

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 45, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 18, 2026

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Over the course of Ohio State's history, few linebackers have accomplished more on the gridiron than James Laurinaitis. In his four-year playing career, Laurinaitis was a three-time All-American and was twice named the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year.

Now, over 15 years after his collegiate playing days ended, Laurinaitis has already started to build up a laundry list of accomplishments as a coach. In two years as Ohio State's linebackers coach, Laurinaitis transformed Sonny Styles, a former safety, and Arvell Reese, a talented but modestly ranked four-star recruit, into the best linebacker tandem in the country.

In addition to earning All-America honors as starters for the 2025 Buckeyes, Reese and Styles are poised to be selected in the top 10 of the upcoming NFL draft.

Considering he was one of the greatest defenders in the illustrious history of Ohio State football, it may be too early to say Laurinaitis is on pace to be a better coach than he was a player, but through a couple of years, he's undoubtedly off to a good start.

"If you look at the play the last two years with the guys they've had, and then obviously, just look at the NFL draft this year and what's going to happen in the first 10 picks, or certainly in the first round, it kind of speaks for itself," said Ohio State beat reporter Pat Murphy of 247Sports. "He's done a really good job. I think he's still learning. I think he'll admit that, but I think for a young coach there's a really promising future there."

The cupboard is never really bare at any position group at Ohio State, but Laurinaitis didn't necessarily have it made when he first took over for former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles as the program's linebackers coach.

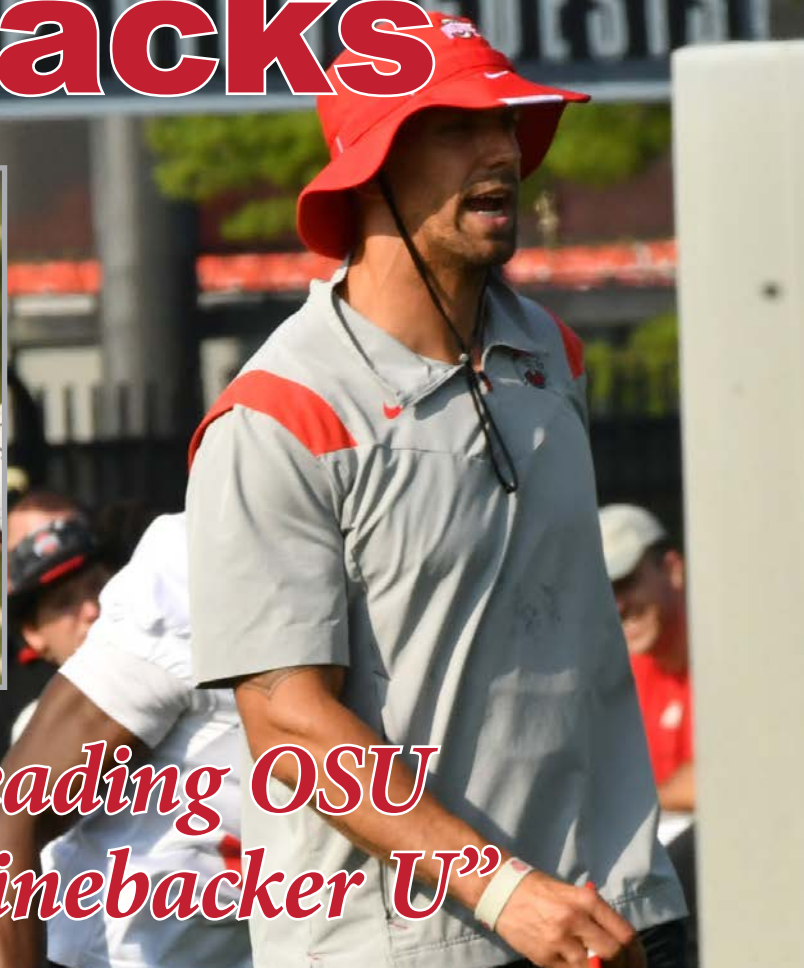
After the 2023 season, Ohio State needed to replace starters Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers at linebacker. Laurinaitis had some decent options but eventually turned to Cody Simon, who had spent the prior year as a backup, and Styles, who – as talented as he is – was in his first year at the linebacker position.

In his very first season in charge of Ohio

Leader Of The Backs



Laurinaitis Leading OSU To Become "Linebacker U"



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEXT IN LINE — Since becoming linebackers coach in 2024, three-time Ohio State All-American James Laurinaitis, pictured as both a player and coach, has started developing high-end talent as evidenced by Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles likely being chosen in the top 10 of this year's NFL draft.

State's linebackers, Laurinaitis' development skills were put to the test. The former NFL veteran quickly earned his stripes, though. Simon and Styles led Ohio State with 112 and 100 tackles, respectively, and each player earned All-Big Ten honors.

But Laurinaitis took it to another level in only his second season as the leader of the room. Reese and Styles combined to be

one of the more effective linebacker duos in recent Ohio State history. The pairing combined for 16½ tackles for loss, and Reese, in particular, flashed some versatility as a pass-rusher, finishing the season with 6½ sacks.

During spring practices, Laurinaitis gave all the credit to Reese and Styles for developing into superstars at their respective positions.

"I think with Sonny and Arvell, obviously, that was a good-looking room," Laurinaitis said. "Those guys worked so hard, and they got drastically better as the season went on, I thought. The standard is the standard. The standard was always to try to get our room to a point where you felt a healthy amount of pressure to perform in the sense of, 'If I have a bad day or two, I could be passed up by the next guy,' because of the talent lev-

el in the room. And I constantly want that grittiness, because I certainly felt it when I was here."

With both Styles and Reese departing for the NFL draft, Laurinaitis once again will have to work his wonders to assemble an elite linebacker tandem. Only former Wisconsin transfer Christian Alliegro has experience as a regular starter, and his Badger team finished just 4-8 last season. But even though the Buckeyes may not have the superstars at linebacker that they had last year, there should be plenty of pressure on each player to perform inside a very talented room.

In large part thanks to Laurinaitis' recruiting efforts, the Buckeyes have several highly touted players – including five-star

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FAN FORUM



From The Message Board

In this issue, BSB looked at former Buckeye Brian Hartline's time at Ohio State as the wide receivers coach. During that stretch, he became known as one of the best position coaches in football. To go along with the story on page 10, we asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum who they think were the top five wide receivers from the Hartline era at Ohio State.

"Marvin Harrison Jr., Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Garrett Wilson, Jeremiah Smith, Chris Olave."

— **Tiffin Buckeye**

"There have been so many that it's hard to just list five. I'll go with WRs that have completed their tenure at OSU and are in the NFL. In no particular order – Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave, Marvin Harrison Jr., Garrett Wilson and Emeka Egbuka."

— **R1TBDBITL**

"I've always been partial towards Garrett Wilson, but I'm not sure I'd put him at the top of the list. Jeremiah Smith is probably the best. Egbuka, JSN and Marvin Harrison Jr.

would probably be my top five. Truly splitting hairs."

— **Terrier Buck**

"Marvin Harrison Jr. came to mind first, though this question is like trying to pick the best beer in Germany. You have to think Jeremiah Smith, too, right up there with Marv. There's a reason they called the Hartline era WR U."

— **PeyoteBuck**

"It's not easy to separate these guys, but I think the easiest choice for me is Jeremiah Smith at the top. If he stays healthy, he's set to smash all kinds of receiving records this season. Sixteen games as a freshman certainly helps that,

but the eye test backs up the numbers. Then I'll go Marvin Harrison Jr., Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and JSN. I feel like, even though I already listed five, Carnell Tate deserves a mention. Even with Jeremiah as the No. 1 target last year, he was a huge deep-ball threat. He'll probably go in the top 10 for a reason."

— **Greg Wilson, BSB**

"My top three is easy. Jeremiah Smith, Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka. After that it gets more difficult. I'll go Garrett Wilson and JSN."

— **Frank Moskowitz, BSB**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Winning It All Used To Be Harder

The April 4 issue of BSB contained a fact that is true but requires an explanation. The result is an uninformed reader unless s/he was a basketball fan in the 1960s or has read books about it. The fact is that the 1960 NCAA Tournament had 25 teams. That fact is used to minimize the value of the 1960 NCAA championship in a smaller field than today.

It was far more difficult to win a championship in 1960 because many worthy teams were omitted. Only league champions and independents were invited. Try winning a title when your team does not qualify! OSU teams tied for the Big Ten title in 1963 and 1964 but were excluded because OSU had qualified in 1962.

In 1970, South Carolina was undefeated in con-

ference play but lost in the ACC tournament; in 1971, second-ranked USC was left out because top-ranked UCLA represented the Pac-8; and in 1974, Maryland ranked No. 4 but lost in the ACC tournament championship game. The field was expanded in 1975, with other increases to follow.

The point is, before 1975, every game mattered, and any conference loss could disqualify a team before the tournament began. For example, this year, Illinois had five conference losses but made it to the Final Four, and many other Big Ten teams had an opportunity to participate. Only Michigan would have qualified before 1975.

The 1963 and 1964 Buckeyes each had three conference losses. The '63 team was ranked seventh in the nation. In 1960, Indiana won 12 straight games

to end the season and ranked seventh. Many good teams never made the tournament.

Lee Caryer
Worthington, Ohio

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

The next issue (May cover date) will be mailed April 28.

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OSU Spring Spotlight On Linebackers

With all due respect to Peyton Pierce, Christian Alliegro, Riley Pettijohn, TJ Alford, Garrett Stover, Cincere Johnson and a few others, the current crop of Ohio State linebackers has a tough act to follow with the departures of Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese.

Long before the Buckeyes turned themselves into "Wide Receiver U," they churned out a steady stream of hard-charging, teeth-rattling, tackle machines at the linebacker position. Starting in the mid-1960s with Dwight "Ike" Kelly and motoring right through such other All-Americans as Randy Gradishar, Tom Cousineau, Chris Spielman, Andy Katzenmoyer, A.J. Hawk and James Laurinaitis, nearly every era of Ohio State football featured a standout at the linebacker position.

In recent years, however, I watched the position fall well behind the standards set of the aforementioned players. I had to listen while being told how efficient the likes of Tuf Borland, Pete Werner and Tommy Eichenberg were playing when my own eyes could tell they weren't holding the proverbial candle to Gradishar, Spielman or Laurinaitis.

Then along came Matt Patricia and whatever kind of magic dust he sprinkled on the OSU defense plus the presence of Laurinaitis, who seems perfectly suited to follow in the footsteps of Luke Fickell and Mike Vrabel – former All-America defenders who found success first as Ohio State assistants and now elsewhere as head coaches.

Suddenly, Reese and Styles became the first Buckeyes to earn first-team All-America status since Ryan Shazier in 2013 and are primed to be the highest Ohio State linebackers to be taken in the NFL draft since Hawk and Bobby Carpenter were selected among the first 18 picks in 2006.

In a mock draft released in mid-March, ESPN draft guru Mel Kiper Jr. predicted Reese to go to Arizona with the No. 3 overall pick with Styles headed to Washington at No. 7. The last time the Buckeyes landed two players among the top seven overall selections was in 2020 when defensive end Chase Young went No. 2 to Washington and cornerback Jeff Okudah was Detroit's pick at No. 3.

Can the 2026 crop of linebackers continue the legacy Reese and Styles reignited, or will they fall back to the level of mediocrity we saw throughout most of the mid-2010s and early 2020s?

Alliegro is perhaps the most intriguing of the group since he is expected to fill Reese's hybrid linebacker/edge role even though he hasn't played a single down for Ohio State. The 6-4, 241-pounder has, however, played a lot of Big Ten football, transferring from Wisconsin where he accumulated 124 tackles and eight sacks over three seasons.

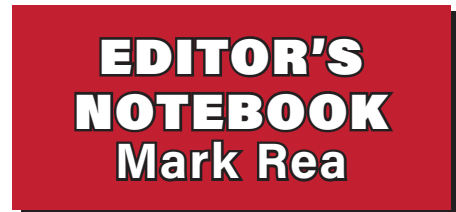
Last season against the Buckeyes, Alliegro's team lost a 34-0 decision, but he had six tackles, including two for loss. But that only tells a fraction of the story. Midway through the first quarter, he dropped into coverage on a first-down screen pass and brought down OSU running back Bo Jackson after a 6-yard gain.

Upon impact with the ground, however, Alliegro could tell something was out of the ordinary. "I got up like, 'I'll be good' and ran back out there for another play," he said. "Then I went to the trainers and was like, 'Yo, I think something's wrong.'"

What was wrong was a broken ulna bone in his forearm, the kind of injury that would later require surgery. Except that after a few plays and having the arm wrapped, Alliegro returned to the game and registered three more tackles.

It was that kind of toughness that led the Buckeyes to pursue Alliegro when the transfer

portal opened in January. It harkens back to a time when Spielman said in 1985 on the eve of an upset win at home against top-ranked Iowa, "If somebody wants to fight me in my own backyard, he had better bring an army with him and be prepared to kill me if he wants to win."



If Alliegro is poised to become this season's version of Reese, that leaves Pierce to fill the shoes of Styles, who led the team in tackles last year with 82.

The 6-1, 228-pound junior has already played two seasons for the Buckeyes, an eternity in the portal era for a nonstarter. Still, the upside is undeniable for Pierce who totaled 312 total stops, including 61 for loss, during his final two high school seasons.

Pettijohn (6-2, 231), Alford (6-1, 233) and Stover (6-1, 228) are all four-star prospects from Texas, Florida and Ohio, respectively. Pettijohn, who is missing spring practice with an undisclosed injury, and Stover each saw action in 13 of the 14 games the Buckeyes played last fall while Alford got into 11 games.

Then there's Johnson, a five-star prospect every bit as prized on defense as receiver Chris Henry Jr. was on offense. The 6-3, 228-pound Johnson was regarded by most recruiting services as the No. 1 player in Ohio regardless of position, and 247 Sports ranked him the No. 2 prep linebacker in the entire country.

With the likes of Troy Smith, Donte Whitner, Ted Ginn Jr., Jermale Hines, Marcus Hall and Marshon Lattimore – just to name a few – there was a time when you could look at a highly rated recruit from Cleveland Glenville and know you were seeing a future Ohio State starter, maybe even a Heisman Trophy winner.

That Glenville pipeline began to dry up until Reese came along, but what many fans tend to forget is that we didn't know this time last year just how special Reese was going to become. He appeared in only six games as a freshman in 2023, suffered a concussion and recorded no statistics. The following season, playing mostly as backup to team co-captain Cody Simon, Reese saw action in all 16 games during the national championship run and posted a modest total of 43 tackles.

Then came last year and the rest is history – the point being that if Johnson is really something special, it might take just a little bit of time before the specialness reveals itself.

Then again, it might not as I am reminded of another Spielman story.

Recruited as a prep All-American out of Massillon (Ohio) Washington, Spielman brought his special brand of intensity with him to Ohio State and immediately won a starting job at inside linebacker, a rarity for a true freshman.

But he aggravated an ankle sprain just before the 1984 season opener against Oregon State, and defensive coordinator Bob Tucker determined the youngster wasn't physically ready to play come game day. It was going to be the first organized football game in Spielman's life that he would not start, and he was beside himself. He paced back and forth along the sideline throughout the first half, staying within earshot of head coach Earle Bruce.

"I was like a caged animal," Spielman said. "I was pawing, I was growling. I just remember saying, 'Put me in! You gotta put me in! This is

why you recruited me! I gotta be in there!"

With his team trailing by a 14-3 margin at halftime, Bruce sought out Tucker in the locker room.

"Why isn't Spielman playing?" the head coach barked.

"He's just a freshman. He isn't ready," Tucker replied.

Bruce narrowed his eyes and snorted, "He's ready."

Spielman finished the game with 10 tackles, tailback Keith Byars ran for 182 yards and two touchdowns, and the Buckeyes came off the mat to score a 22-14 victory.

"It tough for a freshman to be a leader," Spielman told reporters after the game, "but when he's a linebacker, he's got to be."

Hail To The Victors

It occurred to me while watching the NCAA Tournament that Dusty May provided Ohio State (and every other basketball program, for that matter) with the blueprint for winning a national championship in the NIL/portal era.

In just his second season after taking over a Michigan program that had crashed and burned under the combustible Juwan Howard, May guided the Wolverines to a 37-3 record, the Big Ten regular-season championship, a runner-up finish in the conference tournament, and a six-game romp through March Madness that featured victories by an average of 19.0 points per game.

Afterward, May hoisted his program's first national title trophy in 37 years while his assembled roster of all-stars surrounded him.

And, as a prince named Hamlet once said, there's the rub.

May overhauled the wreckage left from Howard's messy exit after an 8-24 season in 2023-24 and put together a starting five of transfers – guards Elliot Cadeau (North Carolina) and Nimari Burnett (Alabama), forwards Morez Johnson Jr. (Illinois) and Yaxel Lendeborg (UAB) and 7-3 center Aday Mara (UCLA). Top reserves included guard Roddy Gayle Jr., who spent the first two years of his college basketball life at Ohio State.

One could label May as basketball's version of Curt Cignetti, who has mined the transfer portal successfully enough to bring a national championship to what was once the laughingstock of college football at Indiana.

Both coaches accomplished their program turnarounds in just two seasons, further amplifying the reality that college athletics has undergone a tectonic shift with millions of dollars available to players who can chase that money through unfettered transfers.

If their donor bases are so inclined, basketball teams can stockpile talent as Michigan has done, producing (some might say diluting) a product that largely overshadowed what some observers said was one of the best incoming freshman classes in many years, a class that included national player of the year Cameron Boozer of Duke.

It also produced – with the notable exception of UConn freshman guard Braylon Mullins' stunner with 0.4 seconds left to beat Duke in the Elite Eight – a stinker of an NCAA Tournament. When mid-majors constantly have their rosters raided, the chances of an emerging Cinderella team are greatly reduced.

Add that to playing the title game in a football stadium where an estimated 80 percent of the 70,720 fans in attendance had terrible views, and those running the tournament seem to be running the risk of killing their golden egg-laying goose.

Then again, what else would one expect from the NCAA these days?



Smith Had \$10 Million Offer In Portal

For years now, the services of superstar receiver Jeremiah Smith have been desired by plenty of suitors in college football, and that was certainly the case over the most recent offseason.

Smith, an All-American regarded by many as the best player in college football, told On3's Chris Low for a story published on April 8 that he had a multi-million dollar offer waiting for him had he entered the transfer portal.

"Over \$10 million, easy," Smith said. "But that's not how I operate."

One team that Low reported was interested in Smith is Miami (Fla.), which is very close to Smith's hometown of Miami Gardens, Fla.

Smith said he didn't consider transferring to Miami.

"No reason to go back home, not when I'm at the best place in the country," Smith said. "I came to Ohio State for a reason, to win championships, develop as a player and a person, and keep building on this legacy. I might have grown up in south Florida, but I'm a Buckeye. That's not changing, I wasn't going anywhere."

The Hurricanes had arguably their best season in over two decades in 2025. They beat Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl on the way to their first national championship

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	

appearance since 2002 against Ohio State, but that run apparently didn't do anything to interest Smith.

"Just because they beat us and things went their way, I wasn't going back home," Smith said. "I mean, you hear the numbers and everything. But to be honest, it didn't make sense for me to go back. I have a good quarterback here. I have a good group of teammates here. A lot of people came back, so it would look stupid for me to go there, and we have a team here that's already built."

Transfers Have Impressed In Practice

Over the offseason, if there was any tight end who stepped up to put himself on track to be a starter, it was rising sophomore Nate Roberts (for more on Roberts, see page 14). Tight ends coach Keenan Bailey made that much clear when he sent Roberts out with the other first-teamers to start spring.

Bailey attributed that decision to Roberts' work ethic in the spring, but according to head coach Ryan Day, Roberts isn't the only one in the room making progress.

"Bringing in Mason Williams and (Hunter Welcing) at tight end with Nate, they're

not perfect at all, but they're grinding at it, and they're working at it," Day said. "And I think those guys at tight end have shown up, especially in the pass game. We're seeing them make a lot more plays, maybe than we've seen in the past. That has been a bright spot."

Unlike Roberts, transfer tight ends Welcing and Williams were not necessarily highly touted prospects coming out of high school. Welcing started his collegiate career at Northwestern, and it took him several years to make an impact for the Wildcats. However, Welcing had a breakout season in 2025, totaling 296 receiving yards and two touchdowns on 28 catches.

Although he didn't play at the Power Five level, Williams was similarly productive last year. In his junior season at Ohio University, Williams had 26 catches for 276 yards and three touchdowns.

On the defensive side, Day praised another transfer. Former Florida State safety Earl Little Jr. has apparently caught Day's eye so far in the spring.

"How do you replace Caleb Downs?" Day asked. "You can't, but Earl has been doing a great job of really communicating back there. (Rising junior safety) Jaylen McClain has been doing a good job back there. So that's been exciting to watch."

It doesn't come as much of a surprise that Day named Little as someone who has been impressive so far in the spring. Not only was Little previously praised by both Day and Smith earlier in the spring, but he was also one of the first players to have his black stripe removed this offseason.

Little had a stellar season last year for the Seminoles, recording 76 total tackles, four interceptions and two passes broken up. He is projected to start at the nickel position, which Lorenzo Styles Jr. occupied last season.

Starting Tackles Out For Spring

Ohio State's projected starting offensive tackles have caught the injury bug. Returning starters Phillip Daniels and Austin Siereveld are currently sidelined with injuries, Day said on April 6, meaning backups Carter Lowe and Ian Moore are receiving first-team reps during spring practices.

Day said Siereveld and Daniels will be out for the rest of the spring and that Lowe and Moore will have an important opportunity to fill their shoes at right tackle and left tackle, respectively.

"It was good to see those guys get some reps and kind of get forced into it, and they'll be like that for the rest of spring,"

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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Day said. "It's great to see both Ian and Carter have to step up in a big way. It's one thing when you're the second guy, or maybe the third for Carter, but now he's getting reps with the ones and is going against the best guys over on the other side of the ball.

"This is a great opportunity for him, and he has to take it and run. It's not just the physical part. It's the mental part, being able to do it and then consistently do it over and over again. I know it happened a couple of years ago in preseason camp. We had some guys out in the offensive line. Some guys had to step up, and that paid off dividends down the road."

In their practice open to students, fans and media on student appreciation day on April 4, Lowe and Moore had their share of struggles in pass protection, with Buckeye defensive linemen seemingly able to pressure rising sophomore starting quarterback Julian Sayin at will.

The growing pains are somewhat to be expected. Lowe, a redshirt freshman, has appeared in only two games in his Ohio State career. But even though both Lowe and Moore are not currently projected as starters, Day said each player could earn playing time even when Siereveld and Daniels return.

"We need (Lowe and Moore) to finish with two really good weeks of work, and they'll be right at the point of attack," Day said. "They need to really step up for us, because not only are they playing for depth, but they're playing for a starting position. Everything is on the board, and the more guys we have that can play, the more we're going to put them in the game."

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Former Buckeye Bob Atha Dies At Age 65

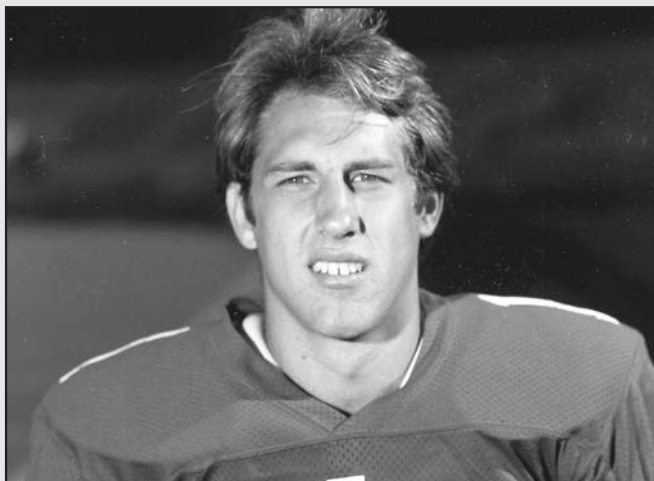
Former Ohio State kicker and quarterback Bob Atha died on March 31 at the age of 65. Atha died at his home in Worthington, Ohio, following a battle with cancer.

Atha joined Ohio State in 1978 as a preferred walk-on and went on to start for the Buckeyes at punter and kicker. In 1981, he led the Big Ten in scoring with 88 points, making 43 of 44 PATs, 13 of 19 field goals and a rushing TD and even passing for a touchdown as the backup quarterback to then-starter Art Schlichter.

In Ohio State's 29-10 win over Indiana that season, Atha kicked five field goals, which is still tied for a school record in a single game, with a long of 46.

Following his Ohio State career, Atha was selected by the St. Louis Cardinals in the 12th round of the 1982 NFL draft.

Atha was the cover subject of the inaugural issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.



"Chris is another one that just came in, kept his head down and is just working. He's the next one up," Smith said.

Defense Shines At Student Appreciation Day

During student appreciation day, when students and former Ohio State players had the chance to observe the football team take part in practice, the Buckeye defense seemed to have the upper hand.

The offensive line's struggles started from the very beginning of practice. Sayin was sacked multiple times in 11-on-11 drills, including once by junior defensive tackle Eddrick Houston.

It wasn't just the defensive line that was wreaking havoc. Incoming freshmen safeties Simeon Caldwell and Blaine Bradford each had pass breakups in drills.

On a crucial fourth-down play later on in 11-on-11 drills, rising senior defensive tackle James Smith also came up with a sack.

The Buckeyes' offense had its moments, though. In one 7-on-7 drill, Sayin flashed his precision and accuracy by fitting a ball into a tight window to find Inniss.

Sayin also connected with Inniss later

on in practice for a touchdown during a red-zone drill.

Redshirt-freshman quarterback Tavien St. Clair had a strong practice. St. Clair connected with McCuin, who made a nice move to pick up a few extra yards during 11-on-11 drills.

St. Clair often used his legs and athleticism in practice to extend plays and looked more than comfortable throwing on the run. However, he did make a freshman mistake one play when he attempted to find Henry but was nearly intercepted by rising sophomore cornerback Miles Lockhart.

Perhaps the biggest play of the practice came during the red-zone period. On a fourth-and-goal play from inside the 5-yard line, Sayin extended the play by rolling out of the pocket and threw a desperation pass toward the end zone. Although Day ruled two days later that he stepped out of bounds first, Jeremiah Smith made the catch over projected starters Jermaine Mathews Jr. and McClain.

The practice was concluded with a pressure kick from transfer kicker Connor Hawkins. Hawkins, who transferred to Ohio State from Baylor over the offseason, was surrounded by his teammates and fans on the field as he drilled a 36-yard field goal.

Six Bucks Shed Black Stripes

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State has had six more players prove themselves enough to shed their black stripes.

Former Alabama defensive end Qua Russaw was the first to become an "official" member of the team on April 2. Russaw's former Alabama teammate and fellow defensive lineman James Smith, and McCuin each had their black stripes removed two days later.

UCF transfer defensive lineman John Walker and Williams each had their black stripes removed on April 8, before former Georgia cornerback Dominick Kelly had his black stripe removed on April 10.

Continued On Page 6

Jackson Embracing Leadership Role

Former Florida running back Ja'Kobi Jackson hasn't been in Columbus for very long, but he's already embraced a leadership position. The seventh-year back said he hopes to set a good example for a running back room that is primarily made up of younger running backs.

"Just positive energy and (being an) older leadership type of guy," Jackson said when asked what he brings to the running back room. "I'm just trying to do everything right and still show everyone the right way to do things."

In a room full of highly touted recruits, Jackson, who started his career at Coahoma Community College, may not be the most talented player at his position, but he is more experienced than any other player in the room. Jackson eventually transferred to Florida after three years in community college and had his best season in 2024 when he ran for 509 yards and seven touchdowns on 95 carries.

Despite the youth of Ohio State's running back room, Jackson said he's been impressed with the work ethic of the others in the group.

"These guys are hard workers," Jackson said. "They already know the majority of the stuff that I know. I'm kind of getting in, learning the system, and taking some things from them too, as well."

With Ohio State returning two of its better running backs from last season in Isaiah West and Bo Jackson, Ja'Kobi Jackson certainly won't be expected to be a workhorse for the Buckeyes. When asked about what he envisions his role being in 2026, Jackson said he's comfortable doing whatever is asked of him.

"I'm doing anything that they really need me to do as far as pass protection, running the ball, or even catching the ball out of the backfield," Jackson said.

Jackson said the presence of running backs coach Carlos Locklyn was an important factor in his decision to come to OSU. He said Locklyn contacted him the first day that he entered the portal, and he enjoyed his vibe and mindset upon meeting him in person. So far in spring practices, Jackson has enjoyed being coached by Locklyn.

"I really love his energy," Jackson said. "I really love the way he coaches. He coaches us hard. He's tough, and he keeps it 100."

Frosh WR Henry Learning From Vets

Ohio State wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. has shown early promise in spring camp, offering a glimpse of the talent that made him one of the program's most intriguing freshmen.

For the Buckeyes and Day, the former five-star recruit out of Mater Dei High School in Santa Ana, Calif., learning from a veteran-filled receiver room could be just as valuable as the talent he has shown on the field.

"He gets to see Jeremiah (Smith) every day and his approach, so that's great," Day said. "Then the other guys in the room, Devin (McCuin) and Kyle (Parker), bring in a certain level of maturity. Brandon (Inniss) is mature. So I think it's great for him to see that."

As a senior for the Monarchs in 2025, Henry caught 28 passes for 607 yards and six touchdowns in eight games, while finishing the recruiting cycle as the No. 14 overall prospect and the No. 2 wide receiver, according to 247Sports composite rankings.

Day said Henry's high school talent has shown early this spring, adding that he must set high expectations and aim to start to make an immediate impact.

"He's flashed. He's really had some nice plays," Day said. "To play as a freshman is a lot, and so he has to have the mentality that he wants to play from day one. Starting in the first game should be his goal. Now, whether he does or not, we'll see, but he has all the traits, and he has all the skills. Everything we thought we saw in recruiting, we've seen on the field."

In early spring practices, Henry has already showcased his all-around skill set, with his 6-5, 195-pound frame standing out in 7-on-7 drills, while also working as a blocker and as a punt returner alongside Smith and Inniss.

Wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton echoed Day's sentiment.

"We're just trying to get him to truly play at a high level with urgency," Hankton said. "He's so efficient and smooth, and he has the length and ball skills. He's an extremely talented young man, but he still has to improve every single day."

Smith added that he believes that with a strong work ethic, the freshman could be next up among great Ohio State receivers.



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Heading into the spring, each of those players was expected to make some sort of impact this season after transferring into the program. Smith, one of the higher-rated players the Buckeyes signed out of the transfer portal, is expected to be a regular starter at the defensive tackle position. He has already made plenty of plays in practice, and the removal of his black stripe is likely a sign his coaching staff has been impressed by his play.

Five Buckeyes Attending Draft

Ohio State will be well-represented at the 2026 NFL draft. For months, several Buckeyes have been projected to be selected early in the draft, and many of those players will be in person for the draft itself, which will start on April 23.

Downs, defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, linebackers Arvell Reese and Sony Styles, and wide receiver Carnell Tate

Last Print Issue Of Biweekly Schedule Mails April 28

The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the May issue, is scheduled to be mailed on April 28. That will be the final issue of our traditional biweekly winter/spring schedule. With spring football practice in full swing, the spring game coming up and many recruits visiting, 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, including any action in the basketball portal, which will be closing on April 21, in real time at the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all BSB print subscribers.

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

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

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

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for

readers having continuing mail problems. This electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is also free to subscribers.

If you are having delivery problems, now would be a great time to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail for football season because we are still honoring last year's price. Postal rates are proposed to go up on July 12, and we will certainly be forced to follow with an increase then, if not sooner. Upgrade from the Football Preview issue through the Michigan game for \$35 or through the playoffs and the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up for \$45. Give us a call at (614) 486-2202 to order by credit card, or to pay by mail write P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. If paying with credit card, don't forget your three- or four-digit code.

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are all set to attend the draft in Pittsburgh.

Each player attending has the chance to be selected in the first round of the draft, and Downs, Reese, Styles and Tate have each been mocked by many draft experts to be picked within the top 10 picks of the draft.

Ohio State could be the first school with four players selected in the top 10 since Michigan State in 1967.

Ohio State has by far the most players set to attend in person. Miami (Fla.) and Alabama will each have two players attending the draft, but no other school will have

more than one player in Pittsburgh for the event.

Biriuk Enters Transfer Portal

Ohio State guard Dasha Biriuk is set to enter the transfer portal, she announced



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"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 44 years and what we plan to do in the future."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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via an Instagram post on April 6.

"After a lot of thought, I've decided to enter the transfer portal and explore new opportunities," the post read. "I'm looking forward to finding the right fit to continue growing both on and off the court."

Biriuk was a talented four-star recruit out of the Webb School in Tennessee, but she earned limited playing time with the Buckeyes in her only year with the team.

Appearing in 20 games for Ohio State, Biriuk averaged 3.3 points, 1.2 rebounds and 0.4 assists per game, while shooting 46.0 percent from the floor, including 34.4 percent from three-point range.

Biriuk was a legitimate factor for Ohio State during the team's nonconference slate. In the Buckeyes' dominant 130-32 win over Niagara, she scored 25 points, grabbed four rebounds, had an assist and snagged two steals.

However, by the time Big Ten play rolled around, she was basically out of the rotation. Biriuk appeared in only nine conference games during the regular season, receiving no more than four minutes of playing time in any of them.

Biriuk is the first Buckeye to announce her intent to enter the portal – and the only

one, as BSB went to press – which opened on April 6.

Cambridge Named Best Guard

Sophomore point guard Jalonni Cambridge was honored for an outstanding 2025-26 season on April 3 when she was named the winner of the Dawn Staley Award, given to the best guard in the country.

Cambridge became the first Buckeye to win the award since Kelsey Mitchell took home the honor in 2018.

Cambridge was undoubtedly the best player on an Ohio State team that won 27 games before losing in the second round of the NCAA tournament for the third year in a row. She finished the season averaging 23.2 points – the best mark of any Big Ten player – 5.6 rebounds, 4.4 assists and 1.9 steals per game while shooting 49.4 percent from the floor, including 36.0 percent from three-point range.

Cambridge was in contention for Big Ten Player of the Year honors but ultimately missed out, with UCLA center Lauren Betts taking the award. Cambridge also earned second-team All-America honors

from The Associated Press.

Pistol Team Wins National Title

Ohio State cruised to its sixth straight pistol national championship on March 28. The Buckeyes swept the air pistol, standard pistol and sport pistol events to defeat second-place Army by 330 points.

Ohio State had the top eight shooters in the overall individual aggregate. Junior Ada Korkhin had a score of 1,685 to lead the team, and sophomores Marcus Klemp (1,679) and Blaine Simpson (1,677) fin-

ished second and third, respectively.

In the sport pistol event, the Buckeyes had the top eight finishers, and in the standard pistol event, they had the top nine finishers. Korkhin narrowly missed a first-place finish in the air pistol event. Her score of 571 was good enough for a second-place finish in that event. Case Western Reserve's Suman Sanghera won the air pistol event with a score of 573.

Led by head coach Emil Milev, Ohio State has won seven national championships since 2018.

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Continued From Page 1

freshman Cincere Johnson as well as rising sophomores and top-150 recruits Riley Pettijohn and TJ Alford – waiting in the wings. Four-star recruit Garrett Stover isn't as highly touted as those players, but he was named an Iron Buckeye over the winter.

According to Murphy, Ohio State's linebacker room is the deepest on the team.

"I think on paper it is," Murphy said. "They're young, most of them. I think everyone's really excited about Riley Pettijohn. He had some big plays. He's still very young and inexperienced, but assuming that talent plays out over the course of the year, I think it can certainly be one of the deeper rooms."

Through the first half of spring, it appears as though rising junior linebacker Payton Pierce is in the driver's seat to start alongside Alliegro, which should come as no surprise. Despite being behind Reese and Styles in the depth chart, Pierce earned valuable playing time last year as Ohio State's third-string linebacker. The four-star recruit out of Lovejoy, Texas, recorded 43 total tackles, appearing in all 14 of Ohio State's games.

So far in the spring, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has liked what he's seen from the linebacker room.

"I think Christian and Payton have both done a good job," Day said. "TJ (Alford) is stepping up in a big way. He's going to find

himself playing a lot of football this year. He's knocking on the door every day. You see him, Cincere and Garrett and all those guys – James is doing a really good job there. We're throwing a lot at them. (Defensive coordinator Matt Patricia) is still trying to figure out what they do best. We know that there's a lot of production there."

The depth in Ohio State's linebacker room hasn't been so important in years. In order to confuse opposing defenses, Patricia lined up Buckeye linebackers in a bevy of roles, allowing players in the room to make an impact before garbage time.

"One of the best things that Coach (Patricia) always does is we're just trying to figure out how many guys we can depend on when it comes to a Saturday and then what roles we can give them," Laurinaitis said. "It's not just the old-school thinking of like, 'Here are the best 11, and we're just going to play them.' We say, 'OK, well, if this guy's really good at XYZ, well, let's make a package for him so that he feels like he's part of a starting defense.' We're really just trying to figure out and evaluate what each of these guys is really good at this spring."

Mental Might Fuels Linebacker Room

As much as Styles and Reese are highly regarded for their physical attributes, and rightly so, their mental attributes were arguably equally important in enabling them to



SONNY BROCKWAY

GOOD MOVE – Former safety Sonny Styles (0) blossomed under second-year linebackers coach James Laurinaitis and is expected to be an early pick in the 2026 NFL draft.

be superstars.

Reese had to be well-versed not only at his linebacker position but also at the defensive end spot, as someone who often rushed the passer in third-down situations. Styles, meanwhile, was in charge of relaying play calls to the rest of his teammates wearing the team's green dot, and he proved enough as a leader to be the recipient of the Block "O" jersey. He earned that honor just one year after his former running mate Cody Simon did.

Laurinaitis is not shy about the impor-

tance of the mental side of the linebacker position.

"Everyone in our room wants to get to the National Football League. The No. 1 thing is the preparation when it comes to taking notes with a pad of paper and a pen and redrawing and redrawing and redrawing," Laurinaitis said. "You can't play 15 plays at one time. You can narrow it down to three or four and play really fast. But if you're out there thinking, which way do I drop? You don't have a chance. As a linebacker in general, or a defensive player, the

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SONNY BROCKWAY

ON THE RISE — A year ago, Arvell Reese (8) was relatively unknown, but his play during the 2025 season has many prognosticators eyeing him as the second pick in the 2026 NFL draft.

offense will tell you a story every time. You just have to pay attention.”

Specific to Laurinaitis’s linebackers is the importance of being vocal. He told his group that being loud as a linebacker is even more important than being right.

“If you’re out there speaking all soft and quiet, it just won’t work on the field, you have to be loud,” Laurinaitis said. “Because even if you’re loud and wrong, all 11 will play the same call and we’ll be together. But if you’re soft and right, some guy will say, ‘What did you say?’ It just doesn’t work that way.”

So far in the spring, one player who has shown the sort of maturity that Laurinaitis is looking for is Alford, who has received some extra reps because of a shoulder injury that has sidelined Pettijohn. Laurinaitis said he appreciates the maturity that Alford has displayed during the offseason.

“TJ has grown so much from last season,” the coach said. “He got so much better from fall camp to when we were in the postseason. There’s been a maturity. I think TJ learned a lot about himself through last season. There’s been a maturity in the off-season. There’s been a seriousness of trying to find a way to get on the field and have a role. I think TJ has done a phenomenal job. He’s had a really strong start to this spring, so I expect to see a lot of football out of TJ Alford come this fall.”

As well as Alford has started his 2026 campaign, it still seems likely that Pierce will eventually be responsible for relaying calls to his teammates. Laurinaitis said that he is a naturally gifted communicator, but the key will be for him to continue to help his teammates.

“Payton’s always had the loud voice to get guys lined up and all those things,” Laurinaitis said. “And now the next step that I’d like to see is that Payton is getting his teammates aligned, and he’s demanding calls from the back end, and I think our communication is going really well so far with our group. You just continue to push the envelope.”

Laurinaitis’ LBs Have Lofty Future

Although he’s still very early in his time leading the Buckeye linebackers, it’s easy to compare him to Ohio State’s most recent great position coach. Like Laurinaitis, former wide receivers coach Brian Hartline had no prior coaching experience when he first arrived in Columbus as a low-level assistant coach.

What Hartline, now head coach at South Florida, and Laurinaitis each had upon arriving in Columbus was an impressive NFL career under his belt. Hartline’s seven-year NFL career undoubtedly helped him become one of the best recruiters of his position in the country.

During a seven-year run in the NFL, Laurinaitis played for the St. Louis Rams and the New Orleans Saints and even led the NFL in tackles in 2012. It may be a stretch to say he’s recruiting at the same level Hartline was, but so far, Laurinaitis is using his own NFL experience to get off to an impressive start, signing the likes of Johnson, Alford and Pettijohn.

Laurinaitis’ wealth of knowledge of the linebacker position was clearly attractive to Alliegro, who recently transferred into Ohio

State. He said Laurinaitis has already become a mentor to him during his brief time in Columbus.

“I think just how long he’s played the game, how long he’s played in the NFL. I think he’s one of the first coaches I’ve really been around who has been in the game for such a long time. He knows all the ins and outs, all the little details of football, especially as a linebacker. So he’s been a great mentor.”

Eleven Warriors’ Andy Anders said that beyond his playing career, Laurinaitis’ communication skills have also been a huge factor in his early coaching success.

“It’s kind of similar to Brian Hartline. (Laurinaitis’) real NFL experience and knowing how to coach the position,” Anders said when asked what has been the key to Laurinaitis’ success. “He’s a great communicator, which is really important as a coach. I think, honestly, his time on the radio helped with that. He was on 97.1 The Fan, had his own show for a while, and it sticks out in interviews when you’re able to articulate. A lot of great players know how to play great. Obviously, they know the finer points of the position you need to succeed in the NFL, but to be able to articulate it and coach someone else on it, that’s what makes the difference.”

With two players set to be selected early in the first round of the NFL draft, Laurinaitis has certainly started his career with the sort of player development that helped Hartline gain credibility as a coach, but Anders said he’ll need a couple more strong

seasons to give Ohio State the reputation as a factory of future highly drafted NFL linebackers.

“He’s got to do it for another year or two before you fully arrive at that state,” Anders said when asked if Ohio State has solidified itself as “Linebacker U,” “but he’s recruiting super well, bringing in Cincere Johnson. He’s going to be a really good player. He’s consistently getting elite prospects, and when you do that, that’s when you can consistently be at the top of the game.”

“They have just produced two guys that could be two top-10 draft picks. They’ll at least both be first-rounders. He’s trending in that direction, and even looking at what they did the year before and how big of a step Cody Simon took and how good he was in the defense, yeah, it’s getting there, but I’m not going to put him on Hartline’s level quite yet.”

With two of the better linebacker prospects in program history headed out to the draft, Murphy said it may be unrealistic to expect Ohio State’s linebackers to immediately be the strength of the team again this year, but the group is in good hands.

“I think James has a standard that he expects from his players in terms of these are the fundamental things you’re going to do. This is how we’re going to play. We’re going to be tough, we’re going to be physical, we’re going to hit, we’re going to be disciplined. Those are kind of his uncompromising things that I think you have to do to get on the field in that room.”

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Hartline Shaped Ohio State WR Standard

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Brian Hartline didn't just recruit and develop wide receivers at Ohio State. He engineered a machine that produces elite talent.

A former Buckeye wide receiver himself, Hartline transformed the position into a proven pipeline to the pros, setting the standard of NFL-caliber play that programs nationwide now strive to match.

Even with the Wild West of NIL creating a new era of freedom and opportunity for recruits, Hartline turned Columbus into the premier destination for wide receiver excellence, building a legacy defined by recruiting dominance, consistent high-level production at the college level and a steady pipeline of NFL first-round draft picks.

Now that Hartline has left Ohio State to become the head coach at South Florida, Buckeye Sports Bulletin talked with Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene, Ohio State football beat reporters Stephen Means of cleveland.com and Andy Anders of Eleven Warriors, and former Ohio State recruiting coordinator and assistant coach Bill Conley to discuss Hartline's legacy in Columbus.

For Greene, the North Canton, Ohio, native's influence on Ohio State football is already cemented.

"Brian basically turned Ohio State into Wide Receiver U during his time, and I think that's going to be his legacy at Ohio State – a wide receiver guru," Greene said.

That reputation was built on a rare blend of technical mastery, player connection and elite recruiting ability, Conley said.

"No. 1 is he knows the position, and he knows the passing game, especially in those (Ohio State) offenses," Conley said. "Second of all, he relates to the players. They respect somebody who knows the game. They respect somebody who's been there and he played the position. He knows the little intricacies of releases, breaking pass routes, reading coverages, those three things right there you have to be able to do as a receiver to have success, besides the physical ability to get the ball and run fast.

"Lastly, he's a tremendous recruiter. Look at the great receivers he recruited at that position, and that carries over for all positions. He's a high-energy guy and likes to bring out the best in each player."

From developing elite wideouts to dominating on the recruiting trail, Hartline's impact on Ohio State's receiver unit was undeniable.

According to 247Sports, Hartline, who coached with the Buckeyes from 2017-2025, was the primary recruiter for nine five-star wide receiver recruits, bringing in 19 total receivers ranked in the top 100. Hartline was also a key part of Ohio State's recruitment of five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau and five-star quarterback Kyle McCord in the class of 2021.

From 2020-2023, Ohio State brought in the top wideout in three of four seasons, with Julian Fleming in 2020, Emeka Egbuka in 2021 and Jeremiah Smith in 2023. A few off-seasons later, Hartline delivered his final gift to Ohio State, earning commitments from two of the top six wide receiver prospects in the 2026 class, five-star Chris Henry Jr. and



SONNY BROCKWAY

HARTLAND — The words "Wide Receiver U." were never associated with Ohio State until Brian Hartline became the position coach in 2018 and displayed his impressive recruiting credentials, leading to at least one receiver being drafted in the first round in four consecutive years. Carnell Tate could make it five in a row on April 23. Hartline was named head coach of South Florida on Dec. 3, 2025.

four-star Jerquaden Guilford to go along with Southlake Carroll's Brock Boyd, who was the third-fastest wide receiver in Ohio State history to have their black stripe removed, trailing only Smith and Carnell Tate.

Hartline was no less impactful as a developer, having Ohio State wide receivers selected in the first round of the NFL draft in each of the last four seasons. The trend began with Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave being selected with the 10th and 11th selections, respectively, in 2022. Then Jaxon Smith-Njigba was selected 20th by the Seattle Seahawks in 2023, Marvin Harrison Jr. was picked fourth by the Arizona Cardinals in 2024 and Egbuka was picked 19th by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2025.

The trend is expected to continue for at least two more years, with Tate expected to be a top selection in the 2026 draft and Smith likely to turn pro and become a top-10 draft pick after his junior campaign with Ohio State.

Means said Hartline's mastery of roster building and player development set him apart from nearly every other coach in the country.

"At the end of the day, college sports is about accumulating talent, retaining talent, and developing talent," Means said. "Brian Hartline did that better than so many coaches in the country."

Before Hartline could begin shaping the future of Ohio State's wide receivers, he entered coaching in 2017 as a quality-control assistant under Urban Meyer.

When wide receivers coach Zach Smith

was fired, Hartline was thrust into the position and forced to prove himself as the position coach.

Early on he showed the ability to get the most out of his players.

That season, Ohio State had four receivers with over 650 yards and five touchdowns in Johnnie Dixon, Terry McLaurin, K.J. Hill and Parris Campbell, with sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins smashing most Ohio State and Big Ten single-season passing records, including passing yards (4,831) and touchdowns (50).

Anders viewed the 2018 season as a pivotal point for the Ohio State program as a whole, particularly with the transition to a pass-friendly attack, adding that it was an early indicator of his elite development skills of wide receivers.

"You look at what he did when he was promoted suddenly in 2018 with the whole Zach Smith saga, he really maximized that group of receivers," Anders said. "When you talk about a guy like Terry McLaurin and having a breakout year, and Parris Campbell had a really good season.

"That first corps and then the next guys, as they kept coming through, he continued to show he could put guys in the league and produce first-round draft picks. I think that's really why people bought what he was selling, because there were proven results and he had real experience in the NFL to say, 'I know what it takes to get you to that level.'"

On Dec. 4, 2018, it was announced that Ryan Day would succeed Meyer as head coach after the 2019 Rose Bowl, and just

four days later, he made one of his first key decisions by hiring Hartline as the full-time wide receivers coach.

Hartline then spent 2019-21 as Ohio State's full-time wide receivers coach before adding passing game coordinator to his résumé for the 2022 season. During that span, Means said, is when Hartline truly came into his own as an elite position coach.

Means pointed to the 2021-22 trio of Smith-Njigba, Olave and Wilson, along with the rise of Egbuka and Harrison in 2022-23 – after a lingering hamstring injury limited Smith-Njigba to just three games – as the moment he believed Ohio State's receivers room truly reached an elite level under Hartline.

"The first time you really started to notice it was 2022, because in (the 2020 recruiting class) they signed a recruiting class with four top-100 recruits, with Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Julian Fleming, Gee Scott Jr. and Mookie Cooper," Means said. "Then you follow that up with Emeka Egbuka, who was the No. 1 wide receiver recruit in his recruiting class. Marvin Harrison Jr. and Jayden Ballard were both top-100 recruits. Two of those three ended up being first-round draft picks.

"The 2022 season, coming off of what C.J. Stroud, Garrett Wilson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Chris Olave did in 2021, when Jaxon goes down and the result of the season isn't 'Oh no, the season's over,' it's 'Ohio State lost the best receiver in the country in Jaxon Smith-Njigba and they just replaced him with the No. 1 wide receiver in the country in Marvin Harrison Jr. Plus, Emeka Egbuka is a first-rounder and on Dec. 14, 2022, Jeremiah Smith committed to Ohio State as the best wide receiver in the country.' So I think that was the moment it started to shift, because it went from 'Oh, he's pretty good,' to 'Oh, this is just never going to stop.'"

Greene felt that at Hartline's peak, he wasn't just the best wide receivers coach nationally.

"He was the best (wide receivers coach), there's no doubt," Greene said. "He was probably the best position coach in the country."

That shift in the perception of Hartline, Means said, wasn't just about recruiting rankings or draft results, but about how clearly Hartline's teaching translated to both player development and on-field production.

For Means, Hartline's experience as a wide receiver at Ohio State was an invaluable selling point for recruits during his time as the Buckeyes' receiving coach.

A former Canton GlenOak High School standout, Hartline first came to Ohio State in 2005 as a wide receiver for the Buckeyes from 2005-08, before he was selected by the Miami Dolphins with the 108th overall pick in the fourth round of the 2009 NFL draft.

Hartline then spent seven seasons in the NFL from 2009-15, catching 344 passes for 4,766 yards and 14 touchdowns, including back-to-back 1,000-yard receiving seasons in 2012 and 2013.

"It's just like anything else in life: You want to learn from people who have done the thing you're trying to do," Means said. "It doesn't mean people who've never played in the NFL can't be good at this. There are plenty of coaches who have been great, who didn't necessarily do the thing that they're trying to develop in other people. But it does

help, especially when you're dealing with 15-, 16-, 17-year-olds.

"There is an element of like, 'Why would I listen to you when you haven't done the thing I'm trying to do?' So I think that was 30 to 40 percent of the reason he was able to have success, because he can physically show you everything that he's trying to get you to do."

Moving Up The Ranks

While Hartline's playing background helped make him an elite recruiter and developer of talent, his growth within the program eventually expanded his role beyond the receiver room and into play-calling responsibilities.

Hartline was named the offensive coordinator in 2023, but Day remained the play caller. He then shifted to co-offensive coordinator in 2024 under Chip Kelly and by 2025 was serving as Ohio State's primary play caller for the first time in his career after Kelly left for the NFL.

While Anders believed Hartline to be the "greatest individual position coach in Ohio State history," the Eleven Warriors' reporter said he left something to be desired as the Buckeyes' play caller last season.

"He was the co-offensive coordinator going back a few years, and that was fine, but I didn't think he did a great job as a play caller in 2025," Anders said. "You look at the offensive struggles in the two biggest games they played after the Michigan game, at least Indiana. I know he wasn't necessarily the one calling plays against Miami, but it was still like his overview of the offense and how that entire unit played out throughout the year. It was one of the worst offenses of the Ryan Day era and not for lack of talent. When you look at some of the concepts Ohio State was running, they weren't doing a good job getting the receivers the ball in open space to make plays. I don't think his year as a play caller went particularly well."

When asked where Hartline would fit best on a coaching staff, Greene noted that every coach has a niche. He expressed strong confidence in Hartline as a wide receivers coach – and even in the future as a head coach – while echoing Anders' belief that his strengths may not have fully aligned with playcalling and the X's and O's responsibilities of being an offensive coordinator.

"I happen to think he's going to be a great head coach, but every coach has strengths and weaknesses," Greene said. "Maybe Brian isn't suited to be an offensive coordinator, and he's better suited to running the whole show. We're going to find out, or maybe he's just a position coach, which I don't think is the case."

Eventually, a new opportunity arose for Hartline, and he accepted the USF job on Dec. 3, 2025.

There were rumors that Hartline was linked to the job opening at Penn State during the Nittany Lions' head-coaching search, but the former Buckeye landed in Tampa, Fla., with the Bulls.

With Hartline's Miami roots from his pro days and strong reputation among recruits from south Florida, Anders felt it was a great landing spot for his first head-coaching role.

"I think USF was the perfect job," Anders said. "I guess you could've waited another year or two for a bigger college. Just the great receiver play you are going to get, having him as your coach is worth a swing for certain programs. But I think South Florida is the

perfect combination of being a job with not too much pressure. If his first head-coaching job was Penn State, I frankly don't think it would go that well. That's just such a huge leap to make – one year of coordinating experience that didn't necessarily go to plan and then you go take a big job like that with a lot of weight and a lot of expectations.

"For a first-time head coach, USF, not only is it a Group of Five school with reasonable expectations, but he gets to recruit straight to his base, south Florida. That's where a lot of his great receivers came from. He pulled them from other places, too, of course, but south Florida is a hotbed of skilled talent that he's going to be able to get really good receivers from and even find some underrated gems that, like his talent evaluation throughout the years, were phenomenal, too."

Conley expressed a similar sentiment, adding that he feels USF is simply a steppingstone for Hartline.

"I think that's a good fit because it's been a good program, and I know it's his first head-coaching job," Conley said. "A lot of guys can't even go to Division I with their first head-coaching job. So you take the opportunities you have. You don't want to wait for a job that may never come. So you get an opportunity to prove your bill, prove your talent and show your ability as a head coach. It's a good enough program where you can do something special with it. It will be a great steppingstone for him."

Passing The Torch

Just under a month after Hartline departed from Ohio State, the Buckeyes hired LSU's Cortez Hankton to become the program's next wide receivers coach.

Hankton, who spent the previous four seasons as the Tigers' wide receivers coach, while also serving as the program's pass game coordinator from 2022-23 and co-offensive coordinator from 2024-25, has major shoes to fill by replacing Hartline.

Anders said he believes some level of regression in recruiting is natural, especially when a program loses a proven developer like Hartline, but he emphasized that Ohio State's recent track record should still keep it firmly in the mix for top talent under Hankton.

"I would expect there to be," Anders said when asked if there would be a drop off in recruiting. "Ohio State is in on some really elite guys in that 2027 recruiting class at the receiver position. Obviously, (five-star) Jamier Brown is already committed, so let's call it a win for Hartline. (Brown) is also from Ohio and wanted to play at Ohio State, which was not the hardest recruiting win for Ohio State. So I'm really interested to see how the rest of this class plays out, because Ohio State is in on so many elite guys in that receiver recruiting room there."

"Cortez, I have no doubt about his development chops. Frankly, he's shown to take some underrated guys and turn them into draft picks. He's shown that with some of the guys he produced out of LSU."

While Greene is unsure if Hankton will be able to pull in the top talent that Hartline did in an era of NIL and expensive payments to elite players, he feels Hankton is a strong developer of talent.

"I looked at LSU, and he developed elite receivers Malik Nabers and Brian Thomas," Greene said. "Those guys were NFL-quality dudes. So I think he can coach. I think he can develop, which is what he's here for. But re-

cruiting is so different now. So it's hard to say how people do in recruiting, but if Ohio State continues to pay the way they have, I think he'll do fine."

As Hankton steps into what Hartline built, those within the Buckeye beat agree that Hartline left Ohio State in a stronger place than when he arrived.

Means said the full impact of Hartline's tenure may not be fully appreciated until his time is further in the rearview mirror, as the standard he set at the wide receiver position continues to shape Ohio State's identity and success.

"It's an unexpected gift that you didn't realize how much you needed until you got it," Means said. "I don't know if you could ever fully grasp it, because it was over before you even got a chance to really dive deep into it, but I think he will be remembered as the hometown kid who made his school proud at every part of his life."

"He is a Canton, Ohio, dude who went to Ohio State, had a decent career, and got to play in the NFL. He got to play for the Cleveland Browns for a little bit, and then he came

home and took something that was already pretty special, historically, that wide receiver room, and essentially made history. We're never going to see anything like that again, and it's that much cooler because if you're an Ohio State fan, you're saying that was one of ours who did it."

Greene said that Hartline's legacy ultimately comes down to a unique combination of elite development and recruiting success, believing him to be one of the most successful position coaches Ohio State has ever had.

"He was a tremendous developer, I mean, look at those guys in the NFL, but he was also a tremendous recruiter, too," Greene said. "Things have changed now. It's pay-for-play now. I still think he would have done just as well if he had stayed in Ohio State and continued on because they pay players, they pay high and they're awesome at NIL. Hartline, as a developer, was second to none. He was not the most successful offensive coordinator, but as wide receiver coach, he was the most successful. So I think that's where you draw the line on his career."

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Mathews, Sanchez Lead Deep CB Room

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Midway through the spring, Ohio State has several starting positions up for grabs, but as it stands, the boundary cornerback spots seem to be occupied.

The Buckeyes lost a starter in Davison Igbinosun, as he is out of eligibility after last season, but cornerbacks coach Tim Walton returns a pair of talented players with varied experience in Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Devin Sanchez.

The third cornerback spot that Sanchez occupied last year, getting onto the field when the Buckeyes were in a dime package, seems to be there for the taking with several newcomers – including freshmen Jay Timmons and Jordan Thomas as well as incoming transfers Dominick Kelly and Cam Calhoun – fighting for position on the depth chart.

“I don’t know,” Walton said when asked about the identity of Ohio State’s third-string cornerback. “It would be based on the situation. I couldn’t really give you an answer with that one right now.”

Although it may seem like it, Walton may not have been side-stepping the question. Under defensive coordinator Matt Patricia last season, Ohio State rotated at several positions, including cornerback, depending on different game situations. That strategy, along with some injuries faced by others in the room, allowed Sanchez, a true freshman last season, to earn valuable playing time despite not being a regular starter.

Appearing in all but one of Ohio State’s games last year, Sanchez made 15 total tackles and had a pair of pass breakups.

Sanchez, a five-star recruit ranked inside the top 10 of the 2025 class, flashed his talent as a freshman but was also picked on in coverage at times when he was on the field.

Sanchez told reporters that he feels like his mentality has greatly improved heading into his sophomore season.

“It feels a lot different. I feel more confident and more comfortable out there,” Sanchez said when asked about the difference between his first and second spring. “I just feel like this is going to be the year for me. Like I said, I feel more confident than I did last year. Walking in the door, I was a little nervous, a little timid, but I feel like this year I’m taking that next step in the role that I have to step up into.”

After receiving more playing time and his first start during the middle of the season while filling in for Lorenzo Styles Jr., who missed two games with an injury, Sanchez was relegated to a backup role in a pair of late-season games.

Sanchez didn’t play in Ohio State’s 27-9 win over Michigan and was on the field for just five snaps in the Buckeyes’ 13-10 loss to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game. However, after Styles struggled with his health and his own play, Sanchez got another chance in the postseason.

In Ohio State’s 24-14 loss to Miami in the Cotton Bowl, Sanchez had one of his best games of the season. Playing on 43 snaps against the Hurricanes, Sanchez made two tackles and had a pass breakup. It was that



SONNY BROCKWAY

STILL LEARNING — Cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr., shown from the 2023 season, made a big leap in his development as a junior in 2025 when he became a starter, but he’s using late-season struggles as motivation heading into this season.

performance that gave Sanchez the confidence he could be a difference-maker at the collegiate level.

“During the beginning of the season, I was still trying to learn a lot of things,” Sanchez said. “I feel like towards the end of the season, and especially in that Miami game, the way I went out there and played, that’s when I realized, ‘Man, I can really do this.’”

Sanchez said after that performance against the Hurricanes, he told Walton that he had high expectations for himself in the offseason.

“I told Coach Walton I’m not stepping back this year,” Sanchez said. “I’m coming in with a full head of steam. I’m putting my foot on the gas, and I’m not letting up. It doesn’t matter who’s in front of me, I’m going to win.”

Sanchez said his improved confidence goes hand in hand with an improved football IQ, and he hopes to be able to diagnose what opposing offenses are doing before it happens in 2026.

“It just comes (to me) quicker,” Sanchez said when asked where his improved confidence shows up. “You see the plays faster. You see everything. You see the big picture. You’re not just focused on your assignment.

When you’re confident, and you have that ability to be like, ‘I can really do this,’ you see everything. You see routes faster. You see the quarterback. You see where the ball is going. You can process things faster before the snap and then while the play is going.”

Walton, who stressed how important it was for Sanchez to take a leap in his sophomore season, has noticed the five-star’s improved maturity.

“Now he’s taking that next step with growing, learning, understanding discipline, the responsibility that comes with it, the competitive nature you have to have, and he’s taking that next step,” Walton said. “He’s having a good spring so far. He has to be the guy that keeps stepping up for us.”

Mathews’ 2025 season couldn’t have been more different from Sanchez’ year. Mathews became a regular starter for the first time last year after an impressive stint as a rotational player during the 2024 team’s national-championship season. He picked up right where he left off to start the 2025 season, regularly locking down opposing receivers.

In his first nine games, the Cincinnati native had a pair of interceptions, forced a

fumble, had 1½ tackles for loss and tallied three pass breakups.

However, down the stretch of the season, Mathews was much less disruptive, and perhaps even worse was that he was much less reliable in pass coverage.

In the Buckeyes’ loss to Indiana, Mathews gave up the Hoosiers’ lone touchdown of the game, a 17-yarder thrown by Heisman Trophy-winner Fernando Mendoza to star receiver Elijah Sarratt, and a critical 33-yard catch by Charlie Becker that all but ended Ohio State’s chances late in the fourth quarter.

“A couple of the plays I want back, but that’s just the business of playing corner,” Mathews said. “I really faced my first type of adversity toward the end of the season last year since I’ve really been here. So I’m just really coping with that and keep going every day.”

Walton said Mathews has been hungry for growth since the start of the spring, and he’s focused on the little things to try to become a better player.

“He didn’t play the way he wanted to toward the end,” Walton said. “Now we have to go out and correct the little things, pay attention to the details. He’s been trying to get that part fixed because he’s the leader of the room. He’s the guy who’s been here the longest. He’s the most experienced.”

Walton says that Mathews’ response to his late-season woes says a lot about his character and added that struggles are just a part of the business at cornerback.

“You have to have amnesia when you play corner in this business,” Walton said. “You’re going to have ups and downs. You’re going to have the ebbs and flows. You need the persistence, the perseverance, the discipline, the competitive nature. That’s the part of the life that we live. You have to understand that he’s unfazed by it.”

Newcomers Jockeying For Position

The Buckeyes may not have an obvious third cornerback so far in the spring, but Walton said it isn’t for a lack of options. He said the Buckeyes have plenty of options to consider at the spot, but with the team still being in the spring period, it’s too early to set anything that resembles a depth chart.

Whoever the third cornerback will be will not necessarily have to play inside if there is an injury. While Styles was injured, Mathews moved inside while Sanchez took over on the outside.

Walton said positional versatility is something he wants all of his players to have.

“You have to be able to have chess pieces,” Walton said. “That’s the thing we’ve had here for a long period of time. You have to be able to move guys around. So the more guys step up, the more guys that can create roles, the more guys have value.”

Perhaps no Buckeye newcomer is more talented than Timmons. The freshman from Gibsonia, Pa., finished the last recruiting cycle as the No. 24 overall player in his class. He hopes to crack the rotation, much like Sanchez did in his first year with the team.

When asked about the advice he has for the freshman, Sanchez said Timmons simply ought to be himself.



SONNY BROCKWAY

BACK FOR MORE — With Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Devin Sanchez as the anchors, cornerbacks coach Tim Walton (above) is confident he will find the third cornerback with freshmen Jay Timmons and Jordan Thomas making good impressions during spring practices.

“Just go out there, have fun, be confident,” Sanchez said. “You’re a freshman. You’re going to mess up. It’s a hard defense. I went through that. I’m just telling him, just calm down. Just go out there, relax. We’ve got you if you mess up. Somebody’s going to make you right. I’m just being there for him, watching film with him all the time. I feel like he’s going to be great.”

Timmons has all of the traits to succeed at the collegiate level, and he’s off to a great start in the spring, according to Walton.

“He’s very competitive, has a great skill set, has good toughness, can cover, good hip fluidity, good blitz, and he’s poised,” Walton said. “You never see him get flustered. He takes coaching. He loves to compete every day. Football is important to him. We’re pleasantly surprised with his progression so far.”

Walton isn’t the only one to sing Timmons’ praises. Star receiver Jeremiah Smith said Timmons is going to be a very special player for the Buckeyes. Walton was likely only half-joking when he said he didn’t want that praise to go to Timmons’ head.

“Every day is a new day. You have to stay on it. You’ll be special for a day and not the next in this business,” Walton said with a laugh. “He’s young, he keeps going, he’s hungry, he’s learning. He’s putting in the work. We’re excited about him.”

Mathews said the two Buckeye freshmen are more talented than he was at their age and added that Thomas, a four-star freshman from Oradell, N.J., has already flashed his work ethic in his short time in Columbus.

“I like those two,” Mathews said. “Those two compete very well. Jordan is the type of guy who is trying to go 100 percent at

all times. Jay’s more technical and a little smart. So I like both of those guys. They’re going to help the Buckeyes in the future.”

Out of the transfer portal, the Buckeyes added a more experienced option in Calhoun and a promising, but unproven, cornerback in Kelly.

Calhoun is entering his fourth year in college, and despite transferring in from Alabama, he already has a connection with Mathews, his former high school teammate.

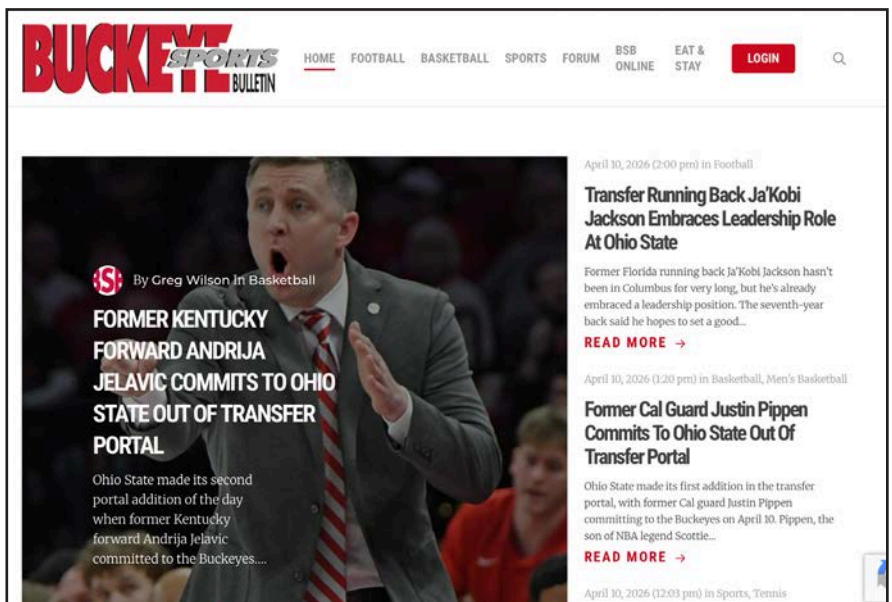
“It’s a dream come true,” Mathews said when asked what it means to reunite with Calhoun. “We talked about this in high school. We never thought we would play together again. It’s really a dream come true to just play with my brother again. It’s very fun. Shoot, I just can’t wait for you guys to see it.”

In his only collegiate season at Georgia, Kelly recorded three total tackles in very limited playing time. He is only a rising sophomore, but he’s impressed Walton with his steadiness so far in the spring.

“Consistency and discipline,” Walton said when asked what stands out about Kelly. “That’s what you must have in this game. We need to know what we’re getting every day. He’s been levelheaded. He’s been a smooth operator with things, and every day, when we go out there, we know what we are getting out of him. When you are consistent all the time, then the plays happen for you because you’re always in the right spot. He’s smart, and he understands the game.”

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TE Roberts Targets Bigger Role In 2026

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When rising sophomore tight end Nate Roberts committed to Ohio State as a talented recruit, he probably didn't foresee himself spending much time at the fullback position with the Buckeyes.

Roberts had plenty of athletic accomplishments during his career at Washington High School in central Oklahoma. He played first base, third base and outfield and described himself as a solid power hitter for a baseball team that won back-to-back state championships.

On the gridiron, Roberts had similar success playing quarterback, defensive end and his natural tight end position to lead his football team to a state championship.

One thing Roberts never did in high school, though, was play fullback.

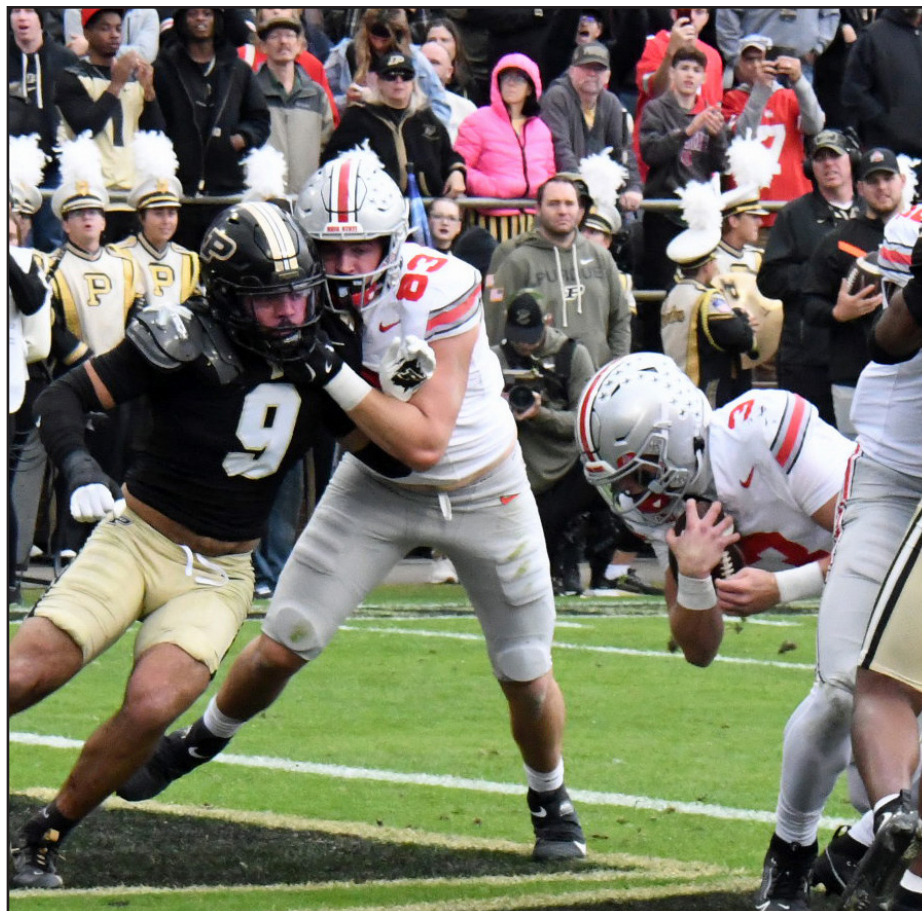
It was at that fullback position that Roberts carved a legitimate role for himself last season, something the vast majority of true freshmen fail to do at Ohio State.

"Coming into the year, I was just trying to help the team as much as I could," Roberts said. "So in the fall camp, we were putting the fullback package in. I was put in there. I was trying to do my job as well as I could. I did it well enough, and I was able to go out there on Saturdays and get the job done. I was really excited with the production I was able to have last year as a freshman, and I am trying to build on that for this year."

Roberts did not necessarily take the tight end room by storm, but he earned enough playing time in short-yardage situations to appear in 13 games and make four catches for 30 yards. Roberts even had a couple of carries out of the backfield.

Clearly, Roberts did something right because less than a month after his freshman season concluded, his head coach paid him a tremendous compliment.

"He is as talented a young tight end



SONNY BROCKWAY

END GAME — Nate Roberts (83) enters his sophomore season with the goal of being the starting tight end after Will Kacmarek and Max Klare entered the NFL draft. Roberts had four catches for 30 yards during his freshman season and also was used at fullback.

that we've had in a while," Ryan Day said of Roberts on "The Ryan Day Radio Show" in January. "We've had some good ones. We're getting better. I think (tight ends coach Keenan Bailey has) done a great job recruiting that room. We now have some depth there."

Roberts' numbers were more than respectable for a first-year Buckeye, but with last year's top two contributors at tight end, Will Kacmarek and Max Klare, headed for the NFL draft, the expectation is that the Washington, Okla., native takes on a bigger role.

"(Bailey) wanted to see me step into a bigger role this year," Roberts said. "Obviously, Max and Will are both gone, so I needed to step up. But bringing (Northwestern transfer Hunter Welcing) in and (Ohio University transfer Mason Williams) in, it was a brand-new room, wide open. So his message was really just to go out there and compete."

"You're going to play every position as the tight end. You're going to play the Y, you're going to play the H, you're going to be moved around a lot. The conversations that we had were just to go out there and do your job as well as you can. The room's going to be wide open, and we'll see how it plays out after the spring."

As Roberts mentioned, he'll have plenty of competition from within the room despite Klare and Kacmarek departing. Transfers Welcing and Williams aren't the only two tight ends who could compete for playing time. Other tight ends on the roster, Max LeBlanc and Bennett Christian, could

make an impact as well.

The good news for Roberts and the rest of the room is that he doesn't have to be a starter to earn playing time for the Buckeyes. Newly hired offensive coordinator Arthur Smith became well-known for his use of multiple tight ends at stops as an offensive coordinator and head coach, respectively, in Tennessee and Atlanta in the NFL.

Roberts said he appreciates what Smith has already brought to the room.

"He's a great coach, and just being able to listen to him and how he runs his offense, and knowing that he's been at every single level – he's such a smart guy," Roberts said. "He comes over in our (independent drills) and teaches us and helps with our footwork and some of our routes, just because he's been through the game for so long. But listening to his offense and being in it for a couple of weeks now, I really enjoy it. I love it. I love his offense, and I know it will help me for the next level."

Make no mistake, though, Roberts has his sights set on being the Buckeyes' starting tight end. He told reporters that he felt mentally prepared for the responsibilities that come with being the starter.

"It's really exciting knowing that this room is wide open and I'm just trying to go and take that role," Roberts said. "Obviously, I want to come in here and be the No. 1 starter. I think that's what everyone wants to be. If you come to Ohio State, that's what you want to be. So that's been my goal all offseason. All of last year, I was trying to work and help the team as much as I could, but this year, I'm trying to help the team

even more and be that starting guy."

Early on in the spring, Roberts was the leader in the clubhouse to start at tight end. He came out with the other first-teamers, a decision that Bailey attributed to his work in the weight room.

"He's taken quite a bit of a step, and it started in the weight room," Bailey said. "Every day we were competing in there, and Nate was far and away top-ranked when we came out of winter, and that's why he got the first crack at it when we got to spring. Now he's got to keep improving, but we have high expectations. No one has higher expectations than he does for himself, and I'm proud of how it's progressing."

His hard work in the weight room allowed Roberts to add some muscle. The four-star recruit said he went from 235 pounds to 250 pounds.

Roberts said the added weight should help him improve as a run-blocker, which is something he takes plenty of pride in.

"I put on a lot of weight this offseason to be able to block the C gap," Roberts said. "(Strength and conditioning coach) Mick Marotti helped me. Just because I'm gaining weight doesn't mean I'm getting any slower, so I'm able to run routes and in-line block."

Roberts is clearly eager to go from the team's fullback to its starting tight end but is grateful for his experience in the Buckeyes' backfield. He said his time at fullback helped him improve his leverage as a blocker, and it helped him improve his vision.

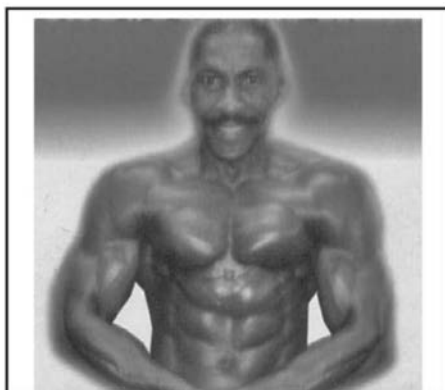
"Everything's about technique and footwork," Roberts said when asked where his experience at fullback shows up on the field. "I think it helps seeing the field really well in the run game, especially being so far back at the fullback position, you get to see the defense pretty well."

Roberts said he was also aided by Klare and Kacmarek, who each, in their own way, seemed to master different aspects of the tight end position.

"I really enjoyed that tight end room last year because it was a little bit of everything," Roberts said. "(Kacmarek), he was able to do a lot, but he was really good at in-line blocking in the run game. Then Klare was really good as a passing threat. Everyone knew that he could go downfield and catch balls, but he could also block. I was just learning from all those guys, and they did a great job with me, but I'm ready to take what they taught me into this season."

With an impressive freshman season behind him and the full support of his coaching staff, Roberts is ready to show off his full skill set at tight end, something he hasn't yet been able to do as a Buckeye.

"I'm ready to show that I'm able to block at that in-line (tight end position) and be able to run routes," Roberts said. "They've only seen me go out of the fullback spot, really. I think that's really all they got to see. But this year, I'm ready to show that I'm the all-around tight end and able to do everything."



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Alliegro Breaks Into OSU Linebacker Room

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Christian Alliegro didn't make his first impression on Ohio State head coach Ryan Day with a highlight play. He did it with a broken arm.

When he was at Wisconsin, the linebacker fractured the ulna in his right arm in the Badgers' October matchup against the Buckeyes and still returned to the field for the second half.

Three months later, when the Darien, Conn., native entered the transfer portal after the regular season, that display of toughness remained top of mind for Day during his recruitment of the senior linebacker, ultimately helping bring him to Columbus. Now, Alliegro will look to bring that grit and veteran presence to a reloading Buckeye defense that values the durability and versatility he showed at Wisconsin.

Alliegro recalled his early meetings with Day and Ohio State's staff, stating the Buckeye head coach quickly praised his toughness in returning from his broken arm during the matchup between Ohio State and Wisconsin on Oct. 18.

"That was one of the first things he brought up when I met with them," Alliegro told reporters on April 2. "He brought up the toughness aspect of it,"

That toughness didn't materialize overnight. It was forged across three seasons of grinding his way up Wisconsin's depth chart.

A three-star recruit and the No. 104 linebacker in the 2023 recruiting class, according to 247Sports' composite rankings, Alliegro didn't begin his collegiate career as a household name at Wisconsin, but he quickly carved out a role as a physical, downhill linebacker over his time with the Badgers under former Ohio State defensive coordinator and Wisconsin head coach Luke Fickell.

Alliegro played in all 13 games during his first season with Wisconsin in 2023, totaling five tackles, one sack and one pass defended. He then made 12 appearances in 2024, including three starts at linebacker, setting career highs in total tackles (66), tackles for loss (five) and sacks (three).

In the 2025 season, Alliegro was on pace to smash his marks from 2024. Through the first six games of the season, he already had 42 tackles and four tackles for loss.

However, in the first quarter of Wisconsin's matchup with Ohio State, the junior suffered the broken arm attempting to make a tackle after a screen pass to Buckeye running back Bo Jackson.

Alliegro broke down the sequence of events after he hurt his arm against Ohio State.

"I didn't know (I broke it)," Alliegro said. "I had never broken my arm before. I got up, like, 'Ah, I'll be good.' I ran back out there for another play, and when I ran back, I said to my trainer, 'I think something's wrong.' So they told me it was broken and (asked) me if I wanted to play. I was like, 'Oh, yeah,' so they wrapped it up, and I came back out and played the rest of



SONNY BROCKWAY

TOUGH ENOUGH — Former Wisconsin linebacker Christian Alliegro's grit and determination while continuing to play after breaking his arm against Ohio State last season caught the attention of coach Ryan Day, and it didn't take long for the Buckeyes to pounce on the opportunity to add him from the transfer portal in January.

the game."

Though Alliegro returned for the second half, he still missed the following two games for the Badgers, and when he came back, his pace slowed, limiting his season totals to 53 total tackles, eight tackles for loss and four sacks in 10 games. That still earned Alliegro All-Big Ten honorable mention.

Despite a solid overall career at Wisconsin, Alliegro ultimately decided it was time for a change.

Following Wisconsin's second straight season finishing below .500 (5-7 in 2024, 4-8 in 2025), Alliegro made the decision to enter the transfer portal on Dec. 15, 2025.

When asked about his conversation with Fickell, Alliegro said it was difficult, but his head coach understood the decision.

"Obviously, it was tough because I had such a great time in Wisconsin," Alliegro said. "But I think (Fickell) understood what was best for me and my career for the future. It was tough to leave, but ultimately I had to do what's best for me."

Alliegro identified the Buckeyes' track record of development and its pathway to the NFL as the primary reasons for his transfer to Columbus.

"I think ultimately I just wanted to come somewhere that can help me for the next level," Alliegro said. "Obviously, Ohio State has the best players, best coaches to do that, so it was a no-brainer."

After Alliegro entered the portal, Ohio

increased over the course of his career, underscoring the value he places on playing multiple positions.

"I think the more you can do, the better," Alliegro said. "I didn't play that much (edge rusher) my sophomore year. But this past year, I played a good amount."

He is now bringing that multi-dimensional skill set to the Buckeyes, already spending time on the edge during spring camp. Alliegro added he will continue to move around throughout Ohio State's spring practices.

"We've been doing a lot of edge stuff right now. I'm playing the Sam (linebacker) position on the field. I think next week we'll go more down to four down with two linebackers."

Ohio State defensive coordinator Matt Patricia envisioned alignments similar to that of 2025 starter and All-American Arvell Reese in Alliegro, who said the role immediately stood out to him during early meetings with the Buckeye staff.

"When I met with Patricia, he went over that Arvell role, and Laurinaitis showed me some of that film," Alliegro said. "So I saw what he was doing on the edge, and I really liked that, what he was doing off the ball as well."

Alliegro joins a room featuring rising juniors Payton Pierce and Garrett Stover and rising sophomores Riley Pettijohn, Eli Lee and TJ Alford, as well as five-star freshman Cincere Johnson and four-stars CJ Sanna and Braxton Rembert.

His experience is likely to give him a starting position alongside Pierce, who was Ohio State's third linebacker behind potential top-10 NFL draft picks Sonny Styles and Reese.

Stover, who earned Iron Buckeye honors in the winter, said that Alliegro's versatility, paired with his physical traits, has already made an impression on the team.

"He's a veteran guy," Stover said. "He's got a lot of length and size to him. Obviously, he's a great dude as well. He's been a great addition to the room."

Alliegro said he will work to live up to the monumental years by Styles and Reese in 2026, noting the standard they set for Ohio State's linebacker room a season ago.

"It's super exciting. I think those guys kind of paved the way for linebackers at Ohio State last year," he said. "I saw that, and obviously that's a lot to live up to, but I'm going to try my best for sure."

Laurinaitis praised Alliegro for fully buying into the program and meeting expectations since his arrival in the winter, adding that he has every bit of confidence that he will be the impact player they expected when he transferred.

"He's done really well," Laurinaitis said. "I truly believe that we are different from other programs, the way we challenge our guys and the culture that Coach Day has here of 'Hey, we're going to fight to be the best version of ourselves.' That is not easy. You're going to be challenged and you are expected to be uncomfortable every single day because you grow when you're uncomfortable. I think (Alliegro has) really bought into it. He's been everything that we expected when we brought him in."

State quickly jumped on the opportunity, signing the Wisconsin linebacker on Jan. 8, 2026, just under a week after the transfer portal opened.

Ohio State linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said he reviewed Alliegro's tape from Wisconsin's matchup against Alabama and the Buckeyes, adding that the Badgers' linebacker's sheer frame stood out from his film.

"When I caught wind that Christian was going to get into the portal, I was like, 'OK, I'll watch two games,'" Laurinaitis said. "I'll watch Alabama, and I'll watch him against us," because I know what our guys are at tight end. I knew what Will Kacmarek could do, what he was like as a blocker. To see (Alliegro) with the club on in that game, the fighting and the toughness. I noticed his size on the field. I was like, 'Gosh, No. 0 over there is a big son of a gun.'"

Alliegro, at 6-4, 241 pounds, has also demonstrated the ability to line up in multiple roles on defense. The senior hasn't been limited to linebacker, seeing reps as an edge rusher at Wisconsin as well.

Alliegro mentioned his versatility when asked to describe his play style.

"I can do a lot on the field, but ultimately I'm really aggressive," he said. "You can put me on the edge, off the ball, wherever. I played safety in high school, too. I'm really good wherever I am on the field."

Alliegro said his reps off the edge have

OSU Players Will Be Drafted Early And Often

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's not easy nowadays to find a group of experts to agree on anything, so why should the NFL draft scheduled for April 23-25 in Pittsburgh be any different?

Of course, there is an obvious gimme in national champion and Heisman Trophy-winning Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza going to the Las Vegas Raiders with the first pick.

But closer to home, there are disagreements on the five Ohio State players who could be taken in the first round, pertaining not only to which team chooses them but also their respective position rankings.

To be clear, safety Caleb Downs, edge rusher Arvell Reese, linebacker Sonny Styles and wide receiver Carnell Tate are projected to be top-15 picks. No one is questioning that. If defensive end Kayden McDonald goes late in the first round, as many expect, the Buckeyes will match their school record of five draftees in the opening round (2006 and 2016).

In all, 11 Buckeyes could hear their names called by the time the seven-round draft is completed if all goes well for defensive end Caden Curry, running back CJ Donaldson, cornerback Davison Igbinosun, tight ends Will Kacmarek and Max Klare, and defensive back Lorenzo Styles Jr.

Also, defensive tackle Tywone Malone Jr. and offensive tackle Ethan Onianwa are long shots to be drafted, but if they are, this year's class would come one short of 2004 and 2025 for the most ever for the Buckeyes, which would be two shy of Georgia's all-time mark of 15 in 2022.

The leader of the Buckeye draft brigade, according to most prognosticators, is Reese, but even then, there is disagreement within the ranks of ESPN's draft analysts, Mel Kiper Jr., Matt Miller, Jordan Reid and Field Yates.

Consensus overall rankings of the 10 best players – not the order they will be drafted – have Reese third behind Notre Dame running back Jeremiyah Love and Mendoza. Then it's Downs and Sonny Styles at four and five, respectively, and Tate is eighth.

Breaking them down by positions, Kiper and Miller have Reese atop their edge rusher rankings, Yates has him second behind Rueben Bain Jr. of Miami, while Reid does not have Reese among his top eight.

It might be shocking, but Reid lists Reese as the top linebacker, a spot ahead of Sonny Styles. By the way, Yahoo Sports' Nate Tice and Charles McDonald had the same ranking for the linebackers.

Among receivers, Reid and Yates rated Tate the best, while Kiper put him at No. 2 behind Jordyn Tyson of Arizona State, and Miller had Tate second as well, with Makai Lemon of USC on top.

McDonald was tabbed second to Clemson's Peter Woods by Kiper and Yates, third by Reid and fourth by Miller at the defensive tackle position.

But the ESPN quartet agreed that Downs is the No. 1 safety.

CBS Sports draft expert Mike Renner has the Buckeyes highly rated in his list of the top 200 prospects, with Reese third, Downs seventh, Tate eighth, Sonny Styles 10th and McDonald 25th. Also, Klare is 88th, Kacmarek 127th, Igbinosun 133rd and Curry 163rd.

M-Arvell-ous

As for the mock drafts, ESPN's Peter Schrager predicts Reese goes third in the draft to the Arizona Cardinals:

"As part of the loaded NFC West, Arizona has to face three of the NFL's best teams twice every season, and the defense was frankly not very good last year, allowing 28.7 points per game (29th)," wrote Schrager. "Reese fills a need in Arizona as a potentially elite pass rusher, and I've heard rave reviews on what he can bring off the field from coaches. With the changing of eras in Arizona, the Cards should be seeking out new cornerstone pieces like Reese this month."

Both USA Today and CBS Sports see the New York Jets at No. 2 picking Reese, as does The Athletic's Bruce Feldman, who gave him the highest praise:

"I think this is the surest bet for future stardom in this draft. There's a handful of other guys with really high ceilings. Reese not only has a sky-high ceiling but an extremely high floor, too.

Point blank: Not even the Jets can screw this one up," Feldman wrote.

"At 6-4 and 241 pounds, Reese (who turns 21 in August) overtook teammate Caleb Downs as the biggest star of the Buckeyes' terrific defense in 2025. By mid-September, rival Big Ten coaches were raving about Reese's ability to menace their offensive game plans. ... His stats might not have been eye-popping (69 tackles, 6½ sacks), but his film is."

The Arizona Cardinals will pick Reese at No. 3, according to ESPN.

Sonny Styles could be the second Buckeye taken. Feldman likes him going to the New York Giants at No. 5, while Schrager and Kiper project him to be drafted by the Washington Commanders at No. 7.

ESPN's Miller feels Styles will have a successful career.

"Ohio State might take the 'Linebacker U' label this year to go along with the 'WRU' tag it has earned in recent years," he wrote. "Styles is a (Fred) Warner-like linebacker who has elite range and tracking ability while tipping the scales at 6-5, 244 pounds.

"Styles' player profile and consistent production over the past three seasons make him one of the easiest evaluations in this class. He's a rookie starter and has the tools of a future All-Pro."

Tate is seen as the Miami Dolphins' choice at No. 11 by Schrager.

"New coach Jeff Hafley (who coached with Ryan Day in San Francisco and at Ohio State) and GM Jon-Eric Sullivan have countless contacts at Ohio State, and the whole program raves about Tate," he wrote. "He could bring some juice to Miami."

Hafley was the defensive backs coach at Ohio State in 2019 for Day before becoming the head coach at Boston College from 2020 to 2023. Hafley also worked with Day for the San Francisco 49ers in 2016 when Hafley was the defensive backs coach and Day was quarterbacks coach.

The Dolphins need help in a lot of places, and any of the top Buckeyes would be a welcome addition, but drafting outside the top 10 may preclude the opportunity.

For example, the New Orleans Saints might take the Ohio State route again for a receiver with Tate at No. 8, Kiper said. They've had success with Michael Thomas and current Saints receiver Chris Olave.

Then there's a chance Tate could stay in-state if USA Today guesses correctly and the Cleveland Browns take him with the No. 8 pick.

"Tate, who averaged more than 17 yards per catch last season for the Buckeyes, would be a nice fit in a stick-and-pick scenario given the need to expand QB Shedeur Sanders' options," Nate Davis wrote.

Downs Has Upside

As well respected as Downs is, Schrager thinks he will drop to 12th to the Dallas Cowboys. Feldman has him slightly higher, going to the Cincinnati Bengals at No. 10.

"The decision here is Downs or LSU's Mansoor Delane, the draft's top corner," Feldman wrote. "My gut tells me that it'd be really hard for Cincinnati to pass on a star player from Ohio State who has excelled in a lot of big games and has a winning pedigree to go with off-the-charts football intelligence."

It's all about the position, not the player, former NFL quarterback Chris Simms said on "PFT Live" on April 9. He said safety is one spot that teams historically are reluctant to use for a high draft pick, but a player like Downs will force teams to rethink that philosophy.

Take the Fox Sports mock draft of April 8, for example. After Mendoza, Reese will be tabbed by the Jets, and Downs will head to the Cardinals at No. 3 with this explanation: "Despite needing an offensive tackle, Arizona needs to land a cemented star with this pick. Downs might be the smartest football player in this draft, having lined up all over the field during his time at Alabama and Ohio State.

"This past season, he played 44 snaps on the defensive line, 241 in the box, 146 at slot corner, nine at wide corner, and 240 at free safety. For his career, he's totaled 257 tackles, 164 solo tackles, 12 passes defended and six interceptions.

"There is nothing Downs can't do, and whatever team gets him is landing a perennial Pro Bowler."

Fox Sports also has Tate to the Browns at No. 6, but Sonny

Styles will join the Kansas City Chiefs with the No. 9 pick, and McDonald is predicted to wind up with former OSU quarterback C.J. Stroud on the Houston Texans with the 28th selection.

Feldman and CBS Sports agree with Fox Sports on where McDonald will land, but USA Today has McDonald to the New England Patriots at No. 31, and Chad Reuter from NFL.com slots him at No. 34 to the Cardinals. ESPN's Miller drops him even further to No. 38, which happens to belong to the Texans.

However, Schrager views McDonald as a solid choice at No. 26 to the Buffalo Bills: "This might be the highest you'll see McDonald going in a mock draft at the moment, but I'm hearing significant first-round buzz on him. A massive run defender, McDonald would be a good fit in Buffalo, where the Bills ranked 30th against the run last season (5.1 yards allowed per carry)."

In the third round with the 77th pick, Reuter forecasts the Cardinals selecting Igbinosun and Klare to the Jacksonville Jaguars (No. 81). He has Curry going to the Indianapolis Colts at No. 156, while Miller views him at No. 171 for the Patriots, both in the fifth round.

Miller slots Klare to the Philadelphia Eagles at No. 68 and Igbinosun to the Los Angeles Chargers at No. 86 in the third round, with Lorenzo Styles Jr. going off the board to the Chiefs in the fifth round with the 176th pick.

In the sixth round, Miller sends Kacmarek to the Giants with pick No. 186, and in the seventh, the Commanders draft Donaldson at No. 223.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is highlighting the 11 potential draftees hoping to hear their names called at the NFL draft. The following boxes contain accolades, projected rounds, quotes from players, recruiting rankings and expert analysis from The Athletic's Dane Brugler, who publishes an annual draft guide breaking down hundreds of prospects.



CADEN CURRY

Defensive End
6-3 • 257

Recruit Rank: Overall 123;
DE 13

ACCOLADES: Curry played 54 games in four seasons for the Buckeyes, with all 14 career starts coming in his senior season in 2025, when he was named third-team All-American by The Associated Press. His 16½ tackles for loss last season ranked 14th nationally and was the 15th-best ever in a season for a Buckeye. Against Washington, he tied the school record with five TFLs in a game.

PROJECTED ROUND: Fourth to fifth round.

CURRY SAYS: "The tape doesn't lie. I feel like I'm a relentless motor, and I get to the ball, and good things happen when you run to the ball, and just effort and mentality. I feel like I'm that kind of old-school player that's rugged and just always tries his hardest and is never going to give up on a play."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Curry is a sawed-off, face-up pass rusher with a basic approach, but he plays alert and physical and affects the game with his white-hot motor (his best attribute). He projects as a versatile NFL backup who can be moved up and down the line of scrimmage – reminiscent of John Simon, another former Ohio State edge defensive end."



CJ DONALDSON

Running Back
6-2 • 230
Recruit Rank: Overall 934;
TE 52

ACCOLADES: In his one season at Ohio State after three for West Virginia, Donaldson led the Buckeyes with 10 rushing touchdowns to give him 40 in his career. He was also second on the team with 361 yards on 96 carries for a 3.8 average. He had 2,419 career rushing yards and a 4.7 yards per carry average in 45 games (16 starts).

PROJECTED ROUND: Seventh round.

DONALDSON SAYS: "As a kid, you dream of hearing your name called in those first seven rounds. Just having the opportunity to play the game that I love, it would be amazing. I'm just hopeful and thankful that I might have an opportunity."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Donaldson is an all-gas, downhill back who wants to quickly find a crease, stay north-south and pound away (similar in ways to another former Ohio State running back, Carlos Hyde)."



CALEB DOWNS

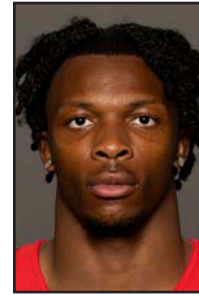
Safety
6-0 • 206
Recruit Rank: Overall 6;
SAF 1

ACCOLADES: Downs had a brief but historic two seasons with the Buckeyes after one season at Alabama, becoming the sixth two-time unanimous All-American at Ohio State. He was the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year in 2025 and, for the second consecutive season, was named the conference's defensive back of the year.

PROJECTED ROUND: First round.

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

BRUGLER SAYS: "Downs sees the field like it's a chess board and plays with an exceptional combination of intelligence, urgency and toughness, allowing him to be disruptive from anywhere on the field. His intangibles and on-field versatility will make him an impactful NFL starter early in his career."



DAVISON IGBINOSUN

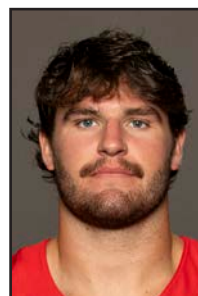
Cornerback
6-2 • 189
Recruit Rank: Overall 162;
CB 21

ACCOLADES: Igbinosun started all 43 games for Ohio State the past three seasons following his freshman season at Mississippi. He was named first-team All-Big Ten in 2025 when he had 53 tackles, eight pass breakups and two interceptions. His 22 PBUs as a Buckeye are tied for 11th in program history.

PROJECTED ROUND: Second to third round.

IGBINOSUN SAYS: "I came to Ohio State not just to get an opportunity to be in the league, but when I get to the league, I want to bring value day one."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Igbinosun is a long, lanky cornerback with the speed and competitive edge that NFL coaches covet in press-man schemes. If he can trade his grabby tendencies for better trust in his technique, he has a multi-contract NFL career ahead of him."



WILL KACMAREK

Tight End
6-6 • 261
Recruit Rank: Overall N/A;
DL N/A

ACCOLADES: An All-Big Ten honorable mention in 2025, Kacmarek had 15 catches for 168 yards and two touchdowns with a career-long 47-yard reception vs. Grambling State. He played two seasons at Ohio State after three at Ohio and made 23 catches for 254 yards and two TDs in his OSU career.

PROJECTED ROUND: Sixth round.

KACMAREK SAYS: "I love it. I think it's my style (blocking). Not a lot of people like to do it, but I take pride in that role and doing so can separate yourself."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Kacmarek is a big, linear athlete with strong hands and the desired level of aggression as a point-of-attack blocker. He projects as a Y tight end and can be one of the better blockers in the draft class."



MAX KLARE

Tight End
6-4 • 246
Recruit Rank: Overall 1,198;
TE 70

ACCOLADES: Klare spent just one season at Ohio State, starting in 11 games and recording 43 catches for 448 yards and two touchdowns. He had a breakout 2024 season with Purdue before transferring to Columbus, with 51 catches for 685 yards and four scores. Klare received first-team All-Big Ten honors in 2025 and third-team all-conference honors the year before.

PROJECTED ROUND: Third round.

KLARE SAYS: "I think I've improved a lot. Coach Keenan (Bailey), Coach (Tim) Hinton, Coach Wendy (Laurent), we're working on my blocking every day, working on my route running. Just being able to learn from guys like (tight ends) Will Kacmarek and Bennett Christian, it's been a great help to me, and I just want to keep continuing to build on that."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Klare is a good-looking athlete and shows speed and urgency that suggest he has yet to play his best football. He needs to improve with some of the pacing and subtleties of getting open, but his route movements are crisp and fluid. He has the body control to play the ball well in the air and flashes a burst after the catch. The foundation is there to be a serviceable positional blocker, although it will likely never be a strength of his game."



TYWONE MALONE

Defensive Tackle
6-4 • 309
Recruit Rank: Overall 63;
DL 11

ACCOLADES: Malone played in 31 games in three seasons at Ohio State. In the 2025 season, he played in 13 games and made 11 starts, recording 26 total tackles and two pass breakups. He totaled 52 tackles, 3½ tackles for loss and two sacks in his five-year career, the first two of which he spent at Ole Miss.

PROJECTED ROUND: Undrafted free agent.

MALONE SAYS: "You've got to play aggressive. You've got to play physically. You just have to know your job, know your assignment, and just execute at a high level. It's a fight every day up front. It's the trenches. You're going to have to fight every time, or you're going to get defeated. It's just a constant battle between you and the other guy."

BRUGLER SAYS: "He is slightly top-heavy but carries his weight well and uses his upper-body strength to create congestion in the run game. Though his pass-rush moves are underdeveloped, he has functional long arms that can put guards on skates (see the 2025 Indiana tape). Despite playing next to a block-eater in Kayden McDonald, he struggled to win quickly and make stops in the backfield."



KAYDEN MCDONALD

Defensive Tackle
6-2 • 326

Recruit Rank: Overall 261;
DL 35

ACCOLADES: He didn't become a starter until his last year at Ohio State, but during that season, he was one of the more productive interior defensive linemen in the country. McDonald finished the season with 65 tackles, including nine for loss, three sacks and a pass breakup. He was named a unanimous All-American and was named the Big Ten's Smith-Brown Defensive Lineman of the Year.

PROJECTED ROUND: First to second round.

MCDONALD SAYS: "I can bend. I'm not just a run stuffer. I can play all four downs and really just show them my power. I'm just explosive. I'm really explosive, and I trust my technique."

BRUGLER SAYS: "McDonald will require time to develop a pass-rush identity, but his dominant run-game qualities will make him immediately useful from different interior alignments. He projects as an early-down rookie, with a role that should continue to expand."



ETHAN ONIANWA

Offensive Lineman
6-7 • 331

Recruit Rank: 1463; IOL 89

ACCOLADES: Onianwa played in 39 career games at Rice over four seasons, redshirting his freshman year, earning 34 starts over the next three years. He started at right tackle for two seasons before moving to left tackle in 2024 and transferring to Ohio State for the 2025 season.

PROJECTED ROUND: Undrafted free agent.

ONIANWA SAYS: "I feel like a big thing that has always helped me along is just my work ethic. I feel like I got that from my parents because they're actually immigrants from Nigeria. And just seeing how hard they worked to provide a life for me and my siblings really inspired me to put in whatever I can into whatever I'm doing. Whether it's school, whether it's football, I'm just giving it 100 percent."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Onianwa is a massive human, with long arms, thickness in his quads and a tall, broad frame. He is an average athlete and has mediocre foot quickness to mirror speed in space, but his body control and bend help him get the job done. He is more consistent in the run game, where he can lean on defenders and create movement with sheer force. NFL scouts speak highly of his intelligence, work habits and character."



ARVELL REESE

Linebacker
6-4 • 241

Recruit Rank: Overall 212;
LB 22

ACCOLADES: Reese became a major part of Ohio State's defense in the 2024 national championship season but had a major breakout last year as a consensus All-American. He finished the season with 69 tackles, 10 of which were for loss, 6½ sacks and two passes broken up.

PROJECTED ROUND: First round.

REESE SAYS: "Teams have pretty much been asking me what I want to do and see where my mind was at. I've been telling them I think I'm an outside linebacker/edge. I haven't even scratched the surface with really what I can do pass rushing."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Reese – who is also one of the youngest prospects in the draft class – was asked to play a blend of multiple positions, which showcased his vast tools for NFL scouts. He is explosive from his spot and has exceptional closing burst to cover ground in a blink. He can create short corners as a rusher but will need time to become more of a pass-rush technician, in terms of setting up and sequencing different moves. He uses his length to anchor as an edge setter and skillfully deconstructs blocks with elusive movements or violent, well-timed hands."



SONNY STYLES

Linebacker
6-5 • 244

Recruit Rank: Overall 12; SAF 1

ACCOLADES: Styles was a three-year starter at Ohio State, one of which was at safety and the other two at linebacker. He also earned playing time as a 17-year-old true freshman and ended up as a first-team All-American at linebacker in 2025. He was the recipient of the Block "O" jersey as a senior.

PROJECTED ROUND: First round.

STYLES SAYS: "Playing safety, I think that helped me understand the totality of a defense. I played free safety, strong safety, and nickel my first two years, and being able to see the game from that lens and then now take that and move to linebacker, I think it helped me see the entire picture vs. only seeing part of it."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Styles is a freaky height/weight/speed athlete with fluid change of direction and the playmaking range to cover every blade of grass. He processes quickly and delivers pop at contact as a downhill player, rarely missing tackles thanks to his ability to violently overwhelm the ball carrier. Though he plays with terrific reaction quickness, the next step in his development is to improve his anticipation, especially in coverage, so he can make more plays on the football."



LORENZO STYLES JR.

Cornerback
6-1 • 194

Recruit Rank: 115; WR 20

ACCOLADES: After starting his collegiate career at the wide receiver position at Notre Dame, Styles transferred to Ohio State and transitioned to cornerback. Although he wasn't a starter in 2024, he played in all 16 games and played nearly 400 defensive snaps. Styles became a starter at the nickel position in 2025 and made 30 tackles, including 1½ for loss, and had three pass breakups. Styles also had a 100-yard kick-return touchdown in Ohio State's 48-10 win over UCLA. It was Ohio State's first kick-return touchdown in 15 years.

PROJECTED ROUND: Seventh round.

STYLES SAYS: "(Special teams) is a big part of my game. I take a lot of pride in special teams. 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."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Styles doesn't have NFL-level cover skills or anticipation right now, but he has enough explosiveness (and an impressive pedigree). His potential impact on special teams should keep him in the mix for a spot on the back end of the roster or practice squad as he continues to develop."



CARNELL TATE

Wide Receiver
6-2 • 192

Recruit Rank: Overall 60;
WR 9

ACCOLADES: Over a three-year career, Tate appeared in 39 games and made 26 starts. He had 121 receptions for 1,872 yards and 14 receiving touchdowns during his time with Ohio State. Tate was named a second-team All-American as a junior. He was also named to the All-Big Ten first team for the 2025 season.

PROJECTED ROUND: First round.

TATE SAYS: "I think my game brings it all to the table. I've got the contested catch. I've got that route-running. I also bring it in the run game. A lot of receivers don't do that. So I'm able to impact the game with or without the ball in my hands."

BRUGLER SAYS: "Tate is a long, technically proficient receiver who can win at all three levels using high-level tracking/adjustment skills and catching radius. He projects as an immediate NFL starting Z with Pro Bowl upside."

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL

Sept. 5 BALL STATE; **12** at Texas; **19** KENT STATE; **26** ILLINOIS.

Oct. 3 at Iowa; **10** MARYLAND; **17** at Indiana; **31** at USC.

Nov. 7 OREGON; **14** NORTHWESTERN; **21** at Nebraska; **28** MICHIGAN.

Dec. 5 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

BASEBALL (19-15, 9-6)

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, W 8-4 (10 inn.); **20-22** BUTLER, W 11-0 (7 inn.); W 13-3 (8 inn.); W 14-4 (7 inn.); **24** at Wright State, L 10-8; **27-29** at Minnesota, W 4-3; W 9-3; W 12-9; **31** TOLEDO, W 10-5.

April 3-5 MARYLAND, W 10-8; W 14-12; W 7-0; **7** BOWLING GREEN, L 9-3; **10-12** PENN STATE, L 10-6; W 3-2; W 15-10; **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 GOLF

Feb. 9-11 Puerto Rico Classic at Rio Grande, P.R., T6th/15; **16-18** Watersound Invitational at Panama City Beach, Fla., 10th/12.

March 1-2 Colleton River Collegiate at Bluffton, S.C., 2nd/15; **20-22** Linger Longer Invitational at Eatonton, Ga., 8th/18.

April 11-12 ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE, 2nd/16; **18-19** Hoosier Collegiate at Bloomington, Ind.

May 1-3 Big Ten Championship at North Plains, Ore.; **18-20** NCAA REGIONAL; **29-June 3** NCAA Championship at Carlsbad, Calif.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Feb. 1-3 Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., 12th/16; **15-16** Spartan Suncoast Invitational at Sarasota, Fla., 3rd/15.

March 2-4 Darius Rucker Intercollegiate at Hilton Head, S.C., 8th/17; **27-29** Clemson Invitational at Sunset, S.C., 5th/16.

April 17-18 THERESE HESSION BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL; **24-26** Big Ten Championship at Los Angeles.

May 11-13 NCAA Regionals at TBD; **22-27** NCAA Championship Finals at Carlsbad, Calif.

MEN'S LACROSSE (9-3, 2-2)

Feb. 1 DETROIT MERCY, W 19-3; **7** CLEVELAND STATE, W 17-7; **10** BELLARMINE, W 11-6; **14** at Air Force, W 14-9; **21** HIGH POINT, W 13-5; **28** at Georgetown, W 10-9.

March 7 NOTRE DAME, L 9-8; **12** DENVER, W 6-4; **21** at Rutgers, W 6-5; **28** PENN STATE, L 13-6.

April 4 at Maryland, L 8-7 (OT); **11** JOHNS HOPKINS, W 7-6; **17** MICHIGAN; **25** Big Ten Tournament First Round; **30** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals.

May 2 Big Ten Tournament Final.

MEN'S TENNIS (25-3, 10-1)

Jan. 18 TOLEDO, W 4-0; **18** XAVIER, W 4-0; **23** NORTH ALABAMA, W 4-0; **24** PURDUE W 4-0; **30** TEXAS, W 4-1.

Feb. 1 WAKE FOREST, W 4-0; **7** VIRGINIA, W 5-2; **13** ITA National Team Indoor at Dallas vs. Southern Methodist University, W 4-3; **14** ITA National Team Indoor at Dallas vs. Stanford, W 4-3; **16** ITA National Team Indoor at Dallas vs. Virginia, W 4-2; **17** ITA National Team Indoor at Dallas vs. Texas, L 4-2; **22** NOTRE DAME, W 5-0; **22** DAYTON, W 4-0.

March 5 at Baylor, L 4-2; **7** at Penn State, W 4-0; **13** MICHIGAN, W 4-0; **15** MICHIGAN STATE, L 4-3; **18** at Texas A&M, W 4-1; **20** at Indiana, W 4-1; **22** at Purdue, W 4-0; **27** ILLINOIS, W 5-2; **29** NORTHWESTERN, W 5-0.

April 3 at UCLA, W 4-0; **5** at Southern California, W 4-3; **10** NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 7-0; **10** OREGON, W 4-0; **12** WASHINGTON, W 4-0; **12** TOLEDO, W 6-0; **17** at Wisconsin; **19** at Nebraska; **22-25** Big Ten Tournament at Ojai, Calif.

May 1-3 NCAA 1st and 2nd Rounds; **8-9** NCAA Super Regional; **14-17** NCAA Team Championships.

WOMEN'S TENNIS (19-3, 10-1)

Jan. 26 IOWA, W 4-0.

Feb. 1 VIRGINIA, W 4-0; **6** ITA National Team Indoor Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. Duke, W 4-2; **7** ITA National Team Indoor Championship at Champaign, Ill., vs. North Carolina, W 4-2; **9** ITA National Team Indoor Championship at Evanston, Ill., vs. Texas A&M W 4-2; **10** ITA National Team Indoor Championship at Evanston, Ill., vs. Georgia, L 4-3; **13** NC STATE, W 5-2; **15** at Penn State, W 5-2; **22** at Oklahoma State, W 4-3; **28** MICHIGAN STATE, W 6-1.

March 6 MICHIGAN, W 4-1; **11** at Pepperdine, L 4-0; **14** at UCLA, W 4-0; **15** at Southern California, L 4-1; **22** DUKE, W 4-0; **27** RUTGERS, W 4-0; **29** MARYLAND, W 4-0.

April 1 at Michigan, W 4-1; **3** at Nebraska, W 4-1; **5** at Iowa, W 4-0; **11** at Purdue, W 4-0; **12** at Indiana, W 4-0; **17** OREGON; **19** WASHINGTON; **23-26** BIG TEN TOURNAMENT.

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., NTS; **26-28** Raleigh Relays at Raleigh, N.C., NTS.

April 1-4 Texas Relays at Austin, Texas, NTS; **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 (14-11, 9-7)

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, W 3-1; **21** LEWIS, W 3-0; **25** at Penn State, L 3-1.

April 4 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-0; **9** at McKendree, W 3-2; **11** at Lindenwood, L 3-2; **18** MIVA Quarterfinals; **22** MIVA Semifinals; **25** MIVA Finals.

May 7 NCAA Quarterfinals; **9** NCAA Semifinals; **11** NCAA Finals.



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B1G Wins Men's And Women's Basketball Titles

The Big Ten stands atop college basketball to finish the season, with a championship in both the men's and women's postseason tournaments.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

With two teams in the Final Four in the men's bracket – Illinois and Michigan – the conference had a good chance to end the drought that has plagued it since Michigan State won the NCAA Tournament in 2000. Ultimately, the Wolverines came through with a 69-63 victory over UConn in the national title game on April 6.

It was North Carolina transfer Elliot Cadeau who stood out in the title game, scoring 19 points on 5-of-11 shooting while also making 8 of 9 free throws. Big Ten Player of the Year Yaxel Lendeborg and Morez Johnson Jr. added 13 and 12 points, respectively, while Johnson recorded a double-double with 10 rebounds.

It is head coach Dusty May's first national championship in his second season with Michigan after being hired away from Florida Atlantic before the 2024-25 season.

It completes an extremely quick turnaround for May and the Wolverines, who finished the 2023-24 season with an 8-24 record and a 3-17 mark in the conference.

That was helped along by the large number of transfers that May brought in to lead his team. Cadeau was far from the only transfer on the roster who made a large impact this season. Lendeborg (UAB), Johnson (Illinois), Aday Mara (UCLA) and Roddy Gayle Jr. (Ohio State) all started their college careers at different schools before choosing to join May's squad either this season or last.

"It's a surreal moment," May said. "It doesn't feel real. It still doesn't feel real because you watch this as a kid. It's been a tough task for me over the years to see that and think back on all the years that you just want to be a part of something greater than yourselves, more than yourself. And for this to come to fruition, it just doesn't seem real."

The title win came after the Wolverines dominated Arizona in the Final Four, beating the Wildcats, 91-73, on April 4. It was Mara who starred in that game, with 26 points on 11-of-16 shooting and nine rebounds.

In the women's bracket, it was UCLA that cut down the nets after blowing out South Carolina, 79-51, on April 5.

The dominance in the game was led by Gabriela Jaquez, who played all four of her college seasons with UCLA. She scored 21 points on 8-of-14 shooting, adding 10 rebounds and five assists. Big Ten Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year Lauren Betts contributed as well with her own double-double, scoring 14 points and grabbing 11 off the boards.

It was a much different story for head coach Cori Close to get her first championship as a head coach than it was for May on



SONNY BROCKWAY

BIG NET — Ten spelled backwards is net, which is appropriate because that's what Big Ten members Michigan for the men and the UCLA women cut down after winning national championships to continue the conference's dominance in major sports. Michigan, Ohio State and Indiana, respectively, have won the past three football titles as well. Second-year coach Dusty May (center) led the Wolverines' revival from an eight-win season in 2023-24.

the men's side. Close has been at the helm of the Bruins for the last 15 seasons. During that time, she has made deep runs into the tournament but hadn't been able to break through with a title.

Last season, the Bruins made their first-ever Final Four but lost to UConn, which went on to beat South Carolina, 82-59, in the national championship game.

Now, Close and the Bruins have finally been able to win the title, claiming the trophy in just their second season in the Big Ten.

"It's immeasurably more than I could ask or imagine," Close said. "It's beyond my wildest dreams."

Close was confident going into the game, though, and obviously she had good reason to be.

"I really did expect us to win today," Close said. "I thought about it several times. I'm like, 'We're going to win.' I felt very peaceful all day. It wasn't about whether or not we got the W. I wanted us to be able to play our best when our best was needed. We delivered on that."

Wetzel: B1G Dominance Will Continue

Dan Wetzel of ESPN wrote before the start of the Final Four that the Big Ten's dominance may not be stopping anytime soon.

With Michigan winning the first men's basketball title for the conference since the Spartans' championship 26 years prior, the conference now holds the most recent titles in men's and women's basketball as well as football, with Indiana winning its first national championship. Before the Hoosiers, Ohio State and Michigan won the previous two football titles.

Wetzel's April 1 article argued that, while the idea that NIL being allowed evened the playing field for all conferences is overblown, there is some truth to that argument.

"This narrative, of course, ignores many past scandals in the league, let alone that the Big Ten has produced plenty of contenders through the years," Wetzel wrote. "It just hasn't won it all since Michigan State in 2000.

"The overall sentiment is somewhat fair, however. While violations certainly occurred in the Big Ten, they generally weren't as extreme as in other places."

Wetzel touched on May's ability to gather what amounted to basically an All-Star team of transfer players for this season, and Illinois head coach Brad Underwood's chance to pay European players who otherwise might have chosen to play professionally overseas helped bolster the Illini.

Underwood himself understood how important that was for his team's success this year before they lost to UConn in the Final Four.

"NIL has opened it up so we can actually get the really, really good European players," Underwood said. "Dribble, pass, shoot guys. They've been extremely well coached. They are fundamentally very sound."

Wetzel finished his piece with this: "Even a title (on April 6) wouldn't give the Big Ten basketball dominance to go with the football variety, but here in the new era of college sports, it would suggest another step in its revival, if not arrival, as a true behemoth."

McCollum Turns Down UNC Interview

After just one season with Iowa men's basketball, in which the Hawkeyes finished with a 24-13 record and an Elite Eight appearance in the NCAA Tournament, head coach Ben McCollum was reportedly contacted by North Carolina regarding its vacant head coaching position.

The Tar Heels hoped to interview the 44-year-old coach, but McCollum turned that opportunity down, according to CBS

Sports.

"He had contact with UNC as the search played out, per sources," Matt Norlander wrote on Twitter. "UNC was hoping to meet with him in person for a proper interview, but he passed on that invitation to stay at Iowa."

McCollum answered with an immediate "yes" when asked during his tournament run if he intended to be the head coach at Iowa next season, and he seems to have been honest in his answer.

"Those are all lies," McCollum said about speculation that he might be leaving. "The only person that would ever know would be – well, three people – my athletic director, my wife, and that's about it. I guess two people."

North Carolina went on to hire former Denver Nuggets head coach Mike Malone, it was reported on April 6.

Basketball Portal Opens

Not surprisingly, when the men's basketball transfer portal opened on April 7, talented players from around the country flooded in.

The most notable Big Ten player in the portal is former Wisconsin guard John Blackwell, who is rated five stars as a transfer prospect by 247Sports.

Blackwell has been with the Badgers for three seasons and has carved out a major role for himself, averaging 19.1 points, 5.1 rebounds and 2.3 assists as a junior. He helped Wisconsin to a 24-11 record this season, but after being upset as a five seed in the first round of the NCAA Tournament by 12 seed High Point, Blackwell will look for a new home for his last year of eligibility.

As BSB went to press, Blackwell was ranked the second-best player in the portal by 247Sports.

Ranked the 10th-best player in the portal was former Oregon point guard Jackson

Shelstad, who had already visited Louisville days after the portal opened. He was also scheduled to visit Arizona on April 14, but he committed to the Cardinals on April 12.

Oregon had a down season this year on the hardwood, finishing 12-20 overall and 5-15 in the conference, and that likely had a lot to do with Shelstad being injured for much of the year and playing in only 12 games. When he was on the floor, he scored 15.6 points per game and added 4.9 assists and 2.9 rebounds.

In three seasons with the Ducks, Shelstad averaged 13.6 points, 3.0 assists and 2.9 rebounds.

10 BIG Prospects In Brugler's Top 25

With the NFL draft approaching quickly, the Big Ten is set to be well-represented early on.

Ohio State's top prospects are a big part of that, with Arvell Reese (ranked No. 1 overall), Sonny Styles (No. 4), Caleb Downs (No. 5) and Carnell Tate (No. 10) all inside the top 10 in "The Beast," a comprehensive breakdown of all draft prospects done each year by The Athletic's Dane Brugler.

Brugler's rankings are not predicted draft slots, but how he ranks each player regardless of position or NFL teams' draft needs.

But it isn't just Buckeyes who will be taken early in the draft.

Other Big Ten players whom Brugler ranks highly are the likely first overall pick, quarterback Fernando Mendoza (ranked No. 3 overall by Brugler, Indiana), offensive lineman Olaivavega Ioane (No. 12, Penn State), wide receiver Makai Lemon (No. 13, USC), tight end Kenyon Sadiq (No. 16, Oregon), safety Dillon Thieneman (No. 18,

Oregon) and wide receiver Omar Cooper Jr. (No. 22, Indiana).

Former Wisconsin TE Pugh Dies

Former Wisconsin tight end Jack Pugh died at the age of 24, the university announced on March 31.

Pugh played for the Badgers from 2021-22, redshirting his true freshman season and getting into one game the next year, not recording any stats.

In December of 2023, Pugh announced that he was stepping away from football due to mental health struggles he was dealing with.

"I made a decision before the football season to medically retire, that I haven't yet formally announced," he posted on Instagram at the time. "My physical health wasn't near perfect, but my mental health was the

reason I decided to hang it up.

"Over years of prolonged depression and substance abuse, I decided I deserved a better life and to finally find happiness. In no way was football the root of these problems, but everything in my life had distracted me for so long to the point I never had prioritized my mental health all along, digging a deeper, darker hole."

Pugh joined the Badgers in the 2021 recruiting class after graduating from Hilliard (Ohio) Bradley High School that year.

Wisconsin released a statement after the news of his death.

"The Wisconsin Athletics family is deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Jack Pugh. Jack was a positive light and brought a genuine spirit to our football program. More than that, he cared about people and was loved by his teammates and staff," it read.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1986

It was like a storybook ending to a season of ups, downs and all sorts of in-betweens.

Exactly 10 years from the day he was hired, Eldon Miller coached his final game at Ohio State. And what a going-away present he gave the school – its first-ever National Invitation Tournament title and the first tourney crown of any kind for OSU since the 1960 NCAA national championship.

Miller, fired on Feb. 3, had just done his thing on the sidelines for the final time as the OSU coach. His Buckeyes, drawing on a lot of emotion for their coach, turned back Wyoming, 73-63, before 11,024 fans in New York's Madison Square Garden.

Miller, appearing looser than perhaps at any time in his OSU coaching tenure, was asked after the victory how it felt.

"The best thing that could happen in coaching," said Miller, who was going to take in the NCAA Tournament's Final Four in Dallas before taking over his new job at Northern Iowa University. "I don't know how else to describe it – a great, great feeling. I've experienced that one other time in my basketball career. That's when I was a senior at Wittenberg College playing for Ray Mears – one of the great coaches in basketball. We won the college (Division III) championship."

35 Years Ago — 1991

Ohio State's new offensive coordinator, Elliot Uzelac, swore that changes he planned to implement in the Buckeyes' offense in the spring would be hard for the average fan to detect.

Nevertheless, Uzelac expected the Buckeyes to be a much more potent offensive threat than they were a year before when they slipped to fifth in the Big Ten in total offense from first in 1989.

For that reason, he had put former offensive coordinator Jim Colletto's playbook in the paper shredder, replacing it with one Uzelac called "complex, but not complicated."

Uzelac had an excellent nucleus of young talent on which to build his offense. Included among the offensive returnees were Big Ten freshman of the year tailback Robert Smith, fullback Scotie Graham and a host of young linemen who had received plenty of on-the-job training the season before.

30 Years Ago — 1996

Ohio State offensive coordinator Joe Hollis had been around coaching long enough to know that spring football practice was a time to improve the individual and was the foundation on which a successful season lay.

Unlike the year before, when most eyes were on the defense, this year people were intently watching the offensive side of the ball. Every handoff, every pass, every block was glimpsed with curiosity, wondering who was going to come out on top in myriad battles for No. 1.

Hollis, beginning his fifth year as coordinator, wasn't worried too much about said battles, preferring instead to concentrate on making each individual a better football player. If they stepped up and inherited a starting role due to hard work, so much the better.

"Fundamentals are a big part of spring practice," Hollis said. "There are a few positions on offense that are very competitive and they want to play, so they know they have to perform every day. We evaluate every period, every snap. We have it on tape and that's what we do all morning long. Evaluate. There's a lot of pressure. These guys want to perform. They want to make the cut."

25 Years Ago — 2001

At the conclusion of a luncheon which served as a preview of the spring season, Jim Tressel was asked what question he had been asked the most during his short reign as Ohio State football coach.

His reply: "I would say it wasn't really a question, but a state-

ment: I thought you'd be taller."

That joke aside, the real answer may have been, "When are we going to see the spread?"

The year before, college football fans across the country saw spread formations bother defenses and alter the scoreboard with regularity. In the Big Ten, for example, Northwestern used the spread so effectively that the Wildcats rolled up big numbers on the likes of Wisconsin and Michigan and managed a share of the Big Ten title.

Meanwhile, back in Columbus, the Buckeyes stumbled and bumbled offensively in key ballgames for the second straight year. The Buckeyes had averaged 27.6 points per game in 2000 but were bailed out a bit by a great senior season from kicker Dan Stultz.

20 Years Ago — 2006

Eight starters returned to an Ohio State offense that was as potent as any in the country when the 2005 season ended.

The Buckeyes piled up 418 yards on Michigan then rolled to a bowl-record 617 yards against Notre Dame to cap the season, and they welcomed back such offensive stars as quarterback Troy Smith, tailback Antonio Pittman and receivers Ted Ginn Jr. and Anthony Gonzalez.

So why weren't those guys pleased with the progress of the offense at the midway point of spring practice, especially after a 69-68 loss in the April 8 jersey scrimmage?

"Coming into today, the defense had probably gotten the best of us a little bit, and that manifested itself out on the field today," Gonzalez said. "Our defense is doing better than people may have thought. They're still fast, they're still physical – pretty much the same thing you're going to see out of any Ohio State defense.

"But at the same time, we expect a lot out of ourselves on offense. I just don't think the consistency is there. Someone asked if we were guilty of being complacent, but I don't think that's it. I think it's a lack of consistency."

15 Years Ago — 2011

Through the first week of spring practice, it was hard to tell that much was different among the Buckeyes.

When the starting offensive unit took the field for an April 9 scrimmage, Mike Adams, Dan Herron and DeVier Posey were all in the lineup while Terrelle Pryor looked on, still limited following offseason foot surgery. All were suspended for the start of the upcoming season for their roles in Tattogate. The fifth suspended player – defensive end Solomon Thomas – also got into the action at the Leo position, where he spent the previous season.

While a number of players who would be available all season had their moments, Posey was one of the stars with two touchdown catches.

Senior center Michael Brewster said that although he was happy to see the wideout turn in a few impressive plays, there was a momentary flash of realization that the offense would look a whole lot different when the season started without Pryor, Posey, Herron and Adams.

"It is what it is, I guess," Brewster said. "At this point, we know it's five games. It's not going to go down and it's not going to go up. Other guys are going to have to make plays, but at Ohio State, we count on guys stepping up. We lose big-name players every year, but you've got to have someone backing them up."

10 Years Ago — 2016

For the first time in his college career, Ohio State junior quarterback J.T. Barrett was alone at the top.

Although he had arrived as a heralded true freshman out of Wichita Falls, Texas, it had taken three years for the depth chart to sort itself out to the point where the starting job unquestionably

belonged to him.

Barrett sat out 2013 as Braxton Miller and Kenny Guiton lorded over center. He had to beat out Cardale Jones in 2014 following an injury to Miller, but even as he put together a magical season, many still viewed the job as Miller's upon his return to health. And then Barrett went down, and the rise of Cardale Jones had forced a nearly season-long battle the previous fall for the right to direct the OSU offense.

But now Miller and Jones were gone, and Barrett was not. He was coming off a 42-13 thrashing of Michigan and a 44-28 walloping of Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl. This spring was the first time in his career that he'd known the starting job belonged to him and that nothing short of an injury could displace him. Backup quarterback Joe Burrow was heralded in his own right, but Barrett realistically wouldn't be challenged for the job.

Five Years Ago — 2021

In 2020, Ohio State was not able to have its annual spring game due to COVID-19, but the major storylines from that game may have been focused on the running backs room, who could replace Chase Young, and how Shaun Wade looked in his move to the outside.

The game would not have been focused on the starting quarterback battle, with Justin Fields returning for his second season at Ohio State following a year when he led the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoff and was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy.

But for the 2021 edition of the spring game on April 17, Fields was gone, or at least he wasn't on the field. Fields was in attendance to pick up his Big Ten championship ring, and he was also there to see three young quarterbacks on the roster.

What he saw was a combined 69 pass attempts between the trio of freshman Kyle McCord and redshirt-freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud. With those pass attempts, they threw 45 completions (65.2 completion percentage) for 497 yards and four touchdowns to one interception, good for a combined quarterback rating of 142.0.

"Some good, some not so good, a lot of learning opportunities there," head coach Ryan Day said. "We tried to get a little bit of a two-minute going at the end of the half, some red-zone stuff, all learning. You can see when you watch, there's flashes here and there, and then there's just learning opportunities, and the more these guys can prepare and work in the film room and just grind in the meeting rooms, the better they're going to prepare and be ready for those moments."

One Year Ago — 2025

Perhaps the biggest progress made coming out of the spring game was at the quarterback position. Heading into the scrimmage, many Buckeye fans and media members were under the impression that the competition between redshirt-freshman Julian Sayin and sophomore Lincoln Kienholz was heating up, especially after Kienholz emerged as one of the top performers of the entire spring and Sayin put forth a much quieter performance.

But when the two gunslingers entered the field in front of fans for the first time on the season, the gap between them seemed to widen a bit. Although Kienholz trotted out to the field first with the starters – both Kienholz and Sayin rotated equally with the ones and twos throughout the game – it was the former five-star Sayin who stole the show, showing off his accuracy and arm strength that many had lauded time and time again when he first arrived in Columbus last season from Alabama.

"I thought Julian, for the most part, was in a rhythm early on and moved the team down for a couple of touchdowns, which was good," Day said of his quarterback. "He made some nice throws."

Day Says Spring Great Time For Recruiting

When Ohio State head coach Ryan Day met with the media on March 31, he talked a lot about how valuable spring practices are in the days of the transfer portal, getting

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

all of the new faces used to their new home.

He also touched on how important those spring practices are when it comes to recruiting, since so many prep players are making their way to Columbus to see how the football program runs.

"Every time we practice, it's a showcase for our guys, and it's a showcase for our program," Day said. "It's an opportunity for recruits to come in and watch our coaches, watch the competitiveness of our practices, be around our culture and see our city. These spring practices are great opportunities every time we have recruits in the building."

The Buckeyes have certainly taken advantage of the time to have prospects on campus, with many different top players making their way for either their first visit to campus or a return to OSU.

Of course, the recruits still have to work

around their high school schedule, which Day said makes the weekends the biggest recruiting days of the spring. Day was expecting a big day for student appreciation day, which the Buckeyes hosted on April 4, and he ended up being right about that (more on that later).

"Weekdays are usually good for those who are on spring break, then the Saturdays are dynamite," Day said. "We have our student appreciation day, and we're expecting a big crowd."

Day has talked about his approach of letting recruits see how competitive even practices can be for the Buckeyes and allowing them to choose whether they want to be part of an environment like that in Columbus.

"The idea, now more than ever, is to make sure that these guys know exactly who we are, what the program is, what the culture is, open up our doors and (let them) decide if this is what they want," he said. "I've said it before. Ohio State is not for everybody. Identifying the right people who are super competitive, who understand that a bad day here is critical, is great."

"But it's also good for them to get around our coaches and see how they operate, see how they treat their players. The more we do that, the closer the relationship gets and the more we get to learn about them. The more we get to know each other, the more accurate we are in terms of identifying the

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

right people that fit us."

OSU Five-Star Visits Miami

Days before the Buckeyes lost to Miami in the Cotton Bowl last season, they got a win over the Hurricanes on the recruiting trail with Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star edge rusher DJ Jacobs (6-5, 235) committing to Ohio State.

It was always going to be a tough road to keep the No. 4 overall player in the 2027 class until signing day, but the Hurricanes are gaining ground back in the battle for the defensive end.

Before Jacobs pledged to the Buckeyes, Miami was considered the favorite in his recruitment, so it came as at least a minor surprise when he announced his commitment to the Scarlet and Gray.

Now, after Jacobs visited Coral Gables, Fla., for three days, On3's EJ Holland believes Miami is a real factor in his recruitment.

"Miami is definitely a factor here," he said in a video on the Rivals YouTube channel. "The Hurricanes are pushing hard for a flip. And if you remember, DJ was considered a Miami lean earlier in the cycle before Ohio State came in in the 11th hour and got a commitment from him."

"You don't go for three days in Miami's biggest recruiting event if you're not interested. I had a chance to be on campus," Holland continued. "I saw DJ hanging out with some of the fellow recruits at the pool party. A lot of the staff members. It gave Miami a real chance to get around him, get around his family. Like I said, I think Miami is a true factor here. Will they flip DJ Jacobs? I'm not sure."

Jacobs was the only defensive lineman the Buckeyes have committed in the 2027 class as BSB went to press, and position coach Larry Johnson surely would like to bring in a five-star on the line for the first time since Eddrick Houston signed with Ohio State in the 2024 class.

But it's going to be a long fight to keep Jacobs around until the early-December signing period.

Student Appreciation Day Attracts Visitors

As Day expected, the showing for the

Buckeyes' student appreciation practice was good, both in terms of the fans who came to watch and the recruits who were there.

Ohio State had a great showing of top prospects on campus from the 2027 class.

Some of the prospects who made it to Columbus for the weekend were Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon four-star defensive lineman Kasi Currie (6-5, 315); Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit five-star linebacker Kaden Henderson (6-2, 218); La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy three-star interior offensive lineman Luke Injaychock (6-5, 285); Vero Beach, Fla., four-star quarterback Wonderful Monds IV (6-2, 224); New Palestine, Ind., four-star tight end Mason Oglesby (6-4, 220); Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep five-star offensive tackle Oluwasemilore Olubobola (6-6, 295); Chicago Brother Rice four-star defensive lineman Brayden Parks (6-3, 305); Garner, N.C., four-star linebacker Arosen Randle Jr. (6-3, 210); Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195); and Chesterfield (Va.) Lloyd C. Bird five-star defensive end Chris Whitehead (6-5, 230).

Randle talked with 247Sports after he visited Columbus and spoke highly of the program.

"Going into it, we were kind of unsure about where they stood with us, not necessarily in a bad way, just it's been a while," he said. "So getting up there and getting the experience, we had the same initial feeling we had in the first place. It's a lot of love there, and they really want us to be a Buckeye family. Just being up there and getting a chance to be around it all just helped us narrow it down to the fact that this is one of the schools that truly wants us."

He also told 247Sports that Ohio State is "definitely at the top of" his list and has a bit of an advantage because he grew up rooting for the Buckeyes. Randle has an official visit scheduled to Columbus on June 19.

Monds is another prospect who spoke after his visit over the weekend. The Buckeyes already have Huntington Beach four-star signal caller Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220) pledged in the class, but it seems to be a possibility that quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler brings in two recruits at the position in 2027.



ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of BuckeyeScoop

Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star defensive end DJ Jacobs (6-5, 255) visited Miami (Fla.) for a weekend. How likely do you believe it is that Ohio State will be able to hold on to him until signing day?

"If this were five years ago, I would probably be able to give a more confident answer, but we're in the NIL era. Miami has got the NIL killer down there in (Miami businessman) John Ruiz. He's back in the game now, he pays, and he's a billionaire who loves Miami. I'm told he's back, and he's spending. That's scary. It's not like in the old days when you would get \$25,000 or \$30,000 under the table. This is monster money. So, if John Ruiz decides he wants DJ Jacobs and is willing to pay through the nose to get him, I don't know how to answer it. If he were being chased heavily and had just visited Georgia Tech, Virginia Tech, Michigan or Notre Dame, I feel pretty good about Ohio State keeping him. But man, Miami with John Ruiz back in NIL and willing to spend, it's hard to say. How does the kid turn that money down if (Ruiz) just trumps the Ohio State NIL offer tenfold, fivefold? I think DJ Jacobs wants to be at Ohio State, but he was visiting Miami for a reason. So I would think Ohio State has to be a little concerned with the fact that it's Miami."

Columbus Academy four-star defensive lineman Reinal-

do Perez (6-5, 245) has been on a lot of visits to Ohio State the last couple of years. Have you seen him play? What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I think he's ranked incorrectly. I think he's ranked too low. I think he's like a high three-star or a low four-star right now. I watch his film, and I see a kid that I don't know if I like better as a defensive end or a defensive tackle. It will probably be where his body takes him by the time he gets to college. But I think that kid is really good and really special. I'll be shocked if they don't get him if they want him, which it seems like they do. I think he's a big-time kid."

Ohio State has had some big recruiting days this spring. Of the players who have been on campus, who are some names to pay attention to that the Buckeyes have a good chance with?

"I was told that Garner, N.C., four-star linebacker Aroson Randle Jr. (6-3, 210) could be the guy that they are more than likely going to get, and it could be soon. I would look for AJ Randall and Reinaldo Perez, the Columbus kid, who I really like. Randle, I didn't see anything super special from him. He's a nice-looking player."

Vero Beach, Fla., four-star quarterback Wonderful

Monds IV (6-2, 224) was on campus for a spring visit. How likely do you think it is that the Buckeyes will take two quarterbacks in the 2027 class?

"The thing that we have to look at is the fact that Monds is a kid who has reclassified. He was the 2028 guy who reclassified to 2027, and I think it's a huge mistake on his part. He's a highly developmental kid. He needs another year of high school before he goes to college. To me, he's a high-risk, high-reward guy. He's raw and has so much untapped potential. He's going to redshirt when he gets to Ohio State and just get developed over time. Now, Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220), to me, would get on the field quicker right now. He'd be safer, but I don't think he has the upside that maybe Monds has. Edmunds seems really safe, but he doesn't have the upside of Monds, nor does he have the floor of Monds, either. Personally, I hope that they both come to Ohio State. I would be anxious to see how these two develop and if I'm right that Edmunds would be safer and quicker to the field. Monds could either wash out and be at Kent State within a year, or he could just take off."

That possibility doesn't concern Monds, the No. 210 player in the country and the No. 19 quarterback.

"I'm completely fine with it," Monds told 247Sports. "Growing up, I was always taught to compete, and I feel like no matter what, you're going to have to go in and compete with older guys anyway. Coming in with a two-quarterback class wouldn't bother me."

Edmunds was considered a five-star quarterback when he committed to Ohio State in December of 2024, but he has fallen down the rankings to the No. 191 player in the country and the No. 18 quarterback.

The Buckeyes also had some 2028 prospects on campus for student appreciation day.

The recruits in that class who made it to campus included Westerville (Ohio) Central offensive tackle Brock Baumann (6-6, 270); Louisville (Ky.) Christian Academy five-star defensive lineman Kellan Hall (6-4, 265); Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley four-star wide receiver Damarion Mays (6-2, 180); Chicago Brother Rice five-star defensive end Kameron McGee (6-3, 234); Chicago Brother Rice four-star tight end Jack McNamara (6-5, 235); Concord (Calif.) De La Salle four-star linebacker Landon Miller (6-2, 195); New Rochelle (N.Y.) Iona Prep offensive tackle Dilen Mulaj (6-8, 340); Sylvester (Ga.) Worth County defensive end Malik Muhammad (6-3, 215); and Detroit Cass Technical four-star offensive tackle Antjuan Wilkes (6-6, 280).

OSU Misses On Top O-Linemen

The Buckeyes' streak of not landing a five-star offensive lineman recruit continues as they were taken out of the running for two since BSB last went to press.

The first was Coatesville Area, Pa., five-star interior offensive lineman Maxwell Hiller (6-5, 300), who committed to Florida on April 8.

Hiller said that it was Gators offensive line coach Phil Trautwein who had the biggest impact on his decision. He chose the Gators over Alabama, Ohio State and Ten-

nessee.

Trautwein has been recruiting Hiller for years, but the coach was previously in Hiller's home state at Penn State until James Franklin was fired. So when Trautwein was hired at Florida, one of the first things he did on the recruiting trail was extend a scholarship offer to Hiller.

"I've known Trautwein since like eighth grade," Hiller told 247Sports. "He offered me in eighth grade when he was up at Penn State. I like Coach Traut like more than a coach. He's my guy. I can talk to Traut about anything I need, and he'll deliver with me, and I know he will."

Hiller is considered by the 247Sports composite rankings as the No. 5 player in the 2027 class and the top interior offensive lineman.

The other lineman the Buckeyes missed out on is Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas five-star offensive tackle Mark Matthews (6-6, 300), who narrowed his top schools down to four, not including Ohio State on that list.

The four schools that the top offensive tackle in the country included in his list were Georgia, LSU, Miami and Texas A&M.

Matthews is considered the No. 3 player in the country and the top player in Florida. Ohio State had him on campus for at least one visit since they offered him, but they weren't able to make it into his finalists. Other schools that didn't make the cut for Matthews were Notre Dame, Florida and Oregon.

Although the Buckeyes have had some top talent commit on the offensive line, like Carter Lowe (2025 class) and Sam Greer (2026), who were both top-100 recruits, the last five-star to pledge to the program was Donovan Jackson, who signed in the 2021 class when Greg Studrawa was coaching the offensive line.

As previously mentioned, the Buckeyes hosted Olubobola on campus for student appreciation day, so they still are in the running for at least one five-star player. Also, there is a chance that Liberty Center, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Kellen Wymer (6-5, 265) continues climbing up the ranks

as he has since he pledged to the Buckeyes.

After having been outside the top 200 when he committed to Ohio State on Nov. 2, Wymer is now considered the No. 82 player in the country and the second-ranked player in Ohio.

Buckeyes Make Top School Lists

When Cleveland Brush three-star defensive end Munir Lewis narrowed down his top schools, the Buckeyes were included in his list of seven.

Also included were Illinois, Louisville, Michigan State, Purdue, Vanderbilt and Virginia Tech.

Lewis is the No. 539 player in the country and the No. 48-ranked defensive end.

As it stood before BSB went to press, it seemed that Virginia Tech, Michigan State and Louisville may have had the biggest advantage to land the three-star since those three programs were scheduled to get official visits from Lewis.

He was scheduled to visit the Cardinals on May 29, the Spartans on June 5 and the Hokies on June 12.

Ohio State was also included in the top four for Memphis (Tenn.) Southwind four-star offensive tackle Antonio Keefer (6-4, 295). The Buckeyes were included along with LSU, Memphis and Ole Miss.

Keefer is the No. 291 player in the 2027 class and the No. 29 offensive tackle. With three offensive linemen already committed in the class, offensive line coach Tyler Bowen is off to a strong start in his first full cycle with the Buckeyes, but Keefer would be another solid addition for Bowen and OSU.

The Buckeyes were also kept in the running for Jackson (Miss.) Academy four-star offensive tackle Caden Moss (6-5, 320), who is down to five schools. With Ohio State, Moss included Kentucky, LSU, Ole Miss and Oregon.

He is the No. 58 player in the 2027 class and the fifth-ranked offensive tackle in the country. He has official visits scheduled to get to Columbus on May 29, LSU on April 17 and Ole Miss on June 19.

Greenwich (Conn.) Country Day four-

star defensive end Mekai Brown (6-7, 230) is down to five schools, and Ohio State made his list as well. The other four programs in competition with the Buckeyes are Notre Dame, Ole Miss, Texas A&M and USC.

Ohio State has been in on Brown for a while and had him on campus for a spring visit in March, so it doesn't come as much of a surprise that it is still in the running. Brown is considered the No. 49 player in the country and the No. 6 defensive end in the 2027 class. With official visit season coming up, it seems likely that Ohio State will get one from Brown.

OSU Makes More Offers

The Buckeyes extended more scholar-

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Ohio State Continues To Offer To 2028 Stars

Continued From Page 23

ship offers since BSB last went to press.

- **Upper St. Clair, Pa., three-star offensive tackle Ryan Robbins (6-6, 270)** – Robbins is in the 2027 class and is ranked No. 661 in the country, No. 59 at offensive tackle and No. 18 in Pennsylvania. He already has official visits scheduled to Pittsburgh (June 11) and Penn State (June 19), so the Buckeyes may be a bit behind in the relationship-building aspect of Robbins' recruitment, but he did tell 247Sports that he also plans to schedule an official visit to Columbus. Robbins told 247Sports: "They definitely rank highly among all the other teams who have offered me because they're The Ohio State," Robbins said. "They're high on my recruiting board."

- **Cleveland Glenville athlete Jaylen Edwards (5-6, 140)** – Edwards is un-

ranked in the 2028 class and has received only four offers. The other three offers he has, according to 247Sports, are from Colorado, Bowling Green and Miami (Ohio). However, now that the Buckeyes are in on the recruitment of the cornerback, other programs may want to get involved as well.

- **Fayetteville (N.C.) E.E. Smith defensive end Cassell Cruickshank (6-6, 230)** – The Buckeyes offered Cruickshank, an unranked 2028 prospect, on April 9 and became his 23rd Division I offer. Those offers include Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Nebraska, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas, among others. While he isn't ranked by the 247Sports composite, he is considered the No. 182 player in the country and the No. 21 edge rusher by On3.

- **Ashburn (Va.) Stone Bridge five-star cornerback Langston Pridgeon (6-**

2, 175) – Cornerbacks coach Tim Walton has proven to be a strong recruiter at Ohio State, and now he is in the running for Pridgeon, the No. 28 player in the 2028 class and the No. 2 cornerback. Pridgeon has 26 Division I offers already, which include Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Penn State, Rutgers, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas A&M, Vanderbilt and Wisconsin. As a sophomore, he had 73 tackles, two sacks, two forced fumbles and one interception for his high school team.

- **Huntsville, Ala., offensive tackle Joey Fleming (6-5, 280)** – Bowen offered Fleming, who is unranked in the 2028 class at this point, on March 31. Fleming holds 16 Division I offers, but some of the schools included are Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia and other top programs, so there will be strong competition in the race for the tackle. According to On3, he is the No. 201 player in the country and

the No. 11 interior offensive lineman.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State was in the final schools for Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star defensive end Rashad Streets (6-4, 230), but it missed out on his services when he committed to Oregon on April 3. Streets is considered the No. 61 player in the country and the No. 7 defensive end. It's possible that, if Jacobs flips elsewhere, then Ohio State could try to get back in contention with Streets since the Buckeyes would be out of a top edge rusher in that scenario. As a junior, Streets finished his season with 103 tackles, 39½ of which were for loss, as well as 15 sacks, five forced fumbles, three passes broken up and two fumble recoveries.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1986

Wes Siegenthaler didn't mind the heat in the kitchen. He simply ignored it and went about his business.

Playing football at Massillon (Ohio) High School was almost like a business. Tradition told us that Massillon football had the longest line of success in Ohio high school circles. There was tremendous pressure to succeed. The old cliché of only the strong survive was certainly apropos for Tiger football.

"Sure, there was a lot of pressure at Massillon," said Siegenthaler, a talented wide receiver for the Tigers the previous two years who was headed for Ohio State after accepting a football scholarship. "But this town is great. Everybody anywhere in Massillon knows who you are and what you do and how good you are if you play football."

Siegenthaler's abilities were many. One was not sure where he might play as a Buckeye. He hoped to make it as a wide receiver, but he knew the competition was going to be tough.

35 Years Ago — 1991

While the year's recruiting bus was loaded with Ohio prepsters traveling north to Michigan, DeWayne Carter was the only one going the other way.

That certainly didn't bother Carter, though.

"I guess you could say Michigan's loss is Ohio's gain," Carter said.

"I really can't say why all those other guys chose to go to Michigan or Michigan State or wherever. I guess they were doing what they felt was right. That's what I did. I always had a feeling that Ohio State was the right place for me. Then, after I visited the campus and got to know some of the players and coaches, I knew it was the right place for me."

Carter would enter preseason practice in the fall in an excellent position to make an immediate impact. Having qualified for freshman eligibility with a 2.70 grade-point average and a score of 19 on the ACT, he would not only be able to contend for playing time, but perhaps for a starting role, with Jeff Graham and Bobby Olive having graduated.

30 Years Ago — 1996

Cincinnati Elder linebacker Jason Ott, already listed as one of the state's and nation's top players in the class of 1997, may have been getting close to reaching a decision on his college choice. Rumors swirled in late March on the Internet that Ott had issued a "silent verbal commitment" to Ohio State.

But when reached by BSB on April 4, Ott said that he was still considering Michigan and Notre Dame in addition to Ohio State. In fact, Ott made unofficial visits to Michigan on March 30 and Notre Dame on April 3, and he watched OSU's practice at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on April 5.

"I definitely know that I am probably leaning toward Ohio State," Ott told BSB. "I truly think that's where I belong."

Ott was believed to be OSU's No. 1 recruiting target. The prevailing thought was the Buckeyes would have liked to build their 1997 class around him, similar to what happened with the signing of All-America linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer the previous year.

25 Years Ago — 2001

After an illustrious college career at Miami (Ohio), Robert Jo-

seph Carpenter Jr., more commonly known as Rob, embarked on a 10-year NFL journey from 1977-86 that included stops with the Houston Oilers, New York Giants and Los Angeles Rams.

After the conclusion of Carpenter's oldest son's prep career following the upcoming season, Robert Joseph Carpenter III, more commonly known as Bobby, would set out to begin, from all early indications, an illustrious college career of his own.

The younger Carpenter, already a chip off his father's block, had the legitimate potential to be every bit the football player that his dad was, and then some.

"Bobby has the kind of ability to do even more," said Lancaster head coach and proud father Rob Carpenter. "When I played football, I didn't really understand the game. I just liked to hit people. There's a lot more going on with Bobby than that, and his size (6-3, 230) makes him even more attractive."

"With the height advantage he has, that helps him a lot."

20 Years Ago — 2006

When Ohio State signed Aaron Gant out of Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's in the previous year's recruiting class, it might have gained more than just a talented athlete. It may have gotten the school's foot in the door at one of Michigan's top prep programs.

Annually one of the state's top talent producers, St. Mary's appeared to be particularly loaded in the class of 2007. Quarterback Justin Siller, wide receiver Taurian Washington and linebacker Alex Delisi all had already received Division I offers, and all had received varying degrees of interest from OSU.

However, the cream of the St. Mary's crop in the class appeared to be Dionte Allen, a wide receiver and defensive back who had already been named one of the nation's top 100 players by Rivals.com.

Schools from across the country had come calling for his services, and Ohio State could be added to that list as well. The Buckeyes could have been in slightly better shape, since Gant was his cousin as well as former teammate.

"Since my cousin's going down there, I'll be there a couple of times," Allen told BSB. "I'm trying to get down there for visits."

15 Years Ago — 2011

Tommy Schutt had seen his fair share of schools. After visiting more than a half-dozen in a few months, the four-star defensive tackle prospect from Glen Ellyn (Ill.) Glenbard West said two stood out.

"Florida and Ohio State," Schutt said. "Both were great visits and very impressive schools."

Schutt checked in as the No. 6 defensive tackle prospect in the country. As a junior, he visited Northwestern, Illinois, Michigan State and Iowa. He had since followed those trips with ones to OSU and Florida as well as another to MSU.

His goal in the spring was to check out Penn State, Wisconsin, Michigan and Notre Dame for the first time while making return trips to Ohio State and Northwestern.

A final decision was possible before his senior season got under way. As a junior, Schutt recorded 67 tackles, including 12 sacks, and he recovered four fumbles.

"(He's) a very good athlete who gets off the ball and shows good ability and effort in pursuit," said Allen Trieu, Midwest recruiting manager for Scout.com. "Compact and strong, he gets

under the pads of offensive linemen and does a good job with his hands disengaging. Right now, he's a disruptor and a playmaker and plays outside a lot."

10 Years Ago — 2016

Even as a visit from five-star quarterback Tate Martell threatened his place as the only quarterback in Ohio State's class of 2017, Akron Hoban four-star Danny Clark was all Buckeye.

Clark, who was offered by OSU coach Urban Meyer as a freshman in December 2013 and committed on the spot, said nothing would change his commitment to his home-state school. The four-star quarterback who had won a state championship in the fall said he had a talk with the Ohio State staff and knew the Buckeyes would be bringing in the talented Las Vegas Bishop Gorman quarterback for an unofficial visit.

"Urban explained it to me," Clark said April 2 at an Unrivaled Athlete Consulting camp in Akron. "It's a business, you know what I mean? It's a business. They have to be balanced on all points of the game, and I am not worried about competition."

"Honestly, I don't care who they bring in. I'm going to win."

Five Years Ago — 2021

In a normal recruiting cycle, Ohio State's 2021 class would have been solidified months before, either by the early signing period or on the traditional National Signing Day. But just like everything else in the past year, this recruiting class was different thanks to the impact of COVID-19.

The pandemic led the NCAA to implement a recruiting dead period on March 13, 2020, and it was still not lifted 407 days later, as of BSB's print date. Although the Buckeyes still secured commitments and letters of intent from 21 recruits, despite some not ever visiting campus, there was still a spot open for Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive tackle J.T. Tuimoloau.

Tuimoloau would have become the top-rated commitment in Ohio State's class as the No. 3 overall prospect in the country, but he had not made his decision and said he would not until he had visited the schools at the top of the list.

Those top schools, according to his most recent top five from Dec. 16, included Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, USC and Washington.

One Year Ago — 2025

In a big win for the Buckeyes, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. announced on social media on April 1 that he had shut down his recruitment and would sign with Ohio State.

"Officially shutting my recruitment down," his post read. "I'm 100 percent locked in and ready to work."

With his announcement, he also canceled three official visits he had set to go to Miami (Fla.), Oregon and USC. He would still take his official visit to Ohio State the weekend of June 20.

Henry originally committed to Ohio State on July 28, 2023, and had said that he remained committed since then, though he was taking visits to other schools throughout that time, making it to Eugene, Ore., multiple times for unofficial visits.

Now, the No. 9 prospect and No. 2 wide receiver in the 2026 class said that he would be with the Buckeyes when he headed to college, another big success on the trail for offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

Perseverance Pays Off For 2027 DL Perez

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Three times, Reinaldo Perez came to Ohio State, hoping for a scholarship offer due to a strong performance at a recruiting camp, and three times, he went home without one. But that didn't deter the 2027 defensive lineman from coming back a fourth time to try to earn an offer.

When he was back in Columbus on June 19, 2025, defensive line coach Larry Johnson had seen enough from the four-star prospect to know that he wanted Perez at Ohio State, and he extended that offer.

"It was surreal, to say the least," Perez told BSB. "Being able to get an offer from them is definitely an honor. When Coach Johnson told me that I received a Buckeye scholarship, my family and I were really excited for that. It was definitely great to hear then, and it's still great to hear now. To be able to continue this process with them is amazing."

Over those four days in Columbus, Perez had gotten a lot of coaching from Johnson, and the two had already been able to talk quite a bit, so when Johnson told Perez about the offer, he didn't need to go into depth about what he liked about Perez.

"He kept it short and sweet, to be honest," Perez said. "We had talked a lot about my technique and stuff, and he said from the beginning to the end that my technique had gotten a lot better."

"We spoke on a bunch of other aspects of not just me receiving the offer and what made it easy for them to make that decision, but also the things that we could work on in the future and continue to improve."

Having seen Perez so much, Johnson already has an idea of what the 6-5, 245-pound lineman could be for the Buckeyes if he does end up in Columbus.

For Columbus Academy, Perez plays a versatile role. He said that he's able to operate from the three-tech, five-tech or wide seven, and he is able to rush the passer and stop the run from wherever he's asked.

"A lot of schools have told me that I fit in the five-tech, defensive end position," Perez said. "Specifically for (Ohio State), playing the five-tech. Kind of like what Kenyatta (Jackson Jr.) plays right now, being able to stop the run. Playing the five-technique, but also being able to do a lot of things and flexing around is the position they see me in."

Being so close to Ohio State, it's been easy for Perez to visit this spring. He said that he had been to three spring practices this year and that they were amazing.

"I've been able to build a relationship with Coach Johnson, Coach (Matt) Patricia and Coach (Ryan) Day for quite some time now," Perez said. "I've been there multiple times, whether it's for camps, spring practices or for games. The proximity of being able to see them is amazing."

"The new adjustments they have for the defensive line and overall for the defense and what they plan to accomplish this year is great. I spent a lot of time going deeper into some things. I loved spending time over there those three days and doing all of those things they had planned for me."

Ohio State being close to home is cer-



PHOTO COURTESY OF REINALDO PEREZ

CHASING A DREAM – Defensive lineman Reinaldo Perez from Columbus Academy finally received the offer he coveted from his hometown school, but Ohio State is not only the program the 2027 prospect is considering with Michigan State and others on his list.

tainly a factor for Perez when it comes to his decision to commit, but he said it isn't going to be one of the bigger things he's thinking about as the recruitment process goes on.

"A lot of things matter in my process with me and my family," he said. "I would say that distance doesn't necessarily play that much into our decision as much as other factors, but of course, I would love for my family to be able to go to games and see me play."

Growing up in Columbus, Perez was very familiar with Ohio State football and how important it is to central Ohio. He's familiar with players who have gone through the Buckeye program and understands what it would mean for him to go to Ohio State.

"I mean, naturally, you're embedded in that culture," Perez said when asked if he grew up a Buckeye fan. "You are kind of brought into that whenever you're born in Columbus and raised all your life here."

"I look up to a lot of those guys who played in recent years. We know some former Buckeyes who played defensive line, linebacker, quarterback. We've been in that culture and know what it means to be a Buckeye."

But it's not just Ohio State that Perez is visiting this spring. He went on a weekend

at all times."

Perez said that he hopes to be back at Michigan State sometime soon.

He will be there for an official visit to see the campus on May 29, according to 247Sports. That is the only official visit Perez has set up that had been revealed as BSB went to press, but he told BSB that his full list of official visits and the dates for them was something he was working on with his family, and he was planning to reveal them all soon.

Perez hasn't officially narrowed his list of schools yet, but some he mentioned seem to be standing out to him, with Ohio State and Michigan State among them.

"A lot of other schools I've been in a lot of contact with – Tennessee has been there," Perez said. "They've been building a long-term relationship with me, as well as with Purdue, Virginia Tech, Indiana and Stanford, some of the other schools I've been able to stay in contact with and build relationships with."

He said that he had an unofficial visit scheduled to get to Virginia Tech over the weekend of April 11.

Wherever Perez ends up committing, he is confident that they will be making a strong addition to their roster.

"I feel like I'm a very physical player," he said when asked about his strengths on the field. "I play very violent and smart at the same time, making sure I'm able to identify different formations and being all over the place on the field."

"Not only that, but the effort I bring in and how much work I put in on the field and off the field, that translates to the games and practices."

Ranked No. 303 overall in the country by 247Sports composite and 36th on the defensive line in his class, Perez is spending the offseason getting ready for his senior season and hoping to make improvements in his game, using an offseason plan he said hcamp has for him.

"One of the biggest things we touched on, from a physical standpoint, is my speed – being explosive and being able to get off the ball faster," Perez said. "Alongside that, staying in the gym, weightlifting, getting stronger and being more powerful. Then, of course, technique-wise, a lot of things we try to focus on are my first step and explosiveness, hand placement, hand work. That was one thing we touched on during my school year."

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Mobley Declares For Draft, Maintains Eligibility

Sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. announced on March 31 that he is declaring for the NBA draft, but he will still maintain his college eligibility.

COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

This will give Mobley the ability to test the NBA waters and see what kind of interest pro teams have in him, and if the feedback isn't what he wants, then he can return to play college basketball.

"Every day I play basketball at Ohio State, I live my childhood dream," he posted on Instagram. "Something special is building at Ohio State, and I'm grateful to have been a part of it. After speaking with my family and Coach (Jake) Diebler, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue another childhood dream of one day playing in the NBA. I'm excited to explore this opportunity and make the best decision for my future when the time is right."

Mobley made an important clarification in his statement, settling any speculation of where he would play if he ultimately returns to play college basketball again.

"I will not be entering the transfer portal," his statement read. "If I return to college basketball next season, there will only be one

place for me, and that's here in Columbus with Buckeye Nation."

Bruce Thornton made the same decision a year before and ended up returning to OSU to set the all-time scoring record.

Mobley has been a big piece of Diebler's offense since 11 games into his freshman season in 2024-25, when he joined the starting lineup and went on to average 13.0 points per game and 2.2 assists.

His scoring ability took a step up in his sophomore season with the Buckeyes, with 15.7 points per game to go with 2.8 assists and 2.4 rebounds.

Mobley also became a more efficient scorer, increasing his field-goal percentage from 38.9 to 43.2 this year. He increased both his three-point percentage (38.5 to 41.1) and his two-point field-goal percentage (39.6 to 47.2).

His solid shooting ability likely makes him an attractive NBA prospect, but it's unclear how much interest he will receive at this point in his development.

If Mobley does return to Ohio State, he would join freshman forward Amare Bynum, who announced his return on March 30, along with Anthony Thompson, the Buckeyes' five-star prospect who will likely start at small forward.

Looking at multiple sites that have NBA draft prospect rankings, Mobley isn't listed by ESPN (lists a top 100) or CBS Sports (top 90) so it seems likely that he will take the same path that Thornton did last season and return for another year with the Buckeyes.



SONNY BROCKWAY

NBA OR C-BUS — Sophomore guard John Mobley Jr. made his intentions clear on March 31 when he declared for the NBA draft while also retaining his college eligibility. The good news for the Buckeyes is if he does not enter the draft, he will return to Ohio State for the 2026-27 season. He averaged 15.7 points, 2.8 assists and 2.4 rebounds this past season.

Cal Guard Phippen Commits To OSU

Ohio State made its first addition in the transfer portal, with former Cal guard Justin Phippen committing to the Buckeyes on April 10.

Phippen, the son of NBA legend Scottie Phippen, has two years of eligibility remaining and will be at his third school in three years. He started his college career at Michigan, where he played in 28 games and scored just 1.6 points per game.

Then, as a sophomore at Cal, Phippen broke out with 14.2 points, 4.6 assists, 3.9 rebounds and 1.9 steals per game. His performance earned him All-ACC honorable mention.

With the Buckeyes losing Thornton, they were in need of a starting point guard, and the 6-3, 180-pound Cal transfer could be that player for the 2026-27 season.

Phippen's 4.6 assists per game last year would have led the Buckeyes, so his passing ability and willingness to find the open man could prove to be great additions for the scorers on Ohio State's roster.

Former UK Big Man Joins OSU

Ohio State made its second portal addition when former Kentucky forward Andrija Jelavić committed to the Buckeyes the same day as Phippen.

The 6-11, 225-pound Jelavić will be 22 years old in May, but he has played just one season of college basketball with the Wildcats and has two years of eligibility remaining after the NCAA ruled that his professional experience overseas would cost him one

year of eligibility.

With Kentucky in the 2025-26 season, he played in 32 games and made 20 starts, averaging 5.5 points and 4.0 rebounds per game in over 15 minutes per contest.

Before he was with Kentucky, Jelavić played in the AdmiralBet ABA League overseas for two seasons for the Serbian team, Mega. There, he averaged 10.6 points per game with 7.5 rebounds and 1.6 assists in a total of 53 games.

The Buckeyes lose senior center Christoph Tilly, who has no remaining eligibility, and currently still have centers Ivan Njegovan and Josh Ojianwuna on the roster if neither enters the transfer portal before it closes on April 21. Jelavić could end up starting for the Buckeyes, but at the very least, he provides very solid depth at the position.

Three Bucks Enter Portal

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State lost Taison Chatman, Gabe Cupps and Colin White to the transfer portal. They joined Devin Royal, who was the first to have his intentions to enter the portal revealed.

Chatman was with the Buckeyes for three seasons but had his career interrupted by a torn ACL that forced him to miss the entire 2024-25 season.

After joining Ohio State in the 2023 class as the 39th-ranked prospect in the country, Chatman played in 17 games as a true freshman and averaged 1.0 points in just over four minutes per game.

Then, when he made his return from injury, he finished the 2025-26 season with 4.3 points per game and 1.2 rebounds, shooting

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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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BUCKEYE GAMEDAY Memories: A new book of short stories about humorous gameday experiences in the 1960s through the 2010s by Tim Sullivan. Available on Amazon.com.

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46.0 percent from the field and 47.1 percent from three-point range. He emerged as a solid contributor after the Buckeyes suffered from some injuries, and he came through with three straight strong games in which he scored 11, 14 and 10 points in late January and early February.

Cupps enters the portal after just one season at Ohio State. He joined the Buckeyes through the portal last offseason after having spent his first two seasons with Indiana, although he missed the majority of his second season in Bloomington due to an injury.

The 2022 Ohio Mr. Basketball wasn't able to provide the depth that Diebler likely hoped for at guard, but his departure still makes it so that the Buckeyes will need to find multiple guards in the portal, with him, Chatman and Thornton all leaving.

In 33 games with OSU, Cupps scored just 1.7 points per game, while adding 1.1 assists and 1.1 rebounds. He had some big shots in the final games of the season, making important three-pointers in both the Big Ten tournament against Iowa and Michigan and the NCAA Tournament loss to TCU, but his impact was limited throughout the season.

White is leaving after two seasons with the Scarlet and Gray, after not getting the chance to get much playing time.

He dealt with an injury throughout his freshman season that he attempted to play through and then had surgery for that ailment over the offseason, slowing down whatever development he may have had before his sophomore season. It took until right before the season began for White to get back to 100 percent, and he was never able to get into a rhythm, scoring 0.9 points and bringing down 1.0 rebounds per game this season.

He joined the Buckeyes in the 2024 class as the No. 157 overall prospect after being named Ohio's Mr. Basketball for 2024.

Each of Chatman, Cupps and White will have two years of eligibility remaining wherever they end up.

Buckeyes In On Notre Dame Guard

According to On3, Ohio State has been in contact with Notre Dame guard Jalen Haralson, who was a major part of the Fighting Irish offense last season.

The Buckeyes were involved in the recruitment of Haralson out of high school when he was the No. 17 overall prospect in the 2025 class, but he chose Notre Dame instead.

In his first season with the Irish, the 6-7 combo guard averaged 16.2 points, 4.0 rebounds and 2.6 assists per game while shooting 51.5 percent from the field. He made it into 27 games this season, 23 of which he started.

When Haralson and the Irish played against Ohio State and lost 64-63 on Nov. 16, Haralson came off the bench and played 27 minutes, scoring 13 points and recording two rebounds, three assists and two steals.

The Buckeyes were far from the only program showing interest in Haralson, however. He had been linked to multiple programs, but as BSB went to press, the latest report was that he had a top three of Ohio State, Tennessee and North Carolina.

OSU In Contact With FAU Guard

According to multiple sources, Ohio State

reached out to former Florida Atlantic guard Devin Vanterpool, 6-4, who entered the transfer portal on April 7.

Vanterpool has been with the Owls for three seasons and had a breakout year this season as a sophomore after redshirting his first year with the program. He started all 24 games that he played in and scored 15.8 points per game, adding 6.3 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.5 steals while shooting 43.8 percent from the field.

With his strong season, he earned American Athletic Conference Most Improved Player honors and a spot on the All-AAC third team.

The rising junior is also reportedly drawing interest from Kentucky, Georgetown, Maryland, Mississippi State and Providence.

Vanterpool has two seasons of eligibility remaining.

Davidson Guard Visits Ohio State

It was reported by Eleven Warriors on April 7 that former Davidson guard Devin Brown was planning to take an official visit to Ohio State.

While the Buckeyes are in need of a starting point guard, that isn't likely what they imagine Brown will be for them. With Chatman and Cupps also leaving in the portal, they also need depth at the position, and he would provide that.

As a freshman this season with Davidson, Brown averaged 6.4 points, 3.4 rebounds and 1.6 assists per game while shooting 40.8 percent from the floor. He earned a starting role after coming off the bench for the first six games of the season.

His top performance of the year was a 17-point contest on Jan. 14 in an 84-79 win over George Washington.

Brown joined the Wildcats in the 2025 class out of Olentangy (Ohio) Orange High School as an unranked prospect, so he would be close to home if he does join the Buckeyes.

Other Portal Players Of Interest

Needing a starting-caliber point guard and center, Ohio State and Diebler will certainly make some additions in the transfer portal this offseason.

Here are some players who have entered the portal that the Buckeyes have reportedly shown interest in.

- **C Sananda Fru, Louisville** – At 6-11, 250 pounds, Fru would give the Buckeyes some size that they are losing with Tilly's departure. As a 22-year-old first-year, Fru averaged 9.0 points and 6.1 rebounds with the Cardinals and could be the type of inside presence OSU lacked in the 2025-26 season.

- **G Isaiah Denis, North Carolina** – The Buckeyes were in on the recruitment of the 6-4 Denis, who was the No. 79 overall player in the 2025 class. He didn't contribute much in his freshman season, but he could provide good depth if he takes a step forward next season. In 10 games, he scored a total of 19 points for the Tar Heels. Denis had a Zoom call scheduled with OSU on April 9, according to On3.

- **G Jerry Easter, USC** – As BSB went to press, there were no published reports that OSU had contacted Easter when he entered the portal, but Diebler has a prior relationship with the 6-5 combo guard, having finished near the top of his recruitment

last year. Easter chose the Trojans over the Buckeyes as the No. 43 overall player in the 2025 class, and as a freshman he averaged 4.4 points, 3.0 rebounds and 1.1 assists per game. Easter and Bynum played together at Link Academy in Missouri as high school seniors, which could help OSU's chances as well.

2026-27 Season To Open With BYU

Ohio State has scheduled its season opener for the 2026-27 season and will go up against BYU on Nov. 2 in Salt Lake City at the Delta Center, the home of the NBA's Utah Jazz.

Rocco Miller of The Field of 68 was the first to report that the two teams had scheduled a game together. He said that it will be counted as a neutral-site game, with a likely return game coming to Ohio in a future season.

The Cougars had a solid 2025-26 season (23-12), earning a No. 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament while being led by freshman AJ Dybantsa. However, they fell in the first round of the bracket to No. 11 Texas.

Now, Dybantsa is likely headed to the NBA, star point guard Rob Wright III and Kennard Davis Jr. are in the transfer portal and third-leading scorer Richie Saunders exhausted his eligibility, so the Cougars and head coach Kevin Young will need to have a strong offseason to get back to where they were this year.

This will be just the second matchup between Ohio State and BYU ever, with the Cougars defeating the Buckeyes, 72-65, on Dec. 30, 1997.

Justus Leaving For Vanderbilt

After two seasons with Ohio State, associate head coach Joel Justus will be leaving to take a job at Vanderbilt, according to multiple reports.

Justus joined Diebler's staff in April of 2024, shortly after the first-time head coach had his interim tag stripped by Ohio State.

Justus leaves to join Commodores head coach Mark Byington, who took over at Van-

derbilt before the 2024-25 season.

Diebler added Justus to his staff after Justus spent two seasons with NC State, one of which finished with a Final Four run when the Wolfpack was an 11 seed in the tournament.

Vanderbilt will be Justus' fifth stop as an assistant coach, after he also spent five seasons as an assistant for John Calipari at Kentucky (2016-21) and one season at Arizona State (2021-22).

Thornton Plays In All-Star Game

Even though the Buckeyes' season came to an end long before the Final Four, Thornton still got to play at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis that weekend.

The point guard was invited to play in the Reese's All-Star Game on April 3 and got one last opportunity to compete as a Buckeye.

He finished the game with eight points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals, showing up in every aspect of the game against some of the top competition in the sport.

Next up for Thornton is the NBA draft, which takes place on June 22. Thornton is listed by ESPN as the 31st-best guard available in the draft and the No. 66 overall player. CBS Sports ranks him as the 68th-best player available.

However, some mock drafts have him being selected as high as the middle of the second round of the draft.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- When Royal officially entered the portal, he entered with a do-not-contact tag. That likely means that he already knows where he is going to end up. On April 6, the day before the portal opened, 247Sports made a "crystal ball" prediction that he would end up with UConn, which lost the national championship to Michigan later that day.

- Thompson played in the McDonald's All-America Game in Glendale, Ariz., since BSB last went to press, scoring five points with three rebounds and one assist in the showcase.



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Harvey Stepping Up As Top First Baseman

After carving out a successful tenure in community college, Dane Harvey has emerged as a key piece for the Ohio State baseball team, stepping into the role as the team's top option at first base.

Harvey, a native of Warfordsburg, Pa., began his collegiate career at Cowley County Community College in 2024 and turned in a productive freshman campaign, batting

**FROM THE
STRETCH**
Sam Cipriani

.352 while recording 62 hits, 13 home runs and 58 RBI.

He then suffered a setback just before his sophomore year, tearing his ACL in mid-December, which caused him to miss the entire 2025 season for Cowley and ultimately caused him to redshirt.

Still, even with a medical redshirt and coming off a torn ACL, Harvey was sought out by Ohio State in the transfer portal, with the 6-5, 270-pound first baseman coming to Columbus along with 15 other transfers.

Harvey recalled his preliminary conversations with Ohio State's coaching staff, saying he felt that the fit was mutual right away.

"I saw Ohio State pop on my phone, and I got chills," he recalled. "The initial conversations were awesome. (Assistant coach Elliott McCummings) reached out on Twitter, saying that he had been keeping up with me and wanted to hop on a phone call. Then he transferred me over to (assistant coach Joey Holcomb) and as soon as we started talking on the phone, I could tell there was an instant connection and there was really no looking back."

Making the leap from junior college to a Power Four program, Harvey's transition was no easy task, as he worked his way back from the torn ACL while also adjusting to Division I baseball during the early part of his Ohio State career.

Harvey looked back to his time recovering from his ACL injury, noting how the setback made his transition to the Division I level and the Big Ten even more challenging.

"The fall was, I wouldn't say difficult, but it was definitely a challenging environment for me. I played my first year at Cowley County Community College. I went out for my second fall, and then I actually ended up tearing my ACL over Christmas. So I was out for six to eight months, not playing baseball. I was laid up rehabbing my knee. So when I got here, making that step was that much more difficult. But it's nothing that I can't go back to work, put my head down and go back to doing what I do."

During his rehab, Harvey said the time away ultimately reinforced his work ethic and helped him prepare for the grind of adjusting to Division I baseball.

While those struggles appeared to linger for Harvey early in the season, going 2 for 10 at the plate during five appearances in Ohio State's first 11 games, he has since



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

GREAT DANE — Cowley County Community College first baseman transfer Dane Harvey had to not only recover from a torn ACL, which caused him to miss the 2025 season, but he had to adjust to Division I play, and so far the results have been encouraging for him and the resurgent Buckeyes. He was tied for the team lead in home runs with seven.

found his rhythm and been dominant offensively for the Buckeyes.

Through 34 games, Harvey is hitting .293, which ranks third on Ohio State while leading the team with a .586 slugging percentage. The towering lefty was also fourth on the team in doubles (eight) and tied for the team lead with seven home runs.

Ohio State head coach Justin Haire emphasized the importance of Harvey as a power hitter, calling the first baseman "a one-swing threat" who can instantly change the game.

"That's a one-swing threat right there in the middle of your lineup. It adds some danger to what you can do," Haire said when asked about Harvey's offensive capabilities.

Harvey joined a first baseman rotation featuring two fellow newcomers in freshman Steven Cavaco and Hutchinson Community College transfer CJ Reid, who has served as a utility piece for the Buckeyes in the infield.

As the season progressed, Harvey continued to establish himself as the leader of that rotation, appearing in 28 games for Ohio State with 25 starts, primarily at designated hitter and first base. He has started in each of the Buckeyes' last 23 contests.

Haire said Harvey's presence has brought a spark to the Buckeye clubhouse and the sophomore could play a major role for the Buckeyes over the next two seasons.

"When Dane's dialed in, he's a really good teammate," Haire said. "He brings a lot of passion and energy and positive vibes to our team and to our guys. That's worth its weight in gold. Dane certainly is one of those guys that we feel like he's our type of guy. He loves playing. He's a goofball at times. He knows how to have fun, but he also works and wants to be really good at his craft."

Looking To Change Bucks' Identity

When Haire took the reins of the Ohio State program two seasons ago following the departure of two-year head coach Bill Mosiello, he inherited a program desperate for stability while the Buckeyes looked to return to consistent success.

Haire's first season at the helm was disappointing. The Buckeyes finished 13-37, the program's lowest win total in over 50 years.

It looked as if Ohio State was on pace for a similar outcome early in 2026, when the Buckeyes started the year with a 6-12 record. However, Ohio State has since won 14 of its last 15 games, climbing to a 19-15 record, while earning back-to-back sweeps in Big Ten play for the first time since 2009.

Haire viewed his second year in Columbus as a step in the right direction, while also outlining his vision of building a program with championship-level expectations at Ohio State.

"We want this program to consistently be a top-25 caliber program that's constantly in the conversation, not just to be an NCAA regional-caliber team, year in year out, whether that's winning the conference championship or being an at-large team, but eventually getting us to a point where we're talking about Ohio State baseball as being a top-16 seed and hosting a regional," Haire said. "We want to bring that level of expectation and that level of play and development back to our program."

Through 34 games in 2026, Ohio State has already surpassed its total wins and conference wins (nine), while claiming four series sweeps to just one series being swept against No. 1 UCLA. Last season, the Buckeyes were swept in a series seven times and didn't earn a sweep of an opponent once.

Haire identified Ohio State's series at Minnesota from March 27-29 as a key moment in the season, when he felt the Buckeyes began to show the resilience and toughness he believes should define the program.

"There are flashes (of what this program can be) that kind of come in all sorts of different ways," Haire said. "You got a flash of the type of resiliency and toughness when we went to Minnesota and played in adverse conditions against a team that's got really good starting pitching and some offensive weapons. We found a way to grind down a 4-3 win on Friday then dominate the game Saturday, and then Sunday, we found a way to outlast them."

Haire added that building the program is a "holistic" effort, with progress showing both on the field and in increased fan support.

"When you're building a program, you're not just building a team, you're not just building the guys on the field. That's the important piece, the product on the field has to be right. But having people to show up and enjoy coming to your games and enjoy watching your guys play, and support the guys day in and day out, and pack this nice stadium, all that stuff is important too. It's a holistic approach, and there's been flashes on both sides that this is moving in the right direction."

Recap

Following Ohio State's series win over Minnesota, the Buckeyes continued their stretch of dominance with a 10-5 victory over Toledo on March 31 in the first of a nine-game homestand at Bill Davis Stadium.

Ohio State then pulled off a series sweep over Maryland the following weekend, defeating the Terrapins 10-8 on Friday, 14-12 on Saturday and 7-0 on Sunday.

The Buckeyes had their win streak snapped on April 7, when Bowling Green defeated Ohio State 9-3.

Ohio State then opened its weekend series against Penn State (10-23, 4-11 Big Ten) with a 10-6 loss on April 10, before the Buckeyes bounced back to win the final two games of the series 3-2 on April 11 and 15-10 on April 12.

The Buckeyes' series victory over the Nittany Lions marked the first time in 10 years that Ohio State had won four consecutive series.

On Deck

Ohio State was set to finish off its homestand with an April 15 contest against Marshall (16-18) at 6 p.m. at Bill Davis Stadium.

The Buckeyes then will hit the road for a weekend series against Purdue (25-10, 12-6 Big Ten) on April 17 at 6 p.m., April 18 at 2 p.m., and April 19 at 1 p.m. at Alexander Field in West Lafayette, Ind.

Ohio State will then return home to take on Akron (15-20) on April 21 at 6 p.m.

Following the Buckeyes' midweek game against the Zips, Ohio State will embark on a trip to Piscataway, N.J., to take on Rutgers (17-18, 5-10 Big Ten) on April 24 at 6 p.m., on April 25 at 3 p.m. and on April 26 at 1 p.m.

Filin and Carpico Shining For Men's Tennis

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Just months after falling in the finals of the NCAA doubles championships in November, Ohio State men's tennis' pairing of Nikita Filin and Brandon Carpico isn't dwelling on what they lost but instead building toward what's next.

The sophomore duo that surged to the championship match has attacked the 2026 season with a new edge, leaning on each other as another year of growth together has the twosome poised to help the Buckeyes make a deep run in the Big Ten and NCAA team championships.

For Filin and Carpico, redemption isn't just about another shot at a title, but about staying in sync, trusting their identity and proving that when they're on the same page, they can be as dangerous as any doubles team in the country.

The pair's shared identity has become the foundation of their success, Carpico told BSB, allowing the duo to flourish since Ohio State head coach Ty Tucker coupled the two as freshmen in 2024-25.

"I feel like we both play the same sort of style of doubles," Carpico said. "We both like to get on the net. We both like to be aggressive. We both have really good volleys. So I think having a similar playing style has helped us mesh together really, really well."

But what has turned out to be a two-season partnership and potentially a four-year pairing almost never happened.

Carpico first arrived at Ohio State in 2023, redshirting his true freshman campaign, while Filin, from Glenview, Ill., joined the Buckeyes the following year as a top-10 recruit and the top-ranked recruit out of Illinois, according to the Tennis Recruiting Network.

A product of Gahanna (Ohio) Lincoln, Carpico spent much of his youth and high school playing days teamed up with fellow Ohio State teammate Alex Fuchs, Utah's 2023 Mr. High School Tennis, as the two joined the Buckeyes together in the class of 2023.

The duo of Carpico and Fuchs was one of the nation's top pairs before their Buckeye careers, capturing the Boys 18-and-under USTA National doubles title in Orlando 2023. They added to their success as redshirt freshmen for Ohio State, winning the doubles title at the Milwaukee Tennis Classic in September of 2024.

While Tucker said Carpico and Fuchs were originally recruited together as a doubles pair, Fuchs dealt with lingering injuries that ultimately opened the door for Filin to pair with Carpico and foster one of the best duos in the country.

"Brandon Carpico had always played with Alex Fuchs," Tucker said. "They won a national championship in juniors. We recruited (Carpico and Fuchs) as a dou-

bles team, and we thought those guys would be a very good doubles team, and they are both the same age. Fuchs got a little bit injured, and Nikita came in, who was recruited as one of the best doubles players in America and won the U.S. Nationals.

"So we tinkered with those guys, trying to see (if they would mesh). Carpico actually redshirted his freshman year, and Nikita was a year younger, so they're the same class with eligibility. So we thought, 'Hey, do we have something special in a team that could play three or four years together and do well?' With Fuchs being sidelined, we put them together, and they've handled business."

Since their pairing, Filin and Carpico have been dominant, winning 21 of 25 matches they were paired for in 2024, including an 8-2 record in Big Ten play.

Carpico finished with a team-best 36-6 record in doubles matches, totaling a team-high 49 total wins between singles and doubles. Filin, on the other hand, finished with an 8-2 record in singles and a 27-6 mark in doubles play, serving as early indicators of what the freshman would do in 2025-26.

From Nov. 18 to 23, during the NCAA individuals tournament, Carpico and Filin won five matches in six days during the 2025 NCAA doubles championships before the pair of Buckeyes fell to Virginia's duo of Mans Dahlberg and Dylan Dietrich 7-6 (3), 6-2 in the finals.

Carpico said their run to the finals reinforced their confidence, particularly after starting the season unranked, while leaving them hungry for more.

"We started the fall unranked, which I think was kind of a surprise to both of us," Carpico said. "Starting out the fall, we wanted to get back to, or show everybody, where we belonged, and then we made it all the way to the NCAA finals. I think after the match, we both thought that we could do better. It wasn't our best match. So we're using that as motivation that we made it all the way to the finals, and we still weren't at our best. We just know that we've got more in the tank going forward. The dual season was a huge motivation for us."

For Filin, both his individual rise in singles and the growth of his partnership with Carpico were fueled by an intense summer spent training in Columbus.

"It goes back to the summer," Filin said. "I was here most of the summer, and I feel like I made a big jump then and had a good fall and kept it up. So I feel like, physically and conditioning-wise, I think it's there to allow me to play singles and doubles."

According to Tucker, Filin spent over 100 days training in Columbus during the summer, putting in voluntary work to prepare for his sophomore season.

He added that Filin's commitment to working over the summer immediately stood out, believing that it quickly set him apart as someone determined to earn a spot in the singles lineup.

"Nikita spent a lot of time here. He did voluntary practice for the whole summer,

and committed himself to getting 100 days in the summertime with us," Tucker said. "It paid off, but we were expecting it to. Nikita is one of the five to six best national players in his age group and in America. It's usually tough as a freshman to come right in, but when we asked him to play singles as a freshman, he obviously won, but he had a look in his eyes and a desire to be the best he could be. So he spent 100 days in the summer doing everything possible to make sure that he was getting the call at every singles match."

Filin said the long hours on the practice court weren't always enjoyable, but the payoff is showing during his sophomore season.

"We had long, long hours outside in the heat. It wasn't always fun, but it definitely paid off," Filin said.

To start his sophomore campaign, Filin had a team-best 26-5 record in singles play, leading the Buckeyes in wins and starts, while he and Carpico had earned a 29-5 record in doubles as of April 10. Filin's 55 total wins in 2025-26 have already surpassed Carpico's team-best 49 total wins a season ago.

Carpico, however, has recorded only eight starts in singles play and a 4-4 record, though the pair has helped Ohio State to a solid 23-3 team record, while the Buckeyes ranked second nationally as a team, according to the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) team rankings.

After beginning the fall unranked, the pair's second-place finish at the doubles championships moved Filin and Carpico into the national spotlight, when the two jumped to No. 5 in the ITA doubles rankings.

The pair rose as high as No. 1 in the rankings, holding the top spot in each of the first four polls of the 2026 calendar year before slipping one position in each of the last two releases. Filin and Carpico now sit at No. 3 nationally.

"The record and results show," Filin said. "I think we both know what we're capable of. We want to be the best team in the country, and we're just going to keep trying to do that."

Despite strong freshman and sophomore campaigns together, Filin and Carpico are still working to fine-tune their

partnership.

"I feel like when we're not playing at our best, we both are missing first serves and some returns, so keeping those in the high percentages is important," Carpico said. "Once and if we're able to do that, then we can do the rest of the stuff that we're really good at."

Still, as the stakes continue to rise with the Big Ten and NCAA championships just weeks ahead, so does their belief that their best tennis is ahead of them and that their partnership can carry Ohio State into championship contention.

With the postseason still to come, Filin and Carpico remain central to the Buckeyes' title hopes, anchoring the lineup as one of the most reliable doubles teams in the country.

"We're a very vital part to our team and to our doubles points," Carpico said. "We're just trying to do the best we can to get one of the two doubles wins. Every time we step on the court, we are trying to be a lock that provides the energy and comfort for the rest of our team."

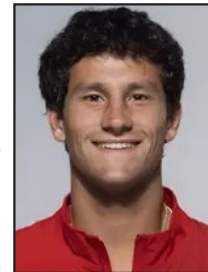
Tucker said he was encouraged by Filin and Carpico's run to the NCAA doubles championship last November, and he emphasized his confidence in their ability to compete with anyone in the country moving forward.

"To see them make a run to the NCAA in the fall and have a chance to be national champion was pretty good," Tucker said. "We believe in them. We believe in a two-out-of-three set match that they're as good as anybody in the country."

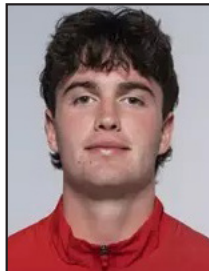
"I'd like to see those guys keep putting the pressure on the other teams by winning their spot as the No. 1 doubles team (in the nation)."

Filin and Carpico have embraced the long-term view. With potentially two more full seasons together, the pair believes they will only continue to improve and accomplish their goals as they spend more time together.

"We talked about it when we first started playing together, that if we keep doing this for the rest of our time together, we're going to be really, really good," Carpico said. "It started out that way. So if we keep working the way that we have and keep playing together, I think the wins and the opportunities and everything like that will continue to follow."



Brandon Carpico



Nikita Filin

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Day's NFL Development Sells Ohio State

News out of the NFL this month that the Houston Texans had exercised C.J. Stroud's fifth-year option for \$25.9 million got me thinking about how deals like this should impact recruiting and transfer decisions by prospects.



Is it really wise to chase an extra \$1 million or so in college football, or should these players really be looking at where they have the best chance to develop in the quest for a deal like the former Ohio State quarterback just received in Houston?

For those looking to position themselves for the next level, they really should be considering what Ryan Day has been developing at Ohio State and what he has put into place with NFL experience on his coaching staff.

In Stroud's case, he had the chance to develop as a QB in college under Day, perhaps the most proven coach of late in developing both quarterbacks and receivers.

While so much has been said about OSU becoming Wide Receiver U., churning out players like 2025 NFL Offensive Player of the Year Jaxson Smith-Njigba and 2022 NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year Garrett Wilson, there's also been quite a run at quarterback.

Not only was Stroud the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2023, but every Ohio State QB who played under Day after J.T. Barrett with Day as an assistant or quarterback coach also has been drafted and made an NFL roster – Dwayne Haskins, Justin Fields, Kyle McCord and Will Howard. Plus, Joe Burrow received

some Day coaching before transferring to LSU.

Day, who himself spent time as an NFL assistant coach, is now taking it to the next level in terms of hiring assistants with NFL head-coaching minds.

Bill O'Brien had six-plus seasons as an NFL head coach for the Texans on his résumé when Day hired him as OSU's offensive coordinator in 2024.

O'Brien's stay was short, as he left to become head coach of Boston College before the 2024 season. But Day then filled the job with Chip Kelly, who spent four seasons in the NFL as a head coach for the Philadelphia Eagles and San Francisco 49ers.

Day must have liked the NFL touch, because when he needed a new defensive coordinator last year, he tapped Matt Patricia, who was the head coach for the Detroit Lions for nearly three seasons and had ample experience as a pro assistant.

Patricia returned this year as defensive coordinator, and on the offensive side is Arthur Smith, head coach for the Atlanta Falcons for three seasons.

That's a lot of NFL head-coaching experience at the coordinating positions. Day obviously has made these hires with winning in mind.

But think about what else they offer to kids dreaming of careers in the NFL. These guys have been there at the very top level. Were they all fired? Yes. Most NFL coaches don't get to leave on their own terms.

But they were all once coaching at the highest level, in rooms where decisions are being made about who to draft and who to keep on rosters.

They bring that dimension to Ohio State. It's been widely reported, for example, that Patricia spent time doing mock interviews ahead of the NFL combine with this year's crop of prospects.

Ohio State has plenty of money to

throw around at recruiting time, both in the portal and among high school prospects. Hard decisions have to be made by Day and his staff on how to allot that money. OSU most certainly is not the highest bidder.

But wouldn't it be wise for players with the highest aspirations to consider the value also of going to a college where both offensive coordinators have NFL head-coaching experience?

Day's Draft Record

It's fairly safe to assume that four, maybe five, Buckeyes will be chosen in the first round of this spring's NFL draft. Perhaps four Buckeyes will be among the top 10 picks overall.

Some mocks have three Miami Hurricanes in the first round, with no other school having more than two.

Regardless of how this sorts out precisely, OSU is sure to again be at the top of the board after churning out a national-leading 14 draft picks last year, including a leading seven in the top 100 and a leading four in the first round.

This is more evidence that Day not only recruits well but gets players NFL-ready at a success rate that far exceeds recruiting class rankings. That's talent and coaching working together.

Day's record has been strong since taking over the head-coaching job in 2019 and starting with the 2020 draft.

Heading into this year, covering the drafts of 2020 through 2025, Ohio State was third in top-100 picks behind Alabama and Georgia, third in first-round picks behind the same two schools, and fourth for total draft picks behind Georgia, Alabama and Michigan.

Day has been closing the gap lately and most likely will trail only Georgia for total picks and trail only Alabama for top-100 and first-round picks once the 2026 draft is added into the mix.

Heading into this draft, just once during the Day tenure has any school in the country had back-to-back years with at least four first-round picks. That was Alabama with four in 2020 and six in 2021.

Ohio State appears to be a near lock to be the second such school to do so, with four first-rounders last year, and likely four or five more this year – Arvell Reese, Sonny Styles, Carnell Tate, Caleb Downs and possibly Kayden McDonald.

Buckeye NBA Check-in

Here's a quick check-in on Buckeyes in the NBA, based on stats through games on April 11 supplied by basketball-reference.com and salaries from hoopshype.com.

The list includes Mike Conley, one of only three Ohio State players to reach the 1,000-game level in the NBA, behind only John Havlicek (1,270 games) and just ahead of Herb Williams (1,102 games).

- Conley, Minnesota, \$11.92 million – 4.5 points a game in 54 games. Over 19 seasons, he has averaged 13.6 points and 5.5 assists in 1,226 games.
- D'Angelo Russell, Dallas, \$5.69 million – 10.2 points a game in 26 games. Over 11 seasons, he has averaged 17.0 points and 5.6 assists in 655 games.
- Malaki Branham, Washington before finishing in the G League – 4.6 points per game in 28 games. Over four seasons, he has averaged 8.0 points in 216 games (salary unavailable).
- Brice Sensabaugh, Utah, \$2.69 million – 14.9 points a game in 74 games. Over three seasons, 11.9 points a game in 177 games.
- E.J. Liddell, Brooklyn, \$636,435 two-way contract with G League – 5.2 points a game in 25 games. Over three seasons, he has averaged 3.4 points in 45 games.

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Former Assistant Receives Well-Deserved Plaudits

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I'm going to call this the "Farewell To Brian Hartline" issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

I believe Hartline, the former Buckeye and pro wide receiver, is the greatest Ohio State assistant coach in my nearly 50 years of covering the Buckeyes. The incredible string of receivers that Hartline has recruited, developed and sent off to the NFL speaks for itself. Now, Hartline has left "home" to try his hand at running his own program at South Florida.

In this BSB, staff writer Sam Cipriani takes a comprehensive look at Hartline's career in Columbus, speaking to experts who followed him during his time here.

"At the end of the day, college sports is about accumulating talent, retaining talent, and developing talent," Stephen Means of cleveland.com said. "Brian Hartline did that better than so many coaches in the country."

"So many coaches in the country"? I'm curious to hear about some of the other coaches who might be his equal. Do they recruit and develop players at their position who are first-round draft picks year after year? I think I would have noticed by now if that were so.

During his time here, Hartline flirted with the offensive coordinator position and play-calling, holding the title or "co" title at times. I was never quite sure why he wanted that extra responsibility and if the extra responsibility detracted from his performance as receivers coach. If it did, it didn't show, and I guess everyone wants to be upwardly mobile in their profession, even if they are already the best at what they do.

When he finally took over as offensive coordinator for real, he wasn't there long enough for me to truly evaluate his play-calling. And with Ryan Day, an outstanding play-caller in his own right, roaming the sidelines, would it have ever been completely Hartline's show?

"He was the co-offensive coordinator going back a few years, and that was fine, but I didn't think he did a great job as a play caller in 2025," Andy Anders of Eleven Warriors told Cipriani. "You look at the offensive struggles in the two biggest games they played after the Michigan game, at least Indiana. I know he wasn't necessarily the one calling plays against Miami, but it was still like his overview of the offense and how that entire unit played out throughout the year. It was one of the worst offenses of the Ryan Day era and not for lack of talent. When you look at some of the concepts Ohio State was running, they weren't doing a good job getting the receivers the ball in open space to make plays. I don't think his year as a play caller went particularly well."

But that doesn't take away from the fact that Hartline was the best assistant coach that most of us have ever seen.

Means summed up Hartline's tenure quite well.

"It's an unexpected gift that you didn't realize how much you needed until you got it," Means said of Hartline's arrival and stay. "I don't know if you could ever fully grasp it, because it was over before you even got a chance to really dive deep into it, but I think he will be remembered as the hometown kid who made his school proud at every part of his life."

"He is a Canton, Ohio, dude who went to Ohio State, had a decent career, and got to play in the NFL. He got to play for the Cleveland Browns for a little bit, and then he came home and took something that was already pretty special, historically, that wide receiver room, and essentially made history. We're never going to see anything like that again, and it's that much cooler because if you're an Ohio State fan, you're saying that was one of ours who did it."

See Cipriani's Hartline story on page 10 of this issue.

The Heir Apparent?

In the cover story of this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, it is suggested that linebackers coach James Laurinaitis might follow in Hartline's footsteps as the next great Ohio State assistant coach. It's too early to tell if the former Buckeye linebacker will reach that level, but he is off to a good start.

"They have just produced two guys that could be two top-10 draft picks," Anders said when asked about Laurinaitis' trajectory as a coach. "They'll at least both be first-rounders. He's trending in that direction, and even looking at what they did the year before and how big of a step Cody Simon took and how good he was in the defense, it's getting there, but I'm not going to put him on Hartline's level quite yet."

But Anders doesn't seem to rule out Laurinaitis ascending to Hartline's rank.

"He's got to do it for another year or two before you fully arrive at that state," Anders said, "but he's recruiting super well, bringing in Cincere Johnson. He's going to be a really good player. He's consistently getting elite prospects, and when you do that, that's when you can consistently be at the top of the game."

Coaching Personalities

Any longtime reader of this column knows that I love our "From the Pages of BSB" feature. There are so many things that I realize I have forgotten and frequently you find a tremendous amount of irony when you look at something with the benefit of 20, 30, 40 years or more of hindsight.

In this issue I found notes about former OSU basketball coach Eldon Miller and football coach Jim Tressel interesting with regard to their personalities.

Miller, who had been fired on Feb. 3 of 1986 but coached out the season (can you imagine that happening now?), had just done his thing on the sidelines for the final time as the OSU coach, turning back Wyoming, 73-63, before 11,024 fans in New York's Madison Square Garden to win the NIT.

Miller, appearing looser than perhaps at any time in his OSU coaching tenure, was asked after the victory how it felt.

"The best thing that could happen in coaching," said Miller, who was getting ready to take over his new job at Northern Iowa University. "I don't know how else to describe it – a great, great feeling. I've experienced that one other time in my basketball career. That's when I was a senior at Wittenberg College playing for Ray Mears – one of the great coaches in basketball. We won the college (Division III) championship."

I covered Miller for six or seven years, and that is more emotion that I had heard him express in one quote than I had heard from him in all those years. And "loose" is a word you never heard associated with Eldon Miller. He was about as buttoned up as his conservative offense, answering most questions with "yes," "no," or "defense," which did not endear him to the local media, who accordingly never cut him a break.

As for Tressel, according to "From the Pages," he was asked at the Spring Preview to benefit Alzheimer's research (boy I miss that event) in his first spring of 2001 what was his most frequently asked question?

His reply: "I would say it wasn't really a question, but a statement: 'I thought you'd be taller.'"

I got to see Tressel at a lot of banquets and

the like, where I was the only member of the media present. There, he dropped his guard and was the real Tressel. I have always maintained that he had a really good sense of humor that he rarely showed in front of the press. Instead, he spoke in coach-speak, earning the nickname "The Senator," as he evaded giving concrete answers, much like a politician.

And now he is the lieutenant governor of Ohio!

Thank You For The Support

Many thanks to those readers who have thrown in a little bit (or in some cases a lot) extra to help keep Buckeye Sports Bulletin vibrant and viable. As everyone knows by now because I have beaten you over the head with it, last year was very difficult for us because of the subscribers we lost, many after 40 years or more, due to poor mail delivery. Thanks to the support of so many of you, we are getting stronger every day.

I am not going to go into heavy detail on ways people have been providing extra support, because I have outlined the various promotions so many times in the last several issues. The most current outreach is the "I Believe In BSB" initiative, where we are asking for readers to pay full price, even if they have received an offer with a discount. The discount on our most popular promotion, the Subscriber Special, is \$20. Not to sound like a late-night charity huckster but paying full price will cost loyal BSB readers less than six cents a day extra. However, if 1,000 BSB readers come up with that six cents a day, it starts to add up.

Remember, those BSB readers who "Believe" for two years are recognized in the paper when they do so. The latest readers to pay full price for two years are listed on page 4 of this issue.

Of course, our oldest program to show support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin is the long-standing VIP program. Not only do you get recognition in the paper, but there are some nice gifts involved as well. Now is a good time to sign up, because we are getting ready to send out the gift cards for such places as Roosters, Rusty Bucket, College Traditions and Cameron Mitchell Restaurants. For more information on the VIP program, see page 7.

We understand that some readers genuinely cannot afford to pay full price, which is why we offer discounts. A simple reminder. Make sure we have your current email address. The best offers come via email because we save the cost of mailing a postcard.

All of us are having to deal with the sky-rocketing gas prices. One of our best offers of late was the e-mailed Gas Beater Special, which is scheduled to expire on April 30. Check your inbox or give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800)760-2862 for details.

If you are continuing to struggle to pay for your BSB subscription, give us a call at one of those same numbers and we will try to help you find a promotion that works for you.

By now you also know there is a companion initiative to "I Believe In BSB."

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. As a gentle shove to get you to act now, I remind you that the postal service has proposed a price increase to go into effect July 12. A BSB in-

crease is sure to follow.

Why not try the upgrade? If you don't see the value simply 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.

Call us at the above numbers or upgrade by writing to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. If paying by credit card, don't forget your three- or four-digit code.

Other Ways To Help

Let me recap some other ways I have suggested readers can help without subscribing for two years at full price.

Don't forget that you can buy a subscription for your local library or barber shop for just \$32.95. This is not a money maker for us in and of itself, but it gives Buckeye Sports Bulletin great exposure to potential subscribers. I remain surprised that our friend Pence Roth is still the only one to take advantage of this opportunity, and I am guessing that he is surprised as well.

The popular three-for-one special is always available. Buy a subscription at full price and get two gift subscriptions for free. We make less money on each subscription, but this promotion helps increase our numbers in support of our advertisers.

And speaking of advertising, I know that many of our readers 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 great 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.

Taking A Mulligan

I am going to take a mulligan and run this note from my column in the April 16, 2016, BSB again in honor of the Masters, which was just played, and because I like the note.

Did you ever wonder about the derivation of the term "mulligan," primarily used to define a do-over in golf but used more widely than that as a chance to redo almost anything? Well, I wondered so I went to the source we generally use around here, Tim Considine's "The Language of Sport." As I remind readers each time I quote him, yes, that's the Tim Considine who was Spin in the Mickey Mouse Club serial "Spin and Marty" and Mike on "My Three Sons."

Considine says that a mulligan, "a free shot to compensate for a mishit ball," is named after Canadian golfer David Mulligan.

"In the late 1920s," Considine explains, "Mulligan, who provided transportation to the golf course for his regular foursome, was given a second ball after mishitting his drive off the first tee with hands still numb from driving over rough roads and a particularly bumpy bridge at the course entrance."

In a battle of ethnic duffers, according to Considine, this do-over is also known as a "Shapiro," which is not to be confused with a "Ginsburg," an opportunity to repeat a shot with the option of playing either the new or original ball.

Do other golfers take a Hernandez, Gnakis or Moretti?



Columbus Clippers

2026 SCHEDULE

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
MARCH/APRIL						27 IOW 8:08 PM	28 IOW 4:08 PM
	29 IOW 2:08 PM	30	31 IND 6:15 PM	1 IND 6:15 PM	2 IND 6:15 PM	3 IND 6:15 PM	4 IND 4:05 PM
	5 IND 1:05 PM	6	7 WOR 6:05 PM	8 WOR 12:05 PM	9 WOR 6:05 PM	10 WOR 6:05 PM	11 WOR 4:05 PM
	12 WOR 1:05 PM	13	14 IOW 6:15 PM	15 IOW 6:15 PM	16 IOW 12:05 PM	17 IOW 6:15 PM	18 IOW 4:05 PM
	19 IOW 1:05 PM	20	21 BUF 6:05 PM	22 BUF 6:05 PM	23 BUF 6:05 PM	24 BUF 6:05 PM	25 BUF 1:05 PM
	26 BUF 1:05 PM	27	28 TOL 6:15 PM	29 TOL 6:15 PM	30 TOL 6:35 PM	31 TOL 6:05 PM	

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
MAY						1 TOL 6:15 PM	2 TOL 4:05 PM
	3 TOL 1:05 PM	4	5 IOW 7:38 PM	6 IOW 1:08 PM	7 IOW 1:08 PM	8 IOW 8:08 PM	9 IOW 4:08 PM
	10 IOW 2:08 PM	11	12 STP 7:37 PM	13 STP 7:37 PM	14 STP 7:37 PM	15 STP 7:37 PM	16 STP 3:07 PM
	17 STP 3:07 PM	18	19 LOU 7:05 PM	20 LOU 12:05 PM	21 LOU 12:05 PM	22 LOU 7:05 PM	23 LOU 7:05 PM
	24 LOU 1:05 PM	25 TOL 5:05 PM	26	27 TOL 11:05 AM	28 TOL 6:35 PM	29 TOL 7:05 PM	30 TOL 7:05 PM
	31 TOL 2:05 PM						

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
JUNE			1	2 OMA 7:05 PM	3 OMA 7:05 PM	4 OMA 12:05 PM	5 OMA 7:05 PM
	6 OMA 7:05 PM	7 OMA 1:05 PM	8	9 IND 7:05 PM	10 IND 1:35 PM	11 IND 7:05 PM	12 IND 7:05 PM
	13 IND 7:05 PM	14 IND 1:35 PM	15	16 SWB 7:05 PM	17 SWB 7:05 PM	18 SWB 12:05 PM	19 SWB 7:05 PM
	20 SWB 7:05 PM	21 SWB 1:05 PM	22	23 OMA 8:05 PM	24 OMA 8:05 PM	25 OMA 8:05 PM	26 OMA 8:05 PM
	27 OMA 7:05 PM	28 OMA 6:05 PM	29	30 LOU 7:05 PM			

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
JULY				1 LOU 7:05 PM	2 LOU 7:05 PM	3 LOU 6:05 PM	4 LOU 7:05 PM
	5 LOU 1:05 PM	6	7 LHV 11:35 AM	8 LHV 6:45 PM	9 LHV 6:45 PM	10 LHV 6:45 PM	11 LHV 6:35 PM
	12 LHV 1:15 PM	13	14	15	16	17 IND 7:05 PM	18 IND 7:05 PM
	19 IND 1:05 PM	20	21 STP 8:07 PM	22 STP 2:07 PM	23 STP 8:07 PM	24 STP 8:07 PM	25 STP 7:37 PM
	26 STP 3:07 PM	27	28 TOL 7:05 PM	29 TOL 7:05 PM	30 TOL 12:05 PM	31 TOL 7:05 PM	

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
AUGUST						1 TOL 7:05 PM	
	2 TOL 1:05 PM	3	4 SYR 6:35 PM	5 SYR 12:05 PM	6 SYR 6:35 PM	7 SYR 6:35 PM	8 SYR 6:35 PM
	9 SYR 1:05 PM	10	11 OMA 7:05 PM	12 OMA 7:05 PM	13 OMA 7:05 PM	14 OMA 7:05 PM	15 OMA 7:05 PM
	16 OMA 1:05 PM	17	18 STP 7:05 PM	19 STP 7:05 PM	20 STP 12:05 PM	21 STP 7:05 PM	22 STP 7:05 PM
	23 STP 1:05 PM	24	25 IND 6:35 PM	26 IND 1:35 PM	27 IND 6:35 PM	28 IND 7:05 PM	29 IND 6:35 PM
	30 IND 1:35 PM	31					

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
SEPTEMBER			1 IOW 6:35 PM	2 IOW 6:35 PM	3 IOW 6:35 PM	4 IOW 7:05 PM	5 IOW 4:05 PM
	6 IOW 1:05 PM	7	8 LOU 6:35 PM	9 LOU 12:05 PM	10 LOU 6:35 PM	11 LOU 7:05 PM	12 LOU 7:15 PM
	13 LOU 1:05 PM	14	15 STP 6:35 PM	16 STP 6:35 PM	17 STP 6:35 PM	18 STP 7:05 PM	19 STP 4:05 PM
	20 STP 1:05 PM	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30			

HOME
 AWAY
 "TANSKY TUESDAY" DIME-A-DOG
 FIREWORKS
 COPA DE LA DIVERSIÓN



PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

