johnson – the No. 47 player in the country – reopening his recruitment, it is down to No. 27.

Johnson and his father, Sonny, who is also the head coach at Garfield Heights, were on campus for the scrimmage against Ohio. Sonny Johnson told The Columbus Dispatch that the Buckeyes are still being considered.

"What Marcus told Coach Diebler when he talked to him was, 'Hey, Coach, hopefully you're still recruiting me. Hopefully, you still want me.

If not, I understand,' " he said. "He wanted to watch some games. He wanted to make sure it's the right style and system for him. I think that's so classy."

Johnson also told the Dispatch that the decision had nothing to do with NIL compensation and was more about the style of play they saw from the Buckeyes last year.

Johnson's decommitment comes shortly before the early signing period for men's basketball begins on Nov. 12

Diebler Lauds Former Buckeye Boals

With Boals back at Ohio State for a basketball game for the first time since he was an assistant coach under Thad Matta in 2016, Diebler made sure to recognize the former Buckeye. He credited Boals for mentoring him when he was the video coordinator for Ohio State beginning in 2013-14.

"(Boals) played a huge, huge role in my professional career," Diebler said. "From the times when I was a video coordinator, I learned a lot about recruiting just sitting in his office with my computer while he's talking on the phone. That's one thing I'll forever be grateful for. (Assistant coach Dave Dickerson) was the same way. You guys were unbelievable, just letting me be around and mentoring me.

"I'm forever grateful," Diebler reiterated. "He's the kind of guy who is always mindful of helping others. I witnessed firsthand the relationships he had with players, and that taught me a lot."

Boals said he was glad to be back at Ohio State, even if it was just for a scrimmage. It was his second time on campus this year after going to Ohio Stadium for the Ohio State football win over Ohio on Sept. 13.

"It was an awesome experience for our group and our guys, and for me to come back and see the people," Boals said. "I've always said that the people make this place. It's fun to see a lot of faces I haven't seen in a long time."

The Buckeyes' most recent Final Four appearance, which Diebler has consistently said is the height that he is hoping to return to as a program, was in 2012 when Boals was an assistant coach. Diebler made sure to credit Boals for much of the success Ohio State had from 2009-16 while Boals was in the building.

"You look at the banners, look at the history of this program," Diebler said. "(Boals) was part of those teams. It was great to have him in the building."

Thornton On Bob Cousy Watch List

Ohio State was represented on the Bob Cousy Award watch list when it was released on Oct. 27. The award is given yearly to the best point guard in the country, and Thornton was included among the 20-player list.

Thornton was joined by other Big Ten point guards Bennett Stirtz of Iowa, Elliot Cadeau of Michigan, Braden Smith of Purdue and Donovan Dent of UCLA. Smith won the award last season and is likely the favorite to do so again.

Former Ohio State recruit Darryn Peterson, who chose Kansas over the Buckeyes, was also included on the list.

Thornton scored 11 points in the scrimmage against Ohio and added four assists and two rebounds. Diebler said in the preseason that Thornton's game could take the next step this season because he won't have to create his own shots like he has needed to in the past at Ohio State.

Last year, he averaged 17.7 points, 4.6 assists and 3.4 rebounds per game for the Buckeyes.

Bucks In Contact With G-Leaguer

Many players who decided to forgo college and play at the professional level through different avenues are now trying to play college basketball.

One of those players is TJ Clark, a shooting guard who has played with Overtime Elite, in the G-League and in the professional Mexican basketball league.

Clark has been receiving interest from many top programs, according to a report from On3, and Ohio State is one of them. He has reportedly heard from Auburn, Clemson, Colorado, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Nevada, Ohio State, Tennessee and Texas A&M.

Clark has not been granted NCAA eligibility yet, but two former G-League players, Thierry Darlan with Santa Clara and London Johnson with Louisville, have already been cleared to play this season.

Now 21 years old, Clark signed a professional deal with Overtime Elite, where he played from 2021-23. He went on to the G-League for the next season, playing with the Ontario Clippers and Texas Legends. With the Clippers, he averaged 3.9 points, 0.9 rebounds

and 0.8 assists, and with the Legends, he averaged 4.8 points, 1.9 rebounds and 1.1 assists per game.

In the 2024-25 season, Clark played for Rayos de Hermosillo in the Circuito de Baloncesto de la Costa del Pacifico (CIBACOPA) league. There, he averaged 10.2 points, 4.4 rebounds, 2.3 assists and 1.6 steals per game.

On3 reports that Clark plans to enroll in the spring if he is granted eligibility but would not play for a team until the 2026-27 season.

OSU Misses On Four-Star Center

Ohio State was one of five schools to make a narrowed-down scholarship list for Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center Tristan Reed (6-9, 230), but on Nov. 1, Reed committed to Mississippi State over OSU.

Before his pledge, Reed included the Buckeyes along with Michigan State, Missouri, Maryland and the Bulldogs. A 2026 prospect, Reed plays at the same high school from which Bynum came to Ohio State.

Reed is considered the No. 80 prospect in the country, the No. 9 center and the No. 5 player in the state of Missouri by 247Sports composite rankings.

He had been on three visits to Ohio State, the most recent of which was during the weekend of the football team's win over the Bobcats. He visited Michigan State the weekend after, and he was at Missouri for an official visit on Aug. 25. He also took official visits to Mississippi State (Sept. 5) and Maryland (Oct. 3).

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Young Buckeyes Look To Take Next Step

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's once-promising 2024-25 season ended in disappointing fashion. Under longtime head coach Kevin McGuff, the Buckeyes won their first 17 games of the season but finished the year just 9-7 in their final 16 games.

Ohio State had particular struggles facing elite competition. Against the two best teams in the Big Ten, UCLA and USC, Ohio State went 0-3 and lost by at least 13 points in each game. Then in the NCAA tournament, the Buckeyes were crushed at home by No. 5 seed Tennessee, 82-67, and for the second year in a row, they failed to make it out of the second round.

The poor finish to the season was followed by a tumultuous offseason. In addition to losing veteran contributors Ajae Petty and Taylor Thierry to the WNBA draft, two-time All-Big Ten first-team forward Cotie McMahon transferred to Ole Miss.

"We had three really good years with Cotie," McGuff said in August. "She's a good kid. I wish her nothing but great success at Ole Miss. Outside of us potentially playing them down the line, I hope she has a great year. In her mind, I wouldn't speak for her, but I think she wanted one more opportunity to showcase her skills

and talents before she tries and moves on to her professional career, and I think Ole Miss will be a great place for her to do that."

After the loss of its best player to Ole Miss, Ohio State made its own additions through the transfer portal, and heading into the 2025-26 season, McGuff's team will have a slightly different identity than that of previous Ohio State teams.

"I like our team," McGuff said on Oct. 2. "We're not real deep, but I do like the group that we have. We're a little bit different, though, and we're probably not quite as athletic as we've been the last couple years, but probably a little bit more skilled, and we will maybe shoot the ball a little bit better. I think we're going to have to hang our hat on that – our skill and our shooting more so than our athleticism, like we had last year."

As McGuff mentioned, it isn't a very deep team. The Buckeyes have only 11 scholarship players, and only three players on the team are upperclassmen. McGuff said the Buckeyes' youth and lack of depth only heighten the urgency for the team as the season approaches.

"We're going to be very inexperienced," McGuff said. "I think our talent level is pretty good, but we're not real deep and we're not real experienced. We've got to get them to grow up very quickly, and we're really pushing them, challenging

OSU Women'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.	Stars	High School/Previous Team
Atlee Vanesko	G	5-11	★★★★	Norristown (Pa.) Westtown School

them in practice to do that."

Ohio State will officially tip off its season with Coppin State on Nov. 9 at Value City Arena in Columbus for a game that will start at 1 p.m. With the season right around the corner, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has a position-by-position breakdown in alphabetical order of Ohio State's roster for the 2025-26 season.

Forwards

Seini Henry, 6-0, R-Fr. – Henry is one of two players still on the roster who redshirted for the Buckeyes last year. She comes from an athletic family. Her dad, Chris Henry Sr., played in the NFL for five seasons, and her brother Chris Henry Jr. is a five-star receiver committed to the Ohio State football team.

Seini Henry put her athleticism on display at West Clermont High School outside Cincinnati, where she averaged 13 points and 10 rebounds as a junior and set single-season school records in rebounds and blocks that year.

She likely won't start for the Buckeyes at the small forward position, but she should be a valuable piece off the bench for a team without a ton of depth.

Ella Hobbs, 6-4, R-Fr. – Hobbs redshirted last year for the Buckeyes but should play an important role off the bench this year. She was ranked the No. 83 player in the nation by ESPN out of the 2024 class and averaged 20.6 points, 13.8 rebounds and 4.4 blocks per game during her senior season at Jay M. Robinson High School in Concord, N.C.

At 6-4, Hobbs is one of the tallest players on the roster, and according to McGuff, she is one of a few players on the roster who can play the center position.

"Ella Hobbs, who redshirted last year, should get some minutes there," McGuff said of Ohio State's center position, "and she's had a good summer and preseason so far."

Kylee Kitts, 6-4, R-Fr. – Kitts was one of two players Ohio State added from the transfer portal over the offseason. She redshirted at Florida last season and didn't appear in a game. Kitts put her talent on display at Orlando (Fla.) Faith Christian Academy High School, where she averaged 13.0 points, 9.0 rebounds and 2.0 blocks in 2022-23.

She helped the program win its first state championship in program history that year. Kitts, who will likely play the power forward position for the Buckeyes, impressed her teammates during the offseason.

"Obviously, Kylee," said senior guard Chance Gray when asked which young player impressed her the most during the offseason. "We're just trying to get her comfortable in a role, get her some confi-

dence. But other than that, she's growing and learning each day. She wants to be in the gym at all times. On her off day, she's always in the gym when she can be. So that's one of them for me. She's really doing a good job."

Kitts was ranked the No. 25 recruit in the country before reclassifying to the 2024 class and joining Florida. Kitts should be one of several players who can help the Buckeyes from beyond the arc. During an exhibition game with the Gators before last season, she scored nine points and made 2 of 3 three-point shots.

Guards

Dasha Biriuk, 6-1, Fr. – Biriuk is one of two true freshmen on Ohio State's roster this year, but that doesn't mean she won't earn playing time. With the Buckeyes' roster at only 11 players, McGuff could certainly turn to someone such as Biriuk, who flashed her offensive potential at The Webb School in Bell Buckle, Tenn.

Biriuk, who grew up in Ukraine, was ranked the No. 83 player in the 2025 class by ESPN. She led The Webb School to two state championships and averaged 16.4 points, 5.8 rebounds and 3.0 assists in 34 games, according to MaxPreps.

In the offseason, McGuff was impressed by both Biriuk and fellow freshman Bryn Martin.

"I think our two freshmen will be important," McGuff said. "Bryn (Martin) and Dasha both look good, especially on the offensive end, and they both shoot the ball really well. I think they will add to what is hopefully going to be a strength of ours, which is the three-point shooting."

Jaloni Cambridge, 5-7, So. – In only her second season with the Buckeyes, Cambridge is ready to step up as the program's best player. She wasted no time in bursting onto the scene as a freshman. In Ohio State's season-opening 104-69 win over Cleveland State last season, Cambridge scored 31 points and had six assists, six rebounds and five steals.

She didn't quite keep up that torrid start, but she earned Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors after averaging 15.4 points, 4.5 rebounds and 3.9 assists.

This year, McGuff wants to see her grow as a leader both on and off the court.

"Jaloni is coming off what was a really productive freshman campaign," McGuff said. "But we expect her to take another step this year, both with her production on the court and scoring the ball for us, making other people better, but also from a leadership standpoint as well."

The attribute that makes Cambridge especially dynamic is her athleticism. In her freshman season, she scored a sizable chunk of her points by simply surging past opposing defenses and scoring



Kevin McGuff

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2025-26 Ohio State Women's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

22 • Jaloní Cambridge • G Ht: 5-7 • Class: So.  As a true freshman, Cambridge averaged 15.4 points, 4.5 rebounds and 3.9 assists while shooting 42.9 percent from the field. Cambridge, the No. 2-ranked recruit in the country, earned All-Big Ten first-team honors last season.	2 • Chance Gray • G Ht: 5-9 Class: Sr.  After transferring in from Oregon ahead of last season, Gray averaged 12.0 points, 1.8 rebounds, 1.5 assists and 1.4 steals over 33 games. Gray went 70 of 201 from beyond the three-point line (34.8 percent) last year.	4 • T'vana Todd • G Ht: 6-0 • Class: Sr.  Todd transfers into Ohio State after spending the past three seasons with Boston College. Todd had a career-best season last year. She averaged 13.7 points and 2.6 rebounds per game, while shooting 45.9 percent from three-point range, the fourth-best mark in the country.	1 • Kylee Kitts • F Ht: 6-4 • Class: R-Fr.  Kitts redshirted at Florida for the 2024-25 season before transferring to Ohio State. She was ranked No. 25 in the country in the 2025 class before she reclassified to the class of 2024.	12 • Elsa Lemmilä • C Ht: 6-6 • Class: So.  Lemmilä averaged 4.1 points, 4.8 rebounds, 0.8 assists and a team-high 1.9 blocks per game as a freshman. She is the tallest player on Ohio State's roster.
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layups. “She’s one of the fastest players I’ve had the chance to coach, where the ball actually comes with her,” McGuff said at Big Ten media days on Oct. 8. “She’s so quick up and down the court.”

Although Cambridge herself said her speed is the best thing about her game, she also added that she wants to be better at distributing the ball to her teammates and slowing her game down.

“Slowing down,” Cambridge said when asked what part of her game she worked on the most in the offseason. “I’ve been doing a pretty good job in practice. I am really proud of myself for slowing down, because it really opens the floor up a lot more. And I should have realized that a long time ago, but here I am now.”

Kennedy Cambridge, 5-8, Jr. – Cambridge may not provide the scoring punch that her younger sister does, but she, too, will be an important part of Ohio State’s rotation this year.

Cambridge started her career at Kentucky but averaged only 2.7 points and 2.3 rebounds during her freshman season there. She redshirted after choosing to transfer to Ohio State but did well in her first action with the team last year.

As a sophomore, she played in 31 games and made four starts, averaging 4.8 points, 2.7 rebounds and 1.2 assists per game. Cambridge, often used as a spark plug off the Buckeyes’ bench, was particularly effective on defense. She finished the season third on the team with 48 steals and fourth with 13 blocks.

Cambridge is one of the older players on the roster, who played for the Buckeyes last year. According to Gray, Cambridge’s experience with the team last year has put her in a position to be a leader for this year’s team.

“It’s really been me and Jaloní,” Gray said of which players have stepped up as leaders. “Last year we had a lot of people, but other than that, I would say Kennedy, just because she’s been here and has a lot of experience, so she’s been another good voice. But everybody’s chipping in a little bit.”

McGuff also mentioned Cambridge as a player who has made an impact as a leader. He said she is someone who has helped the team bond off the court.

“We have good leadership with Chance, Kennedy and Jaloní, and they do a lot of stuff getting together off the court,” McGuff said. “I think chemistry is going to be a big part of the identity of this team. They really like each other, and so we’ve been fortunate. We haven’t had to do a lot because they do a lot on their own.”

Chance Gray, 5-9, Sr. – Gray is entering her second year with the Buckeyes after transferring from Oregon. She had a

bit of an up-and-down first season at Ohio State. Through her first seven games, Gray was averaging 16.0 points per game and seemed to be one of the team’s more reliable scorers.

However, Gray endured some rough patches during Big Ten play and finished the year averaging a modest 12.0 points per game while shooting 39.8 percent from the field. Her struggles continued through the final stretch of the season. In her final 10 games, Gray scored 10 or more points only twice.

Always looking to take a three-point shot, Gray shot more than twice the number of shots from beyond the arc last year as any of her teammates. She finished the year making 70 of 201 three-pointers (34.8 percent).

Gray said at Big Ten media days Oct. 8 that this year she’s hoping to add to other parts of her game because opposing defenses have to respect her shot.

“I want to get back to how I was in my first year in college, not just sticking to shooting three-pointers,” she said. “I have a lot more to my game – finishing, driving, midrange – so I want to use a part of that and shift my mindset to (what it was) the last part of last season. Going into the season, I want to be one of our best defenders.”

Bryn Martin, 6-1, Fr. – Martin, a native of Springboro, Ohio, had been committed to Washington for nearly eight months before flipping to Ohio State. Martin was ranked the No. 69 player in the 2025 class, according to ESPN’s rankings. She had a decorated career at Springboro High School and is the program’s all-time leading scorer and leads the program in assists all-time.

She averaged 23.0 points, 5.1 assists and 4.2 rebounds per game on the way to being named Ohio’s Division I player of the year. At 6-1, Martin offers the Buckeyes some versatility as a defender and proved she can step out and make a three-point shot in high school. In her senior year, Martin connected on 37.0 percent of her three-point attempts.

Martin likely won’t start for the Buckeyes in her first year with the team but could play a role off the bench if she plays well early in the season.

T’vana Todd, 6-0, Sr. – Todd is in her first year with the Buckeyes, but she may be the most experienced player on the roster. She spent her first three seasons in college at Boston College. With the Eagles last year, Todd averaged 13.7 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game, while shooting 43.3 percent from the field. Todd should fill the starting position left vacant by former guard Taylor Thierry.

Todd was one of the better three-point

shooters in the country last year, connecting on 45.9 percent of her attempts from beyond the arc, which was the fourth-best mark in the country. On paper, Todd seems to have a fairly similar skillset to Gray, but Ohio State’s shooting guard says the two players can coexist.

“We’re both shooters, obviously, but we’re both a little bit different,” Gray said. “She plays at a different pace and is a little bit longer, so I think we play off each other very well. I got a chance to play with her a lot (in the offseason), and we played very well. It’s good to have someone else who can spread the floor and someone else to respect that they can shoot as well.”

Ava Watson, 5-8, So. – Watson is yet another three-point specialist on Ohio State’s roster. Like Gray last year, she struggled at times to be consistent with her shot but still flashed her offensive potential.

Watson finished the season averaging 5.3 points per game on 32.6 percent shooting. She started the year connecting on only three of her first 21 three-point attempts before playing better in Big Ten play.

Watson’s regular season was cut short during one of her best games. In Ohio State’s 87-84 overtime win over Minnesota on Feb. 13, she scored 16 points while shooting 5 of 6 from the field and 4 of 4 from three-point range, but she suffered an ankle injury that kept her on the sidelines for weeks. It wasn’t until Ohio State made the NCAA tournament that Watson returned, and in those two games, she combined to play just 14 minutes.

Watson should be healthy heading into this year and may be counted on more for her ball-handling this year now that the Buckeyes don’t have an established backup point guard behind Jaloní Cambridge.

“I think Chance has a lot of experience with the ball in her hands at a high level. Ava Watson also played some point guard in high school,” McGuff said. “Either one of them, I think, with the ball in their hands when Jaloní is not in there, will both be really good.”

Center

Elsa Lemmilä, 6-6, So. – Lemmilä, the tallest player on Ohio State’s roster, showed plenty of promise as a true freshman last year.

Mainly coming off the bench as a backup to Ajae Petty, Lemmilä used her size to be one of the Buckeyes’ best rebounders and rim protectors. She finished the season averaging 4.1 points, 4.8 rebounds and a team-high 1.9 blocks per game.

Lemmilä was limited at the end of the 2024-25 season with a foot injury, needing surgery in the offseason to repair the

2025-26 OSU Women's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Nov. 9	COPPIN STATE
Nov. 13	BELLARMINE
Nov. 16	at UConn
Nov. 19	KENT STATE
Nov. 24	Belmont*
Nov. 26	TBD*
Nov. 30	NIAGARA
Dec. 7	at Northwestern
Dec. 11	NORTHERN KENTUCKY
Dec. 14	TOLEDO
Dec. 18	NORFOLK STATE
Dec. 22	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Dec. 28	UCLA
Dec. 31	at Purdue
Jan. 4	RUTGERS
Jan. 7	at Illinois
Jan. 11	at Maryland
Jan. 14	PENN STATE
Jan. 19	TCU#
Jan. 22	INDIANA
Jan. 25	at Iowa
Jan. 29	Wisconsin
Feb. 1	NEBRASKA
Feb. 5	at Washington
Feb. 8	at Oregon
Feb. 15	MARYLAND
Feb. 18	at Minnesota
Feb. 22	USC
Feb. 25	MICHIGAN
March 1	at Michigan State
Mar 4-8	Big Ten Tournament, Indianapolis

* - Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas
- Coretta Scott King Classic in Newark, N.J.

ailment.

McGuff said Lemmilä is making progress rehabbing from the injury, but he wishes she had a full offseason to help her heading into this season. Still, McGuff said he thinks his center has made some improvements to her game.

“We’re really optimistic that Elsa can have a really impactful season for us,” McGuff said at Big Ten media day. “She’s a terrific athlete, very skilled, a really high-IQ basketball player and person in general. We’re going to need her to be impactful for us to have the season we’re capable of having.”

“She probably shoots it better from the perimeter than she thinks she does, so we really have to inspire some confidence into her, because she’s very capable and she’ll do it in practice. I just think it may take a little time for her to do it successfully in games, especially early on.”

Lemmilä may be lacking some confidence from beyond the arc because she didn’t shoot many three-pointers last year. She finished the year making just 1 of 9 three-point attempts.

Penn State Has The Bucks To Beat OSU Icers

Ohio State met the future of college hockey and didn't like what it saw in being swept at home by the new-look Penn State Nittany Lions on Oct. 30 and 31.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

While the 3-2 and 4-3 defeats were accomplished in different manners, OSU coach Steve Rohlik was left with an empty feeling. The Buckeyes blew a two-goal lead in the opener and rallied from a 2-0 deficit in the second game before allowing two straight goals.

"Different emotions, but the end result was the same, to be honest with you," he said. "We just didn't do enough to win."

As in the first game when the Nittany Lions had eight power plays, converting one, the sin bin was a nemesis.

"You talk about not taking penalties and you come out, take two penalties right away and give them a two-zip lead," Rohlik said following the rematch. "Not a good recipe for success, so I'm disappointed in that, but I give my guys credit for continuing to battle right to the end."

There weren't any treats on Halloween for the Buckeyes (4-4-0, 0-2-0) who entered the series ranked No.17 against the No. 4 Nittany Lions (9-1-0, 2-0-0) but likely will drop out of the top 20, but not because they aren't good. Rather Penn State, benefiting from a timely first Frozen Four appearance last season and oodles of Name Image and Likeness and other financial resources that the OSU program doesn't offer, is simply moving to a different stratosphere.

Actually, it started 15 years ago when Penn State alumnus Terry Pegula and his wife, Kim, donated \$102 million to the university with \$90 million of that earmarked to build a hockey facility to take the programs from club level to Division I. The Pegulas own the NFL's Buffalo Bills and the NHL's Buffalo Sabres.

The 5,704-seat Pegula Ice Arena opened in October 2013.

Penn State finally achieved a breakthrough worthy of its building last season with a torrid run. After being swept by the Buckeyes in early December to drop to 6-9-0 overall and 0-8-0 in the Big Ten, the Nittany Lions went on a 13-4-4 tear to earn an at-large bid and advance to the Frozen Four before losing to Boston University, the same team that eliminated the Buckeyes in the first round of NCAA tournament.

Incoming

Inspired by the Frozen Four appearance, Penn State was in the right place at the right time when the NCAA changed its policy making players from the top junior leagues in Canada eligible to play at American schools beginning with the 2025-26 season.

For years, the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) system has been deemed by the NCAA as a "professional" league because some of its players were drafted and signed by NHL clubs but were allowed to return to their respective junior clubs to develop.

Because of those signees, the entire league

and its players were "tainted" by professionalism and thus ineligible to play for a U.S. college program.

Since the eligibility change, the Nittany Lions have become must-see watching in hockey circles by nabbing the biggest prize, outbidding Michigan State for Gavin McKenna, the 17-year-old who is considered the surefire No. 1 pick in the 2026 NHL draft. There have been five players in NCAA hockey history to be the top pick with Macklin Celebrini of Boston U. the most recent to the San Jose Sharks in 2024, but none entered college as celebrated or with the credentials of McKenna.

He reportedly received between \$500,000 and \$750,000 to commit to Penn State. The Nittany Lions also added defenseman Jackson Smith, the No. 14 pick in the 2025 NHL draft by the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Smith also took advantage of the new rule permitting CHL players. He played in the Western Hockey League for the Tri-City Americans while McKenna played for the rival Medicine Hat Tigers. Smith said the Nittany Lions making the Frozen Four caught his attention.

"They've got a really good team there so that's an added piece," he said. "I've got quite a lot of expectations to go in there and play in a pretty big role. So that's huge, being able to be a big component to such a good team. That's going to be pretty fun."

He expects many more Canadian junior players will cross the border.

"I feel like it is probably just beginning," he said. "I think it's a really good option. CHL is an unbelievable league. I loved my two years in Tri-City, like I said a number of times, but just having that other option there is big. It's an older league, stronger guys and the resources there, like the facilities there (Penn State) are pretty sweet. So getting to use those and getting to play against better competition, I think gets you a bit more ready for the NHL, which is ultimately every hockey player's dream."

Penn State added seven players from the CHL – all freshmen – while the Buckeyes brought in four players from the CHL.

The allure of seeing McKenna and tracking the early career of Blue Jackets prospect Smith drew a larger than normal media turnout for the series, including writers from The Columbus Dispatch, The Athletic and the Blue Jackets' website.

"I'm excited to play against all these guys," OSU defenseman Nathan McBrayer said before the series. "Penn State, they have Gavin McKenna. I'm super excited to get on the ice and play against him. It definitely brings a whole lot more to college hockey, and I think college hockey is getting a lot more respect too than in the past."

"We're definitely going to get more people coming to watch those guys. I think it's a great opportunity for us to show what kind of team we have here and we're a team that's going to just work hard. I'm excited to just get a bigger atmosphere, everything like that, and really show off our talent and everything that we have."

The scary part for the Big Ten is that Michigan State is higher ranked than Penn State and made up for not getting McKenna by signing Cayden Lindstrom, the No. 4 pick by the Blue Jackets in 2024, and Porter Martone, who went sixth in the 2025 draft to the Philadelphia Flyers.

There is so much interest in Michigan State and Penn State that the Nittany Lions will host the Spartans outdoors at Beaver Stadium on Jan. 31 with a potential crowd of around 100,000.

As the Buckeyes showed in their series with PSU, they can be competitive without having superstars, but will it be enough to earn a spot in the NCAA tournament for the third time in four seasons?

Help may be on the way. Someday. Maybe.

OSU president and hockey lover Ted Carter is pushing hard for an arena to house both the men and women's programs, and there's talk that a major fundraising campaign is being considered which would benefit the hockey project as well as renovations to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

Of course, no one should hold their breath. With the Penn State series being alumni weekend, it's a good time to remind readers that several years ago when interviewed by BSB, former OSU player and retired Blue Jackets announcer Bill Davidge said that when he committed to Ohio State, he was told an arena to replace the OSU Ice Rink was in the works. That was 1974.

Lions Roar

All eyes were on McKenna, and he delivered. Although he didn't score, he had three assists in the two games, all on the power play. The Buckeyes had killed 20 of 22 penalties this season, but PSU went 4 of 13, including 3 of 5 in the second game. The Buckeyes were a combined 2 of 12.

McKenna also drew three penalties and missed an empty net late in the second game.

Smith scored a weird power-play goal to open the rematch. His shot went in and out of the net so quickly that play continued for nearly 90 seconds before a stoppage allowed for a review that showed the puck crossed the goal line at 4:32 of the first period to quiet the 4,986 in attendance.

Another power-play goal made it 2-0 before Adam Eisele scored at 10:29 and Felix Caron followed at 16:36 on the power play to tie, but the Nittany Lions scored twice in the second period on Sam Hillebrandt, making his college debut. He made 30 saves.

In addition to the numerous penalties, the Buckeyes were badly outplayed in the two middle periods in the series, being outscored 3-0 and outshot 32-13.

They tried to rally, but a goal by William Smith with 16 seconds remaining wasn't enough.

All four losses have been by a goal, and this was the first game in which OSU allowed more than three goals.

The opener before a turnout of 3,709 was the opposite. Broten Sabo at 1:19 of the first and Riley Thompson at 4:12 on the power play made it 2-0 for the Buckeyes.

PSU then had a goal disallowed after a successful Ohio State challenge for goaltender interference. It was one of a half dozen challenges or reviews that became comical.

OSU thought it had a 3-0 lead in the second period when Thomas Weis came down on the rush and appeared to push the puck across the line after a scramble for a short-handed goal.

The officials took a look and said that indeed the puck had gone in and overturned the

no-goal call on the ice.

Penn State then challenged for goaltender interference. A lengthy review resulted in the goal being taken off the board. So, it was no goal, goal, no goal.

The Nittany Lions then proceeded to score once in the second period and twice in the final stanza with Luke Misa scoring the winner at 11:51.

"I don't even have to look at the sheet to know what stands out to me is our penalties, our discipline," Rohlik said. "When you go out there and you're leading a game, you don't continue to give that type of team power plays, even if they don't score right away."

"You can't give them eight or nine power-play chances. You just can't do that."

Brilliant

The Buckeyes debuted their shiny silver helmets in the opener, replacing for one game at least the gray football-style ones. The helmets really popped under the lights.

Rohlik said it was the idea of equipment manager Tim Adams. The players didn't know about it until prior to the game.

"(He) brought it forward and we just talked about it," Rohlik said. "You know, football and a lot of teams do different things like that, and you see that in hockey now in the National Hockey League and even in college hockey, with some different helmets."

"We had the ability to do it. We thought it would be a really, really cool look for the guys to wear once in a while and decided tonight would be the first night we did so. I think they look sharp but wish we could have gotten a win with them."

Have a Heart

Kristoffer Eberly made 21 saves for his third career shutout when the Buckeyes defeated Sacred Heart of Atlantic Hockey 3-0 on Oct. 25 to gain the series split after the Pioneers won 2-1 in overtime the previous night.

It was the last nonconference series until the Buckeyes play a home-and-home with Bowling Green on Jan. 2 and 3.

Sacred Heart (3-2-0) took the opener after Nathan Lewis gave OSU the lead in the second period with a power-play goal before a crowd of 3,635. The Pioneers tied it with less than five minutes left in regulation, and Felix Trudeau scored his second of the game just 23 seconds into OT.

The rematch was scoreless until the Buckeyes erupted for three goals in 10:02 of the second period starting with Davis Burnside, followed by freshman Niall Crocker with his first goal and Smith to the delight of 3,071 fans.

"We were more focused and worked a lot harder tonight," Rohlik said afterward. "We were more consistent. That's a good hockey team over there. They work extremely hard, and they don't give you a lot of room. Our guys dug a little deeper, and the penalty kill (5 for 5) was really good."

For full recaps of the Sacred Heart and Penn State series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Bucks Dominate Nittany Lions In 38-14 Rout

The Penn State Nittany Lions had high expectations starting the season, but after three early victories over Nevada, Florida International and Villanova, their hopes of making a run for a Big Ten and national championship came crashing down.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

An overtime loss to Oregon in Happy Valley made those championship dreams much harder to achieve. The championship door of any type was all but closed on Penn State when it was upset the following week at UCLA. The losing streak continued when Northwestern edged the Lions out by a single point, another devastating loss in Happy Valley.

To make matters worse, senior quarterback Drew Allar suffered a season-ending injury late in the fourth quarter. The next day, James Franklin was relieved of his duties as head coach of the Nittany Lions. A good coach, but a coach tagged as one who couldn't win "the big games," was now out, and the team that had those very high preseason expectations and rankings was in a quandary.

Only a miracle could save the football season for Penn State. That miracle never saw the light of day as the Nittany Lions dropped the next game to Iowa, again by one point. Only a victory over No. 1 Ohio State and No. 2 Indiana, in back-to-back weeks, could somewhat salvage a season that has turned into a nightmare for Penn State.

To the Penn State faithful, the hammer would once again fall on their beloved Nittany Lions in Columbus on Nov. 1. Ohio Stadium has been a death trap for Penn State in recent years. The Buckeyes have now beaten the Nittany Lions nine games in a row, and the last Penn State victory in Columbus was in 2011, 14 years ago, when Julian Sayin was 6 years old.

Entertaining Start

In terms of football, not necessarily Brutus ziplining onto the field from the press box, the game started with flashback football.

Penn State took the opening kickoff and gave football fans a look at what college football was like decades ago. The Nittany Lions would sprint up to the line of scrimmage and line up in unusual formations, followed by a series of shifts and motions before snapping the football. This strategy seemed somewhat effective early in the game. On their first play of

the game, their best offensive weapon, running back Kaytron Allen, went for 26 yards, his and the Lions' biggest rush of the day.

That first drive lasted for only four plays, however, and the Nittany Lions' humongous punter Gabe Nwosu, 6-6, 297 pounds, booted the ball to the Buckeyes. Ohio State then drove the ball 89 yards in 11 plays for their first score and took a lead they wouldn't relinquish for the afternoon.

The Penn State offensive game plan, with all the smoke and mirrors in hopes of confusing the Buckeye defense, was fun to watch, but in the long run, the Matt Patricia defense made the necessary adjustments and held the Nittany Lions to only 200 total yards for the day. Only a second-quarter fumble by the Buckeyes deep in their own territory, leading to a Penn State touchdown, made the first half close in score only.

That Matt Patricia defense and explosive Ohio State offense would dominate the second half, ending in another Ohio State win over Penn State, 38-14. The loss to the Buckeyes was the fifth in a row for the Nittany Lions this season. This is the most losses in a row for Penn State since the 2004 season, when they went 4-7.

Overpowering Offense

The Brian Hartline and Ryan Day offense was just as dominant as the Buckeye defense. Ironically, the Ohio State offense came out with a similar strategy as the Penn State offense had attempted.

The Buckeyes came out using some new offensive sets, shifts, motions, and varying tempos. Obviously, this was the way to welcome back Penn State and former Buckeye defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

Despite Knowles knowing most of the Buckeye offensive skill talent, it did little to slow down the scarlet and gray wave that hit his defense. The Buckeye offense netted 480 yards for the day, with 316 of those yards being through the air. Ohio State punted the ball only once for the entire game, as compared to six for Penn State.

To add insult to injury for Knowles and his defense, the Buckeyes riddled the Nittany Lions' defense with big plays. Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith both had over 120 receiving yards, and both had a 57-yard explosive play. Of the six scoring drives for the Buckeye offense, only two took longer than 10 plays.

Sayin Playing at Elite Level

The Buckeye running game might not be where fans would like it to be, but it is definitely making strides. The Penn State defense went into this week's game giving up an av-

erage of 159 yards per game. The Buckeyes tallied 164. Bo Jackson again surpassed the 100-yard mark for the afternoon and exploded for a 51-yarder in the fourth quarter.

As a unit, the Ohio State offense averaged over 5.1 yards per rush, a solid performance. But as the running game improves, understand, the passing attack of the Buckeyes is something special, largely due to having a quarterback and a stable of receivers second-to-none in the country.

Freshman quarterback Julian Sayin again proved to be a legitimate candidate for the Heisman trophy, as well as Jeremiah Smith, by passing for over 300 yards and four touchdowns at a nearly 90 percent completion percentage and, again, no interceptions. His poise in the pocket and ability to avoid the rush is instinctive. He masters his position like a seasoned veteran, and hopefully the best is yet to come.

Sayin obviously is surrounded by a wealth of talent at the receiver position with Tate and Smith emerging as the best duo of wideouts in college football. Saying that, Julian sees the field and can spread the wealth. Against Penn State, he delivered the football to seven different teammates, a combination of wide receivers, tight ends and running backs.

Julian is also smart enough to know a huge part of his success is due to the men up front who give him the time to throw. The offensive line has given up only three sacks for the season, and a Penn State defense that tradition-

ally puts pressure on opposing quarterbacks was unable to get to Sayin.

In reality, Penn State has not had a quarterback who has been able to take the program to the next level for quite some time. As good as quarterbacks like Drew Allar, Sean Clifford and Trace McSorley were for the Nittany Lions, they weren't good enough to take the team to the "promised land."

The Buckeyes might just have that guy in Julian Sayin.

What Happens Now

For the Ohio State Buckeyes, the road forward is clear. Take it one game at a time. Do not overlook the upcoming opponents on the schedule. The team must expect the very best effort from everyone they play. Domination comes from steady improvement and focus. The best way to prepare for the regular-season finale is not to look too far ahead. That week against TTUN, a one-game season, takes care of itself.

For Penn State, things aren't quite as defined. They must find a way to break their losing streak, which will be no easy task, since they face Indiana next week. As the Penn State administration looks for a new coach and the players worry about their futures, a storied football program seems in shambles. One can be assured, however, that Penn State will be back as a top football program. One can also be assured that the Buckeyes aren't going anywhere. They're here to stay.



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OSU Made Sense Of PSU, Cruised To Victory

There was about as much rhyme and reason in Ohio State leading Penn State by three points at halftime as there would have been with a giraffe wearing a clown suit.

It made no sense.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsmen

The Buckeyes were ranked No. 1 and possessors of the nation's fiercest defense, while Penn State came in on a four-game losing skid with a fresh-faced backup starting at quarterback.

Yet there it was, Buckeyes 17-14 at intermission.

If there is anything I have learned in the many years of covering Ohio State, it is that even in years when Penn State looks to be taking on water, the Buckeyes will provide a safe port.

Far too many times over the years, Ohio State has made things more difficult than necessary when the Nittany Lions come to town. Sure, the visitors from Happy Valley have brought in some boffo teams, including the 2017 contingent that entered ranked second nationally but left on the short end of a heartbreaking 39-38 defeat. There have been others, too – the 2021 contest (a nine-point Buckeye win with a far superior team) as well as 2002, when a Penn State team barely in the national rankings slogged to a six-point loss in a year when the Buckeyes won the national title.

Ohio State got the memo at halftime and proceeded to open a can of whoop-ass, scoring touchdowns the first two times it had the ball in the second half and putting Penn State in a hole that it could

not get out of. Julian Sayin performed masterfully, showing precise touch on deep-ball throws to Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith that PSU had no answer for.

"We came in at halftime, and we were up by three – you would have thought we were down by 21, but I thought we responded well," coach Ryan Day said. "I thought some of Julian's deep balls were excellent. We saw how they were playing us in the first half and felt we had a chance to get behind them and called those plays."

Sayin's deep passes could not have been placed any better had he walked the ball down to Tate and Smith. OK, maybe the first one – a 45-yard scoring strike to Tate – was underthrown. But the other two were on the dot. It's a thing of beauty to watch Sayin throw the football because it looks so effortless. He's not big, does not cast an imposing figure on the field. He is savvy in the pocket and has just enough movement to evade pass rushers. Oh, and he can even take off and pick up a key first down, as he did just before the strike to Tate.

There was even an explosive in the ground game when Bo Jackson took off through a hole on the left side and rambled 51 yards, setting up Smith for maybe the best catch of his young career – and that covers a lot of ground. To explain would not do it justice, but here is an attempt: Sayin's pass was tipped and went straight up in the air and toward the end zone. Smith was between two defenders and reached up with one hand to snag it out of the air, coming down in full control and crossing the goal line for the Buckeyes' final score of the day. While it helped Smith's growing numbers, he had another reason for making such an effort.

"I didn't want Julian to throw an interception, so he could grade out a champion," Smith said. "So I decided to make a play."

It was a homecoming of sorts for PSU quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer, who prepped right around the corner from me at Olentangy High School. A three-year starter for the Braves, Grunkemeyer grew into a confident signal-caller and showed flashes of the potential he has for Penn State. His mother, Megan McCabe, played basketball at Ohio State, but when it came time for him to pick a school, he felt Penn State had the family quality he was seeking. As someone who has seen probably 10 or 12 of his games, I am rooting for Grunk.

It was also a homecoming for former Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, who left in a huff after the national championship and landed in his home state to run a Nittany Lions defense that was already one of the best in the country. As is usually the case, there have been some growing pains as PSU learns the nuances of Knowles' too-complicated scheme. They gave up eight explosives, mostly in the second half, while the Buckeyes were taking control of the contest.

The scoreboard folks were having some fun with Knowles, showing him on the scoreboard from his perch in

the press box. When fans saw him, they booed lustily. Then the board showed current DC Matt Patricia on the field, and the fans erupted. This was done a few times, and while I get the sentiment, it was kind of juvenile and unnecessary. We get it, you don't like the guy. Don't try to play revisionist history and say he wasn't any good.

Penn State had a modicum of success on the perimeter in the first half, denting an Ohio State defense that has shown few vulnerabilities up to now. But as has been standard practice, the Buckeyes fell back on the wise words of Pete Townshend and were not fooled again, shutting off the edge in the second half. Penn State amassed 140 yards in the first half but was limited to just 60 in the final 30 minutes.

Losing Valued Family Members

It was a tough week for the Ohio State football family after it lost two decorated centers, Nick Mangold and Bob Maggs. Mangold, especially, was revered as one of the best to ever play the position for the Buckeyes, and he was also one of the more insightful and humorous interview subjects I've had the pleasure to deal with.

Day knows what he means to the Ohio State football legacy.

"When you hear that name in this building, people stand up straight," Day said. "This is a guy who had a tremendous amount of character and left a lot of that behind. He didn't just go through this place. He left a work ethic, he left leadership, he left discipline, and certainly a body of work on the field. All of the people who were able to have him as a teammate spoke so highly of him."

Spending A Day Inside A Day

Ever wonder how a coach spends an off week?

Day gave some insight into what he and his family did while other coaches and teams played games and the Buckeyes were idle.

"We went to the corn maze (at Little Darby Creek). It's something we've been doing as a family yearly, and the folks out there had said if we win a national championship, they would do one of me," Day said.

Officially called The MAiZE at Little Darby Creek, it has been around for 24 years and has often had a theme of sports or Ohio or both. One year, the subject was Jack Nicklaus, another was a tribute to Jim Tressel and Woody Hayes, yet another was Ohio Stadium.

This year, it was a full maze of Day, which the coach found to be flattering.

"They held up their end of the bargain," he said. "We went out there for a little while as a normal family, but it wasn't normal because the kids were throwing corn at each other. It's great to do things like that because during the season we're here in the Woody so much that even to get away for a couple of hours is big. We call it The Submarine around here because we don't go out in public, we don't do much. So to hear the people there talk

about how we're glad Ohio State is on a bye week because there are a lot more people here. When the Buckeyes are playing, there's nobody here."

Can you envision Day walking through a giant maze of corn, looking for the exit and hoping not to get lost? He did admit to passing on another aspect of the farm, however.

"I didn't do the haunt," Day said. "I did it a couple of years ago, and it's quite an experience. At some point, someone in a mask jumps out looking to scare me and says, 'Coach Day?!' I decided to pass this year and just let the kids do it."

Buckeyes Staying Hungry

Just about every team this season has had a skin-of-the-teeth moment, where one play going a different way would have resulted in a loss.

Ohio State has yet to face that kind of adversity, and whether it is a product of the Buckeyes simply being that much better than their opponents, real adversity has yet to rear its ugly head.

According to All-America safety Caleb Downs, there's a reason for that.

"We were talking with Coach Day, and he talked about urgency," Downs said. "There's always someone every day who wants what I have, and you have to go with that. If you go at it every day with that mindset, don't take anything for granted, come out every day hungry, it puts you in position on Saturdays to play with confidence."

Buckeyes Still At The Top

Losses by Georgia Tech and Navy brought down the number of undefeated teams to just four, and while the Buckeyes were skating past Penn State, it became painfully apparent that they will not be tested again until the season finale with Michigan. Win that one, and it's a showdown for the Big Ten championship, likely against Indiana. Don't let anyone tell you the Hoosiers aren't legit, because they are. They have a tough, accurate quarterback and a defense that really gets after people.

I am hoping they hold up their end of things and are unbeaten heading into the Big Ten Championship Game because it would be nice to see a pair of unbeaten squaring off not only for a Big Ten title, but the likely top seed in the College Football Playoff.

Dandy Dozen

Ohio State (8-0)
Indiana (9-0)
Texas A&M (8-0)
Alabama (7-1)
Georgia (7-1)
BYU (8-0)
Ole Miss (8-1)
Texas Tech (8-1)
Oregon (7-1)
Oklahoma (7-2)
Notre Dame (6-2)
Virginia (8-1)

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Not Lion, Happy That PSU Is Out Of The Way

I admit it. I was a little nervous about the Penn State game.

Sure, it was unlikely that the Buckeyes would lose to the Nittany Lions, especially in Ohio Stadium. But I only had to think back less than a year, to Nov. 30, 2024, to know that the obvious favorite doesn't always win, especially in a rivalry game.

True, Penn State was in turmoil after inexplicable losses to such teams as UCLA and Northwestern and the termination of longtime coach James Franklin. But the players on the roster were the same players who were picked to contend for the national title, minus quarterback Drew Allar – admittedly a big minus. But I was even more concerned about the fact that this game was PSU's equivalent of the CFP postseason, and if those talented players had any sort of pride, they would want to salvage something out of a lost season. I also wondered if former Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles could provide any intel from three years on staff in Columbus to help give the Lions any sort of edge in their quest for the upset victory.

I felt a little less like an outlier when I heard Urban Meyer, on sports talk radio, express some of the same concerns for the Buckeyes that I had.

My thought was for Ohio State to jump on the visitors early and not let them think that they had a chance for such an upset. It looked like the Buckeyes were going to do just that, methodically marching 89 yards on 11 plays with Jeremiah Smith doing the scoring honors with a 14-yard reception from Julian Sayin. Sayin was 6 of 6 passing on the drive with three of those passes going to Smith for 42 yards.

But then it started.

On their next possession, the Buckeyes stalled in the red zone and had to settle for a 22-yard Jayden Fielding field goal. Was the red-zone problem popping up again? Then the Nittany Lions stunned me when, led by local quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer in just his second start (and the first wasn't that impressive), they marched through Ohio State's top-ranked defense for 75 yards and a touchdown on 15 plays, keeping the ball away from the Buckeye offense for a full 7:50 to make it 10-7. I just didn't see that coming, not against Matt Patricia's defense.

The Buckeye offense quickly responded with a 45-yard TD pass from Sayin to Carnell Tate, and things seemed back in hand.

But then came The Fumble. Was this going to be one of those games where a lesser opponent hangs around, gaining confidence, and at the end of the game somehow prevails on a fluke play like a blocked kick (think Penn State in 2016, arguably the high point in Franklin's tenure)?

Ryan Day and the team must have felt the same way I did.

"We came in at halftime, and we were up by three. You would have thought we were down by 21," Day said.

"Calm down, Frank," I said to myself. "The Buckeyes get the ball to start the second half, and if they come down and score, things will be back under control. The passing attack and the defense are just too good to have the Lions easily make up a two-score deficit."

Sayin and his guys didn't let me down. It took only 2:42 for the offense to take back control of the game, this time with Sayin using a 57-yard pass to Tate to set up a fumble-atoning TD-run by CJ Donaldson. It was hard not to feel good for Donaldson. You know that had to have been a tough halftime for him.

I just can't say enough about Sayin. Anyone who says they saw his season performance

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

coming is just being dishonest. A good season? Sure. A great season? Maybe. But this?

The thing I like is that Sayin seems to just get better every week. Who knows where he will be by the end of the season? Or even on Nov. 29.

Of course, Sayin's performance is aided by the presence of Smith and Tate. But they are aided by the presence of Sayin. In this case it takes three – along with a dose of the tight ends and running backs – to tango.

In the end, Sayin was an extremely efficient 20 of 23 for 316 yards and four scores, without an interception. In fact, Sayin has yet to throw an interception in conference play. Smith caught six passes for 123 yards and two scores and Tate five for 124 yards and six points of his own, helping the Buckeyes rack up 480 yards against Knowles' defense.

As for the Ohio State defense, it took complete charge in the second half.

"The defense was excellent and really stepped up," Day said. "There were a couple of third downs early on that were frustrating. But I thought Matt changed it up a little bit, the guys played physical, got to the quarterback, and changed up the looks in the back end."

Penn State totaled just 60 yards of offense in the second half, including negative-21 yards on the ground. Grunkemeyer was sacked four times in the final 30 minutes.

If you just looked at the stat sheet you might think that the Buckeyes improved their struggling run game as well. I'm not so sure.

The Buckeyes were credited with 164 yards rushing and a 5.1-yard average, but 100 yards of that came in the fourth quarter when the game was no longer in doubt. The rest of the game, Ohio State had just 64 rushing yards on 20 carries for a 3.2-yard average and a long of 11 by Isaiah West.

I saw some holes open up for the Buckeye backs in the early going, something I hadn't necessarily seen in a while. But it seemed like the backs would get as much as the hole allowed yet couldn't break a tackle or avoid a defender to make the run a longer gain.

Bo Jackson, who has been in somewhat of a slump, had a big fourth quarter that included a 51-yard gain among his five carries for 79 yards. Yet I couldn't help but think about how he built his reputation and worked his way up to the starter's role, with his performances in mop-up time against teams like Grambling State and Ohio University. It's a lot easier to pad your stats then.

Given Ohio State's passing attack and air-tight defense, if the Buckeyes can somehow light a fire under the running game, they could prove invincible by the end of the season.

"If they can run the ball, they can beat anybody," former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin says in our story about the run game in this issue (see pages 16-17). "I don't see anybody out there that's going to beat them. When you get up against a good team, I think if they can run the ball, I think they can win it all."

Heisman Hopefuls, Then And Now

Smith, who entered the season as one of the early leaders in the Heisman Trophy watch, had the type of game against Penn State that if he had turned that performance in earlier, he might have maintained his place in the discussion. Not only did he post strong numbers against the Lions, but he had the

type of highlight-reel play – his spectacular touchdown catch of a tipped ball for a touchdown – that is almost mandatory if you want to win college football's premier award.

Instead, with opposing defenders draped all over him, he has turned in workmanlike numbers. Sadly, workmanlike like numbers don't win Heisman Trophies. If you projected Smith's current numbers over the 12-game regular season, he would have 83 catches for 1,088 yards and 14 touchdowns. Solid, but nothing eye-popping other than maybe the TDs. But while he was doing his job with little fanfare, he was helping Ohio State to an undefeated season, helping make running mate Tate a household name, and helping propel Sayin into a spot on the Heisman hopeful list where Smith once resided.

I found it interesting that the Ohio State program has been so deep with talent through the years that in this issue of BSB alone, there are three teams mentioned which had Buckeyes battling each other for Heisman vote positioning, including the current unit.

In this issue's installment recapping Eddie George's march to the 1995 Heisman, the Buckeyes are finally realizing that they have a legitimate Heisman candidate in George. They decide it's time to push his candidacy. Back then there was no social media, multiple sports talk shows or sports books repeatedly touting Heisman odds. In that kinder, gentler time, you sent out postcards, something Ohio State had been reluctant to do for fear of damaging the chances of other star Buckeyes.

"Not only had it not been done at Ohio State since 1984 for Keith Byars, but it also meant potentially downplaying the seasons being had by teammates Bobby Hoying and Terry Glenn," Marcus Hartman writes in this story on George found on page 24. Not that either of them saw it that way, of course.

"We're not concerned about that at all," said Hoying, Ohio State's standout senior quarterback. "We just go out and do whatever we need to do. If we're successful the rest of the year, Eddie's definitely going to be considered for the Heisman."

"It doesn't bother me at all. If I had a vote, I'd vote for Eddie. Everybody's going to say it doesn't matter, but it really doesn't matter for me. If we keep doing what we're doing, we'll all be up for some postseason awards."

That unselfishness seems similar to what we are seeing with the current Buckeyes. And Hoying brings up a good point. While there is only one Heisman each year, if Ohio State keeps playing like it has so far this season, there will be plenty of hardware to go around.

And then there is the 1973 Ohio State team, featured in this issue. I don't think it is mentioned in the story (see pages 20-21), but Ohio State had three players finish in the top 10 of the Heisman voting that year. John Hicks finished second, ironically to Penn State's John Cappelletti. Hicks, an offensive tackle, had a chance that year to become only the second lineman to win the Heisman after Leon Hart of Notre Dame in 1949. There are many who believe that fellow Buckeyes Archie Griffin (fifth) and Randy Gradishar (sixth) siphoned off enough votes to keep Hicks from winning.

With Ohio State's defense allowing just 6.9 points per game so far this season, we at BSB thought it would be interesting to look back at that 1973 squad that allowed just 20 points

total in the first eight games of that year and 64 points for the campaign, against 413 points for the 10-0-1 and Rose Bowl champion Buckeyes. It was a team that may not get its due from Buckeye fans.

There were a couple of quotes from that story that I really enjoyed or found informative.

"We had 11 really, really good football players," said Fred Pagac, who was a tight end on that team and would go on to a lengthy career as an assistant coach for the Buckeyes. "I mean, those were big-time players, and they were tough asses, and they all were very athletic. Every one of those guys was very athletic. They all could run, and they weren't nice guys when it came to contact."

I like the quote because it is something typical that the hard-nosed Pagac would say, and it also describes a time when the rules were not stacked against defenders.

Another longtime Buckeye assistant, Bill Conley, who played in the early '70s, sees similarities with that defense and the current one, despite any rule changes to protect the offenses.

"That's what reminds me so much of this year's defense is that they really ran to the ball," Conley said. "I mean, a lot of silver helmets to the ball, it seemed like every play. They were fast, they were athletic and physically tough."

And here's one I love from Champ Henson, a fullback on that club, about the offense and Woody Hayes.

"Coach Hayes' philosophy was he'd rather have a 90-yard drive that took 25 plays than a 99-yard run," said Henson, a great Woody Hayes storyteller. "When you do have those long, sustained drives, Coach always said that your offense has to have a cumulative effect where you just batter them and wear them down, and of course, that gives your defense a nice rest when you can do those things."

One thing about today's Ohio State, quick-strike offense. It doesn't keep the Buckeye defense on the sidelines as much as those offenses from the "three yards and a cloud of dust" days did.

I hope the BSB story gives you a sense of just how good that 1973 squad, that battled an undefeated Michigan team to a 10-10 tie in Ann Arbor, was.

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