

Ohio State Beat Writers Poll: Unanimous On Buckeyes Playoff Return, Champion A Toss-Up



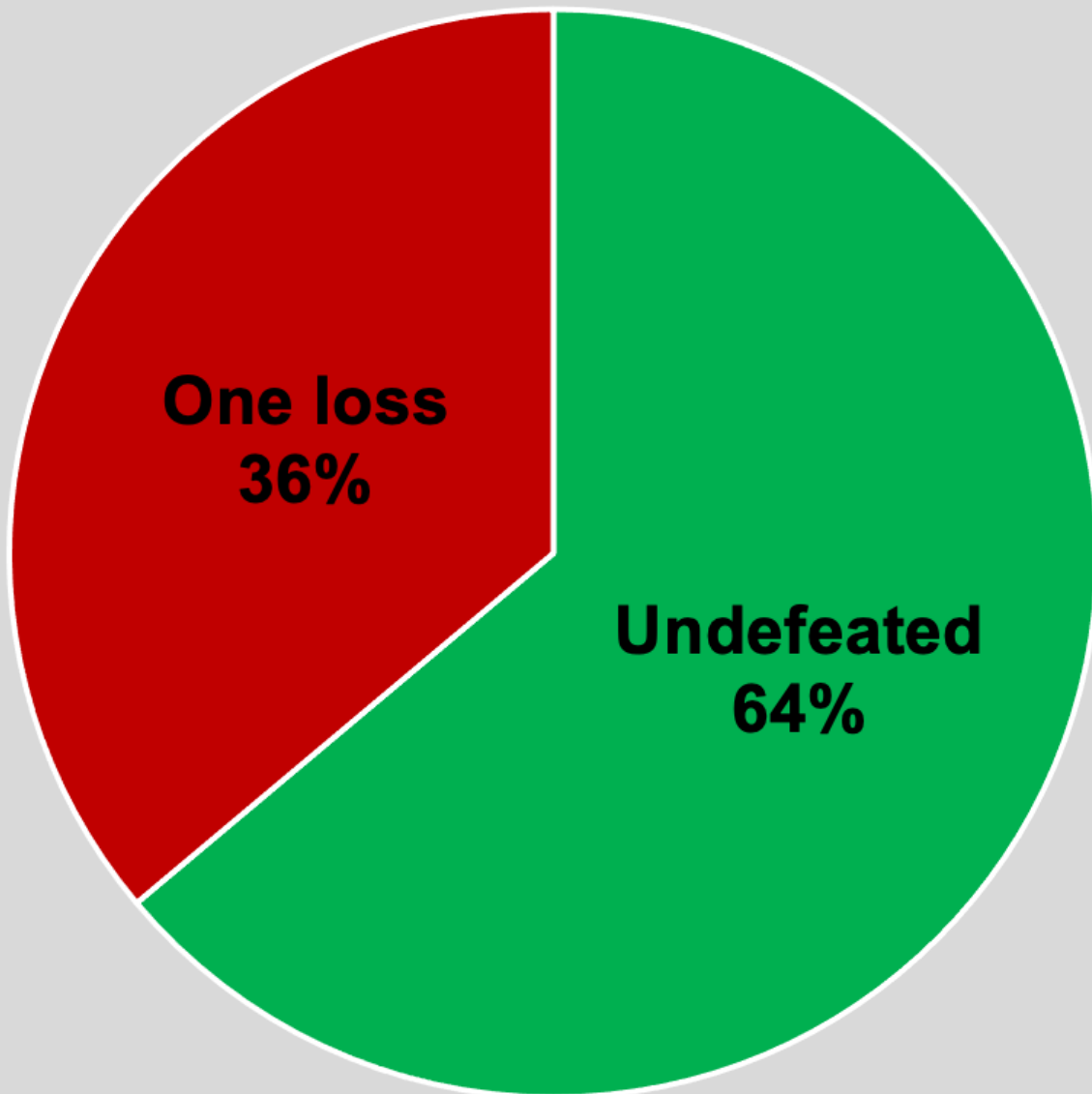
This is a story from the Sept. 1 print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. For four free issues of the print edition, no card required, sign up at the link here: <http://www.buckeyesports.com/subscribe-4issue-trial/>

For the second straight year, Buckeye Sports Bulletin reached out to various members throughout the Ohio State beat to get a feel for what they are expecting heading into the season. In total, including five BSB members, 36 people's responses were counted in the poll.

This time around, while sticking to many of the same questions about Ohio State's title aspirations, who will lead the team in various categories and which freshman will break out, we added a few of the more of the big questions about the team this offseason. What that meant was a pair of questions about the quarterback battle and one about the pass defense.

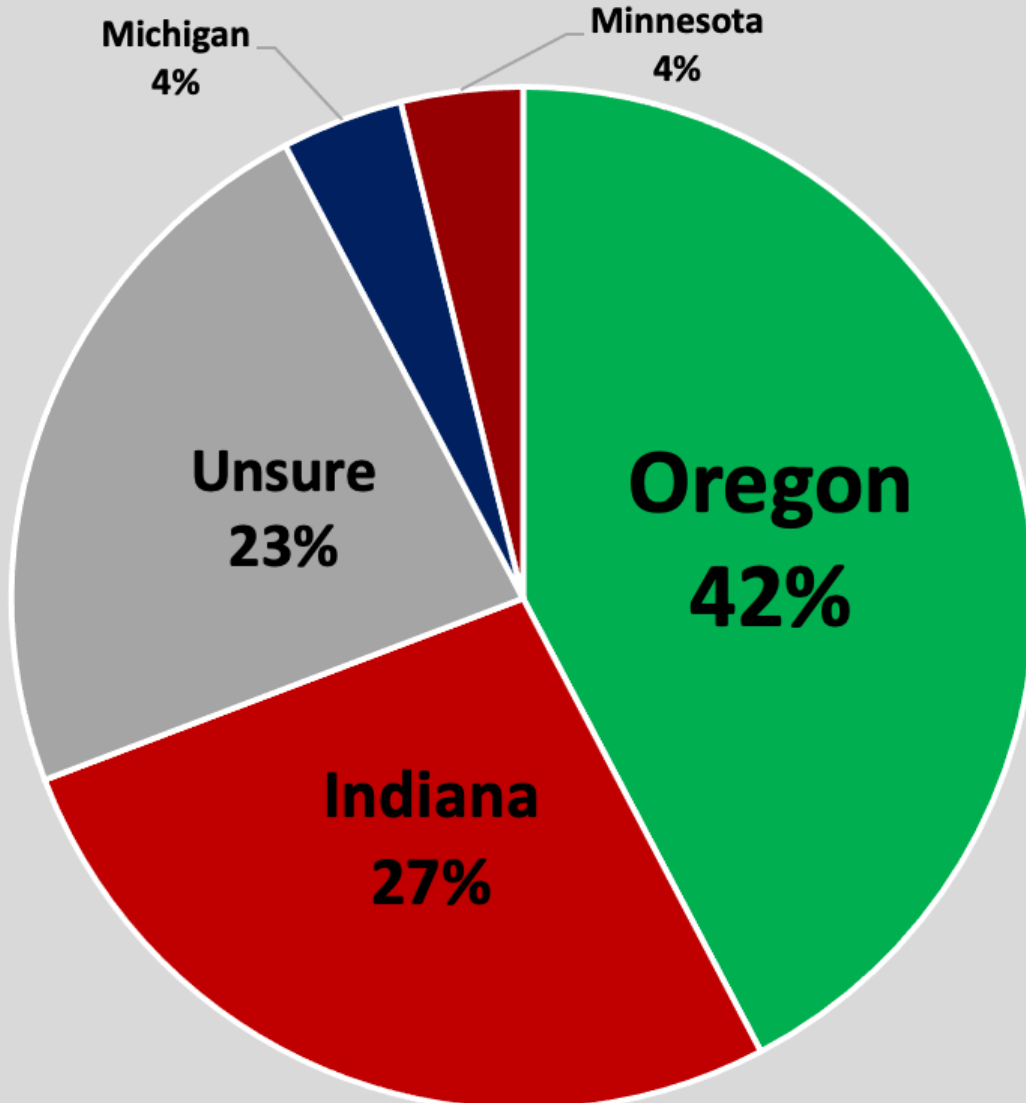
Also, it should be made clear that this is originally based on an idea from Scott Bell, who does this with the Michigan beat. Read his story about the Michigan poll from this year here.

Ohio State's Regular Season



Ohio State's Regular Season Record: While all but Buckeye Scoop's Tom Orr picked Ohio State to go undefeated in 2020, it is more split this time around. But, nearly two-thirds (23 of 36) are still expecting the Buckeyes to go 12-0 heading into the Big Ten championship.

Who Is The Loss



Who Is The Loss: Of the 13 beat writers predicting a loss, five straight up predicted it to come in Ohio State's second game of the season against Oregon. One other, Lori Schmidt of the Columbus Dispatch, predicted it be one of either Oregon or Minnesota, giving the Ducks 5.5 votes. Indiana, a team that has not beaten Ohio State since 1988, was next highest. The unsure category is for three writers who said they predict a loss, more so by odds and less so because of a specific team on the schedule.

Big Ten Champion

36

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Ohio State

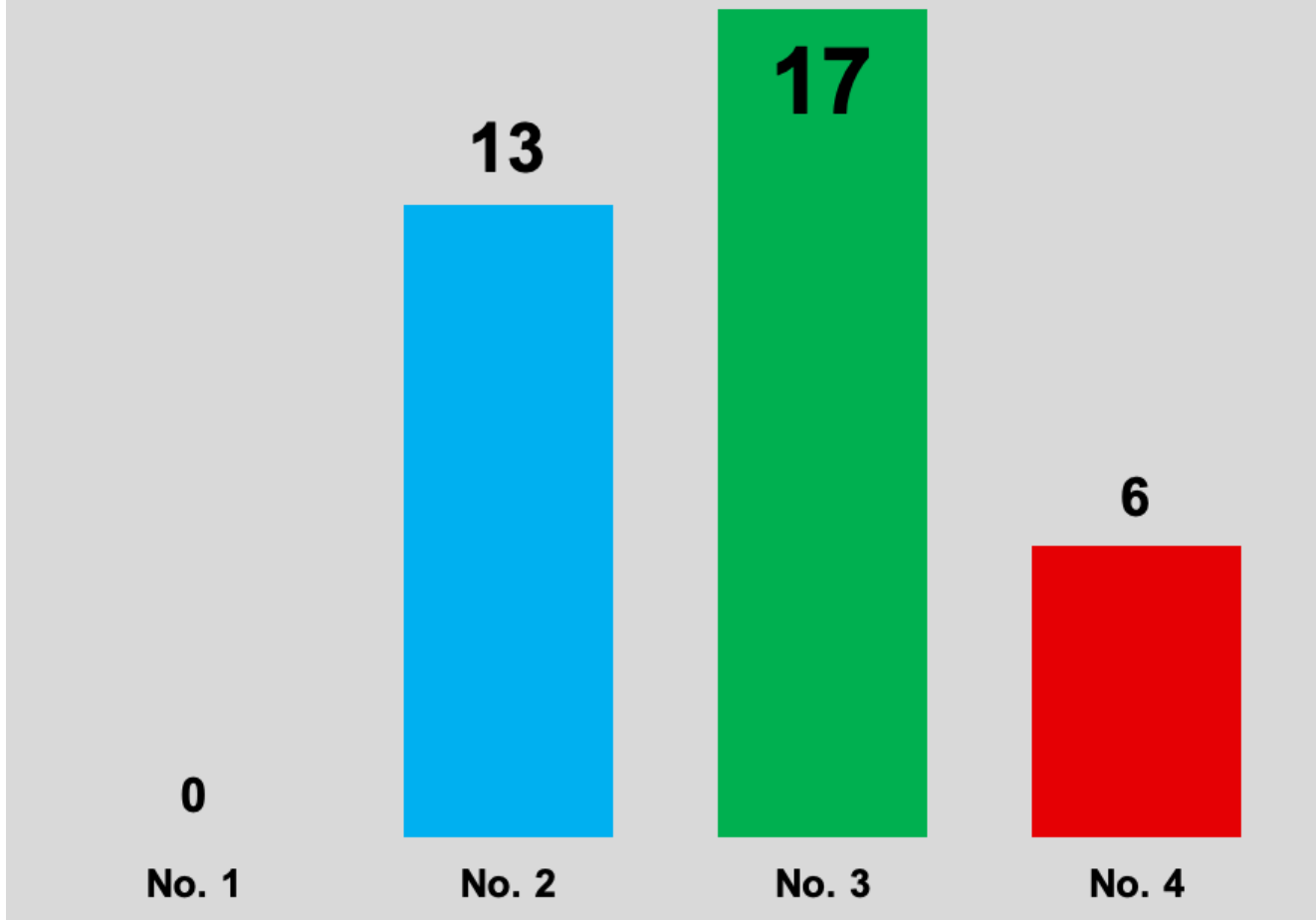
Will Ohio State Make The Playoff?



Yes

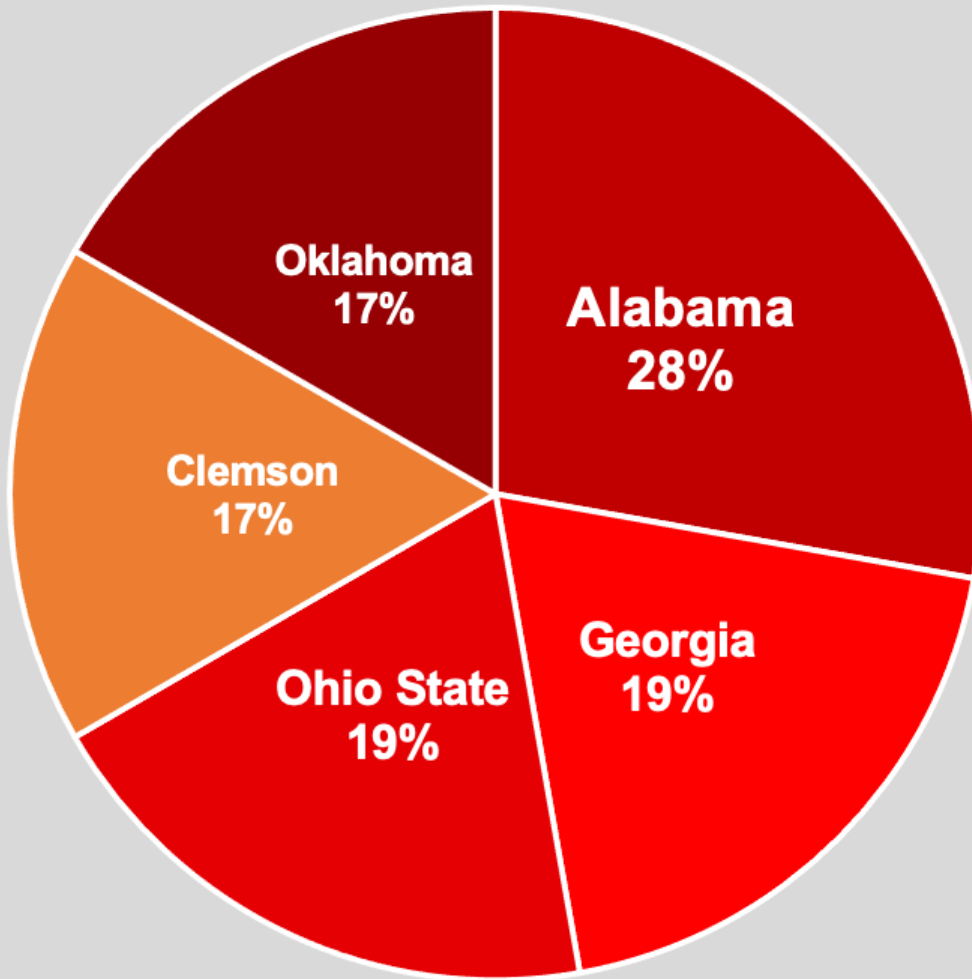
Two pretty straight forward ones. Every beat writer predicts Ohio State, loss or not, to both win the Big Ten and to make the College Football Playoff for the third straight time under Ryan Day.

Ohio State's Playoff Rank



Ohio State's Playoff Rank: One of my favorites on here, simply because I find it fascinating that not one beat writer selected Ohio State to be first overall, even if that Buckeyes team is a 13-0 Big Ten champion.

Who Is The National Champion



National Champion: One of the most divisive questions on the list, not one answer for who will be the national champion got even 30 percent of the vote. And yet, only five teams were named, showing the level of both parity and the opposite of parity existing in college football at this time. Alabama narrowly led the pack with 10 votes, while seven think that the Buckeyes can pull it off this season with a new quarterback. Speaking of quarterback...

Starting QB At End Of Season



C.J. Stroud

1



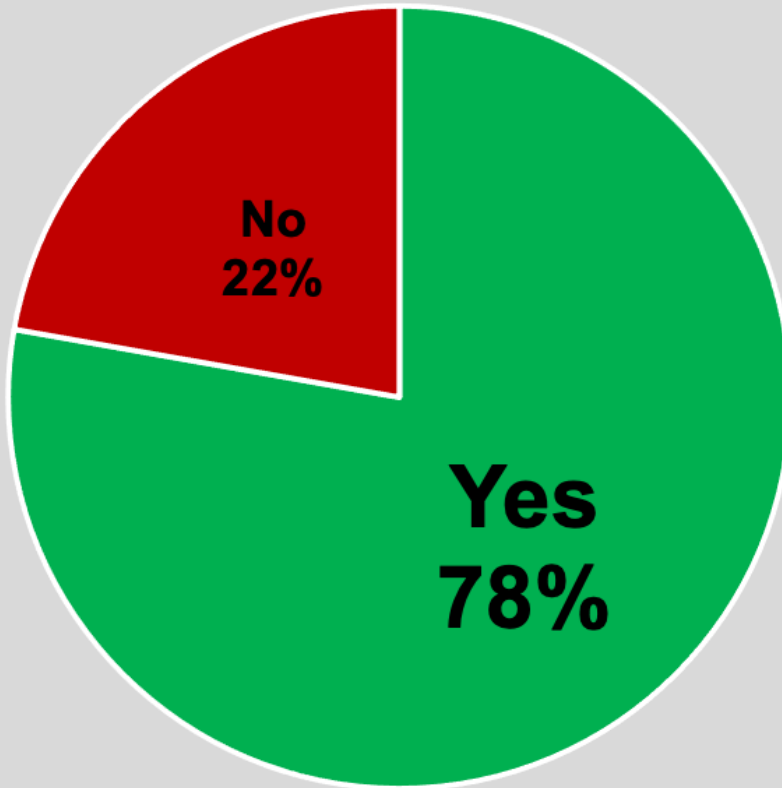
Quinn Ewers

1



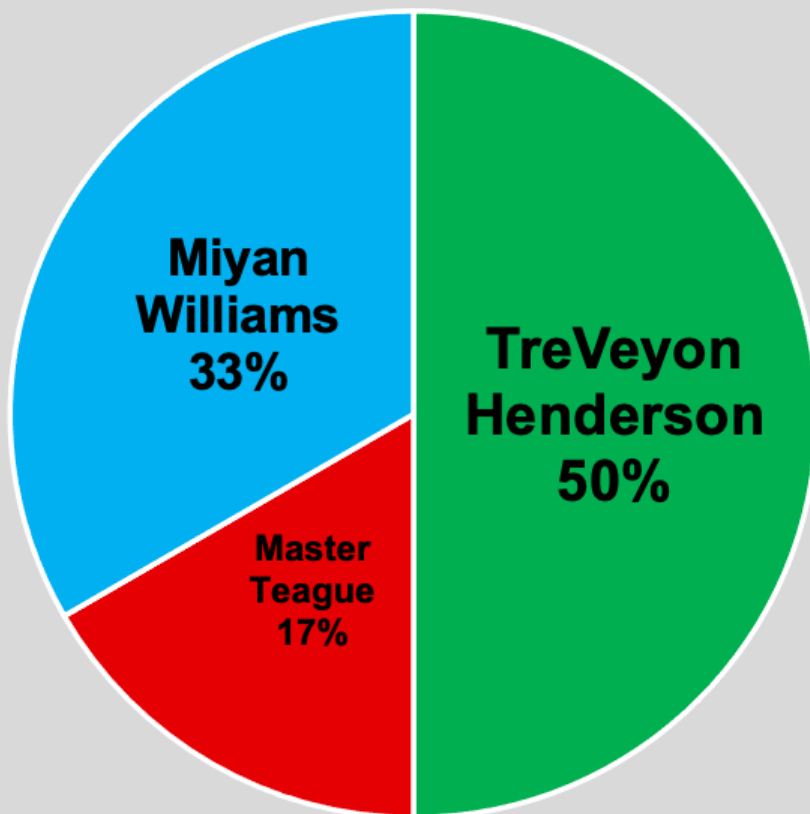
Kyle McCord

Is That The Same Starting QB In 2022?



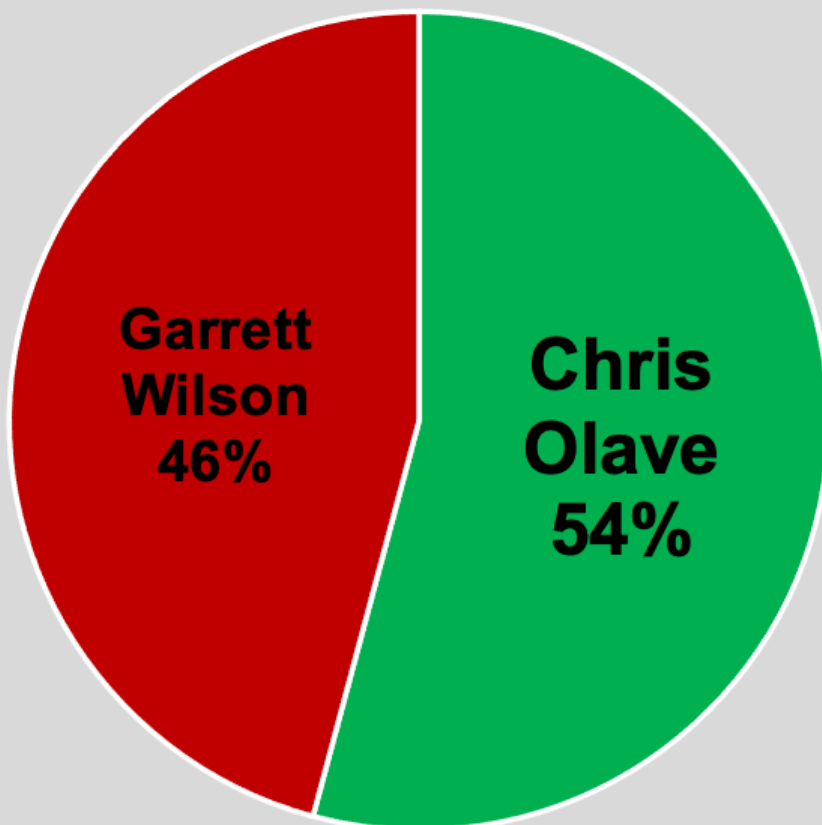
Who Is Starting At The End Of 2021 / Is He The Same Starter For 2022: The goal of these questions was to really ask one thing: What is the expectation for how firm of a grasp C.J. Stroud has on the starting job, something made extremely difficult because he's never thrown a collegiate pass. Only Cleveland.com's Doug Lesmerises and BSB's Craig Merz predicted Stroud loses the job by the end of this season, while eight pollsters think that the quarterback will change in the offseason.

Leading Rusher



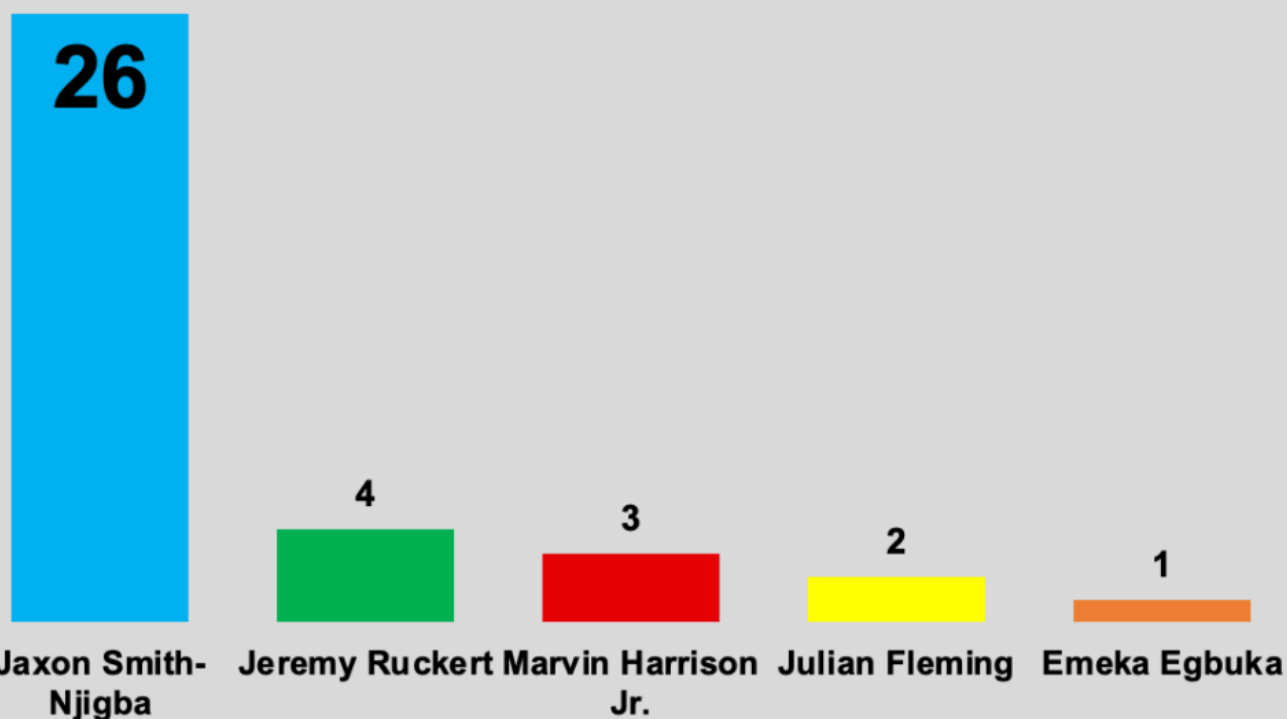
Leading Rusher: A pretty split vote here, and still half of those polled believe that true freshman TreVeyon Henderson will lead Ohio State's rushing categories in 2021. The other half of the vote primarily went to Miyan Williams, who flashed in spurts last season and has been getting reps with the first team in fall camp. The main incumbent, Master Teague, earned just six votes.

Leading Receiver



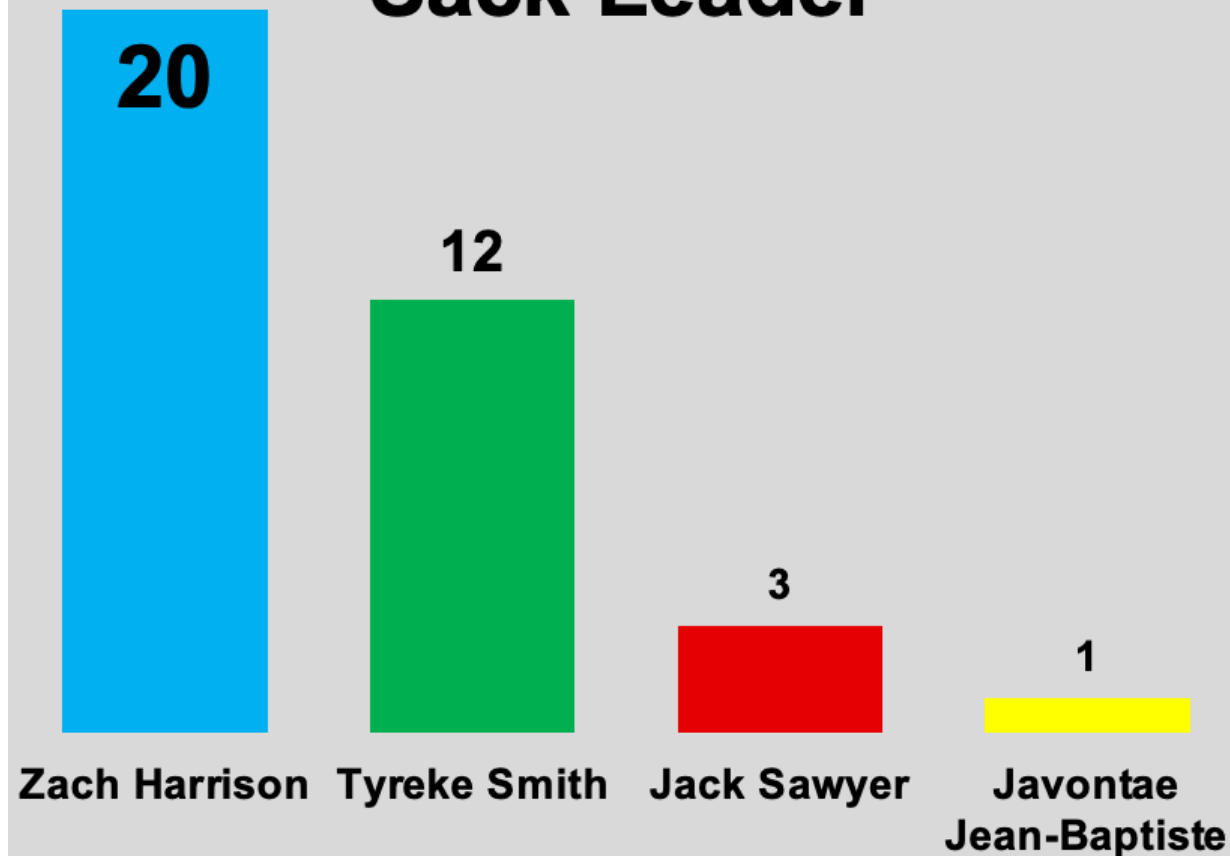
Leading Receiver: I guess when you have two of the top wide receivers in the country, this can become a difficult question. Chris Olave just narrowly edged out Garrett Wilson in the vote 19.5 to 16.5. The half points came from Buckeye Scoop's Tony Gerdeman, who has Wilson leading in catches and Olave leading in yards.

No. 3 Receiver In Production

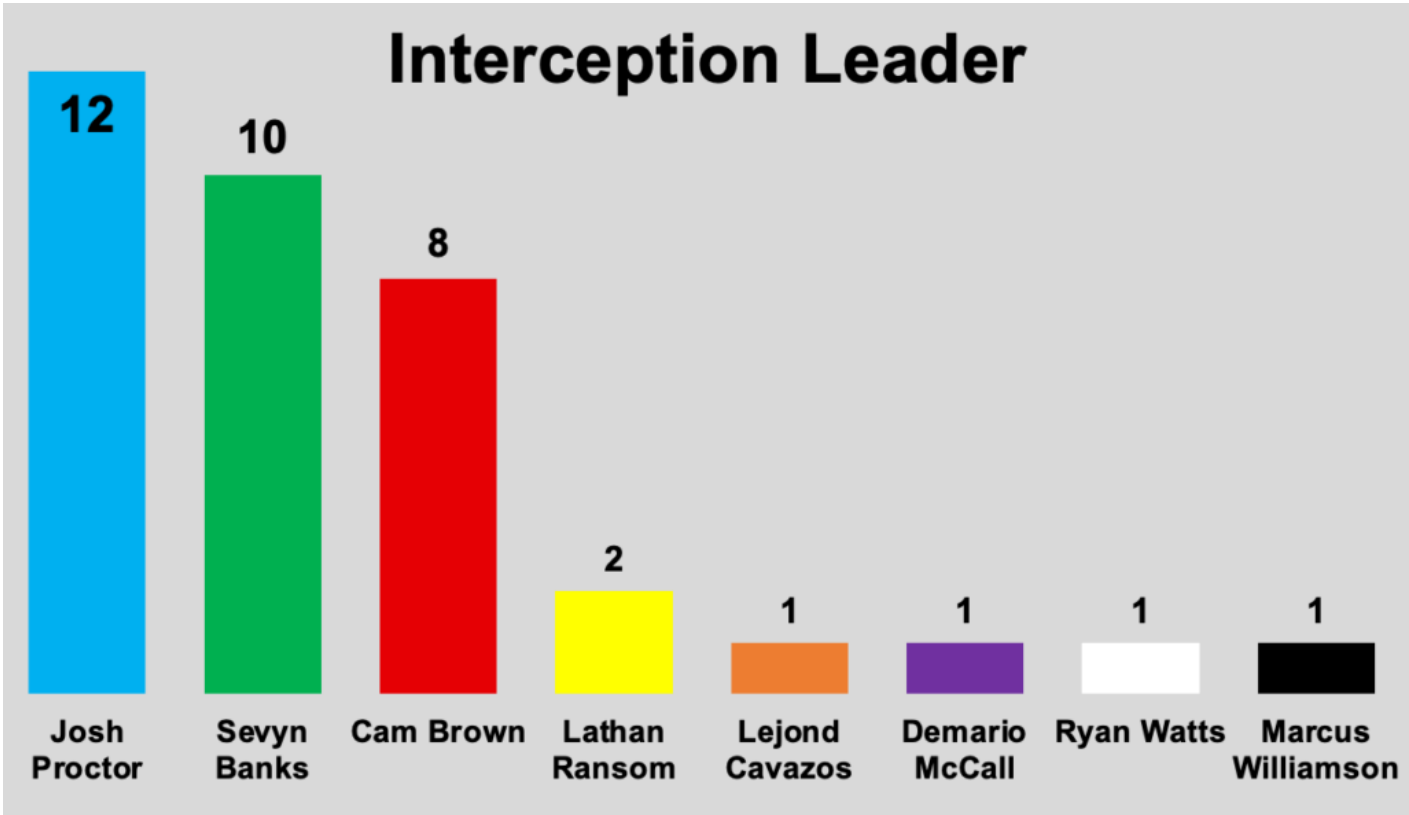


No. 3 Receiver: After Olave and Wilson it gets more interesting, but only slightly. Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who is expected to replace Wilson in the slot as he moves outside, is the runaway favorite, but there are a handful of options after him as upset picks. A pair of freshmen wide outs, a former five-star receiver and a veteran tight end make for a pretty start-studded group to challenge Smith-Njigba this season.

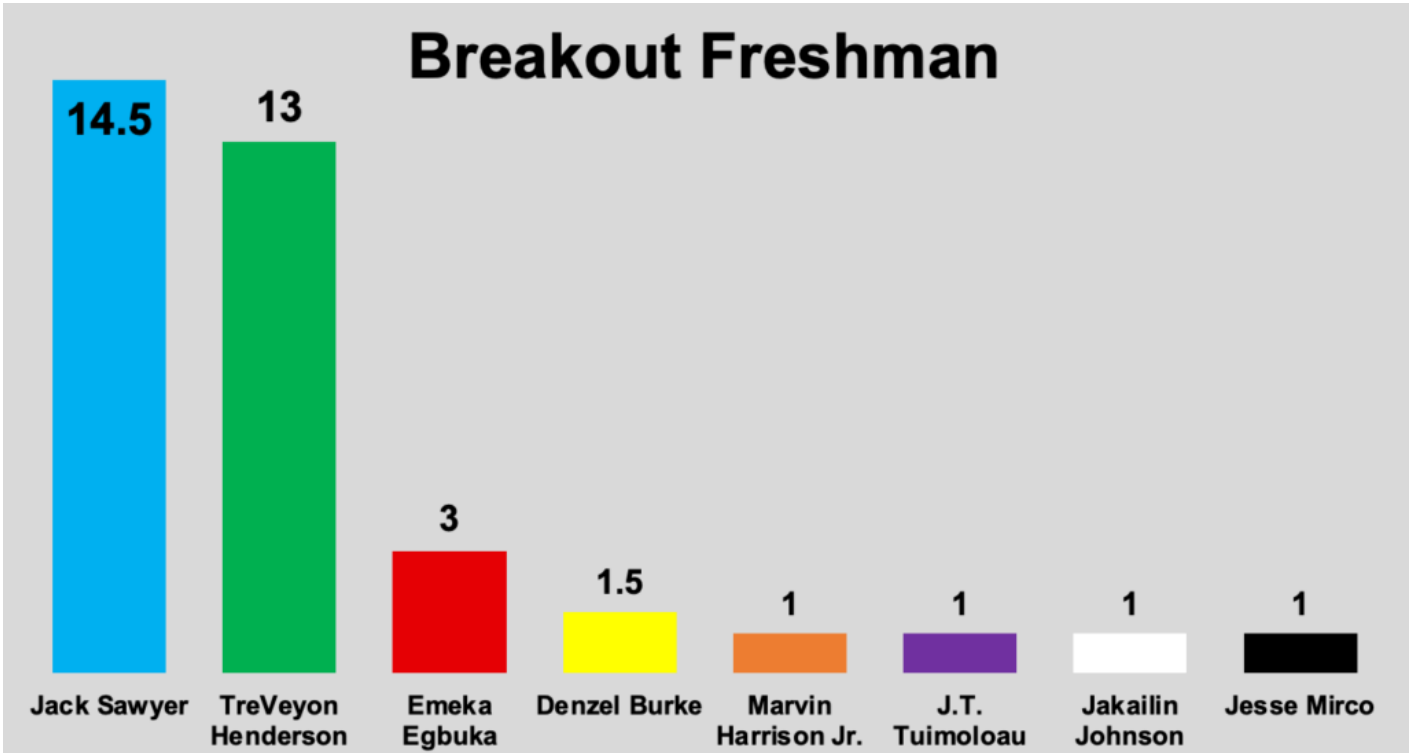
Sack Leader



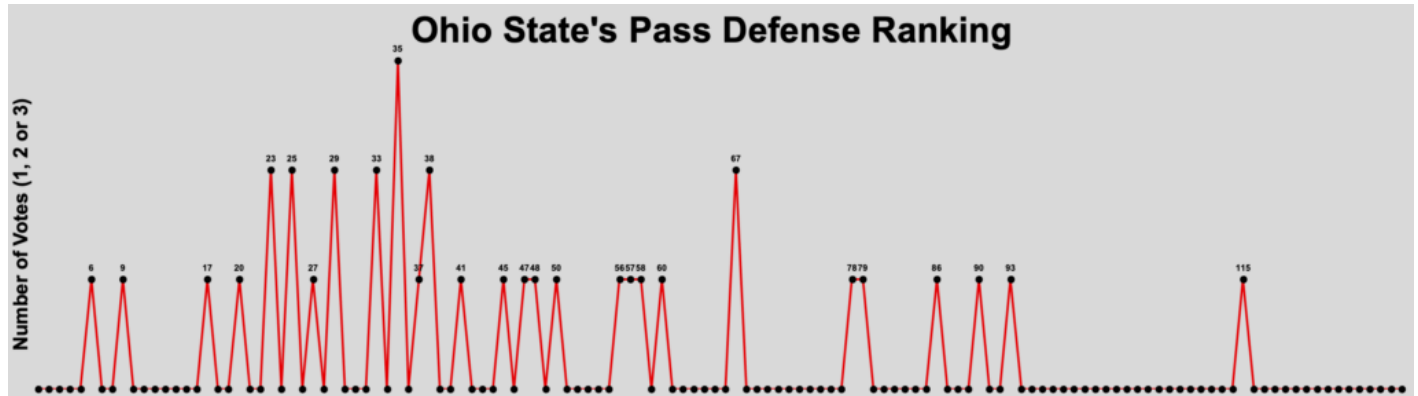
Sack Leader: A decently close battle here, with Zach Harrison leading the bunch with more than half of the vote. Harrison is a former five-star heading into his junior year, and the last Ohio State defensive end to do that had a pretty good year and went No. 2 overall in the draft, so the expectations may be high. Senior Tyreke Smith is not too far behind with a third of the vote, while true freshman Jack Sawyer picked up three votes. Lettermen Row's Austin Ward gave one to the dark horse of the group: Javontae Jean-Baptiste.



Interception Leader: If any question was truly anyone’s guess, it is this one. Eight different defensive backs were named, though three of the more veteran members rose to the top. Josh Proctor, Sevyn Banks and Cam Brown are expected to be the key cogs in the defensive backfield and earned 30 of the 36 votes, with Proctor holding a slight advantage. Of the ones toward the back end, BSB’s own Patrick Mayhorn gave his vote to Demario McCall, a former running back/wide receiver turned corner this offseason.



Breakout Freshman: Once again, eight names were listed, but this time the two favorites were clear. Both Sawyer and Henderson come in as five-stars, both were early enrollees and both could battle for some major reps in their first season with the team. There are names all over the field past them, including at punter with Jesse Mirco, as selected by the Toledo Blade's Kyle Rowland.



Pass Defense Ranking: Finally, Ohio State's much talked about pass defense. After finishing rank No. 122 in 2020 in pass yards allowed, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs is expected to make big improvements this year, according to the beat. The average ranking from the writers was 45.9, and the No. 46 pass defense last year, Fresno State, allowed 217.7 yards per game. That would be 86.3 yards per game less than in 2020. Two writers, Lettermen Row's Ward and Spencer Holbrook, both had the Buckeyes making a complete turnaround with a top 10 pass defense. On the other end, Mayhorn is not sold, ranking the projected pass defense the lowest at No. 115.

Here is the full list of responses from the beat:

| Reporter | Employer | 12-Game Record | Loss | Big Ten Champion | Playoff Rank? | National Champion | Starting QB At End | Same QB For 2022? | Leading Rusher | Leading Receiver | No. 3 Receiver | Sack Leader | Interception Leader | Breakout Freshman | Pass Defense Rank | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----|
| Nathan Bland | Cleveland.com | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Clemson | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Josh Proctor | Tre'Veon Henderson | 41 |
| Jacob Berge | The Lantern | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Oklahoma | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Marvin Harrison Jr. | Zach Harrison | Ryan Watts | Denzel Burke | 33 |
| Dave Biddle | Bucknuts | 11 | 1 | Unsure | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Seyvin Banks | Henderson / Sawyer | 48 |
| Jeremy Birmingham | Letterman Row | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Clemson | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Jeremy Ruckert | Tyreek Smith | Josh Proctor | Tre'Veon Henderson | 35 |
| Chase Brown | BSS | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 4 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | No | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Cam Brown | Harrison / Henderson | 93 |
| Zack Carpenter | Letterman Row | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Cam Brown | Emeka Egbuka | 20 |
| Wyatt Croser | BSS | 11 | 1 | Oregon | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Clemson | C.J. Stroud | No | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Marvin Harrison Jr. | Jack Sawyer | Josh Proctor | Tre'Veon Henderson | 67 |
| Joe Dempsey | BSS | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Ohio State | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Josh Proctor | Jack Sawyer | 79 |
| Jack Emerson | The Lantern | 11 | 1 | Indiana | Ohio State | Yes | 4 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Master Teague | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Seyvin Banks | Jack Sawyer | 60 |
| Tony Gerdesman | Buckeye Scoop | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Ohio State | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Josh Proctor | Tre'Veon Henderson | 29 |
| Marc Givler | Buckeye Scoop | 11 | 1 | Oregon | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Oklahoma | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Josh Proctor | Jack Sawyer | 27 |
| Marcus Hartman | Dayton Daily News | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Jack Sawyer | Seyvin Banks | Henderson / Burke | 38 |
| Colin Hase-Hill | (Formerly) 11W | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Jack Sawyer | Seyvin Banks | Jack Sawyer | 78 |
| Joseph Hastings | Buckeye Grove | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | No | Master Teague | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Seyvin Banks | Jack Sawyer | 57 |
| Steve Hehaegen | Bucknuts | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Master Teague | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Seyvin Banks | Jack Sawyer | 35 |
| Justin Holbrook | NBC4 | 11 | 1 | Indiana | Ohio State | Yes | 4 | Clemson | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Master Teague | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Seyvin Banks | Tre'Veon Henderson | 90 |
| Spencer Holbrook | Letterman Row | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Ohio State | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Josh Proctor | Jakiah Johnson | 9 |
| Dave Holmes | 10TV | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Ohio State | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Seyvin Banks | Tre'Veon Henderson | 45 |
| Dan Hope | Eleven Warriors | 11 | 1 | Indiana | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Lathan Ransom | Jack Sawyer | 58 |
| Joey Kaufman | Columbus Dispatch | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Clemson | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Seyvin Banks | Jack Sawyer | 36 |
| Bill Landis | The Athletic | 11 | 1 | Oregon | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Georgia | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Lathan Ransom | Tre'Veon Henderson | 33 |
| Doug Lesmerises | Cleveland.com | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Georgia | Quinn Ewers | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Cam Brown | Tre'Veon Henderson | 17 |
| Tim May | Letterman Row | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Ohio State | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Garrett Wilson | Marvin Harrison Jr. | Jack Sawyer | Josh Proctor | Henderson / Sawyer | 29 |
| Patrick Mayhorn | BSS | 11 | 1 | Oregon | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Oklahoma | C.J. Stroud | No | Myan Williams | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Demario McCall | Jack Sawyer | 115 |
| Stephane Means | Cleveland.com | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Georgia | C.J. Stroud | No | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jeremy Ruckert | Zach Harrison | Josh Proctor | Jack Sawyer | 29 |
| Craig Merz | BSS | 11 | 1 | Oregon | Ohio State | Yes | 4 | Georgia | Kyle McCord | No | Tre'Veon Henderson | Garrett Wilson | Julian Fleming | Zach Harrison | Seyvin Banks | J.T. Tuimoloua | 23 |
| Patrick Murphy | Bucknuts | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Georgia | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Leydon Cavazos | Tre'Veon Henderson | 35 |
| Kevin Noon | Buckeye Grove | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Clemson | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Cam Brown | Jack Sawyer | 38 |
| Rylee Oler | Columbus Dispatch | 11 | 1 | Indiana / Michigan | Ohio State | Yes | 4 | Oklahoma | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Master Teague | Garrett Wilson | Jeremy Ruckert | Zach Harrison | Marcus Williamsen | Emeka Egbuka | 37 |
| Tom Orr | Buckeye Scoop | 11 | 1 | Unsure | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Georgia | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Josh Proctor | Tre'Veon Henderson | 25 |
| Bill Rabinowitz | Columbus Dispatch | 11 | 1 | Unsure | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Josh Proctor | Tre'Veon Henderson | 50 |
| Kyle Rowland | Toledo Blade | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Georgia | C.J. Stroud | No | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Tyreek Smith | Seyvin Banks | Jesse Mirco | 67 |
| Lor Schmidt | Columbus Dispatch | 11 | 1 | Minnesota / Oregon | Ohio State | Yes | 4 | Oklahoma | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Myan Williams | Chris Olave | Emeka Egbuka | Zach Harrison | Cam Brown | Jack Sawyer | 47 |
| Jerod Smalley | NBC4 | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Oklahoma | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Master Teague | Garrett Wilson | Julian Fleming | Tyreek Smith | Cam Brown | Harrison / Sawyer | 25 |
| Giffin Strom | Eleven Warriors | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 3 | Alabama | C.J. Stroud | No | Myan Williams | Garrett Wilson | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Zach Harrison | Cam Brown | Emeka Egbuka | 86 |
| Austin Ward | Letterman Row | 12 | 0 | None | Ohio State | Yes | 2 | Ohio State | C.J. Stroud | Yes | Tre'Veon Henderson | Chris Olave | Jaxon Smith-Ngigba | Javontae Jean-Baptiste | Cam Brown | Jack Sawyer | 6 |