



# Strength In Numbers

*Ohio State Brings In  
29-Player Recruiting  
Class Ranked Fourth  
Overall Nationally*

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

As is always the case nowadays, almost all of Ohio State's recruiting class signed much earlier than National Signing Day in February, with 29 prospects joining the Buckeyes in the 2026 class.

While the coaches who recruited the players to Columbus likely couldn't care less about any rankings that those players have or how many stars recruiting websites give them, Ohio State still came out of the year with another top-five class, the seventh in a row for head coach Ryan Day.

The only time Day has failed to recruit a class that wasn't in the top five was when he took over for Urban Meyer in December and had just two months to finish the cycle for National Signing Day, finishing the class with just 17 signees.

As for the quantity, 29 recruits are the most that Day has signed since he started, exceeding the 26 players who joined OSU in each of the 2020 and 2025 recruiting classes.

Day, who didn't meet with the media for National Signing Day since almost all of the class signed during the early signing period, hinted in December that the approach was somewhat deliberate with the transfer portal window changing.

"We need to know what our roster is by the time the transfer portal closes," he said. "We have to plan accordingly, the best that we can and predict and forecast what it's going to look like. Looking at what we needed coming out of this class, these were the guys that we felt really fortified us moving forward. This was the number we were looking for."



SONNY BROCKWAY

**RYAN'S EXPRESS** — The talent keeps coming for Ohio State under coach Ryan Day, who had a top-five recruiting class for the seventh year in a row, finishing fourth in the 247Sports composite and third in the Big Ten behind No. 1 USC and No. 3 Oregon with Alabama of the SEC sandwiched between the two. Day also brought in a strong transfer class that is heavy on experience.

Ultimately, the class was ranked No. 4 by 247Sports composite, behind No. 1 USC, which signed 36 prospects, No. 2 Alabama and No. 3 Oregon. The Buckeyes ranked third in average player rating at

92.19, behind the Ducks (92.83) and LSU (92.46), which signed just 17 players after a coaching change, but made the quality count.

With the transfer portal class included, the Buckeyes are ranked second for the additions they have made to the roster over the offseason, with only LSU ahead of them. The Tigers were largely helped by the hiring of Lane Kiffin, adding 40 transfers.

Ohio State brought in 17 players through the portal, more than it ever has, which could be the beginning of a trend.

The two teams that beat the Buckeyes this season, the national champion Indiana Hoosiers and runners-up Miami

Hurricanes, each had rosters littered with college veterans.

Ohio State seemed to take that and apply the formula to its own roster. That could be seen in both the players lost in the portal (36 total, many of whom were coming out of their first or second season in Columbus) and in the players brought in.

It was obvious that the players brought into Ohio State were recruited with one major thing in mind. Day seemed to want to bring in players who had a lot of in-game experience and had played a lot of college football already. Fifteen of the 17 transfers are in at least their fourth year of college

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Continued On Page 8



# FAN FORUM



## From The Message Board

"My overall thought is that the class is good enough. I wish it would have had more OL and DL players. Who do I expect to see the field soonest and have the most success? Chris Henry Jr. The player I'm most intrigued by is Legend Bey. I wonder if the quality and quantity of the class caused 33 players to enter the transfer portal?"

— **Terrier Buck**

"I just can't get as excited over recruiting classes as I used to. Half of them will transfer out before they play a down."

— **R1TBDBITL**

"Chris Henry Jr. interests me too, he's been in the wings forever. I was always afraid he'd jump ship. The entire recruiting class seems fine to me. Day will mold it into a quality team."

— **PeyoteBuck**

"I think it's a great class. It is impressive what Ohio State was able to do at the wide receiver position despite the departure of Hartline,

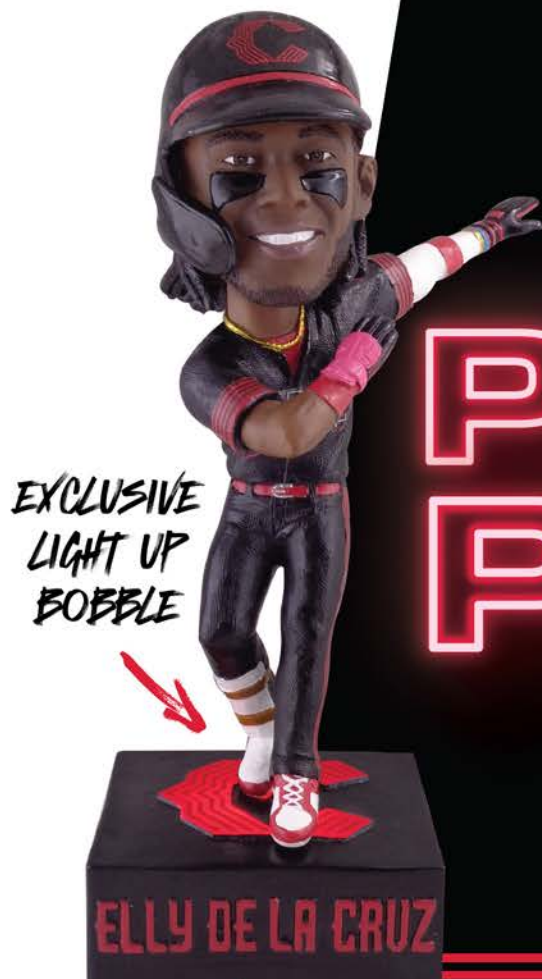
***Now that the 2026 recruiting class is final, the Buckeyes finished with the fourth-ranked class in the country, signing 29 total prospects. We asked subscribers on the Fan Forum at BuckeyeSports.com what their overall thoughts on the class are, who stands out to them the most and who they expect to see get to the field fastest.***

and I think there are some solid offensive linemen coming in this class as well. This should come as no surprise, but I think Chris Henry Jr. will get on the field first. The Buckeyes have an open receiver spot opposite Jeremiah Smith, and Henry is by far the most talented option on the roster. It's easy to expect Henry to have a lot of success, but I'll also add that I think Cincere Johnson will do very well at Ohio State."

— **Bobby Gorbett, BSB**

"Overall, Ohio State's recruiting class hits every position of need and replenishes where the Buckeyes are losing the most. My main qualm is the lack of high-end offensive line talent, though it's 6-7, 331-pound offensive tackle Sam Greer who I think could be the future of the position for Ohio State. Either Chris Henry Jr. or Jerquaden Guilford is most likely to see the field and would fill in at WR2 with the loss of Carnell Tate. If I were to take a swing, I'd say Cincere Johnson will have the most success at Ohio State."

— **Sam Cipriani, BSB**



  
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No. 2	Sept. 13	No. 14	Jan. 17
No. 3	Sept. 27	No. 15	Jan. 31
No. 4	Oct. 4	No. 16	Feb. 14
No. 5	Oct. 11	No. 17	March 7
No. 6	Oct. 18	No. 18	March 21
No. 7	Nov. 1	No. 19	April 4
No. 8	Nov. 8	No. 20	April 18
No. 9	Nov. 15	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 22	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 29	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 6	No. 24	August

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## OPINION

# Basketball Team Has ‘Work To Do’

Despite some major roster overhaul since last year, it's nice to find the Ohio State women back among the top 10 in the national rankings.

Through Feb. 9, the Buckeyes were among five Big Ten teams ranked in the top 15 – UCLA, Michigan, Michigan State and Iowa are the others – as everyone chases still-undefeated UConn and head coach Geno Auriemma, who tries to pad his own title record with a 13th national championship.

Before the Buckeyes can set their sights on the Huskies, though, they must first figure a way to advance past the first weekend of the NCAA tournament.

Meanwhile, the men would like to experience any weekend of an NCAA Tournament after missing the last three Big Dances, and to be brutally honest, it might take a minor miracle for that streak to end this year.

In early February, ESPN basketball writer Neil Payne placed Ohio State in the category of “teams with work to do” to make the tournament field.

“The Buckeyes are right on the bubble at No. 45 in the national résumé rankings, but a 10-point loss at Wisconsin (on Jan. 31) did them no favors,” Payne wrote. “They now rank 11th in what is looking like a 10-bid Big Ten. They have a single Quadrant 1 win (at Northwestern in early December) and are projected by the BPI to fall just short of 19 wins on the season – meaning they’re projected to be sub-.500 from here on, which explains why they’re not as sure of a tournament-bound team as they seemed earlier in the season.”

After a lackluster 82-61 home loss to Michigan on Super Bowl Sunday, the Buckeyes had a 15-8 record and were faced with the necessity of stealing a win or two down the stretch at Michigan State on Feb. 22 or at home March 1 in a nationally televised game against Purdue. Barring that, a long run in the Big Ten tournament becomes a must.

Again, to be brutally honest, I don’t see that happening.

Constantly being outrebounded on the offensive boards (in 16 of 23 games so far), prolonged shooting slumps and the failure to be able to play a total of 40 minutes are carryovers from the last several years. It’s also obvious the team has no depth.

The continued trope of “well, they have lost some close games” really doesn’t ring any bells anymore. Good teams find a way to win close games, and I don’t think anyone without blinders would admit this team is anything but average at best.

Next year should be better with a recruiting class bolstered by five-star small forward Anthony Thomas (OSU’s first McDonald’s All-American since 2014), but if things go sideways again, I think athletic director Ross Bjork might be tempted to blow the whole thing up with a new staff and start over from scratch. After all, if Curt Cignetti could do it for Indiana football, certainly there’s someone out there who could do it for Ohio State basketball.

#### No Expansion For Now

In case you missed it, the College Football Playoff format will remain at 12 teams for the 2026 season. That’s not because the conferences decided the present format was the best. Rather, it was due to the Big Ten and SEC not getting their way regarding expansion of the tournament.

The SEC favored a 16-team tournament with automatic bids for conference champions from the ACC, Big 12, Big Ten and SEC as well as the top-ranked champion from the so-called Group of Five (American Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West and Sun Belt). The remaining

11 spots would be at-large bids.

Meanwhile, the Big Ten wanted expansion to 24 teams with multiple automatic bids spread among the Power Four conferences with up to seven each for the Big Ten and SEC. Big Ten commissioner Tony Petetti reportedly agreed to the 16-team SEC model, but only if there was

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

a guarantee to move to 24 teams within three years.

Although the format will remain at 12 teams next season, there are a few tweaks to the selection formula. The number of automatic bids remains at five with each of the Power Four champions getting in along with the top-ranked champion among the new Group of Six (the aforementioned Group of Five along with the re-constituted Pac-12 which includes Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State, Gonzaga, San Diego State, Texas State and Utah State who joined holdovers Oregon State and Washington State).

Additionally, Notre Dame will receive a guaranteed spot in the tournament if it is ranked among the top 12. If that format had been in play this past season, the Fighting Irish would have made the tournament field rather than settling for a 10-2 season after which they declined a bid to the Pop-Tarts Bowl.

As with everything else in college athletics these days, the playoff situation remains fluid. The Big Ten and SEC can continue their expansion arguments with a new ESPN-imposed deadline of Dec. 1.

If you’d like to make your plans to attend the CFP title game, better start saving your pennies. It is scheduled for Jan. 25, 2027, at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas.

#### What Might Have Been

While marveling at the one-handed grabs Jaxon Smith-Njigba made throughout the season to help the Seattle Seahawks become champions of Super Bowl LX, I couldn’t help but think what might have been had JSN been available to the Buckeyes throughout his final college season.

You undoubtedly remember Smith-Njigba nursed a leg injury (thought to be but never really confirmed as a bad hamstring) throughout the 2022 season, eventually making only five catches for 43 yards and no touchdowns in just three games. JSN went on to become Seattle’s first-round pick in 2023 and has been named an All-Pro each of the past two seasons.

His services might not have altered the outcome of the 2022 Michigan game, but his presence in the playoff semifinal – especially after Georgia cheap-shotted Marvin Harrison Jr. out of the game – might have made the difference in what became an eventual 42-41 loss.

Of course, if you want to play the “what if” game, Ohio State fans can also go back to the 2018 season when All-America defensive end Nick Bosa never returned after suffering a groin injury during a Week Three win against TCU. Would Bosa’s presence have made a difference during the still-inexplicable 49-20 loss at Purdue? Boilermakers QB David Blough threw for 378 yards and three touchdowns in that game and was sacked only twice despite 43 pass attempts.

That was the only loss the Buckeyes suffered during the 2018 season, but it was enough to keep them out of the four-team playoff. OSU fin-

ished that season – Urban Meyer’s last as head coach – with a 23-point victory against Michigan, a 21-point win against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game, and a 28-23 victory against Washington in the Rose Bowl.

You could even go back to the 2003 season when Ohio State lost only twice – a 17-10 defeat at Wisconsin and a 35-21 loss at Michigan, the only time in 10 games that Jim Tressel lost to the Wolverines. The fact the Buckeyes finished 11-2 was remarkable due to the lack of any kind of reliable running game. OSU averaged 126.1 rushing yards per game that season but managed only 69 against Wisconsin and 54 against Michigan. Imagine what might have been had Maurice Clarett not been suspended for that entire 2003 season.

Imagine what might have been had Ohio State won back-to-back national championships in 2005 and 2006? Would the university have been so eager to get rid of Tressel less than five years later?

What might have been had Earle Bruce not gotten fancy and just called for four straight fullback dives after first-and-goal at the 2 in the 1980 Rose Bowl? Or if the Buckeyes hadn’t turned the ball over seven times (including six interceptions) during the 1969 Michigan game?

Of course, playing the “what if” game will only drive you crazy – not to mention break your heart.

#### And Finally

- Ohio State could play as many as seven ranked opponents in 2026, beginning with a rematch against Texas, a Week Two matchup scheduled for Sept. 12 at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin. The last time the Buckeyes visited DKR, they came home with a 24-7 victory in 2006. Troy Smith officially kicked off his Heisman Trophy campaign by throwing for 269 yards and two touchdowns with most of that going to Anthony Gonzalez and Ted Ginn Jr., who combined for 13 catches, 239 yards and both TDs.

- The other teams on OSU’s 2026 schedule that could/should be ranked when they play are Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, USC, Oregon and Michigan. All but Illinois finished among the top 25 last season, and the Fighting Illini were 26th in the final Associated Press poll of the season, just two points out of the top 25.

- The toughest assignment for the Buckeyes is likely a three-game stretch that includes trips to Indiana and USC (with an open week in between) followed by a home game against Oregon. Ohio State hasn’t lost in Bloomington since 1988 but hasn’t beaten the Trojans in the Coliseum since 1946. As for Oregon, the Buckeyes haven’t beaten the Ducks during the regular season since 1987.

- Speaking of tough stretches, Indiana hosts Ohio State and travels to Michigan on back-to-back Saturdays in mid-October. The Hoosiers are 0-14-1 at home against the Buckeyes since their last win in 1988 and have lost 22 in a row in Ann Arbor since a 27-20 win in 1967.

- In case you noticed there is no punctuation following the K in Darrell K Royal, that is not a misprint. The legendary head coach of the Longhorns had no middle name, attaching the K later in life to honor his mother, Katie, who died of cancer when he was an infant.

- One more piece of Royal trivia. In addition to being the winningest coach in Texas program history, he was also the starting quarterback at Oklahoma in the late 1940s, leading the Sooners to 21 consecutive victories in 1948-49. That streak eventually reached 31 before Kentucky delivered a 10-7 upset in the 1951 Sugar Bowl. Two years later, the Sooners began another winning streak, this one lasting an NCAA-record 47 consecutive games.





Jackson, West Out For Spring

Ohio State will be missing its top two running backs during the spring. Head coach Ryan Day said during his appearance on “The Ryan Day Radio Show” on Jan. 30 that rising sophomores Bo Jackson and Isaiah West will miss the spring to have surgery to repair shoulder injuries.

“Both Isaiah and Bo will be out in the spring,” Day said. “They are just getting their shoulders repaired.”

Jackson and West each had impressive first seasons with the Buckeyes last year. Jackson had 179 carries for 1,090 yards and six touchdowns, while West ran for 310 yards and two touchdowns on 59 carries.

Day said he has high expectations for both players next year.

“They won’t be freshmen anymore,” Day said. “They have a lot of experience and a lot to grow from last year. They’re both three-down backs, which to me is exciting. If we’re going to make the run that we need to make

No Buckeye Sports Bulletin Print For Three Weeks

The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the March 7 issue, is not scheduled to be mailed until March 3, three weeks from the mailing of this issue, an annual gap as we align our 24-issue schedule. There is bound to be plenty of Buckeye news between now and that next issue, with spring football and the men’s and women’s basketball postseason rapidly approaching. Just a reminder, the complete print schedule for BSB, including the mailing date of the next issue, is always printed at the bottom of the credit box on page 3.

There is no reason to miss any of the latest news between now and the next print BSB. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be reporting on all the breaking news in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB print subscribers.

The discussion should also be hot and heavy on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, where subscribers and staff members interact, with all this activity.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The BSB staff reports on the breaking stories plus posts additional features.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays.

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems. This electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is also free to subscribers.

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next season, those guys are going to have to be great. They’re going to have to really take the next step.”

With Jackson and West sidelined, Ohio State should get a chance to test Florida transfer Ja’Kobi Jackson and young running backs Anthony Rogers, Favour Akih and Legend Bey.

Meyer Says Day, Smith Need Balance

On the Jan. 29 episode of “The Triple Op-

tion” podcast, former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer discussed how newly-hired offensive coordinator Arthur Smith and Day could blend their offensive philosophies.

Meyer then recalled the process of implementing a new coordinator during his own tenure. The former Buckeye head coach and College Football Hall of Famer added that it was vital for him to see consistency in terminology so he always knew exactly what was being installed and taught.

However, Meyer noted that new coordinators typically look to install their own systems when they arrive, unless an agreement is set in place prior.

“The minute you hire a big-name coordinator, the coordinator is going to run his stuff,” Meyer said. “So you are going to have 100 people in that program now learning new terminology, unless there was an agreement. Whenever I hired a coordinator, I would give them a playbook and tell them, ‘This is what we’re going to run.’ I usually elevated my guys, and we ran it because I wanted to know what’s going on.”

Smith previously served as the offensive coordinator for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 2024-25 and brings a more run-heavy approach compared to the aerial attacks or more balanced offenses Day has often managed at Ohio State.

Meyer, who has extensive experience navigating coordinator turnover after working with four different play-callers at Ohio State, said he had to ensure each new coordinator meshed with the existing framework rather than a complete overhaul in the program’s offensive identity.

Meyer added that Smith and Day will need to merge their offensive styles within Ohio State’s established system and that the progress to this point has been promising.

“We talked about that. Is Coach Day going to walk into the meeting room and say ‘What in hell are we doing? I don’t recognize this terminology?’ It’s been pretty good, so far,” Meyer said. “I think there is going to be a mesh of what he’s done before.”

Day expects the transition to be seamless, expressing his confidence in the hiring of Smith on multiple fronts and calling the pickup a “home run.”

“His track record in the NFL, experience as a coordinator, play caller and a

head coach checked every box during the search,” Day said. “He’ll do a great job in helping our players reach their potential on the field while also connecting with them as people.”

“I think we hit a home run here when you look at all the different things,” Day said. “I can’t get into the details of the background and all that, I think I will at some other point, but it’s easy to see when you talk to people who know football.”

OSU Sets Fiscal Record

After the football team’s run in the 12-team College Football Playoff at the end of the 2024 season, Ohio State’s athletic department brought in a record-setting \$336,077,887 in the 2025 fiscal year, according to an NCAA financial report that recently became public.

The athletic department reported \$320,394,965 in expenses, indicating a surplus of roughly \$15.7 million.

“As the collegiate athletics model continues to evolve, successfully navigating the financial landscape is a must, and I am proud of everyone within our program who made last year a success,” athletic director Ross Bjork said in a statement. “While there will be continued challenges to our economic model, we will strive to be best in class by continuing to innovate and stay aggressive in generating new revenue streams while also managing our expenses as soundly as possible. We are grateful for every Buckeye fan, donor, season ticket holder, and all students who support our program in numerous ways.”

The athletic department was undoubtedly helped by the football team’s run in the playoffs. The Buckeyes played nine home games during the 2025 fiscal year, which started on July 1, 2024, and ended on June 30, 2025.

Ohio State brought in \$22.9 million more in ticket sales than it did during the 2024 fiscal year, when the football team played only six home games.

Ohio State received \$68,284,273 in donor contributions, which was also a record. The Buckeyes reported an increase in revenue from media rights fees. During the 2024 fiscal year, Ohio State received

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## Another Sincere Note From BSB Publisher Frank Moskowitz

In this space last issue, I noted that we are trying to rebuild Buckeye Sports Bulletin's financial and subscriber base after what was a very difficult 2025, primarily associated with continuing problems getting BSB delivered in a timely manner throughout the state and across the nation. We have made no secret about the number of longtime subscribers – many of 40 years or more – we have lost due to their unhappiness with their delivery, something we have no control over. Accordingly, we are also making an effort to convert more readers to first-class mail in an envelope – not perfect but much more consistent than periodicals-class mail and with a shorter waiting period for a replacement paper.

As I also noted last issue, the replacement papers became a severe financial burden as well. We have tried to do the right thing by our readers by replacing tardy or missing issues at the cost of \$3 apiece for a paper we have already paid to mail once. You can see how that quickly adds up. It's a far cry from the missing paper credit most other existing publications would offer you. First-class mail, even for football season only, would sharply decrease the number of replacement issues we send and also increase your enjoyment of BSB.

I don't claim to be the best businessman. Rather I am a newspaper man who wants to offer readers a quality publication at a manageable price. After 45 years at it, I finally realize that there are many of you out there who love your BSB and are willing to pay full price or more without hesitation.

While we are usually promoting special offers with reduced subscription prices, today I am asking you to pay full price. I am also asking you, if you are able, to renew for two years. Each issue we will list the latest names, with city and state, of those who renew

for two years at full price under the heading, "I Believe In BSB." For those who have recently renewed or are preserving funds, you can always become a VIP for as low as \$50 and have your name listed in the paper as well. Higher level VIPs have their name listed in every issue.

One year of BSB full price with regular-mail service is \$129.95. Two years is \$259.90. One year first-class at a temporary adjusted rate is \$199.95. Two years is \$399.90. For information on how to become a Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP consult your latest issue.

Do you realize that if 1,000 readers paid full fare instead of the typical \$20 off for our traditional Subscriber Special, that would generate an additional \$20,000? That's enough to print and mail three issues of BSB. And many of you take advantage of offers that offer greater discounts. If you are paying a lesser rate, why not add at least \$20 to even that? You have to ask yourself how much you enjoy Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Not to sound like those charitable campaigns you see on late night TV, but is it worth an additional five or six cents a day?

People have already started responding to my first call for support. To judge from their conversation, the answer to that question of is it worth it is "yes." Those checking in have been very complimentary both of the paper and in some cases of me. In both cases, it is quite humbling. The compliments should go to our staff however. I have been blessed to have been surrounded with people who understand the concept of quality and family and that the family includes the BSB readers.

Rich Exner and Craig Merz have been with us all 45 years of existence. Mike Wachsmann is in his 43rd year. Mark Rea is on year 38 and Becky Roberts year 30. The subscriber favorite, the affable Dave Breithaupt

was with us for 19 years before he retired in June, and he still works six hours a week just to keep me on my toes. I lost track of how long Nicole Hamilton has been associated with us. She just returned after many years off to raise a family, and I know many of you have spoken to her on the phone in recent months. We are glad to have her back.

As long as all those staffers have been here, along with the many former staffers who remain closely involved, there are far more subscribers who have been along for a lengthy ride, many as long as Craig and Rich. If you have been with us for over 40 years, I am hopeful you feel a vested interest in our rebuild.

As far as upgrading to first class, for the time being as mentioned, we have lowered the cost of an annual first-class subscription by \$10. We believe that getting subscribers to upgrade, even for football season only, will improve the experience for everybody – readers and those here answering the phone. Act now and you can upgrade to first class at last year's rate – \$35 through the Michigan game or \$45 through the football recruiting wrap-up in February.

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For the record, Rev. Steven Brown, currently of Part Charlotte, Fla., was the first to respond to my call to action, and we are looking forward to hearing from many more of you.

Thanks in advance!

\$52,794,280. That figure increased to \$64,917,009 this year.

### OSU Hires Discher As Special Teams Coach

Ohio State hired former Illinois special teams coach/tight ends coach Robby Discher as its new special teams coach on Jan. 31, according to multiple reports.

Headed into the offseason, the Buckeyes were not necessarily expected to hire a special teams coach because, for the past two seasons, they had been without one. Instead of having one coach to oversee special teams, Ohio State used several coaches on staff to work with the special teams. Now, Discher, who coached at Illinois for three seasons, will be tasked with leading the unit.

Discher had success as the Fighting Illini's special teams coach. His units ranked No. 16 and No. 57 in 2024 and 2025 respectively, according to ESPN's special teams efficiency metric.

Before coaching at Illinois, Discher made stops at Toledo, Louisiana, Georgia and Tulane. Although he was a quality control coach at Georgia, he was a special teams coach with Toledo, Louisiana and Tulane.

The Buckeyes have had some impressive special teams moments over the past two seasons. Former safety Caleb Downs had a punt-return touchdown during the 2024 season, and cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. had a kick-return touchdown during the 2025 season, but overall, the unit has struggled with consistency.

During the postseason, kicker Jayden Fielding had a couple of crucial misses, including one that came from just 27 yards in Ohio State's 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game.

With Discher coming in and the Buckeyes also adding former Baylor kicker Connor Hawkins, who went 18 of 22 on field goals last year, they hope to see improvements in the kicking game.

### Day Says Sayin Best College QB

Heading into next season, Day has given his quarterback the ultimate vote of confidence. During an appearance on his radio show on Jan. 30, Day said there is no one Ohio State would rather have under center next year than Julian Sayin.

"We feel like we have the best quarterback coming back in college football next year," Day said.

It's high praise from Day, but it's easy to see why he has such confidence in the Carlsbad, Calif., native. In his first season as a starter, Sayin threw for 3,610 yards, 32 touchdowns and eight interceptions while completing 77.0 percent of his passes, the best mark in the country. As Day pointed out in his radio show, Sayin played beyond his years on the way to becoming a Heisman Trophy finalist.

"One of the youngest guys to get to New York City, I think, in a while. Most of the guys who've been going there are older guys," Day said. "So we're all excited about this year for him and taking the next step, even as a leader and all the different things. But

obviously it was a great first year for him."

### Shaw Guarantees USC Win Over OSU

Former Ohio State safety Bryson Shaw split his collegiate time between the Buckeyes and USC. However, it certainly seems that Shaw's allegiances are with the Trojans.

In an exchange on Twitter with former

Ohio State linebacker Steele Chambers, Shaw guaranteed the Trojans will defeat the Buckeyes when the two teams meet on Halloween in 2026.

"I guarantee you (USC) beats Ohio State on Oct. 31 at home, by the way. (Defensive linemen (Kamryn) Crawford, Jide Abasiri,

Continued On Page 6



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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

(Braylan) Shelby and so on will have a field day with that front. You probably don't even know who they are because you guys live in a bubble. I would research them."

Shaw and Chambers are former Ohio State teammates who now co-host a podcast called the "Shaw and Steele Show."

Like Shaw, Chambers seems fairly confident his alma mater will win on Halloween.

"Oh man, timbers are shivered over

here," Chambers posted in response. "Going up against the 51st-ranked (scoring) defense sure will be a challenge."

## Spring Game Set For April 18

Ohio State's Scarlet and Gray squads will scrimmage each other in the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 18 in Ohio Stadium.

The spring game will serve as Ohio State's final practice in its spring practice window that begins on March 10.

The 2026 spring game will be played almost a week later than Ohio State's spring game in 2025, where the Scarlet offense beat the Gray defense 50-31 on April 12, 2025.

Ohio State holds the record for the highest attendance at a college spring game, drawing 100,189 fans in 2016.

## JSN Says OSU Is WRU

Seattle Seahawks and former Ohio

State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba has made up his mind: Ohio State is "Wide Receiver U." During an availability before the Super Bowl, the superstar receiver praised his alma mater for continuing its receiver production.

"When you look at the list (of elite receivers from Ohio State), it's a long list, and it's about to grow even more," Smith-Njigba said. "It's just too much elite talent from top to bottom in the league and guys that were in the league in past years. So I think when you bring it all together and you look at the names and what we've done, I think there's no question now."

Although Smith-Njigba may currently be the most productive former Buckeye receiver in the NFL, he's only one of several former Buckeyes – including Tampa Bay Buccaneers receiver Emeka Egbuka, Arizona Cardinals receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., Washington Commanders receiver Terry McLaurin, New Orleans Saints receiver Chris Olave and New York Jets receiver Garrett Wilson – who has made a name for

himself at the next level.

As Smith-Njigba mentioned, the Buckeyes' standing as "Wide Receiver U" should only be boosted by the next crop of young Buckeye receivers. Not only did Egbuka have an impressive rookie season, going for 938 receiving yards and six touchdowns on 63 catches, but Carnell Tate appears poised for a first-round selection in the upcoming 2026 NFL draft, and Jeremiah Smith the year after.

## Vrabel, JSN Win NFL COTY, OPOTY Honors

Former Buckeyes Mike Vrabel and Smith-Njigba continued to pick up NFL honors since BSB last went to press. Before Vrabel, the head coach of the New England Patriots, and Seattle's Smith-Njigba were on opposite sides of Super Bowl LX, each took home hardware on Feb. 5 at the NFL Honors award show.

Vrabel took home Coach of the Year honors during the ceremony, while Smith-Njigba was named Offensive Player of the Year.

# 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 44 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.

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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.

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2026 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2025 Record, Bowl Result
Sept. 5	BALL STATE	TBA	TBA	4-8, not bowl eligible
Sept. 12	at Texas	TBA	TBA	10-3, 41-27 win over Michigan
Sept. 19	KENT STATE	TBA	TBA	5-7, not bowl eligible
Sept. 26	ILLINOIS	TBA	TBA	9-4, 30-28 win over Tennessee
Oct. 3	at Iowa	TBA	TBA	9-4, 34-27 win over Vanderbilt
Oct. 10	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	4-8, not bowl eligible
Oct. 17	at Indiana	TBA	TBA	16-0, 27-21 win over Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 31	at USC	TBA	TBA	9-4, 30-27 loss to TCU
Nov. 7	OREGON	TBA	TBA	13-2, 56-22 loss to Indiana
Nov. 14	NORTHWESTERN	TBA	TBA	7-6, 34-7 win over Central Michigan
Nov. 21	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	7-6, 44-22 loss to Utah
Nov. 28	MICHIGAN	TBA	TBA	9-4, 41-27 loss to Texas
Dec. 5	Big Ten Championship	TBA	TBA	

Neither win came as a surprise. Both Vrabel and Smith-Njigba had already received similar honors from the PFWA.

Vrabel earned the honor after leading the Patriots to a record of 14-3 in his first year with the team, while Smith-Njigba won Offensive Player of the Year after hauling in 119 passes for 1,793 receiving yards, which led the NFL.

NBA Buckeyes Traded At Deadline

As the NBA trade deadline approached on Feb. 4, multiple former Ohio State basketball players found new homes in the pros.

Minnesota Timberwolves point guard Mike Conley, who played just one season for the Buckeyes in 2006-07, was traded to the Chicago Bulls with Detroit Pistons guard Jaden Ivey as a part of a three-team deal that sent Kevin Huerter, Dario Šarić and a 2026 first-round protected swap (via Minnesota) to Detroit, while the Timberwolves received cash considerations.

Conley, who helped lead Ohio State to the 2007 national title game in his lone season with the Buckeyes, was later waived by the Bulls and is eyeing a return to the Timberwolves in the buyout market.

Washington Wizards shooting guard Malaki Branham and Dallas Mavericks point guard D'Angelo Russell, who both also spent just a season at Ohio State in 2021-22 and 2014-15, respectively, were part of a blockbuster three-team deal between the Wizards, Mavericks and Charlotte Hornets.

Branham was the lone player to land in Charlotte, while Russell was sent to Washington with Anthony Davis, Jaden Hardy and Dante Exum. Dallas received Khriston Middleton, AJ Johnson, Tyus Jones, Marvin Bagley III, a 2026 first-round pick (via Oklahoma City), a 2030 first-round pick (via Golden State) and three future second-round picks (via Wizards) in the deal.

OSU-UCLA Men's Volleyball Set Record

In the midst of No. 1 UCLA's 3-0 sweep of No. 12 Ohio State's men's volleyball team on Jan. 30, the Bruins and Buckeyes made history in the second set.

After UCLA claimed the first set 25-21, the two teams combined for a whopping 94 points in the second set of the match, with the Bruins claiming the set 48-46.

The 94 points combined set the record for most points in a set, breaking the previous record of 88 in a 45-43 win by No. 9 Grand Canyon over No. 1 BYU on Feb. 25, 2021.

Ohio State sat at a 6-3 record, with its only three losses coming to No. 1 UCLA (3-0), No. 2 Long Beach State (3-1) and No. 4 USC (3-2). Rankings are according to the AVCA National Collegiate Men's Volleyball Poll.

OSU Tennis Earns Two Top-Five Wins

Ohio State delivered two dominant performances when the Buckeyes downed No. 5 Texas 4-1 on Jan. 30, followed by a 4-0 sweep of No. 1 Wake Forest on Feb. 1 at the Ty Tucker Tennis Center in Columbus.

No. 5 Brandon Carpico and Nikita Filin opened the Buckeyes' match vs. the Longhorns with a 6-3 victory over Texas's Sebastian Gorzny and Lucas Marionneau. Ohio State's No. 3 Aidan Kim and Bryce Nakashima then fell to Texas' pairing of Oliver Ojakaar and Sebastian Eriksson 6-4, before No. 10 Alexander Bernard and Alex Okonkwo claimed the doubles point for the Buckeyes with a 7-5 victory over the Longhorns' Kalin Ivanovski and Abel Forger.

In singles, No. 51 Preston Stearns opened with a 6-1, 1-0 victory over Ivanowski prior to Texas' No. 39 Gorzny cutting Ohio State's lead to 2-1 with a 6-4, 6-0 win over Kim. Ohio State claimed its 4-1 victory over Texas with Loren Byers 6-3, 6-4 victory over Lucas Brown, and Filin's 6-1, 6-3 victory over Longhorns' Jonah Braswell.

Former Buckeye OL Dies At 76

Former Ohio State offensive lineman Merv Teague died at the age of 76 on Jan. 23, according to his cousin, Jabari Teague.

Teague was a left tackle for the 1971 and '72 teams, playing under legendary head coach Woody Hayes opposite All-America right tackle John Hicks.

The 1972 team he played on made it to the Rose Bowl, which was the first year of a four-year stretch that the Buckeyes made it to Pasadena for the event. That year, Teague and Ohio State lost to USC 42-17, finishing with a 9-2 record.

As a sophomore, Teague was a defensive

end for the Buckeyes and made three tackles during the 1970 season. He initially joined the team as a tight end for the 1969 season when freshmen were ineligible to play in their first season.

After making the switch to the offensive line, Teague's junior season was cut short due to a shoulder injury that kept him out of the final six games of the 1971 season. His absence may have hurt the Buckeyes toward the end of the season. They lost each of their final three games against Michigan State, Northwestern and Michigan on the way to a 6-4 record.

Lee Arrested On First-Degree Murder Charge

Former Ohio State linebacker Darron Lee was arrested on charges of first-degree murder on Feb. 5.

According to multiple reports, the 31-year-old was arrested by the Hamilton County Sheriff's office in Tennessee after his girlfriend was found dead inside a home near Ooltewah, Tenn.

First responders were called to the scene after a report that CPR was in progress on an adult female. Upon arrival, first responders attempted life-saving measures, but the victim was pronounced dead on the scene.

Investigators arrested Lee after preliminary findings indicated the woman's death was the result of a homicide.

Lee was charged with first-degree murder and tampering with evidence.

Lee played for Ohio State from 2013-15. He was a two-year starter before being selected in the first round of the 2016 NFL draft by the New York Jets.



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# Keeping Players As Important As Recruiting

Continued From Page 1

football. Two of them, tight end Hunter Welcing and running back Ja’Kobi Jackson, are in their seventh years.

That doesn’t mean the roster will only be filled with yearly rentals going forward. Day said on “The Ryan Day Radio Show” in early February that he still wants the program to excel at bringing in high school prospects.

“Philosophically, when you look at it, it’s important to still make sure that we’re recruiting really good high school prospects, getting them into the program, and making sure we’re developing them at a high level,” Day said. “Anytime you want to sustain a certain level of play, you need to have a culture that carries over year to year. It can’t be a year-to-year roster at Ohio State, in my opinion.

“Now, maybe it gets to that point somewhere along the line, but for a lot of reasons, it’s important to bring in young men and develop them. So although the landscape’s changed, we’re going to try to make sure that we do that. For a lot of reasons. I think it’s important to carry over our culture, so that we don’t just start from scratch completely.”

One thing that Day thinks goes under the radar for the Buckeyes is the ability to retain the players who made an impact for them last season. As is always the case, there were many starters who left for the

NFL, with the defense being impacted greatly by seven starters leaving for the pros.

But outside of that, of the 22 starters on both sides of the ball, only one left through the transfer portal. Right guard Tegra Tshabola committed to Kentucky after being arguably the weakest point of the OSU starters last season, so it may be that the two sides decided to mutually part ways.

“It’s important for us to retain the guys that we have,” Day said. “When you look at the starters coming back from last year, there was really only one starter that ended up in the portal. The rest of them, we retained. That’s a really important thing for us year in and year out. I don’t think people quite realize the amount of resources it takes to retain a roster of starting players at Ohio State, because everybody in the country wants those guys.”

And as Day said, recruiting high school players and retaining them would still be his preferred way to build a team, for multiple reasons.

“Not only are they more mature, but they also have poured into this program,” he said. “They’ve invested in this program, they’re now experienced, they’ve played in games, they’ve played in the Horseshoe, they’ve played on the road, they’ve played in the playoffs, and all those things.”

Retaining all of the 29 players the Buckeyes added in the 2026 class is almost certainly not going to happen, but with many



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HENRY JR.

**O-H HENRY — Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star receiver Chris Henry Jr. is one of the many stellar recruits in the Ohio State recruiting class of 2026, ranking 14th nationally in the 247Sports composite. He is the son of the late Chris Henry, who was a wide receiver for five seasons with the Cincinnati Bengals.**

of them enrolling early and already being on campus, Day has been able to see what some of them can bring and he thinks many of them want to remain at Ohio State for their careers.

“We feel like these guys want to be here.

They want to graduate from here. They want to reach the goals of winning the rivalry game, winning championships here. All that comes into play.”


Some of the players who joined OSU in the 2026 recruiting class will get to try to contribute to those goals right away. The most likely to get on the field quickly might be Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 201).

Two-year starter Carnell Tate is off to the draft to likely be selected early in the first round. The players who would have been possible replacements for him on the outside, Bryson Rodgers, Mylan Graham and Quincy Porter, all left through the transfer portal.

The Buckeyes added two experienced wide receivers in the portal in former UTSA and LSU pass catchers Devin McCuin and Kyle Parker, but having been committed to Ohio State since July of 2023, Henry is already likely more familiar with the OSU offense than McCuin and Parker are.

Henry is one of three players who finished as composite five-star recruits in the Buckeyes’ class. As the No. 14-ranked player in the class, he is joined by Cleveland Glenville linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 222) and Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland cornerback Jay Timmons (5-11, 185) as five-star players.

In the final rankings for Rivals, the top of the Buckeyes class looked even better. Timmons was the highest-ranked of the



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PHOTO COURTESY OF CINCERE JOHNSON

**BIG TIME —** Cleveland Glenville's Cincere Johnson is a five-star recruit ranked No. 16 in the 247Sports composite who totaled 185 tackles and 13½ sacks during his senior season.

bunch at No. 12 in the country, followed by Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-2, 182) at No. 17, Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260) at No. 22, Johnson at No. 26 and Henry at No. 31. All five of them finished as five-star players.

The No. 1 player in the Rivals rankings was Princeton (N.J.) Hun School five-star defensive end Luke Wafle (6-6, 257), who was nearly a Buckeye before ultimately committing to USC.

Also in the top 100 in the 247Sports composite rankings for the Buckeyes are Guilford, Wilder, Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 331) and Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207).

Narrowly missing out of that range is No. 103 in the country, Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-0, 189) and No. 126, North Forney, Texas, four-star athlete Legend Bey (5-11, 175).

Bey's path to signing with the Buckeyes was certainly a unique one. He was committed to Tennessee until Nov. 10, when he originally flipped to Ohio State. Then, on the first day of the early signing period, he was prepared to sign with the Buckeyes,

but as a minor, he still needed his mother's signature to complete the necessary paperwork.

She wanted her son to end up with the Volunteers, and on Dec. 3, he flipped back to Tennessee and signed there. Even then, Bey was vocal about his wishes to be a Buckeye and on Dec. 16, he was granted his release from the Volunteers and six days later signed with Ohio State.

Day was excited about the entire 2026 class, but when he spoke about the new additions to the Buckeyes on his radio show, he made a point to focus on Bey and what he can bring to the offense.

Primarily recruited by running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, Bey will be used as a running back, but can also slide to the slot and line up as a kick/punt returner. His 100-meter dash speed of 10.23 seconds will immediately give him an advantage when it comes to creating separation or getting to an open hole.

"Legend Bey is a guy who is dynamite. I call him maybe the poor man's Tyreek Hill," Day said. "I mean, he can go. And when you watch him last year play quarterback in Texas, he's putting up five-touchdown games, six-touchdown games, just running around making guys miss. He's lightning in a bottle. So, he can do a bunch of different

things for us. I'm very excited to see him in the spring and figure out how he can fit into the offense."

Where Day was initially happiest with the incoming freshman class was on the offensive and defensive lines, giving Tyler Bowen and Larry Johnson a lot of credit for the jobs they did recruiting their respective positions when he spoke on Dec. 3.

"Larry really finished strong here and addressed some areas," he said. "Tyler did an excellent job up front, and that was important."

"(Bowen) was thorough," Day added later. "He's constantly bringing guys in on campus. Mark (Pantoni) will tell you that when we have a game or a visit, there are eight, nine, 10 offensive linemen. He connects well for an offensive line coach. He has a great combination of the ability to coach technique, he's got toughness and he also does an unbelievable job of connecting (with players)."

Along with Greer, Bowen brought in a class that consists of Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor three-star interior offensive lineman Tucker Smith (6-5, 280), Mentor, Ohio, three-star offensive tackle Landry Brede (6-5, 280) and Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward three-star interior offensive lineman Mason Wilhelm (6-4, 285).

On the defensive line, Johnson brought in Richland (N.J.) St. Augustine Prep four-star defensive tackle Damari Simeon (6-3, 275), Bessemer (Ala.) City four-star defensive tackle Emanuel Ruffin (6-4, 295), Buford, Ga., four-star edge rusher Dre Quinn

(6-4, 228), Lafayette (La.) Acadiana three-star defensive tackle Darryus McKinley (6-3, 270) and Cleveland Glenville three-star defensive tackle Jamir Perez (6-4, 260) to join Wilder.

All but one of the incoming freshmen enrolled at Ohio State early, according to Day. The only player who is waiting until the summer is Smith.

Day has said in the past that being with the Buckeyes for a full spring is extremely important for freshmen coming into their first season if they want to get on the field.

"That's the great thing about getting these guys in here (in January). They get to go through it, and by the time it gets to August, they get in September, they're not freshmen anymore," he said. "Now they've got to go, and they came here to play."

And with the freshmen already on campus, they have been able to see them in the weight room already and how hard they are working, which the coaches have all been impressed with, according to the head coach.

"If you talk to people in the program and in the building right now, they're very impressed with the makeup of these guys. I think there's a lot of potential, like listening to (director of sports performance Mickey Marotti) talk about what they look like on the field and running and all those things," Day said. "But also just their makeup. Guys are showing up on time, they're communicating well, they're doing a good job already academically – just very serious about what they do. So that part's really good, and that's the foundation of our program."

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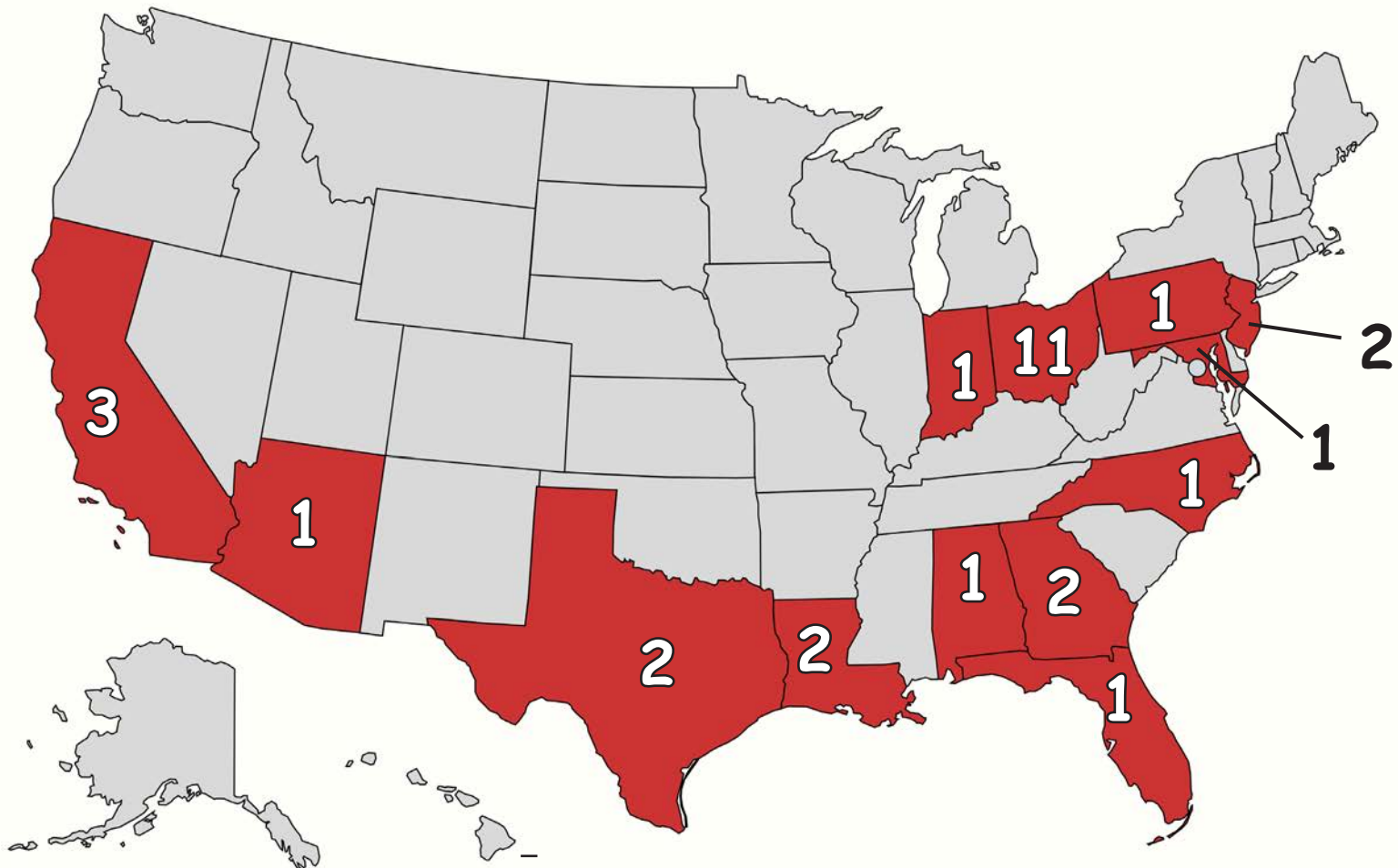
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Times have changed. Our values have not.

# OSU's Class Of 2026



All rankings from the 247Sports composite. All statistics provided by Ohio State and MaxPreps.



## FAVOUR AKIH

RB • 6-0 • 190

Delaware (Ohio)  
Rutherford B. Hayes

Rank: RB 21, Overall 302, OH 13



**ACCOLADES:** Rushed for 1,653 yards in 11 games as a junior at Delaware Hayes with 15 touchdowns and a long of 78 yards. Also caught nine passes for 142 yards and three scores.

**AKIH SAYS:** "From the first time I got the offer (from Ohio State), when I got the chance to speak with Coach (Ryan) Day, he's a very legendary coach and he had a lot of great things to say about me. They know what I need to work on to get better. So they already have a plan for me, and that's really all I needed to know."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Physically imposing between-the-tackles runner with a long-striding gait and the speed to generate explosive plays. Owns impressive two-way snaps at running back and linebacker. Will plow through arm tackles and finish runs with physicality when needed." – Hudson Standish, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Also competes in track and field. Ran a 10.9-second 100-meter dash and a 22.03-second 200-meter dash in his junior season. Akih is young for his class, playing deep into his senior season at 16 years old.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 8, 2025.



## LEGEND BEY

ATH • 5-11 • 175

North Forney, Texas

Rank: ATH: 5, Overall 126, TX 19



**ACCOLADES:** Gained over 4,000 career rushing yards and 3,500 passing yards in his high school career as the quarterback for North Forney. Was responsible for triple-digit touchdowns.

**BEY SAYS:** "Ohio State is a winning school. I want to win and be in the best position to be around guys of my caliber. Ohio State has incredible development and a winning culture. I know they have the best strength and conditioning coach in the nation."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Owns verified track speed that translates in pads. Plays with sudden downhill acceleration and corresponding top-end speed. Also displays short-area redirecting, twitch to evade in tight quarters and set up explosive cuts. His years spent as a high school quarterback should aid in awareness and football IQ when transitioning to a new position." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Also runs track and posted 100-meter times of 10.23 and 10.73, qualifying for Texas 6A Regionals in his junior season.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 22, 2025.



## KHMARI BING

SAF • 6-0 • 190

Baltimore St. Frances

Rank: SAF 35, Overall 405, MD 2



**ACCOLADES:** Bing helped St. Frances Academy post a 9-1 record as a senior in 2025.

**BING SAYS:** "I'm the deepest of the deepest. Sideline to sideline, coming down the alley and making tackles. As a free safety, you're the quarterback of the defense. You've got to know what's coming."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Deep safety with enormous range and sharp tracking skills that can also get ball carriers on the ground in the open field. He played some of his best football as a senior for one of America's top high school defenses and generated takeaways in marquee matchups. He's comfortable operating from a two-high and single-high shell as he can charge down into the alley or get to the deeper corners of the field. Understands that the low man often wins as a tackler and will try to cut down opponents." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Runs a 4.49 in the 40-yard dash and a 4.32 in the shuttle run.

**COMMIT DATE:** Oct. 14, 2025.





## BROCK BOYD

WR • 6-1 • 180

Southlake (Texas) Carroll

Rank: WR 86, Overall 630, TX 85



**ACCOLADES:** Boyd went for 1,875 yards and 19 receiving touchdowns as a junior at Southlake Carroll. He broke Southlake Carroll's all-time receiving record and finished his career with over 4,000 receiving yards.

**BOYD SAYS:** "Everyone talks about their pedigree of wide receivers, and it kind of goes without saying, that's something that always drew me to Ohio State. But I think what did it for me was seeing how hard they worked and how detail-oriented they are. They're a complete group from top to bottom."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "I think Brock Boyd is going to be a guy who outplays his ranking, or he's a guy where you throw the stars out the window when you look at him. Because when you have a Chris Henry and a Guilford, if you have a guy like Brock Boyd as a complementary piece of that, I think that is perfect." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** His brother Brady played at Texas Tech and Utah State. Brock Boyd is a multisport athlete who also competed in track and field. Boyd posted a 200-meter dash time of 21.77 seconds.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 15, 2025



## BLAINE BRADFORD

SAF • 6-1 • 207

Baton Rouge (La.)

Catholic

Rank: SAF 7, Overall 73, LA 3



**ACCOLADES:** Bradford racked up 53 tackles and a blocked kick in his junior year at Baton Rouge Catholic, helping the Bears make it to the semifinals of Louisiana's Division I select playoff. He was also an all-state honorable mention.

**BRADFORD SAYS:** "I chose Ohio State because I came to Columbus and felt how bad they really wanted me here. I was able to talk to a lot of the players, get in contact with them, feel the vibe, feel the culture. Ohio State is not like anywhere else in the country."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Blaine's maybe a little bit more of your traditional safety, although some of the stuff that really impressed me with him is his blitzing and playing in the box. You also see him playing really deep in the secondary. So it's easy to see why he was a top-150 guy when he can do all of those different things on the field." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Has one older brother, Jacob Bradford, who spent a season at LSU before transferring to West Virginia this offseason. The brothers are the sons of Erin and Stacy Bradford.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 31, 2025.



## LANDRY BREDE

OT • 6-5 • 280

Mentor, Ohio

Rank: OT 81, Overall 897, OH 42



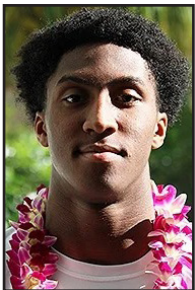
**ACCOLADES:** Helped Mentor to 12-0 seasons in both his junior and senior years, finishing as the Division I Region 1 runner-up in each of those years.

**BREDE SAYS:** "I have been watching the Buckeyes for as long as I can remember, so it's definitely a blessing to be able to join them very soon."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "The biggest thing with him is his versatility to play tackle, and he can play guard. I don't know if his name will excite people, but he's been a pretty good player early on in his career. These other guys in the class are kind of penciled into certain spots. I think he gives them that added flexibility to kind of get their best five out there." – Marc Givler, Buckeye Huddle

**PERSONAL:** Landry is the son of Blair Brede and the late Emily Brede.

**COMMIT DATE:** Oct. 13, 2025



## SIMEON CALDWELL

SAF • 6-2 • 195

Jacksonville (Fla.)

The Bolles School

Rank: LB 9 Overall 187, FL 28



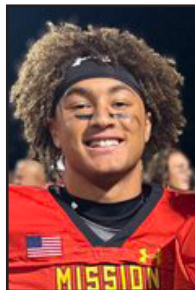
**ACCOLADES:** Recorded 112 total tackles, including five for loss in 15 games as a senior. He also had two interceptions and four pass deflections.

**CALDWELL SAYS:** "Ohio State was the place I felt most comfortable. The culture there is amazing. I had the feeling that I had been a part of the program for years."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Sharp back-seven defender with some alignment flex. Could settle in as a speed-and-space linebacker or try his hand as a low safety. Finding a home in the slot also isn't out of the question. Pairs quick-twitted athleticism with a higher football IQ. Shades passing windows at the first and second levels as both a zone and man defender with his head swivel and route recognition. Frequently makes stops in pursuit with his gap-closing burst and will cut down escape paths in the alley." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Multisport athlete who also competed in both track and field and basketball. Helped his 4x100 relay team capture a gold medal in the Florida 2A state championship in 2024.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 3, 2025.



## LUKE FAHEY

QB • 6-0 • 185

Mission Viejo, Calif.

Rank: QB 38, Overall 659, CA 48



**ACCOLADES:** Completed 207 of 292 passes for 3,199 yards, 25 touchdowns and three interceptions as a senior. In a 76-49 win over Los Alamitos on Oct. 30, he threw for 569 yards and five touchdowns.

**FAHEY SAYS:** "My dad's parents were both students at Ohio State, and they met actually in the library at Ohio State. In their house, all they did was watch Ohio State, every single sport that was on TV. And then my dad grew up an Ohio State fan, and he kind of molded me into being an Ohio State fan."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Fahey is one of the most talented quarterbacks (from the) West. He's surgical from the pocket and can pick a defense apart with his accuracy and timing. Shows off a quick release, throws one of the tighter balls in the region and processes the game extremely quick. In terms of his ability to get through progressions and reads, he's one of the more advanced signal callers in the country." – Greg Biggins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Played basketball as a sophomore in high school and lacrosse for multiple years. In his sophomore and junior seasons, Fahey scored 68 goals with 45 assists in 34 games.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 3, 2025.



## KADEN GEBHARDT

SAF • 6-2 • 200

Lewis Center (Ohio)

Olentangy

Rank: SAF 46, Overall 570, OH 32



**ACCOLADES:** Was the Ohio Capital Conference Defensive Player of the Year in both 2024 and 2025. Recorded 106 tackles, eight pass breakups and two interceptions in his senior year.

**GEBHARDT SAYS:** "I'm a Columbus kid, and Ohio State has been my dream school from before I even got recruited. Then, when I talked to Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach (Matt) Guerrieri and Coach (Matt) Patricia and they talked about how much they wanted me, you can't go wrong with playing for the No. 1 team and being developed by the best coaches."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Gebhardt's a hard-nosed safety with monster year-over-year production that blends nasty physicality with sharp instincts. He flows downhill with authority as he takes efficient angles to the football and will bypass blockers to deliver a blow with his contact explosion. Effective as a zone defender with his short-area quickness and overall awareness, but limited context as to what he looks like in man-to-man coverage." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** He was a multisport athlete at Olentangy, helping the Braves baseball team clinch an OHSAA Division I championship in 2024.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 3, 2025.



## SAM GREER

OT • 6-7 • 331

Akron Hoban

Rank: OT 6, Overall 52, OH 2



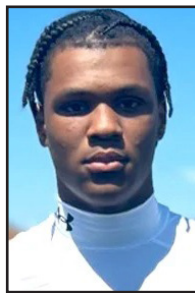
**ACCOLADES:** All-Ohio selection in both his junior and senior seasons as a left tackle for Akron Hoban.

**GREER SAYS:** "It's the Buckeyes, they're national champs. They've had so many guys come through, especially the guys that were first-rounders (in the NFL draft). They've had a lot of linemen get drafted. Really, it was just their background with that, and I'm hoping I can be the next one. It's great having a community to support me (being from Ohio), I have a whole bunch of friends and family that are excited to come watch me play."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Sam Greer has a chance to really be special. The athletic ability at his size, he's got a chance to be a superstar. The guy's like 6-7 and over 300 pounds, and he looks lean." – Bill Greene, Buckeye Scoop.

**PERSONAL:** Was also a basketball star in high school, receiving offers from Akron and Kent State for his play on the hardwood. Averaged 13.6 points per game, 7.7 rebounds and 2.2 blocks per game as a junior

**COMMIT DATE:** March 25, 2025.



## JERQUADEN GUILFORD

WR • 6-2 • 182

Ft. Wayne (Ind.) Northrop

Rank: WR 14, Overall 98, IN 1



**ACCOLADES:** Guilford had 54 catches for 1,073 yards and 14 touchdowns as a senior at Northrop. He had over 2,000 career receiving yards in high school.

**GUILFORD SAYS:** "For me personally, I heard what Coach (Ryan) Day had to say, and I just trusted him. My family trusted him. We all trusted him. I know he's going to do what's best for me and put me in the right situation. It's on me to take advantage of it."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Well-rounded outside receiver who can create separation at all three levels of the defense and stretch the field vertically. Should be viewed as a traits-heavy outside receiver with the ability to contort his body and make acrobatic snags at the catch point." – Hudson Standish, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Initially committed to Penn State before signing with the Buckeyes.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 18, 2025.



## CHRIS HENRY JR.

WR • 6-5 • 201

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei

Rank: WR 2, Overall 14, CA 2



**ACCOLADES:** Was invited to and participated in the Navy All-American Bowl after finishing his senior season with 28 catches for 607 yards and six touchdowns in eight games, which included a four-catch, 135-yard, two-touchdown game against Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas.

**HENRY SAYS:** "(Ohio State is) going to compete for a national championship every year. Obviously, I'll get to play next to a guy like Jeremiah Smith, have Julian Sayin as my quarterback. I just feel like me coming into that is the best situation for me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Hulking outside receiver with impressive long speed that has been bitten hard by the injury bug over the years but has a chance to emerge as an absolute game-wrecker if it all comes together. Turns 50-50 balls into easy wins with a monster catch radius as he plays above defenders with his reach and adjusts to off-target throws." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** The son of the late Chris Henry, former Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver who played in the NFL for five seasons. Sister is Seini Henry, a red-shirt-freshman forward for the Ohio State women's basketball team.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 28, 2023.



## CINCERE JOHNSON

LB • 6-3 • 222

Cleveland Glenville

Rank: LB 1, Overall 16, OH 1



**ACCOLADES:** Named the MaxPreps Ohio Player of the Year in 2025 and the All-Ohio Defensive Player of the Year at the Division IV level for the second season in a row. Totaled 185 tackles, including 42 TFLs, 13½ sacks and five forced fumbles during his senior campaign at Glenville.

**JOHNSON SAYS:** "What stands out to me about Ohio State is Ryan Day, James Laurinaitis and just the brotherhood and relationships that are going on down in Columbus. Ohio State is one of the schools that just shows that brotherhood that stands out to me every time."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He's going to come in physically ready to play. He comes from a good program in Glenville and has seen good competition. He's one of the most productive guys in the class. His high school production was incredible. Glenville used him in different positions. He's been dropped into coverage, he's rushed off the edge some, and I can see him at least pushing for some time because of his versatility." – Allen Trieu, 247 Sports

**PERSONAL:** His brother, Fred Johnson Jr., is an offensive lineman at UConn and also spent two seasons at Louisville. He is the son of Fredrick Johnson.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 19, 2025.



## NICK LAUTAR

TE • 6-5 • 230

Lebanon, Ohio

Rank: TE 29, Overall 543, OH 29



**ACCOLADES:** Earned Division I third-team all-offense honors as a senior. Finished his junior season with 23 catches for 267 yards and three touchdowns.

**LAUTAR SAYS:** "It's always been a dream of mine to be a part of the Buckeyes, but the atmosphere and the relationship Coach (Keenan Bailey) and I have made has been awesome."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Late-blooming tight end that's a vicious blocker and a viable target in the passing game. Tall drink of water with a streamlined build and what appears to be no shortage of growth potential. Owns a unique wrestling background, and that frequently shows up on tape as he establishes leverage in the run game while attached and detached. Will rack up the takedowns when split out wide. Rather fluid as a route runner and can build speed as he works his way across the field. Slips out of the backfield and into the flats with ease but can also challenge the seam with his reach. Gets large at the catch point with his coordination, attacking the football with firm hands." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Won a sectional title as a wrestler in the 215-pound weight class as a junior. His 36 pins were a school record.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 16, 2025.



## DARRYUS MCKINLEY

DL • 6-3 • 270

Lafayette (La.) Acadiana

Rank: DL 74, Overall 630, LA 18



**ACCOLADES:** In his senior campaign at Acadiana, McKinley tallied 72 tackles, 27 TFLs and 9½ sacks.

**MCKINLEY SAYS:** "I feel like that's the best place that suits me and my path. At Ohio State, I'll get development to prepare me for the next level one day, if it's God's plan. Coach (Larry) Johnson has consistently put a lot of players into the NFL. He has a plan that will get me there, if I put in the effort and God allows me to stay healthy."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He's a developmental guy that I think has some upside on the interior and seems like he could be a future three-technique, to me. It's incredible that he was able to play defensive end for his high school sometimes at his size, so it shows you how athletic he is." – Garrick Hodge, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Darryus is the young brother of Dominick McKinley, who is currently a defensive lineman at LSU and was an Ohio State target in the 2024 recruiting cycle.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 26, 2025.





## JAMIR PEREZ

DL • 6-4 • 360  
Cleveland Glenville

Rank: DL 89, Overall 810, OH 39



**ACCOLADES:** Named to Division IV All-Ohio first team as a senior. Helped the Tarblooders win 11 games during the 2024 season.

**PEREZ SAYS:** "Just being an Ohio kid and from the city, having Coach (Larry) Johnson in my corner with Coach (Matt) Patricia, I will have that true development and the best chance of doing what I want to achieve."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Perez is a big space-eater that has the potential to eat up double teams during his college career. You can never have enough big, versatile defensive linemen, especially as an in-state player." – Greg Smith, Rivals.

**PERSONAL:** Posted a 40-foot, 5-inch effort in the shot put as a sophomore in high school. Flipped his commitment from Florida to Ohio State.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 4, 2025.



## COOPER PETERSON

K • 6-0 • 195

Charlotte (N.C.)

Corvian Community

Rank: K NA, Overall NA, NC NA

NA

**ACCOLADES:** Finished senior season 8 of 9 on field goals with a long of 49 yards. Self reports a long of 65 yards in practice.

**PETERSON SAYS:** "(Ohio State) is an amazing school. Everything about Columbus, everything they do as a football program, but even off the field, too. It's just an amazing place to go in there and be able to compete, but also get a great degree and be able to go and get a job in the future after football is done."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Peterson is almost a surefire bet to redshirt this season, considering Baylor transfer Connor Hawkins is the runaway favorite to win Ohio State's starting kicking job. Considering Hawkins has three years of eligibility remaining, Peterson might take over kicking duties for the Buckeyes in his fourth year. If nothing else, Ohio State will have a backup with a strong leg if called upon for the 2026 season." – Garrick Hodge, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Played soccer growing up through his sophomore year in high school but stopped playing to pursue a football scholarship for kicking.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 23, 2026.



## DRE QUINN

Edge • 6-4 • 228

Buford, Ga.

Rank: Edge 38, Overall 368, GA 42



**ACCOLADES:** Recorded 92 total tackles, including 15 for loss, 21 quarterback hurries and five sacks during his senior season.

**QUINN SAYS:** "Ohio State is great for development, with Coach Larry Johnson. He's a legend. Any chance to get coached by him would be a huge blessing. It's just a great program. I mean, it's No. 1 in the country. Can't say much else about that."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Flexible, explosive edge defender with encouraging measurables. Broad pursuit range fostered by athleticism and motor. Experienced outside and inside. Plays above his weight on the interior, but will stay outside, preferably as a two-point defender. Lacks sack production typically seen in higher-end pass rushers. May need a role/scheme fit, but possesses immense potential. Could become a quality high-major starter with traits to play beyond college." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

**PERSONAL:** Played both receiver and defensive end in high school. Quinn was originally committed to Clemson before signing with Ohio State.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 16, 2025.



## BRAXTON REMBERT

LB • 6-5 • 200

Hoschton (Ga.)

Mill Creek

Rank: LB 13, Overall 249, GA 33



**ACCOLADES:** Finished senior season with 56 tackles, 11 tackles for loss, nine sacks, six passes broken up, three forced fumbles and one interception.

**REMBERT SAYS:** "I believe I can play all over the field. At safety, in the box, (on the edge), but I still need to be developed. I really don't know what my strong suit is yet."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Rembert should fill the role of an outside linebacker that serves as a pass-rusher, and in essence, someone that can play on the line of scrimmage looking like a defensive end. But he's got the speed to drop into coverage and the length to make passing lanes difficult for opposing quarterbacks. When he enrolls at Ohio State, he'll almost certainly be unlike any other player on the defense." – Andrew Gillis, cleveland.com

**PERSONAL:** A three-sport athlete in high school, also competing in basketball and track and field. Named the 8-A region player of the year in basketball as a junior.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 18, 2025.



## JAEDEN RICKETTS

WR • 6-0 • 187

Pataskala (Ohio)

Watkins Memorial

Rank: WR 60, Overall 436, OH 21



**ACCOLADES:** In his junior season at Watkins, Ricketts caught 28 passes for 542 yards and six touchdowns

**RICKETTS SAYS:** "They have a lot of success at Ohio State. And it's a great education. There were a lot of people in my ear telling me Ohio State is great. Staying close to home, my family is happy. It's receiver U. They will develop me as one of the best receivers. I think they can really develop me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Ohio State held off a late charge from West Virginia for the speedy Ricketts. We haven't seen him at his best quite yet because of a limited high school offense, but you find a place for speed like his." – Greg Smith, Rivals

**PERSONAL:** Placed fourth at OHSAA Division I state track meet in the 100-meter dash with a time of 10.76 seconds after setting the record for his high school with a 10.5-second time in the preliminaries.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 16, 2024.



## MAXWELL RILEY

OT • 6-5 • 280

Avon Lake, Ohio

Rank: IOL 7, Overall 176, OH 8



**ACCOLADES:** Received the inaugural Paris Johnson Jr. Foundation Ohio Offensive Lineman of the Year Award in 2025.

**RILEY SAYS:** "I just want to set the highest standard for myself and hold everyone else to a high standard. We're all going to be starting a new chapter and building camaraderie, so helping each other out will be huge."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Max Riley is just a battler. He's an Austin Sierieveld type of guy in the making. He's a guy that maybe you think should be an interior player, but then he ends up playing tackle, and he ends up being your best O-lineman." – Bill Greene, Buckeye Scoop

**PERSONAL:** Riley was a multisport athlete at Avon Lake and also competed in track and field. As a junior, he finished in fifth place in the shot put in the state indoor finals at the Division I level in Ohio.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 10, 2025.



## EMANUEL RUFFIN

DL • 6-4 • 295  
Bessemer (Ala.)  
Bessemer City

Rank: DL 27, Overall 246, AL 10



**ACCOLADES:** Ruffin had 163 total tackles at Bessemer City in his career. As a senior, totaled 60 tackles, including four for loss. He also tallied three sacks.

**RUFFIN SAYS:** "(Ryan Day) made a big impact on the culture there. You can tell they have it rolling. He is a great guy and a great coach. He's one of the best in college football. Now I have the chance to have one of the best in college football coaching me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "I like that Ruffin kid. He has a chance to be Tyleik Williams. To me, when I watch his film, that's who he looks like. He may need some work in the weight room. He might be a little pudgy. That's how Tyleik was when he came into Ohio State, but he didn't leave that way. I like Ruffin a lot. Ruffin has the potential to be a freaking monster on the interior." – Bill Greene, Buckeye Scoop.

**PERSONAL:** Originally committed to Colorado before flipping to Ohio State.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 9, 2025.



## CJ SANNA

LB • 6-3 • 225  
Lewis Center (Ohio)  
Olentangy

Rank: LB 16, Overall 261, OH 12



**ACCOLADES:** In his junior season at Olentangy, Sanna recorded 97 tackles (11 for loss), seven sacks, two forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries.

**SANNA SAYS:** "I grew up an Ohio State fan. They're 15 minutes away from my back yard. I grew up watching them with the family, and after getting to know Coach (James) Laurinaitis and Coach (Matt) Patricia, I had to jump on the opportunity. There's no place I'd rather be. Playing at the highest level and being challenged by the best players in America, Ohio State has a high standard for everyone there. Having to compete to earn your spot really means a lot to me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He's a true middle linebacker. A major presence in the middle of the field. Thickly built with throwback toughness and attitude. He has the ability to play through blocks and get downhill in the middle of defense, paired with the ability to get out in space and make plays on bubble screens and outside runs. His hustle shows up on tape; nasty finishing ability when tackling ball carriers." – Mark Porter, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Was high school teammates with safety Kaden Gebhardt, a future Ohio State teammate and fellow class of 2026 signee.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 4, 2025.



## DAMARI SIMEON

DL • 6-3 • 275  
Richland (N.J.)  
St. Augustine Prep

Rank: DL 25, Overall 215, NJ 3



**ACCOLADES:** Capped off his junior season with 28 tackles, six TFLs, 2½ sacks and one forced fumble. Simeon also spent time as a tight end as a blocker in 2024.

**SIMEON SAYS:** "The most important factors to me and my family for deciding on a school are academics, player development, the coaches and program tradition."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Young defensive tackle with a compact frame and favorable movement skills that brings plenty of energy up the middle. Not a ton of third-party verified information available, but appears to be on the shorter side. Impressive lower-body mobility allows him to uproot obstacles and quickly establish leverage. Can also dip while sliding his way around opponents." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Simeon was a multisport athlete at St. Augustine Prep and participated in the shot put in track and field.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 27, 2025.



## TUCKER SMITH

IOL • 6-5 • 280  
Glendale (Ariz.)  
Sandra Day O'Connor

Rank: IOL 45, Overall 600, AZ 9



**ACCOLADES:** Was a first-team all-region honoree after his junior season in the 6A Desert Valley region in Arizona.

**SMITH SAYS:** "I just want to finish blocks every play. I want to be known as a physical player who finishes blocks. I want to get better at everything. I'm excited to get coached by the best at Ohio State."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Smith is a versatile offensive lineman who has played center, guard and tackle in high school. Lines up primarily at left tackle and moves well, fluid in space, can get to the second level and is strong at the point of attack. Shows good bend and has the feet and lateral quickness to mirror speed rushers and adjusts well to moving targets. Plays through the whistle and has the kind of mean streak you love to see in an offensive lineman." – Greg Biggins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Was a dual-sport athlete for most of his time in high school, also wrestling for Sandra Day O'Connor.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 26, 2025.



## JORDAN THOMAS

CB • 6-0 • 189  
Oradell (N.J.)  
Bergen Catholic

Rank: CB 12, Overall 103, NJ 2



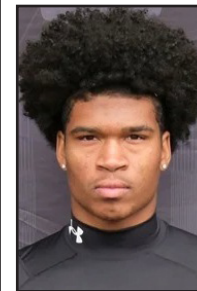
**ACCOLADES:** Finished his senior season with 58 total tackles (23 solo), two tackles for loss, three interceptions, four passes defended and one forced fumble.

**THOMAS SAYS:** "I want to earn the Iron Buckeye in the weight room, and I want to get my black stripe removed as soon as possible. I want to show I'm a competitive athlete, I'm a leader, and even if my ranking doesn't say it, I'm the best athlete and defensive back in the nation."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "The No. 1 thing that I appreciate the most is that he holds himself to an elite standard and he brings his teammates with him. It's so hard to be a junior captain in our program, and he was that. He's one of just three guys that's been able to do that in the last 15 years, and there's a reason for that. He lives it every day, and it's beyond important to him. He has the right value structure, the right mindset, and he's an elite competitor." – Vito Campanile, Bergen Catholic head coach.

**PERSONAL:** Was honored with an invite to the 2026 Navy All-American Bowl.

**COMMIT DATE:** May 12, 2025.



## JAY TIMMONS

CB • 5-11 • 185  
Gibsonia (Pa.)  
Pine-Richland

Rank: CB 3, Overall 24, PA 1



**ACCOLADES:** Totaled 37 tackles, including five for loss, and nine passes broken up as a senior at Pine-Richland. He helped lead Pine-Richland to the WPIAL 5-A championship game.

**TIMMONS SAYS:** "The energy and the family atmosphere stood out. When I got there, I had dinner with the families. There's good people there other than football."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "I saw Jay Timmons at camp at Michigan State, actually, and he was one of the best players at camp that day. He had a fantastic senior year that had his rankings go up on every site. Obviously, he has a great pedigree with his dad playing in the NFL for a long time. He's got it all. He checks all the boxes. That position, Ohio State evaluates really well, and I think they landed a really good one there." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Multisport athlete who also ran for his track team. Timmons was a two-way player on his team, also lining up as a receiver. At Pine-Richland, he had 35 receptions for 637 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior. His father is Lawrence Timmons, who spent 11 seasons in the NFL.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 6, 2025.





## KHARY WILDER

Edge • 6-4 • 260  
Gardena (Calif.)  
Junipero Serra  
Rank: DL 3, Overall 51, CA 7



**ACCOLADES:** As a senior, Wilder had 91 total tackles, including 20 for loss, and also had 10 sacks. The summer before his senior season, he was named the On3 MVP at Rivals' Five-Star Challenge.

**WILDER SAYS:** "The NFL has always been the goal, that's been my dream, so seeing Coach (Larry) Johnson and Ohio State's track record of producing top-level D-linemen and NFL defensive ends, just seeing that really motivates me and encourages me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He's a complete player. Not only is he a great pass rusher, but he can defend the run really well and plays down the line of scrimmage. He plays three-technique, he plays five-technique; there's some versatility he brings to the table. He's a really smart, cerebral football player. I had a chance to watch him play live, and I was so impressed with his ability to play the game at a fast level." – Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

**PERSONAL:** Wilder is a multisport athlete who also played basketball in high school.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 10, 2025.



## MASON WILHELM

IOL • 6-4 • 285  
Lakewood (Ohio)  
St. Edward  
Rank: IOL 81, Overall 1,036, OH 49



**ACCOLADES:** Earned All-Ohio honorable mention as a junior while playing mostly right tackle and occasionally sliding to right guard.

**WILHELM SAYS:** "Offensive line coach Tyler Bowen and I have built a relationship, and when he finally called (to offer), he let me know that my development and growth throughout the season was what they wanted to see. The opportunity to play at Ohio Stadium and compete in the Big Ten was something that was always in the back of my mind."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "The legacy prospect has the look of a future center for the Buckeyes and worked hard to improve his game to be a player the Buckeyes wanted. I'd bet on his work ethic and bloodlines helping him to contribute in Columbus." – Greg Smith, Rivals.

**PERSONAL:** The son of Matt Wilhelm, a former Buckeye linebacker (1999-2002) who played for Jim Tressel on the 2002 national championship team.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 7, 2025.



## CLASS OF 2026



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# Peterson Looking To Compete Right Away

When Charlotte (N.C.) Corvian Community kicker Cooper Peterson committed to Ohio State, he was looking to get to Columbus and compete right away. The Buckeyes also added Baylor transfer Connor Hawkins over the offseason, who had a strong freshman season with the Bears.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

With Jayden Fielding out of eligibility, there is an opening at placekicker, and Peterson believes he can fill it. He told BSB that he's looking to earn that spot in his first college season.

"I'm not going in there hoping to red-shirt. I want to go in there and be able to play and compete," Peterson said. "I know what I'm able to do, and I feel like I can contribute a lot to the team."

"That's what Coach (Rob) Keys has said – we'll go in there, and during fall camp, we'll compete and chart every day, and the better person will play."

Hawkins is going to be some tough competition for Peterson. The former Bear went 18 for 22 last season on field goals with a long of 54 yards, was 3 of 4 on kicks from 50 yards or longer and made 5 of 8 from 40 yards or longer.

But even though there's competition between the two, Peterson has already met Hawkins when he was on his official visit to Ohio State and the competition is going to be a friendly one.

"I met Connor and he's a good dude," Peterson said. "I've heard a lot about him from the Baylor punter (Palmer Williams), who I'm friends with. He said he's a great dude, and that's what I want at the end of the day, is to be able to go in there and compete against good competition."



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOPER PETERSON

**A LEG UP — Freshman kicker Cooper Peterson (33) hopes to win the starting job over Baylor transfer Connor Hawkins this season. Peterson, from Charlotte (N.C.) Corvian Community, has a career long of 49 yards but said he can do better.**

Peterson said he hadn't yet talked to Robby Discher, Ohio State's new special teams coordinator, but he has been in constant contact with the Buckeyes since his freshman year in high school, when he went to his first college camp at Ohio State.

At that point, former special teams coordinator Parker Fleming was still on staff for the Buckeyes, but even after Fleming was let go, assistant special teams coach Gunner Daniel has remained in touch with Peterson.

"I went up for camp, and they liked what they saw, but I needed to lose some weight and tune up a few different things," Peterson said. "Then I just kept coming back. I went to camp for the next two years. I went after my sophomore year, then after my junior year, that's when everything took off."

Peterson made 8 of 9 kicks in his senior season while also serving as the punter. He has a career long of 49 yards in-game as he leaves high school, which he made as a senior, but he says that he's made kicks as deep as 65 yards in practice. He also made sure his coach knew during games that he felt comfortable getting something longer than 49 yards.

"I was telling my head coach, 'Hey, if you get me to the 40-yard line, I'm good to go kick,'" he said. "With the ball spotted there, it's a 57-, 58-yard kick. Anytime you get me there, I'm good."

He said he doesn't feel much pressure when he goes out for long kicks or kicks in big moments because he sticks to the same routine no matter what. He has talked to friends who are college kickers who have done it in front of big crowds in the Big Ten and ACC – former Michigan State kicker Jonathan Kim, Iowa kicker Drew Stevens and former Florida State kicker and current Carolina Panther Ryan Fitzgerald.

"A lot of it's just how you practice," Peterson said. "Don't try to change anything up when you get out there. You practice every day, and it's muscle memory at this point. I have a lot of good dudes that I talk to that have kicked in the Big Ten. I talk to them all the time, and they're just like, 'You kick this kick 100 times at practice. Just go and replicate what you do and you'll be good.'"

For Peterson, the choice to go to Ohio State was an obvious one. He had offers from the Buckeyes and Michigan State, with many other Power Four schools showing a lot of interest, but he knew soon in the process that he wanted to be in Columbus.

"It's an amazing school," he said. "Ev-

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OSU Football 2027 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2027 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.					
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	★★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
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	★★★★	Cibolo (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

everything about Columbus, everything they can do as a football program, but even off the field, too – it’s an amazing place to go in there and be able to compete, but also to get a great degree and be able to go and get a job in the future after football is done.”

Bucks Add OL In Portal

Ohio State added an offensive lineman through the transfer portal on Jan. 28 when Vasean Washington committed to the Buckeyes. Washington visited Ohio State on Jan. 23, and the former Dartmouth lineman didn’t need much time after that to make his decision.

He was the 17th addition the Buckeyes have made through the transfer portal this offseason, but the only offensive lineman. He will also likely be the last addition since the roster now contains 90 scholarship players. Washington has just one season of eligibility left.

Washington started at right tackle for Dartmouth last season and, in eight games, allowed zero sacks. He also has experience at left guard and at left tackle, bringing in some versatility that head coach Ryan Day has said he believes is very valuable for an offensive lineman to have.

Four of the five starters on Ohio State’s 2025 offensive line are returning for the 2026 season, with only right guard Tegra Tshabola entering the transfer portal. Due to that, Washington will very likely be a backup for the Buckeyes, but he provides some depth for the front five.

Ohio State has had mostly good results in the transfer portal when it comes to recruiting offensive linemen. Before the 2023 season, Josh Simmons joined the Buckeyes and turned into a first-round draft pick, and Seth McLaughlin transferred to Ohio State and won the Rimington Award in the 2024 season, despite his season ending after 10 games with an injury.

Then, before the 2025 season, Ohio State brought in former Rice tackle Ethan Onianwa and former Minnesota tackle Philip Daniels. Onianwa ended up hardly playing with the Buckeyes last year, while Daniels started at right tackle the full year.

Former West Virginia tackle Justin Terry also transferred to Ohio State and got a little bit of time with the Buckeyes, getting on the field in the Bison package when they sent six offensive linemen out.

Bucks Host Top ’27 OL

The Buckeyes have still been unable to land a commitment from a five-star offensive lineman since Donovan Jackson in the 2021 class, making it five straight cycles they have fallen short.

They did come close in the 2026 class with Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 331) narrowly missing being ranked that highly, but now Ohio State has to move on to the next class to try to end

Final 2026 247Sports Composite Ohio Rankings

Rank	Name	Position	High School	College
1.	Cincere Johnson	LB	Cleveland Glenville	Ohio State
2.	Sam Greer	OT	Akron Hoban	Ohio State
3.	Elbert Hill	CB	Akron Hoban	USC
4.	Milan Parris	WR	Stow Walsh Jesuit	Miami (FL)
5.	Shahn Alson	RB	Painesville Harvey	USC
6.	Jakob Weatherspoon	SAF	Avon	North Carolina
7.	Victor Singleton	CB	Toledo Central Catholic	Texas A&M
8.	Maxwell Riley	OL	Avon Lake	Ohio State
9.	Ben Congdon	OT	Zoarville Tuscarawas Valley	Miami (FL)
10.	Matt Ponatoski	QB	Cincinnati Moeller	Kentucky
11.	Brayden Fogle	TE	Mansfield Lexington	Georgia
12.	CJ Sanna	LB	Lewis Center Olentangy	Ohio State
13.	Favour Akih	RB	Delaware Rutherford B. Hayes	Ohio State
14.	Henry Ohlinger	ATH	Grandview Heights	Indiana
15.	Kyndall McCaleb	RB	Painesville Riverside	Wake Forest
16.	Lance Dawson	DL	Avon	Cincinnati
17.	Preston Fryzel	TE	Toledo Central Catholic	Notre Dame
18.	Brayden Reilly	LB	Cincinnati Xavier	Clemson
19.	Ja’Dyn Williams	LB	Massillon Washington	Indiana
20.	Storm Miller	LB	Strongsville	Texas A&M

that streak.

Offensive line coach Tyler Bowen has already built a relationship with Coatesville Area, Pa., five-star interior offensive lineman Maxwell Hiller (6-5, 300) and is hoping to make the case for Ohio State.

That continued since BSB last went to press with Hiller coming to Columbus for an unofficial visit. After the visit, On3’s Steve Wiltfong reported that the Buckeyes became a contender for the five-star.

Before his visit, South Carolina had

emerged as the favorite in his recruitment, but Hiller will be a great addition for whatever program adds him.

“Elite offensive line prospect who could probably go pro as an interior defensive lineman as well,” said 247Sports’ scouting report written by Gabe Brooks. “Big-framed but builds leverage consistently. Displays impressive sudden agility that shines on

Continued On Page 18

Superlatives For Ohio State’s 2026 Recruiting Class

**Most Likely To Succeed:** The Buckeyes yet again have a top-five recruiting class, so undoubtedly many of the 28 prospects who are headed to Columbus in 2026 will go on to have a lot of success.

But Cleveland Glenville five-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 222) has shown that he has what it takes to play at the next level. With the success Ohio State has had developing linebackers in the past, and with linebackers coach James Laurinaitis – one of many examples of that success – leading the way at the position, Johnson is in a great spot to be the next great one with the Buckeyes.

With Christian Alliegro, Payton Pierce and Riley Pettijohn likely ahead of him on the depth chart in his first season in Columbus, Johnson may not see the field a ton in his year one, but Laurinaitis has already shown the ability as a coach to both find and develop talent. It wasn’t until year three that fellow Glenville alum Arvell Reese broke out with the Buckeyes, but Johnson has already gotten the comparison to the soon-to-be first-round draft pick.

“On a couple of plays I thought that was Arvell,” Glenville head coach Ted Ginn Sr. said of Johnson after a game in his junior season.

**Future Captain:** It’s never a surprise to see a recruit from Ohio go to Ohio State, develop into a great player and turn into a great leader. Growing up as familiar with Ohio State football as Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225) is due to growing up in the area, he comes to campus already knowing the values of the program.

He had already taken the role of leader for his high school team in his senior season, so it would be no surprise to see him take that to the next level. He can be a leader both on and off the field, and in the center of the defense for the Buckeyes, he’s going to need that skill.

It’s also very common for a linebacker to take a leadership role in Columbus. The last time one of the team captains wasn’t a linebacker was the 2013 season, with Curtis Grant, Joshua Perry, Raekwon McMillan, Joe Burger, Chris Worley, Tuf Borland, Justin Hilliard, Teradja Mitchell, Tommy Eichenberg, Cody Simon and Sonny Styles all earning the distinction since then. Styles and Simon both received the Block “O” jersey. Ohio State wants its linebackers to be leaders, and Sanna could be next in line.

**First To The Field:** With so much talent in the class, it wouldn’t be much of a surprise for many different freshmen to make a case for playing time in the 2026 season. However, the combination of events over the offseason works perfectly for Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 201) to see the field early on.

He is not only the highest-rated prospect in the class for the Buckeyes, according to 247Sports composite rankings, but with Bryson Rodgers, Quincy Porter and Mylan Graham all transferring out over the offseason and Carnell Tate headed to the draft, Henry has the perfect opportunity to come in and immediately make his presence felt in the same way that Jeremiah Smith did two seasons ago.

He may not have the same freshman year that Smith did with Smith

himself on the other side of the field, but at his size and speed, he has already shown that he is ready to take on the college game and will be a strong contender to win the starting spot in his first year with the program.

**Fan Favorite:** Ohio State has had many players with a versatile skill set who can play multiple positions. In the 2026 class, that player is North Forney, Texas, four-star athlete Legend Bey (5-11, 175), whom the Buckeyes plan to utilize in many different ways.

Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn was his primary recruiter, so he will get looks at running back, but he can also slide into the slot to be a receiver as well. Bey also played under center during his high school years. He’s partly able to do so many things because of his elite speed, which head coach Ryan Day recognized by comparing him to five-time first-team All-Pro NFL veteran Tyreek Hill.

Bey has the ability to play multiple positions like former fan favorite Curtis Samuel and has shown flashes of the same speed as Ted Ginn Jr. and if he can bring those two things together, Buckeye fans will love nothing more than seeing him weave his way through defenders in Ohio Stadium.

**Biggest Recruiting Win:** In each recruiting class, it seems like the Buckeyes are able to go into the heart of another top program’s home and pull a top prospect out. Last year, they got Riley Pettijohn and Devin Sanchez out of Texas, and the year before that, Smith committed out of Miami.

This year, the Buckeyes were able to go into LSU’s back yard and pull Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) out. Not only did Bradford commit to Ohio State in March, but there was seemingly no drama when it came to signing him. That may have been helped by the Tigers firing their head coach and not hiring a new one until soon before the December early signing period, but it was still a big win to be able to get Bradford to Columbus.

**Underrated:** Rated a three-star prospect, Southlake (Texas) Carroll wide receiver Brock Boyd (6-1, 180) has an argument for not only the most underrated recruit of Ohio State’s 2026 signees, but in the entire country this cycle. He is rated the No. 630 player in the country by 247Sports composite and the No. 86 overall wide receiver in the class.

But in the talent-rich state of Texas, Boyd was one of the top wide receivers, and he consistently showed that on the field. At Southlake Carroll, he set a career record of 4,179 receiving yards.

“I think Brock is probably the most underrated wide receiver in the country,” general manager Mark Pantoni said when Boyd signed. “He’s at a prominent high school in Texas and breaks the school record there. In the playoffs, he’s just dominating. (Former wide receivers coach Brian) Hartline did a great job when he went down there and said, ‘Hey, Mark, this is a guy that we need to get.’ ”

— Greg Wilson

# Melbourne Captain Receives Major Offer

Continued From Page 17

both sides of the ball. Pancake machine.”

## Moore Down To Six Schools

Ohio State made the narrowed-down list of options for Hueytown, Ala., four-star defensive lineman Donovan Moore (6-4, 280).

Moore included six schools on his list, and the Buckeyes were on it along with Alabama, Auburn, LSU, Ole Miss and Texas. On Feb. 2, Christian Clemente, an Auburn recruiting insider for 247Sports, predicted that Moore would land with Auburn.

The Buckeyes already have one defensive lineman committed in the 2027 class in Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star edge rusher DJ Jacobs (6-5, 225), who has helped Ohio State to the No. 3 spot in the early team rankings in the class. However, defensive line coach Larry Johnson will obviously want to continue to add to the future of the OSU front four.

Moore is the No. 72 player in the coun-

try, the No. 5 defensive lineman and the No. 1 player in Alabama, so he will be a strong addition to any program.

In his sophomore season, he finished with 58 total tackles, nine for loss, seven sacks, two forced fumbles and two interceptions, both of which he took back for a touchdown.

## Buckeyes Ramp Up Offers

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State sent out a flurry of scholarship offers to prospects, many of them to wide receivers, with new position coach Cortez Hankton starting to offer recruits he may already have relationships with from his previous stop at LSU.

- **Melbourne (Fla.) Eau Gallie athlete Captain Rolle (6-3, 150)** – A member of the 2029 class, Rolle still isn’t ranked by 247Sports, or any recruiting site for that matter. However, he made it onto cornerbacks coach Tim Walton’s radar after his high school freshman season and earned

an offer. He also holds offers from 11 other FBS schools. As a freshman, Rolle totaled 28 tackles, one for loss, three interceptions and eight passes broken up.

- **Concord (Calif.) De La Salle three-star linebacker Landon Miller (6-2, 195)** – Miller is in the 2028 class and is ranked the No. 150 player in the country, the No. 12 linebacker and the No. 10 player in California. He has just six total FBS offers from Arizona, Arizona State, California, New Mexico and Oregon. But he told 247Sports that he has been in talks with San Diego State, Washington and Tennessee in December, so his recruitment could be picking up very soon.

- **Massillon (Ohio) Washington athlete Deontay Malone (5-11, 170)** – Malone is in the 2027 class and is unranked with 10 Division I offers. As a receiver, Malone had 34 catches for 498 yards and nine touchdowns last season, and as a defensive back, he had 25 tackles and three interceptions. He was offered by Walton, so the Buckeyes are likely looking at him on the defensive side of the ball.

- **Melbourne (Fla.) Eau Gallie athlete X’Zavier Corbin (6-1, 165)** – Corbin is another member of the 2029 class who is unranked due to how early it is in the process. However, he holds 11 other Division I offers, like his high school teammate Rolle. Corbin also runs track. As a running back, he rushed for 1,223 yards and 13 touchdowns on 111 carries as a freshman. He also caught 13 passes for 139 yards, per MaxPreps.

- **Akron Hoban four-star athlete Brayton Feister (6-3, 230)** – Feister is a 2027 prospect, and he was selected as one of two Division II Ohio defensive players of the year and made All-Ohio first team. He had 133 tackles (39 for loss), 13 sacks, four forced fumbles and two interceptions in his junior season. Feister is ranked the No. 266 player in the country, the No. 12 athlete and the No. 7 player in Ohio.

- **Akron Hoban athlete Brydon Feister (6-3, 210)** – The younger brother of Brayton, Brydon Feister is a 2028 prospect and is unranked by the 247Sports compos-

## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1986

Among those Ohio State was still in the running for was Cincinnati St. Xavier quarterback Greg Frey. Frey had recently denied a report published in a Pittsburgh newspaper that said he had made a verbal commitment to play at Pitt.

“I have narrowed my choice down to four schools,” said Frey, noting that he planned visits to Boston College, North Carolina, Iowa and Ohio State.

The Pittsburgh report said that Frey was good friends with Pitt coach Mike Gottfried, who had recently accepted the head coaching position at the school and who was formerly head coach at the University of Cincinnati.

“I don’t know and have never met Gottfried,” said Frey. “I haven’t talked to anyone at Pittsburgh and have no idea how the rumor started.”

### 35 Years Ago — 1991

On the heels of two consecutive top-10 recruiting efforts, Ohio State head coach John Cooper’s fourth recruiting class was admittedly one of the toughest he had ever put together.

In any normal recruiting year, the OSU coach said, he sold the program to prospective players. That winter, he spent most of his time defending himself and the program.

“It’s been the toughest year of recruiting I’ve ever had in my life,” the square-jawed Cooper told reporters Feb. 6, the first day high school seniors could sign national letters of intent.

“The thing that we’re doing at Ohio State, I don’t think it’s right. I don’t think we should have to continuously defend our program, and that’s what we do. We weren’t as much selling the program as much as defending it.”

### 30 Years Ago — 1996

With National Signing Day just hours away, the Ohio State football coaching staff was busy tying up the loose ends with the program’s verbal commitments and waiting for a good word from one highly prized recruit, Columbus DeSales running back/safety Gary Berry.

Berry visited Notre Dame over the weekend of Feb. 2.

“It was a good visit, but I do not have a decision yet,” said Berry, who had visited OSU, Michigan, Florida and Notre Dame.

If he were to commit and sign a national letter of intent with the Buckeyes on the Feb. 7 signing day, he would become the 28th member of a mammoth OSU recruiting class.

Humble, Texas, wide receiver David Boston became the 27th member of the class when he issued his commitment to the Buckeyes during a press conference at his school on Jan. 30.

### 25 Years Ago — 2001

It appeared that the mere announcement of Jim Tressel as Ohio State’s new football coach on Jan. 18 had netted the Buckeyes an early commitment for the class of 2002.

Reports surfaced that Warren (Ohio) Harding junior running back Maurice Clarett had committed to the Buckeyes. Claret actually lived in Youngstown and commuted 10 miles each way to Warren to attend Harding, so he was well-acquainted with Tressel’s work at nearby Youngstown State.

“For a while, I favored Notre Dame,” said Claret, who first met Tressel when he was 5 years old. “But with Coach Tressel going down there, that changed everything.

“I know a lot about Coach Tressel. He’s all about winning and running a good, disciplined program. He stresses academics. The people who come out of his program here at YSU are good people.”

### 20 Years Ago — 2006

Recruiting season is all about numbers. Twenty signees. A cumulative grade-point average of 3.023. Six state players of the year. Twelve prospects on defense, eight on offense. Ten from Ohio, 10 from elsewhere.

How about 72,546?

That is roughly the number of miles logged by the Ohio State coaching staff in pursuit of the 20 prospects who inked letters of intent on National Signing Day to play their college football for the Buckeyes.

When asked if members of his staff kept a mileage log to find out exactly how far their recruiting travels took them, OSU recruiting coordinator John Peterson got a quizzical look on his face.

“I don’t think they even want to know,” he said. “A rough estimate would be to take the mileage between Columbus and each of the guys we signed and multiply that by one visit every six weeks. That would at least put you in the neighborhood.”

### 15 Years Ago — 2011

Jim Tressel put the finishing touches on his 2011 recruiting class in a way not often seen during his tenure at Ohio State.

When National Signing Day dawned, the Buckeyes remained in the running for a handful of national recruits, including five-star linebacker Curtis Grant from Richmond (Va.) Heritage. After having been left at the altar by such recruits in similar circumstances in recent years, Tressel and the OSU faithful received a pleasant surprise this time.

During a live announcement aired Feb. 2 on ESPNU, the nation’s top prospect at his position told the nation he would be a Buckeye.

Grant was not the only signing day commitment for the Buckeyes, however. Earlier in the day, Tressel had accepted a signed letter of intent from Cleveland Glenville quarterback Cardale Jones, a three-star prospect who earned a scholarship offer from the program during the final weekend before signing day.

### 10 Years Ago — 2016

On the eve of National Signing Day in 2015, Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer had spent the night in the unoccupied bedroom of his daughter Gigi – who was away at college – trying to save a class that ultimately finished eighth in the Scout.com team rankings.

His late-night texts and calls had paid off, and he was able to land four-star offensive tackle Isaiah Prince and four-star wide receiver K.J. Hill while also holding onto commitments from three wavering prospects – four-star quarterback Torrance Gibson, four-star running back Mike Weber and three-star defensive tackle Joshua Alabi.

There was no such drama in 2016. Meyer landed two commitments – Nassau (N.Y.) Community College five-star JUCO offensive tackle Malcolm Pridgeon and Columbus Walnut Ridge three-star athlete Malik Harrison – on signing day but knew beforehand that both were done deals. With no prospects on the verge of flipping and assurances that the two he was chasing would end up as Buckeyes the following day, Meyer spent the night of Feb. 2 in a much more relaxed mood.

### Five Years Ago — 2021

Rather than make his college decision on National Signing Day as widely expected, Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau decided to wait until he could take additional visits before announcing his school of choice that spring.

“He won’t be making a decision until at least April,” Tuimoloau’s father, Ponce Faletoi, told 247Sports on Jan. 28. “He still wants to take visits. Whether those are officials when the NCAA opens it up or us going out and checking those schools out, he still wants to visit a few schools.”

Prospects had been unable to take official or unofficial visits since the NCAA had implemented a recruiting dead period the previous March due to COVID-19, which had been extended multiple times in the meantime and ran through at least April 15 at the time. However, Yahoo Sports’ Pete Thamel reported on Jan. 27 that the Division I Council may have been looking to change it to a quiet period, which would allow prospects to once again make on-campus visits beginning April 16.

Tuimoloau, who named a top five on Dec. 16 of Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, USC and Washington, had never been to Columbus. He had spent time on the campus of the four other finalists, however, which included participating in a summer camp with the Crimson Tide as a sophomore and unofficial visits with the Ducks, Trojans and Huskies during his junior year.

### One Year Ago — 2025

The Buckeyes made one final addition to their 2025 class before National Signing Day when Westerville (Ohio) Central three-star quarterback Jaystin Gwinn committed to Ohio State on Feb. 3.

“You can say I’m going there as a preferred walk-on, but they want to make room for me on the 85-man roster, and if they do, I can go on scholarship,” Gwynn told 247Sports. “If not, they can put some type of package together.”

The Gwinn name might have been familiar to Buckeye fans since his father, Anthony, was a defensive back for Ohio State from 1993-96. His uncle, Jayson Gwinn, was also a Buckeye and seemed likely to have a role ready for him in the early 1990s before he was killed in a car accident near the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Dec. 12, 1993, at 20 years old.

Earlier that season as a redshirt freshman, Jayson Gwinn tied the Buckeyes’ single-game tackles for loss record with five against Indiana.

Now Jaystin Gwinn, named in honor of Anthony’s late brother, would get his chance to be a Buckeye.



# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Garrick Hodge of 247Sports

### What are your thoughts on how Ohio State did in the 2026 recruiting class?

"Overall it's a pretty solid showing. Ohio State cleaned up in senior evaluations and flipped various prospects from other schools in November, and that's reflected in the recruiting rankings. Ohio State finished with a top-five class for the seventh straight year, so it's fair to keep the same high-ceiling expectations fans have come to expect from the Buckeyes.

"You have really high-end talent in this class like Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 201), Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 222), Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 331), Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland four-star cornerback Jay Timmons (5-11, 185) and Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260), just to name a few, but also have some fun developmental players with upside like Southlake (Texas) Carroll three-star wide receiver Brock Boyd (6-1, 180). It's a good balance, and Ohio State fans should be pleased with the additions."

### Was there anyone that you thought the Buck-

### eyes would get in this class that they didn't? Did they sign someone that surprised you?

"Well it was only for about 24 hours I thought they'd get him, but things looked promising with Princeton (N.J.) Hun School defensive end Luke Waffle (6-5, 257) until they didn't. As for the latter part of the question, I'll go with North Forney, Texas, four-star athlete Legend Bey (5-11, 175), just because of the craziness that surrounded his recruitment on National Signing Day. Don't think I'll ever cover a story like that again (or maybe I will, who knows). In any case, OSU has him now, and he's an explosive offensive weapon for the Buckeyes."

### Who are some prospects in the 2027 class you think OSU should go after?

"I'd keep pursuing Cedar Hill, Texas, five-star defensive lineman Jalen Brewster (6-3, 302), because he's a sheer force of nature in the interior. It would take a bit of an upset, but landing Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas five-star offensive tackle Mark Matthews (6-6, 300) would be exactly the kind of commitment Ohio State needs considering the Buckeyes have struck out on premier out-of-state tackles the last couple of recruiting

cycles. OSU is also going to need a star wide receiver to replace Jeremiah Smith's production after this season, and while Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 170) is a hell of a start there, I'd also go after Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Eric McFarland (5-9, 175)."

### With McKeesport, Pa. five-star running back Kemon Spell (5-9, 205) committed, how important do you think it is that Ohio State gets Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205)?

"I don't necessarily know that Ohio State's evaluations of Kemon Spell have him as the No. 2 RB on OSU's board, but even so, he was higher on Georgia, Notre Dame and Penn State than he was Ohio State. I do know that DGG is priority No. 1, 2, 3 and 4 for Carlos Locklyn in the 2027 class, and it's always been that way. The Buckeyes will be extremely competitive in this recruitment till the end, and I don't think they'll move on any other prospect until they get an answer one way or the other."

ite. He holds eight Division I offers, which include Arizona State, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Oregon, Kent State and Ohio.

• **Pearland (Texas) Shadow Creek wide receiver BJ LaFell (5-11, 155)** – In the 2029 class, LaFell is also unranked currently, but he already holds 22 Division I offers, with Hankton's previous LSU offer being one of them. LaFell is the son of former NFL receiver Brandon LaFell, who played nine years in the league.

• **Pearland (Texas) Shadow Creek four-star wide receiver Jaylen Addai (6-1, 170)** – A 2028 prospect from the same school as Lafell, Addai is the No. 68 player in his class, the No. 11 wide receiver and the No. 6 player in Texas. His father is Joseph Addai, who was a first-round pick in the 2006 NFL draft and won Super Bowl XLI with the Indianapolis Colts after being drafted out of LSU.

• **Tampa Carrollwood Day athlete Kameron Battle (5-10, 185)** – Offered by running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, Battle is likely being recruited by the Buckeyes as

a running back. He holds 30 Division I offers, many of them extended in January, so while he is currently unranked by recruiting sites, that likely won't last long with the recent attention he has been getting.

• **Humble (Texas) Summer Creek four-star wide receiver Benny Easter Jr. (6-2, 190)** – Easter is a 2027 prospect and has been committed to Texas Tech since Nov. 20. He is the No. 136 player in the country and the No. 20 wide receiver.

• **Argyle, Texas, four-star wide receiver Julian Caldwell (6-0, 185)** – The No. 59 player in the country and No. 12 wide receiver in the 2027 class, Caldwell finished his sophomore season with 21 catches for 581 yards and seven touchdowns. He has been offered by 42 schools.

• **Martin (Tenn.) Westview three-star quarterback Graham Simpson (6-0, 182)** – Simpson is the younger brother of Ty Simpson, the former Alabama quarterback who declared for the 2026 NFL draft. Graham is the No. 139 player in the 2028 class and the No. 10 quarterback.

• **Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star wide receiver Osani Gayles (5-11, 165)** – The No. 45 player in the 2027 class and No. 7 wide receiver, Gayles holds 30 Division I offers. As a sophomore, Gayles had 43 catches for 756 yards and six touchdowns while running for 218 yards and three touchdowns on 22 carries.

### Other Notes And Tidbits

• McKeesport, Pa., five-star running

back Kemon Spell (5-9, 205) committed to Georgia on Feb. 2. The Buckeyes were lightly involved with Spell after the Penn State firing of James Franklin when the five-star decommitted from the Nittany Lions. The Buckeyes are much more involved with Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205) in the 2027 class. Spell is the No. 7 player in the country and the No. 1 running back.

2026 Transfer Portal Additions				
Name	Position	Cl./Elig.	Stars	Previous School(s)
Christian Alliegro	LB	Sr./Sr.	★★★	Wisconsin
Cam Calhoun	CB	Jr./So.	★★★	Alabama, Utah, Mich.
Connor Hawkins	K	So./Fr.	★★★	Baylor
Ja’Kobi Jackson	RB	Sr./Jr.	★★★	Florida, Coahoma CC
Dominick Kelly	CB	So./So.	★★★	Georgia
Earl Little Jr.	S	Sr./Jr.	★★★★	Florida State
Justyn Martin	QB	Sr./Jr.	★★★	Maryland, UCLA
Devin McCuin	WR	Sr./Sr.	★★★	UTSA
Terry Moore	S	Sr./Jr.	★★★★	Duke
Kyle Parker	WR	Jr./So.	★★★	LSU
Dalton Riggs	LS	Sr./Jr.	★★★	UCF, BYU
Qua Russaw	DE	Jr./So.	★★★★	Alabama
James Smith	DT	Sr./Sr.	★★★★	Alabama
John Walker	DT	Jr./So.	★★★	UCF
Vasean Washington	OL	Sr./Jr.	★★★	Dartmouth
Hunter Welcing	TE	Sr./Jr.	★★★★	Northwestern
Mason Williams	TE	Jr./So.	★★★	Ohio
Brady Young	P	Sr./Jr.	NA	Houston Christian/Cincy

2026 Transfer Portal Departures			
Name	Position	Cl./Elig.	Destination
Devontae Armstrong	OL	So./Fr.	Miami (OH)
Jarquez Carter	DT	So./So.	Miami (FL)
Jackson Courville	K	Jr./So.	Tulane
Faheem Delane	S	So./So.	LSU
Sam Dixon	RB	So./Fr.	South Carolina
Logan George	DE	Sr./Sr.	Washington
Mylan Graham	WR	So./Fr.	Notre Dame
Cody Haddad	S	Fr./Fr.	Iowa
Malik Hartford	S	Jr./So.	UCLA
C.J. Hicks	DE	Sr./Jr.	USF
Ty Howard	LB	Sr./Jr.	undecided
Lincoln Keinholz	QB	Jr./So.	Louisville
Isaiah Kema	OL	Fr./Fr.	Utah
Dominic Kirks	DE	So./Fr.	Northwestern
Jayvon McFadden	OG	Fr./Fr.	Colorado
Nick McLarty	P	So./Fr.	Arizona State
Eric Mensah	DT	So./Fr.	Virginia Tech
Joshua Mickens	DE	Jr./So.	UConn
Bodpegn Miller	WR	Fr./Fr.	Washington
Keenan Nelson Jr.	S	Sr./Jr.	undecided
Trajen Odom	DT	Fr./Fr.	Arkansas
James Peoples	RB	Jr./Jr.	Penn State
Quincy Porter	WR	So./So.	Notre Dame
Bryson Rodgers	WR	Jr./So.	USF
Maxwell Roy	DT	Fr./Fr.	UCLA
Aaron Scott Jr.	CB	So./Fr.	Oregon
Justin Terry	OT	So./Fr.	Virginia Tech
Jelani Thurman	TE	Jr./So.	North Carolina
Tegra Tshabola	OG	Sr./Jr.	Kentucky
Bryce West	CB	So./Fr.	Wisconsin
Damarion Witten	WR	So./Fr.	Miami (OH)

# Ohio State Finishes No. 5 In Consensus Poll

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

For the seventh consecutive season, Ohio State has signed a top-five-ranked recruiting class, according to BSB's consensus poll, which combines rankings from national outlets such as 247Sports, Rivals/On3 and ESPN. The Buckeye class, which includes 29 total signees, ranked No. 5. Last year, Ohio State finished No. 4, slightly better than its final ranking this time around.

Still, the 2026 class included three five stars, with Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 201) being the highest-ranked player in the class.

Cleveland Glenville linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 222), and Gibsonia (Pa.) Pine-Richland cornerback Jay Timmons (5-11, 185) were the second- and third-highest ranked players in the class, respectively.

The Buckeyes have four more top-100 commits in the class, Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop four-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-2, 182), Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star defensive end Khary Wilder (6-4, 260), Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 331) and Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207).

Despite having an impressive class, composed of several talented youngsters, Ohio State was not ranked atop the consensus

## National Recruiting Experts' Rankings

247Sports	Rivals	ESPN
1. USC	1. USC	1. USC
2. Alabama	2. Notre Dame	2. Oregon
3. Oregon	3. <b>Ohio State</b>	3. Texas
4. <b>Ohio State</b>	4. Oregon	4. Notre Dame
5. Notre Dame	5. Georgia	5. Alabama
6. Georgia	6. Alabama	6. Georgia
7. Texas	7. Texas A&M	7. Texas A&M
8. Tennessee	8. Miami (Fla.)	8. Tennessee
9. Miami (Fla.)	9. Tennessee	9. <b>Ohio State</b>
10. Texas A&M	10. Texas	10. Miami (Fla.)

poll. That honor went to USC, the first non-SEC team to be ranked No. 1 in the poll in nine years.

The SEC, which has dominated the top of recruiting rankings in recent years, seemed to have taken a step back in high-school recruiting. After having the three highest-ranked teams in last year's consensus poll, the SEC has only one team ranked in the top five of the poll this year, with Alabama coming in at No. 4.

Joining Ohio State, USC and Alabama in the top five are No. 2 Oregon and No. 3 Notre Dame.

The Trojans, with their 36-man recruiting class, rank above the rest. USC's class

includes three five-stars, 19 four-stars, 13 three-stars and on eplayer who is unranked. The class is led by Princeton (N.J.) Hun School five-star defensive end Luke Waffle (6-6, 257), who is the No. 2-ranked edge prospect and No. 6 overall player in the class.

Waffle, a long-time target of Ohio State, was the No. 1-ranked prospect in Rivals' rankings. He is joined by Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei tight end Mark Bowman (6-5, 225) and Richardson (Texas) five-star defensive lineman Jaimeon Winfield (6-3, 327). The strength of the Trojans' class is in numbers and that is reflected by the fact that they have 10 top-100-ranked players to give them an average player rating of 92.01.

The Ducks have another loaded recruiting class. With four five-stars, tied for the most of any team in the country, Oregon's 92.83 average player rating is the highest mark in the country.

North Bethesda (Md.) Georgetown Prep five-star interior offensive lineman Immanuel Iheanacho (6-7, 345) is the highest-ranked player in the class. He is No. 11 in the country and the No. 1 player at his position. Frisco (Texas) Panther Creek five-star wide receiver Jalen Lott (6-0, 176) is also a five-star, and like Iheanacho, ranks in the top-20.

Mobile (Ala.) St. Paul's Episcopal defensive end Anthony Jones (6-4, 240) and Reidsville, N.C., tight end Kendre Harrison (6-7, 243) are the other two five-stars in the class.

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star safety Jett Washington (6-5, 215) is the only other top-40 prospect in the class.

Notre Dame finished one spot behind Oregon in the consensus poll. Like the Ducks, the Fighting Irish signed four five-star prospects, with three of those players coming on the defensive side of the ball. The Fighting Irish's highest-ranked prospect is Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park defensive end Rodney Dunham (6-4, 227), who is the No. 7 player in the country and the No. 3 player at his position.

The biggest strength of the class was at safety with Wyndmoor (Pa.) La Salle College five-star Joey O'Brien (6-3, 185) and Winter Park, Fla. four-star Ayden Pouncey (6-3, 160) each ranked in the top-100.

Boasting a class of 27 enrollees, Alabama ranks one spot ahead of Ohio State. The Crimson Tide's final ranking is undoubtedly boosted by Omaha (Neb.) Millard South four-star quarterback Jett Thomalla (6-4, 220).

Thomalla is one of six Alabama commits ranked inside the top-50 prospects, and he's joined in the backfield by the highest-ranked player in the Tide's class, Jackson, Ala., five-star running back Ezavier Crowell (5-11, 205). He is one of the four five-star players Alabama signed.

Overall, the top-five programs in the consensus poll signed 18 of the 36 five-stars in the 2026 class.

No. 6 Georgia, No. 7 Texas, No. 8 Texas A&M, No. 9 Tennessee and No. 10 Miami were the last five schools ranked in the top 10 of the consensus poll.

After being ranked at No. 2 in last year's poll, the Bulldogs fell four spots. Georgia's 31-man class included only one five-star, but still had a solid average player rating of 91.27. They brought in 22 four-star players, which was tied for second-most of any team in the country.

The Bulldogs' highest-ranked player and only five-star was Garner (N.C.) South ofensive tackle Ekene Ogboko (6-6, 280).

They had one more top-40 prospect in Bowdon, Ga., four-star tight end Kaiden Prothro (6-6, 210), who also received an offer from the Buckeyes before ultimately signing with Georgia.

The Longhorns, who ranked No. 1 in the consensus poll last year, fell six spots in this year's poll, but still inked a solid class.

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star quarterback Dia Bell (6-3, 215) is the highest-ranked Texas commit as the No. 18-ranked player in the country and the No. 4-ranked quarterback.

Texas' highest-rated defensive commitment is Loganville (Ga.) Grayson five-star linebacker Tyler Atkinson (6-2, 210), another former Buckeye target. Atkinson helped the Longhorns have an average player rating of 91.18, the 11th-best mark in the country.

Behind the Longhorns in the poll was their archrival, Texas A&M. The Aggies' 26-man class only contained one signee ranked in the top-40, but Spring Valley (Calif.) Mount Miguel five-star cornerback Brandon Arrington (6-2, 186) is the No. 8-ranked player in the country and the No. 1-ranked player at his position.

The Aggies had more four-stars (23) than any other team in the country.

The fourth straight SEC team in the rankings was Tennessee at No. 9. The Volunteers' class was led by two of the top-15 players in the country in Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley five-star quarterback Faizon Brandon (6-4, 200) and Hattiesburg, Miss., five-

## Consensus Poll Fast Facts

- The Big Ten had three teams ranked inside the top five of the poll, but the SEC had by far the most teams throughout the top 25. Nine of the SEC's 16 teams made the rankings. Last year, the SEC had 12 teams in the rankings, but this year, they still have three more teams in the top-25 than any other conference.
- USC became the first non-SEC team to top the rankings in nine years. The Trojans received all three first-place votes to finish with a unanimous score of 75 points.
- The SEC and Big Ten had eight teams total included in the top 10 of the consensus rankings. Notre Dame and Miami were the only two teams not in the SEC or Big Ten to be included in the top 10.
- The Big Ten had six teams in the consensus poll, which was tied for the second-most of any conference. No. 1 USC, No. 2 Oregon, No. 5 Ohio State, No. 11 Michigan, No. 13 Washington and No. 23 Illinois represented the Big Ten in the poll. Last year, the Big Ten had eight teams represented in the consensus poll.
- Penn State fell out of the rankings after firing head coach James Franklin. The Nittany Lions were ranked No. 14 in the consensus poll last year, but along with Nebraska and Wisconsin of the Big Ten, fell out of the rankings altogether.
- The ACC also had six teams included in the consensus poll, with No. 25 Virginia Tech making a late surge to be included in the rankings. No. 18 North Carolina, No. 19 Clemson and No. 24 SMU were included in the poll after not making the poll last year. No. 14 Florida State also moved up five spots in the rankings and Miami ranked 10th.
- After having just one team in the rankings last year, the Big 12 had three teams included in the consensus poll. The Mountaineers were included in the rankings after assembling what was arguably the greatest recruiting class in their program history. They joined Texas Tech and BYU in the top 25.
- The Fighting Irish were the only non-Power Four team to make the consensus poll for the second-straight season.
- Auburn was the biggest faller out of the poll. The Tigers ranked No. 7 in last year's consensus poll, but fell all the way out of the top-25 after firing head coach Hugh Freeze midway through the season.
- Ole Miss didn't have quite the fall that Auburn did, but after former head coach Lane Kiffin left to take the same position at LSU, the Rebels fell out of the poll. Ole Miss was ranked No. 16 last year.
- Of the teams included in both this year's poll and last year's poll, USC was by far the biggest riser, moving up 14 spots, while Texas was the biggest faller to still be included. The Longhorns dropped six spots in the poll.

— Bobby Gorbett



BSB Consensus Poll

Rk.	Team	Pts.
1.	USC (3)	75
2.	Oregon	70
3.	Notre Dame	67
4.	Alabama	66
5.	Ohio State	61
6.	Georgia	60
7.	Texas	58
8.	Texas A&M	56
9.	Tennessee	53
10.	Miami	51
11.	Michigan	44
12.	LSU	43
T-13.	Washington	34
T-13.	Florida State	34
15.	Florida	32
16.	Oklahoma	30
T-17.	Texas Tech	29
T-17.	North Carolina	29
19.	Clemson	19
20.	South Carolina	16
21.	BYU	13
T-22.	West Virginia	9
T-22.	Illinois	9
T-24.	SMU	5
T-24.	Virginia Tech	5

Teams received points based on their placement in four top-25 polls. Points assigned to teams are inversely proportional to their placement in a poll (25 points for first, 24 for second, etc.) First-place votes are in parentheses. Others receiving points: Ole Miss (4), Iowa (3), Mississippi State (2).

star wide receiver TK Keys (6-2, 194).

In addition to the two five-stars, the Volunteers' 31-man class included 13 four-stars and 15 three-stars for an average player rating of 90.78.

The national runners-up from last season rounded out the top 10. Miami's class was made up of 30 players and was led by an elite offensive lineman whom Ohio State coveted. Despite the best effort of the Buckeyes, Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 325) signed with the Hurricanes.

Cantwell is the No. 2-ranked player in the country and the No. 1 offensive tackle.

The class includes 22 four-stars and seven three-stars in addition to Cantwell and has an average player rating of 91.29.

The middle of the poll featured teams from all four power conferences. No. 11 Michigan notably fell five spots in the poll after using a late surge in recruiting last year to finish No. 6. The Wolverines dealt with a coaching change in the offseason but still signed two five stars and 10 four stars as part of their 22-man recruiting class during the early signing period, shortly before Sherrone Moore's firing.

No. 12 LSU also has a new head coach heading into the 2026 season. First-year man Lane Kiffin did a solid job holding the Tigers' recruiting class together despite being hired shortly before early signing day.

Like the Wolverines, the Tigers signed two five-stars and 10 four-stars. One of LSU's highest-ranked players, Suwanee (Ga.) Collins Hill four-star defensive lineman Deuce Geraldts (6-2, 275), took an official visit to Ohio State in the summer before committing to LSU. Geraldts is one of the five top-100 recruits the Tigers signed.

After coming in at No. 23 in the poll last year, No. 13 Washington moved up 10 spots. Washington's recruiting class includes one five-star and seven total top-200-ranked recruits. The Huskies had an average player rating of 89.69.

Other notable teams in the middle of the rankings were No. 17 Texas Tech, No. 18 North Carolina and No. 19 Clemson. Each team was not featured at all in last year's poll, but recruited well enough to easily be included in this year's rankings.

Coming off their first appearance in the College Football Playoff, the Red Raiders signed an impressive class, which was led by Savannah (Ga.) Benedictine Military School five-star defensive end LaDamion Guyton (6-3, 230) and former Ohio State target Mansfield (Texas) Lake Ridge five-star offensive tackle Felix Ojo (6-7, 274).

Ojo, who ranked as the No. 48 overall player in the country and the No. 5 offensive tackle, was heavily pursued by the Buckeyes, and he even said they were his second choice.

Although it was a very unsuccessful season on the field for the Tar Heels, who won just four games, head coach Bill Belichick and his staff recruited very well.

The Tar Heels' final ranking was boosted by the fact that they signed 40 players, but 12 of those signees were four-stars. One of North Carolina's highest-ranked recruits, Avon, Ohio, four-star safety Jakob Weather- spoon (5-10, 175), flipped his commitment from Ohio State.

Like the Tar Heels, the Tigers had a disappointing season. Head coach Dabo Swin-

ney's group went 7-6 despite being ranked in the top five of the preseason poll. Still, Clemson was able to sign a solid recruiting class.

After narrowly missing the consensus poll last season, Clemson signed 10 four-stars and 11 three-stars as part of their 22-man recruiting class.

The Tigers took Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) out of the Buckeyes' backyard. He signed on with the Tigers despite taking an official visit to Ohio State over the summer.

The rest of the top 20 featured No. 14 Florida State, No. 15 Florida, No. 16 Oklahoma and No. 20 South Carolina.

The bottom of the poll featured five teams that were not in the consensus poll last year, with No. 21 BYU, No. 22 West Virginia, No. 23 Illinois, No. 24 SMU and No. 25 Virginia Tech making it in.

The Mountaineers may be the biggest surprise in the rankings. It was West Virginia's highest-ranked recruiting class in program history. The sheer size of the Moun-

taineers' 48-man recruiting class certainly helped it finish among the top 25 classes in the country, but Rich Rodriguez and his staff signed three four-stars. Combined with the 45 three-star players they brought in, the class finished with an average player rating of 86.89, which ranked 50th in the country.

The Mountaineers were likely helped by Penn State's firing of former head coach James Franklin midway through the season. West Virginia's two highest-rated recruits were once committed to Penn State before flipping. That included Harrisburg, Pa., four-star offensive tackle Kevin Brown (6-5, 270), whom the Buckeyes were after when he was considering leaving the Nittany Lions' class.

But no program took more former Penn State commits than Virginia Tech. After hiring Franklin to be their own coach, the Hokies inked a top-25 class, signing seven four-stars and 15 three-stars as part of a 23-man recruiting class.

Each of the Hokies' four highest-ranked commits was at one point committed to Penn State.

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# OSU Trying To Keep Up Pace In 2027 Class

By **GREG WILSON**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The Ohio State football team finished adding to its 2026 class after National Signing Day passed, ending with 28 scholarship players added to the roster for next season, which is two more than they added in the 2025 cycle.

With the 2026 cycle in the rearview mirror, Ohio State is wasting no time in recruiting a 2027 class, already with nine commitments in the cycle, two of them ranked in the top 10, with Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 170) and Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star defensive end DJ Jacobs (6-5, 225) at No. 6 and No. 8, respectively.

With those pledges, Ohio State is off to a blazing start in the 2027 cycle and is currently ranked No. 3 in the country, behind just No. 1 Oklahoma and No. 2 Texas A&M and ahead of No. 4 Notre Dame and No. 5 Syracuse.

However, there is still a lot of time to go before the December early signing period, which means head coach Ryan Day and his staff will need to work hard to both finish what they started with this class and try to hold on to the talented players they have already landed.

Other commitments the Buckeyes already have outside of Brown and Jacobs are Cibolo (Texas) Steele four-star safety Eli Johnson (6-3, 200); Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220); Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star linebacker Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220); Liberty Center, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Kellen Wymer (6-5, 265); Richmond (Va.) Godwin four-star offensive tackle Brody McNeel (6-5, 285); St. Clairsville, Ohio, three-star interior offensive lineman Mason Wilt (6-5, 295); and the younger brother of Jeremiah Smith, Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna three-star safety Angelo Smith (5-10, 170).

With 10 months to go until the early signing period for the 2027 class, here's a look at some of the top prospects with whom Ohio State is expected to be involved throughout this cycle. All ratings come from the 247Sports composite rankings, and prospects are listed alphabetically.

**Joseph Buchanan, DL**  
**Owings Mills (Md.) McDonogh School**

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson had a strong year in the 2026 cycle, bringing in six total linemen in the cycle. He is off to an even stronger start in 2027 with the commitment of Jacobs, and he already finds himself and the Buckeyes in the top six for Buchanan.

Ohio State is included in that top six with

**Class Of 2027 National Prospects**

Ten of the top players OSU is pursuing in the 2027 class from around the nation, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Overall Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	Top Colleges
1.	John Meredith III	CB	6-2	175	*****	Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley	ALA, OSU, SMU, TEX, TA&M
2.	Mark Matthews	OT	6-6	300	*****	Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas	ALA, ARK, AUB, COLO, FLA
13.	David Gabriel Georges	RB	6-0	205	*****	Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor	ALA, AUB, CINCY, OSU, TENN
16.	Honor Fa'alave-Johnson	SAF	6-1	190	*****	San Diego Cathedral Catholic	ALA, ARIZ, ASU, ARK, USC
49.	Dakota Guerrant	WR	6-1	195	****	Harper Woods, Mich.	ALA, AUB, BC, CINCY, COLO
52.	Brock Williams	TE	6-5	210	****	Libertyville, Ill.	ALA, ASU, UGA, OSU, TEX
66.	Rashad Streets	EDGE	6-4	230	****	Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook	ALA, ARI, ASU, ARK, AUB
92.	Qua Ford	OT	6-5	285	****	Texarkana (Texas) Texas	ALA, ASU, ARK, AUB, FLA
177.	Joseph Buchanan	DL	6-4	260	****	Owings Mills (Md.) McDonogh	IND, MICH, UNC, OSU, USC
232.	Isala Aisa Wily-Ava	SAF	6-2	195	****	Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco	ARI, ASU, ARK, BYU, CAL

Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, USC and Notre Dame for Buchanan, who is considered the No. 177 player in the country, the No. 21 defensive lineman and the No. 5 player in Maryland. Of those six, there doesn't seem to be an overwhelming favorite for Buchanan yet.

However, he was in attendance for the 42-3 win over Minnesota last season and really enjoyed his time in Columbus.

"It was the best atmosphere I've ever been in," Buchanan told 247Sports. "The defensive line played very well. Larry Johnson is one of the best defensive line coaches of all time. Just seeing the guys playing well at the spot I'd be playing in if I choose to come to Ohio State was excellent to see. They were playing very well. It was definitely encouraging."

**Honor Fa'alave-Johnson, SAF**  
**San Diego Cathedral Catholic**

Fa'alave-Johnson would be a huge addition for the Buckeyes if they are able to get him into the fold at some point. He is the No. 16 player in the country, the No. 1 safety and the No. 1 player in California.

Although Ohio State already has two safeties in the 2027 class, position coach Matt Guerrieri won't let that get in the way of recruiting Fa'alave-Johnson if he feels the Buckeyes have a chance with the five-star. He has already made that much clear, going to Fa'alave-Johnson's high school on Jan. 28 to visit the safety.

There might not be as much urgency to land a top safety this cycle since Ohio State got its top target in the 2026 class, pulling Blaine Bradford from the heart of LSU country, but that doesn't mean Guerrieri won't try. Fa'alave-Johnson named his top 10 schools in December, with the Buckeyes included on that list, although he did say that USC and Alabama were "setting the pace."

**Qua Ford, OT**  
**Texarkana (Texas) Texas High**

Ford isn't the top target on the offensive

line whom the Buckeyes have set their sights on, but he could still be somewhat of a headliner if he's the top recruit that a team lands.

Ranked the No. 92 player in the country, No. 10 offensive tackle and No. 12 player in Texas, Ford would be one of a select few of offensive linemen the Buckeyes have signed recently who were rated inside the top 100.

It will be tough to pull a top tackle out of Texas. That proved to be the case in the 2026 cycle with Felix Ojo, who ultimately committed to and signed with Texas Tech, although he did say that Ohio State was his clear second choice.

Ford visited Columbus for the 14-7 season-opening win over Texas on Aug. 31 last season, but he hasn't been back to campus another time to this point. However, he did tell 247Sports that he was enjoying the relationship he had with offensive line coach Tyler Bowen.

"I'm loving the relationship we are building," Ford said. "We talk every two or three days."

Ford could very likely be a left tackle at the college level, so if the Buckeyes want to get someone they believe could develop into an elite anchor on the blind side, Ford is a great option.

**David Gabriel Georges, RB**  
**Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School**

If there is ever a time for the Buckeyes to go all in on a running back at the high school level, it seems like the 2027 class is that time. Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn has made clear his interest in Gabriel Georges, and the five-star rusher has reciprocated that interest.

The last time he talked about his recruitment, Gabriel Georges put Ohio State and Tennessee above every other school.

He is the No. 13 player in the country, the No. 2 running back and the No. 1 player in Tennessee, and he has been completely dominant in all competition he plays.

The director of scouting for 247Sports, Andrew Ivins, posted a glowing scouting report for Gabriel Georges.

"Hard-driving running back with the quickness and power to emerge as the centerpiece of an offense for a College Football Playoff contender," it reads. "Already owns ready-to-play bulk as he tips the scales at just over 205 pounds and uses that weight to his advantage as he sheds tackles and bounces off contact."

**Dakota Guerrant, WR**  
**Harper Woods, Mich.**

With former wide receivers coach Bri-

an Hartline gone and Cortez Hankton in his place, it will be important for the latter to prove that he will be able to keep up the tradition of Ohio State bringing in top wide receivers.

Hartline already did Hankton a solid and got the five-star Brown into the fold early on, so Hankton will only need to keep his eyes from wandering to see what else is out there.

Guerrant already has major interest in Ohio State as the No. 49 player in the country, the No. 8 receiver and the No. 1 player in Michigan. Brown has also apparently been in the ear of Guerrant to try to get him to come to Ohio State with him.

"All the time," said Guerrant last summer about if Brown is trying to get him to come to Columbus. "Like, 'You might as well.' But it's good, me and Jamier are good. We'd be a good duo."

Guerrant has been to Ohio State multiple times and likely will find time to make it again during his senior year, since he's just one state over.

**Mark Matthews, OT**  
**Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas**

It seems that every year, the Buckeyes are in on one of the top offensive tackles in the country and don't end up landing them. They are hoping to change that trend with Matthews this season.

He is rated the No. 1 offensive tackle in the country and the No. 2 player, and the Buckeyes are well within the running at this point in the process. With how often that has been the case in the past few years – see Jackson Cantwell (signed with Miami in the 2026 class), David Sanders (Tennessee, 2025), Brandon Baker and Jordan Seaton (Texas and Colorado, respectively, 2024) – that doesn't mean much in February.

But that option is certainly better than not being in the running for Matthews in February. He did tell 247Sports in late December that Ohio State is one of three schools standing out right now – along with Miami (Fla.) and Texas A&M – thanks to Bowen.

"He texts me every day," Matthews said. "I really like him. In general, he's a good coach. It's a good coaching staff, good players. They all play tough."

**John Meredith III, CB**  
**Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley**

Meredith is currently rated the No. 1 overall player in the 2027 class, and the Buckeyes were included in his top five along with Alabama, Texas, Texas A&M and SMU.

With Davison Igbinosun leaving for the draft and multiple younger corners leaving

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through the transfer portal, the Buckeyes went into the portal and added some veteran players in the secondary. But after next year, Jermaine Mathews Jr. will be gone as well, and the Buckeyes will be looking for another top corner to fill that role.

Meredith has the tools to make an impact in his freshman season the same way Devin Sanchez had the chance to when he came to Columbus. Ivins even compares Meredith to Sanchez on his recruiting page.

“Height, weight and speed corner who can play press man and off man,” Ivins’ scouting report says of Meredith. “Extremely twitchy in the lower half. Competent in trail technique and possesses the deep speed to recover like few others.”

Rashad Streets, Edge Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook

Another top prospect for Johnson to go after in 2027, Streets is the No. 66 player in the class and the No. 8 defensive end. As a sophomore, Streets had 123 tackles, 35½ for loss, 26½ sacks and two forced fumbles.

He told Rivals in December that Ohio State, Alabama, Oregon, Tennessee and South Carolina are “doing a great job” recruiting him.

“They’ve been consistent. They’ve shown me a lot, and they’ve made it clear that they want me,” he said.

Each of those programs hosted Streets for a gameday visit in the fall, and when the time for official visits comes in the summer, it’s likely that the schools that get one from him are on the short list.

Brock Williams, TE Libertyville, Ill.

Not only is tight ends coach Keenan Bailey making Williams a priority in the 2027 class, but fellow 2027 recruit Edmunds has been trying to get him to join the fold as well, going back to when Edmunds committed to Ohio State in December 2024.

Williams is the No. 52 player in the country, the No. 2 tight end and the No. 3 player in Illinois, and he has a lot of interest in the Buckeyes. They are included in his top three schools with Georgia and Texas.

In January, Williams told 247Sports that he has a good idea of where he wants to go, but he wants to go on a couple more visits first. He’s eyeing a late February or early March commitment date, and he took a visit to Texas on Jan. 24 and Georgia on Jan. 30-31.

Some recruiting experts see those visits as Williams trying to make one last stop at Georgia and Texas to cover all his bases before committing to the Buckeyes, but some believe that the Bulldogs have the advantage.

But with Williams’ timeline, that answer will be clear soon enough.

Isala Aisa Wily-Ava, SAF Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco

Wily-Ava is another solid safety option for Guerrieri to target in the class, to add to Smith and Eli Johnson. He is the No. 232 player in the country and the No. 24 safety.

Greg Biggins, a national recruiting analyst for 247Sports, believes Wily-Ava’s size (6-2, 195) could have him make a move to linebacker at some point, similar to the career path of former Buckeye Sonny Styles.

“He’s a physical player, a very good open-field tackler and gets downhill and flies off the hash to make a play,” Biggins’ scouting report

Class Of 2027 In-State Prospects							
The top 10 players in the state of Ohio for the 2027 class, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.							
Overall Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	Top Colleges
6.	Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	*****	Sunbury Big Walnut	<b>Committed to Ohio State</b>
117.	Ace Alston	CB	5-11	175	****	Cincinnati Anderson	Committed to Notre Dame
180.	Kalel Johnson	OT	6-7	281	****	Cincinnati Moeller	BC,CINCY, IND, KY, LOU
211.	Kellen Wymer	OL	6-5	265	****	Liberty Center	<b>Committed to Ohio State</b>
221.	Jordan Karhoff	TE	6-4	215	****	Columbus DeSales	ASU, ARK, AUB, CINCY, DUKE
226.	Reinaldo Perez	DL	6-5	245	****	Columbus Academy	ASU, CINCY, FLA, IND, KY
266.	Brayton Feister	ATH	6-3	230	****	Akron Hoban	ASU, BC, CAL, CINCY, COLO
276.	Chuck Alexander	WR	6-3	180	****	Cincinnati Withrow	Committed to Louisville
278.	Kei'Shjuan Telfair	CB	6-0	160	****	Euclid	ASU, AUB, CAL, CINCY, CLEM
288.	D'Angelo White	TE	6-6	245	****	Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph	Committed to Louisville

reads. “Wily-Ava is strong in space. Shows good timing and closing speed as a blitzer and has a really nice all-around game.”

Where the Buckeyes have a small advantage is that they have recently recruited a player from St. John Bosco in rising sophomore Epi Sitanilei.

Wily-Ava is already trying to plan an official visit to Columbus after having been to campus during the 2025 season.

More Talent In Ohio

The 2026 class had some great talent in the state of Ohio, and so does the 2027 class, but the players ranked in the top 100 are a little tougher to come by this cycle.

Given that, the Buckeyes will have to be diligent if they want to keep the top in-state talent at home.

There is just one top-100 player in the state – Brown, already committed to OSU – and two in the top 150. Thirteen prospects in the state of Ohio are rated four stars or better.

Brayton Feister, ATH Akron Hoban

Feister wasn’t offered by Ohio State until Jan. 29, but he has been on the Buckeyes’ radar. He is the seventh-ranked player in Ohio and the No. 266 player in the country. He is in the athlete category on 247Sports, but he is being recruited by linebackers coach James Laurinaitis and is higher ranked than any other linebacker in the state.

Once coaches began to go on the road to visit recruits, Feister’s high school was one of the first stops that Laurinaitis made.

Feister grew up an Ohio State fan, so he was excited when he received his scholarship offer.

“It’s awesome,” Feister told 247Sports. “Obviously, being an Ohio kid, I grew up watching Ohio State, so it definitely means a lot. If you’re born in Ohio, everyone is an Ohio State fan, so we grew up Ohio State fans.”

Kalel Johnson, OT Cincinnati Moeller

Bowen has already done well getting in-state offensive linemen to commit to the Buckeyes in the 2027 class.

Wymer and Wilt are both from the Buckeye State, and Johnson seems to be trending toward committing to OSU as well, with long-time recruiting insider Bill Kurelic predicting back in July, before the pairing of Wymer and Wilt committed, that Johnson would ultimately commit to Ohio State.

Johnson has been on multiple visits to Columbus, getting there for a spring practice, a summer recruiting camp and at least one gameday visit during the 2025 season. He’s in contact with Buckeye coaches often, he told

247Sports in the fall.

He’s a tackle for his high school team and helped them to a final four appearance as a sophomore.

Jordan Karhoff, TE Columbus St. Francis DeSales

Ohio State has a somewhat unique relationship with Karhoff, since Day’s son, R.J., a quarterback in the 2027 class, goes to DeSales with the tight end.

Karhoff visited Ohio State for the season-opening win over Texas, and in his next high school game, he was seen wearing an OSU headband underneath his helmet, though he denied to 247Sports that it meant anything. But he did say that he liked how the Buckeyes were using heavy personnel and keeping their tight ends involved.

He is the top-ranked tight end in the state and the No. 221 player in the country.

In the 2026 cycle, Ohio State recruited just one tight end, but it doesn’t seem likely that Williams’ decision will affect how the Buckeyes go after Karhoff since they are trying to keep their TE room deep.

Reinaldo Perez, DL Columbus Academy

Playing near Ohio State, Perez hoped for an offer from his hometown school for a long time, and he finally got one before the 2025 season.

He worked hard over the offseason to get that, going to four of the one-day recruiting camps that the Buckeyes held.

“Being able to have an offer from your hometown school, that’s really big,” Perez told BSB in June. “I would be honored to receive an offer from them.”

Perez is the No. 226 player in the class overall and the No. 6 player in Ohio. He has played on both sides of the ball for Columbus Academy, serving as a left tackle on the offensive end and an interior defensive lineman on the other side, lining up as both a three-tech and one-tech.

Kei'Shjuan Telfair, CB Euclid

There was great in-state talent in the secondary in the 2026 class that the Buckeyes missed out on, but they were still able to find that talent elsewhere. But if they want to get the top available corner in Ohio in the 2027 cycle, that is currently Telfair, since Cincinnati Anderson four-star cornerback Ace Alston (5-11, 175) is already committed to Notre Dame.

Telfair attended an OSU spring practice last year and told 247Sports after he went that he was impressed by the energy that cornerbacks coach Tim Walton brought to practice with his position group.

“The energy level and the competition is what impressed me,” Telfair said. “Coach (Walton’s) energy by himself was out the roof.”

Telfair is considered the No. 278 player in the country, the No. 30 cornerback and the No. 9 player in Ohio.



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# West Coast Teams Top 2026 B1G Recruiting

By **SAM CIPRIANI**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the first year of the Big Ten's expansion a season ago, Ohio State led all schools in the conference with the No. 4-ranked recruiting class.

Although the Buckeyes again secured the nation's fourth-ranked class in 247Sports' composite rankings, a pair of the conference's new West Coast programs were ahead of them this cycle.

USC topped all Division I programs with the nation's No. 1 recruiting class in 2026, signing 36 prospects with an overall team score of 310.69.

While the Trojans had the top-rated class, Oregon, which boasted the third-ranked class just behind second-ranked Alabama, opted for quality over quantity. Though the Ducks signed just 24 prospects, Oregon picked up four prospects who were rated five stars and ranked first nationally, with an average player grade of 92.83.

Ohio State ranked second in the Big Ten behind the Ducks with an average player grade of 92.19, while USC followed closely behind at 92.01.

Only three other Big Ten programs landed in the top 25 of the overall rankings, with No. 12 Michigan, No. 13 Washington and No. 23 Illinois making the cut. Last season, the conference featured eight teams in that range, compared to the six this year. The Big Ten also had the second-lowest-ranked Power Four school in No. 100 Nebraska. The Cornhuskers barely beat out No. 101 Virginia

Buckeye Sports Bulletin looked at the recruiting classes of every Big Ten program besides Ohio State, while a detailed breakdown of Michigan's class can be found on page 26. Each team is listed according to 247Sports' final composite rankings, with their number of signees in parentheses.

### 1. USC (36)

After two straight rankings outside of the top 10 (No. 17 in 2024, No. 13 in 2025), USC claimed the top overall spot in the

Big Ten Team Rankings				
Overall Rk.	Team	Signees	Avg. Player Rating	
1	USC	36	92.01	(3)
3	Oregon	24	92.83	(1)
4	Ohio State	29	92.19	(2)
12	Michigan	22	90.87	(4)
13	Washington	25	89.69	(5)
23	Illinois	33	87.77	(11)
26	Minnesota	31	87.68	(12)
28	Iowa	19	89.38	(6)
32	Indiana	22	88.25	(8)
37	Rutgers	23	87.88	(10)
45	Maryland	17	88.46	(7)
47	Michigan State	21	87.36	(15)
50	Northwestern	22	86.71	(16)
54	Purdue	25	86.56	(17)
62	Penn State	15	87.67	(13)
63	UCLA	19	86.12	(18)
71	Wisconsin	15	87.43	(14)
100	Nebraska	11	88.61	(9)

\*247Sports composite rankings

2026 recruiting rankings.

USC is topped by a trio of five-star recruits in Princeton (N.J.) Hun School defensive end Luke Waffle (6-6, 257), Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei tight end Mark Bowman (6-5, 225) and Richardson, Texas, defensive lineman Jaimeon Winfield (6-3, 327).

Waffle, the No. 2 defensive end commit in the class, ultimately chose USC over Ohio State, Florida, Penn State and Texas after a season in which he totaled 99 tackles, 37 tackles for loss and a school-record 23 sacks.

It was clear that Trojan head coach Lincoln Riley looked to re-up USC's high-flying passing after the loss of Biletnikoff Award winner Makai Lemon, bringing in six wideouts, four of them four-stars. The group is headed by DeSoto, Texas, wide receiver Ethan Feaster (6-1, 180), the No. 40 overall recruit in the class of 2026, and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2,



Lincoln Riley

194), who had originally pledged to Ohio State prior to flipping to USC on the first day of the early signing period. USC also landed Sherman Oaks (Calif.) Notre Dame four-star Luc Weaver (6-3, 205) and Rancho Santa Margarita (Calif.) Catholic four-star Trent Mosley (5-11, 170).

The Trojans looked to bolster the trenches with a pair of top-100 offensive tackles in Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Keenyi Pepe (6-7, 320) and Folsom, Calif., four-star Vlad Dyakonov (6-6, 274).

They brought in three high-four-star recruits in the backfield with a pair of running backs, Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian's Deshonne Redeaux (5-10, 202) and Painesville (Ohio) Harvey's Shahn Alston (5-9, 205), as well as Frankfort (Ill.) Lincoln-Way East quarterback Jonas Williams (6-2, 215). Alston was ranked the No. 5 overall prospect in the state of Ohio.

USC also managed to snag the sixth-ranked cornerback in the country and No. 3 recruit in Ohio, Akron Hoban four-star Elbert Hill (5-10, 175). Hill took official visits to Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon and USC in the spring before choosing the Trojans.

### 3. Oregon (24)

Just behind USC and ahead of Ohio State in the rankings is third-ranked Oregon, which brought in the second-best recruiting class in the Big Ten for the second consecutive season.

While the Trojans brought in by far the most prospects in the Big Ten, the Ducks held the highest concentration of top talent. Oregon was the only school in the conference to bring in four five-star recruits.

At the top of Oregon's class is North Bethesda (Md.) Georgetown Prep five-star interior offensive lineman Immanuel Iheanacho (6-7, 345), who is the No. 11 overall recruit and the top interior lineman in the class.

Behind Iheanacho are Frisco (Texas) Panther Creek wide receiver Jalen Lott (6-0, 176), Mobile (Ala.) St. Paul's Episcopal defensive end Anthony Jones (6-4, 240) and Reidsville, N.C., tight end Kendre Harrison (6-7, 243).

With the losses of multiple key defensive backs – Jahllil Florence, Sione Laulea and Dakoda Fields – to the transfer portal, as well as Dillon Thieneman to the draft, Oregon picked up two safeties and a cornerback ranked in the top 100. Las Vegas (Nev.) Bishop Gorman four-star safety Jett Washington (6-5, 215), the nephew of the late NBA Hall of Famer Kobe Bryant, headlines Oregon's incoming defensive back class, checking in as the No. 39 overall prospect in the nation.

Orlando (Fla.) First Academy four-star safety Devin Jackson (6-2, 200) and Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian four-star cornerback Davon Benjamin (6-0, 180) followed close behind.

Oregon added just one in-state player in the class in Eugene Willamette four-star defensive lineman Tony Cumberland (6-5, 285).

The Ducks also received a late Feb. 4 commitment from Buford, Ga., three-star quarterback Dayton Raiola (6-1, 205), the brother of Nebraska transfer Dylan Raiola, who pledged to Oregon on Jan. 12.

### 13. Washington (25)

Finishing just behind Michigan's recruiting class was 13th-ranked Washington. In their second recruiting cycle since joining the Big Ten, the Huskies signed just one five-star prospect but bolstered their depth with 11 four-stars and 13 three-star recruits.

Washington's top prospect, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle Kodi Greene (6-6, 320), was ranked No. 25 overall in the class of 2026 and was one of just two Husky prospects to rank among the top 100 overall recruits. Greene was committed to Oregon from Aug. 12, 2024, until he flipped from the Ducks to Washington on Apr. 24, 2025, to become the Huskies' top prospect.

With starting running back Jonah Coleman declaring for the 2026 NFL draft, Washington picked up two replacements in Valencia, Calif., four-star running back Brian Bonner (6-1, 185) and Lake Oswego (Ore.) Lakeridge three-star Ansu Sanoe (6-1, 210).

Washington also landed a trio of four-



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star pass catchers in San Antonio Madison wide receiver Jordan Clay (6-2, 197); West Monroe, La., wide receiver Trez Davis (6-0, 180); and Norman (Okla.) North wide receiver Mason James (5-11, 175).

In the secondary, Oakland (Calif.) McClymonds four-star cornerback Rahsjon Duncan (6-1, 186) and Las Vegas Faith Lutheran four-star safety Gavin Day (6-3, 190) stood as Washington's third (No. 120 overall) and fourth (No. 152) highest-ranked recruits, respectively.

## 23. Illinois (33)

Illinois turned in its best recruiting class in the last decade by far in 2026, marking the program's highest-ranked group since 2008, when the Illini had the 22nd-ranked class.

In total, Illinois brought in five four-star recruits, 27 three-star recruits and an unranked wide receiver, totaling 33 recruits, which placed them second only to USC (36) in the Big Ten in numbers. Illinois' 27 three-star prospects are the most in the conference.

The Illini recruiting class features a pair of four-star defensive backs in Belleville (Ill.) West cornerback Nick Hankins (6-0, 190) and St. Louis Kirkwood safety Jacob Eberhart (6-3, 200). Hankins tops the Illinois recruiting class, placing as the No. 134 overall recruit and the 15th-ranked cornerback, while Eberhart is the Illini's fifth-highest ranked player and finished as the No. 416 overall prospect.

In addition, Illinois signed two top-500 linemen in Vero Beach, Fla., four-star offensive tackle Micah Smith (6-6, 325) and Toms River (N.J.) Donovan Catholic four-star interior offensive lineman Kai Pritchard (6-5, 290). Illinois won the down-to-the-wire battle for Smith, a former Ohio State target and the nation's No. 233 prospect, who de-committed from UCLA on Dec. 3 to flip to the Illini.

Illinois also added the state's eighth-ranked recruit with Chicago Morgan Park four-star wide receiver Nasir Rankin (5-10, 161).

## 26. Minnesota (31)

Like Illinois, Minnesota drastically improved its recruiting class from the 2025 season, jumping 21 spots from its 47th-ranked class a year ago.

Leading Minnesota's recruiting class was the Golden Gophers' lone top-200 signee in Lafayette (Ind.) Jefferson four-star defensive end Aaden Aytch (6-3, 230).

The Gophers managed to retain the majority of their top in-state talent, bringing in the No. 1, 2 and 4 players in the state of Minnesota. Headlining that group was Forest Lake four-star defensive lineman Howie Johnson (6-3, 255), followed by Jackson County Central four-star athlete Roman Voss (6-4, 225) and Cold Spring Rocori four-star offensive tackle Andrew Trout (6-6, 295).

Rounding out Minnesota's four-star talents are Atco (N.J.) Winslow Township wide receiver Quayd Hendryx (5-11, 175) and El Paso (Texas) El Dorado running back Ryan Estrada (5-9, 195).

With an already youthful offensive line group, Minnesota continued to add depth at offensive tackle with Janesville (Wis.) Parker three-star Gavin Meier (6-6, 300) and Phoenix Mountain Pointe three-star Aaron



FILE PHOTO

**KNIGHT WATCH — Rutgers coach Greg Schiano recruited a third straight top-40 class in the 2026 recruiting cycle including five four-star prospects for the Scarlet Knights (5-7, 2-7).**

Thomas (6-7, 300). Thomas was committed to Ohio State for a little more than four months before backing off his pledge on Nov. 3 and flipping to Minnesota just two days later. Thomas and Meier are tied in the rankings at No. 570, each with a 0.8856 rating.

## 28. Iowa (19)

Iowa may have finished as the eighth-ranked class in the Big Ten, but the Hawkeyes finished with eight four-star recruits, sixth most in the conference. The Hawkeyes also had the sixth-highest average player grade in the Big Ten at 89.38, which places Iowa 18th nationally.

At the top of Iowa's class is Kaysville (Utah) Davis four-star quarterback Tradon Bessinger (6-5, 210). Bessinger will have major shoes to fill with the Hawkeyes' loss of starting quarterback Mark Gronowski, the NCAA's all-time leader in wins as a quarterback.

The Hawkeyes also brought in Omaha (Neb.) North four-star cornerback Darion Jones (6-1, 170), the nation's No. 168 overall recruit. Jones is followed by Dearborn (Mich.) Divine Child three-star safety Marcell Vitti (6-0, 195) in the secondary.

After Jones in the ranks, the Hawkeyes

also signed the top three players in the state of Iowa with Iowa City West four-star linebacker Julian Manson (6-4, 215), Waterloo West four-star offensive tackle Carson Nielsen (6-7, 275) and Sioux City Bishop Heelan Catholic four-star linebacker Kasen Thomas (6-2, 217). Manson, Nielsen and Thomas rank 202nd, 289th and 290th, respectively, in the class of 2026.

Iowa further bolstered its trenches with Hinsdale (Ill.) Central four-star interior offensive lineman Gene Riordan (6-4, 275) and Brandon (S.D.) Valley four-star defensive lineman Hudson Parliament (6-4, 320), as well as Iowa City West three-star interior

offensive lineman Colin Whitters (6-4, 300).

## 32. Indiana (22)

Coming off the first national championship in program history, Indiana improved in its recruiting efforts for a third consecutive season, bringing in the highest-ranked Hoosier recruiting class since 2022 (25th).

Indiana fell short on the top two in-state players with wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (Ohio State) and Aytch (Minnesota) signing elsewhere but still managed to bring in seven total four-star prospects along with 15 three-star recruits.

Indiana's 2026 class is headlined by Naperville (Ill.) North four-star defensive lineman Gabriel Hill (6-2, 275), with the Hoosiers bringing in two four-stars from each of Florida, Ohio and Indiana.

The Hoosiers received in-state commitments from Columbus North four-star tight end Parker Elmore (6-5, 225) and Indianapolis Decatur Central four-star cornerback Kasmir Hicks (5-11, 170), the third- and fifth-ranked players in the state, respectively.

Out of Florida, Indiana brought in a pair of defensive linemen in Sarasota Booker four-star Kevontay Hukan (6-2, 235) and Bradenton IMG Academy four-star Cameron McHaney (6-1, 315).

Finally, Indiana snagged two linebacker prospects from Ohio with Grandview Heights four-star Henry Ohlinger (6-1, 210) and Massillon Washington four-star Ja'Dyn Williams (6-2, 205).

The Hoosiers secured flips from Merrillville (Ind.) Andean three-star offensive tackle Benjamin Novak (6-6, 310) away from Wisconsin and Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic three-star wide receiver Lavar Keys (5-10, 165), who was previously committed to Penn State.

## 38. Rutgers (23)

For the third season in a row, Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano hauled in a top-40 class for the Scarlet Knights.

Rutgers was unable to bring in a recruit inside the top 250 in 2026 but still managed to sign five four-star prospects, 17 three-star players and an unranked offensive lineman.

The Scarlet Knights' class is headlined by Mineral (Va.) Louisa County four-star wide receiver Dyzier Carter (6-0, 175), the No. 281 overall recruit and seventh-ranked player in the state of Virginia.

Just behind Carter is a pair of defensive backs, Winter Garden (Fla.) West Orange four-star cornerback Devonte Anderson (6-1, 185) and Rockford (Ill.) Guilford four-star safety Messiah Tilson (6-2, 165), who finished No. 383 and No. 391 nationally, respectively.

Continued On Page 26

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# Wildcats, Spartans Marginally Improve Ranks

Continued From Page 25

Rutgers was active in recruiting the South and particularly in Georgia as the Scarlet Knights brought in two four-star linemen with Stockbridge, Ga., interior offensive lineman Jared Smith (6-5, 335) and Macon (Ga.) Southwest defensive end Rinaldo Callaway (6-5, 205). The two linemen are tied for the 436th spot nationally.

Following the departure of senior quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis to the NFL draft, Rutgers replenished its quarterback depth with Fort Washington (Pa.) Germantown Academy three-star Xavier Stearn (6-6, 215). Stearn ranks as the 42nd overall quarterback in the class.

## 46. Maryland (17)

Though Maryland ranked as the 46th overall recruiting class and the 11th-best group in the Big Ten, the Terrapins were the lowest-ranked team nationally to bring in a five-star recruit.

While the Terrapins failed to recruit any four-star players in the class, they managed to snag Baltimore St. Frances Academy five-star defensive end Zion Elee (6-4, 220), as well as 16 three-star prospects.

Elee, who ranks as the fifth overall prospect, No. 1 edge rusher and the top-ranked player in Maryland, finished his senior year with 72 tackles, 20 TFLs, 12 sacks and four forced fumbles on his way to earning Baltimore All-Metro Player of the Year honors. Elee was also the highest-ranked prospect to commit to any Big Ten school.

Outside of Elee, Maryland placed a strong emphasis on strengthening its secondary, adding three in-state defensive back recruits in this class. At the top of that group is Hyattsville, (Md.) DeMatha Catholic three-star safety Darrell Carey (6-2, 185) with Severn (Md.) Spalding three-star cornerback Sean Johnson (6-1, 175) and Baltimore St. Frances Academy three-star cornerback Hakim Satterwhite (6-2, 180)

## Michigan Lands 12th-Ranked Class

Despite a turbulent offseason that included the firing of former head coach Sherrone Moore on Dec. 10, five days after the early signing period concluded, Michigan still secured the fourth-best recruiting class in the Big Ten and a top-15 class nationally.

Now led by former Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham, Michigan grabbed a total of 22 recruits, which consisted of two five-stars, 10 four-stars and 10 three-stars.

The crown jewel of the Wolverines' class is Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200), the No. 12 overall recruit in the class and the top-ranked running back.

Virginia's Gatorade Player of the Year, Hiter, wasn't the highest-rated in Michigan's recruiting class, but he ultimately served as a huge signing for the Wolverines over the other elite programs, including Penn State, Tennessee, Ohio State and Georgia.

Michigan also landed Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga five-star defensive end Carter Meadows (6-6, 225), the No. 9 overall commit and No. 4-ranked edge rusher in the country. Meadows chose the Wolverines over South Carolina, Penn State and Ohio State.

Behind its two five-stars, Michigan brought in a trio of highly ranked defensive linemen, including St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star Titan Davis (6-4, 271); Liberty Hill, Texas, four-star Alister Vallejo (6-3, 310); and Chicago Simeon four-star McHale Blade (6-5, 245).

In the offensive trenches, Honolulu Kamehameha four-star offensive tackle Malakai Lee (6-7, 349) and Needham (Mass.) St. Sebastian's four-star offensive tackle Marky Walbridge (6-6, 280) are the No. 106 and No. 239 offensive tackle recruits, respectively.

Rounding out the Wolverines' recruits in the top 150 are Waco (Texas) Connally four-star cornerback Jamarion Vincent (6-2, 165) and Chesapeake (Va.) Oscar Smith four-star wide receiver Travis Johnson (6-3, 185). Vincent totaled 34 tackles, two TFLs, one interception and a fumble recovery for a touchdown as a junior in 2024.

Michigan brought in a pair of backups for rising sophomore quarterback Bryce Underwood, with Newbury Park, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Smigiel (6-5, 205) and Saline, Mich., four-star quarterback Tommy Carr (6-3, 195), the son of all-time great Michigan head coach and 1997 national champion Lloyd Carr.

Although Michigan still secured a strong overall class, five recruits decommitted following the dismissal of Moore and the ensuing coaching change. Billings (Mont.) West tight end Matt Ludwig (6-4, 240) and Richmond (Va.) Hermitage cornerback Andre Clarke Jr. (6-1, 175) were the only two four-star recruits to decommit after the early signing period.

— Sam Cipriani

behind him.

Additionally, Maryland flipped Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Cameron Brickley (6-2, 305), who was committed to Ohio State for nearly five months before decommitting on Nov. 23, 2025, and choosing the Terrapins on the same day.

## 47. Michigan State (21)

Following its worst recruiting class in more than 20 years in 2025, Michigan State made a modest improvement this season, rising from the 57th to 47th overall class nationally.

While the Spartans had zero recruits ranked inside the top 300 a year ago, Michigan State had three such prospects in 2026: Gilbert (Ariz.) Williams Field four-star offensive tackle Collin Campbell (6-7, 280), Grand Rapids (Mich.) East Kentwood four-star quarterback Kayd Coffman (6-2, 200) and Novi (Mich.) Catholic Central four-star wide receiver Samson Gash (6-0, 180). Utah reportedly made a late push for Campbell after Michigan State hired Pat Fitzgerald on Dec. 1, but the Spartans were able to retain their top recruit.

The Spartans also brought in two four-star prospects outside of that range with Mansfield (Ohio) Lexington tight end Joey Caudill (6-5, 215) and North Branch, Mich., offensive tackle Eli Bickel (6-6, 270).

On Dec. 3, Michigan State earned a late flip from Canton (Ohio) Hoover three-star interior offensive lineman Jack Ziarko (6-4, 280), who decommitted from Miami (Ohio) and signed with the Spartans.

The Spartans notably picked up Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic three-star cornerback TJ Umenyiora (6-1, 185), the son of former New York Giants and Atlanta Falcons defensive end Osi Umenyiora.

## 51. Northwestern (22)

Just two seasons ago, the Wildcats turned in the 80th-ranked class and brought in zero five- or four-star recruits. However, Northwestern has once again managed to marginally improve its recruiting efforts under head coach David Braun.

Northwestern signed 23 recruits in its 2026 class, including two four-stars and 20 three-star prospects, but finished with an average player grade of 86.71, the third-lowest mark in the Big Ten.

The Wildcats' class is led by its duo of four-star prospects with Edgewater (Md.) South River wide receiver Jaden McDuffie

(6-3, 165) and Barrington, Ill., interior offensive lineman Owen Fors (6-4, 290) finishing No. 252 and No. 435 on the national board, respectively.

Northwestern was very active pursuing previously committed recruits, too, flipping five players away from their former schools, including Hendersonville (Tenn.) Beech three-star offensive tackle Jack Fuchs (6-8, 290), who decommitted from Penn State just eight days after longtime head coach James Franklin was fired on Oct. 12, 2025, prior to a Nov. 11 pledge to the Wildcats.

## 55. Purdue (25)

Just a season removed from bringing in the worst recruiting class in the Power Four and the Big Ten, Purdue is no longer at the bottom of the barrel in the conference.

Though head coach Barry Odom and the Boilermakers brought in 25 total recruits – tied for fifth most in the conference – Purdue landed just one four-star prospect with Radcliff (Ky.) North Hardin defensive lineman Josiah Hope (6-3, 300). Hope was committed to Louisville for almost half a year prior to the early signing period. However, the No. 436 overall prospect flipped to Purdue on Dec. 3.

The only other Purdue signee to rank inside the top 500 was Lincoln City (Ind.) Heritage Hills three-star athlete Jett Goldsberry (6-0, 195). Goldsberry ranks as the No. 498 overall prospect and helped lead Heritage Hills to a state championship as a junior, totaling 3,575 all-purpose yards and 54 total touchdowns.

The Boilermakers also claimed two in-state interior offensive line signings with New Palestine three-star Brock Brownfield (6-3, 250) and Indianapolis Lawrence Central three-star James Williams Jr. (6-3, 275).

Purdue's recruits averaged a grade of 86.56, the second lowest in the Big Ten.

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FILE PHOTO

**LUKEWARM RESPONSE** — Not only has Wisconsin coach Luke Fickell struggled to meet expectations, but the Badgers (4-8, 2-7) had the second-worst recruiting class in the conference, ahead of only Nebraska.

## 62. Penn State (15)

In the wake of firing Franklin after a 3-3 start to the regular season, Penn State saw an exodus of recruits, significantly dropping the Nittany Lions' recruiting rankings.

Following the firing of Franklin, the slew of flips left Penn State without a single five-star recruit and with only one player in the top 300, Malvern (Pa.) Prep four-star defensive end Jackson Ford (6-4, 240), who finished as the No. 300 player in the country.

The Lions added another four star in the trenches in Bayville (N.J.) Central Regional defensive end Elijah Reeder (6-5, 210).

Penn State also added two four-star offensive talents, Nazareth, Pa., quarterback Peyton Falzone (6-5, 200) and Piscataway, N.J., wide receiver Josiah Zayas (6-2, 190), who led the Nittany Lions' class on that side of the ball. Penn State signed a second quarterback in Lexington, Texas, three-star Kase Evans (6-2, 198), who will compete with Falzone to replace Ethan Grunkemeyer.

The Nittany Lions also dipped into the state of Nebraska for two safeties and a wide receiver listed in the top 1,000 with Lincoln North Star three-star safety Tyrell Chatman (6-2, 170), Omaha Westside three-star safety Bryson Williams (6-4, 175), and Omaha Millard South three-star wide receiver Amari Jackson (6-1, 175).

Seven of Penn State's 15 recruits in the

class of 2026 were ranked outside of the top 1,000 prospects.

## 63. UCLA (19)

A coaching shakeup reminiscent of Penn State's transition away from Franklin had UCLA dismiss former head coach Deshaun Foster and replace him with former James Madison head coach Bob Chesney.

While UCLA's 19 total prospects place the Bruins tied for 13th in the Big Ten in terms of total recruits, the quality of players was lacking. UCLA's average player rating of 86.12 ranked dead last in the conference, while the Bruins brought in just one four-star prospect this offseason.

Ranking at the top of the Bruins' class is Stockton (Calif.) St. Mary's four-star wide receiver Kenneth Moore III (5-10, 165). Moore was a jack-of-all-trades offensively for the Rams and also spent time at cornerback. He posted 840 passing yards and 10 touchdowns, added 541 rushing yards and five scores, and chipped in 20 tackles with four pass breakups at cornerback.

UCLA worked to strengthen its offensive line. The Bruins brought in Bakersfield (Calif.) Liberty three-star offensive tackle Quinn Buckey (6-6, 270) and San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) Hills three-star interior offensive lineman Cooper Javorsky (6-4, 280).

The Bruins were active in tapping into the Colorado area, securing commitments from three prospects out of the Centennial

State in Littleton Heritage three-star tight end Camden Jensen (6-6, 250), Englewood Cherry Creek three-star running back Jayden Fox (5-9, 165) and Parker Legend three-star quarterback DJ Bordeaux (6-2, 195).

## 72. Wisconsin (15)

Even with Wisconsin athletic director Chris McIntosh's pledge to increase investment in the football program to support head coach Luke Fickell, the Badgers' recruiting results have yet to materialize.

Wisconsin brought in just one four-star recruit in Arlington, Mass., offensive tackle Brady Bekkenhuis (6-6, 295). Originally committed to Boston College in his home state, Bekkenhuis stands as the Badgers' lone offensive tackle recruit after two decommitments from Novak and Richmond (Va.) Benedictine three-star Maddox Cochrane (6-7, 280), who signed with Indiana and Virginia Tech, respectively.

Wisconsin poached two of its top three recruits in the class out of Tennessee with former Vanderbilt commit Keeyshawn Tabuteau (5-11, 165), a three-star wide receiver from Chattanooga McCallie, and Medina South Gibson three-star defensive end Yahya Gaad (6-5, 260).

The Badgers also brought in Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei three-star quarterback Ryan Hopkins (6-3, 195), who served as the signal caller for Ohio State commit Henry and USC pledge Dixon-Wyatt in 2026. Hopkins totaled 2,410 yards and 19 touchdowns as a senior with the Monarchs.

## 100. Nebraska (11)

Following three straight seasons where head coach Matt Rhule and company managed to bring in a top-25 recruiting class, Nebraska held the worst recruiting class in not only the Big Ten but also for any Power Four team, prior to earning a commitment from Monroe (La.) Ouachita Parish four-star defensive lineman Dylan Berymon (6-2, 330) on Feb. 5.

With Berymon – the 223rd-ranked prospect – committing late, the Cornhuskers jumped to 100th nationally. Still, Nebraska remained the conference's weakest class, adding just three four-star recruits and eight three-star prospects.

Nebraska's class is led by Orlando (Fla.) First Academy four-star cornerback Danny Odem (6-1, 189) and Chicago Mt. Carmel four-star offensive tackle Claude Mpouma (6-5, 338).

Odem, who ranks 50th in the class, comes as a huge get for the Cornhuskers after they missed out on Winter Garden, (Fla.) Windermere four-star cornerback CJ Bronaugh (6-1, 166), who committed to Florida. Odem totaled 45 tackles, three pass breakups, two interceptions, and two forced fumbles in 10 games.

Nebraska's next three highest-rated recruits were all pass catchers with Powder Springs, (Ga.) McEachern three-star wide receiver Nalin Scott (6-2, 200), Orlando (Fla.) Jones three-star wide receiver Larry Miles (5-11, 170) and Anaheim (Calif.) Servite three-star tight end Luke Sorensen (6-4, 245).

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# Buckeyes Have Long History In Super Bowl

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State couldn't lose at Super Bowl LX (60) in Santa Clara, Calif., on Feb. 8 when it came to being on the winning side.

The New England Patriots had three former Buckeyes in offensive lineman Thayer Munford Jr., running back TreVeyon Henderson and head coach Mike Vrabel while the Seattle Seahawks were represented by receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Seattle dominated for a 29-13 win to make Smith-Njigba, named on Feb. 5 as the NFL's top offensive player in 2025, the 34th OSU player on an active roster to win a Super Bowl.

Henderson had 19 yards on six rushes, three catches for 26 yards and a late kickoff return for 39 yards. Mumford saw limited action on an offensive line that allowed six sacks.

Vrabel was trying to become the third head coach associated with and the second alumnus of Ohio State to win a Super Bowl.

Don McCafferty guided the Baltimore Colts to a 16-13 win over the Dallas Cowboys in Super Bowl V in 1971 in one of the ugliest championship games. The Colts had seven of the 11 turnovers in a matchup decided in the dying seconds by a 23-yard field goal from Jim O'Brien to make McCafferty and former OSU offensive tackle Jim Vogel winners.

McCafferty was an offensive lineman for the Buckeyes on the 1942 national title team coached by the legendary Paul Brown.

Pete Carroll never played for the Buckeyes, but many people don't know he was an assistant coach at Ohio State in 1979 before becoming the defensive coordinator at North Carolina State from 1980-82.

He would eventually be a head coach and win national titles at USC in 2003 and 2004 and a Super Bowl (XLVIII in 2014) for the Seattle Seahawks, one of 12 Super Bowls without a Buckeye player.

Vrabel, as a defensive end for the Patriots, was a Super Bowl champion in XXXVI (2002), XXXVIII (2004) and XXXIX (2005). He had a 1-yard TD catch in the 2004 game and a 2-yard touchdown reception the following year.

Of note, Dick LeBeau, a member of the Buckeyes' 1957 national championship team, was a coordinator when the Pittsburgh Steelers won Super Bowl XL (2006) and XLIII (2009).

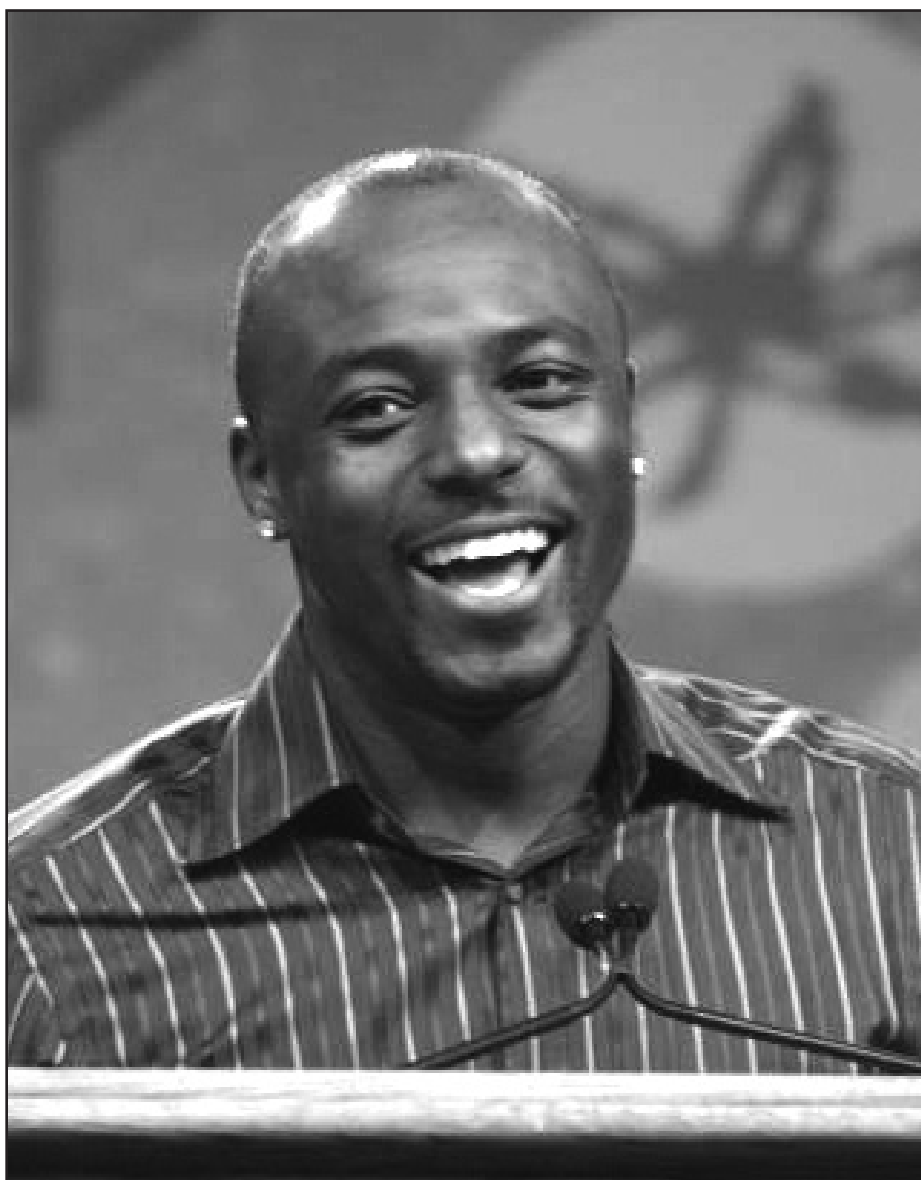
## Lone Buckeye In First SB

Ohio State's participation began in 1967 with the first Super Bowl, or the AFL-NFL Championship Game as it was known, when left tackle Jim Tyrer started for the Kansas City Chiefs in a 35-10 loss to the Green Bay Packers. Since then, more than 60 ex-Buckeyes have played in a Super Bowl, with Vrabel and Minnesota Vikings defensive end Jim Marshall tied for the most appearances with four.

Vrabel and Nate Ebner lead with three championships playing for the Patriots, while Pepper Johnson (New York Giants), William Roberts (Giants), John Frank (San Francisco 49ers) and Morris Bradshaw (Oakland Raiders) each have two titles.

The most Buckeyes in one Super Bowl was six, with an asterisk for LVI in 2022. The Cincinnati Bengals had Eli Apple, Vonn Bell, Sam Hubbard and Isaiah Prince facing Jordan Fuller of the Los Angeles Rams. The sixth member was Bengals QB Joe Burrow, who graduated from Ohio State but played his final two seasons at LSU, where he won the Heisman Trophy and a national championship in 2019.

There have been three instances of five Buckeyes in the same Super Bowl beginning in 1977 at Super Bowl XI with Len Willis and Jim Marshall for Minnesota and Oakland's Bradshaw, Jack Tatum and Neal Colzie. In 2000, at Super Bowl XXXIV, Eddie George and Chris Sanders played for Tennessee while Orlando Pace, Lorenzo Styles and Joe Germaine were with the St.



FILE PHOTO

**BIG PLAY —** Santonio Holmes is the only Ohio State player to be named Most Valuable Player in a Super Bowl. He made the game-winning catch in the waning seconds of the 2009 game for the Pittsburgh Steelers to defeat the Arizona Cardinals 27-23.

Louis Rams, and in the 50th Super Bowl in 2016, the Carolina Panthers had Corey "Philly" Brown, Kurt Coleman, Ted Ginn Jr. and Andrew Norwell vs. Bradley Roby of the Denver Broncos.

## Holmes Alone

There have been many solid performances by Buckeyes in Super Bowls, but only Santonio Holmes has been named MVP.

That occurred in Super Bowl XLIII on Feb. 1, 2009, when Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger connected

with wide receiver Santonio Holmes for a 6-yard TD pass with 35 seconds remaining to give the Steelers a 27-23 victory over the Arizona Cardinals.

For the game, Holmes caught nine passes off 12 targets for 131 yards, with his longest reception being 40 yards, but he will be remembered for that one play.

It was a dramatic turnaround after Larry Fitzgerald's TD reception from Kurt Warner had put the Cardinals ahead 23-20 with 2:37 left.

After returning the kickoff to the Pitts-

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burgh 22, the Steelers had 78 yards and 2:30 to regain the lead. During the drive, Holmes had three catches for 67 yards to put the ball into the red zone.

Roethlisberger went back to Holmes in the left corner on first down from the 6, but the pass was incomplete. On second down, they went to the opposite sideline, and Holmes was able to tap both feet in – though many Cardinal players and fans to this day swear he had one foot touching the out-of-bounds line – for the winning score.

In an interview with ESPN’s Jeremy Fowler 10 years after the Super Bowl catch, Holmes explained that there was a calmness during the winning drive.

“Millions are watching you. What are you going to do now?” Holmes said. “You didn’t ask God to put you in this place for you not to do what you were supposed to do. This won’t break me. This will make me. Legends never die.”

In the days leading to this year’s Super Bowl, USA Today published a list of its top 25 moments. No. 1 was Malcolm Butler’s goal-line interception of Seattle’s Russell Wilson with 20 seconds left in SB XLIX (49) in 2015 to preserve the Patriots’ 28-24 win.

Second in the ranking was the Holmes catch:

“What was better: Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger’s precision strike to the back corner of the end zone – rifled through three Arizona Cardinals – or wide receiver Santonio Holmes’ ability to snatch it while keeping his toes down as he fell out of

bounds with 35 seconds on the clock? Beautifully executed all the way around, it gave the Pittsburgh Steelers a then-record sixth Lombardi Trophy as they rallied for a 27-23 victory in Super Bowl 43.”

Special Game

Buckeyes were involved in other notable games and moments throughout the long history of the Super Bowl.

Undoubtedly, Super Bowl III in 1969 was the most critical to the success of the NFL. It wasn’t the most exciting or well-played, but it jarred the established older league when a brash Joe Namath led the New York Jets, an 18-point underdog, to a stunning 16-7 win over the Baltimore Colts to give the AFL its first in three tries after the Packers won the first two.

Namath had guaranteed a victory and delivered, and the following year the Chiefs downed the Minnesota Vikings to even the series in the final Super Bowl matchup before the leagues merged.

Two former Buckeyes played prominent roles in the Colts-Jets matchup.

Matt Snell of the Jets and the Colts’ Tom Matte became the first and only players from the same school to rush for more than 100 yards each in a Super Bowl.

Snell had 121 yards and a 4-yard TD to open the scoring on 30 carries. He also had four catches for 40 yards. Matte rushed for 116 yards, including a 58-yarder, on 11 carries and added 30 yards on two catches.

Buckeyes In The Super Bowl

Super Bowl (Year)	Player	Postion	Team
I (1967)	Jim Tyrer	OT	Kansas City Chiefs
III (1969)	Tom Matte	RB	Baltimore Colts
	Matt Snell	RB	New York Jets
	Bob Vogel	OT	Baltimore Colts
IV (1970)	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Jim Tyrer	OT	Kansas City Chiefs
V (1971)	Don McCafferty	HC	Baltimore Colts
	Bob Vogel	OT	Baltimore Colts
VI (1972), VII (1973)	Paul Warfield	WR	Miami Dolphins
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
VIII (1974)	Paul Warfield	WR	Miami Dolphins
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
IX (1975)	Morris Bradshaw	WR	Oakland Raiders
	Neal Colzie	DB	Oakland Raiders
XI (1977)	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Jack Tatum	S	Oakland Raiders
	Lenny Willis	WR	Minnesota Vikings
XII (1978)	Randy Gradishar	LB	Denver Broncos
XIV (1980)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Los Angeles Rams
	Doug France	OT	Los Angeles Rams
XV (1981)	Morris Bradshaw	WR	Oakland Raiders
XVI (1982)	Archie Griffin	RB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Pete Johnson	RB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Ray Griffin	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
XVII (1983)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Miami Dolphins
	Tom Orosz	P	Miami Dolphins
XIX (1985)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Miami Dolphins
	John Frank	TE	San Francisco 49ers
	Pete Johnson	RB	Miami Dolphins
XX (1986)	Shaun Gayle	DB	Chicago Bears
	Mike Tomczak	QB	Chicago Bears
XXI (1987)	Pepper Johnson	LB	New York Giants
	William Roberts	OG	New York Giants
XXIII (1989)	John Frank	TE	San Francisco 49ers
	Pepper Johnson	LB	New York Giants
XXV (1991)	William Roberts	OG	New York Giants
	Jim Lachey	OT	Washington Redskins
XXVI (1992)	Joe Staysniak	OT	Buffalo Bills
	Mike Tomczak	QB	Pittsburgh Steelers
XXX (1996)	Keith Byars	FB	New England Patriots
	Terry Glenn	WR	New England Patriots
XXXI (1997)	William Roberts	OG	New England Patriots
	Tom Tupa	P	New England Patriots
XXXIII (1999)	Tito Paul	DB	Denver Broncos
	William White	DB	Atlanta Falcons
XXXIV (2000)	Eddie George	RB	Tennessee Titans
	Joe Germaine	QB	St. Louis Rams
	Orlando Pace	OT	St. Louis Rams
	Chris Sanders	WR	Tennessee Titans
	Lorenzo Styles	LB	St. Louis Rams
XXXV (2001)	Joe Montgomery	RB	New York Giants
	Orlando Pace	OT	St. Louis Rams
XXXVI (2002)	Ryan Pickett	DT	St. Louis Rams
	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XXXVII (2003)	Rickey Dudley	TE	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
	Tom Tupa	P	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
XXXVIII (2004)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
	Nick Goings	RB	Carolina Panthers
XXXIX (2005)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XLII (2008)	Santonio Holmes (MVP)	WR	Pittsburgh Steelers
	Malcolm Jenkins	CB	New Orleans Saints
XLIII (2009)	Will Smith	DE	New Orleans Saints
	Will Allen	DB	Pittsburgh Steelers
XLIV (2010)	A.J. Hawk	LB	Green Bay Packers
	Ryan Pickett	DT	Green Bay Packers
XLV (2011)	Matt Wilhelm	LB	Green Bay Packers
	Jake Ballard	TE	New York Giants
XLVI (2012)	Jim Cordle	C	New York Giants
	Alex Boone	OT	San Francisco 49ers
XLVII (2013)	Larry Grant	LB	San Francisco 49ers
	Ted Ginn Jr.	WR	San Francisco 49ers
	Donte Whitner	S	San Francisco 49ers
	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
XLIX (2015)	Corey “Philly” Brown	WR	Carolina Panthers
	Kurt Coleman	S	Carolina Panthers
50 (2016)	Ted Ginn Jr.	WR	Carolina Panthers
	Andrew Norwell	OG	Carolina Panthers
	Bradley Roby	CB	Denver Broncos
	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
LI (2017)	Malcolm Jenkins	DB	Philadelphia Eagles
	Jake McQuaid	LS	Los Angeles Rams
LII (2018)	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
	John Simon	DE	New England Patriots
LIII (2019)	Nick Bosa	DE	San Francisco 49ers
	Darron Lee	LB	Kansas City Chiefs
LIV (2020)	Eli Apple	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Vonn Bell	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
LVI (2022)	Joe Burrow	QB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Sam Hubbard	DL	Cincinnati Bengals
	Isaiah Prince	OL	Cincinnati Bengals
	Jordan Fuller	DB	Los Angeles Rams
LVII (2023)	Trey Sermon	RB	Philadelphia Eagles
	Nick Bosa	DE	San Francisco 49ers
LVIII (2024)	Chase Young	DE	San Francisco 49ers
	Parris Campbell	WR	Philadelphia Eagles
LIX (2025)	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	New England Patriots
	Thayer Munford Jr.	OT	New England Patriots
LX (2026)	Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	Seattle Seahawks
	Mike Vrabel	HC	New England Patriots

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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# Tressel "Right Guy At Right Time" For OSU

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On the heels of firing 13-year head coach John Cooper, Ohio State had a crucial coaching search ahead of it.

The Buckeyes needed a quality coach to help them regain college football supremacy but had limited time to find one. Having fired Cooper on Jan. 2, Ohio State's 2001 recruiting class was suddenly in flux with just weeks remaining before National Signing Day.

After an exhaustive coaching search, which included candidates such as Minnesota head coach Glen Mason and Oregon head coach Mike Belotti being interviewed, Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger landed on a lesser-known coach who had been a head coach only at the Division I-AA level.

It's hard to argue with the results. As Ohio State's head football coach from 2001-10, Jim Tressel helped the Buckeyes win six Big Ten championships and their first national title in over 30 years.

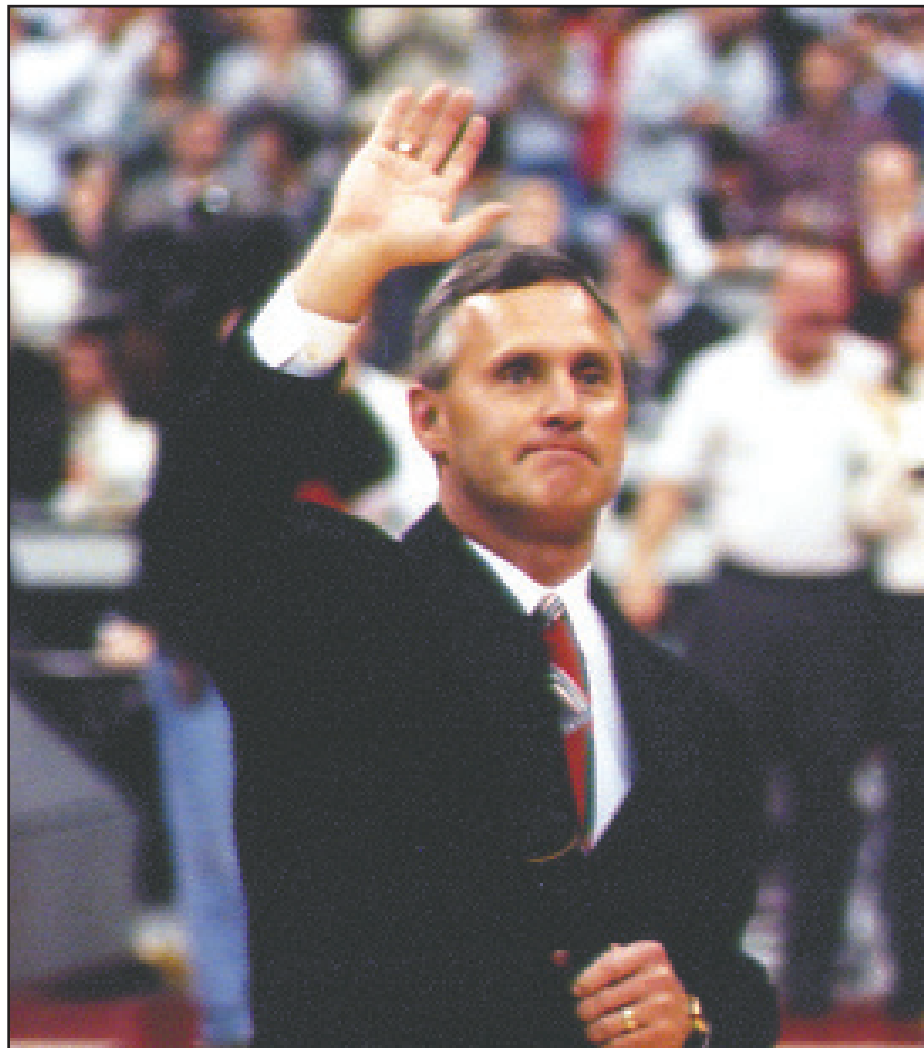
"They definitely got the right guy," 247Sports' Steve Helwagen said of Ohio State's hiring of Tressel. "Hindsight is 20-20, but they most certainly got the right guy at the right time and at the right place, and he came in, and he hit the ground running. He was probably working 20-hour days, and what he did in the short amount of time just to salvage the recruiting class was incredible."

With Tressel's hiring taking place 25 years ago, BSB sat down with Helwagen, former OSU recruiting coordinator Bill Conley and former athletic administrators Denny Hoobler and Larry Romanoff to get an inside look at how the former Youngstown State head coach was ultimately hired.

## OSU Also Considers Mason, Belotti

At least early on, many outside of Ohio State's athletic department didn't want the Buckeyes to hire Tressel, in part because they were only vaguely, if at all, aware of his existence.

Although Tressel was an assistant coach at Ohio State under Earle Bruce, he had spent the entirety of Cooper's tenure as Youngstown State's head coach. Tressel had all sorts of success at the Division I-AA level. He led the Penguins to four national championships in the 1990s, and under his leadership, Youngstown State had a total record of 135-57-2. Still, his name was only one of several that came up during the early part of Ohio State's coaching search.



FILE PHOTO

**JIM DANDY — Jim Tressel was the relatively unknown but highly successful head coach at Youngstown State when he was hired by Ohio State to replace John Cooper on Jan. 18, 2001. Tressel delivered a win over Michigan in his first season and a national championship in 2002.**

"I know (Bellotti) and (former Stanford coach Tyrone Willingham), Glen Mason, Chris Spielman were names that came up. I'm sure there were others, but I think Coach Bellotti was really one of the top names at the time," Hoobler said. "I always found it interesting when he and his wife, at the time, visited Columbus, which was the second week of January. It was just brutal weather, snow, ice, dreary skies, and I think they were both California-natives, and it was like, 'Wow, this is what we get here?' But it seemed like Bellotti was one of the top names that you heard internally and probably in the media at that time."

Helwagen said that many Buckeye fans even hoped for big names, including former Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops, who had just led the Sooners to a 13-2 win over Florida

State in the national championship game.

"When the job comes open, you hear names like Jon Gruden, who coached in the Super Bowl," Helwagen said. "You heard names like that. Andy Geiger wasn't going for somebody who was at the top of the profession, per se. It's kind of complicated, but they were looking for somebody who would be the best fit."

That approach materialized in Bellotti, who had led Oregon to the Pac-10 title the year before, flying to Columbus and interviewing to be the next head coach of the Buckeyes.

Bellotti may have been the biggest name of those who were interviewing for the job, but as a California native and someone who spent all of his coaching career on the West Coast, his knowledge of Buckeye traditions was lacking, to say the least.

"He was one of the favorites, for sure," Conley said. "But the one thing about him is he knew nothing really about Ohio State. I don't think he knew that Columbus was the capital of the state. When he was being interviewed, what I heard was that when they were talking about the Michigan game, he said, 'Do you play them every year?' I don't know if he'd ever coached even east of the Mississippi, so he was way off base with the traditions of Ohio State."

It became clear to either Geiger or Bellotti himself that he wasn't a viable option

for the head coaching position because the day before Tressel was announced as the program's new coach, the former leader of the Ducks pulled out of the running for the position.

Although Ohio State originally looked at several candidates, the search seemed to really come down to Mason and Tressel. And Mason, the former Buckeye linebacker who played for the 1970 and 1971 teams, had the support of plenty of former Buckeyes.

"(Mason) had tons of people pulling for him, tons of people," Romanoff said. "His classes back in '69, '70, '71, those guys were very tight, and Glen had been an assistant here for a long time, so he knew all sorts of people."

According to Helwagen, the former Buckeyes from the '70s wanted to see one of their own as the head coach of Ohio State.

"He had the support of all the former players from the 70s that he played with," Helwagen said. "They loved him. They were friends of his. And for them, they looked at it as if we're going to be back in power. We were going to have one of our guys running the ship, and they were really lobbying Andy Geiger hard to take Glen Mason."

Mason also had a legitimate resume. At a school much more known for its basketball success than anything on the gridiron, Mason led Kansas to a 47-54-1 record over nine seasons. Then, after two mediocre seasons at Minnesota, Mason helped make the Golden Gophers bowl-eligible in back-to-back seasons.

According to Hoobler, Mason felt good about his chances after his interview.

"I know when taking Glen back to the airport here, when he was flying back to Minnesota, he was very optimistic in the car," Hoobler said. "Glen was feeling pretty good when I picked him up after his interview."

However, Tressel came into his interview with the right approach. After the program had struggled with certain players avoiding trouble in the latter part of Cooper's tenure, Tressel emphasized the importance of players representing the university well both on and off the field during his interview.

"I've always heard that when Jim came in for his interview, not only was there some discussion about X's and O's and blocking and tackling and what kind of an offense do you run, but Jim had, and I remember seeing it early on, what he called the Block O of life: your family, your faith, your commitment," Hoobler said. "But there was so much more talk other than, how do you tackle and how do you block. It was also about, 'This is a great honor for you. You're representing yourself, your school, your state, your family,' and I always felt that those things might have put Jim over the top."

Tressel's interview sealed the deal. He was named Ohio State's 22nd head coach on Jan. 18, and according to Helwagen, many of the prominent alumni who backed Mason were not happy with the decision.

"They were really upset, because (with Mason) they were going to be standing on the sidelines. Now they were going to go on the bowl trips. Now they were going to be relevant again. People were going to talk about them because Mason was going to bring them along, and they were going to be front and center with the program," Hel-

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wagen said. “Their guy didn’t get it, so they were not necessarily outcasts, but when you have somebody in the football office, it’s obviously much easier to be embraced and be around the program and be there for practice and take your buddy to practice. You’re welcomed with open arms.”

However, Helwagen said many fans didn’t share the same disappointment that Mason fell short of earning the job.

“I just think that fans were kind of ambivalent about Mason,” Helwagen said. “The smart fans knew that he was just Glen Mason. What had he ever really done? He had had a couple of good years at Kansas and was an improvement over what they’d had at Minnesota. They had winning records, they went to bowl games, but they were not a serious Big Ten contender. I think the smart fans realized that, yeah, it would have been cool for an alma mater guy to get it, but that he wasn’t the first guy on anybody’s list.”

Although Tressel made Youngstown State into a powerhouse at the Division 1-AA level, some were reluctant to believe a coach with no experience as a head coach of an FBS team was ready to lead the Buckeyes.

“I think a lot of people pooh-poohed the (hiring because) he was a (Division) I-AA coach and he had not coached at I-A,” Helwagen said. “I think a lot of people were concerned whether his football was going to translate to I-A, and Andy Geiger said, ‘Well, as we were watching the tapes of Youngstown State, we noticed that their football field measured 57 yards wide and 100 yards long, that the game of football is the game of football, and we chose a guy based on how he’s going to run the program, rather than specifically his strategy for throwing the football, or his blitz package on defense, or anything like that.’ ”

However, Tressel had a plan to win some fans over. During an encounter with Hoobler, Tressel deduced that Ohio State’s game against Michigan was set to take place in a little over 300 days, and equipped with that knowledge, he endeared himself to Buckeye Nation with a now-famous speech given during a basketball game against Michigan.

“I can assure you that you will be proud of your young people in the classroom, in the community, and most especially in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Mich.,” Tressel told the 18,653 fans in attendance for Ohio State’s win over Michigan in basketball that year.

According to Romanoff, Tressel’s message worked.

“People were absolutely thrilled and excited with that, because John (Cooper), as much as I like John the person, he didn’t understand how to win the Michigan game, and Tressel came in and immediately hit people with that,” Romanoff said. “It was an amazing speech. He didn’t use a note. He could just talk off the top of his head. I was ready to jump up and cheer when I heard him talk. I think all of my friends were absolutely pumped when he said that, and I know I was.”

### Conley, Tressel Preserve 2001 Class

Tressel had quickly won over the hearts of plenty of Buckeye fans, but there was still much work to do in recruiting. With around three weeks left before National Signing Day, Tressel and the rest of Ohio State’s coaching staff were tasked with filling out a

relatively incomplete class.

“Recruiting was the No. 1 thing he had to get done,” Conley said. “Hiring a staff and everything really takes a second seat to recruiting that time of year, but it’s 24 hours per day, every day until all of those things get handled.”

Tressel’s immediate responsibility in finalizing a recruiting class was undoubtedly helped by the efforts of assistant coaches such as Conley, who continued to recruit even if they didn’t know whether they would have a spot on Tressel’s staff.

“It wasn’t the easiest thing in the world, but most of the coaches still worked at it pretty hard,” Conley said when asked about recruiting during the 15-day period when Ohio State didn’t have a head coach. “We had a couple of recruiting weekends. Of course, it’s tough to get commitments from guys who don’t know who the head coach is, but they made their visits and all of the relations were pretty good.”

Still, with players not knowing who their head coach would be or even the identity of their future position coach, assistant coaches had to rely on the tradition and brand of Ohio State.

“You sold the school, you sold Columbus, Ohio, and the chance of a great career after football is over in central Ohio, and the other thing we still sold was the great Ohio State football tradition, which was still strong no matter who was going to be hired,” Conley said.

Those efforts proved fruitful because the Buckeyes still managed to have a class of 12 commits by the time Tressel was brought on as the new coach.

As Helwagen mentioned, Tressel immediately went to work on Ohio State’s recruiting class and ultimately helped the Buckeyes sign a class of 17 players that included future star players Chris Gamble and Dustin Fox, each of whom started for Ohio State’s national championship-winning team in 2002.

### Tressel’s Changes Help OSU Beat Michigan

With Ohio State coming off a couple of disappointing seasons under Cooper, Tressel needed to shake up some aspects of the program. The most glaring weakness for the program under Cooper was its record against Michigan. The Buckeyes were just 2-10-1 against the Wolverines under Cooper, and in addition to talking about The Game in his first appearance after being hired, Tressel made sure to discuss the Wolverines with his players.

“I think the players were excited about it, because one thing Jim did in spring practice that year, when he first got here, was every week we watched a quarter of (the previous year’s Michigan game). We intensely watched and broke it down,” Conley said. “The players and the coaches immediately knew that the Michigan rivalry was back, and it’s going to be priority No. 1.”

Tressel also backed up his talk about improving the character of his players. Conley said that he had a winner’s manual for his players, which put an emphasis on being both a good football player and a good person.

“Jim did a good job of getting the players involved with other stuff besides football,” Conley said. “They would go down to the community and make appearances, go

to the hospital, and stuff like that, just as (Woody Hayes) had done. And John did that too, but Jim was a master at coming up with something new and creative and selling it to the players, and they bought in.”

Helwagen also praised Tressel for how he embraced Cooper’s players, many of whom eventually went on to play a large role in the Buckeyes’ 2002 national championship.

“That’s what you see with coaches in a lot of these positions. They go into these jobs, and their ego is like, ‘No, it’s my system, we’re going to get my players in here,’ that’s not what Jim Tressel did,” Helwagen said. “Jim Tressel showed up, and he said, ‘OK, these people were all recruited here by John Cooper, but they’re now our players, as many of them who want to stay with us, they’re our players, and we think we can win with how we play football.’ ”

Tressel and his staff weren’t necessarily rewarded for their approach in 2001. The Buckeyes suffered losses to UCLA, Penn State, Wisconsin and Illinois in the regular season, and among the fan base, some had concerns about the conservative nature of the Buckeyes’ offense.

“There were people who looked at the offense and thought, ‘Man, this is like 1974 again. We’re trying to run the football, and we don’t throw the football a whole lot,’ ” Helwagen said. “Jim Bollman, the offensive coordinator, when they hired him, said, ‘If we win a game 3-2, we are OK with that.’ And everyone’s like, ‘Oh, my God, you can’t be serious.’ It was kind of crazy, but he was obviously exaggerating. In 2001, they lost some close games. They didn’t have Big

Ten-caliber players at some key positions. Not to throw any one player or two players under the bus, but they were lacking in some key positions.”

Still, Tressel had the chance to salvage the 2001 season, which already featured four losses, with one game at the end of the regular season. Going against the No. 12-ranked Wolverines in Ann Arbor, the Buckeyes may not have been favored, but they were the better team on Nov. 24, 2001. After jumping out to a 23-0 lead at halftime, the Buckeyes fended off the Wolverines in the second half to give Tressel a pivotal first win over Michigan, 26-20.

“Obviously, Michigan was favored, and to win up there – it’s one thing to win at home, but to go up there and win in his first year, oh, I think meant the world,” Hoobler said. “It meant the world to the fans too. Winning that game said, ‘Hey, it’s year one, we’re going to get better, and there are better days ahead.’ ”

Ohio State ended that season with a second straight loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl, but that was an afterthought compared to the Michigan game.

“Anybody who was concerned about Tressel was won over on that day. The concerns were over,” Helwagen said. “The comment about Michigan won a lot of people over, and then beating Michigan brought all of the stragglers on board, no doubt. There was a ton of optimism going into the following season. Even though they lost the bowl game, there was a lot of optimism going into the following year.”





# Gavin McKenna Arrested, Charges Dropped

Gavin McKenna, the 18-year-old Penn State hockey star and top prospect for the 2026 NHL draft, will have a felony aggravated assault charge dropped, the Centre County District Attorney's Office announced Feb. 6.

## BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

McKenna was originally charged on four counts stemming from a complaint filed by State College Police following an altercation on Jan. 31, the same day 74,575 fans packed into Beaver Stadium to watch the Nittany Lions play an outdoor game against Michigan State.

McKenna allegedly struck a man twice following a "verbal exchange" near the entrance to a State College parking garage, resulting in a broken jaw, a missing tooth and blood on the sidewalk, according to State College Police.

Centre County District attorney Bernie Cantorna announced that they would drop the first-degree felony aggravated assault charge, as the video of the alleged assault did not show McKenna "attempt to cause serious bodily injury or causing injury with extreme indifference."

"Both our office and the State College Police Department have reviewed video of this incident," Cantorna said at the press conference. "Viewing that video, we have reached the conclusion it does not support the felony charge of aggravated assault. Accordingly, our office will be moving to withdraw the aggravated assault charge with the district justice and correct the record to accurately depict the injuries suffered."

Both Penn State and the NHL were contacted and stated they were aware of the charges placed on McKenna, but made no further comment.

According to the State College Police Department, McKenna was arraigned on Feb. 4 and released on \$20,000 unsecured bail.

A preliminary hearing is still scheduled for Feb. 11 for the remaining charges.

McKenna has totaled 32 points with 11 goals and 21 assists in 24 games for Penn State this season, helping the Nittany Lions to an 18-8 record.

## Nebraska No Longer Undefeated

Following the Nebraska men's basketball team's record-setting start, winning its first 20 games and achieving the highest ranking in program history, the Cornhuskers stumbled with back-to-back losses.

Nebraska entered the Week 12 poll standing as the fifth-ranked team nationally with matchups against No. 2 Michigan on Jan. 27 and No. 9 Illinois on Feb. 1.

In the battle between the two top-ranked teams in the Big Ten, Michigan prevailed with a 75-72 win over Nebraska at the Crisler Center, handing the Cornhuskers their first loss of the season. Despite holding a 66-59 lead with just over seven minutes left, Nebraska surrendered a 16-6 run down the stretch, as a balanced offensive effort, highlighted by 17 points from Wolverine forward Morez Johnson Jr., propelled Michigan to its 19th win of the season.

Nebraska guard Jamarques Lawrence and forward Pryce Sandfort each totaled 20 points in the loss.

In a rematch at Pinnacle Bank Arena, Illinois evened the season series with a 78-69 win over the Cornhuskers, who had previously defeated the Illini 83-80 in their first meeting on Dec. 13.

Freshman guard Keaton Wagler led Illinois with 28 points, five rebounds and five assists, while star redshirt freshman forward Braden Frager scored 20 points off the bench for the Cornhuskers.

After the two losses the Cornhuskers fell four spots in the Week 13 rankings to ninth. They recovered with an 80-68 win over Rutgers on Feb. 7.

Having reached the NCAA Tournament only twice since 1998 and eight times overall in program history, Nebraska is still in position to make the tournament for the first time since the 2023-24 season and will aim to advance to the Round of 32 for the first time ever.

## Rutgers Operating On Major Deficit

According to a report from NJ.com,

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1986

With the troubles the Ohio State basketball team had been experiencing in 1986, there was growing speculation that the squad's head coach, Eldon Miller, was in trouble himself.

Miller, no stranger to pressure, had more than his share of critics in his 10 years at OSU — folks who kept pointing out that none of his teams had ever won a Big Ten championship, that he couldn't win the big games, that he continually failed to lure the state's top high school players to Ohio State.

Matters came to a head on Feb. 3, when Miller and OSU athletic director Rick Bay announced that Miller would be stepping down as coach at the end of the season, his 10th in Columbus.

### 35 Years Ago — 1991

Indiana coach Bob Knight was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame on Feb. 7.

The former Ohio State player was chosen for the 1991 slate of inductees along with the late former NBA commissioner Larry O'Brien, guard Nate "Tiny" Archibald, centers Dave Cowens and Harry Gallatin and the late Larry Fleisher, who founded the NBA Players Association.

"When a coach is honored, it's an honor for all the players that played for him and is a recognition of the teams he has had over the years," Knight told The Associated Press. "I've been fortunate to have had a lot of great kids and players at West Point and Indiana. It means a lot to me to see them all share in this recognition."

"A player enters the Hall of Fame on his ability. A coach enters on the ability of his players."

### 30 Years Ago — 1996

There were few people on the planet who were as much of a Buckeye through and through as Fred Pagac, and Pagac's devotion to Ohio State and its football program paid off when OSU coach John Cooper promoted him to the post of defensive coordinator on Feb. 1.

Pagac, 43, succeeded Bill Young as the defensive coordinator. Young ended his 15-year association with Cooper, including the previous eight at OSU, by taking a similar post at Oklahoma.

"It is a great thrill," Pagac said. "I am simply elated, walking on Cloud Nine. I'm fired up to get to work. I'd like to thank Coach Cooper for this opportunity."

Pagac, who played tight end for the Buckeyes under Woody Hayes from 1971-73, had spent the last 18 years with the program in different capacities, most recently as the linebackers coach.

### 25 Years Ago — 2001

After an exhaustive two-week search, Ohio State's new football coach was only 2½ hours away the whole time.

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger introduced Youngstown State head coach Jim Tressel as Ohio State's 22nd head football coach during a Jan. 18 press conference. The media event, staged in the new recruiting lounge at Ohio Stadium, was attended by more than 200 media members and was beamed live statewide.

"I'm really humbled to stand before you today," Tressel said. "I just spent the last 40 minutes standing before the Ohio State Buckeyes in their team meeting room, and I mentioned the same thing to them."

Tressel's hiring ended a 15-day search to find the successor to John Cooper, who was fired on Jan. 2 after a 13-year reign with the Buckeyes.

### 20 Years Ago — 2006

J.J. Sullinger was a local guy who, after leaving Ohio for one season, returned home and sat out a year for the chance to lead his favorite team to glory.

He also occasionally wore tights.

As the Buckeyes demolished visiting Florida A&M in a rare midweek, nonconference matchup in the heart of their Big Ten schedule with a 93-53 win on Jan. 30, Sullinger tied a career high by scoring 24 points while wearing white tights underneath OSU's white-with-red-trim home uniforms.

"I have no explanation, man," Sullinger said after the win. "I saw them in the store when I was strolling through the mall and picked them up."

His choice of under-attire notwithstanding, in a career that had taken him to Arkansas and back, Sullinger seemed to exemplify the type of player head coach Thad Matta wanted on his team.

### 15 Years Ago — 2011

One day before No. 1 Ohio State headed on the road to face No. 18 Minnesota on Super Bowl Sunday, freshman Aaron Craft said he knew how difficult it would be to win at Williams Arena.

"We know Dave (Lighty) is the only one who's won at Minnesota," he pointed out.

It was fitting, then, that the fifth-year senior led the way to a convincing Buckeye victory on Feb. 6. Lighty put up a game-high 19 points during an 82-69 win against the Golden Gophers, disappointing most of the 14,625 fans on hand and allowing OSU to remain the nation's only unbeaten team.

"I thought our guys had a pretty good mentality coming into the game, knowing the challenge that lay ahead," Ohio State head coach Thad Matta said. "We told the guys going in that this was going to be about playing hard. We had to match their energy. We had to match their intensity."

### 10 Years Ago — 2016

When Evan Turner was crowned National Player of the Year in 2010, he joined an elite club of Ohio State basketball players. Only Turner, Jerry Lucas (twice), Gary Braddis and Jim Jackson had earned that honor wearing a Buckeye uniform.

When Turner was playing for Ohio State from 2008-10, he could look into the rafters and see the numbers of the former winners honored. Now the Chicago native would join them in that regard. When Ohio State played Michigan on Feb. 16, Turner's No. 21 would be raised into the rafters, joining Lucas, Braddis, Jackson

and John Havlicek as the only Buckeye basketball players to be so honored.

"That's unbelievable for our program because the one thing here, it's very difficult to get your jersey hung in the rafters," Matta said. "As I reflect on Evan and just when he started here and what he's done from Day One to where he is today and what he meant to Ohio State basketball, I could not be happier. I will smile every time I look up there and see that thing hanging there."

### Five Years Ago — 2021

The metaphor was mixed but the message wasn't when Duane Washington described how Ohio State had surprised prognosticators with a can-do attitude that had pushed the fourth-ranked Buckeyes near the top of the Big Ten standings and the national rankings.

He spoke Feb. 4 following the 89-85 win at No. 8 Iowa about a day that included an adventure with the team bus in a snowstorm after the morning shootaround.

"We got stuck on the hill right outside the gym for like an hour," he said. "We couldn't get out. We had to call the plow people to come in and plow for us. It kind of reminded me somewhat of the deal we had at Northwestern last year. The fire alarm went off. It was kind of a wrench in the road that only was going to make us go even harder."

Whatever road the Buckeyes (15-4, 9-4) were traveling led to success with the victory at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, marking their team-record fourth straight road win against a top-15 opponent (No. 15 Rutgers, No. 14 Illinois and No. 10 Wisconsin).

Not bad for a team that was picked seventh in the conference in the preseason polling of beat writers.

### One Year Ago — 2025

After defensive coordinator Jim Knowles left for the same position and a pay raise at Penn State, offensive coordinator Chip Kelly also left Ohio State to head back to the NFL, taking the offensive coordinator position with the Las Vegas Raiders on Feb. 2 for \$6 million yearly, making him the highest-paid coordinator in the pros.

One day before Kelly left, offensive line coach Justin Frye also moved on to the NFL, taking a position with the Arizona Cardinals on Feb. 1.

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes had filled Frye's spot with former Virginia Tech offensive coordinator Tyler Bowen and officially promoted wide receivers coach Brian Hartline to offensive coordinator.

Hartline had earned the title in 2023, but head coach Ryan Day didn't give up play calling that year, and Hartline had the title of co-offensive coordinator when Kelly was on staff during the 2024 season. It was unclear as BSB went to press whether Hartline would be calling plays moving forward, but with a national title under his belt, Day might be more willing to give Hartline an opportunity to do so in 2025.



where the site obtained Rutgers' yearly fiscal reports through an Open Public Records Act request, the Scarlet Knights' athletic department recorded a \$78 million deficit during the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Rutgers generated \$146.6 million in revenue during the 2024-25 fiscal year, led by \$61.3 million in Big Ten media rights and \$10.7 million in bowl revenue, but record spending of \$193.8 million resulted in a \$47.2 million shortfall.

After subtracting \$30.8 million in institutional support – including \$7 million from the school's general budget, \$8 million from the state and \$15.8 million in student fees – the department's deficit climbed to a record \$78 million.

It marked the third time in five seasons the athletic department operated on a shortfall of over \$70 million.

Reports indicated that since joining the Big Ten in 2014, Rutgers' athletic department has accumulated a deficit of more than \$516 million over the last 11 years. The Scarlet Knights' athletic spending has also increased nearly 175 percent since 2014-15.

Newly hired athletic director Keli Zinn, who assumed the role on July 30, acknowledged the depth of Rutgers' financial issues after reviewing the department's books.

Zinn stated that regardless of how the numbers are examined, improvement is necessary, particularly as spending continues to surpass revenue generation.

"Obviously, our expenses have exceeded and outpaced our revenue and in some cases year over year to a pretty significant degree," Zinn said. "That's a piece that we will spend quite a bit of time on, understanding that the current fiscal year that we sit in there was a \$20.5 million expense with the revenue sharing (for athletes) and the additional scholarship support."

But Zinn isn't expecting an immediate flip into the positive. In fact, the Rutgers athletic director expects the 2026-27 fiscal year to be the least profitable year to date.

"I think what you'll see a year from now is that's going to be our worst year looking at a profit and loss scenario," Zinn said. "But you'll see some level of improvement that's expected in that '26-'27 year and then by '27-'28, based upon the current projections we have, in some growth categories and opportunities with revenue, I'm hopeful you'll actually see (the deficit) start to decline."

### Fickell Chooses To Forgo Extension

In an unusual decision, Wisconsin didn't issue football head coach Luke Fickell the program's customary one-year contract extension.

While Wisconsin has annually given its head coaches a one-year extension to keep the contract at its original length, according to Badger athletic director Chris McIntosh, it was Fickell himself who decided to pass up on the extension after Wisconsin's disappointing 2025 campaign.

"I respect his request and am determined that the current terms of Luke's contract will be maintained," McIntosh said. "Luke is completely focused on a successful 2026 campaign. There is no one more competitive than Luke and he holds himself to the highest standards. He



FILE PHOTO

**NOTHING TO FEAR — Michigan State coach Tom Izzo threatened to bench Jeremy Fears Jr. after the redshirt-sophomore guard was accused of dirty plays twice recently, including a technical foul against Minnesota on Feb. 4. However, Fears started and scored 26 points with 15 assists and was called for a tripping foul in an 85-82 overtime win vs. Illinois on Feb. 7.**

is committed to meeting and exceeding the expectations of everyone connected to Wisconsin – his own, the team's, the university's, alumni, supporters, fans and the entire state."

In 2025, Wisconsin turned in an underwhelming 4-8 season and a 2-7 record in conference, marking the Badgers' lowest win total in 30 years (4-5-2 in 1995).

Since taking over before the 2022 Guaranteed Rate Bowl, Fickell has compiled a 17-21 record in three seasons as Wisconsin's head coach, including the program's first consecutive losing seasons since 1991-92.

Fickell received an extension in both the 2023 and 2024 seasons, with his current contract set to expire after the 2032 season.

Despite two straight troublesome seasons, McIntosh and the Wisconsin athletic department have continued to back their head coach, voicing strong support while pledging increased resources and funding to help Fickell and the Badgers succeed in 2026.

"He continues to have our full support and, as we shared widely at the end of last year, Luke is making the necessary changes in the program, our department

is increasing our investment and we are aligned with campus leadership in our commitment to football success," McIntosh said.

### Chesney Says UCLA Will Win B1G Soon

During the UCLA men's basketball team's heartbreaking 98-97 loss to Indiana on Jan. 31, Bruins football head coach Bob Chesney told fans at Pauley Pavilion his expectations for the 2026 football season.

Chesney not only said he believes UCLA is positioned for long-term success, but he also made it clear he expects the program to compete for a conference title sooner rather than later.

"I've been here for about a month now," Chesney said. "I look around and there is nothing average that I see about UCLA. There's nothing average and I did not come here to be average. Understand that we're building and understand that we're about to win a Big Ten championship. This is the team of the future."

Chesney was hired to be UCLA's football head coach on Dec. 6, 2025, following a 3-9 season that had the Bruins fire former head coach Deshaun Foster after an 0-3 start on Sept. 14, 2025.

Prior to being hired by UCLA, Chesney spent the last two seasons at James Madison, where he led the Dukes to a 21-6 record in two seasons, including a Sun Belt championship and an appearance in the College Football Playoff in the 2025-26 season.

Chesney also served as the head coach of Holy Cross (2018-23), Division II Assumption (2013-17) and Division III Salve Regina (2010-12), totaling a 132-52 all-time record as head coach.

### Izzo Considered Benching Fears

Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo didn't mince words following the No. 10 Spartans' narrow 76-73 upset loss to Minnesota on Feb. 4, publicly calling out star point guard Jeremy Fears after a critical second-half technical foul.

The technical foul occurred midway through the second half when Fears became tangled with Minnesota guard Langston Reynolds. Though Reynolds was initially called for a foul, Golden Gophers head coach Niko Medved requested an official review and referees ultimately assessed Fears with a technical foul after replay showed his foot making contact with Reynolds' groin. Izzo then benched Fears for the remainder of the game.

When asked about Fears' technical foul after the game, Izzo attributed his point guard's actions to "immaturity," adding that Fears' status as a starter for the next game remained uncertain, especially if his actions continue.

"If he plays that way, he deserves it and he ain't gonna play that way if I bench him the next game," Izzo said.

It marked the second game in a row that Fears found himself in the national spotlight for a "dirty play."

Following Michigan State's 83-71 loss to No. 2 Michigan on Jan. 30, Wolverine head coach Dusty May accused Fears of trying to trip forward Yaxel Lendeborg, saying that there was 40 minutes of film showing several "intentional and dangerous" plays.

While Izzo said May's comments could persuade opponents to "bait" Fears into committing fouls, he said his point guard caused it himself.

"When somebody comes out and publicly says something about a guy, that sometimes happens, but that's Jeremy's fault," Izzo said. "I made sure I cleared all that up. I think the officials knew it. I talked to them. I did not see what happened on the play (against Minnesota). I saw him get pushed and I saw his leg come up and I didn't think he hit anybody, but if he did, then he deserves it, but if he didn't, I questioned it. So are they baiting him? Well, of course. And it's his fault."

Fears played against Illinois on Feb. 7, helping the Spartans to an 85-82 win with 26 points and 15 assists.

Fears was putting up 15.1 points, 2.7 rebounds and 9.1 assists per game this season for the 20-4 Spartans, with his assist average ranking first nationally.



# Chatman Steps Up With Buckeyes Injured

In their 84-78 win over Penn State on Jan. 26, the Ohio State basketball team was plagued with some injuries that gave players down the bench more of a chance to prove themselves on the court.

COURT  
REPORT  
Greg Wilson

With both sophomore guard Gabe Cupps and senior center Christoph Tilly out for the game, sophomore guard Taison Chatman and sophomore center Ivan Njegovan contributed to the win over the Nittany Lions.

Chatman, a former highly-ranked prospect who has dealt with injuries himself over his first two years in the program, took advantage of the opportunity the most. He was 4-of-6 shooting in 17 minutes of playing time off the bench and scored a career-high 11 points, his first time getting to double digits in his three seasons with Ohio State.

“He had some minutes where he didn’t get a shot off, so it starts with being aggressive,” Diebler said. “He’s got some ability on that end that can really help us. Then, he’s got to continue to execute better defensively and help us on the glass. I thought this was, hopefully, a great indication of things to come.”

Chatman took that momentum into the Buckeyes’ next game against Wisconsin as well. While he wasn’t successful in parlaying his strong play on the offensive side of the ball into a win for the Buckeyes, he set a new career high with 14 points on 5-of-6 shooting, which included making 4 of 4 from beyond the arc.

He ended up fouling out late in the contest, but proved that he could be a contributor for the Buckeyes.

Those performances earned him more time against Maryland, where he reached double digits again with 10 points. He also scored eight points in the Buckeyes’ 21-point loss to Michigan on Feb. 8.

In Njegovan’s first career start against Penn State, he played 21 minutes and



SONNY BROCKWAY

**HELPING HAND —** Sophomore guard Taison Chatman has dealt with injuries his first two seasons at Ohio State but is now contributing off the bench. He scored a career-high 11 points against Penn State then broke that mark with 14 vs. Wisconsin followed by 10 points at Maryland before scoring eight against Michigan on Feb. 7.

made 3 of 4 field goals with two free throws to score a total of eight points and bring down three rebounds. He also added two blocks.

Tilly was back in the starting lineup

against Wisconsin, but was monitored closely before he was pulled to start the second half, with Njegovan getting his number called to take Tilly’s place again.

In the loss, Njegovan didn’t score, but

he did have two assists and five rebounds in 11 minutes of game time.

### Mobley Falls Short Of Record

Since BSB last went to press, sophomore guard John Mobley Jr.’s hot streak continued with a 25-point performance against Penn State, helping the Buckeyes to an 84-78 win on Jan. 26.

In the game, he made five three-pointers, making it four straight games that he made four or more shots from beyond the arc, one off a program record set by Jami-son Battle during the 2023-24 season.

Mobley had the chance to tie that record against Wisconsin on Jan. 31.

But the Badgers defended Mobley tightly the entire game, and it didn’t help that he also got into foul trouble early and was pulled from the game. He finished the 92-82 loss shooting 1 of 8 from three-point range and scoring just nine points.

Mobley’s four-game streak included a 28-point game against UCLA, a 26-point game against Minnesota and a 22-point contest against Michigan before his 25-point performance against Penn State.

That stretch was part of a larger trend in which Mobley has been playing much better on the offensive end of the court, and Diebler attributes that to his work ethic and will to win.

“He’s been so consumed with winning and doing whatever is required to win,” Diebler said. “The poise and maturity that he’s been playing with when the ball is in his hands is really impressive for a sophomore.”

Against Maryland, Mobley scored 15 points, all of which were from three-pointers, but he struggled against the Wolverines, putting up just four points in the re-match at the Schottenstein Center.

### Diebler Emotional After Coaches Vs. Cancer

After Ohio State’s win over Penn State, Diebler became emotional speaking about the Buckeyes’ involvement in the annual Coaches vs. Cancer event.

Diebler’s team has been participating in the event for both seasons that he has led the team, an idea that was brought to Ohio State by assistant coach Luke Simons when he came from Baylor.

The Ohio State players and coaches visit Nationwide Children’s Hospital for the event to visit kids who have been diagnosed with some form of cancer. On the visit, the kids get to design shoes for the Buckeye coaches that will be worn during the Coaches vs. Cancer game.

Diebler’s shoes were designed by a girl named Briley from Athens, Ohio, and the head coach was obviously greatly impacted by her story as he was overcome with emotion in his postgame press conference.

“When you spend time with a little kid who’s got to come to Columbus once a week to get chemo treatment – I think I’m tough? That’s real toughness. I’ve got kids. It’s hard,” Diebler said, tearing up. “I praise God every day that I’m able to go home every day and hug my kids.

## 2025-26 Ohio State Men’s Basketball Statistics

### 15-8 Overall (7-6 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 8

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
THORNTON, Bruce	23-23	833-36.2	157-285	.551	42-106	.396	86-105	.819	19-103	122-5.3	40-0	83	29	6	28	442-19.2
MOBLEY JR., John	23-23	713-31.0	110-260	.423	68-168	.405	62-71	.873	10-46	56-2.4	40-0	64	38	3	19	350-15.2
ROYAL, Devin	22-22	708-32.2	105-217	.484	23-73	.315	70-87	.805	38-85	123-5.6	57-2	39	42	3	12	303-13.8
TILLY, Christoph	22-22	588-26.7	83-180	.461	10-47	.213	86-114	.754	36-72	108-4.9	69-2	54	36	10	13	262-11.9
BYNUM, Amare	23-13	624-27.1	83-171	.485	14-57	.246	30-42	.714	28-78	106-4.6	56-2	25	26	20	13	210-9.1
NOEL, Brandon	14-10	288-20.5	45-70	.643	3-14	.214	11-15	.733	17-40	57-4.1	20-0	14	16	3	4	104-7.4
CHATMAN, Taison	18-0	153-8.5	22-39	.564	15-26	.577	11-14	.786	4-12	16-0.9	23-1	12	11	0	6	70-3.9
NJEGOVAN, Ivan	19-1	213-11.2	21-39	.538	1-2	.500	13-21	.619	18-42	60-3.2	36-1	15	14	9	2	56-2.9
JOHNSON, Puff	3-0	31-10.2	2-5	.400	1-2	.500	2-3	.667	3-2	5-1.7	5-0	0	2	0	0	7-2.3
CUPPS, Gabe	22-0	297-13.5	11-30	.367	4-17	.235	14-17	.824	5-26	31-1.4	37-0	27	14	1	10	40-1.8
GRUJICIC, Mathieu	6-0	33-5.6	1-8	.125	1-7	.143	3-7	.429	1-4	5-0.8	2-0	2	1	0	1	6-1.0
WHITE, Colin	22-1	190-8.6	9-24	.375	0-14	.000	1-3	.333	9-15	24-1.1	20-0	10	3	2	7	19-0.9
NASH, Braylen	4-0	05-1.2	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	1	0	0	0	0-0.0
TEAM									50-43	93			12			
Total	23	4675	649-1328	.489	182-533	.341	389-499	.780	238-568	806-35.0	405-8	346	244	57	115	1869-81.3
Opponents	23	4675	591-1368	.432	175-568	.308	330-444	.743	255-482	737-32.0	446-8	308	253	70	121	1687-73.3



## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

"When you're in this position, and you have the opportunity to represent an organization, there's no amount of time that's too much to spend with people like that."

Last season, Diebler's shoes were designed by Charlotte Bauer – called Charley by those who knew her – and he still keeps those in a glass case in his office after Bauer passed away in February at the age of 21 due to acute myeloid leukemia.

Diebler said he takes seriously what he believes is his duty as the head coach at Ohio State to spend time with those who are going through struggles, as Bauer did, and that Briley is now.

"We have a responsibility to spend time with people and be available, so if we can provide them some joy during some struggle, it's the least we can do," he said.

"It's very humbling when you see a little girl who's going through some real tough stuff and the smile on her face. We think we're impactful? The impact they have on us is way more important. I'm thankful for what Ohio State does, for what Nationwide does and for Coaches vs. Cancer."

### Johnson Getting Acclimated

Senior forward Puff Johnson has been with the Buckeyes now for more than two weeks, and he is beginning to get acclimated to his new role.

He earned his first minutes in the loss against Michigan in Ann Arbor on Jan. 23, but only made it into the game for five minutes and didn't score.

But against the Nittany Lions, with whom he played for the past two seasons, Johnson got into the game for 14 minutes and made 1 of 3 shots for two points, adding three rebounds to the box score as well.

While the rest of the team has had the entire offseason and the first half of the regular season to learn plays and build chemistry with their teammates, Johnson has had to do those things at hyper speed.

But Diebler has been impressed with how quickly he has been able to fit in on the court.

"I've been impressed with his basketball IQ and his motor," Diebler said. "He's a great communicator on the court. What we're asking him to do is really hard, and I've been really impressed with how committed he is to trying to catch up as best as he can."

He followed up the win over Penn State with five points in the loss to the Badgers, making his first three-pointer with the Buckeyes.

Johnson was a surprise addition to the injury report before the Maryland game. He missed both the win over the Terrapins and the loss to the Wolverines, and Diebler didn't give a timetable on how long it might take for him to return.

### Thompson An All-American

Ohio State has a recruit who will be in the McDonald's All-American Game for the first time in over a decade, with five-star small forward Anthony Thompson being named to the team on Monday.

The last time a Buckeye commit played in the game was in 2014 when D'Angelo Russell was a McDonald's All-American.

Thompson signed with Ohio State in November, along with four-star power forward Alex Smith, and is set to join the Buckeyes as the highest-ranked recruit to sign with the program since Jared Sulinger in 2010.

"Anthony is a special player. His combination of size, skill, and athleticism gives him unique versatility," Diebler said when Thompson signed with the Buckeyes. "Who he is aligns with what our program is all about and the basketball IQ he has will help him be really impactful right away. Being from Ohio and coming to Ohio State means something to him, and we are excited for Anthony and his family to join ours!"

Thompson is considered by 247Sports composite rankings to be the No. 9 player in the 2026 class, No. 3 at his position and he is the top player in the state. The 6-8 forward has a 7-3 wingspan and averaged 21.5 points, 8.3 rebounds, 2.5 assists, 1.4 blocks and 1.3 steals for Western Reserve Academy in his junior season.

The McDonald's All-American Game is set to take place on March 31 in Glendale, Ariz., with a 9 p.m. tipoff. The game will be televised on ESPN.

### OSU Signs CBS Sports Classic Extension

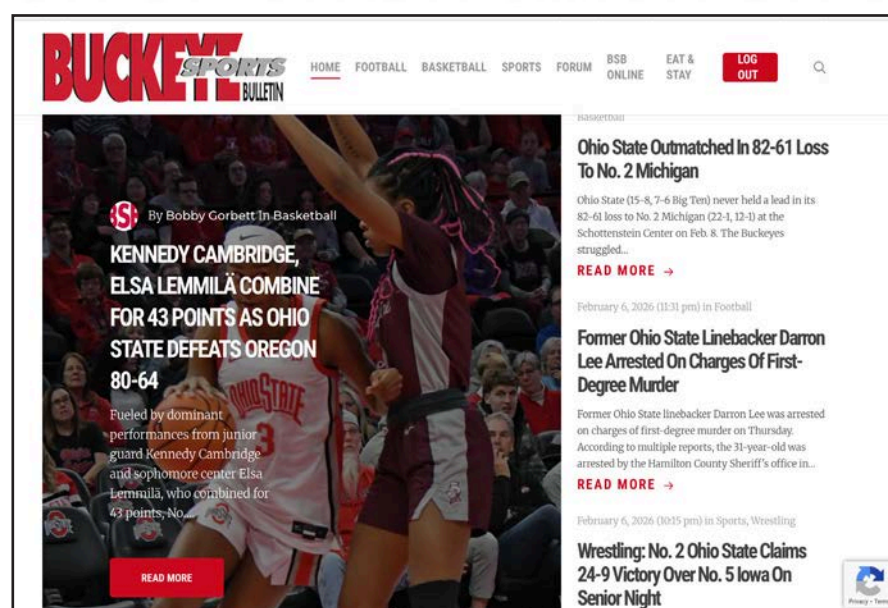
Ohio State took part in the CBS Sports Classic again this season, losing to North Carolina in the final minute. Now the Buckeyes spot in the event is secured through the 2029-30 season after signing an extension with the event.

After playing the Tar Heels this season, the Buckeyes are set to match up against Kansas next year in the event, with Kentucky on the schedule for the 2027-28 season, North Carolina again for the year after that, and finally, the Jayhawks on the schedule again in 2029.

The matchup against the Jayhawks next season is set to take place on Dec. 19 at Madison Square Garden.

The Buckeyes are 6-5 in their 11 appearances in the event to this point, with the most recent win coming last season over then-No. 4 Kentucky. They have won five of their last seven games in the CBS Sports Classic. Only the Tar Heels have a better record in the event, going 8-4, while Kentucky is 6-6.

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# Ohio State Splits Conference Matchups

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Squarely on the bubble of the NCAA Tournament race yet again, the Buckeyes needed to bring home a few wins in four games since BSB last went to press. They started with a victory against Penn State at home before heading on the road for two games.

The first ended as a loss to Wisconsin before Ohio State dominated Maryland on the road. But the tides turned again when the Buckeyes came back home to match up with No. 2 Michigan for the second time this season and they suffered the largest home loss to their archrival since 1976.

### OSU Holds On For Win Over PSU

Ohio State (14-6, 6-4) was able to hold on and keep Penn State (9-11, 0-9) from getting its first Big Ten win of the season, winning 84-78 at the Schottenstein Center on Jan. 26 in front of 10,358 fans who braved the snowy conditions to make it to the arena.

The Buckeyes took an 18-point lead into halftime, but the Nittany Lions brought it as close as one point in the second half. However, OSU was able to pull away late in the game and give itself enough of a cushion to take home the win.

Nearly four minutes into the game, Ohio State was able to take a 9-5 lead with five points from sophomore guard John Mob-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**UP AND DOWN - Freshman forward Amare Bynum put together several solid performances when he scored 13 of his 15 points in the first half of the 84-78 victory over Penn State and tied Bruce Thornton for the team high in a 92-82 loss to Wisconsin with 18. He then scored five points in each of a win at Maryland and a home loss to Michigan.**

ley Jr. The Buckeyes stretched their lead to seven points, 16-9, on an and-one putback layup from Puff Johnson at 11:53. It was his first two points with his new team, but he missed the free throw after a timeout.

Sophomore guard Taison Chatman and Mobley continued Ohio State's run with a couple of three-point jumpers for a 22-11 lead.

The lead remained in double digits for the Buckeyes while Chatman scored four more points on the way to a 29-17 score with 7:13 left in the half.

The Nittany Lions were able to make it a 10-point deficit, 33-23, with three-pointers on back-to-back trips down the court. The next three baskets were more three-pointers, two from the Buckeyes, which made it a 39-26 game with 2:27 before intermission.

Freshman forward Amare Bynum helped stretch the lead to 16 at 1:29 with five straight points, the latter three on a converted three-point play.

The Buckeyes went into the locker room up 50-32. Each of Mobley (13), Bynum (13) and junior forward Devin Royal (10) went into halftime already with double-digit points.

Penn State came out of the half with a 12-4 run to get within 10 points just under four minutes into the frame and shrank the deficit to seven points at 12:49 on a layup from Freddie Dilione V.

Eli Rice then made it a four-point game, 58-54, with a three-pointer, but Bruce Thornton stretched it back to six with a layup, making the score 60-54. But the Nittany Lions soon made it 60-59 at 10:46 with five straight points.

The Buckeyes turned it back on and went on a 9-2 run to go up by eight points with 8:22 left in the game and were able to

keep the lead at over five points until there were just 23 seconds left in the game and Penn State made a three-pointer by Rice to make it 80-76.

The Lions would foul Mobley, and he made both free throws, which all but sealed the six-point win for Ohio State. Chatman capped off the scoring with a pair of free throws of his own.

Head coach Jake Diebler noticed some issues during the second half that led to the Nittany Lions nearly tying the game back up, and he knows it's something that will have to be cleaned up in the future.

"We were a step slow defensively and gave up some catch-and-shoot threes that we had done a good job of taking away in the first half," he said. "We were a step slow on some of our close-outs and a step slow in some of our rotations. That was frustrating. It took too long to respond. We didn't respond with our offense or our defense. I'm proud we were able to flip it back."

The Buckeyes were led by Mobley for the fourth straight game. He had 25 points on 7-of-14 shooting, which included 5 of 11 from three-point range and all six of his free throws. He also dished out five assists and had three steals. Bynum had 15 points and a team-high five boards, tied with Ivan Njegovan, and Royal finished the game with 14 points. Rice paced the Lions with 20 points, and Ivan Juric had a strong game with 14 points and 14 rebounds. PSU out-rebounded the Buckeyes, 31-21.

### OSU Wastes Fast Start

Ohio State (14-7, 6-5) had a cold shooting day on the way to a 92-82 loss to Wisconsin (16-6, 8-3) at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wis., on Jan. 31 in front of 16,838

Wisconsin 92, Ohio State 82							
Jan. 31, 2026 Kohl Center • Madison, Wis.							
		1	2	F			
Ohio State (14-7, 6-5)		43	39	82			
Wisconsin (16-6, 8-3)		49	43	92			
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bynum	35	6-12	4-4	0-7	1	2	18
Royal	32	5-13	7-8	2-4	0	3	16
Tilly	19	0-8	0-0	2-1	1	1	0
Mobley Jr.	28	4-12	0-0	1-1	1	3	9
Thornton	36	6-11	3-4	0-3	2	3	18
Chatman	18	5-6	0-0	0-1	1	5	14
Johnson	12	1-2	2-2	1-1	0	2	5
Cupps	4	1-1	0-0	0-0	1	0	2
Njegovan	11	0-3	0-0	0-1	2	0	0
White	5	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Totals	200	28-69	16-18	14-23	9	20	82
Percentages: FG: 40.6%. FT: 88.9%. Three-point field goals: 10-29 (Mobley 1-8, Bynum 2-5, Royal 0-5, Chatman 4-4, Thornton 2-4, Johnson 1-2, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 1 (Bynum). Turnovers: 7 (Chatman, Cupps, Johnson, Mobley, Royal, Team, Thornton). Steals: 2 (Thornton, Tilly).							
Wisconsin	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Blackwell	36	8-13	5-5	0-4	4	3	22
Boyd	38	6-15	8-8	0-1	2	2	21
Winter	31	5-11	1-2	3-8	3	2	11
Bielauskas	26	3-4	4-4	2-5	0	1	10
Janicki	18	1-2	0-0	0-1	3	4	2
Rapp	20	7-10	0-0	2-4	0	1	19
Carrington	29	2-7	1-2	0-1	4	2	7
Garlock	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	32-62	19-21	7-28	16	15	92
Percentages: FG: 51.6%. FT: 90.5%. Three-point field goals: 9-26 (Rapp 5-7, Carrington 2-6, Winter 0-5, Blackwell 1-4, Boyd 1-3, Janicki 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Winter 2, Bielauskas, Carrington). Turnovers: 5 (Blackwell 3, Bielauskas, Boyd). Steals: 3 (Blackwell 3). Officials: Carstensen, Irving, Walton. Attendance: 16,838.							

fans.

The Buckeyes began fast and went up by double digits early, but they squandered that cushion soon after and were unable to come back in the second half in the loss to the Badgers.

Both offenses started the game slowly with a 2-2 score nearly three minutes in. The Buckeyes were one for their first seven while Wisconsin made just one of its first six shots before Mobley made it 4-2 on a layup. He followed that just over a minute later with his first three-pointer of the game.

Mobley was removed from the game right after with an early two fouls, but Ohio State continued its run and took a 15-4 lead at 14:15 thanks to a three-pointer from Chatman, who was in the game in Mobley's place.

The Buckeyes stayed hot from beyond the arc with Thornton and Johnson each making three-pointers of their own, but Wisconsin clawed back and made it a 21-18 game with 10:33 left in the half.

The Badgers took their first lead of the game on a three from Austin Rapp, 24-23. Over four minutes later, a turnaround jumper from Nick Boyd made it a four-point Badger lead.

With 1:27 left in the half, John Blackwell made a layup to take a 47-39 lead, and the Buckeyes went into the locker room down 49-43 after a buzzer-beating layup from Bynum.

Wisconsin scored on 10 straight possessions to finish the first half, and Diebler



wasn't pleased with the defensive break-downs the Buckeyes had.

"We got caught in some two-way help situations because we weren't positioned early enough," Diebler said after the game. "When we didn't execute our coverage, it put us in these long close-out situations, and against a good-shooting team, you try to limit that."

It quickly became a 10-point deficit 1:26 into the second half and remained around there into a media timeout at 14:43 after Boyd made another three-pointer to make it a 60-49 game.

After a free throw from Royal and a layup from Bynum, neither team scored for nearly three minutes until two Wisconsin free throws ended that streak.

The Buckeyes struggled to bring the game closer, and Blackwell converted a three-point play at 10:38 to go up 65-54. Multiple times, Ohio State brought the game within single digits, but the Badgers would respond soon after and stretch the lead back out.

The Badgers took their biggest lead of the game to that point with 5:22 left when Braeden Carrington made a three-pointer to make it 76-64, but Chatman answered with a deep ball of his own.

The Buckeyes were unable to get a stop for over three minutes and allowed the Badgers to score on eight straight possessions with the clock winding down.

Bynum led Ohio State with 18 points and brought down a team-high seven rebounds in the game. Royal and Thornton each scored 17 points, while Chatman had a career high of 14 before fouling out.

Blackwell led Wisconsin with 22 points and Boyd scored 21 of his own, while Rapp finished with 19 points, helped by his 5-of-7 mark from beyond the arc.

OSU Dominates Terps On Road

Ohio State (15-7, 7-5) got back into the win column by beating Maryland (8-14, 1-10), 82-62, at the XFINITY Center in College Park, Md., on Feb. 5 in front of 12,358 fans.

Maryland kept it close for the first few minutes of the game, but the Buckeyes quickly took a lead that they would not relinquish, leading by 12 at the half and extending that lead in the second half.

Diebler attributed the improvements the Buckeyes made after the loss to Wisconsin the game before to how they practiced in the days between the two games.

"We were intentional about improving over the last few days of practice," Diebler told The Columbus Dispatch after the game. "The toughness we practiced was certainly focused on defensively getting better, and our guys did. I thought that carried over."

Ohio State started the game on the wrong foot, allowing two offensive rebounds and second-chance points for Maryland. But the Buckeyes were able to recover and take a 7-6 lead on a three-pointer from Chatman.

After an 8-8 tie, two free throws from Royal began an 8-0 run for the Buckeyes, capped by a layup from senior center Christoph Tilly, who was coming off a scoreless contest against Wisconsin.

Ohio State was able to extend its lead to 11 points, 23-12, with 10:08 remaining in the half when Tilly made another layup, and the Buckeyes got it out to 12 points on

Ohio State 82, Maryland 62								
Feb. 5, 2026 XFINITY Center • College Park, Md.								
		1	2	F				
Ohio State (15-7, 7-5)		42	40	82				
Maryland (8-14, 1-10)		30	32	62				
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Bynum	33	2-3	1-4	0-2	0	1	5	
Royal	27	2-5	3-4	2-1	4	3	7	
Tilly	27	7-10	4-7	2-1	1	4	19	
Mobley Jr.	34	5-12	0-0	1-2	4	0	15	
Thornton	32	7-9	3-6	0-3	3	2	17	
Chatman	20	3-6	2-3	1-0	3	1	10	
Njegovan	11	1-2	2-2	0-3	1	2	4	
Cupps	10	0-0	3-4	0-2	1	3	3	
White	5	1-2	0-0	1-0	0	0	2	
Nash	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Totals	200	28-49	18-30	9-17	17	16	82	
Percentages: FG: 57.1%. FT: 60.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-17 (Mobley 5-9, Chatman 2-3, Thornton 0-2, Tilly 1-1, Bynum 0-1, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Mobley, Njegovan). Turnovers: 8 (Bynum 2, Royal 2, Chatman, Mobley, Njegovan, Tilly). Steals: 5 (Chatman 2, Mobley 2, Tilly).								
Maryland	Total	FG	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Washington	37	4-10	5-7	1-7	1	2	13	
Saunders	28	8-13	1-3	3-1	2	6	20	
Metcalf	15	1-1	0-0	0-2	1	4	2	
Adams	19	1-4	1-1	2-1	2	0	4	
Mills	34	4-8	1-2	1-0	1	4	11	
Coit	21	4-10	0-0	0-0	1	0	9	
Turkson Jr.	18	0-1	0-2	2-3	2	4	0	
Alston	9	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	1	0	
Del Pino	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0	
Watts	13	1-1	0-0	0-2	0	1	3	
Totals	200	23-49	8-15	11-17	11	24	62	
Percentages: FG: 46.9%. FT: 53.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-26 (Coit 1-7, Saunders 3-6, Mills 2-5, Adams 1-3, Washington 0-3, Watts 1-1, Alston 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 4 (Metcalf 2, Turkson, Washington). Turnovers: 16 (Adams 4, Coit 4, Washington 3, Metcalf 2, Saunders 2, Mills). Steals: 2 (Saunders, Washington). Officials: Breeding, Dorsey, Leno. Attendance: 12,358.								

a fastbreak layup from Thornton that made it 28-16.

From there, the Terrapins went on a 10-2 run to make the score 30-26 with 4:26 remaining, with a four-point play from Darius Adams getting it to that point.

However, Tilly made a three-pointer, and Bynum had a dunk to go back up by nine points less than a minute later.

After two free throws from Thornton to end the first half, the Buckeyes held a 42-30 lead.

Thornton opened the second half with a jumper, but Elijah Saunders scored five straight points to get Ohio State's lead down to single digits again, 44-35, before Royal made a jumper of his own at 17:25. Saunders' points were the closest Maryland would get the rest of the game.

Ohio State slowly made its lead larger, helped by a three-point jumper from Mobley at 14:21 that made it 55-39 and solid defense throughout the frame.

The Buckeyes extended their lead to 22 points after Chatman made a driving layup for an and-one and converted the free throw and a three-pointer from Mobley put them up 68-46 with just under nine minutes remaining in the game.

After two free throws from Tilly at 5:58, both teams went over two minutes without scoring a point until Thornton broke that streak with a jumper with just 3:44 remaining that made it 74-55.

The Buckeye win was secured at that point, and they cruised the rest of the way, stretching the lead to as many as 22 on a pair of free throws by sophomore guard

Michigan 82, Ohio State 61							
Feb. 8, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus							
		1	2	F			
Michigan (22-1, 12-1)		44	38	82			
Ohio State (15-8, 7-6)		34	27	61			
Michigan	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Johnson Jr.	23	5-13	1-1	6-6	0	4	11
Lendeborg	31	5-9	3-4	4-10	3	2	14
Mara	25	11-16	0-0	4-2	3	2	24
Cadeau	20	1-4	0-0	0-2	6	2	2
Burnett	23	3-7	0-0	0-1	1	2	8
McKenney	23	4-6	2-2	1-2	1	0	12
Gayle Jr.	18	0-6	0-0	0-2	2	1	0
Cason	23	3-7	0-0	1-0	3	3	8
Tschetter	14	1-4	0-0	0-1	1	1	3
Totals	200	33-72	6-7	17-27	20	17	82
Percentages: FG: 45.8%. FT: 85.7%. Three-point field goals: 10-24 (Burnett 2-5, Tschetter 1-4, Cason 2-3, Mara 2-3, McKenney 2-3, Lendeborg 1-3, Cadeau 0-2, Johnson 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 4 (Mara 2, Gayle, Lendeborg). Turnovers: 8 (Cason 3, Lendeborg 3, McKenney, Team). Steals: 2 (Lendeborg, McKenney).							
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bynum	33	2-4	0-0	0-0	2	2	5
Royal	36	6-12	3-4	2-4	0	1	15
Tilly	31	3-8	2-2	1-2	3	4	10
Mobley Jr.	33	1-9	2-2	0-3	3	1	4
Thornton	35	6-16	2-2	2-4	4	2	16
Chatman	19	2-5	2-2	1-5	0	2	8
Cupps	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Njegovan	10	0-1	3-4	1-1	0	1	3
Totals	200	20-55	14-16	9-22	12	13	61
Percentages: FG: 36.4%. FT: 87.5%. Three-point field goals: 7-22 (Thornton 2-6, Chatman 2-4, Tilly 2-3, Bynum 1-3, Mobley 0-3, Royal 0-3). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Bynum, Mobley, Royal, Thornton). Turnovers: 12 (Thornton 3, Bynum 2, Chatman 2, Mobley 2, Tilly 2, Royal). Steals: 4 (Bynum 2, Royal, Tilly). Officials: Kimble, Reed, Sciroto. Attendance: 17,684.							

Gabe Cupps. With 1:33 left in the game, Chatman and Saunders were both ejected from the game due to offsetting flagrant fouls.

Tilly led Ohio State in the win with 19 points on 7-of-10 shooting, while Thornton was just behind him with 17 points. Mobley scored 15 points on 5-of-12 shooting, all five makes coming from three-point range on nine shots. Chatman also reached double digits with 10 points.

Saunders led the Terrapins with 20 points, making 8 of 13 field goals.

Bucks Outmatched By Wolverines

Ohio State (15-8, 7-6) never held a lead in its 82-61 loss to No. 2 Michigan (22-1, 12-1) in front of 17,684 fans at the Schottenstein Center on Feb. 8.

The Buckeyes struggled to string multiple stops together throughout the game, partly due to giving up 17 offensive rebounds in the contest that allowed the Wolverines to score 14 second-chance points.

Diebler left the game very disappointed in the Buckeyes' performance on the glass.

"I don't know that it was a lack of effort. There was a major lack of physicality," he said. "Those are two different things. There's some correlation. To give an example, a shot goes up, it's not like we weren't running hard to the rim. The problem was, we were running hard to the rim and not running hard to hit somebody and creating contact so we could rebound down the floor."

Michigan started the game on a 7-2 run, with a layup from Tilly being the only points the Buckeyes scored in the first two min-

utes of the game. But Tilly took two open three-pointers and made them both to get Ohio State to a one-point deficit, 9-8, at 16:25.

Rebounding became a problem early on for the Buckeyes when they let the Wolverines grab five offensive boards in the first five minutes of the game, allowing them to score four second-chance points.

Down 13-8, Chatman made a three-point-er to bring OSU within two points. From there, Michigan scored five straight points before Thornton scored his first points of the game at 11:02.

Thornton scored six straight for the Buckeyes before finding Bynum for a dunk to make the score 21-19.

After another 5-0 spurt from the Wolverines powered by Yaxel Lendeborg, who scored all five, a Bynum three-pointer and a putback layup from Royal brought OSU back within two points with 6:38 left in the half.

Aday Mara and Nimari Burnett of Michigan each made a three-pointer to make it an eight-point deficit, and L.J. Cason made one of his own after Njegovan made 1 of 2 free throws to make the score 35-26 with 4:32 on the clock.

Michigan extended the lead to 12 points in the first half on another deep ball from Cason at 1:03, but Thornton followed with his own with 42 seconds left and a 41-32 score.

The Buckeyes went into halftime down 44-34 being outrebounded 25-19. Michigan had 12 offensive rebounds compared to Ohio State's 13 defensive boards.

Ohio State was held without a field goal for nearly the first three minutes of the half until Thornton made it a 50-39 game with a three-pointer. After each team scored four points, the Buckeyes went on a scoring drought of nearly five minutes, during which the Wolverines scored four more points for a 58-43 lead.

Chatman made another three-point jumper with 9:34 left to end the drought but Michigan was able to keep the large lead, stretching it to 20 points on a free throw from Lendeborg that made it 72-52 with 4:14 left. Ohio State never got closer than 19 the rest of the way.

Thornton led Ohio State in the loss with 16 points on 6-of-16 shooting and tied for a team lead of six rebounds with Royal and Chatman. Royal followed with 15 points, and Tilly had 10.

Mara led Michigan with 24 points on 11-of-16 shooting, and Lendeborg had 14 points with a game-high 14 rebounds, four of them on the offensive end. Michigan shot 41.7 percent from distance, while the Buckeyes were just 7 of 22 (31.8 percent).

Before BSB next goes to press, Ohio State will play six games. It begins with a matchup against USC on Feb. 11 (6:30 p.m., BTN) before playing a Valentine's Day game against No. 15 Virginia in Nashville (8 p.m., FOX). Then, the Buckeyes host Wisconsin for a rematch at home on Feb. 17 (8:30 p.m., FS1) and head to East Lansing, Mich., on Feb. 22 to play No. 10 Michigan State (1 p.m., CBS Sports).

The final two games of that stretch are a Feb. 25 away matchup against Iowa (9 p.m., BTN) and a home game against No. 13 Purdue on March 1 (1:30 p.m., CBS). After those six games, the Buckeyes have just two regular-season games remaining.



# McGuff Picks Up 500th Career Win Vs. Huskies

Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff achieved a career milestone with his team's 70-60 win over Washington on Feb. 5.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

The win over the Huskies was McGuff's 500th as a college basketball head coach. As shown in a post that went up on Ohio State's Instagram account, McGuff was showered with water by his players after the game.

Speaking with the media after the game, McGuff gave all the credit to his players.

"As I told our team, in our profession, there are coaches with great players, and there are ex-coaches, and we've had a lot of great players come through our program at Ohio State. That's allowed us to have great success, and also during my time here at Washington, we had good players, and then all the way back to Xavier," McGuff said. "It's about the people you put around you, and my staff have been terrific. Ultimately, we've had excellent players, which has allowed us to have a lot of success."

The 56-year-old McGuff started his head coaching career at Xavier, where he spent nine years. It was there that McGuff picked up the first 214 wins of his career and finished his tenure with a final record of 214-73.

Then he coached at Washington for two seasons, compiling a record of 41-26, before he ultimately took Ohio State's coaching job, and with the Buckeyes, he has gone 246-112 through the Oregon game.

After the game, McGuff noted the coincidence of the fact that his 500th win came against the program he once coached.

"It's ironic, really, to have any milestone

happen here at Washington, where I once coached, and I had a great experience here," McGuff said. "They were very great to our family, and we had wonderful players here, and it's a great community that supports women's basketball.

"It was a wonderful experience, and so I'm happy to be back. And most importantly, we won the game. More than the 500 wins, or the nostalgia of being back, we won, and we beat a really good team, and we'll get on to the next game."

Senior guard Chance Gray, who had a solid showing against the Huskies with 12 points, four assists and three steals, said she was proud of the fact that she helped McGuff win his 500th game.

"I'm very blessed that I was able to come back and play for McGuff. He instills a lot of confidence in all of us every day, and he shows up every day, and is a very consistent coach, and we know that every day we leave the gym, he wants the best for us," Gray said.

### Buckeyes Make West Coast Trip

Right before BSB went to press, Ohio State made its annual road trip to the West Coast. The Buckeyes played well despite travelling across the country, picking up wins over No. 24 Washington and Oregon.

The Buckeyes made a similar trip to the west last year when they played at UCLA and USC in back-to-back games. They lost both of those games, but at least earned the experience of traveling across the country.

Besides the normal headache of having to make a long flight, McGuff said one of the biggest challenges of the trip is simply time management.

"I just think you have to manage your time a little bit," McGuff said after Ohio State's 90-71 win over Nebraska on Feb. 1. "There's so much downtime, so we may look at that and have some activities for them, but it's going to be a tough trip."



SONNY BROCKWAY

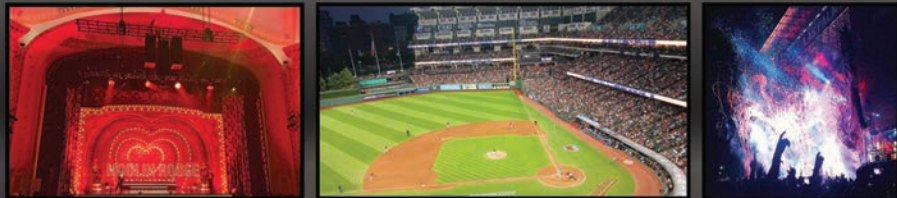
**MILESTONE** — Ohio State women's basketball coach Kevin McGuff reached 500 collegiate wins when the Buckeyes downed Washington 70-60 on Feb. 5. He is in his 13th season at OSU after two at Washington and nine at Xavier prior to that.

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2025-26 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

21-3 Overall (10-2 Big Ten)  
Statistics through games of Feb. 5

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
CAMBRIDGE, J	24-24	739-30.8	210-408	.515	30-91	.330	94-114	.825	26-107	133-5.5	66-2	105	72	7	50	544-22.7
GRAY, Chance	24-24	719-30.0	124-278	.446	51-140	.364	34-42	.810	9-56	659-2.7	17-0	66	44	0	19	333-13.9
KITTS, Kylee	19-19	436-22.9	66-149	.443	10-30	.333	35-45	.778	58-76	134-7.1	48-3	24	32	17	17	177-9.3
LEMMILÄ, Elsa	23-15	567-24.7	83-151	.550	1-9	.111	35-57	.614	46-100	146-6.3	43-0	44	38	55	24	202-8.8
CAMBRIDGE, K	24-24	661-27.5	73-176	.415	16-59	.271	45-72	.625	45-58	103-4.3	65-1	80	31	19	96	207-8.6
WATSON, Ava	24-5	560-23.3	59-135	.437	24-66	.364	29-32	.906	19-34	53-2.2	43-0	55	33	5	49	171-7.1
TODD, T'yana	24-9	345-14.4	44-122	.361	17-62	.274	17-20	.850	14-20	34-1.4	34-0	12	15	2	14	122-5.1
MARTIN, Bryn	24-0	360-15.0	43-97	.443	18-53	.340	4-4	1.000	6-34	40-1.7	34-1	26	13	7	21	108-4.5
BIRIUK, Dasha	16-0	138-8.6	22-47	.468	11-30	.367	8-9	.889	5-19	24-1.5	13-0	8	12	3	7	63-3.9
HOBBS, Ella	22-0	174-7.9	21-43	.488	7-15	.467	4-5	.800	16-40	56-2.5	12-0	11	6	3	4	53-2.4
HENRY, Seini	15-0	102-6.8	12-31	.387	1-10	.100	9-14	.643	12-23	35-2.3	15-0	4	9	3	4	34-2.3
Team									34-52	86			12			
Total	24	4800	757-1637	.462	186-565	.329	314-414	.758	290-619	909-37.9	390-7	435	317	121	305	2014-83.9
Opponents	24	4800	570-1433	.398	159-486	.327	246-353	.697	281-616	897-37.4	410-5	337	548	72	146	1545-64.4

Junior guard Kennedy Cambridge was a bit more enthusiastic about the looming downtime of the trip and even viewed it as an opportunity to build camaraderie.

"Well, we already planned for this trip," she said. "Chance and I are bringing our Nintendo Switches, and we have Uno, so we're going to be doing a lot of team bonding."

Sophomore point guard Jaloni Cambridge was also excited about spending more time with her teammates.

"We do a lot of things because you only have so much time with your teammates," Jaloni said.

"You'd probably be annoyed with us on the plane because we're loud," Kennedy added.

"We're in the back for a reason," Jaloni joked.

Chance Gray  
Reaches 1500 Points

Gray had an impressive stretch for the Buckeyes since BSB last went to press. The senior guard scored in double-figures in all but one of the Buckeyes' last 12 games and had a particularly impressive performance during Ohio State's win over Nebraska.

In the Buckeyes' 19-point win, Gray scored 21 points, shooting 8 of 15 from the field, including 5 of 10 from three-point range. The former Oregon guard's point total brought her over the 1,500-point threshold for her career.

After the game, McGuff emphasized how much she means to the team.

"She made some big shots and timely threes. She's a terrific player," McGuff said. "A lot of people have seen what she's done on the court. She's also been a good leader this year and has helped some of

the younger players come along. Hopefully she can continue to play well, because we're going to need her at her best as we go through February."

During the offseason, the sharp-shooter said she wanted to have a more varied skillset so that she could continue to impact the game even if she went through a dry spell from three-point range. Those efforts have proven to be fruitful. Through 25 games, Gray's 74 two-point field goals are already seven more than the 67 two-point field goals she had all of last season.

In addition to improving her scoring from inside the arc, the 5-9 shooting guard also has more rebounds (70) and assists (69) than she had all of last season.

But Gray has also been much improved from three-point range. After making 34.8 percent of her three-point shots last season, Gray is shooting at a mark of 36.6 percent this year and is only improving as the season progresses.

Since Ohio State's 108-84 win over Penn State on Jan. 14, Gray has had one of the best shooting stretches of her career, making 30 of her last 62 three-point shots (48.4 percent).

When asked about her solid stretch in the middle of Big Ten play, Gray said she simply hopes to continue to impact the game in any way she can.

"I just feel like that's my job, to be as consistent as I can and be at that even level for the team," Gray said. "We know Jaloni is going to do what she does, but they can look to me and just know that I'll be there regardless in the times that we need to get going. Whether that's assisting, whether that's scoring or getting a steal on defense, or just being there in the ways I need to be."

McGuff wasn't the only Buckeye who re-

turned to a previous West Coast stop. Gray also had a reunion when Ohio State took on the Ducks on Feb. 8. After the Washington game, Gray was mainly focused on beating the team she played with for the first two years of her career.

"I'm just excited to go back and play there in the gym and see some of my old coaches, but other than that, I'm just looking forward to winning, honestly," Gray said.

Gray had a quiet performance against her former team going for eight points on 3-9 shooting, but the Buckeyes still picked up the 80-64 win.

Bucks Still Projected  
As No. 3 Seed

For the first time this season, Ohio State was ranked in the top 10 of the

Associated Press' top-25 rankings. After picking up wins over solid Big Ten foes, Nebraska and Wisconsin, the Buckeyes ranked No. 9 the week of Feb. 2. Then, after the wins over Oregon and Washington, the Buckeyes jumped a spot to No. 8.

Ohio State was still a No. 3 seed in ESPN's Charlie Creme's latest Bracketology projection, which came after the win over Washington but before the game against Oregon. In that projection, the Buckeyes were picked to face No. 14-seeded Charleston in the first round.

Still, the Buckeyes have room to move up in projections before even the Big Ten Tournament starts. With looming games against No. 7 Michigan and No. 13 Michigan State, the Buckeyes have the chance to establish themselves as one of the more proven teams in the country.

Gray Is Plank's Lady  
Buck For January

After catching fire from three-point range during the month of January, Gray is the Plank's Lady Buck for January.

Gray, the Oregon transfer, averaged 16.3 points per game on 47-of-100 shooting (47.0 percent), including 24 of 54 (44.4 percent) from three-point range. The senior guard also averaged 2.4 assists and 2.6 rebounds over the time frame, and she went a perfect 12 of 12 from the free-throw line in January.

Gray helped lead Ohio State to an impressive 7-1 stretch in January with two wins over then-top 10-ranked foes Maryland and TCU.

Plank's Cafe



Chance Gray  
Senior Guard  
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# Buckeyes Win Four Straight League Games

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State had one of its most impressive stretches of the season since BSB last went to press. The Buckeyes picked up a pair of home wins over Big Ten foes Wisconsin and Nebraska by comfortable margins before making a trip across the country. Ohio State did what many Big Ten teams before them had failed to do in the Pacific Northwest by beating both Washington and Oregon.

## Cambridge Scores 29 As OSU Dominates UW

No. 11 Ohio State (19-3, 8-2) used a dominant second-half performance to pick up an 81-58 win over Wisconsin (13-9, 5-6) on Jan. 29 in front of 4,855 fans at the Schottenstein Center.

After a sluggish start, Ohio State led just 29-28 at halftime but outscored the Badgers 52-30 in the final 20 minutes to win the game. Sophomore point guard Jalonni Cambridge had yet another impressive scoring night. She finished the game with 29 points on 12-of-21 shooting, including 2 of 3 from three-point range.

Like the rest of the Buckeyes, Cambridge was at her best in the second half, scoring 21 of her 29 points in the final 20 minutes.

"Big-time players show up when it's

most needed," Cambridge said. "(If) we're not playing good, I have to do something about it."

Ohio State allowed Wisconsin to make four three-pointers – two by Destiny Howell – in the opening 4:15 of the game and fell behind 14-7.

After a layup from Cambridge, Wisconsin continued to extend its lead with four straight points.

The Buckeyes scored six straight to cut Wisconsin's lead to 18-15 on an Ella Hobbs layup at 1:31, but after a three-point jumper from Howell with just two seconds on the clock, Wisconsin took a 23-17 lead into the second quarter.

Ohio State was much improved defensively to start the second, holding the Badgers scoreless for the first 5:16 of the frame to go on an 8-0 scoring run and take a 25-23 lead.

Wisconsin finally scored its first points of the quarter on a layup, but senior OSU guard Chance Gray made a three-pointer on the next possession to put Ohio State ahead 28-25.

Neither team scored until 1:26 was left in the half, when Howell broke the drought with a three-pointer to tie the game at 28.

The Buckeyes regained the lead on a free throw by junior guard Kennedy Cambridge with 54 seconds on the clock, ending the half on a field-goal drought of 4:31, taking a 29-28 lead into halftime.

After an ice-cold finish to the first half (Ohio State shot 3 of 18 for 16.7 percent in the second quarter), the Buckeyes started the third quarter with a three-pointer from sophomore guard Ava Watson. However, Wisconsin went on a 6-1 scoring run to take a 34-33 lead with 7:33 showing.

Howell made another three-pointer at 5:24 to put Wisconsin ahead 39-37, but Ohio State answered with a 13-3 scoring run to lead 50-42. Jalonni Cambridge fueled the run with 10 points.

Wisconsin ended a long scoring drought with a free throw by Gift Uchenna, but Gray drained a three-pointer to put Ohio State ahead by 10 with 1:07 left in the period.

Howell answered with a layup, but Jalonni Cambridge connected on a three-pointer to put Ohio State ahead 56-45 entering the fourth quarter.

The Buckeyes' momentum didn't stop after the break. They scored the first seven points of the final period to lead 63-45, all seven points coming from Jalonni Cambridge.

Ohio State led by as many as 27 points on a basket by Seini Henry with 46 seconds to play, before Wisconsin scored the last four points of the game to lose by 23.

Jalonni Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer, but sophomore center Elsa Lemmilä also had an outstanding performance. She scored 14 points and grabbed a game-high 14 rebounds to go along with

four blocks. Gray (10 points) was the only other Buckeye to finish in double figures in scoring.

It wasn't Ohio State's most efficient shooting night, making just 31 of 67 field goals (46.3 percent), but the Buckeyes turned over the Badgers 25 times and had nine turnovers of their own. Additionally, Ohio State shot 60.6 percent in the second half (20 of 33), with Jalonni Cambridge making 8 of 11 of her shots.

Howell led Wisconsin with 29 points on 11-of-16 shooting. No other Badger had more than eight points in the contest, though Uchenna grabbed 12 off the glass to keep Wisconsin close in rebounding, 38-35.

## Gray, Cambridge Combine For 51 In Win

Led by Gray and Jalonni Cambridge, who combined to score 51 points, No. 11 Ohio State (20-3, 9-2) took down Nebraska (16-6, 5-6), 90-71, in front of 7,608 fans at the Schottenstein Center.

The Buckeyes held a 20-point second-half lead that dwindled to just four points. However, they fended off the Cornhuskers by outscoring them 20-5 over the final 6:19.

Lifted by a hot shooting start, Ohio State grabbed an early lead in the first quarter. Gray and Jalonni Cambridge combined to make a trio of three-point jumpers to put Ohio State up 11-4. However, during that

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SONNY BROCKWAY

**RISING ABOVE —** Sophomore guard Jalonni Cambridge led the way when Ohio State reeled off four straight wins since the last issue of BSB. She scored 29 against Wisconsin, 30 vs. Nebraska and 26 on Washington and had a “mere” 19 at Oregon. She was averaging 22.7 points and 5.5 rebounds through Feb. 6.

run, Cambridge picked up two fouls and didn’t play for the rest of the first quarter.

The Cornhuskers made their first three-pointer of the contest with 6:12 to go, and from there, both teams failed to make a field goal until 1:36 when Bryn Martin connected for the Buckeyes to make it 15-7. But Nebraska cut the Buckeyes’ lead to 15-10 on the next possession with a three-pointer by Britt Prince.

Ohio State held a 19-13 lead to start the second quarter, but Nebraska scored the first seven points to take a 20-19 lead with 8:34 before the half.

Jalonni Cambridge and her sister Kennedy provided an answer to Nebraska’s spurt when they combined to make back-to-back three-pointers to lift the Buckeyes to a 25-20 lead.

Ohio State led by seven until it went on a scoring drought midway through the second quarter that lasted until 3:47. The Cornhuskers took advantage of Ohio State’s slump by scoring five straight to make it 29-27, but Martin helped Ohio State answer with its own 5-0 spurt with a three-point jumper, followed by a Jalonni Cambridge layup to lift the Buckeyes to a 34-27 lead.

Nebraska cut Ohio State’s lead to 36-31 with under a minute to go in the first half, but Gray drained a triple on Ohio State’s last possession of the frame to give the Buckeyes a 39-31 lead at the break.

After the Cornhuskers opened the second half with a pair of free throws by Prince, Ohio State went on an 11-4 run to lead 50-37.

Nebraska got back within 10 points of Ohio State’s lead on a three-pointer by Callin Hake, but Gray made two three-point jumpers in a span of less than two minutes to lead the Buckeyes on an 8-0 scoring run and a 58-40 lead with 4:29 left in the quarter.

After Nebraska snapped its drought with a jumper by Petra Bozan, Ohio State extended its lead to 20 points after an and-one layup by Kennedy Cambridge.

However, that is when the Cornhuskers started their comeback. Nebraska ended the third quarter on a 12-2 scoring run to cut Ohio State’s lead down to just 10 points and picked up where it left off in the fourth quarter.

The Cornhuskers opened the final period with an 8-2 run that made the score 66-62 with 8:10 to go.

After the teams traded baskets, Ohio State finally stopped Nebraska’s momentum with a 14-2 scoring run to lead 84-68.

From there, Ohio State was able to coast to its 19-point win, not allowing the Cornhuskers to come closer than 13 points the rest of the way.

“We got very lackadaisical defensively,” said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff

Ohio State 81, Wisconsin 58								
Jan. 29, 2026 Value City Arena • Columbus								
		1	2	3	4	F		
Wisconsin (13-9, 5-6)		23	5	17	13	58		
Ohio State (18-2, 7-1)		17	12	27	25	81		
Wisconsin	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Uchenna	20	1-7	1-4	7-5	1	3	3	
Howell	36	11-16	2-3	0-1	0	2	29	
Porter	34	3-5	0-0	1-3	3	2	8	
Steele	29	1-3	0-0	0-4	5	2	3	
Daniels	24	2-10	0-0	1-6	3	4	5	
Krahn	24	2-7	0-0	0-0	0	1	6	
Bollin	16	0-2	0-0	0-3	2	1	0	
Spasovski	12	1-3	0-0	2-0	0	1	2	
Kerstein	2	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	2	
Patibandla	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Bisballe	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Totals	200	22-56	3-7	11-24	14	16	58	
Percentages: FG: 39.3%. FT: 42.9%. Three-point field goals: 11-24 (Howell 5-7, Krahn 2-7, Porter 2-3, Steele 1-3, Daniels 1-3, Bollin 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 4 (Uchenna 3, Howell). Turnovers: 25 (Team 6, Howell 4, Uchenna 3, Porter 3, Steele 3, Daniels 3, Spasovski 2, Bollin). Steals: 2 (Uchenna, Spasovski).								
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Lemmilä	28	5-11	4-8	5-9	0	2	14	
Gray	32	3-7	2-2	0-1	1	0	10	
K. Cambridge	33	0-8	3-4	1-1	2	2	3	
Watson	35	4-8	0-0	0-3	5	2	9	
J. Cambridge	26	12-21	3-5	2-3	2	2	29	
Martin	20	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	1	4	
Hobbs	6	1-2	0-0	2-0	2	0	2	
Todd	12	2-4	2-2	2-1	0	1	6	
Biriuk	4	1-1	0-0	0-2	1	0	2	
Henry	3	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	2	
Totals	200	31-67	14-21	15-23	13	11	81	
Percentages: FG: 46.3%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 5-16 (Gray 2-5, Watson 1-4, J. Cambridge 2-3, Todd 0-2, K. Cambridge 0-1, Martin 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 6 (Lemmilä 4, Watson, Martin). Turnovers: 9 (Lemmilä 2, Gray, K. Cambridge, Watson, J. Cambridge, Biriuk, Henry, Team). Steals: 8 (Watson 4, K. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä, Gray). Officials: Kalei Enterline, Brad Maxey, Michol Murray. Attendance: 4,855								

Ohio State 90, Nebraska 71							
Feb. 1, 2026 Value City Arena • Columbus							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Nebraska (16-6, 5-6)	13	18	23	17	71		
Ohio State (18-2, 7-1)	19	20	25	26	90		
Nebraska	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Maupin	27	4-8	0-1	2-4	3	3	8
Hargrove	30	10-19	2-2	3-3	0	3	24
Nissley	22	4-8	1-1	1-2	2	1	11
Hake	23	2-8	0-0	1-3	1	2	6
Prince	34	4-13	2-2	0-5	6	3	12
Bozan	11	2-3	0-0	2-2	1	5	4
Johnson	15	0-4	1-2	0-1	0	1	1
Fisher	12	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	2
Williams	19	1-2	1-1	0-0	5	1	3
Weaver	7	0-3	0-0	2-0	1	2	0
Totals	200	28-69	7-9	14-21	19	21	71
Percentages: FG: 40.6%. FT: 77.8%. Three-point field goals: 8-26 (Hake 2-7, Nissley 2-6, Hargrove 2-5, Prince 2-4, Johnson 0-2, Maupin 0-1, Williams 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Hake, Bozan). Turnovers: 21 (Maupin 3, Hake 3, Prince 3, Johnson 3, Nissley 2, Fisher 2, Williams 2, Hargrove, Bozan, Team). Steals: 10 (Johnson 3, Maquin 2, Williams 2, Hargrove, Hake, Prince).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Lemmilä	31	3-5	4-4	1-4	4	2	10
Gray	37	8-15	0-0	1-1	2	0	21
K. Cambridge	32	5-10	1-1	3-5	3	3	12
Watson	33	3-9	2-2	1-5	3	3	10
J. Cambridge	27	9-14	10-11	2-2	6	2	30
Martin	16	2-2	0-0	0-2	0	1	5
Todd	11	1-2	0-0	1-0	0	1	2
Hobbs	9	0-2	0-0	0-5	1	0	0
Biriuk	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Henry	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	31-60	17-18	9-27	19	12	90
Percentages: FG: 51.7%. FT: 94.4%. Three-point field goals: 11-25 (Gray 5-10, Watson 2-6, J. Cambridge 2-3, K. Cambridge 1-2, Hobbs 0-2, Todd 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 6 (Lemmilä 4, K. Cambridge, Todd). Turnovers: 16 (Gray 4, K. Cambridge 3, Watson 3, J. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä, Martin, Biriuk, Henry). Steals: 13 (K. Cambridge 7, Todd 2, Lemmilä, Gray, Watson, J. Cambridge). Officials: Cameron Inouye, Kenneth Nash, Kevin Pethtel. Attendance: 7,608							

of Nebraska’s second-half comeback. “We didn’t rebound. They got two rebounds off of free throws, which is inexcusable. We didn’t get any loose balls. They were getting all the 50-50 balls, and complacency set in, and we allowed it to. Fortunately, we did show some maturity to get ourselves back together and kind of finish the game the right way.”

Jalonni Cambridge led Ohio State with 30 points on 9-of-14 shooting, and Gray wasn’t far off her pace, scoring 21 points and making 5 of 10 from three-point range.

Kennedy Cambridge (12 points), Lemmilä (10 points), and Watson (10 points) were the only other Buckeyes to reach double figures in scoring.

Kennedy Cambridge led Ohio State with eight rebounds and seven steals, while her sister had a team-high total of six assists.

As a team, Ohio State shot 31 of 60 from the field (51.7 percent), including 11 of 25 from three-point range (44.0 percent). The Buckeyes were also 17 of 18 from the line (94.4 percent), led by Jalonni Cambridge, who was 10 of 11. They held the Cornhuskers to just 28-of-69 shooting (40.6 percent), including 8 of 26 from three-point range (30.8 percent).

Nebraska was led by Amiah Hargrove, who scored 24 points on 10-of-19 shooting.

**OSU Starts West Coast Trip With Win**

Led by Jalonni Cambridge, who scored 26 points on 12-of-21 shooting, No. 9 Ohio State (21-3, 10-2) picked up a 70-60 win

over No. 24 Washington (17-6, 7-5) in front of 3,394 fans at Alaska Airlines Arena in Seattle on Feb. 5.

As is usually the case, Cambridge was the Buckeyes’ leader on offense, but as a team, Ohio State had an efficient offensive performance. The Buckeyes connected on 30 of 62 field goals (48.4 percent).

Ohio State couldn’t have dreamt of a better offensive start against the Huskies, making seven of their first 11 field goal attempts to take a 14-8 lead into the first media timeout.

Jalonni Cambridge was spectacular to start the game. She scored eight of Ohio State’s first 14 points but committed two early fouls and had to sit for the final 3:53 of the first quarter.

The Buckeyes still scored with Cambridge on the bench. Gray extended Ohio State’s lead to 11, 19-8, with a three-point jumper, and after Washington snapped a scoreless streak with a layup, Watson drained a three-point jumper to make it 22-10 with 1:53 left in the quarter.

The Huskies scored the final four points of the frame, but Ohio State still led 22-14 headed into the second.

The Buckeyes scored the first three points of the second stanza on a jumper by Cambridge and a free throw by Lemmilä. However, they subsequently went on a lengthy scoring drought and Washington

**Continued On Page 42**



# Cambridge Sisters Lead West Coast Sweep

Continued From Page 41

went on a 9-0 run to trail 25-23 at the 4:50 mark after a three-point play by Sayvia Sellers.

Jaloni Cambridge finally snapped Ohio State's drought with a jumper 18 seconds later, and after the teams traded baskets, the Buckeyes took a 31-27 lead into half-time following a bucket by Lemmilä.

OSU started the second half much like it started the first, scoring the first four points, and after a Husky three-pointer by Avery Howell, Gray answered with her own triple to keep the lead at eight.

Later, Kennedy Cambridge made a three-pointer to extend the Buckeye lead to 45-35, and after a Washington layup from Yulia Grabovskaia, Ohio State scored six straight to lead 51-37 with 2:21 left in the third.

Washington answered with three straight points, but Martin connected on a three-pointer to put the Buckeyes ahead 54-40. The Buckeyes took a 54-43 lead into the final period.

Washington cut Ohio State's lead to single digits on the first possession of the fourth quarter with a jumper by Devin Coppinger, but Ohio State created a 62-47 lead with an 8-2 scoring run capped by a jumper from Kennedy Cambridge.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BIG CONTRIBUTION — Elsa Lemmilä helped Ohio State reach No. 8 in the most recent AP poll with performances such as scoring 14 points, grabbing 14 rebounds and blocking four shots in an 81-79 win over Wisconsin. She also had 23 points and nine rebounds when the Buckeyes defeated Oregon 80-64. She was averaging 8.8 points and 6.3 rebounds through Feb. 6.**

The Huskies battled back, with Sellers scoring six points as part of an 8-0 run to cut Ohio State's lead to 62-55 with 4:06 left in the game.

Gray made a layup to briefly stop the run, but Sellers scored the next five points to make it 64-60 with 2:09 remaining.

Just when it seemed like the Huskies were poised to storm in front, Jaloni Cambridge made a crucial midrange jumper with 1:38 on the clock to put Ohio State ahead by six.

“For a sophomore, she has a lot of poise, and she plays like a veteran,” McGuff said of Cambridge immediately after the game. “Already in her young career, she’s been in a lot of big moments, and so we certainly like the ball in her hands at that time.”

The Huskies wouldn't score for the rest of the game, as Ohio State secured its 10-point victory.

Lemmilä (13 points) and Gray (12) also reached double figures in scoring. Gray led the Buckeyes with four assists, and Lemmilä had a game-high nine rebounds.

The Buckeyes were outrebounded 35-30 but forced 19 turnovers and committed only 11, and they held the Huskies to 40.0 percent shooting (22 of 55).

Sellers led Washington with 26 points on 9-of-16 shooting, but she was also guilty of a game-high five turnovers.

## OSU Defeats Ducks For West-Coast Sweep

Fueled by dominant performances from Kennedy Cambridge and Lemmilä, who combined for 43 points, No. 9 Ohio State (22-3, 11-2) defeated Oregon (18-8, 6-7) 80-64 on Feb. 8 at Matthew Knight Arena in Eugene, Ore., in front of 5,371 fans.

The Buckeyes are typically led in scoring by Jaloni Cambridge, but against the Ducks, it was Lemmilä (23 points) and Kennedy Cambridge (20 points) who were the team's first- and second-leading scorers, respectively.

As they had done in their win over Washington, the Buckeyes got out to a fast start against Oregon.

After falling behind 5-4 in the opening minutes, Ohio State scored 10 straight to lead 14-5. The run was sparked by a three-point jumper from Kennedy Cambridge and capped with a pair of baskets from Lemmilä.

The Ducks ended the run with a three-point jumper by Ari Long, but Cambridge answered with another three-pointer on the Buckeyes' next possession.

In her first game back at her old stomping grounds, Gray, the Oregon transfer, connected on a triple to extend Ohio State's lead to 20-8, but Oregon answered with a 10-0 scoring run to make it 20-18 with 1:27 left in the quarter.

Despite the Ducks' run, the Buckeyes took a 22-18 lead into the second quarter and maintained that four-point advantage after Lemmilä made two free throws with 9:16 to go before halftime.

From there, though, both teams went cold. Neither team scored for over three minutes until Watson made a pair of free throws to put Ohio State up by six, 26-20.

While the Buckeyes finally got back on the board, the Ducks' shooting woes con-

Ohio State 70, Washington 60							
Feb. 5, 2026 Alaska Airlines Arena • Seattle							
		1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (21-3, 10-2)	22	9	23	16	70		
Maryland (17-6, 7-5)	14	13	16	17	60		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Lemmilä	36	5-7	3-5	3-6	2	0	13
Gray	38	5-14	0-0	2-2	4	0	12
K. Cambridge	32	4-6	0-0	0-2	1	3	9
Watson	39	2-10	0-0	0-3	1	3	5
J. Cambridge	33	12-21	2-2	1-6	2	4	26
Watson	5	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	2	2
Todd	13	1-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	3
Martin	4	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	30-62	5-7	8-22	11	15	70
Percentages: FG: 48.4%. FT: 71.4% Three-point field goals: 5-16. (Gray 2-6, Watson 1-5, K. Cambridge 1-2, Martin 1-1, J. Cambridge 0-1, Todd 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 7 (Lemmilä 5, K. Cambridge, Watson). Turnovers: 11 (J. Cambridge 4, Watson 2, Team 2, Gray, K. Cambridge, Hobbs). Steals: 9 (Gray 3, Lemmilä 2, K. Cambridge 2, Watson, J. Cambridge).							
Washington	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
McGaughy	30	6-14	0-0	2-1	0	2	12
Sellers	37	9-16	5-5	0-0	1	3	26
Stines	24	2-6	0-0	2-1	2	2	4
Howell	34	2-4	1-2	1-6	0	3	7
Ladine	28	0-5	0-0	1-7	4	0	0
Briggs	27	0-4	4-6	2-5	2	0	4
Coppinger	20	2-2	1-1	2-0	0	1	5
Harvey	3	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Grabovskaia	7	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	1	2
Totals	200	22-55	11-14	12-23	9	12	60
Percentages: FG: 40.0%. FT: 78.6%. Three-point field goals: 5-14 (Sellers 3-6, Howell 2-3, Ladine 0-2, Briggs 0-2, Stines 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (McGaughy, Sellers, Ladine). Turnovers: 19 (Sellers 5, Briggs 4, Howell 2, Ladine 2, Harvey 2, Grabovskaia 2, Stines, Team). Steals: 5 (McGaughy 2, Sellers 2, Coppinger). Officials: Melissa Barlow, Angel Kent, Julie Krommenhoek. Attendance: 3,394.							

Ohio State 80, Oregon 64							
Feb. 8, 2026 Matthew Knight Arena • Eugene, Ore.							
		1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (22-3, 11-2)	22	12	22	24	80		
Oregon (18-8, 6-7)	18	7	19	20	64		
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Lemmilä	31	10-12	3-4	3-6	1	2	23
Gray	39	3-9	0-0	1-4	3	1	8
K. Cambridge	35	6-10	3-4	1-6	2	3	20
Watson	36	4-11	2-2	1-2	6	3	10
J. Cambridge	38	5-9	9-9	0-6	8	3	19
Kitts	8	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	4	0
Martin	7	0-2	0-0	0-2	0	0	0
Hobbs	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0
Todd	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Biriuk	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-54	17-19	6-29	21	18	80
Percentages: FG: 51.9%. FT: 89.5% Three-point field goals: 7-20. (K. Cambridge 5-7, Gray 2-5, Watson 0-4, Lemmilä 0-1, J. Cambridge 0-1, Kitts 0-1, Martin 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 3 (Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge). Turnovers: 20 (Kitts 6, J. Cambridge 4, K. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, Watson 2, Team 2, Gray). Steals: 14 (K. Cambridge 8, Watson 4, J. Cambridge 2).							
Oregon	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Jacobs	29	5-10	0-0	3-2	0	4	13
Etute	26	2-7	4-6	5-3	1	4	8
Fiso	31	2-8	0-0	0-3	8	4	5
Bell	33	3-9	0-0	1-3	3	1	9
Long	32	5-13	2-2	1-2	2	2	16
Rambus	20	5-7	3-4	1-4	1	0	13
Cain	15	0-3	0-0	0-1	1	0	0
Tuhina	12	0-3	0-0	0-0	1	1	0
Muhammad	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Barhoum	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	22-60	9-12	11-21	17	16	64
Percentages: FG: 36.7%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 11-32 (Long 4-11, Jacobs 3-8, Bell 3-8, Fiso 1-2, Tuhina 0-2, Cain 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 23 (Fiso 7, Jacobs 4, Etute 3, Rambus 3, Long 2, Cain, Tuhina, Team). Steals: 10 (Jacobs 3, Etute 2, Long 2, Fiso, Cain, Tuhina). Officials: Michael Price, Doug Robinson, In'Fini Robinson. Attendance: 5,371							

tinued. They finally broke their scoring drought with a pair of free throws by Ehis Etute at 4:53, but Ohio State was still able to grow its lead to 32-22 with 2:31 remaining before halftime.

The Ducks made three free throws in the last 2:30, but Ohio State still led 34-25 at halftime.

The Buckeyes' lead hovered between eight and 11 points until they scored five straight to lead 47-34 at 5:57.

Oregon forward Sarah Rambus ended the spurt with a jumper, but Kennedy Cambridge drained a triple at the 5:26 mark to put Ohio State ahead 50-36.

Rambus answered Cambridge's three with another layup, but Ohio State scored six straight to lead by 18 with 3:08 left in the quarter.

The Ducks responded with their own 6-0 spurt but still trailed 56-44 heading into the fourth quarter.

Any momentum the Ducks gained from their third-quarter-ending spurt was short-lived. The Ducks scored first in the fourth quarter, but after a layup from Lemmilä, Kennedy Cambridge drained a three-point-er that made it 61-46.

After an Oregon three-pointer by Sofia Bell, Ohio State went on a 9-0 scoring run to take a commanding 70-49 lead with 5:58 remaining.

Oregon responded with a 9-2 run but failed to threaten Ohio State's lead the rest of the game, never getting closer than 12 in

the final 2:54.

After the game, McGuff praised his team for its consistency in the win over the Ducks.

“We got a little closer to 40 minutes than we have been lately, of playing the way we want to play. That was ultimately the key,” McGuff said. “We’ve had really good stretches in all of our games lately, but we just haven’t had as much consistency. Today we were much more consistent.”

It was an efficient shooting night for the Buckeyes. They made 28 of 54 (51.9 percent) field-goal attempts and held the Ducks to just 22-of-60 shooting (36.7 percent).

Lemmilä had a game-high nine rebounds, and Jaloni Cambridge, who still had a solid scoring night with 19 points, led the team with eight assists.

Long led Oregon with 16 points on 5-of-13 shooting.

Before BSB next goes to press, Ohio State will have a difficult stretch of games, starting with No. 20 Maryland at home on Feb. 15 (2 p.m. FS1) before facing Minnesota on the road on Feb. 18 (8 p.m., B1G+).

The Buckeyes will come back home to host USC on Feb. 22 (2 p.m., FS1) and Michigan (8 p.m., Peacock). Ohio State will conclude its regular season with a road game against Michigan State on March 1 (Noon, BTN).



# OSU Men's Lacrosse Aiming For New Heights

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Coming off a landmark season in which the Ohio State men's lacrosse team claimed both Big Ten regular-season and tournament titles, the Buckeyes still faced a bitter ending, falling in the first round of the NCAA tournament to Notre Dame.

Despite a program-best season, Ohio State isn't resting on its laurels after a disappointing ending kept it from its main goal.

With a national championship still standing as the ultimate prize, Ohio State views last season as just the beginning, believing it has only taken its first steps toward that goal.

For Ohio State graduate defenseman Bobby Van Buren, the 2025 William C. Schmeisser National Co-Defensive Player of the Year, the decision to return for another season with the Buckeyes was largely motivated by the chance to capture what Ohio State couldn't achieve a season ago.

"We have unfinished business," Van Buren told BSB. "Last year, we were proud of how far we went, but we didn't get to our final goal. I'm just looking forward to another chance to get to that final game on Memorial Day and win it. That was my main reason for coming back."

At the helm of Ohio State is head coach Nick Myers, who has guided the Buckeyes since 2009 and compiled a 145-110 overall record in his 17 seasons leading the program, including a 14-3 finish in 2025. Under Myers, Ohio State has steadily risen on the national stage, highlighted by a Final Four appearance and run to the national championship game in 2017.



**Nick Myers**

Myers will guide a veteran group in 2026 that includes 26 returnees, highlighted by six starters and five preseason All-Americans in junior goalkeeper Caleb Fyock, senior defenseman Cullen Brown, senior short-stick defensive midfielder Blake Eiland, graduate attacker Alex Marinier and Van Buren.

With much of the core returning, Myers believes the next step for the program lies in refining habits rather than reinventing its identity.

"We have a group, collectively right now, that the one thing from last year you can really feel is belief, and belief is a really powerful thing," Myers said. "They believe that we can compete, but they are also humbled by the process of how hard it is, how challenging it can be. You have to stay healthy, and listen, it's the Big Ten. Every team in our conference is in the top 20. So it's as competitive as they get."

Ohio State's dominance last season started in goal as Fyock looks to build on an excellent sophomore campaign.

The 6-2, 275-pound Fyock, otherwise known as "Big Tasty," has started in all but one games in his career at Ohio State

and led the nation with a .612 save percentage in 2025, earning the Big Ten Specialist of the Year and Ensign C. Markland Kelly Jr. National Outstanding Goalie honors.

Myers emphasized that growth at the position is often measured in small margins.

"For Caleb, the big thing was just absorbing the growth that he had from year one to year two and then saying, 'OK, how do we reset this offseason, come back mentally and physically fresh and then re-attack?' " Myers said. "Playing goalie is very humbling. Even at 60 (save percentage), you're still getting scored on 40 percent of the time. With a 50 save percentage being your average, and 60 percent meaning you're the best goalie in the country, somewhere in that 10 percent window is greatness."

In front of Fyock, Ohio State's defense proved equally impactful. Brown, Van Buren and junior defenseman Kyle Foster, each of whom started in all 17 games on defense for the Buckeyes in 2025, will anchor one of the top units in the nation. Ohio State's defense caused 156 turnovers last season and allowed just 9.1 goals per game compared to the Buckeyes' mark of 12.3 scores per contest. Brown also set a program record with 34 caused turnovers last season, while Van Buren swept most major awards.

Marinier told BSB that Van Buren's physical presence is unmatched in college lacrosse and that the hulking 6-1, 215-pound defender sets the tone for the Buckeye defensive unit and Ohio State as a whole.

"I don't think there's anybody in college lacrosse that matches the size, physicality, speed and tenacity of Bobby," Marinier said. "That's what makes him one



**Alex Marinier**

of the most feared, if not the most feared, defenders in college lacrosse. When he came in, he was very on-ball oriented, and to see his progress to becoming probably the best on-ball defender in the country, and also an amazing off-ball defender, has been great to see."

With Greg Langermeier, a former walk-on who totaled six points as a captain for Ohio State in 2025, departing from Ohio State, senior Eiland could emerge as a contributor if the Buckeyes choose to employ a defensive midfielder.

While the defense remains largely unchanged, Ohio State's midfield and offense will see multiple changes in 2026.

In the offensive midfield, Ohio State lost all three of its starters in Jack McKenna, Gannon Matthews and Ben Mayer. However, the Buckeyes picked up a pair of former Yale midfielders, graduates



**Caleb Fyock**

Brad Sharp and Logan Soelberg, as well as Johns Hopkins graduate Russell Melendez, from the transfer portal. The Buckeyes also brought back sophomore Liam White, who started two games for Ohio State in 2025, recording 11 goals and six assists.

Ohio State's attack is led by Marinier, junior Garrett Haas and Syracuse graduate transfer Jackson Birtwistle, who will look to replace Ryan Donnery, who exhausted his eligibility.

Marinier led Ohio State with 52 points (50 goals, two assists), becoming just the third player in program history to score 50 times in a single season. Haas followed close behind with 29 goals and 17 assists for the Buckeyes in 2025, while Birtwistle has totaled 56 goals in his four-year collegiate career.

Marinier credited his teammates for creating his scoring chances, stressing that his goal record reflects a team effort, not an individual one.

"I've alluded to it before, but all my goals don't come without my teammates," Marinier said. "I'm not a guy who starts the party. I'm a guy who tries my best to end the party. Garrett Haas, guys last year, Gannon Matthews, Ed Shean and Jack McKenna really put in the work to give me the ball. I would be remiss if I didn't mention them when talking about this subject."

Ohio State's roster strength is further bolstered by the No. 9-ranked freshman class in Division I, according to Inside Lacrosse. The class features one five-star and seven four-star recruits.

Several newcomers are expected to make an early impact, particularly as the Buckeyes replace key departures from last season, Myers said.

"There are three freshmen that I think you're going to see early in the year. Owen Lee comes to us from just outside Toronto," Myers said. "He's an athletic freshman who, when you look at the void of Greg Langermeier and Ari Allen, is playing in more of that defensive midfield role."

"Then, from the great state of Ohio, two guys that we've been waiting years to get here. Jake Struck, who I think won every award possible in high school sports, and Khalif Hocker, coming off a knee injury, are getting closer and closer. Those two guys from Ohio that we feel really strongly about are going to be a huge part of our offense moving forward."

Hocker arrives in Columbus as one of the most accomplished offensive recruits

in the 2025 class and is expected to factor into the Buckeyes' attack once fully healthy. A five-star prospect and three-time All-American from Cincinnati St. Xavier, Hocker was rated No. 15 nationally and twice earned Ohio Attackman of the Year honors while leading the Bombers to the 2023 state final.



**Khalif Hocker**

Myers said his return from a knee injury has progressed steadily and that his scoring ability will be a boost moving forward.

Lee adds athleticism and versatility to the midfield after starring as a three-sport athlete at Henry Street High School in Whitby, Ontario. Struck, a four-star in-state standout from Olentangy Liberty, brings a proven scoring touch and competitive edge after earning Ohio Player of the Year honors and setting school records in goals and points.

While the freshman class adds new talent and upside, Myers said their arrival fits into a bigger picture rather than changing the program overnight, as Ohio State continues to build year to year through lessons learned and consistent habits.

"First, you absorb it, reflect on it, champion it, and then you put it away," Myers said. "You don't necessarily build off only one season. We build off every season. To me, 2024 was a year that people don't talk about enough. It was really the reason why we had success in 2025, and at the end of the day, you take lessons learned and you hope culturally the program is stronger each year."

For Myers and the Buckeyes, it's about continuing a culture of accountability and growth, with the 2026 squad aiming to surpass last season and raise the program's expectations.

"There's the phrase leave it better than the way you found it," Myers said. "Our Buckeyes are leaving the program better than the way they found it. We're building off every team, and that's the legacy that they leave. It's the way we practice, the way we take care of each other, the way we love each other, academics, service, across the board."

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# Age No Hindrance For Buckeye Goalie Coach

At an age when a few athletes are still competing in college, Carter Krier is in his second season as the goaltender coach for Ohio State.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

In fact, the 26-year-old is in his seventh season of coaching, having started as an assistant at East Grand Forks (Minn.) Senior High in the 2019-20 season while also being the director of goaltending development for East Grand Forks Hockey.

Going into coaching was a foregone conclusion even as a young goalie in his native Moorhead, Minn.

"With my stature being not being the biggest goalie (5-8, 148 pounds), you see the guys in the NHL and they're 6-5, so I kind of knew my timeline for playing wouldn't be long," he said.

Krier was a non-playing student at the University of North Dakota when he founded the Edge Goaltending academy in 2021 while also coaching in East Grand Forks, which is along the eastern bank of the Red River of the North directly across from Grand Forks and the UND campus.

He earned a communications degree in 2022, but coaching was in his blood.

"Going through the process after high school and looking at juniors and what my path was or wasn't, I had great mentors back home and some family who were coaches," he said. "I've always had great

coaches growing up, and when you're around that you're like, 'Well, it's something I want to do.'

"First I wanted to get into teaching. I did my in-class with fourth graders and thought that it might be a little too much, and then coaching fell into my lap. I was working camps, helping out and it just parlayed from there to being here now."

Krier joined the staff of the Fargo Force of the United States Hockey League in 2020-21.

"I love coaching goalies," he said. "I love being able to do that as a job so that's how I got started."

He knew OSU assistant coach Paul Kirtland from the recruiting trails, and Kirtland approached him about an opening with the Buckeyes after the 2024-25 season.

"It was a whirlwind kind of summer before I got hired here," Krier said. "We just won the Clark Cup in the USHL. Almost the next day, Paul Kirtland called and asked if I would be interested in college. It was an opportunity that I couldn't pass up."

### Young Blood

Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik had no hesitation hiring Krier, then 24.

"You know what? To me at the end of the day, experience, no experience, whatever age, if you're good enough, you're qualified enough and he fits what you need, it's a no-brainer, and the age never was a factor for me," Rohlik said.

"The guys that go out and work hard, the guys that go out and do the job and start to get a reputation, and even at 24, he worked with USA Hockey and I've had phone calls from guys that worked with USA Hockey, guys that worked in the USHL and they were all blown away by how organized he was, his opinions, how hard he worked."

Krier's goalies this season are junior Kristoffer Eberly and freshmen Dawson Labre and Sam Hillebrandt.



Carter Krier

## VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For January



Riley Thompson  
Junior Forward  
Ottawa, Ontario

# BIG

## Men's Hockey

	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Michigan State	18	39	13	5	0	2	2	0
Michigan	18	25	14	4	0	4	0	0
Penn State	16	32	10	6	0	0	2	0
Wisconsin	18	27	10	8	0	3	0	0
Minnesota	18	20	6	12	0	0	2	0
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
Notre Dame	16	5	1	15	0	0	2	0

**Overall records** — Michigan 23-5-0, Michigan State 22-6-0, Penn State 18-8-0, Wisconsin 17-9-2, **Ohio State 10-15-1**, Minnesota 10-18-1, Notre Dame 5-20-3.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

"He's a great coach," Labre said. "He communicates a lot with us. We do a lot of video with him, which is really good."

Krier found a kindred spirit in Labre, who aspires to be a goalie coach.

"The fun part about it is when we watch video, I let those guys do a lot of the talking and just see what they know, what their minds are reading and stuff like that," Krier said. "He's actually been very vocal on things he sees, things he likes, doesn't like, which sometimes collides with the coach. You've got to be honest with your goalie so he'll fit right in one day to be a goalie coach."

Rohlik said Krier's energy is contagious.

"He does a heck of a job with the goalies, but he does a heck of a job in that whole room," Rohlik said. "When he's presenting video to the team, he demands your attention. He's good at what he does. He's a hell of a coach at a young age."

Just as Rohlik had no trepidation about his age, Krier wasn't worried about being so young.

"It was funny," he said. "We had three guys older than me last year. In Fargo or wherever I was coaching I've always been close to the age of the players. For me it's always building a trust relationship. And it's nice to have that voice for guys that might not be able to talk to someone older. There's been no issues."

Krier said his short playing career has benefited his coaching.

"Not playing at the highest levels, I had to learn quickly from different coaches," he said, while adding that adaptability is the key. "One year we might do a lot of video. The next year a goalie might like more on ice. I'll do whatever is necessary to help them. They're the ones stopping the puck."

He feels goalies make good coaches.

"Some of the best coaches in the NHL were former goalies, or the best coaches in the NCAA were former goalies," Krier said. "A big part of that is you're back there, you're seeing the game from a different lens almost like a quarterback. You see everything right in front of you, and you've got to understand it. A perspective that a goalie has each game for sure is a big part of that."

### Gloves Off

Fighting in college hockey is a no-no

and can result in an automatic ejection, so the chances of there being fisticuffs are greatly diminished and a tilt between goalies even more remote.

Not so in the NHL, where the rash of goalie fights – OK, two – recently drew the attention of the hockey world much like a burly defensive lineman running for a "fat man's" touchdown in football draws curiosity.

The first goalie-on-goalie fight was Jan. 19 when Florida's Sergei Bobrovsky fought San Jose's Alex Nedeljkovic.

"It was cool. I mean, there hasn't been a goalie fight in a while," Hillebrandt said. "It wasn't a great fight, to be honest, but it was cool. It helps get fans into the game as well."

The second was more notable because it came with a lot more eyeballs on it in the stand-alone outdoor game in Tampa, Fla., when the hometown Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy and the Boston Bruins' Jeremy Swayman went at it on Feb 1, exactly six years to the day after Calgary's Cam Talbot and Edmonton's Mike Smith fought in the most recent goalie fight in the NHL.

Fortunately, no one got hurt in any of those mashups.

Hillebrandt was asked if he had ever gone toe to toe with his counterpart.

"I've been asked, but I did not end up doing it," he said, referring to his time with the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League. "Three years ago, we were playing Saginaw and we're losing 7-2. At that point, it wasn't worth my time."

He said Rohlik has not told him to stay in the crease if a melee breaks out elsewhere on the ice.

"I've always been a guy to just kind of let it be," Hillebrandt said. "If their goalie does something a little bit outrageous then we'll see but otherwise, I like to just leave the players to do their own thing and fight it out."

The sight of two guys in bulky equipment trying to duke it out is amusing, junior forward Riley Thompson said.

"Honestly, it's some entertainment for you on the bench or wherever you're watching," he said. "It's always funny seeing that."

### Century Mark

Senior captain Davis Burnside assisted on a goal by Félix Caron on Jan. 31 against Michigan to become the sixth Buckeye to reach 100 career points in the past 10 years and the first since Tanner Laczynski (2017-20).

"He's the epitome of a Buckeye," Rohlik said of Burnside. "He's a pro. He's here four years, and he does everything the right way on the ice, off the ice, in the classroom. He represents this university in a first-class manner every day, and to me, that's the thing as a coach you're most proud of."

Burnside was glad the milestone came against Michigan.



Davis Burnside



## MEN'S HOCKEY

"It's pretty special," Burnside said. "I've had an unbelievable four years at this university, and to be able to get 100 points against that team too, it's pretty awesome."

Through games of Feb. 7, he has nine goals and 12 assists for 21 points this season and 101 points (46 goals, 55 assists) in 144 career games.

### Series Recaps

The Buckeyes (10-15-1, 6-10-0 Big Ten) went 2-2 in the four games since BSB last published.

They lost 6-4 and 3-2 in overtime at home to Michigan on Jan. 30 and 31 before winning 6-2 and 2-1 at Minnesota on Feb. 6 and 7.

Against the top-ranked Wolverines (22-4-0, 13-3-0) in the first game, the Buckeyes rallied twice from a goal deficit but twice lost a one-goal lead before U-M broke a third-period tie with a pair of power-play goals for the victory.

"We had our chance to obviously get a win tonight," Rohlik said. "But you know, when you shoot yourself in the foot as many times as we did tonight, you probably don't deserve it."

Hillebrandt made 18 saves, Burnside scored and had an assist, and William Smith had two helpers. OSU was 1 for 3 on the power play and 2 of 5 for the penalty kill.

It was more heartbreak the next night when OSU staged a gutty comeback from a 2-0 third-period deficit only to lose 3-2 in overtime to drop to 1-5-1 in overtimes and 2-8-0 in one-goal games.

Caron, from a Burnside setup, cut a two-goal deficit in half at 14:16 of the third, and Nathan McBrayer tied it 2-2 during 4-on-4 play at 16:45 from Max Montes and Burnside, but Nick Moldenhauer scored his second goal of the game against Hillebrandt (21 saves) at 2:50 of overtime.

The series drew the largest crowds of the season to Value City Arena – 7,659 and 8,188, respectively.

### Gopher It

Freshman Jake Karabela had four points (two goals, two assists) to lead the Buckeyes to the historic sweep of Minnesota.

It was the first time OSU beat the Golden Gophers (10-18-1, 6-12-0) in a series with both wins coming in regulation. Minnesota had won seven games in a row at home vs. the Buckeyes and entered the weekend with an all-time mark of 27-4-3 against them in Minneapolis.

Karabela had a goal and two assists in the opener when the Buckeyes broke a 1-1 tie with goals by Thompson, Montes and the first as a Buckeye by Ethan Straky in less than seven minutes of the second period to carry a 4-2 lead into the third.

Ryan Gordon and McBrayer also scored, Caron added two assists, and Hillebrandt made 19 saves.

Smith opened the scoring for the Buckeyes at 8:11 of the first period in the rematch. After Brody Lamb tied it in the second, Broten Sabo fed Karabela for the winner at 10:25 of the third period.

Hillebrandt, in his fourth straight start, made 28 saves, and the penalty kill was 3 for 3 against the second-best power play in the country.

# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## FOOTBALL

**Sept. 5** BALL STATE; **12** at Texas; **19** KENT STATE; **26** ILLINOIS.

**Oct. 3** at Iowa; **10** MARYLAND; **17** at Indiana; **31** at USC.

**Nov. 7** OREGON; **14** NORTHWESTERN; **21** at Nebraska; **28** MICHIGAN.

**Dec. 5** Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

## MEN'S BASKETBALL (15-8, 7-6)

**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, W 86-74; **20** MINNESOTA, W 82-74 (OT); **23** at Michigan, L 74-62; **26** PENN STATE, W 84-78; **31** at Wisconsin, L 92-82.

**Feb. 5** at Maryland, W 82-62; **8** MICHIGAN, L 82-61; **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 (22-3, 11-2)

**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, W 108-84; **19** at Coretta Scott King Classic in Newark, N.J., vs. TCU, W 71-69; **22** INDIANA, W 81-67; **25** at Iowa, L 91-70; **29** Wisconsin, W 81-58.

**Feb. 1** NEBRASKA, W 90-71; **5** at Washington, W 70-60; **8** at Oregon, W 80-64; **15** MARYLAND; **18** at Minnesota; **22** USC; **25** MICHIGAN.

**March 1** at Michigan State.

Karabela leads the Buckeyes with 16 assists and 23 points.

### Good Start

Thompson opened the calendar year with goals in each of the first two games and finished January with a total of four goals and two assists in eight games to earn the Varsity Club Icer of the Month award.

The Ottawa, Ontario, native scored in

## 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., Men 1-4, Women 0-5; **18** Dave Micahnik Penn Invitational in Philadelphia, Men 3-2, Women 5-0; **31-Feb. 1** Schiller Duals in Evanston, Ill., Men 5-1, Women 6-3.

**Feb. 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 (10-15-1, 6-10-0)

**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, W 4-2; L 6-1; **30-31** MICHIGAN, L 6-4; L 3-2 OT.

**Feb. 6-7** at Minnesota, W 6-2; W 2-1; **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 (26-4-0, 20-4-0)

**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, W 7-4; W 4-1; **23-24** ST. THOMAS, W 2-1 (OT); W 5-0; **30-31** MINNESOTA-DULUTH, W 6-2; W 3-1.

**Feb. 7-8** at Wisconsin, W 4-1; L 4-1; **13-14** MINNESOTA; **20-21** at Bemidji State; **27-March 1** WCHA First Round.

back-to-back games vs. Bowling Green on Jan. 2 and 3 and had a goal in both games at Notre Dame on Jan. 23 and 24.

### Next

The Buckeyes are home against Wisconsin on Feb. 13 (6:30 p.m.) and 14 (7:30 p.m., BTN). They then embark on a four-game trip with all the games on BTN starting with Penn State on Feb. 20 (8:30 p.m.) and 21 (8 p.m.) before going to Mich-

## MENS SWIM & DIVE (3-1)

**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, W 167-133; **23-24** Texas Invitational at Austin, Texas, NTS; **31** PITTSBURGH, W 193.5-106.5.

**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 (2-2)

**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, L 162-136; **23-24** Texas Invitational at Austin, Texas, NTS; **31** PITTSBURGH, W 195-105.

**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 (17-0, 6-0)

**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, W 29-9; **25** at Nebraska, W 17-16; **30** WISCONSIN, W 30-10.

**Feb. 1** MICHIGAN, W 26-16; **6** IOWA, W 24-9; **13** at Penn State; **15** at Maryland.

**March 7-8** Big Ten Championships at State College, Pa.; **19-21** NCAA Championships at Cleveland.

igan State on Feb. 27 (8:30 p.m.) and 28 (8 p.m.).

The final games of the regular season are at home vs. Notre Dame on March 5 (6:30 p.m.) and 6 (5 p.m.).

*For a full recap of the Michigan and Minnesota series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*



# Ryan Earns Career Dual Victory No. 350

Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan reached a significant milestone on Jan. 30, earning his 350th career dual victory as the No. 2 Buckeyes dominated No. 25 Wisconsin (11-3, 3-3 Big Ten) 30-10 by earning wins in seven of 10 matches.

## ON THE MAT Sam Cipriani

The win improved Ryan's career dual record to 350-153-2, including a 241-71 mark at Ohio State.

When Ryan was asked about what the win meant to him, the longtime head coach deflected the praise, stating that it's a community effort to make the Ohio State program great.

"The wins are just about great people who work at a great place," Ryan told BSB. "I have amazing coaches. We're well-funded and we have excellent facilities. It's just a combination of so many people."

Ryan is currently in his 20th season at Ohio State and has been honored as NCAA Head Coach of the Year twice, in 2009 and 2015. He has led the Buckeyes to top-eight finishes in 15 of the 19 NCAA tournaments he has been in with the program.

Ryan guided Ohio State to a team national championship in 2015 and helped the Buckeyes capture three Big Ten titles in four years (2015, 2017-18). An Iowa alumnus, Ryan has mentored 14 individual national champions during his tenure at Ohio State. Most notably, he coached a trio of two-time winners at 141 pounds in associate head coach J Jagers, assistant coach Logan Stieber (four-time champion), and current senior Jesse Mendez.

Before joining the Buckeyes, Ryan spent 11 seasons at Hofstra from 1995-2006, guiding the Pride to six consecutive conference titles from 2001-06. During that stretch, Hofstra posted a 47-match unbeaten streak in conference duals (46-0-1), and Ryan earned conference coach of the year honors seven times.

## OSU Honors Five Bucks On Senior Night

Before Ohio State's 24-9 win over Iowa on Feb. 7, five Buckeyes were recognized during Senior Day in the team's final home dual of the season.

Mendez, Carson Kharchla, Paddy Gallagher, Carter Chase, and Peyton Fenton were all honored for their contributions to the program, earning a standing ovation from the fans at Covelli Center throughout the ceremony.

Mendez, the most accomplished of Ohio State's graduating seniors, has claimed the last two national titles at 141 pounds, the 2024 Big Ten championship and has posted a 96-14 overall record in his four seasons with the Buckeyes. Mendez is looking to be just the third wrestler to claim three individual national championships during his time at Ohio State (Stieber and Kyle Snyder).

Kharchla is in the midst of his seventh year with the Ohio State program, having competed for the Buckeyes since the 2019-20 season. A product of Olentangy Liberty in Powell, Ohio, Kharchla has qualified for nationals and the Big Ten championships in three of the last four seasons. Despite a slew of injuries, he has compiled an 80-22 overall record at Ohio State.

Gallagher, a redshirt senior, has won at least 11 matches in every season, earning a 57-30 record overall. The fifth-year was awarded an Ohio State Black Shirt, which are given to Buckeye wrestlers who exemplify the program's elite standards on a dai-

ly basis, on Feb. 23, 2023, and qualified for the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments both in 2023 and 2025.

Carter Chase, the older brother of fellow Buckeye wrestler Daxton, earned a 16-11 record and a 4-0 first-place finish at 165 in the Storm Open in 2023.

Fenton spent one year at Virginia before transferring to Ohio State, where he has spent the last three seasons.

Following Ohio State's dual against Iowa, 197-pound redshirt sophomore Luke Geog reflected on the impact the Buckeyes' senior class has had on him and the program both on and off the mat.

"So those five guys I'm pretty close with, especially Jesse, Carson, Carter Chase and Paddy. Actually, I went to high school with Paddy, so those guys are my boys, and I love all those guys," Geog said. "I'm going to be upset when they leave because I love going on road trips with them and spending time with them, but I just wish them the best as they go into the postseason. I hope they're clear minded and they achieve what they want to get out of the sport, because I know it eventually comes to an end someday. So I'm excited for them, and just wish them the best, and can't wait to go on a couple more rides with them as we end this season."

## Bucks Down U-M, Iowa

Ohio State dominated rival Michigan (8-4, 4-2 Big Ten), 26-16, on Feb. 1 at the Covelli Center. The Buckeyes raced out to an early advantage they never relinquished.

At 125 pounds, Ohio State's No. 2 Nic Bouzakis opened the dual with a six-point fall at 3:47 against No. 24 Diego Sotelo, before No. 2 Ben Davino and No. 1 Mendez extended the Buckeyes lead to 16-0 with back-to-back technical falls.

With No. 7 Ethan Stiles and No. 1 Brandon Cannon out at 149 and 157 pounds, respectively, Brogan Fielding dropped a 15-3 major decision to No. 13 Lachlan McNeil in Stiles' place. At 157 pounds, Landon Desselle was pinned by No. 14 Cameron Catrabone in 1:36, trimming the OSU lead back to six.

No. 17 Paddy Gallagher and No. 5 Carson Kharchla battled back for Ohio State as each earned decisions in the 165- and 174-pound weight classes to push Ohio State's lead back to 22-10.

Although Michigan's No. 7 Brock Mantana earned a 4-1 decision over No. 8 Dylan Fishback and No. 5 Taye Ghadiali topped No. 3 Nick Feldman 4-1 in a sudden victory period, Ohio State's No. 10 Luke Geog sealed the Buckeyes' win with an 11-3 major decision against the Wolverines' No. 18 Hayden Walters.

In Ohio State's next dual on Feb. 6, it was No. 5 Iowa (9-5, 2-3 Big Ten) that managed to get out to a quick start over the Buckeyes.

The match began at 157 pounds and Hawkeyes won the first three matches by decision to gain an early 9-0 advantage. However, it was all Buckeyes from there as Ohio State won the next seven bouts including a major decision win from Geog and a technical fall from Mendez, ultimate-

ly giving Ohio State a 24-9 victory and its 17th consecutive dual win to start the year.

## Feldman Named B1G Wrestler of the Week

Following two straight road victories over top 10 opponents, Ohio State heavyweight Feldman was named the Big Ten Wrestler of the Week.

The Quarryville, Penn., native opened his week on Jan. 23 with an 11-2 major decision over Minnesota's No. 10 Koy Hopke to help the Buckeyes seal their 29-9 victory over the Gophers.

Feldman faced a much more dire situation during Ohio State's dual against Nebraska on Jan. 25. With the Buckeyes trailing 16-14 heading into the heavyweight bout, Feldman needed a win over No. 4 A.J. Ferrari to prevent Ohio State's first dual loss of the season.

After three periods, the score was tied 1-1 with each wrestler recording an escape. Sending the match to a sudden victory. In the extra period, Feldman secured a takedown, earning a 4-1 decision over Ferrari to give the Buckeyes a 17-16 win over Nebraska.

Feldman is the second Buckeye to earn Big Ten Wrestler of the Week honors this season, joining Kharchla, who claimed the award on Dec. 18.

Since earning the honor, Feldman has been up and down for the Buckeyes. Feldman first earned a 6-4 decision over Wisconsin's No. 9 Braxton Amos before falling to Ghadiali.

## Next Up For Grapplers

Ohio State (17-0, 6-0 Big Ten) will cap off its regular season by hitting the road for a pair of Big Ten duals.

The Buckeyes will first match up against No. 1 Penn State (13-0, 7-0 Big Ten) at 7 p.m. on Feb. 13 at the Bryce Jordan Center in University Park, Pa.

Penn State has consistently served as the primary obstacle for Ohio State in its pursuit of Big Ten and NCAA championships. The Nittany Lions, led by head coach Cael Sanderson, have captured 12 of the past 14 national titles and nine of the last 15 conference championships.

Penn State boasts eight wrestlers ranked in the top five of their weight classes and the top-ranked wrestler nationally at a whopping six weight classes with Luke Lilledahl (125 pounds), Shayne Van Ness (149), Mitchell Mesenbrink (165), Levi Haines (174), Rocco Welsh (184) and Josh Barr (197) each at No. 1. Welsh spent two seasons at Ohio State before transferring to Penn State last offseason.

Ohio State will then cap off its regular season with Maryland (4-8, 0-7 Big Ten) at 2 p.m. on Feb. 15 at the Stephen M. Schanwald Pavilion at XFINITY Center in College Park, Md.

Maryland won the first four matches of its season, but is coming off eight straight dual losses. The Terrapins feature three ranked wrestlers with No. 13 Braxton Brown at 133 pounds, No. 4 Carter Young at 149 pounds and No. 17 Branson John at 197 pounds.



Tom Ryan

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# OSU Hoops Is Proof That Experience Matters

It really isn't all that difficult to make the NCAA Tournament, so the fact that the Ohio State men's basketball is on course to miss it for the fourth straight season should set off alarm bells.

It is unclear when the administration decided that basketball was an afterthought, but it is clear that there was little desire for excellence with the hiring of Jake Diebler. After its home loss to Michigan on Feb. 8, Diebler's coaching record slipped to 32-22 in his two full seasons, and that is not going to get it done.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

The Buckeyes' last invitation to March Madness came in 2022, where they made it to the round of 32, losing to Villanova as a seventh seed.

A seven seed is impossible this season, but most OSU fans would settle for any seed – but even that seems like a pipe-dream.

Ohio State had a chance to make a championship hire after firing Chris Holtmann but decided to go the safe route and elevate Diebler from his assistant coach role. Considering that he was part of the Holtmann regime, which struggled so mightily in its final two seasons, it's hard to see the wisdom in that move.

When you throw in the fact that Michigan coach Dusty May – seen as the other top candidate after guiding Florida Atlantic to a 60-13 mark from 2022-24 with a Final Four berth – was still available when the Buckeyes tabbed Diebler, it's even more mind-boggling. There was also talk that John Calipari – with Final Four trips with three different teams and a national title with Kentucky – had interest but was ultimately passed over. He took the Arkansas gig and had the Hogs in the top 25 in the KenPom ratings this season after guiding the team to the Sweet 16 in 2024-25.

Looking at recent Ohio State basketball history, it's pretty clear that the best move is to pick someone with prior head coaching experience.

In my lifetime, OSU hoops starts with the man who brought the Buckeyes to hardwood prominence, Fred Taylor. He was an assistant for one season before getting the full-time gig, but since he took over prior to my arrival on this mortal coil, he is excluded.

That means we start with Eldon Miller. He was at Ohio State for 10 seasons, winning just under 60 percent of his games after being hired from Western Michigan (where he took the Broncos to the Sweet 16 in 1976). Miller led Ohio State to four 20-win campaigns and five finishes in the league's top five, with four NCAA appearances in his final seven seasons. He was fired after leading OSU to the NIT championship and 176 victories in Columbus.

Miller was replaced by Gary Williams, who went 59-41 in just three seasons but injected life back into the program with im-

proved recruiting. Williams had led Boston College to two Sweet 16 appearances in four seasons and was seen as a burgeoning star in the profession. While many dislike Williams for the way he "used" Ohio State to procure his next job, the fact remains that the Buckeyes made the postseason in all three of his seasons and never won fewer than 19 games. He went on to lead Maryland to the 2002 national championship.

Williams' departure led to Ohio State elevating assistant Randy Ayers to the head coaching spot, and after a fast start, which included 53 wins over the span of two seasons and an Elite Eight berth, things tailed off quickly. Over Ayers' last five seasons, Ohio State never won more than 15 games.

That led to Ohio State tapping the Boston College well once more with Jim O'Brien. Obie led the Eagles to the Elite 8 in 1994 and back-to-back NCAA appearances in 1996 and 1997. Expectations were cautiously high, and after an eight-win campaign in year one, the Buckeyes won 27, 23, 20 and 24 games over the next four seasons. The 1999 team was his best and made the Final Four, though it is no longer recognized due to alleged recruiting improprieties committed by O'Brien, who later sued the school for breach of contract and won a \$2.74 million resolution from Ohio State.

Enter Thad Matta, to this point OSU's second-best coach after Taylor. Matta put himself on the map by taking Butler to the NCAA in 2001 and Xavier to the Elite 8 in 2004. Matta's accomplishments at Ohio State are many – postseason berths in all but two of his 13 seasons; an Elite 8 berth; a Final Four run; a national runner-up season; an NIT title; and a school record for coaches with more than two seasons with a 73.3 winning percentage. Ohio State and Matta agreed mutually to part ways following the 2016-17 season as health issues became more pronounced. It was the first time in his career that one of his teams failed to win at least 20 games (18-15).

Ohio State figured if it could hit gold with a Butler coach once, why not do it again? That led to the hiring of Chris Holtmann, who looked like a veteran after leading the Buckeyes to 25 wins in his first season. Little did fans know that would be the apex of his time at Ohio State. Even though the next four seasons brought at least 20 victories, it always appeared to be a struggle. Double-digit losses accompanied the 20 wins, and the wheels came off in the final two seasons as OSU went 30-30, including a school-record 18-game road losing streak, before firing Holtman on Valentine's Day of 2024.

The administration could have shown that it valued basketball by bringing in someone with experience, but it chose the easy route and elevated Diebler.

And here we are.

The next hire – which may come sooner rather than later – must be someone with prior head coaching experience.

To say otherwise is to deny history.

### Quick Hits

\*The hiring of Arthur Smith as offensive coordinator was met with surprise and a

decent amount of negativity from Buckeye Nation, but if it had been paying attention, it would have known that Ryan Day was looking to do the same thing with the offense as he did with the defense.

Hiring Matt Patricia as defensive coordinator prior to the 2025 season brought NFL concepts to the table, and it paid off in spades as the Buckeyes led the nation in defense.

Day showed his hand during the season by allowing the offense to play at a very deliberate pace, and bringing in Smith should incorporate more NFL concepts on that side of the ball.

Smith has been a mixed bag as a coordinator, producing career years for running back Derrick Henry and Ryan Tannehill with the Titans in 2019 and finishing fourth in the NFL in scoring in 2020, but struggling a bit with the Steelers in 2024 and 2025. Pittsburgh's scoring decreased in 2024 to 22.4 points per game, which ranked 23rd in the league, but went up a tick to 23.3 in 2025, good for 15th.

Fans seem upset because they wanted a flashy hire. But what they failed to realize is that OSU merely needs a guy who can design elite run game concepts – much as Chip Kelly did in 2024 – to pair with Day's passing attack. It is not up for debate that Day knows quarterbacks and offense, and even with Smith favoring the run, there is no way that the offense in 2026 is going to ignore Jeremiah Smith, the best player in college football.

Here's an idea for fans – rather than deciding right now that the hire is a bad one, how about letting the season play out? Apparently, they don't remember the egg all over their faces after declaring Patricia's hiring a "disaster" before the 2025 campaign.

From this corner, the hiring is fine. It's not awe-inspiring, nor is it worrisome. My assumption is that if Day believes in the guy, he gets the benefit of the doubt.

\*Mike Vrabel won multiple Super Bowls as a player with the New England Patriots and became the first person in the history of the National Football League to coach the team he played for on the game's biggest stage. A win by the Patriots would have also given him the distinction of being the first person to win a Super Bowl as a player and a head coach.

Aside from Vrabel, there were other Buckeyes to root for in the Super Bowl.

Jaxson Smith-Njigba, fresh off of winning the league's Offensive Player of the Year award after rolling up nearly 1,800

receiving yards, was vital to Seattle's run to the Super Bowl, while former teammate TreVeyon Henderson flirted with a 1,000-yard season for the Patriots. Henderson amassed 911 yards and scored nine touchdowns as a rookie for the Pats and showed versatility with 35 receptions. Former OSU offensive lineman Thayer Munford came to the Patriots in late November and was part of their active roster for the big game.

\*Don't look now, but the Ohio State wrestling team is showing that it has a real shot at knocking Penn State off of its championship perch. The two teams will face off in a dual meet in State College on Feb. 13th, but that is secondary when compared to the NCAA championships.

This appears to be Tom Ryan's best squad since the 2015 bunch that took home all the marbles. The Buckeyes were dominant that year, outpacing the competition with 102 points and crowning a pair of individual champions in Nathan Tomasello (125 pounds) and Logan Stieber (149). OSU also had a runner-up in Kyle Snyder and a third-place finisher in Bo Jordan, and if it can get anywhere close to that kind of performance in Cleveland March 19-21, a national title is not out of the question.

It appears that two national champs, a runner-up, maybe a couple of third-place finishers and eight All-Americans (top eight finishers) would be enough for the Buckeyes to claim their second wrestling crown.

OSU's lineup is dotted with guys who can bring home a championship, notably No. 1-ranked Nic Bouzakis at 125 and two-time defending champ Jesse Mendez at 141. Freshman Ben Davino (133) and sophomore Brandon Cannon (157) are ranked No. 2 by WrestleStat, senior Carson Kharchla (174) is No. 4 and junior Nick Feldman (HWT) is fifth.

Junior Dylan Fishback (184) is No. 8, sophomore Ethan Stiles (149) won All-America honors at Oregon State last season and comes in at No. 10, junior Luke Geog (197) is No. 11 and senior Paddy Gallagher (165) slots in at No. 18.

In an interesting twist, the top-ranked wrestler at 184 is Penn State's Rocco Welsh, who finished as national runner-up at 174 for Ohio State in 2024.

The last time the championships were in Cleveland was 2018, with Penn State edging the Buckeyes for the crown 141.5 to 134.5.



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# Snow Job By USPS Benefits BSB Readers

As I was writing in this space last issue, I watched the snowstorm around me and wondered if the inclement weather would affect the delivery of that issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. I spend 23 issues a year pretty much bashing the post office for its poor delivery of BSB. Right now, before I get to the editorial business at hand, I wanted to praise the workers of USPS for what we considered pretty good delivery of the last issue.

We mail ourselves a BSB for quality-control purposes, and it came on Saturday, Jan. 31. Normally – granted not always – we would have gotten it two days earlier. We were expecting much worse. We immediately started getting reports from readers who were getting their papers as well.

Think about it. On Monday the 26th, postal workers could not get into work, and delivery vehicles were buried under snow. On Tuesday, some roads were passable and workers started to get to work and vehicles were unburied, but residential streets were still impassable. Suddenly, the mail is starting to stack up. Ultimately the mail, including BSB, started to move, and I take my hat off to the dedicated postal workers who got the logjam unjammed. Two weeks later, I hope most of you have your BSB.

I have never felt that the delivery issues were on the postal workers, but rather the postal system as it has been rearranged. Good job, postal guys and gals.

## 25 Years Ago: Tressel Hired

I can't decide if it seems like a long time ago or not so long ago at all. But 25 years ago, Ohio State, much to the disappointment of many, hired Youngstown State coach Jim Tressel to replace John Cooper.

We have a nice article on Tressel's hiring and the early days of his tenure on page 30 of this issue. Despite any trepidation about the hiring, Tressel quickly won Buckeye fans over with his famed "310 Days" speech, promising pride in the outcome of that year's Michigan game.

"People were absolutely thrilled and excited with that, because John (Cooper), as much as I like John the person, he didn't understand how to win the Michigan game, and Tressel came in and immediately hit people with that," longtime Ohio State athletic administrator Larry Romanoff said of Tressel's remarks. "It was an amazing speech. He didn't use a note. He could just talk off the top of his head. I was ready to jump up and cheer when I heard him talk. I think all of my friends were absolutely pumped when he said that, and I know I was."

Or, as former Buckeye Sports Bulletin editor Steve Helwage, now with 247 Sports, said simply 25 years later:

"Hindsight is 20-20, but they most certainly got the right guy at the right time and at the right place, and he came in, and he hit the ground running. He was probably working 20-hour days, and what he did in the short amount of time just to salvage the recruiting class was incredible."

That remarkable recruiting effort was an early indication of Tressel's energy and ability and a preview of what was to come in the next 10 years. He had just under three weeks between his hiring and National Signing Day.

"I know in the first four or five days I was here, I think I was hoping we would just reach double digits (in signees)," Tressel said on National Signing Day in 2001. "I thought we'd be lucky to do that."

"I was confident we would do the best we could do. How good that would be, I didn't know. That's why I just put my head down and went."

"But to finish like this is a credit to everybody here."

On signing day alone, he got commitments

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

from Florida running back Lydell Ross and Ohio standouts running back Maurice Hall and defensive back Dustin Fox. The class of 17 also included such future Buckeye stalwarts as Simon Fraser, Chris Gamble, Mike Nugent and Chris Vance.

Helwage also praised Tressel for how he embraced Cooper's players, many of whom eventually went on to play large roles in the Buckeyes' 2002 national championship.

"That's what you see with coaches in a lot of these positions," Helwage said. "They go into these jobs, and their ego is like, 'No, it's my system, we're going to get my players in here.' That's not what Jim Tressel did. Jim Tressel showed up, and he said, 'OK, these people were all recruited here by John Cooper, but they're now our players, as many of them who want to stay with us. They're our players, and we think we can win with how we play football.'"

It was pretty clear early on that there was a new sheriff in town.

## Recruiting In The Interim

It's ironic that this is BSB's annual Recruiting Wrap-Up. If you look at the Big Ten Recruiting Wrap-Up on page 24 you will notice that conference teams like Penn State and UCLA, name teams that made coaching changes this season, struggled with their recruiting classes.

So how did Ohio State, which was without a coach for over two weeks after Cooper was fired and had only about three weeks to work with, manage to recover and cobble together a class that was ultimately ranked No. 14 in the country?

A lot of it was obviously Tressel with his hard work and personality. But it was also the hard work that the assistants Cooper left behind, spearheaded by Bill Conley, put in while the coaching search continued. I found Conley's comments on how you carry on amidst the uncertainty without a head coach fascinating.

"It wasn't the easiest thing in the world, but most of the coaches still worked at it pretty hard," Conley said when asked about recruiting during the period when Ohio State didn't have a head coach. "We had a couple of recruiting weekends. Of course, it's tough to get commitments from guys who don't know who the head coach is, but they made their visits and all of the relations were pretty good."

Still, with players not knowing who their head coach would be or even the identity of their future position coach, assistant coaches had to rely on the tradition and brand of Ohio State.

"You sold the school, you sold Columbus, Ohio, and the chance of a great career after football is over in central Ohio, and the other thing we still sold was the great Ohio State football tradition, which was still strong no matter who was going to be hired," Conley said.

## Tressel On The Offensive

Despite the dramatic speech and the great recruiting effort, things didn't necessarily get off to a fast start for the Buckeyes under Tressel.

"There were people who looked at the offense and thought, 'Man, this is like 1974 again. We're trying to run the football, and we don't throw the football a whole lot.'" Helwage recalled. "Jim Bollman, the offensive coordinator, when they hired him, said, 'If we win a game 3-2, we are OK with that.' And everyone's like, 'Oh, my God, you can't be serious.' It was kind of crazy, but he was obviously exaggerating. In 2001, they lost some close games. They didn't have Big Ten-caliber players at some key positions. Not to throw any

one player or two players under the bus, but they were lacking in some key positions."

This negative offensive narrative was quickly reinforced in the second game of the season, when the Buckeyes went to UCLA and lost to the Bruins, 13-6. The Buckeyes had just 166 yards of total offense with 45 yards passing on a 5-of-23 performance by Steve Bellisari with two interceptions. Ohio State had no offensive points, their lone score coming on a blocked punt by Ricky Bryant in the first quarter.

You can see how Buckeye fans might be edgy. But all was forgiven on Nov. 24 when Ohio State, 310 days later, defeated Michigan, 26-20. In that game, the Buckeyes, sparked by three touchdowns in the first half by Jonathan Wells including a 46-yarder, took a 23-0 lead into the locker room and then held on for dear life in the second half for the victory. The Buckeyes had 181 yards in the first half and just 74 in the second.

I bring the 2001 offense up to lead into a discussion on a game a few years later that I somehow had forgotten about.

Tressel was never known as an offensive guru the likes of Urban Meyer or Ryan Day, though he was the coach who called, or at least approved, the Holy Buckeye pass at Purdue that extended Ohio State's undefeated season in 2002 on the way to the national championship. (Jim Bollman was the offensive coordinator, but most always speculated that Tressel was really the OC.)

The game I stumbled across came a couple of years later, and Day or Meyer would certainly have been proud. I just don't know how I could have forgotten this one.

Ohio State met Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl following the 2005 season. Ohio State's point total in the 34-20 victory was not excessive. But Ted Ginn Jr. scored on a 56-yard pass from Troy Smith and ran for a 68-yard score on a reverse. Santonio Holmes scored on an 85-yard pass from Smith, and Antonio Pittman capped off the scoring with a 60-yard run of his own.

That's a lot of "explosives" as they would call them today. The Buckeyes ran up 617 yards of total offense against the No. 6 Irish, and the score could have been even higher, but kicker Josh Huston had two field-goal attempts blocked.

"It was the oft-maligned OSU offense that really took the spotlight during the Fiesta Bowl," I wrote in this space after the game. "Everyone has known that the Buckeyes have the necessary personnel on offense. But this may have been the first time all season that Ohio State really displayed all of its weapons."

"Quarterback Troy Smith and wide receiver Tedd Ginn Jr. both put in their bids on national television for early Heisman consideration for next season. Receiver Santonio Holmes and tailback Antonio Pittman also had huge games. If those guys are all posting big plays, you have to assume the offensive line is doing its job as well."

As it turns out I was right about Smith showcasing for the Heisman in 2006, which he won roughly 12 months later. He was 19 of 28 for 342 yards and two scores without an interception, and for good measure he added 66 yards rushing on 13 carries for a 5.1-yard average. Notre Dame's more ballyhooed Brady Quinn was 29 of 45 for 286 yards without a touchdown. He was sacked five times.

Ginn caught eight passes for 167 yards and ran twice for 73 yards. Holmes contributed five catches for 124 yards, and Pittman had 21 carries for 136 yards and a 6.5-yard average.

Here's a question for you.

These days we always talk about the great receiver tandems the Buckeyes have fielded in recent years such as Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate or Smith and Emeka Egbuka or Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr., or the trio of Jaxon Smith Njigba, Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave, etc.

How about Ginn and Holmes? That's a pretty good tandem. Ginn had a 14-year NFL career and Holmes nine years. Holmes was also the Super Bowl XLIII MVP.

By the way, one of the receivers on the bench in that 2005 season was a freshman named Brian Hartline.

## Reaching Out To Loyal Readers

Please see my publisher's note on page 5 of this issue. We are reaching out to readers to help us keep Buckeye Sports Bulletin vibrant and informative. While we always make an effort to find a subscription price that works for all loyal subscribers, we are reaching out to those who can afford a little more to help underwrite those readers on a fixed income or are a little less fortunate.

There are ways that even those of lesser means but who enjoy that paper can help and I will be suggesting some of them as we go along. Don't forget you can become a BSB VIP for as little as \$50 a year. By the time you get your gift cards, the net cost of your VIP donation is just \$20.

We are also encouraging more readers to upgrade to first-class mail in an envelope, even if only for football season. Act now and you can upgrade at last year's rate, \$35 through the Michigan game or \$45 through the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up in February. Those rates will be going up. To help you enjoy the paper in a timelier fashion, we have also temporarily lowered the annual first-class rate to \$199.95.

Here's an interesting way you can make a modest donation to Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

As I have indicated in the last two issues, the number of replacement issues we had to send out at \$3 each last year was crippling. We are no more responsible for the time it takes for your BSB to arrive than you are. Yet after the designated waiting period, when you call we immediately send out a replacement – that day if the post office is still open.

Frequently, the paper we originally sent you comes before the replacement issue which we mailed first class, thus causing us to essentially lose \$3 for the sake of providing good, but costly, service.

Here's my suggestion for a modest donation. If we sent you six replacement papers last season, donate the additional \$18 we had to spend. If we replaced four issues, send \$12. And to my good friend in Merrillville, Ind., who has been with us for 40 years and calls virtually every issue for a replacement, *please* upgrade to first-class mail, at least for football season. We lose money on your subscription every year!

In case anyone was wondering, Indiana is far and away our worst mail state, although places such as northwest Ohio, the Dayton area and the Mahoning Valley in Ohio are right up there.

Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 and we will explain all of your options for supporting BSB or upgrading to first class. We are working very hard with our readers to rebuild after last year.

If you prefer to pay by mail, send your order to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. If you are paying with a credit card, don't forget your three- or four-digit code.