



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BACK AT IT** – The start of spring practice on March 10 brings excitement and questions for the Ohio State football team and head coach Ryan Day (above) with quarterback Julian Sayin and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith returning for what could be a more potent offense under new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith, while second-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia will once again have to replace eight starters.

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## Ohio State Gears Up For Spring Practices

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As winter fades into spring in Columbus, the Ohio State football team will take its first step toward a promising 2026 season on March 10 with the start of spring practices.

The Buckeyes will hope to build on a successful string of seasons, which has included such accomplishments as a national championship, a 12-win regular season and their first win over Michigan since 2019.

Still, replacing 37 transfer portal-bound players, former offensive coordinator Brian Hartline and 13 others who either declared for the NFL draft or ran out of eligibility, Ohio State has plenty of question marks that it will hope to sort out during the spring period.

But for all the players to replace, the Buckeyes have answers at a couple of key positions, according to Joey Kaufman of The Columbus Dispatch.

"They have continuity at probably the most important position at quarterback, with (rising sophomore) Julian Sayin," Kaufman said. "This is kind of a rare opportunity for them. It's the first time since C.J. Stroud in 2022 that they've had a returning starting quarterback. They've had so much movement at that position in the last three years. Sayin was the third starter in three years. So I think getting him back with experience and upside is really valuable."

"Then obviously you have (rising junior wide receiver) Jeremiah Smith, who, if you're going to draft college football players to be on your team, he would probably be No. 1, or, if not that, in the top five. If you're going to build a team, that's a pretty good place to start. Sayin having room to grow should give Ohio State some optimism."

While newly hired offensive coordinator Arthur Smith is in his first year with the Buckeyes, defensive coordinator Matt Patricia will officially be back for his second season as the leader of the Silver Bullets, according to a report from the Dispatch that Patricia confirmed on Instagram.

"He was always committed to staying here," athletic director Ross Bjork told the Dispatch. "I know his family loves it. His kids have fit in well. We just kept a constant dialogue before we got to an agreement with him."

With spring football right around the corner, BSB spoke to Kaufman, Patrick Murphy, who covers Ohio State for 247Sports, and former Ohio State safety Tyvis Powell to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the team, the players they are expecting to break out, and the importance of the spring period for Arthur Smith, among many other topics.

### Offense Should Be Strength Of OSU

Ohio State's offense was less-than-stellar during the 2025 season. That much was proved during the team's only two postseason games against eventual national championship participants Indiana and Miami (Fla.). Against the Hoosiers and the Hurricanes in the Big Ten championship and Cotton Bowl, respectively, Ohio State combined to score only 24 points.

Like Kaufman, Murphy feels the offense should be much improved this season. Unlike the defense, Ohio State's offense primarily includes returning starters. The Buckeyes return only 11 starters this year, but eight of those players are on offense.

"At least on paper, it looks like it will be a more offense-focused team, given what you have coming back," Murphy said. "Obviously, having Julian Sayin back as a second-year starting quarterback, I think, should enhance what the offense has done. If you look at what Ryan Day's offenses have been like when a quarterback has a second year with (Justin Fields) and C.J. Stroud, usually there's a pretty decent jump there."

"Then you add in Jeremiah Smith and (rising sophomore running back) Bo Jackson. I think some of the transfer-portal guys may not be big names like (former LSU receiver) Kyle Parker and (former UTSA receiver) Devin McCuin, even (former Florida running back) Ja'Kobi Jackson, but I think those are all guys that could certainly have a role."

The skill-position players weren't really the problem for Ohio State last season. Wide receivers Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate earned All-America honors, and Sayin was a Heisman Trophy finalist after a sensational first season leading the Buckeyes.

Ohio State struggled to run the football throughout the season, and in the postseason, the offensive line struggled to

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# FAN FORUM



## From The Message Board

**Spring football is approaching quickly, with the first Ohio State practice on March 10. With a new roster beginning its try at a Big Ten and national championship, we asked our subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what questions they have about the roster that they want to see answered during spring practices. We also asked if there were any position battles or players they are most excited to watch.**

"My question about the roster probably won't be answered in the spring, but will the OL look as good as it did during the first 12 games or as bad as it looked in the last two games of last season? Position battles? I'll say DE. Players I'm eager to see would be Legend Bey and the assortment of new WRs."

— Terrier Buck

"Really interested to see the LB rotation with Riley Pettijohn, Payton Pierce, Christian Alliegro, TJ Alford, etc."

— gold\_pants

"I'm most intrigued to see the wide receiver depth chart take shape in the spring. Specifically, who will end up earning the WR2 spot alongside WR1 Jeremiah Smith and slot receiver Brandon Inniss? The battle at right guard between Josh

Padilla and Gabe VanSickle could potentially go down to the wire, with the two each rotating in for Tegra Tshabola at times in 2025. While last season's transfer portal additions weren't as successful as the loaded 2024 transfer class, I'm curious to see if the two Alabama transfers, Qua Russaw and James Smith, will make an immediate impact."

— Sam Cipriani, BSB

"I know Ohio State is bringing back a lot of experience on the offensive line, but that is still a position that needs to improve next season. The offensive line may not improve a lot during spring practices, but they need to improve during the season for the Buckeyes to reach their goals. I think the position battle at the other outside wide receiver spot opposite Jeremiah Smith is really intriguing. It'll be very interesting to

see if Chris Henry Jr. is ready to step up as a true freshman."

— Bobby Gorbett, BSB

"My biggest question is the offensive line at this point. It was the biggest weakness in the two games Ohio State lost, and they didn't go into the portal to address that position. More experience can only help, but how much will it help? In terms of position battles, I am waiting to see, linebacker is a big one, and right guard. What will the tight end rotation look like? I'm also interested to see how the interior defensive line shakes out. As individual players go, I want to see how fast Legend Bey really is. Also, will Terry Moore be able to get back to form after not playing all of last season?"

— Greg Wilson, BSB

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# Putting The 'Mock' In Mock Drafts

On the heels of the self-styled recruiting experts doling out star ratings to high school players, most of whom they've never seen in person, comes the barely controlled chaos of the NFL combine followed by another season of "mock drafts" during which pundits, podcasters and anyone else with a microphone and unlimited time on their hands offer opinions on the order of the upcoming NFL draft, set to begin April 23 in Pittsburgh.

I realize that recruiting high school talent has slipped a bit as a cultural phenomenon, replaced by an easier and more direct way to supplement a college roster – namely, the transfer portal. And having attended a couple of combines as well as pro days, there isn't much one can glean from individual shirtless bodies running, jumping and throwing.

That leaves the draft projections, heavy on the "mock" part (as in mockery) and light on the draft since no one (including most of the teams themselves) know what players will be available to them once their number is called.

I'll concentrate on perhaps the most famous of the so-called draft gurus, ESPN's Mel Kiper Jr., who has been offering his projections since 1984. How accurate is Kiper? Not very. According to outlets who track such things, Kiper's accuracy for the first round of the four NFL drafts from 2005 to 2008 was just 25.2 percent. In 2023, he correctly predicted only one of the 31 draftees in the first round. That's a 0.3-percent accuracy rate even though he routinely updates his picks up until the first overall choice is formally announced.

Be that as it may, Kiper has made a lot of money with his mock drafts, and this year he has placed five Ohio State players in his first round, including four among the first seven picks. As of this writing, Kiper projects Caleb Downs with the No. 2 pick to the Jets, Arvell Reese at No. 4 to the Titans, Carnell Tate at No. 6 to the Browns, Sonny Styles at No. 7 to the Commanders and Kayden McDonald at No. 25 to the Bears.

By way of comparison, The Athletic offers several mock drafts that combine the predictions of the website's NFL beat writers. One such offering, published Feb. 24, had the same four Buckeyes as Kiper going in the top 10, but in a slightly jumbled order – Reese at No. 2 to the Jets, Downs at No. 5 to the Giants, Tate at No. 9 to the Chiefs and Styles at No. 10 to the Bengals.

For Downs' sake with regard to Kiper, and Reese's sake in The Athletic, let's hope both of those projections are dead wrong. Simply stated, the Jets are a dumpster fire of a franchise that has enjoyed exactly one winning season since last making the playoffs in 2010. Furthermore, that team has been extremely detrimental to the health of former Buckeyes.

With the notable exception of Garrett Wilson, who has led the Jets in receiving ever since entering the league in 2022 with no All-Pro honors or Pro Bowl appearances to show for it, East Rutherford has been a career death trap for Ohio State players.

Justin Fields started nine games for the Jets this past season and threw for only 1,259 yards and seven TDs. He averaged nearly 2,700 yards and more than 30 TDs during the two years he started at Ohio State, and one of those was the truncated 2020 season.

Tight end Jeremy Ruckert, taken by the Jets in the third round of the 2022 draft, has just 58 catches in 58 games over four seasons with the team. Defensive tackle Jalyn Holmes and cornerback Kendall Sheffield had brief non-descript stints with New York in recent years, and linebacker Darron Lee – currently in the headlines for all the wrong reasons – had three

decent years with the Jets, but nothing like what was expected from the 2016 draft's No. 20 overall pick.

There have been outliers, of course. Nick Mangold was an All-America center at Ohio State before becoming a two-time All-Pro and seven-time Pro Bowler after being drafted by the Jets in the first round of the 2006 draft.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

But two years later, New York selected OSU defensive end Vernon Gholston with the sixth overall pick in 2008 and ruined him. While the Buckeyes took full advantage of the 6-4, 258-pound Gholston's bull-rushing ability, Jets coaches – including three different defensive line coaches – had their minds set on turning Gholston into a finesse player. The result? Just three tackles for loss and zero sacks in 45 games over three seasons and the forever tag of an NFL draft bust.

In case you're interested, Kiper's final mock draft in 2008 slotted Gholston as the No. 4 pick to the then-Oakland Raiders.

## Strange But True

While doing research for another project, I found another one of those head-scratching pieces of information that defies logic.

Did you know that Michael Jenkins, who since 2003 has held the Ohio State program record for most career receiving yardage, did not catch a single pass until his 16th game as a Buckeye? Astonishing but true.

Jenkins saw three games of limited action on special teams during his true freshman season in 1999 (preserving a redshirt year) and then despite appearing in all 12 games during the 2000 season, he failed to log a single reception. During that same stretch, guys like Nate Stead, Tim Cheatwood and Tony Locke had at least one catch. Even quarterback Steve Bellisari had two receptions for a total of 29 yards during that span.

Jenkins made up for lost time beginning in the 2001 season opener with six catches for 106 yards during a 28-14 win against Akron, although it took six more games before he got his first career touchdown pass, a 66-yarder from Bellisari during a 29-27 loss at Penn State. That was part of a sophomore season that had Jenkins lead the Buckeyes with 988 receiving yards.

Jenkins led the team in receiving in each of the next two seasons as well, making him only the third player since World War II to lead OSU in receiving yardage for three straight years. The others are Doug Donley (1978-80) and Chuck Bryant (1959-61).

Finishing with 2,898 career receiving yards, Jenkins held off a run at his record from Emeka Egbuka (2,868), although it seems Jeremiah Smith will likely take it down in 2026. Smith enters this fall with 2,558 career yards, needing only to remain healthy and 341 more yards to dethrone Jenkins.

## Time And Change

As long as we're on the subject of trivial tidbits, would you believe Dabo Swinney at Clemson is the only head coach among the 13 teams on Ohio State's 2016 schedule who is still on the job?

The other dozen coaches on that slate include names you know such as Bob Stoops

of Oklahoma, who retired after the 2016 season; Jim Harbaugh of Michigan (now with the NFL's Los Angeles Chargers); Pat Fitzgerald of Northwestern (who just took over at Michigan State); and James Franklin of Penn State (who wound up at Virginia Tech).

Some others have ridden off into relative obscurity.

The Buckeyes kicked off their 2016 season against Bowling Green and head coach Mike Jinks, who had been a successful high school coach in Texas for 17 years before landing his first college job as an assistant at Texas Tech in 2014. Two years later, he landed at Bowling Green where he was 7-24 before being fired midway through the 2018 season.

You might remember that Nebraska was coached in 2016 by Mike Riley, a suitable poster child for the coaching carousel. Including a three-year stint with the Cornhuskers, the 72-year-old Riley made 17 stops during a coaching career that lasted nearly 50 years. Riley guided Nebraska to a nine-win season in 2016, and the Cornhuskers haven't won that many games in any season since.

Then there was Philip Montgomery, who was in the second season of what would become an eight-year stay at Tulsa. Montgomery was fired after the 2022 season and bounced around until joining Virginia Tech as offensive coordinator last year. After head coach Brent Pry was let go just three games into the season, Montgomery was named interim head coach, and he served in that capacity until the Hokies hired Franklin last November.

And in a bit of a twist, Franklin chose not to retain Montgomery, but he did bring back Pry as defensive coordinator and linebackers coach, duties Pry performed on Franklin's staffs at Vanderbilt and Penn State for more than a decade.

## Rich Getting Richer

I'm sure it came to the surprise of nearly no one that the Big Ten recently reported revenue of about \$3 billion for the 2025 fiscal year that began with four West Coast schools joining the conference.

Although the league's final statement has yet to be released, financial reports for athletics are now public record for the Big Ten's 16 non-private institutions. (Northwestern and USC are private schools and not required by law to release their reports.) It also should come as no surprise that the league's richest schools are getting richer.

Among the top three revenue generators, according to a report released Feb. 26 by The Athletic, Ohio State took in more than \$336 million during the 2025 fiscal year followed by Michigan (\$275.8 million) and Penn State (nearly \$255 million). On the other end of scale sat Maryland, which reported \$124 million.

As a group, the league's 16 public athletic departments reported about \$3.118 billion in revenue but spent \$3.126 billion in the 2025 fiscal year. That is an overall deficit of about \$4 million, a veritable drop in the bucket when the conversation is mostly about billions.

So the next time you think about the salaries of Curt Cignetti, Ryan Day, Matt Campbell and Kyle Whittingham (estimated at nearly \$42 million combined just for 2026), the price of a gold parking pass at Michigan Stadium (about \$2,000 a year) or how much a slice of pizza and cup of beer cost at the Horseshoe (about eight bucks apiece), maybe you'll realize how inflation works with regard to college athletics.



**Patricia Returning For 2026 Season**

Ohio State is bringing back defensive coordinator Matt Patricia for the 2026 season. The news was confirmed by Patricia in a video posted to Instagram.

"Buckeye Nation, I'm so excited to share the news that I've extended my contract and will be staying in Columbus," Patricia said. "I'm so appreciative of all your support. The fans have been unbelievable. I'm certainly thankful to Coach (Ryan) Day and his trust in me with the defense, our athletic director Ross (Bjork), his staff, our coaching department, and all of the players. I'm just so thankful to be here."

After one season as the coordinator for Ohio State, during which the Buckeye defense was the No. 1 unit in the country, Patricia was receiving interest from NFL teams to take over in the same position.

However, Patricia is now returning to Columbus for at least one more season after having been a finalist for the Broyles Award, which goes to the top assistant coach in college football. Indiana defensive coordinator Bryant Haines ultimately won the award.

The details of Patricia's new deal have not been reported, but his original contract was set to go through the 2027 season.

The 51-year-old Patricia had spent almost all of his coaching career at the NFL level before joining the Buckeyes for the 2025 season. His most recent college coaching experience was as a graduate assistant for Syracuse from 2001-03.

From there, he got a job with the New England Patriots as the assistant offensive line coach and ended up serving as the defensive coordinator from 2012-17. During his time with New England, Patricia won three Super

**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	

Bowls. He also served as head coach of the Detroit Lions from 2018-20.

**Styles Stars At Combine**

Former Ohio State linebacker Sonny Styles had a remarkable showing at the NFL scouting combine on Feb. 26.

The All-American had a 40-yard dash time of 4.46 seconds and posted a vertical jump of 43.5 inches, the second-best vertical jump of any linebacker ever, trailing only Penn State's Cameron Wake, who had a vertical jump of 45.5 inches in 2005.

Styles, who weighed in at 6-5, 244 pounds, had an 11-foot, 2-inch broad jump, the fourth best among linebackers ever at the combine.

Styles' broad jump, vertical jump and 40-yard dash were the best among this year's linebackers, with fellow Buckeye linebacker Arvell Reese running the same 4.46-second time in the 40-yard dash.

Heading into the combine, Styles was predicted by many to be selected high in the first round of the NFL draft, and following his outstanding display of athleticism, he could hear his name called even earlier than some experts previously expected.

Trevor Sikkema, the lead draft analyst for Pro Football Focus, foresees Styles being selected very early in April.

"This morning, Sonny Styles' draft range started at No. 5," Sikkema posted on Twitter after Styles' performance. "Now five feels like it could be his floor."

Buckeye Sports Bulletin will have com-

plete coverage of the combine in the March 21 issue.

**Downs Confident Heading Into Draft**

Former Ohio State safety Caleb Downs, who didn't participate in drills at the combine, has plenty of confidence in his abilities heading into the next level.

"My confidence level is always at the highest when I'm on the field," Downs said during a Feb. 26 interview. "The belief in myself really never goes down, no matter the circumstance. I feel like my mind really puts me above a lot of people, in terms of how I process the game and play with instincts. I feel like that's what makes me special."

Downs has plenty of reasons to have that self-confidence. He earned All-America honors in all three seasons in college and finished his three-year collegiate career with 257 total tackles, six interceptions and three forced fumbles.

Perhaps the only thing holding Downs back from being one of the first players selected in the NFL draft is his position. Former LSU safety Jamal Adams was the last safety to be selected in the top 10 of the NFL draft. Adams was selected with the No. 6 overall pick in the 2017 draft.

Even with the safety position not being valued as much as others, Downs is still projected to go somewhere in the top 10 of the upcoming draft.

Downs said he doesn't worry much about positional value because his film speaks for itself.

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The following Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers showed that they "Believe in BSB" by renewing their subscriptions for two years at full price. Additionally, there were dozens of readers who renewed for one year at full price. BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz thanks all participants in this initiative. Any new two-year renewal participants will be listed in the next issue of BSB. For information on how to participate, give us a call during regular business hours at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862.

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"At the end of the day, who's the best defender? It's not really positional value, it's who affects the game," Downs said. "If you affect the game in a lot of ways, that's what's most important. So that's really all I can worry about."

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With this issue Buckeye Sports Bulletin returns to its standard winter/spring biweekly print schedule after its annual three-week hiatus following the Football Recruiting Wrapup

The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the March 21 issue, is scheduled to be mailed on March 17. With spring football set to begin and the men's and women's basketball teams and the wrestling and hockey teams ready for postseason play, there is bound to be plenty of Buckeye news between now and the next issue.

There is no reason to miss any of the latest news. 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.

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Day, new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith and Patricia, as well as multiple other Buckeye coaches, as a featured speaker at Ohio State's 2026 coaches clinic.

The coaches' clinic will be held from April 16 to 18 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, concluding with Ohio State's spring game on April 18 and marking the end of spring practice, which begins on March 10.

Hailing from Sandusky, Ohio, Gruden began his head coaching tenure with the Raiders from 1998 to 2001 before he was traded to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2002-2008) in a blockbuster deal.

Gruden returned as the Raiders' head coach in 2018, guiding the team for two more seasons in Oakland and for slightly over one year following their move to Las Vegas at the end of the 2019 season.

He ultimately resigned in 2021 after a 3-2 start to the regular season due to a scandal revealing he sent inappropriate emails spanning from 2011-18. Gruden totaled a 117-112 record as a head coach.

Gruden also served as a color commentator on ESPN's "Monday Night Football" from 2009-18 and now works as a media personality for Barstool Sports.

### Kiper Projects 4 Bucks In Top 10

In a mock draft posted on Feb. 24, ESPN analyst Mel Kiper Jr. projected five Ohio State players to go in the first round of the upcoming NFL draft, which will be hosted in Pittsburgh from April 23-25.

Downs was slotted by Kiper as the second overall pick in the draft by the New York Jets and the first Ohio State player off the board. If selected second as Kiper predicted, Downs would become the highest-drafted safety since Eric Turner was selected No. 2 by the Cleveland Browns in 1991.

Two picks later, Reese was projected to land in Tennessee with the No. 4 overall pick to the Titans. Kiper projects that Reese could shift to edge rusher in Nashville after Tennessee struggled to generate pressure.

With the No. 6 pick in the draft, Kiper had wide receiver Cornell Tate being selected by the Cleveland Browns. Lacking a clear No. 1

wide receiver, Kiper has the Browns weighing their options between wideout and offensive tackle, but ultimately selecting Tate. During his junior season in 2025, Tate ranked second on Ohio State in nearly every major stat behind standout sophomore Jeremiah Smith, totaling 51 catches for 875 yards and nine touchdowns.

Immediately following Tate in the mock draft is Styles, whom Kiper had slated to be taken No. 7 overall by the Washington Commanders. His 6-4, 243-pound frame is drawing attention from multiple NFL teams. Styles was dominant at Ohio State in 2025, leading the team in tackles (82) while adding 6½ TFLs, three pass breakups, one sack, one forced fumble and one interception.

Rounding out the Buckeyes in the first round of Kiper's mock draft was defensive tackle Kayden McDonald. As the No. 25 overall pick by the Chicago Bears, McDonald is listed as Kiper's No. 1 defensive tackle in the

draft class and had a productive season for Ohio State in his junior campaign. McDonald finished with 65 tackles, nine TFLs, three sacks and two forced fumbles.

If Kiper's projection of five Buckeyes selected in the first round holds, Ohio State would tie for the third-most first-round picks from a single school in a draft, trailing only 2004 Miami (Fla.) and 2021 Alabama, which each had six.

### Carter Says NIL Model Not Sustainable

Amid rumors that many teams are spending much more than the revenue-sharing cap, Ohio State president Ted Carter believes the current NIL model is unsustainable. In an interview with Columbus 10TV's Dom Tiberi, Carter expressed concerns he has with the current model.

"I am worried. And I'll just say right up front, I'm not trying to make a headline," Car-

ter said. "It's not sustainable. If you look at the trajectory of when we started with the House v. NCAA (settlement) and where we've just gone in the last couple of years – yes, we're moving them out of third party to more interior, we've got this College Sports Commission that's supposed to help vet all this – it is not sustainable over the next three years unless something changes."

Schools have been allowed to share revenue with student-athletes when the 2025-26 academic year began, as Carter noted. However, as it currently stands, schools are allowed to share \$20.5 million in revenue. It's rumored that some schools are finding loopholes to spend much more than what is permitted.

Carter said Ohio State is still one of the top spenders, but he wonders how much longer the current model can remain the way it is.

"Ohio State is still competitive," he said. "There's only about five schools in the country that can play at this level right now in terms of NIL. Fortunately, we're one of them. But even at that level, especially when we want to field a really good men's basketball team, a women's basketball team and compete in other sports like ice hockey, it's not sustainable. Something's going to have to give."

Carter hopes the NCAA will implement tougher regulations to maintain the sport's integrity.

"I think there's going to have to be some rules that are put up like bumper pads on the bowling alley to kind of make sure that you're not throwing the gutter ball. And that hasn't happened yet," Carter said. "Whether it be at the NCAA level, whether it be the conference commissioners through the university presidents and chancellors getting together, or even legislation coming out of the government, something's going to have to accelerate this before it gets too far out of control. Some people would argue it already is now."

### Bjork Still For CFP Expansion

Although some fans are hesitant to see the

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# OHIO STATE

## INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

College Football Playoff expand, Bjork is in favor of the playoffs including more teams.

"I'm a believer in expansion," Bjork told Eleven Warriors for a story posted Feb. 11. "I think it's good for the game of football. The games have never been more popular. ... The fact that we have content that is valuable, live sporting content in today's environment where everything's sort of on demand, it has never been more valuable. Producing more content produces more revenue, which we

can give back to the players. I'm all for that side of the equation."

Over Day's entire tenure, Ohio State has been inside the top 10 of the Associated Press' final rankings, so they don't need much help to qualify for the postseason tournament, as Bjork pointed out.

"Selfishly, we should say, let's just go back to four," Bjork said. "Selfishly."

Still, Bjork thinks expansion would be positive for the entire sport.

"Now the competitive piece is, look, Ohio State's always been in the conversation. ... But I think (the CFP should expand) for the greater whole of the enterprise of college sports and the commercial activity, the content, the TV negotiations. I think it keeps the regular season more alive. If more teams are in the mix, these games are going to mean so much more than they already do, which again drives the value."

According to a report from ESPN's Pete Thamel, the Big Ten is favoring a 24-team CFP format that would give automatic byes to the top eight ranked teams. Bjork said he's OK with multiple formats for the College Football

Playoff, but he thinks expansion should not be overlooked.

"I can live with 16, I can live with 20, 24, whatever the number is, but I just think that it's too valuable right now in the current climate to overlook not expanding," Bjork said. "I think we need to expand sooner rather than later. The good thing is, even though we're going to stay at 12 for the 2026 season, that doesn't shut off any expansion talks for the '27 season. So talks are going to continue, conversations are going to continue, but I just think that given where we are in this landscape and the fact that the product is so valuable, let's create more compelling content and let's get to the right spot."

### Pate Says OSU Is No. 1 Program

Ohio State may not have won the national championship last year, but college football analyst Josh Pate, who hosts the popular YouTube show "Josh Pate's College Football Show," believes Day's program sits atop the sport.

In a video posted to his channel, Pate cited

Ohio State's recruiting and development as reasons for putting the Buckeyes over programs such as Georgia, Indiana, Oregon and Texas.

"I think Ohio State is the top program in the country," Pate said. "Ohio State is 37-6 over the past three years. They've got a national championship mixed in here. They are a top-five recruiting program in the country. They are a very, very high-value portal program – translation, they don't need to flood themselves with a bunch of transfers because they recruit and develop very well, but when they do need to, they can be very selective and very effective in the transfer portal."

The Buckeyes have had consistent success on and off the field under Day and won the national championship during the 2024-25 season. Under Day's leadership, Ohio State is 82-12 and won the Big Ten championship in Day's first two seasons. Pate also praised Day's ability to hire quality assistant coaches.

"They're just excellent at staffing," Pate said. "I don't know that many programs at all that are doing it better. Just think about what's

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1986

Fired on Feb. 4 effective at the end of the season as head basketball coach at Ohio State, Eldon Miller was hired 24 days later as head coach at the University of Northern Iowa.

"The potential of Northern Iowa basketball is really unlimited," said Miller of a school which competed in Division I in basketball and was a member of the Association of Mid-Continent Universities. "I believe that very strongly. The university has integrity. This is a university that wants to have a great basketball team."

Miller reportedly was one of at least 65 people to apply for the job of replacing Jim Berry, who had announced earlier in the season that he was stepping down after 13 years at the school.

Prior to being named to the UNI post, Miller was evasive with Columbus media.

After Ohio State's win over Iowa on Feb. 26, Miller was asked if he had been offered the job. He shrugged it off by saying: "Right now, I'm talking to a lot of people. I'm out of a job. I'll talk to anybody."

### 35 Years Ago — 1991

Thanks to a clutch free throw from junior guard Jamaal Brown, the Buckeyes took a 65-64 victory over Michigan State on March 3 and secured at least a share of the Big Ten championship.

The Buckeyes' title was the school's 14th basketball championship. Despite coming off a 20-year drought, Ohio State moved into a tie for third in the Big Ten in cage titles with Wisconsin, which hadn't won one since 1947. Only Purdue (18) and Indiana (17) had won more conference basketball championships.

The title not only marked the end of a long championship drought for Ohio State, but it also solidified the return of the once-proud program not only to the top of the Big Ten but back into national prominence as well.

### 30 Years Ago — 1996

The 1996 season would mark the 75th year of OSU football in the Horseshoe. But athletic director Andy Geiger said the stadium was in need of repairs. An estimated \$80 million renovation project was being discussed. Financing would come from additional seating added to the stadium, Geiger said.

"The only way we can finance the level of restoration and renovation that is needed is to add some amenities," Geiger told BSB. "We have developed a feasibility study. Now we're moving toward discussing whether we will have a project.

"Exactly what that entails — sky boxes or club seats — we don't know yet," he said.

Under one tentative plan, the track would be removed and the playing field would be lowered 24 feet. That would allow OSU to add 10,000 seats and push capacity to the 105,000 range.

One thing that was certain, though, was the fact that the stadium needed to be refurbished.

"I love the place, but it is urgent that we work on renovation and restoration," Geiger said.

### 25 Years Ago — 2001

OSU football coach Jim Tressel told members of the media covering the Big 33 Football Classic press conference on Feb. 23 that the Buckeyes were enduring rough 6 a.m. conditioning sessions as winter quarter wound down.

"This past week, we began our early morning workouts, and

we got more of a chance to study as a staff," Tressel said. "Next week, we'll turn up the heat even higher with the morning workouts. We'll work out at 6 a.m. every morning with the team.

"We'll continue our work with the individual units on offense, defense and special teams."

Tressel described the regimen the players were going through. "Our workouts, from a running and agility standpoint, are at 6 a.m.," he said. "Then, of course, they still have their lifting obligations in the afternoons.

"My role in the morning is the same as everyone else. We all have a spot on the field where they rotate through. I'm kind of the guy who blows the whistle and keeps time and keeps observation on all of the stations.

"Each coach has his own station. It ends up being just under 40 minutes of nonstop, tough duty. They have a chance to truly begin the day wide awake."

### 20 Years Ago — 2006

Former Ohio State defensive end Mike Kudla was legendary for his weight room exploits at OSU, topping 600 pounds on the bench press.

Therefore, it wasn't too much of a surprise when Kudla matched the NFL record of 45 reps at 225 pounds during the NFL combine on Feb. 26 in Indianapolis.

"It was the consensus in our databases by our strength coaches that 43 was the record," the 6-3, 265-pounder told reporters after the workout. "I had 46 right there, but I just couldn't get that last inch on the right arm. It kind of gave way. But I was very happy with that performance."

With a Denver Broncos staff member counting and Cleveland Browns strength coach John Lott spotting, Kudla tied the previous combine mark of 45 reps, set in 2000 by defensive tackle Leif Larsen of Texas El-Paso. Larsen went on to become a sixth-round pick of the Buffalo Bills that year.

### 15 Years Ago — 2011

On the final day of February, Ohio State ascended to the top of both major men's basketball polls for the second time that season.

The Buckeyes received 45 of 65 first-place votes in the Associated Press writers' poll and 17 of 31 first-place votes in the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll. Previous No. 1 Duke's 64-60 loss at Virginia Tech on Feb. 26 paved the way for then-No. 2 Ohio State's move back to the top spot in the AP poll, one they previously occupied from Jan. 17-Feb. 14.

The Buckeyes leapfrogged No. 2 Kansas going from No. 3 to No. 1 in the coaches' rankings.

The top six of both polls were identical with Ohio State followed by Kansas, BYU, Duke, Pittsburgh and Purdue.

The Jayhawks received 14 first-place votes from the AP while the Cougars had five and the Blue Devils one. All 14 coaches who did not vote Ohio State No. 1 gave their top nod to Kansas.

"I tell our team all the time we want to be No. 1 at the end of the season," OSU head coach Thad Matta told the AP after the new rankings were announced. "We want to be playing our best basketball in March. Moving to No. 1 is a tribute to how hard our guys have worked all year. We appreciate the recognition, and our guys certainly deserve it."

### 10 Years Ago — 2016

When Ohio State played Michigan State in the final week of February, Matta saw exactly what he hoped his team could become. He saw players comfortable in their well-defined roles, strong leaders and a veteran presence.

The problem was, that vision came from Ohio State's opponents.

The Buckeyes were bludgeoned by the Spartans, losing 81-62 on Feb. 23. The defeat came to a senior-laden team as a trio of Spartans seniors scored 60 points, nearly matching Ohio State's total in the game.

"I think experience is so key in life," Matta said after his senior-less team lost to Michigan State. "I think back to watching (Denzel) Valentine as a freshman, then a sophomore and a junior and you look at him now and it's amazing the player that he's developed into. You look at a guy like (Matt) Costello and just in terms of his natural progression to the level he's playing right now.

"Those are the things when you're coaching a young basketball team that you say, 'Hey, the future is bright,' but we've got to keep coaching every day."

The Buckeyes seemed to learn from the Spartans. Matta's team dispatched Iowa 68-64 with a late rally in the final home game of the season on Feb. 28. It was a win that required Ohio State to come back from a late six-point deficit and handed a fourth defeat in five games to an Iowa team limping to the finish.

### Five Years Ago — 2021

Before hosting Michigan for a Feb. 21 matchup, the Ohio State men's basketball team ranked fourth in the nation with an 18-4 overall record and 12-4 ledger in the Big Ten. The Buckeyes seemingly controlled their own destiny amid competition to secure a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

However, head coach Chris Holtmann's team dropped its showdown with the rival Wolverines, who won the conference's regular-season title, in heartbreaking fashion.

With games against top-10 teams in Iowa and Illinois looming, Ohio State tried to get back on track against Michigan State on Feb. 25. The Buckeyes had to play without starting senior forward Kyle Young, who had suffered a concussion near the end of the Michigan game. Without Young, Ohio State fell to the Spartans 71-67 in a game where Holtmann was ejected for arguing questionable calls and no-calls with officials.

### One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State found its replacement for former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles by hiring former New England Patriots defensive coordinator and Detroit Lions head coach Matt Patricia on Feb. 12, giving head coach Ryan Day and Ohio State another veteran voice to call defensive plays.

Patricia, 50, joined Ohio State's staff just two days after interviewing for the position. His last coaching stint came in 2023 as a senior defensive analyst with the Philadelphia Eagles, but he was most known for the nine years he spent calling defensive plays for the Bill Belichick-led Patriots.

Patricia helped the franchise win two Super Bowls in 2014 and 2016, also leading eight top-10 scoring defenses, including a No. 1 finish in 2016 when New England allowed 15.6 points per game.

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happened the past three years at Ohio State. You had two coordinator turnover situations just this past year. You lose Chip Kelly, who was a foundational piece of that (title) run, and then you elevate from within. But then, you also go and get Matt Patricia because Jim Knowles moves on, and if anything, they improved defensively, which is just really hard to do. That is the supreme organizational structure there."

## LeBron Wears Ohio State Themed Shoes

During his team's 124-104 win over the Dallas Mavericks on Feb. 12, Los Angeles Lakers star forward LeBron James turned back the clock, tallying 28 points, 10 rebounds and 12 assists. The 41-year-old NBA legend had his prolific night while donning a pair of scarlet and gray shoes. James' new Ohio State 23 PE shoes had the "Block O" logo on the heel of the shoe.

In addition to James wearing those shoes in the win over the Mavericks, Ohio State announced on Twitter that the four-time MVP and four-time NBA Finals MVP was gifting the new shoes to the men's basketball team.

James, widely regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, is a longtime Ohio State supporter. The native of Akron was in attendance for the football team's national championship win over Notre Dame in 2024 and has gifted the football team with cleats in previous seasons.

## Men's Tennis Places Second AT ITA Indoors

No. 2 Ohio State came up just short at the 2026 ITA national team indoor tournament, defeating SMU, No. 4 Stanford and No. 1 Virginia before falling to No. 7 Texas in the championship match.

Ohio State opened the tournament with a 4-3 win over SMU (8-5), clinched by No. 24 Jack Anthrop's victory in a third-set tiebreaker.

In the quarterfinals, the Buckeyes came back from being down 3-1 to defeat Stanford, 4-3, with singles wins from Brandon Carpico, Nikita Filin and No. 13 Aidan Kim.

The Buckeyes then defeated Virginia, 4-2, in the semifinals, highlighted by singles victories from Anthrop, Filin and a deciding comeback from Kim.

In the championship, Ohio State fell, 4-2, to Texas, dropping the doubles point and losing the final match as Kalin Ivanovski clinched the Longhorns' first-ever ITA indoor championship.

Despite losing in the finals, Ohio State (12-1) jumped one spot to No. 1 in the ITA team poll for the week of Feb. 24. With Ohio State taking over as the nation's top team, Virginia fell one spot to No. 2, while Texas moved up to No. 4. Stanford dropped eight spots to No. 12 in the most recent rankings.

## OSU Women's Hockey Players Earn Olympic Medals

Three current and former Ohio State

women's hockey players earned gold medals as part of the United States national team's 2-1 overtime win against Canada on Feb. 19 at the Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena in Milano-Cortina, Italy.

Ohio State junior forward Joy Dunne, along with former Buckeye defender Cayla Barnes and forward Hannah Bilka, contributed to the U.S. team's undefeated 7-0 tournament run.

Bilka, who, along with Barnes, spent four seasons at Boston College prior to transferring to Ohio State for their senior campaigns in 2023-24, ranked fourth among the United States' skaters with seven points, while her four goals led all skaters in the Olympics.

Dunne contributed five points for the United States (two goals, three assists), while Barnes added one score for the Americans.

Bilka and Dunne claimed their first-ever gold medals, while Barnes claimed the second of her career, having won gold with the United States at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea. She was also part of the United States' team that took home silver at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

Earning silver medals with the Canadian team were former Buckeyes Jennifer Gardiner, Sophie Jaques, Emma Maltais and Natalie Spooner.

## Former Buckeye Hickman Assaulted

Former Ohio State safety Ronnie Hick-

man was hospitalized on the morning of Feb. 16 after being assaulted in the lobby of the SIXTY LES hotel in New York City by four attackers.

According to the New York Police Department, officers responded to a 911 call at 4:35 a.m. When officers arrived, they were informed that "four unidentified individuals punched a 24-year-old man about the body following a verbal dispute." The suspects then fled the scene. No arrests have been made, and the investigation is ongoing, police said.

Hickman has been with the Cleveland Browns for three seasons after spending four years with the Buckeyes.

The Browns said in a statement on Feb. 16 that Hickman was "treated for minor injuries at an area hospital after the incident, was later released, and is home resting with his family."

Hickman started all 17 games for Cleveland last season, setting career highs with 103 tackles, seven passes broken up and two interceptions. He will become a restricted free agent this offseason when the new NFL league year begins on March 11.

Hickman previously spent four seasons with the Buckeyes from 2019-22, starting in all 13 games for Ohio State in his last two collegiate campaigns. He racked up 157 tackles, 2½ tackles for loss, three interceptions and two forced fumbles during his time in Columbus.

# Sayin, Offense Must Learn From Postseason

Continued From Page 1

protect Sayin. The Buckeyes' signal caller was sacked 10 times over two postseason games. The Buckeyes didn't make any high-profile additions to their offensive line through the transfer portal but will hope to continue to develop a group that includes four returning starters from last season.

"I know there are some fans that thought they should have gone and gotten guys in the portal, but it sounds like they're pretty happy and believe in these guys' ability to develop," Murphy said. "And they believe in the continuity that comes with having four of your five starters back again for a group that, for the most part last year, was pretty good until those last two games, which obviously were the ones you needed to win."

The Buckeye running game should be helped by the addition of Arthur Smith. Ohio State's new offensive coordinator helped NFL teams, including the Tennessee Titans and the Atlanta Falcons, find consistency on the ground during his tenure with them.

As they often do in the spring, regardless of the identity of the offensive coordinator, the Buckeyes will likely keep their offensive play calling rudimentary, but Powell said the spring period is still an important one for Smith.

"This period is very important for him, because you're essentially installing what you want to do," Powell said. "Players always work best when they hear things twice. The first time you hear something, there will be a bunch of missed assignments, things will not look right, timing will be off, but the point is to get them to run through it. So when we get to fall camp, it's not reteaching it all over again and starting from round one. You can pick up right where you left off."

At least in the spring, Smith will be tasked with leading an offense without its top two projected running back options for the 2026 season. Bo Jackson and fellow sophomore running back Isaiah West will each miss the spring period after undergoing surgery to repair shoulder injuries.

As it is, the Buckeye running backs room is thin this spring. In addition to former running back CJ Donaldson Jr. exhausting his last year of eligibility last season, James Peoples and Sam Dixon both hit the transfer portal.

With many runners unavailable, Kaufman said the younger running backs have a significant opportunity to earn playing time during the spring.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SECOND GO-AROUND — Rising sophomore quarterback Julian Sayin (10) had a strong regular season in leading the Buckeyes to a 12-0 record, but he struggled as did the entire offense in postseason losses to Indiana and Miami (Fla.).**

"You have (Ja'Kobi Jackson), who probably will have a chance to get some snaps," Kaufman said. "Then I think it's (freshman running back) Legend Bey and (redshirt-freshman running back) Anthony Rogers to see how they could be involved in the mix. It will be interesting, because Rogers had a lot of interest when he came last year, but we saw the other two guys in his class, West and Bo Jackson, get time, so it's a chance for him to try to carve out a role as well."

As always, though, a portion of the focus on the offensive end will go to the quarterback position. Even though Sayin can already be penciled in as Ohio State's starter after a strong first season as the team's starting quarterback, he proved during the postseason that he still has room for improvement.

"Doing well under pressure, that's probably the biggest thing," Powell said when asked which aspect of Sayin's game can improve the most. "Last year, Indiana and Miami did a really good job once his line broke down and his eyes were bad. His eyes were taken to the rush in front of him, instead of staying downfield."

"He has to be able to feel comfortable knowing that he has to take a hit and deliver the ball because he understands his playmakers are down the field. And then the other thing is, when the defense is giving him a chance to run, whether it's 6 yards or 10 yards, he needs to take the yards with his legs and use his mobility a little bit better."

Like Powell, Murphy wants to see Sayin continue to use his legs, but he also hopes

the Big Ten Freshman of the Year can improve his ability to read the field.

"I also want to see Julian recognize some third reads," Murphy said. "I think back to a couple of times throughout the season where Max Klare is open down the seam, and Julian doesn't ever get to that read or doesn't make the throw."

"There are some of those things that now you have time to really get on the film, go back and look at every single play throughout the year. This is a good time for him to learn from that. It's like, 'OK, on these plays, if one and two aren't there, let's quickly get to that third read.' It's stuff like that that he probably never really had to do in high school and wasn't doing as a scout-team backup quarterback."

Ohio State's 2026 offense is defined by its continuity, but there will likely be a couple of important position battles. The outside wide receiver spot opposite Jeremiah Smith should be up for grabs following the departure of Tate to the NFL draft. The Buckeyes have a couple of options to take over for Tate, including five-star freshman Chris Henry Jr., Parker and McCuin.

"A lot will kind of depend on if Chris Henry Jr. shows up at Ohio State day one and looks like Jeremiah Smith did as a freshman, or if he is somebody who is maybe going to progress more on a Carnell Tate timeline," Kaufman said of Ohio State's open receiver position, "because what Jeremiah Smith did was so unique. Ohio State really hadn't had that freshman starting receiver for decades until he did it, and obviously, he was as impactful as anybody on the roster."

## Plenty Of New Faces On Defense

Heading into 2025, few thought Ohio State's defense could be even better than a 2024 unit that was statistically the best in the country, but somehow the Silver Bullets made improvements.

Led by All-America safety Caleb Downs, linebackers Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese, and defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, Ohio State easily ranked No. 1 in total defense and scoring defense, allowing 219.1 yards per game and 9.3 points per game.

It seems almost impossible that Ohio State will be even better on defense this year, especially considering it is replacing eight starters from last year's star-studded team.

"I think the whole defense (will have position battles) pretty much, other than the few returners like (senior defensive end) Kenyatta Jackson Jr., (senior cornerback) Jermaine Matthews Jr., and (junior safety) Jaylen McClain," Murphy said. "The linebackers, I think, are going to be interesting, because there was the assumption that Payton Pierce moves up a spot on the depth chart now that Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese are gone, and then we saw Riley Pettijohn make some plays last year, so he's probably that next guy."

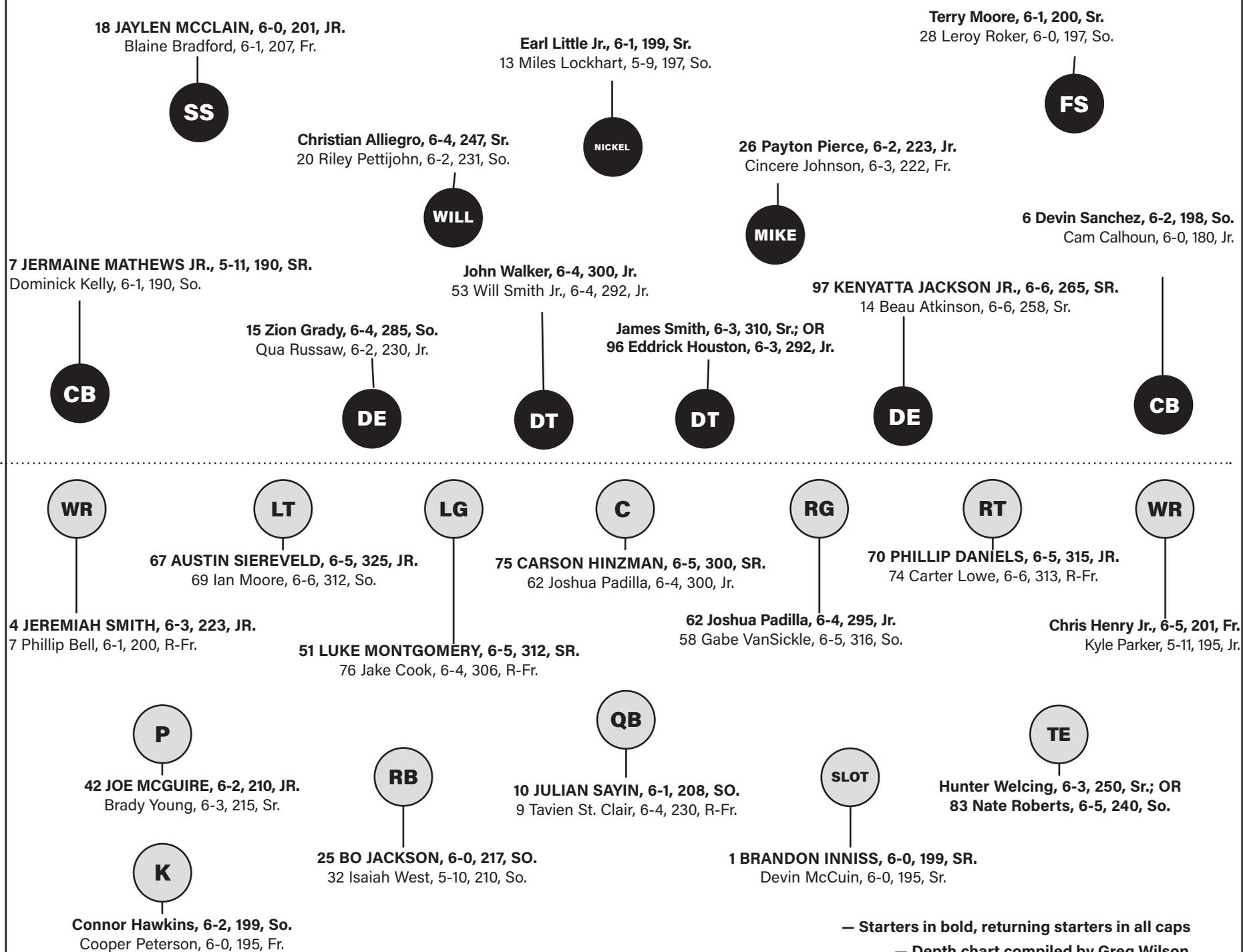
"Well, then they go, and they get (former Wisconsin linebacker) Christian Alliegro from the transfer portal, and that's a veteran guy who I don't think they're going to hand him a starting spot just because he's

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## OHIO STATE PRE-SPRING DEPTH CHART



played in the Big Ten, but I think that experience gives him a leg up to do that.”

As Murphy pointed out, Ohio State went to the transfer portal to supplement much of the talent lost on defense. In addition to picking up Alliegro, who earned honorable-mention All-Big Ten honors for the Badgers last year, Ohio State acquired former Florida State safety Earl Little Jr., former Duke safety Terry Moore and former Alabama defensive tackle James Smith and edge rusher Qua Russaw.

Little and Moore each earned All-ACC second-team selections during their previous stops and are players whom Murphy will be watching closely during the spring.

“Terry Moore coming back from the ACL injury that kept him out last year, I think the big question is, how healthy are you?” Murphy said. “I talked to a guy who covers Duke for us at 247Sports, and he talked about the medical staff at Duke and how it’s been well over a year now, so he didn’t think there would be any issues, but you’ve got to get back on the field and do

football things. The season he had two years ago should make Buckeye fans really excited, and I’m eager to see just what that looks like out there.

“Then, where Earl Little Jr. is lining up is interesting for me. If you remember, they committed on back-to-back days with Little committing first. I was like, ‘Oh, OK, this seems like a guy who can come in and sort of replace Caleb Downs as much as you can do that.’ And then they went and brought in another safety who seemed even more like a replacement for Caleb Downs. So is Little competing for that spot, or is he playing more of the nickel, which I think is what a lot of people expect.”

Perhaps no position on the entire team is more of a question mark than the defensive line, where Ohio State is replacing three starters and depth pieces C.J. Hicks and Logan George.

The departures of several key players in the rotation leave Ohio State with a starting front that will, in all likelihood, include Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and James Smith, but

headed into the spring, the identity of the other two starters remains a mystery.

The Buckeyes have several candidates capable of contributing along the defensive line, including junior defensive tackle Eddrick Houston, who wasn’t technically a starter last year but earned plenty of playing time on the interior defensive line alongside then-senior Tywone Malone Jr. Houston could compete with UCF transfer defensive tackle John Walker and senior Will Smith Jr. for playing time.

Rising sophomore defensive end Zion Grady had a solid debut season for Ohio State last year, and Russaw was one of the higher-ranked transfers the Buckeyes brought in this year. Grady and Russaw will likely compete with fifth-year defensive end Beau Atkinson, according to Kaufman, for a particularly important starting defensive end spot.

“I’m curious how that defensive end spot opposite Kenyatta Jackson goes, because Beau Atkinson is a veteran who was sort of a rotational piece last year, but he

really didn’t even get a full offseason with Ohio State, because he transferred during the spring window from North Carolina last year,” Kaufman said. “So does he take a leap? What kind of progress does he show? And if it’s not what they want, they have someone like Zion Grady as well, as a sophomore, who is the other guy in that positional battle.”

At cornerback, Mathews is in line to start for a second straight season, and sophomore Devin Sanchez could take Davison Igbinosun’s spot across from him.

It will be the second straight season that only three starters return for the defense. With Patricia back for another season, the Buckeyes will at least have continuity with the coaching staff while they deal with so much roster turnover.

They will have four weeks of spring practices to work out whatever rough edges there may be on the way to another run at a Big Ten championship and a national title.

# Buckeye Fans Weigh In On Stadium Changes

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the offseason leading up to the 2025 Ohio State football season, athletic director Ross Bjork and the Buckeye athletic department unveiled the "Tradition Evolved" initiative, a series of changes to gameday presentation and traditions at Ohio Stadium.

Drawing inspiration from the packed scarlet crowd during Ohio State's home victory over Tennessee in the College Football Playoff during the 2024 season, the athletic department set out to revitalize the stadium experience.

From a new gameday entrance for Ohio State mascot Brutus Buckeye to new video board animations and the addition of a new anthem echoing throughout the stadium, the overall presentation at home games changed noticeably from the 2024 season to 2025.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with multiple Ohio State fans to gauge their reactions to the differences, highlighting what resonated with them and what did not.

Despite the recent changes, many Buckeye fans remained unaware of the changes or were indifferent to them, focusing solely on watching the football game they came to see. But the fans whom BSB spoke to also appreciated some of the new experiences introduced for the football season.

## Reid Murray - 22 years old

Murray particularly observed changes to advertising and a renewed focus on a traditional college football atmosphere.

He compared the atmosphere in the 'Shoe before the 2025 season to that of an NFL stadium but believed the recent changes helped create a more authentic college football environment, similar to the energy found at other college stadiums known for their electric atmosphere.

"The biggest thing I observed was more of a focus on getting the crowd loud vs. advertising," Murray said. "There are still advertisements this season during TV timeouts, but I think you saw a more Ohio State-focused game presentation. It felt more akin to some of the other blue-blood programs in college football, like Tennessee, Oregon, Notre Dame, who are known for having really strong environments."

Another component of the "Tradition Evolved" initiative involved relocating the Block-O North student section to join the



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SOMETHING NEW — Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork implemented a few changes to freshen and improve the gameday atmosphere at Ohio Stadium such as having honored Buckeyes ring the victory bell before the game, handing out THE Towel for the fans to wave and reuniting the Block O student section in the south end zone as well as a new gameday entrance for Ohio State mascot Brutus Buckeye (pictured). Opinions were mixed about the changes.**

Block O group in the south end zone, uniting Buckeye students into a single section. This shift moved the band seating to the north end zone, a change Murray said contributed to louder crowds.

"The student section as a whole was definitely louder than the previous sea-

son, and part of that could be because of Block O expanding," Murray said. "I think it could also be fewer advertisements and more engaging video displays during TV timeouts, and then it could just be because of how good (Ohio State) was this year."

Murray, who has been to every Buckeye home game in his four years as a student at the school, emphasized the impact of the athletic department's decision to move all students to the south end zone, calling Ohio State's 14-7 season-opening victory over Texas "the loudest he's ever heard Ohio Stadium."

In the Buckeyes' win over the Longhorns, Ohio Stadium also gave out what they called "THE Towels," which were red towels meant to be waved around, similar to the Pittsburgh Steelers' "Terrible Towels."

Although Murray said he enjoyed the

idea of "THE Towels," they were distributed only for the Texas game, and fans were instructed to bring them back to each game they attended, a requirement that he felt ultimately limited their presence for the rest of the season. Ohio State also made the towels available for purchase.

"If you're going to introduce it, you can't just introduce it in game one," Murray said. "You have to make sure they're there for every game for an entire season. If you want it to become a tradition, they should have them for every single game."

## Bill Talarzyk - 58 years old

The "Tradition Evolved" initiative also worked to decrease the amount of sponsor presentations during media timeouts while putting an increased emphasis on displaying real-time stats, scores and replays on the two video boards at each end zone.

However, Talarzyk — who said his two main focuses are the Ohio State marching band, in which his son performs, and the football game itself — could not identify any differences in the timeout and video board presentations from the previous season.

"I did not notice that, but I'm always about the stats and keeping track of where they are," Talarzyk said. "It's nice to have the stats on the scoreboard, and I already have a tendency to check on my phone and get updates and all that stuff. So anything that's on the scoreboard stat-wise would be interesting to me at least."

Talarzyk was also an advocate for both of Ohio State's new pregame traditions introduced as part of the athletic department's new initiative.

First, Talarzyk said Brutus Buckeye's various entrances were an effective way to engage younger fans during the pregame festivities.

He also expressed appreciation for Ohio State's increased efforts to honor former Buckeyes with the introduction of the new pregame victory bell ringing. OSU had a different former Buckeye ring the bell before each home game, a group that included two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin, three former head football coaches and former Ohio State basketball stars.

Though Talarzyk thought the victory bell idea was sound in itself, he, among other fans, felt that it was odd to ring the bell prior to the game, rather than after a win.

"I know some people are wondering why they ring the victory bell before the game, but I didn't mind it. It makes sense to ring a victory bell after the game, assuming you win, but they could always call it something else," Talarzyk said. "They do a good job of bringing in former athletes for the victory bell. Anything you can do to get former athletes (back for games) is a plus in my mind."

## Steve Williard - 61 years old

Williard said that, unlike his experiences at Ohio Stadium from the 1970s through the early 2000s, the 'Shoe adopted a more corporate atmosphere in the late 2010s and early 2020s, though

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he acknowledged that Ohio State made a noticeable effort this season to engage younger fans.

Ohio State began awarding Buckeye Leaves to fans inside Ohio Stadium whenever the opposing offense commits a false start or burns a timeout because of crowd noise, flashing the season total on the scoreboard anytime one was given. That specific effort struck Williard as an implementation better suited for students and younger fans.

“To me, it doesn’t do a whole lot. I can see it maybe working with the college-age kids, but that’s not going to make me yell more,” Williard said. “As I said, I’m probably not the demographic they’re trying to sway with handing out Buckeye Leaves.”

Despite acknowledging a stronger emphasis on engaging younger audiences through changes to the fan experience, the longtime Buckeye fan said rising ticket prices, especially for high-profile matchups like when OSU played Texas this season, have reduced the number of younger fans who were once a prominent presence in the crowd.

While Williard, along with the four other Buckeye fans BSB spoke to, praised the Ohio State marching band as a vital tradition at Ohio State, there were mixed opinions on the new gameday anthem introduced as part of the initiative.

The song “Ohio” by the Columbus band Caamp was played during the first half of every home game, though Williard felt both the song and the band weren’t quite popular enough to engage a crowd

of all age groups.

“I think if you polled the 105,000 people in the stadium, anybody probably over the age of 35 would not know what that song is, or Caamp,” Williard said.

Williard acknowledged the challenges in finding music that both honors the state of Ohio and resonates with fans of all ages. He pointed to rival Michigan’s use of “Mr. Brightside” by The Killers as an example of the kind of anthem he believes the Buckeyes should aim for.

### Tim Belanger - 65 years old

Belanger was among several Buckeye fans surveyed who identified multiple differences in fan experience between the 2024 and 2025 seasons.

While Belanger noticed increased fan engagement during timeouts, he believes that the key to keeping fans involved is blending tradition with new experiences they haven’t had before.

Belanger highlighted a paid fan experience where he was able to go on the field prior to a game as one of his fondest memories of the 2025 season.

“I received all kinds of fan experiences you could purchase online through emails,” Belanger said. “For one game – I think it was the Penn State game this year – I went on the field before the game with a friend of mine I was attending the game with, and I surprised him with it. We went out several hours before kickoff, and that was a great fan experience.”

Belanger was especially enthusiastic about Ohio State’s various uniforms and

the “color-outs,” where fans are encouraged to wear a single color, which have recently become a part of the team’s traditions.

Against Texas in 2025 and Tennessee in the College Football Playoff of the 2024 season, Ohio State hosted a “Scarlet Out.” The Buckeyes had a blackout against Penn State this season and unveiled a new idea, the “Helmet Stripe Game” against Ohio.

While Belanger considers himself a fan of the color-outs that coordinated with team uniforms, he felt that Ohio State’s matchup with Penn State on Nov. 1, 2025, where the Buckeyes staged a blackout without matching uniforms and played it during the day, ultimately fell flat.

“I think if it matches the jersey of the team, then it’s very cool. If it doesn’t, then you’re just trying to be something extra,” Belanger said. “I know when we did the scarlet out once before, Ohio State wore all scarlet uniforms. But if it’s not a specialty uniform and they say, ‘Hey, let’s do a white out,’ I wouldn’t be down with it.”

### Jim Laughlin - 67 years old

Laughlin, a linebacker at Ohio State from 1976-79 who still attends Buckeye games, said that for him, the fan experience is less about extra attractions and simply about watching the football game with his closest friends.

“To me, I don’t really care (about everything else), I just want to watch the ballgame,” Laughlin said. “I think the people have the most fun tailgating, but the best

fan experience for me is just watching the game.”

He said he often watches games from the suites at Ohio Stadium with former friends and Buckeye teammates, noting he isn’t as focused on fan experience attractions.

Still, he believes the athletic department’s efforts benefit everyone attending the game, noting that even if he experiences the game differently from most fans, the changes help enhance the atmosphere for all fans in the stadium.

Like Murray, Laughlin said the new implementations, specifically more engagement from the jumbotrons and the combination of the two student sections, contributed to some of the loudest crowds he’s ever heard.

“It seemed like it was awfully loud. That goal-line stand (against Texas) was unbelievable,” he said. “The crowd went berserk. I’ve never heard it any louder than that.”

Unlike Belanger, Laughlin was in support of the new anthem “Ohio” by Caamp. However, the former Buckeye linebacker, like many other Ohio State fans, was strongly opposed to moving “Hang on Sloopy” from its traditional spot between the third and fourth quarters.

Though the song was often played at its traditional time, it was occasionally moved to a different time in the game.

“They’ve been doing that forever. I mean, why move it,” Laughlin said. “That’s a great time to do it, and that’s a great tradition.”

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# Big Ten Captures 37 Medals At Olympics

Thirty-seven current and former Big Ten athletes took home medals at the XXV Winter Olympic Games in Milano and Cortina, Italy, highlighted by 24 gold medals – 21 in men's and women's hockey – along with 10 silver medals and three bronze medals.

## BIG TEN NOTES Sam Cipriani

The Big Ten featured a total of 33 athletes from the United States, with 27 athletes representing other nations, which included Canada, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland.

In men's hockey, the United States' gold medalists included Kyle Conner, Quinn Hughes, Dylan Larkin and Zach Werenski (all of Michigan), along with Brock Faber and Jackson LaCombe (Minnesota).

On the United States' women's hockey team, gold medalists were Taylor Heise, Abbey Murphy, Kelly Pannek, Lee Stecklein and Grace Zumwinkle (all from Minnesota); Cayla Barnes, Hannah Bilka and Joy Dunne (from Ohio State); Tessa Janecke (Penn State); and Britta Curl-Salemme, Laila Edwards, Caroline Harvey, Hilary Knight, Ava McNaughton and Kirsten Simms (from Wisconsin).

Though these players represented Big Ten Schools, the Big Ten does not play women's hockey.

Two additional athletes captured gold outside of hockey, with Evan Bates (Michigan) winning the figure skating team event with the United States, while UCLA's Alysa Liu stood out as the Big Ten's only two-time gold medalist in 2026, claiming titles in both the team figure skating event and women's singles. Bates also claimed a silver

medal in the ice dancing event.

Nine Canadians earned silver medals as runners up to the United States in women's hockey in Jennifer Gardiner, Sophie Jaques, Emma Maltais and Natalie Spooner (Ohio State), along with Emily Clark, Ann-Renée Desbiens, Sarah Nurse, Blayre Turnbull and Daryl Watts (Wisconsin).

Three athletes earned bronze medals, with Erik Haula (Minnesota) finishing third with Finland in men's hockey, Andrea Brändli (Ohio State) taking third in women's hockey with Switzerland and Ashley Farquharson (Purdue) placing third in women's singles luge for the United States.

### BIG Regular Season Titles Settled

Michigan men's basketball and UCLA women's basketball have claimed their throne at the top of the Big Ten in the regular season.

The third-ranked Wolverines claimed at least a share of the conference title with a 77-67 win over Minnesota at the Crisler Center in Ann Arbor, Mich., on Feb. 24, before earning sole possession of the regular-season title with an 84-70 victory over Illinois on Feb. 27.

Through 29 games in the 2025-26 season, Michigan posted a 27-2 overall record and a 17-1 mark in conference play, earning a top-five spot in each of the last 13 AP polls, highlighted by the program's first No. 1 ranking on Feb. 16 since January 2013, the same year the Wolverines advanced to the national championship game.

The Wolverines feature one of the most balanced offenses in the country with four scorers averaging double figures. Forwards Yaxel Lendeborg (14.3 points per game) and Morez Johnson Jr. (13.4), center Aday Mara (11.4) and point guard Elliot Cadeau (10.1) are all above that mark.

Michigan began the season 14-0 before suffering a 91-88 loss to Wisconsin at home.

The Wolverines then reeled off another 11-game win streak before falling to then-No. 3 Duke, 68-63, at the Capital Showcase in Washington, D.C.

The Wolverines' regular-season title was the program's 16th overall Big Ten title and first since 2021.

The No. 2 UCLA women's team opened the season 6-0 before falling, 76-65, to No. 4 Texas, which remains the Bruins' lone loss of the season. Since the Nov. 26 defeat, UCLA has gone three months without another setback, winning 22 straight games to rebound from the letdown against the Longhorns.

The 28-1 Bruins claimed the Big Ten regular-season title with a win over Wisconsin, defeating the Badgers 80-60 on senior night to give UCLA its first regular-season conference championship since 1998-99 and first Big Ten title since it joined the conference before the 2024-25 season.

UCLA is led by 2025 first-team All-American and Naismith Defensive Player of the Year Lauren Betts, who was averaging 16.7 points, 8.6 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 2.0 blocks per game on the season.

The Bruins have also defeated 10 opponents ranked in the top 25 this season, including three ranked in the top 10 at the time of their victory: No. 6 Oklahoma (Nov. 10), No. 8 Iowa (Feb. 1) and No. 8 Michigan (Feb. 8).

### UCLA's Cronin Ejects Own Player Vs. MSU

Deep into the second half of UCLA's 82-59 loss to No. 15 Michigan State on Feb. 17, Bruins head coach Mick Cronin ejected his own player from the game.

With just under five minutes remaining in the second half, Spartan center Carson Cooper had a clear lane to the basket on a fast break.

UCLA forward Steven Jamerson II, who was unsuccessful when he attempted to walk on at Michigan State earlier in his career, sprinted back on defense to block the ball and instead committed a hard foul that sent Cooper flying to the floor.

A furious Cronin ejected Jamerson from the game himself, grabbing him by the jersey, while pointing and shouting at the senior to go to the locker room. He then sent an assistant coach to escort Jamerson out of the game.

Before UCLA's practice on Feb. 20, Cronin told reporters that he had apologized to Jamerson and explained his reasoning for the ejection, drawing a comparison to Providence's Duncan Powell incident against St. John's on Feb. 15, which escalated into a team-wide brawl.

"I already apologized to Steve," Cronin said. "It's the only reason I sent him to the locker room. I thought he literally made a dirty play and tried to wipe the guy out. Once I saw the film – I mean, he still got a (flagrant) 1. To be honest with you, I don't even know if he deserved that."

Cronin continued, holding himself accountable for the mistake and stating it's part of his job to protect UCLA and the men's basketball program's reputation, while emphasizing his commitment to both player safety and the integrity of the team.

"I have to do a better job of this, that in this climate, you've got to be careful with what you say. I'm a good fit here because I understand that I'm not bigger than the brand, and the brand matters here, as does the school. The last thing I want to do is bring negative publicity to our school," Cronin said. "I apologize to our people, school, students, everybody in our community, because it's important. These jobs, you have to raise money, you have to be friends with donors. I mean, I believe in all that stuff."

### Cignetti, IU Agree To New Contract

Indiana football coach Curt Cignetti has agreed to his third contract extension in two seasons, as the Hoosiers looked to secure the architect of its rapid rise long-term.

According to multiple reports, Cignetti's new contract extends him through the 2033 season and will increase his pay to an average annual salary of \$13.2 million, elevating him into the top tier of college football coaches. He joins Georgia's Kirby Smart and LSU's Lane Kiffin as the only head coaches scheduled to make at least \$13 million in 2026. Cignetti has now signed more extensions than he has completed seasons in at Indiana (two), a reflection of Indiana's urgency to keep its head coach in Bloomington after one of the most dramatic turnarounds in college football history.

After finishing 3-9 in 2023 prior to Cignetti's arrival, Indiana finished 11-2 in the 2024 campaign and earned its first berth in the CFP.

Then last year, Indiana was dominant on its way to a 16-0 finish, with the season culminating in the Hoosiers claiming their first-ever national championship in a 27-21 victory over Miami (Fla.). The 2025 season also had Indiana capture its first Big Ten title in nearly 60 years and complete college football's first 16-0 season since Yale finished perfect in 1894. In his first two seasons, Cignetti has totaled a 27-2 record with the Hoosiers, the best record in college football over that span.

Cignetti's first extension came during the 2024 season as Indiana surged into the national spotlight.

His second extension was an eight-year deal signed in October 2025, which increased his salary to \$11.6 million annually. That contract included a good faith market review provision to revisit his compensation if Indiana reached the CFP semifinals.

That trigger was activated on Jan. 1 when the Hoosiers defeated Alabama in the Rose Bowl to advance to the playoff semifinals.

Under the October agreement, Indiana had 120 days after the semifinals to renegotiate Cignetti's contract to make him one of the sport's three highest-paid coaches, a provision that has now been exercised.

### Former Purdue WR Moore Dies At 25

Former Purdue and NFL wide receiver Rondale Moore died on Feb. 21 at the age of 25.

According to multiple sources, Moore was discovered dead in his home garage in New Albany, Ind. After an investigation, his cause of death was revealed to be a self-in-



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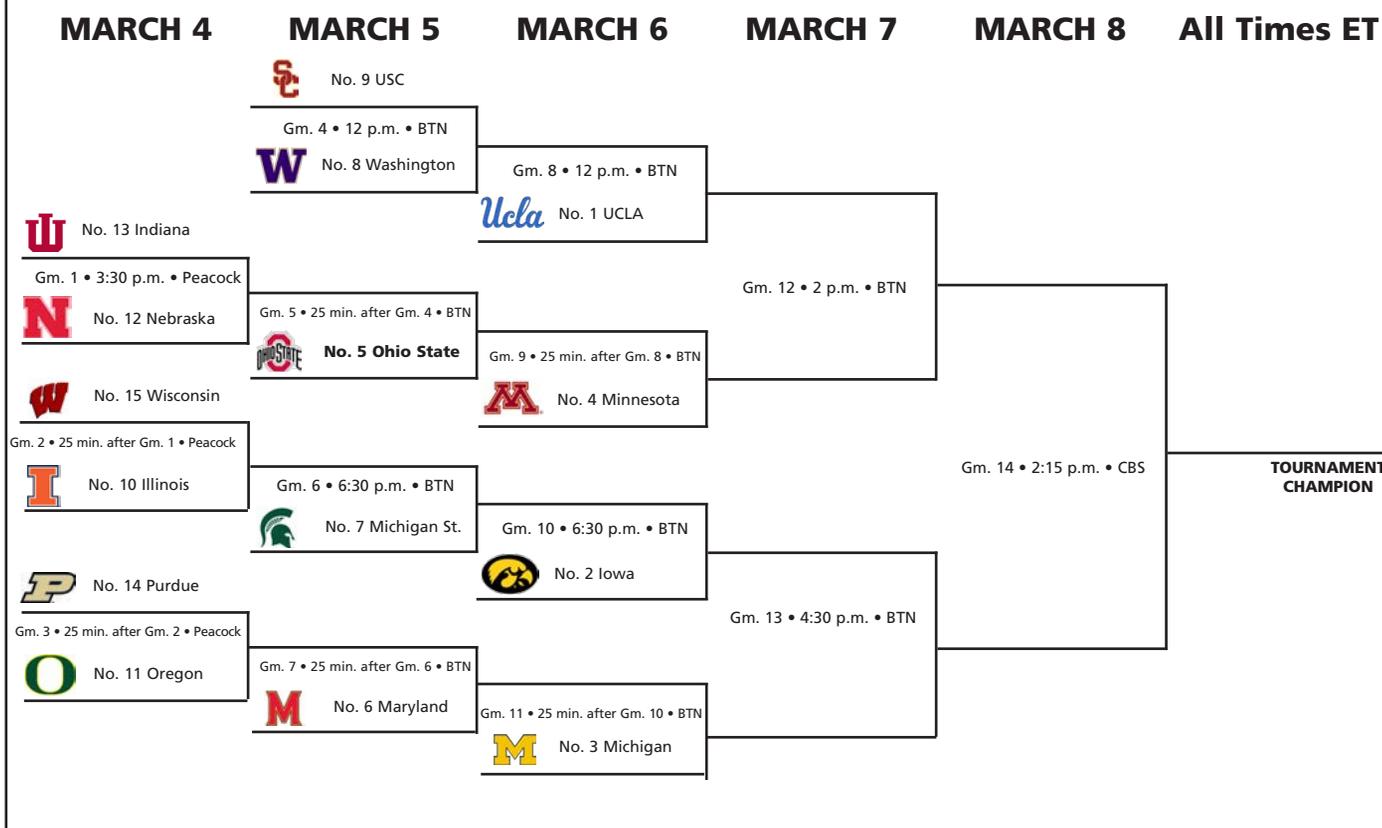
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Stalions also argued that being unable to test the credibility of confidential sources who shared information with the Big Ten “irreparably prejudiced” him and “negatively influenced the NCAA’s subsequent investigation of this case.”

“We find that the record clearly supports that procedures were followed in relation to cases that originated with a confidential source and the hearing panel relied only on corroborating information when making its determinations,” the appeals committee wrote. “Further, Mr. Stalions failed to demonstrate a link between any initial publicity about the allegations and a failure by the enforcement staff to follow their policies and procedures, especially in light of the necessity to limit potential game integrity impacts under the circumstances.”

The appeals committee also mentioned that Stalions’ role in the Netflix documentary “Sign Stealer,” part of the streaming service’s “Untold” series, undermined his claim of undue publicity.

Stalions wasn’t the only Michigan staff member to face stiff penalties. Harbaugh, now the head coach of the Los Angeles Chargers, received a 10-year show-cause penalty, while former Michigan head coach Sherrone Moore was suspended for three games and received a two-year show-cause penalty. Michigan’s football program was also hit with fines expected to exceed \$30 million and a series of other recruiting penalties.

flicted gunshot.

Chief Todd Bailey of the New Albany Police Department confirmed that officers responded to a property in the 1600 block of Ekin Avenue.

Moore grew up in New Albany, Ind., just across the Indiana border from Louisville, Ky., and played three seasons at Purdue from 2018-20.

As a freshman for the Boilermakers in 2018, he was named a first-team All-American and won the Paul Hornung Award, which is given annually to the most versatile player in college football. That same year, Moore also received the Paul Warfield Trophy given to the most outstanding wide receiver in college football, and he was named the Richter-Howard Big Ten Wide Receiver of the Year and earned Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors.

Over his three seasons with the Boilermakers, Moore totaled 1,915 receiving yards with 14 touchdowns and added 248 rushing yards with three touchdowns, highlighting his versatility and playmaking ability. Moore was well known to Ohio State fans for his spectacular performance in the Boilermakers’ upset of the Buckeyes in 2018.

Moore was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals with the 49th overall pick in the second round of the 2021 NFL draft and spent three seasons with the Cardinals. Moore started 23 games for Arizona in that span, catching 135 passes for 1,201 yards and three touchdowns while taking 52 carries for 249 yards and one score. He then spent one season with the Atlanta Falcons in 2024 before signing with the Minnesota Vikings in 2025.

Moore missed the 2024 season with a dislocated right knee while with the Falcons and later suffered a season-ending left knee injury during the 2025 preseason opener with the Vikings.

Louisville head coach Jeff Brohm, who coached at Purdue when Moore was there,

released a statement after his death.

“Rondale Moore was a complete joy to coach,” Brohm said. “The ultimate competitor that wouldn’t back down from any challenge. Rondale had a work ethic unmatched by anyone. He was great teammate who would come through in any situation. We all loved Rondale. We loved his smile and competitive edge, and he always wanted to please everyone he came in contact with. We offer all of our thoughts and prayers to Rondale and his family. We love him very much.”

### Stalions Show-Cause Appeal Denied

The NCAA Division I Infractions Appeals Committee (IAC) has denied the appeal of former Michigan football defensive analyst Connor Stalions, upholding an eight-year show-cause penalty for his role in the Wolverines’ sign-stealing scandal imposed by the NCAA Committee of Infractions.

Stalions, who worked under former Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh from 2018-23, was punished among other parties on Aug. 15, 2025, for his role in the Wolverines’ sign-stealing scheme in which he purchased opponents’ game tickets and recorded sideline signals spanning from 2021-23.

In his appeal, Stalions argued that “procedural errors” occurred when the investigation began and that the NCAA misapplied a scouting bylaw prohibiting off-campus, in-person scouting. The IAC also reported that Stalions cited all six factors that classified the violations as Level I-Aggravated, but he did not elaborate in arguing against them, which the committee cited as a reason for denying his appeal.

“Additionally, Mr. Stalions marked for appeal each of the six aggravating factors applied and used in the determination that

the case was an aggravated case for him,” the appeals committee stated in its report. “However, Mr. Stalions did not specifically outline arguments regarding these aggravating factors in his appeal submissions.”

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# QB Edmunds Gets Invite To Elite 11 Finals

Ohio State will be represented yet again at the Elite 11 finals, with Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220) getting an invite to the event on Feb. 21. He's the first quarterback to receive an invite to this year's finals.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Edmunds took part in the Los Angeles regional Elite 11 event, where he and 50 other prep quarterbacks were put through throwing drills. Edmunds was the only signal caller at the event to earn an invite to the finals.

Tom Loy, a national recruiting analyst for 247Sports, wrote about what he saw from Edmunds at the regional event.

"There are very few prospects in the country who can throw with the same arm strength and velocity as Edmunds while putting the ball precisely where it is supposed to be," Loy wrote. "Whether it was a short, intermediate or deep throw, Edmunds left everyone in awe with his ability to get the ball to its destination in a hurry. He still needs to continue adding mobility and quickness to his game and improve his foot speed, but the mechanics and arm talent shone on (Feb. 21)."

The Elite 11 finals will also be held in Los Angeles over the summer. The last Buckeye commit to take part in the finals was Tavien St. Clair, who joined Ohio State in the 2025 class.

Edmunds has been committed to Ohio State since Dec. 2, 2024, days after the Buckeyes suffered their infamous 13-10 loss to an unranked Michigan team. Edmunds is ranked the No. 166 player in the country in the 2027 class, the No. 16 quarterback and the No. 17 player in California.

### Brewster Looking At Other Options

The Buckeyes were involved in the recruitment of Cedar Hill, Texas, five-star defensive lineman Jalen Brewster (6-3, 302) before he committed to Texas Tech in October.

But the Red Raiders recently made a change at the defensive line coach position, which has Brewster exploring other options.

In an interview with On3, Brewster was asked if he was still "solid with Texas Tech," to which he replied, "No."

Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson must have heard from Brewster because the veteran Buckeye coach visited the five-star at his high school. He was also visited by LSU, Miami, Indiana and SMU.

The Buckeyes already have a top defensive lineman committed in the 2027 class after Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star edge rusher DJ Jacobs (6-5, 235)

## 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

pledged to the Buckeyes on Dec. 29, and adding Brewster – the No. 5 player in the country – would be a major addition.

However, Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene isn't confident that Ohio State will be able to compete for Brewster if he doesn't stick with Texas Tech.

"I think if he flips, he's going to Miami," Greene told BSB. "I think they're offering him an unbelievable NIL package, and Texas Tech pays too. But I think that kid's going to end up at Miami or Texas A&M. Now, could Ohio State get in the mix there? Absolutely. But this is going to be an NIL recruitment, which most of them are, but this one is really going to be a money thing for Brewster.

"You can sell him on, 'We're going to pair you with DJ Jacobs and the top defensive line in the country, or we have Larry Johnson.' They can sell him on all that, but you'd better match the money, or you're not going to be in that game. So what I was told is to look out for Miami. Maybe A&M, but Texas Tech pays too, so they could keep him. I've heard nothing about Ohio State being high up for Jalen Brewster right now."

### Spring Visitors Adding Up

With spring football quickly approaching, the Buckeyes are starting to get prospects lined up to visit.

There will certainly be many more players who make it to Columbus, but many prospects have already announced that they will be on campus at some point in the spring.

Both Girard, Ohio, offensive tackle Dylan Latell (6-6, 295) and New Madison (Ohio) Tri-Village offensive tackle Dominick Black (6-5, 290) are planning to be at Ohio State for a March 28 practice.

Both Latell and Black are unranked 2027 prospects and have not received scholarship offers from the Buckeyes, but they are lower-level in-state prospects who could be late additions to the class, the same way Landry Brede and Mason Wilhelm were in the 2026 cycle.

Also visiting on March 28 will be Poquoson, Va., four-star offensive tackle Carter Jones (6-6, 291). Jones is rated the No. 343 prospect in the country and included Ohio State in his top 10 schools when he revealed them in January. Currently, recruiting experts view Clemson as the favorite to land Jones,

but Ohio State is still in the running. Jones has an official visit to Clemson scheduled for May 29, and no other official visits are scheduled yet.

"I've known (offensive line) coach (Tyler) Bowen since he was the offensive coordinator at Virginia Tech," Jones told 247Sports. "He's been recruiting me since I was a freshman, and he's one of the first coaches to talk to me and really lay eyes on me. Their entire culture there and their players, they are great people."

Vero Beach, Fla., four-star quarterback Wonderful "Champ" Monds IV (6-2, 224) will be at Ohio State on April 4. Monds is also set to visit Florida, Florida State, Miami and Notre Dame at some point over the spring football schedule.

The Buckeyes already have Edmunds committed in the 2027 class but are obviously keeping their options open on some level by hosting Monds, who reclassified from the 2028 class. Before reclassifying, he was rated one of the top quarterbacks in the country, but he dropped to No. 201 nationally and the No. 20 overall quarterback in the 2027 cycle.

Sylvester (Ga.) Worth County defensive end Malik Muhammad (6-4, 205) of the 2028 class is also set to be at Ohio State on April 4, the same day as Monds. Muhammad is unranked, but he does have an offer from the Buckeyes already, which he received on Jan. 27.

Wellington (Fla.) Palm Beach Central defensive lineman Tyler Alexander (6-4, 315) has already scheduled a visit to Ohio State on April 18, which is the day of the Buckeyes' spring game.

Alexander also has spring visits scheduled to Florida, which he will visit twice, Georgia, Notre Dame, Syracuse, Texas and Texas A&M.

### Top Prospects Narrowing Options

Ohio State was included on narrowed-down scholarship lists for a large number of prospects since BSB last went to press.

One of those prospects is Prattville, Ala., four-star safety Jayden Aparicio-Bailey (6-2, 180), who narrowed his list down to 10 schools and included Ohio State. Along with the Buckeyes were Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, Ole Miss, South Carolina, Texas and USC. Aparicio-Bailey is the



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# ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

**Coatesville Area, Pa., five-star interior offensive lineman Maxwell Hiller (6-5, 300) included Ohio State in his top four schools and will make an official visit to Columbus. How likely do you think it is that the Buckeyes are able to land Hiller?**

"I love that kid, and I usually don't go too overboard on interior offensive linemen. I'm usually more of a tackle guy. That guy's a freaking monster. So I would do whatever I had to do to get him. They've got three linemen committed right now, and they're good players, but they're not what I would call the best in the country. This guy is going to play early. I would pay money for this guy. The other three that are committed, I wouldn't have paid a lot of money for those guys. This guy's different. The film's amazing – the size, the athleticism. I would do anything I could to get this guy, and I think the next logical step is to get that official visit locked in. It could just be nothing, it could be a calendar thing to me, but when he's got three official visits set up with schools that pay, that's concerning to me. They are Southern schools, and he's a Midwestern kid. I don't know how much that will matter to him to stay up north, but man, I would really, really target this guy heavily."

**Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220) was invited to the Elite 11 finals over the summer. Have you been able to see him throw? If so, what do you make of Edmunds as a prospect?**

"I haven't seen him in person yet, but I love that kid. He's different from the typical Ohio State quarterback. He's nothing like Will Howard. He's nothing like Julian Sayin. He's a 6-5 gunslinger, and that is typically not what Ohio State has seen lately. If you watch his basketball highlights, he's pretty athletic. He's not just a 6-5 stump back there, but he's not Josh Allen.

I wouldn't call him a scrambler, but I would call him a guy who can get out of his own way. He can create space in the pocket. He's not going to be someone who tucks it down and runs like Will Howard did. Then, when you look at just the arm strength and the accuracy, he has similar arm strength as Justin Fields, but he's more accurate than Justin Fields was. I think he fits what Ryan Day wants to do offensively. This guy's a freaking monster. He's 6-5, 220 pounds, and you watch him throw the ball, and it comes off his hand beautifully. The highlight film is amazing. When you see a kid that size, what you worry about is athleticism. So that's why I went to basketball, and it's pretty impressive. I like Brady Edmunds."

**The Buckeyes brought in 17 transfers this offseason. Do you think their change in approach to the portal will change their approach in high school recruiting moving forward?**

"I think they'd rather do it the way they did a couple of years ago, when they grabbed a handful of guys but they were all superstars, Quinshon Judkins and Caleb Downs. But this year, 37 kids left in the portal. Then, they had 51 people leave the team to both the NFL and to the portal combined. So they were forced to be more active than they'd rather be. I think this is an aberration year. I still think, even in this era of NIL, portal, all that, I still think you need to be selective with how many guys you bring in. You're not going to see this many people leaving the program, from eligibility, portal, and NFL. So I think Ohio State is still going to build itself through high school recruiting, and then you sprinkle in the Judkins and the Downs and those guys. So I think that this year was an aberration year caused by so many guys leaving."

**The Buckeyes are in the running for multiple top 2027 wide receivers despite already having Sunbury (Ohio) Big**

**Walnut five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 192) committed in the class. Do you think they will be able to land one of Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195), Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Eric McFarland III (5-8, 177), or another top pass catcher in the class and keep Brown?**

"With Sales, I would sell him that he's an Indianapolis kid, close to Ohio State. 'We can get you home, and (you can) see your mom anytime you want. You are going to be our next (Jeremiah Smith).' That's what I would sell. Monshun Sales is the same size (as Smith), with a lot of the same characteristics. 'You can see what we've done for JJ. We're going to do the same thing for Chris Henry Jr. We have Marvin Harrison Jr. We do well with the 6-4, 6-5 receivers. We know how to use them. We know how to promote them. We know how to get you to the league, and you're close to home, and we pay.' So I would check off every box that he's looking for.

"Eric McFarland, he's totally different from Sales. Eric's a slot guy. When you look at that, is Jamier Brown going to be in the slot? Jamier is a 5-11 guy that might be playing in the slot. So I wonder how that might scare off Eric McFarland. Would they put two smaller guys on the field? Although Jamier can play outside, they could sell Eric McFarland on that, too. The thing with Eric McFarland is the connection with the South Florida Express (7 on 7 team). He's been up to Ohio State before. He's got a relationship with Carnell Tate. They've had great success with those South Florida kids. So I think they've got a real chance there with Eric McFarland."

No. 235 player in the 2027 class, the No. 24 safety and the No. 9 player in Alabama.

Also including Ohio State in his top 10 schools was Orange (Calif.) Lutheran five-star defensive lineman Marcus Fakatou (6-6, 275). The other nine included were Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and USC. Fakatou is the No. 36 player in the 2027 class, the No. 2 defensive lineman and the No. 3 player in California.

Two other players to keep the Buckeyes on their top-10 lists were Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star safety Zayden Gamble (5-11, 190) and Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek four-star interior offensive lineman Jackson Roper (6-5, 285).

Gamble included the Buckeyes along with Auburn, Florida, Georgia Tech, Georgia, LSU, Miami, Notre Dame, Oregon and Texas A&M. Roper's list included Alabama, Georgia, Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, Oregon, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and USC.

Gamble is ranked the No. 179 player in the country, the No. 19 safety and the No. 19 player in Florida. Roper is the No. 242 player in the country, the No. 12 interior offensive lineman and the No. 1 player in Colorado.

Multiple prospects narrowed their lists down further than 10 schools and still included Ohio State. Pittsburgh Central Catholic four-star offensive tackle Jimmy Kalis (6-6, 280) was one of the recruits who had the Buckeyes in his top six schools. They were included with Clemson, Georgia, LSU, Miami and Texas. Kalis is considered the No. 290 player in the 2027 class, the No. 29 offensive tackle and the No. 11 player in Pennsylvania.

The Buckeyes were also in the top six for Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star defensive end Rashad Streets (6-4, 230). Streets goes to the same high school as 2027 Buckeye

linebacker pledge four-star Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220). Cypher has been active in trying to get Streets to Columbus. Streets also included Alabama, Florida State, NC State, Oregon and South Carolina on his list. He is the No. 63 player in the country in the 2027 class, the No. 7 defensive end and the No. 4 player in North Carolina.

Another Fort Lauderdale St. Thomas Aquinas prospect had the Buckeyes in his top six, with four-star cornerback Jaden Carey including them along with Auburn, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame and Oregon. Carey is the No. 349 player in the 2027 class, the No. 35 corner and the No. 36 player in Florida.

Ohio State made the top five for 2027 prospect Taelyn Mayo (6-4, 185), a four-star cornerback from Lewisville, Texas. The other four schools on Mayo's list are LSU, Oklahoma, Texas A&M and Texas. He is the No. 156 player in the country, the No. 19 cornerback and the No. 21 player in Texas.

The Buckeyes are still in the running for one of the top wide receivers in the 2027 class as well. Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star Monshun Sales (6-5, 195) had Ohio State in his top four with Alabama, Indiana and Miami.

If Sales lands with Ohio State, he would join Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 192) as the second five-star pass catcher in the class for the Buckeyes, which would be a phenomenal first class for new receivers coach Cortez Hankton. Brown committed to OSU when Brian Hartline was still the position coach, but Brown still seems to be locked in with Ohio State. Sales is the No. 8 player in the class, the No. 1 wide receiver and the No. 1 player in Indiana.

Ohio State is also yet again in the final

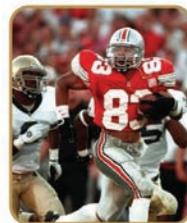
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## Continued From Page 15

four for a top offensive lineman, with Coatesville Area, Pa., five-star interior offensive lineman Maxwell Hiller (6-5, 300) putting the Buckeyes in his top four along with Alabama, Florida and Tennessee.

Hiller has already said that each of those four schools will get official visits over the summer, and the Buckeyes hope to land their first five-star offensive lineman since Donovan Jackson in the 2021 class. Hiller is the No. 4 player in the country, the No. 1 interior offensive lineman and the No. 1 player in Pennsylvania.

## OSU Makes Offers

• **Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian four-star defensive lineman Alifeleti Tuihalamaka (6-4, 260)** – Tuihalamaka is the No. 158 player in the 2027 class and the No. 17 defensive lineman. He holds 26 Division I offers, which include Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Oregon, Texas, Texas A&M, UCLA, USC and Washington. As a sophomore, he had 67 tackles, six for loss and six sacks. He is the younger brother of

Fighting Irish linebacker Junior Tuihalamaka.

• **Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Plantation athlete Za’Kari Johnson (6-1, 190)** – Johnson is unranked as a 2028 prospect, but he already holds 30 Division I offers, a list that includes Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Miami, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Texas A&M and South Florida, among many others.

• **Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School three-star athlete Caleb Cooper (6-0, 207)** – Cooper is the No. 726 player in the 2027 class and the No. 55-ranked athlete. He has 19 Division I offers from Florida, Indiana, Nebraska, Purdue, Tennessee and Wisconsin, among others. As a junior, Cooper totaled 97 tackles, five for loss, six passes broken up and one interception as a safety.

• **Dacula (Ga.) Hebron Christian Academy cornerback Jai’lil Goley (6-1, 175)** – Goley is unranked in the 2028 class but has 11 Division I offers, including Florida State, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Indiana, Pitt and Wake Forest.

• **Winnsboro (La.) Franklin Parrish four-star running back Trey Martin (5-10, 185)** – Martin is ranked No. 285 in the 2027 class and the No. 18 running back. He has 21

Division I offers and has already listed a top four of Alabama, Florida State, Houston and LSU, but running backs coach Carlos Locklyn offered after he decided on that list.

• **Pennington, N.J., four-star running back Tahmere Brown (5-11, 188)** – Brown is ranked the No. 41 player in the 2028 class and the No. 4 running back. He currently holds just 13 Division I offers, which include Florida, Florida State, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Pitt, Rutgers, Syracuse, Tennessee, USC and West Virginia.

## Other Notes And Tidbits

• The Buckeyes missed out on Hueytown, Ala., four-star defensive lineman Donovan Moore (6-4, 280), who committed to Auburn on Feb. 12. He chose the Tigers over Alabama, LSU, Ohio State, Ole Miss and Texas. He included all six of those schools when he revealed his top choices on Jan. 30, but it didn't take him long to decide on Auburn.

• When San Diego Cathedral Catholic five-star safety Honor Fa'alave-Johnson (6-1, 190) narrowed his list down to six schools, the Buckeyes weren't included. Safeties

coach Matt Guerrieri made it clear that Fa'alave-Johnson was a priority for him when he went out to the five-star's high school to visit him early in the offseason, but the safety will decide between LSU, Miami, Notre Dame, Oregon, Texas and USC. Fa'alave-Johnson had a spring visit scheduled to get to Columbus, and he hasn't said whether he will still make that visit.

• Sales and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Eric McFarland III (5-8, 177) have already set up official visits to get to Ohio State. Both of the top wide receivers are scheduled to be in Columbus the weekend of June 12. McFarland is ranked the No. 20 player in the 2027 class and the No. 5 wide receiver. He previously reclassified from the 2028 class and will also visit Georgia, Texas A&M and USC.

• Houston Langham Creek four-star defensive lineman Ezekiel Ayangbile (6-2, 262) has also scheduled an official visit to Ohio State. He will be on campus the weekend of May 29. He has also scheduled official visits to Arizona State (April 17), Virginia Tech (June 5), Miami (June 12) and Kentucky (June 19).

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

## 35 Years Ago — 1991

Rodrick Rhodes, a 6-7 junior from Jersey City (N.J.) St. Anthony who was rated the No. 2 basketball underclassman prospect in the country, was reportedly very interested in attending Ohio State.

According to The New York Times, Rhodes had narrowed his list of schools to six — Ohio State, Arizona, Kentucky, Seton Hall, Indiana and North Carolina — but those close to him said his ultimate decision would come down to OSU and Arizona.

Rhodes' best friend and teammate, Jermaine Womack, told the newspaper, "I think he's leaning toward Ohio State because of Coach (Randy) Ayers."

Rhodes confirmed that he liked Ayers, telling the newspaper, "I like him because he's a young Black coach, he's hungry and he can coach."

Rhodes averaged 21 points, nine rebounds, four blocks and four steals for St. Anthony, which was 27-1 and ranked second in the nation by USA Today at the time.

## 30 Years Ago — 1996

It was official: Na'il Diggs was a Buckeye.

Diggs, a highly regarded outside linebacker prospect from Los Angeles Dorsey, signed a national letter of intent to play for the Buckeyes on Feb. 27, one day after returning from an official visit to the OSU campus.

He became the 26th member of Ohio State's 1996 recruiting class, a collection of players rated by many as the nation's top class.

"It was a combination of the facilities and everything," Diggs told BSB. "It was a lot different than everything I expected. I thought it would be more of a farm town with cows walking through the streets, but it really is a big city."

"Plus, the people I met there were nice. I could tell in talking to the players and seeing them what kind of work ethic they have there," he said.

## 25 Years Ago — 2001

Toledo Rogers running back/linebacker Drushaun Humphrey was ranked Ohio's No. 1 junior prospect by Ohio's Future Stars. According to his coach, Rick Rios, Humphrey — along with Warren (Ohio) Harding running back Maurice Claret — remained committed to Ohio State for the class of 2002.

But there were two things that could have stood in the way for Humphrey: his academic standing and his desire to play tailback.

Humphrey had a reported GPA in the 2.0 range and would take college entrance tests for the first time in April. He was initially offered by the OSU staff the previous summer, although the coaches made it clear at that time that he had to qualify academically. He was reportedly working hard to alleviate his grade problems.

"I believe he is still committed to Ohio State," Rios said. "He has told me he will sign with Ohio State, assuming he qualifies and as long as they recruit him as a running back. He has his heart set on being a running back."

## 20 Years Ago — 2006

With a football coach for a father, Rocco Pentello had been on

hand for countless gridiron battles over the years. But it was still not hard for him to pick one out from the extensive crowd.

"Ohio State-Texas — best game I've ever been to," Pentello told BSB. "It was the loudest game I've ever been to. After Ohio State scored that first touchdown, when you looked across the field, all you saw was camera flashes and everything was kind of blurry because it felt like the entire stadium was rumbling."

In that game, played on Sept. 10, 2005, the No. 2 Longhorns beat No. 4 Ohio State 25-22 in Ohio Stadium.

If the two-way star had his way, he could have very well been taking part in such future contests at Ohio Stadium.

Standing 6-0 and 188 pounds, Pentello had started at quarterback for his father's Westerville (Ohio) South squad since his freshman year. He had received a written offer to play QB for Toledo, an offer that was first extended verbally after his sophomore season when he threw for more than 2,200 yards and rushed for nearly 900.

But despite his prowess as a dual-threat quarterback, many teams were projecting him as a defensive back at the college level. Pentello had a 4.45-second 40-yard dash speed to go along with his size, which could have translated well to the safety position.

## 15 Years Ago — 2011

The same high school that produced former OSU defensive lineman Vernon Gholston, Detroit Cass Tech, produced a three-star cornerback who was putting together an impressive offer list.

In addition to the Buckeyes, Terry Richardson held scholarship offers from Alabama, Iowa, LSU, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame and USC, among others. His OSU offer was extended on Feb. 27, three days after the Fighting Irish joined the fray.

"I was talking to the safeties coach, Coach (Paul) Haynes, and he told me they were going to offer me," Richardson told Scout.com of Ohio State. "They already offered a few DBs, but they wanted to offer me, too. I couldn't get a chance to have a one-on-one meeting with Coach (Jim) Tressel, and because I couldn't, they want me to get back down to talk to Coach Tressel, get a vibe from him."

## 10 Years Ago — 2016

Ohio State got a pleasant surprise on Feb. 9 when Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star defensive tackle Haskell Garrett announced his commitment, but the Buckeyes would have to work to keep him in the fold.

Garrett was the No. 2 defensive tackle and No. 22 overall prospect in the class of 2017. He began his high school career at Honolulu St. Louis, the high school that produced former Oregon Ducks quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota.

"The commitment kind of caught everybody by surprise," said Scout.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene. "Garrett is from Hawaii and is now in Las Vegas and has never been to the Ohio State campus before. They really haven't been recruiting him all that long, but with defensive tackle being such a need for them, they were thrilled to take his commitment."

His pledge gave Ohio State 11 verbal commitments for the class of 2017, a group that also included Cincinnati's Winton Woods

four-star defensive tackle Jerron Cage. The Buckeyes were also in a favorable position with Princeton (N.J.) Hun four-star defensive tackle Fred Hansard, so the Buckeyes' recruiting woes at that position appeared to be improving.

## Five Years Ago — 2021

There's a reason Reid Carrico was the only linebacker signed as part of the 2021 recruiting cycle, and it wasn't because the Buckeyes missed out elsewhere.

In fact, Carrico was the staff's top target at the position from the get-go thanks to his elite work ethic and all-around athletic ability, which translated to back-to-back state title appearances for the Ironton (Ohio) Fighting Tigers over the last two seasons.

"You talk about somebody who, when you look him in his eyes, he's going to get something done," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "He's going to have a great career here just because of the way he takes care of himself in the classroom and on the field. He's one of the toughest guys I've seen on film, running from sideline to sideline."

Carrico played on both sides of the ball at Ironton, where he started at both running back and linebacker. He rushed for 1,544 yards and 25 touchdowns while also contributing 56 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and four sacks as a senior, which was one reason that Ohio State director of player personnel Mark Pantoni mentioned him as someone he truly enjoyed watching on tape.

"There are certain guys that you really look forward to seeing on film, and Reid was always one of them," Pantoni said. "He's really fun to watch, just how hard he plays. He's just this old-school throwback linebacker who has no regard for his body. He's making 20-25 tackles per game, and he's playing running back, making 80-yard runs. He was just a dominant high school player who wasn't into recruiting. He just loves ball!"

## One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State was already in the top six for Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell, the No. 1 prospect in the country, and was among the top choices by each of the three top-200 offensive linemen in the state of Ohio, Avon Lake four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley, Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer and Washington Court House Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie.

Cantwell had said recently that he was trying to make official visits to each of his six top schools — Georgia, Missouri, Michigan, Ohio State, Miami (Fla.) and Oregon — but wasn't sure he was going to be able to make that schedule work. He had already scheduled a spring visit to Ohio State, which would be March 20-21, just a few days after the Buckeyes were set to begin spring ball. The visit would be a major opportunity for offensive line coach Tyler Bowen to build some momentum with Cantwell.

"I'd love to go see schools in spring ball that I haven't seen yet," Cantwell told 247Sports. "I've seen Mizzou and Georgia do spring ball, so I probably won't be back there until official visit season. The other four schools I can see myself making a trip to because it's beneficial."

# Camp Video Changed Wymer's Allegiances

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

It wasn't long ago that 2027 offensive tackle prospect and Ohio State commit Kellen Wymer was sitting around at his lunch table with his friends, claiming he would take an offer to Bowling Green over going to Ohio State.

The Liberty Center, Ohio, recruit grew up a fan of the Buckeyes' archrival Michigan, as the rest of his family was.

But as the 6-5, 265-pound Wymer sat on the turf in the middle of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in June 2025 at a recruiting camp his brother wanted to be at more than he did, a hype video was put on the video board that featured highlights from Ohio State's national championship run the year before, and that changed everything for Wymer.

"They play this video, and I got chills," he told BSB. "It was there that I was like, 'Man, this could be a place that I play at.' That's where it flipped everything for me."

At one point, Wymer did still want to be a Wolverine. Before he camped at Ohio State, Wymer went to a camp in Ann Arbor, but that didn't come as soon as he would have hoped.

"I went to a camp at Michigan, and I have nothing against them, but at the time I was starting to pick up offers from Indiana, Michigan State and Northwestern," Wymer said. "I went there, and I had really high hopes. I was hoping to get an offer. They were my favorite team growing up. I went there and didn't get the offer, but we stayed in contact."

When it came to softening his stance on the Buckeyes, it also helped that offensive line coach Tyler Bowen took an interest in Wymer as well.

"From the second I went there, Coach Bowen came up, introduced himself. It was super welcoming there," Wymer said. "He's super personable. From the moment I started talking to him at camp, he was super easy to connect with."

"He's got super good energy, and he's got great experience when it comes to working with NFL players and college players as well. He's a super likeable guy, and he connects really well with people's families."

Wymer said he consistently talks with Bowen two to three times per week, and his attitude toward Ohio State has completely flipped. Not even six months after he attended that recruiting camp, Wymer was committed to the Buckeyes, pledging on Nov. 2, the day after he was on campus for a gameday visit.

He chose to commit to Ohio State just two days after he ended up getting a scholarship offer from Michigan.

"(Ohio State is) always a national championship contender. Their culture is unreal," he said. "It's something that I wanted to be a part of. I honestly knew when the process started that's probably the place I was going to end up, and after a visit, that really reassured it all, so I committed early so I could strengthen those relationships."

Wymer's high school coach at Liberty Center, Casey Mohler, hadn't had one of



PHOTO COURTESY OF KELLEN WYMER

**DIFFERENT OUTLOOK — Liberty Center, Ohio, offensive lineman Kellen Wymer grew up wanting to play for Michigan, but attending an Ohio State recruiting camp helped alter his opinion and swayed him to commit to the OSU class of 2027 on Nov. 2.**

his players commit to a Power Four school until Wymer did. But he remembers when Ohio State reached out to him to try to learn more about Wymer as a person.

"They're doing their homework and looking at like, 'What kind of student is he?' beyond just looking at a transcript," Mohler told BSB. "Family background was big. They wanted to know about Mom and Dad and family and stuff like that."

"Then once they got him to camp, they could see his size, projectability and how he moved. Probably the biggest thing they were after is his ability to get downfield and move in space."

Mohler has seen Wymer's recruitment progress from no offers to being committed to one of the top football programs in the country, and he has watched Wymer remain grounded along the way and said he remains very coachable.

"He's a very humble kid," Mohler said. "Attitude-wise, he's just looking for somebody to give him information that can help him. Coach Bowen has done a good job of talking with him and building a relationship."

"Our coaches do a great job. My O-line coach does a fantastic job of not letting Kellen think he's arrived and saying, 'Look, you've got stuff to work on.' Because physi-

cally, he can dominate at this level with his size and his strength, and that's not going to be the case when he gets to Ohio State."

Wymer is one of three offensive linemen in the class of 2027 for the Buckeyes already. He is joined by St. Clairsville, Ohio, three-star offensive tackle Mason Wilt (6-5, 295), who committed minutes apart from Wymer on Nov. 2, and Richmond (Va.) Godwin four-star offensive tackle Brody McNeel (6-5, 285), who committed on Nov. 18.

Wymer said that he, Wilt and McNeel have already become good friends and they are looking forward to getting on campus together.

"That's a good advantage when it comes

to committing early," Wymer said. "You get to know all the guys you're going to be around. Me, Mason and Brody, we're all really close. We're talking every day. These are guys you're going to be spending four to five years with, so it's nice to be able to do that."

"Even with the coaches, too. Coach Bowen, Coach (Charlie) Dickey, Coach (Austin) Fields – I get to talk to those guys, ask them for advice on workouts and send them stuff. It's a really good advantage to commit early."

Wymer has been in touch with some of the 2026 recruits – Maxwell Riley, Mason Wilhelm and Landry Brede – after meeting them on visits. He says he has already been able to become close with them as well.

Mohler has also been impressed with Wymer as a leader for his high school team, noting that he has mostly led by example to this point. But he does expect that Wymer will be able to take over a more vocal role as a leader during his senior season as Liberty Center tries to get back to the state championship for the fourth straight season.

"As a sophomore, he was just looking to get on the field and contribute, which he worked hard enough for," Mohler said. "Last year, he was an established kid, but he didn't have to lead vocally because we had a great senior class that did that."

"Most guys naturally look at him as a leader by example as an underclassman because of his ability and how hard he works. Now he's got to take the next step and become a vocal leader, and not just tell kids what to do, but show them."

Wymer said he already has a plan to enroll early at Ohio State after his senior high school football season, and while he is looking forward to getting on campus, he also isn't ready to wish away his high school career.

He helped lead Liberty Center to a Division V state championship last season and is still hoping to capture another state title as a senior. The win in Wymer's junior season came after two straight losses in the state title game in 2023 and 2024.

Before he's able to enroll at Ohio State, he will still be visiting his future home often, starting with a couple of spring visits he already has planned.

"I'm planning on going to the first spring practice, and then I'm planning on getting back on March 28 with the other O-line commits," he said. "We're all going to go down together and kind of make a day of it."

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# Royal Used Poor Performance As Motivation

When Ohio State matched up against Virginia on Feb. 14 in the Nashville Hoops Showdown, junior forward Devin Royal struggled.

## COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

He finished the 70-66 loss making just 2 of 12 field goals and fouling out of the game, ending with just four points in nearly 33 minutes of action.

He said that he was unhappy with his performance, and he wasn't going to wait to try to correct whatever issues showed up in the loss.

"I had a bad game," Royal said of the Virginia game after coming back and having a much better shooting day in the win over Wisconsin on Feb. 17. "Right after the game, I was in the gym and shot like 1,000 shots at 4 a.m. because I did terrible. I let my team down a little bit last game, and I just wanted to work it off."

That late-night shooting session worked out well for Royal, who had a major part in

## 2025-26 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

### 18-11 Overall (10-8 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 1

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	29-29	1054-36.4	204-374	.545	52-135	.385	120-147	.816	25-128	153-5.3	50-0	108	38	7	35	580-20.0
MOBLEY JR., John	26-26	811-31.2	126-292	.432	78-190	.411	69-79	.873	10-52	62-2.4	45-0	72	47	3	21	399-15.3
ROYAL, Devin	27-27	875-32.4	132-274	.482	27-88	.307	88-111	.793	47-104	151-5.6	75-3	45	51	5	15	379-14.0
TILLY, Christoph	27-27	702-26.0	96-207	.464	12-51	.235	97-132	.735	40-89	129-4.8	86-4	61	41	16	16	301-11.1
BYNUM, Amare	29-19	804-27.7	105-215	.488	24-76	.316	37-51	.725	31-103	134-4.6	76-3	28	32	23	18	271-9.3
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	24-3	305-12.7	34-74	.459	19-42	.452	17-20	.850	5-23	28-1.2	33-1	19	16	2	9	104-4.3
NJEGOVAN, Ivan	25-2	303-12.1	29-50	.580	2-3	.667	18-27	.667	29-58	87-3.5	43-1	18	15	11	2	78-3.1
JOHNSON, Puff	8-1	102-12.7	6-18	.333	3-7	.429	6-9	.667	6-4	10-1.3	18-0	1	4	0	1	21-2.6
CUPPS, Gabe	28-0	356-12.7	13-37	.351	4-21	.190	14-19	.737	5-28	33-1.2	46-0	32	19	1	11	44-1.6
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	26-1	236-9.1	10-26	.385	1-16	.063	1-5	.200	10-19	29-1.1	25-0	11	5	2	8	22-0.8
NASH, Braylen	5-0	5-1.0	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	1	0	0	0	0-0.0
Team									57-51	108			16			
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5875</b>	<b>801-1645</b>	<b>.487</b>	<b>226-650</b>	<b>.348</b>	<b>481-622</b>	<b>.773</b>	<b>283-703</b>	<b>986-34.0</b>	<b>519-12</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>2309-79.6</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5875</b>	<b>742-1704</b>	<b>.435</b>	<b>214-690</b>	<b>.310</b>	<b>424-577</b>	<b>.735</b>	<b>319-617</b>	<b>936-32.3</b>	<b>557-13</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>2122-73.2</b>

Ohio State taking down the No. 24 Badgers three days later, 86-69. He finished the game with 25 points on 10-of-17 shooting, making 4 of 7 three-pointers in the contest.

He ended a long cold streak that he had been on from beyond the arc in that game. In the previous eight games, Royal had made just 2 of 25 shots from three-point range (8.0 percent).

However, Royal didn't get to ride that momentum for long, missing the Buckeyes' next game against Michigan State on Feb. 22 due to an illness. He warmed up pre-game and attempted to get ready but ultimately didn't feel that he could play in what ended up as a 66-60 loss to the Spartans.

"The great thing that says something about him is that he tried to get out there," said head coach Jake Diebler on Feb. 24. "That conversation between him and our training staff ultimately is the final decision, but you can't say the kid didn't try. He just couldn't quite get there."

Freshman forward Amare Bynum was also dealing with an illness but was able to make it back for the Michigan State game. However, he struggled in the loss and didn't score in 29 minutes of playing time, shooting 0 for 5 from the field.

Diebler said it was clear that Bynum wasn't feeling his best, but he appreciated both the freshman and Royal making an effort to help the team.

"It hit (Bynum) earlier than it hit Devin. That's just luck, I guess. He was able to get through it earlier and was able to play," Diebler said. "He went out there and fought and tried, but he wasn't his best, and he knows that. I appreciate him trying, just like I appreciate Devin trying. If the game was the day before, Amare wouldn't have been able to play."

Royal was back on the court for the Buckeyes' Feb. 25 game against Iowa that ended as a 17-point loss. He led the team with 16 points on 5-of-9 shooting, also making 6 of 8 from the free-throw line, but it wasn't enough to keep the game close.

### Mobley Dealing With Hand Injury

The Buckeyes are also dealing with injuries, along with illness, late in the season.

Sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. dealt with a finger injury that he suffered in Ohio State's 89-82 win over USC on Feb. 11. Mobley suffered the injury on a drive to the rim, where he jammed the fingers on his right shooting hand into a defender.

He came out of the game immediately after to be evaluated by trainers, but he re-entered the contest and made two three-pointers, so it seemed that he would be able to play through it.

However, before the game against Virginia three days later, Mobley was listed on the availability report as out, and he ended up missing the next three games.

"He's getting better and better each day," Diebler said on Feb. 24. "With this injury, there was never a specific date. It was just kind of a threshold that has to be met (for him to return). He is working so hard to get back as quickly as he can."

Mobley was able to return against Iowa, and he started the game off well, making two three-pointers on the way to an early 14-2 lead over the Hawkeyes that the Buckeyes took just over five minutes into the game.

But Iowa would storm back quickly, and Mobley's 15 points in the game weren't enough to give Ohio State a chance to win.

It was reported by Adam Jardy of The Columbus Dispatch that during the 31-4 run that Iowa went on in the first half, Mobley yelled at the team while they were huddled up during a timeout, which Diebler talked with him about afterward.

"I was just trying to get the team going," Mobley told the Dispatch after the game. "It was totally on me, trying to put something on someone else as well. I take the full blame for it. Should've never reacted that way. I apologized to my teammates and the coaches."

### OSU Still Hoping Noel Can Return

Mobley was able to return to the floor fairly quickly from his injury, but senior forward Brandon Noel has been out of the lineup with a foot ailment since Ohio State lost to Nebraska on Jan. 5.

He was said to be out indefinitely soon after, with no timeline for his return other than Diebler saying over time that they hoped to have the Wright State transfer back by the end of the season.

Noel has gone from not being able to put weight on his foot to walking on it with a boot on, but with the end of the season quickly approaching, time is running out for him to get back on the floor with the Buckeyes.

But on Feb. 24, Diebler maintained that Noel still has the chance to get back and contribute.

"The end of this week should give us an indication of where he's at, and maybe we



SONNY BROCKWAY

**ROYAL FLUSHED** — Junior forward Devin Royal didn't waste any time putting a poor performance against Virginia on Feb. 14 behind him when he immediately went to the gym at Value City Arena upon the return from Nashville to rediscover his shooting touch. It worked three days later when he scored a season-high 25 points in an 86-69 win over Wisconsin.

can start to predict when that return happens," Diebler said. "As far as I'm being told from our team, he's progressing well and hitting markers along the way. There haven't been any setbacks, is the best way to describe it. We're still hopeful we can get him back by the end of the season."

Noel played in 14 games before his injury and averaged 7.4 points and 4.1 rebounds per game. He began the season as a starter but lost that spot to Bynum after 10 games.

However, with some of the depth issues that have been hurting the Buckeyes, Noel's return would likely be helpful with a strong finish to the season needed to make the NCAA Tournament.

**Thornton Close To All-Time Lead**

Senior guard Bruce Thornton has continued to rise up the ranks of the all-time scoring list for Ohio State.

Since BSB last went to press, the fourth-year Buckeye has become the second leading scorer of all time at Ohio State, passing the likes of Herb Williams, William Buford and Jerry Lucas along the way.

Thornton is well aware of the milestones he's reaching but has said that he tries not to think about it during games and is only focused on winning.

But he said when he isn't playing in a game that he does think about his time at Ohio State often and how it feels to climb the all-time ranks.

"My mom told me, 'It's crazy. You didn't even score 2,000 (points) in high school, and now you scored 2,000 in college,' " Thornton said after he reached No. 3 on the all-time list in the win over Wisconsin. "It's a blessing. I had a lot of coaches and teammates help me get to this point. Without them, I wouldn't be in this position."

After scoring 20 points against Purdue on March 1 in an 82-74 win, Thornton is just 29 points shy of tying Dennis Hopson, the all-time leading scorer at OSU. Hopson's 2,096 points in four seasons have topped the list since he passed Williams during the 1986-87 season.

Buford was at the Wisconsin game when Thornton passed him, and both he and Lucas shared messages to Thornton posted by the Ohio State athletics Twitter account that day.

"I want to congratulate Bruce on his great accomplishment of becoming the third leading scorer in the history of men's basketball at Ohio State," Lucas said. "I've enjoyed watching you over the past four years, and the fact that you've been a four-year captain speaks volumes concerning your integrity and leadership. Congratulations, again, Bruce, and good luck in the future."

With a guaranteed three games remaining this season, which includes one round of the Big Ten tournament, Thornton would need to average 10.0 points per game to pass Hopson.

**Johnson Able To Play Rest Of Season**

Ohio State and senior forward Puff Johnson received good news on Feb. 23 when a judge ruled that Johnson will be able to finish the season with the Buckeyes.

A Franklin County judge upheld the temporary restraining order that Johnson had against the NCAA, which allowed the senior

to join the OSU roster in January.

"It has to be somewhat of a relief for him, personally," Diebler said. "For us, we were just operating under the assumption that he was going to be available. We weren't necessarily operating on a day-to-day (basis)."

Johnson was initially denied a medical hardship waiver by the NCAA, prompting Johnson to sue the NCAA. The lawsuit was denied by a federal court, but Johnson took the case to state court, where he received the temporary restraining order.

When he got the news, Johnson was coming off his first start with the Buckeyes with Mobley and Royal out of the lineup. Johnson had two points in 20 minutes of game time in the loss to Michigan State.

But now that Johnson is no longer dealing with his eligibility concerns, Diebler believes that could only positively impact the senior for the rest of the season.

"He missed some time once he got here because he got injured, and I think that impacted him," Diebler said. "But I would imagine – he was doing stuff on game day. There were things he had to spend a lot of time on to get to this point. Now that stuff is over. He can just play and be a part of the team. I would imagine that's a big relief for him."

In eight games this season, Johnson is averaging 2.6 points and 1.3 rebounds per game. He is coming off a campaign with Penn State in which he averaged 10.2 points, 4.4 rebounds and 1.4 steals per contest.

The Buckeyes are hoping he can get back to that production since they have lacked help from the bench throughout the season, and now with the new ruling, Johnson will get the chance to contribute through the remaining two regular-season games and any postseason games Ohio State plays in.

**Matta Reaches 500 Career Wins**

Former Ohio State head basketball coach Thad Matta reached 500 career wins since BSB last went to press with a 93-89 win over Georgetown on Feb. 18.

In 13 seasons with the Buckeyes, Matta won 337 games, which is more than any other coach won at the helm of Ohio State. With 123 losses over that span, Matta also has the second-highest winning percentage of any OSU coach (.773), behind only Thomas Kibler, who led the team from 1909-10 and had a 22-2 record.

After being fired by Ohio State in 2017, Matta took five years off from coaching but returned to Butler,

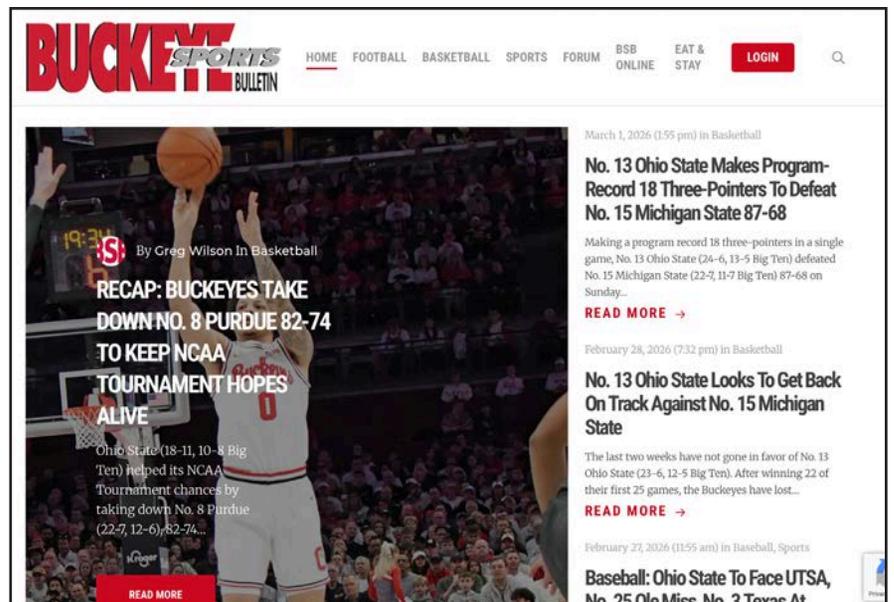
where he got his first head coaching position in 2000. In five total seasons with Butler, he has 86 wins. He also won 78 games in three seasons as the head coach at Xavier, where he coached before he came to Columbus.

"I'm so happy for him and Barb and their family," Diebler said on his radio show about Matta reaching 500 wins. "Really a great moment for them and something we should celebrate as a program because a lot of those were when he was a Buckeye."



**Thad Matta**

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# Buckeyes' March Madness Hopes Still Alive

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State played six games since BSB last went to press, managing a 3-3 record over that period.

The Buckeyes began that stretch with a home win over USC before suffering a late loss to No. 15 Virginia in Nashville, Tenn. They came back with a big win over No. 24 Wisconsin for their first ranked win of the season but then lost two straight road games to No. 15 Michigan State and Iowa.

Ohio State then won its third straight game against Purdue, taking down the No. 8 Boilermakers at home.

## Buckeyes Take Must-Win Game

Ohio State (16-8, 8-6) was able to come through in a must-win game against USC (18-7, 7-7) on Feb. 11 with an 89-82 win at the Schottenstein Center in front of 11,367 fans.

The Buckeyes had a bit of a slow start but were able to recover and keep the game close long enough to pull away in the final minutes of the contest.

The Trojans took an early lead with the help of five points from Kam Woods to go up 7-2 just over two minutes into the game. They extended their advantage to as many as nine points multiple times over the next few minutes, including 15-6 at 13:13, but the Buckeyes came back with a 9-0 run that was capped by a jump shot from sophomore guard Taison Chatman that tied the game at 15.

Ohio State took its first lead of the game at 9:38 on a turnaround jumper from senior guard Bruce Thornton to make it 19-17.

But USC took control of the game again and got back out to a five-point lead, 36-31, on two free throws by Ezra Ausar with 3:28 left in the half. Ohio State struggled to make a run at the end of the half and went into the locker room at a 43-40 deficit.

It was a rough half of basketball for the Buckeye defense, allowing the Trojans to make 51.9 percent of their shots (14 of 27) in the first 20 minutes while OSU made just 42.4 percent (14 of 33). That was hurt by its 2-of-13 shooting performance (15.4 percent) from beyond the arc.

The Buckeyes' fortunes didn't get much better right away in the second frame, with sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. missing his fourth three-pointer of the game on their first possession. But senior center Christoph Tilly helped to start reversing that trend with a three-pointer of his own, bringing the score to a 47-45 USC lead with 18:03 remaining.

Ohio State took another lead on two free throws from Tilly nearly four minutes later to go up by two points and extended it to its biggest advantage of the game, 54-49, at 13:39 on a deep ball from senior forward Puff Johnson, who returned against the Trojans after missing two games due to injury.

The Trojans were able to hang around for the middle of the second half, going down by as many as seven points at 8:13 but using small spurts to bring the game closer.

At 5:49, Jordan Marsh of USC made a sec-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FRONT AND CENTER — Christoph Tilly (13) returned to the lineup March 1 to help the Buckeyes upset No. 8 Purdue, 82-74, by scoring seven points and grabbing five rebounds. The center did not play against Iowa three days earlier because of an ankle injury, and his absence contributed to Ohio State being outscored 44-18 in the paint.**

ond-chance three-pointer to cut the OSU lead to 70-69, but the Buckeyes subsequently went on an eight-point run to lead by nine points.

But the Trojans didn't make it easy for the Buckeyes to pull away with the win. They made it a one-point game again with just 1:09 remaining in the contest on a three-pointer from Alijah Arenas, but Thornton followed with an and-one layup and converted the free throw to make it 85-81 with 40 seconds to play.

The Buckeyes, leading 87-82 on a pair of Thornton free throws, were helped in the final 13 seconds when Arenas drove to the paint and attempted a behind-the-back pass to his teammate in the corner, but it was cut off by junior forward Devin Royal. Thornton made two more free throws with five seconds left to seal the seven-point victory.

Head coach Jake Diebler didn't hide how much the victory meant this late into the season.

"It felt very crucial," Diebler said when asked how important getting the win was. "It's a home game, similar standing in the Big Ten (between the two teams). Results are critical right now. Most importantly, our guys responded in a big way (after a 21-point loss to Michigan three days earlier)."

Thornton led the Buckeyes with 21 points on 5-of-11 shooting, going a perfect 11 of 11 from the charity stripe. He was followed closely by Royal, who had 19 points on 8 of 11 from the field, with his only misses coming from deep. Also in double digits were Mobley (13) and freshman forward Amare Bynum (11). Ohio State was a torrid 24 of 25 from the line (96.0).

Arenas, son of former NBA all-star Gilbert

Arenas, led the Trojans with 25 points on 6-of-19 shooting, with much of his production also coming at the free-throw line, where he made 12 of 16 tries.

## OSU Falls To No. 15 Virginia

Ohio State (16-9) failed to take home its first ranked win when it was unable to hold on to a second-half lead against No. 15 Virginia (22-3) and lost 70-66 on Feb. 14 in Nashville, Tenn., at Bridgestone Arena in front of 6,438 fans at the Nashville Hoops Showdown.

The Buckeye bench was outmatched by the backups for the Cavaliers, getting outscored 28-4. Sophomore center Ivan Njegovan scored the only four non-starter points for Ohio State.

"It was impactful," Diebler said when asked about the discrepancy in bench points. "They had some guys come in and play at a high level. We needed some guys to raise our level we were certainly missing. We've been playing without Brandon (Noel) for some time, and we were missing (Mobley). But when you're down, everybody's got to do a little bit more."

The Scarlet and Gray started the game off well, taking a 9-4 lead just over four minutes into the contest on a pull-up jumper from Chatman. Thornton converted a three-point play to extend that lead to eight points and made a three-pointer at 14:03 to make it an 11-point lead, 17-6.

But that didn't last long. The Cavaliers quickly stormed back to make it a two-point game, 19-17, at 11:40 on a layup by Dallin Hall. The Buckeyes held onto their slight lead over the next few minutes until a three-point jumper at 6:38 by Jacari White made it a 29-

### Ohio State 89, USC 82

Feb. 11, 2026  
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	1	2	F
USC (18-7, 7-7)	43	39	82
Ohio State (16-8, 8-6)	40	49	89

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Ausar	34	4-11	5-6	5-4	2	5	13			
Cofie	38	5-9	0-0	2-2	1	4	12			
Dynes	20	2-3	0-0	0-0	0	4	4			
Arenas	36	6-19	12-16	1-3	3	2	25			
Woods	40	6-13	1-2	1-5	3	2	14			
Williams II	11	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	2	1			
Marsh	19	3-7	5-7	0-2	1	0	13			
Cornish	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Easter II	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>26-62</b>	<b>24-33</b>	<b>14-18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>82</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 41.9%. FT: 72.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-17 (Arenas 1-7, Cofie 2-4, Marsh 2-4, Woods 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Cofie 2, Dynes 2). **Turnovers:** 10 (Arenas 4, Woods 3, Ausar 2, Team). **Steals:** 11 (Ausar 4, Arenas 3, Cofie 2, Dynes 2).

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Bynum	30	5-12	0-0	2-1	1	3	11			
Royal	35	8-11	3-3	0-7	1	2	19			
Tilly	22	2-3	4-4	0-2	1	3	9			
Mobley Jr.	32	4-10	3-3	0-3	2	3	13			
Thornton	32	5-11	11-11	1-5	8	3	21			
Njegovan	7	0-1	1-2	2-2	0	1	1			
Chatman	21	2-6	0-0	0-2	1	1	5			
Johnson	15	2-2	2-2	0-0	0	4	8			
Cupps	6	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	2			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>29-58</b>	<b>24-25</b>	<b>8-24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>89</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 50.0%. FT: 96.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-22 (Mobley 2-7, Bynum 1-3, Chatman 1-3, Royal 0-3, Thornton 0-3, Johnson 2-2, Tilly 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Tilly 2, Bynum). **Turnovers:** 12 (Thornton 4, Mobley 3, Royal 2, Tilly 2, Cupps). **Steals:** 5 (Thornton 2, Bynum, Johnson, Royal). **Officials:** Anderson, Carstensen, Pfeifer. **Attendance:** 11,367.

### Virginia 70, Ohio State 66

Feb. 14, 2026  
Bridgestone Arena • Nashville, Tenn.

	1	2	F
Virginia (22-3)	37	33	70
Ohio State (16-9)	37	29	66

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
De Ridder	26	2-7	2-3	1-5	1	1	6			
Grünloh	19	2-3	0-0	1-1	0	2	4			
Thomas	21	4-10	3-4	1-5	2	2	13			
Lewis	28	2-6	7-9	0-3	0	1	12			
Hall	31	3-6	1-2	1-0	1	1	7			
Mallory	24	3-6	5-7	2-1	1	3	12			
Onyenso	22	2-5	4-7	4-6	1	0	8			
White	15	1-3	0-0	0-3	1	1	3			
Tillis	14	2-4	0-0	1-2	2	1	5			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>21-50</b>	<b>22-32</b>	<b>12-29</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>70</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 42.0%. FT: 68.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-18 (Thomas 2-5, Tillis 1-3, Lewis 1-2, Mallory 1-2, De Ridder 0-2, Hall 0-2, White 1-1, Onyenso 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Onyenso 4, De Ridder, Grünloh). **Turnovers:** 12 (Hall 3, De Ridder 2, Grünloh, Lewis, Mallory, Onyenso, Team, Thomas, White). **Steals:** 5 (Grünloh, Hall, Lewis, Onyenso, White).

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Bynum	33	5-7	2-2	0-6	0	1	15			
Royal	33	2-12	0-0	1-4	0	5	4			
Tilly	26	4-12	2-3	1-2	2	2	11			
Thornton	38	12-21	2-4	0-4	3	4	28			
Chatman	30	2-5	0-0	1-0	1	3	4			
Njegovan	14	2-3	0-0	2-3	0	0	4			
Johnson	8	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	3	0			
White	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Cupps	13	0-0	0-0	0-0	3	3	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-60</b>	<b>6-9</b>	<b>6-20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>66</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 45.0%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-14 (Bynum 3-4, Thornton 2-4, Tilly 1-3, Royal 0-2, Chatman 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Tilly 2, Thornton). **Turnovers:** 8 (Bynum 2, Chatman 2, Cupps, Royal, Team, Thornton). **Steals:** 7 (Thornton 3, Bynum, Chatman, Cupps, Tilly). **Officials:** Johnson, Kitts, McJunkins. **Attendance:** 6,438.

# OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Ohio State 86, Wisconsin 69

Feb. 17, 2026  
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	F
Wisconsin (18-8, 10-5)	26	43	69
Ohio State (17-9, 9-6)	38	48	86

Wisconsin	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Winter	35	5-10	0-0	1-6	2	2	10			
Bieliauskas	18	1-2	0-0	2-2	0	2	2			
Boyd	33	6-15	2-4	1-2	0	3	14			
Rohde	24	0-1	1-2	0-1	3	1	1			
Blackwell	32	5-11	2-4	1-5	4	4	14			
Carrington	28	6-14	3-4	1-0	2	3	20			
Garlock	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Janicki	10	1-1	0-0	1-0	1	0	2			
Jones	16	3-4	0-2	3-1	1	3	6			
Kinziger	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Robison	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-59</b>	<b>8-16</b>	<b>10-17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>69</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 45.8%. FT: 50.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-26 (Carrington 5-12, Blackwell 2-5, Boyd 0-4, Winter 0-2, Jones 0-1, Kinziger 0-1, Rohde 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Carrington 2, Winter 2, Rohde). **Turnovers:** 12 (Blackwell 3, Boyd 3, Rohde 3, Bieliauskas, Carrington, Team). **Steals:** 4 (Carrington 2, Blackwell, Rohde).

Ohio State	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Bynum	34	5-6	0-0	0-6	0	5	13			
Royal	34	10-17	1-4	1-4	3	3	25			
Tilly	19	1-3	0-0	2-2	3	5	2			
Thornton	37	9-18	6-7	3-6	8	0	27			
Chatman	29	3-6	4-4	0-1	1	0	11			
Njegovan	14	1-1	2-2	3-3	0	0	4			
Cupps	12	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Johnson	17	2-4	0-2	0-1	1	2	4			
White	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0			
Nash	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>31-57</b>	<b>13-19</b>	<b>11-24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>86</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 54.4%. FT: 68.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-21 (Royal 4-7, Thornton 3-6, Bynum 3-4, Chatman 1-2, Cupps 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Bynum, Royal). **Turnovers:** 14 (Bynum 2, Chatman 2, Royal 2, Thornton 2, Cupps, Johnson, Njegovan, Team, Tilly, White). **Steals:** 3 (Bynum 2, Chatman). **Officials:** Hartness, Kimble, O'Brien. **Attendance:** 9,006.

28 Virginia.

After Tilly made a three-point jumper at 6:16 to put the Buckeyes back in front, the Buckeyes were unable to score again until 2:44 before the half when Royal made a put-back layup that made it a 36-33 deficit for OSU.

They were able to take the lead back when Thornton made a jumper with 50 seconds remaining to make it 37-36. After a Virginia free throw by Ugonna Onyenso, the game went into halftime tied at 37.

Thornton scored the first four points of the second half, giving OSU a 41-37 lead 2:13 into the frame. The Buckeyes kept trying to stretch that lead and got it to six points five times throughout the next few minutes, the last at 59-53 with 10:06 to play on a layup by Thornton, but they couldn't gain the same momentum they had early in the first half.

After a timeout at 9:50, Virginia was able to bring the game back within two points on a three-pointer by Malik Thomas and tied it back up, 59-59, at 7:07 on a jumper by Chance Mallory. The Cavaliers then took their first lead since early in the half on a layup by Onyenso with 6:09 left in the game, while the Buckeyes struggled to score.

Thornton finally made a turnaround jumper at 5:08 to tie the game at 61.

But the OSU offense went into another drought and didn't score again until Bynum made a three-pointer with 33 seconds left in the game to pull the Buckeyes within two, 66-64. Virginia had scored five unanswered points before Bynum's shot.

## Michigan State 66, Ohio State 60

Feb. 22, 2026  
Breslin Events Center • East Lansing, Mich.

	1	2	F
Ohio State (17-10, 9-7)	26	34	60
Mich. State (22-5, 12-4)	23	43	66

Ohio State	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Bynum	29	0-5	0-0	0-2	0	4	0			
Tilly	28	5-6	0-3	0-7	1	2	10			
Thornton	40	12-22	6-8	1-4	2	0	32			
Chatman	32	2-8	0-0	0-3	3	4	5			
Johnson	20	0-4	2-2	0-0	0	4	2			
Njegovan	14	2-2	2-2	1-2	0	2	6			
White	25	1-2	0-2	1-3	1	4	3			
Cupps	12	1-3	0-0	0-0	1	1	2			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>23-52</b>	<b>10-17</b>	<b>4-22</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>60</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 44.2%. FT: 58.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-22 (Thornton 2-8, Chatman 1-5, Johnson 0-3, White 1-2, Bynum 0-2, Cupps 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Chatman, Tilly). **Turnovers:** 6 (Cupps 2, Team 2, Chatman, Johnson). **Steals:** 5 (Thornton 2, Tilly 2, White).

Mich. State	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Kohler	17	4-8	0-0	2-8	0	5	9			
Scott	31	4-7	3-5	2-2	3	3	12			
Carr	32	2-7	1-4	2-6	1	2	5			
Cooper	34	7-10	6-6	3-8	3	1	20			
Fears Jr.	35	2-7	6-6	0-1	8	3	11			
Ward	15	1-3	2-4	2-2	0	0	4			
Teng	23	2-9	0-0	1-0	1	1	5			
Wojcik	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	2	0	0			
McCulloch	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Fort	4	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>22-55</b>	<b>18-25</b>	<b>15-28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>66</b>			

**Percentages:** FG: 40.0%. FT: 72.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-15 (Teng 1-5, Kohler 1-4, Scott 1-2, Fort 0-2, Fears 1-1, Carr 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Scott, Ward). **Turnovers:** 9 (Fears 3, Carr, Cooper, Kohler, Scott, Team, Teng). **Steals:** 2 (Fears 2). **Officials:** Carstensen, Pfeifer, Phillips. **Attendance:** 14,797.

However, Virginia made a free throw by Sam Lewis, a shot from Thornton was blocked, and Lewis made two more free throws, giving Virginia a five-point lead with just 12 seconds remaining. Tilly scored on a layup with six seconds left to bring the game to its final margin.

Thornton led Ohio State with 28 points on 12-of-21 shooting with four rebounds and three assists. Only Bynum (15) and Tilly (11) also reached double-digit points in the game.

Thomas led a balanced attack for the victors with just 13 points. Onyenso pulled down 10 rebounds to go with eight points, and the Cavaliers held a decisive 40-26 lead on the glass.

### Buckeyes Earn First Ranked Win

Ohio State (17-9, 9-6) earned its first ranked win of the season by beating No. 24 Wisconsin (18-8, 10-5), 86-69, on Feb. 17 at the Schottenstein Center.

The Buckeyes got out to an early double-digit lead and didn't look back, holding onto that advantage through most of the game on the way to their victory. OSU outrebounded the Badgers 35-27, which Diebler was hoping to see.

"Aside from the start, the offensive rebounds that Wisconsin got, we did a great job throughout the game rebounding the ball," he said. "The way our guys have been locked in has certainly helped."

The game was tied at 18:08, with Royal scoring his first points of the game on a jumper to make it 4-4. But after a Wisconsin jumper by John Blackwell, the Buckeyes separated themselves with an 8-0 run, five of those

points from Royal.

The Badgers pulled to 14-10 at 15:14 on a basket by Aleksas Bieliauskas before OSU scored eight in a row to make it a 12-point lead. Royal scored five more points on the run, making his second three-pointer of the game.

Royal made a layup at 12:49 to make it 24-12, but those were the last Buckeye points for over four minutes of game time, with Royal also ending the drought with another layup. However, the Buckeyes defense was strong during that run, and the only points Wisconsin scored during that stretch were a free throw and a layup, and Ohio State led 26-15 after Royal's score.

A three-pointer from Blackwell made it a 26-20 game at 6:49. The Badgers kept the margin within eight until three-point jumpers from Bynum and Chatman stretched the lead back out to 12 points with 3:06 left in the half, 36-24.

Johnson scored his first points of the game on a driving layup to make it a 38-24 lead with just under two minutes left, and the Badgers scored a layup of their own by Nolan Winter 18 seconds later. Those were the last points of the half for either team, and the Buckeyes went into the locker room with a 38-26 lead.

The Buckeyes shot well in the first frame, making 15 of 29 from the field (51.7 percent), which included 6 of 13 from three-point range (46.2 percent). Wisconsin made just 1 of 8 shots from beyond the arc (12.5 percent).

The lead was extended to 15 points at 18:22 of the second half when Thornton, who had just three points in the first half, doubled his point total with a three-pointer. Braeden Carrington answered with a deep ball of his own, but OSU got its lead to 47-31 with 16:06 left in the game on a jumper from Royal.

The Badgers continued to try to cut into the lead over the next few minutes, getting as close as 12 at 14:19, but the Buckeyes continued to answer, and a three-pointer from Royal got the lead to as far as 18 points, 57-39, with 12:41 left in the contest.

That equaled the largest the lead at that point of the game, and Ohio State remained consistent throughout the middle of the second half, not allowing Wisconsin to get within even the 12 points until Hayden Jones made a jumper at 6:12, making the score 67-55. That came toward the end of a two-plus-minute scoring drought for the Buckeyes that was ended by a three-pointer from Thornton with 5:53 to play making it 70-55.

The Badgers were unable to bring their deficit any closer than 14 the rest of the contest, and Ohio State cruised to its 17-point win.

Thornton led Ohio State in the game with 27 points, scoring 24 of those in the second half. He also had game highs of nine rebounds and eight assists. Royal followed closely with 25 points on 10-of-17 shooting, which included 4 of 7 from three-point range. The game ended a long stretch during which Royal was struggling to shoot from beyond the arc.

The Badgers were led by Carrington with 20 points. Blackwell and Nick Boyd each had 14.

### OSU Falters Late In Loss

Ohio State (17-10, 9-7) failed to keep the game close late in the second half, falling to No. 15 Michigan State (22-5, 12-4), 66-60, at the Breslin Events Center in East Lansing, Mich., on Feb. 22 in front of 14,797 fans.

The Buckeyes left the first half with a lead

and, for much of the second half, were able to keep the game close, but late in the final frame, they allowed the Spartans to pull away.

Ohio State shot just 4 of 22 from beyond the arc and 10 of 17 from the free-throw line, which Diebler believes was a major part of how the game finished.

"We didn't shoot well enough from the free-throw line, and we struggled from three," he said after the game. "We had some great looks. The ball just didn't go in for us from the three-point line like we're capable of. Those empty possessions eventually were the difference."

It was a slow start for both teams, with Michigan State scoring the first points of the game at 19:24 on a jumper by Scott Jordan and both teams spending nearly the next three minutes without scoring again. The Spartans ended the drought with a dunk from Coen Carr, and Thornton scored the first points of the game for the Buckeyes at 16:13 to make it 4-2.

Kur Teng of the Spartans made it a 9-6 game with a three-pointer at 13:59, and both teams went cold again until Thornton made a layup at 12:02. Nearly a minute later, Tilly made a jumper in the paint to give Ohio State its first lead of the game at 11:13, 10-9.

Thornton extended that lead to five points with a free throw and a three-pointer, and the Buckeyes continued to hold onto the lead when Tilly and Thornton made layups on back-to-back OSU possessions for a 20-14 lead.

Michigan State brought the score within three points multiple times the rest of the half, and Ohio State led by as much as five multiple times and went into the locker room up 26-23 after Tilly missed a last-second layup.

Thornton started the scoring in the second half with a jumper, and sophomore forward Colin White gave the Buckeyes another six-point lead with a three-pointer with 17:50 left in the game, 31-25. Jeremy Fears Jr. answered with his own shot from beyond the arc, and Chatman made a jumper for a 33-28 lead.

After Chatman's shot, the Buckeyes went into another scoring drought, which allowed Michigan State to take a 36-33 lead at 14:20. It wasn't until 13:50 that Ohio State scored again, with Njegovan ending the drought with two free throws.

However, the Buckeyes were able to take the lead back, with Chatman making a three-pointer and Tilly following with a jumper to make it 43-40 with 11:00 showing. Tilly made a layup at 10:12 for a 45-43 lead, and the Buckeyes had yet another scoring drought that allowed the Spartans to take a 49-45 lead with 7:57 left to play after a 6-0 run.

Johnson made two free throws at 7:30 to bring the Buckeyes back within two, 49-47, but Michigan State stretched its lead out to six points with 4:51 left in the game on two free throws from Fears that made it 55-49. The deficit was stretched to eight points with 3:45 left in the game on a Jaxon Kohler layup that made it 59-51.

With 2:50 left in the game, Michigan State took its biggest lead of the game, 61-51, on a jumper from Jordan Scott. Ohio State was able to make it a three-point game with 14 seconds left on a fastbreak layup from Thornton, but the deficit proved too large to overcome.

Thornton led Ohio State with 32 points in the game on 12-of-22 shooting, while only Tilly joined him with double-digit points with

**Continued On Page 22**

# Buckeyes Snag Signature Win Vs Purdue

Continued From Page 21

10. Tilly also had a team-high seven rebounds.

Carson Cooper led Michigan State with 20 points on an efficient 7-of-10 shooting with a game-high 11 rebounds. Kohler added 10 rebounds to help MSU to a 43-26 edge on the glass. Fears had 11 points and eight assists.

## Buckeyes Blown Out At Iowa

Ohio State (17-11, 9-8 Big Ten) was in dire need of a road win on Feb. 25 but was blown out by Iowa (20-8, 10-7), 74-57, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in front of 10,368 fans.

The Buckeyes got out to a quick start in the first half, scoring 14 points in just over five minutes of game time, but scored just nine more points the rest of the first half and trailed by double digits the rest of the game.

It was a quick start for Mobley in his first game back from his finger injury when he made his first shot from beyond the arc for a 3-0 lead 2:14 into the game. He followed that up with another three-pointer on the Buckeyes' next possession.

Mobley's three-pointers were the start of a 14-2 run for Ohio State, with Bynum also knocking down two deep balls of his own during that stretch that ended at 14:51.

The Hawkeyes would storm back right away, tying the game up at 15 with 10:30 left in the first half on a jumper from Bennett Stirtz. But the run didn't stop there for Iowa.

After the Hawkeyes went up 21-15 on a three from Cooper Koch at 8:47, neither team scored until 5:51, with two free throws from

Trevin Jirak ending the drought. Chatman scored 22 seconds later for Ohio State on a three-pointer, the Buckeyes' first points since 13:46, but Iowa continued to surge, taking a 33-18 lead with 2:31 left in the frame on a Kael Combs fastbreak layup. That was the end of a lengthy 31-4 run for the Hawkeyes.

Ohio State went into the second half down 37-23 despite its fast start. The Buckeyes shot 7 of 22 from the field in the period (31.8 percent) while Iowa made 13 of 24 shots (54.2 percent).

Needing a strong second-half performance to come back, Ohio State was able to bring the score within 10 points at 18:14 with the help of four points from Royal and a three-pointer from Njegovan.

But after Iowa called a timeout, the Hawkeyes took control of the game again and had a quick 5-0 spurt to get back out to a 15-point lead, 45-30. It didn't take long for them to extend the lead to 19 points at 14:37, their biggest advantage of the game at that point.

Ohio State was able to bring it back within 14 points with another three-pointer from Mobley at 12:01, but the Buckeyes couldn't bring it any closer than that, with a media timeout interrupting any momentum they might have been building.

With 7:25 left, Iowa stretched its lead as far as 23 points, 66-43, with Alvaro Folgueiras scoring six points on an 8-0 run.

That deficit was far too large for Ohio State to overcome, with the game ending in a 17-point defeat.

Royal led Ohio State with 16 points on 5-of-9 shooting while Mobley had 15 points in his return to the floor. Thornton scored 10 points, all of them coming in the second half. Thornton was never able to get going against Iowa, and Diebler believes that was because the Hawkeyes had a strong game plan for him.

"Clearly their game plan was to get the ball out of his hands," Diebler told The Columbus Dispatch after the game. "We've seen that before and handled it much better than we did tonight. I think that's the disappointing thing for us. Not to take anything away from them, but we've got to handle it better."

Stirtz scored 22 points for the Hawkeyes, and Folgueiras was close behind with 20 before he fouled out of the game. Iowa finished the game shooting 57.4 percent from the floor (27 of 47), while Ohio State finished at 41.9 (18 of 43).

## Buckeyes Beat No. 8 Purdue

Ohio State (18-11, 10-8) helped its NCAA Tournament chances by taking down No. 8 Purdue (22-7, 12-6), 82-74 at the Schottenstein Center on March 1 in front of 15,524 fans, many of whom were there to support the Boilermakers.

The Buckeyes earned their second Quad 1 win of the season with the eight-point win, getting out to a double-digit lead in the second half and closing the game strong to stave off a late Boilermaker comeback attempt.

Ohio State was able to keep the game close early on, making it 6-5 at 16:47 with a hook shot from Tilly. But Purdue took the lead back with a three-pointer from senior guard Braden Smith.

After Smith made a fastbreak layup off an

inbound turnover by the Buckeyes, Thornton scored his first points of the game on a step-back three-pointer. However, the Boilermakers followed that with two deep balls from sophomore guard C.J. Cox to take a 16-9 lead with 13:12 left in the half.

Ohio State followed by tying the game at 16 with a 7-0 run that included Mobley's first three-pointer of the game. He was 0 for 3 from beyond the arc to start the game.

Purdue stopped the run with a corner three from senior guard Fletcher Loyer, but Mobley made one of his own the next trip down the floor. Mobley gave the Buckeyes a 21-19 lead at 7:39 with a jumper, and Bynum extended it with a jumper of his own 55 seconds later.

Njegovan made it a six-point lead on a putback dunk before Cox and Mobley traded threes. Smith then came out of a timeout with a three-pointer of his own to make it 30-27 with 3:10 left in the half.

Thornton scored on a layup with 18 seconds on the clock to let Ohio State go into the locker room with a 36-31 lead.

The Boilermakers made just 11 of 28 shots (39.3 percent) from the field in the first 20 minutes, eight of them coming from three-point range. They shot 3 of 14 from inside the arc (21.4 percent).

The Buckeyes began the second half outscoring Purdue 9-3, with a three-pointer from Mobley making it 45-34 before a Boilermaker timeout. Out of the timeout, OSU scored three more points on three free throws to take a 14-point lead with 17:03 remaining.

Senior forward Trey Kaufman-Renn brought it back within 10 points on a jumper before Cox made a fastbreak layup off a Mobley turnover to make it 50-42 with 13:55 showing.

After Kaufman-Renn converted a three-point play, Ohio State was able to take advantage of two offensive rebounds, with Thornton knocking down a wide-open three-pointer to get back out to a 10-point lead with 12:02 left in the game.

Chatman had a steal and a fastbreak layup to make it a 13-point Buckeye lead, 62-49, with 9:04 left. Mobley made it 65-51 with an off-balance three nearly a minute later.

After two free throws from Royal and a Purdue layup by Oscar Cluff, both teams went scoreless for over two minutes until Kaufman-Renn converted another three-point play at 5:02 that made it 67-56. A Kaufman-Renn floater got the Boilermakers back within nine points, and Ohio State's lengthy scoring drought continued.

Royal's two free throws at 3:26 were the first Buckeye points in 4:15 and gave OSU a double-digit lead again, 69-58. Purdue took advantage of a Royal foul after Loyer made a three-pointer, and a Smith layup made it 69-63.

Bynum followed that with a three-pointer, and Royal had a putback dunk to stretch the lead back out to 11 points with 1:40 left in the contest.

The Boilermakers got within six points again on a three-point play from redshirt-freshman guard Jack Benter with 31 seconds left, but Thornton made two free throws, and the game proved out of reach for Purdue.

Diebler was proud of Ohio State's ability to limit Purdue's three-point shooting in the

## Ohio State 82, Purdue 74

March 1, 2026  
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	F
Purdue (22-7, 12-6)	31	43	74
Ohio State (18-11, 10-8)	36	46	82

Purdue	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Kaufmann-Renn	28	8-12	3-5	3-6	0	5	19
Cluff	19	1-3	0-0	2-3	0	5	2
Cox	29	5-9	0-0	1-1	1	2	13
Loyer	32	5-10	0-0	0-4	2	1	15
Smith	36	7-19	3-4	0-0	7	4	20
Benter	23	1-3	1-1	2-1	1	2	3
Jacobsen	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0
Harris	13	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	2
Mayer	11	0-4	0-0	0-1	1	1	0
Murphy	5	0-2	0-0	0-1	1	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>28-63</b>	<b>7-10</b>	<b>10-19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>74</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 44.4%. FT: 70.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-29 (Loyer 5-9, Smith 3-8, Cox 3-7, Mayer 0-2, Murphy 0-2, Benter 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 6 (Smith 2, Cluff, Harris, Kaufman-Renn, Mayer). **Steals:** 5 (Benter 2, Smith 2, Loyer).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Bynum	27	4-6	5-6	0-5	0	3	14
Royal	31	2-8	8-9	6-3	2	4	12
Tilly	19	1-3	5-8	1-4	0	5	7
Mobley Jr.	36	8-15	0-0	0-2	3	0	21
Thornton	37	6-9	5-7	0-5	2	1	20
Njegovan	19	1-1	0-0	3-3	1	2	2
Chatman	23	2-5	2-2	0-1	1	1	6
Cupps	8	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-47</b>	<b>25-32</b>	<b>10-26</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>82</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 51.1%. FT: 78.1%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-24 (Mobley 5-11, Thornton 3-6, Bynum 1-3, Chatman 0-2, Royal 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Bynum, Njegovan, Royal). **Turnovers:** 7 (Mobley 2, Royal 2, Thornton 2, Tilly). **Steals:** 3 (Chatman, Mobley, Royal). **Officials:** Comer, Kimble, Richardson. **Attendance:** 15,524.

second half, allowing only three in the final 20 minutes on 15 shots, two of which came in the final minute of the game when OSU had the game largely in hand.

"You're not going to hold them three-less," Diebler said. "But we had to make it really hard (on them), and I thought that we did outside of the last minute where they hit a couple."

Mobley led Ohio State with 21 points on 8-of-15 shooting, with five of those makes coming from three-point range. Thornton (20), Bynum (14) and Royal (12) followed with double-digit points, while Royal had a team-high nine rebounds. Ohio State held a 36-29 edge on the boards.

Kaufman-Renn also had nine rebounds to go with 19 points. Smith led the Boilermakers with 20 points and dished out seven assists.

Ohio State has just two more regular-season games left, which will both take place before BSB next goes to press. That stretch begins with a March 4 game against Penn State at State College, Pa. (7:30 p.m., Peacock), before the Buckeyes come back home for Senior Night against Indiana on March 7 (5:30 p.m., FOX).

The Big Ten tournament then begins on March 10. While Ohio State's seed hasn't been decided yet, they will at least get a bye past the first round and still have a chance at securing a double bye.

For information in the interim, go to the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

## Iowa 74, Ohio State 57

Feb. 25, 2026  
Carver-Hawkeye Arena • Iowa City, Iowa

	1	2	F
Ohio State (17-11, 9-8)	23	34	57
Iowa (20-8, 10-7)	37	37	74

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Bynum	27	3-8	0-1	1-5	2	4	8
Royal	34	5-9	6-8	1-1	0	4	16
Njegovan	23	2-3	0-0	0-3	2	2	5
Mobley Jr.	30	4-7	4-5	0-1	3	2	15
Thornton	37	3-8	4-5	1-1	2	2	10
Johnson	11	0-3	0-0	2-1	0	0	0
Chatman	16	1-5	0-0	0-3	0	1	3
Cupps	10	0-0	0-2	0-2	0	2	0
White	12	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>18-43</b>	<b>14-21</b>	<b>5-18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>57</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 41.9%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-14 (Mobley 3-4, Bynum 2-3, Chatman 1-3, Thornton 0-2, Njegovan 1-1, Royal 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Bynum, Njegovan). **Turnovers:** 11 (Mobley 4, Bynum 2, Royal 2, Chatman, Cupps, White). **Steals:** 3 (Bynum, Mobley, Thornton).

Iowa	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Manyawu	22	5-7	2-2	2-5	1	1	12
Koch	33	1-6	0-0	1-4	0	0	3
Banks	22	3-6	4-5	0-3	2	4	10
Combs	38	2-4	0-0	0-4	3	4	5
Stirtz	39	8-11	3-3	0-1	3	2	22
Folgueiras	25	8-10	4-5	1-3	5	5	20
Sage	9	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Howard	8	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0
Jirak	4	0-0	2-2	0-1	1	1	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-47</b>	<b>15-17</b>	<b>4-24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>74</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 57.4%. FT: 88.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-18 (Stirtz 3-6, Koch 1-6, Combs 1-2, Sage 0-2, Banks 0-1, Folgueiras 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 7 (Folgueiras 2, Stirtz 2, Banks, Combs, Manyawu). **Steals:** 7 (Folgueiras 2, Stirtz 2, Banks, Combs, Manyawu). **Officials:** Reed, Sciroto, Szelc. **Attendance:** 10,368.

# OSU Goes 2-3 Headed Into Postseason

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State women's basketball team struggled during a difficult final stretch of the regular season and went 2-3 in its final five games.

Ohio State opened the slate with a narrow loss to Maryland before falling to Minnesota on the road. The Buckeyes bounced back with a win over USC on Senior Day but lost in heartbreaking fashion three days later to Michigan.

Still, Ohio State was able to build some momentum toward the postseason with a dominant road win over No. 15 Michigan State.

## OSU Blows Big Lead In Loss To Terps

After leading by as many as 19 points, No. 8 Ohio State (22-4, 11-3) fell to No. 20 Maryland (21-6, 9-6), 76-75, on Feb. 15 in front of 7,504 fans at the Schottenstein Center.

The Buckeyes were doomed by a disastrous second half in which they were outscored 45-29. Despite the poor second half, Ohio State had the chance to emerge victorious. However, the Buckeyes missed three key free throws in the final 30 seconds of the game and missed their final four field-goal attempts.

After a weeklong break coming off its trip to the Pacific Northwest, Ohio State had no rust in the first quarter against Maryland.

The Buckeyes made seven of their first eight field goals, including their first four three-point attempts, to storm out to an 18-3 lead.

After Maryland bounced back with a 12-2 run to make it 20-15, sophomore point guard Jalonni Cambridge and senior shooting guard Chance Gray combined to score the final eight points of the opening frame to make it 28-15.

Cambridge (12) and Gray (11) combined to score 23 of Ohio State's 28 first-quarter points. The pair also made all five of their three-point attempts.

Gray made her fourth three-pointer of the game early in the second quarter, and after both teams traded two-point baskets, she made her fifth triple to help Ohio State lead 38-19 with 6:14 left in the half.



Chance Gray

After shooting 17 of 31 from the field (54.8 percent) as a team in the first half, including 9 of 14 from three-point range (64.3 percent), the Buckeyes held a 46-31 advantage heading into the third quarter.

Maryland bounced back in the third, cutting Ohio State's lead down to two, 53-51, with a 17-4 scoring run that lasted over six minutes.

Cambridge managed to extend Ohio State's lead to 60-57 with a free throw before the end of the third quarter, but her team was outscored 26-14 in the penultimate period.

Maryland scored first in the fourth quarter on a pair of Oluchi Okananwa free throws, and the road team took its first lead of the game on a three-pointer from Addi Mack at 8:17 to make it 62-60.

The Buckeyes didn't score for nearly five minutes to start the final quarter. The long drought was finally broken with a layup from Gray with 5:02 left in regulation, but by that point, Ohio State trailed 69-62.

The Buckeyes cut Maryland's lead to three points on a triple from Kennedy Cambridge at the 3:33 mark, but the Terrapins responded with their own triple from Yarden Garson on their next possession.

The Buckeyes cut Maryland's lead to five on a layup from Jalonni Cambridge with 2:01 left, but Maryland ate up over a minute of time on its next trip down the court, collecting three offensive rebounds.

Ultimately, the Buckeyes got a stop, and on their next trip down the court, sophomore guard Ava Watson drained a clutch three-pointer to make it a two-point game, 76-74, at the 51 second mark. The Buckeyes forced another stop, but with 29 seconds remaining in the game, Kennedy Cambridge missed a pair of key free throws.

Ohio State forced a five-second violation after a Maryland timeout, and redshirt-freshman forward Kylee Kitts was sent to the line after collecting a key offensive rebound. Kitts split the free throws, and after coming up with another offensive rebound, Kennedy Cambridge missed a go-ahead basket with less than 10 seconds left.

Maryland's Kyndal Walker missed a pair of free throws to give Ohio State one last chance with less than five seconds left, but Jalonni Cambridge missed a last-second game-winner.

"We had our chances," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said of the last stretch of the game. "Ava made a big shot. We got to the free-throw line a couple of times. We had our

opportunities. The ball just didn't go in for us."

Jalonni Cambridge and Gray were by far Ohio State's two leading scorers. Cambridge led the Buckeyes with 29 points on 11-of-22 shooting, but Gray wasn't far behind with 25 points. Cambridge also led the Buckeyes with eight rebounds and a game-high five assists.

The Buckeyes were much more efficient than Maryland, shooting 27 of 59 from the field (45.8 percent). They held the Terrapins to 25-of-70 shooting (35.7 percent) but were outrebounded 47-34.

Maryland was led by Okananwa and Garzon, who each scored 17 points in the contest. Okananwa also added 10 rebounds, four assists and three steals. Saylor Poffenbarger (13 points) led all players with 11 rebounds, helping the Terps to their edge on the glass, which included 22 of the offensive variety to Ohio State's eight.

## OSU Offense Struggles In Loss To Minnesota

Struggling to find much of an offensive rhythm, No. 10 Ohio State (22-5, 11-4) dropped its second straight game on Feb. 18, falling to No. 23 Minnesota (21-6, 12-4) 74-61 in front of 4,025 fans at Williams Arena.

In the loss, Ohio State shot just 24 of 61 from the field (39.3 percent), including 8 of 19 from three-point range (42.1 percent). Minnesota didn't shoot much better, going 27 of 68 from the field (39.7 percent), but dominated on the glass, outrebounding Ohio State 47-32.

The Buckeyes fell behind 8-4 early in their battle after Minnesota guard Grace Grocholski buried a triple at 7:44, but they were quick to respond with a scoring run. Ohio State held Minnesota scoreless for over five minutes to score seven straight points and take an 11-8 lead.

Then it was Ohio State's turn to go on a scoring drought. The Buckeyes failed to score for over three minutes, and Minnesota led 14-11.

Kennedy Cambridge tied the game at 14 with a triple with less than a minute to go, and

## Minnesota 74, Ohio State 61

Feb. 18, 2026					
Williams Arena • Minneapolis					
	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (22-5, 11-4)	16	13	13	19	61
Minnesota (21-6, 12-4)	14	12	27	21	74

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Lemmilä	24	2-4	0-0	1-9	1	3	5		
Gray	36	6-10	2-2	1-2	3	0	17		
K. Cambridge	36	2-3	0-0	1-5	5	3	6		
Watson	31	2-7	0-0	0-1	0	3	5		
J. Cambridge	40	10-27	2-4	1-6	6	2	23		
Kitts	13	0-3	0-0	1-1	0	3	0		
Martin	10	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	0	2		
Todd	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Hobbs	8	1-4	1-1	0-0	0	0	3		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-61</b>	<b>5-7</b>	<b>6-26</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>61</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 39.3%. FT: 71.4% **Three-point field goals:** 8-19. (Watson 1-5, Gray 3-4, Watson 0-4, J. Cambridge 1-3, K. Cambridge 2-2, Lemmilä 1-2, Kitts 0-1, Martin 0-1, Hobbs 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Lemmilä 3, K. Cambridge 2, Martin). **Turnovers:** 11 (J. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, Watson 2, Kitts 2, K. Cambridge, Hobbs). **Steals:** 6 (K. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä, Gray, Watson, Martin).

Minnesota	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Grocholski	36	4-10	0-0	1-2	5	1	12		
Hart	28	8-16	2-2	5-5	2	2	18		
Battle	39	3-12	7-7	4-8	5	0	13		
Braun	37	6-12	2-2	1-8	2	1	18		
McKinney	28	4-13	0-0	0-3	2	2	9		
Glenn	20	0-2	0-0	1-3	1	1	0		
Tonga	12	2-3	0-0	3-2	0	1	4		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>22-60</b>	<b>11-11</b>	<b>15-32</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>74</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 39.7%. FT: 100.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-21 (Braun 4-9, Grocholski 4-8, McKinney 1-3, Glenn 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (McKinney 2, Braun). **Turnovers:** 9 (Braun 4, Glenn 2, Grocholski, Hart, Battle). **Steals:** 18 (McKinney 3, Grocholski 2, Hart 2, Glenn). **Officials:** Jamie Broderick, Maj Forsberg, Michael McConnell. **Attendance:** 4,025

## Maryland 76, Ohio State 75

Feb. 15, 2026					
Value City Arena • Columbus					
	1	2	3	4	F
Maryland (21-6, 9-6)	15	16	26	19	76
Ohio State (22-4, 11-3)	28	18	14	15	75

Maryland	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Ozzy-Momodu	4	0-1	1-2	2-0	0	0	1		
Mack	33	5-13	1-1	0-2	3	2	14		
Poffenbarger	35	4-11	3-3	3-8	4	3	13		
Okanawa	28	5-12	7-8	6-4	4	5	17		
Garzon	40	6-19	0-0	1-3	1	3	17		
Welson	6	1-4	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
Walker	21	1-4	0-2	2-3	3	3	3		
McLean	33	3-6	2-4	4-3	3	4	8		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-70</b>	<b>14-20</b>	<b>22-25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>76</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 35.7%. FT: 70.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 12-35 (Garzon 5-17, Poffenbarger 2-8, Mack 3-6, Welson 1-2, Walker 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Garzon, McLean). **Turnovers:** 18 (Poffenbarger 5, Okanawa 5, Garzon 2, Walker 2, Team 2, Mack, Welson). **Steals:** 11 (Poffenbarger 3, Okanawa 3, Mack 2, Garzon, Walker, McLean).

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Lemmilä	23	1-5	0-0	0-4	1	1	2		
Gray	39	8-13	4-4	0-2	1	2	25		
K. Cambridge	30	3-5	0-2	2-4	2	4	7		
Watson	36	3-7	0-0	0-0	2	3	9		
J. Cambridge	38	11-22	5-8	2-6	5	3	29		
Kitts	16	1-3	1-2	3-1	1	0	3		
Martin	11	0-2	0-0	0-2	2	3	0		
Todd	7	0-2	0-0	0-1	1	1	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-59</b>	<b>10-16</b>	<b>8-26</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>75</b>		

**Percentages:** FG: 45.8%. FT: 62.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-21 (Gray 5-7, Watson 3-5, J. Cambridge 2-4, K. Cambridge 1-2, Kitts 0-1, Martin 0-1, Todd 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Lemmilä 2, Martin). **Turnovers:** 18 (J. Cambridge 5, Lemmilä 4, Gray 3, K. Cambridge 3, Watson, Kitts, Martin). **Steals:** 7 (Gray 3, K. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä, J. Cambridge). **Officials:** Melissa Barlow, S. Brian Hall, Frank Steratore. **Attendance:** 7,504.

Ohio State took a 16-14 lead into the second quarter after a basket from freshman guard Bryn Martin.

Ohio State continued its run in the second, scoring seven straight to lead 23-14 on a layup

Continued On Page 24

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# Late Lead Vanishes In OT Loss To Michigan

Continued From Page 23

by Watson. The Golden Gophers answered with six straight of their own before Watson ended the spurt with a three-point jumper to make it 26-20 with 3:17 remaining in the half.

After Gray added a jumper, the Buckeyes failed to make a field goal in the final 2:20 of the frame and carried a 29-26 lead into the second half.

Ohio State's cold end to the first half continued into the third quarter. The Buckeyes failed to score in the first 3:34 as Minnesota went on a 9-0 run to lead 35-29 with 6:45 left in the third.

Gray ended Ohio State's drought with a pair of free throws, but Minnesota was able to push the lead to 11, 44-33, after an and-one layup by guard Amaya Battle.

Ohio State continued the "game of runs" trend, scoring seven straight to get back in the game, cutting Minnesota's lead to 44-40 on a basket by Jalonni Cambridge with 3:11 showing.

The Golden Gophers tallied six in a row to lead by 10, and guard Mara Braun pushed the lead to 11 with a triple right before the end of the third quarter to take a 53-42 lead into the final frame.

Minnesota outscored Ohio State 27-13 in the third period.

"We got really impatient offensively," McGuff said immediately after the game when asked about his team's poor quarter. "We took a lot of quick, contested shots, so it really took us out of our rhythm on offense. Then we also had some bad turnovers that they converted into points, and then also the rebounding.

They really did a good job on the offensive boards, and that hurt us."

Ohio State's fortunes didn't change in the fourth quarter. The Buckeyes fell behind by 16 with 7:42 remaining after a three-pointer by Tori McKinney made it 60-44.

The Buckeyes had some hope after going on an 8-0 scoring run midway through the quarter, pulling them within seven, but Braun drained a clutch three-pointer with 3:12 left to make it 67-57.

The Buckeyes scored the next four points after Braun's three-pointer but failed to score in the final 2:08 of the game before losing by 13.

Jalonni Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer in the loss. She had 23 points but wasn't her usual efficient self, making just 10 of 27 field-goal attempts. Gray also reached double figures, scoring 17 points, but the rest of the team combined for just 21 points.

Minnesota was led by Braun and Sophie Hart, who each scored 18 points. Battle (13 points) and Grocholski (12 points) also reached double figures. The rebounding duo of Battle (12) and Hart (10) helped the Gophers to their big edge on the boards.

## Cambridge Scores 33 As OSU Defeats USC

In a back-and-forth battle on Senior Day, No. 10 Ohio State (23-5, 12-4) ultimately prevailed over USC (17-10, 9-7), 88-83.

As they often are, the Buckeyes were led by Jalonni Cambridge in the win in front of 8,144 fans at the Schottenstein Center. Cambridge scored 33 points while shooting 12 of 21 from the floor.

The Buckeyes trailed at halftime in the win, and the Trojans were in front for much of the second half. However, Ohio State outscored USC 27-19 in the fourth quarter to win the game.

Coming off two straight losses, Ohio State started off well. The Buckeyes scored the first six points of the game, with four of those points coming off turnovers.

The Trojans answered with a pair of three-pointers to tie the game at six, but Gray scored five points to lead Ohio State on a 9-3 run that made it 15-9 with 4:03 to go in the first frame.

However, before the end of the quarter, USC guard Jazzy Davidson caught fire, scoring eight points in the final four minutes. Davidson's strong finish to the frame helped the Trojans go ahead 20-19.

The Buckeyes jumped back in front, 25-22, after a midrange jumper from Jalonni Cambridge, but USC then scored 10 straight points to lead 32-25.

The Buckeyes responded with a run of their own, scoring seven straight points to make it 32-32 after a Gray three-pointer at 5:51. Watson gave Ohio State a one-point lead with a three-pointer with 2:08 remaining in the half, but the Trojans scored the final four points of the second quarter to lead 38-35 at halftime.

Kennedy Cambridge came alive for Ohio State in the second half, tying the game at 40 with a three-pointer early on and then converting a three-point play to put the Buckeyes up 45-43 with 6:43 on the clock.

The lead continued to go back and forth with neither team leading by more than three

until USC went on a 10-3 scoring run, capped by a three-pointer from Davidson, to lead 61-55 with 1:59 remaining in the third quarter.

The Buckeyes cut into USC's lead to end the quarter when Gray and Jalonni Cambridge combined for four points in the final minute, but USC still led 64-61 with 10 minutes to play.

Ohio State seemed to open the fourth quarter with a heightened sense of urgency. After Davidson opened the period with a free throw, Cambridge made a layup and a three-point jumper to give Ohio State a 66-65 advantage.

Cambridge's spurt was only the start of what would be a crucial 15-0 run that made the score 76-65 with 4:26 remaining. The Buckeyes found success in the paint during the stretch and made four layups to create the 11-point advantage.

The run would not have been possible without the Buckeyes' defense, which held the Trojans without a field goal until 2:18 was left in the game, when Davidson scored on a layup.

McGuff was proud of the way his team competed on the defensive end in the fourth quarter.

"In general, our third-quarter defense wasn't great, and they really made us pay," McGuff said. "Finally, in the fourth quarter, we played with a little more determination and grit on that end of the floor, and we got some stops."

When USC finally found an offensive rhythm late in the game, it was too late. The Trojans made their final five field-goal attempts of the game to cut Ohio State's lead to 86-83 with two seconds left, but Jalonni Cambridge made a pair of free throws before the final buzzer sounded to cement the five-point victory.

While Jalonni Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer on Senior Day, Gray (16 points), Kennedy Cambridge (14), Lemmilä (10) and Watson (10) also reached double figures. Lemmilä had a game-high 10 rebounds, and her three assists were tied for a team high.

The Buckeyes were slightly outrebounded, 29-27, in the win, but they forced 25 turnovers and committed only 17. In a losing effort, Davidson had a very impressive performance, scoring 32 points on 11-of-22 shooting but committing nine costly turnovers.

## OSU Loses Heartbreaker To Wolverines

Despite leading by 14 points after an impressive first quarter and eight points with under two minutes left in overtime, No. 13 Ohio State (23-6, 12-5) lost to No. 8 Michigan (23-5, 14-3) 88-86 in its final home regular-season game in front of 6,663 fans at the Schottenstein Center on Feb. 25.

Ohio State had a miraculous comeback in regulation to force overtime. In the final two seconds of the fourth quarter, trailing 74-71 without the ball, Lemmilä came up with a steal, and after being fouled in the act of shooting, Jalonni Cambridge made all three free throws to tie the game.

The Buckeyes saw their eight-point lead in overtime slip away after committing a key turnover with 1:25 left and missing their final three shots. Michigan, meanwhile, drained a couple of three-pointers and a late jumper to win the game.

## Michigan 88, Ohio State 86 (OT)

Feb. 25, 2026  
Value City Arena, • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	OT	F
Michigan (23-5, 14-3)	14	25	22	13	14	88
Ohio State (23-6, 12-5)	28	12	13	21	12	86

Michigan	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Sofilkanich	24	2-3	2-4	1-1	3	5	6		
Olson	40	12-24	5-6	4-5	4	2	31		
Holloway	18	2-5	0-0	0-1	2	5	6		
Daniels	19	0-1	0-0	3-4	1	5	0		
Swords	42	9-20	0-0	1-6	4	0	22		
Delfosse	32	4-8	0-0	2-5	2	3	9		
Crockett	6	0-1	0-0	1-1	2	0	0		
Dudley	20	3-4	0-0	0-3	0	1	6		
Brown	24	2-3	2-2	0-3	2	2	8		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>34-69</b>	<b>9-12</b>	<b>14-32</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>88</b>		

Percentages: FG: 49.3%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 11-25 (Swords 4-12, Olson 2-4, Holloway 2-3, Brown 2-3, Delfosse 1-2, Crockett 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Sofilkanich, Brown). Turnovers: 20 (Olson 4, Holloway 4, Daniels 3, Delfosse 3, Sofilkanich 2, Swords 2, Dudley, Brown). Steals: 3 (Daniels 2, Olson).

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Lemmilä	32	5-9	1-2	6-9	3	2	11		
Gray	44	8-18	2-2	0-1	1	0	19		
K. Cambridge	27	3-8	1-6	2-2	5	5	8		
Watson	31	2-8	0-0	1-2	2	3	6		
J. Cambridge	41	6-20	8-9	1-3	9	3	22		
Martin	30	3-7	0-0	1-1	1	4	9		
Kitts	13	3-5	5-5	1-2	0	0	11		
Todd	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	0	0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>30-75</b>	<b>17-24</b>	<b>13-20</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>86</b>		

Percentages: FG: 40.0%. FT: 70.8%. Three-point field goals: 9-28 (Watson 2-7, Gray 1-7, Martin 3-6, J. Cambridge 2-4, K. Cambridge 1-3, Kitts 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 1 (Kitts). Turnovers: 13 (Gray 3, Team 3, Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge 2, J. Cambridge 2, Watson, Martin, Todd). Steals: 7 (K. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, Gray, Martin). Officials: Timothy Daley, Roy Gulbeyan, Lisa Jones. Attendance: 6,663

After the game, McGuff credited Michigan for making plays down the stretch.

"Both teams had opportunities and they made a couple of big threes and we didn't capitalize on some of the opportunities we had, but give them credit for that," McGuff said. "It's a tough loss because we played really hard. We poured a lot into it and just came up a little bit short."

Ohio State seized control in the first quarter, making four three-pointers in the opening 10 minutes, three by Martin on three tries, to lead 28-14.

However, the Wolverines opened the second quarter with a 13-2 scoring run to cut Ohio State's lead to 30-27 with 5:47 before the half.

Michigan took its first lead of the second period, 39-37, on a three-pointer from guard Syla Swords with 38 seconds left, but Jalonni Cambridge answered with her own three-pointer right before halftime to give Ohio State a 40-39 lead at the intermission.

Michigan continued its momentum in the second half. The Wolverines held Ohio State to 1-of-11 shooting to start the period to lead 50-43 at the 4:11 mark.

After Ohio State had a brief 6-0 spurt capped by a Jalonni Cambridge layup, Michigan scored 11 points in the final 2:44 of the frame to lead 61-53.

Michigan's lead hovered between six and nine in the fourth quarter until Kennedy Cambridge capped a 7-0 run with a three-pointer with 4:16 remaining that made it 67-65.

After the Michigan scoring drought was

Ohio State 88, USC 83						
Feb. 22, 2026 Value City Arena, • Columbus						
	1	2	3	4	F	
USC (17-10, 9-7)	20	18	26	19	83	
Ohio State (22-4, 11-3)	19	16	26	27	88	
USC	Total		FT		Reb.	
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF
Williams	19	1-1	0-0	2-5	0	0
Jones	17	1-3	0-0	0-1	1	4
Davidson	40	11-22	4-6	0-6	4	5
Smith	35	6-9	4-4	3-0	4	3
Dunn	27	3-6	2-2	1-2	2	5
Samuels	27	1-5	2-4	0-1	2	3
Raulusaityte	17	2-2	0-0	3-1	1	2
Mendes	18	4-6	2-2	0-4	2	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>29-54</b>	<b>14-18</b>	<b>9-20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>
Percentages: FG: 53.7%. FT: 77.8%. Three-point field goals: 11-25 (Davidson 6-9, Mendes 3-5, Samuels 0-4, Smith 2-3, Dunn 0-3, Jones 0-1). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 6 (Smith 3, Davidson, Dunn, Raulusaityte). Turnovers: 25 (Davidson 9, Dunn 5, Jones 3, Smith 3, Samuels 2, Raulusaityte 2, Team). Steals: 8 (Davidson 3, Dunn 2, Jones, Smith, Samuels).						
Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.	
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF
Lemmilä	35	4-5	2-4	5-5	3	1
Gray	38	4-10	6-6	0-0	3	2
K. Cambridge	33	6-10	1-1	0-4	1	5
Watson	34	2-6	5-6	1-1	3	2
J. Cambridge	33	12-21	8-9	1-5	0	4
Kitts	10	1-2	1-2	0-2	0	0
Todd	5	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	0
Martin	12	0-0	0-0	0-0	3	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>30-57</b>	<b>23-28</b>	<b>9-18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>
Percentages: FG: 52.6%. FT: 82.1%. Three-point field goals: 5-13 (Gray 2-4, Watson 1-4, K. Cambridge 1-3, J. Cambridge 1-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 17 (Lemmilä 5, Gray 4, K. Cambridge 2, J. Cambridge 2, Kitts 2, Watson, Martin). Steals: 11 (Watson 4, J. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä, Watson, Kitts, Martin). Officials: Doug Knight, Michol Murray, Nykesha Thompson. Attendance: 8,144						



# Poor Clock Management Dooms OSU Against U-M

The Ohio State women's basketball team had a difficult stretch to end the regular season, losing three of their last five games to fall to 24-6 and 13-5 in the Big Ten. The most gut-wrenching loss for Ohio State during that part of the slate came against their archrival.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

In its 88-86 overtime loss to No. 8 Michigan on Feb. 25, No. 13 Ohio State seemed to have snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

The Buckeyes overcame a nine-point fourth-quarter deficit to lead 86-78 with 1:40 remaining in overtime. At that point, they had a 99.5 percent chance of winning, according to ESPN analytics.

After Michigan guard Macy Brown made two free throws, the Buckeyes were still in a comfortable position with a six-point lead and only 1:33 remaining. But after breaking Michigan's full-court press on the ensuing possession, senior guard Chance Gray attempted to find sophomore center Elsa Lemmilä under the basket for a potential layup. Gray's pass was inaccurate, and Michigan came up with the steal they desperately needed.

The Wolverines missed a three-point attempt, but Ohio State couldn't come up with the rebound and Brown drained a triple to cut the lead in half.

Ohio State broke Michigan's press again and inexplicably looked for a quick basket rather than running time off the clock when sophomore point guard Jalon Cambridge attempted a contested layup with 58 seconds left.

That attempt missed, but Lemmilä came



SONNY BROCKWAY

**TAKE A BOW — Guards Chance Gray and T'yana Todd were honored at Senior Night before the Buckeyes played USC on Feb. 22. Gray had 16 points and three assists, and Todd scored two points in four minutes of action in an 88-83 win.**

up with a rebound. Still, the Buckeyes never seemed to settle into the possession, and Gray forced up a contested midrange jumper right before the shot clock expired.

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the game that he wished his team had taken more time on offense to protect its lead.

"We had a couple of (possessions) there where we got the lead and rushed up the court a little bit too much," McGuff said. "We could, especially with the lead, have shrunk the clock a little bit. That would have been the right move, but hey, we play aggressively. We had some opportunities there, but we certainly could have shrunk the clock a little bit."

The poor clock management cost Ohio State down the stretch. Michigan had plenty of time to find Brown for a game-tying three-pointer with 15 seconds left, and perhaps the worst bit of clock management was still to come.

Instead of running the clock all the way down to get the last shot with the game tied

at 86, freshman guard Bryn Martin attempted a three-pointer with 11 seconds left.

That shot was no good, and Michigan had a chance to win after collecting the rebound.

"We went a little quick, but we wanted to make sure we got a good shot, which we did," McGuff said. "We got an open shot. It just didn't go in. I thought we had a chance to rebound, but it just went over Jalon's head, and then we didn't get a stop."

Michigan guard Olivia Olson made the game-winning basket with three seconds left.

From there, the Buckeyes had a remote chance of scoring and either tying or winning the game, but Gray wasn't quite aware of how much time she had. After receiving a pass from Cambridge, Gray took an extra dribble and connected on a deep shot that would have won the game, but she released the ball well after the final buzzer sounded.

"We had plenty of opportunities to win the game prior to that," Gray said of her shot that didn't count. "I don't think the shot

would have counted regardless because they started the clock late. I was just trying to fight until the end of the game. That's really all I can do."

## Cambridge Lauded By USC Coach

Cambridge continued her excellent 2025-26 campaign in the Buckeyes' 88-83 win over USC on Feb. 22. The guard scored 33 points on 12-of-21 shooting and added six rebounds and three steals.

After the game, the former McDonald's All-American and her teammates received high praise from USC head coach Lindsay Gottlieb.

"I am proud of our team and the fight," Gottlieb said. "I think it will make us better. I think they're legit. Jalon Cambridge is as good a guard as there is and probably doesn't get talked about enough."

Against the Trojans, Cambridge was at her best when the lights were brightest. In the fourth quarter, which Ohio State entered trailing 64-61, Cambridge went 4 of 5 from the field and 7 of 8 from the free-throw line to score 16 points and help her team outscore USC 27-19 in the final 10 minutes.

"She's elite with (her speed), and the way that they play is elite," Gottlieb said of Cambridge. "And I would still say it wasn't necessarily that she scored, but it obviously puts you under duress the whole game."

Cambridge's 33-point performance only increased her points per game average. Now averaging 23.4 points per game, Cambridge is the sixth-leading scorer in the country and is just above Indiana guard Shay Ciezki as the leading scorer in the Big Ten.

In addition to being one of the best scorers in the country, Cambridge is averaging 5.6 rebounds per game, 4.5 assists per game and 1.9 steals per game. McGuff appreciates the variety of ways his star point guard is able to impact the game.

"She's an incredible player and just a great competitor," McGuff said of Cambridge after the win over USC. "She loves to win, and she'll do anything for this team to put us in position to do that, and tonight was another great example. She obviously scored a lot of points, but she had a lot of great defensive plays. She is an incredible player, and we're certainly fortunate to have her."

## Kitts Making Progress After Injury

Although redshirt-freshman forward Kylee Kitts first made her return to the court on Feb. 8 after missing four games with a shoulder injury, she didn't seem to be the player she was before the injury when she initially returned.

Wearing a sizable brace on her shoulder, Kitts scored just six points in her first four games back from injury (1.5 points per game) and was 0 for 3 from beyond the three-point line.

Kitts, who was a regular starter for Ohio State prior to her injury, had a nightmarish performance in her first game back from injury. In Ohio State's 80-64 win over Oregon, Kitts had six turnovers and four personal fouls in under eight minutes off the bench.

"I still think, in general, she's just trying



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2025-26 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

24-6 Overall (13-5 Big Ten)  
Statistics through games of March 1

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.	30-30	962-32.1	266-531	.501	43-117	.368	128-156	.821	32-137	169-5.6	85-2	136	90	9	58	703-23.4
GRAY, Chance	30-30	951-31.7	160-350	.457	71-178	.399	48-56	.857	11-68	79-2.6	22-0	80	56	0	24	439-14.6
LEMMILÄ, Elsa	29-21	746-25.7	110-193	.570	2-12	.167	42-68	.618	63-141	204-7.0	54-0	56	57	65	29	264-9.1
CAMBRIDGE, K.	30-30	861-28.7	96-222	.432	26-79	.329	54-89	.607	55-83	138-4.6	87-3	103	42	21	120	272-9.1
KITTS, Kylee	25-19	502-20.1	71-163	.436	10-34	.294	42-54	.778	63-84	147-5.9	60-4	26	45	19	18	194-7.8
WATSON, Ava	30-11	761-25.4	75-181	.414	34-96	.354	36-40	.900	24-44	68-2.3	60-0	72	43	5	56	220-7.3
TODD, T'yana	30-9	369-12.3	45-128	.352	17-63	.270	17-20	.850	14-21	35-1.2	36-0	15	16	2	14	124-4.1
MARTIN, Bryn	30-0	444-14.8	48-112	.429	22-63	.349	4-4	1.000	7-39	46-1.5	45-1	33	17	9	25	122-4.1
BIRIUK, Dasha	18-0	140-7.8	22-47	.468	11-30	.367	8-9	.889	5-19	24-1.3	13-0	8	13	3	7	63-3.5
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
HOBBS, Ella	25-0	188-7.5	22-48	.458	7-16	.438	5-6	.833	16-42	58-2.3	16-0	11	8	3	4	56-2.2
Team									43-65	108		18				
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6025</b>	<b>927-2006</b>	<b>.462</b>	<b>244-698</b>	<b>.350</b>	<b>393-516</b>	<b>.762</b>	<b>345-766</b>	<b>1111-37.0493-10</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>2491-83.0</b>	
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6025</b>	<b>730-1811</b>	<b>.403</b>	<b>220-639</b>	<b>.344</b>	<b>318-445</b>	<b>.715</b>	<b>359-765</b>	<b>1124-37.5515-11</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>657</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>1998-66.6</b>	

to find her rhythm," McGuff said of Kitts after she scored three points in the win over USC. "We've probably been at our best when she's been able to play the four or the five, and we just haven't been able to get to that point yet. But hopefully that's something we can get to as we continue to head towards March. But she's trying, she's really working hard in practice, and I think it's going to take a little time for her to find her rhythm again."

In the Buckeyes' narrow loss to Michigan, Kitts looked more like herself, scoring 11 points and grabbing three rebounds. With Kitts coming off the bench, Ohio State has gone to a smaller four-guard lineup that includes its regular starters and also sophomore guard Ava Watson.

Watson has performed well in her new role, scoring 10 or more points in five of her 11 starts, and for the season is averaging 7.3 points per game. Watson's 1.9 steals per game are the third-most on the team.

"Ava has been absolutely critical this year," McGuff said. "Now in year two here at Ohio State, she has a firm grasp of our system. She can play the one (position), the two, or the three, and I think that's something that also makes her very valuable. We could really put her in a lot of different places on the court. She's really smart. She has a high basketball IQ, and things seem to go well when she's on the court."

**Bucks Pick Up Win On Senior Day**

The Buckeyes honored their two graduating seniors, T'yana Todd and Gray, before their win over the Trojans.

While Gray has had an excellent year, averaging 14.6 points, 2.7 assists and 2.6 rebounds per game, Todd has struggled to find any sort of consistency. The former Boston

College Eagle is averaging 4.1 points and 12.3 minutes per game this season.

Still, each player contributed to Ohio State's win over the Trojans. Todd played over four minutes and scored two points on 1-of-3 shooting, while Gray went for 16 points and three assists.

McGuff said after the game he was happy to send those players off with a win.

"I was happy we were able to do that," he said. "Obviously, they've played a long time in their career to get to this point, so I'm happy they got a win, and hopefully they can continue to be a big part of what we do moving forward."

**Cambridge Breaks Steals Record**

Junior guard Kennedy Cambridge etched her name into Ohio State record books in her team's 87-68 win over No. 15 Michigan State on March 1.

Needing just one steal to break former Ohio State guard Yvette Angel's single-season record of 115 steals, which was established during the 1984-85 season, Cambridge had a game-high five steals, with the record-breaker coming early in the first quarter.

Cambridge, who was named to the Naismith Defensive Player of the Year late-season watch list since BSB last went to press, originally thought she broke the record in the Buckeyes' 88-86 loss to Michigan.

In that game, Cambridge had three steals and easily could have been credited with four steals, which would have given her the single-season record, but a close call was given to Gray.

"I know for a fact I had it," Cambridge said about missing out on the record in the previous game against Michigan when asked after the win over the Spartans. "Chance was nowhere near me, and they

gave (the steal) to her. It was my first steal of the game. It didn't really matter, obviously. It's cool to break the record.

"Obviously, it means something that (my name) is etched in Buckeye history. Today wasn't about the record. I knew I was going to get it one way or another, win or lose, but today was about winning, and I think we capitalized on that. I wasn't thinking too far ahead on the steals. I knew I was going to get it, but it does feel good to be the only Buckeye to get that far. That's elite. Not to toot my own horn, but that's nice."

McGuff was very proud of Cambridge for achieving the program record and credited her mentality for helping her become an elite defender.

"I'm really proud of her because she plays so hard on that end of the floor and she takes such pride in it," McGuff said.

"You don't get a lot of players these days that take pride in being great defenders, and she does. She has incredible instincts, and she has great heart. She really wants to contribute at a high level to this program, and she's just been phenomenal this year. Nobody deserves it more than her."

With the record behind her, Cambridge has her sights set on the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, which, as the regular season came to a close, could be within reach. There are plenty of great defenders within the Big Ten, including reigning winner Lauren Betts of UCLA, but Cambridge leads the conference with 3.97 steals per game.

"The biggest thing is becoming (Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year)," Cambridge said when asked if her expectations have been met this season as a defender. "Hopefully I get it. That's the goal. If it's not met, we've got another year. Then the end goal is National Defensive Player of the Year. If we don't get it, we've got another year. We figure out what we did wrong this year, and then we come back for (next year's award)."

**Cambridge Is February Plank's Lady Buck**

Jaloni Cambridge is Plank's Lady Buck for February. Cambridge has been Ohio State's best player all year and only continued her excellent season last month.

Over seven games, the former five-star averaged 26.0 points, 6.0 rebounds and 5.1 assists per game, while shooting 48.5 percent from the field, including 44.4 percent from three-point range.

Cambridge helped the Buckeyes go 4-3 in February with road wins over West Coast opponents Oregon and Washington.

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Sophomore Guard  
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# Buckeyes Hope For Success In Postseason

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Heading into the 2025-26 season, Ohio State had more questions than it had answers. The Buckeyes had three starters departing from a 2024-25 team that disappointed in the postseason, picking up just one win in the Big Ten tournament and one in the NCAA tournament before losing to UCLA and Tennessee, respectively.

Taylor Thierry, Cotie McMahon and Ajae Petty each departed from the program to enter the transfer portal or the WNBA. Even though starting point guard and 2025 Big Ten Freshman of the Year Jaloni Cambridge was returning to the team, Ohio State was not ranked to start the season.

Through its regular season, Ohio State defied the modest expectations many had for the team, compiling a 24-6 record with wins over ranked foes Maryland, TCU, West Virginia and Michigan State.

With a fifth-seed in the Big Ten tournament, which runs March 4-8, and a currently projected fourth-seed in the NCAA tournament, Ohio State is set up well for success in the postseason.

According to Brianna Mac Kay, who covers the team for The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio State has greatly improved since the start of the campaign.

"They've improved significantly throughout the season," Mac Kay said during an interview on Feb. 18. "I think we all watched that UConn game (a 100-68 loss to the Huskies in November). It was like, 'This is not going to be a strong season for Ohio State.' And then they only lost by seven against UCLA, which I still believe is really impressive, and they go on a bit of a run. They build a little momentum. They beat Maryland in Maryland. They beat Illinois, which was a good team when they went to face them there."

The Buckeyes' success would not be possible without Cambridge. Despite being a very solid player in her first collegiate season, Cambridge has taken a huge leap as a sophomore. The former five-star recruit averaged 23.4 points, 5.6 rebounds and 4.5 assists through the regular season, all totals improved from last season, and perhaps most impressive is her greatly improved efficiency.

Cambridge shot 167 of 389 (42.9 percent) from the field as a freshman, but this year, she was shooting 266 of 531 (50.1 percent) from the field.

"She obviously is a special player," head coach Kevin McGuff said of Cambridge after Ohio State's 81-58 win over Wisconsin on Jan. 29. "We rely on her for quite a bit. And she has a sense of maturity about her. She's still a young player, but she's matured quite a bit."

Fellow Ohio State beat writer Thomas Costello of Land Grant Holy Land said it's hard to overstate the improvements Cambridge made in her sophomore season.

"If Jaloni wasn't playing the way she's playing now, Ohio State is a No. 10 seed in the Big Ten," Costello said. "I think they'd be in the middle of the standings or even lower without Cambridge on the team. Her jump from last year to this year – she's a



SONNY BROCKWAY

**ON A TEAR – Sophomore Jaloni Cambridge was the 2025 Big Ten Freshman of the Year and has improved in all areas of her game to lead the Buckeyes' charge into the postseason.**

completely different player. Last season, you saw against Michigan State (an 89-78 win Feb. 26), she had a 33-point game. In that game she looked confident, she was staring down opponents, she was fantastic. That was her big moment last year. It was like, 'Oh my gosh, look how great she could be this year.' She's had like eight or nine of those moments this year. She's able to control games that she wasn't able to control last year.

"She's gone from Freshman of the Year to a candidate for Player of the Year. She's close to a point where she's not going to be a triple-double machine like Caitlin Clark, but she's going to have triple-doubles."

As one of the leading scorers in the country, Cambridge is understandably known for her abilities to put the ball in the basket, but Mac Kay feels the area she's grown the most is as a playmaker.

"I think getting into that point guard role has really changed her game and made her more than just a shooter," Mac Kay said. "It has made her into a dynamic player. Also, with the departure of Cotie McMahon, it opened up the door, like, 'Jaloni, this is your team. This is truly your team. No one's on your level on this team.' I don't think anyone would disagree with that. You have to take control. You have to be mature as a sophomore and prove that you can handle leading a team contending for a Big Ten championship."

One reason that expectations weren't especially high for the Buckeyes this year

was that they lost their best player to the transfer portal. McMahon, a two-time All-Big Ten forward, was Ohio State's leading scorer and was second on the team in assists to Cambridge prior to transferring to Ole Miss.

McMahon has been outstanding this year for her new school. With the Rebels, McMahon averaged a career-best 19.8 points and 5.5 rebounds per game through the regular season.

Costello maintained that McMahon is one of the better players in the country, but the change was needed for both sides.

"Chemistry-wise, I think the team is in a better spot from the outside looking in," Costello said. "From what Cotie shared about (some of) the medical things that she was going through, you could see how last year the highs were high and the lows were low. I think Ohio State's kind of somewhere in the middle this year."

"Fortunately, she's gotten the help she needs, and she's doing fantastic. She is an All-America-caliber player, SEC Player of the Week, it seems like almost every week now. She has grown to become a better player, but I think Ohio State is better off for the change of environment, and she is better off for her change of environment."

Heading into the postseason, Ohio State is in a somewhat similar spot to where it was last year. The Buckeyes once again finished in the top five in the Big Ten standings this year but will be hoping for a much better finish to the season than they

had a year ago.

Ohio State had an encouraging start to its Big Ten tournament last year when it narrowly defeated Iowa. However, in the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State was bludgeoned 75-46 by eventual Big Ten champion UCLA.

Costello believes this year's Ohio State team has a higher ceiling.

"I think you saw the ceiling last year. Three-fourths of the way through the season, they kind of hit a plateau. Their offense got stale," Costello said. "This season, you have all these different players who can have a big night. You've seen Elsa Lemmilä have big nights, (junior guard Kennedy Cambridge), (senior guard Chance Gray), Jaloni. I think (sophomore guard Ava Watson) is someone who's probably set up to have a big night."

But despite all of the improvements Ohio State has made this season, both Costello and Mac Kay were skeptical it would be able to compete with the premier programs in the country.

Ohio State has given observers some reason for optimism against the top teams in the country this year, but it was still dominated by No. 1 UConn. As Mac Kay pointed out, the Buckeyes made improvements and lost to No. 2 UCLA by only seven, but they still haven't proved they can beat a top-five team.

"They lost by 32 points to UConn in the regular season. I think at this point they would lose by 15 to UConn," Costello said. "I don't think that they can match up with UConn. I just think the roster turbulence for the Buckeyes is what is probably going to hold them back, but I don't see them beating a team like UCLA. I could see them running with South Carolina, but I don't think they would be able to overcome them either. I still put them in the A-minus tier of college basketball. A-plus is UConn, South Carolina, I would even say, depending on the night, Texas is up there."

Among other things, rebounding has plagued the Buckeyes in the biggest games of the season. Ohio State, which under McGuff has never been known for its rebounding prowess, ranks just 211th nationally in margin.

"It's not at the level it needs to be for Ohio State to be a top team," Mac Kay said of Ohio State's rebounding. "You cannot be losing the rebounding battle by 10-plus to beat UCLA, UConn, all those teams. You can't be losing those battles like that. You can't give so many more shots to the other team. They're going to take advantage."

"They're not going to win without rebounding. It's not possible. They can't have their best rebounder be Jaloni Cambridge, standing at 5-7. They need their post players to rebound."

Still, Ohio State has plenty on the line in the Big Ten tournament with the NCAA tournament looming. Ohio State was originally on the 3-seed line, according to the NCAA tournament committee, with five regular-season games to go but struggled some down the stretch, winning just two of those final games.

The Buckeyes will need a good enough showing in the Big Ten tournament to earn one of the top-four seeds in the Big Dance

## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

and earn home-court advantage for the first two rounds.

As the Buckeyes found out in their final five games, though, the Big Ten is loaded. When BSB went to press, there were seven teams ranked in the Associated Press' top 25 and other unranked teams, including USC, Illinois, Oregon and Washington, were also projected to make the NCAA tournament.

Despite the strong field, Costello thinks the Buckeyes have a chance to make a run in the conference tournament.

"If I have to put a percentage chance on (Ohio State making the finals), I would say it's 50," Costello said. "I wouldn't be shocked if they made the final, and I also would not be shocked if they lost their first game," Costello said. "The teams that they have the worst matchup with are Iowa and UCLA."

Although home-court advantage in the NCAA tournament will likely be on the line for the Buckeyes when they go to Indianapolis for the Big Ten tournament, both Mac Kay and Costello agreed that it may not be much of an advantage. Ohio State proved that much in each of the last two NCAA tournaments when it failed to make it out of the second round in each year despite being at home.

"The whole home-court aspect in and of itself, I don't know if it's as important as it might be for other teams, because the last two years they've lost on their home court in the NCAA tournament," Mac Kay said. "Granted, two years ago, it was a 100 percent different team, but it seems like they keep falling apart in the second round of the NCAA tournament. I think it's not important in the sense that they need that home-court advantage. It's important in the sense that they need that seeding because that means they have been winning and they didn't end the season on a downfall."

Whatever happens, Costello is viewing this season as a successful one. He feels that, considering the youth of a team that starts only one senior, Ohio State can build off this 2025-26 season.

"I already think that they've had a successful season just because the expectations were all over the place," Costello said. "How are they going to look with Jaloni completely at the helm, running the show, without anything in her way, with all the young players, all the new players that came in?"

"I think there's already so much you can build off of. As long as everybody stays, they're going to be even better next year."

Mac Kay, on the other hand, thinks the Buckeyes need to have some postseason success after disappointing finishes to the last two seasons.

"They have to definitely make at least the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament," Mac Kay said. "If they get knocked out in the quarterfinals or before, that's a big blow to all of the work they did this season. I think you have to get past the second round (of the NCAA tournament). It cannot be the third year in a row that you are knocked out of the second round, because then there is a big problem there, and something has to be done. It can't happen three years in a row, second-round exits, because people are not going to take Ohio State seriously if that happens three times."

# 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.

## BASEBALL (5-5)

**Feb. 13-14** vs. Saint Louis at Pensacola, Fla., W 7-1; W 3-2; W 7-3; **20** vs. Louisiana Tech at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., L 6-0; **20** vs. Memphis at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., W 12-5; **21** vs. Louisiana Tech at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., L 9-3; **22** vs. Memphis at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., W 8-2; **27** vs. Texas-San Antonio at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston; L 6-5 **28** vs. Ole Miss at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston, L 8-0.

**March 1** vs. Texas at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston, L, 10-3; **4** XAVIER; **6-8** UCLA; **10** KENT STATE; **13-15** at Washington; **18** at Xavier; **20-22** BUTLER; **24** at Wright State; **27-29** at Minnesota; **31** TOLEDO.

**April 3-5** MARYLAND; **7** BOWLING GREEN; **10-12** PENN STATE; **15** MARSHALL; **17-19** at Purdue; **21** AKRON; **24-26** at Rutgers.

**May 1-3** NEBRASKA; **5** MIAMI (OH); **8-10** MICHIGAN STATE; **12** WRIGHT STATE; **14-16** at Michigan; **19-24** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb.; **29-31** NCAA Regionals, TBA.

**June 1** NCAA Regionals, TBA **June 5-8** NCAA Super Regionals, TBA; **12-22** College World Series at Omaha, Neb.

## MEN'S BASKETBALL (18-11, 10-8)

**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, W 89-82; **14** at Nashville Hoops Showdown in Nashville, Tenn., vs. Virginia, L 70-66; **17** WISCONSIN, W 86-69; **22** at Michigan State, L 66-60; **25** at Iowa, L 74-57.

**March 1** PURDUE, W 82-74, **4** at Penn State; **7** INDIANA; **10-15** Big Ten Tournament in Chicago.

## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (24-6, 13-5)

**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, L 76-75; **18** at Minnesota, L

74-61; **22** USC, W 88-83; **25** MICHIGAN, L 88-86 (OT).

**March 1** at Michigan State, W 87-68.

## 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, Men 4-0, Women 5-1.

**March 8** NCAA Midwest Regionals in Cleveland; **19-22** NCAA Championships in South Bend, Ind.

## MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (12-18-2, 8-13-1)

**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, L 4-2; W 3-2; **20-21** at Penn State, L 11-4; L 5-4 OT; **27-28** at Michigan State, W 5-1; T 3-3 OT (SL).

**March 5-6** NOTRE DAME; **11-21** Big Ten Tournament.

## WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

(32-4-0, 24-4-0)

**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, W 4-2; W 3-1; **20-21** at Bemidji State, W 7-1; W 6-3; **27-28** WCHA FIRST ROUND vs. ST. THOMAS, W 5-1; W 4-1.

**March 5-7** WCHA Final Faceoff at St. Paul, Minn.

## 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, NTS; **25-28** Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wis., 3rd/1,035.5 pts.

**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, NTS; **18-21** Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis, 3rd/1,066 pts.

**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.

## TRACK & FIELD

**Jan. 9-10** Rod McCravy Memorial Invitational at Louisville, Ky. NTS; **16-17** Indiana Invitational at Bloomington, Ind., NTS; **23** Stan Scott Invite at Lubbock, Texas, NTS; **30-31** PNC Lenny Lyles Invitational at Louisville, Ky., NTS; **30-31** Meyo Invitational at South Bend, Ind., NTS.

**Feb. 13-14** David Hemery Valentine Invitational at Boston, NTS; **13-14** Tiger Paw Invitational at Clemson, S.C., NTS; **26-28** Big Ten Indoor Championships at Indianapolis, Men 8th/15, 41 pts; Women 10th/18, 25 pts.

**March 13-14** NCAA Indoor Championships at Fayetteville, Ark.; **20-21** USF Alumni Invitational at Tampa, Fla.; **26-28** Raleigh Relays at Raleigh, N.C.

**April 1-4** Texas Relays at Austin, Texas; **17-18** Tom Jones Memorial at Gainesville, Fla.; **17-18** Virginia Challenge at Charlottesville, Va.; **23-25** Penn Relays at Philadelphia.

**May 1-2** JESSE OWENS CLASSIC; **15-17** Big Ten Championships at Lincoln, Neb.; **27-30** NCAA East Preliminary Round at Lexington, Ky.

**June 10-13** NCAA Championships at Eugene, Ore.

## MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (9-6, 4-3)

**Jan. 8** CENTRAL STATE W 3-0; **9** N.J. INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY W 3-0; **15** GEORGE MASON, W 3-0; **17** LONG BEACH STATE, L 3-1; **23** LINCOLN MEMORIAL, W 3-0; **29** Big Ten Challenge at Los Angeles vs. UCLA, L 3-0; **30** Big Ten Challenge at Los Angeles vs. USC, L 3-2.

**Feb. 5** at Northern Kentucky, W 3-0; **8** CENTRAL STATE, W 3-0; **13** at Queens University of Charlotte, W 3-1; **15** at Queens University of Charlotte, L 3-2; **19** BALL STATE, W 3-0; **21** PURDUE FORT WAYNE, W 3-0; **26** at Lewis, L 3-0.

**March 1** at Loyola-Chicago, L 3-1; **5** LINDENWOOD; **7** MCKENDREE; **12** at Ball State; **14** at Purdue Fort Wayne; **19** LOYOLA-CHICAGO; **21** LEWIS; **25** at Penn State.

**April 4** NORTHERN KENTUCKY; **9** at McKendree; **11** at Lindenwood; **18** MIVA Quarterfinals; **22** MIVA Semifinals; **25** MIVA Finals.

**May 7** NCAA Quarterfinals; **9** NCAA Semifinals; **11** NCAA Finals.

## WRESTLING (18-1, 7-1)

**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, L 36-5; **15** at Maryland, W 29-16.

**March 7-8** Big Ten Championships at State College, Pa.; **19-21** NCAA Championships at Cleveland.

# Baseball Steadily Improving From Down Year

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's baseball squad heads into its second season under head coach Justin Haire aiming to rebound from a disappointing 13-37 finish in 2025 that marked the program's lowest win total in a full season since the Buckeyes went 11-25 in 1972 under head coach Marty Karow.

Although Ohio State struggled to pile up victories last season, largely due to an abysmal year on the mound in which no pitcher posted an ERA lower than 5.74, the Buckeyes still showed encouraging signs, particularly at the plate.

While the 2025 Buckeyes finished at the bottom of the Big Ten conference standings with a 5-25 conference record, there seems to be a new sense of optimism in Columbus. With a more experienced and transfer-heavy roster featuring a whopping 27 upperclassmen and 16 incoming transfers, Ohio State has added the maturity and depth needed to potentially transform last year's setbacks into momentum for a stronger future.

Now leading his second program after coaching at Campbell from 2015-24, Haire said building a successful program requires patience, noting that it often takes a full year to establish the right culture before results show on the field.

"There were a lot more lows than highs, but when you have a season like that, there's the opportunity for a lot of clarity in terms of exactly what direction we want to go and what we thought we believed in," Haire told BSB. "For us, the biggest lesson learned was to double down on what you believe and make sure that you have the right people in the room."

"The process of developing young men, getting players better, of having a plan and a dedication to helping those guys develop as human beings and as baseball players, was good and sound. Then, when you pair that up with having the right people in the room with you, both as a staff and as players and personnel, good things tend to happen."

Ohio State (5-5) built early momentum in 2026, sweeping St. Louis from Feb. 13-14 in Pensacola, Fla., before dropping two games to Louisiana Tech and earning a pair of wins over Memphis at the Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., from Feb. 20-22.

The Buckeyes then fell to UTSA before dropping games against No. 25 Ole Miss and No. 3 Texas at the BRUCE BOLT College Classic from Feb. 27-March 1 at Daikin Park in Houston.

With its opening stretch complete, Ohio State will look to build consistency and carry its momentum forward as the Buckeyes aim to improve on their 2025 season.

## On The Bump

Addressing a struggling pitching group from 2025 was arguably Ohio State's top priority this offseason, prompting the Buckeyes' lone coaching change.

Ohio State replaced former director of pitching development Griffin Parrill, who was previously a graduate assistant under Haire at Campbell, with Will Morris.

Morris pitched collegiately for three seasons, spending two years at the University of North Alabama and one at The Citadel. He also coached at the Florida Baseball ARMory in Lakeland, Fla., where he helped develop elite-level pitchers through various internship roles from 2024-25.

Ohio State sophomore pitcher Gavin Kuzniewski said Morris has already made a noticeable impact on the Buckeye pitching unit.

"Will's great. I worked with him in the summer at the Florida Baseball ARMory before he was hired here," Kuzniewski said. "All the guys love Will. All the guys respect Will and understand that he has a different approach to the game, and he's taken on more of the new-school development stuff, which is really good for our pitching staff."

"Will is constantly working to develop guys, and he mixes well with (assistant head coach/pitching coach Tyler Robinson). They are a great duo, as Coach Robinson has so many years of experience and is so good at what he does. And bringing Will into the mix brings in some of that, but also some of that new-school, tech-savvy stuff that has taken over pitching, and it's really helping our staff."

Ohio State's pitching staff lost starters Drew Erdmann (transferred to Arkansas State), Chase Herrell (USC) and Blaine Wynk, who was selected 226th overall in the eighth round of the 2025 MLB draft by the Chicago White Sox. The trio started 17 of the Buckeyes' 50 games in 2025.

However, the Buckeyes retained three key arms in junior Jake Michalak (14 starts), Kuzniewski (seven) and graduate Ryan Butler (five).

Michalak, arguably the Buckeyes' most physically imposing arm, clocking pitches as fast as 97 miles per hour, started in every

game he appeared in 2025, pitching in 46⅓ innings, which was second only to Kuzniewski (56), while finishing with a 1-7 record. Michalak's lone win came against Valparaiso on March 9, 2025, and the righthander finished with a 12.15 ERA, 49 strikeouts, 58 walks and a .313 batting average allowed on 201 batters faced.

Kuzniewski finished the 2025 season with a 3-5 record, a 6.75 ERA – the third-best ERA among Ohio State pitchers who logged at least 30 innings. He also surrendered a .280 batting average while facing a team-high 218 batters.

Kuzniewski opened the 2026 season for the Buckeyes against St. Louis in Pensacola, Fla., on Feb. 13, pitching four innings without allowing a run. The 6-0, 195-pound pitcher struck out four batters and walked three in the 7-1 victory.

For Haire, watching Kuzniewski develop into a reliable starter has been a rewarding journey. He noted that while the sophomore has the work ethic to succeed, he must continue learning how to manage and persevere through the demands of the position.

"It's important for him to understand what it takes to be able to start at this level, the toll that it takes on your body, what it takes to recover in between starts, what it takes to prepare mentally, how you ride the ups and the downs and just some maturity. That side of things really goes a long way," Haire said. "He matured really quickly through the season last year and then took those experiences and has been able to wrap it into a much better product of consistency and preparation every single day. So that piece has been really fun to see, because he wants it and he's willing to work for it, and those guys are always fun to coach."

A Liberty transfer, Butler returned for his graduate campaign at Ohio State after making nine appearances on the mound for the Buckeyes in 2025. Butler struck out 23 batters in 25⅓ innings last season, giving up 35 earned runs on 42 hits.

While most of the Buckeyes' starters are healthy to begin the year, Ohio State will be without senior Hunter Shaw, who was second on the team with a 6.09 ERA last season, for the entire 2026 season. The lefthander suffered an elbow injury just two weeks before the season began and will require surgery.

"The ligament itself disconnected from the humerus bone – the bone in the upper part of his arm – on his throwing arm," Haire said. "So unfortunately, he'll have to get surgery and will be out for the season."

Ohio State brought back one of its top relievers in sophomore Nik Copenhaver (7.16 ERA, 27⅓ IP), also returning senior Douglas Bauer, senior Luke Carrell, and junior Sahil Patel, all of whom made at least 15 appearances and pitched 20 or more innings. Bauer, who led the Ohio State pitching staff with 21 appearances, was the only Buckeye to manage a winning record (3-1) on the mound in 2025.

Patel, a southpaw, showed promise throughout the 2025 season, particularly with a strong curveball, but was inconsistent with a 9.38 ERA in 31⅓ innings that included 42 walks and 40 strikeouts.

Carrell recorded 30 strikeouts in 23⅓ innings in his first season with Ohio State after

transferring from Oklahoma before the 2025 season, with the lefthander serving both as a reliever and a situational option against left-handed hitters.

Junior Zak Sigman, who started twice last season among 10 showings, recorded 16 strikeouts in 13 innings with a 6.23 ERA – the third-best mark on the team in 2025.

Ohio State primarily looked to the transfers to make up its pitching losses, bringing in seven juniors and a graduate pitcher via the portal. Zach Weber from Ohio University, Lincoln McVicker from Centralia College, Ryan Zamora and Nick Sawyer from Sacramento City College, Jack Cecil from South Mountain Community College, Chris Domke from Youngstown State, Pierce Herrenbruck from Rend Lake College and Caden Marcum from Cloud County Community College all joined the Buckeyes this offseason.

Domke transferred to Ohio State a season ago but missed the entire 2025 campaign due to injury. However, Domke began his college career with a freshman campaign at Youngstown State in which he made 22 appearances out of the bullpen for the Penguins, tallying a 3-2 record and a 9.00 ERA in 24 innings pitched.

At Rend Lake, Herrenbruck pitched a 2.48 ERA over 54⅓ innings, earning first-team All-Great Rivers Athletic Conference honors in 2024.

Weber made 40 total appearances during his time at Ohio University, pitching 85⅓ innings with a 7.07 ERA, allowing a .334 batting average over three seasons with the Bobcats. However, his most recent season with the Bobcats was his best at the college level with a 3.99 ERA in 29⅓ innings pitched, striking out 28 batters.

Marcum was originally drafted by the Texas Rangers in the 13th round (pick 379) of the 2022 MLB draft out of Paola High School, before spending two seasons at Cloud County Community College. There, he fanned 85 batters in 60⅓ innings pitched and finished with a 6-2 record.

The Buckeyes also added three freshman pitchers in Jude Fisher, Owen Graf and Connor Fuhrer. The trio of rookie righthanders, all being Ohio natives, has already shown promise early into their careers, according to Kuzniewski.

"Jude came in from day one and was a very mature young arm," Kuzniewski told BSB after Ohio State swept St. Louis the opening weekend of the season. "Me still being young and having experience as a freshman made me realize that he was going to impact the team from day one. We just saw his first outing (in the series finale against St. Louis on Feb. 14), and it's pretty much what we expected, as good as he was."

"Owen Graf, who is a fireball, which is what we need out of him, is electric. He's going to be a guy who's going to come in one-run games, tied games, down a run, and dominate and want to kill the other team, which is what we need out of a bullpen arm. Then Connor is a great guy, great teammate, who's taking more of a development phase into his game and is definitely going to impact the Buckeyes here down the road."

## At The Plate

In the field, Ohio State showed promise



Justin Haire

## TOPSOIL



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# OHIO STATE BASEBALL

in 2025 but was ultimately held down by a pitching staff that gave up 447 earned runs and allowed batters to hit .300 on the season.

The Buckeyes faced the departure of multiple key offensive pieces from last year's team, including their entire starting outfield in Nick Giamarusti, Trey Lipsey and Reggie Bussey, as well as first baseman Ryan Miller, second baseman Tyler Pettorini, third baseman Will Carpenter and utilityman Matthew Graveline, who played and started in all 50 games between catcher, left field and designated hitter.

To fill the gaps in the outfield, Ohio State brought in a slew of transfers, including a new trio of starters in transfers Noah Furcht (UNC-Charlotte), Alex Bemis (Gannon University), Miles Vandenheuvel (Eastern Arizona College) and Addison Binnie (Kirkwood Community College).

Furcht started in 57 of 58 games for Charlotte in 2025, batting .256 with 56 hits, eight doubles and six home runs. The graduate outfielder also made just one error and totaled a .990 fielding percentage.

At Gannon last season, Bemis had a whopping .329 average and a .627 slugging percentage in 44 games started for the Knights, while recording 48 putouts to seven errors defensively.

Vandenheuvel is listed as an infielder and right-handed pitcher but has spent his time in center field for Ohio State. The multipurpose Vandenheuvel batted .297 with 89 hits, 19 doubles, four triples and six home runs in two seasons at Eastern Arizona, while also recording 16 strikeouts in 15⅓ innings pitched with a 2.70 ERA on the mound.

When asked about the new trio of starting outfielders – Furcht, Bemis and Vandenheuvel – transfer second baseman Henry Kaczmar emphasized their experience and willingness to buy into Ohio State standards, with Haire and the Buckeye coaching staff looked to rely on transfers to bring added maturity to the team this season.

“Those guys are just great on and off the field,” Kaczmar said. “They embody what the culture is here. You could stick those players anywhere on defense, and I feel like they would shine. They shone (against St. Louis) this past weekend, and I believe they’ll continue to shine throughout the year with whatever changes the staff makes or wherever they’re put. I feel like they’re going to be great players.”

According to Haire, Binnie, along with a pair of freshmen – Steven Cavaco and Jacob Parr – remain key depth pieces who may take on a larger role later this year.

Binnie, a junior, is currently working his way back from a wrist injury. In 2025, he was a force at Kirkwood, appearing in 42 games and maintaining an impressive .503 on-base percentage (OBP) alongside a .352 batting average.

“You’ll see all three of (the starters), along with Addison Binnie, who you’ll get a little bit more of as he’s coming back from a wrist injury,” Haire said. “There are a couple of young freshmen, too, Steven Cavaco and Jacob Parr, who are in our outfield. Those guys want to work, they want to be pushed, they want to be developed. They’re not afraid to jump in and get their confidence crushed a little bit because they know that when they overcome that, they’re going to be better on the other end.”

Returning to the infield are starting shortstop Lee Ellis, catcher Mason Eckelman and

utilityman Maddix Simpson.

Ellis, whom Haire called one of the most talented players on the 2026 squad, started in all 38 games that he was available for the Buckeyes and ranked third on the team with a .296 batting average in 2025, totaling 42 hits, six doubles, two triples, seven home runs and 34 RBI.

Ellis said last season's adversity ultimately reshaped his mindset going into this season.

“From a hitter and position-player standpoint, I’ve learned to trust the process,” Ellis said. “It was really hard last year with 13 wins to buy in and trust the process of what the coaches were trying to sell. But the guys who did buy in are really getting the benefits from the coaching staff and from what we’ve been able to accomplish so far this season.”

Though a catcher by trade, Eckelman often saw time in the infield or at designated hitter for Ohio State when Graveline started behind the plate. Starting in 49 out of 50 games played for the Buckeyes, Eckelman finished with a .281 batting average and was one of three Buckeyes with an OBP above .400.

Ohio State has four total catchers on its 2026 roster. In addition to Eckelman, the Buckeyes returned senior Alonzo Paul Jr. and brought in freshman Austin Rose and McNeese State transfer Grant Mangrum.

As a freshman, Simpson played in 36 games for Ohio State in 2025, starting 34, while batting .237 with 27 hits, six doubles, two home runs and 24 RBI. Simpson shifted between third base and shortstop last season, but with Ellis back and the addition of Kaczmar, the sophomore will likely be a full-time third baseman.

Perhaps Ohio State's biggest transfer-port addition was Kaczmar, who played his first two seasons of college baseball with the Buckeyes under former head coach Bill Mosiello before spending the 2025 season at South Carolina.

In his lone season with the Gamecocks, Kaczmar scored 33 runs and had 57 hits, six home runs and 28 RBI. He was previously a second-team All-Big Ten selection for Ohio State in 2024.

Kaczmar explained what ultimately made his decision to return to Ohio State for his senior campaign.

“I grew up an Ohio State fan,” Kaczmar said. “I’ve always been an Ohio State fan, and every time I put on the jersey here, there’s just a surreal feeling for me. My family is from Cleveland, so a lot of my relatives are going to be able to watch me play a lot more. My cousin, Mason Eckelman, is the catcher on the team here. My cousin and Lee had nothing but great things to say about the coaching staff here. So that just drew me here, and I want to try to get this program back where it should be.”

Hutchinson Community College transfer first baseman CJ Reid was solid in the 2025 season, slashing .358/.442/.583 with 73 hits, 62 RBI and nine home runs in 60 games.

Kaczmar believes Reid will be a great addition for the 2026 Buckeyes.

“CJ has been just incredible. He could play any position in the infield,” Kaczmar said. “He could play outfield, even. When he comes to the plate, he’s got that mindset of grinding out that at bat. For me, personally, there’s nobody else I’d rather have at the plate than CJ. I feel like he’s the type of guy to grind out at bats, play for the team and be super team-oriented.”

Gordon State College transfer infielder

Gavin West has had time this season at designated hitter and third base for the Buckeyes. Last year, for the Highlanders, West managed a .333 average and a .502 on-base percentage with 28 home runs in 54 games.

The Buckeyes also added Cowley County Community College sophomore first baseman Dane Harvey, who batted .352 with 13 home runs and 58 RBI as a redshirt freshman in 2025.

With the roster taking shape and transfer contributors such as West and Harvey stepping into their new roles, the Buckeyes are hoping to translate individual talent into team success.

That focus on both performance and purpose has been a consistent message from players and coaches alike as Ohio State will look to reclaim its spot at the top of the Big Ten.

The focus for the Buckeyes, Ellis said, is

less about talk and more about tangible results.

“We want to make a push for the post-season,” Ellis said. “I mean, for everybody in college baseball, the road is to Omaha. We’re doing all this to be one of the last eight teams to play in Omaha. So that’s definitely one of our biggest goals, as well as winning a Big Ten championship. First and foremost, it’s been a couple of years since the Ohio State Buckeyes have kind of been on that national pedestal, and it’s our goal to get back where we were.”

Kuzniewski echoed that mindset, stating that the main goal for this group is to restore the standard of Ohio State baseball.

“I’m just most excited for this season,” Kuzniewski said. “We really just want to stamp the legacy on Ohio State baseball again.”

## 2026 Ohio State Baseball Roster

No.	Name	Position	Year	Height	Weight	B/T	Hometown
45	Douglas Bauer	RHP	Sr.	6-3	215	R/R	Houston
4	Alex Bemis	OF	Jr.	5-11	210	R/R	Monroe, Ohio
7	Addison Binnie	OF	Jr.	6-0	205	R/R	Clinton, Iowa
29	Ryan Butler	RHP	Gr.	6-2	210	R/R	Salem, Va.
25	Luke Carrell	LHP	R-Sr.	6-2	215	R/L	Davis, Calif.
38	Steven Cavaco	OF/1B	Fr.	5-11	190	L/L	Huntsville, Ala.
17	Jack Cecil	RHP	Jr.	6-0	205	R/R	Lebanon, Ohio
30	Nik Copenhaver	RHP	R-So.	6-4	220	R/R	Hamilton, Ohio
20	Chris Domke	RHP	Jr.	6-4	220	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
16	Mason Eckelman	C	Jr.	6-1	220	L/R	Broadview Hts., Ohio
14	Andrew Edrington	RHP	Jr.	6-0	200	R/R	Cincinnati
1	Lee Ellis	INF	Jr.	6-1	180	R/R	White Plains, Md.
52	Jack Fisher	RHP	Fr.	6-2	205	R/R	Cleveland
51	Connor Fuhrer	RHP	Fr.	6-2	195	R/R	Loveland, Ohio
8	Noah Furcht	OF	Gr.	6-1	215	R/R	Esco, Minn.
54	Owen Graf	RHP	Fr.	6-4	210	R/R	Toledo
19	Dane Harvey	1B	R-So.	6-5	270	L/L	Warfordsburg, Pa.
24	Pierce Herrenbruck	RHP	Jr.	6-2	205	R/R	Evansville, Ind.
2	Henry Kaczmar	INF	Sr.	5-10	195	L/R	Bath, Ohio
48	Gavin Kuzniewski	RHP	So.	6-0	190	R/R	Fishers, Ind.
9	Grant Mangrum	C	Gr.	6-2	210	R/R	Sterlington, La.
31	Caden Marcum	RHP	Jr.	6-6	175	R/R	Paola, Kan.
35	Lincoln McVicker	RHP	Jr.	6-5	255	R/R	Highlands Ranch, Colo.
21	Jake Michalak	RHP	Jr.	6-3	220	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
53	Jacob Parr	OF	Fr.	6-4	215	L/R	Lemont, Ill.
15	Sahil Patel	LHP	R-Jr.	6-0	190	L/L	Buford, Ga.
44	Alonzo Paul Jr.	C	Sr.	5-9	180	R/R	Valparaiso, Ind.
34	CJ Reid	INF	Jr.	6-0	200	L/R	Colorado Springs, Colo.
36	Austin Rose	C	Fr.	6-3	225	R/R	Newark, Ohio
55	Nick Sawyer	RHP	Jr.	5-10	190	R/R	Upper Arlington, Ohio
26	Hunter Shaw	LHP	Sr.	6-5	220	R/L	Chelsea, Mich.
47	Zak Sigman	RHP	Jr.	5-10	185	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
6	Maddix Simpson	INF	So.	6-1	200	R/R	Fort Myers, Fla.
11	Miles Vandenheuvel	OF	Jr.	6-2	200	R/R	Scottsdale, Ariz.
10	Zach Weber	RHP	Gr.	6-2	215	R/R	Lebanon, Ohio
12	Gavin West	INF	Jr.	6-1	215	R/R	Macon, Ga.
41	Ryan Zamora	RHP	Jr.	6-0	205	R/R	Elk Grove, Calif.

**Head Coach** – Justin Haire. **Assistant Head Coach/Pitching Coach** – Tyler Robinson. **Assistant Coach/Field Coordinator** – Joey Holcomb. **Assistant Coach/Director of Recruiting** – Elliott McCummings. **Director of Player Personnel & Development** – Jordan Stampler. **Director of Program Development** – Harrison Mohr. **Director of Pitching Development** – Will Morris.

### 2026 Schedule

**FEB. 13-14** at Saint Louis; **20** vs. Louisiana Tech at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn.; **20** vs. Memphis at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn.; **21** vs. Louisiana Tech at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn.; **22** vs. Memphis at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn.; **27** vs. Texas-San Antonio at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston; **28** vs. Ole Miss at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston.

**MARCH 1** vs. Texas at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston; **3** XAVIER; **6-8** UCLA; **10** KENT STATE, **13-15** at Washington; **18** at Xavier; **20-22** BUTLER; **24** at Wright State; **27-29** at Minnesota; **31** TOLEDO.

**APRIL 3-5** MARYLAND; **7** BOWLING GREEN; **10-12** PENN STATE; **15** MARSHALL; **17-19** at Purdue; **21** AKRON; **24-26** at Rutgers.

**MAY 1-3** NEBRASKA; **5** MIAMI (OH); **8-10** MICHIGAN STATE; **12** WRIGHT STATE; **14-16** at Michigan; **19-24** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb.; **29-June 1** NCAA Regionals, TBA.

# Senior Captain Burnside Ready For Special Night

Davis Burnside is this season's unicorn for Ohio State.

The two-time captain will be the lone four-year Buckeye when he and three others are honored during Senior Night on March 6 at The Schottenstein Center against Notre Dame in the regular-season finale.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"It obviously flies by extremely quick," the forward from Scottsdale, Ariz., said. "I'm so thankful for this whole program, the coaching staff, and the fact that it's coming down to the end is pretty crazy. I'm thankful for everybody that's been a part of my four years, and hopefully we can have a good end of the season."

Also to be recognized are graduate transfer forward Adam Eisele (Minnesota State), transfer defenseman Ethan Straky (Colorado College) – each in their first season with the Buckeyes – and forward Jake Dunlap, who is in his third season at Ohio State after transferring from New Hampshire following his freshman season.

"It's definitely going to be a sad night, but I'm excited for the next chapter after school as well and hopefully continue to play hockey," Dunlap said. "But I'm going to enjoy being in that moment with my family. I've got a bunch of friends coming out too, so it's going to be exciting for everyone involved."

Dunlap's older brother, Joe, was part of an eight-player Senior Night last season, which highlighted the changing college landscape due to the increasing number of transfers plus the final season in which athletes were eligible for five seasons due to the coronavirus.

Joe Dunlap and Patrick Guzzo were fifth-year seniors; Reilly Herbst was a four-year Buckeye; Caden Brown, Brent Johnson and Logan Terness were all in their second seasons after transferring; and Gunnarwolfe Fontaine and Aiden Hansen-Bukata were first-year transfers.

Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik has seen the number of Senior Night honorees fluctuate in recent years and expects the trend could continue.

"These days, you just never know," he said. "You hope you have an opportunity to work with these young guys for four years. But lately it doesn't seem like you have that opportunity, so it's pretty special when you do."

That's why he's proud that Burnside stayed through the ups and downs of the program.

"Who he is, what he's all about, what he represents and how he represents himself, his family and this university is first class," Rohlik said.

OSU lost in the NCAA regional final in Burnside's freshman season but didn't qualify the next year before rebounding last season. The Buckeyes lost the Big Ten tournament final in overtime to Michigan State then were eliminated in the first round of



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**STICKING WITH IT** – Senior forward Davis Burnside (23) stayed all four seasons at Ohio State when the trend is to enter the transfer portal. The two-time captain has experienced ups and downs with two NCAA tournament appearances but also a pair of seasons with losing records. He, Jake Dunlap, Adam Eisele and Ethan Straky, was set to be honored at Senior Night on March 6 at The Schottenstein Center.

the NCAA tournament.

This season has been a struggle for the Buckeyes (12-18-2, 8-13-1 Big Ten), with their only hope of making the NCAA field being to win the conference tournament.

### In For The Long Haul

Burnside said there was no point where he considered transferring.

"We've had such good teams while I've been here, and leaving my best friends and stuff like that never came across my mind," he said. "I think every year we've been able to prove something, whether it's making it to the (NCAA) tournament or playing well at the end of the year after people counted us out. My sophomore year, we didn't have a great year, but we found a way to make it to the Big Ten semifinals, and we were one of the best teams in the country late in the season. Every time we prove something, it made me want to come back."

He also wants to be a role model for the younger players. In Burnside's freshman season of 2022-23, he watched 13 seniors be honored, including five transfers, seven four-year Buckeyes and one five-year Buckeye.

"Seeing all those guys helped me build my passion for Ohio State and the love for this school," he said. "All those guys were here for four or five years, too, so it's easy to get into the community and like what we want to do for this program. That helped me, and I was trying to do the same for the

freshmen coming in this year."

That's the captain being the captain.

"He's a leader," Jake Dunlap said. "He's definitely a vocal guy on our team, a lead-by-example type of guy as well."

The two have been roommates for the past three seasons, so Dunlap has seen Burnside's dedication.

"He's very active. I can say that about him," Dunlap said. "Like yesterday, we had a day off, and he went to Pilates at 8 in the morning. I respect him for it, admire it, but it's not for me. But he's always staying busy, likes to play pickleball and tennis, just like me."

Dunlap has found Burnside's weakness, though.

"He's not a great Monopoly player. He'll tell you that he thinks he is sometimes, but he's not," Dunlap said. "Last year, we played a bunch. This year we've slowed down a bit."

On the ice, Burnside made an almost immediate impact, scoring just 3:52 into his OSU debut in the 2022-23 season. Later in the season, he became the fourth Buckeye to score two shorthanded goals in a game.

Asked recently what the senior Burnside would tell a freshman Burnside, he said, "Just enjoy it. They do say it goes by quick, and you never really believe it until it's finally there. So just try and enjoy the time with your best friends and do as much as you can for the team and the program."

He keeps putting up points. He assisted on a goal by Félix Caron on Jan. 31 against

## BIG Men's Hockey

	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Michigan	24	49	17	6	1	4	0	1
Michigan State	22	47	15	6	1	2	2	1
Penn State	22	41	12	8	2	1	3	1
Wisconsin	22	33	12	10	0	3	0	0
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
Minnesota	22	25	7	14	1	0	2	1
Notre Dame	22	12	3	17	2	1	2	0

**Overall records** – Michigan 26-7-1, Michigan State 24-7-1, Penn State 20-10-2, Wisconsin 19-11-2, **Ohio State 12-18-2**, Minnesota 11-20-2, Notre Dame 7-22-5.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

Michigan to become the sixth Buckeye to reach 100 career points in the past 10 years and the first since Tanner Laczynski (2017-20).

"It's something you don't really try and think about too much," Burnside said. "Points are just a small part of the game. I remember my dad said something in the summer like, 'Oh, you're only 20 points away.' So that was something me and him talked about, that it would be a good goal for me to reach this season."

He has 28 points (12 goals, 16 assists) in 32 games through Feb. 28, and his career total of 108 points (49-59) is 10th among active NCAA players.

Burnside is prouder of being the 19th Buckeye to be a two-time captain.

"It's special. It means so much," he said. "My first two years, the leaders that came through here helped me become a better player and person. You look at the wall in our locker room with the past captains, and they're so respected around Ohio State and in the community, so I tried to lean on them."

Symbolic of his captaincy, Burnside, while being interviewed by BSB, wanted to make sure all the attention is not on him on Senior Night.

"Obviously, the other seniors have put a lot into this program too," he said. "Jake, this is his third year. Eisele and Straky are new, but they love this program as well. It will definitely be special and something I'll try and soak in."

As his career winds down, Burnside said his best memories include outdoor games in Cleveland in February 2023 and Chicago in January 2025.

"Just the buildup for those and being able to beat The Team Up North twice is unbelievable," he said.

So, how long did it take a kid from Arizona to learn the alternative name for Michigan?

"I'd say right away," he said. "Obviously, the first couple of weeks I would say (Michigan), and I remember guys would get on me. But once it's ingrained in your head, you just say it naturally."

### Series Recaps

The Buckeyes were 2-3-1 in their three series since BSB last published.

They split at home with No. 13 Wisconsin and were routed in the opener at No. 6 Penn State before losing the next night in overtime. OSU then took four of six points



**Women's Hockey Tournament • Feb. 27-March 7**  
**1st Round Games On Campus Of Higher Seed**  
**Semifinals And Championship At University Of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.**

**Feb. 27-March 1**  
 Best-Of-Three Series

	No. 8 Bemidji State
All games at 7:00 p.m.	
	No. 1 Wisconsin
	No. 5 Minnesota State
7:00 p.m.; 7:00 p.m.; 5:00 p.m.	
	No. 4 Minnesota-Duluth
	No. 7 St. Thomas
8:00 p.m.; 8:00 p.m.; 6:00 p.m.	
	No. 2 Ohio State
	No. 6 St. Cloud State
8:00 p.m.; 8:00 p.m.; 6:00 p.m.	
	No. 3 Minnesota

**MARCH 5**  
 Single Elimination

	No. 1 Wisconsin
Time 5:00 p.m. • BTN	
	No. 5 Minnesota State
	No. 2 Ohio State
Time 8:30 p.m. • BTN	
	No. 3 Minnesota

**MARCH 7**  
 Single Elimination

Time 3:00 p.m. • BTN	
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**All Times ET**

**TOURNAMENT CHAMPION**

**To The Max**

Montes, a junior forward from Hartland, Wis., is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for February.

He had three goals and five assists for eight points in eight games. He scored in a 6-2 win at Minnesota on Feb. 6 and had two goals and an assist in helping the Buckeyes upset the Spartans.

Montes is third on the team with 26 points (12 goals, 14 assists).

**Moving On**

The Ohio State women's hockey team will play Minnesota in the WCHA Final Faceoff semifinal on March 5 (8:30 p.m. ET, BTN Plus) at the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, Minn.

OSU, the No. 2 seed, defeated St. Thomas 5-1 and 4-1 in the best-of-three quarterfinals at the OSU Ice Rink on Feb. 27 and 28.

The winner between the Buckeyes (32-4-0) and No. 3 Minnesota (26-10-1) will play either No. 1 seed Wisconsin (31-3-2) or No. 5 Minnesota State (17-18-2) in the title game on March 7 (3:02 p.m. ET, BTN Plus)

Wisconsin enters as the defending champion, having defeated Minnesota 4-3 in 2025. The Badgers are also the reigning NCAA champions after a 4-3 overtime victory against Ohio State. The Buckeyes were the 2024 and 2022 champs.

The Buckeyes took the opener against St. Thomas behind the four-point (two goals, two assists) performance of Sara Swiderski.

Ohio State outshot the Tommies 44-8 with Hailey MacLeod earning her 21st win with just seven saves. U.S. Olympic gold medalist Joy Dunne had a goal and an assist in her first game since the Americans defeated Canada on Feb. 19.

In the second game, sophomore defender Mira Jungåker and freshman forward Hilda Svensson each had a goal and two assists, and MacLeod made 19 saves.

*For complete recaps of the Wisconsin, Penn State and Michigan State series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

at top-ranked Michigan State with a 5-1 win followed by a 3-3 tie in which the Spartans got the extra Big Ten point by winning the shootout 3-2 in 13 rounds.

Ryan Gordon scored twice to double his season output when Ohio State secured a 3-2 victory over the Badgers on Feb. 14 to avenge a lackluster 4-2 loss the previous game. His second score in the third period capped a gritty comeback after trailing UW (18-10-2, 11-9-0) twice.

"It was a hard, playoff-type game," Rohlik said after the win. "You've got to find a way to win and come from behind it. We found a way."

The weekend resembled the set against Michigan State a month earlier. The Spartans squashed the home team 6-2 in the opener with the help of three goals in 23 seconds. The next night, Rohlik switched incumbent goalie Kristoffer Eberly for Sam Hillebrandt, and he responded with a 2-1 win.

Fast-forward to the first game vs. the Badgers when they took a 2-0 first-period lead thanks to goals 18 seconds apart against Hillebrandt (21 saves). In the rematch, Eberly made 25 saves in his first start in six games, and Jake Karabela tied it 2-2 for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State played well early at Penn State on Feb. 20, trailing 2-1 after 20 minutes before everything fell apart.

Future NHL star Gavin McKenna, only a freshman, torched the Buckeyes for eight points, seven of them assists, in an 11-4 win in the opener before the projected No. 1 pick in the 2026 NHL draft notched the overtime winner the next night at Pegula Ice Arena in University Park, Pa.

Ohio State got three goals from Caron in

the series, but the special teams were awful. The Nittany Lions (20-9-1, 12-7) went 7 of 11 on the power play while the Buckeyes were 2 of 7 but couldn't get a goal when they needed one in the second game, which allowed PSU to rally from a three-goal deficit.

At Michigan State, the Buckeyes showed that at times they can compete with the best as evidence by their games vs. the Spartans (24-7-1, 15-6-1) at Munn Arena in East Lansing on Feb. 27 and 28. The results allowed OSU to win the season series 2-1-1.

Max Montes led the way with two goals and two assists in the two games. Burnside totaled three assists, and Karabela scored twice in the opener and had an assist in the second game.

The Buckeyes in the first game struck for goals by Bryce Ingles, Karabela and Montes in a 3:29 span of the first period for a 3-0 lead. Montes and Karabela later scored to back the 22 saves by Eberly.

In the rematch, Riley Thompson, Niall Crocker and Jake Rozzi staked the Buckeyes to a 3-2 lead before MSU got the equalizer on the power play in the third period.

Eberly made 34 saves in regulation and overtime and stopped 10 of 13 shootout attempts, but it wasn't enough.

**Next**

The aforementioned regular-season finale series vs. Notre Dame begins at 6:30 p.m. on March 5, followed by another 6:30 start the next night.

Ohio State will then play a conference quarterfinal on March 11 under the new format with seeds two through four hosting a single-game eliminator. Previously, the quarterfinals were a best-of-three at the higher seeds.

The Buckeyes are fifth (27 points), but with a regulation sweep of Notre Dame and Wisconsin (33 points) losing twice in regulation at Penn State, they would be fourth because of the tiebreaker and would host the Badgers. OSU could also finish sixth. Minnesota (25 points) is home vs. Michigan State. The Buckeyes own the tiebreaker over the Golden Gophers.

The semifinals are on March 14 followed by the title game on March 21 at the highest remaining seed.

**VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For February**



**Max Montes**  
*Junior Forward*  
*Hartland, Wis.*

# Ohio State Falls To PSU, Defeats Maryland

No. 2 Ohio State's 2025-26 regular season ended on an unsteady note. The Wrestlebucks entered the final weekend a perfect 17-0 in dual meets, coming off a dominant 24-9 win over No. 5 Iowa at home.

## ON THE MAT Sam Cipriani

But rather than sprinting through the finish line, Ohio State stumbled its way there.

Ohio State opened its weekend on Feb. 13 against No. 1 Penn State (15-0, 8-0 Big Ten) at the Bryce Jordan Center in University Park, Pa., in front of an NCAA-record 16,006 fans.

With the Nittany Lions featuring six top-ranked wrestlers at their respective classes and seven undefeated starters, Ohio State needed to jump on Penn State early with its group of highly ranked lightweights, but the Buckeyes faltered early.

At 125 pounds, Ohio State's No. 2 Nic Bouzakis fell in the sudden victory period, 4-1, to Penn State's No. 1 Luke Lilledahl before the Nittany Lions' No. 4 Marcus Blaze upset the Buckeyes' No. 2 Ben Davino at 133 pounds. In a battle of two unbeaten, Blaze's late reversal in the second tiebreaker period fueled a 3-2

victory by decision, and Penn State earned an early 6-0 lead after two bouts.

Even after Ohio State's No. 1 Jesse Mendez answered with an 18-2 technical fall over Penn State's No. 12 Braeden Davis, the Nittany Lions claimed the next seven bouts of the dual.

Five of those wins earned extra points as Penn State secured a 36-5 victory over the Buckeyes, who were without No. 6 Ethan Stiles (149 pounds), No. 1 Brandon Cannon (157) and No. 5 Carson Kharchla (174).

Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan said that, despite the loss, the Buckeyes gained valuable experience from competing against what he called one of the best teams in NCAA wrestling history and that their struggles at Penn State will ultimately be beneficial to the team's development going forward.

"We didn't go there looking for a moral victory ... but we did learn a lot," Ryan said Feb. 18. "That's one of the best teams in NCAA wrestling history with the people they have. So in many respects, what we got out of it can really help us more than hurt us."

Although Ohio State managed to claim a 29-16 victory over Maryland (5-9, 0-8) on Feb. 15 at the Schanwald Pavilion in College Park, Md., the banged-up Buckeyes scraped by a Terrapins squad with wins in only six of the 10 bouts.

After Ohio State's lightweights – Bouzakis, Davino and Mendez – won each of the first

three matches with extra points, Maryland earned victories at 149 and 157 pounds to push the score to 15-7.

The Buckeyes' Paddy Gallagher earned a 23-7 technical fall at 165 pounds over Maryland's AJ Rodrigues to increase the advantage to 20-7. The Terrapins and Buckeyes traded the final four matches, each earning nine team points to finalize Ohio State's 18-1 dual record and 7-1 mark in Big Ten action.

With the dual season over, Ohio State will have multiple weeks off before the Buckeyes return to the Bryce Jordan Center for the Big Ten championships from March 7-8.

## Bucks Preparing For B1G Tournament

After Ohio State concluded its dual season with the victory over Maryland, the Buckeyes had nearly three weeks to rest and prepare for the postseason.

Ryan noted that the grueling regular-season schedule – featuring matchups against the No. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 teams – tested the team's depth and resilience.

Ryan acknowledged that he has stressed the value of the dual season for development but said he and the Buckeyes are now focused on preparing to make some noise in the postseason.

"I think everyone's glad that the dual season is over at this point," Ryan said. "We're ready to have a great three weeks of practice to get ready for the Big Ten championships and then another eight days between Big Ten and nationals so we can really peak for the championships in Cleveland."

Ryan sees this period as an opportunity to address both individual and team weaknesses that he has identified.

"I think physically, we can get more physical. If we just go up a little bit fitness-wise – I mean, we lost one match (against Penn State) on fitness, but also a tactical mistake," Ryan said. "Finishing still is a big deal for us. We could improve our tactics – ride-out tactics, overtime tactics."

To eliminate complacency, Ryan is framing the three-week period as an opportunity to refine both Ohio State's wrestling and fitness.

While the Buckeyes have shown they can go toe to toe with the nation's elite, Ryan is concentrating on marginal gains during the off period, believing that small improvements in fitness and situational awareness could be the difference between a tight decision and a victory by extra points.

"I thought we outwrestled (Penn State) at 133, and I thought we outwrestled them at 125. We just made a tactical error in each of those matches," Ryan said. "We made a tactical error at 184 that cost us. That Penn State dual was a blessing. We just saw some things that were really high level that weren't quite exposed yet, and they're not easily fixable, but they're very fixable."

One of the Ohio State wrestlers benefiting from the long break is Cannon.

The sophomore wrestler began the season with a 14-1 overall record and a perfect 12-0 mark in duals. However, Cannon suffered a knee injury in late January that required surgery and hasn't wrestled since he took home a 12-6 victory by decision over Minnesota's No. 21 Charlie Millard on Jan. 23.

Cannon, who is expected to be available

for the Big Ten championships, expressed a positive mindset about the long break, stating that it will allow him to continue to recover to 100 percent and fine-tune his wrestling, particularly with his change of pace.

"I've been developing my wrestling, just being more patient," Cannon said. "Even though I want to get after things, I'm being more patient where I need to be."

Heavyweight Nick Feldman said he will draw from multiple motivations to stay sharp during the break leading up to the postseason.

Feldman said his current drive was sparked by a 4-1 sudden-victory loss to Penn State's then-No. 12 Cole Mirasola in his second-to-last bout of the season.

The junior wrestler bounced back in his final match, earning a 19-3 technical fall over Maryland's Joey Schneck. Feldman said that while he never wants to lose, the loss to Mirasola serves as great motivation, and he's ready to carry that energy into the Big Ten tournament.

"It's easy to be focused after you lose," Feldman said. "I'm freaking fired up for (the Big Ten championships). I hate losing. So my training will be hard, my wrestling will be hard, and I'm ready to bring the heat here soon."

In his previous two attempts in the Big Ten championships, Feldman fell just short, placing second in 2024 as the tournament's No. 2 seed before suffering an early loss that resulted in a fifth-place finish in 2025.

"It's something that's eluded me for sure, and it's something I'm going to get," Feldman said of winning a conference title. "So it's just another day in the office."

## Bouzakis Named B1G Wrestler Of The Week



Nic Bouzakis

For his efforts in No. 2 Ohio State's 24-9 victory over No. 5 Iowa, Bouzakis earned Big Ten Wrestler of the Week honors on Feb. 12.

After Iowa jumped out to a 9-0 lead to open the match, Bouzakis helped spark

Ohio State's surge of 24 straight team points. With a 10-9 team lead, the junior powered past the Hawkeyes' No. 6 Dean Peterson with a 9-5 decision, fueled by a commanding first period that featured a takedown and a four-point near-fall.

The 125-pound Bouzakis finished the 2025-26 regular season with a 13-2 record, falling to only Penn State's Lilledahl and junior teammate Brendan McCrone in the finals of the Clarion Open on Nov. 2.

Bouzakis has defeated seven opponents in the top 25 this season, including three wins against top-10 opponents – two against Peterson and one against Minnesota's Jore Volk, who was ranked eighth nationally for their Nov. 15 bout.

Bouzakis is now the third Buckeye to earn Big Ten Wrestler of the Week honors this season, joining Kharchla and Feldman, who claimed the honors on Dec. 18 and Jan. 30, respectively.

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# Reese Worth High NFL Draft Selection?

Is Arvell Reese a guy a lot of us missed out on over the years, or are the NFL draft evaluators off the mark in making their projections?

**EXNER  
POINT  
Rich Exner**

It's hard to believe that a guy who went from special teams-only player to role player to starter in three years possessed the potential to be a top-five pick in the NFL draft, but that's the consensus coming out of the NFL combine.

It might very well be right, but still hard to figure.

The coaches raved about Reese last year. So did the broadcasters, and he certainly was an imposing figure on the field, but at the end of the season, he had the lowest tackle output for an Ohio State starting linebacker since 2021.

Tackle counts can be overinflated. So much more is going on that matters to the success of a defense. But it's one measure of visibility on the football field – meaning casual observers missed out on fully getting to enjoy his talent.



Arvell Reese

Reese finished with 69 tackles, second on the team behind fellow linebacker Sony Styles, who had 82 tackles. Next was Caleb Downs, who had 68 tackles while lining up in various roles in the defense.

Those stats came over 14 games.

In 2024, Cody Simon had 112 tackles in 15 games, while Styles had 100 tackles over 16 games.

In 2023, Steele Chambers had 83 tackles in 13 games. Tommy Eichenberg had 82 tackles in 10 games.

And in 2022, Eichenberg had 120 tackles and Chambers had 77 tackles, both playing 13 games.

But just as important in calling this somewhat of a surprise move up the mock draft boards over the last year is the fact that Reese did not get big playing time until this past season. The snap count among linebackers in 2024: Styles (894), Simon (797), Reese (307), C.J. Hicks (149) and Payton Pierce (31).

And as a freshman in 2023, all 58 of Reese's snaps came on special teams. He never saw the field as a linebacker.

Good for Reese if all this works out to become stardom in the NFL, but if that's to be the case, and even with his All-America honors, I feel like we missed out on seeing Reese's talent over the long haul at Ohio State.

## Former OSU Assistant To Browns

The Cleveland Browns recently hired

one-time Ohio State assistant coach Dom Capers as a "senior defensive assistant." By senior, I assume that comes with being 75 years old (76 by the start of the season) with a coaching résumé that spans 54 years, since 1972.

For me, I immediately think Buckeye ties.

It was in 1982, amid a coaching overhaul for the defense, that Earle Bruce brought in Capers to help fix an ailing pass defense after firing assistant Nick Saban.

## Can Coach, Will Move

In looking up Capers' history, it's amazing to see how much some of these guys move around. For Capers, this is stop No. 22.

Capers' stops, in order, after a graduate assistant start at Kent State in 1972-74: Washington, Hawaii, San Jose State, Cal, Tennessee, Ohio State, Philadelphia/Baltimore Stars, New Orleans Saints, Pittsburgh Steelers, Carolina Panthers (head coach 1995-98), Jacksonville Jaguars, Houston Texans, (head coach, 2002-05), Miami Dolphins, New England Patriots, Green Bay Packers, Jaguars, Minnesota Vikings, Detroit Lions, Denver Broncos, Panthers and now Browns.

Those are all pretty high-level jobs. But for every Capers, there are a lot more people doing it who involve many more stops at smaller schools, probably for far less pay.

Ohio State recently had an offensive analyst, the new word for a coach who isn't officially classified as a coach, named Todd Fitch. I was curious about his career path because we went to grade school and high school together. I've had two jobs since college. His résumé includes 16 stops after playing football at Ohio Wesleyan through 1985.

## Help BSB Grow

Loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers frequently ask us what they can do to help keep BSB vibrant in this increasingly electronic age. One of the things readers can do is introduce BSB to new readers who might find our Ohio State sports content interesting.

In order to help you do that, we are offering an opportunity to send four free trial issues to potential subscribers. We will then offer your potential subscriber a very special offer to get them to join the fold of loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers.

We are also offering a special \$19.95 subscription rate for gifts for our service men and women. It's nice to send a little bit of home to those all over the world who are protecting us. Don't forget to include an APO address when applicable and remember, any subscription includes electronic access to BSB, so our Buckeyes in uniform will be able to enjoy their BSB immediately, wherever they are.

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He coached at Ohio Wesleyan, Bowling Green, West Virginia, Bowling Green, Colorado State, Connecticut, South Carolina, Iowa State, East Carolina, South Florida, Boston College, Louisiana Tech, Vanderbilt, Ohio State, LSU and now as the offensive coordinator at Charlotte.

## Draft Talk And History

There's talk that as many as five Buckeyes could be first-round picks in this spring's NFL draft: Reese, Downs, Styles, Carnell Tate and Kayden McDonald. Four appear to be a lock. Five is a possibility.

But with this in mind, here are the biggest drafts for Buckeyes when it comes to first-round selections:

**2016 (5)** – Defensive end Joey Bosa (3), running back Ezekiel Elliott (4), cornerback Eli Apple (10), tackle Taylor Decker (16) and linebacker Darron Lee (20).

**2006 (5)** – Linebacker A.J. Hawk (5), defensive back Donte Whitner (8), linebacker Bobby Carpenter (18), wide receiver Santonio Holmes (25) and center Nick Mangold (29).

**2025 (4)** – Wide receiver Emeka Egbuka (No. 19), tackle Donovan Jackson (24), defensive tackle Tyleik Williams (28) and tackle Josh Simmons (32).

**1971 (4)** – Running back John Brock-

ington (9), defensive back Jack Tatum (19), defensive back Tim Anderson (23) and running back Leo Hayden (24).

Two or three Buckeyes – Reese, Downs and maybe Tate – could go very high in this year's draft. Here are the previous top-five picks from OSU.

**First overall (3)** – Tackle Orlando Pace (1997), defensive tackle Dan Wilkinson (1994) and linebacker Tom Cousineau (1979).

**Second overall (4)** – Quarterback C.J. Stroud (2023), defensive end Chase Young (2020), defensive end Nick Bosa (2019) and back John McDonald (1938).

**Third overall (6)** – Cornerback Jeff Okudah (2020), defensive end Joey Bosa (2016), cornerback Shawn Springs (1997), tackle John Hicks (1974), running back Matt Snell (1964) and back Howard Cassady (1956).

**Fourth overall (5)** – Wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. (2024), defensive back Denzel Ward (2018), Elliott (2016), quarterback Art Schlichter (1982) and tackle Chris Ward (1978).

**Fifth overall (3)** – Hawk (2006), tackle Bob Vogel (1963) and fullback Bob Ferguson (1962).

I'm looking forward to the spring game to get a glimpse of the next Buckeyes on the rise.

# Men's Tourney Expectations Not A Slam Dunk

Let's start with a little trivia.

Any Ohio State basketball fan knows that Cincinnati was the nemesis of Buckeye basketball's version of the Super Sophs, who included the likes of John Havlicek, Jerry Lucas, Mel Nowell and Bobby Knight. After the Sophs won Ohio State's only national championship in 1960, OSU and Cincinnati met in the NCAA national championship game two times in a row in 1961 and '62 with the Bearcats taking the crown both times.

My question is what conference did Cincinnati play in at the time? Answer later.

## John Plank Says

Reprint Thursday is a popular weekly feature on our BuckeyeSports.com website. Each week we choose a back issue of BSB, usually somehow relevant to today, and reprint stories from that paper. The Feb. 26 edition of Reprint Thursday featured one of Jim Tressel's first major speeches as OSU head football coach from 25 years ago. It was a snoozer but gave fans of the day (and now) a sense of Tressel and his philosophy and values.

In this space in that Feb. 24, 2001, issue of BSB, I was more interested in the basketball Buckeyes and the fact that – at 17-9 and 8-5 in the Big Ten – they were flirting with the NCAA Tournament bubble (sound familiar?). In this space it was John Plank, proprietor of Parsons Avenue mainstay and longtime BSB hangout Plank's Café, who was giving a speech that was more interesting than Tressel's address to the Ohio High School Football Coaches Association clinic.

"John Plank stood behind the bar at Plank's Café, talking to anyone who was listening, but no one in particular," I wrote in this space 25 years ago.

"Let's start talking about winning some games in the tournament, not just getting there," John said, referring to Ohio State's quest for one of the coveted berths in the NCAA men's basketball tournament.

"John's point was that Ohio State fans seem fixated on making the tournament and aren't really talking about what kind of noise the Buckeyes might make once they get there," I continued. "Maybe by putting so much emphasis on just getting to the tournament, fans are setting the bar too low."

Fast-forward 25 years.

Obviously, I hear plenty of chatter about whether Ohio State can make the tournament this year for the first time in four seasons. In the last day or two, before the Buckeyes' upset of Purdue, I heard someone suggest they had about a 35 percent chance of earning a bid and that sounded about right before the big victory over the Boilers. But I've heard *no one* talk about a tourney run, similar to what John Plank was talking about 25 years ago. Frankly, the Buckeyes haven't given fans reason to be that hopeful.

Since the first of the year, when Big Ten action really kicked in, Ohio State has won two games in a row only once, when the Buckeyes defeated UCLA and Minnesota on Jan. 17 and Jan. 20, respectively. Additionally, I don't think Ohio State's lack of depth and production off the bench lends itself to tournament play, especially in the conference tourney format, where the Buckeyes might be making their last-gasp effort.

So maybe it's best that we just be satisfied if the Buckeyes end their three-year hiatus from the Dance and take anything beyond that as gravy.

As for John Plank's 2001 Buckeyes, they finished 20-11 and 11-5, losing their only conference tournament game to Iowa, but made the NAAs, earning a No. 5 seed. Unfortunately for John, the Buckeyes were upset in the first round by No. 12 seed Utah State in overtime, 77-68.

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

In case you are wondering, the last time Ohio State missed the NCAA Tournament more than three years in a row was from 1993 to 1998, when the Buckeyes were on the outside looking in for six straight seasons, five under Randy Ayers and one under new coach Jim O'Brien.

### Where Does Diebler Stand?

I don't have much to say about whether OSU coach Jake Diebler should stay or go at this point. Let's at least let the rest of the season play out. The Buckeyes could make a run, like they did when he was interim coach back in 2024, or they could continue on the meandering path they have been taking and soon be preparing for next season.

On the one hand, I think any coach is probably entitled to at least three seasons to complete a rebuild. On the other hand, it's hard to say that the Buckeyes have made much progress as I write at this moment.

One thing that might work in Diebler's favor is the fact that his hire was athletic director Ross Bjork's first major decision in Columbus. He wasn't even AD yet when he pulled the trigger on Diebler's appointment. I'm sure he would like to be proven right on that bold decision.

But Bjork is a dollar and cents kind of AD in what has become a dollars and cents college athletic world.

I have been following a particular stat for Ohio State that may end up playing a factor in Diebler and Ohio State's future. It's simple enough.

The Buckeyes are not drawing well at the Schottenstein Center. It's a hard (but relevant) fact to ignore.

Despite being one of the largest universities in the country, with one of the nation's richest athletic traditions, as of Feb. 28 Ohio State ranked 10th in the Big Ten in attendance at 10,279. That trails even basketball tradition-laden (sarcasm font) Nebraska, which has been drawing 12,592. Of course, the Huskers were a surprising 25-4, 14-4 in conference and tied for second place, compared to the Buckeyes, who were tied for eighth. All those empty seats at the Schottenstein Center, with its capacity of over 19,000, don't buy tickets, hot dogs or pop let alone souvenirs in the team shop. Nobody knows that better than Bjork.

As the Huskers are proving, nothing fills seats like a winner. Or sometimes a coaching change can generate excitement.

Not surprisingly, tradition-rich Indiana led the Big Ten in attendance at 14,419, followed by Illinois at 13,948.

One last thing. The Iowa women's team was outdrawing the Ohio State men with 10,853 in average attendance (Caitlin Clark's legacy?). The Lady Buckeyes are averaging 5,807, fourth in the conference.

### And The Answer Is . . .

Cincinnati played in the Missouri Valley Conference when the team won its back-to-back national championships at Ohio State's expense.

I did not know the answer to the question. If asked I probably would have guessed the team was an independent, something much more common at the time than today. In fairness to me, that was 65 years ago, and living in Washington, D.C., I had little knowledge of the Buckeyes or Bearcats. This was a couple of years before ESPN and the Internet took sports nationally.

The Missouri Valley Conference featured Bradley, Cincinnati, Drake, Saint Louis, North

Texas, Tulsa, and Wichita State at the time. Bradley and Drake are still in the conference all these years later.

It surprises me how similar the trajectory of both the basketball and football Super Sophs was. Both won their championship in their first season of eligibility (freshmen were ineligible) and then were dominant in their next two seasons but couldn't win another national championship. The basketball Buckeyes were 25-3 in their championship season with regular-season losses to Utah, Kentucky and Indiana. In 1961 they were 27-1 with their only loss to the Bearcats in the championship game, and they were 26-2 in 1962, losing to Cincinnati and Wisconsin in the regular season. That made the championship Buckeyes 78-6 in their three years for a 92.9 winning percentage.

The championship football sophs were 10-0 in their championship season of 1968, 8-1 the following year and 9-1 in 1970, with their only losses to Michigan in the last game of the season and Stanford in the Rose Bowl, respectively, in what were effectively national championship games in those two seasons. The championship football Buckeyes were 27-2 in their three years for a 93.1 winning percentage.

### BSB Readers Show Support

Our "I Believe In BSB" initiative is in full swing, with many of you having already responded.

As you may recall, after many years of concentrating on offers reducing the cost of BSB to help those readers who are on limited incomes, we are asking those readers who can afford to do so to renew at full price as we rebuild from the difficulties of last year, when many, many longtime subscribers fled our rolls due to delivery difficulties. We have gone so far as to request that those readers who can afford to do so renew for two years at the full rate. Those readers who have already done that are listed on page 4 of this issue. There were also many more of you who renewed for *one* year at full price.

As I have mentioned previously, if 1,000 readers pay the \$20 difference between the full price and the "Subscriber Special" rate, our most popular promotion, that would create an additional \$20,000, enough to pay to print and mail three issues of BSB. That's less than six cents a day to help BSB remain vibrant and viable, and many of you have paid far less than the popular Subscriber Special rate.

Thank you to all of you who have responded so far, and we will continue to list new names of people who have responded to the call for two years at full price.

Renewals and new orders in our VIP program have been extremely brisk. This is the best way to give additional support to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, and not only do you get recognition for your support, but you also get special VIP perks. For information on how to become a VIP, see page 7. Remember, VIP status starts at just \$50.

The other part of this ongoing initiative is to encourage more readers to upgrade to first-class mail in an envelope to improve the reader experience and reduce our costly expense of sending replacement papers to people to whom we have already paid to mail their paper. This effort is not going as well as the "pay full price" initiative.

It seems that many subscribers would rather put the full burden of the replacement cost on us, instead of improving their reading experience and reducing the added expense for some-

thing we have no control over (postal delivery) by upgrading.

If you respond now, you can upgrade to first-class mail through football season at the current rate (\$35) or through the playoffs and the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up for \$45. This rate will be going up soon. We have also *lowered* the annual cost of a first-class subscription to encourage more upgrades. If you would like to upgrade the remainder of an existing subscription, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 and we will figure the cost for you.

For those who cannot afford to pay full price, the most important thing for you to do for us is renew. We have extended the Subscriber Special promotion for continued savings. If you can round that up a little, that is much better.

For those of you who love BSB, but genuinely struggle to pay for it, my first suggestion is to make sure we have your email address. The best subscription deals are online because it saves us the cost of a renewal card. You can also call us at the above numbers, and we will try to find you the best offer available. This is for people who *need* the help.

An issue or two back, we mentioned that one lower-cost way anyone can help is to subscribe your barber shop or local library for just \$32.95. While this is not a money maker for us, it gives great exposure to potentially new subscribers.

I wanted to note that reader Pence Roth, now of Bradenton, Fla., was the first to sign up a library. Mr. Roth is sending a subscription to the Pettisville High School library.

Again, thank you from my heart to all of you who are working to keep BSB vibrant and viable. We are truly a family, and we are in this partnership together.

### RIP Rondale Moore

Former Purdue receiver Rondale Moore, who passed away on Feb. 21 at the age of 25, is one of those players like Michigan's Tim Biakabutuka whom Ohio State fans will never forget because of their stunning performances against the Buckeyes. While Biakabutuka rushed for a school-record 313 yards on 37 carries to lead the Wolverines to a 31-23 upset over No. 2 Ohio State on November 25, 1995, Moore caught 12 passes for 170 yards and two touchdowns and added two carries for 24 yards for good measure as the Boilermakers stunned No. 2 Ohio State, 49-20, in West Lafayette on Oct. 20, 2018.

There have been receivers with bigger games against the Buckeyes. What about Clemson's Sammy Watkins, who had 16 catches for 227 yards and two scores against OSU in a 40-35 win for the Tigers in the 2014 Orange Bowl? Or Alabama's DeVonta Smith, who had 12 catches for 215 yards and three scores in the 2020 season's CFP national championship game while playing in just one half due to injury?

And yet it is Rondale Moore we remember, due to the magnitude of the upset by Purdue – certainly the biggest upset of the Urban Meyer era.

In his three seasons with the Boilermakers, Moore totaled 1,915 receiving yards with 14 touchdowns and added 248 rushing yards with three touchdowns.

Moore was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals with the 49th overall pick in the second round of the 2021 NFL draft and spent three seasons with the Cardinals. He started 23 games, catching 135 passes for 1,201 yards and three touchdowns with 52 carries for 249 yards and one score. He then spent one season with the Atlanta Falcons in 2024 before signing with the Minnesota Vikings in 2025. He didn't see action with either of those clubs due to injury.

Moore died from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.