

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 14

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 17, 2026

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Since the spring, all the talk around the Ohio State football program has been about the team trying to become the first-ever Buckeye team to win back-to-back national championships. That hope came to an abrupt stop after months of the Buckeyes looking like the best team in the country, which many thought was destined to win another title.

But after a 12-0 regular season, the first since 2019, which was Ryan Day's first as head coach, the momentum that Ohio State seemed to be building came to a screeching halt.

First, it hit the speed bump that was the Big Ten championship loss to Indiana on Dec. 6. But coming out of that weekend with the No. 2 overall seed and a bye into the Cotton Bowl, where the Buckeyes had played in each of the two seasons prior, it seemed like that could have been only a temporary inconvenience from which they learned their weaknesses and fixed them all before another historic streak to go back to back.

That, of course, didn't happen, with Miami coming to Dallas off a first-round win over Texas A&M and overpowering the Buckeyes to beat them 24-14.

Ohio State might have come into the game against Miami favored by more than a touchdown, but anyone who had watched the Buckeyes throughout this season probably wasn't too surprised by the outcome of the Cotton Bowl.

Ultimately, what undid Ohio State were issues that had been present all along. In both the Big Ten Championship Game and the Cotton Bowl, the offensive line had its two worst games of the season, allowing five sacks in each game.

But while those numbers are similar, the loss to Miami was likely the worse performance, since even when redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin got a throw off, he had very little time to go through his progression and find an open receiver.

"They have two really good edge rushers, so we knew we were going to get the ball out of hand quick," Sayin said after the game. "There were times today where I held onto the football, and they were able to get after me and get some sacks."

Day said that what they saw from the Hurricane rushers was very different from what



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SOUR ENDING — A 12-0 regular season which included the first win over Michigan since 2019 did not translate into postseason success. First came the 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game followed by the 24-14 defeat to Miami (Fla.) in the CFP quarterfinal despite the play of safety Caleb Downs (2) and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (4).**

Indiana presented them with in the Big Ten Championship Game, but both were tough for the OSU front five to deal with.

"It's hard to just say one thing," Day said when asked what went wrong with OSU's pass protection. "We tried to help out. I mean, they have a very good front. And we felt like it was a little bit of a different scheme than what we dealt with the week before against Indiana. Indiana was a lot of pressure, a lot of movement, a lot of twisting and things. This

was a bigger group of guys who are a hard-charging front.

"We went in with a certain plan, and you could tell right from that first third down that we had a hard time. Being on (a silent count), we didn't quite get the ball on one and that caused the first sack, and it went from there."

Day said that pregame the Buckeyes decided they would use the silent count.

At times, the Buckeyes tried to counter the speed that Miami was getting into the backfield, but that also came back to bite them in the second quarter. On a bubble screen to junior slot receiver Brandon Inniss, Hurricane cornerback Keionte Scott jumped the pass and read it correctly, intercepting the ball and taking it 72 yards for a defensive score that put Miami up 14-0.

Scott said that he had seen the play on film, and once he saw Max Klare in motion pre-snap, he knew that he was going to try to jump the pass.

"All the skill players were on one side

of the ball, so we knew the ball was coming in that area," Scott said. "As soon as the tight end motioned, I made up my mind that I was going at that moment. I shot my shot, and the ball went in my hands."

For Sayin, there wasn't much of a decision to make. He was supposed to throw the ball as soon as he received the snap, trusting that the necessary blocks would be made for him to easily get the ball to Inniss.

But Jeremiah Smith missed his block on Scott, at least in part due to Scott getting off the line so fast to go inside and get between Sayin and Inniss.

"I think Julian's decision to throw was the right thing to do at the time," Day said. "(Scott) made a heck of a play. That certainly flipped the scoreboard fast. At that point, you've got to fight yourself out of it, and we weren't able to do that."

The Buckeyes had a large hole to climb

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# FAN FORUM



## From The Message Board

***In the season-ending loss to Miami (Fla.), Ohio State's offensive line gave up five sacks for the second straight game. We asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum whether they were surprised by the poor performances of the OL in the Big Ten Championship Game and the Cotton Bowl after OSU gave up just six sacks the entire regular season. We also asked if they are comfortable with the status of the front five going into next season or if they believe some changes need to be made.***

"I was mildly surprised by the OL performance in the Indiana and Miami games. I think changes need to be made next year, although I remain cautiously optimistic that the OL will improve with a year's experience under their belts. I'm not sure any of the five OL are future pros, and that's a big concern for me.

"In evaluating the OL, we should consider that Michigan didn't lay a hand on Julian Sayin. The Michigan team had 28 sacks on the season (10 by one player) and OSU similarly had 35 sacks (11 by Caden Curry)."

— Terrier Buck

"The OL can always be better, but Indiana and Miami found the secret sauce to disrupt Sayin's talent; don't let him get set in the pocket. Teams will continue to blitz our QB until he learns to use his legs to get out of trouble. Much of Fernando Mendoza's success is his ability to see defenders closing in and to make them pay with his legs."

— R1TBDBITL

"I don't like answering a question with a question(s), but... Would you be asking this question if we had not thrown a pick-six with the wide receiver missing a block and then later we also missed a short field goal? Did Sayin miss seeing open receivers? Did he hold the ball too long? Would it help if he had some legs for escapability? Did the

RB miss picking up a blitzing player? Everything is interwoven with the game. We've got some good linemen. I'm confident they will be better next year!"

— BuckeyeScott

"I was surprised by how poorly the Buckeyes protected Julian Sayin, but the struggles to run the football were not surprising. The Buckeyes struggled all year to run the ball, in large part, because the offensive line isn't very talented. I'd expect Ohio State's offensive line to improve next year as the four returning starters gain more experience, but I think the Buckeyes should look in the transfer portal for a couple of new players."

— Bobby Gorbett, BSB

"I was somewhat surprised. I thought Ohio State's offensive line was better than what it showed in the Indiana and Miami games, but that may have been due to a weak schedule and limited tests. Still, I'm comfortable with the unit next season, as the Buckeyes are expected to return four starters, excluding transfer Tegra Tshabola, who I viewed as a concern anyway. Ohio State should target an elite guard in the portal, but recruiting remains the main issue. Until the Buckeyes consistently land top offensive line talent, the unit won't take a major step forward."

— Sam Cipriani, BSB

## Buckeye Leaves

*Ohio State's season ended in the Cotton Bowl with a 24-14 loss to No. 10 Miami (Fla.), officially ending its attempt at back-to-back national championships. Here are some choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves.*

**Sam Cipriani, BSB:** After setting a College Football Playoff record with two forced fumbles, I'm giving my Buckeye Leaf to safety Caleb Downs.

Just 10 minutes into the game, the junior safety jarred the football loose from Miami freshman wide receiver Malachi Toney, who was attempting to make a move past Downs. With four minutes remaining in the third quarter, Downs again went into the body of Toney, who was coming across the field on a slant, and popped the football out.

Unfortunately for Ohio State, Toney recovered both of his own fumbles popped out by Downs. Downs also totaled eight tackles (five solo), which was tied for the second-best mark on Ohio State's defense.

**Bobby Gorbett, BSB:** For a crucial performance in Ohio State's win, my Buckeye Leaf is going to sophomore receiver Jeremiah Smith. The Buckeyes' superstar pass-catcher had arguably his best performance of the season with seven catches for a game-high 157 yards and a touchdown. It seemed that whenever a big play needed to be made through the air, redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin targeted Smith.

Smith's longest reception came in the second quarter when he broke free on a post route and, despite being surrounded by a couple of Miami defenders, made a catch that allowed the Buckeyes to pick up 59

yards.

However, perhaps his most impactful catch came early in the fourth quarter on a pivotal fourth-and-2. On the play, Smith attracted the attention of multiple Miami defenders but still got open on a slant route, made the catch at the 5-yard line and evaded multiple would-be tacklers to get into the end zone for the Buckeyes' second touchdown of the game.

**Greg Wilson, BSB:** My Buckeye Leaf is going to junior defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, who was his usual disruptive self on the line. While the Buckeyes struggled to stop the Miami run game, much of the Hurricanes' success on the ground was on the outside.

Anytime McDonald was able to make a stop, he was bringing down opposing players, using his quickness and strength to make as much of an impact as he could.

McDonald finished the game with eight tackles (three solo), tied for the second most on the team, one tackle for loss and a pass broken up on a tipped ball.

**Frank Moskowitz, BSB:** Jeremiah Smith on offense (he is a man among boys), and Sonny Styles on defense (he has come so far from the 17-year-old who first arrived in Columbus).

### BSB Subscribers:

**Luckeeman:** Davison Igbinosun

**BuckeyeScott:** There are not that many Buckeye Leaves to go around after this game. I'm thinking they are all gone.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Buckeye Fan For Life

At 86, I am a die-hard Buckeye fan that began at about age 5 when my dad and I listened on the radio to most Buckeye football games. My first Buckeye hero was running back and defensive stalwart Howard "Hopalong" Cassady. I can almost hear in my memory the excitement of the announcer when the junior ran a magnificent 88-yard touchdown return after he had an interception. That year, 1954, the Buckeyes won the national championship, and the next year, Cassady was the Heisman Trophy winner.

It is now the morning after our Buckeyes lost to Miami. I have just read the classic baseball poem, "Casey at the Bat." The fictional story ends with the words, "...there is no joy in Mudville for Mighty Casey has struck out." There is no joy today in Buckeye

land.

I saw a T-shirt with the words on front, "Buckeyes Against the World." Opposing fans and teams dislike the Buckeyes because of their winning tradition and culture. They are always chasing the Buckeyes. Which team would you rather support, the chaser or the chased?

My favorite Christmas gift this year was from my 5-year-old grandson, Luca. It was what he said. Since he was 2, if you said to him, "O-H," he would respond enthusiastically with "I-O." Visiting with us over Christmas, he was drawing with colored crayons when I overheard him say to his mother, our daughter, "Forgive me for using blue and yellow."

**Bill Herr**  
Bluffton, Ohio

### Still A Fan Despite Loss

I'm still a Buckeye fan! I love every one of them! Go Bucks!

**Angela Burdge**  
Hilliard, Ohio

*If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or email it to [bsb@buckeyesports.com](mailto: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.*



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No. 6	Oct. 18	No. 18	March 21
No. 7	Nov. 1	No. 19	April 4
No. 8	Nov. 8	No. 20	April 18
No. 9	Nov. 15	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 22	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 29	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 6	No. 24	August

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## OPINION

# OSU Title Run Fizzles Down Stretch

Based upon the way Indiana opened its special kind of whoop-ass on Alabama and Oregon during the College Football Playoff, I suppose holding the Hoosiers to a mere 13 points during a three-point loss in the Big Ten Championship Game should soothe a few ruffled feathers around Buckeye Nation.

Still, the euphoria that accompanied last year's run to the national championship was likely going to mean that anything less than a repeat would be a letdown. I'm not quite sure I was ready for the 2025 season to end with such a monumental thud, however, as Ohio State allowed first Indiana and then Miami (Fla.) to fully exploit its weaknesses while looking anything but a team that mostly ramrodded its way to 12 straight regular-season victories.

It would take a truckload of whitewash to overlook the fact that the Buckeyes lost their final two games of the season for the third time in the last four years, a disconcerting finish that had happened only twice (2011 and 2013) in the previous 21 seasons.

Ohio State entered the 2025 season either in the No. 2 or No. 3 position depending upon which preseason poll you preferred, a lofty ranking that was due more to the fact the Buckeyes were defending champions. After all, a team that lost 14 starters as well as its offensive and defensive coordinators probably should have been prohibitive longshots to finish in the top 10 much less raise the title trophy again.

Then came a cautious 14-7 win in the opener against preseason No. 1 Texas, a convincing 18-point road win at Washington in late September and a five-game, late-season stretch during which OSU allowed an average of just 8.6 points while scoring nearly 40 a game, and suddenly the Buckeyes were nearly unanimous picks at No. 1 and odds-on favorites to win a second straight title.

That stranglehold was merely strengthened when the team went to Ann Arbor and ended a four-year losing streak to its archrivals, coming home with a solid 27-9 victory and a full head of steam moving into its first conference title game since the COVID-shortened season of 2020.

But sometime between vanquishing Michigan and taking on Indiana in the conference title game, all of the determination of the previous three months seemed to disappear. Sure, there were distractions such as portal rumblings and the imminent departure of offensive coordinator and top recruiter Brian Hartline to take the head coaching job at the University of South Florida.

However, there was just something off after the Michigan win – almost as if the team's bucket list for 2025 ended with a checkmark next to the box beside the rivalry game.

The running game that had averaged 199.2 yards during five November games went into a shell, averaging an anemic 51.5 vs. the Hoosiers and Hurricanes. A defense that had been among the best in the nation all season in third-down efficiency suddenly couldn't get its opponent off the field, allowing Indiana and Miami to convert a combined 13 of 27 third-down situations.

Meanwhile, quarterback Julian Sayin looked more like a flustered first-year starter rather than a Heisman Trophy finalist. He still completed 67.2 percent of his passes for 545 yards over the final two games, but he threw three interceptions and took 10 sacks. During the 12-game regular season, Sayin pitched only five interceptions and was sacked just six times.

In retrospect, the way the Buckeyes lost to Indiana and then Miami 25 days later was

perhaps the most shocking of all. Nearly everything the Hoosiers did to shine a spotlight on OSU's weaknesses – spotty offensive line play (especially on the right side), a reluctance to quickly adjust from the original game plan, poor tackling, a quarterback reluctant to tuck and run under pressure, and an unreliable kicking game – were also exploited by Miami.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

So, how do the Buckeyes rebound heading into 2026 with four Cotton Bowl starters – unanimous All-Americans safety Caleb Downs and defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, consensus All-America linebacker Arvelle Reese, and second-team All-America receiver Carnell Tate – headed to the NFL with college eligibility remaining, defensive coordinator Matt Patricia likely weighing offers to return to the pro ranks, and much of the team's depth decimated by 25 (and counting) scholarship players defecting into the transfer portal?

Stay tuned. Figuring out the path forward is one of the reasons why Ryan Day makes the big bucks.

### The New Normal

The rosters of this year's final four playoff teams underscored the new normal in college football. Thanks to multiple transfers producing a multitude of fifth-year players, including Miami QB Carson Beck, who began his collegiate career at Georgia in 2020, helped to push the average age of the finalists to nearly 22.

In other words, talented five-star freshmen and sophomores are now facing grown men who just a few years ago would already be playing in the NFL. The Hurricanes, for example, featured 14 starters on both offense and defense who had transferred into the program as well as 26-year-old Australian punter Dylan Joyce. Ohio State had a total of just seven starters who had begun their college careers with other programs.

That is not to besmirch what Miami or Indiana or any of the other finalists accomplished. Kudos to those coaches for identifying the quickly changing landscape of the sport and fully embracing the enticements of the transfer portal and NIL money. The bottom line is that no young player wants to wait his turn to play, and with the portal, he doesn't have to.

Unfortunately – or fortunately, depending upon your particular outlook – quick roster fixes via the portal are quickly pushing high school recruiting down the priority list. All the investment of time, money, travel and analysis that went into combing the countryside for the best high school talent has now been compartmentalized into watching film of opponents and opening the NIL pocketbook.

No longer are programs going to be able to hang their hats solely on five-star recruiting classes. Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, a two-time national champion who once opined he wouldn't need the portal to continue churning out title teams, has signed three five-star and 35 four-star high school recruits over the past three recruiting cycles. But the Tigers, ranked No. 4 in the preseason polls, lost five of their first eight games, rallied to salvage a winning record, and then lost a 22-10 decision in the Pinstripe Bowl to perhaps the most underachieving Penn State team in two decades. The fact that Ohio State didn't play its best

game – far from it – against either Indiana or Miami and still played each team down to the wire tells me the talent factor remains high in Columbus. National championships remain rare commodities, something the two teams that defeated Ohio State this year know only too well. Miami hasn't won one since 2001 and Indiana has never taken home the title.

Having the right combination of players and coaches at the right time is extremely challenging, and the programs that remain in the annual mix for championships are to be applauded. But everything changes over time, and the path to the national championship has drastically changed in just the past few years. Those who adapt to the new normal will continue as contenders while those who do not are destined to become afterthoughts.

Ohio State struck gold in the portal two years ago with likes of Downs, Sayin, Seth McLaughlin, Quinshon Judkins, Will Kacmarek and Will Howard joining the Buckeyes to help lead the team to the national championship. This past year, the transfer haul paled in comparison with only tight end Max Klare, right tackle Phillip Daniels and running back CJ Donaldson Jr. making significant impacts. As of this writing, the Buckeyes had commitments from only five transfers for next season with none of them rated any higher than three stars.

While it's extremely doubtful Charles Darwin was much of a college football fan, the English-born naturalist could have been referring to the game in one of his most published quotes: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one most adaptable to change."

### Kicking It Around

According to the NCAA, kickers in the Football Bowl Subdivision combined for more than 150 field goals of 50 yards or more during the 2025 season. Would you believe an Ohio State kicker hasn't converted a field-goal attempt from 50 yards or more since Blake Haubeil booted a 55-yarder at Northwestern in 2019?

Kicking has always been something coaches take for granted although it's almost as much of a gamble as going for it on fourth-and-10 in your own territory. Everything from blocking to the center snap to the hold must be perfect before the kicker can even begin to concentrate on his craft.

Still, the fact that no Ohio State kicker this decade has converted a field goal of 50 yards or more is unacceptable. And it doesn't have to be that way.

Oklahoma went into the transfer portal last season and signed USTA kicker Tate Sandell, who made eight field goals of 50 yards or more this year including three (55, 51 and 55 yards) during a 33-27 win at Tennessee. Ole Miss mined the portal for Western Kentucky kicker Lucas Carneiro, who drilled 55- and 56-yard field goals during a 39-34 win against Georgia in the CFP quarterfinal and then booted a 54- and 58-yarders in a losing effort vs. Miami. Carneiro has converted 11 of 13 attempts from 50 yards or more during the past two seasons and is a perfect 143 for 143 on PATs during his college career.

A strong-legged kicker who can consistently hit from 50 yards and beyond instantly gives your offense an additional weapon. And considering the fact that three of Ohio State's last four defeats have come by three points or fewer, I would suggest a fine-tooth combing of this year's portal for the team's next kicker.

I mean, if Oklahoma and Ole Miss can do it, why can't Ohio State?



Kienholz, Porter  
26 Others Enter Portal

Like many other schools, Ohio State has had plenty of its players depart the program via the transfer portal since it opened on Jan. 2.

As BSB went to press, 28 Buckeyes had hit the transfer portal. It didn't come as a huge surprise that many of them decided to look for new homes, but notable portal-bound players include sophomore quarterback Lincoln Kienholz, who committed to Louisville shortly after entering the portal; freshman defensive tackle Jarquez Carter; red-shirt-freshman receiver Mylan Graham; freshman wide receiver Quincy Porter; red-shirt-freshman cornerback Aaron Scott Jr. and junior offensive lineman Tegra Tshabola.



Lincoln Kienholz

Tshabola was the only one of those players who had previously been a starter, but considering his struggles as the Buckeyes'

right guard over the last two seasons, it doesn't come as a shock that he entered the portal. Kienholz had been with the Buckeyes since 2023, and as the backup to redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin this season, he threw for 139 yards and a touchdown while completing 11 of 14 passes.

Carter, Graham, Scott and Porter each received limited playing time during their brief stints in Columbus, but each player was ranked in the top 200 nationally of their respective recruiting classes. Graham, Scott and Porter were each considered five-star prospects out of high school by 247Sports' composite rankings.

The other Buckeyes to enter the transfer portal were cornerback Bryce West; defensive ends Logan George (committed to Washington), C.J. Hicks (USF) and Dominic Kirks; defensive tackles Eric Mensah (Virginia Tech) and Maxwell Roy (UCLA); kicker Jackson Courville (Tulane); linebacker Ty Howard; offensive linemen Devontae Armstrong, Jayvon McFadden, Isaiah Kema (Utah) and Justin Terry; punter Nick McLarty (Arizona State); running backs Sam Dixon (South Carolina) and James Peoples (Penn State); tight end Jelani Thurman (North Carolina); safeties Malik Hartford, Faheem Delane and Keenan Nelson Jr.; and wide receivers Bodpegn Miller, Bryson Rodgers (USF) and Damarion Witten.

The portal does not close until Jan. 16, which means players will be able to enter until then.

Four Bucks  
Declare For Draft

Following the culmination of Ohio State's season, four junior Buckeyes – safety Caleb Downs, defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, linebacker Arvell Reese, and

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	W, 14-7	FOX	10-3, 41-27 win over Michigan
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	W, 70-0	BTN	7-5, 28-27 loss to Southern
Sept. 13	OHIO	W, 37-9	Peacock	9-4, 17-10 win over UNLV
Sept. 27	at Washington	W, 24-6	CBS	9-4, 38-10 win over Boise State
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	NBC	8-5, 20-17 win over New Mexico
Oct. 11	at Illinois	W 34-16	FOX	9-4, 30-28 win over Tennessee
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	W, 34-0	CBS	4-8, 17-7 loss to Minnesota
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	W, 38-14	FOX	7-6, 22-10 win over Clemson
Nov. 8	at Purdue	W, 34-10	BTN	2-10, 56-3 loss to Indiana
Nov. 15	UCLA	W, 48-10	NBC	3-9, 29-10 loss to USC
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	W, 42-9	FOX	5-7, 40-36 loss to Penn State
Nov. 29	at Michigan	W, 27-9	FOX	9-4, 41-27 loss to Texas
Dec. 6	Indiana*	L, 13-10	FOX	15-0, 56-22 win over Oregon
Dec. 31	Miami#	L, 24-14	ESPN	13-2, 31-27 win over Ole Miss
* - Big Ten Championship at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)				
# - CFP quarterfinal at Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas				

wide receiver Carnell Tate – have forfeited their senior seasons to declare for the 2026 NFL draft.

Tate was the first Buckeye to declare for the NFL draft. In three seasons at Ohio State, the 6-3, 195-pound wide receiver finished with 121 catches for 1,872 yards and 14 touchdowns, including a career-high 51 receptions for 875 yards and nine scores as a junior in 2025. Tate is currently projected to be a top-10 pick and the first receiver off the board in the draft.

Downs entered the draft via an announcement on his podcast, “Downs 2 Business,” on Jan. 7 after two seasons at Ohio State and a single year at Alabama as a freshman in 2023.

A two-time unanimous All-American, Downs racked up 150 tackles (94 solo), 12½ tackles for loss, eight passes defended, four interceptions and two forced fumbles in his two years with the Buckeyes. Like Tate, Downs is also a projected top-10

pick and is the top-ranked safety according to most mock drafts.

Reese was the third Buckeye to declare for the draft, doing so on the afternoon of Jan. 8. The athletic, 6-4, 243-pound linebacker, projected as a top-five NFL draft pick, earned unanimous All-America honors in his first season as a starter. Reese recorded career highs with 69 total tackles, 10 tackles for loss, and 6½ sacks.

McDonald was the final Buckeye to declare for the draft. The standout defensive tackle finished the 2025 season with 65 tackles (31 solo), ranking fifth on the team. He also registered nine tackles for loss, three sacks, two quarterback hurries, two forced fumbles and a pass breakup. Standing 6-3 and weighing 326 pounds, McDonald is projected as a first-round draft pick.

Smith, Inniss  
Staying At OSU

Amid speculation that Ohio State's top wideout could enter the transfer portal following a disappointing end to his sophomore campaign, wide receiver Jeremiah Smith shut down rumors of his departure.

Following the losses of multiple Ohio State receivers, including Porter, Graham and Rodgers to the transfer portal and Tate declaring for the NFL draft, Smith took to Twitter to announce that he's not going anywhere.

In two seasons with Ohio State, the 6-3, 223-pound Smith has racked up 163 catches for 2,558 yards and 27 receiving touchdowns, as well as nine carries for 68 yards and two rushing scores.

Smith now sits just 42 catches, 310 yards and eight receiving touchdowns away from surpassing Ohio State's all-time receiving benchmarks of 205 receptions and 2,868 yards set by Emeka Egbuka, along with the program-record 35 receiving touchdowns that Chris Olave set.

Also returning for another season with the Buckeyes is Brandon Inniss, the junior wideout announced on Jan. 8.

Inniss, who started as a slot receiver for Ohio State in 2025, set career highs with 36 receptions for 271 yards and three touchdowns. The 6-0, 199-pound receiver also routinely contributed in the Buckeyes' return game. Over two years as Ohio State's primary punt returner, Inniss returned 31 punts for 288 yards, averaging 9.3 yards per return.

Hankton Hired As  
New WR Coach

It didn't take long after Ohio State's sea-

42 Student-Athletes Earn OSU Degrees At Fall Commencement

Ohio State's autumn commencement ceremony had 42 student-athletes obtain degrees on Dec. 21.

Leading all of the programs that were represented was Ryan Day's football team, with 13 players graduating. That included seven starters: defensive end Caden Curry (communication), long snapper John Ferlmann (communication), kicker Jayden Fielding (sport industry), cornerback Davison Igbinosun (psychology), defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. (communication), defensive lineman Tywone Malone Jr. (human development and family science) and linebacker Sonny Styles (sport industry).

That list also included guard Bruce Thornton, a four-year captain of the men's basketball team who received a degree in sport industry.

From Kevin McGuff's women's basketball team, current guard Kennedy Cambridge earned a degree in political science, and former member of the program Eboni Walker completed her master's in human resources management.

Other notable graduates in the fall included former baseball player Ronnie Dawson, who returned to complete his degree after getting a cup of coffee with MLB's Houston Astros and Cincinnati Reds

before heading to Korea to play in the Korean Baseball Organization.

The complete list of graduates is below.

**Baseball** – Ronnie Dawson, criminology & criminal justice.

**Men's Basketball** – Bruce Thornton, sport industry.

**Women's Basketball** – Kennedy Cambridge, political science; Eboni Walker, master's in human resource management.

**Women's Cross Country** – Audrey DeSantis, exercise science; Akemi Von Scherr, consumer and family financial services.

**Football** – Caden Curry, communication; John Ferlmann, communication; Jayden Fielding, sport industry; CJ Hicks, human development & family science; Davison Igbinosun, psychology; Kenyatta Jackson, communication; Collin Johnson, marketing; Mason Maggs, finance; Tywone Malone, human development & family science; Bryce Prater, construction systems management; Zachary Prater, construction systems management; Cayden Saunders, electrical engineering; Sonny Styles, sport industry.

**Women's Golf** – Kavya Ajjarapu, psychology.

**Men's Hockey** – Camden Thiesing,

communication.

**Men's Lacrosse** – Zachary Antoniou, finance; Benjamin Mayer, operations management; John McKenna, finance.

**Women's Lacrosse** – Leah Sax, social work.

**Men's Soccer** – Ashton Bilow, sport industry; Luciano Pechota, finance; Max Trejo, sport industry.

**Women's Soccer** – Mirann Gacioch, sport industry; Ella Giannola, sport industry; Arden LaRose, exercise science; Sophia Louder, biology; Molly Pritchard, sport industry; Gabriela Rotolo, sport industry.

**Softball** – Julia Miller, health sciences.

**Men's Swimming** – Samuel Campbell, finance.

**Women's Swimming** – Leah Baker, nursing; Ava DeAngelis, human development & family science.

**Men's Tennis** – Christopher Li Ludena, sport industry.

**Men's Track & Field** – Trey Gardette, Human Ecology.

**Women's Volleyball** – Ella Wrobel, sport industry.

**Wrestling** – Hogan Swenski, operations management.

son came to an end for the Buckeyes to find a new wide receivers coach.

On Jan. 1, they hired Cortez Hankton, who was the wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator for LSU from 2024-25.

Hankton replaces Brian Hartline, who was with the Buckeyes since 2017 and is now officially off to South Florida for his first head coaching job after becoming one of the top position coaches with the Buckeyes.

Hankton played at Texas Southern before going undrafted in 2003, and he spent four seasons with the Jacksonville Jaguars, playing in 46 games in his NFL career. He also had stints with the Minnesota Vikings and Tampa Bay Buccaneers but didn't get

into a game with either team.

His coaching career began in 2012 when he was the wide receivers coach at Dartmouth, and he has made stops in the same position at Vanderbilt (2015-17), Georgia (2018-21) and LSU (2022-25).

At those stops, Hankton has contributed to the success of former Bulldog receiver George Pickens and former Tiger pass catchers Malik Nabers and Brian Thomas Jr., all of whom are now among the top receivers in the NFL.

As BSB went to press, OSU head coach Ryan Day still had not decided on who would replace Hartline as offensive coordinator and play caller going into the 2026 season, but in hiring from the outside for this position, the Buckeyes have

reached the maximum 10 assistant coaches allowed. If Day wants to look outside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for an offensive coordinator, he would have to make a change with his current coaching staff.

Sayin Named Freshman Of The Year

Sayin may not have won the Heisman Trophy after his outstanding first season as the Buckeyes' starting signal-caller, but he was named the Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year on Dec. 30.

Sayin, a redshirt freshman, took home the award, given to the best freshman in the country, after a spectacular first season. He completed 77.0 percent of his passes this season, which is by far the best mark in the

country, for 3,610 yards, 32 touchdowns and eight interceptions.

Sayin helped lead Ohio State to its first 12-0 regular season since 2019 and its first win over Michigan since that same season. Against the Wolverines, Sayin threw for 233 yards, three touchdowns and one interception while completing 19 of 26 passes.

Sayin is the first Buckeye to ever receive the award, but Downs also won the award in 2023 after his freshman season with the Crimson Tide.

Lennon, Lee Lose Black Stripes

Ohio State added two more "official"

Continued On Page 6

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1986

The trophy bore a strong resemblance to the Heisman Trophy, which goes annually to the best player in college football.

To Larry Kolic, it was as valuable as the Heisman Trophy. And Kolic, a senior middle guard/linebacker on the Ohio State football team, would undoubtedly say it was his most prized possession.

'It' was the trophy given to Kolic as the Most Valuable Player of the Florida Citrus Bowl. Kolic picked up the award for his two pass interceptions, one of which he returned 14 yards for Ohio State's only touchdown in a 10-7 triumph over the pass-happy Brigham Young Cougars.

But just playing in the game was reward enough for Kolic. Twice during his junior season a year before, Kolic was so overcome by personal problems that he quit the Buckeye squad and returned to his home in Smithville, Ohio.

"I'm just a turmoil guy," said Kolic when asked after the bowl win about his problems the year before. "I enjoy it."

35 Years Ago — 1991

Not since John Havlicek and Jerry Lucas wore Ohio State uniforms had the Buckeyes won as many as 12 straight games to begin a basketball season.

Yet, in the 1990-91 season, under second-year head coach Randy Ayers, the Buckeyes started out with 12 consecutive victories.

Not since Allan Hornyak, Luke Witte and Jim Clemons patrolled the shiny hardwood of St. John Arena had Ohio State won a Big Ten basketball championship.

Yet, to start the 1990-91 campaign, the Buckeyes notched victories over Iowa and Michigan in their first two conference games and looked more and more like championship contenders.

Despite all of the furor surrounding the 20-year drought between Big Ten crowns, Ayers tried to defuse title talk.

"There is a lot of basketball to be played before any championship can be determined," Ayers said. "We're more interested right now in becoming a better basketball team every time we go out on the floor."

30 Years Ago — 1996

Another bowl trip to Florida. Another deflating defeat.

As was becoming almost the annual modus operandi for Ohio State, the Buckeyes fell just short in the Florida Citrus Bowl, losing to Tennessee, 20-14, on Jan. 1 in Orlando.

The loss ended OSU's season at 11-2 and dropped the Buckeyes, among the frontrunners in the polls all season after winning their first 11 games, to sixth in the final Associated Press rankings.

"I told my players that even though we didn't win today, I'm still proud of them," said OSU coach John Cooper. "I thought we had a good year. We finished up 11-2. We got beat by a good football team. Give Tennessee credit."

The latest OSU bowl loss would have been less distressing if not for the fact that it was almost wholly self-inflicted. The Buckeyes shot themselves in the foot from the opening moments on, although a torrential downpour made holding onto the ball difficult for both teams. Ohio State fumbled five times, losing three, and also threw an interception.

The Volunteers featured Peyton Manning at quarterback. Manning was 20 of 35 for 182 yards and a TD. Ohio State featured Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George, who ran for 101 yards on 25 carries with a score.

25 Years Ago — 2001

Andy Geiger was hoping Ohio State's experience at the Outback Bowl would lead to a "renewal" for the school's embattled football program.

Instead, in the weeks leading up to the game and the contest itself – a 24-7 loss to South Carolina – were examples of everything the OSU athletic director believed to be wrong with the

program.

In the hours after the Jan. 1 bowl game, Geiger decided it was time to make a change and buy out the remaining three years on head coach John Cooper's contract. OSU president William "Brit" Kirwan concurred, and early on the morning of Jan. 2, Geiger informed Cooper he was being relieved of his duties.

Geiger said at his press conference later that day that the decision did not hinge on the Outback Bowl.

"I would say, though, that yesterday was a capstone of what we've seen of a deteriorating climate within the football program," he said. "There were concerns about discipline, competitiveness, and academic pursuits – a whole series of things. I thought yesterday's performance was proportionally an exhibit of all of those things."

20 Years Ago — 2006

Things just kept getting better for Ohio State at the Fiesta Bowl. So what could have possibly remained for the Buckeyes to accomplish in Arizona after their 34-20 victory over Notre Dame in Tempe?

"The national championship is here next year," said OSU quarterback Troy Smith with a wide grin. "We like that."

The next year, when the new BCS contract took effect to produce the so-called "double hosting" format, the Fiesta Bowl would host both its regular game on New Year's Day and the national championship game a week later.

Despite the fact that many experts believed it would be nearly impossible for Ohio State to make a fourth trip to the Valley of the Sun in five years, nothing seemed impossible for a Jim Tressel-coached team.

"Of course, we're aware of where the national championship is being played next year," OSU receiver Anthony Gonzalez said after the game. "Our goal is going to be to try and get out here again."

15 Years Ago — 2011

A sour late December gave way to a sweet early January, but the rest of 2011 figured to be unlike any year in Ohio State football history.

Much of the conversation leading to the Sugar Bowl centered on the suspension of five players for the beginning of the 2011 season, and one of the suspended players acknowledged that conversation would not end after the Buckeyes' 31-26 defeat of Arkansas.

"I don't think I'll ever forget this," said defensive end Solomon Thomas, whose interception clinched the win for the Buckeyes in the final minute. "This will stick with me for life. As far as the negative bashing, people are always going to have their opinions, but I think this will be in Ohio State history."

Handed down on Dec. 22, the suspensions were for selling awards, gifts and university apparel and for violating NCAA by-laws that govern preferential treatment for student-athletes.

Four starters on offense – quarterback Terrelle Pryor, wide receiver DeVier Posey, running back Dan "Boom" Herron and offensive tackle Mike Adams – and Thomas, a defensive reserve, were required to sit out the first five games of the 2011 season for selling items they received from the team as well as accepting discounted tattoos from a Columbus shop. A sixth player, reserve linebacker Jordan Whiting, was suspended for the 2011 season opener in relation to the tattoos.

10 Years Ago — 2016

One last time, Ezekiel Elliott sliced through a top team and carried the rest of the Buckeyes with him.

The 2014 and 2015 seasons were one giant pile of evidence that Ohio State's fate as a football team was intrinsically tied to Elliott. The dynamite back was held to 33 yards in a 2015 loss to Michigan State and 32 yards in the 2014 loss to Virginia Tech but

scored 12 touchdowns in four postseason wins.

His final opus came against Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl, when he rushed for 149 yards and four touchdowns in a 44-28 win against the No. 8 Irish. It was the last chapter of a storied career in which he became the program's No. 2 career rusher and unleashed one of the most memorable runs in program history when he broke Alabama's back with an 85-yard touchdown run late in the fourth quarter of the CFP semifinal at the Sugar Bowl the year before.

In the locker room after the win over the Irish, surrounded by a crush of reporters, Elliott reflected on his three-year college career and what it meant to him.

"I'm blessed to be a part of this university, blessed to have the career I had, blessed to play with the guys I had a chance to play with and form those bonds," he said. "I'm just honored just to be a part of this history."

Five Years Ago — 2021

As confetti fell from the canopy at Hard Rock Stadium in celebration of Alabama's 52-24 win over Ohio State in the 2021 College Football Playoff national championship on Jan. 11, several Buckeyes lingered on the field to watch the trophy presentation, marking a disappointing end to a season in which those players believed they would ultimately be the ones raising the 24-karat gold trophy at the end of the night.

"I'm proud of our team. I'm proud of the seniors. I'm proud of the year that we've had," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "But it was a tough night. There's a lot to unravel there. But when you look the team in the eye after the long season we've been through, it's hard to start focusing on one or two plays or whatever it was because they've been through so much.

"I'm proud of the legacy the seniors have left behind. But you've got to give credit to Alabama. They are certainly a very good team, and they played really well tonight."

The Buckeyes overcame several obstacles during the season on their journey to the national championship game, including the Big Ten postponing and reinstating a conference-only season, living in isolation in an attempt to avoid contracting coronavirus and having three games canceled, though only one was due to an outbreak within the Buckeye program.

One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State's offense, plagued by mistakes and penalties, struggled to put points on the board against Texas in the Cotton Bowl, and with 15 minutes to go, the Buckeyes and Longhorns were tied at 14 in a CFP semifinal. An extended offensive drive put the Buckeyes up seven with only 7:02 to go, but the Longhorns appeared to have their answer when they marched all the way down to the Buckeye 1-yard line for first-and-goal in the waning minutes.

The Buckeyes forced a fourth-and-goal on the 8-yard line, and with Texas starting quarterback Quinn Ewers dropping back to pass, Jack Sawyer came flying around the edge and ripped the ball out of the hand of his former teammate and roommate to put the ball on the ground.

The ball bounced perfectly in front of him as he grabbed it and completed one of the most iconic plays in Ohio State history with an 83-yard fumble-return touchdown.

One may have guessed that Sawyer had all sorts of thoughts about fate or irony, or the fact that he was delivering Ohio State its biggest win in a decade, but what actually came into his head when he picked up the loose ball was something much simpler.

"S—t, I guess just don't fall," Sawyer joked about what went through his head when he had the ball in his hands. "I'm kidding, but no, seriously, I hit about the 30, and I looked back, and I'm like, 'I hope I have some blockers. I'm running out of steam here.' But they were running with me side by side."

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Buckeyes to the team on Dec. 23 when line-backer Eli Lee and tight end Brody Lennon shed their black stripes after practice.

Lee joined the Buckeyes this season out of Akron Hoban as a three-star prospect, and while he didn't get on the field much as a freshman, he recorded two tackles in Ohio State's 70-0 win over Grambling State on Sept. 6. He also got time in the 34-0 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 18.

He's the third of three linebackers in the 2025 recruiting class to lose his black stripe after Riley Pettijohn and TJ Alford both did so earlier this season.

Lennon, a four-star recruit out of high school, made it into game action only once in the win over Grambling State. He joins fellow freshman tight end Nate Roberts in losing his black stripe. Roberts did so in August.

Lee and Lennon were the 32nd and 33rd players to lose their black stripes in 2025 and the 17th and 18th true freshmen to do so.

## Smith Details Getting Back For U-M

During Ohio State's player press conferences on Dec. 22, Smith opened up about a late-season quadriceps injury that forced him to play through significant limitations.

The strain, which sidelined Smith for the Buckeyes' 48-10 win over Rutgers, was one of the toughest moments of his career, he said. At times, he doubted he could play in the rivalry matchup against Michigan on Nov. 29.

"After Rutgers week, I was feeling down," he said. "I was like, 'I don't know if I'm going to play.' I was debating if I was going to play or not because it was really bad."

Day praised Smith for the sheer effort to get back onto the field, adding that he ended up being a key for Ohio State against Michigan.

"I remember sitting down and talking to him and saying, 'You have to will yourself to be healthy.' He was wearing it early for a couple days, not to get too far into it. And I could see it on his face. Jeremiah cares a lot about his team. He loves Ohio State. He loves his teammates, and he loves playing the game. For that to be taken away from him was not a good thing.

"I looked him right in the eye, and I said, 'Listen, no matter what happens, we're going to go win that game with or without you. Now we need you, and we want you in the game.' It's kind of like a weight got taken off his shoulders, and he willed himself to be healthy into that game and play in that game, and it's tremendous. He just did an amazing job. It goes to show you, when you set your mind to something, you can get it done, and he did it."

## BSB Moves To Winter/Spring Biweekly Schedule

With this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we switch to our traditional winter/spring bi-weekly publishing schedule. The next print edition of BSB (Jan. 31 cover date) will be mailed on Jan. 27.

There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin print edition to get the latest OSU sports news, including ramped-up coverage of the popular winter sports like men's and women's basketball, hockey and wrestling. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability and following all of the Ohio State sports activity. Watch for any late-breaking recruiting news as Ohio State heads toward the traditional National Signing Day in February. 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. Also, staff members man

the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively.

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In the Buckeyes' 27-9 victory over the Wolverines, Smith caught just three passes, though arguably he had the play of the game with a 35-yard touchdown catch on fourth-and-5 to put Ohio State up 10-6 early in the second quarter.

## Offensive Linemen Hurt Against Miami

Ohio State was without multiple key offensive linemen for its Cotton Bowl matchup with Miami (Fla.) on Dec. 31.

Tshabola did not play in the Buckeyes' 24-14 loss to the Hurricanes in Arlington, Texas, and redshirt-freshman Gabe VanSickle started in his place.

While VanSickle earned his first career start after a strong outing after coming in late in the Big Ten Championship Game, he struggled throughout the first half against Miami, paving the way for Josh Padilla to step in at right guard for the majority of the second half.

Though he was healthy coming into the game, left tackle Austin Siereveld went down with a leg contusion in the second quarter of the Cotton Bowl. Siereveld played through the injury until the end of the half before being replaced by sophomore offensive tackle Ian Moore, who turned in a solid performance in relief of the veteran captain.

Ohio State's offensive line gave up five sacks for the second straight game after giving up six total throughout the entire regular season.

## Three Bucks Named Unanimous All-Americans

For the first time in program history, Ohio State had three players earn unanimous All-America honors in the same season. Downs, McDonald and Smith all became unanimous All-Americans after earning first-team honors from the Football Writers Association of America on Dec. 18.

Downs, McDonald and Smith also earned first-team All-America honors by the American Football Coaches Association, Associated Press, Sporting News and the Walter Camp Football Foundation.

Downs, who was also named a unani-

mous All-American in 2024, totaled 68 tackles, two interceptions and a sack in 2025.

Unlike Downs, McDonald was not necessarily expected to be a unanimous All-American in 2025, but he broke out in his first year as a starter after sitting behind Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams for two seasons.

Smith was arguably Ohio State's best offensive player during the 2025-26 season. The sophomore receiver had 1,243 receiving yards and 12 touchdowns on 87 catches this season.

Reese was the only Ohio State player to earn second-team All-America honors from the FWAA. Reese was also named a second-team All-American by the Sporting News, which released its list on Dec. 17. Sonny Styles was named a first-team All-American by the Sporting News, which means he earned a tree in Buckeye Grove.

Caden Curry and Tate were named second-team All-Americans by Sporting News.

## Chambers, Shaw Recall Intense Meeting

Days after Ohio State's loss to Miami, former Ohio State players Steele Chambers and Bryson Shaw detailed the aftermath of another difficult loss the Buckeyes had in the playoffs when they were with the team.

In a clip posted to TikTok from the "Shaw Sports Talk Show," Chambers and Shaw reflected on an intense meeting that followed Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl in 2019.

"The meeting that followed that game, that was one of the hardest meetings I think I'll ever be in as a human being on Earth," Chambers said.

According to Chambers, who played for Ohio State from 2019-23, Day and strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti called out an unnamed player after he struggled against the Tigers.

"We're not going to throw out names, but a certain player was called out," Chambers said. "And Coach Day, Coach Mick, they spent 30 minutes or so bringing up every single bad play that happened to that one specific guy. And then they told us what he was doing the night before, as far as not

focusing, doing stuff that you shouldn't be doing."

Shaw added that the unnamed player is an NFL player and said the coaching staff had him standing in front of the team. Chambers said the interaction brought the former Buckeye to tears.

"Fantastic player, great dude," Chambers said. "And I've never seen a grown man just bawl like that in front of a team while coaches are just showing every negative play that he had that game. I'll never forget that meeting. It was one of the hardest things I've ever watched in my life."

## OSU Discusses Adding Jersey Patch

A new addition could be on the way to Ohio State's uniforms. As part of a media rights contract extension announcement between itself and Ohio State, Learfield said that Ohio State is in discussion with brands to add a patch to its jerseys.

"Ohio State is embracing a similar innovative approach to future emerging assets, including engaging brands that are highly interested in pursuing a jersey patch partnership with Ohio State in anticipation of the NCAA rule change," Learfield wrote. "As one of the most celebrated schools in college athletics, boasting 36 sports, a jersey patch opportunity with Ohio State would represent one of the most highly coveted sponsor partnerships in college sports."

Depending on a rule change that could be coming from the NCAA, sponsored jersey patches could become legal in college sports by the 2026-27 season. The rule change was set to be discussed on Jan. 13 at the NCAA Convention.

Multiple schools already have jersey patch sponsorships, with LSU agreeing to a deal with Woodside Energy in October and UNLV reaching an agreement with Acceso Biologics.

## Ted Ginn To Coach Aviators

The United Football League's Columbus Aviators, who will play their first season in the league in 2026, will be led by a former

# 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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South Florida's offensive coordinator.

Beck spent two years with the Buckeyes from 2015-16 as a co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. He left Ohio State before the 2017 season to become Texas' offensive coordinator and most recently operated as Coastal Carolina's head coach from 2023-25. Beck was fired by Coastal Carolina after leading the program to a record of 20-18 over three seasons.

## Lattimore Arrested On Weapons Charges

Former Ohio State and Washington Commanders cornerback Marshon Lattimore was arrested the night of Dec. 7 in Lakewood, Ohio, on charges of carrying a concealed weapon and improperly handling a firearm in a motor vehicle, according to police records.

Lakewood Police reportedly arrested Lattimore in the 11700 block of Clifton Boulevard at 6:14 p.m., police records read.

The Washington Commanders released

a statement regarding Lattimore's arrest.

"We have been made aware of the arrest and are gathering more information. We have informed the NFL League Office and have no further comment at this time," the statement read.

Lattimore, a product of Cleveland Glenville, spent three seasons at Ohio State. He was part of the national championship team in 2014 and earned first-team All-Big Ten honors in 2016.

The 6-0, 192-pound cornerback was drafted 11th overall in the first round of the 2017 NFL draft by the New Orleans Saints and spent most of eight seasons with the team from 2017-24 while earning NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year honors in 2017 and Pro-Bowl nominations four times (2017, 2019-21).

After being traded during the 2024 season to Washington, Lattimore has played in nine games with the Commanders over two seasons, racking up 31 tackles, 10 passes defended and one interception.

Buckeye. Former Ohio State wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr. was named the Aviators' head coach, the UFL announced on Dec. 17.

"Today marks a new milestone in my football journey," Ginn said. "When I heard that the United Football League was going to have a football team in Columbus, I wanted to be a part of creating a new winning tradition in this city that is such an important part of my life. I can't wait to start building this team, and I ask football fans throughout the state to join the Aviators as they take flight."

Ginn played for Ohio State from 2004-06 and made a tremendous impact as both a returner and a receiver. In three seasons with the Buckeyes, Ginn had 135 receptions for 1,943 receiving yards and 15 receiving touchdowns. Ginn also finished his collegiate career with 900 punt-return yards and a Big Ten record of six punt-return touchdowns. As a kick returner, Ginn had 38 returns for 1,012 yards and two touchdowns.

Ginn, a first-round pick in the 2007 NFL

draft for the Miami Dolphins, played in the NFL for 14 seasons from 2007-20.

Former Ohio State coach Jim Tressel has high expectations for his former player.

"I'm so excited for the Columbus Aviators as Teddy Ginn Jr. joins the organization as its inaugural head football coach," Tressel said in a news release. "Teddy will be a great influence on the young men, and he will represent the Buckeye State and the UFL with class. Teddy is so excited to bring a great product to Central Ohio and make a difference in the community and in the game of football."

## Hartline Hires Former OSU Assistant As OC

Hartline may not be with the Buckeyes after the 2025 season, but he is surrounding himself with plenty of familiar faces.

In addition to recruiting former Ohio State players to join him at USF, Hartline also added a former Buckeye coach to his staff. Former Ohio State assistant coach Tim Beck was hired by Hartline to become

# One Of Three Goals Feels Different In 2025

Continued From Page 1

out of at that point, and with a missed 49-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding and only three drives in the second half – not including the final drive with less than a minute left when OSU was down by two scores – they were unable to pull off the comeback.

Other than the offensive line, another issue that plagued the Buckeyes throughout the season was special teams and, more specifically, kicker.

It was mainly in the Big Ten Championship Game that senior placekicker Jayden Fielding's problems were the most apparent.

Late in the fourth quarter, when the Buckeyes failed to convert with a touchdown in the red zone for the second straight drive, Fielding missed a 27-yard chip shot wide left that would have tied the game up.

That would not have secured a definite win for Ohio State in the conference title game, but it would have given it a chance to do so.

Had the Buckeyes won that game, they would have been playing in the Rose Bowl instead of the Cotton Bowl and would have matched up against No. 9 Alabama instead of Miami. The Crimson Tide looked severely outmatched when they went up against the No. 1-seeded Hoosiers in a 38-3 beatdown.

But the Buckeyes were off to Dallas for the third straight season instead and had to go up against the Hurricanes, who were ultimately off to a national championship game appearance after a win in the Fiesta Bowl.

In Ohio State's matchup against Miami, there was also a difference between the quarterbacks on both teams and what they were able to do with their legs. Sayin tried to escape from rushers, but he still held on to the ball a tad too long occasionally.

For the Hurricanes, Carson Beck made a difference by running the ball when that was an option for him, often doing so at pivotal times in the game, gaining a total of 23 yards on seven carries, an average of 3.3 yards per tote.

The most impactful rush that Beck had was early in the fourth quarter when Miami was facing a third-and-11 at its own 24-yard line. With a stop, the Buckeyes would have gotten the ball back down just three points with plenty of time left in solid field position.

But after dropping back to pass and not finding an open man, Beck broke free and found a gap, running into contact at the line to gain and falling past the first-down marker to keep the ball.

The Hurricanes didn't actually score on that possession, still being forced to punt the ball away, but with how late in the game it was, the roughly two minutes of game time that were run off the clock were extremely important.

Sayin recognized after the game that the opportunities for him to tuck and run were there in the loss, and he should have taken some of them.

"There were some opportunities today where I could have maybe taken off and scrambled for some yards," Sayin said. "I took some sacks that weren't necessary and got us into tougher situations."

With the Buckeyes' loss, the conversation of the teams getting byes through the first



SONNY BROCKWAY

**KICKING THEMSELVES — Special teams were not that for the Buckeyes in the 2025 season, and kicker Jayden Fielding (38) took the brunt of the criticism when he missed a 27-yard field-goal attempt that would have tied Indiana late in the Big Ten Championship Game.**

round not being fully ready for game speed in the quarterfinal round began yet again.

When Ohio State lost, teams that got first-round byes were 0-5 in the quarterfinal, with all four teams losing their first game last season as well. Of the three remaining games in the quarterfinals, Indiana was the only team to win their game after getting a bye.

Day thought that the long layoff between the Dec. 6 Big Ten championship loss and the Dec. 31 Cotton Bowl could have been one of the things that hurt the Buckeyes early on.

"I felt like it took us a while to get into the rhythm of the game," Day said. "We did coming out of the second half, and by then, it was going to take a very, very efficient second half to win the game, being down 14-0."

## One Of Three

Last season, when the Buckeyes won the national championship, it was the only one of three major goals that they set for themselves that they successfully accomplished. The season was largely viewed as a huge success because it was the first title in a decade for the program.

But another of those three goals that Ohio State sets for itself is beating Michigan, something that prior to the 27-9 victory on Nov. 29 it hadn't been able to do since the 2019 season.

It's a very different mood from most Buckeye fans following this season than it was last year. But before the season began, after the Buckeyes had lost a majority of their 2024 starters to the NFL, the expectation from

outside the program wasn't national championship or bust.

As the season progressed and it became apparent that the type of talent that Ohio State had waiting in the wings behind the 2024 team was, in some areas, just as good, if not better, the expectation became another national championship.

But one of the three major goals was still accomplished this season, and it seems as if the Michigan monkey is off Day's back after he was finally able to get a team over that hump, bringing his record to 2-4 in The Game.

## Now What?

In modern college football, as soon as the season ends, rosters around the country start getting torn to shreds due to so many players leaving, through the portal or otherwise. Even as one of the top programs in the country, the Buckeyes are not immune to that.

The NFL draft is something the Buckeyes lose talent to every year. Although it might seem like it right now for the Buckeyes, it's not every year that three to four first-round draft picks leave for the NFL.

So far, wide receiver Carnell Tate, safety Caleb Downs, linebacker Arvell Reese and defensive tackle Kayden McDonald have declared for the NFL draft, all of whom have been included in the first round of many mock drafts.

With Caden Curry, Tywone Malone Jr., Sonny Styles and Davison Igbinosun all out of eligibility and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. with

the opportunity to declare as well, the No. 1-ranked Buckeye defense that held opponents to 9.3 points per game will look very different next season.

But that's a reality that this program is no stranger to, churning out NFL talent on a yearly basis.

A comparable scenario happened just last offseason when eight defensive starters departed for the NFL. With defensive coordinator Matt Patricia taking over the unit and talented players who had been previously blocked from more playing time, the Buckeyes were arguably better on that side of the ball.

That is not to say that Ohio State will continue to lose more than half of its defense to the NFL and continue to improve each year, but it's proof that the fall-off in production might not be as bad as it may seem when the offseason begins.

The offensive side of the ball seemingly will largely remain intact. With the portal still open as BSB went to press, there remained a possibility that players with eligibility left would decide to return.

With rising sophomore quarterback Sayin, wide receivers Brandon Inniss and Jeremiah Smith, four of five offensive line starters – the odd man out being Tegra Tshabola, who entered the portal – running backs Bo Jackson and Isaiah West, and possibly tight end Max Klare all coming back, there will be a lot of familiar faces on that side of the ball.

But the Buckeyes are not immune to losing players to the transfer portal either, and this offseason has already seen more scholarship players depart from OSU through the portal than in any previous year.

As BSB went to press, 28 scholarship players had decided to look for a new home, with the previous high being 25 after the 2023 season came to an end.

A difference this offseason is that many players who might have had a good chance to make an impact next season are leaving through the portal, including cornerbacks Bryce West and Aaron Scott Jr., wide receivers Mylan Graham, Bryson Rodgers and Quincy Porter, and defensive tackle Jarquez Carter.

In 2023, when the Buckeyes lost so much to the portal, they made major additions from transfers, bringing in quarterback Will Howard, Downs, running back Quinshon Judkins, tight end Will Kacmarek and much more. Those moves were part of what helped them win a national championship.

The Buckeyes had added just seven players in the transfer portal this offseason as BSB went to press, bringing in tight end Mason Williams (Ohio), long snapper Dalton Riggs (UCF), defensive tackle John Walker (UCF), wide receiver Devin McCuin (UTSA) and linebacker Christian Alliegro (Wisconsin). For more on the transfer additions, check out Recruiting Outlook on pages 22-24.

Ohio State still could make some of the major additions that were seen prior to the 2024 season, but it could be that the Buckeyes are trying the approach of believing in the development of players they already have in the building.

# O-Line Struggles Doom OSU In Postseason

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

What started as a promising title defense ended in disappointing fashion.

The Ohio State football team accomplished plenty in the 2025 regular season. They finished undefeated for the first time since 2019, beat Michigan for the first time since that same year, and qualified for the Big Ten Championship Game for the first time since 2020.

For the most part, the Buckeyes had no problems in the regular season. After their offense didn't play great in a 14-7 Week One win over Texas, Ohio State won each of the final 11 games of the regular season by at least 18 points.

However, the Buckeyes didn't raise their level of play once their competition got better in the postseason.

Instead, Ohio State's offense struggled to finish off drives in a 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten championship and couldn't dig itself out of a 14-0 hole in a 24-14 loss to Miami (Fla.) in the quarterfinals of the College Football Playoff.

"I think it all starts with the offensive line," Eleven Warriors deputy editor Dan Hope said of Ohio State's postseason shortcomings. "The offensive line did not perform well against either Indiana or Miami. We saw Julian Sayin get pressured a lot more than he did at any point in the regular season. The run game, which had had its struggles during the year, did not perform well in those games.

"In general, the offense just was not what it should have been. I think the offensive line is a factor. I think the change in play callers, with Brian Hartline becoming the head coach at South Florida, probably had a factor in that. Ultimately, when you have Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate and Julian Sayin, you shouldn't be scoring only 24 points in your last two games, and that's the reason why Ohio State lost."

With Ohio State's season ending in two straight postseason losses after 12 straight regular-season wins, BSB sat down with 247Sports' Steve Helwagen, Hope, former Ohio State running back Vaughn Broadnax and former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin to discuss what went wrong for the Buckeyes in the postseason.

## Offensive Struggles Plague OSU

As Hope pointed out, if one side of the ball deserves blame for how the postseason went, it's Ohio State's offense. Characterized by its struggles in short-yardage situations, travails in the red zone and inconsistencies in both the run game and in pass protection, Ohio State averaged only 12.0 points per game in its two postseason games.

"After watching the games, you realize a lot of the issues were on the offensive line," Helwagen said. "When you only give up six sacks in the 12-game regular season and then give up five to Indiana and five more in the Miami game, that showed they were a little bit overwhelmed, and that kind of permeated everything else."

Going up against two of the better defensive lines in college football in the postseason, Ohio State was simply not up to the task. The Buckeyes' front, which dealt with injuries to starting left tackle Austin Sierieveld and right guard Tegra Tshabola in the postseason, struggled all year to find consistency as a run-blocking unit. The Buckeyes wrapped up the season ranked No. 73 in the country, averaging 154.4 rushing yards per game. Those issues with the run game continued in the postseason. The Buckeyes finished their two postseason games with a combined total of 103 rushing yards for an average of 51.5 per game.

Hope said the right side of Ohio State's offensive line, which often consisted of Tshabola and former Minnesota offensive tackle Phillip Daniels, was often the source

of the problems for the unit.

"You had three guys in Austin Sierieveld, Luke Montgomery and Carson Hinzman who had all played key roles in the playoffs from the past year," Hope said. "I do think the right side of the offensive line, particularly at the end of the year, was a weakness. They just never quite found the answer at that right guard spot with Tshabola rotating with several guys throughout the year and then ultimately missing the Cotton Bowl.

"They just never quite found the stability they needed at that right guard spot. I think Philip Daniels had some good moments during the year, but I think he struggled a lot in pass protection in the last couple of games. Then certainly in the Cotton Bowl, it did not help that Austin Sierieveld was dealing with an injury."

As much as the Buckeyes struggled to generate a run game in the postseason or otherwise, it was the pass protection, or lack thereof, that ultimately led to Ohio State's demise. Sayin was sacked 10 total times between the two postseason games, and at least against Miami, he was pressured many more times. According to Broadnax, the offensive line's struggles to protect their Heisman Trophy finalist quarterback were due to a lack of preparation.

"They weren't prepared. When you get to this point of the season, you have to anticipate the unanticipated, so if you have linemen twisting and stunting and things like that, you have to be prepared for that,"

Broadnax said. "You can't stand there looking confused as a lineman runs past you to sack a quarterback. That's unacceptable. It's all about preparation, and our team looked unprepared in both of those games.

"We have to be prepared for the unexpected. These guys are coming to win the game, and we have to be prepared to defend and protect a quarterback at all costs. And it just seemed like we were kind of bewildered on our line at times. I know there were some injuries and things like that, but still, the protection was not there."

Without much help from his offensive line in either the running game or in pass protection, Sayin was not surprisingly less effective than he had been in the regular season.

Over two postseason games, Sayin completed 43 of 64 passes (67.2 percent) for 545 yards and two touchdowns, but he also threw three costly interceptions.

At times in both games, Sayin was less accurate than he had been in the regular season, and he made a couple of poor decisions on at least two of the interceptions he threw in the postseason.

Helwagen wouldn't go so far as to say Sayin regressed at the end of the season, but he pointed out some flaws in the Carlsbad, Calif., native's game that he can work on heading into next year.

"They were going against really strong

**Continued On Page 10**

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# Tougher Teams Proved Too Big A Challenge

Continued From Page 9

defenses with Indiana and Miami," Helwag said. "I think that their coverages were better, and it was a little bit more difficult for the wide receivers to get open in those two games. We didn't see as many big, explosive plays, and the ones that they did get, they didn't capitalize.

"It was just definitely a tougher go for him, and yet, I think he'll be better for this, because he and quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler can sit down over this offseason and look through those two games and maybe a few others, and find the things that he really needs to drill down on, which I think are handling pressure, stepping up and running when the opportunity is there, and also to see the field a little bit better."

It didn't help Ohio State's offense that former offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline accepted the South Florida head coaching job in the days leading up to the Big Ten Championship Game. Hartline, who was in his first season this year as a play-caller, remained the offense's play-caller for the Big Ten Championship Game, but head coach Ryan Day took over play-calling duties for the Cotton Bowl.

"That got messy because Coach Day came out after the Big Ten championship and said they were going to leave everything the way it was, with Hartline calling plays. Then two weeks later, he comes out and says, 'No, I'm going to call the plays, and we're going to change who's in the box and who's doing this,' " Helwag said. "And now they're going off script and doing something different here in the 14th game, and I can't imagine there are many teams that have had success changing things up to that degree that late in the season."

Laughlin, on the other hand, was skeptical as to how much Hartline's departure affected the Buckeye offense, especially considering Day's track record as a play-caller.



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## Buckeyes Pay for Offensive Line Recruiting Misses

For much of the past decade, Ohio State has recruited at an elite level at nearly every position group. The offensive line, however, has increasingly stood apart, a trend longtime recruiting analyst Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop believes has contributed directly to the Buckeyes' recent struggles up front.

Since Ohio State and former offensive line coach Greg Studrawa managed to bring in five-star offensive lineman Donovan Jackson, the nation's No. 19 overall recruit in the 2021 class, the Buckeyes have fallen short of landing a top lineman in the recruiting ranks.

Greene believes that trend is directly responsible for the poor postseason offensive line performance the Buckeyes put on the field this year.

In the regular season, Ohio State's offensive line allowed six total sacks on quarterback Julian Sayin, but in the Big Ten Championship Game against Indiana and the College Football Playoff quarterfinal against Miami (Fla.), the Buckeyes gave up 10 more combined, a stretch Greene said exposed the limitations of Ohio State's offensive line talent and depth.

"Ten sacks, 31 pressures allowed in the last two games," Greene said. "Julian Sayin has no freaking chance. If he made a bad throw on the pick-six, he's got to answer for that one. But man, he took a beating in those last two games."

Greene has been consistent over the past few years that Ohio State's struggles in offensive line recruiting have been an issue, attributing it to the program often favoring in-state prospects instead of pursuing the nation's top talent.

"You can go back 10 years. When it comes to the O-line, they really settle for

these three-star Ohio guys," Greene said. "You would never see this many Ohio guys in the wide receiver room, the running back room. When it comes to the D-line room, they go all over the country and get the best of the best. But when it comes to the O-line, it just seems like they settled for these Ohio guys."

In Ohio State's four recruiting classes (2022-25) prior to the 2026 group, offensive line coaches Studrawa and Justin Frye brought in just three total top-150 offensive linemen and zero top-50 recruits at the position.

In 2022, Ohio State brought in Tegra Tshabola (No. 104 overall recruit), Carson Hinzman (No. 177), George Fitzpatrick (No. 244) and Avery Henry (No. 720). Tshabola started two seasons at right guard at Ohio State, although he struggled throughout his time there. Meanwhile, Fitzpatrick hardly played and transferred to Kansas State. Henry didn't get a chance to play, retiring from football after his freshman season due to a cancer diagnosis.

While the class improved in 2023 with Luke Montgomery (No. 92), Joshua Padilla (No. 232), Austin Siereveld (No. 302) and Miles Walker (No. 501), it still reflected Greene's point, as Ohio State once again leaned on developing players he believed were projects and focused on securing the top in-state lineman in Montgomery.

"They seem to end up with a lot of Ohio projects on the O-line," Greene said. "They would never take a comparable player to (2026 Ohio State offensive line signees) Landry Brede or Mason Wilhelm (at another position). You wouldn't take two guys like that in a (Brian) Hartline wide receiver class, or a Tim Walton DB class."

That trend continued in Ohio State's

2024 and 2025 classes, with only offensive tackle Carter Lowe of the '25 class ranking in the top 100 (No. 74).

Greene emphasized that Ohio State's recruiting issues along the offensive line are not purely about talent evaluation or development, adding that they could reflect how the program is allocating resources in the NIL era.

"They improved from a quantity standpoint," Greene said. "This is a position that develops later than any other position group other than quarterback. So they are harder to project. I will give (offensive line coach) Tyler Bowen some slack there, absolutely. If you look at the 2026 class, to me, there's nobody in the country who would identify Sam Greer as just an Ohio project or a guy that they took just to take the Ohio kid. There's not a school in the country that wouldn't take Max Riley."

Even as Ohio State's recent class shows promise, Greene believes the program must continue to prioritize elite offensive line talent to compete at the highest level.

Greer and Riley demonstrate that Ohio State can land nationally competitive linemen, but Greene said the Buckeyes likely need to change their approach to offensive line recruiting to see different results on the field.

"The math doesn't lie. Numbers don't lie," Greene said. "When you're scoring in the teens in the two biggest games of the year, then you've got to look under the hood."

— Sam Cipriani

"I don't think it's a big deal," Laughlin said. "I thought we were kind of pedestrian in the run game the whole year. In short yardage, we weren't that good, and in the red zone we weren't all that great. Ryan Day knows how to call plays as well as anybody in the country, so I don't think it hurt us that much. I just think we got stood up by Miami and stood up by Indiana up front, that's all."

### Soft Schedule Hurts OSU

Although the Buckeyes had plenty of accomplishments in the regular season, they didn't necessarily face many elite opponents. The Longhorns may have been ranked atop the Associated Press' preseason top-25 rankings, but they finished the season with three losses. After the Week One clash with Texas, Ohio State wouldn't play a team ranked inside the final College Football Playoff rankings until its regular-season finale against Michigan.

According to Hope, Ohio State's softer regular-season schedule, which didn't in-

clude perhaps the two best teams in the Big Ten, Indiana and Oregon, didn't do them any favors during the postseason.

"I think the thing that might have hurt Ohio State the most was that it really didn't face any adversity during the regular season," Hope said. "I don't think they trailed in the second half until the Indiana game. There were so many comfortable wins. They had 11 wins by 18 or more points in a row, and I think when they faced adversity finally in the postseason, they weren't quite ready to handle it."

"You just don't know how a team is going to respond until it gets punched in the mouth. I think if Ohio State had been in some more tight games during the regular season, that may have helped prepare Ohio State for facing better teams in the postseason."

It wasn't just the fact that the Buckeyes didn't face adversity, but as Laughlin pointed out, they didn't necessarily fix all of their deficiencies even against lesser opponents. In dominant wins over Purdue and Wisconsin, two teams that finished in the

basement of the Big Ten, Ohio State failed to go for more than 4.0 yards per carry in either game.

"The teams that they played, they should have dominated more," Laughlin said. "When you're playing Minnesota, Purdue, Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio University, you should just dominate those teams," Laughlin said. "I never thought that they really dominated any of them. Now on defense, they did. And you have to give the defense their props. They had studs on defense. I just don't think we ran the ball that well this year."

"I don't think our offensive line was as good. I think Bo Jackson has a chance to be one of the greats of all time, but man, we had TreVeyon (Henderson) and we had (Quinshon) Judkins last year. Those guys are beasts in the NFL, too. And we had Will Howard to help on short yardage last year, too. He was a big dude, and Julian can't do that."

Going against several below-average Big Ten opponents during the regular season, Ohio State opted to run its offense at

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

a slow pace throughout the season. In the regular season, the Buckeyes ran just 63.1 offensive plays per game, making their tempo one of the slowest in college football. The rationale behind Ohio State's offensive pace was that players on both sides of the ball would be fresher later on in the post-season, because they had played fewer snaps than players on other teams.

Day seemed to indicate that the Buckeyes would play at a faster pace when a situation called for it, but that never happened.

"There's kind of that infamous quote now, from when Day was on the radio in early November, and he said, 'When it's time to turn up the gas, we will.' It would be hard to say that that happened based on the way those last two games went," Hope said. "Having only four drives in the second half of the Cotton Bowl, it kind of reminded me of a 2024 Michigan game where they weren't able to get much going on offense. Then at the end of the first half, they have to go up tempo, they go score a touchdown, and it's like, 'OK, they found something. They should keep this tempo going in the second half,' and they didn't. They went back to playing methodically, and they ended up losing the game.

"It felt kind of similar to me, although they did have two good drives to start the second half, but I was of that same mindset. Obviously, they missed the field goal in the first half, but they had a good drive. There was not a lot of time. I was of the mindset like, 'OK, the tempo worked, keep the tempo going in the second half,' and they didn't do that."

Broadnax contends that if Ohio State wanted to keep its players fresh, it should simply focus on building a comfortable lead in the first half, so it can insert its backup players into the game in the second half.

"I think you play your players to score points to get a lead, and then you rest them and allow the others to play," Broadnax said. "Now, if you're worried about your defensive score statistics, that's one thing, but if you want your players to rest and recover, let them score the points and get them out

of the game. So you accomplish two things: You get them rest, but you also give your young pups opportunities to get real game speed, practice and participation."

The arrangement of Ohio State's schedule also may have complicated things. Helwage said Ohio State's first win, coming over the No. 1-ranked Longhorns, led to the Buckeyes being overrated in some ways.

"I think people definitely thought this team was better than they actually were," Helwage said. "There were warning signs throughout, particularly with the run game. And although the offensive line kept the quarterback clean and the quarterback was completing a high percentage of passes, you just wondered, as they're putting up 40 points against a lot of these terrible teams, 'Is this really sustainable when they get in there against the best teams?'"

"They only had 14 against Texas, and as it turned out, they had 10 against Indiana and 14 against Miami and couldn't get into the 20s against any of the best teams that they played. It was definitely something that is a good lesson for people year in and year out, to accept that you have to question everything, and it's not a championship season until it is, and they just didn't make it to the finish line."

Then on the other end of the regular-season schedule was Michigan, and even though every Buckeye fan feels there isn't a bad time for Ohio State to beat the Wolverines, Helwage said Ohio State may have relaxed slightly after beating its archrival for the first time since 2019.

"I think there was definitely an exhale after they beat Michigan, because that's what people held against them and held against Ryan Day," Helwage said. "It was, 'OK, you won the national championship, but you still can't beat Michigan. And they continued to hear that.

"And it was like, 'Well, doggone, we won the national championship. What else do you people want?' And there was still this loud faction of idiot fans who were concerned about the Michigan game. And so I think when they did win that game, I think they allowed themselves to believe, 'OK,

we have truly arrived. We have now ticked off every box at least within these two seasons, and we have a chance now to win the Big Ten,' and they didn't do it. They had a chance to win the national championship, and they didn't do it."

### Experts Conflicted On Success Of Season

Ohio State's 2025 season is a difficult one to judge because even though it is likely to have several of its players selected early in the upcoming 2026 NFL draft, it wasn't the favorite to win the national championship ahead of the season. Instead, the Buckeyes were seen as a team with plenty of question marks on both sides of the ball after replacing 14 starters. With the Buckeyes' regular-season accomplishments in mind, Helwage views the 2025 season as a successful one.

"I would call it a success," Helwage said. "First of all, you won 12 games, and you beat Michigan, and you beat Texas, the preseason No. 1. There's plenty there that you can hang your hat on. Was it a total success? No, because you didn't win the Big Ten and you didn't win the national championship, you didn't advance in the playoffs.

"In the overall context of Ohio State football, to have a 12-0 regular season is very rare. There have probably been less than 10 completely undefeated regular seasons – undefeated, untied is very rare. That has to be commended, that they were able to do that, and at the same time understand that, no, it didn't end the way anybody wanted it to, but there was plenty of success along the way."

Laughlin also took the optimistic approach in viewing Ohio State's season, despite the tough finish to the season. He added that though the Buckeyes didn't finish the season the way they wanted to, that's the case for the vast majority of college football.

"I would say it was a successful season," he said. "They went undefeated and beat Michigan, and then they lost two close games that were one-score ballgames. It could have gone either way. The ending

is always disappointing. Only one team is happy. Only one team wins the Super Bowl. Only one team wins the national title."

Broadnax was a bit more conflicted when evaluating the Buckeyes' season. He said that although there wasn't much to complain about in the regular season, their dominance amplified the disappointment of the postseason.

"I think overall, it was a disappointment just because of what we were able to bring back and how they performed up until the last two games of the season," Broadnax said. "I still think it was a success, but based on the success of the season, based on the success of the defense and the offense, to a point, I expected more. That's the only thing I'm disappointed in is the final result of this season. It was a great season, but I was just disappointed it didn't go further."

Hope agreed with Broadnax that although Ohio State may not have been the preseason national championship favorite, the team's dominant start changed expectations.

"At Ohio State, it's just the reality that anything less than a national championship is viewed as a disappointment," Hope said. "That's just the expectations that people have. I think to just call it a disappointment without context, to me, feels like an oversimplification, because they went 12-0 in the regular season, and they beat Michigan, which was a huge goal for them.

"But I think if you look at the talent, they had Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate, Caleb Downs, Sonny Styles, Arvell Reese, Kayden McDonald, Julian Sayin – you have a lot of superstars on this team. To get bounced in the first College Football Playoff game to make no CFP run this year after winning the national championship last year, it is a disappointment. I would specify to call it a disappointment doesn't mean I would call it a failure, but I think disappointment is accurate, just because I think this was a team that had the talent, had the potential to win another national championship, and ultimately fell short of that goal without making any kind of run in the postseason."

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# Offensive Line Struggles In Cotton Bowl Loss

Ohio State had several things go wrong in its 24-14 loss to Miami (Fla.), but the game was won and lost in the trenches. The Buckeye offensive line, which dealt with injuries in the lead-up to the Cotton Bowl and during the game, struggled to handle the Hurricanes' loaded defensive line group.

GAME  
NOTEBOOK  
Bobby Gorbett

Without starting right guard Tegra Tshabola and with starting left tackle Austin Siereveld sidelined for much of the game with his own injury, the Buckeyes allowed redshirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin to be sacked five times, tying their season-worst mark in the Big Ten Championship Game loss to Indiana. Additionally, Ohio State went for just 45 rushing yards on 24 carries.

"You just have to go out and execute, and I've got to look at everything," Ohio State offensive line coach Tyler Bowen said after the loss. "It starts with me. You're not going to get one big answer right now after the game, until we look at the film and do a thorough evaluation on everything that happened in the game. But obviously, we didn't play well enough and didn't handle it well enough to win."

From the very first drive of the game, the Buckeyes struggled to protect Sayin. On its first two plays of the game, Ohio State picked up 3 yards to bring up third-and-7, and that is when the Hurricanes sacked Sayin for the first time in the game. On that play, Miami defensive end Akheem Mesidor surged past first-time starter Gabe VanSickle to tackle Sayin 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage. Mesidor's sack was a sign of things to come. In two of its next three offensive possessions, Ohio State allowed Sayin to be sacked. Each drive ended with no points for the Buckeyes.

"Early on, I felt like we had a hard time," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said of his offensive line's performance. "Gabe was struggling a little bit early on with his first big spot there, and we were scrambling a little bit. We lost (Siereveld), and they have an excellent front.

"I thought the guys battled and got back into a rhythm, and I thought we had a good plan going in on how to get the ball out of our hands quickly, but that obviously didn't work. We took five sacks. We've got to get



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NOT NEARLY GOOD ENOUGH** – The offensive line, which came under scrutiny when it allowed five sacks to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game, was equally porous trying to stop Miami (Fla.) in the Cotton Bowl. The Hurricanes had five sacks and limited the Buckeyes to 45 rushing yards to earn a 24-14 victory in a CFP quarterfinal.

back to it and figure out where we're going to go moving forward, but we have to sit down and evaluate all of it."

Ohio State's offensive line improved mightily in the second half. After struggling to find any consistency on the ground in the first 30 minutes, the Buckeyes inserted redshirt-freshman offensive lineman Ian Moore into the lineup in place of Siereveld, who left the game because of an injury, and sophomore offensive lineman Josh Padilla started to get playing time in place of VanSickle.

With the offensive line getting enough push to help stabilize the running game, the Buckeyes went on back-to-back touchdown drives in the second half.

The Buckeyes' scoring drives helped cut the Miami lead to just three in the fourth quarter, and after the defense came up clutch with a stop, the offense had a chance to take the lead with a drive that started with only 10 minutes remaining in the game. When they were needed the most, though, Ohio State's offensive line faltered.

After the Buckeyes overcame a Miami

sack earlier on the potential go-ahead drive, a holding penalty committed by sophomore offensive tackle Phillip Daniels backed up the offense. Ohio State couldn't move the sticks after Daniels' penalty, and the next time they Buckeyes got the ball back, they trailed by 10 points with less than a minute to go.

After the game, sophomore offensive lineman Luke Montgomery made sure to credit Mesidor and likely future first-round draft pick Rueben Bain Jr. for playing as well as they did.

"Their two ends are really good," Montgomery said. "Hats off to them. They played a great game, and I don't think we played well. So we didn't play our best, especially in the first half."

### Sayin's Pick-Six Proves Costly

Despite constantly dealing with pressure from Miami's elite defensive line, Sayin was fairly reliable in the loss. The Heisman Trophy finalist threw for 287 yards, a touchdown and two interceptions while completing 22 of 35 passes (62.9 percent).

Although Sayin was, at least on paper, his usual efficient self in Ohio State's 10-point Cotton Bowl loss, his performance will be partially defined by the first of his two interceptions thrown in the game.

Sayin's first blunder came shortly after his longest completion of the game, a 59-yarder to superstar receiver Jeremiah Smith. On the play, Sayin attempted to find Brandon Inniss for a quick bubble screen, but the play was blown up by Miami defensive back Keionte Scott, who not only intercepted the pass but also returned the ball

72 yards for a touchdown that put the underdogs ahead 14-0.

"Yeah, after it came out of my hand, I saw him make the play," Sayin said of his interception. "It was a great play by him. Obviously, I can't have that in that situation."

Sayin's pick-six was one of a number of throws that weren't perfect in the first two quarters of the game. The All-Big Ten quarterback was slightly off while attempting to find Smith and Tate on fade routes deep down the field.

The usually accurate Sayin finished the first half completing only 11 of 20 passes (55.0 percent).

Like many other Buckeyes, Sayin was much sharper to start the second half. He completed his first 10 passes, including an especially significant 14-yard touchdown throw to Smith on fourth-and-2 that gave the Buckeyes life late in the game.

But the fourth quarter is when Miami's pass rush started to heat up again, and Sayin completed just one of his last four passes in the game.

After the game, Sayin said he thought he could have done a better job at neutralizing the Hurricanes' pass rush by getting rid of the ball quicker.

"They have two really good edge rushers, so we knew we were going to get the ball out of our hand quick," Sayin said. "There were times today where I held onto the football, and they were able to get after me and get some sacks."

### Defense Struggles To Slow Down Miami Run Game

The strength of Ohio State in 2025 was undoubtedly the Silver Bullets, a unit that

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# Game Analysis

## What Worked Well

The first half went about as poorly as it could for Ohio State. The Buckeyes struggled to get any offense going while Miami controlled the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball. OSU went into the locker room down 14-0 and had no momentum going into the second half but was able to answer quickly. The Buckeyes got the ball first after deferring on the coin toss and managed a 6:44 long drive that lasted 11 plays and went 82 yards, ending in a 1-yard touchdown for Bo Jackson.

After forcing a 49-yard field goal that stretched Miami's lead to 10 points on the ensuing drive, Ohio State got the ball back and was able to score yet again, going 75 yards on 10 plays, with Jeremiah Smith finishing it off with a 14-yard touchdown reception on a slant route.

However, the Ohio State momentum didn't last long, and the Buckeyes were unable to find the end zone again with their final two drives of the game ending in a punt and a desperation heave by Julian Sayin that was intercepted by the Hurricanes, sealing the loss for the Buckeyes.

## What Didn't Work

The most recent game before the Cotton Bowl was the worst that Ohio State had on the offensive line, giving up five sacks against the Hoosiers. That didn't get any better at AT&T Stadium when Miami had three sacks on the first four offensive possessions for Ohio State. With redshirt-freshman Gabe VanSickle making his first career start at right guard in place of the injured Tegra Tshabola, OSU consistently was beat on the interior. It also didn't help when left tackle Austin Siereveld was injured on a deep ball in the second quarter. He attempted to play through it,

but after getting beat multiple times in the second quarter, he was replaced by redshirt-freshman Ian Moore who started the second half and played the rest of the game.

Even when the Hurricanes weren't getting to Sayin, they were still in the backfield hurrying the redshirt freshman. The sacks hurt the rushing total for the Buckeyes, but the running backs were also struggling to get anything going on the ground with the offensive line failing to open holes for the runners. In the first 30 minutes of the game, the Buckeyes had a total of minus-3 rushing yards, including the 29 yards lost on three sacks.

In the second half when Moore replaced the injured Siereveld and Josh Padilla went in for VanSickle at right guard, the line picked up its performance, but not enough to come back and win the game.

## Play Of The Game

Down by a touchdown in the second quarter, the Ohio State offense had its biggest play of the game to that point with Sayin completing a 59-yard pass to Smith down the middle to put the Buckeyes at the Miami 16-yard line. In great position to get some points on the board and stop some Hurricane momentum, Sayin was sacked for 6 yards on the next play before looking for junior receiver Brandon Inniss on a bubble screen and getting picked off by Keionte Scott, who saw the play coming from a mile away. The veteran Miami cornerback had nothing but green field turf between him and the end zone, and he sped his way 72 yards for a two-touchdown lead. The 14-0 lead ended up being the halftime deficit that the Buckeyes were unable to overcome in the final 30 minutes of the game.

— Greg Wilson

ranked No. 1 in the country in scoring defense and total defense heading into the playoffs, and that was still mainly the case during the last game of the season. In the loss, Ohio State's defense allowed 24 points and 332 total yards.

During a crucial drive in the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes struggled to stop Miami's running game to give the offense one more chance to win the game.

On a drive that started at their own 30-yard line, the Hurricanes ate up over five minutes of game time with a game-sealing touchdown score.

The Hurricanes, who for the game ran for 153 yards on 37 carries, were most dominant on their final touchdown drive. Miami ran the ball eight times during the final drive and picked up 52 yards, five of which came on a touchdown run from CharMar Brown.

"It was frustrating," junior safety Caleb Downs said of the final drive. "We didn't get the stop that we needed to have, and that just lost us the game."

In addition to the Hurricane running backs hurting Ohio State with clutch runs, senior quarterback Carson Beck also managed to pick up crucial yardage with his legs. The former Georgia quarterback ran for 23 yards on seven carries, with the biggest run coming in the fourth quarter of the game on a key third-and-11 play. On that play, Beck stepped up in the pocket to evade pressure from Ohio State and despite being contacted short of the line to gain, he rolled over the first-down marker to move the chains for the Hurricanes with an 11-yard pickup.

"He's an athlete," Ohio State defensive coordinator Matt Patricia said of Beck. "He can move. It's not really what he wants to do on those, so we have to do a better job of keeping him in, and we can't let him scramble through and let him go. He can run. He's a big guy. He can cover some ground. It's not really what he does. He wants to stand back there and throw. If it opens up like that, he's certainly going to take off and go. We have to do a better job of keeping him in."

## Buckeyes Start Slow After Layoff

In the first 30 minutes of their season-ending loss to Miami, the Buckeyes looked nothing like the team that went 12-0 during the regular season.

In addition to giving up the costly pick-six, Ohio State was outgained by Miami 165 yards to 154. In the first half, Ohio State went for minus-3 rushing yards, and on the other end, three of the Hurricanes' five drives went into Buckeye territory.

"We figured they were going to come out fast," said senior linebacker Sonny Styles. "They just came off a huge win. We had a lot of time off. Obviously, we didn't predict us starting slow, but we knew they were going to come out fast."

The Buckeyes weren't great for the entire first half, but it was the first quarter that really went wrong, when Ohio State was outgained 110 yards to 9. The Hurricanes didn't actually score in the first, in large part thanks to a fumble forced by redshirt-freshman linebacker Payton Pierce when Miami had made it into the red zone, but a couple of lengthy drives put the Hurricanes in position to take the two-touchdown lead they held at halftime.

"I think the early drive at the beginning of the game, we were kind of adjusting to

game speed," Patricia said. "It had been a minute since we had been on the field. (Miami was) playing really fast, and I think we weren't quite there yet. Once the game settled down and we made a couple of adjustments, I felt like it was good after that. Give credit to Miami. They were flying around. They did a really good job."

With the loss, the Buckeyes became the fifth straight team to lose their first playoff game after receiving a bye in the two-year history of the 12-team College Football

Playoff format.

The next day, Indiana became the first team to win after receiving a bye after it defeated Alabama in the Rose Bowl 38-3, but the first four seeds in the playoffs still hold a 1-7 record in the quarterfinal round.

The bye, which allows the four highest-ranked teams in the bracket to advance immediately to the quarterfinals, also means teams such as Ohio State this year must go over three weeks without playing a game. Patricia, a longtime former NFL coach, said

the Buckeyes tried to avoid any rust after the layoff, but admitted those efforts didn't show in the first half.

"That was new for me," Patricia said of the layoff. "I was certainly interested to see what that looked like. We had a lot of conversations about it. The guys tried to do the best they could during the layoff, practiced hard and tried to do everything we could to keep that game speed mentality, but obviously, it didn't really show up like that in the first half."



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# Hurricanes Stun Buckeyes 24-14 In Playoff

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Miami raced to a 14-0 halftime lead and held on to upset No. 2 seed Ohio State 24-14 in a College Football Playoff quarterfinal in the Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas, on Dec. 31.

The No. 10 Hurricanes (13-2) went to defeat No. 6 Ole Miss (13-2) in the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 8 and will play Indiana (15-0) for the national title on Jan. 19 in Miami Gardens, Fla.

Carson Beck passed for 138 yards and a TD, and Mark Fletcher Jr. ran for 90 yards for the Hurricanes and had a receiving TD.

The Hurricanes went ahead 14-0 on a 72-yard pick-six by Keionte Scott before a Bo Jackson 1-yard TD run and Jeremiah Smith had a 14-yard TD catch to make it 17-14 but the Hurricanes got a late score to end the national title defense for the Buckeyes (12-2).

Sayin was 22 of 35 for 287 yards, a TD and two interceptions while Smith made seven catches for 157 yards.

## Hurricane Warning

Miami took a touchback on the opening kickoff and punted after gaining only 3 yards. A 51-yard punt by Dylan Joyce was returned 3 yards by Brandon Inniss to the 24.

Jackson ran for 3 followed by an incompleteness to Carnell Tate before Sayin was sacked for 10 yards by Akheem Mesidor. Joe McGuire's 44-yard boot went for a fair catch at the Miami 39.

Beck dropped a pass off to Fletcher for 16 yards to the OSU 41. Facing a third-and-9, CJ Daniels made a 13-yard catch to the OSU 27. Malachi Toney rushed for 4 and Beck ran for another 4 but on third down, Payton Pierce made a big hit on a Fletcher run and he recovered a fumble for the Buckeyes at the 19.

Smith opened the Buckeye drive with a

10-yard reception. Jackson was swallowed for a 2-yard loss trying to get outside to the left. He then came back with a gain of 8. Sayin then was off target to Tate along the left sideline, and McGuire punted 48 yards to the Miami 17.

Undeterred, Miami put together an impressive 83-yard drive that used 13 plays and consumed 8:04 and was capped by a 9-yard TD catch by Fletcher to make it 7-0 at 13:31 of the second quarter.

Beck felt the pressure on the first play and ran up the middle for 8. Fletcher carried for 6 to the 31. Fletcher then broke a tackle at the line and rambled for 13 to the 44. Toney made a 5-yard catch, and fumbled back a yard after being hit by Caleb Downs but Toney made the recovery.

Fletcher had a 3-yard tote, and on third-and-2, Daniels made a 9-yard grab to the 39 to move the chains. Catches of 4 for Toney and 7 by Joshisa Trader made for a first at the 28. Miami kept it going with a Girard Pringle Jr. rush for 7 and he got 3 more for another first at the 18 to end the quarter.

The Buckeyes were dominated even though the game was scoreless. The Hurricanes had 110 yards (56 rush, 54 pass) compared to 9 yards with OSU running for minus-1 yard. Miami had the ball for 11:20 and ran 21 plays to Ohio State's 7.

Fletcher gained 5 to start the second period. Daniels made a catch for 4 to the OSU 9. On third down, Miami stacked the line for a run but Beck stepped back and found Fletcher for the easy score.

Starting from the 25 on the next possession, Sayin took the first snap, found Smith 50 yards downfield, and he advanced to the 16 for a 59-yard gain. Rueben Bain Jr. then sacked Sayin for 6 and on the next play, Sayin tried a screen pass to Inniss but it was intercepted by Scott and he raced untouched for the 72-yard pick-six to make it 14-0 at 11:49. It was Sayin's third straight game with an interception.

With the ball back, on first down from the 25, Smith made a 13-yard catch and CJ Donaldson Jr. on his first run went for 12 to the 50. A pass to Smith was incomplete, and Mesidor had a 13-yard sack back to the 37. Playing without injured starting right guard Tegra Tshabola, the offensive line was porous, as it was in the Big Ten Championship Game when Indiana had five sacks in its 13-10 win.

On third down, Donaldson got 12 back with a catch prior to a 40-yard McGuire punt to the 11. Miami on second down, got a 10-yard catch by Daniels for a first at the 22.

Miami had to punt after 2-yard scramble by Beck on third down was reviewed and ruled he was just short of a first down.

The 60-yard punt rolled to the 9 with 5:55 left in the half. The Buckeyes had to punt after Jackson gained 1, and Sayin threw two incomplete. McGuire punted 50 yards and Toney returned it 2 yards to the Miami 42.

Keelan Marion made a 14-yard catch, Fletcher ran for 4 and Marion went to the ground to snare a 3-yard reception to set up third-and-3 from the 37. After a timeout, Fletcher ran for 1 and on fourth down, Beck had plenty of time to find Toney for 6 yards



SONNY BROCKWAY

**UNDER PRESSURE —** The Miami Hurricanes rocked Ohio State 24-14 in the CFP quarterfinal on Dec. 31 by dominating the trenches. Quarterback Julian Sayin (10) was sacked five times and threw a pick-six in the second quarter to fall behind 14-0.

to the 30 with 2:00 left.

Coming out of the timeout, Eddrick Houston had the Buckeyes' first sack for 4 yards. Sonny Styles then tackled Toney for a 6-yard loss and Beck threw an incompleteness to the end zone to force a punt.

Everything was going Miami's way and Joyce's 38-yard punt was downed at the 2 with 1:36 left.

Donaldson rushed up the middle for 4 and Miami took its second timeout at the 1:30 mark. Donaldson caught a short pass and bulled his way for 6 and a first at the 12.

Tate made his first catch for 15 and Donaldson made a catch and went out of bounds at the 35. An Inniss catch went for 11 to the Buckeye 46. A pass to Inniss was broken up and Donaldson's catch went for 7 to the Miami 47.

Sayin avoided pressure and hit Inniss for 8 to the 39 for a first down. Miami used a timeout with 22 seconds left.

Tate made an 8-yard catch to the 31 and OSU called its final timeout with 16 seconds to go. On the next play, Bain almost got Sayin but he was able to throw the ball away with nine seconds left. On third down, he threw incomplete to Inniss.

Jayden Fielding, who missed a 27-yard field goal with 2:48 left in the game which would have tied Indiana on Dec. 6, wasn't close on a 49-yard try with one second left.

Miami had 165 yards (98 passing, 67 rushing) in the first half while Ohio State had 154, including minus-3 rushing. Miami had three sacks for 29 yards.

Beck was 14 of 18 for 98 yards and a TD. Sayin went 11 of 20 for 157 yards and an interception.

## Not Enough

The Buckeyes got the ball at the 18 after an 18-yard kickoff return by James Peoples to start the second half and Jackson had runs of 7, 6 and 18 yards to help the Buckeyes reach the Miami 45. After Sayin suffered a 4-yard sack, Smith made a catch for 23 to the 26.

Donaldson gained 4, Tate had a reception for 14 to the 8 and Will Kacmarek made a catch for 4. Jackson ran for 3 then went in from the 1 to make it 14-7 at the 8:10 mark. The drive was 82 yards in 11 plays and 6:44.

Miami responded with a 49-yard field goal by Carter Davis with 3:01 left in the third after Toney's 5-yard catch was 2 yards shy of a first at the 32.

The Buckeyes then marched 75 yards in 10 plays and 4:33 to pull to make the score 17-14 on fourth-and-2 on a 14-yard catch by Smith.

Kacmarek had a catch for 12 yards and Inniss for 9 before Smith got 22 on a catch to the 22. Four plays later, the Buckeyes eschewed a field-goal attempt before Sayin spotted Smith at the 5 and he did the rest.

The Buckeyes forced a punt and took over at the 25 with 10:16 left. The Buckeyes made it as far as their 48 on a 16-yard pass to Smith, but a holding call on Philip Daniels forced them back to the 38 and they had to punt to the 30 with 5:50 left.

Miami was able to hold the ball and marched 70 yards to wrap it up when Char-Mar Brown ran in from the 5 with 55 seconds left on a play that the Buckeyes apparently did not contest in an effort to get the ball back. Jakobe Thomas picked Sayin off to seal the Hurricane victory.

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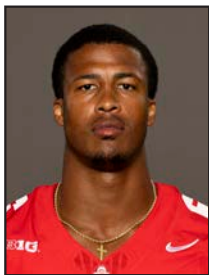
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# BSB Quotebook: Miami 24, Ohio State 14

**Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on taking too long to get into a rhythm and the Buckeyes' failure to climb back from the deficit they built:** "I felt like it took us a while to get into the rhythm of the game. I thought we came out of the second half, and by then, it was going to take a very, very efficient second half to win the game being down 14-0. I felt like at that point, we got into a rhythm. When we had that drive there where we took a shot, it was incomplete. The next play was a hold that got us way behind the chains, and that was the drive that we needed to go win the game. And when you have a start the way that we did, you put yourself at risk of having to be really darn near perfect in the second half to go win the game. So we put ourselves behind the eight ball."

**Ohio State linebacker Sonny Styles on Ohio State starting slow and what the Buckeyes did to attempt to regain momentum in the second half:** "We signed up for 60 minutes. We knew that's how it was going to be. We figured they were going to come out fast. They came up with a huge win. We had a lot of time off. We didn't predict the starting slow, but we knew we were going to come up fast. We knew we had to punch them in the second half. I thought we started the second half fast. We did a good job but couldn't finish it off in the fourth (quarter)."



Sonny Styles

**Ohio State left tackle Austin Siereveld on his second-quarter injury and offensive tackle Ian Moore stepping up in his absence:** "I was struggling out there, and just my pass protection wasn't where I wanted it to be. I wasn't anywhere close, and I just couldn't go. My conversation with (offensive line coach Tyler) Bowen was that Ian (Moore) was ready to go. He's had a great couple weeks of practice, and we needed those fresh legs out there."

**Ohio State guard Luke Montgomery on what he told Moore before he entered the game:** "(I told him), 'You've earned it now, your opportunity is here.' I told him to just go have fun. We're here to play football for fun. When he got his opportunity, he played well."

**Bowen on always looking for improvement**

**on Ohio State's offensive line and the challenges of facing Miami's front:** "I don't think you'd ever find me after a game where I think that the offensive line is up to the standard after any game we play. Win or lose, the issues are always there. We try to constantly address those issues. I've got to take a hard look at what we're doing and make sure the issues get addressed. We knew that they were a talented front, but I don't think we played our best. We've got to match the speed of the game early, and that starts with me."

**Day on Ohio State's game plan for Miami's defensive line and the Buckeyes' failure to execute:** "They have a very good front, and we felt like it was a little bit of a different scheme than what we dealt with (in the Big Ten championship) against Indiana. Indiana was a lot of pressure, a lot of movement, a lot of twisting and things. This was a bigger group of guys who are a hard-charging front. We went in with a certain plan, and you could tell right from that first third down that we had a hard time. And being on (a silent count), we didn't quite get off the ball on that one and that caused the first sack, and it kind of went from there."

**Ohio State center Carson Hinzman on red-shirt-freshman quarterback Julian Sayin dealing with extra pressure in the pocket and the quarterback's poise even after taking multiple hard hits:** "He's going to be a great player. He shouldn't have to deal with that much pressure. For us to continue to clean that up for him for this next year, and for him to be tough enough to come back in the hall and say 'Whatever,' to shake it off, and 'Let's go make another play,' is a really good sign for our team and where it's going."

**Sayin on what changed at halftime and Ohio State's offensive improvement in the second half:** "We just started executing better in the second half. But ultimately, it wasn't good enough. We didn't put up enough points. It starts with me, and we've got to be better on offense from an execution standpoint. It starts with me."

**Miami defensive back Keionte Scott on the emotions of returning an interception for a touchdown:** "I was full of emotions. I took a

little moment to peek at the sideline and look at everybody and let them know what was going on. So that was a pretty cool moment. I'm just having fun. At the end of the day, that's what this team relies on, just going out there, playing free and just having fun."

**Styles on what allowed Miami to run out the clock on its long final drive:** "That last drive, (Miami) just kept getting a little leaky yardage. We were hitting them after 2 yards, and they would get 4 or 5 yards on those runs."

**Miami running back Mark Fletcher Jr. on the impact of the Hurricanes' offensive line group and the whole team coming together to block:** "Those guys up front, they're the hardest-working group, I believe, in the trenches. We know we needed to show up big in this game; but if you look at our tape, you got the tight ends doing it and the receivers. So, they just move people out of the way, and I just choose a hole and run."

**Hinzman on the pain of having the season end and the desire to win for his older teammates:** "It's going to hurt for a long time. I should say it hurts more just for me being an older guy now and knowing other older guys that are leaving right now. It's going to be difficult to swallow for a while."

**Ohio State defensive coordinator Matt Patricia on the challenges of playing after a multiple-week break:** "I was certainly interested to see what that looked like. We had a lot of conversations about it. The guys tried to do the best they could during the layoff and practiced hard and tried to do everything we could to keep that game speed mentality. But obviously, it didn't really show up like that in the first half and first drive there, it took us a minute. We have to do a better job."

**Styles on his time at Ohio State, expressing his gratitude for the brotherhood he developed with the Buckeyes:** "The time flies, thinking about coming in here as a 17-year-old freshman. (I) didn't go out the way you want to finish, but it is what it is. (I) have gratitude for the time here and the great moments we did have. I appreciate it all."



Carson Hinzman



Matt Patricia

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# The Numbers Game

## Miami (Fla.) 24, Ohio State 14

Dec. 31, 2025 – AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
MIAMI (FLA.)	0	14	3	7	24
OHIO STATE	0	0	7	7	14

### Second Quarter

**MIA** – Fletcher Jr., 9-yard pass from Beck (Davis kick), 13:31.

**MIA** – Scott, 72-yard interception return (Davis kick), 11:49.

### Third Quarter

**OSU** – Jackson, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 8:10.

**MIA** – Davis, 49-yard field goal, 3:01.

### Fourth Quarter

**OSU** – Smith, 14-yard pass from Sayin (Fielding kick), 13:28.

**MIA** – Brown, 5-yard rush (Davis kick), 0:55.

**Att.** – 71,323

**Weather** – Indoor

Team Statistics		
	MIA	OSU
First Downs	18	18
Rushing	7	3
Passing	11	15
Penalty	0	0
Rushes-Yards	37-153	24-45
Passing Yards	138	287
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	19-26-0	22-35-2
Offensive Plays	63	59
Total Net Yards	291	332
Third Down Efficiency	7-14	3-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1	1-1
Punts-Avg.	4-46.2	5-44.2
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	0-0
Penalties	0-0	2-15
Time of Possession	33:20	26:40

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** – **MIA:** Fletcher Jr. 19-90; Brown 5-26; Beck 7-23; Pringle Jr. 3-12; Toney 1-4;

Team 2-(-2). **OSU:** Jackson 11-55; Donaldson Jr. 7-31; Smith 1-1; Sayin 5-(-42).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** – **MIA:** Beck 19-26-0-138-1. **OSU:** Sayin 22-35-2-287-1.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** Daniels 5-49; Marion 5-36; Toney 5-16; Fletcher Jr. 2-25; Trader 1-7;

Brown 1-5. **OSU:** Smith 7-157; Donaldson Jr. 5-31; Inniss 4-34; Tate 3-37; Kacmarek 3-28.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** – **MIA:** Joyce 4-46.2-60. **OSU:** McGuire5-44.2-50.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** Toney 1-2. **OSU:** Inniss 1-3.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** None. **OSU:** Peoples 1-18.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** None. **OSU:** Pierce 1-0.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** K. Scott 1-72; J. Thomas 1-3. **OSU:** None.

**SACKS (No.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** Mesidor 2-23; Bissainthe 1-9; Bain Jr. 1-6; Lightfoot 1-4. **OSU:** Houston 1.5-4; Styles 0.5-1.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** – **MIA:** Mesidor 2-23; Lightfoot 2-6; Bain Jr. 1.5-7; Bissainthe 1-9; Moten 0.5-1. **OSU:** Styles 1.5-7; Houston 1.5-4; McDonald 1-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** – **MIA:** J. Thomas 4-3-7; Toure 3-4-7; Bissainthe 3-3-6; Mesidor 5-0-5; Poyser 2-3-5; Frederique Jr. 2-2-4; K. Scott 2-2-4; O'Connor 2-1-3; Aguirre Jr. 2-1-3; Bain Jr. 1-2-3; Lightfoot 2-0-2; Lucas 1-1-2; Pruitt 0-2-2; Blount 1-0-1; Day 0-1-1; Moten 0-1-1; Marcelin Jr. 0-1-1; J. Scott 0-1-1. **OSU:** Igbinosun 5-5-10; Downs 5-3-8; McDonald 3-5-8; Reese 3-4-7; Mathews Jr. 5-1-6; Curry 4-2-6; Houston 1-4-5; McClain 2-1-3; Pierce 2-0-2; Sanchez 2-0-2; Styles 1-1-2; Roker 0-2-2; Smith Jr. 0-2-2; West 1-0-1; Malone 1-0-1; Jackson Jr. 0-1-1; Grady 0-1-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** – **MIA:** Mation, Toney, Beck, Fletcher Jr., Brockermeyer, Mauigoa, Okunlola, Daniels, Bell, Cooper, Bauman, K. Scott, Toure, O'Connor, Frederique Jr., Mesidor, Bissainthe, Bain Jr., J. Scott, Poyser, J. Thomas, Moten, Trader, Aguirre Jr., Blay, Lightfoot, Carr, Fitzgerald, Antoine, Blount, Brown, Pruitt, Pringle Jr., Day, Wheatley-Humphrey, Taylor, N. Thomas, Scroggins III, Davis, Smith, Booker, Williams, Joseph, Marcelin Jr., Donovan, Lucas, Brown, Plazz, Nickel, Lofton, Joyce. **OSU:** Sayin, Tate, Jackson, Smith, Montgomery, Van Sickle, Siereveld, Daniels, Hinzman, Klare, Kacmarek, Styles, Igbinosun, McClain, Downs, Styles Jr., Mathews Jr., Reese, Curry, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald, Inniss, West, Donaldson Jr., Thurman, Grady, Peoples, Jones, Stover, Pierce, Roker, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Scott Jr., Graham, Smith Jr, Sanchez, Moore, LeBlanc, Malone.

## Season Statistics

2025 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Aug. 30	(3) TEXAS (1)	W, 14-7	107,524	
Sept. 6	(1) GRAMBLING STATE	W, 70-0	100,624	
Sept. 13	(1) OHIO	W, 37-9	105,765	
Sept. 27	(1) at Washington	W, 24-6	72,458	
Oct. 4	(1) MINNESOTA	W, 42-3	105,114	
Oct. 11	(1) at Illinois (17)	W, 34-16	60,670	
Oct. 18	(1) at Wisconsin	W, 37-0	72,795	
Nov. 1	(1) PENN STATE	W, 38-14	105,517	
Nov. 8	(1) at Purdue	W, 34-10	57,701	
Nov. 15	(1) UCLA	W, 48-10	104,168	
Nov. 22	(1) RUTGERS	W, 42-9	100,023	
Nov. 29	(1) at Michigan (15)	W, 27-9	111,373	
Dec. 6	(1) Indiana (2)	L, 13-10	68,214	
Dec. 31	(3) Miami (Fla.) (10)	L, 24-14	71,323	

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

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	317	184
Rushing	121	76
Passing	180	88
Penalty	16	20
Average Per Game/Rush	154.4	89.4
Average Per Game/Pass	268.2	129.7
Total Offense	5916	3067
Total Plays	883	767
Average Per Game	422.6	219.1
Average Per Play	6.7	4.0
Penalties-Yards	58-544	50-395
Fumbles-Lost	7-3	11-7
Third Down Efficiency	81-152	54-176
Percentage	53%	31%
Fourth Down Efficiency	12-17	11-28
Percentage	71%	39%
Sacks-Yards	35-229	16-110
Time Of Possession Avg.	33:07	26:51

Score								
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.	
Ohio State	92	137	118	121	0	468	33.4	
Opponents	15	46	33	36	0	130	9.3	

Individual Statistics						
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
Bo Jackson	179	1090	6.1	6	64	
CJ Donaldson Jr.	96	361	3.8	10	27	
James Peoples	61	344	5.6	3	49	
Isaiah West	59	310	5.3	2	38	
Lincoln Kienholz	11	66	6.0	2	22	
Jeremiah Smith	3	21	7.0	1	17	
Brandon Inniss	3	16	5.3	0	8	
Carnell Tate	2	16	8.0	0	8	
Sam Dixon	3	9	3.0	1	6	
Nate Roberts	2	1	0.5	0	1	
Julian Sayin	42	-44	-1.0	0	12	
Team	14	-29	-2.1	0	0	
OSU Totals	475	2161	4.5	25	64	
OPP Totals	425	1251	2.9	5	37	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Julian Sayin	301	391	77.0	3610	32-8	177.5
L. Kienholz	11	14	78.6	139	1-0	185.5
Tavien St. Clair	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
Brandon Inniss	1	1	100.0	6	0-0	150.4
OSU Totals	313	408	76.7	3755	33-8	176.8
OPP Totals	208	342	60.8	1816	7-8	107.5

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	87	1243	14.3	12	87
Carnell Tate	51	875	17.2	9	57
Max Klare	43	448	10.4	2	39
Brandon Inniss	36	271	7.5	3	29
Bo Jackson	19	200	10.5	1	23
Will Kacmarek	15	168	11.2	2	47
CJ Donaldson Jr.	15	96	6.4	1	14
James Peoples	10	50	5.0	0	12
Jelani Thurman	7	84	12.0	1	26
Bryson Rodgers	6	79	13.2	1	21
Mylan Graham	6	93	15.5	0	23
Bennett Christian	5	16	3.2	1	6
Quincy Porter	4	59	14.8	0	22
Nate Roberts	4	30	7.5	0	15
David Adolph	3	31	10.3	0	14
Isaiah West	2	12	6.0	0	12
OSU Totals	313	3755	12.0	33	87
OPP Totals	208	1816	8.7	7	67

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	56-56	-	-	16-20	104
Jeremiah Smith	13	-	-	-	-	78
CJ Donaldson Jr.	11	-	-	-	-	66

Carnell Tate	9	-	-	-	-	54
Bo Jackson	7	-	-	-	-	42
James Peoples	3	-	-	-	-	18
Brandon Inniss	3	-	-	-	-	18
Will Kacmarek	2	-	-	-	-	12
Lincoln Kienholz	2	-	-	-	-	12
Max Klare	2	-	-	-	-	12
Isaiah West	2	-	-	-	-	12
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jelani Thurman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Bryson Rodgers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Sam Dixon	1	-	-	-	-	6
Riley Pettijohn	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jackson Courville	-	4-4	-	-	-	4
OSU Totals	60	60-60	-	-	16-20	468
OPP Totals	13	10-11	-	-	14-17	130

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	6-7	7-8	3-4	0-1	16-20
OSU Totals	6-7	7-8	3-4	0-1	16-20
OPP Totals	6-6	2-4	6-7	0-0	14-17

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	29	1229	42.4	0	55
Nick McLarty	1	45	45.0	0	45
OSU Totals	30	1274	42.5	0	55
OPP Totals	70	3134	44.8	1	65

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
J. Mathews Jr.	2	28	14.0	0	23
Davison Igbinosun	2	2	1.0	0	2
Caleb Downs	2	0	0.0	0	0
Payton Pierce	1	15	15.0	0	15
Sonny Styles	1	5	5.0	0	5
OSU Totals	8	50	6.3	0	23
OPP Totals	8	91	11.4	1	72

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	17	181	10.6	0	32
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	1	36	36.0	0	36
Caden Curry	1	0	0.0	0	0
Jeremiah Smith	1	-6	-6.0	0	0
OSU Totals	20	211	10.6	0	36
OPP Totals	3	9	3.0	0	4

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	5	66	13.2	0	37
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	2	116	58.0	1	100
James Peoples	1	20	20.0	0	20
OSU Totals	8	202	25.3	1	100
OPP Totals	16	266	16.6	0	41

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Sonny Styles	46	36	82	6.5-17	1.0-4
Arvell Reese	34	35	69	10.0-45	6.5-41
Caleb Downs	45	23	68	5.0-13	1.0-8
Caden Curry	40	26	66	16.5-79	11.0-72
Kayden McDonald	31	34	65	9.0-29	3.0-20
Jaylen McClain	42	11	53	0-0	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	29	24	53	0.5-0	0-0
Payton Pierce	23	20	43	1.5-2	0-0
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	18	12	30	1.5-1	0-0
K. Jackson Jr.	16	12	28	11.0-57	6.5-45
J. Mathews Jr.	20	6	26	1.5-7	1.0-6
Tywone Malone	12	14	26	0-0	0-0
Eddrick Houston	6	15	21	4.0-16	3.0-14
Will Smith Jr.	9	11	20	0-0	0-0
Devin Sanchez	12	3	15	0-0	0-0
Zion Grady	7	6	13	2.0-12	1.0-10
Faheem Delane	6	6	12	1.0-1	0-0
Beau Atkinson	3	8	11	2.5-12	1.0-9
Bryce West	7	3	10	0-0	0-0
Aaron Scott Jr.	7	2	9	1.0-5	0-0
Leroy Roker	5	4	9	0-0	0-0
Riley Pettijohn	3	6	9	1.0-1	0-0
C.J. Hicks	2	4	6	1.0-1	0-0
Jason Moore	1	5	6	1.0-1	0-0
TJ Alford	3	3	6	1.0-2	0-0
Garrett Stover	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	1	2	3	0-0	0-0
Carnell Tate	3	-	3	0-0	0-0
Logan George	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Eli Lee	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Eric Mensah	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Malik Hartford	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Epi Sitanilei	-	1	1	0.5-0	0-0
Jarquez Carter	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Nate Roberts	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Dominic Kirks	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joey Velazquez	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
James Peoples	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Jeremiah Smith	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Jayden Fielding	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Ryan Rudzinski	1	-	1	0-0	0-0

# Heisman Win Brings George's Career Full Circle

*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 the culmination of his magical season with his winning of the prestigious award.*

**By MARCUS HARTMAN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Eddie George completed an incredible career turnaround by winning the Heisman Trophy on Dec. 9, 1995, in New York City.

Thanks to a couple of boyhood friends, the chants of "Ed-die! Ed-die!" familiar in Ohio Stadium that fall also rang through the Downtown Athletic Club.

The victory put more than a cherry on top of a stellar career for the Ohio State tailback – it represented the realization of longtime dreams for the Philadelphia native.

"It makes you feel great to just be mentioned with other names like Tony Dorsett, Earl Campbell, Herschel Walker, Rashaan Salam and all those guys," he said. "Now that I am a part of that, I probably will be remembered forever."

## Patience Rewarded

Despite running for 1,442 yards as a junior in 1994, George entered his senior season to relatively little hype, especially for the typical Ohio State tailback.

He was behind fellow rushers such as Warwick Dunn of Florida State and Leeland McElroy of Texas A&M nationally when it came to Heisman hype. Even Chris Dawkins at Minnesota and Mike Alstott at Purdue arguably had more name recognition, but George surpassed them all by going for a school-record 1,826 yards on the ground for the Buckeyes in 1995.

He vaulted into serious contention for the stiff-arm statue in early November with a 314-yard rushing day against an Illinois defense headlined by linebackers Simeon Rice and Kevin Hardy. Then he added two more 100-yard games against Indiana and Michigan to cement his candidacy, but there was much suspense leading up to the selection show in the Big Apple.

Nebraska quarterback Tommie Frazier and Florida quarterback Danny Wuerffel were considered more likely to win the award, but George prevailed.

"I can't believe it's over," he said after being named Ohio State's fifth Heisman winner (sixth trophy) and first since Archie Griffin won it in 1974 and '75. "I think it will start to sink in when I get with my family and we cry a little bit and laugh a little bit and talk about how I got to this point. I guess I'll be happy then."

George's overall rags-to-riches story went back much farther than any preseason slights.

After two seasons at Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia, he was a spring enrollee at Ohio State in 1992, where he joined a crowded backfield that also included Robert Smith, Raymont Harris and Butler B'ynote.

"When we recruited Eddie George, he was not the most highly recruited player coming out that year," said Ohio State head coach John Cooper. "But let me say this: In 33 years of coaching, 19 as a head coach, I have never been around an athlete with a better work ethic."

ic."

That would prove to be important for him to stick with the Buckeyes.

Though George made an immediate impact at Ohio State by running for three touchdowns against Syracuse early in his freshman season, it seemed that he might be forgotten forever after fumbling twice at the goal line in an 18-16 loss to Illinois at Ohio Stadium during the 1992 season.

At that point, George seemed in danger of becoming a footnote in Ohio State football history – for the wrong reasons.

He carried the ball only 42 times for 223 yards as a sophomore in 1993 while Harris (234 carries for 1,109 yards) and B'ynote (87 for 413) formed a formidable one-two punch at tailback behind fullback Jeff Cothran, who had 41 carries for 172 yards himself.

"I was a nobody," George recalled after the win. "I think about those years all the time, but I was real excited for Raymont Harris those two years, and he's very excited for me now."

"He's like a little kid when he sees me on ESPN and being up for the Heisman."

## The Winning Margin

George ended up with 1,460 total points in the Heisman voting, besting Frazier by 264 points.

OSU's tailback had 50 more first-place votes than the Cornhusker QB and 56 more second-place votes to account for most of his winning margin.

Wuerffel was a distant third, followed by Northwestern tailback Darnell Autry and Iowa State running back Troy Davis.

Tennessee quarterback Peyton Manning finished sixth, while receiver Keyshawn Johnson of USC was seventh, Michigan tailback Tshimanga Biakabutuka finished eighth and Dunn was ninth.

Ohio State quarterback Bobby Hoying got nine second-place votes and 10 third-place votes to finish 10th.

Hoying still took home some hardware for his senior season: the Draddy Award, which is known as the Academic Heisman.

"I was surprised," Hoying said. "I was talking to (Florida State QB) Danny Kanell, and we actually had the worst grade-point averages of the nominees."

## 'Woody Would Have Been Proud'

George's mom, Donna, said her son really did grow up dreaming of winning the Heisman.

"At 8 years old, he always said what his goals were out of life and what he wanted to do," she recalled. "And one of them was getting the Heisman Trophy. He knew nothing about it except he wanted to win it."

Her son confirmed that version of the story but supplied his real inspiration.

"Actually, after I saw Barry Sanders win it, I went into the bathroom and looked in the mirror and tried to do things the way he did," George said of the 1988 winner from Oklahoma State. "It was silly. It was a wild dream."

George's hopes might have dimmed after his early adversity in Columbus, but ultimately that only fueled his rise, according to Ohio State administrator Bill Myles.

"The thing about Eddie is that adversity teaches a man to know himself, and he had a lot of adversity with the Illinois game (in 1992)," said Myles, whose time with the pro-

gram stretched back to the 1970s under head coach Woody Hayes. "And then he came back and had his greatest game of his career against Illinois. Woody would have been proud of Eddie George."

"With the class with which Eddie carried himself and his family, he has represented his family and The Ohio State University very well."

Griffin concurred.

"There is no finer person to carry on the OSU football tradition," Griffin said at the time. "Eddie George is a fantastic person. He is a great football player, but even better than that, he is a great person off the field as well."

Fans waited at Columbus International Airport to greet George upon his return from the Heisman ceremony, following him toward the baggage claim and watching him cradle the 56-pound trophy like a baby.

There also came the revelation that the trophy suffered a broken finger via mishandling by an airport attendant in New York. That re-

quired a quick epoxy job.

"They tried to put it through the belt, and something happened to it," George said. "I'm kind of mad about it."

As for the adulation from the public, Griffin suggested that would be the kind of treatment the newest member of the Heisman winners fraternity could expect for the rest of his time above ground.

"Oh, it changes your life – there is no doubt about that," Griffin said. "Not only does your life change, but you also get a name change. It gets a prefix: 'Heisman Trophy winner.'"

"You will be able to go places where you otherwise would not have had the opportunity. You will be in high demand, and you will have people want you to do things all the time."

At that point, George just wanted to see the players who had helped him have the kind of season that would result in such an honor.

"Since the second it was announced, I haven't been around my teammates, so I want to celebrate it with them," he said.

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# Tate, Smith Dominate Top Plays Of 2025

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After Ohio State's 12-0 regular season, the Buckeyes' perfect run unraveled with a disappointing 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game, followed by a 24-14 defeat against Miami (Fla.) in their Cotton Bowl quarterfinal matchup, bringing the 2025 campaign to an abrupt end.

While the season concluded short of the expectations Ohio State set for itself, it still featured multiple unforgettable moments and highlight-reel plays throughout the year.

With that in mind, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff voted on Ohio State's top 10 plays from the past football season. Here are the rankings.

## 10. Curry's Strip-Sack (Rutgers - Nov. 22)

Following a sluggish offensive first half in which Ohio State managed just 175 total yards while building a 14-3 lead over Rutgers, the Buckeyes leaned on their defense.

Ohio State received the second-half kickoff, but an eight-play, 48-yard drive would be stopped at the Scarlet Knights' 43-yard line after back-to-back incompletions from quarterbacks Julian Sayin and Lincoln Kienholz forced the Buckeyes to punt.

Ohio State's punt-return team pinned Joe McGuire's boot at the Rutgers 1-yard line.

The Scarlet Knights would quickly get themselves out of danger when Rutgers quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis tossed a 9-yard pass to Rutgers wide receiver Ian Strong on the opening play of the drive. Three straight runs from Rutgers for a total of 2 yards earned the Scarlet Knights a second-and-9 on their own 12-yard line.

Kaliakmanis took the next snap in the shotgun and dropped back to pass. Caden Curry screamed off the left edge, beating Rutgers offensive tackle Tyler Needham off the snap and stripping Kaliakmanis just before he threw.

The loose ball ricocheted into the end zone and back out, where Curry scooped up the fumble and lunged toward the goal line, fully extending the ball as Needham attempted to make the tackle while flipping him into the air.

While one referee called the play a touchdown on the field, the play was ultimately ruled down at the 1-yard line. The strip-sack and recovery led to a Buckeye touchdown in three plays when Sayin tossed an 11-yard touchdown to tight end Max Klare.

"To go out strong, it definitely means something (to me)," Curry said of the big play on Senior Day. "I've had so many great games in the stadium, so to finish strong is something I'll always have in the back of my head. It's something I'll be able to show my kids when I'm older."

## 9. Ohio State's Goal-Line Stand (Texas - Aug. 30)

In a defensive battle against then-No. 1-ranked Texas to open the season, Ohio State jumped out to a 7-0 first-half lead on the back of a strong defensive effort and a 1-yard rushing touchdown from CJ Donaldson Jr. midway through the second quarter.

The Buckeyes opened the second half



FILE PHOTO

**IN THE CLUTCH — Facing a second-and-7 from the Texas 40 in the season opener vs. Texas in Ohio Stadium, redshirt-freshman Julian Sayin connected with Carnell Tate (17) for the touchdown which gave the Buckeye a 14-0 lead early in the fourth quarter. The score proved to be the difference in the 14-7 win and was named OSU's top play of the 2025 season by the BSB staff.**

with a three-and-out before punting the ball back to the Longhorns' 29-yard line. After Texas totaled 79 yards of offense in the first half, the offense finally got rolling. The Longhorns took 11 plays to drive 62 yards to the Ohio State 9-yard line.

Texas quarterback Arch Manning scrambled on first and second down for a combined 6 yards, positioning the Longhorns with a third-and-goal at the Ohio State 3-yard line. From there, Texas turned to running back C.J. Baxter, who broke through multiple Buckeye defenders before spinning his way down just short of the goal line.

Facing fourth-and-goal from inside the 1-yard line, Manning tried to power his way up the middle on a sneak but was immediately met by multiple Buckeyes, who stonewalled the sophomore quarterback and forced a pivotal turnover on downs, with Curry and Lorenzo Styles Jr. officially getting credit for the stop.

The goal-line stand was one of several critical defensive moments that ultimately defined Ohio State's 14-7 win over Texas.

## 8. Smith's Fourth-Down TD Catch In Cotton Bowl (Miami - Dec. 31)

Despite a losing effort in Ohio State's Cotton Bowl matchup against Miami (Fla.), Buckeye wide receiver Jeremiah Smith still produced multiple highlights.

Ohio State went down 14-0 early in the second quarter after Miami running back Mark Fletcher Jr. caught a 9-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Carson Beck

and Sayin tossed an interception to Hurricanes defensive back Keionte Scott, who returned the pick 72 yards for a touchdown.

However, Ohio State began to find its footing in the second half. The Buckeyes' first possession in the third quarter resulted in a 1-yard touchdown rush from freshman running back Bo Jackson, cutting the lead to seven. Miami responded with a 49-yard field goal on its ensuing offensive drive to extend the Hurricanes' lead to 10 at 17-7.

Ohio State responded swiftly, moving 54 yards over seven plays and reaching the Miami 21-yard line as the third quarter drew to a close.

A 6-yard Jackson rush brought Ohio State down to the Hurricanes' 15. On third-and-3, a Donaldson rush went just 1 yard, forcing a fourth-and-2 scenario for Ohio State's offense.

Trailing by 10 with just under 13 minutes remaining in the quarterfinal, the desperate Buckeyes chose to go for it on fourth-and-2. Sayin dropped back and quickly delivered a pass to Smith on a slant route before the wideout pranced around three Miami defenders before crossing the goal line for an Ohio State touchdown.

Despite finishing with seven catches for 159 yards and one touchdown, including a 59-yard bomb from Sayin in the second quarter, Smith's efforts were eventually futile as Ohio State fell 24-14. But his touchdown gave the Buckeyes some hope late in the game.

## 7. Mathews Intercepts Manning (Texas - Aug. 31)

Jermaine Mathews' standout moment is the second of three Ohio State plays from the Texas game to make BSB's top 10 from the Buckeyes' season.

Ohio State's second highlight of the day came on the very next Texas possession after a crucial goal-line stop.

After receiving the ball at the 50, Texas ran twice with running back Quintrevion Wisner. They gained 5 yards on the first rush before a 10-yard holding penalty negated the yards and sent the Longhorns back for a first-and-15 yards. Wisner picked up 3 yards on the next attempt, setting up a second-and-12 from the Texas 48.

On second down, Manning looked right to throw deep to wide receiver Ryan Wingo, but Mathews perfectly identified the throw, undercutting the wideout's route to earn Ohio State's first interception of the season. Mathews took the ball back 5 yards on the return.

Mathews' interception gave Ohio State the ball at its own 32-yard line and ultimately led to Carnell Tate's 40-yard game-winning touchdown catch, another one of BSB's top-ranked plays of the 2025 season.

Following the Buckeyes' Week 1 win, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day expressed his appreciation for the efforts of cornerbacks Mathews and Davison Igbinosun.

"How about the defensive backs?" Day said. "Jermaine and IGB made that play in the end zone. These guys work their tails off to prepare their players to grade out a champion and do their job. Those guys did their job."

## 6. Peoples' Hurdle And Score (UCLA - Nov. 15)

Ohio State scored early and often in its 48-10 thrashing of UCLA on Nov. 15. The Buckeyes jumped out to a 17-0 lead before running back James Peoples stole the show late in the second quarter.

After the Ohio State defense forced its second three-and-out of the outing, it received the ball on its own 19-yard line with 3:12 remaining in the first half. After a catch for no gain from running back Isaiah West, the freshman broke free for a 38-yard gain to the Bruin 43. Later, on a Sayin incomplete pass to freshman wideout Quincy Porter, UCLA defensive back Rodrick Pleasant was called for pass interference, pushing the Buckeyes up to the Bruin 19.

On first-and-10, Peoples lined up to the left of Sayin, took the handoff and cut upfield, slipping past a defender. He then drifted toward the sideline and leapt over defensive back Cole Martin and proceeded into the end zone for a 19-yard rushing touchdown.

The hurdle sent Ohio Stadium into a frenzy and gave the Buckeyes a 24-0 lead heading into halftime.

After the game, Peoples said the moment was all his instincts, crediting his teammates for creating the opening that led to the jaw-dropping score.

"I have to be honest. What was going through my head was just reading the blocks, and the guys opened it up for me," Peoples said. "From that moment on, it was

kind of just instinct. After I did it, it was kind of like a movie. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, what did I do?' and all my teammates came and congratulated me."

### 5. Lorenzo Styles Jr.'s Kick Return TD (UCLA - Nov. 15)

Ohio State produced its second stunning moment of the night just a quarter later.

The third quarter got off to a slow start for both sides. Ohio State and UCLA each failed to earn a first down, opening the half with a three-and-out and a turnover on downs.

But late in the quarter, UCLA would bounce back with its first touchdown drive of the game, a five-play, 75-yard possession that lasted just over two minutes and resulted in an 18-yard pass and score from Bruins quarterback Luke Duncan to wide receiver Kwazi Gilmer.

However, the Buckeyes weren't done in the third quarter. Nickel back Lorenzo Styles Jr. received the kickoff after the score from the right side of the field, slightly slipping as he rushed out of the end zone. The graduate hit a wide-open lane on the outside, broke through the crease and cut inside to evade the last Bruin defender before racing the length of the field for a 100-yard touchdown return.

After the game, Styles credited the coaching staff for the game plan and his teammates for executing it during the return.

"It feels great," Styles said. "A lot of credit to my coaches and my teammates for putting in the install. That's a lot of work and a lot of preparation. My teammates did their job. So it was great to put that out on the field."

Styles' kickoff return for a touchdown snapped Ohio State's 15-year drought without a kick-return score. The Buckeyes' previous return touchdown came in 2010, when Jordan Hall took a kickoff 85 yards to the house in a 37-7 win over Michigan.

### 4. Tate's TD Over Two Defenders (Wisconsin - Oct. 18)

Ohio State drew first blood against Wisconsin in Camp Randall Stadium, scoring its first points with a highlight-worthy catch.

On the Buckeyes' ensuing possession following a Badger three-and-out, Ohio State received the ball on its own 11 with just 2:01 elapsed in the first quarter.

The Buckeyes moved the football to the Wisconsin 33, setting up an Ohio State third-and-11 with just 8:32 to play in the opening quarter.

Sayin took the snap, slipped past the rush, and rolled left before firing a dart over the middle. Running a post route, Tate fought through tight coverage, twisted back toward the ball near the goalposts, and out-jumped two Badger defensive backs to haul in the 33-yard touchdown.

The force from the ground popped Tate's helmet off, leading to the wideout's excitement being well on display for the world to see as he yelled into the crowd.

Day emphasized the importance of Tate's catch, noting the tone it established for the rest of the game.

"Carnell had to come back and make a contested catch over the defender's head," Day said. "I thought that was a really great catch. That's an All-America catch. For him to make a play like that, it set the tone."

### 3. Tate's Dagger Against Wolverines (Michigan - Nov. 29)

Aiming to break its streak of four straight losses to its rival, Ohio State surged to a 17-9 first-half lead over Michigan, highlighted by Smith's fourth-down touchdown reception, a 24-yard Jayden Fielding field goal and a 4-yard catch and score from Sayin to Inniss.

The Wolverines punted on their opening possession of the half after just one first down on a 26-yard pass from Michigan quarterback Bryce Underwood to wide receiver Donaven McCulley.

After just an 11-yard boot by Wolverine punter Hudson Hollenbeck, Ohio State received the ball with great field position on its own 43-yard line.

Sayin connected with Tate for a 7-yard gain on the first play of Ohio State's drive. Then, on second-and-3, Tate lined up just to the right of the offensive line and faded to the sideline before he cut to the middle and broke free downfield, where Sayin launched a 50-yard strike to find the wide-open receiver for the touchdown.

After the game, Sayin lauded Tate for the catch, expressing his excitement that his two star receivers were back in the lineup after dealing with injuries in the weeks leading up to The Game.

"It was awesome," Sayin said. "Carnell ran a great route. I feel like the sideline was (holding their breath) and waiting on it in the air. It was hanging in the air for a little bit, but he made a great catch. Having (Smith and Tate) back is awesome."

Tate's 50-yard grab helped secure Ohio State's first victory over Michigan since 2019 and proved to be the backbreaker in the Buckeyes' win over the Wolverines.

Tate finished with five catches for 82 yards and the touchdown in the win.

### 2. Smith's Fourth-Down TD (Michigan - Nov. 29)

Early in Ohio State's rivalry bout with Michigan, it looked as if the Wolverines might continue their win streak over the Buckeyes.

Ohio State trailed going into the second quarter, 6-3, after a Sayin interception and two Michigan field goals.

Starting at its own 37-yard line late in the quarter, Ohio State methodically drove down the field, twice needing all three downs to gain a first down before reaching first-and-10 at Michigan's 40.

But again, the Buckeyes could muster only 5 yards on their first three downs, forcing a fourth-and-5.

However, on fourth down, Smith had Michigan cornerback Zeke Berry on an island, faking an inside route before he cut back to the corner, and Sayin found his star wideout for a 35-yard touchdown pass.

Smith was hit by Michigan defensive back Brandyn Hillman just short of the goal line, causing a slight bobble, but the play was ruled a touchdown, putting Ohio State ahead 10-6 early in the second quarter and shifting the tides in the rivalry matchup.

Following the victory, Day praised Smith for stepping up in a big moment, especially given his limited preparation during the previous few weeks.

"Jeremiah was very, very limited," Day said. "So the way that he played, the way he did with really not getting many reps

all week, is just a tribute to him. Then the throw that Julian made on that ball was tremendous. That wasn't a play that we've had a ton of practice in this week, but we talked about it, and we walked through it. You've got to give our guys credit for putting it on the field."

### 1. Tate's Game-Winning TD (Texas - Aug. 30)

Following Mathews' interception against Texas, Ohio State received the ball on its own 32-yard line up 7-0 with 3:01 to play in the third quarter.

After back-to-back 3-yard gains – a short pass to Inniss and a run by Donaldson – Ohio State faced third-and-4. A 7-yard completion to Smith kept the drive alive, and a 9-yard catch by Donaldson set up a second-and-1 as the quarter expired.

Donaldson picked up another 3 yards on a run to gain the first down, but an illegal-formation penalty pushed Ohio State back 5 yards to a first-and-15. On the next play, Donaldson gained 8 yards, giving the Buckeyes a second-and-7 at the Texas 40.

Ohio State ran play-action with Sayin faking the handoff to Donaldson before firing a 40-yard bomb to Tate. The 6-3, 195-pound wideout broke free on the left side of the field, using a double move to shake off Texas defensive back Derek Williams Jr.

Tate then readjusted right before the goal line, turning backward to secure the ball, and with a slight bobble, the junior wide receiver fell back into the end zone to extend Ohio State's lead to 14.

Following the win, Tate broke down his touchdown reception.

"We called the double move play, and I was the first read on the play," Tate said. "I knew the ball was coming to me once (the cornerback) lined up in press coverage, and I made a play from there."

Tate and Sayin's 40-yard catch and score ultimately gave Ohio State the edge over Texas in the Buckeyes' 14-7 win over the Longhorns.

Though it was only Week 1, Tate's catch set the stage for Ohio State's perfect regular season and clinched the Buckeyes the No.

1 spot on all rankings platforms until their loss to Indiana in the conference championship game.

### Honorable Mentions

Even though these plays fell short of the top 10, BSB awarded several of them honorable mentions.

Trailing by seven with less than two minutes remaining, Texas moved 30 yards in just two plays, bringing the ball to its own 45-yard line in search of a game-tying touchdown. Ohio State's defense allowed just 8 yards over the next four plays. On fourth-and-5 at midfield, Buckeye defensive end C.J. Hicks burst off the edge, spinning around Manning just as he launched a desperation pass to tight end Jack Endries, who was brought down by safety Caleb Downs 2 yards short of the first down, sealing Ohio State's victory.

With just under 10 minutes left in Ohio State's 38-14 win over Penn State, Smith hauled in a pass from Sayin that was deflected at the line of scrimmage, twisting his body for an 11-yard one-handed catch and score to cap off the Buckeyes' dominant victory.

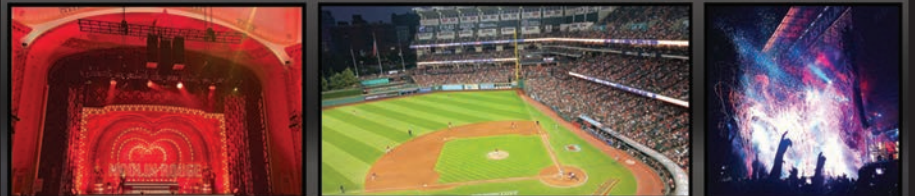
Just minutes into Ohio State's victory over UCLA, Sayin launched a pass toward the left sideline, where Smith extended on Bruins defensive back Andre Jordan Jr. and snatched the ball out of the air with his right hand for an 18-yard reception.

Late in the third quarter of Ohio State's 34-16 victory over Illinois, the Illini faced second-and-10 from their own 30. Mathews exploded off the right edge on a cornerback blitz, stripping quarterback Luke Altmyer before Curry recovered the fumble.

In the early season of his breakout campaign, Jackson opened Ohio State's first third-quarter drive against Ohio University with a 64-yard rush, bursting through a seam up the middle and cutting outside for a big gain. The run helped cement him as the No. 1 running back for Ohio State from that point on.

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# Whittingham Hired As Head Coach Of U-M

Michigan hired former Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham to become the program's next head coach on Dec. 26, signing him to a five-year deal.

Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said that Whittingham exemplifies the leadership, character and proven success Michigan was seeking for its football program.

## BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

"Kyle Whittingham is a well-respected and highly successful head coach who is widely recognized as a leader of exceptional character and principled leadership," Manuel said. "Throughout our search, he consistently demonstrated the qualities we value at Michigan: vision, resilience, and the ability to build and sustain championship-caliber teams. Kyle brings not only a proven track record of success, but also a commitment to creating a program rooted in toughness, physicality, discipline and respect – where student-athletes and coaches represent the university with distinction both on and off the field. We are excited to welcome Kyle to the University of Michigan family as he takes the helm of our football program."

Whittingham served as the Utes' head coach for 21 seasons from 2005-25 before stepping down on Dec. 12. The long-time head coach compiled a 177-88 overall record in his time at Utah, including an 11-6 mark in bowl games.

Prior to stepping down, Whittingham was the second-longest-tenured coach in the FBS behind Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz.

Whittingham spent a total of 32 years

at Utah, 10 of them as the program's defensive coordinator from 1995-2004. He coached various position groups, including defensive line (1994), safeties (1995-96, 1998-2000) and linebackers (1997, 2001-04).

He led the Utes to conference championships three times, once in the Mountain West in 2008 and back-to-back in the Pac-12 from 2021-2022.

After getting on campus and meeting with players, Whittingham was able to successfully retain arguably the most important player on the Wolverines' roster in rising sophomore quarterback Bryce Underwood despite speculation that he would transfer.

### Kelly Hired As OC For Wildcats

Northwestern has hired former Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly for the same position with the Wildcats, the university announced Dec. 30.

After Kelly left Ohio State to become the Oakland Raiders' offensive coordinator and the highest-paid coordinator in the NFL at \$6 million per year, he was fired before he could make it through the full season after a 2-9 start.

Despite the abrupt end to his time with the Raiders, Kelly quickly found his footing, returning to the college ranks with Northwestern, a move the program views as pivotal.

"I am honored to join the Northwestern football program," Kelly said. "This program and university are clearly on the rise, and the values of the people and this place align with my own. I am grateful for the opportunity."

Northwestern head coach David Braun said that the move represents a major turning point for the Wildcats as they look to redefine the program's offensive identity.

"His innovative approach to offense using systems that focus on varying tem-

po, efficiency and smart decision-making, his track record of developing quarterbacks, and his ability to maximize talent are exactly what our program needs at this moment," Braun said.

"Make no mistake, this is a program-defining change and is reflective of our long-term commitment to the pursuit of championships."

Prior to his time with the Raiders, Kelly helped lead Ohio State to a national championship as its offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach in 2024.

### IU Receives Large Donation From Cuban

Following head coach Curt Cignetti's arrival at Indiana on Nov. 30, 2023, the Hoosiers, against all odds, have turned their football program around and are enjoying some financial support that is helping them keep that trend going.

Among those supporting Indiana's revamped football program is billionaire businessman and Hoosier alum Mark Cuban, former owner of the Dallas Mavericks.

After he hadn't previously donated to Indiana, Cuban donated to the football program for the first time in 2024. After Indiana's tremendous success in 2025, Cuban told Front Office Sports' Alex Schiffer that he had increased his donation to Indiana's athletic department, though he did not detail a specific figure.

"Already committed to this portal," Cuban told Schiffer. "Let's just say they are happier this year than last year."

Since Cignetti took over, Indiana's aggressive transfer-portal approach has paid off, a success that played a role in Cuban's decision to give more.

In Cignetti's first offseason in 2024, Indiana added a program-record 31 transfers – many following him from James Madison – finishing with the nation's 30th-ranked transfer class, according to 247Sports. The Hoosiers followed that up with 23 transfers and the No. 25 class in 2025.

As BSB went to press, Indiana held the tenth-ranked transfer class, although there was still a lot of time for players to find new homes through the portal.

### MSU Hires Sheridan As OC

Michigan State is set to hire former Alabama co-offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Nick Sheridan to be the program's next offensive coordinator.

## BIG

### 2025 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	9	0	1.000	13	0	1.000
<b>Ohio State</b>	9	0	1.000	12	1	0.923
Oregon	8	1	0.889	11	1	0.917
Michigan	7	2	0.778	9	3	0.750
USC	7	2	0.778	9	3	0.750
Iowa	6	3	0.667	8	4	0.667
Washington	5	4	0.556	8	4	0.667
Illinois	5	4	0.556	8	4	0.667
Minnesota	5	4	0.556	7	5	0.583
Nebraska	4	5	0.444	7	5	0.583
Northwestern	4	5	0.444	6	6	0.500
UCLA	3	6	0.333	3	9	0.250
Penn State	3	6	0.333	6	6	0.500
Rutgers	2	7	0.222	5	7	0.417
Wisconsin	2	7	0.222	4	8	0.333
Maryland	1	8	0.111	4	8	0.333
Michigan State	1	8	0.111	4	8	0.333
Purdue	0	9	0.000	2	10	0.167

#### Dec. 6 Game

Indiana 13, **Ohio State** 10\*

All times Eastern

\* Big Ten Championship Game, Indianapolis

Sheridan spent the last two seasons at Alabama. The 37-year-old offensive coordinator was formerly the tight ends coach at Washington in 2023, but he followed head coach Kalen DeBoer from Washington to Alabama, accepting the same position with the Crimson Tide.

Prior to his time at Alabama and Washington, Sheridan had stints at Indiana as tight ends coach (2019), quarterbacks coach (2017-18, 2020-21) and offensive coordinator (2020-21).

Sheridan will now join longtime Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald, now the Spartans' head coach, in attempting to rebuild a Michigan State football program that has failed to win more than five games in each of the past four seasons. However, 14 of those wins from 2022-24 were vacated by the NCAA following the program being found guilty of recruiting violations under former head coach Mel Tucker.

Sheridan replaced former Michigan State offensive coordinator Brian Lindgren, who spent two seasons with the Spartans under head coach Jonathan Smith prior to the program cleaning

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# BIG Conference Bowl Matchups

<b>L.A.</b> Dec. 13 • 8 p.m. ABC  <b>Washington 38</b> <b>Boise State 10</b>	<b>CFP First Round</b> Dec. 20 • 7:30 p.m. TNT  <b>Oregon 51</b> <b>James Madison 34</b>	<b>GameAbove Sports</b> Dec. 26 • 1 p.m. ESPN  <b>Northwestern 34</b> <b>Central Michigan 7</b>	<b>Rate</b> Dec. 26 • 4:30 p.m. ESPN  <b>Minnesota 20 (OT)</b> <b>New Mexico 17</b>	<b>Pinstripe</b> Dec. 27 • 12 p.m. ABC  <b>Penn State 22</b> <b>Clemson 10</b>
<b>Music City</b> Dec. 30 • 5:30 p.m. ESPN  <b>Illinois 30</b> <b>Tennessee 28</b>	<b>Alamo</b> Dec. 30 • 9 p.m. ESPN  <b>TCU 30</b> <b>USC 27 (OT)</b>	<b>ReliaQuest</b> Dec. 31 • Noon ESPN  <b>Iowa 34</b> <b>Vanderbilt 27</b>	<b>Citrus</b> Dec. 31 • 3 p.m. ABC  <b>Texas 41</b> <b>Michigan 27</b>	<b>Las Vegas</b> Dec. 31 • 3:30 p.m. ESPN  <b>Utah 44</b> <b>Nebraska 22</b>
<b>Cotton (CFP Quarterfinal)</b> Dec. 31 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  <b>Miami (Fla.) 24</b> <b>Ohio State 14</b>	<b>Rose (CFP Quarterfinal)</b> Jan. 1 • 4 p.m. ESPN  <b>Indiana 38</b> <b>Alabama 3</b>	<b>Peach (CFP Semifinal)</b> Jan. 9 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  <b>Indiana 56</b> <b>Oregon 22</b>	<b>CFP Final</b> Jan. 19 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  <b>Indiana (13-0)</b> <b>Miami (FL) (10-2)</b>	

house in its coaching staff.

Sheridan is part of a larger shake-up at Michigan State, joining six offensive assistants hired by Fitzgerald. He retained Mike Bajakian (quarterbacks), Nick Tabacca (offensive line), Devon Spalding (running backs), Courtney Hawkins (wide receivers) and Brian Wozniak (tight ends). The Spartans also added Iowa's LeVar Woods (special teams/assistant head coach) and Iowa State's Hank Poteat (cornerbacks) to their coaching staff.

Nick Sheridan is the son of longtime football coach Bill Sheridan, who currently serves as a defensive assistant for the Jacksonville Jaguars and won Super Bowl XLII as the New York Giants' linebackers coach in 2007.

## Big Ten Transfer News And Rankings

With the transfer portal officially opening on Jan. 2, a slew of Big Ten teams have picked up highly rated recruits for the 2026 season.

As BSB went to press, Penn State ranked third the 247Sports' transfer portal rankings through Jan. 11 after new head coach Matt Campbell, who formerly held the same role at Iowa State, brought a whopping 21 transfers over from the Cyclones to the Nittany Lions and 31 total incoming transfers UPDATE.

Penn State's transfer portal class is highlighted by three Iowa State transfers in quarterback Rocco Becht and two of his top three targets in wide receiver Chase Sowell and 6-7, 255-pound tight

end Benjamin Brahmer. Becht threw for 2,584 yards and 16 touchdowns in 2025 while adding 86 carries for 116 yards and eight scores on the ground. The pair of Sowell and Brahmer combined for 69 receptions for 996 yards and eight touchdowns last season.

The Nittany Lions saw several players depart for Virginia Tech, including top-50 transfer quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer (45th) and tight end Luke Reynolds (31st), two of seven Penn State athletes who followed former head coach James Franklin to the Hokies.

Indiana isn't quite as deep as Penn State's with just 11 total transfers, though it is deep in quality.

The Hoosiers had added three top-40 transfers – wide receiver Nick Marsh from Michigan State (No. 29 overall), who caught 59 passes for 662 yards and six touchdowns; quarterback Josh Hoover of TCU (No. 42 overall), who finished fourth in passing yards (3,472) and tied for fifth in passing touchdowns (29) before the postseason; and DE Tobi Osumsanmi from Kansas State (No. 33 overall), who totaled 20 tackles, four sacks and a fumble recovery this season.

USC had brought in a pair of top-50 transfers in NC State wide receiver Terrell Anderson and Iowa State cornerback Jontez Williams. Anderson, the 35th-ranked transfer, tallied 39 catches for 629 yards and five touchdowns, while Williams totaled 15 tackles, two breakups and an interception with the Cyclones in 2025.

USC, Penn State and Indiana are

the only three Big Ten schools to have brought in a top-50 transfer as of Jan. 11.

Other notable players headed out of the Big Ten include former Michigan running back Justice Haynes. In just seven games in his lone season with the Wolverines in 2025, Haynes took a career-high 121 rushes for 857 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Minnesota safety Koi Perish, the na-

tion's No. 11 overall transfer, also entered the transfer portal. Perish totaled 128 tackles, six interceptions, two forced fumbles and a sack in two seasons with the Golden Gophers.

Finally, a pair of Big Ten quarterbacks entered the transfer portal in Nebraska's Dylan Raiola and USC backup Husan Longstreet.

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# Buckeyes Adding Through Transfer Portal

With Ohio State's season ending hours before the new year, the program was freed up to fully delve into the chaos of the transfer portal that opened on Jan. 2.

RECRUITING  
OUTLOOK  
Greg Wilson

While there have been many more subtractions from the 2025 roster than there have been additions for the 2026 team, the Buckeyes had been able to sign seven new players as BSB went to press.

The first signee was former Ohio University tight end Mason Williams, who needed just two days of the portal being open to commit to the Buckeyes.

Ohio State has gone into the Bobcat tight end well extremely recently, pulling Will Kacmarek from Athens, Ohio, just two offseasons ago. Kacmarek spent two seasons with OSU, and the Buckeyes likely hope that Williams will be just as strong an addition as Kacmarek was.

Williams brings a bit more receiving prowess into Columbus than Kacmarek did when he made the trip up Route 33, catching 48 passes for 565 yards and six touchdowns in his three seasons with the Bobcats.

But while he does provide an extra pass-catching option, the Buckeyes likely added him due to his ability to be a force as a run blocker at 6-5, 257 pounds.

With Kacmarek out of eligibility, Jelani Thurman transferring out of the program, and the possibility that Max Klare declares for the NFL draft, Williams provides much-needed depth to a position room that branded itself as one of the best in the country last season.

He joins Bennett Christian, Max LeBlanc, Nate Roberts, Brody Lennon and incoming

freshman Nick Lautar in the tight end room.

Williams hails from Mogadore, Ohio – near Akron – and was a three-star prospect in the 2023 recruiting cycle. According to the 247Sports composite, he was the No. 1,804 overall player in his class.

Ohio State's next addition was former UCF and BYU long snapper Dalton Riggs, who has one year of eligibility remaining. The Buckeyes lost both John Ferlmann and backup Collin Johnson after the season, both of whom are out of eligibility, so Riggs seems likely to start at the position in 2026.

The Buckeyes added another former UCF Golden Knight next, with defensive tackle John Walker joining the ranks on Jan. 6. Two major contributors on the line from the 2025 season, Kayden McDonald and Tywone Malone Jr., are leaving for the NFL, and the Buckeyes have lost a lot of depth on the interior to the portal as well.

Walker could play at either the three-tech or at nose guard, but with Eddrick Houston returning and improving toward the end of the season, it seems more likely that Walker will slot in for McDonald, competing with Will Smith Jr. for the starting spot.

Walker spent three seasons at UCF after joining as the highest-ranked signee of all time for the program. In the 2023 class, Walker was ranked the No. 94 overall prospect and the No. 11 defensive lineman, and he picked the Golden Knights over Ohio State at the time.

He played in 13 games as a freshman and had 24 tackles, which included five for loss. Then he missed his entire second season with a leg injury, taking a redshirt. This past season, he finished with 40 tackles, three for loss, one sack and a forced fumble. Walker has two years of eligibility remaining.

The Buckeyes added a wide receiver next, the first time they have done so through the transfer portal since it opened. While former wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was with the program, they added only through the high school ranks and developed that talent, which

OSU Football 2026 Commitments					
Player(s) in the class of 2026 who have signed letters of intent to play football at Ohio State.					
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Favour Akih	RB	6-0	190	★★★★	Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes
Legend Bey	ATH	5-10	175	★★★★	North Forney, Texas
Khmarì 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
Simeon Caldwell	S	6-3	185	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School
Luke Fahey	QB	6-0	185	★★★	Mission Viejo, Calif
Kaden Gebhardt	S	6-2	200	★★★★	Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy
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
Nick Lautar	TE	6-5	230	★★★	Lebanon, Ohio
Darryus McKinley	DL	6-3	270	★★★	Lafayette (La.) Acadiana
Jamir Perez	DL	6-4	360	★★★	Cleveland Glenville
Dre Quinn	DL	6-4	228	★★★★	Buford, Ga
Braxton Rembert	LB	6-5	200	★★★★	Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek
Jaeden Ricketts	WR	6-0	187	★★★★	Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial
Maxwell Riley	OT	6-5	280	★★★★	Avon Lake, Ohio
Emanuel Ruffin	DL	6-4	295	★★★★	Bessemer (Ala.) City
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
Jordan Thomas	CB	6-1	185	★★★★	Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic
Jay Timmons	CB	5-11	185	★★★★	Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland
Khary Wilder	DE	6-4	260	★★★★	Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra
Mason Wilhelm	OL	6-4	285	★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward

obviously worked well for the program.

Former UTSA pass catcher Devin McCuin becomes the first to join the Buckeyes through the portal as a wide receiver. With Carnell Tate leaving for the NFL draft and possible replacements Mylan Graham, Bryson Rodgers and Quincy Porter all entering the transfer portal, Ohio State needed to add some talent at the position.

In three seasons with the Roadrunners, McCuin caught 152 passes for 1,696 yards and 16 touchdowns. In 2025, he had 65 catches for 726 yards and eight scores. Mc-

Cuin brings great speed to the Buckeyes, with times in the 40-yard dash and 100-meter dash of 4.37 and 10.28 seconds, respectively.

He joins Jeremiah Smith and Brandon Inniss in the room, as well as incoming freshman Chris Henry Jr., among others. McCuin could very well compete for the third spot on the field at the position when the Buckeyes are in 11-personnel, and he has one year of eligibility remaining. He could be competing with Henry for that spot, as well as former Texas wide receiver DeAndre Moore Jr., who was still looking for a home in the portal as BSB

## ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

**Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star defensive end DJ Jacobs (6-5, 225) committed to Ohio State on Dec. 29. What do you make of him as a prospect?**

"To get a commitment from him this early, you've got to hold on for a while for this dude and fight. He's a potential superstar. I watched his film, broke it down, and I love this guy. He's different from what they've got, or really what they've had recently. You look at the two guys they started this year, (Caden) Curry and Kenyatta (Jackson Jr.), they're both really good. This guy's different than them. Then you even look at two NFL guys, (JT Tuimoloau) and (Jack) Sawyer, he's different from those guys.

"If I was going to compare him to someone, if everything works out and DJ Jacobs does everything he's supposed to do, he reminds me of Chase Young. I'm not saying he's going to be Chase Young, but the explosion off the ball is something you cannot coach. It's not something someone can learn. You can make these guys bigger, you can make them stronger, you can even make the 40-yard time faster, but that 3-yard time when that ball is snapped and you've got to go now, that's a totally different thing. This guy, from where he is right now, has so much potential as a game-wrecker coming off the edge. I love Caden Curry, and I thought Kenyatta and Sawyer, JTT, those guys were tremendous, but they weren't Chase Young types where you just wreck the game, and you can't block the guy. You can't get a pass off because you've got to commit two or

three guys to block him, and that opens it up for other guys. Is he the No. 1 player in the country? Why not? Why is he not? We're watching junior highlights, but he's got Chase Young potential."

**Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star linebacker Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220) committed to the Buckeyes on Dec. 19. What do you make of him as a prospect?**

"I haven't really dug into him totally yet. When you look at just the raw skills that he's got, I don't see A.J. Hawk, Bobby Carpenter, or Sonny Styles. (He's) maybe more of a Payton Pierce. I can't say that he's a top linebacker in the country. You want me to tell you DJ Jacobs is the No. 1 edge player in the country? I'll tell you that right now. Quinton Cypher, to me, looks like just a guy, and I hate to say that. He doesn't pop off the tape like DJ Jacobs does. I think Quinton Cypher is going to be a developmental guy. Can he be Payton Pierce? Maybe. He's not Sonny Styles, and he's not Arvell Reese, I promise you that. So we'll see how he develops. He's still young. So there's no comparison between DJ Jacobs and Quinton Cypher. DJ is maybe the No. 1 player in the country. Then Cypher, to me, would be top 175 maybe."

**With Brian Hartline now gone to be the head coach at South Florida, do you believe the Buckeyes are concerned about the status of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 170)?**

"I wouldn't think so. I mean, coaching matters. How much

coaching would he get from Hartline if he goes with him? Hartline's got a lot on his plate right now. It's a lot different from being the wide receiver coach. Plus, there's such a difference when you look at who's putting guys in the NFL. So you look at which school does, which I think is easy. I can't see any way they lose Jamier Brown. He had a tremendous relationship with Hartline. But there's no reason for him to go with Hartline. He can get all he wants in Ohio. I mean, I see zero chance that he flips."

**Where do you think Ohio State needs to improve immediately in the transfer portal?**

"I don't know, because that roster is pretty stacked. It's basically a young team, and when you're getting these transfers, these guys want to play. So it's kind of hard to say, 'Hey, come on in here, we'll put you on the field right away.' I don't see any holes here when I look at the roster coming back next year. It's a pretty darn good roster. They were pretty young this year. So we'll see where they go from here. I think they're in pretty good shape. I mean, with the roster they have coming back now, you have to wait and see who leaves. There are guys on this roster that may think they're buried, like James Peoples. When you look at the two top running backs on this team, Bo (Jackson) and Isaiah West, they were true freshmen. They're not going anywhere soon. So I can see if someone thinks they're buried, and then I can see them leaving.

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
Quinton Cypher	LB	6-2	220	★★★★	Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.
DJ Jacobs	DL	6-5	225	★★★★★	Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity
Eli Johnson	S	6-3	200	★★★★	Cibola (Texas) Steele
Brody McNeel	OT	6-5	285	★★★★	Richmond (Va.) Godwin
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

went to press and visited Ohio State.

The fifth addition for Ohio State was from another Big Ten program. Former Wisconsin linebacker Christian Alliegro joined the Buckeyes on Jan. 8 and brings one more year of eligibility to Columbus.

With both Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles leaving for the NFL, Alliegro brings a veteran presence to the linebacker room that wouldn't have been there otherwise. He joins Payton Pierce, Riley Pettijohn, TJ Alford and Garrett Stover, among others, and will compete for a starting spot.

He started just three games with the Badgers in the 2024 season but still played in all 12, finishing with 66 tackles, five for loss and three sacks as a sophomore. He was outpacing those stats through the first seven games of his junior season with 48 tackles, six tack-

les for loss and two sacks, but in the Badgers' 34-0 loss to Ohio State on Oct. 18, he broke his arm. He finished the season with 53 stops, eight tackles for loss and four sacks.

The Buckeyes also added two safeties in back-to-back days on Jan. 11 and 12, with former Florida State and Duke defensive backs Earl Little Jr. and Terry Moore pledging to Ohio State.

Little was the first of the two and joins the Buckeyes after having a career year with the Seminoles with 76 tackles, two for loss, four interceptions and two forced fumbles, playing in all 12 games. He started his college career with Alabama and appeared in 11 games during two seasons with the Crimson Tide, earning two tackles. He has just one year of eligibility remaining.

Moore, the former Duke safety, didn't play

in the 2025 season, spending his time recovering from a torn ACL he had suffered during the Gator Bowl in the 2024 postseason.

He was with the Blue Devils for four seasons, including his injury year, but didn't break out until his junior year in 2024 when he had 71 total tackles, seven for loss and one sack. He also had four interceptions and two forced fumbles, helping him earn second-team All-ACC.

Little and Moore will help to fill the holes left by Caleb Downs and Lorenzo Styles Jr. leaving for the NFL over the offseason.

Buckeyes Add Two '27 Commits

The Buckeyes have added to the 2027 class since BSB last went to press as well, with Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star linebacker Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220) committing to Ohio State on Dec. 19.

Cypher is the No. 193 player in the class, the No. 11 linebacker and the No. 8 player in North Carolina. He has been a force in high school competition, with 181 tackles, 48 tackles for loss, 5½ sacks, five passes broken up, four interceptions and three forced fumbles as a junior.

As a sophomore, Cypher managed 175 tackles, 31½ tackles for loss, 12½ sacks, eight passes defended, three interceptions and a forced fumble. As a freshman, Cypher was nearly as productive with 155 tackles, 8½ for loss, 3½ sacks, three passes broken up, two interceptions and a forced fumble. Those stats combine to make 511 tackles in his three prep seasons.

Andrew Ivins, the director of scouting at 247Sports, describes Cypher as a "multi-role linebacker that pairs excellent play speed and

quick reaction times with a win-at-all-cost mentality." Ivins also writes that Cypher is effective moving sideline to sideline, can fill gaps in the run game and is also effective in coverage as a zone defender, evidenced by his nine picks in three high school seasons.

He chose the Buckeyes over Alabama, Miami (Fla.) and Georgia after the Buckeyes were one of the first schools to extend a scholarship offer to him when he was a sophomore.

He's the first linebacker in the Buckeyes' 2027 class, giving position coach James Laurinaitis a solid start after adding four-stars Cincere Johnson, CJ Sanna and Braxton Rembert in the 2026 cycle.

The next addition to the class was the higher-ranked of the two and came 10 days later. Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star defensive end DJ Jacobs (6-5, 225) pledged to the Buckeyes on Dec. 29.

He's the top edge rusher in the class and is considered the No. 8 overall prospect in the cycle, choosing Ohio State over Miami, Georgia, LSU, Notre Dame, Oregon and Texas A&M. Georgia was at one point considered the favorite for Jacobs before he pledged, since his father, David Jacobs, played for the Bulldogs as a defensive lineman from 1999-2002. But Miami pulled ahead late in the process before defensive line coach Larry Johnson ultimately convinced Jacobs to commit to OSU.

"Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach Johnson, they just treated me like family," Jacobs told 247Sports after he committed. "This is a big moment for me, so I definitely trust them with everything in my future."

In his junior season, Jacobs had 102 tackles, 24 tackles for loss and 16 sacks in just 11

Continued On Page 24



# Roosters

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Continued From Page 23

games.

Ivins writes of Jacobs, “(He’s a) cast-iron edge defender with the size, speed and strength to wreak havoc on Saturdays and then Sundays. Constantly destroys blocks with violent hands and a powerful lower half. Can shoot right past protection with his quick-twitch athleticism and impressive snap anticipation.”

Bey Signs With Buckeyes

In the Dec. 20 issue, BSB detailed the signing day of 2026 recruit North Forney, Texas, four-star athlete Legend Bey (5-11, 175) as told by Mike Roach of 247Sports.

Bey wanted to sign with the Buckeyes during the early signing period, but under pressure from his family, he ended up with Tennessee. He made it obvious that it wasn’t the decision he wanted to make, and it seemed likely that he would request a release from the Volunteers, which he ultimately did.

His release was granted, and soon after, Bey signed with the Buckeyes, making him the 28th player in the class for OSU. The No. 175 player in the cycle, Bey is the 10th-highest-ranked prospect in the class for the Buckeyes and projects to play multiple positions, with his versatility likely making him a high-priority target for Day.

Bey’s primary recruiter was running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, and the four-star will likely be used out of the backfield at times, but he could also line up as a receiver and return punts and kicks as well with his impressive speed (10.23-second 100-meter dash).

Bey was a quarterback at North Forney, but he actually ran for more yards than he threw for as a senior. On the ground, he gained 1,626 yards and scored 23 touchdowns, while he threw for 1,341 yards and 15 touchdowns, tossing three interceptions.

Bey attended the Cotton Bowl and seems to be locked in with the Buckeyes after he signed on Dec. 22.

OSU Extends Offers

Several players have recently received offers from Ohio State:

- **Warner Robins (Ga.) Northside four-star cornerback Amaury Fountain (6-1, 171)** – Fountain is ranked the No. 316 player in the 2027 class, the No. 35 cornerback and the No. 37 player in Georgia. The Buckeyes offered him on Jan. 8, six days after he committed to South Carolina. Cornerbacks coach Tim Walton will have to convince Fountain to flip sometime before December’s early signing period if he wants the four-star in the fold, but there is plenty of time to do so. Fountain holds 24 total Division I offers, including from Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Nebraska, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and Vanderbilt.
- **New Orleans Brother Martin five-star wide receiver Easton Royal (5-11, 185)** – New wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton’s first move in his new position with the Buckeyes was to offer Royal, a Texas commit since Nov. 29. Royal is the No. 12 player in the 2027 class, the No. 3 wide receiver and the No. 1 player in Louisiana. He holds a total of 30 offers, which include Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Nebraska, Ole Miss,

Oregon, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin.

- **Upper St. Clair, Pa., kicker Jacobo Echeverria Lozano (5-10, 170)** – With Jayden Fielding out of eligibility and Jackson Courville back in the transfer portal after just one season on the Buckeyes’ bench, Ohio State is looking to add some depth to the room. Echeverria Lozano is a 2026 prospect and is unranked at the position. He has just three other Division I offers from Arkansas State, Navy and UCLA, according to 247Sports. In his senior season, he made 17 of 18 field goals with a long of 41 yards. On kickoffs, he averaged 68 yards and kicked for a touchback on 73 of 85 chances. He also punted 22 times, 16 of them inside the 20, for an average of 48.1 yards per boot.

Gabriel Georges Narrows Choices

The second-ranked running back in the 2027 class, Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205) has narrowed down his choices to eight schools.

He included Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Miami, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Tennessee and Texas on that list.

The Buckeyes have long been one of his top schools, with Locklyn staying in contact with the five-star consistently. They are considered to be one of his top two schools by recruiting experts, with Tennessee being the other. Gabriel Georges is the No. 13 player in the country and the No. 1 player in Tennessee.

Ivins wrote of Gabriel Georges that he is a “hard-driving running back with the quickness and power to emerge as the centerpiece of an

offense for a College Football Playoff contender.”

Ivins also wrote that the five-star is a willing blocker in pass protection and that he is able to change course “in the snap of a finger and get out of trouble.”

The French-Canadian has taken many unofficial visits to Knoxville, including two during the 2025 football season, since he lives near the campus. So the Buckeyes will have to work hard to pull him away from the Volunteers.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Hankton also had a highly rated 2027 wide receiver on campus in his first few weeks on the job. He hosted Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star Monshun Sales (6-5, 195), hoping to bolster the already talented class. Sales is the No. 9 player in the country, the No. 2 wide receiver and the No. 1 player in Indiana.
- Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Eric McFarland reclassified from the 2028 class to the 2027 class. Hartline was in a good spot with McFarland before the coach left for South Florida, so now Hankton will have to build his own relationship if he wants a chance at getting him in the fold. McFarland is the No. 23 player in the country, the No. 5 wide receiver and the No. 4 player in Florida and holds 35 Division I offers. His offer from the Buckeyes came on May 13, 2024, before he played a single high-school snap.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1991

Ohio State dropped the first round of its annual recruiting fight with Michigan on Jan. 3 when defensive lineman Trent Zenkewicz of Cleveland St. Ignatius decided to become a Wolverine instead of a Buckeye.

Zenkewicz, a Parade magazine All-American, was rated the second-best prep defensive tackle in the country by national recruiting expert Tom Lemming.

Zenkewicz visited both the Michigan and Ohio State campuses before Christmas, and those were the only two official visits he made. When he returned, he couldn’t make up his mind for a long time.

“This was the toughest decision I’ve ever had to make in my life,” Zenkewicz told BSB. “It just came down to the fact that I felt just a little bit more comfortable at Michigan. But I want everyone to know that I feel nothing negative toward Ohio State at all. They treated me really well, and it was really tough to call them and tell them I was going to go ahead and go to Michigan.”

30 Years Ago — 1996

It was strange to say, but with almost a month remaining until the Feb. 7 National Signing Day, Ohio State’s 1996 football recruiting push was nearly complete.

The Buckeyes had commitments from 23 players already and could have upped that total after welcoming five players in for official visits over the weekend of Jan. 5.

It was widely reported that one of those players, running back Michael Wiley of Spring Valley (Calif.) Monte Vista, had issued a verbal commitment to Ohio State. Just before press time, BSB reached Wiley’s mother, Felicia, at their home in the San Diego suburb.

“He told me he loves the school,” she said. “He told me he had committed to Ohio State, and I said, ‘Thank God it’s over.’”

Ohio State had also received five other verbal commitments. Those players included Palatine, Ill., safety Mike Burden; Modesto (Calif.) JUCO quarterback Mark Garcia; Kingston (Ontario) Holy Cross defensive end Brent Johnson; Washington (D.C.) Dunbar defensive end Kevin Johnson; and Columbus Walnut Ridge offensive lineman Eric Smith.

25 Years Ago — 2001

The firing of OSU head coach John Cooper had left the football program’s recruiting efforts for 2001 in a state of limbo just one month before National Signing Day on Feb. 7.

While some key prospects immediately dropped Ohio State and canceled visits upon learning of the news, others insisted that they would still look at the school. In fact, the Buckeyes received their 14th verbal commitment for 2001 over the weekend of Jan. 5-7 when Cincinnati Moeller tight end Ryan Hamby visited and committed to OSU.

The school’s policy had been to honor all scholarship offers made during the Cooper regime. Most, if not all, of OSU’s 13 previous verbal commitments

were still on board.

Bill Conley, OSU’s recruiting coordinator, and the rest of the coaching staff were doing their best to maintain the school’s recruiting efforts, even though they themselves faced an uncertain future.

“Sure, (we’ll lose kids),” Conley said. “That happens. Hopefully we won’t lose anybody that’s already committed, but you never know that. But of the kids that were set to visit, sure, some of them won’t come now. But that’s happened to other colleges around the country this year, too.”

20 Years Ago — 2006

With the announcement of his verbal commitment live on national television from San Antonio, Robert Rose continued the short tradition of players committing to Ohio State from the U.S. Army All-American Bowl and the longer tradition of Tarblooders becoming Buckeyes.

A defensive end out of Cleveland Glenville, Rose was thought to be a heavy lean toward the Buckeyes ever since receiving a scholarship offer from OSU on National Signing Day in 2005.

High school teammates Ray Small and Bryant Browning were also soon expected to join Rose in committing to Ohio State and become the latest in a string of Glenville alums to sign with the Buckeyes. Others included Troy Smith, Donte Whitner, Ted Ginn Jr., Jamario O’Neal and Curtis Terry.

“I want to go where family is, so I feel right at home at Ohio State,” Rose said.

15 Years Ago — 2011

Florida’s loss proved to be Ohio State’s gain.

When Gators head coach Urban Meyer decided to resign following his team’s appearance against Penn State in the Outback Bowl, it led some verbal members of Florida’s recruiting class to reevaluate their decisions.

After doing so, four-star outside linebacker Ryan Shazier from Plantation, Fla., opted to switch his commitment and become a Buckeye. Before he pulled the trigger on Dec. 17, however, Shazier met with newly hired Florida head coach Will Muschamp and took an official visit to Columbus.

In the end, the Buckeyes won out over their foe from the 2007 national championship game.

“I’ve never been happier or felt better than I do right now,” Shazier told BSB. “I loved the atmosphere and their facilities a lot. My family and I have such a great feeling about (head coach) Jim Tressel, and my dad and I talked it over (Dec. 16) and decided Ohio State is the best place for me. We also love (linebackers coach) Luke Fickell and think he’s a great mentor for me on and off the field.”

10 Years Ago — 2016

The Buckeyes may have missed on four-star wide receiver Donnie Corley, but they were believed to be the leader for an even better wide receiver prospect.

Coconut Creek, Fla., four-star wide receiver Binjimen Victor was the nation’s No. 5 receiver and No. 32 overall prospect in the class of 2016. He was initially scheduled to announce his decision at the Under Armour All-American Game but backed out because he wanted to take official visits to Tennessee on Jan. 15 and Florida on Jan. 22.

“I just decided to hold off because I have a lot of recruiting left to do,” he said. “I still have two official visits, and I just want to see what everyone has to offer.”

Victor had already taken official visits to West Virginia and Ohio State, and he said he’s a fan of what the Buckeyes have to offer.

“I’ve been there a couple times,” he said. “I feel like if I do go there, I would fit in their offense and have a great time while I play there.”

Five Years Ago — 2021

Ohio State followed up its impressive win over Clemson in the CFP semifinal with yet another victory over the Tigers when the Buckeyes landed a commitment on Jan. 2 from Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary.

Singletary was considered the fifth-best cornerback and No. 10 prospect overall in the class of 2022 after he recorded 18 tackles, six pass breakups, three interceptions and one blocked field goal to lead the Generals to an appearance in the state semifinals the previous fall. He chose Ohio State over finalists Clemson, Florida and Georgia.

Singletary landed an offer from the Buckeyes in early November, whereas the Bulldogs (May 2019), Gators (June) and Tigers (July) had been in contact much longer. Nevertheless, head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs made quite the impression in just a few short weeks, pushing Ohio State to the forefront of Singletary’s recruitment.

One Year Ago — 2025

The 2026 offensive line class in the state of Ohio was a good one, with the Buckeyes in on at least four prospects in-state. One of those was Avon Lake four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley, who had played both left and right tackle at his high school, although he made the switch to mainly stay on the left side the previous season.

Riley announced his top seven in June 2024 with Ohio State, Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, Michigan State, Missouri and Oklahoma being included. Ohio State and Clemson seemed to be the top two choices.

“It’s still those seven,” Riley told 247Sports in early January. “I’ve been to all of them. I might get back to Ohio State and Clemson, but that’s about it. I’m leaning towards (picking) one of those two schools.”

He said that he would like to make his decision in January or February, although he didn’t give an exact date. But he did say that he was getting along with Ohio State offensive line coach Justin Frye and that the Buckeyes’ offensive line improvement in the College Football Playoff had improved their chances of landing his commitment.

# Seahawks' JSN Grabbing All The Accolades

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The last thing former Ohio State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba could be accused of is resting on his laurels.

But thanks to his historic season, that's what he was doing the second weekend of January after helping the Seattle Seahawks to the No. 1 seed in the NFC to earn a bye in the first round of the playoffs. The Seahawks were set to host the San Francisco 49ers in the divisional round on Jan. 17.

Yet, Smith-Njigba was still making news when it was announced Jan. 10 that he, Los Angeles Rams receiver Puka Nacua and Cleveland Browns edge rusher Myles Garrett were the only unanimous choices for the AP All-Pro team as voted by 50 members of the media.

He's Seattle's first offensive player named first-team All-Pro since 2012 (Marshawn Lynch and Max Unger) and the Seahawks' first unanimous selection this century.

A pair of former Buckeyes were chosen for the second team – New Orleans Saints receiver Chris Olave and Pittsburgh Steelers interior lineman Cameron Heyward.

Smith-Njigba and Heyward were part of the 23 ex-Buckeyes (including three on injured reserve) on playoff rosters.

For Smith-Njigba, the All-Pro selection will be the first of many honors expected to come his way. He is the favorite for the NFL Offensive Player of the Year, which will be announced at the NFL Honors on Feb. 5. If he does win, he'd be the first for the Seahawks to do so since Shaun Alexander in 2005.

Smith-Njigba, or JSN, led the league's receivers with 1,793 yards, 78 more than Nacua. Smith-Njigba's 119 receptions included 10 touchdowns. The yards and catches are Seattle records, as are his receptions per game (7.0) and yards per game (105.5).

How special was JSN's season? The former reception record he held with Tyler Lockett (JSN in 2024, Lockett, 2020) was 100, and the previous yardage mark was 1,303 by D.K. Metcalf in 2020.

"Any limitation that is put on me is not true," Smith-Njigba said. "I honestly feel like I can do almost everything."

He had at least 72 receiving yards in all but one game this season, including 84 in the finale at San Francisco.

It's the first time in four decades that a Seahawk player has led the NFL in receiving yards. Pro Football Hall of Famer Steve Largent had 1,287 yards in 1985 and also topped the league in 1979 with 1,237 yards.

Largent is the most recent Seattle receiver to make first-team All-Pro in 1985.

"I just really like the way he plays football," Largent told The Athletic of JSN. "He's not an overly big guy, but he gets open, and he catches the ball well. He does something with it once he's got the ball. He's an exciting player, for sure."

"It's exciting for him, it's exciting for

the team and it's exciting for his future. He's fully capable of adding to his catches and yards and touchdowns and success as a Seahawk."

For much of the season, Smith-Njigba was on pace to break Calvin Johnson's record of 1,964 receiving yards in a season in 2012. That he fell short was inconsequential.

"He's had this vision of who he thought he could be as a player and all he's done is chase it," said Seattle coach Mike MacDonald.

Setting marks is nothing new for JSN. He was part of a talented group of receivers for Ohio State in 2021 that featured future 2022 first-round picks Garrett Wilson (No. 10 overall to the New York Jets) and Olave (No. 11, New Orleans).

Despite the presence of those two, Smith-Njigba had a breakout season in 2021 as a sophomore, making a school-record 95 catches (fifth all-time in Big Ten history) for 1,606 yards to set a conference mark.

He starred in the 2022 Rose Bowl when C.J. Stroud connected with him for an FBS bowl record 347 yards, a school-record 15 receptions and three touchdowns.

In the 2022 season, a hamstring injury limited him to three games and he had five catches for 43 yards. That didn't prevent the Seahawks from drafting him 20th overall in the 2023 draft.

He was hampered early in his first pre-season with the Seahawks in 2023 by a fractured wrist, but that was only a temporary setback. His 63 receptions were the second-most by a Seattle rookie in history. Former Buckeye Joey Galloway had 67 in a 16-game season in 1995.

## Going Strong

Smith-Njigba has a bright future at age 23. Heyward, 36, is at an age when most players contemplate retiring, but not him. He had 78 tackles with nine tackles for loss, 3½ sacks, six pass breakups and a forced fumble to help the Steelers win the AFC North. And he played more snaps (822) than any interior lineman in the NFL this season.

"It amazes me," Steelers defensive coordinator Teryl Austin said on Jan. 8. "I watch him and how he runs and how he plays, and there are young guys that don't do what he does. So he's a unicorn in a lot of ways, but he's also a unicorn in his demeanor and leadership and all that other stuff."

Austin said that Heyward was at his best during the 28-26 division-clinching win over the Baltimore Ravens on Jan. 4.

"He's played well all year," Austin said. "He's always been, as we know, really good against the run. But you watch in terms of his effort and leadership and all that stuff, it's just top-notch. When you get into thick moments like that, get into games where every snap is counting, it's a win-or-go-home moment, you like those guys to be out in front. He was right out in front."

## Bounce Back

While Heyward was honored for the sixth time, Olave is a first-time All-Pro who had contemplated retirement last season after his latest concussion.

He instead ranked in the top 10 in 2025 for catches (100), yards (1,163) and touchdowns (nine). All were career highs.

His turnaround comes at a great point in his career. The Saints picked up his fifth-year rookie option for 2026 with a cap hit slightly over \$15 million, but he will be a free agent afterward unless the team signs him to an extension.

Olave is pleased with the direction of the franchise after one season under new coach Kellen Moore and first-year quarterback Tyler Shough.

"I feel like the first couple of years it was hard to be able to say that I was stable," Olave said. "It helps a lot with the bigger picture. It makes me want to stay here even more. I know what's going to be here with Kellen. Tyler's a great quarterback, and that's probably the main two things you need as a receiver. It makes me want to get that contract done even more and hopefully it happens soon."

Saints general manager Mickey Loomis was open to an extension.

"Chris is obviously an important player to us and had a really good season, but we haven't really spent much time thinking about that right now," Loomis said.

"We've had a couple conversations with his agent, but that will be part of this off-season. I can't tell you how high it is or low it is (as a priority). I don't have the whole list yet."

Interestingly, former Buckeye teammate Wilson may benefit Olave. Wilson got an extension before the 2025 season worth \$130 million over four years.

The pair have similar career numbers. Olave, in 55 games (44 starts), from 457 targets, has 291 catches for 3,728 yards and 19 touchdowns. Wilson, in 58 games (53 starts), has been targeted 528 times for 315 catches for 3,644 yards and 18 TDs.

## A Sainly Rebound

Another ex-Buckeye also had a big rebound season in New Orleans. Defensive end Chase Young has bounced around since he was the No. 2 pick in 2020 by Washington.

Now in his second season with the Saints, he was named the NFC Defensive Player of the Month for the regular season games in December and January.

In the final five games, he had 19 tackles, six tackles for loss, five sacks, two fumble recoveries (one returned for a touchdown) and a pass breakup. The Saints went 4-1 to finish 6-11.

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# Buckeyes Struggling To Finish Close Games

The Ohio State basketball team is off to a solid 11-5 start this season after splitting two games on their West Coast trip.

But three of those five losses have been by just one possession, and late in each of those games, Ohio State either held a lead or had a chance to tie the game.

The first was against Pittsburgh on Nov.

## COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

28, when the Panthers hit a buzzer-beating three-pointer to take the win 67-66, the same way they had beaten the Buckeyes the year before at Value City Arena.

The next was against No. 12 North Carolina in the CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 20, when Ohio State managed a late comeback to take a 70-67 lead with just 48 seconds remaining in the game. But after the Buckeyes gave up a layup and struggled to beat the Tar Heels' full-court press, North Carolina left with a one-point win, 71-70.

Against Nebraska on Jan. 5, after a rough start to the game when they went down by as many as 14 points, the Buckeyes managed to get back in the contest, even taking

a three-point lead midway through the second half.

Head coach Jake Diebler was very unhappy after the game with the way his team looked in the first half before it was able to recover.

"I challenged our guys after the first media timeout and said, 'What are we doing? This is not who we are in practice. This is not how we play and prepare,' " Diebler said. "There were stretches when we lacked physicality and we lacked ball pressure. You see some of the communication breakdowns. Those are signs that we don't have that aggressive attack-mode mentality that we've shown for other stretches."

After OSU took the lead, the Cornhuskers were able to take the lead back and go up by eight points, but Ohio State brought it within one with 14 seconds left.

The Buckeyes were forced to foul, and Nebraska made both free throws. With nine seconds remaining, they drew up a play to get senior center Christoph Tilly a three-pointer from the left wing, a shot that ultimately wasn't close.

Nebraska head coach Fred Hoiberg acknowledged after the game that Ohio State has had multiple one-possession losses, which he said could have ended up as wins just as easily as they did losses.

But Diebler still sees the loss to Nebras-

ka as a missed opportunity and hopes the Buckeyes can capitalize on late chances in close games the rest of the season.

"This was a missed opportunity. There's no denying that," Diebler said. "Here's the truth. This was a missed opportunity, and we have a bunch of other opportunities coming up. That's life in the Big Ten."

"We have 18 (games) left. Everything is going to be a Quad 1, Quad 2, most likely by the end of the season. It's disappointing we let one slip away tonight, but we can't sulk about it. We have to hop on a plane and get ready to go take advantage of the next opportunity."

### Buckeyes Split West Coast Trip

The Buckeyes came back from that loss with a 72-62 win over Oregon, which was the first game of their West Coast trip before falling to Washington 81-74 in Seattle.

It seemed like the Ducks were going to be able to keep the game close throughout the first half and a few minutes of the second, which would have given them a chance to hand Ohio State another tough, close loss, but the Buckeyes made sure that wasn't an option.

With just over 14 minutes remaining in the contest, Oregon made it a three-point game. But Ohio State would go on to hold the Ducks scoreless for over seven minutes

and score 21 points of their own to go up by 24 points.

Entering the trip out West, Diebler knew that it was going to be a tough stretch for the Buckeyes in terms of both travel and level of competition. He acknowledged that other teams will face the same type of stretch at some point during the season and that OSU was going to need to make it out the other side as a better team than it was before.

"We've had an NBA stretch," Diebler said. "I won't even call it a tough stretch because other teams are going through it. We've gone coast to coast. We're going to play four games in nine days. It's not ideal, but it happens. Other teams are going to face it."

Many times, extended road trips can be a way for a college team to get closer as a unit, which can lead to better performances, but Diebler didn't think that was necessary for the Buckeyes. He thought the only thing missing for Ohio State was the attitude with which they were approaching the first half of games.

"I don't think this team needs to come closer together," Diebler said. "This is a really close group, and they care a lot about each other. We just have to develop more of this nastiness on the court that we play with when we're trailing. That's the missing piece right now."



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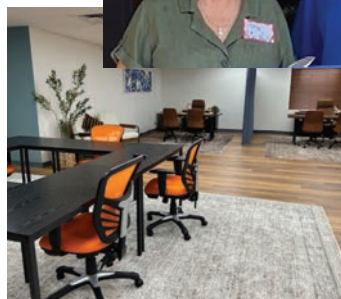
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## Diebler Wants More Boards

In relation to the “nastiness” Diebler referred to after the loss to Nebraska, Ohio State has been struggling in Power Four games with rebounding.

Diebler said before the season began that one of the main goals of the transfer additions the Buckeyes made was to get better in that area of the game since they were outrebounded often last year in conference play.

But it has been an issue this season again for Ohio State at times. While the rebounding margins didn't look terrible 14 games into the season, much of the help with that stat was coming from the low-major games the Buckeyes played in.

But in their first eight Power Four matchups, the Buckeyes were outgained on the boards five times and had only one game, an 80-73 win over Rutgers on Jan. 2, where they outrebounded their opponents (Ohio State had the same amount of rebounds in games against West Virginia and North Carolina).

Those issues were very present in the loss to the Cornhuskers, with OSU grabbing 29 boards compared to Nebraska's 38.

“That was certainly a game within the game that was really disappointing,” Diebler said. “We watch film on Rutgers, and we see ourselves not being physical. We see ourselves turning and staring at the ball, and we made that same mistake some tonight. We have to look ourselves in the mirror and own that. That's a controllable thing.”

Diebler believes the potential to be a solid rebounding team is there for the Buckeyes, but he thinks there needs to be some fundamental changes to the way that OSU approaches going after rebounds.

“There were a couple of times where we got caught when the shot goes up, and we look, and we look, and a guy flew by us (to get the rebound), or we ran in on a deep shot,” Diebler said. “We say it all the time, a long shot equals a long rebound. When the other team shoots a three, you can't run into the paint. You have to carve out space so you can rebound down the floor. That hurt us a couple of times.”

Diebler seems to believe that the rebounding issue and other things all go back to the same thing, which is the Buckeyes not being aggressive enough.

Against Oregon on Jan. 8, he believed that changed in every aspect of the game, and it was reflected both on the floor and on the stat sheet when the game was over.

“It's a different mindset,” Diebler said. “There was no feeling it out. We knew we were going to see multiple defenses in this game, so we just talked about executing whatever is called and being aggressive. I was really happy with the attack mindset we had tonight.”

Against the Ducks, Ohio State brought down 41 rebounds compared to Oregon's 32, despite the size the Buckeyes' opponent brought into the game.

Then, in the loss to Washington, that continued with Ohio State grabbing 39 rebounds to the Huskies' 29.

## Buckeye Bench Production Lagging

Another area where Diebler has been hoping to see improvements is the production the Buckeyes have been getting from

their bench players.

The loss against Nebraska seemed to highlight issues that had been around during the beginning of the season, with the bench production being one of the biggest things that stuck out in the game.

Against the Cornhuskers, players who didn't start for the Buckeyes scored a combined zero points. Diebler thinks that also goes back to the aggressiveness issue that he has seen elsewhere.

“When guys are in, they have to be aggressive,” Diebler said. “I had a conversation with some guys and told them, ‘You're going into the game and passing up open shots. You're going into the game, and you're hesitating. That's not helping us win.’ We're looking for a few guys to add that.”

But that was another part of their game that improved against Oregon, with sophomore guard Gabe Cupps stepping up and scoring nine points in 23 minutes of play. The head coach said after the game that what he saw from Cupps against the Ducks was what he was expecting from the transfer when the Buckeyes got him out of the portal.

“Depth of multiple guys scoring was really important, and we had some guys step up,” Diebler said postgame. “Gabe's aggressiveness is exactly what we've been pushing him to do, and it was really good.”

“This was more like what we expected from (Cupps), being aggressive, playmaking and playing with passion. (We gave) him two or three things he has to do for us, and if he didn't do them, he was coming out, and he did it.”

Cupps was still the only Buckeye to score off the bench.

## Noel Out Indefinitely

The bench production wasn't helped when senior forward Brandon Noel was injured against Nebraska. He left the game in the first half and came out of the locker room in the second half with a boot on his foot.

The next day, it was revealed that the Wright State transfer would be out for an indefinite amount of time, though the team did not disclose exactly what his injury was.

It's Noel's first season with the Buckeyes, and he had played in all 14 games before he was hurt. He was averaging 7.4 points per game, 4.1 rebounds and 1.0 assists.

Noel began the year as one of Ohio State's starters, but as freshman forward Amare Bynum emerged as the impactful player that he has been, Bynum took Noel's starting spot in the loss to North Carolina and has remained there ever since.

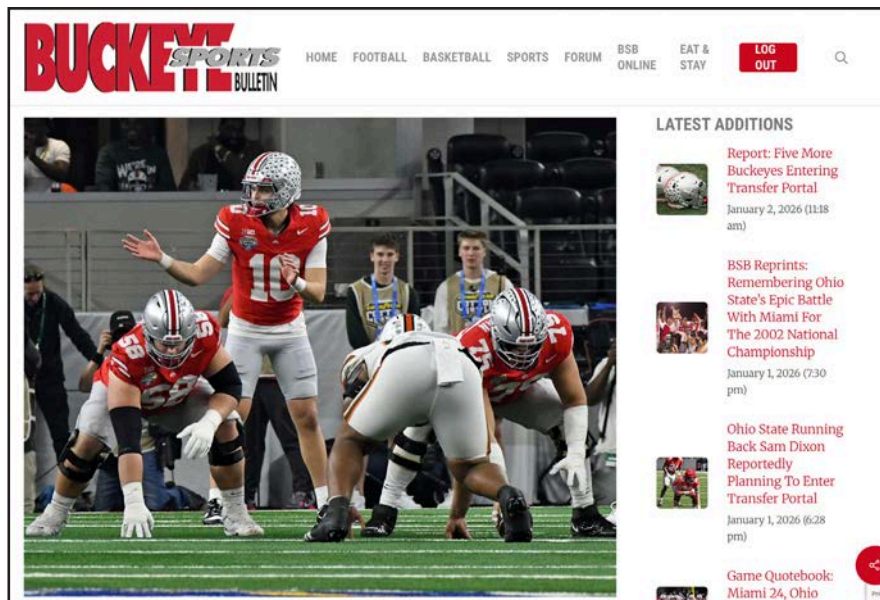
With Noel out, the Buckeyes had to make some adjustments to their lineup at many points in games. Junior forward Devin Royal played more of the four spot late in the game against Nebraska.

Diebler believes that Ohio State will need to continue to deploy different lineups to gain advantages in any way they can, depending on the team they are playing against.

“(Royal) was a mismatch at the three, and now I think the mismatch bends the other way,” Diebler said. “We played Ivan (Njegovan) and Tilly together for a few minutes. That's got to continue to be an option for us.”

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# Buckeyes Split Six-Game, Nationwide Stretch

By **GREG WILSON**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State played six games since BSB last went to press and went 3-3 in those contests, losing when it played the tougher competition of North Carolina, Nebraska and Washington.

The Buckeyes were able to pick up wins over Grambling State, Rutgers and Oregon, however, keeping them squarely in the bubble conversation when it comes to NCAA Tournament projections.

### OSU Falls Short Against UNC

Ohio State (8-3) was unable to pull off a second-half comeback against No. 12 North Carolina (11-1), falling 71-70 on Dec. 20 in the CBS Sports Classic after a late turnover gave the Tar Heels a chance to take the lead at State Farm Arena in Atlanta in front of 16,951 fans.

Sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. was unable to make a last-second deep, contested three that would have put OSU up by two points.

The Buckeyes were led by junior forward Devin Royal in the game, who had 18 points, 12 of them in the first half.

Ohio State was cold to start, making just one of its first six shots, with freshman forward Amare Bynum scoring the first two points in his first career start. But Mobley

put the Buckeyes up 5-2 at 17:39 with a three from the corner.

It took 3:24 for OSU to put more points on the board, with Bynum making a dunk at 14:15 to tie the game up at 7.

The back-and-forth continued as Henri Veesaar of UNC made a three, and senior guard Bruce Thornton answered with a jumper for a 10-9 deficit.

Out of a media timeout, senior center Christoph Tilly took the lead back for the Buckeyes, 11-10, at 11:23 with a hook shot. But the Tar Heels were able to take a 14-11 lead on two free throws and a fastbreak dunk by Jarin Stevenson on the ensuing possession.

After a 17-17 tie at 7:43, UNC converted a three-point play by Seth Trimble, and Bynum brought OSU back within one with a hook shot. North Carolina then would go on a 7-0 run to take a 27-19 lead at 4:15 before Royal ended the streak with a free throw.

UNC took a nine-point lead at 3:30 on a Caleb Wilson jumper, but Ohio State was able to tie the game back up before half-time with an 11-2 run led by Royal, who had seven points over that span. A Derek Dixon three-pointer sent the game into halftime with UNC leading 34-31.

North Carolina got out to a 44-39 lead just under three minutes into the frame to start the second half. A Trimble three-pointer at 16:11 after a Royal bucket made it 47-41 before head coach Jake Diebler called a timeout.

The deficit grew to 10 points, 51-41, with 13:36 remaining, before Tilly scored the first Buckeyes points in 3:30 on a second-chance layup. A Mobley jumper cut the lead back to six before UNC scored five straight to take its biggest lead of the game, 56-45, at 11:14.

The Buckeyes cut into the deficit, getting back within eight points, 59-51, with six straight Buckeye points from Thornton. A Royal layup made that a six-point deficit, but Trimble made a three to go up 62-53 with 6:40 showing.

Four free throws brought OSU back within five points, 62-57, but Wilson made a dunk soon after, and it was 64-57 with 5:23 remaining.

Bynum then converted a three-point play to make the score 64-60, but with 2:37 left and OSU down 66-64, Bynum picked up his fifth foul and was replaced by sophomore forward Colin White.

North Carolina had a 67-66 lead before Mobley converted a four-point play, making a deep three and draining the free throw with just 48 seconds left to put OSU ahead. Trimble brought the game within one with a layup, and UNC called a timeout with 33 seconds left.

Up by one, the Buckeyes struggled with a full-court press, and White’s desperation heave was stolen by UNC. The Tar Heels called a timeout with 18 seconds left.

Out of the timeout, Veesaar made a dunk to take the lead back, 71-70, with just seven seconds remaining in the game before Mobley missed the last-second contested three.

Royal is tired of finishing on the losing end of close games.

“It’s a close game, then at the end something happens, and they get up,” Royal told The Columbus Dispatch. “It’s always the



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BIG HELP — Santa Clara transfer Christoph Tilly has been a valuable addition, averaging 12.4 points and 5.4 rebounds in his first season with the Buckeyes. The German center excited in the second half against Washington on Jan. 11 with an undis-closed injury.**

same thing. I feel like today it was better until the end, but we still did the same thing at the end.”

Thornton had 16 points on 7-of-16 shooting in the game and tied Mobley for the team lead with four assists. Tilly added 12 points on 4-of-9 shooting, with a team-high 10 rebounds for a double-double. The Buckeyes were just 4 of 20 (25.0 percent) from beyond the arc.

North Carolina was led by Wilson, who had 20 points in the contest on 9-of-16 shooting with a career-high 15 rebounds, five of which came on the offensive end. Veesaar also had a double-double with 17 points and 10 rebounds. Both teams pulled 39 off the glass.

### Bucks Win Last Game Of 2025

Ohio State got back in the win column for its last game of the 2025 calendar year, beating Grambling State 89-63 on Dec. 23 at Value City Arena in front of 10,697 fans.

The Buckeyes were led by Mobley, who had a strong second-half performance with 15 points in the final 20 minutes of the game on 4-of-6 shooting, all four makes from three-point range.

Mobley had been going through a cold stretch shooting the ball before beating the Tigers.

“It felt good. I felt good about today,” Mo-

Ohio State 89, Grambling State 63							
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		1	2	F			
Grambling State (5-7)		24	39	63			
Ohio State (9-3)		39	50	89			
Grambling	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Coffee III	36	1-3	0-0	1-3	5	2	3
Ballard	23	2-6	1-2	1-0	2	5	6
Munoz	34	5-17	9-11	0-3	0	3	19
Franklin	11	0-1	1-2	1-1	0	3	1
Muttilib	22	4-8	0-0	0-0	0	1	10
Amaefule	9	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Ward	30	4-11	2-2	2-1	1	2	12
Lane	12	3-3	4-4	1-3	0	1	10
Fitts	20	1-1	0-2	1-0	0	1	2
Edwards	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Perkins	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	20-52	17-23	11-12	8	20	63
Percentages: FG: 38.5%. FT: 73.9%. Three-point field goals: 6-21 (Ward 2-6, Muttilib 2-5, Ballard 1-4, Coffee 1-3, Munoz 0-2, Franklin 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 3 (Munoz, Ward, Fitts). Turnovers: 15 (Munoz 4, Coffee 3, Ward 3, Lane 2, Amaefule). Steals: 9 (Munoz 4, Ballard 2, Ward 2, Coffee).							
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bynum	31	5-8	1-1	1-8	3	2	12
Royal	31	8-13	0-0	2-2	3	2	16
Tilly	23	2-3	6-6	1-1	3	4	10
Mobley Jr.	30	6-10	3-3	0-1	4	4	20
Thornton	33	6-10	6-7	0-4	3	1	18
Noel	23	2-3	2-4	2-1	3	3	6
Cupps	10	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
White	7	1-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	2
Chatman	9	1-1	2-2	0-2	0	0	4
Njegovan	2	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	1	1
Grujicic	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	31-50	21-25	9-22	19	18	89
Percentages: FG: 62.0%. FT: 84.0%. Three-point field goals: 6-18 (Mobley 5-8, Bynum 1-3, Royal 0-3, Thornton 0-3, Cupps 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Tilly 2, Bynum, White). Turnovers: 14 (Bynum 4, Royal 3, Tilly 3, Noel 2, Thornton, Cupps). Steals: 4 (Mobley, Thornton, Noel, Chatman). Officials: Carstensen, Irving, Kimble. Attendance: 10,697.							

bley said after the game. “I was just showing the work that I’ve put in. My touch is coming back. That’s a good feeling, and it’s bringing that confidence back.”

Tilly made the first basket of the game, but Grambling State was able to make a couple of shots to hold a 5-4 lead at 17:20. Royal made a layup to take a 6-5 lead 19 seconds later, and that score held until Bynum made a layup at 14:54.

The Bynum basket was part of a 10-0 run that was capped off by a layup from Mobley at 11:32 that gave OSU a 14-5 lead.

The Tigers made it a 14-12 game before Bynum created some separation again with a three from the top of the key with 8:11 left in the half.

The Buckeyes went up by 10 points for the first time on the first of two free throws by Thornton at 2:23, 28-18, and a Thornton three-point play with 36 seconds left gave them a 14-point lead, 36-22.

Then, after a jumper from the Tigers by Antonio Munoz, a three-pointer for Mobley sent the game into halftime with the Buckeyes holding onto a 39-24 lead.

It was a turnover-filled first half for both teams, with Ohio State and Grambling State both giving the ball away 10 times each. The difference in the frame was the Buckeyes’ shot making, hitting 15 of 22 from the field (68.2 percent) while the Tigers shot just 8 of

Ohio State 80, Rutgers 73							
Jan. 2, 2026							
Jersey Mike's Arena • Piscataway, N.J.							
		1	2	F			
Ohio State (10-3, 2-1)	37	43	80				
Rutgers (7-7, 0-3)	41	32	73				
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bynum	33	2-7	5-6	1-2	1	0	9
Royal	36	5-13	5-6	2-1	4	2	16
Tilly	20	3-4	3-5	2-1	1	4	9
Mobley Jr.	33	4-9	0-0	0-2	5	3	12
Thornton	37	8-13	2-2	2-8	1	2	20
Noel	20	5-6	4-4	3-1	1	1	14
Cupps	11	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	2	0
White	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Chatman	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	27-52	19-23	13-20	15	15	80
Percentages: FG: 51.9%. FT: 82.6%. Three-point field goals: 7-16 (Mobley 4-6, Royal 1-4, Thornton 2-3, Bynum 0-3). Team rebounds: 8. Blocked shots: 2 (Tilly, Noel). Turnovers: 12 (Royal 3, Thornton 3, Tilly 2, Team 2, Mobley, Noel). Steals: 5 (Bynum, Royal, Mobley, Thornton, Chatman).							
Rutgers	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Grant	31	5-12	2-3	2-0	0	3	14
Badalau	10	1-2	0-0	1-0	2	1	2
Ogbole	17	2-4	1-2	5-4	0	2	5
Davis	21	4-10	0-0	2-3	1	1	9
Zrno	9	1-5	2-2	0-1	0	0	4
Dortch	23	2-2	2-3	3-0	1	3	6
Francis	26	6-16	3-3	0-1	3	1	17
Buchanan Jr.	18	2-3	0-0	4-0	2	4	4
Nwuli	14	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	0
Mark	20	1-3	1-2	0-1	3	2	3
Powers	11	3-6	2-2	1-0	2	2	9
Totals	200	27-64	13-17	18-13	14	19	73
Percentages: FG: 42.2%. FT: 76.5%. Three-point field goals: 6-22 (Francis 2-6, Grant 2-5, Zrno 0-4, Powers 1-3, Davis 1-2, Badalau 0-1, Mark 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 3 (Badalau, Ogbole, Powers). Turnovers: 8 (Ogbole 3, Dortch 2, Zrno, Buchanan, Mark). Steals: 9 (Dortch 3, Francis 3, Davis 2, Mark). Officials: Dorsey, Redd, Scirotto. Attendance: 8,000.							

25 (32.0 percent).

Early in the second half, Ohio State got out to a 48-29 lead on a free throw from senior forward Brandon Noel at 17:11 as the Buckeyes continued to be aggressive in the paint.

The lead remained between 16 and 20 points until the Tigers went on a seven-point run that included two OSU turnovers and made the score 56-44 with 12:23 left in the game.

Mobley took control with two straight three-point jumpers to get the lead back out to 18 points at 10:57, and a converted three-point play by Bynum made the score 67-44. Mobley made another three at 9:02 for a 26-point lead to cap a 14-0 run, making it 70-44.

The Buckeyes did not make another field goal until 5:33 was left in the game when Royal dunked off a turnover, but they made six free throws during that span, and they held a 78-54 lead. Ohio State cruised the rest of the way to the 26-point victory.

Mobley had a total of 20 points in the contest on 6-of-10 shooting while each of the other four starters – Thornton (18), Royal (16), Bynum (12) and Tilly (10) – also reached double-digit points. Bynum brought down a game-high nine rebounds.

The Buckeyes were 31 of 50 from the field as a team (62.0 percent) in the game while holding the Tigers to just 20 of 52 shots made (38.5 percent).

Grambling State was led by a 19-point performance from Munoz, who also had four steals.

**Bucks Beat Rutgers To Start New Year**

Ohio State went down big early on against Rutgers in the first game of the new year but was able to recover and beat the Scarlet Knights 80-73 at Jersey Mike's Arena in Piscataway, N.J., in front of 8,000 fans on Jan. 2.

The Buckeyes (10-3, 2-1 Big Ten) had a cold first half but finished the first 20 minutes with a strong comeback that continued into the second, during which the Scarlet Knights (7-7, 0-3) struggled to make stops.

“Big Ten basketball on the road is tricky,” Diebler told the Dispatch after the game. “The place was packed. The team makes a couple shots early, (and) they get some momentum. You’ve got to weather the storm. We talk about toughness and connection when we travel. We have to stand firm on those two things, and we did.”

The Buckeyes got off to a quick start with a three-point play by Tilly on the first possession of the game, followed by a three from Royal to take a 6-2 lead just over a minute in.

But Rutgers went on an 8-2 run to lead 10-8 at 16:18 after a layup by Harun Zrno before OSU scored five straight points to lead 13-10.

To that point, the Scarlet Knights had missed their first five three-point shots of the game, but that luck turned around when Dylan Grant knocked one down at 13:25 to tie the score at 13 and start a run of three straight possessions making one for the Knights, who moved ahead, 19-15.

Thornton answered with a three of his own to bring the Buckeyes within one point at 11:55, but Rutgers was able to take an eight-point lead, 26-18, with seven straight points.

The run for the Scarlet Knights continued, going up by as many as 15 points, 39-24, with 3:58 left in the first half.

Ohio State was able to recover from that deficit in a short time, going on a 13-2 run to finish the half, with Noel scoring eight points during the stretch. The Buckeyes went into the locker room down 41-37.

The impressive play with which OSU finished the first half continued into the second, with the Buckeyes scoring on their first eight possessions with the help of a few offensive rebounds early on. By the time that run was over, Ohio State had a 55-47 lead at 13:53, with two Thornton layups ending the run.

Rutgers brought the game within three points just over a minute and a half later with a layup, a free throw and a three-point jumper by Kaden Powers. Then, at 10:20, Darren Buchanan Jr. made it a 58-57 game with a jumper from just inside the arc.

Royal made two free throws to put the Buckeyes back up by three, but Rutgers scored four straight to take the lead back from the Buckeyes, 61-60 at 9:05. Thornton and Royal both made layups around a Powers basket to get the lead again, 64-63, but the two teams continued to trade it back-and-forth before Bryce Dortch made two free throws to put Rutgers up 65-64 with 7:01 left in the game.

Thornton gained the lead back with a three-pointer, but he was injured on a layup attempt soon after and went to the locker room after being subbed out. The Buckeyes went up 70-67 without Thornton in the game on a converted three-point play from Royal with 5:23 left. Thornton returned to

the game shortly after.

That lead extended to six points on a Royal free throw and a layup from Tilly at 3:23, but a dunk from Dortch at 2:43 brought the Scarlet Knights within four, 73-69.

Mobley made a three-point jumper at 2:13 to make it a seven-point lead for the Buckeyes, and neither team was able to score until Bynum made two free throws at 1:16 to go up 78-69, a lead that was insurmountable for Rutgers.

Ohio State was led by Thornton's 20 points on 8-of-13 shooting, and he added 10 rebounds, which was the most of any player in the game. Royal scored 16 points with four assists. Noel scored 14 points and Mobley had 12.

Ohio State had a solid game from the field, connecting of 27 of 52 shots (52.2 Percent), including 7 of 16 (43.8 percent) from distance.

Rutgers had 17 points from Tariq Francis, who came off the bench in the contest. He and Grant (14) were the only double-digit scorers for the hosts.

**OSU Falls Short Vs. No. 10 Nebraska**

Ohio State wasn't able to knock off undefeated No. 10 Nebraska, falling 72-69 at Value City Arena on Jan. 5 in front of 10,382 fans.

The Buckeyes (10-4, 2-2 Big Ten) came back from a 14-point first-half deficit to take a lead in the second half, but the Cornhuskers (15-0, 4-0) came through late and were able to force a contested three by Tilly with the clock winding down.

It didn't take long for Nebraska to take a 10-1 lead, with senior guard Jamarques Lawrence knocking down a three-pointer from the corner just under two minutes into the game, the second straight three for the Cornhuskers.

The Buckeyes started to knock some shots down, going on a 7-3 run with a three from Mobley, making the score 13-8 at 14:39. After the Huskers made a layup, Mobley converted a three-point play, and Royal found a cutting Bynum for a dunk to bring OSU within two points.

But that wasn't long-lasting, with Nebraska going on a 12-0 run immediately after to take a 14-point lead, 27-13. It was Thornton who finally ended that streak with a layup, and Tilly made one of his own on the next possession for a 27-17 score with 7:39 until halftime.

The Buckeyes made back-to-back threes, including Tilly knocking down his first triple in his last nine games, dating back to the Buckeyes' Nov. 25 win over Mount St. Mary's. His shot made it 29-23.

After a Nebraska layup by Berke Buyuktuncel with 1:47 left in the half, neither team scored the rest of the frame, and the game went into halftime with the Buckeyes trailing 38-31.

“You can't have that type of first half against a team like that,” Diebler said. “This game came down to some 50-50 balls. We've been the team that's gotten those, and we weren't tonight. That's probably the most disappointing thing for me.”

Mobley had 12 points in the half, but the Buckeyes were just 12 of 31 from the field for 38.7 percent.

Both teams struggled to knock down shots early in the second half, with Royal making two free throws to make it a 43-37

Nebraska 72, Ohio State 69								
Jan. 5, 2026 Value City Arena • Columbus								
		1	2	F				
Nebraska (15-0, 4-0)		38	34	72				
Ohio State (10-4, 2-2)		31	38	69				
Nebraska	Total	FG	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Büyüktuncel	22	4-4	0-0	2-5	1	2	8	
Sandfort	36	3-11	2-2	1-2	2	1	11	
Mast	35	5-14	1-1	0-4	2	1	12	
Hoiberg	35	3-7	0-1	3-6	4	2	8	
Lawrence	26	2-6	6-6	0-4	0	4	11	
Fragar	24	6-9	3-4	2-4	2	2	15	
Jacobsen	18	1-4	1-1	0-2	1	0	3	
Garcia	4	1-2	1-2	0-0	0	0	4	
Totals	200	25-57	14-17	8-30	12	12	72	
Percentages: FG: 43.9%. FT: 82.4%. Three-point field goals: 8-29 (Sandfort 3-9, Mast 1-6, Hoiberg 2-4, Lawrence 1-4, Garcia 1-2, Frager 0-2, Jacobsen 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Mast). Turnovers: 12 (Mast 3, Büyüktuncel 2, Lawrence 2, Team 2, Sandfort, Hoiberg, Frager). Steals: 5 (Sandfort 2, Hoiberg 2, Jacobsen).								
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Bynum	35	4-9	0-0	1-8	1	3	9	
Royal	37	5-8	4-6	0-6	2	1	14	
Tilly	33	3-9	1-4	2-1	2	4	8	
Mobley Jr.	36	8-17	1-1	0-2	1	2	22	
Thornton	37	6-12	2-2	0-5	7	2	16	
Cupps	12	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	
Noel	8	0-2	0-0	0-2	0	2	0	
White	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Totals	200	26-57	8-13	4-25	13	14	69	
Percentages: FG: 45.96%. FT: 61.5%. Three-point field goals: 9-26 (Mobley 5-13, Thornton 2-6, Tilly 1-3, Bynum 1-2, Royal 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 2 (Bynum 2). Turnovers: 8 (Tilly 2, Noel 2, Royal, Mobley, Thornton, Cupps). Steals: 4 (Royal, Tilly, Thornton, Cupps). Officials: Groover, Kimble, Kissinger. Attendance: 10,382.								

game for the Huskers at 16:22. Mobley followed with two straight jumpers, bringing Ohio State within two points, 43-41, but the Cornhuskers answered with four points of their own.

The Buckeyes came back with four more points to get back within two again, 47-45, on layups from Thornton and Bynum, the second coming at 11:42.

Continued On Page 30

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# Buckeyes Fail To Finish In Loss To Huskies

Continued From Page 29

At 10:24 the Buckeyes took a 49-48 lead on two free throws from Thornton. It was the first lead of the game for OSU. That lead extended to three points, 53-50. on a three-pointer from Thornton with 8:38 remaining. Nebraska made a fastbreak layup by Braden Frager to make that a one-point lead, 53-52.

The Cornhuskers took the lead back, 55-53, with 6:07 remaining on a three from senior forward Rienk Mast, but Mobley came right back with a make of his own from beyond the arc.

The Buckeyes and Huskers traded the lead back and forth for the next few possessions until a Mast three-point play put OSU down by two, 60-58, at 4:39. That was the start of a 9-0 run for Nebraska while the Buckeyes were scoreless until the 1:56 mark when Mobley had a three that bounced around the rim before going down to end the run with OSU trailing, 66-61. After a Husker free throw, Royal nailed a jumper to get within four. The next time down the floor for Nebraska, Tilly stole the ball from Frager and took it himself for a fastbreak dunk and a two-point deficit, 67-65.

OSU brought it within one point with 14 seconds remaining in the game, 70-69, but after two Nebraska free throws by Lawrence with nine seconds left, Mobley took the ball across half court and passed to Tilly in the corner, and he threw up a three that missed everything but the backboard, ending the game.

The Buckeyes were led by Mobley in the contest, who scored 22 points on 8-of-17 shooting, which included 5 of 13 from three. Thornton scored 16 points, making 6 of 12 shots, and added a game-high seven assists. Royal also reached double digits with 14 points on 5-of-8 shooting. Bynum led the Buckeyes with nine rebounds to go with nine points.

Frager paced Nebraska with 15 points.

## Bucks Start West Coast Trip With Win

Ohio State (11-4, 3-2) managed a big win over Oregon (8-8, 1-4) to start its West Coast trip, beating the Ducks 72-62 at Matthew Knight Arena in Eugene, Ore., on Jan. 8 in front of 6,037 fans.

It was a close game early in the second half, and the Buckeyes led by just three, 43-40, with 15:07 to play. But OSU scored 21 unanswered points to decide the game, thanks to strong performances on the defensive side of the ball and on the glass.

“My biggest concern was rebounding and taking care of the ball, and I think we did that during that stretch,” Diebler said. “And we got the 50-50 balls. We got most of them tonight. That was very important.”

The scoring in the game started with an Oregon layup by Takai Simpkins, but Mobley took the first lead of the game for the Buckeyes with a deep three-pointer at 18:38.

OSU didn’t score again until Bynum had a putback layup at 16:38, but the Buckeyes went up 7-2 on another layup from Bynum thanks to a cold start for the Ducks.

After Oregon made a layup of its own and Royal made a three-pointer six minutes into the game, neither team scored until the

Ohio State 72, Oregon 62									
Jan. 8, 2026 Matthew Knight Arena • Eugene, Ore.									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (11-4, 3-2)		34	38	72					
Oregon (8-8, 1-4)		29	33	62					
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Bynum	27	4-10	2-3	2-2	2	4	10		
Royal	36	5-9	3-3	4-6	3	3	14		
Tilly	31	4-6	6-9	1-4	2	3	14		
Mobley Jr.	26	3-7	5-6	0-5	1	3	13		
Thornton	38	5-14	0-0	3-3	0	1	12		
Cupps	23	3-4	2-2	0-3	1	2	9		
Njegovan	10	0-1	0-0	1-3	0	2	0		
White	9	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	2	0		
Totals	250	24-53	18-23	13-28	10	20	72		
Percentages: FG: 45.3%. FT: 78.3%. Three-point field goals: 6-18 (Mobley 2-5, Thornton 2-5, Bynum 0-3, Royal 1-2, White 0-2, Cupps 1-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Bynum 4, Tilly). Turnovers: 12 (Royal 4, Mobley 2, Cupps 2, Tilly, Thornton, Njegovan, Team). Steals: 5 (Mobley 2, Bynum, Tilly, Cupps).									
Oregon	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Evans Jr.	26	3-8	2-2	1-1	1	2	10		
Stewart	23	2-4	1-2	4-4	0	3	5		
Bittle	33	5-19	2-2	4-5	2	4	14		
Simpkins	34	2-9	8-9	1-3	2	2	12		
Lin	38	4-14	1-1	1-0	5	2	10		
Pryor	15	0-0	1-4	1-2	1	1	1		
Demir	3	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Carter	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Lindsay	11	2-2	0-0	0-0	0	3	4		
Phillips	13	2-4	0-0	0-0	0	1	6		
Totals	250	20-61	15-20	15-17	12	18	62		
Percentages: FG: 32.8%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 7-30 (Lin 1-10, Bittle 2-6, Simpkins 0-5, Evans 2-4, Phillips 2-4, Carter 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 6 (Bittle 3, Evans 2, Stewart). Turnovers: 7 (Bittle 3, Lin 2, Simpkins, Pryor). Steals: 6 (Evans, Stewart, Simpkins, Lin, Lindsay, Phillips). Officials: O'Brien, Phillips, Richardson. Attendance: 6,037.									

11:33 mark when Simpkins connected on a pair of free throws to make it 10-6.

Ohio State’s lead grew to six points twice in the next few minutes, but Gabe Cupps made his first three since Dec. 6 to go up 18-9 with 8:20 remaining in the half.

The Buckeye lead grew to 10 points at 3:50 when Cupps made two free throws and again when Thornton drained a three at 3:15. The Ducks were able to shrink the gap with a 9-4 run to end the half, and Ohio State went into the locker room with a 34-29 lead.

The Buckeyes opened the scoring in the second half on a layup from Bynum, but Oregon quickly got within two points, 36-34, with a three-pointer by Kwame Evans Jr. and a layup by Simpkins.

But Tilly made an and-one layup to go back up by four before missing the free throw. Off the miss, Bynum grabbed the rebound, and after a missed layup that was tipped out to Thornton, the senior drained a three to go up by seven points at 17:24.

The Ducks brought the game back with in three points with an Evans three-pointer making the score 46-43 in favor of OSU at 14:05. But the Buckeyes went on the 21-0 run, holding Oregon scoreless for over seven minutes of game time. Mobley capped the run with three free throws at 7:30 to make it 65-43.

The Ducks finally ended that run, with Nate Bittle making a three-pointer with 6:43 left in the game to make the score 67-46, but it had already been decided by that point.

The Buckeyes had five players reach

Washington 81, Ohio State 74									
Jan. 11, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	F					
Washington (10-6, 2-3)		36	45	81					
Ohio State (11-5, 3-3)		38	36	74					
Washington	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Steinbach	35	9-19	3-3	1-8	0	3	21		
Tucker	34	6-11	0-0	3-2	2	2	12		
Kepnang	31	2-3	7-8	4-3	0	4	11		
Peterson	35	2-5	2-2	0-2	3	2	8		
Diallo	30	7-14	6-6	0-2	3	1	22		
Mandaquit	16	0-0	1-4	0-2	5	0	1		
Dzepina	10	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
Muldrew	9	1-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	3		
Totals	200	28-56	19-23	9-20	14	14	81		
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 82.6%. Three-point field goals: 6-18 (Diallo 2-6, Peterson 2-4, Steinbach 0-3, Dzepina 1-2, Tucker 0-2, Muldrew 1-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 6 (Dzepina 3, Kepnang 2, Tucker). Turnovers: 7 (Steinbach 3, Kepnang 2, Peterson, Mandaquit). Steals: 4 (Steinbach 2, Kepnang, Peterson).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Bynum	36	8-19	2-3	2-2	1	3	20		
Royal	31	4-9	2-2	1-7	1	3	11		
Tilly	15	3-7	2-2	2-2	1	2	8		
Mobley Jr.	29	1-5	0-0	1-3	4	1	3		
Thornton	37	9-17	7-8	2-2	3	1	28		
Njegovan	25	2-4	0-0	4-2	2	2	4		
Cupps	14	0-0	0-0	1-0	1	2	0		
White	8	0-0	0-0	1-1	0	1	0		
Chatman	5	0-2	0-0	1-1	1	2	0		
Totals	200	27-63	13-15	17-22	14	17	74		
Percentages: FG: 42.9%. FT: 86.7%. Three-point field goals: 7-22 (Thornton 3-7, Bynum 2-6, Royal 1-3, Mobley 1-3, Chatman 0-2, Tilly 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Bynum, Thornton, Njegovan). Turnovers: 11 (Mobley 3, Bynum 2, Njegovan 2, Royal, Tilly, Thornton, Team). Steals: 4 (Bynum, Mobley, Thornton, Chatman). Officials: Dorsey, Harris, Szelc. Attendance: 8,163.									

double-digit scoring, with Tilly and Royal leading the way with 14 points each. Mobley (13), Thornton (12) and Bynum (10) were the other three in double figures. Royal had a double-double with 10 rebounds, which led the game, helping the Buckeyes outrebound the Ducks 41 to 32.

Ohio State’s defense was strong in the contest, holding Oregon to a 20-of-61 shooting performance (32.8 percent), which included just 7 of 30 from three-point range (23.3 percent). The Ducks were led in the game by Bittle, who had 14 points on 5-of-19 shooting and nine rebounds.

## Second-Half Drought Dooms Buckeyes

Ohio State (11-5, 3-3) was unable to take the second game of its West Coast trip, falling to Washington (10-6, 2-3), 81-74, on Jan. 11 at Alaska Airlines Arena in Seattle in front of 8,163 fans.

The Buckeyes got out to as big a lead as nine points, but a 14-0 Husky run in the second half gave Washington an advantage that it wouldn’t give up the rest of the contest.

“Our defensive possessions, we broke down our coverage once or twice,” Diebler told the Dispatch of the run. “Then offensively, I think our shot selection wasn’t good enough.”

Washington and Ohio State traded buckets and free throws for the first few possessions for a 6-6 tie at 17:19. The Buckeyes would create some separation immediately after with a 10-2 run that included five points from both Bynum and Thornton.

The Huskies were within six points when Bynum reached 10 points with a three-point jumper at 11:51 to put the Buckeyes up 21-12. Washington answered with a three of its own by Nikola Dzepina, and a layup by Hannes Steinbach cut it to a four-point deficit, 21-17.

Royal made two free throws, and Courtland Muldrew of the Huskies knocked down a three, which started a streak of scoring from beyond the arc for them. Zoom Diallo made two of his own with a three-point make from Mobley to split them up, making the score 28-26 at 6:12.

The Buckeyes struggled to stretch their lead to more than four points, and Washington ended up tying the game at 36 with 40 seconds left in the first half on a pair of free throws by Steinbach, but Royal answered to take the lead back with a step-back jumper with 16 seconds on the clock. Ohio State took a 38-36 lead into the half.

The Buckeyes started the second half with five straight points to go up by seven. After two free throws from Tilly made it 45-38, Ohio State went scoreless for 4:08 while Washington scored 14 straight points to take a 52-45 lead with 14:19 left.

Bynum finally got the Buckeyes back on the scoreboard with a layup at 14:02, but soon after, Washington took a seven-point lead, matching its biggest of the game to that point.

At 9:52, Royal made a second-chance layup, followed by the Huskies going 1 of 2 on free throws, and Thornton took advantage to bring the Buckeyes within three on a three-pointer, making it 60-57.

Playing in place of Tilly, who left earlier in the half with an injury, sophomore center Ivan Njegovan made a layup to make it a one-point deficit, but Washington scored five straight for a 65-59 score at 6:31.

The Husky lead extended to eight points, 71-63, with 4:15 left, but OSU had brought it within four again at 3:15 on two Thornton foul shots.

OSU soon went down by eight points again, 75-67 at 1:50 on a Bryson Tucker layup, and could shrink the deficit only to five the rest of the game, losing its fifth game of the season.

Ohio State was led by Thornton, who had 28 points in the contest on 9-of-17 shooting and was 7 of 8 from the free-throw line. Bynum had a career-high 20 points in the loss on 8-of-19 shooting. Royal had 11 points and eight rebounds.

The Huskies had two 20-plus-point scorers, with Diallo scoring 22 and Steinbach 21.

Before BSB next goes to press, Ohio State will play four more games. The Buckeyes start that stretch with home games against UCLA on Jan. 17 (1 p.m., CBS Sports) and Minnesota on Jan. 20 (6:30 p.m., BTN). The next game will be the toughest opponent OSU has played this season, going on the road to Ann Arbor to play Michigan on Jan. 23 (8 p.m., FOX) before it comes back home to match up with Penn State on Jan. 26 (7 p.m., FS1).

# Cambridge First Buck To Score 40 Since 2016

The Ohio State women's basketball team has had an impressive 15-2 start to Big Ten play, and none of it would be possible without sophomore point guard Jalonie Cambridge. This season, the Buckeyes' top player is averaging career-best numbers of 21.2 points per game, 5.5 rebounds per game and 4.2 assists per game.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

In No. 19 Ohio State's 78-69 win over Illinois on Jan. 7, Cambridge delivered a career-best performance. The Nashville, Tenn., native scored a career-high 41 points on 15-of-25 shooting, added a game-high six assists and had six rebounds.

Cambridge became the first Buckeye to score 40 or more points in a single Big Ten game since former All-America guard Kelsey Mitchell tallied 43 points in her team's 73-58 win over Rutgers in the Big Ten tournament in 2016.

"I was going until I was stopped," Cambridge said. "Respectfully, if no one's stopping me, I'm going to keep going. They kept going under the screens, so I just kept finding my jumper."

Cambridge was solid all game, but she found a different level in the second half. After scoring 12 points in the first 20 minutes of action, Cambridge scored 29 points on 11-of-17 shooting in the final two quarters.

After the game, Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said he tried to give Cambridge as many opportunities to shoot the ball as possible, but he mainly credited his star player with calling her own number.

"She got going early in the quarter, so we started calling a lot of things for her, but every time we got a stop, and we were able to outlet the ball and get the ball in her hands, she made something happen," McGuff said. "It was a combination of, I tried to call as many things as I could for her, but really, when she got the ball, she just took over."

## Cambridge Meets WNBA Legend

It was a particularly significant performance for Cambridge against Illinois for a number of reasons. Not only did her 41-point game come against Illinois, one of the better teams in the Big Ten, but it also took place in front of her favorite WNBA player, Las Vegas Aces center Aja Wilson.

Wilson, a four-time WNBA MVP and three-time WNBA champion, was in attendance at the game with her boyfriend, three-time NBA All-Star and Miami Heat center Bam Adebayo.

"I didn't even know she was there until halftime," Cambridge said. "Kennedy (Cambridge) and I were literally geeking, and I was just so excited because that's literally a dream come true."

Wilson was impressed enough with Cambridge's performance to visit with her after the game. Cambridge said she was starstruck when she had the chance to meet Wilson.

"There are really no thoughts that can go through your mind when you see your favorite player standing in front of you," Cambridge said. "I think I was embarrassing myself. I hope I wasn't embarrassing myself in front of her, but it's just exciting to see someone that you look up to, right in front of your face."

Wilson was apparently complimentary of the Buckeyes' young guard after the game.

"She told me I had a good game, so I think I'm going to take that and run with it for the rest of my life," Cambridge said. "No matter how bad I play, she told me I had a good game, that's all that matters."

## McGuff Adds Lemmilä Into Starting Lineup

Ohio State's starting lineup had a new look since BSB last went to press. McGuff had previously started games with four guards in the lineup, but in Ohio State's 82-75 loss to UCLA on Dec. 28, sophomore center Elsa Lemmilä was placed into the starting lineup. Lemmilä had played well in the preceding game, a 95-47 win over Western Michigan. Against the Broncos, she scored 15 points on 6-of-6 shooting.

Then, against the Bruins, who are led by All-America center Lauren Betts, Lemmilä held her own. The 6-6 center scored 13 points on 6-of-7 shooting and had seven rebounds and four blocks.

Betts finished the game with 18 points and 16 rebounds, but that is to be expected from arguably the best center in the sport.

Lemmilä was rewarded for her impressive performance against the Bruins with another start against Purdue on New Year's Eve. In her team's 83-56 win over Purdue, Lemmilä wasn't quite as impactful offensively, but on the other end, she had then-season-high totals of five blocks and three steals.

After Ohio State's win over Purdue, McGuff said he wasn't certain if he was going to continue inserting Lemmilä in the starting lineup.

"I still think we're kind of game-to-game," McGuff said. "It was sort of matchup-driven vs. UCLA, but we kind of wanted to give it another look to see how we did today, and like we always do, we'll evaluate that and see what we do moving forward."

After some evaluation, the Buckeyes decided to stick with Lemmilä in the lineup for their next game against Rutgers. That approach worked in a 71-49 win over the Scarlet Knights on Jan. 4, because Lemmilä had her first double-double of the season with 10 points and 11 rebounds. She also had five blocks for the second straight game.

"It was just another good step for her," McGuff said of Lemmilä after the Rutgers game. "She's gotten so much better since the year started, and she just looks more comfortable. I still think she's going to continue to grow and get better, and her presence around the basket has been significant for us as of late."

Lemmilä has been solid around the rim for the Buckeyes in multiple ways. In addition to being able to use her size to finish around the rim, she leads Ohio State with 1.8 blocks per game and is second on the team, averaging 6.1 rebounds per game.

Junior guard Chance Gray joked after the Rutgers game that Lemmilä may even be too active on the glass.

"Elsa is a great rim protector," Gray said. "She actually stole one of my rebounds today. It's great to have her out there. I'm glad she's back and playing really aggressively. She's turned it up a little bit, so I'm happy for her."

## Bucks Competitive In First BIG Test

Ohio State has played two games against bona fide national championship contenders. The first game took place in Connecticut when Ohio State was simply overmatched by the defending national champion Huskies in a 100-68 loss on Nov. 16, but the Buckeyes were much better in their second game against a top-five team when they hosted UCLA.

Ohio State didn't beat the Bruins, losing by seven, but McGuff's group hung around with the defending Big Ten champions for four quarters.

Ohio State trailed by as many as 16 points in the fourth quarter against UCLA but cut into the road team's lead with a scoring run and even applied some slight game pressure when it trailed by just six points with 2:05 remaining.

"I'm certainly not into moral victories, but there is a process of getting better and getting prepared for each game," McGuff said. "I think that we've gotten better as the year has gone on, and we played a great team today. Give UCLA credit. I thought they played really well and deserved to win, but we're getting better."

The difference in the game was rebounding and shot-making. In the loss, the Buckeyes made just 7 of 30 three-point attempts (23.3 percent) and were outrebounded by the Bruins 47-32. McGuff knows the Buckeyes will have to improve in those aspects of the game if or when they play another juggernaut like UCLA.

"We're going to have to make a few more shots and, probably more importantly, find a way to keep a team like UCLA off the boards to put ourselves in position to win. We have to learn from that part of it," McGuff said. "We should take some confidence from our effort and our ability to execute a game plan because we did do that."

## Other Cambridge Is Plank's Lady Buck For December

For a productive month of December, red-shirt-junior guard and Ohio State's spark plug, Kennedy Cambridge, is Plank's Lady Buck.

In seven games, Cambridge averaged 9.9 points per game on 26-of-59 shooting (44.1 percent). However, it's how Cambridge affected the game without scoring that earned her Lady Buck of the Month. The Kentucky transfer averaged 4.3 rebounds, 4.1 assists and a team-high 4.6 steals per game.

Cambridge's productive month helped the Buckeyes finish December with an impressive 6-1 record.



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# Bucks On A Roll In Big Ten Conference Play

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State went 6-1. The Buckeyes dominated in their last two regular-season games against low-major opponents before suffering a close loss to UCLA. Ohio State rebounded with convincing wins over Purdue and Rutgers and then picked up a pair of crucial road wins over Illinois and No. 8 Maryland.

## OSU Easily Handles Norfolk State

Powered by a balanced offensive approach with seven players scoring at least eight points, No. 21 Ohio State (10-1) defeated Norfolk State (5-9) 79-45 in front of 4,816 fans at Value City Arena on Dec. 18.

The Buckeyes, who have at times struggled this season early on in games against lesser competition, had no issues with the Spartans. After the opening quarter, the Buckeyes led by at least 10 points for the rest of the game.

Still, as if on script, the first couple of minutes didn't go very well for the Buckeyes. Ohio State didn't score on its first three possessions, as Norfolk State jumped in front 4-0. However, sophomore point guard Jalonι Cambridge scored the next seven points in the game to put the home team ahead by three.

The Buckeyes' lead did not get bigger than

three points until they closed the first quarter on a 13-4 scoring run to make it 20-10 at the first break. The run featured three-point makes from sophomore guard Ava Watson, redshirt-freshman forward Kylee Kitts and freshman guard Daria Biriuk.

After the game, Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff said he didn't love his team's start but credited his bench with giving the team a spark early on.

"It wasn't ideal, and we subbed a little quicker," McGuff said of his team's start. "I thought the bench gave us a boost pretty quickly, and then we subbed back again, and they kept it going. It was a little better start, but not as good as it could have been."

The Buckeyes expanded their lead to 19 when junior guard Kennedy Cambridge made a three-point jumper and a layup, and freshman guard Bryn Martin capped Ohio State's 7-0 scoring run with a layup with 4:13 left in the first half to make it 37-18.

Norfolk State ended a brief scoring drought with a three-point jumper by Cire Worley at the 3:48 mark of the second quarter, but Ohio State scored the final six points of the first half to go into the intermission with a 43-21 lead.

The Buckeyes continued to play well in the second half. Ohio State scored the first six points of the third quarter, capped by a fastbreak layup by T'Yana Todd to take a 49-21 lead.

Norfolk State managed to trim Ohio

State's to 23 at 4:26 in the third, but Watson and Biriuk each made three-pointers to lead Ohio State on a 7-2 scoring run to push the lead back up to 28, 60-32.

Norfolk State closed the third quarter on a 6-2 spurt but still trailed 62-38 heading into the fourth quarter.

The Buckeye defense played well to start the fourth. Ohio State held the Spartans scoreless through the first 5:23 of the frame and held a 70-38 lead until Jasha Clinton finally scored on a layup off a Buckeye turnover.

From there, the Buckeyes cruised to the 34-point win.

Kitts was Ohio State's leading scorer in the win, shooting 6 of 12 from the field to score 13 points. She also led the team with 10 rebounds. It was Kitts' second double-double of the season. Jalonι Cambridge (11 points) and Biriuk (10) also reached double figures. Kennedy Cambridge had a game-high six assists.

As a team, Ohio State shot 30 of 69 from the field (43.5 percent) and held Norfolk State to an inefficient shooting night. The Spartans made just 18 of 59 field goals (30.5 percent). The Buckeyes struggled from beyond the arc, hitting only 8 of 27 (29.6 percent). Norfolk State also had a hard time from long range, connecting on just 2 of 11 (18.2 percent).

The Spartans were led in scoring by Clinton, who scored a game-high 18 points. Ciara Bailey pulled down 11 rebounds to go with 10 points, but the Buckeyes held a large edge on the glass, 55-32.

## Ohio State Dominates Western Michigan

Fueled by five Buckeyes in double figures, including a season-high 15 points from sophomore center Elsa Lemmilä, No. 19 Ohio State (11-1) boatraced Western Michigan (3-7), 95-47, on Dec. 22 at Value City Arena in front of 5,078 fans.

Ohio State came flying out of the gates with Jalonι Cambridge opening the game with a deep two-pointer before Kitts nailed a jumper to give the Buckeyes an early 4-0 lead that they would never relinquish.

After Western Michigan senior forward Ariana Wilkes made a layup for the Broncos' first points of the night, OSU junior guard Chance Gray nailed a triple to extend Ohio State's lead to five, 7-2 with 6:45 to play in the first.

The trio of Cambridge, Kitts and Gray combined for 22 of the Buckeyes' 28 first-quarter points, and Ohio State led Western Michigan 28-15 at the first break. Kennedy Cambridge had two steals in the period, while Lemmilä added two blocks.

Kennedy Cambridge began the second quarter with a midrange jump shot before Western Michigan senior guard Alli Carlson drilled a three to cut Ohio State's lead to 30-18. Carlson began the contest 4 of 4 from deep for the Broncos, scoring 12 of Western Michigan's first 18 points.

Following Carlson's three-pointer, Ohio State reeled off a 13-0 run capped off by a layup from Lemmilä to push its lead to 25 with 3:42 before intermission. The Buckeyes ended the first half with a 28-point lead after Lemmilä sealed Ohio State's 53-25 halftime advantage with a late free throw.

McGuff praised the frontcourt of Kitts and Lemmilä after the game.

"They both played well, especially Elsa," he said. "You can see each week, she seems to be getting a little better, a little more comfortable. That lineup with them both on the court is a lineup we're going to need to be effective with heading into Big Ten play, so we wanted to give it more of a look."

Ohio State was dominant all around in the opening half. The Buckeyes shot an impressive 66.7 percent from the field (24 of 36), while holding Western Michigan to just 27.0 percent (10 of 37). Ohio State also managed 15 assists to just two turnovers.

Back-to-back layups by Western Michigan sophomore forward D'Myjah Bolds and Wilkes bookended two Kennedy Cambridge free throws, but that would be the extent of the Broncos' success early in the third quarter, and they trailed 55-29 at 9:01.

The Buckeyes quickly went on an 18-0 run to grow the difference to 73-29 with 2:55 remaining in the period.

Sophomore guard Alli Harness ended the run with a three-pointer with just under two minutes remaining in the third quarter. Ohio State and Western Michigan each made a layup before Watson hit a long two-pointer with one second remaining to increase the lead to 77-34 at the end of the frame.

After three dominant quarters by Ohio State, Western Michigan was able to stop some of the bleeding in the final quarter, though it was far too late.

The Broncos and Buckeyes each scored 11 points in a stretch of just over six minutes in the fourth quarter, but Ohio State had already built a 43-point lead with 3:50 left in the game.

Ohio State closed out the game on a 6-0 run in the final 2:30 of the fourth quarter to claim the 95-47 victory.

Jalonι Cambridge and Kitts were Ohio State's second-leading scorers with 14 points apiece. Kitts earned a team-high nine rebounds for the Buckeyes, while Watson dished out six assists.

Carlson led Western Michigan with 15 points, while four other Broncos totaled eight points on the night.

Ohio State shot 55.3 percent from the floor (42 of 76), while holding WMU to 18 of 66 shooting (26.7 percent).

## OSU Comeback Falls Short Against UCLA

No. 19 Ohio State (11-2, 1-1 Big Ten) was not quite up to the task in its first game of the season against a Big Ten title contender. The Buckeyes were defeated by No. 4 UCLA (12-1, 2-0), 82-75, in their Big Ten home opener on Dec. 28 in front of 8,455 fans at Value City Arena.

Ohio State flashed signs of potential in its seven-point loss to the Bruins but ultimately struggled to deal with UCLA's size and was outrebounded 47-32.

"Our effort was there, our intensity was there," McGuff said after the game. "I thought we had a game plan that we followed, but we have to do two things: keep them off the boards a little more effectively and make a few more shots, and we didn't do that."

It was an ugly start for Ohio State, which missed its first four shots from the field to fall behind 7-0. Eventually, Lemmilä made Ohio State's first basket of the game at the 6:58

Ohio State 79, Norfolk State 45							
Dec. 18, 2025							
Value City Arena • Columbus							
		1	2	3	4	F	
Norfolk State (5-9)		10	11	17	7	45	
Ohio State (10-1)		20	23	19	17	79	
Norfolk State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bailey	32	5-12	0-0	5-6	0	3	10
Clark	32	0-6	2-8	1-3	0	2	2
Clinton	29	6-16	5-6	0-0	3	3	18
Richardson	37	2-12	0-2	0-5	3	0	4
Worley	31	1-5	0-0	1-3	0	2	3
Hill	29	2-2	0-0	0-3	0	0	4
Nicks	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Kweti	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Rogers	5	2-3	0-0	0-0	1	1	4
Totals	200	18-59	7-16	11-21	7	11	45
Percentages: FG: 30.5%. FT: 43.8%. Three-point field goals: 2-11 (Clinton 1-3, Worley1-3, Clark 0-3, Richardson 0-2). Team rebounds: 5 Blocked shots: 9 (Bailey 4, Clark 4, Richardson). Turnovers: 21 (Clark 7, Bailey 4, Clinton 4, Richardson 4, Worley, Nicks). Steals: 10 (Richardson 4, Clark 3, Clinton 2, Worley).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	20	6-12	0-0	5-5	1	1	13
Gray	20	3-8	2-2	0-3	2	0	9
K. Cambridge	22	2-6	0-2	0-4	6	2	5
Todd	17	1-9	0-0	1-1	0	2	2
J. Cambridge	20	4-8	3-4	5-3	3	3	11
Watson	23	3-6	0-0	1-0	0	1	8
Martin	21	1-5	0-0	1-2	5	1	2
Lemmilä	14	2-4	5-6	2-4	0	0	9
Biriuk	19	4-5	0-0	1-4	1	2	10
Henry	15	3-4	1-2	1-3	0	2	8
Hobbs	9	1-2	0-0	0-3	0	1	2
Totals	200	30-69	11-16	20-35	18	15	79
Percentages: FG: 43.5%. FT: 68.8%. Three-point field goals: 8-27 (Gray 1-5, Watson 2-4, Todd 0-4, Martin 0-4, Biriuk 2-3, K. Cambridge 1-2, Henry 1-2, J. Cambridge 0-2, Kitts 1-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 6 (Kitts 2, Lemmilä 2, K. Cambridge, J. Cambridge). Turnovers: 19 (J. Cambridge 5, Biriuk 4, Kitts 3, Watson 3, Henry 2, K. Cambridge, Todd). Steals: 27 (K. Cambridge 3, Kitts 2, J. Cambridge 2, Watson 2, Martin 2, Henry 2, Gray, Todd, Biriuk). Officials: Ashlee Goode, Brad Maxey, Fatou Cissoko-Stephens. Attendance: 4,816							

Ohio State 95, Western Michigan 47							
Dec. 22, 2025							
Value City Arena • Columbus							
	1	2	3	4	F		
WMU (3-7)	15	10	9	13	47		
Ohio State (11-1)	28	25	24	18	95		
WMU	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bolds	27	3-8	2-4	2-7	0	4	8
Harness	36	3-16	0-0	2-4	0	1	8
Carlson	38	5-11	0-0	0-4	3	1	15
Starks	34	3-13	1-2	1-3	3	2	8
Muguira Orbe	22	0-5	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Wilkes	20	4-9	0-2	5-5	0	3	8
Dibarboure	9	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Clare Brusek	13	0-2	0-2	2-2	0	1	0
Flynn	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Totals	200	18-66	3-10	12-27	7	14	47
Percentages: FG: 27.3%. FT: 30.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-30 (Harness 2-11, Carlson 5-7, Starks 1-6, Muguira Orbe 0-4, Bonds 0-1, Clare Brusek 0-1). Team rebounds: 2 Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 22 (Carlson 6, Harness 3, Starks 3, Wilkes 3, Bonds 2, Muguira Orbe 2, Clare Brusek 2, Dibarboure). Steals: 3 (Starks 2, Harness).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	23	7-12	0-0	2-7	0	0	14
Gray	24	5-10	0-0	0-4	4	0	13
K. Cambridge	20	4-8	2-3	0-2	4	1	10
Todd	16	2-4	0-0	1-1	0	0	5
J. Cambridge	22	7-13	0-0	1-5	4	0	14
Watson	24	3-5	0-0	2-4	6	3	6
Martin	24	2-6	0-0	0-3	2	2	4
Lemmilä	14	6-6	3-6	0-4	1	1	15
Hobbs	13	2-3	0-0	0-2	0	1	5
Biriuk	10	1-3	0-0	1-2	1	2	2
Henry	10	3-6	1-2	2-3	0	3	7
Totals	200	30-69	6-11	10-39	22	13	95
Percentages: FG: 55.3%. FT: 54.5%. Three-point field goals: 5-22 (Gray 3-6, Todd 1-2, Hobbs 1-2, Kitts 0-2, K. Cambridge 0-2, J. Cambridge 0-2, Martin 0-2, Biriuk 0-2, Watson 0-1, Henry 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Lemmilä 2, Biriuk). Turnovers: 7 (Gray 2, J. Cambridge 2, Watson, Biriuk, Henry). Steals: 14 (K. Cambridge 4, Gray 2, Lemmilä 2, Biriuk 2, Kitts, J. Cambridge, Watson, Henry). Officials: Josh Howell, Lisa Jones, Ifeyinwa Seales Attendance: 5,078							

UCLA 82 , Ohio State 75							
Dec. 28, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus							
		1	2	3	4	F	
UCLA (12-1, 2-0)		18	21	24	19	82	
Ohio State (11-2, 1-1)		16	17	23	19	75	
UCLA	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Jaquez	31	4-8	2-3	2-6	1	4	12
Betts	31	9-18	0-0	9-7	4	2	18
Rice	33	6-12	3-3	2-2	4	1	16
Leger-Walker	32	1-7	1-2	0-2	4	4	4
Kneepkens	30	4-12	1-1	1-4	2	2	12
Betts	13	2-6	1-1	2-2	1	0	5
Dugalic	26	7-9	1-3	1-4	0	2	15
Bilic	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	33-73	9-13	19-28	16	15	82
Percentages: FG: 45.2%. FT: 69.2%. Three-point field goals: 7-22 (Kneepkens 3-9, Jaquez 2-5, Leger-Walker 1-4, Rice 1-2, Dugalic 0-2). Team rebounds: 3 Blocked shots: 4 (Betts 3, Dugalic.) Turnovers: 16 (Betts 4, Dugalic 4, Leger-Walker 3, Kneepkens 3, Rice 2). Steals: 8 (Rice 2, Leger-Walker 2, Jaquez, Kneepkens, Betts, Bilic).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	20	0-4	2-2	1-3	2	3	2
Lemmilä	32	6-7	0-1	2-5	0	3	13
Gray	31	2-7	3-3	0-1	4	1	7
K. Cambridge	30	2-11	0-0	3-5	3	4	5
J. Cambridge	37	11-19	5-6	0-2	4	4	28
Watson	14	1-2	2-2	0-1	2	1	4
Todd	24	6-13	0-0	1-2	1	1	16
Martin	10	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hobbs	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-64	12-14	10-22	16	17	75
Percentages: FG: 43.8%. FT: 85.7%. Three-point field goals: 7-30 (Todd 4-9, K. Cambridge 1-7, J. Cambridge 1-4, Gray 0-4, Lemmilä 1-2, Kitts 0-2, Watson 0-1, Martin 0-1). Team rebounds: 6 Blocked shots: 4 (Lemmilä 4). Turnovers: 12 (Gray 3, Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge 2, Watson 2, Kitts, K. Cambridge, Team). Steals: 8 (K. Cambridge 4, J. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä). Officials: Chuck Gonzalez, Brian Hall, Maggie Tieman. Attendance: 8,455							

mark, and after Jalon Cambridge converted a three-point play, Watson tied the game at seven with a layup. However, UCLA responded with a 9-3 scoring run capped by a pair of Kiki Rice free throws to go back in front 16-10 with 1:40 left in the frame.

Jalon Cambridge helped Ohio State trim the deficit to two points with a first-quarter-ending layup to make it 18-16.

The Buckeyes had another scoring drought to start the second quarter and fell behind 23-16 on a Gabriela Jaquez layup at 7:56. Then, after back-to-back baskets from Jalon and Kennedy Cambridge, UCLA went on a 7-0 scoring run to lead 30-20.

The Bruins' lead grew to 11, 38-27, with 1:42 left in the quarter, but the Buckeyes finished the half with a 6-1 spurt to trail 39-33.

After shooting just 1 of 13 from three-point range in the first half, the Buckeyes made a couple of threes in the first two minutes of the third quarter, one apiece by each

Ohio State 83, Purdue 56							
Dec. 31, 2025 Mackey Arena • West Lafayette, Ind.							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Ohio State (12-2, 2-1)	30	17	23	13	83		
Purdue (8-6, 0-3)	17	11	17	11	56		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	19	1-4	7-8	5-5	3	4	9
Lemmilä	31	4-9	0-0	1-4	2	3	8
Gray	30	6-14	0-0	0-1	1	2	14
K. Cambridge	23	5-8	5-6	2-1	4	4	16
J. Cambridge	30	6-16	0-0	0-7	7	2	14
Watson	18	4-5	2-2	0-1	1	2	13
Todd	15	0-4	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Martin	18	2-7	0-0	1-1	1	3	5
Hobbs	5	1-2	0-0	1-4	0	1	2
Henry	7	0-0	2-2	0-0	0	1	2
Biriuk	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	29-69	16-18	12-27	19	25	83
Percentages: FG: 42.0%. FT: 88.9%. Three-point field goals: 9-25 (Gray 2-6, J. Cambridge 2-5, Watson 3-4, Martin 1-3, Todd 0-3, K. Cambridge 1-1, Kitts 0-1, Lemmilä 0-1, Hobbs 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 10 (Lemmilä 5, J. Cambridge 3, K. Cambridge, Martin). Turnovers: 13 (J. Cambridge 5, Lemmilä 3, K. Cambridge 2, Gray, Watson, Team). Steals: 13 (J. Cambridge 5, Lemmilä 3, K. Cambridge 3, Watson 2).							
Purdue	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
McCarthy	7	0-2	0-0	2-6	0	0	0
Karsh	27	1-5	0-0	1-2	1	0	2
K. Smith	26	1-10	2-2	0-3	2	2	5
Layden-Zay	37	4-14	6-6	1-6	1	2	17
Daye	26	3-7	4-8	2-2	1	3	10
N. Smith	23	3-5	5-5	0-2	1	2	11
Puryear	21	2-6	2-6	4-2	1	0	6
Layden	16	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	1	0
Stahl	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Gordon	12	2-4	1-2	0-0	0	1	5
Totals	200	16-54	20-29	13-25	8	13	56
Percentages: FG: 29.6%. FT: 69.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-22 (Layden-Zay 3-11, K. Smith 1-7, Karsh 0-1, Daye 0-1, N. Smith 0-1, Layden 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 4 (Puryear 2, Layden-Zay, N. Smith). Turnovers: 26 (Layden-Zay 6, Layden 4, McCarthy 3, K. Smith 3, Daye 3, N. Smith 2, Team 2, Karsh, Puryear, Stahl). Steals: 7 (Layden-Zay 3, Karsh, Daye, N. Smith, Puryear). Officials: Felicia Grinter, Michael McConnell, Jamie Broderick. Attendance: 4,102							

of the Cambridge sisters, to make the score 41-39 at 8:04.

UCLA grew the lead back to six at 5:40 in the third after buckets from senior center Lauren Betts and graduate power forward Angela Dugalić, but Todd answered with a three-point jumper that made the score 47-44.

Betts scored the next four points, but Todd made another three-pointer to make it 51-47. The Buckeyes went scoreless for over two minutes, and UCLA took a 57-47 lead with 2:11 left in the third quarter on a Rice layup.

After falling behind by 11 points, the Buckeyes went on a 7-0 scoring run, capped by another three-pointer by Todd, that made the score 60-56. The Buckeyes had all of the momentum with a few seconds left in the third quarter until Rice drained a three-pointer

from beyond half-court at the buzzer.

UCLA used Rice's shot to spark momentum in the fourth quarter. The Bruins opened the final frame on a 13-4 scoring run to take a comfortable 16-point lead at the 5:44 mark.

The Buckeyes didn't quit after facing the huge deficit. Instead, after a three-point play by Jalon Cambridge and a layup by Dugalić, they scored nine straight points to make the score 78-72 with 2:05 to go. However, UCLA graduate guard Gianna Kneepkens made a clutch three-point shot on the next possession to build the lead back to nine.

Gray converted on a three-point play on the other end to get the lead back down to six points, but Ohio State was held scoreless over the final 1:28 to lose by seven points.

The Buckeyes were led in scoring by Jalon Cambridge, who shot 11 of 19 from the field and scored 28 points in the loss. Todd (16 points) and Lemmilä (13 points) also reached double figures. Jalon Cambridge and Gray led Ohio State with four assists each, while Kennedy Cambridge had a team-high eight rebounds.

Ohio State was 28 of 64 (43.8 percent) from the floor in its loss, while the Bruins connected on 33 of 73 field goals (45.2 percent).

UCLA was led by Betts, who had 18 points and a game-high 16 rebounds. Betts, who had nine offensive rebounds, helped the Bruins to a 47-32 edge on the glass.

**OSU Defense Shines In Win Over Purdue**

Ohio State (12-2, 2-1) bounced back from a close loss to UCLA with an 83-56 road win over Purdue (8-6, 0-3) in front of 4,102 fans at Mackey Arena on New Year's Eve.

The Buckeyes were dominant on both ends of the floor, but they were especially strong on defense, holding Purdue to just 16-of-54 shooting (29.6 percent) in the win. The Buckeyes also forced 26 turnovers, good for 29 points.

"I was really happy with the way we started the game," McGuff said after the game. "I thought in particular our full-court pressure was really impactful in making it difficult on Purdue. We imposed our will on the game from the start, and that's what I was hoping would happen coming out of the UCLA game."

The Buckeyes wasted no time in building their lead, making four of their first five field goals to open the game on an 11-2 scoring run. Purdue's Madison Layden-Zay stopped the Buckeyes' surge momentarily with a three-pointer, but after both teams traded buckets, Ohio State scored six straight points to lead 19-7.

After Purdue ended a field-goal drought with a layup by Kendall Puryear at the 2:56 mark, Watson and Martin hit back-to-back three-point jumpers to build the lead to 25-10.

The Boilermakers went on a 7-0 scoring run at the end of the first quarter, but Jalon Cambridge made it 30-17 with a three-point jumper right before time expired in the first quarter.

Ohio State wasn't quite as effective offensively in the second quarter but didn't let the Boilermakers get into any sort of offensive rhythm. The Buckeyes held Purdue scoreless for over five minutes in the middle of the second quarter to take a 41-19 lead on a Gray layup with 4:44 to go before halftime.

Continued On Page 34

# Plank's Cafe



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Nashville, Tenn.

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# Jaloni Cambridge Has Career Game Vs. Illini

Continued From Page 33

Purdue slightly cut into Ohio State's lead with a late 7-2 scoring run, but Watson gave the Buckeyes a 47-28 halftime lead with a pair of free throws.

The Boilers shot just 7.7 percent in the second quarter, connecting on one of their 13 attempts.

The Buckeyes were just as efficient to start the second half. Gray helped lead Ohio State on a third-quarter-opening 7-0 scoring run with a three-point jumper at the 8:58 mark.

Kennedy Cambridge made her own three-point jumper that made the score 57-29 in favor of the visiting Buckeyes with 7:12 left in the third.

With a large lead, McGuff was able to play several backup players as early as the third quarter. Purdue had a little bit more success offensively with some of the Buckeyes' bench players in the game, but Ohio State scored enough on the other end to take a 70-45 lead into the fourth quarter.

Jaloni Cambridge made her second three-point jumper of the game to open the fourth quarter, and the Buckeyes scored the first five points of the final frame.

From there, though, the Buckeyes struggled offensively. Ohio State connected on just two of its 17 field-goal attempts in the final quarter (11.7 percent). Still, the Buckeye defense was strong enough to preserve the 27-point win, with the Boilermakers hitting 3 of 10 in the final 10 minutes.

While Purdue struggled all afternoon to find a rhythm, Ohio State boasted adequate shooting numbers, despite the poor fourth quarter. The Buckeyes shot 29 of 69 (42.0 percent) from the field, which included 9 of 25 (36.0 percent) from three-point range.

It was a balanced scoring effort from the Buckeyes. Kennedy Cambridge, who scored 16 points on 5-of-8 shooting, was the leading scorer, but Gray (14 points), Jaloni Cambridge (14 points) and Watson (13 points) also reached double figures.

Kitts had a game-high 10 rebounds, while Jaloni Cambridge had a game-high seven assists and five steals.

Purdue was led in scoring by Layden-Zay, who had 17 points on 4-of-14 shooting to go with a team high eight rebounds. However, she was forced into a game-high six turnovers.

## Bucks Dominate Glass In Win Over RU

It wasn't always pretty, but Ohio State (13-2, 3-1) played well enough defensively and dominated the glass to secure a 71-49 win over Rutgers (8-7, 0-4 Big Ten) on Jan. 4 in

front of 6,201 fans at Value City Arena. The Buckeyes shot just 27 of 65 (41.5 percent) from the field but forced 21 turnovers and outrebounded Rutgers 38 to 25.

"I thought that rebounding was a big key for us today. We were much better on the boards," McGuff said following the game. "Our defense in the second half was really good, and our rebounding was good. That has to be something that we continue to strive to have more consistency and discipline with if we want to continue to get better."

As it has done several times this season, Ohio State struggled in the opening minutes. The Buckeyes made just three of their first nine field-goal attempts to fall behind 9-6 before Kennedy Cambridge made two free throws to start an 8-0 scoring run.

The run, which made the score 14-9 with 4:15 remaining in the first quarter, featured three-point makes from Todd and Kennedy Cambridge.

However, Ohio State ended the first quarter on a scoring drought that lasted over four minutes, and the Scarlet Knights took a 17-14 lead with an 8-0 scoring run.

Jaloni Cambridge tied the game at 17 early in the second quarter with a three-point jumper, but Rutgers responded with its own triple by Nene Ndiaye 30 seconds later.

Neither team made a field goal for over three minutes until Jaloni Cambridge made a midrange jumper to tie the game at 20.

Both offenses remained cold until later in the second quarter when Lemmilä started an 11-0 scoring run with a free throw. During the run, Kennedy Cambridge made a layup before Watson nailed a three-pointer, and Gray capped the run by converting a three-point play on a fast break with 1:14 before the break.

Rutgers' Kaylah Ivey made a three-pointer before halftime, but Ohio State still carried a 31-26 lead into the locker room.

The Scarlet Knights scored the first basket of the third quarter on a Faith Blackstone layup, but Gray helped Ohio State grow its lead to 39-28 with six straight points as part of an 8-0 run.

However, Ohio State struggled down the stretch of the third quarter, making only one of its last five field-goal attempts, and Rutgers cut its deficit to 51-42.

After the teams traded layups to start the fourth quarter, Ohio State went on an 8-0 run with four of those points coming off offensive rebounds to lead 61-44 with 5:36 remaining.

The Buckeyes continued their fourth-quarter dominance from there, finishing the game on a 10-3 scoring run to win by 22 points.

The Buckeyes were led in the win by Jaloni Cambridge, who scored 18 points on 7-of-

## Ohio State 71, Rutgers 49

Jan. 4, 2026  
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Rutgers (8-7, 0-4)	17	9	16	7	49
Ohio State (13-2, 3-1)	14	17	20	20	71

Rutgers	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Ndiaye	26	3-8	0-0	0-2	3	2 6
Blackstone	34	6-16	1-4	0-5	1	2 15
Perkins	34	1-6	0-0	1-2	2	1 2
Lester	31	7-14	0-0	2-4	2	1 14
Ivey	34	3-8	0-0	0-3	5	3 8
Bates	20	0-0	0-0	0-1	1	3 0
Wheeler	5	1-1	0-0	1-2	0	1 2
Walker	7	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0 0
Young	7	1-1	0-1	0-0	0	0 2
Moore	1	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Brandt	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>22-56</b>	<b>1-5</b>	<b>5-20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13 49</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 39.3%. FT: 20.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-17 (Blackstone 2-7, Ivey 2-7, Perkins 0-1, Lester 0-1, Moore 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Blackstone, Lester). **Turnovers:** 21 (Team 5, Ndiaye 4, Blackstone 4, Ivey 3, Bates 3, Perkins, Lester). **Steals:** 8 (Perkins 4, Ivey 2, Ndiaye, Blackstone).

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Kitts	26	4-7	0-0	3-5	2	1 8
Lemmilä	30	4-11	2-5	4-7	4	2 10
Gray	32	7-15	2-2	1-1	2	0 17
K. Cambridge	31	3-7	2-2	5-3	7	0 9
J. Cambridge	32	7-18	3-4	0-3	4	4 18
Todd	13	1-2	1-2	0-0	1	3 4
Watson	18	1-3	0-0	1-1	1	2 3
Martin	11	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0 0
Biriuk	2	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0 0
Hobbs	3	0-0	2-2	0-1	0	0 2
Henry	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-65</b>	<b>12-17</b>	<b>14-24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12 71</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 41.5%. FT: 70.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-16 (Gray 1-6, J. Cambridge 1-4, K. Cambridge 1-2, Watson 1-2, Todd 1-1, Lemmilä 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Lemmilä 5, K. Cambridge, Martin). **Turnovers:** 12 (Lemmilä 3, Gray 3, Kitts 2, K. Cambridge 2, Martin 2, J. Cambridge, Todd, Watson, Hobbs). **Steals:** 12 (K. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge 2, Watson 2, Kitts, Gray, Martin). **Officials:** Kristen Bell, Gina Cross, Tiara Cruse. **Attendance:** 6,201

## Ohio State 78, Illinois 69

Jan. 7, 2026  
State Farm Center • Champaign, Ill.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (14-2, 4-1)	19	17	16	26	78
Illinois (13-3, 3-2)	22	14	10	23	69

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Kitts	31	4-6	1-2	1-4	1	4 10
Lemmilä	31	2-4	1-1	2-6	4	2 5
Gray	38	6-13	5-5	1-3	4	0 18
K. Cambridge	32	2-7	0-0	2-4	0	3 4
J. Cambridge	39	15-25	9-12	0-6	6	2 41
Watson	19	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	3 0
Todd	8	0-5	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Martin	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Hobbs	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>29-60</b>	<b>16-20</b>	<b>6-27</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14 78</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 48.3%. FT: 80.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-15. (J. Cambridge 2-5, Gray 1-4, K. Cambridge 0-3, Todd 0-2, Kitts 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (K. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä). **Turnovers:** 13 (Gray 4, J. Cambridge 3, Kitts 2, Lemmilä 2, K. Cambridge 2). **Steals:** 6 (K. Cambridge 3, J. Cambridge 2, Kitts).

Illinois	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Wallace	36	7-13	1-1	1-3	0	4 17
Parchment	31	8-14	4-4	3-5	2	2 20
Jackson	20	3-7	2-2	1-4	3	3 8
Dolan	31	2-12	0-0	2-3	1	2 4
Brown-Hagger	27	1-2	1-2	0-0	3	3 3
Webber	28	3-11	3-3	1-6	3	4 9
Vasconcelos	7	2-3	0-0	0-0	0	2 4
Guyton	18	2-4	0-0	2-4	1	1 4
Benson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>28-66</b>	<b>11-12</b>	<b>12-26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>22 69</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 42.4%. FT: 91.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 2-13 (Wallace 2-7, Parchment 0-2, Dolan 0-2, Webber 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Wallace, Dolan). **Turnovers:** 17 (Webber 4, Vasconcelos 4, Wallace 3, Jackson 3, Brown-Hagger 2, Parchment). **Steals:** 3 (Jackson, Dolan, Brown-Hagger). **Officials:** Ashlee Goode, Michael Murray, Maggie Tieman. **Attendance:** 4,237

Buckeyes and Fighting Illini from the very start of the game. Kennedy Cambridge gave Ohio State an early 2-0 lead with a layup, but Illinois freshman forward Cearah Parchment made two straight layups to put the home team ahead 4-2 at the 7:59 mark of the first quarter.

Gray put Ohio State up by one with a three-point jumper, but Parchment helped Illinois respond by converting a three-point play.

It wasn't until near the end of the first quarter, when Illinois went on a 6-0 run, that a team created a lead bigger than one possession. However, Kitts helped keep Ohio State within reach with a midrange jumper that made the score 22-19 heading into the second quarter.

After falling behind again by five in the second, Ohio State reclaimed the lead with a 7-0 scoring run. Kitts fueled the spurt with a three-point jumper that tied the game at 26 with 7:58 to go before halftime, and Jaloni Cambridge capped the run with a pair of free throws, leaving the Buckeyes ahead, 28-26.

The lead continued to go back and forth. The Fighting Illini took a two-point advantage late in the second quarter, but Jaloni Cambridge tied it up at 36 with 44 seconds left before halftime with another pair of free throws. The score would remain 36-36 as both teams went to their locker rooms.

After trading baskets with Illinois to start the second half, Ohio State went back ahead 44-40 at the 4:53 mark with a 6-0 scoring

18 shooting. Gray (17) and Lemmilä (10) also reached double figures. Lemmilä was particularly sharp in the win with game-high totals of 11 rebounds and five blocks.

Kennedy Cambridge also had an impressive performance, scoring nine points and finishing the game with team-high totals of seven assists and three steals.

As a team, Rutgers shot 22 of 56 from the floor (39.3 percent). Blackstone led the Knights with 15 points.

## Cambridge Scores 41 In Road Win

No. 19 Ohio State (14-2, 4-1) outlasted Illinois (13-3, 3-2), 78-69, in a back-and-forth battle in front of 4,237 fans at State Farm Center in Champaign, Ill., on Jan. 7.

As she has been many times this season, Jaloni Cambridge was the hero in the win. The Buckeye guard scored a career-high and game-high total of 41 points on 15-of-25 shooting and also added a game-high six assists.

"It was a really special performance by Jaloni," McGuff said. "Obviously, we've seen how good she is, but she took it to another level tonight. It was just really fun to watch, fun to coach, and she just put us on her back and carried us to a big win."

It was a back-and-forth bout between the



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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 89, Maryland 76

Jan. 11, 2026  
Xfinity Center • College Park, Md.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (15-2, 5-1)	12	28	21	28	89
Maryland (16-2, 4-2)	24	18	17	17	76

Ohio State	Total		FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A					
Kitts	32	7-13	1-1	4-4	3	1	18
Lemmilä	37	4-7	0-0	2-9	3	3	8
Gray	30	5-10	0-0	0-1	3	0	11
K. Cambridge	29	5-10	1-2	1-1	4	2	14
J. Cambridge	40	9-19	8-8	0-9	8	3	28
Watson	18	3-6	0-0	2-1	1	2	7
Todd	5	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	1	0
Martin	9	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	3	3
Totals	200	34-68	10-11	11-28	22	15	89

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 90.9%. Three-point field goals: 11-22 (Kitts 3-5, K. Cambridge 3-5, J. Cambridge 2-5, Gray 1-3, Watson 1-2, Martin 1-1, Todd 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Lemmilä). Turnovers: 11 (J. Cambridge 4, Gray 3, Kitts 2, Lemmilä, Todd). Steals: 9 (K. Cambridge 4, J. Cambridge 2, Kitts, Gray, Watson).

Maryland	Total		FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A					
Momodu	15	2-5	1-2	4-4	0	2	5
Mack	27	1-5	1-2	0-1	4	0	3
Poffenbarger	25	2-6	0-0	1-3	6	0	4
Okananwa	30	9-20	9-10	7-2	2	3	27
Garzon	40	7-14	0-0	0-8	5	3	19
Boiko	27	2-6	0-0	1-2	1	0	4
Walker	8	1-2	0-0	1-0	0	2	2
Welson	18	4-10	0-0	0-0	0	1	12
McLean	10	0-0	0-2	1-2	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-68	11-16	16-23	18	11	76

Percentages: FG: 41.2%. FT: 68.8%. Three-point field goals: 9-27 (Garzon 5-10, Welson 4-8, Okananwa 0-4, Mack 0-2, Poffenbarger 0-2, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Boiko 2, Poffenbarger). Turnovers: 17 (Mack 5, Okananwa 4, Poffenbarger 3, Garzon 2, Boiko 2, Walker). Steals: 5 (Okananwa 2, Boiko 2, Garzon). Officials: Mark Berger, Doug Knight, Cameron Inouye. Attendance: 8,623

run.

Illinois sophomore forward Berry Wallace ended the run with a jumper at the 4:31 mark, but Jaloní Cambridge scored eight points over the final four minutes of the third quarter to help Ohio State lead 52-46 heading into the fourth.

Illinois opened the final quarter with a layup by Lety Vasconcelos, but Ohio State extended its lead to 13, 61-48, with a 9-0 scoring run that Jaloní Cambridge fueled

with seven points.

Illinois responded with a 7-0 scoring run that cut Ohio State's lead to 61-55, and after Gray made a midrange jumper at the 5:13 mark, Wallace drained a three-pointer that made the score 63-58 with 4:36 remaining.

Kitts made a clutch and-one layup and the ensuing free throw to put Ohio State back up by eight points with 3:38 to go in the game, and Jaloní Cambridge put Ohio State up 10, 68-58, with a midrange jumper. After Illinois scored five straight points, Cambridge scored five straight by herself to give Ohio State a 73-63 lead with 1:13 remaining before the final buzzer.

The Buckeyes missed three of their eight free throws down the stretch but forced the Fighting Illini to miss their final four field-goal attempts in the last 20 seconds, and they won the game by nine.

Jaloní Cambridge was by far Ohio State's leading scorer in the win, but Gray (18) and Kitts (10) also reached double figures. Lemmilä grabbed eight rebounds for Ohio State in the win, although the Illini had the edge on the boards, 38-33.

Ohio State shot well from the field. The Buckeyes connected on 29 of 60 field-goal attempts (48.3 percent) and held Illinois to 28-of-66 shooting (42.4 percent).

Parchment was Illinois' leading scorer with 20 points after shooting 8 of 14 from the field.

OSU Makes 11 Threes To Upset Terps

No. 19 Ohio State (15-2, 5-1) pulled off an 89-76 upset win over No. 8 Maryland (16-2, 4-2) in front of 8,623 fans at the XFINITY Center in College Park, Md., on Jan 11.

The Buckeyes used a tenacious effort on the defensive end and some efficient three-point shooting to pull off their biggest win of the season.

In addition to turning over the Terrapins 17 times, the Buckeyes shot 11 of 22 from three-point range (50.0 percent), their best mark of the season.

Ohio State didn't get the start it was looking for against the Terrapins. Before they scored a single point, the Buckeyes gave up

back-to-back and-one layups to Maryland guard Oluchi Okananwa to trail 6-0 at 8:32. Kitts got Ohio State on the board with a three-point jumper, but Maryland extended its lead to 13 points, 22-9, with the aid of a trio of three-pointers, all by Yarden Garzon, in the first quarter.

Martin helped Ohio State stay in the game with a three-pointer at the 1:34 mark, but the Buckeyes wouldn't score the rest of the opening frame to trail Maryland 24-12.

Maryland scored field goals on its first two possessions of the second quarter, but Ohio State responded with a 12-2 scoring run that made the score 30-25 with 7:02 remaining before halftime. Kennedy Cambridge led the Buckeyes on the run by draining back-to-back three-point jumpers.

Maryland responded by holding Ohio State scoreless for nearly three minutes to take a 34-25 lead. However, Jaloní Cambridge snapped Ohio State's scoring drought with a pair of free throws, and on the other end, the Buckeyes amped up their defensive pressure.

Forcing four Maryland turnovers the rest of the half, Ohio State was able to go on a 15-6 scoring run to tie the game at 40. Garzon made a midrange jumper in the final seconds of the half to put Maryland up 42-40 heading into the third quarter.

Early in the third, Kitts led Ohio State on an 8-0 run with a three-point jumper and a converted three-point play. Garzon ended the run with a layup at the 5:27 mark, but Ohio State still led 50-48.

After Watson extended Ohio State's lead back to four with a midrange jumper, Maryland surged back in front with a 9-2 scoring run. Gray scored five points in the final minute to put the Buckeyes up 61-59 heading into the fourth quarter.

Maryland made an early three-point jumper in the fourth, but Kitts responded with her own three-pointer at the 8:09 mark that put Ohio State ahead 66-62.

After both teams traded buckets, Maryland made another three-pointer with 7:03 to go before Kennedy Cambridge drained a three that made the score 71-67 with 6:40 left in the game.

Maryland continued its hot shooting start in the fourth quarter when Okananwa made a layup at the 6:14 mark, but Ohio State created some much-needed separation with a key 10-0 scoring run.

Jaloní Cambridge led the Buckeyes with eight points on the run, which included two three-point jumpers.

Maryland scored the next four points but made only one field goal in the final 3:58.

"I thought we showed really good competitive character, because they punched us in the face to start the game and we didn't react well to it, but at the end of the first quarter, we really got ourselves together," McGuff said after the game. "We came out, and we fought, and we stayed together, and as the game went on, our execution improved. By the time we got to the second half, we were really fighting and scrapping, and our execution was at a high level. That allowed us to get the victory."

Ohio State was led in scoring by Jaloní Cambridge, who played all 40 minutes and had a game-high 28 points (9-of-19 shooting). She also tacked on nine rebounds and another game-high total of eight assists.

Kitts also had a stellar performance, finishing the game with 18 points on (7-of-13 shooting) and adding eight rebounds. Gray (11 points) and Kennedy Cambridge (14 points) also finished with double figures. Lemmilä had a game-high 11 rebounds.

Ohio State shot an efficient 34 of 68 from the field (50.0 percent) and held Maryland to just 28-of-68 shooting (41.2 percent).

The Terrapins were led by Okananwa, who scored 27 points and grabbed a team-high nine rebounds in the loss.

Before BSB next goes to press, Ohio State will play four games. The Buckeyes will start at home with a game against Penn State on Jan. 14 (6:30 p.m., B1G-Plus) and will then wrap up their nonconference schedule with a matchup against TCU on Jan. 19 (Noon, FOX).

Ohio State will go back home to face Indiana on Jan. 22 (8 p.m., Peacock) and will travel to No. 14 Iowa on Jan. 25 (2 p.m., Peacock).



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# Halliday Happy In NHL Even Without Homecoming

Business is business with little time for sentimentality in the NHL, as Ottawa Senators forward Stephen Halliday found out in December.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

He made his NHL debut and recorded an assist against the Anaheim Ducks on Nov. 20 and played in the next three games as well, picking up another assist in the third game.

Halliday was loaned to Belleville of the American Hockey League on Nov. 28 but was recalled on Dec. 4 and played three consecutive games, earning another helper, heading into the game at the Columbus Blue Jackets on Dec. 11 in what was going to be a special homecoming for the former Ohio State standout.

He spent two seasons with Ohio State in 2022-23 and 2023-24, leading the team in scoring in both seasons. In 78 career games, Halliday had 19 goals and 58 assists for 77 points and helped the Buckeyes reach the NCAA tournament in his final season before signing with the Senators on March 22, 2024.

But with the Senators on a three-game losing streak and losses in five of six, coach Travis Green opted to make lineup changes against the Blue Jackets, and one of them was sitting Halliday.

"We're all disappointed that he didn't play here," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "I don't think when you get to that level, they're caring if he played for the Buckeyes or not, right?"

It was not what Halliday had hoped for, but he took it in stride.

"When it's my time, I'm going to go out

and play hard every game and see what happens," he told BSB on the morning of the game.

The team had arrived in town the day before, so Halliday was able to go to dinner with current Buckeyes and former teammates Davis Burnside, Jake Dunlap, Nathan McBrayer and Max Montes.

Asked if they were coming to the game that night, Halliday said, "They would have been if I was playing."

However, maybe Green had a soft spot because Halliday skated in the pre-game warmup. It's not unusual for an extra player or two to be out there in case a player slated to be in the lineup was considered a game-time decision because of illness or injury but that was not the case for the Senators on that night.

Earlier in the day, Green praised Halliday, a fourth-round (No. 104) pick by Ottawa in the 2022 NHL draft.

"He's a gifted player. He's shown some signs of what he can do and what he's capable of doing," he said. "He's still a young player in the league and understanding the system, understanding certain details and how important it is every shift."

The coach showed his confidence in Halliday after Columbus by playing him the next seven games and 11 of 13 through Jan. 8, and Halliday responded with four assists, including two vs. the Toronto Maple Leafs on Dec. 27.

He was again assigned to Belleville on Jan. 10 and may miss another opportunity to play in Nationwide Arena when the Senators return on Jan. 20.

In 18 games, he had six assists and averaged 8 minutes, 12 seconds of ice time.

He was putting up good numbers despite the unfamiliar role of being on the

third or fourth line with limited ice time. The most he had played in a game was 11 minutes, 41 seconds, well below the 18 to 20 minutes he would log as a first- or second-line center with the Buckeyes and Belleville.

"I always felt like being a bigger guy (6-4, 214), I could play pretty much up and down the lineup," he said. "College and the AHL was a little bit more offense-oriented. But I think right now I'm just trying to work on the little details of trying to be an everyday player in the NHL and take it day by day."

"Whether it's five minutes a night, 10 minutes a night, I'm trying to provide some sort of contribution, whether it's a big hit, a blocked shot, and maybe chip in offensively occasionally."

Rohlik is proud of the way Halliday earned his way to the NHL by bettering himself at every level.

## Long Journey

Halliday began reshaping his body in the third of his four junior hockey seasons for Dubuque (Iowa) in 2020-21 before joining the Buckeyes.

It was the low point for Halliday, who decided after that season to drop 35 pounds.

"I kind of took it upon myself that I want to play hockey and I want to get better and that weight was the biggest thing holding me back, so I felt I definitely addressed it," he told BSB in September 2022.

In his first season at Ohio State, he was honorable-mention All-Big Ten when he had 41 points (nine goals and a team-high 32 assists).

Following the season, he sought to improve his skating and worked with Shelley Kettles, a former figure skater who was the Senators' technical skating specialist.

"It's pretty amazing, really. I love his resiliency when you think of how highly touted he was," Rohlik said. "And then he had to go through those years in junior, and he stuck it out. The initial team that he committed to said, 'You're not good enough. We don't need you right now,' but he went back and he dug in and then he came here and he dug in."

"He left after two years and he's still digging in. I'm just so happy for him, and I think he's still scratching the surface, to be honest, with where he could be. He's super talented. Always has been, but he's gone through some challenges to get himself in the spot he's in right now."

Halliday called his first NHL game surreal.

"It was special," he said. "I felt happier for my parents than for myself because they've been there through the ups and downs in my career. I was thankful for all the coaches that helped me, like (Rohlik) and JB (assistant coach Bittner) and all the other guys at Ohio State, too."

Halliday made a good impression in his debut. He had the primary assist on the tying power-play goal by Shane Pinto in the second period before Drake Batherson scored for the Senators in the third for a 3-2 win over the Ducks.

"Obviously, a really skilled, high-hockey IQ player," Batherson said of Halliday, according to NHL.com. "He makes that play

through the seam, saucer pass right on the tape (to Pinto). Impressive stuff."

That the Senators' staff were confident enough in Halliday to put him on the power play in his first NHL game was notable.

"I think he's a great player. I think he's really good with the puck. He's a smart player," Senators and German Olympic team forward Tim Stutzle told BSB. "He can really shoot the puck, and, yeah, he's really skilled so I think it's just a matter of time for him until he's going to stay up full time, and he's going to grind in the summer and come back in great shape and make a push to make the team."

## Buckeye At Heart

That's what Halliday plans to do in the offseason when he returns to Ohio State to work out.

"I love coming back in the summer, working with Taylor (Brown), the strength coach. It's been good," he said. "We're trying to get a bigger pro group every year to come back and push the current guys, and also Taylor and the OSU facilities are world-renowned, so it's always fun to just get back."

Halliday said his best memories of Ohio State are seeing his former teammates develop from where they were then to where they are now.

One is defenseman Cole McWard, who scored in his NHL debut with the Vancouver Canucks on April 8, 2023, but played only five more games with the Canucks with his last appearance on Nov. 23, 2023.

McWard eventually signed with the New York Islanders and made his long-awaited return to the NHL on Jan. 1 after being recalled from their Bridgeport affiliate in the American Hockey League.

Boston Bruins defenseman Mason Lohrei and Montreal Canadiens goalie Jakub Dobes also played with Halliday at Ohio State.

"It's cool seeing those guys, following them and trying to climb the ranks with them," Halliday said.

## Take A Bow

Cam Thiesing, who signed a professional contract following his junior season in 2023-24, earned his bachelor's degree at Ohio State's fall commencement in December. He plays for Bridgeport.

## New Year

The Buckeyes (7-12-1, 3-7-0 Big Ten) went 1-2-1 since the last issue of BSB.

OSU opened 2026 with a 2-2 tie (the Buckeyes won the shootout) at home against Bowling Green on Jan. 2 before the Falcons (9-5-4) scored three unanswered goals in the third period for a 5-3 victory the next night.

It was their first win over OSU since an 8-2 result in Columbus on Oct. 26, 2018. OSU had an 8-0-1 mark since then. It was also BG's first home win vs. the Buckeyes since Oct. 10, 2015.

The Buckeyes split against No. 2 Michigan State at Value City Arena on Jan. 9 and 10, losing 6-2 before taking a 2-1 victory.

## Rivalry

The Buckeyes were led in the BG series by Jake Karabela (goal, two assists) and



Stephen Halliday

## VARSAITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For December



**Jake Karabela**  
*Freshman Forward*  
*Guelph, Ontario*

## MEN'S HOCKEY

Burnside (three assists) while Riley Thompson scored in each game.

OSU jumped to a 2-0 lead in the opener before a crowd of 5,779, which was at least one-third BG fans.

Jake Dunlap opened the scoring for the Buckeyes at 16:00 of the first period. Thompson scored a power-play goal at 7:16 of the second period for 2-0 lead. From there, the Falcons took over and carried the momentum into the third when Breck McKinley at 4:41 and Brett Pfoh (8:53) tied it.

The teams went to a shootout for exhibition purposes with no league points at stake, and it was scoreless until the bottom of the sixth round when James Hong sent the Buckeye fans home happy.

In the rematch, BG scored 1:17 after the opening face-off. Karabel and Thompson gave the Buckeyes a 2-1 lead by the 9:24 mark. After BG tied it midway through the second period, freshman Sam McGinley scored his first goal for the Buckeyes to make it 3-2.

Specialty team failures bit the Buckeyes at the beginning of the third when Jaden Grant scored shorthanded to make it 3-3. From there, Pfoh (12:37) and Brody Waters (13:56) scored for the Falcons before a sell-out crowd of 5,000.

### Bitter Before Better

Ohio State had several mental lapses that proved costly in the Michigan State opener before 4,627 fans.

It was 0-0 when MSU (15-5-0, 6-4-0) scored at 13:23 of the first period. OSU challenged for a missed stoppage, in essence saying the puck was hit with a high stick by a Michigan State player at the start of the scoring play. Unfortunately, due to technical issues, the play could not be reviewed, and the goal was awarded to the Spartans.

That seemed to unravel the Buckeyes, and MSU made it 2-0 seven seconds later then added another goal 16 seconds after that for three scores in 23 seconds. They would add another goal on the power play later in the period.

Goals by Montes in the second and Burnside in the third pulled the Buckeyes to within 4-2, but Thomas Weis was called for roughing, and Montes took a high-sticking penalty that allowed MSU to score with the two-man advantage to make it 5-2.

The Spartans have 15 NHL draft picks, including four first-rounders and five from the second. OSU had no draftees in the lineup for the second game, yet the Buckeyes managed to fight for 60 minutes and beyond as a bench-clearing brawl nearly ensued at the end of the game with MSU having two players receiver game misconducts and OSU one.

Nathan Lewis put OSU ahead 2:53 into the second period. After MSU tied it, Burnside scored the winner at 8:01 of the third while freshman Sam Hillebrandt made 26 saves for his first victory in front of a crowd of 5,553.

### Big Time

Karabela, a freshman forward, is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for December. The Guelph, Ontario, native had a goal and two assists in the second game of the Minnesota series on Dec. 5 to help the Buckeyes split their only games of the month.

His second assist led directly to the goal by Adam Eisele at 9:23 of the third period

# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

to make it 5-5. Karabela then scored at 1:11

### FOOTBALL (12-2, 9-0)

**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, W 34-10; **15** UCLA, W 48-10; **22** RUTGERS, W 42-9; **29** at Michigan, W 27-9.

**Dec. 6** Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis vs. Indiana, L 13-10; **31** CFP Quarterfinal at Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas, vs. Miami (Fla.), L 24-14.

### MEN'S BASKETBALL (11-5, 3-3)

**Oct. 26** Ohio (Exh.), W 103-74.  
**Nov. 3** IU-INDY, W 118-102; **7** PURDUE-FORT WAYNE, W 94-68; **11** APPALACHIAN STATE, W 75-53; **16** NOTRE DAME, W 64-63; **20** WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 91-58; **25** MOUNT ST. MARY'S, W 113-60; **28** at Pittsburgh, L 67-66.

**Dec. 6** at Northwestern, W 86-82; **9** ILLINOIS, L 88-80; **13** at Cleveland Hoops Showdown in Cleveland vs. West Virginia, W 89-88; **20** at CBS Sports Classic in Atlanta vs. North Carolina, L 71-70; **23** GRAMBLING STATE, W 89-63.

**Jan. 2** at Rutgers, W 80-73; **5** NEBRASKA, L 72-69; **8** at Oregon, W 72-62; **11** at Washington, L 81-74; **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 (15-2, 5-1)

**Nov. 9** COPPIN STATE, W 88-59; **13** BELLARMINE, W 90-33; **16** at UConn, L 100-68; **19** KENT STATE, W 88-68; **24** at Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. Belmont, W 68-56; **26** at Pink Flamingo Championship in the Bahamas vs. West Virginia, W 83-81; **30** NIAGARA W, 130-32.

**Dec. 7** at Northwestern, W 79-70; **11** NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 94-62; **14** TOLEDO, W 85-60; **18** NORFOLK STATE, W 79-45; **22** WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 95-47; **28** UCLA, L 82-75; **31** at Purdue, W 83-56.

**Jan. 4** RUTGERS, W 71-49; **7** at Illinois, W 78-69; **11** at Maryland, W 89-76; **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.

### FENCING

**Oct. 11** OSU OPEN, NTS; **12** OSU DUALS, Men 4-0, Women 4-0.

**Nov. 8-9** OSU ELITE INVITATIONAL, Men 3-2, Women 4-1; **22-23** Western Invitational at USAF Academy, Colo., Men 5-1; Women 6-1

**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.

### MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (7-12-1, 3-7-0)

**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, W 5-1; L 6-5 (OT); **21-22** at Michigan, L 5-2; L 8-1; **28-29** at Arizona State, L 3-2 (OT); L 4-3 (OT).

**Dec. 4-5** MINNESOTA, L 6-3; W 6-5 (OT).

**Jan. 2** BOWLING GREEN, T 2-2 OT (SW); **3** at Bowling Green, L 5-3; **9-10** MICHIGAN STATE, L 6-2; W 2-1; **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 (19-3-0, 13-3-0)

**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, W 5-2; W 7-3; **21-22** at Minnesota-Duluth, W 3-1; W 4-1; **28** at D1 in DC Tournament in Washington, D.C., vs. Clarkson, W 8-0; **29** at D1 in DC Tournament in Washington, D.C., vs. Colgate, W 5-0.

**Dec. 5-6** WISCONSIN, L 2-1; L 6-1.

**Jan. 2-3** PENN STATE, W 5-1; W 4-1; **9-10** at St. Cloud State, W 4-0; W 5-1; **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.

### MENS SWIM & DIVE (1-1)

**Nov. 7-8** Raleigh Rumble in Raleigh, N.C., vs. NC State, L 790.0-485.5; vs. Virginia Tech, W 485.5-429.0; **18-21** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 3rd/1,745 pts.

**Dec. 3-6** US Open at Austin, Texas, NTS.

**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 (1-1)

**Nov. 7-8** Raleigh Rumble in Raleigh, N.C., vs. NC State, L 790.0-546.0; vs. Virginia Tech, W 546.0-364.5; **18-21** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 1st/2,257 pts..

**Dec. 3-6** US Open at Austin, Texas, NTS.

**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.

### WRESTLING (12-0, 1-0)

**Nov. 2** Clarion Open at Clarion, Pa., NTS; **9** at Tennessee-Chattanooga, W 42-4; **15** National Duals Invitational at Tulsa vs. Wyoming, W 33-6; vs. Minnesota, W 29-6; **16** National Duals Invitational at Tulsa vs. Nebraska, W 33-3; vs. Iowa W 27-12; **20** KENT STATE, W 44-0.

**Dec. 3** BELLARMINE, W 41-3; **12** NC STATE, W 26-10; **21** Collegiate Duals at Nashville, Tenn., vs. Little Rock, W 34-9; vs. Iowa State, W 21-13.

**Jan. 4** at Oregon State, W 41-3; **11** INDIANA, W 45-0; **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.

of overtime to break the Buckeyes' six-game losing streak.

### Next

The Buckeyes play at Notre Dame on Jan. 23 (5 p.m.) and 24 (5 p.m.), with each streamed on Peacock. They host No. 1 Michigan on Jan. 30 (6:30 p.m.) and 31 (5 p.m.).

*For a recap of the Bowling Green and Michigan State series go to the Buckeye-Sports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

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# No. 2 Ohio State Dominates Two Ranked Foes

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State closed out the holiday season with three notable victories, including two at the Collegiate Duals and a road win over Oregon State.

The Buckeyes competed against Little Rock and No. 3 Iowa State at the Collegiate Duals, getting wins over both squads.

## ON THE MAT Sam Cipriani

Ohio State defeated Little Rock 34-9 in the opening bout of the weekend on Dec. 21. Backed by an early win by decision for 125-pounder Vinny Kilkeary as well as a technical fall from No. 2 Ben Davino at 133 pounds and a pin by No. 1 141-pounder Jesse Mendez, the Buckeyes jumped out to a 14-0 lead.

The Buckeyes opted for a younger lineup in the middle weights with Daxton Chase, e'Than Birden and Cayaen Smith wrestling, but each falling by decision at 149, 165 and 184 pounds. However, No. 4 Brandon Cannon (157), No. 4 Carson Kharchla (174), No. 14 Luke Geog (197) and No. 3 Nick Feldman (heavyweight) all earned technical falls for five points apiece, giving the Buckeyes a 34-9 victory.

It wasn't nearly as smooth in the second dual of the day against No. 3 Iowa State, which

pushed Ohio State to its toughest matchup of the season, but strong performances from the Buckeyes' lightweights powered a 21-13 victory over the Cyclones, their narrowest win of the year.

Bouzakis, Davino and Mendez each won by decision before Ohio State's No. 6 Ethan Stiles fell to No. 10 Jacob Frost of Iowa State at 149 pounds in a sudden victory period. In the 155-pound weight class, Cannon secured a crucial pin on the Cyclones' Kane Naaktgeboren with just 11 seconds left in the match to give the Buckeyes a 15-3 lead at the midway point.

Gallagher fell in the next bout to cut Ohio State's lead to nine, but the Buckeyes answered with a 7-3 win by decision from Kharchla at 174 pounds and a 4-1 win in sudden victory by 184-pounder Dylan Fishback to regain momentum.

Even with a major decision loss at 197 pounds and a decision defeat at heavyweight, Ohio State had built a big enough lead to secure a 21-13 win over Iowa State.

Two weeks later, on Jan. 4, Ohio State then managed a dominant 41-3 victory over Oregon State in Corvallis, Ore.

Ohio State won the first eight matches, securing a 35-0 lead before No. 10-ranked Justin Rademacher of Oregon State defeated Geog 8-7 in the tiebreaker period. A forfeit in the heavyweight division earned Ohio State another six points, securing the Buckeyes' victory.

Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan emphasized the value of securing wins in key

moments throughout the season, noting how success can build confidence and momentum vital for matches deep into the year.

"Winning is just more fun than losing," Ryan told BSB. "It's fun to win. It unites people. It builds trust in what you're doing. You fall back on your training, the trust in your staff and teammates, and then when you start stacking those things on top of each other, you have some real momentum."

"This team has momentum and confidence. We have a lot of big tests coming up and are continuing to work hard and focus on the things that we see each week that aren't to the standard that we want them to be at in those particular positions, technically and physically."

## McCrone, Gallagher Out, Bouzakis Surges

Ohio State went into its bout with NC State fully healthy but came out without a top wrestler.

Redshirt-junior Brendan McCrone suffered an undisclosed injury during his 9-2 decision loss to top-ranked Wolfpack wrestler Vincent Robinson.

The temporary loss of McCrone has paved the way for Bouzakis to step into a bigger role, Ryan said.

"We're keeping an eye on (McCrone)," Ryan said. "Then, Nic is wrestling extremely well. The last couple of matches we put him in there, he's looked pretty dominant. So it's a combination of one guy being hurt and another guy wrestling really well."

Since McCrone's injury, Bouzakis has wrestled in two of the Buckeyes' three bouts at 125 pounds, defeating No. 13 Stevo Poulin of Iowa State with a 9-2 decision and No. 10 Maximo Renteria of Oregon State via a 19-4 technical fall.

Bouzakis is 8-1 this season with just one loss to his teammate, McCrone, a 5-4 defeat by decision in the Clarion Open finals to begin the season.

Ryan said Bouzakis' move from 133 pounds down to 125 reflects his daily commitment, adding that the demanding weight cut has translated into strong performances in his new weight class.

"He's always been committed. But I think he's gone from compliant to compelled. He was big at 133, so to move down to 125 was a real challenge for him, and it forced him to be extremely disciplined, to work out more than he normally works out when you're not cutting weight," Ryan said. "He's got a lot of confidence right now, and at that weight, he's unbelievable. He's very strong and powerful at 125, so we're seeing the strength differential."

"The concern was, 'Can you make the weight and feel good there?' Well, he's passed that test. He passed it against Bellarmine, and he passed that test against Oregon State a couple of nights ago. We're seeing him being able to make the weight in a two-hour weigh-in and compete at a high level. So we're excited about Nic right now."

Gallagher was also hurt in Ohio State's Jan. 4 dual and will miss at least one event for Ohio State. Ryan said Birden is expected to start against Indiana at 165 pounds in the absence of Gallagher and the redshirt freshman delivered.

Birden came away with a 2-1 decision over the Hoosiers' No. 20-ranked Tyler Lillard, helping Ohio State claim a 45-0 victory over No. 23

Indiana (5-2, 0-1 Big Ten).

## Mendez Continues Endless Growth

Despite having by far the most accolades of any Ohio State wrestler in 2025, including back-to-back individual national championships from 2024-25 at 141 pounds, Mendez comes into the gym every day like he's fighting for his first.

That approach has shown up on the mat throughout his career with the Buckeyes. Over four seasons with the Buckeyes, Mendez has accrued a 92-14 overall record, winning 49 of 545 dual matches. The three-time All-American also claimed the 2024 Big Ten title at 141 pounds.

The senior is on track for a perfect season in 2025-26, posting an 11-0 record while serving as one of Ohio State's most dependable point scorers in dual meets. Mendez has collected bonus points in 10 of those 12 bouts, including three pins and four technical falls.

Ryan said Mendez's results are simply a by-product of how he approaches the sport on a daily basis, adding that he has a chance to win honors as the best wrestler in America.

"I think he has a shot at winning the Dan Hodge trophy," Ryan said. "This is Jesse Mendez' team. The way he does things, when he carries himself, the way he trains. He's the person to look at. He's a professional. There's a bunch of them, but he's certainly one of them. If you think you've arrived, it's the beginning of the end, and he just doesn't think that way."

Ryan continued, pointing to Mendez's constant pursuit of improvement as what makes him great, even after reaching the top of the collegiate 141-pound podium twice.

"He thinks like professionals should think, which is this idea of endless growth. 'What areas of my life and what areas of my wrestling can I continue to improve?' He really focuses on them," Ryan said. "He's a true professional. For 18- to 22-year-olds, not everyone thinks that way, but he does, as do a lot of other guys. He has an incredible work ethic and incredible love for the sport, just a deep desire to learn. He brings it every single day, every single time."

That mentality has shaped Mendez' approach to his final season with Ohio State. Rather than leaning on the attacks that helped him claim two national titles, Mendez has focused on becoming more complete in every position.

"I'm just continuing to add new attacks to my arsenal and get more savvy defensively," Mendez said. "I'm getting a little bit better on top. It's my last Folkstyle season. So I just want to be well-rounded everywhere, so we put a lot of emphasis on those spots."

## Next Up For OSU

After a dominant win over Indiana at the Covelli Center, Ohio State (12-0, 1-0) will embark on a two-dual road trip before BSB next goes to press.

The Buckeyes will face No. 7 Minnesota (7-2, 1-0) at the Maturi Pavilion in Minneapolis, Minn., at 7 p.m. on Jan. 23 before Ohio State travels to Lincoln, Neb., to take on No. 6 Nebraska (8-3, 1-0) at the Bob Devaney Sports Center at 2 p.m. Jan. 25.



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# College Football Has An NIL Problem

College football is broken, and at the moment, there does not appear to be anyone around who can or even wants to fix it.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

The fact that Buckeye Nation had to panic for a day while freshman running back Bo Jackson decided whether or not to stay highlights the biggest problem plaguing college football – NIL being an inducement rather than a reward.

When the powers that be passed legislation that allowed players to have monetary gain from their name, image and likeness, they had to know that without guardrails in place, it could spiral out of control. Instead of players getting a chance to make a cheesy commercial for a car dealership and get some money from it, which is what NIL was originally designed for, it has become a war chest for schools to pluck star players from the rosters of other schools.

The adults in the room acted like scared children and never got out in front of this, and we are where we are because of it.

The NCAA is not the only side that shoulders blame here, though.

Coaches who use “agents” as backchannels to gauge player interest in coming to their school should be punished, but are not. Parents looking for a big payday rather than telling their sons to work through adversity and come out stronger for it, they have a part. Said “agents”, who are driving up the cost of even mediocre players so that they can receive a bigger cut, they bear a huge chunk of responsibility.

And then there are the players.

I have long been on the side of players getting some kind of compensation beyond a scholarship, because said scholarship cannot pay for a pizza on a Friday night. Players made a ton of money for the schools but never saw any of it.

So when NIL was enacted, I was pleased. But it didn't take long for it to careen out of control and become a change agent that no one asked for.

Now you have players who have one year under their belt asking for money that should be reserved for multi-year veterans. Jackson became a workhorse for Ohio State during the stretch run of the season and flashed star potential. But he is not there yet. There are holes in his game – blocking being one of the biggest, breakaway speed being another. Ohio State reportedly gave him a more than fair offer for year two, near the higher end of the market value for running backs, and he all but laughed at it. His camp wanted something more in line with what TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins – established stars – made last season.

Talk about delusional.

The good thing is that the sides met somewhere in the middle, and Jackson agreed to come back. That means OSU has a veteran presence in the running back room for 2026. But it still needs a backup, and it will almost certainly hit the portal to meet that need.

Based on early returns, the Buckeyes may be looking to go the bargain route, and that is

something that ties Ryan Day's hands. He is exasperated by the fact that there are no ground rules for transferring, that there are no caps for money and that Ohio State has taken its collectives in-house.

That last part is vital, because when The Foundation was at its best, it was able to sit down with players, gauge their needs and come up with a satisfactory monetary figure. The Foundation was largely responsible for the return of most of the veterans in 2024, which ended with a national championship.

Athletic director Ross Bjork made the decision to bring the collectives in-house, where they are overseen by Learfield.

“It's a critical juncture in college athletics, and this is the ideal time to lock arms with Learfield, to continue to provide best-in-class opportunities and lead Ohio State athletics for a long time into the future,” Bjork said in a Jan. 7 statement. “Learfield's expertise brings a full range of capabilities that allow us to continue to maximize the largest sponsorship program in the country through even more commercial activity that impacts revenue and further capitalize through innovative sponsorships and NIL strategies, which help strengthen our entire athletics program. We are proud to continue our long-term affiliation and transformational partnership with Learfield and continue to maximize the Ohio State brand power here in Ohio and across the country.”

That sounds fine and good, but the problem is twofold – Ohio State currently does not have the money in its coffers to put together the roster that Day believes it needs to stay in contention for the national title; and Bjork has decided to slow play NIL as the landscape evolves, even though nearly every other program in college football is moving at full speed. It is putting Ohio State behind, something it should never be.

It is the reason that the Buckeyes missed out on Penn State edge Chaz Coleman, an Ohio product who by all accounts wanted to play in Columbus, and it is the reason that holdovers Quincy Porter and Faheem Delane – who were going to either start or play major roles in 2026 – decided to seek greener pastures.

Day does not want to overpay for kids with potential, nor should he. But it would help if OSU had enough money that it could set the bar for a player rather than finding out what the player wants and then finding out they cannot meet his needs.

Mine is a minority opinion, and maybe it comes from age and experience. I would much rather take a bit less money but play for a team that is in contention for a title than to take more from an also-ran, or a name school where I will barely play.

Most players seem to have the opposite sentiment as they chase the biggest bag possible. And that's a shame, because it is hurting them and college football at large.

The fact that the NCAA failed to get in front of not only NIL but the transfer portal as well has exacerbated this issue tenfold. Players can move about freely, with no restrictions on playing immediately, and if they don't do well at their new school, they can check out and move again the next season.

There are current players working on their sixth and seventh schools, and that is just mind-boggling. It reeks of a “cut and run” mentality, that when the going gets tough, you bolt

instead of working through it. What's going to happen when they get into the job market – and they will as most will fail to reach their goal of the NFL – and find out that they only make \$50,000 their first year? Will they leave to try to find something better rather than gain experience and make themselves more marketable? And what about academics? Are these players who transfer multiple times actually graduating?

There is zero issue in my mind for guys such as Jeremiah Smith and Julian Sayin to be closer to the top end of the scale. Smith is the best player in college football and is among the top two – Texas' Arch Manning being the other – in terms of NIL money, and that's great. He has more than earned it.

Whether you think Sayin had an excellent season or just a good one, quarterback is the highest-profile position on the field, and as such, teams willingly overpay. It's just the nature of the game.

Chris Henry Jr got some late pressure from Oregon, and for a few moments, it appeared that he would fly into the Ducks' recruiting class. But Day agreed that he is one of those rare recruits for whom it is acceptable to overpay, and OSU ultimately secured his services.

Those three, along with Jackson, are the cornerstones of next year's squad – a team that should be in the hunt for the national title but one that also faces more landmines than it did this season as the schedule ramps up.

An example of NIL and transfer portal at its finest is Indiana. The Hoosiers are on the

verge of one of the unlikeliest national titles in the history of college football, largely because the school committed to NIL and because head coach Curt Cignetti was able to bring many players from James Madison with him to Bloomington. Throw in Cal transfer Fernando Mendoza, and you see a team rich in experience and money that is ready to set college football on its ear.

Ohio State is different – kids grow up wanting to be Buckeyes, fans are dyed-in-the-wool Scarlet and Gray, womb to tomb. So when players decide to leave for a silly thing like money, it hurts. Fans want the love and loyalty they feel to permeate the Buckeyes roster, but it is a different time now. Teams are built more with experience than with recruiting, and older is better.

It would not be any kind of shock to see big-time teams like Ohio State slowly move away from recruiting and pivoting toward building through the portal. Class sizes could shrink to maybe 17-18 players, with an emphasis on immediate impact four- and five-star talents. The three-star kids who would get developed will need to find lower-echelon schools because the big boys will no longer have time to bring them along slowly.

That's another unintended consequence of NIL – fewer (or maybe less lucrative) opportunities for developmental recruits.

I guess that is another thing about college football that's broken. Or soon to be.

The list seems to be growing, with no signs of stopping.



# Hoosiers, 'Canes Expose Bucks For Who They Were

A former Ohio State football coach was fond of saying, “Guys, sometimes we don’t give enough credit to the other team. Their players are on scholarship too.”

I suppose you could freshen up that saying for today to be, “Their players get NIL money too.”

I bring this old quote up because in the days since Miami man-handled Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl, I have spoken to dozens of Buckeye fans and seen plenty of online posts, and not once have I heard someone north of South Beach say that the Hurricanes were, certainly on that evening, the much better team. They were better on offense, better on defense, better in both trenches, and better on the coaching sidelines. Regardless of what happens at the CFP title game against Indiana, they have proved their merit with playoff wins over Texas A&M, Ohio State and Ole Miss. But instead of giving the 'Canes their due, Buckeye fans concentrate on the things Ohio State did to lose the game, along with the Big Ten Championship Game, and dissect the team's weaknesses, which are plenty and now quite apparent.

As I have been thinking about this since New Year's Eve, I have been asking myself if the win over Texas to open the season didn't skew our expectations for the team. I know it did for me, and I am not one of those Buckeye fans who have minimized that win over the Longhorns. That was and still is a big win. I base that not only on what I saw on the field, but on the reaction of the fans. That was as enthusiastic a reaction from Buckeye Nation as I had seen since – well – the win over Texas in the CFP last season. That win generated as much of a reaction among Ohio State fans because of the dramatic way Ohio State won, as opposed to the well-executed victory over the Longhorns to open 2025.

After the win, the Buckeyes roll over Grambling State and Ohio University and score a solid win over a decent but not spectacular Washington team (9-4, 5-4 Big Ten), Julian Sayin gets better by the week, and suddenly expectations from me and most Buckeye fans are sky high and the possibility of repeating as national champions – a very difficult feat – becomes realistic.

Was the 2025 Ohio State football team a product of an easy schedule, especially after the collapse of Penn State eliminated what should have been a difficult opponent? The Buckeyes did not play four of the top nine teams in the final Big Ten standings – Indiana, Oregon, USC and Iowa. The Buckeyes faced a really soft schedule down the stretch. Did we become sold on the Buckeye running attack because of that streak of games at the end of the regular season that included Penn State, Purdue, UCLA and Rutgers, where the Buckeyes averaged over 200 yards a game on the ground, as opposed to the 51.5 yards they averaged against Indiana and Miami?

Ohio State ended up averaging 154.4 yards rushing per game, good for 73rd in the country. Take away those four games late in the regular season, though, and the Buckeyes averaged 135.1 yards a game rushing, which would have been good for just 93rd nationally. In fairness to Ohio State, I should mention that they *did* rack up 186 yards rushing against rival Michigan.

I still don't know what to make of Bo Jackson. Obviously, he proved to be a talented freshman, racking up 1,090 yards on the season with a solid 6.1 yards average. But against Indiana and Miami, in those instances where the offensive line opened a hole for him, it seemed like he would get a quick 5 yards, but when he got to the next level, he couldn't make the move or generate the power to break a long one, the type of play that can create a score or at least change the momentum of a game. When I checked the stat sheets, I was surprised to see he had a run of 20 yards against Indiana and 18 against Miami. It didn't seem that way. His long in the final six games of the season was 36 against Michi-

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

gan, and he had two games in that span where his long was 15 yards or less.

Poor Jackson suffered the indignity of being leveled as a pass blocker in the loss to Miami in a way that few backs will ever have to suffer. Did anyone besides me think of Joey Bosa at Penn State in 2014, pushing a Nittany Lion blocker around like a rag doll into quarterback Christian Hackenburg for a sack to end a double-overtime game with a victory on the way to the national championship?

Speaking of running with the football, I believe one of the major differences in the CFP game was the running of Miami quarterback Carson Beck, who was credited with seven carries for 23 yards and a 3.3-yard average. Take away his two sacks for 5 yards, and his output is up to 5.6 yards a carry, including a run in the fourth quarter that converted a third-and-11 and allowed the Hurricanes to run more valuable time off the clock – time Ohio State desperately needed.

Sayin, meanwhile, was credited with five runs, all sacks, for minus-42 yards. There was at least one play against Miami that I recall where Sayin had wide-open green space in front of him but elected to throw a feeble check-down pass that went for no gain.

“There were some opportunities today where I could have maybe taken off and scrambled for some yards,” Sayin admitted. “I took some sacks that weren't necessary and got us into tougher situations.”

This made me think of the same situation when C.J. Stroud was here, where he was frequently accused of not wanting to run the ball. I was never certain if he didn't want to run the ball, or he was instructed *not* to run for fear of injury. I am not suggesting that the Ohio State quarterback should be running around crazy, as in the days of Braxton Miller and J.T. Barrett. But if there is open space in front of you, sometimes you have to take the yards as offered.

Other teams scout the Buckeyes. They know the QB is not going to run. I always feel like if you don't at least pose the threat of an occasional run, it's like playing 10 against 11.

By the way, I always felt like Stroud could run if allowed. He made his name as a freshman with a 48-yard touchdown run against Michigan State, and in the CFP game against Georgia in 2022, as the Buckeyes tried to put Noah Ruggles into position to win the game with a field goal, Stroud rushed for 5 and 27 yards on the final series. The drive stalled at the Bulldogs 32, sadly out of Ruggles' range for a 50-yard attempt (more on that later).

Of course, the most obvious weakness for Ohio State in the final two games was the offensive line. There are some quality players there, but the biggest difference between this year's line and the championship unit last season appeared to be depth.

Recruiting analyst Bill Greene has been calling out warnings for about two years now that Ohio State's recruiting along the offensive line has not been up to the “elite” level, and his warnings seem to have been proven true in this year's postseason. We went back to Greene after the two losses and asked him this thoughts now (see page 10).

“You can go back 10 years. When it comes to the O-line, (the Buckeyes) really settle for these three-star Ohio guys,” Greene said. “You would never see this many Ohio guys in the wide receiver room, the running back room. When it comes to the D-line room, they go all over the country and get the best of the best. But when it comes to the O-line, it just seems like they set-

tled for these Ohio guys.”

The analyst continues to suggest, in his own colorful way, that the Buckeye coaches change the way they do business.

“The math doesn't lie. Numbers don't lie,” Greene said. “When you're scoring in the teens in the two biggest games of the year, then you've got to look under the hood.”

One last thing that puzzles me about this season. All season we were told by Ryan Day and his staff that the team was pacing itself so as to peak when the stakes got higher at the end of the season. What happened to that plan?

“There's kind of that infamous quote now, from when Day was on the radio in early November, and he said, ‘When it's time to turn up the gas, we will.’ It would be hard to say that that happened based on the way those last two games went,” Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors says elsewhere in this issue.

Former Buckeye running back Vaughn Broadnax also seemed puzzled about the strategy and offered a different way of trying to achieve the same thing.

“I think you play your players to score points to get a lead, and then you rest them and allow the others to play,” Broadnax said. “Now, if you're worried about your defensive score statistics, that's one thing, but if you want your players to rest and recover, let them score the points and get them out of the game. So, you accomplish two things: you get them rest, but you also give your young pups opportunities to get real game speed, practice and participation.”

For the complete remarks of Hope, Broadnax and others about what may or not have gone wrong this season, see the story on page 9.

Finally, to close this rant, I wanted to give props to defensive coordinator Matt Patricia and his troops, who were consistent and strong all season and far exceeded anyone's expectations – or at least mine.

But to be fair to everyone else on the team, I have to direct a little criticism to the stop troops as well.

When the Buckeyes had closed to within 17-14 in the fourth quarter and still had time to pull out the win, the defense allowed Miami to hold the ball for a 10-play, 70-yard, 5:01 drive before scoring the game-sealing touchdown. The Hurricanes left Ohio State with just 55 seconds to score 10 points.

Up until that point, I honestly believed Ohio State was going to win the game.

As it turns out, like the other Buckeye fans, I am looking at OSU's shortcomings.

“Sometimes we don't give enough credit to the other team.”

### The Kicker Controversy

Over the years, including under Ryan Day, Ohio State has been a football recruiting juggernaut. I continue to be perplexed as to why the Buckeyes are unable to land a top-notch kicker. I listen to games or highlights on the radio, and so many times, kickers are connecting on 50- and 60-yard field goals, sometimes to win a game and other times just adding a handy three points. Yet Ohio State – its last two kickers, Noah Ruggles and Jayden Fielding, at least – have had ranges below 50 yards. What gives?

As I said in this column last issue, I don't blame Fielding for the losses the Buckeyes suffered in their last two games. With the weapons Ohio State has on offense, it should never have come down to Fielding having to be the difference. The Buckeyes scored 10 and 14 points in their final two contests.

The kicker became a hot topic on our Buck-

eyeSports.com Forum when news came out that Ohio State was looking at a high school kicker whose prep long was 41 yards. Now, he may have a range longer than that, but the news brought out the posters.

“Honestly, Mike Nugent was the last elite kicker Ohio State has had,” poster Michael Bauer said. “It is time for Ryan Day to demand kickers of the same quality as the skill players. Get it done!”

Here are the Ohio State kickers since Nugent: Josh Huston, Aaron Pettrey, Ryan Pretorius, Devin Barclay, Drew Basil, Sean Nuerberger, Jack Willoughby, Tyler Durbin, Blake Haubiel, Ruggles and Fielding. Not a group that would make you forget Tom Skladany. Do you remember all these guys? I didn't remember Jack Willoughby, and he kicked only 10 years ago.

In case you are wondering about Nugent, the measuring stick for all recent Ohio State kickers, he played in Columbus from 2001-2004. He was the 2004 Lou Groza Award winner, given to the nation's best college kicker. He was a two-time All-American, earned first-team All-Big Ten recognition in 2004 and made the all-conference second team twice.

Perhaps most importantly, he was the kicker on Ohio State's 2002 national championship team.

### Horvath Leads Navy

It's not often that I mention players from other schools in this space, let alone players from Navy, but I was listening to 700 WLW out of Cincinnati recently and the Midshipmen were thumping Cincinnati, 35-13, in the Liberty Bowl.

The Middies were being led by quarterback Blake Horvath, who just happens to be the son of Alan Horvath, a friend and business partner of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, who was also a neighbor for a while when BSB was in the long-time former World Headquarters on Fifth Avenue here in the Grandview area.

Followers of high school football in Columbus may be familiar with Blake Horvath, as he prepped at nearby Hilliard Darby.

Against the Bearcats, Horvath was 9 of 15 for 108 yards and two touchdowns without an interception and rushed for 53 yards and another score on 16 carries.

Unlike Ohio State, Navy took care of all of its business at the pivotal end of the season. The Midshipmen, who were 11-2 on the year and 7-1 in the American Conference, also beat archrival Army, 17-16. Horvath was 7 of 14 against the Cadets for 82 yards and a touchdown with a pick and rushed 34 times for 107 yards and a score.

For the season, he carried 224 times for 1,200 yards, good for a 5.4-yard average and 16 scores. That ranked 17th in the country. He passed for another 1,580 yards with 97 completions on 160 attempts, good for a 60.6 completion percentage, 12 TDs and six picks. If he had passed enough times for run-heavy Navy (you have to have 15 attempts per game to qualify), his passing efficiency rating of 160.8 would have been 11th in the country.

Congratulations to Blake, Alan and the entire Horvath family.

### Promos Still Available

Just a reminder that all Buckeye Sports Bulletin holiday promotions, as well as other recent money-saving offers, are available at least until Jan. 31. And if you ask nicely, we may even give you a couple of extra days in addition to that.

These promotions include, but are not limited to, the Holiday Three-For One, the Subscriber Special, the Championship Rollback and more.

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