



# TattooGate Revisited

## Looking Back On Tressel's Firing 15 Years Later

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Characterized by his team's dominance over Michigan, fundamental proficiency and dominance on both defense and special teams, former Ohio State coach Jim Tressel established himself as a legend over his 10 years as the Buckeyes' leader.

Despite leading the program to its first national championship in over 30 years, a 9-1 record over the Wolverines, five BCS bowl wins and six Big Ten titles, Tressel found himself unemployed after "TattooGate," a scandal that originally involved five players who sold memorabilia and accepted other benefits, which was a violation of NCAA rules.

The program suffered several ramifications from the scandal, including a reduction in scholarships, a two-year probationary period, vacated wins from the 2010 season, and a postseason bowl ban that was served after an undefeated 2012 regular season.

Tressel's undoing had more to do with his reaction to the allegations of impropriety than any transgressions committed by his players. On April 25, 2011, the then Buckeye head coach was accused by the NCAA of withholding information and lying to keep his players on the field, and in late May, Sports Illustrated reported that as many as 28 players had exchanged memorabilia for tattoos dating back to Ohio State's national championship-winning season in 2002.

Tressel ultimately sent in his resignation letter on May 30, 2011, an act few had seen coming when news of the scandal first broke months earlier.

"I don't think there was anybody who thought that this was going to stretch to ensnare the coach," said 247Sports' Steve

Helwagen of the scandal. "As it turned out, it kind of mushroomed out of control pretty quickly as people started to take a deeper and deeper look."

Even then-school president Gordon Gee laughed at the notion that Tressel could be fired during a March 8 press conference.

"No – are you kidding?" Gee said when asked if he had considered dismissing Tressel. "Let me be very clear, I'm just hoping the coach doesn't dismiss me."

Despite Gee's remarks, Tressel was forced out and replaced on an interim basis by coach Luke Fickell, who went on to lead Ohio State to a 6-7 record during the 2011 season.

Now that it's been 15 years since Tressel resigned, BSB sat down with Tony Gerdeman of Buckeye Huddle, Helwagen, Doug Lesmerises of the "Bill and Doug on OSU Football" Substack and longtime Ohio State beat writer Tim May to reflect on the tumultuous period for Buckeye football.

### Scandal Cuts Tressel's Tenure Short

On the gridiron, Tressel's program was rock solid. In his second season of 2002, he led the Buckeyes to their first national championship in 34 years

"I think people were generally pleased with where the program was," Helwagen said of the end of Tressel's tenure. "You're talking about a coach in his 10 years who, at that point, was 9-1 against Michigan and had six Big Ten championships and the national championship, and they played in two other national championship games.

"So he took what (former Ohio State head coach) John Cooper left him and took it to another level, and he was still recruiting at a high level. It didn't appear that there was going to be a drop-off. He had it almost on



FILE PHOTO

**NOT JIM DANDY** – On the surface, all was going well for football coach Jim Tressel as he prepared for the 2011 season. But winning a national championship, claiming six Big Ten titles and posting a 9-1 record vs. Michigan were not enough for him to keep his job when he got entangled in the "TattooGate" scandal.

autopilot. But it was an autopilot at a very, very high level. They were picking them up and putting them down."

If there was a critique of Ohio State's program during the late stage of Tressel's tenure, it was that it, at times, struggled to compete with the best teams in the country. The Buckeyes suffered back-to-back national championship losses to SEC opponents in 2006 and 2007 before their 2008 season was doomed by losses to USC and Texas.

A win over Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl after the 2010 season didn't work too well to satisfy Buckeye fans, according to Gerdeman.

"The fan base wanted a little bit more," Gerdeman said. "They were happy, but losing to the SEC and some of the BCS games – there was a frustration in terms of not being able to get over the hump since

the 2002 title.

"You cover it, and you write about it, and you wonder if they can get over this thing that they keep struggling with, and then they kind of do that with Arkansas, but Arkansas is really not a big-name SEC program, so it counted, but only so much."

Less than two weeks before the Sugar Bowl, the NCAA officially announced that offensive tackle Mike Adams, running back Dan "Boom" Herron, quarterback Terrell Pryor, wide receiver DeVier Posey and defensive end Solomon Thomas had received improper benefits and were to be suspended for the first five games of the 2011 season.

With several of its best players set to miss much of the upcoming season, it was hard to dismiss the scandal, but as Gerde-

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# FAN FORUM



## From The Message Board

***Fifteen years after former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel resigned due to the fallout of Tattoogate, we revisited the scandal. We asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum how differently they believe the situation would be viewed if it happened in today's NIL era. We also asked them if they would have wanted Tressel to stick around at OSU, knowing what they know now about how well the Buckeyes recovered.***

"With today's NIL (which is out of control IMHO), I think Tattoogate becomes a nothingburger. Although I enjoyed 'Tresselball' and its success, I'm not sure Tressel would have been able to produce the spread offense we have developed into over the years, complete with the QB and WR successes we've seen."

— R1TBDBITL

"The tattoo fiasco would look like less than a nothingburger today. Few people probably appreciated Tresselball more than I did. I like controlling the line of scrimmage, not making mistakes, and punting the ball inside the 20. I like 24-17 wins more than 42-39 wins.

"I think Tressel was a person with high moral character and a

good influence on players.

"When Tressel was replaced by Urban Meyer, it may be that an excellent coach was replaced with (possibly) the best coach at the time. (I've often wondered if Tressel would have been fired if Urban Meyer was not available and chomping at the bit for the job?) As far as the spread offense and such, I always say, whatever works."

— Terrier Buck

"I don't think a scandal like this would ever happen today because star players wouldn't need to exchange memorabilia for tattoos or anything else. I think things kind of worked out well with Urban Meyer taking over for Tressel. The game may have been passing Tressel by in some ways by 2010. Tressel was a great coach, who piled up plenty of accomplishments at Ohio State, but I don't think Ohio State would have had the same success from 2012-18 without Urban as its coach."

— Bobby Gorbett, BSB

"If Tattoogate had happened in today's NIL era, I think the situation wouldn't have been viewed differently. With athletes regularly receiving compensation through NIL deals, the acts of Tattoogate would still be frowned upon. Though given the NCAA's more recent approach to enforcement, I feel the punishment likely would not have been as severe. Knowing what we know now about the post-Tressel era, the transition to Meyer was necessary even if it resulted in a poor 2011 campaign in between."

— Sam Cipriani, BSB

"If Tatgate never happened, my expectation was Tressel would become AD in a few years and Meyer would replace him as coach."

— Marcus Hartman, BSB

"Exchanging memorabilia for tattoos seems so quaint in today's Wild West of NIL. Now players are trading Mercedes for Jags. One thing we have to remember, however, is that the scandal spun out of control not because of the trading of the memorabilia, but because Tressel tried to cover it up. One thing we were supposed to have learned some 50 years ago after Watergate: 'The cover-up is always worse than the crime.'

"On a sad note. If the offenders back then were playing in the NIL era, they would probably still have their Gold Pants. I wonder if any of those guys think about that?"

— Frank Moskowitz, BSB



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## A Look Ahead To 2026 Season For OSU

Much like those tourists who awaken to the harsh reality that multibillion-dollar casinos aren't built by handing out jackpots, the Big Ten has come to its senses and ended its one-year dalliance with Las Vegas by returning the annual Football Media Days to its Midwestern roots.

Therefore, by the time you read this, there will be fewer than 60 days before the conference hosts its annual preseason festivities in downtown Chicago. Another five weeks after that, Ohio State begins what it hopes will be another season that ends with a trip to the College Football Playoff.

Before that happens, the Buckeyes must find suitable replacements for eight defensive starters, three of whom were taken among the first 11 picks of this year's NFL draft, as well as navigate their way through a challenging schedule that features nine teams that posted winning seasons last year. Five of those nine finished among The Associated Press' top 25.

College football punditry is all over the map with regard to OSU. At least one observer favors the Buckeyes to win their second national title in three years. Others give them only cursory mention while predicting perhaps three or maybe even four regular-season losses.

The doom-and-gloomers have missed at least one vital statistic, however. OSU hasn't lost more than two games since 2011, posting a 165-21 record (an .887 win percentage) during the subsequent 14-season interval.

Here are thumbnail previews of Ohio State's opponents for the upcoming season.

**Sept. 5 vs. Ball State** – The Cardinals haven't had much to celebrate since their most recent MAC championship during the truncated 2020 season. In fact, they haven't posted a full-season winning record since going 10-3 in 2013.

First-year head coach Mike Uremovich presided over a 2025 team that struggled to score on its way to a 4-8 record. The Cardinals averaged only 15.8 points per game, a mark that ranked 130th of 134 teams nationally.

Ball State becomes the 11th of 13 current members of the MAC to take on Ohio State in football. The only remaining outliers are Central Michigan, a conference member since 1971, and Massachusetts, who joined just last year.

**Sept. 12 at Texas** – QB Arch Manning returns to Austin this fall as the Heisman Trophy favorite on an already-talented team that loaded up on transfers, most notably receiver Cam Coleman, who caught 93 passes for 1,306 yards and 13 TDs over the last two years at Auburn.

There are some intangibles that favor the Buckeyes, however. I'm not saying Steve Sarkisian is snakebit the way former Penn State head coach James Franklin was against Ohio State, but the Buckeyes might be close to living rent free in Coach Sark's head.

The Longhorns were coming back in the game two years ago when Jack Sawyer plunged a dagger in their hearts, and Manning had one of his worst performances during a 14-7 loss to OSU in last year's season opener.

**Sept. 19 vs. Kent State** – After the trip to Texas, the Buckeyes return home to take on the Golden Flashes, a team that finished a remarkable 5-7 considering a tumultuous offseason that included the April firing of head coach Keni Burns for multiple financial improprieties.

Assistant Mark Carney was named interim head coach, a tag that was dropped after eight games when he signed a contract that runs through the 2029 season. With the Flashes posting only four winning seasons since 2000, Carney would appear to have his work cut out for him.

Since the late 1990s when OSU began filling out its nonconference schedule with MAC

teams, the Buckeyes are a perfect 31-0 against the conference. That includes three wins against Kent State by a combined score of 165-20.

**Sept. 26 vs. Illinois** – The Fighting Illini bear little resemblance to the team that lost a 52-14 decision the last time they visited the Horseshoe in 2017.

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Over his last two seasons in Champaign-Urbana, Bret Bielema has produced 19 victories, a two-year run of success unmatched in program history. In fact, Illinois hadn't posted back-to-back winning seasons since 2010-11 and hadn't enjoyed three in a row since 1988-90.

Bielema has mined the transfer portal to keep his team's success going, including quarterback Katin Houser, who amassed 5,306 passing yards and 37 TDs the last two years at East Carolina.

**Oct. 3 at Iowa** – The Buckeyes have played the Hawkeyes only twice over the past eight seasons, but things remain pretty much the same in Iowa City.

Kirk Ferentz is set to begin his 28th season as head coach, a figure that matches Woody Hayes for the second-longest tenure in Big Ten history. Only Amos Alonzo Stagg served longer, beginning a 37-year tenure at the University of Chicago in 1896.

Iowa heads into 2026 needing to replace 14 starters, including eight on defense. Also gone is dual-threat QB Mark Gronowski, who threw for 1,741 yards and 10 TDs and added another 545 yards and 16 scores on the ground.

**Oct. 10 vs. Maryland** – To say the Maryland football program has fallen on hard times would qualify as an understatement. The Terrapins are coming off back-to-back 4-8 seasons and have won only four of their last 25 conference games.

But there is some hope in College Park. Maryland returns 71 percent of its production from the 2025 roster, a figure that ranks second nationally only to Notre Dame. Among the returnees is QB Malik Washington, who threw for nearly 3,000 yards and 17 touchdowns last year.

The Terrapins have played the Buckeyes nine times since entering the conference in 2014 and remain winless in the series.

**Oct. 17 at Indiana** – Curt Cignetti has done the impossible in Bloomington, turning Indiana into a football school in just two short seasons. The Hoosiers are coming off a magical season during which they won their first outright Big Ten title since 1945 and their first-ever national championship.

Can Cignetti keep the magic going? His formula of mining the transfer portal for treasure will be tested again with vacancies up and down the starting lineups, most notably Heisman Trophy winner Fernando Mendoza, who at times seemed to lead his team to victory by sheer willpower.

Among IU's accomplishments last year was a 13-10 win against Ohio State in the conference title game, snapping a 30-game losing streak in the series. The Hoosiers haven't beaten the Buckeyes in back-to-back seasons since 1987-88.

**Oct. 31 at USC** – The Buckeyes play seven straight weeks to open the season before getting a breather after which they must travel cross-country to take on the Trojans. Dating back to the 1940s, Ohio State is 0-4-1 in its last

five regular-season trips to historic L.A. Memorial Coliseum.

With a high-octane offense piloted by returning QB Jayden Maiava (3,711 yards, 24 TDs), Lincoln Riley is facing playoff expectations in his fifth season as USC head coach after going 35-18 with no appearances in the past four.

The schedule isn't exactly friendly. The Trojans host Oregon in their Big Ten opener before a four-game, midseason gantlet that includes road trips to Penn State, Wisconsin and Indiana wrapped around the home game vs. the Buckeyes.

**Nov. 7 vs. Oregon** – OSU finishes its three-game minefield by returning home to take on the Ducks and their Heisman Trophy candidate in quarterback Dante Moore. He ranked fifth nationally last year with a completion rate of 71.8 percent and led all Power Four QBs with 64 completions of 20 yards or more.

Oregon isn't all about offense, though. It boasts a stellar defense that returns eight starters including OLBs Teitum Tuioti and Matayo Uiagalelei, who combined for 25½ tackles for loss last season, 15½ of which were sacks.

Ohio State has a 10-2 record in the overall series, including a 41-21 win in the 2024 playoff semifinals. But the last time the Ducks were in Columbus (before they joined the Big Ten), they carved out a 35-28 victory in 2021 that had many in Buckeye Nation questioning if Ryan Day was really the right man to be head coach.

**Nov. 14 vs. Northwestern** – The Wildcats are coming off an 8-5 season that included a bowl victory, the second time they have produced a winning record and a postseason win during the three seasons David Braun has been head coach.

Despite the winning mark, Northwestern struggled at times on offense, ranking a lowly 14th in the Big Ten in scoring. So Braun hired former OSU offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, whose return to the NFL last year didn't go so well. He was fired as Raiders' OC after 11 games.

It will be interesting to see what Kelly can do with the Northwestern offense, especially against Ohio State. The Wildcats have lost 35 of their last 36 meetings in the series, losing by an average score of 41-12.

**Nov. 21 at Nebraska** – After successful stints of breathing new life into such moribund programs as Temple and Baylor, Matt Rhule was supposed to do the same thing in Lincoln. But after three seasons that have produced a 19-19 record, the natives are beginning to get restless.

Be that as it may, Rhule continues to preach patience. His roster is top-heavy with underclassmen – 68 combined freshmen and sophomores – and he has revamped his coaching staff with six new assistants.

The Cornhuskers last celebrated a conference championship in 1999 when they were still members of the Big 12, and their lone appearance in the Big Ten title game was an embarrassing 70-31 loss to Wisconsin in 2012.

**Nov. 28 vs. Michigan** – From the messy firing and subsequent legal troubles of former head coach Sherrone Moore to continued recruiting restrictions as part of sanctions related to the sign-stealing scandal, it's been a winter of discontent in Ann Arbor.

New head coach Kyle Whittingham seems to have weathered his first storm by coaxing QB Bryce Underwood to remain, but he also lost 27 players through the portal including RB Justice Haynes (857 yards, 10 TDs) and CB Cole Sullivan (44 tackles, two sacks, three INTs).

Michigan still leads the overall series 62-53-6, but over the last 25 meetings (since 2000), the Buckeyes hold an 18-7 edge.

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Day Says 24-Team Playoff Is Good for College Football

As the power conferences struggle to decide on a format for future iterations of the College Football Playoff, coaches are weighing in on what they would like to see.

At the Big Ten spring meetings, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and Oregon head coach Dan Lanning both said that a 24-team CFP, which the Big Ten has supported, would be good for college football as a whole.

"It's debatable whether it's best for Ohio State – you can go back and forth on that – but it's certainly best for the conference and great for college football in general," Day told Adam Rittenberg of ESPN. "It engages more fan bases late in the season."

Lanning agreed with Day in that it may not help the teams that are consistently near the top of the rankings since they will have to get through more games once they make it to the postseason.

Day spoke more about why there could be debate about whether it would be good

## 2026 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2025 Record, Bowl Result
Sept. 5	BALL STATE	12:30 p.m.	BTN	4-8, not bowl eligible
Sept. 12	at Texas	7:30 p.m.	ABC	10-3, 41-27 win over Michigan
Sept. 19	KENT STATE	Noon	FOX	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	Noon	FOX	9-4, 41-27 loss to Texas
Dec. 5	Big Ten Championship	TBA	TBA	

for a program like Ohio State, noting that, even though a smaller playoff will only have the best teams in it, a larger pool means there are more opportunities to lose and have a season ended.

"When there were four (teams), you just had to win two games," Day said. "Now there's more games to be played, there's a bigger pool, a bigger field. But when you take a step away from it, you're always going to be late in the season, playing for an opportunity to be the highest seed that you can be."

Lanning compared a larger bracket to the NCAA Tournament for college basketball, which always has a lot of eyes on it.

"It's going to create more opportunity," he told ESPN. "Just like March Madness is great in the spring for basketball, it will be good for our sport."

It was the case at one point that the Big

Ten was the only conference favoring a 24-team bracket, but it has recently been joined by the ACC and Big 12 in that support. The SEC remains steadfast in its push for a 16-team playoff.

Since the Big Ten and SEC weren't able to agree on a new format by the December deadline, the 2026 CFP will be a 12-team format for the third straight year, but changes could be coming as soon as the 2027 playoff if the two conferences are able to come to an agreement.

## Hinzman Says OC Wants 'Violence'

Ohio State brings back four of its five starting offensive linemen this season, and the unit is hoping to prove that it can be one of the best front-five groups in the country.

With new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith – who is known for having occasionally run-heavy schemes as a play caller – taking over, senior center Carson Hinzman said that it's going to take being violent on the football field for the linemen to prove that.

Hinzman said that has been communicated by the former NFL head coach.

"It's been cool. He brings a mentality to the run game that's – it's hard to put into words – almost like a tangible violence that he wants to put into the run game," Hinzman said. "It's pretty fun to be able to play under someone who's like that, knowing that we have confidence in the run game and knowing that we have confidence in the guys up front."

"When we have a guy like that calling plays, you almost feel the confidence in your play. It helps everyone out. It eliminates a lot of the guessing and lets us go play football really fast."

When Smith is asking for his players to be violent, he isn't hoping to see the Buckeyes getting penalized all the time.

"You want the ref clutching but not throwing," Hinzman said. "As long as we can play on the edge of violence, but also obviously in the guidelines, while showing how physical and dominant we can be is important for us."

## Johnson Praises 'Bama Transfers

After losing several pass rushers from its top-ranked 2026 defense, defensive line coach Larry Johnson went into the transfer portal to add talent. Senior defensive tackle James Smith and junior defensive end Qua Russaw were two of the more prominent portal additions along the defensive line. Each player came from Alabama and was viewed as a four-star transfer-portal prospect, according to 247Sports' rankings.

## I Believe In BSB

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Smith seems to be better positioned than Russaw to make an immediate impact. Smith, who made 28 total tackles, including 6½ for loss and 2½ sacks, at Alabama last year, has made strides getting acclimated to Ohio State's culture, according to Johnson.

"I think he's making a jump," Johnson said. "It's a work in progress in the sense that there's a different culture here than there is at Alabama. He's coming here, he's learning new things, learning a new technique. It takes a while to learn that, because you have to lose the old habits and gain the new habits. Right now, he's trying to learn how to play our way of doing things. Sometimes that takes time, but he's making progress, and that's the key."

Smith's progress was displayed during practices made open to the media. The Montgomery, Ala., native was a consistent force as a pass rusher and routinely got into the backfield, often working against Ohio State's first-team offensive line.

In a crowded defensive end room, Russaw has an uphill battle to become a starter alongside Jackson, but the former top-40 recruit out of high school has the potential to be a difference-maker on the edge. In the spring game, Russaw had two tackles, a quarterback hurry and one-half sack, according to 247Sports.

"He is very physically strong," Johnson said. "He's strong at the point of attack with his hands and body. It's just amazing that a guy at 245 pounds can set the edge, and he brings great speed to the table. I think the thing that jumps off the videotape is how hard he plays. And he really has the physical strength, and I think that's the key to it."

Smith and Russaw may well be the next two great Buckeye defensive linemen, but in order for either of them to get on the field, they will have to demonstrate a high level of work ethic that has become standard within

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Johnson's room.

"There's a standard here," Johnson said. "There's a standard for the Rushmen, and that standard is that we have to be able to play hard every play. We're going to run to the football, and that doesn't take any talent."

### Smith Jr. In Contention To Start

Going into the 2025 season, Will Smith Jr. was working to earn the backup role behind eventual unanimous All-America nose guard Kayden McDonald, and he was able to do so.

He earned the fourth-most snaps (223) on the interior defensive line behind McDonald (446), Eddrick Houston (323) and Tywone Malone Jr. (298), according to Pro Football Focus.

So after performing well enough to finish the season with 20 tackles, Smith was likely hoping he could be next up to start in the 2026 season. That became a much taller task when Ohio State went into the portal for defensive line talent.

The Buckeyes added John Walker from UCF and James Smith out of the transfer portal and returned Houston at the 3-tech position, so there is strong competition for the starting spot.

But Will Smith said over the spring that having those players around has only helped him as he worked over the offseason.

"With Coach Mick (Marotti) and his program, I got a lot stronger, and I've been trying to work on my pass rush moves a lot," Smith said. "I feel like I've definitely progressed in that, working with John, James and Eddrick. We've been putting our minds together, and it's been helping us all a lot."

James Smith, who didn't line up over center often at Alabama, said during the spring that he has been learning the nose guard position as well and could slot into that role next to Houston.

But it was still Will Smith who started in that role in the spring game, and he continues to compete for the starting spot. In the spring game, he deflected a pass from starting quarterback Julian Sayin that ended up in the hands of defensive end Beau Atkinson for an interception.

But even though Will Smith knew more competition was coming when Walker and James Smith came to Columbus, he didn't want to be anywhere other than Ohio State.

"I would say it's the culture (that kept me at OSU)," he said. "It's the reason why I picked here. I'm also from here, and I've always been a Buckeye."

Will Smith Jr. is the son of the late former Ohio State defensive end Will Smith Sr., who was with the Buckeyes through the 2003 season when he earned Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year honors. The younger Smith said that he is trying to play up to that standard when he gets on the field.

"A lot of (what pushes me) is I'm representing my dad's name on my back," Smith said. "I just have to make sure I play up to his standard."

### Day Supports Two-Year Mandate

Since it was adopted for the 2021 football season, the transfer portal has certainly created player mobility, but in the eyes of Day and many others, it has also had its drawbacks.

## Davidge Was Hockey Proponent For Buckeyes, Blue Jackets

Although born in Canada and a coach at league rival Miami (Ohio), Bill Davidge always had a special place in his heart for Ohio State hockey and Columbus.

The former OSU captain and longtime radio and TV analyst for the Columbus Blue Jackets died on May 19 at age 72.

"The Columbus Blue Jackets are deeply saddened by the passing of Bill Davidge," a club statement read in part. "Our organization has never known a greater advocate or ambassador for our team and sport than Bill."

He was diagnosed in 2014 with multiple myeloma – a cancer of the blood plasma that also impacts bone marrow and stays in the body even when in remission – and suffered a stroke several years ago after surgery which made talking difficult. The family did not disclose a cause of death.

"He was always talking about his time at Ohio State and how proud he was to be a Buckeye," Jeff Rimer told BSB.

Rimer was doing play-by-play for Florida Panthers telecasts in the 1990s while Davidge was a scout for the NHL team. Davidge preceded Rimer to Columbus by almost four years when Columbus got an expansion team for the 2000-01 season.

Davidge was first hired by the Blue Jackets as a scout but soon became the radio analyst with play-by-play voice George Matthews to form an extremely popular tandem.

In 2009, Davidge moved alongside Rimer as the analyst for the TV games for five seasons until continuing on TV doing pregame, in-between periods and postgame work until retiring to Naples, Fla., after the 2018-19 season.

"His whole persona when he was on the air was from a coach's perspective," Rimer said of Davidge, who hailed from Dunnville, Ontario, a town of about 6,000 on the north shore of Lake Erie. "He always broke the game down from a coach's perspective, and that was pretty helpful to the hockey fans that were learning the game."

Davidge explained to BSB in The Interview Issue of July 2019 that after initially deciding to attend Penn, he accepted a full ride because OSU made him an offer he couldn't refuse:

"I found out I could play varsity hockey at Ohio State, where at the Ivy League, No. 1, back then, they could never give you a full ride. No. 2, you always had to work to get the financial aid package, and No. 3, you couldn't play as freshmen, so I came to Ohio State. The rest is history."

Davidge played from 1974-77. The first two seasons were for coach Gerald Walford, before Jerry Welsh took over. Davidge had 101 points (45 goals, 56 assists) and 141 penalty minutes in 114 games while serving as a co-captain as a junior and team captain as a senior. He graduated with a degree in education in 1977.

He earned the scholar-athlete award four straight years and received the Most Outstanding Senior award in physical education.

"Saddened to hear Bill Davidge, a great Buckeye and a member of the Ohio hockey community, has passed away," Ohio State men's hockey coach Steve Rohlik posted on Twitter, accompanied by a photo of Davidge in his later years standing outside the locker room at the Schottenstein Center in a Blue Jackets jacket. "Keeping Bill, his family and friends in our thoughts and prayers."

While at Ohio State, Davidge met a tennis player named Leann Grimes, the daughter of OSU football player Bob Grimes, and the school's all-time leader in singles and doubles wins when she graduated. The two married, and when injuries ruled out a pro hockey career for Davidge, they moved to Oxford, Ohio, where Bill pursued his master's degree and taught physical education at Miami while his wife coached the school's women's tennis team.

They had a son, Rob, but Leann's life was tragically cut short in



January 1985 when she died from injuries suffered in a car accident while returning home from a recruiting trip.

He eventually married Jayna and the two had a combined six kids and several grandchildren.

### Once a Buckeye ...

Davidge and Miami head coach Steve Cady led the way in taking the hockey program to the Division I level in 1978-79. Davidge served as an assistant coach before replacing Cady in 1985 and held the position for four years.

There was no ill will toward Ohio State in his decision to go to Miami. In fact, Welsh offered him a graduate assistant's job, but Davidge felt he needed to get outside the program to learn different philosophies and cultures. Upstart Miami, with its new Goggin Ice Arena, seemed a perfect fit.

There was one memorable moment facing the Buckeyes.

"I can remember sometime in late November (1983) they were 13-0, I think, and ranked No. 1 in the country and we were 0-13 or something like that and we beat them (4-3) at our place. I think we got outshot 50-13. It was a pretty fun night," he said to BSB seven years ago.

But make no mistake, he loved the Buckeyes and wanted success in hockey. He recalled how, on his recruiting trip, he was shown blueprints for a rink to replace the OSU Ice Rink, and it would be "built by my junior year."

Fifty years later, it's still an empty promise.

"When you're looking around, don't think the other teams in the (Big Ten) don't hold that against them in the recruiting effort," he said to BSB in 2019. "I guarantee it. My hope is they'll eventually, with the strength of the men and women and what they're doing, some things will happen."

Rimer sensed the frustration and is disappointed that Davidge won't be alive if a rink is built.

"That was his pet project and turned out to be his pet peeve," Rimer said. "If it ever comes to pass, they should name the arena after him. I know his family would appreciate it."

A celebration of life was held on May 27 in the Columbus suburb of Dublin, and another was held on the Miami campus two days later.

*In lieu of flowers, donations in Davidge's memory can be made to The OSU Multiple Myeloma research fund #306144: <https://giveto.osu.edu/makeagift>.*

-- Craig Merz

Over the last several years, thousands of college football players have entered the transfer portal. Although Ohio State has managed to retain its best players more often than not, Day's program also lost its share of contributors to the portal after last

season.

The Buckeyes eventually had over 30 players depart from the program via the portal, including multiple players, such as five-star receiver Quincy Porter, who had spent only one year with the program.

In an appearance on Josh Pate's "College Football Show," Day said he would support the NCAA mandating student-athletes to make a two-year commitment before enter-

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

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ing the transfer portal.

"If you're looking at the player who comes in at midyear now, their (high school) season gets done, they jump right into spring ball, they have this season," Day said. "During that freshman season, typically, they're not playing as much as they'd like. They're going through challenges. They're failing. But that's part of being a freshman. You have to fail. You have to fail to learn. That's how it works."

Day continued, saying that young players are put in a position to make quick decisions during an emotional time immediately after the season.

"There are all these expectations in recruiting, and then when their freshman year doesn't go exactly the way they want, they get done in December and January, and there's no cooling off phase right there," Day said. "It's emotional. It's raw. A lot of times, the season is still going on."

Day, an outspoken advocate for mental health, added that he believes a mandate for players to stay at a given school for two years would only bolster student-athletes' mental health.

"I just think it's good for their overall mental health knowing that 'I'm somewhere for two years, and I know I have to push through adversity along the way, and I have to grow,'" Day said. "For a lot of us who went through that, we had four years. Transferring wasn't an option. You had to figure it out. That's a healthy thing."

## McShay Says Smith Could Be Best WR Ever

It seems that Ohio State junior receiver Jeremiah Smith has a bright future ahead of him in the NFL. Smith, who will be eligible to declare for the 2027 NFL draft, received effusive praise from NFL draft analyst Todd McShay of *The Ringer* on an episode of "The McShay Show."

McShay said Smith is among the best wide receiver prospects he's ever graded and even said he has a higher grade on Smith as a prospect than he did on former Buckeye star receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., NFL star and current Bengals receiver Ja'Marr Chase and seven-time Pro Bowl receiver A.J. Green.

McShay said he had a slightly higher grade on former Detroit Lions superstar receiver Calvin Johnson when he was a prospect but still said Smith has the chance to be one of the greatest receivers in the history of the sport.

"He could be the best receiver in the history of the National Football League," McShay said of Smith. "And now he has a quarterback in his second year. All of the coverage in the world is going to be all over him, but he'll get his spots, and I can't wait to

## The Next Print Issue Of BSB Mails July 7

The next issue of BSB, the July issue, is set to be mailed on July 7 as we continue on our monthly summer schedule.

In this ever-changing college sports landscape, there is bound to be plenty of news between now and when the next issue hits the mail. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting or transfer portal activity.

All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers. BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff mans BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on the breaking stories plus posting additional features. Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively.

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.

BSB is still offering a chance to upgrade your subscription to first class mail in an envelope for football season at the current price of \$35 – \$45 through football recruiting in February – in advance of the upcoming postal increase on July 12. Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 to order by credit card. Or you can send your check, money order or credit card information (don't forget your three- or four-digit security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Be sure to mention either the "Football Upgrade" or the "Recruiting Upgrade."

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see him in the league."

Smith was the No. 1 overall recruit out of the 2024 class and has exceeded the lofty expectations bestowed upon him by recruiting experts. Over two seasons, Smith has hauled in 163 receptions for 2,558 receiving yards and 27 touchdowns.

Smith, at 6-3, 223 pounds, has all the physical attributes a receiver could hope for. McShay pointed out that he possesses a very unique combination of physicality, speed and proficiency as a route-runner.



Jeremiah Smith

Equally important as his physical talent may be his work ethic. Very early on in his career, Smith proved he was special when he had his black stripe removed quicker than any freshman in program history.

Since then, Smith has only bolstered his reputation as one of the hardest workers in program history, earning Iron Buckeye honors four times during his career since its awarded semi-annually.

"He loves this game," McShay said. "Talk to people in Columbus. He wants to be the greatest to ever do this. He knows it's in him, so he's going to go get it."

McShay said Smith has a desire for greatness also possessed by Johnson and former Ohio State receiver Cris Carter, who also enjoyed a Hall of Fame NFL career.

"There's a yearning to be Michael Jordan, there's a yearning to be the (legendary golfer) Tiger Woods of his craft, to be (former NBA superstar) Kobe Bryant," McShay said of legendary receivers, such as Johnson, Carter and Randy Moss. "All of these guys have this something that burns inside of them that's different, and (Smith) has that too."

## Analyst Has Mid-Round Grade on Sayin

The 2026 NFL draft may have wrapped up in April, but some experts are already looking ahead. Although Sayin was one of

the most productive passers in college football last season, NFL draft analyst Nate Tice of Yahoo Sports said he may not be selected highly in the 2027 draft if he declares for it after this season.

In an appearance on On3's "Andy & Ari" show, Tice said he has a third- to fourth-round grade on Sayin and raised concerns about his size and arm strength.

"I understand the appeal of him as a college player, but it's a big difference and a big jump from how he wants to play to what he would have to do in the NFL," Tice said. "He's very accurate, I understand that, but that accuracy wavers when he has to push the ball."

Tice compared Sayin to former Oregon and current Cleveland Browns quarterback Dillon Gabriel, who had an up-and-down rookie season in the NFL last year.

"Watch a guy like Dillon Gabriel last year. Supremely accurate, very productive in college, but in the NFL, as soon as he had to push the ball, that ball was kind of floating on him," Tice said. "His receivers kind of stopped running over the middle for him because they were tired of being teed off on by safeties. That's where tools and traits come in. Sayin is a great example of this. I have a third- or fourth-round grade on him."

"I have seen a ton of hype about him. I know he plays at Ohio State. I know Ohio State's always good. I know he was very productive and everything, but also just watch how those games ended up at the end of the season when things got tough, and things got tight. I thought you couldn't really see him push that ball and throw it into those windows."

Sayin was a Heisman Trophy finalist in his first year as Ohio State's quarterback, but as Tice pointed out, he wasn't quite as effective in his team's two postseason losses. Sayin threw three combined interceptions in losses to eventual national championship participants Indiana and Miami (Fla.) and didn't connect with open receivers down the field on certain occasions.

Sayin will have the entire 2026 season to prove some of his doubters wrong. The Carlsbad, Calif., native, who may not declare

for the draft after next season, will go up against six teams that finished the 2025 season in the final CFP rankings.

## Sayin Praises Receiver Room

Ohio State has a few key pieces returning for the 2026 season, including Sayin, but the team also consists of plenty of new pieces. Perhaps the most prominent departure from that 2025 team was offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who is now the head coach at South Florida.

The Buckeyes hired Arthur Smith to become their new offensive coordinator and former LSU receivers coach Cortez Hankton to occupy the same role in Columbus.

In an interview on "The Triple Option" podcast hosted by former Alabama running back Mark Ingram, former Ohio State coach Urban Meyer and FOX's Rob Stone, Sayin said he's adjusted to the new offense.

Sayin said Smith's offense puts some extra responsibility on the quarterback and includes some lengthy play calls. He said he's used the time during the offseason to not only learn Smith's system but also grow with a receiver room that includes returners such as Jeremiah Smith and Brandon Inniss, and transfers Kyle Parker and Devin McCuin.

"We always have some great guys in that receiver room," Sayin said. "That's always something you can bet on. Coach Hartline did a great job with those guys. Coach Hankton is doing a great job. It's a lot of fun as a quarterback to have those guys on the outside, and when you have them one on one, and your coach says, 'Give him a shot, let's give it to him.'"

Five-star freshman Chris Henry Jr. made as much noise as anyone in the room during the spring. The highly recruited Henry capped his first spring with an impressive performance in the spring game. He finished the exhibition with four catches for 96 yards and a touchdown.

"I think he's a great player," Sayin said of Henry. "He has a lot of potential. He had a great spring. It's been fun to build that relationship with him."

# BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

Now is the time for loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers to show their support through our VIP subscription program as we struggle through these times of high inflation, which have affected all small businesses. As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in even the best of times.

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

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

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## OSU-'Bama Will Still Play in 2027 & '28

The home-and-home series between Ohio State and Alabama is still set to take place, On3's Brett McMurphy reported on May 7.

The report came shortly after sources told On3 that Alabama was cancelling its series with Oklahoma State, which was set to take place in 2028 and 2029.

The series between the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide will be played during the 2027 and 2028 seasons. The first matchup between the two teams will be played in Columbus, and then the Buckeyes will make a return trip to Tuscaloosa in 2028.

In two years as the program's head coach, Kalen DeBoer has failed to replicate the success enjoyed by legendary coach Nick Saban, but his program took a step forward last year. After an ugly season-opening loss to Florida State, Alabama won 10 regular-season games, reached the SEC title game, and won one College Football Playoff game before being eliminated by eventual national champion Indiana in the Rose Bowl.

Ohio State and Alabama last met on

the gridiron for the 2021 national championship. The Crimson Tide won that game 52-24. The Buckeyes had their own triumph over the Crimson Tide in the postseason on New Year's Day in 2015. On that day, Ohio State defeated Alabama 42-35 in the Sugar Bowl and subsequently defeated Oregon to win the national championship.

## Four 2026 Game Times Set

Although there are still months to go before the 2026 season starts, four game times were announced for Ohio State's upcoming season. Ohio State is officially set to take on Michigan at noon on FOX for its last game of the regular season and will face Texas at 7:30 p.m. on ABC on Sept. 12. Also revealed were game times and networks for the season opener against Ball State on Sept. 5 (12:30 p.m., BTN) and the Sept. 19 game against Kent State (Noon, FOX).

It comes as no surprise that the Buckeyes and Wolverines will play each other at noon. This will be the 19th consecutive edition of The Game to be played at noon. The last time Ohio State and Michigan didn't play each other in that time slot was in 2006, The

Game of the Century, when the No. 1 Buckeyes defeated the No. 2 Wolverines 42-39.

Ohio State most recently snapped a four-game losing streak to Michigan. Behind a dominant defensive effort, Ohio State defeated Michigan 27-9 in Ann Arbor. The Buckeyes will look to defeat the Wolverines at home for the first time since 2018 this season.

## "Buckeye Stripe" Featured In New Uniforms

A classic look has officially returned to Ohio State's uniforms. The Buckeyes announced on May 13 that they are adding a silver sleeve stripe, previously called the "Heritage Stripe," to their uniforms.

In a release describing the changes to its uniforms, Ohio State said the "Buckeye Stripe" has evolved to more closely match the color of the helmet.

The silver sleeve stripe isn't the only addition to Ohio State's uniforms. The updated uniforms will also include the "Block O" logo at the center of the collar of the jerseys. Since the silver sleeve stripe was removed from the uniforms in 2006, Ohio State has occasionally donned it 15 times, most often

in the College Football Playoff, including in each of its last three national championship appearances.

The changes to Ohio State's uniforms will be on display for its first game against Ball State on Sept. 5.

The "Buckeye Stripe" will also be present on several alternate uniforms revealed by the program in May. Ohio State athletics unveiled an all-black alternate uniform that includes a black helmet to go along with a black jersey and black pants. Additionally, Ohio State will also have a "scarlet rush" alternate and a "sub-zero" alternate.

The scarlet rush uniform includes scarlet pants to go along with the classic scarlet jersey, while the sub-zero set includes white pants and a white jersey. Each set is complete with the gray helmet.

## Ohio Stadium To Get New Turf

Ohio Stadium will be getting new turf installed before the 2026 football season, Ohio State announced on May 15.

The new playing surface will feature

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Shaw Sports Turf's Forge Series system, which Ohio State said is "designed to meet NFL standards, featuring Game ON technology that integrates field markings directly into the turf."

"The new turf is a welcome upgrade to Ohio Stadium to maintain the safety and performance of our players on game days," Day said in a statement.

The last time the turf at Ohio Stadium was replaced was in 2022, and it took just

four years for that turf to be replaced after concerns had been raised about the type of turf the Buckeyes were playing on.

The turf announcement was accompanied by the presentation of the new uniforms. Athletic director Ross Bjork commented on both.

"Ohio State football and Nike represent two of the most iconic brands in sports, and this partnership has delivered uniform enhancements that honor our championship traditions while equipping our student-athletes with cutting-edge performance technology," Bjork said in a statement. "Additionally, the new surface at Ohio Stadium takes this vision further – providing a dynamic playing surface that provides the latest advancements in performance and safety and meets NFL standards and our staff will now be able to utilize customizable end zones that amplify themed game atmospheres and elevate the experience for fans inside the stadium and watching nationwide."

## Two Bucks Named To Lott Watch List

Two senior Buckeyes are on the watch

list for the Lott IMPACT Trophy.

Defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. were both included on the 42-player list that consists of 17 defensive backs, 16 defensive linemen and nine linebackers.

The award honors a defensive player each year who "has had the biggest impact on his team both on and off the field," and is named after NFL Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott.

Jackson decided to return for his fifth season with the Buckeyes after earning the starting job for the 2025 season for the first time in his career. Last year, he finished with 28 total tackles (16 solo), 11 tackles for loss, 6½ sacks and two passes broken up.

Mathews also started for the first time in his career last season as a junior, finishing the year with 26 total tackles, 1½ tackles for loss, one sack, three passes broken up and two interceptions.

Last year, Ohio State safety Caleb Downs won the Lott IMPACT Trophy with a unanimous All-America season, recording 68 tackles, five tackles for loss, two passes broken up and two interceptions.

Downs and current Buckeye linebackers coach James Laurinaitis (won the award in 2008) are the only two Ohio State players to be named the Lott IMPACT Player of the Year.

The winner of the award will be announced on Dec. 9, 2026.

## 30 Former Bucks Join Strauss Lawsuit

Thirty former Ohio State football players have joined the Richard Strauss sex abuse class action lawsuit, alleging the late university doctor sexually abused them during their time with the Buckeyes, according to multiple reports.

The group marks the first time former Ohio State football players have publicly come forward in the case, which has largely been led by former wrestlers during the ongoing eight-year legal battle against the university.

Among the former players involved are members of Ohio State's 1980 Rose Bowl team, including Al Washington Sr., Ray Ellis and Keith Ferguson.

Former Ohio State wrestler Mike DiSabato announced the group's involvement in a press release on May 7. The former players are seeking accountability from the university over allegations that Ohio State failed to protect students from Strauss.

"We stand together in solidarity as former teammates and Buckeyes who love our university and the legacy of Coach Woody Hayes. Coach Hayes always preached to us to 'Pay Forward.' Using our voices to pay forward in this situation is not easy, but we believe it is necessary to protect future athletes and to ensure accountability for what happened to us," Washington said. "We are committed to seeing this through – not only for ourselves, but for every survivor who has carried this burden in silence. We also feel a responsibility to defend the integrity of the program and Coach Hayes, who taught us about accountability, discipline and doing what is right."

Former Ohio State wrestler and attorney Rocky Ratliff announced on May 7 that he would represent the group of 30 that signed engagement letters to join the lawsuit.

Strauss, a former Ohio State physician,

worked at the university from 1978 to 1998. He retired that year and died by suicide in 2005.

According to The Columbus Dispatch, as of April 16, Ohio State had settled with 317 former survivors since March 2020.

## Former OL Gurr Dies At 48

Former Ohio State offensive lineman and four-year letter-winner Michael Gurr died at the age of 48 on May 7.

Gurr played for Ohio State from 1997-2000 after redshirting as a true freshman in 1996. He began his career as a tight end but shuffled between that position and the offensive line while receiving limited playing time as a redshirt freshman.

Gurr found a home as a backup guard in 1998 and played in all 12 of Ohio State's games that year. Gurr took a step forward as a junior and made five starts for the Buckeyes. He went on to become a starter in his final season for the Buckeyes.

Gurr capped off his career with a fumble recovery for a touchdown in Ohio State's 24-7 loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl in his senior season.

Gurr was a four-time academic All-Big Ten honoree. According to his obituary, Gurr continued to support the Buckeyes following his final season with the team.

"His love for Ohio State football remained lifelong, and Saturdays in the fall were never just games to Mike – they were tradition, passion, and family," Gurr's obituary read.

## Men's Tennis Team Falls In NCAA Quarterfinals

Third-seeded Ohio State suffered a loss in the quarterfinals of the 2026 NCAA men's tennis tournament.

Hosting the Columbus regional, the Buckeyes dominated the tournament's opening three rounds. Ohio State swept Buffalo, California and No. 14 Illinois at the Auer Tennis Complex.

However, No. 6 TCU put an early end to Ohio State's year when the Horned Frogs downed the Buckeyes in the quarterfinals in a 4-3 thriller on May 14 to keep them out of the Final Four.

The Buckeyes dropped the doubles point and TCU's Roger Pascual Ferra beat Ohio State's Alexander Bernard 6-2, 6-2, to give the Horned Frogs a 2-0 advantage. Ohio State mounted a comeback when the Buckeyes' No. 31 Preston Stearns took down No. 42 Cosme Rolland De Ravel 6-2, 7-5, and Bryce Nakashima defeated the Horned Frogs' Albert Pedrico Kravtsov 6-2, 7-6(6) to even the match at two apiece.

TCU's No. 55 Cooper Woestendick then upset No. 32 Jack Anthrop 6-3, 7-6(4) on court three before Ohio State's No. 95 Nikita Filin answered with a 2-6, 6-3, 7-5, victory over Oliver Bonding.

In the deciding matchup on court one, TCU's No. 8 Duncan Chan defeated Ohio State's No. 11 Aidan Kim 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 to advance the Horned Frogs to the semifinals.

Ohio State finished the season 32-5 overall, with a 12-1 mark in Big Ten action as the Buckeyes claimed their 20th straight regular-season conference title.

TCU has now ended Ohio State's NCAA tournament run in three of the last six seasons.

# Ohio State Fans!

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# Tressel Pressured As Allegations Mounted

Continued From Page 1

man pointed out, it wasn't the first time the Buckeyes had dealt with an NCAA violation.

"At the outset, there had been other instances throughout Tressel's time where there were some NCAA situations, and it just kind of felt similar to that," Gerdeman said. "There would be some punishment, but you would deal with it, and you'd move on, and it would impact the season, like when Troy Smith had to miss a game or two, that eventually impacted the 2005 Texas game.

"Some of these things can have a grand impact, but you don't really know what. And at that point, it was kids doing what they shouldn't be doing, and now they're going to pay for it."

The scandal quickly became serious when a report from Yahoo Sports revealed Tressel was aware ahead of the 2010 season that his players were selling memorabilia but failed to report the violations to Ohio State. One day after that story was published, he was suspended by the university for the first two games of the 2011 season and fined \$250,000.

Yahoo was only one of several national outlets that had an interest in the scandal.

"It was interesting, because then, like, every national media outlet was looking for something and coming to town, and then, of course, The Columbus Dispatch is doing what they do as well. They're digging into this," Gerdeman said. "You'd hear there's an ESPN producer that's in town for a couple of weeks. They're trying to talk to people. You would just hear all these rumblings about who's in town looking for what.

"And I've told people, if back then, with everybody looking and digging, if there had been a fraction of that, that went after Michigan in the end with the Connor Stalions stuff, they would have found a lot more, just based on how much digging was going on at Ohio State."

After Tressel was issued the two-game suspension, Gee and then-athletic director Gene Smith assured fans that his job was safe, but the scandal was far from over.

"There were little dribs and drabs, ESPN and Sports Illustrated throughout those months, from January to May in particular, and then some local outlets as well. The Columbus Dispatch and different outlets, drip by drip, came out with all these parts of the story about exactly what the players had received and exactly what had been reported, and just some discrepancies that came up in the entire saga," Helwagen said. "One of the reporters at the press conference in December asked Gene Smith, 'Did you get it all, Gene? By that meaning, have you got all of the allegations out into the open?' It was Rusty Miller, who was with the AP. Gene said, 'Yeah, Rusty, we got it all.' Well, as it turned out, they just had the tip of the iceberg. It kind of spiraled out of control on him pretty quickly."

Tressel's suspension was extended to five games to match the length of the suspension received by his star players, but that was something Ohio State's head coach requested himself.

In late April the NCAA accused Tressel of withholding information and lying to the NCAA in order to keep his players on the field, and as May rolled around, Tressel's outlook started to look bleak, according to Lesmerises.

"There was an instance, probably in May, maybe about two weeks before he quit, where I saw or heard that he was speaking at a class, and so I drove down to campus, and we hadn't had contact with him, and I remember parking at the Blackwell Inn. That's where his car was parked. He had been speaking with this class, and he came out, and I caught him at the Blackwell, and I remember asking him something along the lines of, 'Are you worried about your job?' And he said, 'I don't know. Should I be?' And I was sort of like, 'Well, yeah, you should be.' Then, like 10 days later, he quit. By the time May hit, it was like this steady drumbeat of waiting for the axe to fall, and then it finally did."

If there was one specific point that led to Tressel's resignation, it may have been when Sports Illustrated conducted an investigation for a story that was ultimately published in late May.

Sports Illustrated reported that 28 players had exchanged memorabilia for tattoos dating back to the 2002 season and alleged that players exchanged memorabilia for marijuana.

The outlet also reported that as an assistant on Ohio State's coaching staff in the 1980s, Tressel had rigged a raffle at a recruiting camp to give elite recruits prizes such as jerseys and cleats.

"Everybody got paranoid about Sports Illustrated coming out with a new story," May said. "There was hardly anything of substance new in the Sports Illustrated story, but Ohio State has always sort of backpedaled from bad publicity or anything that makes it look bad."

Two days after Sports Illustrated made Ohio State aware of its findings, Tressel resigned from his job, but, according to Lesmerises, he may as well have been fired.

"I think he was pushed out, but also, in being pushed out, sort of acquiesced to (the fact that) this is the best thing for the program, and that's sort of how Tressel was," he said. "Tressel wasn't going to go down fighting the program. If they're pushing me out, then I'll be pushed out. I'm not going to make a last stand and try to say, 'Well, if you're going to blame me, then I'm going to take the whole program down.' That's not how Tressel operated.

"They were going to get hit by the NCAA, and they felt like, if they got rid of Tressel and showed that to the NCAA, like, 'Hey, we did this,' that would lessen the penalties. I think in the end, it was primarily a strategic move in trying to avoid a postseason ban, which they then unsuccessfully avoided."

As Lesmerises said, Tressel's resignation did little to lessen the severity of the punishment for the school, as it received a slew of punishments, including the aforementioned postseason ban and vacated wins from the entire 2010 season.

"Could you go back and give the records back? I think you could do that," Lesmerises

said when asked if the penalty given to Ohio State was too harsh. "Does that mean that the penalty was too harsh in the moment? I don't think that way. There are rules, and you broke them, and you got punished. Then, while doing that, did you lie to the NCAA, trying to cover stuff up? They kind of made it worse along the way.

"Now, are there other programs that didn't get caught who were doing similar things, or worse things at that time? I certainly assume there were. I mean, we all would bet money that there were. But that doesn't necessarily mean to me that Ohio State was punished too harshly because the (other programs) didn't get caught."

## Fickell Put In "Impossible" Situation

Tressel was temporarily replaced by Fickell, who had spent the 2005-10 seasons as Ohio State's co-defensive coordinator and linebackers coach. Fickell was immediately dealt a blow when Pryor, who was Ohio State's starting quarterback for much of the previous three seasons, withdrew from the university in June and subsequently entered the supplemental NFL draft.

With many of the team's star players sidelined due to suspensions from the TattooGate scandal, Ohio State stumbled to a record of 6-7. It was Ohio State's first losing season since John Cooper's first year in 1988.

The Buckeyes lost their last four games of the season in 2011 and suffered a regular season-ending 40-34 loss to Michigan, which snapped a seven-game winning streak against their archrival.

"To Luke Fickell's credit, he only got to hire one coach, and that was Mike Vrabel to take Fickell's place on the coaching staff," May said. "The rest of the coaching staff was intact, and there were several changes he probably would have made to the coaching staff, especially on the offensive side, if he'd had that chance.

"What happened there was it was going to be a transition season in 2011, but it was still going to be probably a pretty good year, if those five or six guys could have played."

Although Lesmerises admits Ohio State probably could have won a couple more games during its 2011 season, he also came to the defense of Fickell.

"I thought he was put in an impossible situation, and I thought he kept the ship from sinking, and that they were competitive," Lesmerises said. "They had the peak of that during that win over Russell Wilson and Wisconsin. That's like a prime-time win in Ohio Stadium on a miracle Braxton Miller touchdown pass against Russell Wilson. That's one of the better wins this century for Ohio State football. That was excellent.

"They're six inches away from beating Michigan on the deep pass to DeVier Posey. If they hit that, they probably win that game. I thought he was overwhelmed at times, but

he never let it get out of hand."

Ohio State didn't retain Fickell as the team's head coach after the 2011 season, though. Instead, the Buckeyes went after former Florida coach Urban Meyer, who had previously won a pair of national championships with the Gators, one of those over Tressel and the Buckeyes.

The move to bring Meyer on board was undoubtedly a success. Under Meyer's leadership, Ohio State won a national championship during the 2014 season and hoisted Big Ten championships in 2014, 2017 and 2018.

However, even though Meyer had much more success than Fickell leading Ohio State, his early success might not have been possible without the recruiting efforts of Fickell and his coaching staff, according to Gerdeman.

"Those guys did a pretty darn good job of keeping the 2012 class together, and it was wise of Urban to go ahead and allow those guys to be Buckeyes, because they got some guys who I don't think he would have ever offered, like Pat Elflein, who ends up being a very, very good player for them," Gerdeman said. "There was a baseline there of players in that class, like Cardale Jones, Jacoby Boren, Mike Thomas and Tyvis Powell, where they're part of that class, and they end up becoming so much more down the road for them.

"I think I mentioned mostly Ohio guys, and that was key, and it paid off. It's very difficult, obviously, to bring in national guys when you're Luke Fickell and nobody knows what's going to happen. But then Urban gets the job, and he's able to finish it off nationally."

At the beginning of the TattooGate scandal, few could have predicted that Ohio State would be searching for a new coach months later, especially because the program's identity became intertwined with Tressel. However, according to Lesmerises, it may have been a blessing in disguise that the scandal prompted a coaching change.

"You were already feeling it sort of schematically and from a recruiting standpoint that it was the Urban era in 2006," Lesmerises said. "It was a little bit of a contrast (in the 2006 national championship game). Here's this young, hotshot coach with this new spread offense, who's recruiting nationally, and here's Jim Tressel, who's trying to win with defense and punting and recruiting Ohio kids, and what happened? Florida won 41-14, and so I think we would have had more of that.

"I think Tressel might have wound up more in the Kirk Ferentz territory of, you do things a certain way, it's successful. Of course, Ohio State would always be better than Iowa, but is Ohio State keeping up with the modern era? I don't know.

"I think he probably would have coached at least another five or eight years, but the back half of that, we would have started to reach the point of, 'Is Ohio State going to have to fire Jim Tressel based on performance because he's going 9-3 every year, and they're not competing against the great national powers, and it feels like he's lost his fastball?' Instead, it was over."



Luke Fickell

# BSB Staff Banters About Buckeye Sports

As the calendar turned to June, the 2026 football season was still nearly 100 days away. With spring practices in the rearview mirror and summer workouts and fall camp coming up, there are plenty of hot topics to discuss with the football team.

There has also been no shortage of discussions to have about Ohio State basketball, NCAA Tournament expansion, and the Ohio State baseball team making it back to the Big Ten tournament.

It's been a while since the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff sat down for a roundtable discussion, so BSB editor Greg Wilson and staff writers Bobby Gorbett and Sam Cipriani convened to discuss a variety of Ohio State sports topics.

**Q: Which game on Ohio State's 2026 schedule will give the Buckeyes the most trouble?**

**Sam Cipriani:** "I'm going with the Nov. 7 matchup with Oregon. This game is at home, which might make this a unique choice for the toughest game of the year, since they do have games at Texas and Kinnick Stadium at Iowa, which Big Ten fans know is a place where upsets can happen.

"But when Ohio State plays Oregon, they'll be coming off a road trip to Indiana, followed by an off week. That's going to be followed up by a trip to the West Coast to play USC, so there might be a hangover coming back from three time zones away. Not only that, but I think Oregon might be the most talented team Ohio State is going to play in the regular season. They're bringing back quarterback Dante Moore, many other starters and had one of the top recruiting classes in the nation."

**Bobby Gorbett:** "I'm going with Indiana. Indiana lost a lot of talent from its national championship team, including first overall pick Fernando Mendoza, but most of that coaching staff is still intact, including both the offensive and defensive coordinators, two pretty huge pieces. As usual, under Curt Cignetti, they did a very good job in the transfer portal and added a lot of talent. That will be a huge test for Ohio State."

**Greg Wilson:** "Maybe this one doesn't have the potential to hurt their season as much since it's a nonconference game, but I think Texas is as tough as any game that they're going to play. Arch Manning, we saw it in the latter half of last year, made significant strides, and he was sort of turning into the QB that some people thought he could be.

"You talk about a team that did well in the transfer portal, Texas landed Cam Coleman, Rasheem Biles, and brought back Colin Simmons and a lot more pieces from last year's team. They've got a great defense and a great offense, and not only will OSU be playing one of the top teams in the country, but they'll be playing them in Austin at 7:30 p.m. That's a tough environment to play in."

**Q: What is Julian Sayin's ceiling, and how much is it tied to the offensive line for Ohio State this year?**

**GW:** "People are stuck right now on what limitations Julian Sayin might have at the next level, but his ceiling at Ohio State is all that matters for this conversation. He



SONNY BROCKWAY

**MAKING A RUN — Quarterback Julian Sayin (10) will hit the ground running, literally, in his bid for the Heisman Trophy when the Buckeyes face a rigorous schedule that will give him plenty of national exposure. His willingness to tuck the ball and occasionally take off to avoid pressure will be scrutinized.**

was already fourth in Heisman voting last year as a redshirt freshman, and I don't have any reason to believe he won't improve in his second year.

"I don't think his success has to be tied to the offensive line because we already saw in the spring game that he's starting to run a bit, which he said was a priority for him to work on this offseason. His ceiling is winning the Heisman, and maybe he wouldn't be one of the better Heisman winners of all time, but we're talking about a guy who's extremely efficient and can do exactly what Ohio State needs him to do."

**BG:** "I think the question for Julian Sayin isn't what he can do in the regular season. He could win a Heisman Trophy. The big question for him is what he can do against the elite of the elite. Last year, he played very well against the lesser foes of the Big Ten. But against elite teams, especially in the postseason, he had his struggles that are well-documented. Ohio State could have used someone who could scramble a bit.

"And as far as what he's learned in that respect, running the football isn't algebra. He's not the biggest guy in the world and certainly not the fastest. There are some physical limitations on how much of a threat he can be as a runner. But his ceiling is still pretty high for a college quarterback."

**SC:** "It was Sayin's first time in the postseason, so you might be able to cut him a little slack. Now that he has that experience under his belt, he should be able to do better things. Some of that comes down to size

— he's standing at 6-1. It's difficult for him to see over the offensive line.

"But if we're talking ceiling, he can win the Heisman Trophy with the supporting cast he has now. The schedule doesn't make that easy, but it will provide plenty of opportunities for Heisman moments if OSU is in big games. If he's playing to his ceiling, Ohio State could win the national championship."

**Q: Can Arthur Smith be as successful in year one as Matt Patricia was with Ohio State?**

**SC:** "I think the OSU offense has the potential to be as productive as the 2025 OSU defense was under Patricia. A lot of that might come from the fact that Arthur Smith is inheriting an offense that was already likely to be a top-10 offense in the country. When Patricia came in, a lot of people thought the defense was going to take a step back after being the No. 1 unit in 2024, and they still turned out to be the No. 1 scoring and total defense in the country.

"I think Arthur Smith will certainly get Ohio State's run game back to where it needs to be, and I think the offense is going to take a step forward because of that, but I don't think I can say that he'll have the same impact as Patricia did last year."

**BG:** "I don't think Smith's unit will have nearly the same production as Patricia's defense last year. Patricia's defense last year was historically great, one of the best defenses in modern college football history.

"Smith can be helpful. Obviously, the run game needs to be revamped. Some-

times, the critique under Ryan Day has been they run the ball too much. Go back to the 2024 season with Chip Kelly and everyone views that as the perfect marriage between Day and a run-game coordinator, but that Michigan game was an absolute nightmare. Arthur Smith is a very smart guy, but I do wonder if it's an imperfect fit with Smith and Day."

**GW:** "I agree with both of you that he likely won't, but the argument that he will be is certainly there. He's got a returning Heisman candidate in Sayin, Jeremiah Smith is an all-time great college football player, Bo Jackson at running back, who ran for over 1,000 yards as a freshman, four returning offensive lineman starters. With this tough schedule, they're also going to need to be scoring a lot of points, so their scoring totals and yard totals will be higher because of it, if that's how we're measuring.

"Again, I agree with you both, but the potential is absolutely there. They have all the pieces in place to be the best offense in the country."

**Q: Out of the transfer portal or NIL, which has had the biggest impact on college sports?**

**BG:** "I think it's been NIL. It's allowed some programs to find legitimacy very quickly. Nobody would have dreamed that Indiana football would be as good as it has been now for two years. I think they've found that in some part due to their NIL backing from big donors like Mark Cuban. Obviously, they're coached by arguably the best coach in college football, Curt Cignetti.

"NIL has changed the way the teams operate, Ohio State included. Ohio State had so many players hit the transfer portal, but their roster wouldn't be constructed the way it is right now without NIL. Teams have to sort of play Moneyball, constructing a roster in a way they didn't have to 15 years ago when teams could stockpile talent at different positions."

**GW:** "In regard to roster construction, that's 100 percent true. Those Nick Saban Alabama teams could be three deep when it came to five-star players at every position. You can't do that anymore.

"But as boring as my answer is, I think the answer is a mix of both NIL and the portal. You touched on Indiana not being able to do this without NIL. It also wouldn't be able to do this without the portal. That championship team was built out of the portal thanks to NIL."

**SC:** "Like Greg said, they go hand in hand. Even Ohio State wouldn't have won a national championship in 2024 without a transfer portal class of Caleb Downs, Quinshon Judkins, guys like that.

"NIL has changed so much about how everything works in the college football world. They can earn money through sponsorships, social media partnerships, and schools are using NIL as a recruiting tool. The negative of that is that smaller schools are struggling to keep their star players from transferring because of NIL."

**BG:** "Have either of them gone too far?"

**GW:** "In regard to NIL, I don't think it's gone too far. I think players deserve to be paid what they're worth, whatever the market decides that is. With NIL we've also

seen more teams have the ability to compete and win national championships. We saw Miami barely make the tournament, beat Ohio State and nearly win a national championship. There didn't used to be 10-plus rosters that could truly compete for a title. The transfer portal may have gone too far."

**BG:** "I don't know if the portal has gone too far. I think in some ways, the water has found its level. For example, in women's basketball, Ohio State managed to keep most of its roster. For the football team, there was a lot of concern that they had so many depart through the portal, but I think that was just more of a strategy change in roster construction rather than these players all seeking greener pastures. Ohio State may have low-balled them or not offered certain players as much NIL money because they needed more experienced players on the roster."

**Q: Of the Ohio State players who were selected in the 2026 NFL draft, who do you think will have the best pro career?**

**SC:** "It's an easy answer for me. I believe Caleb Downs will have the best career. Positional value aside, he was one of the top two or three players in the draft. Not only do I think he has the talent and the mentality to be able to become a high-level safety in the NFL, but between his frame, field vision, and versatility, he's a Swiss army knife. He was also drafted by the Dallas Cowboys, arguably the best organization of any of the Buckeyes taken in the top 11."

**GW:** "Caleb Downs can do so many things. His teammates and coaches also talk about having him out there was like having another coach on the field, and obviously that's an extremely valuable player to have."

**BG:** "I would go with Arvell Reese. He didn't have the best end of the season for Ohio State after a sensational start, but I think he will translate very well to the NFL. His game matches up very well with how New York Giants coach John Harbaugh likes to operate his defense, with Arvell as an outside linebacker, potentially edge rusher in that 3-4 scheme. He could potentially even be an inside linebacker. His versatility will be very good for the NFL."

"A lot of the attention from the combine went to Sonny Styles and how he tested. Arvell Reese tested extremely well, and he has all the traits to be a great NFL player. Some things you can't teach, like strong hands and the ability to move opposing offensive linemen at will. If he puts his skills together, I think he can be one of the best defenders in the NFL."

**GW:** "There's really no going wrong here if you pick one of the guys taken in the first round, but I'm going with Sonny Styles, who I think is similar to Caleb Downs in that he's a very cerebral player as well. He's built exactly how you want a linebacker to be built, and, positional value aside, we're talking about a guy who I think could go on to have a 15-year career where he's one of the top linebackers in the NFL."

"You talk about versatility with Caleb Downs and Arvell Reese. I think Sonny Styles' ability to do different things goes under the radar. He came to Ohio State as a 17-year-old safety and started there as a sophomore then switched to become one of the best linebackers in the country. He can play in coverage, move sideline to sideline

and also played up on the line of scrimmage as well."

**Q: What do you make of the NCAA Tournament expanding to 76 teams?**

**BG:** "I don't know if it's a net positive. I think the 68-team tournament was pretty much perfect, but I think some of the public outcry is a little overblown. The nature of the tournament has always been to reach all corners of the country and get teams in that really have a chance to win a national championship. This isn't college football, a regular-season sport. It's about getting hot in the NCAA Tournament and giving as many teams a chance to win that can really make a run."

"In the last couple of years, we've seen fringe tournament teams or play-in teams make deep runs in the tournament. Texas, an 11 seed, went to the Sweet 16 last year. NC State went to the Final Four as an 11 seed after winning the ACC tournament. There are plenty more examples."

"I don't love that it seems there will be fewer mid-major and low-major conference champions to appear in the first round. But on the other side of that, those mid-majors have gotten crushed these last two years since the transfer portal and NIL have combined to make it harder for those schools to compete."

**GW:** "My thing is – and I said this about the College Football Playoff at one point – at some point, expansion does have to stop. It's not necessarily about, 'Oh this team deserved it, and this team didn't.' It's more about the regular season needing to mean something. If we're just going to be letting in, let's say 70 percent of the Power Five teams in college basketball, then why watch your team in the regular season?"

"Your argument, Bobby, is that these fringe teams can make runs in the tournament, so they should be in. I'd say to them, if you're a team that can make a run in the tournament, and you don't make it in, that's nobody's fault but your own. Have a better regular season. Those games have to mean something."

**SC:** "To Greg's point, I think that you have to ask the question, 'When are we going to stop expanding?' I don't think adding eight teams is necessarily going to hurt the product overall, but like Bobby mentioned, it might take away from how many mid- and low-major teams we're seeing in the round of 64 since they will probably get slotted into these first 12 games."

"As a fan, I'm all for any extra tournament basketball, and structure-wise, I don't mind the expansion. But my main downside is it's starting to get to the point where we might be letting in some teams that didn't necessarily earn it in the regular season. There has to be some value in the regular season where you need to earn your right to play in the tournament."

"I'd also like to add that we've been directing this toward the men's tournament and haven't talked about the women. Adding another eight teams there is just sending more lambs to the slaughter with just how big the talent disparity is. Only 1 through 3 seeds have ever won the women's March Madness. We're adding extra teams here when we know these teams don't have a chance to compete."

**Q: Do you believe the Ohio State basketball team is progressing under Jake Diebler? What are you most anticipating**

**in the 2026-27 season?**

**GW:** "It's hard to make the argument that the basketball team isn't progressing. I didn't feel like I saw a lot of major improvements throughout most of the season, but then they had that little run at the end of the year that got them into the NCAA Tournament, and looking back at the beginning of the season, that was the goal. Because of that, you have to consider this season a success. However, in year two, you were hoping to see a bigger step forward, especially since it was Bruce Thornton's senior year."

"In terms of what I'm looking for most next season, I would say development. What is Amare Bynum going to be this season? What is John Mobley going to be now that he might be the focal point of the offense? Is Anthony Thompson going to be able to live up to the five-star status? I need to see if Jake Diebler can actually coach his guys up before I believe he can lead a team deep into an NCAA Tournament."

**BG:** "I suppose the team is progressing the same way as someone who runs a 10-minute mile starts to run a nine-minute mile. It is progression. As Greg said, I still think Jake Diebler needs to show more signs of development. That's what makes any great program great. That seems to be missing somewhat from OSU the last couple of years."

"I'm most looking forward to seeing Amare Bynum. He showed a lot of potential last year, especially as a freshman, and he has the sort of frame and athleticism that he can really be a next-level talent at Ohio State that maybe they haven't had in the past couple of years."

**SC:** "I agree that there certainly has been progression, but it's minor. They were 17-15 his first season and 21-13 last season. We're also starting to see Diebler land some higher-end recruits. Amare Bynum was great, and now Anthony Thompson is coming in as a five-star forward, their first five-star recruit since D'Angelo Russell."

"What I'm most interested to see next season is the big-man rotation. Brandon Noel and Christoph Tilly leaving is a bit of a loss, but they're bringing back Josh Ojjanwuna, who was out the entire season recovering from an ACL injury, as well as Ivan Njegovan. Then they went in the portal and got Andrija Jelavić, and they also added incoming freshman Vuk Lazarevic, a Serbian center. I'm interested to see how that rotation plays out."

**GW:** "One more thing I want to see improvement on is the transfer portal. Are the guys Ohio State added this year actually going to be able to contribute in a real way? They didn't go after any major stars, and they didn't really need to. They have star po-

tential elsewhere. But Diebler's best portal addition so far in two years is Tilly. Aaron Bradshaw, Sean Stewart, Gabe Cupps – those guys didn't pan out at all. Compare that to Michigan, which just won a national championship with a lineup full of transfers."

**Q: Can head baseball coach Justin Haire get Ohio State into the NCAA tournament regularly?**

**SC:** "I think he'll be able to get them back to the NCAA tournament at some point in the near future. Now, regularly is a different story. For a team in the Big Ten to have that much success with the difficulties of recruiting in the north, it would be a huge challenge to get Ohio State to a level where it is making the Big Ten tournament and NCAA tournament on a consistent basis. He is taking steps in the right direction."

**GW:** "I agree that he can get them back to the NCAA tournament, but I don't know if I agree that it's not realistic that he can do it regularly. I've been big on Justin since he was hired. Campbell, his previous stop, had one NCAA tournament appearance in program history before Haire joined as a coach. Then, with him on staff, they made six appearances from 2014 to 2023. If he can do that at Campbell, who's to say he can't come to Ohio State, where there are likely more resources, and do the exact same thing?"

"To get back to the NCAA tournament, he doesn't have to compete with Vanderbilt, Tennessee, some of the best programs in the country – he has to once he gets his team there – but to get there all he has to do is be one of the best teams in the Big Ten consistently. I think he's able to do that."

**BG:** "I've been impressed with this season. It's hard not to be after a lot of improvements from last year. Ohio State baseball was absolutely dreadful last year. But I will say that I'm still skeptical about the performance in the nonconference. Wright State, which OSU lost to on May 12, might be good for the Horizon League, but that's the sort of team you have to beat. And it's not just Wright State. It's Bowling Green, it's Xavier, some head-scratching losses. I'd like to see his team find more consistency."

**GW:** "It's still year two, though. He still has time to turn the program around, and he's doing exactly what he's supposed to be doing in year two, if not more than what should have been expected this year. Justin Haire has always been a great hitting coach, with guys like Zach Neto of the Los Angeles Angels and Cedric Mullins of the Tampa Bay Rays playing for him at Campbell. He knows how to get an offense going, and what he's done with this Ohio State team is get the offense going."

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# Ohio State Recognizes 804 Scholar-Athletes

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

A total of 804 student-athletes were recognized by Ohio State as scholar-athletes at the "Scarlet and Graymies" awards ceremony on April 13 at the Covelli Center. To be considered a scholar-athlete, a student must have maintained a 3.0 grade-point average or higher for the entire 2025-26 academic year. Last year, 805 student-athletes were honored as scholar-athletes.

Recipients of the Big Ten Medal of Honor for Ohio State were also named, with senior captain Bruce Thornton of the men's basketball team and women's diver Lena Hentchel earning the honor. The award is given annually to the most outstanding male and female student-athlete on each Big Ten campus who has "attained the greatest proficiency in athletics and scholastic work."

Other finalists for the Big Ten Medal of Honor were Jack Anthrop (tennis), Cullen Brown (lacrosse), Davis Burnside (hockey) and Carson Kharchla (wrestling) on the men's side and Chance Gray (basketball), Kary Hollenbaugh (golf), Emma Peschel (ice hockey) and Tory Vetter (gymnastics) on the women's side.

The field hockey and women's soccer teams were honored for having the top grade-point average for large teams, and for small rosters, it was the dance and men's cross country team honored.

Thirty-six of the 804 athletes held a 4.0 grade-point average, indicated by an asterisk in the following list.

The complete list of scholar-athletes is below.

**Artistic Swimming** - Ayla Barry, Kennah Burdette\*, Leonie Corbeil\*, Chloe Davitiani, Janneke Dirven, Rikki Evans, Scarlett Finn\*, Elizabeth Fullen, Charlotte Gray, Keana Hunter\*, Carmen Kawakami, Sarah Levaro, Viola Li, Daniella Molano Arango, Gabriella Molano Arango, Ayla O'Neil, Lilly Ortiz, Ruby Remati, Angelie Roger, Madison Romney, Venice Shoda, Natalie Smith, Emma Spott, Taylor Sullivan, Nathalia Valdez.

**Baseball** - Charles Bauer, Alexander Bemis, Ryan Butler, Luke Carrell, Steven Cavaco, Nikita Copenhaver, Christopher Domke, Mason Eckelman, Andrew Edrington, Jude Fisher, Connor Fuhrer, Noah Furcht\*, Maddix Goldsberry-Simpson, Owen Graf, Christopher Harvey, Pierce Herenbruck, Gavin Kuzniewski, Grant Mangrum\*, Caden Marcum, Jake Michalak, Jacob Parr, Sahil Patel, Alonzo Paul, Caiden Reid, Austin Rose, Nicholas Sawyer, Hunter Shaw, Zakary Sigman, Miles Vandenheuvel, Gavin West, Ryan Zamora.

**Men's Basketball** - Amare Bynum, Gabe Cupps, Mathieu Grujicic, Myles Herro, John Mobley, Braylen Nash, Ivan Njegovan, Brandon Noel\*, Devin Royal, Bruce Thornton, Marc Tilly, Colin White.

**Women's Basketball** - Daria Biriuk, Deayona Cambridge, Jaloni Cambridge, Chance Gray\*, Seini Henry, Ella Hobbs, Kylee Kitts, Elsa Lemmila, Brynleigh Martin, Tyana Todd, Ava Watson.

**Cheerleading** - Mia Blust, Aidan Brooks, Austin Daugherty, Giovanni Desantis, Bella Eldredge, Ethan Fleener, Aiden Garramone, Sarah Gooding, Ocean Henthorn, Gabrielle Krenitsky, Cali Mitchey, Brenlyn Niemeier, Nolan Niemeier, Michael Osinski, Sophia Sankovich, Emily Schaaf, Claire Snyder, Joshua Sobecks, Avery Thielman.

**Men's Cross Country** - Colby Adams, Jack Agnew\*, Kevin Agnew, Chance Basilone, Sean Carney, Colin Cernansky, Weston Day, Connor Long, William McGraw, Andrew Rohde\*, Noah Sharp, William Shaughnessy, Keegan Souhan, Zachary Zielke.

**Women's Cross Country** - Katherine Castelli, Naomi Clarke, Audrey DeSantis, Chloe Dostal\*, Lillian Eckels, Olivia Holbrook, Teodora Iovi, Ana Karmol, Allison Kopser, Zoe Lehman, Sydney Paul, Mia Robillard, Sydney Stevenson\*, Emmi Von Scherr.

**Dance** - Ashlyn Barrett, Reagan Ceglio, Chloe Cerreto, Isabelle Davis, Nicole Dias, Bennet Espinda-Banick, Reese Harper, Emma Hellenkamp, Kara Hurst, Isabella Jarvis, Alexis Leistner, Brielle McCoy, Brynn Melius, Hailey Meyers, Gianna Monjonnier, Samantha Sweetman\*, Olivia Taylor, Ceceilia Thielen, Lauren Wainz, Molly Youngblood.

**Men's Diving** - Ernest Braitenbach, Hamish Patel, Dominic Roberto, Matthew Yuan.

**Women's Diving** - Lena Hentschel, Michelle Mazzara, Hannah Newbrook, Brooklyn Petit\*, Mia Prusiecki.

**Men's Fencing** - Albert Bagdany, Hank Bauer, Matthew Buelau, Lorenzo Di Francesco Mion, Samuel Freedman, Nowell Gibson, Mitchell Huth, Wangjie Li, Kelly Liu, Edward Maklin, Samuel Rightler, James Schardine, Ayush Shah, Mostafa Tahoun.

**Women's Fencing** - Maria Alexe, Natalia Botello, Lira Cannon, Astrid Chapman-Layland, Maria Cojocari, Jayna Davis, Grace Fan, Yuncian Fan, Klaire Gielegheem\*, Erika Gumagay, Gloria Klughardt, Alexis Kostelny, Fara Latifi, Marie Frederique Millette, Raiyan Moradi-Bidhendi, Catherine Popa, Susan Wiggers, Wenjun Zhou.

**Field Hockey** - Zella Bailey\*, Emily Barker, Madeline Bogle, Makayla Carahaly, Katie Crump\*, Mary Curtis\*, Mary Davis, Grace Dixon, Reagan Eickhoff, Katherine Fichtner, Sienna Golden, Loryn Jordon, Autum Kernechel, Raleigh Kerst\*, Anne Krebs, Victoria Kutz, Carmela Maro, Philippa Schipper, Camryn Standish, Madelyn Stevens, Cicely Tomaszewski, Olivia Wallace.

**Football** - David Adolph, Deontae Armstrong, Devontae Armstrong, Beau Atkinson, Nolan Baudo, Phillip Bell, Eli Brickhandler\*, Jarquez Carter, Bennett Christian, Jake Cook, Jackson Courville\*, Caden Curry, Alec DelSignore, CJ Donaldson, Sam Dixon, Caleb Downs, Jayden Fielding, Ian Gece, Logan George, Zion Grady, Mylan Graham, Diante Griffin, Jaystin Gwinn, Cody Haddad, Zach Hayes, Carson Hinzman, Eddrick Houston, Brandon Inniss, Julian Jackson, Bo Jackson, Stanley Jackson, Collin Johnson, De'Zie Jones, William Kacmarek, Isaiah Kema, Lincoln Kienholz, Dom Kirks, Max Klare, Max LeBlanc, Eli Lee, Brody Lennon, Shawn Lodge, Simon Lorentz, Carter Lowe, Mason Maggs, Ty Malone, Jermaine Mathews, Jaylen McClain, Kayden McDonald, Jayvon McFadden, Joe McGuire, Nick McLarty, Eric Mensah, Josh Mickens, Bukari Miles, Bodpegn Miller, Grant Mills, Luke Montgomery, Ian Moore, Jason Moore, Keenan Nelson Jr., Trajen Odom, Ethan Onianwa,

Josh Padilla, James Peoples, Riley Pettijohn, Payton Pierce, Arvell Reese, Eli Riggs, Nate Roberts, Trey Robinette, Anthony Rogers, Leroy Roker, Max Roy, Ryan Rudzinski, Devin Sanchez, Julian Sayin, Brennen Schramm, Aaron Scott, Austin Siereveld, Epi Sitanilei, Jeremiah Smith, William Smith, Tavien St. Clair, Deshawn Stewart, Garrett Stover, Kolton Stover, Alexander Styles, Lorenzo Styles, Carnell Tate, Justin Terry, Jelani Thurman, Ahmed Tounkara, Gabe VanSickle, Joey Velazquez, Bryce West, Isaiah West, Dorian Williams, Damarion Witten, Preston Wolfe, Jordyn Woods.

**Men's Golf** - Finley Barlett, Tim Formanek, Vaughn Harber, Giedrius Mackelis, Tophre Reed, Jack Vojtko, Joe Wilson IV, Jaime Yzaga.

**Women's Golf** - Kavya Ajarapu, Sophie Eppelstun, Kary Hollenbaugh, Marina Joyce Moreno, Man Yee Chloe Lam, Nellie Ong, Matilde Santilli, Meijin Song.

**Men's Gymnastics** - Drake Andrews, Justin Ciccone, Peyton Contini, Noah Copeland, Chase Davenport-Mills, Kristian Grahovsky, Jacob Harmon, Jace Hashimoto, David Ramirez, Lukas Ross, Conlan Simpkins, Zachary Snyder, Caden Spencer, Thomas Thackston.

**Women's Gymnastics** - Baylie Belman, Sadie Berry\*, Samara Buchanan, Janiya Coleman, Mary Green, Kaitlyn Grimes, Rylee Guevara, Ava Jackson, Lillian Jennejohn, Courtney McCann, Ashton Meuret, Kaylyn Mintz, Jaylyn Pomager, Maisyn Rader, Karleigh Reutzel, Cameron Smith, Tory Vetter, Grace Walker, Addison Watson.

**Men's Ice Hockey** - Christopher Able, Davis Burnside, Felix Caron, Niall Crocker\*, Samuel Deckhut, Jake Dunlap, Kristoffer Eberly, Adam Eisele, Ryan Gordon, Landen Gunderson, Samuel Hillebrandt, Jungwook Hong, Bryce Ingles, Jake Karabela\*, Dawson Labre\*, Nathan Lewis, Nathan McBrayer, Samuel McGinley, Christopher Romaine, Broten Sabo, William Smith, Ethan Straky, Riley Thompson, Thomas Weis.

**Women's Ice Hockey** - Jocelyn Anne Amos, Jordan Baxter, Cassidy Carmichael, Brooke Dishner, Joy Dunne, Mira Jungaaker, Genevieve Klein, Taylor Kressin, Kaia Malachino, Sloane Matthews, Grace McCoshen, Emma Peschel, Jordyn Petrie, Macy Rasmussen, Jenna Raunio, Maria Roth, Hilda Svensson, Sara Swiderski, Sanni Vanhanen, Leah Wicks.

**Men's Lacrosse** - Jack Allen, Jack Bichelmeier, Jackson Birtwistle, Cullen Brown, Jake Cohen, Jonny Cool, Kellen Curby, Jack Deliberti, Blake Eiland, Taji Flynn\*, Kyle Foster, Caleb Fyock, Dylan Furshman, Garrett Haas, Ryder Hanin, Christian Hogan, Thomas Janowicz, Coleman Kraske, Angelo Lamatrice, Jack Lehman, Griffin Liedel, Dillon Magee, Kevin Magee, Owen Magee, Sean Magtoto, Alex Marinier, Joe Matan, Matthew Mayfield\*, Russell Melendez, Caden Minniti, Corey O'Connor, Jack Oldman, Colin Puckett, Winter Rivera, Brady Sestili, Dom Shaw, Caden Smith, Logan Soelberg, Jake Struck, Michael Tan, Bobby Van Buren\*, Jewel Walker, Fin Watson, Liam White.

**Women's Lacrosse** - Sammie Bender, Abby Boyle, Camryn Callaghan, Zoe Coleman, Ella Cox, Caitlyn Durchanek, Emma Francis, Darrien Furiness, Annie Hargraves, Makena Harrington, Abby Hawes, SK Isakson, Katie Kaucheck, Amani Kimball-McKavish, Lexie Kupka, Catie Maroutsos, Lindsey McCulloch, Lindsey Money-maker, Kylee O'Donnell, Olivia Orso, Issi Osborn, Audrey Rudolph, Camille Samarasinghe, Audrey Schoemer, Maeve Simonds, Mackie Stickler, Campbell Stone, Bella Tan, Lydia Tangney, Jocelyn Torres, Kate Tyack, Brooke Vinson, Ella Wright.

**Mascot** - Zachary Ahrens, Michael Chaykowski, Caleb Kies, Jeffrey Moody, Kurt Steelman, Calahan Thomas, Tyler Wisman.

**Pistol** - Danae Bell\*, Ankita Deokule, Ariana Dickey, Johnathan Dorsten, Maral Gantsooj, Marcus Klemp, Ada Korkhin, Evan Langerak, Abbie Leverett, Leah Mueller, Riya Salian, Donald Simpson, Sophia Walp.

**Rifle** - Riley Dunn, Andrew Duross, John Hamilton, Elizabeth Hollowell, Mackenzie Pruden, Gabriella Sprague, Emily Valenta, Lillian Warren.

**Rowing** - Elaine Barr, Riley Barwidi\*, Genevieve Baylor, Kathryn Blewett, Abigail Bluhm, Amelia Boes, Elise Brohan, Anna Buckler, Kailey Burns, Maureen Caslow, Caroline Caudill, Erin Dee, Katerina Dohnalova\*, Carie Dumont, Nilaa Elangovan, Taleh Fananapazir, Emma Fitzgibbon, Ellen Flynn, Kelley Forsythe, Samantha Freda, Emilia

Fritz, Paige Guggenbiller, Grace Gutman, Gabriella Hardy, Ella Harrison, Heidi Hemming\*, Daisy Holland, Anna Kwiatkowski, Maria Kyridou, Lillian Leopard, Tess Manning, Kailey McKimm, Adrianna Murphy, Lilian Orosz, Bianca Pandolfi, Vidhi Patel, Payton Pelkowski, Morgan Perce, Kaylee Robbins, Hannah Robinson, Keira Rossi\*, Kathryn Russ, Isabella Schmitt, Katherine Scott, Lucy Scott, Ava Semeniuk, Katie Stirm, Gabriella Svoboda, Abigail Thomas, Avery Wynk.

**Men's Soccer** - Ashton Bilow, Marko Borkovic, Tanner Creech, Joel Demian, Nathan Demian, Cole Evans, Luke Laramore, Jacob Maisonneuve, Patrick McLaughlin, Michael Ndiweni, Justis Olorunto, Luciano Pechota, Andre Roberts, Nicholas Skubis, Robert Stoller, Nyle Waugh.

**Women's Soccer** - Sydney Bering, Jacinda Bonham, Jadin Bonham, Ava Bramblett\*, Elle Britt, Lilly Danner, Micayla Decker, Mirann Gacioch, Natalie Garcia, Ava Greco, Nette Nina Hiltunen, Arela Jacome Agnalt, Alexis Knisely, Arden La Rose, Riley Lijewski, Sophia Louder, Andrea Lu, Berkley Mape, Mai Ly Marella, Mia McSweeney, Maliyah Morrison, Peighton Northrup, Anika Poremba, Molly Pritchard, Lizzie Rozmajzl, Mandy Schlueter, Callie Tumilty.

**Softball** - Sami Bewick, Lorin Boutte, Taylor Cruse, Reese Cullen, Maggie Daniel, Kiana Estrada, Kennedy Kay, Lottie Landmesser, Hailey Lang, Skylar Limon, Reagan Milliken, Izzy Neal, Hadley Parisien, Lexi Paulsen, Kailea Ricks, Cadyn Ruffer, Holly Steffus, Sara Tarr, Emma Tolley, Abbie Wilhelm.

**Men's Swimming** - Cooper Burt, Mason Edmund, William Fentress, Isaac Fleig, Mason Francis, Rasmus Hanson, Ahmed Ibrahim, Cornelius Jahn, Matthew Klinge, Ethan Reniewicki, Michael Robinson, Jackson Schuster, Lucas Vickers, Jordi Vilchez.

**Women's Swimming** - Sienna Angove, Rachel Bockrath\*, Ava DeAngelis, Paige Delma, Jessica Eden, Emma Finlin, Carrie Furbee, Taya Hutchison, Cadence Le Blanc, Charlotte LePage, Erin Little, Delia Lloyd\*, Lucy Malys, Krista Marlin, Elise Nardozzi, Mila Nikanorov, Nika Sharafutdinova, Warner Shaw, Emerson Therrien, Lorin Tobler\*, Danika Varda.

**Men's Tennis** - Jack Anthrop, Alexander Bernard, Loren Byers\*, Brandon Carpico, John Day, Nikita Filin, Alexander Fuchs, Aidan Kim.

**Women's Tennis** - Megan Basil, Alessia Cau, Teah Chavez Babyak, Flora Johnson, Nao Nishino, Hephzibah Oluwadare, Luciana Perry, Audrey Spencer.

**Men's Track & Field** - Sopoluchi Anosike, Nicholas Biega, Cooper Citro, Jaxson Eckert, Daniel Edwards, Bailey Fletcher, Damon Frabotta, Nazzio John, Devin Jordan, Sean Kaminski, Brian Kellon, Ibrahim Khairat, Jack Knapke, Mason Louis, Lawson Maag, Elmer Mixon, Brandt Morlock, Shahaan Singh, Lucas Toernstroem, Victor Toernstroem, Braden Wakey, Logan Wilkins, Reign Winston.

**Women's Track & Field** - Adylin Armstrong, Sophie Bidwell, Morgan Bridges, Sydney Bryant, Laila Campbell, Avery Clark, Fatouma Conde, Columba Effiong, Sophia Fong, Nicole Grimes, Callia Harris, Skyye Lee, Tatum Lynn, Bobbi Olive, Olivia Powell, Noa Smith, Janela Spencer, Tianna Spinks, Christian Thompson, Veronica Waugaman.

**Men's Volleyball** - Stanislaw Chacinski, Aaron Grimm, Andrew Hudson, Daniel Hurley, Benjamin Hutchinson, John O'Riordan, Owen Pickering, Eliel Salva-Torres, Christian Teresi, Shane Wetzel, Tomasz Wisniakowski.

**Women's Volleyball** - Kaia Caffee, Ashley Carr, Na'Vea Gauthier, Kamiah Gibson, Mina Gunes, Olivia Hasbrook, Kaitlyn Hoffman, Hannah Jones, Magdalena Juric\*, Zaria Ragler, Ava Shankle, Mia Stahler, Mia Tuman, Ella Wrobel, Reese Wuebker, Sydney Wyman, Abigail Yoder.

**Wrestling** - Brandon Cannon, Carter Chase, Daxton Chase, Benjamin Davino, Landon Deselle, Patrick Downing, Nicholas Feldman, Brogan Fielding, Dylan Fishback, Padraic Gallagher, Luke Geog, Carson Kharchla, Shaulei King, Brendan McCrone, Carson Ming, Xander Myers, Maddox Shaw, Cayean Smith, Hogan Swenski.

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# 171 Ohio State Student-Athletes Receive Degrees

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State student-athletes were well represented at the 2026 spring commencement ceremony, with 171 current and former Buckeyes receiving degrees.

Of the 171 athletes who graduated – 41 fewer than last spring – 10 were from the football team. Wide receiver David Adolph, running back Chase Brecht, quarterback Eli Brickhandler, defensive lineman Caden Casto, cornerback Diante Griffin, safety Brenten “Inky” Jones, tight end Will Kacmarek, wide receiver Shawn Lodge, offensive lineman Luke Montgomery and All-America wide receiver Carnell Tate were those 10 graduates.

Also among the graduates were women's hockey standouts Emma Peschel, Sloane Matthews and Hailey MacLeod; NCAA fencing champion Gabriel Feinberg; three-time Big Ten swimming champion Tomas Navikonis; and Olympic Silver medalist gymnast Ruby Remati, among many others.

The complete list of graduates is below.

**Artistic Swimming** – Lilly Ortiz, biomedical engineering; Ruby Remati, communication; Emma Spott, animal sciences.

**Baseball** – Charles Bauer, consumer and family financial services; Luke Carrell, master's in business administration; Jake Michalak, international studies; Sahil Patel, consumer and family financial services; Alonzo Paul, health sciences; Hunter Shaw, sport industry.

**Men's Basketball** – Brandon Noel, master's in sport coaching.

**Cheerleading** – Giovanni Desantis, sport industry; Bella Eldredge, information systems; Michael Osinski, finance; Joshua Sobeks, biochemistry; Ryleigh Stelletel, health promotion, nutrition and exercise science.

**Men's Cross Country** – Sean Carney, economics-business/operations management.

**Women's Cross Country** – Katherine Castelli, master's in sport coaching; Teodora Iovi, biochemistry; Ana Karmol, environment, economy, development and sustainability; Aniya Mosley, human development and family science; Sydney Paul, exercise science; Emmi Von Scherr, consumer and family financial services.

**Dance** – Isabelle Davis, health promotion, nutrition and exercise science; Bennet Espinda-Banick, health promotion, nutrition and exercise science; Lauren Wainz, health sciences; Molly Youngblood, marketing.

**Men's Diving** – Jack Matthews, information systems.

**Women's Diving** – Lena Hentschel, international studies; Blake Skilken, marketing.

**Men's Fencing** – Isaac Ariza, communication; Hank Bauer, environmental engineering; Matthew Buelau, psychology; Lorenzo Di Francesco Mion, computer science and engineering; Gabriel Feinberg, human development and family science; Nowell Gibson, computer science and engineering; Mitchell Huth, operations management; Wangjie Li, physics; Kelly Liu, finance; Avin Rai, economics.

**Women's Fencing** – Raiyan Moradi-Bidhendi, psychology; Cara Santos, accounting; Julia Semikin, biology; Wenjun Zhou, human nutrition.

**Field Hockey** – Zella Bailey, master's in consumer sciences; Makayla Carahaly, speech and hearing science; Riley Hudson, political science; Loryn Jordon, sport industry; Lindsey Roberts, communication; Camryn Standish, finance; Olivia Wallace, communication.

**Football** – David Adolph, marketing; Chase Brecht, marketing; Eli Brickhandler, master's in kinesiology; Caden Casto, materials science and engineering; Diante Griffin, sport industry; Brenten Jones, criminology; Will Kacmarek, hu-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**CONGRADULATIONS** – Among the 12,000 graduates at Ohio State's spring commencement on May 10 at Ohio Stadium were 171 athletes with 10 coming from the football team, including wide receiver David Adolph (82) and tight end Will Kacmarek (89). Adolph earned his degree in marketing while Kacmarek received a diploma in human development and family science.

man development and family science; Shawntel Lodge, sport industry; Luke Montgomery, sport industry; Carnell Tate, sport industry.

**Men's Golf** – Christopher Reed II, sport industry; Joseph Wilson IV, marketing.

**Women's Golf** – Kary Hollenbaugh, finance.

**Men's Gymnastics** – Justin Ciccone, hospitality management; Kristian Grahovski, finance; Jacob Harmon, exercise science; Matthew Piekarksi, human development and family science; Caden Spencer, sport industry.

**Women's Gymnastics** – Mallory Gregory, communication; Payton Harris, speech and hearing science; Kaylyn Mintz, criminology.

**Men's Ice Hockey** – Davis Burnside, sport industry; Jake Dunlap, sport industry; Adam Eisele, undergraduate certificate in diversity, equity and inclusion; Ethan Straky, consumer and family financial services.

**Women's Ice Hockey** – Brooke Disher, political science; Hailey Macleod, exercise science; Sloane Matthews, biomedical engineering; Emma Peschel, health sciences; Emily Zumwinkle, consumer and family financial services.

**Men's Lacrosse** – Jackson Birtwistle, undergraduate certificate in diversity, equity and inclusion; Cullen Brown, finance; Jonathan Cool, finance; Blake Eland, finance; Taji Flynn, master's in kinesiology; Aidan Kenley, construction systems management; Coleman Kraske, communication; Griffin Liedel, logistics management; John Maccarone, sport industry; Logan Soelberg, undergraduate certificate in computational analysis of language.

**Women's Lacrosse** – Camryn Callaghan, sport industry; Zoe Coleman, marketing; Darrien Furiness, marketing; Kathleen Kaucke, communication; Jocelyn Torres, international studies; Brooke Vinson, public management, leadership and policy.

**Mascot** – Caleb Kies, nursing; Jeffrey Moody, exercise science; Kurt Steelman, mechanical engineering/English; Tyler Wisman, communication.

**Pistol** – Johnathan Dorsten, agricultural systems management; Abbie Leverett, health sciences.

**Rifle** – Andrew Duross, finance; Paige Hollowell, communication; Lillian Warren, public management, leadership and policy.

**Rowing** – Ceylan Algan, mechanical engineering; Abigail Bluhm, finance; Amelia Boes, sport industry; Caroline Caudill, communication; Ella Harrison, biology; Mara Mangiola, marketing; Morgan Perce, exercise science; Isabella Schmitt, criminology; Lucy Scott, marketing; Emma Shuck, marketing; Gabriella Svoboda, public health; Halen Swickard, food business management; Abigail Thomas, psychology; Cambelle Uveges, animal sciences.

**Men's Soccer** – Tanner Creech, finance; Dyland Onwona-Agyeman, exercise science; Robert Stoller, finance; Donovan Williams, logistics management; Laurence Wootton, history.

**Women's Soccer** – Kira Watase, math.

**Softball** – Kiana Estrada, sport industry; Kennedy Kay, undergraduate certificate in diversity, equity and inclusion; Skylar Limon, psychology; Reagan Milliken, graduate certificate in nonprofit management; Alexis Paulsen, health sciences.

**Men's Swimming** – Joshua Bedford, finance; Charles Clark, sport industry; Mason Edmund, finance; William Fentress, neuroscience; Rylan McDaniel, exercise science; Tomas Navikonis, geographical information science.

**Women's Swimming** – Sydney Davids, electrical and computer engineering; Jessica Eden, human development and family science; Anne Krusinski, human nutrition; Lucy Malys, speech and hearing science; Krista Marlin, respiratory therapy.

**Men's Tennis** – Jack Anthrop, sport industry; Alexander Bernard, sport industry; Loren Byers, graduate certificate in public management.

**Women's Tennis** – Megan Basil, political science.

**Men's Track** – Noah Carmichael, psychology; Cooper Citro, finance; Nazzio John, undergraduate certificate in diversity, equity and inclusion; Sean Kaminski, finance/economics-business; Ibrahim Khairat, consumer and family financial services; Elmer Mixon, communication; Shohaan Singh, consumer and family financial services; Reign Winston, film studies.

**Women's Track** – Avery Clark, information systems; Fatouma Conde, public health; Columbia Effiong, consumer and family financial services; Sophia Fong, health promotion, nutrition and exercise science; Noa Smith, communication; Janela Spencer, information systems; Veronica Waugaman, data analytics.

**Men's Volleyball** – Daniel Hurley, sport industry; Shane Wetzel, sport industry.

**Women's Volleyball** – Kamiah Gibson, master's in social work; Magdalena Juric, master's in kinesiology; Zaria Ragler, social work; Sydney Wyman, master's in animal sciences.

**Wrestling** – Carter Chase, finance; Nicholas Feldman, sport industry; Carson Kharchla, undergraduate certificate in diversity, equity and inclusion; Brendan McCrone, sport industry; Seth Shumate, marketing.



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# Bo Rein Remembered By Former Teammates

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Robert Edward “Bo” Rein is remembered for both the remarkable impact he made in a short time and the promise of a career that was cut tragically short.

Rein remains one of college football’s most haunting tragedies, a coaching prodigy who brought NC State back to national prominence and was then hired at the age of 34 to lead LSU, only to disappear in a bizarre and heartbreaking plane crash over the Atlantic before ever coaching a game for the Tigers.

But before he became a coaching phenom whose life was cut short, Rein was known to his Ohio State teammates as a rare dual-sport standout, creative offensive mind, clubhouse joker and relentless competitor.

Decades after his passing, Rein’s Ohio State football and baseball teammates spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin to reflect on his life, sharing memories of a personality that loomed larger than life and an impact that still resonates today.

Former Ohio State pitcher John Sonedecker, who was a teammate of Rein’s on the Buckeye baseball team from 1965-66, said Rein’s personality was just as memorable as his talent on the field.

“Bo was not only an exceptional athlete, but he was a really off-the-wall character,” Sonedecker said. “He was one of the clubhouse clowns, but man, when he got on the baseball field, he was all business. He was on the All-CWS team in both 1965 and 1966. He played shortstop in ’65, and then he moved to the outfield in ’66.”

Former Ohio State quarterback Rex Kern said Rein’s football intelligence and energy made him stand out even as a graduate assistant.

“Bo was so quick and knowledgeable about the game,” Kern recalled. “He was

just electric, but he really helped our ‘Super Sophs’ along the way and getting out of the fullback every play call. Bo was smart also. You can be talented, but not many talented guys would understand all the defenses and all the whereabouts on the defensive side if you’re like Bo, being an offensive guy. So he was quite amazing, and it was a shame when his airplane went down.”

Rein’s athletic foundation was built in Niles, Ohio, where he starred at Niles McKinley High School.

Former Ohio State running back Rudy Hubbard grew up just 25 minutes away in Hubbard, Ohio. Even before they became teammates in Columbus, Hubbard was well aware of the powerhouse program Rein led in Niles.

“We grew up in the same area. Hubbard High School, where I went, was small. Niles McKinley, where Bo went – what I remember is that they had invited maybe three or four different teams to scrimmage, and they fed us. We didn’t get fed at my high school, which meant they had a really outstanding booster club,” Hubbard said. “Bo was really an outstanding player in the area, and then he became an outstanding player at Ohio State.”

That standard carried over directly to Ohio State, where Rein became a three-year letter winner in both football and baseball.

On the baseball diamond, Rein starred primarily as a left fielder for the Buckeyes during arguably the best stretch in program history. Rein helped Ohio State to the College World Series championship game in 1965 and 1966, with the Buckeyes claiming the national championship in 1966. Rein had one double and scored one run in Ohio State’s 8-2 victory over Oklahoma State in the 1966 championship game.

He also led the Buckeyes in stolen bases in both 1965 (16) and 1966 (17), finishing his career with 49 steals – a program record that stood until Roy Marsh surpassed it with 73 from 1992-94. Rein now ranks seventh

in Ohio State history in the category.

In 1966, he also tied teammate Roger Sexton for the team lead in runs scored with 32.

Rein was later selected by the Cleveland Indians with the No. 732 overall pick in the 40th round of the 1967 MLB draft.

Ohio State right fielder Ray Shoup, who grew up with Rein in Niles before teaming up with him on the Buckeye squad, said Rein’s energy stood out both on the field and in the clubhouse.

“Bo was very successful,” Shoup said. “He was a very good baseball player, a good athlete. He wasn’t really big, but he was bigger than most guys who played baseball. He was just a good guy.”

On the gridiron, Rein quickly emerged as a key piece on the Buckeye offense, playing both running back and receiver. Rein was a three-year starter at Ohio State, finishing his football career with 214 carries for 938 yards and two touchdowns on the ground, to go along with 77 catches for 929 yards and four receiving touchdowns.

Rein led Ohio State in receptions and receiving yards in both of his first two seasons in 1964 (22 for 320 yards) and 1965 (29 for 328 yards), before ranking first on the Buckeyes in rushing yards as a senior in 1966 (456). He also earned second-team All-Big Ten honors in 1966.

After he graduated from Ohio State in the spring of 1967, Rein spent two more seasons in Columbus as a graduate assistant with the football team.

At the same time, Rein climbed through the ranks of minor-league baseball in the Cleveland Indians’ farm system, eventually reaching the Portland Beavers – the organization’s Triple-A affiliate at the time – before injuries ultimately ended his playing career. He spent the 1967 and 1968 seasons in Single-A prior to a jump to Double-A, then Triple-A in 1969.

Hubbard said that with Rein being a year older, he took Hubbard under his wing as a

former running back himself and then as a graduate assistant.

“Because we grew up in the same areas in Ohio and we both played running back, he taught me the ropes,” Hubbard said. “So I always felt like he was trying to help me out as he was about to leave.”

As Hubbard alluded to, Rein’s impact as a graduate assistant under head coach Woody Hayes did not go unnoticed.

Former Ohio State running back Leo Hayden said Rein had earned the utmost respect from the Buckeye coaching staff even as a graduate assistant.

“Whatever field he was in, even as a coach, he was a hustler,” Hayden said. “That was translated to us as well. Every now and then, he’d come over and want us to run a certain play for his receivers or whatnot. (Coach Glenn ‘Tiger’ Ellison) would do that. He said, ‘Oh, Bo wants us to run this play, so let’s do it.’ That’s the type of respect that he got from the full-time coaches, the old-timers there – Tiger Ellison and whoever else that he was working with at the time. They gave him a lot of respect.”

Kern said Rein wasn’t afraid to challenge Hayes’ play calling, even encouraging players to trust their instincts on the field. He recalled that during his sophomore season, Rein would return to help Hayes coach and jokingly tell him not to feel obligated to follow every play call coming from the sideline.

“Bo would say to me, ‘Hey, Rex, you see that fat guy over there on the sideline? You don’t have to call every play.’ He said, ‘If you think something’s going to work, just ignore him,’ and then he said, ‘But you’ve got to circle to Woody’s left, because he’s got a great left hook. He was a prizefighter.’ Bo was always great, he and (assistant coach) George Chaump really encouraged me and some of our sophomore guys to think out of the box,” Kern said

Following his time at Ohio State, Rein followed legendary head coach Lou Holtz to William & Mary, spending two seasons as

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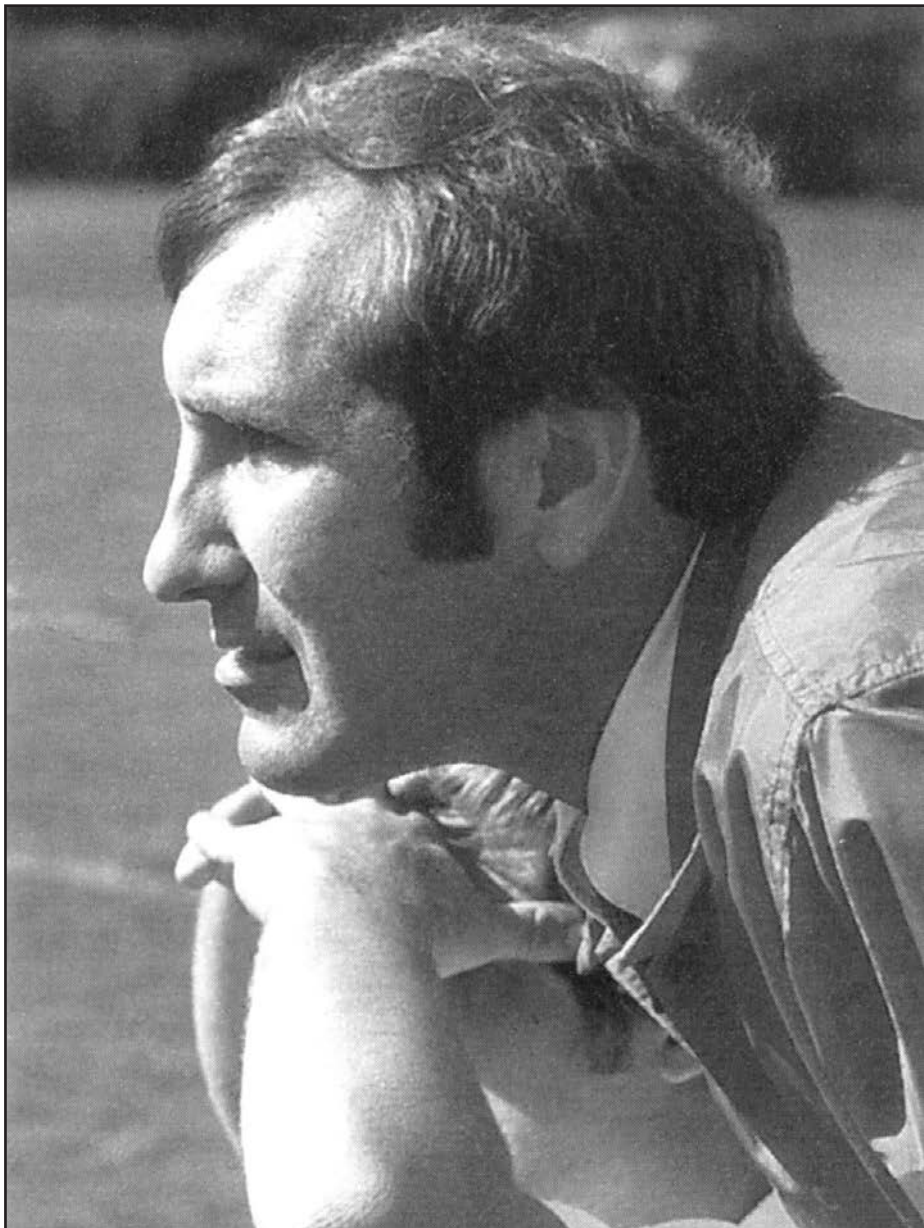
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FILE PHOTO

**CUT SHORT — Bo Rein was a rising college football coach when the former two-sport standout at Ohio State died in a plane crash while on a recruiting trip at age 34 in 1980, leaving his Buckeye teammates to continue his legacy. Rein was also a member of the 1966 national championship baseball team.**

an assistant coach under Holtz from 1969-70 before taking another assistant coaching role at Purdue in 1971. He also served as the head coach of William & Mary's baseball team in the spring of 1971, leading the team to a 20-16 record.

Rein then spent a three-year stint at NC State as an assistant coach from 1972-74 under Holtz, who went from William & Mary to NC State. Rein then made a one-season stop as Arkansas' offensive coordinator in 1975. He then returned to Raleigh, N.C., for his first head-coaching stint, serving as NC State's head coach from 1976-79.

With the Wolfpack, Rein inherited a program most recently led by Holtz, which had finished 7-4-1 the year prior. Despite a disappointing 3-7-1 record to open his career, Rein led NC State to a 24-11 record over the next three seasons, including an ACC title in 1979.

Hubbard said offensive creativity, including scheming routes, allowed him to make a swift rise to a head-coaching position.

"When he left to become a coach, I knew he obviously was very successful. Bo knew everything that they were trying to do, and he had a lot of good ideas relative to the passing game and so forth," Hubbard said.

"(Ohio State) ran a lot of twin routes and stuff that he kind of invented. I think that's what helped sell him and move him up the coaching ranks was that he was able to have success with those twin routes. He created such a great passing game that he was able to have a lot of success and move forward."

After his fourth year at NC State, Rein left to become the head coach for LSU ahead of the 1980 college football season. However, before he could ever coach a down for the Tigers, an unthinkable tragedy struck.

On Jan. 10, 1980, Rein was returning from a recruiting trip to Shreveport, La., aboard a private aircraft piloted by Louis Benscotter when the plane disappeared after attempting to avoid severe weather.

The aircraft lost radio contact shortly after departure and continued on autopilot, eventually traveling more than 1,000 miles off course. Officials said it reached altitudes near 40,000 feet before apparently running out of fuel and crashing into the Atlantic Ocean about 120 miles off Cape Charles, Va., at approximately 1:20 a.m. Neither Rein's body nor the wreckage was ever recovered. The cause of the crash was undetermined, but it was speculated that the event was caused by cabin depressur-

ization.

Rein's sudden passing left his former teammates and the entire Ohio State community shocked.

Hayden recalled learning of Rein's death and the immediate disbelief that followed, stating that he felt he had such a promising life ahead of him.

"I came into the locker room one day, and they were talking about Bo, and I was like, 'What's up with Bo?' They said, 'Didn't you hear? He died in a plane crash.' I said, 'No, you are kidding me.' There wasn't a whole bunch else to say," Hayden said. "He was somebody who was already a great football coach and was going to be even a greater football coach. He had left this planet too soon.

"A lot of folks were really shaken up. Even if you didn't know Bo, you knew about him, and you had to respect that. Bo knows. Bo knew. So he was one of those guys who will be sorely missed. I didn't know anything about his family or whoever else he was attached to, but I know what I saw when he was in the locker room at the Ohio State University."

Hayden added that Hayes, who was particularly fond of Rein, was devastated by the young coach's passing.

"I wouldn't say he was a coach's pet, but there were certain guys that, when I was at Ohio State, Woody paid a lot of attention to. Bo was one of them," Hayden said. "I know when we heard about his death, he was mortified."

Kern said the reaction spread quickly through his friends and former Ohio State teammates as word of the crash broke.

"When that hit the news, all the guys that knew Bo started touching base with everybody, and we all thought, 'What a tragedy,'" Kern said. "He was a great coach, and it would have been only his fifth year as a head coach. He was going to be a great coach for a long time, but that plane accident decided that he wasn't going to be around."

Rein's influence has since lived on through the players he impacted, the offensive ideas he helped shape and the standard

he set as a competitor and coach. Decades later, Rein's name remains linked to his unrealized potential as a rising head coach whose trajectory suggested a long and successful future in the game.

His legacy is now preserved in the honors that bear his name, including NC State's "Bo Rein Award," given to a player who makes a vital contribution in an unsung role, and Ohio State's Bo Rein "Most Inspirational Player" Award, which recognizes the spirit and leadership he embodied during his time as a Buckeye.

Those who knew Rein best remember a life and career cut short, but one that left a lasting impact on the programs and people he touched.

For Hubbard, memories of Rein are rooted in both mentorship and familiarity from their childhoods.

"He was a very classy guy, man. Bo took me under his wing while I was being recruited," Hubbard said. "He kind of just taught me everything because we grew up in the same area."

Former Ohio State first baseman and center fielder Russ Nagelson emphasized that what set Rein apart was his remarkable versatility and athleticism, noting that his personality was just as memorable as his talent.

"He was so outgoing and always had a super positive attitude. He just had so much talent, and he was in different positions at different times," Nagelson said. "He was a tremendous athlete, especially in stealing bases because Bo was so fast."

For Hayden, Rein's rise through the coaching ranks reflected the work ethic and respect he earned throughout his career.

"They say in the Bible, 'Well deserved, my good and faithful servant.' I think it was well deserved," Hayden said. "It was earned. It wasn't just given to him. He earned it. I admire the fact that he earned those sorts of accolades at such a young age. He graduated and came on as a coach, and the next thing I know, he was getting the head-coaching job down south. So that's kind of amazing."



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# Kalis' HS Coach: OSU Getting 'Slam Dunk'

When four-star offensive tackle Jimmy Kalis committed to Ohio State, his high school head coach at Pittsburgh Central Catholic, Ryan Lehmeier, knew the Buckeyes were getting a good one.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

"I couldn't say enough about him," Lehmeier told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "The way he goes about his business, how much he loves football, and the type of person he is, I think Ohio State's getting a slam dunk."

Kalis committed on April 17 and is ranked as the No. 317 overall player in the 2027 class and the 30th-ranked offensive tackle. Ohio State offensive line coach Tyler Bowen liked Kalis enough to make him the fourth player of what is already a five-man offensive line group in the class for the Buckeyes.

And for Lehmeier, it was no surprise that when Bowen set his sights on Kalis, he liked what he saw.

"(Because of) his ability to take coaching, understand game plans from week to week and being engaged with us, this is what we expected," Lehmeier said. "The other thing I can say about Jimmy is that he plays exceptionally hard, and he doesn't just do that on Friday. He's a great practice player."

Kalis started last season at left tackle for the 13-2 Vikings, where Lehmeier believes his length and athleticism fit well.

But it's not only the large frame – Lehmeier says Kalis is "every bit of 6-8" – that makes Kalis a great tackle prospect, but also his knowledge of the game.

"He's seen a lot. He has the ability to recognize, diagnose and understand different fronts, different techniques and different

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.	
Prince Goldsby	LB	6-3	205	★★★★	Blue Spring (Mo.) South	
DJ Jacobs	DL	6-5	225	★★★★★	Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity	
Eli Johnson	S	6-3	200	★★★★	Cibolo (Texas) Steele	
Jimmy Kalis	OT	6-6	280	★★★★	Pittsburgh Central Catholic	
Brody McNeel	OT	6-5	285	★★★★	Richmond (Va.) Godwin	
Davis Seaman	IOL	6-4	290	★★★★	Columbus Bishop Watterson	
Angelo Smith	S	5-10	170	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna	
Wyatt Smith	DL	6-6	235	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas	
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	

ways people are playing him," Lehmeier said. "To be able to identify that stuff, to rely on past experiences and, in real time, make adjustments, I think that's a hard thing for high school kids. He did that last year as well as anybody.

"He had Kevin Brown (two-way player at Harrisburg High School last season) to go up against and some other guys that were really talented. I think Jimmy didn't just beat them with his brawn, he beat them with his brain. At that position, you want those guys to be cerebral, and I think he's the total package."

Kalis has had the chance over the last few years to go up against North Carolina signee Ashton Blatt in practice at Central Catholic, which Lehmeier said has only made both of them better since they couldn't take plays off in practice.

"His ability to apply himself in practice, the temperament he brings to the practice field, there's a lot of carryover to Friday nights," Lehmeier said. "Nothing he does out there is an accident."

### Seaman Looking Forward To Being A Buckeye

Ohio State's commitment from Columbus Bishop Watterson four-star offensive lineman Davis Seaman (6-4, 290) was the fifth pledge the Buckeyes have gotten from an O-lineman in the 2027 class.

For Seaman, it was the development that he sees happening in Columbus that convinced him that Ohio State was ultimately where he wanted to be.

"I just felt, especially after watching the draft, the development at Ohio State is just different," Seaman told BSB. "I kind of felt like I was going to pick Ohio State eventually anyways, so I might as well just not wait."

When he made the call to offensive line coach Tyler Bowen, Seaman said the second-year position coach was very happy to hear the news, as were others on the coaching staff.

"Coach Bowen always said he'd be really excited if I committed," Seaman said. "Coach Bowen, Coach (Charlie) Dickey and Coach (Ryan) Day were all really excited that I finally pulled the trigger and commit-

ted."

Playing his high school ball at Bishop Watterson, Seaman is nearby and grew up an Ohio State fan, and his entire family supports the Buckeyes. His proximity made it easy for him to visit the campus throughout the recruiting process.

So when he got to campus on his recruiting visits, he was already very familiar with the area. He also said that building relationships with the coaches on those visits was a valuable part of coming back so often.

"I've been there as a kid, so I feel like I know my way around, where I'm going," Seaman said. "Every time I grow closer with the coaches, and relationships are what it's all about, so that's important to me."

The recruiting visits weren't the only time Seaman has been on campus. Being close by, he had made the trip and looked around, while also going to football games.

He said that his family tailgates most of the games and that the 2017 victory over Penn State, when OSU scored 19 points in the fourth quarter to win 39-38 on the back of four passing touchdowns from J.T. Barrett, is the game that sticks out the most in his memory that he has been to.

When he finally got his offer from the Buckeyes on Oct. 5, it was an exciting day for both him and the rest of his family.

"It was definitely emotional. My whole family was probably more emotional than me," he said. "It was pretty special for sure, because I had been waiting on that offer for a while."

Now, Seaman is counting down the days until he gets to put on the scarlet and gray when he gets to campus.

### Four-Star DE Smith Commits To OSU

Ohio State made another addition to its 2027 class on May 17 when four-star edge rusher Wyatt Smith (6-6, 235) committed to the Buckeyes.

Smith is the 12th player in the class for the Buckeyes and joins Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star edge rusher DJ Jacobs (6-5, 235) as the only two defensive linemen committed to OSU this cycle so far.

Smith is the 78th-ranked player in the

country and the No. 11 defensive end in the class out of the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., powerhouse St. Thomas Aquinas High School, from which former Buckeyes Joey and Nick Bosa joined OSU. He is the third highest-ranked player pledged to Ohio State in the 2027 class.

Smith is the son of former Missouri defensive end Justin Smith, who starred for the Tigers from 1998 to 2000 before going on to a 14-year career in the NFL, playing seven years for both the Cincinnati Bengals and San Francisco 49ers.

With Jacobs ranked the fourth overall player in the country, OSU defensive line coach Larry Johnson is off to a great start this cycle.

Wyatt Smith chose Ohio State over Missouri, Notre Dame and Indiana.

### Four-Star LB Pledges To OSU

Ohio State made another addition to its 2027 recruiting class when Blue Spring (Mo.) South four-star linebacker Prince Goldsby (6-3, 205) committed to the Buckeyes on May 25.

Goldsby is the second linebacker commitment in the class for OSU, joining Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220).

Goldsby is a solid addition to the group, rated the No. 101 player in the country and the No. 7 linebacker, according to 247Sports composite. He chose the Buckeyes over Alabama, Missouri and Nebraska, among others.

Linebackers coach James Laurinaitis has done very well on the recruiting trail since he became a full-time coach at Ohio State, and Goldsby is yet another addition to the list. In the 2026 class, Laurinaitis brought in five-star Cincere Johnson as well as four-stars Braxton Rembert and CJ Sanna, and the year before, he landed Riley Pettijohn, TJ Alford and Eli Lee.

When he was on staff as a graduate assistant, Laurinaitis also played a big part in getting Payton Pierce to Columbus.

In his junior season, Goldsby had 83 total tackles, 22½ tackles for loss, 13½ sacks and a forced fumble in 10 games.

He is the 13th overall commitment in the 2027 class for the Buckeyes and the second in eight days after Smith's commitment.

### Five-Star WR Brown Shuts Down Recruitment

Ohio State seems to have its latest five-star wide receiver commitment locked in on being a Buckeye, with Jamier Brown announcing he shut down his recruitment.

Brown, who transferred to Big Walnut in Sunbury, Ohio, over the offseason, told reporters after the Under Armour Next camp at Pickerington (Ohio) North High School that he won't visit any other schools before he signs with the Buckeyes.

"I think time is just too close to just be playing around," Brown said. "I know where I want to go, and that's Ohio State, so I really just don't see any point in going anywhere else, honestly."

He had previously been considering making official visits to Miami (Fla.) and Oregon but now he says that he will be a Buckeye no matter what.

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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

**Ohio State added Columbus Bishop Watter-son four-star offensive lineman Davis Seaman (6-4, 290) to the 2027 class on April 27. What do you make of him as a prospect?**

"They have five offensive linemen committed right now, and he's the hardest one for me to evaluate of the five. I think 247Sports probably has it correct, although I might have Pittsburgh Central Catholic four-star offensive tackle Jimmy Kalis (6-8, 290) ahead of Liberty Center, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Kellen Wymer (6-5, 265). Those two are really good in my opinion. And then the bottom two with St. Clairsville, Ohio, three-star interior offensive lineman Mason Wilt (6-5, 295) and Richmond (Va.) Godwin three-star interior offensive lineman Brody McNeel (6-5, 285), I would throw those two back. That's just me. Then there's Seaman, and to me, he's in the middle there. He's going to be an inside guy for sure, and maybe he's a center.

"He's kind of a tweener. He's a brawler. He's a badass. He's just a tough interior guy. The question for me is going to be pass protection. How does he develop there? I know you can't always go by offer lists, but when you look at Seaman's offer list, where's Georgia? Where's Miami (Fla.)? I'm looking, I see Auburn, I see Cincinnati, I see Illinois, Kentucky. Does Ohio State recruit against any of those schools? The answer is no. They don't even consider those schools as viable rivals on the field or in recruiting, so that's a concern for me, too.

"He's an in-state guy, so Ohio State should know him better than anyone else knows him. When you evaluate him, he's better than the bottom two guys, for sure, and he might be as good as Kalis and Wymer. He was just hard for me to evaluate, but would I take him? Yes, hell yes."

**With five recruits already committed at the position, how much more do you think Ohio State will add to the offensive line in the 2027 class, if at all?**

"We cut kids now, so if I'm Mason Wilt or Brody McNeel, you better be working hard on your game, and you better get better, because they can replace both of those kids in the next week. This is not Jim Tressell's recruiting class, and it's not even what Urban Meyer did, so you can add more and keep those kids and try to develop them, or you can add more and tell them you need to move on. It's such a different era now that we've entered into with NIL and the portal, and the perfect example was last year at the end of the year, when you saw over 30 guys from Ohio State go into the portal. That was pretty shocking to see that much turnover.

"I could see them taking six or seven guys, hanging on to Wilt and McNeel, and trying to develop them, or you replace them within the same class, and tell them you wish them the best. It remains to be seen. We're still fairly new into the portal area."

**Ohio State also added Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star defensive end Wyatt Smith (6-6, 235) to the class recently. What do you make of him as a prospect?**

"(Former Ohio State defensive end) Sam Hubbard - that's who he is. I evaluated Sam. I can't believe that (Smith is) ranked as low as he is. He's a low four-star, which I do not understand. You watch that film, he's got like a (former Ohio State defensive end) Jack Sawyer motor, and he's got Sam Hubbard's body. He's a 6-6 kid who is 235 pounds, quick as a cat, yet he doesn't get pushed around. He plays at a tremendous high school, so he's being developed perfectly. That's almost like a small college program, St. Thomas Aquinas.

"He checks off every box that I would look for in

a player. There's only one thing that stuck out to me, and that's his offer list. It doesn't make sense when I see Missouri, Boston College, Georgia Tech, Indiana. Where's Alabama, where's Georgia, where's Florida State, where's Florida, Miami (Fla.)? Where are these schools? What am I missing? That makes me kind of think, 'Well, these guys know more than I do.' They live closer to that kid than I do. They're college coaches. I'm just a dumb recruiting reporter."

**Billy Fessler visited a few 2027 quarterbacks when he was on the road, even though Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220) is already committed to Ohio State. Do you believe Ohio State will add another QB, and do you believe that Edmunds will remain committed to OSU?**

"There's a saying that says, 'Watch what they do, not what they say.' Well, Ohio State can't say anything right now. You watch what they're doing. Something's going on there. They didn't do this with Tavien St. Clair. They didn't bring him in early, but then offer every quarterback in America. I don't know if they're telling (Edmunds) directly, but the signals are, 'You better find another school, brother, because we're going to bring someone in that we like better than you.' That's the way it looks to me.

"Does he stay in the class? I would probably say no, if they can get another, because you don't bring in two anymore. In Jim Tressell's time, you bring in two quarterbacks. There's nothing wrong with that. In these times, hell no. Why bring in two high school kids when you can go at the end of next season and get the SMU quarterback, who blossomed and you didn't know was going to be that good? You don't have to take two high school kids and try to develop them."

Brown has been committed to Ohio State since November 2024, and while there may have been questions about whether he would stick around after the departure of former wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, Brown never wavered and stuck with OSU.

Brown said that his recruitment has actually been shut down for a bit, but he had told only the Ohio State coaches about it.

"My recruitment's been shut down for a minute," Brown said. "I just haven't made it public. Me and Coach Day had a conversation, so it just felt great shutting down my recruitment, knowing how bad I still wanted to be there, knowing how bad Coach Day still wants me to be there and the staff. And I just can't wait to get up there and be great."

It has helped that since wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton took over in Hartline's place as the new position coach, he has been able to build a good relationship with Brown.

"We've been connecting very well since he's been here," Brown said. "He wants success bad for everybody that he coaches, and as great as he wants you to be, he wants to be great, too. So that's what I like about him."

As the No. 21 recruit in the 2027 class and the No. 4-ranked wide receiver by 247Sports composite rankings, Brown will be a strong addition to the roster when he gets to campus.

Of course, Brown isn't officially a Buckeye until he signs his name on the dotted line on signing day. Chris Henry Jr., who ended up sticking with Ohio State in December, said that he had shut his recruitment down much earlier than signing day, but his deci-

sion still came down to the final day of the early signing period.

### OSU Looking For Second '27 QB

Since BSB last went to press, the Buckeyes have done their due diligence on quarterbacks in the 2027 class.

They have had Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star signal caller Brady Edmunds (6-5, 220) in the fold since December 2024, when he pledged to OSU, but after spring practices, quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler was on the road checking in on other QBs in the class.

Fessler visited Marion (Mass.) Tabor Academy four-star Peter Bourque (6-4, 220), a former Michigan commitment who has since committed to James Franklin at Virginia Tech, as well as Omaha (Neb.) Millard South four-star Nebraska commit Trae Taylor (6-3, 192).

Also getting a visit from Fessler were Saraland, Ala., four-star Oklahoma commit Jamison Roberts (6-3, 190), Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson four-star Alabama commit Trent Seaborn (6-1, 200) and Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School four-star Ole Miss commit Keegan Croucher (6-4, 205).

There hadn't been any more updates on those quarterbacks when BSB went to press, but Edmunds seemed to be trying to keep his options open to some extent.

The OSU commit had not posted on social media about any other programs recruiting him until UCLA quarterbacks coach Dean Kennedy was at Huntington Beach High School to visit him. Then, Northwestern offensive coordinator Chip

Kelly also made the trip to visit Edmunds. Kelly was the offensive coordinator at Ohio State when Edmunds committed to the Buckeyes.

Edmunds told On3 that he remains committed to the Buckeyes but needed to keep his eyes open.

"I love Ohio State and can definitely still see myself there. I do think it's smart to protect myself, though, and stay out in front of this."

### Coaches Visit Gabriel Georges

As the offseason continues, Ohio State is still trying to build on some of the recent success it has had on the recruiting trail.

With coaches on the road to visit prospects, the Buckeyes made one recruit in the 2027 class a major priority. Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star running back David Gabriel Georges (6-0, 205), who has long been a top target for OSU, was visited not only by running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, but by nearly the entire offensive staff for the Buckeyes.

Locklyn was joined by offensive coordinator Arthur Smith, tight ends coach Keenan Bailey, offensive line coach Tyler Bowen and wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton at Gabriel Georges' high school.

Gabriel Georges recently named a top four of Georgia, Ohio State, Ole Miss and Tennessee, but the Buckeyes and Volunteers are thought to be ahead of the pack in his recruitment.

It's no surprise that OSU is going all out for the five-star. He is ranked the No. 10 player in the 2027 class, the No. 2 running back

and the top player in Tennessee, according to 247Sports' composite rankings. He finished his junior season at Baylor School with 1,756 yards and 27 touchdowns, averaging nearly 11 yards per carry.

There is a long way to go until the early signing period in December, but expect the Buckeyes' full-court press on Gabriel Georges to continue down to the wire. The five-star running back is set to commit on July 22.

### Official Visits Coming Up

June is an extremely busy time, and the Buckeyes are ready to host official visits throughout the month for 2027 prospects they are still trying to add to their next class. Prospects are listed on each date in order of their 247Sports composite rankings.

As BSB went to press, some official visits had already been taken.

The recruits who were on campus the weekend of May 29 were Gabriel Georges; Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon five-star defensive lineman Marcus Fakatou (6-6, 275); Jackson (Miss.) Academy four-star offensive tackle Caden Moss (6-5, 320); Charlotte (N.C.) Corvian Community four-star defensive lineman Nate Kamba (6-4, 300); Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star athlete Deontay Malone (5-11, 170); New Palestine, Ind., four-star tight end Mason Oglesby (6-4, 220); Lawrenceville, N.J., three-star tight end Sean Currie (6-7, 230); and Loganville (Ga.) Grayson three-star tight end Waylon Wooten (6-2, 300).

Continued On Page 18

# June Heavy On Recruiting Visits For OSU

Continued From Page 17

The weekend after, Ohio State was set to host a group that included Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Eric McFarland III (5-8, 177); Smith; Cibolo (Texas) Steele four-star safety Eli Johnson (6-3, 200); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star cornerback and Notre Dame commit Zayden Gamble (5-11, 190); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star cornerback Jaden Carey (6-0, 165); Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star running back Jayden Miles (6-2, 203); Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna three-star safety Angelo Smith (5-10, 170); and La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy three-star offensive tackle and Missouri commit Luke Injaychock (6-5, 285).

Then, the weekend of June 12, the Buckeyes were set to have another big group on campus. Coming to Columbus were Indianapolis Lawrence North five-star wide receiver Monshun Sales (6-5, 195); Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit five-star linebacker Kaden Henderson (6-2, 218); Garner, N.C., four-star linebacker Arosen Randle Jr. (6-3, 210);

Houston Langham Creek four-star linebacker and Texas Tech commit Jhadyn Nelson (6-3, 210); West Boca Raton, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jamar Thompson (6-3, 305); Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook four-star linebacker and OSU commit Quinton Cypher (6-2, 220); Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek four-star interior offensive lineman and UCLA commit Jackson Roper (6-5, 305); Gainesville, Ga., four-star running back Nigel Newkirk (5-11, 200); Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star cornerback Bruce Woods (6-2, 175); and Springfield (Va.) St. James four-star safety Kenaz Sullivan (6-1, 190).

Then, during the final June weekend of official visits, Ohio State was set to host Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley five-star cornerback John Meredith III (6-2, 175); Chesterfield (Va.) Lloyd C. Bird five-star defensive end Chris Whitehead (6-5, 230); Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon four-star defensive lineman Kasi Currie (6-5, 315); Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star offensive tackle Kelsey Adams (6-5, 293); Birmingham (Ala.) Ramsay four-star defensive lineman Karlos May (6-4, 305);

Edmunds; Cincinnati Moeller four-star offensive tackle Kal-El Johnson (6-7, 281); Norco, Calif., four-star wide receiver Blake Wong (6-1, 170); and Sarasota (Fla.) Booker four-star defensive lineman Maleek Lee (6-3, 270).

## Recruits Narrow Top Choices

When prospects narrowed down their offers since BSB last went to press, Ohio State was included on multiple lists.

For Prattville, Ala., four-star wide receiver Deshawn Hall (6-5, 185), the Buckeyes were inside his top seven. He also included Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Michigan, Penn State and Tennessee on that list. Hall is the No. 202 prospect in the country and the No. 25 wide receiver in the 2027 class.

Ohio State was also named by Fakatou as his top school. Fakatou talked with Greg Biggins of On3 recently and gave a top three.

"It's still Ohio State No. 1, Notre Dame is No. 2 and Georgia is No. 3," Fakatou said. "Texas and Oregon are right there as well, but those are still my top three going into the official visits. I know a lot can still

change, and every visit I've taken has been great."

Fakatou is ranked the No. 32 player in the country and the second-ranked defensive lineman in the 2027 class, so he would be a major addition for the Buckeyes if they are able to remain at the top.

The Buckeyes were also included in the top three for Pflugerville (Texas) Weiss four-star wide receiver Tre Moore (6-3, 200). Moore also included Miami (Fla.) and Washington in his top schools, and he will take an official visit to each of them. He is the No. 160 player in the country and the No. 21 wide receiver. Moore's visit date to OSU had not been revealed by the time BSB went to press, but he was set to visit Miami on May 29 and Washington on June 19.

One 2028 prospect has already started to narrow down his choices as well, with Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge five-star defensive end Jananie George (6-5, 245) down to his final six schools.

He will decide between Auburn, Florida, Miami, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Washington. George is considered the No. 6 player in the 2028 class and the No. 2 defensive end.

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

### 35 Years Ago — 1991

Defensive back Marlon Kerner, who would play football at Ohio State in the fall, wanted to follow in the shoes of ex-Buckeye greats Don Unverferth and John Frank, who starred on the gridiron while pursuing medical degrees. OSU tailback Robert Smith was chasing the same thing.

Kerner had these lofty goals because of the hard work he put in at Columbus Brookhaven, not only on the gridiron, but in the classroom as well, where he carried a 3.50 grade-point average and scored a 23 on his ACT.

"I didn't think I did well (on the ACT)," he said. "I took it and then I didn't hear about it for a long time. Then one day my counselor just came up and gave me my scores, and I looked at her and just came back into the classroom with this stupefied look on my face."

Kerner credited his mother, Brenda, with letting him keep his dreams of playing in the NFL alive, but only if academics were his first priority.

### 30 Years Ago — 1996

The number — and quality — of early verbal commitments for 1997 had given rise to a new debate about initiating an early signing period for football.

Basketball players were permitted to sign letters of intent prior to their season to get the recruiting chaos out of the way. Many football players were seeking the same type of relief by committing early.

"The opportunity was there and it takes a lot of pressure off of me about worrying about where I have to go to college and trying to impress scouts when they come to watch me," said Sidney, Ohio, defensive lineman Ben Pulfer, who had joined Cincinnati Elder linebacker Jason Ott in committing to OSU in mid-April.

"I hope I'll impress them anyhow. At least now I know I don't have to go out there and torture my body trying to impress them. I can worry about my team and just go out and have fun," Pulfer said.

### 25 Years Ago — 2001

Jim Tressel would not lead the Ohio State Buckeyes against Michigan for the first time as the OSU head coach until Nov. 24, but he already had secured one major victory over the Wolverines.

Instead of on the gridiron, though, his victory came on the recruiting trail, as highly sought quarterback Justin Zwick of Massillon (Ohio) Washington picked OSU over Michigan and a host of other schools during a May 30 announcement at a restaurant near his school.

"I feel that I have found a school that is great," Zwick told a crowd of over 100 media members, fans and friends. "It fits all the things that I've talked about."

"And that school will be The Ohio State University."

Just as he began to utter the words of his future school, Zwick casually reached below the podium and pulled out a Buckeye jersey with his No. 12 and his name already inscribed on the back.

### 20 Years Ago — 2006

One of the recruiting advancements instituted by Tressel since taking over at Ohio State in 2001 was the creation of Senior Advanced Camp.

Held separately from the university's all-positions camp, the advanced camp allowed coaches the chance to focus individual attention on rising seniors with legitimate chances for a Buckeye offer.

Nick Claytor was the only player known to hold a Buckeye offer who attended the camp.

The 6-6, 319-pound lineman prepped at Gainesville (Ga.) High School but actually made the trip to Columbus from Toledo, where he spent much of the month of May visiting his father and extended family before heading south the day after the OSU camp.

"Here, it's harder to go work out," he told BSB. "I've been eating grandma's food and stuff, so I've been getting a little bit bigger."

Claytor expected to get down to 305 pounds by football season in the fall. Even with the added weight, he posted a 26-inch vertical leap.

"Once I shed that weight, I'll probably be getting pretty high," he said. "Maybe 30 (inches)."

### 15 Years Ago — 2011

When Luke Fickell was named the interim coach for the 2011 football season, he inherited a seven-person recruiting class headlined by a pair of five-star recruits from Ohio. It took some serious work on his part, but both had publicly declared their plans to remain on board within 36 hours of Tressel's resignation.

Offensive tackle Kyle Kalis from Lakewood St. Edward and running back Bri'onte Dunn from Canton GlenOak were still planning on becoming Buckeyes when they could sign with the program in February.

Dunn had somewhat opened his recruitment in recent weeks as the program faced NCAA sanctions and an uncertain future. Rising on the list of potential suitors was Michigan, which had issued Dunn a scholarship offer and landed an unofficial on-campus visit.

Kalis had made up his mind.

"The only way I'd go to Ohio State is if Coach (Luke Fickell) is the coach," he told The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer.

### 10 Years Ago — 2016

Most class of 2017 quarterbacks had already found a home at that point in the recruiting cycle, but Ohio State remained in great position with two of the nation's best uncommitted prospects.

The Buckeyes were among the top choices for both Las Vegas Bishop Gorman's Tate Martell, the No. 1 quarterback and No. 12 overall prospect, and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Kellen Mond, the No. 11 quarterback and No. 115 overall prospect. Ohio State already had a commitment from Akron Hoban four-star prospect Danny Clark but was looking to take a second quarterback in 2017 to bolster depth with Torrance Gibson moving to receiver and the possibility of J.T. Barrett forgoing eligibility with a

good enough 2016 campaign.

Martell, who decommitted from Texas A&M on May 4, announced June 5 a final five of Ohio State, California, USC, Colorado and UCLA.

"I'm going to graduate early, so I'm going to have to get it done before January," he said. "I'll probably get it done after the season, I'm assuming, and probably have a top five or top seven between now and then. I'll check out those schools during the season, take my five official visits and do two unofficials if I need to. I'll pick at the end of the season and see where I feel comfortable."

### Five Years Ago — 2021

Four hundred forty-five days. That was how long the NCAA's recruiting dead period lasted before it finally came to a close on June 1.

With that gone, Ohio State was finally able to welcome recruits into Ohio Stadium and the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for the first time since March 13, 2020. It started with a two-day camp that opened on the first day of the month, primarily suited for prospects in the 2023 class.

There were plenty of big names in that opening group, including priority in-state targets such as five-star Pickerington Central safety Sonny Styles and four-star Findlay offensive lineman Luke Montgomery. Along with the large list of 2023 names, Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star defensive lineman Christen Miller and Merrillville, Ind., defensive lineman Kenneth Grant highlighted the handful of prospects from the 2022 class.

Ohio State also had a pair of linebacker commitments on campus from the start in Kettering (Ohio) Alter five-star C.J. Hicks and Marysville, Ohio, four-star Gabe Powers.

### One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State gained another commitment in its 2026 class when Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas pledged his services to the Buckeyes on May 12.

He was the 13th commit in the class for the Buckeyes and the second cornerback, joining Avon, Ohio, four-star Jakob Weatherspoon. Thomas chose Ohio State over Notre Dame, Michigan, Auburn, Texas A&M and USC, all of which he visited over the spring, giving co-defensive coordinator and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton yet another win in recruiting.

One of the reasons Thomas chose Ohio State was the coaching staff, which he had already been impressed with despite not being an official Buckeye yet. He said defensive coordinator Matt Patricia could see him playing either inside or outside for his defense.

"I stay in contact with Coach Walton and Coach Patricia all the time," Thomas told 247Sports. "Coach Patricia is a really good recruiter. I send him my film from my practices and training, and he coaches me on things. He says I can play the nickel/star in his defense or outside corner and guard the best wide receiver on the field."

## Asst. Director Of Rec. Strategy Leaving

After four years in Columbus, Ohio State's assistant director of recruiting strategy, Nick Murphy, announced that he is leaving the Buckeyes to pursue new opportunities.

Murphy graduated from Coastal Carolina in 2016 and earned a master's degree at Texas in 2018 before he took on a role as an offensive assistant at UCF that year. From there, he was a graduate assistant at Charlotte in 2019 and then was the director of on-campus recruiting for Minnesota in 2020 before returning to Charlotte for one more year.

Now, Day and general manager Mark Pantoni will look to replace Murphy as they try to put together another strong recruiting class.

## RJ Day Commits To Northwestern

Day's son, RJ Day, a three-star quarterback in the 2027 class, will soon be on the roster of a Big Ten foe after he committed to Northwestern on May 10.

RJ Day (5-11, 203) is a three-star quarterback out of Columbus St. Francis de Sales and is the No. 1,441 overall prospect in the class and the No. 90 quarterback.

Kelly was hired at Northwestern over the offseason, so Day will play for Kelly, just as Ryan Day did when he was in college at New Hampshire, where he started for three seasons from 1998-2001.

RJ Day started last season for DeSales and finished the year with 2,710 passing yards and 25 touchdowns, which were single-season school records. He was able to do so partly due to a 482-yard performance in a playoff win over Ashland.

Over his high school career, Day has accumulated 5,714 passing yards and 54 touchdowns, which has allowed him to earn 18 Division I offers. Those offers included Boston College, Cincinnati, Purdue, Syracuse and South Florida.

The Wildcats didn't get in on Day's recruitment until April 29, when they offered the quarterback. However, it didn't take long for Day to get to campus, taking an official visit over the weekend of May 8, which led to him committing to head coach David Braun.

Day will also be playing for quarterbacks coach Jerry Neuheisel, who joined Northwestern over the offseason after he spent eight years at UCLA, taking over playcalling duties last season and helping the Bruins go on a run midseason.

## Buckeyes Make More Offers

• **San Bernardino (Calif.) Cajon five-star offensive tackle Austin Attalah (6-8, 270)** – The Buckeyes extended an offer to Attalah on April 28 to enter the elite tackle's recruitment. He is considered the 25th-best prospect in the 2028 class and the second-ranked offensive tackle in the country by 247Sports composite rankings.

• **Chandler (Ariz.) Hamilton four-star safety Kacey Allen (6-1, 180)** – The Buckeyes offered Allen the same day as Attalah, becoming his 16th Division I scholarship offer to that point. Allen is the No. 331 player in the 2028 class and the No. 30 overall safety. In his sophomore season, Allen finished with 79 tackles, nine of which were for

loss, eight passes broken up and four interceptions, per 247Sports.

• **Rutherford, N.J., tight end Quinn Weber (6-5, 210)** – Ohio State tight ends coach Keenan Bailey got in the race for Weber on April 29 when he extended a scholarship offer to the 2028 tight end. Weber is currently unranked in the 2028 class, but with the Buckeyes now chasing after him, he could start to garner more attention.

• **Atlanta Mount Vernon Presbyterian three-star wide receiver Taurean Rawlins (6-0, 175)** – Wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton offered Rawlins on May 4, getting in on the recruitment of the 2027 prospect. Rawlins is the No. 478 player in the country and the No. 58 wide receiver. He holds 27 Division I offers to this point, which include Clemson, Georgia, Florida, Florida State, Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma and South Carolina.

• **Detroit Cass Technical five-star quarterback Donald Tabron II (6-4, 180)** – Fessler may not have been at the visit to see Gabriel Georges, but he was still busy on the recruiting trail. He got in on the recruitment of Tabron, who is ranked No. 30 in the 2028 class and the No. 3 quarterback. Tabron already holds 31 Division I offers, many of which are from Power Four programs.

• **Camden, N.J., four-star offensive tackle Eytan D'oleo (6-6, 330)** – D'oleo is the No. 276 player in the 2028 class and the No. 27 offensive tackle. He holds 12 Division I offers, which include Auburn, Boston College, Duke, Florida, Michigan, Penn State, Rutgers and Syracuse.

• **Camden, N.J., three-star defensive end Andre Robinson (6-6, 225)** – Robinson is ranked No. 348 in the 2028 class and the No. 35 edge rusher. He holds 14 Division I offers, which include Auburn, Boston College, Duke, Florida, Michigan, Penn State, Rutgers and Syracuse.

• **Glen Ellyn (Ill.) Glenbard West three-star tight end Brady Johnson (6-3, 220)** – Johnson is committed to Northwestern and has been since Feb. 4, but with the Buckeyes' tight end options in the 2027 class starting to look slim, they got in on his recruitment. Johnson is the No. 1,278 player in the country and the No. 67 tight end.

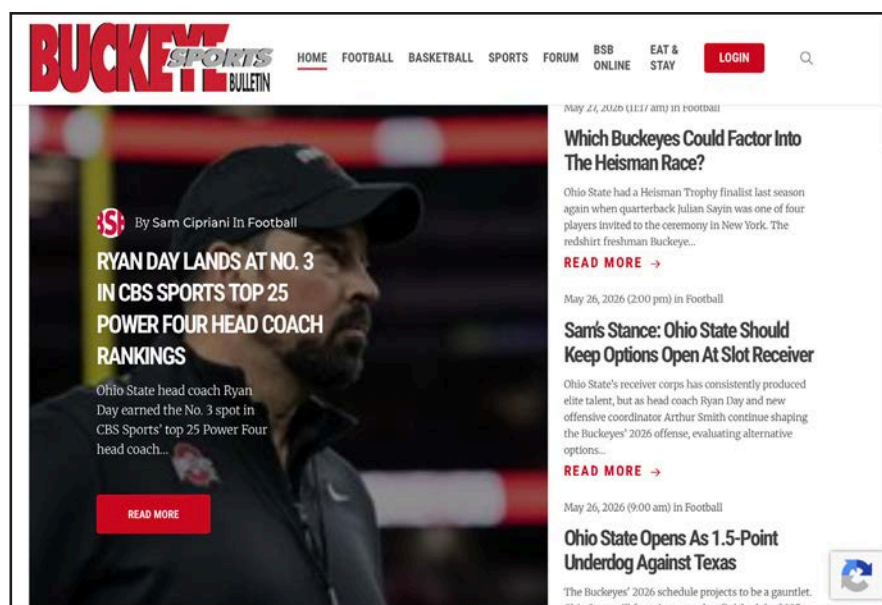
• **Orem, Utah, four-star offensive tackle Taio Fano (6-5, 235)** – Fano is the younger brother of Cleveland Browns first-round draft pick Spencer Fano, who went to Utah, and Utah defensive end Logan Fano. The Utes or former Utah head coach, now Michigan coach, Kyle Whittingham, could have a leg up on the youngest Fano since his two older brothers played for him. Taio Fano is the No. 75 player in the 2028 class and the No. 10 offensive tackle.

## Other Notes And Tidbits

• Libertyville, Ill., four-star tight end Brock Williams (6-5, 215), who had long been a target for the Buckeyes, committed to Texas on May 15, choosing the Longhorns over OSU and Georgia.

• Cincinnati Princeton four-star cornerback Monsanna Torbert Jr. (5-10, 158) decommitted from Indiana on May 18. Tom Loy of 247Sports reported in April that Torbert was strongly considering Ohio State, Michigan and Notre Dame, so the Buckeyes are back in the race for the No. 139-ranked player in the 2027 class and the No. 16 cornerback.

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# Buckeye Rookies Make Good First Impressions

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Praise is abundant for Ohio State's top four picks from the 2026 NFL draft in April, as the teams and the media get a closer look at the potential stars.

OTAs (organized team activities) bring the rookies and veterans together for a few days of workouts after the draft. Think of them as the NFL's truncated version of the college spring practices. Just as the curious get a first look at early enrollees on campus, the draftees are under a microscope, and by most accounts, the former Buckeyes met or exceeded expectations.

Wide receiver Carnell Tate, No. 4 to the Tennessee Titans, is seen as a centerpiece to revive the bedraggled franchise. The next pick, linebacker Arvell Reese, is fitting in nicely with the New York Giants and new coach John Harbaugh.

Linebacker Sonny Styles, who went to the Washington Commanders at No. 7, had coach Dan Quinn excited about utilizing his superb athleticism, while all must be going well for safety Caleb Downs, 11th to Dallas, because the biggest consternation among Cowboys fans is what number he will have on his jersey.

## Receivership

Tate made a good impression during the OTA session on May 21 with two red-zone touchdown catches, another of 50-plus yards and a one-handed grab.

"He's had a pretty good week," Titans receiver Wan'Dale Robinson said. "He didn't have all three practices like (May 21), but today he had a really good day and was just making some incredible catches."

Titans reporter Jim Wyatt filed a glowing recap of Tate's week.

"I can't go any further without mentioning Tate, who had a memorable, three-touchdown day,"

Wyatt wrote. "Tate got behind the defense on several occasions and hauled in would-be touchdowns. Tate went up high in the back of the end zone on one play and snagged the ball out of the air. Just as impressive to me was the strength of Tate's hands – there were several occasions when a defender was at the football at the same time as Tate, and when he secured it, there was no knocking it loose."

Titans quarterback Cam Ward is enthusiastic about adding Tate to the arsenal.

"He has great hands and wins in man coverage," he said. "He's a strider. He's a guy who can create versus off (coverage), versus press (coverage). He really doesn't drop anything. So we just have to continue to find ways to get him the ball early, work on our timing."

"For a rookie coming in at his position, I think this is one of the best offenses (Tate) can be in, just because he's going to be coached, but he's not going to get over-coached," Ward said. "He's going to still be able to play football how he sees it. He listens to the quarterback, and he's going to be

a great target for me."

Tate averaged 43.3 yards on his 10 deep receptions (20 yards or more downfield) last season for the Buckeyes, with six going for touchdowns.

"I just think he'll have an explosive year because he'll get a lot of one-on-one matchups," Ward said. "That's what we want. We want guys to come down and play man because we think we can beat them. I think just him in this system, he's going to have a lot of freelance within his routes, feel spaces to sit down."

Tate likes the sound of the challenge.

"In the NFL, you have to know how to win against press coverage," he said. "That's all it's about. You have to take that very personal."

"The team is going to rely on you to go out there and win that one-on-one matchup with the top corner on the other side of you."

There's an interesting dynamic at play with new offensive coordinator Brian Daboll. Malik Nabers caught 109 passes for 1,204 yards and seven TDs as a rookie when Daboll was head coach and offensive play caller for the New York Giants. Gabe Davis averaged 17.1 yards on 35 receptions with seven touchdowns in 2020 during his rookie season in Buffalo when Daboll was the team's offensive coordinator.

And Brandon Marshall made 81 catches for 1,214 yards and six touchdowns in 2011 in Daboll's first season as the Miami Dolphins' OC. Another receiver on that team was Brian Hartline, who just happened to be Tate's position coach at Ohio State.

ESPN's Mike Clay projects Tate for 1,065 receiving yards and five touchdowns, which would lead the 2026 draft class at the position.

"The quarterback is a pretty damn important piece," Titans coach Robert Saleh said. "So, we're doing everything we can to help (Ward) and surround him with players who can get the ball in their hands and go score."

"Carnell was by far the top receiver on our board. It was a very easy decision to make."

Titans general manager Mike Borgonzi agreed.

"Tate is a bigger, vertical guy with the ability to play big downfield," he said. "That's the one thing, all these contested catches downfield, his ability to go up and catch the football, contort his body in certain ways. I think it's going to be great for Cam."

There's one dissenter of Tate's high draft position. Nabers was doing a live program for Bleacher Report during the draft and called out Tate.

When asked if he saw Tate being the No. 1 receiver, Nabers was clear, "No. I don't see him being a No. 1. He hasn't been a No. 1 on the team that he has been on."

"He's a very talented player. He's going to do tremendous in Coach Daboll's offense, but I don't think this is a draft to take a receiver that high. That's high for a receiver."

Tate was behind Marvin Harrison Jr., then Jeremiah Smith, so it was no shame in not being the top at OSU target as Tampa Bay Buccaneers receiver and former Buckeye Emeka Egbuka pointed out on the "Up and Adams" show.

Egbuka was in the program with the likes of first-round picks Harrison, Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

"That was the same talk about me when I was coming out of the draft," Egbuka said. "It's all semantics."

## Putting Pieces Together

Reese was a highly thought-of draftee, and the Giants were thrilled that he was available. Harbaugh told an annual town hall meeting on May 18 that Reese "is going to be a star in this league for many years to come."

It also might have been a dig at the New York Jets selecting edge rusher David Bailey from Texas Tech at No. 2 instead of Reese.

Sports Illustrated's Justin Melo said the pressure is on Reese, not due to potential, but because his role on the defense is undefined as to whether he will be a pass rusher or an off-ball linebacker.

"The New York Giants took a best player approach when they selected Arvell Reese," Melo wrote. "The team-prospect fit was initially odd, considering Reese was expected to transition from linebacker to full-time pass rusher. The Giants are loaded at edge with last year's first-round pick Abdul Carter, Brian Burns, and, for now, Kayvon Thibodeaux. That means the former Ohio State standout will be staying in an off-ball role. From Reese's developmental plan to usage on defense, there's some pressure to prove all parties involved can make this work."

## Sonny Days

ESPN's Clay forecasts Reese to finish second among all rookies in total tackles in 2026, with 116, compared to 123 for Styles. The latter number would be sixth among rookies over the past decade.

Not bad for Styles, who was recruited as the No. 2 high school safety in the country. He was converted into a linebacker after his sophomore year.

"I think when you're playing linebacker, it's just instinctual," Styles told the Washington media. "You can't play like a robot and try to calculate every move. I think you just have to feel it."

Commanders coach Dan Quinn was effusive in praising Styles during a recent appearance on the "Rich Eisen Show."

"I think it's rare. This type of linebacker – the athletic traits, the speed, the size, the length, it's not an every-year player," Quinn said. "I'm a developmental coach."

"I can't wait to coach him. He's hungry for it. He wants to improve. Seeing his first couple years at DB and then shifting down to linebacker at the start of the 2024 season, I just felt like this guy's going to take off. Reps at the position, and like just seeing it more and more, I cannot wait to get rolling with him."

Quinn added, "He has such unique traits to him. And so, we will play in a lot of zone where we will have vision to the QB and you can imagine this type of speed, this type of length, to be able to close to the ball."

"He's got the football acumen because of his time at safety. The coverage part of his game is intact and so to see him unleashed in some new ways, that's going to be something that I very much look forward to being a part of."

## Take A Number

Like the Giants and Reese, the Cowboys felt fortunate to be able to draft Downs when he fell to them.

"He's a multiplier. He's going to make other people better," said Will McClay, Cowboys VP of player personnel.

Downs has simple goals: "I'm looking to make an impact and do a lot of things on the field. So we've got to go make something happen."

"I think it's just being able to make plays in all facets of the game. Whether that's near the line of scrimmage or in the deep part of the field, I feel like I could do it all, and it will be a great relationship to be able to do that with the Cowboys."

Downs showed up on the first day of camp wearing No. 18, a departure from his No. 2 for the Buckeyes. Social media, no surprise, was critical, noting a star defensive back shouldn't be wearing a number in the teens.

As of now, cornerback Cobie Durant holds No. 2, so Downs switched from 18 to 13, and Downs explained the change on the "Downs 2 Business" podcast with his brother, Indianapolis Colts wide receiver Josh Downs.

"I mean, it was Odell (Beckham Jr.), but defensive-wise, it was (New York Giants safety) Malachi Moore," Downs said. "Shout-out to Malachi. When he was at 'Bama his freshman year, watching that, when I was like a freshman in high school, I was like, oh, that's tough. Thirteen, that's smooth."

Some fans think he should get a number in the 20's if he can't obtain 2, so he could join legendary Cowboys defensive backs such as Darren Woodson (28), Deion Sanders (21), Mel Renfro (20), Everson Walls (24), and Cornell Green (28).

Josh Downs is happy that his younger brother tossed 18.

"Our equipment manager here (in Indianapolis) was like, 'Bro, tell your brother not to wear number 18,'" Josh Downs said. "When I see 18, I'm thinking like Peyton Manning! So, I can't even see a DB in it."

The Downs' father, Gary Downs, said No. 2 is still a possibility, but it's a lot of chatter about nothing. "(Caleb) said none of it matters. He's got to play regardless. When it comes to ball, it's got to be about football. It's not going to be about social media, not going to be about marketing. He understands it's about proving himself."



Arvell Reese



Carnell Tate



Sonny Styles



Caleb Downs

# Mobley To Return To OSU For Junior Year

Ohio State was officially able to retain another important player for the 2026-27 season, with Ohio State announcing on May 18 that shooting guard John Mobley Jr. will return for his junior year with the team.

## COURT REPORT Greg Wilson

Mobley originally entered his name into the NBA draft while keeping his college eligibility, and after likely not getting the interest that he would have wanted, he will be a Buckeye for at least one more year.

Mobley has been a big piece of head coach Jake 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).



John Mobley Jr.

Mobley joins Amare Bynum as starters who will be back for next season, while the other three spots left by Bruce Thornton, Devin Royal and Christoph Tilly will be up for grabs.

The Buckeyes will be adding freshmen Anthony Thompson, Alex Smith and Vuk Lazarevic to the roster next year as well and went into the portal for Curtis Givens III, Jimmie Williams, Andrija Jelavic and Justin Pippen.

### NCAA Tournament Expands To 76 Teams

The NCAA Tournament will be expanding to 76 teams beginning with the 2026-27 season for both men's and women's basketball, according to a May 7 report from Matt Norlander of CBS Sports. Norlander reported that there wasn't a single vote against expansion.

The NCAA had been considering expansion from 68 teams, and just two weeks before the vote, it was reported that it was likely that this would happen before the start of next season. Now, NCAA officials voted to finalize the expansion, agreeing with the media partners of the tournament on updated media contracts.

In the expanded tournament, eight teams will be added to what was called the "First Four" play-in round, and there will be more play-in games. The play-ins will now include 24 teams playing 12 games over two days.

The winners of those games will move on to join the 52 teams that will already be in the traditional first round held on Thursday and Friday after Selection Sunday. The first

12 games will take place on Tuesday and Wednesday after Selection Sunday.

The opening round will include both at-large opponents and automatic bids from conference tournament winners. All of the 16 seeds and half of the 15 seeds will be in the first 24 teams, while the final 12 teams will be a mixture of 11, 12 and possibly 13 seeds.

### Home And Home With UConn Scheduled

The Ohio State men's basketball team has added a nonconference game for its next two seasons, with 2026 NCAA Tournament runner-up UConn on the schedule.

The first of the two games will be at UConn for the 2026-27 season before the Huskies head to Columbus for a rematch in the 2027-28 season.

The Huskies are just over two years removed from winning their last national title under head coach Dan Hurley.

The last time Ohio State matched up with UConn was Dec. 10, 2016, when the Buckeyes topped the Huskies 64-60 behind 33 combined points from Trevor Thompson and JaQuan Lyle. The year before that game, UConn topped Ohio State 75-55, the largest margin of victory between the two teams.

This will be the sixth time the two teams have matched up against each other, with UConn leading the all-time series 3-2.

The Buckeyes are set to open the 2026-27 season in Salt Lake City against BYU, have a road game scheduled against Notre Dame to finish the latter half of a home-and-home series, and play Kansas in the CBS Sports Classic at Madison Square Garden.

### Diebler Brings On Former NBA Coach

Ohio State has added an experienced coach to its staff to replace Joel Justus, who left for Vanderbilt in March Mike Wells, who was an assistant coach in the NBA for over two decades for six franchises, is joining the Buckeyes for the 2026-27 season.

Most recently, Wells was a head coach in Australia's National Basketball League (NBL) for the Adelaide 36ers, but he recently stepped down from that role to return to the United States. Wells was able to lead the 36ers to the NBL Championship Series last season.

Wells began his coaching career in his hometown of Mount Vernon, Ohio, as an assistant at Mount Vernon Nazarene University, where he played college basketball. Then, in 1994, he started with the Rockets, where he was through the 2003-04 season.

He also coached with the Los Angeles Lakers (2004-05), San Antonio Spurs (2005-09), Washington Wizards (2009-11), Utah Jazz (2014-22) and Charlotte Hornets (2023-24). He made other stops in the college game as an assistant with George Mason (2011-13) and South Florida (2013-14).

Ohio State's assistant coaches now consist of Wells, Dave Dickerson, Luke Simons, Jamall Walker and Brian Walsh.

### Strength And Conditioning Coach Leaving Program

For the first time since the 2016 season, Ohio State will be without strength and conditioning coach Quadrian Banks, who is leaving the program after nine years, according to

multiple reports.

Banks started with the Buckeyes in 2017 on former head coach Chris Holtmann's staff after working with the NFL's Indianapolis Colts as a performance and conditioning analyst. Before that, he was an assistant strength and conditioning coach for the Philadelphia Eagles.

"My family and I just have an overwhelming appreciation for every student-athlete that has come through the doors over these past eight-plus years," Banks told The Columbus Dispatch, which first reported the news. "I'm extremely grateful for both the men's basketball and spirit staff members supporting me over the years. Brutus, men's hoops, and THE women of Ohio State cheer will forever hold a place in my heart."

### Thornton Preparing For Draft

Thornton was invited to the NBA combine since BSB last went to press and participated in the event, hoping to hear his name called in the NBA draft in late June.

The all-time leading scorer at Ohio State measured 6-0, 223 pounds, with a wingspan of 6-5 and a standing reach of 8 feet.

In the combine shooting drills, Thornton performed well. Shooting off the dribble, Thornton made 20 of 30 attempts, and he knocked down 17 of 25 shots in the three-point star drill, in which the player shoots from five different spots on the floor. His 17 makes were tied for sixth best of 73 prospects at the event.

Thornton made 15 of 27 attempts in the three-point side drill, which evaluates a player's ability to shoot off the catch. He made just 10 of 25 shots in the spot-up drill, however.

Certainly, Thornton's body of work at Ohio State will have more of an impact on his draft stock. He finished his four-year college career with 15.9 points per game, 4.0 assists and 3.7 rebounds. Those numbers were helped by a senior season of 19.9 points, 5.1 rebounds and 3.9 assists per game.

On May 10, the first day of the combine, ESPN published a full two-round mock draft that had Thornton being selected with the 55th overall pick by the New York Knicks. After the combine, ESPN's full mock draft had Thornton being chosen 59th overall, the penultimate pick of the draft, by the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Many mock drafts have Thornton going the entire 60 picks unselected.

"I'm an everyday guy, a team-first guy," Thornton said when asked at the combine what an NBA team would be getting from him. "I understand the common goal we have for that year. I play this game to win the whole thing, so that's just my goal every time I step on the court."

### 2027 Guard Schedules Official Visit

Ohio State is one of three teams that will get an official visit from Montverde (Fla.) Academy four-star combo guard Oneal Delan-

cy (6-2, 165).

It won't be Delancy's first time on campus. Since being offered by the Buckeyes in July, he has been to Columbus multiple times for unofficial visits, and OSU has been able to stay in the race enough to get him back on June 22 for an official visit.

The other two programs that already have an official visit scheduled with Delancy are Houston on June 5 and Florida on June 10.

Delancy is ranked the No. 50 prospect in the class, the No. 8 combo guard and the No. 8 player in Florida.

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes had one recruit committed in the 2027 class. Mouth of Wilson (Va.) Oak Hill Academy five-star combo guard LJ Smith (6-4, 180) has been pledged to OSU since Nov. 20.

### Henry Trying To Recruit Brother

Chris Henry Jr. of the Ohio State football team and Seini Henry of the women's basketball team have apparently been trying to help out Diebler and his recruiting efforts.

Chandler (Ariz.) Compass Prep five-star small forward Demarcus Henry (6-7, 190) is the brother of those two current Buckeye athletes, and he recently told Rivals that they are trying to get him to join the other Henrys in Columbus.

"They want me to come with them to Ohio State," Henry told Rivals. "They talk to me about it all the time. I tell them I'm just trying to do what's best for me and find the best situation. I'm just going to wait and see what's the best situation that's going to get me to the next level, so I've got to keep my options open and see what's the best situation."

Henry is ranked the 15th overall player in the 2027 class and the fifth-best small forward, according to 247Sports composite rankings.

The Buckeyes will have some tough competition in trying to land the youngest Henry sibling, with basketball powerhouses Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina and UConn also extending offers to the five-star.

However, there could be some advantage to both of his siblings already being at Ohio State. Henry did say that the Buckeyes are still on his radar.

"Ohio State is still an option, but I'm really open to everything still," Henry stated. "I'm looking at every program, just trying to find the best fit for me and my future."

### Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State's game time for its Dec. 19 matchup against Kansas in the CBS Sports Classic was announced on May 21. The Buckeyes and Jayhawks will match up at Madison Square Garden at noon, while a game between Kentucky and North Carolina will immediately follow at 2:30 p.m. the same day.

- Cincinnati Princeton four-star shooting guard Kameron Mercer (6-5, 200) committed to Cincinnati on May 21, choosing the Bearcats over Ohio State, Louisville, Maryland and Xavier. Mercer is the No. 34 player in the 2028 class and the No. 3 shooting guard, according to 247Sports composite rankings.

# Spartans President Leaves For Clemson

Michigan State president Kevin Guskiewicz departed from the Big Ten to take the same position at Clemson on May 27.

## BIG TEN NOTES Bobby Gorbett

Guskiewicz was appointed Michigan State's president in late 2023 before officially stepping into that role on March 4, 2024. Guskiewicz oversaw the firing of former head coach Jonathan Smith and the hiring of former Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald in late 2025.

"Today, President Kevin M. Guskiewicz shared that he will be leaving MSU to become the next president of Clemson University," Michigan State wrote in a statement. "Over the past several years, he has helped lead important progress across our university, strengthening student success initiatives, advancing research and innovation, expanding community partnerships and reinforcing MSU's land-grant mission.

"We are grateful for the leadership, energy and commitment that President Guskiewicz and Amy (Guskiewicz) have brought to the Spartan community, and we thank them for the many relationships and memories built during their time in East Lansing."

In a statement directed toward the Spartan community, Guskiewicz seemed to indicate that the behavior of certain trustees on Michigan State's board may have played a role in his departure from the university.

"Effective university leadership requires a shared commitment to collaboration, trust and a forward-looking vision. While many across this university community have embraced that spirit, it has become increasing-

ly clear that there are differing perspectives within the Board of Trustees regarding how best to move MSU forward," Guskiewicz wrote. "At times, too much energy has been spent revisiting past conflicts and internal disagreements rather than focusing collectively on the opportunities and aspirations ahead of us.

"While I firmly believe we are all better when there is a diversity of viewpoints informing decisions, our ability to make meaningful progress is hampered when disagreements move from offering alternative perspectives into publicly undermining decisions and putting personal interests above the best interests of the university and our faculty, staff and students. What is perhaps most troubling is the actions of some to abuse their access to privileged and confidential information to misrepresent facts, manipulate situations and selectively use and leak that information to promote personal agendas."

Guskiewicz accepted the position at Clemson and signed a five-year contract that includes a base pay of \$1.2 million per year, despite being offered a salary of \$2 million to remain the president of Michigan State.

### Meyer Supports U-M Hiring Whittingham

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer approved of Michigan's latest head coaching hire.

During an appearance on "The Script," a podcast hosted by former Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones, former Ohio State running back Beanie Wells and ABC6's Dave Holmes, the three-time national champion gave the Wolverines props for hiring his former assistant and former Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham.

"He's 66 years old, but he has a 50-year-old body and mind," Meyer said. "And then, after we talked for about 20 minutes, my comment was, 'That's a perfect fit. I get it. Of all the people in the United States of America who they should call, it's you.'

"I know what he stands for. I know he's about doing the right thing. It's about toughness, it's about line of scrimmage, it's about academics. He's about the right stuff. And they got a great one."

Meyer knows Whittingham about as well as any coach or former coach in America. The pair coached together when Meyer was the head coach at Utah from 2003-04. Whittingham was Meyer's defensive coordinator and linebackers coach during those seasons and helped the Utes have an undefeated season in 2004.

Whittingham then took over for Meyer when he departed to take the Florida job after the undefeated season and coached the Utes from 2005 to 2025. Whittingham had a record of 177-88 as the leader of the program.

Although he had kind words for the hire of Whittingham, Meyer did not speak glowingly about the Michigan program. In fact, Meyer said he has lost respect for the program over the last few seasons, during which time the team has been riddled with coaching turnover and was under investigation by the NCAA regarding a scandal relating to illegal sign-stealing committed within

the program.

"I've said this many times: Name another person who respects (Michigan) more than I do," Meyer said. "And I'm including, probably, some people who have gone there. That's how much I respect that school. That's why we worked so hard to beat them. I know their history. I was friends with Bo Schembechler, I was friends with Lloyd Carr, Gary Moeller – the respect I have for that school academically, the school as a football program.

"I'll tell you, it's taken a little bit of a hit, though. What's gone on in the last four or five years, I lost a little respect. I know this is going to make some headlines, but the nonsense that has gone on up there, that's not the Wolverine team or program that – I mean, when I started hearing about all the violations and then, the most recent stuff. They hired the right guy to get them back."

### McCullum, Underwood Sign Extensions

Two basketball head coaches are set to stay in the Big Ten for the foreseeable future. Iowa head coach Ben McCollum and Illinois head coach Brad Underwood each signed extensions in May.

McCollum's new deal will keep him under contract in Iowa City through the 2031-32 season.

McCollum, whose salary is set to increase from \$3.35 million to \$4.35 million in 2026-27, took Iowa to the Elite Eight in his first year as the leader of the basketball program. Despite being just a No. 9 seed in the NCAA Tournament, the Hawkeyes won a first-round game over No. 8 seed Clemson before pulling off upsets over No. 1 Florida and No. 4 Nebraska.

Eventually, the Hawkeyes were eliminated by No. 3 Illinois, but it was their first appearance in the Elite Eight since 1987. McCollum previously coached at Drake and Northwest Missouri State. McCollum led Northwest Missouri State to four Division II national championships as the program's head coach from 2009 to 2024.

Underwood, the Fighting Illini's leading man, was also extended through the 2031-32 season, but the contract could run through the 2035-36 season depending on his team's performance. His deal included a \$2.5 million signing bonus as well as annual retention bonuses that start at \$2.12 million.

Illinois had its furthest NCAA Tournament run under Underwood last year. The Fighting Illini went 28-9 and made it to the Final Four for the first time since 2005.

Underwood is 193-110 in his nine years as Illinois' head coach

### Johnson Declares For NBA Draft

A key member of the national championship-winning Michigan basketball team is headed to the NBA. ESPN's Jeff Borzello reported on May 19 that former Wolverine forward Morez Johnson Jr. was keeping his name in the NBA draft set to take place June 23-24.

Johnson, who spent just two years at the collegiate level, playing for both Illinois and Michigan, earned second-team All-Big Ten

honors last year. The 6-9 forward was one of several key additions for the Wolverines out of the transfer portal last year.

Appearing in all 40 games for the Wolverines, Johnson averaged 13.1 points, 7.3 rebounds and 1.2 assists per game while making 62.3 percent of his field-goal attempts. Like many Wolverines, Johnson played well in the NCAA Tournament. He scored at least 10 points in five of the Wolverines' six wins on their way to the title.

It doesn't come as a huge surprise that Johnson declared for the NBA draft since he is widely predicted to be selected within the top 20 picks of the first round.

Johnson isn't the only player Michigan will lose to the draft. Forward Yaxel Lendeborg and center Aday Mara are also likely to be selected in the first round in June.

The Wolverines are still expected to have a great season in 2026-27. Over the offseason, head coach Dusty May signed another transfer-portal class that ranks in the top 10 nationally.

### Nebraska AD Will Be Patient With Rhule

Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule hasn't gotten out to the start he may have envisioned as the leader of the Cornhuskers, but his boss appears to be giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Nebraska athletic director Troy Dannen told ESPN on May 20 that he wanted to give Rhule, who has not won more than seven games in a single season at Nebraska, the time to turn the program around.

"One of the things Nebraska has done that's harmed itself is being too quick to react when things didn't happen soon enough instead of giving someone who is by definition a program builder the chance to actually build a program," Dannen said. "That's different than inheriting a program that won 10 and then winning 11 the next year.

"It's hard. Especially when Matt walked into a program that hadn't been to a bowl game in 10 years. By definition, that's one of the bottom end of the Power Four programs he walked into. I think he's done a great job getting us from A to B. The next hurdle is C."

Nebraska had all sorts of success under legendary head coach Tom Osborne in the 1990s. The Cornhuskers claimed three national championships from 1994-97 but in recent years haven't come close to replicating that success.

From 2002 to 2022, the Cornhuskers didn't finish a single season ranked inside the top 10 of The Associated Press' final rankings. Rhule took over as the program's head coach for the 2023 season after former head coach Scott Frost had a losing record in each of his five seasons.

Rhule has certainly improved Nebraska, but he is still just 19-19 over three seasons as the program's head coach.

Dannen said Rhule has the right support to take Nebraska to the next level as a program.

"I think he's got the staff and the roster," he said. "Everything around the program that needs to be there, from the board to the president and the donors, everybody being in alignment, we do have that, which gives



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**Riley Confident USC Ready For Revival**

USC head coach Lincoln Riley is also trying to awaken a dormant college football power. Riley is in his fifth season as the head coach of the Trojans, and his program has struggled somewhat since transitioning to the Big Ten conference. The Trojans are just 11-7 against Big Ten foes since joining the conference for the 2024 season.

Still, the Trojans have appeared to take some steps both on and off the field over the last 365 days. USC finished last season 9-4 and was included in the AP's final rankings at No. 20.

Riley also managed to sign the No. 1-ranked recruiting class in the country with a 32-man class that included three five stars and nine players ranked inside the top 100 of 247Sports' final composite rankings.

“We have absolutely taken steps now,”

Riley said at the Big Ten spring meetings. “Honestly, now it's just time to go do it. It's time. The program's ready for it.”

Riley, who took over at USC after a successful run as Oklahoma's head coach from 2017-21, said his optimistic outlook is in part due to improved depth in the trenches, something his previous Trojan teams seemingly lacked.

Previously in the offseason, Riley discussed how he had high expectations for his program in the immediate future. At the Big Ten spring meetings, he emphasized he still has high hopes for USC.

“I caught some flak for saying that I thought we had opened up a window, but it's just true,” Riley said. “It's how I feel. And I feel like I've got a little bit of credibility in terms of having been part of some places that did that at a pretty high level. So I have at least a little bit of an idea of what I'm talking about.”

In addition to adding a very talented re-

cruiting class, Riley hired decorated coach Gary Patterson as his defensive coordinator. Patterson, the head coach at TCU from 2000 through 2021, hopes to improve a USC defense that finished last season 51st nationally in scoring, allowing 23.0 points per game.

“I've told people, there was almost like a feeling when you first got here, you're standing in front of a dam and there's just leaks, and you plug one leak and another one pops,” Riley said. “It's not perfect, but there's not many leaks anymore.”

**Michigan Signs Charles Woodson Jr.**

Early on in his tenure, Whittingham is off to a solid start as a recruiter. The Wolverines' 2027 recruiting class currently ranks 14th nationally with 13 pledges. One of the Wolverines' latest additions to the class is Orlando (Fla.) Lake Noona three-star cornerback Charles Woodson Jr. (5-11, 173),

who committed on May 15.

Woodson, who also had offers from other programs such as Arkansas, Georgia Tech and Florida State, is the son of legendary Michigan defender and Heisman-Trophy winner Charles Woodson Sr.

Woodson Sr. played at Michigan from 1995-97, earning All-Big Ten honors after every season he spent in Ann Arbor. He went on to have a storied NFL career. After being selected with the No. 4 overall pick in the 1998 NFL draft, he played for the Oakland Raiders from 1998 to 2005 and again from 2013 to 2015. He was also with the Green Bay Packers from 2006 to 2012 and helped lead the franchise to a win in Super Bowl XLV.

Woodson Jr. is ranked the No. 805 player in the country, the No. 82 safety and the No. 75 player from the state of Florida.

**From The Pages Of BSB**

**40 Years Ago — 1986**

Ohio State University president Edward Jennings would ask the NCAA Presidents Commission later in the year to change its rules to make freshmen ineligible for Division I football and men's basketball.

Jennings, who represented the Big Ten on the NCAA commission, was asked to carry the proposal to the NCAA commission after league officials agreed to it during a two-day conference at Indiana. The NCAA commission was set to meet in December.

The Big Ten presidents also discussed the possibility of pursuing the issue with other conferences if the NCAA refused to declare freshmen ineligible in all of the nation's Division I conferences.

According to John Ryan, president of Indiana University, the Big Ten would consider unilaterally banning freshmen from playing.

“We'd rather do it at the NCAA level,” said Ryan. “Our vote was to try that. But if we don't succeed with that, our view is to still look at it.”

**35 Years Ago — 1991**

Experience and heart are valuable commodities on a championship team, and that was never more true than with the Big Ten champion Ohio State baseball team.

While there were only six seniors – fifth-year players Tom Schwarber, Matt Ban and Keith Klodnick, along with Dean Mueller, Matt Wajda and Greg Frey – dotting the Buckeye roster this season, their experience from past seasons and their ability to rise to the occasion separated the Bucks from the rest of the league when it came time to decide a champion at the league tournament in Columbus.

Head coach Bob Todd never lost sight of how important those half-dozen seniors were in leading Ohio State to a school record for victories, an overall 53-13 slate and a berth in the NCAA Regionals for the first time since 1982.

“Those guys battled hard all year and never once gave up on themselves,” he said. “They had character, and sometimes they proved that it's the team that wants to win more, not necessarily the team that plays the best. Each of these guys, in his own way, contributed to the season we had.”

**30 Years Ago — 1996**

When thrown into a new situation, many people don't know how they're supposed to act.

That's kind of what the Ohio State baseball team went through at the end of the season. Normally readying for the league playoffs and a shot at the NCAA Regionals, the Buckeyes had the odd experience of going nowhere in the postseason for the first time in nine years under Todd.

Instead of taking homework and class assignments on the road with them, players actually went to class.

And Todd, with more time on his hands than usual, had an opportunity to reflect on the season that almost was.

“The way the season ended up and where we finished, sure, that was a major disappointment,” Todd said of his sixth-place Buckeyes. “We pride ourselves that we bring in new blood and those players will develop. There shouldn't be any letdown in the amount of talent that we put on the field. I don't think that was the case this year. It was more a matter of us not getting the chemistry right and not getting some breaks at the right time.”

**25 Years Ago — 2001**

Dave Kennedy, a fixture with the Ohio State football program as the strength and conditioning coach for 12 seasons, abruptly turned in his resignation on May 12.

The 40-year-old Kennedy, credited with producing a number of NFL stars in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center weight room, walked away from a lucrative long-term contract to “pursue other career opportunities,” he said through an OSU release.

Speculation immediately turned to a possible rift between Kennedy, who had almost full autonomy with the offseason conditioning program under former coach John Cooper, and new head coach Jim Tressel.

Other than the OSU release, Kennedy was not available for comment on his resignation.

“I made this decision a while ago but chose to stay until this time to ensure as smooth a transition as possible when the team began preparation for the upcoming season,” Kennedy said in the release.

**20 Years Ago — 2006**

Tressel and Ohio State agreed on a contract extension that would keep the coach with the Buckeyes through at least the 2012 football season.

The extension was announced on May 18, and a university spokesman told BSB in late May that Tressel had yet to sign the new seven-year deal, but that the coach and school officials had agreed in principle to the figures.

The contract was retroactive to Feb. 1, 2006, and ran through Jan. 13, 2013. Tressel would receive almost \$1.9 million in salary in the coming season, in addition to a \$500,000 signing bonus. In the final year of the contract, he was set to be paid \$2.7 million.

“Jim Tressel is one of the finest football coaches in the country, and we felt it was important to get him near the top nationally in terms of compensation,” said OSU athletic director Gene Smith.

**15 Years Ago — 2011**

With his program and legacy under scrutiny for major NCAA violations after 10 years of winning football, Tressel delivered his letter of resignation to Smith the morning of May 30.

“After meeting with university officials, we agreed that it is in the best interest of Ohio State that I resign as head football coach,” Tressel said in the signed letter. “The appreciation that (wife) Ellen and I have for the Buckeye Nation is immeasurable. We have been blessed to work with the finest group of young men in America and I love them dearly.

“We know that God has a plan for us and we will be fine. We will be Buckeyes forever.”

The announcement – accompanied by confirmation that assistant head coach Luke Fickell would replace Tressel on an interim basis for the 2011 season – came five months after scandal hit the program in the form of an investigation into the fact that six players, including star quarterback Terrelle Pryor, had broken NCAA rules by selling memorabilia and accepting discounted benefits.

**10 Years Ago — 2016**

Ohio State baseball's first trip to the postseason since 2009 was spoiled by an upstart in-state team and a national power.

The Buckeyes were eliminated from the Louisville Regional of the NCAA tournament by a 7-3 loss to Wright State on June 5 as the Raiders avenged OSU's come-from-behind win in the first

game of the regional. The season-ending loss came one day after the Buckeyes were overwhelmed in a 15-3 defeat at the hands of host Louisville, the No. 2 national seed in the 64-team tournament.

“Playing against a very good opponent, we just didn't execute pitches the way we have been,” said OSU head coach Greg Beals. “Unfortunately, we didn't get a quality start from our pitcher and got ourselves in a hole.”

Ryan Feltner got the ball for Ohio State in the elimination game and allowed six runs over three innings as the Raiders jumped out to a 6-1 lead. The bullpen restored order over the rest of the game, yielding just one run over five innings, but the Ohio State offense couldn't do enough to get back into it.

**Five Years Ago — 2021**

The state of Ohio may not have been the first on the scene when it came to a name, image and likeness bill, but on May 24, state Sen. Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg) made sure that the state got on the scene at all.

Antani, joined by Smith at the university's Covelli Center, announced the introduction of a bill into the state senate that would “legalize college athletes earning compensation from their name, image and likeness,” according to a release.

Profiting off name, image and likeness would allow student-athletes to earn endorsement deals on anything from apparel to car dealerships to local pizza shops, all while maintaining their eligibility as a member of a collegiate team.

“As a graduate of The Ohio State University, I saw how hard student-athletes worked, both at their academics and their sport of choice,” Antani said. “Since that time at Ohio State, I have strongly believed that students have an inherent right to their own name, image and likeness. I saw students, even who were on scholarship, struggle to get by, including some of the biggest names. It's important to remember that not every student-athlete is on a scholarship. It's also important to remember that no other students at our universities in Ohio have had these restrictions. It is only placed on student-athletes.”

**One Year Ago — 2025**

During a recent press conference, head coach Ryan Day spent a good portion of his time praising redshirt-sophomore offensive lineman Austin Siereveld. Although he didn't know what position the third-year would play during the upcoming season, Day said Siereveld would be a starter.

“I thought Austin did a nice job moving around,” Day said. “He really took a big step for us. Austin Siereveld is going to be a starter for us. He's an excellent player who really had a good spring.”

Day's excitement about Siereveld's growth did not come out of nowhere. Siereveld was one of three players to win the “Iron Buckeye” award in the winter for his dedication in offseason workouts and followed that up with an impressive spring camp, lining up primarily as the Buckeyes' starting right tackle.

Siereveld, who had started six games at right guard and rotated some with Tegra Tshabola at left guard the previous season, wasn't necessarily viewed as the favorite to start at right tackle heading into the offseason. That title was given to Minnesota transfer Phillip Daniels, who started the final four games for the Golden Gophers the previous year at the position. But the junior spent most of the spring working with the second team as Siereveld earned starting reps.

# Cruise Continues To Deliver Fun and Funds

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Buckeye Cruise for Cancer never ceases to astound founder Lisa Cisco. What started as a simple idea nearly 20 years ago to merge Ohio State fans with the fight against cancer by raising money at sea has burgeoned into a multi-million dollar success described by one patron as a family reunion.

“My initial goal was to raise \$1 million, and I thought, man, if we could just raise a million dollars, that would be so great,” Cisco, of Travel Partners in Dublin, said of the maiden voyage in 2007.

Imagine how she feels now after the 2026 Cruise set a record with \$4.265 million raised, a million more than in 2025, to bring the all-time total to more than \$48 million, to set up a milestone cruise on two fronts in 2027.

Not only will it be the 20th cruise, but the fundraising will surpass the \$50 million mark for The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute.

“It’s going to be a special one,” Cisco said. “Twenty years and to reach \$50 million are worth celebrating. Hopefully, we will have drones, fireworks, and big-time entertainment to raise \$5 million on that cruise alone. We want to have a super special auction. We have incredible auctions, but we want to make it even better.

“We will be going to Barbados, Saint Lucia, Martinique, Antigua, St. Barts, Dominica, St. Vincent and then back to Barbados. I mean, the itinerary alone is going to be jaw-dropping.”

Over the years, the cruise has entertained nearly 40,000 passengers, including more than 125 current and former Ohio State athletes in a variety of sports, although the large majority are from the football program.

“It just amazes me every year how you get around this group of people who are passionate about a project, passionate about a cause and it feels like family,” former Buckeye receiver DeVier Posey said in one of several video interviews done aboard the cruise by Dom Tiberi of WBNS-TV in Columbus. “It feels like a family reunion. It really does.”

One that has gotten smaller by design.

A major change was made in 2023 when the cruise set course in a new direction by downsizing it from a luxury liner with more than 2,500 passengers to an all-inclusive yacht.

This year was the first with the new Silver Sea Silver Ray, which enabled the capacity to go from about 600 on the previous three trips to 750, and the same ship will be used in 2027.

## Never A Dull Moment

After last year’s cruise celebrated the 2024 national championship in football, coach Ryan Day was feted on the most recent cruise with the passengers wearing fake beards and donning gold pants in recognition of beating Michigan.

“We honored him for what a great job he’s done with our young men, how they act



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUCKEYE CRUISE FOR CANCER

**BUCKEYES FOR LIFE - Uniting past and present Ohio State players for a worthy cause is a theme that never gets old on the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer, and the 2026 excursion was no different for (left to right) Luke Montgomery, Ryan Shazier, Zach Boren, Bennett Christian, Austin Siereveld, Payton Pierce, Bobby Carpenter and Julian Sayin.**

and present themselves,” Cisco said.

Day appreciates a respite from the year-round grind of heading a program and values what the cruise represents.

“There’s no other school to pull off something like this where you have something that’s been going on for two decades, where people come together to raise money for cancer and to make a difference,” he said in the video interview. “To see some of the people that have been on the boat for so many years and then you see the impact that it’s having and when you think about being a Buckeye, a part of that is giving back, and that’s what this is all about.”

An added bonus for passengers in recent years has been the addition of current Ohio State players due to changes in Name, Image and Likeness regulations.

“It’s great because our players, we’ve been doing that now for four years and it’s teaching the younger generation about philanthropy and what that means about giving back,” Day said. “Ohio State football goes together with the university, goes together with the community, and so that’s all a part of it. It’s great to see some of the younger guys get involved with this.”

Current football players Bennett Christian, Luke Montgomery, Payton Pierce, Julian Sayin and Austin Siereveld were first-timers, while Carson Hinzman was aboard for the second year in a row.

“It’s awesome just from last year to this year to see how it’s grown,” Hinzman said. “There’s no other place in the world where you can get this kind of community that comes together and puts their heads and hands together to go and raise \$40-plus mil-

lion for the James. I think it’s really inspiring to talk to people that have been through adversity like that. It’s inspiring to see how they fight, to see how they go through their perseverance, but also that people want to give back to those people is also inspiring.”

Montgomery said the cruise is personal.

“It’s an opportunity to help a great cause for cancer research,” he said. “I have a couple family members that have cancer, and they were at the James.”

The cruise sailed round-trip from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and visited the Caribbean ports of Grand Turk, St. Maarten, St. Barts, St. Thomas and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

There were plenty of activities on land and sea during the trip, including deep sea fishing, bingo, a run/walk around the ship, the cancer survivor breakfast, karaoke and the centerpiece auction, which raised a record \$2 million.

Items for bid included attending the 2026 Heisman Trophy presentation in New York, flying with the team for games at Texas and USC and trips to France, Italy and Hawaii.

Also, tickets were auctioned for the Saddle Up at the Woody concert, which was held on April 18, featuring singer Darius Rucker of Hootie and the Blowfish fame, who was a guest on the cruise as well.

Ohio-based country music band North to Nashville provided the entertainment, and Christian, the Buckeye tight end, got on stage and handled lead guitar for a few songs.

“Those are amazing people, amazing band, and I’m now a fan for life. They’re awesome,” he said.

Among the many former football players in attendance were Jake Ballard, Zach Boren, Parris Campbell, Bobby Carpenter, Kurt Coleman, Tom Cousineau, Ty Hamilton, A.J. Hawk, Raekwon McMillan, Dane Sanzenbacher, Ryan Shazier, Cody Simon and Tyleik Williams.

Basketball was represented by Aaron Craft and JJ Sullinger, among others. Women’s volleyball coach Jen Flynn Oldenburg was on board, as was former golfer Craigen Pappas.

Carpenter enjoys the cruise for the friendships renewed and made.

“It’s a great event to be a part of, and it’s been awesome, especially since they’ve started allowing the current players to come on the boat,” he said. “The guys are awesome, plus we’ve got some of the younger guys coming back when you start looking at Ty Hamilton, Tyleik and Cody coming back. Some of the guys who have been here are now getting re-engaged and understanding the total breadth of what Buckeye Nation means.”

Campbell, the wide receiver who won the Super Bowl with the Philadelphia Eagles in 2024 and is now with the Dallas Cowboys, said the cruise is something that he heard about but never participated in when he was playing for the Buckeyes.

“This is one of a kind,” he said. “This is like a big Buckeye tailgate, something that you can’t really put words to, something that you have to experience all while raising money for a great cause and trying to beat cancer.”

# OSU Comes Up Short In B1G Tournament

Making its first Big Ten tournament appearance since 2024, No. 6 seed Ohio State managed just one win in three games at Charles Schwab Field in Omaha, Neb.

## FROM THE STRETCH Sam Cipriani

Though Ohio State and No. 11 seed Washington were tied 6-6 after eight innings, the Buckeyes gave up two runs in the final inning on a late triple in their Big Ten tournament opener, falling to the Huskies 8-6 on May 19, meaning a loss in any remaining game would end their tournament run.

Following its loss to the Huskies, Ohio State survived an elimination game against Rutgers, 3-2, on the heels of a complete game by junior righthander Pierce Herrenbruck. The Rend Lake College transfer needed just 99 pitches to finish the first complete game of his career and the first nine-inning complete game in the Big Ten tournament for any team since 2024. Herrenbruck struck out three Scarlet Knights and allowed just six hits and one earned run.

Ohio State then had its season ended by its rival Michigan when the Wolverines blanked the Buckeyes 3-0 to advance to the single-elimination round of the tournament. The Buckeyes totaled just five hits on the outing, and Ohio State was shut out for the first time since an April 24 loss to Rutgers.

Though the Buckeyes' season came to an end sooner than they may have wanted, Ohio State was still much improved in year two under head coach Justin Haire.

Ohio State finished with a 30-25 overall record, marking the program's first 30-win season since 2023 (31-25). It was also a 17-win improvement from the Buckeyes' disappointing 13-37 record in 2025. Ohio State went from last in the Big Ten with a 5-25 conference record last season to a sixth-place finish with an 18-12 record in the regular-season standings in 2026.

### Pitching Staff Closes Season On High Note

A year ago, Ohio State underwent one of its most brutal pitching seasons in program history, struggling to consistently find answers on the mound.

Fast-forward one year, and the Buckeyes turned one of their biggest weaknesses into one of the team's strengths, particularly with the staff's starting trio of sophomore righthander Gavin Kuzniewski, junior righty Chris Domke and Herrenbruck.

Kuzniewski finished with a 6-3 record and a 4.66 ERA, leading the Buckeyes' staff with 69 strikeouts in 83 innings. He also tossed one of the team's four complete games in an 11-0 victory over Butler in seven innings on March 20.

As Ohio State's Friday starter, Kuzniewski embraced the responsibility of setting the tone each weekend.

"It's been nice this year playing with this group. Last year was tough, so it's nice to bounce back and really learn with guys

around me and really come up on top more often," Kuzniewski said. "It's nice to know that I'm setting the tone for the weekend on the mound."

Haire praised Kuzniewski's competitiveness and versatility on the mound.

"His strength is that he's got four or five pitches on any given night," Haire said. "If he's got three of those going, there's a chance for him to get deep in the game. So that combination, on a Friday night, a guy that's super competitive, is a really good recipe for us. Gavin's just a bulldog. He is a stud."

Domke (6-6) also became a steady presence in the rotation, recording a 5.55 ERA in 73 innings. The Youngstown State transfer threw two of Ohio State's four complete games this season, including a nine-inning effort in an 8-1 win over rival Michigan on May 16 that earned him the final Big Ten Pitcher of the Week honor of the regular season.

Domke, who primarily pitched out of the bullpen during his time with the Penguins, said transitioning into a starting role has been his biggest adjustment in 2026.

"I'd say more just developing into a starter, just figuring out how I can maintain my velocity through seven innings," Domke said of his new role. "I didn't have the best command over at Youngstown, and this year, I've really dialed in on that. Being able to just command the zone pitch to contact, maintain my velocity through the innings and set myself up for success, that's probably the biggest change."

Haire said the growth of both Domke and Kuzniewski became especially evident late in the season after the Buckeyes' difficult outings on the mound against Purdue.

"I just think he continues to mature," Haire said. "(Domke) and Gavin both. They didn't have very good starts two weeks ago at Purdue, and it was a flash point for both those guys. They've rebounded each of the last two weeks with really good starts. Those guys just work extremely hard. They take a lot of pride in it, and they're starting to get

a sense of urgency. They know that as the weather is supposed to warm up here in May, that's when you're supposed to be playing your best. Those guys are responding, and it is really fun to see."

Finally, Herrenbruck finished with the best record among Buckeye starters (7-3), emerging as one of the most dependable arms on the roster and leading Ohio State pitchers with more than 1½ innings with a 3.72 ERA while striking out 58 batters in 82½ innings. His complete-game performance against Rutgers on May 20 also gave the Buckeyes their first victory in the conference tournament since 2024.

Junior righthander Ryan Zamora anchored the bullpen as its top closer. In 21 appearances, he made three saves and had a 3.79 ERA, holding opponents to a .206 batting average. Righthander Lincoln McVicker also made 21 appearances out of the bullpen and ended the season with a 3.95 ERA, just one of three Buckeyes with a sub-4.00 ERA.

As a whole, Ohio State's staff ERA dropped dramatically from 9.62 in 2025 to 5.31 in 2026.

### Kaczmar, Harvey Set Single-Season Records

Ohio State shortstop Henry Kaczmar and first baseman Dane Harvey each set individual single-season records for the Buckeyes this season.

With two doubles in Ohio State's loss to Washington in the Big Ten tournament, Kaczmar set the Ohio State program record for doubles in a single season with 26. As of May 21, the end of the Buckeyes' season, Kaczmar led the Big Ten in doubles, while ranking third nationally in the category.

Kaczmar wrapped up his Buckeye career with a productive senior campaign. He finished second on the team with a .316 batting average, while leading Ohio State in hits (71), runs scored (50) and total bases (133).

Kaczmar finished his Ohio State career with 204 hits, ranking 24th in program history, while his 46 doubles tied Chad Eh-

rnsberger (1998-2000) for eighth most in Buckeye baseball history. He also totaled 26 home runs, which was tied for 20th in program history.

Harvey tied an Ohio State single-season record, finishing with 19 home runs in his first campaign with the Buckeyes. He now shares the record previously set by Zach Dezenzo (2022) and Dan Seimetz (1997).

After transferring from Cowley County Community College, the 6-5, 270-pound first baseman finished the 2026 season as Ohio State's top hitter, batting a team-high .328. Harvey's .729 slugging percentage also topped the Buckeyes, ranking third in the Big Ten and 26th nationally.

### Regular Season Finishes Strong

Since BSB last went to press, the Buckeyes had a strong finish to the regular season.

They began an eight-game homestand at Bill Davis Stadium with a series sweep over No. 20 Nebraska. The Buckeyes defeated the Cornhuskers 2-1 on May 1, 7-3 on May 2 and 10-1 on May 3 to cap off the program's first-ever sweep over Nebraska.

Ohio State's matchup with Miami (Ohio) on May 5 was canceled due to inclement weather before the Buckeyes took down Michigan State in two of three games that weekend. Ohio State defeated the Spartans 15-5 in eight innings at Huntington Park on May 8 then dropped a 7-4 decision to Michigan State on May 9 before rebounding with a 3-2 win in 10 innings on May 10.

The Buckeyes then suffered a loss in their home finale when Wright State defeated Ohio State, 8-4, on May 12.

Ohio State then closed the regular season, traveling to Ann Arbor for a three-game series against Michigan at Ray Fisher Stadium. The Buckeyes completed a sweep of the Wolverines, routing Michigan 13-2 in seven innings on May 14 before earning a 7-3 win on May 15 and an 8-1 victory on May 16.



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# Former Buckeyes Recall 1966 Baseball Title

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Sixty years removed from its historic run, the 1966 Ohio State baseball team remains a defining pillar in Buckeye lore as the last Big Ten program to capture a College World Series title.

Led by longtime head coach Marty Karow, Ohio State was anchored by homegrown talent and dominant pitching. Motivated by the disappointment of falling short in the national title game the previous season, the Buckeyes turned that campaign into a lasting legacy.

With 2026 marking the 60th anniversary of Ohio State's national championship, Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with Ohio State pitchers Dick Boggs and John Sonedecker, first baseman Russ Nagelson, and right fielder Ray Shoup of the championship team to revisit the Buckeyes' title-winning season and its lasting impact.

For Nagelson and many other returners from the 1965 season, the Buckeyes' road to Omaha in 1966 began with the heartbreak that Ohio State had suffered the season before.

In 1965, the Buckeyes were dominant. Ohio State finished the season with a 30-13 record and a Big Ten-winning 11-2 record that got them into the tournament.

Ohio State went on a run to the College World Series championship game, but its path to its first title was halted by Arizona State in the final. Ohio State beat Florida State and Washington State before falling to the Sun Devils into the lower round. The Buckeyes then beat Washington State to advance to a championship game but needed to beat Arizona State twice since the Sun Devils hadn't lost yet.

The Buckeyes took the first game 7-3 and needed just one more win, but the Sun Devils

took the title with a 2-1 victory.

Nagelson, a Cincinnati native and senior on the '66 championship team who ultimately would go on to play for the Cleveland Indians and Detroit Tigers, reflected on the loss to Arizona State and how it carried into the following year.

"We lost that game to Arizona State in 1965, and that was a really tough defeat," Nagelson said. "In 1966, we had quite a different team that played first string after guys left from the 1965 team. So we ended up having a better team in '66 in certain ways than '65, so I guess that is what contributed to us having another successful year and also going the whole way."

Despite finishing the 1966 season at the top of the mountain, Ohio State got off to a rocky start to the regular season. Ohio State began the season 1-2 with losses to Miami (Fla.) and Michigan State and nearly fell to .500 11 games into the season when it was swept by Western Michigan.

Ohio State then finished the regular season on a tear, winning its final 13 games, including all six of its Big Ten contests. And with a perfect 6-0 record in conference play, the Buckeyes made it back to the NCAA tournament and went on a run to their second straight appearance in the College World Series.

Sonedecker, a senior relief pitcher on the team who was born in Columbus, said the Buckeyes' slow start helped fuel their eventual championship run.

"First of all, we started the season on a losing note with Western Michigan. In the mid-'60s, Western Michigan was one of the stronger teams in the Midwest, and Karow was not happy. We were second in the nation in '65 and lost the College World Series to Arizona State. So we were one of the favorite teams along with USC (going into the '66 season),"

Sonedecker said. "On our spring trip, we just were mediocre and when we came back from (Western Michigan) and the last part of the season, we won 21 out of 22 games, so we got hot when we needed to."

Sonedecker added that inclement weather in Columbus limited Ohio State to just six games in conference play, ultimately playing a major role in the Buckeyes securing the Big Ten title.

"The other thing was that the weather really made the difference that year. The Big Ten was, at that point, only sending one representative to the NCAA tournament. So you had to win the Big Ten regular season to even go anywhere. We won all of our (conference) games – only six. Michigan and Minnesota lost only two or three games, but played twice as many as we did, so we won because of a better winning percentage."

Shoup, who was later drafted by the Minnesota Twins in the 17th round of the 1967 MLB draft, expressed a similar sentiment, stating that it took time for Ohio State to develop into a championship-caliber team.

"It just took some time for us to come together and begin to play at the level," Shoup said. "We should have been playing better earlier, but we just kept getting better. We had some breaks. We had some good things happen for us, which are important, and we just kept playing hard and winning."

According to Boggs, it was a trio of starting arms that fueled much of the Buckeyes' success throughout the season.

"I was the No. 2 pitcher behind Steve Arlin, and I would pitch the second game on Saturday. Steve would pitch on Friday. Most weekends or whenever we would have three games, Mike (Swain) would pitch the third one."

The leader of the bunch, Arlin, was one of the top pitchers in college baseball during his final two years with Ohio State.

Arlin was named to the All-CWS team in 1965 and followed that up with an 11-1 record in 1966 and a dominant performance in the CWS that earned him Most Outstanding Player honors.

In three relief appearances and two wins against USC in the CWS in 1966, Arlin tossed 19 1/3 innings and fanned 27 batters while walking 11. The senior allowed just five hits and two earned runs and recorded a 0.98 ERA in the postseason. Arlin was also named to the NCAA's College World Series All-Time Team in 2019.

Nagelson said Arlin's jump from 1965 to 1966 was evident even before the season began.

"I have to admit, Steve Arlin from '65 to '66 improved quite a bit as a pitcher," he said. "Even before the season started. During practice in our indoor field house, Steve would pitch to me and (Chuck Brinkman) being the catcher and also co-captain. Steve added a few pitches and started really showing some signs early on when we came out to start the season."

"I knew that when I batted against Steve, there was no way that he was so good. I had a hard time and used to get mad at him because I couldn't hit his pitches. That's how good he became. We just knew when he was going to pitch that we had a high probability of winning, and we depended on him."

In the infield, Ohio State started Brinkman at catcher, Nagelson at first, Bruce Heine at second base, Roger Sexton at shortstop and Richie Copp at third base. The outfield was led by Bo Rein in left, Robert "Bobby" Baker in center and Shoup in right. Brinkman, Nagelson, Shoup, Rein and Arlin each made the All-CWS team in 1966.

Rein wasn't just pinned down to baseball, as Rein thrived as a two-sport athlete, also playing football under head coach Woody Hayes at Ohio State. Rein led the baseball team in stolen bases in both 1965 and 1966, finishing his career with 49 steals – a program record that stood until Roy Marsh surpassed it with 73 from 1992-94. On the football field, Rein finished his time in Columbus as Ohio State's career receptions leader as a halfback, topping the Buckeyes in receptions in 1964 and 1965 while also leading the team in rushing in 1966.

Rein went on to become a successful football coach, becoming the youngest college football head coach when he was hired at NC State in 1976. After four seasons with the Wolfpack, he was hired as LSU's head coach in November 1979.

But on Jan. 10, 1980, Rein died while returning from a recruiting trip. The plane he was aboard with pilot Louis Benscotter lost contact with air traffic control after diverting around storms and eventually crashed into the Atlantic Ocean, likely due to cabin depressurization. No wreckage or bodies were ever recovered.

"Bo was just the friendliest guy you'd ever want to meet," Boggs said. "He was very competitive. He was a senior, and he had experience with Woody. So he had the experience of playing before 85,000 people at the time of the Horseshoe. He was just a hell of a guy, and it's an awful shame what happened. I wish to this day we knew exactly what happened."

For more on Bo Rein, check out pages 14-15 of this issue.

Once the Buckeyes advanced to the NCAA tournament with a win over Minnesota in late May, capping off a perfect conference season, Ohio State breezed through the NCAA District 4 playoffs with a victory over Valparaiso, followed by a pair of wins in rematches against Western Michigan.

Ohio State then managed wins against Oklahoma State (4-2), USC (6-2) and St. John's (8-7) to advance to the tournament's semifinals. The Buckeyes lost their only game in the CWS against USC, 5-1, in the semifinals, before a redemption 1-0 victory over the Trojans in the double-elimination round to advance to the title game.

In the championship, Ohio State left no doubt. The Buckeyes stomped Oklahoma State 8-2, jumping out to a 6-0 lead before the Cowboys first got on the board. Ohio State totaled nine hits from just five different batters, narrowly outpacing Oklahoma State's eight, but the Buckeyes made the most of nearly every scoring chance.

"There were a couple of guys in the championship game. Richie Copp had three hits, and Heine had two, and then Nagelson had a couple of big triples," Sonedecker said. "In other words, you could always trust (Copp and Heine) to go out and play their best in the biggest moments. So they came through in that game. They were both underclassmen,

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and that was unusual, because I think the year before that, we may have had all juniors and senior starters. In 1966, it was a blend of sophomores, juniors and seniors.

"It was interesting. Brinkman and Shoup were 0 for 4 each, and Baker was 0 for 4, so it was almost like they carried us. But by that time, we had beaten Southern California twice, and so I don't want to take anything away from Oklahoma State, but we were very confident in that championship game, and it showed."

Boggs, who said he came into Omaha with an 0.67 ERA, the second-best mark in the nation, pitched the first seven innings of the championship game for Ohio State, totaling seven strikeouts and giving up just two earned runs in the title-sealing performance, before Swain pitched the eighth, and Arlin went 1-2-3 in the top of the ninth to claim the Buckeyes' first and lone College World Series title.

For Boggs, the performance was unlike anything he had experienced before, stating that he felt that he was "in the zone."

"For one of the few times in my life, you'll hear about athletes that will talk about being in the zone, and during that first six innings, I was in the zone," Boggs said. "I don't remember anything about the game. I couldn't. I did not hear the crowd cheering or booing or whatever they were doing. It was just me, the mound, the batter and the ball. Then in the seventh inning, I gave up the home run and got over to the dugout, and Marty said, 'That's it.'"

Six decades later, Ohio State remains the last Big Ten program to win a national championship in baseball, a reality that multiple players, including Nagelson, said reflects how difficult it has become for northern schools to compete with the year-round advantages held by southern powers.

"Playing baseball in the North, you're handicapped with the fact that you can't start playing for quite a while," Nagelson said. "The teams in the South, in the SEC, those teams, they play a lot more games, and they play a lot earlier in the year. So they have a tremendous advantage over that, and that has contributed to the fact that the Big Ten hasn't really won a lot of national championships in baseball."

Even with the challenges the Buckeye program and Big Ten have faced in the decades since, the members of the 1966 team still take immense pride in what they accomplished and in the legacy they left behind at Ohio State.

"I just think about how proud I am of my teammates and our teams, and how well we did for our coaches. John Machado was a great guy. He was an assistant coach, and Marty motivated everybody. It's just a blessing that I was part of that," Shoup said. "I want people to remember our team and how we won and how well we played."

"I want nothing but good things to happen to the team now, and they're doing better this year than they have in several years. It was more the problem of recruiting. It's just hard to get the quality guys up there to go to school when they can go south and play in better weather and get more money, and it's very hard for (current coach) Justin (Haire) to build a team and keep them going. I'm happy with how well they're doing this year."

The 1966 team returned to Bill Davis Stadium during Ohio State's weekend series against Nebraska from May 1-3, getting

**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 (30-25, 18-12)**

**Feb. 13-14** vs. Saint Louis at Pensacola, Fla., W 7-1; W 3-2; W 7-3; **20** vs. Louisiana Tech at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., L 6-0; **20** vs. Memphis at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., W 12-5; **21** vs. Louisiana Tech at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., L 9-3; **22** vs. Memphis at Grind City Classic in Memphis, Tenn., W 8-2; **27** vs. Texas-San Antonio at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston, L 6-5; **28** vs. Ole Miss at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston, L 8-0.

**March 1** vs. Texas at BRUCE BOLT College Classic in Houston, L 10-3; **4** XAVIER, L 13-4; **6-8** UCLA, L 11-1; L 19-6 (8 inn.); L 10-7; **10** KENT STATE, L 8-5; **13-15** at Washington, W 10-9 (10 inn.); L 5-4 (11 inn.); L 5-4; **18** at Xavier, 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, L 11-7; **17-19** at Purdue, L 10-9; L 12-7; L 6-2; **21** AKRON, W 19-7 (7 inn.); **24-26** at Rutgers, W 8-0; L 3-0; L 11-5.

**May 1-3** NEBRASKA, W 2-1; W 7-3; W 10-1; **5** MIAMI (OH), canceled; **8-10** MICHIGAN STATE, W 15-5 (8 inn.); L 7-4; W 3-2 (10 inn.); **12** WRIGHT STATE, L 8-4; **14-16** at Michigan, W 13-2 (7 inn.); W 7-3; W 8-1; **19** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb. vs. Washington, L 8-6; **20** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb. vs. Rutgers, W 3-2; **19** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb. vs. Michigan, L 3-0.

**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., 8th/15.

**May 1-3** Big Ten Championship at North Plains, Ore., 18th/18.

**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, 1st/14; **24-26** Big Ten Championship at Los Angeles, 2nd/18.

**May 11-13** NCAA Regionals at Ann Arbor, Mich., 2nd/12; **22-27** NCAA Championship Finals at Carlsbad, Calif., 27th/30.

**SOFTBALL (26-27, 13-11)**

**Feb. 6** Paradise Classic at Boca Raton, Fla., vs. Florida Atlantic, L 10-6; **6** Paradise Classic at Boca Raton, Fla., vs. Indiana, L 12-3 (5 inn.); **7** Paradise Classic at Boca Raton, Fla., vs. Army, W 11-0 (5 inn.); **8** Paradise Classic at Boca Raton, Fla., vs. Wisconsin, W 8-5; **13** Bevo Classic at Austin, Texas, vs. Northern Illinois, W 7-2; **13** Bevo Classic at Austin, Texas, vs. Texas, L 14-6 (5 inn.); **14** Bevo Classic at Austin, Texas, vs. Abilene Christian, W 15-7 (5 inn.); **15** Bevo Classic at Austin, Texas, vs. Syracuse, W 9-0 (6 inn.); **15** Bevo Classic at Austin, Texas, vs. Texas, L 7-4; **20** Mizuno Classic at Charlottesville, Va., vs. Delaware, L 2-0; **20** Mizuno Classic at Charlottesville, Va., vs. Virginia, L 8-4; **21** Mizuno Classic at Charlottesville, Va., vs. Delaware, W 11-2 (5 inn.); **21** Mizuno Classic at Charlottesville, Va., vs. Virginia, L 8-0 (5 inn.); **27** Duke Invitational at Durham, N.C., vs. Northwestern, L 11-1; **28** Duke Invitational at Durham, N.C., vs. Boston, L 10-5; **28** Duke Invitational at Durham, N.C., vs. Duke, L 6-3.

**March 1** Duke Invitational at Durham, N.C., vs. Duke, L 3-1; **6-8** IOWA, W 5-2; L 9-1; W 10-2 (6 inn.); **10** WESTERN MICHIGAN, L 11-10; **13-15** at Purdue, L 12-6; L 6-5; L 12-6; **20** OHIO STATE TOURNAMENT vs. INDIANA STATE, W 10-0 (5 inn.); **20** OHIO STATE TOURNAMENT vs. CAMPBELL, W 8-6 (8 inn.); **21** OHIO STATE TOURNAMENT vs. LOUISVILLE, L 6-5; **21** OHIO STATE TOURNAMENT vs. CAMPBELL, L 11-5; **22** OHIO STATE TOURNAMENT vs. INDIANA STATE, W 11-1 (5 inn.); **25** CALIFORNIA, W 10-3 (6 inn.); **27-29** MICHIGAN STATE, W 9-0 (6 inn.); W 2-0; W 10-0; **31** BOWLING GREEN, W 18-7.

**April 4-5** at Minnesota, W 9-5; W 10-1; L 2-1; **8** DAYTON, W 12-4; **10-12** at Michigan, L 10-8; L 11-1; W 13-2; **15** PITT, W 9-1; **17-19** PENN STATE, W 4-3; L 15-7; W 9-0; **21** AKRON, L 9-5; **24-26** at Oregon, W 3-0; L 13-6; L 8-0.

**May 1-3** WASHINGTON, W 5-4; L 8-2; W 3-2; **6** Big Ten Tournament at College Park, Md., vs. Michigan, L 9-0.

**MEN'S TENNIS (32-5, 12-1)**

**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, W 4-1; **19** at Nebraska, W 4-0; **23** Big Ten Tournament at Ojai, Calif., vs. Nebraska, W 4-0; **24** Big Ten Tournament

at Ojai, Calif., vs. Illinois, W 4-3; **25** Big Ten Tournament at Ojai, Calif., vs. Michigan State, L 4-3.

**May 1** NCAA 1st ROUND AT COLUMBUS vs. BUFFALO, W 4-0; **2** NCAA 2nd ROUND AT COLUMBUS vs. CALIFORNIA, W 4-0; **8** NCAA SUPER REGIONAL AT COLUMBUS vs. ILLINOIS, W 4-0; **14-17** NCAA Team Championships at Athens, Ga., vs. Texas Christian, L 4-3.

**WOMEN'S TENNIS (27-5, 12-1)**

**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, W 4-0; **19** WASHINGTON, W 4-2; **24** BIG TEN TOURNAMENT AT COLUMBUS vs. ILLINOIS, W 4-0; **25** BIG TEN TOURNAMENT AT COLUMBUS vs. UCLA, W 4-2; **26** BIG TEN TOURNAMENT AT COLUMBUS vs. MICHIGAN, L 4-2.

**May 2** NCAA 1st ROUND AT COLUMBUS vs. YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 4-0; **3** NCAA 2ND ROUND AT COLUMBUS vs. NOTRE DAME, W 4-0; **9** NCAA SUPER REGIONALS AT COLUMBUS vs. VANDERBILT, W 4-1; **15** NCAA Quarterfinals at Athens, Ga. vs. Pepperdine, W 4-0; **16** NCAA Semifinals at Athens, Ga. vs. Auburn, L 4-1.

**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., NTS; **17-18** Virginia Challenge at Charlottesville, Va., NTS; **23-25** Penn Relays at Philadelphia, NTS.

**May 1-2** JESSE OWENS CLASSIC, NTS; **15-17** Big Ten Championships at Lincoln, Neb., Men 5th/17, 62 pts.; Women 7th/17, 55 pts.; **27-30** NCAA East Preliminary Round at Lexington, Ky.

**June 10-13** NCAA Championships at Eugene, Ore.

a chance to watch the present-day Buckeyes in action.

After the championship team was honored on May 2 and the current Buckeyes clinched a 7-3 victory over Nebraska, Haire reflected on the significance of honoring the 1966 championship.

"Ohio State is one of five athletic departments in the entire country that have won a national championship in football, baseball and men's basketball, which is a really impressive stat," Haire said. "So for that group to still have 16 guys able to make it back and experience this and have their letterman jacket on, just having pride in this place – I was talking on the radio right after the game, and I said, 'From the day we got the job to today, we want to work our butts off to make sure that, whether it's the '66 team or anybody that's ever played here, is proud of the product that we put on the field.'"

"So to have those guys here and have a chance to honor them – because that was 60 years ago, so I don't know how many more times we're going to get a chance on anniversaries to honor that many guys – it was really special and hopefully they're proud of the Block 'O' today."

Boggs said he hopes the current Buckeyes can build a successful program and experience the same pride the 1966 team still carries today.

"We want them to eventually get the talent they need to get to be in the running for the Big Ten and also the College World Series in Omaha, and get back into the NCAA," Boggs said.

For Sonedecker, the legacy of the 1966 team extended well beyond baseball, as he believed the discipline and competitiveness from that championship season helped shape many players' later success in life.

"We were winners, not only on the field, but off the field," Sonedecker said. "Many of our guys went on to successful careers. I think we have three attorneys, four dentists, and two doctors. Three of us have PhDs. It was a smart team, and it played itself out in life."

Nagelson believes the team's talent level and the professional success many players later achieved reflected just how special the 1966 roster was.

"For Ohio State University to have its first and only national championship in baseball, we had to be very exceptional," Nagelson said. "We had some breaks during the season to be that way. But then again, you've got to come through. We had strong players. Steve played professionally. Chuck played with Chicago professionally. I played with Cleveland and Detroit. So, I'm sure that is one thing that people respect."

# Women's Tennis Motivated By Deep NCAA Run

By **SAM CIPRIANI**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State women's tennis team put together one of its strongest runs in nearly a decade, advancing to the NCAA Final Four for the first time since 2017.

Led by head coach Melissa Schaub, the 2026 Big Ten Coach of the Year, the Buckeyes finished the season with a 27-5 overall record and a 12-1 mark in conference play, capturing the Big Ten regular-season title.

Ohio State's success came with a youthful roster, with the Buckeyes featuring just one senior, four juniors, two sophomores and two freshmen, giving those within the program confidence that this year's breakthrough run could be the start of something bigger.

Despite the historic season, the Buckeyes believe there is still another level they can reach. Ohio State junior Luciana Perry, who finished the season ranked No. 4 nationally in singles according to the Intercollegiate Tennis Association, said the team's run to the Final Four, which was held in Athens, Ga., left her with a bittersweet feeling.

"It's a very interesting feeling because it's kind of like it's the most incredible run I've had since I've been here, so it makes me feel very ecstatic that we got to the Final Four," Perry said. "I'll just quickly add that the NCAA Final Four teams were also the Final Four teams that were at the ITA National Team Indoor Championship earlier in the year, so for me, that's a feeling of we can play anywhere. We can play inside, we can play outside. We are



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**WANTING MORE** — Reaching the Final Four for the first time since 2017 wasn't enough for the Ohio State women's tennis team after a semifinal loss to Auburn ended its dream season prematurely. The young Buckeyes under coach Melissa Schaub (right) are optimistic about the future with the likes of doubles partners freshman Flora Johnson (left) and junior Luciana Perry (center).

just a darn good team. For me it's very rewarding to see that we can not only make the Final Four once in a national event, but do it twice in

the same year.

"At the same time, it leaves me feeling hungry, and I know the rest of the girls on the team are also hungry. We wanted to win the national championship, and I think we were fully capable of doing it, but we learned from the loss, and we'll be back next year."

Junior Teah Chavez, the fifth-ranked individual player nationally, shared a similar perspective following the Buckeyes' semifinal exit, especially after watching Texas A&M capture the national championship despite Ohio State defeating the Aggies at ITA Indoors earlier in the season.

"Obviously, it sucks," Chavez said. "After our loss, it was heartbreaking. I feel like we still have so much to give. I feel like we all really believe that we could have won the national championship. It sucks to see Texas A&M winning because we beat them in the regular season. I do believe that everything happens for a reason, and obviously, we're taking our loss and using that as motivation for the summer. Most of the girls are coming back for the summer, and I think we're all really excited to get back to work and get back to winning."

"Looking back at the year, I don't really want to take it as a disappointing season just because we lost in the Final Four. This team has done so much, and it's been so cool to do it. It was just such a great season, and we want more for next year. We're happy with it but not satisfied."

Returning two All-Americans in singles from the 2025 season in Perry and Chavez, Ohio State opened the season at No. 13 nationally.

The Buckeyes opened the season 5-0 before suffering their first loss to Georgia, 4-3, in the ITA Indoor finals. Ohio State would then go on to finish the regular season with wins in 16 of its final 18 contests, falling only to Pepperdine on March 11, 4-0, and USC that same

week, 4-1, on March 15.

With just one loss to the Trojans in Big Ten action, Ohio State claimed a share of the Big Ten regular-season title, with Michigan, USC and the Buckeyes splitting the crown with 12-1 records.

In the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State's run ended in the championship match, with the Buckeyes defeating Illinois 4-0 and UCLA 4-2 before falling to Michigan 4-2 in the finals.

Ohio State carried the motivation from that loss into the NCAA tournament, where the Buckeyes would sweep Youngstown State and Notre Dame in the first two rounds before defeating Vanderbilt 4-1 in the Super Regionals.

Following its victory over the Commodores, Ohio State avenged its regular-season loss to No. 11 Pepperdine, returning the favor with a sweep of its own, capped by a comeback from sophomore Nao Nishino, which advanced the Buckeyes to the Final Four.

Schaub said the win over the Waves in the quarterfinals was a testament to both the team and Nishino's individual resilience.

"You're in the Elite Eight, and we were playing a team that had beaten us earlier in the year," the coach said. "It's tough for us to go outside and play in those conditions in early March weather-wise, so we knew that that wasn't necessarily going to be our best tennis at that moment, but we're really happy with how we responded in May and came out and played."

"I thought we were hungry and wanted to prove to people that we can play outside and can play in the heat. That's kind of a narrative that is around some of our Midwestern Big Ten schools, is that we don't play as well outside, so we were happy to change that narrative as much as we could."

Chavez said she felt a mix of excitement and pride for Nishino after the sophomore delivered the clinching point in Ohio State's

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## OHIO STATE WOMEN'S TENNIS

biggest match of the season.

"I can't even explain the feeling," Chavez said. "It wasn't relief, it was just like, 'Oh my gosh, we knew we could do it, so we finally did it.' When we went out to California, we got swept backward by them, and it wasn't a good trip for all of us. We weren't playing our best, but we would take the loss in February for that win at the end of May. It was just so cool to see Nao come through because she was struggling at the beginning of the season, but then she came through and clinched out for us. It was an awesome experience that I loved every second of."

Unfortunately for Ohio State, that elation was short-lived after the Buckeyes fell to No. 2 Auburn, 4-1, in the Final Four. Chavez claimed the only point of the outing for Ohio State with a dominant, two-set win over No. 16 DJ Bennett.

Perry broke down why the Buckeyes fell short in the Final Four, adding that she felt the experience would help establish the team's standards moving forward.

"When you get to the Final Four, the team that you're playing is very good," she said. "We are very good as well. I think Auburn that day maybe came out swinging a little bit looser in doubles. I think some of us were a little bit nervous. It's a given that we'll be a little bit tight in a big moment like that. I think they almost played to win, and we almost played to make sure we wouldn't lose."

Led by Chavez, who emerged as one of the Buckeyes' most impactful players throughout the season, Ohio State showcased the star power that fueled its historic run even in defeat.

Chavez recorded a 23-6 singles record, primarily on courts one and two, while she and her doubles partner Hephzibah Oluwadare finished No. 34 in the country with an 11-12 mark.

Following the regular season, Chavez was named the Big Ten Player of the Year, becoming the first Buckeye to take home the honor since Shiori Fukuda in 2020.

Schaub emphasized Chavez's impact on and off the court, adding that she felt the junior would make an immediate impact upon her first recruiting visit.

"She was just one of those kids where the minute she came on the visit, it was like, 'We have to have this kid on our team,'" Schaub said. "She just has an energy about her that's contagious. Teah's a very positive person, and that's just the people that you want in the locker room and want on the team."

Perry was also strong, ending the season with a 23-6 record, swapping between Ohio State's top two singles courts with Chavez. The junior and her doubles partner, freshman Flora Johnson, ultimately finished No. 8 nationally in doubles after a 17-4 campaign, making Perry one of just four players in the country to rank in the top 10 in both singles and doubles.

After the season, Johnson and Perry were one of two pairings named Big Ten Doubles Teams of the Year. Perry reflected on the duo's success, noting how quickly their partnership came together and admitting she never anticipated such a rapid rise before the season began.

"When we found out we were going to be playing doubles together this season, she and I sat down and wrote some goals of what we could do together and how we could be a good doubles team. I'll tell you right now, the conference's doubles team of the year was not on it," Perry said. "It was the first time we played together, and it just turned out amazing. We clicked on the court."

Rounding out Ohio State's starting lineup were juniors Alessia Cau (10-4) and Audrey Spencer (22-7) while both Buckeye sophomores finished the season nationally ranked, with Sophia Cisse-Ignatiev (15-11) at No. 68 and Nishino (32-9) at No. 70 turning in productive second seasons.

Cisse-Ignatiev and Spencer teamed up to forge Ohio State's third doubles pairing, ending the season with a solid 14-4 mark.

Johnson (7-7) and Oluwadare (14-11) also showed promise in singles play, with Schaub emphasizing the rookies' contributions in year one.

"They're definitely two people that the team trusts, and they know what it means to them to be at Ohio State," Schaub said. "They've definitely picked that part up, and although they had a good freshman year, I don't think they're

satisfied. I think they want to be someone whose name is called next year that we're relying on in both singles and doubles. We have high expectations for those two."

While Schaub emphasized the growth of Ohio State's younger players on the court, she also pointed to the team's chemistry and camaraderie as major factors behind the program's success this season.

With only one senior on the roster in Megan Basil, Chavez said the Buckeyes relied heavily on a close-knit culture that allowed younger players to grow throughout the year.

"This group of girls is unlike any other team I've been on," Chavez said. "It's so enjoyable to be around them. We work so hard all the time, especially the other girls. It never really felt like I had to push anyone. All the girls did such a great job at that."

"Being a junior, my leadership position changed. I feel like I was able to be a shoulder to lean on for some of the younger girls when they had questions or were wondering what to do. So I felt like I really had to be there for them because someone was there for me."

Schaub said the Buckeyes' enjoyment of competing together helped build the confidence they carried throughout the season.

"They enjoy practicing, they enjoy working hard, it becomes part of them and their culture, and something you can gain confidence from," Schaub said. "I think that (Perry and Chavez) just enjoy what they do every single day, and I think that trickles down to the other ones, when you're enjoying yourself and you know your purpose of being out there. Then there's no way to go but up."

Despite the program's historic postseason

run, the Buckeyes said their focus has already shifted toward building on this year's success heading into next season.

For Perry and several other Buckeyes, the foundation for next season will be built during the summer. She said the team is already eager to return to training and prepare for another deep run.

"A lot of it starts in the summer," Perry said. "One thing about Ohio State is that we work really hard. A lot of our success comes from our training. In the past, we've had people come in the summer before school starts to get hits in, start training early and prepare ourselves for the fall, which is the individual season. We want to have success in the individual season to prepare us for the team season."

"Everyone's going to go home and rest for a bit, but coming up here soon, in late June or early July, text messages will be sent in our group chat. We will be talking about what we're going to do in the summer, the tournaments we're going to play, and when we're going to be in Columbus for training."

With nearly the entire roster returning next season, along with two freshman additions coming in 2027, Schaub hopes this year's Final Four run was just the beginning for her young Buckeyes.

"They want it badly," Schaub said. "They want to go after a national championship. I definitely don't think that they were satisfied with the Final Four. They want more, and I love that for them, and I'm glad that's what we have. I know that the team is motivated, the locker room is motivated, and they're in a really good place right now."



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# Last Three Coaches All Three Upgrades?

Did Ohio State make an upgrade each of the last three times it hired a head football coach?

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

I think the Buckeyes did.

Jim Tressel in 2001 certainly was an upgrade over John Cooper. Tressel led the Buckeyes to a national championship in year two. His teams consistently played at a high level, and he was 9-1 against Michigan.

The one issue with Tressel, of course, is that his actions landed Ohio State on probation. And it was because of that probation that two years later, the undefeated 2012 Buckeyes were deprived of the chance to contend for a national championship, banned from postseason play.

Tressel won 82.8 percent of his games, at the time the best winning percentage in Ohio State history for any coach who lasted more than three seasons.

Then came Urban Meyer. Again, no question, an upgrade over the high bar set by Tressel. His first Buckeye team went undefeated. His third team won the national championship. He never lost to Michigan. And his winning percentage of 90.2 is the best in Ohio State history.

Those two upgrades are indisputable.

I know I'm going to get some pushback on the next one. It's not as clear-cut, but I think Ryan Day has proved to be an up-

grade over Meyer.

Like Tressel, who had a blemish (the probation), Day has one (Michigan). But otherwise, he's done a magnificent job navigating all the changes in college football, from the expanded playoffs to NIL and now the Wild West that is the transfer portal.

Day won his championship in 2024. He's been to the playoffs five out of his seven seasons.

And though his winning percentage of 87.2 trails Meyer's 90.2 percent, that gap is widened in part by the fact that Day has made so many more playoff appearances (five seasons to Meyer's two, though Meyer predated the 12-team playoff). All playoff teams but one are guaranteed to finish with a loss. So, unless you win the title, chalk up another loss by being good enough to make the playoffs.

Take away the playoff games (Day, 5-4, and Meyer, 2-1), and it gets a little tighter, with Meyer's record of 81-8 (91.0 percent) holding the edge over Day's record of 77-8 (90.6 percent).

It's always difficult to compare one era to the next. There are so many variables.

But I think Day has been in a more challenging position than Meyer. Oregon is now in the Big Ten, Indiana has arrived, and then there is what appears to be an up-and-coming USC. And Michigan has been better lately than during those Tressel and Meyer years.

But perhaps we're splitting hairs. Who wouldn't take either Day or Meyer based on what they've done? And Tressel, though a notch below Day and Meyer, certainly upgraded the program tremendously when he came on board.

What's really incredible is the combined success of the three coaches over a quarter century, making Ohio State the winningest program in college football since Tressel arrived.

Even with the 6-7 season under interim coach Luke Fickell in 2011, Ohio State has both the most wins and the best winning percentage over the last 25 seasons.

Here are the best records:

- Ohio State, 277-50 (84.7 percent).
- Boise State, 260-65 (80.0 percent) under Dan Hawkins, Chris Peterson, Bob Gregory (one game), Bryan Harsin, Andy Avalos and Spencer Danielson.
- Alabama, 269-69 (79.6 percent) under Dennis Franchione, Mike Shula, Joe Kines (one game), Nick Saban and Kalen DeBoer.
- Georgia, 263-72 (78.5 percent) under Mark Richt, Bryan McClendon (one game) and Kirby Smart.

### Buckeyes Road Show

We see the coaches on the sidelines. We hear them answering questions from reporters during news conferences. But what are they like in the locker room or on the recruiting trail?

I feel like I got some insight on that in attending a recent Buckeye Club event at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, where among the featured speakers were three OSU coaches with national championships on their résumés – linebacker coach James Laurinaitis, wrestling coach Tom Ryan and women's hockey coach Nadine Muzerall.

They were not discussing the most recent game or an upcoming season but offered life stories and their approach

to coaching during short talks and then while taking questions from the audience.

They had some interesting takes on the new world of paying college athletes.

Muzerall – NCAA champion in 2024 and runner-up in 2023, 2025 and 2026 – said she is not recruiting with NIL money, but that if the players come in and are successful, "then the money will come. You have to earn that." She said she works to make NIL connections at a later point.

On the football side, Laurinaitis acknowledged that pay has become a big part of college recruiting, but Ohio State is unwilling to get into bidding wars. He said recruits sometimes relay information about higher offers elsewhere, but he said OSU will not meet their demands when they want more money than starters are being paid. Again, there's the earn-it model in place, even if it starts at a higher level than in the other sports.

On coaching, Laurinaitis talked about his own experience in trying to learn from other players and working hard, relaying his frustration when young players don't take notes in the meeting room. Write it down in a notebook, don't look at a phone, Laurinaitis said he tells players.

And Ryan, who led OSU to the NCAA wrestling title in 2015 and to three runner-up finishes since, talked about fighting through adversity, though he admitted one time when he did not do so. As a junior high football player, he played against future OSU and NFL running back Scottie Graham, who ran over him so many times that he gave up football.

### From The AD

Athletic director Ross Bjork spoke of the need for more money, saying he would like to see the number of donors grow from 25,000 to 50,000 or 100,000. But he also offered some updates ahead of slipping in that sales pitch toward the end of his talk.

On the stadium: "The stadium is always under construction. It's 104 years old. We're constantly doing things to it. There are new things to come. We'll have a new video board, a new LED board, a new playing surface. We'll have some other new features along the way. And next year, we'll have more things to come."

On performance: He noted top-eight finishes by 10 teams this past year, adding that even Brutus won a national title.

In the classroom, Bjork added, "We've never been better academically," saying the combined grade-point average for the 966 athletes was 3.41 and that for the first time, the GPA for all 36 teams was 3.0 or above.

### In The Hall Of Fame

The Hall of Fame pulled from the normal display area the busts of the 11 Buckeye Hall-of-Famers.

Grouped together were Cris Carter, Sid Gillman, Randy Gradishar, Lou Groza, Dante Lavelli, Dick LeBeau, Orlando Pace, Jim Parker, Ed Sabol, Paul Warfield and Bill Willis.

## The Agonis Club of Columbus 2026

### The Agonis Club of Columbus 2026 Person of the Year

# ARCHIE GRIFFIN

Join us for a special evening honoring Archie. We will have a banquet dinner along with a meet & greet, silent auction and a live auction of Ohio State Football season tickets. For over 100 years, the Agonis Club has been in existence and since 1968 celebrated the Person of the Year. The Agonis Club awards scholarships and assistance to Central Ohio student-athletes.

Tickets: [agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026](http://agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026)

#### WHEN & WHERE

DATE: Wednesday, August 19, 2026  
LOCATION: Villa Milano Banquet & Conference Center  
TIME: 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM  
Tickets: [agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026](http://agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026)

#### EVENING SCHEDULE

5:30 PM - Doors Open & Silent Auction Begins  
5:45 PM - Meet & Greet  
6:30 PM - Dinner Served  
7:00 PM - Feature Program & Award Presentation  
7:45 PM - LIVE AUCTION  
(Featuring 2 Ohio State Football Season Tickets!)  
8:00 PM - Event Conclusion

#### TICKETS AND INFO

Space is limited! This event is expected to reach capacity quickly. Please reserve your seats at: [agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026](http://agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026)

SPONSORSHIPS  
Sponsorship info is available at registration link: [agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026](http://agonisclub.rallyup.com/poy2026)

More info contact Event Chair Tom Sappington: [agonisclubcolumbus@gmail.com](mailto:agonisclubcolumbus@gmail.com) (614) 506-1064

# Opinions Don't Make For (Poison) Pen Pals

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Anyone who is a regular reader of this column knows that when my late mother, the noted educator and writer Faye Moskowitz, was alive there was a standing gag between me, Faye and BSB editor emeritus Mark Rea, that my own mother preferred Mark's column to mine. It wasn't really a gag though. She actually *did* prefer Mark's column. She was a religious reader of The View From 15th and High, but she preferred Mark's Editor's Notebook.

My own mother!

She would try to soothe my battered ego by telling me that I should take pride in the fact that I had created a vehicle, an environment, where Mark could grow as a writer, a journalist, an Ohio State football historian and most importantly a columnist. And now, almost 40 years after his arrival at BSB world headquarters in 1988, I realize that she, like most mothers, was right. I have enjoyed seeing his growth in all those areas, and with Faye gone, I can honestly say that I am now Mark's biggest fan.

A quick plug for Reprint Thursdays, a staple at our electronic BuckeyeSports.com, where we dig into the BSB archives and reprint stories from past issues of BSB: A couple of weeks back, we recalled the passing of iconic OSU coach and commentator Earle Bruce, eight years ago, on April 20, 2018. I enjoyed Mark's column on the passing of a legend, and I am going to reprint part of it. Let my mother's favorite Buckeye columnist write a chunk of my column for me this issue!

I call this "Mark Rea, The Prequel," because I did not know Mark at the time of the event he was recalling.

Here's what Mark had to say about his first encounter with Earle Bruce:

"I first met Earle Bruce almost 40 years ago.

"I was a scruffy, cocksure, 20-year-old sports-writer, and he was a 47-year-old grown-ass man who had been a football coach since before I was in diapers.

"To say that our first encounter didn't go well for me would be akin to saying the Battle of the Little Bighorn didn't go well for Custer and the 7th Cavalry.

"In those days, media members covering Ohio State football had almost unlimited access to players and coaches following games. As sports editor of a small newspaper in OSU quarterback Art Schlichter's hometown, I was used to having nearly unlimited *carte blanche* in terms of asking questions and receiving answers.

"An emotionally-spent Bruce had just won his first game as successor to the legendary Woody Hayes, watching the Buckeyes systematically dismantle a pretty good Syracuse team by a 31-8 final score in the 1979 season opener. OSU enjoyed a lopsided 383-81 edge in rushing yardage – obviously, something Woody would have liked – but Bruce had spent a large chunk of the summer claiming that he would bring a more updated and sophisticated offensive approach to Columbus.

"So, naturally I asked why running the ball 69 times while throwing it on only 16 occasions could be interpreted as anything akin to a modern offensive attack.

"That's when I got the look for the first time.

"Bruce had a way of simultaneously pursing his lips while raising his eyebrows to the point where you didn't know if he was angered by the question or simply pitying you for being so dumb.

"Finally, after a few seconds that seemed like minutes, Bruce answered, 'Well, I don't know. We threw the ball on the first play of the game. I think we threw it three or four times during that first series. Exactly how many times do you think we should have thrown it?'

"Was there ever a time in your life when you wished you could have become invisible? That

was one of those times for me. But it also taught me a valuable lesson that I have carried for the remainder of my journalistic career. If you're going to ask a question, make sure it's based upon facts and not opinion.

"Bruce was the teacher, I was the pupil, and I never played a down for the man.

"To be honest, I didn't think much of Bruce when he was head coach at Ohio State. I never thought he took as much advantage as he should have with such strong-armed quarterbacks as Schlichter, Mike Tomczak and Jim Karsatos at his disposal, preferring instead to rely upon traditional, ground-and-pound Big Ten football.

"It was far from glamorous (much like the coach himself), yet it was a winning formula. When Bruce was fired, he enjoyed a .770 winning percentage against Big Ten competition that at the time ranked fifth all-time among conference coaches with at least five seasons in the league."

Back to Frank writing his current column.

Maybe I enjoyed this recollection because it reminded me of an incident from when I was at a similar point in my career as Mark. I was covering West Jefferson High School football for the now defunct Madison Press in London, Ohio. West Jeff was nothing short of a football power at the time under the tutelage of the legendary (and in West Jefferson I mean *legendary*) coach Gene Keel. Keel could have easily been mayor of the town.

Here I was a cub reporter, and I wrote a column not flattering to Keel. I'm not going to get into what the column was about. Decades later I am embarrassed about it. Keel didn't confront me. Worse, he called the publisher, and advertisers were threatening to pull out of the paper.

I got called on the carpet and basically told not to do anything like that again. The publisher, C. Carlton Hartley, who was a terrific newspaper man, said he would take care of it and apparently he did, because the brouhaha died out, though there are probably still old-time football fans in West Jefferson who hate me, even though the incident happened in 1978.

But I learned a valuable lesson about being a publisher. You have to stand behind your people. Get the problem corrected, but don't throw your employees, especially young ones learning the trade, under the bus.

As I started to write this, I initially didn't recall many other incidents when I got chastised by others.

When I was in professional wrestling (a ring announcer and promoter, not a wrestler), I got blistered by the legendary Ric Flair. The Nature Boy was old school and was always in character, never acknowledging publicly such things as matches being choreographed or outcomes predetermined. I crossed that line and I heard about it from the multi-time heavyweight champion of the world.

After thinking about it a little more, I remembered that the late women's basketball coach Nancy Darsch was mad at me for some reason that I don't remember. I ended up being the one to apologize though I recall it was something that may have been on her end. Our relationship was never quite the same.

Generally, I haven't crossed that many people in my professional life.

Then I realized that I am really slipping in my old age. How could I have forgotten that I was involved in a major dispute with former head football coach John Cooper? In this very space, I called for Cooper to be fired after the 63-14 loss to Penn State in 1994. Coop instructed his assistant coaches to not cooperate with Buckeye

Sports Bulletin. Things were wide-open back then when it came to access, and you could even call assistant coaches at home. Nothing doing for the staff at Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Poor editor Mark Rea had to deal with the OSU staff silence as he tried to put out BSB.

In fairness to Coop, I ultimately went up to talk with him (something not that common any more with PR flacks handling such disputes). There was a very heated discussion between coach and publisher where he made his points, I made mine, and we ultimately agreed to disagree. Interestingly, the next day the coaching staff was cooperating with BSB again. That's the way Coop was, and I would imagine still is.

### Postal Rates Going Up On July 12

Don't forget that most postage rates are going up on July 12. Postage is BSB's single biggest expense, so a subscription price increase is sure to follow. We will continue to honor current rates on such specials as the Affordability Subscriber Special and the Gas Beater Special for a limited time after any increase. Remember, you don't have to wait until your expiration date to renew. Your renewal will tack on to the end of your existing subscription. If you are good until October, your subscription will extend to October one, two or three years from now. If you are good until 2027, your subscription will extend from there.

One thing we are very pleased with is the fact that more and more of you, both inside Ohio and out of state, are upgrading to first-class mail in an envelope for at least football season. We are still taking orders at the current upgrade rates – \$35 through football season or \$45 through the playoffs and the Football Recruiting Wrap-up in February. Those rates will be ending shortly, so sign up now.

You may also note that on your renewal card there is a space for you to add an additional donation to help BSB stay vibrant and viable. Thank you to the many of you who have responded, from those who made a small donation to those of you who have added \$40, \$50 or more. I'm trying to do a little less beating subscribers over the head about donating, using a lower-key form of request. Don't forget, those who pay full price for two years are mentioned in our "I Believe In BSB" note, found this issue on page 4.

Finally, I am on a crusade to have more and more readers buy subscriptions for their local library or barber shop at the reduced rate of \$32.95. This is a great way to help spread the word about Buckeye Sports Bulletin at a nominal price.

### BSB Family, Personal Family Passings

I am sad to report the passing of Kirby Roberts, husband of BSB assistant publisher Becky Roberts, after a lengthy and courageous battle with cancer at age 61.

The best way to describe Kirby is with his widely accepted tagline: "Everybody Loves Kirby," occasionally muttered by Becky with a wifely eye roll. But she would be the first to admit that everybody *did* love Kirby.

While he was not on BSB staff, he was here frequently. In an office of not so handy handy-men and women, he was frequently called on to help fix one thing or another. He always had the right tool and the know-how to fix nearly every problem, and he always did it with good nature and never seemed put out when we called him with some emergency. That's just the way he

was. He took a tremendous amount of pleasure helping others, even those less closely associated with him than we were. Thus, the tagline "Everybody loves Kirby."

There was little small talk when Kirby was here because, ironically, while Becky's family is greatly interested in sports, Kirby was more entertained by music than sports, even though he was an athlete in high school.

Becky got him to watch a Green Bay Packers game one time, and he famously said, "I really like this Brett Favre guy," meaning Brett Favre.

And he will always be part of office lore after his infamous trip in the limousine with my mother, father, favorite uncle and aunt on the occasion of my 50th birthday. Sorry for those curious: What happened in the limo stays in the limo.

I am using my authority as publisher to change Kirby's tagline to "Everybody misses Kirby."

On a more personal note, my nephew Tommy O'Reilly passed away suddenly at the age of 55. Though few of you would know of Tommy, our many readers in nearby Bexley, Ohio, might. He was part of a very visible group of Bexley friends who have remained together for decades.

My condolences to Tommy's wife, Erica, and sons Thomas, Mason and Hudson, as well as my nephew Gordon O'Reilly, also a member of that Bexley group, who considered Tommy his best friend.

### Early Choices To Replace Jim Tressel

I started this column with a plug for Reprint Thursdays on our BuckeyeSports.com website, and I am going to end with the same.

For the May 28 edition of Reprint Thursday, we offered a comprehensive look at the resignation of coach Jim Tressel 15 years previous. Among the many articles reprinted from the June 2011 issue of BSB was an early list of possible replacements for Tressel. Keep in mind this list was compiled only days after the firing. Here were the choices from the BSB staff:

- Mark Dantonio. "The Michigan State head coach spent 2001-2003 as Tressel's defensive coordinator before moving on to Cincinnati."
  - Luke Fickell. "The interim (OSU) coach is a rising star in the business. A former Ohio State defensive lineman, he joined Tressel's staff in 2002 as special teams coordinator."
  - Jon Gruden. "He has never been a head coach at the college level, but Gruden has been installed as a 3:1 choice to take over according to online sportsbook Bodog.com."
  - Darrell Hazell. "Hazell is a dark-horse choice, but he could be in the running after serving as OSU's assistant head coach the past six seasons."
  - Urban Meyer. "The favorite to take over at 3:2 according to Bodog, Meyer just can't seem to escape ties to Ohio State. An Ashtabula, Ohio, native who has coached at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida – where he won two national championships – Meyer reached the top of the profession before retiring last season because of stress-related health problems."
  - Bo Pelini. "An Ohio State letter winner at safety from 1987-90 and a co-captain his senior year, Pelini has brought back the luster to the Nebraska program in his three years, posting a 30-12 record."
  - Mark Stoops. "The Stoops family of Youngstown, Ohio, is well known in coaching circles, and it seems unlikely Ohio State could wrest Bob Stoops from his head coaching role at Oklahoma. As a result, Mark seems like the most viable candidate from the family."
- If you had taken those favored odds on Meyer, you would have come out a winner.



# 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		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		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		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		21 BUF 6:05 PM	22 BUF 12:05 PM	23 BUF 6:05 PM	24 BUF 6:05 PM	25 BUF 1:05 PM
	26	BUF 1:05 PM		28 TOL 6:15 PM	29 TOL 6:15 PM	30 TOL 6:25 PM	31 BUF 6:05 PM	
	Opening Night							

		SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
MAY							1 TOL 6:15 PM	2 TOL 4:05 PM
	3	TOL 1:05 PM		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		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		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		26 TOL 5:05 PM	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				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		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		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		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		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		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		14 All-Star Break	15 All-Star Break	16 All-Star Break	17 IND 7:05 PM	18 IND 7:05 PM
	19	IND 1:05 PM		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		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		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		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		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		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						

		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		8 LOU 6:35 PM	9 LOU 12:05 PM	10 LOU 6:35 PM	11 LOU 7:15 PM	12 LOU 7:15 PM
	13	LOU 1:05 PM		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						
	27							

HOME
  AWAY
  "TANSKY TUESDAY" DIME-A-DOG
  FIREWORKS
  COPA DE LA DIVERSIÓN



## PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

