

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 18

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 21, 2026

GOING DANCING



SONNY BROCKWAY

Ohio State Makes NCAA Tourney For First Time Since 2021-22 Season

By **GREG WILSON**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Less than a month before the March 17 selection show for the NCAA Tournament, it seemed somewhat far-fetched that the Ohio State men's basketball team would make it into the 68-team field.

After traveling to Iowa City, where the Buckeyes were hoping to add another Quad 1 win to their résumé but ended up suffering a brutal defeat at the hands of the Hawkeyes, it seemed as if Ohio State wouldn't be going dancing for the fourth straight season.

But March Madness started as soon as the calendar flipped from February, for the Buckeyes at least, when they knocked off No. 8 Purdue, 82-74, at the Schottenstein Center on the first day of March.

Head coach Jake Diebler said he knew his team was ready to take down Purdue despite the big loss to Iowa on Feb. 25.

"Our guys were ready," he said after the game. "I felt confident in our plan, and I think when they found out that we had everybody available, it amped it up more. The toughness and the connection we showed against one of the best teams in the country was great."

They followed that win by steamrolling Penn State in State College, Pa., by shooting 69.6 percent from three-point range in a 32-point victory and finished the regular season back on their home court by cruising to another big win against fellow bubble team Indiana, 91-78, on March 7.

At that point, it was tough to imagine that the selection committee would be able to leave the Buckeyes out of the tournament, even without a win in the conference tournament. But they further strengthened their résumé with a three-point victory over Iowa, the team that had beaten them badly

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Thornton's OSU Career Winds Down As He Breaks All-Time Scoring Record

By **GREG WILSON**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State head coach Jake Diebler remembers exactly where he was when he got the commitment call from a 17-year-old Bruce Thornton in November 2020.

"I can vividly remember picking up food outside of Bob Evans when he called me and said that he wanted to be a Buckeye," Diebler said on March 6.

It was music to Diebler's ears hearing those words come out of Thornton's mouth, but he

also made sure that the high school senior was keeping the most important person in that process up to date on his decision.

"I remember saying, 'Hey, have you told your mom?'" Diebler said. "He was like, 'No.' And I was like, 'Well, you might want to do that, then call me back.'"

During the recruiting process, Diebler said there was no sort of talk about setting individual records with Ohio State or anything like that because that type of four-year career is so rare for a player to have.

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SONNY BROCKWAY

TOP OF THE CHART — Bruce Thornton is a rarity. He is one of 22 Division I players this season to play all four or five seasons at one school. His commitment to stay resulted in him becoming the Ohio State men's career scoring leader on March 7 when he surpassed Dennis Hopson's previous record of 2,096.

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From The Message Board

Ohio State's men's basketball team officially made the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the 2021-22 season. The Buckeyes are a No. 8 seed and will play No. 9 seed TCU in the first round, likely with overall No. 1 seed Duke waiting in the second round if they win their first game. Before the Buckeyes had their place in the bracket, we asked our subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com fan forum if this OSU team has what it takes to make a run in the tournament and which player(s) will be the key to success if the Buckeyes do go on a run.

"I'm just glad they're making the tournament for the first time in forever. Bruce Thornton deserves that after staying loyal to the program when kids never do that anymore. Everything after today is playing with house money. No, they're not a deep enough roster to make a huge run."

— **Tiffin Buckeye**

"I would expect no more than one or maybe two wins, max. There's a reason they weren't ranked all season. However, the team is playing with more cohesiveness than earlier in the season. Anything more than two wins would be 'Madness!'"

— **Terrier Buck**

"I wouldn't expect the Buckeyes to make a run. Having said that, I think they've been playing their best ball in the last couple of weeks. They will need better play off the bench to

be a 'bracket buster.' I'm just happy to see Thornton get a chance to dance."

— **R1TBDBITL**

"Even without having seen the bracket, I'll say no. I would consider one win a major step forward for the program. Thornton and Mobley are pretty much money in the bank. I would look toward Amare Bynum, who I think has really improved over the course of the season."

— **Frank Moskowitz, BSB**

"If they are an 8 or 9, they won't beat a No. 1 seed in the second round, but I am starting to buy that these guys were really held back by injury and illness, so their best could be something we see more consistently. Which is to say, they could beat plenty of other tournament teams. Would also be

good if they don't face a team that is really big."

— **Marcus Hartman, BSB**

"Thinking about whether this team can make a run or not is already an improvement over the last three years, obviously, so to some extent, the question doesn't matter that much. Ohio State fans are going to be pleased watching their favorite team participate in the event at all. Having said that, they have what it takes to win at least one game as an 8 seed. And after the Buckeyes played Michigan so well in the Big Ten tournament, I certainly won't expect a major upset in further rounds, but I wouldn't be as surprised as I would have been previously if it does happen."

— **Greg Wilson, BSB**

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Tournaments, Spring Ball Intersect

It's that time of year when basketball tournament time intersects with spring football, and since comparing the two is an apples-to-oranges exercise, I won't even try.

The Ohio State men's basketball team finally kicked into gear down the stretch, winning its final three regular-season games as well as a Big Ten tournament third-round match against Iowa. That streak ended with a hard-fought, 71-67 loss to No. 2 Michigan, an effort that showed just how much improvement the Buckeyes have made since a lackluster 21-point loss to the Wolverines in early February.

Still, it was a game that underlined the weaknesses of Jake Diebler's team, including difficulty handling opposing big men, a vanilla-style offense and a relative lack of depth. All of that stipulated, the Buckeyes still made enough of a late-season push to earn their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2022.

The OSU women overcame a late-season streak of losing three of four to win a couple of games in the conference tournament before running into a UCLA buzz saw. No real shame there since the Bruins might be the only team that can give undefeated UConn any kind of scare.

Kevin McGuff's teams have now won 25 or more games in each of the last five seasons – a program record – but playing against the best of the best has often been problematic. The Buckeyes boast a 131-35 record over the past five seasons, but they're only 9-23 against top-10 opponents. That includes a 2-5 mark this year.

Meanwhile, the football team took its first spring snaps March 10 with the bitterness of how last season ended not far from anyone's mind. In case you need a reminder, the Buckeyes lost their final two games for the third time in the last four seasons. Risking the trigger of a gag reflex among a certain generation of fans, that's a trend not seen since the early part of the John Cooper era.

One culprit for the late-season failures was the offensive line, which surrendered 10 sacks in the final two games and produced an anemic rushing average of just 2.1 yards per carry (103 yards, 50 attempts) against Indiana and Miami (Fla.).

The sack total could be attributed at least in part to first-year starting quarterback Julian Sayin practically refusing to tuck and run when his protection began to collapse. Apparently, that has been a point of emphasis during the offseason with head coach Ryan Day indicating Sayin's pocket mobility is "the X-factor that has to show up this year. He knows that."

If experience counts for anything, the Buckeyes should feature an improved offensive line in 2026. Four starters – left tackle Austin Siereweld, left guard Luke Montgomery, center Carson Hinzman and right tackle Phillip Daniels – return along with Joshua Padilla and Gabe VanSickle, who rotated at right guard last year with Tegra Tshabola, who battled inconsistency and injury before transferring to Kentucky.

In addition to the returning starters, OSU returns backup tackles Ian Moore, Deontae Armstrong and Carter Lowe as well as backup guard Jake Cook. The early talk in spring was to perhaps move Daniels to a guard position with Moore taking over at right tackle, but that sounded more like a move to improve the unit's overall depth than anything else.

And while Tshabola was a subtraction (sort of) via the transfer portal, the Buckeyes added former offensive lineman Vasean Washington from Dartmouth. The 6-5, 290-pound native of Springfield, Ohio, reportedly has allowed only one sack in more than 700 career snaps over 28 career games, but comparing Ivy League competition to that of the Big Ten – well, we're

back in apples-to-oranges territory. In any event, Washington won't be available to the Buckeyes until fall camp opens.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Spotlight On Backs

If Sayin is willing to add a sliver of mobility to his obvious passing talents, and the offensive line plays to the expectations of the veteran group that it is, that leaves the running back group as the wild card, and Bo Jackson and Isaiah West each missing the spring following shoulder surgeries shouldn't ease anyone's mind.

Jackson showed he has the tools to become Ohio State's next great running back when he finished his freshman season with 1,090 yards, joining Robert Smith (1990), Maurice Clarett (2002), J.K. Dobbins (2017) and TreVeyon Henderson (2021) as the only true freshmen in program history to eclipse the 1,000-yard mark.

But after three straight 100-yard games against UCLA, Rutgers and Michigan, Jackson's postseason production dipped to 83 yards vs. Indiana and 55 against Miami. Perhaps that was because of fatigue, his shoulder problem or a little bit of both.

The bottom line is that Jackson remains relatively inexperienced in vital facets of the game such as blitz pickups and pass receiving. He totaled just 19 catches for the season, and only eight over the final seven games. Spring ball would have been extremely beneficial for him, as it would have been for West, who showed only brief glimpses of what made him such a prized prospect coming from the same Philadelphia high school that produced Marvin Harrison Jr. and Kyle McCord.

The absences of Jackson and West – along with CJ Donaldson Jr., who exhausted his college eligibility while James Peoples (Penn State) and Sam Dixon (South Carolina) hit the transfer portal – leave plenty of reps for redshirt-freshman Anthony "Turbo" Rogers to live up to his nickname. Rogers, a four-star prospect the Buckeyes somehow managed to pry away from both his home-state Alabama as well as fellow SEC power Georgia, piled up a bunch of yardage in high school despite a smallish 5-8, 190-pound frame.

You should expect the Buckeyes to try to keep Rogers as focused as possible. He transferred twice in high school and was verbally committed to Alabama for a year and a half before switching to the Buckeyes in December 2024.

Also getting a look this spring will be senior Ja'Kobi Jackson (no relation to Bo), who also knows a thing or two about transferring. Jackson began his college career at the JUCO level before spending the last three years at Florida. He was one of the leaders for the Gators in rushing with 509 yards in 2024 but was limited by injuries to just 98 yards in four games last year. The 2026 season will be Jackson's seventh playing college football.

Meanwhile, a couple of true freshmen – Favour Akih and Legend Bey – will try to live up to their ambitious first names.

Akih, a 5-11, 184-pound prospect from Rutherford B. Hayes High School in Delaware, Ohio, is said to be a mix of between-the-tackles power and breakaway speed while the 5-10,

177-pound Bey (who was issued the same jersey No. 2 once worn by Dobbins) has already been compared by Day to Curtis Samuel, the former Buckeye who is the only player in program history to top the 1,000-yard mark in both career rushing and career receiving yards.

In Their Own Words

Elsewhere in this issue, you will find stories regarding the passings of a pair of former Buckeyes who found plenty of fame after they left Columbus.

Lou Holtz was an assistant coach at Ohio State for only year, but it was quite a year. He was in charge of defensive backs on the 1968 coaching staff, a star-studded group headed by the legendary Woody Hayes. Counting Hayes, '68 staff members went on to amass nearly 1,000 victories as head coaches on the college level.

None possessed the level of Holtz's wit, however, and he wasn't above trying to get a rise out of his irascible boss Hayes.

At halftime of the 1969 Rose Bowl, the Buckeyes trailed defending national champion USC by a 10-0 score. Not only was it the first time all season his team had trailed at halftime, but Hayes was especially miffed at the way the Trojans had scored midway through the second quarter – an 80-yard run by Heisman Trophy winner O.J. Simpson.

"We didn't stay behind the ball, and you can't do that against one of the best cutback runners in the history of the game," Holtz told me in 2008. "Woody was mad at halftime, asking repeatedly how O.J. could go 80 yards against us. Finally, I said, 'Because that's all he needed, Coach. He could have gone 90 if he wanted.'"

"Well, you could have heard a pin drop. Then Coach Hayes just shook his head, and we got on with making our adjustments. We flat-out dominated them in the second half."

After allowing Simpson to rush for 137 yards in the first half, the Buckeyes limited him to just 34 yards on 10 carries in the second half while salting away a 27-16 victory and the 1968 national championship.

While Holtz was always quick with a quip, it was much different with Matt Snell, who preferred to let his performance on the field do his talking for him. His three seasons playing for Hayes in the early 1960s included a senior year during which he won MVP honors after leading the Buckeyes in rushing and scoring.

Of course, Snell went on to achieve much bigger things in the NFL, helping lead the underdog New York Jets to a monumental upset of the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III. Snell rushed for a game-high 121 yards and a touchdown in the 16-7 victory, a performance many observers felt was worthy of game most valuable player honors.

The MVP trophy went instead to Jets quarterback Joe Namath, who had earlier in the week predicted the Jets' victory over the 19½-point favorite Colts.

When Namath was handed the trophy in the jubilant Jets locker room, Snell sat on a bench with a huge smile on his face. When asked about the award, he told reporters, "Joe's our leader. He deserves it."

More than 40 years later while I was interviewing him for a book project, Snell offered only a slightly different answer. "I'm not going to lie and say it wouldn't have been nice to have that trophy sitting on my mantle all these years," he said, "but the memories are better than the hardware."

Then he added with a hearty laugh, "Besides, Joe was the man. I mean, he was 'Broadway Joe.' Who else were they going to give it to?"



Patricia Becomes Highest-Paid Assistant

Ohio State defensive coordinator Matt Patricia's new contract extension will make him the highest-paid assistant coach in college football.

According to information obtained by Ohio State beat reporters Bill Landis and Doug Lesmerises, Patricia's contract is worth \$11.45 million over three years. The deal comes after Patricia led Ohio State to No. 1 finishes in both scoring defense and total defense last season, his first at OSU.

Patricia is set to make \$3.75 million in the 2026 season, a sizeable raise from his \$2.5 million base salary last season. His salary makes him the highest-paid assistant ahead of Michigan offensive coordinator Jason Beck, Indiana defensive coordinator Bryant Haines and LSU defensive coordinator Blake Baker, each of whom has a base salary of \$3 million.

Landis and Lesmerises also found details of the contracts signed by other members of Ohio State's coaching staff. New offensive coordinator Arthur Smith signed a two-year deal with the Buckeyes worth \$3.5 million.

Smith had little experience coaching at the collegiate level prior to joining Ohio State's staff, but he was an offensive coordinator with the NFL's Tennessee Titans and the Pittsburgh Steelers and was the head coach of the Atlanta Falcons from 2021-2023.

New additions to the staff, wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton and special teams coach Robby Discher, also signed deals with the Buckeyes.

Hankton, who was previously the

wide receivers coach at LSU, will be paid \$900,000 this year and \$1 million next year as part of his two-year deal.

Discher, the former Illinois special teams coach, will make \$400,000 this year and \$450,000 in 2027.

Four returning coaches also signed new deals. Defensive line coach Larry Johnson signed a one-year deal worth \$1.6 million, linebackers coach James Laurinaitis signed a two-year deal worth \$1.85 million, quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler signed a two-year deal worth \$1.55 million, and running backs coach Carlos Locklyn signed a two-year deal worth \$1.45 million.

OSU President Carter Resigns

Ohio State president Ted Carter resigned from his position at the university after disclosing an inappropriate relationship to the university's board of trustees.

"The board was surprised and disappointed to learn of this matter and takes the situation and its potential impact on the university very seriously," said Ohio State board of trustees chair John Zeiger in a letter accepting Carter's resignation. "We respect your decision and appreciate your cooperation in supporting an orderly leadership transition."

Following the resignation of Carter, the university appointed executive vice president and provost Dr. Ravi V. Bellamkonda to assume the role.

Bellamkonda was appointed by the university's board of trustees and officially became Ohio State's 18th president on March 12.

The university stated in its announcement that Carter's relationship involved someone seeking public resources to support a personal business venture.

Carter took over in January 2024 for former OSU president Kristina Johnson, who stepped down in May 2023 after just two years in the position. Carter made a statement following the news of his resignation.

"For personal reasons, I have made the difficult decision to resign from my role as president of The Ohio State University. I disclosed to the board of trustees that I made a mistake in allowing inappropriate access

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	

to Ohio State leadership," Carter said. "I believe we have made much progress during my time at Ohio State, and I'm sorry I'm not able to remain your president longer."

Four Returners Named Iron Buckeyes

Four Buckeyes were named "Iron Buckeyes" for their effort in the weight room over the winter.

Senior receiver Brandon Inniss, junior receiver Jeremiah Smith, sophomore safety Jaylen McClain and sophomore linebacker Garrett Stover were the four players to be named Iron Buckeyes.

The Iron Buckeye honor is given out by strength and conditioning coach Mick Marotti to players who show "unquestionable training, dedication, determination, discipline, toughness and leadership."

Smith and McClain have solidified themselves as two of the hardest workers within the program. Smith has been named an Iron Buckeye four consecutive times – OSU names Iron Buckeyes twice each year – during his Ohio State career dating back to summer workouts of his freshman year, while McClain has earned the honor twice.

Inniss hadn't previously been named an Iron Buckeye, but considering he was named a team captain last year, it's no surprise his work ethic was rewarded.

Stover is perhaps the most surprising player to be named Iron Buckeye. Despite being a top-150-ranked prospect out of high school, Stover has not yet made much of an

impact at Ohio State.

In his career, Stover has just five total tackles in 18 games played. However, the Iron Buckeye honor may be a sign that Stover will receive more playing time in his third year with the program.

Siereveld, Daniels Will Remain at OT

Although many in the offseason theorized one of Ohio State's 2025 starting offensive tackles could move to guard, it appears the plan is for both Austin Siereveld and Phillip Daniels to stick at offensive tackle.

During his March 10 press conference, Ryan Day said that Siereveld and Daniels are primarily practicing at offensive tackle, even though the Buckeyes are dealing with some uncertainty at the guard positions.

"You've seen (senior) Carson (Hinzman) play multiple positions," Day said. "We get the best five out there, but then six, seven and eight typically have some versatility in there. We want to get (sophomore Ian Moore) some guard work and some tackle work. Austin will mostly be a tackle, although we've seen him play guard before. (Sophomore Gabe VanSickle) will mostly be a guard.

"(Junior Josh Padilla) will play some center and some guard. He is probably going to be limited for a decent amount of the spring, but it's a good opportunity to get some young guys in there. We'll get (redshirt-freshman Carter Lowe) going. We've got a lot of guys in there that are going to be fighting for reps, but there will be enough to go around. We're going to try to find the right five that gives us the best chance to win and then build depth off of that."

The Buckeyes preached the importance of versatility and depth last year, with multiple starting offensive linemen going down in the postseason with injuries.

The Buckeyes have somewhat of a hole heading into this season at right guard, where Tegra Tshabola played last year, but he has since transferred to Kentucky.

Padilla and VanSickle are both candidates to fill in for Tshabola this year.

OC Smith Helps OSU Adjust To New Game

For the second year in a row, Ohio State added a former NFL head coach to its staff when it hired Smith as its offensive coordinator.

According to Day, it's not a coincidence that the Buckeyes are stockpiling their staff with coaches who have spent time in the NFL.

Spring Practice, March Madness Coverage In Full Swing

The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the April 4 issue, is scheduled to be mailed on March 31. With spring football practice and March Madness in full swing, 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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I Believe In BSB

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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"We always say you learn so much when you take on a new role," Day said. "The management of their staff on their side of the ball is critically important. You've seen (Patricia) do that now with some of the staff hires and changes that we've made on his side of the ball. Then, as Arthur starts to install some of the things that he has done in the past, there's a system in place for it."

The value of having former NFL coaches on staff has perhaps never been higher, with the collegiate game becoming increasingly similar to the NFL, according to Day.

"It's not the NFL, but it's pretty close," Day said. "The hash marks are different, but there's a lot of things to carry over here, so that's been good, and, ultimately, we've talked about this many times. It allows me an opportunity to kind of step away and really dive into everything else and just be more present in the building with players, with staff, certainly with NIL stuff, in terms of raising money, asking questions. It's just a different mindset."

One of the biggest changes that has been made to college football to make the sport more like the professional version is the expansion of the College Football Playoff to include 12 teams. Day feels Smith, who has coached in the NFL playoffs multiple seasons as an offensive coordinator, should be able to help the Buckeyes find their stride at the right time.

"When you have somebody like Arthur, who has been through it before, he's been through playoff games, he's played a long

season in the NFL. You have to kind of build towards the end of the season, and that's the goal here for us."

OC Smith Won't Travel To Recruit

At least for now, one of Smith's responsibilities at Ohio State will not be traveling on the road to recruit.

Day said that Smith will not be one of the 10 coaches on staff who will do so. Patricia, however, will continue to recruit on the road. Two years ago, the NCAA removed the limit of on-field coaches allowed on a given staff, but the limit of coaches allowed to travel for recruiting remained at 10, which is why Smith will not travel to recruit.

"Arthur right now would just be somebody that's not going to go on the road," Day said. "I know that there is conversation about depending on what part of the season you're in, being able to designate different people within your program. I think that's an interesting concept that probably will end up happening somewhere along the line. But as of right now, because of our numbers, he would be non-designated. Otherwise, all the other position coaches are, so they would be part of the 10."

Regardless, Ohio State's NFL-like coaching staff could help it land some of the best recruits in the country, according to Day.

"If you come and watch practice, and a lot of recruits did (March 10), you have a chance to see that's an NFL practice right there," Day said. "Guys know that they're going to have an opportunity to develop and be ready to step into these roles, and that's a big part of recruiting nowadays."

Day Calls Parker And McQuin Pros

Coming into the first of Ohio State's 15 spring practices on March 10, questions surrounded the Buckeyes' wide receiver room, particularly who would line up alongside Jeremiah Smith and Inniss.

Day offered an early glimpse of how the rotation could take shape.

On the first day of spring practice, Devin McQuin opened with Ohio State's starting receiver group during the 11-on-11 period, while fellow transfer Kyle Parker of LSU also rotated in with that unit.

McQuin spent most of last season lined up on the outside with UTSA, and he continued in a similar role for the Buckeyes' first spring practice. Parker, meanwhile, was positioned outside as well, away from the slot spot where he saw much of his action last season with LSU.

"Kyle and Devin both came in and had really good practices today," Day said. "On day one, I saw a couple veteran guys go out there and make plays and know exactly what they're doing. They're pros already, you can just see it now. We'll see when the pads come on, what that looks like."

Among a wide receiver group that Day called "as deep as (it has been) in a while," the Buckeye head coach appears to be leaning toward the veteran additions over younger talent such as freshman and five-star prospect Chris Henry Jr.

McQuin arrives in Columbus after recording 152 receptions for 1,696 yards and 16 touchdowns during three seasons at UTSA, including a 65-catch, 726-yard, eight-touchdown season in 2025. Parker brings slightly less production but still valu-

able experience, totaling 34 catches for 385 yards and five touchdowns in three seasons at LSU.

Day also mentioned sophomores Phillip Bell, who appeared in 21 snaps for Ohio State in 2025, and De'Zie Jones, who didn't see game action last season, as players who could step into bigger roles.

He added that three incoming freshmen – Henry, Jerquaden Guilford, and Brock Boyd – could also add depth, noting that the newcomers are already competing for playing time as spring practice moves forward.

Day Says RB Is Biggest Spring Concern

With spring practices beginning, the young Ohio State running back room will get a chance to prove itself. Returning contributors Bo Jackson and Isaiah West were suited up for the first spring practice, but neither participated in contact drills and both will sit out most of the spring with shoulder injuries.

With CJ Donaldson Jr. running out of eligibility and James Peoples and Sam Dixon transferring out of Ohio State after last season, every other scholarship running back on the roster is in his first spring with the program.

Day went through just about every position on the field, and he said that he has one area of concern more so than any of the other positions.

"I would say running back probably right now is my biggest concern," he said.

Ja'Kobi Jackson, who is in his seventh year of college football, has the most expe-

rience of the group. He spent two seasons with Florida, where he played in 17 games and ran for 607 yards on 122 carries, scoring seven touchdowns.

Anthony "Turbo" Rogers is in his second year with the program, but he didn't join the Buckeyes until the summer, and he spent much of his freshman year injured, so he will be trying to prove himself in the spring.

There are also two freshmen joining the backfield, with Favour Akih and Legend Bey both ready to try to establish themselves.

Bey's speed has created excitement around his arrival on campus. The freshman recorded a 10.23-second 100-meter dash time for his track team and a 4.33-second 40-yard dash.

Even as a quarterback, Bey showed some great rushing ability, with more yards and scores on the ground than he had through the air in both his junior and senior prep seasons.

Each of the four healthy running backs – Ja'Kobi Jackson, Rogers, Akih and Bey – will attempt to separate themselves from the pack while Bo Jackson and West recover this spring.

OSU Reveals 2026 Jersey Numbers

With a new year of football starting, Ohio State had many different players donning new jersey numbers for the first day of spring practice.

Among the freshmen who enrolled early with the Buckeyes on the offensive side of

Continued On Page 6

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

the ball, Bey wore No. 2, Guilford and Boyd wore No. 6 and No. 11, quarterback Luke Fahey is No. 13, Henry wore No. 15, Akih is No. 29, offensive linemen Landry Brede and Mason Wilhelm wore No. 66 and No. 68, while Sam Greer and Maxwell Riley wore Nos. 77 and 78, wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts wore No. 80 and tight end Nick Lautar wore No. 89.

On the defensive cornerback Jordan Thomas wore No. 15, safety Blaine Brad-

ford wore No. 16, linebacker Cincere Johnson wore No. 20, cornerback Jay Timmons is No. 25, safety Simeon Caldwell is No. 28, safeties Khmari Bing and Kaden Gebhardt wore No. 30 and No. 32, defensive end Khary Wilder wore No. 34, linebackers CJ Sanna and Braxton Rembert wore No. 36 and No. 41, and of the defensive linemen, Damari Simeon wore No. 90, Darryus McKinley was No. 91, Emanuel Ruffin was No. 95, edge rusher Dre Quinn wore No. 97 and tackle Jamir Perez wore No. 98.

Of the transfers who are in their first semester with the Buckeyes, safety Earl Little Jr. wore No. 1, McCuin wore No. 3, defensive tackle James Smith also wore No. 3, defensive end Qua Russaw wore No. 4, Parker wore No. 5, safety Terry Moore wore No. 11, linebacker Christian Alliegro wore No. 14, quarterback Justyn Martin wore No. 16, cornerbacks Cam Calhoun and Dominic Kelly wore Nos. 18 and 24, Ja'Kobi Jackson wore No. 24, defensive tackle John Walker wore No. 55, tight ends Hunter Welcing and Mason Williams wore No. 84 and No. 86, punter Brady Young wore No. 93, and kicker

Connor Hawkins wore No. 96.

Many returning players also changed their numbers. Defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. is now wearing No. 2, linebacker Riley Pettijohn wore No. 5, McClain wore No. 8, defensive end Zion Grady wore No. 9, safety Leroy Roker wore No. 10, and defensive end Beau Atkinson wore No. 12.

Pantages Replaces Emig

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State hired a replacement for Jerry Emig, its former football communications director.

Former Wake Forest senior associate AD for communications and content Will Pantages was officially named the senior associate athletic director for football strategic communications at Ohio State on March 2.

"It is a privilege to join The Ohio State University," Pantages said. "I'm excited to collaborate with an outstanding team to highlight all the accomplishments of our student-athletes and continue advancing one of the most respected brands in college athletics."

Prior to spending six seasons at Wake Forest, Pantages spent time in communications at Florida and SMU.

"We are excited to add Will to our Buckeye team," said Chris Park, Ohio State's executive associate athletic director for external affairs and chief communications officer. "He has tremendous passion, enthusiasm and vision for his work in the communications and creative space, and his experience as a high-level, thoughtful leader within college football will be valuable in this new role centered around our Ohio State Football program."

Pantages, a native of Akron, will be assisted by Mike Basford in overseeing communications for the football team.

Fields Traded To Chiefs

Former Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields is headed to Kansas City, according to multiple reports. After struggling last year as the starting quarterback of the New York Jets, Fields was traded on March 16 for a sixth-round pick to the Chiefs.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1986

After his name had been bantered about publicly for several days, Gary Williams was officially introduced as the new Ohio State basketball coach at a press conference on March 15. And Williams, who served as coach at Boston College the previous four seasons, quickly let it be known that he was happy to be in Columbus.

"I appreciate the opportunity that President (Ed) Jennings, (athletic director) Rick Bay and the others who were instrumental in my being able to get the position at Ohio State University have given me," said Williams. "What they have given me is a great opportunity to coach at a great institution that has all the weapons necessary to have a great program.

"I think with our style of play, we'll try to be as aggressive as anyone and we'll try to play an up-tempo game, which I think will make us competitive with the type of teams that we have to play against in the Big Ten."

35 Years Ago — 1991

Ohio State head coach Randy Ayers admitted he was initially surprised when he learned his Buckeyes were installed as the No. 1 seed in the Midwest Region of the NCAA Tournament.

After all, he had watched his team lose twice in the final week of the regular season, a 72-67 loss at Purdue and an 80-69 defeat at Iowa, to back into a tie for a Big Ten championship with Indiana.

But Ayers quickly realized that the selection committee thought more of the Buckeyes' performance over the length of the entire season than it did of two season-ending losses.

"We're very happy," said the second-year head coach. "I think the committee rewarded us for having a good year, and we had a good year. You have to remember we've won 25 ball games and we're Big Ten co-champs. I'm very proud of the kids and what they've done this year."

30 Years Ago — 1996

It was hard, Shaun Stonerook said, to finish the basketball season and have no tournament to play in.

After all, Stonerook led his Westerville North High School team to a pair of state final fours, including one big-school state title two years prior.

Stonerook was one of seven Ohio State freshmen who had finished their first year playing college basketball in the Big Ten.

It had been a rollercoaster year marked by learning experiences, turnovers, rim-rattling slams and moral victories. But – for the fourth year in a row at Ohio State – there was no NCAA Tournament berth and no "March Madness."

But according to Stonerook, his teammates and their coach, Randy Ayers, there was optimism that would change.

"It's disappointing now, but we know we're going to be there next year and the next three years," Stonerook said. "We didn't get in and now we have something to play for. We see how these teams react and how great it must be."

25 Years Ago — 2001

We had seen the Jekyll-and-Hyde act before from Jim O'Brien's basketball Buckeyes.

It was an intriguing story that began with an embarrassing early ouster from the Big Ten tournament and somehow carried

into a frenzied and fun ride in the NCAA Tournament.

At least that was the case two seasons prior, when guys named Scoonie Penn and Michael Redd were left shaking their heads in Chicago then could be found dancing on a court in Knoxville, Tenn., two weeks later, a Final Four berth in hand.

But on Friday, March 9, the Buckeyes were blown out of the Windy City's United Center with another unforeseen loss, a 75-66 defeat at the hands of sixth-seeded Iowa.

"This puts a damper on it, sophomore guard Sean Connolly said. "We are disappointed with how we played, but we have to regroup, get over it and get ready to play in the NCAA Tournament."

20 Years Ago — 2006

After nearly two years of waiting, the Ohio State men's basketball program received perhaps the most favorable ruling possible by the NCAA Committee on Infractions.

The governing body of college athletics on March 10 placed the entire OSU athletic department on three years probation for alleged misdeeds committed in the men's basketball program during a four-year period between 1999 and 2002.

Additional sanctions levied included the forced repayment of about \$800,000 the university received for participating in the NCAA Tournament during those four seasons and vacating all games the Buckeyes played during that time.

What was most important about the sanctions, however, was what they did not cover. NCAA officials said they found no lack of institutional control and ruled that the previous year's self-imposed postseason ban and voluntary reduction of scholarships were penalty enough in those areas.

15 Years Ago — 2011

Despite coming to the conclusion that head football coach Jim Tressel violated his contract, athletic department protocol and NCAA bylaw 10.1 by failing to report information that some of his players were potentially involved in NCAA rules violations, Ohio State planned to stand by its man.

The university concluded a nearly two-month internal investigation on March 8 by announcing self-imposed sanctions against the 11th-year head coach after it concluded that Tressel had been informed in April 2010 of the possibility his players were selling memorabilia and accepting discounted services.

Among the penalties, Tressel had been handed a two-game suspension for the opening contests of the 2011 season and fined \$250,000. In addition, he had to attend a compliance seminar in the coming months.

"I want to make sure everyone understands, wherever we end up at the end of the day, Jim Tressel is our football coach," athletic director Gene Smith said during a heavily attended evening press conference. "All the speculation about him being terminated is pure speculation. This case, in my view, does not warrant it."

10 Years Ago — 2016

With Ohio State's basketball season winding down, the Buckeyes didn't want to talk about their most likely postseason fate.

Their final three regular-season games, all of which came against ranked opponents, weren't looked at as potential resumé builders, the team said, but simply as their next opponents. When

the Buckeyes went 1-2 in those contests and remained absent from every reputable NCAA Tournament projection, they insisted that they didn't listen to that stuff, that they were too focused on the day-to-day. Likewise, Ohio State's trip to the Big Ten Tournament was about Penn State, its first opponent, more than anything else.

When the Buckeyes were bounced from the conference tournament by Michigan State on March 11, their third embarrassing loss to the Spartans in just over three weeks, they were finally willing to acknowledge what had been becoming more and more obvious as the season unfolded. For the first time in eight years, Ohio State was not worthy of inclusion in the 68-team NCAA field.

"Honestly, no," point guard JaQuan Lyle said when asked if the Buckeyes deserved a spot in the NCAA Tournament. "We had those losses at the beginning of the season, and they came back and bit us. It's just how it goes, and you have to learn from it."

Five Years Ago — 2021

To many, the 2020-21 Ohio State men's basketball season would be remembered as a disappointment because of the Buckeyes' first-round exit in the NCAA Tournament. The No. 2-seeded Buckeyes dropped an overtime game to No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts on March 19, ending their season far short of their goal.

"Anytime you're a two-seed, that kind of speaks for itself," Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said following the 75-72 loss to the Golden Eagles. "I thought our guys had a terrific season. This is obviously a really, really bitter, bitter end to a terrific season, but we'll own that and accept it, and we'll move forward."

Ohio State was a 16-point favorite against Oral Roberts, making its overtime loss sting even more. The coaches and players would carry the pain of the defeat throughout the offseason, but the reality is that they still exceeded expectations for the overall season.

Holtmann's squad entered the NCAA Tournament as the No. 7 team in the country, according to The Associated Press top-25 poll, blowing its preseason projections out of the water.

One Year Ago — 2025

Just days after completing a wacky 2024-25 regular season that was marred by significant roster discontinuity and a number of close losses, coach Jake Diebler stood in front of a small group of reporters inside the Buckeye locker room at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on March 12 dejected and raspy-voiced, seemingly searching for ways to explain his team's 77-70 upset loss to No. 15 seed Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten tournament.

When asked what went wrong in the loss, Diebler said that he didn't feel his team lacked effort or heart in this do-or-die game but rather lacked connectedness on the defensive end down the stretch, which allowed Iowa to come away with the come-from-behind win.

"When I say we weren't connected, we had too many breakdowns where communication maybe wasn't early enough or communication wasn't received well enough," Diebler said. "Especially down the stretch, we had some opportunities to help more off of some of their personnel, and we didn't do that well enough, and that allowed them to get the ball to the rim."

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Fields had adequate numbers last year with the Jets. Over nine starts, he completed 62.7 percent of his passes for 1,259 yards, seven touchdowns and an interception. However, during those nine starts, the Jets went just 2-7, and he was benched toward the end of the season before dealing with an injury and ultimately being placed on injured reserve.

The Chiefs have arguably the best quarterback in the league, Patrick Mahomes, on their roster, but he is recovering from a torn ACL and LCL in his left knee and may be limited to start the season.

As a Buckeye, Fields showed his potential. He was a two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year before being selected by the Chicago Bears with the 11th overall pick in the first round of the 2021 NFL draft.

Fields had mixed success in Chicago, and after three seasons with the team that drafted him, he was traded to the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Fields was good enough in limited playing time in Pittsburgh to earn a two-year, \$40 million contract with the Jets, but he will now be playing with his fourth different NFL team in the sixth year of his career.

Former OSU Coach Matta Retires

Former Ohio State basketball coach Thad Matta has officially retired after a 21-

year coaching career.

After parting ways with Ohio State following the 2016-17 season, Matta took a few years off but returned to Butler for four more years at the helm. He got his first head coaching job in 2000 at Butler.

"After taking some time to reflect following the end of the season, I have decided that the time has come for me to step away from the sidelines," Matta said in a statement. "The love my wife, my daughters and I have for Butler is what brought us back four years ago, and it feels especially meaningful that I conclude my coaching career here.

"Butler has always meant more to us than just basketball – and that connection is why I'm grateful to continue working with the university and offering my help in any way I can. My commitment to Butler and to the future of this program remains as strong as ever. I want this program to compete at the highest levels of the Big East and national landscape, and I am excited to be part of what we continue to build here."

After three seasons at Xavier, Matta was then hired at Ohio State for the 2004-05 season, where he would have a very successful 13-year stint leading the program. In that time, he made it to the NCAA Tournament nine times with just two first-round exits. He made the Sweet 16 five times, the Elite Eight three times and the Final Four

twice, and he even took the Buckeyes to the national championship game in the 2006-07 season.

That team, led by freshman Greg Oden, had a record of 35-4 and was 15-1 in the Big Ten, winning the conference.

He finished his Ohio State career with a 337-123 record, making him the winningest OSU coach of all time.

At all of his stops, Matta had a 502-223 record, with his only losing stint being his four-year stop with Butler from 2022-26.

Matta will remain with Butler as special assistant to the president and athletic director.

Former WVB Coach Stone Dies At Age 73

Former Ohio State women's volleyball head coach Jim Stone died on March 10 at the age of 73 following a battle with cancer.

Stone led the Buckeyes from 1982-2007, compiling a 531-294 overall record and a 297-177 mark in Big Ten play. He ended his career as both the winningest and longest-tenured coach in program history.

He guided Ohio State to three Big Ten titles, 15 NCAA tournament appearances and both of the program's NCAA semifinal runs in 1991 and 1994. He was inducted into the Ohio State athletics Hall of Fame in 2012 and the American Volleyball Coaches

Association Hall of Fame in 2021.

"Jim Stone dedicated much of his life and career to Ohio State women's volleyball," said current head coach Jen Flynn Oldenburg, who played for Stone from 1996-99. "Jim accumulated many awards as the leader of the Buckeyes, leading two teams to the only Final Fours in program history. He coached numerous All-Americans, All-Region and All-Big Ten student-athletes."

Stone coached 19 AVCA All-Americans, including AVCA Players of the Year Laura Davis in 1994 and Stacey Gordon in 2004. He also earned AVCA Midwest Region and Big Ten Coach of the Year honors four times apiece.

Beyond Ohio State, Stone coached at the U.S. Olympic Festival, the World University Games, and led the U.S. Girls' Youth National Team to multiple placements at the FIVB World Championship, including silver medals in 2013 and 2015 and a gold medal in 2019.

Stone stands as the 11th longest-tenured coach in Ohio State history, having led the program for 26 seasons. He ranks just behind current men's tennis head coach Ty Tucker, who has been at the helm of the program for 27 seasons since 1999, and 10 years behind Jim Brown, who led the men's golf team from 1973 to 2009, 36 seasons.

Late-Season Run Boosts Buckeyes' Confidence

Continued From Page 1

just 15 days earlier.

So after Ohio State fell to the No. 1 seed in the conference, Michigan, in the Big Ten tournament quarterfinals, it didn't come as much of a surprise to see the Block O logo flash across the television screen during the selection show for the first time since the 2021-22 season.

The Buckeyes' first game in the NCAA Tournament since a 71-61 loss to Villanova on March 20, 2022, was set to take place on March 19 against No. 9 seed TCU in Greenville, S.C. (12:15 p.m., CBS).

Diebler didn't need much time to dive into the Horned Frogs.

"They're a really good team," he said just 40 minutes after seeing whom the Buckeyes would match up against. "We've already started diving into the numbers. They have a good defense, and (TCU head coach Jamie Dixon) has been around a long time and won a lot of games.

"This time of year, everybody's in the tournament for a reason. You have to be a really good team to get to this point."

Senior guard Bruce Thornton said that after losing to Iowa on the road, the Buckeyes had to take a look at themselves in the mirror and realize that, at that point in the season, it was now or never if they wanted to get to where they wanted to be.

"I feel like that moment was do or die," Thornton said. "We have a bunch of guys

who aren't quitters. The guys in the locker room, we each had one goal, and that was to be better. I feel like our guys have been doing that at a very high level."

Diebler may have felt the same about the schedule following the big loss to the Hawkeyes, but there was never a doubt in his mind that the Buckeyes would respond.

"I didn't have a question about whether we would respond after the Iowa game," Diebler said. "I knew we would because I know what we're made of and I know what our program is about. It was just a matter of whether we could get better with who's available."

When asked about the Buckeyes' chances to make the tournament for the first time in his collegiate career as they were going on their late run, Thornton said that while he felt confident, he needed to see their team name in the bracket with his own eyes before he believed it was real.

"It would definitely be a dream. I worked so hard all four years, and it's right there," Thornton said on March 6. "I'm not going to put any more pressure on myself, and I'll keep doing what I've been doing because that's been working out a little bit."

Throughout much of the season, one of the major things held against Ohio State was that it couldn't get a win against one of the top teams in the country, with no Quad 1 wins until late in the season when a road win over Northwestern – the eventual No.

15 team in the conference – was upgraded to that level.

But the Buckeyes finally pulled that off when they beat Purdue then went into the tournament and defeated Iowa on a neutral court. And with Wisconsin cracking the top 30 of the NET rankings, they all of a sudden had four Quad 1 wins on their schedule.

Then they went into the Big Ten tournament and gave the Wolverines a better game than many other teams have been able to this season, losing by only four and taking it down to the final seconds.

That performance against Michigan, which was awarded a No. 1 seed in the Midwest region for its impressive season that includes a regular-season Big Ten title, gave Thornton confidence that the Buckeyes might be able to make a run and be one of the teams that give March Madness its nickname.

"Most definitely," Thornton said when asked if playing Michigan gives them more confidence going forward. "How we've been playing as a team, how we've been practicing and how we've been preparing has been showing up on these game days. Everything we've been doing day by day to prepare ourselves to be the best Ohio State team we possibly can be is showing up."

Part of the confidence the Buckeyes have going into the tournament relates to the overall health of the team, which wasn't great during the regular season. For most of

the conference schedule, at least one regular player was held out of the lineup, if not more, due to injury or illness.

Before the Big Ten tournament, Diebler rejoiced in the fact that everyone on the roster who was expected to could finally practice.

"For the first time, really all season, we had every single player warm up this week," Diebler said. "So that was nice. We joked about that as a team. It was really crowded in warm-ups, which is a good sign."

Even with the recent success, the Buckeyes don't want to try to do too much. Even though the plan didn't work out the entire season for them, they aren't going to change anything about the way they play or prepare going into the tournament. Diebler said as much before the Big Ten tournament.

"We have to approach this the same way because that's been successful for us," Diebler said. "That's what's helped us play our best ball, and we can't change now. We can't change that. So I don't want our guys to feel anything different. I want us to keep going out and approaching these games the right way with tremendous fight, playing together and having that connection that we've seen on both sides of the ball. I think if we do that, the rest takes care of itself."

The second-year head coach thinks that his players will be able to do that. Even though there is hardly any experience in the tournament on the roster for the Buckeyes

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SONNY BROCKWAY

AS PROMISED — Even after a resounding 74-57 loss at Iowa on Feb. 25, coach Jake Diebler was confident his team was capable of making the NCAA Tournament, and his faith was rewarded with four straight wins to ensure the Buckeyes' first bid to the NCAA Tournament since 2022.

— senior forward Puff Johnson being the only player on the team who has played in the event — Diebler is confident that the moment won't be too big for them.

"I don't think this team is rattled by the moment," Diebler said. "I think we've proven that. Being healthy has helped, but what's helped probably even in a bigger way is this team's connection and chemistry, the maturity of this team and the basketball IQ, which I talked about before the season, that's allowed us to make adjustments and tweaks, not only as the year has progressed, but even to some degree game to game. And I think we're in a rhythm where guys are really trusting each other."

Diebler also believes the late run to finish the season and how well the Buckeyes played in their final five games will help them going into the March 19 game.

"Momentum matters," he said. "Some teams are trying to reset. For us, we're trying to keep going. We don't need a reset right now. The momentum we've gathered in this stretch of the season, it's a great place to be."

Time To Hop Into The Film

It didn't take long for Diebler to get into the film on the Horned Frogs. He participated in a teleconference very soon after the bracket was fully revealed, and he noted during that appearance that as soon as he got off camera, he was headed to the film room.

The head coach and former video coordinator knew the ropes of getting the film ready and made sure that whatever he needed for any possible team the Buckeyes could see would be ready for him and his players

as soon as possible.

"We had an army full of guys that had film ready for about 12 teams. That's what I did, thinking back to when I was the video coordinator. I didn't have to do it this time, which was kind of nice," Diebler joked.

When Diebler looks at the TCU film, he will likely key in on David Punch, who leads the team with both 14.3 points and 6.7 rebounds per game. The 6-7, 246-pound sophomore forward is a returning starter having a breakout season with the Horned Frogs.

His physicality when he drives to the rim, ability to finish, and capacity to get to the line are his major strengths as a player, but TCU is fairly diverse in its scoring attack, which could make it a tough team to defend on any given night.

Xavier Edmonds averages 12.6 points per game and brings down 6.6 boards. Jayden Pierre and Micah Robinson each are at 10.5 points per game, and both of them are not afraid to shoot the deep ball. Three more Horned Frogs are at 8.0 points per game or above.

Diebler also has a lot of respect for the way Dixon leads his program and is ready for the physicality the game will bring.

"I remember watching some of his Pitt teams (when he coached the Panthers) when I was coming up as a coach, and you could just feel the toughness when you watched them," he said. "I'm excited about the opportunity of going up against a coach with his résumé and against a team that's going to be playing really tough, because that's what we do, too."

Moving In The Right Direction

In Diebler's first press conference of

the new season, he pointed the media to the back wall of Ohio State's practice gym, where it shows all of the success the program has had in the past.

Even in a new college basketball world that deals with NIL and the transfer portal, Diebler was adamant that he wasn't going to sell himself or the program short. He talked about hopes of getting back to the Final Four and felt confident in his plan to eventually get Ohio State back there.

The Buckeyes are back in the tournament for the first time in four seasons, and he still has those goals.

"When I was named head coach, there were some things that we wanted to work on right away to help get this program back where it belongs," Diebler said after getting his team back to the tournament. "This was an important step, but we're not satisfied. We want to keep raising the level of this program."

Along the way, Diebler has held multiple jobs at Ohio State, from video coordinator under former head coach Thad Matta to assistant coach under former head man Chris

Holtmann and now head coach. He has seen the Buckeyes make the tournament each step along the way, with some level of his help.

So did it hit him differently when he saw the Buckeyes come across his screen as the No. 8 seed in the East region?

"It does," he said. "Considering how far we've come in two years, when you think of where we were during my interim stretch and where we are now, I think it did. Then there's what we overcame this year to get to this point."

Although, as of now, the Buckeyes are heading in the right direction as a program with a tournament appearance this season, Diebler isn't focused on the big picture. All he cares about right now is extending this season as long as possible.

"Our staff has worked extremely hard in helping us get to this point. We've dealt with a ton of adversity this season and in the past year, but we've got a group that's connected, and our chemistry — and we've got really good players — has been a big reason why we've gotten to this point."

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Thornton Ready For First NCAA Tournament

Continued From Page 1

But over five years later, Thornton is now the all-time points leader in Ohio State men's basketball history, having stuck around in Columbus through a three-year NCAA Tournament drought, a coaching change and rosters transferring in and out to get to this point.

"I'm so proud of myself for being true to who I am," Thornton said of sticking around at Ohio State for four years. "I could have been like everybody else. I could have left, did a lot of different things, but I stayed true to my values and made things how I wanted them to be, because you only get one life. You only get one decision (where you're) playing in college, and I'm glad I'm a Buckeye for life."

It was a three-pointer that gave Thornton the all-time points record with 44 seconds left in the first half of the Senior Day win over Indiana on March 7. He passed Dennis Hopson in the ranks after climbing up through the top 10 over the course of the season, passing the likes of Jerry Lucas, William Buford and many other all-time great Buckeye basketball players.

In classic Thornton fashion, he was too locked into what was happening in the game to realize that he was only three points away from passing Hopson, but the reaction of the crowd tipped him off to what had just happened.

"When I got to half court, I saw the clock, and I was like, 'I'm shooting this.'" Thornton said after the game. "When I got separation and the way the crowd reacted, I knew that I got it. It was a great feeling, but I was so caught up in the game that I couldn't really sit back and take it all in."

At halftime, Hopson presented Thornton with a basketball at midcourt for a ceremonial exchange to recognize the new scoring leader.

But it took four years of leading the Buckeyes both on and off the court for Thornton to get to that point. The only four-time captain in program history, Thornton was fairly quiet when he was being recruited.

At that point the associate head coach under Chris Holtmann, Diebler still remembers the first conversations the two had when he was trying to get the four-star recruit to move from Alpharetta, Ga., to Columbus. The conversations were fairly one-sided as Diebler remembers them, but he was trying to remain on Thornton's radar any way he could because he knew the type of player he could be for the Buckeyes.

But Thornton was more interested in playing video games than he was in talking to college coaches. That didn't faze Diebler.

"I think of all the times I FaceTimed him during the recruiting process and he was playing video games and I was staring at his ceiling," Diebler said. "Our first conversation was funny. He didn't say a whole lot. I was doing a lot of recruiting, for sure."

Thornton also remembers the FaceTime calls with Diebler when he made him stare at the ceiling of his childhood bedroom through his phone screen for hours on end.

"He was calling me so much during that time, and he was FaceTiming me. He wasn't regular calling like other coaches," Thorn-



SONNY BROCKWAY

TWO OF THE BEST — Dennis Hopson (left) was on hand March 7 to congratulate Bruce Thornton for moving past him to become the all-time points leader for the Ohio State men's program as coach Jake Diebler looked on.

ton said. "He was calling so much that I thought he was the head coach at the time. It's crazy how everything comes full circle.

"But at the time, I was done with (high school). I used to wake up and get myself ready and play the game."

But the persistence paid off for Diebler when he got Thornton's commitment in the Bob Evans parking lot, and it paid off early on.

Thornton made an impact in his freshman year, scoring 10.6 points per game, while adding 2.7 rebounds and 2.6 assists. After not being voted as a captain to begin the season, with that honor going to Kyle Young, Justice Sueing and Zed Key, Holtmann had his team revote in the middle of the season after a dip in performance, and Thornton was named a captain.

He improved on the court as a sophomore, averaging 15.7 points, 4.8 assists and 3.7 rebounds. His scoring average improved again as a junior, going up to 17.7 points per game while he added 4.6 assists and 3.4 rebounds. Now, with the NCAA Tournament still to go, Thornton is averaging 20.2 points, 3.9 assists and a career-high 5.1 rebounds per game.

At the Big Ten tournament, Thornton became just the second player in Big Ten history with over 2,000 points, 500 rebounds and 500 assists in a career.

That constant improvement in his game was no accident, according to Diebler.

"What you see on the court, how hard he plays, the toughness that he plays with, the leadership that he displays, that's who he is every single day," Diebler said. "He goes hard every day, every rep. He takes care of himself at a high level, and he spends extra time on his game. He is a pro's pro. All of that being said, he's an even better young man.

"It's a real joy to coach him. He and I have developed a really close bond. It's been almost six years that we've known each other. I was the one who recruited him. I can remember the first time I talked to him. He probably got annoyed with how much I called him because I knew right away that guy's got something special."

But even more so than the player he is or the leader he is for his teammates, Diebler may appreciate one thing about Thornton more than anything else.

When Holtmann was fired toward the end of the 2023-24 season, Diebler took over as the interim head coach and had the interim tag stripped going into the NIT tournament after a strong finish to the year, which included beating a No. 2 Purdue squad.

After that season, with uncertainty looming around the program and where it could be headed under a first-time head coach, Thornton chose to stick around in Columbus rather than transfer away.

"It means a great deal to me personally,"

Diebler said. "It speaks to the trust that we have, and it speaks mostly to who he is as a person.

"His career should be celebrated across the country because it defies the norm. We all want players like that."

Thornton remembers understanding that he had options but knowing that he wanted to finish his career as a Buckeye, despite the fact that his career wasn't going quite the way he wanted it to at a team level.

"My first year here, we started off super hot, then shit went down really fast," he said. "People start coming and going and you just don't know what's going to be next, but at the end of the day you have to worry about yourself.

"My mom always told me that if you start something, you've got to finish it," Thornton said.

Thornton said he would have some advice for his younger self when he got to Ohio State.

"I would say to just stay the course," he said. "Whatever comes your way, just stay true to who you are. I know that people would die to be in my shoes. When I started thinking like that, it made me more conscious that I'm in a great position and I'm very blessed."

In his time at Ohio State, Thornton has only missed one game, which has also been crucial to him breaking the scoring record. The only time he sat out was in the second half of a Feb. 29, 2024, game against Nebraska in his sophomore season when Diebler was in the interim role.

He said he doesn't regret missing that game because of the way it ended up.

"That migraine was no joke. It was the first time I'd ever experienced that," he said. "I tried my best to get out there, but we still got a win that day, so it wasn't too bad."

Now, Thornton is preparing to play in his first-ever NCAA Tournament game, which he has been hoping to get to do since he was a kid watching March Madness.

"It's been a goal of mine before I even came to college," he said. "I remember filling out the bracket with my mom. It's just competitive. Seeing all the great guys that made big-time runs, I just wanted to be a part of that. I feel like I worked so hard and I have an opportunity to make one of my dreams come true."

But as his Ohio State career comes to an end, Thornton and the Buckeyes are hoping to make some sort of run in the NCAA Tournament.

Whether that happens or not, Diebler couldn't be happier with how the last six years have gone with Thornton.

"He came in as a great young man and stood on a really firm foundation. Since he's been a part of this program, I think we've reinforced some of those things and helped build them up," he said. "That maturation process has been a really good one for him.

"He's also gotten better as a player. He was a really good player coming in, but he's leaving as a great player. Bruce is part of our family, and it's cool that it ended up that way. From all the way down to my kids, my wife and I, we view him as part of our family."

Henry, Grady Among Young Players To Watch

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State football team has always had an impressive crop of young talent on its roster under head coach Ryan Day, and this year's team is no different. Ohio State's roster includes a loaded 2026 recruiting class, which ranked just inside the top-five nationally, and plenty of other talented second-years.

Having to replace 12 starters from its 2025 team and many other depth players who left the program via the transfer portal, Ohio State could have many young players get on the field this season.

BSB chose to look at seven players who could make an impact during the 2026 season: freshman running back Legend Bey, sophomore defensive lineman Zion Grady, sophomore linebacker Riley Pettijohn, freshman wide receiver Chris Henry Jr., sophomore tight end Nate Roberts, redshirt freshman offensive tackle Carter Lowe and redshirt freshman quarterback Tavien St. Clair.

Legend Bey, Fr., RB

Although he may not become a starter anytime soon, Bey is one of the most intriguing young players on Ohio State's roster. Bey, who played quarterback in high school at North Forney, Texas, was ranked as the No. 126 overall player in his class.

Only adding to the intrigue is the ambiguity of his position. The former quarterback was recruited by Ohio State running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, suggesting he will be a ball-carrier, and he spent the first couple of spring practices with the running back group.

Bey certainly has the speed to play that position, evidenced by his running a 4.33-second 40-yard dash in high school as well as a 10.23-second 100-meter dash.

During a press conference following Ohio State's first spring practice on March 10, Day compared him to former Buckeye skill player Curtis Samuel.

"We see him as somebody who can play wide receiver, sort of like Curtis Samuel," Day said. "He kind of reminds me of that style of player. When Xavier Johnson was here, he could play running back or wide receiver. We're trying to get a feel for that now, because he played a lot of quarterback in high school, so we're trying to see what best fits him when he gets moving. Today was just a start seeing him flash, but he has a lot of football to learn."

Bey has an opportunity to make a name for himself in the spring with sophomore running backs Bo Jackson and Isaiah West sidelined with shoulder injuries. He will likely split reps with fellow young running backs, redshirt freshman Anthony Rogers and true freshman Favour Akih.

Zion Grady, So., DE

In just his second year at Ohio State, Grady has a chance to earn a starting spot. The Buckeyes are replacing starting defensive end Caden Curry, and Grady very well could be the one who fills in that role alongside veteran starter Kenyatta Jackson Jr.

At 6-4 and 235 pounds, Grady certainly

has the talent to make an impact. He was a four-star prospect ranked as the No. 81 player in the country and the No. 9 defensive end out of the 2025 class. He flashed his potential last year as a freshman. In a reserve role, Grady went for 13 total tackles on the season and had his first collegiate sack in Ohio State's 70-0 win over Grambling State.

Early on in the spring, it wasn't Grady, but former North Carolina transfer Beau Atkinson who lined up with the rest of the starters along the defensive line. Considering defensive line coach Larry Johnson's willingness to rotate at the position, Grady could position himself to earn playing time even if he doesn't become a starter.

Chris Henry Jr., Fr., WR

The Buckeyes haven't often had a big question mark at the wide receiver position under Day, but as things currently stand at the other outside receiver position opposite rising junior Jeremiah Smith, they are still looking for an answer.

Just because the Buckeyes do not have a starter solidified at both outside receiver positions doesn't mean they don't have options. In fact, Day lauded the depth the Buckeyes have at receiver with players like LSU transfer Kyle Parker, UTSA transfer Devin McCuin and Henry all being viable options to earn a role in the offense.

"That's an interesting group, because obviously Jeremiah leads the way, but Brandon (Inniss is) right there with him, and then you have Kyle and Devin, who both come in and had really good practices," Day said. "Just for day one, seeing a couple veteran guys go out there and make plays, they know exactly what they're doing. They're pros already. You can just see it now. We'll see when the pads come on what that looks like."

"We also have some other guys pushing in those areas, like (redshirt freshman) Phillip Bell and (redshirt freshman De'Zie Jones), but then you have the young guys, and they're coming too, so it's fun to watch that. They flashed. They didn't quite know what they were doing all day today, but they were working at it. Chris hit a big post, (freshman receiver Jerquaden Guilford) hit an over, (freshman receiver Brock Boyd) had a couple of nice plays. All of those guys have bright futures here, all three of them in different ways. It's a deep group."

As much depth as there is in the room, Henry is by far the biggest name of the group of players still vying for a starting spot. The son of former Cincinnati Bengals receiver Chris Henry was ranked the No. 14 overall player and the No. 2 wide receiver in the class.

As Day pointed out, Henry has already made plays in spring practice and stands out with his impressive 6-5, 195-pound frame.

Riley Pettijohn, So., LB

With last year's starters, Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese, departing the program after extremely successful 2025 seasons, the linebacker position is one to watch in the spring.

Junior linebacker Payton Pierce seems to be a strong candidate to start after having an impressive season last year as a backup. Pierce logged 43 tackles and an inter-

ception. He lined up alongside Wisconsin transfer Christian Alliegro with the rest of the starters on the defensive side of the ball at the first couple of spring practices.

However, the Buckeyes often used three-linebacker sets last year against heavier offensive formations. The door is open for a young linebacker to step into that rotation next year.

Pettijohn, who was a top-50 recruit out of his class, is a prime candidate to earn more playing time after having an impressive freshman campaign.

Pettijohn registered nine tackles, including one for loss, last year. He also had a forced fumble and returned a fumble for a 23-yard touchdown against Grambling State.

Pettijohn was often on the field with fellow sophomore linebacker Tarvos Alford early on in the spring. The battle for Ohio State's third linebacker spot could very well come down to Alford and Pettijohn.

However, if Pettijohn impresses enough in the spring and fall camp, he has a chance to crack the starting lineup in just his second season in Columbus.

Nate Roberts, So., TE

Ohio State hasn't often been known for its development of the tight end position under Day, but last year, the position was a relative strength for the team.

Former Purdue transfer Max Klare had a solid season, going for 448 receiving yards and two touchdowns, while former Ohio transfer Will Kacmarek was one of the best blockers at the position in the country.

With both of those players leaving, though, the Buckeyes will likely have somewhat of a position battle at the tight end position. Roberts may have the inside track to start. He was a four-star prospect out of Washington, Okla., ranked as the No. 203 player in the country and the No. 10 tight end.

Roberts did well enough in practice last year to earn playing time, mostly as a full-back, for the Buckeyes. He finished the season with four catches for 30 yards and also had two carries for one yard.

Roberts will likely compete with former Northwestern transfer Hunter Welcing, who is entering his seventh year in college, and former Ohio transfer Mason Williams to be the team's starter.

Day said the tight end position is one that he will specifically have his eye on during the spring.

"Tight end is an interesting position, because we have Mason and Hunter coming in," Day said. "(Graduate Bennett Chris-

tian) will be out for the spring, and so Nate (Roberts) is really going to have to step up. (Sophomore) Max LeBlanc had a really good offseason. I'm looking to see how that group can continue to grow and build. (Freshman Nick Lautar) is a young guy who has done a nice job in the weight room so far, but it's hard to play as a young tight end. Whether it's 11 or 12 (personnel), we'll have to see what we can handle there."

Carter Lowe, R-Fr., OT

The 2026 season should be an important one for Lowe. Despite being one of Ohio State's highest-ranked recruits in its 2025 class, Lowe struggled to make much of an impact in his freshman season, which is to be expected as a first-year offensive lineman. The former top-100-ranked player played in just two games last year.

The Buckeyes are returning both of their starting offensive tackles from last year, Austin Siereveld and Phillip Daniels, meaning Lowe is unlikely to become a starter unless one of the two projected starters deals with an injury. However, Lowe still has the talent to establish himself as a viable rotational option with a strong spring period.

Early on in the spring, Lowe was working with some of the younger players in the room during drills.

While the 2026 season won't likely be one in which Lowe makes a name for himself at Ohio State, it will be an important year in terms of development, with both Siereveld and Daniels having the opportunity to leave after this season if they decide to.

Tavien St. Clair, R-Fr., QB

While he certainly won't start for the Buckeyes as long as sophomore quarterback Julian Sayin stays healthy, St. Clair can establish himself as the Buckeyes' quarterback of the future with a solid 2026 season and continued development at the position.

St. Clair was a five-star prospect out of high school, ranked as the No. 7 overall player and the No. 3 quarterback in the 2025 class. The 6-3, 230-pound signal caller flashed his potential in the spring last year, seeming to make improvements throughout the offseason practices.

Appearing in only the Grambling State game, St. Clair went 0 for 2 on his only two attempts. St. Clair will most likely earn the backup job behind Sayin, but will also battle for the spot with Maryland transfer Justyn Martin and true freshman quarterback Luke Fahey after Lincoln Kienholz transferred to Louisville.

In his senior season at Bellefontaine, St. Clair threw for 2,536 yards and 29 touch-

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Standouts Deliver Big Performances At Combine

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At the annual NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis from Feb. 23 through March 2, Ohio State sent 11 draft prospects to showcase their skills in front of NFL evaluators.

While several Buckeyes opted to participate only in measurements and interviews, choosing instead to showcase their full workouts at Ohio State's Pro Day on March 25, multiple OSU prospects had standout performances.

Ohio State recorded the top 40-yard dash times at the combine among safeties, linebackers, and defensive ends, with Lorenzo Styles Jr., Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese's speed all standing out.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with Ohio State beat reporters Andy Anders and Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors, as well as Steve Helwagen and Patrick Murphy of 247Sports to analyze the former Buckeyes' showing in Indianapolis.

When asked about which Buckeye had the most impressive overall performance, Anders didn't hesitate.

"It's got to be Sonny Styles," Anders said. "He had the tallest vertical leap ever by a player of his weight or higher, a 43½ inch vertical, which is pretty ridiculous. His broad jump was also top among linebackers, and he ran a 4.46 40-yard dash. I honestly think you can put his combine up with some of the best combine performances of all time."

As Anders noted, Styles stood out in virtually every phase of the combine. He recorded top-five finishes among the 28 linebackers tested in nearly every drill he completed, with the lone exception of the three-cone drill run, in which he placed sixth with a time of 7.09 seconds, according to the NFL combine tracker.

Anders wasn't alone. All four Ohio State reporters surveyed said Styles had the best overall performance among Buckeyes, with some believing he had the best overall showing at the entire combine.

The 6-5, 244-pound linebacker was already drawing attention with his measurables before topping all linebackers in the 40-yard dash, vertical jump and broad jump (11-2 inches), while finishing fifth at his position with a 4.26-second shuttle run.

Hope, the deputy editor for Eleven Warriors, noted that Styles was already considered a likely top-10 pick before the combine, and added that his performance there only strengthened his standing.

"He really didn't have to do anything at the combine if he didn't want to, but he ended up going through the vast majority of the drills," Hope said. "He stood out in everything he did. So I think that he proved that he's right up there as one of the absolute best athletes in the 2026 NFL draft class, and probably solidified himself as a top-10 pick."

Helwagen expressed a similar sentiment about who was the top performer, while adding that Sonny Styles' older brother, Lorenzo Styles, also made waves for recording the second-fastest 40-yard dash at the entire combine.



SONNY BROCKWAY

PIECING IT TOGETHER — With versatility as a linebacker or edge rusher plus his athletic abilities highlighted by his speed, it's no wonder Arvell Reese is considered a top-five pick in the 2026 NFL draft.

"I would say Sonny Styles because, to run as fast as he did, as big as he is, and also have the 43½ vertical leap and 11-2 broad jump, that's all very impressive," Helwagen said. "His brother Lorenzo ran a 4.27 (40-yard dash), which is also very impressive. But Sonny, as a whole, probably had the best showing of everybody."

While Lorenzo Styles put up solid numbers at Ohio State at nickel back with 30 tackles, 1½ tackles for loss and three pass breakups, as well as the Buckeyes' first kick return touchdown since 2010 over 12 games played, he still was projected to finish either undrafted or a late day three pick.

However, after posting the impressive 40 time, just 0.06 seconds slower than former Texas wide receiver Xavier Worthy's 4.21 combine record, Lorenzo Styles dramatically boosted his draft stock, making him a strong bet to be selected on day three of the draft, according to Hope.

"Lorenzo Styles Jr. certainly would be the guy who helped himself the most (by running) a 4.27 40-yard dash," Hope said. "He's a guy who, going into the combine, I would have said would have gone undrafted. I think now he will be a day three pick.

There's only so many dudes on the planet who could run a 4.27, so I think having that speed just gives potential, especially when you think about how much he played on special teams at Ohio State."

For Anders, Lorenzo Styles' potential jump in value as a prospect signified just how much the NFL combine can improve, or hurt, a player's draft stock.

"A round or two of difference is what the NFL combine can make, but that too is a stretch," Anders said. "I'd say if you're talking about first-round guys, you don't have that wiggle room. But if you're a day three guy, maybe you could get yourself into day two, or if you were a day two guy, your stock could sink to where you're a day three."

"Lorenzo Styles really improved himself from a fringe draft pick to it being fairly certain he gets drafted and maybe even as an earlier day three pick than originally projected, where he's going in round five or six."

Reese, a linebacker at Ohio State who was counted as an edge rusher at the combine due to how he is likely to be used in the NFL, also stood out for his measurables and speed. Standing at 6-4, 241 pounds

with a 79½ wingspan, he had already impressed scouts with his physical toolset throughout the 2025 season at Ohio State.

The 2025 consensus All-American racked up 69 tackles, 10 TFLs, 6½ sacks and two pass breakups over 14 games last season, with NFL evaluators pegging Reese as a top-five pick early into his junior season with the Buckeyes.

Though Reese is highly unlikely to be selected first overall, with Indiana Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Fernando Mendoza widely expected to be selected with the top pick, his performance at the combine cemented him as a legitimate top-five prospect.

Murphy said that although linebackers typically aren't drafted in the top five, Reese's versatility and skill set as an edge rusher give him the traits NFL scouts look for in a difference-maker, similar to that of Green Bay Packers linebacker Micah Parsons.

"Linebacker is not a position that always goes that high, but I think when you see a guy like him and some of the traits that he has and his ability to play off the edge as well, you immediately think if you're an NFL person like a Micah Parsons type," Murphy said. "Can we do some of the similar things that the Dallas Cowboys and then the Packers last year have done with Micah Parsons, with a guy like Arvell? I think that's a real possibility. We saw it some at Ohio State with him moving around and whatnot. So if you can have a couple of positions in one player like that, that's an advantage for Reese."

Tight end Will Kacmarek and cornerback Davison Igbinosun each participated in the 40-yard dash, vertical jump and broad jump. Kacmarek was second-to-last among 18 tight ends tested with a 4.74 40-yard-dash, but tied for sixth at his position in vertical jump (36.0 inches) and tied for ninth with a 9-11-inch broad jump.

The 6-2, 198-pound Igbinosun posted solid physical measurements, but his testing numbers were less impressive. He finished tied for 11th among cornerbacks in the 40-yard dash (4.45) and tied for second-to-last (of 23 participants) with a 34-inch vertical and was only ahead of one corner with a 10-0 broad jump.

Five Buckeyes chose to skip the measurable drill testing (40-yard dash, vertical jump, etc.) at the event entirely and will instead complete those tests at Ohio State's Pro Day. Defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, defensive end Caden Curry, running back CJ Donaldson Jr., and tight end Max Klare all took part in positional drills, while safety Caleb Downs was the only Ohio State prospect who limited his participation to weigh-ins and measurements.

While most Buckeyes' draft projections stayed the same after measurements and drills, several Ohio State reporters noted that McDonald may not have had his best showing in Indianapolis.

Anders said that while he thinks highly of McDonald as an overall prospect, the drills highlighted some areas for improvement as a pass rusher.

"I cannot say enough glowing things about Kayden McDonald," Anders said. "However, as he was going through some of

Buckeyes At The 2026 NFL Combine

Name	POS	HT	WT	Arm (In.)	Hand (In.)	40-Yd. (Sec.)	Vert. (In.)	Broad (Ft.)	3-Cone Drill (Sec.)	20-Yd. Shuttle (Sec.)	10-Yd. Split (Sec.)	Prospect Grade (Per NFL.com)
Caden Curry	Edge	6-3	257	30 1/8	9 3/8							6.00
C.J. Donaldson	RB	6-2	230	31 3/4	9 1/2							5.82
Caleb Downs	SAF	6-0	206	30 1/4	9 1/2							6.47
Davison Igbinosun	CB	6-2	189	32 7/8	9 1/8	4.45	34	10-0			1.58	6.17
Will Kacmarek	TE	6-5 1/2	261	32 1/4	9 3/4	4.74	36	9-11			1.70	6.12
Max Klare	TE	6-4	246	32 1/8	9 1/8							6.30
Kayden McDonald	DT	6-2	326	32 1/4	9 3/4							6.39
Arvell Reese	Edge	6-4	241	32 1/2	9 1/2	4.46					1.58	7.04
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	SAF	6-0 1/2	194	31 5/8	9 1/2	4.27	39				1.49	5.67
Sonny Styles	LB	6-5	244	32 7/8	10	4.46	43 1/2	11-2	7.09	4.26	1.56	6.42
Carnell Tate	WR	6-2	192	31 3/4	10 1/4	4.53					1.61	6.75

Prospect Grade Key

8.0	The perfect prospect	6.20-6.29	Will eventually be average starter
7.3-7.5	Perennial All-Pro	6.10-6.19	Good backup with the potential to develop into starter
7.0-7.1	Pro Bowl talent	6.0-6.09	Traits or talent to be above-average backup
6.7-6.9	Year 1 starter	5.80-5.99	Average backup or special-teamer
6.5-6.6	Boom-or-bust potential	5.60-5.69	Candidate for bottom of roster or practice squad
6.40-6.49	Will become good starter within two years	5.50-5.59	Priority undrafted free agent
6.30-6.39	Will eventually be plus starter	No grade	Grade not yet available

the defensive line drills, watching the footwork, watching the burst, watching all that stuff, his pass rushing game is a little limited. Now, I think he has generational run defense potential, and I think he's a worthy first-round draft pick for that reason, but I think it did showcase some of his limitations as a pass rusher."

While evaluations of individual performances varied, one topic produced a clear consensus among the reporters.

When asked about which Buckeye prospect is the most pro-ready heading into the NFL draft, all four Ohio State reporters were in agreement.

"Caleb Downs," Helwagen said. "I just think that if you want to change the culture of your team defensively – this is a guy who won at Alabama, he was in the playoffs all three of his seasons in college. – he would be a guy that I would look at, if everything checked out medically and everything. But

I think the thing that he fights for is the fact that a lot of teams view safeties as a dime a dozen, and you wouldn't necessarily spend a top two or three pick on a safety."

Although Downs didn't compete in any drills, he still made headlines for a report that he was flagged by an NFC team with a partially torn meniscus and a potentially degenerative ACL, according to NFL draft analyst Cory Kinnan.

However, a conflicting report from the Pat McAfee Show the following day stated that multiple NFL teams have said that there is nothing they saw medically that would stop them from drafting Downs.

Hope isn't concerned about Downs, noting that while he doesn't have access to the same medical evaluations as NFL teams, he believes there's little reason to worry if scouts and organizations aren't raising concerns.

"It doesn't sound like there was any-

thing that came up on those reports that would disqualify teams from drafting him," Hope said. "You look back at his time at Ohio State and Alabama, I don't believe he ever missed a game in three years of college football. So you think about injury red flags, a lot of times you're thinking about a guy who missed a lot of time in college. That was not the case with Caleb.

"I don't think that this is likely to be something that has a substantial impact on his draft stock. But again, I'm not privy to the medical records that NFL teams are, so I can't say for sure."

Beyond individual performances, Ohio State reporters reflected on how the Buckeyes continue to showcase their talent pipeline to the NFL.

For Helwagen, the Styles brothers and Reese made strong statements at the combine, highlighting a clear trend of Buckeyes showcasing top-tier measurables and

talent.

"The Styles brothers, they really helped themselves, and it's been obvious how hard they've been working to prepare for it. That was probably the most impressive thing," Helwagen said. "For Reese to go out and do as many drills, and everything that he did was very impressive as well, and probably helped establish him as a high first-round pick as well."

Compared to the nation's elite programs and top prospects, Murphy said Ohio State stands out for its depth and its consistent production of NFL-caliber talent.

"They're as good as anybody," Murphy said. "It's just this NFL factory. That's not to say Georgia or Texas or whoever isn't on that same level. Last year, they lost all of those guys and had to replace all those starters from the national championship team, but could still have 10 or 11 guys drafted."

Styles Brothers Put On Show At NFL Combine

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The number of Ohio State players participating in the 2026 NFL combine was down from last season, but the quality and performances were not, with several Buckeyes shining at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis from Feb. 26 to March 1.

No one had a better outing among the 11 Buckeyes than linebacker Sonny Styles, who wowed the NFL draft personnel with his all-around athleticism that Pro Football Focus lead draft analyst Trevor Sikkema called “one of the best, if not the best, linebacker performances in combine history.”

His brother, safety Lorenzo Styles Jr., ran a 4.27 seconds in the 40-yard dash for the fastest time in a combine for a safety since at least 2003 and the best time ever for a Buckeye, bettering the 4.31 by wide receivers Curtis Samuel (2017) and Paris Campbell (2019).

In 2025, no school sent more players to the combine than Ohio State's 15. This year, Texas A&M led with 13 of the 319 invited players, with Alabama having 12 and the Buckeyes tied with LSU for third.

Ohio State is expected to be top-heavy in the draft with the likes of Sonny Styles, safety Caleb Downs, linebacker Arvell Reese, wide receiver Carnell Tate and defensive tackle Kayden McDonald projected to be taken in the first round.

At the other end of the spectrum, Lorenzo Styles, tight ends Will Kacmarek and Max Klare, defensive end Caden Curry, running back C.J. Donaldson and cornerback Davison Igbinosun are seen as mid- to late-rounders or undrafted and most used the combine to highlight their talents in order to improve their stocks before the NFL draft April 23-25 in Pittsburgh.

Leading The Way

Sonny Styles' 43.5 inches on the vertical jump was second all-time by a linebacker, trailing only Cameron Wake of Penn State in 2005 (45.5 inches). Styles also posted a 4.46 in the 40-yard dash and a broad jump of 11-2, the fourth-best among the linebackers.

Mike Renner of CBSSports.com wrote of him, “Styles is one of the most physically gifted linebacker prospects you'll ever see. Between his gangly frame and cornerback-esque athleticism, he's got the goods. After transitioning from safety to linebacker early in his Ohio State career, it all came together for Styles this past fall. He's a blue-chip linebacker prospect.”

Styles (6-5, 244) last season under first-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia led the Buckeyes with 82 total tackles, 6½ tackles for loss, one sack, one forced fumble and an interception to earn first-team All-America honors.

He said switching to linebacker from safety put him in the position he is in now.

“I look back on it, I remember when I made the decision going into my spring, my junior year, I'm glad I did it,” he said. “At the time I was doing it, I was trying to help the team. I felt like that was the best



SONNY BROCKWAY

SONNY DAYS AHEAD — Making the most of the NFL combine, linebacker Sonny Styles (0) put his full arsenal of speed, power and agility on display and improved his stock ahead of the draft in April.

spot for us to win. I felt like it was a spot I could do well at, but most importantly, help the team. In the long run, it worked out, and I'm glad I did it.”

He credits linebackers coach James Laurinaitis for helping ease the transition.

“He played the game, was one of the greats in the game. So having him in the room was awesome,” Styles said. “So much information, so much knowledge. I think the biggest thing is he gave me confidence. When I first switched from safety to linebacker, coach Laurinaitis sent me a text. He said, ‘Hey, man, you're going to be a first-round linebacker.’ He sent me that text before I even technically believed it. For him to have that belief in me, it meant a lot.”

Styles also appreciated that Patricia, a former assistant with the New England Patriots and head coach of the Detroit Lions, helped all the OSU combine invitees prepare.

“Even in this process of training for this moment in the combine, him hopping on Zoom calls with all of us, taking us through what a meeting is going to look like, he's been such a great help,” Styles said.

Intriguing

While Sonny Styles' numbers shocked people in a positive way, Tate's unofficial 4.53 in the 40 was a head scratcher on the negative ledger and created some controversy. ESPN's Adam Schefter reported that most teams had faster speeds in the range of 4.45-4.47, in line with high-end receivers.

That 4.53 is not expected to hurt him in the draft, especially after his main competitor as the top drafted receiver, Makai Lemon, recorded times between 4.48 and 4.53 at USC's pro day on March 12. Lemon did not run at the combine.

By comparison, Hall of Famer Jerry Rice's combine sprint was timed at 4.71 seconds and former Buckeye Cris Carter ran a 4.63.

Tate (6-2, 192) will be the next great OSU receiver to be selected in the first round, coming off making 51 catches for 875 yards and nine touchdowns despite missing three games with a leg injury while playing with the next superstar receiver in waiting, Jeremiah Smith.

“The competition there, we're all pushing to be the best receiver on the field that

day in that practice,” Tate said. “Typically, when you're the best receiver at Ohio State, you're the best receiver in the country. We all have high expectations for each other, always pushing each other to do better.”

“It's a blessing to be here, to be a part of the history at Ohio State and the great receivers that came through before me.”

Tate feels he is the best receiver in the draft and wasn't afraid to say so when asked at the combine: “Me, no question.”

He does feel pressure to continue the legacy of recent Ohio State receivers, which include Emeka Egbuka, Marvin Harrison Jr., Terry McLaurin, Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Garrett Wilson.

“They inspire me a lot. I mean, I would like to be like them,” Tate said. “They're playing at the highest level, at a high level. So, I would love to be like them. I look up to all those guys.”

“It means a lot to me. And it's also a lot on your shoulders now. You've got to be the next one to come out there and put on for the school and carry the Receiver U.”

Downs Is Up

Many consider Downs (6-0, 206) to be the top safety available. In three seasons, the first at Alabama before two with the Buckeyes, he totaled 257 tackles, 16 TFLs, 1½ sacks and six interceptions, and he helped OSU win the 2024 national championship.

He did not participate in any drills, but is excited to move to the next level.

“I would just say every DB has to work on a lot of the same things,” he said. “Tackling in space, tackling in the box is something that everybody needs to work on and coverage in general, whether that's man or zone, everybody has to work on that.”

He's not lacking in self-belief.

“I feel confident every time I step on the field,” Downs said. “So if I would say that I walked on the field and thought anybody was better than me, yeah, that's not true.”

He added that practicing against elite receivers at Ohio State will help him in the NFL.

“I feel like Coach Patricia did a lot of great things in terms of my mind, of processing, whether how to take certain players away, how to negate certain abilities that the offense may have,” Downs said. “I feel like that's something Ohio State brings. The ability to play against high-level talent in practice allows you to play faster in the game.”

Making a Move

Reese (6-4, 241) burst on the scene in 2025 after playing a secondary role for two seasons and opted to enter the draft early after being named a unanimous All-American and winning the Big Ten's Butkus-Fitzgerald linebacker of the year award.

He had the best 40 time (4.46) and 10-yard split (1.58) of the edge rushers and is projected to go as high as No. 2 to the New York Jets

On being a drop linebacker, he said: “I am very comfortable, very comfortable.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

SPEED DEMON — Lorenzo Styles Jr. (3) ran the fastest 40-yard dash ever (4.27 seconds) for an Ohio State player at the NFL combine and hopes his quickness will lead him to being drafted in April.

We did that a lot last year. About 60 percent of the snaps, I was on the edge, I was dropping. I think I do a decent job defending the run from there. I think I set a good edge. I do pretty decent taking on counters and pullers.

“And then, I haven’t even scratched the surface with really what I can do pass rushing for real. I’ve been an inside linebacker. I think I can get way better at pass rushing, for sure.”

Like the other Buckeyes at the combine, he said the competitive nature of the team sharpened him.

“I think it’s like that at Ohio State. That’s kind of the reason I went there, too. I mean, there’s dogs everywhere,” he said. “You’ve got to be comfortable with knowing that you’re not going to be the only dog there. You’ve got to just work to get better every day. You can’t just be complacent.”

The Next Level

McDonald (6-2, 326) did not work out at the combine but is expected to do so at Ohio State’s Pro Day on March 25. An early draft enrollee, he is expected to be picked late in the first round and has no regrets about his decision to leave school.

“I’m just taking a chance on myself having coach (Larry) Johnson, the development off the field and helping me get to my goals and aspirations,” he said. “I’ve been playing football since I was

four years old, and just having a chance to compete against my peers has been a blessing for me.

“I believe I’m the best defensive tackle in this draft class. I really pride myself on being consistent and competitive and holding my teammates accountable.”

Wise Choice

Lorenzo Styles began his career at Notre Dame as a wide receiver and ended it with the Buckeyes on the other side of the ball.

“I feel like it gives me the best potential to play in the NFL for a long time,” he said of the position change. “I feel like I have the skill set to do it at a high level for a while.”

Styles had the fastest 40-yard dash of the safeties and his 39-inch vertical jump was fourth for the position.

He used his speed for a 100-yard kick-off return vs. UCLA last season and looks forward to being on special teams in the NFL.

“I feel like that’s a big part of my game,” he said. “I take a lot of pride in special teams and I feel like it’s big in the NFL now. Field position matters. So being able to contribute to that, I feel like I can do that day one.”

Maximum Effort

Klare (6-4, 246) spent last season with the Buckeyes after transferring from Pur-

due and had 43 catches for 448 yards and two touchdowns to earn first-team All-Big Ten honors.

“I went there to compete against the best every day,” he said. “Whether that was going against Sonny Styles, Arvell Reese in an inside drill and then going down to one-on-one against Caleb Downs. Every day I got better there and I’m super grateful for my time there and the experience I had.”

Willing

Kacmarek (6-5, 261) made 23 catches for 254 yards and two touchdowns in two seasons at OSU after transferring from Ohio. He ran a 4.74 40 and had a vertical jump of 36 inches.

“I’m doing the dirty work,” he said. “I think it’s fulfilling to do that and knowing that you impose your will on another player all game. Every coach I’ve had knew that I had that part of my playing style. I knew how to tap that, that aggression into the game.”

Tough It Out

Having played behind JT Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer, Curry (6-3, 257) emerged as a starter last season and was tabbed for the All-Big Ten first team with a team-leading 16½ tackles for loss and 11 sacks.

“I’m a relentless motor, and I get to the ball, and good things happen when you run to the ball,” he said. “I feel like I’m that kind of old-school player that’s rug-

ged and just always tries his hardest and is never going to give up on a play.”

With The Best

Having spent three seasons at West Virginia, Donaldson (6-2, 230) finally experienced the Michigan game.

“That definitely means a lot to the program,” he said. “It was definitely a blessing to have the opportunity to play in that game, being around guys who are NFL-ready.”

“I had a chance to know I possibly could play with five first-round draft picks. I played with Kayden McDonald, Carnell Tate, Arvell, Sonny Styles and Caleb Downs and saw just how they prepare for the game.”

Taking Stock

Igbinosun (6-2, 189) was clocked in 4.45 for the 40 and a vertical jump of 34 inches and is seen as a late-round selection.

He started all 43 games the past three seasons and was voted to the first team All-Big Ten team in 2025 when he had 53 tackles, eight pass breakups and two interceptions.

“I think what separates me from everybody else in this class is that I feel like my mindset is a little different,” he said. “I feel like I can face adversity and overcome it.”

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College Football Coaching Icon Holtz Passes

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Long before he became a motivational speaker, political pundit and self-appointed expert on the toughness of modern-day college football players, long before his vigorous ESPN debates with former All-America lineman Mark May, even long before he led Notre Dame to its most recent national championship, Lou Holtz was a 31-year-old, first-year assistant on Woody Hayes' staff at Ohio State, admittedly so green he didn't know he was supposed to be scared of his boss.

"It was a very special experience, but it was also new and very unique," Holtz told BSB in 2008. "I was pretty sure of myself and didn't really know there were things you could do and things you probably shouldn't do – like speak up in certain situations."

Holtz, who died March 4 in Orlando, Fla., at the age of 89, was hired by Hayes in the spring of 1968 to coach the defensive secondary. It didn't take long for the two to butt heads.

"It was my first staff meeting," Holtz remembered. "I smoked a pipe back then and someone said that I'd better put it out 'because Coach Hayes will make you swallow it.' I guess I didn't believe them because I was still puffing away when Coach Hayes entered the room.

"Well, he looks straight at me and said, 'What do you think you're doing?' and I said, 'I'm enjoying my pipe.' Then he said, 'You couldn't work for Paul Brown because Paul Brown says anybody that smokes a pipe is lazy and complacent.' To that I said, 'That's why you're smarter than Paul Brown because you don't believe that.' He just sort of grumbled and walked off, and I smoked that pipe the entire time I was at Ohio State.

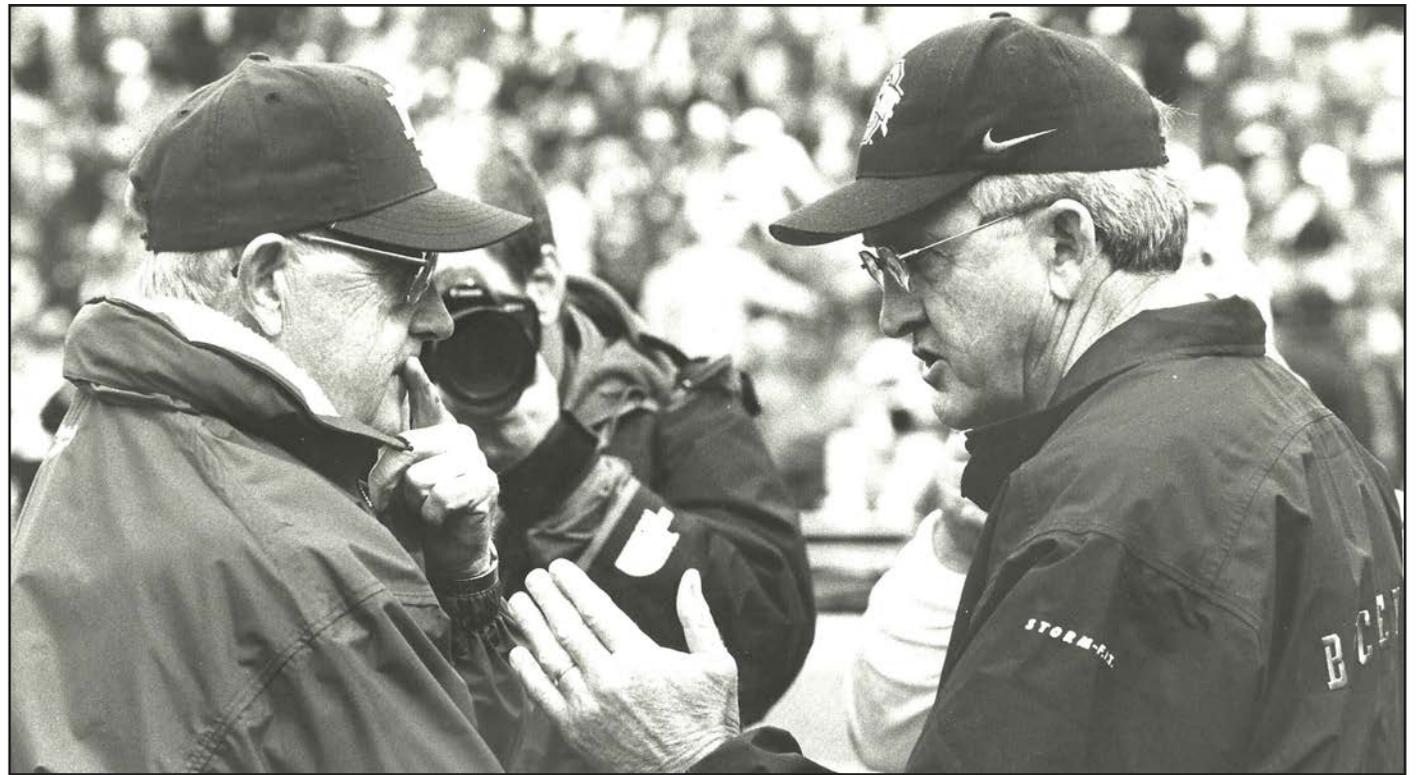
"Maybe he just couldn't come up with something else to say, I don't know, but what I do know is that later in that first staff meeting, he got mad at something or someone and threw the (film) projector through the plate-glass door. But you know, the more you were around Coach Hayes, the more amazing you knew the man was."

Louis Leo Holtz was born Jan. 6, 1937, in a tiny steel town located in the northern panhandle of West Virginia. He grew up in East Liverpool, Ohio, and attended Kent State where he was a walk-on linebacker with the football team.

Holtz entered the coaching profession after graduation, landing his first job in 1960 as a graduate assistant on Forest Evashevski's staff at Iowa. The Hawkeyes won a share of the Big Ten championship that year and finished No. 2 in the final national rankings by The Associated Press.

After that were stints as an assistant at William & Mary, Connecticut and South Carolina before his one-year stay with the Buckeyes. And what a year it was.

"We had such a good group of talented kids that year," Holtz said. "But when I got there, I felt like I was starting from scratch. Three of the guys they gave me had never played in the defensive secondary before. Mike Sensibaugh was a quarterback, Timmy Anderson was a running back and so



FILE PHOTO

ONE OF A KIND — Lou Holtz (left), talking to former Ohio State head coach John Cooper, was an assistant at OSU under Woody Hayes for only one season, but his work with the secondary helped the Buckeyes win the 1968 national championship.

was Jack Tatum. But I guess everything turned out all right."

Ohio State began its 1968 season with a 35-14 win against SMU, a game in which the Mustangs attempted 76 passes and completed 40 of them for 437 yards. The attempts total remains a single-game high for an OSU opponent while the completions remain tied for fourth all-time.

"I didn't know if I was going to have a job on Sunday much less the rest of the season," Holtz said. "We did have five interceptions, but 76 passes for more than 400 yards. Then after the game, Coach Hayes said, 'Your guys did a good job.' I remember thinking, my God, they threw for all that yardage and he thought that was a good job? Heck, this job's going to be easy."

Two weeks later, the Buckeyes handed top-ranked Purdue a 13-0 defeat, a win sparked by Holtz's secondary. While Tatum kept track of Purdue All-America running back Leroy Keyes, helping to limit Keyes to 19 yards rushing, the secondary intercepted quarterback Mike Phipps twice, including one early in the third quarter that junior cornerback Ted Provost returned 35 yards for the first touchdown of the afternoon.

The Buckeyes rolled through the remainder of the season, capped by a 50-14 drubbing of Michigan and a convincing 27-16 win against defending national champion USC in the Rose Bowl.

Holtz was preparing to remain at Ohio State and went through spring practice with the Buckeyes in 1969, but in July, the head coaching position at William & Mary materialized and became an opportunity he couldn't refuse.

"I knew you didn't get many chances to be a head coach," Holtz told BSB in 2017, "and the only reason I think I had that opportunity was because the people at William & Mary knew me. I really didn't want

to leave Ohio State, and my wife didn't want me to leave, but I thought passing it up might affect my chances at a head coaching job in the future. So I took it."

Holtz spent three seasons at William & Mary, compiling just a 13-20 record with the Indians. But that was good enough for North Carolina State, which hired him following the 1971 season. His four years in Raleigh produced 33 victories and the 1973 Atlantic Coast Conference championship, after which he spent one ill-fated season with the NFL's New York Jets before he moved to Arkansas for a seven-year stay that included the 1979 Southwest Conference title.

Before that 1979 season, Holtz was on the short list to replace Hayes as head coach at Ohio State, a position for which Holtz believed he held a considerable amount of negotiating leverage.

"We had a better football team at Arkansas than Ohio State had at that time," he told BSB in 2017. "I told them that if you offer me the job, chances are that I will come back because I love Ohio State. But I'm not going to go through the interviewing process. They said, 'Well, if you change your mind, call us.' I said, 'I wouldn't sit by the phone.' And that was the end of the conversation. I refused to go through the interviewing process because I thought it was totally unfair to the people of Arkansas."

Instead, the Buckeyes hired another former Hayes assistant – Iowa State head coach Earle Bruce.

Holtz left Arkansas in 1984 for a two-year stint at Minnesota before achieving his greatest coaching fame during 11 seasons at Notre Dame that included seven years with at least nine victories and a perfect 12-0 record in 1988 that earned consensus national championship honors for the Fighting Irish.

He finished his coaching career with six

seasons at South Carolina during which his teams defeated Ohio State in back-to-back Outback Bowls at the end of the 2000 and 2001 seasons. His 249-132-7 record over 33 seasons as a head coach, along with the distinction of being the only coach in NCAA history to take six different programs to bowl games, earned him induction into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2008.

After his retirement from coaching, Holtz spent nearly a decade as a college football analyst, most of that time squabbling with May on ESPN pre- and postgame shows. He also dabbled in politics and commanded large audiences as a much-in-demand public speaker.

In recent years, Holtz became an outspoken defender of old-school football, pointedly criticizing Ohio State for its lack of toughness prior to the Buckeyes' game at Notre Dame in 2023.

Following a late comeback that earned his team a 17-14 victory, OSU head coach Ryan Day got his turn, saying, "I'd like to know where Lou Holtz is right now. What he said about our team, I cannot believe! This is a tough team right here. ... Everybody wants to question these guys! These guys are warriors!!"

Holtz later dismissed the back-and-forth, saying it was simply something out of his coaching bag of tricks to try and get under the skin of an opponent.

Despite an affinity for nearly every stop along his coaching career, Holtz admitted that his most special place was South Bend, and in his final public appearance last November, he allowed some of the old cockiness to escape one last time.

"I've been blessed to coach at many places," he said, "but people always ask me, 'Why is Notre Dame so special to you?' Well, they built a statue of me. That kind of says it all. Don't need anything else."

Former OSU, NFL Star Snell Dies At Age 84

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

For most of the first part of his life, Matt Snell was a wrecking ball, tearing down opposing defenses with a unique combination of talents that included slashing athleticism and, when necessary, a run-right-over-the-top-of-you mentality. After football, Snell turned his attention from the destruction of would-be tacklers to the construction of office space as the owner of a construction company in New York.

Despite the fact he played his last down of football a half-century ago, Snell, who died March 10 in an assisted living facility on Long Island at the age of 84, remains fondly remembered by two of the most loyal alumni bases in the sport – Ohio State and the New York Jets.

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” Snell said with a laugh in 2022 about the way he is remembered. “I was pretty fortunate to play on some pretty good teams with some pretty good players in my time. But that was a long time ago. I haven’t even been around a football since 1972.”

That’s not exactly accurate.

For a couple of years during the early 2000s, Snell provided color commentary for internet broadcasts of Northeast Conference college football games. It was a chance to reconnect with the sport he enjoyed so much during his youth and was forced to give up when injuries began to take their toll on his body.

Although he was generally regarded as a native New Yorker, Snell was born in the rural community of Garfield, Ga. His father moved the family from the Jim Crow South to Long Island, a move that was beneficial for his son. Snell attended Carle Place High School, a predominantly white school that featured only one other Black student in a graduating class of more than 250.

Snell dabbled in a variety of sports but was especially proficient in football, where he played halfback and linebacker for the Frogs, who lost only twice during his three years on the varsity squad. He totaled 48 touchdowns during his prep career, and as a senior in 1959 earned the Tom Thorp Award given annually by Newsday to the outstanding prep player in Nassau County, N.Y. Previous winners included such Pro Football Hall of Fame members as John Mackey and Jim Brown.

When it was time to select a college, Snell spurned several offers (many of which came with illegal financial enticements) to sign with Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes.

“Woody knew the things the recruiters from a lot of other colleges were promising me,” Snell said. “He leaned over at me across the desk in his office and said, ‘You’re not going to get a thing under this table. I’m not going to promise you anything I can’t deliver and I’m not going to deliver anything I can’t promise.’”

“Then he shook a finger at me. ‘You know darn well that if I’m dishonest with you, I’m going to be dishonest with a lot of other kids, and you probably don’t want to play ball for a guy who’s going around being dishonest all over the place.’ I knew then and there that I

wanted to play for that man.”

Snell was one of the first high-profile players recruited by Hayes from outside Ohio and its neighboring states. The Buckeyes had won only one Big Ten championship in the preceding four seasons and were coming off a rare losing record in 1959. A whisper campaign had started around Columbus that indicated the seat under Hayes had become increasingly hot, so the legendary coach had no choice but to expand his recruiting base.

“When I got to Ohio State in 1960, Woody was under a tremendous amount of pressure,” Snell said in 2022. “He had won a national championship a couple of years before that, but then people got to expecting that every year. The year before I got there, they had a losing season and that was just unheard of. So it was very tough playing for Woody in those days because he was really pressing.”

After spending the 1960 season on the freshman squad, Snell was ready for his first taste of varsity action. He began as mostly a battering ram for senior fullback Bob Ferguson, who won first-team All-America honors in 1961, and then switched to a defensive end position during his junior year.

Switching back to his more natural halfback spot for his senior year, Snell enjoyed his most productive season, earning team MVP honors after leading the Buckeyes in carries, rushing yardage and touchdowns. Following his college career, he was selected in the fourth round of the 1964 NFL draft by the New York Giants. But he signed instead with the New York Jets of the upstart American Football League, who had taken him with their first-round pick.

Snell joined the Jets for the 1964 season and ran away with AFL Rookie of the Year honors after accumulating 1,341 yards and six touchdowns combined rushing and receiving. One year later, the team drafted a brash, young quarterback out of Alabama, and four years after that, Joe Namath would help lead the Jets to victory against the Balti-

more Colts in Super Bowl III and change the face of professional football forever.

“We really had no fear of Baltimore in that game,” said Snell, who rushed 30 times for a game-high 121 yards while scoring the Jets’ only touchdown. “Baltimore played a zone defense in the secondary that we knew we could beat. We really thought very early in the week that we were going to win that game.”

In fact, Snell remembered that Namath’s famous guarantee of victory stemmed from something he’d heard from a teammate earlier in the week.

“We’d been watching film for a couple of days,” he said with a laugh, “when (tight end) Pete Lammons stood up and told (Jets head coach) Weeb (Ewbank), ‘Don’t show us any more of that. We’re going to get overconfident. I guarantee we’ll beat these guys.’”

“A day later, Joe is out at some function and says the same thing. Of course, he said it in public and that’s when it hit the newspapers.”

Namath won MVP honors for Super Bowl III, but he and many others in subsequent years have admitted the award probably should have gone to Snell.

“I’m really sad to hear that he passed,” Namath said. “Matt was not only a hell of a player, he was a terrific teammate and without him we wouldn’t have had a chance to win that championship.”

A litany of injuries ended Snell’s pro career following nine seasons with the Jets, after which he became a partner in a Wall Street securities firm. In 1973, he was approached by an advertising firm inquiring if he would like to cash in on his football fame. He agreed and became the first television pitchman in a long-running string of television commercials for Miller Lite beer.

Other pursuits included ownership of a Manhattan restaurant called Matt Snell’s Fifth Down as well as his own commercial construction company located in Jersey City, N.J., just across the Hudson River from New York City.

In 2000, Snell was named to the Ohio State Football All-Century Team, chosen in 2000 by the Touchdown Club of Columbus. Interestingly, his selection came as a defensive end, the position he played for only one season. Perhaps even more interestingly, Snell was one of only a handful of the 80 all-century honorees who are not also members of the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame.

In 2015, he ended a longstanding feud with the Jets and agreed to be inducted into the team’s Ring of Honor. More than a half-century after he played his final game for the Jets, Snell still holds a handful of club records, including most single-game rushing yards by a rookie, a 180-yard effort during a 24-21 win against the Houston Oilers in 1964.

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Sayin Looks To Level Up In Second Year

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At the end of Julian Sayin's season last year, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day compared his experience as a freshman quarterback to a young sailor who had gone off to sea. Apparently, the experience of his first season had turned Ohio State's starting quarterback from a baby-faced freshman into a bona fide gunslinger.

"The guy who played against Texas and the guy who came off that field on Saturday look like two different people to me," Day said a few days after Ohio State's first win over Michigan since 2019. "The look in his eyes (was different)."

Clad with a freshly-grown beard and a distinct hunger to improve, it seemed as though the rising sophomore only continued to add to his maturity over the offseason.

Sayin told reporters at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on March 12 that the beard may be temporary, but it seems as though his quest for growth will be a fixture of his 2026 season.

"There are so many things I can improve on," Sayin said. "I went home this offseason. I was able to spend a little bit of time and work out, but it's been a very fun offseason, because there have been so many things that we did well last year, but we could do so much better. Whether it's cleaning my feet in the pocket, whether it's just taking off when we need to on third down, there have been a lot of things (to improve upon). It's been really encouraging to chase that."

For pretty much the entire regular season, it was hard to imagine Sayin becoming much better. A Heisman Trophy finalist, the five-star prospect threw for 3,610 yards, 32 touchdowns and eight interceptions, while completing 77.0 percent of his passes, the best mark in college football.

However, opposing defenses exposed some vulnerabilities Sayin had in his game during the postseason, in which the Buckeye offense struggled.

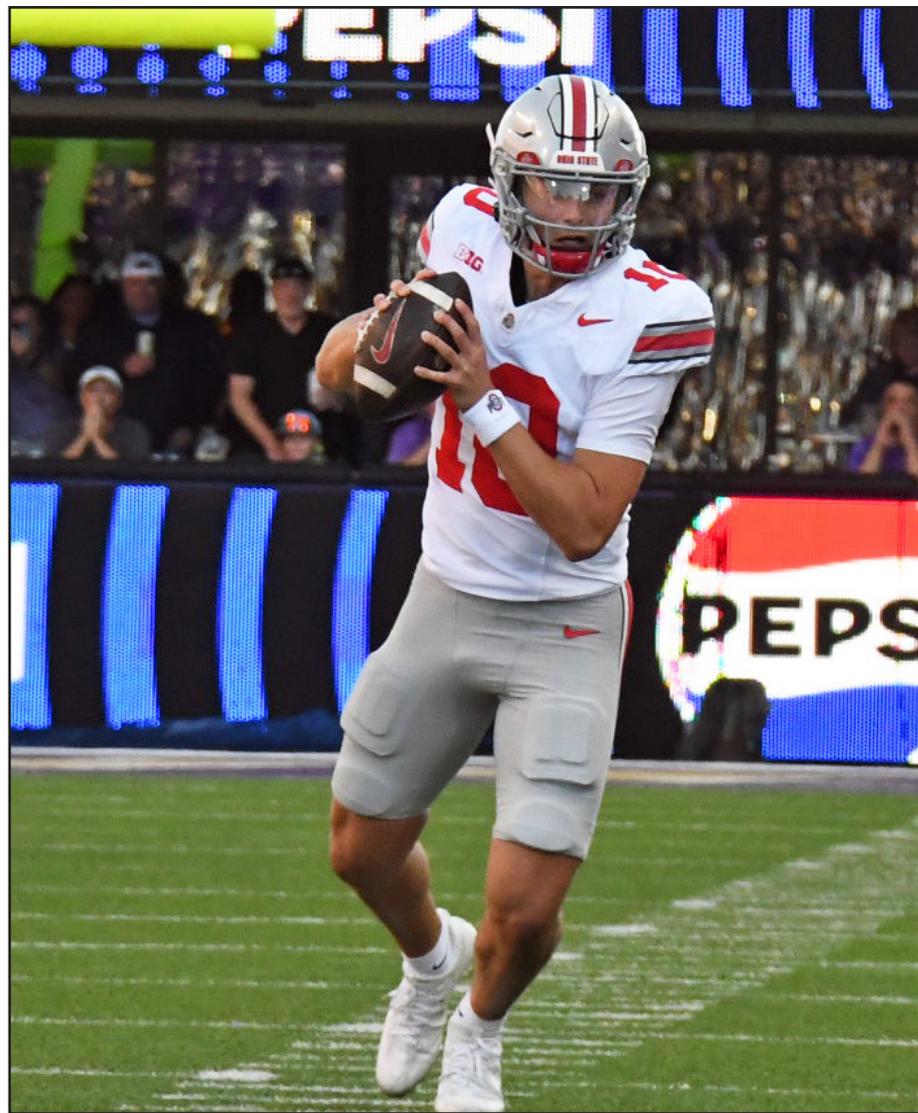
In Ohio State's 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten championship, Sayin threw a costly interception, and in addition to missing a couple of open receivers, he threw two picks in his team's season-ending 24-14 loss to Miami (Fla.) at the Cotton Bowl.

Sayin said those mistakes have stuck with him months later.

"As a competitor, you definitely have plays that you want back," Sayin said. "For me, I'm not really focused on what good plays I made. I'm focused on the few plays that I wish I had made that would have given us a chance to win those games. I definitely think about that. I'm looking to be the best version of myself."

But more than any individual interception thrown by Sayin in the postseason, the lack of playmaking with his legs was the bigger concern.

Sayin was sacked a combined 10 times in the Buckeyes' two postseason losses, and in each game, he seemed to bypass yards that were available to him on the ground. Day said Sayin's scrambling and mobility were a part of his game he could refine during the offseason.



SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT A KID ANYMORE — Julian Sayin (10) entered his first season as a starter in 2025 full of unknowns but with plenty of potential. A strong regular season was followed by flaws in losses to Indiana and Miami, but the rising sophomore is eager to improve.

"We all know the ball comes out accurately (for him), throwing the football, but making an impact with his legs when appropriate, we know that that's the X-factor that has to show up this year," Day said. "He's aware of that. He's been working hard in the offseason."

Sayin said he's comfortable with his own internal clock and has a feel for the opposing pass rush and the pocket, but admitted he still wants to enhance that part of his game.

"I'm very comfortable with having that clock in my head, of knowing when the ball needs to get out, or knowing that I have to take off," Sayin said. "I'm still improving that, but I'm very comfortable in that aspect of having that internal clock in my head and knowing when the pocket is breaking down."

Sayin took his first strides towards becoming a better runner in the weight room. It was there that he gained five to 10 pounds, which enabled him to feel stronger.

"I'm getting bigger, stronger, faster with (strength and conditioning coach Mick Marrotti). He's obviously the backbone of our program and someone that brings the best out of us every day," Sayin said.

Sayin can also make improvements before the ball is snapped, according to himself and his head coach. Day said newly-hired offensive coordinator Arthur Smith immediately noticed how intelligent Sayin is with

his ability to process high-level information quickly, but he added that he hopes he can take his football IQ to the next level.

"There are certain areas now that he has to take the next step," Day said. "Like we say, level up. I talked to (defensive coordinator Matt Patricia) about this the other day. He was explaining how growing up, we used to have Mario Brothers, and you would go through all the different levels, and if you lost, you started back at level one. You had to figure out and solve what the problem was to get to the next level."

"Now with the video games, you have to level up. You don't really go back to the start. We just continue to level up. I tried to hit on that with these guys the other day. We all have to level up with our football IQ."

"Whether it's someone like Aaron Rodgers, who has been in the league for decades, or it's (redshirt freshman quarterback) Taven St. Clair in year two of the program, or anybody within the program in terms of football IQ, the more information you have, the slower the game goes. So that's a big thing for him, and finding the right things that we can do to help get us into the right play."

Sayin said meetings with Smith have only helped his football IQ so far, and that he and Smith used his film to talk about football during the offseason.

"It's always cool to have new perspectives," Sayin said. "In football, there are so many different ways that people see it. We watched some of my tape from last year, and I was talking him through it. We just talked ball."

In his time with the Buckeyes, he has already had three different offensive coordinators, including Smith, but Sayin sees the positives in spending time with several different offensive-minded coaches.

"I don't think there's been much of an adjustment (with Smith as the new OC)," Sayin said. "As a quarterback, you're going to have to learn new offenses and learn different verbiage and things like that. It's been great to see all those perspectives as a quarterback."

Sayin is a somewhat rare returning starting quarterback for Day. In fact, heading into his eighth year as Ohio State's head coach, Day has only had a returning starter at quarterback in 2020 with Justin Fields and in 2022 with C.J. Stroud.

With Sayin coming back, he's poised to take on much more responsibility than the standard sophomore quarterback.

"We've done a lot to give the quarterback a lot of responsibility by the line of scrimmage with what we've been running these past few days," Sayin said. "It also comes with having more leadership out there and really just taking command of the offense. 'Hey, this is the route that I want you at, and this is the depth (of the route), and this is the timing, because I'm the one out there throwing it to you, so this is how it's going to go.'"

In general, Sayin is stepping into the sort of leadership role he may have been more reluctant to embrace as a freshman. Before Ohio State's second spring practice open to the media, Sayin gave a brief but impassioned speech to his teammates. Sayin said his leadership is a specific area that he hopes to work on with Ohio State having a roster that includes 51 new players.

But he's even taking strides to improve his connection with the other most prominent returner on Ohio State's roster, junior receiver Jeremiah Smith.

"It's been cool," Sayin said when asked what it means to grow into a leadership role with Smith. "We came in during the same year as freshmen, and now we're (in our third year) getting ready for the season. It's been fun, and we have a good connection, and we've been working to make it even better on the field. We've been working to be able to know what each other's thinking out there so that we can be even better."

It will be a high bar for Sayin and Smith to improve what was a sensational 2025 season for the pairing. Together, they made Ohio State into one of the best passing offenses in the country, with each player being regarded as one of the best in the country.

As someone born roughly 20 years after the original Super Mario Bros game was released, Sayin may not have fully understood Day's analogy about the iconic video game. Still, he's willing to do what it takes to level up as a second-year starter.

"I'm not a big Mario fan. I played Mario Kart a little bit, but there are just so many parts of my game that I can improve on and get even better at," Sayin said. "I can just take that next step and really be someone who's bringing our offense to the next level."

Lewis Gets Offer Despite Little Contact With OSU

The spring is a busy time for recruiting. With offseason practices happening, there are recruits from all over the country trying to get to Columbus to see the campus.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

One of the prospects who made his way to Ohio State and was able to leave with a scholarship offer was Cleveland Brush three-star defensive end Munir Lewis (6-5, 245) of the 2027 class.

But it was somewhat of a surprise that Lewis left the March 10 visit with an offer, if only because he hadn't been in contact with the Buckeyes much before his visit. Safeties coach Matt Guerrieri had visited Lewis' school, but other than that, he was somewhat of a stranger to the OSU coaches, compared to other recruits who usually get offers.

"(Defensive line coach) Larry Johnson told me, 'I usually don't do this' because this is my first time ever connecting with the coaches," Lewis told Bucknuts. "I did have a chance to connect with Coach Guerrieri in the open period, but other than that, I've never been on campus. I never spoke with Coach Johnson. It was fresh. But he offered me anyway.

"(Coach Johnson) loves my hands, he loves the way I stop the run, and what mostly every coach loves is my motor. That's the main part of my game, is my motor. I chase people down. That's how I've always been playing football since I was a little kid. He offered me because I fit all the criteria they're looking for."

He has already decided that he will take one of his official visits to Ohio State, he told Bucknuts. He also said that the Buckeyes are in his top-five schools already.

By 247Sports composite rankings, Lewis is the No. 526 player in the country, the No. 45 edge rusher and the No. 20 player in Ohio. However, with his senior season of football left to go, and the amount of interest he is receiving from Johnson and other Division I coaches, it wouldn't be a surprise to see him move up in the rankings as the year goes on.

Lewis holds 21 Division I offers, with 18 of those coming in 2026, long after his junior football season ended. A few of the other schools he holds offers from are Illinois, Louisville Michigan State, Minnesota, Purdue, Wisconsin, and a few MAC schools.

Top '27 DL Enjoys OSU Visit

For their first spring practice of the season, the Buckeyes also hosted Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon five-star defensive lineman Marcus Fakatou (6-6, 275) on campus, and he enjoyed his time in Columbus as well.

He already had an offer from Johnson when he came to campus, receiving one back in May, 2025.

Fakatou also talked with Bucknuts after the practice he attended, saying that Ohio State is in his top three schools after he left, along with Georgia and Notre Dame.

"It was an amazing visit overall," Fakatou said. "Being able to be on campus and talk to coach Johnson again was something special and also getting to talk to coach Ryan Day. I think one of the biggest take-aways from today was they emphasized at the end of the day, it's bigger than football. Football will only take us so far, and we need to have a life outside of football.

"They're very faith-based. I know the school probably isn't, but they love to carry out their faith, which is something special because in my recruiting process, I'd like to find a school that's also strong in their faith. Being able to see not only Coach Johnson but Coach Ryan Day emphasize we can't be here without God is something special."

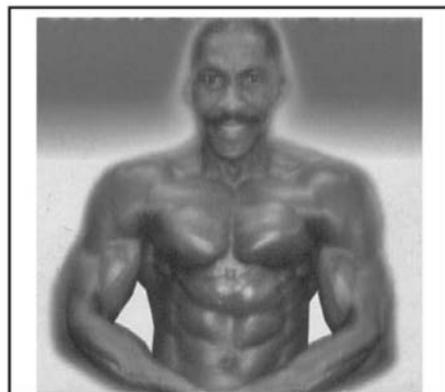
Fakatou scheduled an official visit to Ohio State for May 29, and he also has some set with Texas, Michigan and Oregon at this point, although those dates haven't been revealed.

He is considered the 35th-best prospect in the 2027 class, the No. 2 defensive lineman and the No. 3 player in California.

The director of scouting for 247Sports, Andrew Ivins, was very high on Fakatou in his scouting report on their website.

"Rugged defensive lineman with a sky-scraping frame and a wide base that wins primarily with effort and energy," Ivins wrote. "Has gotten snaps out of a variety of different alignments, but is frequently featured as a 5-technique in a four-man front where he powers his way into the backfield with his raw strength."

Johnson is already off to a very strong start in the 2027 class with the No. 4 overall prospect in the class committed to the Buckeyes, Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star edge rusher DJ Jacobs (6-5, 235), so Fakatou joining the Buckeyes



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OSU Football 2027 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2027 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	★★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Quinton Cypher	LB	6-2	220	★★★★	Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.
DJ Jacobs	DL	6-5	225	★★★★★	Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity
Eli Johnson	S	6-3	200	★★★★	Cibolo (Texas) Steele
Brody McNeel	OT	6-5	285	★★★★	Richmond (Va.) Godwin
Angelo Smith	S	5-10	170	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
Mason Wilt	OT	6-5	265	★★★	St. Clairsville, Ohio
Kellen Wymer	OT	6-5	265	★★★★	Liberty Center, Ohio

OSU Football 2028 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2028 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Elijah Newman-Hall	RB	5-11	195	★★★★	Tampa (Fla.) Blake
Jameer Whyce	DL	6-4	270	★★★★★	Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison

would immediately have them in contention for the strongest defensive line class in the cycle if both end up signing with OSU.

'27 TE Decommits From Virginia

Another spring visitor for the Buckeyes, Lawrenceville, N.J., three-star tight end Sean Currie (6-7, 230) was committed to Virginia when he was on the Ohio State campus.

However, after heading back home, he

decided that he was going to decommit from the Cavaliers and explore his options. The timing of his decision could be purely coincidental, but most likely the Buckeyes are in the mix for the tight end now that he has reopened his recruitment.

Currie told Bucknuts that he was able to meet with tight ends coach Keenan Bailey and new OSU offensive coordinator Arthur Smith during his trip. When Smith was hired by Ohio State, Currie was the

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first recruit he reached out to.

"I talked to him a couple times (on the visit), I've also called him a couple times," Currie told Bucknuts. "He said he loved watching my film and I'm definitely a guy who can help him in his pro-style running scheme and I'm a guy who can go outside and get mismatches."

The three-star is considering Penn State, Texas A&M and Rutgers, as well as Ohio State, while not completely taking Virginia out of the running.

Currie did well as a receiving tight end last season as a junior, catching 34 passes for 474 yards and eight touchdowns. He is considered the No. 527 player in the country, the No. 31 tight end and the No. 13 player in New Jersey.

Other tight ends the Buckeyes are still in the mix for are Libertyville, Ill., four-star Brock Williams (6-5, 210), who is the No. 67 player in the country, and Columbus St. Francis DeSales four-star Jordan Karhoff (6-4, 215), the No. 247 player in the country, among others.

Henderson Includes OSU In Top Five

Ohio State and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis have themselves in the running for the top linebacker in the 2027 class after he decided to reveal a top five.

Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit five-star Kaden Henderson (6-2, 218) is down to Alabama, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame, Ohio State and Texas A&M.

"I feel like they have one of the best coaching staffs in the nation," Henderson told Eleven Warriors when he was in Columbus for a recruiting camp over the summer. "Every single (visit) I'm up here, I get a little bit of nuggets of knowledge and I get a grasp of how they feel about me and I know I'm definitely a top priority for them,"

Ivins writes that Henderson is more of a natural Will linebacker who can cover well and also rush the passer. The versatility that he has at the position wouldn't be foreign for the Buckeyes since many of their linebackers in recent years have ex-

celled in multiple areas.

Henderson is considered the No. 24 player in the country, the No. 1 linebacker and the No. 3 player in Florida.

On March 9, Miami football recruiting analyst Gaby Urrutia made a prediction that Henderson would ultimately land with the Hurricanes, but there is still a lot of time for Laurinaitis to stay in Henderson's ear and try to get him on campus again.

Other Recruits Narrowing Options

Three other recruits narrowed down their list of schools since BSB last went to press.

The first of them was Louisville, Miss., four-star defensive lineman Mitchell Turner, who is down to eight programs. He included Ohio State along with Alabama, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Mississippi State, Ole Miss and Texas.

Turner is considered the No. 78 recruit in the country, the No. 7 defensive lineman and the No. 4 player in Mississippi. As BSB went to press, the 2027 prospect had official visits scheduled for Alabama, Ole Miss, Texas and Mississippi State. In the 2025 season, Turner had 103 total tackles, 41 tackles for loss, 15½ sacks, two passes broken up, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery.

The next to narrow their schools down was Indianapolis Warren Central four-star safety Kaleb Elkins (6-3, 185), also of the 2027 class. He is down to six schools, with Indiana, Missouri, Ohio State, Oregon, Tennessee and Vanderbilt on his list.

Elkins is the No. 273 player in the country, the No. 25 safety and the No. 5 player in Indiana. If he does ultimately land with OSU, he would join Cibolo (Texas) Steele four-star Eli Johnson (6-3, 200) and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna three-star Angelo Smith (5-10, 170) in the safety room of Ohio State's 2027 class.

Getting his list down to four schools was Boca Raton (Fla.) West four-star defensive lineman Jamar Thompson, who included OSU in his final four along with Auburn, Miami and Michigan. He is the No. 177 player in the 2027 class, the No. 19 defensive lineman and the No. 19 player

in Florida.

Buckeyes Give Out More Offers

The Buckeyes have also remained active in giving scholarship offers to prospects since BSB last went to press.

Oakdale (Conn.) St. Thomas More four-star defensive lineman Marvin Nguetsop (6-8, 268) – Ranked as the No. 383 player in the country and the No. 45 defensive lineman, Nguetsop was one of many players to get an offer from OSU. He has official visits already scheduled for Michigan State and Ole Miss, but now that the Buckeyes are in the mix, he might want to get to Columbus at some point.

Hattiesburg (Miss.) Oak Grove defensive lineman Andrae Maddox (6-2, 265) – Maddox is unranked currently in the 2028 class and holds eight Division I offers. Those are from Alabama, Auburn, Nebraska, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Texas A&M, UTSA and Kennesaw State.

Lafayette (La.) Christian Academy running back Caiden Bellard (5-10, 190) – Bellard is one of many 2028 prospects who has been offered by running backs coach Carlos Locklyn. He is currently unranked, but holds 10 Division I offers. The Power Four offers are from Florida State, Houston, Illinois, LSU, Ohio State and TCU.

Baltimore Mergenthaler Vocational three-star wide receiver Brandon Jefferson (6-1, 180) – New wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton remained active with his offers, giving one to Jefferson, the No. 174 player in the 2028 class and the No. 31 wide receiver. As a freshman in 2024, he had 51 receptions for 837 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Louisville, Miss., five-star running back Zaiden Jernigan (5-11, 195) – Locklyn also got the Buckeyes involved in the sweepstakes for Jernigan, who is considered the No. 19 player in the 2028 class and the top running back currently. He holds 14 Division I offers, which include Alabama, Florida State, Nebraska, Ole Miss, Texas A&M and Notre Dame.

Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge four-star safety Jaelyn Easterling-Flores (6-2,

180) – Guerrieri offered Easterling-Flores, the No. 110 player in the country and the No. 9 safety, since BSB last went to press. The four-star in the 2028 class already holds 28 Division I offers, a list that is sure to grow as his high school career continues.

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star defensive end Wyatt Smith (6-6, 235) – Smith is considered the No. 75 player in the 2027 class and the No. 10 defensive end, with 26 offers on his plate. Ivins describes Smith as a "throwback defensive end with exceptional size and exceptional testing metrics." As a junior, he was a MaxPreps All-American with 155 tackles, 24 tackles for loss, 33 quarterback hurries, 13 sacks, two passes broken up and two forced fumbles.

Duncanville, Texas, four-star wide receiver Trenton Yancey (5-11, 190) – Yancey is the No. 244 player in the 2027 class and the No. 32 wide receiver. He holds 39 Division I offers, most of which are from Power Four programs. He also ran track in his first two years in high school, posting times of 11.23 seconds in the 100-meter dash and 22.23 seconds in the 200-meter dash as a sophomore.

Frisco, Texas, three-star running back Brennen Lacey (6-0, 190) – While Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205) is still undoubtedly Locklyn's top priority in the 2027 class, the coach has also offered Lacey, who is the No. 526 player in the country and the No. 39 running back. The recruitment of Gabriel-Georges very likely will not affect the recruitment of Lacey or other backs who aren't ranked among the top in the country.

Prattville, Ala., four-star wide receiver Deshawn Hall (6-5, 185) – Hall is the No. 217 player in the country and the No. 27 wide receiver. The 2027 prospect has 28 Division I offers and also has offers from Division I basketball programs. He self-reports basketball offers from Cincinnati, Mississippi State, UCF, Jackson State and Alabama State after being named the Alabama AISA Player of the Year as a sophomore. As a junior in his football season, he caught 40 passes for 660 yards

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Allen Trieu of Rivals

Chicago Brother Rice four-star defensive lineman Brayden Parks (6-3, 305) is one of many prospects who have scheduled an official visit to Ohio State over the summer. Have you been able to see him play? What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I have seen him play. I saw him in a game and I also saw him at Irish Invasion last year at Notre Dame. That was a loaded camp full of national guys and I could make the argument that he was the best player at that camp. He's really good. He's ranked pretty high by the recruiting sites and for me, would be a little bit even higher than where the sites have him. He's a very athletic, big man. It's hard to find those kinds of body types up in this region. Usually, Ohio State has to go east or south to find these guys, so it's nice to have one in the Midwest. He's an elite national prospect."

Are there any visitors coming to Columbus this spring who Buckeye fans should keep an eye on?

"The obvious one is Cleveland Brush three-star edge rusher Munir Lewis (6-5, 245). He just visited and got an offer. He's going to visit again, either for the spring game or an official

visit, or both. I would say he's a huge one because I think Ohio State has some ties there to where maybe you can get him. I think they would like to get him wrapped up before he takes some officials to other schools. We'll see if that happens. Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195) is a big one. He's one of the top receivers in the country and he's going to be coming in for an official visit, so he's one to keep an eye on. La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy three-star interior offensive lineman Luke Injaychock (6-5, 285) is another one who is going to get to campus."

Where does Ohio State stand in the recruitment of Injaychock? What is it about him that OSU likes?

"I think they arguably could lead for him. If they don't, I think Missouri has kind of increased and made a good pitch at him. He's going to visit Illinois in-state, but I think Ohio State has a good advantage there. They were one of his first major offers. He's been to campus several times and has a really good relationship with (offensive line coach) Tyler Bowen, who I think identified him before some of these other schools did. He comes from one of the best high school programs in Illinois,

has played a lot of football for them, and had no sacks allowed last year. He brings some versatility as well. When he first came along, we had him pegged as a guard, but he's kept growing to where he's now nearly 6-6 and could possibly play tackle as well. So he fits the mold of what coach Bowen likes in that he's not stuck in one offensive line position."

As you mentioned, Ohio State offered Munir Lewis when he was on campus for a spring visit. What do you make of him as a prospect?

"He's a really good athlete. He fits the mold of what schools are looking for in a pass rusher. He's got a 6-5 frame, but he's a guy who moves that very well and fluidly. He's bendy and flexible enough to turn the corner and get to the quarterback. He's got a great motor as well - you have to at that position, I mean, the guy plays at 100 miles per hour. I think that's why we've seen him increase his offer list so much in the winter months because it's a total premium for schools to be able to get heat on the quarterback and that's something he does extremely well."

and five touchdowns in 10 games.

Other Notes And Tidbits

Chicago Brother Rice four-star defensive lineman Brayden Parks (6-3, 305)

has an official visit to Ohio State scheduled for May 29. He is one of many prospects who have scheduled to get to Columbus over the summer. Parks is the No. 179 player in the country and the No. 20 defensive lineman and will also get to Notre Dame (June 12) and Oregon (June

19)

Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley five-star cornerback John Meredith III has also scheduled an official visit to Ohio State. He will be in Columbus the weekend of June 19, which is currently his last scheduled official visit. He will also get

to Alabama (May 29), Texas (June 5) and Texas A&M (June 12). Meredith would be a major addition if the Buckeyes can successfully pull him out of the Lone Star State, as he is the No. 2 player in the class and the top-ranked cornerback.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1991

Being a football player from a school more renowned for its basketball tradition, Jason Louis said he was eager to prove he was no aberration.

"I'd like to prove that we play a pretty good style of football as well as basketball," Louis said. "Hopefully, by the time I'm through at Ohio State, nobody will say I come from a basketball school."

The defensive back was recruited by the Buckeyes out of DeMatha High School in Hyattsville, Md. And although DeMatha traditionally had one of the top high school cage programs in the country, the grid program was improving by leaps and bounds.

In 1991 alone, DeMatha sent 15 players to Division I programs, something which made head coach Bill McGregor extremely proud.

"There are a lot of high school programs who would be happy to say they sent 15 players to Division I colleges in their history," he said. "We've done that in one year and we're very proud of that fact."

30 Years Ago — 1996

Ohio State would have one more incoming freshman in the fall, although he was targeted for walk-on status as a freshman.

Akron Garfield lineman Lafayette Martin issued a commitment to Ohio State on his 18th birthday, March 7.

Martin was well acquainted with the OSU program. OSU sophomore-to-be Antoine Winfield was a high school teammate. Also, Martin was a member of the Young Scholars program, which steered him toward Ohio State.

"Lafayette is not going to be on football scholarship for at least his first year," said Garfield coach Bill McGee. "He is in a program, Young Scholars, and that is designed for inner-city kids. He will receive a partial scholarship through that program as a freshman."

OSU had already signed a group of 26 players for the 1996 class.

"I'm really looking forward to the chance to play at Ohio State," Martin said. "It's something that I've thought about even as a kid."

25 Years Ago — 2001

Piqua, Ohio, defensive lineman Quinn Pitcock was considered one of the top-five prospects in the state by Ohio's Future Stars.

He was a two-time All-Ohio player in Division II. As a sophomore, he had 14 sacks and 20 tackles for loss and blocked four punts. The following season, he upped those totals to 15 sacks, and 26 tackles for loss for a 12-3 team that lost to Olmsted Falls in the Division II state championship game.

Pitcock was among a collection of prospects who visited OSU for junior day in early February.

"It was pretty cool," Pitcock said of his OSU visit. "The facilities there are pretty nice and everything was good."

According to Pitcock, he had a scholarship offer from OSU for more than a year.

"They actually offered me during my sophomore year verbally," he said. "I've gotten two letters from them offering me again, one from John Cooper and one from Jim Tressel."

20 Years Ago — 2006

Less than a week after receiving word that the Buckeyes would be offering him a scholarship, Detroit Cass Tech's Joseph Barksdale made the trip south to check out Ohio State firsthand during Pro Day.

The defensive tackle prospect spotted a few NFL general managers at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and said Chicago Bears head coach Lovie Smith was the one coach who stood out to him. But the highlight was not meeting just the Buckeyes who were working out for the pro scouts, but also the OSU coaching staff and the numerous players who were watching their former teammates perform.

"I basically met the whole team," Barksdale told BSB. "We were there for a while. We got around to meeting the whole coaching staff. It was a very pleasant experience."

15 Years Ago — 2011

Not long after Jim Tressel's two-game suspension for the 2011 season was made public, the Ohio State head coach took a phone call from the most recent player to commit to his most recent recruiting class.

On the line was Curtis Grant, a five-star outside linebacker from Richmond (Va.) Hermitage, who pledged to the Buckeyes on national television on National Signing Day. After learning that his future coach would be suspended for the first two games of his career, Grant was a little concerned.

By the time the conversation was over, however, the linebacker had no further worries.

"It sounded like an honest answer to me when he said he was trying to protect his players," Grant told BSB. "That's one thing he told my mom he was going to do when he was recruiting me. I respected him for that. I'm really not mad about the situation or anything. I still want to go up there and play for Coach Tressel and do what I've got to do to help the team win championships."

10 Years Ago — 2016

Ohio State continued to show that this had the chance to be a recruiting class unlike any other. The Buckeyes followed a commitment from Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star defensive tackle Haskell Garrett by landing Ann Arbor (Mich.) Pioneer four-star outside linebacker Antjuan Simmons and La Grange, Texas, four-star athlete J.K. Dobbins, the latter of whom was projected as a running back.

Those two commitments pushed Ohio State up to 13 commits for the class of 2017, giving the Buckeyes a stranglehold on the No. 1 spot in the team recruiting rankings. The March 1 commitment from Simmons, who attended school across the street from Michigan Stadium, came at a time when the Wolverines and head coach Jim Harbaugh were down in Florida for spring practice. Pioneer head coach Jari Brown said the Buckeyes - led by cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs, who recruited Michigan for OSU - put themselves in good position with Simmons long before he committed.

"I didn't know he was going to make his decision now, but I knew that if he was going to make it now it was going to be Ohio State," Brown told BSB. "Ohio State won over him and his family because they took the time to get to know him."

Five Years Ago — 2021

Ohio State landed a commitment on Feb. 28 from Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes, who was in the middle of a three-day unofficial visit to Columbus.

Grayes was considered the 17th-best wide receiver and No. 127 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He caught 28 passes for 556 yards and 10 touchdowns to lead the Wolves to the state championship last season.

A one-time Arizona commit, Grayes was a relatively unknown prospect when he landed a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes in October. But since then, he picked up offers from the likes of Auburn, LSU, Nebraska, Oregon, Penn State, Texas, USC and Utah.

Grayes had garnered numerous comparisons to current Ohio State wide receiver Chris Olave due to his rise through the recruiting rankings (from No. 521 overall at the time of his offer), as well as his overall frame and interest in the Buckeyes.

One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State earned its first commitment in the 2026 class in over two months when Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley pledged his services to the Buckeyes on March 10.

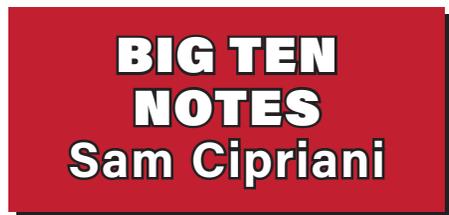
"I can't believe God gave me the opportunity to be a Buckeye," Riley posted on Twitter to announce his commitment. "As a kid from Avon Lake, Ohio, it was always my goal to play for the world-famous Buckeyes. Thank you to Coach (Ryan) Day and (offensive line coach) Tyler Bowen for believing in me."

He had been saying that he wanted to make his decision early in the year, but when Bowen was hired as the new offensive line coach, he pushed that back slightly so that he could get to know him a little more.

Riley was deciding between Ohio State and Clemson and had unofficial visits scheduled to both schools during spring ball, but he apparently had seen enough to make up his mind.

UCLA Claims B1G Women's Championship

UCLA women's basketball capped off a perfect conference season with a dominant 3-0 run to claim the Big Ten tournament championship on March 8.



The No. 1-seeded Bruins began their tournament with a 78-60 win over No. 8 Washington on March 6, before ousting the No. 5 Ohio State 72-62 the following day in the semifinal.

UCLA then claimed the conference title with a 96-45 thrashing of No. 2 Iowa in the Big Ten championship game. The 51-point margin of victory was the largest scoring difference in a Big Ten tournament final in conference history. The Bruins shot 40 for 63 from the field and UCLA's 63.5 shooting percentage marked the highest field goal percentage ever recorded in a Big Ten tournament game.

The championship marked the second straight year the tournament's No. 1 and No. 2 seeds met in the final and UCLA became the first top-seeded team to win the Big Ten tournament since 2021.

The Bruins also clinched back-to-back conference tournament titles for the first time in school history, claiming their first Big Ten title a year ago in UCLA's first season in the conference.

UCLA's 31-1 record marked the Bruins' second consecutive 30-win season and

currently stands as the second most wins in program history, trailing only the team's 34-3 mark in 2024-25.

UCLA guard Kiki Rice was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player. Rice and Bruins center Lauren Betts represented UCLA on the All-Tournament team along with Ohio State guard Chance Gray and Iowa teammates, forward Hannah Stuelke and guard Ava Heiden.

With the win, UCLA secured the Big Ten's automatic berth to the NCAA tournament. The Bruins secured a No. 1 seed in the national tournament and will face No. 16-seeded Cal Baptist on March 15.

On the men's side, No. 7 Purdue defeated No. 1 Michigan in the conference championship, 80-72, to capture the title.

B1G Hands Out Postseason Awards

The Big Ten released its postseason awards for women's and men's basketball, including the all-conference teams and individual honors.

Headlining the conference's women's basketball awards, which were announced on March 3, was UCLA's Betts. The Bruins' dominant center claimed both Big Ten Player of the Year and Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year honors, leading UCLA to a perfect record in conference play while averaging 16.7 points and 8.6 rebounds in the regular season.

Betts wasn't the only Bruin to claim a postseason award. UCLA forward Angela Dugalic earned the conference's Sixth Player of the Year award and head coach Cori Close was selected as Coach of the Year.

USC guard Jazzy Davidson was named

Freshman of the Year after averaging 17.9 points, 5.9 rebounds and 4.3 assists, while being honored as one of eight unanimous first-team All-Big Ten selections. That group also included UCLA's Betts and Rice, Iowa's Heiden, Illinois forward Berry Wallace, Ohio State guard Jaloni Cambridge, Michigan guard Olivia Olson and Washington guard Sayvia Sellers.

Rounding out the women's first-team selections were Maryland guard Oluchi Okananwa and Wolverines guard Syla Swords.

On March 12, the men's Big Ten postseason awards were announced, with Michigan forward Yaxel Lendeborg earning Player of the Year honors after averaging 14.7 points, 7.2 rebounds, and 3.2 assists per game.

Lendeborg's teammate with the Wolverines, center Aday Mara, earned the conference's Defensive Player of the Year honors after averaging 2.6 blocks per game, which ranked fifth nationally and first in the Big Ten.

Illinois guard Keaton Wagler earned the Big Ten's Freshman of the Year nomination, while Nebraska forward Braden Frager was named the conference's Sixth Man of the Year.

Nebraska head coach Fred Hoiberg was the coaches' selection for Big Ten Coach of the Year, while Michigan head coach Dusty May earned the media's Coach of the Year honor.

Lendeborg and Wagler were each named to the Big Ten's first team, joining Purdue guard Braden Smith, Nebraska forward Pryce Sandfort and Michigan State guard Jeremy Fears Jr.

Hoiberg Gets Contract Extension

After leading Nebraska men's basketball to a school-record 26 wins in the regular season, Hoiberg has agreed to a three-year contract extension with the university, the school announced on March 9.

Hoiberg's contract now runs through the 2031-32 season, following a prior two-year extension he signed in 2024.

"Fred Hoiberg is a tremendous representative of the University of Nebraska, the Lincoln community and our state," Nebraska athletic director Troy Dannen said. "We are extremely proud that he will continue to lead the Nebraska men's basketball program well into the future. Fred has built this program step by step, and his leadership has positioned Nebraska to continue to compete at a high level in the Big Ten Conference and nationally. Fred is one of the most respected coaches in the country by his peers and his success has been recognized throughout the college basketball world."

The extension was signed days before the Big Ten tournament, where Nebraska earned the No. 2 seed after a program-record 15 conference wins. The Cornhuskers' No. 2 seed marked the program's best conference finish since the 1992-93 season in the Big Eight.

However, the Cornhuskers were knocked out in the quarterfinals when they matched up against Purdue, falling 81-68.

Nebraska defied expectations after being picked to finish 14th in the conference in the league's unofficial media poll, but finished the season ranked second with a 26-5 overall record and spent much of the winter

BIG Men's Basketball Tournament

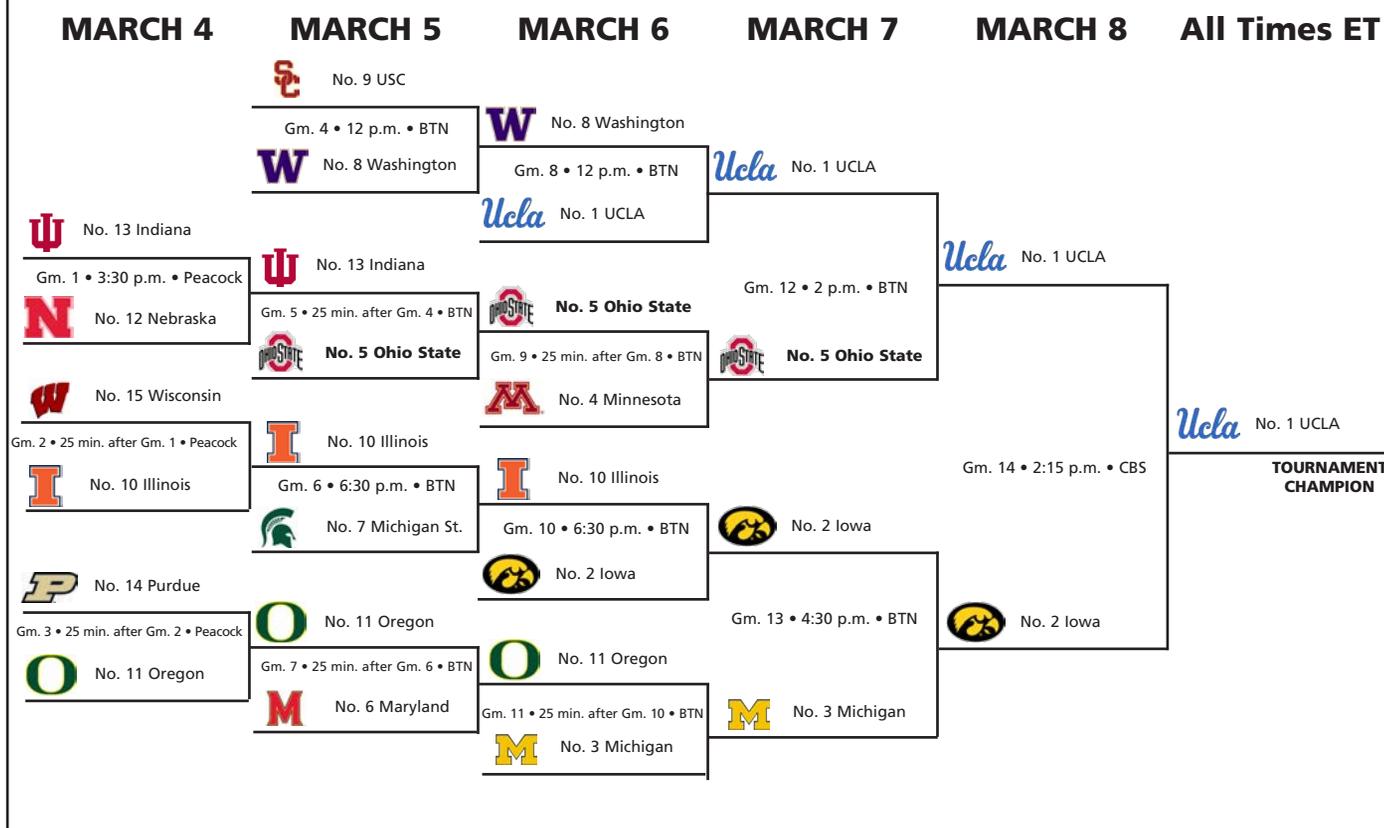
March 12-16 • Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis

MARCH 10	MARCH 11	MARCH 12	MARCH 13	MARCH 14	MARCH 15	All Times ET
<p>M No. 17 Maryland Gm. 1 • 5 p.m. • Peacock</p> <p>O No. 16 Oregon</p>	<p>M No. 17 Maryland Gm. 3 • Noon • Peacock</p> <p>I No. 9 Iowa</p>	<p>I No. 9 Iowa Gm. 7 • Noon • BTN</p> <p>OS No. 8 Ohio State</p>	<p>OS No. 8 Ohio State Gm. 11 • Noon • BTN</p> <p>M No. 1 Michigan</p>	<p>M No. 1 Michigan Gm. 15 • 1 p.m. • CBS</p>	<p>M No. 1 Michigan</p>	
	<p>SC No. 13 USC Gm. 4 • 25 min. after Gm. 3</p> <p>W No. 12 Washington</p>	<p>W No. 12 Washington Gm. 8 • 25 min. after Gm. 7</p> <p>W No. 5 Wisconsin</p>	<p>W No. 5 Wisconsin Gm. 12 • 25 min. after Gm. 11 • BTN</p> <p>I No. 4 Illinois</p>	<p>W No. 5 Wisconsin Gm. 16 • 25 min. after Gm. 15 • CBS</p>		
<p>PS No. 18 Penn State Gm. 2 • 25 min. after Gm. 1 • Peacock</p> <p>N No. 15 Northwestern</p>	<p>N No. 15 Northwestern Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN</p> <p>I No. 10 Indiana</p>	<p>N No. 15 Northwestern Gm. 9 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN</p> <p>P No. 7 Purdue</p>	<p>P No. 7 Purdue Gm. 13 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN</p> <p>N No. 2 Nebraska</p>	<p>P No. 7 Purdue</p>		
<p>R No. 14 Rutgers Gm. 6 • 25 min. after Gm. 5 • Peacock</p> <p>M No. 11 Minnesota</p>	<p>R No. 14 Rutgers Gm. 10 • 25 min. after Gm. 9 • BTN</p> <p>Ucla No. 6 UCLA</p>	<p>R No. 14 Rutgers Gm. 14 • 25 min. after Gm. 13 • BTN</p> <p>Ucla No. 6 UCLA</p>	<p>Ucla No. 6 UCLA Gm. 14 • 25 min. after Gm. 13 • BTN</p> <p>MS No. 3 Michigan State</p>	<p>Ucla No. 6 UCLA</p>		
					<p>P No. 7 Purdue</p>	<p>P No. 7 Purdue</p> <p>TOURNAMENT CHAMPION</p>



Women's Basketball Tournament

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ranked in the national polls.

The Cornhuskers climbed as high as No. 5 in the Week 12 AP poll on Jan. 26, marking the program's highest all-time ranking in the poll.

Hoiberg said he's focused on building on the momentum of this season and continuing to develop his players both on and off the court.

"We have a long family history with the University of Nebraska, and the support we have received over the last seven years is truly remarkable," Hoiberg said. "We are blessed with world-class facilities, but the people are what make Nebraska special. Our goal is to continue building a program that our fans can embrace and have pride in because it represents the values of Nebraska."

Nebraska was awarded for its solid season with a 4 seed in the NCAA Tournament, and will play 13 seed Troy on March 19 in the first round. If the Cornhuskers win that game, it would be the first-ever victory in the NCAA Tournament for the program.

B1G Sends NCAA Letter Regarding Tampering

The Big Ten formally requested that the NCAA put a stop to tampering investigations and infractions proceedings in a letter to NCAA president Charlie Baker on March 11, according to ESPN's Pete Thamel.

The conference cited the need to "comprehensively reevaluate" its tampering rules, which it says were "designed for a world that no longer exists."

The Big Ten's letter to the NCAA arrives weeks after Yahoo Sports' Ross Dellenger reported on Feb. 26 that the NCAA planned to crack down on tampering, following a memo sent to schools late last month warning of "significant penalties" for violations.

One of the Big Ten's most prominent requests in the letter is a call to pause enforcement of NCAA bylaw 13.1.1.4, which prohibits schools from contacting athletes

at other institutions without permission.

The conference argued that the rules punish athletes who enter the transfer portal, which can, in turn, threaten scholarships, NIL deals, and individual support, while blocking pre-portal communication forces these athletes to take uncertain risks without knowing if they'll have a spot elsewhere.

"The fundamental structural problem is this: the current framework has chosen to impose significant negative consequences on student-athletes who enter the transfer portal – loss of scholarships, NIL arrangements, facilities access, academic support, and relationships with coaches – while simultaneously prohibiting the pre-portal communication that would allow those student-athletes to determine whether risking those consequences is worthwhile," the letter reads.

"These rules were not designed for a world in which student-athletes are compensated market participants making annual decisions with significant economic consequences. The collision between the old rules and the new reality is producing outcomes that harm the very population the rules were designed to protect."

Despite the request, the NCAA responded on March 12 that enforcement of the rules will continue, with three of the other four Power Four conferences having voiced their support for ongoing investigations.

Big 12 commissioner Brett Yormark told Yahoo Sports he is "adamantly opposed" to pausing enforcement, while ACC commissioner Jim Phillips released a statement fully backing NCAA efforts.

The Big Ten's call for a moratorium would require approval from the Division I board of directors, a move that appears unlikely.

"There have been no changes in tampering rules, and there is no moratorium on enforcement activity for possible tampering violations," NCAA spokesperson

Meghan Durham Wright told On3's Pete Nakos. "Any changes to the infractions process – or a moratorium on enforcement of certain rules – would need to be approved by the Division I board of directors. The NCAA is committed to enforcing the rules as agreed to by NCAA member schools and will always work with members to ensure fair competition and to protect student-athlete well-being in this new era of college sports."

Shiver Claims Moore Manipulated Her

Former Michigan football head coach Sherrone Moore's ex-executive assistant Paige Shiver said through her attorneys that Moore used his position to "harass,

manipulate and exploit" her for years, according to a March 9 report from the Detroit Free Press.

Shiver, who had not previously spoken publicly about the case, believes Michigan failed to prevent Moore from abusing his authority as her supervisor, according to the statement released by her lawyers.

Shiver is the woman with whom Moore had an affair and whose home the former coach entered after he was fired. Until now, she had not publicly identified herself in connection with Moore or his criminal case.

Her lawyers, Andrew M. Stroth and Steven A. Hart, sent the statement on March 6, hours after Moore and prosecutors agreed to a deal where the former coach pleaded no contest to two misdemeanors.

"This case is about far more than one terrifying incident. It raises urgent and troubling questions about how a powerful figure within a major university athletic program was able to engage in years of inappropriate conduct toward a subordinate without meaningful intervention or oversight," the statement read.

"Our client believes strongly that she may not be the only person who experienced inappropriate, coercive, or predatory behavior from this individual."

Moore pleaded no contest on March 6 to misdemeanor charges of malicious use of a telecommunications service and trespassing after prosecutors dropped a felony charge and two other misdemeanors. He is not expected to face jail time at his sentencing on April 14.

Stroth said on March 7 that Shiver held off from speaking publicly until now because she was waiting for the criminal case to be closed.

"The University of Michigan is one of the most well-regarded institutions in the world, yet they have an athletic department that has a pattern and practice of systemic failures," Stroth said. "Our pursuit on behalf of Ms. Shiver is to get some level of accountability and justice so this doesn't happen to other individuals."



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Buckeyes Strengthened Résumé With Win Streak

After beating Purdue on March 1, the Ohio State basketball team continued its hot stretch since BSB last went to press.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

That started with a 94-62 win over Penn State in State College, Pa., on March 4, in which the Buckeyes made 16 of 23 shots from beyond the arc (69.6 percent) largely fueled by an 8-of-9 performance from sophomore guard John Mobley Jr.

While it was the best shooting game that Mobley has had in his career, senior guard Bruce Thornton wasn't surprised as he watched it happen.

"Yes, because I see that in practice," Thornton said when asked if he had ever seen someone shoot so well. "We have a drill called NBA shooting and he got close to (making) 88 or 89 out of 100. That's what he works on each and every day. We all know he's got high-level shooting and it went his way at Penn State."

The win over the Nittany Lions made it the first time the Buckeyes won two games in a row since they had a Jan. 17 win over UCLA and a Jan. 20 overtime victory over Minnesota.

But they weren't finished there, either. Still on the bubble of the NCAA Tournament, Ohio State came back home for Senior Day against Indiana and had a convincing 91-78 win in which it led by double digits for over half of the game.

After that victory, most college basketball analysts had Ohio State making it into the tournament, even if it had gone on to lose its first game in the Big Ten tournament.

Even before the win over Indiana, head coach Jake Diebler believed the Buckeyes deserved to make an appearance in March Madness, if only based on some of the metrics the analysts use.

"Our metrics and all that stuff will speak for themselves," Diebler said. "We're in a good position from a NET (ranking standpoint) and that WAB (Wins Above Bubble) stat that they're talking about. So, I like where we're at, but, you know what, we have to focus on the task at hand and that's a big game against Indiana on Saturday."

But the Buckeyes continued to

2025-26 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

21-12 Overall (12-8 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 13

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	33-33	1201-36.4	234-419	.558	60-150	.400	139-168	.827	31-138	169-5.1	59-0	129	43	8	38	667-20.2
MOBLEY JR., John	30-30	943-31.4	149-342	.436	94-225	.418	79-91	.868	11-61	72-2.4	53-0	81	56	3	23	471-15.7
ROYAL, Devin	31-31	1000-32.3	146-307	.476	31-97	.320	101-127	.795	50-127	177-5.7	84-3	52	54	5	20	424-13.7
TILLY, Christoph	31-31	801-25.8	110-229	.480	13-55	.236	109-150	.727	42-103	145-4.7	99-4	68	47	16	19	342-11.0
BYNUM, Amare	33-23	934-28.3	124-247	.502	28-88	.318	43-59	.729	37-122	159-4.8	86-3	35	37	26	20	319-9.7
NOEL, Brandon	15-10	299-19.9	46-73	.630	3-15	.200	11-15	.733	19-40	59-3.9	22-0	14	16	3	5	106-7.1
CHATMAN, Taison	27-3	357-13.2	40-85	.471	24-51	.471	17-20	.850	6-26	32-1.2	36-1	23	20	3	10	121-4.5
NJEGOVAN, Ivan	29-2	341-11.8	29-51	.569	2-3	.667	19-29	.655	29-61	90-3.1	49-2	20	17	12	4	79-2.7
JOHNSON, Puff	9-1	104-11.5	6-18	.333	3-7	.429	6-9	.667	6-4	10-1.1	18-0	1	4	0	1	21-2.3
CUPPS, Gabe	32-0	401-12.5	16-43	.372	6-25	.240	14-19	.737	6-31	37-1.2	49-0	36	21	1	12	52-1.6
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	29-1	252-8.7	11-28	.393	2-18	.111	1-5	.200	10-19	29-1.0	27-0	12	5	2	8	25-0.9
NASH, Braylen	6-0	08-1.3	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	1	0	0	0	0-0.0
Team									59-54	113			22			
Total	33	6675	912-1850	.493	267-741	.360	542-699	.775	307-790	1097-33.2	584-13	474	343	79	161	2633-79.8
Opponents	33	6675	833-1896	.439	242-765	.316	494-665	.743	338-691	1029-31.2	623-13	445	350	98	181	2402-72.8

strengthen their résumé with a win over Iowa in the Big Ten tournament to move on to the quarterfinals, improving the metrics Diebler referenced even more.

The fact that they had lost to Iowa so badly in the regular season on Feb. 25, which seems to have been a turning point for OSU, was not any motivation that the Buckeyes needed, according to Diebler.

"No, it was just another opportunity for us," Diebler said when asked if he pushed the fact that it could have been dubbed a revenge game for the Buckeyes. "This team has had a great approach game to game, and we have a high level of respect for every single team in this league. We've played our best when we've taken it one single day at a time.

"This is the Big Ten tournament. You don't need extra motivation. That thought didn't cross my mind."

That win streak ultimately ended with a 71-67 loss to Michigan in the quarterfinals, but not without a fight from Ohio State, which held a lead at one point late in the second half. However, the Buckeyes did enough to make it into their first NCAA Tournament since the 2021-22 season.

As of March 14, a day before the selection show, Ohio State was rated as the No. 26 team by KenPom, which largely measures efficiency, 30th in the NET rankings and 31st in the WAB rankings.

Johnson, Noel Back From Injury

Senior forward Puff Johnson was held out of the game against Penn State with

an undisclosed injury.

He was said to be day-to-day at the time, according to Diebler, but the head coach said that Johnson wasn't thrilled to have to miss his return to Penn State, where he played for two seasons before transferring to Columbus.

Johnson was then held out of the regular-season finale against Indiana and the first game of the Big Ten tournament against Iowa.

Noel has been dealing with a foot injury that he suffered in a Jan. 5 loss to Nebraska, which had him on a scooter, unable to put weight on his injured foot for a while, before he had to wear a walking boot for an extended period of time.

But both Johnson and Noel were able to make their returns to the hardwood in the quarterfinal game against Michigan on March 13.

While the Buckeyes lost, Thornton was happy to finally have Noel back after his extended absence.

"It means a lot," Thornton said. "His presence and his experience of playing college basketball definitely help. It was great to see him back in there today, him playing well and playing hard. I'm just glad he had the opportunity to play again after the injury."

Noel got more time in the game, getting on the floor for close to 12 minutes and going 1 for 3 from the field with two points and two rebounds. Johnson played just two minutes for the Buckeyes in the game and didn't record a stat.

The two will likely be needed in the Buckeyes first round game in the NCAA Tournament on March 19 against No. 9 seed TCU.

But the Buckeyes couldn't play completely healthy that game because, beforehand, sophomore guard Taison Chatman was listed as questionable and ended up not getting into the game.

Then, late in the second half, Tilly came out of a defensive stop limping to the bench. He came out of the game before returning soon after, but needed to be assessed by trainers.

"Taison tried to be out there. He warmed up but couldn't quite get to

where he was comfortable," Diebler said after the loss. "It happened (against Iowa). Every time I walked by the training room, he was getting treatment, but we just couldn't quite get him there for the quick turnaround. We don't anticipate this being a long-term thing.

"As far as Tilly goes, you saw that we had to take him out there at the end. He needed to see our medical team and we needed to make sure we were OK to put him back in before we did. His size not being out there against them hurt. Michigan got an offensive rebound on that possession."

Tilly, Noel, Thornton Honored For Senior Day

Before the win over Indiana on March 7, each of Thornton, Tilly and Noel were honored for the Buckeyes' Senior Day.

While the night was being commemorated with Bruce Thornton bobbleheads for the first 2,000 fans to enter the arena, Diebler said that both Noel and Tilly still deserved to be recognized that night as well.

"Christoph hasn't had one yet, and Brandon's an Ohio kid – young man really, not a kid," Diebler said. "There was never a doubt in my mind of whether they should be honored because of how much they've embraced what we're about and poured themselves into this program."

The night, as expected, was more about Thornton than anyone else, also due to the fact that he broke the all-time Ohio State scoring record, but Noel and Tilly each walked with their families as well and were met with enthusiasm from the sellout crowd.

Both Noel and Tilly have dealt with injuries in their final years of eligibility, Noel's lasting multiple months, and Diebler gave them credit for fighting through those and trying to help the team as much as possible.

"Brandon's injury has been well documented and he missed a lot of time," Diebler said. "But people don't know everything Christoph has been through just to play in some games and to get where he is at this point."

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SONNY BROCKWAY

HONORED — Brandon Noel, Bruce Thornton and Christoph Tilly were recognized on Senior Night before playing Indiana on March 7. Thornton is in his fourth year with the Buckeyes while Noel and Tilly are in their first after transferring from Wright State and Santa Clara, respectively.

Ojianwuna Wants To Return To OSU

When the team was made available in the locker room after the 72-69 win over Iowa in the Big Ten tournament, Adam Jardy of the Columbus Dispatch talked with Baylor transfer Josh Ojianwuna, who continues to recover from a torn ACL he suffered last season with the Bears.

Ojianwuna has just one year of eligibility remaining, but he was able to use a redshirt this season, and he says that he hopes to return to Ohio State next season and play a big role on the 2026-27 team.

"I'm coming back for sure. I'll be back, yep," Ojianwuna told the Dispatch.

While Ojianwuna would have been good for the Buckeyes' depth this season at the center position, they have needed to rely on the duo of Tilly and sophomore center Ivan Njegovan.

That rotation has worked out well enough for Ohio State to make the NCAA Tournament for the first time in four years, but with Tilly's previously mentioned minor injuries, Diebler surely would have liked to have another option to help control the paint.

Ojianwuna was putting up averages of 7.4 points and 6.4 rebounds per game last season before he suffered the injury in a Feb. 8, 2025, game against UCF.

But while he won't play this season, Ojianwuna is hoping to show up as an improved player next year when he puts on the scarlet and gray.

"My goal is to expand my game," he said. "I'm not going to say much on that until next season when you guys see me play. I feel like I have a lot to give to the team. I feel like I'm probably going to play a very big role on this team next year. I'm looking forward to that."

Keels Makes Ohio Basketball HOF

The Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame announced its 2026 class of inductees on March 2, and Ohio State play-by-play announcer Paul Keels is set to be inducted into the hall.

Keels has been on the broadcast for Ohio State men's basketball and football since 1998. He began his broadcasting career in 1979 as a news anchor and reporter for WLW radio in Cincinnati, his hometown.

Since then, he has called Detroit Pistons games as the play-by-play announcer from 1980-81, called Michigan football and basketball games (1981-87), Cincinnati Bearcats (1988, 1994-98) and Cincinnati Bengals games (1996). He also served as the Bengals' preseason announcer on WKRC-TV from 2000 to 2010.

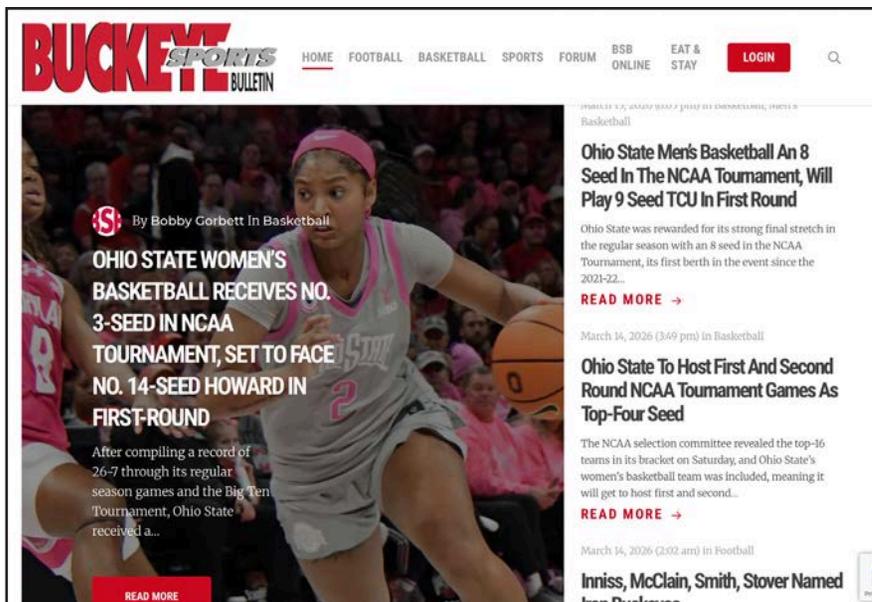
Keels has been named the NSMA Broadcaster of the Year six times (2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2021 and 2023) and was inducted into the Ohio Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2007.

The enshrinement ceremony will take place on June 6 at the Hilton Polaris in Columbus. Keels is joined by 13 other people who will be inducted into the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame that day.

Diebler congratulated Keels after it was revealed he would be headed into the hall.

"He's a great point guard when you're on the radio (with him)," said Diebler, who does his weekly radio show with Keels during the basketball season. "The level of respect is extremely high. He's a legend. His voice is recognizable to any Ohio State fan."

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Buckeyes' Win Streak Secures Tourney Spot

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State was able to earn itself an NCAA Tournament berth for the first time since the 2021-22 basketball season by winning three games since BSB last went to press.

After beating Purdue on March 1, the Buckeyes followed that performance with big victories over Penn State and Indiana to finish the regular season.

They went on to avenge a 17-point regular-season loss to Iowa, beating the Hawkeyes in the Big Ten tournament to make it to the quarterfinals. There, they put up a fight against Michigan, but were unable to come out on top.

OSU Lights Out From Three In Win

Ohio State (19-11, 11-8) had an extremely strong shooting performance in a 94-62 win over Penn State (12-18, 3-16) at the Bryce Jordan Center in State College, Pa., on March 4.

The Buckeyes didn't waste any time in getting out to a huge lead against the Nittany Lions and made 16 three-pointers as a team, eight of them from sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. on nine shots (88.9 percent). As a team, OSU shot 69.6 percent from three-point range (16 of 23).

"Going into this game, we felt like we had to make the extra pass," said coach Jake Diebler after the game. "We felt like we had to play inside out, and I felt like our guys exe-

cuted that at a really high level. Then, when you have a guy like John Mobley on your team, he's capable of breaking the game open with the three-ball."

It didn't take long for the Buckeyes to get out to a lead with freshman forward Amare Bynum making a layup 34 seconds into the game. Senior guard Bruce Thornton made a three-point jumper and senior center Christoph Tilly made a layup for a 7-0 lead at the 18:02 mark.

Penn State scored eight straight points to take an 8-7 lead at 15:32, with seven of those points coming from Ivan Juric.

However, the Buckeyes quickly turned the game around after that, starting with a three-pointer from Mobley. The Nittany Lions made a free throw following Mobley's three, but Ohio State scored 13 straight points, with Thornton's five leading the way, along with another three from Mobley. The Buckeyes held a 23-9 lead with 7:13 left in the first half after that stretch.

But it didn't stop there for OSU. Following two more free throws for Penn State, Thornton started another run with a layup. Bynum and Mobley both scored three points, Mobley's coming from another deep ball, as Ohio State put up 10 unanswered points to give itself a 33-11 lead with 3:44 left in the half.

The Nittany Lions had a field-goal drought of 13:32, allowing the Buckeyes to get out to that 22-point lead.

However, Ohio State still was able to stretch the lead further in the first half, getting it to 28 points, 43-15, with 1:22 left in the



SONNY BROCKWAY

TAKE THAT — Devin Royal (21) shoulders his way to the basket during Ohio State's 72-69 win against Iowa in the Big Ten tournament on March 12 to seal the Buckeyes' first appearance in the NCAA Tournament since the 2021-22 season.

frame thanks to back-to-back three-pointers from Mobley and Tilly.

The Buckeyes went into halftime with a 45-21 lead after a last-second tip-in from Bynum. They far outpaced the Lions on the offensive end with their efficiency, making 18 of the 29 shots they put up (62.1 percent) while Penn State made just four field goals the entire half on 22 tries (18.2 percent), with OSU showing off the defensive improvements it has made lately.

The second half began with the teams trading three-pointers while the Nittany Lions tried to claw their way back into the game, but the Buckeyes refused to let that happen. By 15:11, they had taken their biggest lead of the game, 60-31, on another three-pointer from Mobley.

The lead reached 30-plus points for the first time on the next trip down the floor for the Ohio State offense, with Bynum making a jumper to stretch it to 31.

The deficit stayed at least 28 points, and Mobley made another three to continue his hot shooting night at 5:50, with Thornton following with a jumper to make it an 84-48 game.

Not surprisingly, after his three-point barrage in State College, Mobley led Ohio State with 28 points on an extremely efficient 9-of-12 shooting performance. In addition to his 8 of 9 shots from beyond the arc, he added four assists and four rebounds.

Thornton finished the game with 18 points, making 7 of 8 field goals and dishing out seven assists, while Bynum and junior forward Devin Royal had 14 points apiece and Tilly scored 10. Royal led all players with nine rebounds, helping Ohio State to a 34-14 edge in that department.

Juric and Freddie Dilione V led the Lions with 15 points each.

Thornton Breaks Record On Senior Day

Thornton became the all-time leading

scorer at Ohio State, and the Buckeyes (20-11, 12-8) made their NCAA Tournament resumé much stronger with a 91-78 win over Indiana (18-13, 9-11) on Senior Day at the Schottenstein Center in front of a crowd of 18,809.

The senior needed 12 points going into the game to break Dennis Hopson's career record of 2,096 and got there right before the end of the first half with a three-pointer that gave Ohio State a 17-point lead heading into the locker room.

"When I got that separation (for the shot), then how the crowd reacted, I knew I got it," Thornton said. "It was a great feeling. I was so caught up in the game that I couldn't sit back and take it all in, but I will."

It was Indiana that struck first in the game, taking a 5-0 lead 1:19 into the contest after Lamar Wilkerson made three free throws. But the Buckeyes came back quickly and took a 6-5 lead at 17:16 with four of those points from Mobley.

That lead got to eight points at 14:39 after Mobley made his first deep ball of the game and converted on a free throw after he was fouled on the shot. Sophomore guard Taison Chatman and Bynum got involved with their own three-pointers to make it 22-14, and Tilly had his own three-point play with a layup and a free throw to make it a double-digit lead 25-14 with 10:17 left in the half.

Later, the Hoosiers were able to get back within three points with 7:39 left in the first half, with an 8-0 run, making it 28-25.

However, the Buckeyes answered quickly, with Chatman making another three and Bynum scoring four straight OSU points, including throwing down an emphatic dunk to make it 35-27. A Thornton jumper and two three-pointers from Mobley and Bynum later, the Buckeyes held a 14-point lead, 43-29, with 3:35 left to go in the frame.

Thornton scored the last five points of the half for the Buckeyes, his last bucket coming from beyond the arc with 44 seconds remaining to break Hopson's record. Ohio State held

Ohio State 94, Penn State 62										
March 4, 2026 Bryce Jordan Center • State College, Pa.										
		1	2	F						
Ohio State (19-11, 11-8)		45	49	94						
Penn State (12-18, 3-16)		21	41	62						
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Bynum	25	6-7	1-2	2-4	0	2	14			
Royal	32	5-11	3-5	1-8	2	1	14			
Tilly	20	4-6	1-2	0-6	3	2	10			
Mobley Jr.	31	9-12	2-2	0-4	4	3	28			
Thornton	32	7-8	2-2	1-3	7	1	18			
Njegovan	13	0-0	1-2	0-1	0	5	1			
Chatman	19	2-5	0-0	0-0	2	1	6			
Cupps	17	0-1	0-0	1-2	3	1	0			
White	8	1-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	3			
Nash	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	34-51	10-15	5-29	22	18	94			
Percentages: FG: 66.7%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 16-23 (Mobley 8-9, Chatman 2-4, Royal 1-3, Thornton 2-2, Bynum 1-2, Tilly 1-1, White 1-1, Cupps 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 12 (Bynum 3, Team 3, Cupps 2, Chatman, Mobley, Royal, Tilly). Steals: 5 (Mobley 2, Cupps, Royal, Tilly).										
Penn State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Juric	24	4-5	6-7	0-1	0	4	15			
Reed	30	1-5	1-2	0-2	0	1	3			
Dilione V	33	5-11	2-2	0-0	1	2	15			
Stewart	32	3-7	3-3	0-1	4	3	11			
Rice	27	0-6	0-0	0-2	3	1	0			
Tunca	19	1-5	7-8	0-1	2	0	9			
Ciani	8	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	0	0			
Blackwood	18	2-2	0-0	1-2	0	1	5			
Houser	9	1-3	1-2	0-0	1	2	4			
Totals	200	17-44	20-24	1-13	11	14	62			
Percentages: FG: 38.6%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-19 (Dilione 3-5, Stewart 2-4, Houser 1-2, Juric 1-2, Rice 0-2, Tunca 0-2, Blackwood 1-1, Reed 0-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 10 (Juric 3, Team 2, Tunca 2, Dilione, Rice, Stewart). Steals: 7 (Dilione 2, Tunca 2, Juric, Rice, Stewart). Officials: Dorsey, Pfeifer, Shortt. Attendance: 6,137.										

Ohio State 91, Indiana 78										
March 7, 2026 Value City Arena • Columbus										
		1	2	F						
Indiana (18-13, 9-11)		33	45	78						
Ohio State (20-11, 12-8)		50	41	91						
Indiana	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Alexis	18	5-5	4-5	1-1	0	3	14			
Dorn	16	1-3	0-0	0-0	1	2	3			
DeVries	39	7-14	2-2	1-2	5	2	17			
Wilkerson	40	6-15	4-4	0-3	3	3	18			
Enright	38	4-6	3-4	1-1	5	4	12			
Miles	13	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Bailey	29	5-8	2-4	1-4	0	2	12			
Conerway	7	0-0	2-2	0-2	1	2	2			
Totals	200	28-51	17-21	5-16	15	20	78			
Percentages: FG: 54.9%. FT: 81.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-18 (DeVries 1-7, Wilkerson 2-6, Dorn 1-3, Enright 1-2). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 1 (Wilkerson). Turnovers: 12 (Wilkerson 3, Alexis 2, Dorn 2, Enright 2, Conerway, DeVries, Miles). Steals: 6 (DeVries 3, Alexis, Conerway, Enright).										
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Bynum	35	7-10	2-2	1-8	0	2	18			
Royal	31	3-6	5-5	0-4	2	3	12			
Tilly	20	3-4	1-1	1-0	1	4	7			
Mobley Jr.	36	5-15	5-6	0-2	1	3	18			
Thornton	39	7-9	9-11	0-3	7	1	25			
Chatman	20	4-5	0-0	1-3	0	0	11			
Njegovan	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1	0			
Cupps	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
White	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	29-49	22-25	4-20	12	15	91			
Percentages: FG: 59.2%. FT: 88.0%. Three-point field goals: 11-24 (Mobley 3-11, Chatman 3-4, Thornton 2-4, Bynum 2-3, Royal 1-1, Tilly 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 2 (Bynum, Chatman). Turnovers: 11 (Mobley 4, Team 3, Chatman, Njegovan, Royal, Tilly). Steals: 6 (Bynum 2, Thornton 2, Chatman, Njegovan). Officials: Sciroto, Szelc, Underwood. Attendance: 18,809.										

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 72, Iowa 69									
March 12, 2026 United Center • Chicago									
	1	2	F						
Iowa (21-12)	30	39	69						
Ohio State (21-11)	34	38	72						
Iowa	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Manyawu	22	4-5	1-2	0-1	1	3	9		
Koch	27	3-5	0-0	0-1	1	3	8		
Banks	19	3-6	2-2	0-3	0	4	9		
Combs	20	1-3	0-0	1-2	2	0	3		
Stirtz	38	6-11	3-4	0-1	4	2	17		
Howard	18	2-4	0-0	2-2	1	2	5		
Folgueiras	23	2-4	2-3	1-5	3	0	8		
Sage	18	1-4	5-6	1-1	0	0	8		
Jirak	5	0-1	2-2	0-1	2	2	2		
Hausen	10	0-1	0-0	0-0	2	0	0		
Totals	200	22-44	15-19	7-17	16	16	69		
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 78.9%. Three-point field goals: 10-21 (Stirtz 2-5, Folgueiras 2-4, Koch 2-3, Howard 1-3, Combs 1-2, Banks 1-1, Sage 1-1, Hausen 0-1, Jirak 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Banks, Stirtz). Turnovers: 10 (Stirtz 3, Howard 2, Manyawu 2, Team 2, Banks). Steals: 5 (Manyawu 2, Combs, Hausen, Koch).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Bynum	37	5-10	1-2	1-3	4	3	11		
Royal	26	2-4	2-2	0-2	2	3	6		
Tilly	29	5-6	6-9	0-4	2	4	16		
Mobley Jr.	37	3-9	3-4	1-1	3	0	12		
Thornton	38	10-14	2-2	3-3	3	3	24		
Njegovan	11	0-0	0-0	0-2	1	0	0		
Chatman	14	0-1	0-0	0-0	2	2	0		
Cupps	4	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
White	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	26-47	14-19	5-16	17	15	72		
Percentages: FG: 55.3%. FT: 73.7%. Three-point field goals: 6-20 (Mobley 3-8, Thornton 2-4, Bynum 0-3, Cupps 1-2, Chatman 0-1, Royal 0-1, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 9 (Tilly 3, Chatman 2, Mobley 2, Bynum, Thornton). Steals: 3 (Royal 2, Tilly). Officials: Anderson, Dorsey, O'Brien. Attendance: N/A.									

Michigan 71, Ohio State 67									
March 13, 2026 United Center • Chicago									
	1	2	F						
Ohio State (21-12)	35	32	67						
Michigan (30-2)	39	32	71						
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Bynum	33	1-5	2-2	2-4	3	3	5		
Royal	36	4-12	3-4	2-9	1	2	13		
Tilly	30	2-6	4-6	1-4	1	3	8		
Mobley Jr.	27	6-14	0-0	0-2	1	2	14		
Thornton	39	6-14	6-6	2-1	4	4	20		
Njegovan	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Noel	12	1-3	0-0	2-0	0	2	2		
Cupps	17	2-3	0-0	0-1	1	1	5		
Johnson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	22-58	15-18	10-22	11	17	67		
Percentages: FG: 37.9%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 8-24 (Mobley 2-7, Thornton 2-5, Royal 2-4, Bynum 1-4, Tilly 0-2, Cupps 1-1, Noel 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 4 (Bynum 2, Njegovan, Thornton). Turnovers: 10 (Thornton 4, Mobley 2, Bynum, Njegovan, Royal, Tilly). Steals: 6 (Royal 2, Njegovan, Noel, Thornton, Tilly).									
Michigan	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Johnson Jr.	28	5-11	0-0	2-5	1	3	11		
Lendeborg	35	1-4	4-6	1-4	6	1	6		
Mara	28	7-11	3-3	1-6	1	3	17		
Cadeau	36	3-9	8-10	0-2	7	2	15		
Burnett	18	2-4	1-2	0-1	1	2	6		
Gayle Jr.	20	1-6	2-3	1-3	1	3	4		
McKenney	28	5-8	0-0	0-4	0	1	12		
Tschetter	7	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	1	0		
Totals	200	24-53	18-24	6-28	17	16	71		
Percentages: FG: 45.3%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-17 (McKenney 2-5, Cadeau 1-5, Burnett 1-2, Gayle 0-2, Lendeborg 0-2, Johnson 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 6 (Gayle 2, Mara 2, Johnson, McKenney). Turnovers: 9 (Cadeau 4, Lendeborg 2, Gayle, Johnson, Mara). Steals: 7 (Cadeau 3, Lendeborg 2, Mara, McKenney). Officials: Carstensen, Pfeifer, Richardson. Attendance: 18,988.									

a 50-33 lead going into the locker room.

Thornton (12), Bynum (14) and Mobley (11) had already scored double-digit points in the first 20 minutes. Ohio State continued the hot shooting it had on display earlier in the week against Penn State, going 8 for 13 from deep (61.5 percent).

Royal scored the first four points for Ohio State in the second half to make it 54-35. By 16:02, the Buckeyes' lead was 23 points, 61-38, after Mobley made another from three-point range.

The Hoosiers got within 18 at 17:42, but at 12:18, Thornton made three free throws to stretch the lead to 24 points. That was the biggest it got the rest of the game.

However, Indiana still wasn't able to bring the game within single digits either, only getting as close as a 10-point deficit with 3:24 left in the game, 83-73, when it was too late for a comeback.

Thornton led the Buckeyes with 25 points in the game, shooting 7 of 9 from the field and 9 of 11 from the free-throw line. Mobley and Bynum finished with 18 points each, while Royal (12) and Chatman (11) had double-digit points as well. Bynum had a game-high nine rebounds, and Thornton had a game-high seven assists.

Wilkerson led IU with 18 points, while Tucker DeVries was close behind with 17.

Both teams shot well from the field with Ohio State finishing 29 for 49 for 59.2 percent and the Hoosiers connecting on 54.9 percent of their shots (28 of 51).

OSU Moves On To Quarterfinals

Thornton led Ohio State (21-11) to a 72-

69 win over No. 9-seeded Iowa (21-12) in its first Big Ten tournament game at the United Center in Chicago on March 12.

The Buckeyes struggled offensively in the first few minutes of the game before getting hot from the field, finishing shooting 26 of 47 (55.3 percent) in the game. They held a lead as big as 16 points. Iowa was able to chip away throughout the second half, but it was too little too late.

Iowa got the scoring started with a three-pointer from Tavion Banks at 19:05, which was the beginning of an 8-2 run that Tilly ended when he made two free throws at 16:04.

Two more free throws from Royal made it a two-point game. But the Buckeyes went into another early scoring drought that lasted over three minutes before Tilly went to the line again to knock down 1 of 2 tries to make it a 12-7 game.

Later, after Bennett Stirtz knocked down a three as the shot clock ran down, Ohio State scored four straight points on a dunk from Bynum and a hook shot from Tilly that made it 16-15 with 7:50 showing.

The Buckeyes took their first lead of the game, 21-20, on a layup from Bynum with 5:10 left in the first half. Sophomore guard Gabe Cupps got involved with an open three from the top of the key at 3:39 to make it 24-22 Buckeyes.

Ohio State got its lead out to four points when Tilly made both chances of a 1-and-1, its biggest of the game to that point, 29-25. One more Tilly free throw made it 30-25 with 1:28 left in the frame.

A late Thornton layup made it a 34-30 Buckeye lead at the half despite shooting just 1 of 8 from beyond the arc (12.5 percent) as a

team in the first 20 minutes.

A three-point play from Thornton made it a nine-point lead for the Buckeyes early in the second half and he made a jumper, a layup and a three to cap a 13-2 OSU run that made it 51-35 at the 13:55 mark.

Iowa was able to get the Buckeye lead back to seven points with an 8-0 run that ended with two free throws by Tate Sage at 8:09 to make it 58-51. Mobley ended the scoreless stretch for Ohio State with a make of his own from the charity stripe, but the Hawkeyes made it a 59-53 game with two more free throws, this time by Alvaro Folgueiras.

OSU's lead got back out to 11 points on a three by Mobley, but a three from Folgueiras made it 68-62 with 3:33 left in the game.

The lead got down to three points, 70-67, when Banks made a dunk at 1:22 and Iowa got a stop on the other side. Stirtz made two free throws to make it a one-point game. Thornton missed a layup with nine seconds left and Bynum missed the putback, but Mobley got the rebound when the ball bounced back out to the free-throw line and was fouled. He made both free throws for a 72-69 lead with eight seconds left.

After a timeout, Iowa put up a quick three, trying to avoid being fouled by OSU, and the shot from Brendan Hausen hit the top of the backboard into the shot clock. Tilly was fouled on the inbounds pass and missed his first free throw, giving the Hawkeyes another chance. They were fouled for a 1-and-1. Iowa missed the first free throw, but Isaiah Howard got the rebound and threw up a three-pointer as the buzzer sounded that was just short.

"This was a high-level game between two really good teams," Diebler said. "I'm really excited about where we are as a team right now - the fight that we're playing with and the connection that we're playing with on both sides of the ball."

Thornton led Ohio State in the win with 24 points on 10-of-14 shooting while adding a game-high six rebounds. Tilly had a strong scoring performance with 16 points, making 5 of 6 from the floor. Mobley (12) reached double figures as well.

Stirtz was the only Hawkeye in doubles figures with 17.

OSU Knocked Out Of BIG Tourney By U-M

Ohio State (21-12) dropped a hard-fought quarterfinal game against No. 1-seeded Michigan (30-2), 71-67, on March 13 at the United Center in Chicago.

After going down by double digits in the first half, the Buckeyes were able to come back to take a brief lead in the second frame, but couldn't keep up with the Wolverines down the stretch.

"I'm proud of the fight we showed," Diebler said. "We just didn't quite get enough to go in down the stretch. Our guys battled throughout. I thought we executed for the majority of the game. Against a really good team this time of the year, you've got to be able to do that and sustain that."

It was a rough start for the Buckeyes with two missed shots and a turnover while Michigan went on a 7-0 run to begin the game. Thornton scored the first Buckeye points on a second-chance jumper 1:54 into the half.

A three from Royal made it 8-5, but the Wolverines went on another 7-0 run to take a 10-point lead at 14:47. The run was capped by two free throws from former Buckeye Roddy Gayle Jr., his first points of the game.

Ohio State followed with a 6-0 spurt with points from Tilly, Royal and Thornton, but Trey McKenney scored five straight for Michigan to make it 20-11 at 11:25.

By 8:36, the deficit was back out to 11 points, 25-14, after Elliot Cadeau made a three-pointer. The Wolverine lead bounced between nine and 11 points until 6:13 when Mobley made his first three of the game.

With a tip-in from senior forward Brandon Noel, who was playing in his first game since Jan. 5, and four points from Thornton, OSU got back to within four points, 31-27, with 3:51 to go in the half. Then, after a McKenney jumper, Bynum made a deep ball to make it a three-point game.

A Thornton three brought it within two points, 35-33, and after a block by Bynum, OSU had the chance to tie the game up on a fast break, but Thornton turned the ball over and the Wolverines went down the floor for their own alley-oop, thrown down by Aday Mara.

Michigan made two free throws by Cadeau and Thornton had a buzzer-beating floater for Ohio State to close the first half down 39-35.

After the Wolverines missed a shot by Cadeau on their first possession of the second half, the teams traded baskets until Ohio State got a defensive stop and tied the game up at 44 with a layup from Tilly at 17:22.

After Tilly's layup, neither team scored for nearly three minutes until Cadeau made a layup at 14:34 to take the lead back. Mara made it a five-point lead for U-M when he converted a three-point play before two more free throws by Cadeau put Michigan up by seven.

Cupps ended the OSU drought with a corner three after five minutes without scoring for the Buckeyes. He followed that with a layup and Thornton came back down the floor with a three-pointer to make it a 53-52 game with 11:25 to play.

It took over two minutes for OSU to score again as Mara put up six straight. But the Buckeyes went on a 9-1 run immediately after, capped by a Royal three, to take their first lead of the game, 61-60, with 5:40 left. After a Tilly free throw, Michigan tied the game back up at 62 with two more free throws by Cadeau.

The Wolverines got a goaltending call and made a free throw to go back up by three points, but Thornton followed with two from the charity stripe. Mara made a layup at 2:56 and neither team scored until 1:24 when Big Ten Player of the Year Yaxel Lendeborg made one of two free throws.

Royal ended the OSU drought with a free throw to make it a 68-65 game with just 29 seconds remaining and the Buckeyes had to foul. Cadeau made 1 of 2 from the line and Royal made a jumper with six seconds left to bring the Buckeyes within two. Lendeborg made both free throws after being fouled to put the game out of reach.

Thornton led Ohio State with 20 points on 6-of-14 shooting, with Royal (13) and Mobley (14) trailing him. Royal also had a game-high 11 rebounds. Ohio State shot just 37.9 from the floor on just 22-of-58 shooting.

Mara led the Wolverines with 17 points, followed by Cadeau with 15, including 8 of 10 from the line. Ohio State held Lendeborg to just six points and five rebounds in 34 minutes.

OSU To Take On No. 14 Howard As No. 3 Seed

For the fourth year in a row, Ohio State will host first and second round games of the NCAA Tournament. The Buckeyes received a No. 3 seed from the NCAA selection committee on Selection Sunday and will take on No. 14 Howard in the first round of the tournament on March 21 at 11:30 a.m. (ESPN 2).

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

"I'm happy for our team," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said shortly after his team's name was called on March 16. "We've been waiting since the Big Ten tournament and now it's nice to have a team to play and a draw. Howard is used to winning this year. They've had a great season so far. We'll dive in on some film and get a little better feel for them and start to prepare as best we can."

The Buckeyes earning a top-four seed means their players, including seniors Chance Gray and T'yana Todd, will be able to play at least once more in the confines of their own arena.

Gray said she's excited to play in front of the Buckeye faithful again.

"I think we have one of the best fan bases," Gray said. "I love our fans and hopefully they show up for us and pack the (Schottenstein

Center) on Saturday. I'm excited. I think we can't get too complacent, though. I think playing at home, it has its advantages and disadvantages, so (we are) just making sure that we stay grounded and continue to play our style of basketball."

The 14-seeded Bison made the tournament after having a 26-7 record and winning the MEAC tournament. They are led by senior forward Zennia Thomas, who averages 15.2 points and 8.0 rebounds per game.

Also joining Ohio State and Howard in Columbus is No. 6 Notre Dame and No. 11 Fairfield, who will play each other at 2 p.m. on Saturday. The winner of that game will likely take on the Buckeyes in the second round.

The No. 1 seed in regional 1 in Fort Worth is UConn, which defeated the Buckeyes by 32 points earlier in the season. Vanderbilt is the No. 2 seed in the region. The Commodores, who finished tied for second in the SEC in the regular season, could match up with Ohio State in the Sweet 16.

Bucks Miss Out On Major B1G Awards

The Big Ten announced the winners of its major awards, and Ohio State guards Jaloni and Kennedy Cambridge went home empty-handed.

UCLA center Lauren Betts was named both the conference's Player of the Year and the Defensive Player of the Year. Jaloni Cambridge was viewed as a candidate for Big Ten Player of the Year after she averaged 23.4



SONNY BROCKWAY

FUEL TO FIRE — Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff hopes opening the NCAA Tournament at home as well as a few snubs for Big Ten postseason honors will be motivation when the No. 3 seed Buckeyes host Howard on March 21.

points per game in the regular season, the most in the conference. However, she had to settle for a unanimous selection to the first-team All-Big Ten.

Kennedy Cambridge similarly had a strong case to win the Defensive Player of the Year. She averaged 4.0 steals per game, the most in the Big Ten in the regular season, but only made the conference's All-Defense team along with sophomore center Elsa Lemmilä.

McGuff said he hoped his players would use the missed awards as motivation during the postseason.

"Kennedy and Jaloni, I think, were very worthy of potential Defensive Player of the Year and Player of the Year awards," McGuff said a day before his team played its first game in the Big Ten tournament. "They went to Lauren Betts, who's had an amazing season, and UCLA has had a great year, so I can understand why she got the votes that she got. Like I've told kids my entire career, when sometimes an award doesn't go your way, the only thing you do is show up and remind people how good you are and what you can do on that court. I think they'll both be motivated to do that."

Jaloni Cambridge not only led the conference in scoring, but her 23.4 points per game during the regular season were the sixth-most in the country. The five-star recruit said she wasn't the only Buckeye to be snubbed of a major award.

"I'm definitely not going to say we're upset, but it should have gone a different way, not just for me, but for a lot of us," Cambridge said after Ohio State's 83-59 win over Indi-

ana on March 5. "I don't think we have to prove anything. We've shown everything. We went from unranked to top-10 ranked, so we proved everything we needed to."

Senior guard Chance Gray was named to the Big Ten honorable-mention list after the regular season. She echoed her coaches' message after the Buckeyes' first Big Ten tournament game.

"The decisions are already made. People feel how they feel, but we just have to use it to make some points this week," Gray said.

Redshirt freshman forward Kylee Kitts was the only other Buckeye to earn All-Big Ten honors. Despite battling injuries late in the season, she was named to the All-Big Ten freshman team after averaging 7.8 points and 5.9 rebounds per game in the regular season.

Lemmilä Takes Strides In Big Ten Tourney

The Buckeyes haven't necessarily been known for their frontcourt play this season, but in the Big Ten tournament, one of the team's most impactful players was Lemmilä.

Despite going against two of the better centers in the Big Ten in Betts and Sophie Hart of Minnesota, Lemmilä had a very strong string of games. The sophomore from Finland averaged 11.0 points, 10.0 rebounds and 4.3 assists while shooting 50.0 percent from the floor.

Lemmilä shone brightest in Ohio State's 60-55 win over Minnesota in the quarterfinals of the tournament. She matched against Hart, who had previously given her and the Buckeyes issues. It seemed as though that

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2025-26 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

26-7 Overall (13-5 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of March 7

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.	33-33	1067-32.3	283-578	.490	44-127	.346	141-171	.825	39-147	186-5.6	93-2	152	98	11	63	751-22.8
GRAY, Chance	33-33	1056-32.0	177-388	.456	82-202	.406	57-65	.877	12-73	85-2.6	23-0	89	60	0	26	493-14.9
LEMMILÄ, Elsa	32-24	838-26.2	126-225	.560	2-13	.154	43-70	.614	75-159	234-7.3	58-0	69	63	71	32	297-9.3
CAMBRIDGE, K.	33-33	955-28.9	106-254	.417	28-92	.304	57-95	.600	63-91	154-4.7	95-3	110	44	22	128	297-9.0
KITTS, Kylee	28-19	556-19.9	77-179	.430	12-38	.316	44-56	.786	70-90	160-5.7	66-4	28	47	20	19	210-7.5
WATSON, Ava	33-14	851-25.8	81-198	.409	37-105	.352	36-40	.900	25-49	74-2.2	67-0	78	51	5	63	235-7.1
MARTIN, Bryn	33-0	467-14.2	51-116	.440	24-66	.364	4-4	1.000	7-40	47-1.4	50-1	33	18	10	25	130-3.9
TODD, T' yana	33-9	389-11.8	46-132	.348	18-66	.273	18-22	.818	14-22	36-1.1	36-0	15	16	2	15	128-3.9
BIRIUK, Dasha	19-0	143-7.5	22-49	.449	11-32	.344	8-9	.889	5-19	24-1.3	13-0	8	14	3	7	63-3.3
HOBBS, Ella	27-0	195-7.2	23-51	.451	7-16	.438	5-6	.833	17-42	59-2.2	17-0	12	8	3	4	58-2.1
HENRY, Seini	16-0	106-6.6	12-31	.387	1-10	.100	9-14	.643	13-25	38-2.4	15-0	4	10	3	4	34-2.1
Team									44-75	119		19				
Total	33	6625	1004-2201	.456	266-767	.347	422-552	.764	384-832	1216-36.8	533-10	598	448	150	386	2696-81.7
Opponents	33	6625	800-1984	.403	235-697	.337	349-484	.721	392-843	1235-37.4	557-12	491	706	95	216	2184-66.2

trend would continue in the Big Ten tournament when Hart had a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds midway through the second quarter.

However, Ohio State assistant coach Ryan Murray had Lemmilä make an adjustment to front Hart, and for the second half, she was held to two points on 0-of-1 shooting.

On the other end, Lemmilä had one of her better performances of the season. She scored 17 points while making 8 of 15 field goals.

McGuff feels as though his center has made plenty of improvements since the start of the season.

"She's defended, she's rebounded. She's really getting off of ball screens and catching and finishing better than she was at the beginning of the year," McGuff said. "It's important

because people have to commit a lot to stopping Jaloni off the screen, so when Elsa rolls, it gives us another option to get her the ball."

Those improvements continued to be reflected when she went up against arguably the best player in the conference in Ohio State's 72-62 loss to UCLA the next day.

Lemmilä scored 10 points on 5-of-11 shooting and also tacked on six assists. Most importantly, though, she held Betts to 14 points, with eight of those points coming off mid-range jumpers.

Lemmilä was proud of her effort against the conference's player of the year.

"I tried my best," Lemmilä said. "Part of our game plan was to drop off of her. She, of course, is going to get a couple of those (mid-range) shots, and she made them. We'd rather have her take that than be in the post. I

think her percentage is probably a lot higher in the post, but I'm happy about how I played against her."

Against the Bruins, Lemmilä grabbed six rebounds to help her team only be out-rebounded by one, which, considering Ohio State's relative lack of size compared to its counterparts, was an impressive feat.

"Part of our game plan was to be able to get rebounds against them," Lemmilä said. "That obviously wasn't why we lost, but I think we can be pretty proud of that, because we're definitely an undersized team compared to UCLA."

Gray Named To All-Tournament Team

As a team, Ohio State had a solid showing in the Big Ten tournament, picking up a

pair of impressive wins, but no player elevated their game more in the tournament than Gray.

On the way to being named to the All-Tournament team, Gray averaged 18.0 points and 3.0 assists per game while shooting 11 of 24 from beyond the three-point line and connecting on all of her nine free throw attempts.

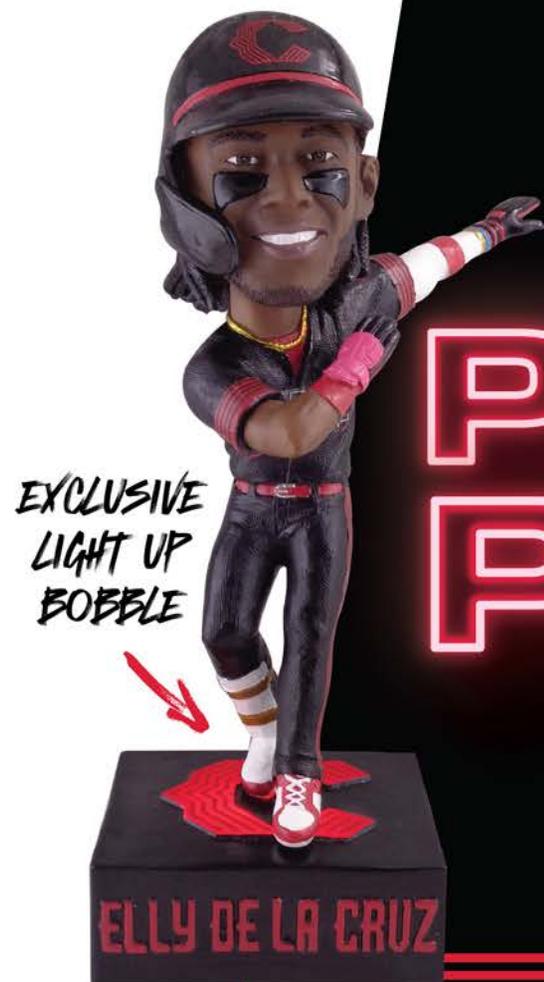
Gray had her best performance on the biggest stage. In Ohio State's loss to UCLA, she scored 23 points while making 4 of 7 three-point attempts.

"Chance played great," McGuff said of the senior guard. "It was an excellent tournament for her. And we're certainly going to need her when we get into the NCAA tournament. It was really nice to see her play so well in her last Big Ten tournament."

Gray's performance in the tournament only continued a white-hot finish she had to the regular season. The former Oregon guard made multiple three-pointers in 12 of her final 13 regular-season games. After the conference tournament, she was averaging 14.9 points, 2.7 assists and 2.6 rebounds per game.

Her teammate, Kennedy Cambridge, praised her after she went for 18 points in Ohio State's win over Indiana to make it to the quarterfinals.

"She does it all," Cambridge said. "She shoots, she drives, she makes the extra pass. She also defends. When she's going, she's going, and McGuff realized that, and we ran a lot of plays for her to keep her going."



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OSU Reaches Semis Of Big Ten Tournament

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State played fairly well at the Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes may not have been the last team standing in the tournament, but defeated Indiana and Minnesota on the way to an appearance in the semifinals before ultimately losing to the eventual champions of the tournament, UCLA.

OSU Opens Postseason With Dominant Win

Behind a dominant defensive effort, No. 11 Ohio State (25-6) got out to an ideal start to postseason play with an 83-59 win over Indiana (18-14) on March 5 at the Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis in front of 5,962 fans.

The Buckeyes held the Hoosiers to just 19-of-57 (33.3 percent) shooting, including 5 of 21 (23.8 percent) from three-point range in the win.

It was a much-improved defensive effort from the one Ohio State had in the regular season against Indiana when, in an 81-67 win on Jan. 22, the Buckeyes allowed the Hoosiers to shoot 56.4 percent from the floor and 64.7 percent from three-point range.

"We had much better focus and intensity on the defensive end, especially in the half-court," said head coach Kevin McGuff when asked about the Buckeyes' defensive



SONNY BROCKWAY

LOOKING UP — Sophomore guard Jalon Cambridge (22) led Ohio State with 19 points when the Buckeyes opened the Big Ten tournament in grand style with an 83-59 victory over Indiana on March 5. The Buckeyes then defeated Minnesota before losing to powerhouse UCLA in the semifinals.

improvements against Indiana. "We didn't play very well against them in the first half the first time around. We watched a lot of film, and we worked on that for the last couple of days. It was good to see our players execute on that end of the floor."

After starting the game ice cold from the field and missing its first seven field goal attempts, Ohio State fell behind 5-4 through the first 4:37 of the game.

The Buckeyes' slow offensive start continued, and they fell behind 12-6 with 3:02 remaining in the opening frame after IU's Nevaeh Caffey converted a pair of free throws.

Ohio State got back in the game with a 6-0 spurt in the last two minutes of the first quarter to tie it up at 12. Redshirt freshman forward Kylee Kitts led the Buckeyes on that run with a pair of layups.

Indiana scored first to start the second quarter on a bucket by Shay Ciezki, but Ohio State took its first lead of the game on a three-pointer from senior guard Chance Gray to make it 17-14 with 7:38 to go in the half.

Gray's three-pointer was part of what would be a 12-0 Ohio State run, and she capped the run with another three-pointer that put the Buckeyes ahead 24-14 with 6:03 before intermission.

Ohio State's lead remained at least eight and junior guard Kennedy Cambridge put the Buckeyes ahead 33-20 with a triple with 2:04 remaining.

The Hoosiers then scored back-to-back two-point field goals, but Gray made her third triple of the half to make it 36-24 at the break.

After struggling mightily to make open shots in the first half (they were 10 of 30), Indiana opened the second half with a three-pointer by Maya Makalusky. The Hoosiers started the third quarter on a 5-0 spurt, but the Buckeyes answered by scoring 10 straight to lead 46-29 with 6:10 left in the frame.

Ohio State had a scoring drought that lasted over two minutes, but Indiana was only able to score four points during that span, and the Buckeyes were quickly able to grow their lead back to 17, 50-33, after

Ohio State 60, Minnesota 55

March 6, 2026
Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (26-6, 13-5)	16	16	15	13	60
Minnesota (22-8, 13-5)	18	10	14	13	55

Ohio State	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Lemmilä	33	8-15	1-2	4-7	2	1	17		
Gray	35	5-11	0-0	0-1	2	0	13		
K. Cambridge	37	2-9	1-2	2-1	4	0	5		
Watson	32	3-7	0-0	1-2	2	2	8		
J. Cambridge	39	8-20	0-1	1-4	6	2	17		
Kitts	14	0-1	0-0	1-0	1	3	0		
Martin	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Todd	9	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	26-64	2-5	9-18	17	9	60		

Percentages: FG: 40.6%. FT: 40.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-26, (Gray 3-8, J. Cambridge 1-7, Watson 2-5, K. Cambridge 0-4, Lemmilä 0-1, Todd 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge). **Turnovers:** 11 (J. Cambridge 3, Watson 2, K. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä, Gray, Kitts, Team). **Steals:** 12 (K. Cambridge 6, J. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä, Gray, Todd).

Minnesota	Total		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Grocholski	40	8-14	0-1	2-5	4	0	18		
Hart	35	5-18	2-2	9-10	1	0	12		
Battle	40	4-11	2-3	0-5	2	3	10		
Braun	39	2-10	0-0	0-4	6	2	6		
McKinney	15	1-4	0-0	0-1	1	4	2		
Glenn	21	3-7	1-2	0-2	1	0	7		
Tonga	5	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	1	0		
Holloway	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Klick	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	23-54	5-8	13-31	15	10	55		

Percentages: FG: 42.6%. FT: 62.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-18 (Grocholski 2-7, Braun 2-7, McKinney 0-2, Battle 0-1, Glenn 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Hart). **Turnovers:** 21 (Battle 5, Grocholski 4, Braun 4, Hart 2, McKinney 2, Glenn, Tonga, Klick, Team). **Steals:** 7 (Grocholski 3, Battle 2, McKinney 2). **Officials:** Tiara Cruse, Angie Enlund, Brenda Pantoja. **Attendance:** 5,146.

Ohio State 83, Indiana 59							
March 5, 2026 Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Indiana (18-14, 6-12)	12	12	16	19	59		
Ohio State (25-6, 13-5)	12	24	25	22	83		
Indiana	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Makalusky	37	5-13	6-7	0-0	0	3	21
Noyan	35	3-7	0-0	5-6	1	4	6
Caffey	36	1-8	8-10	1-2	0	3	10
Beaumont	29	2-7	2-2	0-7	0	4	6
Ciezki	37	6-20	0-0	2-4	5	1	12
Kiaku	19	1-1	0-0	0-2	4	3	2
Ondineme	5	1-1	0-0	1-0	1	0	2
Spreen	2	0-0	0-0	0-2	1	1	0
Totals	200	19-57	16-19	10-23	12	19	59
Percentages: FG: 33.3%. FT: 84.2%. Three-point field goals: 5-21 (Makalusky 5-12, Beaumont 0-4, Ciezki 0-4, Caffey 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 15 (Beaumont 6, Kiaku 4, Makalusky, Noyan, Caffey, Ciezki, Team). Steals: 2 (Noyan, Beaumont).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Lemmilä	24	3-6	0-0	6-7	5	1	6
Gray	32	6-16	2-2	1-2	6	0	18
K. Cambridge	25	5-12	2-4	3-3	1	4	14
Watson	32	2-6	0-0	0-2	3	4	4
J. Cambridge	31	5-13	9-10	5-3	5	3	19
Kitts	20	4-10	0-0	2-4	0	2	9
Martin	17	3-4	0-0	0-1	0	4	8
Todd	6	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3
Hobbs	5	1-3	0-0	1-0	1	0	2
Biriuk	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Henry	4	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	0	0
Totals	200	30-74	13-16	19-26	21	18	83
Percentages: FG: 40.5%. FT: 81.3%. Three-point field goals: 10-25 (Gray 4-9, K. Cambridge 2-6, Martin 2-3, Kitts 1-2, Todd 1-1, Watson 0-1, J. Cambridge 0-1, Biriuk 0-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Lemmilä 3, J. Cambridge, Biriuk, Henry). Turnovers: 8 (Watson 3, Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge, Biriuk, Henry). Steals: 7 (Watson 5, Gray, K. Cambridge, Kitts). Officials: Felicia Grineter, Nykeshia Thompson, Frank Steratore. Attendance: 5,962							

OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

UCLA 72, Ohio State 62

March 7, 2026
Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (26-7, 13-5)	10	11	19	22	62
UCLA (30-1, 18-0)	14	18	20	20	72

	Total				FT			Reb.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	A	PF	Pts.
Ohio State	35	5-11	0-0	2-4	6	2	10	6	2	10
Lemmilä	35	5-11	0-0	2-4	6	2	10	6	2	10
Gray	38	6-11	7-7	0-2	1	1	23	1	1	23
K. Cambridge	32	3-11	0-0	3-5	2	4	6	2	4	6
Watson	26	1-4	0-0	0-1	1	1	3	1	1	3
J. Cambridge	36	4-14	4-4	1-3	5	3	12	5	3	12
Kitts	20	2-5	2-2	4-2	1	1	7	1	1	7
Hobbs	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Todd	5	0-1	1-2	0-1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Martin	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	200	21-57	14-15	11-23	16	13	62			

Percentages: FG: 36.8%. FT: 93.3% **Three-point field goals:** 6-18 (Gray 4-7, Watson 1-3, K. Cambridge 0-3, Kitts 1-2, J. Cambridge 0-2, Todd 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 4 (K. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä, Martin). **Turnovers:** 15 (J. Cambridge 4, Lemmilä 3, Gray 3, Watson 3, Kitts, Martin). **Steals:** 6 (Lemmilä 2, Watson 2, J. Cambridge 2).

	Total				FT			Reb.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	A	PF	Pts.
UCLA	32	4-12	1-2	1-2	1	3	10	1	3	10
Jaquez	32	4-12	1-2	1-2	1	3	10	1	3	10
L. Betts	33	7-13	0-0	2-7	4	1	14	4	1	14
Rice	34	6-13	4-4	2-6	2	3	17	2	3	17
Leger-Walker	29	1-4	0-0	0-1	6	5	2	6	5	2
Kneepkens	32	5-13	0-0	1-2	3	0	13	3	0	13
Dugalic	28	4-6	5-6	2-4	4	1	14	4	1	14
S. Betts	7	1-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	2	0	0	2
Muse	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bilic	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-63	10-12	10-24	20	13	72			

Percentages: FG: 44.4%. FT: 83.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-19 (Kneepkens 3-9, Jaquez 1-4, Rice 1-2, Dugalic 1-2, Leger-Walker 0-1, Bilic 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Dugalic 3, L. Betts 2, Leger-Walker). **Turnovers:** 12 (Jaquez 3, L. Betts 2, Leger-Walker 2, Kneepkens 2, Rice, Dugalic, S. Betts). **Steals:** 10 (L. Betts 2, Kneepkens 2, S. Betts 2, Jaquez, Leger-Walker, Dugalic, Bilic). **Officials:** Maj Forsberg, Julie Krommenhoek, Felicia Grinter. **Attendance:** 6,387.

a season-high 21 turnovers, No. 11 Ohio State (26-6) picked up a 60-55 win in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten tournament on March 6 in front of 5,146 fans at the Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

The Buckeyes didn't have their best shooting performance in the win, making 26 of 64 from the field (40.6 percent), but they attempted 10 more shots than Minnesota because of a tenacious defensive effort.

The win avenged a 74-61 regular-season loss the Buckeyes suffered at Minnesota on Feb. 18. In that game, the Buckeyes forced just nine turnovers.

"We were a little more effective with our full-court pressure, but also, in the half-court, our guards were really pesky today," McGuff said when asked about Ohio State's improved defensive pressure. "Ava, Kennedy, Jalonni and Chance really had good ball pressure, and I thought that disrupted them a little bit."

Ohio State started slowly against the Golden Gophers. After the teams traded a pair of scores for a 4-4 tie, Minnesota scored seven straight points to lead 11-4.

Gray snapped an Ohio State scoring drought with a three-pointer with 5:34 left in the quarter, and after the Golden Gophers split a pair of free throws by Brylee Glenn, the Buckeyes made back-to-back triples by Jalonni Cambridge and Gray to take a 13-12 lead, their first of the game.

Minnesota made a pair of baskets, but Lemmilä made an and-one layup to tie the game at 16 with 33 seconds on the clock. The Golden Gophers ended the quarter

with a layup by Grace Grocholski to lead 18-16.

The Buckeyes didn't take the lead in the second frame until they held Minnesota scoreless for 2:19 to go on a 6-0 run, which made it 26-22 with 4:42 showing.

Despite going scoreless in the final 1:37 of the first half, Ohio State still took a 32-28 lead into the locker room.

Minnesota scored first in the third quarter on a layup by Grocholski, but Ohio State scored five straight on a three-pointer from Watson and a layup from Lemmilä to lead by seven.

The Buckeyes' lead bounced from five to seven before Gray made a triple with 2:44 left in the third quarter to put Ohio State ahead 44-36. The Buckeyes had a chance to stretch their lead beyond double digits after forcing a Minnesota turnover, but they couldn't convert, and Minnesota knocked down back-to-back three-pointers to make it 44-42 with 1:16 on the clock.

The Buckeyes answered the Golden Gophers' spurt at the end of the third quarter to take a 47-42 lead when Kennedy Cambridge split a pair of free throws, and Watson made a mid-range jumper.

Both teams started the fourth quarter slowly on offense, with neither team making a field goal for the first 2:12. Watson got the Buckeyes on the board with a triple with 7:48 remaining to make it 50-42.

Less than a minute later, Minnesota responded with its own three-pointer by Grocholski to cut Ohio State's lead to 50-45.

Minnesota cut Ohio State's lead to three points on free throws from center Sophie Hart, but later Lemmilä converted a pair of baskets to make it 56-49 with 4:11 left.

Minnesota scored the next three points as Ohio State went into a mini scoring drought, but Gray made a contested layup with 2:06 remaining to put the Buckeyes up 58-52.

After Ohio State couldn't score in transition, Minnesota cut the lead in half with a triple by Mara Braun with 1:32 remaining.

Minnesota had a chance to tie the game after getting a stop on the next trip down the court, but Grocholski missed a triple with 43 seconds left.

The Buckeyes collected the rebound, and Cambridge converted a layup to give her team the winning margin with 16 seconds remaining.

Ohio State was led by Jalonni Cambridge and Lemmilä in the win, with each scoring 17. But Cambridge wasn't very efficient, making just 8 of 20 attempts from the field, including 1 of 7 attempts from three-point range. Gray (13 points) also reached double figures.

Cambridge had a team-high six assists, while Lemmilä led the Buckeyes with 11 rebounds. Minnesota outrebounded Ohio State 44-27.

The Golden Gophers were led by Grocholski, who scored 18 points on 8-of-14 shooting. Hart collected a game-high 19 rebounds.

Poor Shooting Dooms OSU vs. UCLA

No. 11 Ohio State's (26-7) run in the Big Ten tournament ended in the semifinals on March 7, as it fell to the Big Ten's most dominant team, No. 2 UCLA (30-1), 72-62, in front of 6,387 fans.

Going against the only Big Ten squad

that hadn't lost a conference game, Ohio State struggled mightily offensively, finishing the game shooting 21 of 57 (36.8 percent) from the field and committing 15 turnovers.

"UCLA is a great team," McGuff said. "They played well today. We played really hard and competed for 40 minutes, but just didn't play well enough. Specifically, their length gave us problems where we turned the ball over, and we also got some opportunities in terms of shots that we got that we were going to have to make if we were going to beat UCLA."

The Buckeyes didn't get the start they needed against the Bruins, missing each of their first five shot attempts as UCLA scored the first eight points of the game.

Gray broke Ohio State's drought with a triple at the 6:03 mark, but UCLA scored on its next two trips down the court.

UCLA guard Gianna Kneepkens made a jumper to make it 14-3 with 3:47 to go, but Ohio State ended the first quarter on a 7-0 run to get back in the game, after Kitts and Gray each made triples.

The Bruins seized the momentum again in the second quarter. After a layup by Jalonni Cambridge with 7:50 remaining in the half to make it 20-14, UCLA went on a 10-0 run to take a commanding 30-14 lead.

Gray eventually got Ohio State back on the board with a layup with 2:56 to go in the half, and less than a minute later, she made a three-pointer to cut UCLA's lead to 30-19.

The Buckeyes, who trailed 32-21 at half-time after a layup by Kitts with 53 seconds to go, were much better offensively in the third quarter than they were in the first half. Ohio State made its first three field goals – two by Jalonni Cambridge – to start the frame, and Gray made three free throw attempts to cut the UCLA lead to 38-30 with 7:36 left in the period.

The Buckeyes made their next three attempts from the field, but couldn't get stops on the other end, and it was a 45-38 UCLA advantage after two more free throws from Gray.

Just when it seemed as though the Buckeyes had gotten back in the game, the Bruins ended the third quarter on a 7-2 spurt to lead 52-40.

Watson opened the fourth quarter with a three-pointer, but the Bruins went back up by 12 after they made their own three-pointer by Kneepkens.

Ohio State scored four straight to get within eight of UCLA's lead with 6:54 to play.

UCLA guard Kiki Rice responded with a three-pointer and center Lauren Betts made a layup to lead 62-49, but Ohio State responded with five straight points, capped by a Gray three, to trail 62-54 with 5:09 remaining.

The Buckeyes had a chance to get within striking distance, but Gray had a three-pointer blocked, and the Bruins made a triple by Angela Dugalic to lead by 11 at 4:16.

The Buckeyes got within seven points of UCLA's lead with 1:24 to go, 69-62, on a pair of Jalonni Cambridge free throws, but missed their final four shots from the field (three by Cambridge) to lose by 10.

Gray had an outstanding performance in the losing effort, scoring 23 points on 6-of-11 shooting, including 4 of 7 from three-point range. Jalonni Cambridge was unusually quiet in the loss, with 12 points on 4-of-14 shooting. It was her lowest scoring total of the season against a Big Ten opponent. She did have five assists.

Lemmilä scored 10 points and had a team-high six assists, while Kennedy Cambridge had a team-high seven rebounds, as Ohio State was barely outrebounded 34-33.

UCLA was led by a balanced offensive approach with five players scoring in double figures. Rice scored a team-high 17 points, while Dugalic and Betts weren't far behind her pace with 14 each. Betts had a game-high nine rebounds.

Before BSB next goes to press, the Buckeyes NCAA tournament run will begin with a first-round game against Howard on March 21 at the Schottenstein Center (11:30 a.m., ESPN2).

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Kaczmar Returns To OSU For Senior Year

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State senior second baseman Henry Kaczmar has come full circle in his college career.

Kaczmar first arrived in 2023 under head coach Bill Mosiello, quickly establishing himself as one of Ohio State's top young talents during his first two seasons. He earned Big Ten All-Freshman team honors in 2023 and a second-team All-Big Ten selection in 2024 with Ohio State posting a combined 60-51 record over that span.

Then, when Mosiello left to rejoin TCU as its hitting coach and assistant head coach, Kaczmar felt it was time to explore a different path.

Kaczmar transferred away from Ohio State during the offseason prior to the 2024 season, leaving for South Carolina to play under head coach Paul Mainieri.

Kaczmar said that while his decision to transfer initially stemmed from Mosiello's departure, he also wanted the opportunity to compete in the SEC, widely regarded as the best conference in college baseball.

"It was a couple of different things," he said of the move. "The first thing that made me think about transferring was the coaching change. Coach Mosiello recruited me, and I was his first recruit here, so when he left, it made me think that there are other options out there. I didn't know whether I would be drafted or attend a different school, so I

was trying to figure that out at the same time.

"I just wanted to get more experience under my belt, and last year did that for me. I gained a tremendous amount of experience against some of the best competition in the world. It was really just a great experience for me to enhance my career at that point."

At South Carolina, Kaczmar was just as effective. In his lone season, he started all 53 games and hit .315 with seven doubles, three triples, six home runs and 28 RBI, while posting a .486 slugging percentage for the 28-29 Gamecocks. He also led South Carolina with a .333 batting average in SEC play.

Kaczmar said that while the overall talent level in the SEC was better, the jump wasn't quite as dramatic as he initially expected, which he considered a testament to his own growth and the strength of the Big Ten.

"I'd say there was a difference, but I was honestly expecting more of a difference," Kaczmar said. "A quarter of the way through the year, I was like, 'Man, this is still just baseball.' But again, seeing those arms and getting that experience against that type of pitching was really important for me, and it definitely elevated my game."

Despite a successful individual season at South Carolina, Kaczmar felt something was missing.

Following the 2025 season, Kaczmar entered the transfer portal for the second time in his career on June 6, transferring back to Ohio State just five days later.

Kaczmar recalled a conversation that

helped solidify his decision to return to the Buckeyes.

"I remember talking to (assistant coach Joey Holcomb) first, and I think our first phone call was 45 minutes long and we were just talking baseball, talking about hitting, talking about the philosophy that they have here, and it was just something that I found extremely attractive," Kaczmar said. "I realized during that phone call that the philosophies here really aligned with my personal philosophies as a hitter, and they've taught that through and through, ever since the fall when I got here."

Kaczmar was off to a strong start this season with the Buckeyes, with a .271 batting average through 15 games, trailing only first baseman Dane Harvey (.320), who had only 25 at-bats, and outfielder Noah Furcht (.291). He and Furcht were tied with 16 hits and Kaczmar led the team with five doubles, while adding his first long ball of the season in Ohio State's 8-5 loss to Kent State on March 10.

Kaczmar's strong production early in the season has not only solidified his role in Ohio State's lineup but also reinforced the value of bringing him back into the program, with head coach Justin Haire highlighting the positive impact he has had on the team's culture and chemistry in the locker room.

"All the guys love Henry, and the coaches love him," Haire said. "We've got a really fun group, and he fits in with those guys, and those guys fit in with him. Across the board, we've got the right personalities in the locker room, and Henry is certainly chief among them. Again, the energy and the passion that he shows up with every single day are infectious, and it naturally draws people to him."

OF Vandenheuvel Meshing Early

Ohio State junior Miles Vandenheuvel has gotten off to a strong all-around start this season, though his role looks very different from what many expected coming in.

After spending his first two college seasons at Eastern Arizona College, mainly playing the infield while also pitching for the Monsters, his experience with the Buckeyes has been anything but typical.

Moving away from his two primary positions at Eastern Arizona, Vandenheuvel started each of the first 15 games for Ohio State in center field and quickly became one of the Buckeyes' most productive hitters and fielders.

Vandenheuvel was solid offensively, ranking sixth on Ohio State with a .245 batting average in 49 at-bats, totaling 12 hits, five RBI and a .393 on-base percentage, which ranked second on the team behind Furcht (.394).

For Kaczmar, Vandenheuvel has been a seamless fit into the Buckeyes' lineup and outfield, quickly shifting from a newcomer to one of the team's most reliable and versatile contributors.

"Miles has brought an incredible work ethic, and there's nothing that he can't do," Kaczmar said. "There's no task big or too small for Miles. He came in as a pitcher and as an infielder, but it was like the snap of a finger, and he's one of the best outfielders I've ever seen."

"He covers a ton of ground out there. He

makes unbelievable catches. He was our leadoff batter a couple of weeks in, and I feel like there's nobody else I'd want to have in the box. Miles has this confidence and perseverance, and he doesn't care who we're playing. We know that we're going to get a super gritty at bat from him."

Haire said Vandenheuvel embraced the challenge of switching positions with a team-first attitude.

"He has handled it like a champion," Haire said. "He's like, 'Coach, I don't care where I'm put, throw me wherever. I've played everywhere. I'll go do anything. Whatever you think is going to help the team, I'm in for it.'"

Even though Vandenheuvel has yet to pitch for the Buckeyes, Kaczmar still faced the transfer at the plate during Ohio State's fall practices.

The Buckeye second baseman said Vandenheuvel brings the same mindset to the field, no matter what position he's playing.

"In the fall, he threw some live bullpens against some of our hitters, and he's got that same mindset that he does in the batter's box," Kaczmar said. "He's trying to get you out, and he truly believes that there's nobody better than him, no matter what position he's playing. So I feel like that's really a testament to his character and his perseverance on the field, it's just unbelievable."

Recap

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State first fell to Xavier on March 4, 13-4, in the first of a five-game homestand at Bill Davis Stadium in Columbus.

Ohio State was then swept by No. 1 UCLA over that weekend from March 6-8. The Bruins defeated the Buckeyes 11-1 in the opener, 19-6 via an eight-inning run rule in the second game and 10-7 in the finale.

The Buckeyes were unable to recover in their midweek matchup against Kent State, surrendering five runs in the top of the ninth after holding a 5-3 lead and ultimately falling 8-5 in the final game of their home stand.

Ohio State then finished 1-2 in its weekend trip to Seattle, defeating Washington 10-9 in 10 innings on March 13, was defeated 5-4 in 11 innings on March 14 and fell to the Huskies 5-4 on March 15 at Husky Ballpark.

On Deck

Ohio State (6-12, 1-5 Big Ten) will look to bounce back/continue its success from its trip to Seattle when the Buckeyes venture to Cincinnati for the second matchup of a home-and-home series against Xavier at 3 p.m. on March 18 at Hayden Field.

Following its matchup with the Muskeeteers, the Buckeyes will return to Bill Davis Stadium for a series against Butler (4-16) from March 20-22.

Ohio State will hit the road again two days later for the first of a home-and-home against Wright State (5-12) at Nischwitz Stadium in Dayton on March 24.

The Buckeyes will culminate that two-week stretch with a road trip to Minneapolis for a clash against Minnesota (15-5, 1-2) at Siebert Field from March 27-29.

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TIM POND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently offered his publication entitled "Coaching Youth Basketball: Coaching the Coaches" for sale on Amazon.com. Access to this instructional manual was previously limited to attendees of his basketball clinics and camps only.

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Mendez, Davino Win Big Ten Championships

Ohio State wrestlers Jesse Mendez and Ben Davino each captured Big Ten titles, with the two Buckeyes each finishing perfect during the tournament held at the Bryce Jordan Center in State College, Pa., March 7-8.

ON THE MAT
Sam Cipriani

At 133 pounds, Davino claimed the first of the two titles for Ohio State with a 4-0 record over the weekend. The redshirt freshman wrestler entered as the Big Ten's No. 3 seed at his weight class and opened the tournament with a defeat of Minnesota's 14th-ranked Jager Eisch via a 19-2 technical fall.

Davino then topped Nebraska's No. 6 Jacob Van Dee via a 5-1 decision in the quarterfinals, before earning a dominant 21-5 technical fall over Purdue's No. 10 Blake Boarman in the semifinals.

In the 133-pound finals, Davino avenged his lone loss of the regular season, defeating No. 1 Marcus Blaze of Penn State.

With Davino and Blaze deadlocked at 2-2 after two tiebreaker periods, the Buckeye freshman was awarded the victory with a riding time advantage.

Before the Big Ten championships, Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan told BSB he shared advice with Davino going into his first Big Ten tournament, believing the key for the freshman wrestler was to simply have fun.

"Trust your coaches, trust your training. Trust yourself," Ryan said on March 5. "Trust your belief in the system. This is a guy who's won four state titles in Illinois. He beat three NCAA champions, basically back-to-back-to-back, this summer, who are seven or eight years older than him. He's been in big matches. It's just about having fun. Have fun number No. 1 and trust all the things in your life that you've been able to build a successful wrestling career on up to this one."

Mendez first wrestled in the quarterfinals after earning a bye in the first round with the No. 1 overall seed in the 141-pound bracket. He opened with a win by fall over Northwestern's No. 8 Billy DeKraker in 1:04, before he defeated Iowa's No. 4 Nasir Bailey by a 19-4 technical fall.

In the 141-pound championship Mendez secured Ohio State's second conference title with a 7-2 decision against Nebraska's Brock Hardy, the No. 2 seed.

Mendez's win over the Cornhusker marked the sixth time he has defeated Hardy in seven career meetings. Hardy had previously dashed Mendez's Big Ten title hopes in 2025 with a 9-8 decision in the semifinals, but Mendez later captured the 2025 NCAA championship over Hardy and has now beaten the Nebraska wrestler

three times this season.

Bucks Place Second At BIG Championships

Though Davino and Mendez established individual supremacy in the Big Ten at 133 and 141 pounds, Ohio State fell short of the team title, finishing second with 148.5 points behind Penn State's 184.0.

Despite falling just short of the conference title, Ohio State's 148.5 points were the highest total ever recorded by a second-place finisher at the tournament. Penn State's 184.0 points also set a new team scoring record, surpassing the Nittany Lions' previous mark of 181.5 set in 2025.

Ohio State ended the conference tournament with two first-place finishers, one in second place, four third-place finishers, one in fourth and two seventh-place finishers.

At 149 pounds, Ethan Stiles came up just short of a third individual title for Ohio State. The Oregon State transfer won his first two bouts of the tournament, defeating Minnesota's No. 10 Drew Roberts by a 4-1 decision and Wisconsin's No. 3 Joseph Zargo via a 4-3 decision. After a scoreless first period in the finals, Penn State's top-ranked Shayne Van Ness pinned Stiles at 3:29 to claim the conference championship and continue his perfect season.

No. 2 Nic Bouzakis (125 pounds), No. 4 Carson Kharchla (174), No. 5 Luke Geog (197) and No. 3 Nick Feldman (heavyweight) all claimed third place at their respective weight classes.

Bouzakis defeated Indiana's No. 4 Jacob Moran via a 4-2 decision. Kharchla topped No. 3 Patrick Kennedy of Iowa by a 7-3 decision fueled by key takedowns in the first and third period.

Geog earned a 7-5 decision over Indiana's No. 8 Gabe Sollars with the help of two takedowns in the first minute of action.

Feldman defeated the Hawkeyes' No. 10 Ben Kueter by a 6-2 decision with two third-period takedowns in the final 1:15.

No. 3 Kannon Webster of Illinois earned a 9-2 victory by decision over No. 7 Brandon Cannon of Ohio State at 157 pounds to take third place, leaving the Buckeye in fourth.

Ohio State's No. 8 Paddy Gallagher at 165 pounds and No. 6 Dylan Fishback at 184 pounds both claimed seventh place by medical forfeits.

Prior to the Big Ten championships, Ryan emphasized that the Buckeyes' training plan is built around peaking at the NCAA championships rather than the conference tournament.

"The No. 1 focus is the NCAA. We didn't pull back as much (in training) as we will as we near the NCAA. So we pulled back from our regular season to the Big Ten, and we'll pull back a little bit more leading into nationals from the Big Ten," Ryan said on March 5. "It's all about feeling good. It's just all about getting your body and mind feeling good and not beating them down, not wearing them out. So, we'll get back from the Big Ten tournament, we'll take a day or two off, and then we'll work back into it."

All 10 Buckeyes secured spots in the 2026 NCAA championships, set for March 19-21 at Rocket Arena in Cleveland.

Ryan, Three Bucks Earn BIG Honors

Following the Big Ten championships from March 7-8, Ryan, Mendez, Davino and Stiles were nominated for conference honors.

Ryan took home Big Ten Coach of the Year for the fourth time in his career after leading the Buckeyes to an 18-1 finish in the dual season, while Ohio State finished second in the conference tournament. For the fifth time in Ryan's career, all 10 of Ohio State's starters qualified for the 2026 NCAA championships. Those 10 wrestlers accumulated a 155-32 record this season.

Mendez earned Big Ten Wrestler of the Year and first-team All-Big Ten honors following a perfect 19-0 regular season and a 4-0 finish in the Big Ten championships.

Davino claimed both Big Ten Freshman of the Year and first-team All-Big Ten honors after finishing 23-1 overall in the regular season.

Stiles was named to the Big Ten's second team after a 13-4 regular season and a 2-1 finish in the conference championships.

Bouzakis Flourishing In First Season At 125

Heading into the 2025 season, Bouzakis made a choice that ultimately had a trickle-down effect on the entire Ohio State roster.

Though he had spent his entire career with the Buckeyes wrestling at 133 pounds, earning a 60-21 record in that span, Bouzakis came to Ryan with a proposition to cut weight.

"He started off at 133 (pounds), but he came to us at the start of the school year and just said, 'I think I can make 125 and I want to do it,'" Ryan said. "That's a big boy's decision. You can't force one person to make the kind of commitment that he needed to make 125. He made that decision, and it's really been a transformational thing for our team this year."

After a summer filled with cutting calories and early morning workouts, Bouzakis finally cracked 125 pounds, setting the stage for an in-season battle with junior Brendan McCrone, as well as the emergence of the 133-pound Davino, who claimed a Big Ten championship at the weight.

McCrone appeared to hold the early advantage, defeating Bouzakis in a 5-4 decision at the Clarion Open during Ohio State's season-opening tournament. However, the momentum has gradually shifted in Bouzakis' favor.

Bouzakis and McCrone split time early in the season, rotating matches before the new year. However, McCrone suffered an injury against NC State on Dec. 12, and Bouzakis has handled nearly every bout at 125 pounds for the Buckeyes.

Bouzakis finished the regular season 13-2 and ranked as the No. 2 wrestler nationally at 125 pounds, behind eventual Big Ten champion No. 1 Luke Lilledahl of Penn State. Bouzakis' only losses of the regular season came at the hands of McCrone and Lilledahl.

Despite a third-place finish for the Tampa, Fla., native at the Big Ten championships, Ryan said before the tournament that Bouzakis was reaching a pivotal point in his career and believed the Buckeye wrestler was ready to take the next step on the national stage.

"He came in with Feldman and Mendez as the pound-for-pound No. 1, 2 and 3 recruits in the country and the goal was to do big things together," Ryan said. "Nic has been in the All-America round twice and lost, but Nic of the three is the one yet to really, really step up at the nationals and be a guy that led us to a championship, led us to a trophy, and it's his time. It's time now. This is his third year as a starter, and it's time to get the job done. So we're excited for him, and he's done a good job all year."

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OSU vs. U-M For Title After MSU Stunner

It was after another gut-wrenching overtime loss to Notre Dame on March 6, the second in as many nights to the visiting Fighting Irish to end the regular season, that Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik managed a hint of a smile when asked about how the overtime format changes in the postseason.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

He knew the kryptonite that had turned the Buckeyes from a possible NCAA tournament contender to an afterthought was now in the past.

The Buckeyes that night fell to an ungodly 1-8-2 in overtime this season, the main reason they were 4-11 in one-goal games.

That was the bad news. The better news was that the 3-on-3 five-minute overtime during the regular season was scrapped for the traditional 5-on-5 play until you score format, although OSU's double OT loss at Michigan State in the Big Ten tournament championship game last season might not seem like it.

But nearly a year later, Ohio State got a measure of revenge with a 3-2 overtime win over the third-ranked Spartans (25-8-2) on March 14 to advance to the title game for the fourth time in search of an elusive first championship when it plays at No. 1 Michigan on March 21 (8 p.m., BTN).

In addition to last season's final, the previous two championship games also ended in overtime losses for the Buckeyes in 2014 and 2018.

That's why Ohio State (14-20-2) remains alone among the seven schools

without a tourney title since its inception in 2014.

The Wolverines (28-7-1) have three championships in five appearances, but the Buckeyes and Wolverines have never met for the title.

Michigan won all four games vs. OSU this season: 5-2 and 8-1 in Ann Arbor on Nov. 21 and 22, and 6-4 and 3-2 in overtime on Jan. 30 and 31 in Columbus.

"Ohio State against Michigan in a Big Ten championship. It can't get any better than that," Buckeye sophomore forward and OT hero Félix Caron told BTN.

He scored at 2:36 of the extra session against the Spartans from the right face-off circle after a pass from freshman Jake Karabela, who had a hand in all three scores with a goal and two assists.

"They're a really good hockey team, but so are we," Caron said of Michigan State. "Every team in the Big Ten is such a good team this year. Against the top teams in the country, you've got to play simple. You've got to play above the puck. You've got to be in on the forecheck. You've got to be relentless and you've got to play 60 minutes."

More accurately, 60-plus. This was the fourth time in the past five games that the Buckeyes went to overtime.

Of note, despite the 0-3 OT record in title games, Ohio State is 8-4 all-time in overtime in the Big Ten tournament, with a 4-1 mark vs. the Spartans.

Last season, Ohio State benefited from overtime, going 5-3-2, including Game 2 of the quarterfinals vs. Wisconsin to stave off elimination before defeating Penn State in OT in the semifinal to reach the championship game.

This season, OSU reached the semifinal with a 7-1 shellacking of No. 10 Wisconsin in a quarterfinal at Madison, Wis., on March 11.

Junior Riley Thompson led the way with a goal and two assists, and junior

Kristoffer Eberly made 33 saves. He followed with 36 vs. Michigan State.

One Shot

Despite the feel-good nature of downing the Spartans, the reality is that the only hope for the Buckeyes to make the 16-team NCAA tournament for a second straight season is a win over the Wolverines to earn the automatic qualifier.

The Buckeyes are 19th in the National Percentage Index (NPI), the selection process, which, beginning this season replaced the PairWise Rankings.

Six schools receive automatic qualifiers, leaving 10 at-large berths, with the Atlantic Hockey America conference slotted for the No. 16 seed because its champion will not be ranked higher than that.

That means the 15th spot is the cut-off line, and any team on the bubble is rooting against Ohio State because a win will knock out one of those teams since Michigan – along with Michigan State, Penn State (No. 10) and Wisconsin (No. 12) – is secure.

If there's any consolation for the Buckeyes, it's that the NPI views them better than their record because overtime losses aren't as harmful as regulation defeats. The quality of opponents matters too.

Ohio State by far is the highest-ranked team with a losing record. Northeastern (17-18-1) is next at No. 27. There are 16 teams with .500 or better records below the Buckeyes.

Gimme 5

Overtime, specifically 3-on-3, has been a big topic since the Olympics in February when the U.S. defeated Canada in overtime in the men's and women's Gold Medal games. Each used a 3-on-3 sudden-death format.

Tampa Bay Lightning and Team Canada men's coach Jon Cooper expressed disappointment with the format, and Rohlik agreed following the Notre Dame series.

"I'm with Jon Cooper. I think the 3-on-3 to me is gimmick hockey, really, to be honest," Rohlik said. "It's entertainment, but we've got to play by the rules. It just hasn't been our year on the 3-on-3 for sure. But you're never going to see it in the playoffs. You're never going to see it in the (NCAA) tournament. You're never going to see it in the Stanley Cup playoffs. It just hasn't been our deal."

Rewind

Here's how the Buckeyes got to this

BIG Men's Hockey

	GP	Pts.	W	L	T	OW	OL	SW
Michigan State	24	51	16	6	2	2	2	1
Michigan	24	49	17	6	1	4	0	1
Penn State	24	41	12	10	2	1	3	1
Wisconsin	24	39	14	10	0	3	0	0
Ohio State	24	29	8	15	1	1	5	0
Minnesota	24	27	7	15	2	0	2	2
Notre Dame	24	16	5	17	2	3	2	0

Overall records — Michigan State 25-8-2, Michigan 28-7-1, Penn State 21-13-2, Wisconsin 21-12-2, **Ohio State 14-20-2**, Minnesota 11-22-3, Notre Dame 9-23-5.

- standings courtesy of College Hockey Inc.

point since BSB last published.

It was a rough series against the Fighting Irish (9-23-5, 5-17-2) on March 5 and 6 at the Schottenstein Center.

In the opener, the Buckeyes trailed 4-2 in the third period but staged a comeback on goals by Ryan Gordon at 4:47 and James Hong at 10:13 to tie it, only to see Evan Werner pot the winner at 3:23 of OT to disappoint the crowd of 6,852.

Caron and Thompson staked the Buckeyes to a 2-0 lead by the 12:15 mark of the first before Notre Dame scored four unanswered goals. Eberly made 21 saves.

In the rematch, Karabela opened the scoring in the first period, and it was 1-1 when Adam Eisele made it 2-1 in the second, and Sam Deckhut extended the Buckeyes' lead to 3-1 at 7:18 of the third.

But Notre Dame drew to within 3-2 less than two minutes later, and with the goalie pulled, Paul Fischer scored with 0.1 seconds remaining to send the game to overtime.

The Irish got the winner by Panayioti Fimis at 3:16.

Prior to the game, Eisele, Davis Burnside, Jake Dunlap and Ethan Straky were honored on Senior Night in front of 5,989 fans.

Rohlik said the series was good preparation for the playoffs.

"I mean, it's playoff hockey, right?" he said. "Two tight games, we've got to come from behind one night, we're playing with the lead the next. So, you've got to be comfortable in both those positions. We did a lot of good things, but it's not good enough. It's playoff hockey, 60 minutes, especially against a team we're playing up there (Wisconsin)."

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Battering Badgers

The No. 5 seed Buckeyes whipped the No. 4 seed Badgers (21-12-2) by extending a 1-0 lead with two second-period goals and four in the third, three on the power play, before Eberly lost the shutout late.

Thompson led the Buckeyes with three points. Eisele, Karabela and junior Broten Sabo each had a goal and an assist, and Burnside added two helpers. OSU was 3 for 6 on the power play and 2 for 2 on the penalty kill.

"We've showed spurts throughout the year and unfortunately, some of those games didn't go our way," Burnside said. "Tonight we were able to show what we can do and we want to keep doing that going forward,"

The Buckeyes eliminated the Badgers for a third straight season in the semifinals. The previous two went the distance in the former best-of-three format, with OSU winning in Madison two years ago and at Nationwide Arena in downtown Columbus in 2025.

Nathan Lewis opened the scoring at 5:01 before 11,297 spectators. Caron made it 2-0 at 2:06 of the second period with a shot from the face-off dot and Karabela added a tally at 17:30 off a turnover with Burnside setting him up.

The Buckeyes started the third with a 5-on-3 power play, and Sabo scored 25 seconds into the period to make it 4-0. At 6:42, William Smith's stretch pass led to Eisele's marker and a 5-0 advantage.

The Buckeyes' final two scores by junior Max Montes at 9:38 and Thompson at 10:23 came during a five-minute power play before Finn Brink scored for the Badgers at 12:29.

Redemption

Top-seed Michigan State revved up the sellout crowd of 6,555 when Shane Vansaghi scored 1:56 into the game. The Buckeyes did not panic and Thompson scored at 9:03 to tie it.

Karabela made it 2-1 at 1:33 of the second during a 4-on-3 power play but Caron was called for his third penalty of the game and second in less than six minutes which resulted in Porter Martone's power-play goal making it 2-2 at 17:29 of the middle period. Those were the only penalties for OSU.

Caron atoned for them in OT when he took a drop pass from Karabela and blasted a shot past Trey Augustine to start the celebration.

"I said to myself, 'You've got to find a way to help the team,'" Caron said. "I think scoring in overtime in a game like that, that's a bounce back and a response you want to have."

The Buckeyes went 3-1-1 vs. the Spartans, including a 2-0-1 mark at Munn Arena to deny Michigan State a third straight tournament title.

For a complete recap of the Notre Dame, Wisconsin and Michigan State games, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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 (6-12)

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, L 13-4; 6-8 UCLA, L 11-1; L 19-6 (8 inn.); L 10-7; 10 KENT STATE, L 8-5; 13-15 at Washington, W 10-9 (10 inn.); L 5-4 (11 inn.); L 5-4; 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 (21-12, 12-8)

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, W 94-62; 7 INDIANA, W 91-78; 12 Big Ten Tournament in Chicago vs. Iowa, W 72-69; 13 Big Ten Tournament in Chicago vs. Michigan, L 71-67; 19 NCAA Tournament at Greenville, S.C., vs. TCU.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (26-7, 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; 5 Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis vs. Indiana, W 83-59; 6 Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis vs. Minnesota, W 60-55; 7 Big Ten Tournament semifinals in Indianapolis vs. UCLA, L 72-62; 21 NCAA TOURNAMENT IN COLUMBUS vs. HOWARD.

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, NTS; 19-22 NCAA Championships in South Bend, Ind.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (14-20-2, 8-15-1)

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, L 5-4 (OT); L 4-3 (OT); 11 Big Ten Tournament quarterfinals at Wisconsin, W 7-1; 14 Big Ten Tournament semifinals at Michigan State, W 3-2 (OT); 21 Big Ten Tournament finals at Michigan.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

(35-4-0, 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 WCHA Final Faceoff at St. Paul, Minn., vs. Minnesota, W 4-0; 7 WCHA Final Faceoff at St. Paul, Minn., vs. Wisconsin, W 2-1; 12 NCAA Columbus Regional vs. Yale, W 6-1; 20 Frozen Four at University Park, Pa., vs. Northeastern.

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 9-11 NCAA Zone Diving Championships, NTS; 13-15 CSCAA National

Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla., 2nd/746.5 pts.; 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 9-11 NCAA Zone Diving Championships, NTS; 13-15 CSCAA National Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla., 3rd/496 pts.; 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., Men 52nd, 1 pt; Women DNP, 0 pts; 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 (10-9, 5-6)

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, L 3-0; 7 MCKENDREE, L 3-0; 12 at Ball State, L 3-1; 14 at Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-0; 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., 2nd/148.5 pts.; 19-21 NCAA Championships at Cleveland.

Walking With A Spring (Football) In His Step

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

March Madness is officially here. However, if you are looking for my insightful commentary on the Ohio State men's and women's basketball teams and their prospects in the NCAA tournaments, you have come to the wrong place.

I think it's great that the men have broken their NCAA drought, and it's great that the women are going to host games in the first two rounds of the tourney. But this is Ohio State, not Kentucky or Duke (or Connecticut on the distaff side), and I am more interested in what is going to happen in Ohio State spring football practice than I am in how the Buckeyes fare in March Madness. I know that's probably a sad admission from the publisher of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, but it's the truth. My apologies to coaches Diebler and McGuff and their hard-working players. There will be plenty of others out there providing basketball commentary. Best of luck to both teams.

One of the things I will be following with the grid team this spring is the progress of quarterback Julian Sayin. I was completely on the Sayin bandwagon last season, a performance good enough to make him a Heisman finalist, and I still am. One of the things I would tell anyone I could get to listen last year when I was touting the young quarterback was, "and he gets better each week." Truth be told, he *did* get better each week up until a certain point and then started to taper off.

After his efficient performance in the opener against Texas, when the coaches for the most part kept the wraps on him, they let him loose, and he went on an epic eight-game run, completing more than 80 percent of his passes in five of those games and over 78 percent in two more. He threw for over 300 yards in six of those eight games.

By the time the UCLA game rolled around on Nov. 15, he would not throw for 80 percent completions or 300 yards again, a stretch of five games. His line for the first nine games of the season, including the Texas game, was 203 completions on 251 attempts for an 80.9 completion percentage, 2,491 yards and 24 touchdowns against just four interceptions. He had been sacked just five times.

In the final five games he completed 98 of 140 passes for a 70.0 percentage, eight touchdowns vs. four interceptions, 1,119 yards and a troubling 11 sacks. That's a fine performance for most quarterbacks (with the exception, perhaps, of the sacks), but Heisman-worthy?

I've maintained that he got tired as the season progressed. No high school season can simulate the grueling nature of a big-time 14-game college season and all the prep that comes with it. There's also the possibility that the drop in numbers was caused by a step-up in competition, with the Buckeyes closing with Michigan, national champ Indiana and runner-up Miami.

There's also the reality that those better teams at the end of the season would have had the benefit of much more film to watch on Sayin and the Buckeyes.

One of the things that those opposing teams would have seen on the film was that it was highly unlikely that Sayin was going to run the ball. This was a hot topic of discussion among Buckeye fans and observers as last season progressed and actually a discussion that dates back to the days of C.J. Stroud at quarterback. Many, including me, have always believed that this lack of running was on Ryan Day and his offensive coordinator du jour, who didn't want to expose their franchise quarterbacks to potential injury, not a decision by the quarterback. I always felt that Stroud could run if he was called on to run it or had to. I'm not talking about a Braxton Miller, but a guy who could get the yards if he had to. As for Sayin and his running ability, I wouldn't know.

I have no sample to judge him on. I do know that there were several times last season when the opposition sea parted and there was suddenly vast green space in front of Sayin but he didn't take the easy yards.

I've always felt that when your quarterback doesn't offer at least the *threat* of running the ball, it's like 10 players against 11 on defense.

So Sayin's mobility was going to be one of the things I followed this spring. Imagine how I felt when I saw Day appeared to be ready to address the issue.

"We all know the ball comes out accurately (for him), throwing the football, but making an impact with his legs when appropriate, we know that that's the X-factor that has to show up this year," Day said. "He's aware of that. He's been working hard in the offseason."

Sayin seems to understand the issue.

"I'm very comfortable with having that clock in my head, of knowing when the ball needs to get out, or knowing that I have to take off," Sayin said. "I'm still improving that, but I'm very comfortable in that aspect of having that internal clock in my head and knowing when the pocket is breaking down."

He also has been working hard off the field with strength coach Mickey Marotti, in preparation for the possibility of carrying the ball more. Reports are that he has added several pounds.

"I'm getting bigger, stronger, faster with (Marotti)," Sayin said. "He's obviously the backbone of our program and someone that brings the best out of us every day."

Unless you are at practice every day, it is hard to tell what improvements are being made, and the spring game – with its no contact with the quarterback rules – is no place to see how Sayin is progressing. But I will be monitoring the progress of the new, mobile Sayin and the effect on him of new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith as best I can as the spring moves along.

And just so you don't think it's only me watching this, here's what former Buckeye defensive back – and always candid observer – Tyvis Powell said in a recent issue of BSB when asked about what Sayin needed to work on most.

"Doing well under pressure, that's probably the biggest thing," Powell said. "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."

"I Believe In BSB" Continues

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.

In a simultaneous effort, we are also encouraging readers to upgrade their subscrip-

tions to first-class mail in an envelope. Quite frankly, I am disappointed in the response to the call for the first-class upgrade. I feel like some readers would rather call and complain about their delivery and have us absorb the cost of resending a paper than to partner with us to do something about that delivery. We are offering a chance to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail from the Football Preview issue through coverage of the Michigan game at the current rate of \$35, or \$45 through the playoffs and the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up in February.

In most of your cases, you have already subscribed at a reduced rate. Why not use some of that money you saved to try the upgrade? If you don't see the value just don't upgrade next year. Don't forget, your BSB will arrive in more pristine condition because it is mailed in an envelope, and the replacement policy is also more liberal for first-class subscribers.

To show how serious we are about encouraging you to upgrade, we have also lowered the annual rate for those who want their first-class delivery for the entire year.

That's how serious we are about improving your BSB experience.

As for the "I Believe In BSB," initiative, we are asking that readers renew their subscription for two years at the full rate as we rebuild from last year's well-chronicled delivery-driven problems. If your subscription is not up for renewal, your I Believe In BSB renewal will tack right on the end of your existing subscription, and you will be supporting the paper that you have been enjoying (or so you tell me) for so many years. Those who renew for two years at full price will be recognized in BSB upon their participation. The latest readers to show they "believe" are listed on page 5.

If you traditionally renew one year at a time, you can still support BSB by paying full price for that year.

For those of you who genuinely cannot afford to pay full price, we have extended our traditional money-saving Subscriber Special, which is now known as "The Affordability Subscriber Special." There is a space on your renewal card to make an additional donation if you desire, or if you order by phone, just tell us you want to add something to show your support.

If you genuinely love Buckeye Sports Bulletin and truly struggle to pay for it, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862, and we will try to find a promotion that suits you. Your fellow readers who are paying a little more are helping to underwrite your subscription.

Just a reminder. Make sure we have your email address. The best subscription deals are online because it saves us the cost of a renewal card.

There are also other ways to support BSB.

As I mentioned in the last issue, 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.

In speaking to so many of you, I also know that there are many Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers who own businesses. I'm offering you a chance to run a business card-sized ad in the Football Preview Issue, the Michigan Preview Issue with its popular Michigan Memories, the Playoff Wrap-Up and the Football Recruiting

Wrap-up in February for just \$300 total. What a fantastic way to carry your message to fellow Buckeyes

Give me a call at one of the above numbers, and I will get you fixed up.

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. The kind words from those of you whom I have talked to on the phone throughout this process are truly humbling.

From Boy To Man

Back around the time of the recent NFL combine, I heard a talking head say that former Buckeye linebacker Sonny Styles was such a physical specimen "he looked like he was built in a laboratory."

That notion made me realize that we've seen Sonny Styles grow up right before our very eyes. I usually refrain from calling college athletes "kids." They're not. At the least, they are young adults. But Sonny Styles really was a kid when he arrived on campus. He should have been worrying about the senior prom and instead, he was worrying about the likes of Penn State and Michigan. In retrospect, another year of high school might have helped his college growth with another year of experience on the football field and another year of physical maturity.

Still, Buckeye fans greeted him with lofty expectations as the next great safety at Ohio State. Some seemed disappointed that he wasn't the second coming of Jack Tatum the moment he hit the field. Not that he didn't produce in his first two years.

As a true freshman he appeared in 10 games, recording nine tackles, one for loss. By his sophomore year he broke into the starting lineup and was sixth on the team with 53 tackles, 4½ for loss and two sacks, plus a pass breakup and a forced fumble. All the while, he was maturing from a boy to a "young adult."

Then came the move to linebacker.

He seemed to take to the position, finishing second on the team to Cody Simon with 100 tackles, 10½ for loss and six sacks, with five pass breakups from his linebacker spot, helping the Buckeyes to a national championship.

He came back for his senior year and earned the prestigious Block "O" jersey, establishing him as one of the true leaders on the team. All the while, he was improving his mental game, as well as his physical play.

"Last year, I was just kind of figuring it out," Styles said. "I wasn't really trusting myself. Now I more so understand the defense so that I can kind of just focus on the offense. You have to know it like the back of your hand, so you can just look at the offense and see what's happening on their side of the ball and be able to anticipate rather than reacting to every play and having no idea what's coming."

That added up to a team-high 82 tackles, 6½ tackles for loss, a sack, an interception, three breakups and a forced fumble.

By the time he got to the combine, he had already established his reputation.

"He really didn't have to do anything at the combine if he didn't want to, but he ended up going through the vast majority of the drills," Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors said. "He stood out in everything he did. So, I think that he proved that he's right up there as one of the absolute best athletes in the 2026 NFL draft class and probably solidified himself as a top-10 pick."

It's been fun watching the four-year ride and the four-year growth.

Best of luck, Sonny.